

# The Dirty Conservative

## Freedom Rankings of All 50 States—Guess Which One Is ‘Least Free’

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August 16, 2016

The libertarian Cato Institute this week released its “Freedom in the 50 States” report, showing which states are “least free” and “most free” based on a variety of data.

The study found that New York is “least free” — a ranking it has received since 2000. It’s No. 1 problem, according to Cato: fiscal policy.

“If New York were to adopt a fiscal regime closer to that of California, New Jersey, or Connecticut, its overall economic freedom score would be close to theirs. As it is, New York looks set to remain the least free state for many years to come,” an analysis of the data reads.

New Yorkers have the highest state tax burden in the country, paying twice the national average of 7.8 percent of one’s income as of 2012. In addition, the state government’s spending is nearly four times that of most states, and its debt is more than 30 percent of its income. The state does, however, employ fewer people than other states, on average, saving it some cash.

Regulations in the Empire State aren’t much better. In fact, New York has the worst regulatory system in the country, according to Cato.

Here’s more of what the group found:

*Land-use freedom is very low, primarily because of the economically devastating rent control law in New York City. Local zoning is actually fairly moderate compared with surrounding states not named “Pennsylvania.” Renewable portfolio standards are high. The state enacted a minimum wage in 2013-14 and also has a short-term disability insurance mandate. Cable and telecommunications are unreformed. Occupational freedom is a bit subpar, but nurse practitioners did gain some independence in 2013-14. Insurance freedom is a mixed bag (the state has stayed out of the IIPRC), but property and casualty insurers gained some freedom to set rates in 2013-14. The civil liability system looks poor, but we may underrate it slightly because of the state’s large legal sector.*

On other issues, New York gives other states more of a run for their money. Its arrest rate is “quite low” and the number of citizens who are incarcerated is also below average.

The study also factored in issues such as same-sex marriage, marijuana use, “alcohol freedom,” “tobacco freedom,” gun rights and school choice. On same-sex marriage, marijuana use and “alcohol freedom,” New York outranked most other states. But on gun rights, school choice and “tobacco freedom,” it significantly trails other states.

The Washington, D.C.-based think tank recommended three things that it says New York could do to improve its ranking, including cutting spending and paying down its debt, getting rid of rent control and cutting tobacco taxes.