

# The News & Observer

## How free is your state?

Kate Irby

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The most free and least free states are only separated by about 150 miles, according to the Cato Institute.

In rankings published Tuesday, the Libertarian think tank deemed New York the least free state and New Hampshire the most free. States were ranked based on their policies on personal and economic freedoms.

Personal freedoms, according to Cato, include freedom to marry, own firearms, pursue education, gamble, drink alcohol, consume marijuana and travel. Economic freedoms include freedom of choice on land use and health insurance, and a lower burden on entering the job market. Cato then calculated the cost each government policy creates on each of those freedoms to assemble the ranked list.

Cato also lists recommendations at the bottom of each state's profile to make it "freer."

New York has apparently been taking the least free state title for a while due to its economic policies, including a local tax burden twice the state average. Cato predicts it will remain there for "many years to come."

"The government spends almost four times what the average state does on subsidies to business," Cato reported. "Debt is the highest in the country at 31.9 percent of income."

The top five least free states also include California, Hawaii, New Jersey and Maryland.

New Hampshire, at the opposite end of the list, has the lowest government tax rate of all states except Alaska, the number two state on the list.

Other states rounding out the five freest states are Oklahoma, Indiana and South Dakota.