



NY, Calif. Rank Last in Personal Freedom

By Melanie Batley April 1, 2013

A new survey ranks New York and California dead last in terms of state policies that promote individual freedom. Hawaii, New Jersey, and Rhode Island were just ahead of them to round out the worst five.

The "Freedom in the 50 States" survey by the libertarian-leaning think tank, Mercatus Center, also found the top five states with the most freedom are North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, New Hampshire, and Oklahoma, Fox News reported.

"When it comes to overall freedom, New York ranks dead last," said the report's authors, noting that New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has attempted to take away several personal freedoms, including his move to outlaw the sale of super-size drinks.

The survey, which looks at fiscal issues and tax rates as well as regulatory policies, also hit New York on its 14 percent state income tax rate, which it suggested helped drive 1.7 million people out of the state between 2000 and 2010.

"Even New Yorkers who don't care about sweet drinks have to deal with the highest state and local tax burden in the country," the authors wrote.

The report also hit California equally hard, calling its business regulations a huge limitation on personal freedom.

"The Golden State, with hundreds of miles of picturesque Pacific coastline, nonetheless managed to drive off a net of 1.5 million residents between 2000 and 2010 — over 4 percent of its 2000 population," the report noted.

Timothy Lee, a Forbes Magazine columnist and adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, challenged the credibility of the survey's findings by questioning the selection of North Dakota as the top state for policies that uphold individual freedom. It was picked primarily because of its "very low taxes," the report said.

"If your index of freedom says that Minot, N.D., is the freest place in the country and Brooklyn, N.Y., is the least free, you're doing it wrong," he said.

"Either you chose a bad definition of freedom, or 'freedom' isn't as important as you thought it was," he added.

The think tank, based at George Mason University in Virginia, scored all 50 states on over 200 policies, including fiscal policy, regulatory policy, and personal freedom.