



## World's Freest Countries: The U.S. is Only Number 7

Frank Hagler, January 15, 2013

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Merriam-Webster defines freedom as the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action. In the United States these actions have been codified as speech, assembly, religion, the press, and the right to own a gun. Freedom of movement, and the freedom to live and love where you want and whomever you want are also thought to be included in the list. These social and civil freedoms are well known, however economic freedoms are somewhat less clear. Tax law, financial and industry regulations, access to capital are all factors that impact economic freedom. The combination of social and civil liberties in America combined with the economic opportunity leads most to believe that the United States is arguably the most free country in the world. However a recent study challenges that assumption.

The Fraser Institute, Canada's leading public policy think-tank, Germany's Liberales Institut, and the libertarian leaning Cato Institute have completed a study that found the United States seventh on the list of the top 10 freest countries in the world. New Zealand, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Australia, Canada, and Ireland all finished above the U.S.

It is interesting that the study, financed and published by primarily libertarian think tanks, found that countries with very restrictive gun laws like Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, and Honk Kong were all more free than the U.S. Ireland even has a national ban on abortion and it also still finished ahead of the United States. Ireland recently allowed a woman, Savita Halappanava, to die from complications of a miscarriage rather than terminate the pregnancy.

The findings of the academics and economists that conducted the study have been published in a new book, *Towards a Worldwide Index of Human Freedom*. The authors believe that the index is the first of its kind to combine and measure the combination of civil, political, and economic freedoms in "an intellectually consistent index" that can be used to compare different nations. Fred McMahon of the Fraser Institute and editor of the book explained, "Our intention is to measure the degree to which people are free to enjoy classic civil liberties — freedom of speech, religion, individual economic choice, and association and assembly." The index looks at a number of factors to help determine its rankings including drug policy, crime and violence, LGBTQ discrimination laws, and women's rights.

Towards a Worldwide Index of Human Freedom provides scholarly analysis on everything from the history of freedom to the costs of freedom based on the definition of “negative freedom” i.e. “the absence of restraints on individual actions.” The authors feel that only by determining “the absence of barriers or coercion that prevents individuals from acting as they might wish” can we determine the true extent of freedom.

The most important takeaway from this study is if you feel “the right to bear arms” is an essential freedom that should not be infringed upon and you want to live in the country with the least obstacles to acting as you wish, then you have two simple choices: New Zealand or the United States. In New Zealand abortion is illegal except in cases where the pregnant woman faces a danger to her life, physical or mental health, incest, rape, “extremes of age,” or if there is a risk of the fetus being handicapped, in the event of the continuation of her pregnancy.

New Zealand's stance on abortion may indeed narrow your country choice down to one.