



New Hampshire ranks first in the nation in freedom

Kelly Thomas

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – New Hampshire is the most “free” state in the nation, but the five other New England states lag far behind, according to a recently released report by the CATO Institute.

CATO’s 2016 edition of *Freedom in the 50 States*, provides detailed rankings of the states in the areas of “Fiscal Freedom,” “Regulatory Freedom” and “Personal Freedom.” The report also provides an overall ranking based on weighed scores from each category.

New York claims the title of the “least free” state overall, primarily due to high tax burdens and large government debt, as well as a low degree of land-use and labor market freedom. New Hampshire, which previously ranked second overall, claimed the top spot this year, in large part due to fiscal decentralization that occurred following the recession.

New Hampshire did well in the Fiscal Freedom category (which looks at rates of taxation and amount of government debt, among other things), coming in 2d only to Alaska. The report highlights New Hampshire’s low tax burden and praises its fiscal decentralization and relatively small government apparatus, as well as its low government debt and subsidies.

The study also gives New Hampshire high marks for personal freedom, ranking it 9th nationally: New Hampshire was one of the first to enact same-sex civil unions and then marriage through the legislative process; incarceration rates and drug arrest rates in New Hampshire are low; and the state offers a generous tax credit scholarship law raises the state above average on educational freedom.

Despite this generally rosy picture, however, New Hampshire scored only 29th on the Regulatory Freedom index (which includes grades for land use regulations, labor-market freedom, and health insurance policy). The report is particularly critical of Granite state zoning policy, noting that New Hampshire is one of the four worst states in the country for residential building restrictions.

Although each of the New England states scored well on the Personal Freedom index (which includes education freedom, incarceration rates, gun and tobacco rights, and marriage freedom),

only New Hampshire found its way into the CATO top 10. Maine, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Connecticut all ranked in the bottom 10 overall, with Connecticut the lowest ranked New England state at 45.

Massachusetts was the next highest ranked New England state overall, coming in at 33. The Bay State placed 36th and 39th in the fiscal and regulatory categories respectively, although its 11th place ranking in the personal freedom category pulled its overall ranking up slightly overall.

The full breakdown of the rankings for the New England states is below:

State	Overall	Fiscal	Personal	Regulatory
New Hampshire	1	1	9	29
Massachusetts	33	36	11	39
Vermont	40	47	10	32
Maine	42	43	4	44
Rhode Island	43	38	17	45
Connecticut	45	44	15	46

The report was authored by William P. Ruger, the Vice President of Policy and Research at the Charles Koch Institute, and Jason Sorens, a government professor at Dartmouth College.

Ruger and Soren note that the report's rankings are based on the CATO Institute's definition of freedom, which focuses on limited government and individual liberty, but the authors also provide a [personalized ranking tool](#) so that users can see how states stack up in protecting the freedoms they value most. The authors also and provide a thorough index of demographic and economic data in order to educate readers on various policies throughout the 50 states.

Read the full report [here](#).