

Sentinel & Enterprise

America, land of the less free?

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Since its very founding, the United States of America has served as a beacon and exemplar of freedom in the world. But that mantle has been slipping in recent years, according to a Cato Institute analysis.

Put simply, the gap between the U.S. and most of the rest of the world with regard to personal and economic liberties has narrowed the past couple of decades. Some of this is for good reason: The rest of the world is simply following our lead and catching up in certain areas. The U.S. has always scored well in civil liberties and the free and democratic election of political leaders, for example, but, in recent decades, these freedoms have improved in many other nations, closing the gap.

But some of the reason for the narrowing is because the U.S. is headed in the wrong direction. Freedom of the press has steadily fallen since 1993, dropping from a score of 12 to 22 by 2014 on a 100-point scale, according to Freedom House. Public perceptions of accountability, and corruption and cronyism, have also deteriorated fairly significantly over the past 20 years.

The diminished economic-freedom gap is an example of both improvements in the rest of the world and regression at home. The rest of the world has continued to improve.

Meanwhile, after U.S. economic freedom grew continuously from 1970 to 2000, according to the Fraser Institute, it has fallen rapidly since -- because of increasing regulation, a weakening of the rule of law and misguided wars on terrorism and drugs -- almost back to 1970 levels.

"Americans have long enjoyed a level of freedom and quality of institutions that are still denied to the majority of humanity," writes Marian Tupy, senior policy analyst at the Cato Institute and editor of Cato's HumanProgress.org project. "But if some of the worrying trends that can be seen above continue, America may not always be the 'land of the free.'"

The United States is still one of the freest nations in the world, but its government has become increasingly complacent and heavy-handed in recent decades. We must rededicate ourselves to preserving the personal and economic liberties that made our nation so great if we are to continue to lead and provide younger generations with the same prosperity and opportunity.