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Omicron and the fall of human freedom

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The last grains of sand are trickling to the bottom of 2021's hourglass, in concert with the slow ebb of human freedom. Authoritarian measures meant to check the spread of the coronavirus have surely contributed to the loss of liberty, but the downward trend line predates the pandemic. It is incumbent upon free-thinking Americans and their like-minded brethren the world over to turn back the flood of fear and ensure that future generations know the taste of freedom.

The Human Freedom Index, published earlier this month by the Washington-based Cato Institute and Vancouver's Fraser Institute, assesses that a preponderant 83% of the world's population has experienced a decline in liberty since 2008. The deterioration has bedeviled even the world's most dominant nations, including China, India, United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Brazil, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Russia and Mexico.

"The decline in fundamental rights represents a disturbing trend that was occurring even before the world experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and political effects," writes Cato author Ian Vasquez. The implication is subsequent reports that include the torturous COVID-19 years of 2020 and 2021 are likely to reveal harsher threats to freedom yet to come. Areas of human activity found to have suffered most are freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of association, assembly and civil society.

It might surprise Americans that among 165 nations covered in the index, "the land of the free" only ranks in 15th place, tied with Germany and Japan. Sitting atop the HFI liberty list is the European alpine redoubt of Switzerland. New Zealand and Denmark in second and third place,

respectively, risk precipitous freedom falls. In recent months, they have joined with other, more authoritarian nations in imposing harsh restrictions on travel and commerce.

No modern jurisdiction has lost more liberty than Hong Kong, sliding 10 places during the past year to No. 30, largely owing to incrementally heavier pressure from the boot of the city's Chinese overlords. China itself, where government control of thought and movement is a science, has tumbled five steps toward the basement of global freedom at No. 150. There, it keeps company with the likes of Zimbabwe and Chad.

Sadly, the rise of the omicron variant is triggering the return of puerile lockdowns, quarantines and, in some places, the equivalent of internment camps for the infected and the unvaccinated. If nothing else, massive anti-vaccine-mandate marches in major cities like New York, London, Vienna and Sydney have demonstrated that human beings — unlike sheep — kick when the master's corral gets too cramped.

No one guards their liberty as jealously as Americans. It is something worth remembering for President Biden, who has cited COVID-19 as ample reason for issuing dark warnings about the deadly disease. The U.S. may not lead the HFI, but its people still harken to the echo of "Give me liberty or give me death."