

Opportunity**Lives**

There's A New Way To Measure Global Freedom

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August 19, 2015

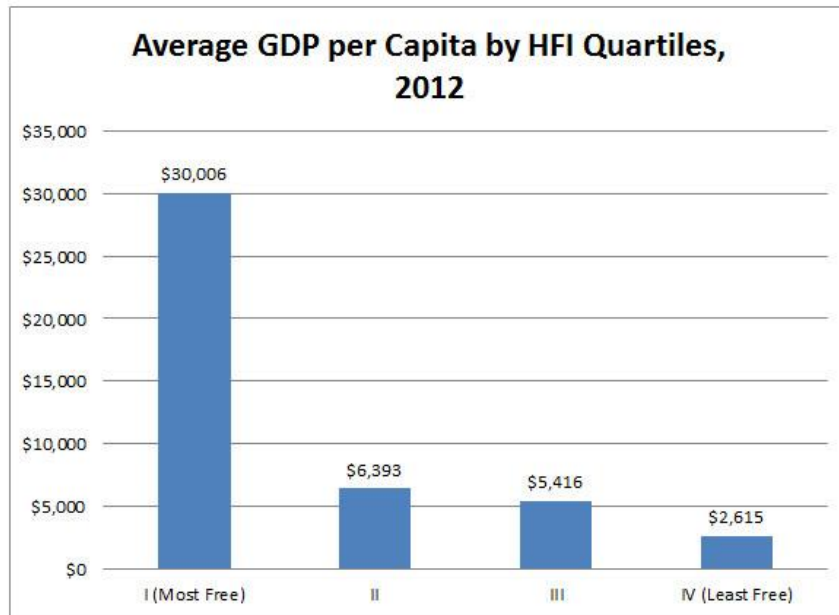
Alexis de Tocqueville once wrote, “He who seeks freedom for anything but freedom’s self is made to be a slave.” Tocqueville’s observation about the French Revolution sets the tone for the Human Freedom Index (HFI), a new report that offers a comprehensive measure of freedom around the world with country-by-country comparisons.

The HFI is a joint venture of the Cato Institute, Canada’s Fraser Institute and the Swiss-based Liberales Institut at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom. The report examines 152 countries and ranks them on 76 different indicators of personal and economic freedom. Though the inaugural report uses data from 2012, the authors said the report would be updated annually as new information becomes available.

After calculating all 76 variables on a score of zero to 10 (with 10 being the most free), each country receives a final overall freedom score that can then be compared with other countries.

Half of the weight of this score comes from variables measuring economic freedom, and the other half measures indicators of personal freedom. The personal freedom indicators are subdivided by “legal protection and security” and “specific personal freedoms,” such as the strength of civil society, freedom of expression and private relationships.

Topping the list are Hong Kong, Switzerland, and Finland. Iran ranks dead last.



Source: Human Freedom Index

The United States comes in 20th on the Index, well above the average but trailing many European nations. Although the U.S. scored higher than many European nations in the realm of economic freedom, a weak showing in the personal freedom category dragged down the final score.

Ian Vásquez, the director of Cato’s Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity and a co-author of the report, said the U.S. decline “reflects a long-term drop in every category of economic freedom and in its rule of law indicators.”

Beyond merely documenting the freedom among different countries, the HFI also endeavors to show how freedom improves society. According to the authors, the average per capita incomes in countries placed in the top quartile of freedom are more than 11 times higher than those of the least free countries.

Over the past five years, freedoms such as civil society, expression, and relationships have improved on average. But freedoms that fall under the categories of rule of law, security and movement have dropped.

The report also finds that personal and economic freedom are positively correlated. HFI’s rankings also show that freedom and democracy tend to go hand in hand. The Index scores are strongly correlated with the Economist Intelligence Unit’s popular measure of democracy.

Alexis de Tocqueville also wrote, “Nothing is more wonderful than the art of being free, but nothing is harder to learn how to use than freedom.” The Human Freedom Index should be a valuable resource in the fight to preserve that freedom.

