



BARR: America's 'Freedom' Rating Slips Significantly

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Thirty-two years ago, in his final State of the Union address, Ronald Reagan described America as the “shining city on a hill.”

That characterization of the United States was accurate then and it is accurate today, though according to a nonpartisan analysis of human freedom around the globe, our shine has lost some of its luster.

The CATO institute in Washington, DC recently published its annual *Human Freedom Index*, according to which the United States dropped nine points, and now qualifies as only the 17th freest country among 162 nations ranked. New Zealand, Switzerland and Hong Kong continue to hold the top three spots as the freest countries on earth, with Venezuela, Sudan and Syria holding the dubious distinction as the least free. Japan and Estonia are among the nations whose citizens fared better than did ours in the encyclopedic survey.

The data on which this 2020 index is based is from 2018, insofar as that is the most recent year for which comprehensive data was available to CATO. Looking ahead to 2019 and 2020, there is little reason to expect New Zealand or Switzerland to lose their coveted positions atop the list, as there have been no significant economic or political policy changes in either country as would likely affect their status, at least relative to other countries. For Hong Kong, however, it would not be surprising to see its top-three ranking suffer as a result of crackdowns over the past two years by the parent regime in Communist China on the degree of liberty that had been enjoyed by Hong Kong's businesses and citizens.

CATO's analysts consider a dozen indices of freedom in arriving at their conclusions, including the following:

- The Rule of Law
- Security and safety of citizens
- The degree to which citizens are free to associate and assemble
- Freedom of movement in the country
- The size of the government

- Property rights and a robust legal system
- Access to sound money

Each country's performance is then calculated on a scale of one (least free) to ten (most free). According to the 2018 analysis, the United States scored 8.66 (out of a possible 10.0) in terms of "Personal Freedom" and 8.22 for "Economic Freedom," for a combined "Human Freedom" score of 8.44. That total, of course, is not bad, but for a nation founded on what were at the time — and for many decades thereafter — principles of individual liberty unique in the annals of human history, it is not something to brag about; especially in terms of a nine point drop to #17 over the course of a single year.

Some of America's lowest scores were in the categories of civil and criminal justice, where we scored a measly 6.2 and 6.3, respectively (actually below average). Not surprising, we scored a perfect 10.0 in a number of technical indices, such as "Access to Cable and Satellite," that kept us from slipping even further down the ranking. While we garnered a perfect score for "Same-Sex Relationships," our low scores on far more fundamental characteristics of a society's legal mechanisms for protecting individual liberty, still is troubling.

Considered over the course of the past ten years, the U.S. has occupied the 17th position three other times, in 2008, 2011, and 2013. And while we have never dropped below position 17, the plunge from being in the top ten just the year before (at number eight), portends further bad news when the full data for calendar year 2020 finally is calculated. The loss of freedoms resulting from governments' responses to the COVID pandemic have by any objective measure significantly eroded freedom in America, especially in terms of property and employment rights, and it is not a pretty picture for human freedom.