



Less Freedom

John Stossel

June 21, 2023

Politicians claim their bills bring us good things. Free health care! Child care! A cellphone for all!

But government isn't Santa Claus. Government is force.

Most every law takes away a little of our money or freedom or both.

The Heritage Foundation ranks economic freedom across the globe. The United States once ranked No. 4 in the world, but we've been in decline. This year, as my [new video](#) explains, we're 25th.

"If you care about living a prosperous life, you should care about what government economic policies are," says The Heritage Foundation's Derrick Morgan.

The foundation ranks countries' economic freedom based on things like rule of law, regulatory efficiency, open markets, fiscal health, etc.

The big reason the USA fell in the rankings is that Congress spends so much more money than government can squeeze out of us in taxes.

I say to Morgan, "Free child care, free this, free that!" That sounds *good* for my freedom."

"Sooner or later, you run out of other people's money," Morgan responds. "More dollars chasing fewer goods leads to inflation," and inflation leaves us less financial freedom.

In addition, politicians ban some of our choices, like future natural gas hookups and gas-powered cars. Many want to ban contraception, TikTok, guns.

And on top of that, America's bureaucrats add thousands of regulations, most of which restrict individual freedom.

"Those are examples of our smothering government and why we keep dropping places," says Morgan.

The world's least free countries have even more smothering governments.

India ranks toward the bottom of the freedom list because Indian bureaucrats are empowered to decide whether entrepreneurs may try something new. Investors must get up to 70 different approvals. No wonder India stays poor.

It could be worse. The most repressed people in the world are trapped in countries at the bottom of the freedom list: Sudan, Venezuela, Cuba and, of course, North Korea.

"It's bad in the economic sphere just as it is in the political sphere," says Morgan. "These things reinforce each other. The freer a country is economically, the better off they are."

Hong Kong was a great example of how economic freedom makes life better. In just 30 years, people there moved from poverty to prosperity.

It happened because Hong Kong's British rulers enforced rule of law but put few obstacles in the way of trying new things.

That allowed free people in Hong Kong to get rich and put Hong Kong at the top of many freedom rankings.

Then the British gave Hong Kong back to China. China promised to respect Hong Kong's open society, but a few years ago, China turned Hong Kong into another Chinese police state.

So Heritage dropped Hong Kong from its list. "We got to the point where we could no longer consider them separate from Communist China, sadly," says Morgan.

The freest countries on Heritage's list are Taiwan, Ireland, Switzerland and Singapore.

But wait! Singapore doesn't have free speech. You can't criticize politicians or assemble without a police permit. They recently hanged some people for selling marijuana.

"Would you want to live in Singapore?" I ask Morgan.

"Your point is a good one," he responds. "This isn't a measure of freedom overall. It's a measure of economic freedom. Other freedoms are important, religious freedom ... First Amendment freedom."

The Cato Institute's [Human Freedom Index](#), which ranks both economic and personal freedom, lists Switzerland, New Zealand, Estonia and Denmark as the freest countries. Singapore ranks 44th. America 23rd.

"Our point," explains Morgan, "is really to have a data longevity to look at. Does economic freedom over time lead to freer, more prosperous, healthier and cleaner environments? It does."

That's something to remember next time politicians take away your choices or print more money.

"They're going to offer you free stuff," says Morgan. "It's all going to sound good ... but their policies are in all likelihood going to make things worse."