



Florida second 'freest' state in country, says libertarian Cato Institute

Regulatory policy, 'personal freedom' could still improve though.

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Gov. **Ron DeSantis** often talks up the “Free State of Florida,” and a libertarian think tank largely backs his read, proclaiming the Sunshine State to be yet again the second freest in the United States, behind only New Hampshire.

The latest edition of the Cato Institute’s “**Freedom in the 50 States**” measures the states against each other with 230 metrics reflecting the group’s philosophical bent: “from taxation to debt, eminent domain laws to occupational licensing, and drug policy to educational choice.”

Overall, **Florida ranks second**, as it has since 2016, but it is a designation with internal differences. The state scores its best marks on economic freedom and fiscal policy, where it is #1. The state is #12 in personal freedom, and just #21 in regulatory freedom.

“Regulatory policy is improved but mediocre compared with the fiscal side. Florida’s personal freedom has lagged in the past; however, it has improved a lot since 2014,” authors **William Ruger** and **Jason Sorens** remark.

There is still room for improvement, however: ” (Florida) does have a law restricting employers from banning guns on certain company property, such as parking lots, which violates employers’ property rights.”

In addition to having room to improve on gun rights, summed up here as “mediocre” and made worse with post-Parkland legislation in 2018, the authors contend that Florida is lacking in terms of personal freedoms relative to tobacco and cannabis, even as they’ve gotten liquor mostly right.

“The cannabis regime is largely unreformed despite recent liberalization of medical marijuana policy (which the authors recommended in the fourth edition), whereas alcohol is lightly regulated despite beer and wine taxes being a bit high ... Tobacco freedom is middling,” the authors contend.

Beyond these cavils, there are other suggestions for improvement.

One such seems to be more local control for school districts, specifically allowing “municipalities to control their own school districts” by giving them and not counties that discretion.

Occupational freedom is also a Cato concern, with room for improvement in expansion of scope of practice.

“Physician assistants are now free to prescribe, but nurse practitioners and dental hygienists are not yet free from independent practice limitations,” the authors remark.