

FreedomWatch

Australia ranked 7th in human freedom rankings

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Since the mid-1980s, classical liberals have sought to develop a new basis for explaining the benefits of greater freedom to the general public – namely, index-based quantitative measurements of relative freedom for the countries of the world.

The initial efforts ([described here](#)) in developing freedom indices were mainly centred on examining the freedom with which people can buy and sell their goods and services and invest in assets without undue interference from governments.

Now liberals are going further with their quantitative index work, empirically exploring the importance of freedom in every dimension. This includes areas such as the legal system and rule of law, security and personal safety, freedom of association, expression, movement and religion, the size of government, the freedom to trade, and regulation of business, credit, and labour.

This has culminated in the release, just this week, of the [Human Freedom Index](#), jointly produced by the Cato Institute, the Fraser Institute and others.

What the Index shows is that Australia is, in relative terms, within the top ten most free countries in the world, placing seventh in the international league table for 2012.

Compared with other countries, we are doing pretty well, especially when it comes to personal freedoms. The freedom score for the personal freedom index components stood at 9.23 (out of 10), bested only by the likes of the Nordic and Scandinavian countries.

Despite this, the index results show we should further enhance personal freedoms in this country. For example, we should free the press by reducing the extent of government controls over media and improve the effectiveness of our criminal justice system.

Confirming the results of previous economic freedom indices in recent years, the Human Freedom Index is showing that Australia is struggling to maintain momentum retaining relatively high levels of economic freedom. Our score for the economic freedom index components in 2012 was 7.87, behind the likes of Hong Kong (8.98), Switzerland (8.19), New Zealand (8.25), and Canada (8.00).

If Australians want to become more prosperous in the future we should accept reforms, such as lower government spending, more competitive taxes and reducing the degree of government interference in our economic affairs.

No index measure is going to perfectly capture every aspect of human freedom, as complex as it all is. However, the authors of the Human Freedom Index should be commended for making a valuable start comparing freedom comprehensively in an impressive listing of 152 countries.

What is of most value to us is that the Human Freedom Index indicates we are doing less bad in a world filled with so many depredations of freedom. Still, we have much work to do to make Australians more free than ever before.