



# NEWS RELEASE

## Personal freedom on the wane worldwide: report

December 17, 2020  
For Immediate Release

**TORONTO**—In recent years, personal freedom has declined significantly around the world—and the worst is likely yet to come, finds a new study released today by Canada’s Fraser Institute and the U.S.-based Cato Institute.

“Troubling developments include the Chinese Communist Party intensifying its attack on freedom, regimes in Hungary and Poland continuing to undermine the rule of law and suppress media freedom, and dictatorships in Egypt and other Arab countries ramping up repression,” said Fred McMahon, Dr. Michael A. Walker Research Chair in Economic Freedom at the Fraser Institute and co-author of this year’s [Human Freedom Index](#).

The index, based on 2018 data (the most recent year of available comparable data), uses a 0 to 10 scale to measure personal freedom—which includes the rule of law, safety and security, identity and relationships (LGBTQ and women’s freedom), and freedom of movement, speech, assembly and religion—alongside economic freedom, the ability of individuals to make their own economic decisions without government or crony interference.

While economic freedom globally increased slightly from 2008 to 2018, personal freedom fell by 0.21 points, with declines in all but two of the 10 years. Religion saw the largest decrease in freedom (0.63) followed by identity and relationships (0.43) and rule of law (0.31). The rule of law also has the lowest overall score at 5.09.

New Zealand tops this year’s freedom index followed by Switzerland, Hong Kong, Denmark and Australia (although due to Beijing’s accelerated suppression, we expect Hong Kong’s freedom score to decline significantly in coming years). The five least-free countries are (in descending order) Iran, Yemen, Venezuela, Sudan and Syria.

Overall worldwide rankings for other significant countries include Canada (6<sup>th</sup>), Germany (9<sup>th</sup>), the United Kingdom and the United States (tied for 17<sup>th</sup>), France (33<sup>rd</sup>), South Africa and Indonesia (tied for 68<sup>th</sup>), Malaysia (83<sup>rd</sup>) Mexico and Colombia (tied for 86<sup>th</sup>), India (111<sup>th</sup>), Russia (115<sup>th</sup>), Turkey (119<sup>th</sup>), China (129<sup>th</sup>) and Saudi Arabia (151<sup>st</sup>).

Regionally, from 2008 to 2018, the Middle East and North Africa saw the largest declines while North America and Western Europe experienced small declines yet remained the freest regions worldwide.

Crucially, people in freer countries are more prosperous than those in less-free countries. For example, the average per-capita income for the top-quartile countries on the index was US\$50,340 compared to US\$7,720 for the least-free quartile in 2018.

“When people are free, they have more opportunity to prosper and lead happier healthier lives,” said Ian Vásquez, report co-author and director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity.

The complete index, a joint project of the Fraser Institute and the Cato Institute, is available as a free PDF download at [www.fraserinstitute.org](http://www.fraserinstitute.org).

### The 10 freest and the least-free countries in the 2020 Human Freedom Index

#### The 10 freest jurisdictions

1	New Zealand	8.87
2	Switzerland	8.82
3	Hong Kong	8.74

#### The 10 least free jurisdictions

153	Central African Rep	5.25
154	Algeria	5.20
155	Iraq	4.90

4	Denmark	8.73	156	Libya	4.83
5	Australia	8.68	157	Egypt	4.67
6	Canada	8.64	158	Iran	4.53
7	Ireland	8.62	159	Yemen	4.17
8	Estonia	8.54	160	Venezuela	4.08
9	Germany	8.52	161	Sudan	4.01
9	Sweden	8.52	162	Syria	3.97

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Fred McMahon, Dr. Michael A. Walker Research Chair in Economic Freedom  
Fraser Institute

*To arrange media interviews or for more information, please contact:*

Mark Hasiuk, Fraser Institute

(604) 688-0221 ext. 517

[mark.hasiuk@fraserinstitute.org](mailto:mark.hasiuk@fraserinstitute.org)

Follow the Fraser Institute on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)



The Fraser Institute is an independent Canadian public policy research and educational organization with offices in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax and ties to a global network of think-tanks in 87 countries. Its mission is to improve the quality of life for Canadians, their families and future generations by studying, measuring and broadly communicating the effects of government policies, entrepreneurship and choice on their well-being. To protect the Institute's independence, it does not accept grants from governments or contracts for research. Visit [www.fraserinstitute.org](http://www.fraserinstitute.org)