



# NEWS RELEASE

## 83% of world’s population live in countries where freedom declined

December 16, 2021  
For Immediate Release

**TORONTO**—Even before COVID—and the response from governments worldwide—global freedom was on the wane, finds a study released today by Canada’s Fraser Institute and the U.S.-based Cato Institute.

“When people are free, they have more opportunity to prosper and pursue happier healthier lives for themselves and their families,” said Fred McMahon, resident fellow at the Fraser Institute and co-author of this year’s *Human Freedom Index*. The index covers the period from 2008, the earliest year of comprehensive data, to 2019, the most recent year of comprehensive data.

The index measures personal freedom— the rule of law, safety and security, identity and relationships (i.e. the freedom to choose your relationship partner), freedom of movement, speech, assembly and religion—alongside economic freedom, the ability of individuals to make their own economic decisions.

From 2008 to 2019, 83 per cent of the world’s population experienced a decline in freedom.

“These data are pre-COVID so the percentage will likely increase in future reports and the country rankings will likely also see significant variance,” McMahon said.

Switzerland tops this year’s freedom index followed by New Zealand, Denmark, Estonia and Ireland (Canada tied with Finland for sixth place). The five least-free countries are (in descending order) Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Venezuela and Syria.

Overall worldwide rankings for other significant countries include the United Kingdom (14), Germany, Japan and the United States (tied at 15), Taiwan (19), Chile (28), Hong Kong (30), Brazil (78), Mexico (93), India (119), Nigeria (123), Russia (126), Turkey (139), China (150), Saudi Arabia (155) and Iran (160).

Regionally, North America (Canada and the United States), Western Europe and Oceania have the highest levels of freedom while the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have the lowest levels.

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\$48,748 compared to US\$11,259 for the least-free quartile in 2019.

“When government limits the ability of people to move, assemble and speak freely, people are less able to lead the lives they want to live,” said Ian Vásquez, report co-author and Cato Institute Vice President for International Studies.

Ryan Murphy, Research Associate Professor Southern Methodist University, and Guillermina Sutter Schneider, data scientist and project manager at Cato Institute, are co-authors. 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 2019:

The 10 freest jurisdictions	The 10 least-free countries
1. Switzerland	156. Libya
2. New Zealand	157. Iraq
3. Denmark	157. Burundi
4. Estonia	159. Somalia
5. Ireland	160. Iran
6. Finland (tied)	161. Egypt

6	Canada (tied)	162.	Sudan
8	Australia	163.	Yemen
9	Sweden	164.	Venezuela
10	Luxembourg	165.	Syria

**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)