

2019 Avenir Suisse Freedom Index

New indicators, new top two

In the 2019 Avenir Suisse Freedom Index there has been a change at the top of the rankings: Canton Schwyz now leads the way, with Appenzell-Ausserrhoden in second place. Aargau, which came in first for many years, has slipped back to third. The year's biggest climber is Canton Zug, which shot up 11 places to make it into the top ten. There have also been surprising shifts at the other end of the table, with Canton Vaud managing to escape the bottom rankings.

For the first time Aargau has been toppled from the number one spot in the Avenir Suisse Freedom index – by Canton Schwyz, long seen as the eternal runner-up. The central Swiss canton of Schwyz got absolute top marks in areas such as tax burden and regional labour market regulation. It also scored well for its liberal shop opening hours, the low proportion of public sector employees, and lack of hospitality levies. In addition to this the canton refrains from unnecessarily strict regulation on veils, smoking, and dog ownership.

Four additional indicators

This year's index sees the introduction of four additional indicators. For the first time the evaluation also takes account of the cantons' stance on the freedom of information in public administration, dance bans on public holidays, lay judges, and legislation banning certain breeds of dog. This rewards transparency vis-à-vis the public and penalises over-regulation of public holidays. Cantons that don't impose restrictions on the choice of judge and give dog owners personal responsibility get positive scores.

While these new indicators aren't responsible for the change at the top of the rankings, they have brought about some shifts around the densely-populated middle of the table, some of them surprising. Valais, for example, fell 13 places and is now second-last ahead of the traditionally bottom-ranking Geneva. Canton Zug, by contrast, moved up 11 places to make it into the top ten.

Mixed picture in French-speaking cantons

Although Geneva continues to bring up the rear in 26th place, the Avenir Suisse Freedom Index doesn't point to any clear language divide. However, cantons in western Switzerland do tend to do somewhat better than their German-speaking counterparts in terms of civil liberties. For example, Canton Jura remains unchallenged at the head of the civil liberties sub-index, with Neuchâtel coming in second. Overall, the biggest winner in French-speaking Switzerland has to be Vaud. The canton's economic indicators for tax burden and public-sector employment have improved significantly, which together with liberal approaches to home schooling and bans on alcohol has enabled it to leap from 25th to 18th in the rankings. In terms of civil liberties, Canton Vaud benefits from a lack of church tax for corporations and a fairly hands-off approach to regulating public holidays.

*The Avenir Suisse Freedom Index is an **interactive online publication**. For example it enables you to compare cantons, or include or exclude specific indicators to create your own personal freedom index.*

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Download links to the evaluations of individual cantons, including graphics (PDF):

