

Avenir Suisse Freedom Index Has New Member and Surprise Result

Liechtenstein a Nose Ahead

As it says in the preamble to the Swiss Federal Constitution, “...only those who use their freedom remain free.” The constitution mentions the notion of freedom and liberty dozens of times. But which canton allows people to live most freely? The Avenir Suisse Freedom Index answers this question on the basis of 33 societal and economic indicators. For the first time it now includes the Principality of Liechtenstein. The index is a snapshot of economic and civil liberties before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

For the first time the Avenir Suisse Freedom Index looks beyond Switzerland’s borders to include the Principality of Liechtenstein in addition to the cantons. It’s a fascinating comparison: Switzerland’s sovereign neighbor takes first place in the rankings at the very first attempt, leaving the Swiss cantons trailing in its wake. Interestingly, however it’s not the economic indicators that help the Principality to this position as one might assume. What tips the balance more than anything is a broad tendency to refrain from prohibitions and a liberal approach to regulating civil liberties. For example, it is around three times faster to obtain a building permit in Liechtenstein than in the average Swiss canton. The Principality also gets top marks when it comes to creditworthiness and government spending on housing. The Avenir Suisse Freedom Index was extended in collaboration with the Stiftung Zukunft.li think tank.

Shifts among the Cantons

The most liberal Swiss canton is now Appenzell-Ausserrhoden. Long in the shadow of the longstanding number one Aargau and last year’s winner, Schwyz, Appenzell-Ausserrhoden has made the breakthrough to lead the rankings among the cantons. But the inclusion of the Principality of Liechtenstein denied it first place overall in the Avenir Suisse Freedom Index.

The biggest climber was Canton St. Gallen, thanks to significant improvements in the societal indicators. Nevertheless, Canton Jura continues to lead the pack in terms of civil liberties, as well as being the best-placed French-speaking canton in the overall rankings. Canton Schwyz continues to provide the greatest economic freedoms. It’s not just down to its tax framework; Schwyz also does well in terms of indicators such as shop opening hours and hospitality levies.

So the Principality of Liechtenstein's domination of the 2020 Avenir Suisse Freedom Index is by no means absolute. But no canton puts in such a good performance in both the economic and societal subindices.

Snapshot of Economic and Civil Liberties before the Coronavirus Pandemic

The debate on freedom has picked up again in the wake of Covid-19, especially in Switzerland, where civil and economic liberties traditionally enjoy high status. Despite this, the 2020 index doesn't yet reflect the impact of coronavirus measures on freedom. On the one hand there's the inherent time lag to which any index based on statistical time series, including the Avenir Suisse Freedom Index, is subject. On the other there's the cut-off dates set for gathering the data. For this reason it's not possible for a single construct such as the Avenir Suisse Freedom Index to mirror current developments resulting from the pandemic. Avenir Suisse does plan, however, to publish another, separate publication in 2021 analyzing the measures taken in the individual cantons.

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

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Click on the emblem to download a PDF of the evaluation for each canton:

