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## Pa. scores well in study on government regulation

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By Amy McConnell Schaarsmith, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Many Americans have seen their personal and economic freedom whittled away by local and state governments in recent decades, according to researchers for the Mercatus Center at George Mason University.

And the residents of some states have it worse than others, they say, with Pennsylvania earning high marks for freedom from regulations but ranking in the middle of the pack overall.

The freest states -- those with the fewest regulations in key areas, the greatest fiscal prudence and the highest respect for individual liberties -- also seem to attract new residents, while the least free states tend to lose them, said researcher Jason Sorens, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Buffalo, State University of New York.

If Pennsylvania was as free as say, New Hampshire -- by the researchers' reckoning, the freest state in the nation -- it could have attracted several hundred thousand new residents instead of losing more than 44,000 residents since 2000, he said.

Mr. Sorens and his co-author, Texas State University political science assistant professor William Ruger, say they hope lawmakers start to pay more attention to such facts when deciding public policy.

"People do observe what works and what doesn't, and that affects where they live and presumably affects what state legislators are willing to do to keep their state economies growing and healthy," Mr. Sorens said.

The study, "Freedom in the 50 States: An Index of Personal and Economic Freedom," released last month by the Mercatus Center ranked states on a variety of indicators grouped according to fiscal policy, regulatory policy, economic freedom and personal freedom.

The center said it is non-partisan. However, the study's co-authors said they evaluated states against a libertarian ideal of government non-intervention.

Among personal freedoms, for instance, researchers looked at each state's limits on such things as gaming, alcohol, physician-assisted suicide, auto regulations, tobacco taxes, campaign finance laws, gun control, and regulation of home schools and private schools.

Overall, Pennsylvania ranked 20th among the states in allowing fiscal, regulatory and personal freedom; researchers judged New Hampshire the most free and New York the least free.

Pennsylvania ranked third in allowing freedom from regulation, according to researchers.

Pennsylvania's home school laws are "draconian," and its private-school regulations are not much better, they said. But the state's gun-control laws "are not awful" and its gambling laws are the most liberal in the nation.

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