
Big Government and Freedom

Videos:

“Is ‘Big Government’ Really the Problem?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTou0ViHOXM> (5:50 minutes)

“How Free Are You?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Isa59wlS5E> (5:56 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on both sides of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What would you say is the topic discussed in these two videos?
2. What are the opposing ideas presented in these videos?
3. What is the primary argument in the Gravel Institute video in favor of big government?
4. What are some examples of big government referred to in the Gravel Institute video?
5. Briahna Gray suggests that big government helps make people more free. How is that possible?
6. John Stossel says that Switzerland ranked high in the Human Freedom Index in part because it has low regulations and low taxes. How do these make people more free? What is Briahna Gray’s explanation about Switzerland’s ranking?
7. In the Gravel Institute video, Briahna Gray says that some countries with bigger governments have higher economic mobility. What is economic mobility? Why is it important? Other than the size of government, what else might impact economic mobility?
8. What are some examples Ian Vásquez gives in the Stossel video of countries regulating people’s free time? Can you think of any other examples?
9. Both videos reference the Human Freedom Index. What are some of the countries that rank higher than the United States? Are you surprised the United States wasn’t higher? Why/Why not?
10. While John Stossel and Briahna Gray both discuss the Human Freedom Index, they use it for different purposes. How so?

11. What three reasons does Ian Vasquez and John Stossel give for the United States' decline in the Human Freedom Index?
12. What do John Stossel and Ian Vasquez attribute to Ireland's rapid rise on the Human Freedom Index?
13. At the beginning of the Gravel Institute video, Briahna Gray says that all Americans can agree that we value democracy, and that leaders are elected to represent the people's interests. Is there anything she ignores about the United States in her discussion of the U.S. as a "democracy"?
14. Briahna Gray says "the American Dream is more alive in these big government countries than in America." What did she mean by this? What else might play a role in the opportunities a country's citizens have?
15. The Stossel video includes footage of Venezuelans fighting over bags of flour. What does John Stossel say caused this?
16. Briahna Gray says that big government vs. small government is a "false choice." It's not the size of government that is the problem, she says, it's who controls it. Briahna says big government only becomes a problem when it's controlled by business interests. Is that what happened in Venezuela? What *did* happen there?
17. Is it possible that one problem with big government is that people use government to control the actions of others? Can government control others and *not* take away some of their freedom?
18. If Briahna is concerned about groups influencing government, why might she have left out labor unions? Are they looking out for all Americans or just their union members?
19. Briahna Gray cites a Princeton University study which found that the desires of regular people had zero impact on policy adoption in the United States. Did this surprise you? Why/Why not? Other than businesses, what other groups try to influence government?
20. John Stossel says that Syria is at the bottom of the Human Freedom Index "mostly because of the war." How does war reduce freedom? How is war related to big government?
21. What other countries are toward the bottom of the Freedom Index? What might be some reasons for that?
22. Personal and corporate tax rates in the U.S. used to be higher, Briahna says. Does taking more money from people make them more or less free? If corporations have to pay higher taxes, do you think that will affect the prices consumers pay? Does the amount of time we need to work to pay for products affect our freedom?

23. John Stossel says Hong Kong became more prosperous because there were fewer obstacles for “trying new things.” Why is it important for people to try new things? How does this lead to prosperity?
24. John Stossel says: “Despite what we hear on the news, over several decades, the world has slowly been getting better.” What influence has the news had on your own worldview? Do you feel like the world is getting better or worse? Why/Why not?
25. Before watching these videos, did you have an opinion on “big government”? Have these videos changed your views?
26. What role do you think John’s and Briahna’s political views played in the positions they took in their videos?
27. What else would you like to learn about how big government and freedom impact prosperity and quality of life?
28. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?