

Why freedom matters more than safety

Safety is, of course, to be valued, but some important questions do arise, particularly in the context of our 21st-century challenges: Are we sacrificing too much freedom in the pursuit of safety, and if so, why?

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In an age consumed by concerns for safety and security, many of us have been quick to embrace unprecedented safety measures, [surveillance](#), and expanding state control. Safety is, of course, to be valued, but some important questions do arise, particularly in the context of our 21st-century challenges: Are we sacrificing too much freedom in the pursuit of safety? Is freedom more important than safety, and if so, why?

The idea here is not to reject safety outright, but to ensure that it is achieved within the bounds of individual freedom, limited government, and the protection of individual rights. Moreover, it's worth noting that pursuing

safety without due regard for freedom can paradoxically render the world less safe.

But what's the driving force behind this belief that freedom should be favored even amidst safety concerns? Let's delve into the reasons why, with the aim of fostering a just and prosperous society, the principle of individual liberty is paramount.

How the pursuit of safety can be dangerous

Excessive safety measures and regulations can stifle innovation and economic progress. In a society where government control is pervasive, individuals and businesses may be discouraged from taking risks or pursuing innovative ideas. This can result in economic stagnation and a lack of dynamism, hindering overall prosperity.

When a society prioritizes safety above all else, it often leads to the concentration of power in the hands of a few. Governments may seek to centralize authority to respond to perceived threats more efficiently.

However, this concentration of power can undermine the system of checks and balances that is essential for preventing abuses of power. Authoritarian tendencies can emerge, jeopardizing the principles of [democracy](#) and [individual rights](#).

Indeed, arguably the most concerning risk is the gradual slide toward authoritarianism. It often begins with seemingly well-intentioned safety measures but can evolve into a full-blown authoritarian regime if left unchecked.

Once established, authoritarian governments are notoriously difficult to dismantle, and the erosion of individual liberties becomes a long-term and entrenched reality.

Indeed, history is replete with stories of authoritarianism emerging when societies prioritize safety or perceived stability over individual liberty. Here are some notable historical examples:

Nazi Germany (1933-1945): Adolf Hitler's [rise to power](#) in Germany is a stark example of authoritarianism emerging in the name of safety and stability. In the aftermath of World War I and the economic turmoil of the Weimar Republic, many Germans were yearning for stability.

Hitler promised to restore order and provide safety and economic security, but his regime quickly dismantled democratic institutions, suppressed dissent, and imposed a totalitarian rule marked by violence and terror.

Soviet Union (1917-1991): The Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the rise of the [Soviet Union](#). While the initial promise was to create a

fair and equitable society, the pursuit of collective safety and societal transformation led to a regime under Joseph Stalin marked by purges, mass executions, and a complete disregard for individual liberties. The 'safety' of the Soviet regime came at the expense of individual freedom, progress, and prosperity.

Post-9/11 United States (2001-present): In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. Government implemented a series of security measures in the name of safety.

The Patriot Act expanded surveillance powers, and the government engaged in mass data collection. These measures compromised civil liberties and privacy rights, providing a compelling example of the erosion of individual freedoms in the name of national security

China's Social Credit System (ongoing): China's Social Credit System is a modern example of [authoritarianism](#) emerging under the guise of safety and social stability.

Under Xi Jinping, the communist regime has implemented a complex system that assigns scores to individuals based on their behavior, online activities, and social interactions. Those with low scores face restrictions on various aspects of life, including travel and access to certain services. The system is designed to promote compliance with government policies,

but it raises significant concerns about privacy and freedom of expression.

Freedom is *the* fundamental principle that enables justice and prosperity

Freedom isn't an abstract aspiration; rather, it serves as the very foundation of a just and prosperous society. In pursuing safety, we mustn't forget the timeless principles that define our civilization.

The idea of freedom as an important end in and of itself has been at the heart of the philosophical discourse for centuries, championed by classical liberal and Enlightenment thinkers who laid the intellectual groundwork for the modern world.

[John Locke](#), a seminal figure in the Enlightenment era, argued that individuals possess natural rights, including life, liberty, and property. These rights, he contended, precede the existence of government and cannot be taken away without just cause.

Locke's ideas laid the foundation for the concept of limited government and individual freedom. He believed that governments exist to protect these rights, and their legitimacy is derived from the consent of the governed. For Locke, the primacy of freedom was not merely a philosophical notion; it was a blueprint for constructing a just society.

Likewise, [John Stuart Mill](#), another influential figure in [classical liberalism](#), emphasized the importance of individual liberty as a means to promote the well-being and progress of society. Mill argued that a society that fosters freedom of thought, expression, and action allows individuals to pursue their own happiness and development.

In his famous work, *On Liberty*, he asserted that the only justification for limiting individual freedom is to prevent harm to others. But this harm has to be real and demonstrable in order for an individual to be restrained from pursuing their course of action — not just a potential risk.

Why freedom makes us thrive

One of the essential aspects of freedom is the idea that it allows individuals to take responsibility for their choices and actions. In a society that prioritizes safety at the expense of freedom, personal responsibility often takes a backseat.

This can result in a culture of dependency, where individuals look to the government for solutions to every problem, eroding the self-reliance and resilience that are essential for a prosperous society.

Furthermore, freedom fosters innovation and economic prosperity. History has shown that societies with greater economic freedom enjoy

greater economic growth and higher standards of living.

When individuals are free to pursue their economic interests and innovate without excessive government interference, it leads to the creation of wealth and opportunities.

Cultural and intellectual diversity also thrive in a [free society](#). The exchange of ideas and perspectives is vital for the growth of knowledge and the development of a vibrant culture. In a society that values freedom, individuals are encouraged to express themselves and challenge established norms, leading to social progress and a more dynamic and inclusive culture.

Conclusion

While safety is undoubtedly important, it must be achieved within the framework of individual freedom and limited government intervention to ensure a thriving and vibrant society.

The lessons from history and the insights of classical liberal and [Enlightenment](#) thinkers remind us that sacrificing too much freedom in the name of safety can lead down a perilous path. To maintain a just and prosperous society, it is essential to cherish and uphold the principle of individual liberty.

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Students For Liberty's Local Coordinator Program, you can be supported in promoting the ideas of liberty while also developing your skills and meeting many like-minded students from across the world. Click on the button below to find out more and get involved!

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LibertyCon International offers an opportunity to engage with top experts, scholars, and entrepreneurs from a variety of fields while providing a platform for attendees to connect with others who are dedicated to advancing pro-liberty ideas and creating a freer future.

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