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Best States 2021

Ranking Performance Throughout All 50 States

RANK	STATE	HEALTH CARE	EDUCATION	ECONOMY	INFRASTRUCTURE	OPPORTUNITY	FISCAL STABILITY	CRIME & CORRECTIONS	NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
1	 Washington	8	4	4	3	25	6	19	15
2	 Minnesota	16	17	15	9	2	21	15	10
3	 Utah	11	10	1	5	30	5	8	47
4	 New Hampshire	13	13	11	34	3	33	1	2
5	 Idaho	24	29	3	10	24	4	10	12
6	 Nebraska	28	9	20	6	10	17	31	6
7	 Virginia	12	12	13	39	8	18	9	19
8	 Wisconsin	15	8	26	24	9	9	25	17
9	 Massachusetts	2	2	5	42	36	43	4	4
10	 Florida	25	3	8	20	33	8	26	18
11	 Vermont	18	15	25	12	17	37	3	9
12	 Iowa	20	18	27	19	1	23	14	20
13	 North Carolina	30	7	17	22	28	7	20	27
14	 North Dakota	27	25	32	4	23	16	18	8
15	 South Dakota	29	19	30	14	27	2	35	3
16	 Colorado	10	5	2	15	41	45	41	23
17	 Maryland	6	14	35	38	15	29	22	11
18	 Georgia	43	26	12	11	13	11	29	25
19	 New Jersey	4	1	33	41	19	49	5	33
20	 Connecticut	3	6	22	46	45	30	6	28
21	 New York	7	16	43	30	46	20	11	5
22	 Oregon	17	35	14	2	31	13	40	42
23	 Delaware	14	24	24	25	14	12	39	45
24	 California	5	20	10	31	50	36	28	35
25	 Hawaii	1	27	46	33	34	46	12	1

RANK	STATE	HEALTH CARE	EDUCATION	ECONOMY	INFRASTRUCTURE	OPPORTUNITY	FISCAL STABILITY	CRIME & CORRECTIONS	NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
26	 Kansas	41	23	31	7	16	39	27	16
27	 Maine	26	28	36	37	29	26	2	14
28	 Missouri	42	30	23	27	4	15	45	21
29	 Tennessee	40	33	16	17	21	3	42	39
30	 Illinois	23	11	39	26	12	50	16	43
31	 Texas	31	34	9	16	39	10	37	40
32	 Indiana	32	22	21	32	7	32	24	48
33	 Montana	36	32	19	13	35	19	34	24
34	 Rhode Island	9	39	28	49	32	44	7	7
35	 Wyoming	38	21	45	8	42	34	21	13
36	 Ohio	37	31	34	29	6	24	32	44
37	 Nevada	39	40	6	1	47	27	36	50
38	 Michigan	35	38	29	35	5	38	30	32
39	 Arizona	21	46	7	23	40	40	38	41
40	 Pennsylvania	19	37	42	44	11	47	17	38
41	 Kentucky	44	36	40	18	20	48	13	29
42	 South Carolina	34	44	18	36	38	31	46	26
43	 Oklahoma	48	42	37	21	26	25	44	34
44	 Arkansas	49	41	41	43	22	14	48	30
45	 Alaska	22	49	50	40	43	1	49	46
46	 Alabama	45	47	38	28	37	22	43	37
47	 West Virginia	47	45	48	50	18	28	23	36
48	 New Mexico	33	50	44	45	49	35	47	31
49	 Mississippi	50	43	49	48	44	41	33	22
50	 Louisiana	46	48	47	47	48	42	50	49

How We Score

The [Best States rankings](#) from U.S. News & World Report show how each of the 50 U.S. states ranks in 71 metrics across eight categories. The data behind the rankings aims to show how well states serve their residents in a variety of ways.

In calculating the rankings, each of the eight categories was assigned weightings based on the average of three years of data from an annual national survey that asked nearly 70,000 people to prioritize each subject in their state:

- [Health Care](#): 15.97%
- [Education](#): 15.94%
- [Economy](#): 13.36%
- [Infrastructure](#): 12.93%
- [Opportunity](#): 12.29%
- [Fiscal Stability](#): 11.36%
- [Crime & Corrections](#): 9.16%
- [Natural Environment](#): 8.99%

Equal weight was assigned to elements within each category. Those weights are:

Health Care

- [Health Care Access](#): 33.33%
- [Health Care Quality](#): 33.33%
- [Public Health](#): 33.33%

Education

- [Higher Education](#): 50%
- [Pre-K - 12](#): 50%

Economy

- [Business Environment](#): 33.33%
- [Employment](#): 33.33%
- [Growth](#): 33.33%

Infrastructure

- [Energy](#): 33.33%
- [Internet Access](#): 33.33%
- [Transportation](#): 33.33%

Opportunity

- [Affordability](#): 33.33%
- [Economic Opportunity](#): 33.33%
- [Equality](#): 33.33%

Fiscal Stability

- [Long-Term](#): 50%
- [Short-Term](#): 50%

Crime & Corrections

- [Corrections](#): 50%
- [Public Safety](#): 50%

Natural Environment

- [Air and Water Quality](#): 50%
- [Pollution](#): 50%

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Methodology

From there, U.S. News created an index score for each metric for each state. In each metric, the state that performed the best in the metric was given 100 points and the state that performed the worst was given 0 points. States between these were indexed proportionally. After translating raw data to index scores for each state in each metric, metric index scores were averaged to determine subcategory scores and rankings. Then, subcategory scores were averaged to determine category scores and rankings.

For the overall ranking, U.S. News created a weighted average of the eight category rankings using the weight for each category as determined by the survey, and then ranked the outcome. We chose this method so that the overall ranking would not be skewed by large differences in scores at a metric level.

The Survey

For the weighting of the Best States rankings, U.S. News wanted to use an objective measure reflecting the priorities of citizens for their state governments. An annual survey asked Americans how satisfied they were with various state government services and where they thought their state governments should focus resources. The weights for the 2021 Best States rankings are based on the average of responses from three surveys: one conducted in fall 2017 that included 20,100 respondents from all 50 states, a second conducted in the winter of 2018-19 that included 23,400 respondents from all 50

states, and a third conducted in the winter of 2020-21 that included 26,300 respondents, also from all 50 states. Survey respondents were adults age 18 and older who collectively represent all U.S. adults. The survey results were weighted to be representative of the country's population across all ages, genders, ethnicities and household incomes.

The categories for the rankings aligned with the survey questions. We based the weightings for the categories on a question that asked respondents to rank the categories, such as health and education, from 1 to 8 (1 being most important) in order of what their home state's priorities should be. Respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with their state's performance in these categories, and if they felt their state was not adequately funding these areas. The weights for these were calculated from the average rank for each among the respondents.

The Data

In order to select metrics for the project, we consulted experts in each of the categories for guidance. These are the criteria we used in choosing metrics:

- Metrics that measure citizen outcomes in a state were favored over inputs or outputs. For example, we selected the percentage of state residents who have an associate degree or higher instead of the dollars spent on education per capita or the number of students enrolled at state

universities.

- The set of metrics within each category should work together to provide an overview of that category.
- Government data was favored over other sources because of its reliability.
- Standardized data needed to be available across all or most states. Publicly available data was favored for its accessibility.
- Data for each measure should be recent and have regularly scheduled updates.

In developing the Best States rankings, data was pulled from the following sources:

- U.S. Census Bureau
- ACT
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- The College Board
- The Council for Community and Economic Research
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Federal Communications Commission
- Fortune
- The Institute for College Access & Success
- Medicaid.gov
- The Mercatus Center at George Mason University
- Moody's Analytics
- National Assessment of Educational Progress
- National Center for Education Statistics
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Pew Charitable Trusts
- PricewaterhouseCoopers
- Tax Policy Center
- U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
- U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics

- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Department of Energy
- U.S. Department of Transportation
- U.S. Energy Information Administration
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. News Best Hospitals
- U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

For each set, we used the most recent data available as of January 2021. Because datasets have different schedules for updates, data comes from different years and months. This allowed us to pull many more data points. Data will be updated for the 2022 relaunch of Best States.

In some cases, data for certain states are missing because not all states provide data – or reliable data – for all metrics. We omitted metrics with missing data from the calculation of rankings for those states.

Ties were rare in the dataset because we calculated scores to the maximum amount of decimal places without rounding. In some cases, where the score was from a letter grade, such as the state credit rating, there were ties.

Best States didn't rank Washington, D.C., or U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico. Data for Washington, D.C., was included for national averages. For more information, please see the [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

You can see all the raw data behind the Best States rankings on the [Data Explorer](#).

FAQ

What is Best States?

Best States is a unique rankings and news analysis platform designed to inform citizens, business leaders and policymakers alike about what's working and what needs improvement across the country.

The project includes rankings that measure the 50 states overall across eight different categories: health care, education, economy, opportunity, infrastructure, crime & corrections, fiscal stability and natural environment. The rankings are derived from 71 metrics and thousands of data points.

In addition to rankings, the platform offers expert commentary, news analysis and storytelling to highlight the issues, insights and best practices that matter most for states.

Why rank states?

U.S. News & World Report created the Best States rankings to provide a platform for citizens, government leaders and business executives alike to compare and better understand the issues, insights and best practices that matter most for states.

Like U.S. News' [Best Countries](#) franchise and the [Healthiest Communities](#) platform, Best States gives readers a way to analyze the world around them. It shows which state policies are working and which can be improved, and encourages citizens to interact more with their governments to promote positive change.

How is this different from other state rankings?

Other state rankings tend to focus on a very narrow set of issues, such as the business or tax environment of a state or the education and health care offered there.

U.S. News Best States, launched in 2017, is the first comprehensive effort to gauge how states perform across a wide array of issues. This project provides citizens with a full picture of state performance.

How were the states ranked?

The [overall Best States ranking](#) is determined by each of the 50 U.S. states' rankings in eight main categories: health care, education, economy, infrastructure, opportunity, fiscal stability, crime & corrections and natural environment. The rankings are based on thousands of data points gathered by U.S. News, largely from government and publicly available sources.

The categories and subcategories used in the ranking are:

Health Care

- [Health Care Access](#)
- [Health Care Quality](#)
- [Public Health](#)

Education

- [Higher Education](#)
- [Pre-K - 12](#)

Economy

- [Business Environment](#)
- [Employment](#)
- [Growth](#)

Infrastructure

- [Energy](#)
- [Internet Access](#)
- [Transportation](#)

Opportunity

- [Affordability](#)
- [Economic Opportunity](#)
- [Equality](#)

Fiscal Stability

- [Long-Term](#)
- [Short-Term](#)

Crime & Corrections

- [Corrections](#)
- [Public Safety](#)

Natural Environment

- [Air and Water Quality](#)
- [Pollution](#)

What were the respective weights of the inputs and why were they chosen?

The overall Best States ranking is determined by how each of the 50 U.S. states ranks in our eight categories. The weights of the categories are as follows:

- [Health Care](#): 15.97%
- [Education](#): 15.94%
- [Economy](#): 13.36%
- [Infrastructure](#): 12.93%
- [Opportunity](#): 12.29%
- [Fiscal Stability](#): 11.36%

- [Crime & Corrections](#): 9.16%
- [Natural Environment](#): 8.99%

The weights of the category rankings are determined by an annual online survey of thousands of people across the country. The survey is meant to determine which factors are the most important to people about their state. For more on the survey, weighting and inputs, including for subcategories, see the [Best States methodology](#).

Why did my state perform so well?

Each state's performance in the overall ranking correlates directly with its ranking in each of the eight categories, including health care, education, economy, infrastructure, opportunity, fiscal stability, crime & corrections and natural environment. The overall ranking takes a holistic view of all of these category rankings to determine which states are best for their citizens in all aspects. If a state performed well in several categories, especially those weighted more heavily, it is likely to rank highly overall.

Why did my state perform so poorly?

Each state's overall ranking relies on its performance in all eight categories. Since these categories are not weighted equally, a state could rank highly in one or more categories but not overall. For example, if a state ranks near the top for natural environment, weighted at 8.99%, it still could perform poorly overall if it ranks near the bottom for health care and education, the most heavily weighted categories. Also, state rankings are relative; a low ranking doesn't necessarily mean a state is failing but that other states outperformed it in that category

or metric.

Why did my state's rank change?

U.S. News is committed to building the most comprehensive and current analysis of all 50 states. To that end, we continually assess the data used in the rankings, updating to include the most recent data releases and reviewing the methods used to evaluate them. Feedback from industry experts, government officials and state residents alike informed a methodology review process that has resulted in a number of changes over time. The 2021 Best States rankings should therefore be viewed independently from prior years' rankings.

Are the rankings objective and fair?

To ensure that the Best States rankings are objective and fair, U.S. News weighted the eight major categories based on results from representative surveys designed to determine what factors Americans believe their home states should prioritize each year.

Within each category, the metrics were selected objectively in collaboration with experts, using specific criteria. Among these considerations were the comprehensiveness, reliability and timeliness of the data reflecting each metric. The project used publicly available government data when possible and vetted proprietary data in cases where public data was not available.

Why wasn't Washington, D.C., included in the rankings?

For this ranking, U.S. News looked at the 50 states and didn't include the District of Columbia or U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico. One reason was data availability, as

many state datasets do not include these locations. Values for D.C. are often skewed because of its smaller population, making meaningful comparisons between D.C. and other states difficult. However, D.C. was included in national averages for each metric.

How often will the rankings be updated?

U.S. News plans to update the Best States rankings each year.

Is the data used for the rankings reliable?

The rankings are primarily based on publicly available data from government agencies. Examples include the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Department of Energy and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How recent is the data?

U.S. News used the most recent data available as of January 2021. Not all datasets were released at the same time, since they are created throughout the year.

Are there any ties?

Ties were rare in the dataset because we calculated scores to the maximum amount of decimal places without rounding. In some cases – such as government credit rating, where a state's score stemmed from a letter grade – ties were possible.

How did culture and history factor into the rankings?

The Best States rankings concentrate on measurable citizen outcomes and factors that a government can influence with policy. Because of this, we didn't include factors such as culture or history of a state.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the rankings?

COVID-19 is a significant challenge that continues to profoundly impact all states nationwide. While we do make [COVID-19 data](#) available in dashboards to help users understand this evolving situation, we do not include this data in the rankings.

The datasets that are used in the rankings predominantly came from a period predating the pandemic, with the exceptions of Fortune 1000 and Cost of Living Index data for the year 2020. Therefore, the bulk of the analysis is from a “pre-COVID-19” perspective.

Why were no rankings published in 2020?

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. News postponed publishing new rankings for a period of time to focus our editorial coverage more directly on the public health issue and how it has impacted states across the country.

Who can I contact with questions?

For questions about Best States, please email pr@usnews.com.