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Best States 2023: How They Were Ranked

Here's a look at the data behind our rankings.

May 2, 2023, at 12:01 a.m.

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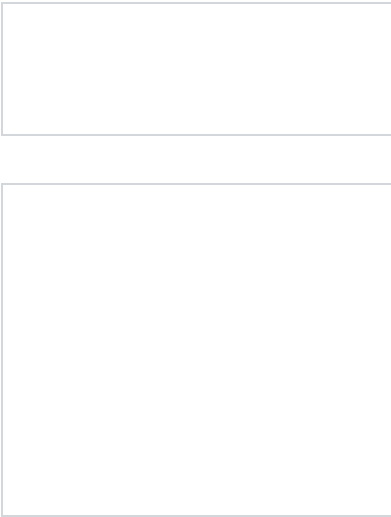


(GETTY IMAGES)

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 weights based on the average of three years of data from recent national surveys that asked nearly 70,000 people total to prioritize each subject in their state.

These are the categories in the Best States framework, along with their weights and subcategories:



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Top States for the Foreign-Born

- **Health Care:** 15.97%
 - [Health Care Access](#)
 - [Health Care Quality](#)
 - [Public Health](#)
- **Education:** 15.94%
 - [Higher Education](#)
 - [Pre-K-12](#)
- **Economy:** 13.36%
 - [Business Environment](#)
 - [Employment](#)
 - [Growth](#)
- **Infrastructure:** 12.93%
 - [Energy](#)
 - [Internet Access](#)
 - [Transportation](#)
- **Opportunity:** 12.29%
 - [Affordability](#)
 - [Economic Opportunity](#)
 - [Equality](#)
- **Fiscal Stability:** 11.36%
 - [Long-Term Fiscal Stability](#)
 - [Short-Term Fiscal Stability](#)
- **Crime & Corrections:** 9.16%
 - [Corrections Outcomes](#)
 - [Public Safety](#)
- **Natural Environment:** 8.99%
 - [Air and Water Quality](#)
 - [Pollution](#)

Equal weight was assigned to subcategories within each category, and to each metric within a subcategory.

For each of the 71 metrics across the eight categories, U.S. News collected raw values for each state to determine metric-level results, often performing calculations using the raw data. These results then were scaled relative to the average among states assessed for that metric using a z-score distribution. Outliers were capped at three standard deviations away from the mean. For metrics such as smoking rate, where increasing values reflected worsening outcomes, results were inverted so that increasing z-scores always represented improving outcomes across the analysis.

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.

BEST STATES
States With the Most Banned Books



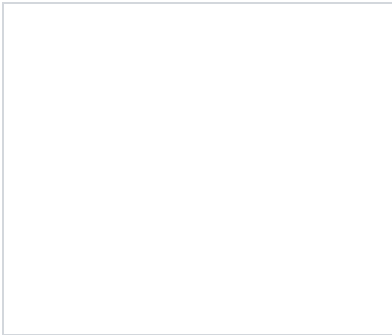
BEST STATES
The Geography of the U.S. Auto Industry



BEST STATES RANKINGS

- #1** Utah
- #2** Washington
- #3** Idaho
- #4** Nebraska
- #5** Minnesota

[SEE FULL RANKINGS LIST »](#)



For the overall Best States rankings, 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 rankings would not be skewed by large differences in scores at a metric level.

U.S. News data analyst Christopher Wolf and data editor Julia Haines performed data collection, analysis and validation leading to the final 2023 Best States rankings.

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. Three yearly surveys 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 2023 Best States rankings are based on the average of responses from the three surveys: one conducted in the fall of 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 from all 50 states. Survey respondents were adults age 18 and older who collectively represented 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 weights 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 also were 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 the categories 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.

For each metric, we used the most recent data available that allowed for consistent nationwide comparison as of March 31, 2023. Because data sets have different schedules for updates, data

comes from different years and months. Data updates are planned for each relaunch of Best States.

The 71 metrics used to determine [America's Best States](#), along with their associated categories and subcategories, follow below.

HEALTH CARE

Health Care Access

- *Population Without Health Insurance*: The percentage of adults ages 19 to 64 who reported having no health insurance coverage. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Child Dental Visits*: The percentage of children and young adults enrolled in Medicaid who received past-year preventive dental services among those eligible for the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit for 90 continuous days. (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; fiscal 2020)
- *Child Wellness Visits*: The percentage of children and young adults enrolled in Medicaid and eligible for the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit who received screening services among those who should have received such services. (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; fiscal 2020)
- *Adults Without Dental Visit*: The age-adjusted percentage of adults who reported not visiting a dentist or dental clinic within the past year. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; 2020)
- *Adults Without Wellness Visit*: The age-adjusted percentage of adults who reported they had not visited a doctor for a routine checkup within the past year. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; 2021)
- *Adults Deterred From Care Due to Costs*: The age-adjusted percentage of adults who reported there was a time in the past 12 months when they needed to see a doctor but could not because of cost. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; 2020)

Health Care Quality

- *Preventable Hospital Admissions*: The number of preventable hospital admissions per 100,000 Medicare beneficiaries. (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; 2021)
 - *Medicare Enrollees With Top-Quality Coverage*: The percentage of Medicare Advantage enrollees with a health plan rated 4 stars or better, among plans with a published star rating and number of enrollees. (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; March 2022-June 2022)
 - *Nursing Home Quality Rating*: An average index score per state reflecting a proportional scale between nursing homes rated by U.S. News as "high-performing" and those rated as "below average." (U.S. News Best Nursing Homes; 2022-2023)
 - *Hospital Quality Rating*: An average index score per state reflecting a proportional scale between hospitals rated by U.S. News as "high-performing" and those rated as "below average," among hospitals that perform or treat specific [procedures or conditions](#). (U.S. News Best Hospitals; 2022-2023)
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Public Health

- *Infant Mortality Rate*: The number of infants who died before turning 1 year old, per 1,000 live births. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2020)
- *Mortality Rate*: The number of age-adjusted deaths per 100,000 population. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2021)
- *Obesity Rate*: The age-adjusted percentage of obese adults, based on self-reported height and weight. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; 2021)
- *Smoking Rate*: The age-adjusted percentage of adults who are current smokers, based on self-reported tobacco usage. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; 2021)
- *Poor Mental Health*: The age-adjusted percentage of adults who reported their mental health was not good for 14 days or more in the past 30 days. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; 2021)
- *Suicide Rate*: The age-adjusted rate of suicides per 100,000 population. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2021)

EDUCATION

Higher Education

- *2-Year-College Graduation Rate*: The share of students attending public institutions who complete a two-year degree program within three years, or 150% of the normal time. (National Center for Education Statistics; 2018 cohort)
- *4-Year-College Graduation Rate*: The share of undergraduate students at public institutions who initially pursue a bachelor's or equivalent four-year degree and receive one within six years, or 150% of the normal time of study. (National Center for Education Statistics; 2015 cohort)
- *Population With Advanced Degree*: The share of people 25 and older in a state who have an associate degree or higher. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Debt at Graduation*: The average amount of debt held by college students graduating from four-year public or private nonprofit institutions. (The Institute for College Access and Success; 2020)
- *Tuition and Fees*: The average college tuition and fees required of in-state students at public four-year institutions, not including room and board. (National Center for Education Statistics; 2020-2021)

Pre-K-12

- *College Readiness*: The approximate percentage of high school graduates who have met benchmarks in the SAT, the ACT or both. (College Board, ACT, U.S. Census Bureau; 2020)
- *High School Graduation Rate*: The four-year adjusted cohort high school graduation rate for public schools. (National Center for Education Statistics; 2019-2020)
- *NAEP Math Scores*: The average composite-scale score on mathematics achievement tests taken by eighth-grade students. (U.S. Department of Education National Assessment of Educational Progress; 2022)
- *NAEP Reading Scores*: The average composite-scale score on reading achievement tests taken by eighth-grade students. (U.S. Department of Education National Assessment of Educational Progress; 2022)

Progress; 2022)

- *Preschool Enrollment*: The percentage of children ages 3 to 4 enrolled in a nursery or preschool program. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)

ECONOMY

Business Environment

- *Business Creation Rate*: The average quarterly rate at which new businesses were formed in the private sector over a two-year period, seasonally adjusted. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; July 2020–June 2022)
- *Top Company Headquarters per Capita*: The number of top company headquarters per million residents in each state. (Fortune 1000, U.S. Census Bureau; 2022)
- *Patent Creation Rate*: The average number of patents granted per million residents over a three-year period. (U.S. Patent and Trademark Office; 2019–2021)
- *Tax Burden*: State and local tax revenues as a share of personal income. (U.S. Census Bureau Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; 2020).
- *Venture Capital per GDP*: The amount of venture capital dollars invested in each state, relative to \$1,000 of the state's nominal gross domestic product. (PitchBook-NVCA Venture Monitor, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; 2022)

Employment

- *Job Growth*: The compound annual growth rate of the number of jobs over a three-year period. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; 2019 and 2022)
 - *Labor Force Participation*: The percentage of noninstitutionalized civilians age 16 or older who participated in the labor force. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; 2022)
 - *Unemployment Rate*: The annual average percentage of the labor force classified as unemployed. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; 2022)
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Growth

- *Net Migration*: The three-year average of net migration to and from a state – both international and domestic – as a percentage of the state population. (U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program; 2020–2022)
- *GDP Growth*: The three-year compound annual growth rate, adjusted for inflation, of real gross domestic product. (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; 2019 and 2022)
- *Growth of Young Population*: The three-year compound annual growth rate of the population ages 25 to 29. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2018 and 2021)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Energy

- *Electricity Price*: The average retail price of electricity in cents per kilowatt hour, including prices across residential, commercial, industrial, transportation and other sectors. (U.S. Energy Information Administration; 2022)
- *Minutes of Power Outages*: The number of minutes of power outages the average customer experiences in a year, excluding major events. (U.S. Energy Information Administration; 2021)
- *Renewable Energy Usage*: The percentage of a state's total energy use that comes from renewable sources, including hydroelectric power, biomass, geothermal, solar power and wind power. (U.S. Energy Information Administration; 2020)

Internet Access

- *Households With Broadband Internet*: The percentage of households with a broadband internet subscription. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Access to Gigabit Internet*: The percentage of housing units with access to high-speed broadband internet with download speeds of 1 gigabit per second or more. (Federal Communications Commission; June 2022)

Transportation

- *Structurally Deficient Bridges*: The percentage of bridges considered to be in poor condition. (Federal Highway Administration; 2022)
- *Average Commute Time*: The average travel time for workers over the age of 16 who did not work from home. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Public Transit Usage*: The average number of miles per resident traveled via public transit in a year. (Department of Transportation National Transit Database, U.S. Census Bureau; 2021)
- *Roads in Poor Condition*: The percentage of evaluated road miles considered to be in poor condition. (Department of Transportation Highway Statistics Series; 2020)

OPPORTUNITY

Affordability

- *Cost of Living Index*: A score reflecting the price levels of goods and services compared with national price levels. (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; 2021)
 - *Housing Affordability Index*: A score reflecting the affordability of housing compared with the national level. Encompasses rents paid by tenants and imputed rental value for owner-occupied dwellings, among other variables. (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; 2021)
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Economic Opportunity

- *Food Insecure Households*: The three-year average percentage of households with low or very low food security. (U.S. Department of Agriculture; 2019–2021)
- *Gini Index*: An index score reflecting the dispersion of income across the entire income distribution, ranging from total income equality to total inequality. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Median Household Income*: The median household income earned by household members age

15 and older in a year. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)

- *Poverty Rate:* The share of the population whose family or individual income falls below poverty thresholds. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)

Equality

- *Education Gap by Race:* A ratio comparing the share of BIPOCH (Black, Indigenous, people of color or Hispanic) individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher to the share among non-Hispanic whites. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Unemployment Gap by Disability Status:* The ratio of unemployment among those with a disability to unemployment among those without a disability. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Labor Force Participation Gap by Gender:* The ratio of female labor force participation to male labor force participation. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Unemployment Gap by Race:* The ratio of unemployment among BIPOCH (Black, Indigenous, people of color or Hispanic) individuals to unemployment among non-Hispanic whites. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Income Gap by Gender:* The ratio in median earned income for females to males among those employed full time year-round. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)
- *Income Gap by Race:* A ratio comparing the per capita income of BIPOCH (Black, Indigenous, people of color or Hispanic) individuals with the per capita income of non-Hispanic whites. (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year estimates; 2021)

FISCAL STABILITY

Long-Term

- *Government Credit Rating:* A rating that reflects a state's ability to honor promised financial obligations along with the likelihood of default and resulting financial losses. (Moody's Investors Services; captured March 31, 2023)
- *Pension Fund Liability:* The shortfall in a state pension plan's net position as a percentage of total pension liability. (The Pew Charitable Trusts; fiscal 2020)

Short-Term

- *Liquidity:* The ratio of noncapital assets to current liabilities. (Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports; fiscal 2020)
- *Budget Balancing:* The ratio of total revenues to total expenses. (The Pew Charitable Trusts; fiscal 2020)

CRIME & CORRECTIONS

Corrections Outcomes

- *Racial Parity in Imprisonment:* The ratio of incarceration rate per 100,000 population among BIPOCH (Black, Indigenous, people of color or Hispanic) individuals to the incarceration rate per 100,000 among non-Hispanic whites. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau; 2021)
- *Juvenile Incarceration:* The incarceration rate of juveniles from age 10 to [the upper age limit](#) for

juvenile delinquency in a state per 100,000 in the population. Missing data in responses submitted by facilities was [imputed](#). (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; 2019)

- *Incarceration Rate*: The number of people incarcerated per 100,000 state residents. (Bureau of Justice Statistics; 2021)

Public Safety

- *Property Crime Rate*: The number of property crimes per 100,000 residents, including burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft. (Federal Bureau of Investigation; 2020)
- *Violent Crime Rate*: The number of violent crimes per 100,000 residents, including murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, robbery, aggravated assault and rape. (Federal Bureau of Investigation; 2020)

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Air and Water Quality

- *Drinking Water Violation Points*: The number of violation points accrued over five years by public water systems per 1,000 customers served. (Environmental Protection Agency; captured March 31, 2023)
- *Days With Unhealthy Air Quality*: The population-weighted average of available county-level figures reflecting the number of days the Air Quality Index was not rated “good.” (Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Census Bureau; 2021)

Pollution

- *Industrial Toxins*: The total toxic chemical pollution released per square mile of land area. (Environmental Protection Agency; 2021)
- *Pollution Health Risk Index*: A per capita risk score reflecting the risk pollution poses to residents’ long-term health. (Environmental Protection Agency; 2021)

In some metrics, data for a state may be missing – potentially because the state did not provide data to the source, or the source conducted a survey and their reporting standards were not met for the state. In most cases, we omitted states with missing data from the calculation of subcategory scores and rankings that use those metrics. The exception to this is metrics based on Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data, which inform significant portions of the health care access and public health subcategories. Florida is absent in the 2021 BRFSS data set. To include Florida in those metrics, 2020 BRFSS data was used.

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

U.S. News did not rank Washington, D.C., or U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico. Depending on the metric and data available, national figures may or may not include Washington, D.C., and U.S. territories. National figures are only reported on Best States profile pages for comparison purposes; they are not used in the scoring methodology discussed above. For more information,