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The Legatum Institute would like to extend their gratitude to The Helmsley Charitable Trust for their support, without which the production of this Index and report would not have been possible. Support for the county Index was provided in part by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, for which the Institute is very grateful. The Institute would also like to thank The Walton Family Foundation, in particular for their support towards the county Index during the past year. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the Legatum Institute and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Helmsley Charitable Trust, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, or any of their individual employees.



#### About the Helmsley Charitable Trust

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The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust aspires to improve lives by supporting exceptional efforts in the U.S. and around the world in health and select place-based initiatives. Since beginning active grant-making in 2008, Helmsley has committed more than \$3 billion for a wide range of charitable purposes. Learn more about Helmsley at [helmsleytrust.org](https://helmsleytrust.org).

#### About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

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For more than 45 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are working alongside others to build a national Culture of Health that provides everyone in America a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being. For more information, visit [www.rwjf.org](https://www.rwjf.org). Follow the Foundation on Twitter at [www.rwjf.org/twitter](https://www.rwjf.org/twitter) or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/RobertWoodJohnsonFoundation>.

#### About the Walton Family Foundation

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The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving K-12 education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta.



The Legatum Institute would like to thank the Legatum Foundation for their sponsorship and for making this report possible. Learn more about the Legatum Foundation at [www.legatum.org](https://www.legatum.org)

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## Foreword



The United States stands tall on the global stage with much to be confident about and celebrate. It is one of the most prosperous countries in the world, ranking 18<sup>th</sup> out of 167 nations. It can be justifiably proud of its particularly strong and open economy, ranking 7<sup>th</sup> globally. In the decade to 2020, prosperity in the U.S. had been rising consistently, with all states benefiting from the improvement.

However, over the last year, the nation has faced three major challenges that are likely to be reflected upon as significant moments in U.S. history: the handling of a global pandemic and its consequences, a heavily contested presidential election, and increased tensions because of political, social and racial divisions. These all have a direct impact on what it means to have an inclusive society, an open economy, and empowered people – the building blocks of prosperity.

Even before the pandemic, other factors were acting as a brake on progress. Increases in suicides, drug overdose deaths and poor self-reported mental health reflect the deterioration of the Mental Health of Americans, which has fallen 21 places in the global rankings to 149<sup>th</sup> over the last decade, contributing to the nation ranking 59<sup>th</sup> globally for Health. There has been a steady increase in the frequency of mass killings and injuries, the high level of which is a factor in the U.S. ranking 66<sup>th</sup> globally on Safety and Security.

To create a more prosperous America, the new administration, seeking to address these and other challenges, must build on the nation's strengths and mitigate its weaknesses. To do so well, it is critically important to have a clear picture of the America it has inherited. This means understanding the true nature of these strengths and weaknesses at a local, state, and federal level across its institutions, economy, and the wellbeing of the people.

Through the generous support of The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, and with additional support from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Walton Family Foundation, the U.S. Prosperity Index provides a detailed and locally-based diagnosis of the underlying characteristics of the nation's prosperity. The Index uses a comprehensive set of indicators grouped into 48 policy-focused elements to present an update on the prosperity of the 50 states of the Union and Washington D.C., and an analysis of the prosperity across 1,196 counties in twelve selected states.\*

By assessing a combination of institutional, economic, and social wellbeing measures, the Index can help frame an agenda through which the nation's interconnected challenges can be better understood and addressed. In particular, the Index reveals that the high levels of prosperity that enable the U.S. to stand tall on the global stage are distributed unevenly across the country, with significant disparities at state and local levels and among different groups in society.

Our analysis in this report shows that the key to unlocking greater prosperity in the U.S. lies in the potential for improvement in every state and county, and not just nationally. The response by state and local governments will be critical to the recovery. As political, social and racial divisions have widened, trust in the federal government is near historic lows. However, trust in local government has been stronger through the pandemic. The essay *Rebuilding U.S. social capital in a polarized era* illustrates how public trust in institutions is highest for those that are local, and that Americans' pride in their local community's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic was twice as strong as at a national level.

The Index has been intentionally designed to be a transformational tool at a local level. Its granular detail enables targeted policy responses that can drive tangible improvements in prosperity. Following the recently announced \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan (ARP), the Index is available for state and county leaders, to support them in their decision making on how and where best to focus these important resources. Combined with additional local insight and demographic data, this will enable a roadmap of targeted interventions to be developed that will benefit all Americans. The essay *Getting recovery right* discusses the need for states and counties to invest in the necessary data infrastructure and systems so they are best placed to utilize resources to address local challenges. It offers some reflections on how the Index can guide this process.

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\* California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma and Texas.

While acknowledging the considerable challenges the nation is facing, there is much to be hopeful about when considering prosperity in the U.S. Its high global ranking and the long-term improvement across many aspects of U.S. society will provide a strong foundation upon which to reset and rebuild as it emerges from these challenging times. Innovation and dynamism will be critical to forging strong economies following the disruption of the pandemic. Hence, it is encouraging to see the entrepreneurial spirit already rising, with the number of new business applications in 2020 being the highest on record, and that this trend has continued into 2021.

We are keen to work with those who wish to play their part in building a more prosperous America. Over the past year, we have been encouraged to hear about the different ways the Index is already being used to effect change across the country, from informing the community needs assessments of rural hospitals in Montana to helping make the case for legislative change to reduce high healthcare costs in Mississippi and by a community foundation to shape their strategic priorities.

Our ambition is that other national, state, and local governments, business leaders, investors, philanthropists, and civil society leaders across the U.S. will use the Index to help set their agendas for growth and development, and that others will use it to hold them to account. If you are interested in discussing how you can use the findings of the U.S. Prosperity Index or want to know more about our work overall please contact us at [info@li.com](mailto:info@li.com), or visit the dedicated website at [www.usprosperity.net](http://www.usprosperity.net).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Brien". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stephen" and last name "Brien" clearly distinguishable.

**Dr. Stephen Brien**  
Director of Policy, Legatum Institute

# Executive summary

The following key findings emerge from the 2021 United States Prosperity Index.

- **The United States is one of the most prosperous countries in the world, ranking 18<sup>th</sup> out of 167 nations.**
- **Prosperity is distributed unevenly across the country.**
- **U.S. prosperity had been rising continuously for more than a decade.**
- **Prosperity weakened between 2020 and 2021, but a strong resurgence in new business applications signals hope for the recovery.**
- **Even prior to COVID-19, there were some significant challenges acting as a brake on U.S. prosperity.**

## THE UNITED STATES IS ONE OF THE MOST PROSPEROUS COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD

The United States continues to be one of the most prosperous nations globally and is well positioned to prosper in the future. The U.S. business environment actively supports startups, promotes competition and expansion, and innovation and ideation are encouraged, which results in a very strong global ranking of 4<sup>th</sup> for Enterprise Conditions. It ranks 10<sup>th</sup> in the world for its Investment Environment: U.S. businesses have good access to capital from domestic and international sources, and there are strong property rights and protections in place for investors.

In addition to its many strengths, however, the country faces some significant challenges that are holding it back from performing even more strongly on the global stage. In particular, the United States ranks 66<sup>th</sup> on Safety and Security, on par with Morocco, and 59<sup>th</sup> on Health, weaker than Croatia. These weaknesses, which are experienced across many parts of the country, are acting as a brake on further progress.

## PROSPERITY IS DISTRIBUTED UNEVENLY ACROSS THE COUNTRY

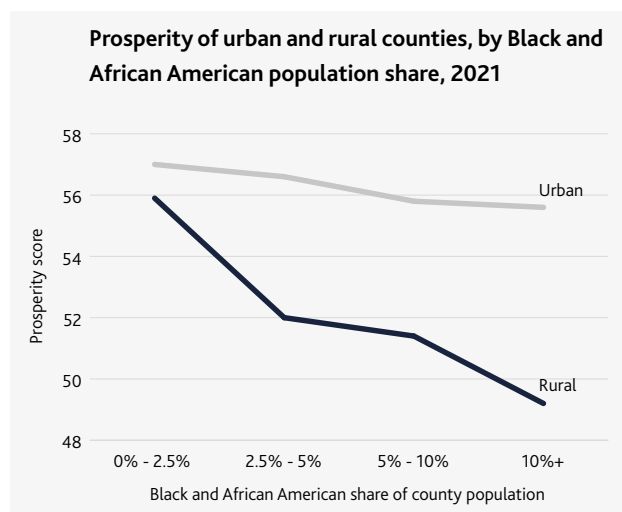
The Northeastern states exhibit the highest levels of prosperity, with Massachusetts almost always the top-performing state over the past decade. Outside the Northeast, **Minnesota (3<sup>rd</sup>)** and **Utah (5<sup>th</sup>)** also perform well. The Southeastern states are the least prosperous, with Mississippi the weakest-performing state in 2021 and in five of the past 11 years, and Arkansas the weakest in other years. The distribution of prosperity among counties in a state varies significantly across the 12 states. In **Nebraska (14<sup>th</sup>)** and **Oklahoma**

(47<sup>th</sup>), for example, all counties share similar levels of prosperity, whereas in **California (25<sup>th</sup>)** and in many of the other states, there is much greater variation in prosperity among the counties. On the whole, urban counties are more prosperous than rural counties, although this is not universally the case. For example, Yuma County in Colorado has a population of around 10,000 but it ranks within the top 100 counties across the 12 states due to low crime and a strong business environment.

The socioeconomic differences that exist across the United States are reflected by race and ethnicity, and by place. For example, prior to the pandemic, one in two adults in a White family were degree-educated, compared to less than one in four for a Black family.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, among those without college education, a Black American was nearly twice as likely as a White American to be unemployed (15.4% vs. 8.4%).<sup>2</sup>

Population demographics interact with county prosperity. Prosperity levels across urban and rural counties can vary considerably, depending on the share of the resident population from Black and African American backgrounds. For example, counties that have a Black population share of less than 2.5% exhibit similar levels of prosperity, irrespective of whether they are urban or rural. But in rural counties, prosperity is weakest in counties that have the highest Black population share (dark blue line in the chart). In urban counties, however, prosperity levels are broadly the same irrespective of the share of the Black population (grey line).

While this pattern is broadly consistent across the different characteristics of prosperity, there are a few notable exceptions. For example, Safety and Security is weakest in counties that have the highest black population share, across both urban and rural areas,



although Safety and Security is weaker in urban counties than in rural counties across all four groups. Additionally, Infrastructure is strong in big cities, which have high Black share of population.

This fairly simple analysis suggests that the experiences of Black and African Americans across many aspects of society are variable when where they live is taken into account. To comprehend fully how prosperity is built and distributed across different ethnic and racial groups, further investigation is necessary, and we will be exploring that in greater detail in future editions.

## U.S. PROSPERITY HAD BEEN RISING CONTINUOUSLY FOR MORE THAN A DECADE

Prior to the pandemic, U.S. prosperity had been rising year-on-year for over 10 years, due to long-term improvements across many aspects of U.S. society including the economy, education and crime, and as a result of Americans smoking and drinking less.

### Increased productivity

The U.S. economy responded strongly following the global financial crisis, enjoying the longest period of economic growth in its history. The increase in prosperity was in part due to a steady increase in productivity and competitiveness. Labor productivity and the per-capita value of exported goods increased by over 10%, and the export value of non-manufactured goods increased by over 60%. Maryland and Massachusetts were among the 10 most improved states, with a number of other states seeing an increase in GVA per capita due to the fracking boom. Not all places in the U.S. improved, however, with six states experiencing a deterioration in productivity and competitiveness since 2011, with Wyoming and Idaho seeing the biggest decline. In Wyoming, labor productivity decreased from \$82 to \$76 per hour, whereas in Idaho, the per-capita value of manufactured goods decreased from \$1,950 to \$1,160.

### Improved skills

The long-term improvement in U.S. prosperity was also the result of an increase in the skills of the adult population, as people became more educated. In 2009, 85% of adults had a high-school diploma, which had increased to nearly 89% by 2019; and the percentage that held a degree increased from 28% in 2009 to 33% by 2019, resulting in 20 million more degree-educated Americans in 2019 than there were in 2009. The strengthening of Adult Skills was widespread, with all states and nearly 94% of counties experiencing improvement, with Borden and McMullen counties in Texas and Meagher in Montana boasting major improvements. However, of the 76 counties in the Index that saw a deterioration in Adult Skills, over 40% are located in Texas.

### Reductions in smoking and drinking

The rise in prosperity over the past decade has been a consequence of Americans becoming healthier overall, as rates of smoking and alcohol and pain-reliever abuse have all fallen. All states have experienced a reduction in smoking rates since 2011, with D.C., Oklahoma and Nevada seeing a reduction of over seven percentage points. In addition, all but 4 states and 107 counties saw a reduction in the percentage of residents who have an alcohol-use disorder, with Arizona, Kansas and New Jersey seeing the biggest decrease. Colorado, which saw the biggest state-level increase, is home to Denver county, which saw the percentage of the population with an

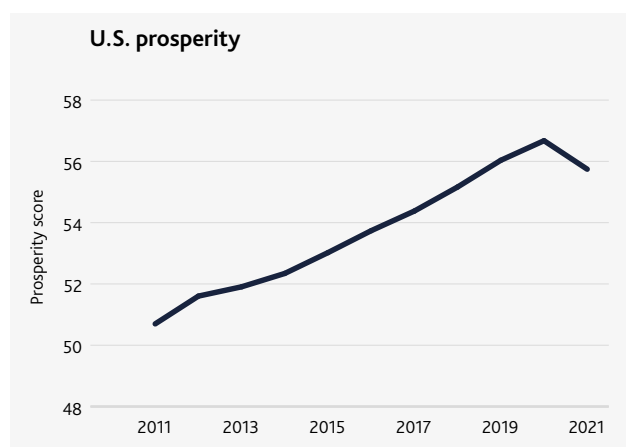
alcohol-use disorder rise from 8.2% to 10.5% over the past decade. Furthermore, all states but Iowa saw a reduction in pain-reliever abuse.

### Falling property crime

Another contributor to improving prosperity prior to the pandemic was falling rates of property crime, with reductions in burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft. Florida and Massachusetts saw the biggest improvement. Burglary rates, for example, fell in Florida from 955 to 292 incidents per 100,000 population over the last decade. Eight states experienced an increase in rates of property crime, since 2011, with North Dakota experiencing the biggest increase, where rates of motor vehicle theft increased from 133 to 234 thefts per 100,000 population and rates of larceny also increased.

## PROSPERITY WEAKENED BETWEEN 2020 AND 2021, AS COVID-19 IMPACTED MANY ASPECTS OF U.S. SOCIETY

The direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic have resulted in many aspects of prosperity deteriorating over the past year. As the pandemic took hold, all but a handful of states introduced restrictions that curtailed other aspects of prosperity. Social Wellbeing, the economy, and institutional strength have all been impacted by the pandemic and how states have responded to it. Nonetheless, the U.S. entrepreneurial spirit has risen to the challenge, and the number of new business applications has been the highest on record, which bodes well for a post-pandemic recovery.



### Health

Adult mortality rates, which were already on the rise prior to the pandemic, have been further impacted by the 600,000 covid-related deaths as of mid-2021. Between 2019 and 2020, the mortality rate for those aged 15-64 increased by 20% from 288 to 347 per 100,000 population, and the likelihood of a 65-year-old dying before they reach the age of 85, which had been falling in recent years, increased substantially from 49% to 57%. Both age groups are experiencing rates not seen since at least the late 2000s.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on U.S. mental health. In a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in June 2020, 40% of adults reported struggling with mental health or substance abuse, 13% reported starting or increasing substance use as a way of coping with stress or emotions related to



COVID-19, and one in four young adults reported having seriously considered suicide in the 30 days before completing the survey.<sup>3</sup> Initial estimates show that more than 90,000 Americans died from overdoses in the 12-month period to October 2020, compared to roughly 70,000 drug deaths during the same period a year earlier.<sup>4</sup>

### Education

Schools were closed across many states, resulting in millions of American pupils being denied a normal education, the impact of which they are likely to carry into their working lives. According to one study, a total of 24.2 million children aged 5 to 11 years were enrolled at public schools that were closed during the 2020 pandemic, losing a median of 54 days of teaching.<sup>5</sup> Another study estimates that by the end of June 2021, students could lose five to nine months of learning, on average.<sup>6</sup> Research by the Brookings Institution showed that while students in the Fall of 2020 performed as well as students in the Fall of 2019 in Reading, the achievement of students in Math in 2020 was about 5 to 10 percentage points lower when compared to same-grade students the year before.<sup>7</sup>

### Living conditions

The poverty rate increased from 15% in February 2020 to 16.7% in September 2020.<sup>8</sup> In addition, figures from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development show that the rate of homelessness increased by 2.2% between 2019 and 2020. Consequently, in 2020, 18 Americans in every 10,000 were homeless, equating to over 550,000 people — roughly equivalent to all residents of Wyoming being homeless.

### Economic quality

Prosperity was weakened as restaurants, bars and non-essential retail closed. Shutting down certain parts of the U.S. economy resulted in 20 million non-farm workers losing their jobs. As a result of this action, unemployment spiked sharply upwards, from just over 4% in March 2020 to over 14% in April 2020. Although this has fallen back sharply since, it is still over 50% higher than it was pre-pandemic, and there were still eight million fewer jobs in April 2021 than in February 2020. No state was spared job losses, but some were hit harder than others. Nevada's unemployment peaked at nearly 30%, Michigan rose to nearly 24% and unemployment in a number of Northeastern states, including New York and Massachusetts, rose above 15%. All states have seen unemployment rates fall back since the peak in April 2020, although the rate of progress has been uneven. Nevada was one of six states still to have a rate above 8% in April 2021. Counties have been impacted unevenly, with urban counties being harder hit than rural counties. Rural counties experienced a two-percentage-point rise in unemployment, whereas urban counties saw a rise of 3.4 percentage points.

The early stages of the pandemic saw a fall in the number of new businesses applications, with an initial sharp decline from late March through May 2020.<sup>9</sup> However, there was a resurgence in applications in June 2020, which continued through to May 2021. As a result, new business applications in 2020 were 20% higher than in 2019 and this was the highest annual figure since records began in 2004. The surge in new applications has been uneven across the U.S., with new applications especially numerous in Georgia, Florida

and Texas, with California, New York, and New Jersey seeing much less of a surge. Analysis, prior to the pandemic, shows that a surge in new business applications yielded substantial and significant increases in both business numbers and worker turnover over the subsequent four years, which is an encouraging sign for post-pandemic economic recovery.

### Safety and security

Crime has fallen as a result of the pandemic, with robbery rates during the first six months of 2020 7% lower than in the same period of 2019, and property crime rates down 8%.<sup>10</sup> However, by way of contrast, rates of identity theft significantly increased. Over the past few years, rates of identity theft have oscillated around 150 per 100,000 population. In the latest year the rate had risen sharply to nearly 400, although Kansas, Rhode Island and Illinois experienced rates in excess of 1,000 per 100,000 population. There was also an increase in fraud complaints during the pandemic. In 2019, the Federal Trade Commission received 1.7 million fraud complaints, which increased to 2.2 million in 2020.<sup>11</sup>

### EVEN PRIOR TO COVID-19, THERE WERE SOME SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES ACTING AS A BRAKE ON U.S. PROSPERITY

Even before COVID-19 arrived in the U.S., there were a number of long-term challenges that were holding the nation back from performing even more strongly on the global stage, a number of which were affecting large parts of the country.

#### More mass shootings

The rise in mass killings and injuries over the past decade has devastated many communities and weakened Safety and Security across many parts of the nation. The United States ranks 122<sup>nd</sup> globally for Mass Killings and Injuries (including terrorism), just below Eritrea and just above Iran. Since 2013, death rates from mass killings in the U.S. have increased by over 50%, and injuries from such events have increased by 80%. More than half of the 50 states have been subject to at least one mass shooting in every year since 2013, and D.C. has seen a mass shooting every year except in 2014. Nearly 17% of counties across the 12 states have experienced at least one mass shooting since 2013 and ten counties have endured one in each year since then, five of which are in California. Hawaii, Idaho, New Hampshire and North Dakota are the only states not to have experienced a mass shooting since 2013.

#### Rising obesity

As mentioned above, there had been notable improvements in certain behavioral risk factors prior to the pandemic. Offsetting this are high and increasing rates of obesity, which contribute to the United States ranking 165<sup>th</sup> globally for the Behavioral Risk Factors element. Over 40%, of adult Americans are now identified as obese, up from 33% in 2008. Self-reported obesity rates vary considerably by state and even more so by county. Colorado and D.C. have the lowest self-reported rate of all states, with less than one in four residents classifying as obese. Mississippi has the highest rate at over 40% followed by West Virginia. The obesity rate in Okfuskee county, Oklahoma, stands at 59% and in Candler county, Georgia, it is 53%. Georgia boasts the county with the lowest obesity rate, Taliaferro county at 13%, again highlighting the considerable disparity that



can exist within a state and emphasizing the need to consider more localized policies to address certain challenges.

### Weakening mental health

Since 2016, the mental health of America has deteriorated year on year, with every state and D.C. having weaker mental health than in 2016. Even prior to the pandemic, the increase in the number of 'deaths of despair' — suicides and drug overdose deaths — was well documented,<sup>12</sup> claiming tens of thousands of American lives each year. These events have a devastating impact on family, friends and the wider community, but also cost the U.S. nearly \$80 billion a year in healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment and criminal justice involvement, according to the CDC. Delaware, Kansas and D.C. had seen the greatest deterioration in the five years leading up to the pandemic. In Delaware, drug overdose rates more than doubled to 48 deaths per 100,000 population, over twice the national rate. In Kansas, the prevalence of serious mental illness increased by a quarter, and the percentage of people reporting their mental health as not good increased by 40%. All but 6 of the 1,196 counties analyzed experienced a weakening in mental health since 2016, with 6 counties in Colorado seeing the biggest deterioration. Over the past decade there has been an increase in illicit drug-use disorders, with all but eight states seeing an increase. Over 5% of residents in Colorado are reported to have an illicit drug-use disorder, equivalent to nearly 300,000 people.

### Declining social networks

U.S. Social Capital weakened between 2011 and 2016 but had been gradually improving since then, although more nuanced patterns emerge across the different elements within the pillar. Personal and Family Relationships have continued to strengthen since 2011, benefiting from reductions in divorce and teen birth rates and more frequent contact between friends and family. However, Social Networks continued to deteriorate over the past decade.

Just over half the population report frequently talking with neighbors, whereas a decade ago it was two-thirds. At the start of the pandemic, two in three Americans were not friends with their neighbors.<sup>13</sup> While one in three Americans report not having a community to which they belong, this varies by group. For example, it rises to more than one in two for the Passive Liberals group, which represents 15% of Americans (see the essay *Rebuilding U.S. social capital in a polarized era*, written by Tim Dixon from More in Common).

### CONCLUSION

The handling of a global pandemic and its consequences, a presidential election that has been highly contested by a significant proportion of Americans, the attack on Capitol Hill, and the conviction of a police officer for the murder of George Floyd are all likely to be reflected upon as significant moments in U.S. history. These all impact on establishing an inclusive society, an open economy and empowered people – the building blocks of prosperity. Even before these more recent events, there were a number of warning signs that were already undermining progress across many parts of the country.

In total, around \$6 trillion has been made available by the Federal Government to help states and counties recover and rebuild from the pandemic. Although the full impact of COVID-19 on state and county-level prosperity is yet to be fully understood and measured, the U.S. Prosperity Index provides a holistic and comprehensive framework for each state and county to identify its challenges and opportunities and determine the appropriate response.

As it looks to its future, America can draw inspiration and courage from how it has overcome significant challenges in the past and take confidence from a number of long-term improvements it has seen across many parts of its society, to reset and rebuild a more prosperous nation that will benefit all Americans.



Sundry Photography/Shutterstock.com

*Two friends enjoying a walk in the summer.*

**While Social Networks deteriorated in all states since 2011, all but three states saw an improvement in Personal and Family Relationships.**

# How to use the United States Prosperity Index

The United States Prosperity Index has been developed as a practical tool to help identify what specific action needs to be taken to contribute to strengthening the pathways from poverty to prosperity across the 50 states of the Union and Washington D.C., and the 1,196 counties of twelve selected states.

The Index consists of 11 pillars of prosperity, built upon 48 actionable policy areas (elements), and is underpinned by over 200 indicators. The Index has been designed to benefit a wide range of users, including state and county leaders, policymakers, investors, business leaders, philanthropists, journalists, researchers and U.S. citizens.

- State and county leaders can use it to help shape priorities for a policy agenda for their area;
- Federal, state and county leaders can use it to help inform priorities for a policy agenda for their area;
- Policymakers can use it to determine specific areas that require action to help increase prosperity;
- Investors can use it to inform capital allocation;
- Business leaders can use it to identify and communicate the changes that need to be made to improve the business climate and the productive capacity of states and counties;
- Philanthropists can use it to identify the areas where they can have the greatest impact beyond the well-trodden paths, and to sense-check grant applications for funds;
- Journalists and U.S. citizens can use it to hold their state and local governments to account;
- Researchers can use it to complement other datasets to analyze the underlying patterns behind economic and social issues, and inform the broader policy, business, and philanthropic community.





# Using the United States Prosperity Index

## INTERPRETING THE INDEXES

For every U.S. state and Washington D.C., the Index uses the same indicators, and combines them in the same way to create elements and pillars, domains and overall prosperity. Similarly, for the 1,196 counties in the twelve selected states, a consistent set of indicators have been used and combined in the same way to mirror the state-level approach to ensure the state-level and county-level Indexes complement each other and provide a deeper richness of how prosperity is distributed across each state.

By using the Index at a state-and county-level, it is possible to compare the relative performance of each state or county for overall prosperity and for each of the 11 pillars of prosperity, such as health, education, and social capital, and the 48 elements within the pillars. The elements have been established to represent key policy areas, such as early K-12 (primary) education, government integrity, and mental health, to help facilitate more targeted action at the appropriate level.

Making these comparisons will enable the user to explore which aspects of prosperity are more or less well-developed within a state or county, and how these compare with other states and counties. The higher the ranking, the stronger the performance of that state or county for the pillar or element, when compared with another lower down the rankings. Further to this, the index provides data over a 10- year period, making it possible to see whether prosperity, and its underpinning elements, has been improving or deteriorating over time, and what specifically is driving that change. This will enable areas of strength in a state or a county to be built on and areas of weakness to be understood and addressed. The county-level Index enables the performance within a state to be more clearly understood, and it enables comparison with counties in other states, creating an environment in which good practice can be identified and shared across state boundaries.

## APPLYING THE INDEXES

The data in the state-and county-level Indexes and analysis contained in the report can be used for a variety of purposes, for example:

- Benchmarking performance against peers;
- In-depth analysis of prosperity at the state or county level;
- Understanding whether prosperity is improving or weakening over time, and what is driving this;
- Identifying the binding constraints to increased prosperity;
- Informing priorities for setting state and county agendas, for example as part of the budget planning process.

Where a state or county shows a strong or weak performance in a pillar, it is possible to drill down and identify what particular policy-related element is driving this trend. This will help inform the required policy action to strengthen performance.

For example, it may be discovered that a state or county's poor prosperity rankings are driven by a weak performance in education. Upon further investigation, the Index reveals that, although current education policy in the state is weaker in K-12 education, it has been focused on improving tertiary education when contrasted with comparator states. In particular, further investigation of the Index reveals that low graduation rates may be driving the weak performance in K-12 education. This information can help to target specific areas that need improvement and provide a starting point for what can be done to improve education, and thereby increase prosperity.

By using the historical data provided by the Index for the example above, it may become apparent that K-12 graduation rates have declined rapidly over the past three years. Discussion with local education officials on the decline may reveal that this coincides with the conclusion of a learning difficulties support program, pointing to the particular area where action is needed.

## RESOURCES AVAILABLE

There are several tools available to aid analysis and interpretation of the United States Prosperity Index. Alongside this report, which provides a high-level analysis of the findings from states and counties, additional information is available via our website at [www.usprosperity.net](http://www.usprosperity.net).

**State-and county-level profiles.** This 15-page profile, for each of the 50 states and Washington D.C. and the 1,196 counties, provides more detailed pillar, element and indicator information, including rankings and scores, and how these change over time.

**Indicator scores.** This Excel spreadsheet contains the scores for all of the indicators for each year since 2010 at the state or county level. Using these scores, the user can carry out more in-depth analysis. Further information on how the scores for each indicator are calculated can be found in the Methodology section (see page 94).

## USING THE INDEX

### Political leaders

This report provides federal, state and local governments with the ability to explore the performance of the states and counties across 11 pillars of prosperity. The Index and the data on which it is built provide a foundation on which more effective interventions and policies can be designed. It provides an unparalleled overview of how these units have been performing over time and relative to one another.

### Policymakers

The Index and its accompanying resources allow policymakers to benchmark the performance of each state and county against other states and counties across 11 pillars and 48 elements of prosperity, to create a more granular perspective of performance and identify what is holding back their development.





Each of the 48 elements has been designed to be a recognizable, discrete area of domestic policy, each of which is measured using a combination of indicators from a variety of public data sources. The indicators should be interpreted as a set of proxies for the underlying policy concept, and we would encourage policymakers to interpret their score and rank for an element as the trigger for more fundamental analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of its performance.

In addition to helping focus analysis, these materials allow policy-makers to develop diagnostic tools and identify potential options to consider, based on the performance of other states and counties.

#### **Philanthropists**

The Index identifies areas where philanthropists might want to contribute to drive levels of prosperity in the U.S., working in partnership with local agencies. This might involve using the Index to identify areas where civil society can make a meaningful difference to people's lives, such as by contributing to the strengthening of social capital in particular local areas where it is fraying, or working in partnership with local governments to try and boost the quality of local investment environments for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

#### **Investors and business leaders**

The business community is well positioned to identify barriers to starting, operating, and growing a business, and to demonstrate to local, state and federal governments the economic potential

from reforms such as lifting onerous regulation and reducing other barriers to help improve the investment environment. Furthermore, business leaders and investors can contribute to infrastructure policy development by demonstrating the economic impact of investment in communications, transport, and energy projects, which by implementing can lead to increased prosperity.

#### **Academics and researchers**

For academics and researchers, our database of curated indicators is a unique resource, enabling comparison of trends and patterns across the past 10 years for much of the data. By providing a holistic dataset across many disciplines, it provides an opportunity to compare in a straightforward way the impact of disparate factors, such as how living conditions are related to education levels, or how levels of social tolerance are related to social networks.

#### **Journalists and civil society**

The United States Prosperity Index is based on publicly available and verifiable data, which means it can be a powerful resource for those who want to hold up a mirror to those in power and society at large. Holding federal, state and local leaders to account is a crucial role for both journalists and civil society. The institutional, economic and social performance of a state or county is critical to its prosperity, and that of the U.S. as a whole, and having non-government actors identifying weaknesses and celebrating successes can help spur on state and county leaders. To do so well requires easy access to reliable data that can be represented in a digestible way.

## THE PATHWAY TO TRANSFORMATION

Transformation is a process, not an event, which can take time. Intermediate benchmarks are most helpful and effective, and the most obvious challenges facing a state or county should be considered in the first instance. Understanding the specifics of each state and county's circumstances will be critical to determining the sequencing and prioritisation. The Index provides a set of hypotheses to test. The issues of highest priority will likely be the elements that are performing relatively poorly, but are not necessarily the weakest performing elements, as creating the conditions to warrant improving the weakest performing elements may require improving some of the elements that are less weak first.

It is important to identify the most binding constraint to progress and use it to inform the sequencing and prioritisation. To give a simplified example, a state may find itself performing poorly when it comes to its financing ecosystem and low levels of dynamism. In such a situation, seeking to increase investment is unlikely to have much of an impact, as investors will be more attracted to investing in an area where there are already a large number of startups and new entrepreneurs. In such a circumstance, creating an environment that attracts new businesses and startups might make for a more impactful first step.

As every single state or county can improve both the economic and social wellbeing of its residents, clear opportunities therefore exist for states and counties to learn from each other. The Index identifies these opportunities for improvement and where other states and counties have been successful in addressing the same challenges. This can guide supplementary research to inform the ways in which successful strategies from one state or county might be adapted to address weaknesses in another.

## EMERGING USER CASE STUDIES

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of producing the U.S. Index and there are a number of user-case stories where the Index is being used to inform different parts of U.S. society.

In particular, the Index is gaining considerable traction within the health community. The health pillar, containing 33 indicators, provides a comprehensive assessment of the overall health of each state and county. The Index captures social determinants of health – for example, those within the Living Conditions and the Natural Environment pillars – which impact health outcomes. To this end, the county-level Index is being used by Montana State University as part of its work in conducting the Community Needs Assessments of rural hospitals within the state. These assessments take into account the 'up-stream' services that contribute to health outcomes. Many of these 'up-stream' services are contained within the Index, providing a rich source of information for these assessments.

The county-level Index is being used by foundations to help identify the particular weaknesses within their state to inform the areas that they wish to give attention to. It being used to help assess the merits of grant applications made to foundations as part of its application assessment criteria.

Finally, the state-level Index has been used to support legislative changes that will reduce the high prevalence of occupational licensing within a state. The legislation adopts Universal Recognition, which helps ease the overly burdensome and duplicative licensing process that prevents workers from out of state gaining employment in their chosen profession, reducing the need for retraining for a number of occupations.

## INFORMING THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

In March 2021, President Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act 2021, providing a package of \$1.9 trillion to address the impact of COVID-19. The ARP offers a significant opportunity to invest in the future prosperity of the United States, at a state and county level, especially for those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, who were already the ones that had been left behind.









# State-level findings

The United States Prosperity Index has been developed as a practical tool to help identify what specific actions need to be taken to strengthen the pathways from poverty to prosperity across the United States.

The state-level Index assesses the 50 states of the U.S., and the District of Columbia, on the promotion of their citizens' flourishing, reflecting both wealth and wellbeing. We worked with around 40 U.S. academic and policy experts (see page 29 for a full listing) with particular expertise in different aspects of prosperity in a U.S. context, to identify the different characteristics of prosperity for each of the 50 states of the Union and D.C. The state-level Index was first

published in 2019 and updated in 2020. Since last year we have made some minor improvements and modifications to the Index, although these have been kept to a minimum to ensure consistency between years. A detailed methodology report, which identifies the changes made since 2020 can be found at: [www.usprosperity.net/downloads/reports](http://www.usprosperity.net/downloads/reports).

This next section provides the high-level insights from this year's Prosperity Index at state-level, which includes a map showing how prosperity is shared across the U.S. at state level, the overall U.S. performance on the 11 pillars over time, and the rankings of the 50 states and D.C. for prosperity and the 11 pillars.



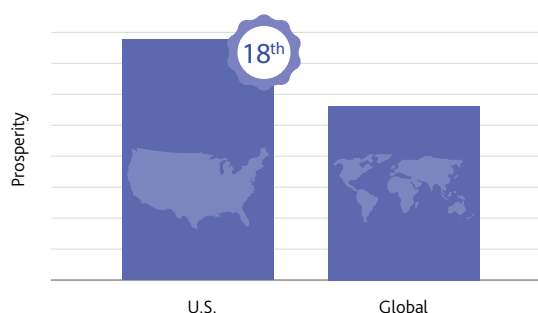




# Key findings

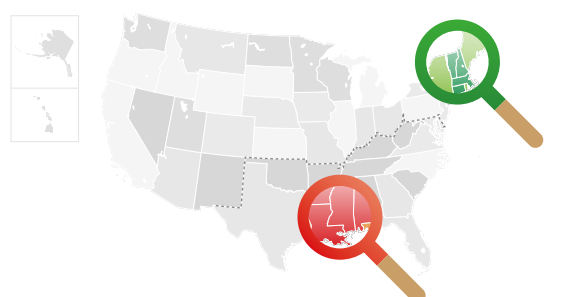
**The United States is one of the most prosperous countries in the world, ranking 18<sup>th</sup> out of 167 nations.**

On the global stage, the U.S. remains one of the most prosperous nations. It has a particularly strong and open economy, ranking 4<sup>th</sup> in the world for Enterprise Conditions and 10<sup>th</sup> for Investment Environment.



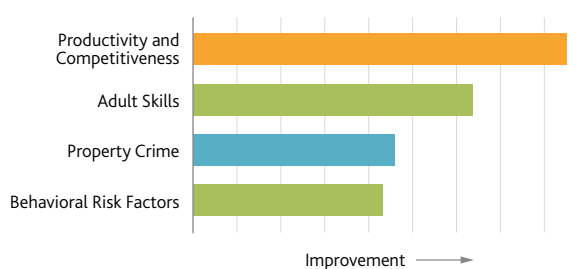
**Prosperity is distributed unevenly across the country.**

Prosperity is not equally shared across the United States, with disparities at state and county level and among different groups of society. Massachusetts continues to be the strongest-performing state and Mississippi the weakest.



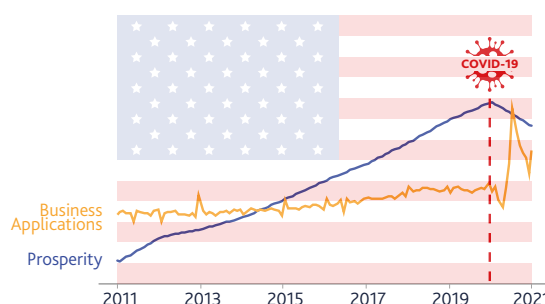
**U.S. prosperity had been rising continuously for more than a decade, as a result of long-term improvements across many areas.**

Increasing productivity and competitiveness, a more educated adult population, reductions in smoking and drinking, and lower levels of property crime had all contributed to more than a decade-long rise in prosperity.



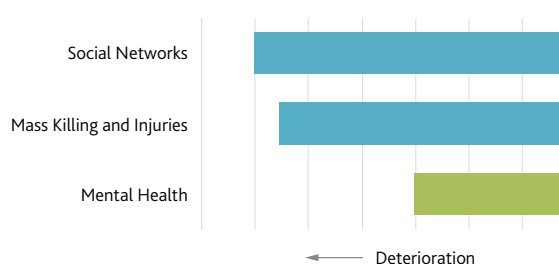
**Prosperity weakened between 2020 and 2021 as COVID-19 impacted many aspects of U.S. society, but a strong resurgence in new business applications signals hope for the recovery.**

The direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic resulted in many aspects of prosperity deteriorating over the past year and further consequences are still to be felt, but the number of new business applications has been the highest on record, signaling hope for a strong post-pandemic recovery.



**Even prior to COVID-19, there were some significant challenges acting as a brake on U.S. prosperity.**

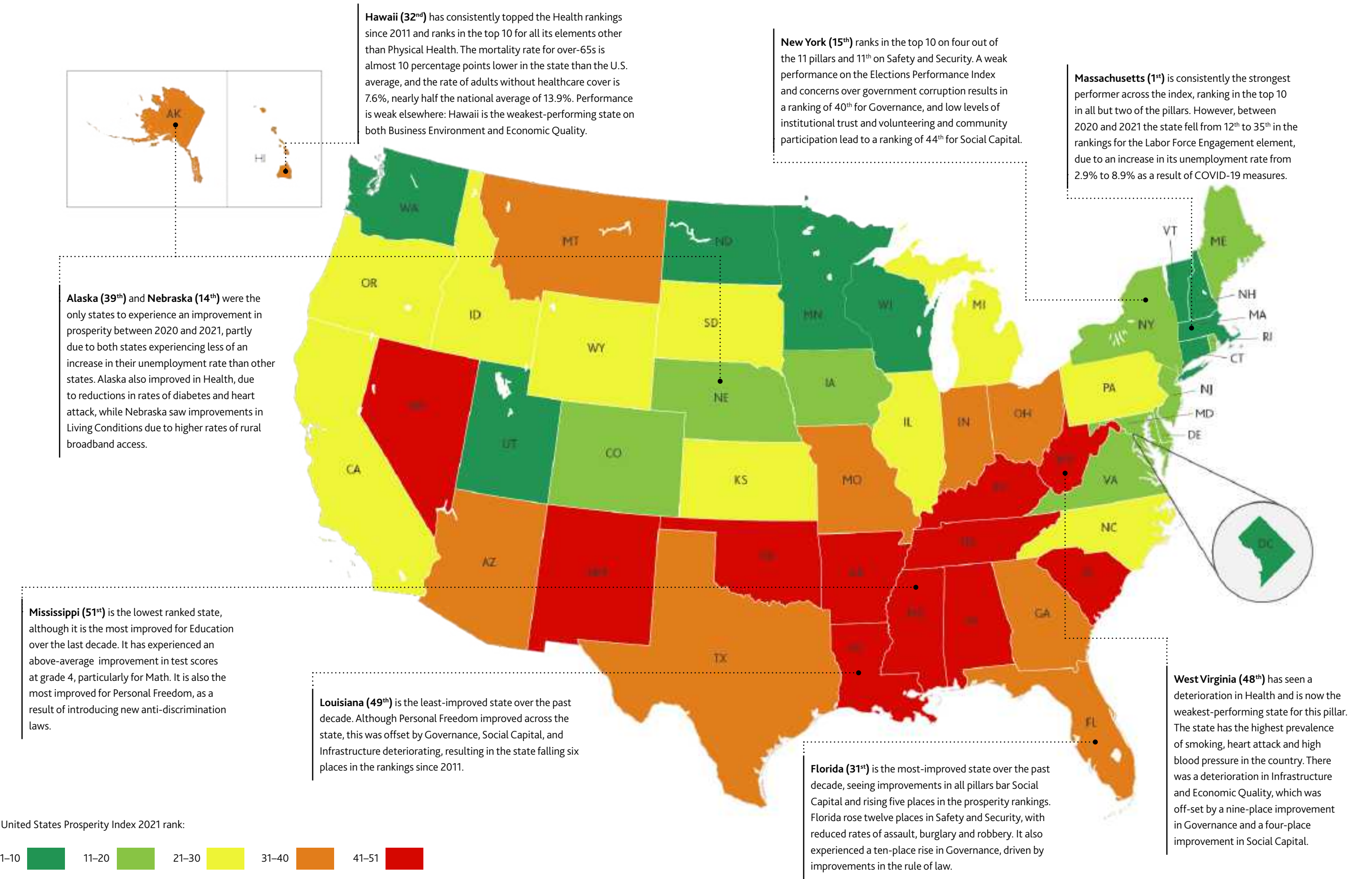
Pre-pandemic, the increase in mass shootings, rising obesity and mental health issues, and people interacting less with neighbors were already impeding further progress and stopping the U.S. performing more strongly on the global stage.







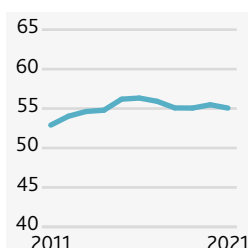
# Mapping state prosperity in 2021



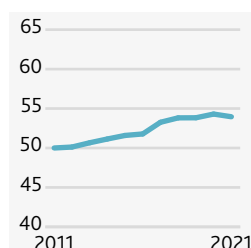
# The pillars of U.S. prosperity at a glance



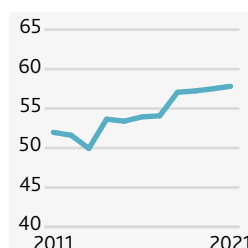
The **Safety and Security** pillar measures the degree to which mass killings and injuries, violent crime, and property crime destabilize the security of individuals, both immediately and through longer-lasting effects.



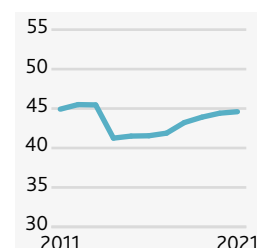
The **Personal Freedom** pillar measures progress towards basic legal rights, individual liberties, and social tolerance.



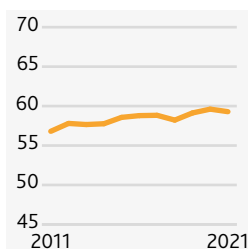
The **Governance** pillar measures the extent to which there are checks and restraints on power and whether the government operates effectively and without corruption.



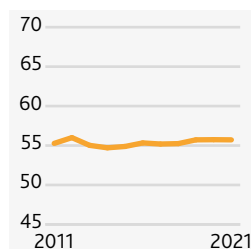
The **Social Capital** pillar measures the strength of personal and social relationships, institutional trust, social networks and civic participation.



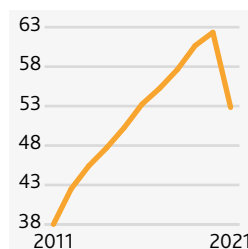
The **Business Environment** pillar measures the entrepreneurial environment, business infrastructure, access to credit, labor market flexibility and price distortions for goods and services.



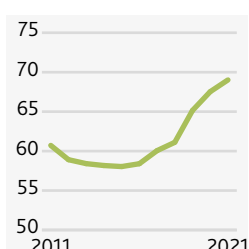
The **Infrastructure** pillar measures the quality of the infrastructure that facilitates trade — from telecommunications and transport to the availability and reliability of resources.



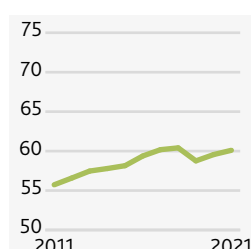
The **Economic Quality** pillar measures how well the economy is equipped to generate wealth sustainably, with the full engagement of its workforce.



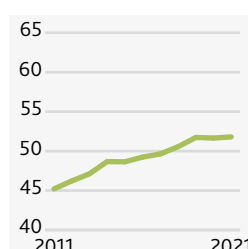
The **Living Conditions** pillar measures the degree to which a reasonable quality of life is experienced by all, including material resources, shelter, basic services, and connectivity.



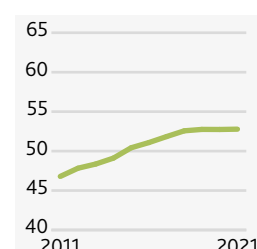
The **Health** pillar measures the health of the population, their illness and risk factors, access to services to maintain good health, and health outcomes, including mortality rates.




The **Education** pillar measures access to, and the quality of, the four stages of education (pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary), and the education level of the adult population.



The **Natural Environment** pillar measures the aspects of the physical environment that have an immediate impact on people in their daily lives and those that impact the prosperity of future generations.



# The United States Prosperity Index, rankings



2011 Rank	2020 Rank	2021 Rank	State	Safety and Security	Personal Freedom	Governance	Social Capital	Business Environment	Infrastructure	Economic Quality	Living Conditions	Health	Education	Natural Environment
1	1	1	Massachusetts	8	2	5	15	4	7	35	3	2	1	9
2	2	2	Connecticut	5	1	1	25	6	10	21	5	3	4	2
3	3	3	Minnesota	14	23	15	2	5	22	13	4	5	5	17
10	5	4	New Hampshire	2	5	31	9	15	31	20	1	14	7	4
7	4	5	Utah	15	6	25	1	11	27	4	14	16	13	24
16	7	6	Vermont	3	10	32	4	27	40	29	10	13	2	1
4	9	7	Washington	27	21	4	18	14	24	5	15	12	9	13
11	6	8	District of Columbia	51	4	2	28	8	1	6	31	24	11	19
5	10	9	North Dakota	21	15	30	6	26	2	1	11	18	31	44
6	8	10	Wisconsin	12	25	7	7	7	33	17	22	15	10	23
9	12	11	Colorado	38	14	3	12	2	34	40	20	7	6	7
14	11	12	New Jersey	6	12	39	34	21	3	43	2	9	3	14
12	14	13	Iowa	13	16	14	13	29	20	8	16	10	14	39
13	16	14	Nebraska	18	24	11	5	20	29	7	18	11	12	43
8	13	15	New York	11	18	40	44	3	9	27	12	6	26	3
15	15	16	Maine	1	13	8	8	30	51	33	21	31	18	8
20	18	17	Maryland	34	19	10	32	33	8	25	6	17	16	15
19	17	18	Rhode Island	7	3	21	23	45	16	47	9	8	28	6
17	20	19	Virginia	10	31	22	31	19	37	23	7	20	8	26
18	19	20	Delaware	29	38	19	26	23	6	10	8	32	29	30
27	22	21	Illinois	35	11	23	33	9	5	48	13	22	20	40
26	24	22	Pennsylvania	17	22	49	24	1	11	45	17	23	15	31
22	21	23	Idaho	4	29	28	14	25	32	15	32	26	35	34
23	23	24	Oregon	22	20	13	22	42	21	19	38	21	23	22
35	26	25	California	36	32	24	45	32	25	9	33	4	40	11
21	25	26	South Dakota	16	42	41	3	31	39	12	30	19	34	28
32	27	27	North Carolina	33	39	20	38	17	17	22	25	36	25	21
29	28	28	Wyoming	9	8	46	17	40	43	3	36	34	17	33
24	31	29	Michigan	30	28	16	27	22	35	38	19	33	30	25
28	32	30	Kansas	31	17	42	16	18	26	18	34	29	19	45
36	29	31	Florida	32	27	34	47	35	4	31	29	27	32	16
25	30	32	Hawaii	23	7	6	19	51	38	51	26	1	33	18
33	33	33	Texas	39	45	36	41	13	18	2	40	35	42	32
38	35	34	Montana	24	33	27	11	34	42	36	37	25	22	38
31	34	35	Indiana	25	30	35	21	24	19	26	24	42	27	51
34	36	36	Ohio	26	47	18	35	10	15	42	28	43	21	49
39	37	37	Georgia	28	51	47	43	12	14	16	23	38	36	27
37	39	38	Missouri	44	48	38	20	16	28	24	27	40	24	37
41	38	39	Alaska	48	26	26	10	46	45	11	45	30	44	10
30	40	40	Arizona	37	35	12	48	38	41	34	43	28	43	12
40	41	41	Tennessee	42	49	17	42	28	23	30	39	44	37	29
42	42	42	South Carolina	45	36	48	29	39	13	32	35	41	41	35
44	43	43	Kentucky	20	40	33	39	36	36	50	41	47	39	42
49	44	44	Alabama	43	46	44	37	37	12	37	42	49	46	41
43	45	45	New Mexico	50	9	9	50	44	50	44	51	37	50	20
45	46	46	Nevada	47	44	37	51	48	30	39	44	39	48	5
48	48	47	Oklahoma	41	43	45	46	41	48	14	47	46	38	50
47	47	48	West Virginia	19	37	29	30	50	49	46	48	51	51	46
46	49	49	Louisiana	49	34	50	49	43	46	28	49	45	49	48
51	50	50	Arkansas	46	50	43	40	49	47	41	46	48	45	47
50	51	51	Mississippi	40	41	51	36	47	44	49	50	50	47	36



# County-level findings

The state-level Index reveals the characteristics of prosperity across the whole state, identifying its strengths and weakness and how this has changed over time. The county-level Index, first introduced in 2020, enables a more localized understanding of how each county performs on prosperity and its underlying characteristics. The two indexes have been constructed using the same approach and indicators so that they can be used hand in-hand to identify areas for investment and policy action.

The Index has been expanded this year to include the 367 counties within the four states of Florida, Kentucky, Minnesota and Nebraska, alongside the existing 829 counties within the eight states of California, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Montana, Oklahoma, New York and Texas. These 12 states have been carefully selected to capture demographic and geographic variety, and because they exhibit

different levels of state prosperity. In the coming years, our ambition is to expand the Index to cover all counties within the United States, enabling a more detailed understanding of prosperity at the local level.

This next section includes a map of prosperity for each of the 12 states that shows the relative positioning of the state's counties in the county-level Index (i.e. against all 1,196 counties), grouped into quintiles, with commentary on the performance of certain counties within the state. The relative performance of the counties in each state is determined by assessing whether the county is in the top (1<sup>st</sup>), middle (2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>) or bottom (5<sup>th</sup>) quintiles of the county Index.

A separate, more detailed, report is available for each of the 12 states within the county-level Index, which is available via the website, under the Downloads section at: [www.usprosperity.net/downloads/reports](http://www.usprosperity.net/downloads/reports).







## Prosperity of California's counties 2021

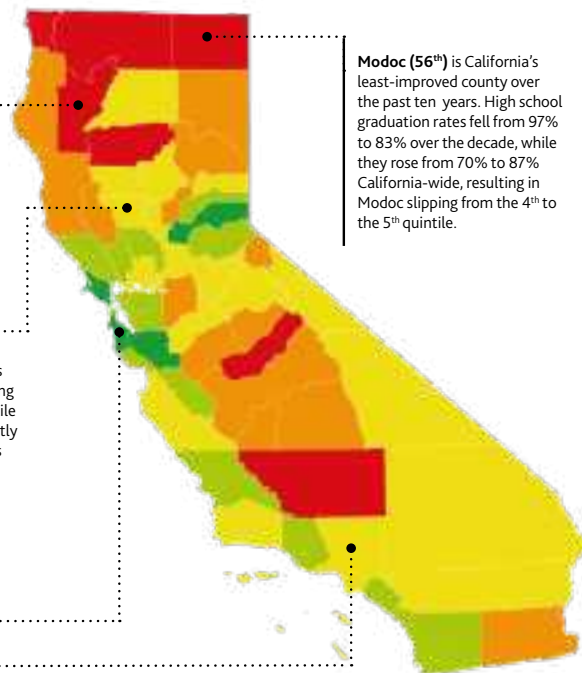
Strongest		Weakest	
1	San Mateo	54	Tehama
2	Marin	55	Kern
3	Santa Clara	56	Modoc
4	Placer	57	Siskiyou
5	San Francisco	58	Trinity

**Trinity (58<sup>th</sup>)** has 30 people per 10,000 population homeless, almost twice the national average. Nearly 80% of the homeless in the county are unsheltered, compared to around 30% nationwide. This contributes to Trinity being both California's weakest performing county since 2018 and one of its least improved counties over the past decade.

**Colusa (28<sup>th</sup>)** is California's most improved county, rising from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile of the Index since 2011, partly due to the percentage of its residents who can access broadband increasing from 34% to 86%.

**San Mateo (1<sup>st</sup>)** experiences one of the highest labor productivity rates across the surveyed states, at over \$80 per hour, over 20% higher than the national average. This contributes to Trinity being both California's weakest performing county since 2018 and one of its least improved counties over the past decade.

**Los Angeles (20<sup>th</sup>)**, home to a quarter of all Californians, suffers from a lack of suitable housing: 11% of residents in the county are living in overcrowded housing, compared with a national average of 3.5%.



**Modoc (56<sup>th</sup>)** is California's least-improved county over the past ten years. High school graduation rates fell from 97% to 83% over the decade, while they rose from 70% to 87% California-wide, resulting in Modoc slipping from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> quintile.

Positioning of counties within the County Index



## Prosperity of Colorado's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	Broomfield	60	Dolores
2	Douglas	61	Saguache
3	Ouray	62	Pueblo
4	Boulder	63	Bent
5	Pitkin	64	Crowley

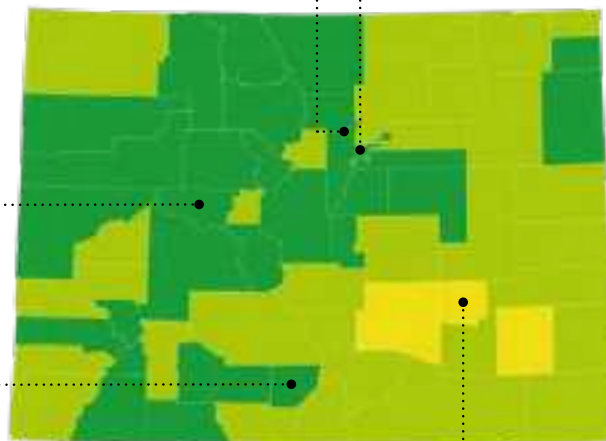
**Broomfield (1<sup>st</sup>)** sees a community college graduation rate of 97%, over 60 percentage points higher than the national average, contributing to its placement as the most prosperous county across the 12 surveyed states.

**Denver (22<sup>nd</sup>)** is Colorado's most populous county and has the strongest communications infrastructure in the state, with mean download speeds of 140mbps, 55% higher than the state average and 30% higher than the national average.

**Pitkin (5<sup>th</sup>)**, home of the ski resort of Aspen, is a county whose residents are among the healthiest in the Index. Diabetes rates of 3% are less than a third of the national average, and the proportion of residents reporting having poor physical health stands at 8%, nearly five percentage-points lower than the national average.

**Alamosa (27<sup>th</sup>)** has seen the incidence of aggravated assaults fall by just under 80% since 2011, from 200 to 40 incidents per 100,00 people, helping to push it from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> quintile of the Index, and is Colorado's most improved county.

**Crowley (64<sup>th</sup>)** is Colorado's weakest performing county, and has experienced a slight deterioration in prosperity since 2011, falling from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile of the Index. Over the decade, the youth unemployment rate more than doubled in the county, from 14% in 2010 to 29% in 2019.



Positioning of counties within the County Index



## Prosperity of Florida's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	St Johns	63	Dixie
2	Seminole	64	Hendry
3	Collier	65	Madison
4	Sarasota	66	Taylor
5	Charlotte	67	Putnam

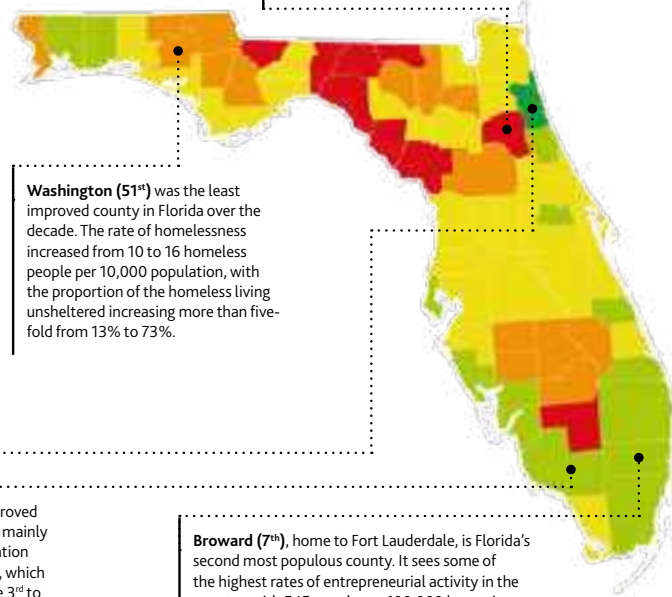
**St Johns (1<sup>st</sup>)** has a highly educated population, 95% of whom have attained at least a high school diploma and 45% of whom have achieved at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 88% and 33% nationally, contributing to it being Florida's top performing county.

**Washington (51<sup>st</sup>)** was the least improved county in Florida over the decade. The rate of homelessness increased from 10 to 16 homeless people per 10,000 population, with the proportion of the homeless living unsheltered increasing more than five-fold from 13% to 73%.

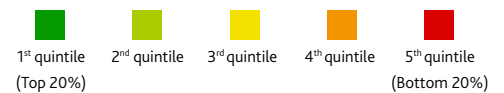
**Putnam (67<sup>th</sup>)** has been Florida's least prosperous county for the past three years. It suffers from high rates of violent crime, with an aggravated assault rate of almost 370 incidents per 100,000 people, 50% higher than the national average.

**Collier (3<sup>rd</sup>)** is Florida's most improved county over the past decade, due mainly to the community college graduation rate increasing from 24% to 81%, which has resulted in it moving from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quintile.

**Broward (7<sup>th</sup>)**, home to Fort Lauderdale, is Florida's second most populous county. It sees some of the highest rates of entrepreneurial activity in the country, with 545 people per 100,000 becoming entrepreneurs for the first time in the last year, 70% higher than the national average of 320 per 100,000.



Positioning of counties within the County Index



## Prosperity of Georgia's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	Forsyth	155	Warren
2	Fayette	156	Clinch
3	Cobb	157	Macon
4	Cherokee	158	Hancock
5	Oconee	159	Twiggs

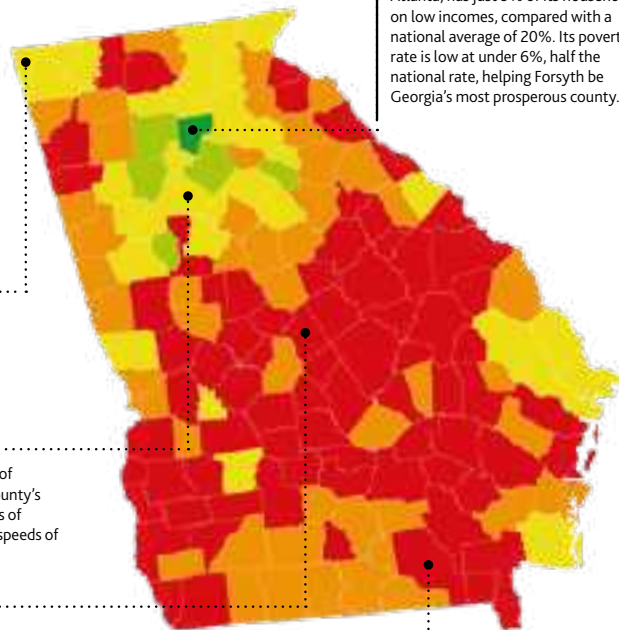
**Dade (7<sup>th</sup>)**, located on the border with Tennessee, is Georgia's most improved county since 2011, moving from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile of the Index. The county benefited from significant drops in crime rates, with burglary rates falling from over 400 to 43 incidents per 100,000 people.

**De Kalb (31<sup>st</sup>)**, together with Fulton, represents the city of Atlanta. Internet access is universal, with 100% of the county's population having access to broadband download speeds of 100mbps and up, while experiencing average download speeds of 220mbps, over twice the national average.

**Twiggs (159<sup>th</sup>)** saw motor vehicle thefts increase 35% over the past 10 years, from 82 to 111 incidents per 100,000 people. These shifts have contributed to it being the weakest performing county across the 12 selected states.

**Clinch (156<sup>th</sup>)** is Georgia's least improved county and has remained in the 5<sup>th</sup> quintile of the Index for over a decade. Health insurance costs have increased in the county from an average of \$4,155 per employee per year in 2011 to \$5,407 in 2019.

**Forsyth (1<sup>st</sup>)**, an outer suburb of Atlanta, has just 9% of its households on low incomes, compared with a national average of 20%. Its poverty rate is low at under 6%, half the national rate, helping Forsyth be Georgia's most prosperous county.



Positioning of counties within the County Index



## Prosperity of Iowa's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	Bremer	95	Webster
2	Sioux	96	Lee
3	Story	97	Des Moines
4	Dallas	98	Pottawattamie
5	Winneshiek	99	Wapello

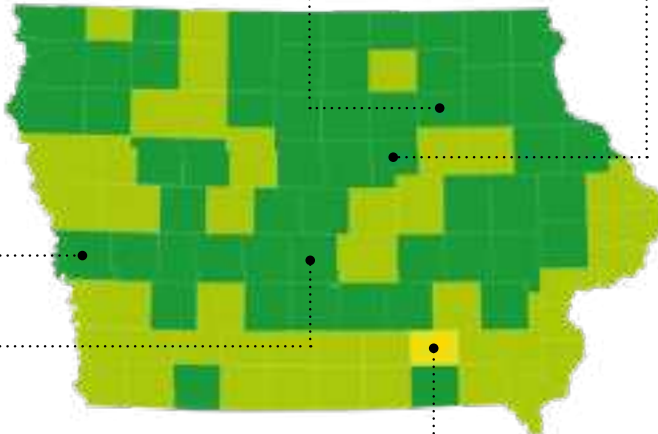
**Bremer (1<sup>st</sup>)** has experienced nearly a tripling in the rate of new entrepreneurs since 2011, from 115 to 336 new ventures per 100,000 of the population, contributing to it ranking as the strongest performing county in Iowa.

**Grundey (36<sup>th</sup>)** has not seen an improvement in prosperity over the past decade. The percentage of residents in the county reporting confidence in the media fell from 72% to 47%, compared to 59% and 53% respectively for the whole state of Iowa.

**Harrison (44<sup>th</sup>)** is the most improved county in Iowa since 2011, moving from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> quintile as a result. The county's government saw its revenue to expenditure ratio improve from \$0.99 of revenue to each dollar of expenditure in 2011 to \$1.10 in 2021 and saw its debt to GDP ratio fall almost 80% from 2.8 to 0.6.

**Polk (35<sup>th</sup>)** is home to the city of Des Moines, the capital of and largest city in Iowa. The county is well served when it comes to public transport, with 0.6 miles of bus route for each square mile of land area, twice the national average. This contributes to its placement in the 1<sup>st</sup> quintile for prosperity.

**Wapello (99<sup>th</sup>)** sees the volume of toxic water releases standing at 1,743lbs per square mile, over 16 times the national average of 105lbs. This has contributed to Wapello's ranking as the weakest performing county in Iowa.



Positioning of counties within the County Index



## Prosperity of Kentucky's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	Oldham	116	Fulton
2	Woodford	117	Mason
3	Campbell	118	Breathitt
4	Spencer	119	Clay
5	Boone	120	Leslie

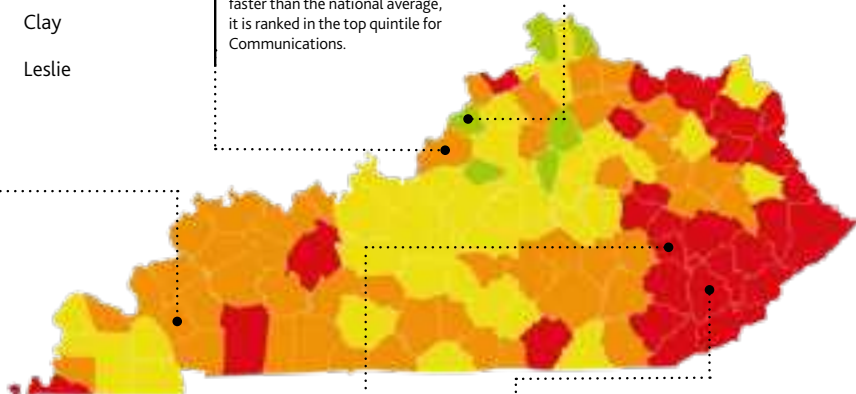
**Jefferson (56<sup>th</sup>)** is the most populous county in Kentucky and is home to the city of Louisville. With 100% of its residents having access to fast internet and mean download speeds of over 170mbps, almost 60% faster than the national average, it is ranked in the top quintile for Communications.

**Oldham (1<sup>st</sup>)**, an affluent suburb of Louisville, has just 9% of households on low incomes and 6% in poverty, both of which are around half the national rate, which contributes to it being the most prosperous county in Kentucky.

**Lyon (60<sup>th</sup>)** saw the greatest increase in prosperity across all counties in Kentucky, rising from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> quintile of the Index. The college enrollment rate in the county almost doubled from 11% to 21%.

**Owsley (111<sup>th</sup>)** is Kentucky's least improved county, falling from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> quintile. Its lack of progress has been hampered by its college enrollment rate falling by almost three quarters from 40% to just over 10%.

**Leslie (120<sup>th</sup>)** is one of 54 counties in the state in the Appalachia region. It has a labor force participation rate of 40%, 23 percentage points lower than the county average across the 12 selected states, contributing to Leslie being the least prosperous county in Kentucky.



Positioning of counties within the County Index



## Prosperity of Minnesota's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	Carver	83	Renville
2	Houston	84	Cass
3	Wabasha	85	Mahnomen
4	Scott	86	Aitkin
5	Rock	87	Pine

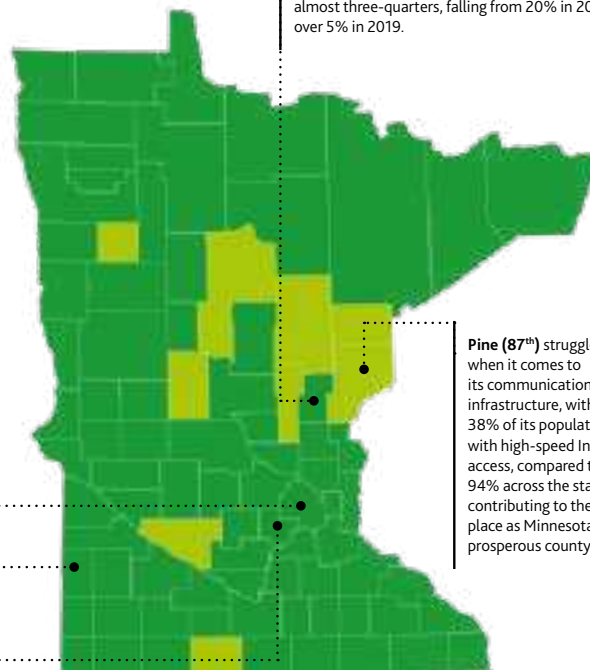
**Hennepin (21<sup>st</sup>)**, located in Western Minneapolis, the county is the most populous county in Minnesota. Fewer than one in four residents in the county (23%) are classified as obese, a third lower than the national average.

**Lincoln (48<sup>th</sup>)** saw its prosperity stagnate over the past decade. The county's college enrolment rates more than halved, going from 41% to 18% over the decade, while across Minnesota, they rose slightly from 43% to 45%.

**Carver (1<sup>st</sup>)** has a working-age mortality rate that is 50% below the national average, at 145 deaths per 100,000 population, contributing to the county's place as the most prosperous county in Minnesota.

**Kanabec (69<sup>th</sup>)** was the most improved county in Minnesota over the decade, moving from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> quintile. Its youth unemployment rate reduced by almost three-quarters, falling from 20% in 2010 to just over 5% in 2019.

**Pine (87<sup>th</sup>)** struggles when it comes to its communications infrastructure, with only 38% of its population with high-speed Internet access, compared to 94% across the state, contributing to the county's place as Minnesota's least prosperous county.



Positioning of counties within the County Index



## Prosperity of Montana's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	Daniels	52	Lincoln
2	Gallatin	53	Rosebud
3	Fallon	54	Glacier
4	Madison	55	Big Horn
5	Beaverhead	56	Roosevelt

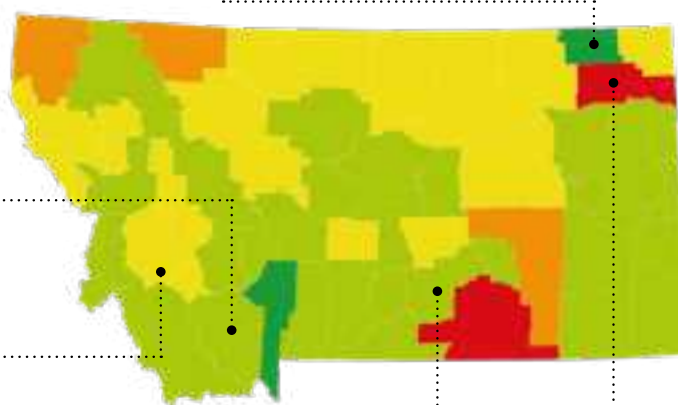
**Madison (4<sup>th</sup>)** is the most improved county in Montana since 2011. Over the decade, rates of broadband access in the county rose from 6% to 91%, compared to an increase from 67% to 87% Montana-wide.

**Deer Lodge (51<sup>st</sup>)** saw the least improvement of all counties in Montana, due to its prosperity stagnating over the past 10 years. Rates of toxic air releases in the county increased sevenfold from 4lbs to 28lbs per square mile over the decade.

**Yellowstone (25<sup>th</sup>)** is Montana's most populous county and is home to the city of Billings. Almost three-quarters of residents trust others in their neighborhoods and 65% regularly talk with their neighbors.

**Daniels (1<sup>st</sup>)** saw 46% of its population participate in religious organizations and 29% participate in sports and recreation organizations, 25 and 20 percentage-points higher, respectively, than the national average. This strong social capital has contributed to Daniels' place as Montana's most prosperous county.

**Roosevelt (56<sup>th</sup>)**, home to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, fell from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> quintile, becoming Montana's least prosperous county as a result. The high school graduation rate fell by almost 30%, from 100% in 2011 to 73% in 2021.



Positioning of counties within the County Index





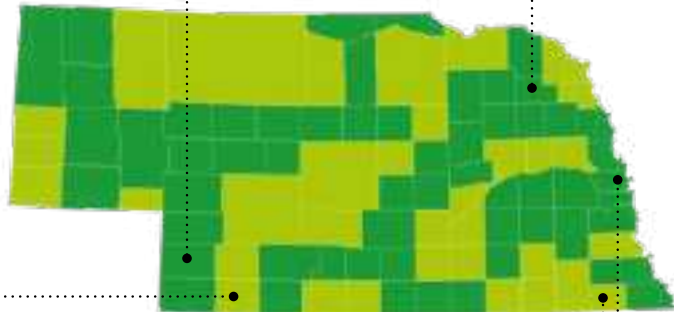
## Prosperity of Nebraska's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	Wayne	89	Gage
2	Pierce	90	Jefferson
3	Cuming	91	Furnas
4	Burt	92	Thurston
5	Seward	93	Hitchcock

**Hitchcock (93<sup>rd</sup>)** has mean download speeds of just 11mbps, nearly a tenth of the nationwide average of 108mbps. Such issues have led Hitchcock to be ranked as Nebraska's least prosperous county.

**Chase (14<sup>th</sup>)** saw the biggest increase in prosperity of any county in Nebraska over the past 10 years, moving from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> quintile. The proportion of the county's children living in unmarried households fell from one in three in 2010 to one in five in 2019.

**Wayne (1<sup>st</sup>)** sees its college enrolment rates stand at 90%, the highest rate of any county across the 12 states and 50% above the national average. The county has been Nebraska's most prosperous county for over a decade.



**Pawnee (88<sup>th</sup>)** has experienced a slight reduction in prosperity since 2011, falling from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quintile. The county saw its poverty rate increase from 14% to 19%, while for Nebraska the rate fell over the same time period from 12% to 9%.

**Douglas (57<sup>th</sup>)** is Nebraska's most populous county and houses the state's largest city, Omaha. The area lags behind when it comes to its natural environment, with 388lbs per square mile of toxic land releases per year, compared to the state average of 66lbs.

Positioning of counties within the County Index



## Prosperity of New York's counties 2021

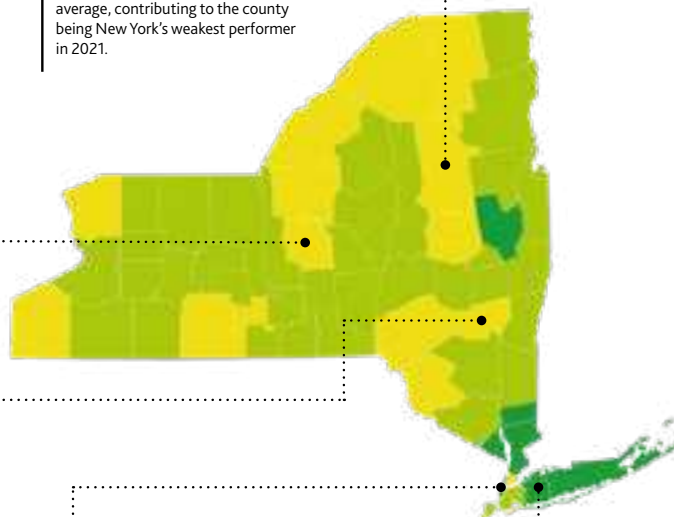
Strongest		Weakest	
1	Nassau	58	Sullivan
2	Putnam	59	Montgomery
3	Saratoga	60	Jefferson
4	New York	61	Bronx
5	Westchester	62	Hamilton

**Onondaga (50<sup>th</sup>)** saw the percentage of people trusting others in their neighborhoods almost halve over the decade, from 57% to 33%, which has led to a slight reduction in prosperity, with the county falling from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile of the Index.

**Greene (47<sup>th</sup>)** experienced the greatest increase in prosperity over the past 10 years. Its high school graduation rates increased from 68% to 90%, while across New York, the rate increased by just 6%, from 77% to 83%.

**New York (4<sup>th</sup>)** (Manhattan), is the most densely populated of all U.S. counties with nearly 30,000 people per km<sup>2</sup>. While the rate of obesity in the county is 16%, 24 percentage points below the nationwide average, 8.2% of residents report having an alcohol-use disorder, almost twice the national rate.

**Hamilton (62<sup>nd</sup>)** has a labor force participation rate of 47%, 29 percentage points below the national average, contributing to the county being New York's weakest performer in 2021.



**Nassau (1<sup>st</sup>)** has a highly educated population, with 46% of its adults holding at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 32% across the country as whole, helping to place it as New York's most prosperous county.

Positioning of counties within the County Index





## Prosperity of Oklahoma's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	Washington	73	Choctaw
2	Kingfisher	74	McIntosh
3	Woods	75	Le Flore
4	Cleveland	76	Okfuskee
5	Canadian	77	McCurtain

**Cimarron (39<sup>th</sup>)** moved from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> quintile of the Index over the past decade. Burglary rates in the county almost doubled, increasing from 125 to 234 incidents per 100,000 people, while across the state, they fell from 355 to 306 incidents per 100,000.

**Washington (1<sup>st</sup>)** has super fast internet connectivity, with 77% of its population having access to broadband with download speeds of at least 1,000mbps, compared to 27% across the wider U.S., helping to rank the county as Oklahoma's most prosperous.

**Delaware (9<sup>th</sup>)** is Oklahoma's most improved county since 2011. It saw its homelessness rates decrease by 65%, from 14 homeless per 10,000 people in 2009 to five homeless per 10,000 people in 2019. The proportion of homeless people living in unsheltered accommodation fell from 58% to 31% over the same period.

**Tulsa (13<sup>th</sup>)**, Oklahoma's second most populous county, experiences high levels of air pollution, with 1,290lbs per square mile of toxic air releases, compared to the nationwide average of 669lbs.

**McCurtain (77<sup>th</sup>)** has 23% of its population living below the poverty line and 47% in liquid asset poverty, 14 and 11 percentage points, respectively, above the national averages. The county currently ranks as the least prosperous in Oklahoma and 2<sup>nd</sup> least prosperous across the 12 selected states.

Positioning of counties within the County Index



## Prosperity of Texas's counties 2021

Strongest		Weakest	
1	Collin	250	Limestone
2	Kendall	251	Cass
3	Williamson	252	Dawson
4	Denton	253	Terry
5	Travis	254	San Augustine

**El Paso (67<sup>th</sup>)**, Texas' westernmost county, ranks in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile for prosperity. Only 6% of its population engage with sport or recreational organizations, just over half the average of 11% across the 12 surveyed states.

**Floyd (236<sup>th</sup>)** was Texas' most deteriorated county, falling from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> quintile between 2011 and 2021. The county's pre-primary school enrolment rates fell by 80% over the decade, from 49% in 2010 to 10% in 2019.

**Collin (1<sup>st</sup>)** on the edge of Dallas, sees 94% of its adult population holding at least a high school diploma and 52% holding a bachelor's degree or higher, 5 and 19 percentage points, respectively, higher than the national average, helping to place Collin as Texas' strongest performing county.

**Hardeman (128<sup>th</sup>)** is the most improved county in Texas since 2011, rising from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> quintile of the Index. The county saw its rates of aggravated assaults fall from 195 incidents per 100,000 people to 51, while its burglary rates fell from 1,562 per 100,000 to 381.

**San Augustine (254<sup>th</sup>)** the most deteriorated county in Texas, has only 19% of its population connected to broadband, compared to 96% across the 12 surveyed states. Average download speed is low at 25mbps, compared to 103 mbps for Texas as a whole. San Augustine has remained Texas' least prosperous county since 2017.

Positioning of counties within the County Index



# Acknowledgements

## The United States Prosperity Index Team

The following team has worked with huge passion and rigor, in producing the United States Prosperity Index. We are incredibly grateful for their dedication and hard work.

**Mohamed Abdikarim**

**Joshua Lee**

**Shaun Flanagan**

**Edward Wickstead**

**Matt Latham**

The Legatum Institute would also like to express their huge thanks to the following advisors who have been so helpful in the initial construction of the Index and its component elements. The views expressed in this report are those of the Legatum Institute and do not necessarily reflect the views of these advisors.

### **Inclusive Societies:**

Christopher Albin-Lackey, Legal & Policy Director, National Center for Access to Justice, Fordham Law School

Katy Bass, Research Director, Knight Institute

Saskia Brechenmacher, Associate Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Alison Brysk, Mellichamp Professor of Global Governance, University of California

Meagan Cahill, Senior Policy Researcher, RAND Corporation

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Mark Gibney, Belk Distinguished Professor, University of North Carolina — Asheville

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### **Empowered People:**

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Doug Noonan, Professor, Indiana University — Purdue University Indianapolis

Dr. Andrew Sharpe, Executive Director, Centre for the Study of Living Standards

Duncan Thomas, Professor of Economics, Global Health and Public Policy, Duke University

David N. Weil, Professor of Economics, Brown University

Zachary A. Wendling, Principal Investigator, 2020 Environmental Performance Index"

The Legatum Institute would also like to thank Broadband Now for the provision of their data.

Unless otherwise stated, all data is from the 2021 United States Prosperity Index.

All original data sources can be found in the methodology report and online at [www.usprosperity.net](http://www.usprosperity.net).

We encourage you to share the contents of this document. In so doing, we request that all data, findings, and analysis be attributed to the 2021 United States Prosperity Index.

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# Endnotes

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## ABOUT THE LEGATUM INSTITUTE

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The Legatum Institute is a London-based think tank with a bold vision to create a global movement of people committed to creating the pathways from poverty to prosperity and the transformation of society. We seek to fulfil our mission by raising up leaders of character, restoring an ethical vitality to all sectors of society, and developing the practical solutions and data tools that will help build inclusive and peaceful societies with open economies and empowered people. For more information about the United States Prosperity Index or to speak to one of the Legatum Institute's experts, please email [info@li.com](mailto:info@li.com).

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CREATING THE PATHWAYS FROM POVERTY TO PROSPERITY

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## PROSPERITY INDEX

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ISBN 978-1-911125-70-9



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JULY 2021