





















































# Best States 2019

Ranking Performance Throughout All 50 States

RANK	STATE	HEALTH CARE	EDUCATION	ECONOMY	INFRASTRUCTURE	OPPORTUNITY	FISCAL STABILITY	CRIME & CORRECTIONS	NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
1	 Washington	4	4	3	2	19	22	15	14
2	 New Hampshire	16	5	13	31	1	10	1	4
3	 Minnesota	10	17	18	6	3	25	16	3
4	 Utah	9	10	2	3	24	5	12	49
5	 Vermont	11	8	29	28	10	19	2	7
6	 Maryland	8	13	26	21	5	15	22	25
7	 Virginia	18	7	25	35	9	8	9	18
8	 Massachusetts	2	1	7	44	29	30	4	26
9	 Nebraska	27	6	21	9	15	7	24	27
10	 Colorado	12	11	1	8	28	29	29	31
11	 Wisconsin	14	14	24	30	6	14	30	10
12	 New Jersey	6	2	31	34	8	49	6	13
13	 Florida	29	3	9	14	38	2	31	21
14	 Iowa	20	9	32	23	2	17	19	32
15	 North Dakota	38	20	35	5	4	13	18	28
16	 Idaho	26	33	6	29	35	11	8	15
17	 Georgia	39	30	11	10	21	9	27	20
18	 North Carolina	30	25	14	18	36	4	14	36
19	 California	7	21	4	32	49	42	23	5
20	 South Dakota	32	18	27	16	34	3	40	2
21	 Connecticut	3	12	30	46	33	46	7	6
22	 Kansas	33	15	36	7	16	35	32	8
23	 Delaware	15	23	17	19	23	18	36	47
24	 Hawaii	1	29	40	12	46	36	5	16
25	 New York	13	22	33	22	47	26	10	24

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

# How We Score

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

In calculating the rankings, each of the eight categories was assigned weightings based on the average of three years of data from an annual national survey that asked a total of more than 50,000 people to prioritize each subject in their state:

**Health Care: 16%**

**Education: 15.8%**

**Economy: 13.8%**

**Infrastructure: 12.9%**

**Opportunity: 12.7%**

**Fiscal Stability: 10.5%**

**Crime & Corrections: 9.9%**

**Natural Environment: 8.4%**

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

## Health Care:

- **Health Care Access:** 33%
- **Health Care Quality:** 33%
- **Public Health:** 33%

## Education:

- **Higher Education:** 50%
- **Pre-K - 12:** 50%

## Economy:

- **Business Environment:** 33%
- **Growth:** 33%
- **Employment:** 33%

## Infrastructure:

- **Energy:** 33%
- **Internet Access:** 33%
- **Transportation:** 33%

## Opportunity:

- **Affordability:** 33%
- **Economic Opportunity:** 33%
- **Equality:** 33%

## Fiscal Stability:

- **Long-term:** 50%
- **Short-term:** 50%

## Crime & Corrections:

- **Corrections:** 50%
- **Public Safety:** 50%

## Natural Environment:

- **Natural Environment:** 50%
- **Social Environment:** 50%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

# Methodology

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

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

## The Survey

For the weighting of the Best States rankings, U.S. News wanted to use an objective measure reflecting the priorities of citizens for their state governments. An annual survey asked Americans how satisfied they were with various state government services and where they thought their state governments should focus resources. The weights for the 2019 Best States rankings are based on the average of responses from three surveys: one conducted in fall 2016 that included 11,100 respondents from 22

states, a second conducted in fall 2017 that included 20,100 respondents from all 50 states and a third conducted in the winter of 2018-19 that included 23,400 respondents from all 50 states. Survey respondents were adults ages 18 and older who collectively represent all U.S. adults. The survey results were weighted to be representative of the country's population across all ages, genders, ethnicities and household incomes.

The categories for the rankings aligned with the survey questions. We based the weightings for the categories on a question that asked respondents to rank the categories, such as health and education, 1 to 8 (1 being most important) in order of what their home state's priorities should be. Respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with their state's performance in these categories, as well as how well the states fund those areas. The weights for these were calculated from the average rank for each among the respondents.

## The Data

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

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

the number of students enrolled at state universities.

- The set of metrics within each category should work together to provide an overview of that category.
- Government data was favored over other sources because of their reliability.
- Standardized data needed to be available across all or most states. Publicly available data was favored for their accessibility
- Data for each measure should be from 2015 or later and have regularly scheduled updates.

These guidelines meant that some of the desired metrics were not available, such as government corruption, which is not regularly updated, and recidivism rates, which are not measured consistently across states.

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

- U.S. Census Bureau
- ACT
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- The College Board
- The Council for Community and Economic Research

- FBI
- Federal Communications Commission
- Fortune
- The Institute for College Access & Success
- The Mercatus Center at George Mason University
- Moody's
- National Center for Education Statistics
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- PitchBook Data, Inc.
- U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
- U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
- U.S. Bureau of Agriculture
- U.S. Department of Energy
- U.S. Department of Transportation
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. News Best Hospitals
- U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

For each set, we used the most recent data available as of February 2019. Because datasets have different schedules for updates, data comes from different years and months. This allowed us to pull many more data points. Data will be updated for the 2020 relaunch of Best States.

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

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

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

You can see all the raw data behind the Best States rankings on the Data Explorer.

# FAQ

## What Is Best States?

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

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

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

## Why rank states?

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

Like U.S. News' [Best Countries](#) franchise, launched in 2016, and the [Healthiest Communities](#) platform, Best States gives readers a new way to analyze the world around them. It shows which state policies

are working and which can be improved, and encourages citizens to interact more with their governments to promote positive change.

## How is this different from existing state rankings?

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

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

## How were the states ranked?

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

The categories and subcategories used in the ranking were:

### Health Care

- Health Care Access



- Health Care Quality
- Public Health

### Education

- Higher Education
- Pre-K - 12

### Economy

- Business Environment
- Employment
- Growth

### Infrastructure

- Energy
- Internet Access
- Transportation

### Opportunity

- Affordability
- Economic Opportunity
- Equality

### Fiscal Stability

- Long-term
- Short-term

### Crime & Corrections

- Corrections
- Public Safety

### Natural Environment

- Air and Water Quality
- Pollution

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

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

**Health Care: 16%**

**Education: 15.8%**

**Economy: 13.8%**

**Infrastructure: 12.9%**

**Opportunity: 12.7%**

**Fiscal Stability: 10.5%**

**Crime & Corrections: 9.9%**

**Natural Environment: 8.4%**

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

### Why did my state perform so well?

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

especially those weighted more heavily, it is likely to rank highly overall.

### **Why did my state perform so poorly?**

Each state's overall ranking relies on its performance in all eight categories. Since these categories are not weighted equally, a state could rank highly in one or more categories but not overall. For example, if a state ranks near the top for natural environment weighted at 8.4%, it could still perform poorly overall if it ranks near the bottom for health care and education, the most highly weighted categories. Also, state rankings are relative; a low ranking doesn't necessarily mean a state is failing, but that other states outperformed it in that category or metric.

### **Why did my state's rank change?**

U.S. News is committed to building the most comprehensive analysis of all 50 states and, to that end, is continually assessing the data used in the rankings and the methods used to evaluate them. Feedback from industry experts, government officials and state residents alike informed a methodology review process that resulted in a number of changes. The 2019 Best States rankings should therefore be viewed independently from prior years' rankings.

That said, there are two main reasons why state rankings may have shifted between the 2018 Best States rankings and the 2019 Best States rankings:

- Updates based on most recent performance: Dozens of metrics were updated to reflect the most recent state data available, which in turn shifted state scores in many cases. For example, the high school graduation rate in Florida improved from 77.9% for the 2015 cohort to 80.7% for the 2016 cohort. This, in some part, helped the state improve its standing in the education category and its overall Best States ranking.
- Streamlining of metrics: To measure state performance in a way that best aligns with the U.S. News mission to inform consumers and decision-makers about the happenings in their states, some metrics were removed from the Best States framework. These include measures of recidivism and sexual violence in prisons in the Crime & Corrections category, preschool quality in the Education category and three measures of social environment. The social environment metrics previously accounted for half of what was a Quality of Life category, which has shifted into a Natural Environment category. Additionally, data from U.S. News' own Best Hospitals rankings replaced measures of hospital quality and nursing home quality that were previously from different sources.

See details on the 2018 methodology and the 2017 methodology.

### **Are the rankings objective and fair?**

To ensure that the Best States rankings are

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

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

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

For this ranking, U.S. News looked at the 50 states and didn't include D.C. or U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico. One reason was data availability, as many state sets do not include these locations. Values for D.C. are often skewed because of its smaller population, making meaningful comparisons between D.C. and other states difficult. However, D.C. was included in national averages for each metric.

### **How often will the rankings be updated?**

The Best States rankings will be updated each year.

### **Is the data used for the rankings reliable?**

The rankings are primarily based on publicly available data from government sites. Examples include the U.S. Census

Bureau, the U.S. Department of Energy and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### **How recent is the data?**

U.S. News used the most recent data available as of February 2019. Not all data sets were released at the same time, since they are created throughout the year.

### **Are there any ties?**

Ties were rare in the data set 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, ties were possible.

### **How was culture/history factored into the rankings?**

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

### **Who can I contact with questions?**

For questions about Best States, please email: [pr@usnews.com](mailto:pr@usnews.com).