



# Best States 2018

Ranking Performance Throughout All 50 States



McKinsey&Company

# Best States Overall Rankings 2018



Overall Rank	State	Healthcare	Education	Economy	Opportunity	Infrastructure	Crime & Corrections	Fiscal Stability	Quality of Life
1	Iowa	3	5	17	4	1	15	21	9
2	Minnesota	7	13	20	3	6	10	24	2
3	Utah	10	3	2	35	8	14	1	22
4	North Dakota	14	10	19	17	2	24	2	1
5	New Hampshire	13	4	11	1	37	2	26	4
6	Washington	2	6	3	27	4	39	27	21
7	Nebraska	19	9	21	13	9	20	11	14
8	Massachusetts	5	1	9	14	45	5	40	25
9	Vermont	6	8	31	6	35	7	16	26
10	Colorado	9	20	1	28	14	29	31	10
11	Wisconsin	17	18	27	8	26	23	19	3
12	Idaho	18	30	7	42	10	6	7	20
13	Maryland	16	11	24	2	25	28	23	31
14	South Dakota	21	17	28	24	7	40	4	5
15	Florida	34	7	5	36	11	32	3	33
16	Oregon	20	33	6	32	3	21	30	18
17	Hawaii	1	29	23	18	27	16	35	36
18	Delaware	25	32	10	7	18	46	15	24
19	New Jersey	12	2	41	10	28	3	49	49
20	Virginia	29	12	30	9	39	4	14	41
21	Wyoming	33	15	47	15	36	12	9	11
22	Maine	22	19	37	26	43	1	29	12
23	North Carolina	37	16	18	40	24	22	6	34
24	Connecticut	4	14	43	29	41	8	41	38
25	New York	15	23	35	43	19	11	28	37

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Overall Rank	State	Healthcare	Education	Economy	Opportunity	Infrastructure	Crime & Corrections	Fiscal Stability	Quality of Life
26	Tennessee	43	28	13	31	15	43	5	28
27	Montana	26	22	26	37	34	36	12	13
28	Rhode Island	8	27	29	34	48	13	33	23
29	Kansas	30	21	42	12	16	37	39	16
30	Missouri	39	25	33	21	20	45	10	15
31	California	11	26	4	46	38	17	43	50
32	Georgia	42	31	14	33	17	35	13	32
33	Indiana	40	35	25	11	30	30	8	48
34	Nevada	35	44	12	19	5	44	38	43
35	Illinois	27	24	39	22	13	25	50	47
36	Texas	38	37	8	47	21	26	17	46
37	Michigan	32	36	22	20	40	33	32	29
38	Pennsylvania	23	38	34	16	29	27	42	44
39	Arizona	24	43	16	45	12	38	34	39
40	Ohio	36	41	32	25	23	19	37	40
41	Kentucky	45	34	45	30	22	9	46	27
42	South Carolina	41	48	15	39	33	41	18	30
43	Oklahoma	48	39	36	38	31	34	22	17
44	Alaska	28	40	50	5	42	50	47	19
45	Arkansas	49	42	40	41	46	47	20	7
46	Alabama	46	47	38	48	32	42	25	35
47	West Virginia	44	45	49	23	50	31	36	45
48	New Mexico	31	50	46	44	47	49	44	8
49	Mississippi	50	46	48	49	49	18	45	6
50	Louisiana	47	49	44	50	44	48	48	42

# How We Score

The Best States rankings from U.S. News & World Report shows how each of the 50 U.S. states ranks in 77 metrics across eight categories. The data behind the rankings were based on [McKinsey & Company's](#) Leading States Index.

In calculating the rankings, each of the eight categories was assigned weightings based on the average of two years of data from an annual national survey that asked a total of more than 30,000 people to prioritize each subject in their state:

**Health Care: 16.1%**

**Education: 15.5%**

**Economy: 14.4%**

**Opportunity: 13.4%**

**Infrastructure: 12.5%**

**Crime & Corrections: 10.6%**

**Fiscal Stability: 9.5%**

**Quality of Life: 8.1%**

The elements of the categories and the weightings assigned to each were:

## Health Care:

- [Health Care Access](#): 33%
- [Health Care Quality](#): 33%
- [Public Health](#): 33%

## Education:

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

## Economy:

- [Growth](#): 50%
- [Employment](#): 30%
- [Business Environment](#): 20%

## Opportunity:

- [Economic Opportunity](#): 40%
- [Equality](#): 40%
- [Affordability](#): 20%

## Infrastructure:

- [Energy](#): 33%
- [Internet Access](#): 33%
- [Transportation](#): 33%

## Crime & Corrections:

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

## Fiscal Stability:

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

## Quality of Life:

- [Natural Environment](#): 50%
- [Social Environment](#): 50%

Note: Weights don't add to 100 due to rounding.

# Methodology

U.S. News and McKinsey created an index score for each metric for each state. In each metric, the state closest to the 90th percentile, usually the sixth-best state based on the raw data, was given 90 points and the state closest to the 10th percentile, usually the 45th-best state based on the raw data, was given 10 points. States between these were indexed proportionally. The top 10 percent and bottom 10 percent of states were capped at 150 points and -50 points, respectively, to ensure extreme outlier performance did not disproportionately affect a state's rank. After translating raw data to index scores for each state in each metric, we multiplied the weight for each metric by each state's index score to calculate weighted averages. These weighted averages were then ranked 1 to 50 to determine the category and subcategory rankings.

For the [overall ranking](#), U.S. News created a weighted average of the eight category rankings and multiplied each by the weight for each category, and then ranked the outcome. We chose this method for the overall ranking so it would not be skewed by large differences in scores at a metric level.

Weights within categories and subcategories were selected in collaboration with experts based on each metric's relative importance and breadth. For example, mortality metrics in the health care index were weighed the most heavily

in that category because they encompass many factors of health in the state. For categories where there was no clear order of importance, equal weighting was used.

## 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. McKinsey conducts a citizen experience survey on a fairly regular basis that asks Americans how satisfied they are with various state government services and where they think their state governments should focus resources. The weights for the 2018 Best States rankings are based on the average of responses from two annual surveys: one conducted in the fall of 2016 that included 11,100 respondents from 22 states and another conducted in the fall of 2017 that included 20,100 respondents from all 50 states. Survey respondents were adults ages 18 and up, 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 questions that were asked of citizens. We based the weightings for the categories on a question that asked respondents to rank the categories, such as health and education, on a scale of 1

to 8 (1 being most important) 1-8 in order of what matters most to their overall happiness and in their satisfaction with their home states. 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 were favored over other sources because of their reliability.
- Standardized data needed to be available across all or most states. Publicly available data were 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.

In developing the Best States rankings, we pulled data 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
- Feeding America
- S&P Capital IQ
- The Institute for College Access & Success
- The Mercatus Center at George Mason University
- Moody's
- McKinsey & Company: Citizen Experience Survey
- National Center for Education Statistics
- National Institute for Early Education Research
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- PitchBook Data, Inc.
- State Corrections Department Reports

- U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
- U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
- U.S. Department of Energy
- U.S. Department of Transportation
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

For each set, we used the most recent data available as of Jan. 1, 2018. Because data sets have different schedules for updates, data come from different years and months. This allowed us to pull many more data points. All data will be updated again for the 2019 relaunch of Best States.

In some cases, data for certain states are missing because not all states provide data for all metrics. In other cases, especially in states with small populations, there weren't enough people to have a statistically significant sample in a given year, which led to missing values. We omitted metrics with missing data from the calculation of rankings for those states.

Ties were rare in the data set 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 answers to

frequently asked questions, please see the [FAQ](#).

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 quality of life. The rankings are derived from nearly 80 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 upcoming [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.

## What role did each partner play in producing Best States?

U.S. News & World Report, a global authority on rankings, news analysis and consumer advice, provides the journalistic, data and rankings expertise for the Best States project. U.S. News developed the rankings, hosts the website and maintains editorial control of the content.

McKinsey & Company, with deep experience working with state government leaders on many of their most pressing issues, serves as the analytical engine for the project. McKinsey produced its Leading States Index in order to help state

government leaders better understand where to focus their efforts, make lasting improvements in their performance and deliver on their mission to citizens. McKinsey also runs an annual nationwide survey measuring citizen satisfaction with government services, which was used to calculate the weightings behind the Best States rankings. More than 30,000 responses were collected over two years.

### How were the states ranked?

The overall Best States ranking is determined from how each of the 50 U.S. states ranks in eight main categories: health care, education, economy, opportunity, infrastructure, crime & corrections, fiscal stability and quality of life. The rankings are based on thousands of data points gathered by McKinsey in its Leading States Index.

The categories and subcategories considered were:

#### Health Care

- Health Care Access
- Health Care Quality
- Public Health

#### Education

- Higher Education
- Pre-K - 12

#### Economy

- Growth
- Employment
- Business Environment

#### Opportunity

- Economic Opportunity
- Equality
- Affordability

#### Infrastructure

- Energy
- Internet Access
- Transportation

#### Crime & Corrections

- Corrections
- Public Safety

#### Fiscal Stability

- Fiscal Stability
- Budget Transparency

#### Quality of Life

- Natural Environment
- Social Environment

Certain categories were weighted more heavily than others. For more information on category weights, please see the [Best States methodology](#).

### 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 seven categories. The weights of the categories are as follows:

**Health Care: 16.1%**

**Education: 15.5%**

**Economy: 14.4%**

**Opportunity: 13.4%**

**Infrastructure: 12.5%**

**Crime & Corrections: 10.6%**

**Fiscal Stability: 9.5%**

**Quality of Life: 8.1%**

Note: these weights do not equal 100 due to rounding.

In order to determine the weights of the category rankings, McKinsey & Company conducted online surveys 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 [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, opportunity, infrastructure, crime & corrections, fiscal stability and quality of life. 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 quality of life, weighted at 8.1 percent, it could still perform poorly overall if it ranks near the bottom for health care and education, the most highly weighted categories.

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

- 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, Tennessee's unemployment rate improved from 4.8 percent in 2016 to 3.1 percent in 2017. This, in some part, helped the state improve its standing in the economy bucket and overall Best States ranking.
- Changes to the methodology: U.S. News and McKinsey are committed to building the most comprehensive analysis of all 50 states and, to that end, are continually assessing the data used in the rankings and the methods used to evaluate them. Feedback from industry experts, government officials in more than 25 states, and state residents alike informed a methodology review process that led to the removal of a handful of metrics that did not meet our standards and the addition of new metrics that better represent our goals for this project. This

resulted in changes to the collection of metrics in some buckets, the addition of a new bucket that looks at the quality of life – in terms of both natural and social environments – within the 50 states and a fiscal stability bucket that is a more focused version of last year’s government ranking. Additionally, an adjustment to the metric scoring methods ensured extreme outliers, both positive and negative, did not disproportionately affect a state’s overall rank or score.

### **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 most influence Americans’ satisfaction with their home states 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.

Further, experts helped determine the weights of the subcategories and the metrics within them, focusing on which were most important and representative of their respective categories.

### **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 small population, making meaningful comparisons between D.C. and other states difficult. D.C. was included in national averages for each metric, though.

### **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 and McKinsey used the most recent data available as of Jan. 1, 2018. 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.

### **Have there been any updates/changes to the data for the 2018 Best States rankings?**

As of May 14, 2018, the recidivism metric was updated for 20 states to adjust for input errors and reflect the most recently available data. Recidivism is one of seven metrics used in the crime & corrections category, weighted at 10.6 percent in the methodology. Twenty-one states moved in the crime & corrections category, and two states – Georgia and California – moved in the overall ranking. With the new data, California moves No. 31 – previously at No. 32 – and Georgia is No. 32 – previously at No. 31.

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

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