



2026 Data Notes



STATE · OF · THE STATES

Data Notes

This document describes the data sources, definitions, and methodological decisions underlying the measures reported in the State of the States report. We begin with the general rules and definitions we applied to the data to calculate our results. When the data come from surveys, we also discuss the survey weights. Finally, we discuss each measure individually, explaining the data source and indicator used, as well as any important caveats for interpretation.

General Rules and Definitions

The Explainer Table below summarizes our rules for reporting measures and trendlines in terms of state rank, state trend, and state vs. US trend. We did not do any significance testing due to the lack of microdata for the vast majority of our measures. Instead, we imposed rules and thresholds described below.

Explainer Table

How to Read This Report:		
We report each measure three different ways: State Rank, State Trend, State vs. US Trend. Each result is color coded as either red (negative/worsening), yellow (neutral/stable), or green (positive/improving), as indicated below. If the simple trends were erratic, had too few data points, or had no data points, we do not color code and label the trend as "mixed," "unclear," or "NA," respectively.		
State Rank (Where are we now?)	State Trend (Where are we going?)	State vs. US Trend (How do we compare?)
 <u>Top third of states</u> (i.e., ranks 1-17)	 <u>Improving</u> Trendline is improving by >5% <i>and</i> most points are improving relative to the first data point.	 <u>Improving</u> Trendline is improving relative to the national trend <i>and</i> rank is improving by 2+ rank spots.
 <u>Middle third of states</u> (i.e., ranks 18-34)	 <u>Neutral/Stable</u> Doesn't fall into the improving, worsening, mixed, unclear, or NA categories.	 <u>Neutral/Stable</u> Trendline is improving/worsening the same amount as the national trend or rank is changing by <2 spots.
 <u>Bottom third of states</u> (i.e., ranks 35-51)	 <u>Worsening</u> Trendline is worsening by >5% <i>and</i> most points are worsening relative to the first data point.	 <u>Worsening</u> Trendline is worsening relative to national trend <i>and</i> rank is declining by 2+ rank spots.
	 <u>Mixed</u> Large shares of points are improving <i>and</i> worsening by >5% in different parts of the trend.	 <u>Mixed</u> This label only applies when a measure has more than 1 trendline. One trendline is improving and another is worsening.
	 <u>Unclear</u> Not enough data to determine a trend.	 <u>Unclear</u> Not enough data to determine a comparison.
 <u>Not Applicable</u> No data.	 <u>Not Applicable</u> No data.	 <u>Not Applicable</u> No data.
For more information on our definitions and methods, please see the Data Notes section.		

The rest of this section explains these rules and any special applications of these rules in more detail.

State Rank – Special Applications

There are three cases where our state rankings cannot be applied to the data directly:

1. Only a subset of states have data available, and/or
2. The most recent year of data differs across states, and/or
3. The measure has more than one trendline.

In the first case, we take the inflated rank. For example, if only 32 states have data available, we inflate the rankings so that the state that ranks last (32nd) is ranked 51st. Otherwise, the last ranked state would appear to be much higher ranked. Specifically, this occurs for life satisfaction, trust in other people, trust in science, and trust in the federal government.

In the second case, we combine the data for the most recent years and then take the rank. For example, if 45 states have data through 2023 but the remaining 6 states only have data through 2022, we take the 2023 values for the 45 states and the 2022 values for the 6 states. We then calculate the ranks from that list. Specifically, this occurs for trust in other people and science test scores.

In the third case, we generally calculate the ranks separately for each trendline and then take the simple average of these ranks. For example, if a state is ranked 26 in voter participation in presidential elections and 28 in participation in congressional elections, we report the final voter participation rank as 27. Specifically, this occurs for voter participation and academic test scores. However, this does *not* apply to life satisfaction, trust in other people, trust in science, or trust in the federal government, even though these four measures have two trendlines for many states. The two trendlines for these four measures reflect two different ways of aggregating the data to the state-level: a simple version and a modeled version. In these cases, we report only the rank of the modeled version and describe the modeling procedure used for these measures in the following section.

State Trend – Detailed Rules

The detailed rules for calculating the state trends are listed below. Note that these rules are written in terms of positive valence (i.e., increasing is improving, decreasing is worsening). For measures with negative valence, these rules are adjusted accordingly. The “simple change” referenced in the rules below refers to the percent change from the first year of data to the last year of data.

1. **Unclear** if:
 - a. There are <5 data points, and
 - b. The total span of years (most recent year minus first year) is <8 years.
2. **Improving** if:
 - a. The simple change is >+5%, and

- b. The variable doesn't fall *below* the initial starting point for more than or equal to 50% of the remaining data points.
- 3. **Worsening** if:
 - a. The simple change is $<-5\%$, and
 - b. The variable doesn't fall *above* the initial starting point for more than or equal to 50% of the remaining data points.
- 4. **Mixed** if:
 - a. Simple change is $>+5\%$ (otherwise "improving") AND the variable falls *below* the initial starting point by more than 5% for more than or equal to 30% of remaining data points; OR
 - b. Simple change is $<-5\%$ (otherwise "worsening") AND the variable falls *above* the initial starting point by more than 5% for more than or equal to 30% of data points; OR
 - c. Simple change is $0 \leq \text{change} \leq 5\%$ (otherwise "slightly improving") AND the variable falls below the initial starting point by more than 10% in more than or equal to 30% of the periods AND the variable falls above the initial starting point by more than 10% in more than or equal to 30% of the periods; OR
 - d. Simple change is $-5\% \leq \text{change} \leq 0$ (otherwise "slightly worsening") AND the variable falls above the initial starting point by more than 10% in more than or equal to 30% of the periods AND the variable falls below the initial starting point by more than 10% in more than or equal to 30% of the periods; OR
 - e. Simple change is $-5\% \leq \text{change} \leq +5\%$ AND there are two or more data points that are $>|15\%|$ from the initial starting point (i.e., a generally stable trend but with a spike or two).
- 5. **Stable** otherwise.

State Trend – Special Applications

There are two cases that require special applications of the state trend rules:

- 1. The measure has more than one trendline, and/or
- 2. The bounds of the measure make the percent change thresholds unreasonable.

In the first case, we define the state trend for each trendline individually and then combine them as follows:

- 1. **Improving** if:
 - a. Both trendline 1 and trendline 2 are improving, or
 - b. Either trendline 1 or trendline 2 is improving and the other is stable.
- 2. **Worsening** if:
 - a. Both trendline 1 and trendline 2 are worsening, or
 - b. Either trendline 1 or trendline 2 is worsening and the other is stable.
- 3. **Mixed** if:
 - a. Trendline 1 and/or trendline 2 is mixed, or
 - b. Either trendline 1 or trendline 2 is improving and the other is worsening.
- 4. **Stable** if:

- a. Both trendline 1 and trendline 2 are stable.

This occurs for voter participation (the two trendlines are participation in presidential elections and participation in congressional elections), academic test scores (math and reading scores), life satisfaction (simple version and modeled version), trust in other people (simple version and modeled version), trust in science (simple version and modeled version), trust in the federal government (simple version and modeled version). Even though academic test scores have three trendlines (math, reading, and science), we only include math and reading in our determination of the state trend. This is because science test scores have <5 data points over <8 years for all states. Its trendline, therefore, is always unclear.

In the second case, we found that the percent change thresholds we imposed in our rules were unreasonable in the context of some of the measures. For example, imposing the 5% threshold on the national average years of education trendline would translate to a change of almost three quarters of a year of education. This is a large change, especially considering students are required to attend school through age 16 (and higher in some states). We therefore adjust the base of this measure, subtracting 10 years (roughly the required years of school) from each data point when calculating the percent change. We similarly adjust the base by subtracting the minimum value from these additional measures: academic test scores (math, reading, and science), employment-to-population ratio, labor force participation rate, and life expectancy.

State vs. US Trend – Detailed Rules

For comparing each state to the rest of the US, we take into account both the state's rank change from first year to last year and the state's absolute change from first year to last year compared to the national absolute change. The rank change is calculated before any rank inflation calculations. The absolute change is the difference between the last data point and the first data point of the trendline. The detailed rules are listed below. Note that these rules are written in terms of positive valence (i.e., increasing is improving, decreasing is worsening). For measures with negative valence, these rules are adjusted.

1. **Unclear** if:
 - a. There are <5 data points, and
 - b. The total span of years (most recent year minus first year) is <8 years.
2. **Improving** if:
 - a. The state absolute change is larger than the national absolute change, and
 - b. The state improves in rank by two or more places.
3. **Worsening** if:
 - a. The state absolute change is smaller than the national absolute change, and
 - b. The state worsens in rank by two or more places.
4. **Stable** if:
 - a. The state absolute change is the same as the national absolute change, or
 - b. The state changes in rank by less than two places.

State vs. US Trend – Special Applications

There are two cases that require additional discussion of the comparison rules:

1. The first and most recent years of data differs across states, and/or
2. The measure has more than one trendline, and/or
3. The state is ranked in the bottom two or top two, and/or
4. The US trendline is the sum of the state trendlines (rather than the average).

In the first case, we calculate the rank change for each state using only the subset of states that have data available in both the first and last years. For example, if only 38 states have data going back to 1990 and the remaining 13 states' data starts in 2003, we calculate the rank change for the 38 states from 1990 to the most recent year using only that subset of 38 states. For the remaining 13 states, we calculate the rank change using all 51 states from 2003 to the most recent year. This occurs for air quality, fatal overdoses, math test scores, and reading test scores.

In the second case, we follow the same approach as we do the state trend. Specifically, we define the comparison for each trendline individually and then combine them as follows:

1. **Improving** if:
 - a. Both trendline 1 and trendline 2 are improving, or
 - b. Either trendline 1 or trendline 2 is improving and the other is stable.
2. **Worsening** if:
 - a. Both trendline 1 and trendline 2 are worsening, or
 - b. Either trendline 1 or trendline 2 is worsening and the other is stable.
3. **Mixed** if:
 - a. Trendline 1 and/or trendline 2 is mixed, or
 - b. Either trendline 1 or trendline 2 is improving and the other is worsening.
4. **Stable** if:
 - a. Both trendline 1 and trendline 2 are stable.

Note that the only time we define a state vs. US trendline as “mixed” is when that measure has two trendlines. This occurs for voter participation (the two trendlines are participation in presidential elections and participation in congressional elections) and academic test scores (math and reading scores). Even though academic test scores have three trendlines (math, reading, and science), we only include math and reading in our determination of the state trend. This is because science test scores have <5 data points over <8 years for all states. Its trendline, therefore, is always unclear. These rules do *not* apply to life satisfaction, trust in other people, trust in science, or trust in the federal government, even though these four measures have two trendlines for many states. The two trendlines for these four measures reflect two different ways of aggregating the data to the state-level: a simple version and a modeled version. We report only the comparison of the modeled version and describe the modeling procedure used for these measures in the following section.

In the third case, we apply special rules to these extreme rankings (i.e., ranks 1, 2, 50, and 51). We cannot apply the rank change rule to these observations in the same way because, for

example, a state ranked first cannot improve in ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we apply the following rules, affecting only the “improving” and “stable” categorizations, to the states that ranked in the top two in the first year available (in terms of positive valence):

1. **Improving** if:
 - a. The state absolute change is larger than the national absolute change, and
 - b. The state rank does not worsen.
2. **Stable** if:
 - a. The state absolute change is larger than the national absolute change, and
 - b. The state rank worsens.

Similarly, we apply the following rules, affecting only the “worsening” and “stable” categorizations, to the states that ranked in the bottom two in the first year available (in terms of positive valence):

1. **Worsening** if:
 - a. The state absolute change is smaller than the national absolute change, and
 - b. The state rank does not improve.
2. **Stable** if:
 - a. The state absolute change is smaller than the national absolute change, and
 - b. The state rank improves.

In the fourth case, we cannot use the absolute change to compare the state trendline to the US trendline when the US values reflect the sum of all state values, rather than the average. Instead, we use the percent change to compare the state and US trendlines. This occurs for net greenhouse gases and real GDP.

Discussion of MRP Method

National surveys like the General Social Survey are designed to represent the country as a whole, but researchers and policymakers often need to understand how attitudes vary across states. When state-level samples are large enough, direct estimates can be calculated from the respondents actually surveyed in each state and reweighted to reflect the population composition in each state over time. This method offers a straightforward and transparent measure of local opinion. However, many states have too few respondents in any given survey period to support reliable direct estimates on their own. Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP) extends the geographic reach of the survey by combining what we observe within each state with broader national subgroup patterns.

The MRP approach fits a statistical model that reveals how demographic characteristics and state-level conditions relate to opinion across the full national sample, then applies those relationships to the known demographic composition of every state. This method essentially asks, “given what we know about how different kinds of people tend to answer this question, and given who actually lives in each state, what would we expect that state’s overall opinion to look like?” States with more survey data contribute more of their own local information to their estimate, while states with fewer respondents lean more heavily on the national pattern (Gelman & Hill, 2007; Park, Gelman, & Bafumi, 2004). The same logic extends across time: by pooling surveys from multiple periods, Shirley and Gelman (2015) used GSS data to estimate how state-level attitudes shifted over decades. Lax and Phillips (2009) demonstrated that the MRP approach consistently recovers state-level opinion more accurately than simple, common weighting methods, and Butticé and Highton (2013) established the cross-validation framework used to assess estimate quality in the present report. The measures that use this method in the report are satisfaction with current life, trust in other people, trust in the federal government, and trust in science.

We proceed with an overall measure-by-measure description below.

Description of All Measures

Children & Families

Child Mortality

Child mortality data for each state are available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [WONDER](#) data system. Mortality data are produced by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) at the CDC by relying on the cause of death and demographic information in death certificates. Their "Underlying Cause of Death" data are broken up into three different databases: Compressed Mortality (1968-2016), Underlying Cause of Death by Bridged-Race Categories (1999-2020), and Underlying Cause of Death by Single-Race Categories (2018-2023). Within the Compressed Mortality database are 4 separate databases: Mortality Archives (previous data releases for the years 1979-2015), Mortality for 1968-1978 with International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 8 codes, Mortality for 1979-1998 with ICD 9 codes, Mortality for 1999-2016 with ICD 10 codes. To construct a trendline for 1990-2023, we used 1990-1998 data from the Compressed Mortality database, 1999-2017 data from the Underlying Cause of Death Bridged-Race database, and 2018-2023 data from the Underlying Cause of Death Single-Race database. The data are reported yearly for various age groups. The mortality rate was calculated using the number of deaths and the total population of children under 5.¹

The differences between the Compressed Mortality data and the two Underlying Cause of Death databases do not impact the data series we used. For more information on these differences and how we determined this, please see our [State of the Nation Data Notes](#).

Low Birthweight

Birthweight data for each state are available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Vital Statistics System (NVSS), accessible through the CDC's [WONDER](#) data system. Natality data are produced by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) at the CDC relying on the birth certificates of children born to US residents from 1995-2023. Low birthweight is defined by the [CDC](#) as less than 2500 grams. From the CDC, we are able to calculate the prevalence of live births weighing 2499 grams and below.

The natality data are broken up into four separate databases: Natality for 1995-2002, Natality for 2003-2006, Natality for 2007-2023, and Natality for 2016-2023 (expanded). To construct a trendline from 1995-2023, we used 1995-2002 data from the first database, 2003-2006 data from the second database, and 2007-2023 data from the third database. The low birthweight prevalence was calculated by taking the total number of live births weighing 2499 grams and below divided by the total number of live births.

¹ We note that Vermont's 2020 child mortality rate is flagged by the CDC's rules as "unreliable," because it is calculated with a numerator of 20 or less.

The differences between the databases do not impact the data series we used. For more information on these differences and how we determined this, please see our [State of the Nation Data Notes](#).

Youth Depression

Youth depression data for each state are available through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Survey on Drug Use and Health ([NSDUH](#)). NSDUH data are produced by the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ) at SAMHSA by relying on responses to an annual, nationally representative survey of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population aged 12 and older. NSDUH defines a Major Depressive Episode (MDE)—using questions originally derived from the Fourth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) and treated as consistent with the more recent Fifth Edition (DSM-5)—as a period of at least two weeks of depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure accompanied by at least four additional symptoms of depression, with episodes occurring in the context of bereavement not excluded. From NSDUH, we report the percentage of youth aged 12-17 who experienced an MDE in the past year.

In our previous State of the Nation report, youth depression was measured using the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). NSDUH's small area estimates provide more years of state-level data, so we chose to rely on them to build a longer trendline for this report. SAMHSA produces state-level NSDUH estimates using a small area estimation (SAE) methodology, in which state-level survey data are combined with county and sub-county level data from the Census to improve the precision of estimates for each state and the District of Columbia, and are released in two-year pooled periods. To construct a trendline for 2006-2023, we used the two-year pooled estimates from 2005-2006 through 2022-2023, reporting each period at its second year, with the exception of the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 periods, which are unavailable due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on survey methodology. We use SAMHSA's published SAE estimate for each pooled period.

Further, SAMHSA notes a break in trend comparability beginning with the 2021-2022 estimates: estimates from 2021-2022 onward should not be directly compared to earlier periods. This break reflects a change in survey methodology, not a change in the MDE criteria, which have been unchanged for youth since 2004. It is also not an artifact of statistical imputation: NSDUH imputes some of its estimates, but the youth MDE estimates we report are not among them. The break is not visible on the trend line, so although the most recent estimates appear continuous with earlier years, they are not directly comparable to them.

For more information on the SAE methodology, please see [SAMHSA's](#) Guide to State Tables and Summary of Small Area Estimation Methodology.

Children Living With Single Parent

Data on children living with a single parent for each state are available from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), downloadable through their [Explore Census Data](#) tool. We use Table B09002, "Own Children Under 18 Years by Family Type and Age," which counts own children under 18 by the family type of the household in which they live.

The Census Bureau defines own children as the never-married sons and daughters, including stepchildren and adopted children, of the householder, and classifies the families in which they live as either married-couple families or other families—the latter divided into a male householder with no wife present and a female householder with no husband present. We treat the two other-family categories as single-parent families, since together with married-couple families they account for the entire universe of own children in this table. From these counts, we report the percentage of own children under 18 living with a single parent, calculated by taking the number of own children in male-householder and female-householder families divided by the total number of own children under 18. The measure excludes foster children and any child living with the householder who is not the householder's biological, adopted, or stepchild. In addition, a child counted as living with a single parent may live in a household that includes another adult, such as an unmarried partner or grandparent.

In our previous State of the Nation report, the share of children living with a single parent was measured using the Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC), a national survey. To produce state-level estimates for this report, we rely on the ACS, which is designed to support state and sub-state geographies. We report the 5-year ACS estimates rather than the 1-year ACS estimates because our focus is the long-term trend rather than yearly fluctuations. To construct a trendline for 2010-2023, we follow the Census Bureau's methodology and graph each data point using the last year of its 5-year span. The 5-year estimates whose spans include 2020 incorporate a revised weighting that the Census Bureau applied to reduce nonresponse bias in data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this change is not visible on the trend line, so although the most recent estimates appear continuous with earlier years, they should be interpreted with some caution.

For more information on ACS methodology and definitions, please see the Census Bureau's Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data [Handbook](#) and its [Subject Definitions](#).

Citizenship & Democracy

Voter Participation

State-level data for voter participation are available from the US Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). Data are collected for both congressional and presidential elections on registration and participation. The data reported here reflect the percent of the voting-age US citizen population who voted in each election. These percentages were calculated by the US Census Bureau in the Historical Reported Voting Rates [Tables A-3a and A-5a](#).

Civil Liberties

Freedom of the Press

Data on press freedom violations for each state are available through the US Press Freedom Tracker's Incident Database.² The [US Press Freedom Tracker](#) was started in 2017 as a project of the Freedom of the Press Foundation (FPF), the Committee to Protect Journalists, and other press freedom organizations, and is the first attempt to centralize data on violations against journalists by compiling tips directly from journalists, individuals, and a wide network of professional organizations. The US Press Freedom Tracker defines a press freedom violation as an incident in which a journalist's right to collect and publish information was violated during the course of their work or as an outcome of their work. From the Incident Database, we report the rate of press freedom violations per 1 million people.

Because larger states will tend to record more violations simply by virtue of their population, we report a rate so that states can be compared on a common basis. The rate was calculated by taking the number of violations in each state for a given year divided by that state's population for that year, expressed as the number of violations per 1 million people. To build a trend line for 2017-2024, we use the Census Bureau's annual state population estimates as the denominator—drawing on the [intercensal estimates](#) covering 2010-2020 for the earlier years and the [Vintage 2024 estimates](#) covering 2020-2024 for the later years.

For more information on how press freedom violations are defined and categorized, please see our [State of the Nation Data Notes](#).

² Data reflected in the state trend lines are current as of November 7, 2025.

Economy

Economic Output

State-level GDP data were downloaded from the Bureau of Economic Analysis ([BEA](#)). The BEA reports the data yearly, going back to 1997. Both inflation- and not inflation-adjusted values are available. However, the inflation-adjusted series calculated by the BEA is in terms of 2017 US dollars, which is not the standard used in this report for inflation-adjusted data. Therefore, we downloaded the nominal data for the US from the BEA and adjusted to constant 2023 US dollars using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers research series ([R-CPI-U-RS](#)). The gray shading in the national trend graph marks US recessions, using the same dates as the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Data system ([FRED](#)), which relies on the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

In our previous State of the Nation report, national GDP was measured using the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI). The data source in this report differs because the World Bank does not produce state-level GDP data.

Productivity

State-level productivity data were downloaded from the Bureau of Labor Statistics ([BLS](#)). The BLS reports productivity as an index, where 2017 is equal to 100. Data are also available for different sectors. We chose to report the productivity of the largest share of the workforce reported – the private nonfarm sector. The gray shading in the nation trend graph marks US recessions, using the same dates as the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Data system ([FRED](#)), which relies on the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

In our previous State of the Nation report, we measured national productivity as real GDP per hour worked from the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD) Productivity Levels Database. The measure's calculation and data source in this report differs because GDP per hour worked was not available at the state-level from the OECD or any other source.

Education

Academic Test Scores

8th grade NAEP score data come from the US Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NAEP's sampling includes public and private schools. There are two NAEP datasets to choose from: the Main NAEP and the Long Term Trends (LTT) NAEP. Both can be downloaded from NAEP's [Data Explorer](#).

We chose to rely on the Main NAEP data, rather than the LTT NAEP, because it offers data on more subjects, and it includes more data points in the time period studied. For more detail on the differences between the two datasets and our decision, please refer to our [State of the Nation Data Notes](#).

Each subject is scored on a different scale. For example, the math Main NAEP data can be shown on the composite scale or on the algebra scale, data analysis, statistics, and probability scale, geometry scale, measurement scale, or the number properties and operations scale. The data in this report reflect data for all students on the "composite" or "overall" scale, if more than one scale was available. NAEP results are reported as average scores on either a 0-500 scale or 0-300 scale. Math and reading use the 0-500 scale, while science uses the 0-300 scale. Since these scales are not comparable across subjects, we placed each subject on a separate graph to indicate that subject test levels cannot be compared with one another. Our previous State of the Nation report also included NAEP scores for US history and civics, but these test scores are not available at the state-level.

In 2009, NAEP's science testing was updated, resulting in two science frameworks: the 1996 framework and the 2009 framework. Results from the two frameworks cannot be compared to each other (for more information, see NAEP's [Comparison](#) of the 1996-2005 and 2015 Frameworks). Only the data for the 2009 framework is included in the figure.

Average Years of Education

Average years of education data for each state are available from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), downloadable through their [Explore Census Data](#) tool. We use Table B15001, "Sex by Age by Educational Attainment for the Population 18 Years and Over," which reports educational attainment in categories rather than a precise number of years. We report the average years of education for the population aged 25-64. To convert these categories into years, we assign each a number of years of education as follows:

- Less than 9th grade: 8 years
- 9th to 12th grade, no diploma: 12 years
- High school graduate (includes equivalency): 13 years
- Some college, no degree: 14 years
- Associate's degree: 15 years
- Bachelor's degree: 17 years
- Graduate or professional degree: 19.5 years

These values are then averaged, weighted by the number of people in each category. We report the 5-year ACS estimates rather than the 1-year ACS estimates because our focus is the long-term trend rather than yearly fluctuations. To construct a trendline for 2010-2023, we follow the Census Bureau's methodology and graph each data point using the last year of its 5-year span. The 5-year estimates whose spans include 2020 incorporate a revised weighting that the Census Bureau applied to reduce nonresponse bias in data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this change is not visible on the trend line, so although the most recent estimates appear continuous with earlier years, they should be interpreted with some caution.

In our previous State of the Nation report, average years of education was measured using the Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC), a national survey. That edition reported the prime-age population, ages 25-54. To produce state-level estimates for this report, we rely on the ACS, which is designed to support state and sub-state geographies. However, the ACS brackets cannot isolate the 25-54 age range, so we report the measure for ages 25-64 instead. The State of the Nation report also benchmarked the US against other countries, counting schooling on an internationally comparable basis that left out the kindergarten year. Because this report compares only US states, the crosswalk above includes the mandatory kindergarten year, raising every figure by one year relative to the prior edition.

For more information on ACS methodology and definitions, please see the Census Bureau's Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data [Handbook](#) and its [Educational Attainment definitions](#).

Young Adults Employed or in School

The Annie E. Casey Foundation defines youth not attending school and not working as the share of those who are neither enrolled in school (full- or part-time) nor employed (full- or part-time). These data are published through the Foundation's [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#) and are based on the Population Reference Bureau's analysis of the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). We report the complement of this measure—the share of those aged 16 to 24 who are employed or in school—for 2008-2023. Data for 2020 are not available.

In our previous State of the Nation report, the share of young adults employed or in school was measured using the ILO Data Explorer for those aged 18 to 24. This report uses ages 16 to 24, the closest range available from this source. The national trend data in this report comes from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Environment

Net Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Data for each state on greenhouse gas emissions are available from the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Greenhouse Gas Inventory [Data Explorer](#). Data are reported annually and by type of emission: carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, fluorinated gases, land use and forestry carbon stock change. Our measure of net greenhouse gas emissions includes all of these types, netting out emissions and removals from land use, land-use change, and forestry (LULUCF).

Air Quality

Air quality data for each state are available from the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Air Quality System (AQS), downloadable through the EPA's [AirData portal](#), which reports pollutant concentrations by monitoring site. Under the Clean Air Act, state, local, and tribal agencies monitor ambient air and report their measurements to AQS. The EPA defines PM2.5, or fine particle pollution, as inhalable particles with diameters generally 2.5 micrometers and smaller. From AQS, we report the average annual concentration of PM2.5, in micrograms per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), across the monitoring sites in each state.

To construct a trendline for 1999-2024, we take the annual mean concentration recorded at each of a state's monitoring sites and average these values across the state for each year. We exclude values affected by exceptional events such as wildfires and dust storms. A state's average rests on far fewer monitors than the national network, so a single such event can move its annual figure sharply. Excluding these events gives a more stable measure of persistent air quality that can be compared fairly across states.

In our previous State of the Nation report, air quality was measured at the national level using the EPA's Air Trends series—a population-weighted average that is intended to reflect actual air quality and therefore includes exceptional events. Because that series is not produced for individual states, each state's trend in this report is built from the monitor-level data described above, and we carry over the national trend line unchanged from the prior report.

For more information on the air monitoring program and how these data are reported, please see the EPA's [AirData documentation](#). For more information on the national trend line, please see our [State of the Nation Data Notes](#).

Inequality

Income Inequality

The Gini coefficient is a measure of income inequality that compares the actual income distribution to a perfectly equal income distribution. While many sources report the Gini coefficient ranging from 0-1, we follow our previous State of the Nation report and report the range from 0-100. A value of 0 means perfect equality and 100 means perfect inequality. The Gini coefficient data are calculated by the US Census Bureau using their American Community Survey (ACS) data, downloadable through their [Explore Census Data](#) tool. We use Table B19083, “Gini Index of Income Inequality.” Both 1-year and 5-year ACS estimates are available. We report the 5-year estimates, because our focus is the long-term trend rather than yearly fluctuations. We follow the Census Bureau’s methodology and graph each data point using the last year of its 5-year span.

Although we chose to report the Gini coefficient post-government taxes and transfers in our previous State of the Nation report, these are not available at the state level, so we use the pre-government taxes and transfers Gini coefficient in this report.

Poverty

Poverty data for each state are calculated by the US Census Bureau using their American Community Survey (ACS) data. Data are available going back to 2009, downloadable through the [Census website](#) (State ACS SPM and OPM Rates: 2009-2019, 2021-2023). While the Census reports both the Official Poverty Measure (OPM) and Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), we report the percentage of the population living in poverty as measured by the SPM. Unlike the OPM, the SPM accounts for “several government programs that are designed to assist low-income families but are not included in official poverty measure calculations. The SPM also accounts for geographic variation in housing expenses when calculating poverty thresholds and includes federal and state taxes, work expenses, and medical expenses” (see the Census Bureau’s [“Poverty in the United States: 2023”](#) report).

In our previous State of the Nation report, we were able to report the SPM going back to 1990, relying on Columbia University’s Center on Poverty and Social Policy data from 1990 to 2008. However, this center does not produce state-level SPM estimates.

Life Satisfaction

Satisfaction with Current Life

State-level data on satisfaction with current life are from the General Social Survey ([GSS](#)) from NORC at the University of Chicago, using restricted-use geocode data that identify respondents' state of residence. The GSS asks respondents, "Taken all together, how would you say things are these days — would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" We report the proportion of respondents who answer "very happy" to construct our state-level estimates of satisfaction with current life. Data for this survey question were available in the GSS during the period 1990–2024, with the exception of 1992, odd-numbered years after 1994, and the 2020 data year.

Because the GSS is a nationally representative survey not designed to produce state-level estimates, adjacent data years are pooled into five time periods — 1990–1996, 1998–2006, 2008–2014, 2016–2018, and 2021–2024 — to increase the reliability of estimates within each state. Two complementary approaches are then used to generate state-level statistics from the pooled data. For states with sufficient sample sizes, we weight individual GSS responses so that the demographic composition of the sample within each state matches that state's adult population. The target population distribution is constructed from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC) and the American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates, accessed via [IPUMS](#).

For each state, we partitioned the population into 36 demographic cells defined by the cross-classification of age, race/ethnicity, marital status, and educational attainment, and GSS respondents are weighted to match these cell-level population shares. In the small number of cases with missing cells, we assigned observations from the most similar groups in the same state with non-missing values (called "adjacent-pool borrowing"). For states where the sample size is too small to support reliable direct estimates, we use Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP) to extend coverage, as described in the introduction to this document. Direct weighted estimates are reported for a given state and period when the pooled sample includes at least 75 respondents, and only for states that meet this threshold in at least four of the five periods. MRP estimates are reported for states with at least 30 respondents in each of the five periods.

GSS provides post-stratification sampling weights to adjust for population controls and ensure a nationally representative sample. The recommended weight variables for the 1972–2024 Cumulative Data File are *WTSSPS* and *WTSSNRPS*. The former is the default weight, accounting for all sampling selection stages in all data years. The latter further corrects for non-response bias and is available for 2004–2024. *WTSSNRPS* is the preferred weight for any year that it is available. We employed *WTSSPS* for the years 1990–2003 and *WTSSNRPS* for 2004–2024. These survey weights are incorporated as baseline weights prior to reweighting or modeling. For more details regarding this recommendation, please refer to [GSS Methodological Report 137](#).

In our previous State of the Nation report, we measured satisfaction with current life using data from the Gallup World Poll. That survey asks respondents to evaluate their current life on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is the worst possible life and 10 is the best possible life. However, this Gallup survey data is not representative at the state-level.

Social Isolation

Social isolation data for each state are calculated by the US Census Bureau using their Household Pulse Survey (HPS), downloadable through the HPS [interactive tool](#). Data are only available for 2024. The survey asks participants, “How often do you get the social and emotional support you need?” Participants answer this question on a 5-point scale: “always”, “usually”, “sometimes”, “rarely”, “never.” Responses are weighted to be representative at the state-level, showing the percent of adults in each state who answered “sometimes”, “usually”, or “always”. However, to align with our previous State of the Nation report, we report the percent of adults who are *not* getting the social and emotional support they need sometimes, usually, or always. Therefore, we subtract the percentage reported by the Census from 100. Our value includes participants who responded “don’t know,” but this is a very small percentage of responses.

In our previous State of the Nation report, we measured social isolation as the percent of adults who said they do not have relatives or friends they can count on. These survey responses came from the Gallup World Poll. However, this Gallup survey data is not representative at the state-level.

Mental Health

Depression

Adult depression data for each state are available through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Survey on Drug Use and Health ([NSDUH](#)). NSDUH data are produced by the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ) at SAMHSA by relying on responses to an annual, nationally representative survey of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population aged 12 and older. NSDUH defines a Major Depressive Episode (MDE)—using questions originally derived from the Fourth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) and treated as consistent with the more recent Fifth Edition (DSM-5)—as a period of at least two weeks of depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure accompanied by at least four additional symptoms of depression, with episodes occurring in the context of bereavement not excluded. From NSDUH, we report the percentage of adults aged 18 and older who experienced an MDE in the past year.

In our previous State of the Nation report, adult depression was measured using the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). NSDUH's small area estimates provide more years of state-level data, so we chose to rely on them to build a longer trendline for this report, consistent with our youth depression measure. SAMHSA produces state-level NSDUH estimates using a small area estimation (SAE) methodology, in which state-level survey data are combined with county and sub-county level data from the Census to improve the precision of estimates for each state and the District of Columbia, and are released in two-year pooled periods. To construct a trendline for 2006–2023, we used the two-year pooled estimates from 2005–2006 through 2022–2023, reporting each period at its second year, with the exception of the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 periods, which are unavailable due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on survey methodology. We use SAMHSA's published SAE estimate for each pooled period.³

Further, SAMHSA notes a break in trend comparability beginning with the 2021–2022 estimates: estimates from 2021–2022 onward should not be directly compared to earlier periods. This break reflects a change in survey methodology, not a change in the MDE criteria, which have been unchanged for adults since 2004. Beginning in 2021, NSDUH also began statistically imputing the adult MDE variables, a further change in how the most recent estimates are produced. The break is not visible on the trend line, so although the most recent estimates appear continuous with earlier years, they are not directly comparable to them.

For more information on the SAE methodology, please see [SAMHSA's](#) Guide to State Tables and Summary of Small Area Estimation Methodology.

³ For the earliest periods, SAMHSA applied model-based adjustments to the 2005, 2006, and 2007 adult MDE estimates, and to a 2008 half-sample, so that they are comparable with the 2008–2012 estimates. The published estimates we use incorporate these adjustments.

Fatal Overdoses

Fatal overdose data for each state are available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [WONDER](#) data system. Mortality data are produced by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) at the CDC by relying on the cause of death and demographic information in death certificates. The fatal overdose rate is the total number of drug overdose deaths divided by the total population, expressed as the number of deaths per 100,000 people. We report the age-adjusted rate, rather than the crude rate.

The CDC identifies fatal overdoses using International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes X40-X44 (accidental drug poisoning), X60-X64 (intentional self-poisoning), X85 (assault by drugs), and Y10-Y14 (drug poisoning of undetermined intent). The CDC's Underlying Cause of Death data are broken up into two databases: Underlying Cause of Death by Bridged-Race Categories, covering 1999-2020, and Underlying Cause of Death by Single-Race Categories, covering 2018-2023. To construct a trendline for 1999-2023, we used 1999-2017 data from the Bridged-Race database and 2018-2023 data from the Single-Race database.⁴

The differences between the Bridged-Race and Single-Race databases do not impact the data series we used. For more information on these differences and how we determined this, please see our [State of the Nation Data Notes](#).

Suicide Rate

Suicide rate data for each state are available from the CDC Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System ([WISQARS](#)), which pulls data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Data are available starting in 2001, where the suicide rate is the total number of deaths by suicide divided by the total population, expressed as the number of suicides per 100,000 people. The CDC identifies suicides using the International Classification of Diseases Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes X60-X84 (intentional self harm), Y87.0 (sequelae of intentional self-harm), and *U03 (terrorism intentional suicide). We report the age-adjusted rate, rather than the crude rate.

⁴ We note that 8 annual fatal overdose rates for North Dakota and 1 for South Dakota are suppressed by the CDC's rules, because they are based on a small number of deaths.

Physical Health

Life Expectancy

State-level data on life expectancy are available from the United States Mortality Database ([USMDB](#)), a project developed at the University of California, Berkeley. Life expectancy calculations are based on data from the US Census Bureau and from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). While some life expectancy data are calculated by and available through the CDC, the USMDB offers a longer trendline. At the time of this release, the USMDB is housed in the Harvard Dataverse. Data are available yearly from 1990–2022.

In our previous State of the Nation report, we used life expectancy data from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Data Warehouse. The data source in this report differs because UNICEF does not produce state-level life expectancy estimates.

Social Capital

Volunteerism

State-level data on volunteering are available through the US Census Bureau's Current Population Survey ([CPS](#)) Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement. The Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement is conducted every *other* September. It used to be called the September supplement and was conducted every September, with data going back to 2002. Following the same methodology as other government publications (for example, see AmeriCorps' 2024 Volunteering and Civic Life [Research Summary](#)), we combine the answers of two questions in the supplement to calculate the percent of the civilian non-institutionalized population (i.e. the surveyed population) who have volunteered in the past year.

For survey years 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2023, the survey questions are the following:

1. PES16: "In the past 12 months, did [you/[NAME]] spend any time volunteering for any organization or association?"
 - a. Possible responses:
 - i. No answer
 - ii. Refusal
 - iii. Do not know
 - iv. Not in universe (i.e. not asked)
 - v. Yes
 - vi. No
2. PES16a: "Some people don't think of activities they do infrequently or for children's schools or youth organizations as volunteer activities. In the past 12 months (have you/has she/has he) done any of these types of activities?"
 - a. Possible responses:
 - i. No answer
 - ii. Refusal
 - iii. Do not know
 - iv. Not in universe (i.e. not asked)
 - v. Yes
 - vi. No

For survey years 2002 to 2015, the survey questions are the following:

1. PES1: "Since September 1st of last year, have you done any volunteer activities through or for an organization?"
 - a. Possible responses:
 - i. Don't know
 - ii. Not in universe (i.e. not asked)
 - iii. Yes
 - iv. No

2. PES2: Sometimes people don't think of activities they do infrequently or activities they do for children's schools or youth organizations as volunteer activities. Since September 1st of last year, have you done any of these types of volunteer activities?
 - a. Possible responses:
 - i. Don't know
 - ii. Not in universe (i.e. not asked)
 - iii. Yes
 - iv. No

In the most recent survey version, PES16a is only asked to those who responded with “no answer,” “do not know”, or “no” to PES16. Similarly, in the previous version, PES2 is only asked to those who responded with “don’t know” or “no” to PES1. Therefore, we are able to combine “yes” answers for the two questions in each year while being sure we are not double counting anyone.

The wording of the questions in the most recent survey version differs slightly from the previous version. Most notably, the more recent version asks participants about activities in the past 12 months, whereas the previous version asked participants about activities since September 1st of the previous year. However, since the survey is conducted in September, we consider the two versions comparable enough to construct a consistent trendline. Responses are weighted to construct values representative at the state-level for the percent of the population who volunteer.

Trust in Other People

State-level data on trust in other people are from the General Social Survey ([GSS](#)) from NORC at the University of Chicago, using restricted-use geocode data that identify respondents' state of residence. The survey question of interest is, “Generally speaking, would you say that people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” We report the proportion of respondents who answer “Can trust,” rather than “Can’t be too careful” or “Depends.” Data for this survey question were available in the GSS during the period 1990–2024, with the exception of 1992, odd-numbered years after 1994, the 2020 data year, and the 2021 data year.

Because the GSS is a nationally representative survey not designed to produce state-level estimates, adjacent data years are pooled into five time periods — 1990–1996, 1998–2006, 2008–2014, 2016–2018, and 2021–2024 — to increase the reliability of estimates within each state. Two complementary approaches are then used to generate state-level statistics from the pooled data. For states with sufficient sample sizes, we weight individual GSS responses so that the demographic composition of the sample within each state matches that state’s adult population. The target population distribution is constructed from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC) and the American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates, accessed via [IPUMS](#).

For each state, we partitioned the population into 36 demographic cells defined by the cross-classification of age, race/ethnicity, marital status, and educational attainment, and GSS respondents are weighted to match these cell-level population shares. In the small number of

cases with missing cells, we assigned observations from the most similar groups in the same state with non-missing values (called “adjacent-pool borrowing”). For states where the sample size is too small to support reliable direct estimates, we use Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP) to extend coverage, as described in the introduction to this document. Direct weighted estimates are reported for a given state and period when the pooled sample includes at least 75 respondents, and only for states that meet this threshold in at least four of the five periods. MRP estimates are reported for states with at least 30 respondents in each of the five periods.

GSS provides post-stratification sampling weights to adjust for population controls and ensure a nationally representative sample. The recommended weight variables for the 1972–2024 Cumulative Data File are *WTSSPS* and *WTSSNRPS*. The former is the default weight, accounting for all sampling selection stages in all data years. The latter further corrects for non-response bias and is available for 2004–2024. *WTSSNRPS* is the preferred weight for any year that it is available. We employed *WTSSPS* for the years 1990–2003 and *WTSSNRPS* for 2004–2024. These survey weights are incorporated as baseline weights prior to reweighting or modeling. For more details regarding this recommendation, please refer to [GSS Methodological Report 137](#).

Trust

Trust in Federal Government

State-level data on trust in the federal government are from the General Social Survey ([GSS](#)) from NORC at the University of Chicago, using restricted-use geocode data that identify respondents' state of residence. GSS asks respondents, "I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?" They include both the executive branch of the federal government and Congress as institutions. We combine the top two response categories — "a great deal of confidence" and "only some confidence" — for each institution and average the two measures to construct our state-level estimates of trust in the federal government. Data for these survey questions were available in the GSS during the period 1990–2024, with the exception of 1992, odd-numbered years after 1994, and the 2020 data year.

Because the GSS is a nationally representative survey not designed to produce state-level estimates, adjacent data years are pooled into five time periods — 1990–1996, 1998–2006, 2008–2014, 2016–2018, and 2021–2024 — to increase the reliability of estimates within each state. Two complementary approaches are then used to generate state-level statistics from the pooled data. For states with sufficient sample sizes, we weight individual GSS responses so that the demographic composition of the sample within each state matches that state's adult population. The target population distribution is constructed from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC) and the American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates, accessed via [IPUMS](#).

For each state, we partitioned the population into 36 demographic cells defined by the cross-classification of age, race/ethnicity, marital status, and educational attainment, and GSS respondents are weighted to match these cell-level population shares. In the small number of cases with missing cells, we assigned observations from the most similar groups in the same state with non-missing values (called "adjacent-pool borrowing"). The two component measures — confidence in the executive branch and confidence in Congress — are estimated separately and averaged to produce the state estimate. For states where the sample size is too small to support reliable direct estimates, we use Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP) to extend coverage, as described in the introduction to this document. Under MRP, the two components (congressional and executive branch) are also modeled separately and averaged after estimation. Direct weighted estimates are reported for a given state and period when the pooled sample includes at least 75 respondents, and only for states that meet this threshold in at least four of the five periods. MRP estimates are reported for states with at least 30 respondents in each of the five periods.

GSS provides post-stratification sampling weights to adjust for population controls and ensure a nationally representative sample. The recommended weight variables for the 1972–2024 Cumulative Data File are *WTSSPS* and *WTSSNRPS*. The former is the default weight, accounting for all sampling selection stages in all data years. The latter further corrects for non-response bias and is available for 2004–2024. *WTSSNRPS* is the preferred weight for any

year that it is available. We employed *WTSSPS* for the years 1990–2003 and *WTSSNRPS* for 2004–2024. These survey weights are incorporated as baseline weights prior to reweighting or modeling. For more details regarding this recommendation, please refer to [GSS Methodological Report 137](#).

In our previous State of the Nation report, we measured trust in the federal government using data from the Gallup Poll Social Series. As part of their Governance survey, Gallup asks respondents to report how much trust and confidence they have in the federal government to handle both international problems and domestic problems: “a great deal,” “a fair amount,” “not very much,” or “none at all.” We combined the top two answers and reported one trend line each for confidence in handling both domestic and international affairs. However, these data were not available at the state-level. The national trend data in this report comes from the GSS Cumulative Data File.

Trust in Science

State-level data on trust in science are from the General Social Survey ([GSS](#)) from NORC at the University of Chicago, using restricted-use geocode data that identify respondents’ state of residence. GSS asks respondents, “I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?” They include the scientific community as one of these institutions. We report the proportion of respondents who answer “a great deal of confidence” to construct our state-level estimates of trust in science. Data for this survey question were available in the GSS during the period 1990–2024, with the exception of 1992, odd-numbered years after 1994, and the 2020 data year.

Because the GSS is a nationally representative survey not designed to produce state-level estimates, adjacent data years are pooled into five time periods — 1990–1996, 1998–2006, 2008–2014, 2016–2018, and 2021–2024 — to increase the reliability of estimates within each state. Two complementary approaches are then used to generate state-level statistics from the pooled data. For states with sufficient sample sizes, we weight individual GSS responses so that the demographic composition of the sample within each state matches that state’s adult population. The target population distribution is constructed from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC) and the American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates, accessed via [IPUMS](#).

For each state, we partitioned the population into 36 demographic cells defined by the cross-classification of age, race/ethnicity, marital status, and educational attainment, and GSS respondents are weighted to match these cell-level population shares. In the small number of cases with missing cells, we assigned observations from the most similar groups in the same state with non-missing values (called “adjacent-pool borrowing”). For states where the sample size is too small to support reliable direct estimates, we use Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP) to extend coverage, as described in the introduction to this document. Direct weighted estimates are reported for a given state and period when the pooled sample includes at least 75 respondents, and only for states that meet this threshold

in at least four of the five periods. MRP estimates are reported for states with at least 30 respondents in each of the five periods.

GSS provides post-stratification sampling weights to adjust for population controls and ensure a nationally representative sample. The recommended weight variables for the 1972–2024 Cumulative Data File are *WTSSPS* and *WTSSNRPS*. The former is the default weight, accounting for all sampling selection stages in all data years. The latter further corrects for non-response bias and is available for 2004–2024. *WTSSNRPS* is the preferred weight for any year that it is available. We employed *WTSSPS* for the years 1990–2003 and *WTSSNRPS* for 2004–2024. These survey weights are incorporated as baseline weights prior to reweighting or modeling. For more details regarding this recommendation, please refer to [GSS Methodological Report 137](#).

Violence

Murder Rate

Murder rate data for each state are available through the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, which compiles crime data voluntarily reported by law enforcement agencies. State-level data for 1999-2020 come from the Program's annual Crime in the United States ([CIUS](#)) publications, and data for 2022-2024 come from the FBI's Crime Data Explorer ([CDE](#)), which is also the source for the national trend. The FBI defines [murder and nonnegligent manslaughter](#) as the willful killing of one human being by another, excluding deaths caused by negligence, suicide, or accident as well as justifiable homicides. We report the FBI's published rate of this offense per 100,000 population, which we label the rate of murder and other unlawful, but intentional, killings.

We present the trend line for 1999-2024, with the exception of 2021, for which state-level data are not available. In that year the FBI moved to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) as its sole reporting standard, and agency participation fell sharply, leaving state figures incomplete.

In our previous State of the Nation report, the earliest years of the murder rate were drawn from the Brennan Center for Justice's analysis of FBI crime statistics rather than from the FBI directly. For this report, the entire series comes from the FBI.

For more information on the FBI's reporting systems and the transition between them, please see our [State of the Nation Data Notes](#).

Shootings

Fatal shooting data for each state are available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [WONDER](#) data system. Mortality data are produced by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) at the CDC by relying on the cause of death and demographic information in death certificates. The fatal shooting rate is the total number of firearm deaths divided by the total population, expressed as the number of deaths per 100,000 people. We report the age-adjusted rate, rather than the crude rate.

The CDC identifies fatal shootings using International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes W32-W34 (accidental firearm discharge), X72-X74 (intentional self-harm by firearm), X93-X95 (assault by firearm), Y22-Y24 (firearm discharge of undetermined intent), Y35.0 (legal intervention involving a firearm), and U01.4 (terrorism involving firearms). The CDC's Underlying Cause of Death data are broken up into two databases—Underlying Cause of Death by Bridged-Race Categories, covering 1999-2020, and Underlying Cause of Death by Single-Race Categories, covering 2018-2023. To construct a trendline for 1999-2023, we used 1999-2017 data from the Bridged-Race database and 2018-2023 data from the Single-Race database. The differences between the Bridged-Race and Single-Race databases do not impact the data series we used.

In our previous State of the Nation report, shootings and gun violence were presented using several sources, for transparency and because of the complexity of the data, and included both fatal and non-fatal events. This report focuses only on fatal shootings. The CDC trend line in the previous report excluded legal-intervention deaths beginning in 2015 and supplemented those years with police-shooting data from the Washington Post’s Fatal Force Tracker. For this report, we rely on CDC WONDER data alone across the full 1999–2023 period, retain legal-intervention deaths throughout, and calculate the national trend line on the same basis as the state estimates—a single, consistent CDC WONDER series.

For more information on the underlying cause-of-death data, please see the CDC’s [WONDER documentation](#).

Work & Labor Force

Employment-to-Population Ratio (EPOP)

State-level prime age (25-54) EPOP data is gathered in the Current Population Survey ([CPS](#)) and are calculated by and downloaded from the Economic Policy Institute ([EPI](#)). The EPI defines the employment-to-population ratio as the share of the civilian noninstitutional population that is employed. We present the trend line for 1990-2024. The gray shading marks US recessions, using the same dates as the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Data system ([FRED](#)), which relies on the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

We note that in our previous State of the Nation report, prime age EPOP data were downloaded from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) rather than the EPI. In this report, the national trend data comes from the EPI.

Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR)

State-level prime age (25-54) LFPR data are gathered in the Current Population Survey (CPS) and are calculated by and downloaded from the Economic Policy Institute ([EPI](#)). The gray shading marks US recessions, using the same dates as the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Data system ([FRED](#)), which relies on the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

We note that in our previous State of the Nation report, prime age LFPR data were downloaded from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) rather than the EPI. The source in this report differs because BLS does not produce state-level prime-age LFPR data.

Long-Term Unemployment Rate

State-level prime age (25-54) long-term unemployment data is gathered in the Current Population Survey ([CPS](#)) and are calculated by and downloaded from the Economic Policy Institute ([EPI](#)). The EPI defines the long-term unemployment rate as the share of the prime-age labor force that has been unemployed for six months or more. We present the trend line for 1990-2024. The gray shading marks US recessions, using the same dates as the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Data system ([FRED](#)), which relies on the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

We note that in our previous State of the Nation report, prime age long-term unemployment data were downloaded from the ILO Data Explorer rather than the EPI. In this report, the national trend data comes from the EPI.

Hourly Earnings Growth

Average hourly earnings data for each state are collected by the Current Employment Statistics (CES) survey and available through the Bureau of Labor Statistics ([BLS](#)). The BLS reports the data monthly and nominally, going back to March 2006. The data are available for

different groups of employees. We chose to report the hourly earnings growth of the largest share of the workforce reported – the total private sector. In our previous State of the Nation report, in addition to this BLS data series, we were able to report the average hourly earnings growth rate for production and nonsupervisory employees in the private sector going back to 1990. However, this data series is not widely available at the state-level.

Both seasonally and not seasonally adjusted values are reported from BLS – the not seasonally adjusted values were downloaded because we are only reporting data annually. The monthly data were adjusted to constant 2023 US dollars using the BLS Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers research series ([R-CPI-U-RS](#)). The growth rates reported in our graph are the calculated year-over-year real change from January to January.