The Nation's 250th Anniversary

STATE OF THE STATES

Report 2026

WASHINGTON

STATE OF THE NATION

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Washington

Summary

How is Washington doing as a state? The bipartisan State of the Nation Project has collected extensive data on Washington and compared it with other states. Below we provide a brief progress report that shows the state rank and trend for each measure.

Washington ranks higher, on average, on the topics of Economy (rank #2), Trust (rank #5), and Children and Families (rank #9), but lower on Civil Liberties (rank #33), Work and Labor Force (rank #36), and Mental Health (rank #44). Washington also outperforms its West neighbors in 0 of the 14 topics and is improving over time on 10 of the 31 measures.

Washington Summary Table

Children & Families	State Trend	State Rank
Child Mortality	●	15
Low Birthweight	●	4
Youth Depression	●	36
Children Living With Single Parent	●	8

Citizenship & Democracy	State Trend	State Rank
Voter Participation	●	13

Civil Liberties	State Trend	State Rank
Freedom of the Press	↕	33

Economy	State Trend	State Rank
Economic Output	●	9
Productivity	●	1

Education	State Trend	State Rank
Academic Test Scores	↕	21
Average Years of Education	●	11
Young Adults Employed or in School	●	26

Environment	State Trend	State Rank
Net Greenhouse Gas Emissions	●	20
Air Quality	●	9

Inequality	State Trend	State Rank
Income Inequality	●	26
Poverty	↕	19

Life Satisfaction	State Trend	State Rank
Satisfaction with Current Life	●	28
Social Isolation	*	13

Mental Health	State Trend	State Rank
Depression	●	47
Fatal Overdoses	●	42
Suicide Rate	●	28

Physical Health	State Trend	State Rank
Life Expectancy	●	12

Social Capital	State Trend	State Rank
Volunteerism	●	21
Trust in Other People	↕	7

Trust	State Trend	State Rank
Trust in the Federal Government	●	14
Trust in Science	●	6

Violence	State Trend	State Rank
Murder Rate	●	19
Shootings	↕	18

Work & Labor Force	State Trend	State Rank
Employment-to-Population Ratio (EPOP)	●	37
Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR)	●	36
Long-Term Unemployment Rate	●	46
Hourly Earnings Growth	↕	11

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?)
Top third of states (i.e., ranks 1-17)	Improving: Trendline is improving by >5% *and* most points are improving relative to the first data point.	Improving: Trendline is improving relative to the national trend *and* rank is improving by 2+ rank spots.
Middle third of states (i.e., ranks 18-34)	Neutral/Stable: Doesn't fall into the improving, worsening, mixed, unclear, or NA categories.	Neutral/Stable: Trendline is improving/worsening the same amount as the national trend *or* rank is changing by <2 spots.
Bottom third of states (i.e., ranks 35-51)	Worsening: Trendline is worsening by >5% *and* most points are worsening relative to the first data point.	Worsening: Trendline is worsening relative to national trend *and* rank is declining by 2+ rank spots.
	Mixed: Large shares of points are improving *and* worsening by >5% in different parts of the trend.	Mixed: This label only applies when a measure has more than 1 trendline. One trendline is improving and another is worsening.
	Unclear: Not enough data to determine a trend.	Unclear: Not enough data to determine a comparison.
NA Not Applicable: No data.	NA Not Applicable: No data.	NA Not Applicable: No data.

For more information on our definitions and methods, please see the Data Notes section.

The progress report above shows both the state rank and the state trend for all the measures. The full report, starting on the next page, also shows whether the state is improving faster, or declining more slowly, than the country as a whole. Washington is improving faster (or worsening more slowly) than the country on net greenhouse gas emissions, productivity, hourly earnings growth, economic output, shootings, children living with single parent, and voter participation.

To better understand the data, we urge you to read the rest of this report, the Executive Summary of the larger State of the States report, and the Data Notes to learn more about how and why we carried out this analysis.

Washington

Children & Families

Introduction. We can learn a lot about any state based on how it treats its children. Research is also clear that childhood shapes our life trajectories in profound ways. Moreover, those trajectories are shaped by children's families. For example, parents' income and wealth shape the physical resources available in the household. The time that parents and other family members spend with their children shape children's values, knowledge, skills, habits, beliefs, and emotional well-being. Of course, we are also products of our neighborhoods, friendships, national culture, policies, environments, and the decisions we make in adulthood, but our focus here is on families. In the long run, no state can be more successful than its children.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been mixed. Child mortality is improving over time. Both the percentage of children born at low birthweights and youth depression are worsening. The percentage of children living with a single parent is remaining relatively stable.

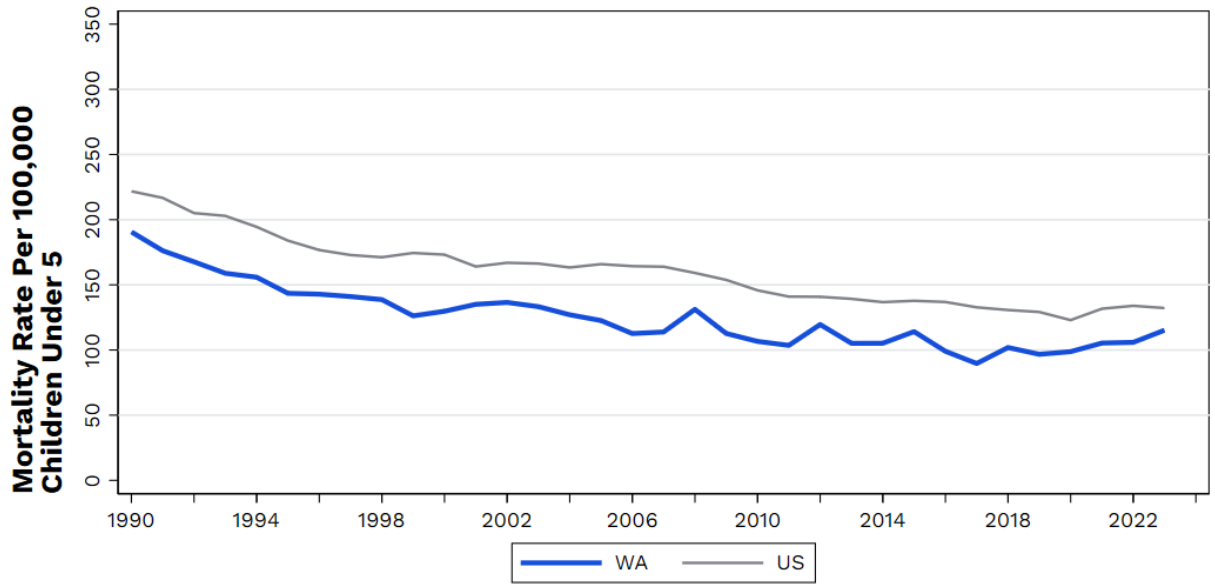
Child Mortality

Specific measure: Mortality rate of children under age five per 100,000 children under age five, age-adjusted. (Source: Authors' analysis of Centers for Disease Control data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
15		

Why did we include this measure? All forms of mortality are concerning, but the deaths of young children are especially alarming, given the vulnerability of this group. A rising number of deaths also signals larger trends in threats and risks, even to those who survive.

Figure 1: Child Mortality Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in child mortality has been improving less than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as negative. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 15 (out of 51). In the same year, Massachusetts ranked first, and Mississippi ranked last.

Additional Information. The leading causes of death among infants and toddlers in the US are (in order): accidents, health conditions, and homicides. (When including adolescents and teenagers, the leading cause is murder/suicide.) The recent decline in US child mortality is almost entirely due to a decline in motor vehicle accident deaths. These have declined faster than the overall death rate from motor vehicle deaths, indicating that this is partly related to much greater use and quality of car seats and seat belt use. The decline in mortality is also happening despite the national rise in low birthweight (see below), which increases child mortality.

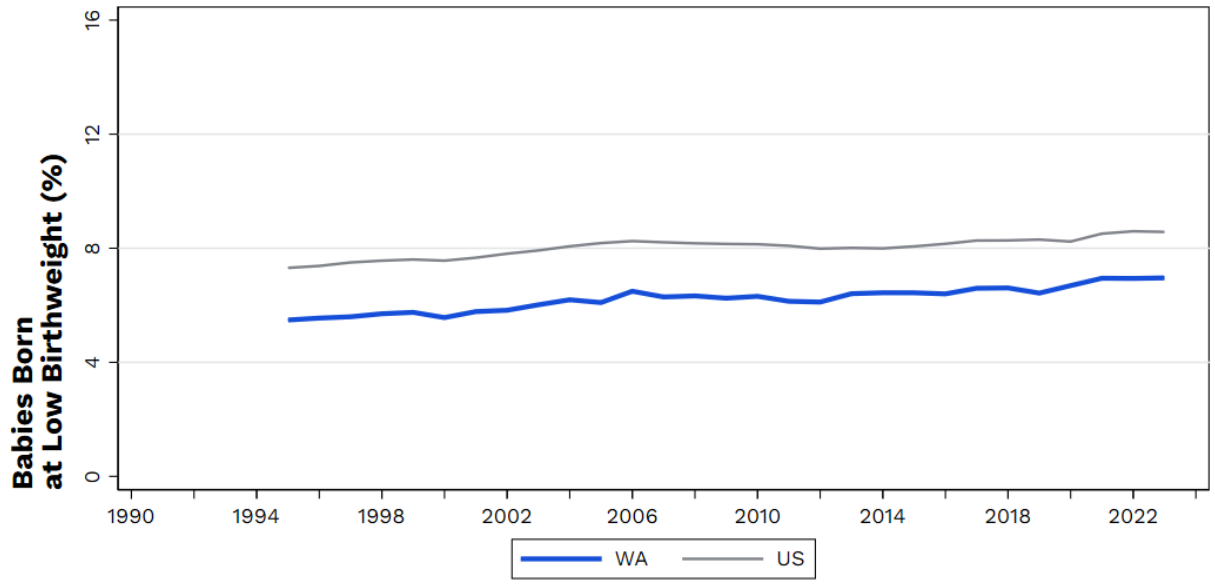
Low Birthweight

Specific measure: Percentage of live births where children weigh 2,499 grams (5.51 lbs.) or less. (Source: Authors' analysis of Centers for Disease Control data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
4		

Why did we include this measure? Low birthweight is associated with a wide range of short-term issues for infants and longer-term issues later in life, including developmental delays, chronic health issues, behavioral and emotional problems, and stunted physical growth.

Figure 2: Low Birthweight Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in the percentage of children born at low birthweights has been worsening more than the US, it did not change in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 4 (out of 51). In the same year, Alaska ranked first, and Mississippi ranked last.

Additional Information. Some of the rise in low birthweight is driven by the rising age at which women are having children. Also, the rising use of assisted reproduction (e.g., in vitro fertilization, IVF) leads to a greater prevalence of multi-child births where each baby generally has a lower birthweight. Low birthweight is also related to mothers' obesity, malnutrition, sexually transmitted diseases, stress, and substance abuse, which are related to a mix of behaviors, habits, policies, and socio-economic conditions. One of those conditions is poverty. While our national measure of poverty is declining, this might not be the case among pregnant women and poverty measures do not capture access to health care very well. A lack of

prenatal health care, especially among lower income groups, may contribute to these and other issues that cause low birthweight.

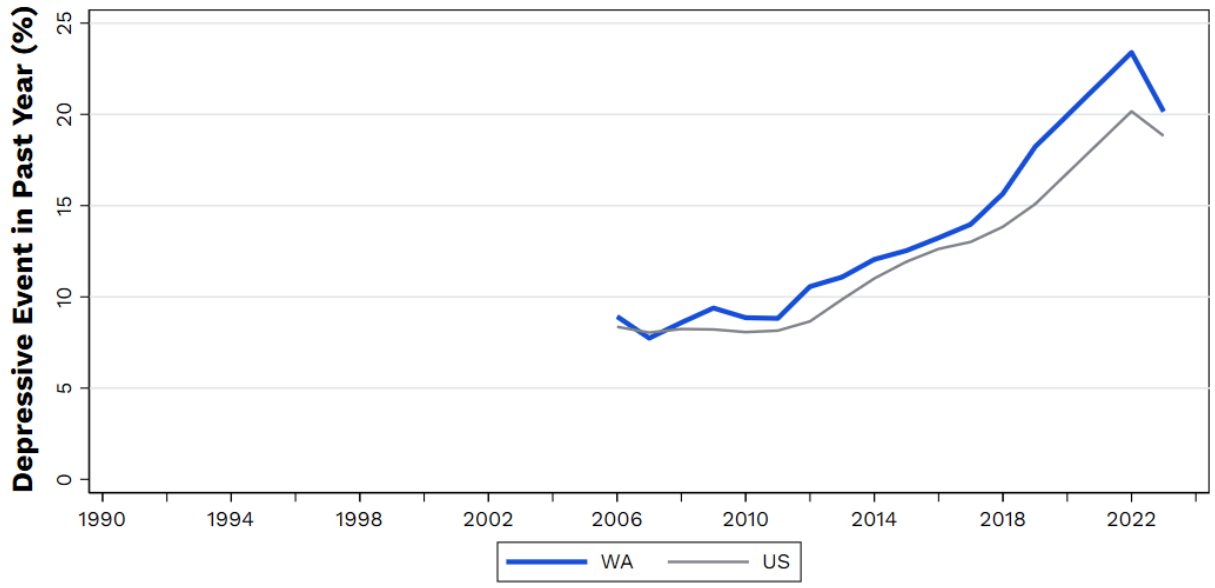
Youth Depression

Specific measure: Percentage of youth aged 12-17 who reported experiencing a Major Depressive Episode (MDE) in the past year. (Source: Authors' analysis of National Survey on Drug Use and Health data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
36		

Why did we include this measure? Depression is an extreme form of mental distress and a common precursor to suicide. Given the importance of childhood for shaping life trajectories, depression at this early stage is a particular concern for the future. Especially in its more extreme forms, depression affects almost every element of life, including the ability to focus on studying, participate in school activities, and engage in deep relationships with friends and family. Depression also carries over to our ability to sleep and other aspects of our physical health. Those who have depression when they are young are also more likely to experience depression, and all of these symptoms, when they are older.

Figure 3: Youth Depression Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in youth depression has been worsening more than the US, it increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 36 (out of 51). In the same year, Hawaii ranked first, and New Hampshire ranked last.

Additional Information. The upward shift in national youth depression started around 2007 and has been concentrated mainly among girls. There has been considerable debate about the causes. The timing of the depression spike coincides with the launch of the iPhone, and the

more recent national spike around 2017 is associated with the rapidly expanded use of social media through those devices. We could not find any other proposed explanation that can explain these patterns. On the other hand, it is difficult to carry out the kinds of studies that would be needed to clearly pin down the role of smartphones, social media, or other causes.

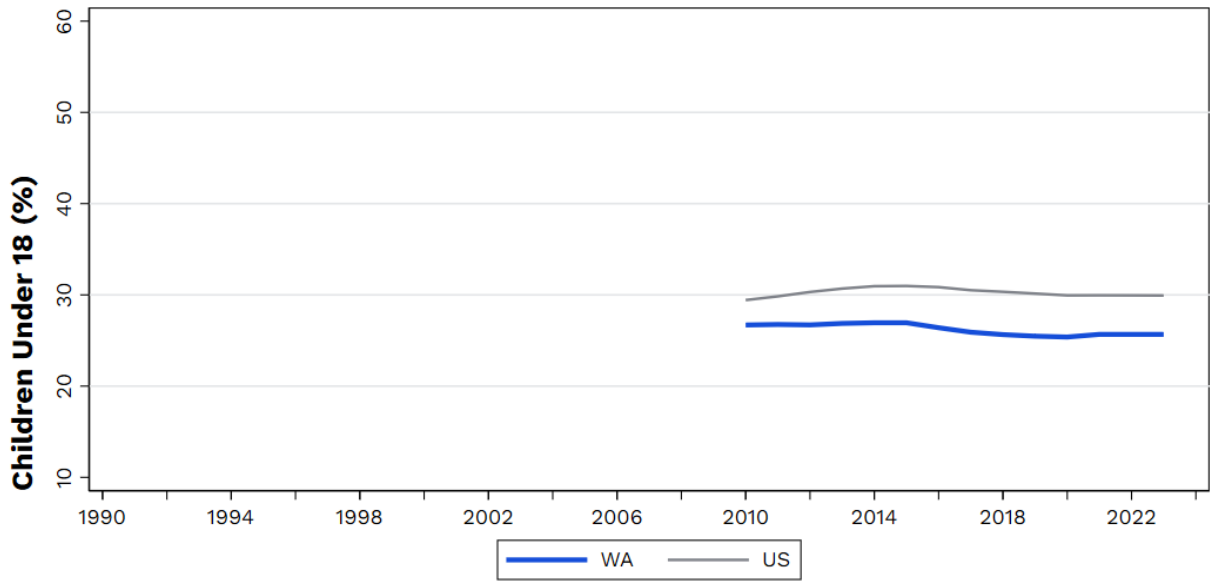
Children Living with Single Parent

Specific measure: Percentage of own-children under age 18 living in single-parent households, of all own-children under age 18. (Source: Authors' analysis of Census Bureau data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
8		

Why did we include this measure? Single-parent households have less access to quality housing and schooling and are more unstable financially, which causes stress for parents and more frequent housing moves. Single parents also have less time and energy to spend with their children to provide emotional support, instill good habits, enforce rules, and help with homework. Perhaps for these reasons, growing up in a single-parent household is associated with a wide range of negative consequences during adolescence, including lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates, increased aggression in school, fewer social connections, risky behaviors (e.g., drug use), and a higher chance of teen pregnancy. When they become adults, these children tend to have lower incomes, higher rates of anxiety and depression, difficulty engaging in their own stable relationships (e.g., they have higher divorce rates), and increased rates of incarceration. Growing up with a single parent seems to be a particular problem for boys.

Figure 4: Children Living with Single Parent Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in the percentage of children living with a single parent has been improving while the US has been worsening. Compared to other states, Washington has also increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as positive. In

the most recent year, Washington ranked 8 (out of 51). In the same year, Utah ranked first, and Washington DC ranked last.

Additional Information. The national rate of single-parent children has hovered in the 25–28% range for 35 years. This relative stability may seem surprising given that the national marriage rate has been in steady decline during this same period. However, birth rates are declining for both single and married women of childbearing age, so these cancel out in our measure of the share of children living with single parents.

Related Topics. Youth depression is related to the larger topic of mental health for adults and is a precursor of measures like suicide (see the Mental Health section). Youth depression is also closely related to social isolation and perceptions of one's own well-being and leads people to withdraw from social life (see the Life Satisfaction section). While not likely a major cause of declining trust, depression does lead to negative thoughts and concerns about others (see the Trust section).

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Citizenship & Democracy

Introduction. The United States is a representative democracy. We choose our leaders and hold them accountable through elections. Those leaders are responsible for upholding the Constitution, which includes respecting civil liberties, separation of powers between branches of government, and the rule of law. Our elected officials are also obligated to maintain free and fair elections and the peaceful transition of power, and to lead with civility, truth, and transparency. But the responsibility of democratic government cannot be limited to elected leaders alone. Our citizens also have important responsibilities, including being informed, holding elected officials accountable through voting, tolerating those who are different and have divergent views from our own, and engaging more broadly in civic affairs. The rights of citizens go hand in hand with these responsibilities.

Summary of Results for Washington. This is one of the few topics that has only a single measure: voter participation. Washington's progress in this area has been positive.

Voter Participation

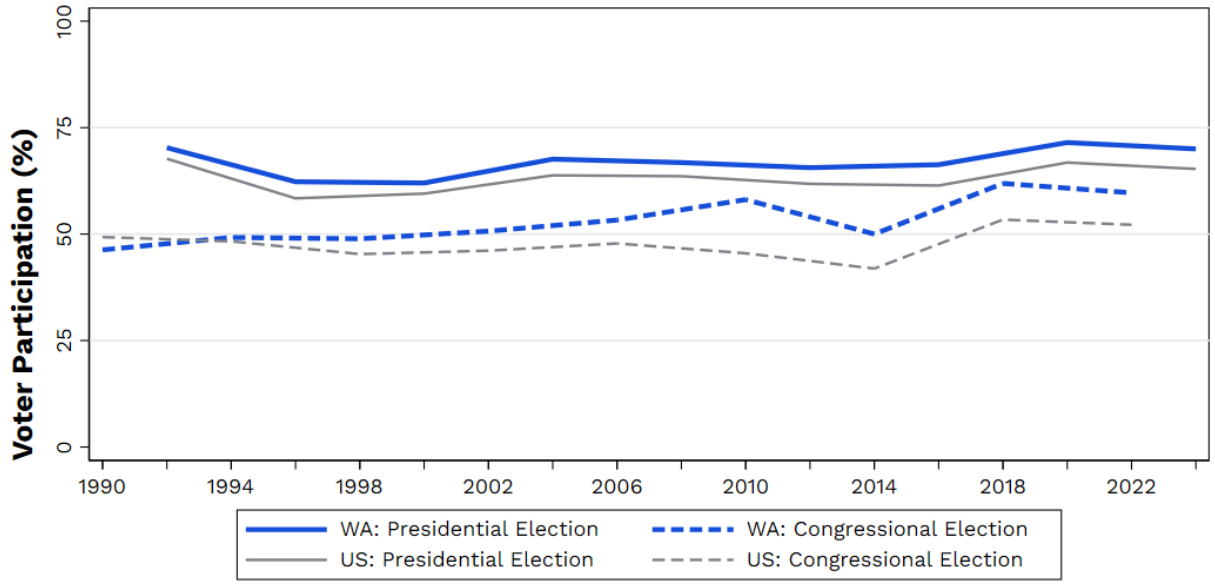
Specific measure: Percentage of the voting-age citizen population who voted in presidential and congressional elections. (Source: Authors' analysis of Census Bureau data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
13		

Why did we include this measure? Democracy is rooted in elections and its success depends on citizens holding their leaders accountable by voting. Voting is also a signal of how engaged citizens are in public affairs.

Since there are two election cycles (congressional and presidential), we report the average rank across those cycles.

Figure 5: Voter Participation Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in congressional elections has been improving more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US in congressional elections as positive. Washington's trend in presidential elections has been worsening less than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US in presidential elections as positive. Taking both congressional and presidential elections into account, we categorize Washington's overall comparison to the US for voter participation as positive. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 10 (out of 51) for voting in congressional elections. In the same year, Oregon ranked first, and West Virginia ranked last. For presidential elections, in the most recent year,

Washington ranked 15 (out of 51). In the same year, Washington DC ranked first, and Arkansas ranked last.

Additional Information. The difference between presidential and congressional elections is partially due to the US having separate elections for the executive and legislative branches. Elections that involve the selection of a single leader will naturally have higher turnouts when those elections occur. Many areas also have few voting places that are far away and involve long wait times, though mail-in voting has become much more widespread in recent years. Voter ID requirements are also increasing.

Related Topics. Voter participation is likely related to trust in government (see the Trust section) and our social connections with our communities (see Social Capital).

Other Measures Considered. The board also agreed on two other measures: belief in democracy and polarization. However, we were not able to find reliable, state-level data for these measures.

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Civil Liberties

Introduction. Civil liberties are central not only to our government, as outlined in the Bill of Rights in the US Constitution, but to what it means to be an American. Our freedoms of speech, press, religion, and assembly allow us to think for ourselves, criticize the government, and practice our faiths. We also have the right to due process and protection from unreasonable search and seizure. These rights protect us from unreasonable interference and imposition by our governments and help define what freedom means in the United States.

Summary of Results for Washington. This is one of the few topics that has only a single measure: freedom of the press. Washington's progress in this area has been mixed.

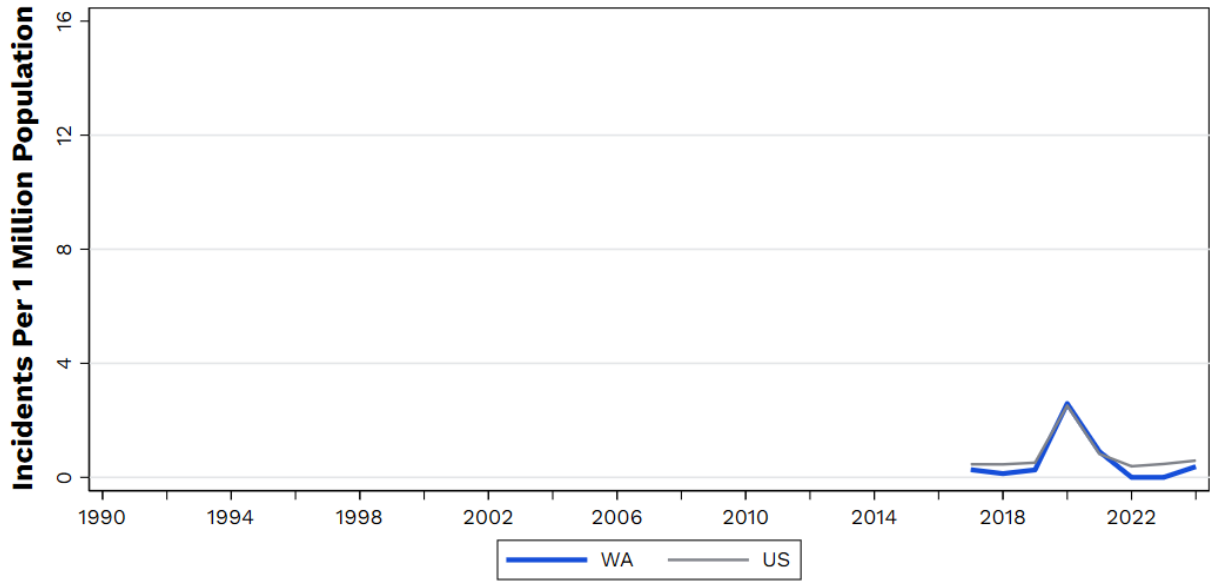
Freedom of the Press

Specific measure: Rate of press freedom violations per 1 million population, including assaults and arrests of reporters, damage to their equipment, and subpoenas/legal orders for anonymous sources and restricting coverage. (Source: Authors' analysis of US Press Freedom Tracker data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
33	↕	●

Why did we include this measure? The press is seen as so important to holding the government accountable and keeping the public informed that it is sometimes called the "fourth estate," placing it on par with other "estates," including the government itself. The specific measure we chose was the only one we could find that consistently and objectively measured press freedom. Other data sources focus on assessments of press freedoms by experts and reporters themselves, but these are more subjective and difficult to interpret than our measure, which focuses on actual, documented events that seem to violate press freedoms.

Figure 6: Freedom of the Press Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in freedom of the press has been worsening less than the US, it decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 33 (out of 51). In the same year, 21 states tied for first (Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia). Washington DC ranked last.

Additional Information. The year 2020 was an unusual year in the US. The COVID pandemic upended our lives and led to controversy over social distancing, vaccines, and other pandemic-related matters; the murder of George Floyd spurred national protests over racial injustice; and the 2020 presidential election saw verbal attacks against the press. The national number of attacks on the press was more than four times higher that year compared with 2019 and 2022.

Related Topics. Civil liberties are clearly aligned with the Citizenship and Democracy topic. Freedom of the press is necessary for a well-informed citizenry and as a venue for debate and public discussion.

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Economy

Introduction. We provide for our material well-being mainly through markets. Private markets provide not only for basic necessities like food, housing, and medicine, but others, from entertainment to transportation, that shape the quality and character of life.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been positive. In Washington, both economic output and productivity are improving.

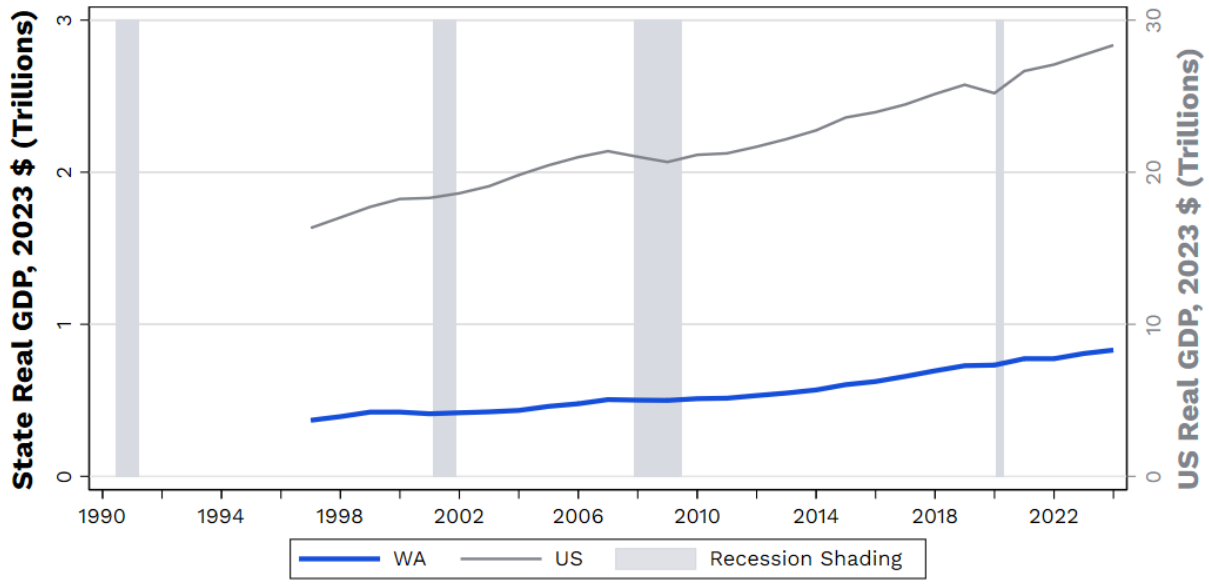
Economic Output

Specific measure: Real gross domestic product (GDP), or the level of production within a state's boundaries, expressed in 2023 US dollars. (Source: Authors' analysis of Bureau of Economic Analysis and Bureau of Labor Statistics data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
9		

Why did we include this measure? GDP measures the value of output of final goods and services—a state's economic production. Because GDP depends not just on the quantity of output but also on prices, the measure reflects the value of that output to consumers in their market exchanges. As such, it is an important measure of income and material well-being.

Figure 7: Economic Output Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in economic output has been improving more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as positive. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 9 (out of 51). In the same year, California ranked first, and Vermont ranked last. We note that the state and US scales in the above graph are quite different, which makes them difficult to compare and explains why we created two scales. When determining the comparison to US trends, we focused on the percentage change.

Additional Information. GDP is driven by three immediate factors: the size of the labor force, average hours per worker, and worker productivity. The national rise in GDP in recent years has been driven by productivity growth as well as some increase in population size (driven mainly by immigration).

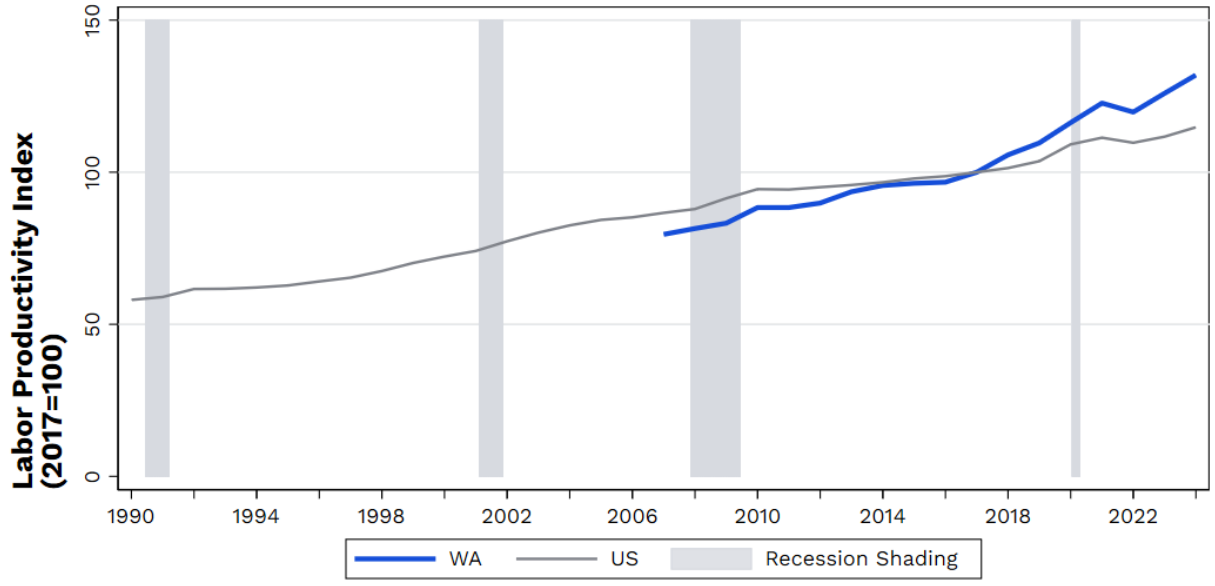
Productivity

Specific measure: Labor productivity of the private nonfarm sector, indexed to 2017. (Source: Authors' analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
1		

Why did we include this measure? It is not just how much we produce that matters but how much time we need to put into it. Productivity growth is one of the main drivers of overall economic growth and signals increases in human and physical capital and innovations in products, technology, management, and work processes. This allows us to increase our material prosperity while also having leisure time to rest, exercise, vacation, and spend time with our families and friends and in civic and community activities.

Figure 8: Productivity Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in productivity has been improving more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as positive. In the most recent year, Washington ranked first (out of 51). In the same year, South Dakota ranked last.

Additional Information. Productivity improves because of a combination of factors. Firms can develop and invest in new production technologies and improve workplace organization, while workers may enter the workforce with greater general skills (human capital) or specific skills better matched to firm needs.

Our national GDP and productivity are both strong. This appears to be due to a combination of our large population size, historical investments in education and business capital, culture of hard work, innovation, entrepreneurialism, relatively stable democratic government, free market policies, national security, and other advantages.

Related Topics. The national rise in productivity is a key factor behind the slight (though mixed) rise in average real wages, and economic output is driven partly by the size of the labor force (see the Work and Labor Force section). Since human capital is a key driver of productivity, the Education section is relevant. Economic output is also a driver of the environment. Finally, as with other topics in this report, the averages we report reflect improvements for some groups and negative outcomes for others. For evidence on how economic output is shared across the population, see the Inequality section.

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Education

Introduction. The state of a state can be no stronger than the state of its young people, including the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are instilled by parents, schools, and community organizations. Education prepares young people for their roles as workers and citizens.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been mixed. Average years of education is improving over time. The percentage of young adults employed or in school is remaining relatively stable. Academic test scores are showing mixed trends over time.

Academic Test Scores

Specific measure: Average scale scores of eighth graders taking the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in math, reading, and science. Funded and managed by the federal government, the NAEP is a low-stakes test administered every few years to a representative sample of the nation's schools. (Source: Authors' analysis of National Center for Education Statistics data.)

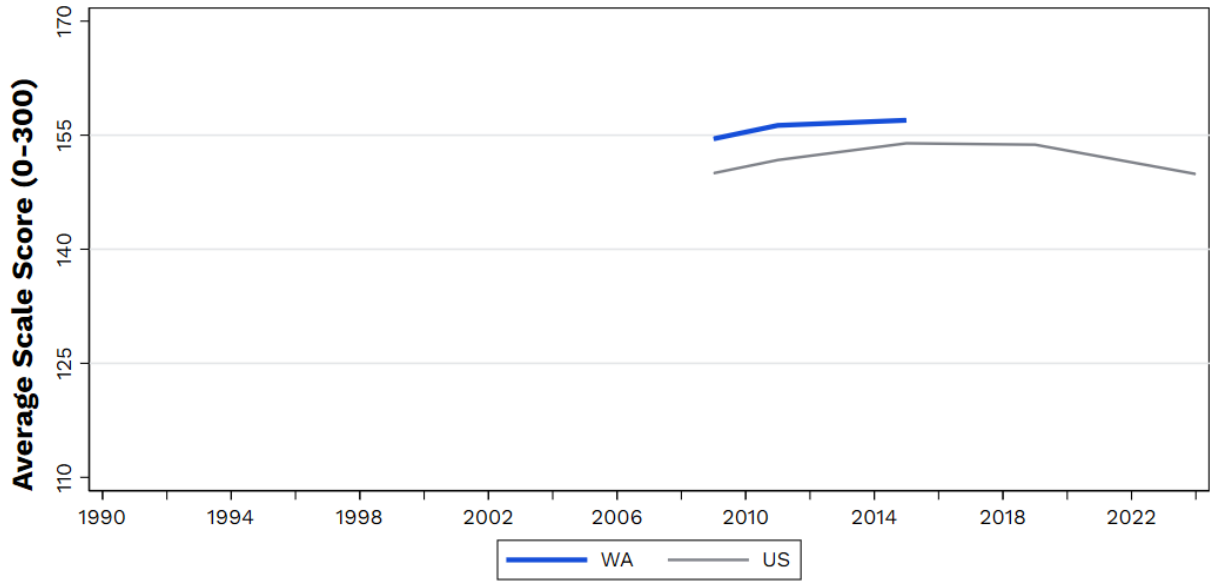
State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
21	↕	↕

Why did we include this measure? It is widely agreed that these academic subjects are important. Increases in test scores, especially math and reading, cause increases in a wide variety of other long-term life outcomes, including earnings and employment. We focus specifically on eighth-grade NAEP scores because this is a pivotal grade/age for children's education and it is feasible to include essentially all students, even if they eventually drop out of school. Eighth-grade scores also reflect the accumulation of knowledge from earlier ages and grades. (We note that test score levels cannot be compared across subjects. For example, we cannot say that our math levels are higher than our reading levels.)

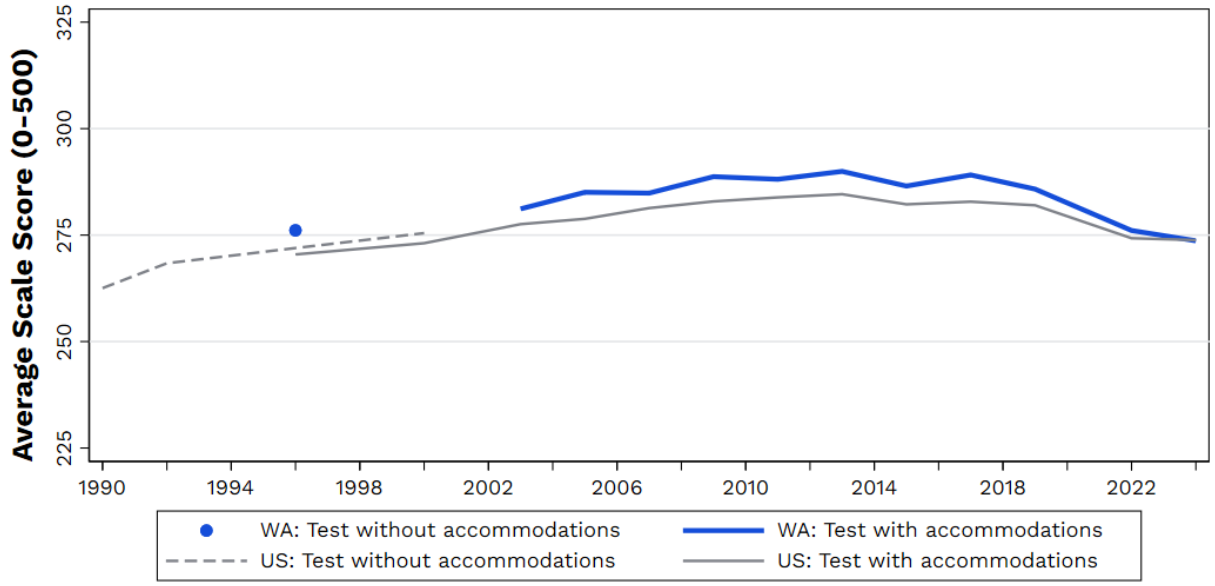
Since there are three subjects (math, reading, and science), we report the average rank across those subjects. We consider only math and reading when defining the state trend and comparison to the US, because there are not enough science data points.

Figure 9: Academic Test Scores Trend

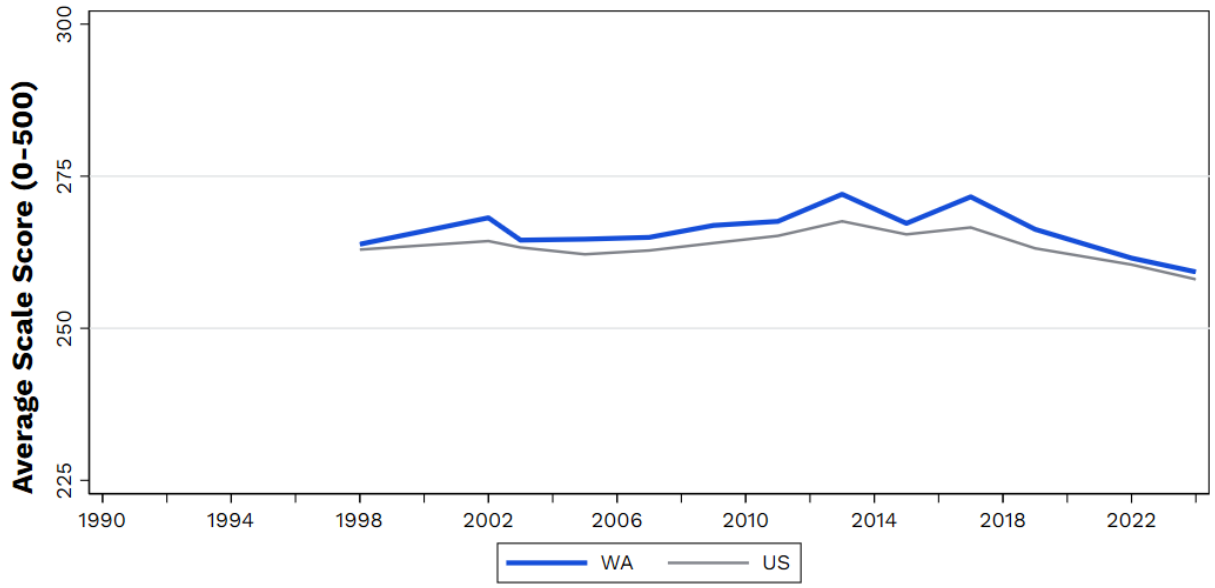
Science



Math



Reading



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in math has been worsening while the US has been improving. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US in math as negative. Washington's trend in reading has been worsening less than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US in reading

as positive. Taking both math and reading into account, we categorize Washington's overall comparison to the US for academic test scores as mixed. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 25 (out of 51) in math NAEP scores. In the same year, Massachusetts ranked first, and New Mexico ranked last. For reading, Washington ranked 18 (out of 51) in the most recent year. In the same year, Massachusetts ranked first, and New Mexico ranked last. For science, Washington ranked 20 (out of 51) in the most recent year. In the same year, Utah ranked first, and Washington DC ranked last.

Additional Information. Student achievement is closely related to home and family situations. However, one such factor, child poverty has been on the decline, which suggests that other factors are pushing national scores down. Education policy and practice also affect student achievement. The recent declining emphasis on test-based accountability may be one factor that may partially explain the pre-COVID national decline in scores. Other possible factors include increased distractions from social media and gaming and changing alignment between the content taught in schools and what is covered on the above tests. However, research has not uncovered a definitive explanation about the reasons behind the pre-COVID national decline in NAEP scores. COVID led to school closures and altered learning environments that further reduced achievement throughout the world over the past few years.

Average Years of Education

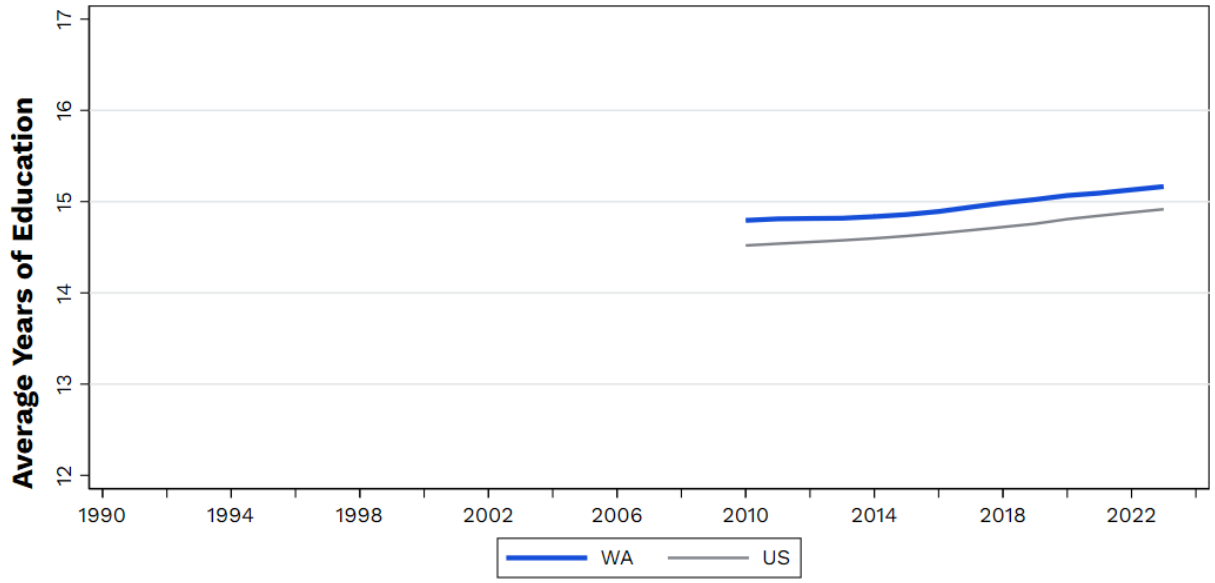
Specific measure: Average years of educational attainment for the population age 25-64. (Source: Authors' analysis of Census Bureau data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
11		

Why did we include this measure? Test scores only capture some of the knowledge and skills we expect of young people. But students' motivation to learn and work hard, the ability to collaborate with and get along with others, and the wherewithal to persist through difficulties (sometimes now called "grit") are also important. Years of education is a useful signal of these "soft skills." By staying in school longer, students engage in activities that help them improve on these dimensions. This is apparently why, when researchers look at the life outcomes of people who have the same test scores, the ones with more years of education have better outcomes on a wide range of measures, including earnings, employment, happiness, civic participation, life expectancy, and other measures of health. However, concern has arisen in recent years that the same level of education no longer reflects the same level of skill and knowledge, due to grade inflation and reduced standards. While the research on this is unsettled, it is still clear that students are learning useful skills and knowledge as they pass through the education system.

Formal education usually focuses on general skills, but our measure of years of education also includes more job- and career-oriented skills that are taught in community colleges and involve certificates in addition to academic degrees. There is increasing interest in alternative credentials, such as competency-based programs and digital badges, which place less focus on classroom time and let students progress and receive credentials based on whether they have demonstrated knowledge or experience in a particular area. These credentials are not yet very common or well-measured so while we are forced to omit them, we intend to include them in future reports when the data become available.

Figure 10: Average Years of Education Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in average years of education has been improving less than the US, it did not change in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 11 (out of 51). In the same year, Washington DC ranked first, and West Virginia ranked last.

Additional Information. The steady national rise through 2020 in years of education follows a longstanding US trend. Given the accompanying national decline in test scores in recent years (see above), concern has arisen that students are not learning as much as in the past while they are in school, which might make rising years of education misleading. On the other hand, time in school may develop skills, knowledge, and dispositions other than what is measured on these tests.

Young Adults Employed or in School

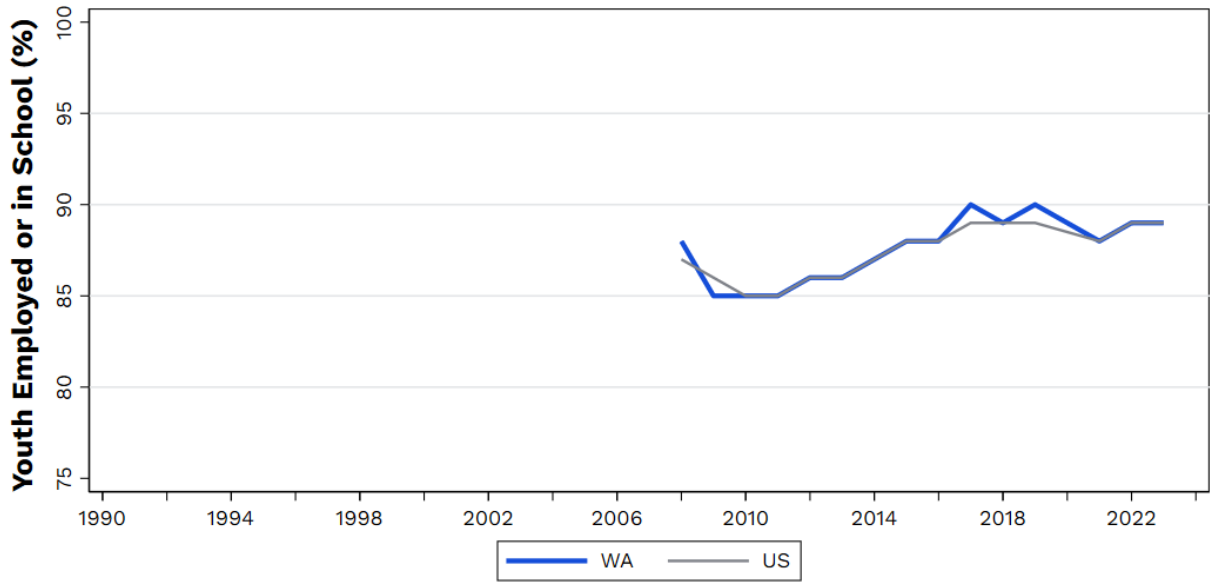
Specific measure: Percentage of the population age 16-24 currently employed or in school. (Source: Authors' analysis of Annie E Casey Foundation data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
26		

Why did we include this measure? Formal education is not the only way to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Workplace skills, in particular, are also learned on the job. Therefore, we also report the percentage of young adults who are either enrolled in a formal education program or working (or both). Those who are neither working nor in school are sometimes called "disconnected" from opportunity.

Another reason for focusing on this measure is that formal education is usually completed by the time people reach their mid-20s, and the prior measure (average years of education) focuses on the population aged 25 to 64. This measure of employed-or-in-school stops instead at age 24 and provides a better sense of the experiences of current young adults who will make up the majority of the workforce in the decades ahead.

Figure 11: Young Adults Employed or in School Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in the percentage of young adults employed or in school has been improving less than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as negative. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 26 (out of 51). In the same year, New Hampshire ranked first, and Louisiana ranked last.

Additional Information. This national upward trend is consistent with the rise in average years of education (see above). More students are graduating high school and attending college, which increases both measures. However, the number of young adults employed or in school is more unstable than years of education because employment among young people is more cyclical. When recessions hit, young people are among the first to be laid off.

Related Topics. Education is a key factor in making people qualified for work (see the Work and Labor Force section) and improving worker productivity (see the Economy section).

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Environment

Introduction. Human life depends on an environment that can provide for the most basic human needs. But climate change is increasing the earth's temperature, melting glaciers, raising sea levels, and likely shifting ocean currents. This, in turn, appears to be reducing biodiversity and increasing the intensity of extreme weather, such as floods, droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, and excessive heat days. The quality of the air we breathe is also critical to our existence.

Climate change and air quality are driven mainly, although not entirely, by human activity. Climate change is also creating fast-rising financial losses from property damage as well as increased prevalence of asthma, dementia, heatstroke, exhaustion, and other health ailments. Some argue that the future effects are somewhat uncertain and that future technological developments might reduce greenhouse gas emissions, offset warming with technologies that cool the earth, or prevent some harms from climate change. However, given the major risks involved and the uncertainty about future technologies, there is broad agreement that greenhouse gas emissions are a significant problem. The actions we take on climate change also have a global impact. Each country's and each state's emissions affect everyone else.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been positive. In Washington, both net greenhouse gas emissions and air quality are improving.

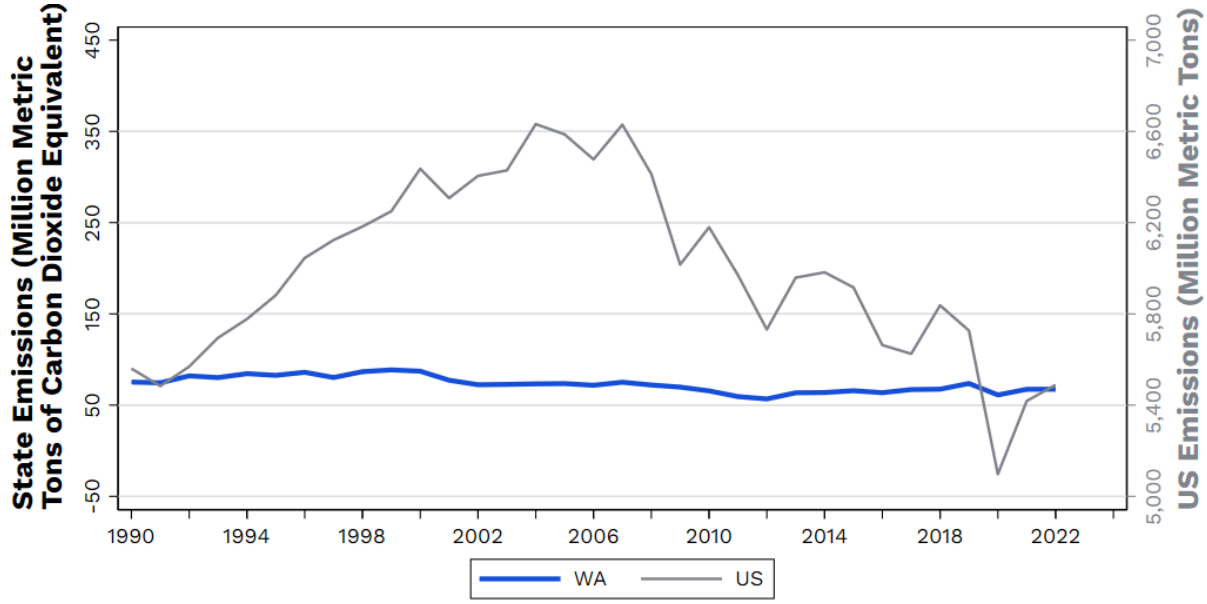
Net Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Specific measure: Net greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, fluorinated gases), including discharge from land use and deforestation. (Source: Authors' analysis of Environmental Protection Agency data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
20	●	●

Why did we include this measure? Greenhouse gases trap the sun's rays and cause the earth to warm, resulting in several predictable environmental effects. The number of extreme heat days increases, causing dehydration, exhaustion, and heat strokes and making us less healthy and productive. Warming also increases extreme weather events. The rising number and severity of droughts and floods make it difficult to grow crops, while the increasing severity of hurricanes, superstorms, and wildfires destroys homes and businesses and sometimes costs lives. Climate change is a concern in part because a large share of the nation's—and the world's—population lives near large bodies of water. Climate change is melting glaciers, raising sea levels, and likely increasing the severity of hurricanes, all of which particularly affect coastal areas.

Figure 12: Net Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in net greenhouse gas emissions has been improving more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as positive. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 20 (out of 51). In the same year, Maine ranked first, and Texas ranked last. We note that the state and US scales in the above graph are quite different, which makes

them difficult to compare and explains why we created two scales. When determining the comparison to US trends, we focused on the percentage change.

Additional Information. Greenhouse gas emissions are driven heavily by economic activity, which is currently dependent on energy consumption and the burning of fossil fuels. Nationally, we are generating economic output more efficiently than in the past—with lower greenhouse gas emissions per unit of output—but the overall problem is getting worse because these gases accumulate in the atmosphere.

The primary greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide, which is responsible for 80% of gross US greenhouse gas emissions. The main sources are transportation, electricity generation, and industry. We have improved nationally in these areas in recent years by switching from coal to natural gas, expanding the use of renewable energy, and improving efficiency in all of the major sources, especially vehicles. Methane represents only 12% of US greenhouse gas emissions but has particularly large warming effects. Methane comes mainly from animal agriculture, oil and gas industry operations, and landfills.

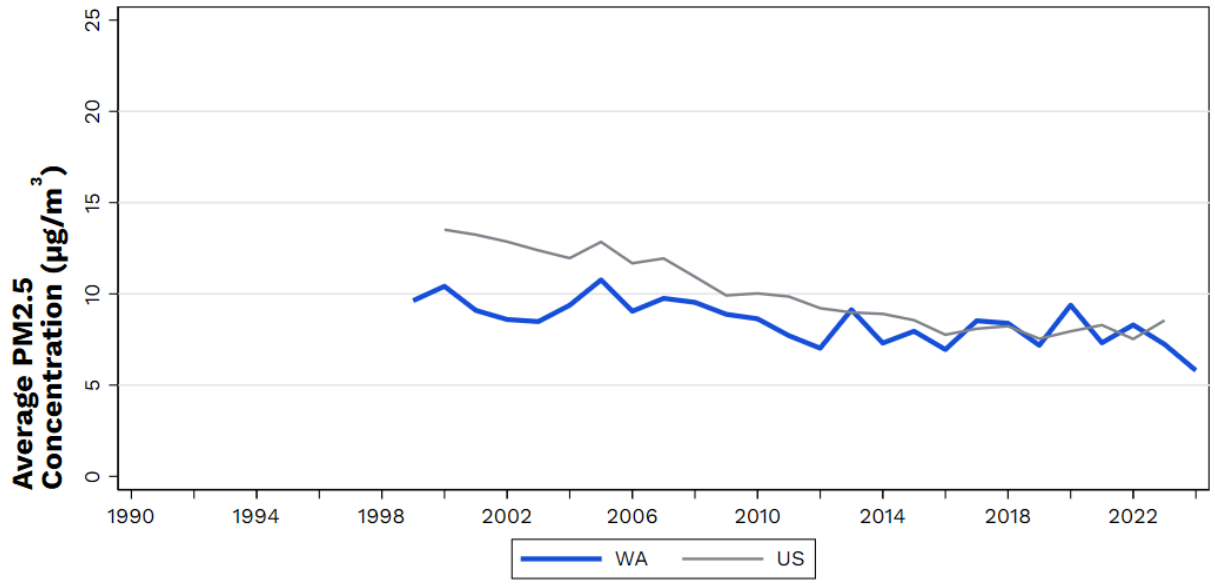
Air Quality

Specific measure: Annual mean concentration of particulate matter with diameter of 2.5 micrometers or less (roughly 3% of the width of a human hair). (Source: Authors' analysis of Environmental Protection Agency data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
9		

Why did we include this measure? Our lungs are designed to provide oxygen to the body and to remove pollution that interferes with basic bodily functions. However, this only works for larger particles that our bodies can filter out—not tiny particles. The main source of these tiny particles is combustion of fossil fuels—the same source as greenhouse gas emissions (transportation, electricity generation, etc.). This particulate matter directly enters our respiratory systems and bloodstreams and can bypass the usual defenses. This appears to create harmful breathing problems (asthma and bronchitis) and an increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, and hypertension.

Figure 13: Air Quality Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in air quality has been improving less than the US, it increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 9 (out of 51). In the same year, Hawaii ranked first, and Texas ranked last.

Additional Information. Given that greenhouse gas emissions and particulate matter have the same sources, the national decline in the burning of fossil fuels partly explains the decline in

particulate matter. But particulate matter has declined much more quickly than carbon dioxide emissions because of technological advances and government regulations.

Related Topics. Greenhouse gas emissions arise mainly because of economic activity—energy fuels the economy (see the Economy section). Particulate matter is linked to lower birthweight and reduced cognitive function in children (see the Children and Families and Education sections) and other health effects (see Physical Health).

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Inequality

Introduction. Inequality refers to the differences in income and wealth between all groups in society—between rich and poor. High levels of inequality can signal real differences in social and economic opportunity and lead to perceived unfairness, distrust of government and other key institutions, and political unrest.

The importance of inequality relative to *average* economic well-being is sometimes debated. Some argue that a degree of inequality is a natural outgrowth of differences in individual abilities, motivations, and decisions. Others argue that inequality of outcome is less important than inequality of opportunity— specifically, the opportunity to get out of difficult economic circumstances, or economic mobility. Still, inequality is a concern across the political spectrum.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been mixed. Income inequality is worsening over time. Poverty is showing mixed trends over time.

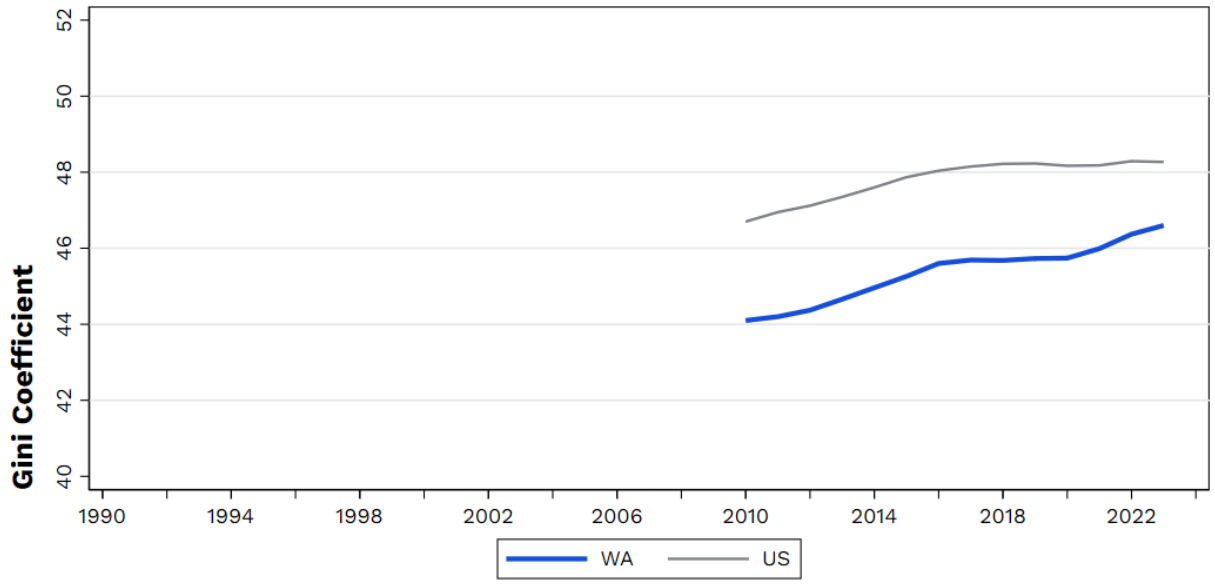
Income Inequality

Specific measure: Income Gini coefficient (pre-government taxes and transfer programs). This is an index that ranges from zero to 100 where higher numbers indicate more inequality. (Source: Authors' analysis of Census Bureau data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
26		

Why did we include this measure? The Gini coefficient is a common measure of inequality and describes the extent to which a measure like income is concentrated within certain groups. When the income Gini coefficient is zero, it means everyone has exactly the same income. When it is 100, it means that a single person has all the income. (Of course, these extremes almost never occur in practice, but the extremes are useful for understanding the scale.) The specific income Gini coefficient we use captures only wage earnings, excluding pensions, government taxes and transfers.

Figure 14: Income Inequality Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in income inequality has been worsening more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as negative. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 26 (out of 51). In the same year, Utah ranked first, and New York ranked last.

Additional Information. Income inequality is driven by a complex set of forces, including the variation in education and human capital, decisions made by individuals regarding their careers and work hours, segregation and isolation of opportunity, the strength of labor unions and minimum wage laws, free trade policies that place US workers in competition with those

in low-wage countries, technological change favoring high-skill workers, and government taxation and spending.

While we do not argue that any factor is more important than the others, we can say that the national rise in income inequality is driven mainly by people with very high incomes. As we show below, poverty is actually declining nationally, which reduces income inequality. So, the "rich are getting richer" faster than the poor.

Also, income inequality is intertwined with wealth inequality. Wealth comes mostly from inheritance and other financial support across generations, which also produces income. The high and growing level of US wealth inequality therefore partially explains rising income inequality.

Poverty

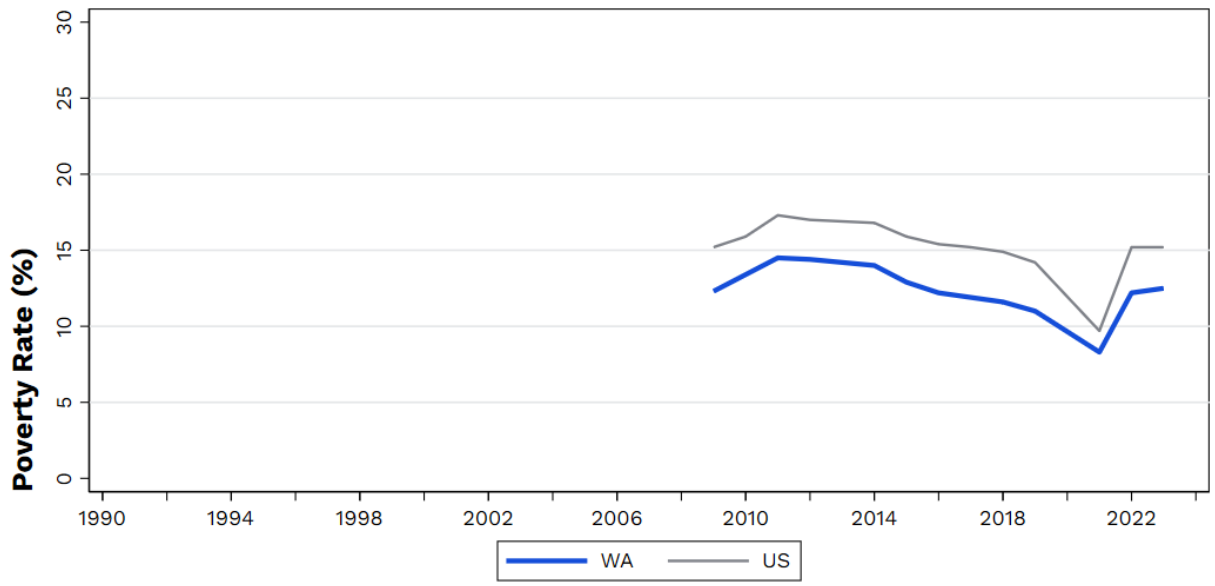
Specific measure: The Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), which measures income net of government taxes and transfer programs (see examples below). (Source: Authors' analysis of Census Bureau data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
19	↕	●

Why did we include this measure? There is general agreement that people should be able to provide the most basic material needs for themselves and their families. Poverty measures capture this by identifying households where these needs are not being met.

An advantage of the Supplemental Poverty Measure we use is that it accounts for a wide variety of factors affecting the economic resources people have available. First, it counts more than just wage income and includes cash benefits and some in-kind government supports that are intended to prevent poverty. Income from Social Security, Supplemental Nutrition (SNAP), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit, and housing subsidies are all included, for example. Second, this supplemental poverty measure subtracts necessary expenses, such as taxes and out-of-pocket health expenses, from that income when deciding whether someone is living in poverty. (Medicare and Medicaid benefits are not directly counted as income, but these programs affect out-of-pocket health expenses, which are accounted for as necessary expenses.)

Figure 15: Poverty Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in poverty has been worsening while the US has returned to the same level as the first year of data, it did not change in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize

Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 19 (out of 51). In the same year, Maine ranked first, and California ranked last.

Additional Information. In the discussion above, we noted some of the factors affecting income inequality generally, and most of these also affect poverty. The US has government programs intended to reduce poverty, but there is debate about the degree to which the government should address poverty directly, given the costs to taxpayers. Also, government programs may reduce employment, which could increase poverty over the longer term.

Related Topics. Every other section in this report focuses on average outcomes across the state. This is the only one where we focus on how outcomes compare between groups within the state. However, our explanations for changes in income inequality are related to the other topics. For example, most income comes from wages from work (see the Work and Labor Force section). Also, education is a key driver of income (see the Education section). Income inequality might also affect how people perceive their lives and their state as a whole (see the Life Satisfaction and Mental Health sections).

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Life Satisfaction

Introduction. Many of the measures in this report—economic output, employment, greenhouse gas emissions, and life expectancy—are not matters of opinion. They go up or down regardless of what we think about them. But how people view the world is also important. The nation's founders wrote in the Declaration of Independence about "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." So, it is worth asking: Are we actually happy or satisfied with our lives? The answers to this question are useful in part because of everything the other measures miss. We might have good jobs and incomes, but does that material prosperity actually make us feel better off? If we are not satisfied with our lives, then we might be passing on more discontent, or a reduced sense of hope, to our children.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been negative. Satisfaction with our current lives is worsening over time. Social isolation does not have enough data points to confidently determine a trend.

Satisfaction with Current Life

Specific measure: Percentage of adults who report being very happy with their life. (Source: Authors' analysis of the General Social Survey (GSS) data and IPUMS-harmonized ACS/CPS microdata.)

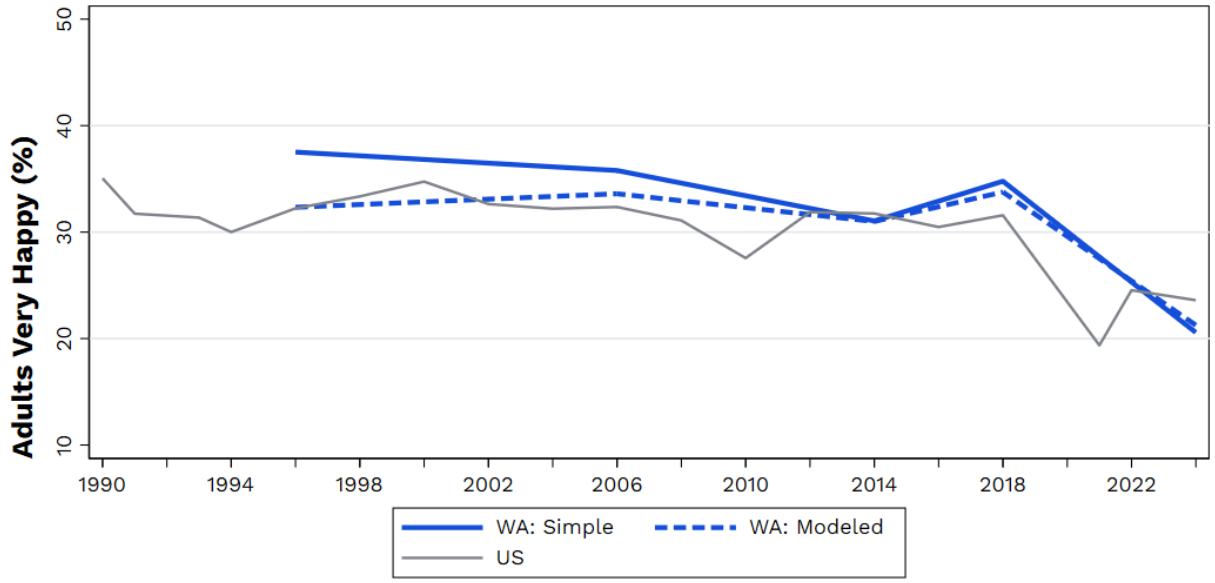
State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
28		

Why did we include this measure? Perhaps more than any other measure, this one tells us how Americans feel about their own current state of affairs. This measure is about how we feel about our own lives.

We included this measure despite the fact that only 34 states have the measure available. To address this, we "inflated" the rank so that the lowest ranked state (34) is ranked 51.

We report this in two ways. The "simple" method is a weighted average of the individual survey responses where the weights reflect the survey design. The "modeled" method also uses statistical patterns that arise across subgroups and states to adjust each state's estimate. This second method is motivated by small sample sizes on this measure in some states.

Figure 16: Satisfaction with Current Life Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in satisfaction with our current lives has been worsening more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as negative. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 28 (out of 51). In the same year, South Dakota ranked first, and Arizona ranked last.

Additional Information. Current life satisfaction has been gradually declining. Some possible explanations include the 2008 Great Recession, the rise of smartphones and social media, rising negativity in the broader media and political environment, and increasing social isolation. The precise causes are still being explored by researchers.

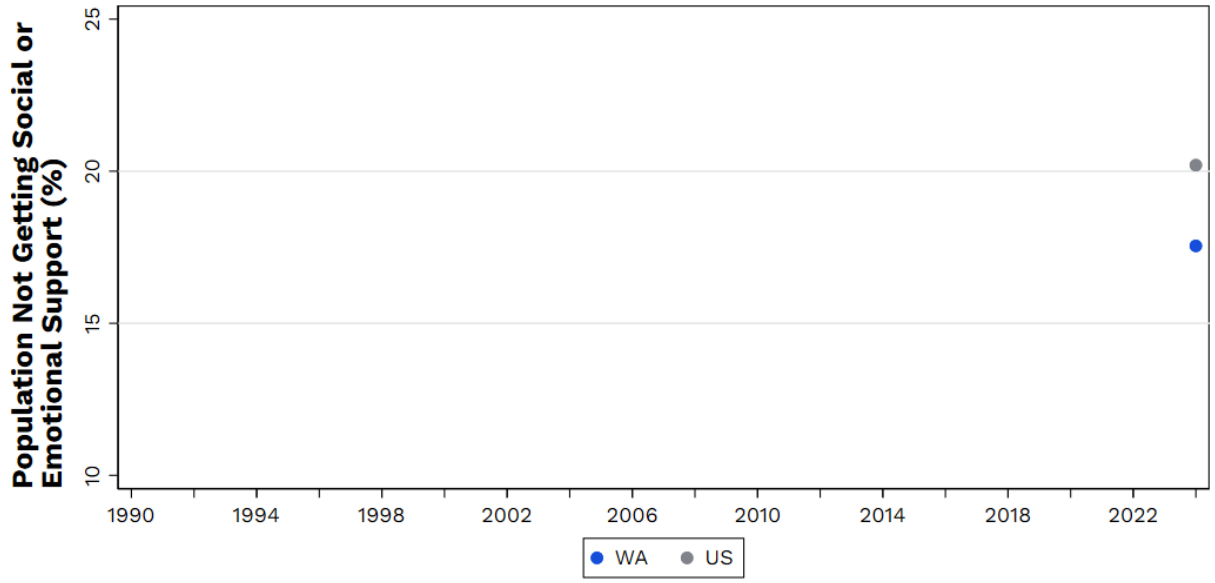
Social Isolation

Specific measure: Percentage of adults who are not getting social and emotional support they need sometimes, usually, or always. (Source: Authors' analysis of Census Bureau data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
13	*	*

Why did we include this measure? Humans are naturally social. Our sense of happiness, purpose, and security depends heavily on our friends and family members. When life gets difficult, we need people we can count on to lift us back up.

Figure 17: Social Isolation Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Unfortunately, Washington's trend in social isolation does not have enough data points to compare it to the rest of the country. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 13 (out of 51). In the same year, Washington DC ranked first, and Nevada ranked last.

Additional Information. Current life satisfaction and social isolation may be partially intertwined: people may be less satisfied with their current lives because they are more socially isolated, and they are more isolated because they have a more negative outlook that pushes them away from friends and family. The increased pressure we place on ourselves to excel in life could explain both patterns: raising expectations about some areas of our lives and leading us to put less effort into our relationships.

Related Topics. Life satisfaction is related to all the other subjective measures, including youth depression (see Children and Families), trust in people generally (see Social Capital),

and all of the trust-in-institution measures (see Trust). Finally, social isolation is a widely accepted cause of suicide (see the Mental Health section).

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Mental Health

Introduction. Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It is more than just happiness. It reflects how we think and feel, manage stress, relate to others, and make decisions. Mental health is essential for human thriving and has rightfully received much more attention in recent years.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been negative. In Washington, depression, fatal overdoses, and suicide are worsening.

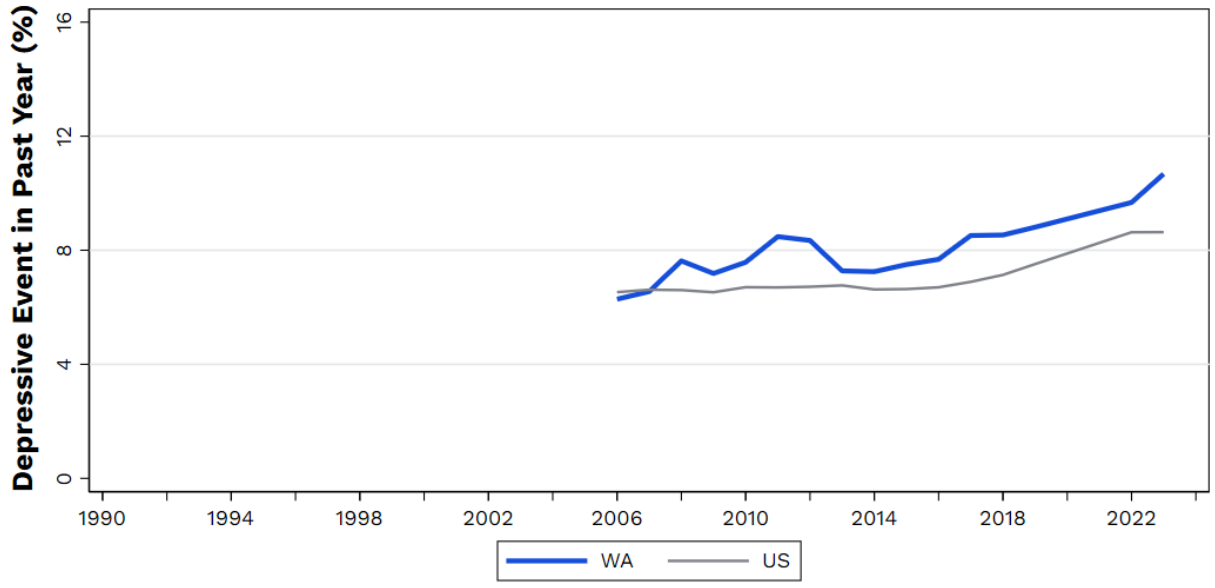
Depression

Specific measure: Percentage of adults over age 18 who reported experiencing a Major Depressive Episode (MDE) in the past year. (Source: Authors' analysis of National Survey on Drug Use and Health data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
47		

Why did we include this measure? We chose this measure because depression is a common debilitating mental illness. It can also affect physical health and contribute to the risk of addiction.

Figure 18: Depression Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in depression has been worsening more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as negative. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 47 (out of 51). In the same year, Hawaii ranked first, and West Virginia ranked last.

Additional Information. These patterns may reflect increased national reporting of depression and increased public awareness of mental health, but there is general consensus that people nationally are more depressed than they used to be. The next two measures (suicides and fatal overdoses), which are based on actual behavior rather than self-reports, also suggest a national decline in mental health. We consider other explanations of this decline below and discuss common patterns we see with our other mental health measures.

Fatal Overdoses

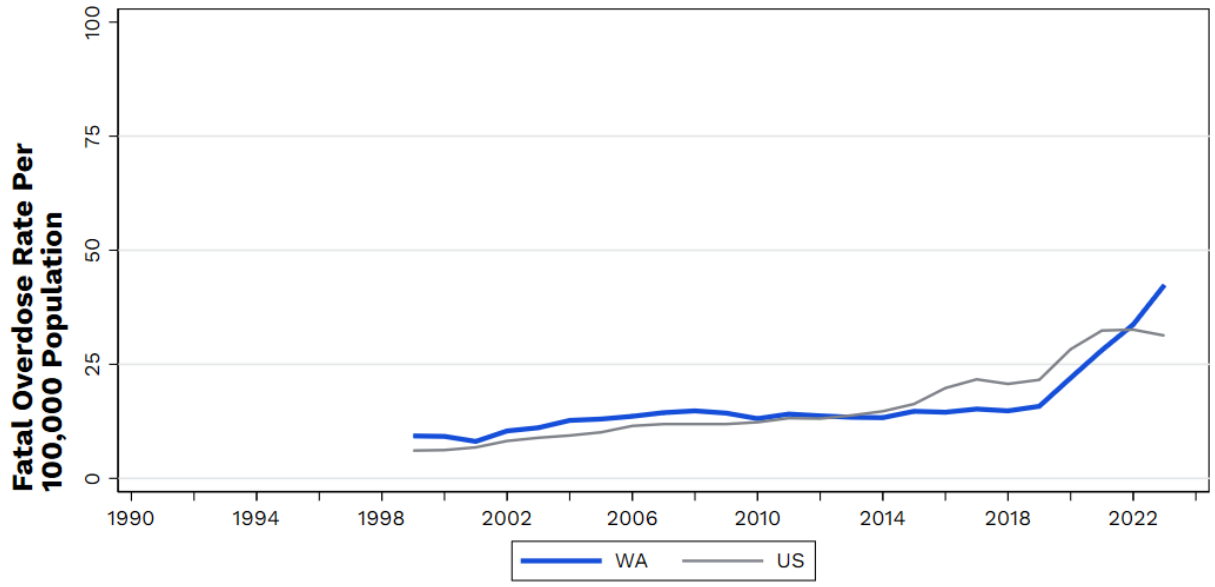
Specific measure: Deaths per 100,000 population from drug overdoses, age-adjusted. (Source: Authors' analysis of Centers for Disease Control data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
42		

Why did we include this measure? Fatal overdoses are a concern not only because of the direct loss of life but also because the use of powerful drugs reflects a broader problem with addiction. Most people who use these drugs do not die from them but do get addicted and this can physically change how their brains and bodies work in ways that make it difficult to stop using them. The fact that so many are using such high-risk drugs reflects a broader mental health crisis.

The most common drugs leading to overdose are opioids (including fentanyl, oxycodone, and heroin), stimulants (including cocaine and methamphetamines, commonly called "meth"), and sedatives (including Xanax and Valium). We focus on fatal overdoses because these reflect more extreme drug use and because they are measured more accurately than nonfatal overdoses. (When overdoses are judged to be intentional, they are also counted as suicides, which we discuss separately below.)

Figure 19: Fatal Overdoses Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in fatal overdoses has been worsening more than the US, it increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 42 (out of 51). In the same year, Nebraska ranked first, and West Virginia ranked last.

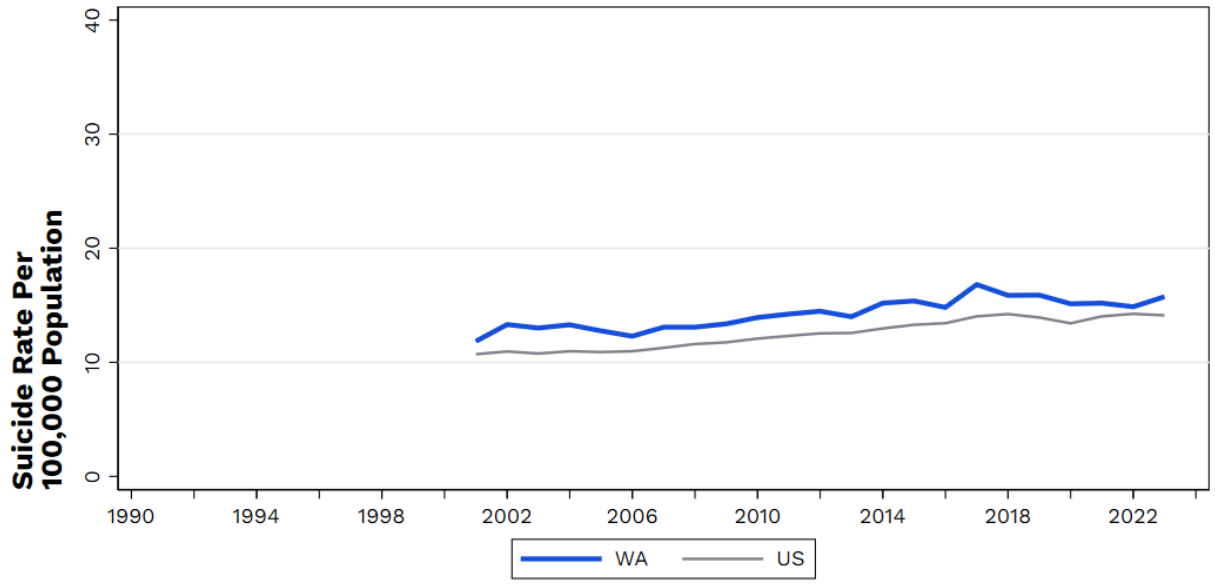
Additional Information. The primary cause of the national rise in fatal overdoses appears to be increased supply and use of powerful drugs. This is partially driven by the increased availability of drugs and drug combinations that produce stronger effects and pose greater risks. Drugs like fentanyl are becoming more accessible and are far more potent than heroin and morphine, for example. The illicit production of such drugs also means that users often do not know what they are consuming. Illicit drugs are often mixed with cheaper and more dangerous drugs that users are not aware of. The rise in overdoses may also be related to the national declining mental health shown in other measures in this section.

Suicide Rate

Specific measure: Suicide rate per 100,000 population, age-adjusted. (Source: Authors' analysis of Centers for Disease Control data.)	State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
	28		

Why did we include this measure? Suicide is arguably the most extreme indicator of mental illness. Suicide is also consistently and accurately measured over time.

Figure 20: Suicide Rate Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in suicide has been worsening more than the US, it did not change in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 28 (out of 51). In the same year, Washington DC ranked first, and Alaska ranked last.

Additional Information. The high US suicide rate can be explained in part by the broad availability of guns, which are, by far, the most common means of suicide. Our suicide rate is also likely rising over time because of a decline in mental health and a rise in isolation and distress reflected in the other measures. The causes of mental illness are many and complex, but some potential reasons include social media, social isolation, economic disparity, and increased access to addictive substances and behaviors.

Related Topics. The most similar measure is youth depression (see the Children and Families section), which is also worsening nationally. Mental health is also related to current life satisfaction and social isolation (see the Life Satisfaction section). Declines in mental health

are also associated with declining trust in other people and institutions (see the Social Capital and Trust sections).

Other Measures Considered. The board also agreed on a measure of anxiety. However, we were not able to find reliable, state-level data.

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Physical Health

Introduction. The importance of our physical health may seem self-evident. We value living long and prosperous lives. We also cannot achieve our potential if we are sick or unsafe. Physical health is also intricately connected to mental health and other measures of psychological well-being.

Summary of Results for Washington. This is one of the few topics that has only a single measure: life expectancy. Washington's progress in this area has been positive.

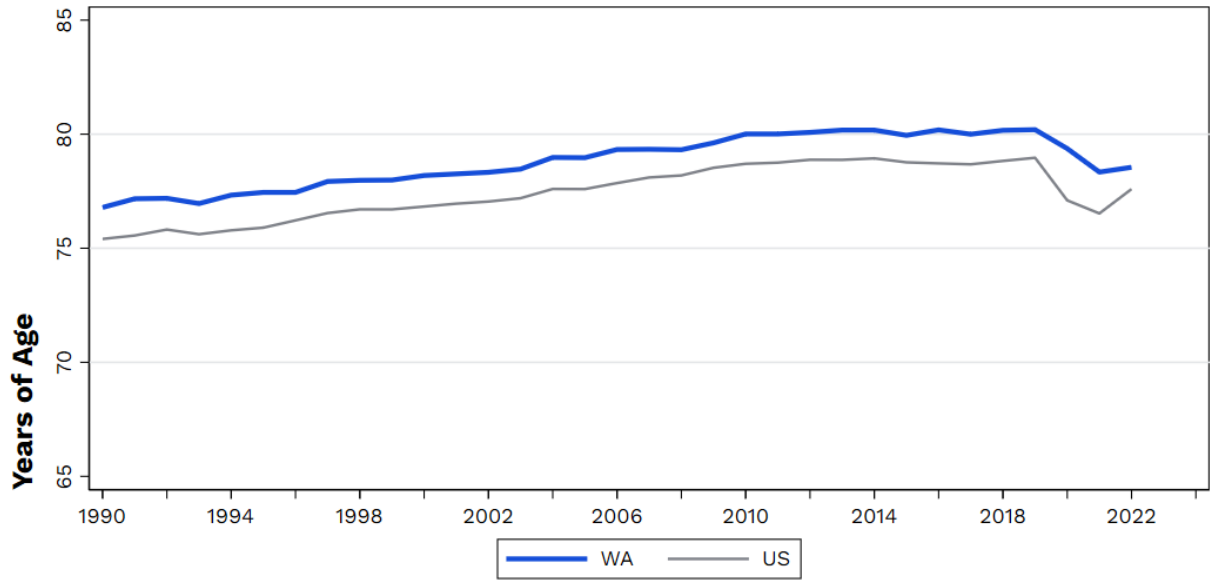
Life Expectancy

Specific measure: The number of years today's newborn children would live if subject to the mortality risks prevailing for the US population. (Source: Authors' analysis of US State Life Tables 1941-2022 from the Harvard Dataverse.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
12		

Why did we include this measure? Life expectancy is a common and intuitive measure of how well we succeed in living long and healthy lives. When people die young, it reflects unhealthy habits, availability and quality of health care, and external threats to safety, such as violence. (We note that life expectancy is not simply the average age at which people are currently dying, which, for older Americans, is partially based on factors that occurred in the distant past. Life expectancy tells us how long we can expect today's newborns to live based on the risks that the rest of the population faces now.)

Figure 21: Life Expectancy Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in life expectancy has been improving less than the US, it increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 12 (out of 51). In the same year, Hawaii ranked first, and West Virginia ranked last.

Additional Information. The main immediate causes behind the pre-COVID national decline in life expectancy were increased drug overdoses and alcohol-related deaths among young people and the middle-aged, especially men. During COVID, the US also had an unusually high

"excess mortality" rate, which reflects both the direct and indirect effects on mortality from COVID.

Related Topics. Life expectancy is partly rooted in our experiences when we are growing up, such as low birthweight (see the Children and Families section) and poverty (see the Inequality section). Another cause of lower life expectancy is social isolation (see the Life Satisfaction section).

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Social Capital

Introduction. Social capital refers to the strength and usefulness of our relationships with other people, including family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and institutions (such as schools, religious organizations, and civic organizations). Our sense of connectedness and the degree to which we cooperate with others, hold shared values and purposes, and trust one another are all part of social capital. While we often see and respect people as individuals, almost everything we do is accomplished through groups and therefore depends on our social relations. Throughout our history, Americans have been recognized for our active participation in civic groups and public affairs—from town hall meetings to marches—and volunteering for our favored causes.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been mixed. Volunteerism is remaining relatively stable. Trust in other people is showing mixed trends over time.

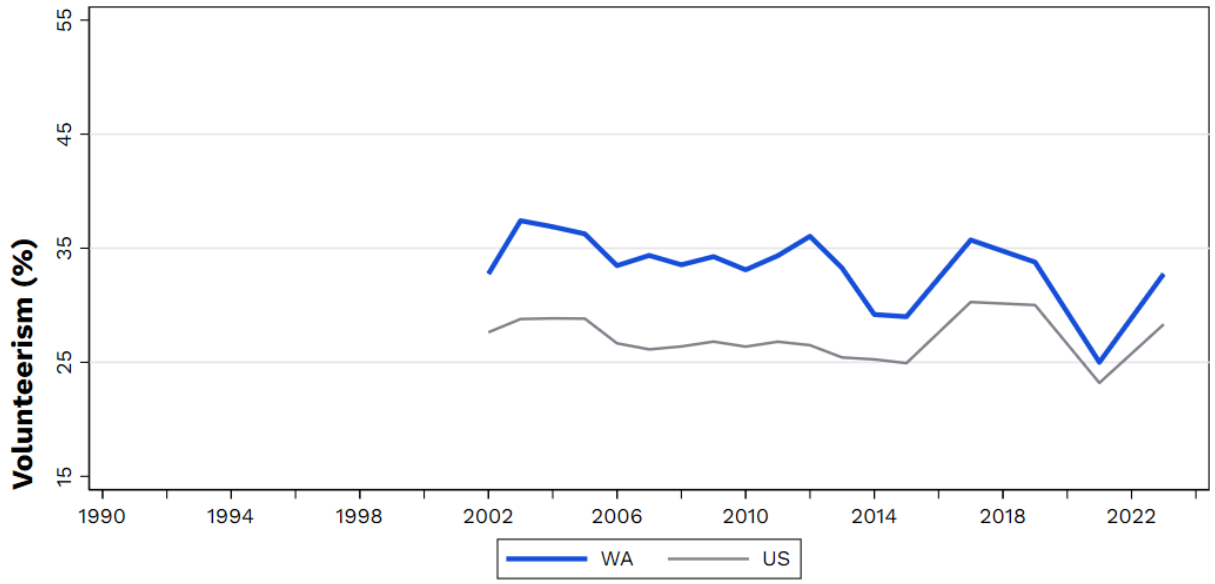
Volunteerism

Specific measure: Percentage of the population (age 16 and over) who have volunteered through an organization in the past year. (Source: Authors' analysis of Census Bureau data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
21		

Why did we include this measure? Civic and nonprofit groups play an important role in American society and often depend on volunteers to carry out their work. Our willingness to volunteer is also a sign of our sense of shared purpose and interest in contributing to our communities.

Figure 22: Volunteerism Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in volunteerism has been worsening more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as negative. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 21 (out of 51). In the same year, Utah ranked first, and Rhode Island ranked last.

Additional Information. It is unclear why national volunteerism increased so quickly in 2017, but the fact that this occurred over two consecutive years and remained there until COVID suggests that it is probably not a data issue. We do not view the brief decline and rebound around the COVID pandemic as reflecting meaningful instability because social distancing rules precluded many forms of in-person activity, including some volunteer work. One reason that national volunteerism may be stable over the long run is that declines in volunteer work among middle-aged adults is being offset by the growing share of retirees and greater encouragement for high school and college students to volunteer.

Trust in Other People

Specific measure: Percentage of adults who report that other people can generally be trusted. (Source: Authors' analysis of the General Social Survey (GSS) data and IPUMS-harmonized ACS/CPS microdata.)

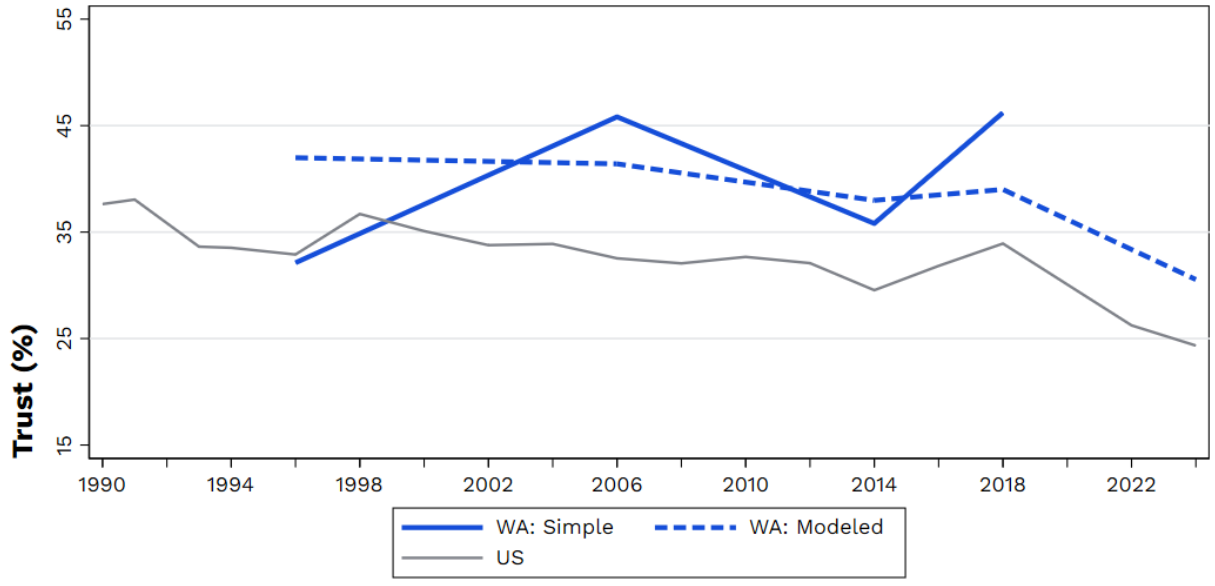
State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
7	↕	●

Why did we include this measure? We cannot have positive relations with each other, or in society as a whole, if we do not trust each other. This requires believing that others are generally honest, try to do the right thing, and do not take advantage of us. (We also include measures of trust in institutions elsewhere in the project.)

We included this measure despite the fact that only 27 states have the measure available. To address this, we "inflated" the rank so that the lowest ranked state (27) is ranked 51.

We report this in two ways. The "simple" method is a weighted average of the individual survey responses where the weights reflect the survey design. The "modeled" method also uses statistical patterns that arise across subgroups and states to adjust each state's estimate. This second method is motivated by small sample sizes on this measure in some states.

Figure 23: Trust in Other People Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in trust in other people has been worsening more than the US, it did not change in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 7 (out of 51). In the same year, Wisconsin ranked first, and Mississippi ranked last.

Additional Information. Decline in national trust may reflect a combination of increased social isolation, cynicism about our collective ability to solve persistent social problems, social and mass media that emphasize negative messages about people's actions, and the increasingly impersonal nature of key institutions. We also note that trust is among the many subjective measures, based on surveys of Americans, that show a steady national decline.

Related Topics. Our "trust in other people" measure is related to social isolation (see the Life Satisfaction section), depression (see the Mental Health section), and a long list of trust measures—mostly focused on trust in institutions, rather than individuals—that can be found in the Trust section.

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Trust

Introduction. Trust in institutions reflects the degree to which we believe groups such as governments and universities are serving the state—how honest and reliable they are and how they are serving the state's and nation's interests. These institutions are responsible for important aspects of our success, and our trust in them is also likely necessary if we are going to make lasting improvements in the measures listed elsewhere in this report.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been mixed. Trust in science is improving over time. Trust in the federal government is worsening over time.

Trust in Federal Government

Specific measure: Percentage of the population with a great deal or some confidence in the executive branch and Congress. (Source: Authors' analysis of the General Social Survey (GSS) data and IPUMS-harmonized ACS/CPS microdata.)

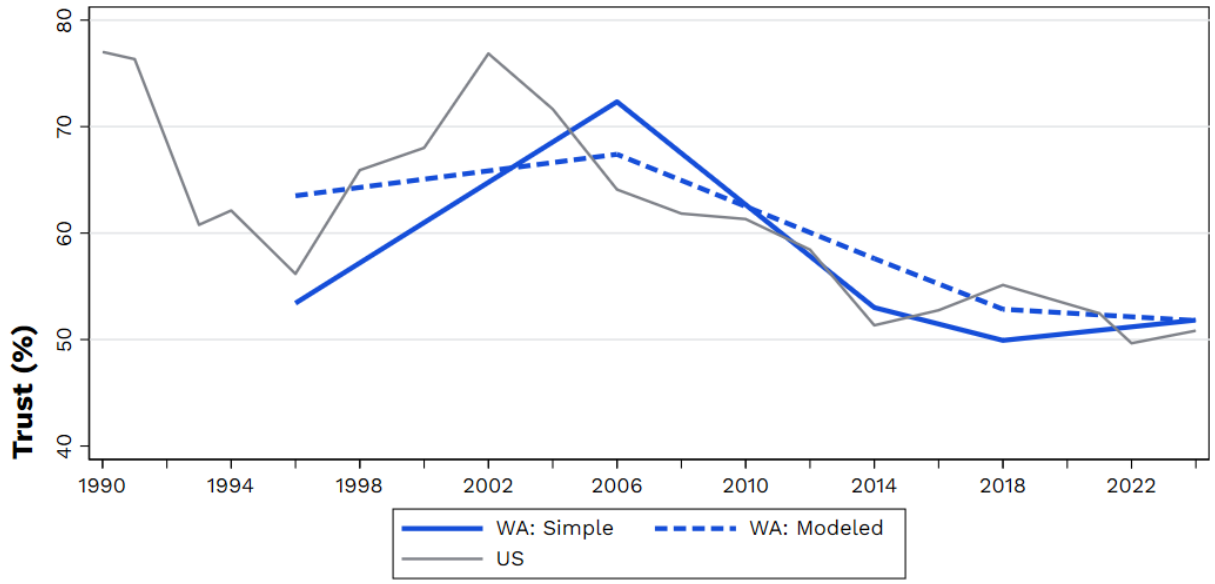
State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
14		

Why did we include this measure? The federal government has important responsibilities, including national defense, economic policy, immigration, environmental resource management, and social insurance and income support programs. The federal government also shapes the actions of state and local governments through laws and program subsidies and shapes interstate commerce through business regulation and transportation infrastructure.

We included this measure despite the fact that only 32 states have the measure available. To address this, we "inflated" the rank so that the lowest ranked state (32) is ranked 51.

We report this in two ways. The "simple" method is a weighted average of the individual survey responses where the weights reflect the survey design. The "modeled" method also uses statistical patterns that arise across subgroups and states to adjust each state's estimate. This second method is motivated by small sample sizes on this measure in some states.

Figure 24: Trust in Federal Government Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in trust in the federal government has been worsening more than the US, it increased in state

ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 14 (out of 51). In the same year, New Jersey ranked first, and Oklahoma ranked last.

Additional Information. The national trend shows a continuation of an old trend that began in the 1960s. When people perceive that things are not going well in the country, as many of the measures in this report suggest, the federal government, and especially the president, are often held responsible.

Trust in Science

Specific measure: Percentage of the population with a great deal of confidence in the scientific community. (Source: Authors' analysis of the General Social Survey (GSS) data and IPUMS-harmonized ACS/CPS microdata.)

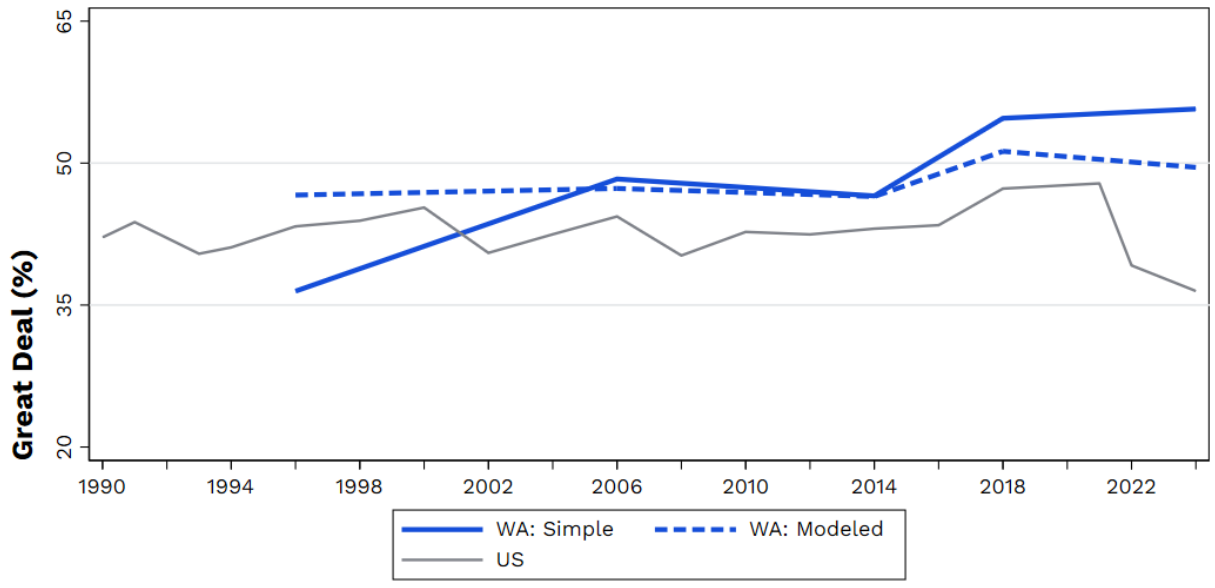
State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
6		

Why did we include this measure? Science plays an important role in our lives, including basic research that helps us understand our world and applied research that develops new technologies such as medicines, energy sources, transportation, communication, weapons systems, and space exploration, to name a few.

We included this measure despite the fact that only 30 states have the measure available. To address this, we "inflated" the rank so that the lowest ranked state (30) is ranked 51.

We report this in two ways. The "simple" method is a weighted average of the individual survey responses where the weights reflect the survey design. The "modeled" method also uses statistical patterns that arise across subgroups and states to adjust each state's estimate. This second method is motivated by small sample sizes on this measure in some states.

Figure 25: Trust in Science Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in trust in science has been improving while the US has been worsening, it did not change in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 6 (out of 51). In the same year, Massachusetts ranked first, and Mississippi ranked last.

Additional Information. The slight growth of national trust in science before the pandemic might reflect recognition of the new medicines and other discoveries emerging from the scientific community. The drop in trust in science during the COVID pandemic might be explained by the overall contentiousness of the pandemic and the unusually significant role of science in making decisions. The scientific community was asked to make judgements on social distancing and other health measures that involved science but also entailed difficult value judgments that are beyond the scientific domain. Specific concerns emerged about whether COVID originated from a lab leak (in China), poor and overconfident communication about COVID-related evidence, conflicting and shifting advice from the scientific community about how to respond to the pandemic, and political conflict over appropriate public health and social distancing measures being recommended by the public health community.

Related Topics. Trust in institutions may be related to a wide variety of perceptions people have about their own lives and the world around them. The Social Capital section discusses trust in other people. Trust in institutions might also be related to how people feel about their lives (see Life Satisfaction and Mental Health sections).

Other Measures Considered. The board also agreed on several other measures: trust in local government, trust in the police, trust in the criminal justice system, and trust in colleges and universities. However, we were not able to find reliable, state-level data for these measures.

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Violence

Introduction. Safety from physical violence, along with food, water, and shelter, is among the most basic human needs. Violence resulting in death not only indicates a direct loss of life but instills fear in others who see themselves as facing increased risks in their daily lives. That fear, in turn, can lead people to avoid interactions with others and prevent people from reaching their full potential.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been mixed. The murder rate is improving over time. The shootings rate is showing mixed trends over time.

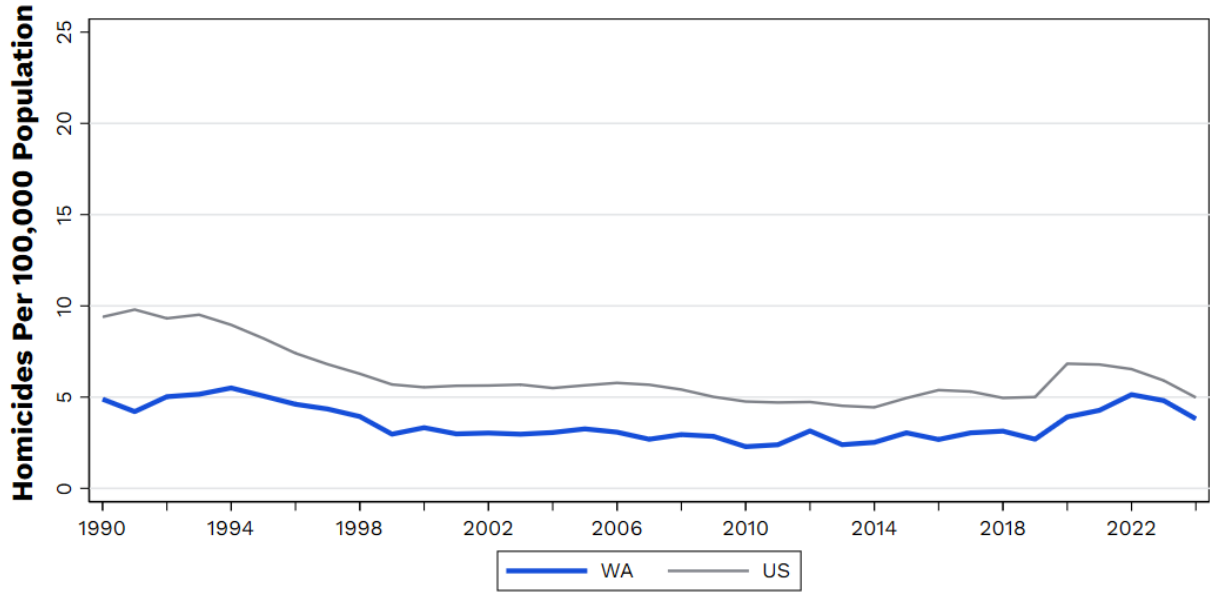
Murder Rate

Specific measure: Rate of murder and other unlawful, but intentional, killings per 100,000 population. (Source: Authors' analysis of Federal Bureau of Investigation data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
19		

Why did we include this measure? Murder is the most severe form of violence. It is also the one most accurately measured.

Figure 26: Murder Rate Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Although Washington's trend in the murder rate has been improving less than the US, it did not change in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as neutral or stable. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 19 (out of 51). In the same year, New Hampshire ranked first, and Washington DC ranked last.

Additional Information. Almost all murders are committed with guns. The Constitution's Second Amendment provides the right to bear arms and, as a result, the country has more guns than people. Because almost all murders are committed with guns, and there are essentially no alternative weapons that are as lethal, this is one viable explanation for our high national murder rate.

Cycles of high murder rates are also partly driven by demographics, especially the number of men in the population between the ages of 20 and 34. The decline in the national murder rate from 1990 to 1999 coincided with a decline in the percent of the population who are men in that age range. The decline in the crack epidemic in the late 1990s and stricter sentencing and

mass incarceration were also likely causes. The increased number of police officers might have been a factor in the 1990s, though the number of officers has subsequently declined to near their prior levels even as the murder rate has remained much lower than the 1990s.

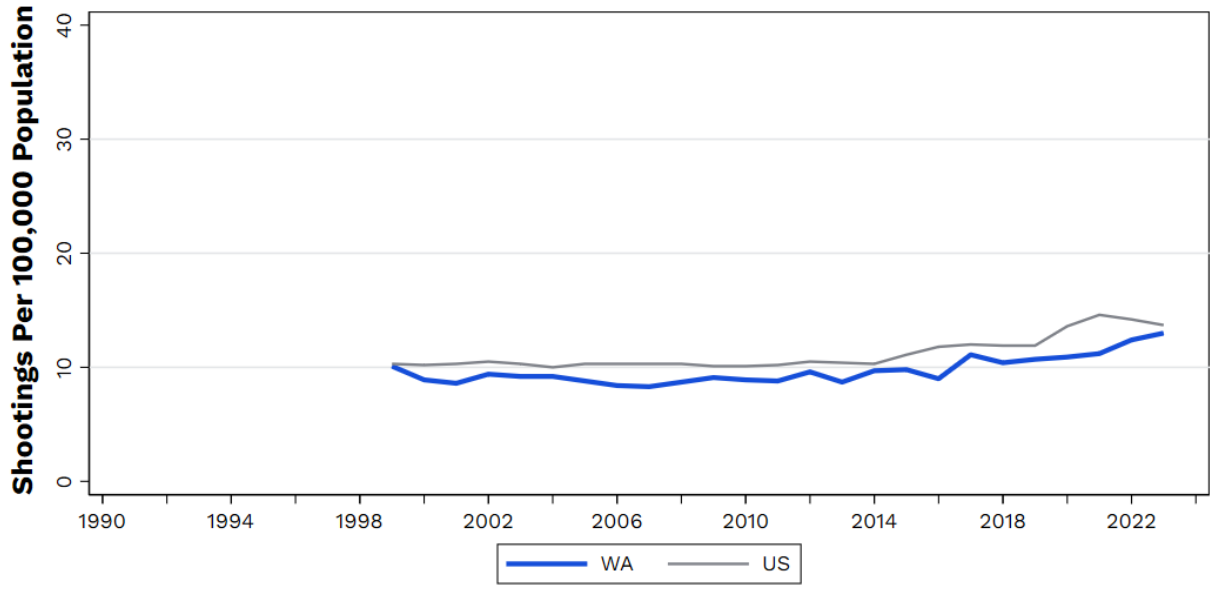
Shootings

Specific measure: Rate of fatal shootings per 100,000 population. This includes murders and suicides, as well as officer-involved, accidental, and mass shootings, and many other types. (Source: Authors' analysis of Centers for Disease Control data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
18	↕	●

Why did we include this measure? All uses of guns create physical injury, trauma, and/or fear.

Figure 27: Shootings Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in the shootings rate has been worsening less than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as positive. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 18 (out of 51). In the same year, Massachusetts ranked first, and Washington DC ranked last.

Additional Information. Given the close connection between the murder rate and gun violence, see the explanations above for the murder rate.

Related Topics. Homicides, the vast majority of which involve shootings, affect Life Expectancy and are also one of the leading causes of child mortality (see Children and Families).

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.

Washington

Work & Labor Force

Introduction. Paid work is one of the important activities in our lives. Most directly, work yields the income we need to provide for ourselves and our families. Our employment also partially defines who we are and can be a source of dignity, respect, and fulfillment. It is one of the main ways in which we interact with people outside our families and make contributions to society as a whole. Working-age adults spend more of their lives working than in any activity other than sleep.

Summary of Results for Washington. Washington's progress in this area has been negative. The employment-to-population ratio, the labor force participation rate, and the long-term unemployment rate are worsening. Hourly earnings growth is showing mixed trends over time.

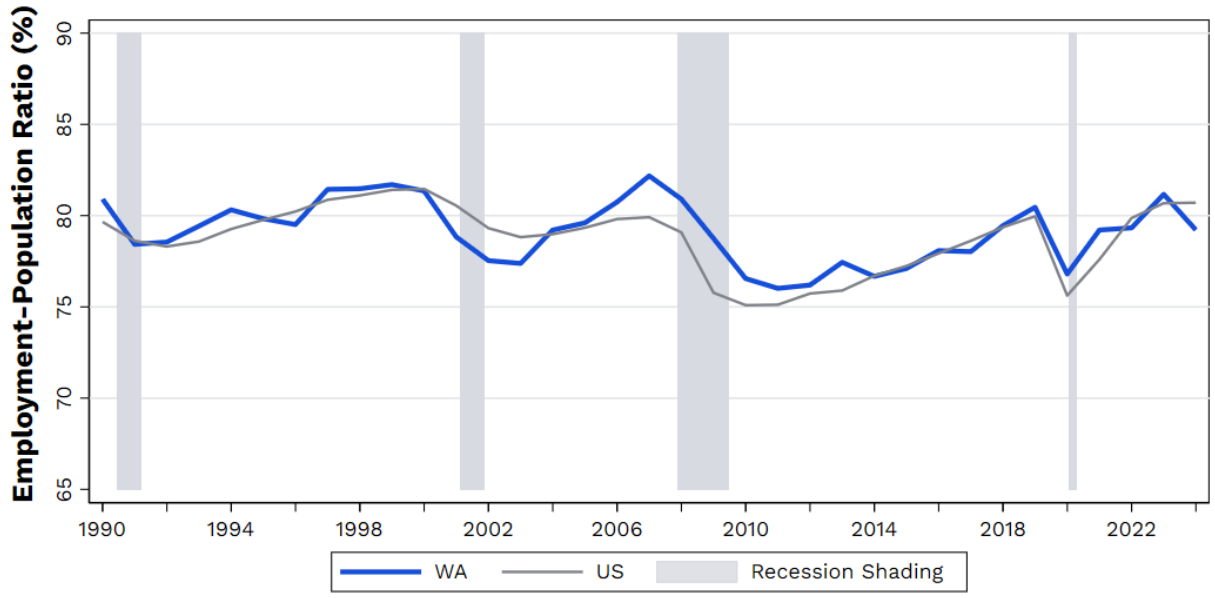
Employment-to-Population Ratio (EPOP)

Specific measure: Percentage of the population age 25-54 ("prime age adults") who are employed. (Source: Authors' analysis of Economic Policy Institute data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
37		

Why did we include this measure? The employment-to-population ratio measures the extent to which this age group is working for pay. Those not employed include those who are not in the labor force (for example, because they are raising children at home, are full-time students, or have a disability) and those who are seeking work but cannot find an acceptable job. While there are often good reasons not to be working, this measure is useful because it reflects all the possible reasons that people might not work. With this and the other work measures below, we focus specifically on those age 25–54 to avoid including young adults who are not working because they are in college and older adults who are not working because they are retired. (The term "prime age" refers to the idea that these are ages when we are most likely to be in the labor force.)

Figure 28: Employment-to-Population Ratio Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in the employment-to-population ratio has been worsening while the US has been improving. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as negative. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 37 (out of 51). In the same year, South Dakota ranked first, and Louisiana ranked last.

Additional Information. The national trend has varied across several key periods. The ratio was increasing from 1990 until its peak around 2000, then declined some, and saw a sharp decline with the 2008 Great Recession. It then took more than a decade for the figure to revert back to the pre-2008 level, but then came the COVID-19 pandemic. More generally, employment is strongly related to the business cycle.

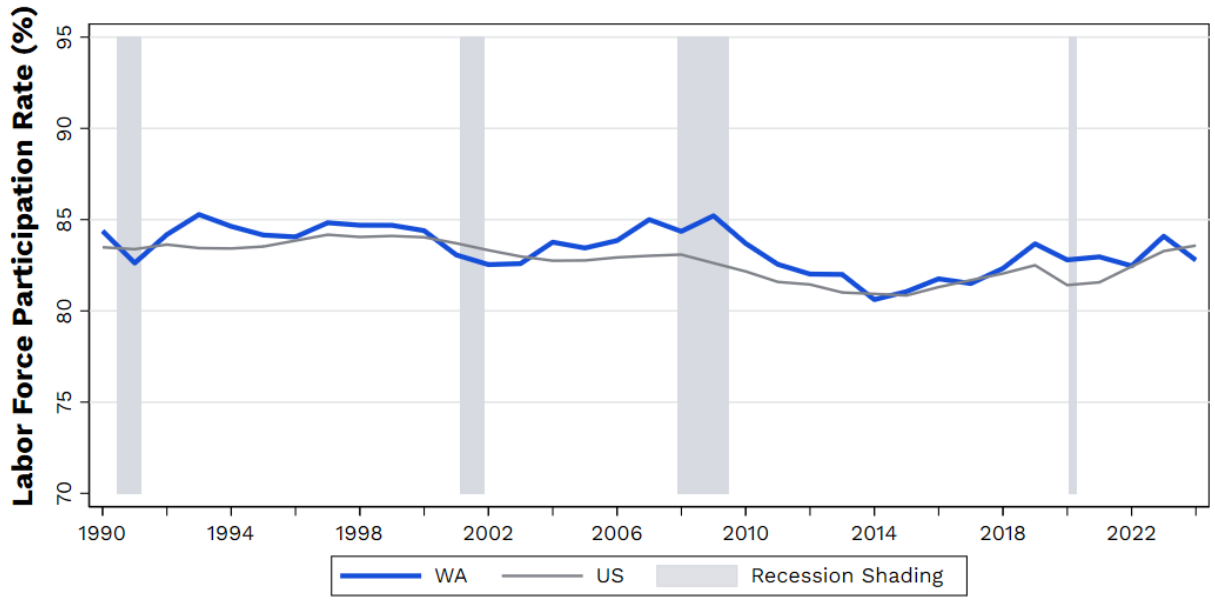
Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR)

Specific measure: Percentage of the population age 25-54 ("prime age adults"), employed or unemployed and actively looking for work. (Source: Authors' analysis of Economic Policy Institute data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
36		

Why did we include this measure? The labor force participation rate allows us to better understand whether changes in the employment-to-population ratio are due to changes in the likelihood that people are actively working or seeking work.

Figure 29: Labor Force Participation Rate Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in the labor force participation rate has been worsening while the US has been improving. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as negative. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 36 (out of 51). In the same year, Washington DC ranked first, and Louisiana ranked last.

Additional Information. Labor force participation reflects some combination of interest, ability, and opportunities in work, as well as rising incomes, which increase demand for leisure. While women have seen increased or stable labor force participation, this has been offset by a decline for men. One likely reason is the decline in manufacturing jobs, which, since the mid-20th-century expansion of unionization, have been higher-paying jobs than the alternatives available to these workers. Once a person loses one of these jobs, it is generally difficult to find another of similar quality. Another reason may be that adults are getting married and

having children less often and later in life and men have traditionally been the primary breadwinners. This means men now spend fewer of their prime working years being financially responsible for their families.

Nationally, more adults—again, especially men—are not working and are also receiving income from disability insurance. This is happening even while work itself has been much safer and more accommodating to some disabilities. Declining mental and physical health and rising drug use may be part of the explanation.

For women, employment has generally been increasing or remaining steady at the national level. This reflects the decline in birth rates combined with changing social norms about women's role in the labor force and declining occupational segregation by gender, which has increased women's job opportunities. The rise in single-parent households (and unmarried adults generally), combined with the fact that women are typically the main caretakers of children, means that women now have a greater need to work outside the home than in the past.

The national trend in labor force participation also tells us that the decline in the employment-to-population ratio we saw earlier is not due, for example, to an increase in the number of people who are seeking work but cannot find it. (This is further reinforced below in our discussion of the long-term unemployment rate.)

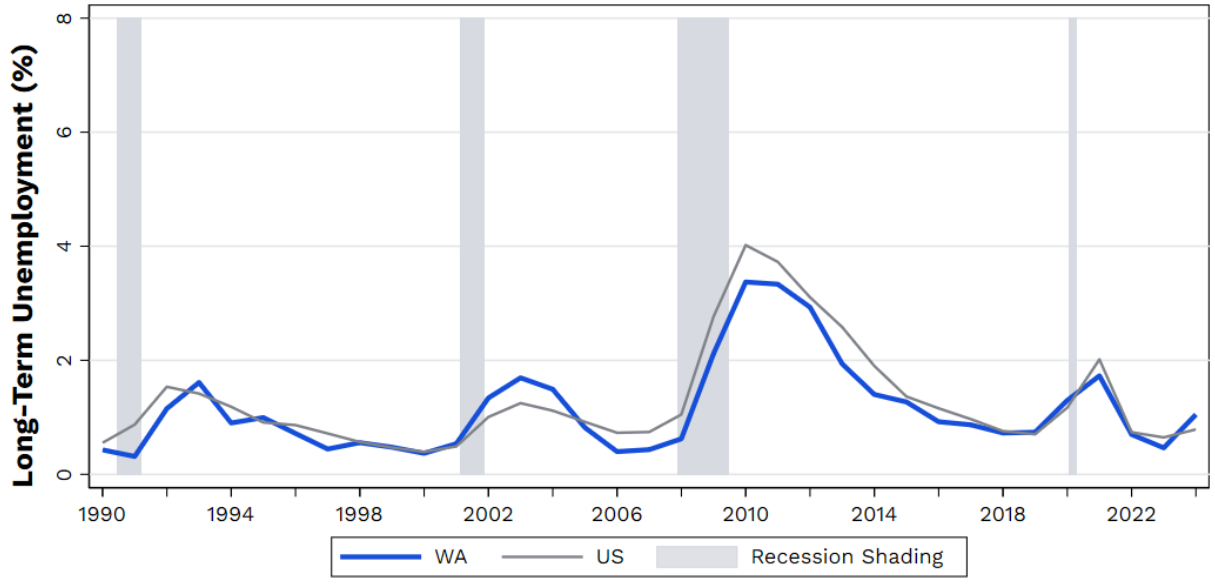
Long-Term Unemployment Rate

Specific measure: Percentage of the labor force age 25-54 ("prime age adults") unemployed for six months or more. (Source: Authors' analysis of Economic Policy Institute data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
46		

Why did we include this measure? Short-term unemployment mostly reflects the business cycle, layoffs, and people deciding they are not satisfied with their current jobs. Some degree of unemployment is natural and healthy as it allows both employers and employees to search for better matches between skills and job requirements. However, unemployment becomes a larger problem when people are out of the labor force for long periods of time. The longer workers are out of work, the harder it is to find a job and reengage in gainful employment.

Figure 30: Long-Term Unemployment Rate Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in the long-term unemployment rate has been worsening more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also decreased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as negative. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 46 (out of 51). In the same year, Montana ranked first, and Nevada ranked last.

Additional Information. Our national long-term unemployment is relatively low by global standards perhaps in part because we have less generous unemployment insurance than other countries on average. These insurance policies are set at the state level, which might also partially explain cross-state variation in long-term unemployment because unemployment insurance is primarily a state matter. Of course, long-term unemployment is

also driven by the overall strength of the economy and job creation, which also vary across the country.

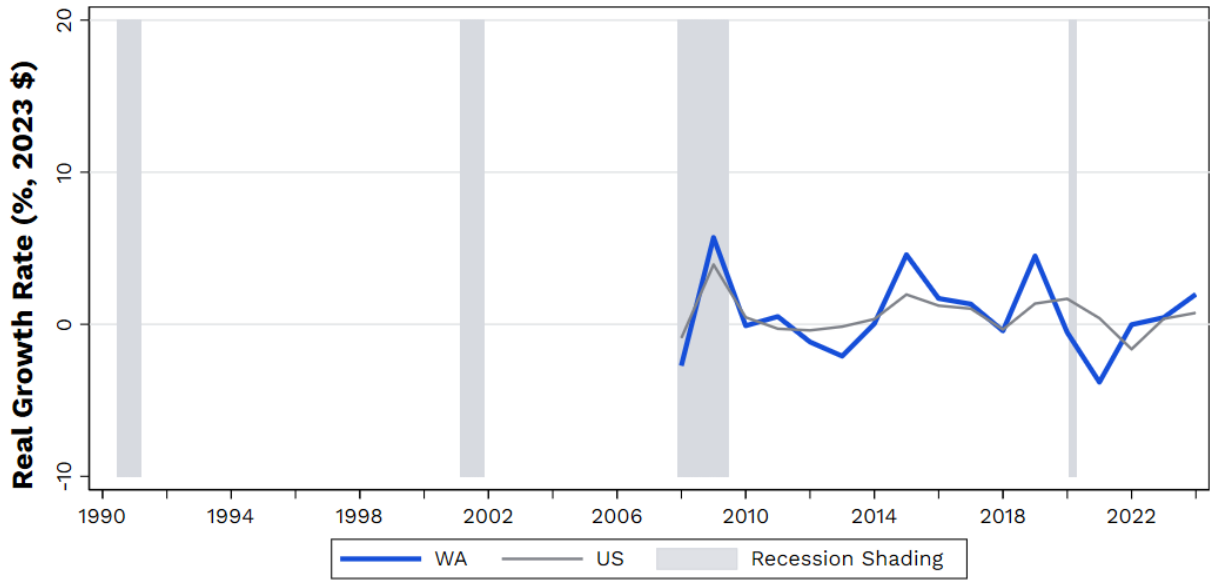
Hourly Earnings Growth

Specific measure: Year-over-year growth rate of real average hourly earnings among those working, based on 2023 US dollars, private sector only. (Source: Authors' analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data.)

State Rank	State Trend	State vs. US Trend
11	↕	●

Why did we include this measure? Inflation-adjusted wages capture the ability of Americans to provide for their own needs and are a measure of work productivity. This is the largest single source of income overall and, for working age adults, usually the sole source of income.

Figure 31: Hourly Earnings Growth Trend



How does Washington compare to the rest of the country? Washington's trend in hourly earnings growth has been improving more than the US. Compared to other states, Washington has also increased in state ranking by two or more places. Therefore, we categorize Washington's comparison to the US as positive. In the most recent year, Washington ranked 11 (out of 51). In the same year, South Dakota ranked first, and Louisiana ranked last.

Additional Information. Real wage growth is related to productivity growth. When productivity rises, employers can pay workers more. However, they do not move completely in tandem. National productivity has been increasing somewhat faster than real wages (see the Economy section). This reflects the rapid growth of executive pay, which falls outside the wage definition, relative to the wages of the average worker.

Related Topics. The above discussion connects our measures of work and labor to many other topics covered in this report. We discuss the connection between wages and productivity and how GDP is heavily dependent on the size of the labor force in the Economy section. We also

note how delay and decline in marriage is related to workforce participation (see the discussion of the percentage of children growing up with a single parent in the Children and Families section). Finally, we discuss why wage growth and productivity measures might be higher than our education levels (see the Education section).

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.