

How Texas Ranks

August 26, 2024



Top Line

1. After years of Republican control of the Texas Legislature and Governor’s office, it is a good time to step back and see how Texas stacks up compared to other states.
2. This background paper looks at several metrics of relative performance in the major policy areas that voters care about. This review demonstrates that Republican policies have been detrimental to our state and our citizens.
3. Summary rankings are shown in the table below, and sources and additional metrics for each area are provided on the following pages.

Policy Area	Primary Metric	Texas Rank (1 is best, 50 is worst)
1. An Economy that works for everyone	Percent in Poverty	40
2. A healthy and sustainable Environment	Natural Environment (Air, water and pollution)	45
3. Access to Health Care	Percent without Health Insurance	50
4. Quality Education	National Assessment Scores (NAEP)	About Average
5. Secure Voting Rights	Ease of Voting	46
6. Safe Communities	Violent Crime per 100,000 people	40
Average Ranking		41

Texas is near the bottom in all but one of these critical areas. Averaged across these areas, Texas is in the bottom 10. And in most cases, that poor performance can be traced directly to Republican policies, which are not working for most Texans.

It is clearly time for a change in Texas. To improve the lives of Texans, we need to elect leaders who will reverse the harmful policies of the GOP, and instead prioritize building an economy that works for everyone, investing in healthcare and education, preserving our environment, protecting the right to vote, and making our communities safer.

Backup

The sections below provide sources for the primary metrics, and additional metrics related to these areas.

1. An Economy that works for everyone.

- a. **Percent in Poverty** - As of 2022, 14% of Texans lived below the poverty threshold. This is significantly above the us average of 12.6%, and Texas ranks 40th among the 50 states. Nearly all of the states with worse poverty rates than Texas are also red states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana and Oklahoma. (Source – US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2023/acs/acsbr-016.pdf>)
- b. **Percent of Children in Poverty** – As of 2024, one in five children under age 18 are living in poverty in Texas. The Texas rate is 20.5% relative to a US average of 17.5%. Only 12 states have a higher Child Poverty rate than Texas. (Source - World Population Review - <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/child-poverty-rate-by-state>)
- c. **Rural Poverty** – Poverty in rural parts of Texas significantly exceeds that of urban areas – 17.3% in rural areas compared to 13.9% in urban areas. (Source - Rural Health Information Hub - <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/texas#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20USDA%20Economic,urban%20areas%20of%20the%20state.>)
- d. **Median Household Income** – Consistent with higher poverty rates, overall median household incomes were lower in 2022 than the US average - \$72,284 vs. \$74,755. (Source – US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2023/acs/acsbr-017.pdf>)
- e. **Unemployment Rate** – The Texas unemployment rate tends to exceed the US average. As of July 2024, unemployment was 4.1% in Texas compared to 3.5% in the US overall. Texas has the 15th highest unemployment rate among the states.

(Source – US Bureau of Labor Statistics -
<https://www.bls.gov/web/laus/laumstrk.htm>)

2. A Healthy and Sustainable Environment

According to US News and World Report’s latest ranking, Texas ranks 45th. We rank 40th in Air and Water quality, and 43rd in levels of pollution. (Source – US News and World Report, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/natural-environment>)

3. Access to Health Care

- a. **Percent of Texans without Health Insurance** – Texas has by far the highest percentage of uninsured people of any state. The uninsured rate in Texas as of 2022 was 16.6%, more than double the US average of 8.0%. (Source – US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/percentage-without-health-insurance-coverage-by-state-2021-2022.html>).
- b. **Percent of Children without Health Insurance** – Again, Texas is dead last among the states. As of 2021, 12% of Texans aged 0 – 18 did not have health insurance, compared to just 5% for the US overall. (Source - Commonwealth Fund - https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Radley_2023_State_Scorecard_APPENDICES.pdf#page=8)
- c. **Health System Performance** – the Commonwealth Fund ranks the Texas health care system 48th among the states as of 2023. We are 49th in Reproductive Healthcare (only Mississippi is worse) and 50th in Health Care Access and Affordability. (Source - Commonwealth Fund - <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/scorecard/2023/jun/2023-scorecard-state-health-system-performance>)

The refusal of the GOP-led Texas Legislature to expand Medicaid access is preventing hundreds of thousands of Texans from accessing health insurance and is hurting our economy, especially in rural areas. Our paper on Medicaid Expansion is [here](#).

4. Quality Education

a. **Educational Performance** – based on standardized tests conducted nation wide by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP),

- Texas is about average relative to the US in the subjects for which recent data is available (Math and Reading) in 4th and 8th grades, the two grade levels with recent data.
- Scores in Texas have fallen significantly in the past 10 years, in both subjects and in both grade levels.

These results are summarized in the table below.

b. **Spending on education** – Based on the most recent data available, Texas spends \$14,260 per K – 12 student. This is below the US average of \$17,280 and ranks 36th among the states. (Source – Education Data Initiative - <https://educationdata.org/public-education-spending-statistics>)

Texas Educational Performance

(National Assessment of Educational Progress)

Subject	Grade	Texas			Difference from National	
		2013	2022	Change	2013	2022
Math	4	242	239	-3	1	4
Math	8	288	273	-15	+5	even
Reading	4	217	214	-3	-4	-2
Reading	8	264	255	-9	-2	-4
Average				-7.5	0	-0.5

Source: NAEP,

https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/TX?sfj=NP&chort=1&sub=MAT&sj=TX&st=MN&year=2022R3&cti=PgTab_OT

5. Secure Voting Rights

- a. **Ease of Voting** – Based on analysis by Political Science researchers at Northern Illinois University in 2022, Texas ranked 46th in terms of ease of voting. This ranking is based on a combination of factors, including difficulty in registering to vote, availability of mail-in voting, and convenience of ballot drop-off locations. (Source – Northern Illinois University, <https://newsroom.niu.edu/study-states-with-all-vote-by-mail-process-make-it-easiest-on-voters/>)
- b. **Voter Turnout** – consistent with the difficulty in voting, voter turnout in Texas is below average. In the 2022 election, turnout in Texas (as a percentage of the Voter Eligible Population) was 41.8%, compared to a US average of 46.2%. Texas ranks 39th among the states in voter turnout. (Source – US Elections Project - <https://www.electproject.org/election-data/voter-turnout-data>)

Texas Republicans have intentionally made it hard for Texans to vote, because they benefit from low turnout. Our paper on Voting Rights is [here](#).

6. Safe Communities

- a. **Violent Crime (per 100,000 people)** – FBI statistics indicates that Texas had a violent crime rate in 2022 of 432 per 100,000 people, significantly higher than the US average of 381. The Texas rate ranks 40th among the states. (Sources – FBI - <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/crime-trend>; and Visual Capitalist, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/mapped-violent-crime-rates-by-u-s-state/>)
- b. **Gun deaths per 100,000 people** – At 15.3 deaths per 100,000, Texas ranks 23rd, slightly better than average among the states. However, this is above the US average of 14.5.

Gun deaths in Texas have risen rapidly since Governor Abbott took office in 2015. 2,848 Texans died by guns in 2014, and that increased to 4,630 in 2022 – an increase of 62% in just 8 years. During this time, the Republican controlled legislature has done nothing to address gun violence. (US data – CDC - https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/firearm_mortality/firearm.htm; Texas data – CDC - <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/injury.htm>).