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## **Strong state economies offer disappointing quality of life**

*None of the five largest state economies (California, New York, Illinois, Florida and Texas) are in the top ten states on social progress. And three of these five don't even crack the top 30.*

[Washington, DC] April 11, 2018 – The 2018 Social Progress Index: US States released today shows the growing economy is not working for millions of Americans who face stagnant or declining living standards. Each state is evaluated on how well it provides its people with the things they really care about, including health, safety, shelter, education, rights and freedom.

“The country is not living up to its potential,” said Ladan Manteghi, a global director at the Social Progress Imperative, which produces the index. “Too many Americans still live with limited educational opportunity, poor health and housing, and violence persists in our schools and streets.”

“The United States’ failure to improve quality of life for its people has far-reaching effects,” said Michael Green, CEO of the Social Progress Imperative. “We see it in a 20-year decline in competitiveness; rising discontent and a sense of unequal opportunity; divisive politics, as citizens turn on fellow citizens; and declining participation and trust in democracy.”

As the United States approaches the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence, the Social Progress Index: US States exposes the gap between today’s quality of life and the American ideal.

- **California** has the world’s sixth largest economy as well as a reputation as a progressive leader, but ranks just 33<sup>rd</sup> in social progress, performing significantly worse than both its economic peers and several states with far fewer resources. It is the second-lowest ranked state on the index’s Basic Human Needs dimension, ahead of only Louisiana. The index reveals that despite strong economic growth and flourishing innovation, many Californians don’t have adequate access to basic necessities like clean, safe water and affordable housing.
- Another wealthy state in terms of Medium Household Income, **Massachusetts tops the social progress rankings** with a score of 64.82 out of 100. The Bay State, which boasts some of the nation’s top hospitals and universities, excels in many areas measured by the index, including Nutrition and Basic Medical Care and Access to Advanced Education. But despite its advantages, Massachusetts still has real problems with homelessness and drug abuse.
- **Alaska** ranks just 35<sup>th</sup> on the Social Progress Index despite being the second-richest state in the country. Alaska performs worse than other rich states on nine out of 12 index components. In absolute terms, Alaska’s strengths include providing freedoms, rights and shelter. Its weaknesses, possibly due to its remote location, include Health and Wellness as well as access to universities and the internet.
- **Wisconsin** and **Texas** have similar Median Household Incomes but perform very differently on the Social Progress Index (Wisconsin ranks sixth, Texas ranks 42<sup>nd</sup>), suggesting that many factors besides income can affect a state’s quality of life. We can all learn from the states that are directing their limited resources toward delivering the greatest impact.

The Social Progress Index represents what Americans need and expect to thrive. Leading up to the 2018 elections, the nation will have the opportunity to respond to these findings and propose a way forward. State leaders on the front lines of our nation’s biggest battles—like addiction, inequality and failing schools—are not giving up. The country faces serious challenges, but real solutions are available today.

“Advancing social progress is not a political ideology; it is a bi-partisan goal,” Manteghi said. “The Social Progress Index shows us that leaders on both sides of the aisle care about how residents are living. Red, blue and purple states alike recognize that effective policy making and budgeting should be based on data and the needs of people. That’s how we will ultimately build stronger communities and a more perfect union.”

## Key Findings from the 2018 Social Progress Index: US States

- Higher performance states are clustered together in the Northeast and Upper Midwest regions, while the Deep South is a cluster of weaker performance. Massachusetts (1), Minnesota, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut are the leaders that make up the first tier on social progress. Mississippi (50), West Virginia, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Alabama fall in the last tier.
- Top-ranked Massachusetts outperforms states with similar levels of income by the second-widest margin, behind only Maine. Equally tellingly, last-ranked **Mississippi** underperforms its economic peers by a greater margin than almost any other state, narrowly behind Alaska.
- There is a real difference in performance between blue states and red states: **15 of the top 16 states are blue**, and the other is purple. North Dakota, the best performing red state, is 17<sup>th</sup>.
- Some states are geographic islands of strong or weak performance that stand out from their neighbors. **Colorado** is a high performing (ranked 11<sup>th</sup>) state surrounded by relatively lower performing states.
- Several states do a better job at using their limited resources to produce positive social and environmental outcomes for residents, including: Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont and Minnesota (aka Social Progress Index overperformers). The states who struggle to use their incomes to improve living conditions include: Alaska, Mississippi, Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma (aka the greatest underperformers).
- On average, states exhibit their **strongest performance** on the index’s Shelter component, although many of the fastest-growing states in the country, like California, struggle to make decent, affordable housing available to residents.
- The two most common national areas of **weakness** are found in the index’s Access to Advanced Education and Health and Wellness components. Despite being home to more globally ranked universities than any other country, US states are not successful at providing higher education opportunities to all Americans. And although the US spends more on healthcare than any other country, states do not, in general, have healthy populations. The top-ranked state on Health and Wellness is Hawaii with an underwhelming score of just 56.49 out of 100.
- A state’s social progress correlates significantly with its level of poverty, but surprisingly its level of employment only weakly affects social progress. The fact that a state’s social progress is more closely linked to its **poverty** rate than its **unemployment** rate suggests that other factors beyond employment, such as the quality of work available (e.g. whether it pays a living wage and offers benefits to employees) and the strength of the social safety net likely also contribute to a high quality of life.
- There is no evidence to suggest that states with primarily urban or primarily rural populations perform consistently better or worse on the Social Progress Index.

While the state-level index reveals both areas of strength and priorities for improvement, it also highlights the difficulty of working with national-level data, which cannot be disaggregated by race, gender and income. Only measuring progress on the local level, community-by-community, will fully capture the diversity of lived experience within the US. By harnessing superior local-level data, leaders from all sectors of society can improve their understanding of the issues facing their communities and start comprehensively solving them. In support of this, the Social Progress Imperative has launched a major initiative to bring the data and insight of the Social Progress Index to every community (roughly 19,000 cities and 3,000 counties) in the United States.

To learn more about how states are performing, compare their performance to regional neighbors and economic peers, and learn more about localizing the Social Progress Index visit [www.socialprogressimperative.org](http://www.socialprogressimperative.org).

### **About the US Social Progress Initiative**

To truly understand Americans' feelings of neglect and inequity, and address the issues revealed in the state-level index, government, business and philanthropic organizations must also examine living standards at regional and local levels. The Social Progress Imperative has launched a major initiative that will provide cities with actionable, evidence-based insight into how they can improve quality of life by 2022.

Recently, the Skoll Foundation awarded the Social Progress Imperative a \$1.5 million challenge grant to support this aim and inspire others to help accelerate social progress across the United States.

This investment will support the first stage of the initiative, which targets 10 U.S. cities and regions as pilots to develop local Social Progress Indexes that measure how successful they are in converting resources into positive, equitable social and environmental outcomes. These first pilots will also help identify and advance the solutions and strategies that have the biggest impact on quality of life in preparation for nationwide scaling and adoption of the index.

"During a time when trust is in free fall, the Social Progress Index can be a tool for government, business, and civil society to regain that trust and make a compelling case for rebuilding the institutions that matter most to citizens, communities, and our country," said Sally Osberg, President and CEO of the Skoll Foundation.

To double your donation in support of this important goal, visit [www.socialprogressimperative.org](http://www.socialprogressimperative.org).

### **About the 2018 Social Progress Index: US States**

The Social Progress Index: US States is an objective, transparent measure that compares quality of life in all 50 states. The Social Progress Index is meant to complement, not replace, economic measures like GDP per capita and Median Household Income. These measures only tell half the story about what life is really like for ordinary Americans. The Social Progress Index™ highlights the issues and the individuals that are invisible when only looking at changes in the economy.

The Social Progress Imperative, a US-based nonprofit, created the index to help local officials, businesses and community organizations understand how well people are truly living, how economic changes are affecting quality of life, and what improvements can have the greatest impact on society.

The state-level index organizes 53 social and environmental outcome-based indicators into twelve components, which are grouped into three broad dimensions: Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing and Opportunity. In addition to priorities like access to medical care and education, the framework includes several hallmarks of an open, just society that many other indexes simply leave out, like Personal Rights, Inclusiveness, and Personal Freedom and Choice.

Each state is given a progress report that summarizes how well it is meeting people's needs and stands its scores up against Median Household Income to reveal the strongest and weakest performers among similarly resourced states.

With the help of the index, state and local leaders are empowered and better equipped to:

- decide what issues or gaps need the most focus;
- align funding, programs and innovations with those priorities;
- fulfill promises to the communities they serve; and
- improve living conditions over time.

To learn more, please visit [www.socialprogressimperative.org](http://www.socialprogressimperative.org).

**About the Social Progress Imperative**

The Social Progress Index is an initiative of the Social Progress Imperative, a Washington DC-based 501(c)(3) organization exclusively focused on redefining how the world measures success. Established in 2012 with support through initial investments by the Skoll Foundation, Avina Foundation and others, the Social Progress Imperative strives to improve the lives of people around the world by fostering research and knowledge sharing on social progress and using data to catalyze action.

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