

The State of the Lone Star State: How Life in Texas Measures Up

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Texans for Public Justice is a non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization that tracks campaign money and corporate power in Texas.



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**“We must not
become two
societies—one that
believes in the
American dream
and one that is
without such hope.”**

—Governor George W. Bush, 1999 inaugural speech



INTRODUCTION

Texans are prone to exaggerated pride when discussing the Lone Star State. As a people, Texans are still dealing with the sense of loss that occurred when a larger state was admitted to the union in 1959. Texas derives a heap of character from its vast and scenic countryside, its cowboy and oil lore and the independent streak that runs through many of its residents. Yet, if there is one thing that Texans have trouble thinking independently about, it's Texas.

This circle-the-wagons mentality prevents Texans from seeing the fact that, in many areas, their state just does not measure up to other states. Texas ranks so poorly on so many social indicators that columnist Molly Ivins, one Texan who will take an unflinching look in the mirror, calls it, "Mississippi with good roads." Texas has far greater resources to address its problems than Mississippi. But it will never tackle these problems until it recognizes their existence.

When benchmarked against other states, Texas:

- Flunks out of environmental protection;
- Contents itself with educational mediocrity;
- Has an economy and tax structure that punishes the working poor;
- Spent billions of dollars on a huge penal system that has not delivered low crime rates;
- Is one of the nation's least compassionate welfare states; and
- Has one of the nation's lowest voter turnout rates.

The pages that follow rank Texas against its peers on 150 indicators that fall into six broad social and economic categories: Environment, Education, Human Services, Economy, Public Safety and Democracy. On many of these indicators, Texas does not stack up well to the competition. While Texas does not bottom out on each indicator, it does appear with disturbing frequency among the five or 10 worst-performing states.

The Texas-sized problems presented here are the bipartisan byproducts of a working majority of Texas politicians burying their heads in the sand for decades. Governor George W. Bush did not create these problems—nor did he take major steps to solve them. As a result of unprecedented budget surpluses, the State of Texas has had a golden opportunity in recent years to turn the tide on these problems. But the priorities of the governor and the Texas Legislature have continued to be those of the business community that foots much of their campaign bills.

The nation's second-most-populated state needs to take time out from cheerleading and swaggering braggadocio. There is too much work to be done.



METHODOLOGY

The indicator data presented in this report come from a variety of public and private research organizations. These sources are cited for each indicator, along with a corresponding Internet address, when available.

In each case, Texas is compared to the five best- and worst-performing states on a given indicator. Texas ranks second after California in population and second in area to Alaska. For this reason, readers should carefully note the difference between absolute numbers and the relative numbers that show percentages or

rates. It is not particularly surprising when a heavily populated state such as Texas has many more people (in absolute terms) on food stamps, for example, than a sparsely populated state such as Wyoming. It is surprising when Texas (with 20.4 million inhabitants) has more people (in absolute terms) in its criminal justice system than California (with 33.1 million inhabitants). Where available, relative numbers are presented to provide for better comparisons of the 50 diverse states.