

The Data Proves That Life Is Good in Tennessee | Opinion

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In a world worn down by a pandemic, war and economic uncertainty, it is easy to go negative. Lift your spirits – good news does not sell, but there is a plethora of it. For example, per Our World in Data, literacy is at an all-time high, over 86%. Per the Cato Institute, the global population grew by almost 150% from 1960 to 2016, and global per capita income rose by over 180%!

US News & World Report state rankings use more than 70 key performance metrics. In 2017 Tennessee was ranked No. 37. For 2022, Tennessee has moved up to No. 29. Some areas of interest include being No. 5 in cost of living and No. 26 in housing affordability. While we have all enjoyed the housing appreciation, it is squeezing some folks out of the market, especially as interest rates rise. Just a reminder: you cannot eat your equity.

From a fiscal stability perspective, Tennessee is ranked No. 1. The state has a multi-billion dollar surplus. According to [an article in the Tennessean by Adam Friedman](#), the money won't be spent until next year. Just because the state has the money does not mean it should spend it. How about giving it back to the taxpayers? One of the negatives of our state is that we have one of the highest sales tax rates in the country. This may sound like blasphemy from a fiscal conservative, but this regressive tax negatively affects the people who can least afford it. Tennessee ranks 14th in growth rankings, which are based upon gross domestic product and population trends. Tennessee's population per the U.S. Census was 5.6 million in 2000, 6.3 million in 2010 and 6.9 million in 2020.

There's good and bad news here. This is not organic growth. Approximately 92,000 babies were born in Tennessee in 2010 and 89,000 in 2019. That is the bad news; from a statistical perspective we are not replacing ourselves. The population growth is spurred by people voting with their wallets and moving here because there are better opportunities than from where they emigrated. There is an economic phrase, "Good goes to good," which means talent pursues better opportunities or money buys quality.

According to WalletHub's "Best and Worst State Economies" for 2022, Tennessee ranks 11th. Their data set looks at 28 key indicators, including GDP growth, the unemployment rate, state public gross debt and startup activity. Per the Tennessee Department of Labor, the state recorded its lowest unemployment rate in history in March 2022 at 3.2%. Let's look at per capita income. According to Statista, Tennessee's per capita income was \$27,066 in 2000, \$35,856 in 2010 and \$51,046 in 2020 (these numbers have been converted to 2022 U.S. dollar valuations).

Looks like a success story to me.

The crime rate in Tennessee is somewhat of a paradox. According to 247wallst.com, crime fell in Tennessee by almost 12% from 2014-2019. This decline is good, but our crime rate did not drop as much as the national average. Over the last 60 years, Tennessee has been in the top 10 and the bottom 10 states for the crime rate. There are only five other states that had that type of variability.

High school graduation rates in Tennessee tell a remarkable story, going from a heart-wrenching 55% in 2000 to 67% in 2007 to an all-time high of 89.7 in 2019. What an awesome job! Sadly, we have had declines in each of the last two years, and the graduation rate is now at 88.7%. This data is from the Tennessee Department of Education and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. To help put these numbers in context, Montana leads the nation in the graduation rate at 94%.

Much good has been accomplished; high-fives for everyone. Let's keep working on making tomorrow better than today and tomorrow's tomorrow better than tomorrow.