

Bipartisan State of the Nation Report reveals where US is excelling — and falling behind

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State of the Nation Project Director Douglas Harris, professor and chair of economics at Tulane University. Photo by Kenny Lass.

The [State of the Nation Project](#), a bipartisan collaboration of former appointees and advisors from the past five presidential administrations, released its first comprehensive "State of the Nation" report to shed light on how the United States is doing in key areas — the economy, education, health, the environment, civic engagement, trust in major institutions — compared to historical trends and peer countries.

The [report](#), which tracks 37 measures across 15 topics, found stark contrasts in the nation's global standing in key indicators. The United States excels economically and is improving in poverty reduction. Yet it lags other high-income nations in mental health, life satisfaction, citizenship and democracy, income inequality, trust in institutions, and rates of violence. The country is doing extremely well in some areas and extremely poorly in many others.

The report, funded by Tulane University's [Murphy Institute](#), provides a consensus-based "progress report" for the nation that rises above polarizing headlines and campaign speeches to candidly assess the current state of the country.

"Ultimately, the goal of the work is to foster progress," said State of the Nation Project Director [Douglas Harris](#), professor and chair of economics at Tulane University School of Liberal Arts. "Without a clear and accurate diagnosis of the most pressing issues facing the nation, there can be little hope for sensible solutions."

The report found:

- **Economic Strength:** The U.S. economy remains a global powerhouse, maintaining its position as one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies for over a century. This success is underpinned by consistently high worker productivity, improving education levels relative to competitors, and a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. While labor force participation has slightly declined, population growth through immigration continues to expand the workforce.
- **Gains at Home, Declines Abroad:** While the trends within the country show improvement in more areas than decline, international standings in key areas faltered. U.S. trends since 1990 show domestic improvement in the economy, education, environment, health and violence, but the nation is declining in citizenship, democracy, life satisfaction, mental health and trust. Internationally, America's position is weakening in environmental protection, physical health and civil liberties, with gains only in economy and education. This suggests that while the U.S. is advancing domestically, it's falling behind global peers.
- **Disconnect Between Wealth and Well-being:** As material wealth and income levels rise, measures of perceived well-being are declining. Mental health indicators and life satisfaction are deteriorating despite economic gains. Social connections are also fraying, with increasing social isolation and eroding

trust. This suggests either that other factors are outweighing the positive effects of rising income, or that the current approach to pursuing material prosperity might be directly undermining psychological and social well-being.

The group also polled 1,000 Americans from various regions and political spectrums to gather additional perspectives on the best indicators of national progress. While there were some differences of opinion, the overall findings from the report's authors are largely consistent with the public's views. So, while the report shows growing dislike for opposing political parties, the various sides actually agree on more than they think. This realization provides hope for the potential to make tangible progress, Harris said.

"We embarked on this project to provide a more realistic assessment of how the country is doing," Harris said. "It's noteworthy that such a wide-ranging group could find common ground on how we should gauge our progress. The first step toward moving the nation forward is to gain broad agreement on the real state of the nation. The State of the Nation Project is committed to monitoring these critical measures and engaging the public in dialogues that shape America's future."

The full report and a detailed breakdown of the findings are available at <https://stateofnation.org/>.

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