



Oregon's Choice: Grow Modestly or Not at All

The Choice

For decades, growth seemed inevitable in Oregon. Railroads, highways, and fiber lines stitched the state into the national economy. Its forests, coastline, and mountains drew talent from across the country. And for two generations, the central question was how to manage that growth—how to avoid California’s sprawl.

But that era has ended.

The Choice

Today, Oregon finds itself in a changing nation: older, less mobile, with birth rates falling and immigration stalled. The drivers of automatic expansion have slowed. **Economic growth is no longer guaranteed—and it doesn't happen without effort.**

The Choice

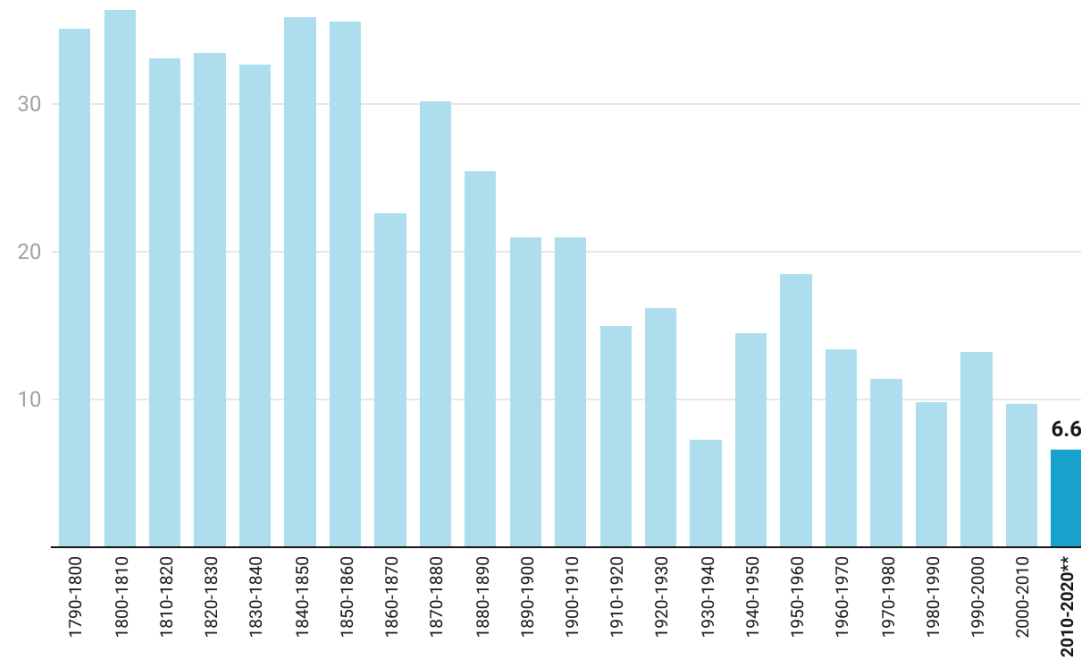
Now, the choice facing Oregon is stark: pursue modest, deliberate economic growth—or accept the costs of standing still. **In today's slow-growing U.S., unmanaged rapid growth is no longer our threat—stagnation is.** Sustained prosperity depends on a stable workforce, which requires modest population growth—not for its own sake, but to support jobs, public services, and community well-being.

Defining Features of the New Era

Slowing U.S. Population Growth Driven by Aging, Low Birth Rates, and Restrained Immigration

US Population Growth for Decades

Percentage change by decade



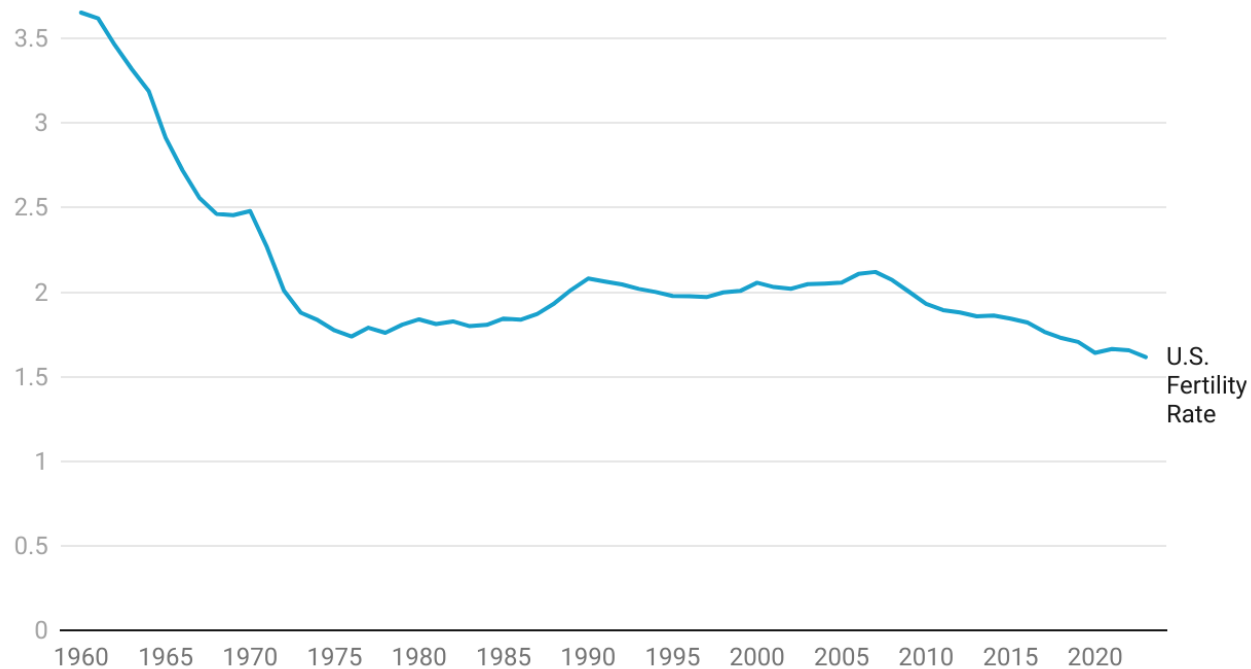
***April 1 2020 population is calculated by adding pro-rated growth July 1, 2019 to April 1, 2020, based on July 1, 2019 and July 1, 2020 population estimates*

Source: William H Frey analysis of US decennial censuses 1790-2010, annual Census Bureau Population Estimates, released Dec 22,2020 • Created with Datawrapper

U.S. Fertility Rate Has Declined Sharply Since 1960, Reaching Historic Lows

Fertility Rate, Total for the United States

Births per Woman



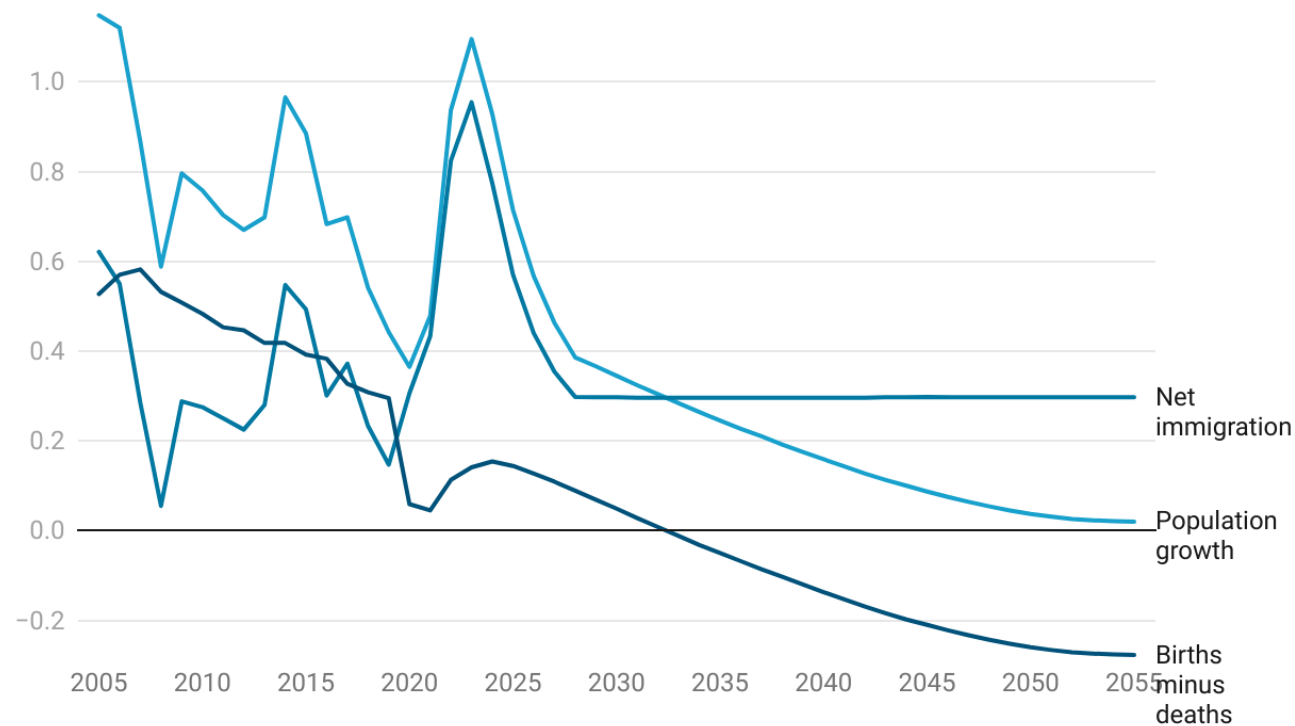
Total fertility rate represents the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with current age-specific fertility rates.

Source: World Bank via FRED • Created with Datawrapper

U.S. Population Growth Will Slow Sharply, Projected to Nearly Stall by 2055

U.S. Population Growth and Contributing Factors

Annual Percent Change

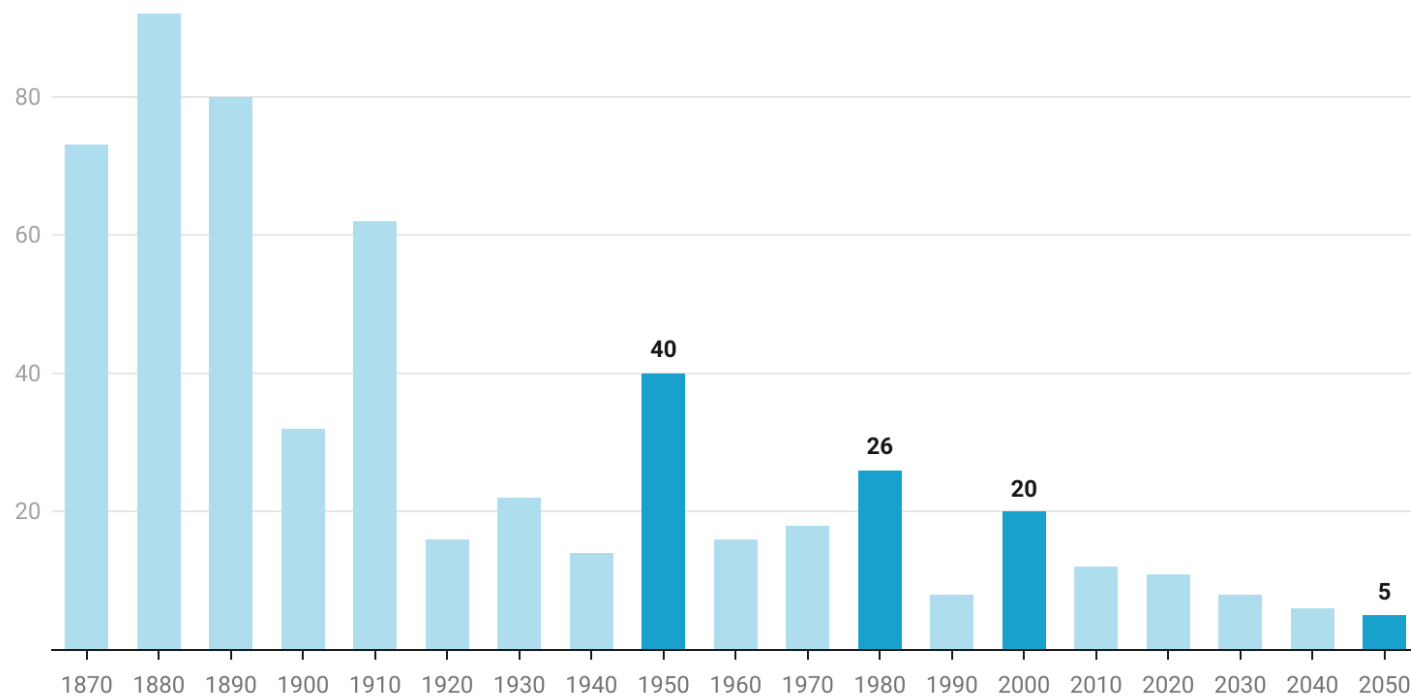


Source: U.S. Congressional Budget Office January 2025 report The Demographic Outlook: 2025 to 2055 • Created with Datawrapper

Oregon's Era of 20%+ Decade Growth Is Over

Oregon Population Growth for Decades, Actual and Projected

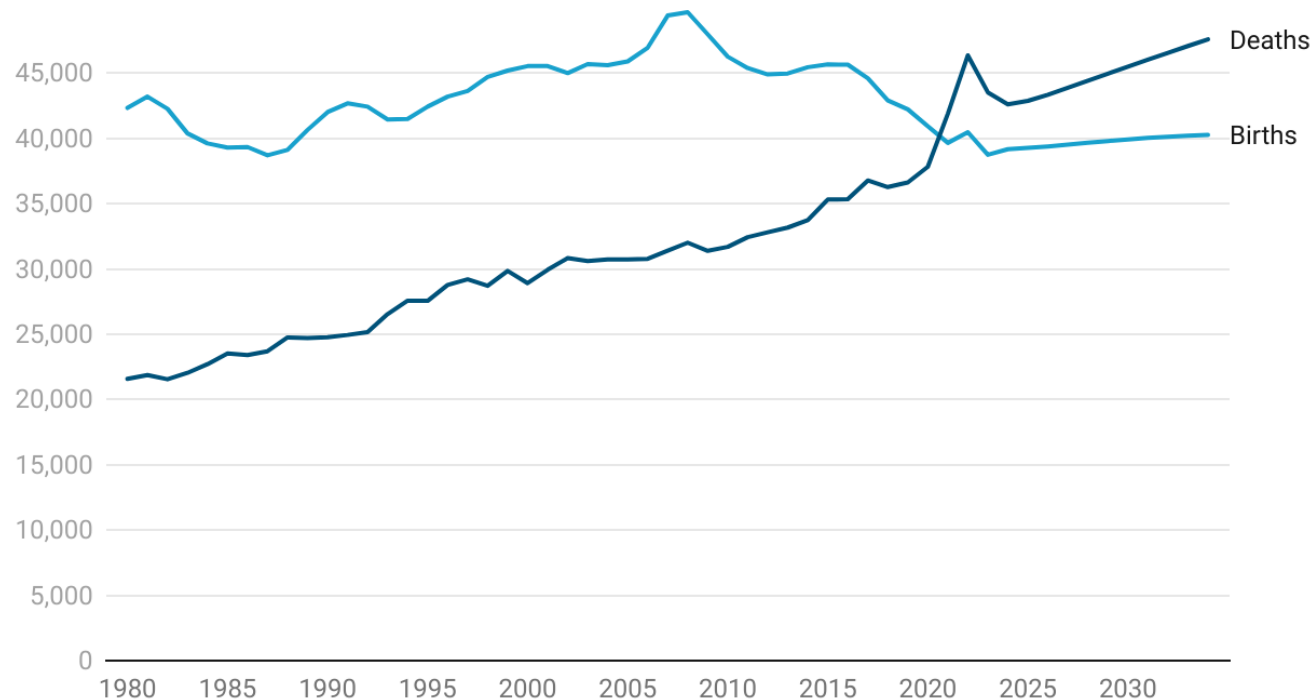
Percentage Change by Decade for Decades Ending 1870 through 2050



Source: U.S. Census (actual through 2020); University of Virginia, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service (projections after 2020) • Created with Datawrapper

Natural Population Growth has Gone Negative

Oregon, Births and Deaths, 1980-2034 (projected)

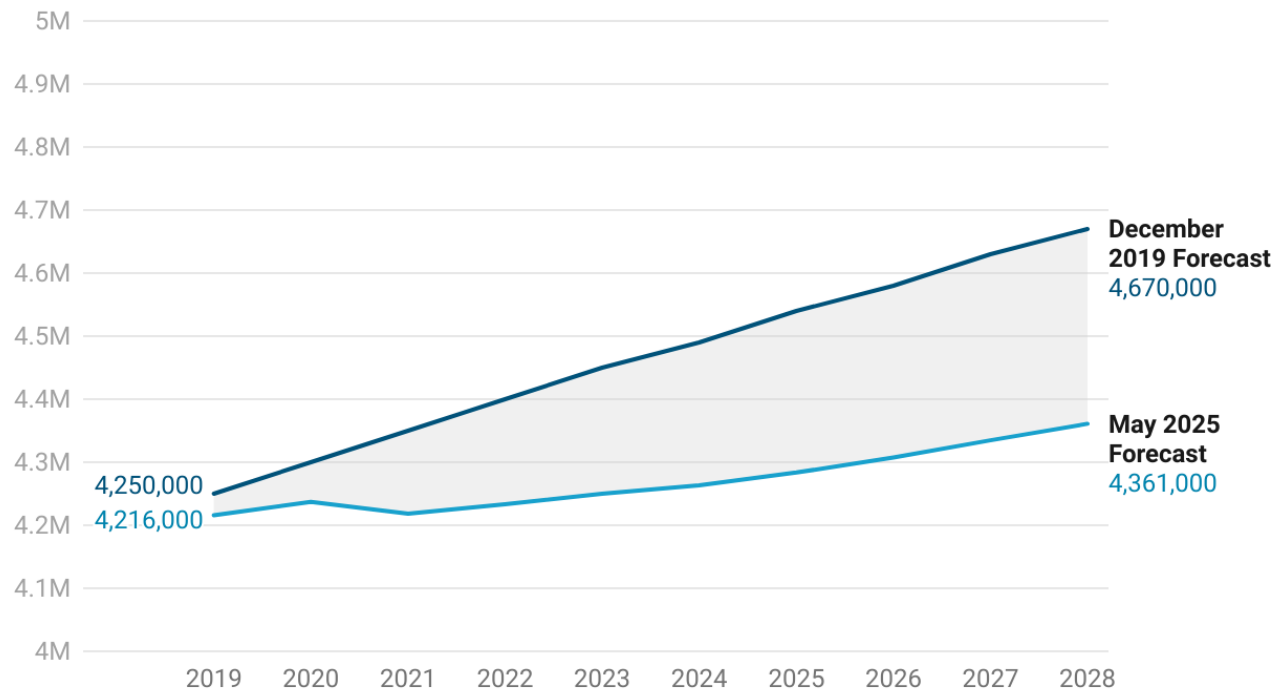


Source: Sources: 1980-2019 intercensal population estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau; 2020-2024 population by Population Research Center, PSU; Forecasts of population, births, deaths, and net migration are by Office of Economic Analysis • Created with Datawrapper

Oregon's Growth Expectations Cut Sharply Since 2019 Forecast

Oregon Population Forecasts, 2019-2028

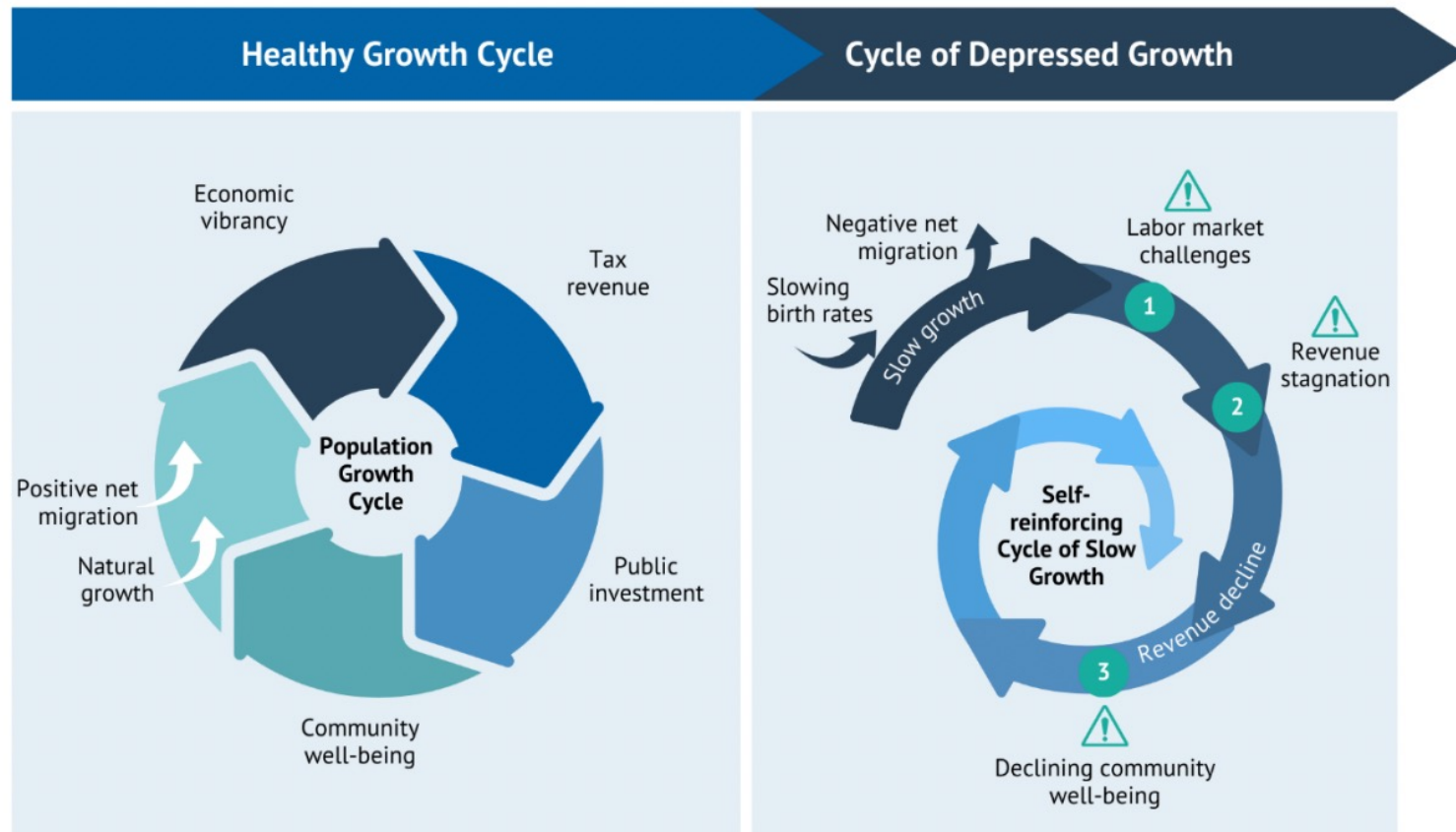
December 2019 and May 2025 Forecasts



Source: Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, Oregon Economic and Revenue Forecasts, December 2019 and May 2025 • Created with Datawrapper

Why Oregon Needs Moderate, Deliberate Growth

The Choice



Source: Guidehouse 2023 *GROWING MICHIGAN TOGETHER COUNCIL REPORT*

Growth Brings Good Jobs.
Construction, health care,
education—growth fuels job
creation in sectors vital to
middle-income workers.



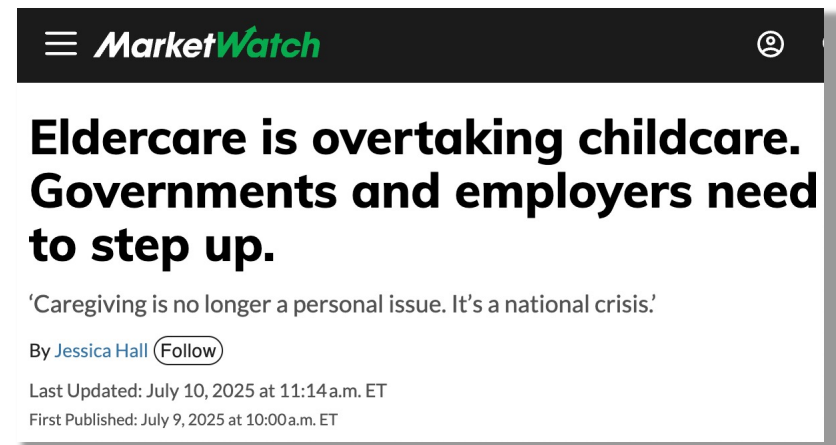
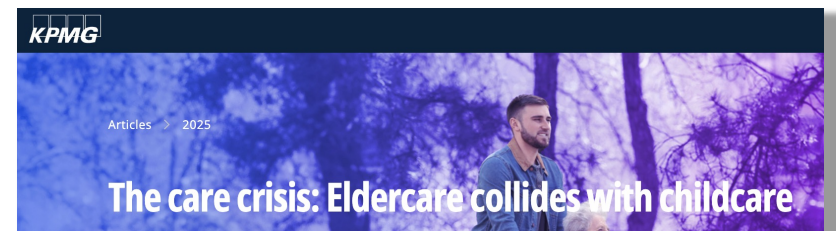
The Bills Don't Shrink. Fewer workers means fewer taxpayers. Yet costs for schools, PERS, and infrastructure keep rising. As Pew notes: “The bills don’t shrink as fast as the population does.”

Pension spikes will cost Oregon public employers \$1.8B in the next biennium: ‘It will be more intense before it gets less’

Updated: Nov. 29, 2024, 2:46 p.m. | Published: Nov. 27, 2024, 7:00 a.m.



A Care Crisis Is Coming. The senior population is growing twice as fast as the working-age population, and eldercare and childcare—already in crisis—are competing for the same scarce workforce.

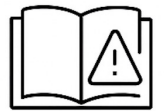


Five Pressures Driving Oregon Toward Stagnation

Five Pressures Driving Oregon Toward Stagnation



High housing prices and the resulting homeless crisis



K12 schools among the lowest performing in the United States



Fires and smoke



Overreliance on the individual income tax, especially in Portland



A deeply rooted cultural ambivalence about growth and an aligned policy environment

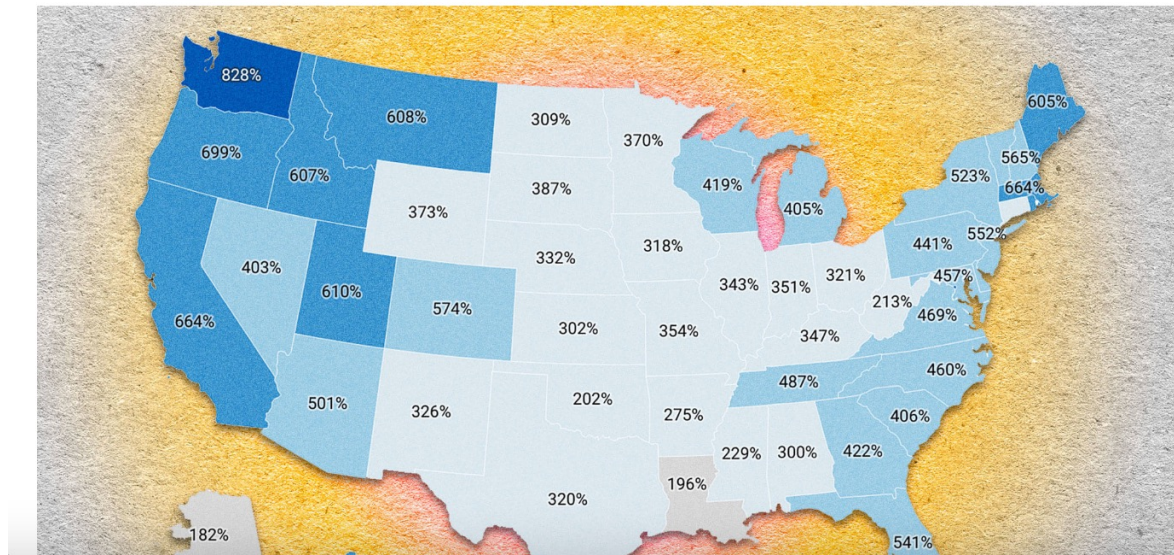


10-19-2024 | NEWS

Housing market report: 10 states where home prices have risen more than 600% since 1984

The most significant home price gains over the past 40 years are concentrated in coastal markets.

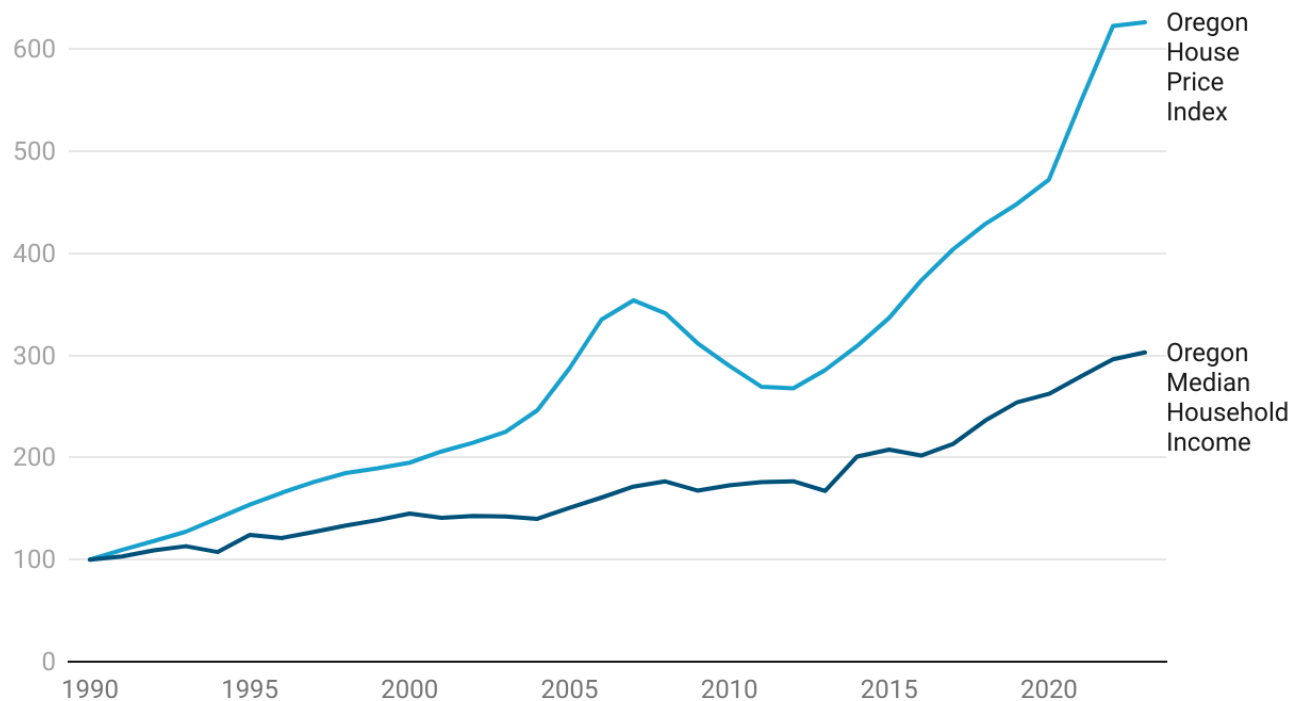
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Oregon Home Prices Far Outpace Incomes Since 1990

Oregon House Prices and Median Household Incomes

Indexed, 1990 = 100

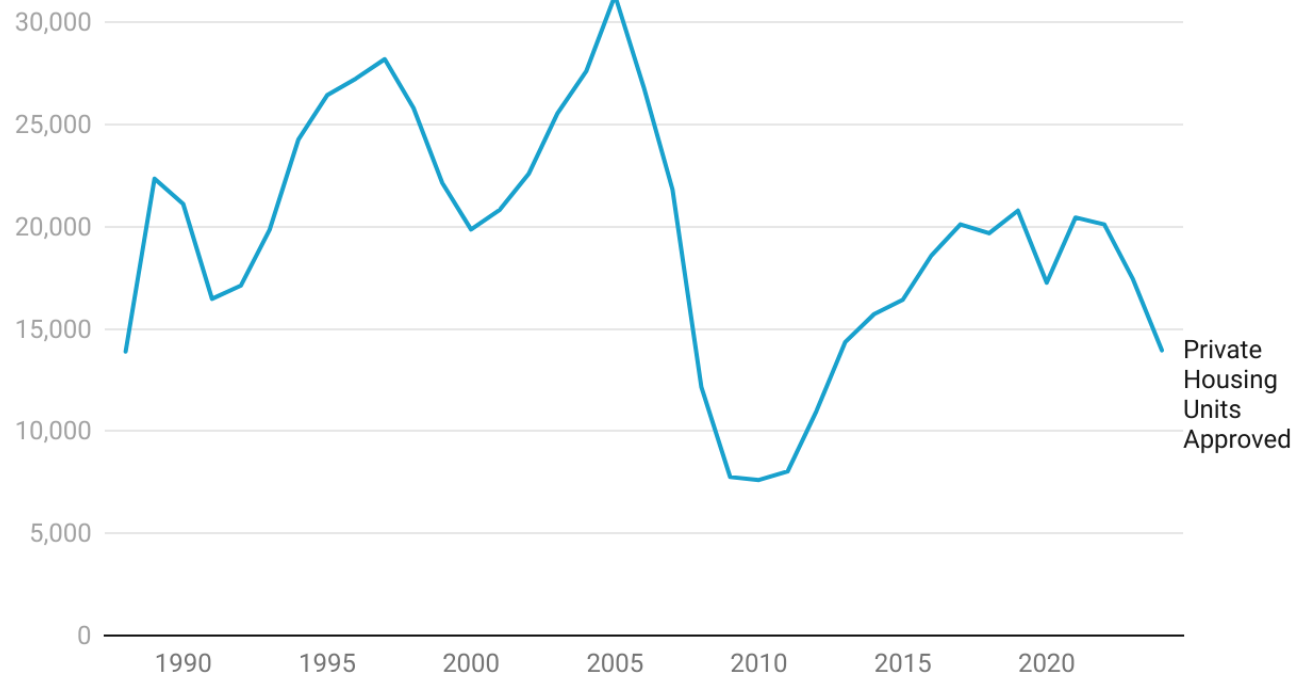


Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis • Created with Datawrapper

Oregon Permit Drop Reflects National Market Pressures

New Private Housing Units Approved by Permit, Oregon

1988-2024

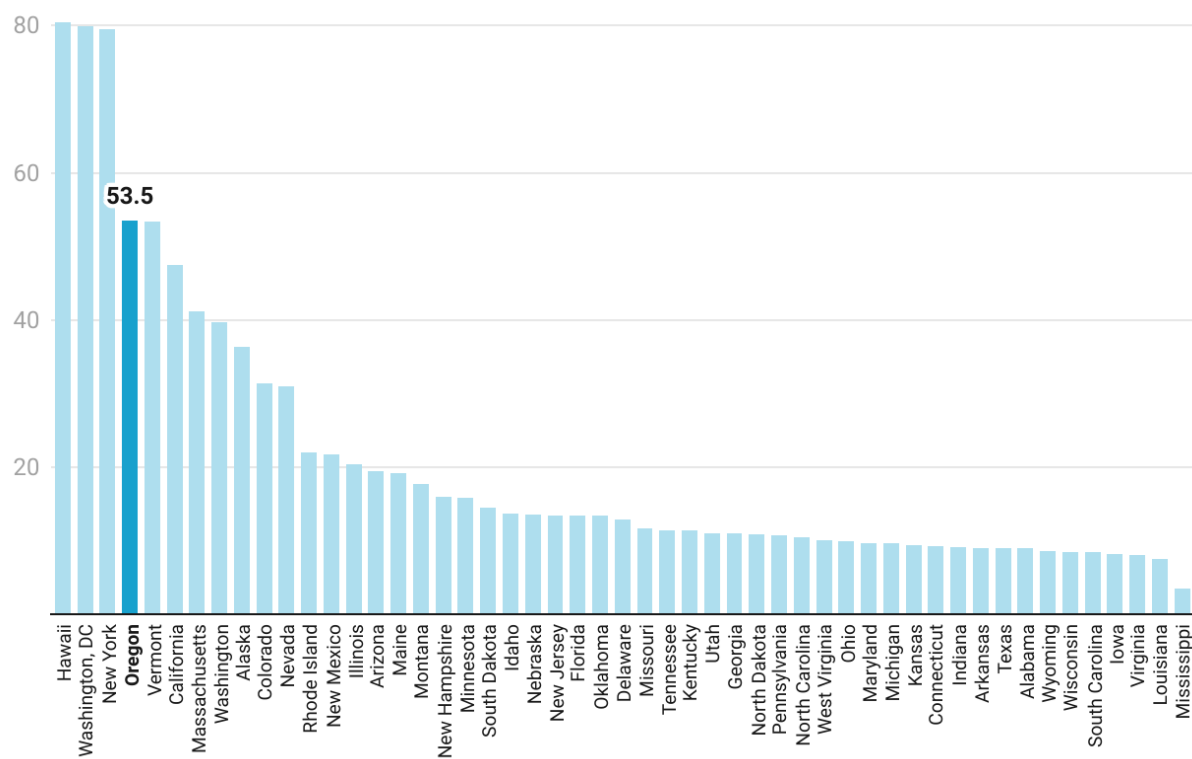


Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis • Created with Datawrapper



Oregon's Homelessness Rate Reflects Persistent Affordability Pressures

Homeless Population per 10,000 People, 2024



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development • Created with Datawrapper



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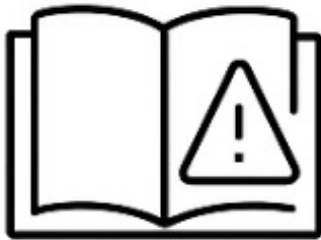
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The Departure of Oregon Companies Speaks to a Bigger Problem for the State

How much faith can one retain in the local workforce when Oregon's fourth and eighth grade test scores for reading and writing are among the nation's worst?

By [Steve Duin](#) | Published on June 13, 2025 2:58PM PDT

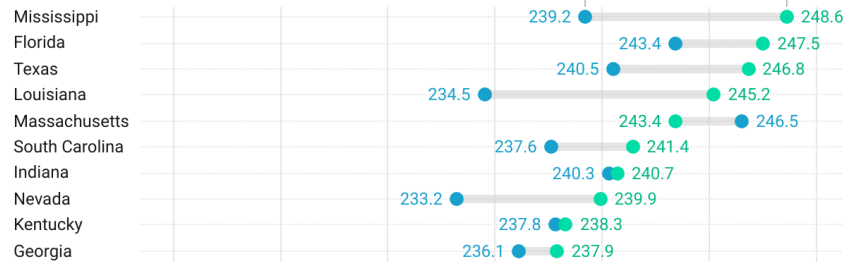


Oregon Ranks Among Lowest in 4th Grade Math & Reading Performance

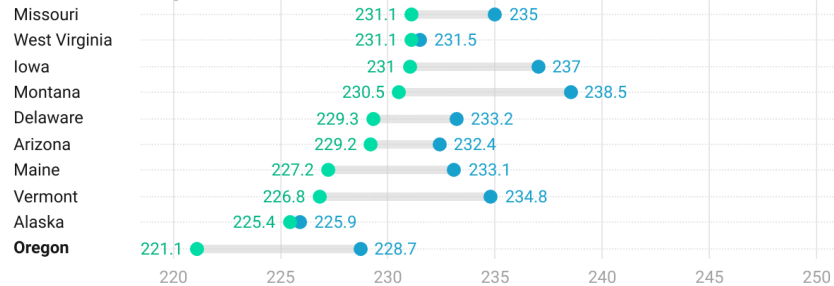
National Assessment of Educational Progress, 4th Grade Math Scale Score, Adjusted for Demographics

Ten Highest and Lowest Performing States

Highest Performing States



Lowest Performing States

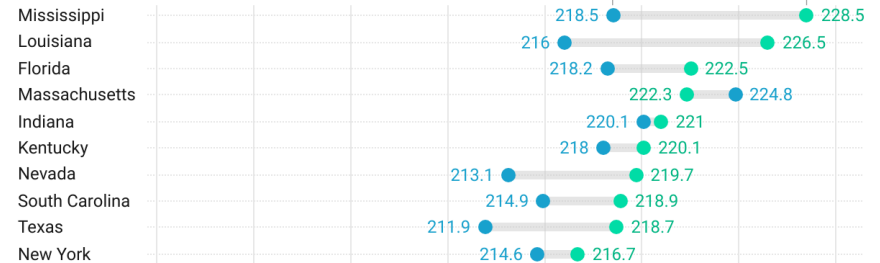


Source: Urban Institute • Created with Datawrapper

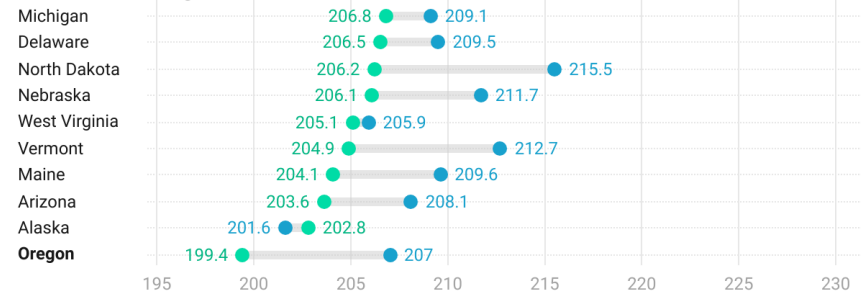
National Assessment for Educational Progress, 4th Grade Reading Scale Score, Adjusted for Demographics

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Highest Performing States



Lowest Performing States



Source: Urban Institute • Created with Datawrapper

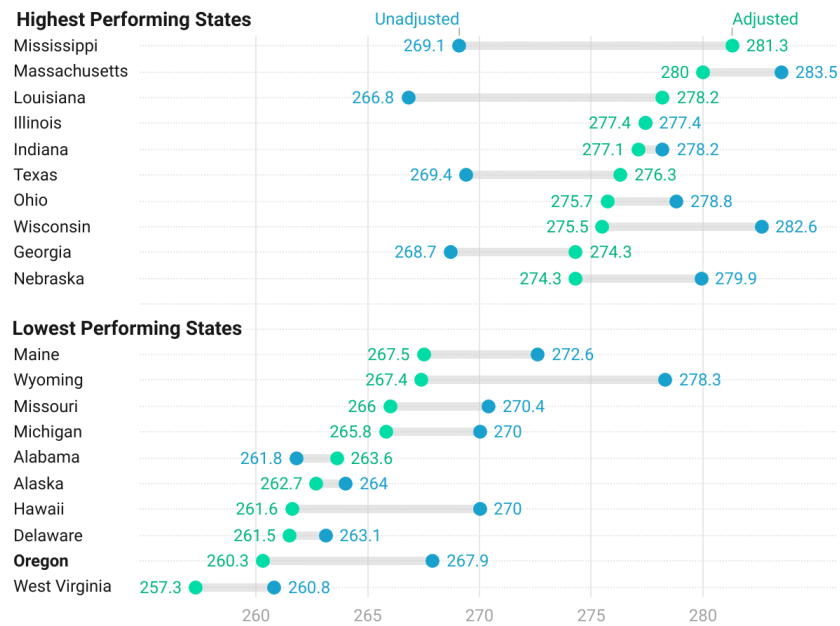
NOTE: Scores shown are adjusted for student demographics (e.g., income, race/ethnicity, language status) to enable fair comparisons across states. For example, Mississippi's adjusted scores improve significantly, while Oregon's remain low—indicating underperformance relative to its student mix.



Oregon Ranks Among Lowest in 8th Grade Math & Reading Performance

National Assessment of Educational Progress, 8th Grade Math Scale Score, Adjusted for Demographics

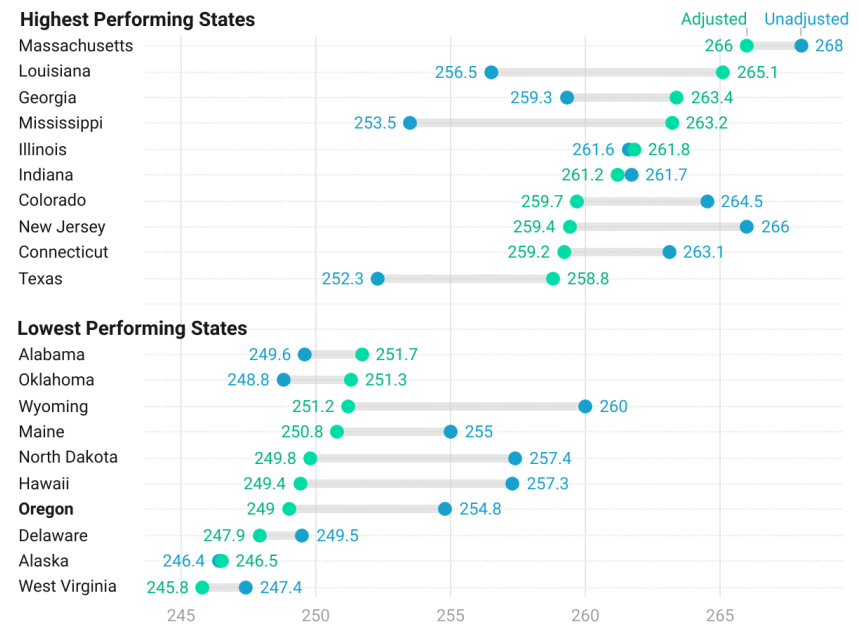
Ten Highest and Lowest Performing States



Source: Urban Institute • Created with Datawrapper

National Assessment of Educational Progress, 8th Grade Reading Scale Score, Adjusted for Demographics

Ten Highest and Lowest Performing States



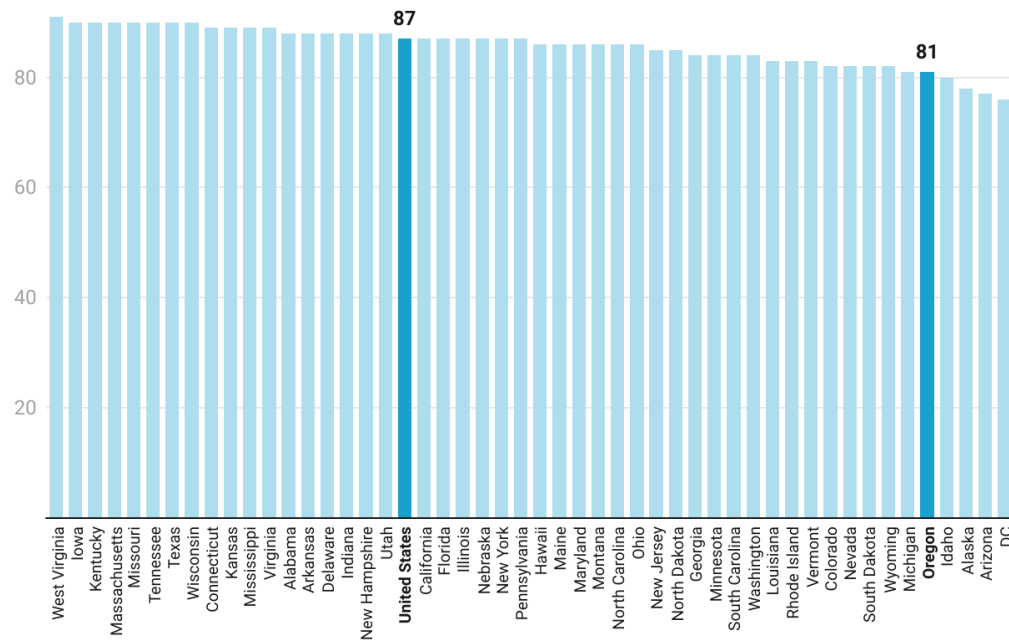
Source: Urban Institute • Created with Datawrapper

NOTE: Scores shown are adjusted for student demographics (e.g., income, race/ethnicity, language status) to enable fair comparisons across states. For example, Mississippi's adjusted scores improve significantly, while Oregon's remain low—indicating underperformance relative to its student mix.



Oregon Among Lowest in U.S. High School Graduation Rates

Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), by state or jurisdiction: 2021-22



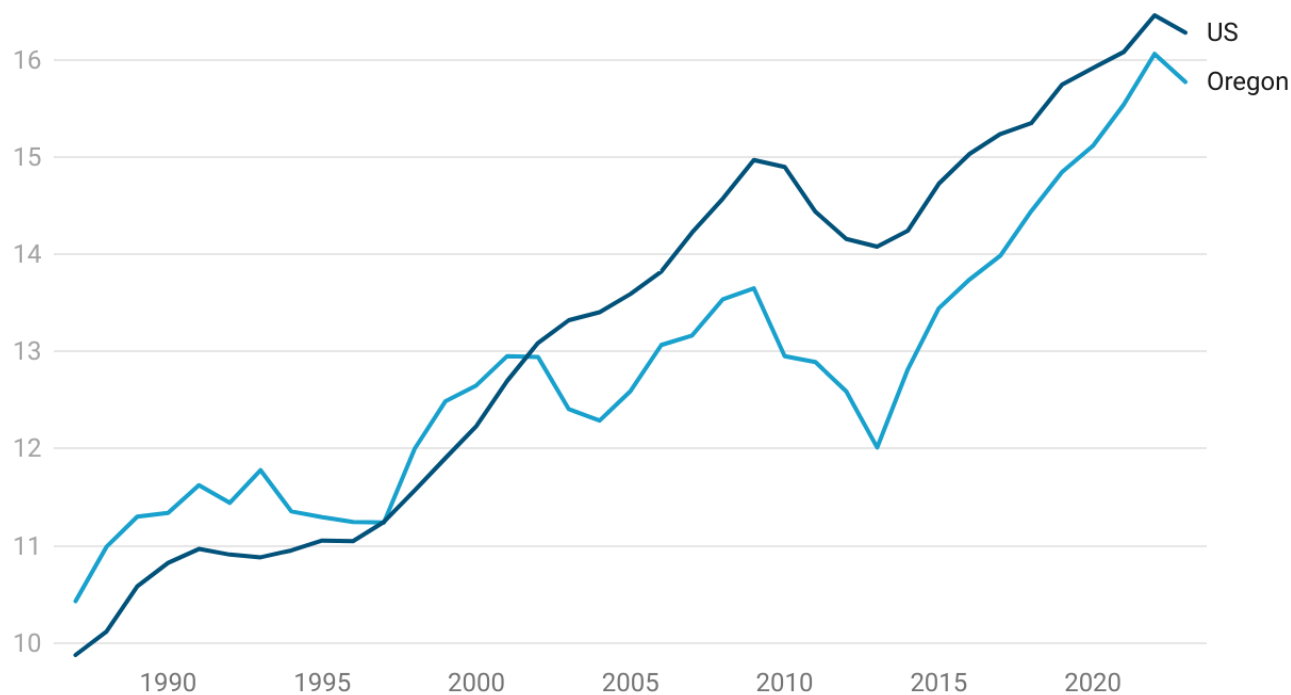
The adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) is the percentage of public high school freshmen who graduate with a regular diploma or a state-defined alternate high school diploma for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities within 4 years of starting 9th grade. Students who are entering 9th grade for the first time form a cohort for the graduating class. This cohort is "adjusted" by adding any students who subsequently transfer into the cohort and subtracting any students who subsequently transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die.

Created with Datawrapper

A Decade of Investment, No Academic Payoff for Oregon Students

Operational Expenditures Per Pupil, Oregon and U.S.

1987-2023, 2023 Dollars in Thousands, Adjusted for Inflation



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "National Public Education Financial Survey (State Fiscal)" • Created with Datawrapper



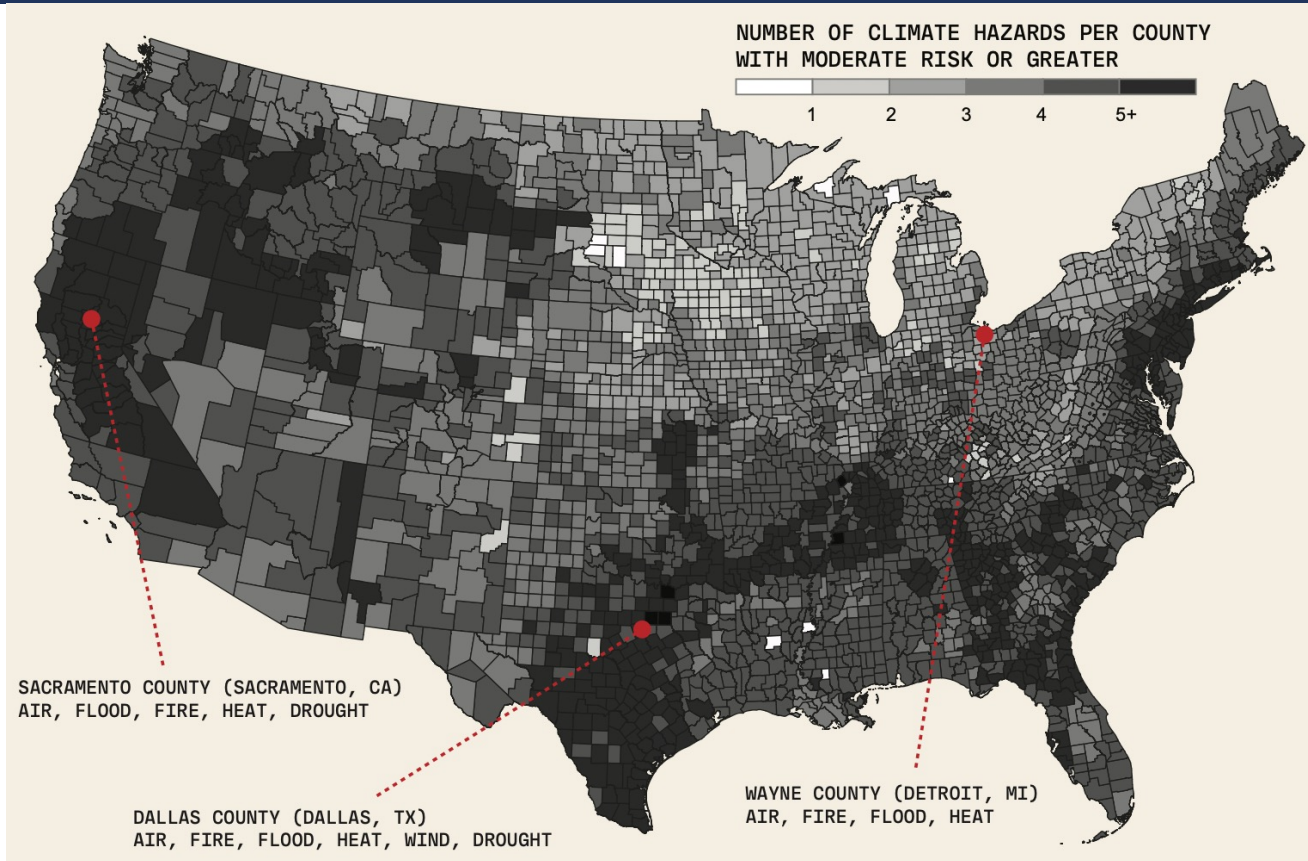
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Oregon Smothered with Smoke

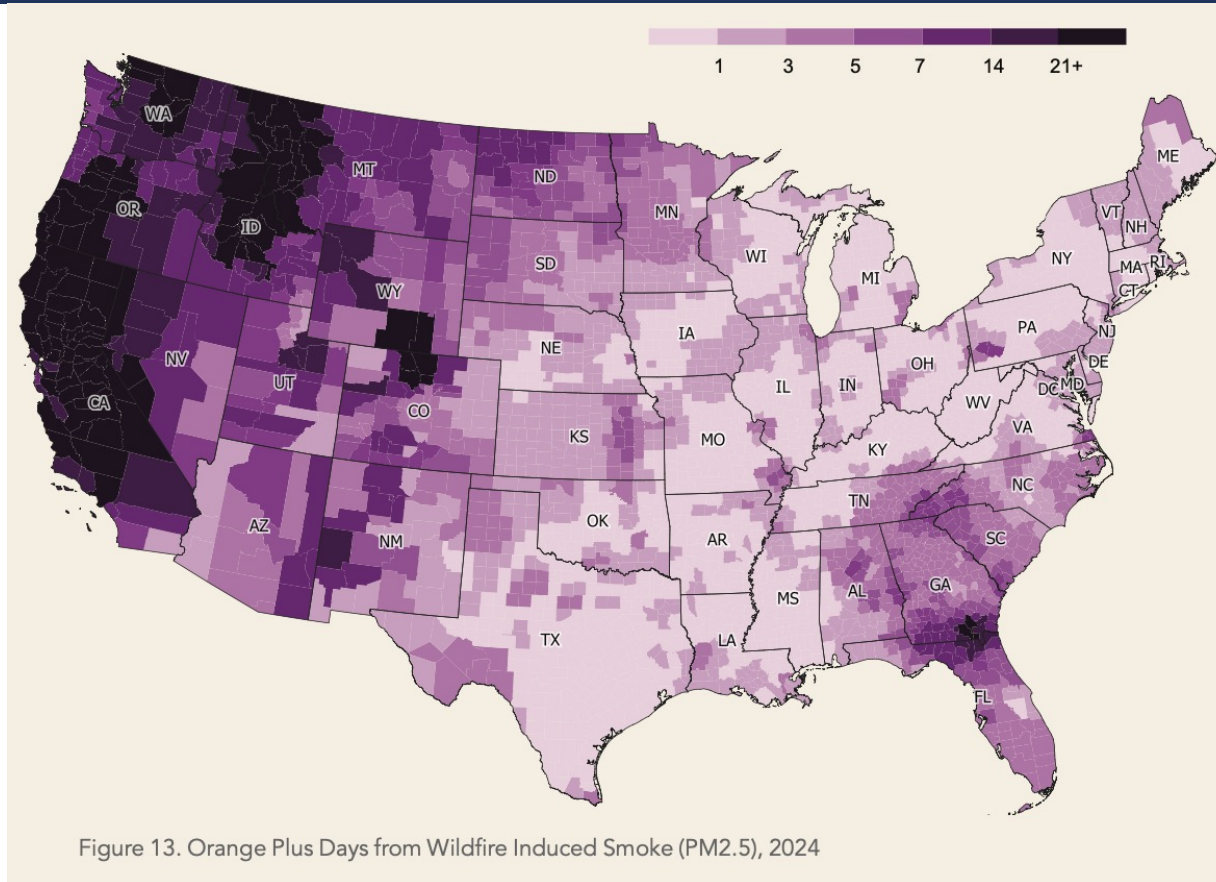


Air, Fire, Drought, and Heat Threaten SW Oregon



Source: First Street Foundation. *The 11th National Risk Assessment: Portfolio Pressures*. First Street, September 2024.
<https://firststreet.org>.

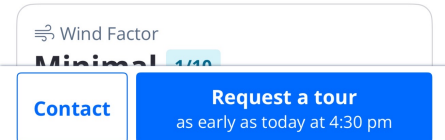
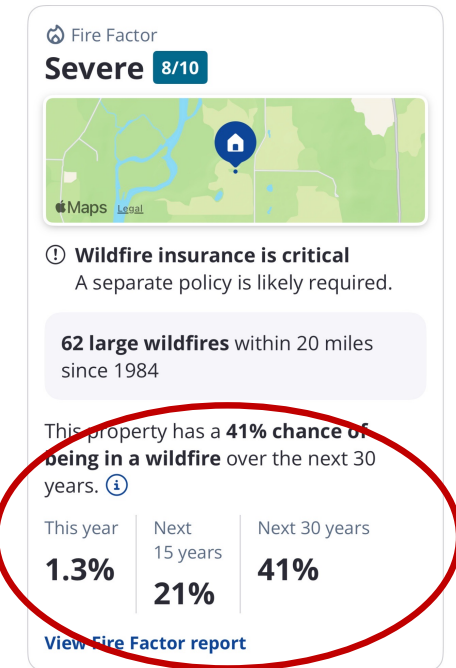
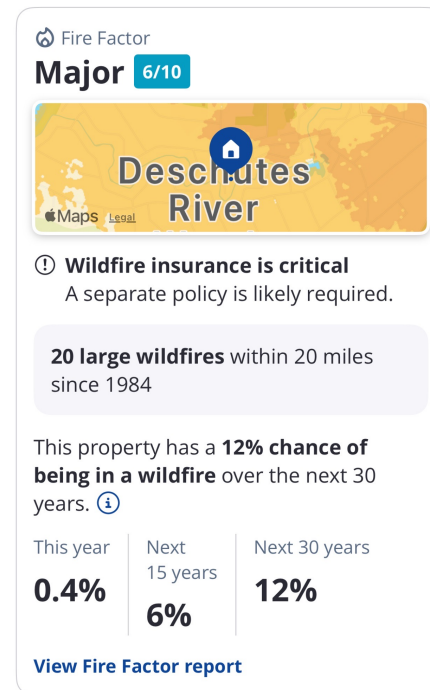
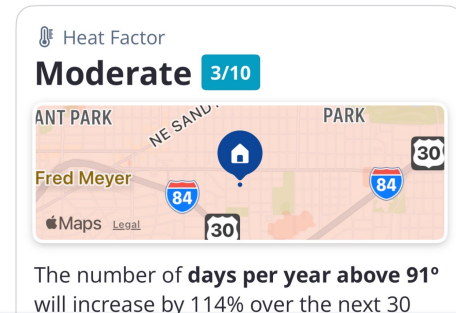
Three Weeks+ of Unhealthy Air, 2024



Source: First Street Foundation. *The 10th National Risk Assessment: Atrocious Air*. First Street <https://firststreet.org>.

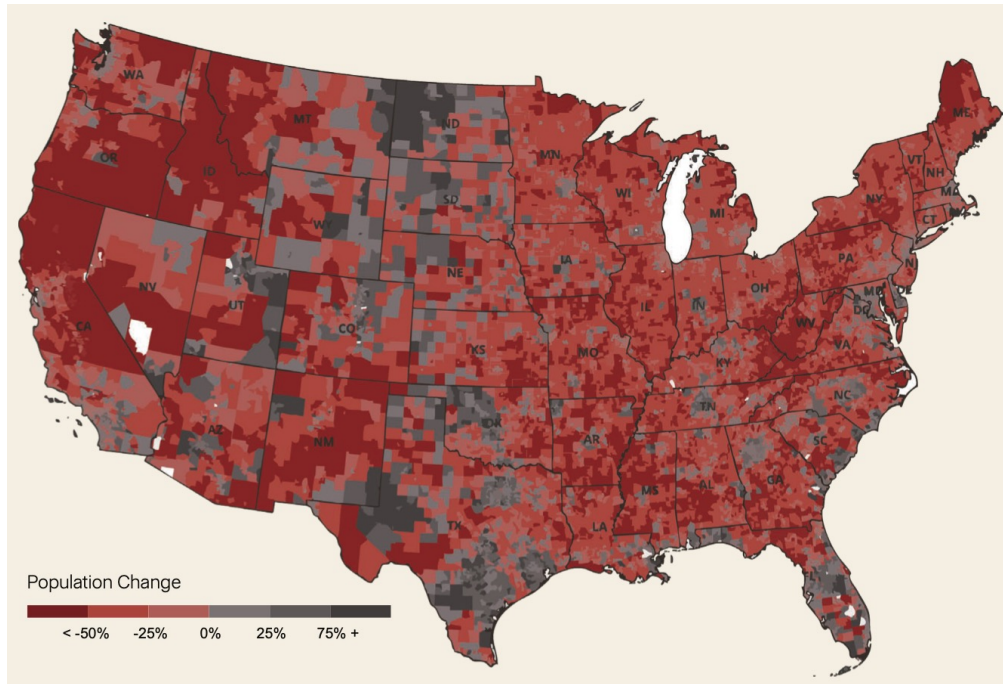


Buyers Beware: Climate Risk on Oregon Home Listings



Source: Zillow. Climate Risks for Selected Oregon Properties. Zillow mobile app. January 13, 2025.

Oregon at Risk: Projected Wildfire Smoke Migration and Population Shifts by 2055



*By 2055, the combined impact of wildfires and their smoke will drive significant migration across the U.S. **Wildfire smoke will likely cause 12.8 million Americans to relocate, primarily in western states including California, Washington, and Oregon.***

First Street Foundation

Source: First Street Foundation. *The 12th National Risk Assessment: Property Prices in Peril.* First Street, <https://firststreet.org>.





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MULTNOMAH COUNTY

Central City Task Force finds Portland has second-highest top marginal tax rate in U.S.

by: [Jashayla Pettigrew](#)

Posted: Jan 19, 2025 / 07:30 AM PST

Updated: Jan 17, 2025 / 11:25 AM PST

Portland businesses' paid taxes surged by 82% from more than \$781 million in 2019 to more than \$1.4 billion in 2023.

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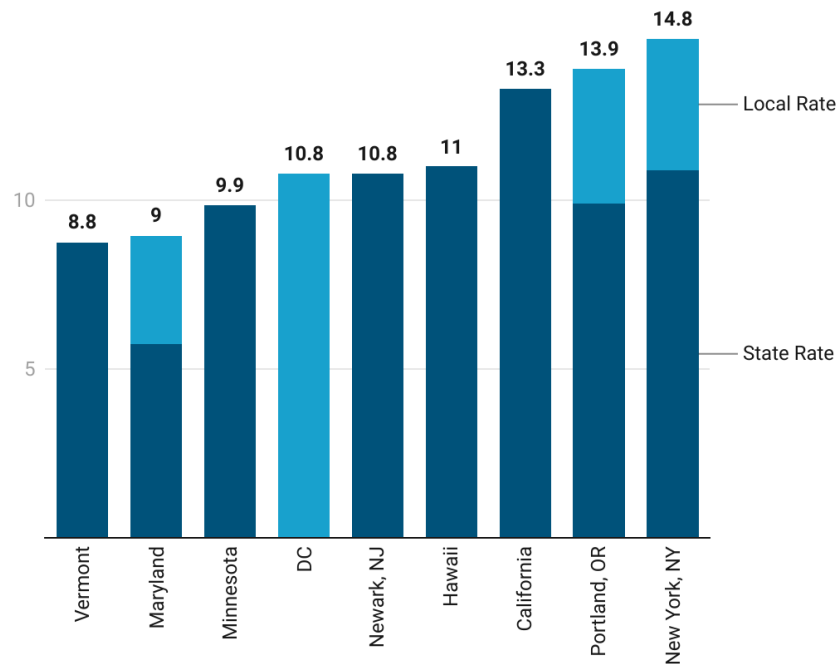


PORTLAND, Ore. ([KOIN](#)) — A new report shows how Portland tax measures have impacted residents and business owners, causing some of the area's higher-income households to relocate elsewhere.

Portland's 13.9% Income Tax Rate Poses Challenges for Talent and Business Retention

Highest Combined State and Local Individual Income Tax Jurisdictions in the United States

Top Marginal Income Tax Rates Shown for TY 2024



*One essential feature of cities is that **people and capital can readily leave them**; greater factor mobility is a key feature of urban, as opposed to national, public finance.*

Edward Glaeser (2012) *Urban Public Finance*



Source: EY for Oregon Business and Industry. Data on state marginal income tax rates and brackets from Wolters Kluwer CCH. Data on local income tax rates compiled from internal research. • Created with Datawrapper



Jul 1, 2024 3:03 PM Eastern Daylight Time

Amplify Cell Technologies Begins Construction of Mississippi Battery Cell Factory.

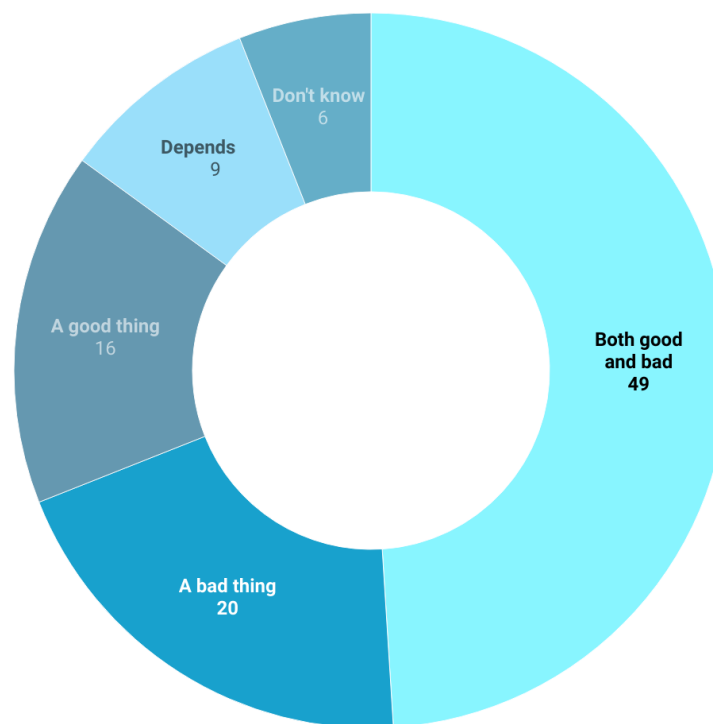
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Oregonians Divided on Population Growth: Nearly Half See Both Pros and Cons

Oregonians' Perspectives on Growth

Both good and bad A bad thing A good thing Depends Don't know



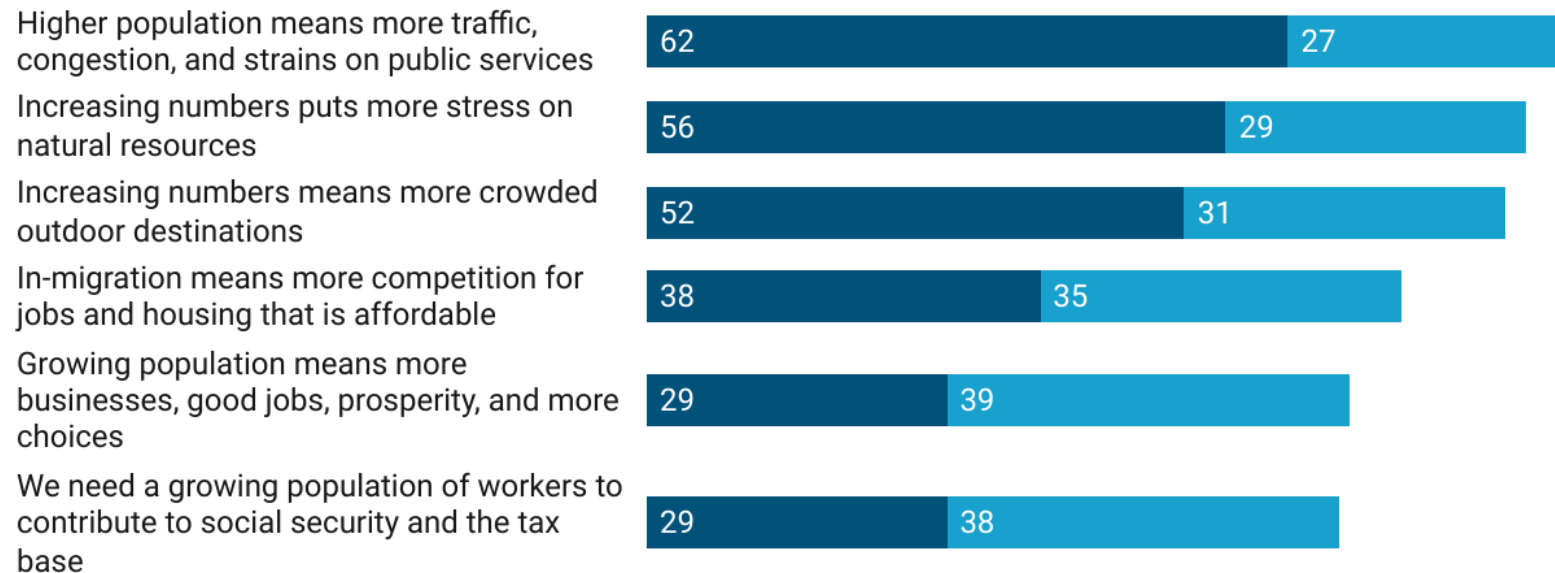
From February 11-20, 2023, the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center conducted a statewide survey of Oregonians' values and beliefs on population growth in Oregon.

Source: Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, March 10, 2023 • Created with Datawrapper

Oregonians Voice Strong Concerns About the Impacts of Population Growth

Statements About Population Growth, Agree or Disagree

■ Strongly Agree (%) ■ Lean Agree (%)

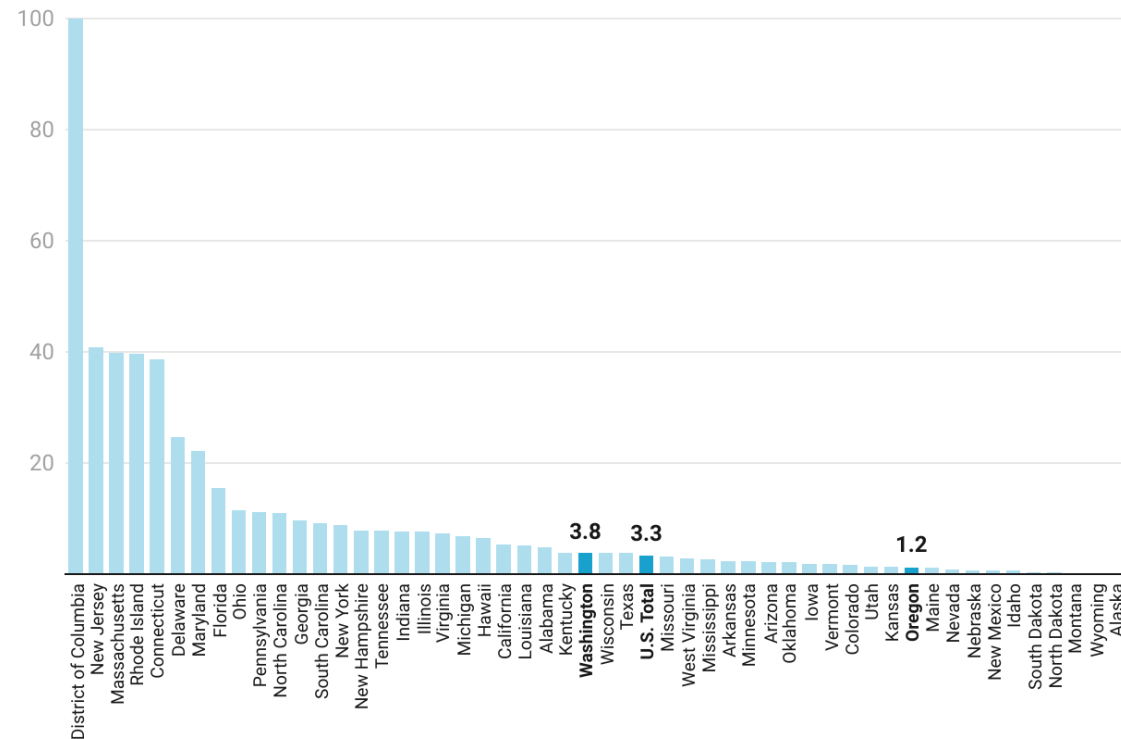


Source: Oregon Values and Beliefs Center (March 10, 2023) • Created with Datawrapper

Oregon Among States with the Least Urbanized Land

Urban Land as a Percent of Total Land

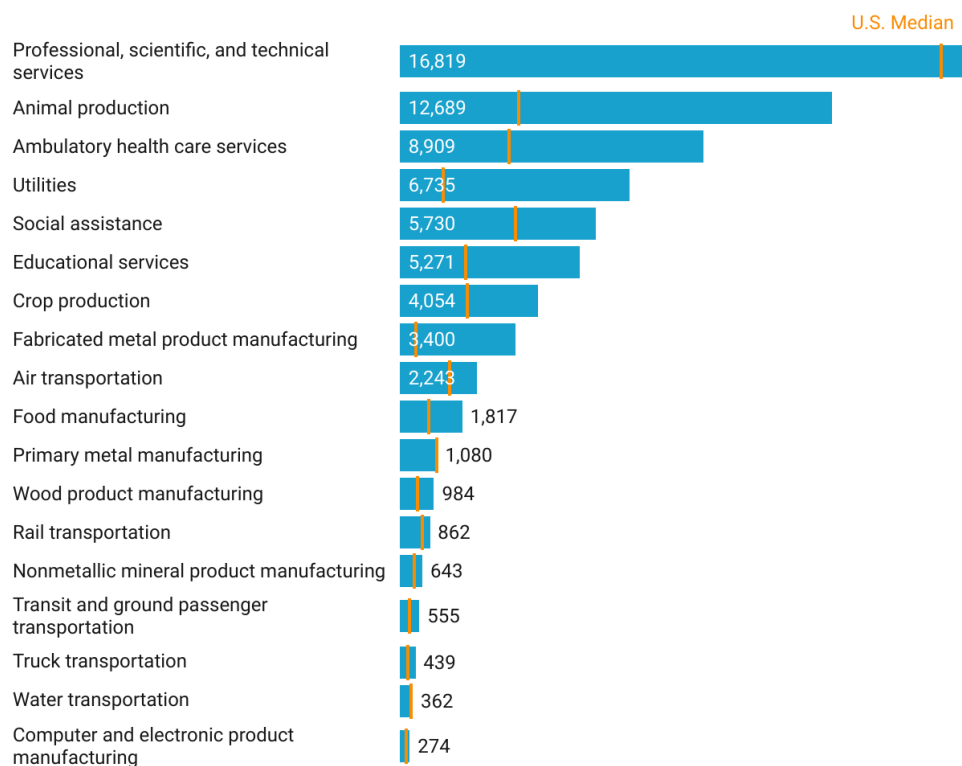
2014 (Most Recent Available)



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, 2017 Major Land Uses Report • Created with Datawrapper

Oregon's Businesses Operate Under Heavier Regulatory Loads Than Most States

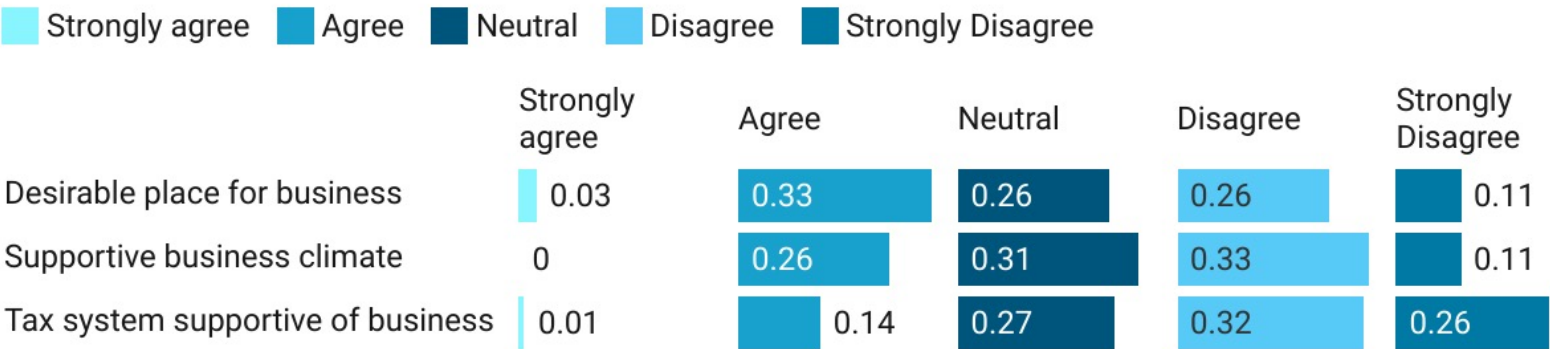
Oregon Business Regulations Compared to the Median State, by Industry



Source: D. Chambers and P. A. McLaughlin, Oregon's Regulatory Landscape. Arlington, VA: Mercatus Center, 2024 • Created with Datawrapper

Local Leaders Doubt Oregon’s Business Environment Supports Growth

Perceptions of Oregon Business Environment by Oregon Economic Development Professionals, City Managers, and Mayors, 2024



Source: Oregon Statewide Economic Development Needs Assessment, Institute for Policy Research & Engagement, School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon, 2024 • Created with Datawrapper



A large, snow-capped mountain peak, likely Mount Hood, dominates the background. The mountain is covered in patches of white snow and dark, rocky outcrops. The sky above is a pale, hazy blue. The overall image has a soft, slightly faded appearance, typical of a presentation background.

The Good News: We Have a Choice

Oregon has the Assets—Land, Talent, Climate, and Innovation—to Grow Sustainably. What we need is the will.

Oregon's Strengths Include

1. **Natural Beauty That Draws Talent.** Oregon's mountains, forests, coastline, and climate continue to attract people—especially when paired with livability and access.
2. **Urban Growth Capacity Without Sprawl.** The state has room to grow, but land use rules require an update.
3. **Innovation Legacy That Builds What's Next.** From shipyards to semiconductors to the running revolution, Oregon has a habit of making the improbable real—and could again.
4. **Clean Energy Resources for a Low-Carbon Economy.** With strong wind and solar capacity, Oregon is positioned to lead as demand for clean, affordable energy accelerates.

The Choice

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Many of Oregon's systems—our schools, regulations, land use rules, and permitting processes—were built for a different time, to solve yesterday's problems. **But the future has never looked less like the past than it does right now.**

The Choice

If we fail to adapt, we risk locking ourselves into a future of stagnation, scarcity, and decline. Yet this is still a choice. We can choose to modernize, to grow deliberately, and to build a state that remains vibrant, inclusive, and full of possibility. **The question is no longer whether we can afford to change—but whether we can afford not to.**