

## Independent Journal Review 2014 Article



Home » How Corrupt is Y.

# How Corrupt is Your State? All 50 Are Ranked from Most to Least Corrupt



by **Caroline Schaeffer** 4 years ago

9 Votes

There are certain places across the country that have the unfortunate distinction of being known for their government corruption. Chicago's nickname "The Windy City" isn't just about the weather, folks.

But rumors and speculation aren't an effective measure of deciding which states are more corrupt than others.

That's why the **Data Lab** at *FiveThirtyEight* used four indicators to measure which states' politicians muddy the water, and which are clean as a whistle:

Image credit: *FiveThirtyEight*

Image credit *FiveThirtyEight*

First, the number of corruption convictions was counted, landing New York, California, and Illinois in the top three places, respectively.

But because those states have higher populations and thus more politicians, the conviction rate per capita was noted in the second column.

The top offenders per capita?

1. Louisiana
2. Mississippi
3. Alaska

New York, California, and Illinois drop to numbers 11, 34, and 6 when taking population into account.

Although these numbers give us a good impression of the illegal dealings in the states, it can't capture the legal yet unethical actions committed by state politicians.



That's why Oguzhan Dincer and Michael Johnston of the Harvard University Center for Ethics sought out 280 political journalists from across the country to gather their impressions of the political corruption in their state:

According to reporters, Kentucky ranked #1 in corruption, followed by Illinois and New Jersey. ←

As far as the *least* corrupt states, aggregate scores place these guys as the winners:

1. Nebraska & Oregon (tied at 43.5)
2. Vermont (41.5)
3. Iowa (39.5)

But if honesty is an important policy for you, you might want to steer clear of Illinois and New York. It's a shame, but are we really surprised?

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

9  
posts

### COMMENTS

OUR SITE  FACEBOOK

Politics

# Is N.J. among the most corrupt states? Political reporters think so

Published: Dec. 09, 2014, 11:40 a.m.

By Erin O'Neill | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

\$\$ icon Sapone

Is New Jersey government corrupt? A new study from Harvard University of political reporters found the state ranks among the most corrupt in the country.

*(Patti Sapone/The Star-Ledger)*

New Jersey ranks among the most corrupt states in the nation, according to a new study, which surveyed political reporters for their view on the subject.

The study by two fellows at Harvard University's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics received responses from 280 reporters from every state except Louisiana, where none of the individuals contacted participated in the survey. Louisiana, the study said, is "historically one of the more corrupt states in America."

Reporters were asked to rate their perceptions of illegal and legal corruption in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of state government in 2013 on a five-tier scale from "not at all common" to "extremely common."

Illegal corruption is defined by the study as a government official receiving cash or gifts in exchange for specific benefits to private individuals or groups, while legal corruption is defined as a public official receiving campaign contributions or

endorsements in exchange for specific benefits to a private individual or group, whether that's through an explicit or implicit understanding.



Only in New Jersey and Arizona did the study find reporters perceived illegal corruption to be "very common" in the executive branch. New Jersey's legislative branch ranked as in between "moderately common" and "very common" for illegal corruption along with New Mexico and South Carolina, according to the study, which put 10 states in the "very common" column for that category.

The survey found reporters ranked legal corruption in the executive branch as "extremely common" in only Kentucky and New Jersey. For the legislative branch, New Jersey, as well as Alabama, Illinois, Kentucky, Montana, Nevada and New York, were included in the "extremely common" column for legal corruption.

Reporters put both types of corruption for the judicial branch in New Jersey in between "not at all common" and "slightly common."

Overall, the study found Arizona is perceived to be the most corrupt state when it comes to illegal corruption, followed by California, Kentucky, Alabama, Illinois and New Jersey. On the other hand, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, the Dakotas, and Vermont are seen as the least corrupt states, followed by Michigan and

Oregon.

Kentucky is the most corrupt state when it comes to legal corruption, the study found, followed by Illinois and Nevada. Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon and Vermont are at the other end of that spectrum.

But the study's authors wrote that "it is all bad news for Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, New Mexico, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania as their aggregate scores are in the highest quartiles of both illegal and legal corruption."

*Erin O'Neill may be reached at [eoNeill@njadvancemedia.com](mailto:eoNeill@njadvancemedia.com). Follow her on Twitter [NJ.com on Facebook](#).*

Note to readers: if you purchase something through one of our affiliate links we may earn a commission.