



Pathways *to* Prosperity LOUISIANA

APRIL 2026



THE DATA CENTER

Independent Analysis for Informed Decisions in Southeast Louisiana



National Conference on Citizenship

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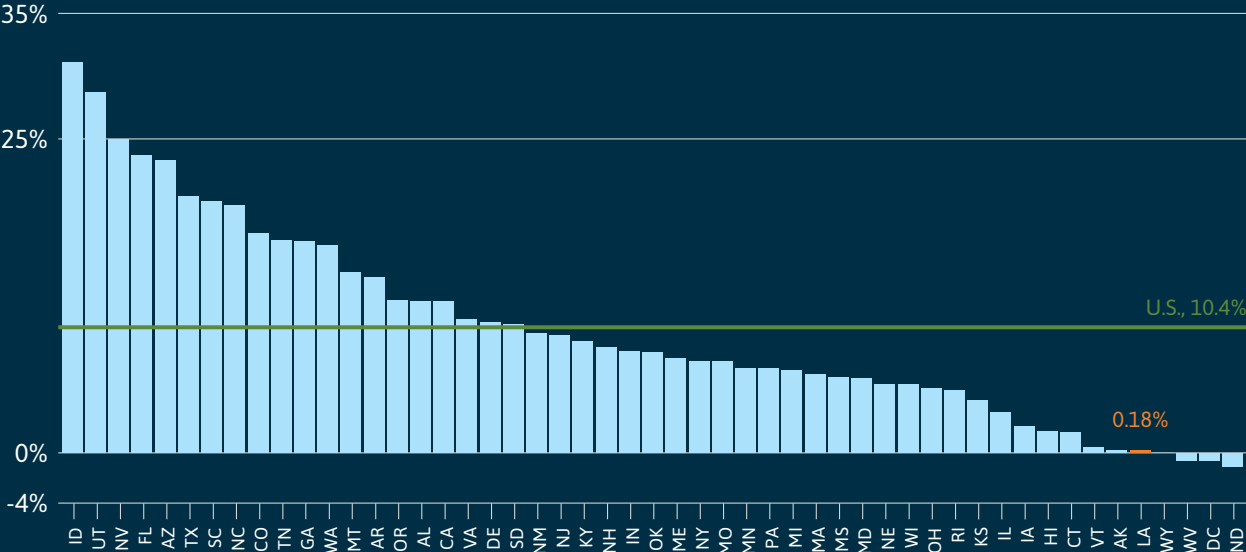
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Executive Summary

In 2014, *The Data Center* published “The Transformative Possibility of the New ‘Energy Boom’ in Southeast Louisiana”, highlighting tens of billions of dollars of investments to come in liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals, chemical manufacturing, and refineries that promised to produce thousands of jobs.¹ However, over the last decade, despite \$90 billion in new capital investment, and GDP peaking in 2023, job growth in Louisiana has been flat and the state’s population has declined by 52,000 people.² Without a doubt, the number one reason people move long distances is for work opportunities.³ Without growth in permanent jobs, the state is likely to continue losing population.

Job growth and decline by state Percent change 2015–2025 (annual averages)



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Note: 2024 data is averaged for January 2024–November 2024.

As the state embarks on a new wave totaling \$100 billion in capital investment — in LNG projects, steel manufacturing, and AI data centers — this report examines the overall impacts of the last wave of industrial expansion.⁴ We examine economic indicators that reflect the financial well-being of Louisianans, indicators of pollution related to the state’s expanded industrial base, and health indicators with links to air, water, and soil pollution.

Economy. While U.S. employment has grown 10.4 percent since 2015, Louisiana managed just 0.18 percent growth. Median household income, at under \$61,000, has not budged in real terms since 2010. Meanwhile, the cost of living has surged — two working adults now need to earn nearly \$99,000 combined to support a family of four, a 19 percent jump in just five years. Louisiana’s real estate values have collapsed in the national

rankings — falling from 28th in 2015 to third from the bottom by 2024.

Pollution. Louisiana ranks 1st in the nation for nitrogen oxide emissions from refineries and 2nd in the nation for fine particulate matter and carbon monoxide. Louisiana leads all states in cancer risk from toxic air pollution, with more than 41 residents per million at risk — a rate 25 percent higher than Texas. Toxic sites are concentrated in the state’s most populous parishes. Calcasieu leads with 31 industrial sites emitting hazardous toxins and 14 active Superfund sites, followed by East Baton Rouge with 27 and 16 respectively. Industrial spills have worsened dramatically — rising from an average of 5.6 annually in the late 1980s to 34.4 over the most recent decade.

Health. Louisianans are 37 percent more likely to suffer from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease than the national average, 36 percent more likely to have a stroke, and 16 percent more likely to have a heart attack according to 2022 data. Louisiana leads the nation in prostate cancer, with 157 cases per 100,000 men. One in nine newborns is born at low birth weight — 37 percent above the national average. Louisiana mothers are nearly 47 percent more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than the average American woman. While pollution is not the sole cause, the links between air, water, and soil contamination and these health conditions are well-documented.

A decade ago, Southeast Louisiana stood on the threshold of what appeared to be a generational economic boom. Billions in petrochemical and manufacturing investment promised tens of thousands of job openings. That promise has gone unfulfilled. While capital and billions of dollars in tax subsidies did flow into refineries, chemical plants, and LNG facilities, job growth has failed to materialize.⁵

Tracking cost of living, real estate trends, pollution exposure, and health outcomes is a necessary step toward understanding what is actually happening

to Louisianans and making the case that economic development must be measured not only in capital investment and GDP, but in the quality of life it delivers to families.



Economy

Energy-producing states have long reported strong GDP growth, but the benefits are bypassing workers and families. Corporations are increasingly using automation to eliminate jobs and retain more revenue as profits.⁶ Rather than report on levels of investment or GDP, this section examines measures of Louisiana’s economy that more directly reflect the financial lives of its residents — jobs, incomes, cost of living, insurance premiums, and real estate values.

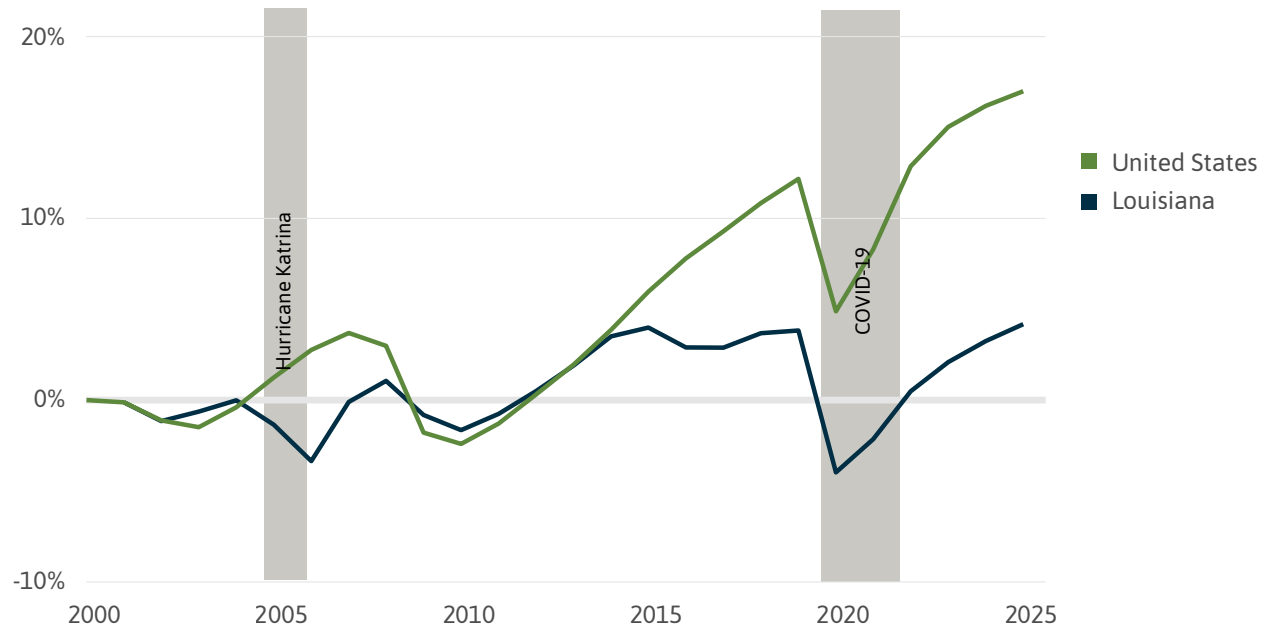
INDICATORS IN THIS SECTION:

- Job growth
- Median household income
- Cost of living
- Insurance premiums
- Real estate values

DESPITE \$90 BILLION IN INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT, LOUISIANA HAS GROWN JOBS ONLY A SMALL FRACTION OF 1 PERCENT OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS.

Job growth and decline, Louisiana and U.S.

Percent change since 2000 (annual averages)

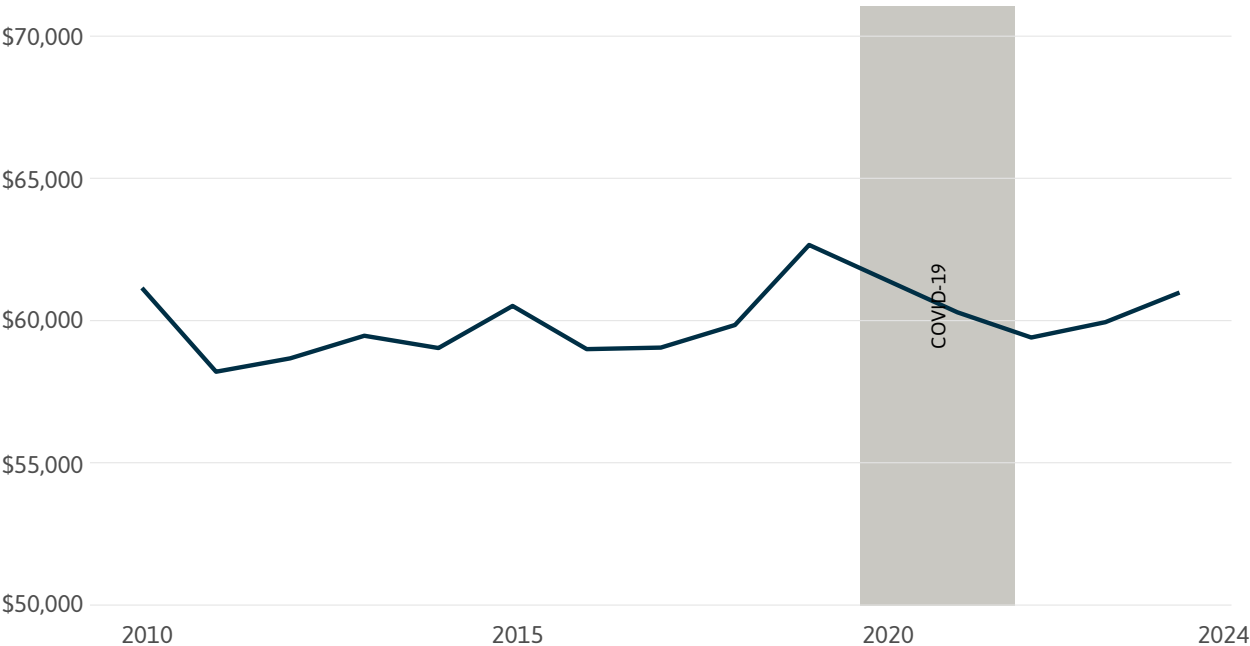


Source: [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

Louisiana's job growth has fallen dramatically behind the nation — growing only 0.18 percent since 2015. From 2015 to 2019, Louisiana actually lost 3,000 jobs, while nationally jobs grew by 6 percent. Then the COVID-19 crisis caused massive job loss, but as of 2025, Louisiana has only barely recovered to its 2019 jobs level, while the nation has exceeded its pre-COVID-19 pandemic benchmark by another 4 percent. The fracking boom catalyzed a collapse of oil prices in 2014, which gutted Louisiana's offshore industry. Oil and gas extraction jobs plummeted from roughly 50,000 in 2014 to just 27,000 by 2024.⁷ Massive capital investment flowed into chemical manufacturing, LNG, and refining — industries that use abundant, cheap natural gas. Today, Louisiana boasts the nation's highest concentration of refinery and chemical manufacturing jobs, but this has diminishing returns as the increasing use of automation means these industries hire fewer workers than in the past. The result is \$90 billion in industrial investment, alongside a decade of flat job growth.⁸

LOUISIANA INCOMES HAVE REMAINED FLAT FOR MORE THAN A DECADE. AFTER ADJUSTING FOR INFLATION, MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN LOUISIANA, AT LESS THAN \$61,000, IS NO HIGHER THAN IN 2010.

Median household income, Louisiana
2010–2024, 2024 inflation-adjusted dollars

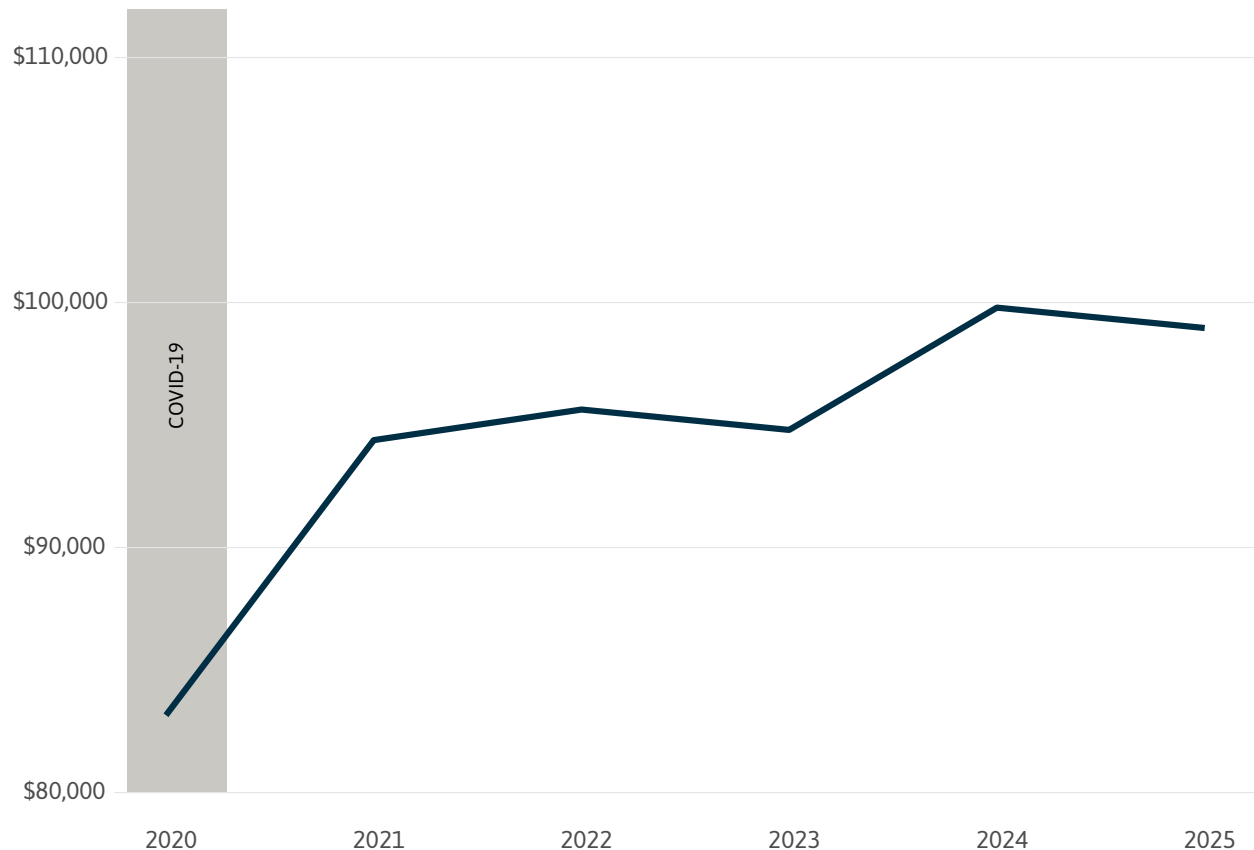


Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#) and [IPUMS NHGIS](#).

Louisiana’s median household income, adjusted for inflation (2024 dollars), has been remarkably flat over the past decade and a half. After dipping from \$61,148 in 2010 to around \$58,200 in 2011 (in 2024 dollars), income levels hovered in a narrow band between roughly \$58,700 and \$60,500 through most of the 2010s, never fully recovering to 2010 levels. The strongest year in the last 15 years was 2019, when median income briefly climbed to \$62,656 — the only year to surpass the 2010 figure. That modest high-water mark was short-lived, as incomes fell again after the COVID-19 pandemic and have remained essentially flat, landing at \$60,986 in 2024. Taken together, the data paint a picture of stagnation. After adjusting for inflation, Louisiana households earned about the same in 2024 as they did in 2010, with little sustained upward momentum over an entire generation of workers. This trend aligns closely with the state’s broader job growth struggles over the same period.

THE COST OF LIVING HAS INCREASED DRAMATICALLY IN LOUISIANA, SUCH THAT TWO WORKING ADULTS NEED TO EARN A TOTAL OF NEARLY \$99,000 TO SUPPORT A FAMILY OF FOUR — UP 19 PERCENT IN JUST FIVE YEARS.

Annual living wage for a family with two working adults and two children, Louisiana
2020–2025

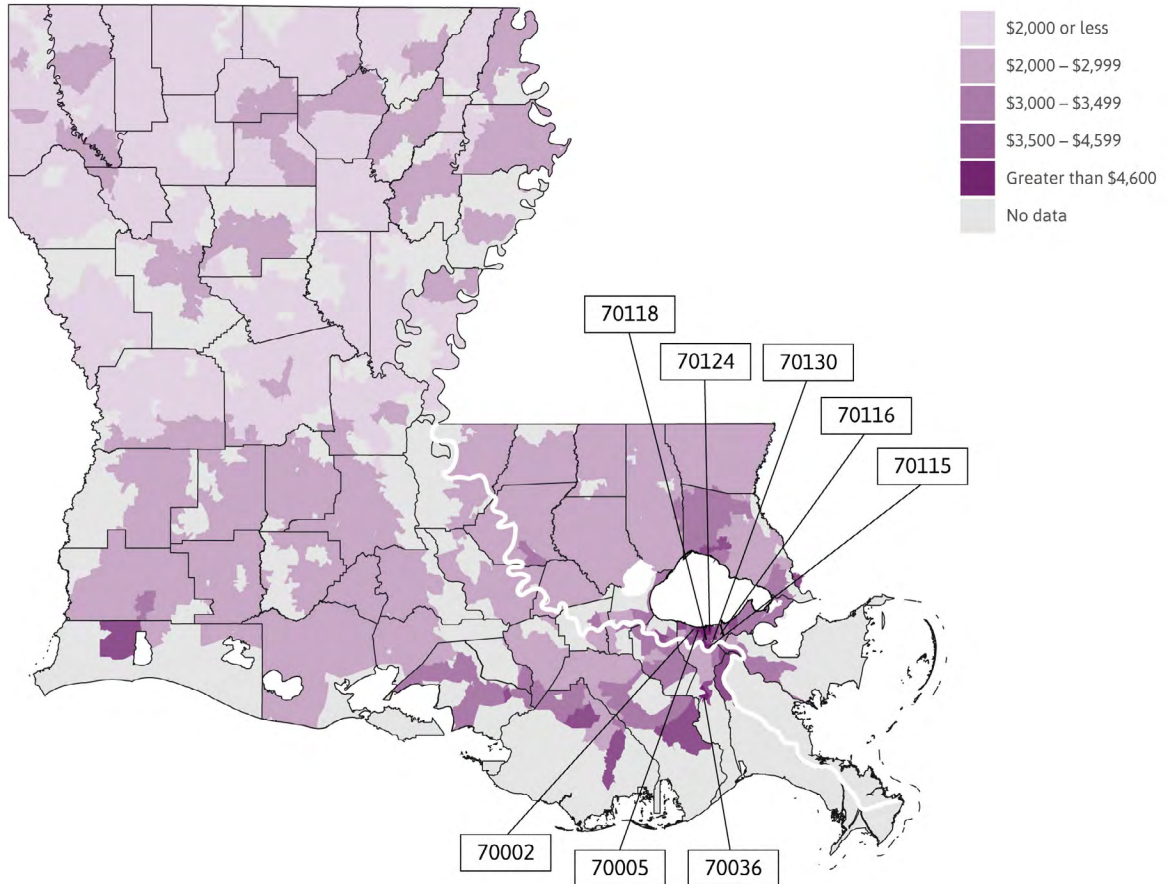


Source: [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#).

MIT's Living Wage Calculator totals the expenses of a Louisiana family of four, with two working adults and two children, covering: housing, transportation, medical costs, internet, cell service, taxes, food, and basic household expenses. These calculations assume no retirement savings nor discretionary spending. In 2025, a family of four in Louisiana needed \$98,966 in total income to cover these basic expenses (or \$23.79 per hour per working adult). The gap between what Louisiana families actually earn and what MIT calculates they need has grown since 2020. That year, the MIT living wage for a household with two working adults and two children stood at \$83,158. By 2021, the living wage jumped sharply to \$94,390, a nearly \$11,000 increase in a single year. It has remained elevated ever since, peaking at \$99,798 in 2024 before settling slightly to \$98,966 in 2025 due to modestly falling transportation and housing costs. But medical, childcare, food, internet and other costs continued to rise. Meanwhile, Louisiana's median household income was just \$60,986 in 2024. The practical implication is striking: even with two adults working full-time, a typical Louisiana household earns only about 60 cents for every dollar MIT calculates is needed to cover basic living expenses.

IN 2022, AVERAGE HOME INSURANCE EXCEEDED \$4,600 IN EIGHT LOUISIANA ZIP CODES.

Average homeowners insurance premiums by ZIP code, Louisiana
2022

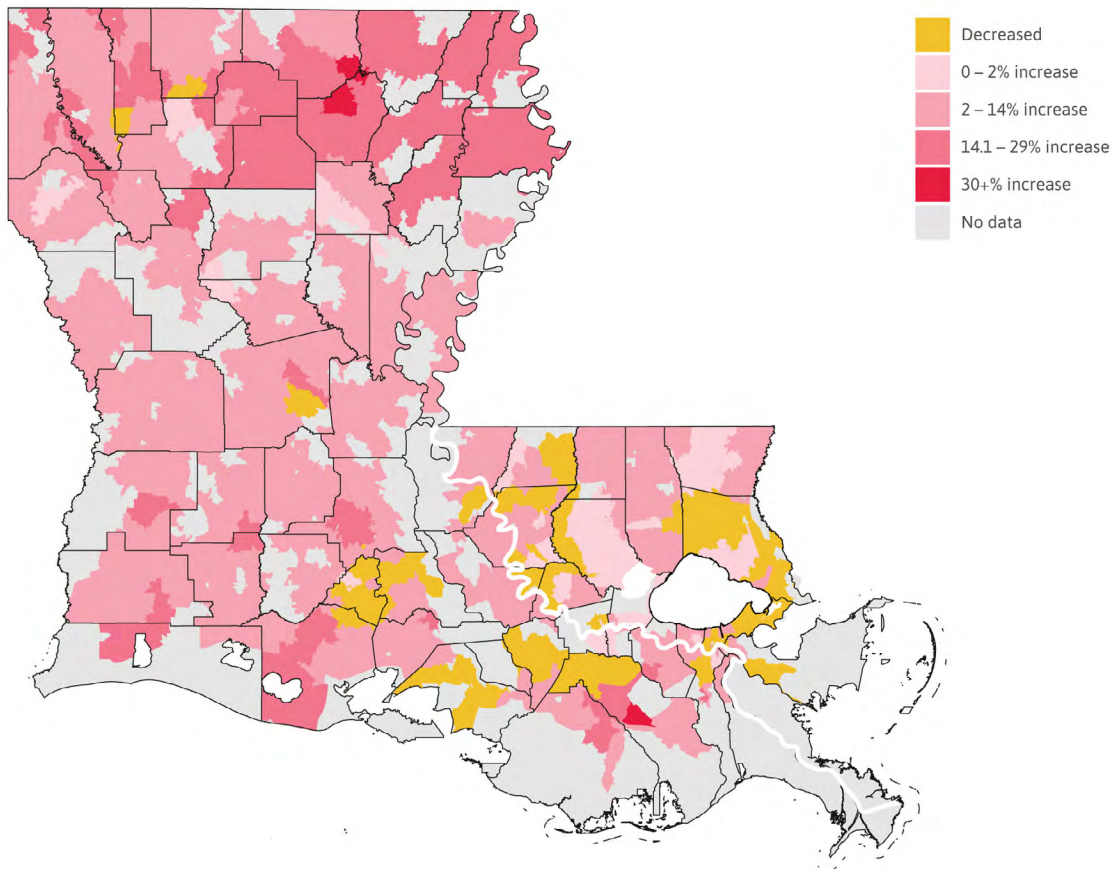


Source: U.S. Department of the Treasury's Federal Insurance Office (FIO).

In 2025, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, state insurance regulators, and the Federal Insurance Office published the results of a massive data collection effort that gathered data from more than 330 private insurers. The data they acquired covers 338 ZIP codes in Louisiana and covered the years 2018 to 2022. Average homeowners insurance premiums exceeded \$4,600 in 8 of Louisiana's ZIP codes in 2022. In the New Orleans ZIP code of 70130, (covering much of the Garden District, Warehouse District, and Central Business District) the average homeowners insurance premium was \$8,305. Many larger homes pay quite a bit more for homeowners insurance, while more modest homes incur lower than average premiums.

ACROSS 60 LOUISIANA ZIP CODES, THE SURGE IN HOMEOWNERS INSURANCE PREMIUMS OUTPACED THE HIGH RATE OF INFLATION BETWEEN 2018–2022.

Change in average homeowners insurance premiums by ZIP code, Louisiana
2018–2022

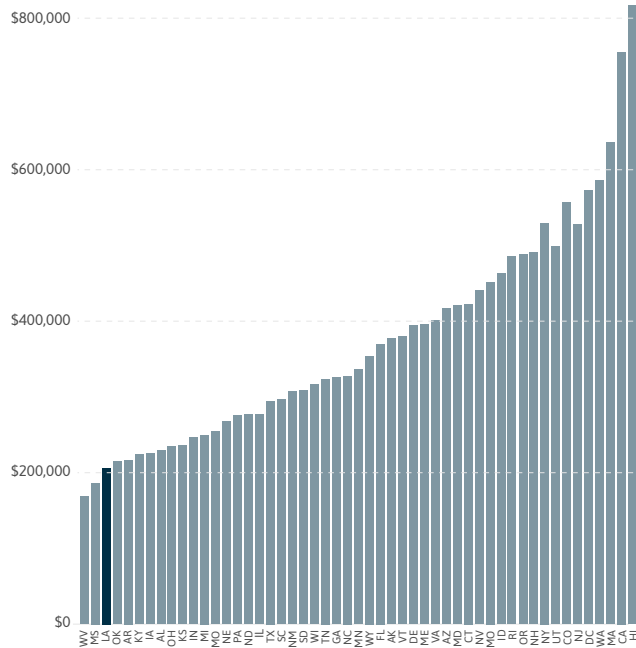


Source: U.S. Department of the Treasury's Federal Insurance Office (FIO).

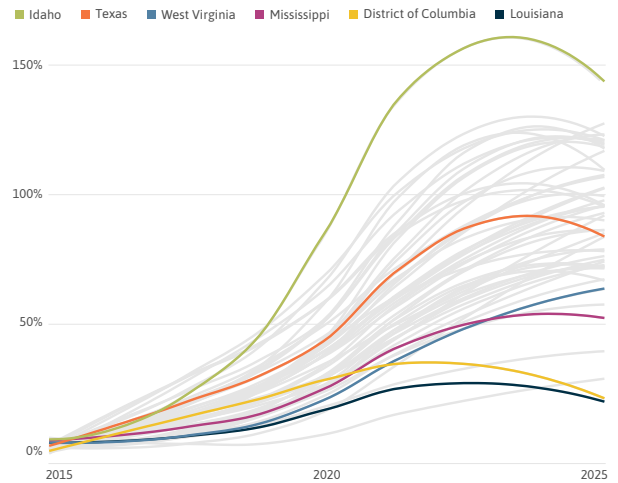
The cost of homeowners insurance increased substantially between 2018 and 2022. In 60 Louisiana ZIP codes, the rising cost of homeowners insurance eclipsed the rapid inflation rate of 14.1 percent over those four years. In four ZIP codes, the average homeowners insurance premium rose more than 30 percent. The cost of homeowners insurance continued to rise after 2022 when the State Insurance Commissioner approved rate increases averaging 14 percent in 2023.⁹ And according to Insurify and Quadrant Information Services, the average annual Louisiana homeowners insurance policy cost \$10,964 in 2024, rising to \$13,938 in 2025.¹⁰

LOUISIANA’S REAL ESTATE VALUES HAVE SUNK TO THE 3RD LOWEST IN THE COUNTRY, WITH ONLY 16.5 PERCENT TOTAL GROWTH SINCE 2015, AND VALUES DECLINING 3.9 PERCENT FROM THEIR 2022 PEAK.

Average real estate values by state
December 2025



Average real estate value by state
Percent change since January 2015



Source: [Zillow Home Value Index \(ZHVI\)](#).

Home ownership is widely considered the most accessible and reliable wealth-building tool available to ordinary families. Owning real estate that is growing in value provides families with equity that can be borrowed against in emergencies, such as job loss, medical crisis, or disaster.¹¹ In 2015, Louisiana’s real estate values ranked 26th among all states, but by 2024 had sunk to third from the bottom. As of 2025, West Virginia, Mississippi, and Louisiana had the lowest real estate values in the country at \$169,000, \$186,000, and \$206,000 respectively. Louisiana is particularly notable as it sits in this bottom tier despite being a larger state with major metro areas like New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Moreover, property values have increased 43 percent in Mississippi and 54 percent in West Virginia since 2015, but only 16.5 percent in Louisiana — the second worst appreciation rate in the nation. Research shows that homes near certain polluting industrial facilities can lose more than 10 percent of their value, because buyers are simply unwilling to pay full price to live near facilities associated with health risks. These property value losses tend to be permanent in areas where pollution is ongoing and cleanup never happens — meaning the state’s weak real estate performance may not be a temporary slump but a long-term one after decades of industrial land use with little environmental remediation.¹²



Pollution

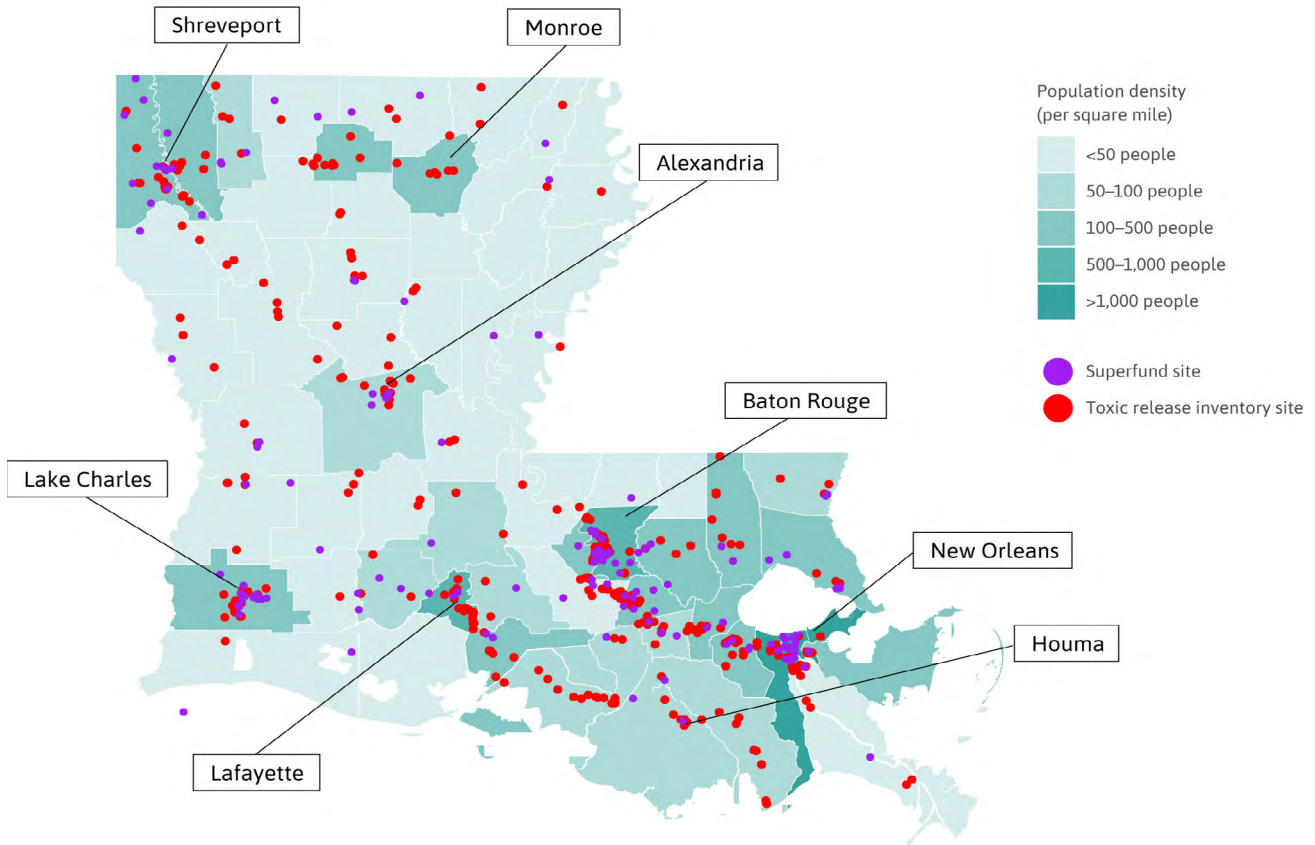
Louisiana’s dominant industries — LNG terminals, chemical manufacturing, and refineries — are among the United State’s highest emitters of both air pollutants (nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, fine particulate matter) and toxic chemicals (benzene, 1,3-butadiene, formaldehyde), far exceeding less prevalent sectors like tech manufacturing, textiles, or service-based industries.¹³ This section provides available indicators of air pollutants that are linked to poor health outcomes, as well as indicators of water and soil pollution and their proximity to Louisiana residents.

INDICATORS IN THIS SECTION:

- Toxic sites and population density
- Carbon monoxide emissions
- Fine particulate matter emissions
- Cancer risk due to toxic air pollution
- Nitrogen oxide emissions
- Spillages

90 PERCENT OF LOUISIANA PARISHES HAVE ONE OR MORE INDUSTRIAL SITES THAT EMIT TOXINS HAZARDOUS TO HUMANS, AND TWO-THIRDS OF PARISHES HAVE AT LEAST ONE ACTIVE SUPERFUND SITE.

Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) sites, active Superfund sites, and population density by parish, Louisiana 2023



Source: EPA Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), Superfund Registry, U.S. Census.

While the river parishes between Baton Rouge and New Orleans have been dubbed, “Cancer Alley,” many Louisianans living outside that area fail to realize that toxic hazards are in their own backyards as well. Two federal tracking systems offer a window into nearby toxicity. The EPA’s Toxics Release Inventory monitors companies that emit harmful chemicals, while Superfund designations flag areas where hazardous waste has been dumped. All total, Louisiana has 406 Toxic Release Inventory sites and 154 active Superfund sites, according to the most recent data available from 2023.

MANY OF LOUISIANA'S 500+ TOXIC SITES ARE IN THE URBAN CENTERS OF BATON ROUGE, LAKE CHARLES, NEW ORLEANS, AND SHREVEPORT.

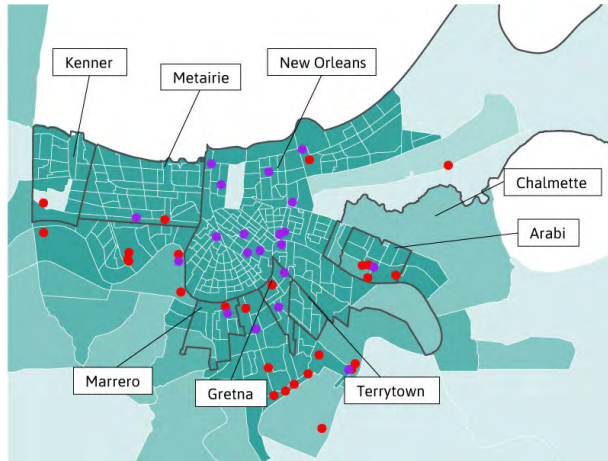
Toxics Release Inventory TRI sites, active Superfund sites, and population density by census tract

Population density (per square mile)

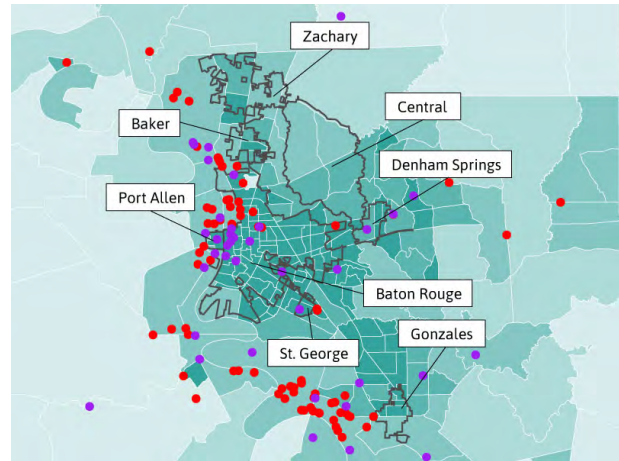
<50 people 50–100 people 100–500 people 500–1,000 people >1,000 people

● Superfund site ● Toxic release inventory site

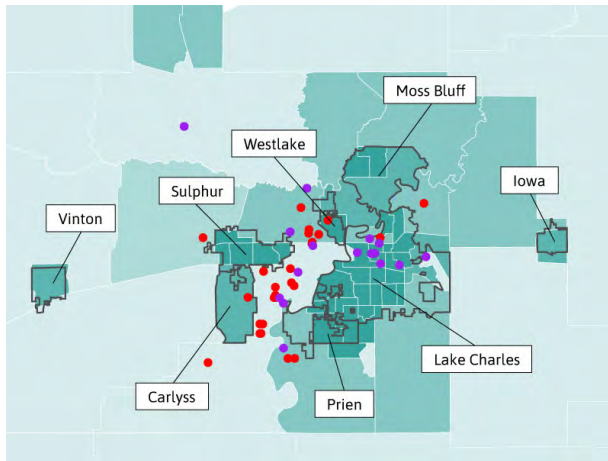
Greater New Orleans, 2023



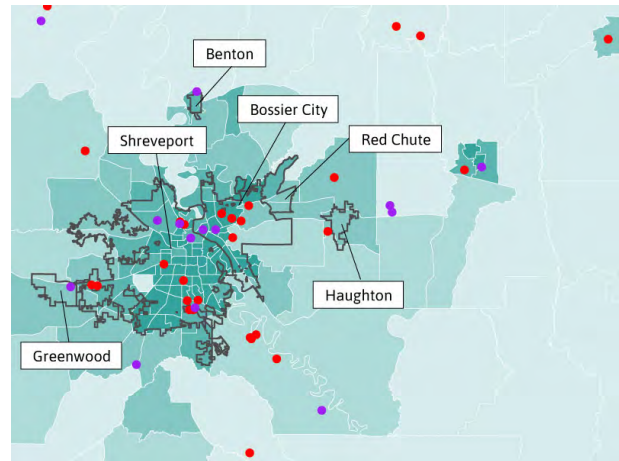
Greater Baton Rouge, 2023



Greater Lake Charles, 2023



Greater Shreveport, 2023

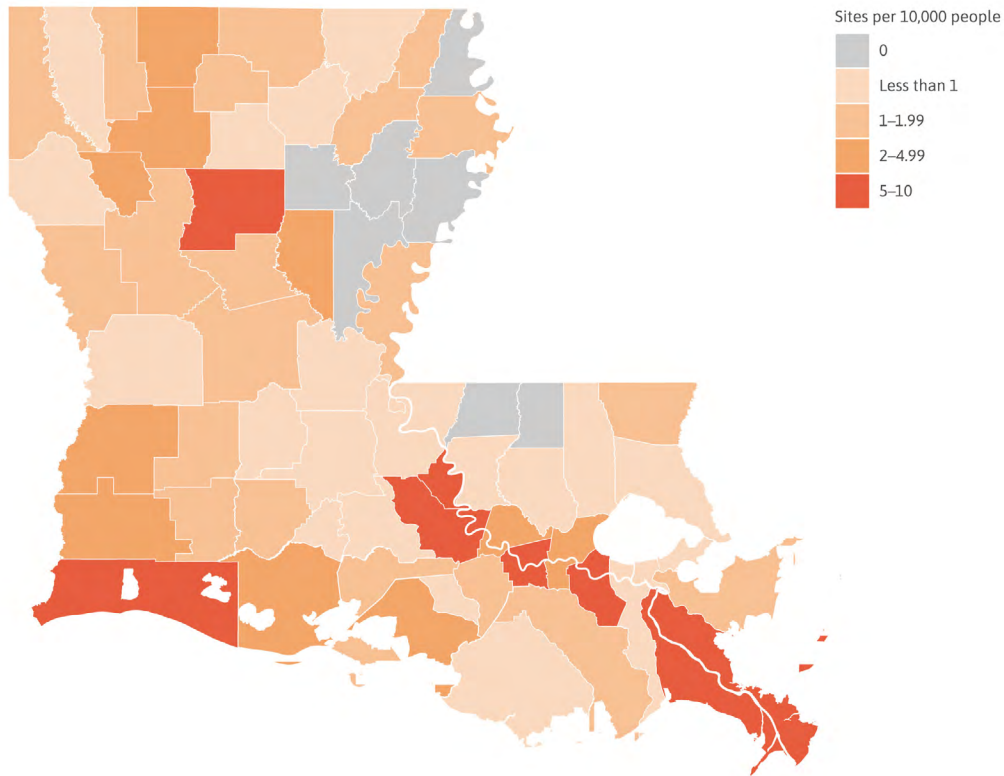


Source: EPA Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), Superfund Registry, U.S. Census.

Communities near these toxic sites face exposure to carcinogenic chemicals that pose serious health risks. And in the face of frequent flooding, these risks spread out even farther. For example, Hurricane Katrina floodwaters carried polluted soils from Superfund landfill sites into homes across the area. Despite early reassurances from the EPA and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality that the area was safe, later studies revealed many areas had unsafe soil contamination levels. It took until 2010 for the EPA to publicly acknowledge that many neighborhoods remained toxic and to issue an apology. But elevated levels of lead, arsenic, cadmium, and other toxic substances are still visible in soil samples today.¹⁴ As recently as 2025, unsafe levels of lead were found in half of all New Orleans playgrounds.¹⁵

THE MOST POPULOUS PARISHES IN LOUISIANA HAVE AMONG THE LARGEST NUMBER OF TOXIC SITES.

Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) sites, active Superfund sites, and population by parish
Sites per 10,000 people



Source: [EPA Toxics Release Inventory \(TRI\)](#), [Superfund Registry](#), U.S. Census.

Leading the pack is Calcasieu Parish (home to the city of Lake Charles) with 31 industrial sites that emit chemicals hazardous to humans (Toxics Release Inventory sites) and 14 active Superfund sites. East Baton Rouge has nearly as many with 27 industrial sites that emit hazardous toxins and 16 active

Superfund sites, followed by Ascension Parish which has 26 emitting industry sites and six active Superfund sites. Similarly, Lafayette Parish has 17 industrial sites emitting harmful toxins and two active Superfund sites, and Caddo Parish (home to Shreveport) has 17 emitting industrial sites and 12 active Superfund sites. Jefferson and Orleans parishes are not immune. Jefferson has 14 industrial sites that are emitting hazardous toxins, and Orleans has two emitting industrial sites. While Orleans has 12 active Superfund sites and Jefferson has five.

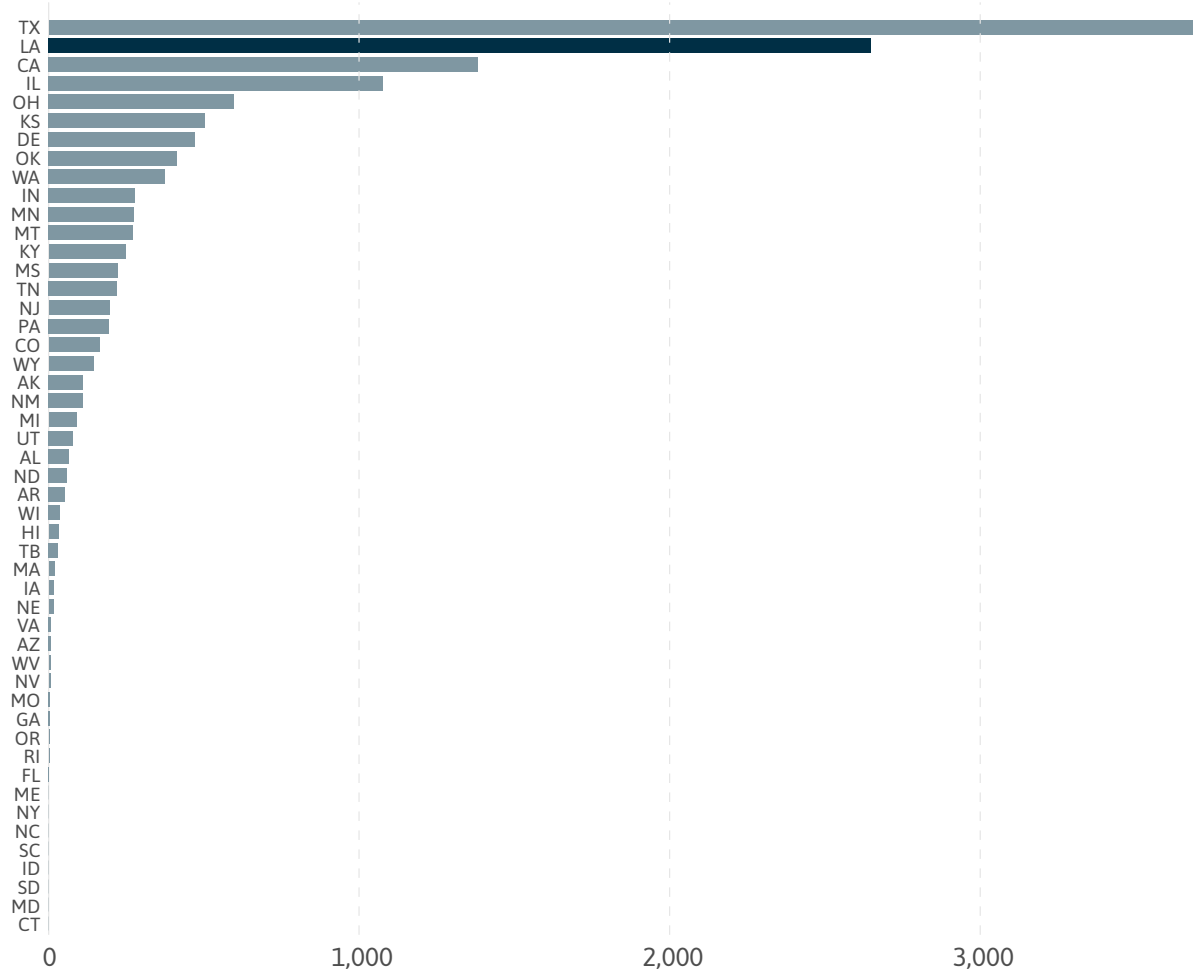
On a per capita basis, Iberville Parish has the largest number of toxic sites at 9.7 per 10,000 residents, followed by St. James Parish at 6.7. West Baton Rouge Parish is a close third at 6.1 sites per 10,000, followed by Cameron Parish at 6 sites per 10,000.

St. Charles, Plaquemines, and Winn parishes all have more than 5 TRI or Superfund sites per 10,000 residents.

For a list of toxic sites and their addresses by parish be sure to see the downloadable excel tables accompanying this report at datacenterresearch.org

IN 2024, LOUISIANA RANKED 2ND IN THE NATION FOR DANGEROUS AIR QUALITY FROM PETROLEUM REFINERIES EMITTING FINE PARTICULATE MATTER.

Tons of PM_{2.5} emissions from petroleum refineries industrial processes by state
2024

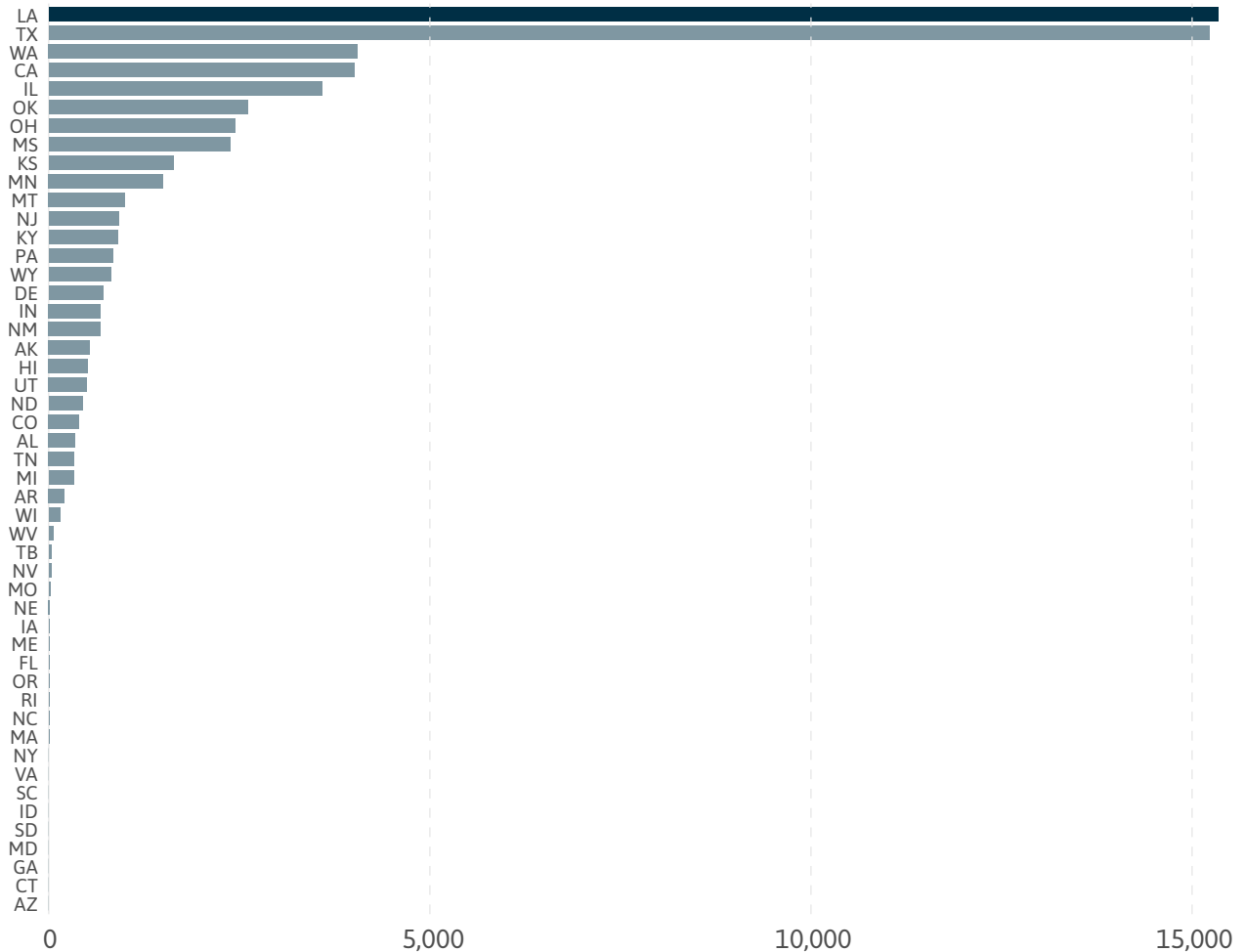


Source: EPA: Air Pollutant Emissions Trends Data.

Fine particulate matter, known as PM_{2.5}, refers to microscopic particles small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream, triggering inflammation and oxidative stress that disrupt blood vessels, alter heart rhythm, and impair the immune system’s ability to fight infection. Heart attacks, strokes, asthma attacks, and respiratory infections are among the most common consequences. Studies consistently find that on days when fine particulate matter levels rise, so do emergency room visits, hospital admissions, and deaths — typically within 48 hours.¹⁶ Fine particulate matter also contributes to prostate cancer, low birth weights, and pregnancy related deaths.¹⁷ According to 2024 estimates, Louisiana’s fine particulate matter levels from refinery emissions were around 2,647.80 tons — more than 45 times the median of all states. Some Louisianans have purchased air monitors to warn their neighbors when air quality reaches dangerous levels. But in 2024, Louisiana outlawed the sharing of air quality alerts from non-governmental entities, with stiff daily penalties of \$32,500.¹⁸

IN 2024, LOUISIANA RANKED 1ST IN THE NATION FOR NITROGEN OXIDE RELEASED INTO THE AIR FROM PETROLEUM REFINERIES.

Tons of nitrogen oxide emissions from petroleum refineries industrial processes by state
2024

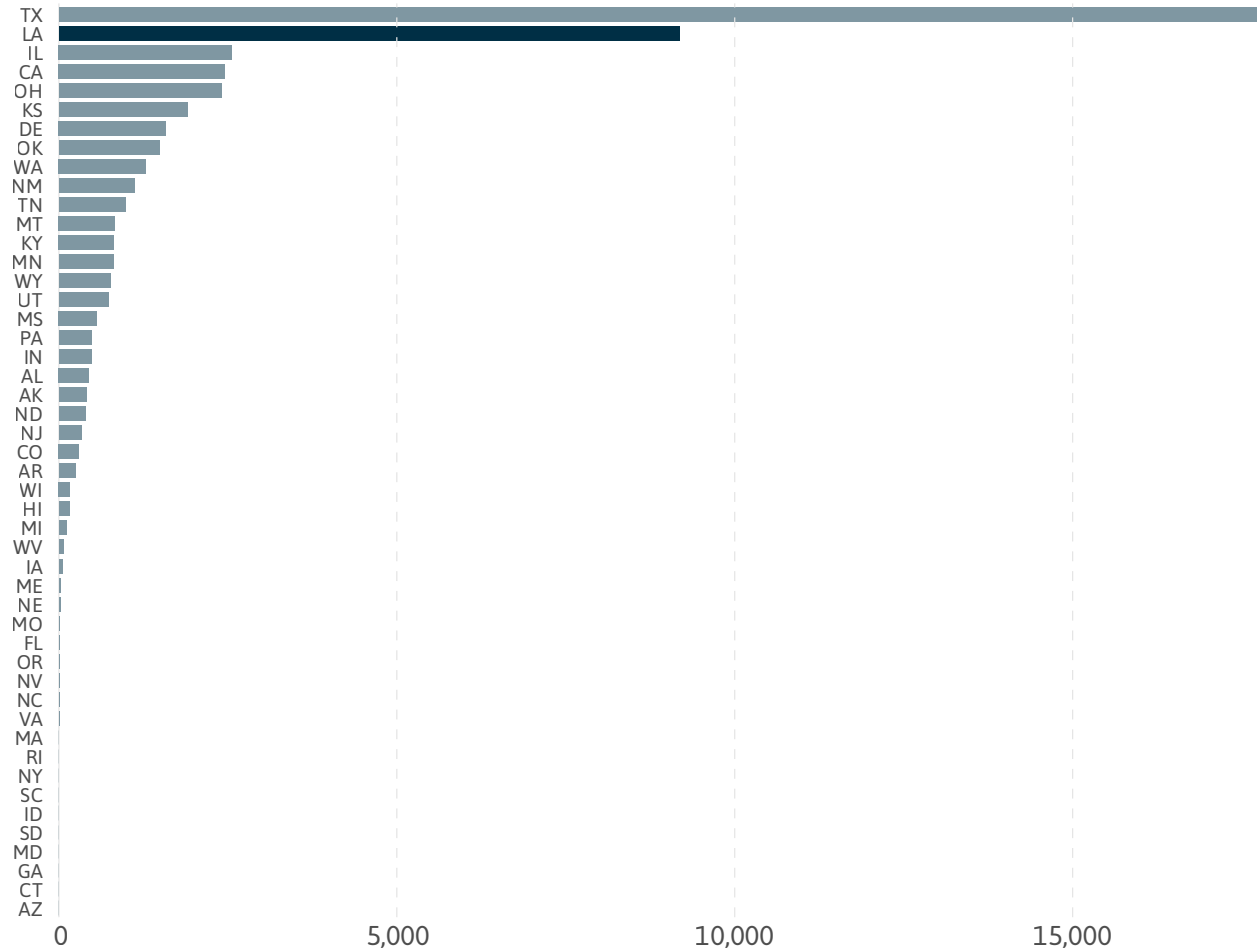


Source: EPA: Air Pollutant Emissions Trends Data.

Nitrogen oxides (NO_x, primarily nitrogen dioxide NO₂ and nitric oxide NO) are air pollutants with acute and chronic impacts on human health, especially on the respiratory and cardiovascular systems. These pollutants pose serious risks to human health both indoors and out. Short-term exposure can trigger asthma attacks and respiratory distress. Over time, chronic exposure is linked to stunted lung development in children, COPD, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and adverse birth outcomes. Scientists say the pollutants cause harm by generating cell-damaging compounds that drive inflammation throughout the body.¹⁹ Louisiana's petroleum refineries produced 15,337 tons of nitrogen oxide in 2024, more than any other state in the country. Texas was a close second with 15,224 tons of NO_x emissions.

IN 2024, LOUISIANA RANKED 2ND IN THE NATION FOR CARBON MONOXIDE RELEASED INTO THE AIR FROM PETROLEUM REFINERIES.

Tons of carbon monoxide emissions from petroleum refineries industrial processes by state
2024



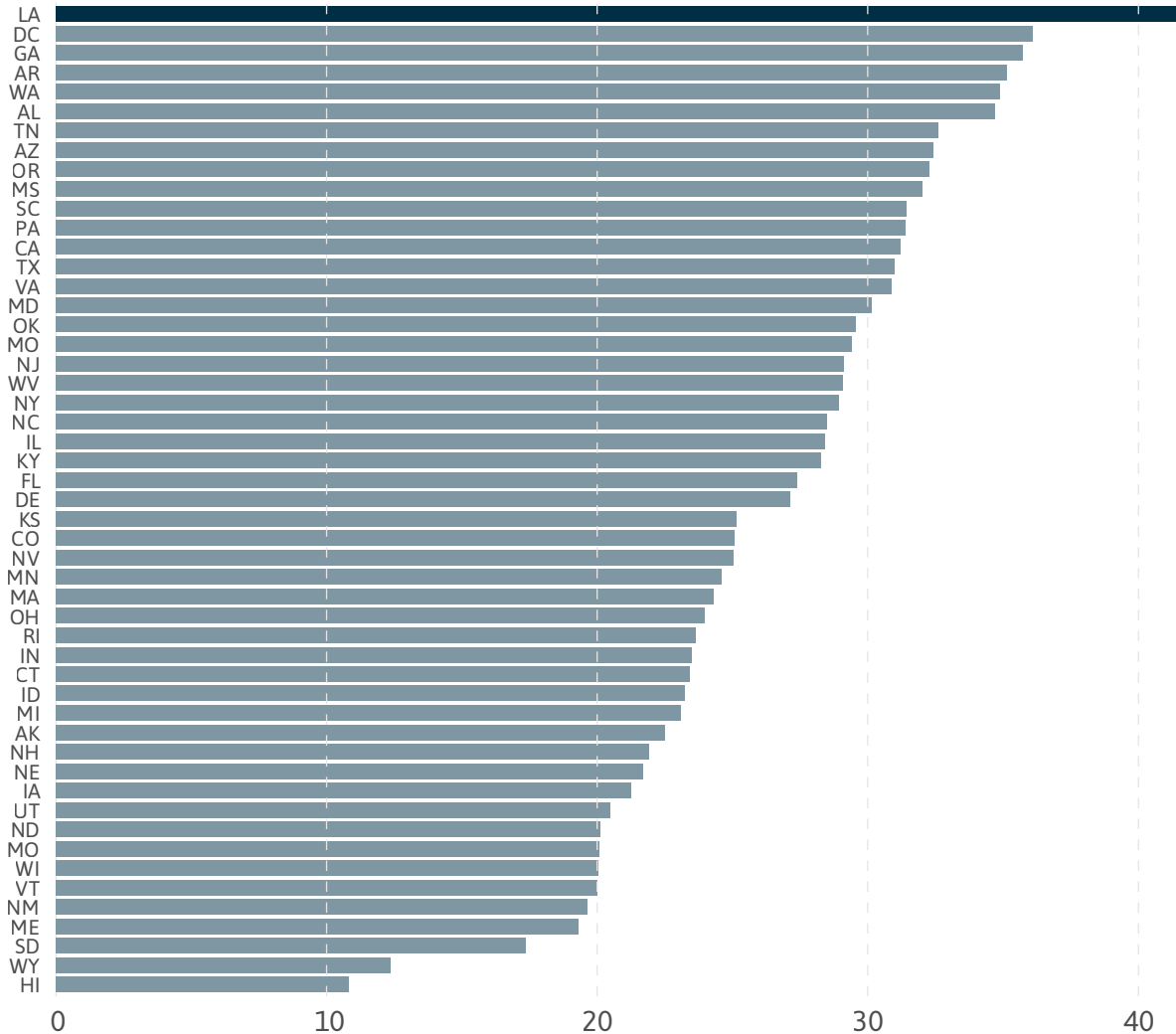
Source: EPA: Air Pollutant Emissions Trends Data.

Carbon monoxide released by petroleum refineries harms human health by reducing the blood’s ability to carry oxygen to vital organs. During refinery upsets or heavy flaring, nearby residents can experience headaches, dizziness, nausea, and confusion. People with heart disease face heightened risks of chest pain or loss of consciousness. Even at lower routine levels, repeated exposure worsens cardiovascular disease and reduces exercise tolerance. Children, older adults, and people with pre-existing heart or lung conditions are most vulnerable.²⁰ Louisiana’s petroleum refineries produced 9,182 tons of carbon monoxide emissions in 2024, nearly 38 times the state median.

LOUISIANANS FACE THE HIGHEST RISK IN THE NATION OF CANCER DUE TO TOXIC AIR POLLUTION.

Cancer risk due to toxic air pollution by state

Per one million people, 2017

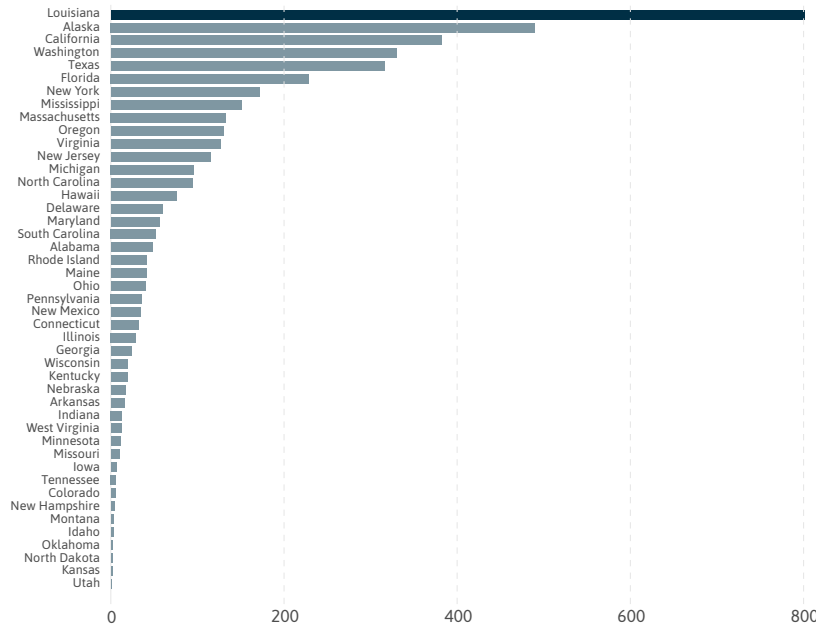


Source: [U.S. Climate Vulnerability Index](#).

Louisiana exceeds all other states in cancer risk due to toxic air pollution. More than 41 Louisianans per one million are at an increased risk for cancer due to toxic air exposure. Louisiana’s rate is 33 percent higher than in Texas and 15 percent higher than the next highest state, the District of Columbia (which is included as a state in this analysis). The dominant driver of toxic air pollution is Louisiana’s extraordinary concentration of heavy industry. The state hosts over 300 manufacturing facilities, more than 150 petrochemical plants, and 15 refineries. It is these industrial point sources — rather than vehicle emissions or other diffuse sources — that set Louisiana apart from most states.²¹ Moreover, Louisiana is moving in the opposite direction from the rest of the country. The number of facilities that pollute at levels such that they are required to report toxic releases to the federal government has increased in Louisiana since the 1980s, while it has decreased nationally.²²

AT NEARLY 800, LOUISIANA HAS EXPERIENCED MORE TOXIC SPILLAGES SINCE 1986 THAN ANY OTHER STATE. ON AVERAGE, STATES EXPERIENCED ONLY 34 CUMULATIVE SPILLAGES OVER THE LAST 40 YEARS.

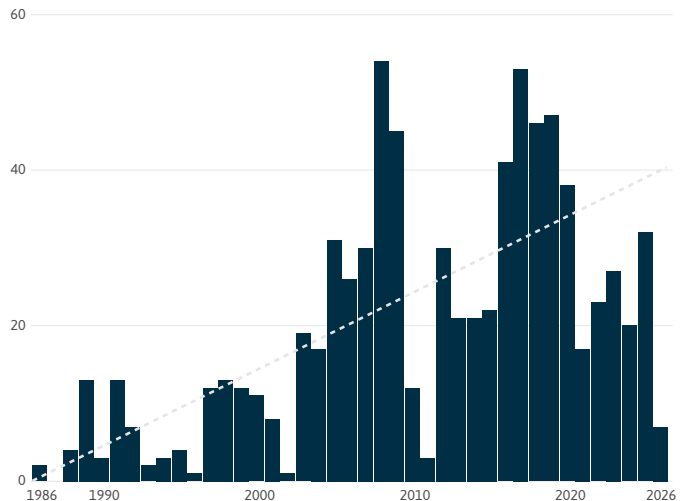
Cumulative spillages by state
1986–2026



Source: [Raw Incident Data](#) | [IncidentNews](#) | [NOAA](#).

Many spillages of oil, chemicals, or other hazardous substances into waterways are tracked by NOAA’s Office of Response and Restoration. The number of spillages in Louisiana tracked by NOAA has climbed from an average of 5.6 annually between 1986 and 1995, to 12.5 from 1996 to 2005, to 26.4 from 2006 to 2015, to 34.4 over the last decade. Over these 40 years, Louisiana has experienced the most spillages of any state at 791. That’s 22 times the state median over those 40 years. Because Louisiana’s rivers and bayous feed into municipal drinking systems, spillages can threaten drinking water. A 2024 spill of over 34,000 gallons of crude oil into Bayou Lafourche prompted water conservation notices for nearby districts serving four parishes, as officials worked to prevent oil from entering treatment plants.²³ The 2025 explosion at Smitty’s Supply in Roseland released oily chemicals into the Tangipahoa River leading toward Lake Pontchartrain, raising fears of broader waterway contamination that could indirectly impact downstream water supplies.²⁴

Spillages, Louisiana
1986–2026





Health

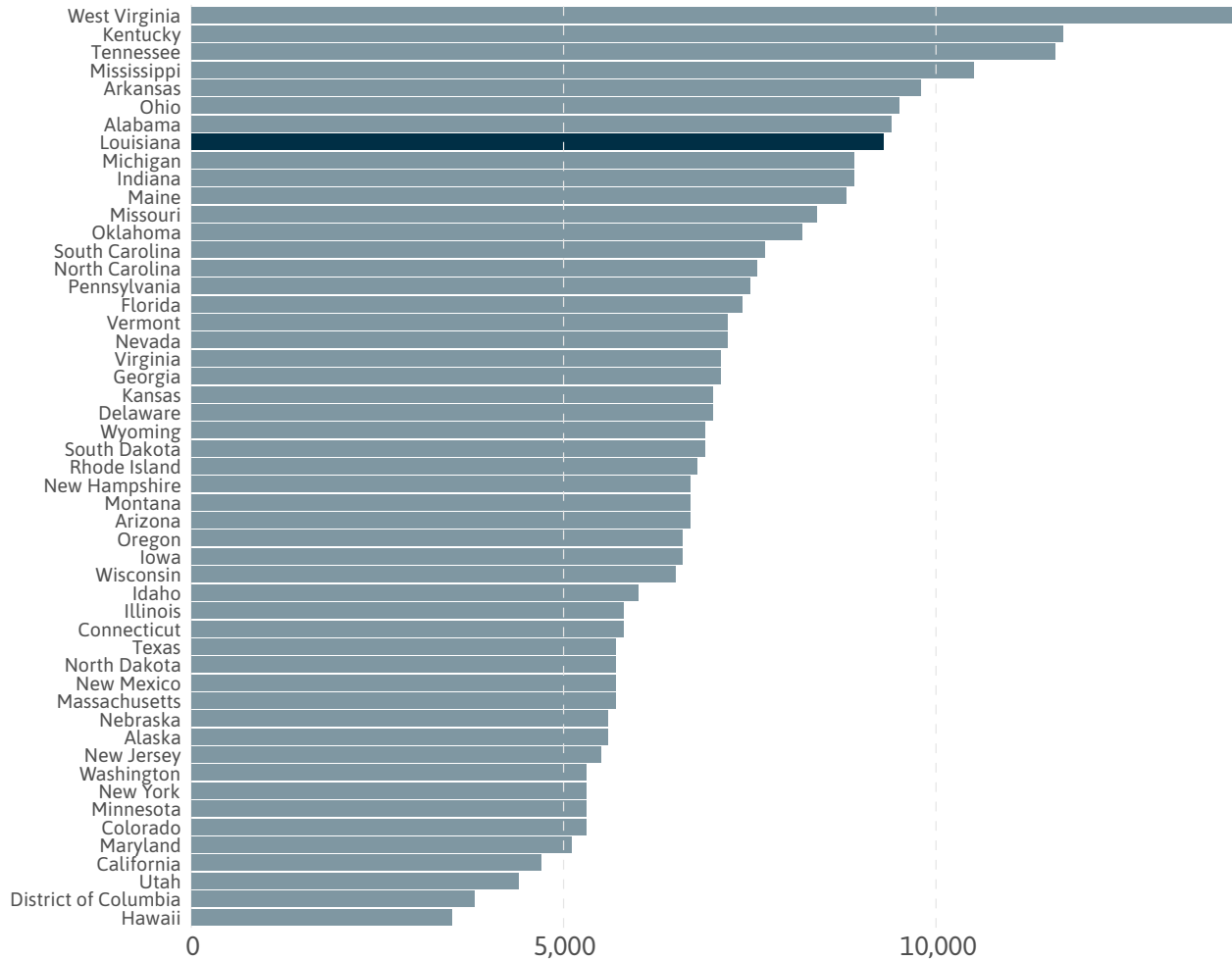
This section highlights health conditions and events with well-documented links to environmental pollution. For each indicator, we present a summary of the research connecting pollution to these outcomes. While other factors contribute to each condition, the evidence makes clear that air, water, and soil pollution in Louisiana plays a meaningful role in these health burdens.

INDICATORS IN THIS SECTION:

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease rates
- Stroke rates
- Heart attack rates
- Prostate cancer rates
- Low birth weight rates
- Pregnancy-related death rates
- Life expectancy

LOUISIANANS ARE 37 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO HAVE CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD) THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE.

COPD prevalence rates per 100,000 people
2022

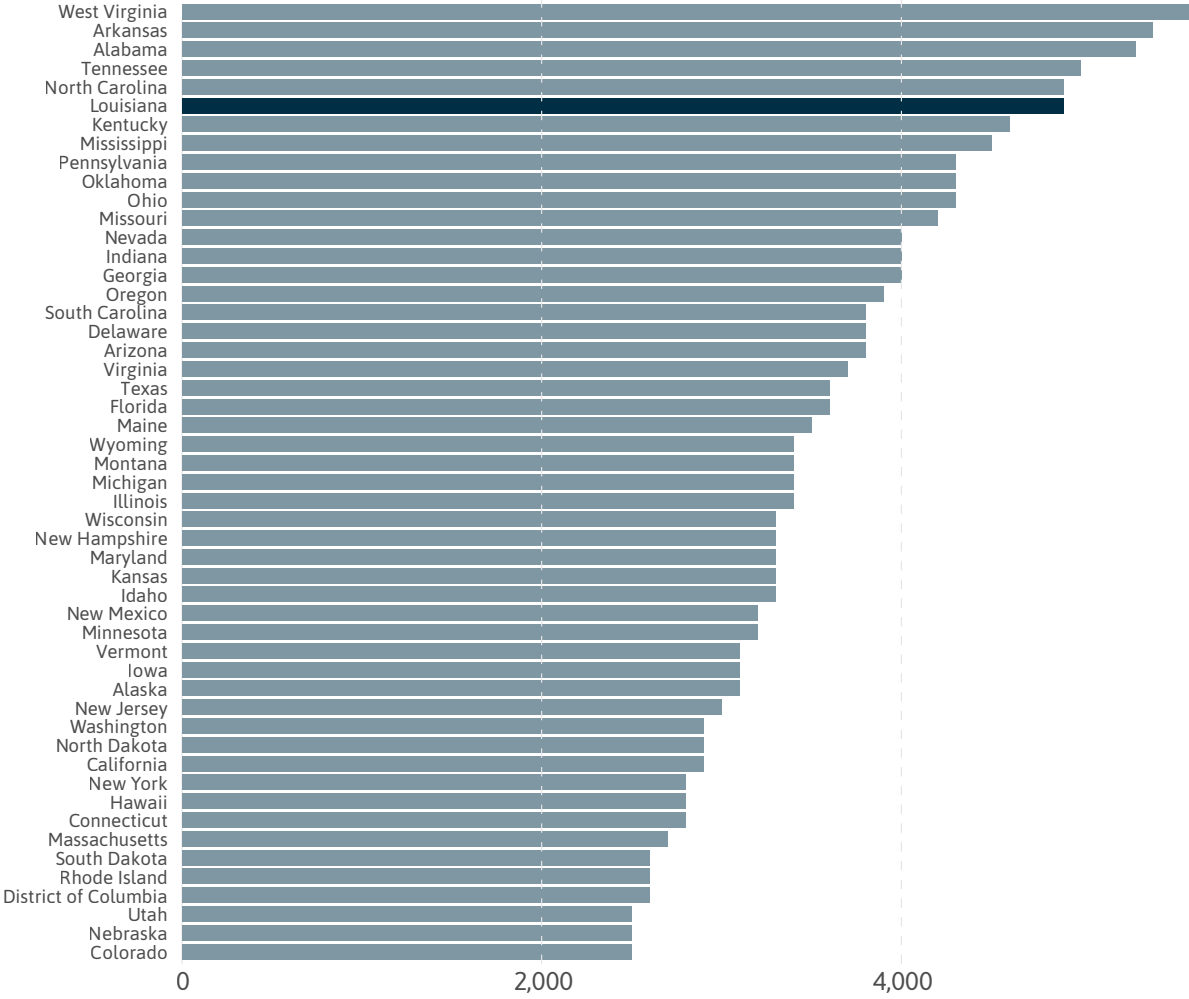


Source: [CDC BRFSS Chronic Disease Indicators](#).

Chronic exposure to polluted air increases the likelihood of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) — with some research suggesting that even relatively low pollution levels carry measurable risk. COPD is a progressive lung condition that makes breathing increasingly difficult, and for those living in polluted environments, the disease can accelerate more rapidly and prove harder to manage. Biological studies help explain why: inhaled particles generate oxidative stress that injures lung tissue, impairs the body’s repair mechanisms, and drives the chronic inflammation that defines the disease. Short-term spikes in pollution levels, particularly fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and ozone, are consistently followed by surges in COPD-related hospitalizations and emergency visits. For patients already living with the disease, high-pollution days can trigger dangerous flare-ups, prompting health officials to advise limiting outdoor activity when air quality deteriorates.²⁵ Louisiana’s COPD rate is the 8th highest in the nation.

LOUISIANANS ARE 36 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE A STROKE THAN THE AVERAGE AMERICAN.

Stroke prevalence rates per 100,000 people 2022

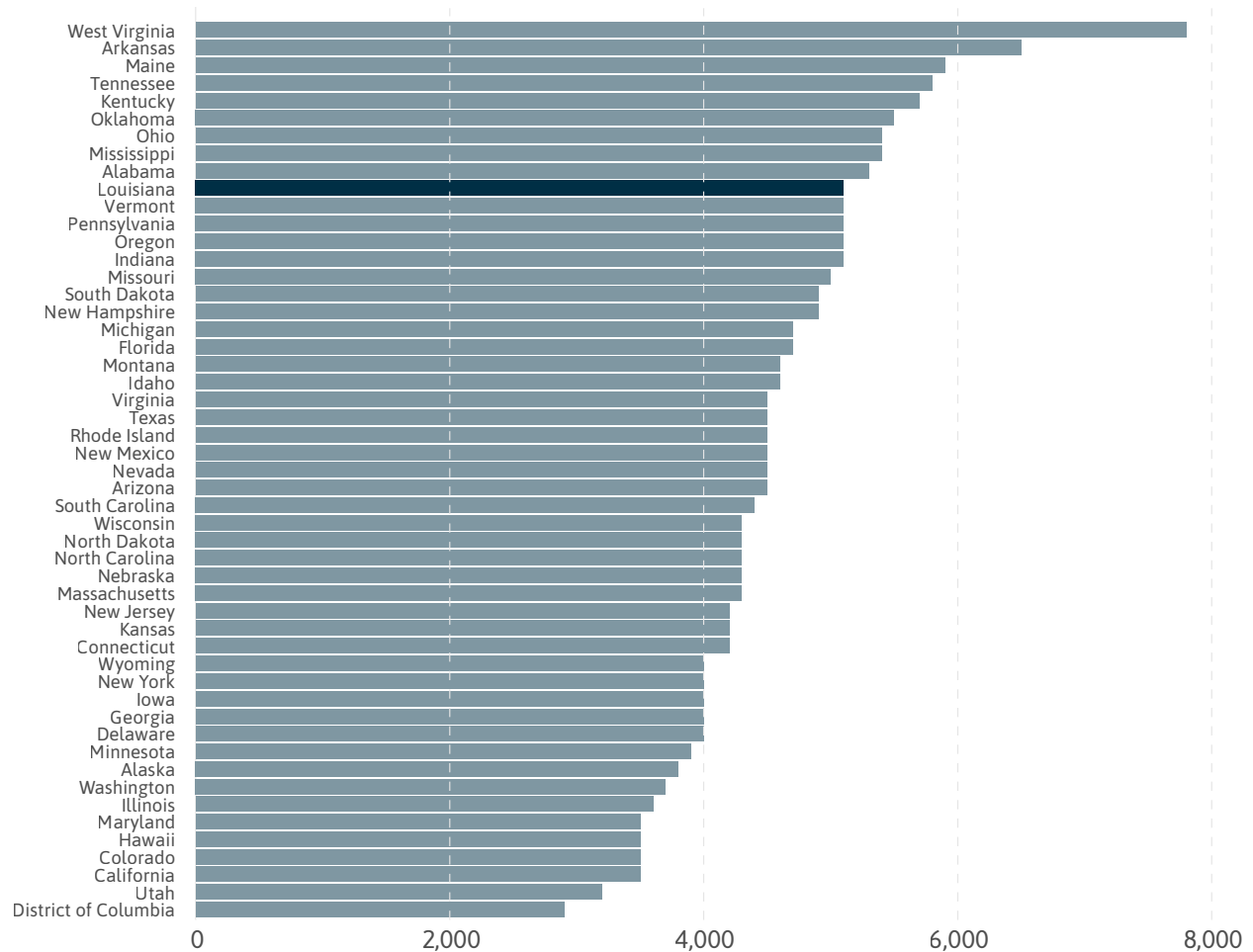


Source: [CDC BRFSS Chronic Disease Indicators](#).

Air pollution is a significant risk factor for stroke, even after controlling for smoking.²⁶ Short-term spikes in fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and other pollutants are followed by measurable increases in stroke hospitalizations and emergency visits. Even modest increases in particulate pollution are associated with higher stroke rates — particularly ischemic strokes, which occur when blood flow to the brain is blocked. Pollution triggers stroke through multiple pathways — inflaming blood vessels, promoting clot formation, raising blood pressure, and accelerating the arterial damage that sets the stage for a brain attack. Long-term particulate exposure contributes significantly to elevated cerebrovascular mortality.²⁷ In Louisiana, the air itself may be silently increasing the risk of one of the world’s leading causes of death and disability. Louisiana has the 5th highest stroke prevalence rate and the 3rd highest stroke mortality rate nationwide.²⁸

LOUISIANA IS TIED FOR THE 9TH HIGHEST RATE OF HEART ATTACKS IN THE U.S.

Heart attack prevalence rates per 100,000 people
2022

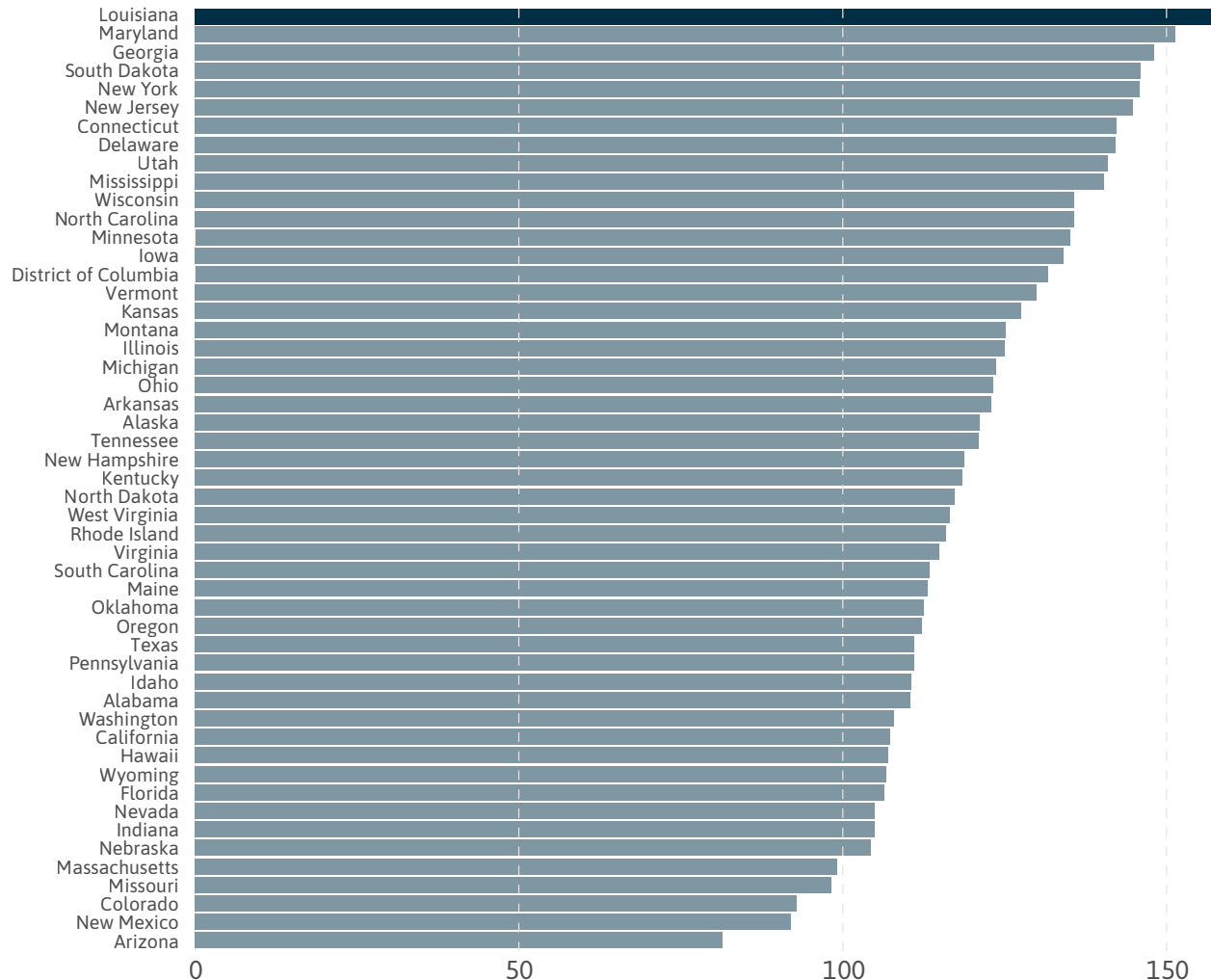


Source: [CDC BRFSS Chronic Disease Indicators](#).

Air pollution has emerged as a serious threat to heart health, with research showing it can both trigger heart attacks in the short term and lay the groundwork for coronary disease over years of exposure. Spikes in fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and carbon monoxide, can precipitate a heart attack within hours of exposure, especially (but not exclusively) among older adults and those with preexisting heart conditions. Sustained exposure is associated with significantly higher rates of coronary heart disease.²⁹ Pollution drives this risk by inflaming blood vessels, accelerating arterial plaque buildup, promoting blood clotting, and contributing to hypertension and diabetes. In Louisiana, pollution is an important but often under-recognized contributor to the state’s high heart attack burden. These exposures are especially relevant in Louisiana where many residents already face elevated rates of hypertension, diabetes, and obesity. In this context, pollution acts as an additional cardiovascular “stressor.”³⁰ Louisianans are 16 percent more likely to have a heart attack than the national average.

LOUISIANA HAS THE HIGHEST PROSTATE CANCER INCIDENCE IN THE NATION AT 157 PER 100,000 MEN.

Age-adjusted prostate cancer incidence rates per 100,000 men
2022



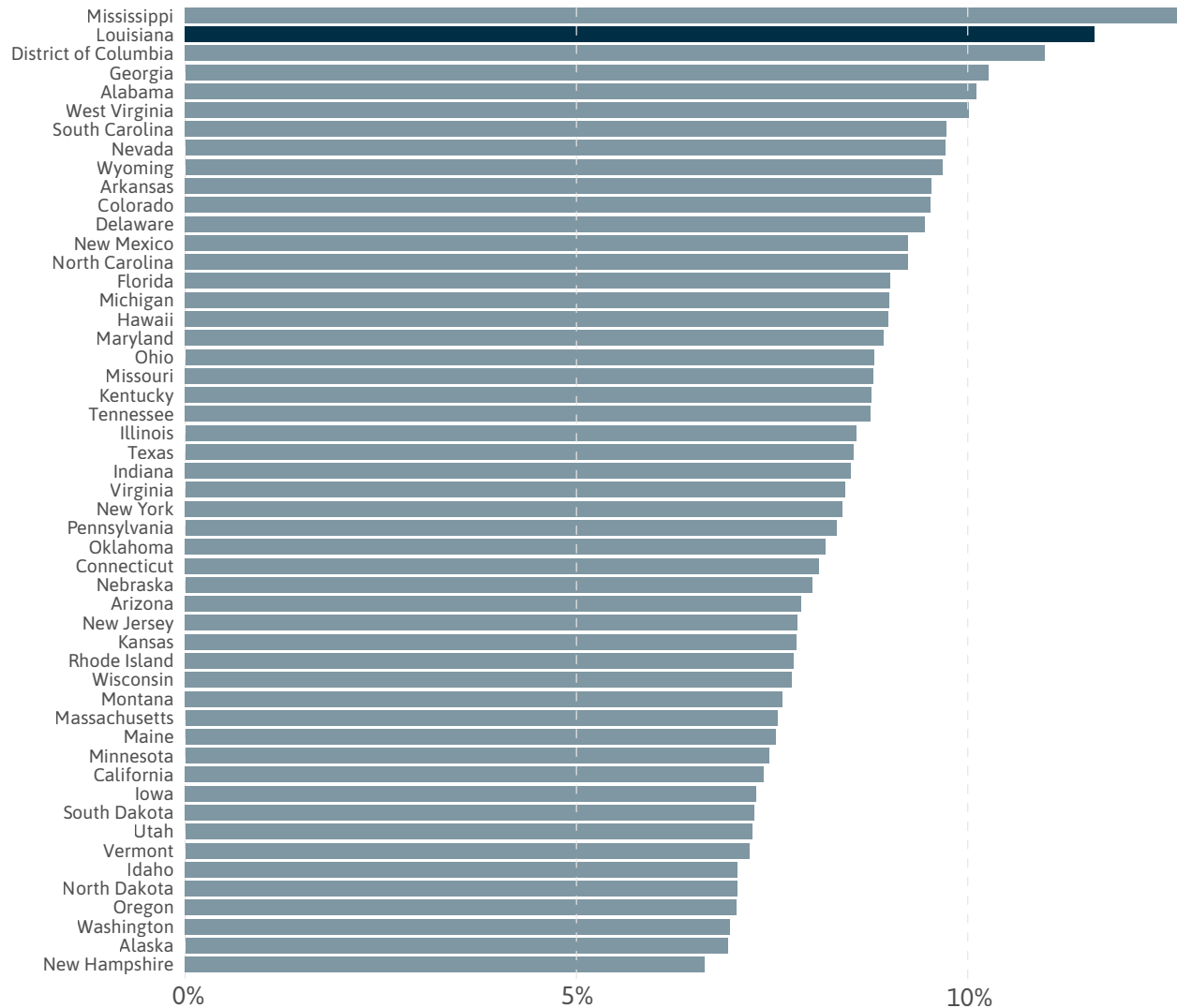
Source: [CDC Wonder Cancer Statistics](#).

Many environmental pollutants act as endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) and are linked, with varying strength of evidence, to cancers of the breast, ovary, uterus (endometrium), cervix, prostate, and testis.³¹ Among these, Louisiana has the highest incidence of prostate cancer of all U.S. states. Studies have linked long-term exposure to air pollutants — including fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and benzene — to higher rates of prostate cancer. Heavy metals like cadmium, arsenic, and lead, which enter the environment through industrial activity, have been associated with elevated prostate cancer rates.³² For communities already living near Superfund sites and industrial facilities, including residents of every parish in Louisiana, the findings carry a sobering implication: chronic exposure to industrial pollution may be compounding the risks residents face, often without their knowledge. Louisiana men develop prostate cancer at a rate nearly one-third higher than the national average.

LOUISIANA RANKS 2ND IN THE NATION FOR THE SHARE OF BABIES BORN AT DANGEROUSLY LOW WEIGHTS.

Low birth weight rates

2024

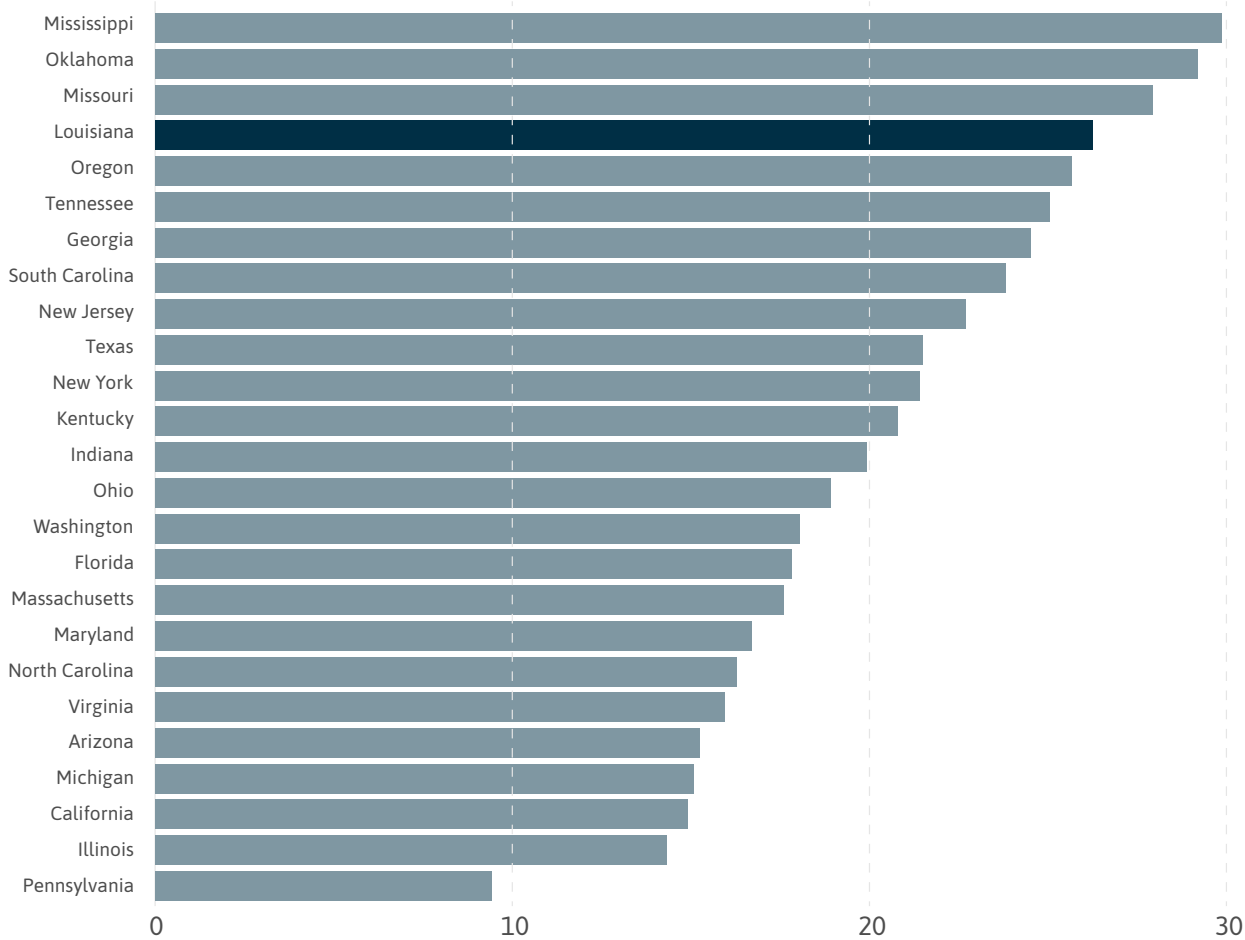


Source: [CDC](#).

Infants born with low birth weights are more likely to die in the first year of life, or experience early developmental challenges and long-term health issues including diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease.³³ Studies consistently found that exposure to fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide during pregnancy was associated with measurable reductions in birth weight. Scientists believe pollution restricts fetal growth by inflaming the placenta, impairing blood flow, and reducing the oxygen and nutrients that reach the developing baby. Crucially, these findings held even after accounting for maternal smoking, socioeconomic status, and other known risk factors — indicating that pollution contributes independently to the problem.³⁴ One in nine Louisiana newborns is born at low birth weight — a rate 37 percent above the national average.

LOUISIANA MOTHERS ARE NEARLY 47 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO DIE FROM PREGNANCY-RELATED CAUSES THAN THE AVERAGE AMERICAN WOMAN.

Pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 births
2024



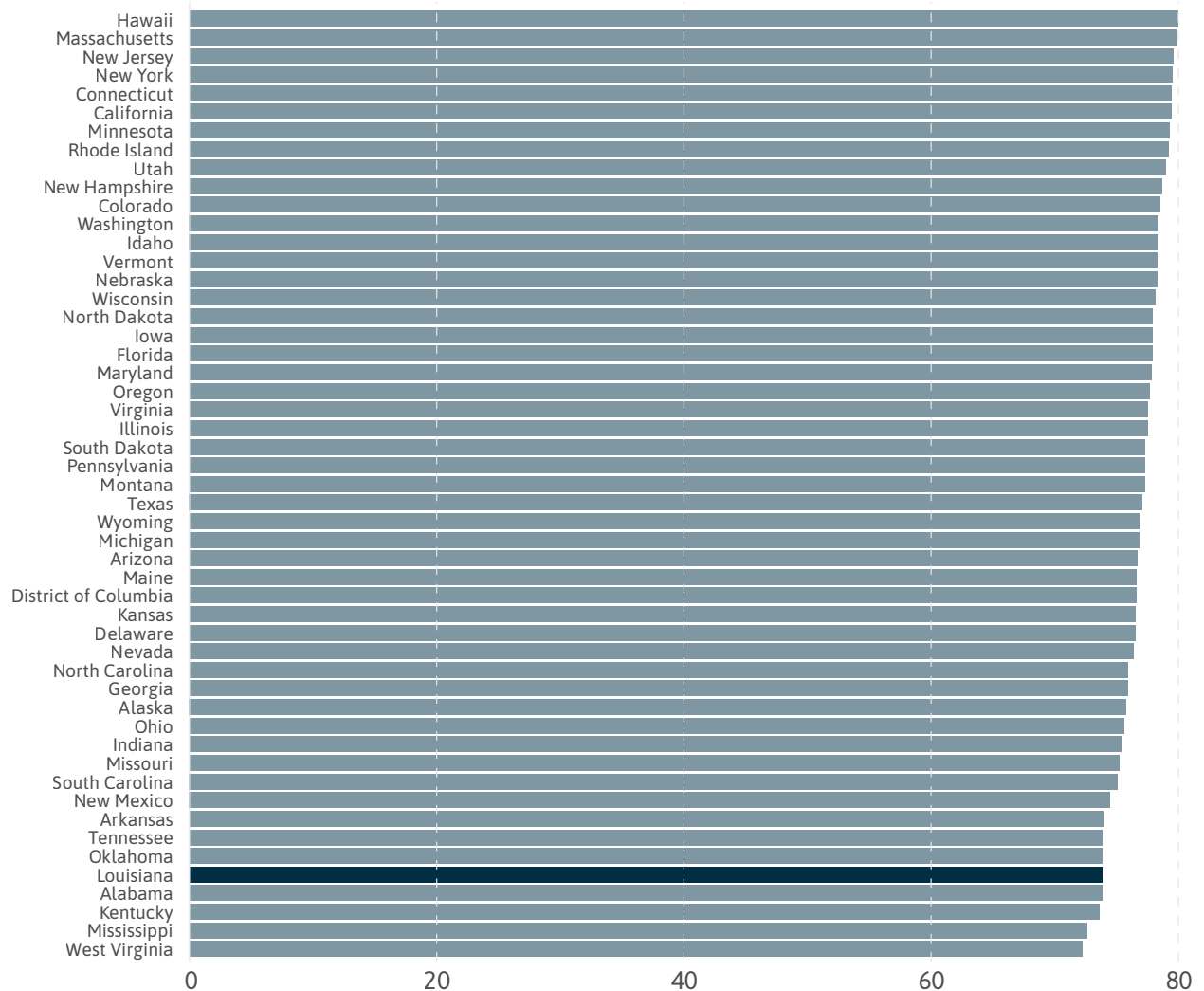
Source: [CDC Wonder Mortality Data \(deaths\)](#) and [CDC Wonder Natality Data \(births\)](#).

Pregnant women and girls are among the most vulnerable in society, and air pollution is linked to serious pregnancy complications. Exposure to fine particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide contributes to gestational diabetes and hypertensive disorders. A synthesis of 58 studies found that the overwhelming majority identified a significant association between fine particulate matter or ozone exposure and at least one adverse birth outcome. Scientists have identified several biological pathways driving these outcomes. Fine particulate matter promotes inflammation, constricts blood vessels, and disrupts oxygen delivery to the placenta — conditions that can escalate into preeclampsia, fetal distress, and in severe cases, maternal death. Emerging metabolic research suggests pollution may also interfere with how a mother’s body processes energy during pregnancy, triggering early or preterm labor.³⁵ For Louisianans burdened by pollution exposure, the air mothers breathe during pregnancy may be life threatening. Louisiana has the 4th highest rate of maternal mortality in the nation.

LOUISIANA HAS THE 4TH LOWEST LIFE EXPECTANCY OF ANY STATE, TIED WITH ALABAMA, AT ONLY 73.8 YEARS.

Life expectancy by state

2022



Source: [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov).

Pollution contributes to elevated rates of cancer, respiratory diseases, heart disease and stroke, low birth weight, preterm births, and infant mortality — all key drivers of Louisiana’s low life expectancy. In a 2022 report, the CDC measured Louisianans’ life expectancy is only 73.8 years. This is the 4th lowest rate in the nation — tied with Alabama. Only Kentucky, Mississippi, and West Virginia have lower life expectancies at 73.6, 72.6, and 72.2 years respectively. While Louisiana’s low life expectancy stems mainly from chronic diseases, obesity, smoking, poverty, and poor healthcare access, pollution amplifies these by worsening cardiopulmonary health and reproductive outcomes.³⁶ A 2023 study found that the Metro New Orleans ranked among the worst in the country for premature deaths caused by air pollution.³⁷

Technical Notes on Data Sources

Economy

Median Household Income

The differences between 2010 and 2011, 2014 and 2015, 2015 and 2016, 2018 and 2019, 2019 and 2021 are all statistically significant. The differences between the rest of the one-year intervals are not significantly different.

Annual Living Wage

MIT considers “working adults” to be working full-time at 2,080 hours per year.

Homeowners Insurance

Excludes any ZIP code with fewer than 10 reporting insurers and those with fewer than 50 insurance policies.

Real Estate Value

Zillow Home Value Index for all homes including single-family residences, condos, and co-ops time series, smoothed and seasonally adjusted. Reflects the typical value for homes in the 35th to 65th percentile range.

Pollution

Toxics Release Inventory Sites, Active Superfund Sites

Section 313 of EPCRA established the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) Program which tracks large operations in chemical production, manufacturing, power generation, and waste management that emit chemicals hazardous to humans. Facilities meeting TRI reporting criteria must report to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) yearly. Active Superfund sites are designated and tracked by the EPA when a toxic amount of chemicals has been improperly managed and is being evaluated for cleanup.

Tons of PM_{2.5}, Tons of Nitrogen Oxide, or Tons of Carbon Monoxide Emissions by Petroleum Refineries Industrial Processes

EPA’s emissions estimates for Criteria Air Pollutants (CAPs) are developed using a combination of National Emissions Inventory (NEI) data, year-specific modeling platforms, and continuous emissions monitoring, depending on the pollutant, source type, and year. Data for Washington DC, New Hampshire, and Vermont are not available.

Cancer Risk due to Toxic Air Pollution

This hazard index represents the risk of getting cancer as a result of exposure to certain toxic air pollutants and diesel particle pollution.

Cumulative Spillages

Due to inconsistencies in how the location of spillages were self-reported, totals by state represent a conservative count.

Health

COPD Prevalence

Survey respondents were asked, “Have you ever been told you had COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), emphysema, or chronic bronchitis (CHCCOPD3)?”

Stroke Prevalence

Survey respondents were asked, “Has a doctor, nurse, or other health professional ever told you that you had a stroke?”

Heart Attack Prevalence

Survey respondents were asked, “Have you ever been told you had a heart attack, also called a ‘myocardial infarction’?” Louisiana, Indiana, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Vermont are tied at 5,100 per 100,000 for heart attack prevalence. Mississippi and Ohio are tied at 5,400.

Low Birth Weight

Low birth weight is defined as less than 5.5 pounds.

Pregnancy-related Deaths

A pregnancy-related death is defined as a death while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes. Pregnancy-related deaths are identified using ICD–10 underlying cause-of-death codes: A34, O00–O95, and O98–O99. Data for states with nine or fewer deaths was suppressed, and those states are not included in the graphic.

Life Expectancy

Life expectancy at birth is the average number of years that a newborn would live if death patterns of the population at the time of their birth did not change during their lifetime. This means that any future changes to mortality rates would not be taken into account.

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ABOUT PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY: LOUISIANA

Last year's edition of *Pathways to Prosperity: Louisiana* examined the growing impacts of extreme weather and sea level rise on Louisiana communities, and the economic opportunities emerging from historic federal investments in climate resilience and clean energy transition.

The landscape has shifted considerably since that report was published. Federal investments in clean energy and climate adaptation have been substantially curtailed. The state's Climate Action Plan, once a framework for bipartisan action, has receded from the policy agenda. And Louisiana was spared major hurricane impacts over the past year, reducing the immediacy of climate concerns in public discourse.

In this changed environment, we have refocused this year's report on Louisiana's decade-long emphasis on heavy industrial investment — in refineries, chemical manufacturing, and liquefied natural gas terminals — and examined the extent to which it has delivered broad economic benefit to workers and families, and at what cost to environmental quality.

Pathways to Prosperity: Louisiana 2026 offers the latest data on the state's economy, pollution exposure, and related health outcomes. These

17 indicators are intended to equip civic leaders with a shared, evidence-based understanding of Louisiana's trends as they build consensus, set priorities, and form partnerships to revive job growth and reduce pollution-related harms statewide.

About The Data Center (datacenterresearch.org)

The Data Center of Southeast Louisiana, a project of Nonprofit Knowledge Works, is the most trusted resource for data about Southeast Louisiana. Founded in 1997, we provide fully independent research and analysis to offer a comprehensive look at issues that matter most to our region. With a mission of democratizing data, The Data Center of Southeast Louisiana has, and continues to be, an objective partner in bringing reliable, thoroughly researched data to conversations about building a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable region.

About the National Conference on Citizenship

(NCoC.org) NCoC is committed to strengthening democracy by supporting local leaders and nonpartisan projects dedicated to citizen engagement and public service. Our vision is one of full participation in our democracy, and that in doing so our democracy reflects the combined voices, dreams, and actions of all who call our country home.

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This report is dedicated to all the data heroes — in institutions, nonprofits, volunteer organizations, state, local, and federal government — who make these types of analyses possible.