

DEPARTMENT OF DATA

What state best represents America?

This week, we take a stab at identifying the most normal state in the nation and discover that, by at least one measure, it's the state you'd least expect.



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What are the most representative — dare we say, most American — states in the nation? And what does that even mean?

Our friend Lenny Bronner, The Washington Post's tousle-haired political-stats wunderkind, needed an answer. You may recognize Lenny

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We here at the Department of

So he churned through Census variables, creating indexes of how similar U.S. states are to one another — whereupon we realized that his work would be perfect for a less important purpose: finding the most typical and most unusual places in America.

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Next we moved to income, looking for places with the most representative mix of non-earners and earners in three different income tiers, as well as median household income. Illinois comes out on top again, with the other close matches found in Sun Belt states such as Georgia, Arizona and Nevada.

The states most similar to the U.S. in terms of income

Based on median income, as well as the shares of the population with no income, low income, middle income and high income

As med school graduates may have noticed, education helps determine income. So education variables produced similar results, with Georgia showing the optimal mix of high school dropouts and advanced-degree holders. Illinois and Rhode Island also do well; highly educated Vermont and less highly educated West Virginia do not.

The states most similar to the U.S. in terms of education

Based on based how the adult (25+) population is divided between those with no high school diploma, only a diploma, some college, a bachelor's degree or an advanced degree

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 In related news, Pennsylvania, Oregon and Texas have the right mix of blue-collar, white-collar and service jobs, as well as the most representative working-age adult employment rates. States that lean on just one sector, such as Nevada's service industry or West Virginia's extraction industries, don't do as well.

The states most similar to the U.S. in terms of work

Based on the mix of white-collar jobs, blue-collar jobs, service-sector jobs and the employment rate



Your state's closest match

Each state's closest matches, based on similarity index built from almost 30 variables, weighted by those (other than party affiliation) that best predict how individuals will vote in elections

STATE	BEST MATCH	2ND BEST	3RD BEST
Alabama	Mississippi	South Carolina	Arkansas
Alaska	Montana	South Dakota	Wyoming
Arizona	Nevada	Florida	Texas
Arkansas	Tennessee	Kentucky	Alabama
California	Texas	Nevada	Arizona
Florida	Nevada	Texas	Arizona
Iowa	Wisconsin	Kansas	Missouri
New Hampshire	Vermont	Maine	Washington