

State Integrity 2015 FAQs

What is the *State Integrity Investigation*?

The State Integrity Investigation is a data-driven assessment of state laws and practices that deter corruption and promote accountability and transparency by the Center for Public Integrity and Global Integrity. This is the second time the project has run; the first go-round was published in March 2012. For more information, visit the [State Integrity Investigation project site](#).

How did you conduct this investigation?

At least one experienced journalist in each state graded their state government using 245 specific measures, or “indicators,” across 13 categories, like public access to information, lobbying disclosure, and electoral oversight. The indicators were first developed in 2011 as a result of conversations with 100 experts in state government[WG1] . Editors at Global Integrity and the Center for Public Integrity reviewed the journalists’ work for accuracy and internal consistency. Independent experts in every state then reviewed the data.

So is each state grade based upon one reporter?

No. The state reporters scored each question based on a uniform set of scoring criteria. The process removes subjectivity as much as possible so that a reporter in Michigan and one in Nevada would score the same conditions the same way. Editors at Global Integrity reviewed each answer for consistency. The overall grades are then calculated based on averaging the scores for each question across subcategories and categories.

Why did scores change so dramatically from 2012 to now?

First, the rankings, grades and scores are not directly comparable between the two investigations. This year’s investigation was completely updated with new research and reporting. In 2014, Global Integrity and the Center for Public Integrity reviewed the indicators and categories, removing questions that were ineffective and adding new ones based on our experience, evolving conditions such as the growth of independent political spending, and dozens of conversations with issue experts.

For example, we removed redistricting, which generally happens only once a decade, and added questions about “open data” practices - which seek to have information published online in formats that are easy to download and analyze. Most states score poorly on those questions, dragging down the scores. We also refined the methodology to better account for nuances between state laws.

All of that notwithstanding, there has been little progress on these issues in the three years since the first investigation was published, save for a few notable exceptions, and notable backsliding in some states. Meanwhile, at least 12 states have seen their legislative leaders or top cabinet-level officials charged, convicted or resign as a result of ethics of corruption-related scandal. Five house or assembly leaders have fallen. You can find the [methodology for the State Integrity Investigation](#) on our website.

So, does this mean that Alaska is the least corrupt state, and Michigan is the most corrupt?

No. The State Integrity Investigation looks at the laws and practices that are meant to prevent corruption and catch it when it occurs. It does not measure corruption itself. And we believe that simply tabulating corruption cases is a poor way to measure accountability, as a state with few of the systems to detect malfeasance might have a clean slate, while a state with robust investigative or auditing functions might produce multiple cases.

My state had a major reform pass earlier this month, why isn't it included?

The period of study for the report cards runs from January 2013 through March 2015. To be included in the report card, events must have occurred within that time period. The report may include laws that were passed during the period of study but which go into effect no later than January 1, 2016. We ended the period in early spring to make sure that all data included in the report cards received adequate fact-checking, consistency checks and peer review.

Does the report simply grade the laws on the books?

No. The 245 indicators include questions that ask about what the law says as well as questions asking how well those laws are implemented or enforced.

Are there any national trends or takeaways?

States scored worst in the categories for public access to information — only six escaped failing grades — ethics enforcement entities and judicial accountability. Across the country, the investigation found that public records laws are riddled with loopholes and that agencies often delay or deny records requests without much explanation. What's more, those agencies and their officials rarely face sanctions for doing so. Ethics enforcement entities in most states are toothless and underfunded, and often fail to initiate investigations or issue sanctions. In many states, ethics oversight is handled by a complex mix of agencies, committees and commissions. In some, lawmakers are responsible for overseeing their own ethics rules.

States scored best in the categories for state budget processes and internal auditing.

What is the Center for Public Integrity? Global Integrity?

The Center for Public Integrity is a nonprofit, nonpartisan investigative news organization in Washington, D.C. It is more than 25-years old, and won its first Pulitzer Prize in 2014 for an investigation into the resurgence of black lung among coal miners. Global Integrity was founded in 1999 as part of the Center for Public Integrity, and spun off in 2005. It supports progress toward open and accountable governance in countries around the world by conducting original research and generating data. Global Integrity supports progress toward open and accountable governance in countries and communities around the world. We do so by conducting research and generating context-appropriate data, by supporting the work of country-level reformers and by influencing global conversations on open governance.

Who funded the *State Integrity Investigation*?

The investigation received major funding from the Omidyar Network and the Rita Allen Foundation, with additional support from the McCormick Foundation.

Isn't the Center for Public Integrity just a liberal-funded arm of George Soros?

The Center is funded by a wide and diverse group of more than 40 foundations, including the Ford, W.K. Kellogg, MacArthur and Laura and John Arnold Foundations. You can find a list of the foundations who support them by [visiting our website](#). The Center also receives support from several hundred individuals; those who give more than \$250 are also listed on our website.