

State Courts Earn ‘F’ Rating In 2015 Judicial Integrity Report

State courts in the U.S. earned an overall judicial integrity rating of F in a [new report released](#) by The Center for Public Integrity (CPI). The courts in only eight states earned a judicial integrity rating above D-, and courts in 33 states flunked by earning an F judicial integrity rating.

The “2015 State Integrity Investigation” report was [released by the CPI](#) in November 2015. The report evaluates and scores judicial accountability in each state based on 32 criteria. (The 32 criteria are listed below.) A score of 90 or above was given an A; 80 or above a B; 70 or above a C; 60 or above a D; and 59 or less an F. The highest scoring state was Alaska, with a B rating and a score of 82. Three states scored a C rating: Arizona (77); New Mexico (73); and, Virginia (72). Thirteen states earned a D rating — with nine of those states earning a D-. Thirty-three states were given an F rating, with eleven of those states earning a sub-50 score. So 42 of the 50 states earned a judicial accountability rating of D- or F. The four lowest scoring states were Pennsylvania (43); New York (43); Louisiana (40); and with a score of 30, Michigan by far earned the lowest state judicial integrity rating.

The following is a chart of the states from the highest rating to the lowest. Click on the highlighted name of a state to go to that state’s page in the State Integrity 2015 report, and then click on that pages “[Judicial Accountability](#)” heading to see that state’s score for each of the 32 criteria comprising the state’s judicial accountability rating.



18.	West Virginia	F	59
20.	California	F	58
21.	Iowa	F	58
21.	Vermont	F	58
23.	Utah	F	58
24.	Mississippi	F	57
25.	South Carolina	F	57
26.	Hawaii	F	56
27.	Massachusetts	F	56
28.	Kentucky	F	56
29.	North Carolina	F	55
30.	Minnesota	F	55
31.	Indiana	F	55
32.	Oregon	F	55
33.	Wisconsin	F	53
34.	Maine	F	53
35.	Nevada	F	53
36.	New Hampshire	F	52
37.	Tennessee	F	51
38.	Florida	F	51
39.	Idaho	F	51
40.	Wyoming	F	49
41.	Connecticut	F	49
41.	Texas	F	49
43.	Illinois	F	49
43.	Kansas	F	49
45.	Oklahoma	F	48
46.	Delaware	F	46
47.	Pennsylvania	F	43
48.	New York	F	43
49.	Louisiana	F	40
50.	Michigan	F	30

The average score was 56 for the 50 states.

Rank	State	Grade	Score
1.	Alaska	B	82
2.	Arizona	C	77
3.	New Mexico	C	73
4.	Virginia	C	72
5.	Missouri	D	67
6.	Colorado	D	66
7.	Maryland	D	64
7.	Rhode Island	D	64
9.	Arkansas	D	63
9.	North Dakota	D	63
11.	Washington	D	62
12.	Alabama	D	62
13.	Nebraska	D	61
14.	South Dakota	D	61
15.	Georgia	D	61
16.	Montana	D	60
17.	Ohio	D	60
18.	New Jersey	F	59

The 32 criteria for evaluating each state’s judicial accountability are:

- Can members of the judiciary be held accountable for their actions?
- In law, state-level judges are prohibited from using state resources for personal purposes.
- In practice, state-level judges do not use state resources for personal purposes.
- In law, state-level judges are required to give reasons for their decisions.
- In practice, state-level judges give reasons for their decisions.
- In law, there is a disciplinary agency for the state-level judicial system.

In law, the leadership of the entity/ies for judicial discipline is protected from political interference.

In practice, the entity/ies mandated to exert judicial disciplinary measures independently initiates investigations and imposes penalties on offenders.

In law, citizens can access court administrative records.

In practice, the citizens can access court decisions and opinions within a reasonable time period and at no cost.

In practice, court decisions and opinions are accessible to the public in open data format.

Is the process for selecting state-level judges transparent and accountable?

In law, there is an independent confirmation process for state-level judges (i.e. conducted by the legislature or an independent body), based on professional criteria.

In practice, professional criteria are followed in selecting state-level judges.

In law, there is a process in place to evaluate the performance of judges.

In law, citizens can access the performance evaluations of judges.

In practice, state-level judges’ performance evaluations are complete and detailed.

Are there regulations governing conflicts of interest for the state-level judiciary?

In law, state-level judges are required to file an asset disclosure form.

In law, state-level judges’ asset disclosure forms are regularly audited.

In law, gifts and hospitality offered to state-level judges are regulated.

In law, nepotism (favorable treatment of family members), cronyism (favorable treatment of friends and colleagues), and patronage (favorable treatment of those who reward their superiors) are prohibited when hiring judicial staff.

In law, there are restrictions for state-level judges entering the private sector after leaving the government.

In law, state-level judges must recuse themselves from cases in which they may have a conflict of interest.

Are the regulations governing conflicts of interest for the state-level judiciary effective?

In practice, state-level judges’ asset disclosures are independently audited.

In practice, state-level judges adhere to the law governing gifts and hospitality.

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300 U.S. Exonerations In 2015

Three hundred exonerations in the United States in 2015 are documented in the [Innocents Database](#), which is the only database in the world that attempts to compile all known exonerations in the United States, as well as internationally. The database includes 202 international exonerations in 2015. The 2015 U.S. exonerations were greater than the 231 in 2014, and the international exonerations were almost the same as the 207 in 2014.

The Innocents Database that is linked to from [Justice Denied's](#) website, currently includes 6,184 cases — 3,782 from the U.S. and 2,402 from 116 other countries.

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In practice, judicial branch actions (e.g. hiring, firing, promotions) are not based on nepotism, cronyism, or patronage.

In practice, state-level judges recuse themselves from cases in which they may have a conflict of interest.

In practice, state-level judges adhere to the law governing private sector employment after leaving office.

Can citizens access the asset disclosure records of members of the state-level judiciary?

In practice, citizens can access the asset disclosure records of state-level judges within a reasonable time period and at no cost.

In practice, the asset disclosure records of state-level judges are complete and detailed.

In practice, asset disclosure records of state-level judges are accessible to the public in open data format.

The CPI's 2015 State Integrity Investigation is a comprehensive assessment of state government accountability and transparency conducted in partnership with [Global Integrity](#). CPI reports that the project uses extensive research by reporters in each state to grade and rank the states based on existing laws and analysis of how well they are implemented. [Click here](#) for detailed information about the CPI's State Integrity 2015 investigation, including its scorecard methodology.

Source:

[States flunk at integrity](#). By Nicholas Kusnetz, The Center for Public Integrity, November 9, 2015 (updated 11-23-2015)

[State Integrity 2015](#) Report, [www.publicintegrity.org](#)
[Global Integrity](#), [www.globalintegrity.org](#)



The 300 known U.S. exonerations in 2015 include:

- 77 Homicide cases
- 3 Homicide/Sexual assault cases
- 11 Sexual assault cases
- 10 Child sexual assault cases
- 11 Robbery/Theft/Burglary cases
- 19 Assault cases
- 65 Drug cases
- 15 Fraud/Forgery cases
- 1 Child abuse case
- 19 Cases involving violent crimes not listed above
- 69 Cases involving non-violent crimes not listed above

The Innocents Database includes 202 known exonerations in 2015 in countries other than the U.S. Those cases are:

- 53 Homicide cases
- 1 Homicide/Sexual assault cases
- 7 Sexual assault cases
- 9 Child sexual assault cases
- 13 Robbery/Theft/Burglary cases
- 13 Assault cases
- 12 Drug cases
- 22 Fraud/Forgery cases
- 10 Cases involving violent charges not listed above
- 62 Cases involving non-violent charges not listed above

It is notable that the types of cases that involved an exoneration in 2015 both in and outside the United States aren't appreciably different, except for many more drug cases in the U.S. What is extraordinary, is the additional length of time that a person in the U.S. spends incarcerated before their exoneration compared with other countries. Excluding non-violent and drug cases, in 2015 the average person was incarcerated in the U.S. for almost 12-1/2 years before their exoneration, while it was less than half that outside the U.S. — 5-1/2 years.

Although DNA exonerations get a lot of attention, there were only eight exonerations in the U.S. in 2015 based on new DNA evidence, and six others in which new DNA evidence contributed to an exoneration along with other exculpatory evidence. In 2015 there wasn't a single international exoneration that was based on new DNA evidence, or contributed to by new DNA evidence.

The state's with five or more known exonerations in 2015 are:

- Texas, 59
- New York, 29
- Illinois, 24

- North Carolina, 21
- Wisconsin, 9
- Florida, 8
- Iowa, 8
- Pennsylvania, 8
- Washington, 8
- Alaska, 6
- Connecticut, 6
- Indiana, 6
- Ohio, 6
- Alabama, 5
- California, 5
- Virginia, 5

The countries with five or more known exonerations are:

- United States 300
- United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, & Northern Ireland), 45
- India, 29
- New Zealand, 13
- Australia, 9
- Canada, 9
- Pakistan, 9
- Italy, 8
- China, 6
- Costa Rica, 6
- Bahamas, 5
- Egypt, 5
- Ireland, 5

The sortable version of the Innocents Database that [became available online](#) in December 2015, allows both user defined searches, and user defined sorts of any combination of more than 100 columns of data. The Innocents Database's homepage is at [www.forejustice.org/innocentsdatabase.htm](#).



Visit the Innocents Database

Includes details about more than 5,700 wrongly convicted people from the U.S. and other countries.

[www.forejustice.org/search_idb.htm](#)

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