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Public Corruption by State

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Which states have the highest and lowest levels of public corruption? Public corruption generally involves elected or career government officials stealing public property or receiving bribes from businesses and individuals in return for special treatment. Some recent examples are [here](#).

We [previously explored](#) Department of Justice (DOJ) **data** on corruption convictions in the nation's 94 federal judicial districts. As a complementary analysis, this blog post aggregates the data by state and then ranks the states on convictions relative to federal, state, and local government employment in each state.

The table shows annual conviction rates per 10,000 government employees for the 2004 to 2023 period. Louisiana, Montana, South Dakota, Kentucky, and West Virginia have the highest levels of corruption by this measure. Montana and South Dakota may rank high partly because of **efforts** to crack down on lawbreaking in Indian reservations.

The states with the lowest corruption levels by this measure are New Hampshire, Utah, Oregon, Colorado, and Minnesota. New Hampshire is the **freest state in the nation**, with one of the smallest governments. Corruption levels may vary across jurisdictions because of differing government structures, cultures, education levels, and poverty rates.

The US average rate is 0.38 convictions per 10,000 government employees. The average rate for the top 10 states is 0.70, while the average for the bottom 10 states is 0.13. Thus, corruption by this measure is five times higher in the high-corruption states than the low-corruption states. If they want cleaner government, the former states appear to have a lot to learn from the latter states.

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