

Americans are increasingly moving to red, Republican-leaning states—where life is cheaper, but people also die younger

May 25 2023, by Robert Samuels



While blue, Democratic states are becoming bluer, red, Republican-leaning states are becoming more conservative. Credit: Matt Champlin

The United States is an [increasingly polarized country](#) when it comes to politics—but one thing that almost all people want is to live a [long, healthy life](#).

More and more Americans are moving from [Democratic-leaning blue](#)

[states to Republican-voting red ones](#), and one of the effects of this change is that they are relocating to places with lower life expectancy.

Idaho, Montana and Florida, [all red states](#), had the [greatest population growth](#) among U.S. states between 2020 and 2022. Meanwhile, New York and Illinois, both blue states, and Louisiana, a red state, suffered the biggest population losses. California, another blue state, has experienced significant [recent population loss](#) as well.

One key reason for this migration is the [high cost of living](#) in places like New York and California, compared with the lower cost of living in red states such as [Georgia or Indiana](#).

I am a scholar who [studies the intersection](#) between politics, media and psychology. I think it is important to note that another trend, though, is that people are largely migrating to places with [lower life expectancies](#).

Understanding demographics

There is a [large difference in expected life spans](#) for people living in certain states, according to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.

For instance, people born in New York and California—two of the [richest states](#) in the country, which largely vote Democratic—have a [life expectancy](#) of 77.7 and 79 years, respectively. But people in Mississippi and Louisiana—two of the [poorest states](#), which tend to vote Republican—live, on average, until they are [71.9 and 73.1 years old](#).

People who live in Republican-leaning states tend to have [less money](#), [worse health conditions](#), higher rates of [gun-related deaths](#) and [lower levels of education](#) than people living in Democratic states.

On average, people in red states have higher rates of poverty than residents of blue states.

Poverty is an indicator for life expectancies in the U.S.—the poorer someone is, the more likely to die younger.

But there are likely other issues at play in people in red states' having lower life spans.

Health differences

Research in 2020 showed that Americans in blue states tend to live longer than people in red states, primarily because of state policies on everything from seat belt laws to abortion laws. That research also identified health policies as a major factor.

People in blue states also tend to have higher rates of health insurance than people in red states.

Moreover, when looking at the rates of people who are diagnosed with cancer in each state, it is clear that people in red states are generally less healthy than people in blue ones. Red-state residents are also more likely to die from heart disease than people in blue states.

But health rates vary greatly across racial and ethnic groups. Black and Hispanic people are far more likely than white and Asian people in the U.S. to not have access to quality affordable health care, regardless of their state of residence.

And Black people remain more likely than white people to have high blood pressure and to die from heart disease, among other health conditions.

Lower education levels

Another key factor in this life span trend is that people in red states have [lower levels of education](#) than people in blue states.

This matters, since some recent research has shown that [education](#) levels are the best [predictor of a person's life span](#) for a variety of complex, interconnected reasons, including an increased likelihood that receiving a higher education will [lead to a boost in income](#).

Experts also often consider race and ethnicity another [major factor](#), in part because of [structural inequalities](#) facing people of color that may place access to quality affordable education out of reach, for example.

Lack of education may be the most direct reason for [lower incomes and shorter lives](#)—but it is not clear if attaining a higher level of education makes people wealthier, or if people who are born into wealth receive more and better education.

Are people moving to die young?

There are other reasons that factor into the complex question of life expectancy, and discrepancies in longevity across states.

One reason identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for example, is that there are more gun deaths—[by homicide and suicide](#)—in red states [than blue states](#).

People are moving to different states in the U.S. for a variety of reasons—including, in some cases, political ideologies. While blue ZIP codes have been found to be getting bluer, [red ones are becoming](#) even more red.

But it is important to keep in mind that data on life spans and health are simply averages, and so there can be a high variation within particular locations.

There are people in red and blue states who defy these statistics—many people living long lives in poor red states, and people dying younger in rich blue ones.

Still, the overall trends are clear. People living in blue states—by and large—tend to live longer, healthier and wealthier lives.

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