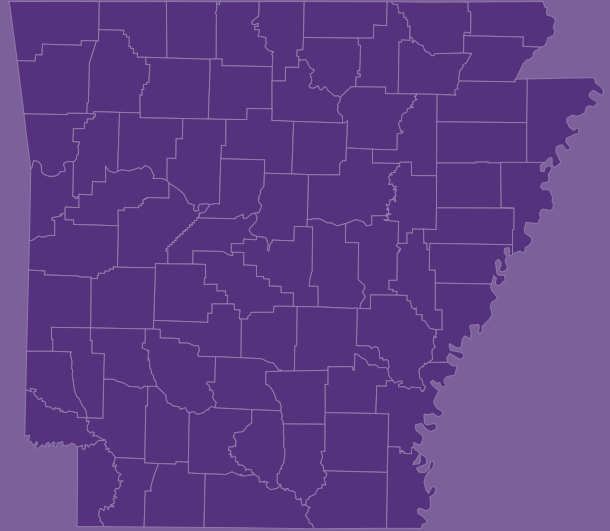# ACCESS
ARKANSAS

COUNTY AND CITY WEB TRANSPARENCY

ARKANSAS CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A review of transparency research reveals that transparency enhances accountability, instills fiscal discipline, improves economic performance, promotes trust between governments and citizens, and reduces corruption.[1] Therefore, transparency is key to good governance.[2]

To further transparency and good governance, the Arkansas Center for Research in Economics (ACRE) started the Arkansas Projects in Transparency in 2018 to improve transparency at Arkansas's local government level. A vital component of this project is creating and maintaining a transparency index for Arkansas local governments called the *Access Arkansas: Web Transparency Report*. This publication is the fourth edition of the index. It is noteworthy that previous editions of the report analyzed only the web transparency of Arkansas's 75 counties. This edition of the report includes Arkansas's 112 first class cities in its analysis for the first time.

We calculate our transparency index by assessing the information that county and city governments publish on their websites and the Arkansas.gov platform. We identify the counties that are best and worst in web transparency overall, and we also quantify their strengths in three overarching kinds of transparency: fiscal, administrative, and political.

- **Fiscal transparency** is the disclosure of how governments spend tax dollars.

- **Administrative transparency** relates to the openness of government activities and processes.

- **Political transparency** relates to the disclosure of information about elected officials and the openness of elected bodies such as quorum courts—the legislative body of county governments.[3]

THE PUBLICATION OF OUR REPORT HAS ENCOURAGED COUNTIES TO HAVE MORE AGENCY OVER THEIR TRANSPARENCY EFFORTS AND TO INTERACT ACROSS COUNTIES TO EXCHANGE IDEAS.

During this project process, we worked with county officials to remedy gaps in their online publication of public information. We also received motivating comments from the judges engaged in improving transparency in their counties. Here are two:

"ACRE'S transparency project has been instrumental in giving us as a county a framework and a goal to work towards. We are excited to see other county contributing and fostering healthy competition in the pursuit of transparency."

"…The transparency project has been a game-changer! The assessment of our page has caused us to evaluate our website and review the suggestions that are given by ACRE and try to implement them into our site. We look forward to the transparency report and try to improve in our ranking each time. We also review the top-ranked sites and learn from their rankings and recommendations."

Our report serves two purposes. First, it informs residents about the level of government transparency in their local governments and the improvements their government officials are making and need to make. Second, it provides researchers and policymakers with the necessary data to analyze the relationship between transparency and economic and socioeconomic factors in Arkansas.

We focus on local governments because they are just as important as state governments, and the state government in Arkansas already provides some of the essential equivalent information online. For example, Arkansas counties provide critical services like law enforcement, firefighting, ambulances, trash pickup, sewers, and water for their residents.[4] Similarly, city governments address zoning and building regulations and promote economic development, among other things. However, despite the impact of county and city governments' decisions on citizens' lives, information on their decision-making processes and policy outcomes is not always readily available and accessible to voters, taxpayers, and citizens.

There is a greater need for increased transparency at the local government level: A 2013 assessment of online transparency by Kristin McMurray, "2013 Transparency Report Card: Bringing State & Local Governments to Light," revealed that state governments are more transparent than local governments.[5] In Arkansas, the state government earned a grade of B, while its county governments earned an F. Arkansas's counties were the worst in the nation: no other state's counties earned such a low grade at the time of that report. In addition, cities earned a C grade, while school districts earned a C- grade. Thus, ACRE's goal was to raise awareness of web transparency in Arkansas local governments and encourage local entities to improve their web transparency.

This edition of our publication highlights the improvements counties have made in web transparency since 2021 while also shining a light on how cities are currently doing. Our assessment shows that Arkansas counties have made improvements in overall county transparency. We also found that unlike in 2020, when Arkansas counties were most web transparent in political transparency, in 2022, Arkansas counties are most transparent in fiscal transparency, followed by political, then administrative transparency. We acknowledge that a significant factor contributing to the improvement in fiscal transparency is Act 564. Since Act 564 was passed into law, fiscal transparency has significantly improved in Arkansas. Recall that the law provided that beginning in January 2020, counties must publish financial information on web platforms, including Facebook. Today, all 75 counties publish some financial information, such as their budgets, through the ARtransparency.gov website set up by the Association of Arkansas Counties.[6]

Overall, the current index shows that, on average, Arkansas counties publish about 37% of the important information included in our index compared to about 31% in 2020, 21% in 2019, and 15% in 2018. We acknowledge that a significant factor contributing to the improvement could be that we had more researchers searching for information on the county websites this year than we did in the previous two years. This increase in our research resources may have increased our chances of finding the information. However, another contributory factor to the improvement may be the rise in the county government's engagement in transparency efforts. The publication of our report has encouraged counties to have more agency over their transparency efforts and to interact across counties to exchange ideas. For example, over the last year, we interacted with several county officials inquiring how they could enhance their counties' transparency. They also reach out to and review the top-ranked sites and learn from their rankings and recommendations. As a result, several counties have made tremendous web transparency improvements on their web platforms.

BACKGROUND

A 2013 assessment of online transparency by Kristin McMurray, "2013 Transparency Report Card: Bringing State & Local Governments to Light," published by the Sunshine Review, revealed that Arkansas counties are the worst in the nation at publishing public information on their websites.[7] Considering the benefits of transparency, including instilling fiscal discipline and reducing corruption, ACRE embarked on a project designed to measure and improve web transparency at the local government level in Arkansas. Our project systematically reviews and assesses the types of information local governments publish online.

We released our inaugural report, "Access Arkansas: County-Level Web Transparency," in 2018. It revealed a deficiency in Arkansas counties' online publication of information, especially information about fiscal transparency (financial information such as budgets and financial statements) and administrative transparency (information about local officials' activities and processes).

As of December 2022, 44 counties (up from 40 in 2020) have stand-alone websites; the rest have some or minimal web presence through the state's Arkansas.gov platform. We consider Arkansas.gov an important platform for counties without stand-alone websites to publish information. At a minimum, residents can find contact information for their county assessor and collector at https://portal.arkansas.gov/counties/. Many counties' pages contain links to their assessor's or collector's website. For some counties, more information is available at "countyname" county.arkansas.gov. For example, for Johnson County, there is more information at johnsoncounty.arkansas.gov. However, we noticed that it is difficult to get to these counties' pages by going through the home page of arkansas.gov rather than just using a search engine such as Google.

Previous studies have assessed Arkansas local governments' websites but included only those counties with stand-alone websites. The first study, published in 2013, assessed just 35 counties,[8] while the second one, published in 2015, assessed 31 counties.[9] Both earlier studies are based on web assessments conducted no later than 2012. However, circumstances have changed and will keep evolving in Arkansas, generating the need for ACRE's inaugural transparency index in 2018 and regular updates. An example of an evolving circumstance is the improvement in web access in rural areas. As of year-end 2019, 63.3% of Arkansas's rural population had access to fixed terrestrial 25 Mbps/3 Mbps internet,[10] up from 16.0% in 2013.[11] This number is expected to go up with the establishment of the Arkansas Rural Connect (ARC) grant program aimed at providing high-speed broadband to residents in rural communities by 2022. The ARC program was established in August 2019.[12]

Building on the two earlier studies, our study assesses the web performance of all 75 counties and has now included all 112 first class cities in our transparency index. As a result, our report is the most current assessment of web transparency of Arkansas local government, and in addition to being the most current assessment, our study has four more noteworthy features:

1. **Benefits categorized.** Our study categorizes fiscal, administrative, and political information separately, allowing researchers and policymakers to easily assess the relative benefits of increasing accessibility for each information type.[13]

2. **Focus on the fiscal.** Our study breaks out fiscal information from other types of information. Isolating fiscal transparency allows us to examine the items with the most significant deterrence and detection effects on public corruption.

3. **Recent information prioritized.** Our study assigns more weight to current information when analyzing sources that include past information, such as budgets. Recent information is a more accurate indicator of county web transparency, especially when evaluating current officials or programs' successes or failures.

4. **Ongoing.** We update our study regularly. Regular updates allow residents and researchers to make comparisons over time with a consistent and reliable data set.

A possible reason local governments may give for lack of web transparency may include inadequate resources or capacity to do so. However, a 2018 United States Public Interest Research Group (US PIRG) report notes that as technology improves, governments may be able to lower the costs of creating and maintaining their websites.[14] Despite this possible barrier, counties should consider that a transparent government's benefits, such as improved relationships between government officials and residents, will likely outweigh the costs of developing online resources.

OVERALL TRANSPARENCY

The overall score ranges from 0.000 to 1.000, combining the three types of transparency: fiscal, administrative, and political.

TOP 10 PERFORMERS IN OVERALL TRANSPARENCY

Scoring highest on all three types of transparency, Benton County (0.952), Craighead (0.952), and Washington County (0.952) stand out as the most web-transparent counties in Arkansas in 2022, as Figure 1 shows.

FIGURE 1: Top 10 Performers in Overall Transparency

County	Score
Benton	0.952
Craighead	0.952
Washington	0.952
Cross	0.905
Faulkner	0.905
Sebastian	0.905
Garland	0.833
Pope	0.774
Pulaski	0.774
Mississippi	0.714
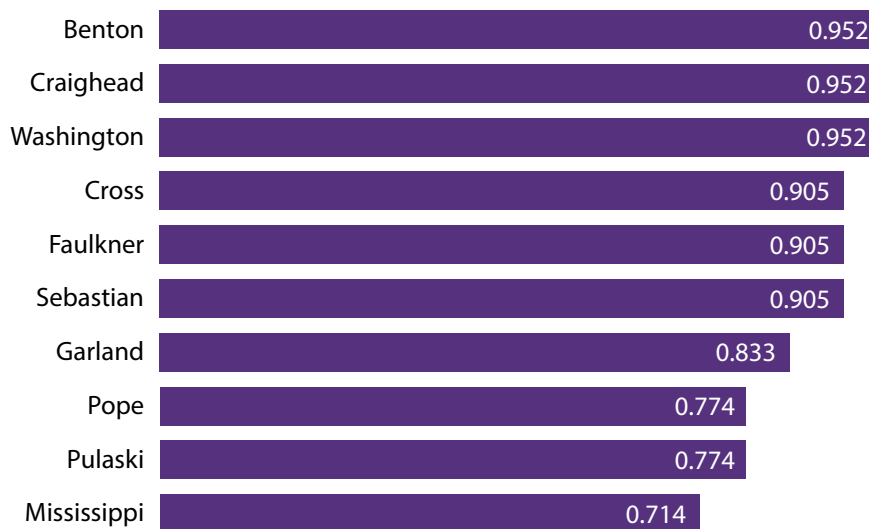
While there used to be a noticeable gap between Washington County, the most transparent county in the inaugural edition in 2018, and Arkansas's other 74 counties, some counties have made significant improvements to shrink that gap.

- In 2020, Craighead trailed behind, ranking 5th place with a score of 0.722 compared to Benton and Washington's 1st place with 0.952 scores. Craighead, Washington, and Benton Counties are now tied for first place with a 0.952 score.

- Pope and Pulaski Counties are tied for this year's 8th-ranked overall with a score of 0.774, publishing just about 17% less information than the first-place counties.

- Mississippi County pulled into the top 10 for the first time, increasing its score from 0.467 in 2020 to 0.714 in 2022, publishing about 23% less information than the first-place counties. This is also a marked improvement over 2020, when the 10th-ranked county, Saline, had a score of 0.619 and published less than 34% of the information that top-ranked Washington published.

- The current index shows that all top 10 counties have a score greater than 0.714. This was a significant improvement from 2020, when only five counties had a score great than that.

OVERALL WEB TRANSPARENCY OF ARKANSAS COUNTIES OVER THE YEARS

Generally, progress has been made in county-level transparency in Arkansas since 2018, when we published the first edition of the Transparency Report. However, there is still much room for improvement, as Table 1 shows.

TABLE 1: Average Percentage Of Published Information By Transparency In Arkansas Counties Over The Years

	2018	2019	2020	2022	IMPROVEMENT
Fiscal	7.24	16.4	36.9	52.7	45.6
Administrative	6.22	12.2	15.1	20.1	13.88
Political	28.02	36.6	43.1	44	15.98

Overall, Arkansas counties performed better in fiscal transparency this year than in the other two types of transparency, and their scores show improvement from our assessment in 2020.

DISTRIBUTION OF OVERALL COUNTY TRANSPARENCY SCORES

Figure 2 shows the distribution of overall scores for all 75 Arkansas counties. Figure 2 also shows the number of counties in each score range. Despite significant improvements from 2020, most counties still have a long way to go to improve their web transparency. The distribution skews to the left, where transparency scores are lower, implying that most counties in Arkansas are still not publishing enough information on their websites.

FIGURE 2: **Distribution of Overall Transparency Scores in Arkansas**

Overall Transparency Score		
0.000–0.200	★★★★★★★★★★★★	12
0.210–0.300	★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★	32
0.310–0.400	★★★★★★	6
0.410–0.500	★★★★★★★★★	9
0.510–0.600	★★	2
0.610–0.700	★★	2
0.710–0.800	★★★★★	5
0.810–0.900	★★	2
0.910–1.000	★★★★★★	6

Number of counties

Added together, 50 out of 75 (67%) Arkansas counties still score less than 0.500, which means these counties publish less than 50% of the important public information included in our index. This clearly indicates that Arkansas counties as a whole are still deficient in web transparency.

OVERALL TRANSPARENCY SCORE AND RANKING BY COUNTY

Table 2 gives the rank and overall score for each of Arkansas's 75 counties. The last 19 counties in the table do not have stand-alone websites and only supply information on the contacts of their two elected offices, the assessor and collector, through the Arkansas.gov platform. Of the remainder, 40 counties have stand-alone websites; the other 16 use the Arkansas.gov platform and include more information than the bottom 19.

TABLE 2: Overall Transparency Score and Ranking by County in 2022

RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE
1	Benton	0.952	26	Carroll	0.393	51	Bradley	0.202
1	Craighead	0.952	27	Fulton	0.353	51	Chicot	0.202
1	Washington	0.952	28	St. Francis	0.350	51	Clay	0.202
4	Cross	0.905	29	Lawrence	0.345	51	Crittenden	0.202
4	Faulkner	0.905	30	Greene	0.341	51	Drew	0.202
4	Sebastian	0.905	31	Crawford	0.337	51	Howard	0.202
7	Garland	0.833	32	Van Buren	0.298	51	Independence	0.202
8	Pope	0.774	33	White	0.282	51	Lincoln	0.202
8	Pulaski	0.774	34	Union	0.274	51	Little River	0.202
10	Mississippi	0.714	35	Hempstead	0.250	51	Logan	0.202
11	Boone	0.702	35	Woodruff	0.250	51	Randolph	0.202
11	Saline	0.702	37	Prairie	0.239	51	Scott	0.202
13	Jefferson	0.659	38	Stone	0.236	63	Perry	0.201
14	Ashley	0.607	39	Calhoun	0.234	71	Arkansas	0.199
15	Cleburne	0.583	39	Hot Spring	0.234	64	Newton	0.197
16	Baxter	0.548	39	Sharp	0.234	64	Ouachita	0.197
17	Sevier	0.480	42	Lee	0.231	64	Phillips	0.197
18	Poinsett	0.472	43	Clark	0.226	67	Monroe	0.194
19	Conway	0.448	43	Franklin	0.226	68	Pike	0.186
20	Columbia	0.446	43	Jackson	0.226	69	Desha	0.183
21	Grant	0.440	46	Cleveland	0.223	69	Montgomery	0.183
21	Marion	0.440	46	Johnson	0.223	72	Dallas	0.162
23	Miller	0.425	48	Lafayette	0.215	72	Lonoke	0.162
24	Izard	0.417	49	Yell	0.210	74	Polk	0.153
24	Madison	0.417	50	Nevada	0.207	74	Searcy	0.153

TRANSPARENCY HEAT MAP OF COUNTIES

Figure 3 presents a transparency heat map of counties. Even though we found some improvements in 2022, it is evident from the map that most Arkansas counties are still not web transparent.
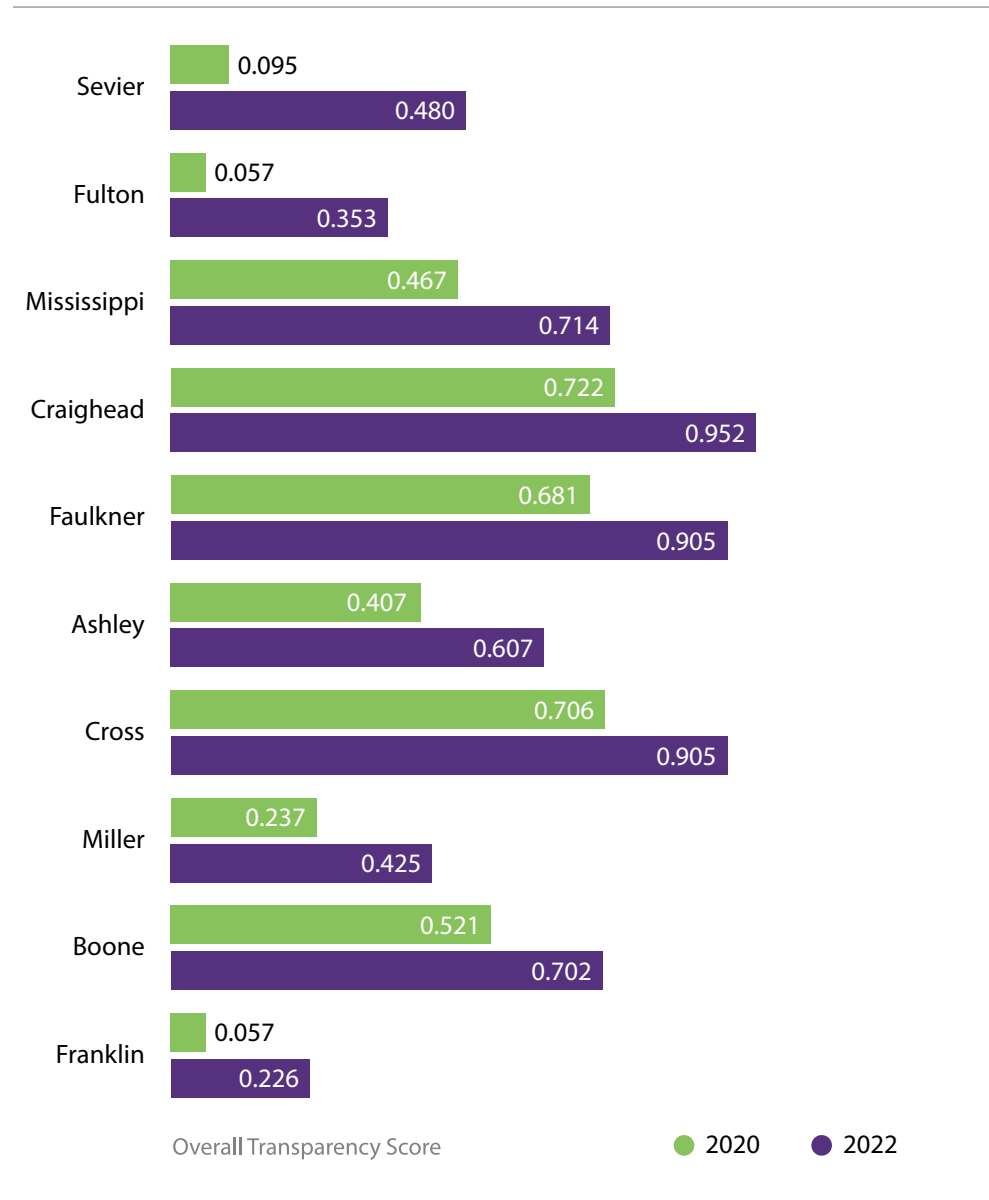
FIGURE 3: Heat Map

Legend:

- 0.900–1.000
- 0.700–0.890
- 0.500–0.690
- 0.300–0.490
- 0.000–0.290
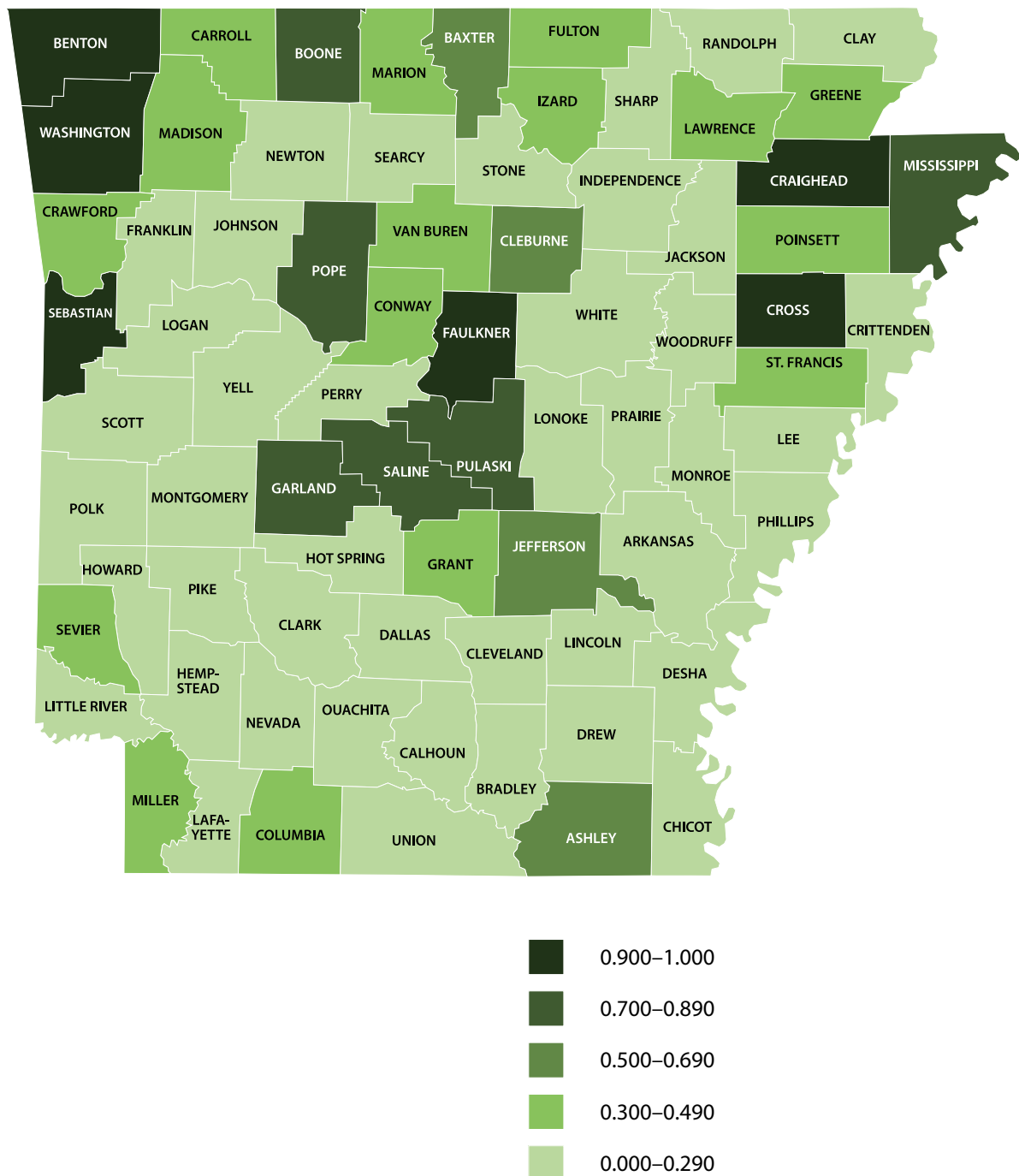
TOP 10 MOST-IMPROVED COUNTIES

One reason for creating the index and updating it regularly is for county officials and county residents to see the progress their county is making on web transparency. Figure 4 shows the top 10 most-improved counties in Arkansas.

FIGURE 4: Top 10 Most Improved Counties, Overall Transparency Score

County	2020	2022
Sevier	0.095	0.480
Fulton	0.057	0.353
Mississippi	0.467	0.714
Craighead	0.722	0.952
Faulkner	0.681	0.905
Ashley	0.407	0.607
Cross	0.706	0.905
Miller	0.237	0.425
Boone	0.521	0.702
Franklin	0.057	0.226

Overall Transparency Score   ● 2020   ● 2022

Sevier County improved the most by 0.385 points, equivalent to adding 38% of the important public information to the index. In terms of ranking, Sevier County moved from 56th in 2020 to 17th in 2022. Other counties worthy of mention are Fulton and Mississippi, which improved by 0.296 and 0.247 points, respectively. Fulton was at a low 72nd rank in 2020 but is now in 27th place with a 0.353 score. Mississippi was 18th in ranking in 2020, now 10th place in 2022 with a 0.714 score. Another stellar performance was from Craighead County, which was also among the top 10 most improved counties with a 0.722 score in 2020 but is now one of the most transparent in overall transparency in 2022 with a 0.952 score, showing that even when counties have relatively high rankings, they can make important improvements.

OVERALL TRANSPARENCY BY COUNTY CLASSIFICATION

The Association of Arkansas Counties organizes counties into different classes based on population size:[15]

Class 1 (0–9,999 people): Calhoun, Cleveland, Dallas, Lafayette, Monroe, Montgomery, Nevada, Newton, Prairie, Searcy, and Woodruff.

Class 2 (10,000–19,999 people): Arkansas, Bradley, Chicot, Clay, Cross, Desha, Drew, Franklin, Fulton, Grant, Howard, Izard, Jackson, Lawrence, Lee, Lincoln, Little River, Madison, Marion, Perry, Pike, Randolph, Scott, Sevier, Sharp, Stone, and Van Buren.

Class 3 (20,000–29,999 people): Ashley, Carroll, Clark, Cleburne, Columbia, Conway, Hempstead, Johnson, Logan, Ouachita, Phillips, Poinsett, Polk, St. Francis, and Yell.

Class 4 (30,000–49,999 people): Baxter, Boone, Greene, Hot Spring, Independence, Miller, Mississippi, and Union.

Class 5 (50,000–69,999 people): Crawford, Crittenden, Lonoke, and Pope.

Class 6 (70,000–199,999 people): Craighead, Faulkner, Garland, Jefferson, Saline, Sebastian, and White.

Class 7 (200,000 and above): Benton, Pulaski, and Washington.

Seven out of the ten most populous counties in Arkansas (Pulaski, Benton, Washington, Sebastian, Faulkner, Craighead, and Garland) are among the top 10 performers in web transparency. A simple scatter plot of the population and our transparency index in Figure 5 indicates that more populous counties tend to be more web transparent than less populous ones.
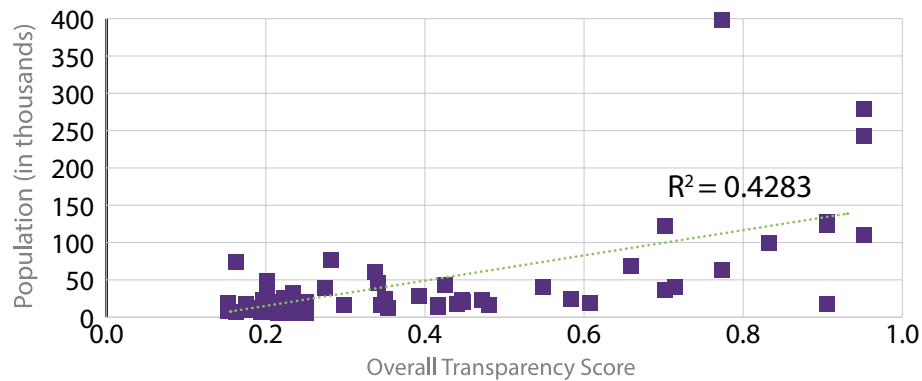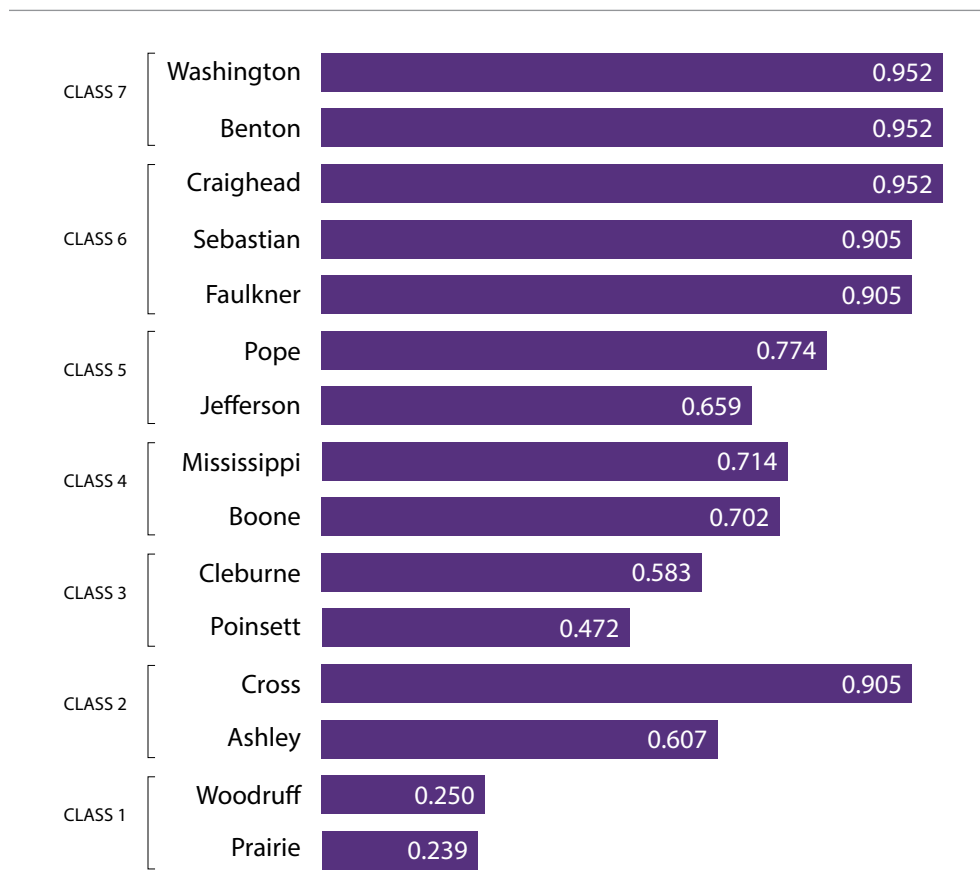
Note that R² value is 0.4283, indicating that approximately 42.83% of the variation in county transparency can be explained by the variation in population. This value suggests a moderate positive relationship between population and county transparency. However, it is important to note that correlation does not necessarily imply causation, and there may be other factors influencing county transparency that are not accounted for in this analysis. Further research and analysis would be needed to fully understand the relationship between population and county transparency.

In addition to ranking the top 10 overall performers (Figure 1), we analyzed the top two performers in each of the seven population-size classes, as Figure 6 shows.

This analysis allows us to compare each county with all other counties in the state and counties similar in population. Competition among peers can bring about much-needed improvement as counties realize that counties like theirs can do better. Even though we see a positive relationship between population size and web transparency in our scatter plot, a low population is no excuse for not publishing public information online. Cross, which is in Class 2, outperforms more populous counties in Classes 3, 4, and 5. Contrasting with Jefferson County, which is in Class 5, it is outperformed by the less-populous counties as top performers in Classes 2 and 4.

Each of the top two performers by population class scores higher than 0.500, except for Poinsett, Woodrufff, and Prairie. Their low scores indicate that some top performers publish less than 50% of important public information online. A factor contributing to these counties' low scores is that, currently, they do not publish bids and bid outcomes online. Doing so would improve their low scores.

CLASS 7	Washington	0.952
	Benton	0.952
CLASS 6	Craighead	0.952
	Sebastian	0.905
	Faulkner	0.905
CLASS 5	Pope	0.774
	Jefferson	0.659
CLASS 4	Mississippi	0.714
	Boone	0.702
CLASS 3	Cleburne	0.583
	Poinsett	0.472
CLASS 2	Cross	0.905
	Ashley	0.607
CLASS 1	Woodruff	0.250
	Prairie	0.239

OVERALL TRANSPARENCY BY COUNTY INCOME CLASSIFICATION

One concern raised for web transparency is that it imposes new and ongoing costs for counties to create and maintain websites. The implication is that higher income counties are likely to be more web transparent than lower-income counties. This section compares counties by income. Using median household income, we have placed counties into seven groups.[16]

Group 1 ($30,000–$34,999): Chicot, Dallas, Desha, Lee, Phillips, St. Francis, and Stone.

Group 2 ($35,000–$39,999): Clay, Fulton, Howard, Jackson, Lafayette, Searcy, and Sharp. Woodruff.

Group 3 ($40,000–$44,999): Ashley, Baxter, Bradley, Clark, Columbia, Conway, Cross, Drew, Franklin, Hempstead, Izard, Jefferson, Johnson, Lawrence, Marion, Mississippi, Monroe, Montgomery, Nevada, Newton, Ouachita, Poinsett, Polk, Randolph, Scott, Van Buren, and Woodruff.

Group 4 ($45,000–$49,999): Boone, Cleburne, Cleveland, Crittenden, Garland, Hempstead, Hot Spring, Lincoln, Logan, Madison, Miller, Pope, Prairie, Sevier, Union, and White.

Group 5 ($50,000–$54,999): Carroll, Crawford, Craighead, Faulkner, Greene, Independence, Sebastian, and Yell.

Group 6 ($55,000–$59,999): Arkansas, Calhoun, Little River, Pulaski, and Washington.

Group 7 ($60,000 & above): Benton, Grant, Lonoke, and Saline.

Three of the top 10 highest-income counties in Arkansas (Benton, Pulaski, and Washington) are in the top 10 performers in web transparency. A scatter plot of median household income and our transparency index in figure 7 indicates that higher-income counties tend to be more web transparent than lower-income ones.

FIGURE 7: Scatter Plot of Median Household Income
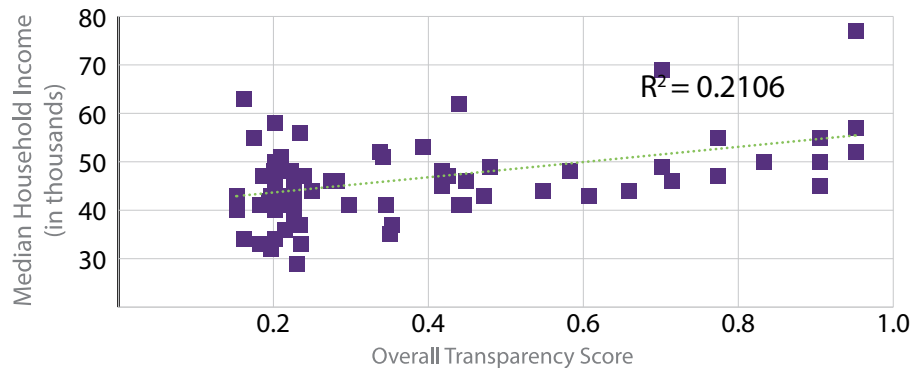
The R^2 value of 0.2106 indicates that approximately 21.06% of the variation in county transparency can be explained by the variation in median household income. This value suggests a weak positive relationship between median household income and county transparency.

FIGURE 8: Top Two Performers in Overall Transparency by County Income Classification

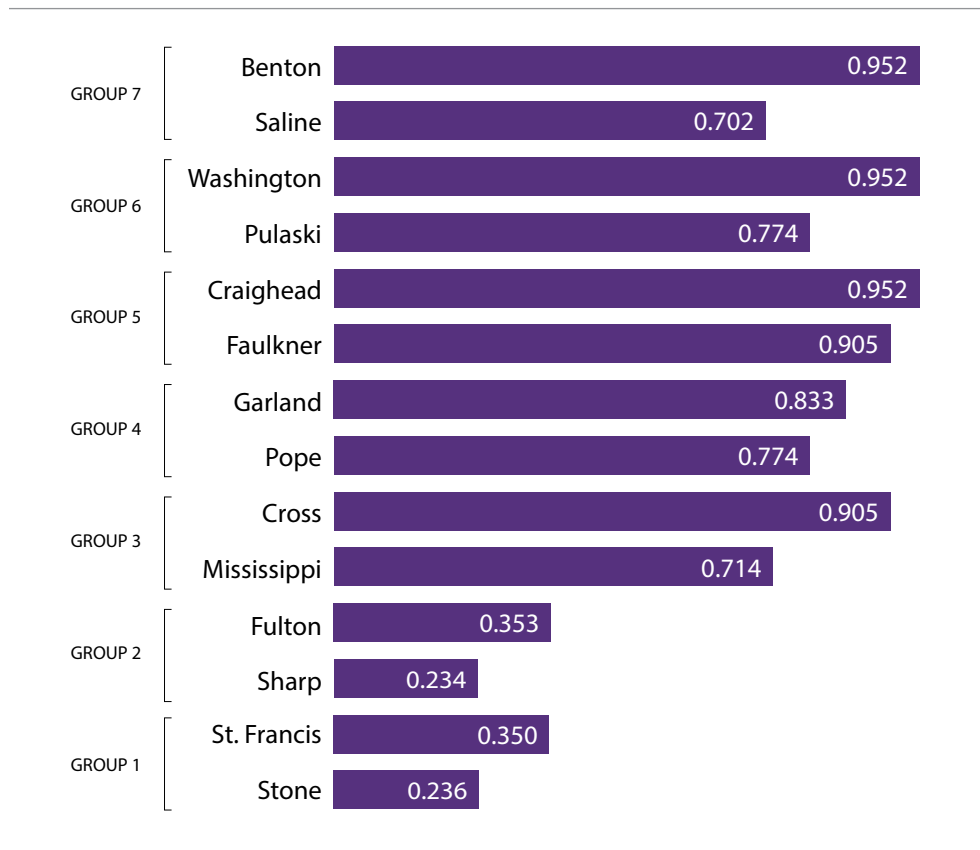| Group	County	Score
GROUP 7	Benton	0.952
GROUP 7	Saline	0.702
GROUP 6	Washington	0.952
GROUP 6	Pulaski	0.774
GROUP 5	Craighead	0.952
GROUP 5	Faulkner	0.905
GROUP 4	Garland	0.833
GROUP 4	Pope	0.774
GROUP 3	Cross	0.905
GROUP 3	Mississippi	0.714
GROUP 2	Fulton	0.353
GROUP 2	Sharp	0.234
GROUP 1	St. Francis	0.350
GROUP 1	Stone	0.236

Figure 8 shows the top two performers in each group and illustrates that income seems to be correlated with the level of web transparency for the first four groups. However, the relationship seems not to hold as some counties in the lower income groups outperform some counties in the lower income groups. For example, Cross County, which is in group 3 and has an overall score of 0.905, outperforms counties such as Saline, Pulaski, Garland, and Pope, which are among the top 2 in their respective higher-income groups.

FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

Recall that fiscal transparency is the disclosure of how governments spend tax dollars. Our fiscal transparency score combines three components: budgets, audits, and taxes and fees. Figure 9 shows that Benton, Craighead, Cross, Faulkner, Garland, Sebastian, and Washington counties, each earning the maximum score of 1.000, post 100% of the important fiscal information included in our index. These seven counties outperform all other counties in fiscal transparency in Arkansas.

FIGURE 9: Top 10 Performers in Fiscal Transparency

County	Score
Benton	1.000
Craighead	1.000
Cross	1.000
Faulkner	1.000
Garland	1.000
Sebastian	1.000
Washington	1.000
Ashley	0.875
Grant	0.875
Mississippi	0.875
Pope	0.875
Sevier	0.875
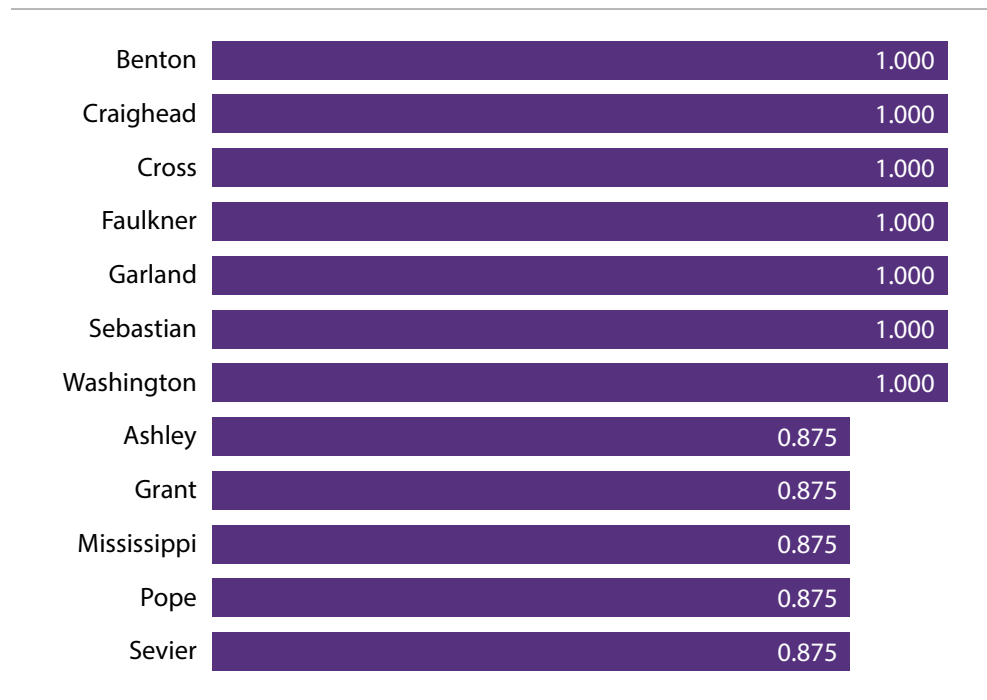
Compared to 2020, we observe some improvement in fiscal transparency across counties. Only three counties (Benton, Garland, and Washington) had a score of 1.000 in 2020. Our 2022 index shows that four other counties (Craighead, Cross, Faulkner, and Sebastian) have joined at the top. Furthermore, all top 10 fiscal transparent counties in 2022 scored greater than 0.800, compared to only six in 2020. This is a significant improvement from the 10th-ranked county in the 2020 edition, Pope, with a 0.733 score. In the 2019 edition, Carroll, the 10th-ranked county, scored 0.467.

NOTEWORTHY CHANGES TO FISCAL TRANSPARENCY IN ARKANSAS

In our inaugural report on county transparency in Arkansas, we recommended an amendment to AR Code § 14-21-102 (2017) to include the publication of financial information online. Previously, the law required the county clerk to publish the county's annual financial report one time in one local newspaper (or a newspaper with the largest circulation in the county if the county had no local newspaper). The Arkansas Legislature followed our recommendation and enacted Act 564 in 2019, requiring counties to publish annual budgets and annual financial reports on a website owned or maintained by the county, the state, or the Association of Arkansas Counties. Effective January 2020, annual budgets and other annual financial reports were required to be available online. With this change, we have noticed an upswing in fiscal transparency.

The online platforms that publish this financial information include the county's official website, its Facebook page, the Association of Arkansas Counties website, and the Arkansas Legislative Audit website. For counties that do not publish their budgets and audited financial information on their official websites, we recommend that they provide a link to that financial information from their websites to make it easy for residents to access the information. Publishing information is meaningless if residents cannot find it.

Table 3 provides the number of counties that reported each of the index's subcomponents in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2022. It demonstrates both the improvement that Arkansas counties have made as a whole and the deficiency that still exists in publishing certain types of financial information.

Number and Percentage of Counties Publishing Each Subcomponent of Fiscal Transparency Online by Year

SUBCOMPONENT	2018		2019		2020		2020	
	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%
Current budget	8	11	18	24	39	52	75	28
Previous year's budget	9	12	15	20	41	55	75	37
Two years prior's budget	7	9	10	13	35	47	75	33
Three years prior's budget	6	8	9	12	12	16	75	32
Current audit[17]	0	0	6	8	34	45	75	23
Previous year's audit	1	1	6	8	31	41	75	23
Two years prior's audit	2	3	7	9	30	40	75	20
Three years prior's audit	2	3	6	8	28	37	75	20
County fees	22	29	36	48	36	48	30	40
Property tax rates	11	15	27	36	34	45	18	24
General sales tax rates	4	5	8	11	9	12	13	17

Three things especially stand out in Table 3:

- In 2022, the number of counties publishing budgets and audits online was 75, meaning all counties now purportedly publish the information online via the Arkansas.gov platform or through the Arkansas Association of Counties (AAC) website as a result of Act 564.[18] However, in the calculations of each county's final fiscal score, we award a full point to those counties that either publish the information directly on their website or direct users to the information via a link to the ACC website. Those that do not score 0.75.

- The number of counties publishing each subcomponent of fiscal transparency online has increased in every category except for county fees.

- For all but three subcomponents of fiscal transparency, most counties do publish each subcomponent of fiscal transparency online.

Table 4 shows fiscal transparency scores for each of Arkansas's 75 counties. Thanks to Act 564, all counties in Arkansas now score at least 0.375 on the fiscal transparency component of the index, meaning that they publish at least 38% of the fiscal information captured in our index. Compared to 2020, this is an improvement from when at least 19 Arkansas counties had a zero score in fiscal transparency, indicating that they did not publish any financial information.[19]
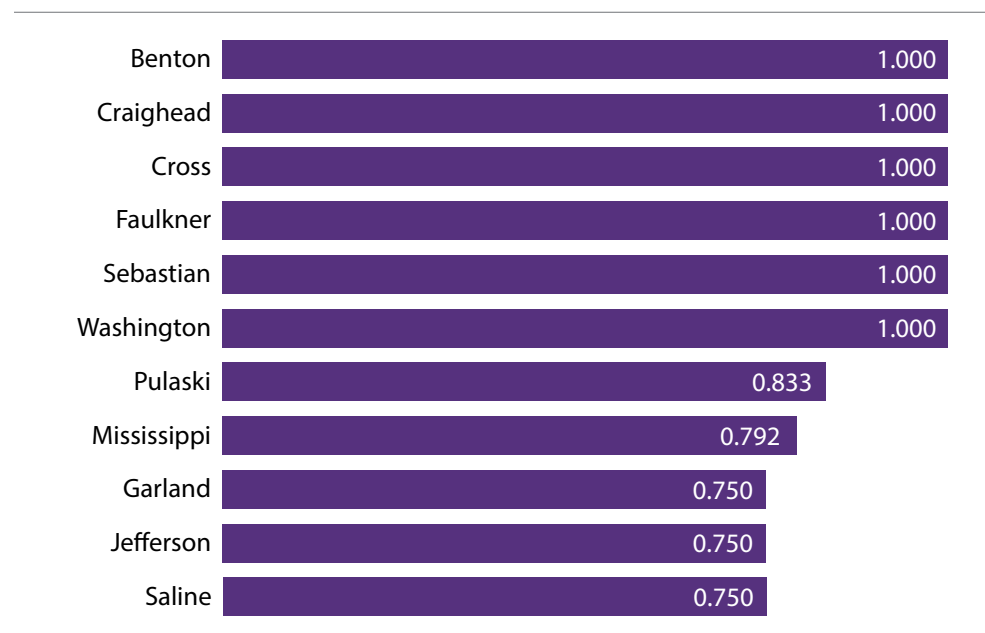
RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE
1	Craighead	1.000	21	Hempstead	0.542	51	Johnson	0.375
1	Cross	1.000	21	Conway	0.542	51	Lafayette	0.375
1	Faulkner	1.000	21	Crawford	0.542	53	Lawrence	0.375
1	Garland	1.000	21	Saline	0.542	53	Lee	0.375
1	Sebastian	1.000	21	Woodruff	0.542	53	Lincoln	0.375
1	Washington	1.000	31	Jefferson	0.500	53	Little River	0.375
1	Benton	1.000	32	Jackson	0.375	57	Logan	0.375
8	Pope	0.875	32	Poinsett	0.375	57	Lonoke	0.375
8	Grant	0.875	32	Dallas	0.375	57	Madison	0.375
8	Mississippi	0.875	32	Cleburne	0.375	57	Monroe	0.375
8	Sevier	0.875	32	Clay	0.375	57	Montgomery	0.375
8	Ashley	0.875	32	Hot Spring	0.375	57	Nevada	0.375
13	Baxter	0.833	32	Desha	0.375	57	Newton	0.375
14	Fulton	0.708	32	Franklin	0.375	57	Ouachita	0.375
14	Pulaski	0.708	32	Stone	0.375	57	Perry	0.375
14	Carroll	0.708	32	Arkansas	0.375	57	Phillips	0.375
14	St. Francis	0.708	32	Bradley	0.375	57	Pike	0.375
14	Boone	0.708	32	Calhoun	0.375	57	Polk	0.375
14	Izard	0.708	32	Chicot	0.375	57	Prairie	0.375
20	Greene	0.667	32	Clark	0.375	57	Randolph	0.375
21	Columbia	0.542	32	Cleveland	0.375	57	Scott	0.375
21	White	0.542	32	Crittenden	0.375	57	Searcy	0.375
21	Marion	0.542	32	Drew	0.375	57	Sharp	0.375
21	Miller	0.542	32	Howard	0.375	57	Van Buren	0.375
21	Union	0.542	32	Independence	0.375	57	Yell	0.375

ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSPARENCY

Administrative transparency relates to the openness of local officials' activities and processes, specifically public records requests, building permits and zoning, government contracts, and jobs. With a score of 1.000, Benton County, Craighead, Cross, Faulkner, Sebastian, and Counties outperform all other counties, followed by Pulaski County, as Figure 10 shows. Rounding out the top 10 performers in this category are Garland (0.750), Jefferson (0.750), and Saline (0.750) Counties. Compared to the other categories of transparency, administrative transparency is still the weakest, with an average score of 0.206 (up from 0.151 in 2020), compared to 0.527 for fiscal transparency and 0.440 for political transparency.

FIGURE 10: Top 10 Performers in Administrative Transparency

County	Score
Benton	1.000
Craighead	1.000
Cross	1.000
Faulkner	1.000
Sebastian	1.000
Washington	1.000
Pulaski	0.833
Mississippi	0.792
Garland	0.750
Jefferson	0.750
Saline	0.750

There have been improvements in administrative transparency in 2022. A score of 0.750 for Garland, Jefferson, and Saline Counties means that they publish about 75% of our index's important administrative information. Other counties that were outstanding in this category were Craighead and Faulkner. Though they were in the top ten categories in the previous edition, they have improved their administrative information by at least 20% this year. Previously, they both scored 0.583.

Table 5 shows the subcomponents of our administrative transparency score and the number and percentage of counties that published each subcomponent online in 2022. The table also provides 2020, 2019, and 2018 data to show the progress in publishing each subcomponent.

TABLE 5: Number and Percentage of Counties Publishing Each Subcomponent of Administrative Transparency Online (2018-2022)

SUBCOMPONENT	2018		2019		2020		2022	
	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%
Court records	10	13	18	24	23	31	37	49
FOIA request forms	3	4	6	8	5	7	10	13
FOIA request contact person	5	7	3	4	7	9	10	13
FOIA contact information	6	8	4	5	7	9	10	13
Permit Applications	3	4	4	5	4	12	*--	*--
Permit Holders	0	0	2	0	1	0	*--	*--
Planning Board Meeting Announcements	4	5	28	37	6	9	*--	*--
Planning Board Agenda	3	4	9	12	6	12	*--	*--
Planning Board Minutes	2	3	8	11	4	9	*--	*--
Current RFPs	5	7	7	9	11	15	11	15
Archived RFPs	2	3	4	5	9	12	9	12
Current year bids and bid winners	1	1	2	3	11	15	11	15
Archived bids and bid winners	1	1	3	4	7	9	10	13
(Hiring)Job Titles	9	12	16	21	19	25	20	27
(Hiring) Position descriptions	7	9	13	17	18	24	19	25

*Compared to 2020, this year, data on building permit holders and the planning board was not captured. We did not score counties for the information because many counties indicated that the information was not applicable in their jurisdictions.

Two things especially stand out in Table 5.

- The most significant improvements occurred in publishing court records and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request forms.

    - In 2022, 37 of the 75 counties provided links to CourtConnect[20] for court records, compared to 23 of 75 in 2020.

    - In 2022, 10 of the 75 counties published information on FOIA request forms online, compared to 5 of 75 in 2020.

- The process for obtaining information through FOIA is still inadequate. Only 10 counties list their FOIA contact information or provide a way of requesting information on their websites.

Further analysis reveals that only 9 of 75 counties (Benton, Craighead, Cross, Faulkner, Garland, Pulaski, Saline, Sebastian, and Washington) publish all of the following: current Request for Proposals (RFPs), archived RFPs, current year bids, and bid winners, and archived bids and bid winners. Cumulatively, an alarming 61 of 75 counties do not publish this information. This information is important because contracts involve large public expenditures being transferred to the private sector. Therefore, they merit extra transparency.[21]

Table 6 displays a complete ranking of all 75 counties. Only 21 counties have a score greater than 0.100. Of these 21, only 14 publish 50% of the important administrative transparency information in our index. Thirty- five counties do not publish any information about administrative transparency at all. This finding indicates how deficient Arkansas counties are in this area of transparency.

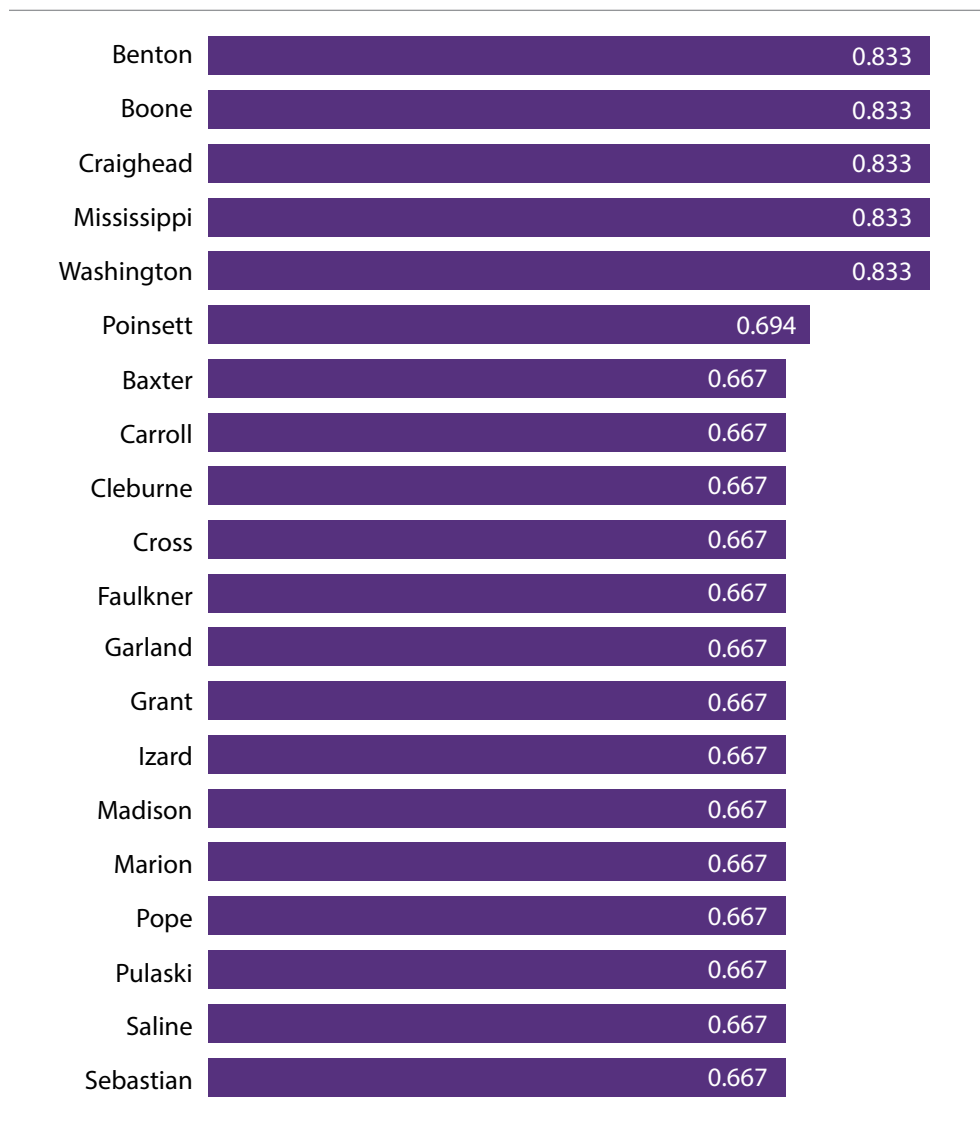**TABLE 6:**   **Administrative Transparency Score and Ranking**

RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE
1	Benton	1.000	22	Conway	0.083	41	Hempstead	0.000
1	Craighead	1.000	22	Crawford	0.083	41	Hot Spring	0.000
1	Cross	1.000	22	Franklin	0.083	41	Howard	0.000
1	Faulkner	1.000	22	Fulton	0.083	41	Independence	0.000
1	Sebastian	1.000	22	Greene	0.083	41	Lafayette	0.000
1	Washington	1.000	22	Izard	0.083	41	Lawrence	0.000
7	Pulaski	0.833	22	Jackson	0.083	41	Lee	0.000
8	Mississippi	0.792	22	Johnson	0.083	41	Lincoln	0.000
9	Garland	0.750	22	Nevada	0.083	41	Little River	0.000
9	Jefferson	0.750	22	Poinsett	0.083	41	Logan	0.000
9	Saline	0.750	22	Prairie	0.083	41	Lonoke	0.000
12	Pope	0.667	22	St. Francis	0.083	41	Monroe	0.000
13	Cleburne	0.500	22	Union	0.083	41	Montgomery	0.000
13	Miller	0.500	22	Van Buren	0.083	41	Newton	0.000
15	Ashley	0.417	22	Yell	0.083	41	Ouachita	0.000
15	Baxter	0.417	41	Bradley	0.000	41	Phillips	0.000
15	Boone	0.417	41	Calhoun	0.000	41	Pike	0.000
15	Madison	0.417	41	Carroll	0.000	41	Polk	0.000
19	Marion	0.333	41	Chicot	0.000	41	Randolph	0.000
20	Sevier	0.250	41	Clay	0.000	41	Scott	0.000
21	Perry	0.167	41	Crittenden	0.000	41	Searcy	0.000
22	Arkansas	0.083	41	Dallas	0.000	41	Sharp	0.000
22	Clark	0.083	41	Desha	0.000	41	Stone	0.000
22	Cleveland	0.083	41	Drew	0.000	41	White	0.000
22	Columbia	0.083	41	Grant	0.000	41	Woodruff	0.000

POLITICAL TRANSPARENCY

Political transparency relates to the openness of elected officials, including the quorum courts. Quorum courts are a type of local government that is made up of a group of elected officials, usually called justices of the peace, who meet regularly to conduct the business of the community. In order for the quorum court to conduct official business, a certain number of justices of the peace, known as a quorum, must be present. This report on political transparency has three components: quorum court information,[22] other elected officials' contact information, and financial disclosures inclusive of conflict of interest statements and salaries. The quorum courts and other categories have subcomponents (shown in Table 7).

As Figure 11 shows, Benton, Boone, Craighead, Mississippi, and Washington counties, each with a score of 0.833 out of a maximum possible score of 1.000, outperform all other counties in Arkansas. The only piece of information these counties do not publish are the financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements of elected officials. The next best political transparency performance was from Poinsett County, with a 0.694 score improving from 0.667 in the previous edition. The next 14 counties in the ranking have a score of 0.667. In addition to failing to publish financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements, those counties do not publish elected officials' salaries.

County	Score
Benton	0.833
Boone	0.833
Craighead	0.833
Mississippi	0.833
Washington	0.833
Poinsett	0.694
Baxter	0.667
Carroll	0.667
Cleburne	0.667
Cross	0.667
Faulkner	0.667
Garland	0.667
Grant	0.667
Izard	0.667
Madison	0.667
Marion	0.667
Pope	0.667
Pulaski	0.667
Saline	0.667
Sebastian	0.667

Compared to administrative transparency, Arkansas counties perform relatively well in political transparency. All top 10 performers scored at least a 0.667, meaning that they posted at least 67% of the political information included in our index.[23] Table 7 shows the update on political transparency over the years, from 2018 through 2022. The table shows the number and percentage of counties for each subcomponent of political transparency.

SUBCOMPONENT	2018		2019		2020		2022	
	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%
Quorum Courts: meeting time and place	18	24	36	48	39	52	33	44
Quorum Courts: meetings-Agenda	12	16	23	31	24	32	23	31
Quorum Courts: meetings- Minutes	11	15	21	28	21	28	22	29
Quorum Courts: archived videos	4	5	7	9	9	12	9	12
Elected officials: names	61	81	61	82	75	100	73	97
Elected officials: office phone	60	80	61	82	75	100	73	97
Elected officials: email	42	55	51	68	61	82	68	91
Elected officials: office location	52	69	48	64	66	88	64	85
Elected officials: job description	33	44	52	70	57	76	69	92
Financial disclosure and conflict of interest statements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Salaries	1	1	1	1	2	3	6	8

Four things to note in Table 7.

- Room for improvement remains, as less than 50% of the counties publish their meeting agendas and minutes. Residents need access to their elected officials, quorum court meetings, and deliberations to encourage more participation and add more scrutiny to the policymaking process.

- The number of counties publishing certain subcomponents of political transparency online has decreased in some categories compared to 2020. For example, information on quorum courts (meeting time and place and agendas) and elected officials (names, office phone numbers, and location) has dropped.

- For the fourth year in a row, no county in Arkansas publishes financial disclosure and conflict of interest statements.

- Six counties now publish elected officials' salaries, an improvement from two in the last edition.[24]

Further analysis of political transparency information reveals the following:

- For the second year in a row, only 19 of 75 counties (25%) publish online information on the quorum courts' meeting times, places, agendas, and minutes.

- 50 of 75 counties publish online all information regarding elected officials: names, contacts, and job descriptions.

Table 8 shows the political transparency scores for each of Arkansas's 75 counties. Notice that all counties have a score greater than zero, unlike the other categories of transparency. Twenty-three counties scored at least 0.500 in 2022, a decrease compared to 26 in 2020.

TABLE 8: **Political Transparency Scores**

RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE
1	Benton	0.833	25	Conway	0.444	38	Lincoln	0.333
1	Boone	0.833	25	Fulton	0.444	38	Little River	0.333
1	Craighead	0.833	25	Greene	0.444	38	Logan	0.333
1	Mississippi	0.833	25	Hot Spring	0.444	38	Randolph	0.333
1	Washington	0.833	25	Miller	0.444	38	Scott	0.333
6	Poinsett	0.694	25	Sharp	0.444	38	Union	0.333
7	Baxter	0.667	25	White	0.444	38	Woodruff	0.333
7	Carroll	0.667	33	St. Francis	0.435	58	Cleveland	0.324
7	Cleburne	0.667	33	Columbia	0.435	58	Johnson	0.324
7	Cross	0.667	33	Lee	0.435	60	Newton	0.314
7	Faulkner	0.667	36	Lafayette	0.378	60	Ouachita	0.314
7	Garland	0.667	36	Prairie	0.378	60	Phillips	0.314
7	Grant	0.667	38	Ashley	0.333	63	Monroe	0.305
7	Izard	0.667	38	Bradley	0.333	64	Pike	0.276
7	Madison	0.667	38	Chicot	0.333	64	Yell	0.276
7	Marion	0.667	38	Clark	0.333	66	Desha	0.267
7	Pope	0.667	38	Clay	0.333	66	Montgomery	0.267
7	Pulaski	0.667	38	Crittenden	0.333	66	Nevada	0.267
7	Saline	0.667	38	Drew	0.333	69	Arkansas	0.238
7	Sebastian	0.667	38	Franklin	0.333	70	Dallas	0.190
21	Crawford	0.556	38	Hempstead	0.333	70	Lonoke	0.190
21	Jefferson	0.556	38	Howard	0.333	72	Perry	0.162
21	Sevier	0.556	38	Independence	0.333	72	Polk	0.162
24	Stone	0.451	38	Jackson	0.333	72	Searcy	0.162
25	Calhoun	0.444	38	Lawrence	0.333	75	Van Buren	0.086

EASE OF FINDING INFORMATION

Transparency implies that public information is posted online, but posting is not enough: it is important that residents can easily find this information online. For many counties, information was not easy to find. During our study, college students helped with collecting the data. Seven students helped collect fiscal and political transparency data, while four collected data for administrative transparency. College students can most likely find the requisite information more quickly than the average Arkansan. Growing up with technology, college-age students are often adept at navigating and locating information on the internet.

The maximum length of time it took for the students to search and locate information for a single county for each transparency category was 43 minutes (fiscal), 24 minutes (political), and 24 minutes (administrative). On average, the students required 4 minutes of searching to find information on fiscal transparency for each county, 10 minutes to find information on political transparency, and 8 minutes to locate information on administrative transparency.

Another way to assess the ease of finding information is to look at the percentage of counties for which all the researchers could locate all the available subcomponents. We provide these percentages in Table 9.

As an example of the ease of finding information, let's examine the "current budget" subcomponent. All 75 counties in Arkansas either publish their budgets on their websites or provide a link to a third-party site that publishes county budgets, such as the Association of Arkansas Counties. All our researchers were only able to locate current budgets for six out of the 75 counties, representing 8% of counties. Similarly, elected officials' names are published online by 73 counties in Arkansas, but our researchers could only locate 25 out of the 75 (34%) counties elected officials' names.

TABLE 9: Percentage of Counties Where All Researchers Located Each Available Subcomponent

SUBCOMPONENT	# OF COUNTIES THAT PUBLISH SUBCOMPONENT	# OF COUNTIES WHERE SUBCOMPONENT WAS LOCATED BY STUDENT RESEARCHERS	% OF COUNTIES THAT PUBLISH SUBCOMPONENT WHERE SUBCOMPONENT WAS LOCATED BY ALL STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Fiscal			
Current budget	75	6	8
Previous year's budget	75	8	11
Two years prior's budget	75	7	9
Three years prior's budget	75	7	9
Current audit	75	1	1
Previous year's audit	75	3	4
Two years prior's audit	75	3	4
Three years prior's audit	75	3	4
County fees	30	5	17
Property tax rates	18	0	0
General sales tax rates	13	0	0
Administrative			
Court records	37	9	24
FOIA request forms	10	0	0
FOIA request contact person	10	0	0
FOIA contact information	10	0	0
Current RFPs	10	0	0
Archived RFPs	9	0	0
Current year bids and bid winners	11	2	18
Archived bids and bid winners	10	1	10
Hiring: job titles	19	10	53
Hiring: position descriptions	18	6	33

SUBCOMPONENT	# OF COUNTIES THAT PUBLISH SUBCOMPONENT	# OF COUNTIES WHERE SUBCOMPONENT WAS LOCATED BY STUDENT RESEARCHERS	% OF COUNTIES THAT PUBLISH SUBCOMPONENT WHERE SUBCOMPONENT WAS LOCATED BY ALL STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Political			
Quorum courts: meeting time and place	33	12	36
Quorum courts: meeting agendas	23	8	35
Quorum courts: meeting minutes	22	5	23
Quorum courts: archived meeting videos	9	2	22
Elected officials: names	73	25	34
Elected officials: office phone numbers	73	31	43
Elected officials: email addresses	68	11	16
Elected officials: office locations	64	11	17
Elected officials: job descriptions	69	10	15
Elected officials: financial disclosure and conflict of interest statements	0	0	0
Elected officials: salaries	5	1	20

Based on the time it takes to find this information and the percentage of counties for which our researchers could locate each subcomponent of the index, we conclude that finding information is not easy—even for college students. We recommend that counties make a deliberate effort to ensure that residents can access public information easily. Benton County is one of the few we can point to as an exemplar. Under a tab for transparency on its website, residents can easily access all the important public information contained in our index.

ENGAGEMENT

An important part of compiling ACRE's transparency index is ACRE's interaction with local government officials. ACRE deliberately engages these officials by sending out a components verification form. They indicate whether the information we could not find online actually exists, in case we missed it. If so, we ask them to provide a link to that information.

In this edition of the report, out of the 75 counties we contacted, 45 county officials responded to our request to verify the information we gathered. Thirty responses came by postal mail, while fifteen came by phone or email. The number of responses increased in 2022 compared to 2020, as shown in Figure 12.

FIGURE 12: Number of Response by Year
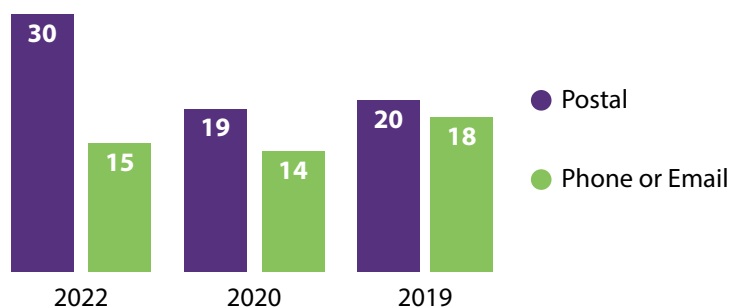
We are encouraged by the quality of the engagement. Overall, we saw county officials engaging and facilitating the process of recreating their websites to provide more information.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
A GOOD PLACE TO START

Forty-four Arkansas counties have stand-alone websites. To improve transparency, these counties should post public information on their websites or provide links to web pages where certain kinds of information (such as audited financial statements) are posted. The other 31 counties have some web presence on the Arkansas.gov platform. However, these counties tend to publish less information than those that have stand-alone websites.

A pathway exists for local officials who want to improve their counties' websites or create new ones. Since 1997, the Arkansas Information Consortium (AIC) has been the state's contracted digital government services provider. The state hired AIC to increase the number of governmental processes completed online. AIC works with local governments to develop specific forms for web programs or design entire website platforms.

AIC charges a transactional "citizen fee" on all of its online services. For example, AIC is set up in 58 of Arkansas's 75 counties to accept property tax payments online. In 2017, AIC collected $12 million in transaction fees from providing nearly 500 online services. Two percent of all fees paid to AIC each year go into the Board Revenue Share Fund (BRSF), controlled by the Information Network of Arkansas. Counties that lack the funds to improve their web transparency can apply for Board Revenue Share funding and work with the Information Network of Arkansas to ensure that important public information (or links to it) gets posted on their websites.[25]

CONCLUSION

Ensuring that information is always available to the public can deter bad behavior. More people watching means public officials have more opportunities to get caught if they break the rules. With more transparency, perhaps such cases and others like them could be discovered earlier, or perhaps the fear of getting caught would deter the crime. ACRE's County-Level Web Transparency project aims to ensure honesty, accountability, and efficient use of tax dollars.

Our project may already be spurring positive change. Compared to 2020, we observed a lot of improvements in all three types of transparency in 2022. Regardless, Arkansas's web transparency is still seriously deficient. The average score for overall transparency among Arkansas county websites is 0.372 on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. This score means that, on average, Arkansas counties publish only 37% of the important public information included in our index.

Of the three types of transparency we evaluated, Arkansas counties improved the most in fiscal transparency. They went from publishing 7% of fiscal information in 2018 to 53% in 2022. We attribute this improvement to Act 564, which came to law during the 2019 Arkansas Legislative session. Act 564 mandates counties to publish their fiscal information online. Before that time, just a handful of counties were doing that. Only 8 in 2018 and 18 in 2019, but today all 75 counties at least have their budgets and other essential fiscal information online. Unfortunately, cities do not currently have the same mandate. Currently, only 34 of Arkansas's 112 first class cities publish their budgets online.

This year, we scored all counties as publishing fiscal information because the Association of Arkansas Counties does publish all county financial information on a centralized website. However, in the final analysis of each county's score, we gave partial scores to counties that do not post the budgets on their direct websites or do not provide a link to a third-party site, such as the Association of Arkansas Counties web platform. In total, 42 counties were scored partially, meaning 33 counties either post the financial information on their website or direct residents where to find information. Thirty-one counties publish more than 50% of the important fiscal transparency information included in our index, compared to 32 in 2020. However, unlike in 2020, where 39 counties had a fiscal score of less than 0.375, this year, all counties have a score of at least 0.375.

Improvement in fiscal transparency is important because the more people who scrutinize counties' financial information, the higher the likelihood that county officials will be deterred from misusing tax dollars. Cross-country empirical studies show that fiscal transparency is a necessary tool to fix corruption. This finding should apply to counties, too, and we hope that more research on this topic will be done.

Administrative transparency remains the weakest area of transparency in Arkansas, with 35 counties not publishing any of this information online, albeit an improvement from 2020, when 50 counties were not publishing any of this information online. Only 14 counties publish at least 50% of the important administrative transparency information included in our index, compared to five in 2019. A key area of deficiency is the publishing of bids and bid winners for government contracts. Only eight counties (Benton, Craighead, Faulkner, Garland, Pulaski, Saline, Sebastian, and Washington) publish all the information about contracts: current and archived RFPs, and current and archived bids and bid winners. Five others publish partial administrative transparency information.

Why does this deficiency matter? Public procurement is considered one of the most corruption-vulnerable areas in the public sector because of the money involved and the opportunities for bribery. Requiring that counties publish such information promotes residents' trust that county officials are not favoring certain vendors. Publishing bids and bid winners also allow taxpayers to scrutinize them, encouraging elected officials to be accountable to their constituents and to allocate contracts prudently.

Along with citizens and county elected officials, the state government should also promote transparency in Arkansas counties. The legislature took an encouraging step forward in the 2019 Regular Session by amending AR Code § 14-21-102 (2017) to require that counties publish financial information such as budgets and financial statements online beginning in January 2020. The rationale for expanding online access to financial information is that the internet now plays a significant role in access to information.[27] For the same reason, the state should also improve residents' participation in quorum court deliberations by amending AR Code § 25-19-106(b)(2) to require counties to publicize online, through a consistent platform, notifications about regular, special, and emergency quorum court meetings. AR Code § 25-19-106(b)(2) currently provides that "for emergency or special meetings, the person calling the meetings shall notify the representatives of newspapers, radio stations, and television stations, if any, located in the county in which the meeting is to be held and any news media located elsewhere that cover regular meetings of the governing body, that have so requested ... of the time, place and date of the meeting." The law further stipulates that "the notification shall be made at least (2) hours before the meeting takes place in order that the public shall have representatives at the meeting." This law does not guarantee that the public will have representation, hence the need to expand it.

For now, certain interesting developments that have come up in the Arkansas legislature at the time of completing this report as at March 2023 was the introduction of a couple of bills touching on local government procurement transparency (House Bill 1388) and local government publishing requirement (House Bill 1399). House Bill 1318, an act concerning the allowable bases for bids for certain municipal purchase contracts was introduced and passed in

the Arkansas legisture. The law requires contractors to list their lowest price for the entire life of the contract, which provides greater cost certainty for city governments as the project's total cost is known upfront and will not change throughout the contract life. The law also ensures that all bidding parties have a clear and equal understanding of the criteria for evaluating bids, thereby promoting fair competition as all bidders are bidding on the same terms, promoting a more transparent and fair procurement process.

House Bill 1399 proposed to amend the law regarding publishing requirements for counties and municipality bylaws, ordinances, and annual financial statements. Certain sections of the Bill will allow cities to publish such information in a newspaper or online instead of just a newspaper, invariably expanding the reach of residents that are currently being served with information. If the proposed bill is passed, the improvement in local government transparency would be similar to the changes that counties experienced in their index scores with Act 564. The change will improve the average score for a city in our index by 0.8 points on a 0 to 1 scale. At the time we concluded this report, the Bill was still being deliberated upon.

Another issue the legislature should address is the publication of county officials' salaries. Even though a public employee's salary is considered public information, no law currently requires counties to publish public employees' salaries.[28] In contrast, at the state level, Act 303 requires that state employees' salaries be published online. Currently, only six counties publish elected officials' salaries online.[29]

We propose that the legislature enact a law requiring local governments to publish online information about bids and contracts to improve administrative transparency. The information should include current and archived requests for proposals, current year bids and bid winners, and archived bids and bid winners. Not only does publishing public information provide on-demand access, but it also reduces the costs that arise when people request information through FOIA. For example, in Mississippi, every information request fulfilled by its transparency website rather than a state employee saves the state between $750 and $1,000 in staff time.[30]

Much work remains to be done to improve web transparency in Arkansas. We have offered a tool that can be used as a benchmark for assessing the progress Arkansas counties make in the short, medium, and long term. Our goal is to annually reassess county websites and point out areas that are still lagging. The information already exists, and it should be made public. Transparency will make officials more accountable and citizens more powerful. Corruption should not happen, but if it does, it should be easily discovered and quickly stopped. This index is a measuring tape for good governance, and we hope Arkansans will use it to build better and more transparent county governments.

COUNTY SNAPSHOTS

COUNTIES WITH NO STAND-ALONE WEBSITES

There are 31 Arkansas counties without a stand-alone website. The average overall score for these counties is 0.213, and the highest-ranking among them is 24th. These counties are generally weak in all three types of transparency but especially in fiscal and administrative transparency. To improve transparency, they should work with the Information Networks of Arkansas to find ways of posting public information online.

Highest Ranked County with No Stand-Alone Website:

- Overall Rank: Marion, 21st. Score: 0.440

- Administrative Rank: Marion, 19th. Score: 0.333

- Fiscal Rank: Green, 20th. Score: 0.667

- Political Rank: Marion, 7th. Score: 0.667

SUCCESS SNAPSHOTS

The following snapshots highlight counties that are excelling either through their exemplary transparency or through their attempts to improve. The first group includes results for the top 10 counties with the highest transparency scores in the state: Benton, Craighead, Washington, Cross, Faulkner, Sebastian, Garland, Craighead, Pulaski, Pope, and Mississippi.

The second group of counties did not make the top 10 but showed notable improvements in their efforts for more transparency: Boone, Ashley, Sevier, Miller, Fulton, and Franklin.

BENTON
COUNTY
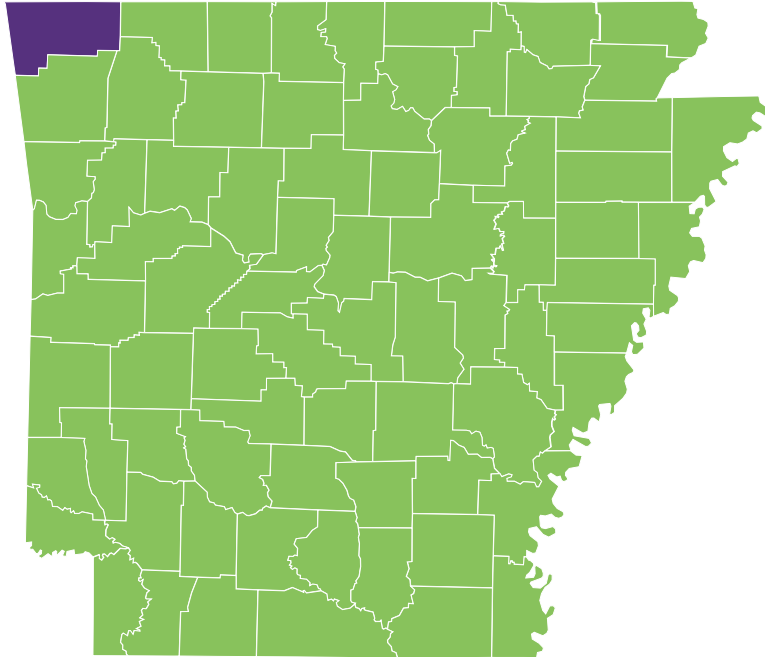
Benton County is the most transparent county in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of **0.952** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #1 in 2020. Benton County's weakest area is political transparency: the county does not publish financial disclosure and conflict of interest statements online.
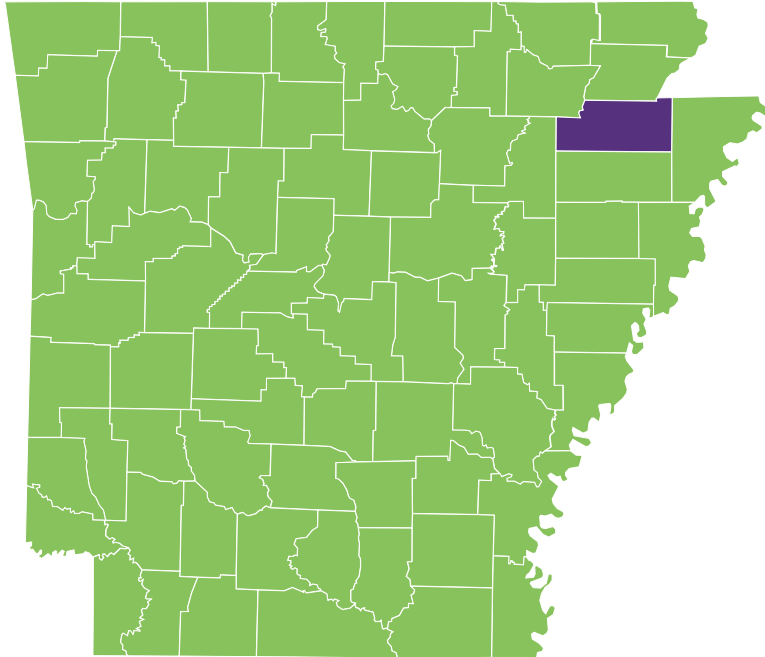
OVERALL RANK: **#1**

#1

ADMINISTRATIVE

#1

FISCAL

#1

POLITICAL

ARKANSAS CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

CRAIGHEAD
COUNTY

Craighead County ranks #1 in Arkansas with an overall score of **0.952** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #5 in 2020. Craighead County's weakest area is political transparency: the county does not publish financial disclosure and conflict of interest statements online.

OVERALL RANK: **#1**
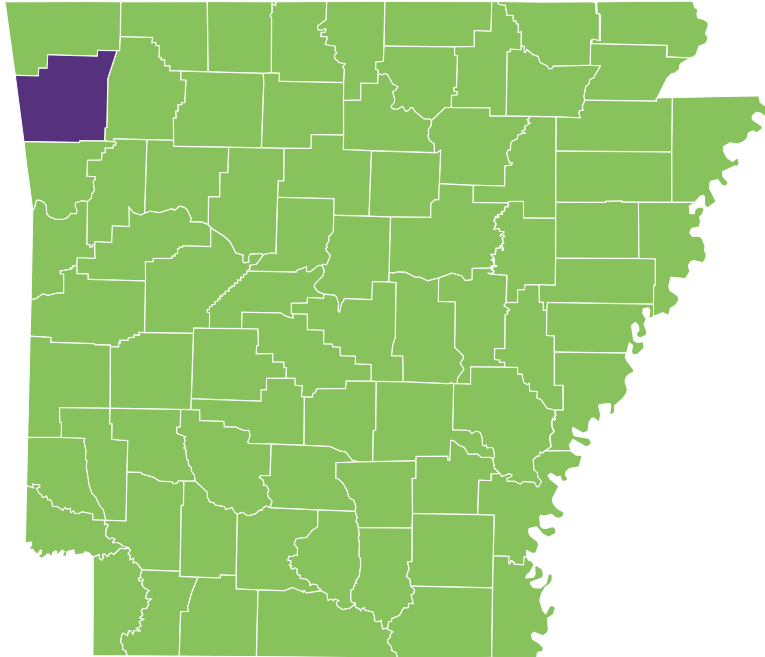
#1
ADMINISTRATIVE

#1
FISCAL

#1
POLITICAL

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WASHINGTON
COUNTY

Washington County ranks #1 in Arkansas with an overall score of **0.952** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #1 in 2019. Washington County's weakest area is political transparency: the county does not publish financial disclosure and conflict of interest statements online.

OVERALL RANK: **#1**
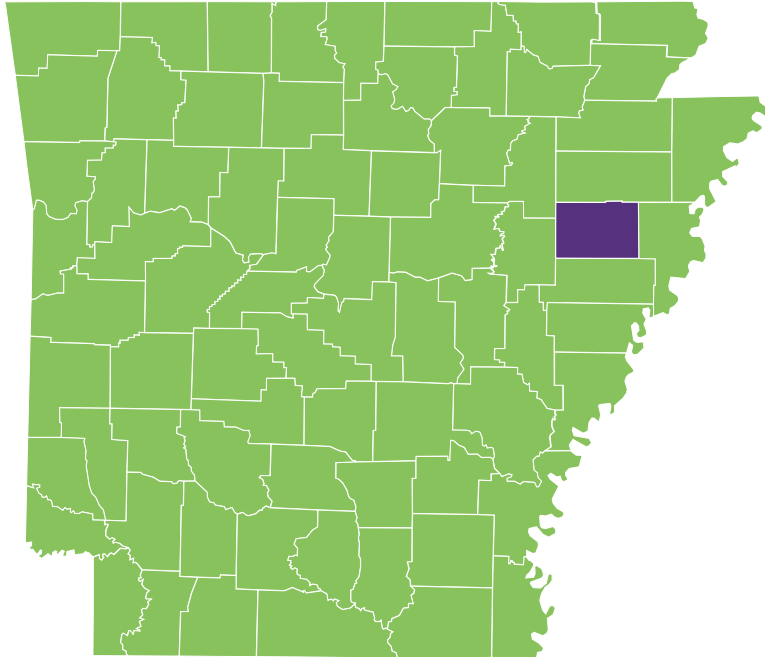
#1
ADMINISTRATIVE

#1
FISCAL

#1
POLITICAL

ARKANSAS CENTER FOR
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UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

CROSS
COUNTY

Cross County ranks #4 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall transparency score of 0.905 on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #6 in 2020. It is weakest in political transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish salaries and financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements.

OVERALL RANK: #4

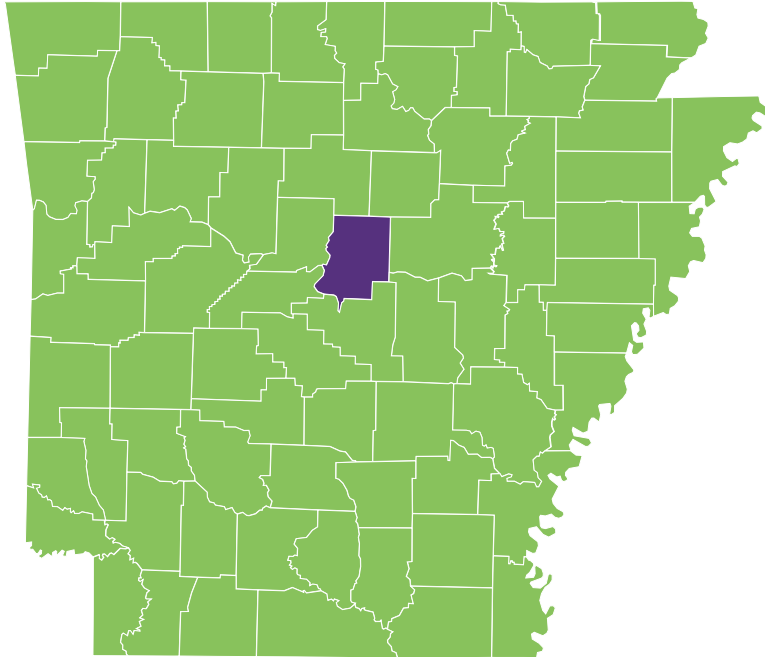### #1
ADMINISTRATIVE

#1
FISCAL

#7
POLITICAL

ARKANSAS CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS
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FAULKNER
COUNTY

Faulkner County ranks #4 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of **0.905** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #8 in 2020. It is weakest in political transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish salaries and financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements.

OVERALL RANK: #4

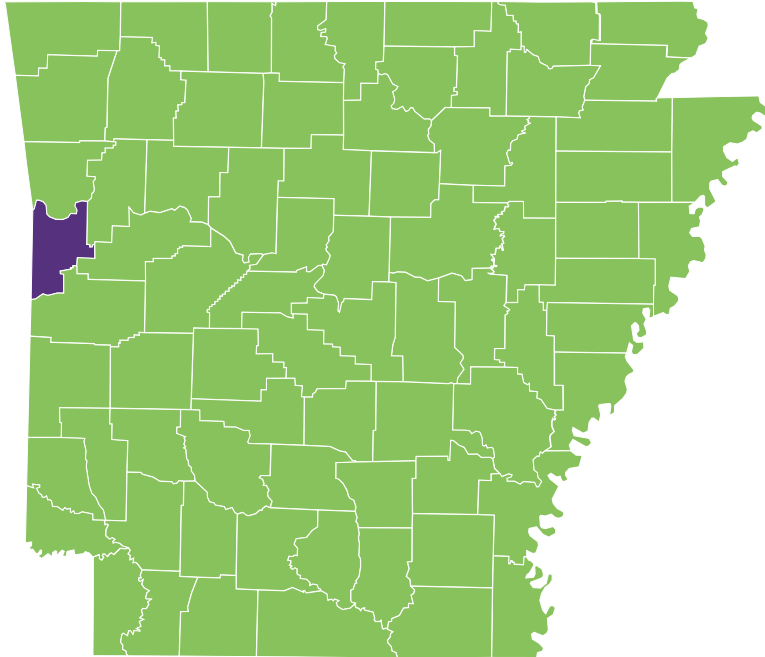**#1**
ADMINISTRATIVE

#1
FISCAL

#7
POLITICAL

ARKANSAS CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

SEBASTIAN
COUNTY

Sebastian County ranks #4 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of **0.905** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #3 in 2020. It is weakest in political transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish salaries and financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements.

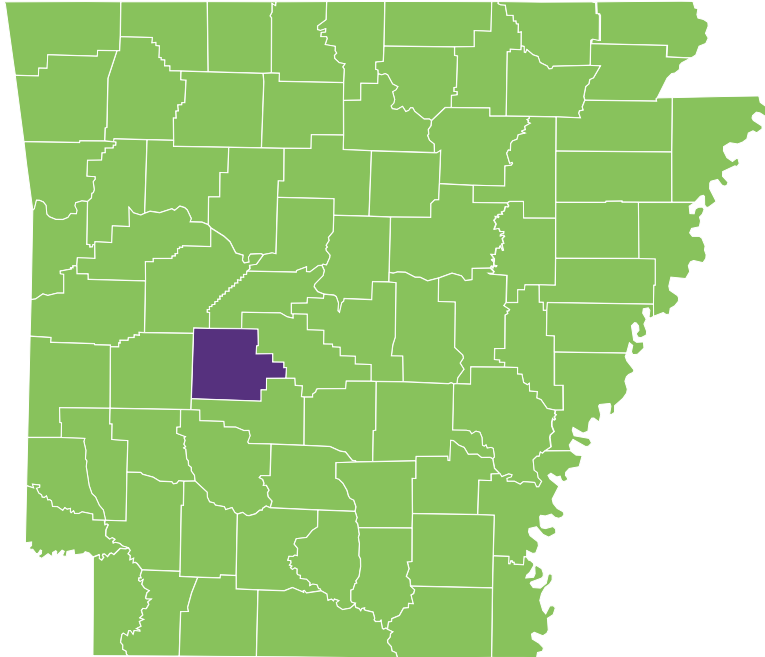OVERALL RANK: **#4**

#1
ADMINISTRATIVE

#1
FISCAL

#7
POLITICAL

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GARLAND
COUNTY

Garland County ranks #7 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall transparency score of **0.905** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #4 in 2020. It is weakest in political transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish salaries and financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements.

OVERALL RANK: **#7**

#7

ADMINISTRATIVE

#1

FISCAL

#9

POLITICAL

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PULASKI
COUNTY

Pulaski County ranks #8 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of **0.774** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #7 in 2020. It is weakest in political transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish salaries and financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements.

OVERALL RANK: **#8**

#7	#14	#7
ADMINISTRATIVE	FISCAL	POLITICAL

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2022

POPE
COUNTY

Pope County ranks #8 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of **0.774** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #9 in 2020. It is weakest in political transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish salaries and financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements.
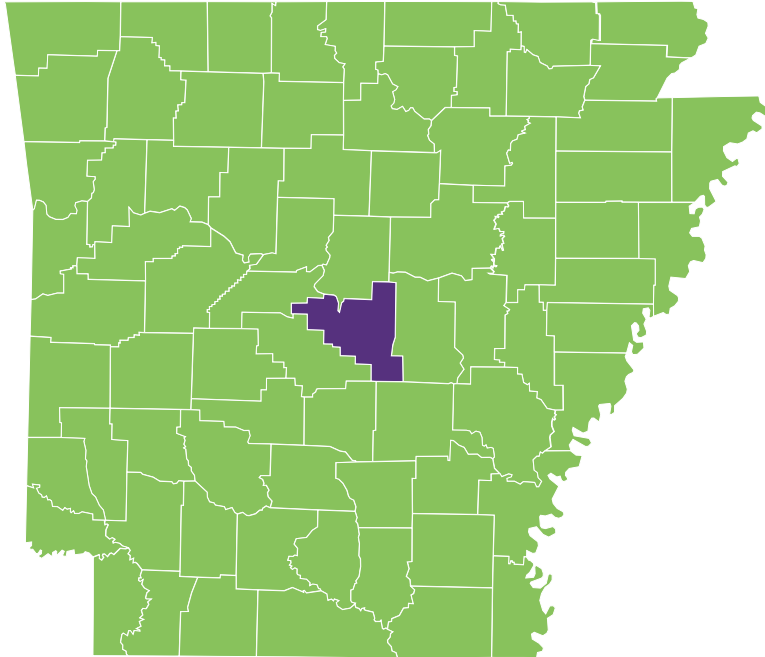
OVERALL RANK: #8

#12	#8	#7
ADMINISTRATIVE	FISCAL	POLITICAL

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MISSISSIPPI
COUNTY

Mississippi County ranks #10 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of **0.714** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #18 in 2020. It is weakest in administartive transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish information on contracts, including archived bids and bid winners.

OVERALL RANK: **#8**

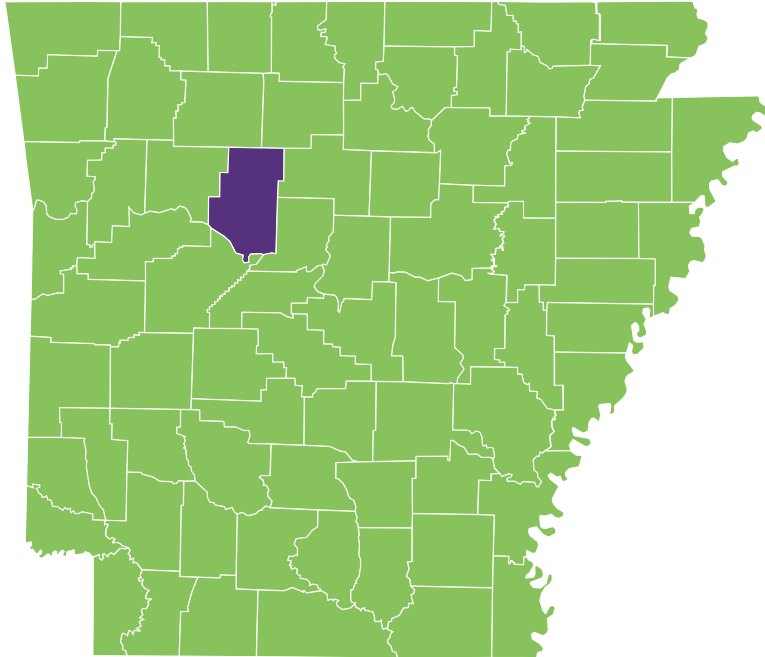| **#8**	**#8**	**#1**
ADMINISTRATIVE	FISCAL	POLITICAL

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BOONE
COUNTY

Boone County ranks #11 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of **0.702** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #14 in 2020. The biggest improvement for Boone is in fiscal transparency. It is weakest in administrative transparency. To improve transparency, officials should make public records easily accessible by providing online tools and information on FOIA requests. Officials should also publish information on contracts, including current and archived bids and bid winners.

OVERALL RANK: **#11**

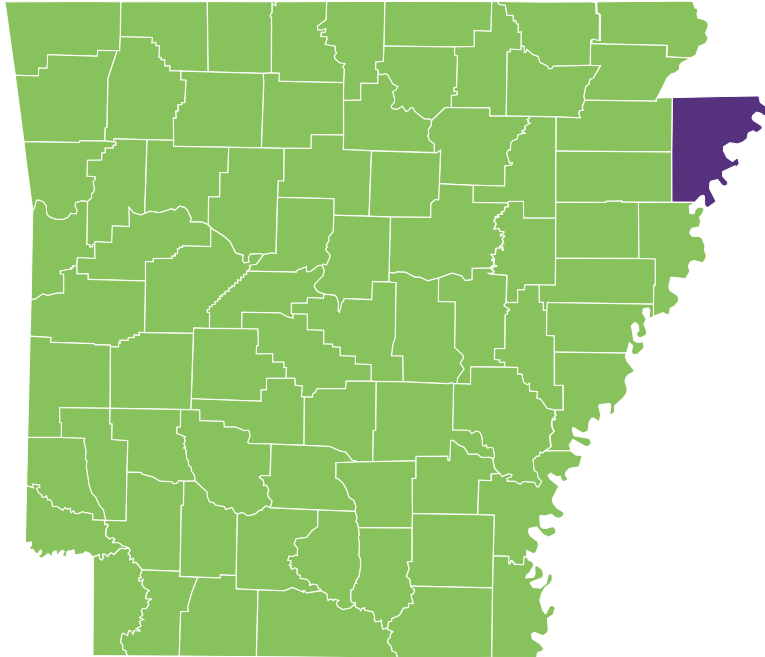| #15	#14	#1
ADMINISTRATIVE	FISCAL	POLITICAL

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ASHLEY
COUNTY

Ashley County ranks #14 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of 0.607 on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #19 in 2020. The biggest improvement for Ashley is in fiscal transparency. It is weakest in political transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish information on Quorum Court meetings, including meeting time, place, agenda and minutes. Official should also publish salaries and financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements.

OVERALL RANK: #14

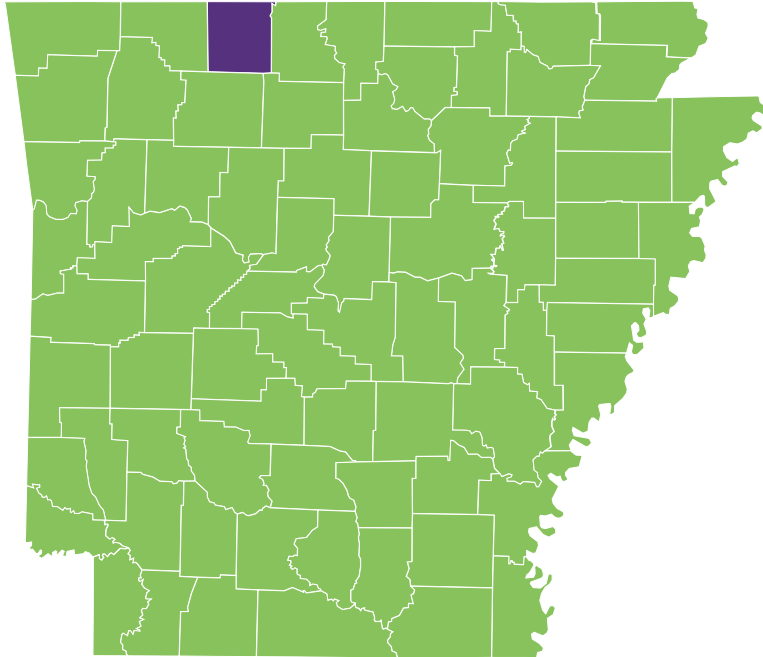| #15	#8	#38
ADMINISTRATIVE	FISCAL	POLITICAL

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SEVIER
COUNTY

Sevier County ranks #17 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of 0.480 on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #56 in 2020. The biggest improvement for Sevier is in fiscal transparency. It is weakest in administrative transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish information on contracts, including current and archived bids and bid winners.

OVERALL RANK: **#17**

#20	#8	#21
ADMINISTRATIVE	FISCAL	POLITICAL

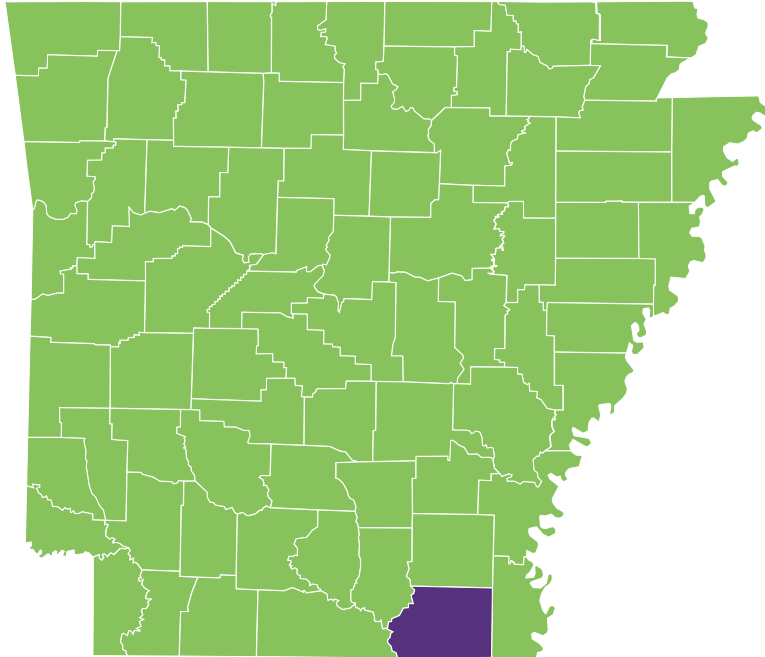**ARKANSAS CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS**
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

MILLER
COUNTY

Miller County ranks #23 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of 0.425 on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #9 in 2020. The biggest improvement for Miller is in fiscal transparency. It is weakest in political transparency. To improve transparency, officials should publish information on Quorum Court meetings, including meeting time, place, agenda and minutes. Official should also publish salaries and financial disclosures and conflict of interest statements.

OVERALL RANK: **#23**

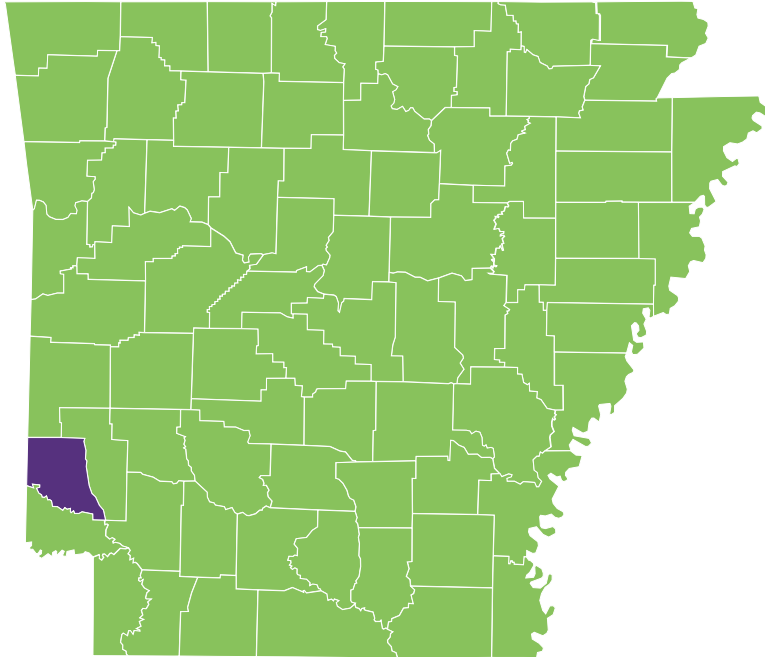| #13	#21	#25
ADMINISTRATIVE	FISCAL	POLITICAL

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FULTON
COUNTY
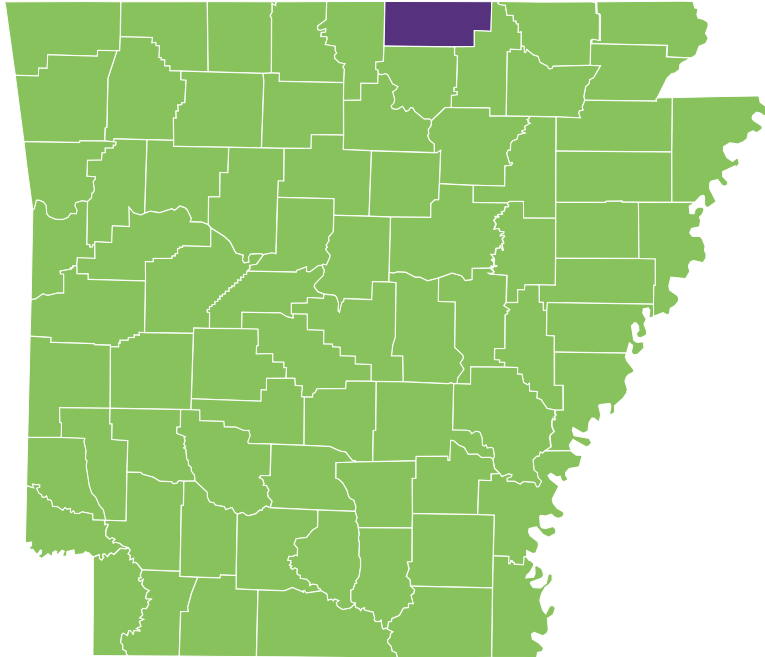
Fulton County ranks #27 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of **0.353** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #9 in 2020. The biggest improvement for Fulton is in fiscal transparency. It is weakest in administrative transparency. To improve transparency, officials should make public records easily accessible by providing online tools and information on FOIA requests. Officials should also publish information on contracts, including current and archived bids and bid winners.

OVERALL RANK: #27

#22
ADMINISTRATIVE

#14
FISCAL

#25
POLITICAL

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FRANKLIN
COUNTY

Franklin County ranks #43 in Arkansas web transparency with an overall score of **0.226** on a scale of 0.000 to 1.000. It ranked #9 in 2020. The biggest improvement for Franklin is in fiscal transparency. It is weakest in administrative transparency. To improve transparency, officials should make public records easily accessible by providing online tools and information on FOIA requests. Officials should also publish information on contracts, including current and archived bids and bid winners.

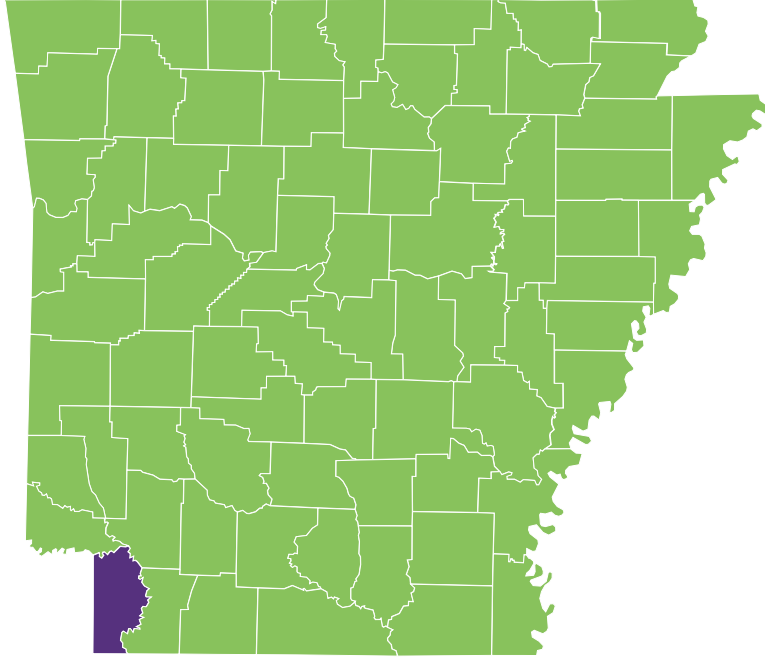OVERALL RANK: **#43**

#22
ADMINISTRATIVE

#32
FISCAL

#38
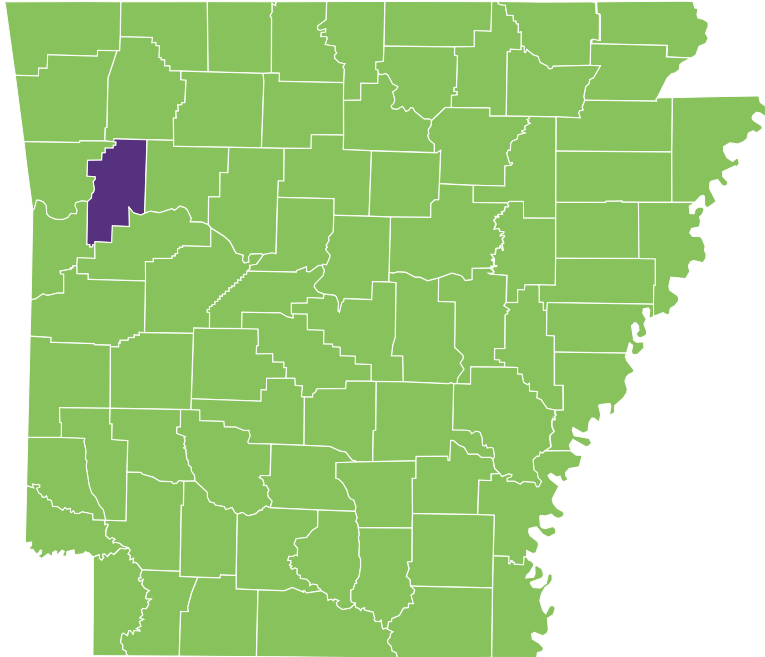POLITICAL

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FIRST CLASS CITIES WEB TRANSPARENCY PERFORMANCE

In 2022, we extended the scope of ACRE'S transparency projects to cities and municipalities. We collected and analyzed to create a similar transparency index for first class cities in the state. First, it informs residents about the level of government transparency in their city governments and the improvements their governments need to make. Second, it provides researchers and policymakers with the necessary data to analyze the relationship between transparency and economic and socioeconomic factors in Arkansas.

According to Arkansas law, Arkansas cities and municipalities are divided into three (3) classes based on population size (ACA § 14-37-102 & 103). First class cities are cities that, at the last federal census, have a population exceeding 2,500 people.[31]

OVERALL TRANSPARENCY BY CITY CLASSIFICATION

We do not have an overall transparency score ranking for cities in this edition to give a fair chance for improvement, as this is the first time we have evaluated cities' web transparency performance. However, we have categorized their performance based on each component of transparency.

Despite this, we want to highlight two cities, Conway and Fayetteville, which already have perfect scores on all three areas of our index. They have already achieved a very high degree of online transparency. A third city, Springdale, has perfect scores in two categories and a very high score in the third category

(fiscal transparency). These cities can serve as models for other cities that want to improve their web transparency and their scores in our index.

FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

Figure 13 shows that only 20 out of 112 first class cities publish online at least 50% of public information included in the fiscal component of the transparency index.

FIGURE 13: Distribution of Fiscal Transparency, 2022

Fiscal Transparency Score		
0.000	★★★	73
0.000–0.100	★	1
0.110–0.200	★	1
0.210–0.300	★★★★★★★	7
0.310–0.400		0
0.410–0.500	★★★★★★★★★★	10
0.510–0.600	★	1
0.610–0.700	★★	2
0.710–0.800	★★	2
0.810–0.900		0
0.910–1.00	★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★	15

Number of counties
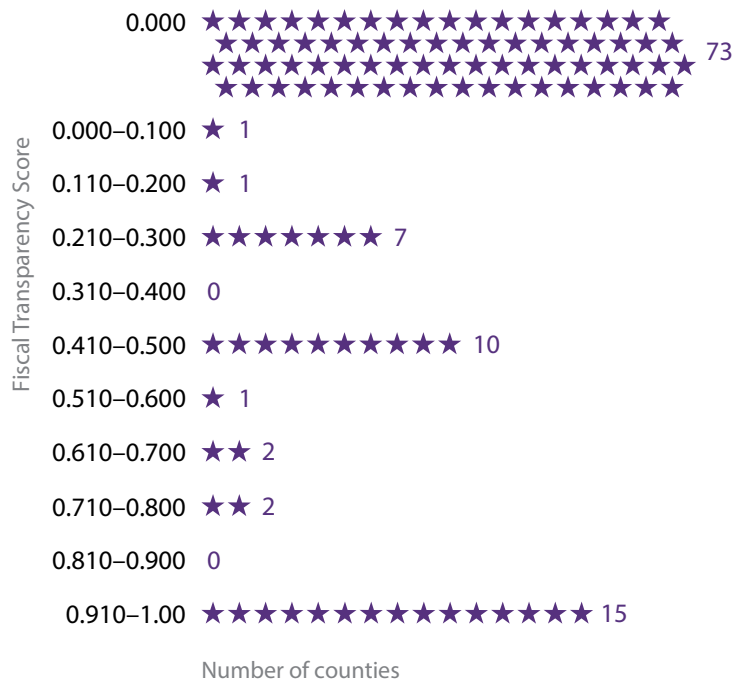
Top Performers in Overall Fiscal Transparency for First class Cities

Scoring highest in fiscal transparency in 2022, Bentonville, Bryant, Conway, Fayetteville, Fort Smith, Hot Springs, North Little Rock, Vilonia, Benton, Greenwood, Siloam Springs, Texarkana, Jacksonville, Little flock, and Osceola stand out as the top performers in fiscal transparency among Arkansas first class cities. These cities publish all of the fiscal information in our index online.

FIGURE 14: Top Performers in Fiscal Transparency of First Class Cities, 2022

City	Score
Bentonville	1.000
Bryant	1.000
Conway	1.000
Fayetteville	1.000
Fort Smith	1.000
Hot Springs	1.000
North Little Rock	1.000
Vilonia	1.000
Benton	1.000
Greenwood	1.000
Siloam Springs	1.000
Texarkana	1.000
Jacksonville	1.000
Little Rock	1.000
Osceola	1.000

Table 10 is a breakdown of first class cities and fiscal transparency ranking. While 15 first class cities publish all of the information in our index online, unfortunately, there are another 73 first class cities that publish *none* of the fiscal information online.
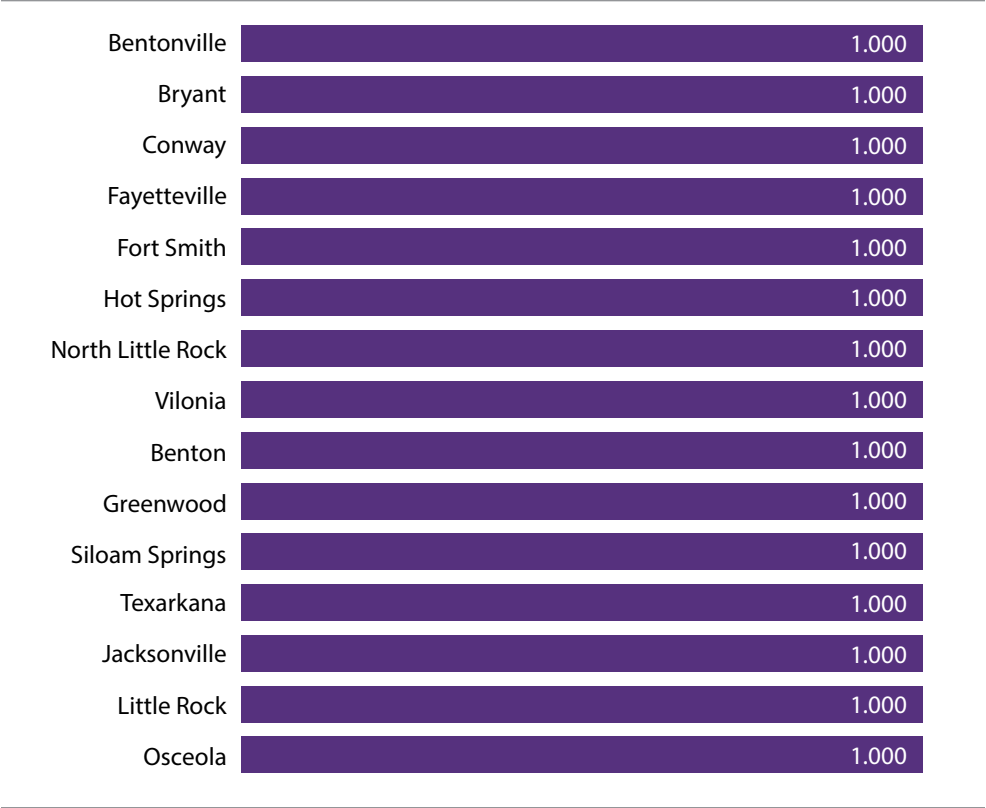
RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE
1	Bentonville	1.000	38	Brookland	0.167	40	De Queen	0.000
1	Bryant	1.000	39	Johnson	0.083	40	DeWitt	0.000
1	Conway	1.000	40	Corning	0.000	40	Dumas	0.000
1	Fayetteville	1.000	40	Farmington	0.000	40	El Dorado	0.000
1	Fort Smith	1.000	40	Huntsville	0.000	40	Fordyce	0.000
1	Hot Springs	1.000	40	Marion	0.000	40	Forrest City	0.000
1	North Little Rock	1.000	40	Ozark	0.000	40	Gentry	0.000
1	Vilonia	1.000	40	Austin	0.000	40	Gosnell	0.000
1	Benton	1.000	40	Charleston	0.000	40	Gravette	0.000
1	Greenwood	1.000	40	Clinton	0.000	40	Green Forest	0.000
1	Siloam Springs	1.000	40	Crossett	0.000	40	Harrison	0.000
1	Texarkana	1.000	40	Dardanelle	0.000	40	Haskell	0.000
1	Jacksonville	1.000	40	Hamburg	0.000	40	Hoxie	0.000
1	Little Flock	1.000	40	Monticello	0.000	40	Magnolia	0.000
1	Osceola	1.000	40	Morrilton	0.000	40	Malvern	0.000
16	Springdale	0.750	40	Newport	0.000	40	Manila	0.000
16	Little Rock	0.750	40	Prairie Grove	0.000	40	Marianna	0.000
18	Maumelle	0.667	40	Wynne	0.000	40	McGehee	0.000
18	West Memphis	0.667	40	Alexander	0.000	40	Mena	0.000
20	Jonesboro	0.583	40	Alma	0.000	40	Mountain Home	0.000
21	Elkins	0.500	40	Arkadelphia	0.000	40	Mountain View	0.000
21	Heber Springs	0.500	40	Ashdown	0.000	40	Nashville	0.000
21	Rogers	0.500	40	Atkins	0.000	40	Paris	0.000
21	Bella Vista	0.500	40	Bald Knob	0.000	40	Pea Ridge	0.000
21	Lonoke	0.500	40	Barling	0.000	40	Piggott	0.000
21	Pine Bluff	0.500	40	Batesville	0.000	40	Pocahontas	0.000
21	Cherokee Village	0.500	40	Beebe	0.000	40	Pottsville	0.000
21	Greenbrier	0.500	40	Berryville	0.000	40	Prescott	0.000
21	Helena-West Helena	0.500	40	Bethel Heights	0.000	40	Shannon Hills	0.000
21	Hope	0.500	40	Blytheville	0.000	40	Sheridan	0.000
31	Paragould	0.250	40	Booneville	0.000	40	Southside	0.000
31	Russellville	0.250	40	Brinkley	0.000	40	Stuttgart	0.000
31	Sherwood	0.250	40	Cabot	0.000	40	Trumann	0.000
31	Ward	0.250	40	Camden	0.000	40	Van Buren	0.000
31	Lowell	0.250	40	Cave Springs	0.000	40	Waldron	0.000
31	Searcy	0.250	40	Centerton	0.000	40	Walnut Ridge	0.000
31	Tontitown	0.250	40	Clarksville	0.000	40	Warren	0.000
						40	White Hall	0.000

Political Transparency of First Class Cities

Figure 15 shows that 51 out of 112 first class cities publish online at least 50% of public information included in the political component of the transparency index.

FIGURE 15: Distribution of Political Transparency, 2022

0.000	★★★★★★ 6
0.000–0.100	★★★★★★★★★★★★★ 13
0.110–0.200	★★★★★★★★★ 9
0.210–0.300	★★★★★ 5
0.310–0.400	★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★ 17
0.410–0.500	★★★★★★★★★★★ 11
0.510–0.600	★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★ 15
0.610–0.700	★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★ 26
0.710–0.800	★ 1
0.810–0.900	★★★★★ 5
0.910–1.00	★★★★ 4

Fiscal Transparency Score

Number of counties

Top Performers in Overall Political Transparency for First Class Cities

Scoring highest in political transparency in 2022, Conway (1.000), Fayetteville (1.000), Springdale (1.000), Heber Springs, Bentonville, Centerton, Jacksonville, Jonesboro, North Little Rock, and Prairie Grove cities stand out as top ten performers in political transparency among Arkansas's first class cities as Figure 16 shows.

FIGURE 16: Top Performers in Political Transparency

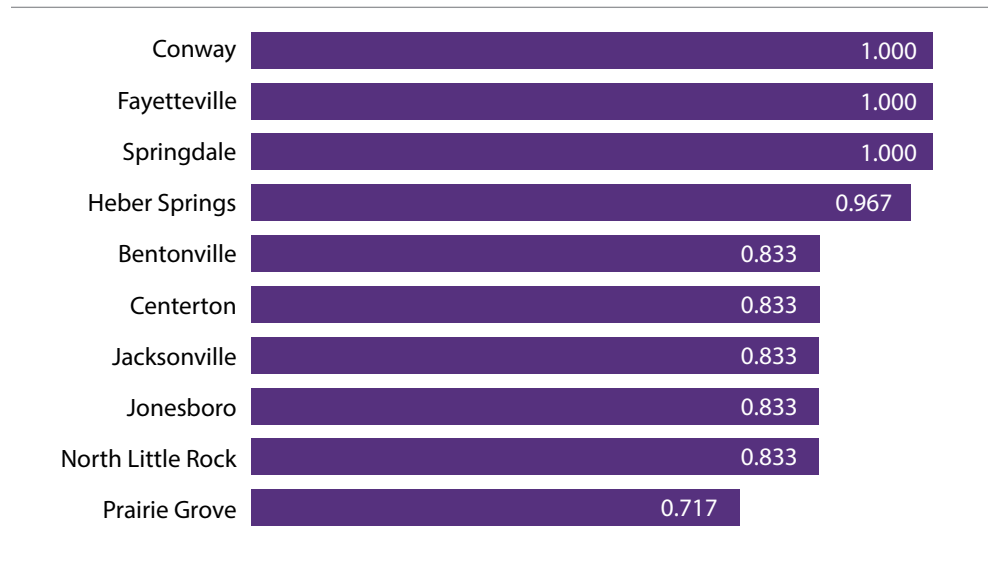| City	Score
Conway	1.000
Fayetteville	1.000
Springdale	1.000
Heber Springs	0.967
Bentonville	0.833
Centerton	0.833
Jacksonville	0.833
Jonesboro	0.833
North Little Rock	0.833
Prairie Grove	0.717

Table 11 on the following page is a breakdown of first class cities and political transparency ranking. Unlike fiscal information, there is a much larger variation in political transparency among first class cities. Three cities publish everything, six cities publish no information online, but most cities are somewhere in between.
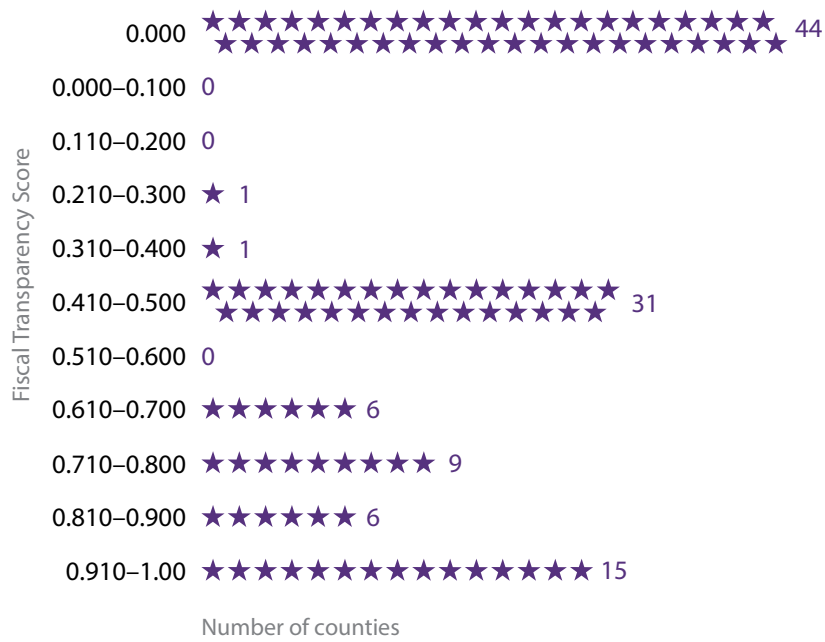
TABLE 11: Overall Political Transparency Ranking of First Class Cities

RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE
1	Conway	1.000	37	Tontitown	0.600	68	Sheridan	0.333
1	Fayetteville	1.000	39	Cherokee Village	0.583	68	Stuttgart	0.333
1	Springdale	1.000	40	Batesville	0.556	68	Walnut Ridge	0.333
4	Heber Springs	0.967	40	Cave Springs	0.556	78	Beebe	0.317
5	Bentonville	0.833	40	Greenwood	0.556	79	Pottsville	0.311
5	Centerton	0.833	40	Hamburg	0.556	80	West Memphis	0.300
5	Jacksonville	0.833	40	Haskell	0.556	81	Marion	0.289
5	Jonesboro	0.833	40	Lonoke	0.556	82	Green Forest	0.267
5	North Little Rock	0.833	40	Pea Ridge	0.556	83	Little Flock	0.250
10	Prairie Grove	0.717	47	Corning	0.533	84	Pocahontas	0.233
11	Austin	0.667	47	Helena-West Helena	0.533	85	Crossett	0.200
11	Bella Vista	0.667	47	Johnson	0.533	86	Hoxie	0.167
11	Bryant	0.667	47	Piggott	0.533	87	Atkins	0.150
11	Cabot	0.667	51	Monticello	0.517	87	Magnolia	0.150
11	Farmington	0.667	52	Charleston	0.500	89	Warren	0.144
11	Forrest City	0.667	53	Gravette	0.489	90	Brinkley	0.133
11	Harrison	0.667	53	Newport	0.489	91	Trumann	0.133
11	Hope	0.667	55	Clinton	0.467	91	Wynne	0.133
11	Hot Springs	0.667	55	Vilonia	0.467	93	Paris	0.117
11	Huntsville	0.667	57	Malvern	0.456	94	Greenbrier	0.100
11	Little Rock	0.667	57	Shannon Hills	0.456	94	Marianna	0.100
11	Maumelle	0.667	59	Gentry	0.450	94	McGehee	0.100
11	Mountain Home	0.667	60	Nashville	0.444	97	Bald Knob	0.067
11	Rogers	0.667	61	Alma	0.428	97	Berryville	0.067
11	Russellville	0.667	62	Gosnell	0.422	97	DeWitt	0.067
11	Searcy	0.667	63	Arkadelphia	0.400	97	Dumas	0.067
11	Sherwood	0.667	64	Ashdown	0.394	97	Mountain View	0.067
11	Siloam Springs	0.667	65	Prescott	0.378	97	White Hall	0.067
11	Van Buren	0.667	66	Elkins	0.367	103	Barling	0.033
11	Ward	0.667	67	Dardanelle	0.361	103	Bethel Heights	0.033
31	Clarksville	0.650	68	Benton	0.333	105	Booneville	0.017
31	Paragould	0.650	68	Camden	0.333	105	Osceola	0.017
33	Blytheville	0.633	68	De Queen	0.333	107	Alexander	0.000
33	Brookland	0.633	68	Fort Smith	0.333	107	El Dorado	0.000
33	Morrilton	0.633	68	Lowell	0.333	107	Fordyce	0.000
33	Texarkana	0.633	68	Mena	0.333	107	Manila	0.000
37	Ozark	0.600	68	Pine Bluff	0.333	107	Southside	0.000
						107	Waldron	0.000

Administrative Transparency of First Class Cities

Figure 17 shows that 35 out of 112 first class cities publish online at least 50% of public information included in the administrative component of the transparency index.

FIGURE 17: Distribution of Administrative Transparency, 2022

Fiscal Transparency Score

0.000	★★ 44
0.000–0.100	0
0.110–0.200	0
0.210–0.300	★ 1
0.310–0.400	★ 1
0.410–0.500	★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★ 31
0.510–0.600	0
0.610–0.700	★★★★★★ 6
0.710–0.800	★★★★★★★★★ 9
0.810–0.900	★★★★★★ 6
0.910–1.00	★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★ 15

Number of counties

Top Performers in Overall Administrative Transparency for First Class Cities

Scoring highest in administrative transparency in 2022, Bella vista, Bentonville, Cave Springs, Conway, Fayetteville, Hot Springs, Jonesboro, Little Rock, Prairie Grove, Rogers, Russellville, Siloam Springs, Springdale, and Van Buren cities stand out as the top ten performers in administrative transparency among Arkansas's first class cities, as Figure 18 shows.

FIGURE 18: Top Performers in Administrative Transparency

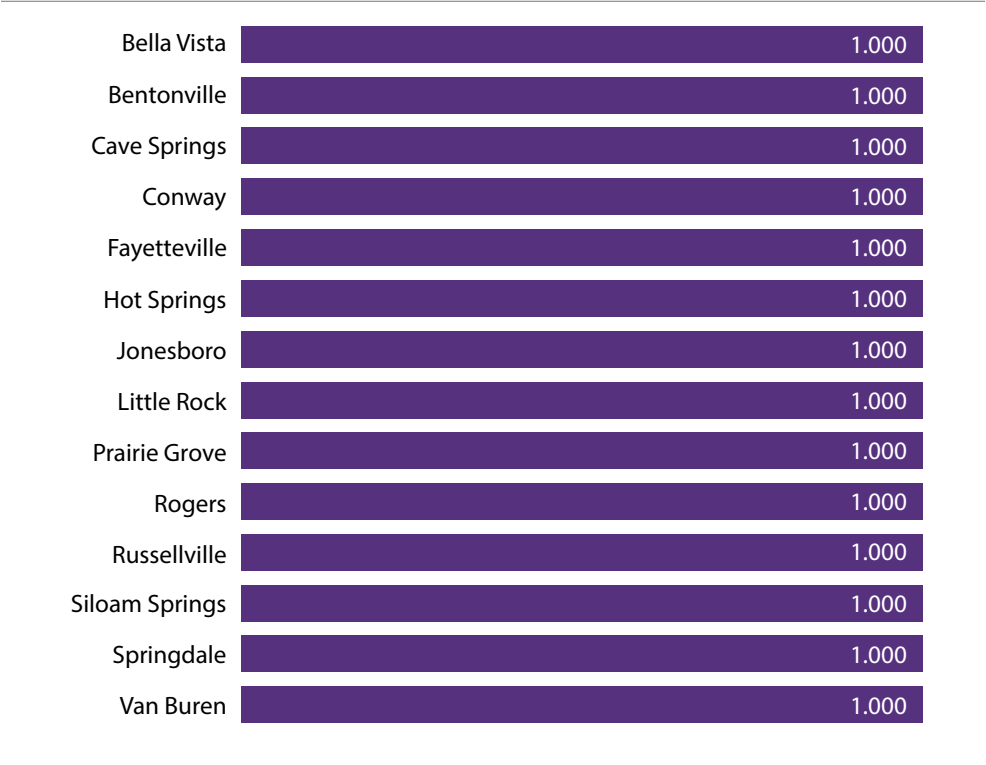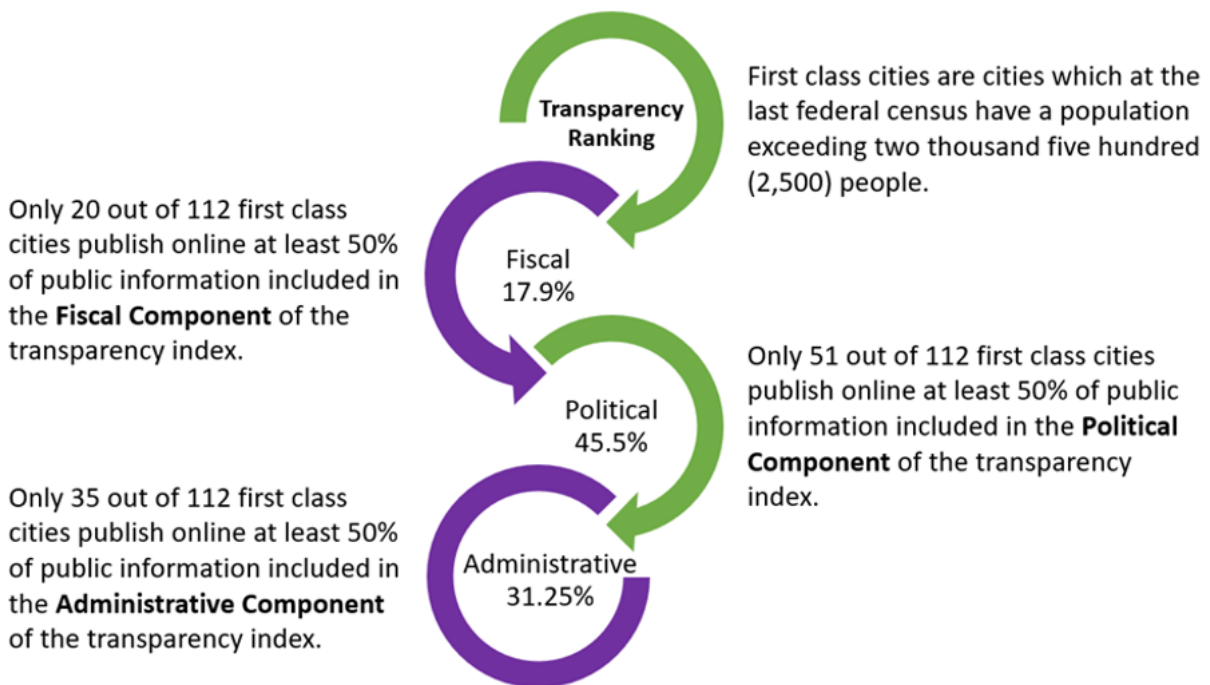| City	Score
Bella Vista	1.000
Bentonville	1.000
Cave Springs	1.000
Conway	1.000
Fayetteville	1.000
Hot Springs	1.000
Jonesboro	1.000
Little Rock	1.000
Prairie Grove	1.000
Rogers	1.000
Russellville	1.000
Siloam Springs	1.000
Springdale	1.000
Van Buren	1.000

Table 12 on the following page is a breakdown of first cities and administrative transparency ranking. Fourteen cities publish all of the administrative information in our index online, but once again, a large number (44 first class cities) publish nothing online currently.

TABLE 12: Overall Administrative Transparency Ranking of First Class Citiest

RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE
1	Conway	1.000	36	Greenwood	0.500	69	Pottsville	0.000
1	Fayetteville	1.000	36	Clarksville	0.500	69	Corning	0.000
1	Little Rock	1.000	36	Pea Ridge	0.500	69	Greenbrier	0.000
1	Springdale	1.000	36	Alma	0.500	69	Haskell	0.000
1	Bella Vista	1.000	36	Centerton	0.500	69	Sheridan	0.000
1	Hot Springs	1.000	36	Arkadelphia	0.500	69	Berryville	0.000
1	Russellville	1.000	36	Austin	0.500	69	Charleston	0.000
1	Prairie Grove	1.000	36	Camden	0.500	69	Gosnell	0.000
1	Siloam Springs	1.000	36	Cherokee Village	0.500	69	Monticello	0.000
1	Van Buren	1.000	36	Elkins	0.500	69	Nashville	0.000
1	Bentonville	1.000	36	Helena-West Helena	0.500	69	Green Forest	0.000
1	Jonesboro	1.000	36	Hope	0.500	69	Hoxie	0.000
1	Rogers	1.000	36	Lonoke	0.500	69	Magnolia	0.000
1	Cave Springs	1.000	36	Malvern	0.500	69	Mena	0.000
15	Brookland	0.875	36	Marion	0.500	69	Shannon Hills	0.000
15	North Little Rock	0.875	36	Morrilton	0.500	69	Trumann	0.000
15	Maumelle	0.875	36	Ozark	0.500	69	White Hall	0.000
15	Jacksonville	0.875	36	Searcy	0.500	69	Alexander	0.000
15	Blytheville	0.875	36	Vilonia	0.500	69	Ashdown	0.000
15	Benton	0.875	36	Barling	0.500	69	Bald Knob	0.000
21	Farmington	0.750	36	Gentry	0.500	69	Bethel Heights	0.000
21	Cabot	0.750	36	Gravette	0.500	69	Booneville	0.000
21	Sherwood	0.750	36	Hamburg	0.500	69	Brinkley	0.000
21	Osceola	0.750	36	Pocahontas	0.500	69	De Queen	0.000
21	Paragould	0.750	36	Batesville	0.500	69	DeWitt	0.000
21	Pine Bluff	0.750	36	Newport	0.500	69	Dumas	0.000
21	Ward	0.750	36	Beebe	0.500	69	El Dorado	0.000
21	West Memphis	0.750	36	Forrest City	0.500	69	Fordyce	0.000
21	Harrison	0.750	36	Walnut Ridge	0.500	69	Little Flock	0.000
30	Bryant	0.625	67	Warren	0.375	69	Manila	0.000
30	Fort Smith	0.625	68	Crossett	0.250	69	Marianna	0.000
30	Tontitown	0.625	69	Dardanelle	0.000	69	McGehee	0.000
30	Lowell	0.625	69	Clinton	0.000	69	Mountain View	0.000
30	Wynne	0.625	69	Atkins	0.000	69	Paris	0.000
30	Heber Springs	0.625	69	Huntsville	0.000	69	Prescott	0.000
36	Texarkana	0.500	69	Johnson	0.000	69	Southside	0.000
36	Mountain Home	0.500	69	Piggott	0.000	69	Stuttgart	0.000
						69	Waldron	0.000

SNAPSHOT OF FIRST CLASS CITIES TRANSPARENCY PERFORMANCE

Only 20 out of 112 first class cities publish online at least 50% of public information included in the **Fiscal Component** of the transparency index.

Only 35 out of 112 first class cities publish online at least 50% of public information included in the **Administrative Component** of the transparency index.

Transparency Ranking

Fiscal 17.9%

Political 45.5%

Administrative 31.25%

First class cities are cities which at the last federal census have a population exceeding two thousand five hundred (2,500) people.

Only 51 out of 112 first class cities publish online at least 50% of public information included in the **Political Component** of the transparency index.

METHODOLOGY

In the inaugural edition of this index, we reviewed existing transparency analyses to determine what indicators they use to measure transparency. The best practices emphasize aspects of transparency, such as the display of budgets and tax information.[32] Some studies also examine the display of information about elected officials, public meetings, government contracts, criminal records, and public records.[33] Darrell West includes foreign language access and search functions.[34] The Sunshine Review adds lobbying, audits, and permits.[35] We draw most frequently from Carolyn Harder and Meagan Jordan's work since it incorporates all the information from earlier studies and also assesses Arkansas counties.[36]

However, our goal is to emphasize the transparency of information that can detect and deter corruption. We omit from our index measures that require a value judgment, such as readability and presentation. Assessing those factors is beyond the scope of our project.[37] However, counties should ensure that their displayed information is readable and presentable. We do encourage other researchers to look at these characteristics in their studies.

Table 13 provides the components and subcomponents included in our assessment and shows the rationale for including each component.

COMPONENT	SUBCOMPONENT	DEFINITION
Fiscal Transparency		
Budget	Current	2022 plan that reveals county government's priorities
	Previous year	2021 plan that reveals county government's priorities
	Two years prior	2020 plan that reveals county government's priorities
	Three years prior	2019 plan that reveals county government's priorities
Audit	Current	Certified 2020 financial statements
	Previous year	Certified 2019 financial statements
	Two years prior	Certified 2018 financial statements
	Three years prior	Certified 2017 financial statements
Fees & taxes	County fees	Payments for use of services
	Property tax rates	Tax assessed on real estate
	General sales tax rates	Tax levied on the sale of goods and services
	Special sales tax rates[38]	Tax levied for a specific purpose
	County fees and taxes on the same web page	All the fees and taxes that the county levies provided in one place
Components of Administrative Transparency		
Public records	FOIA request contact person	Whom to contact for information under FOIA
	FOIA request contact information	Email, phone, and address
	FOIA request forms	Downloadable forms
	Court records	Link to CourtConnect
Government contracts	Current RFP	Open RFPs
	Archived RFPs	Closed RFPs
	Current year bids and bid winners	Database of searchable current bids and winners
	Archived bids and bid winners	Previous years' bids and bid winners
Jobs	Hiring: job titles	Position advertised
	Hiring: position descriptions	Duties and required credentials

COMPONENT	SUBCOMPONENT	DEFINITION
Components of Political Transparency		
Quorum courts	Meeting notice	Time and place where the meetings occur
	Meeting agendas	List of issues to be discussed at meetings
	Meeting minutes	Deliberations and resolutions of meetings
	Archived videos	Recorded videos from previous meetings
Elected officials' contact information and duties	Names	Names of the eight elected office holders
	Phone numbers	Office phone numbers for each of the eight elected office holders
	Email addresses	Official email addresses for each of the eight elected office holders
	Location addresses	Location addresses for each of the eight elected office holders
	Job descriptions	Duties of the elected officials
Elected officials' financial disclosures, conflict of interest statements, and salaries	Financial disclosures	A signed document showing whether an elected official is involved in multiple interests related to their work
	Salaries	Actual pay received by elected officials

FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

BUDGET: Budgets inform citizens about government resources and how it intends to spend those resources. Budget scrutiny by the citizenry can deter elected officials from directing resources toward unproductive projects.

AUDIT: Financial statements provide information about the results of the use of resources. Making such information easily accessible to voters can encourage elected officials to be prudent in their use of resources, knowing that voters can check up on them.

FEES AND TAXES: Aside from exposing overcharging by some officials, citizens need to be aware of their burden in providing resources to their government. That awareness could make them more willing to hold elected officials accountable when they misappropriate funds.

ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSPARENCY

PUBLIC RECORDS: Making public information easy to access can reduce corruption by deterring government officials from engaging in dubious activities. It can also increase the chances of detection.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS: An open bidding process reduces the likelihood of favoritism and bribery. The ability to view winning and losing bids encourages public officials and awardees to follow bidding rules.

JOBS: An open hiring process discourages nepotism.

POLITICAL TRANSPARENCY

QUORUM COURTS: Residents' involvement in quorum court deliberations provides scrutiny to ordinances that affect their daily lives. Agendas, minutes, and videos allow citizens to revisit what was discussed or check if there are discrepancies in what was passed or what was executed, which may sometimes arise from misuse of resources. This kind of transparency should also deter the quorum court from abusing its allocation of funds to benefit specific individuals or groups.

ELECTED OFFICIALS' CONTACT INFORMATION AND DUTIES: Residents need access to their elected officials. Knowing how to contact elected officials makes it easier for residents to participate in the policymaking process. It will also encourage them to question elected officials whenever they detect anomalies in the way resources are used.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE, CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENTS, AND SALARIES: Disclosure of this information should reduce the possibility of corrupting decision-makers' motivation.

Data Collection and Coding

After identifying the components and subcomponents that comprise each type of transparency, we assessed the availability of information on each county's website.[39] First, we used a Google search of the county name to find each county's website. We then searched for information related to each type of transparency separately, moving from fiscal to political to administrative transparency and timing our search for each type. On average, we needed 7 minutes to locate information on fiscal transparency, 5 minutes to locate information on political transparency, and 5 minutes to locate information on administrative transparency.[40] It is important to note that the researchers we used are college students and may be better equipped to find information than the average Arkansan. Thus, it may take longer for someone else to find the information. It is also worth noting that we spent more time locating information on stand-alone county websites than on Arkansas.gov. There is little information on Arkansas.gov, most of the information published on the platform pertains to political transparency and it is uniformly presented, which decreases search time.

After each search, we coded a value of 1 if the information was available on the website and 0 if the information was not available. The only exception was the information on elected officials. We entered fractions if some elected officials did not have their information available while others did. There are eight elected positions required by law, and we differentiated between counties where only some of the elected officials had their information online from those that had all eight.[41]

To ensure the accuracy of the information we collected, we sent out our initial findings to each of the 75 counties to verify if the information we found on their websites was correct.[42] The cutoff date for our assessment was November 16, 2020. After collecting and verifying all the information, we calculated scores for each type of transparency before calculating overall transparency scores. To illustrate how we calculated the index, see the example for Benton County below. We chose Benton County because it performs better in all three categories of transparency than the rest of the counties (except for Washington, which we highlighted in 2019).

Calculation of Scores Examples: Craighead County and Sevier Counties

FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

Tables 14 A and B provide the subcomponent values we used to calculate our scores for each component of Craighead and Sevier County's fiscal transparency. We used these two different counties to show an example of the calculation of scores for Counties that have perfect scores if they have all the data or counties that do not have a perfect score as a result of penalties for not having all the data.

The tables also show subcomponent values. For example, the component "fees and taxes" is made up of four subcomponents: county fees, property tax rates, general sales tax rates, and county fees and taxes, all of which must appear on the same web page. The table also shows the calculated values for each of the three components of fiscal transparency. The fiscal transparency score is calculated by taking the average of the three components: budget, audit, and fees and taxes.

COMPONENT	SCORE
Budget	**1.000**
Current budget	1.000
Average of previous years	1.000
Previous year's budget	1.000
Two years prior's budget	1.000
Three years prior's budget	1.000
Audit	**1.000**
Current audit	1.000
Average of previous years	1.000
Previous year's audit	1.000
Two years prior's audit	1.000
Three years prior's audit	1.000
Fees and taxes	**1.000**
County fees	1.000
Property tax rates	1.000
General sales tax rates	1.000
Special sales tax rates	1.000
County fees and taxes on same web page	1.000
Fiscal transparency score	*1.000*

The scores for fiscal transparency are calculated as follows:

- Budgets & Audits Score = (current budget + average of previous years' budget scores) / 2 = 1.000

- Audit score = (current audit + average of previous years' audit scores) / 2 = 1.000

- Fees and taxes score = average of 5 subcomponents = 1.000

COMPONENT	SCORE
Budget	**0.750**
Current budget	1.000
Average of previous years	1.000
Previous year's budget	1.000
Two years prior's budget	1.000
Three years prior's budget	1.000
Audit	**1.000**
Current audit	1.000
Average of previous years	1.000
Previous year's audit	1.000
Two years prior's audit	1.000
Three years prior's audit	1.000
Fees and taxes	**1.000**
County fees	(0.250)
Property tax rates	1.000
General sales tax rates	1.000
Special sales tax rates	1.000
County fees and taxes on same web page	1.000
Fiscal transparency score	*0.875*

The scores for fiscal transparency are calculated as follows:

- Budgets & Audits Score= Budget score +Audit score – Penalty = 0.75

- Budgets & Audits Score = (current budget + average of previous years' budget scores) / 2 = 1.000

- Audit score = (current audit + average of previous years' audit scores) / 2 = 1.000

- Penalty= 0.25[43]

- Fees and taxes score = average of 5 subcomponents = 1.000

ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSPARENCY

Tables 15 A and B provide values for each subcomponent of Craighead and Sevier County's administrative transparency. The tables also show subcomponent values. For example, the component "government contracts" is made up of four subcomponents: current RFPs, archived RFPs, current year bids, bid winners, and archived bids and bid winners. The table also shows the calculated values for each of the four components. The administrative transparency score is calculated by taking the average of the four components, namely public records, building permits and zoning, government contracts, and jobs.

TABLE 15A: Craighead County Administrative Transparency

COMPONENT	SCORE
Public records	**1.000**
Court records	1.000
FOIA request forms	1.000
FOIA request contact person	1.000
FOIA contact information of person	1.000
Government contracts	**1.000**
Current RFP	1.000
Archived RFPs	1.000
Current year bids and bid winners	1.000
Archived bids and bid winners	1.000
Jobs	**1.000**
(Hiring)Job Titles	1.000
(Hiring) Position descriptions	1.000
Administrative Transparency Score	*1.000*

The scores for each component of administrative transparency in Table 15A are calculated as follows:

- Public records score = (court records + FOIA request contact person + FOIA contact information + FOIA request forms) / 4 = 1.000

- Government contracts score = (current RFP + archived RFPs + current year bids and bid winners + archived bids and bid winners) / 4 = 1.000

- Jobs score = (job titles + position descriptions) / 2 = 1.000

COMPONENT	SCORE
Public records	**0.750**
Court records	1.000
FOIA request forms	0.000
FOIA request contact person	1.000
FOIA contact information of person	1.000
Government contracts	**0.000**
Current RFP	0.000
Archived RFPs	0.000
Current year bids and bid winners	0.000
Archived bids and bid winners	0.000
Jobs	**0.000**
(Hiring)Job Titles	0.000
(Hiring) Position descriptions	0.000
Administrative Transparency Score	*0.250*

- Public records score = (court records + FOIA request contact person + FOIA contact information + FOIA request forms - penalty) / 4 = 0.750

- Government contracts score = (current RFP + archived RFPs + current year bids and bid winners + archived bids and bid winners) / 4 = 0.000

- Jobs score = (job titles + position descriptions) / 2 = 0.000

POLITICAL TRANSPARENCY

Tables 16A and B provide values for each subcomponent that goes into the calculation of each political transparency component for Craighead County. For example, the financial disclosure and salaries component is made up of two subcomponents: elected officials' salaries and their financial disclosure and conflict of interest statements. The tables also show the calculated values for each of the three components of political transparency. The political transparency score is calculated by taking the average of the three components: quorum court meetings, elected officials' contacts and duties, and elected officials' financial disclosures and salaries.

TABLE 16A: Craighead County Political Transparency

COMPONENT	SCORE
Quorum Courts Meetings	**1.000**
Meeting notice	1.000
Meeting agendas	1.000
Meeting minutes	1.000
Archived meeting videos*	0.000
Elected Officials Contacts & Duties	**1.000**
Names	1.000
Phone numbers	1.000
Email Addresses	1.000
Location addresses	1.000
Job descriptions	1.000
Financial Disclosure and Salaries	**1.000**
Disclosure and conflict of interest statements	1.000
Salaries	1.000
Political Transparency Score	*1.000*

* Archived meeting videos can replace the three other subcomponents.

The scores for each component of political transparency are calculated as follows:

- Quorum courts score = (meeting notices + meeting agendas + meeting minutes) / 3 = 1.000

- Elected officials score = (names + phone numbers + email addresses + office addresses + job descriptions) / 4 = 1.000

- Financial disclosure and salaries = (disclosure and conflict of interest statements + salaries) / 2 = 0.500

COMPONENT	SCORE
Quorum Courts Meetings	**0.667**
Meeting notice	1.000
Meeting agendas	1.000
Meeting minutes	0.000
Archived meeting videos*	0.000
Elected Officials Contacts & Duties	**1.000**
Names	1.000
Phone numbers	1.000
Email Addresses	1.000
Location addresses	1.000
Job descriptions	1.000
Financial Disclosure and Salaries	**0.000**
Disclosure and conflict of interest statements	0.000
Salaries	0.000
Political Transparency Score	*0.556*

* Archived meeting videos can replace the three other subcomponents.

- Quorum courts score = (meeting notices + meeting agendas + meeting minutes) / 3 = 0.667

- Elected officials score = (names + phone numbers + email addresses + office addresses + job descriptions) / 4 = 1.000

- Financial disclosure and salaries = (disclosure and conflict of interest statements + salaries) / 2 = 0.000

OVERALL TRANSPARENCY SCORE

In addition to the three types of transparency, we also include a fourth item: Does the website have a working search bar that actually yields the term you are searching for? A working search bar makes it easier to find information on the website, but only 18 counties had a working search bar. The rest either did not have one, or the search returned no results. To avoid detracting from the importance of the three types of transparency, we assign a value of 0.500 (rather than 1.000) if a website has a working search bar and a value of zero if not.

To calculate the final score, we sum up the four items and divide them by the total possible points (3.5). Thus, the overall score for Craighead County is calculated as follows:

(fiscal transparency score + political transparency score + administrative transparency score + search bar score) / total possible score = (1.000 + 0.833 + 1.000 + 0.500) / 3.5 = 0.952

ENDNOTES

1. Maria Cucciniello, Gregory A. Porumbescu, and Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, "25 Years of Transparency Research: Evidence and Future Directions," *Public Administration Review* 77, no. 1 (2017): 32–44.

2. Christopher Hood and David Heald, *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?* Vol. 135. (Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2006).

3. Maria Cucciniello, Gregory A. Porumbescu, and Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, "25 Years of Transparency Research: Evidence and Future Directions." *Public Administration Review* 77, no. 1 (2017): 32–44.

4. See Arkansas Code § 14-14-802 (2017).

5. Kristin McMurray, "2013 Transparency Report Card: Bringing State & Local Government to Light." *Chesterfield, VA: Sunshine Review*, (2013).

6. https://artransparency.gov/

7. McMurray, "2013 Transparency Report Card: Bringing State & Local Government to Light."

8. Carolyn T. Harder and Meagan M. Jordan, "The Transparency of County Websites: A Content Analysis." *Public Administration Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2013): 103–128.

9. Barbara M. Warner, "A Study of Arkansas County Government Websites." *Midsouth Political Science Review* 16 (2015): 73–106.

10. "Mbps" stands for "megabits per second," a measurement of data transfer speeds. The first number (25 in this case) refers to download speed, while the second refers to upload speed. The federal government considers 25 Mbps/3 Mbps sufficient to provide "advanced telecommunications capability." See US Federal Communications Commission, Wireline Competition Bureau. *Inquiry Concerning Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion*. 2021 Broadband Deployment Reports. GN Docket No. 20-269. January 19, 2021, p.57. Retrieved from: https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/21064816-fcc-broadband-deployment-report-jan-2021

11. US Federal Communications Commission. Wireline Competition Bureau. *Inquiry Concerning Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion*. 2018 Broadband Deployment Reports. GN Docket No. 17-199, 33 FCC Rcd 1660 (2). February 2, 2018; US Federal Communications Commission. 2015 Broadband Progress Report. Wireline Competition Bureau, 2015. https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/2018-broadband-deployment-report. Accessed Dec. 12, 2020.

12. Arkansas former Governor Asa Hutchinson announced the 'Arkansas Rural Connect' Grant Program for Broadband Deployment in 2019 https://broadband.arkansas.gov/ar-rural-connect/ Accessed Feb. 12, 2023.

13. Categories were inspired by Maria Cucciniello and Greta Nasi, "Transparency for Trust in Government: How Effective Is Formal Transparency?" *International Journal of Public Administration* 37, no. 13 (2014): 911–921.

14. Rachel J. Cross, Michelle Surka, and Scott Welder, "Following the Money 2018: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data." *US PIRG Education Fund and Frontier Group*, (April 2018).

15. Association of Arkansas Counties, "Classification of Counties 2010 Final Census Figures," https://www.arcounties.org/site/assets/files/3388/censuspopulationsclassificationscounties1.pdf. Accessed Dec. 12, 2020. The AAC is a government-sector lobbying association that lobbies on behalf of Arkansas counties. It was founded in 1968, and all Arkansas counties have been members since 1988.

16. Median income data for state, counties, and county equivalents retrieved from US Census Bureau Data 2021. "2017–2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates."

17. There is a lag in the release of audited financial statements, so "current" here means the most recent conducted by the Arkansas Legislative Audit.

18. https://artransparency.gov/country-budgets/

19. We give a 0 score not necessarily because the information is nonexistent. Sometime it is nonexistent. Other times, it is on a third-party website and the county does not provide a link to the third-party platform. We want to emphasize that the Association of Arkansas Counties website now publishes county budgets and financial statements. However, counties have to provide a link to this information on their websites to ensure that residents can easily access this information.

20. CourtConnect is the Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts Public Website. See https://www.arcourts.gov/administration/acap/courtconnect

21. Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe, "Making Public Procurement Transparent at Local and Regional Levels," *Council of Europe 33rd Session Report CG33* (October 19, 2017).

22. The quorum court is the legislative body of county government and by residents in county. The Quorum court is composed of elected members called Justices of the Peace. Members are responsible for the county finances, ordinances (a misdemeanor level), and other county affairs. They do not have any judicial authority except in certain circumstance e.g. to perform marriage ceremonies.

23. Seventeen counties are tied for 3rd place.

24. Association of Arkansas Counties, "Publication Library, 2017," https://www.arkansascounties.org/site/assets/files/4355/2017_salary_survery_2017.pdf. Accessed Dec. 12, 2020. The Association of Arkansas Counties (AAC) publishes a county government salary survey that shows the salaries of elected officials. If counties cannot directly publish salaries on their websites, they should provide a link to direct citizens to the AAC salary survey so that citizens can easily access the data.

25. Christy S. Williams. Information Network of Arkansas, personal communication, May 30, 2018.

26. US Department of Justice. United States Attorney's Office Eastern District of Arkansas. 2020. "Former Craighead County Clerk Federally Indicted. Defendant Allegedly Took More Than $1.4M in County Funds." News release, Dec. 2. Offices of the United States Attorneys. https://www.justice.gov/usao-edar/pr/former-craighead-county-clerk-federally-indicted. Accessed Dec. 12, 2020.

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29. See Arkansas Code § 25-1-404 (2019)

30. Rachel J. Cross, Michelle Surka, and Scott Welder, "Following the Money 2018: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data."

31. The list of the 112 cities of the first class upon which we based our research analysis was obtained from the Arkansas Municipal League via email in December 2022.

32. Jonathan Fox, "The Uncertain Relationship between Transparency and Accountability," *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4-5 (2007): 663–671.

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35. Kristin McMurray, "2013 Transparency Report Card: Bringing State & Local Government to Light,"

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37. Although, when counties contact us on how to improve their transparency standing, we have guided them to present the information in a readable form.

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39. We only considered official county websites and the Arkansas.gov platform, unless there was a link taking us to other sites that contain certain information.

40. Our measure for the average time is the median because the data distribution is skewed. Possibly, these times are on the lower side because of the obvious lack of certain information on the websites. For example, most counties do not publish administrative information, which makes the search times on those websites shorter than if they had the information.

41. See Arkansas Code § 14-14-502 (2017).

42. The response rate in 2020 was slightly lower than the response rate in 2019. In 2019, 38 counties responded, while in 2020, 34 counties responded. This rate is still better than 2018, when had only 18 responses.

43. Penalized for not having a link on its website directing users to budget landing page on https://artransparency.gov/

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