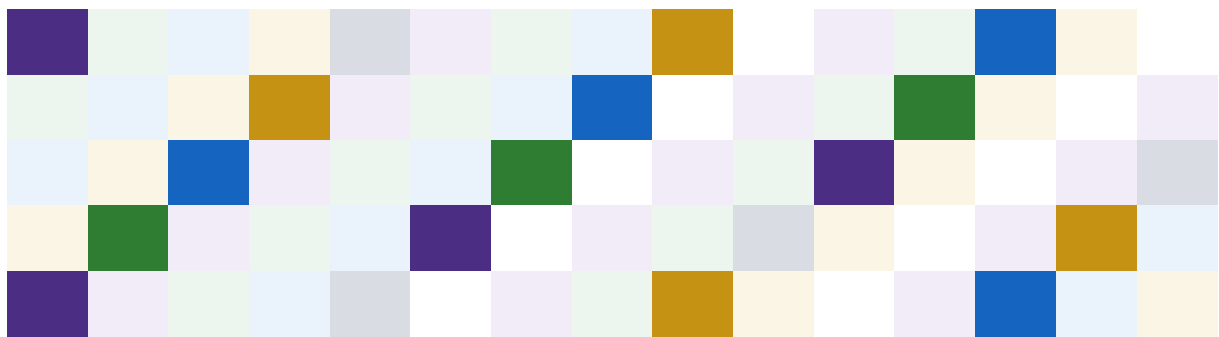


Arkansas County Transparency Report

Findings from the 2024 Statewide Assessment

2026 EDITION

Report No. 5



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Arkansas Center for Research in Economics

University of Central Arkansas

Access Arkansas 2026

Arkansas County Transparency Report: Findings from the 2024 Statewide Assessment

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¹ The fourth edition also evaluated municipal transparency. Beginning with this report, county and municipal transparency assessments will be conducted and published separately on an alternating schedule.

Letter from ACRE

Transparent government is essential to public confidence, effective administration, and informed civic participation. County governments make decisions that shape the daily lives of Arkansans, yet residents can only evaluate those decisions when information is readily available and easy to understand.¹

ACRE created Access Arkansas to provide a consistent statewide benchmark of online county transparency. Since the first assessment in 2018, the project has documented substantial progress while also identifying practical opportunities for improvement. This fifth edition continues that work by evaluating all 75 counties across fiscal, administrative, and political transparency.

Our purpose is not simply to rank counties. It is to encourage continuous improvement, recognize effective practices, and help county officials make public information easier to find and use. We hope this report serves as a practical resource for county leaders, policymakers, journalists, researchers, and citizens throughout Arkansas.

We are grateful to the county officials and research assistants whose cooperation and careful work made this assessment possible.

Arkansas Center for Research in Economics
University of Central Arkansas

ABOUT THE PROJECT

About Access Arkansas

Access Arkansas is ACRE’s statewide initiative for measuring and encouraging online transparency in Arkansas county government.

WHAT IT MEASURES Whether essential public information is available through official county websites and related public platforms.	WHY IT EXISTS To help residents understand local government and to give counties a practical benchmark for continuous improvement.
HOW IT WORKS All 75 counties are evaluated using standardized fiscal, administrative, and political transparency indicators.	WHO USES IT County officials, policymakers, journalists, researchers, civic organizations, and Arkansas residents.

The project’s central principle

Transparency is meaningful only when residents can locate and use public information without unnecessary barriers.

READER GUIDE

How to Read This Report

The Access Arkansas index combines three complementary dimensions into one overall transparency score.

OVERALL	0.000–1.000	Combined measure of fiscal, administrative, and political information.
FISCAL	Blue	Budgets, audits, taxes, fees, and other financial information.
ADMINISTRATIVE	Green	Public records, procurement, permits, zoning, and employment information.
POLITICAL	Gold	Elected officials, quorum court meetings, agendas, minutes, and elections.

Interpreting scores

A higher score means that a county publishes a larger share of the information included in the index. The score does not evaluate the quality of government services, policy choices, or financial management.

Use the rankings as a benchmark—not as the only measure of progress.

Counties with similar scores may be separated by several ranks, and a county can improve substantially even if its rank changes little. This report therefore emphasizes both performance and improvement over time.

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Arkansas County Transparency in 2024

Statewide progress is continuing, but most counties still publish fewer than half of the public-information items included in the Access Arkansas Index.

75 counties assessed	0.40 average overall score	41 counties improved	56 counties below 0.500
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The project

Access Arkansas is a statewide initiative of the Arkansas Center for Research in Economics at the University of Central Arkansas. The project evaluates how effectively Arkansas counties make essential public information available through official county websites and related government platforms. It focuses on three dimensions of transparency—fiscal, administrative, and political—and gives counties a consistent benchmark for identifying publication gaps, monitoring progress, and improving public access.

This report presents findings from the 2024 assessment of all 75 Arkansas counties. Researchers reviewed 32 transparency subcomponents, including budgets, audits, taxes and fees, public-records information, permits, procurement materials, employment information, quorum-court records, elected-official information, accountability disclosures, and salaries.

WHAT THE INDEX MEASURES

Scores reflect whether residents could locate information online through a reasonable search as of the assessment date. The index measures online availability and discoverability; it does not independently evaluate policy quality, legal compliance, or the overall effectiveness of county government.

Statewide progress—and the remaining gap

Arkansas counties continued to improve in 2024. The statewide average overall transparency score increased from approximately 0.37 in 2022 to 0.40 in 2024, and 41 counties improved their scores. Nevertheless, substantial gaps remain. Fifty-six counties scored below 0.500, meaning that most counties still published fewer than half of the items included in the index.

The results also reveal considerable variation. Some counties provide broad access across all three transparency dimensions, while others maintain only a limited online presence or depend heavily on county pages hosted through Arkansas.gov. Benton, Craighead, and Washington Counties achieved the highest overall scores, each earning 0.952. Faulkner, Garland, and Sebastian Counties followed with scores of 0.905.

CENTRAL FINDING

The leading counties distinguish themselves through breadth: they publish useful information across all three transparency pillars and organize it so residents can find it.

What the 2024 Assessment Shows

Progress differs across the three transparency pillars, but the next steps are practical and attainable.

FISCAL 0.537 strongest pillar	ADMINISTRATIVE 0.272 largest gain	POLITICAL 0.451 modest gain
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Fiscal transparency

Fiscal transparency remained the strongest component, with a statewide average score of 0.537. Most counties made commonly requested financial documents—especially current budgets and audits—more accessible than in earlier assessments. Historical archives, complete tax and fee information, and consistent document organization remain uneven. Future gains will require counties to move beyond publishing current documents and develop reliable, searchable archives.

Administrative transparency

Administrative transparency recorded the largest improvement, rising from 0.201 in 2022 to 0.272 in 2024. More counties now provide online court-record access, Freedom of Information Act request forms, procurement information, and employment materials. Even with this progress, it remains the weakest component. Many counties still do not identify a dedicated public-records contact, publish complete procurement records, or maintain accessible archives of bids, contracts, permits, and planning materials.

Political transparency

Political transparency increased more modestly, from 0.440 in 2022 to 0.451 in 2024. Most counties provide at least basic information about quorum-court meetings and elected officials, but comprehensive access remains uncommon. Meeting agendas, minutes, archived videos, statements of financial interest, conflict-of-interest disclosures, duties, and salary information are not published consistently.

A practical path forward

Counties do not necessarily need expensive website redesigns to improve transparency. Many of the most consequential improvements involve publishing documents they already produce, using clear and predictable navigation, maintaining current and historical records, assigning responsibility for each content area, and conducting an annual review of online information. A centralized transparency hub can help residents find financial documents, public-records materials, procurement information, meeting records, and official disclosures without searching across multiple departmental pages.

State-level support can reinforce these efforts through clear minimum disclosure standards, shared website templates, technical assistance, records-management guidance, and accessible publishing tools. Arkansas.gov can also improve transparency by providing more direct and consistent routes to county-specific information, particularly for counties with limited staff or technical capacity.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Transparency should be treated as part of the basic infrastructure of effective county government. Used annually as a management tool—not merely as a ranking—the Access Arkansas Index can help counties document progress, prioritize attainable improvements, and strengthen public confidence.

DASHBOARD 1

ARKANSAS AT A GLANCE

75**COUNTIES**

Statewide coverage

5**ASSESSMENTS**

2018–2024

40%**OVERALL AVERAGE**

Up from 37%

3**PILLARS**

Fiscal • Administrative • Political

THREE PILLARS**FISCAL****53.7%**

+1.0 point since 2022

ADMINISTRATIVE**27.2%**

+6.6 points since 2022

POLITICAL**45.1%**

+1.1 points since 2022

HEADLINE FINDING

Arkansas counties publish more public information online than in any previous Access Arkansas assessment, but most counties still make fewer than half of the indexed items available. Administrative transparency produced the largest recent gain.

DASHBOARD 2 FIVE FINDINGS TO KNOW**1****Statewide transparency continued to improve.**

Overall average: 37% in 2022 → 40% in 2024.

2**Fiscal transparency remains the strongest pillar.**

The statewide fiscal average reached 53.7%.

3**Administrative transparency recorded the largest gain.**

The average increased from 20.6% to 27.2%.

4**High performance is not limited to large or wealthy counties.**

Several smaller counties outperform more populous peers.

5**The largest opportunity is making information easier to find.**

Organization, direct links, and routine updates matter.

These findings frame the detailed county-level evidence presented in the report.

DASHBOARD 3

TRANSPARENCY BY PILLAR

The index evaluates three complementary dimensions of county web transparency.

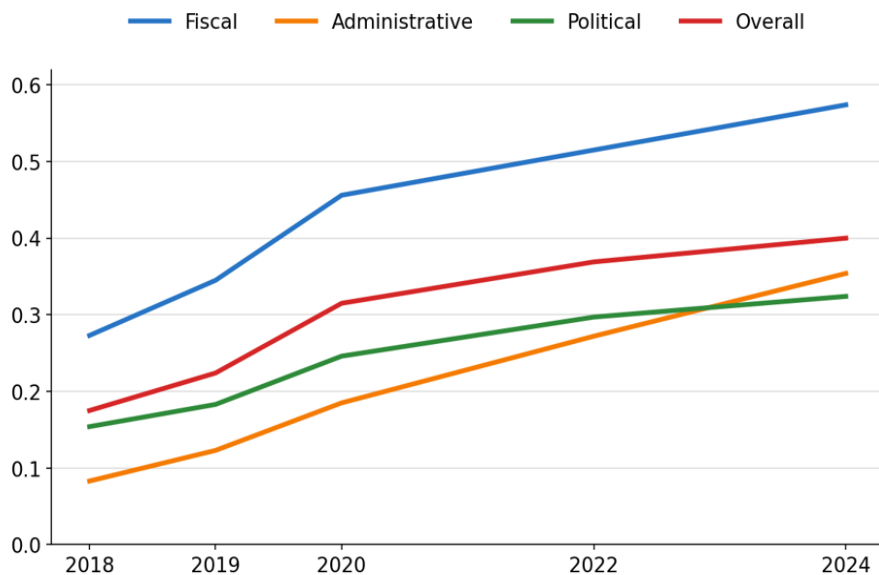
PILLAR	PURPOSE	EXAMPLES	PERFORMANCE
FISCAL	Financial accountability	Budgets, audits, financial statements, taxes	Highest
ADMINISTRATIVE	Government operations	FOIA, contracts, bids, employment, permits	Improving
POLITICAL	Democratic accountability	Officials, meetings, agendas, elections	Moderate

KEY INSIGHT

Strong overall performance requires consistent attention to all three pillars rather than excellence in only one area.

DASHBOARD 4

STATEWIDE TRENDS



KEY OBSERVATIONS

FISCAL

Strongest pillar throughout the study.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Largest gains since 2020.

POLITICAL

Improved gradually; further gains remain possible.

OVERALL

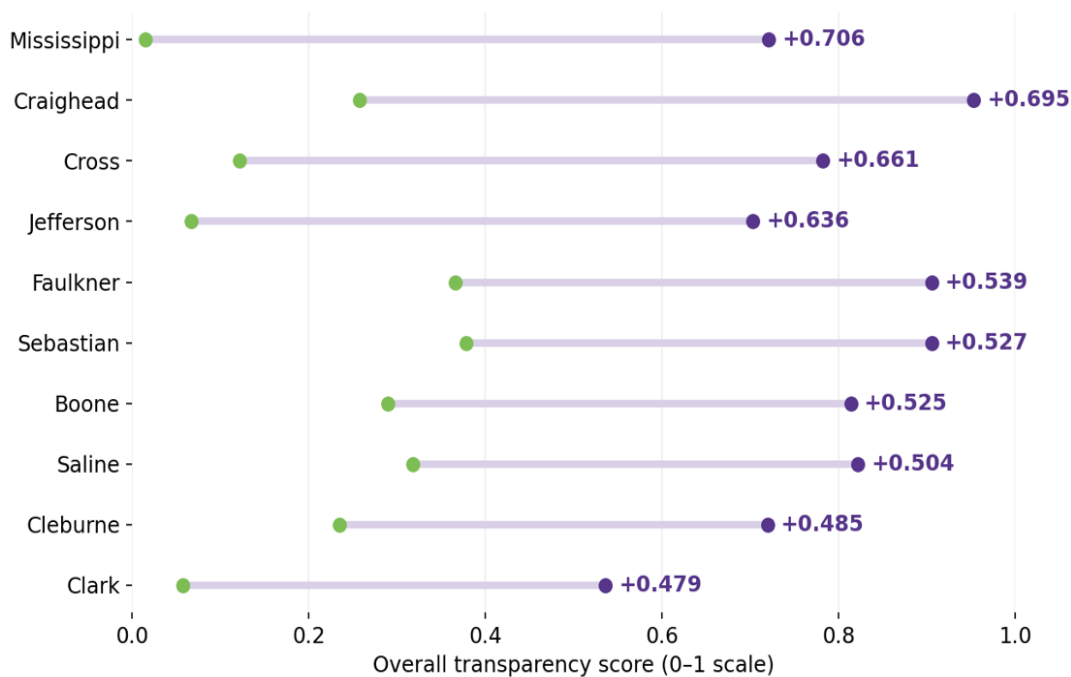
Transparency increased across Arkansas over time.

KEY MESSAGE

The long-run pattern shows increasing online availability and gradual strengthening of transparency practices.

DASHBOARD 5 CUMULATIVE COUNTY GAINS

The counties below recorded the largest net increases in overall transparency between the 2018 baseline and the 2024 assessment.



WHAT THE LONG-RUN COMPARISON SHOWS

Mississippi County recorded the largest cumulative gain, followed closely by Craighead and Cross. All ten counties improved by at least 0.479 points, showing that substantial progress is possible from very different starting positions.

DASHBOARD 6 TOP PERFORMING COUNTIES

The counties below achieved the highest overall transparency scores in 2024.

RANK	COUNTY	OVERALL SCORE	2024 STANDING
1	Benton	0.952	Statewide lead
1	Craighead	0.952	Statewide lead
1	Washington	0.952	Statewide lead
4	Faulkner	0.905	Tied for fourth
4	Garland	0.905	Tied for fourth
4	Sebastian	0.905	Tied for fourth
7	Saline	0.821	Seventh
8	Boone	0.813	Eighth
9	Cross	0.782	Ninth
10	Pulaski	0.726	Tenth

WHAT LEADERS DEMONSTRATE

Leading counties combine broad publication across all three pillars with clear organization and reliable updates.

DASHBOARD 7 MOST IMPROVED COUNTIES

These counties made the greatest progress between the 2022 and 2024 assessments.

IMPROVEMENT RANK	COUNTY	GAIN	2024 SCORE
1	Clark	+0.310	0.536
2	Crittenden	+0.230	0.433
3	Clay	+0.179	0.381
4	Cleburne	+0.136	0.719
5	Bradley	+0.129	0.331
6	Saline	+0.119	0.821
6	Lawrence	+0.119	0.464
8	Greene	+0.115	0.456
9	Boone	+0.111	0.813
10	Searcy	+0.106	0.260

WHY IMPROVEMENT MATTERS

Clark led with a 0.310-point gain. The full list shows that focused publication and better website organization can produce meaningful improvement within one assessment cycle.

DASHBOARD 8 WHAT EXPLAINS TRANSPARENCY?

No single factor determines success, but recurring patterns distinguish stronger performers.

POTENTIAL DRIVER	RELATIONSHIP	INTERPRETATION
Population	Positive	Larger counties generally publish more information.
Income	Moderate	Higher-income counties often have greater capacity.
Leadership	Strong	Commitment by county officials is a central factor.
Website design	Strong	Organization improves access to existing information.
Resources	Mixed	Limited resources do not prevent meaningful gains.

KEY INSIGHTS

Leadership and website organization consistently distinguish higher performers. Population and income matter, but smaller counties can outperform larger peers through focused management.

DASHBOARD 9

WHAT COUNTIES CAN DO NEXT

PRIORITY	RECOMMENDED ACTION	EXPECTED BENEFIT
Immediate	Publish current budgets, audits, and financial reports.	Improves fiscal transparency.
Short term	Post agendas, minutes, and elected-official information.	Strengthens political transparency.
Short term	Create a clearly labeled FOIA page.	Improves administrative transparency.
Medium term	Use consistent menus and searchable archives.	Makes information easier to locate.
Annual	Review the website using the index.	Supports continuous improvement.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Assess content → Identify gaps → Publish priority documents → Improve navigation → Review progress annually

Incremental improvements and peer learning can move every county toward greater transparency.

BACKGROUND

Background to the Project

Why ACRE created Access Arkansas and how the statewide assessment evolved.

2013	2018	5	75
national report-card catalyst	first Access Arkansas report	statewide assessments	counties reviewed

A 2013 national assessment by the Sunshine Review reported that Arkansas counties ranked last in the nation for publishing public information online. ACRE responded by launching a systematic project to measure and improve county-level web transparency.²

The inaugural *Access Arkansas* report, published in 2018, identified significant gaps in county fiscal and administrative transparency. Since then, recurring assessments have provided a consistent framework for tracking progress across all 75 Arkansas counties. Although the fourth edition also evaluated municipal transparency, future county and city assessments will be published separately on an alternating schedule. Accordingly, the next *Access Arkansas* report will focus exclusively on cities.

FROM A ONE-TIME ASSESSMENT TO A RECURRING BENCHMARK

MILESTONE	DEVELOPMENT
2013	Sunshine Review highlights weak online transparency.
2018	ACRE publishes the first county transparency index.
2019	Second assessment establishes consistent comparisons.
2020	Third review tracks continued changes in publication.
2022	Fourth assessment documents gains and remaining gaps.
2024	Fifth assessment reviews all counties across three pillars.

WHY RECURRING ASSESSMENT MATTERS
County websites, technology, staffing, legal requirements, and residents’ expectations change. Repeated measurement documents whether public access keeps pace.

PURPOSE
Access Arkansas provides a consistent statewide benchmark of whether residents can locate important county-government information online.

THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

County Websites and Study Design

46	29	+2	100%
stand-alone county websites	primarily on Arkansas.gov	stand-alone sites since 2022	statewide coverage

As of December 2024, 46 counties maintained stand-alone websites, up from 44 in 2022. The remaining counties relied on some or minimal web presence through Arkansas.gov. Public access depends not only on whether information is online, but also on whether navigation makes it reasonably discoverable.³⁻⁵

PLATFORM IMPLICATION
Arkansas.gov needs a clear route to county-specific pages; stand-alone county sites need consistent menus, archives, and working search tools.

WHY TRANSPARENCY MATTERS

Why Accessible Information Matters

Transparency creates public value only when residents can readily find, understand, and use government information.

Clear access to budgets, audits, meeting materials, and officials' contact information helps residents follow decisions, participate in public affairs, and hold government accountable. Research also finds that timely, understandable disclosure is associated with stronger budget quality, accountability, and public-sector performance.^{1, 6}

Counties differ in staffing, funding, and technical capacity, but meaningful improvements do not always require costly technology. Plain-language labels, current documents, organized archives, and predictable website locations can substantially improve access. Access Arkansas therefore measures whether an ordinary resident can reasonably locate and use information online—not simply whether a document exists.^{7, 8}

HOW ACCESS ARKANSAS MEASURES ONLINE ACCESS

- 1 Three pillars are assessed separately**
Fiscal, administrative, and political information are evaluated as distinct components.
- 2 Availability and discoverability are measured**
Credit reflects whether an ordinary resident can locate information through a reasonable online search.
- 3 Current information is prioritized**
Current documents receive the greatest weight, while archives are reviewed where relevant.
- 4 Progress is tracked over time**
Repeated assessments support statewide benchmarking and reveal persistent gaps.

SCOPE

The index evaluates online availability and discoverability. It does not independently assess policy quality, legal compliance, government effectiveness, or the performance of individual officials.

HOW THIS GUIDES THE REPORT

1

Measure availability

Apply a consistent index across fiscal, administrative, and political information.

2

Compare performance

Identify statewide patterns, leading counties, and areas of improvement.

3

Support action

Translate publication gaps into practical steps that county officials can implement.

OVERALL TRANSPARENCY

How Arkansas counties perform across fiscal, administrative, and political transparency—and what the statewide patterns reveal.



Statewide Overview

The overall transparency score ranges from 0.000 to 1.000 and combines the fiscal, administrative, and political components of the Access Arkansas index. In 2024, Arkansas counties published, on average, about 40 percent of the information included in the index, up from about 37 percent in 2022.

Highest-Scoring Counties

Benton, Craighead, and Washington Counties share the top overall score of 0.952. Faulkner, Garland, and Sebastian follow at 0.905. Saline ranks seventh at 0.821, followed by Boone (0.813), Cross (0.782), and Pulaski (0.726).

FIGURE 1 | Ten highest-scoring counties in overall transparency



WHAT STANDS OUT

Every county in the 2024 top 10 scored above 0.700, reflecting stronger top-tier performance than in 2022. Mississippi, Cleburne, and Jefferson were just outside the top 10.

COUNTY COMPARISON

TABLE 1 | Overall Transparency Score and Ranking by County

The 2024 ranking reveals wide variation in the amount of public information available online. Because tied counties receive the same rank, the table should be read as a distribution of performance rather than as 75 unique positions. It also provides the statewide benchmark used throughout the chapter's peer comparisons.

RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE	RANK	COUNTY	SCORE
1	Benton	0.952	26	Greene	0.456	51	St. Francis	0.212
1	Craighead	0.952	27	Conway	0.437	52	Lincoln	0.204
1	Washington	0.952	28	Crittenden	0.433	53	Independence	0.202
4	Faulkner	0.905	29	Crawford	0.409	53	Johnson	0.202
4	Garland	0.905	30	Izard	0.409	53	Pike	0.202
4	Sebastian	0.905	31	Fulton	0.405	56	Nevada	0.196
7	Saline	0.821	32	Poinsett	0.382	57	Calhoun	0.188
8	Boone	0.813	33	Clay	0.381	58	Chicot	0.188
9	Cross	0.782	34	White	0.353	59	Lonoke	0.188
10	Pulaski	0.726	35	Bradley	0.331	59	Sharp	0.188
11	Mississippi	0.721	35	Van Buren	0.331	59	Woodruff	0.188
12	Cleburne	0.719	37	Stone	0.329	62	Arkansas	0.183
13	Jefferson	0.702	38	Hempstead	0.321	62	Dallas	0.183
14	Sevier	0.583	39	Union	0.321	62	Howard	0.183
15	Baxter	0.548	39	Little River	0.306	62	Lee	0.183
16	Pope	0.540	39	Scott	0.298	66	Ouachita	0.181
17	Clark	0.536	42	Randolph	0.283	66	Perry	0.181
17	Columbia	0.536	43	Desha	0.279	68	Franklin	0.164
19	Miller	0.504	43	Jackson	0.274	68	Lafayette	0.164
20	Carroll	0.488	43	Logan	0.266	68	Monroe	0.164
20	Grant	0.488	46	Cleveland	0.260	68	Montgomery	0.164
22	Madison	0.480	46	Searcy	0.260	68	Newton	0.164
23	Marion	0.464	48	Drew	0.234	68	Phillips	0.164
23	Ashley	0.464	49	Hot Spring	0.234	74	Polk	0.162
23	Lawrence	0.464	50	Yell	0.226	74	Prairie	0.161

The leading counties distinguish themselves through breadth: they publish useful information across all three transparency pillars rather than relying on strength in only one area. Counties farther down the table generally have several attainable disclosure gaps that can be addressed without redesigning the entire website.

INTERPRETING THE LOWER SCORES

A lower score does not necessarily mean that a county provides poor services or fails to conduct public business. It means that residents could not readily locate many of the items measured by this index on the county's website or linked pages. Figure 2 places those individual scores in statewide context by showing how all 75 counties are distributed across the scale.

Score Distribution and County Improvement

FIGURE 2 | Distribution of overall transparency scores in Arkansas



The distribution is concentrated at the lower end of the scale: 56 of 75 counties score below 0.500, including 44 below 0.400. Only 13 counties score above 0.700, and none falls between 0.610 and 0.700. The pattern suggests that improvement has not yet produced a broad middle tier; instead, a relatively small group of high performers remains separated from most counties.

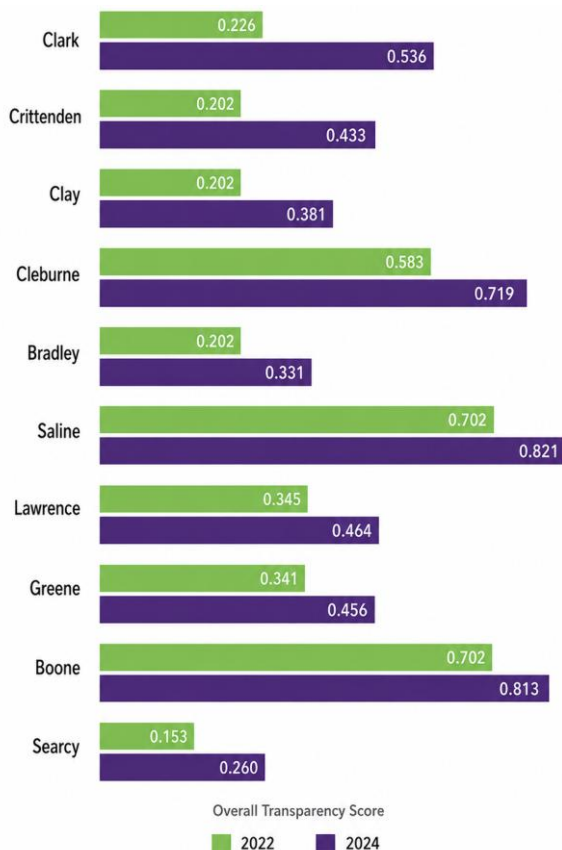
WHAT THE DISTRIBUTION SHOWS Fifty-six counties score below 0.500, while only 13 exceed 0.700. The gap between 0.610 and 0.700 underscores the limited statewide middle tier.

CHANGE FROM 2022 TO 2024

Most-Improved Counties

Regular updates allow county officials and residents to track progress over time. The largest gains demonstrate that meaningful improvement can occur within a single assessment cycle.

FIGURE 3 | Top 10 most-improved counties by overall transparency score



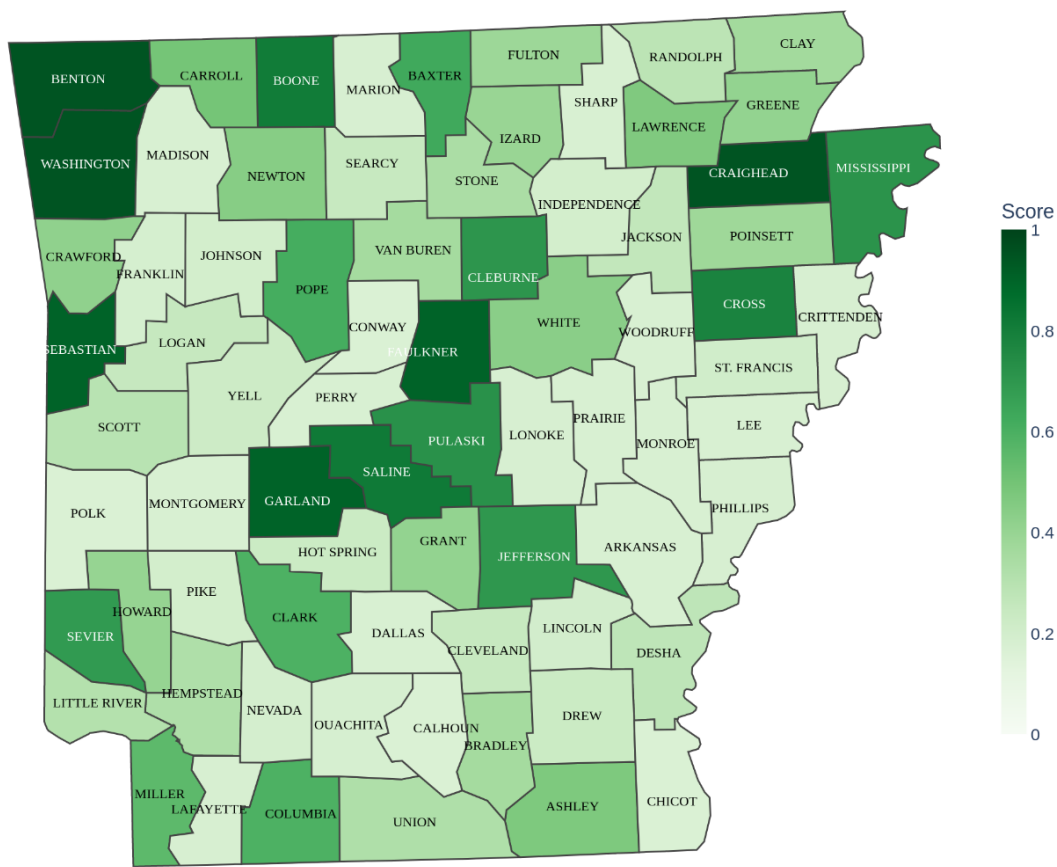
LARGEST GAINS Clark improved by 0.310 points, followed by Crittenden (+0.230) and Clay (+0.179). The ten counties shown demonstrate that focused publication changes can produce measurable gains.

TRANSPARENCY HEAT MAP

Where Transparency Is Strongest and Weakest

Although several counties showed measurable improvement in 2024, the statewide map shows that relatively low transparency remains widespread. Higher scores are concentrated in a limited number of counties, while substantial opportunities for improvement remain across much of Arkansas.

FIGURE 4 | Overall transparency scores by county



READING THE MAP

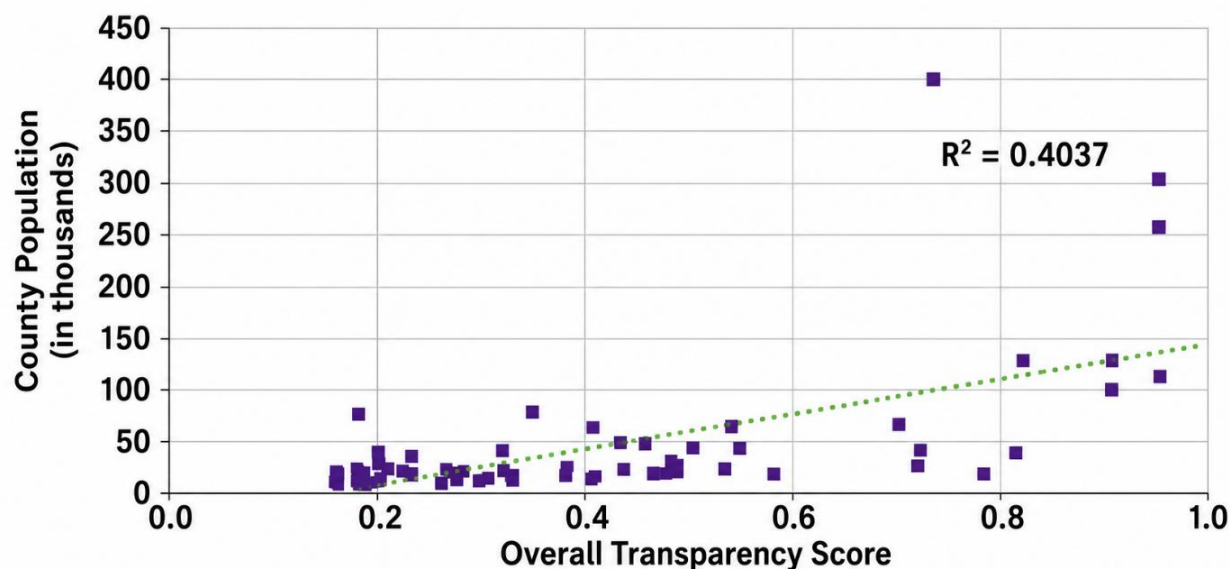
The darkest counties are the strongest performers. The broad concentration of lighter shades indicates that many counties still make only a limited share of key public information readily accessible online.

COUNTY SIZE AND CAPACITY

Population and Transparency

Grouping counties by population provides a more meaningful basis for comparison because counties of similar size often face comparable staffing, administrative capacity, and financial resources. Eight of Arkansas's ten most populous counties are also among the top ten in overall transparency.⁹

FIGURE 5 | County population and overall transparency



RELATIONSHIP, NOT DESTINY

The relationship is positive but imperfect ($R^2 = 0.4037$). Larger counties generally score higher, yet population alone does not explain county performance.

Population classes

The Association of Arkansas Counties classifies counties into seven groups, ranging from fewer than 10,000 residents in Class 1 to 200,000 or more residents in Class 7. Comparing counties within these classes allows officials to benchmark against peers with broadly similar capacity.⁹

CLASS 1 | 0–9,999

Calhoun, Cleveland, Dallas, Lafayette, Lee, Monroe, Montgomery, Nevada, Newton, Prairie, Scott, Searcy, and Woodruff

CLASS 2 | 10,000–19,999

Arkansas, Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Clay, Cross, Desha, Drew, Franklin, Fulton, Grant, Howard, Izard, Jackson, Lawrence, Lincoln, Little River, Madison, Marion, Perry, Phillips, Pike, Polk, Randolph, Sevier, Sharp, Stone, and Van Buren

CLASS 3 | 20,000–29,999

Carroll, Clark, Cleburne, Columbia, Conway, Hempstead, Johnson, Logan, Ouachita, Poinsett, St. Francis, and Yell

CLASS 4 | 30,000–49,999

Baxter, Boone, Crittenden, Greene, Hot Spring, Independence, Miller, Mississippi, and Union

CLASS 5 | 50,000–69,999

Crawford, Jefferson, and Pope

CLASS 6 | 70,000–199,999

Craighead, Faulkner, Garland, Lonoke, Saline, Sebastian, and White

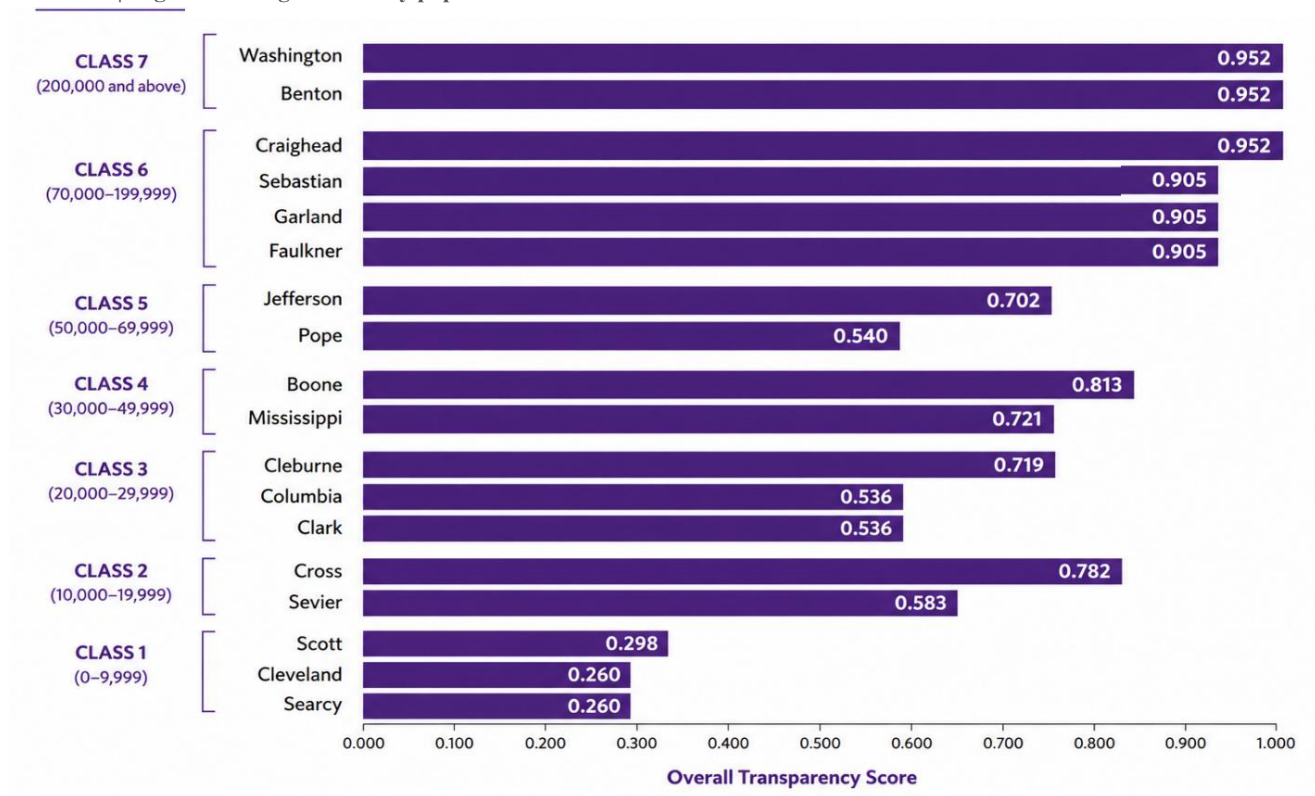
CLASS 7 | 200,000 and above

Benton, Pulaski, and Washington

Classes 1 through 4 contain most Arkansas counties. Figure 6 identifies the strongest performers within each class and shows that high transparency is achievable at several population levels.

Benchmarking Within Population Classes

FIGURE 6 | Highest-scoring counties by population-size class



Comparisons within population classes show that county size is not the sole determinant of web transparency. Cross County, a Class 2 county, outperforms several counties in larger population classes. By contrast, some more populous counties trail smaller peers.

Peer-group comparisons are especially useful for smaller counties because they identify achievable standards without assuming that every county has the same staffing or tax base. The results also show that website organization and publication routines can offset some resource constraints. Counties can therefore use the leaders in their own class as practical models while still learning from the statewide leaders.

KEY INTERPRETATION

Larger counties tend to be more transparent, but population should not be treated as an excuse for weak performance. Strong results in smaller counties demonstrate that administrative priorities and commitment to transparency matter.

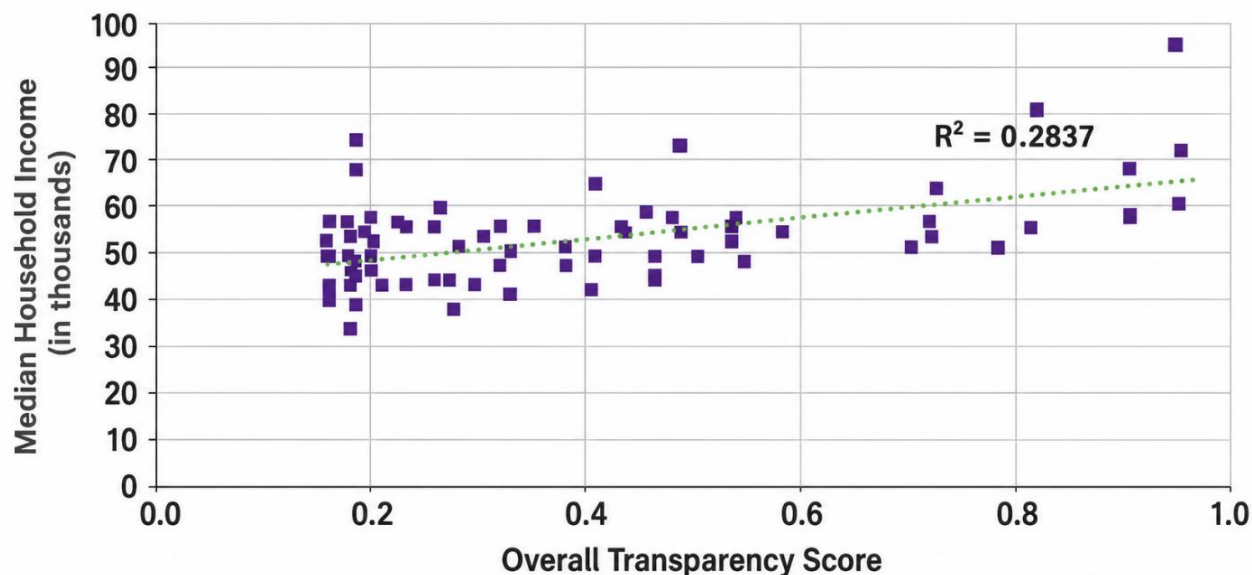
COUNTY INCOME AND RESOURCES

Income and Transparency

Maintaining a strong county website requires resources. Counties with higher median household incomes may be better positioned to support website development, information technology staff, and ongoing content maintenance.¹⁰

Four of Arkansas's ten highest-income counties—Benton, Pulaski, Saline, and Washington—also rank among the top ten counties in overall transparency.

FIGURE 7 | Median household income and overall transparency



A POSITIVE BUT INCOMPLETE RELATIONSHIP

County income is positively associated with transparency, but the relationship is weaker than the population relationship ($R^2 = 0.2837$). Higher income may support capacity, but it does not guarantee strong performance.

GROUP 1 | \$34,000–\$39,999

Chicot, Desha, and Lee

GROUP 2 | \$40,000–\$44,999

Ashley, Bradley, Dallas, Drew, Fulton, Jackson, Lafayette, Lawrence, Monroe, Phillips, Scott, Searcy, Sharp, St. Francis, and Stone

GROUP 3 | \$45,000–\$49,999

Baxter, Hempstead, Howard, Izard, Johnson, Marion, Miller, Montgomery, Newton, Ouachita, Poinsett, Pike, and Woodruff

GROUP 4 | \$50,000–\$54,999

Arkansas, Carroll, Clark, Clay, Cleveland, Conway, Cross, Jefferson, Lincoln, Little River, Mississippi, Nevada, Prairie, Randolph, Sevier, and Van Buren

GROUP 5 | \$55,000–\$59,999

Boone, Cleburne, Columbia, Craighead, Crittenden, Franklin, Garland, Greene, Hot Spring, Independence, Logan, Madison, Perry, Pope, Sebastian, Union, White, and Yell

GROUP 6 | \$60,000–\$69,999

Calhoun, Crawford, Faulkner, and Pulaski

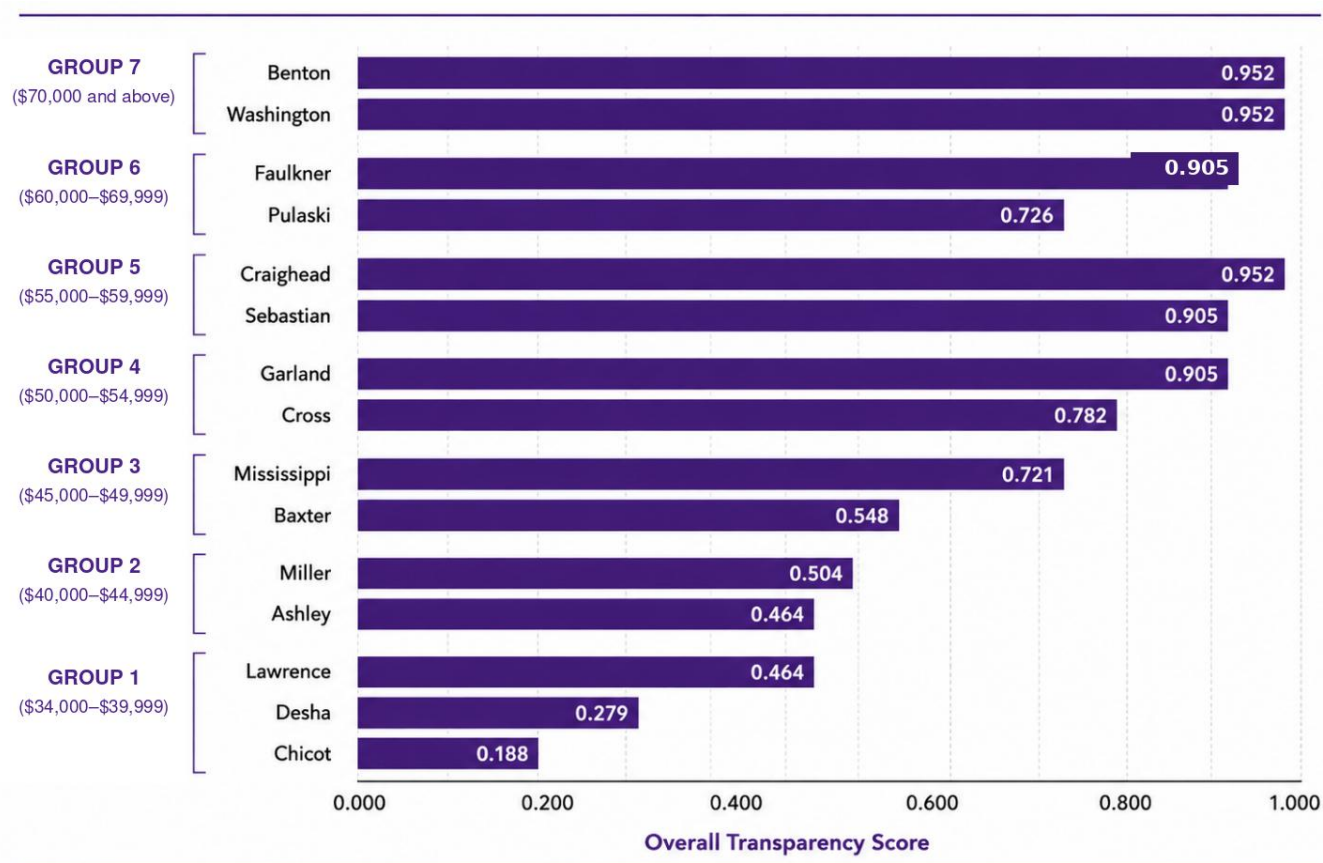
GROUP 7 | \$70,000 and above

Benton, Grant, Lonoke, Saline, and Washington

Counties within the same income group often achieve very different results. Figure 8 highlights the leading counties in each group and shows that resources influence—but do not determine—online transparency.

Benchmarking Within Income Groups

FIGURE 8 | Highest-scoring counties by county income group



The income-group comparison reinforces the broader conclusion that resources matter but do not fully determine performance. Several counties in lower-income groups outperform counties in higher-income groups, indicating that website organization, publication routines, and leadership priorities also play important roles.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

Counties should benchmark themselves against both statewide leaders and similarly situated peers. The strongest performers provide replicable examples of how public records can be organized and made easier to find.

STATEWIDE TRENDS

Statewide Transparency Progress, 2018–2024

County-level web transparency has improved since the first Access Arkansas assessment in 2018. Fiscal transparency remains the strongest pillar, while administrative transparency recorded the largest gain from 2022 to 2024. Reading the figures together shows whether improvement is broad-based or concentrated in a single pillar. The comparison also reveals how the composition of county transparency has shifted since 2018.

TABLE 2 | Average percentage of published information by transparency component, 2018–2024

	2018	2019	2020	2022	2024	2022–2024 Change (Percentage Points)
Fiscal	7.24	16.40	36.90	52.70	53.70	+1.00
Administrative	6.22	12.20	15.10	20.10	27.20	+7.10
Political	28.02	36.60	43.10	44.00	45.10	+1.10

The largest long-run gain occurred in fiscal transparency, while administrative transparency recorded the strongest improvement between 2022 and 2024. Political transparency changed more slowly, indicating that meeting and accountability disclosures remain a durable area for attention.

SECTION SUMMARY

Key Takeaways

1	Arkansas is improving The average overall score rose from about 0.37 in 2022 to about 0.40 in 2024.
2	The strongest counties are pulling ahead All counties in the top 10 scored above 0.700, and three counties reached 0.952.
3	Most counties remain below the midpoint Fifty-six counties scored below 0.500, leaving substantial room for improvement.
4	Population and income help—but do not decide outcomes Both are positively associated with transparency, yet smaller and lower-income counties can outperform larger peers.
5	Improvement can happen quickly The leading improvers made sizable gains between 2022 and 2024, led by Clark County’s 0.310-point increase.

LOOKING AHEAD

The remainder of the report examines the fiscal, administrative, and political dimensions separately. Together, those chapters identify where counties have advanced, where gaps remain, and which practical improvements offer the greatest value.

FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

How Arkansas counties disclose budgets, audits, taxes, and fees—and where the strongest opportunities for improvement remain.

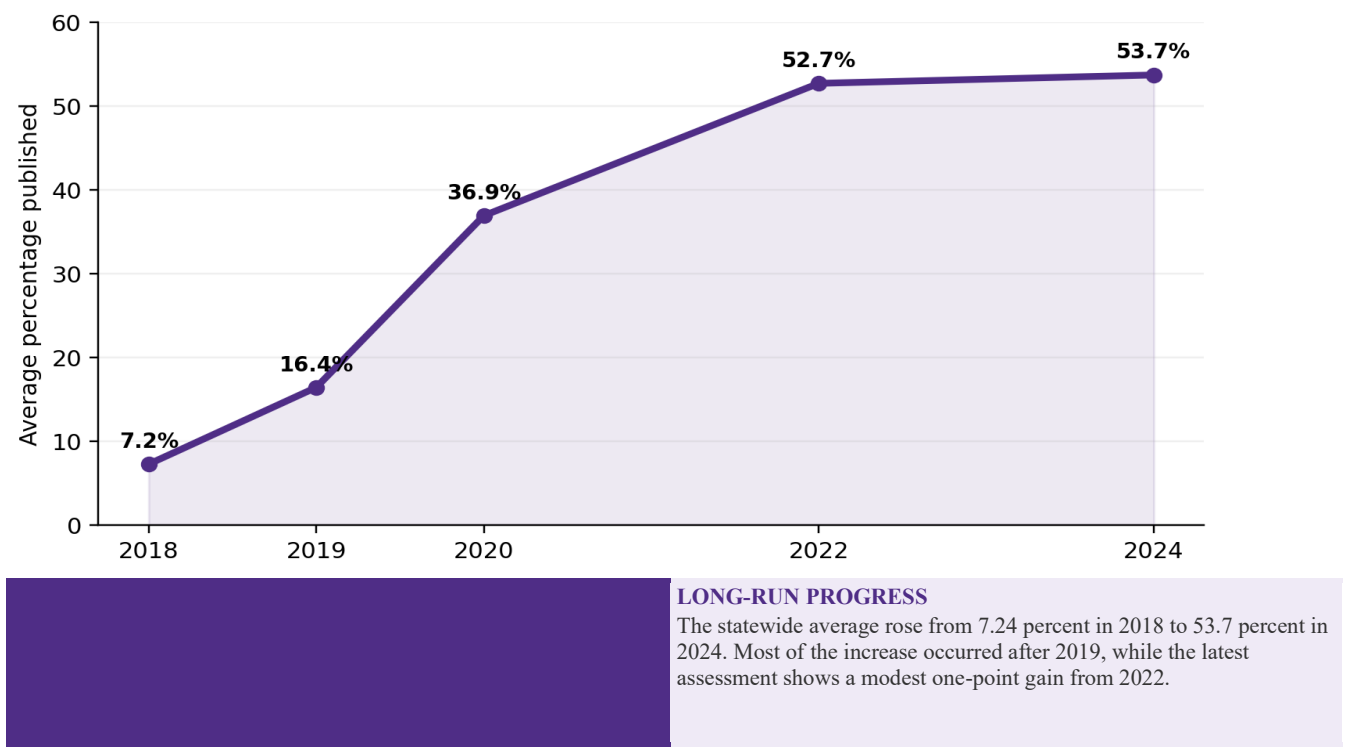
53.7% statewide average	1.000 highest score	6 perfect-score counties	+1.0 points since 2022
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The 53.7 percent statewide average means that counties publish slightly more than half of the fiscal information measured by the index. The gap between the six perfect-score counties and the statewide average shows that complete disclosure is achievable, but far from routine. The one-point increase since 2022 also indicates that recent gains have slowed.

Statewide Fiscal Transparency

Arkansas counties have made substantial long-run progress, although momentum slowed between 2022 and 2024. Fiscal transparency measures whether county residents can readily find information about how public dollars are raised and spent. The index combines the availability of budgets, audits, county fees, property-tax rates, and general sales-tax rates.

FIGURE 9 | Average fiscal transparency, 2018–2024



Fiscal transparency leads the three pillars, but the 53.7 percent average remains far from universal access. Direct links, archives, and clear navigation determine whether information is genuinely usable.

Policy Change That Mattered

Act 564 helped move county budgets and annual financial reports from newspaper-only publication toward online access.

The inaugural Access Arkansas report recommended amending Arkansas Code § 14-21-102 so that county financial information would be available online. The Arkansas General Assembly subsequently enacted Act 564, requiring annual budgets and annual financial reports to be posted on a website maintained by a county, the state, or the Association of Arkansas Counties. The requirement took effect in January 2020.¹¹

2018	2019	2020	2024
ACRE recommendation	Act 564 enacted	Requirement effective	Observed result
Expand publication beyond a one-time newspaper notice.	Online publication requirement established.	Budgets and annual financial reports become available online.	Fiscal transparency remains the strongest statewide pillar.
		ACCESSIBILITY IS MORE THAN COMPLIANCE A budget or audit is useful only when residents can find it. Counties that rely on the Association of Arkansas Counties or Arkansas Legislative Audit should place direct links to those documents on their official websites.	

Why the policy change is important

Act 564 illustrates how a targeted statutory change can strengthen transparency infrastructure across an entire state. It also shows the limits of legal compliance alone: posting location, file format, website organization, and archival practices determine whether information is practically accessible to residents.¹²

MEASUREMENT GUIDE

What the Fiscal Score Measures

The fiscal score combines three dimensions of public financial disclosure.

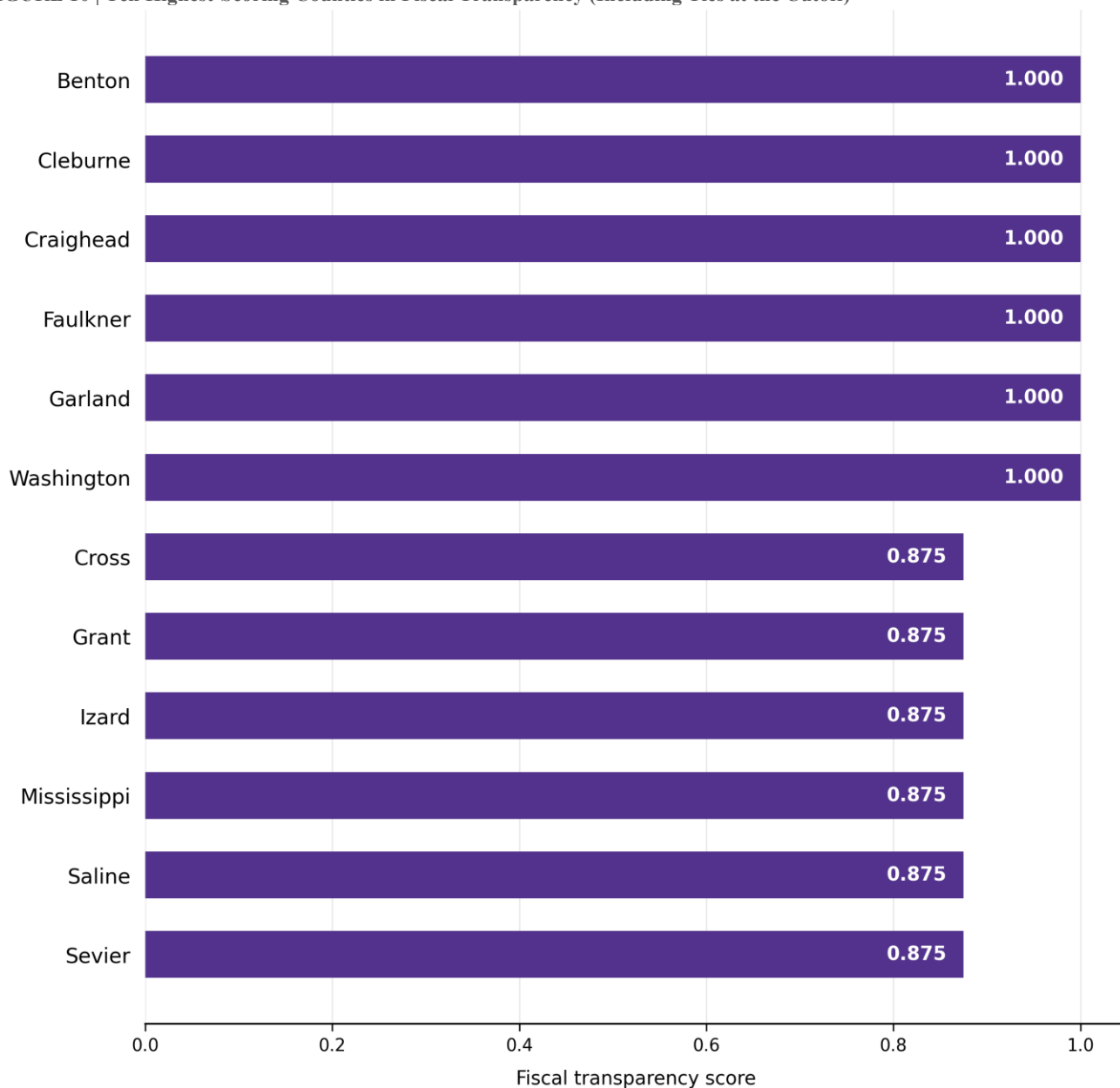
BUDGETS	Current budget and the three preceding budget years.
AUDITS	Current audit and the three preceding audit years.
FEES AND TAXES	County fees and the property-, sales-, vehicle-, and other-tax information included in the index.
READING THE SCORE A score of 1.000 means that a county received full credit across budgets, audits, fees, and taxes. Lower scores identify missing documents, incomplete historical coverage, or information that residents could not locate through a reasonable online search.	

STATEWIDE LEADERS

Six Counties Achieved Perfect Scores

Benton, Cleburne, Craighead, Faulkner, Garland, and Washington Counties each published every fiscal item included in the index.

FIGURE 10 | Ten Highest-Scoring Counties in Fiscal Transparency (Including Ties at the Cutoff)



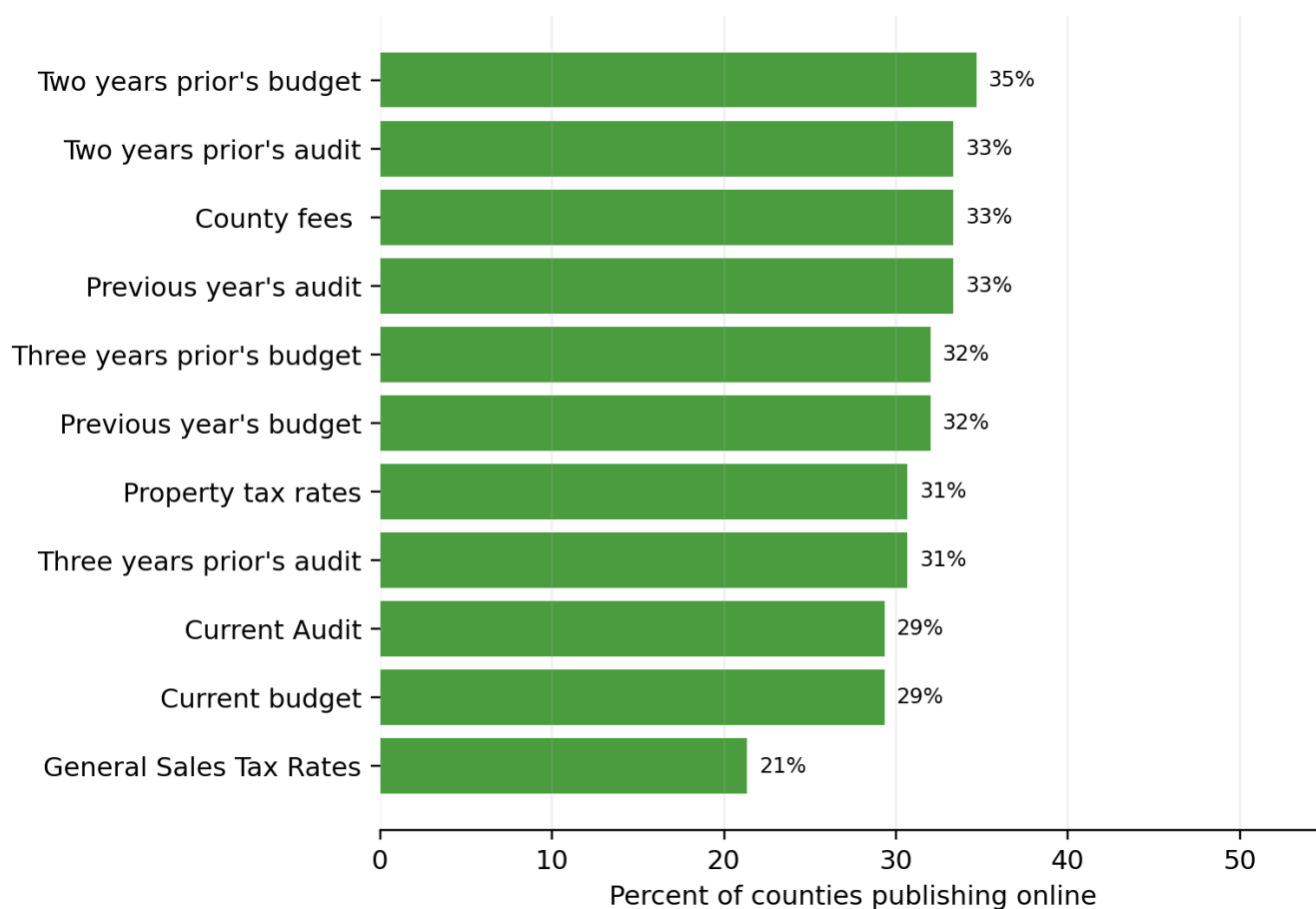
WHAT THE LEADERS SHOW

The leaders demonstrate that complete fiscal transparency depends on both current documents and historical depth. The six perfect-score counties confirm that full publication across budgets, audits, fees, and taxes is achievable. The next tier of counties scored 0.875, showing that even strong performers typically have one remaining publication gap.

Fiscal Information Counties Publish

Publication remains uneven across the eleven fiscal subcomponents included in the index.

FIGURE 11 | Share of counties publishing each fiscal subcomponent, 2024



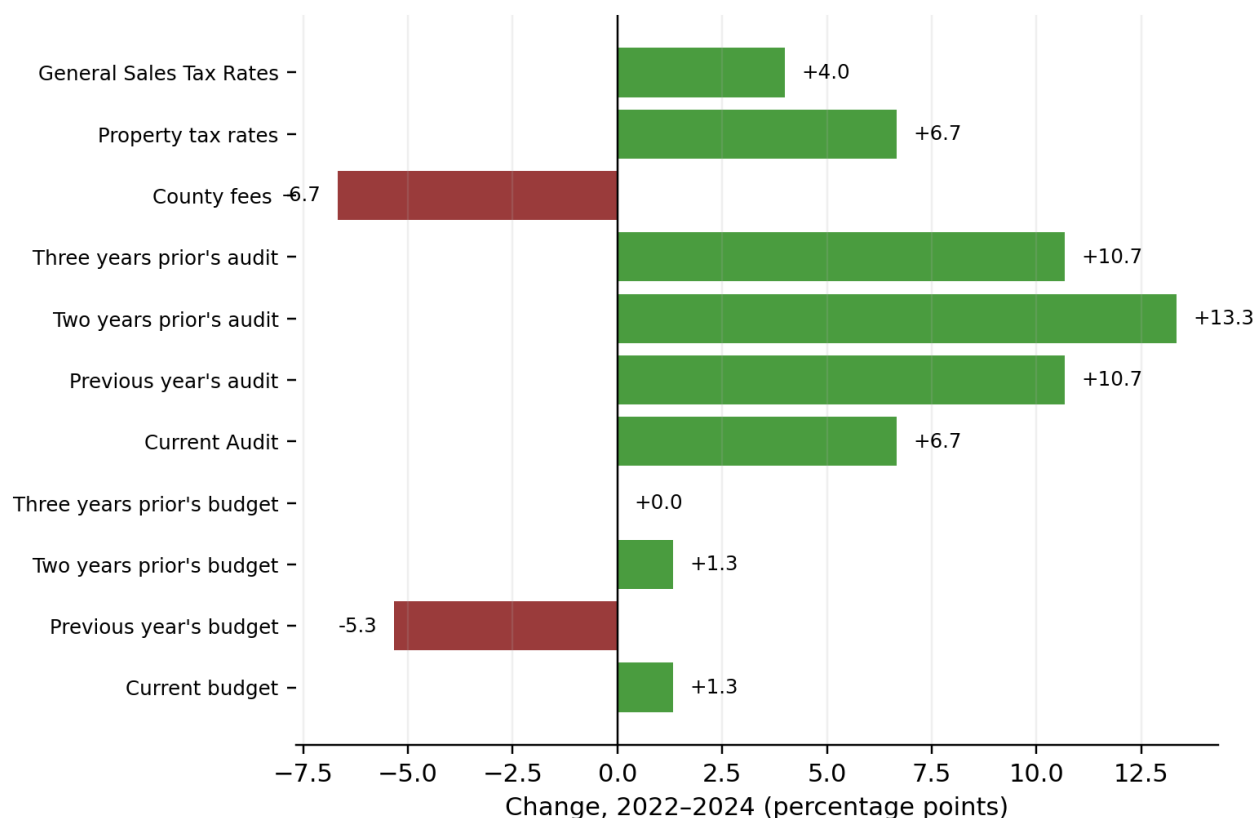
CENTRAL FINDING

No fiscal subcomponent is published by even half of Arkansas counties. The most frequently published items reach only about one-third of counties, while general sales-tax rates are available from just 21 percent.

Where Fiscal Transparency Improved

Most fiscal subcomponents improved between 2022 and 2024, but county-fee publication declined.

FIGURE 12 | Change in fiscal publication rates, 2022–2024



Audits improved most

Current and archived audits recorded the strongest gains.

Tax information expanded

Property-tax and sales-tax publication increased but remains limited.

County fees moved backward

Publication fell from 40 percent to 33 percent—the only decline among the fiscal subcomponents. One possible explanation is discoverability: fee schedules may exist but be difficult to locate when they appear on department-specific pages or use inconsistent labels. A clearly labeled link from the county's main fiscal or services page would make this information easier for residents to find.

Fiscal Disclosure Trends, 2018–2024

The full five-assessment record shows both sustained progress and persistent gaps. The table separates current documents from archived records so recent compliance can be distinguished from sustained public access. Comparing the five assessment years also identifies gains that have persisted rather than appearing in only one review cycle.

TABLE 3 | Fiscal Transparency Subcomponents, 2018–2024

Subcomponent	2018	2019	2020	2022	2024
Current budget	11%	24%	52%	28%	29%
Previous year's budget	12%	20%	55%	37%	32%
Two years prior's budget	9%	13%	47%	33%	35%
Three years prior's budget	8%	12%	16%	32%	32%
Current Audit	0%	8%	45%	23%	29%
Previous year's audit	1%	8%	41%	23%	33%
Two years prior's audit	3%	9%	40%	20%	33%
Three years prior's audit	3%	8%	37%	20%	31%
County fees	29%	48%	48%	40%	33%
Property tax rates	15%	36%	45%	24%	31%
General Sales Tax Rates	5%	11%	12%	17%	21%

Current budgets and current audits were each available from 22 counties in 2024. Publication was somewhat higher for selected archived documents, but direct online access remains limited across the state. The pattern suggests that many counties have established a basic fiscal-publication floor but have not yet built consistent archives.

COUNTY COMPARISON

TABLE 4 | Fiscal Transparency Scores and Rankings by County

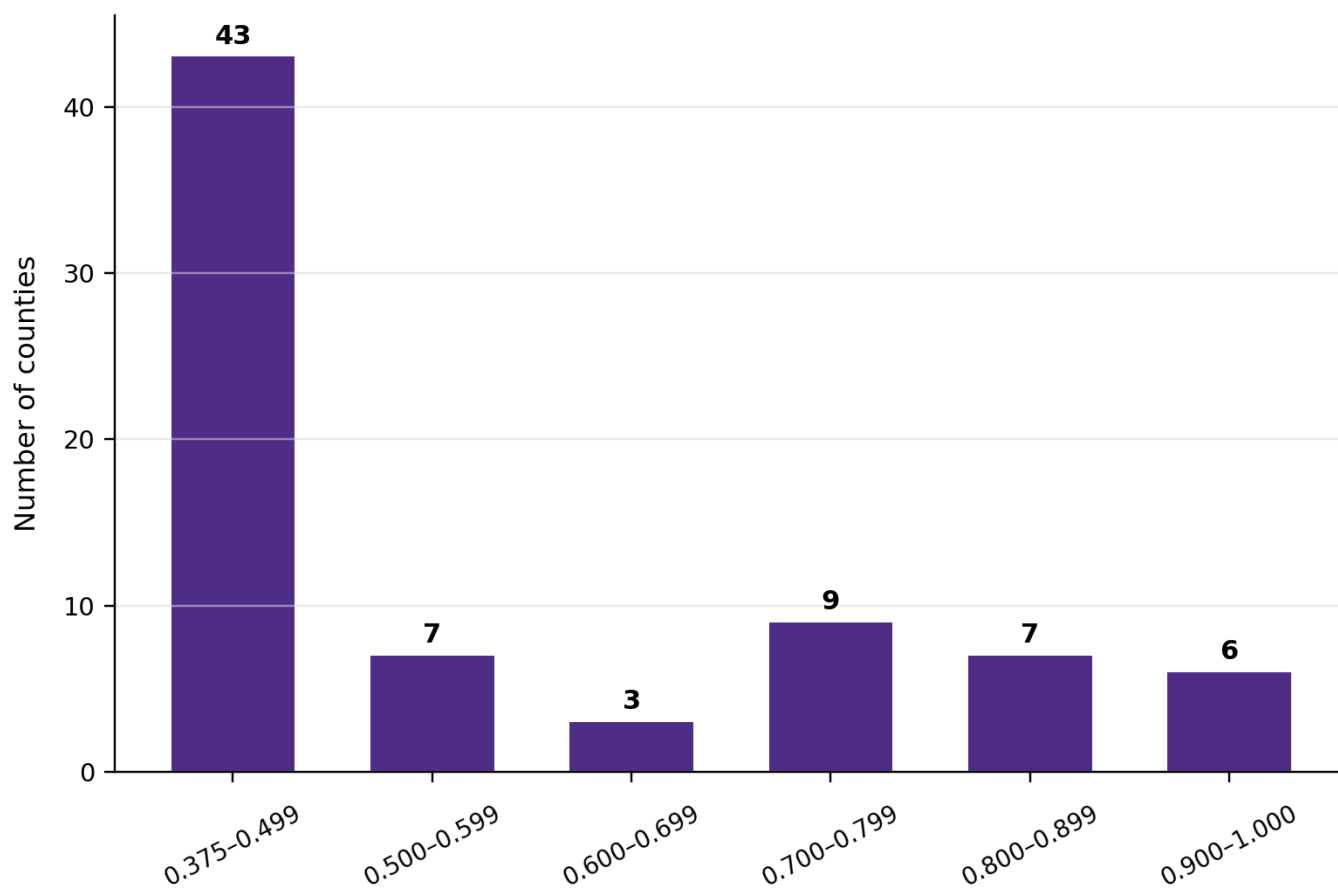
Every county scores at least 0.375 because the Association of Arkansas Counties publishes budgets and financial statements for all 75 counties. Residents may not know those records are available, however, unless their county directs them to the Association's website. A clearly labeled link from the county website to the relevant Association page is sufficient to make the records readily discoverable. Beyond this shared baseline, the compressed score distribution means that modest improvements in archives, fees, or tax information can meaningfully affect relative performance.

Rank	County	Score	Rank	County	Score	Rank	County	Score
1	Benton	1.000	26	Carroll	0.542	33	Little River	0.375
1	Cleburne	1.000	26	Greene	0.542	33	Logan	0.375
1	Craighead	1.000	26	Jackson	0.542	33	Lonoke	0.375
1	Faulkner	1.000	26	Miller	0.542	33	Marion	0.375
1	Garland	1.000	26	Poinsett	0.542	33	Monroe	0.375
1	Washington	1.000	31	Clay	0.500	33	Montgomery	0.375
7	Cross	0.875	31	Conway	0.500	33	Nevada	0.375
7	Grant	0.875	33	Arkansas	0.375	33	Newton	0.375
7	Izard	0.875	33	Bradley	0.375	33	Ouachita	0.375
7	Mississippi	0.875	33	Calhoun	0.375	33	Perry	0.375
7	Saline	0.875	33	Chicot	0.375	33	Phillips	0.375
7	Sevier	0.875	33	Clark	0.375	33	Pike	0.375
13	Sebastian	0.833	33	Crittenden	0.375	33	Polk	0.375
14	Ashley	0.708	33	Dallas	0.375	33	Prairie	0.375
14	Boone	0.708	33	Drew	0.375	33	Pulaski	0.375
14	Cleveland	0.708	33	Franklin	0.375	33	Randolph	0.375
14	Columbia	0.708	33	Hempstead	0.375	33	Scott	0.375
14	Crawford	0.708	33	Hot Spring	0.375	33	Searcy	0.375
14	Desha	0.708	33	Howard	0.375	33	Sharp	0.375
14	Jefferson	0.708	33	Independence	0.375	33	St. Francis	0.375
14	Madison	0.708	33	Johnson	0.375	33	Stone	0.375
14	Union	0.708	33	Lafayette	0.375	33	Van Buren	0.375
23	Baxter	0.667	33	Lawrence	0.375	33	White	0.375
23	Fulton	0.667	33	Lee	0.375	33	Woodruff	0.375
23	Pope	0.667	33	Lincoln	0.375	33	Yell	0.375

Fiscal Scores Are High but Closely Clustered

The minimum score reflects broad compliance with basic fiscal-publication requirements, but many counties do not move beyond that floor.

FIGURE 13 | Distribution of county fiscal transparency scores



A STRIKING CONCENTRATION

43 counties score exactly 0.375, while 6 achieve 1.000. Leading counties maintain a dedicated financial page, archives, tax and fee information, and direct links to external reports.

Practical Steps for Improving Fiscal Transparency

Practical improvements can make fiscal information easier to find, understand, and use.

1**Create one financial-transparency hub**

Place budgets, audits, taxes, fees, and links to external reports on a single clearly labeled page.

2**Publish current documents promptly**

Post the current budget and latest audit as soon as each becomes available.

3**Maintain searchable archives**

Retain at least three prior years of budgets and audits using consistent file names and dates.

4**Link directly to external records**

Provide one-click access to Arkansas Legislative Audit and Association of Arkansas Counties documents.

5**Use accessible formats**

Prefer searchable PDFs or web tables rather than scanned images, and include descriptive link text.

6**Review annually**

Use the Access Arkansas checklist to identify missing items and confirm that links still work.

SECTION SUMMARY

Fiscal Transparency Has Improved, but Gaps Remain

Arkansas has made important progress, but residents still cannot reliably find core financial information in most counties.

53.7%	6	22	22
average published	perfect counties	current budgets online	current audits online

Key takeaways

Fiscal transparency leads the index.	It is the strongest pillar and has improved dramatically since 2018.
Act 564 changed publication.	The law created an online pathway, but direct county-site access remains uneven.
The floor is not the goal.	Many counties cluster at 0.375 while six achieve comprehensive disclosure.
Findability matters.	External publication is not enough without a clear, direct county-website route.
Incremental improvements are practical.	Current documents, working links, and searchable archives can materially improve access.

LOOKING AHEAD

The next chapter examines administrative transparency: access to public records, contracting information, and employment opportunities.

ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSPARENCY

How easily can residents access public records, contracting information, and employment opportunities?

0.272 statewide average	+6.6 percentage-point gain	7 perfect-score counties	28 counties scoring zero
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Administrative transparency captures whether residents can locate the information needed to monitor and interact with county government. The index emphasizes access to public records, government contracting, and county employment information.

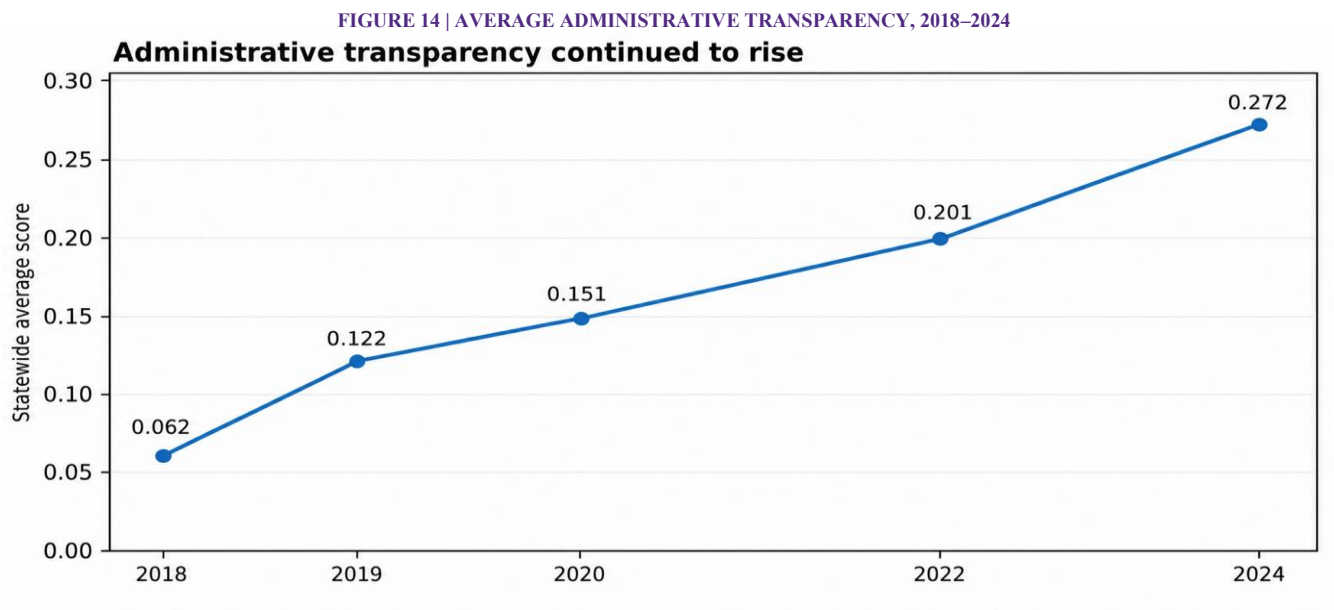
CENTRAL FINDING

Administrative transparency posted the largest improvement of the three pillars between 2022 and 2024, yet it remains the lowest-scoring pillar statewide.

OVERVIEW

Administrative Transparency at a Glance

Progress accelerated in 2024, especially in court-record access, FOIA forms, and employment information.



The statewide administrative transparency average rose from 0.201 in 2022 to 0.272 in 2024. This 7.1 percentage-point gain was larger than the gains recorded in fiscal or political transparency over the same period.

Administrative information helps residents request records, monitor procurement, and compete for county jobs without relying on personal contacts or courthouse visits.

MEASUREMENT GUIDE

What the Administrative Score Measures

The score combines four operational dimensions of county government openness.

PUBLIC RECORDS

Court records, FOIA request forms, a named FOIA contact, and direct contact information.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Current and archived RFPs, bids, winning vendors, and bid outcomes.

BUILDING & ZONING

Permit applications, permit holders, and planning-board notices, agendas, and minutes.

JOBS

Job titles and position descriptions for current openings.

READING THE SCORE

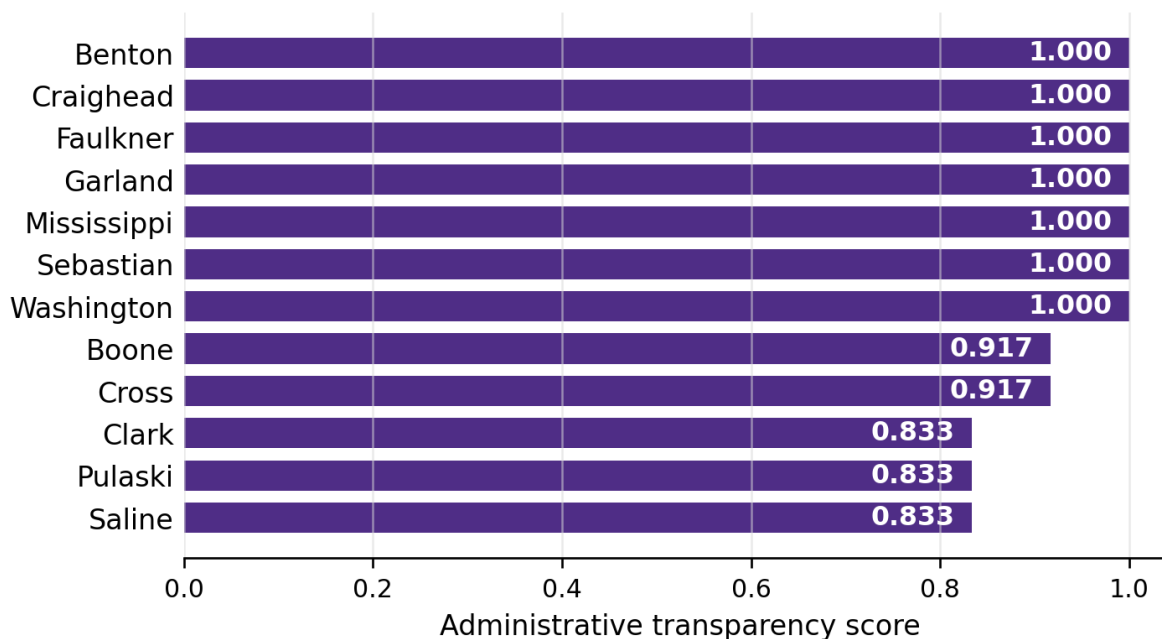
A score of 1.000 means that a county publishes every measured administrative item. A score of 0.000 means none of the measured items were found online during the assessment.

STATEWIDE LEADERS

Seven Counties Achieved Perfect Scores

The top tier demonstrates that comprehensive administrative disclosure is achievable.

FIGURE 15 | Ten Highest-Scoring Counties in Administrative Transparency (Including Ties at the Cutoff)



Benton, Craighead, Faulkner, Garland, Mississippi, Sebastian, and Washington each earned 1.000. Boone and Cross followed at 0.917, while Clark, Pulaski, and Saline earned 0.833.

WHAT LEADERS HAVE IN COMMON

Leading counties make information easy to find across all four dimensions. Their performance reflects both content availability and deliberate website organization.

TABLE 5 | Administrative Transparency Subcomponents, 2018–2024

Number and percentage of counties publishing each item online. The side-by-side years show which administrative practices are becoming routine and which remain uncommon. Counts provide the number of publishing counties, while percentages make the scale of statewide adoption immediately comparable.

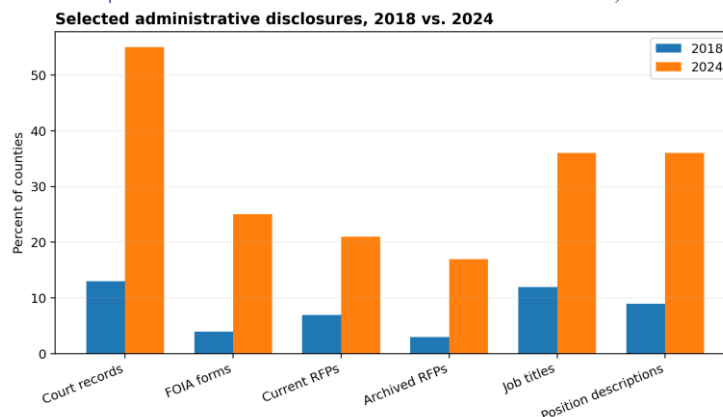
Subcomponent	2018		2019		2020		2022		2024	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Court records	10	13	18	24	23	31	37	49	41	55
FOIA request forms	3	4	6	8	5	7	10	13	19	25
FOIA request contact person	5	7	3	4	7	9	10	13	12	16
FOIA contact information	6	8	4	5	7	9	10	13	12	16
Current RFPs	5	7	7	9	11	15	11	15	16	21
Archived RFPs	2	3	4	5	9	12	9	12	13	17
Current-year bids and winners	1	1	2	3	11	15	11	15	13	17
Archived bids and winners	1	1	3	4	7	9	10	13	11	15
Hiring: job titles	9	12	16	21	19	25	20	27	27	36
Hiring: position descriptions	7	9	13	17	18	24	19	25	27	36

SUBCOMPONENT TRENDS

Administrative Disclosures with the Largest Gains

Court records, FOIA forms, and hiring information registered the clearest long-run gains.

FIGURE 16 | SELECTED ADMINISTRATIVE DISCLOSURES, 2018 VS. 2024



Online court-record access expanded from 10 counties in 2018 to 41 in 2024. FOIA forms rose from 3 counties to 19, while job titles and position descriptions increased to 27 counties each.

PERSISTENT WEAKNESS

Only 12 counties identified a dedicated FOIA contact and provided that person's contact information. Procurement disclosure also remains limited: only 16 counties published current RFPs and 11 archived past bids and winners.

INTERPRETATION

What the Administrative Subcomponents Reveal

1

Access is expanding

CourtConnect links, downloadable FOIA forms, and employment pages are becoming more common across county websites.

2

The request process is still unclear

Most counties do not identify a responsible FOIA contact, forcing residents to search for the correct office or staff member.

3

Procurement remains the weakest frontier

Few counties provide current solicitations together with searchable archives of bids and awards.

POLICY IMPLICATION

The next statewide gains can come from relatively low-cost actions: naming a FOIA contact, posting a standard form, and maintaining procurement archives.

COUNTY COMPARISON

TABLE 6 | Administrative Transparency Scores and Rankings by County

Scores are reported on a 0.000-to-1.000 scale; ties receive the same rank. The table allows readers to compare each county's administrative performance against the statewide range. Counties with the same score share a rank, so clusters reveal common levels of publication rather than minor numerical distinctions.

Rank	County	Score	Rank	County	Score	Rank	County	Score
1	Benton	1.000	26	Carroll	0.333	48	Crawford	0.000
1	Craighead	1.000	27	Searcy	0.333	48	Dallas	0.000
1	Faulkner	1.000	28	Sevier	0.333	48	Desha	0.000
1	Garland	1.000	29	Stone	0.333	48	Drew	0.000
1	Mississippi	1.000	30	Grant	0.167	48	Franklin	0.000
1	Sebastian	1.000	30	Pope	0.167	48	Hot Spring	0.000
1	Washington	1.000	30	St. Francis	0.167	48	Howard	0.000
8	Boone	0.917	33	Ashley	0.083	48	Independence	0.000
8	Cross	0.917	33	Calhoun	0.083	48	Izard	0.000
10	Clark	0.833	33	Chicot	0.083	48	Johnson	0.000
10	Pulaski	0.833	33	Conway	0.083	48	Lafayette	0.000
10	Saline	0.833	33	Fulton	0.083	48	Lee	0.000
13	Miller	0.667	33	Jackson	0.083	48	Logan	0.000
14	Bradley	0.583	33	Lawrence	0.083	48	Monroe	0.000
15	Clay	0.500	33	Lincoln	0.083	48	Montgomery	0.000
15	Greene	0.500	33	Little River	0.083	48	Nevada	0.000
17	Baxter	0.417	33	Lonoke	0.083	48	Newton	0.000
17	Cleburne	0.417	33	Sharp	0.083	48	Ouachita	0.000
17	Crittenden	0.417	33	Union	0.083	48	Perry	0.000
17	Hempstead	0.417	33	Van Buren	0.083	48	Phillips	0.000
17	Jefferson	0.417	33	Woodruff	0.083	48	Pike	0.000
17	Madison	0.417	33	Yell	0.083	48	Poinsett	0.000
17	Marion	0.417	48	Arkansas	0.000	48	Polk	0.000
17	Randolph	0.417	48	Cleveland	0.000	48	Prairie	0.000
17	White	0.417	48	Columbia	0.000	48	Scott	0.000

The ranking confirms that strong administrative transparency requires coverage across several service areas, not merely a public-records page. The middle and lower portions of the table also show substantial room for gains in procurement, permitting, zoning, and employment information.

ACTION AGENDA

Practical Steps for Improving Administrative Transparency

Administrative transparency can improve quickly when counties prioritize a small number of high-value disclosures.

1	Create a dedicated FOIA page Name the responsible contact, provide direct contact information, and post a downloadable request form.
2	Link residents to court records Provide a prominent CourtConnect link and explain what records are available.
3	Publish procurement from notice to award Post current RFPs, bids, winning vendors, and contract awards in one location.
4	Maintain searchable archives Keep prior RFPs and bid results available by year and project.
5	Keep hiring information current Post job titles, position descriptions, deadlines, and application instructions.
6	Organize permits and planning materials Provide forms, permit-holder information, notices, agendas, and minutes through a consistent navigation structure.

SECTION SUMMARY

Administrative Transparency Is Moving in the Right Direction

The 2024 assessment documents meaningful progress, but also a large unfinished agenda.

Largest pillar gain The statewide average increased from 0.206 to 0.272.	Clear leaders Seven counties published every measured administrative item.
Public-record progress Court-record links and FOIA forms expanded substantially.	Procurement gap Current and archived contracting information remains uncommon.
Uneven access Twenty-eight counties still scored zero.	

LOOKING AHEAD

The next section examines political transparency: quorum-court meetings, elected officials' contact information and duties, and disclosure of salaries and potential conflicts of interest.

POLITICAL TRANSPARENCY

How easily can residents follow public decisions, contact elected officials, and review quorum-court activity?

0.451	+1.1	10	31
statewide average	percentage-point gain	counties tied for first	counties scoring at least 0.500

Political transparency measures the online availability of quorum-court information, elected officials’ contact information and duties, and disclosures involving salaries and potential conflicts of interest.

CENTRAL FINDING

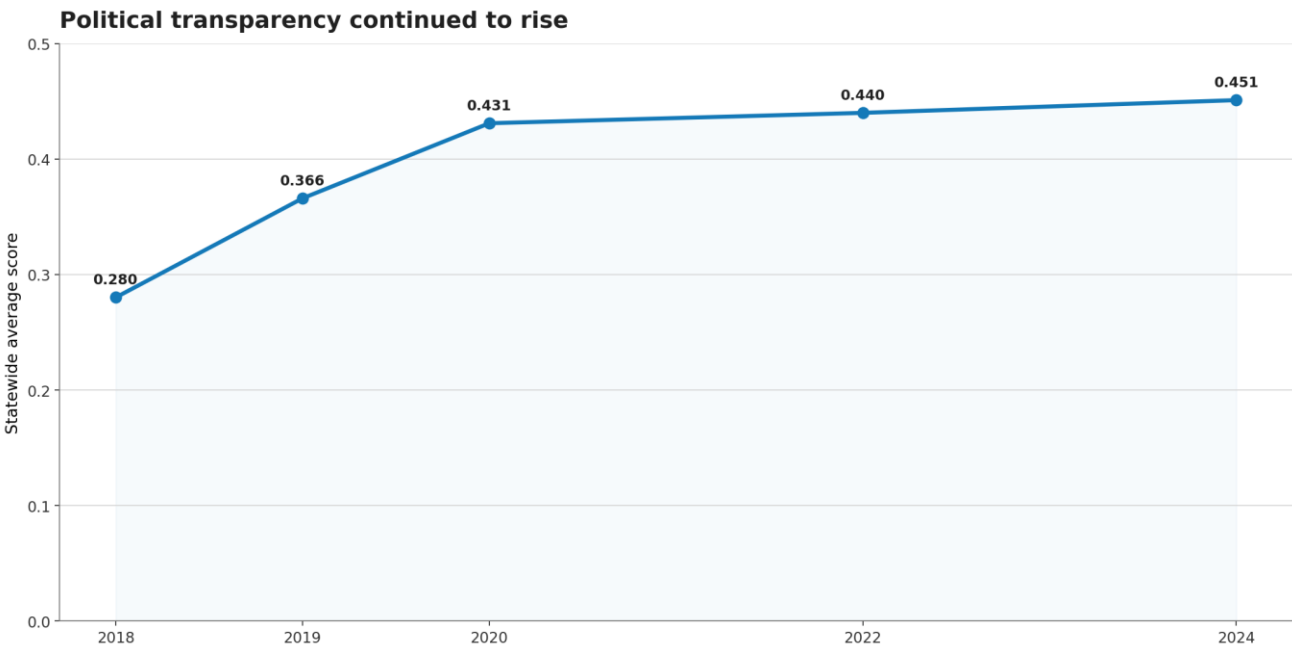
Political transparency remains the second-strongest pillar statewide. Every county earned a score above zero, but meeting records and accountability disclosures remain incomplete.

OVERVIEW

Political Transparency at a Glance

Progress was modest overall, with meaningful gains in archived meeting videos and salary publication.

FIGURE 17 | AVERAGE POLITICAL TRANSPARENCY, 2018–2024



The statewide political transparency average rose from 0.280 in 2018 to 0.451 in 2024. Most of the long-run improvement occurred by 2020; the increase from 0.440 in 2022 to 0.451 in 2024 was a more modest 1.1 percentage-point gain. Political transparency continues to outperform administrative transparency but remains below fiscal transparency.

WHY IT MATTERS | Residents need clear access to meeting schedules, agendas, minutes, elected officials, and accountability disclosures to follow how county decisions are made.

MEASUREMENT GUIDE

What the Political Score Measures

The score combines public access to meetings, officials, disclosures, and salaries.

QUORUM COURT INFORMATION

Meeting time and place, agendas, minutes, and archived meeting videos.

ACCOUNTABILITY DISCLOSURES

Financial disclosure and conflict-of-interest statements.

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Names, office phone numbers, email addresses, office locations, and job descriptions.

SALARIES

Online publication of elected officials' compensation.

READING THE SCORE

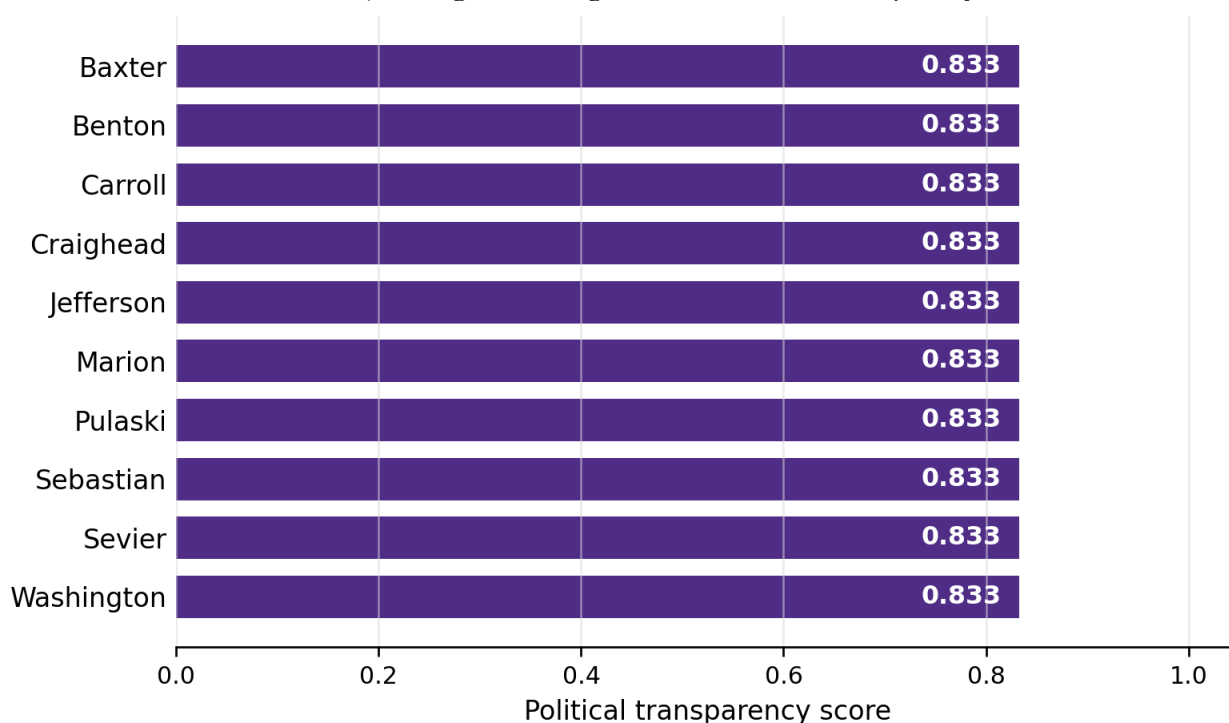
A score of 1.000 means that a county publishes every measured political item. The highest 2024 score was 0.833; no county published all measured items.

STATEWIDE LEADERS

Ten Counties Tied for the Highest Score

Each leading county earned 0.833, showing strong breadth without complete disclosure.

FIGURE 18 | Ten Highest-Scoring Counties in Political Transparency



Baxter, Benton, Carroll, Craighead, Jefferson, Marion, Pulaski, Sebastian, Sevier, and Washington counties share the top position. Their identical scores show that the current statewide ceiling is broad access across most—but not all—political indicators.

WHAT LEADERS HAVE IN COMMON

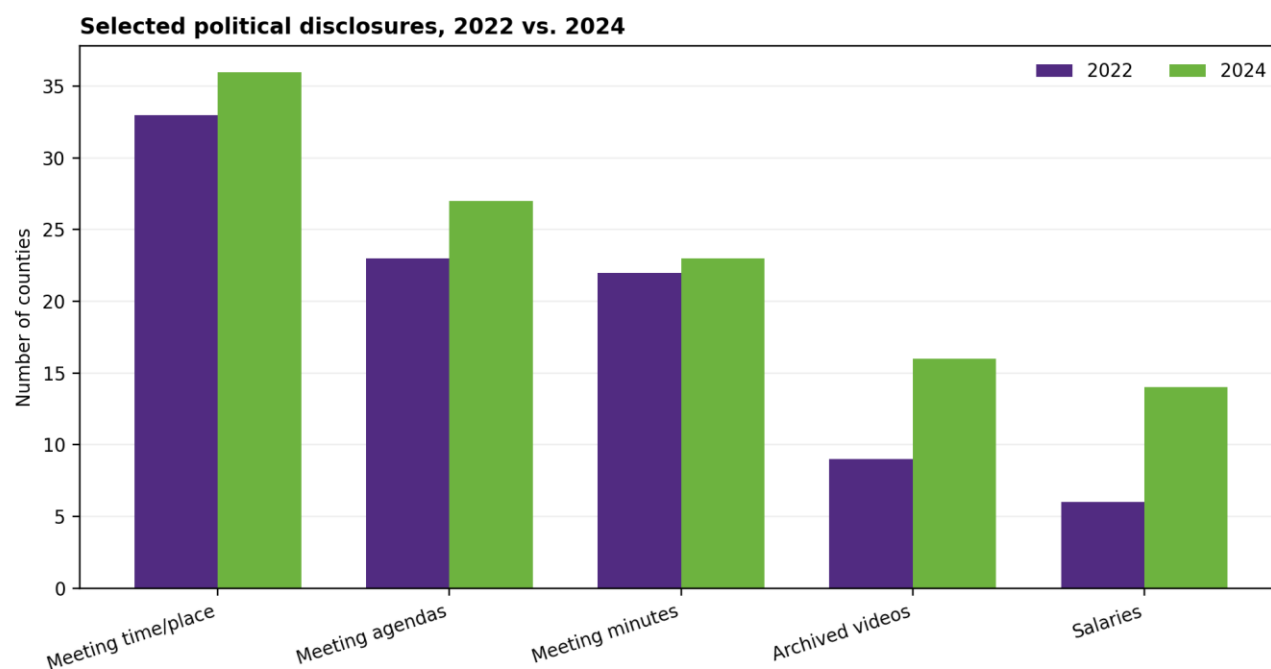
Leading counties make elected officials easy to identify and contact while also publishing multiple forms of quorum-court meeting information.

SUBCOMPONENT TRENDS

Political Disclosures with the Largest Gains

Archived meeting videos and salary disclosure posted the clearest gains since 2022.

FIGURE 19 | SELECTED POLITICAL DISCLOSURES, 2022 VS. 2024



Archived meeting videos increased from 9 counties in 2022 to 16 in 2024. Salary publication more than doubled, rising from 6 counties to 14. Meeting agendas also improved, while minutes changed little.

PERSISTENT WEAKNESS

No county published financial disclosure and conflict-of-interest statements. This remains the clearest statewide accountability gap in the political pillar.

TABLE 7 | Political Transparency Subcomponents, 2018–2024

Number and percentage of counties publishing each item online. The time series distinguishes disclosures that are broadly adopted from those that remain exceptional. Examining counts and percentages together also makes modest numerical changes easier to interpret in statewide terms.

Subcomponent	2018		2019		2020		2022		2024	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Quorum Courts: meeting time and place	18	24	36	48	39	52	33	44	36	48
Quorum Courts: meeting agendas	12	16	23	31	24	32	23	31	27	36
Quorum Courts: meeting minutes	11	15	21	28	21	28	22	29	23	31
Quorum Courts: archived videos	4	5	7	9	9	12	9	12	16	21
Elected officials: names	61	81	61	82	75	100	73	97	75	100
Elected officials: office phone	60	80	61	82	75	100	73	97	75	100
Elected officials: email	42	55	51	68	61	82	68	91	51	68
Elected officials: office location	52	69	48	64	66	88	64	85	75	100
Elected officials: job description	33	44	52	70	57	76	69	92	49	65
Financial disclosure and conflict-of-interest statements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Salaries	1	1	1	1	2	3	6	8	14	19

INTERPRETATION

What the Political Subcomponents Reveal

1

Meeting access remains incomplete

Only 19 counties publish the meeting time and place together with agendas and minutes—information residents need to follow deliberations.

2

Basic official information is nearly universal

All 75 counties publish elected officials' names, office phone numbers, and office locations.

3

Digital contact and role clarity weakened

Email availability fell to 68 percent and job descriptions to 65 percent, leaving residents with uneven ways to understand and contact offices.

4

Accountability disclosures remain the largest gap

No county publishes financial disclosure and conflict-of-interest statements; only 14 publish salaries.

POLICY IMPLICATION

The next gains require more than contact directories. Counties should publish complete meeting packets, preserve archives, and add routine accountability disclosures.

COUNTY COMPARISON

TABLE 8 | Political Transparency Scores and Rankings by County

Scores are reported on a 0.000–1.000 scale; ties receive the same rank. The ranking summarizes how consistently counties publish meeting information, official contacts, accountability disclosures, and salaries. Shared ranks identify groups of counties with comparable political-transparency coverage.

Rank	County	Score	Rank	County	Score	Rank	County	Score
1	Baxter	0.833	26	Greene	0.556	49	Desha	0.267
1	Benton	0.833	26	Izard	0.556	49	Howard	0.267
1	Carroll	0.833	26	Logan	0.556	49	Lee	0.267
1	Craighead	0.833	26	Madison	0.556	54	Lincoln	0.257
1	Jefferson	0.833	26	Miller	0.556	54	Ouachita	0.257
1	Marion	0.833	26	Pope	0.556	54	Perry	0.257
1	Pulaski	0.833	32	Conway	0.444	57	Bradley	0.200
1	Sebastian	0.833	32	Cross	0.444	57	Calhoun	0.200
1	Sevier	0.833	32	Drew	0.444	57	Chicot	0.200
1	Washington	0.833	32	Hot Spring	0.444	57	Cleveland	0.200
11	Boone	0.722	32	Stone	0.444	57	Franklin	0.200
11	Crawford	0.722	32	White	0.444	57	Lafayette	0.200
11	Crittenden	0.722	38	Ashley	0.333	57	Lonoke	0.200
14	Clark	0.667	38	Clay	0.333	57	Monroe	0.200
14	Columbia	0.667	38	Hempstead	0.333	57	Montgomery	0.200
14	Faulkner	0.667	38	Independence	0.333	57	Newton	0.200
14	Fulton	0.667	38	Jackson	0.333	57	Phillips	0.200
14	Garland	0.667	38	Johnson	0.333	57	Randolph	0.200
14	Grant	0.667	38	Pike	0.333	57	Searcy	0.200
14	Lawrence	0.667	38	Union	0.333	57	Sharp	0.200
14	Saline	0.667	38	Yell	0.333	57	St. Francis	0.200
14	Scott	0.667	47	Nevada	0.311	57	Van Buren	0.200
23	Mississippi	0.648	48	Poinsett	0.295	57	Woodruff	0.200
24	Little River	0.611	49	Arkansas	0.267	74	Polk	0.190
25	Cleburne	0.600	49	Dallas	0.267	75	Prairie	0.189

The leaders demonstrate that high political transparency depends on both access to quorum-court records and complete information about elected officials. Lower-ranked counties can often improve quickly by consolidating meeting materials and standardizing official disclosures.

ACTION AGENDA

Practical Steps for Improving Political Transparency

Political transparency can improve quickly when counties organize meeting information and standardize elected-official disclosures.

1

Create a quorum-court hub

Post meeting dates, locations, agendas, minutes, and video links in one predictable location.

2

Publish packets before meetings

Provide agendas and supporting materials early enough for residents to review them.

3

Maintain a searchable archive

Keep prior agendas, minutes, and videos organized by year and meeting date.

4

Standardize elected-official profiles

Include every official's name, phone, email, office location, and a plain-language description of duties.

5

Publish compensation information

Provide current elected-official salaries in a clearly labeled, accessible format.

6

Add accountability disclosures

Publish financial disclosure and conflict-of-interest statements and identify the responsible filing office.

SECTION SUMMARY

Political Transparency Shows Broad Access—but Uneven Accountability

Every county publishes some political information, but complete meeting and disclosure practices remain uncommon.

Modest statewide gain

The average rose from 0.440 to 0.451.

Shared leadership

Ten counties tied for first with a score of 0.833.

Universal basic access

All counties publish officials' names, office phone numbers, and office locations.

Persistent accountability gap

No county publishes financial disclosure and conflict-of-interest statements.

LOOKING AHEAD

The next chapter brings the three transparency pillars together and translates the evidence into report-wide recommendations for county governments and state policymakers.

WHAT COUNTIES CAN DO NEXT

A practical roadmap for turning the assessment into sustained, measurable improvements in public access.

4	90	1	Annual
implementation stages	days to establish the basics	transparency hub	review cycle

The Access Arkansas assessment is intended to encourage continuous improvement. County leaders do not need to rebuild every website at once. They can begin with high-value disclosures, organize them in one predictable location, and establish a routine for keeping them current.

CENTRAL MESSAGE

Transparency improves when publishing public information becomes a normal operating responsibility—not a one-time website project.

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Four Stages of Continuous Improvement

Counties can sequence improvements according to urgency, staff capacity, and the value of the information to residents.

Priority	Recommended action	Expected benefit
Immediate	Provide a link to the Association of Arkansas Counties where residents can access current budgets, audits, and financial reports.	Improves fiscal transparency and gives residents a clear view of county finances.
Short term	Post meeting calendars, agendas, approved minutes, elected-official profiles, and a dedicated FOIA page.	Strengthens political participation and makes routine public access easier.
Medium term	Use consistent menus, plain-language labels, and searchable archives across departments.	Reduces search costs and keeps information usable over time.
Every year	Review the county website against the Access Arkansas Index and document corrections.	Creates a repeatable benchmark for continuous improvement.

The sequence begins with information that counties already create—budgets, audits, meeting materials, official directories, and procurement records. The central task is to publish these materials consistently and make them easy to locate.

START WITH ACCESS, THEN IMPROVE USABILITY

A complete document that residents can find today is more valuable than an elaborate redesign that delays publication.

90-DAY ACTION PLAN

Build the Foundation in Three Months

A short implementation cycle can create visible progress while establishing long-term ownership.

1

Days 1–30: Inventory

List every indexed item, its current web location, responsible office, update frequency, and whether the link works.

2

Days 1–30: Assign ownership

Name one staff owner and one backup for each disclosure category; establish a simple escalation path for missing documents.

3

Days 31–60: Consolidate

Create a single transparency landing page linking finance, meetings, elected officials, public records, procurement, jobs, and planning materials.

4

Days 31–60: Fill priority gaps

Publish current budgets and audits, meeting agendas and minutes, a FOIA contact and form, and current procurement notices.

5

Days 61–90: Build archives

Organize prior documents by year, use consistent file names, and keep permanent links whenever possible.

6

Days 61–90: Test and verify

Ask someone unfamiliar with county operations to locate key documents; repair broken links and unclear labels.

90-DAY DELIVERABLE

A functioning transparency hub, named content owners, current high-value documents, basic archives, and a documented review schedule.

ACTION MATRIX

Priority Actions Across the Three Pillars

Each pillar has a small set of disclosures that can materially improve residents' access.

Pillar	Highest-value content	Recommended publishing practice
Fiscal	Current budget; annual audit; monthly or quarterly financial reports; property-tax and sales-tax rates; fees.	Publish current files first, then add year-by-year archives.
Administrative	Court-records link; FOIA form and named contact; current RFPs; bids and winners; jobs; permits and planning-board materials.	Show the full public process—from notice and request through decision or award.
Political	Meeting calendar and location; agendas; approved minutes; recordings; complete official profiles; salaries; legally available disclosure records.	Keep meeting materials together and standardize every official's profile.

Counties should prioritize completeness within each topic. For example, a procurement page is most useful when it connects current solicitations, submitted bids, winning vendors, and archived awards rather than scattering them across unrelated pages.¹³

PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE

Publish information where residents expect to find it, and link to it from a single countywide transparency page.

WEBSITE ORGANIZATION

Build One Clear Transparency Hub

A predictable information architecture is the bridge between publication and actual public access.

Recommended section	Contents
County finances	Budgets • audits • financial reports • tax rates • fees
Quorum court	Calendar • meeting notices • agendas • minutes • videos
Elected officials	Names • duties • phone • email • office location • salaries • disclosures
Public records	FOIA instructions • form • named contact • CourtConnect link
Purchasing and contracts	Current RFPs • bids • winners • contracts • archives
Jobs, permits, and planning	Open positions • applications • permits • notices • board materials

Use plain-language labels in the main navigation, not department-specific jargon. Every document should have a descriptive title, publication or meeting date, responsible office, and an accessible file format. Archives should use the same categories as current materials.

SEARCH IS A SUPPLEMENT—NOT THE STRUCTURE

A search bar helps, but residents should be able to reach the most important information through menus and topic pages without guessing keywords.

OPERATING MODEL

Make Transparency a Routine Responsibility

Clear ownership, publishing standards, and review dates keep a strong website from becoming outdated.

Role	Core responsibility	Review point
Content owner	Supplies approved documents and confirms accuracy.	At creation or approval
Web publisher	Posts files using standard labels and locations.	Within the county's target timeframe
Department head	Confirms that required items are complete.	Monthly or quarterly
Countywide coordinator	Checks links, archives, accessibility, and cross-department consistency.	Quarterly
County judge / quorum court	Reviews performance and unresolved gaps.	Annually

A lightweight publishing standard should define file names, folder structure, approval status, update deadlines, accessibility expectations, retention periods, and backup responsibilities. The standard should apply even when information is hosted on Arkansas.gov or another external platform.

CONTINUITY SAFEGUARD

Assign a backup owner for every transparency category so publication does not stop during staff turnover, leave, or elections.

POLICY AGENDA

How the State Can Support County Progress

State policy can reinforce local improvements through clear minimum expectations, shared tools, and implementation support.

1

Set minimum online disclosure standards

Establish a consistent baseline for county financial reports, meeting notices and records, procurement information, and public compensation data.

2

Provide a shared publishing platform

Offer counties—especially those without stand-alone websites—a standard structure for transparency pages and archives.

3

Standardize meeting publication

Create consistent expectations for posting regular, special, and emergency meeting information online.

4

Strengthen procurement disclosure

Require current and archived RFPs, bids, winning vendors, and awards to be available online.

5

Support implementation and accessibility

Provide templates, training, technical assistance, and accessibility guidance rather than relying only on mandates.

6

Track progress publicly

Use a statewide dashboard or recurring assessment to identify gains and persistent gaps.

IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLE

Statewide consistency should make compliance easier for counties and information easier for residents to recognize and use.

ANNUAL REVIEW

Use the Index as a Management Tool

A recurring self-assessment turns the Access Arkansas Index into an operational checklist—not merely a ranking.

Step	Annual review task
1. Score	Review every index item and record whether it is online, current, and easy to locate.
2. Verify	Open every link, test downloads, and check pages on desktop and mobile devices.
3. Correct	Repair broken links, publish missing current-year files, and replace unclear labels.
4. Compare	Review the prior year's score and identify which improvements changed access most.
5. Report	Share results with county leadership and publish a short improvement summary.
6. Plan	Assign next-year priorities, owners, deadlines, and required support.

The annual review should occur on a predictable date and produce a short internal action plan. Counties can also compare themselves with peers of similar population or income to identify achievable practices and practical models.

MEASURE PROGRESS, NOT JUST POSITION

A county can make meaningful gains even if its rank changes little. Track documents published, broken links corrected, archives completed, and high-value gaps closed.

CONCLUSION

Transparency Is Infrastructure for Good Governance

Public information is most valuable when it is complete, current, understandable, and available before residents have to request it.

40%

average overall transparency

41

counties improved

3

pillars of public access

75

counties benchmarked

The 2024 assessment documents progress across fiscal, administrative, and political transparency, but it also shows that important information remains difficult to locate or absent from county websites. On average, counties publish about 40 percent of the information included in the Access Arkansas Index.

The path forward is practical: publish the information counties already produce, organize it around residents' needs, assign responsibility for keeping it current, and review performance each year. These steps can strengthen accountability, reduce routine information-request costs, and make participation in county government easier.¹⁴

FINAL TAKEAWAY

The information already exists. Making it consistently accessible gives residents a stronger voice and gives county leaders a durable framework for earning public trust.

The Access Arkansas Index provides a measuring tape for good governance. Used annually, it can help counties document improvement, identify remaining gaps, and build more transparent local government.

Methods, Coding, and Scoring

How the Access Arkansas Index translates online public information into comparable county transparency scores.

75	32	3	0–1
counties assessed	indexed subcomponents	transparency pillars	standard score scale

This appendix documents the index structure, data-collection procedure, coding rules, component formulas, quality-control process, and a worked calculation for Craighead County. Its purpose is to make the assessment transparent, reproducible, and useful for future benchmarking.

METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

The index measures whether important public information can be found online—not the quality of county policy or the performance of individual officials.

INDEX ARCHITECTURE

TABLE 9 | From Public Information to an Overall Score

The index combines three equally important transparency pillars and a smaller website-usability measure.¹⁵ The structure prevents strength in one pillar from fully offsetting missing information in another. It also gives counties a clear path from individual publication decisions to the final statewide score.

Index element	What it captures	Maximum
Fiscal transparency	Budgets, audits, fees, and tax rates	1.000
Administrative transparency	Public records, permits and zoning, contracts, bids, and jobs	1.000
Political transparency	Quorum-court records, elected-official information, salaries, and disclosures	1.000
Working search bar	A functioning site search that returns relevant results	0.500

Each transparency pillar is calculated from component scores. The final overall score is the sum of the three pillar scores and the search-bar score divided by the maximum possible total of 3.5.

OVERALL FORMULA

Overall transparency = (Fiscal + Administrative + Political + Search) ÷ 3.5

Scores range from 0.000 to 1.000. A higher score indicates that a larger share of the indexed information was available online during the assessment period.

DATA COLLECTION

A Consistent Search Protocol

Researchers follow the same sequence for every county, so scores reflect comparable online searches.

1	Locate the official web presence Search the county name and verify the county's stand-alone website or Arkansas.gov page.
2	Search by pillar Review fiscal, political, and administrative information separately using the index checklist.
3	Follow visible navigation Use menus, department pages, document links, and the county's search function as a resident would.
4	Record the evidence Save the relevant URL and note the document, page, or directory where each item appears.
5	Code each item Assign the appropriate binary or fractional value under the published coding rules.
6	Submit for review Flag uncertain cases and broken links for quality-control review before scores are finalized.
7	Send preliminary findings to counties Invite county officials to verify the recorded findings and provide links to information researchers may have missed.
8	Reconcile responses and finalize scores Review the submitted evidence, adjust scores where warranted, and finalize the statewide assessment.

Search time is itself informative: content that exists but cannot be located through reasonable navigation provides less practical access. Researchers therefore use a structured search rather than unlimited investigation.

USER-CENTERED STANDARD

The assessment asks whether a reasonably capable resident can locate the information online—not whether an expert can eventually discover it through institutional knowledge.

CODING AND VERIFICATION

Rules That Support Comparability

The scoring system favors simple, auditable decisions while allowing limited fractional coding where coverage varies across officials.

Coding condition	Decision rule	Value
Available online	The current item or a clearly labeled archive is accessible through the county's public web presence.	1.000
Not found	The item is absent, inaccessible, behind a broken link, or cannot be located through the protocol.	0.000
Partial official coverage	For elected-official fields, only some of the eight required officeholders have the information online.	Fraction with eight as denominator
Working search	The site search returns a relevant result for the test term.	0.500
Nonworking or absent search	No search is present or the search returns no relevant result.	0.000

After the internal review, preliminary findings are sent to each county for verification. Researchers evaluate any additional links or documentation supplied by county officials, adjust scores when the evidence warrants a change, and finalize the assessment only after this reconciliation is complete.

QUALITY-CONTROL RULE

A score changes only when supporting public evidence can be verified online. Explanations without an accessible link do not substitute for publication.

COMPONENT DICTIONARIES

TABLE 10A | Fiscal Components and Definitions

Operational definitions for budgets, audits, fees, and taxes. The fiscal dictionary distinguishes simple document availability from the depth of a county's online archive. These definitions ensure that the same evidence threshold is applied to every county.

Component	Subcomponent	Operational definition
Budget	Current budget	Current fiscal plan and appropriations
Budget	Previous three years	Prior annual budgets, scored as an archive average
Audit	Current audit	Most recent available certified financial statements
Audit	Previous three years	Prior certified audits, scored as an archive average
Fees and taxes	County fees	Payments required for county services
Fees and taxes	Property-tax rates	Rates assessed on real property
Fees and taxes	General sales-tax rates	Countywide tax on taxable sales
Fees and taxes	Special sales-tax rates	Tax dedicated to a specific purpose
Fees and taxes	Single fees-and-taxes page	Consolidated presentation of county levies

Budget and audit scores balance current-year availability with the depth of prior-year archives. Fees and taxes are averaged across five equally weighted subcomponents.

FISCAL DESIGN CHOICE

Current information and historical access both matter: residents need today's financial plan and enough prior records to examine change over time.

TABLE 10B | Administrative Components and Definitions

Operational definitions for public records, permitting, procurement, and employment. Each definition identifies the public-facing evidence required for credit rather than assuming that an internal county process is sufficient. The categories cover both routine resident services and higher-value procurement and employment disclosures.

Component	Subcomponent	Operational definition
Public records	Court records	Direct link to CourtConnect or the relevant public court-record system
Public records	FOIA request form	Downloadable or online request form
Public records	Named FOIA contact	Person or office responsible for public-record requests
Public records	FOIA contact information	Direct phone, email, or mailing details
Permits and zoning	Permit applications	Downloadable or online application materials
Permits and zoning	Permit holders	Public list or searchable permit records
Permits and zoning	Planning-board notices	Meeting date, time, and location
Permits and zoning	Planning-board agenda	Items scheduled for discussion
Permits and zoning	Planning-board minutes	Deliberations, actions, and resolutions
Government contracts	Current RFPs	Open requests for proposals
Government contracts	Archived RFPs	Closed or prior solicitations
Government contracts	Current bids and winners	Current-year bids and selected vendors
Government contracts	Archived bids and winners	Prior-year bids and selected vendors
Jobs	Job titles	Open positions advertised
Jobs	Position descriptions	Duties and required qualifications

Administrative components reward information that residents and vendors can locate and use without contacting county staff. Complete publication across the four component groups therefore reflects both service accessibility and institutional openness.

ADMINISTRATIVE DESIGN CHOICE

The index measures both access to routine services and visibility into decisions—especially public contracting, where notice-to-award disclosure is most useful.

TABLE 10C | Political Components and Definitions

Operational definitions for quorum-court access, elected-official information, and accountability disclosures. These definitions distinguish basic contact information from the records residents need to follow decisions and evaluate accountability.

Component	Subcomponent	Operational definition
Quorum court	Meeting time and place	Published date, time, and location for meetings
Quorum court	Meeting agendas	Agenda or meeting materials available online
Quorum court	Meeting minutes	Minutes documenting deliberations, actions, and votes
Quorum court	Archived videos	Accessible recordings of prior quorum-court meetings
Elected officials	Names	Names of the required county officeholders
Elected officials	Office phone	Public telephone number for the official or office
Elected officials	Email	Direct or official email contact
Elected officials	Office location	Public office address or building location
Elected officials	Job description	Published duties or responsibilities of the office
Accountability	Financial/conflict disclosures	Accessible statements of financial interest or conflicts
Accountability	Salaries	Current salary or compensation information

Political components combine meeting access, information about elected officials, and public accountability records. Archived video receives credit when prior quorum-court meetings remain reasonably accessible online.

POLITICAL DESIGN CHOICE

The pillar rewards information that helps residents identify officials, follow quorum-court business, and review compensation and potential conflicts.

How Component and Pillar Scores Are Calculated

Subcomponents are averaged within components; component scores are then averaged within each pillar.

Score	Formula
Budget	$(\text{Current budget} + \text{average of three prior budgets}) \div 2$
Audit	$(\text{Current audit} + \text{average of three prior audits}) \div 2$
Fees and taxes	Average of five fees-and-taxes subcomponents
Fiscal pillar	Average of Budget, Audit, and Fees and Taxes
Public records	Average of four public-record subcomponents
Permits and zoning	Average of five permitting/planning subcomponents
Government contracts	Average of four procurement subcomponents
Jobs	Average of job title and position description
Administrative pillar	Average of the four administrative components
Quorum court	Average of notice, agenda, and minutes, subject to the video rule
Elected officials	Average of five official-information fields
Accountability	Average of disclosures and salaries
Political pillar	Average of the three political components

ROUNDING

Calculations use the underlying values; displayed scores are rounded to three decimal places.

WORKED EXAMPLE**TABLE 11 | Craighead County: Fiscal Transparency**

The 2024 example shows complete fiscal publication across all measured components. The table traces each subcomponent into its component score so the final result can be independently reproduced.

Component or subcomponent	Score
Budget	1.000
Current budget	1.000
Average of previous three years	1.000
Audit	1.000
Current audit	1.000
Average of previous three years	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
Single fees-and-taxes page	1.000
Fiscal transparency score	1.000

CALCULATION

Fiscal transparency = average of Budget (1.000), Audit (1.000), and Fees and Taxes (1.000) = 1.000

TABLE 12 | Craighead County: Administrative Transparency

All four administrative components receive full credit in the 2024 assessment. The grouped rows show how multiple subcomponents are first combined and then averaged into the administrative pillar.

Component or subcomponent group	Score
Public records	1.000
Court records, FOIA form, named contact, and contact information	1.000 each
Permits and zoning	1.000
Applications, holders, notices, agendas, and minutes	1.000 each
Government contracts	1.000
Current/archived RFPs and current/archived bids and winners	1.000 each
Jobs	1.000
Job titles and position descriptions	1.000 each
Administrative transparency score	1.000

CALCULATION

Administrative transparency = average of Public Records, Permits and Zoning, Government Contracts, and Jobs = 1.000

TABLE 13 | Craighead County: Political and Overall Scores

The accountability component explains why the county's political score is 0.833 rather than 1.000. Following the rows from political components to the overall calculation makes the effect of that partial score transparent.

Component or subcomponent group	Score
Quorum court	1.000
Notice, agendas, and minutes	1.000 each
Elected officials	1.000
Names, phone, email, location, and job descriptions	1.000 each
Accountability disclosures and salaries	0.500
Financial/conflict disclosures	0.000
Salaries	1.000
Political transparency score	0.833

Political transparency = $(1.000 + 1.000 + 0.500) \div 3 = 0.833$

OVERALL CALCULATION

$(\text{Fiscal } 1.000 + \text{Administrative } 1.000 + \text{Political } 0.833 + \text{Search } 0.500) \div 3.5 = 0.952$

This worked example reconciles the component scores with Craighead County's published overall score and demonstrates how one missing accountability subcomponent affects the political pillar without erasing strengths elsewhere.

INTERPRETATION AND LIMITATIONS

What the Index Can—and Cannot—Tell Us

The index is a consistent measure of online availability, but it should be interpreted alongside institutional and community context.

Consideration	Interpretation
The index measures	Whether specified public information is available and reasonably discoverable online.
It does not measure	Policy quality, legal compliance in every circumstance, corruption, service quality, or officials' intent.
Time sensitivity	Websites change after the assessment cutoff; a score is a documented snapshot of the review period.
Researcher judgment	Some cases require interpretation, which is managed through documented evidence and review.
Platform differences	Stand-alone websites and Arkansas.gov pages offer different levels of customization and content depth.
Comparability over time	Definitions should remain stable; any future index change should be documented before trend comparisons.

RESPONSIBLE USE

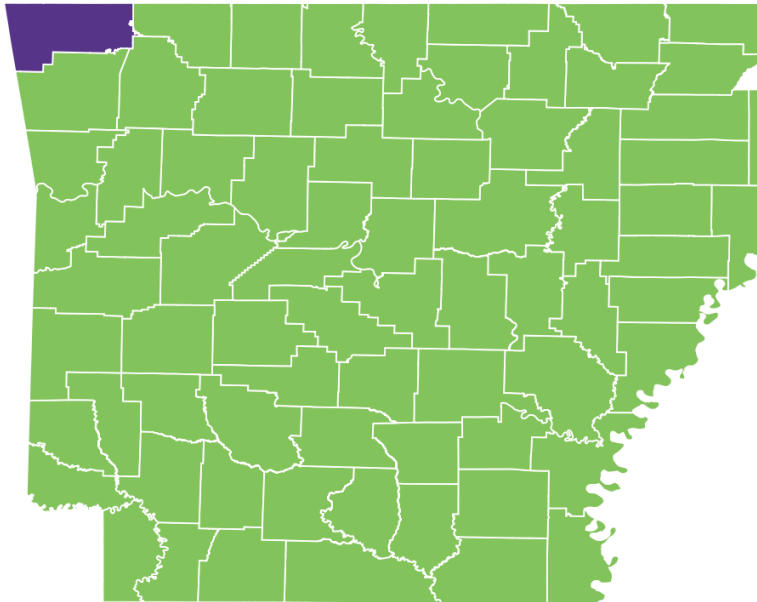
Use scores to identify publication gaps, compare patterns, and track improvement—not as a standalone judgment about the integrity or effectiveness of a county government.

Future assessments should preserve the coding guide, source records, assessment date, and documented methodological changes to maintain comparability over time.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

BENTON COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER



Benton County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Benton County is one of Arkansas's top-performing counties, ranking #1 overall with a score of 0.952. Its strongest relative showing is fiscal transparency at #1. Political transparency is the clearest area for continued improvement because its score remains below the county's perfect fiscal and administrative scores.

OVERALL



#1

SCORE 0.952

FISCAL



#1

SCORE 1.000

ADMINISTRATIVE



#1

SCORE 1.000

POLITICAL



#1

SCORE 0.833

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

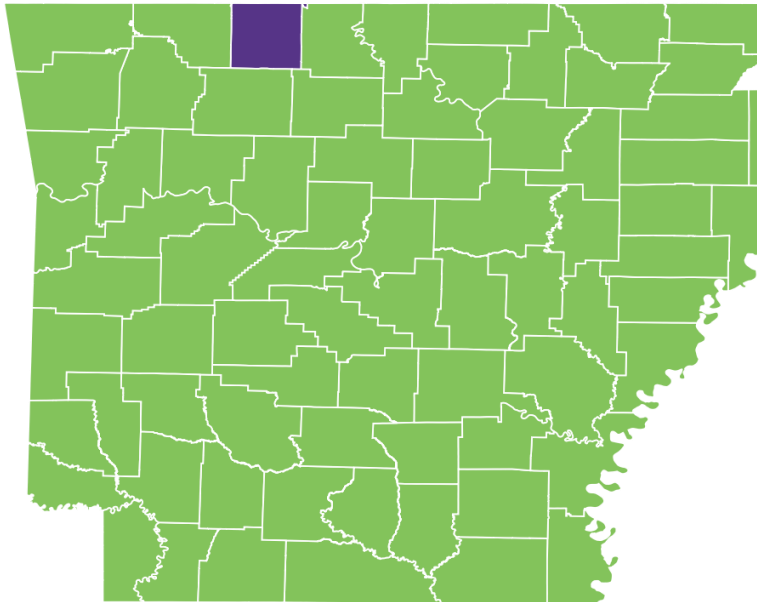
Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

BOONE COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER • MOST IMPROVED



Boone County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Boone County ranks #8 statewide with an overall transparency score of 0.813. It is also among the ten most improved counties, gaining 0.111 points since 2022. Its strongest relative showing is administrative transparency at #8; the clearest remaining opportunity is fiscal transparency.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.111 points

#9 among statewide improvers

OVERALL



#8

SCORE 0.813

FISCAL



#14

SCORE 0.708

ADMINISTRATIVE



#8

SCORE 0.917

POLITICAL



#11

SCORE 0.722

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Fiscal transparency — Expand current and archived budgets, audits, tax rates, and county-fee information through one clearly labeled financial page.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

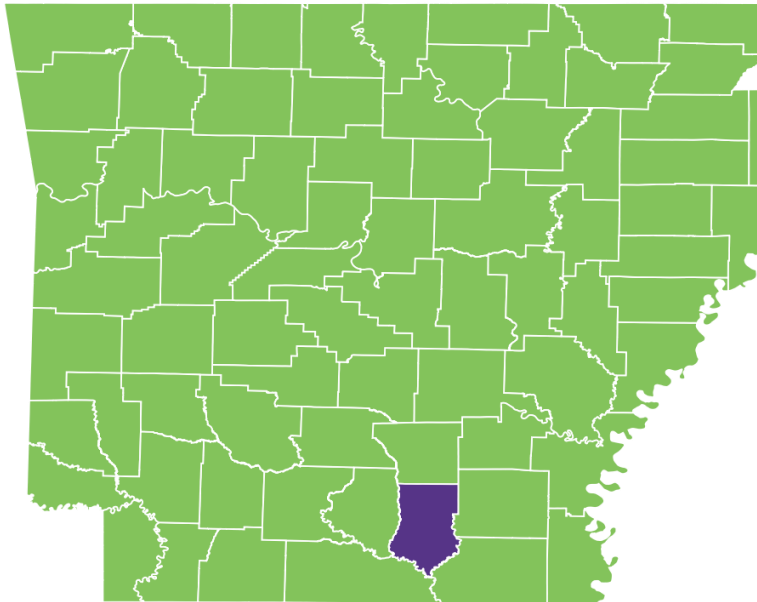
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

BRADLEY

COUNTY

MOST IMPROVED



Bradley County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Bradley County is one of Arkansas's most improved counties, gaining 0.129 points between 2022 and 2024—#5 among statewide improvers. Its 2024 overall score is 0.331, ranking #35. Its strongest relative showing is administrative transparency at #14.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.129 points

#5 among statewide improvers

OVERALL



#35

SCORE 0.331

FISCAL



#33

SCORE 0.375

ADMINISTRATIVE



#14

SCORE 0.583

POLITICAL



#57

SCORE 0.200

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

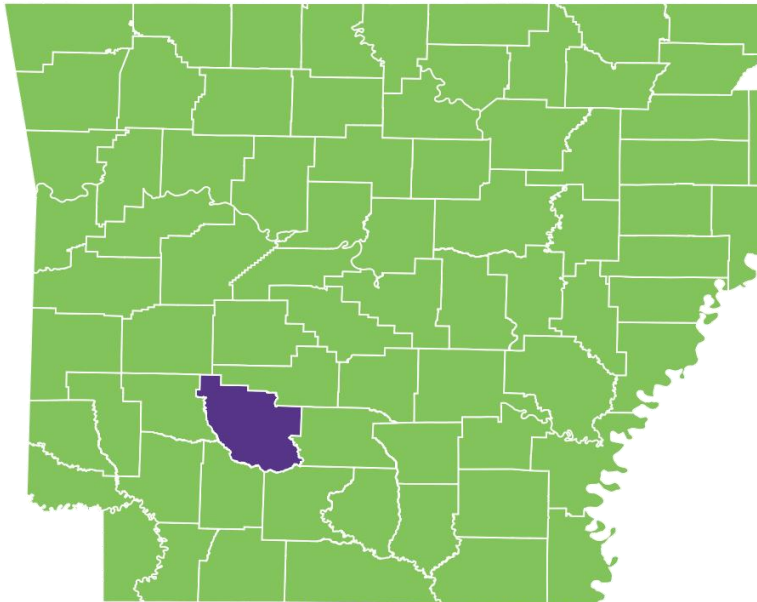
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

CLARK

COUNTY

MOST IMPROVED



Clark County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Clark County is one of Arkansas's most improved counties, gaining 0.310 points between 2022 and 2024—#1 among statewide improvers. Its 2024 overall score is 0.536, ranking #17. Its strongest relative showing is administrative transparency at #10.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.310 points

#1 among statewide improvers

OVERALL



#17

SCORE 0.536

FISCAL



#33

SCORE 0.375

ADMINISTRATIVE



#10

SCORE 0.833

POLITICAL



#14

SCORE 0.667

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Fiscal transparency — Expand current and archived budgets, audits, tax rates, and county-fee information through one clearly labeled financial page.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

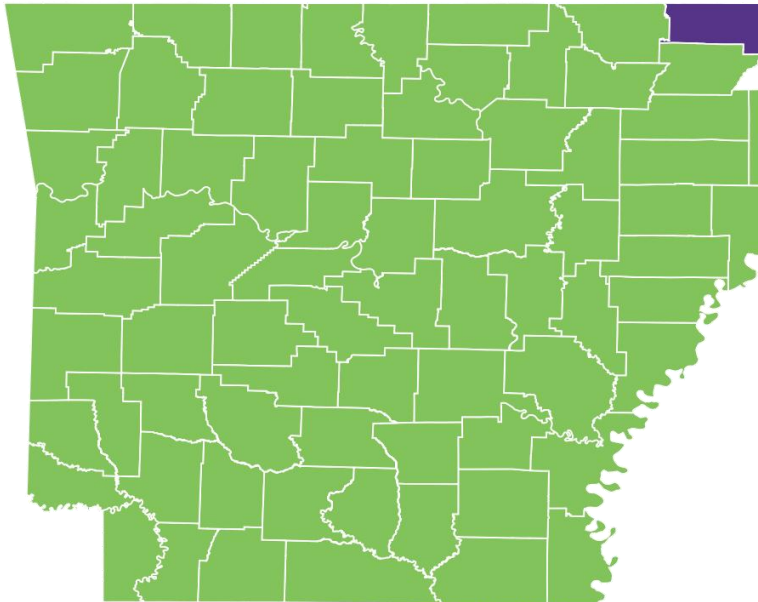
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

CLAY

COUNTY

MOST IMPROVED



Clay County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Clay County is one of Arkansas's most improved counties, gaining 0.179 points between 2022 and 2024—#3 among statewide improvers. Its 2024 overall score is 0.381, ranking #33. Its strongest relative showing is administrative transparency at #15.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.179 points

#3 among statewide improvers

OVERALL

#33

SCORE 0.381

FISCAL

#31

SCORE 0.500

ADMINISTRATIVE

#15

SCORE 0.500

POLITICAL

#38

SCORE 0.333

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

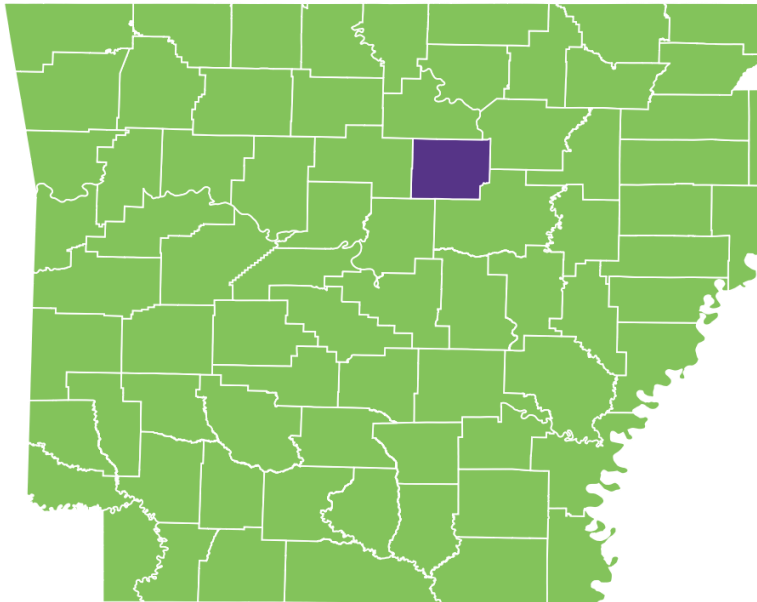
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

CLEBURNE

COUNTY

MOST IMPROVED



Cleburne County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Cleburne County is one of Arkansas's most improved counties, gaining 0.136 points between 2022 and 2024—#4 among statewide improvers. Its 2024 overall score is 0.719, ranking #12. Its strongest relative showing is fiscal transparency at #1.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.136 points

#4 among statewide improvers

OVERALL



#12

SCORE 0.719

FISCAL



#1

SCORE 1.000

ADMINISTRATIVE



#17

SCORE 0.417

POLITICAL



#25

SCORE 0.600

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Administrative transparency — Expand FOIA resources, procurement records, permits and planning materials, and employment information in a consistent location.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

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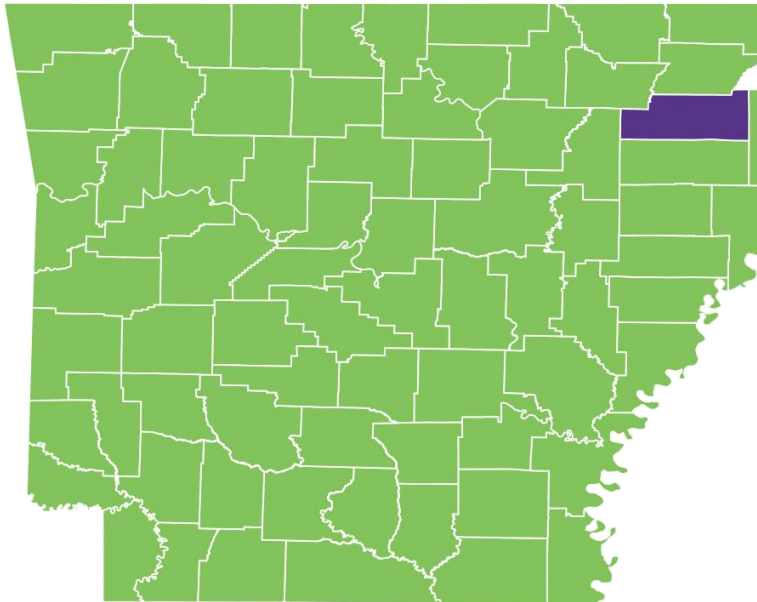
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

CRAIGHEAD

COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER



Craighead County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Craighead County is one of Arkansas's top-performing counties, ranking #1 overall with a score of 0.952. Its strongest relative showing is fiscal transparency at #1. Political transparency is the clearest area for continued improvement because its score remains below the county's perfect fiscal and administrative scores.

OVERALL



#1

SCORE 0.952

FISCAL



#1

SCORE 1.000

ADMINISTRATIVE



#1

SCORE 1.000

POLITICAL



#1

SCORE 0.833

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

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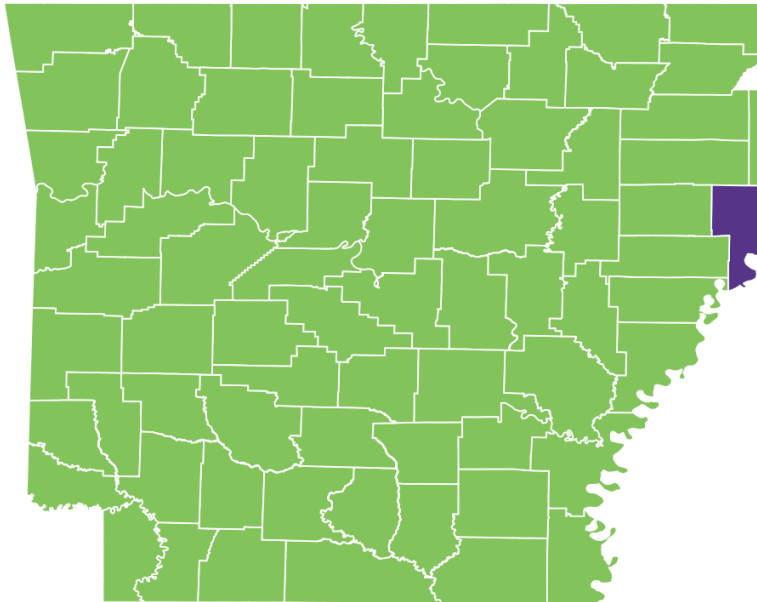
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

CRITTENDEN

COUNTY

MOST IMPROVED



Crittenden County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Crittenden County is one of Arkansas's most improved counties, gaining 0.230 points between 2022 and 2024—#2 among statewide improvers. Its 2024 overall score is 0.433, ranking #28. Its strongest relative showing is political transparency at #11.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.230 points

#2 among statewide improvers

OVERALL



#28

SCORE 0.433

FISCAL



#33

SCORE 0.375

ADMINISTRATIVE



#17

SCORE 0.417

POLITICAL



#11

SCORE 0.722

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Fiscal transparency — Expand current and archived budgets, audits, tax rates, and county-fee information through one clearly labeled financial page.

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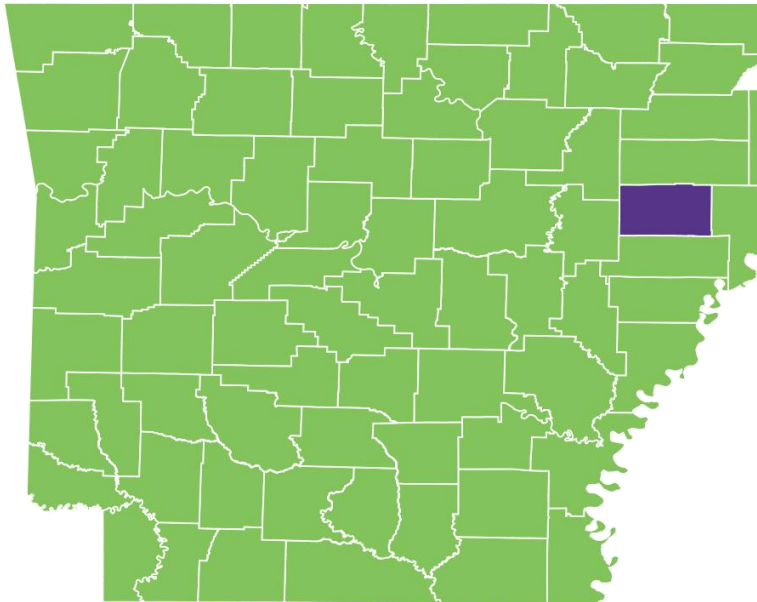
Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

CROSS COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER



Cross County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Cross County is one of Arkansas's top-performing counties, ranking #9 overall with a score of 0.782. Its strongest relative showing is fiscal transparency at #7. Continued attention to political transparency offers the clearest path for further improvement.

OVERALL



#9

SCORE 0.782

FISCAL



#7

SCORE 0.875

ADMINISTRATIVE



#8

SCORE 0.917

POLITICAL



#32

SCORE 0.444

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

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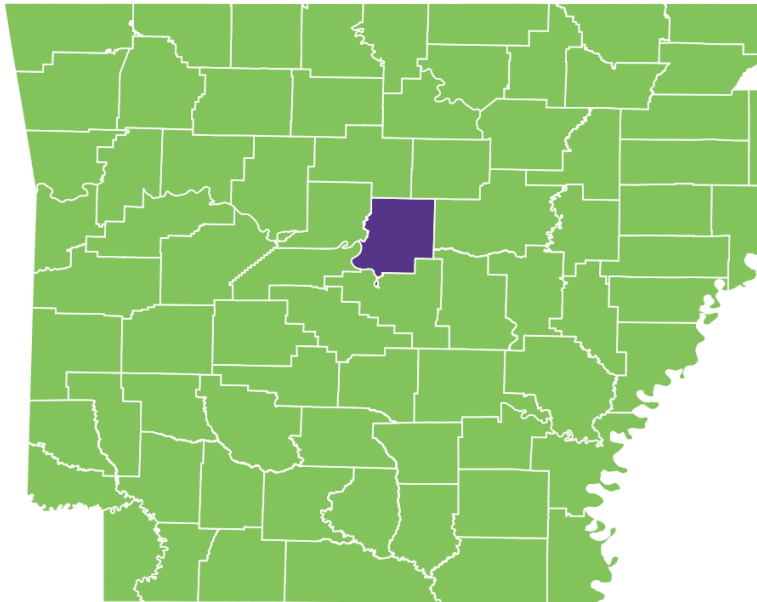
Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

FAULKNER COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER



Faulkner County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Faulkner County is one of Arkansas's top-performing counties, ranking #4 overall with a score of 0.905. Its strongest relative showing is fiscal transparency at #1. Continued attention to political transparency offers the clearest path for further improvement.

OVERALL



#4

SCORE 0.905

FISCAL



#1

SCORE 1.000

ADMINISTRATIVE



#1

SCORE 1.000

POLITICAL



#14

SCORE 0.667

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

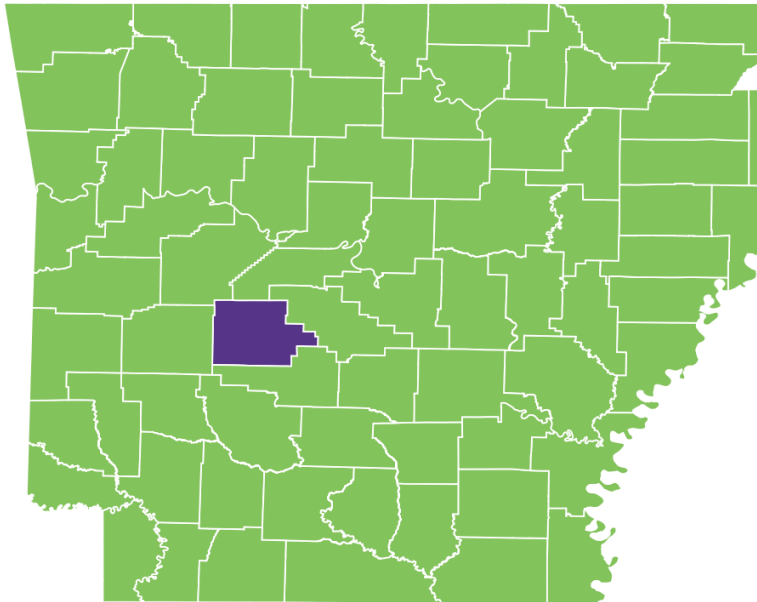
Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

GARLAND COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER



Garland County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Garland County is one of Arkansas's top-performing counties, ranking #4 overall with a score of 0.905. Its strongest relative showing is fiscal transparency at #1. Continued attention to political transparency offers the clearest path for further improvement.

OVERALL



#4

SCORE 0.905

FISCAL



#1

SCORE 1.000

ADMINISTRATIVE



#1

SCORE 1.000

POLITICAL



#14

SCORE 0.667

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

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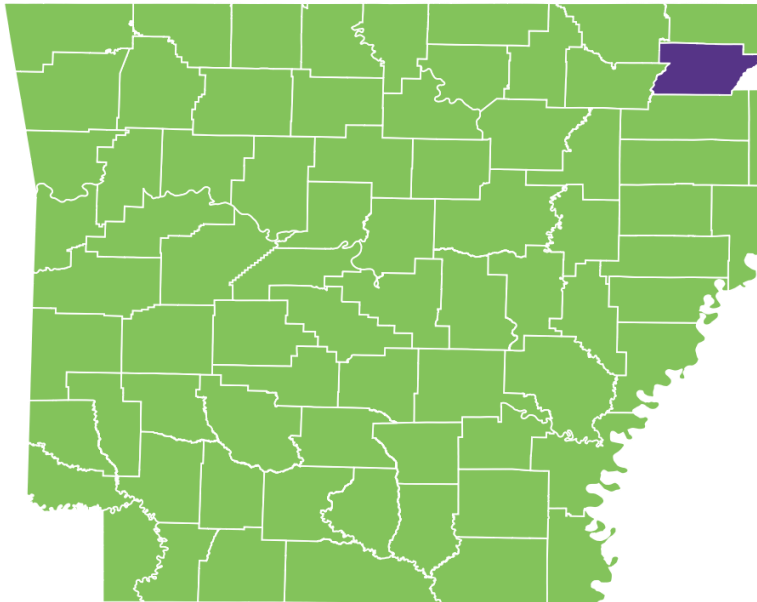
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

GREENE

COUNTY

MOST IMPROVED



Greene County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Greene County is one of Arkansas's most improved counties, gaining 0.115 points between 2022 and 2024—#8 among statewide improvers. Its 2024 overall score is 0.456, ranking #26. Its strongest relative showing is administrative transparency at #15.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.115 points

#8 among statewide improvers

OVERALL



#26

SCORE 0.456

FISCAL



#26

SCORE 0.542

ADMINISTRATIVE



#15

SCORE 0.500

POLITICAL



#26

SCORE 0.556

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Administrative transparency — Expand FOIA resources, procurement records, permits and planning materials, and employment information in a consistent location.

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Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

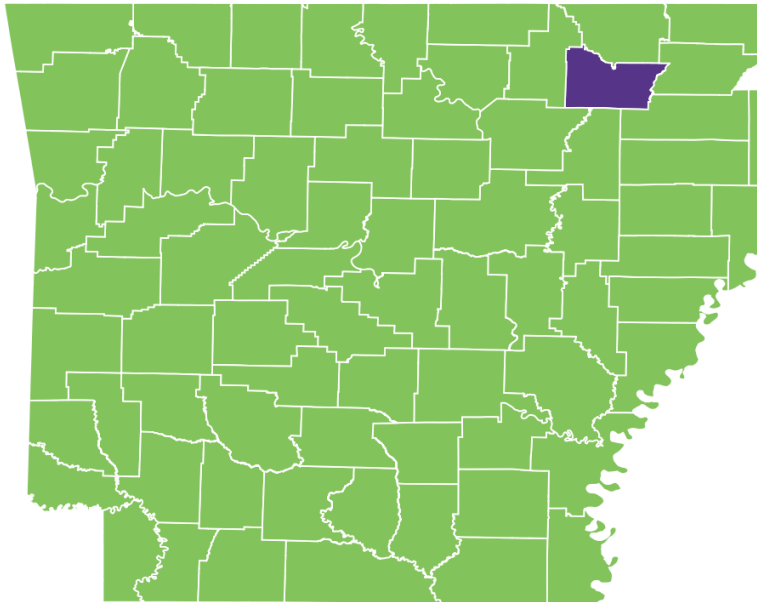
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

LAWRENCE

COUNTY

MOST IMPROVED



Lawrence County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Lawrence County is one of Arkansas's most improved counties, gaining 0.119 points between 2022 and 2024—#6 among statewide improvers. Its 2024 overall score is 0.464, ranking #23. Its strongest relative showing is political transparency at #14.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.119 points

#6 among statewide improvers

OVERALL



#23

SCORE 0.464

FISCAL



#33

SCORE 0.375

ADMINISTRATIVE



#33

SCORE 0.083

POLITICAL



#14

SCORE 0.667

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Administrative transparency — Expand FOIA resources, procurement records, permits and planning materials, and employment information in a consistent location.

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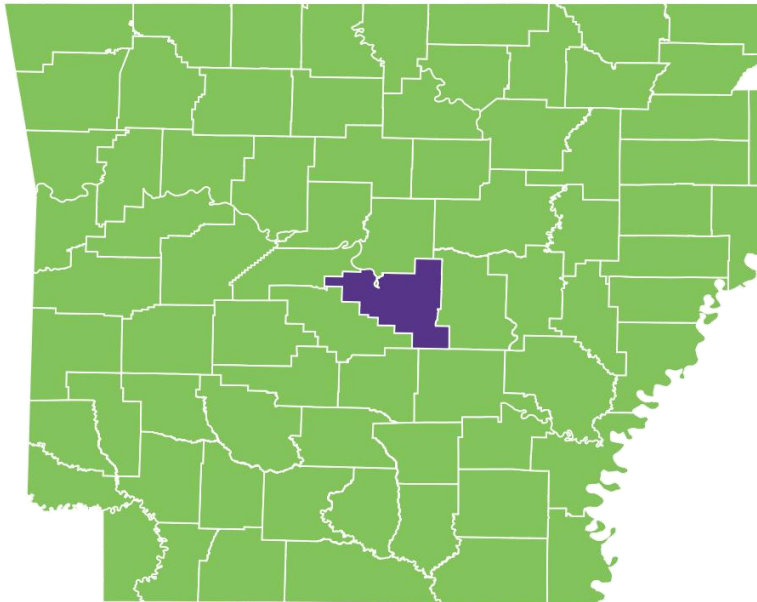
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

PULASKI

COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER



Pulaski County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Pulaski County is one of Arkansas's top-performing counties, ranking #10 overall with a score of 0.726. Its strongest relative showing is political transparency at #1. Continued attention to fiscal transparency offers the clearest path for further improvement.

OVERALL



#10

SCORE 0.726

FISCAL



#33

SCORE 0.375

ADMINISTRATIVE



#10

SCORE 0.833

POLITICAL



#1

SCORE 0.833

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Fiscal transparency — Expand current and archived budgets, audits, tax rates, and county-fee information through one clearly labeled financial page.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

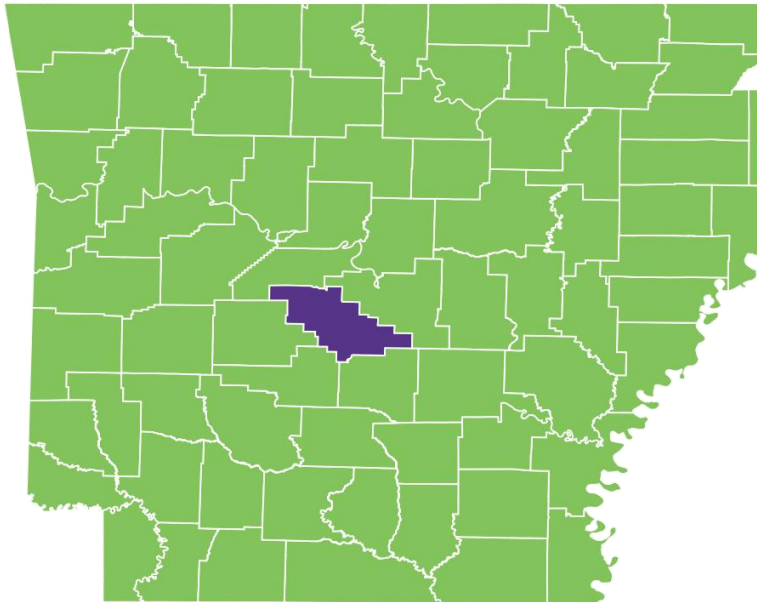
Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

SALINE COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER • MOST IMPROVED



Saline County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Saline County ranks #7 statewide with an overall transparency score of 0.821. It is also among the ten most improved counties, gaining 0.119 points since 2022. Its strongest relative showing is fiscal transparency at #7; the clearest remaining opportunity is political transparency.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.119 points

#6 among statewide improvers

OVERALL



#7

SCORE 0.821

FISCAL



#7

SCORE 0.875

ADMINISTRATIVE



#10

SCORE 0.833

POLITICAL



#14

SCORE 0.667

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

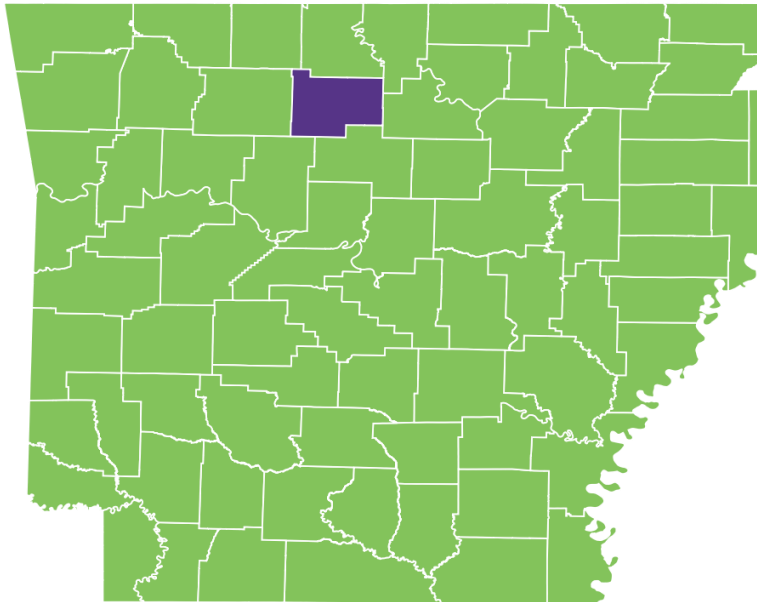
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

SEARCY

COUNTY

MOST IMPROVED



Searcy County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Searcy County is one of Arkansas's most improved counties, gaining 0.106 points between 2022 and 2024—#10 among statewide improvers. Its 2024 overall score is 0.260, ranking #46. Its strongest relative showing is administrative transparency at #27.

CHANGE SINCE 2022

+0.106 points

#10 among statewide improvers

OVERALL



#46

SCORE 0.260

FISCAL



#33

SCORE 0.375

ADMINISTRATIVE



#27

SCORE 0.333

POLITICAL



#57

SCORE 0.200

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

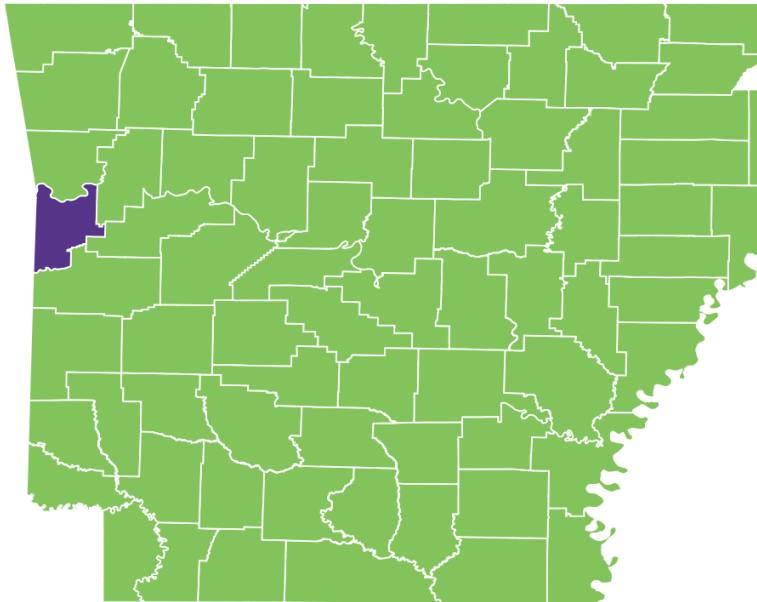
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

SEBASTIAN

COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER



Sebastian County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Sebastian County is one of Arkansas's top-performing counties, ranking #4 overall with a score of 0.905. Its strongest relative showing is administrative transparency at #1. Continued attention to fiscal transparency offers the clearest path for further improvement.

OVERALL



#4

SCORE 0.905

FISCAL



#13

SCORE 0.833

ADMINISTRATIVE



#1

SCORE 1.000

POLITICAL



#1

SCORE 0.833

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Fiscal transparency — Expand current and archived budgets, audits, tax rates, and county-fee information through one clearly labeled financial page.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

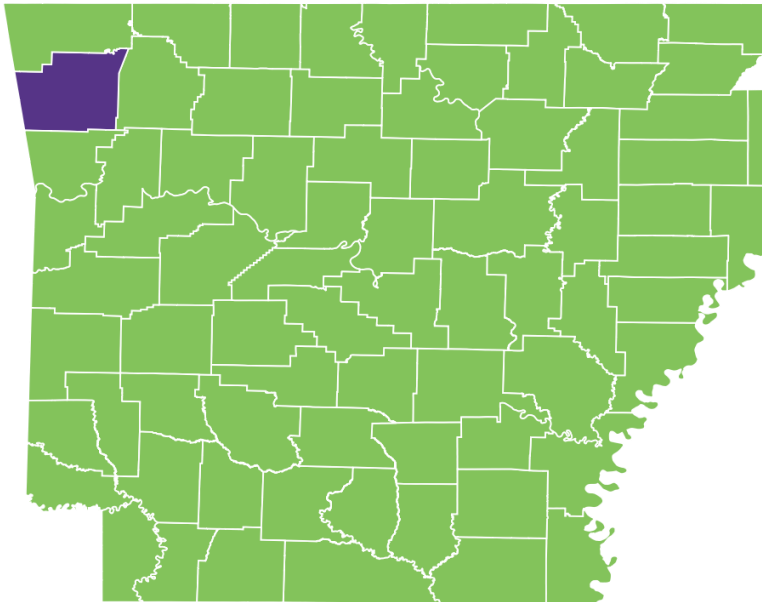
Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

2024 | COUNTY SNAPSHOT

WASHINGTON

COUNTY

TOP PERFORMER



Washington County highlighted

COUNTY PROFILE

Washington County is one of Arkansas’s top-performing counties, ranking #1 overall with a score of 0.952. Its strongest relative showing is fiscal transparency at #1. Political transparency is the clearest area for continued improvement because its score remains below the county’s perfect fiscal and administrative scores.

OVERALL



#1

SCORE 0.952

FISCAL



#1

SCORE 1.000

ADMINISTRATIVE



#1

SCORE 1.000

POLITICAL



#1

SCORE 0.833

CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

Political transparency — Continue strengthening meeting information, elected-official details, salary publication, and accountability disclosures.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE

Ranks include ties. A lower rank number indicates stronger relative performance; scores range from 0.000 to 1.000.

Source: Access Arkansas 2024 statewide assessment. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGERweb.

Endnotes

Source notes are numbered in the order in which they appear in the report.

1. Christopher Hood and David Heald, eds., *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?* vol. 135 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2006); Maria Cucciniello, Gregory A. Porumbescu, and Stephan Grimmelikhuisen, “25 Years of Transparency Research: Evidence and Future Directions,” *Public Administration Review* 77, no. 1 (2017): 32–44; Paolo de Renzio and Joachim Wehner, “The Impacts of Fiscal Openness,” *The World Bank Research Observer* 32, no. 2 (2017): 185–210.
2. Kristin McMurray, “2013 Transparency Report Card: Bringing State & Local Government to Light” (Chesterfield, VA: Sunshine Review, 2013).
3. Carolyn T. Harder and Meagan M. Jordan, “The Transparency of County Websites: A Content Analysis,” *Public Administration Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2013): 103–128.
4. Barbara M. Warner, “A Study of Arkansas County Government Websites,” *Midsouth Political Science Review* 16 (2015): 73–106.
5. County website status was assessed in December 2024 using official stand-alone county websites and county-specific public pages available through Arkansas.gov.
6. 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.
7. Asa Hutchinson, “Governor Hutchinson Announces the ‘Arkansas Rural Connect’ Grant Program, \$25 Million for Broadband Deployment,” press release, 2019.
8. Federal Communications Commission, *In the Matter of Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion*, FCC 24-27 (March 14, 2024).
9. Association of Arkansas Counties, “Classification of Counties: 2020 Final Census Figures,” county population classifications.
10. U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey five-year estimates, Table DP03, Selected Economic Characteristics*. Median household income data were used to group Arkansas counties for peer comparison.
11. Arkansas General Assembly, Act 564 of 2019, amending Arkansas Code § 14-21-102 to require online publication of county annual budgets and annual financial reports.
12. Maria Violeta Cimpoeu and Valentin Cimpoeu, “Budgetary Transparency: An Improving Factor for Corruption Control and Economic Performance,” *Procedia Economics and Finance* 27 (2015): 579–586.
13. Nikos Passas, *Corruption in the Procurement Process/Outsourcing Government Functions: Issues, Case Studies, Implications* (Boston: Institute for Fraud Prevention, 2007).
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” (U.S. PIRG Education Fund and Frontier Group, April 2018).
15. The index design also draws on Jonathan Fox, “The Uncertain Relationship between Transparency and Accountability,” *Development in Practice* 17, nos. 4–5 (2007): 663–671; Suzanne J. Piotrowski and Gregg G. Van Ryzin, “Citizen Attitudes toward Transparency in Local Government,” *American Review of Public Administration* 37, no. 3 (2007): 306–323; Cory L. Armstrong, “Providing a Clearer View: An Examination of Transparency on Local Government Websites,” *Government Information Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2011): 11–16; and Darrell M. West, “Global E-Government 2007” (Brown University, 2007).

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Finally, many thanks to our colleagues at the University of Central Arkansas and the Arkansas Center for Research in Economics for their internal support, guidance, and feedback.

This report reflects a shared commitment to clearer, more accessible county government information for Arkansans.

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The researchers behind Access Arkansas 2026

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Arkansas Center for Research in Economics • University of Central Arkansas