



## Quality of Life Report Tough on Area

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In the latest study about quality of life, the east side of Tulare County is not only among the worst areas of the state - but would rank last for all of America.

Using the American Human Development (HD) Index, a composite measure of health, education, and standard of living, A Portrait of California ranks from highest to lowest the state's five most populous metro areas using a single number on a scale from 0 to 10.

The Five Californias include:

Extremely well-educated entrepreneurs and professionals in Silicon Valley Shangri-La (Human Development Index of 9.35);

Affluent, credentialed, and resilient knowledge workers in Metro-Coastal Enclave California (HD of 7.92);

"Middle class" suburban and ex-urban residents across the state who have longer lives, more education, and higher earnings than the typical American, but face rising insecurity in Main Street California (HD of 5.91);

Blue- and pink-collar workers who contend with chronic economic insecurity due to low wages, few benefits, and meager job opportunities, three in ten of whom did not complete high school, in Struggling California (HD of 4.17); and The bottom 5 percent on the Index, left behind in impoverished LA neighborhoods and parts of the San Joaquin Valley, with median earnings akin to those of the nation as a whole in the early 1960s, in The Forsaken Five Percent (HD of 2.59).

While Visalia and Tulare fell into the "Struggling California," Porterville and the east side of the county fell into the Forsaken Five Percent, which represents the worst five percent of the state. Also in that group were East Los Angeles, Western Kern and Fresno counties and a small area south of Stockton.

Not everyone agrees.

Former mayor Ted Ensslin, who was born and raised here, disagrees, saying there are many good things about Porterville that people should take pride in.

"It was a wonderful community to grow up in. People didn't lock their doors," he recalled.

"I love Porterville. I've had many people, some from out of state, who say Porterville is a sleeping giant."

Ensslin does admit the east side of the Valley has its challenges - poverty, gangs, unemployment and a high teenage birth rate - to name a few. "But we're working it. I still have confidence in people of this community."

According to the report, Porterville and others in the bottom five were bypassed by the digital economy.

"These areas register some of the country's lowest levels of well-being. In human development terms, The Forsaken Five Percent's score is on par with the country as a whole in the late 1970s, a generation ago," found the report.

It found that 45 percent of adults did not complete high school which translates into high rates of unemployment and severely limited occupational options. It also found

"Those who are working tend to hold low-paid jobs with neither security nor benefits, chiefly in areas like construction, maintenance, production, agriculture, and transport that require physical labor. This group is most reliant on public services to meet their basic needs for health care, shelter, food, and income, and thus hardest hit when services are cut or inadequate," stated the report.

The median household income is \$34,000; in no California county is that household income sufficient to make ends meet. Median personal earnings, around \$18,000, are comparable to those that prevailed in the country as a whole in the early 1960s. Nearly 30 percent of all people in The Forsaken Five Percent, and 40 percent of children there, live in poverty.

Poverty rates are the lowest for the elderly, 17 percent.

In Porterville, the median income is put at \$17,057. That compares to \$23,312 in Tulare and \$30,696 in Visalia.

Also, according to the report, nearly seven in ten people in The Forsaken Five Percent are Latino, and Latino children disproportionately attend schools that are large, crowded, underfunded, and underperforming.

Porterville's Human Development Index was 2.67, Visalia's 4.92 and Tulare 3.30.

Porterville and the eastern portion of the county did do better in terms of life expectancy.

According to the report, the life expectancy in the Porterville area is 77.6 years, slightly better than the 75.6 years in Tulare, but lower than the 78.6 years in Visalia.

Overall, eastern Tulare County ranked 229th out of 233 areas in the state.

Porterville City Manager John Lollis admitted the report was not positive, but said, "I don't think businesses would look at this and do something here or not do something here."

He said some of the findings in the report might actually be attractive to a business looking at hiring incentives. Ensslin said it is much to do about attitude.

"We have to look at positives and change their attitude," he said.

Other findings of the report:

- The San Joaquin Valley region scores 3.84; if the San Joaquin Valley were a state, it would vie for last place on the American Human Development Index with West Virginia (3.85).
- 31.6 percent of renters in the Forsaken Five spend half or more of their income on rent.
- 16.8 percent of households in the area receive food stamps/SNAP benefits.
- 39.5 percent of children live below poverty level.
- 16.7 percent of seniors over 65 live below poverty level.
- The Bay Area region scores 6.80 out of 10 on the American HD Index; if the Bay Area were a state, it would surpass top-ranking Connecticut (6.30) for first place on the American Human Development Index.
- Life expectancy is longer in California (80.1 years) than in the nation as a whole (78.6 years).
- The foreign-born outlive the native-born by an average of four years in California.
- Nearly 44 percent of Latino adults in California do not have a high school degree — almost triple the state average.
- For every 100 men who get a bachelor's degree today, 134 women do.
- Over 50 percent of California's public schoolchildren are Latino; 27 percent are white; 11.6 percent are Asian American; 6.9 percent are African American; and fewer than 1 percent are Native American.
- Men earn more than women in every racial and ethnic group. In Silicon Valley Shangri-La, women earn 49¢ for every \$1 men earn; in The Forsaken Five, women earn 77¢ for every \$1 men earn.
- California's Latina women earn the least, at \$18,000 — earnings on par with those of the typical American worker in 1960.

"The American HD Index at the heart of A Portrait of California provides a way to make sense of economic, health, and education challenges in the interconnected way that people actually experience them," said Sarah Burd-Sharps, co-author of A Portrait of California.

"Given the current budgetary environment in California, there could be no better time for this nonpartisan, fact-based tool to break down the silos, look at who is thriving and who is merely surviving, and identify the most strategic levers for change," added Kristen Lewis, co-author of A Portrait of California.

As solutions, the report urges investing in public health campaigns and food subsidies for fruits and vegetables; investing in preschool and targeting the worst performing high schools with the highest dropout rates; and taking steps to address gender equality and wage discrimination in the workplace.

The American Human Development Project is an initiative of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC).