

COMMUNITY SAFETY INDEX

The **INSTITUTE** for
Public Policy & Economic Development
at Wilkes University

A collaboration among Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Keystone College, King's College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, Penn State Scranton, The Wright Center, University of Scranton & Wilkes University

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The Institute offers a wide array of research, consulting and support services to help organizations boost productivity, increase profitability and be successful in their missions.

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Introduction

What does the Community Safety Index Tell Us?

The community safety index was designed to provide a snapshot comparison of a variety of public safety indicators in counties throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This index gives insights on the county-to-county state of safety of lives and property. Aspects of public safety include several categories of crime, including violent crime, property crime, sexual offenses, and drug abuse, law enforcement resources, school safety, traffic safety, and accidental deaths. These metrics were selected to offer a holistic view of community safety in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties in relation to other regions throughout the state. It is important to remember that the eight measures analyzed here do not capture all possible dimensions of community safety – thus, the index is just one tool that should be considered alongside other data and analysis when trying to better understand crime and safety issues in Pennsylvania.

Methodology and Limitations

Eight indicators were selected for inclusion in the index that reflect a broad definition of community safety. Five were directly related to crime: violent crime rate, property crime rate, sex offenses rate, drug abuse offenses rate, and law enforcement officers, all normalized per 1,000 population. All of this data was sourced from the most recently Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System Annual Report (2015). Additionally, data on fatal crashes per 1,000 highway miles was collected from Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. Data for school misconduct incidents per 1,000 enrollment was collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Education SafeSchools Online portal. Finally, data on the age-adjusted death rate from accidental causes was collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

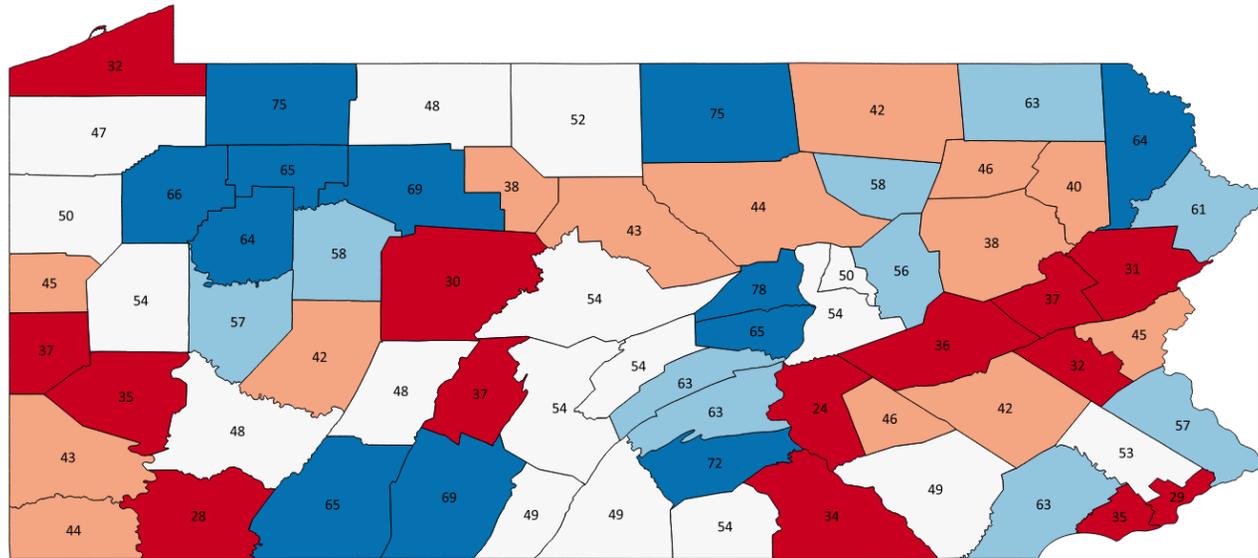
These indicators were indexed on a 0 to 100 scale, weighting each of the eight component measures equally. The rank score corresponds with the county's rank among all counties, expressed as a percentage. The community safety index of the respective counties is given as the average of the percent rank across the eight component rates. For most measures, a higher value (higher rate of crime, higher rate of death, etc.) is understood as negatively reflecting community safety and thus higher values yield lower ranks. This is reversed for law enforcement officers per capita, which is understood to positively reflect community safety. Thus, higher values yield higher rank scores in that metric. Consequently, the higher the community safety index of a county, the better its average rank on these eight metrics, and vice versa. In the case of missing values, the community index is calculated using the other reported safety indicators.

Again, it is important to remember that the eight measures analyzed here do not capture all possible dimensions of community safety, though an attempt was made to capture key facets of community safety, defined broadly. Furthermore, complex causal relationships are likely to exist between many of the component variables. Due to these limitations, this index is best used as an illustration of relative performance on key community safety metrics, but it is not a comprehensive analysis of all factors influencing public safety.

How does NEPA Compare to Other Metro Areas in Community Safety?

The overall community safety index across the 67 counties ranges from 24 in Dauphin County to 78 in Union County. The full range of scores is shown on the map below.

Lackawanna County has an index score of 40, while Luzerne County scored 38. They ranked 51st and 53rd, respectively, out of the 67 Commonwealth counties.



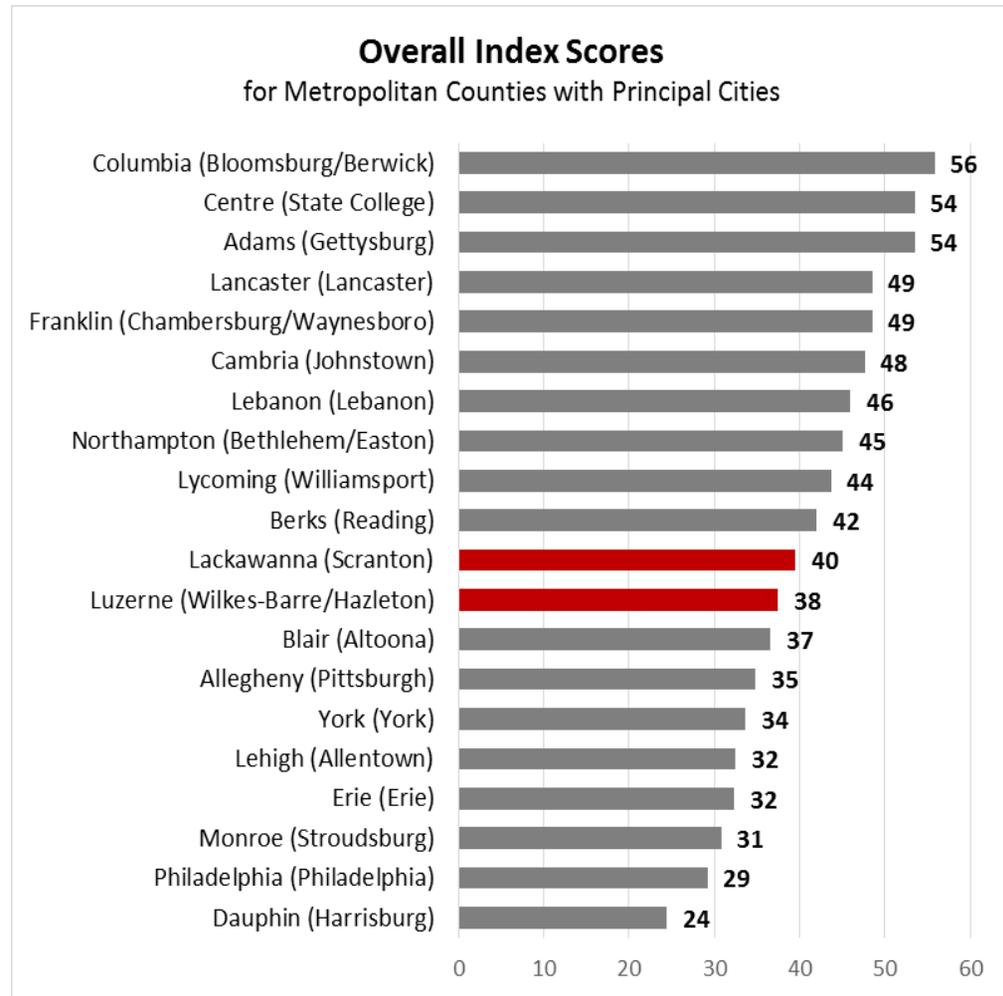
It is notable that all 67 counties perform above average in at least one component of the index, and below average in at least on component. Thus, there are strengths and weaknesses related to public safety in all parts of the Commonwealth.

Dauphin County’s low score was driven largely by it having the highest rate of drug abuse offenses statewide, and its similarly high rates in several other crime categories. Union County’s index score was highest, with low rates of drug abuse, property crimes, and violent crimes. It did score below average in police officers per capita, however.

In order to draw the most appropriate comparison to Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, the chart below shows overall index scores for the 20 counties in the Commonwealth that include at least one principal city of a designated Metropolitan Statistical Area. Excluded are counties that are primarily rural or suburban in nature.

Among these peer counties, both Lackawanna and Luzerne rank near the middle. Many of the higher performing of these counties are part of Metropolitan areas with relatively small populations or located in more rural parts of the Commonwealth. Columbia County had the highest index score of any of these counties, but ranked 22nd out of all Counties statewide.

The two counties performed slightly better than Blair, York, and Erie Counties, which have been utilized as peer counties in Pillars of a Strong Community and other work by The Institute due to their shared demographic and socioeconomic characteristics with Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.



Component Scores: Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties

The table below shows the rank scores (on a zero to 100 scale) of safety indicators of Luzerne and Lackawanna as compared with the three previously identified peer counties as well as Dauphin and Union, the lowest and highest scoring counties in the overall index.

Of the eight component measures, Lackawanna County's lowest rank was in traffic safety, where it scored 18 on a zero to 100 scale, followed by property crime with 27. Luzerne County scored in the single digits in both property crime and drug abuse offenses. Both counties performed better than average in the accidental death rate, and Luzerne County also performed better than average in sex offenses and law enforcement officers per capita.

Component Rank Scores for Selected Counties									
County	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate	Sex Offenses Rate	Drug Abuse Offenses Rate	Total Law Enforcement Officers	Fatal Crashes per 1,000 registered vehicles	School Safety Incidents per 1,000 enrollment	Accidental Death Rate per 100,000 residents	Community Safety Index
Lackawanna	35	27	46	43	48	18	44	55	40
Luzerne	18	8	56	6	59	14	74	65	38
Blair (peer)	39	46	52	15	41	5	67	29	37
Erie (peer)	27	5	26	53	47	27	0	74	32
York (peer)	33	38	65	18	6	36	21	51	34
Dauphin (lowest index)	8	9	11	0	ND	38	23	83	24
Union (highest index)	100	99	47	100	23	74	86	92	78

This charts below these scores for Lackawanna and Luzerne County for each of the safety indicators considered in this study.

