

THE BURG

Burg Blog: On Average

DECEMBER 12, 2018 | by Lawrance Binda - [LINK](#)



Harrisburg's historic Walnut Street Bridge

Are you feeling exceptionally average?

Ordinary? Middling? Nothing special?

If you live in and around Harrisburg, there's a good reason for that today and, well, every day, according to a new study by [Echelon Insights](#), an Alexandria, Va.-based research and data analytics firm.

The company just released the results of its "[Middle America Project](#)," which ranked Dauphin County as, statistically, the most typical county in the United States.

"Dauphin County is home to Pennsylvania's state capital of Harrisburg and is statistically the closest to resembling America as a whole," states the report.

Echelon drilled down into a host of demographic and other data and gave each of America's 3,000-plus counties (and similar jurisdictions) a "Middle America score" based upon how closely they compared to national averages.

According to the study, Dauphin County is 99.91 percent "more typical" than all other counties, making it the most-typical county in the country. It mirrors the nation's averages on a wide range of comparative data—from median household income to median age to education levels.

Echelon said it used “more than a dozen measures” to arrive at its “Middle America score,” which, for Dauphin County, totaled 2,781 points, the most of any county.

According to the report, Dauphin County:

- Has a median income of \$54,968 vs. the national median of \$57,805
- Has a college graduation rate of 29.3 percent vs. the national rate of 30.3 percent
- Has church congregation membership of 47.8 percent vs. the national average of 48.8 percent
- Voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election by a margin of 2.9 points versus the nationwide tally of 2.1 points.

Another Pennsylvania county—Lehigh—took second place, with a “Middle America score” of 2,772. Scott County, Iowa, Shawnee County, Kansas, and Peoria County, Ill., rounded out the top five spots.

Locally, Lancaster County was closest to Dauphin County on the “Middle America” ranking, coming in at No. 51. Cumberland County was ranked 109, York County 318, Lebanon County 533, Adams County 633 and Perry County 2,024.

What is the least average place in America? According to the study, that title goes to Webster County, W.Va., with a “Middle America score” (along with Hancock County, Tenn., and Douglas County, Mo.) below 400.

However, it wasn’t just poorer, more rural areas that had low scores and rankings.

The same was true on the higher end, with wealthy counties outside of Washington D.C., like Arlington County, Va., Falls Church, Va., and D.C. itself, ranking low, along with places like San Francisco County, Calif., and New York County, N.Y.

So, what does this mean for us—the terribly average residents of the Harrisburg area?

The study implies that we could become national lab rats, as researchers and reporters venture forth from their protected cloisters in D.C., New York, Boston and Chicago to study us in our natural habitat. Will they be shocked to discover we’re not all wearing beige, drinking Bud Lite and watching 3.5 hours of TV daily?

Perhaps, with a wink and nod, we should embrace our new status as the most average place in America.

Come study us. Eat in our way-above-average restaurants. Drink our way-above-average beer and coffee. Visit our way-above-average farmers market. Gaze upon our way-above-average architecture and river. Read our way-above-average community magazine.

As goes Harrisburg, so goes the nation!

Lawrance Binda is editor-in-chief of TheBurg.