A BETTER CONNECTICUT INSTITUTE

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CT IS BETTER THAN OK: CONNECTICUT'S PROGRESSIVE POLICIES INCREASE LIFE EXPECTANCY

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One fact flies in the face of the political narrative that Connecticut is in a state of decline: Connecticut residents enjoy several additional years of life compared to conservative states. A recently published peer-reviewed study looked at how changing policies affect state life expectancy[1] over the last 60 years:[2]

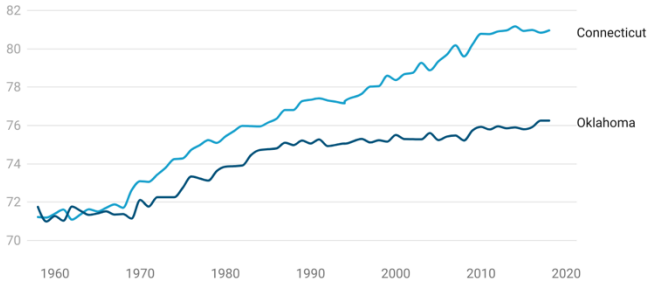
> States that adopted liberal policies were more likely to experience larger gains in life expectancy (and in recent years to avoid an outright decline). Connecticut and Oklahoma were the two states whose policies shifted the most, Connecticut toward the liberal side and Oklahoma toward the conservative side. In 1959, life expectancy in both states was 71.1 years; by 2017, it had increased to 80.7 years in Connecticut but only to 75.8 years in Oklahoma.

They summarize:

> As state-level policy has diverged since the 1970s (and especially since 2000), so have differences in mortality rates and life expectancy among the states. These differences are correlated with a state's dominant political ideology. Americans' chances of living longer are better if they live in a blue state and worse if they live in a red state.

This is a startling result: Life expectancy is accepted internationally as one of the most important indicators of health and well-being, which can significantly improve through public policy (e.g., better sanitation, safer water supply, vaccinations, etc.). The same is true at the state level: The values progressives fight for, such as tobacco, labor, immigration, civil rights, gun control, Medicare expansion, family and medical leave, and more, have a direct effect on how long people live.

Life Expectancy in Connecticut and Oklahoma: 1959-2019



Life expectancy is an estimate of how long a person born today will live, controlling for the age structure of a population.

Chart: © A Better Connecticut Institute, 2024 • Source: Adapted from Starr, P. (2023, December 8). The Life-and-Death Cost of Conservative Power. The American Prospect. https://prospect.org/health/2023-12-08-life-death-cost-conservative-power/ • Created with Datawrapper

While the study compares the effect of policy on life expectancy among all states, the authors make their point by comparing Connecticut and Oklahoma – two states taking different paths. They conclude:

> . . . if all states' policies were the same as Connecticut's in 2014, U.S. life expectancy would have been two years longer for women and 1.3 years longer for men—and if all states' policies were like Oklahoma's, Americans' lives would have been even shorter.

Investment in public goods and services improves the quality of life, while divestment in public goods and services comes at the expense of years of life.

Unfortunately, not only do some states ignore the potential of progressive policies to improve quality of life, but so does the Federal government: [3]

> Lawmakers have . . . worked at cross purposes, with Republicans fighting Democrats' efforts to enact legislation linked to gains in life expectancy, including efforts to expand access to health coverage and curb access to guns.

The American Prospect puts it more strongly:[4]

> What . . . unites conservatives is a complete absence of any self-reflection about the impact of their policies on life and death in America . . . otherwise, they would have to confront the toll that their policies have taken. The balance of power in the states has been a life-and-death matter. Liberals and progressives should know that the policies they have struggled to enact have not been in vain.

At least Connecticut is on the right track: Investment in progressive policies and public goods and services make Connecticut a better place for everyone.

NOTES

[1] To be clear, life expectancy is an estimate of how long a person born today will live, controlling for the age structure of a population.
[2] Montez, Jennifer Karas, et al. " US State Policies, Politics, and Life Expectancy." The Milbank Quarterly 98.3 (2020): 668-699.
[3] Diamond, D. (2023, December 28). America Has a Life Expectancy Crisis. But It's Not a Political Priority. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2023/12/28/america-life-expectancy-crisis/
[4] Starr, P. (2023, December 8). The Life-and-Death Cost of Conservative Power. The American Prospect. https://prospect.org/health/2023-12-08-life-death-cost-conservative-power/