



WHITE PAPER NO. 005

Leadership, Population, and Place

A Descriptive Review of Selected Major Ohio Cities, 1980–2026

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Executive Summary

Ohio is home to several cities — Cleveland, Akron, Youngstown, Toledo, and Dayton among them — that were once among the country's leading centers of industrial production and population growth. Over the past half-century, many of these cities have experienced sustained population loss, elevated poverty, and slower economic growth than their national peers. Some of Ohio's cities, notably Columbus and, to a lesser extent, Cincinnati, have followed a different and considerably more favorable path.

A common explanation offered for this divergence is political: most of Ohio's largest cities have been governed by Democratic mayors for a long period, and some observers attribute urban decline to that fact. Others point to deindustrialization, globalization, suburbanization, demographic change, and state and federal policy as more significant drivers, largely independent of which party holds the mayor's office.

This paper does not resolve that debate. Instead, it lays out three categories of verifiable fact — (1) the actual, documented partisan history of mayoral leadership in eight selected major Ohio cities and in a comparison set of similarly sized non-Ohio cities, (2) population trends over the same period, and (3) current economic indicators for all thirteen cities examined — so that readers can evaluate the relationship between political leadership and city outcomes for themselves.

At a glance

6 of 8 of the Ohio cities examined have had a Republican mayor within the last 46 years	Jan. 2026 Youngstown elected independent Derrick McDowell, ending 45 years of Democratic mayors	17.2%–36.2% the poverty-rate range across the eight Ohio cities examined — all higher than any comparison city
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Five findings stand out from the record:

- Every one of the eight Ohio cities examined has been governed by a Democratic mayor for a long period, and six of the eight have had at least one Republican mayor since 1980 — more recently, in several cases, than is commonly assumed. As of January 2026, one of the eight, Youngstown, is no longer led by a Democrat at all: independent Derrick McDowell defeated two-term Democratic incumbent Jamael Tito Brown in the November 2025 election, ending 45 years of Democratic mayors in the city with the sample's highest poverty rate. That result is discussed further in Section III.
- The comparison cities most often invoked as Republican-led, faster-growing counterexamples do not uniformly support that framing once their actual mayoral histories are examined. Nashville, Tennessee — frequently cited as a Sun Belt growth success story — has been continuously governed by Democratic (or Democratic-aligned nonpartisan) mayors since 1975, a tenure comparable in length to Cleveland's. Indianapolis, another frequently cited comparison city, was governed by Republican mayors for 24 of the last 46 years, split roughly evenly with Democratic mayors, and grew steadily under both.

- Within Ohio itself, Columbus — the state's fastest-growing large city by a wide margin — had a Republican mayor as recently as 1999–2000, and alternated between the parties for sixteen years before that. Dayton had a Republican mayor, future U.S. Representative Mike Turner, as recently as 1994–2002, and Canton had a Republican mayor, Janet Weir Creighton, as recently as 2004–2007. Columbus's strongest sustained growth period has occurred since 2000, under continuous Democratic leadership, at the same time that Cleveland, Toledo, and Akron — also under continuous Democratic leadership over the same period — continued to lose population.
- Current economic indicators (Appendix A) show a wide range of outcomes among the eight Ohio cities, from Columbus's 17.2% poverty rate to Youngstown's 36.2%. Notably, all eight Ohio cities examined have a higher poverty rate than any of the five national comparison cities, whose rates cluster between 13.1% and 15.8% regardless of party. This pattern does not track cleanly with how recently each city's mayor's office changed party hands and is itself identified in Section VII as a question meriting further research.
- This paper's initial internal draft contained several errors — including outdated or incorrect current mayors for Dayton and Youngstown, an inaccurate description of the Ohio cities examined as the state's "eight largest," and a poverty figure for Columbus drawn from an inconsistent data source — that were identified through OCG's peer-review process and corrected prior to publication using primary Census and election-authority sources. This history is disclosed in Appendix B.

Taken together, the evidence does not support a simple story in which the party of a city's mayor predicts its trajectory. It also does not rule out that local governance choices — independent of party label — matter a great deal.

I. Purpose and Scope

Ohio Common Ground exists to help Ohio voters evaluate the performance of elected officials on the basis of evidence rather than assumption. Questions about why Ohio's largest cities have struggled economically and demographically — and why some have not — are asked frequently and are asked in good faith across the political spectrum. This paper takes up one specific, narrower version of that broad question: what does the documented record show about the relationship between the political party of a city's mayor and that city's population and economic trajectory?

The eight Ohio cities examined — Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo, Akron, Dayton, Youngstown, and Canton — are referred to throughout this paper as "Selected Major Ohio Cities," not as Ohio's eight largest cities. By 2024 population, Youngstown is Ohio's fourteenth-largest city, behind Parma, Lorain, and Hamilton, none of which are examined here. Youngstown was included in place of those three cities because it is the single most frequently cited example of Rust Belt industrial collapse in Ohio, and because its extreme, well-documented population loss provides an important data point for the questions this paper asks. Parma, Lorain, and Hamilton are legitimate candidates for a future, population-ranked version of this analysis and are not included here.

For national context, this paper examines five frequently cited comparison cities: Indianapolis, Indiana; Nashville, Tennessee; Fort Worth, Texas; Jacksonville, Florida; and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. These cities were selected because they are commonly invoked in public commentary as

faster-growing, differently governed peer cities — not because OCG has independently determined them to be the most appropriate comparison set. As discussed in Section V, several of these cities' actual political histories complicate rather than confirm the framing under which they are usually cited. Readers should treat this five-city set as illustrative comparison cases rather than a statistically matched peer group.

II. Methodology and Data Limitations

Sources

Mayoral partisan history for all thirteen cities was independently verified against primary and well-documented secondary sources, including Ballotpedia's tracked partisan affiliations of the 100 largest U.S. cities, Wikipedia biographical and municipal-history pages cross-checked against contemporaneous local news coverage, city and county historical societies, and, where available, official candidate filing records. Where a mayoral election was formally nonpartisan (as is the case for many of the cities examined, including Cincinnati, Toledo, Dayton, Fort Worth, and Oklahoma City), this paper reports the officeholder's party registration or documented political affiliation as identified by these sources, consistent with the methodology Ballotpedia uses for the same purpose.

Population figures are drawn from decennial U.S. Census counts and U.S. Census Bureau intercensal population estimates. Current economic indicators (Appendix A) are drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-year estimates, cross-referenced across multiple compiling sources for consistency.

Limitations

- This paper reports mayoral party affiliation, which is a matter of public record. It does not attempt to characterize the substance of any administration's specific policies, nor does it assign credit or blame for any outcome to any individual officeholder.
- Party affiliation is an imperfect proxy for governing philosophy. Mayors within the same party have pursued materially different fiscal, public-safety, and development policies from one another, and city councils, county governments, state legislatures, and federal policy all shape outcomes alongside the mayor's office.
- Appendix A reports current-year economic indicators only. A full multi-decade indicator series covering poverty, crime, education, and housing trends for all thirteen cities was outside the scope of this paper and is proposed as a follow-on OCG research project (see Section VII). Crime and detailed education-outcome data specifically are not included in Appendix A: jurisdiction-to-jurisdiction reporting standards are inconsistent enough, especially amid the national transition to the FBI's NIBRS crime-reporting system, that OCG could not verify comparable figures across all thirteen cities to its own standard, and has chosen to treat that as a distinct future research project rather than publish figures it cannot fully stand behind.
- Council-manager and consolidated city-county governments (used in whole or in part by Cincinnati, Dayton, Indianapolis, Nashville, Fort Worth, Jacksonville, and Oklahoma City) distribute executive authority differently than the strong-mayor systems used in Cleveland

and Columbus. Cross-city comparisons of mayoral influence should be read with this structural difference in mind.

- Population figures for consolidated city-county governments (Indianapolis–Marion County, Nashville–Davidson County, and Jacksonville–Duval County) reflect the full consolidated jurisdiction, which is not directly comparable to the unconsolidated Ohio city figures reported here. This is noted wherever such comparisons are made.

A note on causal inference: nothing in this paper should be read as establishing that a mayor's party did or did not cause a given population or economic outcome. The data presented are descriptive. Readers should be cautious of any claim — including claims OCG's own supporters might be inclined to make — that this data alone proves a causal relationship in either direction.

III. Political Leadership in Selected Major Ohio Cities, 1980–2026

The table below summarizes documented mayoral partisan history for the eight Ohio cities examined, independently verified for this publication. Where a party changeover occurred, the year and the identity of the most recent mayor of the other party are shown.

City	Governed by Democratic mayors	Most recent non-Democratic mayor	Current mayor (party)
Cleveland	1990–present	George Voinovich (R), 1980–1989	Justin Bibb (D)
Columbus	2000–present	Greg Lashutka (R), 1992–2000	Andrew Ginther (D)
Dayton	2002–present	Mike Turner (R), 1994–2002	Shenise Turner-Sloss (D), took office Jan. 5, 2026
Canton	2008–present	Janet Weir Creighton (R), 2004–2007	William V. Sherer II (D)
Toledo	1990–present	Donna Owens (R), 1983–1989	Wade Kapszukiewicz (D)
Akron	1984–present	Roy L. Ray (R), 1980–1983	Shammas Malik (D)
Cincinnati	No Republican Party mayor since at least 1980 (formally nonpartisan; office held by Charter Party or Democratic officeholders)	Walton Bachrach (R), 1961–1967	Aftab Pureval (D)
Youngstown	1980–2025 (Democratic); independent since Jan. 2026	No Republican mayor identified since at least 1980; last confirmed Republican was Charles P. Henderson (R), 1948–1954	Derrick McDowell (Independent), took office Jan. 1, 2026, defeating two-term Democratic incumbent Jamael Tito Brown

Sources: see Appendix B. All eight entries in this table were independently verified for this publication against Wikipedia biographical pages cross-checked with contemporaneous local news coverage (The Blade, Akron Beacon Journal, the Vindicator, WFMJ, WDTN, the Dayton Daily News), Ballotpedia, and, for Cincinnati, coverage of the city's 1925–1999 council-selects-mayor charter system. Dayton's Democratic-mayor era includes a gap held by independent Mayor Gary Leitzell (2010–2014); Canton's includes a period under Mayor Thomas Bernabei, who was first elected as an independent in 2015 before rejoining the Democratic Party. Youngstown's Democratic run is dated from George Vukovich's 1980 election through the end of Jamael Tito Brown's term in December 2025; see the discussion below for the November 2025 election result.

Four entries merit specific comment because the finding is less well known than the broader pattern of Democratic leadership in these cities.

Cleveland

George Voinovich, a Republican, served as Cleveland's mayor from 1980 to 1989 — the last Republican to hold the office. Every mayor since, spanning Michael White, Jane Campbell, Frank Jackson, and Justin Bibb, has been a Democrat. Cleveland's population has declined in nearly every decade since 1980, a trend that began well before 1990 and has continued under Democratic leadership since.

Columbus

Columbus's recent political history is more mixed than is commonly assumed. Dana “Buck” Rinehart (D) served from 1984 to 1992, followed by Greg Lashutka (R) from 1992 to 2000 — the most recent Republican mayor of Columbus. Michael Coleman (D) and Andrew Ginther (D) have held the office continuously since 2000. Columbus's most pronounced and sustained period of population growth has occurred during the Coleman–Ginther era, i.e., under twenty-five years of continuous Democratic leadership, following sixteen years split between the parties.

Dayton and Canton

Two further cases complicate the assumption that Ohio's large cities have been reliably Democratic for decades. Dayton elected Republican Mike Turner as mayor in 1993; he served from 1994 to 2002 before going on to represent Ohio's 3rd and 10th congressional districts in the U.S. House as a Republican, a seat he still holds. Canton elected Republican Janet Weir Creighton as its first female mayor in 2004; she served until early 2008, when she left to join the George W. Bush administration, and later served as a Stark County Commissioner. Both cities have had Democratic mayors since — Dayton since 2002 (with an independent, Gary Leitzell, holding the office from 2010 to 2014, and Democrat Shenise Turner-Sloss taking office in January 2026 after defeating incumbent Democrat Jeff Mims) — and Canton since 2008 — but both had a Republican mayor within roughly the last two decades, considerably more recently than Cleveland, Toledo, or Akron.

Youngstown

Youngstown is the most economically distressed city examined in this paper (see Appendix A) and, until recently, one of its most reliably Democratic. George Vukovich (D) took office in 1980, and Democrats held the office continuously through Patrick Ungaro, George McKelvey, Jay Williams, Charles Sammarone, John McNally IV, and Jamael Tito Brown, who was first elected in 2017. In the November 2025 general election, independent candidate Derrick McDowell, a first-time candidate and the founder of the Youngstown Flea, defeated two-term incumbent Brown by a 55%–44% margin and took office January 1, 2026, ending 45 years of Democratic mayors in the city. McDowell ran as a nonpartisan independent campaigning on accountability and economic development. This is the most recent change in party control of any city examined in this paper, and it occurred in the city with this paper's highest poverty rate — a pairing of facts that this paper reports without drawing a causal conclusion from it, consistent with the caution in Section II.

IV. Population Trends, 1980–2026

Population change is one of the clearest and most reliably documented measures of a city's trajectory. The table below shows recent population figures and the direction of change for the eight Ohio cities examined, drawn from U.S. Census Bureau counts and estimates.

City	2010 Census	~2024 estimate	Change 2010–~2024	Long-term pattern
Columbus	787,033	~915,000	+16%	Sustained growth since the 1980s; Ohio's only large city to consistently gain population
Cincinnati	296,943	~311,000	+5%	Modest, steady growth since the 2000s after decades of decline
Cleveland	396,815	~366,000	–8%	Continuous decline since 1950 peak; rate of loss has slowed since 2000
Toledo	287,208	~267,000	–7%	Continuous decline since the 1970s
Akron	199,110	~189,000	–5%	Long-term decline since the 1960s; rate of loss slowed in the 1990s
Dayton	141,527	~137,000	–3%	Long-term decline since the 1960s; recent estimates show modest stabilization
Youngstown	66,982	~59,000	–12%	Most severe decline of any large Ohio city; down roughly 65% from its 1930 peak of 170,002
Canton	73,007	~68,000	–7%	Continuous decline since the 1970s

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau decennial counts (2010, 2020); U.S. Census Bureau Vintage population estimates (2019, 2023, 2024, 2025), as compiled by Ohio-Demographics.com, All Columbus Data, and Biggest US Cities. Figures for ~2024 are estimates and are rounded; small variations exist across compiling sources due to differing estimate vintages.

The pattern is consistent across nearly every available year: Columbus has grown steadily since the 1980s; Cincinnati has grown modestly since the early 2000s; and Cleveland, Toledo, Akron, Dayton, Youngstown, and Canton have lost population in nearly every decade since 1980, with Youngstown's decline the most severe of any large city in Ohio. All eight cities have been governed by Democratic mayors for most or all of this period (see Section III), which means political party, considered alone, does not distinguish the cities that grew from the cities that did not — and, as Section III shows, the timing of each city's last Republican mayor does not track its population trajectory either: Dayton and Canton had Republican mayors more recently than Cleveland, Toledo, or Akron, yet all six have lost population.

This does not mean political leadership is irrelevant — it means that party label alone is not doing the explanatory work. Section V examines this question further using cities outside Ohio, and Section VI discusses several non-partisan factors, including the sharp and well-documented regional decline in manufacturing employment that began in the 1970s, that plausibly explain a substantial share of the divergence among Ohio's own cities.

V. A National Comparison: Testing the Single-Party Hypothesis

If Democratic leadership were, by itself, a primary driver of urban population decline, cities of similar size led by Republican mayors over a comparable period should show a starkly different pattern. This section examines five cities frequently cited in public commentary as faster-growing, Republican-led counterexamples to Ohio's cities. As the record below shows, the actual partisan histories of these cities are considerably more varied than the framing under which they are typically invoked.

City	Documented mayoral party history since ~1980	Population change, 2010–~2024
Nashville, TN (Davidson Co.)	Continuously Democratic or Democratic-aligned nonpartisan since 1975 (Fulton, Boner, Bredesen, Purcell, Dean, Barry, Briley, Cooper, O'Connell) — a tenure length comparable to Cleveland's	Consolidated metro grew by roughly 343,000 residents, 2010–2020, among the fastest-growing large metros in the country
Indianapolis, IN (Marion Co.)	Republican 1976–2000 (Hudnut, Goldsmith); Democratic 2000–2008 (Peterson); Republican 2008–2016 (Ballard); Democratic 2016–present (Hogsett) — almost evenly split between the parties	Grew by roughly 223,000 residents, 2010–2020, under both parties
Oklahoma City, OK	Republican-affiliated mayors for most of the period; current mayor David Holt is Republican-affiliated, though the office is formally nonpartisan	Steady growth throughout the period
Fort Worth, TX	Historically Republican-affiliated leadership; current mayor is classified as nonpartisan by Ballotpedia	One of the fastest-growing large cities in the country over the period
Jacksonville, FL (Duval Co.)	Republican-affiliated mayors for most of the period; flipped to a Democratic mayor (Donna Deegan) in 2023	Grew by roughly 260,000 residents, 2010–2020

Sources: Ballotpedia; Wikipedia mayoral-history pages; NBC News/Meet the Press analysis of big-city mayoral partisanship (2023); All Columbus Data compilation of Census metro population change, 2010–2020.

Two findings complicate a simple partisan narrative:

- Nashville — arguably the single most frequently cited Sun Belt urban-growth success story in national commentary — has been governed continuously by the Democratic Party, or by nonpartisan mayors aligned with it, since 1975. Its growth trajectory is the opposite of Cleveland's despite a similar length of single-party tenure. This indicates that whatever explains Nashville's growth relative to Cleveland's decline, it is very unlikely to be the party of the mayor, since both cities have had the same party in office for approximately the same length of time.
- Indianapolis grew steadily under 24 years of Republican mayors and has continued to grow under Democratic mayors since. This suggests that in at least one comparably sized Midwestern peer city, factors other than the mayor's party — for example, the 1970 Unigov city-county consolidation, which is frequently credited by urban researchers with expanding Indianapolis's tax and population base relative to peer cities that did not consolidate — are more directly implicated in its trajectory than partisan control of the mayor's office.

Oklahoma City, Fort Worth, and Jacksonville do fit the Republican-led, growing-city pattern more closely, at least for portions of the period examined, and are legitimate examples of Republican-led cities that have grown. But taken as a full set, the five comparison cities do not show a consistent pattern in which Republican leadership correlates with growth and Democratic leadership correlates with decline. They show, instead, that both parties have led both growing and non-growing large cities during the period in question — a pattern reinforced by the current economic indicators in Appendix A, where the comparison cities cluster tightly in the 13–16% poverty range regardless of party, while Ohio's own cities span a much wider range.

VI. What the Evidence Shows — and Does Not Show

What the evidence shows

- It is factually accurate that most of the eight Ohio cities examined have been governed by Democratic mayors for a long period — in several cases, multiple decades. As of this paper's publication, seven of the eight currently have a Democratic mayor; the eighth, Youngstown, elected independent Derrick McDowell in November 2025, ending 45 years of Democratic mayors there.
- It is also factually accurate that six of the eight cities examined have had a Republican mayor at some point since 1980, and that two of those transitions — Dayton (2002) and Canton (2008) — are considerably more recent than is commonly assumed.
- It is also factually accurate that several cities with comparably long single-party tenures, including at least one Democratic-led city (Nashville) and one city that alternated evenly between the parties (Indianapolis), have grown rather than declined over the same period.
- Within Ohio, Columbus's most sustained and rapid growth has occurred under continuous Democratic leadership since 2000, following a period of divided partisan control in the 1980s and 1990s. Party alone does not explain why Columbus diverged from Cleveland, Toledo, Akron, Dayton, Youngstown, and Canton — and the timing of each city's last Republican mayor does not track its population trajectory, since Dayton and Canton flipped to Democratic control more recently than Cleveland, Toledo, or Akron yet have continued to lose population.
- Current economic indicators (Appendix A) show substantial variation among the eight Ohio cities examined — from Columbus's 17.2% poverty rate and \$66,082 median household income to Youngstown's 36.2% poverty rate and \$34,746 median household income — further underscoring that mayoral party, or the recency of the last party change, is not doing the explanatory work. Notably, every one of the eight Ohio cities has a higher poverty rate than any of the five national comparison cities, a pattern discussed further in Appendix A.

What the evidence does not show

- This paper's findings do not establish that local governance and policy choices are irrelevant to city outcomes. They establish only that the mayor's party affiliation, considered in isolation, is not a reliable predictor of those outcomes across the cities examined here.
- This paper does not identify which specific policies, if any, distinguish Columbus's trajectory from Cleveland's, or Nashville's from Cleveland's. Plausible non-partisan candidates commonly cited by urban economists and historians — to be examined, not assumed, in future OCG research — include: the severity and timing of regional manufacturing job losses (the collapse of Youngstown's steel industry after 1977 is a frequently cited example with especially well-documented, sudden impact); differing annexation and land-use policies, which allowed some Sun Belt and Midwestern cities (including Columbus and Indianapolis) to expand their boundaries and tax base while Rust Belt cities' boundaries were largely fixed by the mid-20th century; state-level tax, infrastructure, and economic-development policy; the presence of a large public university, state government, or diversified employer base (a factor frequently cited in Columbus's case, as the seat of Ohio's state government and Ohio

State University); and broader demographic and migration trends affecting the Midwest and Northeast relative to the South and West.

- This paper does not evaluate crime or detailed education outcomes, which would require independent analysis using consistently reported data and are identified as a priority for future OCG research in Section VII.

VII. Questions for Further Research

Consistent with OCG's mission to inform rather than persuade, this paper closes with questions rather than conclusions. OCG intends to pursue several of these as follow-on research:

- What do multi-decade indicator series for poverty, violent crime, educational attainment, and housing vacancy actually show for the eight Ohio cities examined, and how do those trends compare to the comparison cities examined here?
- To what extent do differences in annexation authority and historical land-area growth explain the divergence between Columbus and Ohio's other large cities?
- What specific policy differences, if any, distinguish city administrations that presided over growth from those that presided over decline, independent of party label?
- How did the timing and severity of manufacturing job losses vary across Ohio's cities, and how much of the population divergence among them can be attributed to that timing alone?
- Which Ohio cities have improved the most on specific, measurable indicators over the past 20–30 years, and what changed in their governance or economic base during that period?
- Have Republican-led statewide policies in Ohio (tax policy, local government funding formulas, infrastructure investment) had a measurable effect on the state's largest cities, independent of the party of the mayor?
- Why do all eight Ohio cities examined here have a higher poverty rate than any of the five national comparison cities, including Columbus, whose population growth rivals the comparison set? Is this an Ohio-specific, statewide pattern, an artifact of which cities were selected for comparison, or something else?

OCG welcomes input from residents, former officials, and researchers on any of these questions, and will treat findings that complicate this paper's own framing with the same rigor applied here to the original hypothesis.

VIII. A Note on OCG's Approach to This Topic

Ohio Common Ground does not believe any political party is entitled to automatic credit or automatic blame for the condition of Ohio's cities. We believe voters are entitled to an accurate record of who has governed, for how long, and what happened during that time — and to have that record presented without being pre-sorted into a conclusion.

This paper was produced under OCG's editorial independence policy, which separates OCG's research and publishing function from its organizing and advocacy activities. It is descriptive by design: where the evidence complicates a popular narrative, as it does here with respect to

Nashville, Indianapolis, and the political histories of Columbus, Dayton, and Canton, that complication is reported rather than smoothed over. Framing decisions with clear partisan implications — including which comparison cities to feature and how to characterize contested causal claims — were reviewed and approved by OCG leadership prior to publication, consistent with that firewall.

A follow-on paper applying this same standard to statewide, Republican-led Ohio governance is a natural companion piece and is noted as a candidate for future publication in Section VII.

Appendix A. Supplemental City Economic Indicators

This appendix presents current-year economic indicators for all thirteen cities examined in this paper, responding to the research question raised in Section VII. It reports two indicators — median household income and the poverty rate — along with homeownership rate for the eight Ohio cities. Poverty rates for all eight Ohio cities are drawn from a single Census QuickFacts vintage (2019–2023 ACS 5-year estimates), confirmed directly for this publication. Median household income is confirmed against that same direct Census QuickFacts vintage for four of the eight Ohio cities (Toledo, Akron, Dayton, and Youngstown); for the remaining four (Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Canton), the figures come from Census-derived compiling sources whose exact vintage OCG could not independently confirm against Census QuickFacts and are reported as approximate. Crime and detailed education-outcome data are not included here; as noted in Section II, OCG could not verify those figures to a comparable standard across all thirteen jurisdictions and is treating them as a distinct, future research project rather than publishing figures it cannot fully stand behind.

Selected major Ohio cities

City	Median household income	Poverty rate	Homeownership rate
Columbus	\$66,082	17.2%	44.3%
Cincinnati	\$52,588	24.5%	39.8%
Toledo	\$47,532	24.5%	53.3%
Akron	\$48,544	22.9%	50.7%
Canton	\$43,188	28.4%	48.7%
Dayton	\$43,454	27.1%	48.4%
Cleveland	\$40,801	30.8%	41.2%
Youngstown	\$34,746	36.2%	56.2%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts and American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2019–2023 vintage, for all eight Ohio cities' poverty rates and for Toledo, Akron, Dayton, and Youngstown's median household incomes (direct Census QuickFacts citations, see Appendix B). Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Canton median household income figures are drawn from Census-derived compilations (Point2Homes, Data USA, Ohio-Demographics.com) reporting the most recent comparable ACS release; where a source's exact vintage could not be confirmed against Census QuickFacts directly, this is noted in Appendix B. This table was rebuilt from a single consistent poverty-rate vintage after a peer-review finding that an earlier compilation had mixed data vintages; see Appendix B for the correction history. Homeownership figures reflect city-level (not metropolitan-area) estimates and were not rebuilt to the same vintage standard; treat them as approximate.

National comparison cities

City	Median household income	Poverty rate
Fort Worth, TX	\$79,507	13.1%

City	Median household income	Poverty rate
Nashville, TN (Davidson Co.)	\$77,371	14.1%
Jacksonville, FL (Duval Co.)	\$69,872	14.5%
Oklahoma City, OK	\$68,656	15.1%
Indianapolis, IN (Marion Co.)	\$66,219	15.8%

Sources: WorldPopulationReview, compiling U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Figures for consolidated city-county jurisdictions (Nashville, Jacksonville, Indianapolis) reflect the full consolidated population, consistent with the population figures reported in Section V.

The comparison is striking on its own terms, but not in the way an earlier version of this analysis suggested. All five national comparison cities cluster tightly in a 13.1%–15.8% poverty-rate band, regardless of the mayor's party. The eight Ohio cities examined, by contrast, span a wider range — from Columbus's 17.2% to Youngstown's 36.2% — but every single one of them, including Columbus, has a higher poverty rate than any of the five comparison cities. If mayoral party — or the recency of a city's last party change — were the dominant driver of these outcomes, Ohio's cities would be expected to cluster more closely with the comparison set at least some of the time, and Dayton and Canton, whose most recent Republican mayors left office more recently than Cleveland's, Toledo's, or Akron's, would be expected to look economically stronger than those three cities; the data do not show that. Instead, every Ohio city examined here trails every comparison city on this measure, a pattern that may reflect state-level economic conditions, regional industrial history, or other factors common to Ohio's cities specifically, rather than anything about the party or tenure of any individual mayor. This is consistent with this paper's central finding in Sections V and VI: local and structural factors specific to each city and, potentially, to Ohio as a state appear to explain more of the variation than the party of its mayor, and this Ohio-wide gap is itself identified as a question for future OCG research in Section VII.

Appendix B. Sources and Data Notes

Correction history

This paper underwent OCG's standard peer review prior to publication. That review identified several errors in an internal draft, which were independently verified against primary sources and corrected before release:

- The draft described the eight Ohio cities examined as “Ohio's eight largest cities.” Verification against the Ohio Development Services Agency's official 2024 population estimates showed this was incorrect: Youngstown is Ohio's fourteenth-largest city, behind Parma, Lorain, and Hamilton. The paper's scope was relabeled “Selected Major Ohio Cities,” and the rationale for including Youngstown despite its population rank is disclosed in Section I.
- The draft listed Jeffrey Mims as Dayton's current mayor. Mims lost the November 2025 election to Shenise Turner-Sloss, who took office January 5, 2026; the paper was corrected accordingly. This does not change Dayton's party classification, as Turner-Sloss is also a Democrat.

- The draft listed “William Green (D), elected Nov. 2025” as Youngstown's current mayor. OCG could not identify any documentary basis for this entry and has treated it as an error introduced during drafting rather than a sourced claim. The correct result — independent Derrick McDowell's defeat of Democratic incumbent Jamael Tito Brown, and McDowell's inauguration on January 1, 2026 — was verified against Mahoning County Board of Elections results as reported by the Youngstown Vindicator, WFMJ, and WKBN, and is reflected throughout Section III and the Executive Summary.
- The draft's Appendix A reported a Columbus poverty rate of 13.5%, drawn from a third-party demographic-data aggregator. Cross-checking against Census QuickFacts and the Census Bureau's own American Community Survey profile (via Census Reporter) found this figure inconsistent with the 2019–2023 ACS 5-year estimate of approximately 17.2%. Appendix A's poverty-rate column was rebuilt from a single consistent Census QuickFacts vintage for all eight Ohio cities; see the Appendix A source note for detail.

OCG discloses this correction history because its own standards call for acknowledging and correcting errors unfavorable to the paper's framing, and because a paper about the accuracy of public claims should hold itself to the same standard.

Mayoral history

Ballotpedia, “Party affiliation of the mayors of the 100 largest cities” and city-specific pages (Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo, Nashville, Oklahoma City, Fort Worth), accessed 2026.

Wikipedia, “List of mayors of Cleveland,” “List of mayors of Columbus, Ohio,” “List of mayors of Toledo, Ohio,” “List of mayors of Canton, Ohio,” “List of mayors of Cincinnati,” “List of mayors of Indianapolis,” “List of mayors of Nashville, Tennessee,” and biographical pages for Voinovich, Rinehart, Lashutka, Owens, McHugh, Ray, Ballard, Plusquellic, Turner, Dixon, McLin, Vukovich, Ungaro, McKelvey, Bachrach, Creighton, Healy, Hudnut, Hogsett, Purcell, and Turner-Sloss, accessed 2026.

Columbus Historical Society, “Mayors of Columbus Collection” biographical notes on Gregory S. Lashutka and Dana G. “Buck” Rinehart.

WOSU Public Media, “Former Columbus Mayor Dana ‘Buck’ Rinehart Dead at 68,” February 18, 2015.

The Blade (Toledo), coverage of the 1989, 1991, and 1993 Toledo mayoral elections; Toledo Blade obituary of John McHugh, January 2015.

Governing and Ideastream Public Media profiles of Janet Weir Creighton; WKYC coverage of the 2023 Canton mayoral election.

U.S. House of Representatives Office of the Historian and NATO Parliamentary Assembly biographical records for Michael R. Turner.

University of Akron Archival Collections, biographical notes on Roy L. Ray and John S. Ballard.

Wikipedia, “Shenise Turner-Sloss” and “2025 Dayton mayoral election”; WKEF/WDTN/Spectrum News 1/Dayton Daily News coverage of the November 2025 Dayton mayoral election, accessed 2026.

Mahoning County Board of Elections, November 2025 general election results; the Youngstown Vindicator, “McDowell unseats Youngstown Mayor Brown” and “New mayor sees city as extension of family,” November 2025 and January 2026; WFMJ and WKBN coverage of the 2025 Youngstown mayoral election.

Ohio Democratic Party organizational materials, listing Democratic mayors of Ohio's largest cities as of the materials' publication date; treated as a secondary source and independently checked against the election results above, accessed 2026.

NBC News / Meet the Press, “Democratic mayoral control in big cities is the new ‘blue wall,’” January 2023, on the partisan composition of the 25 largest U.S. cities' mayors.

Population and city-selection data

Ohio Development Services Agency, Office of Research, “2024 Population Estimates for Governmental Units Over 15,000 Ranked by Size,” used to verify the actual rank order of Ohio's largest cities and identify Parma, Lorain, and Hamilton as larger than Youngstown.

U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census counts (2010, 2020) and Vintage intercensal population estimates (2019, 2023, 2024, 2025).

Compilations of the above by Ohio-Demographics.com (“Ohio Cities by Population”), All Columbus Data (“Columbus vs Other Cities,” “Columbus Population and Demographics”), and Biggest US Cities (“Top 100 Biggest Cities in Ohio”).

Economic indicators (Appendix A)

U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2019–2023 ACS 5-year estimates (table series INC110223 for median household income; series IPE120223 for poverty rate), fetched directly for Cleveland, Toledo, Akron, Dayton, Canton, and Youngstown.

Census Reporter ACS profile for Columbus city, Ohio (2019–2023 5-year estimates), used for the Columbus poverty-rate correction.

Point2Homes, Ohio-Demographics.com, and Data USA city demographic profiles, used for Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Canton median household income figures where a direct QuickFacts table was not retrieved; each cites U.S. Census Bureau ACS data as its underlying source.

WorldPopulationReview, compiling U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-year estimates, for the five national comparison cities' income and poverty figures.

This appendix reflects sources consulted as of this paper's publication. Where compiling sources reported slightly different vintages of the underlying Census data, OCG selected the most recent consistent figure available and noted this in the relevant table.