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From the Puget Sound Business Journal:
<https://www.bizjournals.com/seattle/news/2023/02/27/top-counties-for-economic-growth.html>

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Here are Washington's top counties for economic growth

Feb 27, 2023, 11:28pm PST



Andriy Onufriyenko via Getty Images

Most counties posted solid year-over-year economic growth during the Covid-19 recovery, but there were a few standouts that set the pace.

As Washington state's economy recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic, its most populated counties — with a few exceptions — were also among its biggest engines of growth.

That's according to an analysis by *The Business Journals* of the latest gross domestic product county data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, which provides new insights about the economic recovery from Covid-19.

King County — home to tech juggernauts such as Amazon and Microsoft — led all but one county in GDP growth in 2021, posting an 8.9% increase to \$328.8 billion from 2020. Just behind King were Clark and Whatcom counties, which recorded year-over-year gains of 8.6% (to \$21.4 billion) and 7.5% (to \$13.1 billion), respectively. Next were Island (up 7.1%), Spokane (up 6.9%) and Grays Harbor (up 6.4%). Among other Puget Sound-area counties, Pierce ranked 12th (up 5.4%), Kitsap was 19th (up 2.9%) and Snohomish was 24th (up 1.9%).

Washington's fastest-recovering county was tiny San Juan — population 18,557 — which grew 9.9% between 2020 and 2021 (to \$754.4 million in GDP) after suffering declines the two previous years. Adams in Eastern Washington was the worst-performing county, slipping 5.6% to \$895.1 million between 2020 and 2021.

Washington state as a whole grew 6.7% year over year to \$575.1 billion in 2021 GDP. That followed a 1.1% increase to \$538.9 billion the year prior.

More than 77% of counties across the nation posted GDP growth between 2020 and 2021 as the economic recovery ramped up, a trend that fueled substantial hiring — which in turn eventually contributed to labor shortages, pay growth and inflation. The average county posted a 3.3% increase.

The national GDP increased 5.9% between 2020 and 2021 to \$19.4 trillion. That came after a 2.8% decrease in 2020 due to the pandemic.

The national leaders

The tech sector's explosive growth during the pandemic recovery powered a strong year for counties in Silicon Valley, and several fast-growing Sun Belt counties also hovered near the top of the rankings, but they couldn't outpace Elkhart County, Indiana.

The northern Indiana county, known as the "RV Capital of the World," posted a 25% increase in GDP between 2020 and 2021. That was the highest growth for any county with a GDP of at least \$10 billion in 2020.

Elkhart County is home to several of the nation's largest recreational vehicle manufacturers, including Forest River Inc. and Thor Industries Inc., and the industry recorded a surge of business after the pandemic.



As with many recent growth metrics, the Sun Belt was well represented near the top of the GDP growth rankings. The region accounted for 18 of the top 25 counties for economic growth between 2020 and 2021 among counties with at least \$10 billion in 2020 GDP.

The Sun Belt also was a big winner in Covid-19-fueled migration and job growth.

Overall, the economic recovery from the pandemic was very kind to the nation's largest county economies, but there were some

exceptions.

Of the 310 counties to top the \$10 billion threshold, the average growth was 5.5%, and only nine counties saw their GDP dip between 2020 and 2021. Six of those counties are in Texas.

Among counties with at least \$100 billion in GDP, Harris County, Texas — home to Houston — recorded the weakest growth, at 1.5%.

Taking size out of the equation, Coke County, Texas, posted the strongest growth in the nation. Its GDP grew from \$129 million in 2020 to \$235 million in 2021 — an 82% increase powered by growth in the utility industry, according to the BEA.

At the other end of the spectrum, Chouteau County, Montana, had the largest decrease, at 34.8%. The agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting industry was the primary cause cited for the drop.

Looking at statewide GDP growth, New Hampshire (up 9.3%), Tennessee (up 9%) and Nevada (up 8.9%) led the way, while North Dakota (down 4.8%), Alaska (down 5.1%) and Wyoming (down 5.7%) were at the bottom of the rankings.



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