

December 12, 2014

## America the Beautiful? Not So Fast, Says Pew Research

### JUN OKUMURA

VISITING RESEARCHER AT MEIJI  
INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS



A GRADUATE OF TOKYO UNIVERSITY, HE WORKED MAINLY METI ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT AND OTHER ISSUES. AFTER LEAVING THE CIVIL SERVICE, HE HAS PLAYED ADVISORY ROLES FOR THE EURASIA GROUP AND NASIC. HE IS OFTEN APPEARS IN THE OVERSEAS MEDIA ON JAPANESE POLITICS AND POLICY ISSUES AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

Conrad Hackett, a demographer at Pew Research has a highly active twitter account where he posts an endless stream of fascinating data, usually with colorful charts, graphs and the like. Most recently, he posted the Google single-word autocomplete results for “Why is [name of state] so ...” for every state in the USA [here](#). A total of 28 words were used to describe the 50 states, which means that many of the words were used multiple times. The following is the list of words in alphabetical order with the number of states described by each word in parenthesis.

**Backwards** (1), **Bad** (1), **Big** (1), **Boring** (2), **Cheap** (1), **Cold** (5), **Conservative** (1), **Corrupt** (1), **Democratic** (1), **Empty** (1), **Expensive** (5), **Fit** (1), **Flat** (1), **Good** (2), **Haunted** (2), **Hot** (2), **Important** (1), **Liberal** (3), **Mormon** (1), **Poor** (6), **Racist** (2), **Republican** (3), **Rich** (1), **Small** (1), **Smart** (1), **Strict** (1), **White** (1), and **Windy** (1).

The color code for the descriptions, in case you didn’t guess, is **blue** for positive, **red** for negative, and **black** for neutral. That’s six positives, 26 negatives, and 16 neutrals. Even if we upgrade “hot” to neutral—Florida, just maybe; Arizona, I don’t think so, but just for the sake of argument—negatives still outnumber positives 24 to six. We like to think of the United States as a place of boundless opportunity and optimism, and maybe it is. But as far as the

American view—let’s face it, the vast majority of internet users typing in the names of individual states will be Americans—of its respective states are concerned, the first thing that comes to the collective mind of the Google algorithms more often than not reflects a rather mordant outlook.

Is that how the average American sees the individual states? Perhaps. But then, it may be a reflection of a more general negativism in internet commentary, judging from the comments sections of leniently monitored websites. This looks like an interesting subject for the statistics-minded social scientist, but for now, it's just one interesting data point, brought to you by Conrad Hackett, of Pew Research.