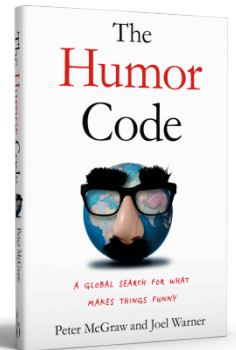


WHAT ARE THE FUNNIEST CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES?

In collaboration with the Humor Research Lab (HuRL), the co-authors of The Humor Code rank the funniest cities in the United States – plus reveal the top cities' preferred type of humor.

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As they travelled the world for their new book, [The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny](#), scientist [Peter McGraw](#) and journalist [Joel Warner](#) noticed that humor often has a local flavor. The jokes that get laughs at a comedy club in Denver seem unlikely to fly in the office of the cartoon editor of *The New Yorker*, and the torturous game shows that the Japanese find so amusing would likely be incomprehensible to a sitcom producer in Los Angeles.



This observation led to the Humor Code's latest and perhaps most controversial question:

“What are the funniest cities in the United States?”

To answer this question, McGraw and Warner turned to McGraw's [Humor Research Lab](#) (HuRL) at the University of Colorado Boulder. The HuRL team, helmed by [Adrian Ward](#) and Caleb Warren, created the Humor Algorithm (HA) to rank the 50 funniest cities in America – the most comprehensive analysis of humorous cities ever attempted.



Over a nine-month period, the team collected extensive data for the project.

First, they mined the Internet and the comedy industry for a variety of objective measures:

- Frequency of visits to [Cheezburger](#) comedy websites, such as [Lolcats](#) and [FAIL Blog](#)
- Number of comedy clubs per square mile in each city
- Traveling comedians' ratings of each city's comedy-club audiences
- Number of famous comedians born in each city, divided by city population
- Number of famous funny tweeters living in each city, divided by city population
- Number of comedy radio stations available in each city
- Frequency of humor-related web searches originating in each city

Then, the team conducted an extensive survey with more than 900 residents from the top ten cities determined by the objective measures above. To glean a deeper understanding of humorous daily life in these cities, researchers quizzed residents on the kinds of funny entertainment they enjoyed, asked whether they looked for humor in their friends and lovers, and subjected them to a “Need for Levity” personality test. Participants also had to describe their city's sense of humor and recount their favorite joke. The result was not just a more accurate top ten list, but also a window into the various “humor profiles” of each of the top ten cities.

Here are the results:

**THE TOP 10 FUNNIEST CITIES IN AMERICA,
AS REVEALED BY THE HUMOR ALGORITHM (HA)**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>City</u>
1	Chicago, IL
2	Boston, MA
3	Atlanta, GA
4	Washington, DC
5	Portland, OR
6	New York, NY
7	Los Angeles, CA
8	Denver, CO
9	San Francisco, CA
10	Seattle, WA

The following 40

11	Minneapolis, MN	31	Colorado Springs, CO
12	Long Beach, CA	32	Omaha, NE
13	Philadelphia, PA	33	Oklahoma City, OK
14	Austin, TX	34	Milwaukee, WI
15	Raleigh, NC	35	Nashville-Davidson, TN
16	Cleveland, OH	36	Dallas, TX
17	Charlotte, NC	37	Houston, TX
18	Phoenix, AZ	38	Albuquerque, NM
19	Mesa, AZ	39	Detroit, MI
20	San Diego, CA	40	Fresno, CA
21	Oakland, CA	41	El Paso, TX
22	Louisville-Jefferson County, KY	42	Tucson, AZ
23	Sacramento, CA	43	Las Vegas, NV
24	Columbus, OH	44	Virginia Beach, VA
25	Indianapolis, IN	45	Tulsa, OK
26	Memphis, TN	46	Arlington, TX
27	Baltimore, MD	47	San Antonio, TX
28	Kansas City, MO	48	Miami, FL
29	San Jose, CA	49	Jacksonville, FL
30	Wichita, KS	50	Fort Worth, TX

THE TOP TEN CITIES' HUMOR PROFILES

Researchers asked more than 900 residents of the top ten cities to describe their city's sense of humor and recount their favorite joke. Their responses revealed unique "humor profiles" for each city. For example, Boston residents balance high-brow intellectualism with drunken rowdiness, Washington, D.C. denizens find humor in the absurdities of our political system, and Portlanders are just plain weird.

1) Chicago, IL

Summary: Improvisational and situation-based humor, rather than traditional jokes.

For a place that's the funniest city in the country, Chicago doesn't seem to boast a lot of jokes! Many Chicago residents surveyed noted that they could not think of any zingers, since they prefer to mine observational humor from the situations in which they find themselves. Such remarks seem to fit with the city's professional comedy scene, since the city is known as a mecca for improv and stand-up. As one respondent remarked, "Chicago is a city where improv comedy is popular, and people appreciate quick wit and topical humor. It's also a very diverse city, so you get all types of humor." The jokes that Chicagoans do tend to tell often feature deadpan and quick-witted humor, much of it directed at the foibles and frustrations of living in Chicago, including the lousy weather. As one participant noted, "We find making jokes about 'The Windy City' to be funny. We also have a lot of humor about our public transportation system, the CTA, due to how dangerous it is."

Representative jokes:

"I cannot think of a single 'joke' to put here. Typically the kinds of things I find funny are related to contextual or referential comments."

"If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes."

2) Boston, MA

Summary: Dry, intellectual, humor balanced by low-brow, drunken rowdiness.

When it comes to humor, Boston has a split personality. Some residents described the city's high-brow intellectual humor, driven by the multitude of colleges and universities in the region. As one person put it, "[We have] lots of analytical and observational humor. [There are] lots of people with advanced degrees in Boston." Others, however, described Boston's working-class sense of humor, focused on sports and drinking. ("I believe that the city's humor is very blue collar. From my experience, my friends from Boston are more of pranking type, not necessarily with clever humor, but a humor that is easy to grasp with little understanding.") The one constant appears to be dry sarcasm: "Sarcastic, Backhanded, Slapstick. You can get a good gauge for the sense of humor by listening to sports talk radio. Every remark feels like a sarcastic or tongue-in-cheek type of joke. Also there's a lot of drunk people, so that's where the slapstick comes in, I guess."

Representative jokes:

“Two fish swim into a bar. The first fish says, ‘I’ll have some H₂O.’ The second fish says, ‘I’ll have some H₂O, too.’ The second fish died.” *(Note: Half of Boston’s intellectual jokes were so cerebral that HuRL’s team wasn’t smart enough to understand them.)*

“Knock, knock. *Who’s there?* Honey Bee. *Honey Bee who?* Honey, bee a dear and get me a beer.”

3) Atlanta, GA

Summary: Racially-charged humor.

Many Atlanta residents claimed that because of their city’s diversity, much of the humor was racially-oriented, and perhaps a bit crass. One respondent noted, “I feel that at comedy shows I have been to, the comedians have made jokes about racial relations and stereotypical differences in the way people live.” The region’s diversity has also spawned a variety of comedy styles; according to one participant, popular genres range from the redneck jokes of Jeff Foxworthy to the gritty urban comedy of Katt Williams. But that diversity also generates more basic jokes, stuff that everyone can understand, despite their differences. As one resident said, “Pretty much anything that can make us laugh or put a smile on our face we would consider humorous.”

Representative joke:

“What do you call a black pilot? A pilot, you racist.”

4) Washington, DC

Summary: Political and cynical humor.

Is it any surprise that Washington, D.C. residents joke about politics? Much of this comedy appears to be cynical cracks about the frustrations of government work and political networking. As one respondent said, “People tend to be more intelligent and miserable, which is a perfect mix for comedy and comedic appreciation.” Another person noted, “Even if the subject of a joke isn’t overtly political, it tends to be colored by the world-weariness that comes with dealing with a lot of politicians.” Plus, modern politics are such a mess, it doesn’t seem to take much work to turn these shenanigans into jokes. As one participant cracked, “Have you read any news about Congress since the last election? That’s pretty funny.”

Representative joke:

“Knock, knock. *Who’s there?* KGB. *KGB who?* (Knocker smacks the responder) We will ask the questions!” *(Note: This joke showed up multiple times in DC, but nowhere else.)*

5) Portland, OR

Summary: Quirky, absurd, and just plain weird.

People in Portland, the setting of the surreal sketch comedy series *Portlandia*, don't really seem to think of themselves as funny—just odd. When asked to describe the city's sense of humor, one resident simply wrote, "You wouldn't understand." Another said, "Portland isn't 'funny' as much as it's a unique blend of people. Some may look at that as funny, but I'm not laughing." A third noted, "For the most part, we enjoy Darth Vader wearing a kilt riding a unicycle playing the bagpipes."

Representative jokes:

"If God dwells inside us like some people say, I sure hope He likes enchiladas, because that's what He's getting."

"A man is in the library and goes up to the desk. He asks for a burger and fries. The librarian says, 'Sir this is a library.' The man replies, 'Oh, I'm sorry,' and leans over and whispers, 'Can I get a burger and fries?' (Note: this joke showed up twice in Portland, but nowhere else.)"

6) New York, NY

Summary: Fast-paced and high-stress comedy.

In New York, everyday humor tends to serve as a release. As one New Yorker put it, "The city is full of laughter. Jokes are stress relievers and most people are stressed in NYC." Some of these jokes are cracks at residents' busy, fast-paced lifestyle. ("The city has a sense of humor that can be applied to any situation, even as small as someone rushing for an elevator.") Other jokes are at the expense of others, dark stuff that's often related to New York's ethnic diversity. According to one respondent, "I believe in NYC we have a crude sense of humor. NYC people sometimes live tough lives, so we gotta have tough skin."

Representative jokes:

"How does every ethnic joke start? By looking over your shoulder."

"I was at the library today. The guy at the desk was very rude. I said, 'I'd like a card.' He said, 'You have to prove you're a citizen of New York.' So I stabbed him."

7) Los Angeles, CA

Summary: Cynical show-business zingers.

Los Angeles-based humor is often cynical, much of it based on criticizing "fake" LA culture. As one resident complained, "There are a lot of hipsters in LA, and sometimes people act like they don't have a sense of humor so that they don't look 'uncool.'" Of course, this being Los Angeles, many of the jokes are all about show business. One respondent noted, "I think people generally find it funny when someone makes fun of pop culture, specifically the film or television industries." Another added, "LA is full of aspiring actors, musicians and entertainers and they seem to be the butt of every joke—especially if they fall into the stereotype of being a waitress."

Representative jokes:

“Have you heard of the movie, *Constipated?* It's not out yet”

“How do you wake up Lady Gaga? Poker face.”

8) Denver, CO

Summary: Laid-back (and pot-fueled) comedy.

In Denver, people are relaxed, and that trickles into the city's laid-back humor style. Said one respondent, “People are pretty relaxed here and thus have a good sense of humor. We don't take things too seriously.” That includes not taking themselves and their city too seriously. “We can laugh about things like seeing wildlife running around town,” cracked a resident. “Have you seen [Blucifer](#) out by Denver International Airport?” asked another. “I think the city would have to have an easy-going attitude to accept that thing as the ‘Welcome to Denver!’ icon.” All the recreational marijuana being smoked around town these days seems to help, too: “Most jokes today about Denver are about pot/marijuana and we find them to be funny.”

Representative jokes:

“A piece of string walks into a bar. Bartender won't serve him, saying, ‘We don't serve string.’ String goes outside, ruffles his cut end, and goes back into the bar. Bartender says, ‘Aren't you the piece of string that was just in here?’ The string replies, ‘No, I'm a frayed knot.’”

9) San Francisco, CA

Summary: Comedic tension between “liberal” San Francisco and “high-tech” San Francisco

In the past, San Francisco-based comedy was rooted in the city's liberal leanings and slightly zany personality (as opposed to the full-blown zaniness of Portland). As one resident put it, “San Francisco is full of crazy characters, in all neighborhoods. You can walk down the street at any given time and see wacky clothing, strange behavior, and overall craziness.” But lately, the growth of the tech sector has led to more intellectual humor. (“People who have been here longer are for the most part a little weird... The influx of tech people has made humor perhaps be a bit more nerdy/geeky.”) The tension between the two worlds generates lots of jokes.

Representative jokes:

“What does a gay horse eat? *Heeyyyyyy.*”

“An electron and a positron walk into a bar. The positron says, ‘This round's on me.’ The electron says, ‘Are you sure?’ The positron says, ‘I'm positive.’”

10) Seattle, WA

Summary: Snooty, intellectual humor

Seattle residents are proud of themselves, and that comes through in their humor. The city's youthful, intellectual strain of comedy involves jokes about technology, start-up culture, and yes, coffee. Sometimes, the gags are at the expense of all the poor schmucks who live somewhere else. As one resident cracked, "With our above-average intelligence, many, especially those in the South, never quite understand when we are being funny and/or sarcastic."

Representative jokes:

"What does one computer say to the other? *0101010101010101*"

"Why does California have all the lawyers and New Jersey have all the hazardous waste dumps? New Jersey got first choice."

CITY RANKINGS FOR VARIOUS HUMOR ATTRIBUTES

Humor can be calibrated in a variety of different ways. Is it a measure of how much comedy you consume, or how many jokes you tell? For the Humor Algorithm, HuRL combined a variety of humor attributes to end up with an overall ranking, but if you consider each attribute independently, the rankings end up looking quite different. Here are a variety of top five lists, based on various humor attributes.

Rankings on "Need for Levity" test

- 1) Chicago, IL
- 2) New York, NY
- 3) Boston, MA
- 4) Washington, DC
- 5) Portland, OR

Frequency of attending live comedy shows

- 1) Boston, MA
- 2) Los Angeles, CA
- 3) San Francisco, CA
- 4) Chicago, IL
- 5) New York, NY

Preference for funny movies

- 1) Atlanta, GA
- 2) Washington, DC
- 3) Boston, MA
- 4) Seattle, WA
- 5) San Francisco, CA

Preference for funny television shows

- 1) Washington, DC
- 2) Boston, MA
- 3) Atlanta, GA
- 4) Los Angeles, CA
- 5) Portland, OR

Preference for funny books

- 1) Portland, OR
- 2) Boston, MA
- 3) Denver, CO
- 4) Los Angeles, CA
- 5) Seattle, WA

Preference for funny newspaper sections

- 1) Boston, MA
- 2) Atlanta, GA
- 3) Chicago, IL
- 4) Denver, CO
- 5) Seattle, WA

Preference for funny holidays (April Fool's)

- 1) San Francisco, CA
- 2) Boston, MA
- 3) Portland, OR
- 4) New York, NY
- 5) Chicago, IL

Preference for funny costumes at parties

- 1) Washington, DC
- 2) Denver, CO
- 3) Atlanta, GA
- 4) Seattle, WA
- 5) Boston, MA

Use of Comedy Central as a news source

- 1) Portland, OR
- 2) Chicago, IL
- 3) Seattle, WA
- 4) Los Angeles, CA
- 5) Atlanta, GA

Preference for funny friends

- 1) New York, NY
- 2) Chicago, IL
- 3) San Francisco, CA
- 4) Atlanta, GA
- 5) Boston, MA

Preference for funny romantic partners

- 1) Atlanta, GA
- 2) Washington, DC
- 3) Chicago, IL
- 4) Portland, OR
- 5) New York, NY

Funniest workplace environments

- 1) Portland, OR
- 2) Atlanta, GA
- 3) New York, NY
- 4) Washington, DC
- 5) Los Angeles, CA

ABOUT THE HUMOR CODE

Part road-trip comedy and part social science experiment, [*The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny*](#) details a scientist and a journalist’s epic quest to discover the secret behind humor.

Dr. Peter McGraw, founder of the Humor Research Lab at the University of Colorado Boulder, teamed up with journalist Joel Warner on a far-reaching search for the secret behind humor. Their journey spanned the globe, from New York to Japan, from Palestine to the Amazon. Meanwhile, the duo conducts their own humor experiments along the way—to wince-worthy, hilarious, and illuminating results.

In their quixotic search, they questioned countless experts, from Louis C.K. to rat-tickling researchers, and answered pressing (and not-so-pressing) questions such as, “What’s the secret to winning the New Yorker cartoon caption contest?” “Who has the bigger funny bone—men or women, Democrats or Republicans?” and “Is laughter really the best medicine?” As a final test, McGraw uses everything they learned to attempt stand-up—at the largest comedy festival in the world.

Funny, surprising, and often touching, *The Humor Code* is a revealing exploration of humor, society and an unusual friendship.

ABOUT THE HUMOR RESEARCH LAB (HuRL)

The [Humor Research Lab](#) (HuRL) at the University of Colorado, Boulder is dedicated to the scientific study of humor, its precipitating factors, and its consequences. The lab’s theoretical and methodological base is in the interdisciplinary fields of emotion, judgment, and decision making, with an emphasis in social and cognitive psychology. (Special thanks goes out to HuRL team members Erin Percival Carter, Christopher Miller, Alexandra Weiner, Allison Paul, Anthony Levy, Hayley Dunn, and Alec Wilkie for their work on the Humor Algorithm.)

ABOUT THE BENIGN VIOLATION THEORY

In collaboration with Caleb Warren, Peter McGraw has been developing and testing a general theory of humor called the benign violation theory. The theory builds on work by a linguist, Tom Veatch, and integrates existing humor theories to propose that humor occurs when and only when three conditions are satisfied: (1) a situation is a violation, (2) the situation is benign, and (3) both perceptions occur simultaneously. For example, play fighting and tickling, which produce laughter in humans and other primates, are benign violations because they are physically threatening but harmless attacks.

The theory also explains why humor sometimes fails—either because the violation involved does not seem benign, or because it’s so benign there is no violation. For example, play fighting and tickling cease to elicit laughter either when the attack stops (strictly benign) or becomes too aggressive (malign violation). Jokes similarly fail to be funny when either they are too tame or too risqué.

METHODOLOGY

Part One: Data collection

HuRL began with the 50 largest U.S. cities, based on population. For each city, researchers found data on seven city attributes related to both humor production and humor appreciation:

Humor Production:

1. Famous funny people:

Funny people have to come from somewhere. Researchers compiled lists of the most iconic, popular, and well-respected humorists, then determined where these funny people were born.

2. Top Tweeters:

Funny cities encourage engaging with others in humorous ways. Researchers scoured media lists of the funniest tweeters, paying special attention to non-celebrities (for example, those listed in *Complex Magazine's* "[25 Funniest Non-Celebrities on Twitter](#)"), and noted how many currently lived in each city.

Humor Appreciation:

1. Number of comedy clubs:

Comedy clubs provide a venue for touring comedians, a place for local up-and-comers to cut their teeth, and a general hub for a city's comedy scene. Researchers used publicly available business listings to compile a list of all clubs dedicated to comedy and/or improv in each city.

2. Comedian's favorite cities:

Comedy clubs don't mean much if comedians hate performing there. Researchers asked twenty nationally touring comedians to rate the audience quality in each city on our list.

3. Visits to funny websites

Researchers collaborated with the Cheezburger Network, home of LOLcats and Fail Blog, to track each city's average number of visits to funny websites over a three-month period.

4. Google search data:

When people appreciate comedy, they search for funny things. Researchers used Google Trends analysis to track the tendency of residents in each city to search for humor-related words, such as "funny," "humor," and "comedy" over a ten-year time period.

5. Comedy radio:

Some people listen to Snoop Dogg on the way to work, while others prefer Seinfeld. Researchers compiled listings of all comedy radio stations broadcast in each city, including both nationally-affiliated syndicates and locally-based stations.

Part Two: Data weighing

Not all humor attributes are created equal. To weigh the relative importance of each data source, researchers asked sixteen HuRL collaborators to independently rate the significance of each source by distributing 100 “humor points” among the seven attributes. Attributes more representative of a “funny” or “humorous” city were given more points. Researchers aggregated these independent ratings and used them to weigh the raw rankings of each city, producing the following hierarchy of importance:

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Attribute</u>
1	Comedian’s Favorite Cities
2	# Comedy Clubs
3	Cheezburger Visits
4	Google Trends
5	Funny People on Twitter
6	Comedy Radio
7	Funny Births

Researchers took the data collected in Part One, equalized them on variables including city population and land area, then weighed these equalized data points using these importance rankings. This process delivered humor scores for all 50 of the most populous U.S. cities.

Part Three: Surveying the top 10 cities

Next, HuRL’s team used survey methods to collect more information on the top 10 cities identified by the Humor Algorithm.

Researchers administered surveys to more than 900 residents in the top 10 cities. The survey respondents included 491 men and 418 women, with an average age of 31 years; 64% held an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, and an additional 14% had a graduate degree; respondents reported an average yearly income of \$61,224.

Each respondent was asked a variety of questions related to the preference for and prevalence of humor in their daily lives. Answers to the following questions were used to adjust the rankings of the top 10 cities:

- 1) In general, what is your favorite movie genre?
- 2) In general, what is your favorite type of TV show?
- 3) In general, what do you most look for in the books that you read for leisure?
- 4) In general, what is your favorite type of live entertainment?
- 5) If you were to read a newspaper, what section would you be most likely to read first?
- 6) Which is your favorite holiday to take part in?
- 7) If you were invited to a costume party, which adjective would best describe the costume you would wear?
- 8) On which channel would you be most likely to watch a news program?

- 9) What trait do you look for most in your friends?
- 10) What trait do you look for most in a romantic partner?
- 11) How many times in the past year have you attended a live comedy performance (stand up comedy, improv, etc)?
- 12) Think of the last three movies you saw. How many of these movies would you consider comedies?
- 13) Think of your three favorite television programs. How many of these programs would you consider humorous?
- 14) Please think about the environment in which you work. Which adjective best describes your workplace?

From the “[Need for Levity](#)” personality test:

- 15) Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
 1. People look to me to say amusing things.
 2. Sometimes I think up jokes or funny stories.
 3. I can often crack people up with things I say.
- 16) Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
 4. I like situations where people can express their sense of humor.
 5. I like to be around people who have a good sense of humor.
 6. I enjoy hearing someone tell a joke.
- 17) Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
 7. I often act on a whim.
 8. I often come up with ideas "out of the blue"
 9. My behavior could be described as spontaneous.
- 18) Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
 10. I prefer spontaneous to planned situations.
 11. I prefer my life to be filled with surprises.
 12. I enjoy unpredictable situations.

Researchers ranked each city’s answers to each questions to produce a total of 18 new survey-based scores. The team further used these scores to create a single subjective humor score for each of the top 10 cities.

Part Four: Integrating subjective data into the Humor Algorithm

Finally, the team used the subjective humor scores computed from our survey data to update the rankings of the top 10 cities identified by the initial Humor Algorithm. Original rankings and survey-based subjective rankings were given equal weight when computing the final scores for these 10 cities. In order to equate these rankings, the team scaled each set of scores by a constant factor before combining them to produce the final ranking.