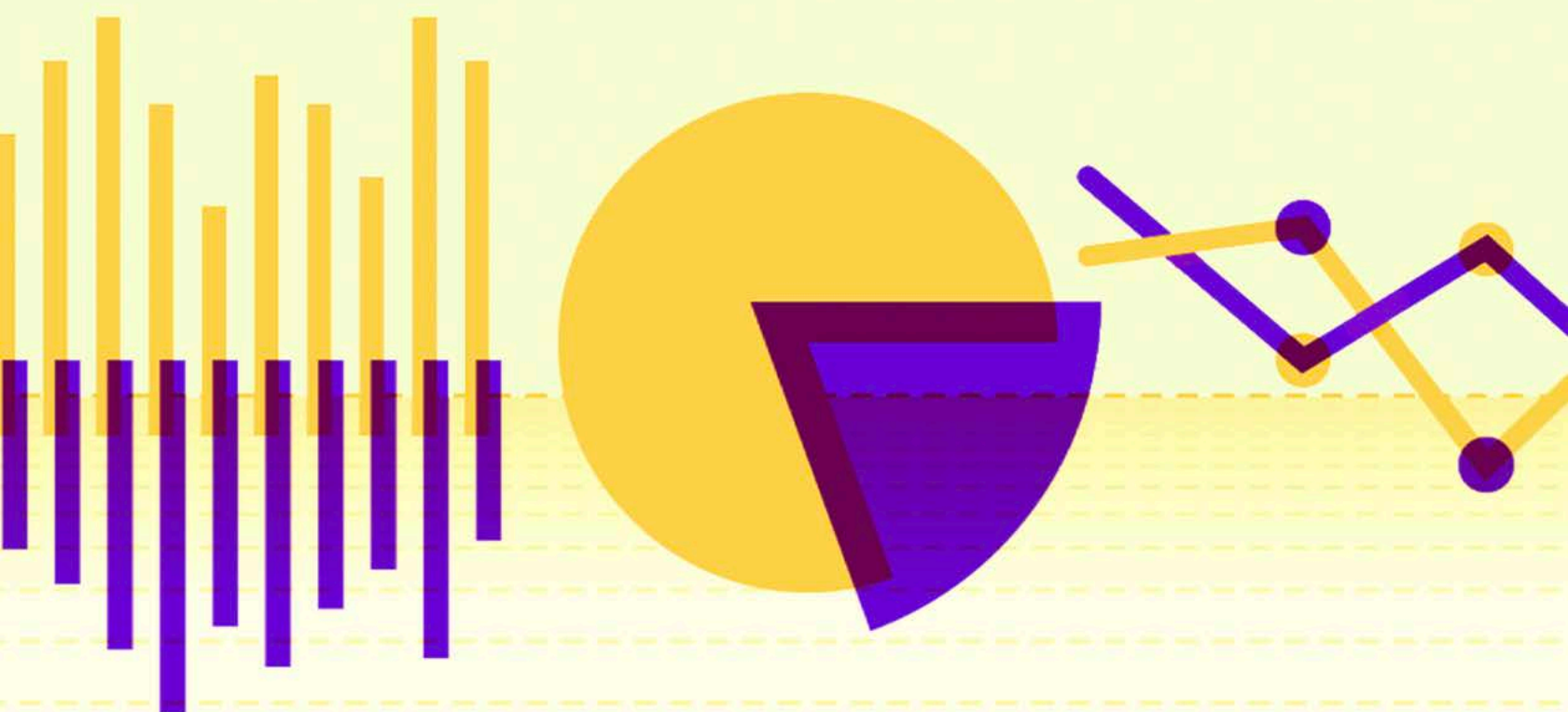


April 20, 2023

PANDEMIC *to* PROSPERITY *SOUTH*



**Measuring Rapid Changes to Build
Prosperous and Resilient Communities**



National Conference on Citizenship

FOREWORD

A civic ecosystem has been burgeoning for decades in the South and it offers a path to turn the tragedy of the pandemic into an opportunity to build prosperity and progress for all. Data and civic engagement will be critical for this to occur. Together, the Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP) — which works to lift up policies that address particular vulnerabilities in the South — and Fair Count — whose work focuses on strengthening pathways to continued civic participation — partnered with the National Conference on Citizenship to document the state of the South during the pandemic. State and local governments prioritizing projects for the American Rescue Plan, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Inflation Reduction Act can use these findings to target disparities that ultimately undermine community resilience and prosperity.

Though the Covid national emergency has officially ended, the impacts from the worldwide Covid crisis will be felt for generations. The U.S. was in a particularly vulnerable position when Covid struck, with pregnancy-related and overdose death rates both 3 times higher than in other wealthy countries, and gun suicide rates 8 times higher.^{[1],[2]} The Covid crisis accelerated these trends. While U.S. employers have recovered well and created a record number of jobs, many Americans have not. As we brace for the challenges ahead, our review of 25 indicators highlights issues across the U.S. with a particular focus on the South.

Health In 2020, there were 750,000 excess deaths in the U.S. as compared with western Europe where the Covid response was more comprehensive, and health care is more widely available.^{[3],[4]} In 2021, there were an additional 900,000 excess deaths in the U.S. 10 of 12 Southern states passed laws limiting the ability of state officials to impose public health measures such as mask mandates and quarantines. MS had the highest death rate in the nation in 2020-2021, followed by WV, AL, KY, LA, and TN. In 2021, over 100,000 Americans died of drug overdoses, with KY, LA, WV and TN experiencing the highest rates of all U.S. states. Meanwhile, 1 in 3 Southerners who have survived Covid are now suffering from Long Covid. Across 7 Southern states, more than 1 in 3 adults reported experiencing anxiety or depression as

recently as March. Yet 15% of Southerners lack health insurance, largely because 7 Southern states have not implemented Medicaid expansion. In March, North Carolina's legislature voted to adopt Medicaid expansion, joining the ranks of the majority of American states that expanded Medicaid availability years ago. [\[5\]](#)

Economy The nation has reached a record 155.6 million jobs, but employers struggle to find workers as Long-Covid and drug addiction have sidelined hundreds of thousands. White men and older white women are more likely to have dropped out of the labor force, while opportunities are expanding for Black adults. In March, Black adults were employed at higher rates than white adults for the first time since this data started to be collected. Nonetheless, the labor market will remain tight with hundreds of thousands fewer workers due to excess deaths.

Inflation and financial well-being Spikes in grocery prices have affected all Americans, and over 1 in 10 households across the South went hungry as recently as March. Tuition, gasoline, health care, and rent costs all grew at a compounded rate of at least 3% per year from 2005 to 2020. Millennials have faced financial hurdles from the moment they reached adulthood, such that fewer were able to buy a home by the age of 35 compared to previous generations, and a growing share are planning to have fewer or no children. Across 8 Southern states (AL, AR, GA, KY, LA, MS, SC, WV), a higher than average share of Americans could be eligible for student loan debt relief.

Disasters and housing Climate disasters have worsened the nation's suffering over the last 3 years and Southerners have borne the brunt of these disasters, with 76% of Southerners living in a county that has had a disaster since March 2020. After disasters, increased insurance costs and decreased housing supplies lead to increasing rents. In March, 31% of Southerners who were past-due on rent or mortgage were fearful of eviction or foreclosure.

Children Nearly 1 in 5 American children live in poverty, despite the government benefits they may receive. The chronic stress caused by poverty actually inhibits brain development with long lasting effects. Extended remote learning during the pandemic exacerbated learning loss, especially for poorer students. For example, in 4th grade math, the top 10% of students lost 2 points between 2019 and 2022 while the bottom 10% of students lost 7 points. American high school students have experienced significant stress due to social isolation, anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, and school shootings. In fall 2021, 45% of LGBTQ+ students and 30% of female students in U.S. high schools reported that they had seriously considered attempting suicide.

Democracy In 2022, just 7 of 112 Southern races for the U.S. House of Representatives were competitive, which could have contributed to lower voter turnout in those states. In addition, 8 Southern states have enacted restrictive voting laws. Ultimately, voter turnout for the 2022 midterm elections fell in 11 of 12 Southern states. In both Mississippi and Tennessee, less than 1 out of 3 eligible voters cast a ballot. However, in Georgia, voter turnout reached 52.6% — 6 percentage points above the national average.

The Covid crisis has had impacts that will unfold across many years. Southern states experienced among the highest death rates in the nation in 2020-2021 and continue to struggle with drug addiction and Long Covid. As Southern legislators convene over the next several months, ensuring that Southerners are healthy and have the training and supports they need to take advantage of the thousands of jobs being created is essential for ensuring our expanding job market doesn't result in resurgent inflation. Taking a clear eyed approach to these challenges now will yield benefits for years to come.



Dr. Jeanine Abrams McLean
President, Fair Count



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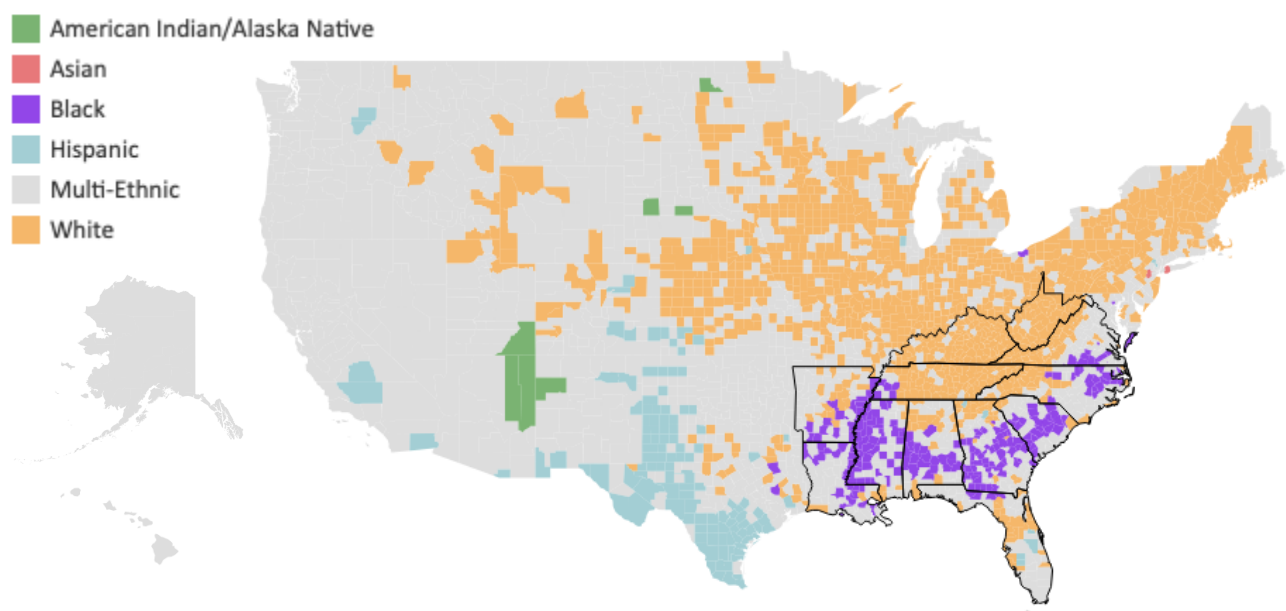
DEFINING THE SOUTH

In this report, the South is defined as the 12 states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Southern states include 217 of the 221 U.S. counties where the Black population is uniquely greater than the national average.

Disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic group by county

Population by race/ethnicity, 2021



Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](https://www.census.gov). Note: Color indicates the race/ethnicity that is higher than the national average in each county. Multi-ethnic indicates the county has more than one race/ethnicity greater than the national average.

The Black Belt, which stretches from Virginia to Louisiana, has a unique demographic makeup — vestiges of a violent history of enslaving millions on cotton and tobacco plantations located there. The Appalachian region from northern Alabama to West Virginia has been long dominated by extractive industries such as coal mining. As a whole, these 12 states have struggled from a history of underinvestment in transportation, infrastructure, education, and job training, and still have among the highest poverty rates in the United States today.

LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

To recover from any disaster, an assessment of damages is essential. Covid exacerbated multiple health and economic trends. As such, tracking Covid-related damage requires monitoring a number of metrics, each of which may change as conditions change. Additionally, shocks and stressors such as extreme weather continue to compound the nation's stress.

In later sections of this report, these indicators serve as context for a unique analysis of the complex interactions between the pandemic, the nation's civic health, and Americans' well being.

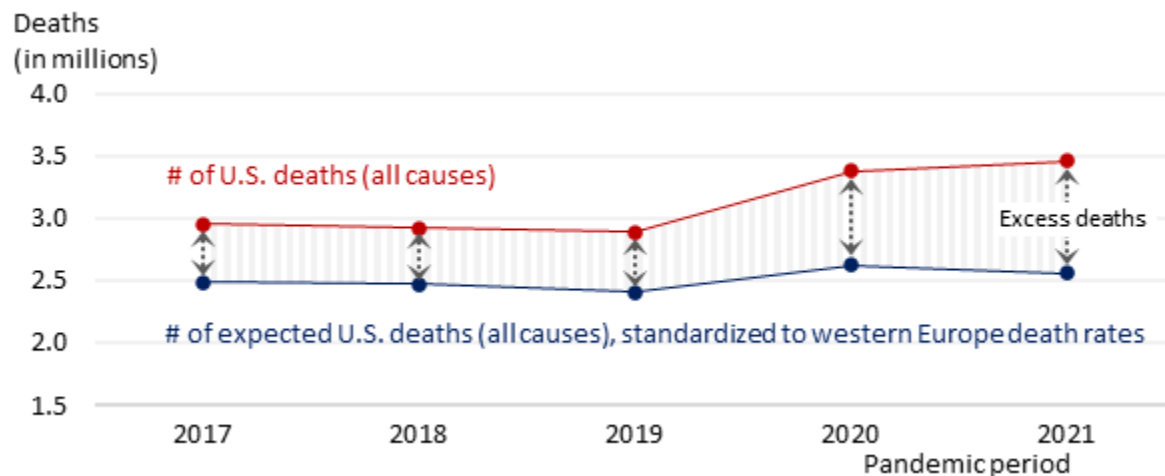
Indicators in this section

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- Death rates 2020-2021, by state
- Public health authority limits, by state
- Drug overdose death rates, by state
- Long Covid estimates, by state
- Total jobs, by month
- Quits rate, by industry
- Change in cost of household essentials
- Disaster declarations, by county

Even before the pandemic, the U.S. had an excess death problem. The number of excess deaths nearly doubled during the pandemic.

Excess deaths in the U.S.

Deaths above expected levels using population-weighted average death rate of western Europe



Source: [Heuveline P \(2023\) The Covid-19 pandemic and the expansion of the mortality gap between the United States and its European peers. PLoS ONE 18\(3\): e0283153.](#) Inspired by [Impact Factor with F. Perry Wilson](#).

Notes: "Excess" deaths is calculated by applying western Europe (England and Wales, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain) sex- and age-specific mortality rates to the U.S. population to create an alternative, or "counterfactual" estimate of deaths for the U.S., i.e. the # of expected U.S. deaths. Next, researchers arrive at "excess" deaths by subtracting that counterfactual estimate of U.S. deaths from the actual number of U.S. deaths. Estimates are also standardized to 2021 to control for population growth.

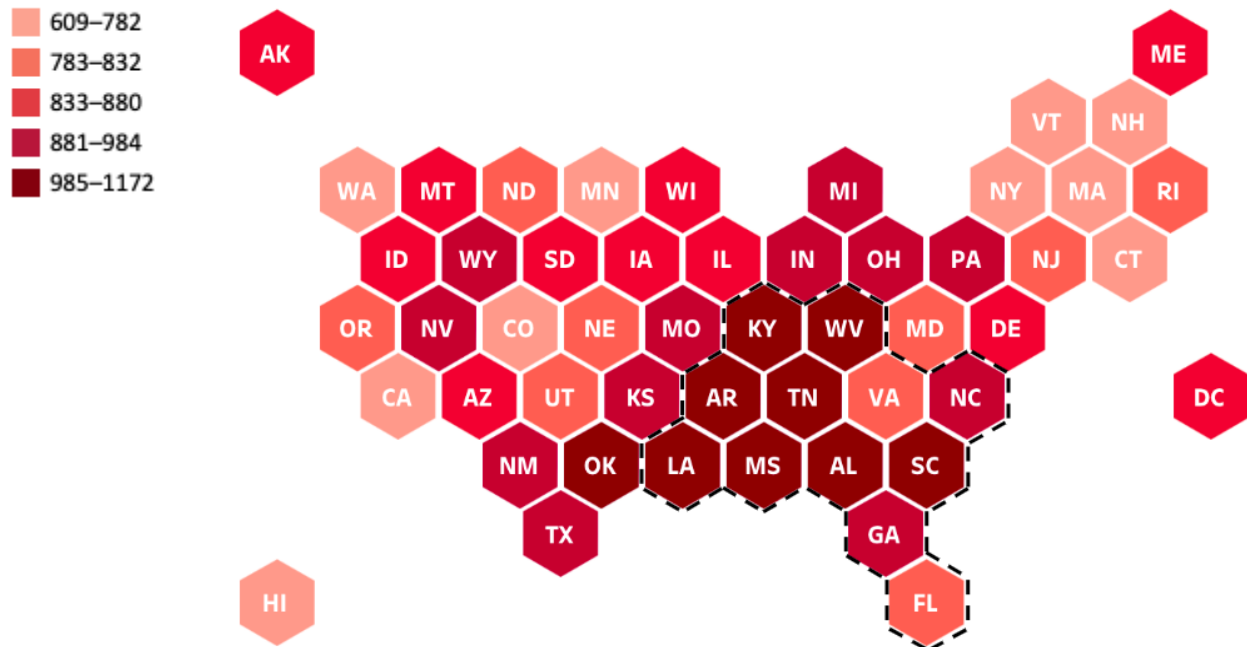
The excess death gap (the difference between observed deaths and expected deaths) between the U.S. and the 5 largest western European countries is higher than ever, nearly doubling from 465,617 excess deaths in 2017 to 892,491 excess deaths in 2021.^[1] Most of the growth occurred between 2019 and 2021, when the number of U.S. excess mortalities grew by 84.9%, compared to 3.7% between 2017 to 2019. Earlier research indicates that the U.S. has had an excess death problem since at least 2000.^[2]

50% of the excess deaths in 2021 were among Americans in their "prime of life" — between 15-64 years old. While Covid has been one of the leading causes of death in the U.S. since the start of the pandemic, rates of death by drug overdose, alcohol incidents, firearms, road rage and other vehicle incidents have spiked as well ([Death rates](#), [Drug overdose deaths](#)).^{[3],[4],[5],[6],[7]}

In comparison to peer nations, the U.S. was also the only nation where life expectancy declined for a second year in a row, dropping from 78.8 years in 2019 to 77.0 years in 2020 to 76.4 years in 2021.^[8] Peer nations saw smaller decreases of life expectancy (approximately 0.5 years) from 2019-2020, and had modest increases in life expectancy (approximately 0.25 years) from 2020 to 2021.^{[9],[10]}

States with the highest death rates in 2020 and 2021 are heavily concentrated in the South. MS has the highest death rate, followed by WV, AL, KY, LA, and TN.

Age-adjusted death rates per 100,000 population
Average for years 2020-21



Source: [CDC, Wonder](#).

As Covid ravaged the nation in 2020 and 2021, on its way to killing more than 1 million Americans, the U.S. death rate jumped 20%. Among states with the highest overall death rates in 2020 and 2021, 7 Southern states (AL, AR, KY, LA, SC, TN, and WV) have all enacted legislation to weaken their state governments' authority to protect public health through options such as mask mandates and quarantine orders. This has left these states more vulnerable to future pandemics ([Public health authority limits](#)).

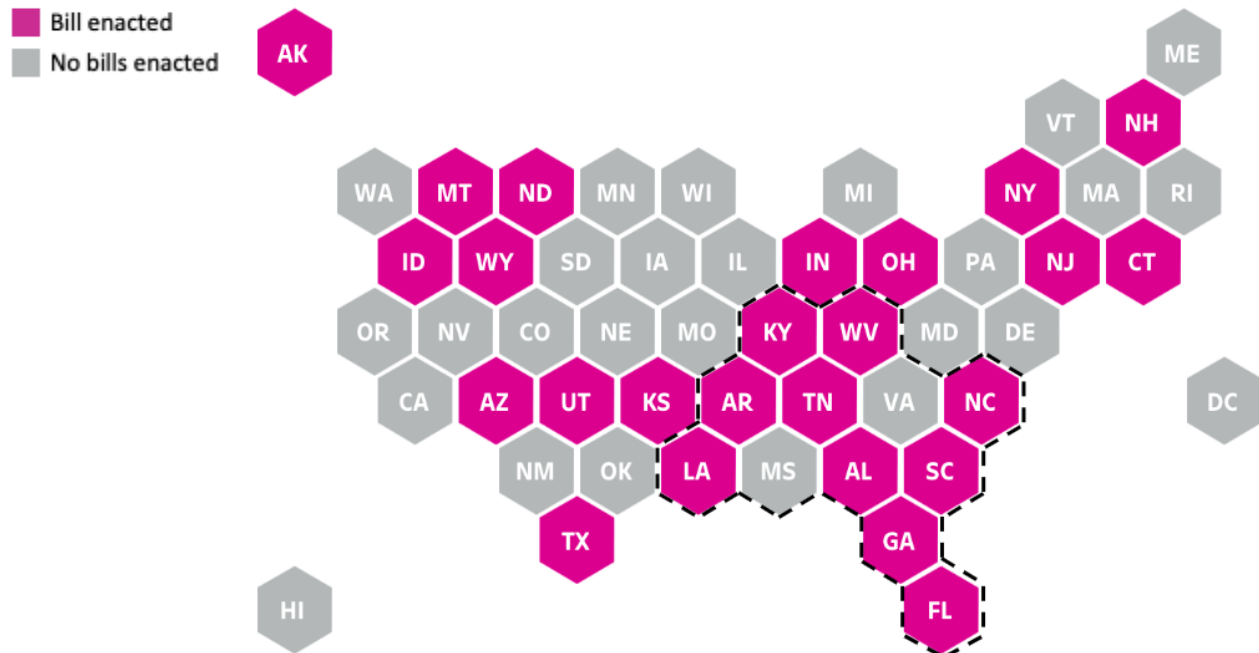
Drug overdose deaths are also ravaging the nation, with over 100,000 deaths in 2021 ([Drug overdose deaths](#)). 4 Southern states (KY, LA, TN, and WV) suffered among the highest overdose death rates in the U.S., contributing to their high overall death rates.

From 2020-2021, approximately 1.6 million Americans died, in excess of expected, about half of whom were working-age. Covid was a leading cause of death but other causes spiked sharply, including overdoses, suicides, motor vehicle deaths, and pregnancy-related deaths ([Excess deaths](#)). ^{[\[1\]](#),[\[2\]](#),[\[3\]](#),[\[4\]](#)}

As of May 2022, 10 out of 12 Southern states have enacted bills that limit authority regarding public health emergency orders.

States that have enacted bills limiting public health authority

Jan 2021- May 2022



Source: [Temple University Beasley School of Law Policy Surveillance Program](#). Notes: “Bill enacted” indicates the state has enacted at least 1 bill limiting the public health authority of the governor, state health official, and/or local health official regarding public health emergency orders.

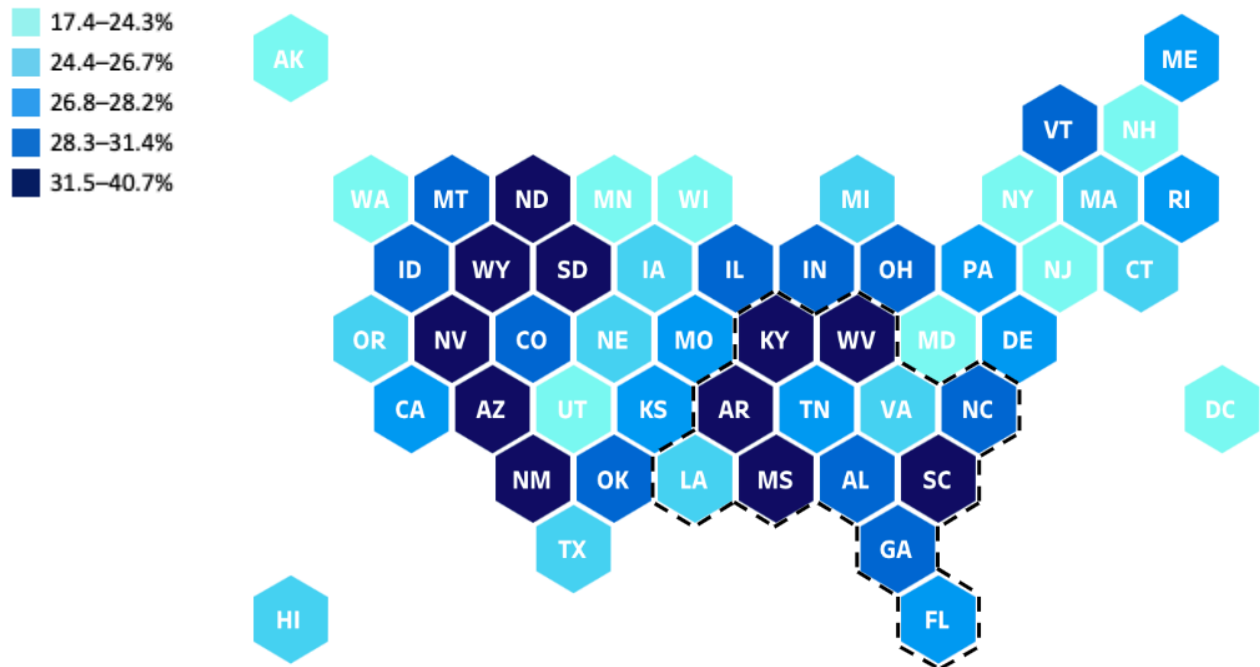
In a failure to respond to the pandemic, legislators in 25 states enacted bills to limit the authority of officials regarding public health emergency orders. In Southern states, it’s 10 out of 12 (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, NC, SC, TN, and WV).^{[1],[2]} North Carolina’s bill (Senate Bill 220) restricts the governor from issuing a public health emergency, while Louisiana’s bill (SB 136) restricts the authority of state public health officials. Florida’s bill (SB 2006) restricts both entities. In the other 7 Southern states, bills have been enacted that restrict the governor’s and state and local health officials’ authority on everything: from issuing a public health emergency order to the duration, scope, and termination of the emergency order. Public health officials across the nation have expressed strong concern about how these restrictions will impact the response to future Covid outbreaks and potential pandemics.^{[3],[4]}

At the federal level, President Biden recently signed a bipartisan congressional resolution to immediately end the Covid national emergency on April 11th, 2023, weeks before its anticipated ending.^{[5],[6]} Still, concerns remain as 1.1 million Americans have died of Covid, including a weekly average of 2,823 deaths in January and February 2023 ([Excess deaths](#), [Death rates](#)).^{[7],[8]}

29% of Southerners who previously had Covid currently suffer from Long Covid symptoms. In West Virginia, it's 41%.

Long Covid estimates, Mar 1-13, 2023

Percent of adults who previously had Covid, with symptoms lasting 3 months or longer



Source: [Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey](#).

Long Covid continues to impact millions of Americans across the nation. Among those who previously had Covid, 29% of Southerners (and 26% of non-Southerners) are currently experiencing prolonged symptoms, known as Long Covid.^[1] Consistent with the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey results, experts find that one-third of Covid patients experience Long Covid symptoms.^{[2],[3]} Long Covid largely affects immune and circulatory systems, as well as the brain and lungs.^{[4],[5],[6],[7]}

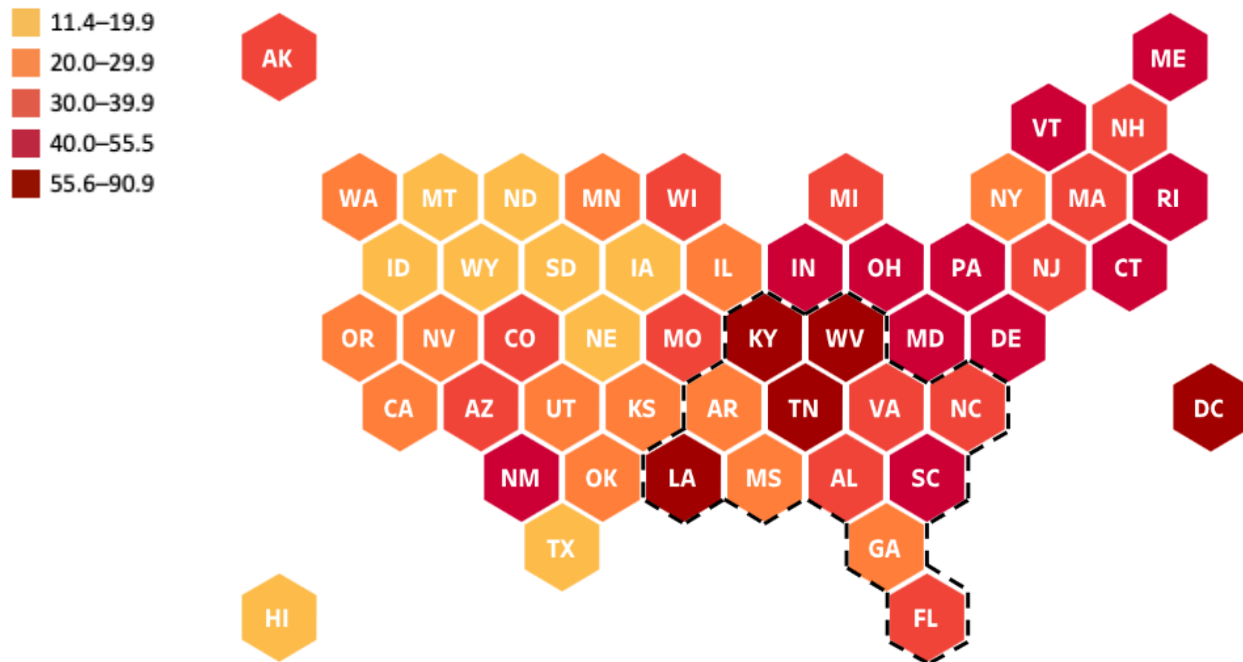
Days before ending the the Covid national emergency, the Biden administration released a fact sheet detailing their efforts to raise awareness, deliver high-quality care, and make services and supports available to Long Covid patients over the last year.^{[8],[9]} Still, many Long Covid patients struggle to receive the appropriate healthcare. A recent study finds that patients who experience Long Covid symptoms were more likely to report unmet health care needs in the last year because of costs, difficulties finding doctors, and difficulties using health insurance.^[10]

Safe and effective treatments for Long Covid patients are crucial to the nation's economic recovery, as persistent Covid symptoms sidelined approximately 500,000 workers in 2022, equivalent to \$62 billion in per-year value of labor loss supply. ([Total jobs](#)).^[11]

West Virginia has the highest drug overdose death rate in the nation. TN, LA, and KY are also among the 5 worst states for overdose deaths.

Drug overdose death rates, 2021

Age-adjusted per 100,000 population



Source: [CDC](#). Notes: Drug overdose deaths are identified using ICD–10 underlying cause-of-death codes: X40–X44, X60–X64, X85, and Y10–Y14.

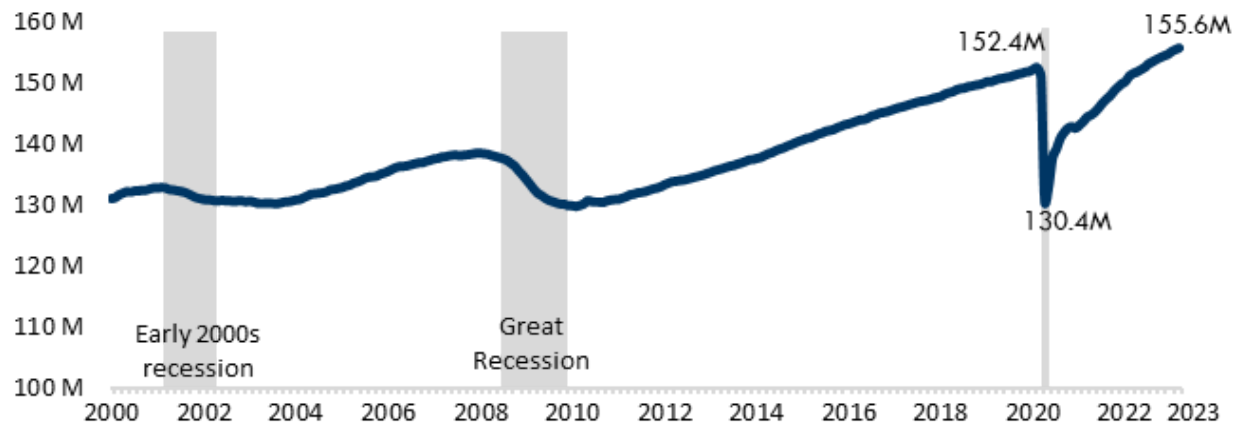
Americans are dying of drug overdoses in record numbers. In 2021, over 100,000 Americans died of a drug overdose, up from just 17,415 in 2000.^[1] Even back in 2015, when fewer than 53,000 Americans died of drug overdoses, the drug overdose rate in the U.S. was about 3 times higher than other wealthy countries.^[2] Overdose deaths are highest for Americans in jobs that have high injury rates and little paid sick leave such as construction, mining, oil and gas, food service, and personal care.^[3] The “opioid epidemic” (including heroin and now fentanyl) has also contributed to reduced labor force participation, particularly among men. 75% of employers in a 2019 poll reported that they have been directly affected by opioids.^[4]

Pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors have agreed to pay at least \$26 billion to states and localities as part of the National Opioid Settlement.^[5] Each state will receive funds over 18 years and can make independent decisions about how to utilize these funds, although 70% is supposed to be spent on opioid-related expenses.^[6] Like American Rescue Plan funds, communities can ensure that opioid settlement funds are dedicated to community priorities by connecting and engaging with their local and state leaders, insisting on transparency, and using data and storytelling to amplify community needs.^[7]

1 million jobs were added in Q1 2023 as the U.S. reached a record 155.6 million jobs.

Total jobs by month, U.S.

Jan 2000 - Mar 2023



Source: [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Note: Seasonally adjusted. Data for Feb 2023 and Mar 2023 are preliminary.

The nation gained 1 million jobs in the first three months of 2023 to reach a new record of 155.6 million jobs. But employers continue to struggle to find workers, with nearly 10 million unfilled jobs reported in February 2023 – up from 7 million reported in February 2019.^[4] Overall labor force participation is just as high today as it was in 2019, with Black adults increasingly participating in the labor force while white men (of all ages) and older women are more likely to have dropped out of the labor force ([Employment rates](#)).

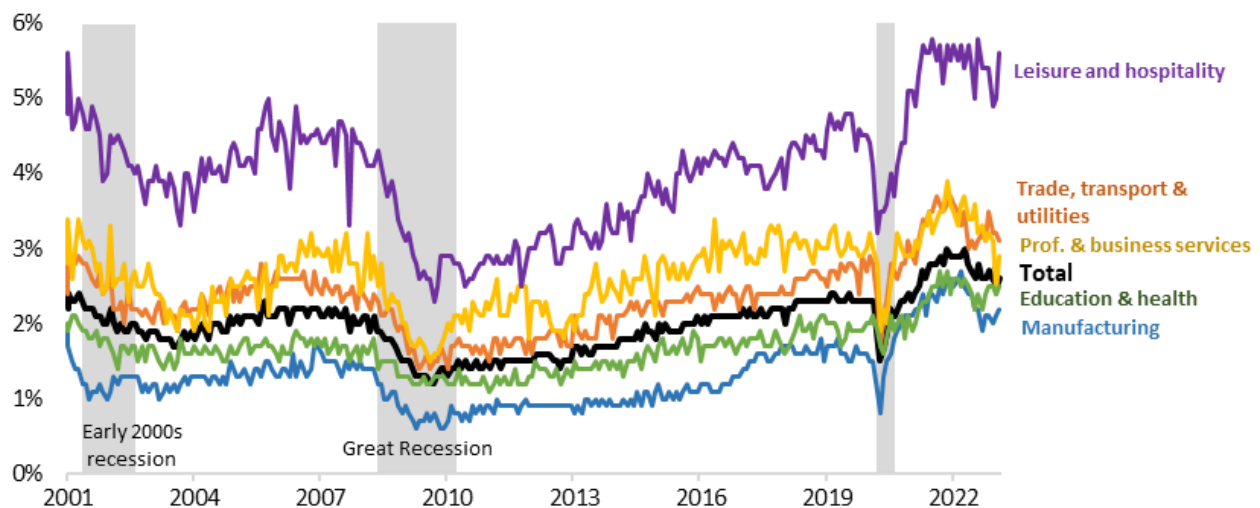
The larger problem is that too many working-age Americans are dying. In 2020-2021, approximately 800,000 working-age Americans died, in excess of expected, due to Covid and other causes ([Excess deaths](#)).^{[2][3]} Other factors have contributed to a smaller labor force including Long Covid, which sidelined approximately 500,000 American workers in 2022 ([Long Covid](#)).^[4] In addition, lack of child care kept a million parents of young children from looking for work in 2022.^[5] And the nation's "opioid epidemic" has contributed to significant declines in labor force participation, particularly among men.^[6] ([Drug overdose deaths](#)).

Together, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act are predicted to create over 2 million new jobs each year for 10 years.^{[7][8]} Ensuring that Americans are healthy and have the child and elder care they need to be able to take advantage of these jobs will be essential for ensuring this wave of jobs doesn't result in another surge of inflation. In addition, helping workers build the skills necessary to fill these jobs and to transition from old industries to new industries will require substantial retooling of current workforce development systems.^{[9][10][11][12]}

In February, quits remained higher than pre-pandemic, as workers pursued better wages and working conditions in a strong job market.

Quits rate by industry, U.S.

Dec 2000 - Feb 2023



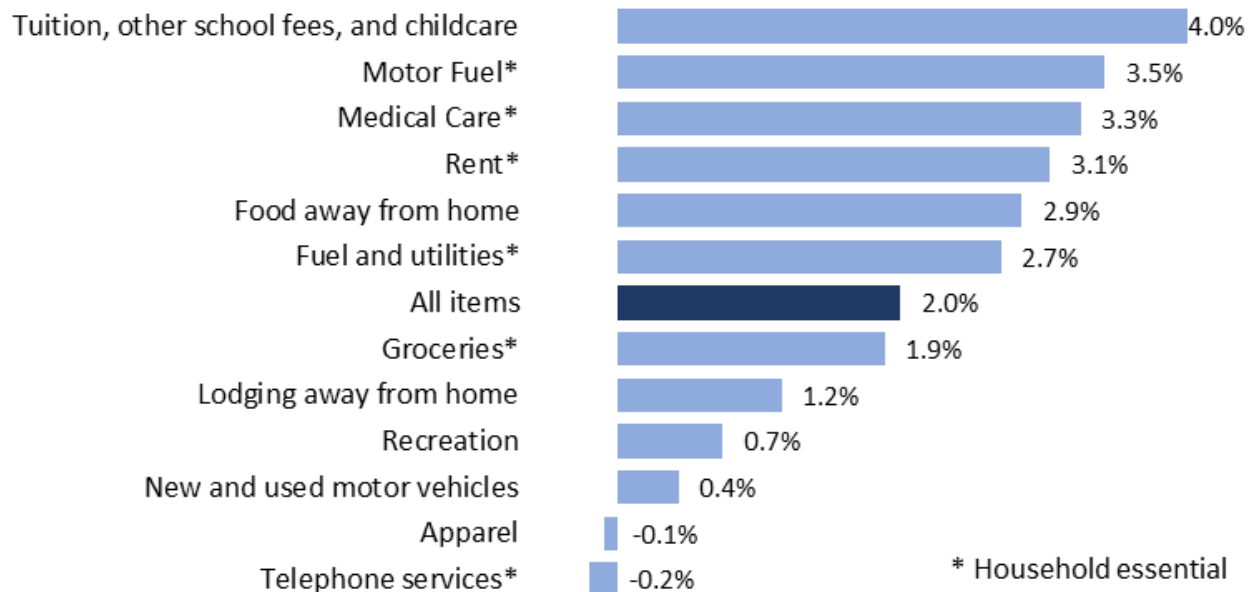
Source: [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Notes: The quits rate is the number of quits during the entire month as a percent of total employment. Quits include employees who left voluntarily, except retirements or transfers to other locations. Data is seasonally adjusted. Feb 2023 data is preliminary.

Buoyed by a tight labor market, nearly 50 million American workers quit their jobs over the last 12 months in search of better wages and working conditions. In February alone, 4 million workers quit jobs. Quits rates were highest in the leisure and hospitality (5.6% in February) and retail (3.6% in February) where wages are typically low. The labor market will likely remain constrained for the foreseeable future with approximately 800,000 fewer workers due to excess deaths ([Excess deaths](#)).^[1]

The Federal Reserve's efforts to tame inflation by raising interest rates is aimed at reducing employment growth and increasing unemployment to bring down wage levels.^[2] When unemployment increases, low-wage workers historically have borne the brunt of job losses. Moreover, recent inflation has been driven by several factors, including supply chain breakdowns and corporate profits surging – neither of which will be corrected through rising interest rates.^[3] The Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act aim to reduce inflation by addressing supply chain issues, while containing key healthcare costs.^{[4],[5]} Meanwhile, the 12-month inflation rate has been decreasing steadily (down to 5% in March 2023) since June 2022 when it was 9.1%.^[6]

Tuition, gasoline, health care, and rent costs have all grown at a compounded rate of at least 3% per year since 2005.

Average 12-month change in cost of household essentials and nonessentials
2005-2020



Source: [Bureau of Labor Statistics \(BLS\)](#). Notes: Based on Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers (CPI-U). Categories marked with asterisks were classified as a “household essential” by the BLS.

Despite strong job growth, Americans remain pessimistic about the economy.^[1] Many observers point to recent spikes in groceries and gasoline prices as the source of this pessimism.^[2] But tuition, health care, and rent costs have also risen steeply since 2005, and Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996) have faced difficult financial challenges from the moment they reached adulthood.^[3]

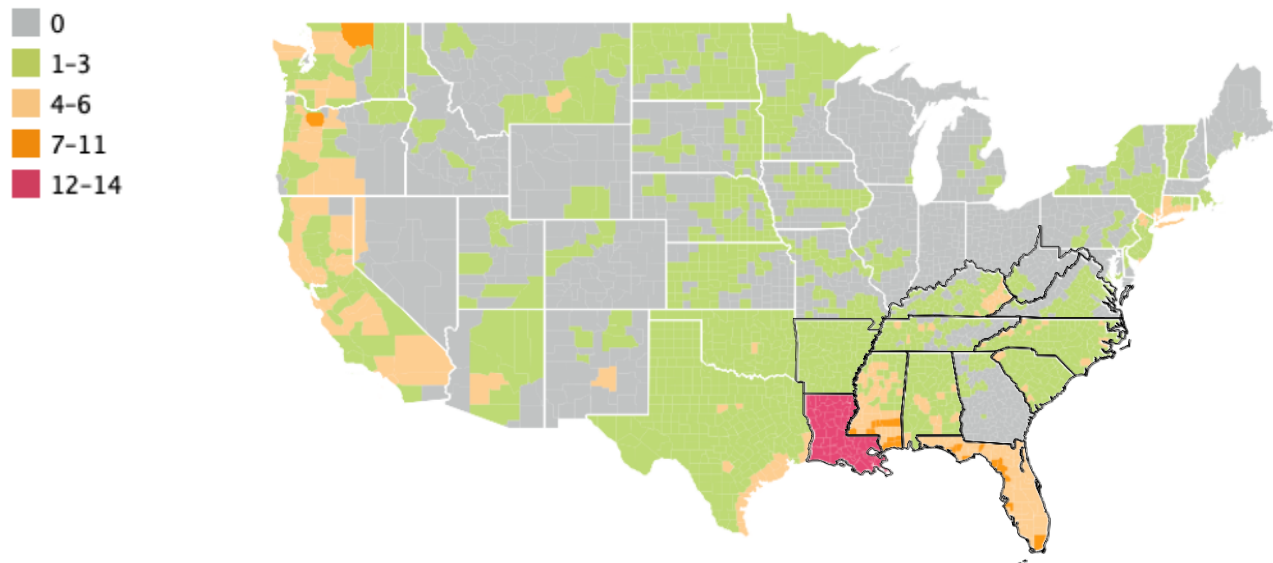
Nearly a decade ago, the issue of student debt was measurably impeding the ability of young Americans to save money for future needs — with a record share of households carrying student debt ([Student loan debt relief](#)).^[4] New parents have also had to grapple with childcare costs that today are 3 times higher than in 1990.^[5] Additionally, the cost of health insurance coverage for families has quadrupled since 2000.^[6]

Meanwhile, rising housing costs have prevented many Millennials from buying homes. Only 50% of those born in the 1980s achieved homeownership by the time they reached 35 years old, compared to 60% of Americans born in the 1960s.^[7] And rents have been increasing such that 1 in 4 renters nationwide has to spend the majority of their pre-tax household income on housing, limiting their ability to consider starting a family ([Housing cost burden](#)). Recent polls find that increasing numbers of Americans are simply planning not to have children or, if they are already parents, not to have any more children.^[8]

76% of Southerners live in counties that have experienced disasters in the last 3 years, compared to 64% of non-Southerners.

Number of FEMA disaster declarations by county

Mar 1, 2020 - Apr 11, 2023



Source: [FEMA](#). Notes: Excludes COVID declarations. Includes all other county-level disaster declarations, for example: hurricanes, fires, floods, tornadoes, levee breaks, landslides, earthquakes, and severe ice storms.

Climate disasters have worsened the nation's suffering over the last 3 years with an average of 20 "billion-dollar" climate disasters annually — up from an average of 7 annually in the two previous decades.^[1] Southerners have borne the brunt of these disasters, with 76% of Southerners living in a county that has had a disaster since March 2020, compared to 64% of non-Southerners. In 7 of 12 Southern states (AL, AR, FL, LA, MS, NC, and SC), 100% of the population live in a county that has experienced a disaster since March 2020. In Louisiana, every county (parish) has experienced 12 or more FEMA-declared disasters since March 2020. On April 13, more than 25 inches of rain inundated Fort Lauderdale in less than 24 hours — one example of the extreme rainfall events that are becoming increasingly common especially in Southern states.^{[2],[3]}

Federal spending on disaster relief more than doubled in 2020 and 2021 compared to 2018 or 2019.^[4] But the time- and document-intensive FEMA application process has been shown to increase inequity because it is too burdensome for smaller/rural municipalities and people with low-incomes.^[5] Moreover, the supply of available housing diminishes, and housing costs (including insurance) increase after disasters ([Housing cost burden](#)).^[6]

GOVERNMENT

This section tracks measures of democracy and high-functioning governments that will be important as we continue to recover from the Covid health and economic crises.

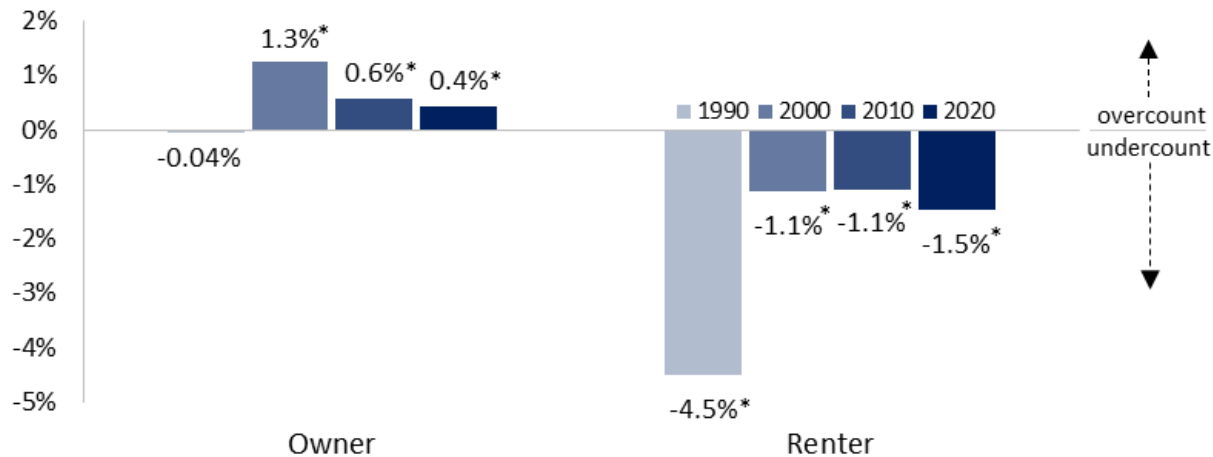
Indicators in this section

- 2020 Census undercount by renter/homeowner
- Voter turnout, 2022 midterm elections, by state
- Competitiveness of the 2022 U.S. House elections
- 4th- and 8th-grade reading and math scores
- Student loan debt relief, by state

Undercount problems persisted for renters in the 2020 Census count.

Net coverage error by renter/owner status, U.S.

Percent of under- and overcounts, 1990-2020 Census



Source: [Census Bureau Post-Enumeration Survey \(PES\)](#). Notes: *Net coverage error is statistically significantly different from 0.

For decades, the decennial census has undercounted renters and overcounted property owners. Because the census serves as the basis for political representation as well as the distribution of \$1.5 Trillion in federal funding, this has resulted in communities with more renters receiving less funding and political influence than communities with more owners.^[1]

The differential undercount of renters in the 2020 Census increased to 1.5%, up from 1.1% in 2010, according to the Post-Enumeration Survey, a Census Bureau field test of census accuracy. Both decades represented drastic improvements from the 1990 Census when the undercount of renters reached 4.5%. The overcount of property owners edged down to 0.4% in 2020 from 0.6% in 2010.

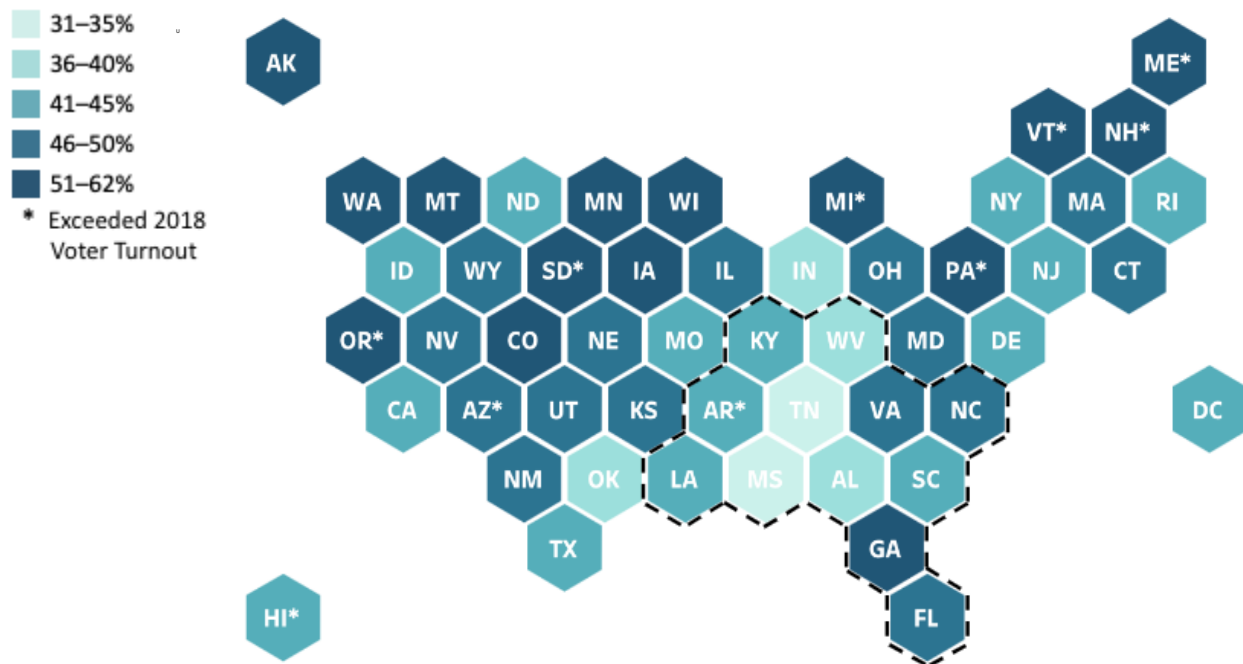
The U.S. Census Bureau explained that “many (renters) are young and mobile, multicultural, or low-income. They can also be hard to reach due to physical barriers [in apartment buildings, for example].”^[2] Still, it is important for the Census Bureau to get an accurate count of renters to ensure fair representation and federal benefits.

The two Constitutional use cases for census data, apportionment and redistricting, are completed. But Census Bureau Director Robert Santos has announced new investment and a research effort to improve the Population Estimates Program, the annual updated population numbers which help determine the distribution of that \$1.5 Trillion in federal funds.^{[3],[4]} This effort could begin to mitigate not only the undercount of renter, but also the larger undercounts of people of color and those living in rural areas.

In the 2022 midterms, voter turnout fell in 11 of 12 southern states. In MS and TN, less than 1/3 of the voting-eligible population cast a ballot.

Voter turnout as a percent of the voting-eligible population (VEP)

2022 midterm elections



Source: [U.S. Elections Project](#). Notes: Turnout rates are calculated as total ballots counted divided by the voting-eligible population (VEP).

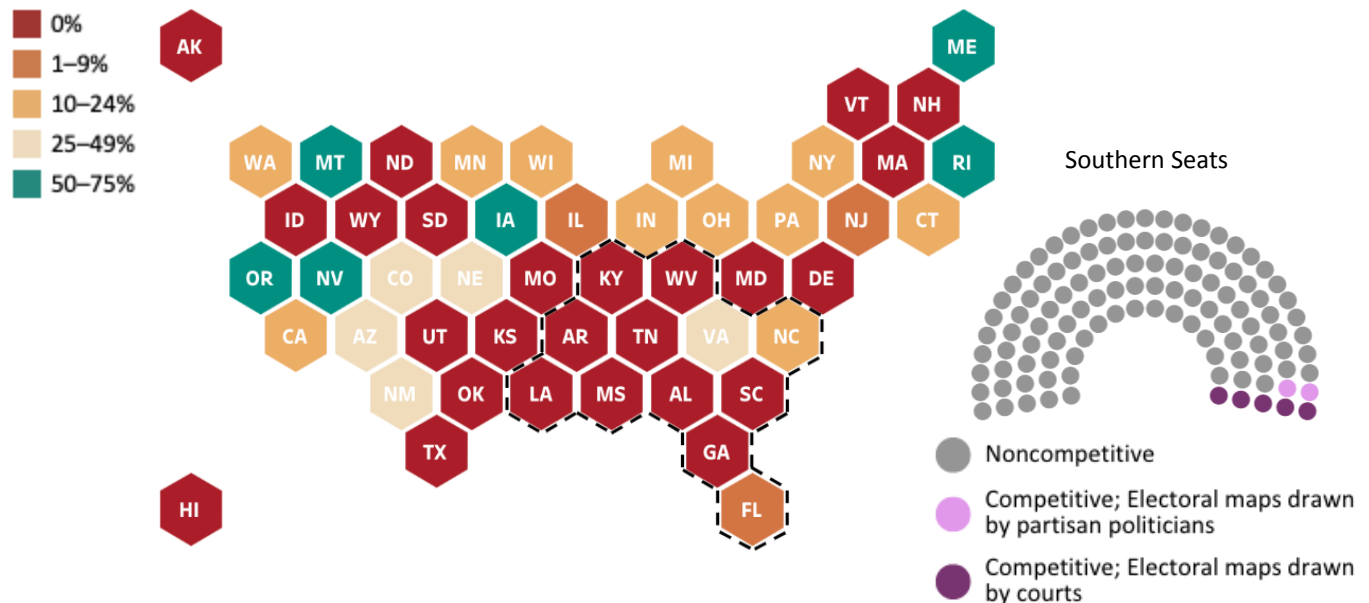
The 2022 midterm election saw voter turnout rates drop in 42 states compared to the 2018 midterms, and nationwide turnout fell below 47%. In the South, every state but Arkansas had lower participation. While presidential election years always garner larger voter turnout than midterm years, record high turnout in the 2020 election demonstrated pandemic-related challenges to voting could be overcome.^[1] Yet, many temporary provisions made to make voting easier for the 2020 election — such as expanding access to mail-in voting, establishing ballot drop-boxes, or increasing the availability of early voting — have been rolled back in numerous states. In addition, since 2020, 20 states enacted restrictive voting laws that were in effect for the 2022 midterm election, including 8 Southern states.^[2]

One study found that, as of 2022, Southern states rank among the most difficult to vote, with South Carolina (43rd), Alabama (45th), Arkansas (48th), and Mississippi (49th) having some of the highest barriers to voting access.^[3] Mississippians face the second highest personal cost in the country in terms of the time and effort required to cast a ballot, and in both Mississippi and Tennessee, less than 1 out of 3 eligible voters cast a ballot. However, in Georgia, where a slate of restrictive voting provisions were passed in 2021, voter turnout reached 52.6% — 6 percentage points above the national average.^[4]

In the 2022 midterms, just 7 of 112 Southern races for the U.S. House of Representatives were competitive.

Competitive elections in the 2022 midterms

Percent of U.S. House races with a margin of victory of less than 8 percentage points



Source: [Brennan Center](#) and [Cook Political Report](#). Notes: Maps drawn by partisan politicians include those drawn by the state legislatures, governors, or political redistricting commissions.

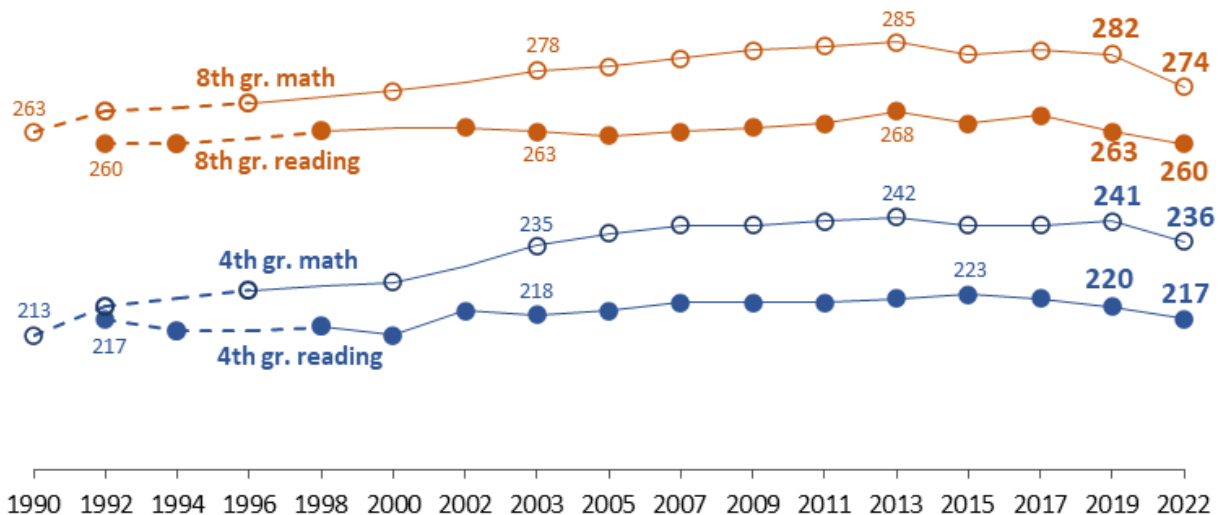
Electoral competition is a cornerstone of a vibrant democracy, and higher levels of electoral competition have been shown to increase voter turnout as well as future political engagement. [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#), [\[3\]](#) This is likely because, in close elections, citizens feel their vote matters more and that they have a greater impact on the election's outcome. Additionally, competitive elections tend to generate more outreach to voters and political information, resulting in a more politically informed and energized electorate. [\[4\]](#) In the 2022 election, only 13% of the seats for the U.S. House of Representatives were competitive (won by a margin of less than 8%), continuing a decline in competitive districts. [\[5\]](#) Half of all states had no competitive House races and, in the South, only 6% (7 of 112 seats) were competitive.

The 2022 midterm election was the first to be held using new electoral maps redrawn after the 2020 Census. This decade's redistricting cycle saw a number of significant changes to producing and reviewing maps, including the 2013 elimination of key Voting Rights Act provisions and a 2019 Supreme Court decision barring federal courts from hearing claims of unconstitutional partisan gerrymandering. [\[6\]](#), [\[7\]](#) The decision in the pending *Moore v. Harper* case argued before the Supreme Court in December could go one step further by barring state courts from intervening to overturn gerrymandered maps. [\[8\]](#) In the South, state courts drew 5 of the 7 House races that were competitive in 2022.

8th- and 4th-grade math scores declined 8 and 5 points, respectively, from 2019 to 2022. Reading scores also fell by 3 points.

4th- and 8th-grade reading and math average scores, U.S.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)



Source: [U.S. Department of Education, NAEP](#). Notes: Dashed lines indicate that test accommodations were not permitted in those years. 2022 assessment period was Jan-Mar 2022, with some 100,000+ students participating on each assessment from 5,000+ public and private schools.

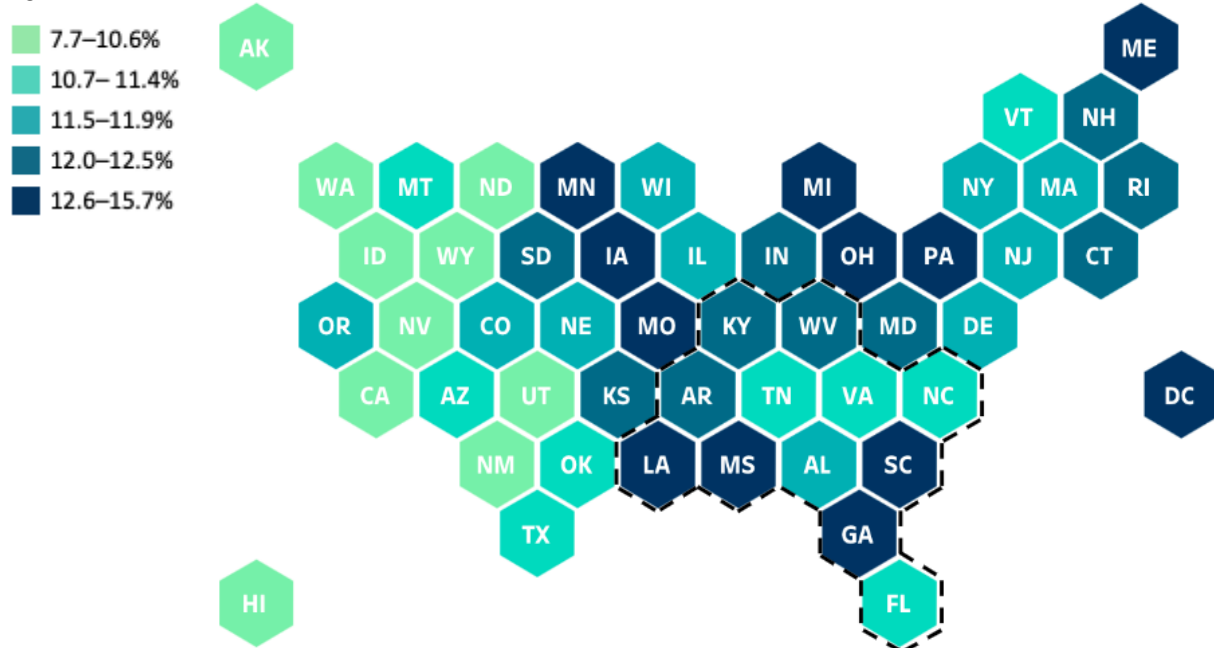
Many parents, teachers, and school leaders feared that extended remote learning during the pandemic would harm children's educational outcomes. Assessing the impact of the pandemic on educational outcomes nationwide can be difficult because each state has their own assessments and content standards.^[1] The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is administered to a large sample of students in public and private schools nationwide, overcomes that obstacle in order to provide national-level trends in student achievement. As feared, NAEP test results from early 2022 reveal that both math and reading scores declined for 4th and 8th graders, compared to before the pandemic in 2019.^[2]

Although NAEP test results varied by school district, disruptions to in-person learning were not the only factor accounting for these differences. Poverty levels were a key factor in the disparate impacts of the pandemic on learning loss.^{[3],[4]} Indeed, the pandemic has widened an already large achievement gap among students. For example, in 4th grade math, the top 10% of students lost 2 points between 2019 and 2022 while the bottom 10% of students lost 7.^[5]

To close these gaps in student achievement, states and local school districts can invest American Rescue Plan funds in intense tutoring, out-of-school enrichment activities, and increasing the pipeline of qualified teachers.^{[6],[7]}

11% of the U.S. population (approximately 38 million people) are estimated to be eligible for federal student loan relief.

Percent of population estimated to qualify for federal student loan debt relief plan
2022



Source: [U.S. Department of Education](#) and [Census Bureau PEP](#).

In August 2022, the Biden administration announced their plan for one-time student loan debt relief.^[1] Under the plan, borrowers who made under \$125,000 if single, or under \$250,000 if married, are eligible for up to \$20,000 in student loan debt relief. Eligible borrowers who received a Pell grant in college will receive up to the full \$20,000, while all other eligible borrowers will receive up to \$10,000. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, approximately 38 million people are estimated to benefit from student loan debt relief.^[2]

Just one month after borrowers were able to apply for the program, a federal court issued a nationwide injunction appealing the student loan debt relief plan, which required the Department of Education to halt all progress, including accepting new applications.^[3] In that one month, 66% (25.4 million) of eligible borrowers applied for debt relief, and 64% of those applications (16.3 million) were approved.^[4]

Student loan repayments have been paused since March 2020 in response to the economic toll of the pandemic. The pause on student loan payments saved borrowers an average of \$393 a month, an essential support as many struggled with unstable income over the course of the pandemic. Once student loan payments resume, it is estimated that roughly 18 million borrowers will lose \$85.5 billion of their income annually.^[5]

INSTITUTIONS

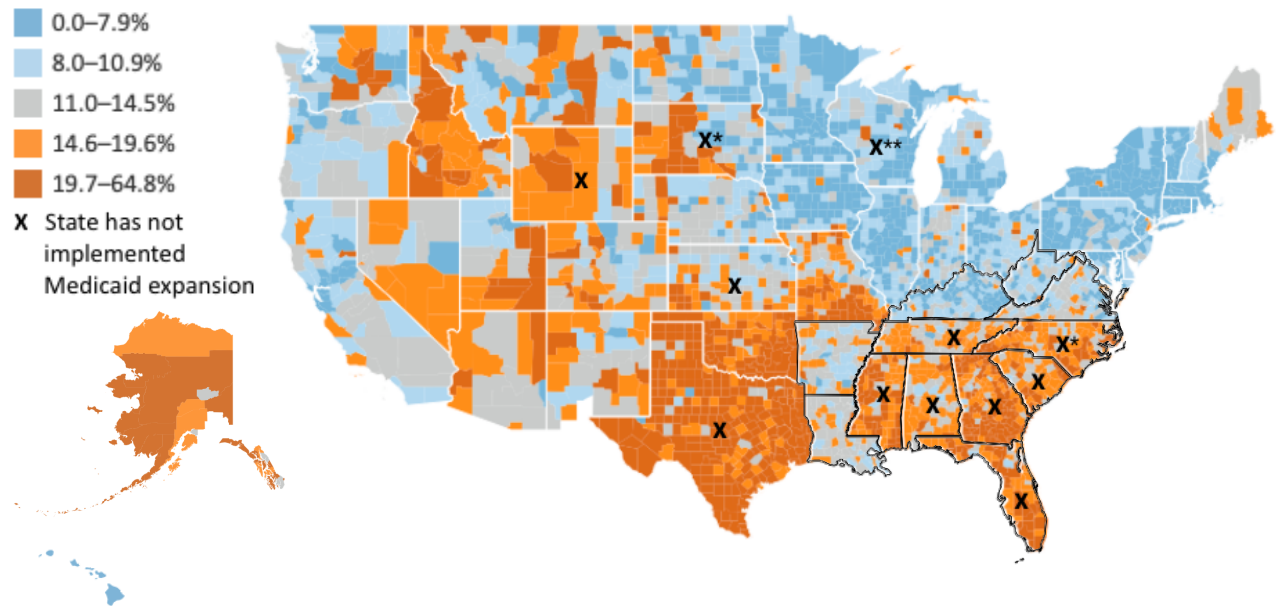
Beyond governments, American society has always depended on a wide array of civic institutions to provide critical information to constituents, hold governments accountable, and offer support to families and workers to be healthy, educated, and productive. This section examines civic institutions and whether they are fair, effective, and sufficiently available.

Indicators in this section

- Lack of health insurance coverage, by county
- News deserts, by county
- Lack of internet access, by county

Over 15% of Southerners lack health insurance, compared to only 11% of Americans outside the South, largely because 7 Southern states have not implemented Medicaid expansion.

Lack of health insurance coverage by county, 2017-21 (5-yr average)
Percent of population age 19-64



Sources: [Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2017-21](#) and [Kaiser Family Foundation](#).

Note: *North Carolina and South Dakota have adopted but not yet implemented Medicaid expansion. **Wisconsin has not adopted the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion but it has partially expanded Medicaid, under a Medicaid waiver, to include all adults under 100 percent federal poverty level.

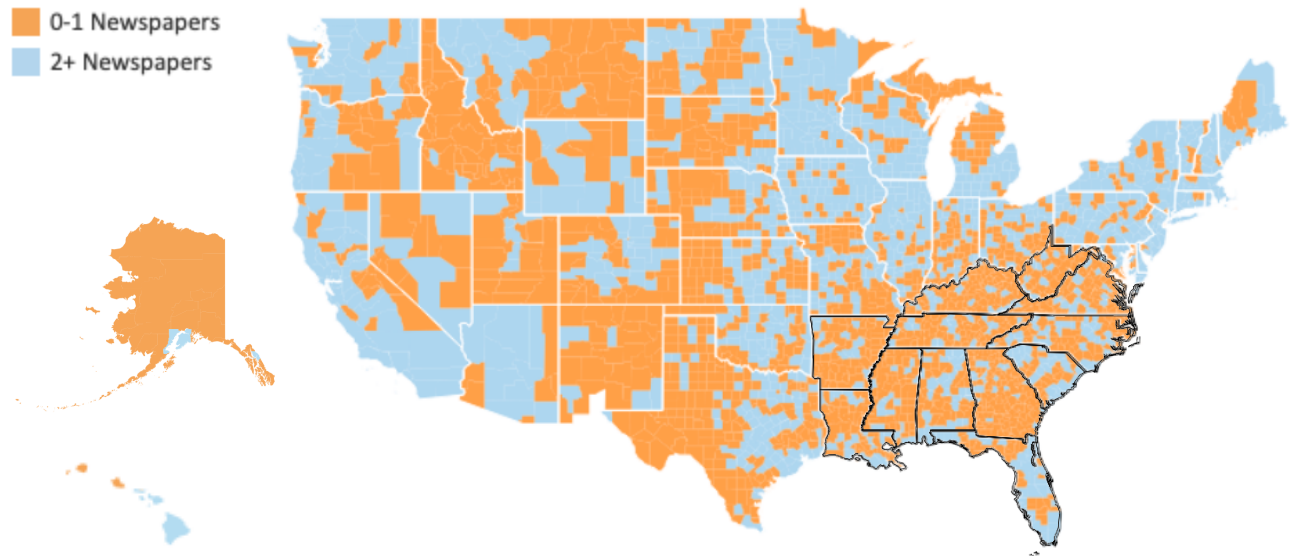
Lack of health insurance is one of the reasons that the U.S. has an “excess death” problem.^{[1],[2]} Americans without health insurance often fail to get treatment for chronic conditions until they are very ill and go to emergency rooms. In 2010, the Affordable Care Act began to dramatically reduce the number of uninsured people across the country through Medicaid expansion and new subsidies for health insurance “marketplaces.” 10 states (6 of them in the South) have still not adopted Medicaid expansion.

In addition, patients who qualify for Medicaid must regularly renew their coverage and periodically verify their eligibility which often leads to patients inadvertently becoming unenrolled. When Covid struck, Congress required that Medicaid keep patients enrolled continuously, a provision which ended in March 2023. An estimated 5 to 14 million people will lose coverage at some point this year.^[3] Hospitals serving many uninsured patients become financially strapped, and thus high uninsurance rates have led to many closures of rural hospitals across the South.^{[4],[5]} In 2020, a record 19 rural hospitals closed.^[6] In 2021, 8 of the 10 states with the highest death rates were Southern states ([Death rates](#)).

Southerners are more likely to live in news deserts, meaning less access to critical information.

Counties with no or only one newspaper (“news deserts”)

News deserts as of 2022



Source: [Northwestern Medill Local News Initiative](#).

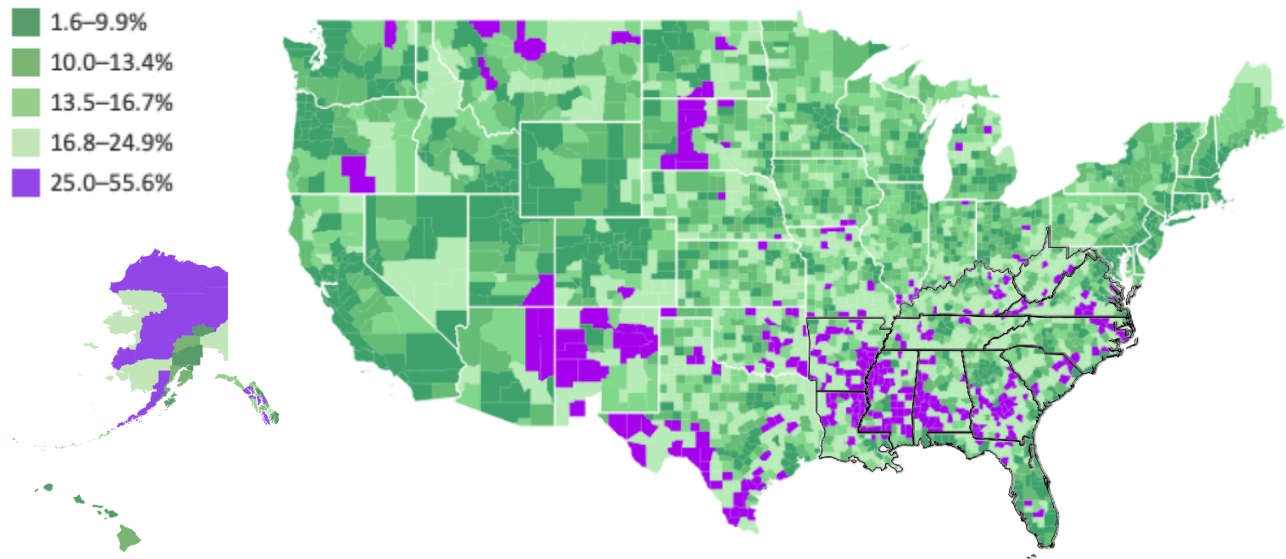
Southern counties are more likely to be what experts call “news deserts,” counties that have either no or only one newspaper. 75% of Southern counties are news deserts, compared to only 50% of non-Southern counties. The steady decline of local newspapers across the nation has accelerated since the start of the pandemic, with over 300 news sources closing their doors.^[1] Large newspaper companies like Gannett play a major role in the now rapidly consolidating industry. While Gannett owns the largest number of newspapers across the nation, it continues to significantly cut staffing, leaving its remaining newspapers across the nation weakened.^{[2],[3],[4],[5]}

Rapidly disappearing trusted local news sources leave room for misinformation and disinformation to flourish.^[6] Mis- and disinformation circulated prior to the 2022 midterm elections, ranging from false information campaigns in multiple languages to candidates falsifying or embellishing their backgrounds — with little to no community accountability.^{[7],[8],[9],[10],[11]} Experts have identified some of these sources as “pink slime” journalism: political propaganda that disguises itself as legitimate local news.^[12] A Stanford University study under preliminary review finds that consumer usage of these sites still remains low, signaling that the ability to revive trusted local news remains hopeful. Community- and federal-based solutions, ranging from local news initiatives supported by nonprofit organizations, to legislation such as the Local Journalism Sustainability Act (a bipartisan bill that would provide tax credits for subscriptions and employment at local news organizations), are critical to revitalizing local news.^{[13],[14]}

12% of Southerners have no internet at home — not even a cellular data plan — compared to 10% of non-Southerners.

Lack of internet access by county, 2017-21 (5-yr average)

Percent of households without internet access



Source: [Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2017-21](#). Note: "Lacking internet access" means the household has no internet subscription, no cellular data plan, and no access to the internet without a subscription (such as through property-wide Wi-Fi service in an apartment building).

Internet access is essential for Americans to be productive, healthy, and informed. For low-income households, affordable internet increases employment rates and earnings.^[1] Increased internet access is also yielding cost savings in health care delivery through telehealth management of chronic conditions.^[2] Yet, 12% of Southerners have no internet access at home — not even a cellular plan.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is sending \$42.45 billion directly to states to collaboratively plan and execute broadband expansion in partnership with local and regional communities.^[3] It also allocated \$14.25 billion toward a \$30 monthly subsidy of household broadband subscriptions for about 50 million eligible American households through the Affordable Connectivity Program.^[4]

8 of the 10 states with the worst internet access are in the South. 6 Southern governors have prioritized the implementation of the Affordable Connectivity Program, including governors in Alabama (15% of households lack internet), Kentucky (13% lack internet), Mississippi (19% lack internet), North Carolina (12% lack internet), Tennessee (13% lack internet), and West Virginia (16% lack internet).^[5] However, the program is projected to run out of funding by July 2024.^[6]



At the end of the day, governments and institutions are responsible for ensuring the well-being of the communities they serve. This section examines key metrics of community well-being.

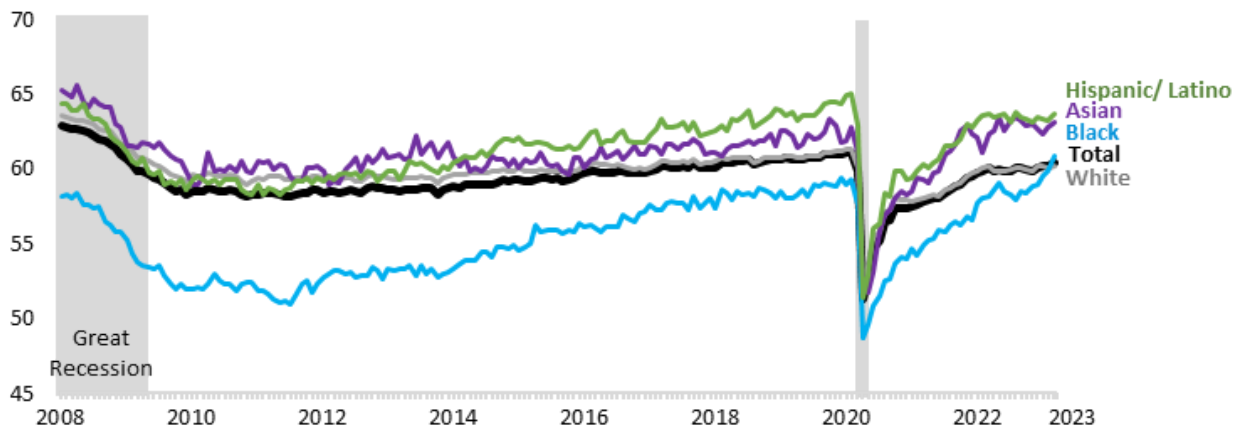
Indicators in this section

- Employment rate, by race/ethnicity
- Renters with severe housing cost burdens, by county
- Likelihood of eviction or foreclosure, by state
- Food insecurity, by state
- Severe maternal morbidity, by state
- Monthly child poverty rates
- Symptoms of anxiety or depression, by state
- Youth mental health

The employment rate for Black workers increased 3 points in the past 8 months, surpassing the white employment rate to reach 61%.

Employment rate (age 16+) by race/ethnicity, U.S.

Jan 2008 - Mar 2023



Source: [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Note: The employment rate is officially known as the “employment-population ratio.” Here it is calculated for the population 16 years and older. Data is seasonally adjusted.

For the first time since 1972 when this data started to be collected, the employment rate for Black workers (age 16+) has surpassed that of white workers.^[1] The Black employment rate surged 3 percentage points in the past 8 months, and as of March 2023, the Black employment rate (60.9%) is half a point higher than the white employment rate (60.2%).

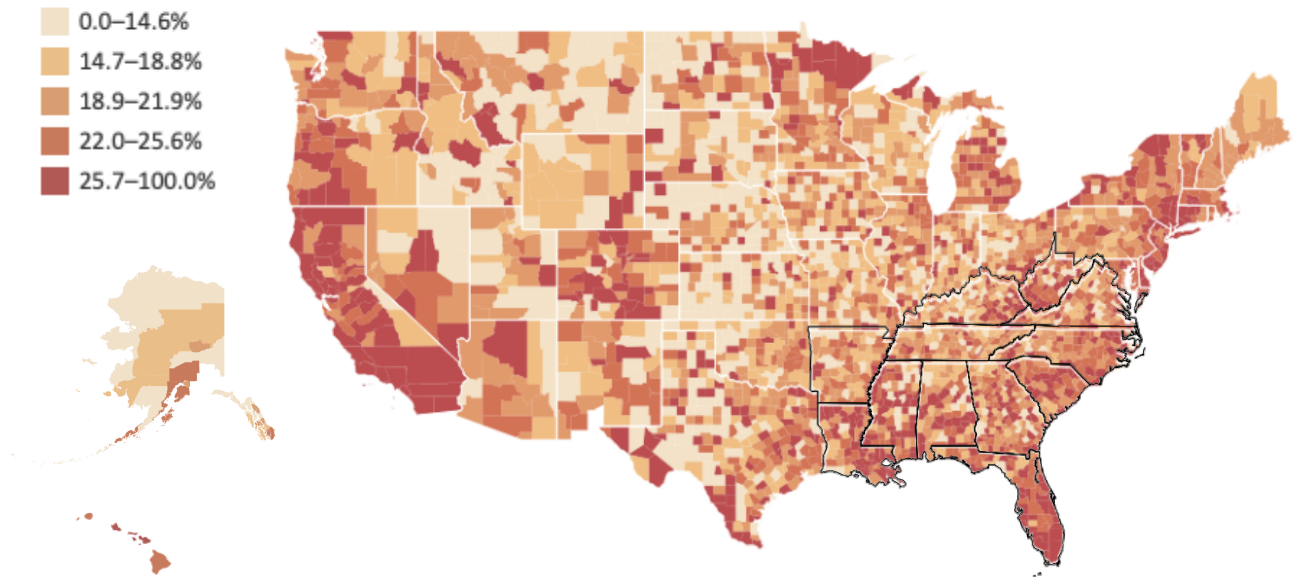
Black adults are now more likely to be participating in the labor force than white adults. Many white men and older white women are reaching retirement or otherwise dropping out of the labor force, providing Black adults with expanding opportunities as employers search for workers.^[2] Black labor force participation has surged by nearly 2 percentage points compared to 2019, suggesting Black workers are less “discouraged” than before the pandemic. By March 2023, the Black unemployment rate reached a record low of 5%.^[3]

Compared to February 2020 (immediately before the effects of the pandemic), the overall U.S. employment rate is down slightly, driven by lower employment rates for White and Hispanic Americans. Several factors may be contributing to fewer people securing employment, including lack of available and affordable child care, opioid addiction, and Long Covid which is sidelining workers regardless of age, gender, race or ethnicity ([Drug overdose deaths](#), [Long Covid](#)).^{[4],[5],[6],[7]}

In Florida and Louisiana, 29% of renters pay the majority of their household income on housing costs.

Severe housing cost burdens by county, 2017-21 (5-yr average)

Percent of renter households paying half or more of household income on housing costs



Source: [Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2017-21](#).

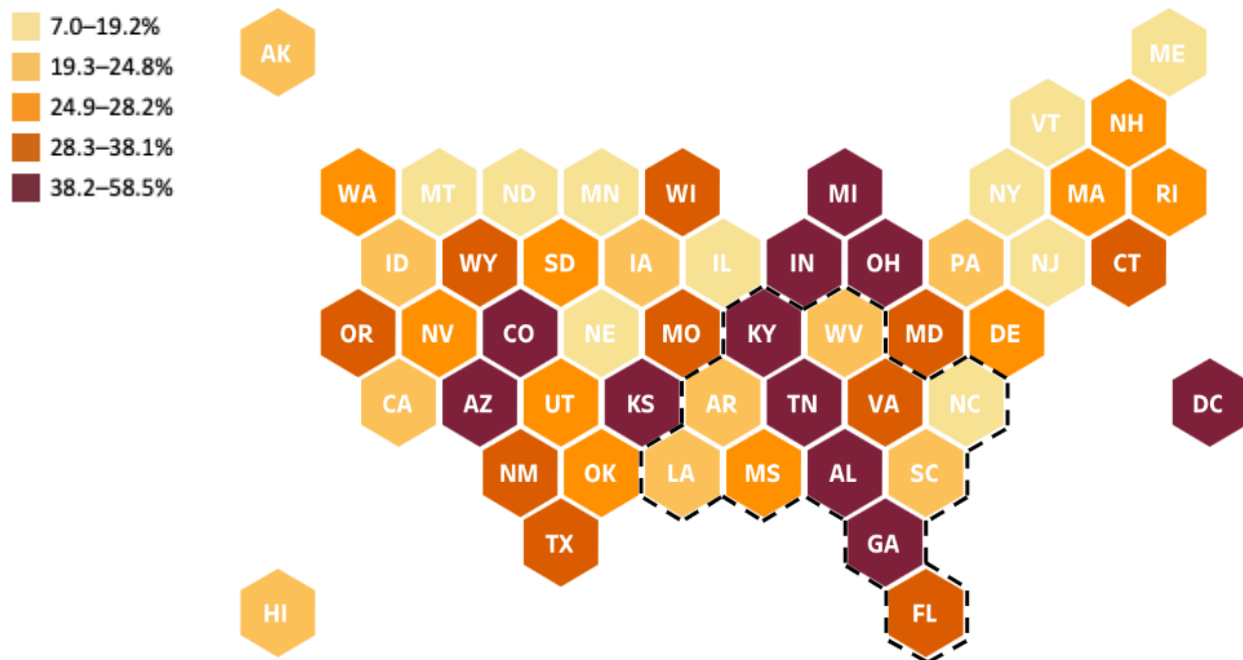
At least 1 in 4 renters in several Southern states (LA, FL, WV, MS, and SC) used half or more of their total household income toward housing costs from 2017-2021. Having to spend the majority of their income on rent means less money for families to buy food, clothing, medical care, educational needs, and other necessities.^{[1],[2]}

The number of renters burdened by housing costs continues to rise, jumping from 19 million households in 2019 to 20.1 million households in 2021.^[3] This increase was largely driven by households with lower incomes, with half of renter households in the lowest income quintile spending more than 60% of their income on rent. Marginal increases in housing costs can have a significant impact on lower income families. A Harvard study finds that while the median renter household had \$2,400 per month after paying for housing costs, renter households with an income of \$30,000 or less had just \$360 to cover remaining basic needs.^[4] Though monthly median rent prices have lowered since a record high of \$2,053 in 2022, rent costs still remain high relative to previous years.^{[5],[6]}

31% of Southerners who are late on rent/mortgage said they feared losing their home. In KY, GA, AL, and TN, it is above 41%.

Likelihood of eviction or foreclosure, Mar 1-13, 2023

Percent of adults living in households not current on rent or mortgage where eviction or foreclosure in the next two months is “very likely” or “somewhat likely”



Source: [Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey](#).

Though home sale prices year-over-year fell for the first time in February 2023 after over a decade of continued increases, the housing market remains tight.^{[1],[2]} 31% of Southerners (27% of non-Southerners) who are past-due on rent or mortgage fear that eviction or foreclosure is likely. Among Southern states, fears are highest in KY (44%), GA (42%), AL (41%), and TN (41%).

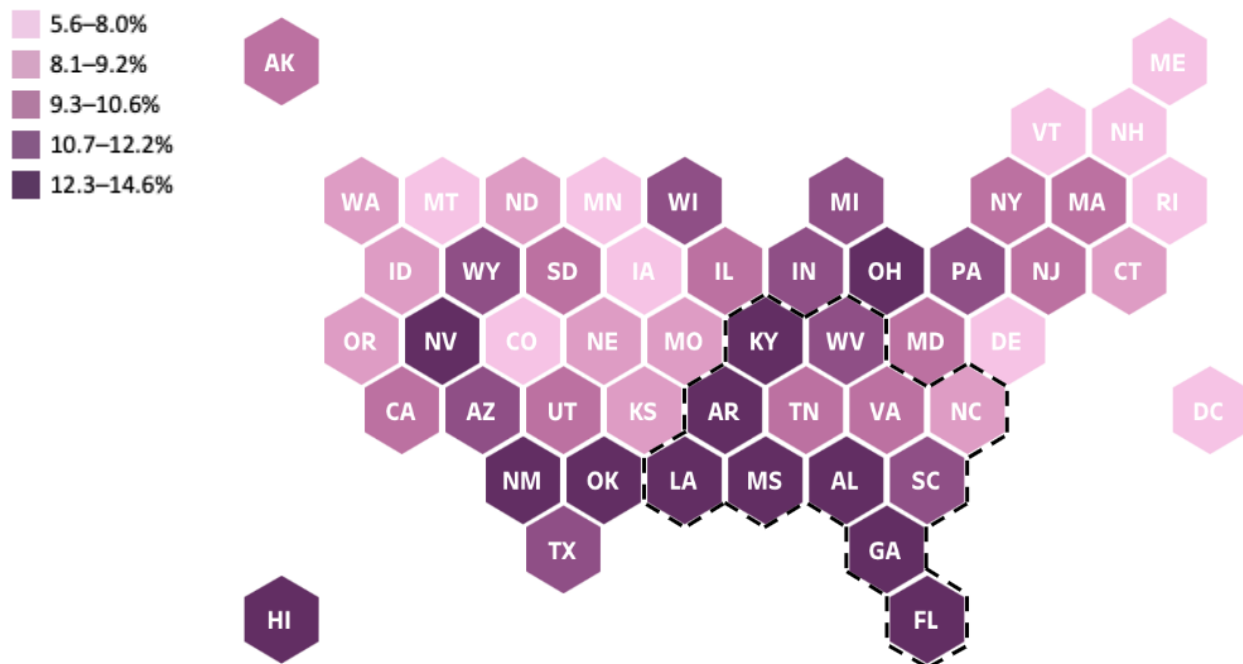
Across the nation, Americans share their struggle to find affordable housing options.^{[3],[4],[5],[6]} The National Low Income Housing Association's report, *The Gap*, finds a shortage of 7.3 million affordable housing options nationwide.^[7] Respondents to a Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP) survey in AL, GA, and MS said affordable housing was their community's greatest challenge.^[8] And yet only 4 Southern states (NC, GA, TN, VA) have dedicated a portion of American Rescue Plan funds to housing as of December 2022.^[9]

Studies have found growing evidence of a link between housing instability and health outcomes.^{[10],[11]} More than 1 in 4 Southern renters have to spend the majority of their household income on rent and utilities — leaving less money for families to cover food, clothing, medical care, and other necessities, and putting them at higher risk of eviction ([Housing cost burden](#), [Likelihood of eviction or foreclosure](#)).^{[12],[13]} This can lead to higher levels of stress, increased chronic conditions, and food insecurity.^{[14],[15]}

12% of Southerners went hungry in March, compared to 10% of non-Southerners. AL and FL had the highest rates of hunger in the U.S.

Food insecurity, Mar 1-13, 2023

Percent of adults who report their household sometimes or often went hungry in last 7 days



Source: [Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey](#).

Food insecurity is a chronic problem globally, often overlooked in higher income countries. According to a recent report, 8–20% of the population in higher income countries lack access to enough food in the household.^[1] In March 2023, 11% of Americans reported that their household sometimes or often went hungry. In the South, it was 12%. Two Southern states had the highest rate of food insecurity: AL (14.6%) and FL (14.1%).

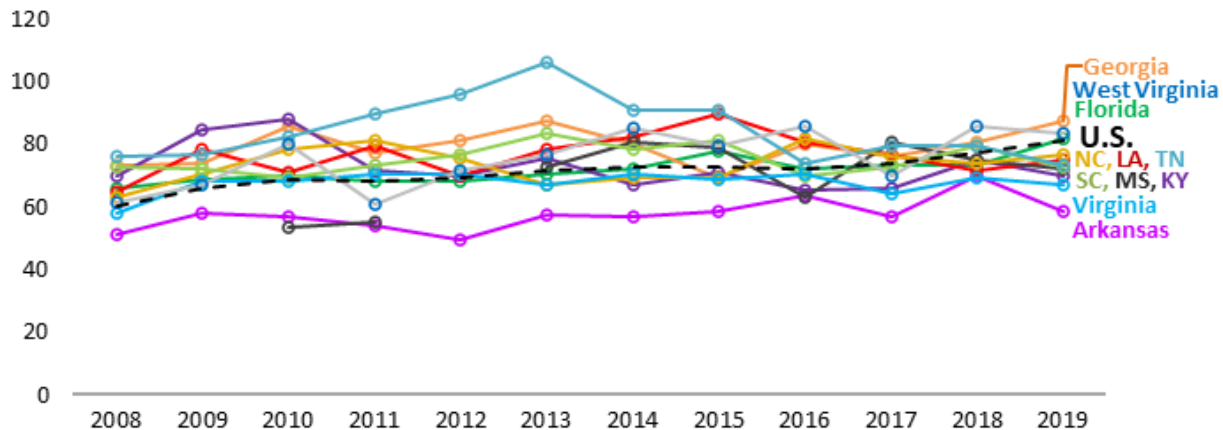
Temporary SNAP pandemic emergency allotments ended as of March 2023, leaving SNAP recipients across the nation with at least \$90 less per month.^[2] More and more Americans are turning to food banks, nonprofits, and other community organizations for help. Many of these entities are volunteer-operated with limited supplies and tight budgets, and struggle to keep up with increased demand.^{[3],[4],[5],[6],[7],[8],[9]}

State and federal-level policy is needed to curb food insecurity and its subsequent physical and mental health effects ([Symptoms of anxiety/depression](#)).^{[10],[11]} AL, the state with the highest rate of food insecurity in March 2023, is one of 3 states that offers no relief on the sales tax rate on groceries.^[12] A statewide poll shows that 84% of Alabamians support eliminating the sales tax on groceries.^[13]

Over 25,000 pregnant people experience life-threatening complications during delivery, every year. Severe maternal morbidity increased from 60 to 81 per 10,000 deliveries, from 2008 to 2019.

Severe maternal morbidity rates, U.S. and Southern states

Number of deliveries involving severe maternal morbidity per 10,000 delivery hospitalizations



Source: [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#). Notes: Severe maternal morbidity (SMM) is defined using diagnosis and procedure codes across the [21 indicators of SMM](#) (e.g. heart failure, kidney failure, stroke, embolism, hemorrhage) excluding blood transfusions. If patients receiving blood transfusions due to complications of labor and delivery were included, the SMM rate would be much higher. Data for Alabama is not available.

In 2020, the U.S. had 24 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births — more than 3 times the rate of other high income countries.^[1] For every maternal death, there are 60 pregnant people that experience severe maternal morbidity (SMM)— short- or long-term health problems related to pregnancy, birth, or the postpartum period.^[2] This amounts to over 25,000 people annually when limiting to the 21 indicators of SMM.^{[3],[4]} This number skyrockets to an estimated 50,000-60,000 people when including blood transfusions needed due to complications of labor and delivery, many of which experts say can be prevented with appropriate and timely care.^{[5],[6],[7]}

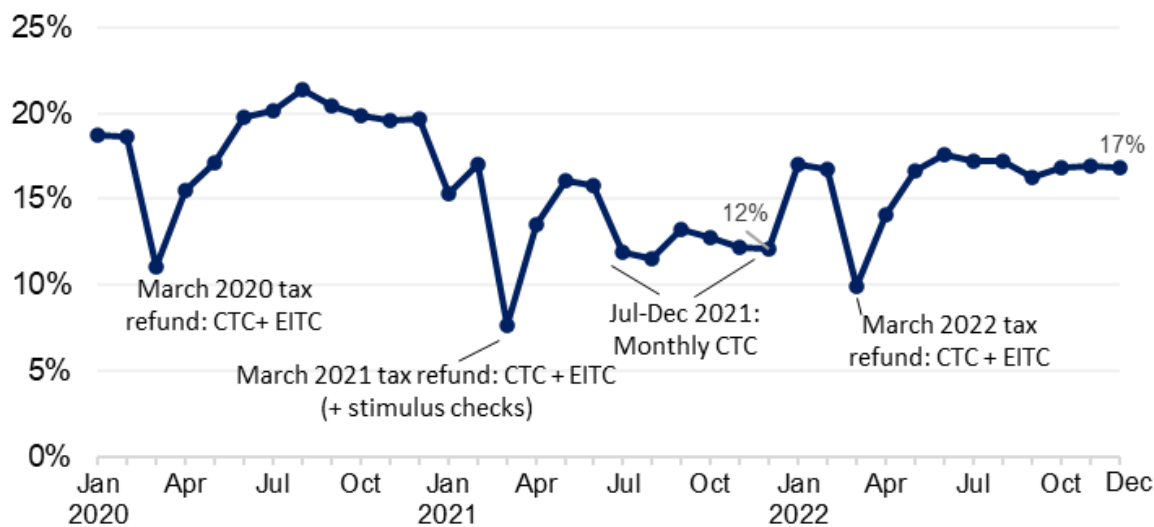
The rate of maternal morbidity has increased across the nation since 2008, including in every Southern state except TN. TN had a massive spike in SMM deliveries between 2011 and 2015 (ranging from 90-106 SMM deliveries for every 10,000 delivery hospitalizations). By 2019, however, those numbers decreased to 73 SMM deliveries for every 10,000 delivery hospitalizations. 3 Southern states remained above the 2019 national average of 81 SMM deliveries per 10,000 delivery hospitalizations (GA: 87, WV: 84, and FL: 82).

Among SMM deliveries, racial disparities persist. Black people were 2 times more likely than white people to experience SMM measured with or without blood transfusions.^[8] Black women have historically faced racial discrimination, bias, and inequity in health care systems, for pregnancy-related and other care.^{[9],[10],[11],[12],[13],[14]}

The monthly child tax credit reduced child poverty to 12% during July-Dec 2021. After the tax credit ended, child poverty spiked to 17%.

Monthly child poverty rates, U.S.

Jan 2020-Dec 2022



Source: [Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University](#). Notes: These monthly estimates are based on the [supplemental poverty rate](#), which includes after-tax income, in-kind benefits, and transfers such as earned income tax credits (EITC), child tax credits (CTC), stimulus checks, and other gov't benefits.

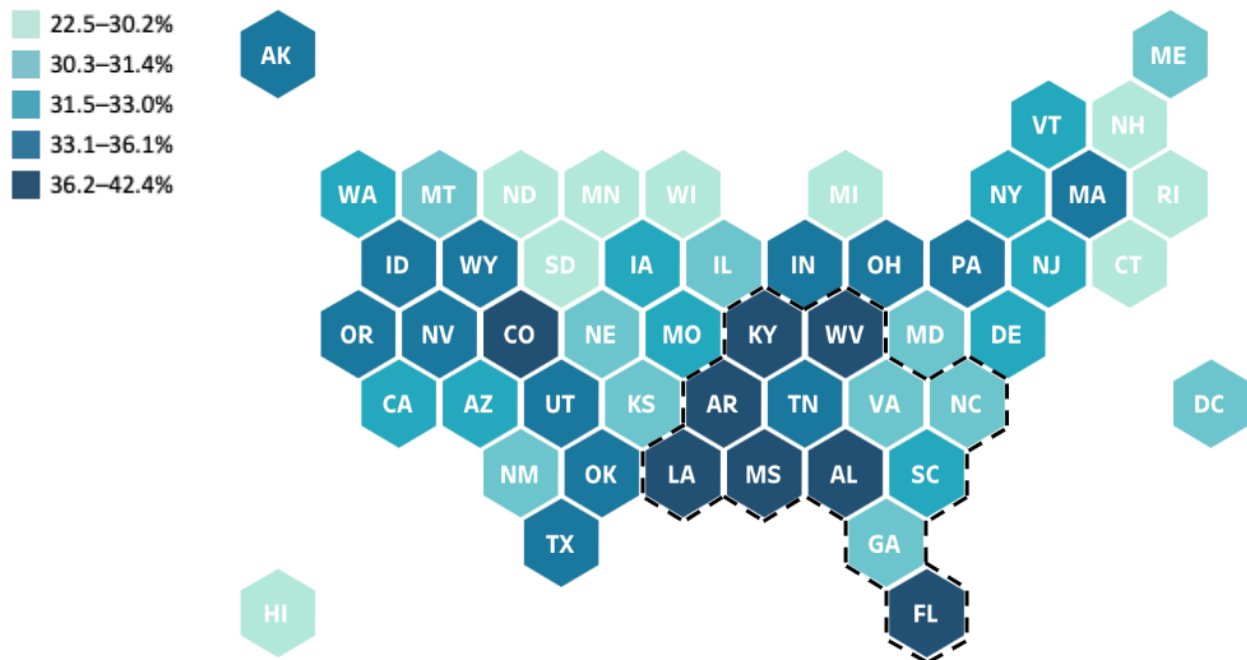
The chronic stress that impoverished children experience actually disrupts the development of the brain. Uncertainty about whether there will be enough food to eat each day, frequent home moves, exposure to violence, and lack of supervision when parents work irregular schedules in low-wage jobs lead to chronic stress that adversely impacts brain architecture.^{[4],[2]} Children living in poverty develop less gray matter volumes which, in turn, negatively impacts their school readiness, and results in later difficulties in memory and self-regulation.^[3] Large-scale, long-term studies have found that increasing government support for children boosts their academic achievement, increases their earnings as adults, decreases their likelihood of needing government support as adults, and reduces their likelihood of becoming incarcerated.^{[4],[5]}

From July through December 2021, the American Rescue Plan provided low and middle-income families with monthly Child Tax Credit (CTC) payments. The majority of these families spent these funds on essentials such as housing, utilities, healthier foods, clothing and school supplies.^[6] But after the CTC expiration in December 2021, child poverty spiked to 17%. The Biden administration's FY24 budget calls for renewing the Child Tax Credit but faces an uncertain future in a deeply divided Congress.^[7] Meanwhile, several non-Southern states have enacted or are considering enacting their own child tax credit programs.^{[8],[9],[10]}

33% of Americans report symptoms of anxiety or depression, up from 11% in 2019. The South had 7 of 8 states with the highest rates.

Symptoms of anxiety or depression, Mar 1-13, 2023

Percent of adults who experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression in the last two weeks



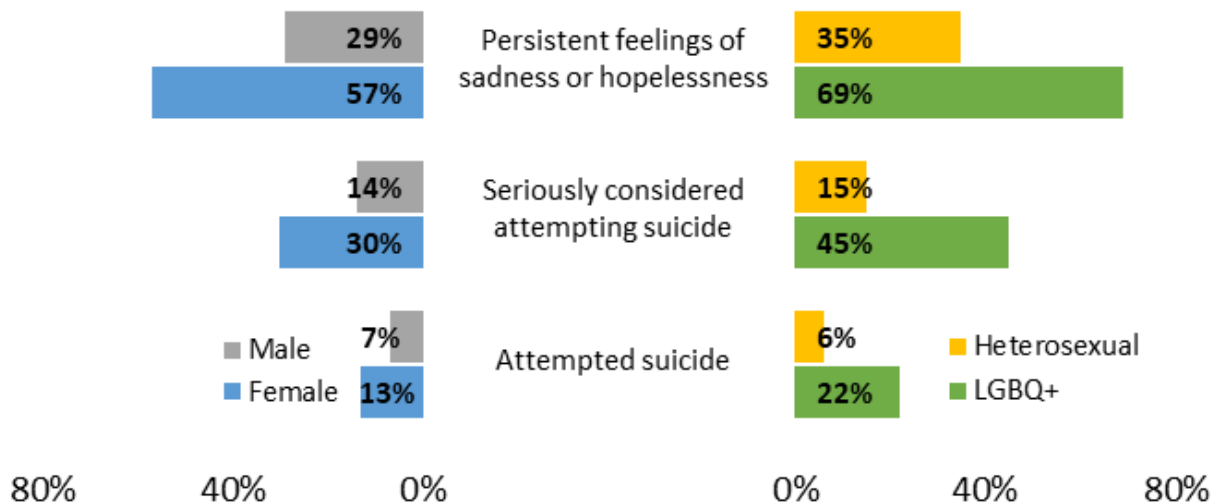
Source: [CDC](#) and [Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey](#). Notes: This indicator is based on self-report of the frequency of anxiety and depression symptoms, derived from responses to the first two questions of the eight-item Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2) and the seven-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-2) scale.

Though pandemic concerns have eased, Americans face a growing mental health crisis. The percent of adults in the U.S. reporting symptoms of anxiety and depression has tripled from 11% in 2019 to 33% in March 2023.^[1] 7 out of the 8 states with the highest rates were in the South: WV (42%), MS (40%), AL (39%), KY (38%), LA (37%), FL (36%), and AR (36%). WV also has the highest drug overdose death rate in the nation ([Drug Overdose Deaths](#)). KY and LA are also among the 5 worst states for drug overdose deaths. The effects of this mental health crisis continue to become clear, with increasing incidence of substance abuse, drug overdose and alcohol-induced deaths, gun violence, and road rage incidents and other vehicular fatalities.^{[2],[3],[4],[5],[6],[7]}

In addition to the economic, racial, political, and cultural tensions exacerbated by the pandemic, growing evidence is revealing that air pollution contributes to higher levels of depression and anxiety.^{[8],[9],[10],[11]} As climate disasters increase across the South, they also may contribute to increasing air pollution which can compound issues of depression and anxiety overtime. ([Disaster declarations](#)).^{[12],[13]}

45% of LGBTQ+ students and 30% of female students in U.S. high schools reported that they had seriously considered attempting suicide.

Mental health among U.S. high school students, by sex and sexual identity
Fall 2021



Source: [CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\)](#). Notes: Because the 2021 national YRBS did not have a question assessing gender identity, data specifically on students who identify as transgender is not available. Survey questions on mental health and suicidality were worded as “During the past 12 months, did you....”

From 2011–2021, the share of high school students that experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, seriously considered suicide, or attempted suicide increased by 50%, 38%, and 25%, respectively.^[1] Surveys show that the pandemic has exacerbated the growing youth mental health crisis. Reports of worsening mental health and suicidality were highest among female and LGBTQ+ students. In Fall 2021, the share of female students that experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and either seriously considered or attempted suicide, was twice the share of male students. Almost half of LGBTQ+ students seriously considered attempting suicide and 22% attempted suicide — rates 3 to 4 times higher than that of heterosexual students.

Today’s youth face many challenges, such as social pressures, pandemic-related instabilities, anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, and school shootings.^{[2],[3],[4]} As schools closed at the start of the pandemic, in-person interactions with friends and social supports like teachers, counselors, and social workers, were significantly reduced.^[5] More than 140,000 children lost a parent or caregiver, and some lacked or lost housing, food, and medical care ([Likelihood of eviction or foreclosure](#), [Food insecurity](#)).^[6] Over 300 bills that target LGBTQ+ youth and their right to healthcare and/or the ability to express themselves in school have been introduced across the nation, with many advancing to hearings and floor debates.^[7] Firearms are now the leading cause of death for U.S. children, with 110 school shooting incidents in 2023 alone.^{[8],[9]}

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

The impacts from the worldwide Covid crisis will be felt for generations. History has shown that large-scale crises accelerate pre-existing trends, exacerbate inequities, and permanently change societies and civic life. The American South has lagged on nearly every indicator of prosperity and equity for decades, and similar patterns are emerging with the current crisis. *Pandemic to Prosperity: South* offers an overview of the Covid-related impacts on our lives and livelihoods, governments, civic institutions, and overall well-being, with a focus on the states of **Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.**

Pandemic to Prosperity: South's thoughtfully-curated data serves to illuminate the challenges facing the South. In addition, this reliable source of wide-ranging, impartial information will be valuable in aligning public and private sector efforts and reflect the progress made, or the lack thereof, over time.

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) launched the *Pandemic to Prosperity* series in July 2020 to look at the nation as a whole and this is the tenth edition of *Pandemic to Prosperity: South*.

About Fair Count (FairCount.org) Founded by Stacey Abrams in 2019 and anchored in Georgia, Fair Count works to build long-term power in communities that have been historically undercounted in the decennial census, underrepresented at the polls, and whose communities are often torn apart in redistricting.

About the Southern Economic Advancement Project (TheSEAP.org) SEAP works to broaden economic power and build a more equitable future in the South through research, policy, and network-building. Focused on 12 Southern states and marginalized/vulnerable populations within the region, SEAP amplifies the efforts of existing organizations and networks that work toward similar goals. The organization was founded by Stacey Abrams in 2019 and is a fiscally-sponsored project of the Roosevelt Institute.

About the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC.org) NCoC is committed to strengthening democracy by supporting local leaders and nonpartisan projects dedicated to citizen engagement and public service. Our vision is one of full participation in our democracy, and that in doing so our democracy equitably and inclusively reflects the combined voices, dreams, and actions of all who call our country home.

AUTHORS

Allison Plyer is the Chief Demographer for The Data Center of Southeast Louisiana. She is author of *The New Orleans Index* series, developed in collaboration with Brookings to analyze the state of the recovery post-Katrina and later to track the region's progress toward prosperity. She is also a co-author of *The New Orleans Prosperity Index* which examines the extent to which economic outcomes have improved for Black New Orleanians since the end of the Civil Rights era. She served as an editor for *Resilience and Opportunity: Lessons from the U.S. Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita*, a Brookings Institution Press volume. Allison is an international expert in post-Katrina demographics and disaster recovery trends and frequently provides commentary on recovery and development to media such as NPR, the Associated Press, the New York Times, and USA Today. Allison received her Doctorate in Science from Tulane University and has an MBA from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University.

Alysha Rashid is a policy and data consultant with a focus on building a more equitable society through a social and racial lens. She supports nonprofit and government organizations across policy areas using data analytics and visualization to promote data-informed decisions for marginalized populations. Previously, Alysha's focus was on increasing college access and success for underrepresented populations, developing her expertise as an admissions counselor, a high school college advisor, and ultimately a nonprofit administrator. As the Director of Program and Operations for America Achieves and Bloomberg Philanthropies' CollegePoint initiative, she oversaw day-to-day programming and led the data operations, working closely with the research and evaluation team. Alysha co-created an Anti-Racism Discussion Series for postsecondary institutions. She received her MPP from the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago, and her BA from Adelphi University.

Elaine Ortiz is the Lead Data Analyst for Pandemic to Prosperity. Elaine is an expert in economic and demographic data for applied research to support informed decision-making and more resilient communities. She has 20 years experience in research design, implementation, data analysis, statistical methods, and writing on complex and technical topics for a lay audience. Elaine's work in data dissemination is grounded in the importance of user-centered design and strategic communications for reaching targeted audiences. She is an expert in federal statistics (e.g. BLS, Census) and private sources of data (e.g. EMSI, Moody's). Elaine has an MS in urban and regional planning from University of Iowa and a BA in economics from Hanover College.

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This report is dedicated to all of the data heroes — in state, local, federal government, institutions, nonprofits, and volunteer organizations — who make these types of analyses possible.

PANDEMIC
to
PROSPERITY
SOUTH