

# OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA 2011-2015

5 YEARS OF THE  
OPPORTUNITY  
INDEX

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

03	<b>FIVE-YEAR LANDSCAPE</b>
04 - 05	<b>PATHS OF OPPORTUNITY</b>
06 - 07	<b>STATE RANKINGS</b>
08	<b>NATIONAL TRENDS</b>
09	<b>INDEX INDICATORS</b>
10 - 25	<b>INDEX DATA</b>

# A FIVE-YEAR VIEW OF OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA

The fifth annual Opportunity Index offers a chance to not only reflect on a half-decade of both progress and setbacks for opportunity as the country has emerged from the Great Recession, but also to accelerate bipartisan, cross-sector solutions that benefit all of us.

★ Overall, the Index shows that access to opportunity has increased nearly 9 percent nationally since 2011, a result of a dramatically improved employment picture, improved high school graduation rates and a significant drop in violent crime, among other key indicators.

However, the nation's ongoing economic recovery is uneven, leaving millions of Americans behind. There are higher rates of poverty and income inequality

and lower median family incomes in 2015 than there were five years ago. And access to upward mobility varies greatly by geography. In too many places, how far one goes in life is largely determined by one's zip code.

This is unacceptable.

While the percentage of young adults who are neither in school nor working has decreased slightly since 2011, U.S. youth disconnection rates remain higher than they were pre-recession.

Today, there are 5.5 million disconnected youth, equivalent to the entire population of Denmark, and millions more at risk. We must do better.

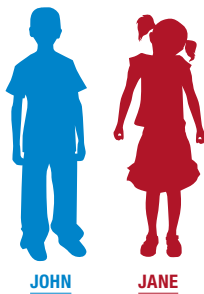
When our youth do well, our communities do well. We all benefit.

As the 2016 presidential race gathers momentum, it is critical that candidates and voters have a clear picture of where access to the American Dream is expanding and constricting, as well as a deeper understanding of effective solutions by public, private and nonprofit sectors that can improve the lives, prospects and communities of Americans.

Let's make sure that expanding opportunity is at the top of the next president's agenda so that five years from now, we will be celebrating even more significant gains in Opportunity Index Scores in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

# YOUR ZIP CODE SHOULDN'T DETERMINE HOW FAR YOU GO IN LIFE

Meet John and Jane.



Somerset County,  
New Jersey



BIRTHPLACE

4.8%



JOBS  
Unemployment rate

\$92,683



MEDIAN INCOME  
Annual, per household



Marion County,  
Florida

4.7%

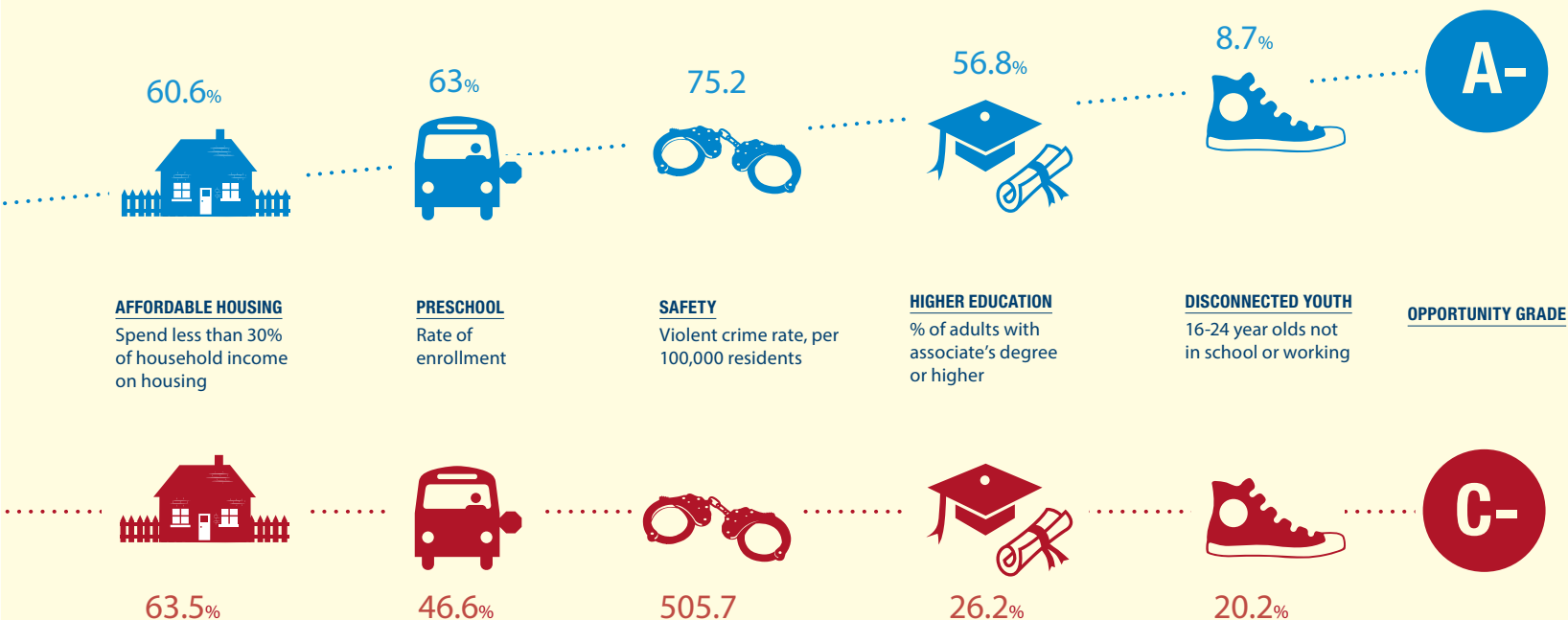


\$36,928



What access to opportunity really looks like

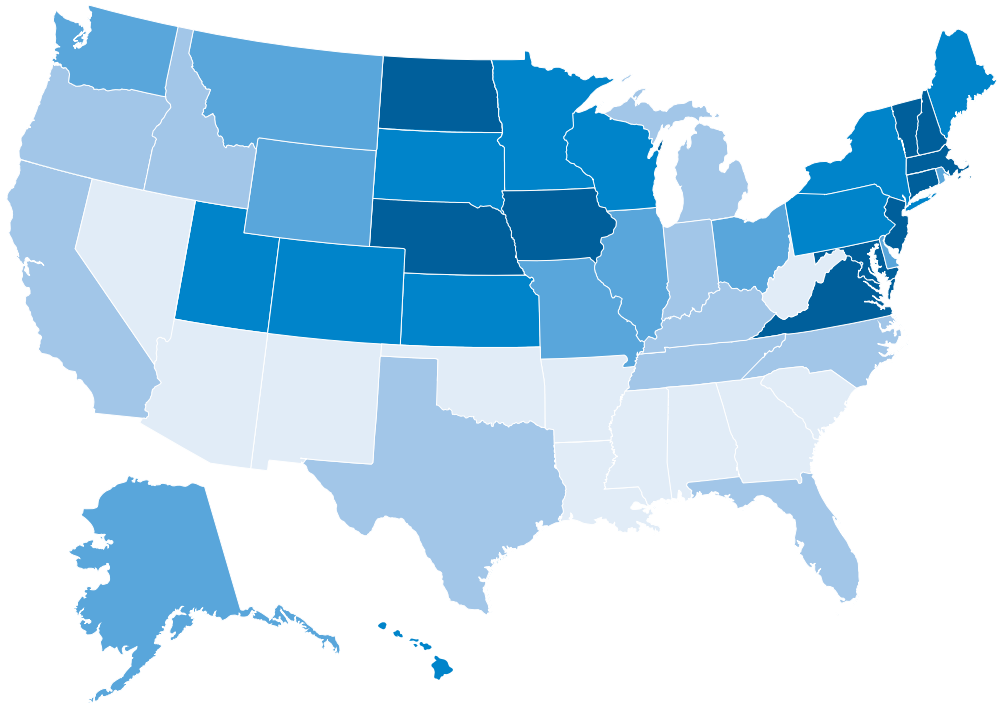
John and Jane were born in two counties of similar size, racial composition and unemployment rates. But that's where the similarities end.



We can't change all the circumstances of John and Jane's lives, and their talents and ambitions also play a role in how far they will go in life. But shouldn't all children have access to the same conditions of opportunity that John enjoys simply because of where he grows up?

We can't pick our ethnicity, our parents or our IQ. But if you work hard, your zip code shouldn't condemn you to an inescapable economic fate. In a free society, some inequality is unavoidable. But inequality without the chance for mobility is economically inefficient and unjust.

# OPPORTUNITY INDEX STATE RANKINGS



The 2015 Opportunity Index is a composite measure of 16 key indicators in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 2,673 counties.

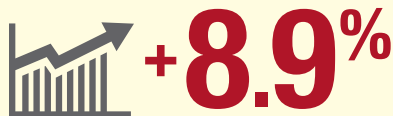


STATE	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Vermont	1	1	1	1	1
Massachusetts	2	3	3	2	3
Connecticut	3	5	10	9	2
North Dakota	4	4	6	4	9
New Hampshire	5	7	2	3	4
New Jersey	6	8	7	7	5

STATE	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	STATE	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	STATE	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Nebraska	7	2	5	6	7	Illinois	22	26	25	22	22	California	37	33	33	37	37
Iowa	8	10	8	8	8	Wyoming	23	24	21	24	18	Florida	38	40	39	39	38
Maryland	9	9	9	10	10	Delaware	24	23	26	27	28	Oregon	39	32	31	31	29
Virginia	10	16	15	15	13	Rhode Island	25	29	28	28	25	Tennessee	40	38	41	40	41
Kansas	11	12	13	13	15	Montana	26	25	27	21	23	Oklahoma	41	39	37	35	36
Minnesota	12	6	4	5	6	Missouri	27	28	29	30	31	South Carolina	42	42	43	42	48
Hawaii	13	21	24	25	19	Ohio	28	31	30	29	30	West Virginia	43	43	45	44	40
Utah	14	17	14	16	20	Washington	29	22	22	26	27	Arizona	44	44	44	47	47
New York	15	19	19	17	16	Alaska	30	27	23	23	24	Arkansas	45	48	46	46	45
Maine	16	14	16	12	14	Indiana	31	34	35	34	33	Alabama	46	47	47	48	49
Pennsylvania	17	20	20	20	17	Kentucky	32	41	40	41	39	Georgia	47	45	42	43	43
Wisconsin	18	13	12	11	12	Idaho	33	30	32	32	32	Louisiana	48	46	48	45	44
District of Columbia	19	11	18	19	26	Michigan	34	36	34	33	34	Mississippi	49	50	50	50	50
South Dakota	20	15	11	14	11	North Carolina	35	35	36	36	35	Nevada	50	51	51	51	51
Colorado	21	18	17	18	21	Texas	36	37	38	38	42	New Mexico	51	49	49	49	46

# 2011-2015 OPPORTUNITY TRENDS

01



Overall opportunity in America has increased by 8.9% since 2011.

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
49.6	50.1	51.0	52.7	54.0

02



Economy

Over the past 5 years, all 50 states and the District of Columbia and 3/4 of all counties have increased their scores on the Opportunity Index. Most of this progress is due to an improved employment picture as the country has emerged from the Great Recession.

03

The indicators that correlate most strongly with 2015 state Opportunity Scores include:



Poverty rate



Rate of youth disconnection



Percentage of adults with associate's degrees or higher

04

The rate of youth disconnection has fallen 4.8% since 2011, but remains above pre-recession levels.



2011

14.5%

**5.7**  
MILLION



2015

13.8%

**5.5**  
MILLION

05



INCOME

2011

**\$51,050**

2015

**\$48,906**

CHANGE

**-4.2%**

Lower median household income than in 2011



INEQUALITY

**4.8 to 1**

**5.0 to 1**

**+3.4%**

Higher income inequality than in 2011



POVERTY

**14.3%**

**15.8%**

**+10.5%**

Higher poverty rate than in 2011

Unemployment rates have fallen 44% since 2011. Yet youth unemployment remains in the double digits.



Despite gains, the economic landscape is decidedly mixed, showing uneven economic recovery from the recession.



# OPPORTUNITY INDEX INDICATORS

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## ECONOMY

Jobs  
Wages  
Poverty  
Inequality  
Access to  
Banking  
Affordable  
Housing  
Internet  
Access

## EDUCATION

Preschool  
Enrollment  
On-time  
High School  
Graduation  
Postsecondary  
Completion

## COMMUNITY

Group  
Membership  
Volunteerism  
Disconnected  
Youth  
Community  
Safety  
Access to  
Health Care  
Access to  
Healthy Food



ECONOMY

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EDUCATION

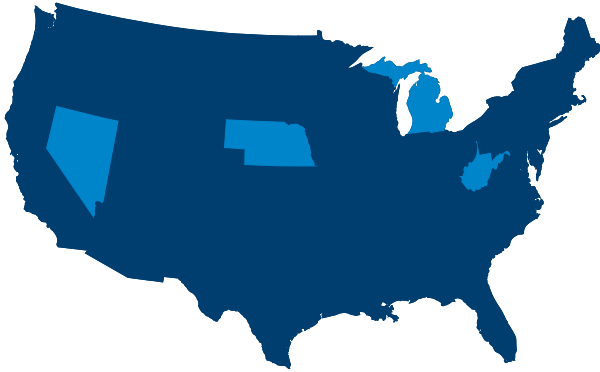
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COMMUNITY

# JOBS

## The unemployment rate



### BEST:

Nebraska  
**2.5%**


### WORST:

Nevada & West  
Virginia (tie)  
**7.2%**

### MOST IMPROVED:

Michigan  
**4.8%**  
(11.9% in 2011)

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics tables and news releases.  
Unemployment rates in the 2015 Opportunity Index are from April 2015.

 Economy

# 5.1%

NATIONAL AVERAGE



Nationally, the unemployment rate decreased 44% since 2011.



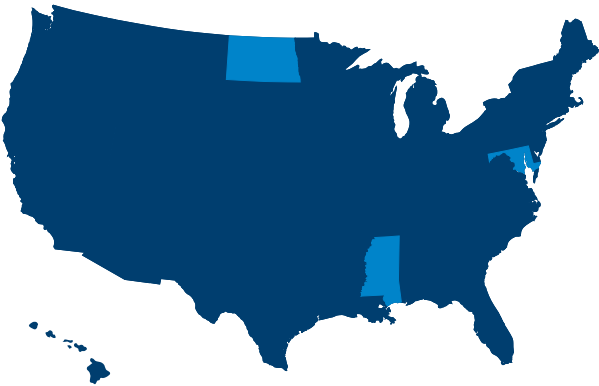
youth

adult

Youth unemployment rate remains at least twice the national average.

# WAGES

## Median household income



**BEST:**  
Maryland  
**\$67,844**

**WORST:**  
Mississippi  
**\$35,533**

**MOST IMPROVED:**  
North Dakota  
**\$52,191**  
(\$48,617 in 2011)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

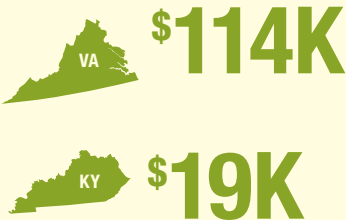
**\$** Economy

**\$ 48,906**

NATIONAL AVERAGE



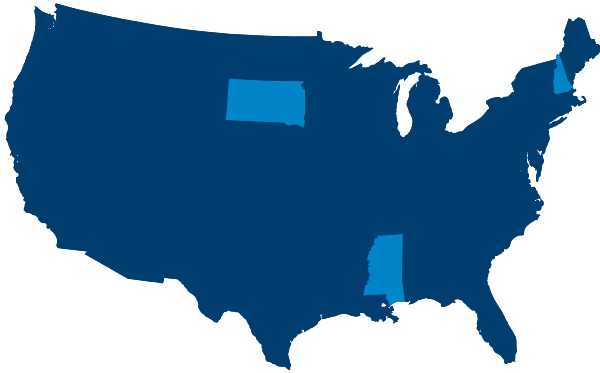
National median household income declined 4.2%; it was \$51,050 in 2011.



In 2015, Loudoun County, VA had highest median income: \$114,415, while Owsley County, KY had the lowest: \$18,707.

# POVERTY

Percentage of population below the poverty line




**BEST:**  
New Hampshire  
**8.7%**

**WORST:**  
Mississippi  
**24%**

**MOST IMPROVED:**  
South Dakota  
**14.2%**  
(14.2% in 2011 - only state  
to not increase poverty rate  
2011-2015)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

 Economy

# 15.8%

NATIONAL AVERAGE



Poverty has increased  
10.5% over the past  
five years. In 2011,  
14.3% lived below  
poverty line.



+ 27.4%

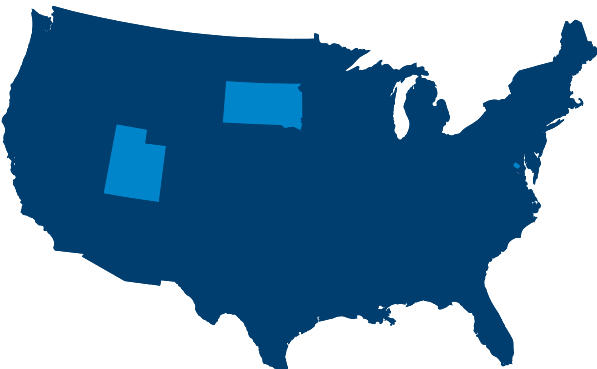


+ 24.4%

Poverty increased the most in  
Nevada and Rhode Island – up  
27.4% and 24.4%, respectively,  
since 2011.


# INEQUALITY

Ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that of the 20th percentile



<b>BEST:</b>	<b>WORST:</b>	<b>MOST IMPROVED:</b>
Utah	District of Columbia	South Dakota
3.9	7.2	4.1
		(4.2 in 2011)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. In 2015, households at the 80th percentile had incomes 5 times higher than households at the 20th percentile.

 Economy

5.0

NATIONAL AVERAGE



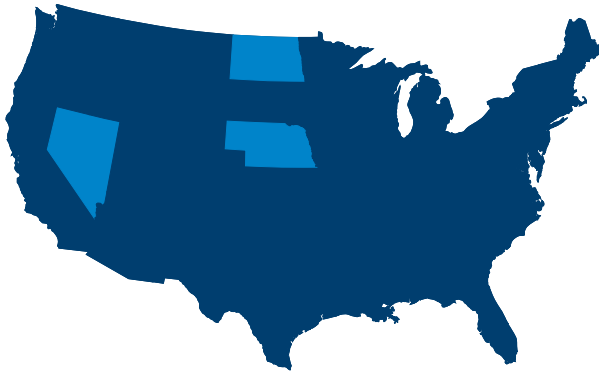
Nationwide, income inequality has increased 3.4% since 2011.



Morgan County, UT has lowest rate of income inequality in 2015: 2.6.

# ACCESS TO BANKING


Banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions and credit unions per 10,000 residents)



**BEST:**  
North Dakota  
**7.5**

**WORST:**  
Nevada  
**2.6**

**MOST IMPROVED:**  
Nebraska  
**6.7**  
(6.4 in 2011)

 Economy

# 3.9

NATIONAL AVERAGE



Nationally, access to traditional banks dropped nearly 7%, perhaps an indication of more Americans shifting to online banking.

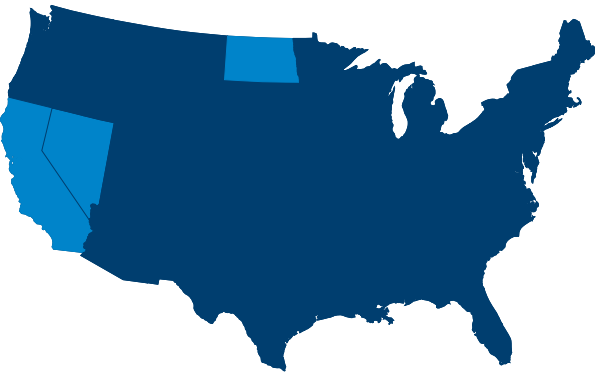
# -19.3%

North Carolina lost the most ground, with a 19.3% decrease in access to banks since 2011.

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns and Population Estimates Program.

# AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Households spending less than 30% of income on housing




**BEST:**  
North Dakota  
**76.8%**

**WORST:**  
California  
**55.3%**

**MOST IMPROVED:**  
Nevada  
**61.9%**  
(54.9% in 2011)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

 Economy

# 65.4%

NATIONAL AVERAGE



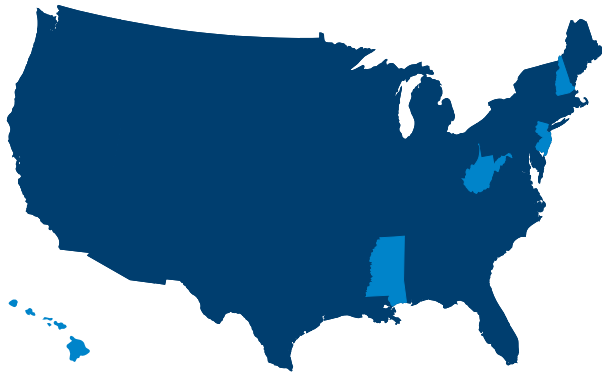
More Americans lived in affordable housing in 2015 than in 2011 – a 4.5% increase.



Louisiana was the only state to experience a slight decrease in the number of households living in affordable housing since 2011.

# INTERNET ACCESS

Percentage of households with high-speed Internet for state overall; 5-level categories for counties



**BEST:**

Hawaii, New Hampshire  
& New Jersey (tie)  
**84%**


**WORST:**

Mississippi  
**51%**

**MOST IMPROVED:**

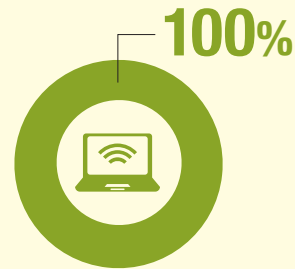
West Virginia  
**64%**  
(50.1% in 2011)

Source: Federal Communications Commission, Internet Access Services.

 Economy

# 72.7%

NATIONAL AVERAGE



All 50 states plus the District of Columbia increased high-speed Internet connections since 2011; average increase is 13.7%.

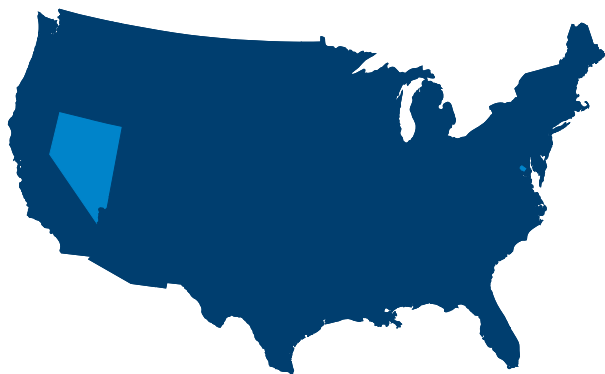


311 counties received the highest level (5) in 2015 for Internet access.



# PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds in school

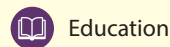


**BEST:**  
District of Columbia  
**77.7%**

**WORST:**  
Nevada  
**31.9%**

**MOST IMPROVED:**  
District of Columbia  
**77.7%**  
(65.91% in 2011)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.



# 47.1%

NATIONAL AVERAGE



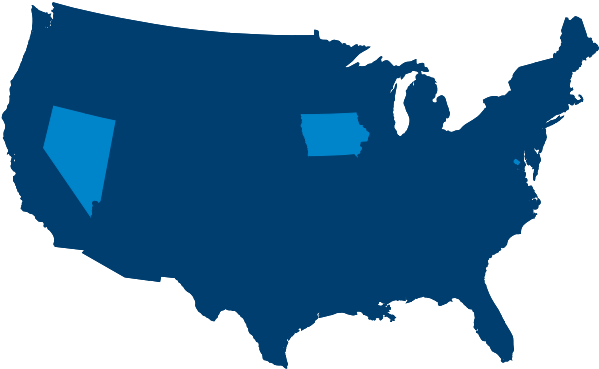
Nationwide, there were fewer children in preschool in 2015 than in 2011; 2.3% decrease reflects state cuts in wake of the Great Recession.

# +15.8%

In contrast, North Dakota increased enrollment by 15.8% due to early education investments that began in 2009.

# ON-TIME HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years



<b>BEST:</b>	<b>WORST:</b>	<b><u>MOST IMPROVED:</u></b>
Iowa	District of Columbia	Nevada
<b>89.7%</b>	<b>62.3%</b>	<b>70.7%</b>
		(56.3% in 2011)

Source: State and county data are from the U.S. Department of Education: ED Facts Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for the 2012-13 school year.

# 81.4%

NATIONAL AVERAGE

+9%



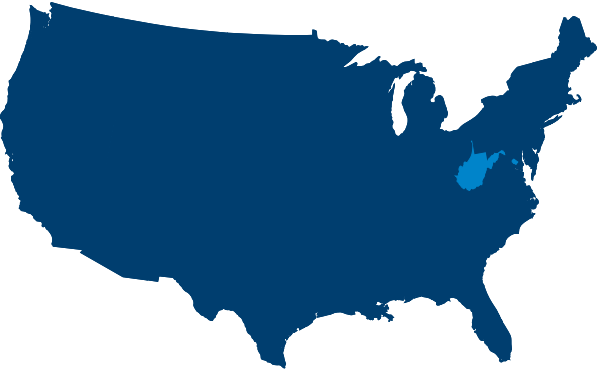
National on-time high school graduation rates increased 9% since 2011.



Oregon dropped the most, 10.4%, but the decrease is linked to federal changes in the way high school graduation rates are calculated.

# POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

Percentage of adults 25 and older with an associate's degree or higher

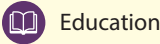


**BEST:**  
District of Columbia  
**58.2%**

**WORST:**  
West Virginia  
**25.7%**

**MOST IMPROVED:**  
District of Columbia  
**58.2%**  
(51.1% in 2011)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.  
\*Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce.



Education

# 37.7%

NATIONAL AVERAGE



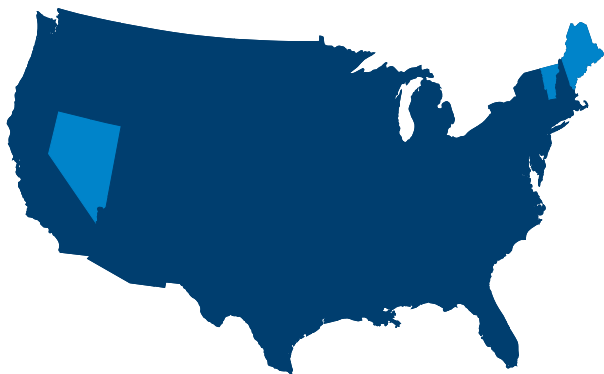
Nationally, postsecondary completion rates increased 6.7% since 2011.



By 2020, two-thirds of all U.S. jobs will require some form of postsecondary degree or credential.\*

# GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Percentage of adults 18 and older involved in social, civic, sports and religious groups



**BEST:**

Vermont  
**55.6%**

**WORST:**

Maine  
**28.2%**

**MOST IMPROVED:**

Nevada  
**41.7%**

(24.4% in 2011)

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Data-Ferrett, Current Population Survey, Civic Engagement Supplement. Due to limitations of the survey data, this indicator is only calculated at the state level. As a result of the discontinuation of the Civic Engagement Supplement of the Current Population Survey, data for this indicator in the 2015 Opportunity Index are from 2011 and 2013.



Community

# 39.8%

NATIONAL AVERAGE

# +13.4%

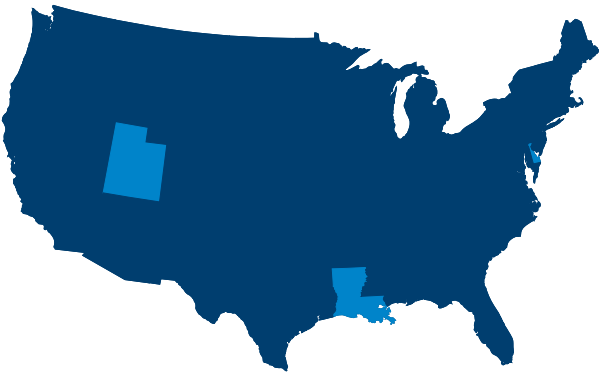
Nationwide, group membership increased 13.4% since 2011.



Civic engagement may help low-income youth build social capital and skills that help them find meaningful career pathways.

# VOLUNTEERISM

Percentage of adults ages 18 and older who volunteer



**BEST:**  
Utah  
**45.4%**

**WORST:**  
Louisiana  
**17.7%**

**MOST IMPROVED:**  
Delaware  
**26%**  
(23.5% in 2011)

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, DataFerrett, Current Population Survey, Volunteering Supplement. Due to limitations of the survey data, this indicator is only calculated at the state level.



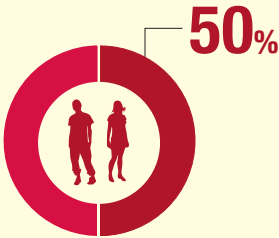
Community

# 25.4%

NATIONAL AVERAGE



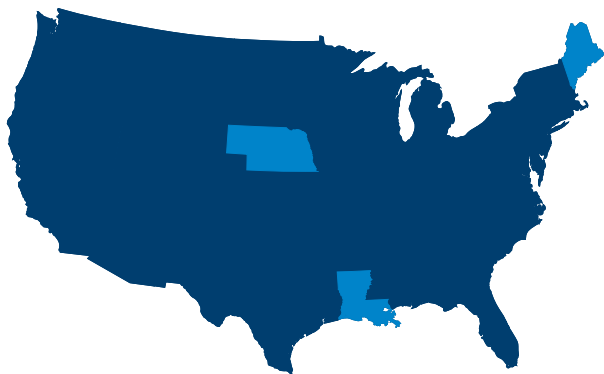
Nationally, the percentage of adults who volunteer decreased 4% since 2011.



The likelihood that a young person is disconnected from school or work drops nearly in half if he or she volunteers.

# DISCONNECTED YOUTH

Percentage of young adults 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor working



**BEST:**

Nebraska  
**7.6%**

**WORST:**

Louisiana  
**19.8%**

**MOST IMPROVED:**

Maine  
**9.8%**  
(13.5% in 2011)

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey PUMS Microdata.



Community

# 13.8%

NATIONAL AVERAGE



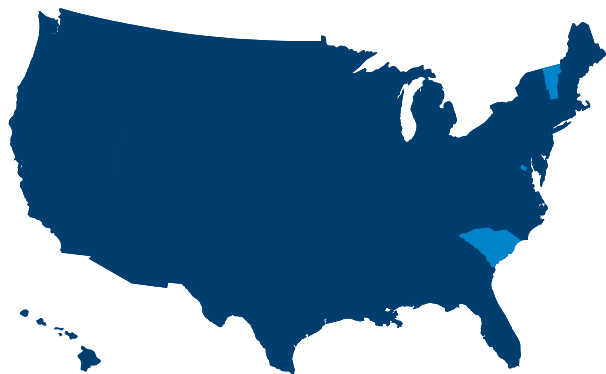
Nationally, youth disconnection rates have dropped 4.8% since 2011, a decrease of 136,508 young adults.

# 5.5 MILLION

The number of disconnected youth—5.5 million in 2015—is one of the strongest predictors of state Opportunity Scores.

# COMMUNITY SAFETY

Violent crime rate per 100,000 population



**BEST:**

Vermont  
**114.9**

**WORST:**

District of Columbia  
**1,281.9**

**MOST IMPROVED:**

South Carolina  
**494.8**

(675.2 in 2013)

Source: State data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics ([www.ucrdatatool.gov](http://www.ucrdatatool.gov)); county data from the County Health Rankings analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Criminal Justice Information Services. County Health Rankings are from the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute in collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Community

# 387.8

NATIONAL AVERAGE



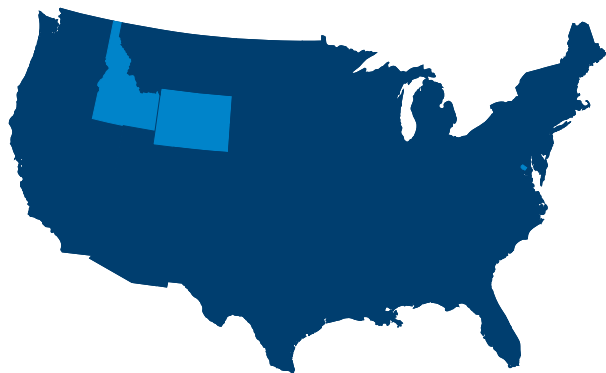
Nationally, violent crime dropped 10.2% since 2011.



Knox County, NE has the nation's lowest crime rate, 7.7 (population 8,557).

# ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Medical doctors per 100,000 population



**BEST:**

District of Columbia  
**1,025.4**

**WORST:**

Idaho  
**159.4**

**MOST IMPROVED:**

Wyoming  
**250.2**  
(169.5 in 2011)

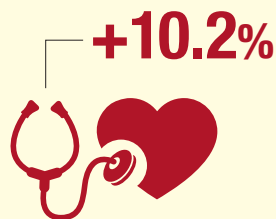
Source: Measure of America calculations using medical workforce data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Area Health Resources Files and population data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program.



Community

# 286.5

NATIONAL AVERAGE



Nationally, access to medical doctors increased 10.2% since 2011.

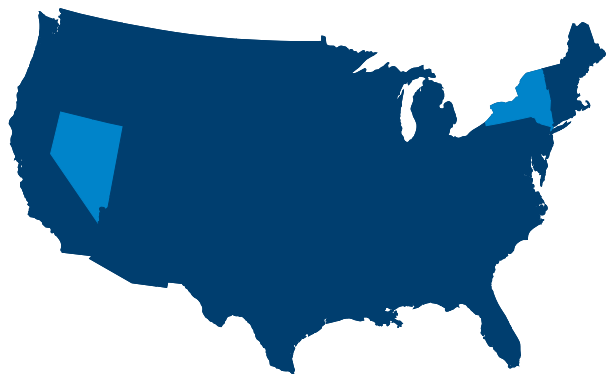


Statistically, 175 counties did not have a doctor in their community in 2015.



# ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

Grocery stores and produce vendors per 10,000 population



**BEST:**

New York  
**5.5**

**WORST:**

Nevada  
**1.2**

**MOST IMPROVED:**

New York  
**5.5**

(4.9 in 2011)

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns and Population Estimates Program.

\* U.S. Department of Agriculture, Healthy Food Access.



Community

# 2.2

NATIONAL AVERAGE



Nationally, access to healthy food increased 1.3% since 2011.



23.5 million Americans live in “food deserts,” neighborhoods that are located more than one mile from a supermarket in urban areas and more than 10 miles in rural areas.\*

# ABOUT OPPORTUNITY NATION



Opportunity Nation is a bipartisan, national coalition of more than 350 businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions and community leaders working to expand economic mobility. Opportunity Nation seeks to close the opportunity gap by amplifying the work of its coalition members, advocating policy and private sector actions, and releasing the annual Opportunity Index.

# ABOUT MEASURE OF AMERICA



Measure of America, a Project of the Social Science Research Council, provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being, opportunity and inequality in America and for stimulating fact-based conversations about issues we all care about: health, education and living standards.



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## OPPORTUNITYINDEX.ORG

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visit [www.opportunityindex.org](http://www.opportunityindex.org)

\*For additional sources, visit [www.opportunityindex.org/briefingbook](http://www.opportunityindex.org/briefingbook)



The Opportunity Index was jointly developed by Opportunity Nation and Measure of America.