

The 2018 Opportunity Index and 2019 Preview for Selected Indicators

Introduction

Creating opportunities for all families to thrive in their communities requires a complex set of strategies. These will vary according to each community's history, culture, needs, assets, and demographic makeup. Both historically and currently, opportunity in the United States is not distributed equally. Where a baby is born, grows into childhood, moves into adolescence, and seeks an adult role (which can include raising a family or starting a career) can greatly influence whether this journey is supported and fulfilling, or full of overwhelming obstacles, dangers, and disappointments.

Across our nation's states and counties, community members, policymakers, philanthropic leaders, and other change agents need tools to understand the strengths and challenges related to building opportunity in the communities in which they live and serve. Since 2011, the Opportunity Index has provided insight into this critical question, offering a comprehensive and detailed examination of conditions that affect opportunity, place by place, across the United States.

The Opportunity Index is a composite measure made up of indicators in four distinct dimensions of opportunity: Economy, Education, Health, and Community. This report shares the latest Index scores for all 50 states plus the District of Columbia, ranking them from 1 to 51, with 1 indicating the state with the greatest opportunity. The report also presents overall levels of opportunity for more than 2,000 counties (representing 97 percent of the U.S. population, with even greater coverage for most indicators).

To highlight the uneven distribution of opportunity in our nation, we also share, for those indicators with available data, breakdowns of the data by gender and race/ethnicity.

The Index was first launched in 2011, and Child Trends led a structural change in 2017 affecting a number of its indicators and dimensions. Because of this change, composite Opportunity and Dimension Scores from 2011 to 2015 should not be compared with those from 2016 and forward. This report focuses on progress since the publication of the 2017 Index to bring continuity to the way we measure opportunity. The 2018 Opportunity Index was jointly developed by Child Trends and the Forum for Youth Investment's Opportunity Nation campaign. The 2017 [Technical Supplement](#) has a more detailed discussion of the structural change.

As of this report's release, data for a number of indicators are not yet available for a 2019 Index. Thus, this report combines the 2018 Opportunity Index with a limited preview of the 2019 Index, based on the data that are available. Partial 2019 data is not currently available on the Opportunity Index website, but can be requested on [opportunityindex.org](https://opportunityindex.org/request-data/) (<https://opportunityindex.org/request-data/>).

Findings and Trends

For the nation as a whole, the 2018 Opportunity Score, which is the composite measure of opportunity, stands at 53.1 out of 100. This increase of 0.6 points (1.2 percent) in overall opportunity since 2017 is driven by improvements in the Economy, Education, and Community dimensions. The largest increase (4.6 percent) was in Economy, while Education and Community saw growth of 1.5 and 1.8 percent, respectively. The Health dimension, however, declined by 2.8 percent.

Since the Opportunity Index first launched in 2011, through 2017, Vermont was the state ranked number one in overall opportunity. However, in 2018, Minnesota moved to the fore, at 62.5 points, while Vermont placed a close second, at 62.3.

For the fourth consecutive year, New Mexico had the lowest Opportunity score. However, at 42.8, its score did improve from 2017's score of 40.9. From 2017 to 2018, opportunity increased in 44 states while it decreased in six states and the District of Columbia.

In a large majority (83.2 percent) of counties where changes could be calculated, opportunity increased from 2017 to 2018. At the county level, overall opportunity is indicated by a letter grade, based on each county's performance on the indicators that comprise the Opportunity Index. In 2018, 18 counties received an Opportunity Grade of A, three more than in 2017. The number of counties receiving an F decreased substantially, from 18 to seven.

How Is Opportunity Measured in the Opportunity Index?

Opportunity is multidimensional. Recognizing these dimensions and taking a comprehensive view of them is important; for all Americans to thrive, a focus on just one or two aspects of opportunity may misrepresent communities' actual experiences. For instance, opportunity may improve in one aspect (such as the economy), but be unmoved, or even decline, in others. Opportunity may be headed in a positive direction for some groups, but not for others. Communities that acknowledge the complex nature of opportunity delve deeper into the data and are more likely to devise thoughtful strategies that account for the many factors that drive opportunity.

The Opportunity Index identifies four important dimensions, with specific measures (indicators) of opportunity under each (see the 2017 [Analysis Report](#) for a thorough overview of why the individual indicators making up these dimensions are important):

- Economy
- Education
- Health
- Community

The Index examines opportunity at multiple geographic levels, acknowledging that those working to expand opportunity may focus their work locally, at the state level, or even nationally. National trends can be helpful benchmarks for comparisons, but they are less useful for

understanding the substantial disparities in opportunity that are evident when analysis drills down to smaller geographies. State-level Opportunity Scores can begin to reveal the range of opportunity across the nation, and may suggest to policymakers “peer states” whose experience may offer useful insights. At the county level, Opportunity Grades and Dimension Scores provide the most community-specific data that can inform local planning and action.

With the 2018 Index, for the first time, indicator data was disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender at the national level with an intention to encourage discussion of the ways these factors can restrict access to opportunity. In subsequent editions of the Opportunity Index, and as the data permit, we plan to expand upon this analysis through a more comprehensive look at specific dimensions, and at multiple geographic levels.

Methodologies

The Opportunity Index uses official statistics from a number of government sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Department of Justice, the Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Vital Statistics System, as well as data compiled by reputable nonprofit organizations. (See the [Technical Supplement](#) for complete sources for every indicator.) Opportunity Index data are derived from sources that were not designed to address questions of causality. For this reason, we caution against using the Opportunity Index to draw any cause-and-effect inferences.

At the national and state levels, the Opportunity Index is made up of 20 indicators combined to yield a score from 0 to 100 in each of the four dimensions. The four dimensions are equally weighted in determining the overall Opportunity Score of each state and the District of Columbia, again on a 100-point scale. At the county level, the Opportunity Index includes only 17 indicators because data for three indicators in the Community

dimension (volunteering, primary care physicians, and incarceration) are not available at the county level. Rather than Opportunity Scores, counties are awarded “Opportunity Grades” (A+ to F) for their overall performance—both for ease of interpretation and because opportunity at the county level is measured by a slightly different set of indicators. (See the [Technical Supplement](#) for full details on construction of the Index.)

The Opportunity Index: Dimensions and Indicators

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION
Economy	JOB	Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are not working but available for and seeking work)
	WAGES	Median household income (in 2010 dollars)
	POVERTY	Percentage of the population below the federal poverty level (the amount of pretax cash income considered adequate for an individual or family to meet basic needs)
	INCOME INEQUALITY	80/20 ratio (ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that at the 20th percentile)
	ACCESS TO BANKING SERVICES	Number of banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions, and credit unions) per 10,000 residents
	AFFORDABLE HOUSING	Percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing-related costs
	BROADBAND INTERNET SUBSCRIPTION	Percentage of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service
Education	PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT	Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool
	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION	On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)
	POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION	Percentage of adults ages 25 and older with an associate degree or higher
Health	LOW BIRTH WEIGHT	Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds
	HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE	Percentage of the population (under age 65) without health insurance coverage
	DEATHS RELATED TO ALCOHOL/DRUG USE AND SUICIDE	Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)
Community	VOLUNTEERING	Percentage of adults (ages 18 and older) who reported they volunteered during the previous year [national and state-level only]
	VOTER REGISTRATION	Percentage of adults ages 18 and older who are registered to vote [national and state-level only]
	YOUTH DISCONNECTION	Percentage of youth (ages 16–24) not in school and not working
	VIOLENT CRIME	Incidents of violent crime reported to law enforcement agencies (per 100,000 population)
	ACCESS TO PRIMARY HEALTH CARE	Number of primary care physicians (per 100,000 population)
	ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD	Number of grocery stores and produce vendors (per 10,000 population)
	INCARCERATION	Number of people incarcerated in jail or prison (per 100,000 population 18 and older) [national and state-level only]

The Nation's 2018 Opportunity Score

The overall Opportunity Score for the United States is 53.1 on a 100-point scale, representing an increase of 0.6 points (1.2 percent) from the overall score in 2017. As discussed in this and previous reports, because of the significant changes in the composition of the Opportunity Index made for the 2016/17 update, we caution readers against comparing this year's Opportunity Score with scores for years before 2016.

Data from the 2018 Index show that opportunity increased from 2017 in three of the four dimensions, with the greatest improvement (4.6 percent) in the Economy dimension. Gains in scores for Education and Community were smaller, at 1.5 and 1.8 percent, respectively. The Health score—which improved by 2.1 percent from 2016 to 2017—declined by 2.8 percent from 2017 to 2018. In fact, the Health score in 2018 was slightly lower overall in 2018 than in 2016.

State Opportunity Scores

Twenty-three states have scores below the U.S. Opportunity Score of 53.1, while 27 states and the District of Columbia have scores above the average.¹

Minnesota ranks highest on the 2018 Opportunity Index, with a score of 62.5 out of 100. Vermont, which had held the highest-scoring position since the inception of the Index in 2011, fell to a close second place, with a score of 62.3.

New Mexico has had the lowest Opportunity Score since the 2015 Opportunity Index and remains in the bottom slot in 2018. However, its score increased by nearly two points, to 42.8. Outpacing the United States as a whole, this growth was driven by the state's improvements in all four dimensions of opportunity.

¹ We advise readers that small differences in Index scores between one state and another are not likely to indicate substantively meaningful differences. We recommend examining all available information (dimension-level scores and specific indicators), as well as using additional contextual information from other sources, to gain a more nuanced understanding.

Similar to previous years, the states with the highest levels of opportunity tend to be clustered in the Northeast and Midwest. Of the 10 highest-ranking states, four are in New England (Vermont, 2nd highest; Massachusetts, 4th highest; Connecticut, 7th highest; and New Hampshire, 8th highest) and four are in the Midwest (Minnesota, highest-scoring; Iowa, 3rd highest; Nebraska; 5th highest; and North Dakota, 6th highest); Washington State and New Jersey hold the ninth and tenth spots, respectively.

The lowest Opportunity Scores in 2018 have a geographic distribution similar to that of previous years, with high representation from states in the South (Louisiana, 2nd lowest; Mississippi, 4th lowest, Alabama, 7th lowest; Georgia, 8th lowest; and Florida, 10th lowest), the Southwest (New Mexico, lowest-scoring; Nevada, 3rd lowest; Oklahoma, 6th lowest, and Arizona, 9th lowest), and Appalachia (West Virginia, 5th lowest) in the bottom 10 states.

The following are the highest and lowest state scores for each dimension:

Economy. North Dakota is the highest-performing state, with a score of 67.2. Mississippi, at 46.2, is lowest.

Education. New Jersey is the highest-performing state, with a score of 66.8. Nevada, at 42.1, is lowest.

Health. Minnesota is the highest-performing state, with a score of 70.1. West Virginia, at 35.8, is lowest.

Community. Maine is the highest-performing state, with a score of 64.6. Oklahoma, at 38.4, is lowest.

The complete state rankings, including overall opportunity and dimension scores, are presented on the following page.

2018 Opportunity Index State Rankings

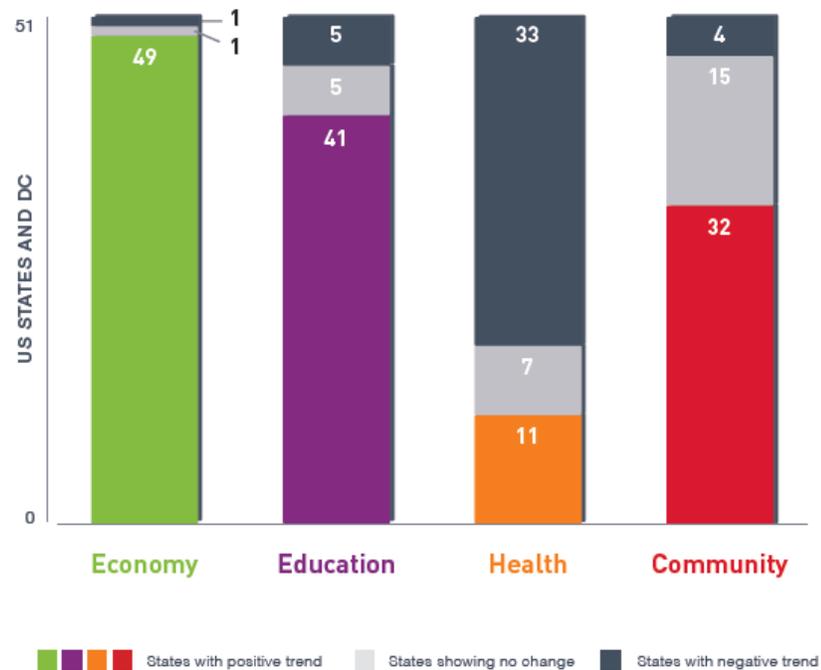
Overall Opportunity Rank	State	Overall Opportunity Score	Economy	Education	Health	Community
United States		53.1	55.4	55.2	54.0	47.6
1	Minnesota	62.5	63.3	55.5	70.1	61.3
2	Vermont	62.3	59.4	62.7	62.6	64.3
3	Iowa	62.1	63.9	58.4	69.5	56.5
4	Massachusetts	60.7	59.8	65.5	58.8	58.8
5	Nebraska	60.6	64.5	56.2	66.3	55.5
6	North Dakota	60.2	67.2	51.1	64.4	58.3
7	Connecticut	59.8	60.2	66.0	57.2	55.6
8	New Hampshire	59.6	66.4	60.7	52.3	59.0
9	Washington	59.1	60.4	54.7	67.0	54.4
10	New Jersey	58.9	57.5	66.8	56.2	55.1
11	Maine	58.5	60.1	55.7	53.5	64.6
12	Wisconsin	58.1	61.8	55.9	60.6	54.1
13	Kansas	57.5	62.1	55.0	61.9	50.9
14	Virginia	57.0	61.1	60.3	56.0	50.4
15	New York	56.9	50.8	57.5	61.4	57.9
16	Hawaii	56.8	60.8	54.4	62.7	49.5
17	South Dakota	56.7	62.9	50.2	62.2	51.8
18	Oregon	56.6	57.1	48.6	65.7	54.8
19	Utah	56.5	64.9	55.0	52.7	53.4
20	Maryland	56.5	62.0	60.4	49.6	53.8
21	Illinois	56.4	57.1	60.0	57.1	51.5
22	Rhode Island	56.0	54.4	58.7	53.9	57.0
23	California	56.0	52.4	57.4	67.6	46.4
24	Montana	54.6	57.7	53.7	53.5	53.7
25	Colorado	54.4	61.8	55.3	50.0	50.7
26	District of Columbia	54.0	48.2	63.9	43.7	60.1
27	Delaware	53.1	61.1	56.4	48.7	46.1
28	Pennsylvania	53.1	57.5	56.1	47.3	51.3
29	Michigan	52.9	55.4	51.8	53.4	51
30	Missouri	52.6	58.1	56.8	46.9	48.4
31	Indiana	52.2	58.8	51.7	50.8	47.5
32	North Carolina	51.9	53.9	55.0	47.8	50.9
33	Alaska	51.9	61.1	44.1	51.6	50.7
34	Idaho	51.9	58.5	45.3	56.4	47.3
35	Wyoming	50.7	62.2	49.3	43.5	47.8

Overall Opportunity Rank	State	Overall Opportunity Score	Economy	Education	Health	Community
36	Ohio	50.4	56.4	50.9	44.0	50.3
37	South Carolina	50.4	54.3	53.9	45.8	47.4
38	Arkansas	49.8	52.7	52.7	52.6	41.1
39	Tennessee	49.4	54.9	53.3	44.9	44.5
40	Texas	49.4	53.8	55.1	49.7	38.9
41	Kentucky	48.7	51.8	54.1	44.0	44.9
42	Florida	48.7	53.4	52.8	45.0	43.5
43	Arizona	48.5	52.8	48.2	53.1	39.9
44	Georgia	47.9	53.3	51.5	45.6	41.3
45	Alabama	47.5	51.0	52.6	44.4	42.0
46	Oklahoma	46.0	54.1	47.1	44.3	38.4
47	West Virginia	45.7	50.6	49.9	35.8	46.6
48	Mississippi	44.8	46.2	52.0	40.2	40.9
49	Nevada	44.8	53.0	42.1	45.3	38.8
50	Louisiana	43.4	46.6	48.1	39.3	39.8
51	New Mexico	42.8	47.2	42.5	41.2	40.5

Note: State scores have been rounded to one decimal place. While values may appear tied, the rankings reflect the original (not rounded) values. There are no ties in the unrounded values.

How many US states are trending up, down or flat on each dimension?

2017 to 2018 Index



Individual Indicators in the Opportunity Index

In the 2018 Index, 12 states and the District of Columbia have the top spot on at least one of the 20 indicators, while 10 states and the District of Columbia hold the lowest position on at least one indicator. The District of Columbia was top-ranked on four indicators (preschool enrollment, postsecondary completion, primary health care, and incarceration), but ranked last on three indicators (income inequality, on-time high school graduation, and violent crime). Mississippi holds the lowest spot on five indicators (median household income, poverty rate, broadband internet access, low birth weight, and access to primary health care).

From 2017 to 2018, progress on individual indicators in each dimension was inconsistent:

Economy. More than half of states saw improvements in the poverty rate, the unemployment rate, housing affordability, and broadband internet access. At the same time, income inequality rose in one-third of states, and over half of all states saw a reduction in access to banking. Twenty-two states had an increase in median household income, but an equal number had no change on this indicator.

Education. A majority of states made strides in preschool enrollment and postsecondary education. However, 24 states saw no change in high school graduation rates.

Health. Indicators related to health had the most mixed progress from 2017 to 2018. There were positive trends in health insurance coverage for all but three states and the District of Columbia. However, rates of low birth weight increased in the majority of states, while 40 states and the District of Columbia saw higher rates of death due to drugs/alcohol or suicide.

Community. Volunteering rose in every state except South Dakota (which has historically had a volunteer rate well over the national average). The percentage of young people ages 16 to 24 who are not in school and not working (disconnected youth) declined in over half of states, as did the incarceration rate. For nearly two-thirds of states, access to primary health care was relatively unchanged. Finally, for the indicators of violent crime rate and access to healthy food, more states lost ground than did not. The voter registration indicator was unchanged from the 2017 to 2018 Index. To capture registration trends over a complete election cycle, this indicator is updated biannually.

The table on the following page summarizes the 2018 top- and bottom-ranked states on the overall Index, for each dimension and each indicator, as well as the state showing the greatest improvement (as measured by percentage change) since 2017.

Top, Bottom, and Most-Improved States by Opportunity Index Indicator			
	TOP-RANKED	BOTTOM-RANKED	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2017
OPPORTUNITY INDEX	MN	NM	AR
Economy	ND	MS	NM
Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are unemployed and seeking work)	HI	AK	NM
Median household income (2010 dollars)	MD	MS	ID
Percentage of the population below the federal poverty level (the amount of pretax cash income considered adequate for an individual or family to meet basic needs)	NH	MS	OR
80/20 ratio (ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that at the 20th percentile)	UT	DC	ND
Number of banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions, and credit unions) per 10,000 residents	ND	NV	RI
Percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing-related costs	ND	CA	NJ
Percentage of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service	WA	MS	MS
Education	NJ	NV	NV
Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool	DC	ND	ME
On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)	NJ	DC	NM
Percentage of adults ages 25 and older with an associate degree or higher	DC	WV	WV

Top, Bottom, and Most-Improved States by Opportunity Index Indicator			
	TOP-RANKED	BOTTOM-RANKED	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2017
Health	MN	WV	AR
Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds	AK	MS	NH
Percentage of the population under age 65 without health insurance coverage	MA	TX	MT
Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)	NE	WV	MS
Community	ME	OK	WY
Percentage of adults ages 18 and older who reported volunteer activity during the previous year	UT	FL	NC
Percentage of the population ages 18 and older who are registered to vote	ME	HI	<i>See footnote ²</i>
Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working	ND	AK	WY
Incidents of violent crime reported to law enforcement agencies (per 100,000 population)	ME	DC	FL
Number of primary care physicians (per 100,000 population)	DC	MS	WY
Number of grocery stores and produce vendors (per 10,000 population)	NY	NV	UT
Number of people incarcerated in jail or prison (per 100,000 population ages 18 and older)	DC	OK	AK

² Because this indicator is updated biannually, we do not assess progress from the 2017 to 2018 Index.

County Opportunity Grades and Changes Since 2017

If state-level data offer a glimpse into the ways opportunity is distributed across the United States, county-level data can paint a more vivid picture of how various localities are faring and how opportunity is distributed within each state. For the 2018 Opportunity Index, we were able to calculate Opportunity Grades for 2,065 counties or county equivalents, which cover nearly 313 million residents (97 percent of the nation's population).

The picture at the county level for 2018 includes some encouraging signs of progress. In 2018, 18 counties received an Opportunity Grade of A (three more than in 2017) and 41 received an A- (nine more than in 2017). Seven counties (about one-third of a percent, or 11 fewer counties than in 2017) received an F. From 2017 to 2018, Opportunity Grades improved in 643 counties, worsened in 59, and stayed the same in 1,293.³

Among counties with fairly substantial changes from 2017 to 2018, just 15 had *declines* of 5 percent or more in their Opportunity Grades. Three of these counties were in Kentucky, two were in California, and most of the rest were in the South and West. These counties were typically small in size, with a median population of 18,470, and they were, on average, 79 percent white.

Meanwhile, 310 counties saw *increases* of at least 5 percent in their Opportunity Grades. Five states had more than 20 counties represented on this list: Georgia (22 counties), Kentucky (25), South Carolina (21), Tennessee (25), and Virginia (23). The median population size in these counties was about 32,000, and they were 73 percent white, on average—just slightly larger and more diverse than those that had declines of more than 5 percent.

At the county level, change from 2017 to 2018 varied substantially by dimension. Most counties showed positive trends in the Economy and Education dimensions (78.0 and 65.0 percent of counties, respectively), but

³ There are 1,995 counties with Opportunity Grades in both 2017 and 2018. The number of counties having both 2017 and 2018 scores in the individual indicators and dimensions ranges from 579 to 3,141.

only a plurality of counties had positive trends in the Health and Community dimensions (42.1 and 43.8 percent of counties, respectively).

Overall, more than half of all counties had a positive trend on eight indicators:

- Jobs
- Poverty
- Affordable housing
- Broadband internet subscription
- High school graduation
- Postsecondary education
- Health insurance coverage
- Youth disconnection

More than half of counties had a negative trend on two indicators, indicating higher levels of undesirable outcomes:

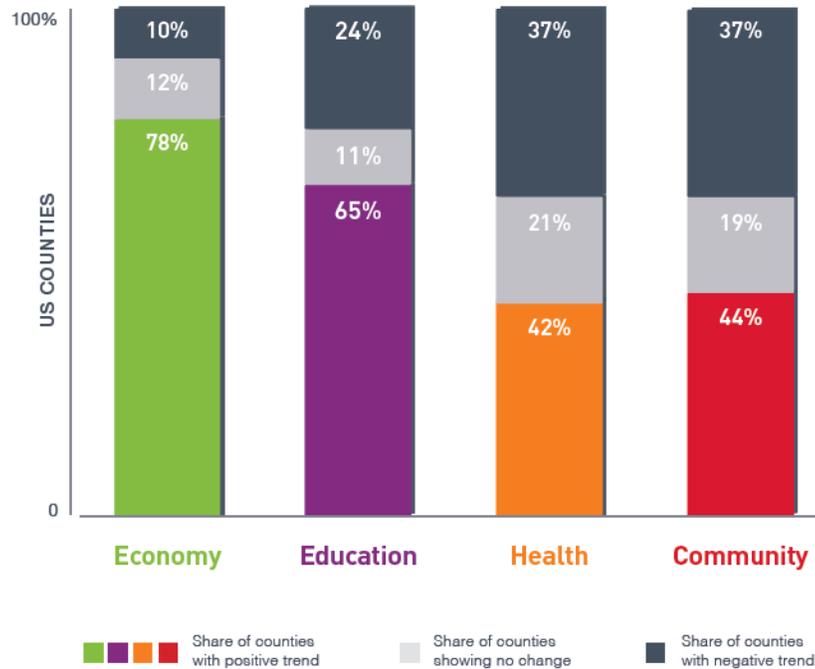
- Deaths related to drug/alcohol use or suicide
- Violent crime

More than half of counties had neither a positive nor negative trend on seven indicators:

- Wages
- Income inequality
- Access to banking services
- Preschool enrollment
- Low birth weight
- Access to primary health care
- Access to healthy food

What share of US counties are trending up, down or flat on each dimension?

2017 to 2018 Index



In 2018, and for the third straight year of the Opportunity Index, Williamson County, Tennessee, was the county with the highest level of opportunity. With a population of about 219,000, Williamson is a mostly-white (85 percent) county to the south of Nashville. From 2017 to 2018, Williamson County's data improved on a number of indicators: wages, affordable housing, broadband internet access, preschool enrollment, postsecondary education, unemployment, health insurance coverage, and youth disconnection. Its unemployment rate of 2 percent is just over half that of the nation's; 63 percent of preschool-age children are enrolled in school; 63 percent of adults have a postsecondary degree; just 5.2 percent of those

under age 65 lack health insurance; and 6.7 percent of youth ages 16 to 24 are not in school and not working, compared with a national average of 11.7 percent.

While opportunity increased for the nation as a whole between 2017 and 2018, seven counties received an F Opportunity Grade. Distributed across just four states—Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, and New Mexico—these counties also received an F in 2017. For these counties, changes varied by dimension. On average, scores in Economy and Health improved (by 2.7 and 0.7 points, respectively), but Education scores declined by 1.3 points, on average, and Community scores saw very little change.

The county that made the biggest strides from 2017 to 2018 was Suwannee County, Florida. Suwannee County has a population of 43,835 and is mostly white (75.6 percent), with black and Hispanic residents making up 13.5 and 8.7 percent of the population, respectively. Suwannee County moved from a D-minus to a C-minus, driven by improvements across all four dimensions of opportunity, but especially Education.

The highest Economy score, as in the 2017 Opportunity Index, belongs to Roberts County, Texas (population 916). Roberts County has a poverty rate of under 2 percent, and more than 90 percent of its residents spend less than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. In the Education dimension, the Washington, DC, suburb of Falls Church City, Virginia (population 13,868), remains in the first-place slot for the second year in a row. In Falls Church, seven out of eight children ages 3 and 4 are enrolled in preschool, nearly all high schoolers (99.5 percent) graduate in four years, and 83 percent of adults have a postsecondary degree. In the Health dimension, Wright County, Minnesota (population 132,387), has the highest score with just 4.2 percent of adults under age 65 lacking health insurance, and a rate of deaths due to drugs/alcohol or suicide (16.2 per 100,000) half that of the United States as a whole. In the Community dimension, Boone County, Nebraska (population 5,358), fares best; notably, its youth disconnection rate is less than 4.5 percent, and there are nearly 150 primary care doctors per 100,000 population. With the exception of Falls Church City

(which is 9.9 percent Hispanic, 9.1 percent Asian, and 5.4 percent black), these counties were all over 90 percent white.

Trends at the county level are summarized in the table below. In cases where multiple counties have the same value, the number of counties is listed.

Top, Bottom, and Most-Improved Counties, by Indicator			
	TOP-RANKED	BOTTOM-RANKED	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2017
OPPORTUNITY GRADE	18 counties received an A, including three each in NJ and VA	Seven counties received an F, including two each in AZ, LA, and NM	Suwannee County, FL
Economy	Roberts County, TX	Wilcox County, AL	Zapata County, TX
Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are unemployed and seeking work)	Cheyenne County, CO	Kusilvak Census Area, AK	Kenedy County, TX
Median household income (2010 dollars)	Loudoun County, VA	McCreary County, KY	Daggett County, UT
Percentage of the population below the federal poverty level (the amount of pretax cash income considered adequate for an individual or family to meet basic needs)	Roberts County, TX	Oglala Lakota County, SD	San Juan County, CO
80/20 ratio (ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that at the 20th percentile)	Skagway Municipality, AK	New York County, NY	Schleicher County, TX
Number of banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions, and credit unions) per 10,000 residents	Loup County, NE	San Jacinto County, TX	Hyde County, NC
Percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing-related costs	Blaine County, NE	Bronx County, NY	San Juan County, CO
Percentage of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service	Douglas County, CO	Apache County, AZ	Jefferson County, AR

Top, Bottom, and Most-Improved Counties, by Indicator			
	TOP-RANKED	BOTTOM-RANKED	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2017
Education	Falls Church City, VA	Clark County, ID	East Carroll Parish, LA
Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool	Nine counties in AK, CO, GA, MA, NE, SD, TX, and UT with 100% enrollment	22 counties, including five each in MT and NE, with 0% enrollment	Brule County, SD
On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)	61 counties, including 18 in TX and 12 in NE, with 100% graduation	Wheeler County, OR	Union County, OH
Percentage of adults 25 and older with an associate degree or higher	Falls Church City, VA	Kusilvak Census Area, AK	Lander County, NV
Health	Wright County, MN	Three counties, including two in AK	Kusilvak Census Area, AK
Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds	Wright County, MN	Hinds County, MS	Pickens County, SC
Percentage of the population under age 65 without health insurance coverage	McPherson County, NE, and Norfolk County, MA	Aleutians East Borough, AK	Wichita County, KS
Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)	Hidalgo County, TX	Kusilvak Census Area, AK	Bandera County, TX
Community	Boone County, NE	Benton County, MS	Leake County, MS
Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working	19 counties, including six in NE, with 0% youth disconnection	Kalawao County, HI	Six counties, including three in TX
Incidents of violent crime reported to law enforcement agencies (per 100,000 population)	40 counties, including eight in TX and six each in NE and SD, with no violent crime reported	St. Louis City, MO	16 counties, including 7 in TX
Number of primary care physicians (per 100,000 population)	Adams County, ND	207 counties with 0 primary care physicians	Izard County, AR
Number of grocery stores and produce vendors (per 10,000 population)	Yakutat City and Borough, AK	Wagoner County, OK	Manassas Park City, VA

2019 Indicators Preview

For a subset of Opportunity Index indicators, across all four dimensions, more recent data are available that allow us to present a partial 2019 Index:

- Wages
- Poverty
- Income inequality
- Affordable housing
- Broadband internet subscription
- Preschool enrollment
- Postsecondary education
- Low birth weight
- Health insurance coverage
- Deaths related to drug/alcohol use or suicide
- Youth disconnection

State-level analysis shows mixed progress on these indicators. On six of the 11 indicators (household income, poverty, income inequality, broadband internet, postsecondary education, and youth disconnection), data for a plurality of states show improvement. Most notably, the poverty rate decreased in 40 states and the District of Columbia, and postsecondary attainment increased in 39 states and the District of Columbia. Across the United States, the number of young people ages 16 to 24 not in school and not working fell by nearly 100,000, to 4.5 million, the lowest ever recorded in the Index.

For four indicators—three of them in the Health dimension—2019 data show deterioration in a plurality of states. In 21 states and the District of Columbia, preschool enrollment went down; in 29 states and the District of Columbia, low birth weight increased the rate of uninsured individuals increased in 32 states; and 42 states and the District of Columbia had more deaths of despair. The decline in health insurance coverage is a departure from previous years; from 2016 to 2018, all 50 states and the District of Columbia saw improvements on this indicator. For the indicators of

affordable housing and on-time high school graduation, most states were relatively unchanged from 2018 to 2019.

The table below shows the top- and bottom-ranked states for the 2019 preview indicators, as well as the state making the greatest improvement since 2018.

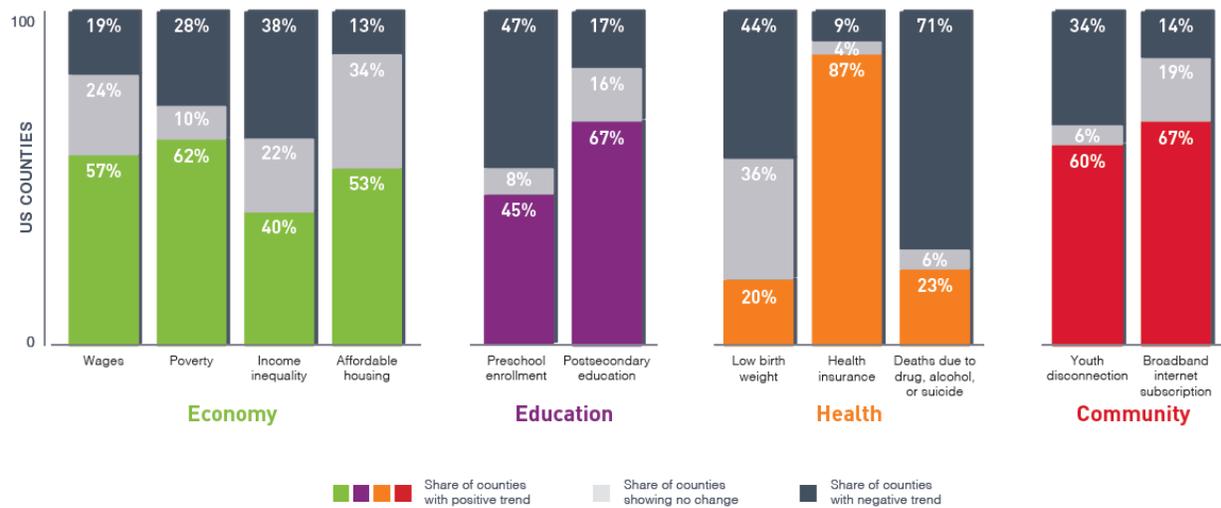
Top, Bottom, and Most-Improved States by Opportunity Index Indicator, 2019			
	TOP STATE	BOTTOM STATE	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2018
Median household income (2010 dollars)	DC	WV	DC
Percentage of the population below the federal poverty level (the amount of pretax cash income considered adequate for an individual or family to meet basic needs)	NH	MS	ME
80/20 ratio (ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that at the 20th percentile)	UT	DC	DC
Percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing-related costs	ND	CA	NV
Percentage of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service	WA	AR	AL
Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool	DC	ND	ID
On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)	NJ	NM	NV
Percentage of adults ages 25 and older with an associate degree or higher	DC	WV	ME
Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds	AK	MS	RI
Percentage of the population under age 65 without health insurance coverage	MA	TX	LA
Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)	CA	WV	OK
Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working	MN	WV	AK

The data are similar at the county level, showing progress for 2019 on most indicators with a few exceptions: rates of low birth weight and deaths due to drug/alcohol use or suicide increased in more counties (44 and 71 percent, respectively) than decreased (20 and 23 percent, respectively).

The chart below shows trends on these indicators at the county level.

What share of US counties are trending up, down or flat on select indicators?

2018 to 2019



Equity and Disparity in Opportunity

Up to this point, our analysis of opportunity has focused on how it varies geographically across the United States. At the national level, the data show some clear divides in the quality of opportunity that are associated with race/ethnicity. For example, the 59 counties with an “A” or “A-” Opportunity Grade, are, on average, 78 percent white and 5 percent black. In contrast, the counties receiving a “D-” or “F” Opportunity Grade are, on average, 55 percent white and 13 percent black. A more informative way of examining equity and disparity in opportunity is to disaggregate the data at the indicator level.

Historically, and currently, many non-white ethnic groups have experienced systematic disadvantage in their access to opportunity, which is reflected in numerous policies; institutional structures and practices; and individual acts of bias. Indeed, the data by race and ethnic origin reveal stark contrasts across multiple dimensions.⁴ Broadly speaking, on six of the 12 indicators where we have disaggregated data, white residents have the most favorable outcomes; on six others, Asians fare best. American Indian and Alaska Native populations experience the highest rates of poverty, deaths due to drug/alcohol use or suicide, and youth disconnection, as well as the lowest rates of on-time high school graduation and health care coverage. (Disaggregated data were unavailable for some indicators; for other indicators, data were unavailable for some racial/ethnic groups.)

The largest gap that emerges is in the percentage of black and Hispanic people who are imprisoned, compared with white people. According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 274 of every 100,000 white adults are incarcerated. For Hispanic people, the incarceration rate is more than three times higher at 856 per 100,000; black people are incarcerated at an even higher rate (1,608 per 100,000)—nearly six times the rate for white people. These disparities reflect enduring structural racism that affects many stages of the criminal justice system—from arrest to

⁴ Statements on differences by race/ethnicity or gender are descriptive in nature; we did not conduct analyses to assess the statistical significance.

charging and sentencing.⁵ Incarceration is both an outcome of disadvantage and a major barrier to opportunity following release.

For the indicator of deaths due to drug/alcohol use or suicide, white people fare worse than several other racial/ethnic groups, although rates remain highest for American Indians and Alaska Natives. With rates of 44.0 and 52.6 out of 100,000, respectively, whites and American Indians/Alaska Natives are more than 1.5 times as likely to die from these causes as black individuals, about 2.5 times as likely as Hispanics, and more than four times as likely as Asians.

Another substantial gap is in health insurance coverage. Only about 6 percent of white residents lack health insurance; in comparison, about 19 percent of American Indians or Alaska Natives, 10 percent of black residents, and nearly 18 percent of Hispanic residents do not have health insurance.⁶ While these gaps have narrowed,⁷ they have not closed. Although health insurance coverage is an indicator in the Health dimension, it is also related to economic factors since a large proportion of those insured receive coverage through their employer.

Gender disparities are generally less pronounced than those associated with race or ethnicity. Males fare better than females in two of the 10 indicators for which gender-disaggregated data are available (having a slightly lower rate of poverty, and a slightly higher rate of preschool enrollment).

⁵ Ulmer, J., Painter-Davis, N., & Tinik, L. (2016). Disproportional imprisonment of Black and Hispanic males: Sentencing discretion, processing outcomes, and policy structures. *Justice Quarterly*, 33(4), 642-681; Weaver, V. M., Papachristos, a., & Zanger-Tishler, M. (2019). The great decoupling: The disconnection between criminal offending and experience of arrest across two cohorts. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 5(1), 89-123.

⁶ While the health insurance indicator in the Opportunity Index focuses on individuals under the age of 65, these statistics include those over the age of 65. Large gaps in coverage persist for seniors (for example, Hispanic seniors were about 10 times more likely than white seniors to lack health insurance), so we considered this population important to include.

⁷ Artiga, S., & Orgera, K. (2019). *Changes in Health Coverage by Race and Ethnicity since Implementation of the ACA, 2013-2017*. San Francisco, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

Females are less likely to be unemployed (though also less likely to be in the labor force); more likely to have postsecondary education, and to have health insurance; somewhat less likely to be disconnected from school and work as youth; more likely to be registered to vote and to volunteer; and much less likely to be incarcerated or to die due to drugs/alcohol or suicide.

By far, incarceration rates are associated with the greatest gender gap. Men are more than 13 times as likely as women to be behind bars (rates of 1,108 and 82 per 100,000, respectively). However, the gap has been closing over recent decades, with the rate for women growing twice as fast, since 1980, as the rate for males.⁸

Women are just over one-third as likely to die from drug or alcohol use or suicide as men. Suicide rates for both men and women have increased since 2000⁹; although women attempt suicide more frequently, men are much less likely to survive attempts.¹⁰ Research on recent increases in drug-overdose deaths indicates the gender gap can be explained in part by differences in drug choice; in particular, heroin and synthetic drugs are more often involved in the deaths of young men.¹¹

Men are less likely to have health insurance coverage than women: 7.8 of women and 9.8 percent of men are without insurance. This gap has narrowed since the early 2010s, although recent research also indicates

⁸ The Sentencing Project. (2018). *Incarcerated Women and Girls, 1980-2016*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

⁹ Hedegaard, H., Curtin, S. C., & Warner, M. (2018). *Suicide rates in the United States continue to increase* (NCHS Data Brief, Number 309).

¹⁰ Freeman, A., Mergl, R., Kohls, E., Székely, A., Gusmao, R., Arensman, E., ... & Rummel-Kluge, C. (2017). A cross-national study on gender differences in suicide intent. *BMC psychiatry*, 17(1).

¹¹ Jalal, H., Buchanich, J. M., Roberts, M. S., Balmert, L. C., Zhang, K., & Burke, D. S. (2018). Changing dynamics of the drug overdose epidemic in the United States from 1979 through 2016. *Science*, 361(6408).

that, following Medicaid expansion, women were somewhat more likely to enroll than men.¹²

We recognize that this brief look at gender and race/ethnicity is merely an opening to a fuller discussion of the social determinants of opportunity.¹³ Many groups in our society, including people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community, face exclusions from opportunity that operate at both the personal and institutional levels.

Moreover, in this report outcomes related to multiple types of privilege or disadvantage—for example, the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender—are not examined. These interactions form a complex issue that merits a detailed, focused investigation outside the scope of this report.

The table on the following page presents the latest available indicator data disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender. Cells marked with a superscript letter ^a indicate that data on this group were unavailable from the source.

¹² Wehby, G. L., & Lyu, W. (2018). The impact of the ACA Medicaid expansions on health insurance coverage through 2015 and coverage disparities by age, race/ethnicity, and gender. *Health Services Research, 53*(2), 1248-1271.

¹³ For example, household wealth, access to social capital, and exposure to childhood trauma are among the many factors influencing pathways to opportunity. Sacks, V., & Murphey, D. (2018). *The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, nationally, by state, and by race or ethnicity*. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends; Darity Jr., W., Hamilton, D., Paul, M., Aja, A., Price, A., Moore, A., & Chiopris, C. (2018). *What We Get Wrong About Closing the Racial Wealth Gap*. Durham, NC: The Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity; PayScale. (2019). *The State of the Gender Pay Gap 2019*. Seattle, WA: PayScale, Inc.

Indicator Data, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender										
INDICATOR	RACE/ETHNICITY ¹⁴								GENDER	
	AI/AN	Asian	Black	Hispanic	NH/PI	White	Another race	Multiracial	Female	Male
Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are unemployed and seeking work)	a	2.7%	6.1%	4.3%	a	3.0%	a	a	3.5%	4.3%
Percentage of the population below the federal poverty level (the amount of pretax cash income considered adequate for an individual or family to meet basic needs)	25.4%	11.1%	23.0%	19.4%	18.3%	9.6%	20.3%	16.7%	14.5%	12.2%
Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool	45.5%	55.8%	49.7%	41.9%	41.9%	49.9%	44.7%	49.0%	47.9%	48.1%
On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)	68.0%	89.9%	78.0%	80.5%	a	87.8%	a	81.4%	a	a
Percentage of adults ages 25 and older with an associate degree or higher	23.8%	60.4%	29.9%	22.6%	26.7%	44.8%	a	41.3%	41.9%	38.9%
Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds	8.2%	8.5%	13.9%	7.4%	7.7%	7.0%	a	8.9%	a	a
Percentage of the population without health insurance coverage	19.3%	6.6%	10.0%	17.8%	10.5%	5.9%	19.7%	7.7%	7.8%	9.8%
Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)	52.6	9.9	27.3	17.6	a	44.0	a	a	19.2	51.1
Percentage of adults ages 18 and older who reported volunteer activity during the previous year	21.2%	19.6%	22.8%	17.0%	29.8%	31.7%	a	28.2%	30.8%	24.0%
Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working	19.0%	6.5%	17.5%	13.2%	12.5%	9.5%	10.4%	11.5%	11.1%	11.8%
Percentage of the population ages 18 and older who are registered to vote	a	36.7%	62.5%	37.1%	a	69.7%	a	a	63.6%	59.8%
Rate of people incarcerated in jail or prison (per 100,000 population ages 18 and older)	a	a	1,608	856	a	274	a	a	82	1,108

¹⁴ For most indicators, racial/ethnic groups besides Hispanic do not include Hispanic persons; however, this varies by data source. For on-time high school graduation, Asian includes Hispanic and Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native and multiracial include Hispanic. For lack of health insurance, races besides white also include Hispanic persons. For voter registration, black and Asian include Hispanic persons. Finally, for deaths due to drugs/alcohol or suicide, Asian includes Pacific Islander.

Conclusion

Since its inception, the Opportunity Index has taken a holistic approach to examining progress toward opportunity in our nation's communities. Data for the 2018 Opportunity Index show continued economic progress for the nation as a whole, as well as improvements in the educational and civic dimensions of opportunity. However, a closer look shows that these gains do not extend to all populations or locations. Place-related disparities, and those allocated inequitably across race/ethnicity and gender, indicate that much progress must still be made if we are to achieve truly inclusive opportunity in our communities.

We call out some specific trouble spots within the overall picture of progress. Nearly three times as many states lost ground in the Health dimension between 2017 and 2018 than improved. Data from the 2019 preview indicate that this trend is unlikely to reverse soon, especially in light of the recent decline in health insurance coverage.

This report is intended to serve as a resource for conversations at national, state, and local levels; to help those living and working in their community understand its strengths and needs; and to promote a more equitable distribution of opportunity that includes all of our residents. While promoting opportunity requires much more than data, we hope this report offers a touchstone for communities' efforts toward that goal. In particular, effectively conveying the experiential realities that lie behind the statistics is an important task for communities. Thus, communities should consider interviews, focus groups, community forums, and personal stories as vital components of a comprehensive fact-finding that motivates planning an opportunity-for-all strategy.

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For more information, please visit <http://www.opportunityindex.org> and <http://www.childtrends.org>.