

THE 2023 Opportunity Index



Executive Summary

Since 2011, the Opportunity Index has provided valuable insight into the conditions and environments that impact individuals' and communities' ability to thrive and prosper. As a tool, the Opportunity Index provides population-level indicators that assess opportunity at the county, state, and national levels for all ages.

The 2023 Opportunity Index update offers an overview of overall opportunity over the past several years, as well as scores for four dimensions of opportunity. We highlight progress in the Economic and Community dimensions while noting substantial declines in the Health dimension. Findings reveal uneven advancements and regressions in scores across populations and regions, with disparities related to location, race, ethnicity, and gender underscoring the ongoing need for inclusive opportunity efforts. Persistent declines in the Health dimension, largely due to rises in suicide and drug or alcohol poisoning deaths (often referred to as deaths of despair), signal an urgent need for attention in this area.

About the Opportunity Index and this report

By incorporating a holistic perspective of the factors that influence opportunity, the Opportunity Index creates a composite measure of 20 equally weighted indicators in four distinct dimensions of opportunity: Economy, Education, Health, and Community. Overall Opportunity and dimension scores (calculated out of 100) are produced at the national, state, and county levels. The Opportunity Index offers a robust framework intended to provide a snapshot of societal conditions that can be used to identify and improve access to opportunity and promote youth well-being.

This report focuses on findings from the 2023 Opportunity Index, including scores and ranking for all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as trends in opportunity over time. This report marks the first analysis and release of this data since the 2019 Opportunity Index, allowing us to compare scores over time. For a selected number of indicators, national data disaggregated by racial and ethnic background and gender are also presented. This data can help communities make data-driven decisions and monitor progress on specific indicators.

After small but steady increases in the overall Opportunity Index score from 2016 (score of 51.1 out of a possible 100) to 2021 (53.4), the nation's score decreased in 2022 (52.4) and 2023 (51.9). This decline was driven largely by declines in the Health dimension, which has been declining since 2017, and was compounded by declines in the Education dimension in 2022 (using data primarily from 2020) and 2023 (using data primarily from 2021). Movement in the Health dimension has been driven largely by increases in deaths due to drugs or alcohol and suicide, while movement in the Education dimension was driven largely by decreases in preschool enrollment. In contrast, the Economy dimension experienced notable improvements from 2016 to 2023, particularly in decreased unemployment and increased subscriptions to broadband internet service. Similarly, the Community domain also saw substantial increases with a lowered incarceration rate and increase in voter registration. Key takeaways from the 2023 Index are presented below.

Key findings

Overall Opportunity

- The overall 2023 Opportunity Index score for the nation was 51.9 (out of 100), compared to 53.2 on the 2019 Index, when we last reported.
- Opportunity in the United States did not change substantially from the 2016 to 2023 Indexes, despite some progress made prior to 2022.

- Opportunity scores vary considerably across geographic areas. States in the Northeast, Coastal West, and Northern Midwest regions scored above the national score, while states in the Deep South, Southeast, Southwest, and Appalachia regions scored below it.

Economy Dimension

- The national score on the Economy dimension was 59.3 in 2023 (with data primarily from 2021), up from 57.0 in 2019 (data primarily from 2017).
- Since the 2016 Index, all states have seen an improvement in the Economy dimension.
- One indicator within the Economy dimension has seen marked increases: Broadband internet subscriptions increased significantly from the 2016 Index (when 75.1% of the population had subscriptions to broadband internet service) to the 2023 Index (90.1%). Mississippi led all states in this increase, raising its household subscriptions by 22.7 percentage points.
- American Indian/Alaska Native and Black communities experience poverty at twice the rates of White and Asian communities.

Education Dimension

- The national score on the Education dimension was 53.9 in 2023 (with data primarily from 2021), compared to 56.1 in 2019 (data primarily from 2017).
- The Education dimension steadily increased through the 2021 Index before declining in 2022 and 2023.
- Since the 2016 Index, state-level progress within the Education dimension has been split: 22 states have increased their overall education scores, 22 states have experienced a decrease, and 7 states have stayed flat.
- One indicator within the Education dimension has seen notable decreases: Preschool enrollment across the United States decreased from 47.1 percent in 2016 to 40.2 percent in the 2023 Index. However, enrollment percentages varied greatly across states in the 2023 Index, from 23.5 percent in West Virginia to 73.0 percent in the District of Columbia.

Health Dimension

- The national score on the Health dimension was 43.2 in 2023 (with data primarily from 2021), which is a dramatic decline from 52.0 in 2019 (data primarily from 2017).
- Nearly all states (49) experienced declines in the Health dimension since the 2016 Index.
- One indicator in the Health dimension has markedly deteriorated: Deaths related to alcohol/drugs and suicide have increased greatly since the 2016 Index, from 26.7 deaths per 100,000 people to 45.9 deaths per 100,000 people in 2023.
- In the 2023 Index, West Virginia experienced 110 deaths related to alcohol/drugs and suicide per 100,000 people, two times the national rate.
- Deaths related to alcohol/drugs and suicide are disproportionate among communities of color: In 2023, American Indian/Alaska Native individuals were five times more likely to die of these causes than the racial demographic with the lowest rate (Asians).

Community Dimension

- The national score on the Community dimension was 51.2 in 2023 (with data primarily from 2021), compared to 47.8 on the 2019 Index (data primarily from 2017).
- Over half of states (33) have seen an improvement in their Community dimension scores since the 2016 Index.

- Since the 2016 Index, voter registration increased from 62.2 percent of the eligible population to 70.9 percent in 2023.
- One indicator in the Community dimension has markedly improved since 2016: Incarceration rates dropped from 890 per 100,000 adults in the 2016 Index to 680 per 100,000 adults in 2023.
- Compared to White people, incarceration rates among Black people are 4.5 times higher and incarceration rates of Hispanic people are twice as high.
- New Mexico has the highest rate of youth disconnection at 20.5 percent; nationally, the rate is 12.1 percent.
- Utah has the highest volunteering rate at 41.5 percent; nationally, the rate is 26.4 percent.

Introduction

As a concept, "opportunity" encompasses the conditions that allow individuals to realize their full potential. This means that, in addition to economic prosperity, an assessment of opportunity must also consider education, health, and community factors that are critical for people to thrive. Communities across the nation aim to develop and sustain opportunity-promoting conditions, which requires a complex set of strategies that account for each community's history, culture, needs, assets, and people. Moreover, disparities in access to opportunity have been perpetuated through inequitable systems, leading to disparities in many facets of life, including maternal and infant health, educational outcomes, and neighborhood resources.¹⁻⁴

Understanding nuances in opportunity is more important than ever as community stakeholders, policymakers, and advocates chart a path forward amidst economic and social disruptions created by developments on multiple fronts, including COVID-19, a rising cost of living, political polarization, broader recognition of (and attempts to address) inequities, and demographic shifts. The Opportunity Index serves as a tool for assessing and addressing differential access to opportunity by geography by providing comprehensive insights into opportunity conditions at national, state, and county levels.

Community members, policymakers, philanthropic leaders, and other change agents need tools to understand the strengths and challenges related to building opportunity in the communities where they live and serve. Since 2011, the Opportunity Index has provided insight into this critical question. The Opportunity Index is a composite measure made up of 20 indicators in four distinct dimensions of Opportunity: Economy, Education, Health, and Community. Its holistic perspective captures the complexity of circumstances shaping youth well-being and empowers stakeholders to identify not only economic opportunities but also areas for improvement in education, health care, and social support systems. The Opportunity Index offers a robust framework for designing targeted interventions, allocating resources effectively, and fostering inclusive growth and development. It has been calculated for every year since 2016 (with the exception of 2020, due to issues with data reliability),^a which allows users to reliably track movement in indicators and facilitate comparisons over time and geographies. The Opportunity Index can be a valuable tool for policymakers, researchers, and investors seeking to promote holistic youth empowerment and sustainable societal progress.

The 2019 Index was released in Summer 2020. After a hiatus while navigating uncharted territory during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Opportunity Index has returned with updates, including the 2021, 2022, and 2023 Index. This report shares the 2023 Index scores and rankings for all 50 states plus the District of Columbia, and highlights trends in the scores over time. The report also presents overall levels of opportunity for around 2,000 counties, representing 96 percent of the U.S. population. To understand the distribution of opportunity in our nation, we also share—for those indicators with available data—breakdowns of the data by gender and race/ethnicity.

Methodology and Data

Opportunity is a multidimensional concept, and focusing narrowly on just one or two aspects may misrepresent communities' experiences or even drive disparities. In many cases, positive changes for some groups in a specific dimension may be accompanied by negative changes for the same or another group in other dimensions. Consider the example of gentrification, defined for our purposes as a process in which low socioeconomic status neighborhoods experience increased investment and an influx of residents with higher socioeconomic statuses, typically resulting in displacement of some of the original neighborhood residents who have lower incomes. The process often coincides with increased access to higher-quality services, more resources, better credit scores,⁵ and higher paying employment

^a The Index was first launched in 2011; Child Trends led a structural change in 2017 that affected a number of the Index's indicators and dimensions. With the structural change, Child Trends recalculated the 2016 Index, so composite opportunity and dimension scores from 2011 to 2015 should not be compared with those from 2016 and forward.

opportunities; however, it may also result in a decrease in affordable housing stock and increased economic and psychological strain on both displaced and remaining low socioeconomic status residents.^{6,7} Alternatively, with the rise of precarious employment and the “gig economy” (wherein many residents depend on part-time, on-demand contract employment for critical income),⁸ employment does not always equate with high wages or benefits like health insurance.^{9–11}

Because it encompasses multiple dimensions of opportunity, the Opportunity Index can be useful for communities across the United States in identifying opportunities for intervention. It is a tool that can help facilitate the development of thoughtful strategies to improve and balance opportunity, both across its facets and across demographic subgroups. The Opportunity Index is constructed of 20 indicators selected based on a combination of data availability and relevance to the concepts the Index measures. The indicators are synthesized into a holistic opportunity score that accounts for the diverse assets, challenges, and opportunities of a community. The 20 indicators are also grouped into four important dimensions of opportunity: Economy, Education, Health, and Community. We calculate a sub-score for each dimension.

One important strength of the Opportunity Index is that it has been calculated for every year from 2016 to 2023 (with the exception of 2020, given data quality issues during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic). With consistent indicators over time, users can reliably track movement in indicators and facilitate comparisons over time and geographies.

Each year’s Index uses the most recent data available for that year, which is typically not the year of the Index. For example, the indicators comprising the 2023 Index were collected primarily in 2021, although some indicators are from 2022 or 2023. The 2022 Index data were largely sourced from 2020, and the 2021 Index data from 2019. For most indicators, this difference in Index year vs. source data year is due to the lag between the year the data were collected and when the data are released, because of the time needed for agencies to validate and prepare data for public release. Additionally, within an Index year, some indicators use more recent data (e.g., data on unemployment are from the same year as the index), older data if newer data aren’t available, or data from two years combined (e.g., the data on voter registration are an average of registration for a mid-term and presidential year election cycle). This lag is particularly important to keep in mind given the timeframe of the data in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the 2023 Index is being published four years after the start of the pandemic, the data are largely from *one year into* the pandemic. Care must also be taken in considering the impact of COVID-19 on any two indicators in a given year, given that data for specific indicators may not come from the same timepoint relative to the pandemic. Refer to the Technical Supplement for details on the source year for a given indicator.

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, in addition to data compiled by reputable nonprofit organizations. See the Technical Supplement for a complete list of data sources.

National trends can be helpful benchmarks for comparison, but they are less useful for understanding the dynamics of opportunity that operate at a community level and do not provide the context and specificity necessary to devise effective policy prescriptions. State-level opportunity scores start to reflect the range of opportunity across the nation and may suggest to policymakers “peer states” whose experiences could offer useful insights. County-level scores provide the most localized data and may inform the strategy and implementation of policy interventions for a given community.

At the national and state levels, 20 indicators were standardized and combined into four dimensions of opportunity to yield a score from 0 to 100 in each dimension. The four dimensions were then averaged (equally weighted) to create the overall opportunity score. At the county level, the 2023 Opportunity Index includes only 17 indicators because data for three indicators (volunteering, voter registration, and incarceration) are not available at the county level. Some counties with small populations or a low number of incidences of an outcome (such as deaths or births of babies at a low weight) may experience variance

in scores that should be interpreted with caution. For ease of interpretation and to account for this variability, county scores are converted into “opportunity grades” (A+ to F). See the Technical Supplement for full details on Index construction.

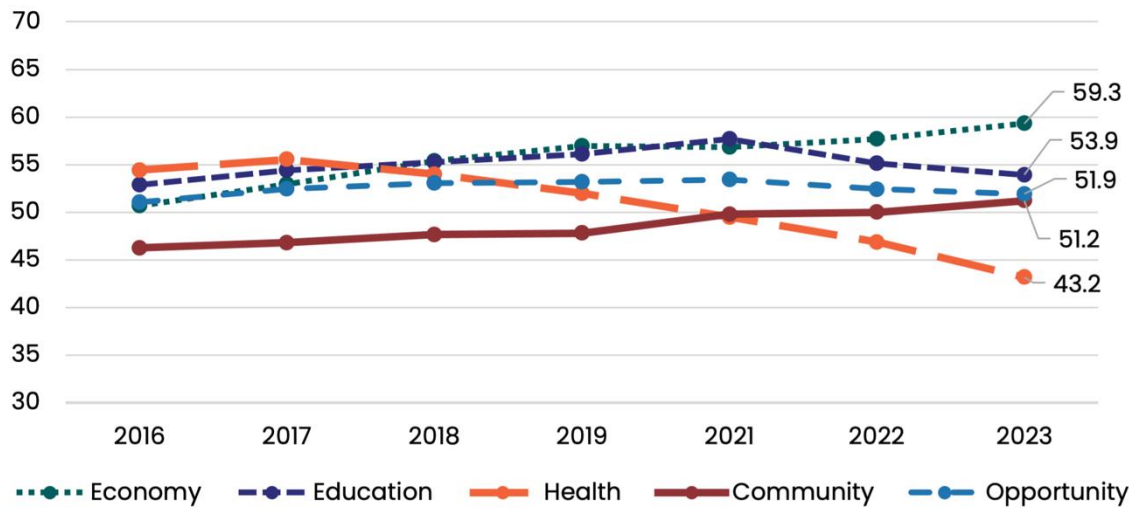
Table 1. County Opportunity Grade Assignments Based on Standardized Scores

Opportunity Grade	Minimum Standardized Score (rounded)	Maximum Standardized Score (rounded)
A+	80.0	100.0
A	67.5	79.9
A-	64.0	67.4
B+	60.5	63.9
B	57.1	60.4
B-	53.6	57.0
C+	50.1	53.5
C	46.6	50.0
C-	43.1	46.5
D+	39.6	43.0
D	36.2	39.5
D-	32.7	36.1
F	0.0	32.6

National Findings

In 2023, the national opportunity score was 51.9 out of a possible 100 (see Figure 1). This represents a decrease of 1.3 points—down 2.4 percent from 53.2 at the last public Opportunity Index report, which presented findings from the 2019 Index. The decrease was driven by declines in the Health (-8.8 points) and Education (-2.1 points) dimensions. Increases in the Economy dimension (2.4 points) and the Community dimension (3.4 points) over the same period (2019-2023) attenuated the overall decline in the national opportunity score. Substantial declines in the Health dimension are largely responsible for the decrease in overall opportunity: This dimension has declined consistently year-over-year since its peak of 55.5 in 2017 (data from 2015). It reached its lowest level of 43.2 in 2023 (data from 2021).

Figure 1. National Overall Opportunity and Dimension Scores, 2016–2023



Note: The vertical axis starts at 30 and ends at 70 to better illuminate changes over time.

The Health dimension score has been in decline since 2017, well before the COVID-19 pandemic began. While the size of the uninsured population and the frequency of babies born with low birthweights each increased slightly from 2019 to 2023, the number of deaths due to alcohol, drug use, or suicide exhibited a substantial increase—from 34.9 per 100,000 people in 2019 to 45.8 per 100,000 in 2023, or a 31 percent increase.

While it would be logical to expect the effects of a global pandemic to show up in the Health dimension, the indicators that make up the Health dimension are not closely related to infectious disease. However, the Health indicators *are* likely to be affected indirectly by the pandemic, via intermediary psychological, economic, and social factors (all of which have more direct effects in other dimensions of the Index). For example, social isolation, worsening trends in mental health, and economic exasperation may all contribute to increases in deaths due to alcohol, drug use, or suicide.^{12, 13} Additionally, other drivers of the opioid epidemic, such as the prevalence of synthetic opioids (e.g., fentanyl) and unintentional polysubstance use, have increased the risks associated with substance consumption.^{14, 15} While this indicator reflects trends in the general population, similar trends have been detected amongst adolescents, with fentanyl-involved fatality rates more than doubling since 2019¹⁶ and the percentage of high school students who seriously considered or attempted suicide increasing since 2011.¹⁷

The Economy dimension score improved from 2019 to 2023, from 57.0 to 59.3 (+4.2%). This increase was primarily driven by a decrease in the unemployment rate (-6.1%), a reduction of the share of the population living below the federal poverty line (-4.5%), an increase in the share of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service (+7.5%), and an increase in national median household income (+7.8%). Given that unemployment data are reported in the same year they were collected, the relatively low unemployment rate in 2023 reflects a longer period of recovery from the initial COVID-19 job losses in comparison to other indicators.¹⁸ It is possible that pandemic-related stimulus and tax credits had an effect on median household income and the decline in the share of the population living in poverty (both of which were measured in 2021, about a year into the pandemic, for the 2023 index).¹⁹ Additionally, federal efforts²⁰ to bolster broadband connectivity—through both infrastructure and affordability initiatives—likely contributed to the 7.5 percent increase in householders with a broadband subscription. Broadband access increases economic stability²¹ and access to education and social supports, as well as health care, and a lack of reliable broadband access may impact youth's school performance and educational opportunities if they are unable to complete schoolwork at home.^{22, 23}

The decline in the Education dimension score from 56.1 (2019) to 53.9 (2023) was primarily driven by substantial decreases in preschool enrollment (-16.3%). This finding aligns with research suggesting that preschool enrollment declined significantly during the pandemic, driven in part by school and child care center closures, family concerns about in-person learning, and cuts to preschool funding.^{24,25} Although the high school graduation rate declined slightly from 2019 to 2023, the proportion of the population who attained college degrees increased slightly over the same period.

The Community dimension score increased from 47.8 in 2019 (data largely from 2017) to 51.2 in 2023 (data largely from 2021). However, examining the individual indicators within the Community dimension tells a nuanced story. Incarceration (-21.2%) and voter registration (+13.0%) both improved substantially from 2019 to 2023, while youth disconnection (+5.7%) and volunteering (-4.0%) both worsened over the same period. Because the notion of “community” itself is multifaceted, the indicators comprising the Community dimension are varied by design. When compared to indicators in the Economy dimension, for example, the Community indicators are less likely to move in tandem in response to policy developments and external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth disconnection directly reflects young adults’ education and employment, but this indicator is also closely tied to other indicators included in the Index. High rates of disconnection have been associated with neighborhood violence, poverty, and low parental education and employment, while low disconnection is often related to neighborhoods where education, wealth, and economic opportunities are higher.^{26, 27} More information on specific indicators and their national-level values for the 2021, 2022, and 2023 Index can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. The Opportunity Index: Dimensions, Indicators, and National Values

Dimension	Indicator	Description	2021 Index Value	2022 Index Value	2023 Index Value
Economy	Jobs	Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are not working but are available for and seeking work)	5.7%	3.3%	3.1%
	Wages	Median household income (in 2010 dollars)	\$56,512	\$54,595	\$57,865
	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)	12.3%	12.8%	12.8%
	Income Inequality	80/20 ratio (i.e., the ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that at the 20th percentile)	4.8	4.9	5.0
	Access to Banking Services	Number of banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions, and credit unions) per 10,000 residents	3.5	3.4	3.4
	Affordable Housing	Percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing-related costs	69.4%	68.7%	68.2%
	Broadband Internet	Percentage of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service	86.4%	85.2%	90.1%

Dimension	Indicator	Description	2021 Index Value	2022 Index Value	2023 Index Value
Education	Preschool Enrollment	Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool	48.9%	47.3%	40.2%
	High School Graduation	On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)	85.8%	83.2%	83.5%
	Postsecondary Education	Percentage of adults ages 25 and older with an associate degree or higher	41.7%	41.6%	43.8%
Health	<i>Low Birth Weight</i>	Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds	8.3%	8.2%	8.5%
	<i>Health Insurance Coverage</i>	Percentage of the population (under age 65) without health insurance coverage	10.8%	10.2%	10.2%
	<i>Deaths Related to Alcohol/Drug Use and Suicide</i>	Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or to suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)	34.9	41.3	45.8
Community	Volunteering	Percentage of adults (ages 18 and older) who reported they volunteered during the previous year [national and state-level only]	29.9%	26.4%	26.4%
	Voter Registration	Percentage of adults ages 18 and older who are registered to vote [national and state-level only]	65.0%	64.0%	70.9%
	<i>Youth Disconnection</i>	Percentage of youth (ages 16–24) not in school and not working	10.7%	11.5%	12.1%
	<i>Violent Crime</i>	Incidents of violent crime reported to law enforcement agencies (per 100,000 population)	381	399	387
	Access to Primary Health Care	Number of primary care physicians (per 100,000 population)	76.5	76.4	74.9
	Access to Healthy Food	Number of grocery stores and produce vendors (per 10,000 population)	2.0	2.0	2.0
	<i>Incarceration</i>	Number of people incarcerated in jail or prison (per 100,000 population ages 18 and older) [national and state-level only]	810	660	680

Note: Indicator names in *italics* denotes indicators that are reverse scored when standardizing data, such that higher values represent better outcomes.

State Findings

In 2023, state scores ranged from 40.3 (New Mexico) to 60.2 (New Hampshire). Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia had scores above the national opportunity score of 51.9, while 23 states had scores below the national score. States scoring above the national value were predominantly in the Northeast, Coastal West, and Northern Midwest regions, while states scoring below the national value were predominantly in the Deep South, Southeast, Southwest, and Appalachia (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. State Opportunity Scores Across the United States, 2023

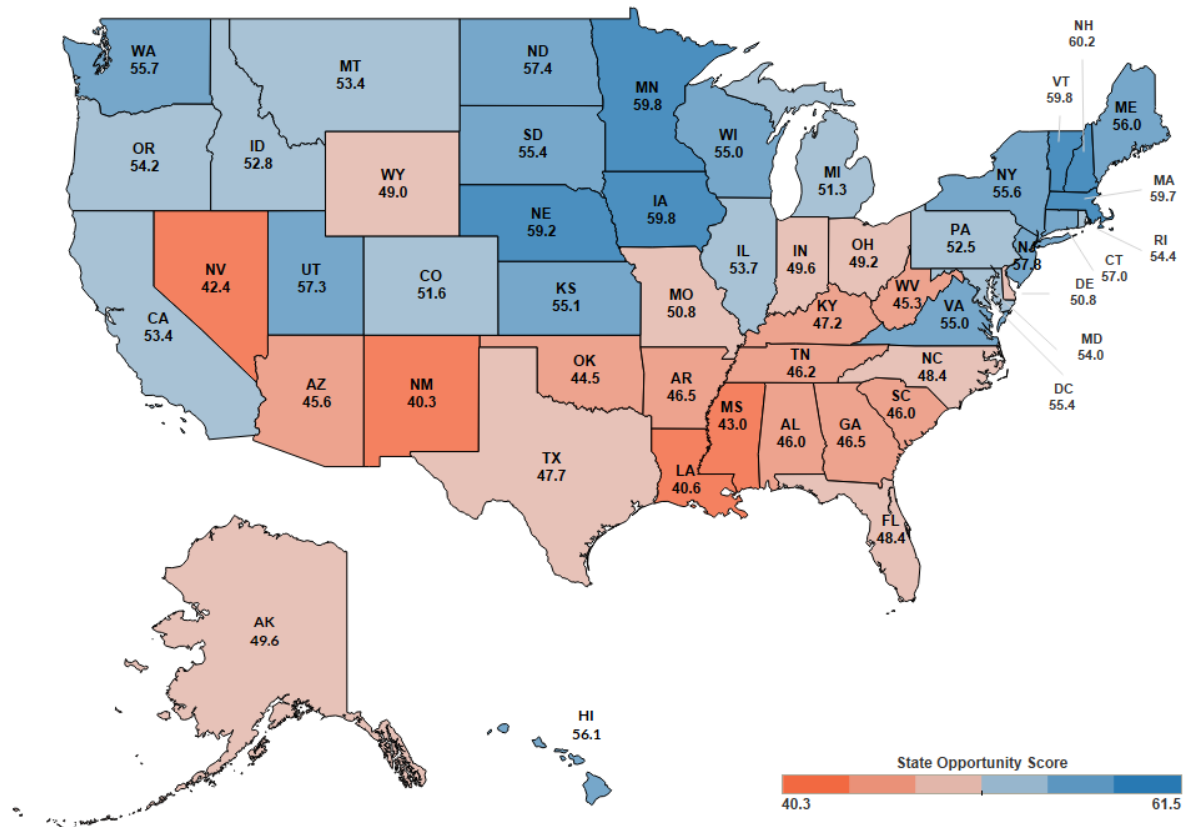


Table 3 presents the complete state rankings and overall Opportunity and dimension scores for each state. States with high opportunity scores tend to have high overall performance across dimensions (states toward the top of Table 3 are broadly indicated by darker-shaded—i.e., higher—dimension scores). Some states have substantial variability in performance across dimensions, which results in a middle-of-the-road overall opportunity score—including California (ranked #25), which has relatively high Education and Health scores and relatively low Economy and Community score

Table 3. Opportunity Index State Rankings and Dimension Scores, 2023

Over all Rank	State	Opportunity Score	Economy Score	Education Score	Health Score	Community Score
	United States	51.9	59.3	53.9	43.2	51.2
1	New Hampshire	60.2	70.9	55.6	54.4	59.8
2	Minnesota	59.8	66.5	53.0	58.7	61.0
3	Vermont	59.8	66.1	60.4	48.4	64.2
4	Iowa	59.8	66.9	52.9	63.3	55.9
5	Massachusetts	59.7	62.0	62.3	56.5	57.9
6	Nebraska	59.2	67.7	54.5	60.5	54.2
7	New Jersey	57.8	61.4	61.7	52.3	55.7
8	North Dakota	57.4	67.7	48.5	56.8	56.9
9	Utah	57.3	68.3	56.2	51.7	53.0
10	Connecticut	57.0	62.4	63.2	46.0	56.4
11	Hawaii	56.1	60.9	56.2	56.4	51.1
12	Maine	56.0	64.4	52.0	44.0	63.7
13	Washington	55.7	63.8	50.2	54.9	53.7
14	New York	55.6	54.2	57.5	53.6	57.0
15	District of Columbia	55.4	53.7	64.5	37.3	66.2
16	South Dakota	55.4	67.8	48.2	53.8	51.6
17	Kansas	55.1	65.4	55.5	48.7	50.8
18	Virginia	55.0	63.4	58.5	48.1	50.2
19	Wisconsin	55.0	65.5	52.6	51.1	50.8
20	Rhode Island	54.4	60.8	50.5	48.2	58.2
21	Oregon	54.2	60.7	47.8	53.7	54.6
22	Maryland	54.0	64.7	56.5	41.2	53.4
23	Illinois	53.7	60.2	53.0	49.0	52.5
24	Montana	53.4	63.5	52.7	45.1	52.4
25	California	53.4	56.3	54.0	56.1	47.1
26	Idaho	52.8	65.2	44.8	55.0	46.2
27	Pennsylvania	52.5	61.3	52.7	42.5	53.7
28	Colorado	51.6	65.0	55.5	36.3	49.7
29	Michigan	51.3	60.9	48.4	45.1	50.7
30	Delaware	50.8	62.8	50.5	36.3	53.7
31	Missouri	50.8	62.3	54.5	35.5	50.9
32	Alaska	49.6	62.0	45.6	39.4	51.5
33	Indiana	49.6	63.5	51.7	37.8	45.5
34	Ohio	49.2	60.4	49.3	37.1	49.8
35	Wyoming	49.0	63.8	49.5	31.3	51.4
36	North Carolina	48.4	58.5	54.7	33.2	47.2
37	Florida	48.4	58.1	58.8	32.8	43.8

Table 3. Opportunity Index State Rankings and Dimension Scores, 2023

Overall Rank	State	Opportunity Score	Economy Score	Education Score	Health Score	Community Score
38	Texas	47.7	57.0	54.5	39.8	39.5
39	Kentucky	47.2	56.7	53.0	36.4	42.6
40	Georgia	46.5	58.4	53.8	33.2	40.8
41	Arkansas	46.5	59.0	48.5	39.9	38.7
42	Tennessee	46.2	60.0	50.9	29.9	44.0
43	South Carolina	46.0	58.4	51.8	27.9	46.1
44	Alabama	46.0	56.6	53.3	32.8	41.2
45	Arizona	45.6	60.1	43.4	36.1	42.8
46	West Virginia	45.3	55.9	46.8	32.6	46.0
47	Oklahoma	44.5	58.7	45.2	35.1	38.8
48	Mississippi	43.0	52.4	53.0	26.0	40.6
49	Nevada	42.4	54.2	43.5	32.6	39.4
50	Louisiana	40.6	50.7	49.8	24.1	38.0
51	New Mexico	40.3	51.2	40.7	29.4	39.9

Note: Lighter shading in the table indicates lower scores, both overall and by dimension. State scores have been rounded to one decimal place. While some values may appear tied, the rankings reflect the original (unrounded) values. There were no ties in the unrounded values.

In 2023, New Hampshire ranked first in overall opportunity, with an opportunity score of 60.2. This is the first year that New Hampshire had the highest opportunity score; in all previous years, either Vermont or Minnesota was ranked first. However, while New Hampshire scored above the national average across all dimensions, it only ranked first among the states in the Economy dimension.

New Mexico, at 40.3, had the lowest opportunity score—and has consistently had the lowest opportunity score since 2016, except in 2022, when Louisiana had the lowest opportunity score at 42.0. New Mexico holds the bottom spot for two indicators in 2023 (see Table 4): youth disconnection (20.5%) and violent crime rate (699.1 per 100,000 people). However, New Mexico scored similar to the national average for several indicators, such as jobs, health insurance coverage, and access to primary health care. These findings demonstrate that, although New Mexico ranks lowest in overall opportunity, the state does not necessarily rank lowest (or even low) across all 20 indicators.

State performance on specific indicators

Opportunity and dimension scores (i.e., Economy, Education, Health, and Community) reflect general performance on the Index, but some states excel or fall behind on specific indicators. Table 4 summarizes the top- and bottom-ranked scores (and their states) and the largest improvement in scores (as measured by absolute change since 2016) for each dimension and indicator. Two patterns emerge. First, while there were stark differences between the highest and lowest states on some indicators—such as median household income, preschool enrollment, and income inequality—there were much smaller differences on other indicators, such as affordable housing. Second, multiple states were represented in the top- and bottom-scoring states, suggesting that, at the individual indicator level, there is a fair amount of variation in which states have opportunity. In 2023, 10 states and the District of Columbia had the top spot on at least one of the 20 indicators, while 9 states and the District of Columbia held the lowest position on at least one indicator.

The District of Columbia provides an example of variability in performance across dimensions. The District was top-ranked on five indicators (preschool enrollment, postsecondary completion, voter

registration, access to primary health care, and incarceration); however, it also ranked lowest on two indicators (income inequality and high school graduation). For DC, this translated to higher relative performance in Education and Community dimensions, but with lower performance in Economy and Health. This variation in the performance across dimensions resulted in an overall ranking of 15 in 2023.

Table 4 may be useful for states interested in improving their scores in one or more indicators. For example, these states might look to their peers with the top values in each indicator—as well as the states with the largest improvement in each indicator—to explore potential pathways toward improvement while recognizing each state’s unique context (such as population size and density, heterogeneity of the population, and other unique cultural or community factors). For example, Utah has the highest volunteering rate, at 41.5 percent, which research suggests is connected to religious organizations, while other states, like the most-improved Wyoming, have higher rates of secular volunteerism.²⁸ In Mississippi, households with broadband subscriptions have increased by 22.7 percentage points since 2016, although the state remains at the bottom in that indicator. Mississippi, like other states, has benefited from multiple federal funding mechanisms to support broadband availability and affordability and has developed a state action plan that estimates that affordable service will be available to all Mississippians by the end of 2028.²⁹ The District of Columbia provides two years of universal, full-day preschool, a practice that has likely contributed to its top performance (73.0%) on this indicator.³⁰

It may also be useful for states to look to their peers that have low indicator values. In contrast to the District of Columbia, West Virginia has the lowest rate (23.5%) of preschool enrollment and only offers statewide pre-Kindergarten for 4-year-olds and 3-year-olds with “special needs.”³¹ West Virginia also experienced 110 deaths per 100,000 people, which is over twice the national rate for deaths related to alcohol, drug use, and suicide. The state has a particularly high rate of overdose-related deaths, which has been attributed to a combination of sociocultural influences, economic downturn, insufficient educational opportunities, and a high opioid prescription and dispensation rates.³²

Table 4. Bottom Value, Top Value, and Largest Improvement (since 2016), by Indicator, 2023

	Bottom Value	Top Value	Largest Improvement
Opportunity Score	40.3 (NM)	60.2 (NH)	+3.4 (UT)
Economy Score	50.7 (LA)	70.9 (NH)	+ 12.1 (AL)
<i>Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are unemployed and seeking work)</i>	5.2% (NV)	1.2% (NH)	-3.6 p.p. (AL)
Median household income (2010 dollars)	\$40,434 (MS)	\$74,868 (MD)	+\$13,429 (CA)
<i>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)</i>	19.6% (LA)	7.2% (NH)	-5.4 p.p. (AZ)
<i>80/20 ratio (ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that at the 20th percentile)</i>	7.2 (DC)	3.8 (UT)	-0.4 (AZ)
Number of banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions, and credit unions) per 10,000 residents	2.1 (NV)	6.9 (ND)	+0.4 (RI)
Percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing-related costs	58.3% (CA)	77.5% (WV)	+6.1 p.p. (VT)
Percentage of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service	81.8% (MS)	93.5% (UT)	+22.7 p.p. MS

	Bottom Value	Top Value	Largest Improvement
Education Score	40.7 (NM)	64.5 (DC)	+10.1 (FL)
Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool	23.5% (WV)	73.0% (DC)	+6.4 p.p. (NE)
On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)	69.5% (DC)	88.7% (FL)	+12.7 p.p. (FL)
Percentage of adults ages 25 and older with an associate degree or higher	32.1% (WV)	66.2% (DC)	+10 p.p. (VT)
Health Score	24.1 (LA)	63.3 (IA)	+1.1 (UT)
<i>Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds</i>	12.3% (MS)	6.6% (ND)	-0.3 p.p. (NJ)
<i>Percentage of the population under age 65 without health insurance coverage</i>	20.4% (TX)	2.9% (MA)	-5.8 p.p. (LA)
<i>Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)</i>	110.0 (WV)	25.3 (NE)	-0.8 (UT)
Community Score	38.1 (LA)	66.2 (DC)	+7.6 (DE)
Percentage of adults ages 18 and older who reported volunteer activity during the previous year	15.1% (FL)	41.5% (UT)	+9.8 p.p. (WY)
Percentage of the population ages 18 and older who are registered to vote	36.6% (CA)	78.6% (DC)	+11.3 p.p. (HI)
<i>Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working</i>	20.5% (NM)	7.0% (ND)	-4.3 p.p. (DE)
<i>Incidents of violent crime reported to law enforcement agencies (per 100,000 population)</i>	699.1 (NM)	50.0 (PA)	-353.7 (FL)
Number of primary care physicians (per 100,000 population)	53.3 (MS)	129.0 (DC)	+15.6 (DC)
Number of grocery stores and produce vendors (per 10,000 population)	1.1 (NV)	4.6 (NY)	+0.1 (DE)
<i>Number of people incarcerated in jail or prison (per 100,000 population ages 18 and older)</i>	1330.0 (LA)	310.0 (MA & DC)	-220 (DE)

p.p. = Percentage points

Note: Indicators in italics denote indicators that are reverse scored when standardizing data, such that higher values represent better outcomes.

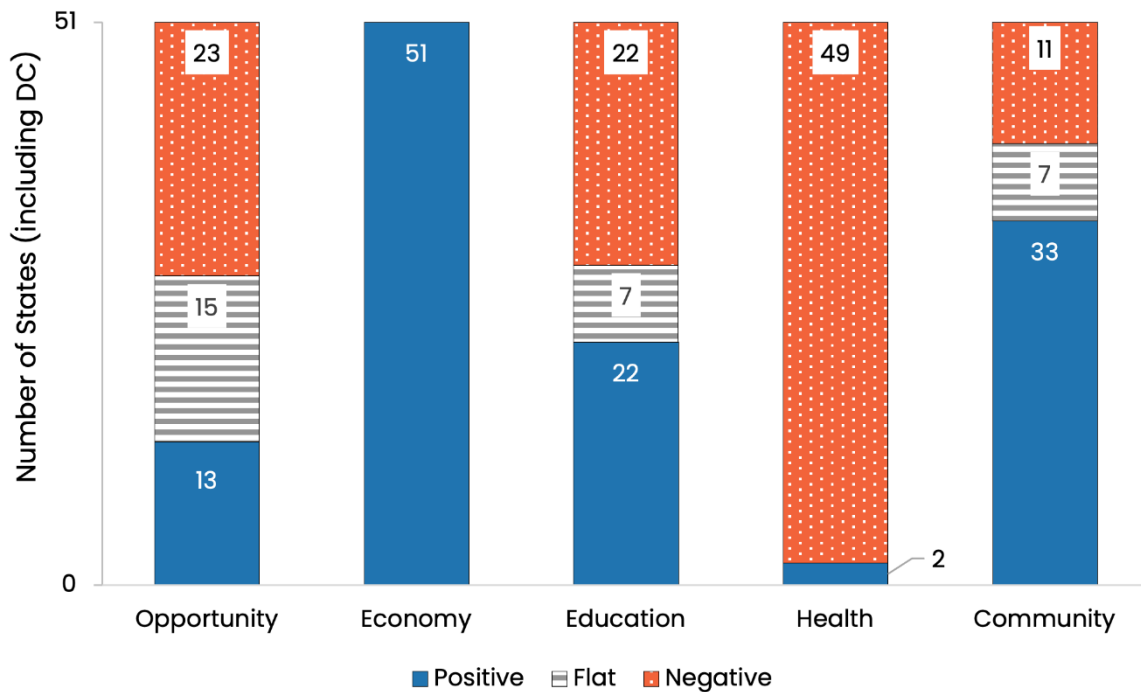
State changes over time

From 2016 to 2023, opportunity scores increased by at least 1 percent^b in 13 states and decreased by at least 1 percent in 22 states. Some states that experienced growth from 2016 already had higher

^b The Opportunity Index uses 1 percent as the cut off for meaningful change when examining changes over time.

opportunity scores and improved further, while some had lower opportunity scores and moved toward or just crossed the national average. However, improvements in scores were small: Utah demonstrated the most growth, both on a relative (6.3%) and absolute (3.4 points) basis. As displayed in Figure 3, for 15 states, increases or decreases were less than 1 percent, so these states were considered to have flat scores. Most notably, all 50 states and the District of Columbia had increases in their Economy scores greater than 1 percent since 2016, while 48 states and the District of Columbia had decreases in their Health scores. New Hampshire and Utah are the only states that increased their health scores.

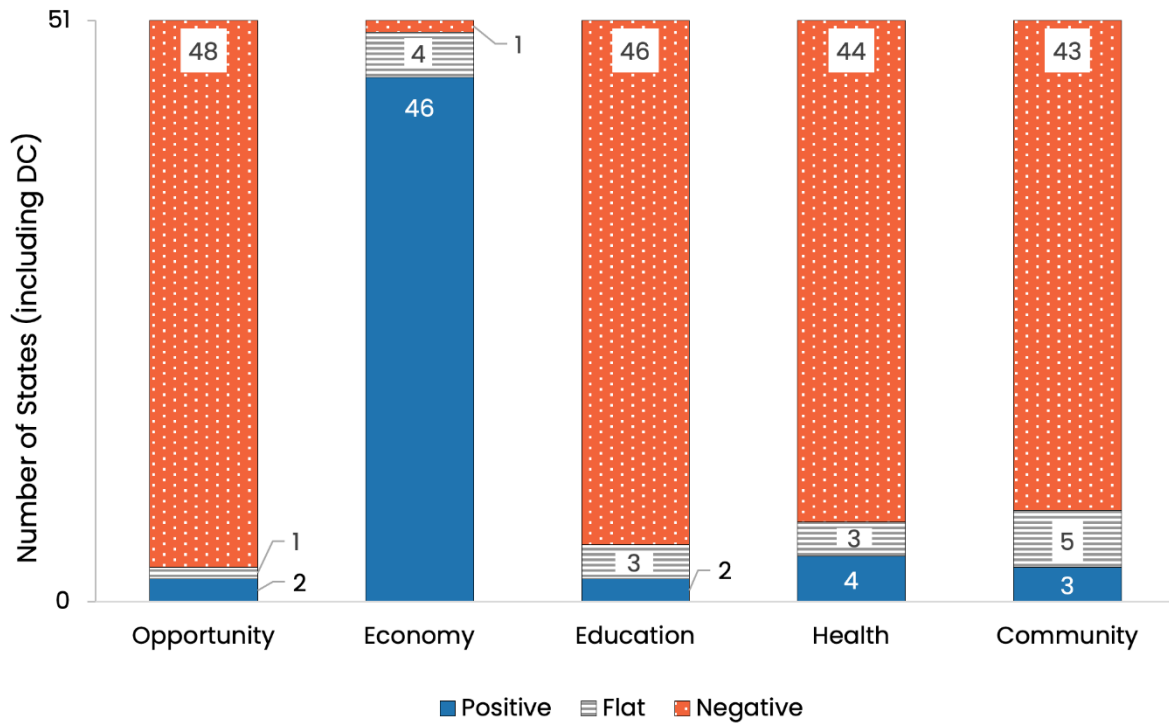
Figure 3. U.S. States Trending Up or Down, or Staying Flat on Each Dimension, 2016–2023



However, Figure 4 shows that, in recent years (2021–2023), Economy scores continued to trend upwards in most states while scores in overall opportunity—and across the Education, Health, and Community dimensions—have been trending down. Data included in the 2021–2023 Indexes are mainly from 2019–2021, respectively. As with national trends, states saw positive changes in unemployment rates, median household income, and poverty during these years, contributing to the increases in Economy scores. States also saw substantial increases in deaths related to alcohol or drug use and suicide, as well as increases in persons without health insurance and babies born at a low birth weight, contributing to the recent decreases in Health scores.

Although the overall national Community score increased from the 2021 (49.8) to 2023 (51.2) Index, the trend in state-level Community scores cannot be directly compared to national trends due to differences in how they were calculated. At the national level, data were available for 2020 and 2021, and indicated a steep decline in incarceration, which drove improvements in the overall Community dimension score. At the state level, we used 2019 incarceration data for the 2021, 2022, and 2023 index, and did not see this positive trend. Also at the state level, the small decreases in other indicators in the Community dimension over the same time period resulted in overall decreases in the dimension score in most states.

Figure 4. U.S. States Trending Up or Down, or Staying Flat on Each Dimension, 2021–2023



County Findings

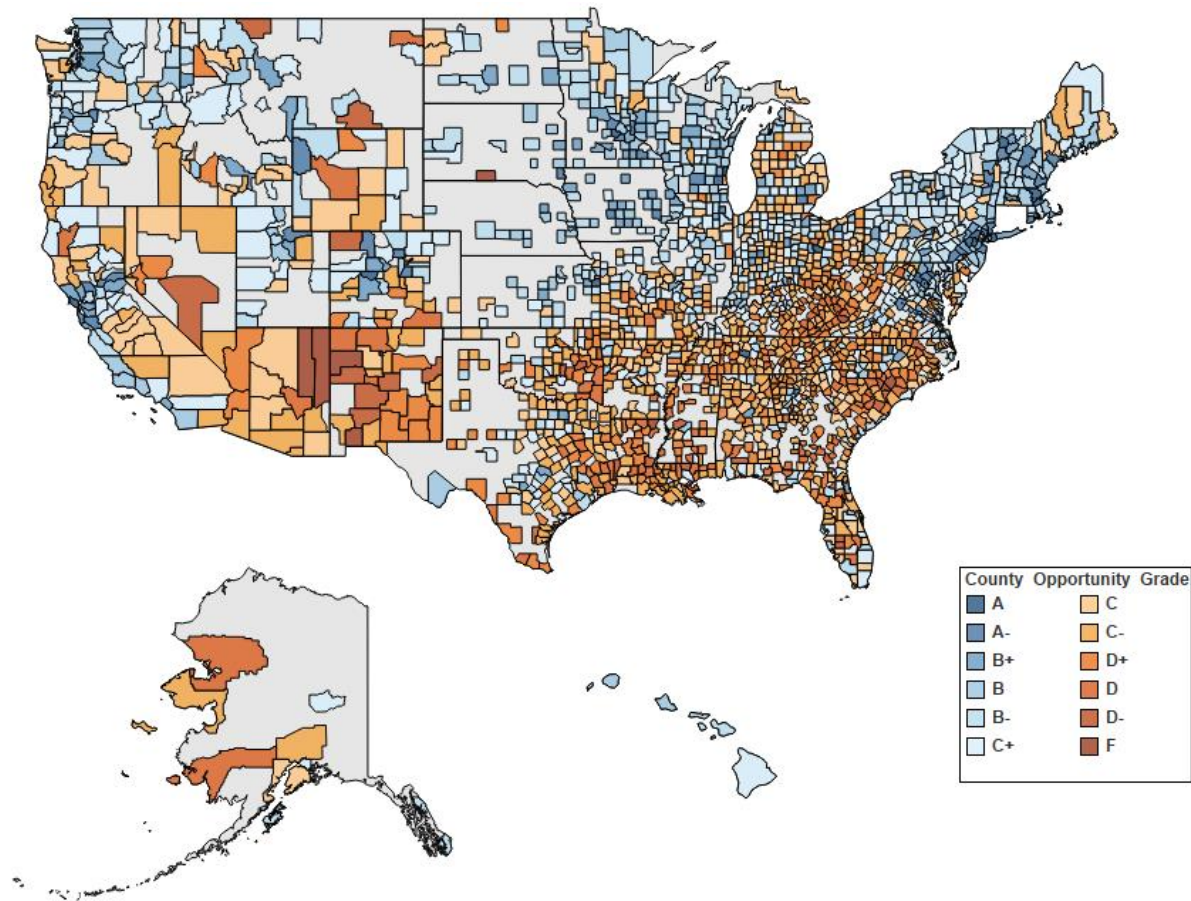
For the 2023 Opportunity Index, we were able to calculate opportunity grades for 2,068 out of 3,143 counties or county equivalents.^c This represents a 172-county increase from the 2019 Opportunity Index report. While only 66 percent of counties or county equivalents received a grade, these grades represented 96 percent of the total national population. Only counties that had data for all four dimensions received an overall opportunity grade; the number of counties that received a dimension score ranges from 2,146 to 3,128 across the four dimensions.

Overall county performance

There was substantial county-level variation in opportunity (see Figure 5). The state-level map (Figure 2), shows that higher opportunity scores clustered in the Northeast, Coastal West, and North Midwest. When we examine county-level grades, we see that there were areas with lower grades (orange shading in Figure 5), even within those states in those regions. Similarly, there were counties with higher grades (blue shading) in regions with lower state-level opportunity, such as the South and Southwest.

^c As a reminder, counties with smaller population density are more susceptible to large swings in their indicator metrics; as such, we focus on county *grades* instead of raw scores for the purpose of this report.

Figure 5. County Opportunity Grades Across the United States, 2023

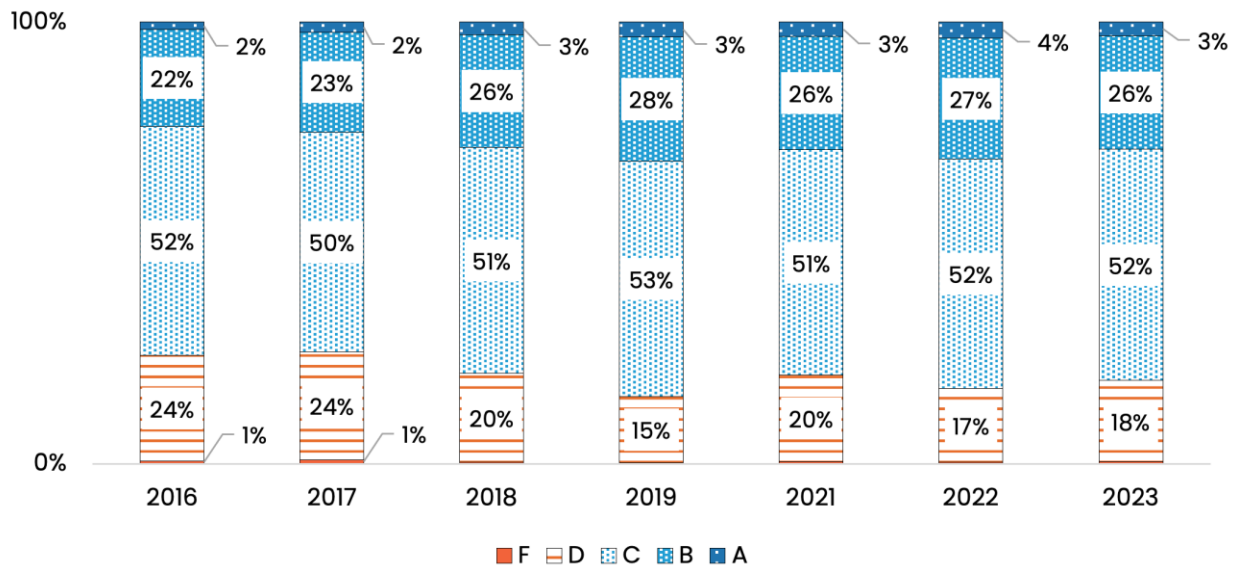


Note: Areas that are grey did not have sufficient data to calculate a grade.

The percentage of counties that received an A or B grade increased from 2016 to 2019, a trend that was maintained through 2023 (Figure 6). The overall distribution of county opportunity grades remained fairly consistent from 2019 to 2023. Only about 3 percent of graded counties received an A grade (A+, A, or A-) in the 2023 Opportunity Index. About one quarter of graded counties received a B and about half got a C grade. The percentage of graded counties that received an A or B grade declined slightly, from 31 percent in 2019 to 29 percent in 2023, but overall percentages changed little.

Using 2016 as a starting point, there was a decline in the percentage of counties that received a D or F grade from 2016 to 2019 that was maintained through 2023. However, more counties received an F grade in 2023 than in 2019 (although it was still less than 0.5 percent of counties, appearing as 0% in Figure 6). The 2019 Opportunity Index report noted that four counties across three states (Arizona, New Mexico, and West Virginia) received an opportunity grade of F (see the [Opportunity Index website](#) for a full list of grades for each county). In 2023, nine counties across seven states (Arizona, Louisiana, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia) received an opportunity grade of F. Three of these counties maintained their F grade between 2019 and 2023, while one previously F-graded county improved to a D. Of the newly F-graded counties, four counties saw a grade decrease from either D- or D+, while two were newly graded for the first time due to previously insufficient data. As mentioned above, counties scores are more susceptible to variance in performance due to sample size, so future analysis is needed to determine characteristics associated with performance on the Index or specific indicators.

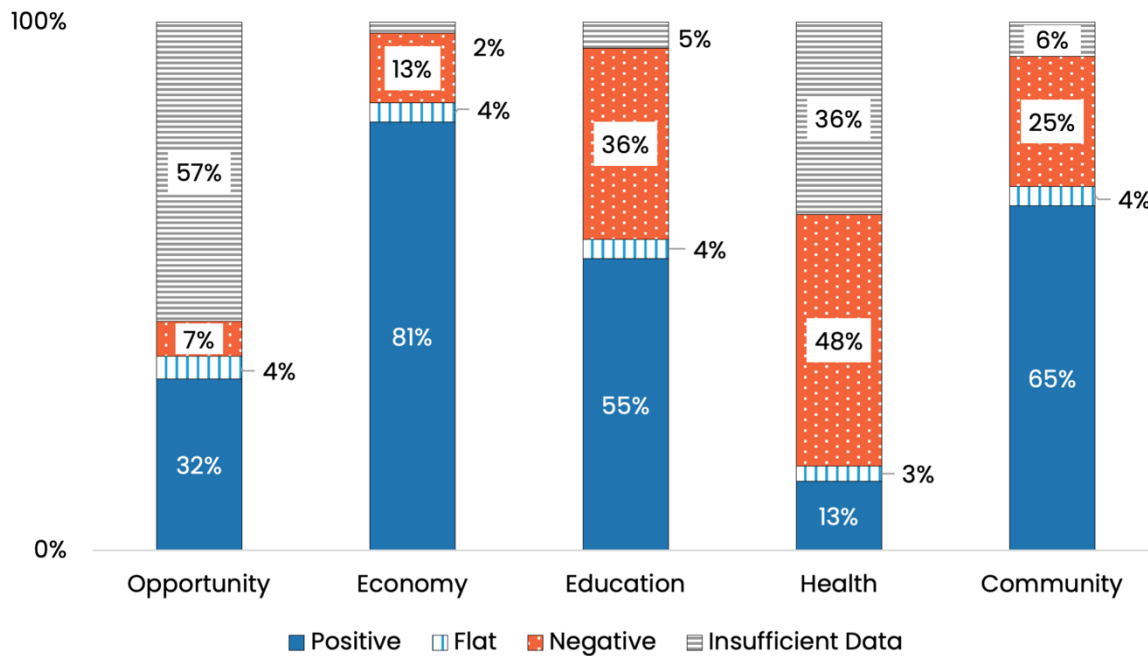
Figure 6. County Opportunity Grade Distribution, 2016–2023



Over time, the similar distribution of county grades for the United States as a whole does not mean that individual county opportunity scores did not change (see Figure 7). About 32 percent of all U.S. counties had improvements of at least 1 percent from 2016 to 2023, while 7 percent had a negative change of at least 1 percent. Notably, more than 50 percent of U.S. counties did not have sufficient data at both time points to calculate an overall opportunity score.

Overall, counties had the most positive change in the Economy dimension: 81 percent of counties experienced positive change from 2016 to 2023, compared to 13 percent of counties experiencing negative change and 4 percent staying flat (an additional 2% of counties did not have enough data to calculate a score). More counties had increases in Community scores (65%) than had decreases (25%); progress in Education was similar, with 55 percent of counties experiencing increases and 36 percent experiencing decreases. Similar to national trends in Health, 48 percent of counties experienced a decrease from 2016 to 2023; however, about one third of U.S. counties did not have sufficient data to calculate a Health dimension grade at both time points, primarily because of limited availability of birthweight data at the county level.

Figure 7. Percent of Counties Trending Up, Down, or Staying Flat on Each Dimension, 2016–2023



County data limitations

The county data have some limitations to consider when using the county-level opportunity scores and grades. In 2023, grades for 2,068 counties represented nearly 319 million residents, or 96 percent of the nation’s population. However, there is variability in within-state population representation, ranging from 67 percent (South Dakota) to 100 percent (13 states). Thirty states had at least 96 percent of their population represented at the county level. The five states with the lowest percent of their population represented in the county-level dataset are South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Montana.

Due to a 2022 change in the county equivalent geographic units for Connecticut,^d we were unable to calculate grades for the state’s county equivalents in the 2022 and 2023 Indexes. Additionally, because the District of Columbia does not have a county-equivalent, it is also not represented in the county data.

Equity and Disparity in Opportunity

Opportunity varies across the United States and is not equitably distributed, either between or within communities. A web of policies, institutional frameworks, and individual biases have systematically disadvantaged people of color, women, and other historically marginalized groups of people in accessing opportunity.^{33–37}

^d In 2022, the Census Bureau adopted Connecticut’s nine Councils of Governments as the county-equivalent geographic unit for purposes of statistical data in 2022.

To assess equity (i.e., fair distribution according to relative need) and disparity (differences in access to resources or outcomes)³⁸ in opportunity, we disaggregated 11 individual indicators by race, ethnicity, and gender at the national level. We did not examine the interactions between multiple intersecting identities that carry their own privileges, disadvantages, and historical contexts,³⁹ nor did we examine differences between these demographic groups at the state or county levels. These complex interactions between intersecting identities and geography fall outside the scope of this report. The call out box further describes our approach to analyzing equity and disparity in opportunity.

Our approach to analyzing equity and disparity in opportunity

Throughout this section, we refer to racial and ethnic groups by the term used in the data (e.g., White people, Black people, etc.), but we acknowledge that these categories are broad and refer to large groups of people who are heterogenous. Wherever possible, we disaggregated the data into as many sub-groups as the data would allow. Three demographic groups in particular—Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders (NH/PI), American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN), and multi-racial individuals—are often excluded from reporting entirely or grouped into an “Other race” category (or with Asian in the case of NH/PI) in the datasets we used to construct the Index. These instances can occur when the data collection protocol itself does not include these categories as an option for respondents, or when small sample sizes from these demographic groups necessitate data suppression to preserve respondent anonymity and data quality.

The demographic groups included in our dataset only represent a cross-section of the identities and lived experiences that play a role in shaping opportunity for individuals across the United States. Even race and ethnicity categories for which there are more regularly available data can mask intergroup differences between people of different ethnic heritage (e.g., one may be of Korean heritage or Japanese heritage, yet both experiences are encompassed under the Asian demographic category) or immigration status, two categorical distinctions with known differences in opportunity.^{a, b} Further, many demographic variables associated with disparities are not collected, making it impossible to disaggregate pre-existing national datasets by categories such as disability status, immigration/citizenship status, primary language spoken, or LGBTQ+ status. While we were unable to include these demographic categories in our analysis, we underscore the importance of further research to understand and document the lived realities of individuals who identify with these labels, among others.

^a Ewing, W. A. (2008). *Opportunity and exclusion: A brief history of US immigration policy*. Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center.

^b Gonzales, S., & Sommers, B. D. (2018). Intra-ethnic coverage disparities among Latinos and the effects of health reform. *Health services research*, 53(3), 1373-1386.

Demographic group highlights: Gender

We found that, for most indicators, differences between people of various racial and ethnic backgrounds were larger than differences between people of different genders. In fact, there were few substantial differences between men and women in the indicators we analyzed; notable exceptions were incarceration rates and deaths from alcohol/drugs and suicide (also known as “deaths of despair”), with men experiencing more than double the rate of deaths and over 10 times the rate of incarceration than that experienced by women. Deaths of despair and incarceration are two indicators where the intersection of gender and racial/ethnic identity are particularly salient. Other data show that differences in deaths of despair between men and women are mediated by both race and age.⁴⁰ Differences in incarceration rates between men and women are heavily mediated by the disproportionate rate of incarceration experienced by Black males, relative to any other demographic group in the country⁴¹; however, this trend has seen small improvements in recent years (discussed further below).

Demographic group highlights: Race and ethnicity

Across the 11 indicators we examined, Asian and White people had the most systemic access to opportunity in 2023. Broadly, Asian and White people in the United States exist within unique sociocultural, sociopolitical, and historical contexts that positively influence their access to opportunity and subsequent long-term outcomes—as measured by our select group of indicators—in comparison to people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Below, we highlight some of the key patterns and trends in indicators by racial, ethnic, and gender groups.

Asian demographic group: While a long history of racial prejudice and socioeconomic exclusion impacts Asian people living in the United States, they have historically been able to assimilate at faster rates than other racial and ethnic minorities,⁴² which has allowed them more access to institutional networks of opportunity maintained by the White majority. Notably, the vast majority of Asian immigrants currently living in the United States entered the country through legal means (8% are undocumented, compared to 43% of individuals who immigrated from the Americas),⁴³ which has far-reaching implications for both employment and educational opportunities—both of which are critical for a smooth transition into financial stability and upward mobility. Among the racial and ethnic groups examined, Asian people had the lowest unemployment rate, the highest percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in preschool, the highest educational attainment, the lowest percentage of people without health insurance, the lowest rate of deaths due to alcohol/drugs or suicide, and the smallest percentage of youth who are not connected to school or work.

White demographic group: Among the 2023 Opportunity Index indicators, White people had the lowest poverty rate, the fewest babies born at a low birthweight, the highest volunteer activity, the highest percentage of people registered to vote, and the lowest incarceration rates. As the dominant racial group that holds the most institutional power and financial/cultural capital, White people benefit from the inequitable circulation of opportunity through a phenomenon known as “opportunity hoarding.”^{44–46} Even though White people maintain the most institutionalized access to opportunity, any given individual’s relative access to opportunity may be affected by their geographic location, proximity to urban centers, or socioeconomic status.

American Indian/Alaskan Native demographic group: Structural violence and intergenerational trauma resulting from ongoing settler colonialism and neo-colonial policies have caused disproportionately high proportions of the Americas’ Indigenous populations to experience social suffering in the form of mental health and substance abuse issues—in turn resulting from intergenerational, historic, and ongoing trauma.^{47–52} This structural violence also results in disproportionate numbers of Indigenous populations living in communities that experience cyclical poverty while being structurally denied adequate financial support for community-led socioeconomic development initiatives—initiatives that could otherwise improve opportunity by bolstering self-determination and self-sufficiency in Native communities.^{53, 54} These disparate socioeconomic conditions were clearly represented in the 2023 Opportunity Index findings. The AI/AN population in the United States has the highest rate of deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning or suicide, at 54 deaths per 100,000 adults. AI/AN individuals are almost five times more likely to die of drug or alcohol overdose or suicide relative to the racial demographic with the lowest rate of deaths from drugs/alcohol or suicide (Asians). The AI/AN population experienced the second-highest poverty rate in the nation (21.4%), the highest percentage of the population without health insurance coverage (19.6%), and the highest percentage of youth who are not connected to school or work (18.8%).

Black demographic group: In the United States, Black people have historically experienced racial discrimination in employment or financial practices, residential segregation, and mass incarceration.⁵⁵ These systems of inequality involve deeply ingrained inequities. This process is most apparent in the evolution of Jim Crow laws—which legalized racial segregation (a practice enforced in the majority of American states, despite being largely associated with the South^{56, 57}) from right after the Civil War until the Civil Rights Era (1880–1965)—into mass incarceration policies that have perpetuated the legal disenfranchisement and socioeconomic exclusion of Black people from roughly the 1970s to the modern day. In the 2023 Index, Black people experienced the highest rate of poverty across all racial and ethnic

groups examined (21.8%). Black and AI/AN people are both about twice as likely to live below the federal poverty line as the groups with the lowest rates of poverty (Asian or White people). Both populations have been found to have much lower rates of upward mobility and higher rates of downward mobility than White people, leading to the perpetuation of intergenerational economic disparities.⁵⁸

In one bright spot, rates of incarceration have decreased for all demographic groups since the last Opportunity Index report in 2019. However, Black individuals continue to be incarcerated at astonishingly high rates in 2023—about double the rate of Hispanic individuals and 4.5 times the rate of White individuals. The disparities in interactions with the criminal justice system in the United States are well documented: Black people—and especially Black men—are more likely to be stopped by police, charged with more serious crimes, and given longer sentences than White people.^{59, 60} Nationally, it is estimated that one in five Black men born in 2001 are likely to experience imprisonment in their lifetime.^{61, 62} This actually represents a decrease in rates of incarceration between generations of Black men: One in three Black men born in 1981 were at risk of incarceration, which can be attributed to strict policing and sentencing practices enacted during the War on Drugs.⁶³

Hispanic demographic group: While post-secondary degree attainment improved across all racial demographic groups since the last public report on the Opportunity Index, disparities still persist. Hispanic individuals had the lowest rates of postsecondary degree attainment: Only 29.7 percent of individuals ages 25 and older had an associate degree or higher. The group with the highest levels of education (Asian people) was more than twice as likely as Hispanic individuals to have a postsecondary degree (67.6%). The educational experience of Hispanic people in the United States has been described as one of “accumulated disadvantage.”⁶⁴ Recent research has found that the gaps in postsecondary educational attainment for Hispanic populations can largely be attributed to restricted access to citizenship.⁶⁵ College enrollment differences explain the majority of bachelor’s degree gaps (as opposed to college completion); when accounting for differences in enrollment related to citizenship status, Black-Hispanic enrollment gaps disappear while White-Hispanic enrollment gaps are reduced by up to 75 percent.⁶⁶

County-level disparities

Racial and ethnic disparities in individual indicators are also reflected in county-level opportunity grades. For example, the 64 counties with an “A” or “A-” opportunity grade are predominantly White (73% White, 5% Black, and 10% Hispanic). In contrast, the 38 counties receiving a “D-” or “F” opportunity grade are, on average, 49 percent White, 17 percent Black, and 14 percent Hispanic. Institutionalized opportunity hoarding continues at the local level through ongoing racial segregation of neighborhoods, disinvestment by public and private institutions, and the systematic denial of capital to people of color that ultimately fuels the geographic concentration of poverty.⁶⁷ Perhaps most illustrative of the lasting impacts of racial segregation in the United States is the recent finding that U.S. public schools are more racially segregated now than in the late 1960s.⁶⁸ This trend is fueled by public school funding allocations that result in low-income communities having underfunded school systems that produce worse educational and life outcomes for their students,⁶⁹ further trapping people of color in economically impoverished communities. For these reasons, it is important to consider geographic variations in opportunity as they pertain to race and ethnicity.

Shifting race/ethnicity categorizations in population research

Finally, while analyzing data by race and ethnicity is critically important to our understanding of intergroup differences, we must recognize that race and ethnicity are both socially assigned and socially constructed, and that these constructions shift over time.⁷⁰ Most recently, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) announced revisions to the Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity (SPD 15); these revisions include the addition of the new minimum category Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) and the combination of separate race and ethnicity questions into one question. Additionally, the federal definition of “White” will no longer include people who identify with Middle Eastern or North African groups, including Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli,

Jordanian, Kurdish, Lebanese, Moroccan, Palestinian, Syrian, and Yemeni.⁷¹ These major shifts have far-reaching implications for the measurement of race and ethnicity in the United States and underscore the relative fluidity of racial categorization as it applies to population research. It has become increasingly important to highlight the need for researchers, policymakers, and the general public to consider the social constructions of race as a function of appearance, societal interactions, institutional dynamics, stereotypes, and social norms.⁷² While racial and ethnic (and gender) categories cannot fully encompass the unique context and lived experiences of any given individual, they serve as a vital tool to measure population-level disparities that exist due to structural and historical inequities that reinforce disparate life outcomes among members of marginalized communities.

Table 5. National Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, and by Gender, 2023

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	RACE/ETHNICITY ^{1,3}							GENDER	
		AI/AN	Asian	Black	Hispanic	NH/PI	White	Multi-racial	Female	Male
Economy	Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are unemployed and seeking work)	See note ²	2.7%	4.4%	4.0%	See note ²	2.8%	See note ²	3.1%	3.7%
	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)	21.4%	10.2%	21.8%	17.5%	17.6%	9.8%	15.4%	13.9%	11.6%
Education	Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool	See note ²	59.0%	46.7%	41.8%	See note ²	50.9%	See note ²	48.1%	52.6%
	Percentage of adults ages 25 and older with an associate degree or higher	See note ²	67.6%	38.6%	29.7%	See note ²	48.7%	See note ²	50.4%	46.2%
Health	Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds	8.2%	9.2%	14.1%	7.8%	9.2%	7.2%	9.2%	9.3%	7.8%
	Percentage of the population without health insurance coverage	19.6%	5.9%	9.6%	17.7%	10.4%	6.1%	13.8%	7.6%	9.7%
	Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)	54.0	11.6	52.1	28.8	29.4	48.6	22.4	24.1	68.4
Community	Percentage of adults ages 18 and older who reported volunteer activity during the previous year	20.7%	19.2%	20.8%	15.4%	24.2%	31.2%	29.3%	29.2%	23.5%
	Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working	18.8%	7.3%	18.8%	14.0%	See note ²	10.0%	13.3%	11.5%	12.6%
	Percentage of the population ages 18 and older who are registered to vote	See note ²	44.8%	62.5%	42.4%	See note ²	67.4%	See note ²	66.3%	63.5%
	Rate of people incarcerated in jail or prison (per 100,000 population ages 18 and older)	See note ²	See note ²	1850.0	810.0	See note ²	410.0	See note ²	120.0	1270.0

¹ For most indicators, racial/ethnic groups besides Hispanic do not include Hispanic persons; however, this varies by data source. For lack of health insurance, White is White Non-Hispanic, while all other racial groups 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.

² Data on this group were unavailable from the source.

³ "Other race" demographic category has been excluded from Table 5 due to the ambiguity around which race/ethnicity demographic groups may fall under this category for any given indicator.

Conclusions

The Opportunity Index strives to provide a comprehensive approach to assessing opportunity across our nation's communities. This update reflects on the past several years and finds that, despite progress in Economic and Community indicators, substantial ground has been lost in the Health dimension. As a result, the national opportunity score declined from 53.2 in 2019 to 51.9 in 2023. However, a closer examination reveals that these advancements and losses are not uniformly distributed across all populations or regions. Disparities related to location, race and ethnicity, and gender underscore the need for continued efforts to achieve inclusive opportunity in our communities. Consistent declines in the Health dimension over time—primarily driven by increases in the number of deaths from suicide and drug or alcohol poisoning—suggest an area in need of urgent attention.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies to promote equitable access to opportunity. Efforts must extend beyond examining data, but this report can serve as a foundational resource for community efforts by providing a starting point for national, state, and local discussions. The report can also help residents and stakeholders better understand their communities' strengths and areas for improvement. We encourage communities to incorporate firsthand experiences behind the statistics through interviews, focus groups, community forums, and personal narratives, thereby fostering a comprehensive understanding that informs inclusive opportunity strategies and collective action.

Acknowledgements

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

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