

Child Poverty in Rural America: New Data Shows Increases in 41 States

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On August 29th, the U.S. Census Bureau released new data on child poverty that show a disturbing increase in rural child poverty rates in many states. The child poverty rate is the most widely used indicator of child well-being because poverty is closely linked to undesirable outcomes in areas such as health, education, emotional welfare, and delinquency. Changes in child poverty signal important changes in children's quality of life and life chances.

Table 1 shows how child poverty rates have changed between 2000 and 2005 for the children living outside metropolitan areas in each state. (Data are collected in 2000 and 2005, but they actually reflect poverty in 1999 and 2004.) Release of data from the Census Bureau's new American Community Survey provide the first chance we have had to look at state-by-state changes in rural child poverty since the 2000 Census data provided rural child poverty data for the 1990 to 2000 period.

The data shown here are based on the official poverty measure as determined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. The official poverty measure consists of a series of income thresholds based on family size and composition. The 2005 poverty line was \$19,806 for a family of two adults and two children.

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Key results include:

- Rural child poverty rates increased between 2000 and 2005 in forty-one of the fifty states (data were not available in four states).
- In eighteen states, the increase in the rural child poverty rate was higher than the increase in the overall U.S. rural child poverty rates between 2000 and 2005.
- The state with the biggest percentage point increase in rural child poverty between 2000 and 2005 was Maine (+ 7.4 percentage points), followed by North Carolina (+ 6.7 percentage points), and Mississippi (+ 6.1 percentage points).
- Only six states showed a decrease in the rural child poverty rate, lead by Wyoming with a 4.2 percentage point decrease.
- Five states (Maine, North Carolina, Mississippi, Ohio and Indiana) experienced increases of 5 percentage points or more in the rural child poverty rate between 2000 and 2005.
- The rural child poverty rate in 2005 ranges from a low of just over 6 percent in Connecticut to a high of nearly 37 percent in Mississippi.
- Five states (Mississippi, Louisiana, New Mexico, Arizona, and Alabama) all had rural child poverty rates above 30 percent in 2005, which reflects the pervasive child poverty in the rural South.

Table 1. Child poverty in non-metropolitan areas¹ by state: 2000 and 2005

	2000 Census			2005 American Community Survey			Percentage point change in poverty rate from 2000 to 2005
	Population under age 18*	Population under age 18 below poverty	Percent of population under age 18 below poverty	Population under age 18*	Population under age 18 below poverty	Percent of population under age 18 below poverty	
U.S.	13,742,721	2,644,052	19.2	11,336,476	2,552,591	22.5	3.3
Alabama	332,749	87,110	26.2	305,855	92,525	30.3	4.1
Alaska	112,840	15,180	13.5	63,005	11,281	17.9	4.5
Arizona	167,417	49,343	29.5	171,709	52,966	30.8	1.4
Arkansas	331,938	81,708	24.6	267,433	78,474	29.3	4.7
California	282,892	62,521	22.1	176,776	36,399	20.6	-1.5
Colorado	167,164	24,106	14.4	150,298	23,964	15.9	1.5
Connecticut	34,966	2,336	6.7	67,820	4,270	6.3	-0.4
Delaware	34,417	5,273	15.3	36,240	6,595	18.2	2.9
District of Columbia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Florida	241,825	55,002	22.7	224,488	54,076	24.1	1.3
Georgia	651,551	150,267	23.1	420,562	115,467	27.5	4.4
Hawaii	84,919	14,387	16.9	89,365	14,304	16.0	-0.9
Idaho	220,968	34,694	15.7	125,259	24,631	19.7	4.0
Illinois	437,147	64,090	14.7	369,445	68,454	18.5	3.9
Indiana	428,843	49,635	11.6	343,648	58,494	17.0	5.4
Iowa	391,775	43,773	11.2	291,437	40,536	13.9	2.7
Kansas	297,659	42,243	14.2	234,632	41,680	17.8	3.6
Kentucky	498,717	127,783	25.6	400,978	116,053	28.9	3.3
Louisiana	296,626	92,517	31.2	281,915	88,837	31.5	0.3
Maine	188,129	28,321	15.1	108,732	24,410	22.4	7.4
Maryland	91,722	13,636	14.9	65,515	11,159	17.0	2.2
Massachusetts	54,791	5,654	10.3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Michigan	426,474	57,527	13.5	413,720	73,203	17.7	4.2
Minnesota	365,389	41,266	11.3	309,143	41,452	13.4	2.1
Mississippi	491,699	150,376	30.6	417,931	153,366	36.7	6.1
Missouri	437,843	88,848	20.3	339,942	83,511	24.6	4.3
Montana	150,910	30,806	20.4	131,011	27,475	21.0	0.6
Nebraska	209,175	28,292	13.5	176,518	27,184	15.4	1.9
Nevada	65,920	8,101	12.3	60,330	9,414	15.6	3.3
New Hampshire	115,543	10,126	8.8	102,684	10,408	10.1	1.4
New Jersey	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Mexico	229,836	68,609	29.9	172,450	53,217	30.9	1.0
New York	350,537	60,687	17.3	334,081	61,107	18.3	1.0
North Carolina	620,149	128,003	20.6	631,052	172,761	27.4	6.7
North Dakota	90,858	15,228	16.8	71,923	9,868	13.7	-3.0
Ohio	545,599	73,234	13.4	527,004	100,002	19.0	5.6
Oklahoma	336,924	77,161	22.9	291,120	72,117	24.8	1.9
Oregon	221,997	39,533	17.8	180,715	39,541	21.9	4.1
Pennsylvania	433,571	65,103	15.0	416,020	74,612	17.9	2.9
Rhode Island	13,897	1,668	12.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Carolina	304,110	72,489	23.8	247,714	65,833	26.6	2.7
South Dakota	130,019	26,332	20.3	100,750	19,833	19.7	-0.6
Tennessee	426,258	83,870	19.7	354,727	86,580	24.4	4.7
Texas	827,383	205,766	24.9	726,242	206,081	28.4	3.5
Utah	170,771	22,891	13.4	80,364	11,196	13.9	0.5
Vermont	105,163	13,244	12.6	86,217	12,912	15.0	2.4
Virginia	334,054	56,893	17.0	227,005	46,541	20.5	3.5
Washington	250,389	49,332	19.7	168,512	34,747	20.6	0.9
West Virginia	227,053	62,977	27.7	164,114	45,996	28.0	0.3
Wisconsin	423,362	43,238	10.2	329,572	41,164	12.5	2.3
Wyoming	88,783	12,873	14.5	75,480	7,801	10.3	-4.2

N/A = Not applicable.

1. Metropolitan areas are defined based on the the U.S. Census Bureau's definitions as of June 1999. The full list of counties and New England towns used to define metropolitan areas is available online at: <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/99mfips.txt>.

*for whom poverty is determined