



Overall Declines in Child Poverty Mask Relatively Stable Rates Across States

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Earlier this week, the U.S. Census Bureau published its official poverty estimates noting a decline in poverty across the population.¹ In this brief, we use additional Census data released today from the American Community Survey (ACS), the only regular source for estimating yearly child poverty rates at, and below, the state level. We examine child poverty rates across the United States by place type, region, and state (see Box 1).

Nationwide child poverty rates are still higher than they were in 2009, at the end of the Great Recession. Child poverty has declined to 2009 levels in rural areas only, and remains above pre-recession levels in all place types.

Child poverty decreased across the United States from 21.7 percent in 2014 to 20.7 percent in 2015 (see Table 1). Nationwide child poverty rates are still higher, however, than they were in 2009, at the end of the Great Recession. Child poverty has declined to 2009 levels in rural areas only, and remains above pre-recession levels in all place types (analyses not shown).

Child poverty declined across all place types over the past year, as shown in Table 1. It remains lowest in suburbs and highest in cities, though rural areas are not far behind. Regionally, child poverty rates were highest in the South and lowest in the Northeast; yet, Northeastern cities have higher child poverty than cities in any other region. Child poverty fell in thirteen states and only rose in Mississippi—the only state with a child poverty rate over 30 percent. New Hampshire child poverty remains among the lowest nationwide at 10.7 percent, a significant decline from last year. See Figure 1.

KEY FINDINGS



Between 2014 and 2015, child poverty declined nationwide across rural areas, suburbs, and cities.



As before, cities had the highest child poverty, followed closely by rural areas. Suburbs had the lowest rates.

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In thirteen states, child poverty declined since 2014; only Mississippi saw an increase since 2014, and the remaining thirty-six states and the District of Columbia had stable rates.

28%

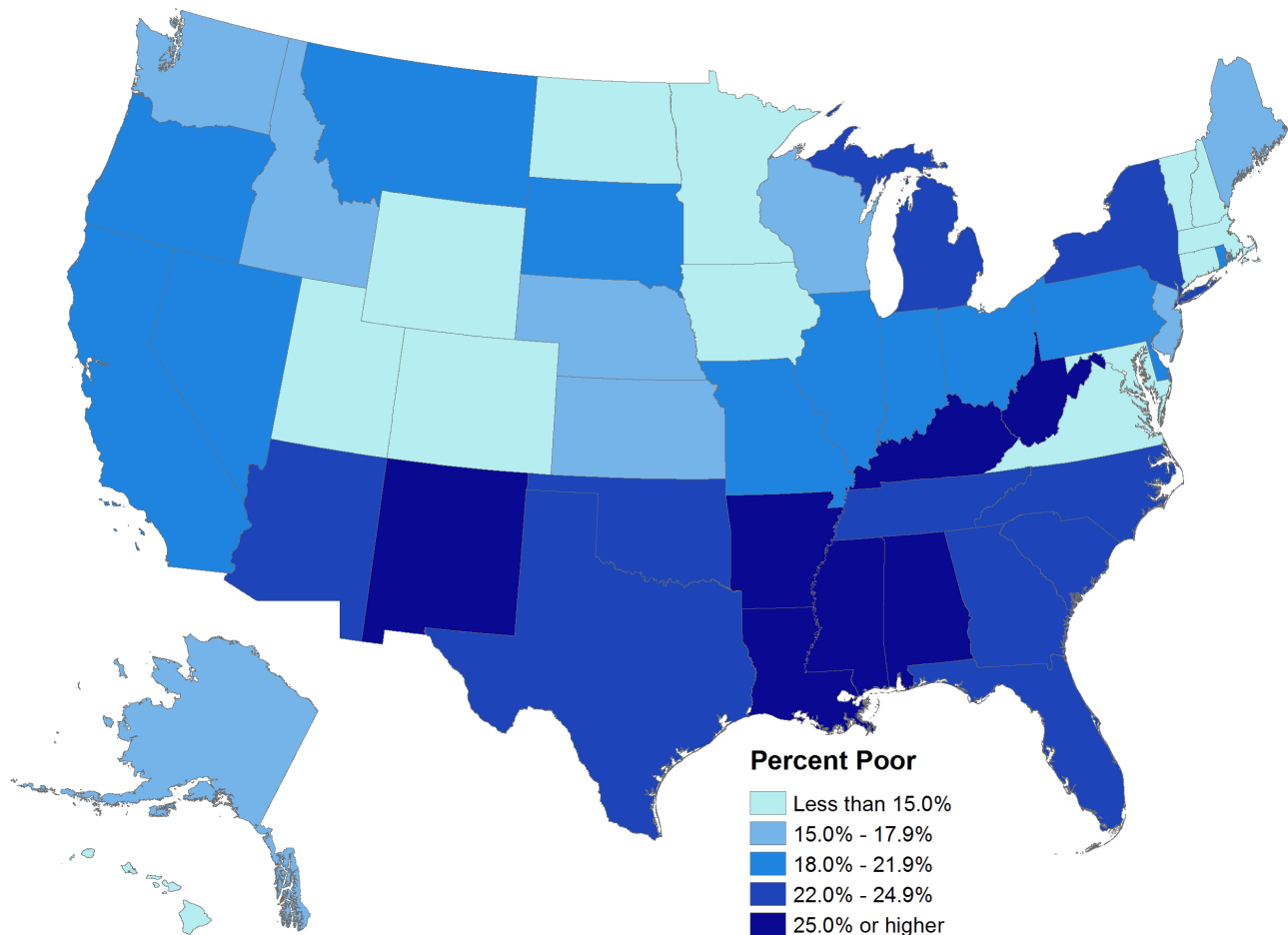
Mississippi, New Mexico, and Louisiana had exceptionally high child poverty rates, each over 28 percent.



New Hampshire child poverty was among the lowest nationwide, at 10.7 percent.

While these child poverty declines are promising and corroborated by results from the official poverty statistics published earlier this week, it is important to keep in mind that most states experienced no change between 2014 and 2015. Lower child poverty rates appear to be driven by higher median incomes over the past year.²

Although policy programs like refundable tax credits and nutrition programs play an important role in supporting children, official statistics do not consider these supports in their calculations. Policy makers, therefore, might consider using additional measures like the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) or additional calculations using the official poverty measure in assessing the efficacy of safety

FIGURE 1. PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY, 2015

Source: Carsey School of Public Policy analysis of 2015 ACS, U.S. Census Bureau

Box 1: Definition Of Place Type: Rural, Suburb, And City

Definitions of rural and urban vary among researchers and the sources of data they use. Data for this brief are derived from the American Community Survey, which identifies each household as being within one of several geographic components. As used here, “city” designates households in the principal city of a given metropolitan statistical area, and “suburban” includes those in metropolitan areas, but not within the principal city of that area. “Rural” consists of the addresses that are not within a metropolitan area.

net efforts. In calculating the SPM, the U.S. Census Bureau has identified an important role for refundable tax credits and nutrition support programs, albeit only for children these programs reach. SPM estimates that account for these programs, as well as living expenses, geographic differences in the cost of living, and other factors cannot be derived directly from the ACS, precluding reliable annual state and sub-state estimates. Thus, we rely on the official poverty measure to provide timely analyses of change in poverty at the state and sub-state level.

Data

This analysis is based on estimates from the 2009, 2014, and 2015 American Community Survey. Tables were produced by aggregating information from detailed tables available on American FactFinder (<http://factfinder.census.gov>). These estimates give perspective on child poverty, but they are based on survey data, so caution must be exercised in comparing across years or places because seemingly disparate estimates may fall within margins of error. All differences highlighted in this brief are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

TABLE 1. CHILD POVERTY BY STATE AND PLACE TYPE IN 2015

	ALL PLACES			RURAL			SUBURBAN			CITY		
	Percent Poor	+/-	Change Since 2014	Percent Poor	+/-	Change Since 2014	Percent Poor	+/-	Change Since 2014	Percent Poor	+/-	Change Since 2014
United States	20.7	0.1	-1.0	24.3	0.3	-0.8	16.0	0.1	-0.8	27.2	0.2	-1.3
Northeast	18.5	0.2	-0.4	20.0	0.8	0.4	12.2	0.3	-0.3	31.4	0.5	-0.8
Midwest	19.1	0.2	-1.0	19.3	0.4	-1.4	13.4	0.3	-0.5	29.4	0.5	-1.5
South	23.0	0.2	-1.0	29.8	0.5	-0.7	18.2	0.2	-0.8	28.2	0.4	-1.4
West	19.9	0.2	-1.3	22.1	0.6	-0.6	17.4	0.3	-1.4	22.6	0.4	-1.3
Alabama	26.6	0.9	-1.1	33.7	1.9	-0.9	20.4	1.2	-0.5	31.8	1.8	-2.4
Alaska	15.2	1.5	-0.6	20.8	1.9	1.9	10.0	2.6	0.2	13.8	2.7	-2.9
Arizona	24.7	0.7	-0.9	37.6	2.2	3.4	18.0	1.0	-2.0	29.7	1.1	-0.3
Arkansas	27.2	1.1	0.8	31.9	1.7	2.1	19.2	1.7	-1.2	30.6	2.8	1.3
California	21.2	0.3	-1.5	21.4	2.1	0.4	19.8	0.4	-1.8	22.8	0.4	-1.4
Colorado	14.7	0.7	-0.7	18.1	2.0	-1.0	10.7	0.9	-0.4	18.8	1.2	-1.1
Connecticut	14.5	0.9	-0.3	8.9	3.9	1.4	10.3	1.0	-0.1	25.0	1.9	-1.2
Delaware	19.4	2.2	1.7				16.6	2.4	1.2	37.9	6.9	2.6
District of Columbia	25.6	2.8	-0.4							25.6	2.8	-0.4
Florida	23.1	0.5	-0.7	31.6	2.7	-1.7	21.3	0.6	-0.5	26.8	1.2	-1.1
Georgia	24.5	0.6	-1.8	33.5	1.6	0.1	19.9	0.7	-2.2	33.2	1.6	-1.9
Hawaii	14.2	1.4	-0.6	26.9	4.3	6.6	10.5	1.6	-1.6	12.9	2.6	-3.7
Idaho	17.8	1.3	-1.0	19.9	2.1	-0.7	15.6	2.0	-2.0	19.1	3.2	0.4
Illinois	19.1	0.5	-1.1	21.0	1.2	0.5	14.6	0.7	-0.5	27.0	0.9	-2.6
Indiana	20.9	0.7	-0.7	18.0	1.3	-1.5	14.7	1.0	-0.1	31.5	1.4	-1.0
Iowa	14.8	0.8	-0.6	15.1	1.1	-0.9	10.0	1.5	1.4	19.6	1.9	-1.8
Kansas	17.2	0.9	-0.5	19.4	1.5	-0.4	10.9	1.3	-1.8	21.7	1.7	0.8
Kentucky	25.9	0.9	-0.3	30.8	1.4	-0.5	20.6	1.6	1.1	25.4	1.9	-2.0
Louisiana	28.4	1.0	0.5	33.4	2.2	-1.7	24.5	1.4	2.6	33.2	1.7	-2.3
Maine	17.4	1.5	-1.7	20.9	2.5	-0.5	12.3	1.9	-1.5	25.9	5.8	-5.1
Maryland	13.2	0.7	0.2	17.4	4.2	-4.6	10.0	0.7	-0.1	24.8	1.7	1.6
Massachusetts	14.8	0.7	-0.3	16.0	6.0	2.0	12.3	0.7	0.6	25.8	2.0	-4.0
Michigan	22.4	0.6	-0.2	22.2	1.1	-0.9	15.1	0.7	-0.1	39.1	1.4	0.4
Minnesota	13.1	0.6	-1.9	14.5	1.0	-3.1	9.1	0.7	-1.2	21.9	1.7	-2.2
Mississippi	31.3	1.2	1.9	35.9	1.7	0.2	19.6	2.0	3.0	44.7	3.9	7.1
Missouri	20.2	0.8	-0.9	25.3	1.4	-0.1	15.2	1.0	-0.5	27.7	1.8	-2.6
Montana	19.4	1.7	0.9	21.4	2.2	0.3	15.8	4.6	3.8	15.5	3.6	0.7
Nebraska	16.8	1.0	0.7	15.7	1.6	-0.9	10.2	1.8	2.1	22.2	1.9	1.2
Nevada	20.9	1.1	-1.1	15.1	3.1	-5.5	21.4	1.8	0.5	21.4	1.8	-1.7
New Hampshire	10.7	1.2	-2.4	15.0	2.3	-0.8	6.3	1.6	-2.4	15.1	4.1	-6.5
New Jersey	15.6	0.6	-0.3				12.6	0.6	-0.1	37.2	2.0	-1.0
New Mexico	28.6	1.3	-1.0	29.8	2.3	-1.1	29.0	2.5	-1.5	27.0	2.6	-0.4
New York	22.0	0.4	-0.6	23.6	1.5	2.4	12.2	0.6	-0.7	30.6	0.7	-1.0
North Carolina	23.5	0.6	-0.8	30.4	1.4	-1.8	18.3	0.9	-2.0	26.8	1.2	1.8
North Dakota	12.1	1.5	-2.7	12.7	1.9	-1.4	6.7	1.8	-4.3	14.4	3.9	-3.8
Ohio	21.3	0.5	-1.7	21.4	1.1	-3.2	14.3	0.6	-0.8	39.2	1.3	-2.2
Oklahoma	22.2	0.7	-0.2	23.4	1.1	-0.5	17.0	1.1	0.5	27.1	1.7	-0.9
Oregon	20.3	1.0	-1.4	26.0	2.5	-3.1	18.3	1.5	-1.0	20.4	1.9	-1.2
Pennsylvania	19.4	0.5	0.0	21.3	1.2	0.2	12.6	0.5	-0.4	38.5	1.4	1.4
Rhode Island	19.4	2.0	-0.4				15.9	2.3	-2.6	29.0	4.5	5.2
South Carolina	24.0	0.9	-3.0	31.6	2.2	-6.1	21.9	1.1	-1.7	26.0	2.2	-5.9
South Dakota	18.1	1.6	0.1	21.7	1.9	-1.2	9.3	2.9	3.0	18.4	3.8	0.8
Tennessee	24.2	0.7	-2.0	27.2	1.5	-0.9	16.5	1.1	-0.9	31.8	1.4	-4.0
Texas	23.0	0.4	-1.6	25.5	1.2	-0.8	17.7	0.6	-1.2	27.8	0.6	-2.2
Utah	12.9	0.8	-0.4	17.5	2.3	1.0	9.7	0.9	-0.9	23.5	2.5	1.2
Vermont	13.3	1.8	-2.6	13.8	2.1	-4.6	11.5	3.7	3.4			
Virginia	14.8	0.6	-1.0	26.9	2.1	2.3	10.2	0.7	-1.8	21.7	1.3	-0.5
Washington	15.5	0.6	-2.0	19.0	1.9	-4.3	13.4	0.8	-1.0	18.2	1.3	-3.0
West Virginia	25.2	1.6	0.4	27.1	2.3	0.6	22.5	2.2	1.6	29.6	4.6	-4.5
Wisconsin	16.4	0.6	-2.1	16.1	1.0	-2.5	9.3	0.8	-1.4	27.4	1.4	-2.7
Wyoming	13.2	2.1	0.4	11.0	1.9	-2.1				19.5	6.5	6.4

Note: Change is displayed in percentage points and based on unrounded percentages. Results may differ slightly from those that would be obtained using rounded figures. Bold font indicates a statistically significant change ($p < 0.05$). Margins of error (“+/-”) refer to the 95 percent confidence interval around the 2015 estimated percent poor.

Source: American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, 2014 and 2015.

Endnotes

1. See Bernadette D. Proctor, Jessica L. Semega, and Melissa A. Kollar, 2016, “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015.” <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256.html>.
2. Proctor, Semega, and Kollar, 2016.

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