

**NEWS RELEASE**

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***Geographies of Opportunity: Ranking Well-Being By Congressional District* Reveals California Residents On Top And Bottom, With The Largest Inequality Gaps Within Rather Than Between States**

*Update to the American Human Development Index measures health, education, and earnings, empowering public and private sectors to identify priorities and track progress*

NEW YORK — [Measure of America](http://www.measureofamerica.org/) today released [*Geographies of Opportunity: Ranking Well-Being by Congressional District*](http://www.measureofamerica.org/congressional-districts-2015/). It examines the country’s 435 congressional districts and Washington, DC, using the American Human Development (HD) Index, a measure that combines official government health, education, and income data. The report reveals astonishing gaps in human development within states, often between districts just a few miles apart.

California’s 18th District, home to Silicon Valley, tops the rankings, and its 21st District, which includes parts of Bakersfield and the Central Valley, rounds out the bottom. Compared to those in the country’s lowest-ranking districts, people in the highest-ranking districts live up to eleven years longer, are about eight times as likely to have bachelor’s degrees, and earn three times as much.

The top ten congressional districts are all in the greater metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, New York City, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. The bottom ten districts disproportionately comprise struggling rural and urban areas in the South.

“While popular metrics like GDP measure how the economy is doing, the American HD Index measures how people are doing, which offers a very different—and much more accurate—perspective on opportunity and well-being nationwide,” said Sarah Burd-Sharps, co-director of Measure of America. “These huge gaps in well-being are a critical issue for all of us because leaving people behind hurts America’s competitiveness, is extremely costly for society as a whole, and pushes the American dream out of reach for too many.”

“The findings enable policymakers, researchers, businesses, philanthropists, and advocates to identify areas of need and channel resources toward building the capabilities people need to seize opportunities and live to their full potential,” added Kristen Lewis, co-director of Measure of America. “Only then can the United States thrive in today’s global knowledge economy.”

*Geographies of Opportunity* provides an agenda for action to improve American HD Index scores for the country as a whole, including tackling the “fatal four” health risks that are the biggest contributors to preventable death in the United States—smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity, and excessive drinking; making high-quality preschool programs universal, increasing high school graduation rates, creating more robust pathways to higher education, and supporting young people in completing their degrees; and helping more people bypass or exit low-paying sectors through more education while also ensuring that all jobs afford workers decent wages, dignity, and economic security.

**AMONG THE KEY FINDINGS:**

OVERALL

* Among large states, California is the most unequal; among medium-sized states, Missouri has the largest gap between its highest- and lowest-scoring districts; and for small states, New Mexico contains the biggest disparities.
* In the 22 congressional districts where almost all residents (98 percent or more) are native-born, American HD Index scores are all below the national average.

HEALTH

* Life expectancy ranges from just under 84 years in California District 19 (San Jose and part of Santa Clara County) to just under 73 years in Kentucky District 5 (rural southeastern Kentucky). Put another way, residents of the San Jose area can expect to live longer than the people of the longest-lived country, Japan (83.1 years) while residents of southeastern Kentucky can expect to live about as long as residents of Gaza and the West Bank (73.0 years).
* African Americans fare particularly poorly on health indicators. Whites outlive blacks by 3.6 years, and African American women outlive their male counterparts by over half a decade, the largest gender gap of any racial or ethnic group in life expectancy.
* The higher the proportion of foreign-born residents in a congressional district, the longer the district’s average life expectancy.

EDUCATION

* Topping the charts in education are districts from the San Francisco, Boston, New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC, metro areas.
* In 23 districts, less than one-third of 3- and 4-year olds are enrolled in preschool, despite a large body of research highlighting the importance of preschool education in terms of future educational, professional, and social outcomes. These districts are found chiefly in Texas, California, Arizona, Washington, Nevada, and West Virginia.

STANDARD OF LIVING/INCOME

* Median personal earnings by congressional district range from about $20,000 in the highly diverse Los Angeles neighborhoods of California District 34 to more than triple that sum (nearly $61,000) in New York District 12 (Manhattan’s East Side and parts of Brooklyn and Queens).
* The distribution of earnings between these two extremes is heavily skewed toward the lower end; in over half of all districts (222 out of 436), median personal earnings fall between $20,000 and $30,000.
* Pockets of high and low earnings are found in every part of the country. The greatest earnings inequality is in the Middle Atlantic region—home to both the storied glamour of the top-earning Upper East Side of Manhattan and, just five subway stops away, the entrenched poverty of the South Bronx neighborhoods that make up District 15, which has the fourth-lowest earnings in the nation.

**About Measure of America and the American Human Development Index**

An initiative of the **Social Science Research Council,** [Measure of America](http://www.measureofamerica.org/) provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding the distribution of well-being and opportunity in America and stimulating fact-based dialogue about issues we all care about: health, education, and living standards.

**About the Authors**

**Sarah Burd-Sharps is Co-Director of Measure of America and co-author of two volumes of The Measure of America (Columbia University Press, 2008 and NYU Press, 2010) as well as state and county-level well-being reports for California, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Marin and Sonoma Counties. Prior to this position, Sarah worked for the United Nations for over two decades, with a focus on economic empowerment, democratic, governance, and gender equity. Before she left the UN in 2007 to found Measure of America, she was Deputy Director of the UN Development Program’s Human Development Report Office, where she worked on three global Human Development Reports (Oxford University Press) and led the UN’s work on national human development reports on every continent. Sarah has worked in 14 African countries and is fluent in French and proficient in Spanish and Chinese. Sarah contributes regularly to media outlets, with articles published in the New York Times, The Nation, Huffington Post, Stanford Social Innovation Review and more, and research cited by Forbes, The Atlantic, Washington Post, NPR, Slate, the Freakonomics blog, and many more. She received a master’s degree in international affairs from Columbia University.**

**Kristen Lewis is Co-Director of Measure of America and co-author of two volumes of *The Measure of America* (Columbia University Press, 2008 and NYU Press, 2010) as well as well-being reports for California, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Marin and Sonoma Counties. Before founding Measure of America with co-director Sarah Burd-Sharps in 2007, Kristen was senior policy advisor to the water and sanitation task force of the UN Millennium Project, led by Jeffery Sachs, and was co-author of the task force report, *Health, Dignity and Development: What will it take?* (Earthscan, 2005). She previously worked at the United Nations for many years, first with UNIFEM and then as in UNDP’s policy bureau, and has served as a consultant on gender equality issues for numerous international development organizations, including UNICEF and UNFPA. Kristen contributes regularly to media outlets, with articles published in the The Nation, Huffington Post, and Stanford Social Innovation Review, among others, research cited by The New York Times, Forbes, The Atlantic, Washington Post, NPR, Slate, and the Freakonomics blog, and frequent newspaper and radio interviews. She received a master’s degree in international affairs from Columbia University.**

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