

# Key Findings

*A Portrait of Louisiana 2020* explores well-being in Louisiana through the framework of human development, taking an in-depth look at three key components of a life of freedom, choice, and opportunity: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. Measure of America uses official government data on health, education, and earnings to calculate the American Human Development Index (HDI), a 0-to-10 scale based on the United Nations' Human Development Index, the global gold standard for measuring well-being. This simple measure allows for comparison of well-being and access to opportunity across Louisiana's different demographic groups and geographies.

Of course, the many facets of human well-being can't be reduced to numbers on a scale. The index cannot and does not intend to capture everything that makes life in Louisiana unique and worthwhile—its vibrant culture, its rich history, its diverse and deep-rooted communities. What the index does provide is a starting point for uncovering gaps in well-being and opportunity and pinpointing their underlying causes, opening a path to addressing disparities that are often decades or even centuries in the making.

When Measure of America published its first human development report on Louisiana in 2009, the state was still reeling from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Today, Louisianans are again facing crisis, including both a record-breaking hurricane season and the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak, and once again, the communities that were already struggling before disaster struck have been hardest hit. The trajectories of these and other disasters are not inevitable. The pandemic throws into sharp relief the ways that people's life chances are radically shaped by race and place. Ensuring that every Louisianan has adequate resources to prepare for, weather, and recover from crises of various sorts is essential.

*A Portrait of Louisiana 2020* presents HDI scores for the state as a whole as well as by gender, by race and ethnicity, by parish, by public use microdata area, and, in some cases, by census tract. In addition to the index, this report has a special focus on children and youth and includes a child and youth well-being dashboard that brings together available data on children and young people in a number of key areas. Based on our findings and consultations with stakeholders, this report also offers targeted recommendations for improving well-being as well as for closing the gaps between different groups.

Improving human development in Louisiana will require confronting two interlinked barriers to well-being, incarceration and youth disconnection, both of which can have detrimental effects on each dimension of the index, disrupting education, damaging job prospects, and harming health both in the short term and over the course of a lifetime. Louisiana has the country's highest incarceration rate, and fourth-highest disconnection rate, which measures the share of young people ages 16–24 who are neither working nor in school.

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## Human Development in Louisiana

### KEY FINDINGS: AMERICAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

- Louisiana scores 4.35 out of 10 on the American Human Development Index, nearly a full point below the United States overall, 5.24. All but one of the state's parishes, as well as three out of its four major racial and ethnic groups, score lower than the US average. Still, Louisiana has made heartening progress since its 2007 HDI score of 3.92, especially in the realm of education: the share of adults without high school diplomas dropped from 20.6 percent to 14.0 percent, and the share of adults with bachelor's degrees increased from 20.1 percent to 24.3 percent.
- Unlike in the US overall, women in Louisiana score slightly lower on the American Human Development Index than their male counterparts. This is due to the state's wide gender earnings gap—women earn \$16,000 less than men, a gap \$5,000 larger than in the United States as a whole.
- Asian Louisianans have the highest HDI score (6.29), followed by whites (5.15) and Latinos (4.62). Black Louisianans face the greatest challenges to well-being, with a score of 2.93, as well as both the lowest life expectancy and the lowest median earnings of the four major racial and ethnic groups. Black Louisianans are the only racial group in which women outscore men on the HDI. They also have the largest gender well-being gap of any group.
- East Carroll Parish scores lowest in the state, 1.49, compared to a high of 5.35 in Ascension Parish. The ten highest-scoring parishes are home to medium-to-large cities or their suburbs, whereas the ten lowest-scoring parishes are all made up of small towns and rural areas.
- The chances of a Louisiana resident being incarcerated are closely connected to the level of human development in their community. The average rate of prison admissions is nearly twice as high in the lowest-scoring parishes as in the highest-scoring ones (about 750 per 100,000 in parishes with HDI scores under 2.50, compared with about 420 per 100,000 in parishes scoring 4.50 and above).
- Louisiana has the fourth-highest youth disconnection rate in the United States—16.4 percent as compared to the national average of 11.2 percent. Black youth are nearly twice as likely to be disconnected as white youth, 22.3 percent and 12.2 percent, respectively, and Black young men are 1.5 times as likely to be disconnected as Black young women.

# Health

## KEY FINDINGS: A LONG AND HEALTHY LIFE

- A child born in Louisiana today can expect to live for 76.0 years, 2.6 years less than the average US life expectancy. This average masks vast health disparities depending on race and ethnicity, however. The life expectancies of Louisiana's Asian and Black residents are more than a decade apart: 87.5 years and 73.4 years, respectively. Latinos and whites fall between the two; Latinos are the second-longest-lived group (84.0 years) and whites are the third (76.8 years).
- Women in Louisiana can expect to live 78.9 years, six years longer than their male counterparts (73.1 years). Factoring in race and ethnicity, male-female life expectancy gaps range from about five years for whites and Latinos to a 7.3-year difference between Black men and women, driven by the particularly low life expectancy of Black men, 69.5 years.
- Black men in Louisiana live two years less than Black men in the country as a whole. Contributing to these disparities are the high rates of firearm homicide and infant mortality in Louisiana. The Black infant mortality rate, 10.5 infants per one thousand live births, is more than twice the rate for white Louisianans, and the rate is even higher for Black baby boys, 12.8 per one thousand live births.
- Residents of Ascension Parish have the highest life expectancy (76.9 years), and residents of Catahoula Parish have the lowest (69.3 years). The five parishes with the longest life expectancies all have a majority of white residents.
- As life expectancy decreases, the poverty rate tends to increase; the five parishes with the shortest life expectancies—LaSalle, Caldwell, East Carroll, West Carroll, and Catahoula—all have poverty rates above 20 percent.



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## Education

### KEY FINDINGS: ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE

- Louisiana scores 4.62 out of 10 on the Education Index, which measures school enrollment rates for the population ages 3 to 24 and high school, bachelor's, and graduate degree attainment rates for adults over 25. Louisiana has made considerable advances over the last decade but is still behind the United States as a whole on many key educational indicators. The greatest gap is in postsecondary education; a smaller share of adults ages 25 and older in Louisiana have at least a bachelor's degree than in the country as a whole, 24.3 percent compared to 32.6 percent.
- Women have higher Education Index scores than men, on average, in Louisiana and in the country as a whole. This is also true in all of Louisiana's major racial and ethnic group except Asians.
- Education Index scores range from 1.28 in East Carroll Parish to 5.91 in Lincoln Parish. Orleans Parish comes in second at 5.79, followed by St. Tammany (5.73), East Baton Rouge (5.58), and Lafayette (5.27). With the exception of St. Tammany, the parishes with the highest scores are home to major colleges and universities.
- The parishes that include major urban centers exhibit more striking racial disparities in educational attainment and enrollment than those found in the state as a whole. The gap between Black and white Education Index scores in Louisiana overall is 1.34, but 2.76 in East Baton Rouge Parish and 4.29 in Orleans Parish.
- Louisiana is ahead of the country overall in preschool enrollment at 51.3 percent, compared to the national rate (47.9 percent). Black children are more likely to be enrolled in preschool than white children (61.1 percent vs. 47.0 percent), likely reflecting the success of Head Start and other publicly funded preschool programs in low-income Black communities.

# Earnings

## KEY FINDINGS: A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING



Black workers earn less than their white counterparts in every parish in Louisiana.

- Median personal earnings for Louisiana workers 16 and over are \$31,000, \$4,000 less than the US median of \$35,000. White workers out-earn workers from other racial and ethnic groups by a wide margin, driven largely by the high earnings of white men. Asian, Latino, and Black workers have similar earnings (\$26,457, \$25,422, and \$22,430, respectively), all within \$4,000 of each other and at least \$12,000 less than white workers.
- Men earn more than women in each racial and ethnic group, but the gender gap varies significantly. The earnings gap between Black men and women is the smallest—women earn \$0.82 for every dollar men earn, due more to the comparatively low earnings of Black men relative to men of other racial and ethnic groups.
- Median personal earnings range from \$19,470 in Claiborne Parish to \$43,678 in Ascension Parish, a more than twofold difference. The highest-earning parishes are clustered in the southeast portion of the state.
- The percentage of children living in households below the poverty line, also known as the child poverty rate, ranges from a low of 12 percent in Cameron Parish to a high of 73 percent in East Carroll Parish. Only five parishes—Cameron, St. Tammany, Livingston, Ascension, and St. Charles—have child poverty rates below the US average of 18 percent.
- Black workers earn less than their white counterparts in every parish in Louisiana. The gap ranges from \$5,558 in Vernon Parish to \$21,412 in West Feliciana Parish.

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Every Louisianan deserves an equal chance at a freely chosen life of value. Our findings suggest that for a host of reasons—residential segregation, poverty, health inequities, slavery’s enduring legacy, persisting racial and gender discrimination, among others—many of Louisiana’s residents are deprived of that opportunity. The good news is that real progress is possible: this report details various policies—some of which the state has already put in place—to expand opportunity and reduce inequalities in health, education, and income, helping Louisiana withstand the current crisis and build a better future for all of its residents.