

Poverty: 2010 and 2011

American Community Survey Briefs

By Alemayehu Bishaw
Issued September 2012
ACSB/11-01

INTRODUCTION

The poverty rate is one of several socioeconomic indicators used by policy makers to evaluate economic conditions. It measures the percentage of people whose income fell below the poverty threshold. Federal and state governments use such estimates to allocate funds to local communities. Local communities use these estimates to identify the number of individuals or families eligible for various programs.

This report, using income and household relationship data from the 1-year 2010 and 2011 American Community Surveys (ACS), compares poverty rates for the nation, states, and large metropolitan statistical areas. The report also summarizes the distribution of people by income-to-poverty ratios for states and the District of Columbia.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2011, about 15.9 percent of the U.S. population had income below the poverty level, an increase from 15.3 percent in 2010. The number of people in poverty increased from 46.2 million to 48.5 million during the same time period.
- This was the fourth consecutive increase in the poverty rate, but the percentage point increase between 2010 and 2011 was smaller than the change between 2008 and 2009, and between 2009 and 2010.
- The number and percentage of people in poverty increased in 17 states between 2010 and 2011.

For 10 states, this was the third consecutive annual increase.

- Between 2010 and 2011, both the percentage and number of people in poverty in Vermont declined. In 27 states and the District of Columbia, there was no change in either the number of people in poverty or the poverty rate.
- The percentage of people in the United States with income below 125 percent of their poverty threshold increased from 20.1 percent to 20.8 percent between 2010 and 2011. During the same time period, the percentage of people with income below 50 percent of their poverty threshold increased from 6.8 percent to 7.1 percent.
- Among large metropolitan areas, poverty rates ranged from 8.3 percent to 37.7 percent in the 2011 ACS.

The estimates contained in this report are mostly based on the 2010 and 2011 ACS. The ACS is conducted every month with income data collected for the 12 months preceding the interview. Since the survey is continuous, adjacent ACS years have income reference months in common. Therefore, comparing the 2010 ACS with the 2011 ACS is not an exact comparison of the economic conditions in 2010 with those in 2011, and comparisons should be interpreted with care.¹ For more information on the ACS sample design and other topics visit www.census.gov/acs/www.

¹ For a discussion of this and related issues see Hogan, Howard, "Measuring Population Change Using the American Community Survey," in *Applied Demography in the 21st Century*, eds. Steven H. Murdock and David A. Swanson, Springer, Netherlands, 2008.

POVERTY

According to 2011 ACS, about 48.5 million people or 15.9 percent of the U.S. population had income below their respective poverty level. Between 2010 and 2011, the number of people with income below the poverty level increased by 2.2 million, while the poverty rate increased by 0.6 percentage points. This was the fourth consecutive increase in the poverty rate, but the percentage point increase was smaller than the increases between 2008 and 2009 and between 2009 and 2010, which were 1.1 percentage points and 1.0 percentage point, respectively (see Figure 1).²

Table 1 shows the estimated number and percentage of people in poverty by state in 2010 and 2011. The table also presents the changes in the number and percentage of people in poverty.

According to the 2011 ACS, the poverty rates for New Hampshire (8.8 percent), Maryland (10.1 percent), New Jersey (10.4 percent), and Alaska (10.5 percent) were among the lowest in the country, while the rates for New Mexico (21.5 percent) and Mississippi (22.6 percent) were the highest.³

Among all the states and the District of Columbia, New Hampshire (8.8 percent), Maryland (10.1 percent), and New Jersey (10.4 percent) were the three states with a 2011 poverty

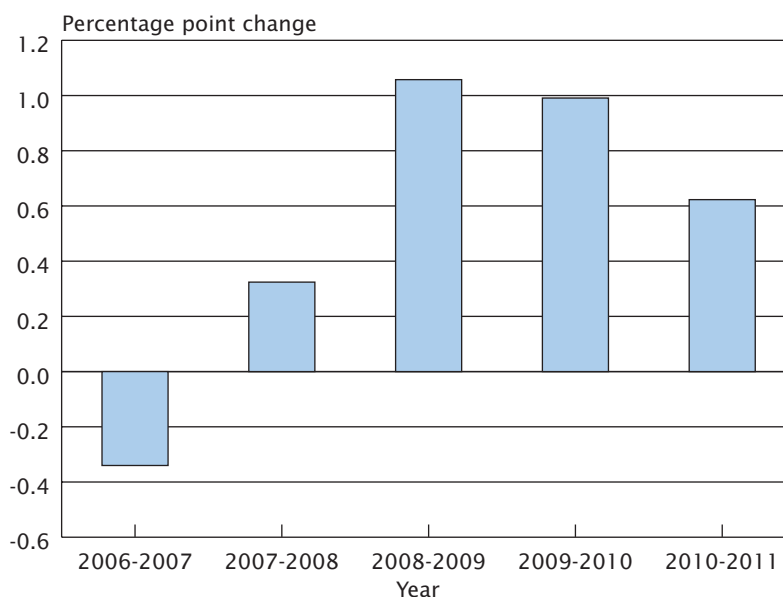
² The poverty rate increases between 2008 and 2009 and between 2009 and 2010 are not statistically different from each other.

³ The poverty rates for Maryland (10.1 percent), New Jersey (10.4 percent), and Alaska (10.5 percent) were not statistically different from each other, while the poverty rates for New Jersey and Alaska were not statistically different from the poverty rates for Connecticut (10.9 percent) and Wyoming (11.3 percent). The poverty rate for Mississippi (22.6 percent) was not statistically different from the poverty rate for New Mexico (21.5 percent).

Figure 1.

Year to Year Percentage Point Change in Poverty Rate: 2006–2011

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2011 American Community Survey.

rate lower than 11 percent.⁴ The number of states with poverty rates greater than 16 percent increased from 13 states in 2009 to 17 states in 2010 to 20 states in 2011.⁵

In 2011, the poverty rate for Puerto Rico was 45.6 percent, which was not statistically different from its rate of 45.0 percent in 2010.

⁴ In the 2010 ACS, five states (New Hampshire, Maryland, Alaska, Connecticut, and New Jersey) had poverty rates less than 11 percent.

⁵ In 2009, 13 states had a poverty rate greater than 16 percent including the District of Columbia, Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia. In 2010, 17 states had a poverty rate greater than 16 percent: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The number grew in 2011 to 20 states: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

Figure 2 displays the range of poverty rates across the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico using the 2011 ACS and the Puerto Rico Community Survey. According to the figure, most of states in the South and West regions had higher poverty rates, while states in the Northeast and Midwest had lower poverty rates.

As shown in Table 1 and Figure 3, 17 states experienced an increase in both the number and percentage of people in poverty between 2010 and 2011. For 10 states, this was the third consecutive increase.⁶ For 27 states and the District of Columbia, the changes in the number and percentage of people in poverty were not statistically significant. Only Vermont experienced declines in both the number and percentage of people in poverty during the same time period.

⁶ Bishaw, "Poverty: 2009 and 2010," *American Community Survey Briefs*, U.S. Census Bureau, October 2011.

Table 1.

Number and Percentage of People in Poverty in the Past 12 Months by State and Puerto Rico: 2010 and 2011

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf)

State	Below poverty in 2010				Below poverty in 2011				Change in poverty (2011 less 2010)			
	Number ¹	Margin of error ² (±)	Percentage ¹	Margin of error ² (±)	Number ¹	Margin of error ² (±)	Percentage ¹	Margin of error ² (±)	Number ¹	Margin of error ² (±)	Percentage ¹	Margin of error ² (±)
United States . . .	46,215,956	240,306	15.3	0.1	48,452,035	234,166	15.9	0.1	*2,236,079	335,530	*0.6	0.1
Alabama	888,290	22,673	19.0	0.5	892,483	23,804	19.0	0.5	4,193	32,874	—	0.7
Alaska	69,279	6,120	9.9	0.9	73,905	5,839	10.5	0.8	4,626	8,459	0.5	1.2
Arizona	1,094,249	33,633	17.4	0.5	1,203,501	38,097	19.0	0.6	*109,252	50,818	*1.5	0.8
Arkansas	534,898	16,599	18.8	0.6	555,876	17,602	19.5	0.6	20,978	24,194	0.6	0.8
California	5,783,043	74,336	15.8	0.2	6,118,803	71,852	16.6	0.2	*335,760	103,385	*0.8	0.3
Colorado	659,786	23,009	13.4	0.5	674,195	21,621	13.5	0.4	14,409	31,573	0.1	0.6
Connecticut	350,145	15,842	10.1	0.5	377,856	17,034	10.9	0.5	*27,711	23,263	*0.8	0.7
Delaware	103,427	8,098	11.8	0.9	104,831	8,149	11.9	0.9	1,404	11,489	0.1	1.3
District of Columbia	109,423	7,577	19.2	1.3	109,363	8,006	18.7	1.4	—60	11,023	—0.5	1.9
Florida	3,047,343	41,603	16.5	0.2	3,173,456	53,070	17.0	0.3	*126,113	67,433	*0.5	0.4
Georgia	1,688,932	36,955	17.9	0.4	1,827,743	40,709	19.1	0.4	*138,811	54,981	*1.3	0.6
Hawaii	142,185	9,627	10.7	0.7	161,290	12,291	12.0	0.9	*19,105	15,612	*1.3	1.2
Idaho	242,272	10,788	15.7	0.7	255,027	13,229	16.5	0.9	12,755	17,070	0.7	1.1
Illinois	1,731,711	31,915	13.8	0.3	1,879,965	34,757	15.0	0.3	*148,254	47,187	*1.2	0.4
Indiana	962,775	25,003	15.3	0.4	1,011,017	27,152	16.0	0.4	*48,242	36,911	*0.7	0.6
Iowa	370,507	13,924	12.6	0.5	378,864	12,247	12.8	0.4	8,357	18,544	0.2	0.6
Kansas	377,530	15,414	13.6	0.6	383,467	13,367	13.8	0.5	5,937	20,403	0.2	0.7
Kentucky	800,226	20,902	19.0	0.5	811,277	24,336	19.1	0.6	11,051	32,080	0.2	0.8
Louisiana	825,144	21,101	18.7	0.5	908,375	21,304	20.4	0.5	*83,231	29,985	*1.7	0.7
Maine	167,242	7,702	12.9	0.6	182,448	8,462	14.1	0.7	*15,206	11,442	*1.2	0.9
Maryland	557,140	21,050	9.9	0.4	571,887	19,719	10.1	0.3	14,747	28,844	0.2	0.5
Massachusetts	725,143	21,471	11.4	0.3	738,514	23,459	11.6	0.4	13,371	31,802	0.1	0.5
Michigan	1,618,257	30,260	16.8	0.3	1,693,294	28,336	17.5	0.3	*75,037	41,456	*0.8	0.4
Minnesota	599,516	15,022	11.6	0.3	621,970	17,360	11.9	0.3	22,454	22,957	0.4	0.4
Mississippi	643,883	22,452	22.4	0.8	650,524	20,706	22.6	0.7	6,641	30,542	0.2	1.1
Missouri	888,570	21,761	15.3	0.4	920,118	22,609	15.8	0.4	*31,548	31,380	0.5	0.5
Montana	140,969	9,640	14.6	1.0	144,054	8,962	14.8	0.9	3,085	13,162	0.2	1.4
Nebraska	229,923	11,823	12.9	0.7	234,710	10,211	13.1	0.6	4,787	15,621	0.2	0.9
Nevada	398,027	20,092	14.9	0.8	426,741	20,552	15.9	0.8	28,714	28,742	1.0	1.1
New Hampshire	105,786	8,064	8.3	0.6	112,715	8,386	8.8	0.7	6,929	11,634	0.5	0.9
New Jersey	884,789	24,939	10.3	0.3	897,376	24,537	10.4	0.3	12,587	34,986	0.1	0.4
New Mexico	413,851	19,768	20.4	1.0	439,914	17,336	21.5	0.8	26,063	26,293	1.1	1.3
New York	2,821,470	46,759	14.9	0.2	3,027,342	42,152	16.0	0.2	*205,872	62,953	*1.0	0.3
North Carolina	1,627,602	29,606	17.5	0.3	1,680,963	36,728	17.9	0.4	*53,361	47,175	0.4	0.5
North Dakota	84,895	5,668	13.0	0.9	80,882	5,567	12.2	0.8	—4,013	7,945	—0.8	1.2
Ohio	1,779,032	32,237	15.8	0.3	1,845,800	35,067	16.4	0.3	*66,768	47,633	*0.6	0.4
Oklahoma	616,610	15,751	16.9	0.4	633,298	18,126	17.2	0.5	16,688	24,014	0.3	0.7
Oregon	596,408	17,283	15.8	0.5	662,283	20,527	17.5	0.5	*65,875	26,834	*1.6	0.7
Pennsylvania	1,648,184	29,243	13.4	0.2	1,695,996	36,138	13.8	0.3	*47,812	46,488	0.4	0.4
Rhode Island	142,188	9,018	14.0	0.9	148,819	8,909	14.7	0.9	6,631	12,676	0.7	1.3
South Carolina	815,755	22,461	18.2	0.5	856,938	22,008	18.9	0.5	*41,183	31,446	*0.7	0.7
South Dakota	113,760	7,599	14.4	1.0	110,681	6,608	13.9	0.8	—3,079	10,070	—0.5	1.3
Tennessee	1,095,466	29,085	17.7	0.5	1,142,299	29,429	18.3	0.5	*46,833	41,377	0.6	0.7
Texas	4,414,481	53,320	17.9	0.2	4,628,758	63,020	18.5	0.3	*214,277	82,550	*0.6	0.3
Utah	359,242	14,693	13.2	0.5	374,859	19,403	13.5	0.7	15,617	24,338	0.4	0.9
Vermont	76,352	5,250	12.7	0.9	69,075	4,730	11.5	0.8	*—7,277	7,066	*—1.2	1.2
Virginia	861,969	22,046	11.1	0.3	905,914	25,152	11.5	0.3	*43,945	33,446	*0.5	0.4
Washington	888,718	27,270	13.4	0.4	929,258	23,388	13.9	0.4	*40,540	35,925	0.5	0.5
West Virginia	326,507	13,020	18.1	0.7	334,885	13,958	18.6	0.8	8,378	19,088	0.4	1.1
Wisconsin	731,479	17,834	13.2	0.3	725,797	20,946	13.1	0.4	—5,682	27,510	—0.1	0.5
Wyoming	61,577	6,480	11.2	1.2	62,629	5,598	11.3	1.0	1,052	8,563	0.1	1.6
Puerto Rico	1,659,792	21,557	45.0	0.6	1,673,610	27,123	45.6	0.7	13,818	34,646	0.5	0.9

— Represents or rounds to zero.

* Statistically different from zero at the 90 percent confidence level.

¹ Poverty status is determined for individuals in housing units and noninstitutional group quarters. The poverty universe excludes children under age 15 who are not related to the householder, people living in institutional group quarters, and people living in college dormitories or military barracks.

² Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. This number when added to or subtracted from the estimate forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

Note: The number and percentage of people in poverty for the United States does not include Puerto Rico.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 and 2011 American Community Survey and 2010 and 2011 Puerto Rico Community Survey.

How Poverty Is Measured

Poverty status is determined by comparing annual income to a set of dollar values called poverty thresholds that vary by family size, number of children, and the age of the householder. If a family's before-tax money income is less than the dollar value of their threshold, then that family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty. For people not living in families, poverty status is determined by comparing the individual's income to his or her poverty threshold.

The poverty thresholds are updated annually to allow for changes in the cost of living using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). They do not vary geographically.

The ACS is a continuous survey and people respond throughout the year. Since income is reported for the previous 12 months, the appropriate poverty threshold for each family is determined by multiplying the base-year poverty threshold (1982) by the average of monthly CPI values for the 12 months preceding the survey month.

For more information see "How Poverty Is Calculated in the ACS" at www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/methods/definitions.html.

DEPTH OF POVERTY

The poverty rate is an estimate of the proportion of people with family or personal income below their poverty threshold. The income-to-poverty ratio gauges how close a family's income is to their poverty threshold, measuring the depth of poverty for those with income below their threshold, and the proximity to poverty for those with income above their threshold.

In this report, the income-to-poverty ratio is reported as a percentage. For example, an income-to-poverty ratio of 200 percent indicates a family or individual with income equal to twice their poverty threshold, while an income-to-poverty ratio of 50 percent identifies a family or individual with income equal to one-half of their poverty threshold. Families and individuals who are identified as in poverty have an income-to-poverty ratio of less than 100 percent.

According to 2011 ACS data, the proportion of people in the United States with an income-to-poverty

ratio of less than 125 percent increased from 20.1 percent in 2010 to 20.8 percent in 2011. Similarly, the proportion of people with an income-to-poverty ratio of less than 50 percent increased from 6.8 percent to 7.1 percent during the same time period.

Among the states, New Hampshire (12.0 percent) had the lowest proportion of people with income-to-poverty ratios of less than 125 percent, followed by Maryland (13.0 percent) according to the 2011 ACS (see Figure 4). On the other side of the distribution, Mississippi, with 29.1 percent, and New Mexico, with 27.6 percent, were the two states with the highest proportions of people with an income-to-poverty ratio of less than 125 percent.

In the 2011 ACS, New Hampshire (4.4 percent), Wyoming (4.7 percent), Alaska (4.7 percent), New Jersey (4.8 percent), and Vermont (4.9 percent) were among the states with the lowest proportions of people with

income-to-poverty ratios of less than 50 percent.⁷ New Mexico (9.4 percent), Louisiana (9.4 percent), Mississippi (9.8 percent), and the District of Columbia (10.3 percent) were among the states with the highest proportions of people with income-to-poverty ratios of less than 50 percent.⁸

Poverty in Metropolitan Areas

This brief reports poverty rates for large metropolitan areas with populations of 500,000 or more in 2011. More than 80 percent of the U.S. population lives in one of the 366 metropolitan areas and about two-thirds of the total U.S. population reside in these largest areas. Table 2 shows the ten large metropolitan areas with some of the lowest poverty rates and the ten large metropolitan areas with some of the highest poverty rates.⁹

According to the 2011 ACS, poverty rates for large metropolitan areas ranged from a low of 8.3 percent in the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area to a high of 37.7 percent in the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area. The poverty rates for the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT Metro Area (9.4 percent), the Ogden-Clearfield, UT Metro Area (10.1 percent), the Honolulu, HI Metro Area (10.1 percent), and the Harrisburg-Carlisle, PA Metro Area (10.5 percent) were among

⁷ The proportion of people with income-to-poverty ratios of less than 50 percent for New Hampshire (4.4 percent), Wyoming (4.7 percent), Alaska (4.7 percent), New Jersey (4.8 percent), and Vermont (4.9 percent) were not statistically different from each other.

⁸ The proportion of people with income-to-poverty ratios of less than 50 percent for the District of Columbia (10.3 percent), Mississippi (9.8 percent), Louisiana (9.4 percent), and New Mexico (9.4 percent) were not statistically different from each other.

⁹ The poverty rates for metropolitan areas listed in this table may not be statistically different from each other or from areas not shown in the table.

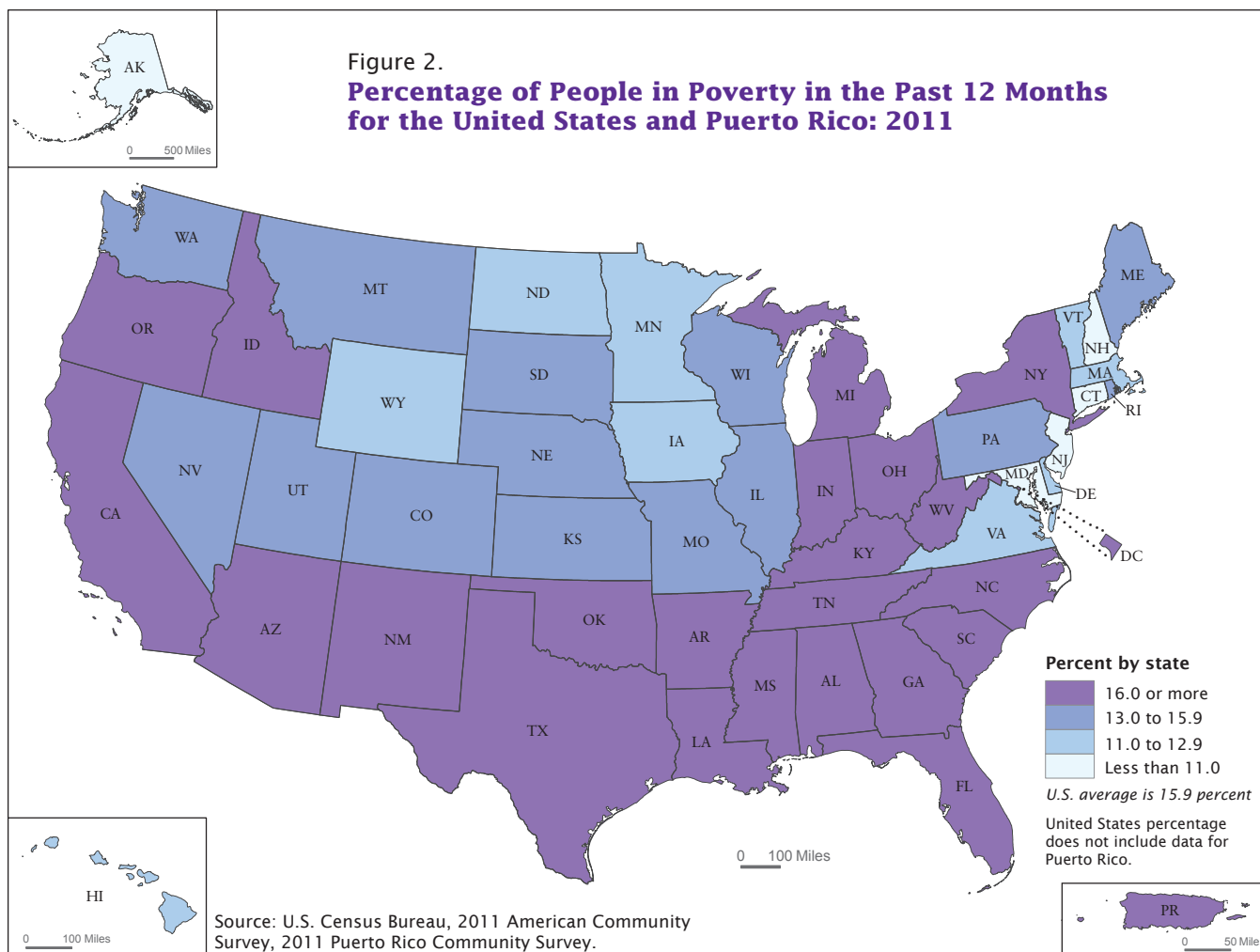


Table 2.
Percentage of People in Poverty in the Past 12 Months for Large Metropolitan Areas With the Highest and Lowest Poverty Rate: 2011

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf)

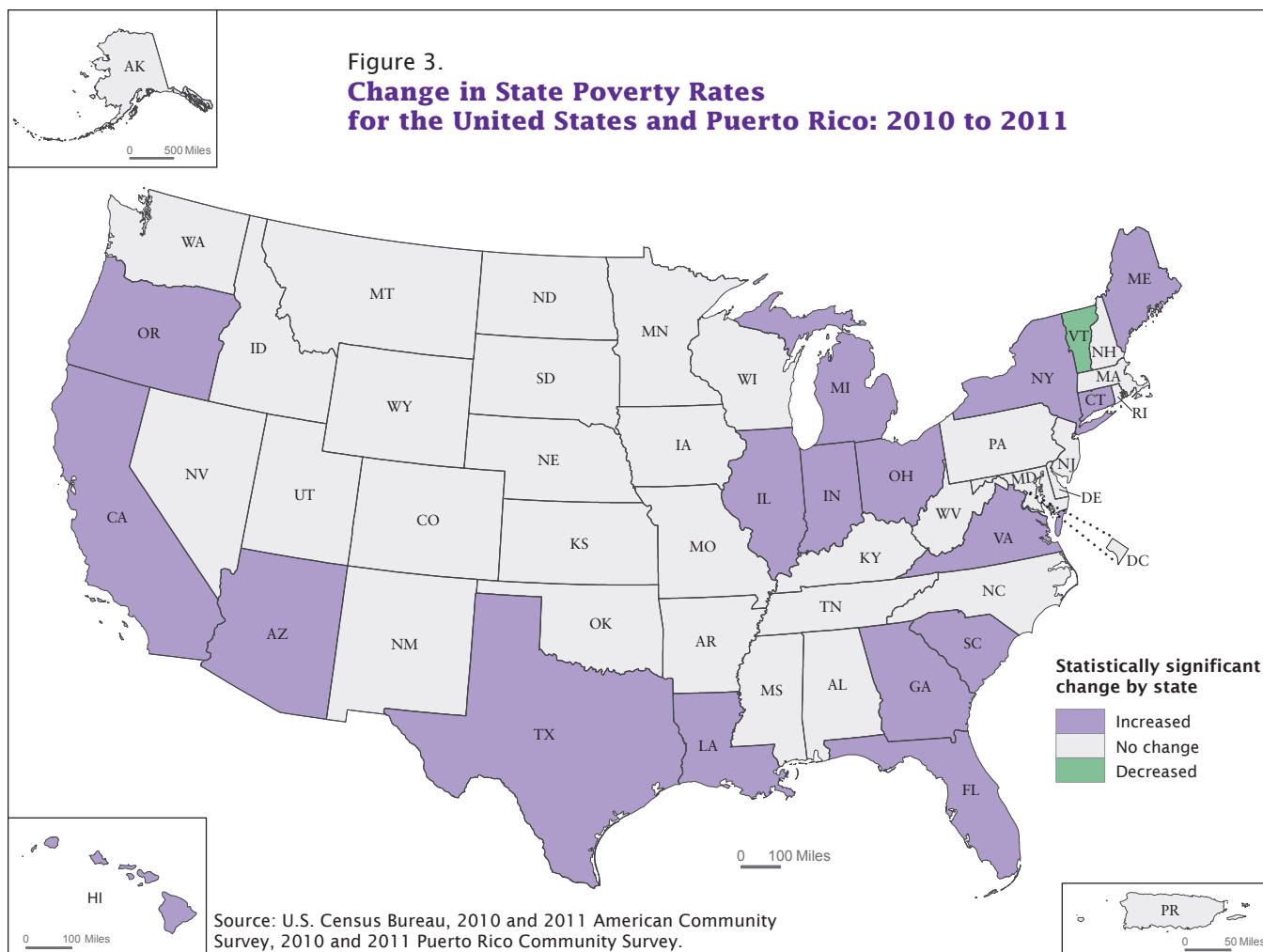
Metropolitan area	Ten of the lowest rates		Metropolitan area	Ten of the highest rates	
	Estimate ¹	Margin of error ² (±)		Estimate ¹	Margin of error ² (±)
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area . . .	8.3	0.4	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	37.7	2.4
Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT Metro Area	9.4	0.9	Fresno, CA Metro Area	25.8	1.5
Ogden-Clearfield, UT Metro Area	10.1	1.4	El Paso, TX Metro Area	24.7	1.6
Honolulu, HI Metro Area	10.1	0.9	Bakersfield-Delano, CA Metro Area	24.5	1.5
Harrisburg-Carlisle, PA Metro Area	10.5	1.0	Modesto, CA Metro Area	23.8	2.0
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA Metro Area	10.6	0.6	Tucson, AZ Metro Area	20.4	1.1
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH Metro Area	10.7	0.4	Albuquerque, NM Metro Area	20.4	1.5
Lancaster, PA Metro Area	10.9	1.0	Toledo, OH Metro Area	20.2	1.4
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI Metro Area	11.0	0.4	New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, LA Metro Area . .	19.5	1.0
Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA Metro Area	11.1	1.2	Lakeland-Winter Haven, FL Metro Area	19.4	1.7

¹ Poverty status is determined for individuals in housing units and noninstitutional group quarters. The poverty universe excludes children under age 15 who are not related to the householder, people living in institutional group quarters, and people living in college dormitories or military barracks.

² Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. This number when added to and subtracted from the estimate forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

Note: Because of sampling variability, some of the estimates in this table may not be statistically different from one another or from estimates for other geographic areas not listed in the table.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey.



What Is the American Community Survey?

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, social, economic, and housing data for the nation, states, congressional districts, counties, places, and other localities every year. It has an annual sample size of about 3.3 million addresses across the United States and Puerto Rico and includes both housing units and group quarters (e.g., nursing facilities and prisons). The ACS is conducted in every county throughout the nation, and every municipio in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey. Beginning in 2006, ACS data for 2005 were released for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 and greater. For information on the ACS sample design and other topics, visit www.census.gov/acs/www.

the lowest poverty rates for large metropolitan areas.¹⁰

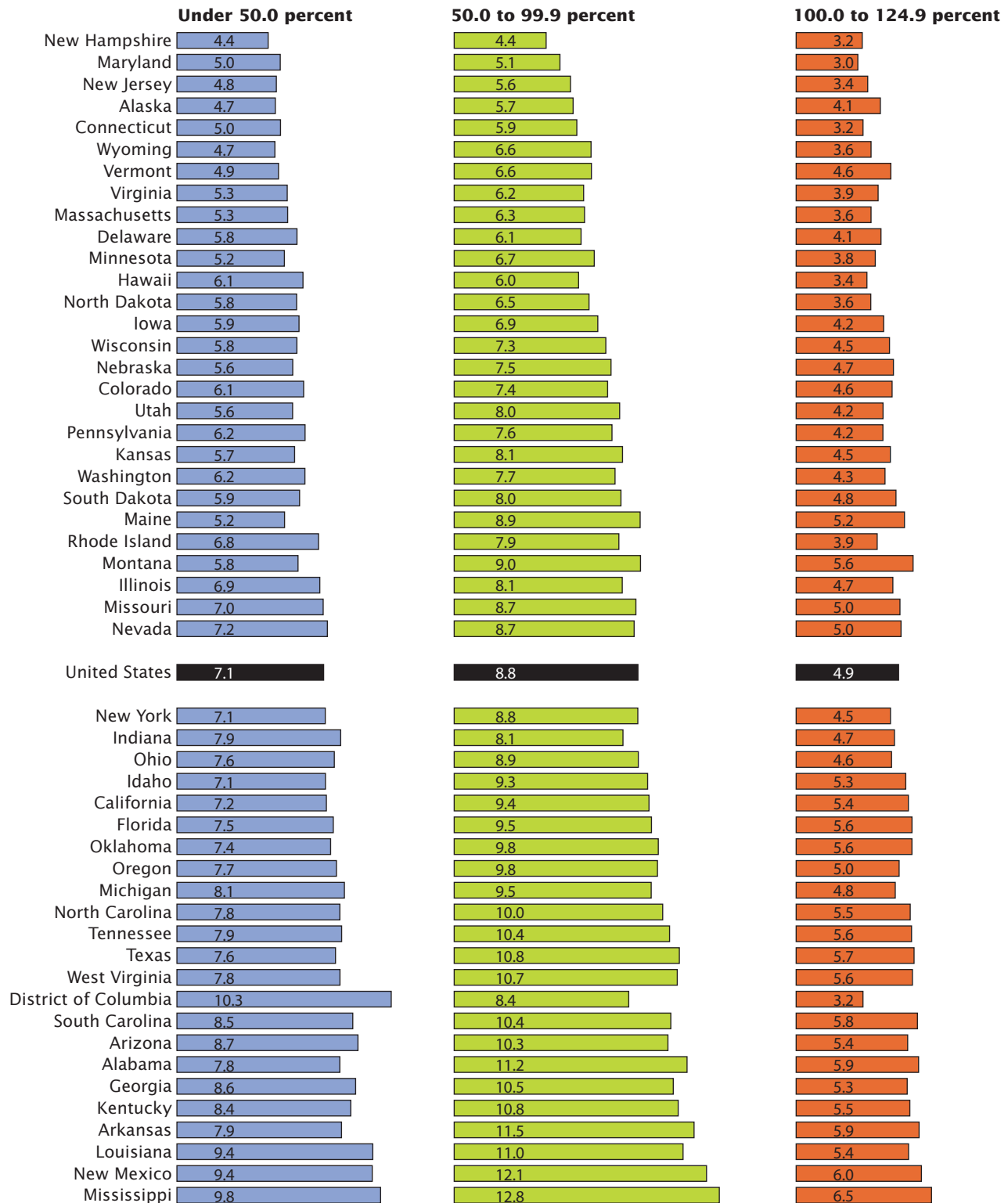
Among the large metropolitan areas, the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area (37.7 percent) had the highest poverty rate in 2011 ACS. The poverty rates for the Fresno, CA Metro Area (25.8 percent), the El Paso, TX Metro Area (24.7 percent), the Bakersfield-Delano, CA Metro Area

¹⁰ The poverty rates for the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT Metro Area (9.4 percent), the Ogden-Clearfield, UT Metro Area (10.1 percent), the Honolulu, HI Metro Area (10.1 percent), and the Harrisburg-Carlisle, PA Metro Area (10.5 percent) were not statistically different from each other.

Figure 4.

Percentage of People by Income-to-Poverty Ratio in the Past 12 Months by State: 2011

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf)



Note: Details may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey.

(24.5 percent), and the Modesto, CA Metro Area (23.8 percent) were among the highest poverty rates for large metropolitan areas.¹¹

SOURCE AND ACCURACY

The data presented in this report are based on the ACS sample interviewed in 2011. The estimates based on this sample approximate the actual values and represent the

¹¹ The poverty rates for the Fresno, CA Metro Area (25.6 percent), the El Paso, TX Metro Area (24.7 percent), the Bakersfield-Delano, CA Metro Area (24.5 percent), and the Modesto, CA Metro Area (23.8 percent) were not statistically different from each other.

entire household and group quarter population. Sampling error is the difference between an estimate based in a sample and the corresponding value that would be obtained if the estimate were based on the entire population (as from a census). Measures of the sampling errors are provided in the form of margins of error for all estimates included in this report. All comparative statements in this report have undergone statistical testing, and comparisons are significant at the 90 percent level unless otherwise noted. In addition to sampling

error, nonsampling error may be introduced during any of the operations used to collect and process survey data such as editing, reviewing, or keying data from questionnaires. For more information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, please see the 2011 ACS Accuracy of the Data document located at www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf.