

A DECADE UNDONE

YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN THE AGE OF CORONAVIRUS

Kristen Lewis

THE MEASURE OF AMERICA
YOUTH DISCONNECTION SERIES

2020



Acknowledgements

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MEASURE OF AMERICA

Measure of America is a project of the **Social Science Research Council**, a century-old independent nonprofit that mobilizes knowledge for the public good. Measure of America creates easy-to-use and methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being and opportunity in America. Through reports, interactive websites and apps, and custom-built dashboards, Measure of America works with partners to breathe life into numbers, using data to identify areas of need, pinpoint levers for change, and track progress over time. The root of this work is the human development and capabilities approach, the brainchild of Harvard professor and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. Human development is about improving people's well-being and expanding their choices and opportunities to live freely chosen lives of value. Measure of America cares about youth disconnection because it hampers human development, closing off some of life's most rewarding and joyful paths and leading to a future of limited horizons and unrealized potential.

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Through our Opportunity Youth initiative, we forge unique partnerships and invest in clear pathways to employment. By focusing on both traditional and innovative programs such as mentorship, access to housing, job readiness and community connections, the Foundation helps close the opportunity gap for these young people so they, in turn, can build communities and families that prosper into the next generation.

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WHO ARE AMERICA'S DISCONNECTED YOUNG PEOPLE?

38,970,400

UNITED STATES YOUTH POPULATION

(Teens & Young Adults 16-24 Years Old)

11.2%

OF YOUTH IN THE UNITED STATES IS ARE DISCONNECTED

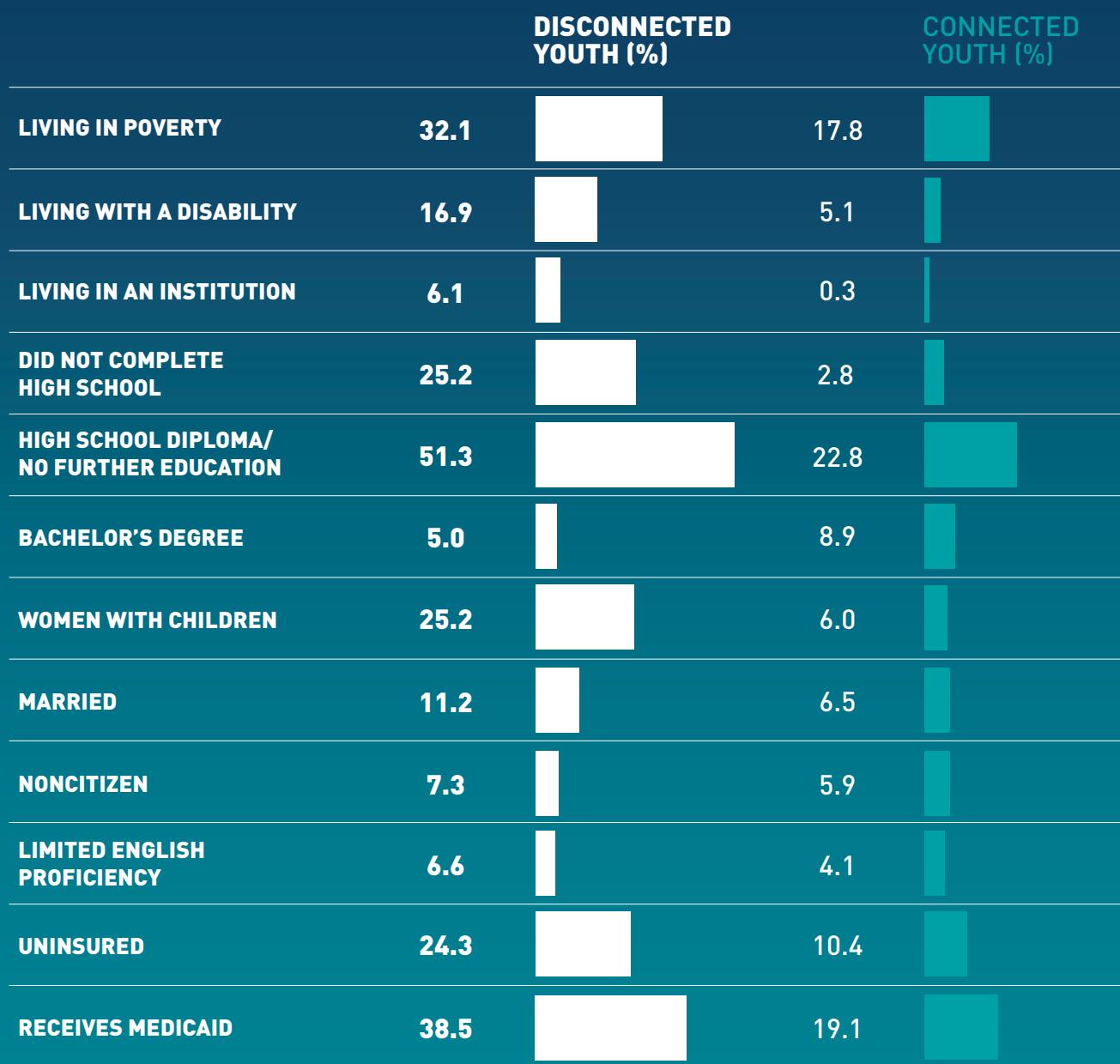
(4,353,300 PEOPLE)

Measure of America defines disconnected youth as teens and young adults ages 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor working.



Measure of America has used this definition in its data calculations and analysis on youth disconnection since its first report on the topic, *One in Seven*, published in 2012.

WHO ARE AMERICA'S DISCONNECTED YOUNG PEOPLE?



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

PREFACE: COVID-19 AND THE NEW LANDSCAPE OF DISCONNECTION

Global pandemics are akin to wildfires or hurricanes in that they hit with devastating effect and upend life for months if not years. But the current Covid-19 pandemic stands apart from other recent disasters in its sheer scale. In a matter of weeks, nearly all parts of the country have come to an abrupt standstill, and it is impossible to say from today's vantage point what the full effects of this crisis will be. Getting accurate information on how the novel coronavirus is affecting young people and the youth disconnection rate in real time is a challenge. We rely on carefully collected data that takes researchers eighteen months or more to gather, verify, and format. For this reason, *A Decade Undone*, written in the months before the pandemic, highlights data from 2018. The numbers in this report show a decade of progress in reducing the youth disconnection rate; however, we are painfully aware that as we write, the Covid-19 pandemic is eating away at these gains. The pandemic will change the rates of youth disconnection drastically, likely wiping out a decade's progress.

While youth may not face the greatest risk of serious medical complications from the coronavirus, they are not completely immune, especially young people with underlying health conditions. Disconnected young people tend to hail from low-income communities of color, which, due to centuries of structural racism, are uniquely vulnerable to Covid-19. Thus, these already-vulnerable teenagers and young adults will bear a disproportionate share of sorrow, trauma, and grief as they lose parents and grandparents, friends and neighbors. Even young people who don't get seriously ill from the virus or lose a loved one will experience profound impacts on their lives:

- Unemployment could spike to 30 percent, and our research shows that the youth disconnection rate follows the unemployment rate very closely.
- Schools across the country have closed for months.
- Universities and colleges have moved to online classes.
- Places of employment have been forced to close or shift rapidly to remote work.

As of April 26, 2020, forty-three states and four US territories have ordered or recommended school building closures for the rest of the academic year. At least 124,000 US public and private schools have closed, impacting at least 55.1 million students in the United States.¹

The pandemic will change the rates of youth disconnection drastically, likely wiping out a decade's progress.

When students leave the school environment, remaining engaged in academic tasks is difficult, and returning to school once it opens again is not guaranteed. These challenges are particularly acute for young people already at risk of not completing their degree. Many students depend on school for meals and special educational supports. Many students don't have a home environment that is conducive to doing work; they may lack a computer or an internet connection, or they may have siblings who need to use the same room or device. With libraries and cafes closed, these students have nowhere to go. In addition, some college students may experience housing insecurity when they are forced out of dorms or may not have the funds to return home on short notice.

Our latest map of youth disconnection across the country can be a guide for predicting which communities may be hit the hardest. Areas with high rates of disconnection are at risk of falling even further behind amid this viral storm. They are the communities with the least resilience; they will face greatest difficulty bouncing back after the pandemic passes. This report includes the first-ever youth disconnection estimates at the public use microdata area level for the whole country, providing data for areas as small as neighborhoods in many places. These granular estimates for nearly 2,400 locales can help guide recovery efforts to those most in need.

During and in the years following the Great Recession, the number of disconnected youth was close to six million; 14.7 percent, or about one in every seven young people, were neither working nor in school. Given the wide-ranging and catastrophic effects of the current crisis on both the economy and the educational system, we estimate that the number of opportunity youth in 2020 will easily top six million and could swell to almost one-quarter of all young people, or nearly nine million teens and young adults.² In an epidemic, it's important to measure and test to accurately trace and respond to infection as it spreads. With youth disconnection, it's just the same. Estimating and localizing the number of disconnected youth is even more crucial during such uncertain times. Measure of America is committed to helping young people navigate the road ahead and guiding community organizations and direct service providers to where they are needed most. We know it is going to be tough, but measuring the problem is the first step

Areas with high rates of disconnection are at risk of falling even further behind amid this viral storm.

2010: 1 in 7



2018: 1 in 9



2020: 1 in 4?



A DECADE UNDONE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America's youth disconnection rate—the share of young people in the United States who are neither working nor in school—has dropped for the eighth year in a row, from a recession-fueled high of 14.7 percent in 2010 to 11.2 percent in 2018. A lower disconnection rate is good news for America's young people and for society as a whole. Disconnected teens and young adults are cut off from the institutions, communities, and experiences that prepare them for a successful and rewarding adulthood. Measure of America analysis has shown that experiencing a period of disconnection as a young person can have profound effects on earnings, employment, homeownership, and health that last into one's thirties.³ In short, the drop in the disconnection rate since the Great Recession was cause for optimism.

The effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic will erase these gains. The lowest unemployment rate in half a century and an expanding economy that added jobs for 113 months straight pulled hundreds of thousands of young people into the labor market over the last decade. All that is unraveling. In the six weeks between March 19 and April 30, more than 30 million people filed for unemployment benefits. More than four in ten adults report that they or someone in their household have experienced job loss or reduced hours due to the pandemic.⁴ As schools in all fifty states remain shuttered—cutting at-risk young people off not just from learning, encouragement, and social interaction but also disability services, meals, health care, psychological support, and a safe place to spend the day—as-yet-unknown numbers of young people will drift away from high school, abandon fledgling plans for postsecondary education, or find themselves unable to remain in college. Previously attached young people will join the ranks of the disconnected as high school and college students graduate into the worst job market since the Great Recession.

It is clear that while young people of all stripes will suffer, low-income young people of color will be the hardest hit by the economic and social dislocation unfolding before our eyes. Despite overall improvements in the youth disconnection rate over the last decade, the gaps between racial and ethnic groups persisted—and in some cases widened—and striking disparities between different geographies within the US remained. Helping those who remained disconnected during the boom times was already a challenge, one that required addressing entrenched societal issues like intergenerational poverty, institutional racism, and mass incarceration. That challenge has now grown in breadth and depth. Teens and young adults who were already out of work and school are more likely to face myriad barriers to reconnection today. As before, they are more likely to live in poverty, to have a disability, and to lack a high school degree, among other obstacles, and now they will face an economy that has no room for them and a method of delivering education that vastly favors the affluent.

The rate of youth disconnection in America dropped for the eighth year in a row.

The effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic will erase these gains.

It is clear that while young people of all stripes will suffer, low-income young people of color will be the hardest hit.

This report, written largely in the months before the pandemic took hold, focuses on two areas. First, it includes youth disconnection rates for the country as a whole, by race and ethnicity, by gender, and for various geographic units including regions, states, counties, metro areas, and congressional districts. For the first time, we also present disconnection rates for each of the roughly 2,400 public use microdata areas (PUMAs) in the US. Using data on PUMAs, we introduce a new community typology that highlights the distinct characteristics of the country's urban, suburban, and rural areas, and explores how these factors affect youth disconnection rates. These pre-coronavirus numbers create a map of vulnerability; they highlight where disconnection rates were already highest and therefore where the situation today is most precarious.

Second, given that 2020 is an election year, the report explores the youth vote. Civic engagement during late adolescence and early adulthood is positively associated with adult income, educational level, and upward economic mobility. *A Decade Undone* delves into the relationship between political participation and youth disconnection with a state-level analysis of the correlation between voter turnout and disconnection rates. As black and brown communities bear a disproportionate burden of loss and sorrow, the question of whose voices and realities inform policy matters more than ever.

The 2018 youth disconnection rate is 11.2 percent, or one in nine young people, down from 11.5 percent in 2017.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall

The 2018 youth disconnection rate is 11.2 percent, or one in nine young people, down from 11.5 percent in 2017. The country's disconnected youth are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty, more than three times as likely to have a disability of some kind, nine times as likely to have dropped out of high school, and more than twenty times as likely to be living in institutionalized group quarters as their connected counterparts. Disconnected young women are over four times as likely to be mothers as their connected peers.

Native American youth have a disconnection rate of 23.4 percent, the highest of the United States' five major racial and ethnic groups.

Race and ethnicity

Native American youth have a disconnection rate of 23.4 percent, the highest of the United States' five major racial and ethnic groups. Black teens and young adults have the second-highest disconnection rate, 17.4 percent, followed by Latino (12.8 percent), white (9.2 percent), and Asian (6.2 percent) young people.

Gender

Girls and young women are less likely to be disconnected than boys and young men, 10.8 percent versus 11.5 percent. But the gender gap varies by race and

ethnicity. For Latino and Native American youth, young women have slightly higher disconnection rates, whereas for black and white youth, young men do. (Asian men and women's rates are not significantly different.) Black young people have the largest gender gap of any racial or ethnic group—14.8 percent for black girls and young women, compared to 19.9 for their male counterparts. Native American teen girls and young women have the highest disconnection rate of any race/gender combination, 24.8 percent.

Public use microdata areas (PUMAs)

The ten best-performing PUMAs can all be found in affluent sections of large cities or in well-to-do suburbs of major metro areas, and all have youth disconnection rates below 3 percent. The ten PUMAs facing the greatest challenges have youth disconnection rates that range from 29.8 percent to 36.1 percent. Two types of communities are found in this group: low-income, majority-minority neighborhoods in large metro areas, and isolated rural areas characterized by long-term, deep poverty. PUMAs are areas defined by the US Census Bureau; they have populations of at least 100,000 people.

Rural opportunity deserts have the highest disconnection rates, with an average of 25.5 percent.

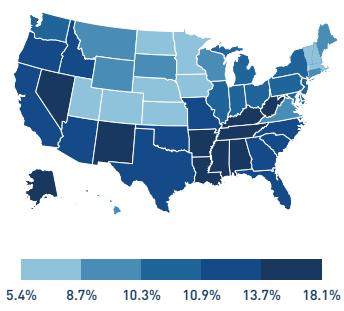
Community types

A cluster of PUMAs termed “rural opportunity deserts” in our typology has the highest disconnection rates, with an average of 25.5 percent. Contrary to the typical portrayal of isolated rural areas as overwhelmingly white, 20.3 percent of youth in the country’s most disadvantaged rural areas are black, 24.4 percent are Latino, and 6.4 percent are Native American.

Regions and States

The East South Central region, which includes Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee, has the highest disconnection rate (14.4 percent). The female disconnection rate in this region (14.8 percent) is the highest gender/region combination in the country. New England has the lowest rate of all US regions, 8.3 percent. North Dakota has the lowest rate of youth disconnection (5.4 percent) of any state, and Alaska has the highest rate (18.1 percent). In terms of change over time, Alaska experienced the largest increase in the share of disconnected young people between 2017 and 2018, 28.0 percent. The largest drop in disconnection was achieved by Utah, from 9.6 percent in 2017 to 7.3 percent in 2018, a decrease of 24.9 percent. The lowest state-level disconnection rate for young black men (Massachusetts, 11.1 percent) is still well above that same state's rate for young white men (6.0 percent).

Youth Disconnection by State



Metro Areas

Provo-Orem, Utah (6.1 percent), boasts the lowest disconnection rate of any metro area in the country. The highest rate of disconnection can be found in Bakersfield, California (20.8 percent).

Counties

Rural counties have by far the highest average rate of youth disconnection, 18.1 percent; suburban counties have the lowest, 10.4 percent. County youth disconnection rates have the greatest range of any unit of geography. Iowa's Story County, a small city, has the lowest rate of youth disconnection in the country (1.6 percent), while Georgia's Hancock County has the highest rate in the country (80.7 percent), a 79.1-percentage-point difference.

Congressional Districts

Massachusetts District 5, which includes suburbs north and west of Boston, has the lowest rate (4.4 percent). West Virginia District 3, which includes the southern cities of Huntington, Princeton, Bluefield, and Buckley, is home to the highest youth disconnection rate, 21.9 percent.

Political Participation

Youth voter turnout increased between 2014 and 2018 in nearly every state, but the states where more youth are working or in school saw the greatest increase in youth civic engagement. On average, for every 1 percentage point lower a state's disconnection rate is than another's, its voter turnout rate increase is 1.3 percentage points higher.

Youth disconnection in America improved significantly in the decade following the Great Recession. But the fact that one in nine young people remained disconnected shows that a healthy economy alone is simply not enough to help the country's most vulnerable young people. Even in economic boom times, vulnerable young people needed far more support, and in the face of Covid-19, their needs have grown precipitously. Yet the danger that vulnerable youth will wind up at the back of the line as recovery resources are allocated is a very real one.

One thing has become stunningly plain over the past month: we have enough money to solve youth disconnection. The idea that money is scarce, that the United States lacks the resources required for all children—including poor ones—to flourish, has been unmasked as the lie it is. In the space of just eight days, from March 19 to March 27, a divided Congress that agrees on next to nothing managed to pass the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act,⁵ and more is on the way. While this crisis is unprecedented in its reach and suddenness, a day-in-day-out crisis has shaped the contours of life in poor communities for decades. In a country where rich corporations have been granted \$500 billion dollars after a week's deliberation, the argument that universal health care, high-quality childcare, good schools for everyone, affordable college, and dignified employment are just too expensive is clearly a vile fiction.

The idea that money is scarce, that the United States lacks the resources required for all children—including poor ones—to flourish, has been unmasked as the lie it is.

INTRODUCTION

The teens and early twenties are thick with memorable firsts. First dates, first loves, and first heartbreaks. First jobs and first paychecks. First time living away from home. This fall, some 6 million young Americans ages 18–21 will meet another important first—their first chance to cast a ballot for president. But which of these potential first-time voters will actually go to the polls? The answer depends largely on their lived experience to date: the extent and quality of their educations, the resources available in their homes and communities, and the degree to which they are engaged with institutions like colleges, unions, volunteer or service organizations, churches, and community groups.

This report is concerned with inequalities in the period of life called emerging adulthood, the years that stretch from the late teens to the mid-twenties. These years are critical to developing the capabilities required for a full, flourishing, and freely chosen adulthood. Such capabilities include knowledge and credentials, social skills and networks, a sense of mastery and agency, a grasp of one's strengths and preferences, and the ability to handle stressful events, regulate one's emotions, and form and maintain healthy relationships, to name just a few. They also include the skills and habits required to participate in our democracy—an understanding of civics and politics, the ability to evaluate information and assess arguments, and a belief that their views and voices count. The real-life chances young people have to build these capabilities are wildly divergent.

For the majority of American young people, the transition to adulthood is aided by strong attachments to educational institutions, gradually supplemented and often replaced by workplace or professional ties. These young people, who we call “connected youth,” are 16- to 24-year-olds who are working or in school. In addition to academic skills, schools provide such young people a place to learn positive work habits, develop confidence through success on the soccer field, in the orchestra pit, or during a debate tournament, be recognized for their unique strengths, and start to engage in civic activities, from volunteering through a service club to registering to vote. Early work experiences build soft skills like punctuality and cooperation, familiarize young people with the unspoken rules and behavioral norms of the workplace, and help them develop networks of contacts and connections. Both work and school provide opportunities to gain knowledge and develop skills necessary to participate in our democracy, such as collaboration, negotiation, and critical thinking. School, work, and civic engagement provide a sense of belonging and the feelings of worth and dignity that come with having a purpose in life.

But 11.2 percent of young Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 are neither working nor in school. These teens and young adults, known alternatively as disconnected youth or opportunity youth, are unmoored from institutions that provide knowledge, networks, skills, identity, and direction. While successful firsts foster self-confidence, optimism, and agency, negative firsts, whether a first

6 million
Americans 18-21
will be able to vote
for the first time,
but will they go to
the polls?



1 in 9 American
young people are
disconnected.

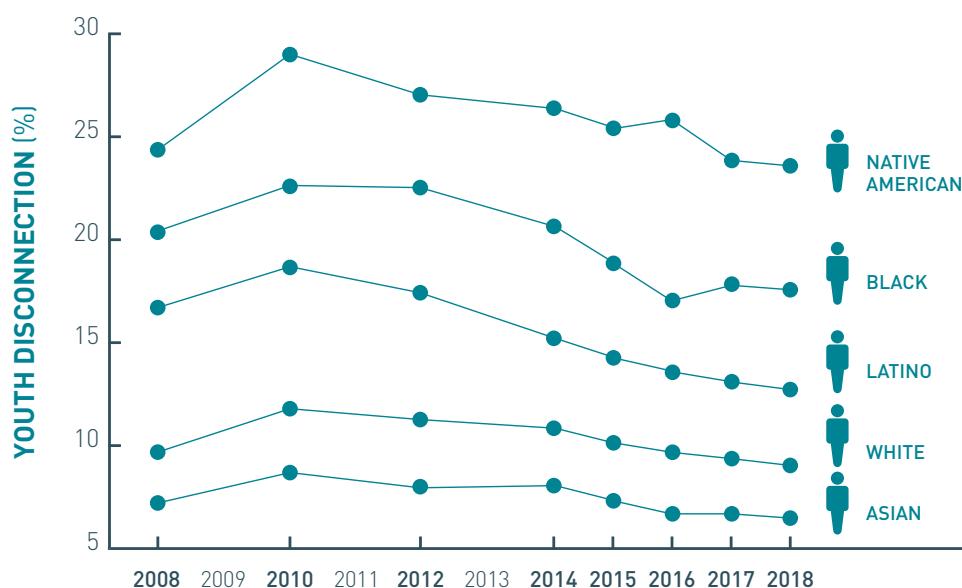
failed class, a first September not returning to school, a first job rejection, or a first arrest, can be prominent features of early adulthood that cast a long shadow across the life course. Unemployed young people are missing out not just on a paycheck and benefits, but also on the social inclusion, status, and support that employment affords. And the long-term consequences of youth disconnection are serious and enduring. Using data from a large longitudinal study that has run for more than 50 years,⁶ we determined that by the time they reach their thirties, people who had been working or in school as teens and young adults earn \$31,000 more per year and are 45 percent more likely to own a home, 42 percent more likely to be employed, and 52 percent more likely to report excellent or good health than those who had been disconnected as young people.⁷

This is the eighth report in Measure of America's youth disconnection series, which has charted the steady decline in the rate of youth disconnection since 2010. Though the youth disconnection rate has fallen sharply, from 14.7 percent to 11.2 percent, the huge gaps that persist between young people of different racial and ethnic groups, different parts of the country, and different types of communities are deeply disturbing (see FIGURE 1). These gaps give lie to America's promise of equal opportunity and threaten our democracy. As this report goes to press in May 2020, the progress made over the last decade is under threat, as new groups of young people face interruptions in their schooling, 2020 graduates face the worst job market since the Great Recession, and already disconnected young people find barriers to reconnection higher than ever.

Youth Disconnection from 2010 to 2018

2010 2018
14.7% → 11.2%

FIGURE 1 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, 2008-2018



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

As this is an election year, this report has a special section on political participation. Though 2020 is being called the year of the youth vote, youth participation in the electoral process will likely be highly uneven. Youth who are low-income and from minority groups are less likely to vote than more affluent, white youth. Young people who have experienced cumulative disadvantage, such as poverty, struggling schools that offer little-to-no civics education, and neighborhoods whose civic organizations are severely underfunded, are much less likely to participate in activities like voting or volunteering than advantaged young people. And young people detached from institutions like colleges or labor unions, with their abundant avenues for civic engagement, are also less likely to vote, campaign, run for office, and the like.⁸ Disconnected young people are overrepresented in all three categories: they disproportionately are poor and black, Latino, and Native American; have experienced cumulative disadvantages; and are (by definition) disconnected from key institutions like schools and workplaces. Engaging these young people in the political process could help build their skills, confidence, and agency.

This report also presents, for the first time, youth disconnection calculations for the country's approximately 2,400 public use microdata areas (PUMAs), Census-Bureau-defined geographies with populations of at least 100,000. These coast-to-coast geographic units cover the entire country, allowing every community in the US to discover their youth disconnection rate (find yours on our interactive website, <http://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/>). Densely populated counties are broken up into many PUMAs (Los Angeles County has 69), and sparsely populated counties are combined to form a single PUMA.

In addition, we present a novel typology of communities that draws important distinctions between and among urban, suburban, and rural communities in the United States. We find that a cluster of isolated rural areas, which we call "rural opportunity deserts," and the black, Latino, and Native American young people living in those communities, have the country's very highest disconnection rates. We also argue that these opportunity deserts align with areas other researchers have identified as "civic deserts," places where young people have little-to-no chance of participating meaningfully in the political process.

In addition to this exploration of political participation among youth, groundbreaking granular disconnection rates for 2,400 locales, and analysis of community types, we also feature youth disconnection calculations for regions, states, metro areas, congressional districts, and counties as well as for women and men and for racial and ethnic groups. Some of these data can be found in this report; disconnection rates for all of these groupings are available on our interactive website.

Though 2020 is being called the year of the youth vote, youth participation in the electoral process will likely be highly uneven.



Log onto
[www.measureofamerica.org/
DYinteractive](http://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive)
 for interactive data.

BOX 2 What Is the Source of the Data and Who Is Included?

Measure of America's data come from the **American Community Survey (ACS)**. The survey's main advantage over other sources is that its sample size is extremely large, making it possible to calculate youth disconnection rates nationally and by state, as well as for counties, metro areas, and even smaller geographic areas. The ACS also allows for disaggregation by race and ethnicity and by gender for geographies with sufficiently large populations.

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (ACS) DEFINITION	
IN SCHOOL	Part-time or full-time students who have attended school or college in the past three months.
WORKING	Those who had any full- or part-time work in the previous week.
NOT WORKING	Unemployed in previous week or not in labor force and not looking for a job.
LIVING IN 'GROUP QUARTERS'	People in non-household living arrangements such as correctional facilities, residential health facilities, dorms, etc. If enrolled in educational programs, they are considered connected.
MEMBERS OF ARMED FORCES (Group Quarters)	Counted as employed and thus as connected.
HOMELESS (Group Quarters)	Surveyed but likely to be undercounted; surveying the homeless is difficult.

YOUTH DISCONNECTION NATIONALLY



The 2018 youth disconnection rate is 11.2 percent, down from 11.5 percent in 2017—the eighth consecutive year of decline in the share of young people neither working nor in school in the United States. Between 2010 and 2018, the rate fell 24 percent, driven largely by the sharp, recovery-fueled drop in youth unemployment, from over 18 percent in 2010, when the country was still reeling from the effects of the Great Recession, to 8 percent in 2018.⁹ The national youth unemployment rate in 2018 was lower than it had been at any point since the early 1990s, and the national on-time high school graduation rate continued its modest increase.

To have gone from one in seven young people out of school and work in 2010 to one in nine today is cause for celebration. But closing the gaps between groups remains a challenge. The pre-coronavirus economic recovery pulled easier-to-connect young people into the labor market, and the barriers to rewarding educational and career opportunities that remained were typically steeper and more difficult for young people to overcome on their own. And Covid-19 will create a host of new challenges. Some of these barriers stem from:

- The nature and extent of educational and employment opportunities in the communities where these young people tend to live.
- Institutional racism, as evidenced by the sharp variation in disconnection rates between different racial and ethnic groups, which persist despite the decline in the overall rate.
- Challenges like having a disability or having been in contact with the justice system, issues that are discussed below.



2018 YOUTH
DISCONNECTION
RATE

2010: 1 in 7



2018: 1 in 9



Characteristics of Disconnected Youth

Connected and disconnected young people differ in many ways that go beyond their current employment and educational status.



Poverty

Almost one-third of disconnected youth live in a poor household; they are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty as connected young people. Disconnected young women are much more likely to live in poverty than disconnected young men, 36.6 percent versus 27.7 percent. Poverty compounds a range of barriers to connection, among them the concentration of low-income families in neighborhoods with poor-quality educational, health, and transportation services; the greater exposure of people living in poverty to violence¹⁰ and the resulting trauma; the lack of financial resources needed to cover the costs of college; and the cumulative impacts of intergenerational, concentrated poverty.¹¹ Disconnected Native American young men and women and disconnected young black women have the highest rates of poverty, all over 40 percent.



Disability

Despite laws requiring school, workplace, and public accommodations, teens and young adults living with disabilities often face barriers to participating fully in society. Disconnected youth are more than three times as likely to have a disability of some kind than connected young people—16.9 percent as compared to 5.1 percent. Disability is not a monolithic category, of course; the Census Bureau identifies six distinct types of disability. Disconnected youth are five times as likely as connected youth to report having an independent-living difficulty (difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping, due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition). Teens and young adults reporting a cognitive

1/3

Almost one-third of disconnected young people live in a **poor household**.

They are **nearly twice as likely** to live in poverty as connected young people.

difficulty (difficulty with concentration, remembering, and making decisions due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition) make up 12.7 percent of disconnected youth, compared to just 3.4 percent of connected youth. Almost 60 percent of disconnected youth with a disability report more than one type of difficulty.¹²



Motherhood and marriage

Motherhood is a common and rewarding life experience—86 percent of US women have at least once child by the end of their reproductive years¹³—but the timing of the decision to pursue parenthood varies sharply. Disconnected young women are over four times as likely to be mothers as their connected counterparts, 25.2 percent versus 6.0 percent. Connected women tend to postpone childbearing, typically spending their late teens and early twenties investing in their educations, building their careers, forming romantic partnerships, having novel and exciting experiences, and generally making life decisions free of the obligations of parenthood. Young women living in disadvantaged communities often lack appealing educational and career options, and research suggests that motherhood may offer them a route to adult status that is both rewarding and attainable.¹⁴

Due to how data on parenthood are collected, we do not have information on the share of connected and disconnected young men who are fathers—a telling data gap in itself. Data on marriage are available, however. Disconnected young women are far more likely to be married than disconnected young men, 19.5 percent compared to just 3.8 percent. This five-fold difference reflects gendered expectations of the roles of women and men and the division of labor in relationships. While married women who are not in the workforce may make valuable contributions to their families and communities, and in some cases may prefer to stay home, research shows that, on average, being out of the workforce limits career trajectories and earnings later in life.¹⁵

It is important to draw a distinction between the human development implications of marriage or motherhood at ages 16 or 17 compared to ages 23 or 24. Marrying at 16 or 17 should be called what it is—the harmful practice of child marriage. Early marriage exposes girls to an elevated risk of domestic violence as well as the dangers of early motherhood, with the added risk of rapid subsequent births.¹⁶ Compared to mothers in their twenties, teen mothers are more likely to experience domestic violence, poor birth outcomes, and postpartum depression, and have higher rates of high school dropout, higher rates of and poverty, and lower levels of educational attainment levels and incomes. These risks transfer to the next generation. Children born to teenage mothers perform less well in school, are less likely to complete high school, and are more likely to be incarcerated, become teen parents themselves, be unemployed, and have health problems than children born to older mothers.¹⁷

3X

Disconnected youth are more than three times as likely to have a disability of some kind than connected young people.

Young women living in disadvantaged communities often lack appealing educational and career options.



Living Arrangements

Compared to connected youth, disconnected youth ages 16 and 17 are more than twice as likely to be living apart from both parents, 22.1 percent versus 8.5 percent. Over 90 percent of connected teens in this age group live with either both parents (six in ten) or one parent (three in ten). Living apart from one's parents at this age may indicate traumatic childhood experiences, and lacking parental guidance in the transition to adulthood poses significant challenges.



Institutionalization

Disconnected youth are more than twenty times as likely to be living in institutionalized group quarters (such as correctional facilities or residential health facilities) as their connected peers, 6.1 percent compared to just 0.3 percent. Almost one in five disconnected black boys and young men are living in institutionalized group quarters of some kind, attesting to continued racial disparities in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. These statistics underscore the importance of breaking the school-to-prison pipeline through strategies like ending racialized harsh school discipline as well as creating educational opportunities that can both reconnect youth living in institutions and ease their transition to rewarding careers when they return home.¹⁸



Limited Education

Disconnected youth are nine times as likely to have dropped out of high school as connected youth; one in four disconnected young people left high school without a diploma. The path to dropping out of high school often starts with academic difficulties and disengagement in middle school, frequently due to a lack of adequate accommodation for learning challenges of various sorts.¹⁹ This points to the need for improved early identification programs, better screening, more holistic support for children with learning disabilities, and prompt interventions to forestall a pattern of failure and hopelessness. Connected youth ages 21 to 24 are more than twice as likely to have a bachelor's degree (22.4 percent) as their disconnected counterparts (8.9 percent).

9X
Disconnected
youth are nine
times as likely to
have **dropped out**
of high school as
connected youth.

BOX 3 What About College Graduates?

It is rare for Measure of America staff to make a presentation about youth disconnection without an audience member asking about the plight of disconnected young people with college degrees. During the Great Recession, an image of well-educated young adults unable to find jobs took hold in the popular imagination. And to be sure, many college grads who finished their studies in the 2008–2010 period struggled to find a foothold in the labor market. But the situation facing college graduates was never as dire as that facing those without bachelor's degrees, and today, less than 9 percent of disconnected youth ages 21–24 have completed a four-year college degree. Black and Latino young people with bachelor's degrees make up particularly small shares of the disconnected population.

The glaring exception is Asian disconnected youth, an astonishing 36.2 percent of whom have four-year degrees—nearly as large a share as that found among Asian connected youth (40.3 percent). Two-thirds of disconnected Chinese young women and six in ten disconnected Indian women hold bachelor's degrees. Language and immigration barriers may be keeping these young women from continuing their educations or entering the labor market despite their degrees. Marriage and motherhood may also be factors; for example, 57 percent of disconnected Indian women are married, the largest share of any group of disconnected youth. Disconnected young people from South America also stand out; 17.9 percent of them have college degrees. Language proficiency and immigration status are likely holding them back as well.

Covid-19 will swell the ranks of college graduates unable to find work and, as after the Great Recession, such young people will likely capture a disproportionate share of attention and resources, metaphorically pushing more disadvantaged young people to the back of the line.

Percentage of Youth Ages 21-24 With a Bachelor's Degree

GROUPS	DISCONNECTED Youth With a Bachelor's Degree (%)	CONNECTED Youth With a Bachelor's Degree (%)
UNITED STATES	8.9	22.4
Men	7.9	18.5
Women	9.9	26.5
ASIAN	36.2	40.3
Men	31.9	37.1
Women	40.3	43.6
BLACK	4.4	14.3
Men	3.6	11.1
Women	5.5	17.4
LATINO	5.5	11.9
Men	4.8	9.2
Women	6.1	14.9
NATIVE AMERICAN		9.2
Men		8.3
Women		
WHITE	11.2	26.3
Men	10.5	21.6
Women	11.9	31.3

ASIAN SUBGROUPS

CHINESE	55.1	49.5
Men	43.7	44.5
Women	65.3	54.6
INDIAN	57.3	56.3
Men	52.0	57.1
Women	61.3	55.2

LATINO SUBGROUPS

MEXICAN	5.0	9.9
Men	4.0	7.2
Women	5.8	12.9
CENTRAL AMERICAN	4.4	9.8
PR, DR, CUBAN	6.5	16.1
SOUTH AMERICAN	17.9	23.0

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity

Despite the overall improvement in youth disconnection nationally, the picture for young women and men from different racial and ethnic groups continues to show great variation. Some groups, like Latina young women, have gained ground swiftly; their disconnection rate fell an astonishing 34 percent between 2010 and 2018, 10 percentage points more than the national decline. Others, like Native American young women, have benefited far less from the generally positive national employment and educational trends; their 2018 youth disconnection rate of 24.8 percent is not statistically different from their 2010 rate of 26.7 percent in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Girls and young women continue to be less likely than boys and young men to be disconnected, 10.8 percent as compared to 11.5 percent, as has been the case for some time. This gender differential varies by race and ethnicity, however; among Latino and Native American youth, young women have a slightly higher disconnection rate, whereas for Asian, black, and white youth, young men do. The size of the gender gap also varies; it is largest, about five percentage points, for black young people. Disconnected teen girls and young women are much more likely to live in poverty than their male counterparts, 36.6 versus 27.7 percent.

Most racial and ethnic groups saw a decrease in their youth disconnection rate between 2017 and 2018, but only three race/gender combinations experienced a statistically significant drop. The youth disconnection rate for black young men decreased from 20.8 to 19.9 percent, the rate for Asian women decreased from 6.7 to 6.1 percent, and the rate for Latina young women fell from 13.9 to 13.3 percent.

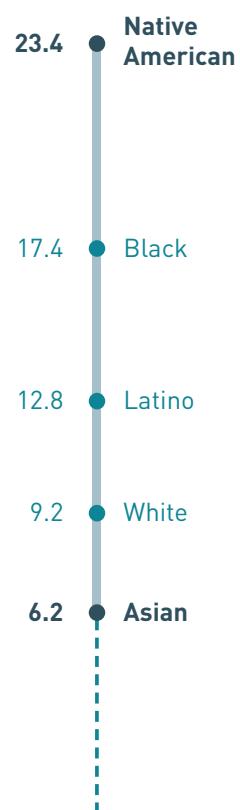
Native American Youth

Of the five major racial and ethnic groups in the United States, Native American teens and young adults have the highest disconnection rate, 23.4 percent, nearly one in four. Native American youth have had the highest rate of all groups for at least a decade. Because the Native American population is the smallest of the five groups, the number of Native American disconnected youth is likewise the smallest, approximately 68,000 young people. Native American teen girls and young women have the highest disconnection rate of any race/gender combination, 24.8 percent, and their rate increased slightly over the last year. They are the only group that has not improved significantly since the height of the recession in 2010.

Disconnected Native American young women are less likely than disconnected women on the whole to be mothers, 18.0 percent compared to 25.2 percent. Native American young men are the most likely to live in poverty (46.0 percent) and the most likely to have dropped out of high school (31.2 percent) of any race/gender combination.

23.4%
of Native
American youth
are disconnected,
the highest rate of
any US racial and
ethnic group.

YOUTH DISCONNECTION (%)



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

Black Youth

Black teens and young adults have the second-highest youth disconnection rate, 17.4 percent, or 951,900 young people. This rate is higher than the 2016 rate. Disconnected black teens ages 16 and 17 are much more likely to be living apart from both their parents than disconnected young people overall, 35.5 percent compared to 22.1 percent. Black boys and young men are much more likely than their female counterparts to be disconnected, 19.9 percent compared to 14.8 percent, the largest gender gap of any racial or ethnic group. Over the last year, however, the disconnection rate for black young men decreased from 20.8 to 19.9 percent, narrowing the gap somewhat. Of all the race/gender combinations, disconnected black young men are the most likely to live in institutional group quarters, which include hospitals, juvenile detention centers, jails, and prisons, and the most likely to live with neither parent (43.9 percent). Black young women are the second-most-likely race/gender combination to live in poverty (44.1 percent). Disconnected black young women are slightly less likely than disconnected women overall to be mothers, 23.8 percent compared to 25.2 percent.

Latino Youth

Latino young people continue to make the fastest progress, girls and young women in particular. The Latino youth disconnection rate has fallen 30 percent since 2010 and now stands at 12.8 percent, or 1,132,000 young people. Latina young women are slightly more likely than their male counterparts to be disconnected, 13.3 percent compared to 12.3 percent, but the gender gap has narrowed significantly over the last decade; in 2008, 20.2 percent of young Latina women were out of school and work, compared to 13.6 percent of young Latino men. Disconnected Latinas are the most likely to be mothers; three in ten are. Disconnected Latinas are more likely than their male counterparts to speak English “less than well” (21.4 percent compared to 14.8 percent) and to be noncitizens (21.5 percent compared to 13.4 percent). They are more than six times as likely to be married (24.9 percent compared to 3.9 percent).

The category “Latino” is internally diverse. We were able to calculate disconnection rates for several Latino subgroups: Mexican, Spanish-speaking Caribbean (Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba), Central American, and South American. Rates ranged from 7.5 percent for South American young men to 13.8 percent for Mexican young women. Central American young people saw a relatively large increase from 2017 to 2018, from 12.0 to 13.7 percent. That change was largely driven by a sharp increase of 2.6 percentage points among Central American men; the rate jumped from 9.3 percent in 2017 to 11.8 percent in 2018.

White Youth

YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY LATINO SUBGROUP

LATINO SUBGROUP	%	#
SOUTH AMERICAN	8.0	36,500
Men	7.5	16,900
Women	8.6	19,600
MEXICAN	12.9	743,200
Men	12.0	355,200
Women	13.8	388,000
PR, DR, CUBAN	13.7	187,600
Men	14.9	106,300
Women	12.4	81,300
CENTRAL AMERICAN	13.7	110,500
Men	11.8	50,800
Women	15.9	59,700

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

The disconnection rate for white young people is 9.2 percent, the second-lowest rate. White teens and young adults make up the largest absolute number of disconnected youth, 1,895,900 people (even though whites have a lower-than-average rate, they make up the largest share—43.6 percent—of people in the 16-to-24 age range). Disconnected white 16- and 17-year-olds are the most likely to live with both their parents (53.1 percent) and the least likely to live with neither parent (17.1 percent). White young people who are disconnected are more likely than other disconnected youth to have a disability; 20.6 percent do. Disconnected white male youth have the highest disability rate of any race/gender combination, 23.2 percent, and are over four times as likely to have a disability as their connected counterparts. White boys and young men in general face fewer structural barriers—such as discrimination, residential segregation, poverty, language barriers, immigration status, or contact with the justice system—to school persistence and employment than other groups do. For this reason, disability is a contributing factor to disconnection for a larger share of disconnected white young men than disconnected Asian, black, Latino, or Native American young men.

9.2%
of white youth are disconnected, the second-lowest rate.

Asian Youth

Asian youth have the lowest disconnection rate, 6.2 percent, or 137,100 young people. The Asian rate dropped 27 percent since 2010. In previous years, Asian young women have had a slightly higher disconnection rate than their male counterparts. This situation reversed in 2018; the female rate is 6.1 percent, the male rate 6.4 percent. Limited English-language abilities and immigration status appear to be potent barriers for the comparatively small share of Asian young adults who are out of school and work. Disconnected Asian teens and young adults are the most likely to report being able to speak English “less than well,” 23.6 percent compared to 6.6 percent for disconnected youth overall. More than one in four Asian young women and one in five Asian young men experience such language difficulties. They are also the most likely to be noncitizens; 35.5 percent are noncitizens, compared to 7.3 percent of disconnected youth overall. Girls and young women are more likely to be noncitizens than boys and young men—42.2 percent compared to 29.3 percent.

Strikingly, educational attainment among disconnected Asian youth is better than among connected youth overall. Over one-third (36.2 percent) of disconnected Asian young people ages 21–24 have at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to 22.4 percent of connected youth overall. Among all disconnected race/gender combinations, young Asian women are the most likely to have a bachelor’s degree (40.3 percent) and to be married (31.6 percent) and least likely to be mothers (16.6 percent), to have a disability (6.8 percent), and to have dropped out of high school (14.8 percent).

The category “Asian” encompasses tremendous diversity, from US-born

YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY ASIAN SUBGROUP

ASIAN SUBGROUP	%	#
CHINESE	4.1	23,300
Men	4.5	12,500
Women	3.7	10,800
INDIAN	5.4	21,800
Men	4.7	10,400
Women	6.1	11,300
KOREAN	5.5	9,000
Men	5.6	4,700
Women	5.4	4,300
Vietnamese	6.3	15,300
Men	7.6	9,000
Women	5.0	6,400
FILIPINO	6.8	20,800
Men	6.3	10,000
Women	7.4	10,800
HMONG	10.2	5,300
CAMBODIAN	13.8	4,200

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

Americans whose families have been in the country for generations to recent immigrants from India, China, or elsewhere in East, Southeast, or South Asia.²⁰ While data were insufficient to allow us to calculate disconnection rates for all Asian subgroups, we were able to calculate rates for Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean young women and men, and for Hmong and Cambodian young people (data were insufficient to allow for gender disaggregation for these last two groups). The rate ranged from a low of 3.7 percent for Chinese girls and young women to a high of 13.8 percent for Cambodian young people. Their small population sizes make it impossible for us to drill down on characteristics of disconnected young people in these groups, with a few exceptions. Roughly one-third of disconnected Vietnamese young people and about one-fourth of Indian young people speak English “less than well”; 46 percent of Indian and Chinese and 39.6 percent of Filipino disconnected youth are noncitizens; and 57.1 percent of Indian young women 18 to 24 years old are married, and 57.1 percent are noncitizens (it is a coincidence that these two rounded values are both 57.1 percent).

Strikingly, educational attainment among disconnected Asian youth is better than among connected youth overall.

YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY PLACE



A NEW LENS: PUBLIC USE MICRODATA AREAS

THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

REGIONS

STATES

METRO AREAS

COUNTIES

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

A New Lens: Public Use Microdata Areas

This edition of Measure of America's annual youth disconnection series presents for the first time ever youth disconnection estimates for all of the country's roughly 2,400 public use microdata areas, or PUMAs.

The Census Bureau defines the boundaries of PUMAs such that they are:

- nesting within states
- comprised of census tracts and counties
- almost always geographically contiguous
- containing at least 100,000 people
- covering the entirety of the United States

In urban areas, a county will be comprised of many PUMAs; Los Angeles County, for example, contains 69 PUMAs. In rural areas, PUMAs are generally comprised of several contiguous counties.

Ten Best-Performing PUMAs

Advantages

- They have roughly similar population sizes, allowing for apples-to-apples comparisons among them.
- The Census Bureau releases a great deal of statistical information by PUMA, making the geography useful to researchers.
- PUMAs allow for more granular analysis of urban areas, as the Los Angeles County example makes clear.
- PUMAs include every place in the US, combining counties with small populations to create a solid blanket of statistically reliable estimates from coast to coast.

Disadvantages

- PUMA boundaries do not necessarily neatly align with more commonplace and well-known boundaries like city limits.
- The Census Bureau's naming conventions can make for long, clunky, and sometimes confusing PUMA designations.

This report presents, for the first time, youth disconnection rates for all the country's 2,400 public use microdata areas (PUMAs).

The ten best-performing PUMAs all have youth disconnection rates below 3 percent. Though they are located in a variety of states—Massachusetts, Iowa, Ohio, Arizona, Michigan, Colorado, Texas, and Wisconsin—all these communities can be found in affluent sections of large cities or in well-to-do suburbs of major metro areas. Many are home to large universities and as a result have unusually high proportions of connected young people.

Ten Most Challenged PUMAs

The ten PUMAs facing the greatest challenges have youth disconnection rates that range from 29.8 percent to 36.1 percent. Two types of communities are found in this group: some, like parts of Washington, DC, Philadelphia, or Chicago, are low-income, majority-minority neighborhoods in large metro areas; others, like the Kisatchie Delta District of Louisiana, Navajo and Apache Counties in Arizona, and Logan, Mingo, Wyoming, and McDowell Counties in West Virginia, are isolated rural areas characterized by long-term, deep poverty. The country's extensive incarceration system is hauntingly visible on this list, which features both places where prisoners disproportionately come from (such as struggling neighborhoods in Chicago) and places where they are disproportionately imprisoned. In Arizona's Central Pinal County, for example, home to several correctional facilities, 26 percent of all youth and 67 percent of disconnected youth are behind bars.

While top and bottom lists give us a sense of the extremes, dominated at the top by university students and at the bottom by profoundly disenfranchised young people, the more nuanced and important story about the distribution of opportunity across different types of communities requires grappling with the entire list of nearly 2,400 PUMAs. We tackle this task in the next section.

TABLE 4 TOP-AND BOTTOM-SCORING PUMAS

RANK	Public Use Microdata Area	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection (%)
TOP 10			
1:	Boston—Allston, Brighton & Fenway; Massachusetts	800	1.8
2:	Story & Boone Counties—Ames; Iowa	700	1.9
3:	Middlesex County (East)—Cambridge; Massachusetts	500	2.1
4:	Columbus (Central); Ohio	900	2.1
5:	Maricopa Count—Tempe (North); Arizona	1,000	2.4
6:	Washtenaw County (East Central)—Ann Arbor Area; Michigan	1,000	2.4
7:	Boulder County (Central)—Boulder; Colorado	900	2.5
8:	Austin (Central); Texas	900	2.5
9:	Milwaukee County (Northeast); Wisconsin	500	2.7
10:	Chicago (North)—Lake View & Lincoln Park; Illinois	700	2.7
BOTTOM 10			
2342:	District of Columbia (East); District of Columbia	6,100	29.8
2343:	Columbia, Levy, Bradford, Gilchrist, Dixie & Union Counties; Florida	6,000	30.2
2344:	Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas & Siskiyou Counties; California	4,000	30.4
2345:	Kisatchie Delta Regional Planning & Development District 1; Louisiana	4,200	30.6
2346:	Philadelphia (East); Pennsylvania	6,200	30.7
2347:	Navajo & Apache Counties; Arizona	7,000	31.8
2348:	Chicago (West)—North & South Lawndale, Humboldt Park, East & West Garfield Park; Illinois	10,000	31.8
2349:	Logan, Mingo, Wyoming & McDowell Counties; West Virginia	3,000	31.8
2350:	North Delta Regional Planning & Development District 2--Northeast Louisiana; Louisiana	6,300	36.1
2351:	Pinal County (Central)—Florence, Eloy (Northeast) & Coolidge; Arizona	4,400	36.1

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2014–2018.

The Eight Community Types

People working to support disconnected youth have long been interested in the characteristics of the communities in which these young people live. To better understand the specific challenges presented by the areas that disconnected teens and young adults call home, starting in 2017, we calculated the disconnection rate for six types of counties. Using a categorization developed by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics, we sorted all 3,000-plus US counties into six groups, ranging from urban centers to rural areas, and then calculated the youth disconnection rate for each. Rural counties had the highest rate by far (18.1 percent), and suburban counties had the lowest (10.4 percent).

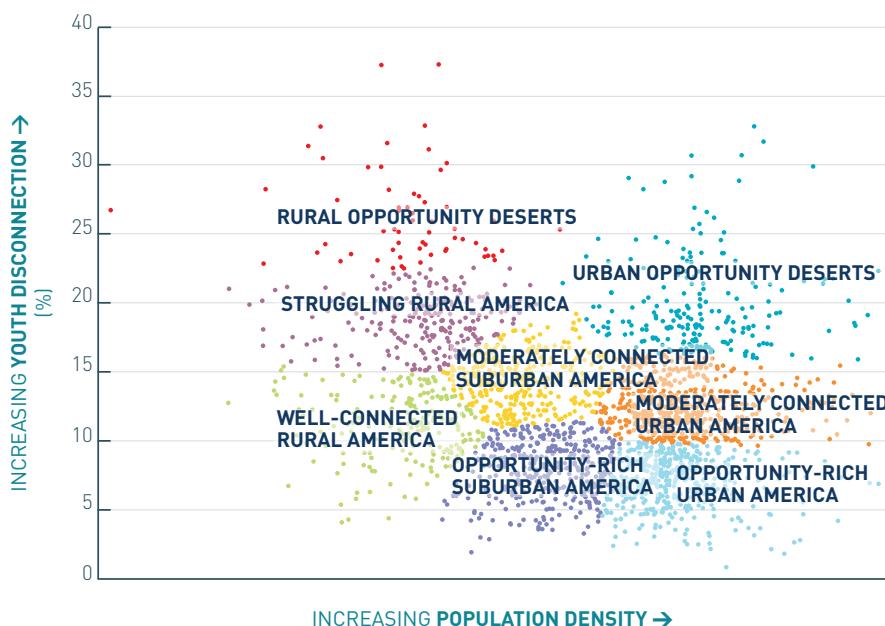
We knew, however, that this typology, while helpful, nonetheless obscured important differences within broad categories like "urban centers" and "suburbs." For instance, we found in a previous study that some neighborhoods in urban Cook County, home of Chicago, had disconnection rates below 4 percent, whereas others had rates that topped 30 percent. **For this report, we sorted the approximately 2,400 US PUMAs into eight categories. We used a clustering algorithm to group the PUMAs according to their similarity on two variables, youth disconnection and population density.** (For details, please see the methodological note.)



Log onto
[www.measureofamerica.org/
DYinteractive](http://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive)
 to find the data for your PUMA.

FIGURE 5 WE CLUSTERED SIMILAR PUMAS INTO COMMUNITY TYPES

This typology offers a new way to think about youth disconnection by place to supplement our analysis by region, state, metro area, county, and congressional district.



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2014–2018.

TABLE 6 THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

COMMUNITY TYPE	AVERAGE YOUTH DISCONNECTION (%)	MINIMUM DISCONNECTION RATE (%)	MAXIMUM DISCONNECTION RATE (%)	TOTAL # OF YOUTH	TOTAL # OF DISCONNECTED YOUTH
1 OPPORTUNITY-RICH URBAN AMERICA Diverse communities located primarily in thriving sections of major metropolitan areas that are well served by public services.	6.6	1.8	9.6	6.9 Million	457,000
2 OPPORTUNITY-RICH SUBURBAN AMERICA Primarily white, comparatively affluent suburban communities with strong education systems.	7.5	1.9	11.0	6.3 Million	475,000
3 WELL-CONNECTED RURAL AMERICA Primarily white rural and exurban areas; areas with the lowest rates tend to be home to colleges and universities or have thriving tourism industries. These communities are concentrated in the Midwest.	10.6	4.0	14.9	2.9 Million	312,000
4 MODERATELY CONNECTED URBAN AMERICA Highly diverse communities in and around large and mid-sized cities, with uneven access to educational and job opportunities.	12.2	9.4	15.7	8.2 Million	993,000
5 MODERATELY CONNECTED SUBURBAN AMERICA Suburbs and exurbs generally not in the immediate orbit of economic "superstar" cities and with uneven access to educational and job opportunities.	13.8	10.4	19.1	5.1 Million	706,000
6 STRUGGLING RURAL AMERICA Rural areas primarily in the South and West with disconnection rates well above the national average.	18.2	14.7	21.9	3.4 Million	612,000
7 URBAN OPPORTUNITY DESERTS Majority black and Latino communities in and around major cities, poorly served by public services, and often clustered in peripheral or industrial areas.	19.1	15.4	31.8	3.4 Million	650,000
8 RURAL OPPORTUNITY DESERTS Geographically isolated rural areas poorly served by public services and with limited economic activity; often, one racial or ethnic group predominates, such as Native Americans in the Lakota Region of South Dakota or whites in the Big Sandy area of Kentucky.	25.5	21.8	36.1	900 Thousand	231,000

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2014–2018.

THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

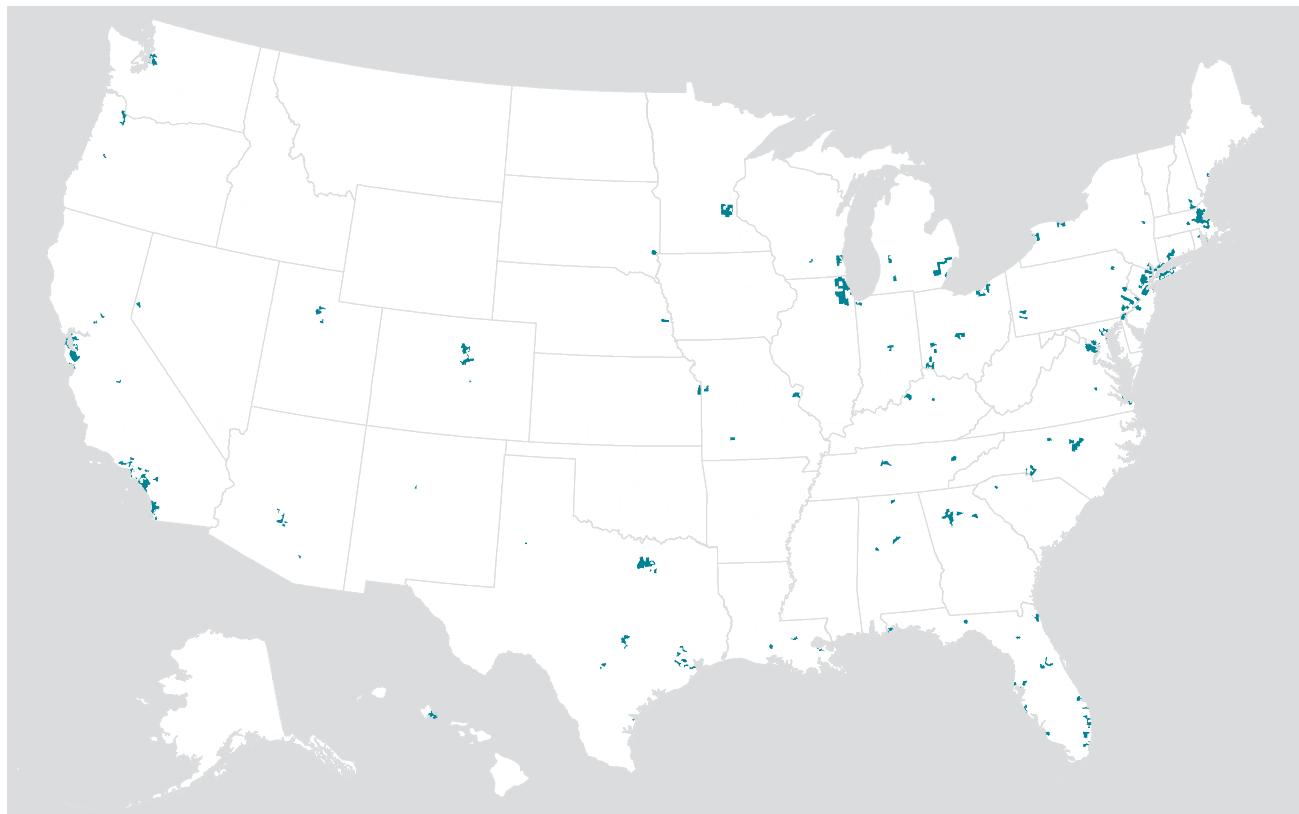
1 OPPORTUNITY-RICH URBAN AMERICA

Opportunity-rich urban America is home to 6.9 million young people, 460,000 of whom are disconnected. These racially diverse communities contain 18.5 percent of the country's 16- to 24-year-olds, but only 10.3 percent of its disconnected youth.

The average youth disconnection rate in opportunity-rich urban America is 6.6 percent, the lowest of all eight community types. The lowest disconnection rate in this cluster, 1.8 percent, is found in Boston's Allston, Brighton, and Fenway neighborhoods; the highest, 9.6 percent, is found in the Hockessin, Delaware area, on the outskirts of Wilmington and not far from Philadelphia.

6.9 million
young people live here

6.6%
are disconnected
(456,700 people)



THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

1 OPPORTUNITY-RICH URBAN AMERICA

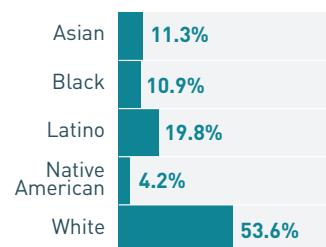
Opportunity-rich urban America is the best place for Asian, black, Latino, and white young people. Just 4.9 percent of Asian young people in these cities and neighborhoods are disconnected, the lowest rate for any race/place combination. The white rate, 5.5 percent, is close behind. The rate for black young people in this cluster, 10.9 percent, is significantly lower than the national black disconnection rate, 17.3 percent. And the Latino rate of 8.3 percent is roughly one-third lower than their national rate. The Native American disconnection rate in opportunity-rich urban America, 17.3 percent, while lower than the national rate, is nonetheless strikingly high, demonstrating the challenges Native American young people face even in thriving cities. Asian young people make up a larger share of young people in this cluster than in any other, 11.3 percent. One in ten young people are black, two in ten are Latino, and a bit over half are white.

Young women in this cluster are the least likely to be mothers; only 5.1 percent are. Disconnected young women, however, are four times as likely to be mothers as all young women, 20.5 percent. Two in ten young people live in poverty in these communities, and three in ten disconnected young people do. Although these areas are generally affluent, income inequality is sharp, and many families struggle. More disconnected young people have earned a high school degree in this cluster than in any other, 83.0 percent.

Examples of Communities in Opportunity-Rich Urban America

Opportunity-rich urban areas include **well-off sections of large, prosperous cities**, such as the Lake View and Lincoln Park neighborhoods in Chicago (2.7 percent), the West-Central part of Houston (4.9 percent), South Central Denver (5.5 percent), Manhattan's Upper East Side (6.7 percent), and Center City, Philadelphia (7.3 percent). Also included are **affluent cities in major metropolitan areas**, such as Scottsdale and Paradise Valley in Arizona (4.0 percent); Morristown, New Jersey (4.2 percent); and the Beach Cities in Los Angeles County, California (5.6 percent). And this category includes **many university towns**, among them Cambridge, Massachusetts (2.1 percent); Ann Arbor, Michigan (2.4 percent); Berkeley, California (3.6 percent); and Gainesville, Florida (6.9 percent).

RACE AND ETHNICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN OPPORTUNITY-RICH URBAN AMERICA



2 in 10 young people live in poverty in Opportunity-Rich Urban America

THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

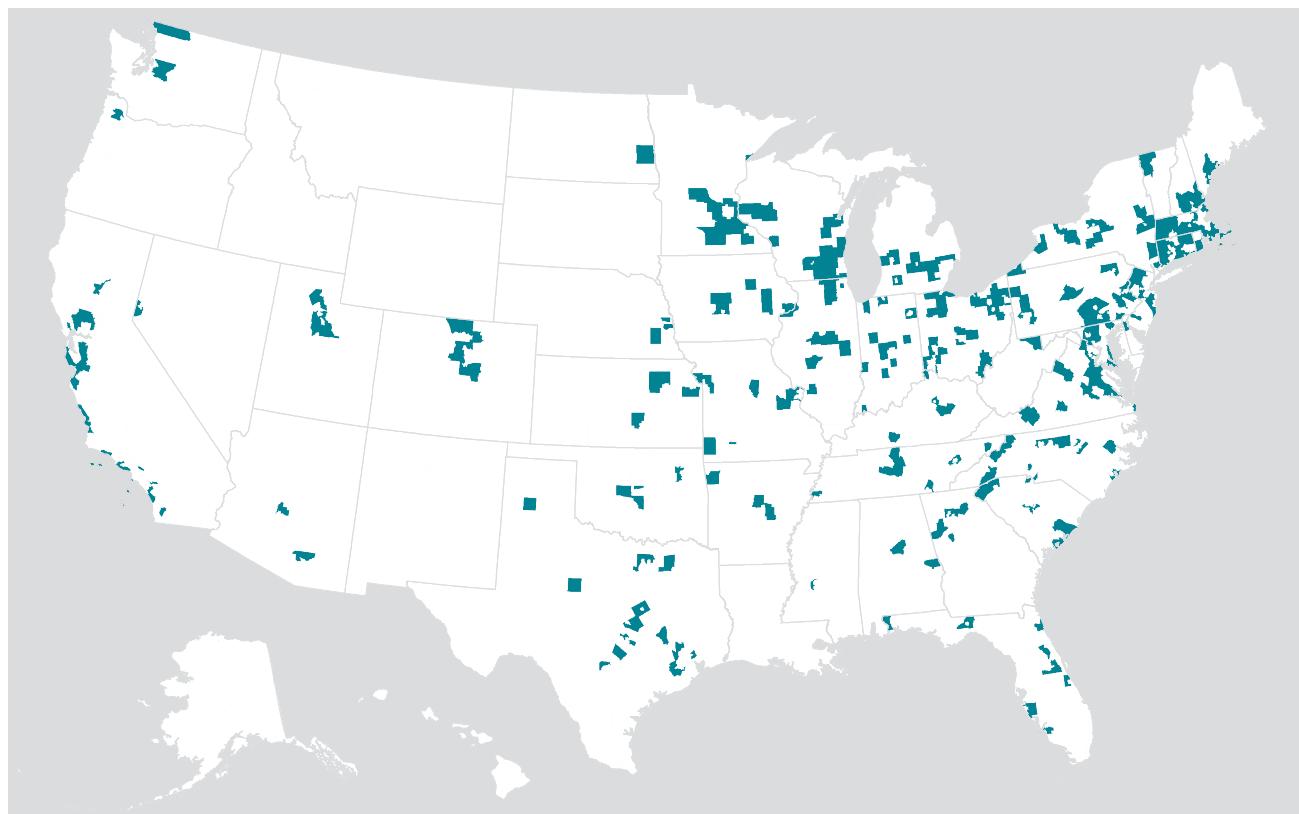
2 OPPORTUNITY-RICH SUBURBAN AMERICA

Opportunity-rich suburban America has a youth disconnection rate of 7.5 percent. It is home to 6.3 million young people, 470,000 of whom are neither working nor in school.

Similar to opportunity-rich urban America, the youth disconnection rate is disproportionately low; 17.1 percent of all young people, but only 10.7 percent of disconnected youth, live in these communities. Disconnection rates range from 1.9 percent in Story and Boone Counties in Iowa, in and around Ames, to 11.0 percent in Virginia's George Washington Regional Commission North, which contains Fredericksburg and Stafford County.

6.3 million
young people live here

7.5%
are disconnected
(474,900 people)



THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

2 OPPORTUNITY-RICH SUBURBAN AMERICA

Opportunity-rich suburbs are where Native Americans have the lowest disconnection rate, 14.6 percent. Asian, black, Latino, and white young people all have their second-lowest rates here, and the gap between the groups with the highest and lowest rates is smaller here than in other community types, 9.2 percentage points.

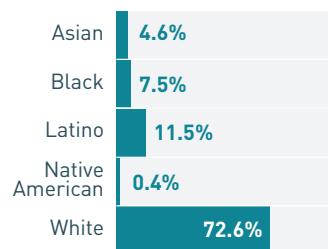
The majority of young people in opportunity-rich suburbs are white (72.6 percent). Black and Latino youth are both underrepresented in this cluster, making up 7.5 percent and 11.5 percent of the youth population, respectively.

Seven in one hundred of all young women are mothers in this cluster, compared to twenty-five in one hundred disconnected young women; motherhood is an uncommon experience for most young women in this cluster, but fairly common for disconnected young women. Nine in ten young people ages 18 to 24, and eight in ten disconnected young people, have high school degrees.

Examples of Communities in Opportunity-Rich Suburban America

Examples of communities in opportunity-rich suburban America include Northern Bucks County, Pennsylvania (5.6 percent); Black Hawk County, Iowa (5.7 percent); greater Fargo, North Dakota (5.7 percent); La Crosse County, Wisconsin (5.8 percent); South St. Louis County, Missouri (5.9 percent); Livermore, Pleasanton, and Dublin in California's Bay Area (7.0 percent); Carroll County, Georgia (7.3 percent); Litchfield County, Connecticut (8.6 percent); Northeast Westchester County in New York (8.6 percent); and Miami County, Ohio (9.9 percent).

RACE AND ETHNICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN OPPORTUNITY-RICH SUBURBAN AMERICA



The majority of young people in opportunity-rich suburbs are white (72.6 percent).

THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

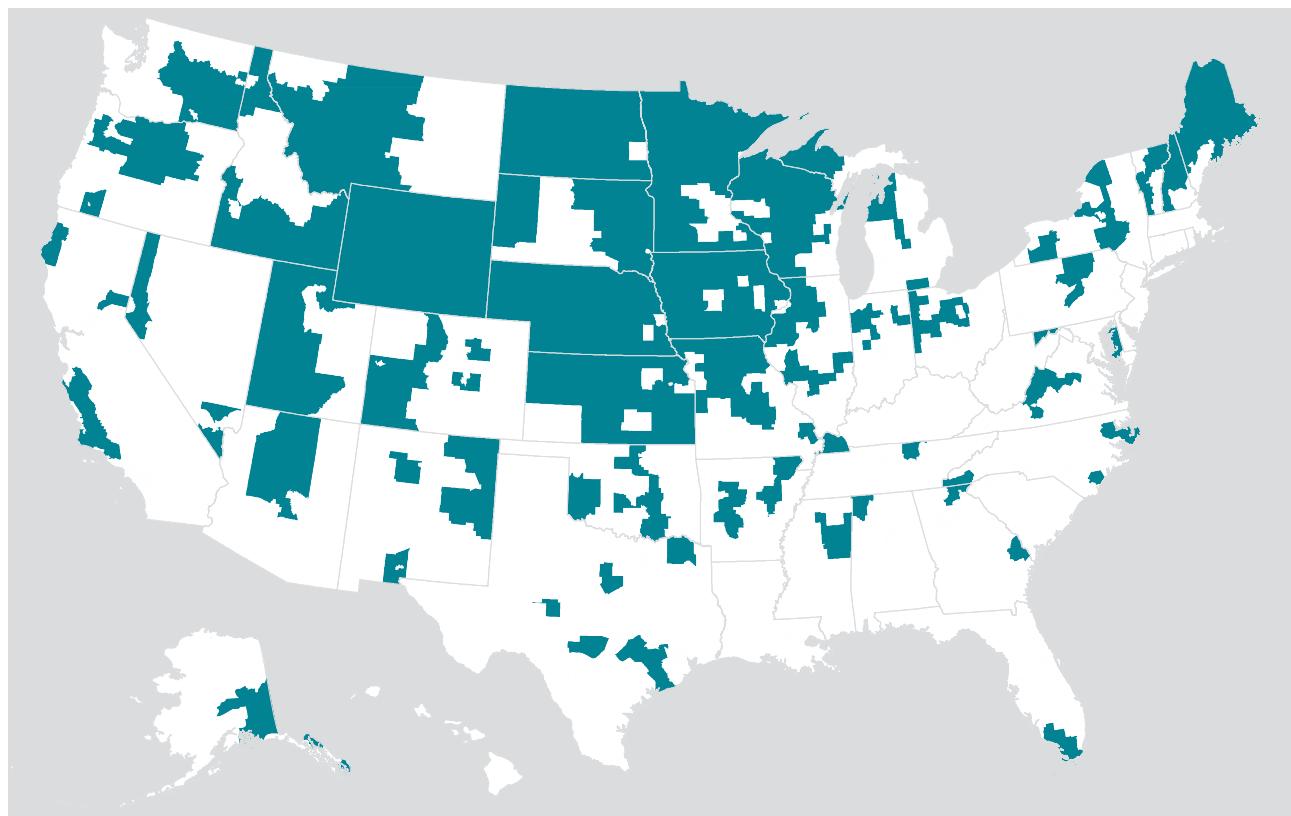
3 WELL-CONNECTED RURAL AMERICA

Well-connected rural areas are home 7.9 percent of all youth and 7.0 percent of disconnected youth. The disconnection rate is 10.6 percent, lower than the national average but several percentage points higher than in opportunity-rich urban and suburban clusters.

The rates range from 4.0 percent in greater Grand Forks and the northeast part of North Dakota to 14.9 percent in Eastern Plains, New Mexico, in the northeast portion of the state—3.7 percentage points higher than the national average, but still much lower than other rural regions.

2.9 million
young people live here

10.6%
are disconnected
(312,200 people)



THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

3 WELL-CONNECTED RURAL AMERICA

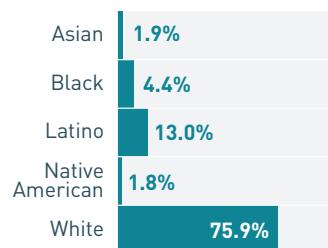
Well-connected rural areas are predominantly white (75.9 percent), and Asian, black, and Latino young people are underrepresented. Black and Latino young people are slightly less likely to be disconnected than they are at the national level; Asian, Native American, and white young people are slightly more likely to be.

Well-connected rural areas are home to the highest motherhood rate among disconnected young women, 34.1 percent, and 36.3 percent of disconnected youth live in poverty.

Examples of Communities in Well-Connected Rural America

Well-connected rural America contains **some areas with very low disconnection rates**, such as South Central Montana and greater Bozeman, home of the University of Montana (4.2 percent); South Dakota's Jackrabbit Region (5.2 percent); Northwest Kansas (6.5 percent); the Lakes Region of New Hampshire (7.9 percent); Washington County, Utah (7.9 percent); Laramie and Albany Counties in Wyoming (7.9 percent); and Virginia's Roanoke Valley (9.1 percent). It also contains **areas with rates that are high by national standards but low for rural areas**, such as Sandoval County, New Mexico (12.3 percent); Twin Falls and Cassia Counties in Idaho (12.8 percent); North Central Texas (13.1 percent); Southwest Oklahoma (13.9 percent); the northern Outer Banks in North Carolina (14.2 percent); and the region in and around The Dalles in Oregon (14.4 percent).

RACE AND ETHNICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN WELL-CONNECTED RURAL AMERICA



Well-connected rural areas are home to the highest motherhood rate among disconnected young women, 34.1 percent.

THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

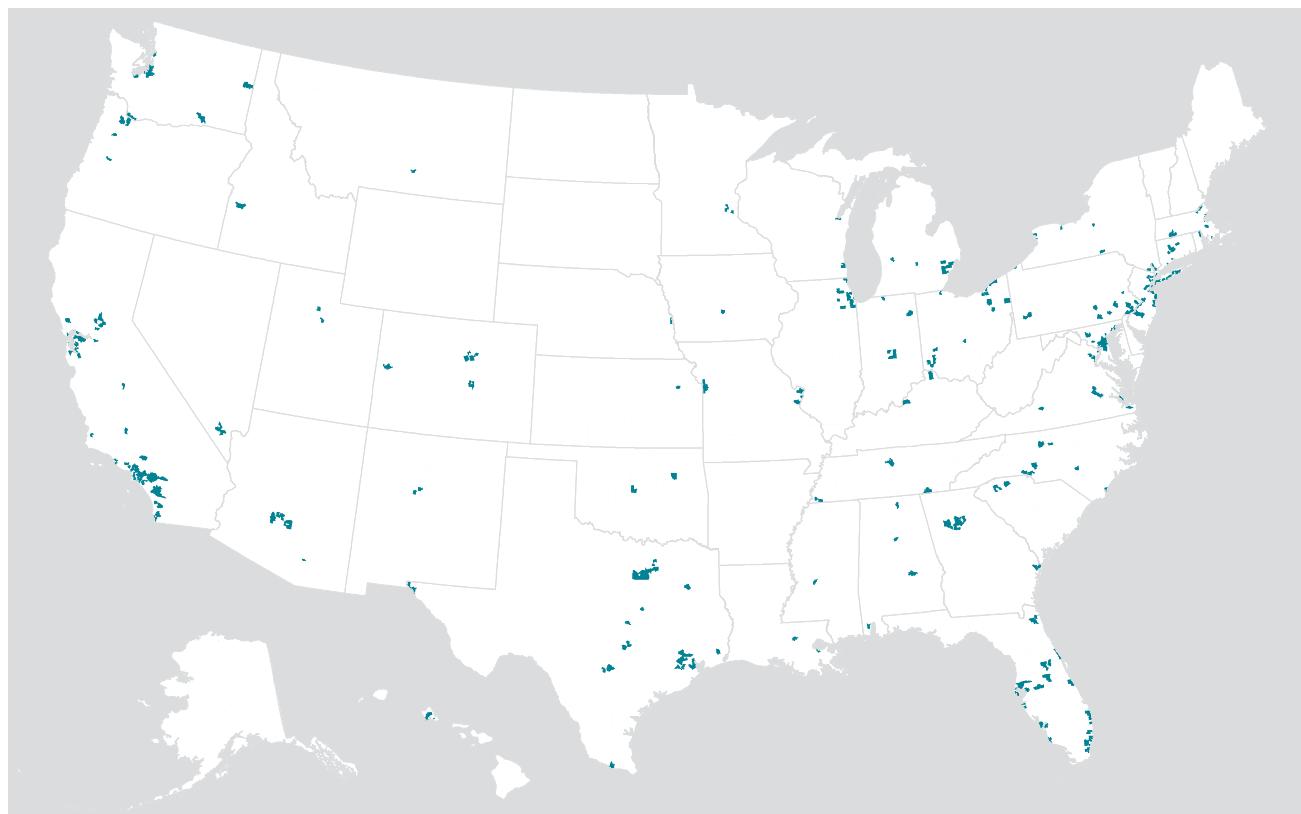
4 MODERATELY CONNECTED URBAN AMERICA

Racially diverse communities in and around large and medium-sized cities make up this cluster, where the average disconnection rate is 12.2 percent.

Rates range from 9.4 percent in the Irving Park, Albany Park, Forest Glen, and North Park neighborhoods of Chicago to 15.7 percent in nearby Bremen and Orland, towns that, like Chicago, lie in Cook County, Illinois.

8.2 million
young people live here

12.2%
are disconnected
(993,400 people)



THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES**4 MODERATELY CONNECTED URBAN AMERICA**

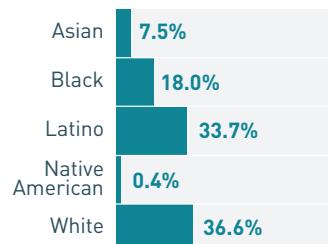
Black (16.2 percent) young people are slightly less likely to be disconnected in these communities than they are at the national level, while Asian (8.1 percent), white (10.0 percent), and Latino (13.3 percent) young people are more likely.

About one-third of all young people in this cluster are Latino, and another third are white. Black young people are 18.0 percent of the youth population, Asian young people 7.5 percent.

In these communities, about one in four disconnected young women are mothers, and one in three disconnected young people live in poverty.

Examples of Communities in Moderately Connected Urban America

Moderately connected urban America includes greater Grand Rapids, Michigan (10.2 percent); the central and eastern portions of Portland, Oregon (10.4 percent); Des Moines, Iowa (11.1 percent); the eastern portion of El Paso, Texas (11.8 percent); the eastern portion of Anaheim, California (12.8 percent); southwest Gwinnet County in greater Atlanta, Georgia (13.1 percent); southern St. Louis, Missouri (14.0 percent); and Warren, Franklin, and east Indianapolis, Indiana (15.6 percent).

RACE AND ETHNICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN MODERATELY CONNECTED URBAN AMERICA

In these communities, about one in four disconnected young women are mothers and one in three disconnected young people live in poverty.

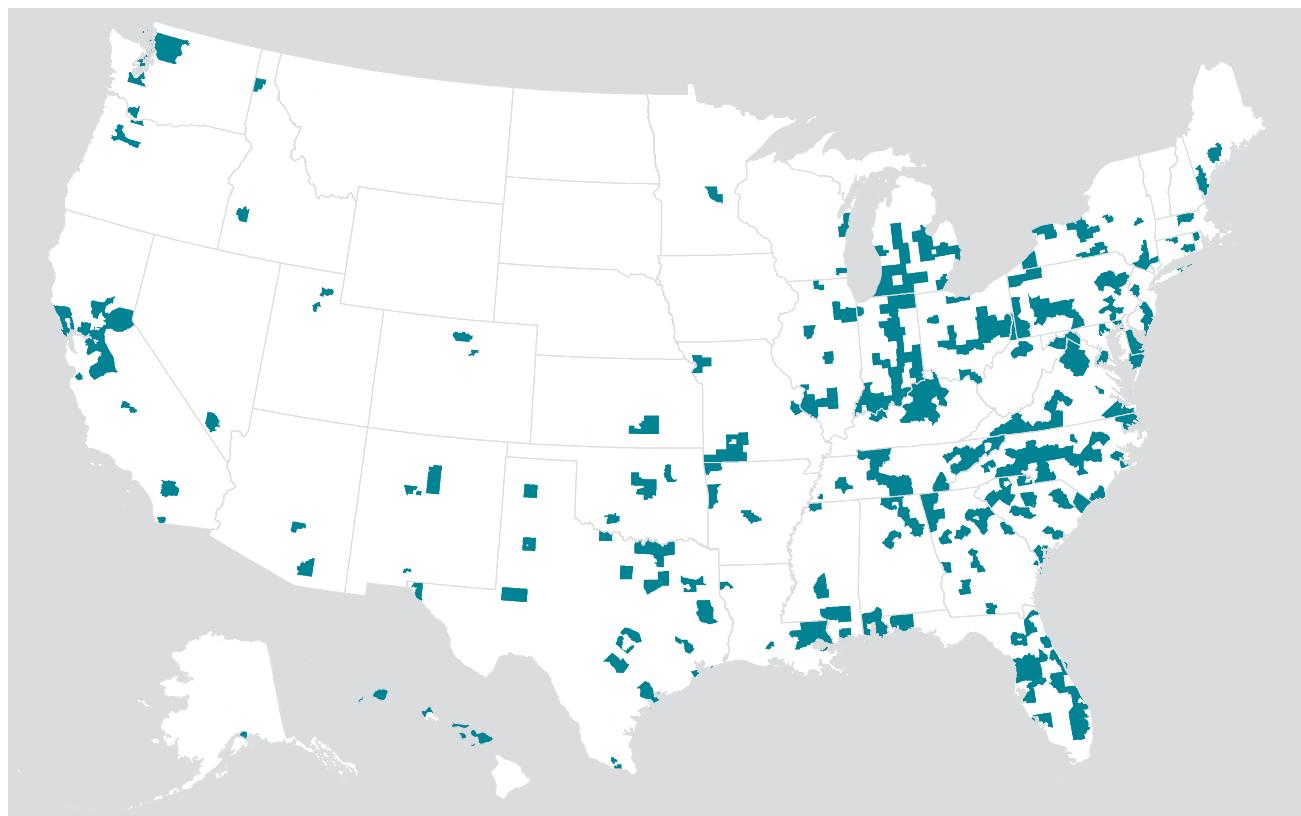
THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

5 MODERATELY CONNECTED SUBURBAN AMERICA

Communities in this cluster have disconnection rates that range from slightly below the national average (10.4 percent, in southern Boise and Kuna, Idaho) to well above the national average (19.1 percent, in south-central Marion County, Florida). The average rate in moderately connected urban America is 13.8 percent. The racial and ethnic breakdown of young people in this cluster is similar to that of the US population as a whole.

5.1 million
young people live here

13.8%
are disconnected
(705,900 people)



THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

5 MODERATELY CONNECTED SUBURBAN AMERICA

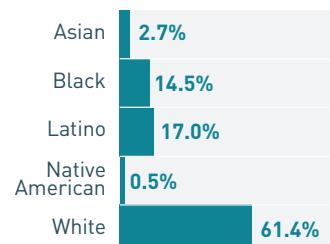
In moderately connected suburban America, all racial and ethnic groups except Native Americans have higher disconnection rates than they do at the national level.

Twelve percent of young women in these communities are mothers, and this figure rises to three in ten for disconnected young women. One in three disconnected young people lives in poverty.

Examples of Communities in Moderately Connected Suburban America

The communities that make up moderately connected suburban America include **locales with disconnection rates quite close to the national average**, such as Coral Springs and Parkland in Broward County, Florida (10.9 percent); Greater Anchorage (11.0 percent); greater Wichita, Kansas (11.2 percent); northern Sonoma County, California (11.3 percent); and Benton County, Arkansas, home of the retail giant Walmart (11.4 percent); and **others with rates quite a bit higher**, such as the southeastern section of St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana (17.2 percent), and northern Nashville-Davidson, Tennessee (18 percent). This cluster also contains **some bedroom communities for once-thriving manufacturing hubs** like Saginaw County, Michigan (15.6 percent), and Schenectady, New York (13.2 percent).

RACE AND ETHNICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN MODERATELY CONNECTED SUBURBAN AMERICA



In moderately connected suburban America, all racial and ethnic groups except Native Americans have higher disconnection rates than they do at the national level.

THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

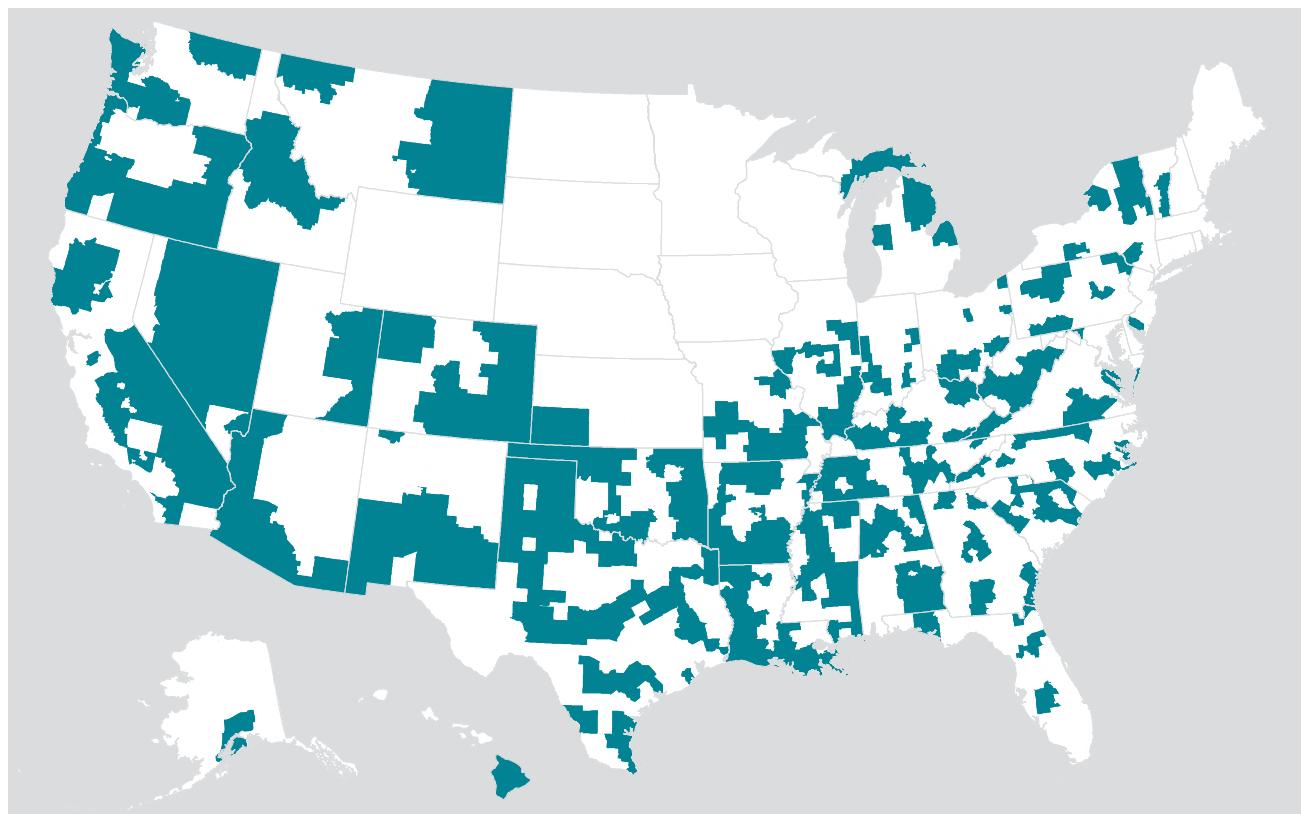
6 STRUGGLING RURAL AMERICA

Struggling rural America is home to 9.1 percent of America's young people (3.4 million youth); 600,000 teens and young adults living in these communities are neither working nor in school.

Communities in this cluster have disconnection rates ranging from 14.7 percent in Hawaii County to 21.9 percent in Alabama's St. Clair and Blount Counties. The average is 18.2 percent, seven percentage points above the national rate.

3.4 million
young people live here

18.2%
are disconnected
(612,100 people)

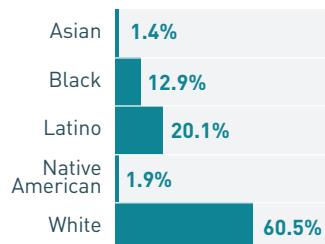


THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES**6 STRUGGLING RURAL AMERICA**

Native American young people have the highest disconnection rate, 26.6 percent, 3.2 percentage points higher than their national rate. The Asian rate in struggling rural areas is more than double their national rate, 12.6 percent compared to 6.2 percent, and black, Latino, and white young people have rates upwards of five percentage points higher than their national rates.

One in three disconnected young women are mothers, and four in ten disconnected young people live in poverty. White young people make up the majority of the population in struggling rural areas, 60.5 percent, followed by Latino (20.1 percent), black (12.9 percent), Native American (1.9 percent), and Asian (1.4 percent) youth.

RACE AND ETHNICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN STRUGGLING RURAL AMERICA

**Examples of Communities in Struggling Rural America**

Communities in this cluster include Southeast Vermont (14.7 percent); Michigan's Eastern Upper Peninsula (15.1 percent); Southeast Colorado (15.3 percent); Carteret, Beaufort, and Pamlico Counties in North Carolina (15.6 percent); Shasta County, California (16.1); Aiken and Edgefield Counties in South Carolina (16.5 percent); Southeast Utah and the Uintah Basin Region (17.0 percent); west Maricopa County and the Gila River Indian Community in Arizona (18.0 percent); Clallam and Jefferson Counties in Washington (19.1 percent); outer Pulaski County, Arkansas (19.2 percent); and Glynn Camden and McIntosh Counties in Georgia (19.4 percent).

One in three disconnected young women are mothers, and four in ten disconnected young people live in poverty.

THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

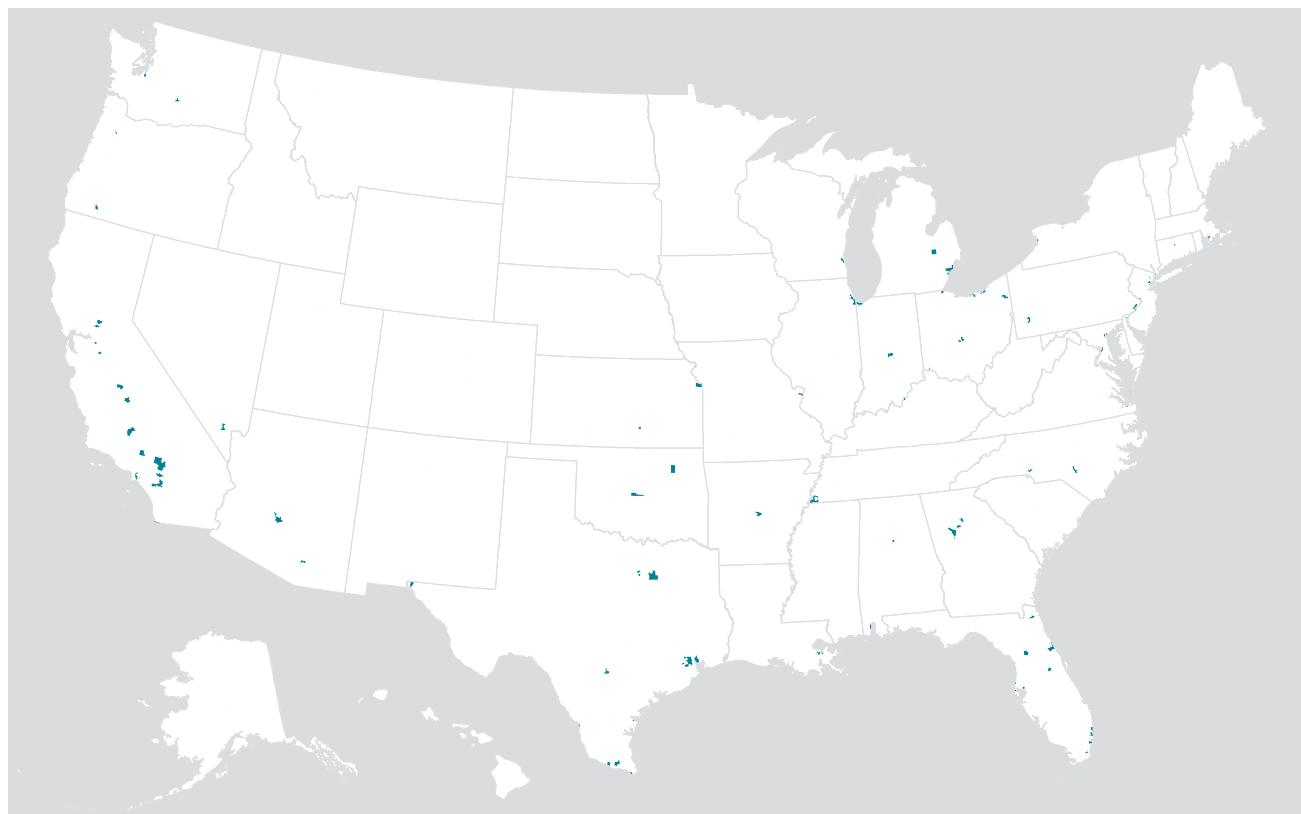
7 URBAN OPPORTUNITY DESERTS

Some 3.4 million young people live in urban neighborhoods where high-quality educational and employment opportunities are scarce, residential segregation is stark, and public transportation is inadequate. These areas, which we are calling urban opportunity deserts, are home to 650,000 disconnected young people.

Disconnection rates range from 15.4 percent in the Washington Heights, Inwood, and Marble Hill sections of northern Manhattan to 31.8 percent in the North and South Lawndale, Humboldt Park, and East and West Garfield Park sections of Chicago.

3.4 million
young people live here

19.1%
are disconnected
(650,400 people)



THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

7 URBAN OPPORTUNITY DESERTS

Latino (44.6 percent) and black (30.6 percent) young people are the most populous groups in urban opportunity deserts. White young people make up 18.1 percent of the youth population, and Asians make up 3.7 percent.

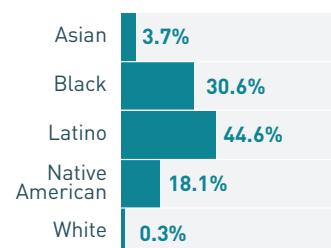
Three in ten disconnected young women are mothers, compared to 14.7 percent of all young women. The percentage of all youth living below the poverty line is 27.9, the highest rate of any cluster, and the share of disconnected youth living in poor households is 42.9 percent; only rural opportunity deserts have a higher poverty rate for out-of-school, out-of-work youth. Seventy-three percent of disconnected youth ages 18–24 have a high school diploma.

Examples of Communities in Urban Opportunity Deserts

When many people think of youth disconnection, **post-industrial urban areas along the Northeast Corridor, in the Rust Belt, and in Los Angeles come to mind**. Such places include central Los Angeles (15.8 percent), Baltimore (16.1 percent), Buffalo (16.3 percent), Columbus (17.7 percent), Newark (19.7 percent), and Flint (27.9 percent). **But urban opportunity deserts include neighborhoods in cities across the country:** Miami (15.5 percent), Fort Lauderdale (16.1 percent), Charlotte (16.9 percent), Fort Worth (17.6 percent), Memphis (18.6 percent), Central New Orleans (22.9 percent), and Mobile (28.2 percent).

The communities that bookend this cluster of locales make one point vividly clear: urban opportunity deserts often exist in close proximity to opportunity-rich urban areas. Washington Heights (15.4 percent) and the Upper East Side (which has a youth disconnection rate of 6.7 percent) share the island of Manhattan and are less than seven miles apart; Garfield Park (31.8 percent) is less than six miles from Lincoln Park (2.7 percent).

RACE AND ETHNICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN URBAN OPPORTUNITY DESERTS



Latino and black young people are the most populous youth groups in urban opportunity deserts.

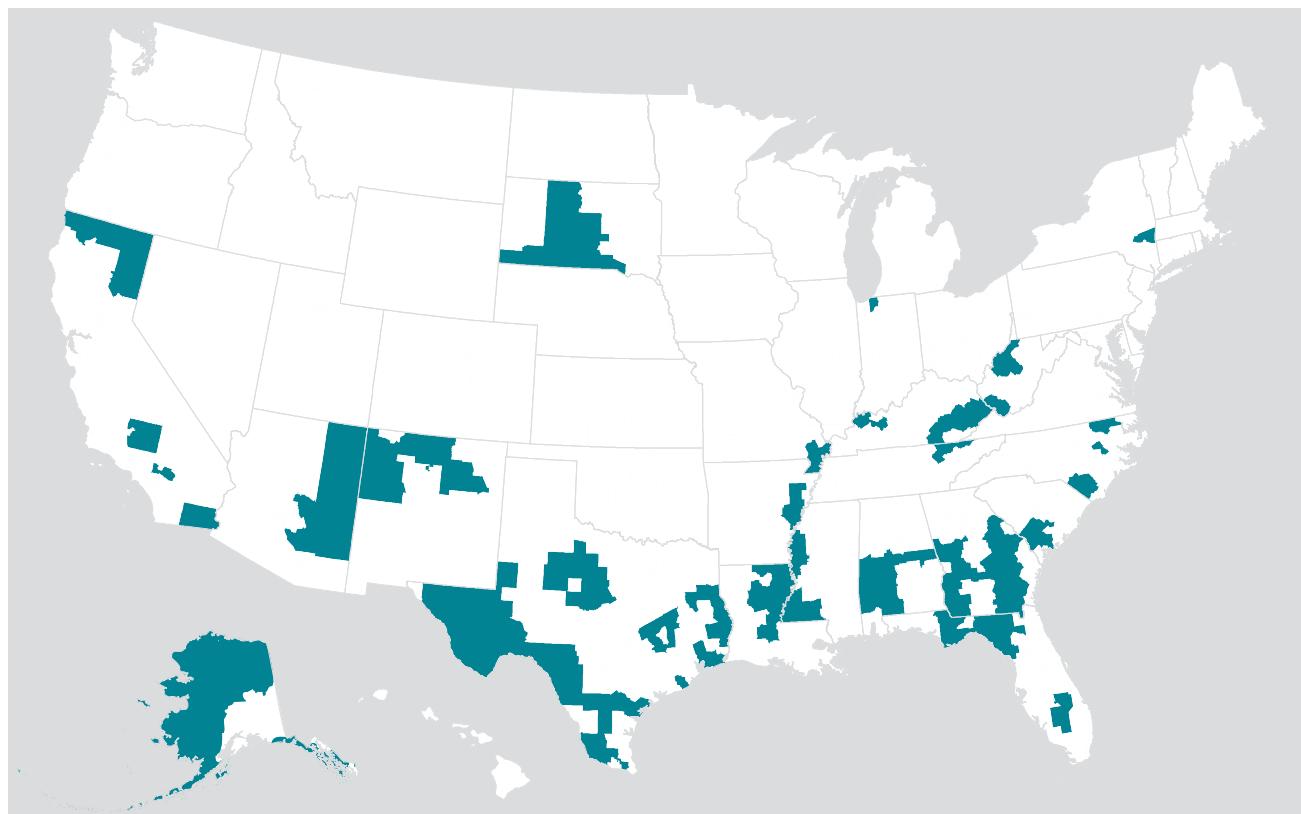
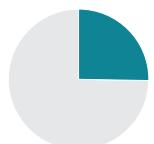
THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

8 RURAL OPPORTUNITY DESERTS

Rural opportunity deserts are home to some of the most acute challenges facing disadvantaged youth and the highest rates of disconnection for young people of every racial and ethnic group. Rates range from 21.8 percent in Missouri's Dunklin, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot, and Mississippi Counties to 36.1 percent in Northeast Louisiana and Central Pinal County, Arizona. The average disconnection rate for the cluster is a staggering 25.5 percent.

900,000
young people live here

25.5%
are disconnected
(230,500 people)



THE EIGHT COMMUNITY TYPES

8 RURAL OPPORTUNITY DESERTS

In rural opportunity deserts, fewer than half of all youth are white. In contrast, both well-connected rural America and struggling rural America are majority white, 75.9 percent and 60.5 percent, respectively. The struggles of rural Americans have captured the nation's attention in recent years, and the popular image of these residents is nearly universally white. But 20.3 percent of youth in the country's most disadvantaged rural areas are black, 24.4 percent are Latino, and 6.4 percent are Native American. Native Americans are particularly overrepresented in this cluster—only 2 percent of the nation's youth live in these areas, but 20 percent of Native American youth do.

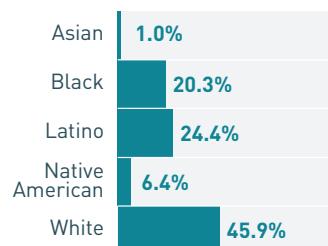
The youth disconnection rates for every racial and ethnic group are higher in this cluster than in any other, and all groups other than Asians have rates over 20 percent. Particularly alarming are the rates among black and Native American youth (33.2 percent and 34.2 percent, respectively). While the rate among Asian youth, 12.9 percent, is more than double the Asian disconnection rate nationally, it is 21.3 percentage points lower than the Native American rate—the largest racial gap in any cluster by far.

One-third of disconnected young women in rural opportunity deserts are mothers, and the poverty rate among disconnected youth, 43.5 percent, is higher than in any other cluster. Just seven in ten disconnected 18- to 24-year-olds have a high school diploma, lower than the share in any other cluster.

Examples of Communities in Rural Opportunity Deserts

Many of these communities are extremely segregated—often a single racial or ethnic group predominates. **Some are mostly Native American**, such as the Navajo Nation in northwest New Mexico (where 29.6 percent of youth are disconnected), the Lakota Region of South Dakota (27.4 percent), and Navajo and Apache Counties in Arizona (31.8 percent). **Others are predominantly black** (the South Delta region of Mississippi, 25.9 percent), **Latino** (the Middle Rio Grande Development Council region in South Texas, 22.3 percent), **or white** (Logan, Mingo, Wyoming, and McDowell Counties in southern West Virginia, 31.8 percent).

RACE AND ETHNICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL OPPORTUNITY DESERTS



The popular image of rural America is nearly universally white. But more than half of all youth in Rural Opportunity Deserts are people of color.

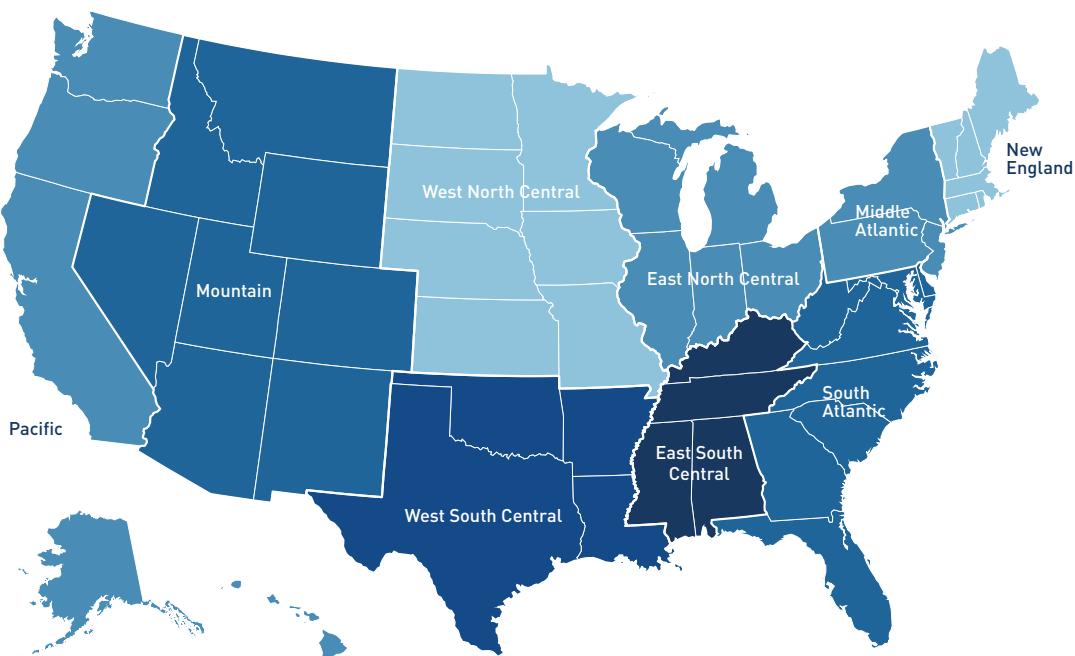
Regions, States, Metro Areas, Counties, and Congressional Districts

REGIONS

The youth disconnection rate remains stubbornly high in the South.

The East South Central region, which includes Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee, has the highest disconnection rate of any region in the United States (14.4 percent). The West South Central region (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma,

FIGURE 7 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY REGION



REGION	OVERALL (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	White (%)	Latino (%)	Black (%)
United States	11.2	11.5	10.8	9.2	12.8	17.4
New England	8.3	9.8	6.9	7.0	13.7	11.9
West North Central	8.5	8.6	8.4	7.2	10.9	15.1
East North Central	10.3	11.2	9.4	8.3	11.5	20.5
Middle Atlantic	10.6	11.4	9.9	8.2	13.7	17.6
Pacific	10.9	11.1	10.7	9.7	12.3	17.7
Mountain	11.4	11.0	11.8	9.2	13.0	15.8
South Atlantic	11.5	12.0	11.0	9.9	11.3	16.1
West South Central	13.2	13.1	13.3	11.0	14.4	17.3
East South Central	14.4	14.0	14.8	12.4	14.6	19.5

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

and Texas) has the second highest (13.2 percent). The South Atlantic region, the final southern division, which runs down the coast from Delaware to Florida and includes West Virginia, has a rate slightly above the national average (11.5 percent).

Northern regions fare far better.

New England saw a small increase but still boasts the lowest rate of any region, 8.3 percent, and the West North Central region (the Dakotas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, and Nebraska) has the second-lowest rate, 8.5 percent.

Gender

The rate of disconnection for young women in New England (6.9 percent) is far lower than the rate for men in the region (9.8 percent). Though the disconnection rates of young women are generally lower than the rates of young men in most places, the female rate in the East South Central region (14.8 percent), which includes Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee, is the highest gender/region combination in the country.

Race and Ethnicity

We calculated regional disconnection rates for the three largest racial and ethnic groups: black, Latino, and white young people. For black young people, the East North Central region (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin) has the highest rate, 20.5 percent. New England has the lowest rate, 12.5 percent—the same as the highest rate for white young people, found in the East South Central region. The high-to-low range for black youth, eight percentage points, is also far wider than that of white or Latino youth.

For Latino young people, the highest rate is found in the East South Central region (14.7 percent). The lowest rate is the West North Central region (10.9 percent).

For white young people, the East South Central region has the highest disconnection rate (12.5 percent) and New England features the lowest rate (7.1 percent).

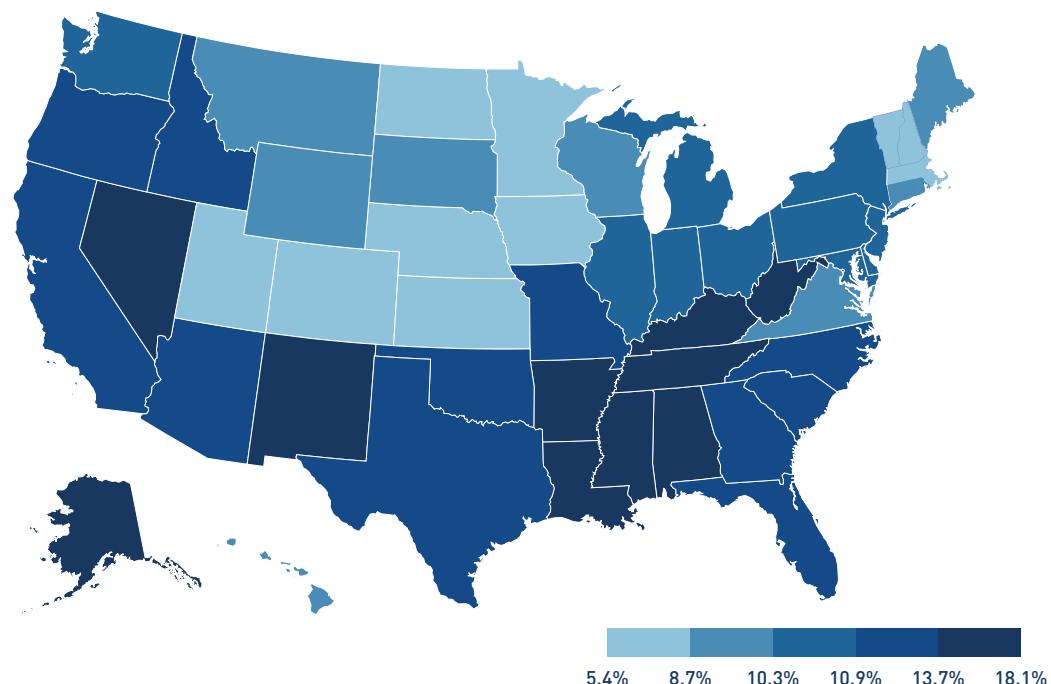
STATES

State governmental policies and budgets play a large role in three policy areas particularly consequential for disconnected youth: education, health care, and the criminal justice system.

Education and health care are two of the largest expenditures in the majority of state budgets, and state prisons hold far more US prisoners than local jails or federal prisons. Given that these three areas of policy, service delivery, and government expenditure are determined at the state level, state government arguably offers particular promise for combating disconnection and creating change at scale.

North Dakota has the lowest youth disconnection rate (5.4 percent), followed by Minnesota (6.5 percent) and Nebraska (7.2 percent). Alaska has the highest rate (18.1 percent), followed by West Virginia (17.8 percent) and New Mexico (16.7 percent).

FIGURE 8 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY STATE



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

TABLE 9 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY STATE

Rank	State	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
1	North Dakota	5.4	5,400					
2	Minnesota	6.5	41,600	6.3	6.7			5.1
3	Nebraska	7.2	17,100	8.6	5.7			6.4
4	Massachusetts	7.3	62,500	8.4	6.1	11.1	12.3	6.0
5	Utah	7.3	33,600	6.7	7.9		8.0	6.9
6	Vermont	7.8	6,300					
7	Iowa	8.3	33,200	8.4	8.2		13.1	7.1
8	New Hampshire	8.5	13,500	8.8	8.2			7.8
9	Kansas	8.6	32,500	8.0	9.3	15.6		7.3
10	Colorado	8.6	58,100	8.7	8.5		11.3	7.4
11	Wisconsin	8.7	60,200	11.1	6.2	28.0	15.1	6.0
12	Virginia	8.9	92,300	8.6	9.2	12.9	9.5	8.1
13	Hawaii	9.2	13,800	9.5	8.9			
14	Maine	9.6	13,200	11.6	7.5			9.3
15	Rhode Island	9.6	13,600	13.6				7.0
16	Montana	9.7	11,900	7.4	12.1			8.0
17	South Dakota	9.7	10,500	8.4				5.4
18	Connecticut	9.7	42,800	11.0	8.3	15.4	14.0	7.6
19	Wyoming	9.9	6,700	10.4				10.1
20	Delaware	10.3	11,200	11.0	9.6	19.7		
21	Ohio	10.3	142,400	11.1	9.6	18.0	14.2	8.7
22	Illinois	10.3	156,900	11.2	9.5	19.9	11.0	7.9
23	New Jersey	10.5	104,200	11.8	9.0	20.9	11.8	7.3
24	Pennsylvania	10.5	156,200	11.0	10.0	17.8	15.3	8.6
25	Michigan	10.6	128,700	11.1	10.2	22.4	9.5	8.4

TABLE 9 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY STATE, CONTINUED

Rank	State	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
26	District of Columbia	10.7	9,100	14.4		20.2		
27	Washington	10.8	89,200	10.1	11.5	13.1	14.1	9.6
28	Maryland	10.8	74,200	11.6	10.0	16.2	11.0	7.7
29	Indiana	10.8	89,700	11.3	10.2	18.4	10.3	10.1
30	New York	10.8	245,700	11.5	10.2	16.2	14.1	8.2
31	California	10.9	515,500	11.2	10.5	18.7	12.3	9.1
32	Missouri	11.0	79,800	11.5	10.4	16.6		10.0
33	North Carolina	11.1	138,600	11.0	11.2	13.5	12.6	9.8
34	Oregon	11.2	51,500	11.7	10.7		11.9	11.5
35	Florida	11.9	268,000	12.8	10.8	17.3	11.7	10.3
36	Oklahoma	11.9	56,700	11.5	12.4	13.2	11.7	10.9
37	South Carolina	12.3	75,800	13.3	11.3	18.1	8.6	10.0
38	Georgia	12.6	168,300	13.1	12.2	16.4	11.6	10.6
39	Texas	12.7	462,300	12.4	13.1	14.3	14.5	10.5
40	Idaho	13.1	28,200	15.2	10.9		14.5	12.3
41	Arizona	13.2	115,300	12.3	14.2	16.3	13.7	10.5
42	Tennessee	13.7	107,900	12.7	14.6	21.6	13.4	11.4
43	Nevada	13.8	44,500	13.5	14.1	24.5	12.5	12.3
44	Kentucky	14.3	75,600	12.9	15.7	21.4	14.9	13.4
45	Alabama	14.5	85,200	14.7	14.3	17.9		12.8
46	Arkansas	14.7	53,900	14.2	15.3	24.2	11.3	12.0
47	Mississippi	15.8	61,400	16.9	14.7	18.9		12.6
48	Louisiana	16.4	92,100	18.4	14.4	22.3	15.8	12.2
49	New Mexico	16.7	43,700	16.1	17.4		16.8	13.3
50	West Virginia	17.8	36,800	16.9	18.9			18.4
51	Alaska	18.1	15,900	19.2	17.0			16.6

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

Gender

The highest disconnection rates for young men are in Alaska (19.2 percent), Louisiana (18.4 percent), and Mississippi (16.9 percent), and the lowest rates are in Minnesota (6.3 percent), Utah (6.7 percent), and Montana (7.4 percent). Young women are most likely to be disconnected in West Virginia (18.9 percent), New Mexico (17.4 percent), and Alaska (17.0 percent) and least likely to be disconnected in Nebraska (5.7 percent), Massachusetts (6.1 percent), and Wisconsin (6.2 percent). The lowest rate of disconnection of any gender/state combination is for young women living in Nebraska.

Race and Ethnicity

Black young people face significantly higher disconnection rates than both white and Latino young people. The highest rates for black young people are found in Wisconsin (28.0 percent), Nevada (24.5 percent), and Arkansas (24.2 percent). The lowest rates of disconnection are in Massachusetts (11.1 percent), Virginia (12.9 percent), and Washington (13.1 percent). The lowest state-level rate of disconnection for young black men (Massachusetts, 11.1 percent) is still well above that same state's rate for young white men (6.0 percent).

New Mexico (16.8 percent), Louisiana (15.8 percent), and Pennsylvania (15.3 percent) are home to the highest disconnection rates for Latino young people. The lowest rates can be found in Utah (8.0 percent), South Carolina (8.6 percent), and Virginia (9.5 percent).

White young people are most likely to be disconnected in West Virginia (18.4 percent), Alaska (16.6 percent), and Kentucky (13.4 percent). West Virginia has been home to the highest white disconnection rates for the past four years. White young people are least likely to be disconnected in Minnesota (5.1 percent), South Dakota (5.4 percent), and Wisconsin (6.0 percent).

The divergence in disconnection rates between the three racial and ethnic groups is particularly stark in Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, the rate for black young people is the highest of any state in the country and more than 4.5 times the rate for white people, the third-lowest in the country. The state's rate is the fourth-highest in the country for Latino youth (15.1 percent), 2.5 times higher than that of white youth.

In Wisconsin, the rate for black young people is the highest in the country and more than 4.5 times the rate for white people. The white rate is the third-lowest in the country.

Change over Time

In terms of change over time, Alaska experienced the largest increase in the share of disconnected young people between 2017 and 2018, 28.0 percent. The state's 2018 rate of 18.1 percent erases virtually all the gains made between 2016 and 2017, when the rate fell from 17.9 percent to 13.1 percent. The largest drop in disconnection was achieved by Utah, a decrease of 24.9 percent, though both the state's 2018 rate (7.3 percent) and 2017 rate (9.6 percent) are well below the national average.

METRO AREAS

A metropolitan area is a central city and its surrounding towns, suburbs, and exurbs. Communities within metro areas are bound together by strong economic, social, and environmental ties, even when they cross state lines. Metro areas are a key unit of analysis for understanding youth disconnection rates as they frame labor markets and higher education systems, which can be more aligned to metro areas rather than bounded by state or county lines.

Provo-Orem, Utah (6.1 percent), boasts the lowest disconnection rate of any metro area in the country, followed by Ogden-Clearfield, Utah (6.2 percent), and Dayton, Ohio (6.2 percent). The highest rate of disconnection can be found in Bakersfield, California (20.8), followed by Winston-Salem, North Carolina (18.3 percent); Augusta-Richmond County, GA-SC (17.6 percent); and the Memphis, TN-MS-AR, metro area (17.5 percent).

Communities within metro areas are bound together by strong economic, social, and environmental ties.

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TABLE 10 YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA'S MOST POPULOUS METRO AREAS

Rank	Metro Area	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
1	Provo-Orem, UT	6.1	7,700		6.5			6.4
2	Ogden-Clearfield, UT	6.2	4,800					
3	Dayton, OH	6.2	6,000					
4	Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	6.6	40,800	7.4	5.9	10.8	11.6	5.4
5	Akron, OH	7.0	6,500	9.1				6.7
6	San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	7.1	14,700	6.9	7.3		9.1	
7	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	7.1	30,600	6.5	7.7			5.5
8	Salt Lake City, UT	7.4	11,900	7.6	7.2			6.7
9	Harrisburg-Carlisle, PA	7.5	5,000	7.4				
10	Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO	7.8	25,100	8.8	6.7		10.0	6.3
11	Durham-Chapel Hill, NC	7.8	6,300					
12	Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin, SC	8.0	9,900	8.4	7.5			6.9
13	Grand Rapids-Wyoming, MI	8.0	9,700	9.1				5.9
14	Worcester, MA-CT	8.1	9,600	7.9				8.1
15	Austin-Round Rock, TX	8.3	22,300	9.0	7.6		8.4	7.3
16	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	8.3	58,900	8.8	7.8	13.3	10.7	5.2
17	San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, CA	8.3	38,700	8.9	7.7	15.2	11.7	6.4
18	Raleigh, NC	8.4	13,600	9.3	7.5			7.9
19	Urban Honolulu, HI	8.5	9,400	7.1	10.2			
20	Omaha-Council Bluffs, NE-IA	8.5	9,900	9.8	7.0			8.5
21	Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT	8.5	9,700	10.1				6.1
22	Colorado Springs, CO	8.6	8,500		12.2			7.3
23	Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, FL	8.6	4,900					
24	Scranton-Wilkes-Barre-Hazleton, PA	8.7	4,900					
25	Pittsburgh, PA	8.9	21,500	9.2	8.5			7.2

TABLE 10 YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA'S MOST POPULOUS METRO AREAS, CONTINUED

Rank	Metro Area	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
26	Des Moines–West Des Moines, IA	8.9	8,100					
27	Albany–Schenectady–Troy, NY	8.9	10,600					
28	Sacramento–Roseville–Arden–Arcade, CA	8.9	25,100	10.4	7.4	13.0	9.6	8.3
29	St. Louis, MO–IL	9.0	29,200	9.6	8.4	16.3		6.8
30	Rochester, NY	9.0	11,800	11.4	6.5			6.6
31	Virginia Beach–Norfolk–Newport News, VA–NC	9.0	21,600	8.6	9.6	10.7		9.0
32	Buffalo–Cheektowaga–Niagara Falls, NY	9.1	12,100	8.1	10.1			8.1
33	San Diego–Carlsbad, CA	9.2	38,500	9.3	9.1		10.0	8.6
34	Deltona–Daytona Beach–Ormond Beach, FL	9.3	6,300					
35	Syracuse, NY	9.3	8,900	10.4				
36	Oxnard–Thousand Oaks–Ventura, CA	9.3	9,500	10.0	8.5		10.5	
37	Kansas City, MO–KS	9.3	23,900	9.8	8.8	15.9		7.5
38	Charlotte–Concord–Gastonia, NC–SC	9.3	27,400	8.5	10.1	11.3		7.8
39	Cape Coral–Fort Myers, FL	9.3	6,400		10.2			
40	Spokane–Spokane Valley, WA	9.3	6,500		11.1			8.6
41	Oklahoma City, OK	9.4	16,300	9.8	8.9			7.3
42	Providence–Warwick, RI–MA	9.4	19,400	12.8	6.1		14.6	7.7
43	Cincinnati, OH–KY–IN	9.5	25,400	10.4	8.6			8.7
44	New Haven–Milford, CT	9.6	10,300	10.0				
45	Seattle–Tacoma–Bellevue, WA	9.6	39,200	9.2	9.9	12.1	11.4	8.9
46	Los Angeles–Long Beach–Anaheim, CA	9.6	151,200	9.7	9.5	18.1	10.7	7.4
47	Allentown–Bethlehem–Easton, PA–NJ	9.7	9,800					8.2
48	Toledo, OH	10.0	8,400	11.3				
49	Hartford–West Hartford–East Hartford, CT	10.0	15,200	11.3	8.6			7.2
50	Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL–IN–WI	10.1	113,900	10.7	9.5	20.9	10.6	6.5

TABLE 10 YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA'S MOST POPULOUS METRO AREAS, CONTINUED

Rank	Metro Area	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
51	Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN	10.1	24,000	9.6	10.7	12.4		8.4
52	North Port-Sarasota-Bradenton, FL	10.2	6,900	10.2				9.2
53	Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL	10.2	31,000	10.4	10.0	15.5	12.2	6.7
54	Charleston-North Charleston, SC	10.3	9,100		9.2			10.1
55	Columbus, OH	10.4	24,800	10.2	10.5	19.0		8.0
56	Richmond, VA	10.5	15,200	10.3	10.7	15.2		7.9
57	Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson, IN	10.7	24,900	12.5	9.0	16.9		9.2
58	New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	10.8	238,500	11.5	10.1	16.7	12.8	7.7
59	Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	10.9	80,400	11.3	10.4	14.0	10.5	8.6
60	Tucson, AZ	10.9	16,100	9.0	12.8		12.6	7.2
61	Jackson, MS	11.0	8,800	13.1		14.8		
62	Columbia, SC	11.2	13,200	12.2	10.0	18.5		7.4
63	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	11.2	104,600	10.0	12.4	14.7	12.1	9.2
64	Baltimore-Columbia-Towson, MD	11.3	36,800	12.4	10.1	19.7		7.7
65	Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA	11.4	31,500	11.3	11.5		14.0	10.9
66	Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	11.8	83,200	13.5	10.0	19.7	19.3	7.1
67	Greensboro-High Point, NC	11.8	11,900	12.0	11.6			9.1
68	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	11.9	76,600	14.1	9.6	16.1	10.5	10.6
69	Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	12.0	55,700	12.7	11.3	21.3		9.2
70	Tulsa, OK	12.1	11,700	11.7	12.4			11.1
71	Wichita, KS	12.1	10,400	10.8				
72	Cleveland-Elyria, OH	12.1	27,500	14.6	9.5	20.6		8.7
73	Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI	12.1	21,400	14.8	9.4	24.6		5.7
74	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	12.2	38,400	12.4	12.0	17.6	14.4	10.3
75	Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX	12.2	102,500	11.3	13.2	13.2	14.6	9.8

TABLE 10 YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA'S MOST POPULOUS METRO AREAS, CONTINUED

Rank	Metro Area	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
76	Phoenix–Mesa–Scottsdale, AZ	12.3	70,300	12.3	12.3	14.6	13.5	10.0
77	Springfield, MA	12.3	9,300	16.5			22.4	
78	Baton Rouge, LA	12.4	14,200	15.3		18.2		9.4
79	Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN	12.5	17,100	12.0	12.9			10.6
80	Knoxville, TN	12.5	14,900	10.7	14.3			10.7
81	Little Rock–North Little Rock–Conway, AR	12.9	11,000	10.6	15.2	19.1		10.1
82	Jacksonville, FL	13.0	21,300	14.3	11.5	20.3	12.7	11.5
83	Stockton–Lodi, CA	13.1	12,400	10.5	15.9		10.8	
84	Boise City, ID	13.2	11,800	15.2				12.6
85	Albuquerque, NM	13.4	13,900	14.4	12.3		13.7	
86	Chattanooga, TN-GA	13.7	10,300	10.6	16.7			10.6
87	Riverside–San Bernardino–Ontario, CA	14.0	83,500	13.4	14.5	23.1	14.3	12.9
88	Las Vegas–Henderson–Paradise, NV	14.2	33,900	14.5	13.9	26.1	11.9	12.3
89	New Orleans–Metairie, LA	14.4	19,400	16.5	12.3	20.1		10.0
90	Fresno, CA	14.6	18,800	17.1	12.1		16.7	9.9
91	El Paso, TX	14.8	18,200	15.8	13.6		14.7	
92	McAllen–Edinburg–Mission, TX	15.0	18,900	12.6	17.4		15.5	
93	San Antonio–New Braunfels, TX	15.5	51,500	16.4	14.5		16.8	13.1
94	Birmingham–Hoover, AL	15.8	21,900	16.5	15.1	16.8		15.2
95	Lakeland–Winter Haven, FL	15.8	12,200	17.5				16.3
96	Memphis, TN-MS-AR	17.5	34,000	17.4	17.6	20.7		13.1
97	Augusta–Richmond County, GA-SC	17.6	14,500	19.1		25.2		
98	Winston–Salem, NC	18.3	13,700	21.5	15.1			17.3
99	Bakersfield, CA	20.8	24,600	20.7	20.9		18.8	24.5

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

COUNTIES

Counties are defined by the Census Bureau as the primary legal divisions of most states. Most counties are functioning governmental units in themselves, meaning that county stakeholders have key decision-making power on policies related to youth disconnection.

TABLE 11 TOP- AND BOTTOM-SCORING COUNTIES

10 Lowest-Disconnection Counties

County	State	County Type	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)
Story County	Iowa	Small City	1.6	500
Harrisonburg City	Virginia	Small City	2.3	400
Johnson County	Iowa	Small City	3.0	1,000
Montgomery County	Virginia	Small City	3.1	900
Wallace County	Kansas	Rural	3.2	4
Hampshire County	Massachusetts	Medium City	3.2	1,300
Gallatin County	Montana	Town	3.4	600
Wood County	Ohio	Medium City	3.5	900
Tompkins County	New York	Small City	3.5	1,000
Riley County	Kansas	Small City	3.6	900

10 Highest-Disconnection Counties

County	State	County Type	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)
Jones County	Texas	Small City	50.4	1,100
Telfair County	Georgia	Rural	50.5	700
Madison County	Texas	Rural	52.2	885
Hamilton County	Florida	Rural	53.5	900
Lincoln County	Arkansas	Small City	53.6	800
Lassen County	California	Town	54.3	2,400
Forest County	Pennsylvania	Rural	66.2	500
Stewart County	Georgia	Rural	72.7	600
East Carroll Parish	Louisiana	Rural	77.2	900
Hancock County	Georgia	Town	80.7	600

Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2014–2018.

Counties can range from rural areas or townships to large cities and urban centers. Rural counties have by far the highest rate of youth disconnection (18.1 percent). They also, however, have the lowest total population and total youth population, meaning that the number of disconnected youth in rural counties (362,500) is the lowest by head count of all county types. Towns, the least-populated type of county following rural counties, have the second-highest disconnection rate (13.8 percent). The lowest rate (10.4 percent) is found in the suburbs.

County youth disconnection rates have a far greater range than any other unit of geography. Iowa's Story County, a small city, has the lowest youth disconnection rate in the country (1.6 percent), followed by Virginia's Harrisonburg City (2.3 percent), Iowa's Johnson County (3.0 percent), Virginia's Montgomery County (3.1 percent), and Kansas's Wallace County (3.2 percent).

Georgia's Hancock County has the highest rate of youth disconnection in the country (80.7 percent), which differs from the lowest county-level rate by 79.1 percentage points. Hancock County is followed by Louisiana's East Carroll Parish (77.2 percent), Georgia's Stewart County (72.7 percent), Pennsylvania's Forest County (66.2 percent), and California's Lassen County (54.3 percent).

Rural counties have by far the highest rate of youth disconnection (18.1 percent).

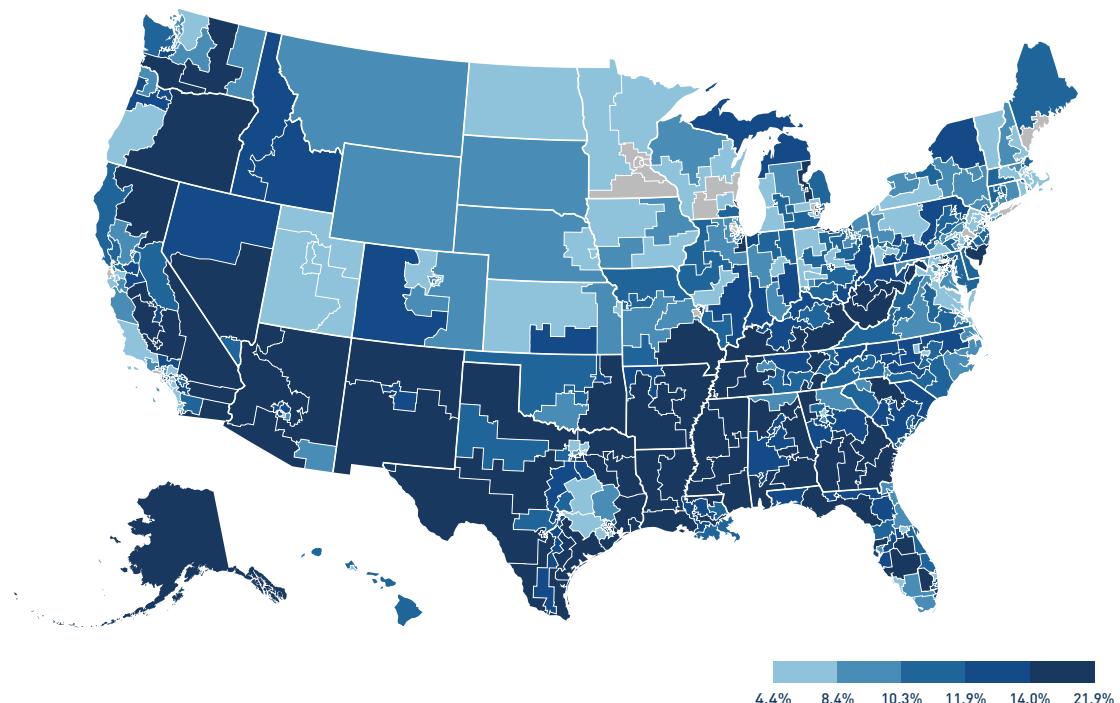
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

As is the case with the other geographies examined in this section, the rate of youth disconnection varies widely by congressional district. Massachusetts District 5, which includes suburbs north and west of Boston, has the lowest rate (4.4 percent). Massachusetts District 7, which comprises the majority of Boston, parts of Cambridge, and surrounding suburbs, comes next (4.5 percent). California District 48 (along the coast from Laguna Niguel to Seal Beach, 4.7 percent), California District 45 (inland suburbs of Orange County, 4.7 percent), and Colorado District 2 (northwestern suburbs of Denver, 5.0 percent) round out the five districts with the lowest rates.

West Virginia District 3, which includes the southern cities of Huntington, Princeton, Bluefield, and Buckley, is home to the highest youth disconnection rate, 21.9 percent. Kentucky District 5, in rural Appalachia, follows closely with a rate of 21.9 percent (rounding gives them the same rate, but in reality, Kentucky District 5 has a slightly lower rate). Louisiana District 5, which contains Alexandria and Monroe, has the third-highest rate (21.5 percent), followed by New York District 15, which includes the southern and western portion of the Bronx (21.4 percent), and Tennessee District 9, which is home to nearly all of Memphis (20.6 percent).

West Virginia District 3 has the highest youth disconnection rate, 21.9 percent.

FIGURE 12 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

The male youth disconnection rate is highest in Louisiana District 5 (24.5 percent) and lowest in Utah District 3 (6.1 percent) in the southern and eastern part of the state. The female disconnection rate is highest in California District 8 (26.0 percent), which contains most of the eastern desert and is the largest and least dense district in the state. The lowest rate of disconnection for girls and young women is in Texas District 17 (5.2 percent), which runs from Waco to Bryan-College station in the central part of the state.

Illinois District 7 has the highest black youth disconnection rate in the country, 31.7 percent; this district extends from the western border of Cook County to Lake Michigan and contains much of the West Side of Chicago as well as surrounding suburban communities. The second- and third-highest rates (both rounded to 29.7 percent) can be found in Louisiana District 5 and New York District 15. For black youth, the lowest rate of disconnection (11.3 percent) is in Virginia District 3, which is in the southeastern part of the state and includes Franklin, Newport News, and Portsmouth, parts of the cities of Chesapeake, Hampton, Norfolk, and Suffolk, and all of the county of Isle of Wight. The second- and third-lowest rates can be found in Georgia, in District 4 (13.2 percent) and District 5 (14.0 percent).

For Latino youth, the highest rate of disconnection is found in Massachusetts District 1 (21.6 percent), the state's largest congressional district, which, though it is mainly rural, includes Springfield, West Springfield, Pittsfield, Holyoke, and Westfield. New York District 15 has the second-highest rate (20.4 percent) and Texas District 34 has the third highest (19.3 percent). The three lowest rates for Latino youth are all 8.0 percent and are found in Florida District 25, California District 46, and Texas District 17.

The white youth disconnection rate is highest in Kentucky District 5 (22.0 percent), which lies northeast of Houston and contains Hardin, Jasper, Liberty, Newton, Orange, Polk, and Tyler Counties. West Virginia contains the second- and third-highest rates, in District 3 (20.8 percent) and District 2 (20.7 percent). The lowest rates for white youth are found in Michigan District 12 (4.8 percent), which contains the city of Ann Arbor; South Dakota at-large District (5.4 percent); and Michigan District 8, also located in the southeastern corner of the state (5.6 percent).

The lowest rate of disconnection for girls and young women is in Texas District 17 (5.2 percent).

THE YOUTH VOTE: WHOSE VOICES COUNT?



The 2018 elections saw the highest voter turnout of any midterm contest in more than a century,²¹ an increase driven in part by a jump in the number of young people going to the polls.²² If the 2018 midterms were any indication, young people, fired up about burning existential issues ranging from climate change and gun violence to inequality and student debt, will go to the ballot box in record numbers this November. The emerging consensus among political pundits and researchers alike is that 2020 will be the year of the youth vote.

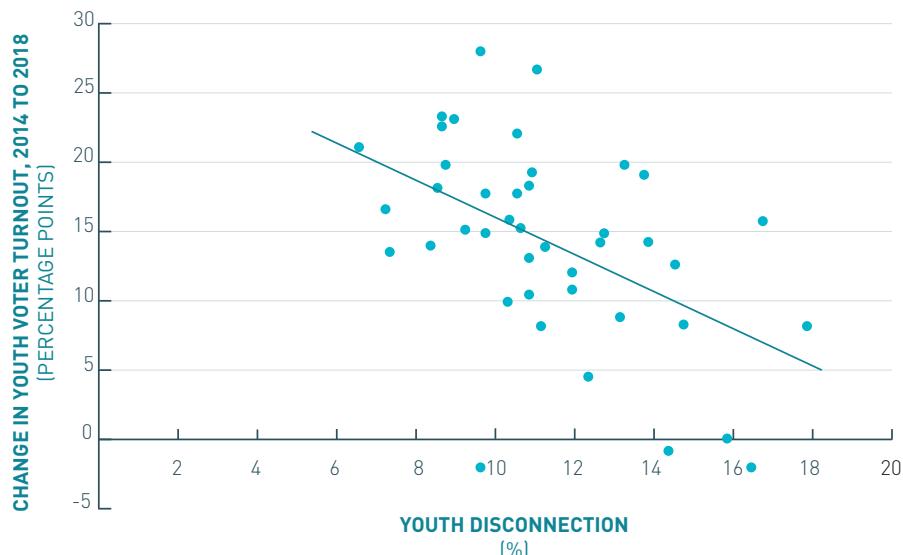
But this raises a new set of questions: Are civic engagement and investment in politics increasing among all groups of young people? Are young people of all sorts equally aware of how to engage in the electoral process? And are candidates and campaigns looking beyond easy-to-reach college kids and working to capture the attention of all potential voters in the 18–24 age bracket? The answer to these questions, unsurprisingly, is no, according to our analysis of relationships between youth voter turnout and youth disconnection rates by state. In the context of the 2020 election cycle, the term “youth” largely appears to be shorthand for college students, with teens and young adults who are neither working nor in school an afterthought at best.

That some young people are encouraged and others ignored when it comes to political participation matters for many reasons. Civic engagement—which can include volunteering in one’s local community, running for office, engaging with local officials, or voting in elections—can help youth, particularly low-income teens and young adults whose links to the worlds of education and work are tenuous, build social capital, skills, and a sense of agency that can help them find meaningful education and career pathways.²³ For the individual young person, civic engagement is a key marker of the transition from adolescence to adulthood, on par with finishing school or starting a family.²⁴ Civic engagement during late adolescence and early adulthood is positively associated with adult income and educational level, and voting in particular is positively associated with good mental health and health behaviors in adulthood.²⁵ Civic engagement is also strongly correlated with upward economic mobility,²⁶ thanks to the social capital and opportunity for skills development it brings.²⁷ For the country as a whole, unequal civic engagement results in government policies that favor the interests of the wealthy,²⁸ and low rates of engagement and voter turnout are correlated with elected officials who are unrepresentative of the general population of the area they represent.²⁹ Voting is habit-forming, and those who go to the polls as teenagers are more likely to vote as adults, a boon to democracy.³⁰ The bottom line: an equitable, inclusive America requires that all voices are heard.

Voting is habit-forming, and those who go to the polls as teenagers are more likely to vote as adults, a boon to democracy.

Of the past four US election cycles, 2018 was the only one that saw a strong correlation between youth disconnection and youth voter turnout. Youth voter turnout increased between 2014 and 2018 in nearly every state, but the states where more youth are working or in school saw the greatest increase in youth civic engagement. In short, the lower the state youth disconnection rate, the higher the increase in youth voter turnout.

FIGURE 13 MORE-CONNECTED STATES SAW GREATER INCREASES IN TURNOUT



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey and Current Population Survey, 2018.

Zooming in on different states shows the range of turnout increases between the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections. Minnesota, for example, had one of the lowest state disconnection rates in 2018 (6.5 percent) and saw an uptick in youth voter turnout of 21.1 percentage points. West Virginia, which has one of the nation's highest disconnection rates (17.8 percent), saw an increase of only 8.2 percentage points. On average, for every percentage point lower a state's disconnection rate is than another's, its voter turnout rate is 1.3 percentage points higher.

Though some of the overall increase in voter turnout can be attributed to the 2018 “blue wave,” the surge of liberal voters that allowed Democrats to gain control of the House of Representatives, it alone cannot explain this pattern of increased youth voter turnout by state. While the turnout data is not broken down by party registration, we can see that across the board, low-disconnection states saw large increases in turnout—whether they leaned Democratic or Republican. And although states with the highest disconnection rates and the lowest increases in turnout tend to lean Republican, high-disconnection Democratic-leaning states like Nevada and New Mexico also saw more moderate increases in

Across the board, low-disconnection states saw large increases in turnout—whether they leaned Democratic or Republican.

turnout than their more-connected counterparts. In other words, statewide party affiliation is not the sole driver of the disconnection-turnout relationship.

Media attention has focused on how the student vote has been both mobilized and suppressed in recent years, but little attention has been paid to teens and young adults who are out of school. In the 2008 presidential election, only 26 percent of those with less than a high school diploma voted, compared to 71 percent of those with at least a college degree.³¹ Young people heading to college are more likely to belong to civic organizations than those who are not college-bound,³² and college students, part of a shared community and often living together on or near campuses, are easier to organize than youth in general. Disconnected young people, on the other hand, are often cut off from opportunities for civic engagement in much the same way and for the same reasons they are detached from educational and job opportunities.

Scholars studying civic engagement employ the same “desert” metaphor we use to discuss extremely disconnected urban neighborhoods and rural areas, saying that low-income young people often live in “civic deserts,” communities with few civic institutions or opportunities to become engaged politically.³³ The rural and urban opportunity deserts we discussed previously also tend to be civic deserts due to their isolation from the mainstream (physically, socially, and economically), limited access to information, inadequate public services, and poorly resourced civic institutions whose good work too often goes unnoticed. The people living in these areas are invisible to many politicians and absent from the tables where decisions are made; their voices are missing from the public discourse. Civic deserts can be found in rural opportunity deserts, such as southwest Alabama, where the youth disconnection rate is 28.9 percent, and Kentucky’s Big Sandy area (26.1 percent), as well as in urban opportunity deserts in the middle of big cities, such as central Indianapolis (21.6 percent) or northern Milwaukee (20.1 percent).

Getting out the youth vote, especially in non-presidential election years, is challenging. Many young people can be intimidated by a voting process they perceive as hostile to them. A 2018 survey from Tufts University found that only 41 percent of low-income young people ages 18 to 34 believed that election officials were making an effort to ensure that “people like themselves” could vote in their communities. Thirty-eight percent said they did not know where to vote, and only 21 percent knew how to secure an absentee ballot. These young people are most likely to get voting and election information from their peers (66 percent) and least likely to get such information from civic organizations (18 percent), suggesting that civic organizations need to do a better job of reaching teens and young adults through social media and other youth-friendly channels. Issues of voter suppression are also crucial: 62 percent of those surveyed said they personally knew someone who was unable to vote or whose ability to vote was in question due to their criminal record or immigration status.³⁴

26%
of those with less than a high school diploma voted in the 2008 presidential election, compared to 71% of those with at least a college degree.

Rural and urban opportunity deserts also tend to be civic deserts.

Addressing youth disconnection more broadly—particularly creating stronger attachments to educational institutions, traditionally a key place for young people to learn about democracy—would go a long way to addressing the civic disconnection of out-of-school, out-of-work youth. So, too, would improving the quality of civic education in schools, which is wildly uneven. State standards for the development of civics skills like deliberation and collaboration, as well as support to teachers facilitating political discussions on controversial topics in the classroom, would help to address the fact that well-resourced schools tend to have better-quality civics education than schools serving low-income young people.³⁵ Improving the quality of community service programs and making them more accessible to youth who are not in college would also boost civic engagement.³⁶

Improving skills and knowledge around civic engagement is a long-term project that would likely improve political participation and voter turnout over time. There are also short-term measures that could quickly boost the youth turnout if implemented more broadly—automatic voter registration systems that register a person to vote when he or she gets a driver’s license, preregistration of 16- and 17-year-olds through high schools, and same-day voter registration. Same-day registration, which allows voters to register at the polls on election day itself and then immediately cast their ballots, shows tremendous promise—particularly for disconnected young people, as they are less likely to have access to a car and thus to have a driver’s license, more likely to have left high school, and more likely to have frequent changes of address that complicate the registration process. A 2019 study using data from the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey Voter Supplement found that same-day registration increases turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds by as much as ten percentage points, which translates to hundreds of thousands of votes.³⁷

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY POINTS:

- The 2020 youth disconnection rate will spike.
- Disconnected youth and their families will be hardest hit.
- We have enough money to solve youth disconnection.
- This report shines a spotlight on our most vulnerable communities.
- One size doesn't fit all.
- The danger that current disconnected youth will be further left behind is very real.



Covid-19 has likely erased ten years' progress in reducing the national youth disconnection rate in a matter of months. It is difficult, at the height of the pandemic, to make recommendations for a future whose landscape we cannot yet divine. Nonetheless, a few things are clear.

The 2020 youth disconnection rate will spike.

Data on school enrollment and employment from the American Community Survey have a lag of roughly twelve to eighteen months. (That's why this report, released in 2020, features data from 2018.) Thus, we won't definitively know the impact of the pandemic on youth disconnection until late 2021. It is already apparent, however, that the ranks of disconnected youth will swell well beyond what we saw in the aftermath of the Great Recession, when 5.8 million young people were out of school and work.

First, unemployment has skyrocketed. Between March 15 and March 28 alone, 13.2 million people filed jobless claims, an all-time record,³⁸ and as of May 1, the novel coronavirus had cost more than 30 million Americans their jobs. At the time of this writing, the Congressional Budget Office predicted that the unemployment rate will soon exceed 15 percent—higher than during the Great Recession—and remain close to that until the end of 2021.³⁹ Less-sanguine economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis have predicted that the unemployment rate could top 32 percent.⁴⁰ In times of high unemployment, young workers and less-educated workers are the hardest hit. They are also the least likely to hold jobs that can be conducted remotely, as they are often employed in food service or retail jobs. Current high school and college seniors will graduate into the worst economy since the Great Depression.

Second, school enrollment is likely to drop. Unlike during the Great Recession, when many young people waited out the poor job market in the classroom, the coming year will see ties to the educational system unravel. K-12 schools in all fifty states have moved to distance learning, and, as of April 27, at least forty-three states have said that their schools will remain shuttered through the end of the school year.⁴¹ Colleges and universities have almost universally moved their operations online through the end of the semester, and many are already planning for summer and fall sessions to be held remotely. Recent surveys suggest that four-year colleges and universities could lose 20 percent of their students in the fall.⁴²

Distance learning magnifies the effects of the vastly different home environments students experience. Some are able to work from their childhood bedrooms on personal computers with strong internet connections and parents able to lend a hand, while others live in crowded households without broadband where siblings and parents must share a single computer or make due with mobile

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devices. Just 61 percent of Latino households and 66 percent of black households have broadband internet, compared to 79 percent of white households.⁴³ Anecdotal evidence suggests that while students in affluent K-12 districts have been managing the demands of online learning, students in struggling districts have not. Low-income young people may lose valuable instruction time, fall further behind their peers, and risk repeating a grade, all of which make them more likely to drop out. If distance learning continues, districts and state governments lacking resources and guidance may resort to online or virtual school providers, which often have dismal performance records and receive little oversight. Evaluations of online charter schools—which on average show almost no academic growth in math scores after a year of instruction—speak to the overwhelming challenges inherent in moving the classroom into cyberspace.⁴⁴

In this environment, when even high-achieving students struggle to remain engaged, the already tenuous bonds between at-risk young people and school are far more likely to fray. In the absence of in-person encouragement and support, fewer high school students will transition to college or career and technical programs than in normal times, and many college students will withdraw from school at least temporarily if the fall 2020 semester goes virtual.

During and in the years following the Great Recession, the number of disconnected youth was close to six million; 14.7 percent, or about one in every seven young people, were neither working nor in school. Given the wide-ranging and catastrophic effects of the current crisis on both the economy and the educational system, we estimate that the number of disconnected youth will easily top six million and could swell to almost one-quarter of all young people, or nearly nine million teens and young adults.

Disconnected youth and their families will be hardest hit.

Disconnected young people hail disproportionately from low-income communities of color—communities that are nearly always most harmed and slowest to recover from disasters of all sorts.

Preliminary evidence shows that black people of all ages are disproportionately likely to die from novel coronavirus, meaning that the burden of illness, trauma, and grief will weigh heavily on black teens and young adults. In Louisiana, as of early April, 70 percent of those who have died were black, though black people make up just 32 percent of the state population; in Michigan, where 14 percent of the population is black, 40 percent of those who have died were black; and in Chicago, black people have died at six times the rate of white people.⁴⁵ Native American populations, whose young people experience the highest disconnection rate of the five major racial and ethnic groups, are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 due to poverty, overcrowding, widespread lack of running water for handwashing, an underfunded health system, and a heavy burden of diseases like diabetes.

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Already-fragile household economies are being shattered. Family members are more likely to be low-wage service-sector workers, a group whose jobs are insecure, poorly paid, and lack benefits in the best of times and now face unprecedented job loss. Others have jobs that cannot be done from home and which require continual contact with people—home health aides, delivery workers, grocery checkout clerks, and cleaners—heightening their risk of infection. Basic survival needs are going unmet as food insecurity spikes, health systems are stretched beyond the breaking point, childcare is nonexistent, and community-based organizations' ability to provide services is hamstrung.

Disconnected young people who live on their own are particularly vulnerable yet are not a priority in relief packages passed so far. For instance, they are not eligible for direct payments or unemployment insurance since they were not in the workforce. Homeless youth are unable to shelter in place; they have no place. Living on the street or in shelters, they risk exposure and can't even engage in basic self-protection like handwashing with soap. Disabled people are particularly vulnerable, and disconnected young people are three times as likely as connected young people to be living with a disability. People living in institutions are likewise more vulnerable than the rest of the population, and disconnected youth are twenty times as likely as connected youth to be institutionalized.

Disconnected young people are more likely than the general population to be in contact with the criminal justice system, and jails and prisons are emerging as infection hot spots. As of April 8, the Cook County Jail was the largest known source of novel coronavirus infection in the United States, and over 1,300 cases confirmed cases have been tied to prisons and jails across the country.⁴⁶ People are crowded together cheek-by-jowl, the population disproportionately suffers underlying health conditions, protective gear is nonexistent, health care is poor, and even access to soap and water is not a given; for these reasons, Covid-19 is spreading like wildfire behind bars. Because of the lasting impact of tough sentencing laws, unnecessary bail and pretrial incarceration policies, and an overly punitive juvenile justice system, far too many young people are behind bars, and Covid-19 is turning jail time into a potential death sentence. Roughly 200,000 people enter and leave jails and prisons each week, a population churn that endangers inmates, correctional officers, and the communities into which people are released.⁴⁷ Releasing nonviolent offenders and ensuring that they have safe places to self-quarantine is vital.

We have enough money to solve youth disconnection.

The idea that money is scarce, that the United States lacks the resources required for all children—including poor ones—to flourish, has been unmasked as the cruel lie it is. In the space of just eight days, from March 19 to March 27, a divided Congress that agrees on next to nothing managed to pass the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act,⁴⁸ and more is on

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the way. This aid comes after years of cuts to food stamps, public health clinics, housing assistance, schools, and programs for at-risk young people—belts tightened during the recession and not loosened during the years of economic turnaround. While this crisis is unprecedented in its reach and suddenness, a day-in-day-out crisis has shaped the contours of life in poor communities for decades. In a country where rich corporations have been granted \$500 billion dollars in aid after a week's deliberation, the assertion that universal health care, high-quality childcare, good schools for everyone, affordable college, and dignified employment are just too expensive is quite obviously false.

This report shines a spotlight on our most vulnerable communities.

The locales that make up Urban and Rural Opportunity Deserts were not only struggling in 2018, they are also the most vulnerable to the economic and social dislocation Covid-19 will wreak. Deaths, trauma, and jobs losses will fall thick and fast on young people and their families in communities where one in four youth were already out of school and work. Providing in the short term for the basic needs of these communities and committing over the long term to building an infrastructure of opportunity for young people in isolated and impoverished rural areas as well as in deeply disadvantaged urban neighborhoods must be our priority.

One size doesn't fit all.

The data in this report show that disconnected young people share many challenges but differ in important ways. For instance, some girls and young women may need appealing and attainable educational and career options that make delaying motherhood worthwhile, as well as support like childcare, to reengage with educational programs, whereas others may need to improve their English-language skills so that they can find employment commensurate with their educational backgrounds. Reaching disconnected youth in Rural Opportunity Deserts will be a more formidable challenge than connecting out-of-school-and-work young people in Opportunity-Rich Urban Areas. Tailoring programs to meet the distinct needs of different groups of young people is more important than ever.

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The danger that current disconnected youth will be further left behind is very real.

During the Great Recession, an inaccurate image of disconnected young people took hold in the popular press: middle-class college graduates holed up in their parents' basements, their nascent careers derailed by the economic collapse. In reality, while some college grads struggled to find jobs, the lion's share of disconnected young people were still low-income, disproportionately minority youth who did not have college degrees. If, as a result of the coronavirus, the ranks of disconnected youth swell by two million people, or more, a similar

phenomenon may emerge. The out-of-school-and-work young people who reporters, policymakers, and other thought leaders and decision-makers know personally will more likely be “newly” disconnected youth—previously thriving high schoolers whose college plans were thrown into disarray, or successful college grads entering a jobless job market. What these young people need is for schools to reopen and the economy to get back on its feet; though their pain will be real and understandable, and though they may indeed suffer some long-term economic effects (research shows that young people who graduate college into a recessionary job market have depressed earnings for years to come),⁴⁹ they are well-positioned to resume their positive trajectory, though with delays and possibly lowered earnings for some time.

The young people struggling and off track prior to the coronavirus pandemic, on the other hand, face still bleaker prospects now and risk deep and lasting scars. Research shows that, compared to newly minted bachelor’s degree-holders, young people without college degrees face more negative effects on long-term health behaviors, mortality, and socioeconomic outcomes—from earnings to marriage rates—from entering the job market during a recession.⁵⁰ Attention and resources are likely to focus on the newly disconnected; they will be the young people policymakers can more easily target and assist, the squeaky wheel that will get the grease. Their distress (and that of their parents) in this sudden crisis is likely to unleash resources well beyond what was ever available to address the slow-moving, quotidian crisis of long-term disconnection. It is critical that the needs and voices of, to borrow the phrasing of William Julius Wilson, the “truly disconnected” are heard and listened to and that a fair share of the tsunami of resources let loose is channeled to them and their communities.

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METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Who Is Considered a “Disconnected Youth”?

Youth disconnection rates in this report are calculated by Measure of America using employment and enrollment data from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) of the US Census Bureau. Disconnected youth, also referred to as opportunity youth, are teenagers and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. Young people in this age range who are working or in school part-time or who are in the military are not considered disconnected. Youth who are actively looking for work are considered disconnected.

Several data sources exist that can be used for calculating youth disconnection. As a result, researchers working with different datasets, or using different definitions of what constitutes disconnection, can arrive at different numbers for this indicator. A good summary of these various definitions can be found on a Huffington Post blog piece from September 2016 [here](#).

Measure of America uses the Census Bureau’s ACS for four reasons: (1) it is reliable and updated annually; (2) it allows for calculations by state and metro area as well as by more granular census-defined neighborhood clusters within metro areas; (3) it includes young people who are in group quarters, such as juvenile or adult correctional facilities, supervised medical facilities, and college dorms; and (4) it counts students on summer break as being enrolled in school.

Methods

In this report, the youth disconnection rates and numbers at the national, state, congressional district, and metro area levels use 2018 data. Estimates at the county and public use microdata area (PUMA) level use 2014–2018 (five-year) data. Time series data are one-year estimates from the relevant year.

The ACS is an annual survey conducted by the Census Bureau that samples a subset of the overall population. As with any data drawn from surveys, there is some degree of sampling and nonsampling error inherent in the data. Thus, comparisons between similar values on any indicator should be made with caution since these differences may not be statistically significant.

In order to arrive at the percentage of disconnected youth, the total number of disconnected young people and the total number of young people overall are calculated for each geographic area from the ACS Public Use Microdata Sample. Not in school means that a young person has not attended any educational institution and has also not been home schooled at any time in the three months prior to the survey date. Not working means that a young person is either unemployed or not in the labor force at the time they responded to the survey. Disconnected youth are young people who are simultaneously not in school and not working. This population cannot be estimated by simply adding the number of young people not enrolled in school to the number of young people not working because many students in this age range do not work and many young workers are not in school.

Calculating Metro Area Youth Disconnection and Identifying the Largest Metro Areas

The US Census Bureau provides a list of metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) by population size. The top one hundred MSAs include Madison, Wisconsin. But because the standard error of the youth disconnection estimate for this metro area was too large to provide a reliable estimate, this MSA is not included in this report.

The employment and enrollment data needed to calculate youth disconnection for metro areas are not available directly by metro area from the ACS. Metro areas were custom built up by Measure of America from the PUMAs that make up metro areas. In cases where a PUMA falls partially within two or more metro areas, it is included in the metro area where it has the largest population. If the PUMA falls partly in and partly outside a metro area, it is included in the metro area.

Due to changes in the definitions of metro areas by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), findings from this report for specific metro areas are not directly comparable to findings from Measure of America's first three reports on youth disconnection: One in Seven: Ranking Youth Disconnection in the 25 Largest Metro Areas, Halve the Gap by 2030: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities, and Zeroing In on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities. They are comparable to the previous three reports: Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps: Youth Disconnection in America, More Than a Million Reasons for Hope: Youth Disconnection in America Today, and Making the Connection: Transportation and Youth Disconnection.

Counties

US county and county equivalent (as defined by the federal government) estimates are custom tabulations provided by special arrangement with the US Census Bureau. Counties range in size from over 10 million to under one hundred residents. Because many counties are relatively small, disconnected youth rates for each county in this report are calculated using five-year estimates from 2014–2018. Counties with disconnected youth populations considered statistically unreliable have been removed from the analysis.

Urban-Rural Classification of Counties

There are multiple definitions of urban and rural areas used by different federal agencies in the United States. In this report, the youth disconnection estimates for each of the six urban-rural categories use the taxonomy developed by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Its schema places each of the 3,154 counties in the United States into one of six categories: large central metro, large fringe metro, medium metro, small metro, micropolitan, and non-core. Further details on this classification are here. For ease of communication, these six categories have been renamed to commonly used terms: urban centers, suburbs, medium-sized cities, small cities, towns, and completely rural areas. The table above contains the definitions used by NCHS in classifying counties.

Based on the most recent NCHS county categorizations (2013), each county was assigned to a category in the above schema. Then, using county-level estimates prepared for MOA by the Census Bureau, we calculated an aggregate disconnected youth rate for each of the six county classifications by dividing the total number of disconnected youth in a given county classification by the total number of people ages 16–24 in a given county classification.

Public Use Microdata Areas and the Eight Community Types

For the first time ever, this report includes youth disconnection estimates for each public use microdata area in the country. PUMAs are the smallest geographic unit of the Public Use Microdata Sample. They are defined by the US Census Bureau, are built out of census tracts and counties, and have populations of at least 100,000 people. Due to this population threshold, urban areas may contain multiple PUMAs within a county whereas in rural areas a PUMA may cover multiple counties. There are 2,351 PUMAs within the 50 US states.

In order to help make sense of these many geographic units, the PUMAs have been broken into eight categories. The categories were created using a k-means clustering algorithm to group PUMAs based on their similarity, as defined by two factors: the youth disconnection rate and the logarithm of the population density. Population density was calculated using 2018 ACS population estimates and areas calculated from a PUMA shapefile from IPUMS USA.

Voter Turnout Analysis

In election years, the US Census Bureau's Current Population Survey collects data on reported voting and registration. This report examines the relationships between state-level youth disconnection rates and the percentage of the citizen 18- to 24-year-old population that reported voting in 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018. We compare turnout in 2014 and 2018 to assess how changes in midterm turnout rates are associated with youth disconnection rates.

TYPE OF COUNTY	DEFINITION
URBAN CENTERS (Large Central metro)	Counties within metro areas with populations 1,000,000 or more
SUBURBS (Large fringe metro)	Counties within metro areas with populations 1,000,000 or more that are not urban centers
MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES (Medium metro)	Counties within metro areas with populations between 250,000 and 999,999
SMALL CITIES (Small metro)	Counties containing cities with populations between 50,000 and 249,999
TOWNS (Micropolitan)	Counties within metro areas with populations between 10,000 and 49,999
COMPLETELY RURAL AREAS (Non-core)	Counties with no cities larger than 10,000

DEFINITIONS

Disability – Disability status in this report refers to any enduring emotional, physical, or mental condition that makes everyday activities like walking, dressing, or remembering things difficult and restricts an individual's ability to work or to perform basic required tasks without assistance. This is self-reported; individuals who report having such a condition in the ACS are counted as having a disability. Those who do not are counted as not having a disability.

Group Quarters – The US Census Bureau refers to people who live in any kind of non-household living arrangement as living in “group quarters”. These can be institutional group quarters such as correctional or supervised medical facilities or non-institutional group quarters such as college or university dormitories, military bases, or group homes. One of the primary advantages of using the ACS as the data source for this research is that the survey includes young people living in group quarters.

Metro Area – Metro areas used in this report are formally known as metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), geographic areas defined by the OMB and used by the US Census Bureau and other government entities. MSAs constitute counties grouped around an urban center and include outlying suburban and exurban counties from which a substantial percentage of the population commutes to the urban center for work.

PUMA – Public use microdata areas, or PUMAs, are the smallest geographic unit of the Public Use Microdata Sample. They are defined by the US Census Bureau, are built out of census tracts and counties, and have populations of at least 100,000 people.

Regions – In the discussion of regional differences in disconnected youth rates, we use the four regions of the United States (Midwest, Northeast, South, and West) as defined by the US Census Bureau.

Racial and Ethnic Groups – Racial and ethnic groups in this report are based on definitions established by the OMB and used by the Census Bureau and other government entities. Since 1997, this office has recognized five racial groups and two ethnic categories. The racial groups include Asian, black, Native American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and white. The ethnic categories are Latino and not Latino. People of Latino ethnicity may be of any race. In this report, members of each of these racial groups include only non-Latino members of these groups. All references to Asians, blacks, Native Americans, and whites include only those who are non-Latino. Throughout the report, the Asian racial group combines the OMB categories of both Asian and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Due to the very small population sizes of some of the racial and ethnic groups in some states and metropolitan areas, we cannot always present reliable estimates of youth disconnection for these groups. These are denoted in the report’s tables.

In recognition of the fact that these racial groups are not monolithic, this report includes youth disconnection rates for seven of the largest Asian subgroups and the five largest Latino/a subgroups in the United States. The selection of these groups is based on national population estimates from the 2018 one-year ACS. The most populous Asian subgroups also include Japanese and Pakistani residents, but because the standard errors of the youth disconnection estimates for these groups were too large to provide reliable estimates, they are not included in this report.

Unreliable – With one exception, estimates with a coefficient of variance of greater than 0.2 are considered unreliable and are omitted from the report. Estimates at the PUMA-level with a coefficient of variance of greater than 0.3 are considered unreliable so that more geographies could be examined.

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