

Computer and Internet Use in the United States: 2015

American Community Survey Reports

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INTRODUCTION

Access to computers and a broadband Internet subscription has become increasingly important to Americans in carrying out their day-to-day lives.¹ This technology is used for a variety of activities including accessing health information, online banking, choosing a place to live, applying for jobs, looking up government services, and taking classes. Access to broadband Internet also has positive effects on individual empowerment, economic growth, and community development.²

Data about computer use have been collected periodically in the Current Population Survey (CPS) since 1984 and data about Internet use have been collected in the CPS since 1997. The CPS data provide national- and state-level estimates. The American Community Survey (ACS) began collecting these data in 2013 and provides yearly estimates for geographies with populations of 65,000 people or more. This report uses data from the CPS to provide historical context and data from the ACS to highlight characteristics that are more current.

¹ A "broadband" Internet subscription refers to having at least one type of Internet subscription other than a dial-up subscription alone. In the American Community Survey, it specifically refers to those who said "Yes" to one or more of the following types of subscriptions: DSL, cable, fiber optic, mobile broadband, satellite, or fixed wireless.

² See Jayakar et al., "Broadband 2021," *Report of the Interdisciplinary Workshop on the Development of a National Broadband Research Agenda*, Institute for Information Policy, Penn State University, State College, PA, 2016.

2015 ACS Computer and Internet Use Questions

9 At this house, apartment, or mobile home – do you or any member of this household own or use any of the following computers?

• EXCLUDE GPS devices, digital music players, and devices with only limited computing capabilities, for example: household appliances.

	Yes	No
a. Desktop, laptop, netbook, or notebook computer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Handheld computer, smart mobile phone, or other handheld wireless computer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Some other type of computer Specify <u> </u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10 At this house, apartment, or mobile home – do you or any member of this household access the Internet?

☐ Yes, with a subscription to an Internet service

☐ Yes, without a subscription to an Internet service → SKIP to question 12

☐ No Internet access at this house, apartment, or mobile home → SKIP to question 12

11 At this house, apartment, or mobile home – do you or any member of this household subscribe to the Internet using –

	Yes	No
a. Dial-up service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. DSL service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Cable modem service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Fiber-optic service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Mobile broadband plan for a computer or a cell phone?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Satellite Internet service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Some other service? Specify service <u> </u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM ACS DATA

- Among all households, 78 percent had a desktop or laptop, 75 percent had a handheld computer such as a smartphone or other handheld wireless computer, and 77 percent had a broadband Internet subscription.
- Households headed by a person aged 65 and older lagged behind households with younger householders in computer ownership or use and the likelihood of having an Internet subscription.
- Households with an Asian householder were most likely to own or use a desktop or laptop, own or use a handheld device, and have a broadband Internet subscription.
- Households in metropolitan areas were more likely to report owning or using a desktop or laptop or a handheld device and subscribing to broadband Internet compared to their non-metropolitan counterparts.
- States on the Pacific Coast and most states in the Northeast had higher levels of broadband Internet compared to the national average.
- Overall, 62 percent of American households had “high connectivity,” meaning they had three key computer and Internet items: a desktop or laptop, a handheld computer or smartphone, and a broadband Internet subscription. High connectivity was highest

among households where the householder was less than 65 years old or had a household income of \$150,000 or more.

COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE OVER TIME

Figure 1 shows the percentage of households with computer and Internet use from 1984 to 2015 using data from the CPS and the ACS. While both surveys show differences over time for computer and Internet use, it is important to note the estimates for each measure will vary between the surveys due to differences in question wording and data collection procedures. For more information, see the text box titled “Key Differences Between the American Community Survey and the Current Population Survey.” In 1984, 8 percent of

households had a computer according to the CPS. By 2000, about half of all households (51 percent) had a computer. In 2015, this percentage had grown to 79 percent. The ACS, by contrast, indicated that in 2013, 84 percent of households had a computer (desktop, laptop, handheld, or other), with the percentage growing to 87 percent in 2015.

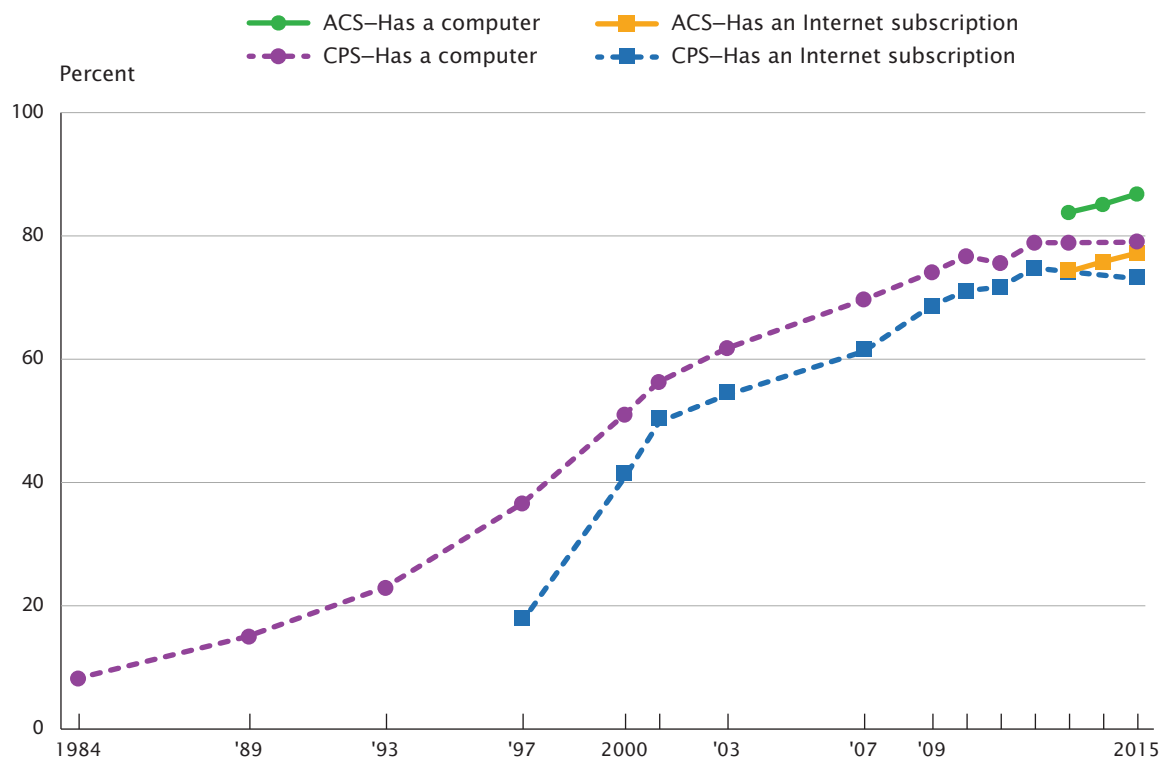
In 1997, the CPS began collecting data about Internet use in addition to computers. The CPS indicated 18 percent of households in 1997 used the Internet. A decade later, in 2007, this percentage had more than tripled to 62 percent and increased to 73 percent in 2015. The percentage of households in the ACS using the Internet grew from 74 percent in 2013 to 77 percent in 2015.

Key Differences Between the American Community Survey and the Current Population Survey

The Current Population Survey (CPS) has been collecting data about computer use since 1984 and Internet use since 1997. In 2013, the American Community Survey (ACS) also began collecting data on these topics as mandated by the 2008 Broadband Data Improvement Act. Strengths of the CPS data include the greater detail available through its longer questionnaire and its longer time series, whereas the ACS, with its larger sample size, provides estimates at more detailed levels of geography. Estimates of computer and Internet use vary between these surveys due to differences in weighting procedures, data collection methods, and question wording. Federal agencies use these statistics to measure and monitor the nationwide development of broadband networks and to allocate resources intended to increase access to broadband technologies, particularly among groups with traditionally low levels of access. State and local governments can use these statistics for similar purposes. Understanding how people in specific cities and towns use computers and the Internet will help businesses and nonprofits better serve their communities as well.

Figure 1.

Percentage of Households With Computer and Internet Use: 1984 to 2015



Note: For more information, visit <www.census.gov/acs>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1984–2015 Current Population Survey (CPS) and 2013–2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates.

COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE BY SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS

Table 1 displays computer and Internet use for households by a variety of demographic, social, and geographic characteristics using data from the ACS. Among all households, about 78 percent had a desktop or laptop, 75 percent had a handheld computer such as a smartphone or other handheld wireless computer, and 77 percent had a broadband Internet subscription.

Householder age is an important factor for understanding computer ownership or use and Internet subscription. Households headed by a person 65 years and older

lagged behind households with younger householders on both indicators. Differences in desktop or laptop ownership or use among the under-65 age groups were small, with percentages ranging between 81 percent for households with householders aged 15 to 34, and 85 percent for the 35- to 44-year-old group. However, only 65 percent of households headed by a person aged 65 and older owned or used a desktop or laptop. Handheld computer ownership or use showed even more variation by age of householder. Ninety percent of households with householders aged 15 to 34 had a handheld computer, compared with 89 percent where the householder was aged 35 to 44, 78 percent where the householder was aged 45 to 64,

and 47 percent where the householder was 65 years and older. Similar to desktop or laptop ownership or use, there were narrow differences in broadband Internet subscription among the three younger age groups, with percentages ranging from 80 percent for the 45- to 64-year-old group to 84 percent for the 35- to 44-year-old group, compared with only 62 percent of households headed by a person aged 65 and older.

Computer and Internet use also varied according to race and Hispanic origin of the householder. Households with an Asian householder were most likely to own or use a desktop or laptop, own or use a handheld device, and have a broadband Internet subscription. In

Table 1.

Computer and Internet Use for Households by Selected Characteristics: 2015—Con.(For more information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, and definitions, visit www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html)

Household characteristics	Total households (in thousands)		Household with a computer						Household with an Internet subscription			
			Total		Desktop or laptop		Handheld		With any Internet subscription ¹		With a broadband subscription	
	Estimate	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	118,208	155	86.8	0.1	78.2	0.1	74.8	0.1	77.2	0.1	76.7	0.1
Age of householder												
15–34 years	22,326	75	94.3	0.1	80.6	0.2	90.3	0.1	81.2	0.1	81.0	0.1
35–44 years	20,576	45	94.4	0.1	84.7	0.2	89.0	0.1	84.6	0.1	84.4	0.1
45–64 years	46,307	68	89.7	0.1	82.3	0.1	78.5	0.1	80.9	0.1	80.4	0.1
65 years and older	29,000	53	70.9	0.1	65.4	0.1	47.1	0.1	63.1	0.1	62.0	0.1
Race and Hispanic origin of householder												
White alone, non-Hispanic	80,847	84	88.0	0.1	81.7	0.1	74.6	0.1	79.9	0.1	79.3	0.1
Black alone, non-Hispanic	14,207	42	80.1	0.2	65.1	0.2	70.3	0.2	64.9	0.2	64.5	0.2
Asian alone, non-Hispanic	5,314	23	94.1	0.2	90.1	0.2	87.2	0.2	88.8	0.2	88.5	0.2
Hispanic (of any race)	15,062	44	84.2	0.2	68.3	0.2	75.8	0.2	70.9	0.2	70.5	0.2
Age of household members												
Without members under 18 years	81,111	148	83.1	0.1	75.3	0.1	68.2	0.1	73.6	0.1	73.0	0.1
With member(s) under 18 years	37,098	74	94.8	0.1	84.6	0.1	89.3	0.1	85.1	0.1	84.8	0.1
Limited English-speaking household³												
No	112,875	158	87.6	0.1	79.4	0.1	75.6	0.1	78.3	0.1	77.7	0.1
Yes	5,334	34	70.2	0.4	53.0	0.4	59.3	0.4	55.8	0.4	55.3	0.4
Household income												
Less than \$25,000	26,084	66	67.1	0.1	52.5	0.2	51.8	0.1	51.7	0.2	51.0	0.2
\$25,000–\$49,999	27,262	78	84.3	0.1	72.5	0.2	68.1	0.1	71.7	0.2	70.9	0.2
\$50,000–\$99,999	35,535	98	93.9	0.1	87.3	0.1	82.4	0.1	86.2	0.1	85.6	0.1
\$100,000–\$149,999	16,011	70	97.6	0.1	94.5	0.1	90.9	0.1	93.3	0.1	92.9	0.1
\$150,000 and more	13,316	48	98.4	0.1	96.6	0.1	94.0	0.1	95.6	0.1	95.3	0.1
Metropolitan status and region												
Metropolitan area	100,501	95	88.0	0.1	79.7	0.1	76.7	0.1	78.9	0.1	78.4	0.1
Nonmetropolitan area	17,707	74	80.0	0.2	70.1	0.2	64.4	0.2	68.1	0.2	67.2	0.2
Northeast	21,007	29	86.9	0.1	80.1	0.1	73.6	0.1	79.4	0.1	78.9	0.1
Metropolitan area	19,172	25	87.2	0.1	80.4	0.2	74.6	0.1	79.9	0.1	79.5	0.1
Nonmetropolitan area	1,835	10	83.1	0.3	76.6	0.4	63.1	0.5	74.0	0.4	73.0	0.4
Midwest	26,372	50	86.1	0.1	77.6	0.1	73.1	0.1	76.5	0.1	75.8	0.1
Metropolitan area	20,377	28	87.3	0.1	79.0	0.1	75.2	0.1	78.0	0.1	77.5	0.1
Nonmetropolitan area	5,995	28	82.2	0.2	73.0	0.3	66.1	0.3	71.3	0.3	70.3	0.3
South	44,442	80	85.4	0.1	75.5	0.1	74.1	0.1	74.3	0.1	73.7	0.1
Metropolitan area	37,045	55	87.3	0.1	77.8	0.1	76.5	0.1	76.7	0.1	76.2	0.1
Nonmetropolitan area	7,397	37	76.1	0.3	64.0	0.4	62.2	0.3	62.2	0.3	61.4	0.3
West	26,388	38	89.7	0.1	82.0	0.1	78.7	0.1	81.3	0.1	80.7	0.1
Metropolitan area	23,907	34	90.2	0.1	82.6	0.1	79.8	0.1	82.1	0.1	81.5	0.1
Nonmetropolitan area	2,481	15	84.4	0.3	76.4	0.4	68.1	0.4	73.8	0.4	72.8	0.4

See notes at end of table.

Table 1.

Computer and Internet Use for Households by Selected Characteristics: 2015—Con.

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			Total		Desktop or laptop		Handheld		With any Internet subscription ¹		With a broadband subscription	
	Estimate	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²	Percent	Margin of error (±) ²
Total households with householder 25 years and older	113,767	136	86.5	0.1	78.3	0.1	74.2	0.1	77.3	0.1	76.7	0.1
Educational attainment of householder												
Less than high school graduate	12,526	55	62.6	0.2	46.2	0.2	50.4	0.2	48.5	0.2	47.9	0.2
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	28,392	64	78.0	0.1	65.9	0.2	62.0	0.1	66.1	0.1	65.3	0.1
Some college or associate's degree	34,594	81	91.2	0.1	83.1	0.1	78.4	0.1	81.2	0.1	80.6	0.1
Bachelor's degree or higher	38,255	124	96.5	0.1	93.7	0.1	87.4	0.1	91.4	0.1	91.0	0.1

¹ About 4.2 percent of all households reported household Internet use without a paid subscription. These households are not included in this table.

² A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error is in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

³ A "limited English-speaking household" is one in which no member 14 years old and over (1) speaks only English or (2) speaks a non-English language and speaks English "very well."

Note: Handheld computers include smart mobile phones and other handheld wireless computers. A broadband subscription refers to households who said "Yes" to one or more of the following types of subscriptions: DSL, cable, fiber optic, mobile broadband, satellite, or fixed wireless.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

contrast, households with a Black householder were the least likely to own or use each type of computer or to have a broadband subscription. Differences in ownership or use of handheld computers across households headed by each race and Hispanic origin were smaller than differences in desktop or laptop ownership or use or Internet subscription. For example, the gap between households headed by Asians and households headed by Blacks (the groups with the highest and lowest values) was 17 percentage points for handheld computers, but 24 percentage points for Internet subscription and 25 percentage points for desktop or laptop ownership or use.

Households with children under 18 years were more likely to have a

computer and Internet subscription than households without children. The proportion of households with children under 18 years that owned or used a desktop or laptop was 85 percent versus 75 percent of households without children. Households with children under 18 years were also more likely to have a broadband Internet subscription, 85 percent versus 73 percent of households without children. The gap for handheld computers was larger, at 89 percent versus 68 percent.

Desktop or laptop computers were found in 79 percent of nonlimited English-speaking households and 78 percent of nonlimited English-speaking households had a broadband Internet subscription. Among limited English-speaking

households, only 53 percent owned or used a desktop or laptop, and 55 percent had broadband Internet.³ The difference in handheld ownership or use among nonlimited English-speaking households compared to limited English-speaking households was smaller (76 percent versus 59 percent).

The share of households owning or using a computer, whether a desktop or laptop or handheld computer, increased with household income. The same pattern was observed for a broadband Internet subscription. The observed differences between income brackets decreased at higher incomes. For

³ A "limited English-speaking household" is one in which no member 14 years old and over (1) speaks only English or (2) speaks a non-English language and speaks English "very well."

example, 52 percent of households earning less than \$25,000 owned or used a desktop or laptop, compared with 73 percent of those earning \$25,000 to \$49,999 for a difference of about 21 percentage points. Meanwhile, the gap between desktop or laptop ownership or use for households with an income of \$100,000 to \$149,999 versus those with an income of \$150,000 or more was only about 2 percentage points.

Computer and Internet use also differed by geography. Households in metropolitan areas were more likely to report owning or using a desktop or laptop (80 percent) and subscribing to broadband Internet (78 percent) than their nonmetropolitan counterparts (70 percent and 67 percent). The gap in handheld device ownership or use was even larger, with 77 percent of metropolitan households reporting ownership or use of a handheld device compared with 64 percent of nonmetropolitan households. This pattern of higher values for metropolitan areas was also observed for each region of the country—Northeast, Midwest, South, and West.⁴ Ownership or use of a desktop or laptop and broadband Internet subscription were highest among households in the West, followed by those in the Northeast, Midwest, and South. Ownership or use of handheld computers was also highest in the West (79 percent). Differences in ownership or use of handheld computers among other regions were small, with percentages ranging between 73 percent for the Midwest and 74 percent for the South and Northeast.⁵

⁴ The South was unique, the difference between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan households was somewhat larger for broadband Internet than handheld ownership or use.

⁵ The percentage of households that owned or used a handheld computer in the South and the Northeast both rounded to 74 percent. However, these percentages were statistically different from each other.

Computer and Internet use also varied according to householders' educational attainment. The share of households owning or using a desktop or laptop, owning or using a handheld computer, and having broadband Internet increased with each level of education. Among households where the householder did not complete high school, 46 percent owned or used a desktop or laptop, about half owned or used a handheld device, and 48 percent had a broadband Internet subscription. In comparison, for homes where the householder held a bachelor's degree, desktop or laptop ownership or use stood at 94 percent, handheld ownership or use stood at 87 percent, and broadband Internet stood at 91 percent.

Table 2 and Figure 2 further examine geographic differences in the percentage of households with a broadband Internet subscription.⁶ States on the Pacific coast and most states in the Northeast, such as New Hampshire and Massachusetts, had higher levels of broadband Internet compared to the national average (77 percent). These also tended to be the states with higher incomes compared to the nation.⁷ Utah and Colorado were also states with higher percentages of a broadband subscription. However, higher income did not guarantee a higher percentage of households with broadband. Although household income for the District of Columbia was higher than the national average, the percentage of households with broadband was not statistically different than the national average, at 77 percent for both. Conversely, the average household income

⁶ Table 2 and Figure 2 use data from the 2015 American Community Survey 1-year estimates.

⁷ For data showing household income for states, see the ranking tables for household income at <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_1YR_R1901.US01PRF&prodType=table>.

in Idaho was below the national average, yet the rate of broadband subscription was not statistically different from the national average and the District of Columbia. The states with the lowest rates of broadband, such as Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and New Mexico also had low median household incomes compared to the national average.⁸

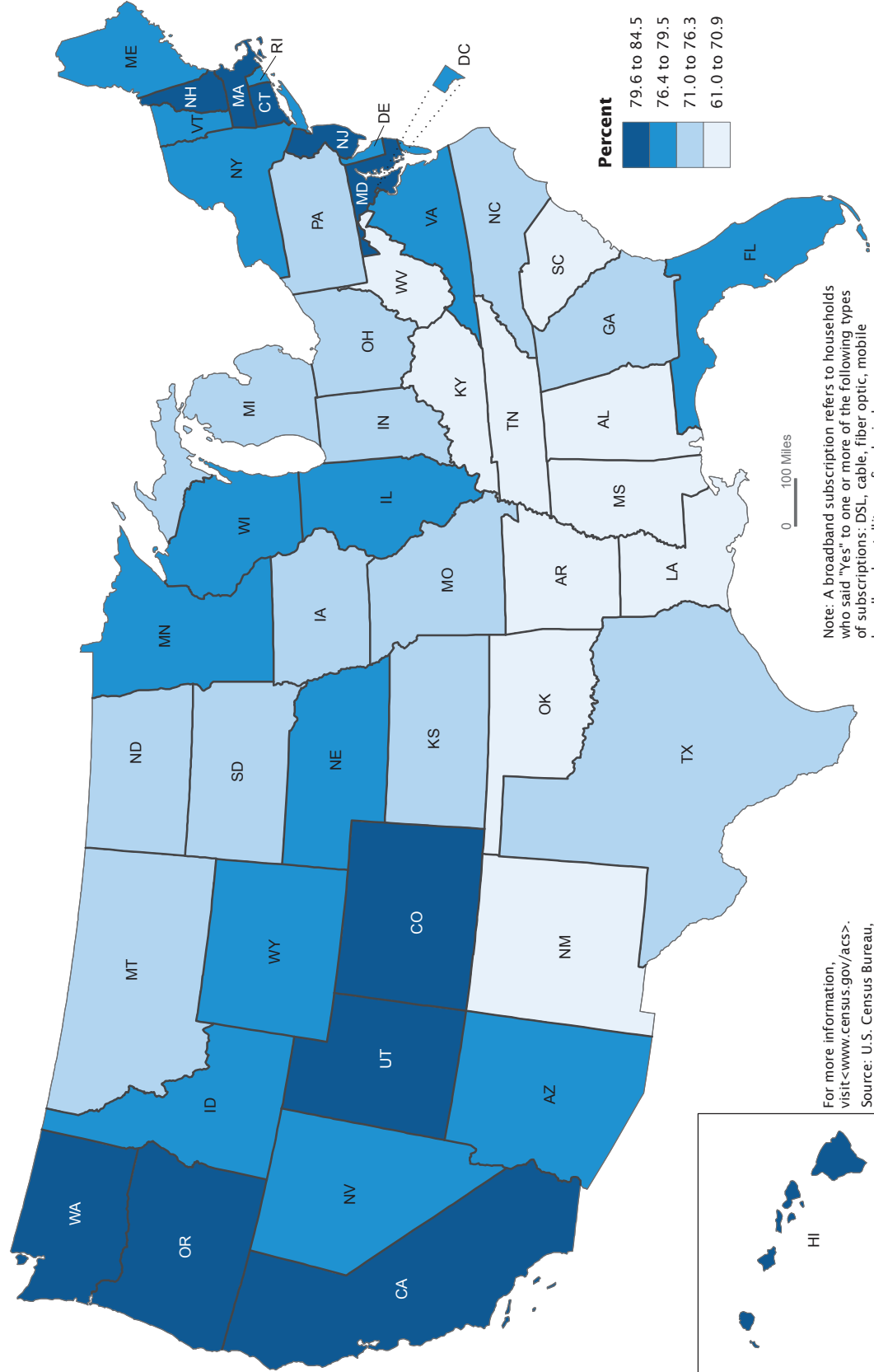
Figure 3 presents broadband Internet and computer types by household and householder characteristics.⁹ Overall, 62 percent of American households had "high connectivity," meaning they had three key computer and Internet items: a desktop or laptop, a handheld computer or smartphone, and a broadband Internet subscription. Households where the householder was less than 65 years old were more likely to be highly connected compared with households headed by people 65 years and older. In fact, among households with a householder aged 65 and older, 39 percent lacked either a computer or a subscription to the Internet. Households with higher household income were also more likely to be highly connected. Of households with a household income of \$150,000 or more, 90 percent had broadband, a desktop or laptop, and a handheld computer or smartphone. At the opposite end, among low-income households (income under \$25,000), 50 percent had these key items.

Among race and Hispanic origin groups, Asians were the most likely to have a desktop or laptop, handheld device, and broadband subscription, as about 80 percent reported this combination of the

⁸ The percentage of households with a broadband Internet subscription in Alabama was not statistically different than the percentage of households with a broadband Internet subscription in Louisiana.

⁹ Figure 3 uses data from the 2015 American Community Survey 1-year estimates.

Figure 2.
**Percentage of Households With Broadband Internet Subscription by State:
 2015**



For more information,
 visit www.census.gov/acs.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau,
 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

Table 2.

Percentage of Households With a Broadband Internet Subscription: 2015

(For more information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, visit www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html)

Geographical area	Percent	Margin of error (\pm) ¹
New Hampshire	84.5	0.7
Washington	83.9	0.4
Utah	83.1	0.7
Colorado	83.0	0.4
Massachusetts	82.6	0.4
Hawaii	82.2	0.9
Connecticut	82.0	0.6
Alaska	81.7	1.3
New Jersey	81.6	0.3
Maryland	81.4	0.4
California	81.3	0.2
Oregon	80.8	0.4
Minnesota	79.5	0.4
Nevada	79.0	0.6
Vermont	78.7	1.1
Virginia	78.6	0.4
Rhode Island	78.2	1.1
Arizona	78.1	0.4
Nebraska	78.1	0.5
New York	77.8	0.2
Wyoming	77.8	1.3
Florida	77.5	0.2
Delaware	77.4	1.1
Maine	77.1	0.7
Illinois	76.9	0.3
Wisconsin	76.9	0.4
District of Columbia	76.8	1.4
UNITED STATES	76.7	0.1
Idaho	76.7	0.9
North Dakota	76.3	1.0
Kansas	76.2	0.5
Ohio	76.1	0.2
Pennsylvania	75.7	0.3
South Dakota	75.3	1.2
Iowa	75.0	0.5
Montana	75.0	1.0
Georgia	74.8	0.4
Michigan	74.4	0.3
Texas	74.3	0.2
North Carolina	74.1	0.4
Indiana	73.3	0.4
Missouri	73.3	0.4
Kentucky	70.9	0.6
Oklahoma	70.8	0.5
Tennessee	70.2	0.4
South Carolina	69.9	0.5
West Virginia	69.8	0.8
Louisiana	68.7	0.6
Alabama	68.3	0.5
New Mexico	67.2	0.9
Arkansas	64.2	0.5
Mississippi	61.0	0.8

Note: A broadband subscription refers to households who said "Yes" to one or more of the following types of subscriptions: DSL, cable, fiber optic, mobile broadband, satellite, or fixed wireless.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

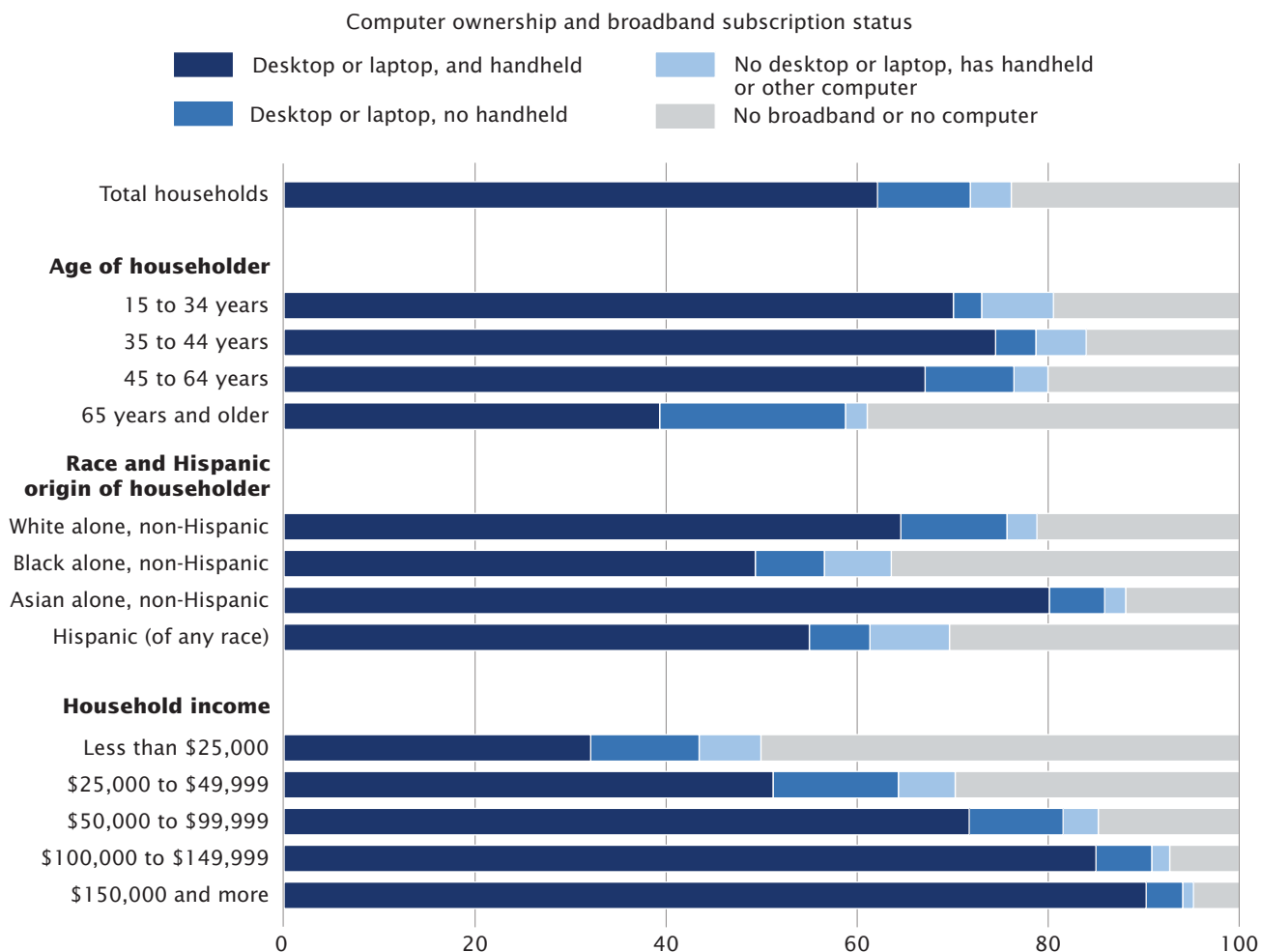
three key items. Sixty-five percent of Whites reported all three items, compared with 55 percent of Hispanics and 49 percent of Blacks.

It is interesting to observe households who lacked a desktop or laptop, but were still connected to the Internet—that is, they relied on handheld devices, smartphones or other devices, rather than desktop or laptop computers for Internet connectivity. These households will be referred to as "handheld-only households" for the sake of brevity. Looking at age, younger households were more likely to be in this group (8 percent of households with householders aged 15 to 34, versus 2 percent of households with householders aged 65 and older), meaning "handheld-only" households had some characteristics similar to other "high connectivity" households. On the other hand, when it comes to income, race, and Hispanic origin, the pattern is reversed. Low-income households had the lowest overall connectivity, but had the highest proportion of "handheld-only" households. Similarly, Black and Hispanic households had lower overall connectivity than White and Asian households, but higher proportions of "handheld-only" households. As mobile devices continue to evolve and increase in popularity, it will be interesting to see what happens with this group.¹⁰

¹⁰ For further discussion of the "handheld-only" group, see Jamie M. Lewis, "Handheld Device Ownership: Reducing the Digital Divide?" *SEHSD Working Paper 2017-04*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2017. This group was also looked at in Thom File and Camille Ryan, "Computer and Internet Use in the United States: 2013," *American Community Report*, ACS-28, U.S. Census Bureau, 2014.

Figure 3.

Percentage of Households by Broadband Internet Subscription and Computer Type: 2015



Note: For more information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error and definitions, visit www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

CONCLUSION

More and more, access to computers and broadband Internet opens the door to a variety of opportunities. From communicating with family and friends to online shopping and everything in between, Americans use this technology to pursue a wide range of tasks. We also have more options than ever before in the types of computers and devices we use, as well as the ways we connect to the Internet.

In this report, we have reviewed key characteristics of computer and Internet use using data from the CPS and ACS. Both computer and Internet use have increased since the CPS began collecting data on computer use in the 1980s and Internet use in the 1990s. Although computer and Internet use have grown overall, recent ACS data show important differences by demographic, social, and geographic characteristics. Households with a younger householder were

more likely to own or use a desktop or laptop or handheld computer, as well as to have a broadband Internet subscription. Computer ownership or use and the likelihood of having an Internet subscription increased alongside household income and was more common among metropolitan versus non-metropolitan households. States vary in terms of broadband Internet subscription, with higher levels for those on the Pacific coast and

most states in the Northeast.¹¹ Some households rely on handheld devices or smartphones alone for Internet access. This was more common for low-income households.

In summary, although more American households today use a computer and the Internet, gaps persist for some groups. Thus, a digital divide between those who have and those who lack access to computers and the Internet persists.

SOURCE AND ACCURACY

The data presented in this report are based on the ACS sample interviewed from January 1, 2015, through December 31, 2015. The estimates based on this sample describe the average values of person, household, and housing unit characteristics over this period of collection. Sampling error is the uncertainty between an estimate based on a sample and the corresponding value that would be obtained if the estimate were based on the entire population (as from a census). Measures of sampling error are provided in the form of margins of error for key estimates included in this report. All comparative statements in this report have undergone statistical testing, and comparisons are significant at the 90 percent level unless otherwise noted. In addition to sampling error, nonsampling error may be introduced during any of the operations used to collect and process survey data such as editing, reviewing, or keying data from questionnaires. For more information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, please see the

¹¹ Although many of the states with high levels of broadband subscriptions are in the Northeast and Pacific coast, other states also had high levels. For example, Utah and Colorado were among the top five states with the highest percentage of households with a broadband Internet subscription, both at 83 percent.

2015 ACS 1-Year Accuracy of the Data document located at <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html>.

NOTES

The Census Bureau also reports estimates about computer and Internet use based on data from the CPS. The CPS Computer and Internet Use Supplement includes questions about computer ownership, types of computing devices, and Internet use and types of Internet subscriptions. The CPS data about computer and Internet use are collected periodically and questions can vary from year to year. For complete documentation on the CPS Computer and Internet Use Supplements, including questionnaires, see <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/technical-documentation/complete.html>. For information on computer and Internet use estimates from the ACS and how they differ from those based on the CPS, see the report “Comparison of Data on Computer and Internet Use in the American Community Survey and the Current Population Survey: 2013” at

<www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2017/demo/SEHSD-WP2017-11.html>.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Ryan, Camille, and Jamie M. Lewis, “Computer and Internet Use in the United States: 2015,” *American Community Survey Reports*, ACS-37, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2107.

What Is the American Community Survey?

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, social, economic, and housing data for the nation, states, congressional districts, counties, places, and other localities every year. It has an annual sample size of about 3.54 million addresses across the United States and Puerto Rico and includes both housing units and group quarters (e.g., nursing homes and prisons). The ACS is conducted in every county throughout the nation, and every municipio in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey. Beginning in 2006, ACS data were released annually for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 and greater. For information on the ACS sample design and other topics, visit <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>.