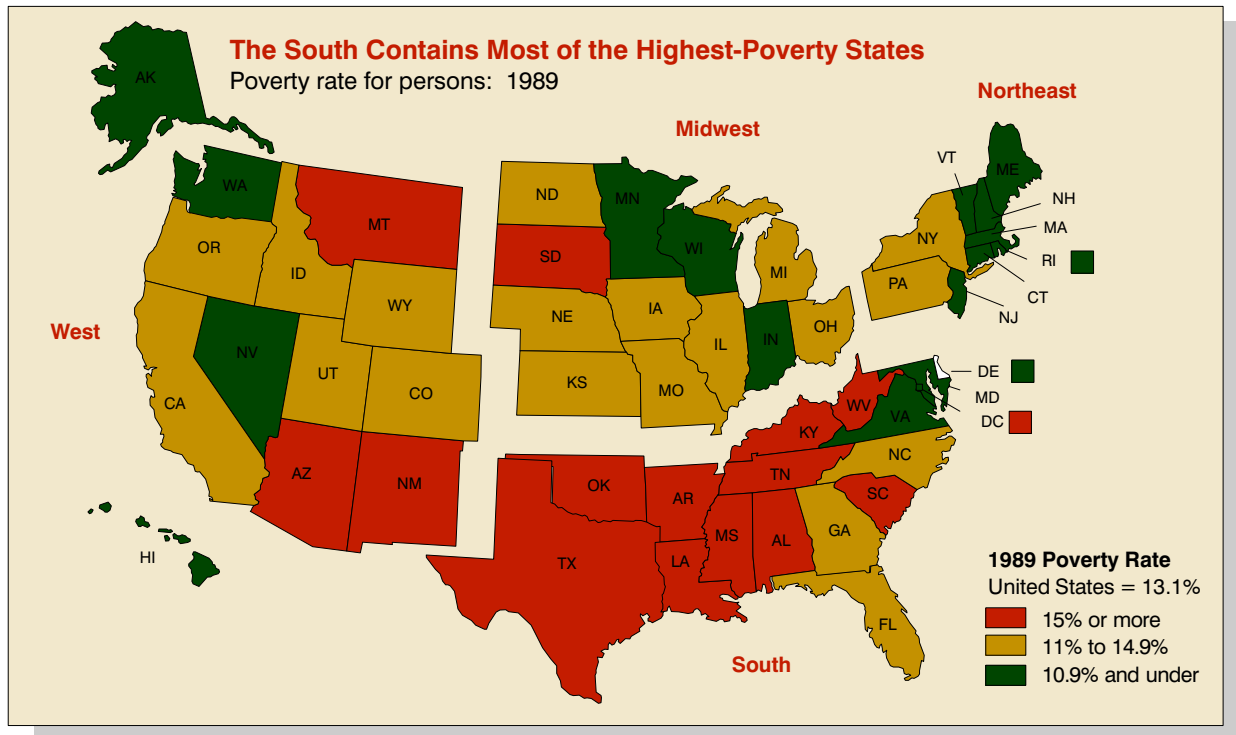


Statistical Brief

Poverty in the United States — Changes Between The Censuses



What are the odds of being poor in the United States? In 1989, they were a little better than 1 in 8. The Nation's 1989 poverty rate — 13.1 percent — was higher than its 1979 rate (12.4 percent) but lower than the rate in 1969 (13.7 percent).

This Brief uses data collected by the 1990, 1980, and 1970



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BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Censuses of Population to examine changes in poverty rates over the past two decades for the 50 States and the District of Columbia.

New Hampshire had the lowest poverty rate in 1989.

Regionally, the Northeast had the lowest poverty rate in 1989 (10.6 percent). In fact, it contained 6 of the Nation's 10 least-impoorished States. New Hampshire (6.4 percent), Connecticut (6.8 percent), and New Jersey (7.6 percent) led the United States.

The Midwest followed, at 12 percent. Rates there ranged from 10.2 percent in Minnesota (11th-lowest nationally) to 15.9 percent

in neighboring 40th-ranked South Dakota.

The West lagged a little further behind, with a rate of 12.6 percent. Though Alaska and Hawaii were among the eight least poor States, New Mexico ranked among the three poorest.

The South was home to two of the Nation's six lowest-poverty States — Maryland and Delaware. Yet also located there were 9 of the 10 poorest. Mississippi (25.2 percent) and Louisiana (23.6 percent) had the United States' two highest poverty rates. Consequently, the South's rate — 15.7 percent — was the Nation's highest.

Some States improve their lot in the '80's....

Overall, 21 States saw poverty drop between 1979 and 1989. (See map below and table on the next page.) Interestingly —

- Poverty fell in all 14 Atlantic seaboard States, but dropped in only 7 of the other 37.
- Four States — Delaware, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont — had declines of 2 percentage points or more. Delaware, with the largest decline during the decade (3.2 points), recorded the greatest improvement in its ranking as well — from the 27th-lowest rate in 1979 to the 6th-lowest in 1989. Joining Delaware in leaping more than 10 places were Alaska, Vermont, and fellow Atlantic coast States Maine and Virginia.
- Among the regions, only the Northeast saw its rate fall between 1979 and 1989 (from 11.2 percent to 10.6 percent).

.... while others see their fortunes take a downturn.

Twenty-nine States posted poverty rate increases during the 1980's. During the decade —

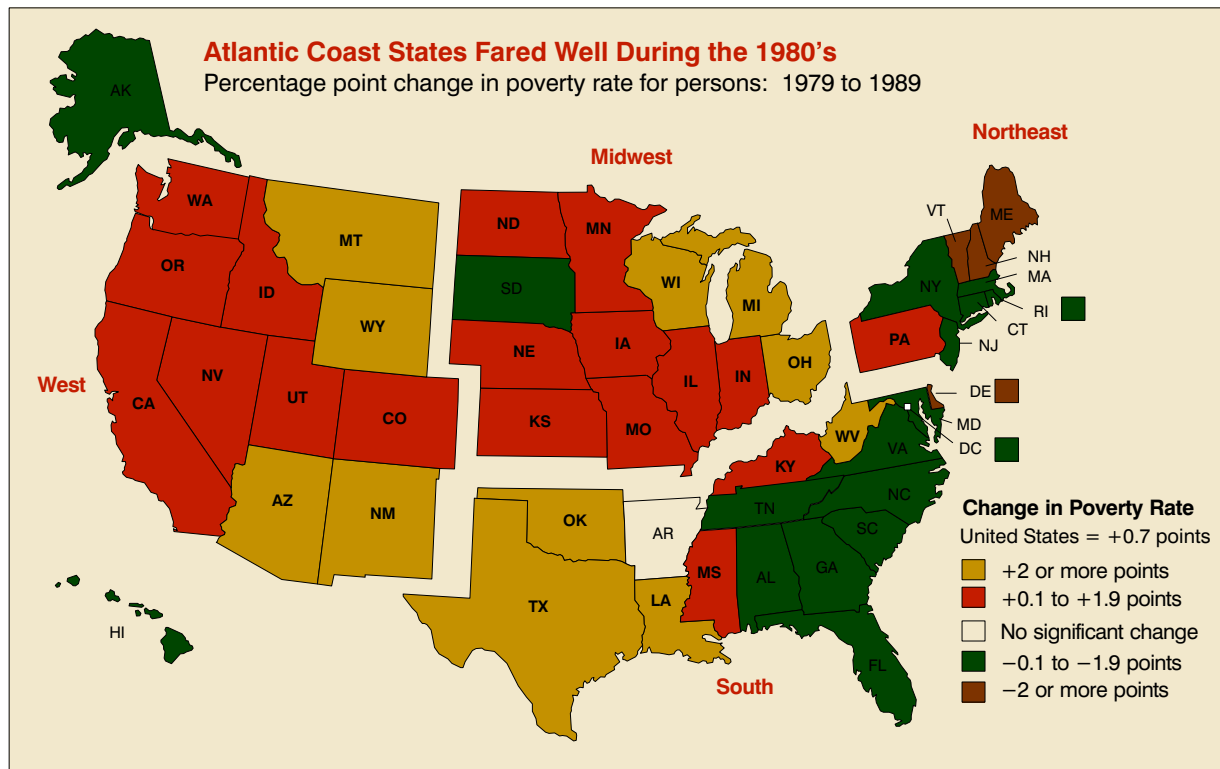
- Among the 48 contiguous States, poverty rose in nearly all of the 29 that either were located west of the Mississippi or had a shoreline on one of the Great Lakes. South Dakota and New York, where the rates fell, and Arkansas, whose apparent rise wasn't statistically significant, were the only exceptions.
- Louisiana, West Virginia, and Wyoming all suffered rises of at least 4 percentage points. Wyoming, as a matter of fact, had the largest rankings drop — from the Nation's lowest rate in 1979 to its 24th-lowest in 1989. Also moving down 10 places or more were two other Rocky Mountain States (Colorado and Montana) and a trio of Great Lakes States (Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin).

- Regionally, the Midwest and West had the fastest-growing poverty rates — +1.5 and +1.3 percentage points, respectively. The South posted a smaller gain (+0.3 points).

Looking back at the '70's....

As the table on page 3 shows, nearly twice as many States saw poverty drop between 1969 and 1979 (38) as did over the next 10 years (21). The degree of decline was also sharper during the 1970's — 13 States saw their rate drop 4 percentage points or more, compared with none during the 1980's.

Several States, however, saw their poverty rate decrease during *both* decades. Most were located along the Atlantic Ocean. Moving down the coast, they were: Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. The other four were Alabama, Alaska, South Dakota, and Tennessee.



State and Regional Rankings by Poverty Rates: 1969 – 1989

	1989		1979		1969		1979–	1969–
	Poverty Rate	Rank	Poverty Rate	Rank	Poverty Rate	Rank	Percent– age point change	Percent– age point change
United States	13.1	—	12.4	—	13.7	—	0.7	-1.3
New Hampshire	6.4	1	8.5	3	9.1	4	-2.1	-0.6
Connecticut	6.8	2	8.0	2	7.2	1	-1.2	0.8
New Jersey	7.6	3	9.5	6	8.1	2	-1.9	1.4
Maryland	8.3	4	9.8	10	10.1	11	-1.5	-0.3
Hawaii	8.3	4	9.9	12	9.3	6	-1.6	0.6
Delaware	8.7	6	11.9	27	10.9	16	-3.2	1.0
Massachusetts	8.9	7	9.6	8	8.6	3	-0.7	1.0
Alaska	9.0	8	10.7	21	12.6	26	-1.7	-1.9
Rhode Island	9.6	9	10.3	16	11.0	17	-0.7	-0.7
Vermont	9.9	10	12.1	28	12.1	24	-2.2	0
Minnesota	10.2	11	9.5	6	10.7	15	0.7	-1.2
Nevada	10.2	11	8.7	4	9.1	4	1.5	-0.4
Virginia	10.2	11	11.8	26	15.5	34	-1.6	-3.7
Wisconsin	10.7	14	8.7	4	9.8	9	2.0	-1.1
Indiana	10.7	14	9.7	9	9.7	8	1.0	0
Maine	10.8	16	13.0	33	13.6	30	-2.2	-0.6
Washington	10.9	17	9.8	10	10.2	12	1.1	-0.4
Pennsylvania	11.1	18	10.5	20	10.6	14	0.6	-0.1
Nebraska	11.1	18	10.7	21	13.1	28	0.4	-2.4
Utah	11.4	20	10.3	16	11.4	20	1.1	-1.1
Kansas	11.5	21	10.1	13	12.7	27	1.4	-2.6
Iowa	11.5	21	10.1	13	11.6	22	1.4	-1.5
Colorado	11.7	23	10.1	13	12.3	25	1.6	-2.2
Wyoming	11.9	24	7.9	1	11.7	23	4.0	-3.8
Illinois	11.9	24	11.0	24	10.2	12	0.9	0.8
Oregon	12.4	26	10.7	21	11.5	21	1.7	-0.8
California	12.5	27	11.4	25	11.1	18	1.1	0.3
Ohio	12.5	27	10.3	16	10.0	10	2.2	0.3
Florida	12.7	29	13.5	37	16.4	36	-0.8	-2.9
North Carolina	13.0	30	14.8	39	20.3	41	-1.8	-5.5
New York	13.0	30	13.4	35	11.1	18	-0.4	2.3
Michigan	13.1	32	10.4	19	9.4	7	2.7	1.0
Idaho	13.3	33	12.6	31	13.2	29	0.7	-0.6
Missouri	13.3	33	12.2	29	14.7	32	1.1	-2.5
North Dakota	14.4	35	12.6	31	15.7	35	1.8	-3.1
Georgia	14.7	36	16.6	42	20.7	42	-1.9	-4.1
South Carolina	15.4	37	16.6	42	23.9	47	-1.2	-7.3
Arizona	15.7	38	13.2	34	15.3	33	2.5	-2.1
Tennessee	15.7	38	16.5	41	21.8	43	-0.8	-5.3
South Dakota	15.9	40	16.9	44	18.7	38	-1.0	-1.8
Montana	16.1	41	12.3	30	13.6	30	3.8	-1.3
Oklahoma	16.7	42	13.4	35	18.8	39	3.3	-5.4
District of Columbia	16.9	43	18.6	47	17.0	37	-1.7	1.6
Texas	18.1	44	14.7	38	18.8	39	3.4	-4.1
Alabama	18.3	45	18.9	49	25.4	48	-0.6	-6.5
Kentucky	19.0	46	17.6	45	22.9	46	1.4	-5.3
Arkansas	19.1	47	19.0	50	27.8	50	0.1	-8.8
West Virginia	19.7	48	15.0	40	22.2	44	4.7	-7.2
New Mexico	20.6	49	17.6	45	22.8	45	3.0	-5.2
Louisiana	23.6	50	18.6	47	26.3	49	5.0	-7.7
Mississippi	25.2	51	23.9	51	35.4	51	1.3	-11.5
Regions								
Northeast	10.6	1	11.2	2	10.1	1	-0.6	1.1
Midwest	12.0	2	10.5	1	10.8	2	1.5	-0.3
West	12.6	3	11.3	3	11.7	3	1.3	-0.4
South	15.7	4	15.4	4	20.3	4	0.3	-4.9

Note: The rankings in this Brief are based on point estimates; actual rankings may be slightly different due to sampling error. The apparent change (between 1979 and 1989) for Arkansas was not statistically significant.

On the flip side, poverty worsened during both decades in four big States: California, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio.

And, finally, three States stand out for their double-digit turn-arounds:

- Mississippi had a 12.8 percentage point swing. Its 1970's drop of 11.5 percentage points was followed by a 1.3-point gain during the next decade to 25.2 percent.
- Louisiana had a 12.7-point swing (from a 7.7-point drop in the '70's to a 5.0-point rise in the '80's), West Virginia an 11.9-point swing (from -7.2 to +4.7 points). Their respective 1989 poverty rates were 23.6 percent and 19.7 percent.

How did we compute the poverty rates?

The 1989 data in this Brief were collected via the 1990 census "long form," which was sent to 1 in every 6 housing units. The "long form" asked not only the basic questions asked of all households (like the race, age, and marital status of persons living there), but a series of more detailed questions covering numerous housing, social, and economic subjects. One of these subjects was income, from which the Bureau derives poverty rates.

We computed the poverty rate by first asking each family and unrelated individual in the sample to report their total money income for the 1989 calendar year. These amounts were reported before any deductions, such as personal income tax, and excluded the value of any noncash benefits.

The income for each family and unrelated person was then compared to the appropriate 1989 poverty threshold to determine their poverty status. These thresholds were originally set at three times the cost of meeting Department of Agriculture-determined food consumption

The Poverty Line

Poverty thresholds by size of family and number of related children under 18 years old: 1989

Size of Family Unit	Weighted average thresholds	Related children under 18 years						
		None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
One person (unrelated individual)	\$6,310	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Under 65 years	6,451	\$6,451	—	—	—	—	—	—
65 years and over	5,947	5,947	—	—	—	—	—	—
Two persons	8,076	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Householder under 65 years	8,343	8,303	\$8,547	—	—	—	—	—
Householder 65 years and over	7,501	7,495	8,515	—	—	—	—	—
Three persons	9,885	9,699	9,981	\$9,990	—	—	—	—
Four persons	12,674	12,790	12,999	12,575	\$12,619	—	—	—
Five persons	14,990	15,424	15,648	15,169	14,798	\$14,572	—	—
Six persons	16,921	17,740	17,811	17,444	17,092	16,569	\$16,259	—
Seven persons	19,162	20,412	20,540	20,101	19,794	19,224	18,558	\$17,828
Eight persons	21,328	22,830	23,031	22,617	22,253	21,738	21,084	20,403
Nine or more persons	25,480	27,463	27,596	27,229	26,921	26,415	25,719	25,089

Note: For 8-person families (7 children), the threshold was \$20,230. For families with 9 or more persons, the respective thresholds were \$24,933 (7 children) and \$23,973 (8 or more children).

requirements; the thresholds differ based on family size and composition. (See chart above.) If their total income was less than the corresponding cutoff, a family unit was classified as "below the poverty level."

Dividing the number of poor unrelated individuals and persons in families with incomes below the poverty level by the total number of persons gave us the poverty rate. Persons who were institutionalized, those living in military group quarters and college dormitories, and unrelated individuals under 15 years old were excluded from the calculations.

Incidentally, the rankings in this Brief are based on point estimates; the actual rankings may be slightly different due to sampling error.

More information:

Poverty data down to the block group level from the 1990 Census of Population are available from *Summary Tape File 3A* on computer tape and CD-ROM and *Summary Tape File 4A* on computer tape only. Data also are available (for geographic entities down to the place level) in printed report series, such as *Summary Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics, Series 1990, CPH-5*.

Population and Housing Characteristics for Census Tracts and Block Numbering Areas, Series 1990, CPH-3, contains information for even smaller entities. Call Customer Services at the Census Bureau (301-763-4100) for more information on 1990 census products.

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This Brief is one of a series that presents information of current interest. It examines data from the 1990 census and previous censuses. A complete description of statistical quality and limitations is included in the introduction and appendices of the 1990 census printed reports.

Poverty statistics presented in this Brief are based on a poverty definition originated by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and later modified by Federal interagency committees in 1969 and 1980. The definition is prescribed by the Office of Management and Budget as the standard to be used by Federal agencies for statistical purposes. For more information on the poverty definition, see Appendix B. Definitions of Subject Characteristics of any 1990 Census of Population report.