Poverty: 2009 and 2010

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty estimates represent an important indicator of economic well being. This report, using income and household relationship data from the 1-year 2009 and 2010 American Community Surveys (ACS), compares poverty rates for the nation, states, and large metropolitan statistical areas. The report also summarizes the distributions of income-to-poverty ratios for states and the District of Columbia.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Nationally, the poverty rate increased from 14.3 percent in the 2009 ACS to 15.3 percent in the 2010 ACS. The number of people in poverty increased from 42.9 million to 46.2 million during the same time period.
- Thirty-two states experienced an increase in the number and percentage of people in poverty between 2009 and 2010. For 20 states, this was the second consecutive annual increase.[1]
- No state had a statistically significant decline in either the number of people in poverty or the poverty rate between 2009 and 2010.
- The percent of people with income below 125 percent of their poverty threshold increased from 18.9 percent in 2009 to 20.1 percent in 2010. During the same time period, the percentage of people with income below 50 percent of their poverty threshold increased from 6.3 percent to 6.8 percent.
- The poverty rate among large metropolitan areas varies from a low of 8.4 percent to 33.4 percent in the 2010 ACS.

The estimates contained in this report are based on the 2009 and 2010 ACS. The ACS is conducted every month with income data collected for the 12 months preceding the interview. Since the survey is continuous, adjacent ACS years have income reference months in common. Therefore comparing the 2009 ACS with the 2010 ACS is not an exact comparison of the economic conditions in 2009 with those in 2010, and comparisons should be interpreted with care.[2] For more information on the ACS sample design and other topics visit <www.census.gov/acs/www>.

Poverty

According to 2010 ACS, 46.2 million people or about 15.3 percent of the U.S. population had income below their respective poverty threshold during the year. Compared with the 2009 ACS estimates, the number of people in poverty increased by 3.3 million and the poverty rate increased by 1.0 percentage point.[3]

[1] Bishaw and Macartney, *Poverty: 2008 and 2009*, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2010.

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

[3] The poverty universe is a subset of the total population covered by the ACS. Specifically, the universe excludes children younger than age 15 who are not related to the householder, people living in institutional group quarters, and those living in college dormitories or military barracks.

United States Census Bureau

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

Table 1.

Number and Percentage of People in Poverty in the Past 12 Months by State and Puerto Rico: 2009 and 2010

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see *www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2010.pdf*)

Area	Below poverty in 2009				Below poverty in 2010				Change in poverty (2010 less 2009)			
	Number[1]	Margin of error[2] (+/–)	Percentage[1]	Margin of error[2] (+/–)	Number[1]	Margin of error[2] (+/–)	Percentage[1]	Margin of error[2] (+/–)	Number[1]	Margin of error[2] (+/–)	Percentage[1]	Margin of error[2] (+/–)
United States	**42,868,163**	**236,589**	**14.3**	**0.1**	**46,215,956**	**240,306**	**15.3**	**0.1**	***3,347,793**	**337,226**	***1.0**	**0.1**
Alabama	804,683	22,895	17.5	0.5	888,290	22,673	19.0	0.5	*83,607	32,222	*1.5	0.7
Alaska	61,653	5,417	9.0	0.8	69,279	6,120	9.9	0.9	7,626	8,173	0.9	1.2
Arizona	1,069,897	28,715	16.5	0.4	1,094,249	33,633	17.4	0.5	24,352	44,223	*0.9	0.7
Arkansas	527,378	17,322	18.8	0.6	534,898	16,599	18.8	0.6	7,520	23,991	0.0	0.9
California	5,128,708	60,936	14.2	0.2	5,783,043	74,336	15.8	0.2	*654,335	96,120	*1.6	0.3
Colorado	634,387	21,625	12.9	0.4	659,786	23,009	13.4	0.5	25,399	31,576	0.5	0.6
Connecticut	320,554	16,151	9.4	0.5	350,145	15,842	10.1	0.5	*29,591	22,624	*0.7	0.7
Delaware	93,251	9,829	10.8	1.1	103,427	8,098	11.8	0.9	10,176	12,736	1.0	1.5
District of Columbia	104,901	9,224	18.4	1.6	109,423	7,577	19.2	1.3	4,522	11,937	0.8	2.1
Florida	2,707,925	39,754	14.9	0.2	3,047,343	41,603	16.5	0.2	*339,418	57,543	*1.6	0.3
Georgia	1,574,649	36,922	16.5	0.4	1,688,932	36,955	17.9	0.4	*114,283	52,239	*1.4	0.6
Hawaii	131,007	9,277	10.4	0.7	142,185	9,627	10.7	0.7	11,178	13,370	0.4	1.0
Idaho	216,115	12,490	14.3	0.8	242,272	10,788	15.7	0.7	*26,157	16,503	*1.4	1.1
Illinois	1,677,093	37,391	13.3	0.3	1,731,711	31,915	13.8	0.3	*54,618	49,159	*0.5	0.4
Indiana	896,972	23,765	14.4	0.4	962,775	25,003	15.3	0.4	*65,803	34,495	*0.9	0.6
Iowa	342,934	13,024	11.8	0.4	370,507	13,924	12.6	0.5	*27,573	19,066	*0.8	0.7
Kansas	365,033	15,162	13.4	0.6	377,530	15,414	13.6	0.6	12,497	21,621	0.2	0.8
Kentucky	777,295	21,970	18.6	0.5	800,226	20,902	19.0	0.5	22,931	30,325	0.4	0.7
Louisiana	755,460	23,513	17.3	0.5	825,144	21,101	18.7	0.5	*69,684	31,593	*1.4	0.7
Maine	157,685	8,398	12.3	0.7	167,242	7,702	12.9	0.6	9,557	11,395	0.6	0.9
Maryland	505,286	18,824	9.1	0.3	557,140	21,050	9.9	0.4	*51,854	28,240	*0.8	0.5
Massachusetts	654,983	20,720	10.3	0.3	725,143	21,471	11.4	0.3	*70,160	29,839	*1.2	0.5
Michigan	1,576,704	30,948	16.2	0.3	1,618,257	30,260	16.8	0.3	41,553	43,283	*0.6	0.4
Minnesota	563,006	17,470	11.0	0.3	599,516	15,022	11.6	0.3	*36,510	23,041	*0.6	0.4
Mississippi	624,360	17,712	21.9	0.6	643,883	22,452	22.4	0.8	19,523	28,597	0.5	1.0
Missouri	849,009	24,710	14.6	0.4	888,570	21,761	15.3	0.4	*39,561	32,926	*0.7	0.6
Montana	143,028	9,517	15.1	1.0	140,969	9,640	14.6	1.0	–2,059	13,546	–0.5	1.4
Nebraska	214,765	9,539	12.3	0.6	229,923	11,823	12.9	0.7	15,158	15,191	0.6	0.9
Nevada	321,940	18,092	12.4	0.7	398,027	20,092	14.9	0.8	*76,087	27,038	*2.6	1.0
New Hampshire	109,213	8,221	8.5	0.6	105,786	8,064	8.3	0.6	–3,427	11,516	–0.2	0.9
New Jersey	799,099	26,131	9.4	0.3	884,789	24,939	10.3	0.3	*85,690	36,122	*0.9	0.4
New Mexico	353,594	19,626	18.0	1.0	413,851	19,768	20.4	1.0	*60,257	27,856	*2.5	1.4
New York	2,691,757	43,874	14.2	0.2	2,821,470	46,759	14.9	0.2	*129,713	64,120	*0.8	0.3
North Carolina	1,478,214	29,213	16.3	0.3	1,627,602	29,606	17.5	0.3	*149,388	41,592	*1.2	0.5
North Dakota	72,342	4,796	11.7	0.8	84,895	5,668	13.0	0.9	*12,553	7,425	*1.4	1.2
Ohio	1,709,971	33,382	15.2	0.3	1,779,032	32,237	15.8	0.3	*69,061	46,407	*0.6	0.4
Oklahoma	577,956	18,136	16.2	0.5	616,610	15,751	16.9	0.4	*38,654	24,021	*0.7	0.7
Oregon	534,594	17,909	14.3	0.5	596,408	17,283	15.8	0.5	*61,814	24,888	*1.6	0.7
Pennsylvania	1,516,705	25,949	12.5	0.2	1,648,184	29,243	13.4	0.2	*131,479	39,096	*0.9	0.3
Rhode Island	116,378	8,258	11.5	0.8	142,188	9,018	14.0	0.9	*25,810	12,228	*2.6	1.2
South Carolina	753,739	21,608	17.1	0.5	815,755	22,461	18.2	0.5	*62,016	31,167	*1.1	0.7
South Dakota	111,305	8,178	14.2	1.0	113,760	7,599	14.4	1.0	2,455	11,163	0.2	1.4
Tennessee	1,052,144	23,735	17.1	0.4	1,095,466	29,085	17.7	0.5	*43,322	37,541	0.6	0.6
Texas	4,150,242	58,989	17.2	0.2	4,414,481	53,320	17.9	0.2	*264,239	79,515	*0.7	0.3
Utah	316,217	14,867	11.5	0.5	359,242	14,693	13.2	0.5	*43,025	20,902	*1.6	0.8
Vermont	68,246	5,148	11.4	0.9	76,352	5,250	12.7	0.9	*8,106	7,352	*1.3	1.2
Virginia	802,578	26,888	10.5	0.4	861,969	22,046	11.1	0.3	*59,391	34,770	*0.6	0.5
Washington	804,237	23,667	12.3	0.4	888,718	27,270	13.4	0.4	*84,481	36,108	*1.1	0.5
West Virginia	313,419	11,866	17.7	0.7	326,507	13,020	18.1	0.7	13,088	17,615	0.4	1.0
Wisconsin	683,408	19,384	12.4	0.4	731,479	17,834	13.2	0.3	*48,071	26,340	*0.8	0.5
Wyoming	52,144	5,517	9.8	1.0	61,577	6,480	11.2	1.2	*9,433	8,510	1.3	1.6
Puerto Rico	1,764,635	24,829	45.0	0.6	1,659,792	21,557	45.0	0.6	*–104,843	32,881	0.1	0.9

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

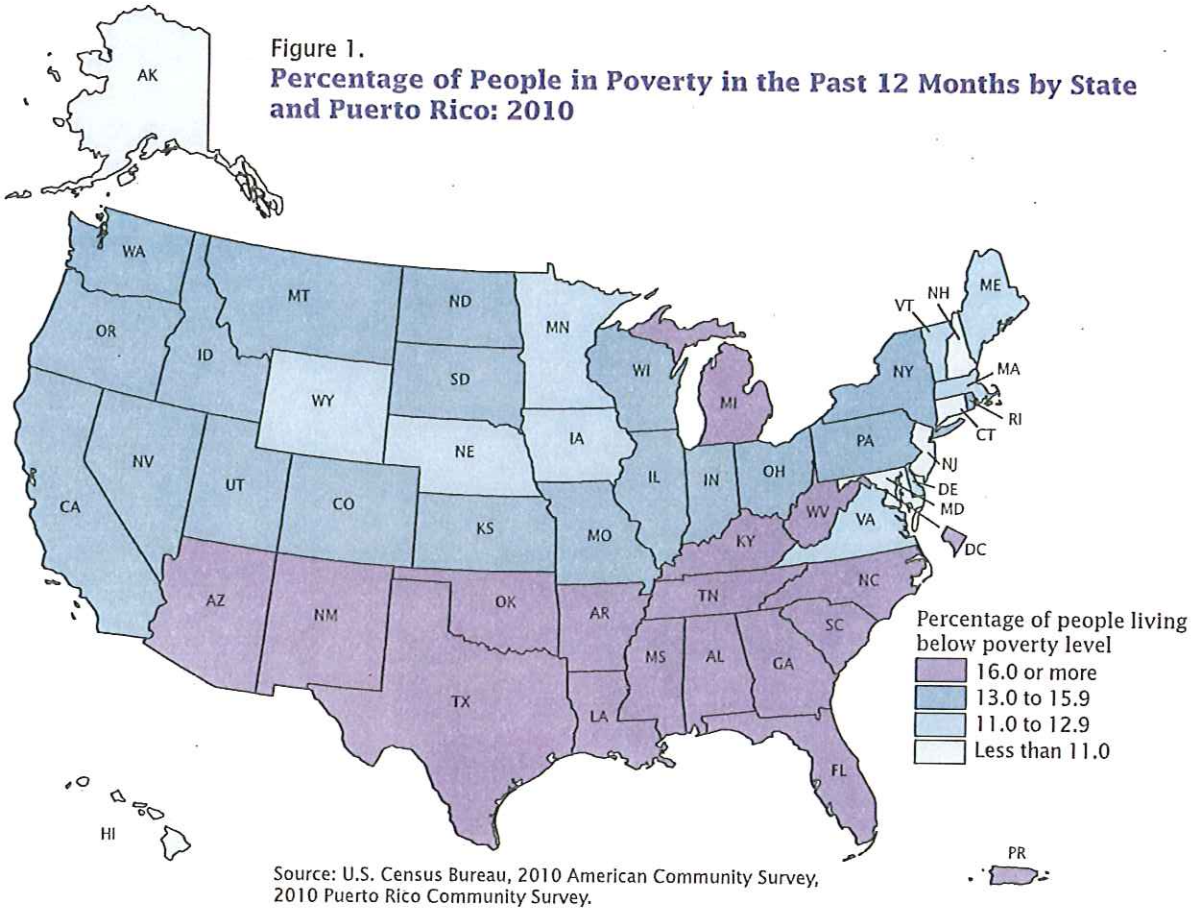
[1]Poverty status is determined for individuals in housing units and noninstitutional group quarters. The poverty universe excludes children under age 15 who are not related to the householder, people living in institutional group quarters, and people living in college dormitories or military barracks.

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

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

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 and 2010 American Community Surveys, 2009 and 2010 Puerto Rico Community Surveys.

Figure 1.
Percentage of People in Poverty in the Past 12 Months by State and Puerto Rico: 2010



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

Table 1 shows the estimated number and percentage of people in poverty by state in 2009 and 2010. This table also indicates the changes in the number and percentage of people in poverty by taking the difference between the 2009 and 2010 ACS estimates.

Poverty rates for the 50 states and the District of Columbia ranged from a low of 8.3 percent in New Hampshire to a high of 22.4 percent in Mississippi, according to the 2010 ACS. Poverty rates for Alaska (9.9 percent), Maryland (9.9 percent), Connecticut (10.1 percent), and New Jersey (10.3 percent) were among the lowest in the nation (Table 1).[4] Poverty

[4] Poverty rates for Alaska, Connecticut, Maryland, and New Jersey were not statistically different from each other.

How Poverty Is Measured

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

The poverty thresholds are updated annually to allow for changes in the cost of living using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). They do not vary geographically. The ACS is a continuous survey and people respond throughout the year. Since income is reported for the previous 12 months, the appropriate poverty threshold for each family is determined by multiplying the base-year poverty threshold (1982) by the average of monthly CPI values for the 12 months preceding the survey month.

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

rates for Mississippi (22.4 percent) and New Mexico (20.4 percent) were higher than all other states.[5]

Only New Hampshire had an estimated poverty rate significantly lower than 10 percent in 2010, while five states had single-digit poverty rates in 2009—Alaska, Connecticut, Maryland, New Hampshire, and New Jersey. The number of states with poverty rates above 17 percent increased from 5 in 2009 to 12 states plus the District of Columbia in 2010.[6]

The poverty rate for Puerto Rico in 2010 was 45.0 percent, showing no change from the 2009 rate.

Between 2009 and 2010 ACS, 32 states experienced increases in both the number and percentages of people in poverty. For 20 states, this was the second year in a row with an increase. During the same time period, none of the states had a statistically significant decline in either the number of people in poverty or the poverty rate.

For 14 states and the District of Columbia the changes in the number of people in poverty and the poverty rates were not statistically significant.[7]

Figure 1 (map) displays the range of poverty rates across the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico using the 2010 ACS and Puerto Rico Community Survey. This map shows that poverty rates are higher in the states in the Southern region, while most of the states in the Northeast region had lower poverty rates.

Depth of Poverty

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

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

About 20.1 percent of people in the 2010 ACS had an income-to-poverty ratio less than 125 percent, compared with 18.9 percent in the 2009 ACS. Similarly, the percentage of people with an income-to-poverty ratio less than 50 percent increased from 6.3 percent in the 2009 ACS to 6.8 percent in the 2010 ACS.

At the state level, the share of the population with an income-to-poverty ratio less than 125 percent ranged from a low of 11.2 percent in New Hampshire to a high of 28.9 percent in Mississippi in the 2010 ACS. New Hampshire (11.2 percent), Maryland (12.8 percent), and Connecticut (13.1 percent) had the lowest percentages of people with an income-to-poverty ratio less than 125 percent.[8] Mississippi (28.9 percent) and New Mexico (26.4 percent) had the largest proportions of people with an income-to-poverty ratio less than 125 percent.

The proportion of people with an income-to-poverty ratio less than 50 percent ranged from a low of 3.8 percent in New Hampshire to a high of 10.7 percent in the District of Columbia.[9]

Poverty in Metropolitan Areas

This brief analyzes poverty rates for large metropolitan areas with populations of 500,000 or more in 2010. More than 80 percent of the U.S. population resides in one of the 366 metropolitan areas and about two-thirds of the total U.S. population lives in the largest areas. Table 2 shows the 10 large metropolitan areas with the lowest poverty rates and the 10 large metropolitan areas with the highest poverty rates.[10]

The poverty rates among these metropolitan areas varied widely,

[5] The 2010 ACS poverty rate for New Mexico was not statistically different from the 2010 poverty rate of the District of Columbia.

[6] The 5 states with poverty rates greater than 17 percent in 2009 were Alabama (17.5 percent), Arkansas (18.8 percent), Kentucky (18.6 percent), Mississippi (21.9 percent), and West Virginia (17.7 percent), and in 2010 there were 12 states—Alabama (19.0 percent), Arkansas (18.8 percent), Georgia (17.9 percent), Kentucky (19.0 percent), Louisiana (18.7 percent), Mississippi (22.4 percent), New Mexico (20.4 percent), North Carolina (17.5 percent), South Carolina (18.2 percent), Tennessee (17.7 percent), Texas (17.9 percent), and West Virginia (18.1 percent), and the District of Columbia (19.2 percent) with poverty rates greater than 17 percent.

[7] States with no significant change in the number of people in poverty and poverty rate includes Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and West Virginia.

[8] The proportion of people with an income-to-poverty ratio less than 125 percent for Maryland and Connecticut are not statistically different from each other, while the proportions of people with an income-to-poverty ratio less than 125 percent for Connecticut, New Jersey, Hawaii, and Alaska are not statistically different from each other.

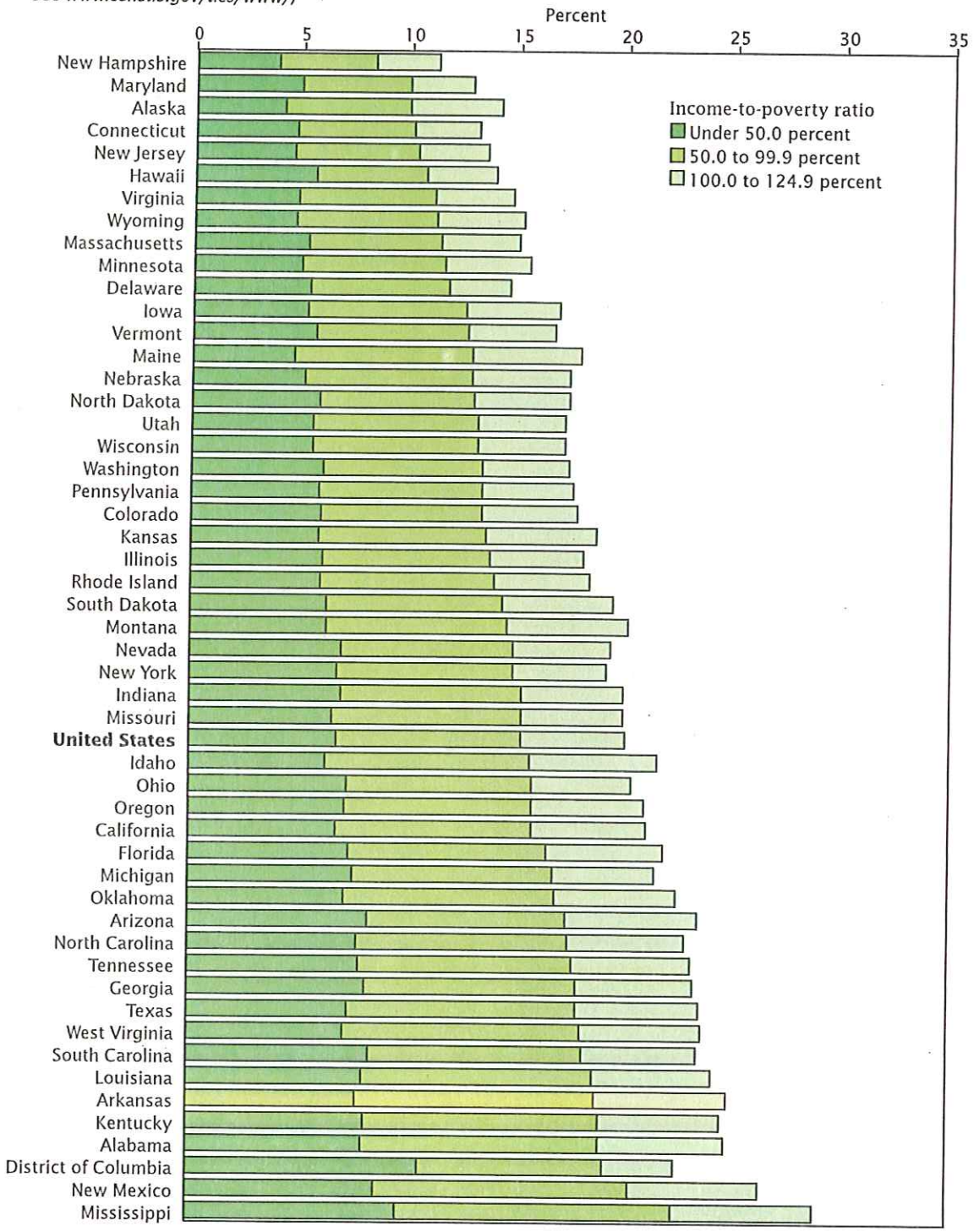
[9] The proportion of people with an income-to-poverty ratio less than 50 percent for Alaska was not statistically different from New Hampshire, while the proportion of people with an income-to-poverty ratio less than 50 percent for Mississippi was not statistically different from the proportion for the District of Columbia.

[10] In this table, poverty rates for the metropolitan areas may not be statistically different from each other or from areas that are not shown in the table.

Figure 2.

Percentage of People by Income-to-Poverty Ratio in the Past 12 Months by State: 2010

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see *www.census.gov/acs/www/*)



Note: Details may not sum to totals because of rounding.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey.

Table 2.

Percentage of People in Poverty in the Past 12 Months for Large Metropolitan Areas With Lowest and Highest Poverty Rate: 2010

Metropolitan area	Ten of the lowest rates		Metropolitan area	Ten of the highest rates	
	Estimate[1]	Margin of error[2] (+/–)		Estimate[1]	Margin of error[2] (+/–)
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area	8.4	0.4	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX Metro Area	33.4	2.2
Honolulu, HI Metro Area	9.1	0.9	Fresno, CA Metro Area	26.8	1.4
Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Middletown, NY Metro Area	9.4	1.1	El Paso, TX Metro Area	24.3	1.7
Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT Metro Area	9.4	0.9	Bakersfield-Delano, CA Metro Area	21.2	1.4
Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA Metro Area	9.9	1.1	Augusta-Richmond County, GA-SC Metro Area	19.9	1.7
Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, CT Metro Area	10.1	0.8	Modesto, CA Metro Area	19.9	1.7
Ogden-Clearfield, UT Metro Area	10.2	1.2	Stockton, CA Metro Area	19.2	1.7
Portland-South Portland-Biddeford, ME Metro Area	10.3	1.3	Memphis, TN-MS-AR Metro Area	19.1	1.0
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH Metro Area	10.3	0.4	Durham-Chapel Hill, NC Metro Area	18.9	1.8
Lancaster, PA Metro Area	10.5	1.3	Greensboro-High Point, NC Metro Area	18.1	1.3

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

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

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

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey.

according to 2010 ACS. They ranged from 8.4 percent in the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV metro area to 33.4 percent in McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX. Honolulu, HI (9.1 percent), Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Middletown, NY (9.4 percent), and Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT (9.4 percent), were among the metropolitan areas with the lowest poverty rates in the nation.[11]

McAllen-Edinburg-Mission in Texas had the highest poverty rate (33.4 percent) of all large metropolitan areas, followed by Fresno in California with 26.8 percent and El Paso in Texas with 24.3 percent.

SOURCE AND ACCURACY

Data presented in this report are based on people and households that responded to the ACS in 2009 and 2010. The resulting estimates are representative of the entire population. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted. Due to rounding, some details may not sum to totals. For information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, please see the 2010 ACS Accuracy of the Data document located at <www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2010.pdf>.

[11] Poverty rates for the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV, Honolulu, HI, and Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Middletown, NY, metro areas were not statistically different from each other. Poverty rates for Honolulu, HI, Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Middletown, NY, and Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT, metro areas were not statistically different from each other.

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 million addresses across the United States and Puerto Rico and includes both housing units and group quarters (e.g., nursing facilities and prisons). The ACS is conducted in every county throughout the nation, and every municipio in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey. Beginning in 2006, ACS data for 2005 were released for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 and greater. For information on the ACS sample design and other topics, visit <www.census.gov/acs/www>.

Notes

The Census Bureau also publishes poverty estimates based on the Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC). Following the standard specified by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in Statistical Policy Directive 14, data from the CPS ASEC are used to estimate the official national poverty rate, which can be found in the report *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010*, available at <www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-239.pdf>.

For information on poverty estimates from the ACS and how they differ from those based on the CPS ASEC, see "Differences Between the Income and Poverty Estimates From the American Community Survey and the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey" at <www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/datasources/index.html>.