

2019 CENSUS DATA ON TENNESSEANS' EDUCATION LEVELS

The U.S. Census Bureau released new data in September on [income](#), [poverty](#), education, and [health insurance coverage](#) in 2019. These metrics paint a picture of the social and economic circumstances across America in the final year of a historically long period of economic growth. For years to come, they will serve as a baseline to measure many of the coronavirus recession's short- and long-term effects.

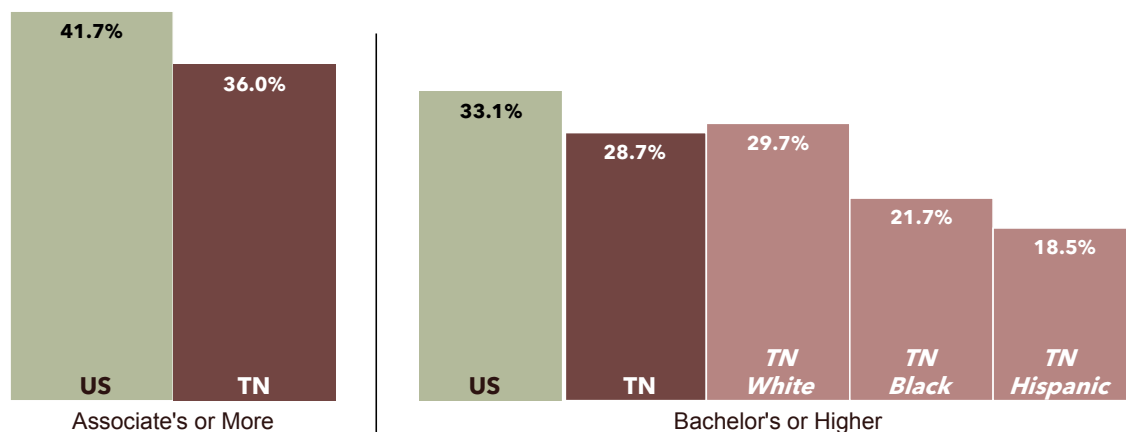
Here's what stands out from the estimates of Tennesseans' education levels in 2019.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- An estimated 36.0% of Tennesseans age 25+ had at least an associate's degree last year, and 28.7% had a bachelor's or more – both higher than past years but lower than the national rate.
- Differences in post-secondary education rates among white, black, and Hispanic Tennesseans are shrinking, but significant gaps remain.
- Over the last decade, median earnings have grown for Tennesseans at almost every level of education after adjusting for inflation.

Figure 1. Most Tennesseans Did Not Have a Post-Secondary Degree in 2019

Highest Level of Education Attained by Tennesseans Ages 25+ (2019)



Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents.
Source: 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Education Levels in Tennessee

Tennessee's recent upward trend in the share of residents with post-secondary degrees continued into 2019, though it remains lower than the national rate. An estimated 36.0% of Tennesseans 25 and older had at least an associate's degree last year, and 28.7% had a bachelor's degree or higher (**Figure 1**). Both metrics have risen in recent years (**Figure 2**). (1) Meanwhile, state

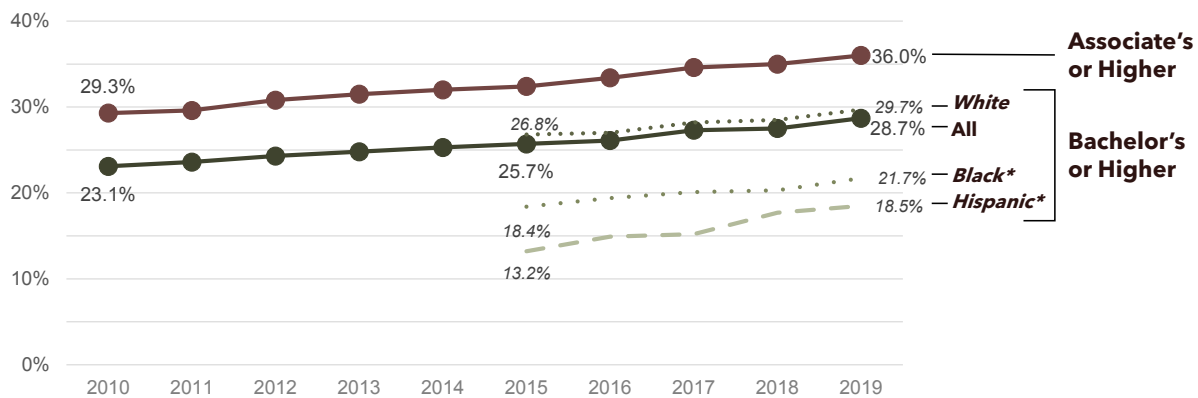
policymakers have also sought to increase the number of Tennesseans with technical degrees and certifications. However, the American Community Survey does not collect information on those credentials.

Demographic and Geographic Variation

Differences in post-secondary education rates by race and ethnicity are shrinking, but significant gaps remain (Figure 2).* (1) From 2015 to 2019, the share of Tennesseans with at least a bachelor's increased the most among Hispanics (up 5.3 percentage points), followed by black residents (up 3.3 points), and then white residents (up 2.9 points). Despite this progress, 19% of Hispanics and 22% of black Tennesseans had a bachelor's or higher, compared to 30% of white residents.

Figure 2. As Educational Attainment Rose in Tennessee, Racial and Ethnic Gaps Narrowed

Highest Level of Education Attained by Tennesseans Ages 25+ (2010-2019)



Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents. * Due to the margins of error, the difference in 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant for these groups.

Source: 2010-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

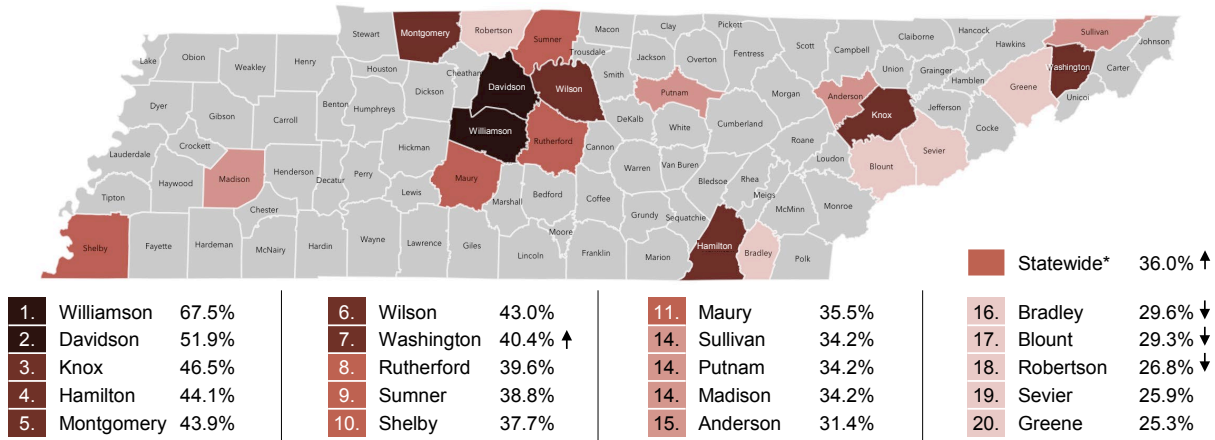
Rates of post-secondary education in Tennessee also vary by geography. The Census Bureau's September data release also includes 2019 estimates for counties with populations above 65,000. Among the 20 Tennessee counties with available data (2):

- Associate's Degree or More** – The share of adults 25 and older with at least an associate's degree ranged from 67.5% in Williamson County to 25.3% in Greene County (**Figure 3**). The share increased in Washington County and fell in Bradley, Blount, and Robertson Counties. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant.
- Bachelor's Degree or More** – Residents with bachelor's degrees or more varied from 61.8% in Williamson County to 19.0% in Greene and Sevier Counties (**Figure 4**). Four counties saw a statistically significant increase from 2018: Davidson, Hamilton, Sevier, and Sumner.

See **Table A1** in the Appendix for complete 2018-2019 county data.

Figure 3. In Tennessee's Most Populated Counties, 25-67% of Adults Age 25+ Have at Least an Associate's Degree

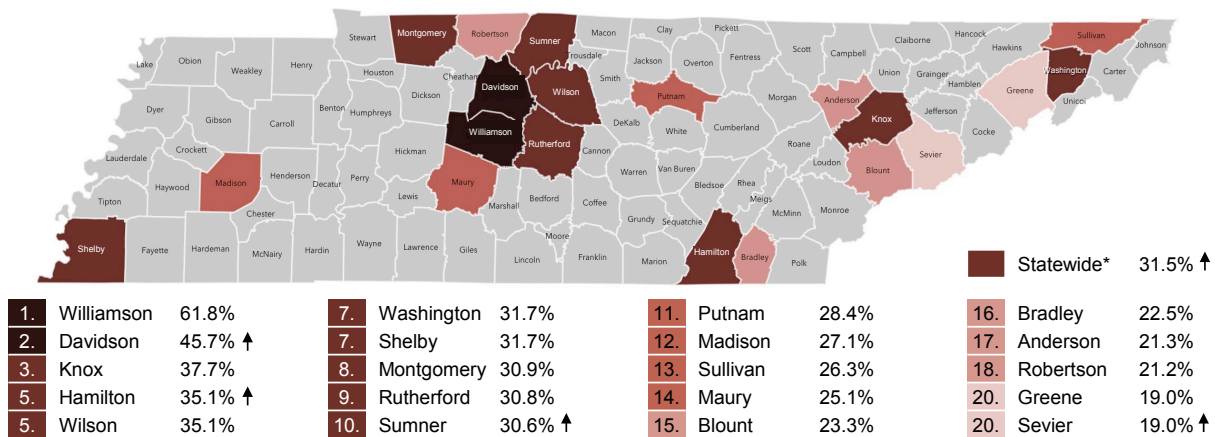
Percent of Tennesseans Ages 25+ with an Associate's Degree or Higher (2019)



↑↓ Shows a statistically significant change from 2018. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant. * One-year estimates are not available for the 75 grey counties due to small sample sizes, but every county is included in the statewide estimate.
 Source: 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Figure 4. In Tennessee's Most Populated Counties, 19-62% of Adults Age 25+ Have at Least a Bachelor's Degree

Percent of Tennesseans Ages 25+ with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2019)



↑↓ Shows a statistically significant change from 2018. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant. * One-year estimates are not available for the 75 grey counties due to small sample sizes, but every county is included in the statewide estimate.
 Source: 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Education and Earnings in Tennessee

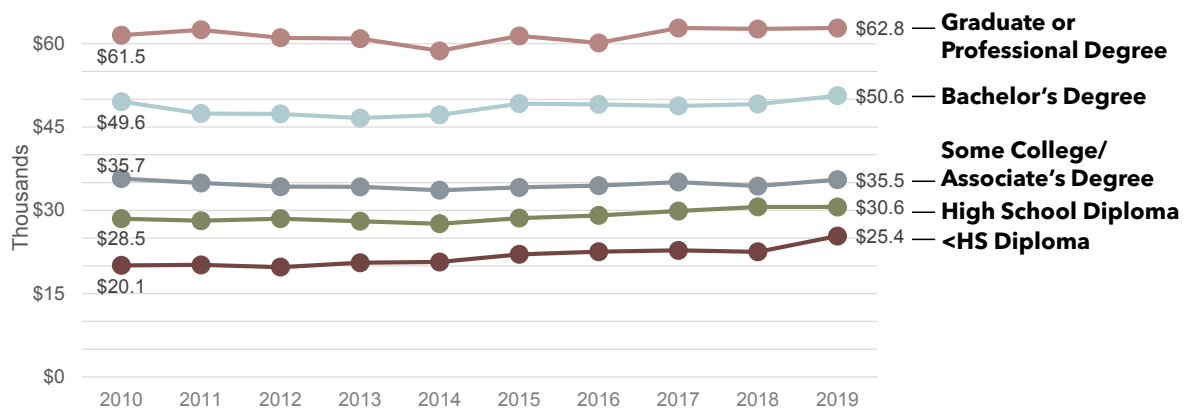
Higher levels of education continue to be associated with higher earnings in Tennessee (Figure 5). (1) In 2019, for example, Tennesseans with just a bachelor's degree had median earnings of about \$51,000. In other words, half of the people in that group made more and half earned less. For

comparison, median earnings were 43% lower for Tennesseans with only some college or an associate's degree – about \$36,000.

Over the last decade, median earnings have grown for Tennesseans at almost every level of education (Figure 5). (1) (2) After adjusting for inflation, the greatest increase occurred for earnings of those with less than a high school diploma, which were 26% higher in 2019 than in 2010. Earnings grew more slowly for those with a high school diploma - up 7% -- and those with a bachelor's degree or with a graduate or professional degree – both up 2%. Meanwhile, median earnings declined just slightly for those with some college or an associate's degree - down 0.5% in 2019 versus 2010.

Figure 5. At Almost Every Level of Education, Tennesseans Earned More in 2019 than a Decade Prior

Percent of Tennesseans Ages 25+ with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2019)



Inflation-adjusted median earnings are shown in 2019 dollars using the CPI-U-RS (2)
 Source: 2010-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

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References

1. **U.S. Census Bureau.** 2010-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. [Online] September 17, 2020. Accessed from <http://data.census.gov>.
2. **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.** Consumer Price Index: R-CPI-U-RS. [Online] [Cited: September 14, 2020.] Accessed from <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/research-series/r-cpi-u-rs-home.htm>.

* Due to the margins of error, the difference in some 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant. The Census Bureau's American Community Survey generates estimates based on a sample of the total population. The margin of error measures the likely range of the true value if every person were surveyed. When the error margins for two values overlap, the difference may simply be due to sampling or estimation issues. To learn more about the importance of samples, [read our tips for interpreting statistics](#).

Table A1. 2019 Census Data on Tennesseans' Education Levels

American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2018-2019)

	Total Population		% of Adults 25+ with an Associate's Degree or Higher		% of Adults 25+ with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher	
	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019
Tennessee	6,770,010	6,829,174	35.0%	36.1%*	27.5%	28.7%*
Anderson	76,482	76,978	31.4%	31.4%	23.3%	21.3%
Blount	131,349	133,088	33.2%	29.3%*	24.5%	23.3%
Bradley	106,727	108,110	30.7%	29.6%*	20.7%	22.5%
Davidson	692,587	694,144	48.6%	51.9%	42.3%	45.7%*
Greene	69,087	69,069	24.0%	25.3%	17.9%	19.0%
Hamilton	364,286	367,804	40.8%	44.1%	31.2%	35.1%*
Knox	465,289	470,313	45.2%	46.5%	36.2%	37.7%
Madison	97,605	97,984	32.3%	34.2%	25.0%	27.1%
Maury	94,340	96,387	35.3%	35.5%	22.4%	25.1%
Montgomery	205,950	208,993	41.7%	43.9%	30.7%	30.9%
Putnam	78,843	80,245	30.5%	34.2%	24.5%	28.4%
Robertson	71,012	71,813	29.3%	26.8%*	20.3%	21.2%
Rutherford	324,890	332,285	38.7%	39.6%	30.3%	30.8%
Sevier	97,892	98,250	22.3%	25.9%	14.8%	19.0%*
Shelby	935,764	937,166	37.9%	37.7%	31.5%	31.7%
Sullivan	157,668	158,348	33.9%	34.2%	24.5%	26.3%
Sumner	187,149	191,283	33.5%	38.8%	26.2%	30.6%*
Washington	128,607	129,375	38.7%	40.4%*	33.1%	31.7%
Williamson	231,729	238,412	68.9%	67.5%	62.6%	61.8%
Wilson	140,625	144,657	40.0%	43.0%	32.3%	35.1%

* Indicates a statistically significant change from 2018. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant.

One-year estimates are not available for 75 counties due to small sample sizes, but every county is included in the statewide estimate.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's 2018-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)