

## 2019 CENSUS DATA ON INCOME & POVERTY IN TENNESSEE

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.

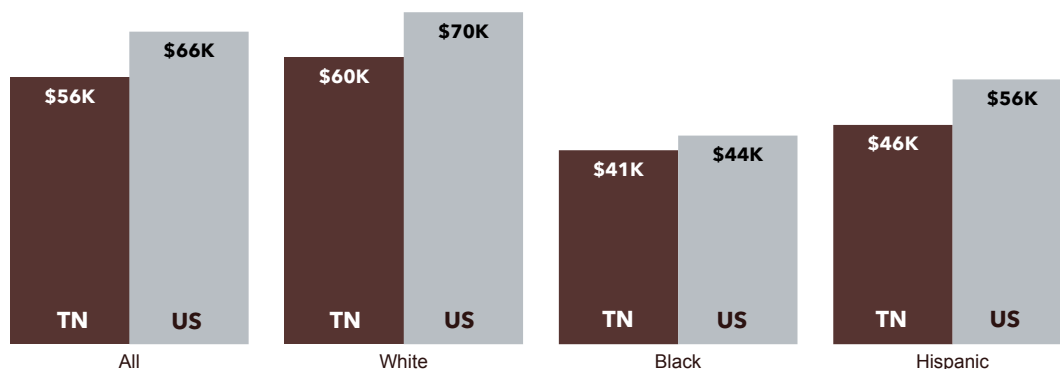
Here's what stands out from the 2019 estimates of income and poverty in Tennessee.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Tennessee saw large improvements in median household income and the official poverty rate last year, but both metrics continue to trail the national average.
- Median household incomes trended upward over the last decade for black, white, and Hispanic Tennesseans, but differences in their purchasing power also grew.
- Meanwhile, racial and ethnic differences in the poverty rate varied over the last decade but ultimately shrank.

### Figure 1. White, Black, and Hispanic Tennesseans All Have Lower Median Incomes than Their Counterparts Nationwide

Median Household Income by Race/Ethnicity<sup>†</sup> (2019)



<sup>†</sup>Reflects the race/ethnicity of the homeowner or lease/mortgage holder (or one of them if multiple exist). Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents.

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

### Income and Poverty in Tennessee

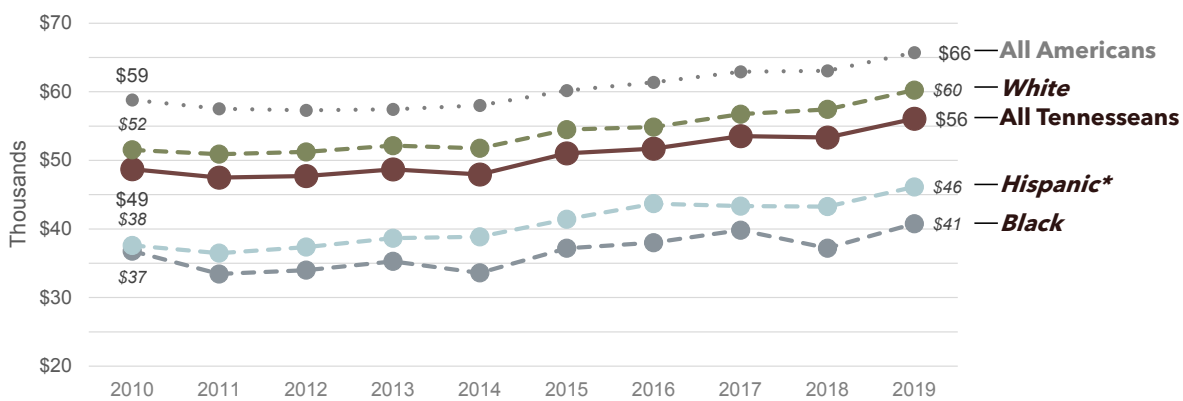
**Tennessee saw large improvements in income and poverty in 2019.** Median [household income](#) in the state reached \$56,000 last year, meaning half of households had less income and half had more (**Figure 1**). (1) After adjusting for inflation, that is a 5% increase from the year before (**Figure 2**). (2) (1) Meanwhile, the [official poverty rate](#) fell to 13.9% – down 1.4 points from 2018 – and child poverty fell 2.6 points to 16.8% (**Figures 3 and 4**). (1) These trends unfolded as [earnings grew at nearly every level](#)

of education over the last decade – especially among Tennesseans with the least education. See **Table A1** in the Appendix for the 2018–2019 data.

**Tennessee’s higher rates of poverty and lower levels of income than the U.S. narrowed over the last decade.** In 2010, the official poverty rate was 2.4 percentage points higher in Tennessee than nationwide, and the child poverty rate was 4.1 points higher. By 2019, those gaps had narrowed to 1.6 and 2.9 points, respectively (**Figure 4**). Meanwhile, the gap in median household income narrowed slightly from \$10,000 in 2010 to \$9,700 in 2019, after adjusting for inflation (**Figure 2**).

### Figure 2. Household Incomes Are Trending Up for Black, Hispanic, and White Tennesseans, But at Different Rates

Median Household Income in Tennessee by Race/Ethnicity† (in 2019 dollars) (2010-2019)

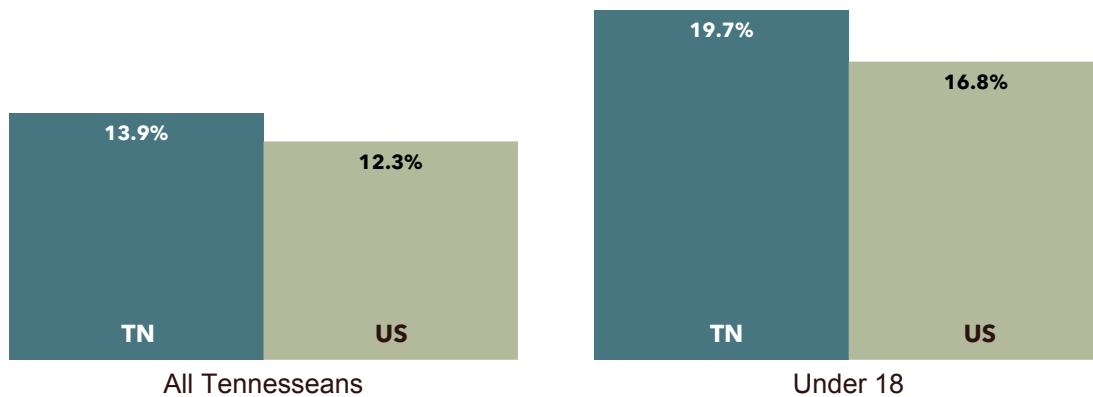


Inflation-adjusted median incomes are shown in 2019 dollars using the CPI-U-RS (2) †Reflects the race/ethnicity of the homeowner or lease/mortgage holder (or one of them if multiple exist). Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents. \*Due to the margins of error, the difference in 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant.

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

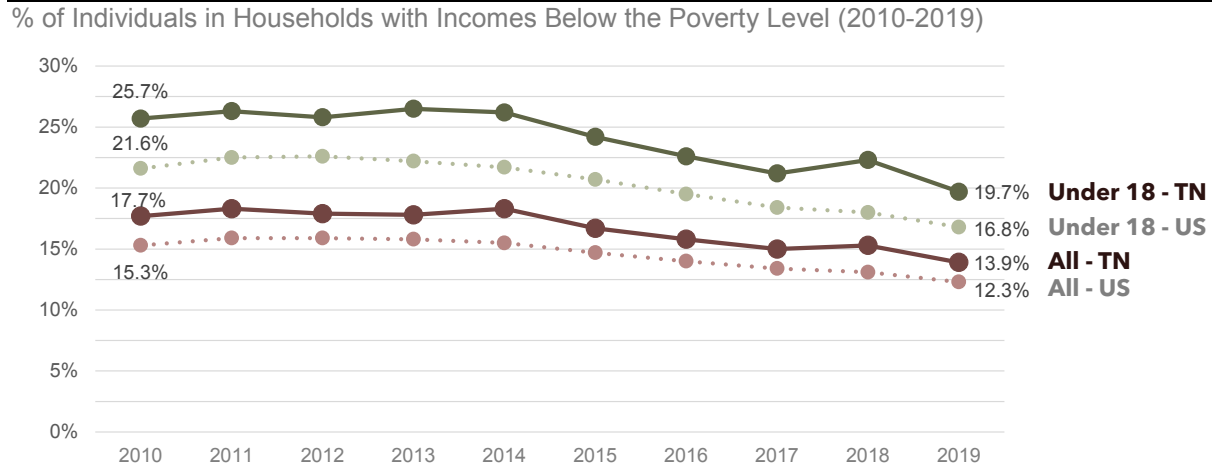
### Figure 3. Tennessee’s Official Poverty Rates Remain Higher than the National Rates

Percent of Individuals Living in Households with Incomes Below Poverty (2019)



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

### Figure 4. The Share of Tennesseans in Poverty Has Fallen Since 2014, Especially Among Children

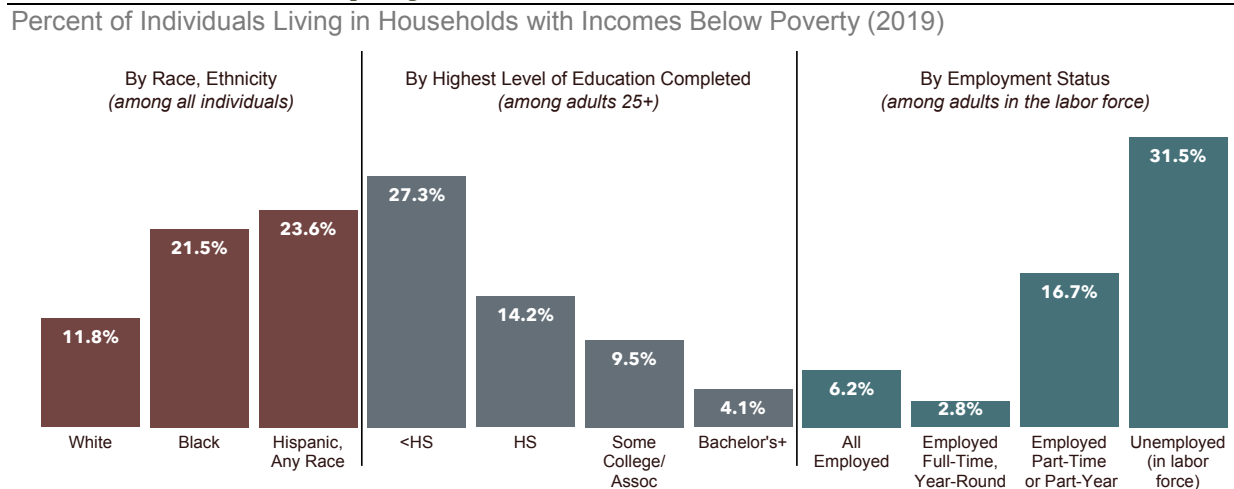


Source: 2010-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

### Demographic Variation

**Tennessee’s poverty rate and median income vary across race, ethnicity, education level, employment, and household type.** In 2019, Hispanic Tennesseans, adults without a high school diploma, and unemployed adults had the highest rates of poverty, while white residents, college graduates, and full-time workers had the lowest (**Figure 5**). In terms of household type, poverty rates were lowest for married couples without children and highest for female-headed, non-married households with children. (**Figure 6**). (1)

### Figure 5. Poverty Rates in Tennessee Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Education, and Employment

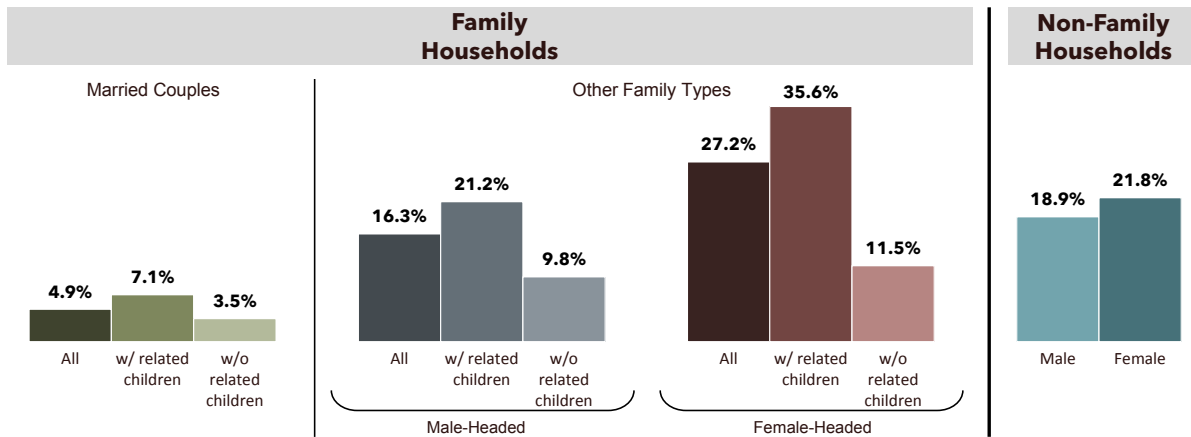


Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents.

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

### Figure 6. Married Tennesseans Without Children Have the Lowest Rate of Poverty Among Household Types

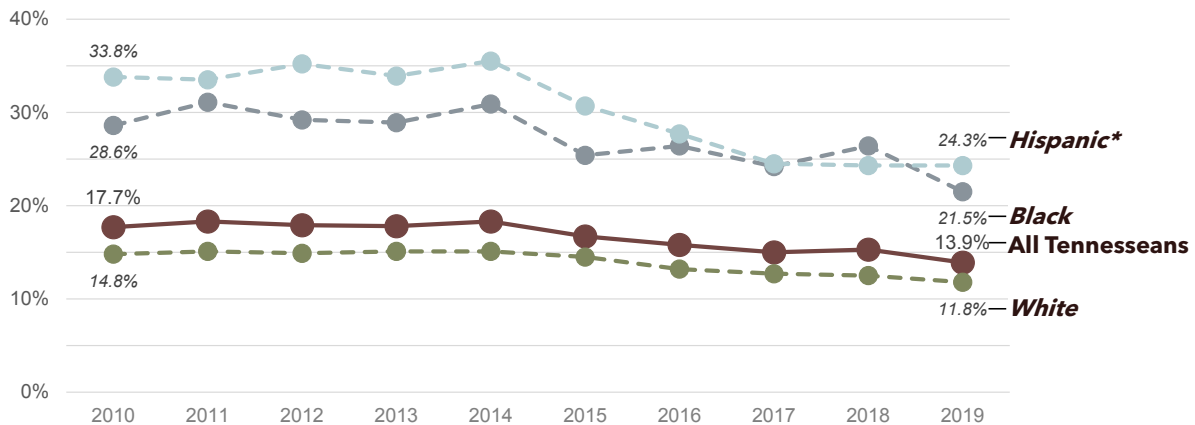
Poverty Rates by Household/Family Type, Head-of-Household Sex, and Presence of Children (2019)



Family households have at least two people related by blood, adoption, or marriage. The household head is the the homeowner or lease/mortgage holder (or one of them if multiple exist).  
 Source: 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

### Figure 7. Poverty Rates Are Trending Down for Hispanic, Black, and White Tennesseans, But at Different Rates

Percent of All Individuals in Households with Incomes Below Poverty by Race/Ethnicity (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.  
 Source: 2010-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

**Racial and ethnic differences in the poverty rate varied over the last decade but ultimately shrank (Figure 7).** (1) In 2010, the poverty rate among Hispanic Tennesseans was 19 percentage points higher than for whites and 5 points higher than that of black residents. By 2019, those gaps had narrowed to 12 and 2 points, respectively. For black Tennesseans, the difference from white Tennesseans shrank from 14 points to 10 points.

**Median household incomes trended upward over the last decade for black, white, and Hispanic Tennesseans, but differences in their purchasing power also grew (Figure 2).** (1) (2) Adjusted for

inflation, Tennesseans' median household income grew most quickly over the last decade among Hispanics (up 23%), followed by white (up 17%) and black residents (up 11%). In dollar terms, the difference between white and Hispanic incomes grew by about \$200 while the gap between white and black incomes rose by \$4,700.

### Geographic Variation

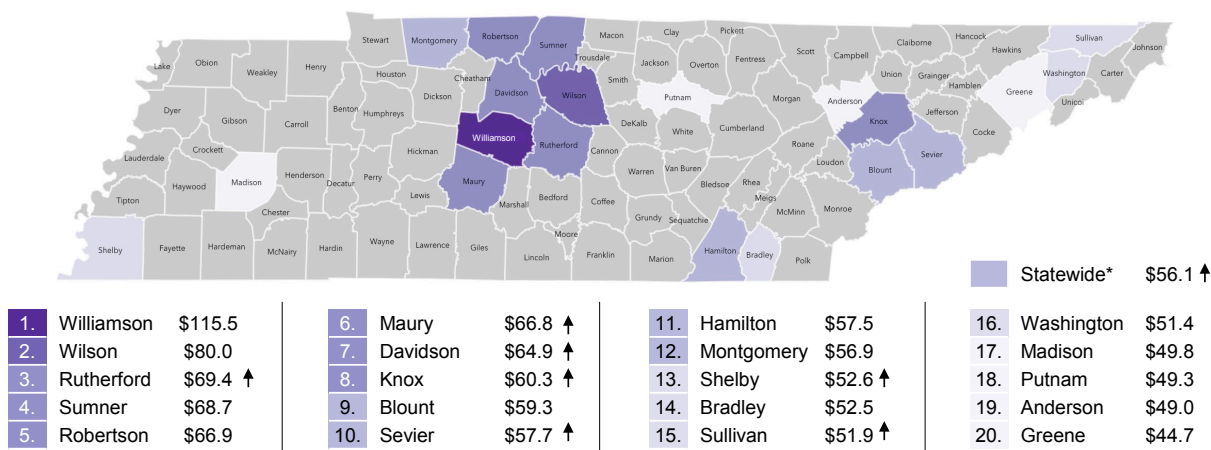
**Income and poverty rates in Tennessee also vary by geography.** The Census Bureau’s September data release includes 2019 estimates for counties with populations above 65,000. Among the 20 Tennessee counties with available data (1):

- Median Household Income** – Median household income ranged from nearly \$116,000 in Williamson County to about \$45,000 in Greene County (**Figure 8**). Seven counties experienced a statistically significant increase last year. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant.
- Poverty Rate** – The official poverty rate varied from 4.5% in Williamson County to 18.3% in Madison County (**Figure 9**). From 2018 to 2019, statistically significant improvements occurred in Davidson (down 3 points), Maury (down 4 points), and Shelby Counties (down 5 points).
- Child Poverty** – Meanwhile, the poverty rate among residents younger than 18 ranged from 4.4% in Williamson County to 22.5% in Madison County (**Figure 10**). Statistically significant changes occurred in Davidson (down 10 points), Putnam (up 15 points), Shelby (down 9 points), and Williamson Counties (up 3 points).

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

### Figure 8. In Tennessee’s Most Populated Counties, Median Household Incomes Ranged from \$44,700-\$115,500

Median Household Income (in thousands) (2019)

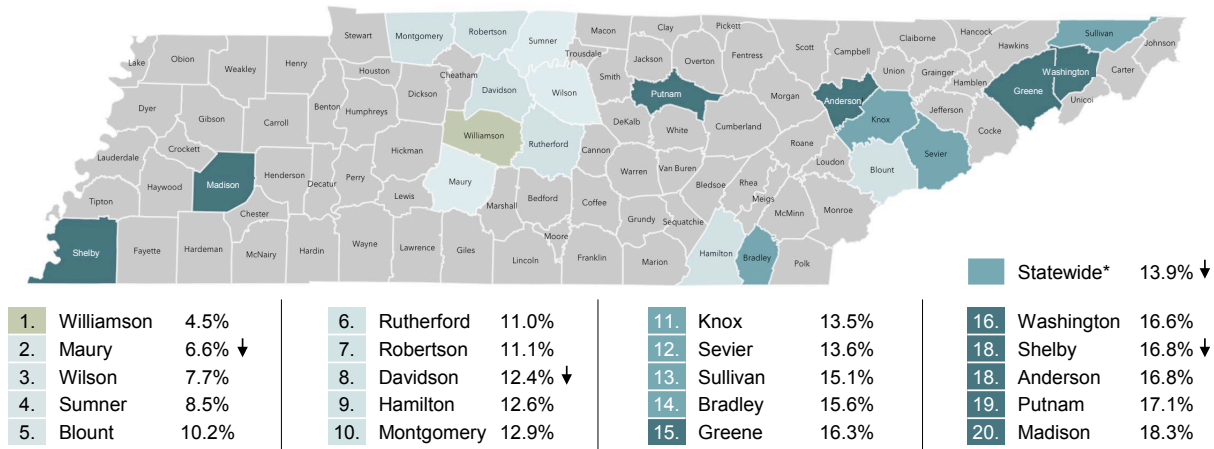


↑↓ Shows a statistically significant change from 2018. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant. \* One-year estimates are not available for the 75 grey counties due to small sample sizes, but every county is included in the statewide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

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

### Figure 9. In Tennessee's Most Populated Counties, Official Poverty Rates Ranged from 4.5% to 18.3%

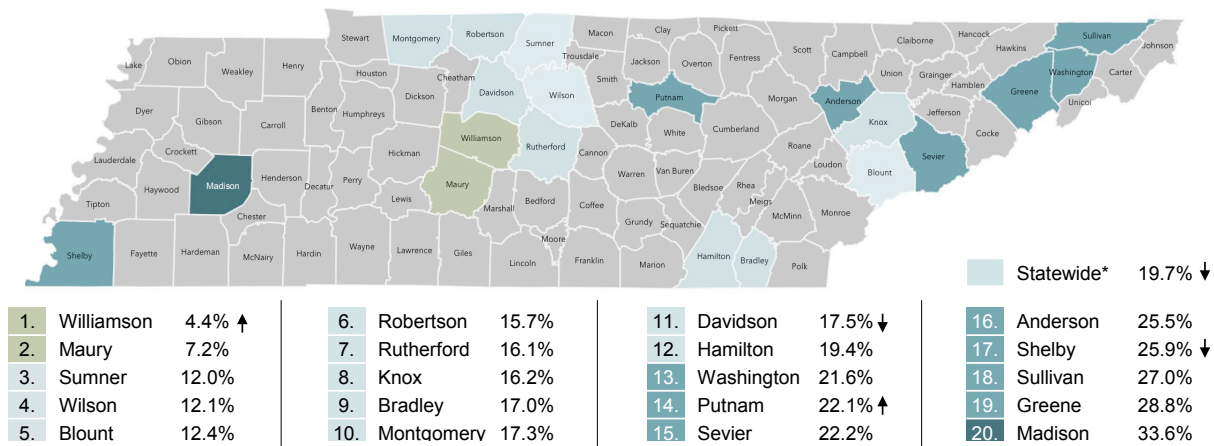
Percent of All Individuals in Households with Incomes Below Poverty (2019)



↑↓ 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 10. In Tennessee's Most Populated Counties, Child Poverty Rates Ranged from 4.4% to 33.6%

Percent of Individuals Under 18 in Households with Incomes Below Poverty (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)

## THE SYCAMORE INSTITUTE

*The Sycamore Institute is an independent, nonpartisan public policy research center for Tennessee.*

Sign up for email alerts at:  
**[SycamoreInstituteTN.org](https://SycamoreInstituteTN.org)**

*Written By*  
**Mandy Pellegrin**  
Policy Director

**Bryce Tuggle**  
Policy Analyst

*Other Contributing Staff*  
**Laura Berlind**  
Executive Director

**Brian Straessle**  
Director of External Affairs  
[BStraessle@SycamoreInstituteTN.org](mailto:BStraessle@SycamoreInstituteTN.org)

### 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. Tennessee 2018-2019 Income and Poverty Data**

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

	Total Population		Median Household Income		Poverty Rate		Under 18 Poverty Rate	
	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019
<b>Tennessee</b>	6,770,010	6,829,174	\$52,375	\$56,071	15.3%	13.9%	22.3%	19.7%
<b>Anderson</b>	76,482	76,978	\$50,616	\$49,044	19.7%	16.8%	11.4%	25.5%
<b>Blount</b>	131,349	133,088	\$58,809	\$59,276	8.9%	10.2%	3.8%	12.4%
<b>Bradley</b>	106,727	108,110	\$50,560	\$52,468	15.4%	15.6%	9.6%	17.0%
<b>Davidson</b>	692,587	694,144	\$60,856	\$63,938*	15.4%	12.4%*	3.6%	17.5%*
<b>Greene</b>	69,087	69,069	\$47,383	\$44,722	13.6%	16.3%	9.7%	28.8%
<b>Hamilton</b>	364,286	367,804	\$57,280	\$57,502	12.7%	12.6%	4.2%	19.4%
<b>Knox</b>	465,289	470,313	\$55,632	\$60,283*	13.1%	13.5%	2.8%	16.2%
<b>Madison</b>	97,605	97,984	\$45,360	\$49,820	18.1%	18.3%	8.1%	33.6%
<b>Maury</b>	94,340	96,387	\$53,794	\$66,781*	10.4%	6.6%*	6.1%	7.2%
<b>Montgomery</b>	205,950	208,993	\$56,019	\$56,948	12.6%	12.9%	4.4%	17.3%
<b>Putnam</b>	78,843	80,245	\$45,199	\$49,282	13.0%	17.1%	5.9%	22.1%*
<b>Robertson</b>	71,012	71,813	\$69,079	\$66,939	10.9%	11.1%	6.4%	15.7%
<b>Rutherford</b>	324,890	332,285	\$63,739	\$69,397*	11.0%	11%	3.9%	16.1%
<b>Sevier</b>	97,892	98,250	\$47,411	\$57,741*	14.7%	13.6%	8.9%	22.2%
<b>Shelby</b>	935,764	937,166	\$47,500	\$52,614*	21.7%	16.8%*	4.1%	25.9%*
<b>Sullivan</b>	157,668	158,348	\$44,652	\$51,860*	16.8%	15.1%	6.8%	27.0%
<b>Sumner</b>	187,149	191,283	\$65,948	\$68,743	8.7%	8.5%	3.3%	12.0%
<b>Washington</b>	128,607	129,375	\$48,765	\$51,428	14.9%	16.6%	5.5%	21.6%
<b>Williamson</b>	231,729	238,412	\$110,700	\$115,507	3.1%	4.5%	1.2%	4.4%*
<b>Wilson</b>	140,625	144,657	\$76,756	\$80,071	8.2%	7.7%	5.0%	12.1%

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

Notes: 2018 median household income values have not been adjusted for inflation. Because of small sample size, one-year estimates are not available for the 75 TN counties with populations below 65,000. However, statewide estimates include residents of every county.

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