

## 2019 CENSUS DATA ON INCOME & POVERTY IN SHELBY COUNTY

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.

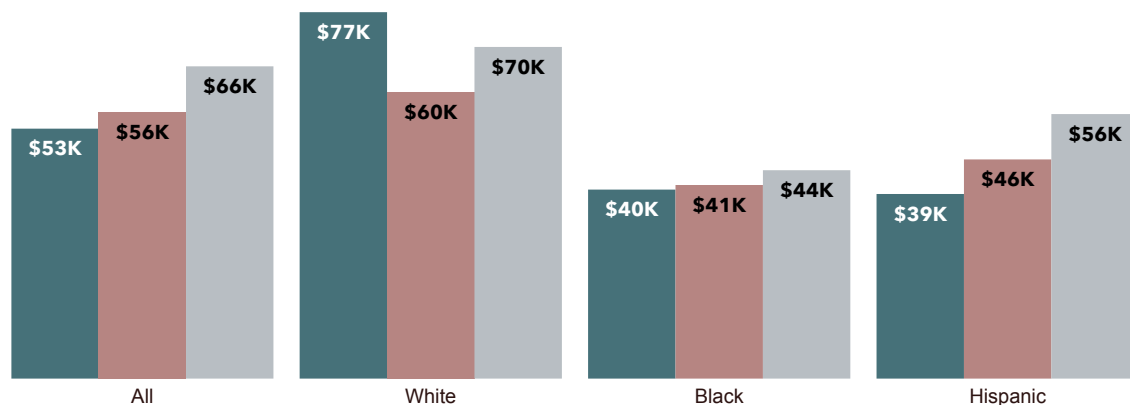
Here's what stands out from the 2019 estimates of income and poverty in Shelby County, Tennessee.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Shelby County saw improvements in median household income and the official poverty rate last year, but there are large racial and ethnic disparities in both metrics.
- Racial and ethnic differences in the poverty rate varied over the last decade but ultimately shrank.
- Because median household incomes were flat over the last decade for black, white, and Hispanic Shelby County residents, differences between them remain unchanged.

### Figure 1. Black and Hispanic County Residents 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)

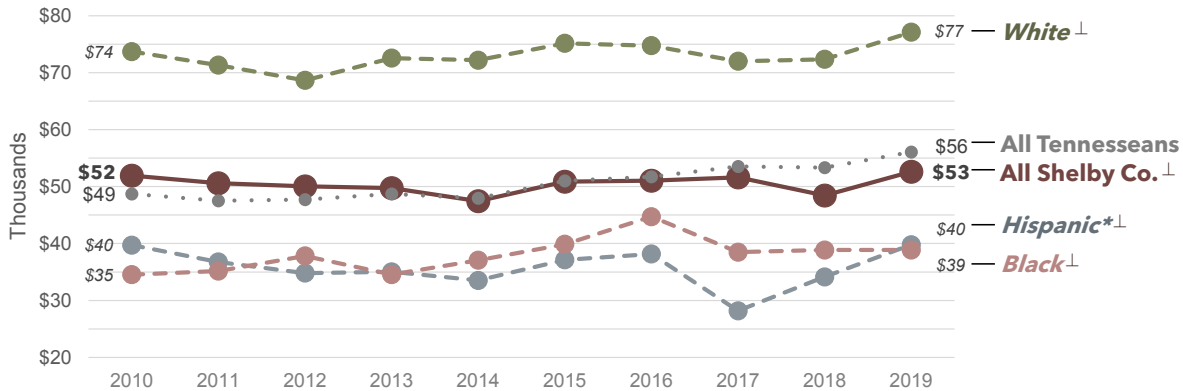
### Income and Poverty in Tennessee

**Shelby County saw improvements in income and poverty in 2019.** Median [household income](#) in the county reached almost \$53,000 last year, meaning half of households had less income and half had more (**Figure 1**). (1) After adjusting for inflation, that is a 9% increase from the year before (**Figure 2**). (2) (1) Meanwhile, the [official poverty rate](#) fell to 16.8% – down 4.9 points from 2018 – and child poverty fell 8.7 points to 25.9% (**Figures 3 and 4**). (1)

**Trends in income and poverty over the last decade for Shelby County residents were a mixed bag.** Compared to 2010, the overall poverty rate ultimately dropped nearly four points, but childhood poverty and inflation-adjusted median household income were statistically unchanged due to the estimates' margins of error (**Figure 4**).\* Compared to 2013-14 when poverty rates were at their highest and incomes at their lowest, however, 2019 saw improvement on both measures. (**Figures 2 and 4**).

### Figure 2. Household Incomes in Shelby County Were Higher Than in 2014 But Flat Compared to a Decade Ago

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

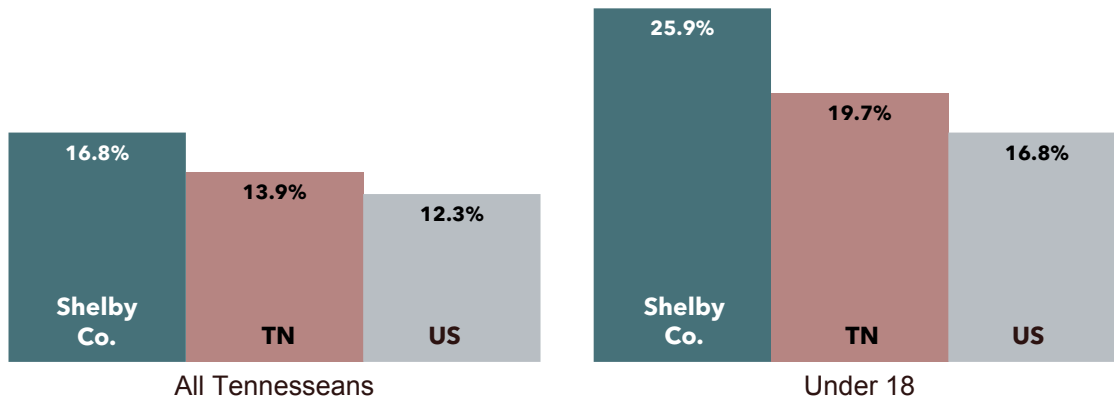


Inflation-adjusted median incomes are shown in 2019 dollars using the CPI-U-RS (2) †Reflects the race/ethnicity of the homeowner or lease/mortgage holder (or one of them if multiple exist). Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents. \*Due to the margins of error, the difference in 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant. ‡ Due to the margins of error, the difference in 2010 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant.

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

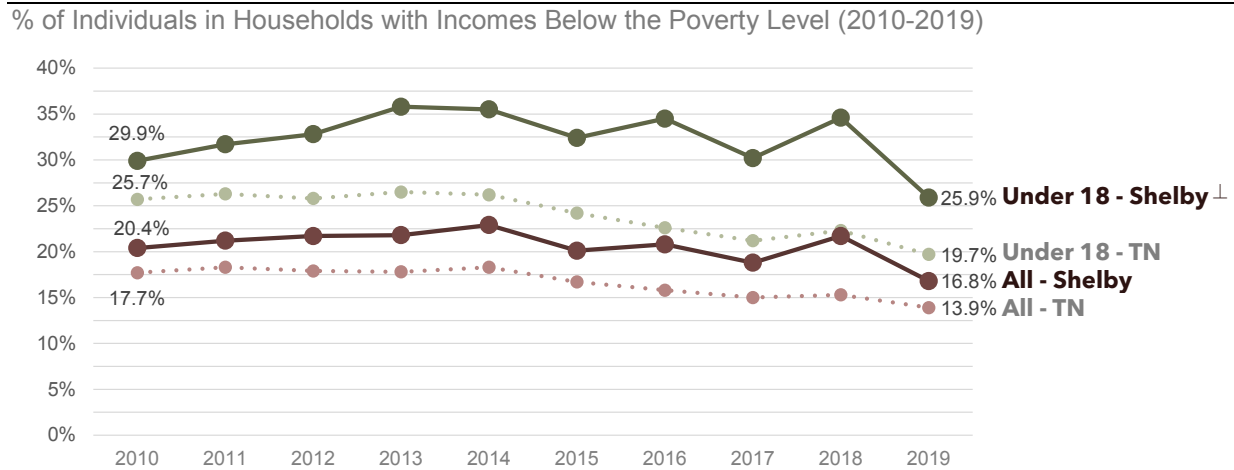
### Figure 3. Shelby County's Official Poverty Rates Remain Higher than the State and National Rates

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



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

### Figure 4. The Share of Shelby County Residents in Poverty Has Fallen Since High Points in 2013-2014



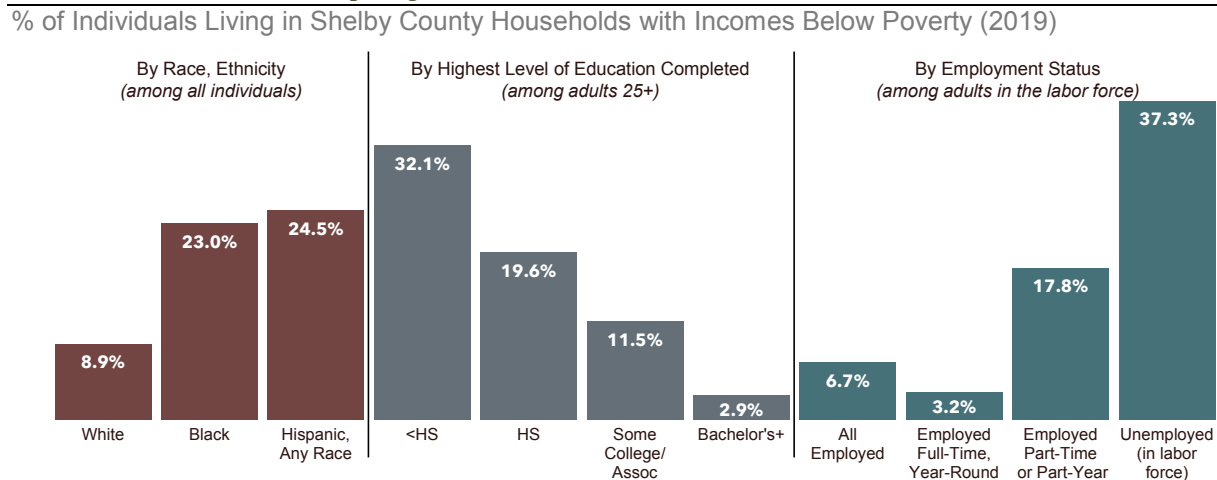
⊥ Due to the margins of error, the difference in 2010 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant.

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

### Demographic Variation

**Poverty rates and median income in Shelby County vary across race, ethnicity, education level, employment, and household type.** In 2019, Hispanic residents, 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 Shelby County Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Education, and Employment

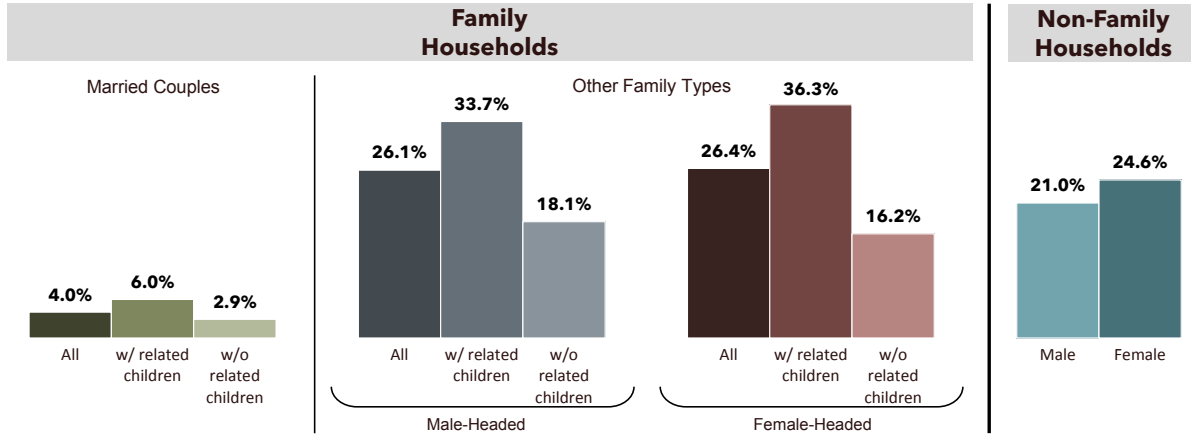


Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents.

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

### Figure 6. Married Shelby County Residents 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 in Shelby County (2019)

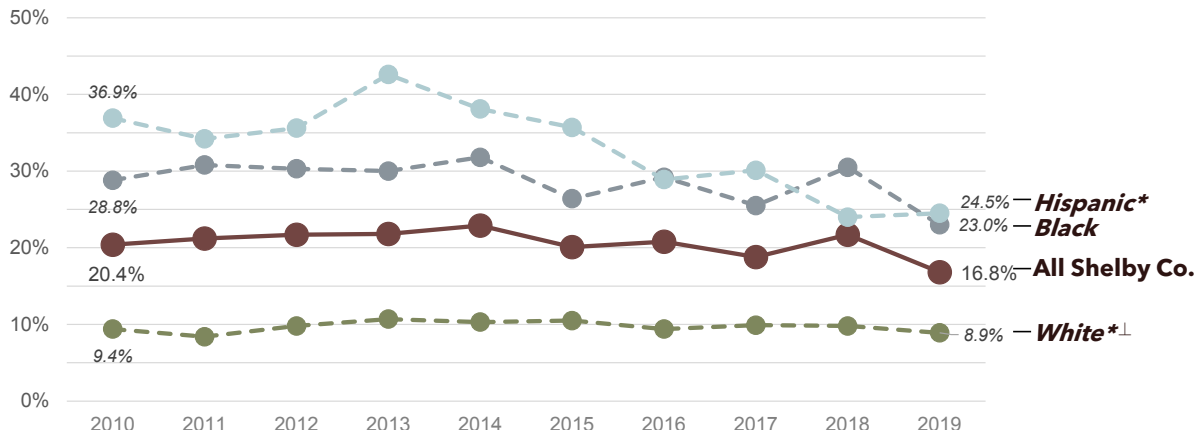


Family households have at least two people related by blood, adoption, or marriage. The household head is the homeowner or lease/mortgage holder (or one of them if multiple exist).

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

### Figure 7. Gaps in Poverty Rates Between Hispanic, Black, and White Shelby County Residents Have Narrowed Over Last Decade

% of All Individuals in Shelby County 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. ± Due to the margins of error, the difference in 2010 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 Shelby County residents was 28 percentage points higher than for whites and 8 points higher than that of black residents. By 2019, those gaps had narrowed to 16 and 2 points, respectively. For black residents, the difference with whites shrank from 19 points to 14 points.

**Median household incomes were flat over the last decade for black, white, and Hispanic Shelby County residents (Figure 2).** (1) (2) Adjusted for inflation, median household incomes for black, white, and Hispanic Shelby County residents in 2019 were not statistically significantly different than in 2010.\* Although there was variation in the years in between, the differences across racial and ethnic groups in 2019 vs. 2010 remained statistically unchanged.

See **Table A1** in the Appendix for data for 2010-2019.

## THE SYCAMORE INSTITUTE

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

Sign up for email alerts at:  
**[SycamoreInstituteTN.org](http://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 estimates are 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. 2010-2019 Census Data on Income and Poverty in Shelby County**

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

|  | 2010     | 2011     | 2012     | 2013     | 2014     | 2015     | 2016     | 2017     | 2018     | 2019     |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Inflation-Adjusted Median Household Income                                       | \$51,908 | \$50,606 | \$50,057 | \$49,749 | \$47,453 | \$50,850 | \$51,028 | \$51,633 | \$48,450 | \$52,614 |
| -among white residents   | \$73,703 | \$71,324 | \$68,645 | \$72,557 | \$72,197 | \$75,157 | \$74,750 | \$72,005 | \$72,346 | \$77,110 |
| -among black residents   | \$39,716 | \$36,748 | \$34,808 | \$35,030 | \$33,521 | \$37,128 | \$38,160 | \$28,176 | \$34,143 | \$39,776 |
| -among Hispanic residents  | \$34,529 | \$35,164 | \$37,816 | \$34,546 | \$37,063 | \$39,865 | \$44,714 | \$38,478 | \$38,864 | \$38,864 |
| Percent of Individuals in Household with Incomes Below the Federal Poverty Level | 20.4%    | 21.2%    | 21.7%    | 21.8%    | 22.9%    | 20.1%    | 20.8%    | 18.8%    | 21.7%    | 16.8%    |
| -among children <18 years  | 29.9%    | 31.7%    | 32.8%    | 35.8%    | 35.5%    | 32.4%    | 34.5%    | 30.2%    | 34.6%    | 25.9%    |
| - among white residents  | 9.4%     | 8.4%     | 9.8%     | 10.7%    | 10.3%    | 10.5%    | 9.4%     | 9.9%     | 9.8%     | 8.9%*    |
| -among black residents   | 28.8%    | 30.8%    | 30.3%    | 30.0%    | 31.8%    | 26.4%    | 29.2%    | 25.5%    | 30.5%    | 23.0%    |
| -among Hispanic residents  | 36.9%    | 34.2%    | 35.6%    | 42.6%    | 38.1%    | 35.7%    | 28.9%    | 30.1%    | 24.0%    | 24.5%*   |

Inflation-adjusted median earnings are shown in 2019 dollars using the CPI-U-RS. (2) \* Due to the margins of error, the difference in the 2018 and 2019 estimates is not statistically significant.

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