



2022 Census Data on Tennesseans' Education Levels

March 7, 2024

Key Takeaways

- An estimated 39% of Tennesseans age 25+ had at least an associate's degree in 2022, and 31% had a bachelor's or more — both higher than past years but lower than national rates.
 - Some 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 every level of education after adjusting for inflation.
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The U.S. Census Bureau released new data in September 2023 on income, poverty, education, and health insurance coverage in 2022. These metrics paint a picture of the social and economic circumstances across America. Here's what stands out from the estimates of Tennesseans' education levels in 2022.*

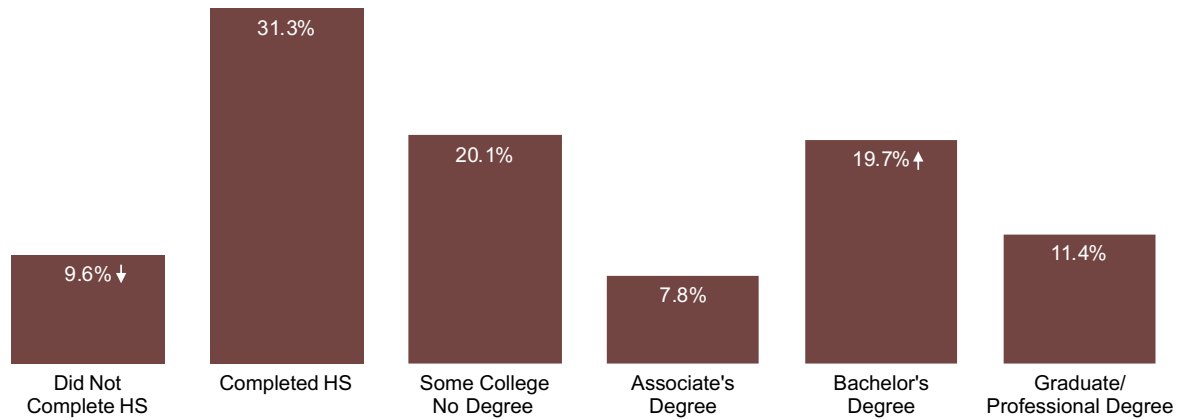
Education Levels in Tennessee

Tennessee's recent upward trend in the share of residents with post-secondary degrees continued into 2022, though rates remain lower than national ones. Most Tennesseans have attended at least some college (**Figure 1**), but most do not have a post-secondary degree (**Figure 2**). An estimated 38.2% of Tennesseans 25 and older had at least an associate's degree in 2022, and 30.5% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Both metrics have risen in recent years (**Figure 3**). (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.

* Due to the margins of error, the difference in some 2021 and 2022 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](#).

Figure 1. The Majority of Tennesseans Have Completed At Least Some College

Highest Level of Education Attained by Tennesseans Ages 25+ (2022)

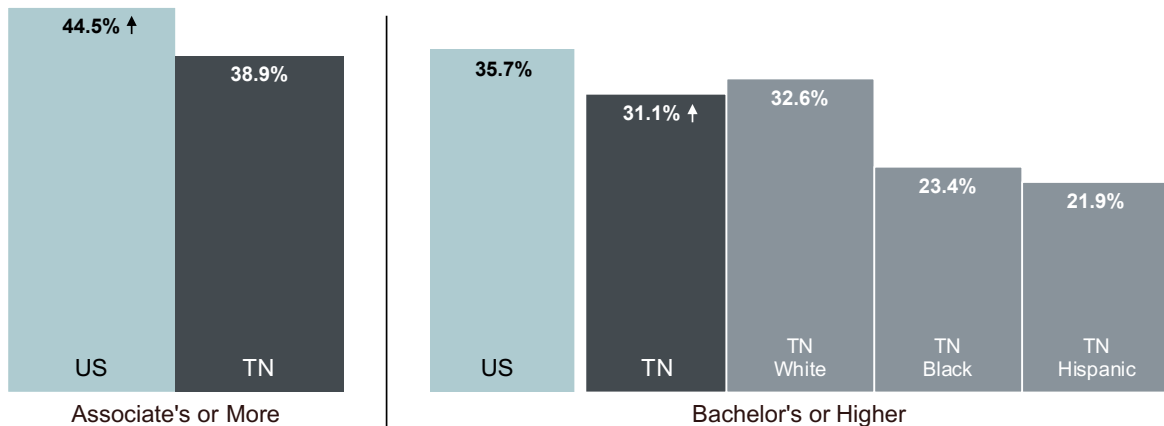


↓↑ Denotes a statistically significant change from 2021. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2021 and 2022 estimates is not statistically significant.

Source: 2021-2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Figure 2. Most Tennesseans Did Not Have a Post-Secondary Degree in 2022

Highest Level of Education Attained by Tennesseans Ages 25+ (2022)

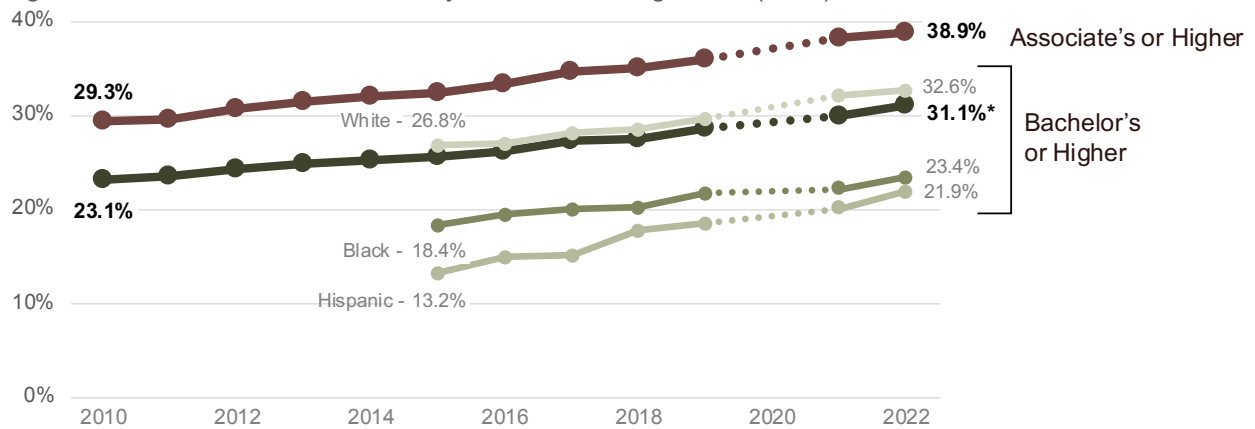


↓↑ Denotes a statistically significant change from 2021. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2021 and 2022 estimates is not statistically significant.

Source: 2021-2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Figure 3. Educational Attainment is Trending Up for Black, Hispanic, and White Tennesseans, But at Different Rates

Highest Level of Education Attained by Tennesseans Ages 25+ (2022)



*Denotes a statistically significant change from 2021. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2021 and 2022 estimates is not statistically significant. Note: Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS 1-year estimates are unavailable for 2020.

Sources: 2010-2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Demographic and Geographic Variation

Some differences in post-secondary education rates by race and ethnicity are shrinking, but significant gaps remain (Figure 3). (1) From 2015 to 2022, the share of Tennesseans with at least a bachelor's degree increased the most among Hispanics (up 8.7 percentage points), followed by white residents (up 5.8 points), and then black residents (up 5.0 points). Despite this progress, 21.9% of Hispanics and 23.4% of black Tennesseans had a bachelor's or higher, compared to 32.6% of white residents.

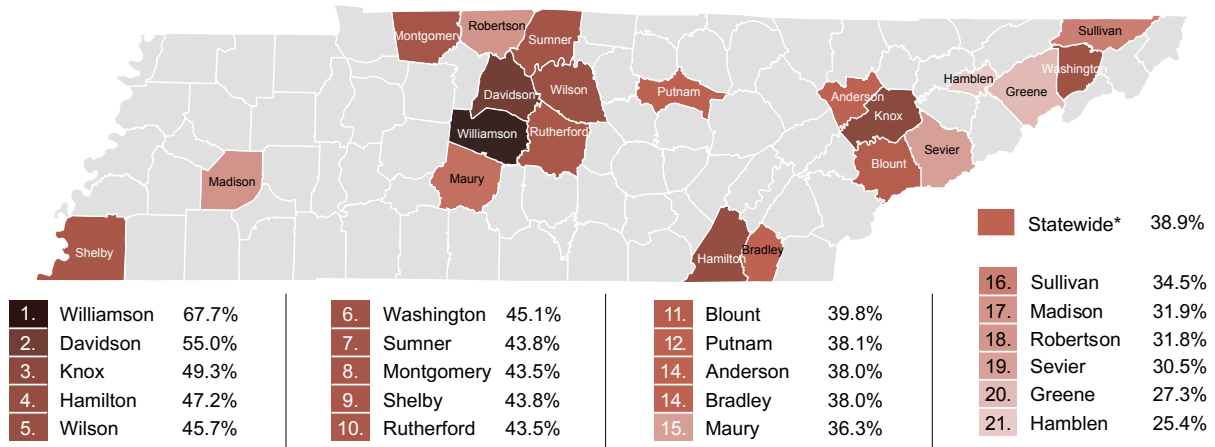
Rates of post-secondary education in Tennessee also vary by geography. The Census Bureau's September data release also includes 2022 estimates for counties with populations above 65,000. Among the 21 Tennessee counties with available data:

- **Associate's Degree or More** — The share of adults 25 and older with at least an associate's degree ranged from 67.7% in Williamson County to 25.4% in Hamblen County (**Figure 4**). Due to the margins of error, the differences in all 2021 and 2022 estimates are not statistically significant. (1)
- **Bachelor's Degree or More** — Residents with bachelor's degrees or more varied from 62.6% in Williamson County to 20.0% in Hamblen County (**Figure 5**). Four counties saw a statistically significant increase from 2021 — Blount, Bradley, Davidson, and Sumner. Two counties saw a statistically significant decline — Rutherford and Madison. (1)

See **Table A1** in the Appendix for complete 2019-2021 county data.

Figure 4. In Tennessee's Most Populous Counties, 25–68% of Adults Aged 25+ Have at Least an Associate's Degree

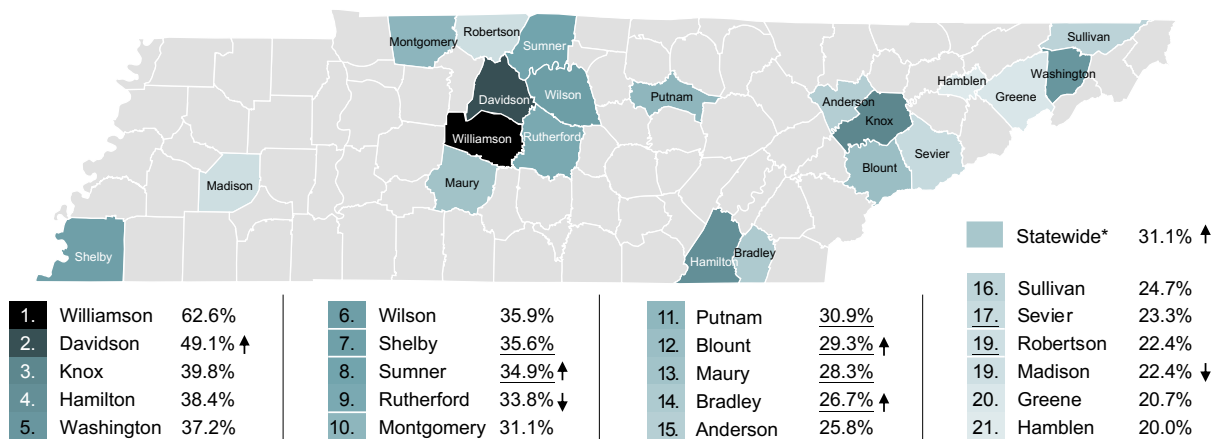
% of Tennesseans Ages 25+ with an Associate's Degree or Higher (2021)



↓↑ Denotes a statistically significant change from 2021. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2021 and 2022 estimates is not statistically significant. * One-year estimates are unavailable for the 74 grey counties due to small sample sizes, but the statewide estimate includes every county.
Source: 2021-2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Figure 5. In Tennessee's Most Populous Counties, 20–63% of Adults Aged 25+ Have at Least a Bachelor's Degree

% of Tennesseans Ages 25+ with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2021)



↓↑ Denotes a statistically significant change from 2021. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2021 and 2022 estimates is not statistically significant. * One-year estimates are unavailable for the 74 grey counties due to small sample sizes, but the statewide estimate includes every county.
Source: 2021-2022 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 6).

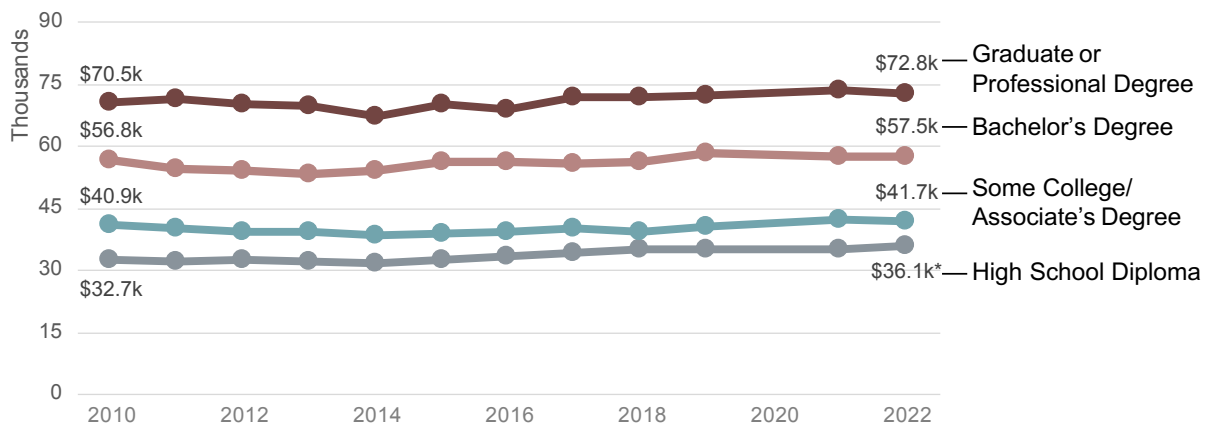
In 2022, for example, Tennesseans with a bachelor's degree had median earnings of about \$57,500. In other words, half of the people in that group made more, and half earned less. For comparison, median earnings were 28% lower for Tennesseans with only some college or an associate's degree — about \$42,000.

Over the last decade, median earnings have grown for Tennesseans at every level of education (Figure 6).

(1) (2) After adjusting for inflation, the greatest earnings increase occurred for those with a high school diploma, which were 10% higher in 2022 than in 2021. Earnings grew more slowly for those with some college or an associate's degree — up 2% — and those with a bachelor's degree or with a graduate or professional degree — up 1% and 3% respectively.

Figure 6. Median Earnings Have Grown for Tennesseans at Every Education Level

Median Earnings for Tennesseans by Highest Level of Education (in 2022 dollars) (2010-2022)



Inflation-adjusted median earnings are shown in 2022 dollars using the CPI-U. (2) Note: Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS 1-year estimates are unavailable for 2020. *Denotes a statistically significant change from 2021. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2021 and 2022 estimates is not statistically significant. Sources: 2010-2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

References

1. **U.S. Census Bureau.** 2010-2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. [Online] September 2023. Available via <http://data.census.gov>.
2. **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.** Consumer Price Index: CPI-U. [Online] Accessed from <https://www.bls.gov/>.

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Written By:

Mandy Spears, Deputy Director

Other Contributing Staff:

Brian Straessle, Executive Director • David Simpson, Sr Policy Analyst • Grace Baron, Communications & Engagement Manager

For further information, contact Research@SycamoreTN.org.

Table A1. 2011-2022 Census Data on Tennesseans' Education Levels

American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2021-2022)

	Total Population		% of Adults 25+ with an Associate's Degree or Higher		% of Adults 25+ with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
Tennessee	6,975,218	7,051,339	38.3%	38.9%	30.5%	31.1%*
Anderson	77,576	78,913	37.6%	38.0%	27.6%	25.8%
Blount	137,605	139,958	34.2%	39.8%	25.2%	29.3%*
Bradley	110,162	110,616	31.8%	38.0%	21.4%	26.7%*
Davidson	703,953	708,144	52.0%	55.0%	46.6%	49.1%*
Greene	70,621	71,405	26.7%	27.3%	21.0%	20.7%
Hamblen	n/a	65,168	n/a	25.4%	n/a	20.0%
Hamilton	369,135	374,682	44.1%	47.2%	36.1%	38.4%
Knox	486,677	494,574	49.4%	49.3%	40.5%	39.8%
Madison	98,775	99,245	35.6%	31.9%	29.3%	22.4%*
Maury	104,760	108,159	36.6%	36.3%	26.5%	28.3%
Montgomery	227,900	235,201	38.8%	43.5%	28.2%	31.1%
Putnam	81,188	82,382	37.0%	38.1%	30.0%	30.9%
Robertson	74,098	75,470	30.3%	31.8%	21.1%	22.4%
Rutherford	352,182	360,619	44.3%	42.5%	37.7%	33.8%*
Sevier	99,517	98,789	30.3%	30.5%	19.2%	23.3%
Shelby	924,454	916,371	41.1%	42.8%	34.3%	35.6%
Sullivan	159,265	160,820	35.7%	34.5%	24.6%	24.7%
Sumner	200,557	203,858	40.3%	43.8%	29.9%	34.9%*
Washington	134,236	136,172	42.7%	45.1%	34.9%	37.2%
Williamson	255,735	260,815	69.5%	67.7%	62.0%	62.6%
Wilson	151,917	158,555	44.1%	45.7%	37.4%	35.9%

*Denotes a statistically significant change from 2021. Due to the margins of error, the difference in other 2021 and 2022 estimates is not statistically significant.

Notes: Because of small sample size, one-year estimates are unavailable for the 74 TN counties with populations below 65,000. However, statewide estimates include residents of every county.

Source: 2021-2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates