



2021 Census Data on Income & Poverty in Tennessee

December 19, 2022

Key Takeaways

- Tennessee saw continued improvements in income and poverty in 2021.
 - Median household incomes trended upward over the last decade for black, white, and Hispanic Tennesseans, but differences in their purchasing power also grew.
 - Racial and ethnic differences in the poverty rate varied over the last decade but ultimately shrank.
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The U.S. Census Bureau released new data in September on income, poverty, education, and health insurance coverage in 2021. These metrics paint a picture of the social and economic circumstances across America.

Here's what stands out from the 2021 estimates of income and poverty in Tennessee.

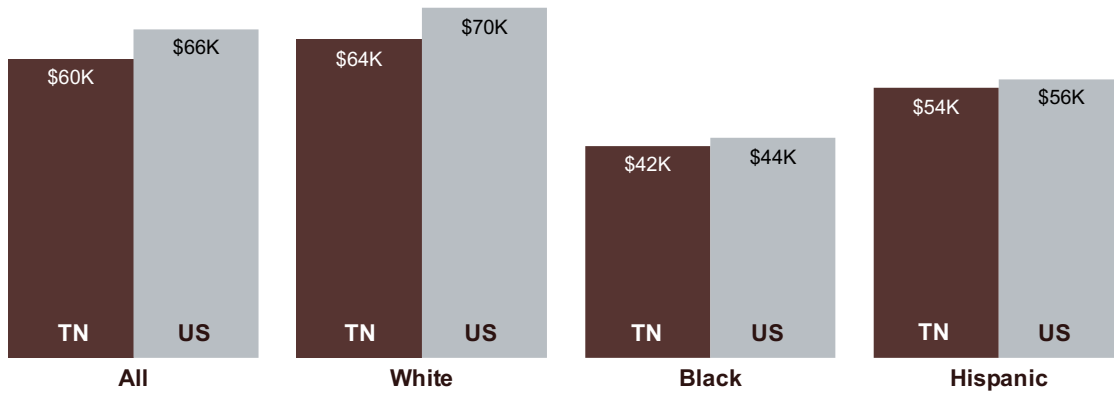
Income and Poverty in Tennessee

Tennessee saw continued improvements in income and poverty in 2021. Median household income in the state reached \$59,700 last year, meaning half of households had less income and half had more (**Figure 1**). (1) After adjusting for inflation, that is about a 1% increase from two years before (**Figure 2**).* (2) (1) Meanwhile, the [official poverty rate](#) held relatively steady at 13.6% — compared to 13.9% in 2019 — and child poverty fell 1.6 points to 18.1% (**Figure 3**). (1) These trends unfolded as [earnings grew at every level of education over the last decade](#) — especially among Tennesseans with the least education. See **Table A1** in the Appendix for the 2019–2021 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 2021, those gaps had narrowed to 0.8 and 1.2 points, respectively (**Figure 3**). Meanwhile, the gap in median household income remained at about \$10,000 between 2010–2021, after adjusting for inflation.

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

Median Household Income by Race/Ethnicity† (2021)

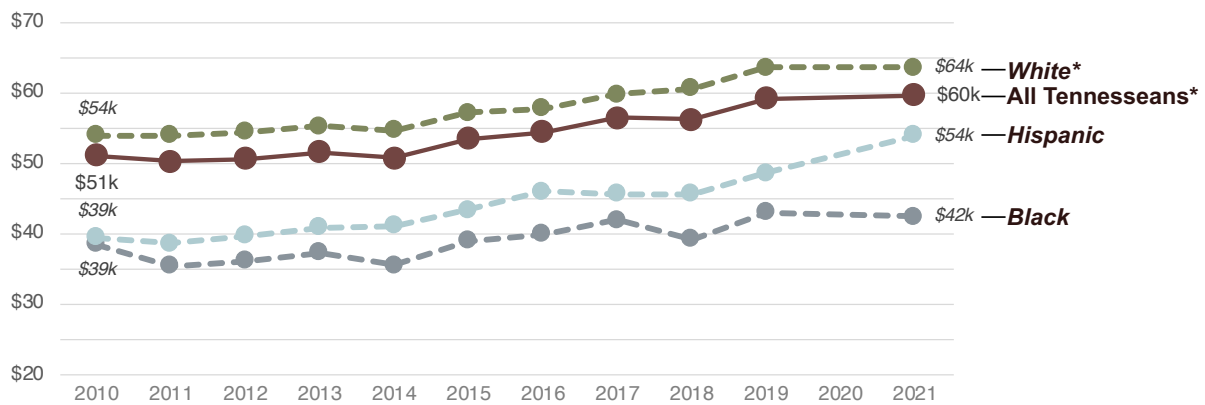


†Reflects the race/ethnicity of the homeowner or lease/mortgage holder (or one of them if multiple exist). Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents.

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

Figure 2. Household Incomes Have Trended Up for Black, Hispanic, and White Tennesseans, But at Different Rates

% of Individuals with Household Incomes Below the Poverty Level by Race/Ethnicity (2010-2021)

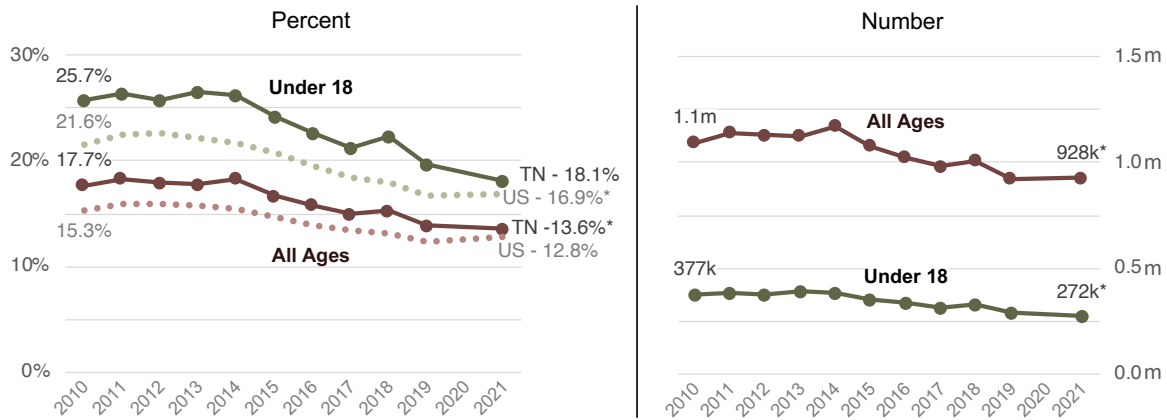


Inflation-adjusted median incomes are shown in 2021 dollars using the CPI-U. †Reflects the race/ethnicity of the homeowner or lease/mortgage holder (or one of them if multiple exist). Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents. *Due to the margins of error, the difference in 2019 and 2021 estimates is not statistically significant. Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS 1-year estimates are not available for 2020.

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

Figure 3. Both the Share and Number of Tennesseans in Poverty Reached Historic Lows in 2021

Individuals with Household Incomes Below the Federal Poverty Level (2010-2021)



*Due to the margins of error, the difference in 2019 and 2021 estimates is not statistically significant. Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS 1-year estimates are not available for 2020.

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

Demographic Variation

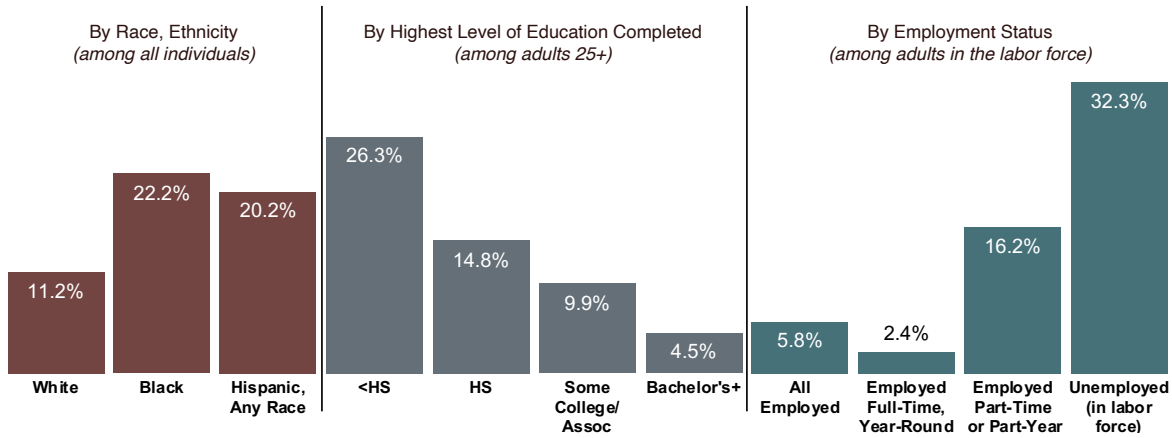
Tennessee’s poverty rate and median income vary across race, ethnicity, education level, employment, and household type. In 2021, black Tennesseans, adults without a high school diploma, and unemployed adults had the highest rates of poverty, while white residents, college graduates, and full-time workers had the lowest (Figure 4). 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 5). (1)

Racial and ethnic differences in the poverty rate varied over the last decade but ultimately shrank (Figure 6). (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 2021, the rate was 11 points higher than for white Tennesseans and 2 points lower than that of black residents. Meanwhile, the gap between black and white Tennesseans shrank from 14 points to 11. Since 2014 – when numbers peaked for all three groups, black Tennesseans experienced the largest drop in the number of people under poverty – 30% or about 97,000 people. White and Hispanic Tennesseans both saw about a 26% drop – or 193,000 and 29,000 people, respectively.

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 37%), followed by white (up 18%) and black residents (up 10%). In dollar terms, the difference between white and Hispanic incomes shrank by about \$4,900 while the gap between white and black incomes grew by \$5,700.

Figure 4. Poverty Rates in Tennessee Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Education, and Employment

Individuals with Household Incomes Below the Federal Poverty Level (2021)

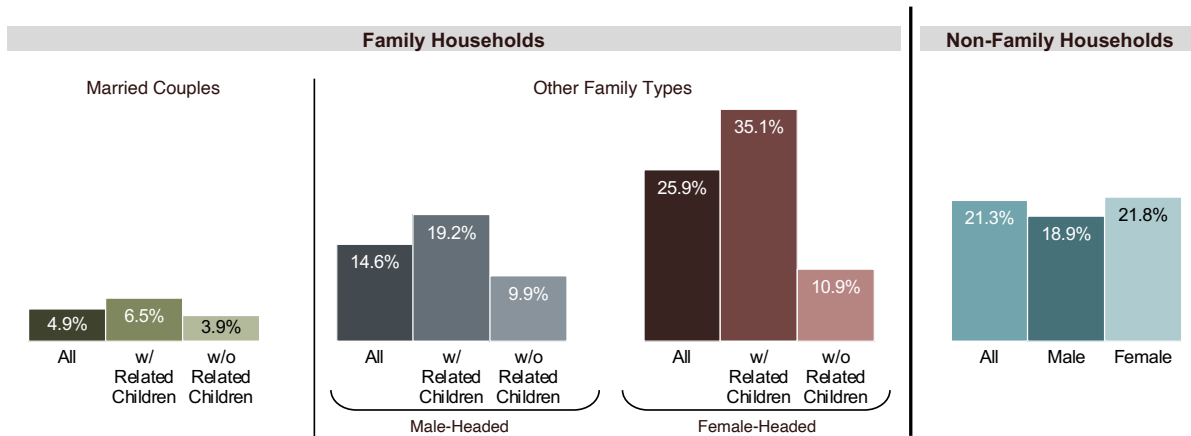


Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents.

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

Figure 5. Married Tennesseans Without Children Have the Lowest Rate of Poverty Among Household Types

Poverty Rates by Household/Family Type, Head-of-Household Gender, and Presence of Children (2021)

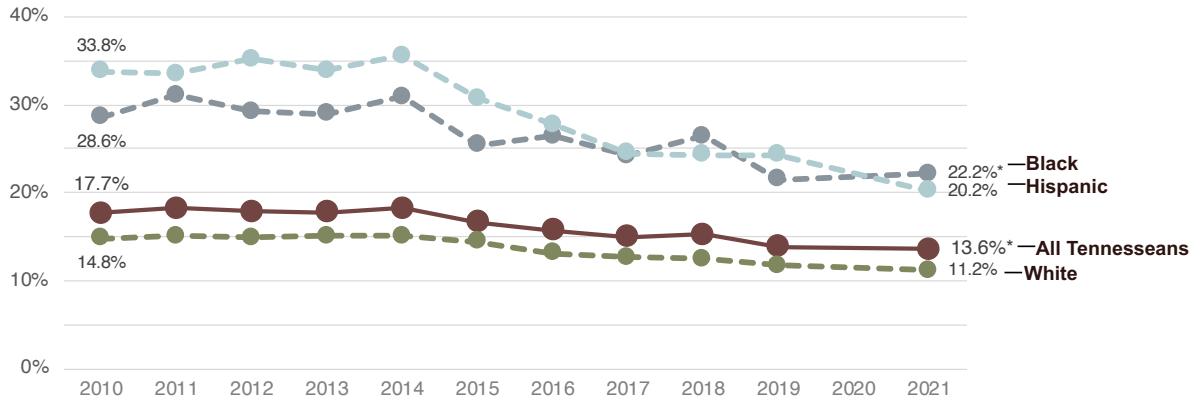


Family households have at least two people related by blood, adoption, or marriage. The household head is the the homeowner or lease/mortgage holder (or one of them if multiple exist).

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

Figure 6. Poverty Rates Are Trended Down for Hispanic, Black, and White Tennesseans, But at Different Rates

Percent of Individuals Living in Households with Incomes Below the Poverty Level by Race/Ethnicity (2010-2021)



Note: Some Hispanic individuals also appear in the categories for black and white residents. *Due to the margins of error, the difference in 2019 and 2021 estimates is not statistically significant. Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS 1-year estimates are not available for 2020.

Source: 2010-2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Geographic Variation

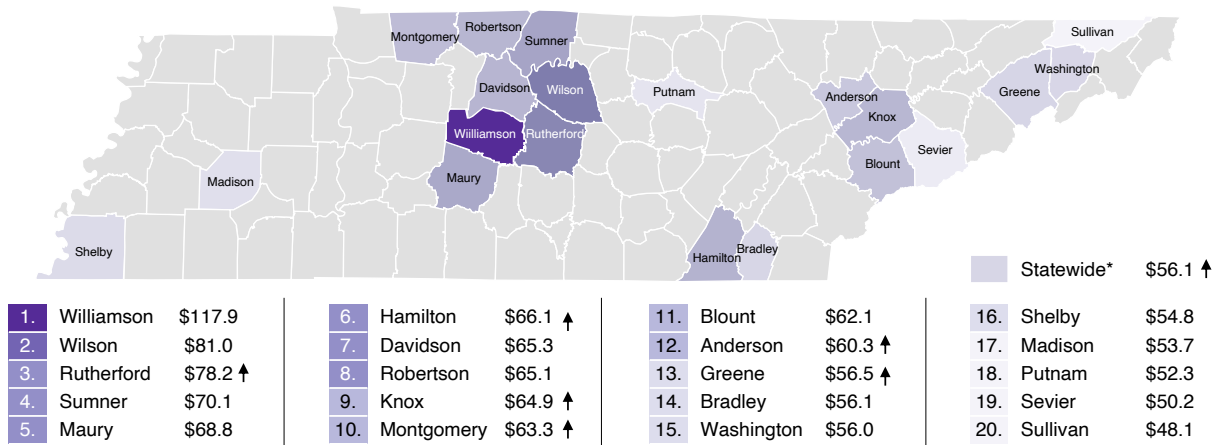
Income and poverty rates in Tennessee also vary by geography. The Census Bureau's September data release includes 2021 estimates for counties with populations above 65,000. Among the 20 Tennessee counties with available data (1):

- Median Household Income** — Median household income ranged from nearly \$118,000 in Williamson County to about \$48,000 in Sullivan County (**Figure 7**). Six counties experienced a statistically significant increase last year. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2019 and 2021 estimates is not statistically significant.
- Poverty Rate** — The official poverty rate varied from 3.5% in Williamson County to 17.9% in Shelby and Sullivan Counties (**Figure 8**). From 2019 to 2021, statistically significant changes occurred in Greene (down 7 points), Bradley (down 6 points), Maury (up 4 points) and Davidson (up 3 points) Counties.
- Child Poverty** — Meanwhile, the poverty rate among residents younger than 18 ranged from 3.5% in Williamson County to 30.1% in Sullivan County (**Figure 9**). Statistically significant changes occurred in Greene (down 20 points), Knox (down 5 points), Davidson (up 5 points), and Maury (up 13 points) Counties.

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

Figure 7. In Tennessee's Most Populated Counties, Median Household Incomes Ranged from \$48,100 to \$117,900

Median Household Income (in thousands) (2021)

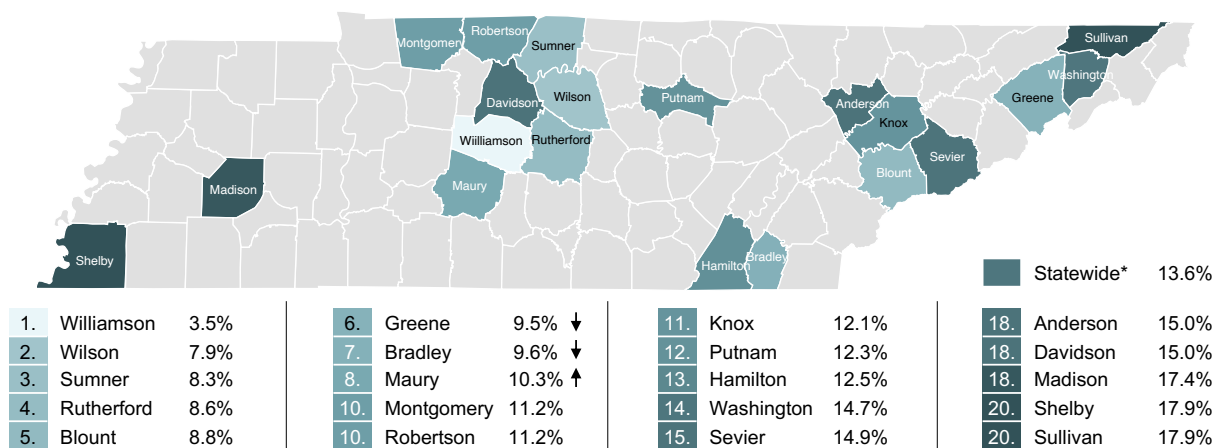


↓↑ Shows a statistically significant change from 2019. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2019 and 2021 estimates is not statistically significant. Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS 1-year estimates are not available for 2020. *One-year estimates are not available for the 75 grey counties due to small sample sizes, but every county is included in the statewide estimate.

Source: 2010-2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Figure 8. In Tennessee's Most Populated Counties, Official Poverty Rates Ranged from 3.5% to 17.9%

Percent of All Individuals with Household Incomes Below Poverty (2021)

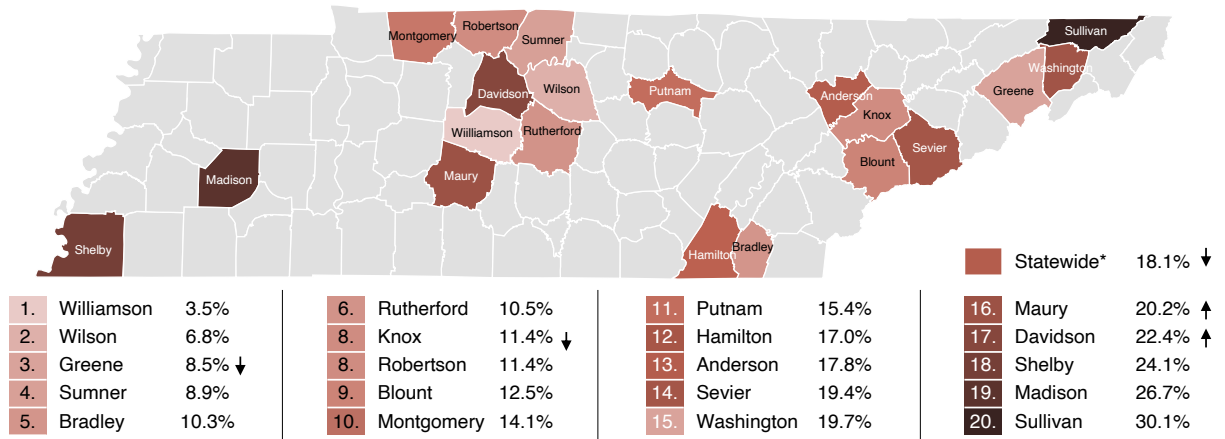


↓↑ Shows a statistically significant change from 2019. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2019 and 2021 estimates is not statistically significant. Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS 1-year estimates are not available for 2020. *One-year estimates are not available for the 75 grey counties due to small sample sizes, but every county is included in the statewide estimate.

Source: 2010-2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

Figure 9. In Tennessee's Most Populated Counties, Child Poverty Rates Ranged from 3.5% to 30.1%

Percent of All Individuals Under 18 with Household Incomes Below Poverty (2021)



↓↑ Shows a statistically significant change from 2019. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2019 and 2021 estimates is not statistically significant. Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS 1-year estimates are not available for 2020. *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: 2010-2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (1)

References

1. **U.S. Census Bureau.** 2010-2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. [Online] September 2022. 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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Table A1. Tennessee 2019-2021 Income and Poverty Data

American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2019-2021)

	Total Population		Median Household Income		Poverty Rate		Under 18 Poverty Rate	
	2019	2021	2019	2021	2019	2021	2019	2021
Tennessee	6,829,174	6,975,218	\$56,071	\$59,695*	13.9%	13.6%	19.7%	18.1%
Anderson	76,978	77,576	\$49,044	\$60,364*	16.8%	15.0%	25.5%	17.8%
Blount	133,088	137,605	\$59,276	\$62,102	10.2%	8.8%	12.4%	12.5%
Bradley	108,110	110,162	\$52,468	\$56,139	15.6%	9.6%*	17.0%	10.3%
Davidson	694,144	703,953	\$63,938	\$65,348	12.4%	15.0%*	17.5%	22.4%*
Greene	69,069	70,621	\$44,722	\$56,488*	16.3%	9.5%*	28.8%	8.5%*
Hamilton	367,804	369,135	\$57,502	\$66,096*	12.6%	12.5%	19.4%	17.0%
Knox	470,313	486,677	\$60,283	\$64,894*	13.5%	12.1%	16.2%	11.4%*
Madison	97,984	98,775	\$49,820	\$53,720	18.3%	17.4%	33.6%	26.7%
Maury	96,387	104,760	\$66,781	\$68,840	6.6%	10.3%*	7.2%	20.2%*
Montgomery	208,993	227,900	\$56,948	\$63,331*	12.9%	11.2%	17.3%	14.1%
Putnam	80,245	81,188	\$49,282	\$52,278	17.1%	12.3%	22.1%	15.4%
Robertson	71,813	74,098	\$66,939	\$65,139	11.1%	11.2%	15.7%	11.4%
Rutherford	332,285	352,182	\$69,397	\$78,201*	11.0%	8.6%	16.1%	10.5%
Sevier	98,250	99,517	\$57,741	\$50,239	13.6%	14.9%	22.2%	19.4%
Shelby	937,166	924,454	\$52,614	\$54,841	16.8%	17.9%	25.9%	24.1%
Sullivan	158,348	159,265	\$51,860	\$48,063	15.1%	17.9%	27.0%	30.1%
Sumner	191,283	200,557	\$68,743	\$70,092	8.5%	8.3%	12.0%	8.9%
Washington	129,375	134,236	\$51,428	\$56,009	16.6%	14.7%	21.6%	19.7%
Williamson	238,412	255,735	\$115,507	\$117,927	4.5%	3.5%	4.4%	3.5%
Wilson	144,657	151,917	\$80,071	\$80,960	7.7%	7.9%	12.1%	6.8%

* Indicates a statistically significant change from 2019. Due to the margins of error, the difference in all other 2019 and 2021 estimates is not statistically significant. Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS 1-year estimates are not available for 2020.

Notes: Because of small sample size, 1-year estimates are not available for the 75 TN counties with populations below 65,000. However, statewide estimates include residents of every county.

Source: 2019-2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

* Due to the margins of error, the difference in some 2019 and 2021 estimates is not statistically significant. Due to pandemic-related disruptions, detailed ACS –year estimates are not available for 2020. 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](#).