

As Nation's Poverty Rate Declines, San Antonio's Increases

IRIS DIMMICK SEPTEMBER 19, 2017

The poverty rate in San Antonio inched slightly upward to 18.5%, higher than the statewide rate of 15.6%, according to data released by the U.S. Census Bureau last week.

While median household income was up nationally by 3.2% to \$59,039, San Antonio's median remained virtually flat, declining by \$11 to \$49,268.

Other major metropolitan areas such as Dallas-Fort Worth; Charlotte, N.C.; Portland, Ore.; Detroit; Phoenix; and San

Francisco experienced significant decreases in poverty. San Antonio's rate rose by less than 1%.

Nationwide, the poverty rate decreased by 0.8% to 12.7% in 2016, according to the Census data. There were 2.5 million fewer people living in poverty – 40.6 million – in 2016 than in 2015. The national rate is similar to that of 2007 levels, 12.5%, before the 2008 recession.

“For most demographic groups, the number of people in poverty decreased from 2015,” a news release from the Census Bureau stated. “Adults age 65 and older were the only major population group to see an increase in the number of people in poverty.”

The percentage of people nationwide without health insurance also decreased to 8.8% from 9.1% in the final year of the Obama administration, according to the data. Texas has the highest uninsured rate and number of uninsured people in the nation with 16.6% – 4.5 million people.

Cities in general saw higher median incomes last year, a continuation of the decades-long trend of cities yielding more economic success for residents than rural areas.



A sign promoting higher wages sits alongside pews at San Fernando Cathedral during a celebration of farm workers. Photo: SCOTT BALL / RIVARD REPORT

Still, there is substantial work to be done at the state and local level to get Texas and San Antonio on par with national averages, said Father Jimmy Drennan, a pastor and member of the COPS/Metro Alliance. The Alliance has been working for decades on issues related to social inequality.

Many years ago, San Antonio gained a reputation for being a low-wage town with unskilled workers, Drennan said, “and we did not challenge that or move away from that. To me, [this data] is an indicator for the City Council to really take a look at our city and say we’re not going to be known for that anymore. ... We’re going to invest in the people of this city.”

Access to education and job training – investments in “human capital” – should be prioritized to build San Antonio’s economy, he added, instead of local governments offering incentive packages to lure big companies.

COPS/Metro Alliance has been pushing the City, County, and local school districts to increase the minimum wage for public workers to \$15 per hour. The City and County approved budgets for fiscal year 2018 that increase minimum hourly wages from \$13.75 to \$14.25 per hour. Both are on track to be at \$15 by 2019.

The statewide minimum wage is just \$7.25 per hour.

Local municipalities have to set an example for the private sector, said Drennan, who is a former police officer. “If the City can’t do it, we have no ability to challenge [private entities] to move it higher.”

The City is trying to tackle the complex issue of poverty and inequality, Mayor Ron Nirenberg stated in an email. “If nothing else, the census numbers underscore the agenda that we have set on this council.”

The 2018 budget that Council approved last week used a so-called “equity lens” to continue support for job training programs such as **Project Quest** and for early childhood education while increasing funding for bus services on which many low-income residents depend.

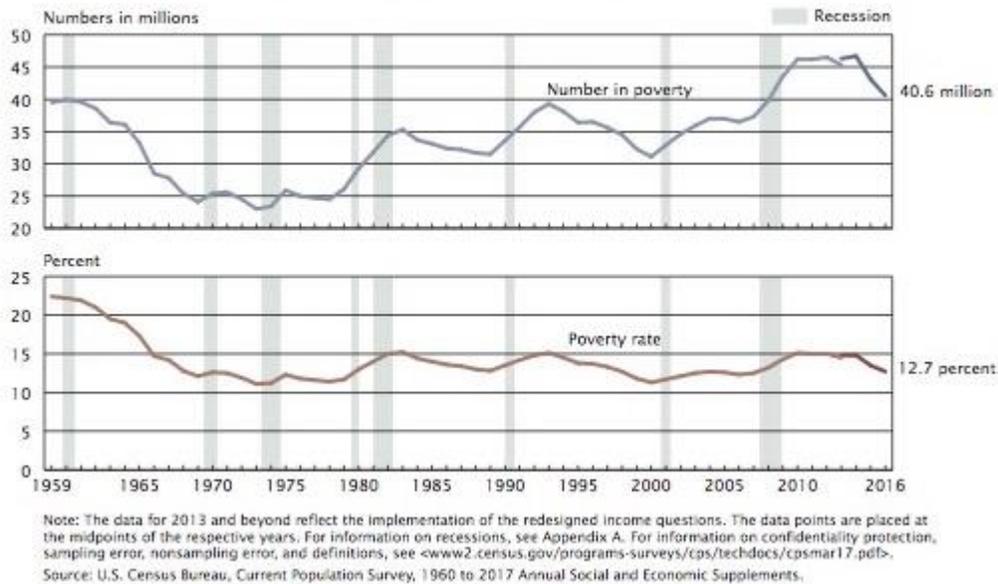
“We are working to create a culture of equity by focusing on needed infrastructure investment in historically neglected communities,” Nirenberg stated.

“The lack of affordable housing is a glaring problem that limits San Antonians trying to enter the middle class,” and the Mayor’s Housing Policy Task Force will start to tackle affordability and gentrification this year.

The District of Columbia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and New Mexico all had poverty rates higher than 18%, while New Hampshire had the nation’s lowest poverty rate at 7.3%. Texas has the 38th highest poverty rate.

“That means that we are not doing as much to reduce the barriers for people to be able to access education so that they can get the kind of training and good jobs that they need,” said Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) Associate Director Frances Deviney during a Facebook Live discussion after the data release last week. “We’re not doing as good a job as we can of getting people connected to other resources they need to get them on their feet.”

Figure 4.
Number in Poverty and Poverty Rate: 1959 to 2016



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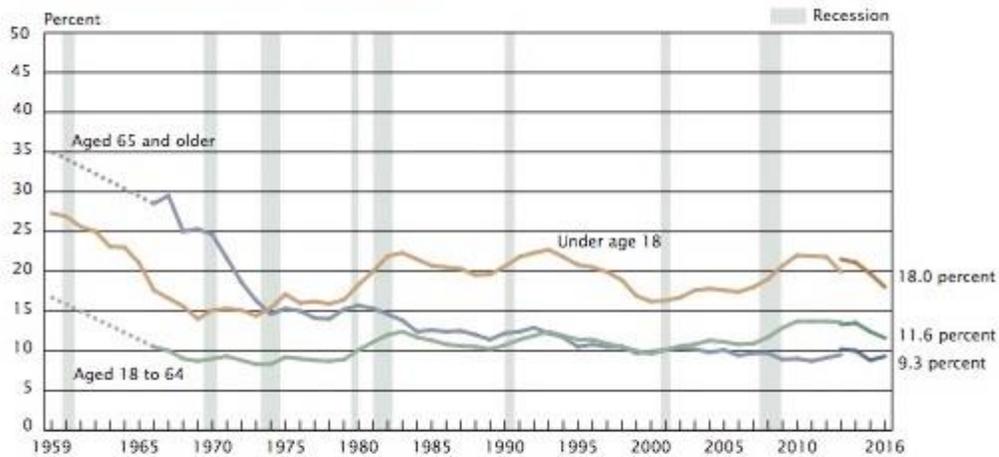
The poverty rate in the U.S. has declined since the height of the recession.

More than 1.6 million Texas children, 22.4%, lived in poverty in 2016. That is the lowest level in more than 10 years, Deviney said, but it’s also far above the national average of 18%.

“Kids who live in poverty are less likely to have health insurance coverage, which means that they are more likely to miss school, which means they are more likely to be held back, which means they are more likely to drop out,” Deviney said. “So all of this stuff that we’re talking about today – family income, health insurance coverage, living in poverty ... these are not just separate data points, they are connected.”

One of the prevailing problems nationally and locally is racial inequality in relation to health insurance, poverty, and income. That largely has to do with access to education in Texas, said Garrett Grover, director of the Economic Opportunity Program at CPPP.

**Figure 5.
Poverty Rates by Age: 1959 to 2016**

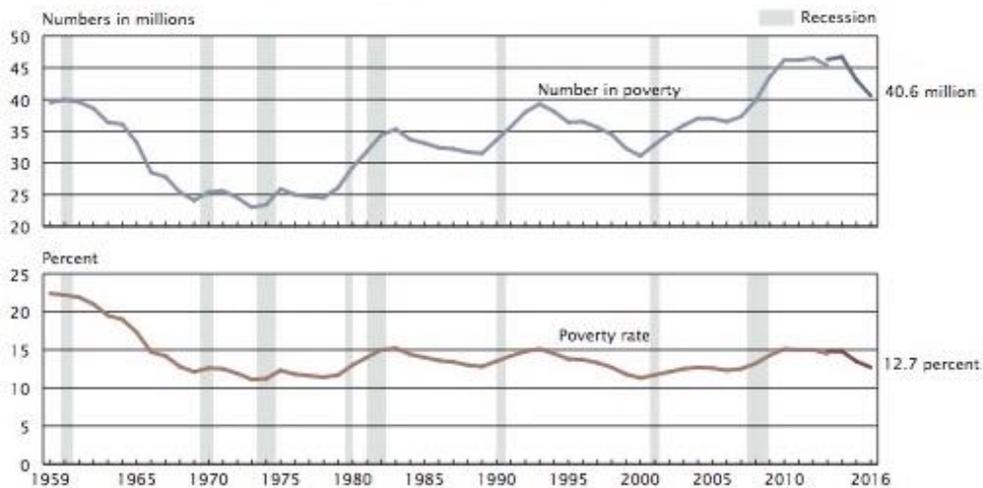


Note: The data for 2013 and beyond reflect the implementation of the redesigned income questions. The data points are placed at the midpoints of the respective years. Data for people aged 18 to 64 and aged 65 and older are not available from 1960 to 1965. For information on recessions, see Appendix A. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar17.pdf>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960 to 2017 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

*COURTESY / U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
Americans age 64 and older saw an increase of poverty rate in 2016.*

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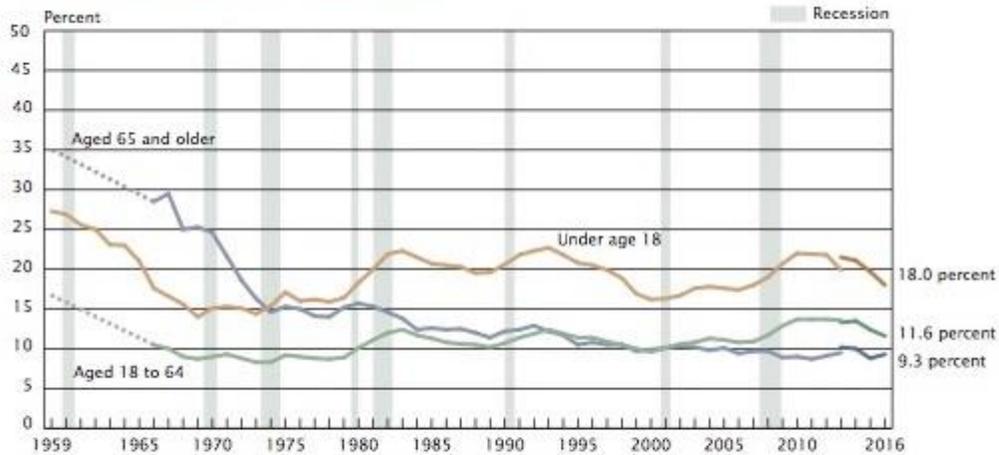
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San Antonio data reflects similar disparities.

The American Community Survey’s state and county data was released last Thursday as a complement to the release of the Census bureau’s Current Population Survey on Sept. 12, 2017.

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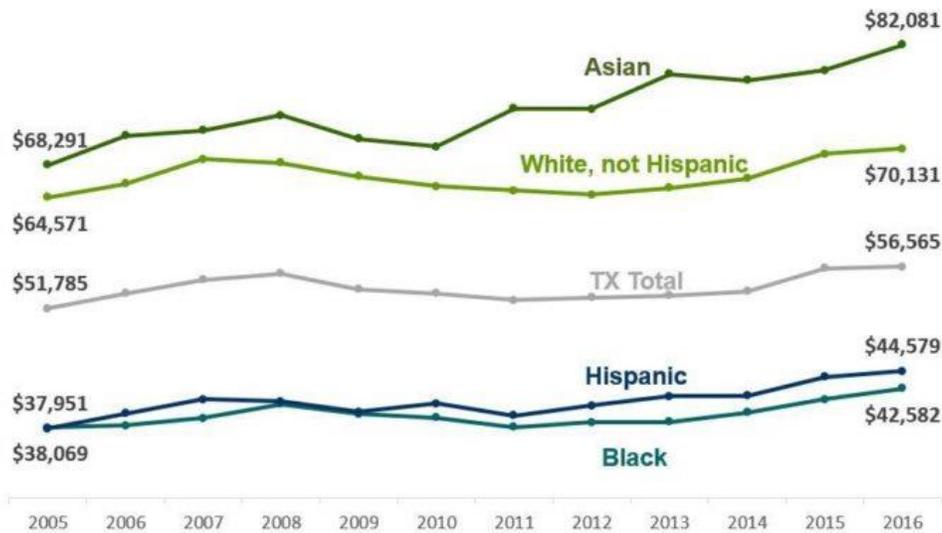


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Median Income On the Rise, Why Such Huge Gaps by Race/Ethnicity?



ACS Table B19013B-B19013I, One-year estimates 2005-2016. Adjusted for inflation and expressed in 2016 dollars.

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Gaps in median income by race and ethnicity persisted in 2016.