

The State of the South 2010: Data Points

From 1980-1997, the South was on a trajectory to erase a long legacy of poverty and economic barriers by significantly broadening the middle class. But the double whammy of two recessions produced a lost decade and revealed that gaps had only temporarily been narrowed.

- For two decades, the South enjoyed a “gilded age” in which the region led the nation in population growth and job creation.
- Poverty rates across the South closed to within 1.4 percentage points of the rest of the nation in 1998.
- Every Southern state had a lower poverty rate in 2000 than it had in 1980.

The 2000s were a lost decade—people were knocked back from fleeting middle-class prosperity and millions of low-skill, low-wage jobs disappeared, probably for good.

- 1.8 million jobs lost in the South from September 2008-November 2009 (out of 6.2 million nationally).
- Of 50 rural and exurban counties that lost the most jobs in the current recession, 28 were in the South (10 in Alabama).
- Median household income declined more in the South than in any other region.
- Three states (KY, LA, NC) saw real median household incomes decline from 1997-2007; seven states had declines compared to the rest of the nation from 1987-2007; and nine states had declines compared to the rest of the nation from 1997-2007.
- By 2009 every Southern state except Virginia had a larger percentage of people below 200 percent of poverty level than the national rate of 32 percent. The South remains the region with the highest incidence of poverty.
- In most Southern states (except North Carolina, Florida, and Virginia) more than 1 in 5 children live in poverty.

The South is far from uniform—there are many Souths.

- Of the 20 strongest metro areas in U.S. in 2009, 11 were in the South.
- Of 20.2 million jobs added from 1987-2007, nearly 9 in 10 were in metropolitan areas.
- Unemployment in 2009 hit men, African Americans, and Latinos hardest.
- From 1987 to 2007 all Southern states grew in population except West Virginia, and the populations of Atlantic seaboard states and Texas exceeded the U.S. growth rate of 24 percent.
- The average age in 2008 in Southern states ranged from about 25-34 for Hispanics, 30-33 for African Americans, and 39 to 41 for (non-Hispanic) whites.
- Every Southern state except Texas had a higher Latino growth rate than the national average of 28.7 percent.

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