

# JSRI

RESEARCH  
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JESUIT SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

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## JustSouth INDEX 2019



LOYOLA  
UNIVERSITY  
NEW ORLEANS | COLLEGE OF  
ARTS AND SCIENCES

 JESUITS  
USA Central and  
Southern Province



**Our mission is to transform the Gulf South through action research, analysis, education, and advocacy on the core issues of poverty, race, and migration.**

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## **ABOUT THE JESUIT SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

**The Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI) is a collaboration of Loyola University New Orleans and the Society of Jesus, rooted in the faith that does justice. Founded in 2007, JSRI conducts, gathers, and publishes research on social and economic conditions of the marginalized communities in the Gulf South states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.**

Through the lens of Catholic social thought, the Institute's staff and associates educate the university, faith, and civic communities on the social realities shaping the lives of the poor and marginalized and on how we can work together to promote human dignity and the common good.

JSRI staff work with community groups and others to advocate on critical local, state, and national issues, such as the minimum wage, immigration reform, welfare regulations, education spending, and criminal justice reform.

The *JustSouth Index* is one of our flagship publications, and this is our fourth annual report. In it, we measure and compare all 50 states and Washington, D.C., on nine social justice-related indicators: average household income of poor households, health insurance coverage for the poor, housing affordability, public school integration, white-minority wage equity, white-minority employment equity, immigrant youth outcomes, immigrant English proficiency, and health insurance coverage for immigrants.

Though we measure all the U.S. states, we give special attention in this report to the five Gulf South states which make up our area of focus.



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## From the Director

This is our fourth annual *JustSouth Index*. Just as we did in the first three studies, we focus on three key dimensions of social justice: poverty, racial disparity, and immigrant exclusion. We continue to use the social indicator methodology of the *Human Development Index* of the United Nations which helps us to assess the current realities of all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

Our goal is to help citizens and policy-makers, business and labor, church and community leaders—all of us—know more about our social realities and the many challenges faced by our most vulnerable neighbors. With enhanced awareness should come action to promote the common good in our communities, states, and nation. As does the *Human Development Index*, this report looks directly at three essentials of human well-being: health, education, and economic security. These three areas of human life and society are essential to creating the quality of life that respects and upholds human dignity and is consistent with the responsibility of all of us, especially our elected leaders, for the common good. Human dignity and the common good are the bedrocks of a just society in Catholic social teaching.

As in past reports, the Gulf South states—Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas—continue to be at the bottom of most indicators, although there have been some modest changes from year to year. For this reason, we present more detailed information and recommendations near the end of the Index on these five states. The reality of this region's persistent social problems—highlighted in the current COVID-19 pandemic and economic shutdowns—underscores the urgency with which concerned readers should receive and respond to this information.

Again, we include specific policy recommendations throughout this report that aim to improve the nine social indicators that are at the heart of our research. Careful attention to each state's indicators will help the reader to understand how a state fares and what should be done to improve residents' lives. Each state's ranking and scores in each of three dimensions (poverty, racial disparity, and immigrant exclusion) are contained in the *Index* text, and an interactive map can be found at [www.loyno.edu/jsri/indicators-map](http://www.loyno.edu/jsri/indicators-map) that highlights nine specific indicators within these three dimensions for every state and the District of Columbia.

Finally, special thanks go to Dennis Kalob, Ph.D., JSRI Fellow, Research Assistant Millicent Eib, and Office Manager Kelsey McLaughlin for their dedicated research, writing, design, and presentation.

**Fr. Fred Kammer, S.J., J.D.**  
**Director, Jesuit Social Research Institute**  
**College of Arts and Sciences**  
**Loyola University New Orleans**

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## WHAT IS SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Justice, as defined by Catholic social teaching, is not a simple human convention, because “what is ‘just’ is not first determined by the law, but by the profound identity of the human being.”<sup>1</sup> Every person’s right to human dignity is derived from their creation in the image of God; therefore, social, political, and economic aspects of society must serve to protect and promote the inherent dignity of individuals.<sup>2</sup> While justice is not a human convention, human behaviors, institutions, and systems can increase or decrease the level of justice in society.

A just society is one that fosters the common good. This ancient Greek concept, which is fundamental to Catholic social teaching, is defined in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* as, “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”<sup>3</sup> The common good is not merely the sum of individual goods, but describes the interconnectedness of all persons in society.

To attain the common good, individuals must have the material, cultural, and spiritual resources needed to reach their full potential.

It is the duty of political institutions to ensure that civil society is ordered toward social conditions that are equally to everyone’s advantage. In fact, the common good is the reason that the political authority exists, and political leaders must “harmonize the different sectoral interests with the requirements of justice” in order to achieve it.<sup>4</sup>

Essentially, social injustice is any policy or system that detracts from the common good or undermines human dignity. For example, the growing gap between the rich and poor in the U.S. is evidence of underlying economic policies that make the rich wealthier and keep the working poor from earning enough to live a dignified life. Systems that maintain segregation of schools and housing keep racial minorities from achieving their full potential. In addition, policies that prohibit access to services and support systems further

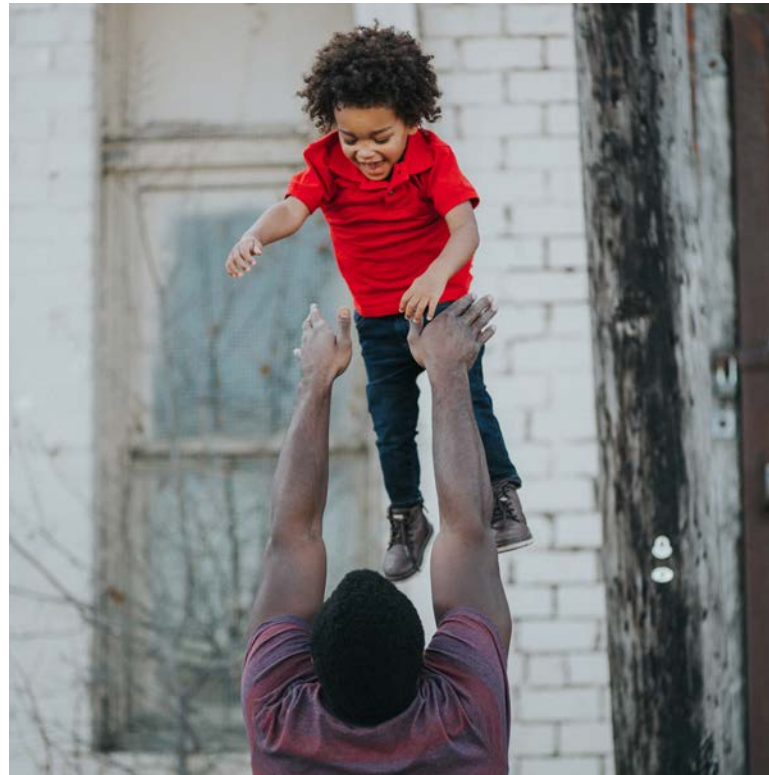
marginalize immigrants rather than promote solidarity. Together these policies and systems create an inequitable distribution of wealth, opportunity, and privilege. This leaves many without the ability to participate meaningfully in the economy and in society generally. It also prevents them from enjoying the economic security, education, and good health essential to human wellbeing. All members of a community share a moral responsibility to address these injustices.

### **THE JUSTSOUTH INDEX AS MEASURE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The *JustSouth Index* is part of a growing movement among social scientists to better understand and illustrate complex human and societal challenges through the analysis of concrete indicators.

The *Index* is a response to the call of Catholic social teaching to identify and address structural injustices that undermine the dignity of the human person. This project drew inspiration from the well-established *Human Development Index* (HDI) created by the United Nations in 1990 as a new approach to defining, measuring, and comparing human well-being around the world. The HDI focuses on three key dimensions of human well-being: health, education, and standard of living in 189 countries and territories. Released annually, the HDI report sheds light on the advances and setbacks to human development within those dimensions by measuring a set of representative indicators and calculating a composite index score for each country. In doing so, its authors aim to influence the agenda-setting and decision-making processes that impact human well-being in each country.<sup>5</sup>

The goal of the *JustSouth Index* is similar, albeit on a smaller scale. Like the HDI, the *JustSouth Index* is intended to stimulate dialogue, foster accountability, and shape solutions. Indicator projects, however, are not without limitations, as the former director of the Human Development



Report office, Selim Jahan, noted : “A concept is always broader than any of its proposed measures. Any suggested measure cannot fully capture the richness, the breadth, and the depth of the concept itself.”<sup>6</sup> His statement rings true in the case of the *JustSouth Index*, because the rich concept of social justice as understood by Catholic social thought cannot be wholly captured by any single set of measures. That said, the nine indicators we have included in the *JustSouth Index* are among the most fundamental components of social justice and cut across the three areas of human wellbeing included in the HDI: health, education, and standard of living, with a focus on how the poor and marginalized fare within the larger society.

The *JustSouth Index* is designed to measure, on an annual basis, progress made and ground lost on issues of social justice in the Gulf South region. For purposes of comparison, all fifty states and Washington D.C. are included in the *Index*. The *JustSouth Index* presents a point-in-time assessment of how residents of each state are faring with regard to nine quantitative indicators

that represent the distribution of wealth, opportunity, and privilege in each state. The indicators are grouped under three interconnected dimensions of social justice that are critical to the history and future of the region: poverty, racial disparity, and immigrant exclusion. Although there are many elements of society that contribute to social justice, these three dimensions are among the most relevant to the region's history and to the social, economic, and political challenges faced by residents and communities in the Gulf South states.

The *JustSouth Index* allows policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, business, labor and community leaders, and other stakeholders in the region to better understand the specific issues of social justice that are most problematic in their respective states. In other words, the *Index* serves as a starting point for advocacy and responsible civic action.



**The Year 2020:  
COVID-19, the Economic Recession,  
and the Black Lives Matter Movement**

**SOCIAL JUSTICE IN  
THREE DIMENSIONS**

**Within the dimensions of poverty, racial disparity, and immigrant exclusion, indicators were selected that fulfilled the following criteria:**

- Measure socio-economic well-being
- From clear and reliable data sources
- Updated annually
- Common to all states
- Actionable

Some indicators that are also important in measuring material deprivation, discrimination, and exclusion of immigrants were not included because they did not fulfill one or more of the above-listed criteria.

Each indicator serves as a marker of social justice that can be compared across states and time. The indicators also are important to the central dimensions of human well-being: economic security, education, and health. Because the indicators are actionable, states have the possibility of improving their scores annually.

This report is based on data that were released in 2019. Therefore, we are unable, within these pages, to capture the impact of the 2020 COVID-19 crisis and the resulting economic recession. Where appropriate, we reference in this report our current new reality and the impact it is having, but the specific numbers and rankings found herein are from our pre-crisis era. It is worth contemplating when reading this report how the current crisis significantly increases the urgency to act on the pressing problems we highlight: poverty, racial disparity, and immigrant exclusion.

Regarding the issue of racial disparity, it is important to note that 2020 was also a year when America was beginning to say with a larger, more collective voice that Black lives do indeed matter. This is certainly a long overdue development. The material on racial disparities found in this report may be helpful as we think about the racial justice protests this year and the need to address the shocking inequities that we find throughout our society.



## THE POVERTY DIMENSION

The Poverty Dimension includes three indicators that measure economic wellbeing and access to a basic standard of living for the poorest residents of each state.



### Average Income of Poor Households

Average annual income of households in the lowest quartile of income in the state



### Health Insurance Coverage for the Poor

Percent of persons in the lowest quartile of income that do not have health insurance coverage



### Housing Affordability

Percent of households in lowest income quartile with a housing cost burden

## THE RACIAL DISPARITY DIMENSION

The Racial Disparity Dimension includes three indicators that measure segregation and disparities in economic opportunity based on race.



### Public School Integration

Percent of public schools segregated by race



### White-Minority Wage Equity

Percent difference in earnings between white workers and workers of color of similar age, level of education, and occupation



### White-Minority Employment Equity

Gap in unemployment rate between white and minority workers

## THE IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION DIMENSION

The Immigrant Exclusion Dimension includes three indicators that measure social inclusion, economic opportunities, and basic services available to immigrant residents of a state.



### Immigrant Youth Outcomes

Percent of immigrant youth ages 18 to 25 who are not in school and not working



### Immigrant English Proficiency

Percent of immigrants with difficulty speaking English



### Health Insurance Coverage for Immigrants

Gap in health insurance rate between immigrant and native-born populations



## RESULTS

### DEVELOPING THE DIMENSIONS AND INDEX SCORES

The methodology for calculating the indicator scores and *JustSouth Index* ranking is based on the United Nations' *Human Development Index* "goalpost approach" to measuring well-being.<sup>7</sup> All 50 states and Washington, D.C., were given a score on each of the nine indicators in relation to the highest and lowest observable indicator values. The state with highest indicator value was given a score of 1 and the rest of the states receive a standardized score between 0 and 1 according to their respective indicator values.

As with the individual indicator scores, each dimension *Index* score and the overall *Index* score fall between the "goalposts" of 0 and 1, with the highest scores closest to 1 and the lowest scores closest to 0.

On the overall *JustSouth Index* rankings, all five Gulf South states ranked very low compared with the other states and Washington, D.C. In fact, four of these states occupy the bottom four positions

in our rankings: Alabama #48, Texas #49, Louisiana #50, and Mississippi #51. Florida, the other Gulf South State, comes in at #37 (see Table 1, page 7, for all of the rankings).

The four Gulf South states that occupied the last four positions in our ranking system scored poorly in all three dimensions of the *Index*: Poverty, Racial Disparity and Immigrant Exclusion.

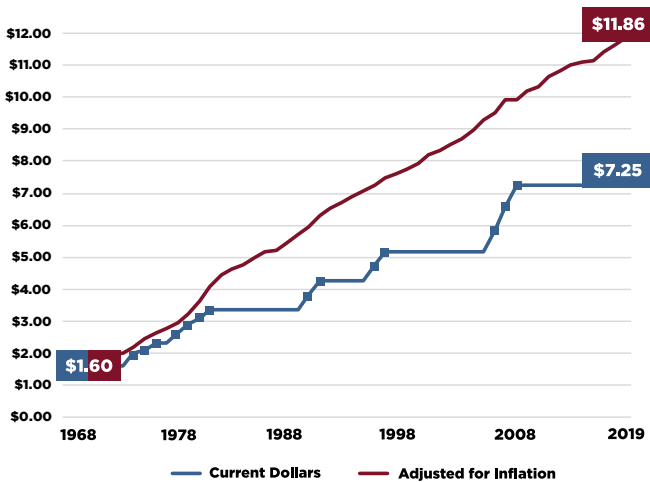
This is our fourth annual report, and it is the first year that Louisiana was not last. Mississippi has that "distinction" this year.

Southern states, overall, are heavily represented on the lower end of the rankings. In the bottom 16 positions there are 11 Southern states, along with 2 Southwestern states. States that are ranked high on the list can be found in virtually all regions of the country, particularly across the northern tier.

Though there are many policies, large and small, that can affect dimension rankings and overall rankings, we would like to focus attention on two major public policies that are often discussed and

that we believe have a real impact on the economic and social conditions of the states and their citizens: minimum wage and Medicaid expansion.

The current federal minimum wage was last set in 2009 and has stood since then at \$7.25 per hour. States may implement, if they wish, a higher minimum wage, which twenty-nine states and Washington, D.C., have chosen to do (with Virginia scheduled to become the 30th state in 2021).<sup>8</sup>



**The RED line represents the minimum wage if it had kept up with inflation since 1968.**

**The BLUE line represents the actual minimum wage and its increase over time.**

Medicaid expansion is an important part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. This expansion makes those up to 138% of the poverty line eligible for Medicaid. Originally, all states were expected to take part in this effort (effective January 1, 2014), though due to a successful court challenge states were allowed to opt out, which roughly half of the states did initially. As of the start of 2018 (the year of the data set we used for this report), 31 states had expanded Medicaid. Four other states have since implemented it. Three additional states have adopted, but have yet to implement, expansion.<sup>9</sup> (NOTE: The federal government pays 90% of the cost of Medicaid expansion.)

Among the ten lowest-ranked states overall (and D.C. is included as a state), six did not expand Medicaid and nine had a minimum wage of \$7.50 per hour or less (eight with the federal minimum and New Mexico \$.25 higher).

Of the ten highest-ranked states, seven had implemented Medicaid expansion (with two additional top states implementing it since 2018) and eight had a minimum wage of over \$8 per hour.

Of the four Gulf South states at the bottom of the rankings, all had a \$7.25 per hour minimum wage and only Louisiana had adopted Medicaid expansion.

Examining all of the states on the indicator measuring the average income of poor households, we find that eight of the lowest scoring states had minimum wages of \$7.50 per hour or less. Of the ten states that scored the highest on this indicator, eight had minimum wages of \$8.60 or more.

On the indicator measuring health insurance coverage of the poor, we find that none of the bottom ten states—those with the highest percentage uninsured poor—had expanded Medicaid. And conversely, we find that all of the top 10 states—those with the lowest percentage of uninsured—had expanded Medicaid.

**Overall, we find that states that have increased their minimum wage and expanded Medicaid, as well as created robust income support programs, taken action to reduce racial disparities, and enacted policies that support the integration of immigrants, have scored higher on the *JustSouth Index* ranking and the underlying dimension indices.**

**Table 1: JustSouth Index Rankings: 2016 & 2019\***

<b>STATE</b>	<b>2019 SCORE</b>	<b>2019 RANKING</b>	2016 RANKING	<b>STATE</b>	<b>2019 SCORE</b>	<b>2019 RANKING</b>	2016 RANKING
<b>MT</b>	<b>0.742</b>	<b>1</b>	10	<b>NJ</b>	<b>0.589</b>	<b>27</b>	18
<b>WY</b>	<b>0.739</b>	<b>2</b>	24	<b>IL</b>	<b>0.589</b>	<b>28</b>	29
<b>ME</b>	<b>0.726</b>	<b>3</b>	12	<b>NY</b>	<b>0.583</b>	<b>29</b>	25
<b>WA</b>	<b>0.692</b>	<b>4</b>	13	<b>SD</b>	<b>0.583</b>	<b>30</b>	15
<b>HI</b>	<b>0.689</b>	<b>5</b>	3	<b>WI</b>	<b>0.582</b>	<b>31</b>	33
<b>AK</b>	<b>0.685</b>	<b>6</b>	28	<b>CA</b>	<b>0.566</b>	<b>32</b>	31
<b>WV</b>	<b>0.685</b>	<b>7</b>	14	<b>NV</b>	<b>0.564</b>	<b>33</b>	35
<b>VA</b>	<b>0.683</b>	<b>8</b>	6	<b>OH</b>	<b>0.558</b>	<b>34</b>	22
<b>MA</b>	<b>0.681</b>	<b>9</b>	4	<b>OK</b>	<b>0.554</b>	<b>35</b>	36
<b>MN</b>	<b>0.679</b>	<b>10</b>	9	<b>SC</b>	<b>0.550</b>	<b>36</b>	43
<b>IA</b>	<b>0.679</b>	<b>11</b>	11	<b>FL</b>	<b>0.545</b>	<b>37</b>	41
<b>VT</b>	<b>0.672</b>	<b>12</b>	1	<b>AZ</b>	<b>0.545</b>	<b>38</b>	42
<b>UT</b>	<b>0.668</b>	<b>13</b>	17	<b>CT</b>	<b>0.544</b>	<b>39</b>	5
<b>MI</b>	<b>0.663</b>	<b>14</b>	30	<b>KS</b>	<b>0.536</b>	<b>40</b>	20
<b>PA</b>	<b>0.663</b>	<b>15</b>	21	<b>AR</b>	<b>0.514</b>	<b>41</b>	44
<b>NH</b>	<b>0.662</b>	<b>16</b>	2	<b>GA</b>	<b>0.513</b>	<b>42</b>	45
<b>ND</b>	<b>0.658</b>	<b>17</b>	8	<b>TN</b>	<b>0.508</b>	<b>43</b>	38
<b>DE</b>	<b>0.654</b>	<b>18</b>	16	<b>NC</b>	<b>0.507</b>	<b>44</b>	39
<b>MO</b>	<b>0.643</b>	<b>19</b>	34	<b>KY</b>	<b>0.506</b>	<b>45</b>	27
<b>RI</b>	<b>0.643</b>	<b>20</b>	26	<b>DC</b>	<b>0.495</b>	<b>46</b>	47
<b>MD</b>	<b>0.642</b>	<b>21</b>	7	<b>NM</b>	<b>0.489</b>	<b>47</b>	46
<b>OR</b>	<b>0.642</b>	<b>22</b>	23	<b>AL</b>	<b>0.434</b>	<b>48</b>	48
<b>CO</b>	<b>0.632</b>	<b>23</b>	19	<b>TX</b>	<b>0.428</b>	<b>49</b>	49
<b>NE</b>	<b>0.625</b>	<b>24</b>	37	<b>LA</b>	<b>0.411</b>	<b>50</b>	51
<b>IN</b>	<b>0.620</b>	<b>25</b>	32	<b>MS</b>	<b>0.351</b>	<b>51</b>	50
<b>ID</b>	<b>0.598</b>	<b>26</b>	40				

\*These rankings are from our inaugural *Index* (2016) and our most recent *Index* (2019). For the 2019 raw score, numbers are rounded to the thousandth place. In our dataset, these numbers extend well beyond.

**Table 2: JustSouth Index 2019  
Dimension Scores\* and Rankings**

	POVERTY		RACIAL DISPARITY		IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION		OVERALL	
STATE	SCORE	RANK	SCORE	RANK	SCORE	RANK	SCORE	RANK
AL	0.449	49	0.454	49	0.402	44	0.434	48
AK	0.681	8	0.655	31	0.721	6	0.685	6
AZ	0.590	31	0.649	35	0.423	40	0.545	38
AR	0.505	41	0.653	33	0.412	42	0.514	41
CA	0.538	37	0.686	24	0.490	35	0.566	32
CO	0.652	15	0.714	15	0.542	27	0.632	23
CT	0.541	35	0.556	43	0.534	29	0.544	39
DE	0.666	11	0.701	18	0.598	19	0.654	18
DC	0.576	33	0.271	51	0.775	5	0.495	46
FL	0.449	48	0.677	29	0.533	30	0.545	37
GA	0.454	47	0.635	38	0.469	38	0.513	42
HI	0.779	1	0.708	16	0.593	20	0.689	5
ID	0.635	19	0.797	3	0.422	41	0.598	26
IL	0.597	29	0.623	41	0.550	25	0.589	28
IN	0.609	25	0.715	14	0.547	26	0.620	25
IA	0.735	5	0.786	5	0.541	28	0.679	11
KS	0.607	26	0.680	28	0.372	45	0.536	40
KY	0.607	27	0.693	20	0.309	49	0.506	45
LA	0.491	44	0.469	47	0.301	50	0.411	50
ME	0.613	24	0.707	17	0.883	2	0.726	3
MD	0.721	6	0.629	39	0.583	21	0.642	21
MA	0.673	10	0.687	22	0.684	13	0.681	9
MI	0.620	21	0.691	21	0.681	14	0.663	14
MN	0.758	4	0.685	26	0.605	18	0.679	10
MS	0.335	51	0.492	46	0.262	51	0.351	51
MO	0.564	34	0.676	30	0.699	8	0.643	19

\*For the dimension raw scores, numbers are rounded to the thousandth place. In our dataset, these numbers extend well beyond.

**Table 2: JustSouth Index 2019  
Dimension Scores\* and Rankings**

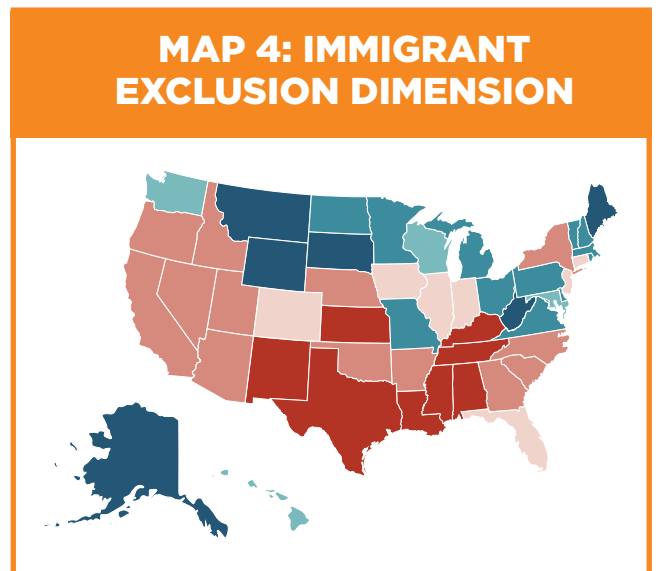
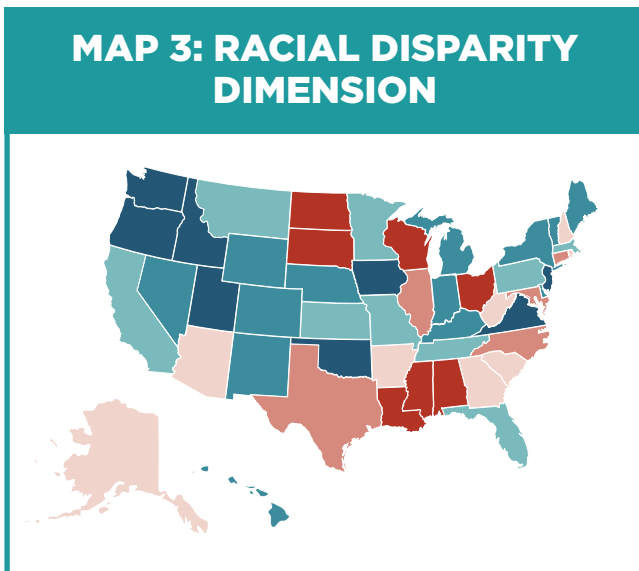
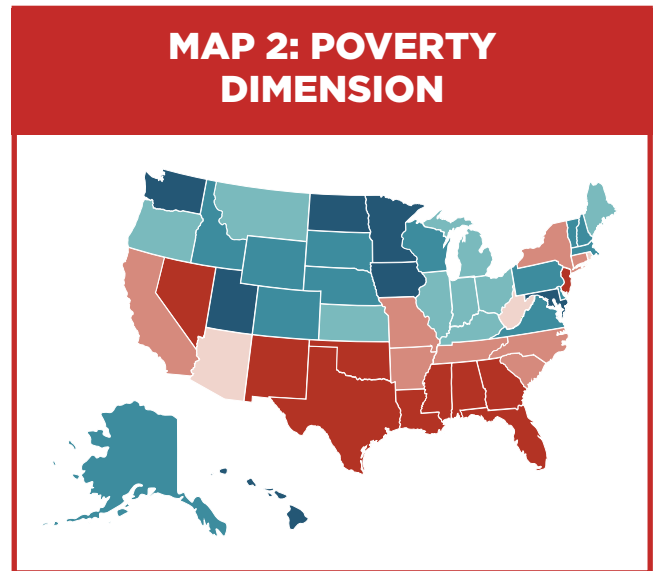
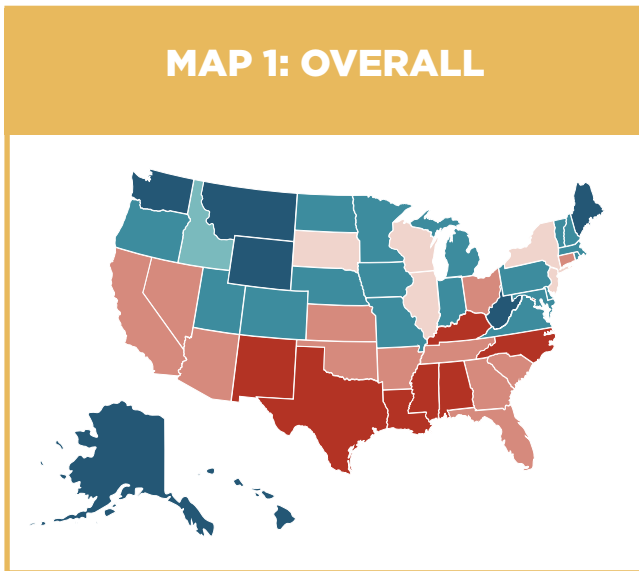
STATE	POVERTY		RACIAL DISPARITY		IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION		OVERALL	
	SCORE	RANK	SCORE	RANK	SCORE	RANK	SCORE	RANK
MT	0.615	23	0.682	27	0.971	1	0.742	1
NE	0.650	17	0.746	10	0.504	33	0.625	24
NV	0.495	43	0.738	11	0.490	34	0.564	33
NH	0.652	16	0.643	37	0.693	10	0.662	16
NJ	0.480	45	0.775	8	0.550	24	0.589	27
NM	0.496	42	0.737	12	0.320	48	0.489	47
NY	0.536	38	0.734	13	0.505	32	0.583	29
NC	0.541	36	0.597	42	0.404	43	0.507	44
ND	0.764	3	0.543	44	0.687	12	0.658	17
OH	0.603	28	0.458	48	0.630	16	0.558	34
OK	0.470	46	0.776	7	0.465	39	0.554	35
OR	0.620	22	0.834	1	0.510	31	0.642	22
PA	0.646	18	0.686	25	0.657	15	0.663	15
RI	0.593	30	0.654	32	0.688	11	0.643	20
SC	0.529	40	0.648	36	0.486	37	0.550	36
SD	0.661	13	0.419	50	0.715	7	0.583	30
TN	0.531	39	0.687	23	0.360	46	0.508	43
TX	0.387	50	0.628	40	0.324	47	0.428	49
UT	0.773	2	0.791	4	0.488	36	0.668	13
VT	0.625	20	0.699	19	0.693	9	0.672	12
VA	0.663	12	0.780	6	0.616	17	0.683	8
WA	0.712	7	0.826	2	0.563	23	0.692	4
WV	0.590	32	0.650	34	0.839	3	0.685	7
WI	0.654	14	0.528	45	0.571	22	0.582	31
WY	0.673	9	0.747	9	0.802	4	0.739	2

\*For the dimension raw scores, numbers are rounded to the thousandth place. In our dataset, these numbers extend well beyond.

# JUSTSOUTH INDEX MAPS

The map visualization groups states into six categories: more or less near the national average, mostly above or below average, and greatly above or below average. The six categories are based on whether states' *Index* scores are:

- + Less than 0.25 standard deviation from the national average in either the positive or negative direction,
- + Between 0.25 and 1 standard deviation from the national average in either the positive or negative direction, or
- + More than 1 standard deviation from the national average in either the positive or negative direction.
- + An interactive map can be found at [www.loyno.edu/jsri/indicators-map](http://www.loyno.edu/jsri/indicators-map)





## DIMENSION 1: POVERTY

**“We can best measure our life together by how the poor and the vulnerable are treated.”**

– National Conference of Catholic Bishops. 1986.

*Economic Justice for All.* United States Catholic Conference, 8.

In their 1986 pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops proclaimed that dealing with poverty is a moral imperative of the highest priority.<sup>10</sup> Ensuring that all people are able to enjoy a basic standard of living preserves human dignity and strengthens the common good of the whole society. Alternatively, those living in poverty suffer from material deprivation and negative psychosocial effects that undermine their dignity, diminish their life prospects, and reduce their ability to contribute to the common good.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, extreme economic inequality is “detrimental to the development of social solidarity and community.”<sup>12</sup> This led the bishops to call for collaboration in addressing these injustices: “Justice requires that all members of our society work for economic, political, and social reforms that will decrease these inequities.”<sup>13</sup>



**Indicator 1:  
Average Annual Income  
of Households in the  
Lowest Income Quartile**

The Great Recession, which lasted from December 2007 to June 2009, caused serious economic hardship for millions of Americans.<sup>14</sup> Well into the recovery period, people were still being impacted by stagnant wages and increased inequality. It took about a decade for the poverty rate to finally get back to its pre-recession level.<sup>15</sup>

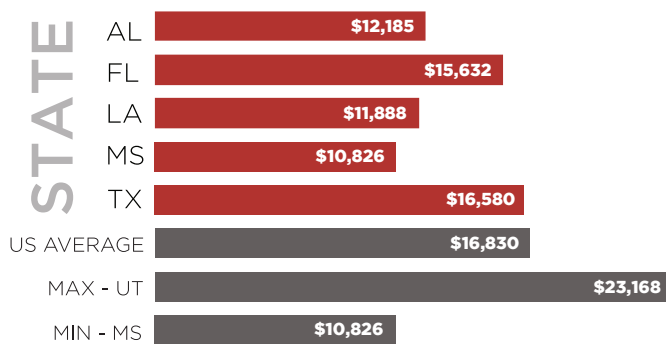
Southern states have been the hardest hit in terms of poverty and economic insecurity, whether in or out of official recessions.<sup>16</sup> Our research bears that out, and we take particular note of the hardships faced in our Gulf South region.



Many low-income households rely on income supports such as federal and state Earned Income Tax Credit programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cash assistance, and childcare assistance to try to bridge the gap between what they earn and the cost of basic necessities. In the Gulf South states, however, the investment in income support programs has been trending downward, and efforts to increase wages have been met with stiff resistance from state legislatures. Earnings from low-wage jobs combined with dwindling assistance from income support programs form a shredded safety net that often fails families in times of crisis or unforeseen major expenses such as automobile trouble or a medical complication. In a recent survey by the Federal Reserve, 40% of adults said that they do not have the cash to cover an unexpected expense of \$400.<sup>17</sup>

It is imperative that both pieces of the equation—earnings and income supports—are strengthened so that low-income families are earning enough to live a dignified life.

## AVERAGE INCOME OF POOR HOUSEHOLDS



## Action Steps

The most direct way to increase the average income of the poorest households is to increase wages. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that in 2018 about seven million workers had earnings that were not sufficient to bring them above the federal poverty line, which was just \$25,100 a year for a family of four in 2018.<sup>18,19</sup>

A powerful tool that state leaders can use to boost the earnings of low-income families is a state **minimum wage** law. With the absence of federal action on the minimum wage for the past decade, twenty-nine states and D.C. have taken their own initiative and have raised their minimum wages above the federal minimum of \$7.25 per hour. (Virginia has voted to become the 30th state, effective in 2021.) Some state laws include a provision that indexes the wage to inflation each year to adjust for an increase in prices. Furthermore, a number of states have set in motion specific step increases that will bring them to \$15 per hour. Unfortunately, in the Gulf South states only Florida has enacted its own minimum wage law, set at \$8.56 per hour as of January 1, 2020.<sup>20</sup> Municipal governments also can take action to raise the local minimum wage, but they are often preempted by state law.

We strongly recommend that all states take steps to bring their minimum wages up to \$15 per hour. Studies show that higher minimum wages improve the economic security of workers and their families, stimulate local economies, and do so with minimal or no negative impact on employment levels or overall economic conditions.<sup>21,22</sup> Ultimately, it would be most effective and desirable for the federal government to take steps to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 from the paltry \$7.25 that has been in place since 2009; but absent federal action, we need the states to step up.

## Additional steps states can take to address poverty include the following:

**State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** programs that supplement the federal EITC program are highly effective in raising families out of poverty. Thirty states and D.C. have created state EITC programs, but of the Gulf South states Louisiana is the only one to have such a program, and it is one of the smallest in the nation.<sup>23</sup> States should move to create or enhance their EITC programs.

**The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** cash assistance program is another income support program that helps some of the poorest families meet their basic needs. The amount of TANF funding that actually goes to cash assistance has decreased substantially, especially in the Gulf South states. For example, the maximum TANF monthly benefit for a single-parent family of three in Mississippi is \$170 compared to \$1,066 in New Hampshire. Most poor people are unable to qualify for any cash assistance.<sup>24</sup> State legislatures (and Congress) must alter eligibility criteria and benefit amounts to ensure that families in deep poverty can maintain a basic standard of living.

**The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** is a federal assistance program that provides funds to low-income households to purchase grocery items. The average SNAP recipient received just \$127 a month in fiscal year 2018.<sup>25</sup> SNAP is a very effective and efficient federal program, and the Congressional Budget Office and Moody's Analytics have found SNAP to have one of the largest "bangs-for-the-buck": every \$1 increase in SNAP benefits generates about \$1.70 in economic activity during a weak economy.<sup>26</sup> Increasing SNAP benefits should be a priority.



## Indicator 2: Percent of Persons in Lowest Income Quartile Without Health Insurance

Though Catholic social thought holds that access to health care is a basic right that flows from the sanctity and dignity of human life, this access is out of reach for many Americans, especially the poor.<sup>27</sup> Without private or public health insurance coverage, many low-income persons do not seek needed medical care or preventive services to avoid illness. When the uninsured do receive medical care, high out-of-pocket costs often lead to medical debt and even greater financial instability. The most common health insurance option for low-income individuals and families is the Medicaid program, which is jointly funded by federal and state governments.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, strict eligibility criteria for Medicaid in a number of states prohibit many low-income persons from enrolling in the program. The 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act provided for state leaders to expand the Medicaid program to provide coverage to more of the poorest persons in the state (those up to 138% of the poverty line). Medicaid expansion is largely funded with federal dollars. However, the Supreme Court determined that this was a state option, and to date twelve states have chosen to opt out.<sup>29,30</sup>

In 2016, Louisiana became the first and only state in the Gulf South to expand the Medicaid program. The expansion now reaches more than 500,000 persons in the state.<sup>31</sup> Failing to expand Medicaid ignores not only the moral imperative to ensure access to health care but also the practical reasons for state leaders to do so. Increasing the rate of health insurance coverage among the lowest earning individuals increases their economic potential, because healthy individuals are more likely to participate in the workforce, have higher productivity on the job, and contribute to the common good of society.<sup>32,33</sup> Also, persons with health insurance coverage experience less financial instability and are less likely to have to borrow money to pay for medical bills and other living expenses.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the act stipulates that the federal government will pay 90% of the cost of expansion, while the economic benefits to the states and many of their health care providers is substantial.<sup>35</sup>

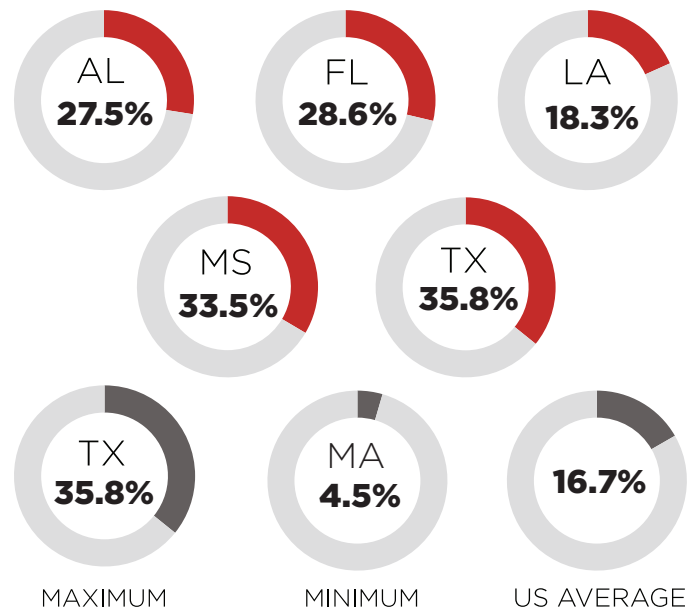
### Action Steps

Increasing access to medical care through an **expanded Medicaid program**, as called for in the Affordable Care Act, or through other means, is one of our chief recommendations for states seeking to improve the well-being of their people.

States can also engage in **outreach programs** to connect with hard-to-reach populations who may not be aware of their eligibility for Medicaid or private insurance subsidies, such as residents of rural areas and immigrant populations.

The real solution to the significant lack of access to health care and its ramifications—poorer health, shorter life expectancy, and significant financial burdens—is for our county to embrace a true **universal health care system**, something that is in place in virtually all other industrialized societies. Short of that, we call upon individual states to take action.

### PERCENT OF POOR WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE

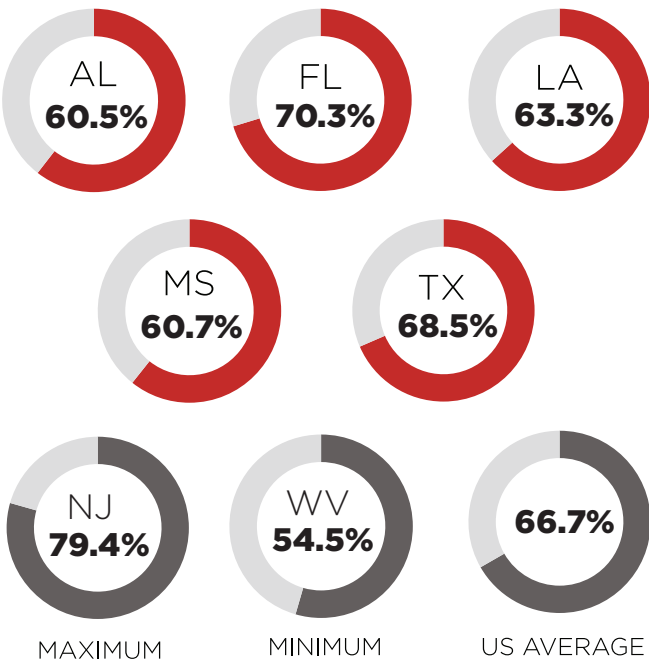


### Indicator 3: Percent of Households in Lowest Income Quartile with a High Housing Cost Burden

There is an affordable housing crisis in the United States. Families that pay more than 30 percent of their total household income for housing are considered by the federal Housing and Urban Affairs Department to be “housing cost burdened.”<sup>36</sup> The numbers of such households have been increasing across the country in recent years. For households with a limited income, paying a high percentage of income on housing often does not leave enough money for other essential expenses, such as food, transportation, and medical expenses. Moreover, high rent and mortgage payments reduce the proportion of income members of a household can spend in their community, creating a ripple effect of economic distress. Housing subsidies and affordable housing units can alleviate the financial strain faced by families whose earnings have not kept pace with rising housing costs.

Federal housing programs such as the Housing Choice Voucher Program, Section 8 Voucher Program, and Public Housing help to reduce the share of monthly income that is consumed by rent for some families. Federal spending for housing assistance, however, is not nearly sufficient to meet demand.<sup>37</sup> As a result, there are long waiting lists for housing assistance in most states, which has prompted states, cities, and nonprofit organizations to develop housing initiatives to supplement federal efforts.

**PERCENT OF POOR WITH HIGH HOUSING COST BURDEN**



**Impact of COVID-19**

As we go to press with this year's *Index*, we must pause at the tremendous toll that the COVID-19 crisis is having on our nation that extends beyond its health effects. The year 2020 is seeing large numbers of newly unemployed, declining household incomes, loss of health coverage for many, and threats of large scale foreclosures and evictions. The many challenges presented in this report are being amplified today by the coronavirus crisis.

**Action Steps**

**Community Development Financial Institutions**

(CDFIs) play a very important role in funding local community needs, such as affordable housing, nonprofits, and small businesses. Investors in CDFIs can be individuals, unions, faith-based organizations, socially-conscious businesses, traditional banks, and others. They represent a great way for community members to come together in a common purpose of developing local economies and helping meet local needs.<sup>38</sup> CDFIs have been major players in helping low-income housing buyers and developing larger scale affordable housing initiatives. There are now more than 1100 CDFIs across all 50 states, with many right here in the Gulf South.<sup>39</sup> We suggest that community leaders and nonprofits take a greater interest in the development and nurturing of these important economic development organizations.

**States can offer incentives** to developers and municipalities to encourage the development of affordable housing. Through supplementing federal housing programs, state policymakers can reduce housing waiting lists and protect families from the harmful impacts of housing insecurity.





## DIMENSION 2: RACIAL DISPARITY

**“To work at ending racism, we need to engage the world and encounter others—to see, maybe for the first time, those who are on the peripheries of our own limited view.”**

– United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2018.

*Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*

Race is a critical consideration of social justice and an issue that has been addressed by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in several pastoral letters over many years. Their most recent statement on race, *Open Wide Our Hearts*,<sup>40</sup> was presented in 2018. In it, the Bishops emphatically state that “racism... profoundly affects our culture, and it has no place in the Christian heart.”<sup>41</sup>

Both systemic racism and individual racial discrimination divides communities and inhibits large racial groups in society from achieving their full potential and contributing fully to the common good. The Catholic Church denounces every form of exclusion and emphasizes that racial prejudice, in particular, denies the equal dignity of all members of the human family and blasphemes the Creator.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, Catholic social thought teaches that racial discrimination be prohibited and punished legally, and that communities should interiorize the conviction of equal dignity of all.



### Indicator 1: Percent of Public Schools Segregated by Race

School districts made significant progress toward school desegregation in the years following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but the trend has shifted back toward race-based school segregation as federal oversight has diminished.<sup>43</sup>

The percentage of Black students attending intensely segregated schools (those with 90-100% non-white school population) went from 64.3% in 1968 to 32.1% in 1988, a year generally considered to be the high-water mark in school integration. Since then, segregation has re-emerged. By 2016, over 40% of Black students were in intensely segregated schools.<sup>44</sup> Although Latino students did not have the same Jim Crow experience that their Black counterparts did, a similar segregation pattern has now emerged for these young people.

In 1988, 33.1% of Latino students were in intensely segregated schools. By 2016, that number was 41.6%.<sup>45</sup>

The trend toward re-segregation represents an injustice because it often means minorities are concentrated in schools that have fewer resources and face the challenges of attracting and retaining quality teachers.<sup>46</sup> A mounting body of evidence indicates that segregation of schools has negative impacts on both short-term academic achievement of minority students and their success in later life.<sup>47</sup>

Integrated schools have a positive impact on all in attendance through promoting awareness and understanding, ensuring that students have the necessary tools to function in an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse society.<sup>48</sup> Not taking intentional steps to ensure that all students have the opportunity to attend quality, integrated schools perpetuates injustice and allows the mistakes of the past to haunt the future.

### Action Steps

To reverse the trend toward re-segregation of public school systems, states and districts must implement policies that are designed in the same spirit and intentionality as those that were effective in **integrating schools** in the 1970s and 1980s. These tools included redrawing of school district boundaries, allowing intra- and inter-district transfers, and subsidizing transportation. Strategic housing development and community planning is also necessary since housing segregation is a powerful driver of many forms of racial inequality, including segregated schools.<sup>49</sup>

Action needs to be taken to **address funding inequities** within and between school districts in the various states, particularly as such inequities seriously disadvantage low income and minority students. One part of the problem is the heavy reliance on local property taxes, which can burden and limit property-poor districts. State funding, in these cases, becomes critical. Additional money

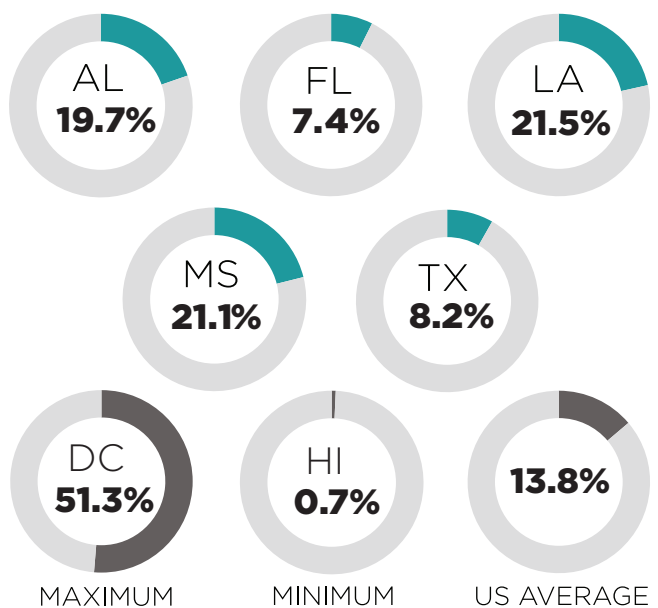
for under-funded schools would allow them to attract and retain high quality teachers and provide critical support services for at-risk students. Offering pre-kindergarten programs, early grade reading programs, reduced class sizes, and counseling can help offset the challenges often faced by minority students.

### MEASURING SCHOOL SEGREGATION

School segregation was analyzed in the *JustSouth Index* by measuring whether a school serves a high proportion of students of a single race and whether the student population of a school is representative of the public school student population in the school's home county. Specifically, a school was considered segregated if it met two criteria:

- 1. More than 90 percent of students attending the school were the same race.**
- 2. The racial composition of the school's student population was significantly different (5 percentage points) from that of the overall student population in the county.**

### PERCENT OF SEGREGATED SCHOOLS





**Indicator 2:  
Percent Difference in Earnings  
Between White and Minority  
Workers of Similar Age, Level  
of Education, and Occupation**

In 1986, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops denounced the existence of employment discrimination based on race in the United States as a scandal that could never be justified. This is because, they explained, “Work with adequate pay for all who seek it is the primary means for achieving basic justice in our society.”<sup>50</sup> Although lawmakers have put in place federal and state laws that prohibit and penalize racial discrimination in employment, it still is a practice that significantly distorts the distribution of wealth, opportunity, and privilege in society.<sup>51, 52, 53</sup>

“One of the most striking features of U.S. racial inequality,” according to the Economic Policy Institute, “is just how stubborn the wage gap between black and white workers has remained over the last four decades.”<sup>54</sup> According to research by Valerie Wilson and William M. Rodgers III, Black-white wage gaps are larger today than they were in 1979.<sup>55</sup>

**Action Steps**

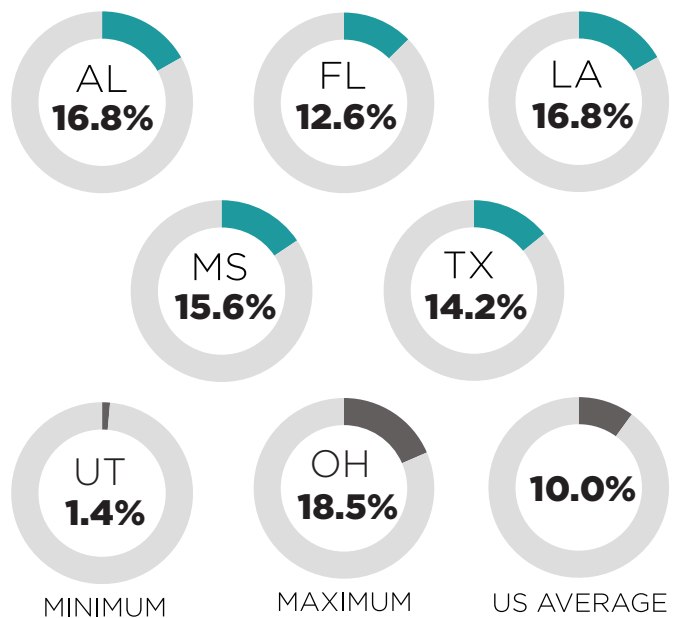
**Enhanced enforcement of labor discrimination laws** is critical to creating a culture in which overt or covert racial discrimination in the workplace is considered completely unacceptable. Many employers likely have not acknowledged the underlying psychological and cognitive processes that result in discriminatory hiring, compensation, and promotion practices.

Racially discriminatory hiring will continue to occur unless businesses and organizations take proactive steps to counter those practices, which perpetuate racial inequity.<sup>56</sup> Judiciously administered affirmative action programs in workplaces can contribute to ensuring that

minorities have equal opportunity to obtain positions and compensation for which they are qualified.

While some business leaders may make the effort to ensure that decisions about wages and promotions are not discriminatory, others will not act until government and legal entities have taken action against them. Accordingly, **investigations by state inspectors and members of the media** for wage and hour violations, **enforcement of prevailing wage rates**, and **educational efforts for employers and employees** are essential to closing the earnings gap between white and minority workers.

**WHITE-MINORITY WAGE GAP**



**Impact of COVID-19**

As we go to press with this year’s *Index*, we are mindful of the suffering many are experiencing now due to the COVID-19 crisis. This crisis has further exposed the racial divide and the vulnerability of people of color. Minorities are suffering disproportionately from both the health effects and economic impacts of the crisis.



### Indicator 3: Gap in Unemployment Rate Between White and Minority Workers

Employment is a basic right that allows all citizens the freedom to participate in the economic life of society.<sup>57</sup> Jobs enable workers to contribute to the common good and to meet their basic needs. The distribution of unemployment in the U.S. is skewed such that a significantly higher proportion of minority workers are unemployed than white workers. The cause of this disparity is multifaceted. Research indicates that differences in average educational attainment and job-preparedness between racial groups account for a portion of the unemployment gap.<sup>58</sup> Studies also have documented clear racial discrimination in hiring practices, including some studies indicating that a white man with a criminal conviction has greater success finding a job than a Black man with no criminal record.<sup>59, 60</sup>

#### Action Steps

Disparity in job preparation between racial groups and discriminatory practices in the workplace must be addressed in order to reduce the gap in unemployment rates between white and minority workers. **Creating equal access to quality public education** for minority children is vital to ensuring equal preparation for post-secondary education and employment.

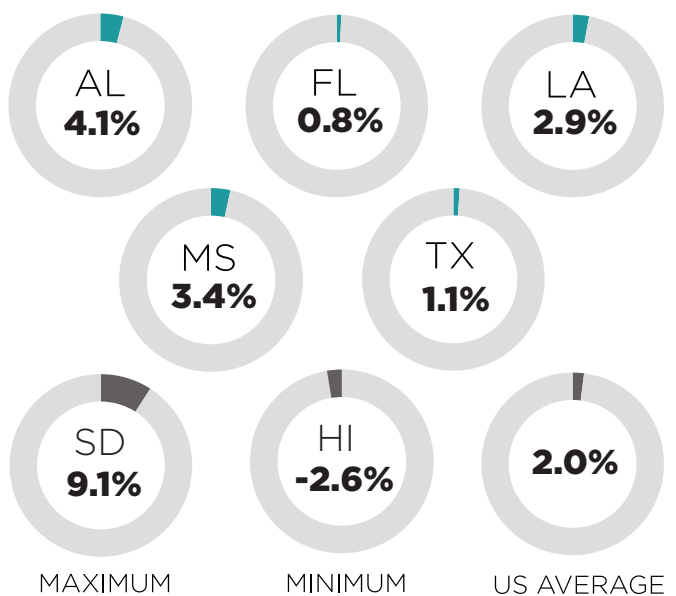
States and communities should **increase support for programs** that offer vocational training, GED classes, tutoring, and other supports that help minorities increase their marketable skills and credentials.

**Covert and overt racial discrimination in hiring and termination practices must be addressed.** In a meta-analysis of field experiments on racial bias in hiring practices published in 2017, the authors

found “no change in the level of hiring discrimination against African Americans over the past 25 years,” though they did “find modest evidence of a decline in discrimination against Latinos.”<sup>61</sup> The authors examined 28 studies since 1989 and found that “whites receive on average 36% more callbacks than African Americans, and 24% more callbacks than Latinos.”<sup>62</sup>

**Discrimination against minority communities at all levels of the criminal justice system must also be addressed.** This well-documented discrimination occurs from the point of initial interaction with law enforcement to sentencing and incarceration.<sup>63, 64, 65</sup> The impact of this maltreatment can be severe and even deadly. Just in terms of employment opportunities the impact can be significant. Individuals with a past conviction can find it exceedingly difficult to become gainfully employed.<sup>66</sup> Aside from halting discriminatory practices in criminal justice, we suggest that states and communities pass legislation that forbids employers from asking prospective employees about their past convictions.

#### WHITE-MINORITY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE GAP







## DIMENSION 3: IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION

**“A change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone... towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just, and fraternal world.”**

– Pope Francis. *Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World*. 2014.  
*Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees.*

The treatment of immigrants is an important dimension of social justice because it represents the way in which a society protects or denigrates human dignity based on nation of origin. Pope Saint John XXIII wrote that “every human being has the right to freedom of movement.”<sup>67</sup> He adds,

**When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership in the human family.**<sup>68</sup>

And as Pope Francis has said: “It is important to view migrants not only on the basis of their status as regular or irregular, but above all as people whose dignity is to be protected and who are capable of contributing to progress and the general welfare.”<sup>69</sup>

Catholic social teaching recognizes that, as people of good will, church and society must comprehensively serve the needs of migrants. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all people and governments to create the political, economic, and social conditions for persons to live in dignity, access just employment, and raise their families irrespective of their naturalization status.



**Indicator 1:  
Disconnected  
Youth Rate**

Disconnected youth are between 18 and 25 years old, not in school or working, and do not have a college degree. While youth of all races, ethnicities, and nationalities are at risk of becoming “disconnected,” immigrant youth are particularly susceptible to this plight. Immigrant youth face many stressors associated with migration to a new country, including discrimination, high rates of poverty, separation from family members, difficulty in language acquisition, and lack of cultural knowledge.<sup>70</sup> Combined, the various challenges for immigrant youth can place them at high risk for dropping out of high school or college and unemployment. Undocumented immigrant youth also face barriers to accessing post-secondary education and legitimate employment opportunities due to their immigration status. The individual and societal costs of disconnected immigrant youth are significant, as those youth are less likely to achieve self-sufficiency as they transition to adulthood and will be poorly positioned to make positive economic contributions to the common good. They also are more likely to have children and start a young family in poverty.

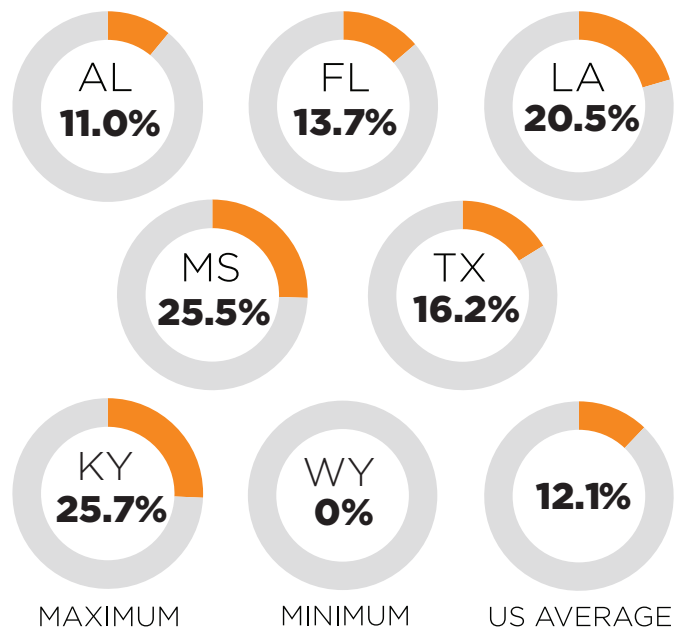
**Action Steps**

To decrease the rate of disconnected immigrant youth, communities must ensure that immigrant youth have both the **academic opportunities and social supports needed** to overcome obstacles associated with migrating to a new country. Through increasing resources to schools that teach English as a Second Language (ESL), states and school districts can ensure that immigrant students overcome language barriers and receive a high school diploma.

For young people who already have left the public education system, **job training programs** and support services such as GED preparation programs, affordable childcare, and community-based language instruction can help to bring disconnected youth back into the workforce and on the path to self-sufficiency.

**School and community-based mentoring programs** can help disconnected youth overcome the psychological and emotional difficulties that result from immigrating to a foreign country.

**SHARE OF IMMIGRANT  
DISCONNECTED YOUTH**



**Indicator 2  
Percent of Immigrants with  
Difficulty Speaking English**

Most immigrants arrive in the U.S. with limited English skills, but recognize the benefits of English proficiency and are highly motivated to learn.<sup>71</sup> English language acquisition is beneficial to immigrants of all ages, including school-age children, working-age adults, and older immigrants.

Providing immigrants the opportunity to learn English facilitates their integration into the local community, helping them become more economically productive and allowing them to participate more fully in society.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, many immigrants have skills and training that could allow contributions to the economy through innovation and entrepreneurship; yet limited English proficiency often inhibits skilled immigrants from obtaining jobs commensurate with their competencies.<sup>73</sup> Language acquisition is also important for young immigrants, as effective language programs increase the cognitive and social development of children and help them be better prepared to learn in school.<sup>74</sup>

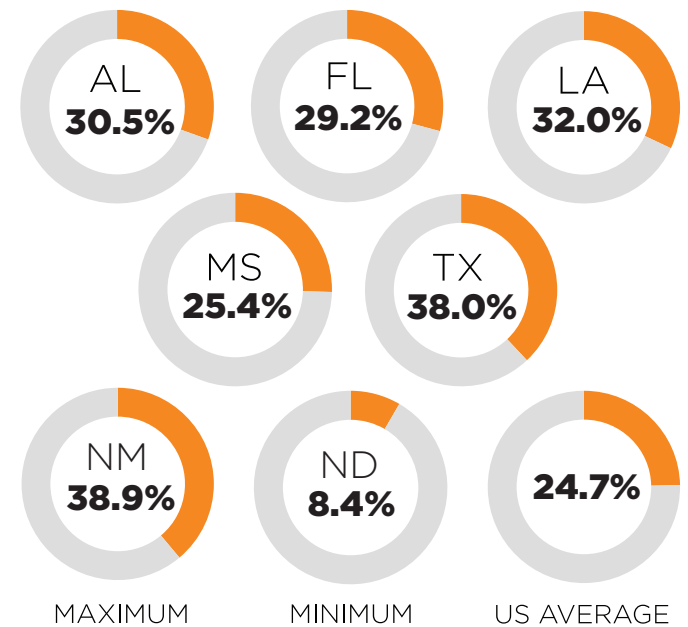
### Action Steps

State and community leaders must effectively utilize federal, state, and local resources to **develop and expand English as a Second Language (ESL) programs** to ensure that immigrants have the opportunity to become part of their new community, both socially and economically. Particularly helpful and effective are family literacy programs that allow parents and children to participate in shared literacy activities.<sup>75</sup>

Initiatives that **combine workforce development and language learning programs** put immigrants on a fast track to better social and economic outcomes.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, collaboration between various entities that serve immigrants in a community, such as early childhood education providers, public schools, community colleges, and job-training programs is essential to increasing the availability and quality of language services provided to immigrant families.

**State funding for school districts** must adequately account for the extra resources required to teach students of limited English proficiency.

### SHARE OF IMMIGRANTS WITH DIFFICULTY SPEAKING ENGLISH

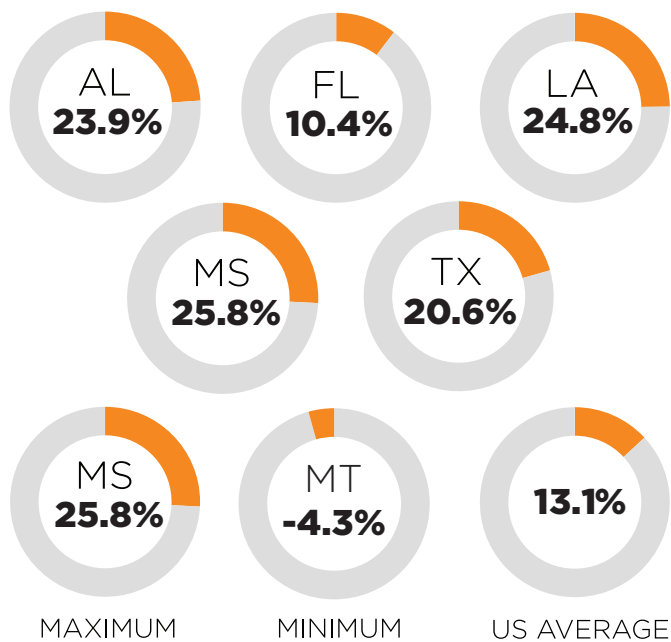


### Indicator 3 Gap in Health Insurance Coverage Between Immigrant and Native-Born Populations

Immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are less likely to have health insurance than native-born residents of the United States. As a result, many are forced to rely on a patchwork system of safety-net clinics and hospitals for free or reduced-price medical care or to pay out-of-pocket for health care services.<sup>77</sup> As with the general population, lack of health care coverage for immigrants often leads to poor health outcomes, lost wages, and financial instability. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops describe access to health care as a basic human right that should never be out of reach for individuals simply based on social or legal status.<sup>78</sup> The gap in health insurance rates between immigrant and native-born populations exists in both private and publicly provided coverage. Despite high rates of employment, significantly fewer immigrants have employer-sponsored health care than native-born employees, largely because the insurance is less likely to be offered at the workplace.<sup>79</sup>

Federal and state regulations also prevent many immigrants from enrolling in Medicaid and Medicare.<sup>80</sup> Creating barriers to health insurance not only puts immigrants and their children in jeopardy, it also weakens their ability to contribute to the common good. This is because immigrants' lack of health insurance, like that of the poor, puts them at risk of absence from work, financial instability, long-term health complications, and early death.

### GAP IN HEALTH INSURANCE RATE, IMMIGRANT AND NATIVE-BORN RESIDENTS



### Impact of COVID-19

As we go to press with this year's *Index*, we are aware of the incredible difficulties immigrants and refugees are experiencing because of the COVID-19 crisis. From immigrants working in essential jobs and unable to work from home to refugees confined to crowded detention centers, this population is exceptionally vulnerable to illness and economic hardships.

### Action Steps

Federal regulations generally prohibit immigrants from entering the Medicaid program unless they have been lawfully residing in the country for at least five years.<sup>81</sup> **Individual states**, however, **have flexibility** to allow some immigrants to obtain public health insurance regardless of their date of entry or immigration status. "Twenty-nine states, plus the District of Columbia... have chosen to provide Medicaid coverage to lawfully residing children and/or pregnant women without a 5-year waiting period. Twenty-one of these states also cover lawfully residing children or pregnant women in CHIP"<sup>82</sup> (Children's Health Insurance Program). Among the five Gulf South states, Florida and Texas allow immigrant children to participate in both Medicaid and CHIP without meeting the five-year waiting period.<sup>83</sup> There are six states—California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, and Washington—along with Washington, D.C., that have state-funded children's health insurance programs that provide coverage to all immigrant children who fall below a certain income threshold.<sup>84</sup> Reports indicate, however, that the Trump administration's hostility toward immigrants has deterred at least some parents from enrolling their eligible children in public health care programs for fear of attracting unwanted attention.<sup>85</sup> This is very unfortunate as it risks the health and even lives of these children. We applaud those states that have taken steps to expand access to their health care programs so newcomers to our nation may access needed care.

**Employers** also must take action to close the health insurance gap between the immigrant and native-born populations by offering health insurance on equivalent terms to all workers as required by federal law.

## THE INDEX OVER TIME

The *JustSouth Index* captures changes over time in both the relative rankings of states and in the poverty, race, and immigrant measures employed in the *Index*. From our first report in 2016 to this fourth (2019) edition, eight states shifted fifteen or more places in the rankings (see Table 1, page 7). None of these states were in the Gulf South.

**The most critical takeaway from the *Index* over a four-year period is the persistent presence of the Gulf South states at or near the bottom of our rankings. Four of these states—Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas—have never ranked higher than 46. The fifth Gulf South state, Florida, has hovered above the other four, but never higher than 35.**

This is a cause of much frustration and concern. Our region can do much better, and certainly our people deserve more secure social and economic conditions and brighter futures. It is incumbent on all of us, particularly those in positions of power, to do whatever is necessary to help uplift our states and our people.

## CONCLUSION

Catholic social teaching highlights the moral imperative for all members of society to promote the common good and the dignity of all persons. The *JustSouth Index* and its underlying dimension indices represent areas in which people of good will must focus their attention to improve the standing of all persons in each state. Each individual indicator is actionable and connected to concrete policy and program recommendations. While the Gulf South states rank low in the *Index*, it is well within the power and the duty of leaders and citizens in those states to change the current reality. Improving a state's ranking on the indicators, dimension indices, and the overall *JustSouth Index* will require that policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, business, labor, and community leaders, and citizens take action to work for policy and program changes that will more justly distribute opportunity and resources to all in society. In turn, these actions will serve the common good and create greater solidarity among residents of each state.



# JUSTSOUTH INDEX METHODOLOGY

POVERTY DIMENSION	RACIAL DISPARITY DIMENSION	IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION DIMENSION
<p><b>AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME OF HOUSEHOLDS IN LOWEST INCOME QUARTILE:</b></p> <p>Considers the total annual income* of each household in a state to isolate the households in the lowest income quartile. The mean income of households in the lowest income quartile in a state represents the state’s indicator value.</p> <p>Source: U.S. Census Bureau. <i>2018 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Household file</i></p>	<p><b>PERCENT OF SEGREGATED SCHOOLS:</b></p> <p>Considers the percentage of schools in a state that have a student population that is 90 percent or more one race and that student population is more than 5 percentage points different than the total public school population in the county in which the school is located.</p> <p>Source: National Center for Education Statistics, <i>Elementary/Secondary Information System, 2016-2017</i></p>	<p><b>DISCONNECTED IMMIGRANT YOUTH RATE:</b></p> <p>Compares the total number of foreign-born youth (persons aged 18-25 who were not born in the U.S.) in a state with the number of foreign-born youth who reported that they were not enrolled in school in the last three months and had not worked in the last week.</p> <p>Source: <i>2018 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Individual file</i></p>
<p><b>SHARE OF PERSONS IN LOWEST INCOME QUARTILE WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE:</b></p> <p>Compares the total number of persons between the ages of 16 and 64 who are in the lowest income quartile* in a state to the number of the persons in that income quartile who reported not having any form of public or private health insurance coverage at time of survey.</p> <p>Source: U.S. Census Bureau. <i>2018 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Individual file</i></p>	<p><b>WHITE-MINORITY WAGE GAP:</b></p> <p>Compares the hourly wages of working age (ages 18-64) white persons in a state to the hourly wages of working age people of color while controlling for age, level of education, and occupation using a weighted regression analysis to determine the isolated impact of minority status on earnings.</p> <p>Source: U.S. Department of Labor. <i>2018 Current Population Survey Microdata**</i></p>	<p><b>PERCENT OF IMMIGRANT POPULATION WITH DIFFICULTIES SPEAKING ENGLISH:</b></p> <p>Considers the number of foreign-born individuals in each state who entered the U.S. in 2014 or earlier who reported speaking English “not well” or “not at all” compared to the total population of foreign-born individuals in each state.</p> <p>Source: <i>2018 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Individual file</i></p>
<p><b>PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS IN LOWEST INCOME QUARTILE WITH A HIGH HOUSING COST BURDEN:</b></p> <p>Compares the total number of households in a state that are in the lowest income* quartile and the number of those households that report spending more than 30 percent of their income to cover housing costs.</p> <p>Source: U.S. Census Bureau. <i>2018 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Household file</i></p>	<p><b>WHITE-MINORITY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE GAP:</b></p> <p>Compares the percentage of white persons aged 16 years and over that reported being unemployed to the percentage of people of color who reported being unemployed. (Unemployment is defined as respondent did not have employment during the last week, was available for work, and had made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the preceding 4-week period.)</p> <p>Source: U.S. Department of Labor. <i>2018 Current Population Survey Microdata**</i></p>	<p><b>GAP IN HEALTH INSURANCE RATE BETWEEN IMMIGRANT AND NATIVE-BORN POPULATIONS:</b></p> <p>Considers the difference in the percentage of total foreign-born residents of a state who reported not having public or private health insurance in 2018 compared to the percentage of all native-born residents of the state who report not having public or private health insurance for persons between the ages of 16 and 64.</p> <p>Source: U.S. Census Bureau. <i>2018 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Individual file</i></p>

\* All indicators that are based on individual or household income include earned wages, commissions, bonuses, or tips; self-employment income; interest, dividends, net rental income, royalty income, or income from estates and trusts; Social Security or Railroad Retirement; Supplemental Security Income; public assistance or welfare payments; retirement, survivor or disability pensions; veterans’ payments; unemployment compensation; and child support payments.

\*\* Current Population Survey data were analyzed using the coded extracts provided by the Economic Policy Institute’s Economic Analysis and Research Network. All income and earnings data are reported in 2018 income-adjusted dollars.

Detailed statistical output and tables generated by Millicent Eib using the U.S. Census Bureau’s Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), U.S. Department of Labor’s Current Population Survey, and National Center for Education Statistics Elementary/ Secondary Information (ESLI) System.

# GULF SOUTH STATES 2019 INDICATOR VALUES

## POVERTY

STATE	AVERAGE INCOME OF POOR HOUSEHOLDS	PERCENT OF POOR WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE	PERCENT OF POOR WITH HIGH HOUSING COST BURDEN
AL	\$12,185	27.5%	60.5%
FL	\$15,632	28.6%	70.3%
LA	\$11,888	18.3%	63.3%
MS	\$10,826	33.5%	60.7%
TX	\$16,580	35.8%	68.5%
US (AVERAGE)	<b>\$16,830</b>	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>66.7%</b>

## RACIAL DISPARITY

STATE	PERCENT OF SEGREGATED SCHOOLS	WHITE-MINORITY WAGE GAP	WHITE-MINORITY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE GAP
AL	19.7%	16.8%	4.1%
FL	7.4%	12.6%	0.8%
LA	21.5%	16.8%	2.9%
MS	21.1%	15.6%	3.4%
TX	8.2%	14.2%	1.1%
US (AVERAGE)	<b>13.8%</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>

## IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION

STATE	SHARE OF IMMIGRANT DISCONNECTED YOUTH	SHARE OF IMMIGRANTS WITH DIFFICULTY SPEAKING ENGLISH	GAP IN HEALTH INSURANCE RATE, IMMIGRANT AND NATIVE- BORN RESIDENTS
AL	11.0%	30.5%	23.9%
FL	13.7%	29.2%	10.4%
LA	20.5%	32.0%	24.8%
MS	25.5%	25.4%	25.8%
TX	16.2%	38.0%	20.6%
US (AVERAGE)	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>24.7%</b>	<b>13.1%</b>



## JUSTSOUTH INDEX FACT SHEETS

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**Alabama**  
**Florida**  
**Louisiana**  
**Mississippi**  
**Texas**

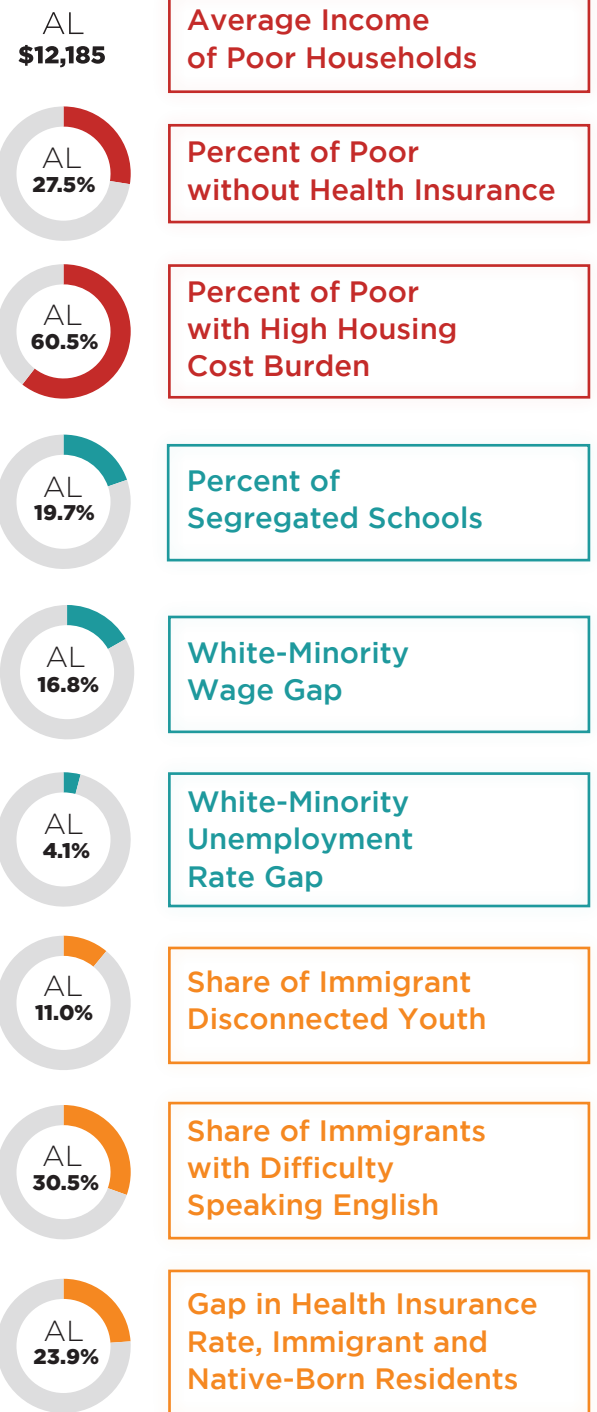
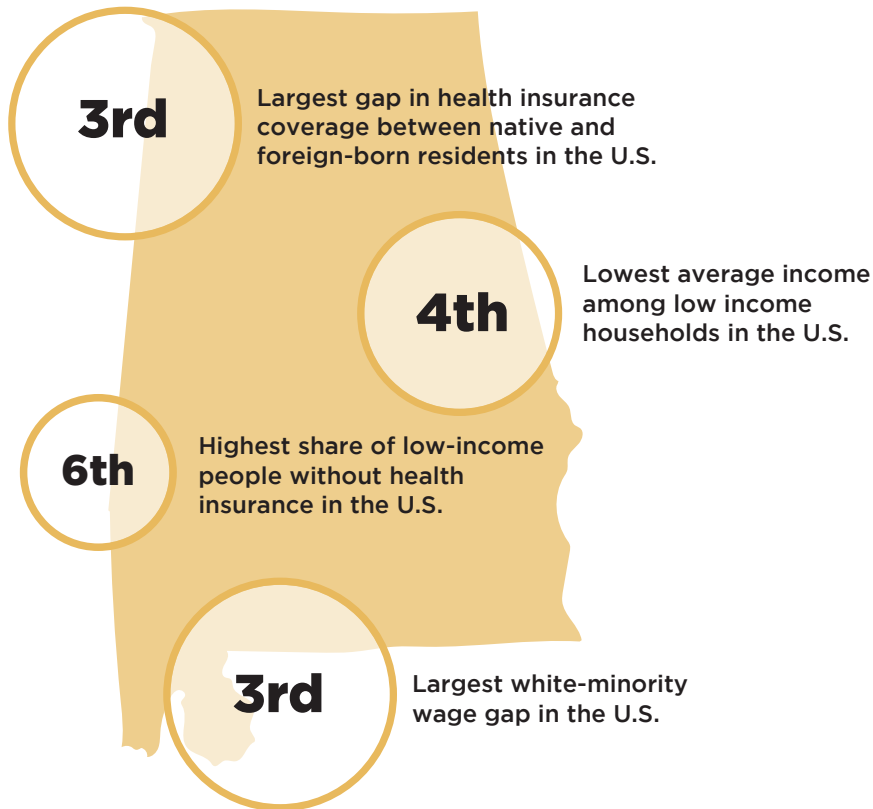


# JUSTSOUTH INDEX 2019 FACT SHEET

## ALABAMA

### JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (OUT OF 51)

<b>POVERTY</b>	<b>RACIAL DISPARITY</b>	<b>IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>
<b>49</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>48</b>



## ACTION STEPS

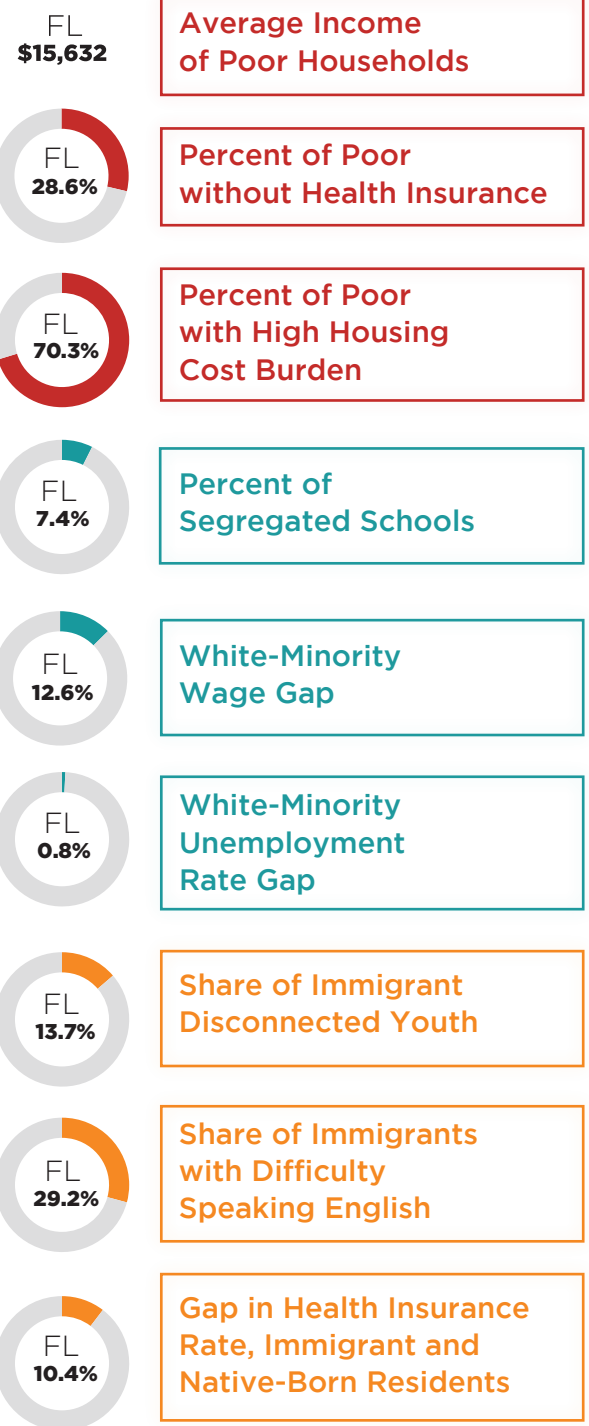
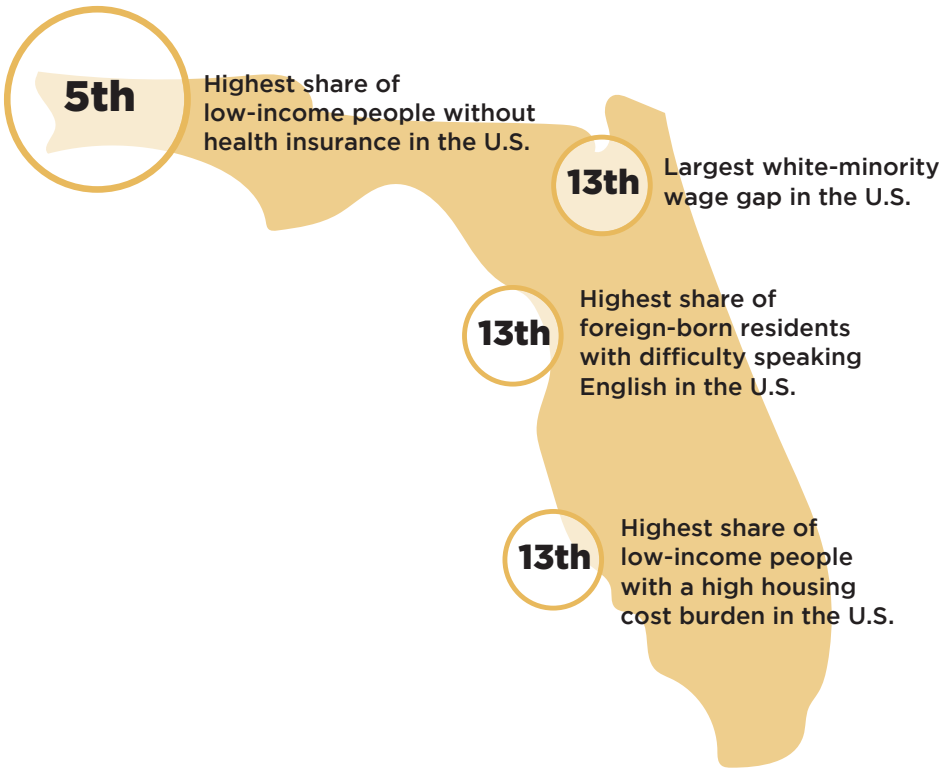
- ✓ Legislate a state minimum wage significantly higher than the federal minimum of \$7.25 per hour and rescind the 2016 preemption law banning municipal minimum wages.
- ✓ Expand Medicaid coverage as provided for in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and make available resources to educate all residents about the various benefits available to them via the ACA.
- ✓ Aggressively investigate discriminatory labor practices.
- ✓ Enact a state Earned Income Tax Credit program.

# JUSTSOUTH INDEX 2019 FACT SHEET

## FLORIDA

### JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (OUT OF 51)

<b>POVERTY</b>	<b>RACIAL DISPARITY</b>	<b>IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>
<b>48</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>37</b>



## ACTION STEPS

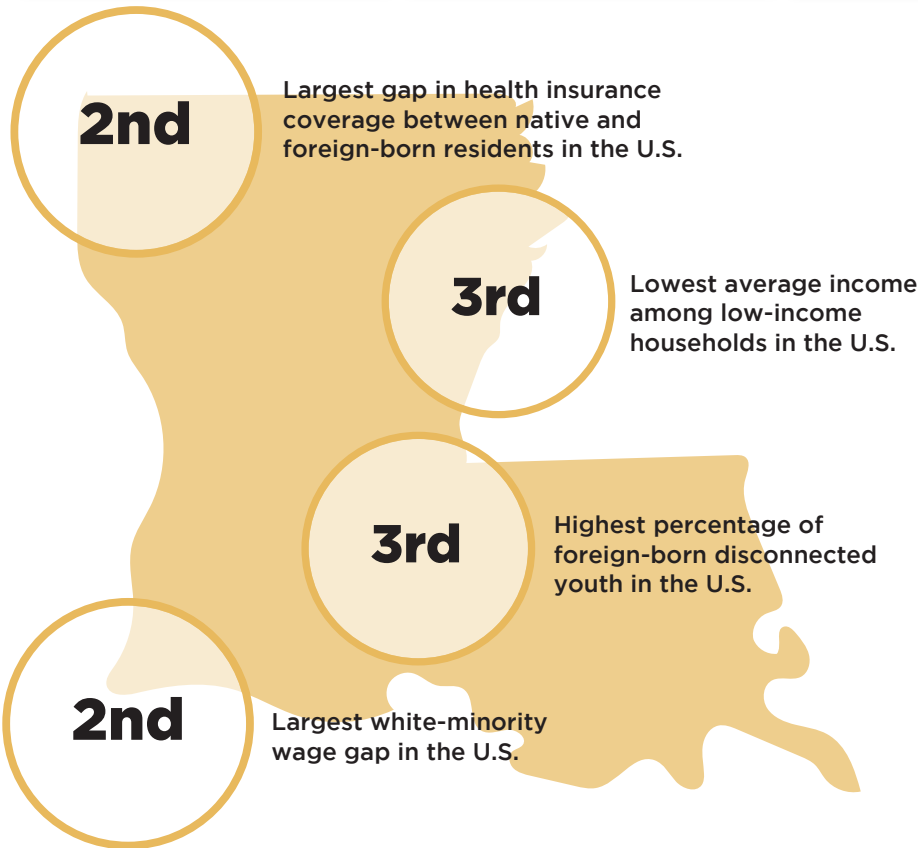
- ✓ Expand Medicaid coverage as provided for in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and make available resources to educate all residents about the various benefits available to them via the ACA.
- ✓ Aggressively investigate discriminatory labor practices.
- ✓ Assist non-English speakers by increasing funding and access to educational support services such as English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and community-based language instruction.
- ✓ Take action to increase the availability of affordable housing.

# JUSTSOUTH INDEX 2019 FACT SHEET

## LOUISIANA

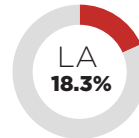
### JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (OUT OF 51)

<b>POVERTY</b>	<b>RACIAL DISPARITY</b>	<b>IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>
<b>44</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>

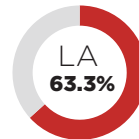


LA  
**\$11,888**

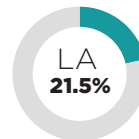
**Average Income of Poor Households**



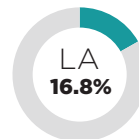
**Percent of Poor without Health Insurance**



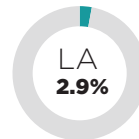
**Percent of Poor with High Housing Cost Burden**



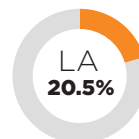
**Percent of Segregated Schools**



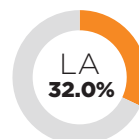
**White-Minority Wage Gap**



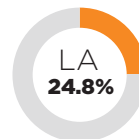
**White-Minority Unemployment Rate Gap**



**Share of Immigrant Disconnected Youth**



**Share of Immigrants with Difficulty Speaking English**



**Gap in Health Insurance Rate, Immigrant and Native-Born Residents**

## ACTION STEPS

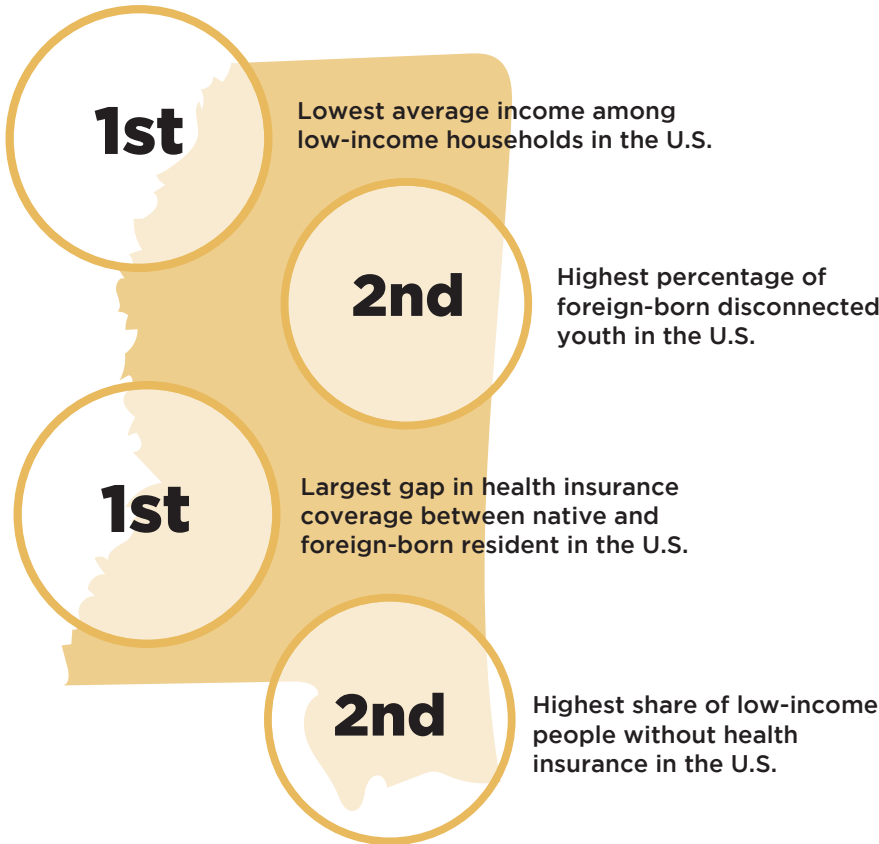
- ✓ Legislate a state minimum wage significantly higher than the federal minimum of \$7.25 per hour and rescind the 1997 preemption law banning municipal minimum wages.
- ✓ Aggressively investigate discriminatory labor practices.
- ✓ Make available more resources to educate all residents about various benefits available to them via the Affordable Care Act (ACA).
- ✓ Support foreign-born youth by increasing funding and access to GED and job training programs.

# JUSTSOUTH INDEX 2019 FACT SHEET

# MISSISSIPPI

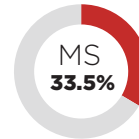
## JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (OUT OF 51)

<b>POVERTY</b>	<b>RACIAL DISPARITY</b>	<b>IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>
<b>51</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>51</b>

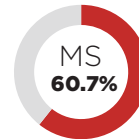


MS  
**\$10,826**

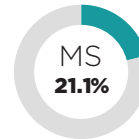
**Average Income of Poor Households**



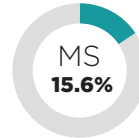
**Percent of Poor without Health Insurance**



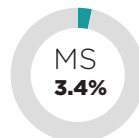
**Percent of Poor with High Housing Cost Burden**



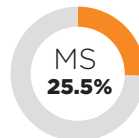
**Percent of Segregated Schools**



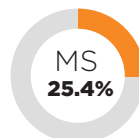
**White-Minority Wage Gap**



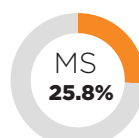
**White-Minority Unemployment Rate Gap**



**Share of Immigrant Disconnected Youth**



**Share of Immigrants with Difficulty Speaking English**



**Gap in Health Insurance Rate, Immigrant and Native-Born Residents**

## ACTION STEPS

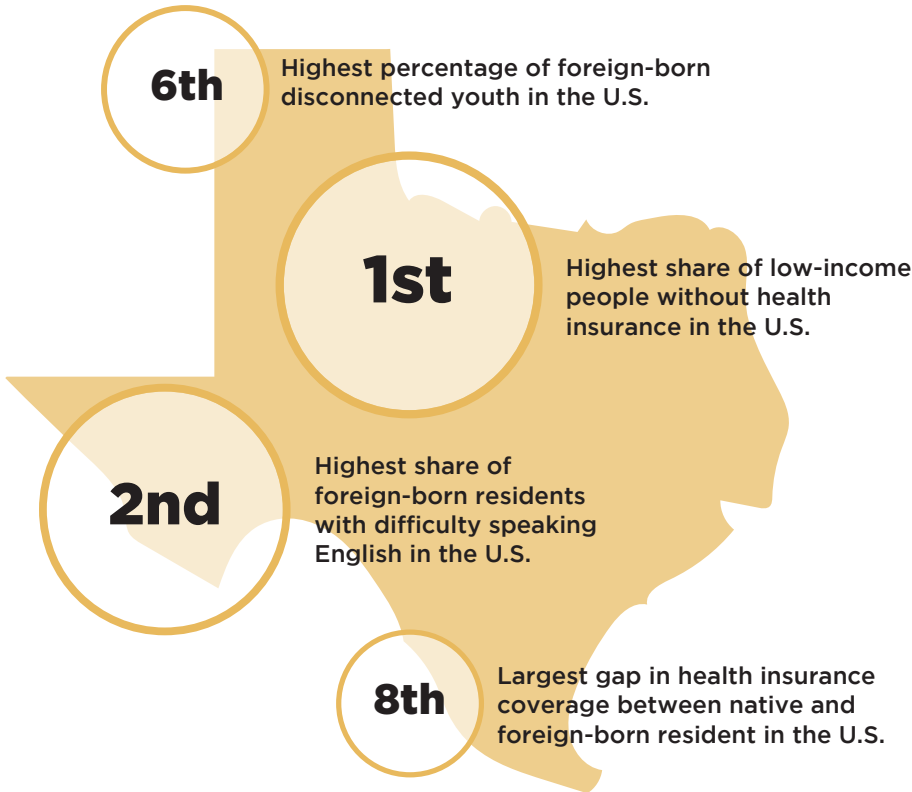
- ✓ Legislate a state minimum wage significantly higher than the federal minimum of \$7.25 per hour and rescind the 2013 preemption law banning municipal minimum wages.
- ✓ Expand Medicaid coverage as provided for in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and make available resources to educate all residents about the various benefits available to them via the ACA.
- ✓ Support foreign-born youth by increasing funding and access to GED and job training programs.
- ✓ Enact a state Earned Income Tax Credit program.

# JUSTSOUTH INDEX 2019 FACT SHEET

## TEXAS

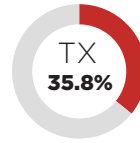
### JUSTSOUTH INDEX RANKINGS (OUT OF 51)

<b>POVERTY</b>	<b>RACIAL DISPARITY</b>	<b>IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>
<b>50</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>

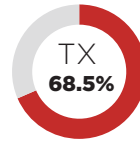


TX  
**\$16,580**

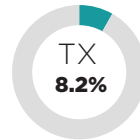
**Average Income of Poor Households**



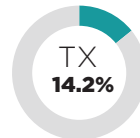
**Percent of Poor without Health Insurance**



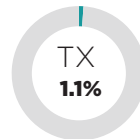
**Percent of Poor with High Housing Cost Burden**



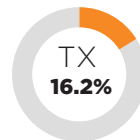
**Percent of Segregated Schools**



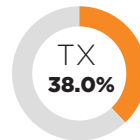
**White-Minority Wage Gap**



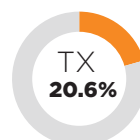
**White-Minority Unemployment Rate Gap**



**Share of Immigrant Disconnected Youth**



**Share of Immigrants with Difficulty Speaking English**



**Gap in Health Insurance Rate, Immigrant and Native-Born Residents**

## ACTION STEPS

- ✓ Expand Medicaid coverage as provided for in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and make available resources to educate all residents about the various benefits available to them via the ACA.
- ✓ Support foreign-born youth by increasing funding and access to GED and job training programs.
- ✓ Assist non-English speakers by increasing funding and access to educational support services such as English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and community-based language instruction.
- ✓ Legislate a state minimum wage significantly higher than the federal minimum of \$7.25 per hour and rescind the 2003 preemption law banning municipal minimum wages.

**ENDNOTES:**

- 1 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. (2007). *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 202.
- 2 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1999). *Sharing Catholic social teaching: challenges and directions, reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops*. Washington, DC: USCCB, pp. 4-6.
- 3 Catholic Church. (1994). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, No. 1906.
- 4 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, op. cit., 169.
- 5 United Nations Human Development Programme. (2018). *Human Development Reports*. Retrieved from United Nations Human Development Programme website: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2018-update>.
- 6 Jahan, S. (2017, October 17). *The human development index – what it is and what it is not*. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/hdi-what-it-is>.
- 7 United Nations Human Development Programme. (2016). *Technical Notes: Calculating the Human Development Indices*. Retrieved from United Nations Development Programme website: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2016\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2016_technical_notes.pdf).
- 8 This and other information included in this report on the federal and state minimum wages came from the website of the National Conference of State Legislatures: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-minimum-wage-chart.aspx>.
- 9 Information on Medicaid expansion including its status in the various states was found at the website of the Kaiser Family Foundation: <https://www.kff.org/healthreform/state-indicator/state-activity-around-expanding-medicaid-under-the-affordable-care-act/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=7B%22collid%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>.
- 10 National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1986). *Economic Justice for All: pastoral letter on Catholic social teaching and the U.S. economy*. Washington, D.C. U.S. Catholic Conference, 170.
- 11 Evans, G. & English, K. (2002). The environment of poverty: multiple stressor exposure, psychophysiological stress, and socioemotional adjustment. *Child Development*, 73, 1238-1248.
- 12 *Economic Justice for All*, op. cit., 185.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Chappelow, J. (2020, April 21). The Great Recession. *Investopedia.com*.
- 15 Duffin, E. (2019, September 24). Poverty rate in the United States 1990 to 2018. *Statista*.
- 16 Zandt, A. (2015, November 3). What went wrong with the South? *Facing South*.
- 17 Sherter, A. (2019, May 23). Nearly 40% of Americans can't cover a surprise \$400 expense. *CBS News*.
- 18 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). (2020, July). *A Profile of the Working Poor, 2018*. Retrieved from the BLS website: <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/working-poor/2018/home.htm#:~:text=About%2038.1%20million%20people%2C%20or,to%20the%20U.S.%20Census%20Bureau.&text=The%20working%20poor%20rate%20of,or%20more%20was%204.5%20percent>.
- 19 Poverty threshold from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/2018-poverty-guidelines>.
- 20 This and other information included in this report on state minimum wage laws come from the website of the National Conference of State Legislatures: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-minimum-wage-chart.aspx>.
- 21 Economic Policy Institute. (2019, February 5). *Why America Needs a \$15 Minimum Wage*. Retrieved from the EPI website: <https://www.epi.org/publication/whyamerica-needs-a-15-minimum-wage/>.
- 22 Florida, Richard. (2019, April 26). *In Praise of a Higher Minimum Wage*. Retrieved from City Lab website: <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2019/04/minimum-wage-by-state-jobs-data-employment-economic-research/587992/>.
- 23 National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). (2020, July 15). *EITC Enactments 2009-2019*. Retrieved from the NCSL website: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-earned-income-tax-credit-enactments.aspx>.
- 24 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). *State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs Do Not Provide Adequate Safety Net for Poor Families*. Retrieved on August 22, 2020 from the CBPP website: <https://www.cbpp.org/state-temporary-assistance-for-needy-families-programs-do-not-provide-adequate-safety-net-for-poor>.
- 25 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). (2019, June 25). *Policy Basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*. Retrieved from the CBPP website: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/policy-basics-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap#:~:text=How%20Much%20Do%20Households%20Receive,meal%20in%20fiscal%20year%202018>.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 United States Catholic Conference. (1981). *Health and health care: a pastoral letter from the American Catholic Bishops*. Retrieved from the USCCB website: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/health-care/upload/health-and-health-care-pastoral-letter-pdf-09-01-43.pdf>.
- 28 Medicaid is jointly funded by the federal government and the states. The federal government pays states for a specified percentage of program expenditures, called the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP). FMAP varies by state based on criteria such as per capita income. State FMAP ranges from 50% to 78%. Source: Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF). (2019). Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) for Medicaid and Multiplier. Retrieved from the KFF website: <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/federal-matching-rate-and-multiplier/?currentTimeframe=0&rtModel=7B%22collid%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>.
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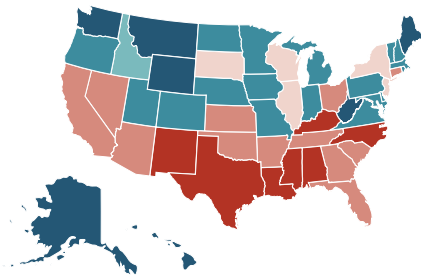
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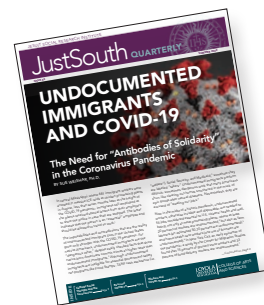
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