

Narrowing The Gap



Economic Inequality

Food Security and Race in the U.S.

The complexity of food security in the U.S. is well-documented by groups like the U.S.D.A. In compiling their annual statistical analysis of food security, the [U.S.D.A.](#) notes how job loss, divorce, or other unexpected events can suddenly propel households into episodes of food insecurity even though their incomes may be above the poverty line. Food insecurity is disproportionately high among racial and ethnic minorities, especially those in households with children.

Black households are the most likely to live in households with very low food security (10% of all households with very low food security) while whites have the lowest rates of very low food security (4.4% of all households with very low food security). Food stamp participation also reflects racial gaps; blacks are 2x as likely as whites to have used this program once in their lives according to [Pew](#) (31% vs. 15%).

What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

Hunger and poor nutrition can have severe consequences for people's health and well-being and jeopardizes children's development and learning.

In NYC, food insecurity varies considerably by race/ethnicity. The percentage of Hispanics (29.5%) and blacks (28.8%) with low or very low food security represented more than 6x the percentage among Asians (4.7%) and more than 3x the percentage among whites (8.7%).

More than one in 10 children (11.5%) experienced food insecurity, and racial and ethnic differences were especially pronounced among this group: roughly a quarter of black children (22.6%) had low or very low food security compared to 8.8% of Hispanic children, 7.8% of white children, and 5.1% of Asian children.

Justice Inequality

Civic Engagement in the U.S.

In the digital age, civic engagement and political participation have changed considerably. Many choose to engage in local politics online, through social media groups or online advocacy campaigns. Yet [Pew Research](#) finds many people still engage in these activities in more direct ways (e.g., in-person participation in civic activities, groups, events, and meetings).

Nationally these rates of participation vary by race: [Pew](#) finds 50% of whites participate directly, 48% of blacks participate directly, and 36% of Hispanics participate directly (note: [Pew](#) did not include Asians in their measurements).

Trust levels in federal government can have an outsized effect on participation levels in local civic activities. [Pew](#) studied trust level differences among demographic groups and found differences to be pronounced. Among whites, 15% said the federal government can be trusted to do the right thing "always/most of the time" while 68% indicated it does "only some of the time." Fifteen percent of whites said it "never" does. These rates were higher for blacks and Hispanics; 23% of blacks agreed with "always/most of the time," 66% with "only some of the time," and 11% with "never." For Hispanics, 28% said "always/most of the time," 63% with "only some of the time," and 6% with "never."

What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

In NYC, we found marked differences by race in the likelihood of attending public meetings, an indicator that speaks to civic engagement levels. Citywide, 7.3% of blacks, 6.8% of whites, 4.1% of Hispanics, and 1.6% of Asians said that they had attended one or more public meetings in the past year. Black respondents were more than 4x more likely to do so than Asians. Public meeting attendance rates were higher for all racial groups in 2014; 10.4% for blacks, 10.1% for whites, 5.8% for Hispanics, and 2.2% for Asians although the black-to-Asian disparity was similar.

The higher than average rates of black participation in public meeting attendance is promising for a variety of reasons. Organizations like the National League of Cities (NLC) work to improve civic participation levels, especially among racial minorities. NLC recently published a report, "[Bright Spots in Community Engagement](#)," which documents some best practices for boosting participation levels.

Among their recommendations were for cities to use new tools and strategies to communicate information about meetings, to select media platforms that reach a broad spectrum of people, to promote positive outcomes that come from civic engagement, and to commit to sustained efforts at building engagement.

Narrowing The Gap, Volume 4, February 2016

In this issue of *Narrowing The Gap*, we focus on one of the groups adversely affected by inequality: **Racial and Ethnic Minorities**. Other issues will describe inequalities faced by children, immigrants, individuals currently in jail or on probation, individuals living in poverty, individuals with a physical or intellectual disability, individuals with less than a high school diploma, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer individuals, religious minorities, seniors, single parents, and women.

Health Inequality

Racial Disparities in Health Outcomes

Advances in medicine give Americans longer and healthier lives, but not all groups share in them equally. Health disparities are closely linked with social, economic, and environmental disadvantage, and often driven by social conditions. Living under highly unequal social conditions, racial and ethnic minorities also suffer higher rates of morbidity and mortality as compared to their white counterparts.

A 2013 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report, [Health Disparities and Inequalities](#), found poverty rates were higher among minorities, and that those in poverty were much less likely to report their health as excellent or very good. Poverty is strongly correlated with a lack of health insurance and healthy food options.

In part for these reasons, blacks and Hispanics also have higher rates of potentially preventable hospitalizations than whites. According to the CDC, coronary heart disease and stroke accounted for the largest inequalities in life expectancy between black and white Americans despite highly effective preventative treatment.

What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

In NYC, we found inequalities were greatest in the area of Health. Ten of the 16 indicators under this theme compare racial groups, demonstrating the sizable racial and ethnic disparities in this area. Huge disparities exist in key health topic areas: Access to Health Care and Quality of Health Care.

Going without needed health care can exacerbate existing health conditions and put individuals at risk for severe emergency health events like heart attacks or diabetic attacks. In accessing health care, our research found that a significantly higher number of Hispanic (15.2%) and black (12%) New Yorkers report going without needed health care than white (8.4%) New Yorkers.

Quality of Health Care was not only the lowest scoring Health topic, but the lowest scoring topic in the Equality Indicators overall. Looking at diseases that typically can be prevented or managed with adequate health care, we found wide disparities. For example blacks are 10x more likely to have chlamydia compared to whites, 5x more likely to be hospitalized for asthma compared to whites, and 3x more likely to be hospitalized for diabetes compared to whites. Immigrants also faced disparities: tuberculosis rates were 9x higher among foreign-born than U.S.-born New Yorkers.

Education Inequality

The Racial Gap in High School Graduation Rates Is Narrowing But Still Large

According to the [U.S. Department of Education](#), the high school graduation rates for Hispanic, black, white, and Asian/Pacific Islander students all increased between 2012-13 and 2013-14 academic years, but wide racial and ethnic gaps in graduation rates remain. The most pronounced is the black-Asian/Pacific Islander gap. Blacks' graduation rates in 2013-14 were 72.5% versus Asian/Pacific Islanders' which was 89.4%, a 16.9 point difference.



*What happens to
a dream
deferred?
Does it dry up,
like a raisin in the
sun?
Or does it
explode?*
-Langston Hughes

What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

In NYC, there were large racial and ethnic disparities in the percentage of high school graduates receiving an Advanced Regents diploma, which requires students to receive a score of 65 or higher on nine Regents exams across a range of subjects. More than half of Asians (57.0%) received an Advanced diploma compared to 11.8% of blacks; these percentages were quite similar to the previous year for both blacks (11.8%) and Asians (57.6%). The percentage among whites (39.6%) fell between the two, while the percentage among Hispanics (15.7%) was closer to that of blacks.

Though we did not study enrollment in gifted-and-talented programs in NYC, [The Atlantic](#) has recently reported that blacks and Hispanics have lower enrollment rates in such programs:

“Black and Latino students are far less likely than their white and Asian peers to be assigned to gifted-and-talented programs. The odds of getting assigned to such programs are 66% lower for black students and 47% lower for Latino students than they are for their white counterparts.”

The article draws from a [new report](#) published by Vanderbilt University which investigates why these students are underrepresented. The report found that non-black teachers were significantly less likely to refer black students to gifted-and-talented programs, and the authors posit that teacher bias plays a large role in existing disparities.

The Equality Indicators is a project of the [Institute for State and Local Governance](#) (ISLG) of the City University of New York.

The project measures progress towards greater equality across six themes related to **Economy, Education, Health, Housing, Justice, and Services** using 96 indicators. Each indicator is scored from 1 to 100, where 1 represents the most inequality and 100 the least inequality. For more information please visit our website at equalityindicators.org and follow us on twitter [@equalityISLG](https://twitter.com/equalityISLG)