

Working Paper #4

Racial Disparities in Delaware Remain Deep: Fifty Years After the Kerner Commission Report and the Wilmington Riots

Abstract

Between 1965 and 1968, race relations in the United States existed in a state of confusion that resulted in civil disturbances. Wilmington, Delaware was one of many cities that experienced civil unrest and racial tension. In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to answer three fundamental questions regarding the civil disturbances: what happened, why it happened, and what can be done to prevent it from happening again? The Commission would later become known as the Kerner Commission after Otto Kerner, the chair of the Commission. In 1968, the trajectory of race relations and racial disparities in the quality of life and standards of living were such that the Kerner Commission wrote: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one White, separate and unequal." The top four grievances identified by Blacks in late 1960 according to the Kerner Commission Report were: 1) unethical police practices, 2) unemployment and underemployment, 3) inadequate housing and 4) inadequate education. This working paper aims to consider if the racial disparities that led to civil unrest in Delaware in 1968 continue to persist 50 years after the Kerner Commission Report in Delaware. The findings show that nearly 50 years after the Kerner Commission Report and the Wilmington Riots:

- 1) racial disparities in education, employment, income, and housing remain a serious issue in Delaware,
- 2) Blacks and Whites differ in their perceptions of what are the most important problems facing the state, and
- 3) racial differences in perceptions of fairness of police practices and the justice system remain deep

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In 1968, Wilmington, Delaware was one of many cities that experienced civil unrest after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Blacks in Wilmington showed anger and frustration over racial differences in the quality of life, police misconduct and the state of race relations. For several days, groups of young Blacks engaged in civil unrest. Former Mayor James Baker, then a social worker, said the behavior of those young people was a reaction to years of inequality that included living in inadequate housing and dealing with police brutality.¹

Between 1965 and 1968, race relations in the U.S. existed in a state of confusion that resulted in civil disturbances all across the nation. In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (The Kerner Commission) to answer three fundamental questions: what happened, why it happened, and what could be done to prevent it from happening again.² The Kerner Commission noted that the causes of civil unrest and the nature of the problem itself were very complex with many overarching factors.

Among the causes of civil unrest in the mid-1960s according to the Kerner Report, were frustration with “unfulfilled expectations’ and a feeling of “powerlessness” among Blacks. The Commission noted that among the most fundamental contributing factors were racial prejudice and White racism. The Commission pointed out that pervasive racial discrimination and racism led to segregation in employment, education, and housing that impeded Blacks’ economic progress. Also, the Commission concluded that many police (and police departments) reflected, and were symbolic of, the negative racial attitudes and racism of White America.

The top four grievances identified by Blacks according to the Kerner Commission Report were: 1) police practices, 2) unemployment and underemployment, 3) inadequate housing and 4) inadequate education. The Kerner Commission ultimately concluded “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, on White—separate and unequal.”

This working paper aims to consider if the racial disparities that led to civil unrest in Delaware in 1968 continue to persist 50 years after the Kerner Commission Report and the Wilmington Riots. In pondering this question, there are three objectives. First, to examine differences in standards of living along racial lines in Delaware today. Second, to consider the level of consistency in Blacks and Whites’ perceptions of the most important issues facing the state of Delaware. Lastly, to scrutinize the nature of Blacks and Whites’ perceptions of the behavior of local law enforcement in Delaware.

Although these objectives alone do not begin to explain the nature of racial disparities in Delaware a half-century after the Kerner Commission Report, they do serve as a starting point toward understanding the nature of racial inequality today. Today, implicit bias and institutional racism have replaced overt racial discrimination and racial hostility. Issues

¹ Adam Taylor, 2008. “Somebody threw a brick... and all hell broke loose.” The News Journal, April 6th

² REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMISSION ON CIVIL DISORDERS (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), pp. 1-29.

about different and unfair treatment by law enforcement and the justice system continue to be a problem today. Finally, this discussion is significant because of the continuation of covert discrimination, unconscious bias and racism in the labor market, housing segregation, and differences in educational outcomes impede progress toward reducing racial disparities in the standards of living in Delaware.

Disparities in Standards of Living

During Wilmington's 1968 civil disturbances, the average Black family in Delaware earned 59.6 cents for every dollar earned by the average White family. In 1970, 25 in every 100 Black families lived in poverty compared to six in every 100 White families. The difference between the percentages of Black and White's graduating from high school in the late 1960s was 29.5 percent, and the college graduation gap was 9.5 percent.³

By 2015, as shown in Table 1, between 1970 and 2015 the difference in the annual family incomes of Blacks and Whites had improved by 21 cents on the dollar. In 2015, the average Black family in Delaware earned 81 cents for every dollar earned by the average White family. Nevertheless, the average White family had fifteen thousand dollars more to spend annually than the average Black family. In 2015, the average Black household earned 72 cents for every dollar earned by the average White household. What is important to note here is that household income is a better indicator of well-being and racial disparities than median family income.

The per capita income for Blacks in Delaware was \$23,359, while the per capita income was \$34,522 for Whites. This difference means if we took all of the money Blacks and Whites earned respectively as a group in 2015 and distributed evenly within the respective populations, each Black person would get twenty-three thousand dollars and each White person would get thirty-three thousand dollars.

In Delaware, there has been no significant closure in the poverty gap between Blacks and Whites since 1970. In 2015, two out of every ten Blacks in Delaware were in poverty compared only one in ten Whites. The poverty rate for Black families in 2015 was twice that of White families. Although there has been a decline in the overall percentage of Black families in poverty since 1970, the decline for Black families was comparable to that of White families. The percentage of Black children in poverty was 22.3 percentage points greater than for the poverty rate for White children. Nearly one-third of Blacks under the age of 18 in Delaware live in poverty compared to only one-tenth of White children.

³ Source: SU-96-9 Estimates of the Population of States, Counties, Places, and Minor Civil Divisions: Annual Time Series Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC 20233. Contact: Statistical Information Staff, Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census 301-457-2422

Table 1: Differences in the indicators of quality of life and standards of living along racial lines in Delaware: 2015

	Whites (non-Hispanics)	Blacks	Difference
Median family income	78,909	63,857	15,052
Median household income	65,267	47,189	18,078
Per capita income	34,522	23,359	11,163
Poverty Individual	9.6	20.2	10.6
Poverty family	6.3	15.3	9.0
Poverty Children (under 18)	9.1	31.4	22.3
High School Graduates	92.0	87.5	4.5
College Graduates	32.7	22.9	9.8
Unemployment rate (16 to 64 years of age)	3.9	7.1	3.2
Home ownership	79.5	51.3	28.2

Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Studies 1-year estimates

Educationally, the high school attainment gap between Black and White populations in Delaware has closed significantly since the 1970s. In 2015, approximately 92 percent of Whites were high school graduates compared to 87.5 percent for Blacks. However, when we look at the college graduation gap, the numbers tell a different story. Over the last 45 years, the difference in the college graduation rate between Black and White Delawareans has increased. In 2015, 32.7 percent of White Delawareans were college educated compared to only 22.9 percent of Black Delawareans. In 2015, the unemployment rate for Blacks, between the ages of 16 and 64, was nearly doubled that of Whites. Roughly, 7.1 percent of Blacks were unemployed compared only 3.9 percent of Whites. Regarding home ownership, one of the primary measures of wealth, 79.5 percent of Whites owned their homes compared to just 51.3 percent of Blacks.

Racial disparities between Blacks and Whites' quality of life in Delaware's three counties and largest city, remains deep nearly fifty years after the 1968 riots, as shown in Table 2. In 2015, the greatest parity in the measures of well-being at the county level between Blacks and Whites was in Kent County. The gap in median household income between Blacks and Whites in Kent County was less than \$1,000, and the difference in median family income was less than \$2,000. The difference in the per capita income was less than \$5,000. Although significant differences remain in the levels of poverty between Blacks and Whites in Kent County, the gaps were not as substantial as they were between the two groups in New Castle and Sussex counties. Differences in educational attainment between Blacks and Whites in Kent were not significant. Roughly, 87 percent of both populations were high school graduates, and 22 percent were college graduates. Kent County also had the smallest racial disparities in home ownership.

In general, Blacks in Sussex County are less prosperous than Blacks in Kent or New Castle counties. When compared to other Blacks in Kent and New Castle Counties, Blacks in Sussex County had lower incomes, higher rates of poverty, there are fewer high school and college graduates, and their unemployment rate was much larger than Blacks

in the other two counties. For purposes of comparison, Whites in Sussex County measures of well-being were comparable to Whites in Kent County but differed from Whites in New Castle County. In Sussex County, for every dollar earned by White households, Black households earned sixty-one cents. The poverty rate for Blacks in Sussex County was triple that of Whites. The poverty rate for Black children was 22 percentage points higher than it was for White children in the county. The educational attainment gaps (high school and college graduates) were significantly larger between Blacks and Whites in Sussex County when compared to similar differences in the other two counties. Although Blacks in Sussex County had the highest unemployment rate, the unemployment gap between Blacks and Whites was not measurably different from that between the two racial groups in New Castle and Kent Counties.

Table 2: Measures of quality of life and standards of living along racial lines in Delaware’s three counties and largest city: 2015

	Kent County		New Castle County		Sussex County		Wilmington City	
	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
Median Household Income	58,398	57,502	72,198	47,694	59,005	36,041	65,218	28,609
Median family Income	68,664	70,269	90,748	62,421	66,618	54,143	81,828	36,140
Per capita income	28,485	23,871	36,853	23,799	33,717	20,177	46,068	15,844
Poverty Individual	9.9	19.3	6.7	19.5	7.2	24.9	10.7	32.1
Poverty family	6.2	13.7	3.4	15.4	5.6	17.6	N/A	28.7
Poverty Children (under 18)	14.5	28.8	6.5	32.0	10.6	33.1	8.7	43.9
High School Graduates	87.2	86.5	93.5	88.3	89.6	75.0	92.5	80.9
College Graduates	22.4	22.1	38.2	23.1	26.0	8.8	48.6	12.1
Unemployment rate (16 to 64 years of age)	5.0	6.3	5.5	7.1	6.2	8.0	3.1	8.6
Homeownership	73.9	56.8	79.1	48.8	83.4	57.1	56.4	38.5

In New Castle County, the state’s most populous and urban county, for every one dollar earned by White households, Black households earned sixty-six cents. The difference between Blacks and Whites family incomes was sixty-eight cents to the dollar. Whites in New Castle had the lowest rate of poverty in the state. The rate of poverty for Blacks in New Castle County was comparable to that of Blacks in Kent County but lower than Blacks in Sussex. The poverty gap between Blacks and Whites in New Castle was larger than the difference between Blacks and Whites in Sussex but smaller than the poverty gap in Kent. Disparities in educational attainment and unemployment rates between Blacks and Whites were not as small as they were in Kent County, but not as large as they were in Sussex County. The largest homeownership gap was between Blacks and Whites in New Castle County.

New Castle County's figures were skewed higher because it included Wilmington's data (the state's largest city). Overall, the racial disparities between Blacks and Whites in Wilmington were significantly higher than the differences between Blacks and Whites in the other geographic units. The average White family in Wilmington had \$45,688 more to spend annually than the average Black family in Wilmington. The high school completion rate for Whites in Wilmington was 11.6 percentage points higher than Blacks. The college completion rate in Wilmington was 36.5 percentage points higher among Whites. The unemployment rate among Blacks in Wilmington was more than five percentage points higher among Blacks than Whites. Although the homeownership rate among Whites in Wilmington was much smaller than the rate for Whites in the state's three counties, the homeownership rate among Whites was 17.9 percentage points higher than that of Blacks. The median family income for Black families in Wilmington was \$28,609 compared to the \$62,421 median income for Black families in New Castle County at-large. In Wilmington, the Black families earned only 44 cents for every dollar earned by White families. The poverty rate for Black children in Wilmington was ten percentage points higher than Black children living outside of the city. Ironically, the educational attainment of Blacks in Wilmington was greater than Blacks in Sussex County but significantly lower than Blacks in Kent County and New Castle County (as a group). Blacks in Wilmington had the highest unemployment rate and the lowest homeownership rate in the state. Racial disparities in the measures of quality of life and standards of living were significantly smaller between Blacks and Whites in Dover the state's second largest city (see Appendix).

Most Important Issues Facing Delaware

In 2014, a poll by the University of Delaware's Center for Political Communication showed Black and White Delawareans differing significantly, on what they thought were the most pressing problems facing Delaware.⁴ As shown in Table 3, among White Delawareans, the issues they felt were among the most important facing the state were: employment/wages (28.1 percent), crime/public safety (13.9 percent), education/school funding, (11.9 percent), and social welfare (10.1 percent).

Among Blacks, two issues stood out as the most significant problems facing Delaware. Nearly 70 percent of the Black respondents felt that employment/wage and public safety related matters were among the most important problems facing the state. Thirty-three-point-six percent of Black Delawareans thought that employment/wages were among the most important problems facing Delaware, and 35.4 percent of Blacks identified public safety as the most important problem. The percentage of Blacks thinking that public safety was the most important issue facing the state was more than double the rate of Whites.

⁴ University of Delaware's Center for Political Communication's 2014 Delaware Politics Survey. The 2014 Delaware Politics Survey is based on 900 telephone interviews with a representative sample of Delawareans. Roughly, 450 were to adults on landline and 450 on cell phones. The data was collect between September 10 and 22, 2014 and conducted in English only. When the appropriate weigh was applied there, were 615 Black respondents and represented 19.8 percent of the sample.

While the previous data sought to profile differences in perceptions of the most important problems between racial groups in the state, Table 4 sought to examine differences *within* the Black population. Individual opinions on the most important problems facing Delaware were predicated on where they live. Table 4 attempts to shed light on perceptions of Blacks of the important problems facing the state, based on the racial composition of the Black population. When we divide the Black population by

Table 3: Think the most important problem facing Delaware by race (2014)

	White Delawareans	Black Delawareans
Employment/Wages (includes jobs and unemployment minimum wages)	28.1	33.6
Economy/Economic Development	7.8	3.3
Education/School Funding	11.9	7.9
Social Welfare (health care, welfare and money issues)	10.1	4.2
Fiscal Matters (taxes, budgets, deficits, revenue)	4.8	1.8
Public safety and criminal justice system (violence, crime, drugs, prisons and police issues)	13.9	35.4
Environmental/ Infrastructure/traffic issues (including roads, planning, building)	5.6	4.4
Governance and government affairs (Government overreach, corruption, politicians, etc.)	7.4	1.8
Other (includes immigration, morals, values, social issues, something else)	10.4	7.6

zip codes, zip codes where Blacks were 30 percent or more of the population and those where the Black population was less than 30 percent. As it works out, the zip codes with

the proportionately larger Black populations tended to be urban (i.e., Wilmington and Dover).⁵

Issues about public safety were important to more than one-third of both groups, as shown in Table 4. A slightly larger percentage of suburban Blacks (37.0 percent) than urban Blacks (34.0 percent) identified a public safety issue. Close to 40 percent of the Black respondents, living in an urban area, identified an employment/wage-related issue as among the most important facing the state, compared to less than 28 percent of the Black suburban respondents. A notably larger percent of urban Black respondents also identified the economy/economic development and environmental/infrastructure/traffic issues as important. On the one hand, a notably higher percent of suburban Blacks identified a social welfare-related issue as among the most important facing the state. The significance occurs when Blacks were further broken down into sub-groups, they only differed marginally in their perceptions of the most important problem facing Delaware.

Table 4: Think the most important problem facing Delaware by racial composition zip code and location (2014)

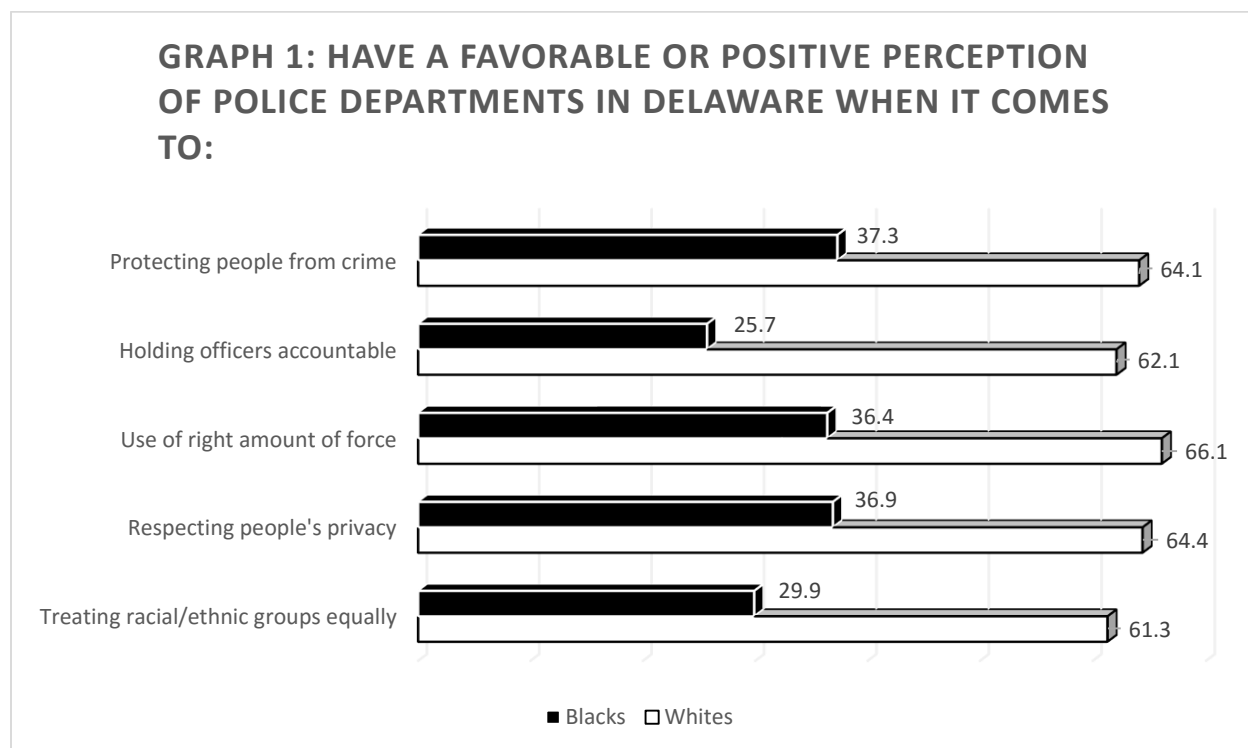
	Zip Codes with larger Black Populations (Urban)	Zip Codes Smaller Black populations (Suburban)
Employment/Wages	39.5%	27.5%
Economy/economic development	5.1	1.4
Education/School Funding	7.1	8.8
Social Welfare (health care, welfare and money issues)	2.0	6.6
Fiscal Matters (taxes, budgets, deficits, revenue)	0.0	3.7
Public safety and criminal justice system	34.0	37.0
Environmental/ Infrastructure/traffic issues	5.8	2.9
Governance and government affairs	1.4	2.2
Other (includes immigration, morals, values, social issues, something else)	5.1	9.9

⁵ Zip codes with larger Black populations (or percentage of Black population above 30 percent) included 19703, 19720, 19801, 19802, 19805, 19901, 19904 and 19941.

Perceptions of Delaware's Police Departments

Police actions have traditionally been the catalyst for sparking civil unrest and rioting in Black communities. Such was recently the case in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland. The most recent social justice movement in America, the Black Lives Matter Movement, got started around the death of several Blacks at the hands of the police. The Black Lives Matter Movement itself is primarily concerned with violence towards Black people, police brutality and racial inequality in the justice system. In effect, the criminal justice system and law enforcement serve as a greater motivator and symbol for Blacks' frustration and protest than living standards.

Graph 1 illustrates differences and the perceptions of Blacks and Whites about police departments in Delaware, the criminal justice system, and symbolically, about government in general. Only 37.3 of Black Delawareans felt that police departments in the state were doing a favorable job protecting people from crime. On the other hand, 64.1 percent of Whites felt police departments in Delaware were doing a favorable job of protecting the public.



On the issue of holding officers accountable when misconduct occurs, 19.2 percent of Whites believed police departments were doing an excellent job, and 42.9 percent felt police departments were doing a good job. Among Blacks, only 5.9 percent felt police

departments in Delaware were doing an excellent job of holding officers accountable when misconduct occurs, and 19.8 percent felt they were doing a good job. Only 36.4 percent of Black Delawareans felt that police in the state used the right amount of force for each situation compared to 66.1 percent of White Delawareans. Similarly, 36.9 percent of Black Delawareans felt police departments in the state did a favorable job respecting people's privacy compared to 64.4 percent of White Delawareans.

Nineteen-point-seven percent of White Delawareans felt that police in Delaware treated racial and ethnic groups equally, and 41.6 percent thought they did a good job. Among Blacks, only 11 percent felt police departments in Delaware did an excellent job treating racial and ethnic groups equally, and just 18.9 percent felt local police departments did a good job.

Conclusion

The central question addressed was, in light of the recent civil unrest, could it happen in Delaware? After all, Wilmington, like several large cities across the U.S. in 1968, experienced civil unrest over the issues of socioeconomic inequality and poor police relations.

The Kerner Commission, in 1968, identified many "triggering" or "precipitating" incidents that were related to a "disturbed social atmosphere", in which typically a series of tension-heightening incidents, over a period weeks or months, became linked in the minds of many in the Negro community with a reservoir of underlying grievances."

Among the causes of the "disturbed social atmosphere" were:

- Police actions
- Ineffective political structure and formal complaint mechanism that was seen by Blacks as inefficient and ignored
- Unemployment
- Inadequate housing
- Inadequate education
- Poor recreation facilities and programs
- Disrespectful attitudes and discriminatory practices (i.e. consumer, credit, the administration of justice, etc.)

Based on this simple descriptive analysis, racial and socio-economic inequality continues to exist in Delaware nearly 50 years after the Kerner Commission released its 1968 report. In 2015, the income of the average Black household in Delaware was near \$18,000 less than the average White family. The poverty rate for Blacks, although smaller than it was in 1968, is still more than double that of Whites. The college graduation and unemployment rates among Blacks still lag significantly behind Whites, and the percentage of Whites' owning their home far exceeds Black homeowners.

Sections of Wilmington have become a classic example of the “formation of racial ghettos” mentioned by the Kerner Commission. The quality of life and standards of living for Blacks in Wilmington’s inner city (ghettos) has gotten worse since 1968. This formation has occurred in spite of the city’s executive and legislative governmental apparatus being dominated by Black elected officials.

While this paper did not address Whites’ attitudes toward Blacks, it did examine differences in perceptions of how the state’s resources should be allocated and utilized to address problems facing the state. Metaphorically speaking, when it comes to what Black and White Delawareans see as the most important issues, they are in the same ballpark, but different parts of the field. Among Blacks, the concern is employment/wages or public safety matters. Among White Delawareans, their perceptions of the primary problem were more widely distributed. Finally, whether real or perceived, Blacks in Delaware still consider the police departments in the state to be a threat to ethnic and racial minorities.

Short of business and community leaders, elected officials, and policy decision-makers taking progressive actions to reduce racial disparities in education, employment, labor market opportunities, and income inequality, the environment for civil unrest in Delaware remains 50 years after the 1968 riots.

Ironically, 50 years after the Kerner Commission Report, it appears that it is the Black community itself in Delaware that is moving toward two societies: one affluent and relatively prosperous and one trapped in disadvantaged social and economic enclaves. As a result, Blacks in Delaware are increasingly separated by class and unequal in their pursuit of opportunities to improve their standard of living and quality of life.

Appendix

Measures of quality of life and standards of living along racial lines in Delaware's two largest cities: 2015

	Dover		Wilmington	
	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
Median Household Income	51206	42252	58116	30395
Median Family Income	71116	44467	90886	37468
Poverty Individual	13.5	25.7	11.3	30.1
Poverty family	10.1	20.2	7.3	28.4
Poverty Children (under 18)	21.4	40.6	11.5	38.1
High School Graduates	86.8	86.5	87.2	78.5
College Graduates	28.6	28.0	37.2	10.9
Unemployment rate (16 to 64 years of age)	9.0	10.6	8.7	16.6
Homeownership	61.8	35.9	55.2	38.0

Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 ACS 1-year estimates