



*summary
report*

2023

Greater Houston Community Foundation
515 Post Oak Blvd., Suite 1000 | Houston, TX 77027
Telephone: 713.333.2200

For more information contact understandinghouston@ghcf.org

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Data partner: Rice University's Kinder Institute for
Urban Research

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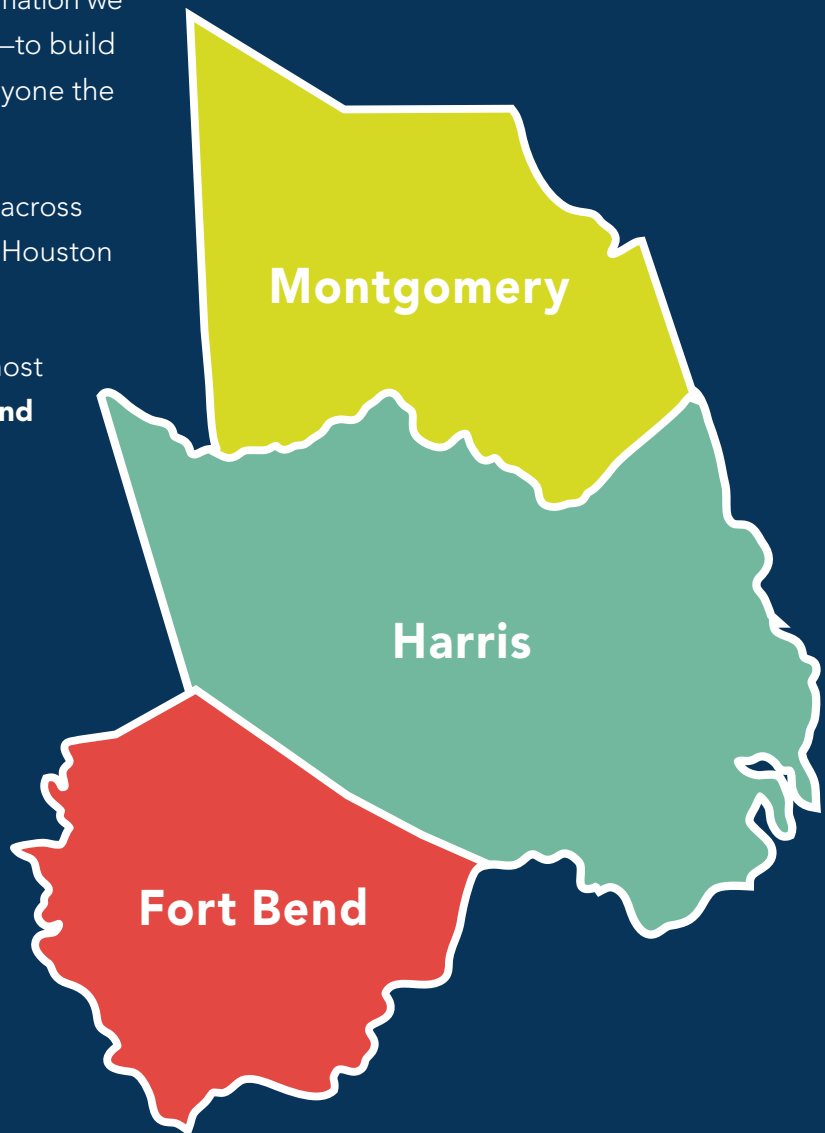
about the initiative

Building a more vibrant Houston region with opportunity for all. Together, we are measuring *what matters* to do *what matters*.

Understanding Houston is a highly collaborative initiative led by Greater Houston Community Foundation to empower us all with the information we need to act—individually and collectively—to build a more vibrant Houston that provides everyone the opportunity to reach their full potential.

We believe informed, collaborative action across sectors can be a powerful force in making Houston a more vibrant and equitable region.

We're taking a look at our region's three most populous counties—**Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery.**





fort bend county



harris county

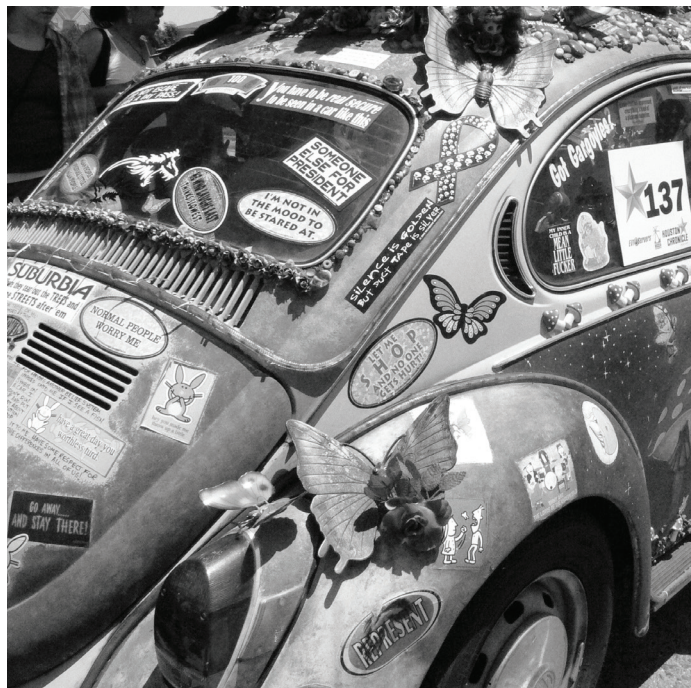


montgomery county

arts and culture

HOW OUR REGION'S CREATIVE RESOURCES BENEFIT RESIDENTS—SOME MORE THAN OTHERS

Houston is more than just the energy capital of the world. In addition to our world-famous energy sector, medical center, and aerospace industry, Houston is one of the only U.S. cities with resident, year-round professional ballet, opera, symphony, and theater companies. In fact, Houston's Theater District alone contains more than 12,000 seats, second only to New York City in the number of theater seats located in a specific area.¹ All-in-all, these arts and cultural institutions are estimated to generate \$45.6 million per year in local tax revenues and \$51.8 million in state taxes for Harris County. Houston's artistic and cultural offerings also attract more than two million tourists annually, contributing roughly \$132 million to our local economy per year.²



The benefits of arts and culture in Houston extend well past the economy. Arts and culture organizations play a key role in promoting neighborhood improvements, community connections, and civic engagement.³ As our region becomes increasingly diverse, these organizations become even more valuable, as community-based arts programs have been shown to increase tolerance and

understanding between people of different backgrounds.⁴ The health of our arts and cultural programs is also vital to the continued success of our other industries. As our region continues its shift toward an information economy, the arts will play an increasingly important role in our ability to attract and retain the talent necessary for a modern workforce.

Consistent with the rest of the nation, designers (interior, graphic, etc.) represent the largest portion of working artists in our region at 32%.⁵ However, Houston trails the national average when it comes to arts occupations' share of regional employment.⁶ Within our region, opportunity gaps in both pay and employment persist between counties and races/ethnicities. Whites represent the majority of arts employees in all categories but one (performing arts), and the majority of these jobs are located in Harris County. While artists in our region generally make enough to meet their basic needs, many are still underpaid relative to their overall skill and education levels.⁷

Many of Houston's art and cultural programs primarily rely on the resources of nonprofit organizations to keep their work accessible to the public. And while these organizations are largely growing throughout our region, they aren't necessarily keeping up with our rapidly growing populations. Harris County boasts the most arts and cultural organizations with 11.6 organizations per 100,000 residents as of 2015 compared to 6.8 in Fort Bend County and 5.0 in Montgomery County. Harris County also leads the way in arts spending by both nonprofits and government organizations.

Similarly, attendance at artistic events and performances relies heavily on socioeconomic trends in the Houston area. While most residents report that they believe the arts are important and deserve support, attendance levels vary by household income and educational attainment.

The more we know about arts and culture in Houston, the more we can enrich our lives, enhance our community, and support our creative economy.

3 Subtopics of Arts & Culture

EMPLOYMENT IN THE ARTS



73% of Greater Houston writers are white

Whites dominate every creative employment category in the Houston metro region except for performing arts.

31% of Greater Houston media employees are Hispanic.

The largest share of arts employment held by any non-white group in the Houston metro area.

ACCESS TO THE ARTS

181 → 602

The three-county area had 602 art and culture nonprofits in 2015 compared to 181 in 1990.



ARTS ATTENDANCE

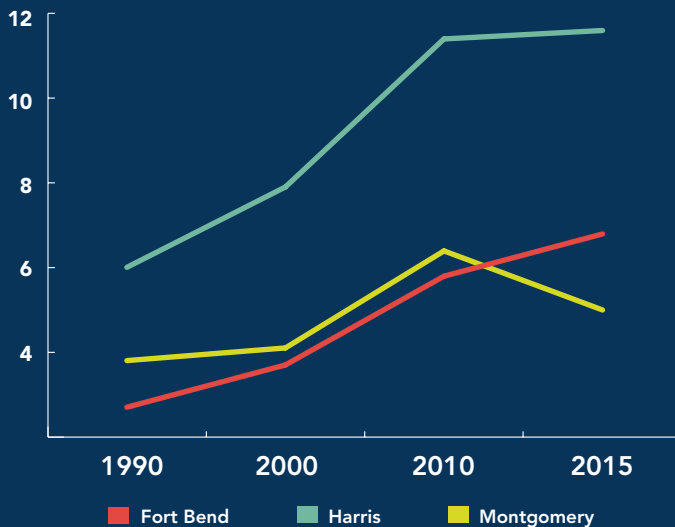
29% of low-income Harris County residents attended an artistic performance

Those earning \$37,500 or less attended artistic performances at half the rate of those earning \$100,000 or more in 2012.

EXPLORE ALL THREE SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON OUR WEBSITE.

ARTS DENSITY

Number of Arts and Cultural Organizations per 100,000 Residents



Harris County nearly doubled in the number of total arts and cultural organizations per 100,000 residents between 1990 and 2015 (6.0 to 11.6, respectively). Fort Bend County experienced even greater growth while Montgomery County has seen less growth and less consistency with the number of arts and cultural organizations per 100,000 residents.

When compared to similarly sized communities throughout the country, all three counties fall near the middle or behind the pack with growth in arts access in Fort Bend and Montgomery not reflecting the rapid population growth in the area over the decades.

Trend over time:
 Compared to nation:

LEGENDS

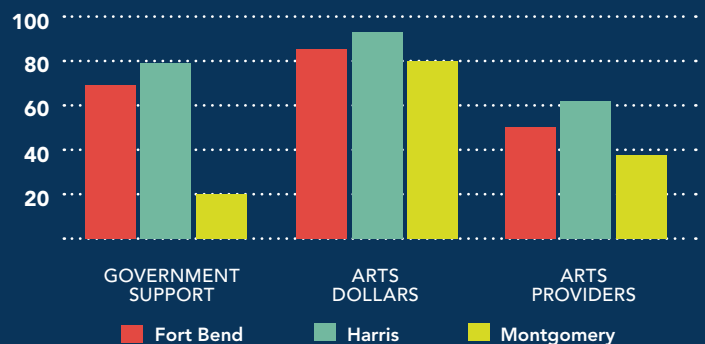
LOCATIONS: **FB** Fort Bend **H** Harris **M** Montgomery

COMPARISONS: Better Worse Same No Info

ARTS VIBRANCY INDEX

SMU DataArts, a data partner of Understanding Houston, created the Arts Vibrancy Index to provide meaningful metrics about the health of the arts and culture sector in various geographies across the nation.

The Arts Vibrancy Index includes 12 measures that fall under three main rubrics: **total arts providers**, considering the number of independent artists, arts and culture employees, nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, and arts, culture, and entertainment firms in the community; **total arts dollars** in the community, including earned revenue from program activities, contributed revenue supporting the arts, total compensation to artists and staff, and total expenses; and **public support** using state and federal arts funding.



The scores are on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 as the highest. The scores are akin to percentiles—i.e., if a county's score on a given parameter is 56, it means it did better than 56% of counties on that measure.

The three counties appear to be spending more than 80 to 93% of other counties across the country, although government support and the number of arts providers is less in comparison and varies considerably by county.

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arts & culture

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2. Ibid.
3. Patterson and Binkovitz, 2019 Patterson, G., & Binkovitz, L. (2019). *Artist-Planner Collaborations: Lessons Learned from the Arts and Culture Ecosystems of Three Sun Belt Cities for a New Model of Inclusive Planning*. Retrieved from The Kinder Institute for Urban Research website: <https://kinder.rice.edu/sites/g/files/bxs1676/f/documents/Artist-Planner%20Collaborations.pdf>
4. Ibid.
5. Iyengar et al., 2019 Iyengar, S., Nichols, B., Moore Schaffer, P., Akbar, B., Menzer, M., Moysowicz, A., ... Santoro, H. (2019). *Artists and Other Cultural Workers: A Statistical Portrait*. Retrieved from National Endowment for the Arts website: https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Artists_and_Other_Cultural_Workers.pdf
6. Ibid.
7. Jackson, M.-R., Kabwasa-Green, F., Swenson, D., Herranz, Jr., J., Ferryman, K., Atlas, C., ... Rosenstein, C. (2003). *Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists*. Retrieved from Urban Institute website: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/50806/411311-Investing-in-Creativity.pdf>

DATA SOURCES

INDICATOR HIGHLIGHTS

Arts density: National Center for Charitable Statistics

ADDITIONAL FEATURE

Arts Vibrancy Index: SMU DataArts Arts Vibrancy Index, 2018 (<https://www.culturaldata.org/>)

SUBTOPICS

Employment in the arts: U.S. Census Bureau, EEO Tables

Note: Some racial categories in the U.S. Census EEO tables were suppressed. For this reason, the Producers and Directors occupational category does not appear to reach 100 percent in the above chart.

Access to the arts: National Center for Charitable Statistics

Arts attendance: The Houston Arts Survey, 2012

civic engagement

HOW RESIDENTS PARTICIPATE IN THEIR COMMUNITY TO BUILD A VIBRANT HOUSTON REGION WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

When Houstonians stay connected and engaged, we cultivate trust and achieve more as a region. Places with high levels of civic engagement have lower levels of unemployment, better schools, stronger health and more responsive governments.¹ Civic engagement includes a variety of different activities an individual can take to shape the future of their community and to improve the condition of the community members.² A civically-engaged resident is invested in their community's overall well-being, that of its most marginalized groups, and actively works toward its betterment by engaging in the political process, participating in civic institutions and giving back.³ Combined, these indicators provide a way to measure the state of civic life across Houston and our community's capacity to meet the needs of all residents.

However, widespread civic participation is ultimately dependent on the levels of the perceived extent to which that community, society or government has held up its end of the social contract and developed trust among members.⁴ In 2020, less than half of Harris County residents believe that most people can be trusted, and in 2018, levels

of trust in Harris County were nearly nine percentage points lower than the national average. Trust levels have been shown to increase when community members belong to civic and social organizations and work to improve their community.⁵ However, residents throughout our region have lower access to opportunities to connect. Compared to the state and nation, Houston's three-county region is behind in the number of civic and social organizations available to residents.

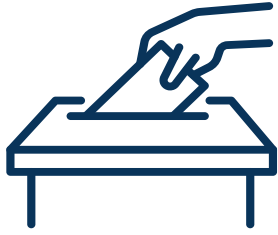
Of the various ways in which citizens can work to shape and improve their community, the act of selecting our representation at the local, state and federal levels of government is one of the most obvious and basic.⁶ And while the 2020 election inspired the biggest increase in voter registration and turnout in our region's recent history, we still lag national rates in the percentage of registered voters who ultimately cast a ballot, suggesting certain barriers still keep some residents away from the polls.

Nonprofit organizations in Houston's three-county region play an essential role in advancing civic engagement not only by improving the condition of our residents and their communities but also through the strengthening of social ties among those who actively participate by volunteering or donating to important causes.⁷ Studies have shown that volunteering one's time or money can increase general life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem and overall psychological well-being.⁸ About half of Houstonians report donating at least \$25 to a nonprofit organization in 2019 and prior to widespread disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, about half of Houstonians also volunteered their time.

The more we can build trust and connection among our neighbors to ensure that the needs of all our residents are being met, levels of civic engagement in the Houston region will rise.



3 Subtopics of Civic Engagement



VOTER & NON-ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

82%

of Black citizens in Greater Houston are registered to vote.



PHILANTHROPY & VOLUNTEERING

49%

of residents in Greater Houston donated at least \$25 to charitable organizations in 2019.



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

46%

Only 46% of Harris County residents say "most people can be trusted" in 2020. Though low, levels of trust have increased 15 percentage points since 2014.

EXPLORE ALL SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON OUR WEBSITE WWW.UNDERSTANDINGHOUSTON.ORG

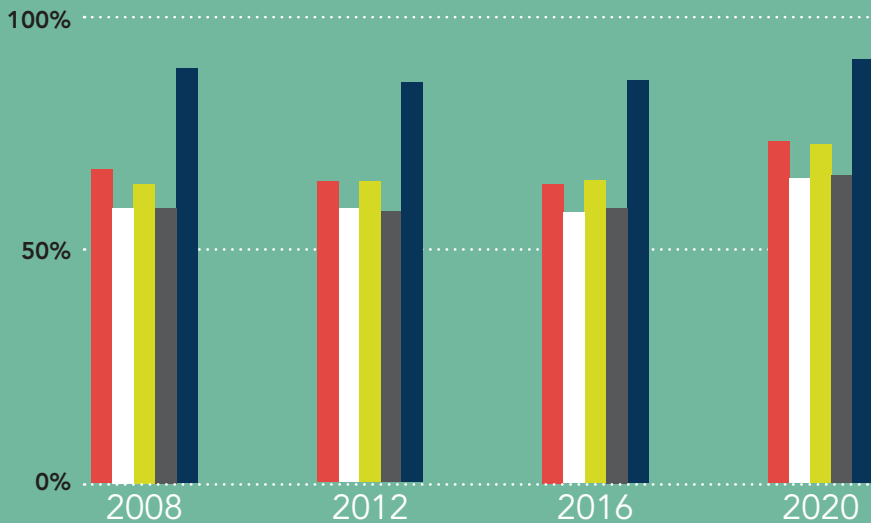
VOTER TURNOUT

Between 66% and 74% of registered voters in Houston's three-county region cast a ballot in the 2020 Presidential Election.

Trend over time:
Compared to nation:

Percent of Registered Voters who Voted in Presidential Elections

Fort Bend Harris Montgomery Texas U.S.



Source: For counties and Texas: Texas Secretary of State; For U.S.: Census Bureau, Voting and Registration, Retrieved on April 29, 2021

LONELINESS



53%

About 53% of Houstonians sometimes or always felt lonely in 2019 — about five percentage points higher than in 2018.

Trend over time:
Compared to nation:

PHILANTHROPY

Public Charities Per 10,000 Residents

FORT BEND = 21.7

HARRIS = 26.4

MONTGOMERY = 22.0

Trend over time:
Compared to nation:

LEGENDS

LOCATIONS: Fort Bend Harris Montgomery

COMPARISONS: Better Worse Same No Info

See next page for references and data sources.

references

civic engagement

1. Lappie, John, Jeff Coates, and Lisa Matthews. (2018). 2018 Houston Civic Health Index. Retrieved from <https://kinder.rice.edu/sites/g/files/bxs1676/f/documents/2018%20Houston%20Civic%20Health%20Index.pdf>.
2. Adler, R. P., & Goggin, J. (2005). What do we mean by "civic engagement"? *Journal of transformative education*, 3(3), 236-253.
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8. Konrath, S. (2014). The power of philanthropy and volunteering. *Wellbeing: A complete reference guide*, 1-40.

DATA SOURCES

SUBTOPICS

Social Connectedness: Kinder Houston Area Survey

Voter & Non-Electoral Participation: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey - Voting and Registration Supplement

Philanthropy & Volunteering: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey - Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement

INDICATOR HIGHLIGHTS

Loneliness: Cigna Loneliness Index

Voter Turnout: Texas Secretary of State

Public Charities per 10,000 Residents: Urban Institute, National Center for Charitable Statistics; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census

community context

HOW DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES, PUBLIC SAFETY AND ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION SHAPE AND DEFINE HOUSTON'S THREE-COUNTY REGION.

Understanding a region as large and diverse as Houston requires a deep look at the foundational factors that shape our society — the community context. Exploring and analyzing critical indicators like population growth, transportation access, and public safety provide valuable insights into our region's health.

Population growth brings economic growth, innovation, and — in Houston's case — delicious food from across the globe. At the same time, growth can also stretch the capacity of social services and the limits of aging infrastructure. To thrive, people need access to safe, reliable, affordable, and convenient transportation options, and to live in safe communities that facilitate social connections, housing stability, and economic opportunity.



The population in Houston's three-county region has grown 134% since 1980 to 6.2 million in 2021. Primarily driven by domestic and international migration, this population growth is part of a decades-long trend that has positioned Houston as an economic and cultural hub of the South. During this time, Houston became more diverse as well. Currently, people of color (i.e., people who do not identify as non-Hispanic white) comprise 73% of the population in Harris County, 71% in Fort Bend, and 39% in Montgomery County. By 2050, that figure is expected to increase to 78% in Harris, 79% in Fort Bend, and 59% in Montgomery counties.

Despite rapid population gains, the rate of traffic fatalities has declined significantly in the suburban

counties. The rate of deaths from collisions in Fort Bend and Montgomery counties fell by more than half between 2000 and 2020. Montgomery County reduced its vehicle fatality rate to 13.6 per 100,000, and Fort Bend County's rate fell to 6.7 per 100,000 people in 2020. That same year, the vehicle death rate in Harris County dipped to 12.3 per 100,000 — marginal improvement since 2000 when 15 people died on the roads out of every 100,000 people.

While Houston-area roads have become safer over the last two decades, gun violence has become a larger threat. The rates of firearm fatalities in Harris and Fort Bend counties have risen sharply, surpassing respective vehicle death rates in 2020. The number of deaths per 100,000 people in Montgomery County that involved a firearm in 2020 had not improved from 2000. And a pressing threat for our most marginalized neighbors is the prevalence of hate crimes and human trafficking. The latter for which the Houston region is known as a hub because of our central location and vast network of interconnected roads and highways.

It is this same physical infrastructure which strongly incentivizes car ownership in the region. Houstonians overwhelmingly rely on private vehicles to get around our vast metropolis — over 9 out of 10 residents in the three-county region own a private vehicle. Further constraining transit options, over 95% of households in Fort Bend and Montgomery counties live more than a quarter mile from the nearest public transit stop. While not a common mode of commuting to work or running errands, cycling in the region is a popular form of recreation with the expansion of dedicated trails and bike lanes. While future investments in public transportation could change access to transportation for Houstonians, the car remains king, shaping how we interact with the larger region and one another.

Every community has its own set of strengths, assets, and valuable history. The deeper we understand our community context, the more equipped we are to tackle persistent and emerging challenges through solutions that allow everyone to live to their fullest potential.

3 Subtopics of community context

POPULATION & DIVERSITY



Fort Bend, Harris, and Montgomery counties grew each decade between 1980 and 2021.

GROWTH BETWEEN 1980 & 2021

FORT BEND **↑ 6X**

HARRIS **↑ 2X**

MONTGOMERY **↑ 5X**

TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

<5% **OF HOUSEHOLDS**

are located within ¼ mile of a public transit stop.



Only 4% of households in Harris County and 3% in Fort Bend and Montgomery counties live within a quarter mile of a public transit stop. Consequently,

OVER 95% OF HOUSTONIANS

lack access to public transportation.

PUBLIC SAFETY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE



83% **↓**

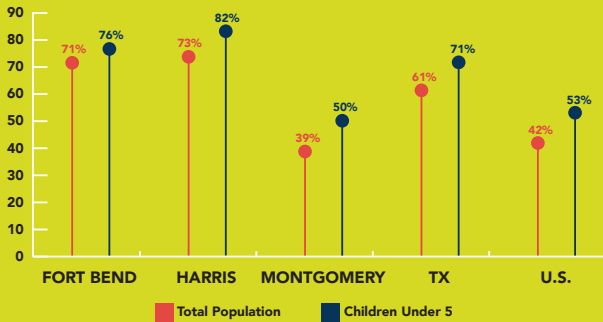
In 2021, just over 600 per 100,000 young people received referrals to juvenile probation, an 83% decline from 3,600 in 2010. Even prior to pandemic-related school closures in 2021, the referral rate was trending downward.

EXPLORE ALL THREE SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON WWW.UNDERSTANDINGHOUSTON.ORG

DIVERSITY

At least half of children under 5 in the region identify as a person of color, with the largest percentages in Fort Bend and Harris counties.

Percent of population that identifies as a person of color, 2021



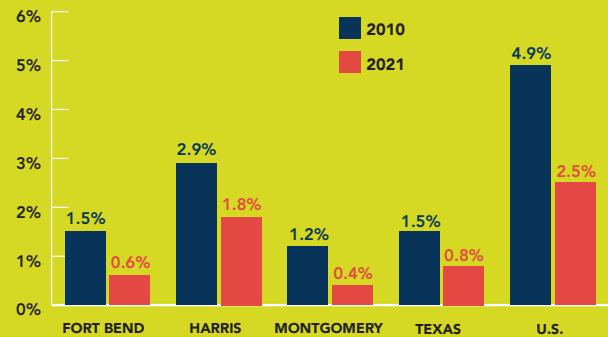
Regional trend over time: **👍**

Region compared to nation: **👍**

TRANSPORTATION TO WORK

Less than 5% of Houston-area workers use public transportation to get to work. The majority drive alone with a substantial portion working from home.

Percent of workers who took public transportation to work, 2021



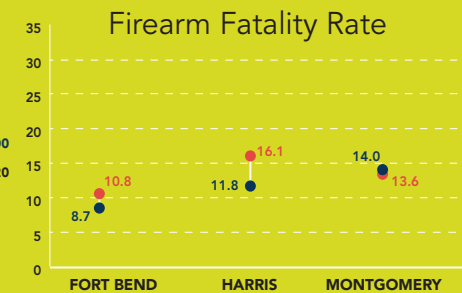
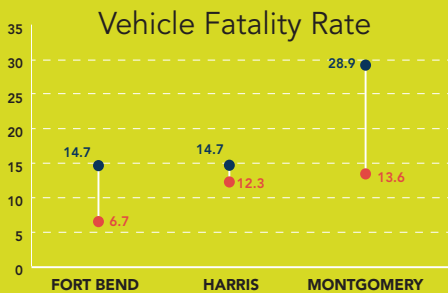
Regional trend over time: **👎**

Region compared to nation: **👎**

PUBLIC SAFETY

Between 2000 and 2020, the vehicle death rate declined while the firearm fatality rate increased.

Rate of people who died in incidents involving vehicles or firearms per 100,000 population



Trend over time:



Compared to nation:



LEGENDS

LOCATIONS: **FB** Fort Bend **H** Harris **M** Montgomery

COMPARISONS: **👍** Better **👎** Worse **👉** Same **🚫** No Info

See next page for references and data sources.

references

community context

DATA SOURCES

SUBTOPICS

Population & Diversity: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey Estimates

Transportation Access: Houston-Galveston Area Council, by request

Public Safety & Criminal Justice: Harris County Juvenile Probation Department

INDICATORS HIGHLIGHTED

Population & Diversity: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey

Transportation Access: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey

Public Safety & Criminal Justice: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics Mortality Data on CDC WONDER (Wide-ranging ONline Data for Epidemiologic Research), Current Final Multiple Cause of Death Data

economic opportunity

HOW OPPORTUNITY AND PROSPERITY FLOW THROUGH OUR REGION

Healthy communities are built on a strong economic base. Access to fundamental elements of financial stability such as jobs, credit, and small business resources is essential to ensuring that all Houstonians can contribute to the building of a vibrant Houston region for all. While Houston remains vital to the national economy, we're still working toward greater and more equal access to opportunity at home. By taking steps to reduce income inequality in our region, we can make lasting improvements to our neighborhoods, education systems, and financial systems — improving economic security for all residents.



The Houston region is home to one of the most vibrant economic engines in the country. Metro Houston's GDP, at \$537 billion in 2021, places us seventh highest in the country. Between 2010 and 2021, the three-county area net 890,500 jobs, a 29% increase. In addition, Houston's small businesses continue to grow.

Houston's strong economy provides the foundation for economic opportunity for residents, but we must identify levers to ensure all can build on that foundation. Employment rates have largely rebounded since the pandemic, indicating a healthy labor market. However, our region struggles with a skills gap, making it

challenging for residents and employers to match current skills to employment opportunities that are in demand.

Despite strong employment and industry growth, incomes in Houston's three-county region have seen little growth compared to the state and nation. Between 2010 and 2021, median household income ticked up 1–2% in Fort Bend and Harris counties and 7% in Montgomery County, compared with 11–12% in Texas and the U.S., respectively.

Consistent with trends in communities across the nation, median household income in the Houston area varies significantly by racial/ethnic group; and despite sluggish income growth, income disparities by race/ethnicity have grown during this period. In 2021, white households in Harris County earned 109% more than Black households, marking an increase from 2010 when the gap was 101%. Additionally, wealth remains heavily concentrated among a small proportion of households. About half of all income in 2021 was distributed to the top 20% richest households in the greater Houston area.

Given stagnant incomes and rising living costs, it is not surprising that nearly one million Houston-area households, or 40% of the region, struggle to afford basic living costs — these are households with incomes below the Federal Poverty Line or experiencing ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed). Family financial stability is further put at risk when one-quarter of households are un/underbanked and 30–40% of residents have subprime, high-risk credit. And while poverty rates are on the decline, nearly one in four children is living in poverty in the three-county area — resulting in early challenges that make it abundantly difficult for children to succeed academically and climb the economic ladder.¹

We have an economic and moral imperative to ensure everyone in the Houston region has equal access to economic opportunity and security — a fundamental condition of our collective success.

5 Subtopics of Economic Opportunity

POVERTY & SOCIAL MOBILITY



1 MILLION

Houston-area households struggle financially by living below the Federal Poverty Level or experiencing ALICE.

INCOME & INEQUALITY



Between 2010 and 2021, median household income in Harris County increased only 1%, compared to 12% growth across the nation.

CREDIT & DEBT

2X UNBANKED

Residents of Houston are twice as likely to be unbanked as the national average.

UNEMPLOYMENT & JOBS

FORT BEND **↑ 72%**

HARRIS **↑ 23%**

MONTGOMERY **↑ 58%**

Between 2010 and 2021, job growth in Houston's three-county region grew faster than the national rate (16%).

SMALL BUSINESS



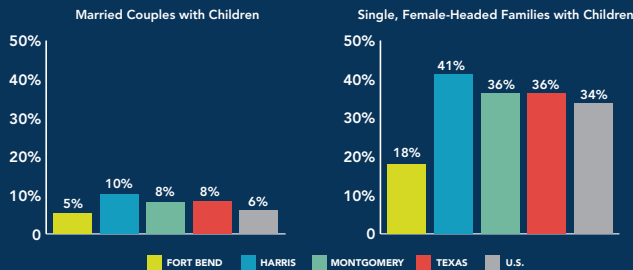
1 OUT OF 4

Houston-area small businesses are owned by women.

EXPLORE ALL FIVE SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON WWW.UNDERSTANDINGHOUSTON.ORG

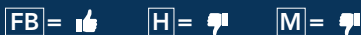
POVERTY BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE

Percent of households with children under 18 living in poverty by household structure, 2021



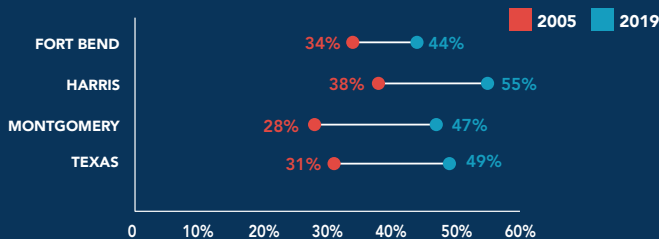
In Houston's three-county region, households led by single moms are three and four times more likely to live in poverty as married-couple families.

Compared to nation:



"HIGH WAGE" JOBS

Percent of jobs with earnings of more than \$3,333 per month/\$40,000 annually (also known as "high wage jobs")

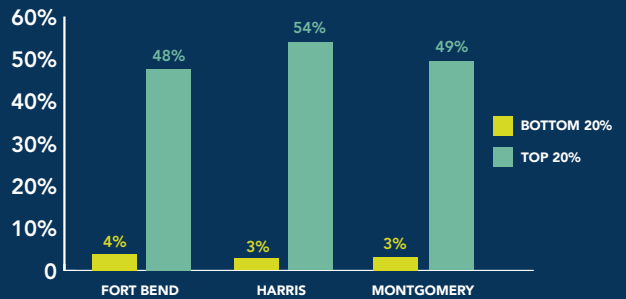


Nearly half of jobs in Houston's three-county area pay more than \$40,000 annually, considered "high wage."

Trend over time:

INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Percent of total income by household income quintile, 2021

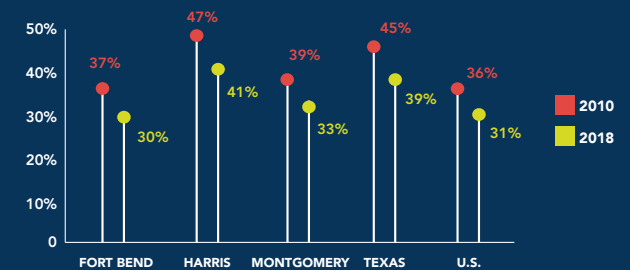


In 2021, the top 20% of households in Houston's three-county region received about half of income, while the bottom 20% of households received 3-4% of income.

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

CREDIT & DEBT

Percent of credit economy with subprime credit score (below 660)



The share of Houston-area residents with subprime credit fell 7 points between 2010 and 2018.

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

LEGENDS

LOCATIONS: **FB** Fort Bend **H** Harris **M** Montgomery

COMPARISONS: Better Worse Same No Info

See next page for references and data sources.

references

economic opportunity

1. Ratcliffe, Caroline E., and Signe-Mary McKernan. "Child poverty and its lasting consequence." Urban Institute. Low-Income Working Families Working Paper 21 (2012).

DATA SOURCES

SUBTOPICS

Poverty & Social Mobility: United for ALICE, 2021

Income & Inequality: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates

Unemployment & Jobs: Bureau for Economic Analysis

Credit & Debt: 2021 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households

Small Business: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 Annual Business Survey

INDICATORS HIGHLIGHTED

Poverty by Household Type: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates

Income Distribution: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates

"High Wage" Jobs: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES)

Subprime Credit: New York Fed

education

THE BENEFITS OF AN EDUCATION EXTEND NOT ONLY TO EARNINGS, HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE, BUT ALSO TO FUTURE GENERATIONS AND THE COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING AND ECONOMY OF OUR REGION.

A person with a bachelor's degree earns an average of \$1.3 million more over a lifetime compared to those with a high school diploma only.^{1,2} They also enjoy the lowest unemployment rates. Adults with stable, well-paying jobs are less likely to rely on the social safety net (nutritional assistance, subsidized housing, etc.) and less likely to interact with the criminal legal system.³ People with higher education tend to be healthier, live longer^{4,5,6} and are also more likely to vote.^{7,8} Now imagine if these individual benefits were enjoyed by the majority of a population.

Regions that are home to skilled and educated workers attract employers that provide good jobs. A 2009 report by McKinsey & Company estimated that gaps in educational outcomes have had a larger negative impact on GDP than all recessions since the 1970s. The whole region benefits from a growing population of skilled workers, and higher levels of civic engagement. Even better, these benefits are more likely to be passed to future generations.⁹

However, only a minority successfully walk through this door of opportunity. For every 100 eighth-graders in the Houston region, 78 graduate from high school, 53 enroll in a two- or four-year in-state college, and 23 receive a degree or credential by the time they are 25 years old.

Children in the Houston region have disparate access to high-quality education that adequately prepares them for academic success. Black and Hispanic students in the region are five times more likely to attend a high-poverty school than white students, which results in very different educational experiences and contributes to the fact that Black and Hispanic students lag between three and three-and-a-half years behind their white counterparts.¹⁰ This is because of discriminatory practices that have existed since our nation's founding continue to be exacerbated by present-day inequities. Compounded over generations, the result is academic outcomes and educational attainment levels that vary significantly by race and ethnicity.

Recognizing its educational challenges, in 2019 Texas signed into law House Bill 3 (HB3), which would inject millions of dollars into Texas's public schools. Then COVID-19 arrived, disrupting an already strained educational system. Academic outcomes for students worsened, and pre-existing disparities were exacerbated during the pandemic. Regional enrollment fell 23% in pre-kindergarten, 7% in kindergarten, and 3% in public schools overall in 2020-21, the first full academic year during the pandemic. The proportion of students in the region who met state standards that year fell 5 percentage points in third-grade reading assessments, 20 points in eighth-grade math, and 17 points in algebra from the pre-pandemic STAAR administration in 2018-19.

It is too soon to know how the pandemic may affect the college-going behavior of these students, but high school graduates in the region enrolled in a public college or university in Texas at slightly lower rates than the state in 2018 and 2019. Only 9% of students who graduated from a high school in the region in 2013 completed their degree at a public in-state university within four years and only 18% did within six years.

Despite challenges in shepherding students successfully through the educational pipeline, overall levels of education in the region have grown. The percentage of adults without a high school diploma in the three-county area fell by 8.6 percentage points, and the share with bachelor's degree or higher in the three-county area increased to 34% from 25%. However, this is partly because our region attracts talent from across the nation and state to work in the lucrative oil and gas and professional services industries. For our region to remain competitive with today's and future jobs, more must be done to ensure all students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for success in their future pursuits.

The more we know about where and when students need the most support during their academic careers, the better equipped we are to work toward an education system that prepares every Houston-area child to thrive and contribute to our region's vibrant future.

5 Subtopics of Education

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



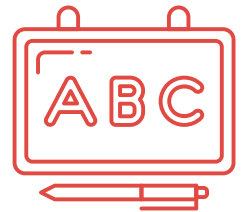
46%

of adults in Fort Bend County have a bachelor's degree or higher.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

23% decline

in pre-K enrollment in first year of pandemic.



ACADEMIC OUTCOMES



6 point decline one-year into the pandemic

in reading proficiency among third-graders in Harris County.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION



Less than 1 in 4

8th graders in the region earned an in-state post-secondary credential by the time they are 25 years old.

FUNDING, ENROLLMENT & TEACHERS

44th

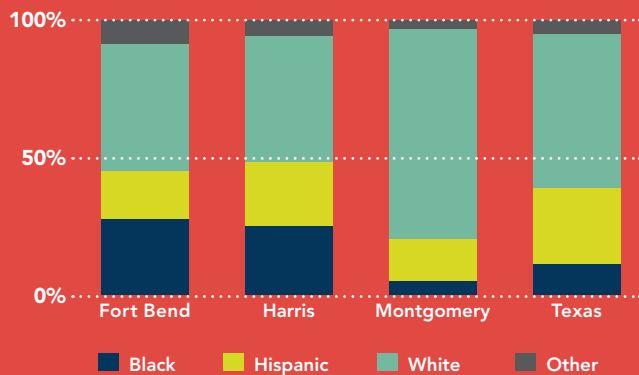
Texas ranking among all states and D.C. in most per pupil spending.

EXPLORE ALL FIVE SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON OUR WEBSITE.

TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS, 2020-21

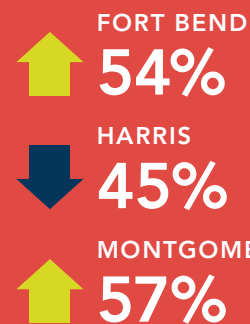
The teacher workforce in Fort Bend and Harris counties is more diverse than in Montgomery County and Texas.

Percentage of Teachers by Race/Ethnicity 2020-22



KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Percent of kindergarten students classified as "ready," 2020



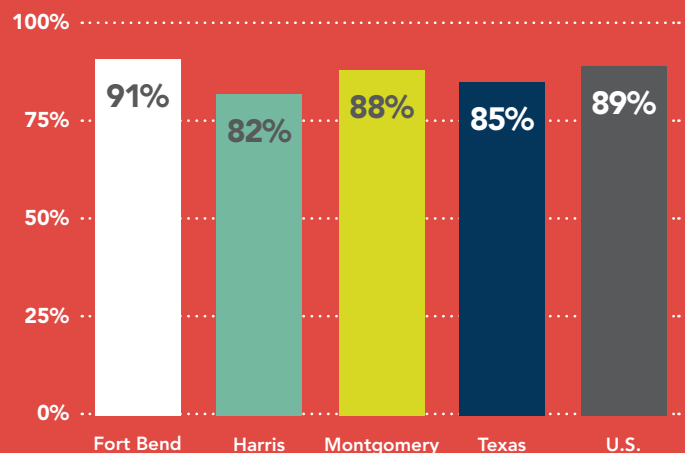
Trend over time: Compared to state:

Trend over time: Compared to state:

Trend over time: Compared to state:

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

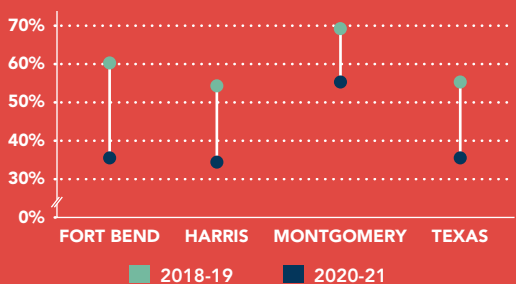
Percentage of Adults with High School Diplomas 2019



Despite gains in the number of adults with a high school diploma, rates in Harris County continue to lag behind the nation.

STAAR EIGHTH GRADE MATH PROFICIENCY

Percent Who Met/Exceeded State Standards Before and After Pandemic



LEGENDS

LOCATIONS: **FB** Fort Bend **H** Harris **M** Montgomery

COMPARISONS: Better Worse Same No Info

See next page for references and data sources.

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education

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DATA SOURCES

SUBTOPICS

Early Childhood Education: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS, Student Enrollment Reports

Funding, Enrollment & Teachers: U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Survey of School System Finances Tables

Academic Outcomes: Texas Education Agency, STAAR Aggregate Data

Educational Attainment: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey

INDICATORS HIGHLIGHTED

Kindergarten Readiness: Texas Education Agency, TPEIR, Kindergarten Programs & Readiness

Teacher Demographics: Texas Education Agency, TAPR District Staff Information

STAAR Eighth-grade Math Proficiency: Texas Education Agency, STAAR Aggregate Data

Adults with High School Diplomas: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey

environment

HOW OUR REGION'S AIR AND WATER QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS AFFECT OUR ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND FUTURE WELL-BEING

Fundamental to our existence are clean air, potable water, and temperatures being “just right” on Earth. And while eight billion people share this planet, most environmental impacts are felt locally — and unevenly.

Houston used to be known as the nation’s smog capital in the 1990s, but our region has made significant strides to clean its air. And it has been working — air and water quality in Houston’s three-county region has improved over the last couple decades. However, they remain at levels that can still harm public health, particularly for people of color, low-income communities, older adults, children, and people with special medical needs. Toxic chemicals can be found in our air, water, and land, affecting our collective health, however, communities of color are disproportionately harmed.^{1,2} People of color are over three times more likely to be breathing the most polluted air than white people across the country.³

Air pollution caused by growing industries, heavy traffic and a car-dependent culture remain a persistent problem for the Houston region. The number of days in which ozone levels were above EPA standard fell 64% in Harris County and 77% in Montgomery County between 2000 and 2020. However, they remain high compared to other places — the American Lung Association graded the ozone levels in Harris and Montgomery an “F” in its 2021 State of the Air report.⁴ Despite the amount of particulate matter in the three-county area being below the National Ambient Air Quality Standards, they remain higher than national rates. High levels of ozone and particle pollution have been found to lead to premature death and other health conditions like cancer, asthma attacks, cardiovascular damage, developmental and reproductive damage.⁵

Contaminated water also poses serious health threats for residents and the environments they live in.⁶ About two-thirds of water streams in Houston’s three-county region

are contaminated by bacteria, making their water unsafe. And while it can be difficult to assess the total population impacted, nearly 1,600 drinking water violations were reported from Harris County’s active facilities in 2020.

Simultaneously, Houston has become hotter and wetter than it was a decade ago, an effect of climate change primarily caused by greenhouse gases that trap heat from the sun in our atmosphere. Extreme heat is the number one killer from America’s weather-related disasters.⁷ One under-recognized challenge in Houston is the urban “heat island” effect which makes temperatures much hotter in some neighborhoods within the same city.⁸ These pockets of trapped heat cause nighttime temperatures to remain elevated which is the greatest driver of heat-related health issues. Because low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to live in areas classified as heat islands, they not only bear “excessive environmental risk” but also they are disproportionately harmed by heat islands and other effects of climate change.⁹

Houston’s location, topography, and local climate also make us particularly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions such as flooding, storms, and hurricanes, which will continue to occur at greater intensities and with more frequency.¹⁰ Houston could face significant precipitation extremes in the future - more intense rainstorms and longer dry periods.¹¹ As our region continues to experience the effects of climate change, the role of renewable energy sources grows more important, particularly since Texas produces a larger share of its energy from renewables than the nation does.



The more we know about our local air and water quality and how climate change will continue to impact our region, the more we can do to make the adjustments necessary for a more livable future, particularly for our residents who bear the greatest risks.

2 Subtopics of Environment

CLIMATE CHANGE & RENEWABLE ENERGY

Houston is hotter and wetter

Average temperatures in the region increased between 0.6 to 1.0 degrees Fahrenheit and annual rainfall increased by about two inches compared to the three decades ending in 2020 versus 2010.

0.6 — 1.0°F



23%



Texas is a leader in wind power production, a renewable energy source. The share of power produced from renewable sources in Texas (23%) is nearly double that of the nation (12%).

AIR & WATER QUALITY

67%

of water streams are impaired

due to bacterial contamination and are unsafe for human consumption or exposure.

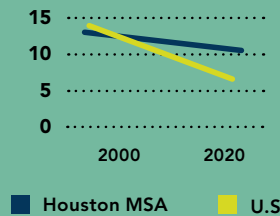


high ozone days

The number of days in which ozone levels were above EPA standard fell 64% in Harris County and 77% in Montgomery County between 2000 and 2018.

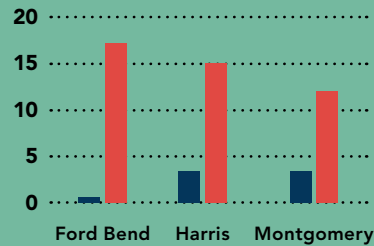
PARTICLE POLLUTION (PM_{2.5})

PM_{2.5} levels fell from 13.1 µg/m³ to 10.1 in the Houston MSA, reflecting a 23% improvement in air quality. National PM_{2.5} levels declined by 41%.



Trend over time:
 Compared to nation:

EXTREME RAIN

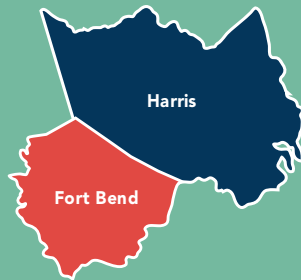


Days with 3 inches or more of rain: 1980s vs. 2010s

Trend over time:
 Compared to nation:

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Fort Bend and Harris counties perform worse than other Texas counties on eight out of nine environmental justice indices related to air and water, meaning **people of color and low-income communities are disproportionately harmed by pollution.**



Trend over time:
 Compared to nation:

DRINKING WATER VIOLATIONS

There were **2,258 drinking water violations** across the three-county area in 2020.

Fort Bend = 91
 Harris = 1,595
 Montgomery = 572



Trend over time:
 Compared to nation:

TOXIC CHEMICALS

↓ 23%



The three-county Houston area reduced the amount of toxic chemicals released on-site by 23.4% from nearly 50.1 million pounds to 38.8 million pounds between 2005 and 2019, respectively.

Trend over time:
 Compared to nation:

EXTREME HEAT

Days above 95°F in the decade ending in 2010 vs 2020

Fort Bend = 478
 Harris = 436
 Montgomery = 523



The equivalent of more than one year of the last decade was above 95°F.

Trend over time:
 Compared to nation:

references

environment

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³ American Lung Association, State of the Air Report (2021) - Key Findings.

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⁴ Ibid

⁶ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Why Urban Waters?

⁷ Sarofim, M.C., S. Saha, M.D. Hawkins, D.M. Mills, J. Hess, R. Horton, P. Kinney, J. Schwartz, and A. St. Juliana. 2016. Chapter 2: Temperature-related death and illness. In: The impacts of climate change on human health in the United States: A scientific assessment. U.S. Global Change Research Program. <https://health2016.globalchange.gov>.

⁸ EPA, Heat Island Effect

⁹ EPA, Heat Islands and Equity

¹⁰ Stoner, A. and Hayhoe, K. 2020. *Climate Impact Assessment for the City of Houston*.

¹¹ HARC, Resilience Science Information Network.

DATA SOURCES

SUBTOPICS

Climate Change: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Climate Normals

Renewable Energy: U.S. Energy Information Administration

Water Quality: Houston Galveston Area Council, by request

Air Quality: CDC, National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

INDICATORS HIGHLIGHTED

Particle Pollution: EPA, National Air Quality: Status and Trends of Key Air Pollutants; EPA: Air Quality - Cities and Counties

Environment Justice: EPA, EJSCREEN

Toxic Chemicals: EPA, Toxics Release Inventory

Extreme Rain: CDC, National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

Drinking Water Violations: EPA, SDWIS Fed Reporting Services system

Extreme Heat: CDC, National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

health

THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF ALL HOUSTONIANS IS ESSENTIAL TO A THRIVING, EQUITABLE REGION.

Good health is integral to quality of life. In addition to genetics and daily habits, physical and mental health is shaped by the environment, ability to access affordable, quality health care, and access to community resources, like parks, fresh affordable food, and supportive social networks.¹ These social determinants, including our occupation, income, and education level, are responsible for up to *half* of our health outcomes.²

Because these social determinants are critical to our physical and mental health, they are also responsible for explaining why the largest health disparities are found across neighborhoods and racial lines. The practices and policies related to residential segregation led to a reduction in public and private investments and employment opportunities in predominantly Black and Brown communities.^{3, 4} This disinvestment laid the groundwork for active harm by allowing polluting industries to operate without enforcing regulations and limited residents' opportunities for better health.⁵



Despite reductions in cancer mortality and lower rates of premature death than the state and nation,⁶ many Houstonians continue to experience poor physical health. More Houstonians have become sedentary, food insecure, obese, and diabetic in recent years, with people of color and low-income households disproportionately burdened. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated these issues.

One in four adults in the three-county area does not exercise,⁷ and the prevalence of obesity and diabetes has risen, particularly among people of color. The proportion

of adults aged 20 and over in Montgomery County with obesity rose to 34% in 2019 from 20% in 2011 — the fastest increase in the region.⁸ These outcomes ultimately lead to a decline in quality of life and contribute to the most common causes of death. Racial disparities in life expectancy remain; the average life expectancy for Black residents in Harris County is 74 years — five years shorter than white residents.⁹

People without health insurance, or quality insurance, receive less preventative care and tend to have worse health outcomes than those with insurance.¹⁰ Texas has had the highest number and percentage of residents without health insurance each year for the last decade, and 1.2 million Houston-area residents under 65 have no health insurance coverage, including 232,000 children.

Lack of health insurance is also the largest contributor to delaying or not accessing prenatal care.¹¹ Women in Fort Bend and Harris counties receive prenatal care in their first trimester at lower rates than in Montgomery County, Texas, and the nation. The early prenatal care access rate in Fort Bend County fell by more than 10 percentage points to 61% in 2020 from 71% in 2019. One in 20 women in Harris County do not receive *any* prenatal care.¹²

Mental health is critical to well-being and is closely connected with physical health. Positive mental health can promote productivity and help us cope with adversity, while mental disorders may cause disability or even death.¹³ About 13% of Houston-area adults reported at least two weeks of poor mental health within one month during a 2019 survey — two points higher than in 2016.¹⁴ Just as suicide rates in the Houston region have ticked up, access to mental health care providers remains low.¹⁵ Our mental health worsened in 2020 and 2021 from emotional and mental distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with troubling implications for the future.¹⁶

The more we understand gaps in physical and mental health care access and outcomes, we can make investments to eliminate health disparities and improve outcomes for all residents.

4 Subtopics of Health

MENTAL HEALTH



1 out of 8

adults in the three-county Houston region reported mental distress for at least half the days in a one-month period in 2019, with the highest rates of distress in Harris and Montgomery counties.

HEALTH RISKS & OUTCOMES



IN THE HOUSTON REGION

- 1 in 6** adults are food insecure
- 1 in 4** adults don't get enough exercise
- 1 in 3** adults live with obesity

While individuals may be responsible for making healthy choices, the ability to choose and make changes also depends on the resources available to them. Half of Harris County adults who earn less than \$25,000 annually have obesity compared to about one-third of higher-earning adults.

EXPLORE ALL SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON OUR WEBSITE

WWW.UNDERSTANDINGHOUSTON.ORG

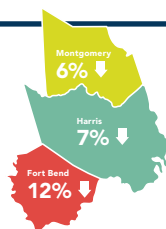
MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH



3x

Infant mortality rate for babies born to Black mothers in Harris County in 2018 is three times that for babies born to white women.

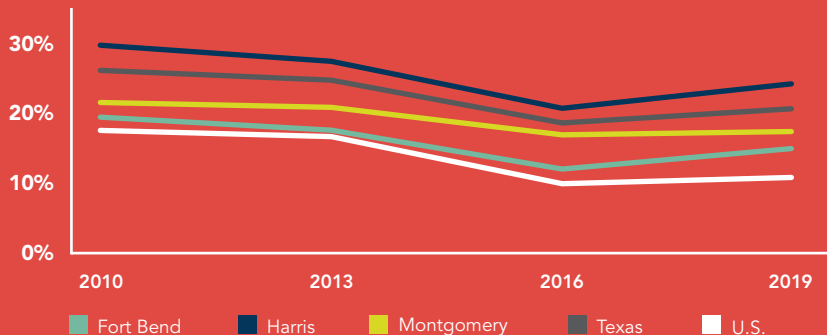
HEALTH CARE ACCESS



The ratio of preventable hospital stays per 100,000 Medicare enrollees fell in Houston's three counties between 2016 and 2018.

UNINSURED RATES

Percent of population under 65 without health insurance



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE)

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

LOW BIRTH WEIGHT



8.5% of babies born in the three-county area in 2020 weighed less than 5.5 lbs.

In addition to the high risk of infant mortality, infants with low birth weight also face short- and long-term health conditions which can permanently affect their quality of life.

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

CANCER MORTALITY

Per 100,000 people (age-adjusted)

FORT BEND = 111 HARRIS = 140 MONTGOMERY = 138

Cancer mortality rates in 2018 have steadily declined in Houston's three-county region and remain lower than the U.S. and Texas rate. Between 2010 and 2018, the cancer mortality rate in the United States fell 13%, compared with declines of 22% in Fort Bend, 13% in Harris and 15% in Montgomery counties.

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

COVID ANXIETY

1 out of 3

When COVID cases were soaring in July 2020, and vaccines were still in development, 1 out of 3 Houston-area adults reported feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge for **more than half the days** in the last week.

LEGENDS

LOCATIONS: Fort Bend Harris Montgomery

COMPARISONS: Better Worse Same No Info

See next page for references and data sources.

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health

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DATA SOURCES

SUBTOPICS

Health Care Access: County Health Rankings; Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Maternal & Child Health: CDC Wonder

Mental Health: 2022 County Health Rankings

Health Risks & Outcomes: Feeding America, 2021; 2022 County Health Rankings 2022, 2019 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; CDC, U.S. Diabetes Surveillance System, 2019

INDICATORS HIGHLIGHTED

Uninsured Rates: U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE)

Low Birth Weight: CDC, Wonder

COVID Anxiety: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 11 (July 9–14, 2020)

Cancer Mortality: Texas Cancer Registry

housing

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE AND SAFE HOUSING IS CRITICAL TO THE HEALTH, QUALITY OF LIFE, AND WELL-BEING OF ALL RESIDENTS.

Hundreds of thousands of Houston-area residents face housing insecurities, vulnerabilities, and inequities. Many of our neighbors are burdened by housing costs and economic insecurity, and they have been negatively impacted by multiple devastating disasters.

The cost of housing in Houston's three-county region has soared in recent years — especially for renters. In fact, between 2010 and 2021, median monthly housing costs increased by 10-22% for renters but *declined* by 8-15% for homeowners. In total, 760,000 households in the three-county region are burdened by monthly housing costs. Half of renter households spend 30% or more of their income on housing, compared with a quarter of homeowners. And one out of four renters spend at least half of their income on housing costs while one out of 10 homeowners do.



The Housing Price Index, a measure of average price changes of the same single-family homes, increased by 62%-66% in Houston's three-county region between 2010 and 2021. As a result, homeownership rates remain flat from a decade ago — despite an uptick in each of Greater Houston's three counties in the pandemic's immediate aftermath — and it has become increasingly unaffordable for would-be first-time homebuyers.

About 73% of white and 69% of Asian-American households were homeowners in 2021, compared with 54% of Hispanic and 41% of Black households. Since 2010, the disparity in homeownership rates between white and Black households has widened by six points in Harris County and four points in Fort Bend County and remained flat in Montgomery County.

The historical practice of redlining and other legalized discriminatory housing policies intent on racial exclusion prevented most Black households from homeownership for much of our nation's history. The impacts of these practices linger today, along with more modern tactics such as low home appraisals, predatory lending, and loan denials. Because homeownership remains a critical pathway to building wealth, homeownership disparities are among the main drivers of our nation's massive wealth gap.¹

Households burdened by housing costs typically have lower access to resources to navigate through and recover from external crises and threats such as weather-related disasters or economic shocks,² which can often lead to housing vulnerabilities, exposing residents to unsafe conditions, overcrowding, eviction, and homelessness.

Thousands of Houston-area homes have been damaged by multiple devastating crises since 2015. Nearly 11,000 homes in Houston's three-county region did not have complete plumbing and nearly 16,000 did not have a complete kitchen in 2021. These residents are among the most vulnerable to future storms because they are less able to withstand damage and tend to have the fewest resources to recover.³

Overcrowded households (more than one occupant per room) can have negative health impacts, as we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ About one out of 10 Houston-area renter households are overcrowded compared to 4% of homeowners. While rates of homelessness have declined significantly over the last decade, down 63% since 2011, eviction filings have been on the rise since COVID protections expired. The effects of eviction are devastating for families and make it harder to secure housing in the future.⁵

The more we understand affordable, safe, and stable housing as a basic need, the more we can do to ensure quality housing options are available across our region to keep our communities healthy and vibrant.

2 Subtopics of Housing



HOUSING AFFORDABILITY & HOMEOWNERSHIP

Between 2010 and 2021, median monthly housing costs fell for homeowners but rose for renters.

MEDIAN MONTHLY HOUSING COSTS

COUNTY	HOMEOWNERS	RENTERS
FORT BEND	8% ↓	10% ↑
HARRIS	15% ↓	12% ↑
MONTGOMERY	8% ↓	22% ↑

HOUSING VULNERABILITIES



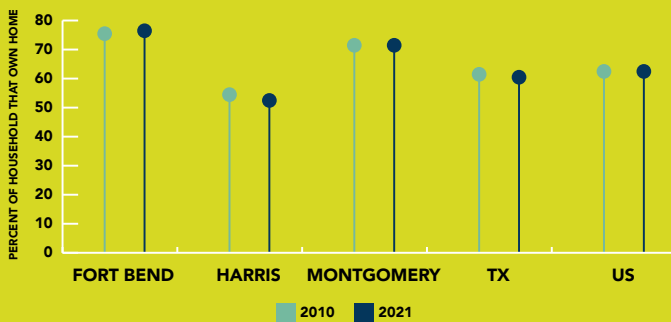
63% decline

in homelessness in the Houston area between 2011 and 2022.

EXPLORE BOTH SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON WWW.UNDERSTANDINGHOUSTON.ORG

HOMEOWNERSHIP

Homeownership rates have not improved in over a decade.



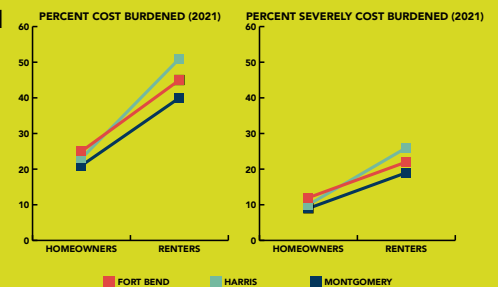
Trend over time: **FB** 👍 **H** 🗿 **M** 👍
 Compared to nation: **FB** 👍 **H** 🗿 **M** 👍

HOUSING-COST BURDEN

Renters are more cost-burdened (spend 30% or more of income on housing) than homeowners and are more likely to be severely cost burdened (spend 50% or more of income on housing).

Regional trend over time:
 Owners 👍
 Renters 🗿

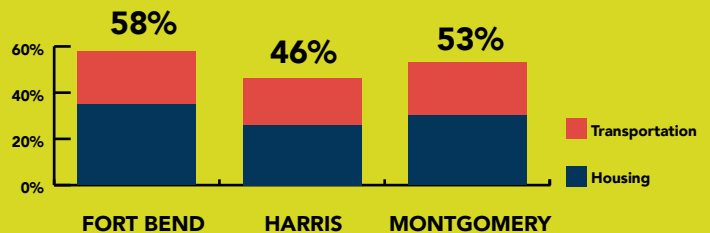
Compared to nation:
 Owners 🗿
 Renters 🗿



LOCATION AFFORDABILITY

For most households, housing and transportation represent the largest and second-largest expenditures, respectively.

Fort Bend County residents spend the largest share of their income on housing and transportation compared to residents of Harris and Montgomery counties.



HOUSING PROBLEMS

Between 2019 and 2021:



↑ 66%

IN HOUSING UNITS WITH INCOMPLETE PLUMBING

↑ 22%

IN HOUSING UNITS WITH INCOMPLETE KITCHENS

LEGENDS

LOCATIONS: **FB** Fort Bend **H** Harris **M** Montgomery

COMPARISONS: 👍 Better 🗿 Worse 👍 Same 🗿 No Info

See next page for references and data sources.

references

housing

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2. Bergstrand, K., Mayer, B., Brumback, B., & Zhang, Y. (2015). Assessing the Relationship Between Social Vulnerability and Community Resilience to Hazards. *Social Indicators Research*, 122(2), 391–409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-014-0698-3>
3. Pais, J. F., & Elliott, J. R. (2008). Places as Recovery Machines: Vulnerability and Neighborhood Change after Major Hurricanes. *Social Forces*, 86 (4), 1415–1453. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20430816>
4. WHO Housing and Health Guidelines. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. 3, Household crowding. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK535289/>
5. Desmond, M. (2012). Eviction and the reproduction of urban poverty. *American Journal of Sociology*, 118 (1), 88-133.

DATA SOURCES

SUBTOPICS

Housing Affordability & Homeownership: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates

Housing Vulnerabilities: The Coalition for the Homeless Houston/Harris County

INDICATORS HIGHLIGHTED

Homeownership: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates

Housing Cost Burden: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates

Location Affordability: CNT, 2022 H+T Index

Housing Problems: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates



GREATER HOUSTON
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

515 Post Oak Blvd.
Suite 1000
Houston, Texas 77027



www.understandinghouston.org