Saint John Paul II described social justice as concerning the social, political, and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions. Creating a socially just society, therefore, requires critical analyses of the structures of our society to determine if they perpetuate inequity or enhance justice. In the United States, levels of justice vary greatly between and among regions and states.

In the Gulf South states—Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida—policy and programmatic decisions historically have perpetuated inequity and left the poor, immigrants, and racial minorities without the ability to meet their basic human needs. Although some progress has been made, the history of injustice in the Gulf South states continues to manifest itself in contemporary social, political, and economic systems.

By measuring and comparing all 50 states and Washington, D.C. on nine social justice-related indicators, the JustSouth Index provides a strong starting point for determining not only where inequity is most problematic but also what systemic factors contribute to the inequity. The JustSouth Index also provides guidance regarding how citizens and leaders in the Gulf South can change this picture.
JustSouth Index
The JustSouth Index is designed to measure, on an annual basis, progress made and ground lost on issues of social justice in the Gulf South region, which includes Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. For purposes of comparison, all 50 states and Washington, D.C. are included in the Index. The JustSouth Index presents an assessment of how residents of each state are faring with regard to nine quantitative indicators. The indicators represent three interconnected dimensions of social justice that are critical to the history and future of the region: poverty, racial disparities, and immigrant exclusion.

Historically, states and communities in the Gulf South region have been slower to enact policies and develop systems that promote justice and equity for their residents, as compared to other states. Accordingly, this index will allow policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, community leaders, and other stakeholders in the region to better understand the specific issues of social justice that are most problematic in their respective states.

The nine indicators included in the JustSouth Index were selected specifically because they represent fundamental rights and needs of the human person. Other indicators related to civic participation, homeownership, and higher education are not included because they are not as pertinent to the most basic aspects of human life and dignity or they are not measured and reported on a regular basis for each state. Each indicator included in the index also is measurable and actionable, meaning that improvement is possible if sufficient political and social will is focused on taking the required steps forward.

The JustSouth Index is intended to be a point-in-time measure of how a state’s residents are faring with regard to poverty, racial disparity, and immigrant exclusion and to highlight opportunities for growth. In other words, the index serves as a starting point for advocacy and responsible civic action. It allows those working to increase justice and equity to measure progress and celebrate successes. The Index also highlights areas in which conditions are worsening in a state or a region, illustrating the need for focused action.

This project drew inspiration from the well-established Human Development Index, or HDI, created by the United Nations in 1990 as a new approach to defining, measuring, and comparing human well-being around the world. The HDI focuses on three key dimensions of human well-being: health, education, and standard of living. Released annually, the HDI report sheds light on the advances and setbacks to human development within those dimensions by measuring a set of representative indicators and calculating a composite index score for each country. In doing so, its authors aim to influence the agenda-setting and decision-making processes that impact human well-being in each country.

The goal of the JustSouth Index is similar, albeit on a much smaller scale. Like the HDI, this index is intended to stimulate dialogue, foster accountability, and shape processes that impact human well-being in the U.S. This index is designed to measure, on an annual basis, progress made and ground lost on issues of social justice in the Gulf South region, which includes Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. For purposes of comparison, all 50 states and Washington, D.C. are included in the Index. The JustSouth Index presents an assessment of how residents of each state are faring with regard to nine quantitative indicators. The indicators represent three interconnected dimensions of social justice that are critical to the history and future of the region: poverty, racial disparities, and immigrant exclusion.

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Measures of Social Justice

What is Social Justice?
Justice, as defined by Catholic social teaching, is not a simple human convention. As St. John Paul II stated, “what is ‘just’ is not first determined by the law but by the profound identity of the human being.” Every person’s right to human dignity is derived from his or her creation in the image of God; therefore, social, political, and economic aspects of society must serve to protect and promote the inherent dignity of individuals. Although justice is not a human convention, human behaviors, institutions, and systems can increase or decrease the level of justice in society.

A just society is one that fosters the common good. This concept, which is fundamental to Catholic social teaching, is defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church as, “social conditions that allow people, as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.” To attain the common good, individuals must have the material, cultural, and spiritual resources needed to achieve full development and contribution to society. It is the duty of political institutions to ensure the civil society is ordered in such a way that those resources are available to every citizen.

In fact, the common good is the reason that the political authority exists, and political leaders must “harmonize the different sectoral interests with the requirements of justice” in order to achieve it.

Policies and systems detract from social justice when they are inherently biased and perpetuate inequity rather than ameliorate it. The growing gap between the rich and poor in the U.S. is evidence of underlying economic policies that make the rich wealthier and keep the working poor from earning enough to live a dignified life. Policies that prohibit access to services and support systems further marginalize immigrants rather than promote solidarity. Finally, policies that maintain segregation of schools and housing keep racial minorities from achieving their full potential. Together these policies create an inequitable distribution of wealth, opportunity, and privilege. This leaves many without the ability to participate meaningfully in the economy and thus also unable to fully provide for themselves and their families. It also prevents them from enjoying the economic security, education, and good health essential to human well-being.
Measuring Social Justice

To measure progress toward social justice, the JustSouth Index isolates individual factors that represent the distribution of wealth, opportunity, and privilege in each state. The nine indicators included in the index are categorized into the three aforementioned dimensions: poverty, racial disparity, and immigrant exclusion. Although there are many elements of society that contribute to social justice, these three dimensions are most relevant to the region’s history and to the social, economic, and political challenges faced by residents and communities in the Gulf South states. Together the three dimensions illustrate the levels of material deprivation as well as discrimination and exclusion across states that are pivotal to explaining current levels of social justice in America and the Gulf South.

Social Justice in Three Dimensions

### POVERTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Income Per Household</td>
<td>Measures income generated per household, providing insight into purchasing power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Insurance Coverage for the Poor</td>
<td>Indicators availability and accessibility of health insurance to prevent medical debt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Affordability</td>
<td>Indicates the affordability of housing, including rent and mortgage costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In its 1986 pastoral letter, Economic Justice for All, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops proclaimed that dealing with poverty is a moral imperative of the highest priority. Ensuring that all people are able to enjoy a basic standard of living preserves human dignity and strengthens the common good of the whole society. Alternatively, those living in poverty suffer from material deprivation and negative psychosocial effects that undermine their dignity, diminish their life prospects, and reduce their ability to contribute to the common good. The common good, a basic concept of Catholic social teaching, describes the interconnectedness of individuals in society and the general social conditions that are equally to everyone’s advantage.

### RACIAL DISPARITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public School Segregation</td>
<td>Measures the integration of children into public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Minority Wage Equity</td>
<td>Indicates the wage gap between white and minority groups within the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Minority Employment Equity</td>
<td>Reflects the employment opportunities for white and minority groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Race is a critical consideration of social justice. Both systemic and individual-level racial discrimination divides communities and inhibits large racial groups in society from achieving their full potential and contributing fully to the common good. The disproportionate advantages for white Americans in relation to persons of color in virtually every sphere of life illustrate the deep divisions that exist despite the passage of Civil Rights Acts and the election of the first African-American president. Acknowledging and countering the lingering effects of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and racial prejudice are imperative steps to creating a more just society, especially in the Gulf South states.

### IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Youth Outcomes</td>
<td>Measures the treatment and integration of young immigrants in the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant English Proficiency</td>
<td>Indicates proficiency levels of immigrant youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Insurance Coverage for Immigrants</td>
<td>Ensures access to health care for immigrant residents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The U.S. and Mexican bishops expanded upon that notion in 2003, saying, “Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent dignity that should be respected.” The way that each U.S. state and community responds to newcomers has a direct impact on social justice. States in the Gulf South have experienced a significant influx of immigrants into their work forces in recent years. They have not yet, however, made adequate adjustments to their social, economic, and political systems in order to promote justice and dignity for immigrant residents. In addition, treatment of immigrants in the Gulf South states is colored by a history of discrimination against Hispanics and African Americans. Accordingly, the JustSouth Index Immigrant Exclusion Dimension includes indicators related to the treatment of immigrants and immigrant integration.

The selected indicators under each dimension are annually updated socioeconomic measures that are also clear, reliable, and actionable. Each indicator serves as a marker of the current state of social justice and as a baseline that can be compared across states and time. Because they are actionable, states and communities have the possibility of improving their scores on each indicator every year. Some indicators that are also important in measuring material deprivation, exclusion, and discrimination were not included because they are either not actionable or the data is not annually updated.

“...The fact that one is a citizen of a particular state does not detract in any way from his membership in the human family as a whole, nor from his citizenship in the world community.”
Some indicators that are also important in measuring material deprivation, discrimination, and exclusion of immigrants were not included because they did not fulfill one or more of the previous criteria.

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

### Developing the Dimension and Index Scores

The methodology for calculating the indicator scores and JustSouth Index rankings is based on the United Nations’ Human Development Index “goalpost approach” to measuring well-being. All 50 states and Washington, D.C., were given a score on each of the nine indicators in relation to the highest and lowest observable indicator values. The state with highest indicator value was given a score of 1, and the rest of the states received a standardized score between 0 and 1 according to their respective indicator values.

The three indicator scores under each of the three dimensions were used to calculate the Poverty, Racial Disparity, and Immigrant Exclusion Dimension index scores. This was done by calculating the arithmetic mean of each group of indicators. The arithmetic mean was used because each indicator is considered independent from the other indicators. The arithmetic mean weights each of the indicators equally, which means that a high or low score on one indicator can drastically affect a state’s dimension score.

With each dimension being a proxy for social justice, the dimensions are not independent of one another. As a result, in order to create an overall JustSouth Index, the geometric means of the dimension scores were used. The geometric mean “normalizes” the scores being combined so that no score dominates the weighting. This ensures that very high or low scores on one dimension do not drastically affect a state’s overall score. As with the individual indicator scores, each dimension index score falls between the “goalposts” of 0 and 1, with the highest scores closest to 1 and the lowest scores closest to 0.

### The Results

On the overall JustSouth Index rankings, most Gulf South states rank at the bottom of the list. Specifically, Alabama, Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana earned the bottom four rankings, respectively (see Table 1). Florida placed the highest of the five Gulf South states at 41st on the JustSouth Index. These results indicate the vast amount of work to be done to increase social justice in the region. Measures to increase income equity, access to health insurance coverage, racial equality, and community support for immigrants will improve social justice and preserve human dignity in the Gulf South states. The states’ scores on the three dimension indices and individual indicators provide more detailed information regarding specific areas of social justice in which each state is lacking. (See Table 2 and Table 3, page 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>JustSouth INDEX SCORE</th>
<th>JustSouth INDEX RANKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td>0.9048</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>0.8525</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>0.7461</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>0.7456</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>0.7195</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0.7047</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>0.7039</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>0.7032</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN</td>
<td>0.6939</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>0.6911</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>0.6801</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>0.6792</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>0.6792</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV</td>
<td>0.6714</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.6653</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>0.6629</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT</td>
<td>0.6629</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>0.6526</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>0.6432</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>0.6242</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>0.6242</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH</td>
<td>0.6223</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>0.6162</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI</td>
<td>0.6155</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>0.6141</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RI</td>
<td>0.6129</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>KY</td>
<td>0.6058</td>
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<tr>
<td>AK</td>
<td>0.6004</td>
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<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>0.5999</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>0.5931</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>0.5891</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>0.5787</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI</td>
<td>0.5729</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>0.5577</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NV</td>
<td>0.5539</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
<td>0.5525</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>0.5494</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN</td>
<td>0.5352</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>0.5159</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>0.5153</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>0.5084</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>0.5072</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>0.5055</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>0.5019</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>0.4786</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NM</td>
<td>0.4741</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>0.4598</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>0.4572</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>0.4517</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>0.3869</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>0.3814</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| TABLE 1 |
The Results, continued from page 7

JustSouth INDEX Maps

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

- Less than 0.25 standard deviation from the national average in either the positive or negative direction
- Between 0.25 and 1 standard deviation from the national average in either the positive or negative direction, or
- More than 1 standard deviation from the national average in either the positive or negative direction

GULF COAST STATES: Raw Indicator Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>Average Income of Poor Households</th>
<th>Percent of Poor Without Health Insurance</th>
<th>Percent of Poor with High Housing Cost Burden</th>
<th>White Minority Wage Gap</th>
<th>White Minority Unemployment Rate Gap</th>
<th>Share of Immigrant Disconnected Youth</th>
<th>Share of Immigrants with Difficulty Speaking English</th>
<th>Gap in Health Insurance Rate, Immigrant and Native-Born Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>$11,379</td>
<td>27.83%</td>
<td>88.74%</td>
<td>24.13%</td>
<td>12.49%</td>
<td>6.75%</td>
<td>11.58%</td>
<td>32.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>$13,890</td>
<td>33.15%</td>
<td>93.73%</td>
<td>7.77%</td>
<td>8.78%</td>
<td>3.11%</td>
<td>15.60%</td>
<td>32.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>$11,156</td>
<td>32.07%</td>
<td>90.63%</td>
<td>22.13%</td>
<td>21.01%</td>
<td>5.78%</td>
<td>21.50%</td>
<td>34.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>$9,891</td>
<td>35.25%</td>
<td>88.08%</td>
<td>23.29%</td>
<td>19.77%</td>
<td>6.14%</td>
<td>16.35%</td>
<td>30.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>$14,776</td>
<td>36.07%</td>
<td>89.72%</td>
<td>8.97%</td>
<td>13.91%</td>
<td>2.52%</td>
<td>19.71%</td>
<td>41.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US AVERAGE</td>
<td>$15,281</td>
<td>21.16%</td>
<td>85.90%</td>
<td>15.55%</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
<td>4.05%</td>
<td>15.23%</td>
<td>28.21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GULF COAST STATES: JustSouth INDEX and Dimension Indices Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>POVERTY DIMENSION</th>
<th>RACIAL DISPARITY DIMENSION</th>
<th>IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION DIMENSION</th>
<th>JustSouth INDEX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>0.3911 45</td>
<td>0.4963 46</td>
<td>0.4923 40</td>
<td>0.4572 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>0.3213 49</td>
<td>0.7222 16</td>
<td>0.5664 29</td>
<td>0.5084 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>0.3163 50</td>
<td>0.4443 49</td>
<td>0.3948 48</td>
<td>0.3814 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>0.2996 51</td>
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<td>0.4383 44</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>0.3830 46</td>
<td>0.6788 25</td>
<td>0.3543 49</td>
<td>0.4517 49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dimension 1: Poverty

**Average Annual Income of Households in the Lowest Income Quartile**

Stagnant wages and rising costs of living have created a class of “working poor” who simply cannot earn enough to cover their basic expenses. Unemployment and underemployment continue to plague particular regions and states, adding to the challenges households face in getting by and getting ahead. Many low-income households rely on income supports such as federal and state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) programs; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance; and child care assistance to bridge the gap between what they earn and the cost of basic necessities.

In the Gulf South states, however, the investment in income support programs has been trending downward and efforts to increase wages have been met with stiff resistance from state legislatures. Earnings from low-wage jobs combined with dwindling assistance from income support programs form a shred of a safety net that often fails families in times of crisis or unforeseen major expenses such as automobile trouble or a medical complication. It is imperative that both pieces of the equation, earnings and income supports, are strengthened so that low-income families are earning enough to live a dignified life.

**INDICATOR DATA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Minimum Indicator Value</th>
<th>Maximum Indicator Value</th>
<th>Average Indicator Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>$9,891</td>
<td>$11,379</td>
<td>$10,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>$9,891</td>
<td>$11,156</td>
<td>$10,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>$9,891</td>
<td>$14,776</td>
<td>$11,788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>$9,891</td>
<td>$13,890</td>
<td>$11,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>$9,891</td>
<td>$15,624</td>
<td>$12,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US AVERAGE</td>
<td>$9,891</td>
<td>$15,624</td>
<td>$12,047</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Action Steps**

The most direct way to increase the average income of the poorest households is to increase wages. Data show that in 2013 more than 10 million workers had earnings that were not sufficient to bring them above the federal poverty line, which is just $23,834 a year for a family of four. A powerful tool state leaders can use to boost the earnings of low-income families is a state minimum wage law. Twenty-nine states and D.C. already have created their own minimum wage laws that are higher than the federal minimum wage. Unfortunately, in the Gulf South states, only Florida has enacted its own minimum wage law, which currently is set only modestly above the federal minimum wage at $8.05 per hour. Municipal governments also can take action to raise the local minimum wage.

Also, state EITC programs that supplement the federal EITC program are highly effective in raising families out of poverty. Twenty-five states and D.C. have created state EITC programs, but of the Gulf South states, Louisiana is the only one to have such a program. Albeit a good start, Louisiana’s EITC program is the smallest in the nation at only 3.5 percent of the federal EITC. Comparatively, California allows low-income filers to claim a state tax credit up to 85 percent of the federal credit. State EITC programs generally have bipartisan support, are easy to administer, and nearly every dollar a state spends on its EITC program goes to working families who need help. By allowing low-income workers to keep more of what they earn, EITC programs increase family economic security and encourage the lowest-earning households to remain in the work force and work more hours.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance program is another income support program that helps the poorest families meet their basic needs. The federal government provides funding to states for TANF in the form of a block grant. States have great discretion regarding setting eligibility criteria and benefit levels for their cash assistance programs. The amount of TANF funding that actually goes to cash assistance has decreased substantially, especially in the Gulf South states. For example, the maximum TANF monthly benefit for a single-parent family of three in Mississippi is $370 compared to $506 in Oregon and $653 in Wisconsin. Moreover, substantially fewer poor families qualify for TANF cash assistance programs as eligibility criteria have been tightened in many states since the block grant program went into effect. In 1996, 68 of every 100 poor families received TANF benefits, and in 2014, just 23 of every 100 poor families were receiving benefits. State legislatures must alter eligibility criteria and benefit amounts to ensure that the families in deep poverty can maintain a basic standard of living.

Child care assistance is another cost-effective income support program that contributes to the economic security of low-income working households. The federal government provides the majority of funding for child care assistance in the form of the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the TANF block grant. States, however, have discretion regarding eligibility criteria, copayment requirements, and provider reimbursement rates for their state programs. States also have options regarding how much of their federal TANF block grant funds are devoted to child care subsidies and how much state revenue, if any, will supplement the federal funding. Reduced funding and increasingly restrictive eligibility criteria in certain states limit the number of low-income parents who qualify for assistance. High copayment requirements limit the number of families who can afford child care even with assistance. Investing additional federal and state resources in child care assistance is a “win-win” economic investment for states because it allows parents to maintain stable employment and provides their children the opportunity to learn and develop the skills they need to succeed in school.
Catholic social thought holds that access to health care is a basic right that flows from the sanctity and dignity of human life, but it is out of reach for many Americans, especially the poor. Without private or public health insurance coverage, many low-income persons do not seek medical care when sick or pursue preventive services to avoid illness. When the uninsured do receive medical care, high out-of-pocket costs often lead to medical debt and even greater financial instability. The most common health-insurance option for low-income individuals and families is the Medicaid program, which is jointly funded by federal and state governments. Unfortunately, strict eligibility criteria for Medicaid in a number of states prohibit many low-income persons from enrolling in the program. The 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act provided an option for state leaders to expand Medicaid eligibility to include all who are below 138 percent of the federal poverty line. Also, states can engage in outreach activities to connect with hard-to-reach populations who may not be aware of their eligibility for Medicaid or private insurance subsidies, such as residents of rural areas and immigrant populations.

**Action Steps**

The most efficient way for state leaders to increase the health insurance coverage rate among the poor is to expand Medicaid eligibility to include all who are below 138 percent of the federal poverty line. Also, states can engage in outreach activities to connect with hard-to-reach populations who may not be aware of their eligibility for Medicaid or private insurance subsidies, such as residents of rural areas and immigrant populations.

**Indicator 2**

**Percent of Persons in Lowest Income Quartile Without Health Insurance**

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**Action Steps**

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**Indicator 3**

**Percent of Renter Households in Lowest Income Quartile With a High Housing Cost Burden**

Families who pay more than 30 percent of their total household income for housing are considered by the federal Housing and Urban Affairs Department to be “housing cost-burdened.” For households with limited income, spending a high percentage of income on rent often does not leave enough money for other essential expenses, such as food, transportation, and medical expenses. Moreover, high rent payments reduce the proportion of income that members of a household can spend in their community, creating a ripple effect of economic distress. Housing subsidies and affordable housing units can alleviate the financial strain faced by families whose earnings have not kept pace with rising costs of rent. Federal housing programs such as the Housing Choice Voucher Program, Section 8 Voucher Program, and public housing help to reduce the share of monthly income that is consumed by rent for some families. Federal spending for housing assistance, however, is not nearly sufficient to meet demand, and only 1 in 4 low-income households paying rent received federal assistance in 2014. As a result, there are waiting lists for housing assistance in most states, which has prompted states, cities, and nonprofit organizations to develop housing initiatives to supplement the federal efforts.

**Action Steps**

Many states supplement the federal housing assistance funding they receive with state-funded housing subsidies and assistance. A 2015 report on state-funded housing assistance programs found 77 such programs in 30 states. The state-funded programs vary in size and function, but all are aimed at improving housing affordability and ensuring that low-income persons and families have a secure place to live. Unfortunately, Texas currently is the only Gulf South state to offer a state-funded housing assistance program. Without additional state investment or an unlikely expansion in the level of federal housing funding, the waiting lists and housing insecurity of families in the Gulf South states will continue to grow. States and municipalities also can improve housing affordability by offering incentives to developers and municipalities to encourage the development of affordable housing. For example, states and cities can create incentive housing zones in which developers can request a project-based subsidy for a specified number of affordable rental units developed within the zone. Massachusetts’ lawmakers created a program called Smart Growth Zoning Districts. The program allows municipalities to receive incentive payments for creating zoning districts in which residential development is constructed at higher densities than typically allowed and 20 percent of homes are affordable to low- and moderate-income families. By creating similar programs, the Gulf South states can reduce the share of households that are housing-cost burdened and increase economic security of the most vulnerable households.

**INDICATOR DATA**

**Minimum Indicator Value**

6.2% of poor are without health insurance coverage (MA)

**Maximum Indicator Value**

36.1% of poor are without health insurance coverage (TX)

**Average Indicator Value**

21.2% of poor are without health insurance coverage

**Gulf South States**

AL 27.8% FL 33.2% LA 32.1% MS 35.3% TX 36.1%

**INDICATOR DATA**

**Minimum Indicator Value**

77.7% of poor households that are renters that have a high housing cost burden (SD)

**Maximum Indicator Value**

93.7% of poor households that are renters that have a high housing cost burden (FL)

**Average Indicator Value**

85.9% of poor households that are renters that have a high housing cost burden

**Gulf South States**

AL 88.7% FL 93.7% LA 90.6% MS 88.1% TX 89.7%
Racial Disparity

Indicator 1

Percent of Public Schools Segregated by Race

School districts made significant progress toward school desegregation in the years following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but the trend has shifted back toward race-based school segregation as federal oversight has diminished. Following a set of Supreme Court decisions in the late 1960s and 1970s that required Department of Education officials to oversee implementation of school desegregation plans, the rate of black students attending majority-white schools increased dramatically, growing from 1 percent in 1963 to 43 percent in 1983. After federal oversight was phased out and schools were left to make good faith efforts to maintain integration, there was significant backsliding. In 2012, 74 percent of black students and 80 percent of Latino students attended schools that were 50 to 100 percent minority, and of these, more than 40 percent of black and Latino students attended schools that were 90 to 100 percent minority.

This trend toward re-segregation represents an injustice because it often means minorities are concentrated in schools that have fewer resources and face challenges attracting and retaining quality teachers. A mounting body of evidence indicates that segregation of schools has negative impacts on both short-term academic achievement of minority students and their success in later life. Integrated schools have a positive impact on all in attendance through promoting awareness and understanding and ensuring that students have the necessary tools to function in an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse society. Not taking intentional steps to ensure that all students have the opportunity to attend quality, integrated schools perpetuates injustice and allows the mistakes of the past to haunt the future.

INDICATOR DATA

Minimum Indicator Value
14% of public schools are segregated (HI)

Maximum Indicator Value
57.0% of public schools are segregated (Washington, D.C.)

Average Indicator Value
15.6% of public schools are segregated

Gulf South States
AL 24.1% FL 7.8% LA 22.1% MS 23.3% TX 9.0%

Measuring School Segregation

School segregation was analyzed in the JustSouth Index by measuring whether a school serves a high proportion of students of a single race and whether the student population of a school is representative of the public school student population in the school’s home county. Specifically, a school was considered segregated if it met two criteria:
1.) More than 90 percent of students attending the school were the same race
2.) The racial composition of the school’s student population was significantly different (5 percentage points) than that of the overall public school student population in the county.

Action Steps

To reverse the trend toward re-segregation of public school systems, states and districts must implement the policies that are designed in the same spirit and intentionality as those that were effective in integrating schools in the 1970s and 1980s. These tools included redrawing of school district boundaries, allowing intra- and inter-district transfers, subsidizing transportation, and increasing school choice through charter and magnet schools. Strategic housing development and community planning are also necessary since housing segregation is a powerful driver of many forms of racial inequality, including segregated schools. Ultimately, the appropriate policy tools for increasing integration in public schools depend on the individual district and the students it serves, but in districts where schools are becoming less diverse, decisive action by local leaders is critical.

States and school districts also should increase the share of resources allocated to schools serving a large percentage of minority students. Additional funding would allow those schools to attract and retain high-quality teachers, and provide critical support services for at-risk students. Funding quality early child care and pre-kindergarten programs, early grade reading programs, reduced class sizes, and counseling can help offset the challenges often faced by minority students.

INDICATOR DATA

Minimum Indicator Value
1.3% gap in white-minority earnings (IA)

Maximum Indicator Value
21.0% gap in white-minority earnings (LA)

Average Indicator Value
8.8% gap in white-minority earnings

Gulf South States
AL 12.5% FL 8.8% LA 21.0% MS 19.8% TX 13.9%

In 1986, the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops denounced the existence of employment discrimination based on race in the United States as a scandal that could never be justified. This is because, they go on to explain, “work with adequate pay for all who seek it is the primary means for achieving basic justice in our society.” Although lawmakers have put in place federal and state laws that prohibit and penalize racial discrimination in employment, it still is a practice that significantly distorts the distribution of wealth, opportunity, and privilege in society. A 2011 study found that the raw gap in earnings between white and black workers is close to 30 percent. When relevant factors are controlled for, including educational attainment, age, and occupation, the gap is still nearly 10 percent. This means that on average, a minority worker would earn only $45,000 in the same position in which a white worker in the same field with the same level of education and experience would earn $50,000. A significant body of field-based research also has found that employers engage in conscious and non-conscious processes that result in inequitable hiring and compensation. Denying minorities equal pay for equal work, whether consciously or not, is inherently unjust and undermines the dignity of minority workers, continuing centuries of injustice.
Employment is a basic right that allows all citizens the freedom to participate in the economic life of society. Jobs enable workers to contribute to the common good and to meet their basic needs. The distribution of unemployment in the U.S. is skewed such that a significantly higher proportion of minority workers are unemployed than white workers. The cause of this disparity is multifaceted. Research indicates that differences in average educational attainment and job-preparedness between racial groups account for a portion of the unemployment gap. Studies also have documented the impact of racial discrimination in hiring practices. Taken together, minority workers and their families are at a significant disadvantage regarding employment and earning potential. As with wage laws, discrimination in hiring practices already is prohibited by federal and state laws, but violations of those laws can be difficult to prove.

Disproportionate levels of unemployment also are harmful to minority workers and families because unemployment negatively impacts one’s psychological and spiritual well-being. As noted by the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops in 1986: “The unemployed often come to feel they are worthless and without a productive role in society. Each day they are unemployed our society tells them: ‘We don’t need your talent. We don’t need your initiative. We don’t need you.’ As a result, those who suffer long periods of unemployment often have psychological damage that can have lasting effects on their well-being."

**INDICATOR DATA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Minimum Indicator Value</th>
<th>Maximum Indicator Value</th>
<th>Average Indicator Value</th>
<th>Gulf South States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No gap in white-minority unemployment rate (VT)</td>
<td>9.5% gap in white-minority unemployment rate (Washington, D.C.)</td>
<td>4.1% gap in white-minority unemployment rate (50 states and Washington, D.C.)</td>
<td>AL 6.8% FL3.1% LA5.8% MS6.1% TX2.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Action Steps**

Enhanced enforcement of labor discrimination laws is critical to creating a culture in which overt or covert racial discrimination in the workplace is considered unacceptable. Many employers likely have not acknowledged the underlying psychological and cognitive processes that result in discriminatory compensation and promotion practices. Stereotyping based on race will continue to occur unless businesses and organizations take proactive steps to counter those tendencies that perpetuate race inequity. Judiciously administered affirmative action programs in workplaces can contribute to ensuring that minorities have equal opportunity to obtain positions and compensation for which they are qualified.

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

Disparity in job preparation between racial groups and discriminatory practices in the workplace must be addressed in order to reduce the gap in unemployment rates between white and minority workers. Creating equal access to quality public education for minority children is vital to ensuring the same preparation for post-secondary education and employment as their white counterparts. The employment and earning potential of working-age persons who are minorities also can be improved through strategic investment. To close the unemployment gap among workers, states and communities should increase support for programs that offer vocational training, GED classes and tutoring, and other supports that help minorities increase their marketable skills and credentials.

Covert and overt racial discrimination in hiring and termination practices also must be addressed. A 2010 study found that black employees are significantly more likely than white employees to be laid off when companies need to downsize, indicating that state and federal enforcement agencies and nonprofit legal organizations must be vigilant in their efforts to protect workers and prosecute employers that engage in discriminatory hiring and firing practices. Voluntary affirmative action programs and recruitment activities by public and private employers that reach a broad and diverse audience also are critical to closing the employment gap for minorities.
Focused on the aspects of immigration, the document highlights the challenges faced by immigrant youth, particularly those who are disconnected from the education system. These youth, aged between 18 and 25, are more likely to lack cultural knowledge, face barriers to education and employment, and struggle with language acquisition. The Report suggests strategies to mitigate these challenges, emphasizing the importance of early childhood education providers, public schools, and community colleges in offering support and resources to help immigrants gain English proficiency.

Furthermore, the document acknowledges the need for federal, state, and local resources to develop and expand ESL programs to ensure that immigrants have the opportunity to become part of their new community, both socially and economically. Initiatives that combine work force development and language-learning programs with immigrants on a fast track to better social and economic outcomes are essential to increasing the availability and quality of language services provided to immigrant families.

**Dimension 3: Immigrant Exclusion**

**Indicator 1: Rate of Disconnected Immigrant Youth**

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

**Action Steps**

To decrease the rate of disconnected immigrant youth, communities must ensure that immigrant youth have both the academic opportunities and social supports needed to overcome obstacles associated with migrating to a new country. Through increasing resources to schools that teach English as a Second Language, or ESL, states and school districts can ensure that immigrant students overcome language barriers and receive their high school diplomas. For students who already have left the public education system, providing job-training programs and offering support services such as GED preparation programs, affordable child care, and community-based language instruction to immigrants can help bring disconnected youth back to the work force and on the path to self-sufficiency. In addition to skill-building, immigrant youth also need mentors who can help them navigate their challenging new circumstances. School and community-based mentoring programs can help disconnected youth overcome the psychological and emotional difficulties that result from immigrating to a foreign country.

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

Most immigrants arrive in the U.S. with limited English skills but recognize the benefits of English proficiency and are highly motivated to learn. English language acquisition is beneficial to immigrants of all ages, including school-age children, working-age adults, and older immigrants. Providing immigrants the opportunity to learn English facilitates their integration into the local community, helping them become more economically productive and allowing them to participate more fully in society. Moreover, many immigrants have skills and training that could allow contribution to the economy through innovation and entrepreneurship, yet limited English proficiency often inhibits skilled immigrants from obtaining jobs commensurate with their competencies. Language acquisition also is important for young immigrants, as effective language programs increase the cognitive and social development of children and help them be better prepared to learn in school.

**Action Steps**

State and community leaders must effectively utilize federal, state, and local resources to develop and expand ESL programs to ensure that immigrants have the opportunity to become part of their new community, both socially and economically. In particular, funding family literacy programs that allow parents and children to participate in shared literacy activities is important because they provide the opportunity for parents to learn how to use English with their children during daily routines. Also, initiatives that combine work force development and language-learning programs with immigrants on a fast track to better social and economic outcomes. Accordingly, collaboration between and among various entities that serve immigrants in a community, such as early childhood education providers, public schools, community colleges, and job-training programs, is essential to increasing the availability and quality of language services provided to immigrant families. Additionally, state funding for school districts must adequately account for the extra resources required to teach students of limited English proficiency. For example, in Texas, schools districts that have experienced an influx of students with limited English proficiency have had difficulty providing effective services to students because the school finance system does not take into consideration the true costs of providing quality language services to immigrant children.

**INDICATOR DATA**

**Indicator 1: Rate of Disconnected Immigrant Youth**

| Minimum Indicator Value | AL 11.6% | FL 15.6% | LA 21.5% |
| Maximum Indicator Value | MS 16.4% | TX 19.7% |
| Average Indicator Value | 15.2% |

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

| Minimum Indicator Value | AL 32.4% | FL 32.3% | LA 34.8% |
| Maximum Indicator Value | MS 30.6% | TX 41.7% |
| Average Indicator Value | 28.0% |

**Gulf South States**

AL 11.6% FL 15.6% LA 21.5% MS 16.4% TX 19.7%
Indicator 3
**Gap in Health Insurance Coverage Between Immigrant and Native-Born Populations**

Immigrants, both legal and unauthorized, are less likely to have health insurance than native-born residents of the United States. As a result, many are forced to rely on a patchwork system of safety-net clinics and hospitals, facing high costs or paying out-of-pocket for health care services. As with the general population, lack of health care coverage for immigrants often leads to poor health outcomes, lost wages, and financial instability. The U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops describes access to health care as a basic human right that should never be out of reach for individuals simply based on social or legal status.

The gap in health insurance rates between immigrant and native-born populations exists in both private and publicly provided coverage. Despite high rates of employment, significantly fewer immigrants have employer-sponsored health care than white employees, largely because insurance is less likely to be offered to them in the workplace. According to research by the Migration Policy Institute, job-based health insurance is offered to 87 percent of white citizen workers but only to 50 percent of Hispanic workers. This gap persists even after controlling for job type, salary level, and other factors. Federal and state regulations also prevent many immigrants from enrolling in Medicaid and Medicare. Creating barriers to health insurance not only puts immigrants at great risk but also weakens their ability to contribute to the common good. This is because immigrants’ lack of health insurance, like the poor, puts them at risk of absence from work, financial instability, long-term health complications, and early death.

**INDICATOR DATA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum Indicator Value</th>
<th>3.5% gap in immigrant and native-born health insurance rate (VT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Indicator Value</td>
<td>32.3% gap in immigrant and native-born health insurance rate (AK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Indicator Value</td>
<td>17.4% gap in immigrant and native-born health insurance rate (50 states and Washington, D.C.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gulf South States**

| AL | 29.3% |
| FL | 16.5% |
| LA | 26.9% |
| MS | 31.5% |
| TX | 27.4% |

**Action Steps**

Federal regulations generally prohibit immigrants from entering the Medicaid program unless they have been lawfully residing in the country for at least five years. Individual states, however, have flexibility to allow some immigrants to obtain public health insurance regardless of their date of entry or immigration status. For example, states have the option to use federal Children’s Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, funds to provide care to legally residing immigrant children and pregnant mothers without enforcing the five-year waiting period. In 2014, only 29 states and D.C. had chosen to utilize that option, with Texas being the only Gulf South state to do so. States also can extend public health insurance to immigrants regardless of their immigration status but must use state funds to cover the costs. For example, Illinois and Washington have state-funded children’s health insurance programs that provide coverage to all immigrant children who fall below a certain income threshold.

Employers also must take action to close the health insurance gap between the immigrant and native-born populations by offering health insurance on equivalent terms to all workers, as required by federal law. While a portion of the gap in private health insurance rates is attributable to immigrants working in industries that are less likely to offer health insurance, some is attributable to the practices of employers. Some businesses attempt to reduce costs by classifying immigrants as contract, temporary, or part-time workers to avoid offering benefits. Not only are these practices harmful to immigrant workers and families, but they also are not in the long-term interest of the employer because workers who have health insurance are more present, productive, and committed to their jobs.
Conclusion

The JustSouth Index and its underlying dimension indices represent areas in which people concerned about social justice must focus their attention to improve the standing of all persons in a state. Each individual indicator is actionable and connected to concrete policy and program recommendations. While the Gulf South states currently rank low in the Index, it is well within the power, and the duty, of leaders and citizens in those states to change the current reality. Improving a state’s ranking on the indicators, dimension indices, and the overall JustSouth Index is incumbent on policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, community leaders, and citizens taking action to work for policy and program changes that will more justly distribute opportunity and resources to all in society. In turn, they will serve the common good and create greater solidarity among residents of each state. Going forward, the JustSouth Index will continue to measure and report on the successes of efforts to improve social justice in the Gulf South states on an annual basis.

For more detailed data, methodology, and resources related to the JustSouth Index, please visit loyno.edu/JSRI or contact Jeanie Donovan at jdonova@loyno.edu.

Indicator Methodology

POVERTY DIMENSION

Average Annual Income of Households in Lowest Income Quartile

Considers the total annual income of each household in a state to isolate the households in the lowest income quartile. The mean income of households in the lowest income quartile in a state represents the state’s indicator value. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Household file.

Share of Persons in Lowest Income Quartile Without Health Insurance

Compares the total number of persons between the ages of 15 and 64 who are in the lowest income quartile* to the total number of persons in that income quartile who reported not having any form of public or private health insurance coverage at the time of survey. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Individual file.

Percent of Renter Households in Lowest Income Quartile with a High Housing Cost Burden

Compares the total number of households in a state that are in the lowest income quartile* and rent their home to the number of those households that report spending more than 30% of their income in gross rent costs in the past 12 months. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Household file.

RACIAL DISPARITY DIMENSION

Percent of Segregated Schools

Considers the percentage of public schools in a state that have a student population that is 90 percent or more one race and where student population is more than 5 percentage points different than the total public school population in the county in which the school is located. Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Elementary/Secondary Information System, 2013.

White-Minority Wage Gap

Considers the hourly wages of working-age (ages 18-64) white persons in a state to the hourly wages of working-age non-white persons while controlling for race, level of education, and occupation using a weighted regression analysis to determine the isolated impact of minority status on earnings. Source: 2014 Current Population Survey**.

White-Minority Unemployment Rate Gap

Considers the percentage of white persons aged 16 years and over who reported being unemployed to the percentage of non-white persons who reported being unemployed. Unemployment is defined as “respondent did not have employment during the last week, were available for work, and had made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the proceeding 4 week period.” Source: 2014 Current Population Survey Microdata**.

IMMIGRANT EXCLUSION DIMENSION

Disconnected Immigrant Youth Rate

Compares the total number of foreign-born youth (ages 18-25) who have not been born in the U.S. in a state with the number of foreign-born youth who reported that they were not enrolled in school in the past three months and had not worked in the past week. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Individual file.

Percent of Immigrant Population with Difficulty Speaking English

Considers the number of foreign-born individuals in each state who entered the U.S. in 2011 or earlier who reported speaking English “not well” or “not at all” compared to the total population of foreign-born individuals in each state. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample; Individual file.

Gap in Health Insurance Rate Between Immigrant and Native-Born Populations

Considers the difference in the percentage of total foreign-born residents of a state (all who reported being born in another country who reported not having public or private health insurance in 2014) compared to the percentage of all native-born residents of the state who reported not having public or private health insurance in 2014. Source: 2014 American Community Survey, detailed table created using American FactFinder.

All indicators that are based on individual or household income include earned wages, commissions, bonuses, or tips; self-employment income; interest, dividends, net rental income, royalty income, or income from estates and trusts; Social Security or Railroad Retirement; Supplemental Social Security Income; public assistance or welfare payments; retirement, survivor or disability pensions; veterans’ payments; unemployment compensation; and child support payments. Income is reported in inflation-adjusted 2014 constant dollars.

*All indicators that are based on individual or household income include earned wages, commissions, bonuses, or tips; self-employment income; interest, dividends, net rental income, royalty income, or income from estates and trusts; Social Security or Railroad Retirement; Supplemental Social Security Income; public assistance or welfare payments; retirement, survivor or disability pensions; veterans’ payments; unemployment compensation; and child support payments. Income is reported in inflation-adjusted 2014 constant dollars.

**Current Population Survey microdata were analyzed using the pooled extracts provided by the Economic Policy Institute’s Economic Analyze and Research Network. All income and earnings data are reported in 2014 income adjusted dollars. Detailed statistical output and tables generated by Jeanie Donovan using the U.S. Census Bureau’s Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) file, Community Population Survey, and National Center for Education Statistics Elementary/Secondary Information System (ELS) System. For more detailed statistical methodological information, please contact jdonova@loyno.edu.

Indicator icons courtesy of The Noun Project.

Average Income of Poor Households

Inspired by and its underlying dimension indices represent areas in which people concerned about social justice must focus their attention to improve the standing of all persons in a state. Each individual indicator is actionable and connected to concrete policy and program recommendations. While the Gulf South states currently rank low in the Index, it is well within the power, and the duty, of leaders and citizens in those states to change the current reality.

Improving a state’s ranking on the indicators, dimension indices, and the overall JustSouth Index is incumbent on policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, community leaders, and citizens taking action to work for policy and program changes that will more justly distribute opportunity and resources to all in society. In turn, they will serve the common good and create greater solidarity among residents of each state. Going forward, the JustSouth Index will continue to measure and report on the successes of efforts to improve social justice in the Gulf South states on an annual basis.

For more detailed data, methodology, and resources related to the JustSouth Index, please visit loyno.edu/JSRI or contact Jeanie Donovan at jdonova@loyno.edu.
Alabama

JustSouth Index State Report Card

DIMENSION INDICES

Poverty: 45
Alabama ranks 45th out of 50 in the Poverty Dimension, which reflects how little the state has invested in creating a safety net for its poorest residents. To improve family economic security, state leaders should consider raising the state’s minimum wage and establishing a state Earned Income Tax program. Further, expanding Medicaid eligibility to ensure that low-income Alabamians have access to health care is critical to improving well-being in the state.

Racial Disparity: 46
Alabama ranks 46th out of 50 in the Racial Disparity Dimension, illustrating the immense amount of work to be done to increase racial equity in the state. State and local leaders must invest in programs that provide economic and educational opportunities to minorities, including funding high-quality schools, vocational training, and need-based financial aid for college. Also, state oversight of employment practices by public and private firms is imperative to ensuring minority workers earn equal pay for equal work. (Dimension Index Score: 50 out of 1)

Immigrant Exclusion: 40
Alabama ranks 40th out of 50 in the Immigrant Exclusion Dimension, which is reflective of the hostile environment that state borders have created for immigrants in the state. A large number of immigrant youth in Alabama are disconnected from education or employment. Alabama also has a large gap between the health insurance rates of immigrants and native-born residents. Without a comprehensive strategy to address this gap, Alabama will continue to miss the opportunity to benefit from a growing portion of the state’s population and the creativity of the state as a whole. (Dimension Index Score: 49 out of 1)

JUST SOUTH INDEX RANKING: 48

2014 State Population by Race

Total Population: 4,849,377

White: 66.2%

Hispanic or Latino: 4.4%

Black or African American: 26.2%

American Indian and Alaska Native: 0.7%

Two or more Races: 0.9%

Asian: 1.1%

Individual Indicator Scores (0 to 1 Goalpost Scoring)

Income of Poor Households

Health Insurance Coverage for Poor

Housing Affordability

Non-Segregation of Public Schools

White-Minority Employment Equity

White-Minority Wage Equity

Immigrant English Proficiency

Immigrant Youth Outcomes

Health Insurance Coverage for Immigrants

Poverty Dimension

Average Income of Poorest 25% of Households

$11,379

$15,261

$20,996

Share of Poor Without Health Insurance: 28%

Nearly 1 in 4 Alabama public schools are segregated by race.

Gap in Unemployment Rates Between White and Minority Workers

11.7% Minority workers unemployed

4.9% White workers unemployed

88%

Immigrant Exclusion Dimension

Only 59 percent of immigrants in Alabama have public or private health insurance coverage, compared to 89 percent of the native-born population.

32% of immigrants in Alabama have difficulty speaking English

SOURCE:

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014


National Center for Education Statistics, Elementary and Secondary Information System, 2012-2013

See JustSouth index Report, Indicators and Methodology sections for detailed description of analyses.
Florida

**JustSouth Index State Report Card**

**DIMENSION INDICES**

**Poverty**
- Florida ranks 49 out of 51 in the Poverty Dimension because the state has an extremely high percentage of low-income Floridians without health insurance and low-income households struggling to afford basic necessities. [Dimension Index Score: 52 out of 100]

**Racial Disparity**
- Florida ranks 16 out of 51 in the Racial Disparity Dimension, indicating that the state has made significant progress with regard to reducing racial disparity in its schools and workplaces. [Dimension Index Score: 64 out of 100]

**Immigrant Exclusion**
- Florida ranks 29 out of 51 in the Immigrant Exclusion Dimension, largely due to its well-integrated Latino immigrant population. State and local leaders must invest in efforts to increase English proficiency among immigrants to ensure that immigrant youth have access to the workforce of tomorrow. [Dimension Index Score: 72 out of 100]

**JUST SOUTH INDEX RANKING**
- 41

**2014 State Population by Race**
- Total Population: 19,893,297
  - White: 55.8%
  - Black or African American: 18.8%
  - Hispanic or Latino: 24.1%
  - Asian: 2.8%
  - American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.5%

**Individual Indicator Scores (0 to 1 Goalpost Scoring)**
- Income of Poor Households
- Health Insurance Coverage for Poor
- Housing Affordability
- White-Minority Employment Equity
- Non-Segregation of Public Schools
- White-Minority Wage Equity
- Immigrant English Proficiency
- Immigrant Youth Outcomes
- Health Insurance Coverage for Immigrants

**Florida**

**Poverty Dimension**
- Average Income of Poorest 25% of Households:
  - Florida: $13,890
  - National Average: $20,996
  - New Hampshire: $15,291

**Racial Disparity Dimension**
- 8 percent of Florida's public schools are segregated by race.

**Immigrant Exclusion Dimension**
- 70 percent of immigrants in Florida have public or private health insurance coverage, compared to 67 percent of the native-born population.

**Sources:**
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014

See the full JustSouth Index Report, Indicators and Methodology sections, for detailed description of analyses.
Louisiana

**JustSouth Index State Report Card**

**DIMENSION INDICES**

**Poverty** 50
Louisiana ranks 50 out of 51 in the Poverty Dimension, which is a reflection of state leaders’ unwillingness to increase the minimum wage, enhance the state’s Earned Income Tax Credit program, or expand Medicaid eligibility to cover the poorest Louisianans. Additionally, housing and child care assistance programs only reach a fraction of those who need help due to low investment by the states. [Dimension Index Score: 32 out of 41]

**Racial Disparity** 49
Louisiana ranks 49 of 51 in the Racial Disparity Dimension, which is attributable to the large gap in earnings between white and minority workers in similar occupations and high rates of unemployment for non-white job seekers. While Louisiana does have a state law banning employment discrimination based on race, the state has not enforced its investigative and adjudicatory activities to ensure that all workers have an equal opportunity to earn a fair wage.

**Immigrant Exclusion** 48
Louisiana ranks 48 out of 51 in the Immigrant Exclusion Dimension due to the large gap in the health insurance rates of immigrants compared to native-born residents and a high rate of immigrant youth who are not attending school or working. Through increasing services for immigrant workers, families, and youth, state and local leaders can ensure that immigrants are able to successfully integrate into Louisiana communities.

**JUST SOUTH INDEX RANKING** 51

**2014 State Population by Race**

- Total Population: 4,666,676
- White: 59.3%
- Black or African American: 32.5%
- Hispanic or Latinx: 4.6%
- Asian: 1.6%
- Two or more Races: 1.5%
- American Indian and Alaska Native: 0.6%

**Individual Indicator Scores**

- Income of Poor Households
- Health Insurance Coverage for Poor
- Housing Affordability
- White-Minority Employment Equity
- Non-Segregation of Public Schools
- White-Minority Wage Equity
- Immigrant English Proficiency
- Immigrant Youth Outcomes
- Health Insurance Coverage for Immigrants

**Poverty Dimension**

Average Income of Poorest 25% of Households

- Louisiana: $11,156
- National Average: $15,281
- New Hampshire: $20,956

Share of Poor Without Health Insurance: 32%

**Racial Disparity Dimension**

More than 1 in 5 Louisiana public schools are segregated by race.

**Gap in Unemployment Rates Between White and Minority Workers**

- 10.0% Minority workers unemployed
- 4.2% White workers unemployed

Minority workers’ earnings compared to white workers’ earnings with similar experience and occupations. 79%

**Immigrant Exclusion Dimension**

Only 59 percent of immigrants in Louisiana have public or private health insurance coverage, compared to 86 percent of the native-born population.

**Louisiana Immigrants’ Health Insurance by the Numbers**

- Insured: 34,276
- Uninsured: 89,162

35% of immigrants in Louisiana have difficulty speaking English.

**Sources:**

- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014
- National Center for Education Statistics, 2012-2013
- See full JustSouth Indicator Report Indicators & Methodology sections for detailed description of analyses.
Mississippi

**JustSouth Index State Report Card**

### Poverty Indices

- **Mississippi ranks last in the Poverty Dimension, due to the extremely low average income for the poorest households and high rate of poor adults without health insurance.**
  
  **Score:** 51  
  **30%:**  
  **60%:**  
  **90%:**  

### Racial Disparity Indices

- **Mississippi ranks 50 out of 51 in the Racial Disparity Dimension, which is attributable to the 20 percent gap in earnings between white and minority workers in similar occupations and a share of segregated schools significantly higher than other states. Without explicitly addressing this severe racial disparities in Mississippi communities, schools, and workplaces, states and community leaders are failing to fully serve and mobilize for a significant portion of the state’s population.**
  
  **Score:** 50  
  **0%:**  
  **25%:**  
  **50%:**  

### Immigrant Exclusion Indices

- **Mississippi ranks 4 out of 51 in the Immigrant Exclusion Dimension due to the high percentage of immigrants without health insurance and a large share of disconnected immigrant youth. Although only 2 percent of Mississippis are immigrants, they are a growing segment of the population, and the state has much to gain economically and socially from analyzing that these immigrants are able to integrate in the communities in which they settle through language acquisition, quality education, and access to health care.**
  
  **Score:** 44  
  **0%:**  
  **25%:**  
  **50%:**  

### Just South Index Ranking

**Score:** 50  

### 2014 State Population by Race

- **Total Population:** 2,994,079  
- **White:** 57.3%  
- **Black or African American:** 37.5%  
- **Hispanic or Latino:** 1.0%  
- **Two or more Races:** 1.3%  
- **Asian:** 1.9%  
- **American Indian/Alaska Native:** 0.6%

### Individual Indicator Scores

- **Income of Poor Households:** 57.1%  
- **Health Insurance Coverage for Poor:** 57.1%  
- **Housing Affordability:** 60.7%  
- **White-Minority Employment Equity:** 50.0%  
- **Non-Segregation of Public Schools:** 69.9%  
- **White-Minority Wage Equity:** 50.0%  
- **Immigrant English Proficiency:** 50.0%  
- **Immigrant Youth Outcomes:** 60.0%  
- **Health Insurance Coverage for Immigrants:** 40.0%

### Poverty Dimension

- **Average Income of Poorest 25% of Households:**  
  - Mississippi: $9,891  
  - National Average: $15,281  
  - New Hampshire: $29,596  

### Racial Disparity Dimension

- **Share of Poor Without Health Insurance: 35%**

### Immigrant Exclusion Dimension

- **Only 55 percent of immigrants in Mississippi have public or private health insurance coverage, compared to 86 percent of the native-born population.**

**Sources:**

- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014  
- National Center for Education Statistics, Elementary and Secondary Information System, 2010-2013

See full JustSouth Index Report, Indicators and Methodology sections, for detailed description of analyses.
Texas

**JustSouth Index State Report Card**

**DIMENSION INDICES**

**Poverty**
- Texas ranks 46 out of 51 in the Poverty Dimension. Although the state has a robust economy with low unemployment, it also has a high proportion of low-wage jobs and no state minimum wage law. Texas also has one of the weakest safety nets for families due to state leaders’ decision not to expand Medicaid, shrinking of the TANF cash assistance program, and relatively low state investment in housing and child care assistance programs. (Dimension Index Score: 32 out of 41)

**Racial Disparity**
- Texas ranks 25 of 51 in the Racial Disparity Dimension. Illustrating the gaps in opportunity and prosperity between white and minority residents in the state. Although minority groups have high rates of employment, they still earn far less than their white counterparts in similar occupations. Although increasing investments in schools among minority students and ensuring that all workers are paid fairly, states and local leaders can increase equity and improve economic outcomes for minority families. (Dimension Index Score: 58 out of 41)

**Immigrant Exclusion**
- Texas ranks 40 out of 51 in the Immigrant Exclusion Dimension. Illustrating the depth of support available to the vast number of immigrants in the state, English proficiency rates lag behind comparable states, and the number of immigrant youth who are not working or attending schools reflects the lack of investment in education for immigrant students and exclusion efforts. (Dimension Index Score: 35 out of 41)

**JUST SOUTH INDEX RANKING**

49

**2014 State Population by Race**
- White: 43.5%
- Black or African American: 11.5%
- American Indian/Alaska Native: 2.0%
- Asian: 4.5%
- Two or more Races: 1.8%
- Total Population: 26,956,956

**Individual Indicator Scores (0 to 1 Goalpost Scoring)**

- Income of Poor Households
- Health Insurance Coverage for Poor
- Housing Affordability
- Non-Segregation of Public Schools
- White-Minority Wage Equity
- Immigrant English Proficiency
- Immigrant Youth Outcomes
- Health Insurance Coverage for Immigrants

**Poverty Dimension**
- Average Income of Poorest 25% of Households
  - Texas: $14,776
  - National Average: $15,281
  - New Hampshire: $20,956

**Racial Disparity Dimension**
- Share of Poor Without Health Insurance: 36%

**Immigrant Exclusion Dimension**
- Only 58 percent of immigrants in Texas have public or private health insurance coverage, compared to 86 percent of the native-born population.
- 42% of immigrants in Texas have difficulty speaking English

**Gap in Unemployment Rates Between White and Minority Workers**
- 6.2% Minorities not unemployed
- 3.7% White workers unemployed

**When controlling for age, education level, and occupation, minority workers in Texas earn 86% of what their white counterparts earn.**
- Minority workers’ earnings compared to white workers’ earnings with similar experience and occupations.

**SOURCES:**
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014

See full JustSouth Index Report, indicators and methodology sections, for detailed description of analyses.