

In 14 states and DC, the African American unemployment rate is at least twice the white unemployment rate

The highest African American unemployment rate is in the District of Columbia at 12.9 percent, while the highest white unemployment rate is in West Virginia at 5.2 percent

State Jobs by Race & Ethnicity • By [Janelle Jones](#) • May 17, 2018

In the first quarter of 2018, African American workers had the highest unemployment rate nationally, at 7.2 percent, followed by Hispanic (5.1 percent), white (3.3 percent), and Asian workers (3.0 percent).¹

This report provides a state-by-state breakdown of unemployment rates by race and ethnicity and racial/ethnic unemployment rate gaps for the first quarter of 2018. It shows that while there have been state-by-state improvements in prospects for black and Hispanic workers, their unemployment rates remain high relative to those of white workers. Following are some key highlights of the report:

- While the African American unemployment rate is at or below its pre-recession level in 17 states (of the 22 states and the District of Columbia for which these data are available), in 14 states and the District of Columbia, African American unemployment rates exceed white unemployment rates by a ratio of 2-to-1 or higher.
- The District of Columbia has the highest black–white unemployment rate ratio overall, at 8.5-to-1, while South Carolina and Maryland have the highest ratios among states (3.2-to-1 and 2.8-to-1, respectively).
- The highest African American unemployment rate is in the District of Columbia (12.9 percent), followed by Illinois (9.1 percent) and New Jersey (9.0 percent). The highest Hispanic state unemployment rate is in Connecticut (10.0 percent). In contrast, the highest white state unemployment rate is 5.2 percent, in West Virginia.
- While the Hispanic unemployment rate is at or below its pre-recession level in 13 states (of the 16 states for which these data are available), there is no state where the Hispanic unemployment rate is lower than the white rate.
- In five states and the District of Columbia, Hispanic unemployment rates exceed white unemployment rates by a ratio of 2-to-1 or higher (Connecticut, 3.4-to-1; Massachusetts, 2.1-to-1; Washington, 2.1-to-1; Colorado, 2.0-to-1; District of Columbia, 2.0-to-1, and Idaho, 2.0-to-1).

SECTIONS

1. Background • 2
2. State unemployment rates, by race and ethnicity • 2

Methodology • 8

Endnotes • 8

Background

In March 2018, the national unemployment rate was 4.1 percent, unchanged from at the end of the fourth quarter of 2017.² State unemployment rates in March ranged from a low of 2.1 percent in Hawaii to 7.3 percent in Alaska.³ According to a previous EPI analysis of unemployment by state, from December to March 2018, 25 states and the District of Columbia saw their unemployment rates decline, 7 states saw unemployment rates rise, and 18 states saw no change.⁴

State unemployment rates, by race and ethnicity

EPI analyzes state unemployment rates by race and ethnicity, and by racial/ethnic unemployment rate gaps, on a quarterly basis to generate a sample size large enough to create reliable estimates of unemployment rates by race and ethnicity at the state level. We only report estimates for states for which the sample size of these subgroups is large enough to create an accurate estimate. For this reason, the number of states included in our map and data tables varies based on the analysis performed (unemployment rate, change in unemployment rate since the fourth quarter of 2007, and ratio of African American or Hispanic unemployment rate to white unemployment rate).

Trends among white workers

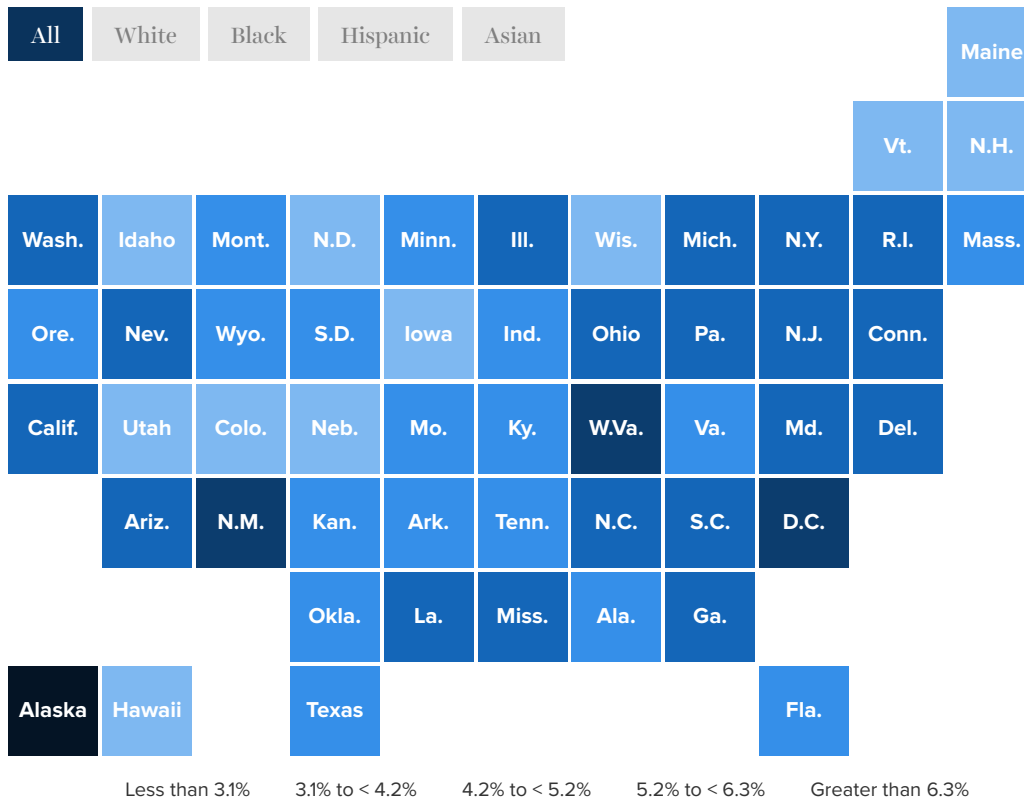
In the first quarter of 2018, the white unemployment rate was lowest in the District of Columbia (1.5 percent) and highest in West Virginia (5.2 percent), as shown in the interactive map and underlying data, which present state unemployment rates by race and ethnicity. Among states, North Dakota had the lowest unemployment rate for white workers (1.9 percent).

Table 1 displays changes in state unemployment rates by race and ethnicity from the fourth quarter of 2007 to the first quarter of 2018. The white unemployment rate remained most elevated above its pre-recession level in Louisiana and New Mexico: in both states, the rate was 1.0 percentage point higher than in the fourth quarter of 2007. The white unemployment rate is at or below its pre-recession level in 39 states and the District of Columbia. The largest declines in white unemployment since the end of 2007 have occurred in Maine (down 2.1 percentage points), Michigan (down 2.1 percentage points), Rhode Island (down 2.1 percentage points), Hawaii (down 2.0 percentage points), and Massachusetts (down 1.9 percentage points). The white unemployment rate is above but within 0.5 percentage points of its pre-recession level in six states.

Trends among African American workers

African American unemployment rate estimates are available for 23 states and the District

State unemployment rates, by race/ethnicity and overall, 2018Q1



Note: The map reports unemployment rates only for state subgroups with sample sizes large enough to create accurate estimates.

Source: EPI analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) data and Current Population Survey (CPS) data

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of Columbia. During the first quarter of 2018, among states, the African American unemployment rate was lowest in Indiana (4.8 percent) and highest in Illinois (9.1 percent); in the District of Columbia, it was 12.9 percent. The District of Columbia also had the highest black unemployment rate during the previous six quarters.

In the first quarter of 2018, of the 23 states with African American unemployment rate estimates, all had black unemployment rates below 10 percent; in 14 of these states, the rate was at or below the first quarter national average for African American workers (7.2 percent).

As shown in **Table 2**, which displays the black–white and Hispanic–white unemployment rate ratios in the first quarter of 2018, Delaware, Indiana, and Pennsylvania had the smallest black–white rate gaps of the 23 states and the District of Columbia. In those states, black unemployment was 1.6 times the white rate. In the first quarter of 2018, as in the previous six quarters, the largest gap was in the District of Columbia, where the black unemployment rate was 8.5 times the white rate. The next highest unemployment ratios

Table 1

Change in state unemployment rates by race and ethnicity from 2007Q4 to 2018Q1 (percentage points)

State	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
<i>United States</i>	-0.7	-1.4	-0.9	-0.5
<i>Alabama</i>	-0.8	-0.1	NA	NA
<i>Alaska</i>	0.2	NA	NA	NA
<i>Arizona</i>	0.1	NA	-0.6	NA
<i>Arkansas</i>	-1.4	-3.4	NA	NA
<i>California</i>	-1.4	-2.6	-1.6	-2.0
<i>Colorado</i>	-1.3	NA	-0.7	NA
<i>Connecticut</i>	-0.5	NA	1.8	NA
<i>Delaware</i>	0.7	0.8	NA	NA
<i>District of Columbia</i>	-0.2	3.0	NA	NA
<i>Florida</i>	-1.1	1.0	-1.6	NA
<i>Georgia</i>	-0.4	-0.6	-2.9	NA
<i>Hawaii</i>	-2.0	NA	NA	-0.9
<i>Idaho</i>	-0.4	NA	NA	NA
<i>Illinois</i>	-0.6	-3.2	-0.5	0.0
<i>Indiana</i>	-1.3	-6.6	NA	NA
<i>Iowa</i>	-1.4	NA	NA	NA
<i>Kansas</i>	-0.9	NA	NA	NA
<i>Kentucky</i>	-1.3	NA	NA	NA
<i>Louisiana</i>	1.0	-2.3	NA	NA
<i>Maine</i>	-2.1	NA	NA	NA
<i>Maryland</i>	-0.4	1.2	NA	NA
<i>Massachusetts</i>	-1.9	NA	NA	NA
<i>Michigan</i>	-2.1	-7.2	NA	NA
<i>Minnesota</i>	-1.3	NA	NA	NA
<i>Mississippi</i>	-0.5	-3.5	NA	NA
<i>Missouri</i>	-1.4	-4.3	NA	NA
<i>Montana</i>	0.0	NA	NA	NA
<i>Nebraska</i>	-0.5	NA	NA	NA
<i>Nevada</i>	-0.4	NA	-0.6	NA
<i>New Hampshire</i>	-1.0	NA	NA	NA

Table 1
(cont.)

State	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
<i>New Jersey</i>	-0.3	0.6	-0.4	2.6
<i>New Mexico</i>	1.0	NA	1.3	NA
<i>New York</i>	0.3	-0.2	-1.6	-0.6
<i>North Carolina</i>	-0.4	-1.5	-1.6	NA
<i>North Dakota</i>	-0.2	NA	NA	NA
<i>Ohio</i>	-0.5	-6.6	NA	NA
<i>Oklahoma</i>	-0.1	NA	NA	NA
<i>Oregon</i>	-1.4	NA	NA	NA
<i>Pennsylvania</i>	0.1	-0.2	NA	NA
<i>Rhode Island</i>	-2.1	NA	NA	NA
<i>South Carolina</i>	-1.0	-2.3	NA	NA
<i>South Dakota</i>	0.0	NA	NA	NA
<i>Tennessee</i>	-1.4	-4.3	NA	NA
<i>Texas</i>	-0.4	-1.0	0.0	-0.8
<i>Utah</i>	0.3	NA	-0.3	NA
<i>Vermont</i>	-1.5	NA	NA	NA
<i>Virginia</i>	-0.3	0.1	-0.4	NA
<i>Washington</i>	-0.9	NA	2.3	-0.5
<i>West Virginia</i>	0.5	NA	NA	NA
<i>Wisconsin</i>	-1.7	NA	NA	NA
<i>Wyoming</i>	0.9	NA	NA	NA

Note: The table reports data only for state subgroups with sample sizes large enough to create accurate estimates.

Source: EPI analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) data and Current Population Survey (CPS) data

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were in South Carolina (3.2-to-1), Maryland (2.8-to-1), and Georgia (2.6-to-1).

The black unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2018 was at or below its pre-recession level in 17 states: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. (Data on the change in black unemployment over this period are available for 22 states and the District of Columbia). However, all states except for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas have black labor force participation rates that were lower in the first quarter of 2018 than at the end of 2007, indicating that the return to pre-recession levels of unemployment in these states was not a full recovery for African American workers because not all discouraged job seekers have returned to the market.⁵

Table 2

Black–white and Hispanic–white state unemployment rate ratios, 2018Q1

State	Black–white ratio	Hispanic–white ratio
<i>United States</i>	2.2	1.5
<i>Alabama</i>	2.2	NA
<i>Alaska</i>	NA	NA
<i>Arizona</i>	NA	1.6
<i>Arkansas</i>	1.7	1.0
<i>California</i>	2.3	1.6
<i>Colorado</i>	NA	2.0
<i>Connecticut</i>	NA	3.4
<i>Delaware</i>	1.6	NA
<i>District of Columbia</i>	8.5	2.0
<i>Florida</i>	2.5	1.4
<i>Georgia</i>	2.6	1.5
<i>Hawaii</i>	NA	NA
<i>Idaho</i>	NA	2.0
<i>Illinois</i>	2.4	1.4
<i>Indiana</i>	1.6	NA
<i>Iowa</i>	NA	NA
<i>Kansas</i>	NA	1.6
<i>Kentucky</i>	NA	NA
<i>Louisiana</i>	1.9	NA
<i>Maine</i>	NA	NA
<i>Maryland</i>	2.8	NA
<i>Massachusetts</i>	2.3	2.1
<i>Michigan</i>	2.1	NA
<i>Minnesota</i>	NA	NA
<i>Mississippi</i>	2.2	NA
<i>Missouri</i>	2.4	NA
<i>Montana</i>	NA	NA
<i>Nebraska</i>	NA	NA
<i>Nevada</i>	NA	1.5

Table 2
(cont.)

State	Black–white ratio	Hispanic–white ratio
<i>New Hampshire</i>	NA	NA
<i>New Jersey</i>	2.5	1.3
<i>New Mexico</i>	NA	1.4
<i>New York</i>	1.9	1.3
<i>North Carolina</i>	1.8	1.3
<i>North Dakota</i>	NA	NA
<i>Ohio</i>	1.7	NA
<i>Oklahoma</i>	NA	1.3
<i>Oregon</i>	NA	1.2
<i>Pennsylvania</i>	1.6	1.5
<i>Rhode Island</i>	NA	NA
<i>South Carolina</i>	3.2	NA
<i>South Dakota</i>	NA	NA
<i>Tennessee</i>	1.7	NA
<i>Texas</i>	2.3	1.5
<i>Utah</i>	NA	1.3
<i>Vermont</i>	NA	NA
<i>Virginia</i>	2.0	1.2
<i>Washington</i>	NA	2.1
<i>West Virginia</i>	NA	NA
<i>Wisconsin</i>	NA	NA
<i>Wyoming</i>	NA	NA

Note: The table reports data only for state subgroups with sample sizes large enough to create accurate estimates.

Source: EPI analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) data and Current Population Survey (CPS) data

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Trends among Hispanic workers

Hispanic unemployment rate estimates are available for 23 states and the District of Columbia, and data on changes in Hispanic unemployment rates since the fourth quarter of 2007 are available for 16 states. In the first quarter of 2018, among states, the Hispanic unemployment rate was highest in Connecticut (10.0 percent) and lowest in Arkansas and Virginia (both at 3.3 percent). The Hispanic unemployment rate was 3.1 percent in the District of Columbia. Connecticut and Washington were the only states with Hispanic unemployment rates above 8.0 percent in the first quarter.

The Hispanic unemployment rate is at or below its pre-recession level in 13 states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Virginia. The Hispanic unemployment rate was most elevated above its pre-recession level in Washington (by 2.3 percentage points).

In no state was the Hispanic unemployment rate lower than the white unemployment rate. In Arkansas, the Hispanic unemployment rate and white unemployment rate were exactly the same (3.3 percent). The ratio of Hispanic unemployment to white unemployment was highest in Connecticut (3.4-to-1), Massachusetts (2.1-to-1), and Washington (2.1-to-1).

Trends among Asian workers

Asian unemployment rate estimates are available for 10 states, and data on the change in Asian unemployment rates since the fourth quarter of 2007 are available for seven states. For the third consecutive quarter, the Asian unemployment rate was lowest in Hawaii (1.6 percent). The highest Asian unemployment rate was in Massachusetts (6.2 percent). The Asian unemployment rate was at or below its pre-recession level in California, Hawaii, Illinois, New York, Texas, and Washington. In only one state—New Jersey—was the Asian unemployment rate more than 2 percentage points above its pre-recession level (at 2.6 percentage points higher).

Methodology

The unemployment rate estimates in this report are based on the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and the Current Population Survey (CPS) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The overall state unemployment rate is taken directly from the LAUS. CPS six-month ratios are applied to LAUS data to calculate the rates by race and ethnicity. For each state subgroup, we calculate the unemployment rate using the past six months of CPS data. We then find the ratio of this subgroup rate to the state unemployment rate using the same period of CPS data. This gives us an estimate of how the subgroup compares with the state overall.

While this methodology allows us to calculate unemployment-rate estimates at the state level by race and ethnicity by quarter, it is less precise at the national level than simply using the CPS. Thus, the national-level estimates may differ from direct CPS estimates.

In many states, the sample sizes of particular subgroups are not large enough to create accurate estimates of their unemployment rates. We report data only for groups that had, on average, a sample size of at least 700 in the labor force for each six-month period.

Endnotes

1. EPI analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) data and Current Population Survey (CPS) data.

2. “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey: Unemployment Rate,” Series Id. LNS14000000 [online data table], U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 27, 2018.
3. “[State Employment and Unemployment—March 2018](#),” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 20, 2018.
4. “[March Weather Likely at Play in State Jobs Report](#)” (press release). Economic Policy Institute, April 20, 2018.
5. EPI analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) data and Current Population Survey (CPS) data.