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Food_Security_in_the_U.S._USDA_September_2013.docx;
The_Power_of_218_WSJ_Editorial_09_16,_2013.docx;
Another_Insult_to_the_Poor_NYT_Editorial_September_19,_2013.docx;
Shooting_of_13_at_park_puts_Chicago_back_in_the_spotlight-Chicago_Tribune-September_20,_2013.docx; Judy_Collins_bio.docx

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DEAR FRIEND.....

Another Insult to the Poor

By: NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL BOARD

In what can be seen only as an act of supreme indifference, House Republicans passed a bill on Thursday that would drastically cut federal food stamps and throw 3.8 million Americans out of the program in 2014. The vote came two weeks after the Agriculture Department reported that 17.6 million households did not have enough to eat at some point in 2012 because they lacked the resources to put food on the table. It came two days after the Census Bureau reported that 15 percent of Americans, or 46.5 million people, live in poverty.

These numbers are basically unchanged from 2011, but in a growing economy steady rates of hunger and poverty amount, in effect, to backsliding. Cutting food stamps would accelerate the slide. Food stamps kept four million people out of poverty last year and kept millions more from falling deeper into poverty. Under the House Republican bill, many of these people would be further impoverished.

The struggling middle class is also faring poorly. Though the unemployment rate dropped to a low of 7.8 percent last year from a high of 9.1 percent in 2011, median household income was virtually unchanged, at \$51,017. In a healthy economy, income would rise when unemployment falls. But in today's weak economy, much of the decline in the jobless rate is not due to new hiring, but to a shrinking work force — the very definition of a feeble labor market in which employed people work for years without raises and unemployed job seekers routinely end up in new jobs that pay less than their previous ones.

Even so, congressional Republicans have shown no inclination to end the automatic budget cuts that, if left in place, will lead to an estimated loss of 900,000 jobs in the coming year, keeping poverty high and incomes stagnant. In addition, there seems to be little Republican appetite for renewing federal unemployment benefits — a lifeline for millions of unemployed Americans — when they expire at the end of 2013.

It is nothing new that poor people are stuck and those in the middle class are struggling. The poverty rate, though steady last year, has worsened or failed to improve in 11 of the last 12 years. The latest

numbers would have been worse but for “doubling up.” There are currently 10.1 million adults age 25 to 34 who are not in school and who live with parents or others who are not spouses of cohabitating partners. If they were on their own, 43 percent of them would fall below the poverty line, which last year was \$11,945 for someone under age 65.

Similarly, while median household income held steady last year, it was still lower by 8.3 percent, or \$4,600, (measured in 2012 dollars) than in 2007, before the recession. And the longer the historical perspective, the more dire the situation. From 2000 to 2012, median income for working-age households headed by someone under age 65 (again in 2012 dollars) fell almost \$7,500, from nearly \$65,000 to just under \$57,500, a decline of 11.6 percent.

Against that backdrop, there is no justification for savaging the safety net and decimating the budget.

As it happens, the *Times* editorial board actually understated things. Thursday's vote was not only an undeniable act of heartlessness, it was also perhaps the ultimate example of how today's increasingly radical and unhinged GOP leadership picks on the poor, coddles the rich, makes thinly veiled appeals to racism, and plays time-wasting political games instead of governing.

As Dan Froomkin pointed out in **The Huffington Post** -- in short, the important thing about this vote to anyone paying any attention at all was the subtext -- what it really meant. But the coverage was stenographic and context-deficient.

The New York Times (critique)

The headline over Ron Nixon's story characterized the cuts as “*deep*,” but the author quickly turned to a play-by-play, writing that the vote “set up what promised to be a major clash with the Senate.”

His initial assessment was un-skeptical and almost sympathetic:

Republican leaders, under pressure from Tea Party-backed conservatives, said the bill was needed because the food stamp program, which costs nearly \$80 billion a year, had grown out of control.

Then he presented a fabulously disingenuous quote, without a hint of what it really signified, from Rep. Marlin Stutzman (R-Ind.):

“In the real world, we measure success by results. It's time for Washington to measure success by how many families are lifted out of poverty and helped back on their feet, not by how much Washington bureaucrats spend year after year.”

What's notable about this quote is how it illustrates the GOP's loopy fantasy that defenders of the program want more people on food stamps as a goal unto itself. In fact, the program is by design -- and for good reason -- countercyclical. When people need it more, participation goes up. When there are more hungry people, we spend more to feed them.

Everyone is concerned when there are a lot of people getting food stamps, but the problem is that they are hungry, not that they are being fed.

The GOP argument boils down to a nonsensical: When people are hungrier, we should feed them less. It shouldn't be treated as if it makes sense. But it was.

Yes, Nixon put this comment in his story:

Senator Debbie Stabenow, Democrat of Michigan and the chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, called it “a monumental waste of time.”

But then he offered his readers this shockingly dishonest quote, without any skepticism:

“This bill makes getting Americans back to work a priority again for our nation's welfare programs,” House Speaker John A. Boehner said.

Toward the bottom of the story, Nixon finally offers a little context:

A Census Bureau report released on Tuesday found that the program had kept about four million people above the poverty level and had prevented millions more from sinking further into poverty. The census data also showed nearly 47 million people living in poverty -- close to the highest level in two decades.

But maybe that should have been in the second paragraph instead?

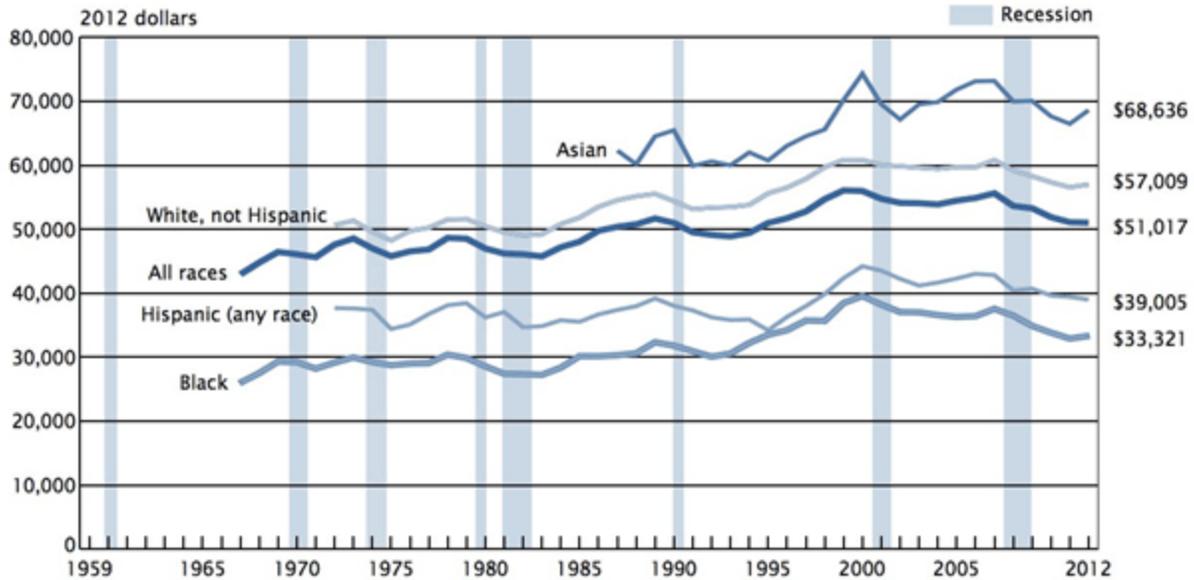
One of the big uglies in the U.S, is that millions of Americans are still stuck five years now after the depth of the great American recession. New data out this week from the U.S. census bureau is showing us more than 46 million living below the poverty line, by the way, that is considered \$23,500 for a family of four. More than one in five Americans in poverty are children. Needy and household income, that is the exact mid-point, about the same as last year, a little more than \$51,000, a little more than 8% less than before the recession hit. And all of this is happening in plain sight. In 2012, the top 5% of the households, those making more than \$91,000 took in the same as they did before the recession, but the other 95% made less. This reality is reflected in the growth of Americans who rely on local food banks to feed themselves and their families.

While median income has fallen, the incomes of top earners have continued to rise, making income inequality worse. The Census Bureau's measure of inequality, known as the "*Gini index*," held steady at 0.477 in 2012, but at the record high set in 2011. A *Gini index* of 0 means perfect income equality, an index of 1 means one person would get all of the nation's income. We're slowly grinding our way towards 1. The top 5 percent of all households earned 22.3 percent of all the nation's income in 2012, matching its haul in 2011.

The median income of households in the top 5 percent rose to \$318,052 from \$317,950 in 2011. The income of these highest-earning Americans has recovered completely from a dip during and after the recession, compared with the 8 percent decline for the median American household. The racial differences in income are even starker: The median income for black households was \$33,321 last year, less than half the median income for Asian households. The current federal poverty threshold for a family of four is \$23,550. These numbers help explain why, even though the Great Recession officially ended in June 2009, and even as President Barack Obama touts "*progress*" in the economy, one-third of Americans think we are still in a recession or a depression, according to a recent survey. For many of them, the recovery has been worse than the recession.

In an article by Mark Gongloff this week in **The Huffington Post – *Income Falls For 5th Year, Inequality At Record High*** – he points out that the facts are in showing that the poor are poorer and the rich are getting richer. Median household income fell for the fifth straight year in 2012, the Census Bureau reported on Tuesday, to \$51,017. This is the lowest annual income, adjusted for inflation, since 1995. As the typical American family's income has fallen every year since 2007, the year the Great Recession began, for a cumulative decline of 8.3 percent. Median income is also down 9 percent from its record high of \$56,080, set two recessions ago in 1999.

Real Median Household Income by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1967 to 2012



Note: Median household income data are not available prior to 1967. Implementation of 2010 Census population controls began in 2010. For information on recessions, see Appendix A.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1968 to 2013 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

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In contrast this week **Forbes Magazine** published (32nd list) – **2013 Forbes 400: Richest People in America**, and just to check out how several friends on the list fared this past year, I took a look. Bill Gates is still the richest American for the 20th year in a row and has reclaimed the title of world's richest person from Mexico's Carlos Slim with a net worth of \$72 billion. Warren Buffett, again number two, was the year's biggest dollar gainer, having added \$12.5 billion to his fortune. Facebook's hot stock pumped up Mark Zuckerberg's fortune by \$9.6 billion and put him back into the top 20 after missing the top cut last year; Carl Icahn lost his battle to stop DELL (+0.07%) from going private but he had a great year and moves back in the top 20 for the first time since 2008. The biggest percentage gainer was Workday's David Duffield, whose fortune more than tripled to \$6.4 billion, and just behind him in terms of percentage jumps was the entrepreneur Elon Musk, now worth \$6.7 billion and ranked 61st.

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Five years after the financial crisis sent the fortunes of many in the U.S. and around the world tumbling, the wealthiest as a group have finally gained back all that they lost. The 400 wealthiest Americans are worth just over \$2 trillion, roughly equivalent to the GDP of Russia. That is a gain of

\$300 billion from a year ago, and more than double a decade ago. The average net worth of list members is a staggering \$5 billion, \$800 million more than a year ago and also a record. The minimum net worth needed to make the 400 list was \$1.3 billion. The last time it was that high was in 2007 and 2008, before property and stock market values began sliding. Because the bar is so high, 61 American billionaires didn't make the cut. There are 20 newcomers to the list.

Among the notables are Michael Rubin, whose online sports merchandise retailer Fanatics, recently attracted venture capital investors at a sky-high valuation; Jeff Sutton, who owns a number of the priciest store fronts on Fifth Avenue and Times Square, and 35-year-old Robert Pera, one of just nine under 40, whose wireless networking gear maker Ubiquiti Networks surged after a strong earnings announcement in August. At the time he tweeted this lyric from a Jay-Z song: "And as for the critics, tell me I don't get it. Everybody can tell you how to do it, they never did it."

Only 30 people from last year's list are poorer than a year ago. Twenty-eight people dropped out of the ranks and six people died, including surround sound pioneer Ray Dolby. Of those 28, only 15 saw their fortunes drop, including T. Boone Pickens, whose costly bets on wind energy lost him his billionaire status, and Manoj Bhargava, whose 5-Hour Energy drink firm has been hit by lawsuits and falling revenues. The rest simply couldn't keep up with the rising tide. Washington Redskins owner Dan Snyder is one of the billionaires who didn't qualify and, in his case, even with a rise in his fortune, just didn't have enough to stay in the club.



Under a Republican bill that the House of Representatives that passed on Thursday the GOP wants to change the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** ("SNAP") so that more recipients must be working or in training to qualify for food stamps. The office of House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) has said in background documents explaining the proposals to reporters. First of all it is important to emphasize that more than 85% of the people who get federal assistance for food are either children, children with their parents, senior citizens or people with disabilities, including our veterans. And the other 15% are people who are just trying to hang on by their fingertips, as food stamps aren't a luxury that anyone brags about. You try to live on \$4 a day..... which is the average food assistance allotment for a person.

The newscasts in question are two Fox News stories about one 29-year-old California food stamp recipient who harbors no ambition to get a job. "This is the way I want to live and I don't really see

anything changing,” the man said in the stories, copies of which Fox distributed to Capitol Hill offices. “It’s free food; it’s awesome.” Just wanting a job wouldn’t be awesome enough to satisfy Republicans’ proposed rules, however. While merely seeking work fulfills a requirement of unemployment insurance, SNAP recipients would have to do better. *“If you’re looking for work but can’t find it, and you can’t find a place in a work or training program -- something only a few states make available to all of these individuals -- you will lose SNAP after three months,”* Robert Greenstein, director of the Center on Budget Priorities said in a Wednesday blog post. The Center on Budget has been the foremost critic of the legislation outside of Congress.

Able-bodied adults without children would be eligible for only three months of benefits under the GOP plan unless they’re working, training, or volunteering 20 hours per week -- a pre-existing requirement that most states have waived because of high unemployment. Republicans have cited Congressional Research Service data showing that able-bodied adults without dependents had risen to 10.2 percent of the overall SNAP population in 2011, up from 6.6 percent in 2007. Overall SNAP enrollment surged to 47 million in 2012 because the Great Recession and its aftermath made more Americans poor enough to qualify. Republicans prefer to blame liberal policy for the increase, so their bill would take the waivers away.

Republicans also want states to be able to require working-age SNAP recipients with children older than one year to obey the work requirements outlined in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, meaning at least 20 hours per week at a job, volunteering, or participating in a state-run training or work-search program. But the legislation doesn’t require states to make space available to SNAP recipients in such a program. Since it would allow states to keep half the savings from reduced enrollment, critics like Greenstein say the bill essentially pays states to kick people off food stamps.

Despite slacker stereotypes, the share of food stamp recipients who work has risen over time. According to the Congressional Budget Office, 30 percent of SNAP recipients worked in 2010, up from fewer than 20 percent in 1990. Most of the rest are either elderly, children, or disabled. The CBO has estimated that the Republican legislation would result in 3.8 million fewer Americans receiving food stamps next year and would save \$39 billion over 10 years. But House Republicans are unlikely to get their way -- even if the bill passes the House on Thursday afternoon, the Democratic Senate is unlikely to accept most of its provisions, and the White House has already threatened a veto.

Even without new legislation, all food stamp beneficiaries will see an across-the-board drop in the value of their benefits this November thanks to the expiration of a boost from the 2009 stimulus bill. Reps. John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) have introduced a long-shot bill to prevent the drop. The surfer in the news reports, Jason Greenslate, did not respond to a request for comment on serving as the latest in a long line of examples of no-good food stamp recipients.

Like everything else, I am sure that there is fraud and abuse in our food stamp program but the truth is that with 15% of the American population living in poverty and more than one in five children in the country living in households where food insecurity is a serious problem, the richest country in the world should be doing everything that it can to make sure that no one goes to bed hungry. This legislation is the same boondoggle that it is suppose to address. More importantly it doesn’t address the problem, that in America tens of millions of people including millions of children are not getting enough food and nutrition. Therefore, if Congress wants to address food assistance, why don’t they start with trying to find a way to make sure that no one goes to sleep hungry, especially children.

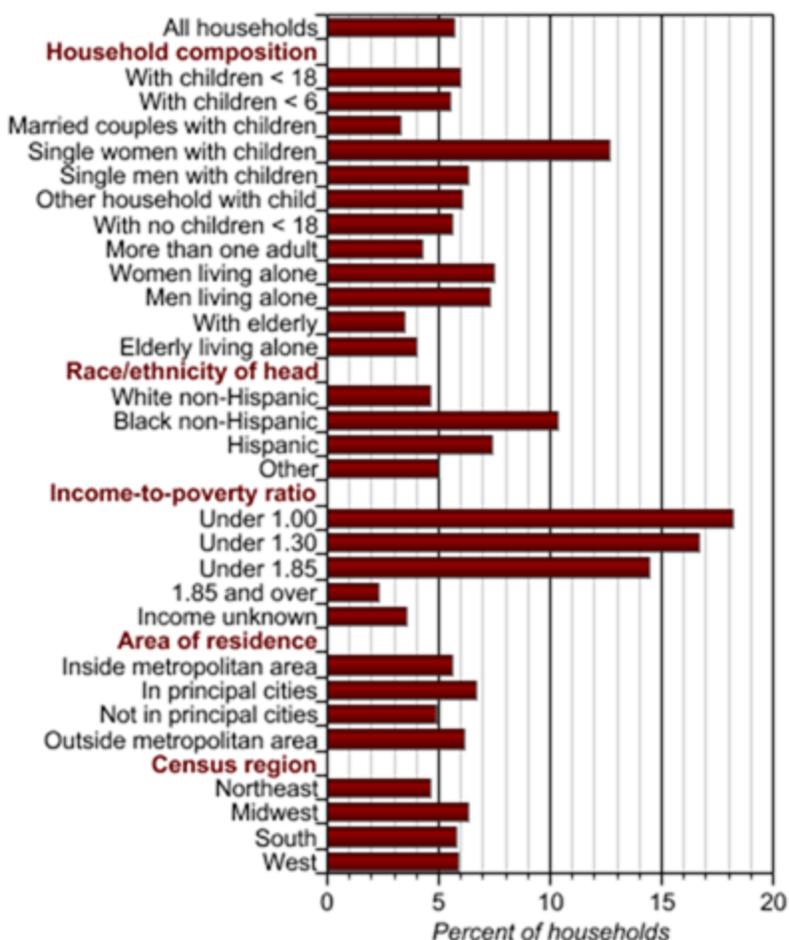
An estimated 14.5 million American households had difficulty providing enough food for their families last year, according to a recent government report. In 7 million of those homes, at least one member of the family had to skip meals or eat less because money was tight. These numbers are more or less unchanged since 2008.



A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service report measures how many households have to limit their food options or even skip meals because they cannot afford enough or healthier food. According to the report, between 2010 and 2012, an average of 20% of Mississippi households had low or very low food security. In that period, an average of one in 12 Arkansas households had at least one family member skip a meal or eat less because of a lack of money. These are the states where the most people go hungry.

The states with the lowest food security, not surprisingly, are among the poorest in the country. In all 10 states, the median household income was less than the national median of \$50,502. In Mississippi and Arkansas, the two worst states for food security, median income was less than \$40,000. Of the 10 states with the lowest food security, eight had the highest poverty rates in the country.

Prevalence of very low food security, 2012



Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2012 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Ross Fraser, spokesperson for hunger-relief charity Feeding America, explained that having low food security does not necessarily mean families are starving. While people may feel full after eating, nutritious food is expensive. “Often, people have to make unfortunate choices about what they put in their stomachs.” Fraser added.

Indeed, according to a 2012 Gallup-Healthways survey, people in nine of the 10 states were less likely to eat healthily on a daily basis than the nation as a whole. Missouri and Tennessee were third and second worst in the country by this measure.

It may surprise some that, in fact, the majority of the 10 states with food access problems have higher-than-average obesity rates. Mississippi and Arkansas had the second and third highest obesity rates in

the country in 2012. “The lack of healthy food among families in these states,” explained Fraser, “is one of the reasons you have very poor people who are obese. It is because they’re not able to afford nutritious and high protein food.”

Based on a three-year average between 2010 and 2012, the USDA’s report, Household Food Security in the United States in 2012, identifies the states with the highest proportion of residents who had low or very low food security. The report measures how many households have low food security — defined as being able to eat three square meals a day, but forced to reduce the quality of the food they eat — and very low food security — defined as having food intake reduced and eating patterns disrupted because of a lack of affordability. The 2000-2002 and 2007-2009 averages also were considered. 24/7 Wall St. also reviewed poverty, income, education and food stamp reciprocity data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2011 American Community Survey, as well as the obesity and access to food data for 2012 from the Gallup-Healthways 2012 Well-Being Index.

These are the states where the most people go hungry.

10. Ohio

- > Low food security homes: 16.1%
- > Very low food security homes: 7.1% (3rd highest)
- > Median household income: \$45,749 (16th lowest)
- > Pct. obesity: 29.5% (8th highest)

More than 16% of families in Ohio experienced low food security, meaning they had difficulty accessing food and had poor diet quality. This problem was even worse for some families. Ohio also had the third highest percentage of households in the nation, at 7.1%, that had experienced very low food security at some point. In these homes, at least one person had to reduce food intake or had their eating patterns disrupted by irregular access to food.

9. Tennessee

- > Low food security homes: 16.2%
- > Very low food security homes: 6.9% (5th highest)
- > Median household income: \$41,693 (6th lowest)
- > Pct. obesity: 29.6% (7th highest)

More than 16% of Tennessee households faced food insecurity at some point. Like in most states, this number rose considerably from the decade before. In 2002, just 11.3% of households faced food insecurity at some point. Similarly, between 2002 and 2012, the average proportion of households facing very low food security more than doubled, from 3.3% to 6.9%. As of 2011, 17.6% of homes received food stamps or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, more than all but two other states. Also, according to Gallup-Healthways, residents in Tennessee were less likely than Americans in almost any other state to eat healthily.

8. Nevada

- > Low food security homes: 16.6%
- > Very low food security homes: 6.7% (8th highest)
- > Median household income: \$48,927 (24th lowest)

> Pct. obesity: 24.9% (15th lowest)

Between 2002 and 2012, the percentage of households in Nevada that faced food insecurity rose from 9.3% to 16.6%. This was the largest such increase in the nation. In those 10 years, the percentage of Nevadans facing very low food security jumped as well, from 3.3% in 2002 to 6.7% in 2012. A lack of access to food was hardly the only major constraint facing Nevada residents, who according to Gallup were less likely to have a doctor or health insurance than residents of nearly all other states as of 2012.

7. Missouri

> Low food security homes: 16.7%

> Very low food security homes: 7.6% (2nd highest)

> Median household income: \$45,247 (15th lowest)

> Pct. obesity: 27.2% (21st highest)

According to a 2012 Gallup-Healthways survey, residents of just two other states were less likely than Missourians to eat healthily. The falling food security of many of the state's residents may play a role in their poor diets. Nearly 8% of households faced very low food security, the second highest percentage in the nation. This was up significantly from 3.3% in 2002, and the largest increase in the nation over the 10-year period.

6. Georgia

> Low food security homes: 16.9%

> Very low food security homes: 6.5% (10th highest)

> Median household income: \$46,007 (18th lowest)

> Pct. obesity: 28.6% (14th highest)

Several factors likely contribute to food insecurity in Georgia. Georgia had one of the nation's highest poverty rates in 2011, at 19.1% of all residents. Similarly, 6.4% of families earned less than \$10,000 annually as of 2011, one of the highest proportions in the nation. According to a 2012 Gallup survey, Georgia residents were among the most likely in the nation to have lacked money for food at some point. They also were more likely than most Americans to not have a doctor or health insurance coverage.

5. North Carolina

> Low food security homes: 17.0%

> Very low food security homes: 5.5% (24th highest)

> Median household income: \$43,916 (12th lowest)

> Pct. obesity: 28.9% (12th highest)

While there are some prosperous regions of the state, North Carolina still has a substantial poverty problem. In 2011, 17.9% of residents were living below the poverty line, the 13th highest rate in the country. More than one in five people surveyed in 2012 by Gallup-Healthways said they had not had enough money to buy food their family needed in the past 12 months. North Carolina's food security problems have worsened during the recession. In 2009, 14.8% of families had low or very low food security. In 2012, it was 17% of families.

4. Alabama

- > Low food security homes: 17.9%
- > Very low food security homes: 6.8% (7th highest)
- > Median household income: \$41,415 (5th lowest)
- > Pct. obesity: 30.4% (5th highest)

Alabama residents practiced less healthy behavior than most Americans as of 2012. Residents were among the most likely to smoke and the least likely to exercise and eat healthy all day. The lack of healthy eating habits may have been driven by low food security, which results in households reducing “the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets,” according to the USDA. The combination of unhealthy behaviors and limited food access likely has led to Alabama residents being among the most overweight and unfit in the country. According to Gallup, just four states had higher obesity rates than Alabama in 2012.

3. Texas

- > Low food security homes: 18.4%
- > Very low food security homes: 6.2% (13th highest)
- > Median household income: \$49,392 (25th highest)
- > Pct. obesity: 28.9% (12th highest)

In 2002, close to 15% of Texas households faced low food security each year. By 2012, 18.4% of Texas households experienced low food security. For many residents, low incomes likely prevent access to healthy food. As of 2011, Texas had a poverty rate of 18.5%, among the higher rates in the nation. Additionally, many residents in Texas lack the skills to work a high-paying job. Nearly 19% of the state’s population over age 25 had less than a high school diploma, tying Texas with Mississippi for the highest percentage of any state.

2. Arkansas

- > Low food security homes: 19.7%
- > Very low food security homes: 8.1% (the highest)
- > Median household income: \$38,758 (3rd lowest)
- > Pct. obesity: 31.4% (3rd highest)

Last year, Arkansas had proportionally more households with very low food security than any other state in the nation, averaging 8.1% of all households. Making it difficult for many residents to afford proper food, Arkansas was one of the nation’s poorest states as of 2011. That year, the median household income was less than \$39,000 and one of the lowest in the country. Meanwhile, nearly 20% of the state’s residents lived below the poverty line. With limited, irregular access to nutritious and balanced food, residents were among the most likely to be overweight, based on the results of a 2012 Gallup survey.

1. Mississippi

- > Low food security homes: 20.9%

- > Very low food security homes: 6.9% (5th highest)
- > Median household income: \$36,919 (the lowest)
- > Pct. obesity: 32.2% (2nd highest)

One in every five households experienced food insecurity in Mississippi. Residents of the state were among the poorest in the nation in recent years by numerous measures. In 2011, Mississippi had the lowest median household income in the nation, at \$36,919, as well as its highest poverty rate, at 22.6% of all residents. Last year, one in four respondents to a Gallup survey stated they had, at some point, lacked the money necessary to feed their family. Even when residents could ensure they did not have to cut back on their meals because of low food security, many likely often had to eat nutritionally poor food. Mississippi residents had among the highest obesity rates in the country.

As Chris Matthews said last week on **HARDBALL** on **MSMBC**, there's something strange and frightening emerging in American politics. I don't think it's right to call it politics in the same sense. There are dozens on the right who are trying to jeopardize the American economy by defaulting on the debt. They want to basically kill the affordable care act in its crib. That's the threat, that's what the demand is, and it's now all out there for all to see. I can't remember when the political party did something like this. It could throw the market into a tailspin and whack our 401(k)'s into a fare thee well. So what justification does the right wing of this country have for the senseless assault on the credit rating which happened the last time they pulled this tactic? What's the end game in which the world watches us as the country defaces itself. It achieves nothing, kills whatever's in its path. This is how i look at it. And I hate to see what I see because I still believe despite this hard evidence in the rights of self-government.

I would understand if the Republican opposition had a solution to fix America's disgusting healthcare inequality and broken healthcare system, but they don't. It appears all that they want to do is kill the President's signature accomplishment to nullify his Presidency. And if this wasn't bad enough, the Republican right in the House of Representatives are threatening to not raise the debt ceiling limit, that enables the government pay obligations that Congress approved. Two years ago when Republicans suggested that they would shut down the government the stock market lost 1760 points, the DOW just dived, hurting everyone's 401 (k), which the **Wall Street Journal** in its lead editorial last week called "kamikaze politics." So why are they willing to shut down the government on October 1, 2013.

Obamacare may not be perfect, (*I for one would have like to seen national health single-payer system*) but at least it is heading in the right direction, so we have to truly ask why the Republican Right in Congress are willing to bring the government when they know that it will our weak economic recovery. They refuse to recognize that we have divided government. And they refuse to recognize that the Congress passed Obamacare, the Supreme Court said it was constitutional and they want to keep having this same fight over and over again, much like Bill Murray in the film, **Ground Hog Day**. You would also understand if they had the support of the American public, but in a recent **CNN** poll, a majority of Americans will blame republicans if congress, if the government is shut down. While only 33% will blame President Obama.

Let's be honest here, at the core this is about race. In the way that Southerners often describe the secession of the Southern states as noble, they are trying to paint everything and anything that President Obama does as sardonic. When the truth is that Obamacare is based on the highly successful health care legislation instituted by Mitt Romney when he was Governor of Massachusetts, which was based on recommendations from the Republican think-tank, Heritage Foundation. And to hold the entire economy hostage in an attempt to kill it borders on secession. My father was a proud Republican leader, who loved Dwight Eisenhower, Nelson Rockefeller, Jacob Javits and John V. Lindsey. The Republican Party was the political party of Abe Lincoln. Jackie Robinson, Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Booker T. Washington and Eldridge Cleaver were proud Republicans. Today, none of the above mention whites could get nominated in a Republican Primary nor would any of the notable Blacks would be attracted to the party.

Bill O'Reilly Blames 'Fanaticism' For Obamacare Defunding Fight

Web Link: [\[REDACTED\]](#)

Bill O'Reilly dismissed Republican attempts to defund Obamacare on his Thursday show, calling it an example of "fanaticism."

The GOP has been riven by internal conflicts between members who want to vote to defund the health care program once again, and members who have said the effort is doomed.

O'Reilly apparently agreed with the latter, as he made clear on his show.

"Fanaticism on the right is also harming the country," he said, adding, "There is no way Obamacare is going to be defunded. It is not going to happen."

O'Reilly then spoke to Tea Party Express chair Amy Kremer, who wants to defund the program.

"What you are trying to do...is impossible," he said. "Do you not know that?" He added, "I just think it's destructive to your cause."

Last week, I included a op-ed in **The Washington Post** by Chris Cillizza – **Compromise IS a dirty word** – where he cites a poll that indicated that the word “*compromise*” – or “*consensus*” – amounts to capitulation in many peoples’ minds. When ask, voter clearly say that they want leaders who listen and work together but reaching consensus somewhere in the middle ground between right and left is not good enough. They want candidates with new ideas that go beyond the stale and stalled partisan agendas of both sides. We have politicians who are willing to bomb Iran if it were to develop a nuclear weapon capability, yet these same politicians are willing to shut down the government. So in addition to compromise, we need common sense and we need to challenge our political leaders to go beyond their partisan bickering and work like Marines and in the worlds of Alexander Dumas, “*One for All and All for One.*”

THIS WEEK'S READINGS



mass shootings us

When 13 people died in a shooting rampage at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., on Monday, the story made front page news. Yet many of the mass shootings that have happened since the massacre of elementary school students and teachers in Newtown, Conn., last December didn't. The FBI's definition of mass murder is the slaying of four or more people. There have been at least 17 such tragedies already this year where the victims were gunned down, but shootings related to drug or gang violence often get less attention than those perpetrated by a crazed gunman.

The Huffington Post combed through a variety of news sources, including Reddit's community-generated database of mass shootings, and came up with this graphic, which may be incomplete.

Killing sprees that occurred in more than one location were counted, but mass shootings that unfolded over more than one day, such as the string of homicides committed by ex-cop Christopher Dorner in Los Angeles, were not. This is just one small and somewhat arbitrary measure of gun violence, but it shows that mass shootings have become too common for each to be treated as a national event. Guns have killed about 24,580 Americans since Newtown, according to Slate's estimate based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Mass Shootings Since Newtown

Sept. 16, 2013 - Washington, D.C. - 13 dead (including gunman)

Defense contract employee and former Navy reservist Aaron Alexis, 34, allegedly opened fire shortly after 8 a.m. inside building 197 in the Washington Navy Yard, killing 12 people and wounding more than a dozen others. Alexis was slain in a gun battle with police.

Sept. 11, 2013 - Crab Orchard, Tenn. - 4 dead

Jacob Allen Bennett, 26, was arrested in the shooting deaths of a woman and three teenagers. Their bodies were found in a car about 50 miles west of Knoxville, Tenn.

August 14, 2013 - Oklahoma City, Okla. - 4 dead

Daniel Livingston Green, 40, was arrested on four counts of first-degree murder, after his mother, sister and her two children were discovered fatally shot inside their home.

August 11, 2013 - Omaha, Neb. - 4 dead

Nikko Jenkins, 26, was arrested for allegedly shooting four people in the head. Police say three of the four victims had no connection to Jenkins.

July 26, 2013 -- Hialeah, Fla. -- 7 dead (including gunman)

Shooter Pedro Vargas killed six neighbors in a rampage after setting fire to his apartment complex. He was later shot and killed by police.

June 7, 2013 -- Santa Monica, Calif. -- 6 dead (including gunman)

Shooter John Zawahri killed his father and brother before going on a shooting spree on and around the campus of Santa Monica College that claimed the lives of four more and injured others.

April 24, 2013 -- Manchester, Ill. -- 5 dead

A shooter rocked the small town of Manchester when he killed five, including two children, at a federal housing complex. The gunman later died of gunshot wounds sustained during a shootout with police.

April 21, 2013 -- Federal Way, Wash. -- 5 dead (including gunman)

After shooting and killing his girlfriend, a gunman gunned down three more neighbors in an apparent attempt to eliminate all witnesses. He was later killed by police.

March 13, 2013 -- Herkimer County, N.Y. -- 5 dead (including gunman), one FBI K-9 dead

Kurt Myers, 64, shot six people, killing four, before holing up in an abandoned building. He later killed an FBI K-9 officer during a shootout in which he was eventually killed.

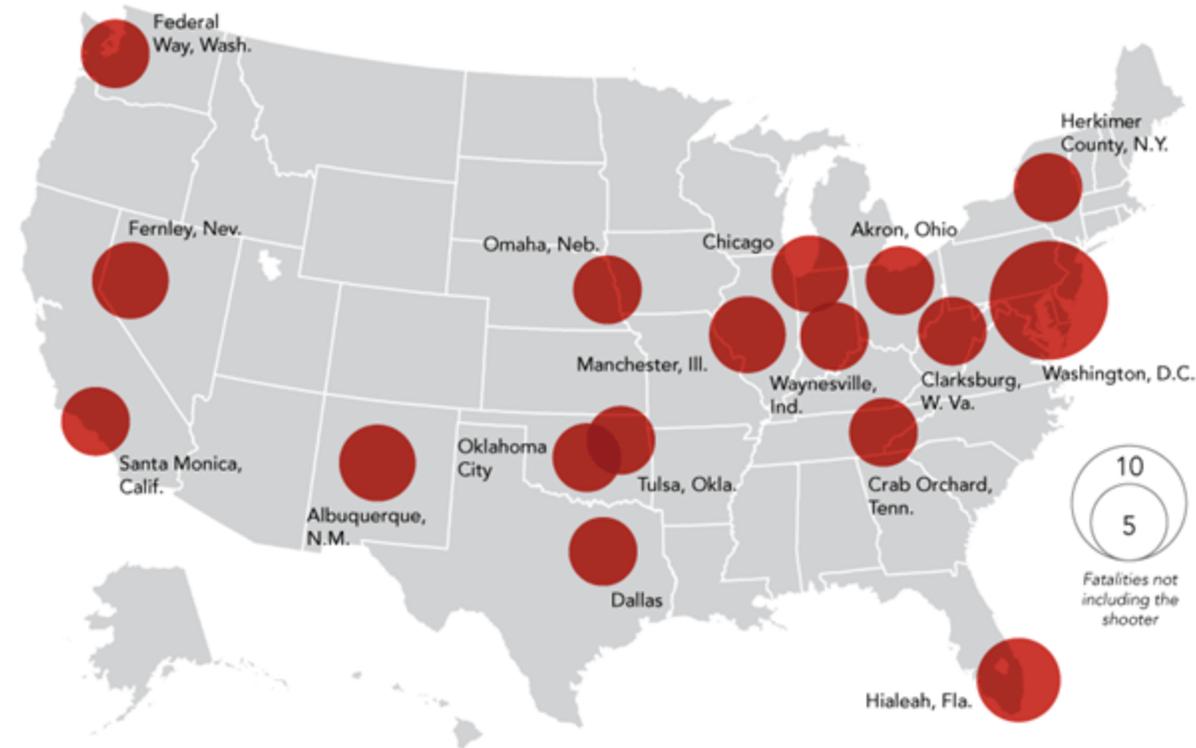
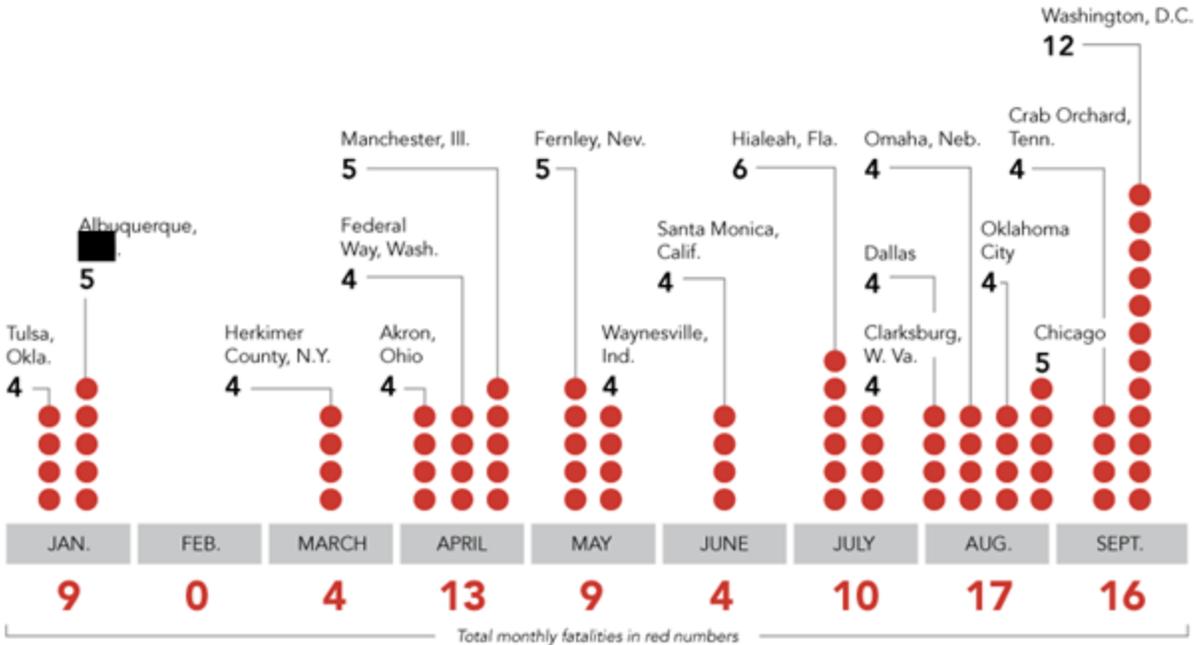
Dec. 14, 2012 -- Newtown, Conn. -- 27 dead (including gunman)

The shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary was the second-deadliest school shooting in U.S. history, leaving 27 dead -- including 20 young children.



The Year In Mass Shootings

Since Newtown, there have been at least 17 mass shootings, each killing four or more people other than the shooter. The Navy Yard shooting Monday was the deadliest.



Note: Data collected from various databases and news reports and may be incomplete.
 Sources: NBC, ThinkProgress, MotherJones, Associated Press, Business Insider, NewsOK, CNN, *The Charleston Gazette*

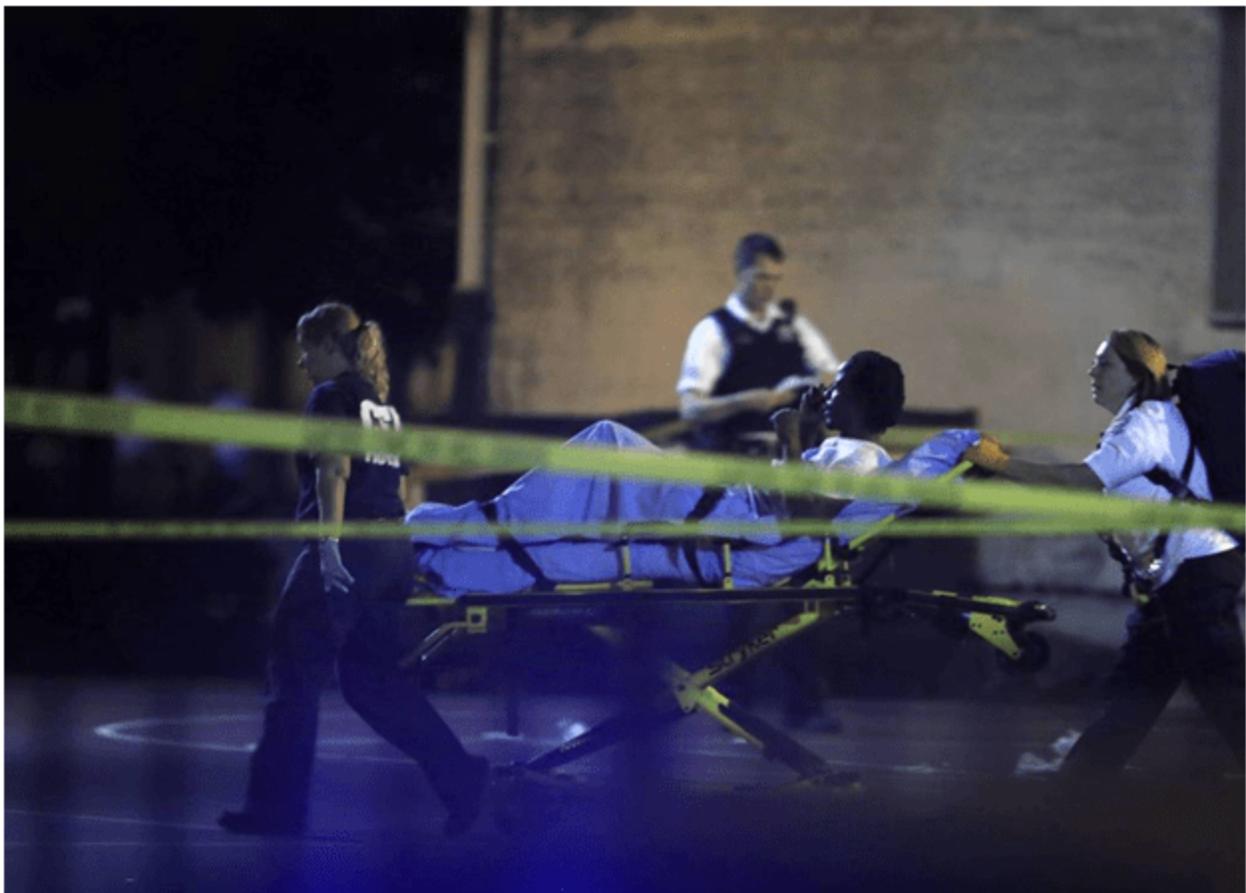
THE HUFFINGTON POST

Obviously we need stronger gun control law but the truth is that more 30% of the people killed in America are not killed with firearms so we have to acknowledge that there is an unprecedented rage of

violence in our country. There were 11,000 gun-related murders a year in the U.S. in contrast to 39 gun-related murders in Great Britain last year. Granted we are six times bigger, but still if they were our size there would only have had 240 murders verses our 11,000. Yes today's popular culture of violent movies and internet games in America have contributed to this psyche, but no more than in Great Britain or Japan (population of 127.6 million) where in 2012 only 11 people died from gun-related homicides.

Lets be honest, we are an extremely violent society right from the top to the bottom -- from our foreign policy to our lowest basic entertainment, we seem to be thrilled by violence and death. This culture of violence is destructive, as it has infected our entire society. Obviously there is a plus side to our cowboy mentality of exploration and the quest for new frontiers, as well as the freedoms that we see as our birthright. But we have to ask – what is this dark side that causes so many Americans to view killing as a tool to achieve a solution and that causes some to want to kill a lot of people at once and fast. Again, accessibility to guns contribute greatly, as well as mental illness (or the lack of treatment, and the media which glorifies outrageous behavior from Al Capone and John Gotti to *Rambo* and *Iron Man*.

Let's remember that violent crimes and murders has declined precipitously over the last 20 years, almost half, mass murders has not. Obviously, impulse rage whereby deranged gunmen try to kill as many people as they can, as fast as they can with the most lethal firearms that they can get should frighten any sane society and its politicians to enact laws to try to stem this craziness and the first sensible that we could do is to strengthen background checks, impose waiting periods for purchasing a gun, so you just can't buy a gun right away..... the allowing a cooling off period for rage full people to cool off. This is just common sense.... We almost went to war in the Middle East over the use of weapons of mass destruction, while the NRA and other lobbyist groups are fighting tooth and nail to stop any sensible gun legislation. This is just plain crazy..... So how many more Americans have to die via gun violence, before something is done.



Although it hasn't received as much attention and outrage as the mass shooting in Washington, DC earlier this week a gunman with a military-grade assault rifle opened fire on a pickup basketball game in a playground in a residential neighborhood in Chicago late Thursday, injuring 13 people, wounding a 3-year-old boy and a dozen other people. All are expected to survive, many with wounds to their arms and legs. At least 16 bullets were fired into Cornell Square Park around 10:15 p.m. Shell casings found around the blood-soaked basketball courts were 7.62 mm rounds, which are traditionally used in AK-47 assault rifles and rarely found in gang attacks on Chicago's South Side. Though gun violence has long plagued the city's impoverished neighborhoods, offenders almost never use military-style weapons. "It's a miracle there has been no fatality," Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy said at a news conference this morning. "Illegal guns, illegal guns, illegal guns drive violence....A military-grade weapon on the streets of Chicago is simply unacceptable."

The park is in a heavily gang-infested area, but it is not in a so-called impact zone flooded by officers to deter crime, McCarthy said. The nearest zones are three blocks to the north and three blocks to the south, leaving the Cornell Square as a no man's land protected only by occasional patrols and an 11 p.m. curfew.

About 45 minutes before the park's closing time, at least one gunman walked to the basketball court in the 1800 block of West 51st Street and opened fire, police said. The 13 people hit included both the pick-up game's players and spectators such as 3-year-old Deonta Howard. Authorities do not have anyone in custody and are currently reviewing police cameras mounted nearby. There could be as many as three offenders, officials said. The first paramedics on scene found more than a dozen people lying across the rust-colored court. One person lay near a bicycle that was on its side. A pair of white gym shoes were left near an out-of-bounds line. Ambulances continued to arrive a half hour after the shootings as wounded people – including a 15-year-old boy and a 17-year-old girl – were carried out on stretchers. About 60 police officers converged on the park and crime lab investigators combed the scene. Witnesses say Deonta was the first to be carried away. The images again captured the world's attention as international media organizations ran stories about the shooting and foreign reporters attended a Friday morning press conference at police headquarters.

The incident appeared problematic enough for Mayor Rahm Emanuel to cancel a meeting with Obama administration cabinet secretaries today on city issues and return to Chicago, his spokeswoman Sarah Hamilton said. Emanuel flew to D.C. Thursday to raise money for his campaign fund. His East Coast swing also was supposed to include a political fundraiser for Democratic New Jersey U.S. Senate candidate Cory Booker. Upon his return, Emanuel spent 40 minutes at Mount Sinai Hospital, where he spoke with Deonta's mother. The boy, who remains in critical condition, was sedated and being prepared for surgery during the visit. The mayor did not speak with reporters, but released a statement asking the community to cooperate with the investigation. "Senseless and brazen acts of violence have no place in Chicago and betray all that we stand for," Emanuel said in a statement. "The perpetrators of this crime will be brought to justice and prosecuted to the full extent of the law. I encourage everyone in the community to step forward with any information and everyone in Chicago to continue their individual efforts to build stronger communities where violence has no place."

The shootings came just days after the FBI released crime data showing that Chicago had more murders than New York in 2012. McCarthy argued Friday that the statistics were old news and did not represent the progress made in the city, where the murder rate has dropped by 20 percent over the past year.

Ald. Willie Cochran, a retired police sergeant whose redrawn ward will include Cornell Square in 2015, acknowledged the shootings landed a damaging blow against the city's crime-fighting efforts. "It's a setback because we've been focusing so much attention on suppressing crime," he said. "If you look at where we were last year and where we are this year, it shows that. But the perception of crime is greater than the crime itself. While law enforcement has been implementing programs, putting more officers on the street on overtime initiatives, it only takes one incident like this to change the whole perception of the reality."



Police listed the victims as:

- A 3-year-old boy, shot in the ear, in critical condition at Mount Sinai
- A 17-year-old girl, shot in the foot, condition stabilized at Holy Cross Hospital
- A 15-year-old boy shot in the arm, stabilized at Holy Cross
- A man, 27, shot in the leg and wrist, serious condition at Mount Sinai
- A man, 24, shot twice in the stomach, serious condition at Mount Sinai
- A man, 21, shot in the leg, serious condition at Mount Sinai
- A man, 41, shot in the buttocks, serious condition at John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital
- A woman, 33, shot in the shoulder, condition stabilized at Northwestern Memorial Hospital
- A man, 31, shot in the buttocks, condition stabilized at Northwestern
- A woman, 23, shot in the foot, condition stabilized at St. Anthony Hospital
- A man, 37, shot in the leg, in good condition at Stroger
- A man, 25, shot in the knee, in good condition at Northwestern
- And a man, 33, who drove himself to Little Company of Mary Hospital in Evergreen Park with a gunshot wound to the leg and who was treated and released.

We have to ask ourselves when enough is enough. We have Congress holding hearings because four Americans were killed in a war zone in Libya, yet this same Congress seems impervious to the daily carnage that is happening on our city streets and in our rural communities. It was a shame that Ambassador Chris Stephens was killed, but when local citizens can't enjoy breakfast before heading off to their jobs or are mowed down while watching a pickup basketball game in their local playground, we need to do something aggressively and radical. Conservatives will tell you that it is a mental health issue, yet Conservatives/Republicans in Congress have cut funding for mental health. But the truth is that America has more guns than people and it is obvious that gun availability is the largest contributing factor to gun violence. As such, and in spite of our Second Amendment rights and the

NRA, the next war that America should consider is a war against guns, because we live in a society where more than 11,000 people are killed each year in gun violence and the two ways to stem this trend is through an aggressive campaign to get rid of military style weapons and expand mental treatment. Anything less is just BS....

Conservatives like to tell you that the "*free market*" is a cure all (aspirin) to both administrate and fix any economic problem and is natural and inevitable, existing outside and beyond government. So whatever inequality or insecurity it generates is beyond our control. And whatever ways we might seek to reduce inequality or insecurity -- to make the economy work for us -- are unwarranted constraints on the market's freedom, and will inevitably go wrong. By this view, if some people aren't paid enough to live on, the market has determined they aren't worth enough. If others rake in billions, they must be worth it. If millions of Americans remain unemployed or their paychecks are shrinking or they work two or three part-time jobs with no idea what they'll earn next month or next week, that's too bad; it's just the outcome of the market.

According to this logic, government shouldn't intrude through minimum wages, high taxes on top earners, public spending to get people back to work, regulations on business, or anything else, because the "free market" knows best. This week in **The Huffington Post**, famed economist Robert Reich posted – ***The Myth of the 'Free Market' and How to Make the Economy Work for Us*** – saying the following.

In reality, the "free market" is a bunch of rules about **(1)** what can be owned and traded (the genome? slaves? nuclear materials? babies? votes?); **(2)** on what terms (equal access to the internet? the right to organize unions? corporate monopolies? the length of patent protections?); **(3)** under what conditions (poisonous drugs? unsafe foods? deceptive Ponzi schemes? uninsured derivatives? dangerous workplaces?) **(4)** what's private and what's public (police? roads? clean air and clean water? healthcare? good schools? parks and playgrounds?); **(5)** how to pay for what (taxes, user fees, individual pricing?). And so on.

These rules don't exist in nature; they are human creations. Governments don't "*intrude*" on free markets; governments organize and maintain them. Markets aren't "*free*" of rules; the rules define them.

The interesting question is what the rules should seek to achieve. They can be designed to maximize efficiency (given the current distribution of resources), or growth (depending on what we're willing to sacrifice to obtain that growth), or fairness (depending on our ideas about a decent society). Or some combination of all three -- which aren't necessarily in competition with one another. Evidence suggests, for example, that if prosperity were more widely shared, we'd have faster growth.

The rules can even be designed to entrench and enhance the wealth of a few at the top, and keep almost everyone else comparatively poor and economically insecure. Which brings us to the central political question: Who should decide on the rules, and their major purpose? If our democracy was working as it should, presumably our elected representatives, agency heads, and courts would be making the rules roughly according to what most of us want the rules to be. The economy would be working for us; we wouldn't be working for the economy.

One of the most deceptive ideas continuously sounded by *The Right* (and its fathomless think tanks and media outlets) is that the "*free market*" Instead, the rules are being made mainly by those with the power and resources to buy the politicians, regulatory heads, and even the courts (and the lawyers who appear before them). As income and wealth have concentrated at the top, so has political clout. And the most important clout is determining the rules of the game.

Not incidentally, these are the same people who want you and most others to believe in the fiction of an immutable "*free market*." If we want to reduce the savage inequalities and insecurities that are now undermining our economy and democracy, we shouldn't be deterred by the myth of the "*free market*."

We can make the economy work for us, rather than the other way around. But in order to change the rules, we must exert the power that is supposed to be ours.

Last year, household income remained effectively unchanged, according to data released this week by the U.S. Census Bureau. This is despite the fact that the U.S. added nearly 2.2 million jobs in 2012.

“The big story is that everything was stagnant over the year” said Economic Policy Institute’s Elise Gould. “We’re stagnant, and continue to be in bad place.”

While the economy continues to struggle, residents in the wealthiest states continued to make far more than in the poorest. In 2012, Maryland remained the richest state in the country, with a median household income of \$71,221. Mississippi was again the poorest, with an income of \$37,095 — nearly half that of Maryland’s.

Despite the addition of jobs nationwide, median incomes remained stagnant in most states and were still generally below their 2008 levels, adjusted for inflation. Sheldon Danziger, president of the Russell Sage Foundation, explained that this has been the nature of the recovery. “We have an economy that continues to grow, with most of the gains going to the economic elite. I don’t see any bright prospects for the median worker, much less the poor.”

States with lower median incomes generally had much higher rates of poverty than the national rate. All of the 10 states with the lowest median income in 2012 also had among the highest poverty rates in the country. While 15.9% of Americans fell below the poverty line in 2012, nearly one in four Mississippians did.

Employment is one of the biggest factors affecting income. In some states with lower unemployment, a higher share of the households had steady income, which bolsters the state’s median. In many of the highest-income states, like New Hampshire, Minnesota and Hawaii, unemployment in 2012 was less than 6%, compared to a national rate of 8.1%.

Elise Gould, Director of Health Policy for Economic Policy Institute, explained that unemployment rates can have a significant effect on a state’s household income. “When we’re talking about average families and poor families, the vast majority of income comes from wages. So it’s about jobs.” Gould cautioned, however, that unemployment rates do not tell the full story.

Unemployment rates, for example, ignore those people who have given up looking for work or accept part-time work. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, while 8.1% of American workers were unemployed in 2012, 14.7% were underemployed, meaning they wanted to work full time but could not. This was an increase from roughly 10% in 2008.

The types of jobs available in each state also affect income. A review of Census Bureau industry composition data shows that people in most of the states with a higher median income were often more likely to be employed in information, finance, professional and other positions that tend to pay higher salaries. Maryland, the wealthiest state in the country, had the highest percentage of workers in professional, scientific and management positions.

At the same time, many of the low-income states had smaller percentages of these professional occupations and higher rates of employment in retail, manufacturing and transportation. The high proportion of manufacturing jobs in low-income states might be surprising, but, explained Danziger, the makeup of the manufacturing industry in the country has changed.

“There’s a difference between unionized auto company workers and non-unionized parts suppliers,” Danziger said. “Even when manufacturers haven’t cut wages, they are adopting labor-saving technological change.”

To identify the states with the highest and lowest median household income, 24/7 Wall St. reviewed state data on income from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey (ACS). Based on Census treatment, median household income for all years is adjusted for inflation. We also reviewed unemployment data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics for 2012, as well as 2012 ACS data on health insurance coverage, employment and poverty.

These are America's richest and poorest states.

America's Richest States

10. Delaware

- > Median household income: \$58,415
- > Population: 917,092 (6th lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 7.1% (tied-23rd lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 12.0% (12th lowest)

Delaware's median household income declined from more than \$62,000 in 2008 to \$58,415 last year — still well above the national median. One reason for this may be the relatively large number of workers in finance, insurance and real estate. These jobs, which tend to pay well, accounted for almost 10% of employment in the state. Delaware also had a high percentage of residents with health insurance, with only 8.8% lacking coverage.

9. Minnesota

- > Median household income: \$58,906
- > Population: 5,379,139 (21st highest)
- > Unemployment rate: 5.6% (9th lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 11.4% (7th lowest)

Minnesota had one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country last year, at 5.6%, compared to a national rate of 8.9%. Most of the states with high median household incomes also had smaller populations of impoverished residents, and Minnesota was no exception. The state's poverty rate was among the lowest in the nation, at 11.4%. Further, just 3.3% of Minnesota households earned an income of less than \$10,000 in 2012, compared to a national rate of 5.0%.

8. Virginia

- > Median household income: \$61,741
- > Population: 8,185,867 (12th highest)
- > Unemployment rate: 5.9% (13th lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 11.7% (9th lowest)

Median household income in Virginia declined from over \$65,000 in 2008 to an estimated \$61,741 last year. The unemployment rate improved from 6.4% in 2011 to 5.9% last year. Nearly 10% of Virginian households earned at least \$200,000 in 2012, one of the highest rates nationally. One reason for these high incomes may be the concentration of high-skilled jobs in professional, scientific and

management fields, which can pay well. Individuals in occupations within these groups accounted for 15% of Virginia's workforce, more than any state except Maryland.

7. New Hampshire

- > Median household income: \$63,280
- > Population: 1,320,718 (9th lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 5.5% (8th lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 10.0% (the lowest)

In addition to being one of the wealthiest states in the nation, New Hampshire also had the lowest poverty rate last year. Just 10% of people in the state had an income that placed them below the poverty line, versus nearly 16% nationwide. Similarly, just 2.7% of households earned less than \$10,000 in 2012 — again the lowest rate in the nation and nearly half the national rate of 5%. Also demonstrating how well residents in the state are doing, just 8.3% of households received food stamps in 2012, the lowest percentage in the nation, while the state had an unemployment rate of only 5.5%.

6. Massachusetts

- > Median household income: \$65,339
- > Population: 6,646,144 (14th highest)
- > Unemployment rate: 6.7% (16th lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 11.9% (11th lowest)

Massachusetts was one of just four states with a significant increase in median household income between 2011 and 2012. Last year, median household income rose to \$65,339, from \$64,311 the year before. The many colleges and universities in the Boston area are a major source of high-paying jobs in the state. Nearly 28% of working residents in Massachusetts were employed in education, health care or social assistance, the most in the nation. Additionally, just 3.9% of the state's population lacked health insurance last year, lowest of all 50 states and well below the 14.8% figure nationwide. This may be partly because of the state's own health care reform measures, passed in 2006. These reforms are often seen as a model for the federal government's 2010 Affordable Care Act.

5. Hawaii

- > Median household income: \$66,259
- > Population: 1,392,313 (11th lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 5.8% (12th lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 11.6% (8th lowest)

Over 16% of people in Hawaii worked in arts and entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services last year, the second highest percentage in the country. This reflects the state's strong retirement and tourism economy. The unemployment rate in Hawaii declined only slightly in 2012 from the year before, but remained well below the U.S. rate, at just 5.8%. Over that time, Hawaii was also one of a handful of states to see a meaningful increase in income. Median household income rose by more than \$3,000, to \$66,259.

4. Connecticut

- > Median household income: \$67,276
- > Population: 3,590,347 (22nd lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 8.4% (tied-14th highest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 10.7% (4th lowest)

Connecticut's median household income fell considerably from 2008, when a typical family in the state took in \$73,075 annually. This mirrored broader trends in the rest of the U.S., as nationwide median household income fell from over \$55,000 in 2008 to \$51,371 in 2012. Still, 11.5% of the state's households earned at least \$200,000 in 2012, the most in the U.S. Connecticut also remains one of the states with the worst income inequality in the nation, ahead of only New York.

3. Alaska

- > Median household income: \$67,712
- > Population: 731,449 (4th lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 7.0% (22nd lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 10.1% (2nd lowest)

In spite of Alaska's high median household income — and the nation's second-lowest poverty rate — over 20% of the population did not have health insurance last year, more than all but two other states. This could be due in part to the state's high volume of seasonal employees, who are much less likely to have health insurance. Alaska's oil production also bolsters residents' income, with most collecting dividend payments from the state's reinvested oil savings.

2. New Jersey

- > Median household income: \$69,667
- > Population: 8,864,590 (11th highest)
- > Unemployment rate: 9.5% (tied-5th highest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 10.8% (5th lowest)

The median household income in New Jersey was just shy of \$70,000 in 2012. This was due in part to the large number of especially wealthy households. More than 11% of households had an income of at least \$200,000 in 2012, a higher percentage than any other state except Connecticut, and nearly double the national rate. But not all residents were well off in 2012. The state's unemployment rate for the year was 9.5%, among the highest in the nation. Also, the percentage of households that depended on food stamps rose from 8.0% in 2011 to 9.3% last year. This mirrored a nationwide trend: The number of American households on food stamps rose to from 13.0% to 13.6% between 2011 and 2012.

1. Maryland

- > Median household income: \$71,122
- > Population: 5,884,563 (19th highest)
- > Unemployment rate: 6.8% (17th lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 10.3% (3rd lowest)

Maryland was the only state in the country with a median household income to exceed \$70,000 in both 2011 and 2012. Also, nearly 11% of households in Maryland earned \$200,000 or more last year, the third-highest percentage in the nation and close to double the national rate of 5.9%. People in Maryland were more likely to be employed and to hold good jobs. Just 6.8% of the workforce was unemployed in 2012, compared to 8.1% nationwide. Conversely, 15.5% of the workforce, the highest percentage in the nation, were employed in professional, scientific and management occupations, which are generally high skill and high pay.

America's Poorest States

10. Oklahoma

- > Median household income: \$44,312
- > Population: 3,814,820 (23rd lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 5.2% (tied-5th lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 17.2% (tied-15th highest)

Oklahoma's median household income was \$7,000 less than the national median in 2012. The state also ranked among the lowest in the country for health insurance coverage, with more than 18% of the population lacking coverage as of last year. However, median household income did not decline as much as it did in the rest of the country during the recession. Between 2008 and 2012, the national median income fell by nearly \$4,000, but in Oklahoma the drop was just slightly over \$1,000. With the state's economy heavily reliant on the energy industry, rising oil prices helped cushion the effects of the recession.

9. South Carolina

- > Median household income: \$43,107
- > Population: 4,723,723 (24th highest)
- > Unemployment rate: 9.1% (tied-7th highest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 18.3% (9th highest)

Like many states, South Carolina's median household income declined substantially between 2008 and 2012 — from \$47,157 to \$43,107. While unemployment fell considerably between 2011 and 2012, South Carolina still had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country last year. Like a number of the states with low median household incomes, South Carolina had a higher-than-average concentration of jobs in manufacturing, at 13.8% of all workers, compared to a national rate of 10.5%.

8. Louisiana

- > Median household income: \$42,944
- > Population: 4,601,893 (25th highest)
- > Unemployment rate: 6.4% (15th lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 19.9% (3rd highest)

Almost 20% of Louisiana residents lived below the poverty line in 2012, better only than Mississippi and New Mexico. Last year, nearly 18% of households in the state received food stamps, four percentage points above the national rate. Income inequality in the state has become worse in the past

decade. As measured by the Gini index, Louisiana is among the five states with the highest income equality. It also had the fourth-highest percentage of households earning less than \$10,000 in 2012.

7. Tennessee

- > Median household income: \$42,764
- > Population: 6,456,243 (17th highest)
- > Unemployment rate: 8.0% (tied-19th highest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 17.9% (tied-11th highest)

Tennessee's unemployment rate fell from 9.3% to just 8.0% between 2011 and 2012, one of the largest drops in the nation. However, by many other measures, the state did not improve much in that time. Tennessee's median household income of less than \$43,000 and its poverty rate of nearly 18% were both effectively unchanged from the year before. The state also had one of the highest percentages of residents who received food stamps in 2012, at 17.7%. While Tennessee rates poorly by most measures, only 13.9% of residents lacked health insurance, better than the 14.8% figure nationwide.

6. New Mexico

- > Median household income: \$42,558
- > Population: 2,085,538 (15th lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 6.9% (tied-19th lowest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 20.8% (2nd highest)

New Mexico's median household income was among the lowest in the country in 2012, but its poverty rate was an even larger problem. More than one in five residents lived below the poverty line in 2012, one of just two states where that was the case. An estimated 7.6% of all households were in extreme poverty, earning less than \$10,000 per year. This was the highest percentage of any state except Mississippi. The percentage of households receiving food stamps rose from 15.4% in 2011 to 16.5% last year, among the highest rates in the country.

5. Kentucky

- > Median household income: \$41,724
- > Population: 4,380,415 (25th lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 8.2% (tied-17th highest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 19.4% (5th highest)

Kentucky is, by many measures, one of the most poverty-stricken states in the nation. The state's 19.4% poverty rate in 2012 was worse than all but four states. Additionally, more than 18.0% of residents received food stamps in 2012, higher than all but two states and up from 17.4% the year before. Among the more positive developments for the state, the unemployment rate fell from 9.5% to 8.2%. But recently, concerns have risen over the state's coal jobs. Demand for coal has declined due to low natural gas prices, as well as tougher emission controls.

4. Alabama

- > Median household income: \$41,574

- > Population: 4,822,023 (23rd highest)
- > Unemployment rate: 7.3% (tied-22nd highest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 19.0% (7th highest)

After falling by 1.4 percentage points, the unemployment rate in Alabama was just 7.3%, well below the national rate in 2012. Despite this improvement, families in the state still did not make very much money last year, with 6.7% of households earning less than \$10,000. Only Mississippi and New Mexico had higher percentages living on so little. About one in six households relied on food stamps in 2012, making Alabama among the 10 states most dependent on these benefits. Despite the high level of poverty, only 13.3% of Alabama residents lacked health insurance last year, better than the national rate.

3. West Virginia

- > Median household income: \$40,196
- > Population: 1,855,413 (13th lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 7.3% (tied-22nd highest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 17.8% (13th highest)

While incomes declined across the country from 2008 to 2012, West Virginia's median household income was effectively unchanged. Unfortunately, the state's median income was still the third lowest in the U.S. The state had a high proportion of people employed in low-earning jobs, including retail, agriculture, forestry and fishing. Compared with other states with low median incomes, though, few people in West Virginia went without health care. Just 14.4% of the state's population lacked health insurance, better than more than half of all states.

2. Arkansas

- > Median household income: \$40,112
- > Population: 2,949,131 (19th lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 7.3% (tied-22nd highest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 19.8% (4th highest)

Arkansas was one of just three states, along with Mississippi and West Virginia, with a median household income \$10,000 below the U.S. median. The state's poverty rate, at nearly 20%, was also among the highest in the country. Despite these problems, unemployment dropped from 7.9% in 2011 to 7.3% last year. Arkansas was also one of the nation's worst states for food insecurity, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Between 2010 and 2012, an estimated 19.8% of households had little or very little secure access to food, above the 14.7% figure for all U.S. households.

1. Mississippi

- > Median household income: \$37,095
- > Population: 2,984,926 (20th lowest)
- > Unemployment rate: 9.2% (6th highest)
- > Pct. below poverty line: 24.2% (the highest)

In Mississippi, about one in five households depended on food stamps last year, second only to Oregon. The state's poverty rate was 24.2%, the highest in the nation by more than three percentage points. Like many of America's poorest states, the median household income in Mississippi has declined considerably since 2008, when it was just over \$40,000. Fewer households earned over \$200,000 last year, proportionally, than any other state except West Virginia. In addition to poverty, income inequality was also extremely severe in Mississippi, ranking behind only New York and Connecticut.

The Best Economies in the World

After sliding in the rankings for four consecutive years, the United States moved up two places in the World Economic Forum's competitiveness ranking, from seventh last year to fifth in 2013. A combination of factors, including improving financial markets and a strong university system, helped the U.S. improve, despite its weak macroeconomic environment.

The WEF's [Global Competitiveness Report](#) defines competitiveness as the "institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country." In order to assess competitiveness, the WEF divided the 148 nations it surveyed into one of three classifications, depending on their development. Based on the WEF's report, these are the best economies in the world.

"Factor-driven" economies are the least developed and rely on low-skilled labor and natural resources. More developed countries are considered "efficiency-driven" economies because they focus on improving economic output through increasing production efficiency. The most developed economies, which rely on innovation and technological changes to drive growth, are considered "innovation-driven" economies. Nations may also fall in between these classifications.

While gross domestic product is not a measure of well-being or competitiveness by itself, competitive nations often have high GDP per capita. This is because the factors that allow nations to compete for new business are the same factors that drive productivity and output.

Each of the 10 most competitive nations is among the 25 highest for GDP per capita out of the countries measured. The most competitive economy in the world, Switzerland, had a per capita GDP of more than \$79,000, good for fourth highest worldwide. At the other end, almost all the 10 least competitive economies have extremely low GDP per capita, six of them below \$1,000.

According to Margareta Drzeniek-Hanouz, lead economist at the WEF's Global Competitiveness and Benchmarking Network, "competitiveness is not so much about countries competing in the global marketplace, but rather about the factors — politicians, institutions — that countries put into place to raise productivity and thereby grow." In the case of the United States, Drzeniek-Hanouz highlighted financial market efficiency, labor market efficiency and innovation as factors that make the country globally competitive.

Many of the world's most competitive nations also have the ability to borrow a great deal to support their spending and investment, which can result in high government debt. Seven of the 10 most competitive nations had at least 50% of GDP in gross general government debt as of 2012. And three of them — Japan, Singapore and the United States — had more than 100% of their GDP in debt.

In poorer nations, where access to financing often is not only an issue for businesses but for governments as well, debt levels are typically lower. Just one of the 10 least competitive countries had more than 50% of its GDP in debt.

To create the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) score for each country, [the WEF](#) ranked more than 100 economic indicators that it grouped into 12 broad categories. Also referred to as pillars, these categories quantify the extent to which a country is competitive. The pillars were then scored from 1 to 7, but each had a different weighting in the final country rank, depending on which classification a nation fell under. Innovation and sophistication accounted for 30% of the score for nations such as the United States, which is an innovation-driven economy, but just 5% of the final score for less-developed nations such as Haiti, a factor-driven economy.

Based on the WEF's Global Competitiveness Report, which ranks 148 countries, 24/7 Wall St. reviewed the economies with the highest and lowest GCI scores. All GDP figures, as well as figures on government debt as a percentage of GDP and GDP per capita, were provided to the WEF by the International Monetary Fund.

These are the 10 most competitive global economies.

10. United Kingdom

- > **GCI score:** 5.37
- > **GDP per capita:** \$38,589 (23rd highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 90.3% (13th highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 87.0% (11th highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Access to financing

The United Kingdom, considered to be the eighth most competitive last year, has fallen by two places. The world's eighth largest economy by GDP has some of the most efficient labor practices — the U.K. ranks fourth for its ability to attract talent and fifth in overall labor market efficiency. The quality of higher education and training in the U.K. is not groundbreaking, but the country has some of the best management schools and ranks among the top countries around the world in terms of Internet access in schools. The biggest obstacle to doing business is access to financing, overwhelmingly chosen by survey respondents — well above tax rates and government bureaucracy, both tied for the next most selected factor. During the financial crisis, Britain had to bail out two of the country's largest banks, Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds Banking Group, which remain state-owned.

9. Japan

- > **GCI score:** 5.40
- > **GDP per capita:** \$46,736 (13th highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 237.9% (the highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 79.1% (24th highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Tax rates

Japan received top marks for business sophistication due to an abundance of local suppliers, highly sophisticated production processes and its prominent role in the international distribution of goods and services. Companies in Japan — the fourth largest economy in the world — spent considerable

amounts on research and development, ranking only behind first place Switzerland. Tax rates were reported to be the most problematic factor for doing business, according to the WEF's survey. However, tax hikes may be on the horizon as part of the nation's "Abenomics" plan, pushed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, to combine aggressive economic stimulus with structural reform.

8. Netherlands

- > **GCI score:** 5.42
- > **GDP per capita:** \$46,142 (14th highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 71.7% (31st highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 93.0% (4th highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Access to financing

Strong infrastructure, few reports of corruption and high-quality health and education systems have made the Netherlands a reliable trade partner and a competitive advanced economy. Port infrastructure in the Netherlands was ranked first out of all countries surveyed. When business leaders polled by the WEF's Executive Opinion Survey were asked to select the most problematic factor for doing business, the most common reply was access to financing. According to the European Commission, applicants in the Netherlands were denied loans nearly twice as much as the European average, and when applications succeeded, lenders paid much higher interest rates than other EU countries. Financial market development was not the strongest economic indicator for the Netherlands, but the country still ranked 30th out of 148 countries in terms of the availability of financial services.

7. Hong Kong (SAR)

- > **GCI score:** 5.47
- > **GDP per capita:** \$36,667 (25th highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 32.4% (42nd lowest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 72.8% (33rd highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Insufficient capacity to innovate

Hong Kong has the best infrastructure, according to the WEF, with the most consistent electricity and some of the best roads and rail networks in the world. The special administrative region of China is extremely healthy, reporting only 1.4 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, the lowest such rate in the world, and an average life expectancy at birth of 83.4 years, the highest in the world. Hong Kong also was judged to have the most developed financial market in the world. Financial services in the region are some of the most available and affordable in the world. Additionally, the pay received by workers in the city is widely held to be directly related to their productivity, a strong indicator of Hong Kong's efficient labor market. Despite these reportedly high levels of convenience and economic freedom, residents of Hong Kong reported the greatest hindrance to doing business was an insufficient capacity to innovate.

6. Sweden

- > **GCI score:** 5.48
- > **GDP per capita:** \$55,158 (8th highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 38.0% (62nd lowest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 94.0% (3rd highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Restrictive labor regulations

Sweden has fallen slightly on the competitiveness index in the past three years, from third in 2011 to sixth this year. However, the country still ranks first in technological readiness, the WEF's measure of how nations incorporate existing technologies to improve efficiency, with Swedish companies absorbing new technologies better than those in any other country. People living in Sweden also are among those using the Internet the most, and mobile subscriptions there are among the highest in the world. Ericsson, a large Swedish telecommunications company, has remained relevant in a very competitive global wireless technology industry. In line with Sweden's strong scores in technology categories, the country also had the highest concentration of patent applications of all other countries assessed in the WEF report, at nearly 303 per million residents.

5. United States

- > **GCI score:** 5.48
- > **GDP per capita:** \$49,922 (11th highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 106.5% (9th highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 81.0% (20th highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Tax regulations

The United States still faces a weak economic environment, largely due to the nation's massive government deficit and debt burden. In spite of this, the U.S. was more competitive this year than it was a year ago, up from seventh place to fifth. The U.S. ranked seventh for the availability of financial services, and it was one of the top five nations for the availability of venture capital and the ease of raising money through equity markets. The U.S. also ranked as one of the top countries for attracting and retaining talent. The world's largest economy is also home to many highly sophisticated businesses, with U.S. companies handling international distribution of their goods and services across the world.

4. Germany

- > **GCI score:** 5.51
- > **GDP per capita:** \$41,513 (21st highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 82.0% (19th highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 84.0% (16th highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Tax regulations

Germany consistently scores well in all major categories the WEF uses to measure competitiveness. In addition to being one of the world's largest economies, Germany provides its residents with an extremely well-developed infrastructure, top-quality higher education and training, and a sophisticated and innovative private sector. The local availability of research and training services is better in Germany than in all but one other country, behind only Switzerland. Germany also scored in the top 10 in six out of the nine factors in the infrastructure category, including for the quality of its rail and port infrastructure and fixed telephone lines. Germany has a very sophisticated business climate as well, with nine out of 10 factors in this category ranked in the top 10, including a first-place position for value chain breadth.

3. Finland

- > **GCI score:** 5.54
- > **GDP per capita:** \$46,098 (16th highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 53.3% (48th highest)

- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 91.0% (7th highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Restrictive labor regulations

Finland ranks as the top country in the world for innovation and is also one of the top countries in the world for business sophistication. Finland had the third-best score for company expenditure, and its capacity for innovation ranked second out of 148 countries. Scientists and engineers residing in the country also were considered to be more widely available than comparable professionals in any other country. The WEF gave Finland first place in higher education and training, which is not surprising given the country's well-regarded education system.

2. Singapore

- > **GCI score:** 5.61
- > **GDP per capita:** \$51,162 (10th highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 111.0% (8th highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 74.2% (29th highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Restrictive labor regulations

Singapore has some of the highest quality institutions, as well as some of the best infrastructure and education systems in the world, according to the WEF. The citizens of Singapore have the most trust in their politicians, the most transparent government policymaking and the most efficient legal framework for settling disputes. Singapore's air transport infrastructure was rated the best out of 148 countries. The tiny country takes its higher education very seriously as well, with a first-place ranking in the quality of math and science education. Singapore's labor market is reported to be more efficient than that of any other country due in part to its ability to attract talent.

1. Switzerland

- > **GCI score:** 5.67
- > **GDP per capita:** \$79,033 (4th highest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 49.1% (59th highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 85.2% (13th highest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Inadequately educated workforce

Switzerland topped the list this year as the world's most competitive economy. The small alpine nation was among the best in the world for both business sophistication and innovation. It was also the top country in the world for local supplier quality and for the amount businesses spent on research and development and university-industry collaboration. Some of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world are based in Switzerland and contribute to the country's strongest competitiveness indicators.

The Worst Economies in the World

September 11, 2013

After sliding in the rankings for four consecutive years, the United States moved up two places in the World Economic Forum's competitiveness ranking, from seventh last year to fifth in 2013. A

combination of factors, including improving financial markets and a strong university system, helped the U.S. improve, despite certain weak macroeconomic elements.

The WEF's [Global Competitiveness Report](#) defines competitiveness as the “institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country.” In order to assess competitiveness, the WEF divided the 148 nations it surveyed into one of three classifications, depending on their development. Based on the WEF's report, these are the worst economies in the world.

“Factor-driven” economies are least developed and rely on low-skilled labor and natural resources. More developed countries are considered “efficiency-driven” economies because they focus on improving economic output through increasing production efficiency. The most developed economies, which rely on innovation and technological changes to drive growth, are considered “innovation-driven” economies. Nations may also fall in between these classifications.

While gross domestic product (GDP) is not a measure of well-being or competitiveness in itself, less competitive nations often have low GDP per capita, and the least competitive nations also have among the lowest GDP per capita. This is because the same factors that prevent countries from competing for new business are often also the same factors that limit productivity and output.

Almost all the 10 least competitive economies are extremely poor — six of them have a GDP per capita below \$1,000. One of these economies, Burundi, has a per capita GDP of just \$282. U.S. GDP per capita, by comparison, is nearly \$50,000.

According to Margareta Drzeniek-Hanouz, lead economist at the WEF's Global Competitiveness and Benchmarking Network, “competitiveness is not so much about countries competing in the global marketplace, but rather about the factors — politicians, institutions — that countries put into place to raise productivity and thereby grow.” In the case of the United States, Drzeniek-Hanouz highlighted financial market efficiency, labor market efficiency and innovation as factors that make the country globally competitive.

Just as the 10 least competitive nations are relatively poor, the 10 most competitive nations are relatively wealthy. And as wealthy countries they have the ability to borrow a great deal to support their spending and investments, which can result in high government debt. The least competitive countries lack this ability. While the gross national debt of seven of the 10 most competitive nations was at least 50% of GDP as of 2012, just one of the least competitive nations — Mauritania — had debt totalling more than 50% of GDP. And given that most of these countries have extremely low per capita GDP, the amount they can borrow is extremely small.

To create the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) score for each country, the WEF ranked more than 100 economic indicators that it grouped into 12 broad categories. Also referred to as pillars, these categories quantify the extent to which a country is competitive. The pillars were then scored from 1 to 7, but each had a different weighting in the final country rank, depending on which classification a nation fell under. Innovation and sophistication accounted for 30% of the score for nations such as the United States, which is an innovation-driven economy, but just 5% of the final score for less-developed nations such as Haiti, a factor-driven economy.

Based on the WEF's Global Competitiveness Report, which ranked 148 countries, 24/7 Wall St. reviewed the economies with the highest and lowest GCI scores. All GDP figures, as well as figures

on government debt as a percentage of GDP and GDP per capita, were provided to the WEF by the International Monetary Fund. These are the 10 most and least competitive global economies.

These are the worst economies in the world.

10. Myanmar

- > **GCI score:** 3.23
- > **GDP per capita:** \$835 (20th lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 47.5% (63rd highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 1.1% (2nd lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Access to financing and police instability

Myanmar ranks as the 10th least competitive nation in the world despite the progress it has achieved since 2011, when the decades-long military rule ended. Since then, the once-isolated country has opened up to the outside world. Myanmar's economy still remains behind much of the world, lacking many of the basic requirements for economic competitiveness. The nation has an inefficient legal framework, a lack of transparency in government policy making and an extremely low quality of infrastructure — all major issues limiting its competitiveness. The availability of modern technology is also highly limited, with barely 1% of the population using the Internet.

9. Burkina Faso

- > **GCI score:** 3.21
- > **GDP per capita:** \$603 (10th lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 27.7% (35th lowest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 3.7% (11th lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Access to financing

Burkina Faso, located in Western Africa, has one of the worst health care and basic education systems in the world. Malaria, a disease mostly eradicated in developed countries, is a major problem in Burkina Faso, with nearly a third of the residents suffering from the disease. Similarly, the country has one of the highest rates of infant mortality in the world at 81.6 deaths per 1,000 live births. The nation's enrollment rate of students in primary school is also among the lowest in the world. Also indicative of the nation's weak economy are its poor infrastructure and low scores for higher education and training.

8. Mauritania

- > **GCI score:** 3.19
- > **GDP per capita:** \$1,157 (26th lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 79.7% (21st highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 5.4% (18th lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Access to financing

Mauritania was rated as one of the worst nations for higher education and training, which are necessary to develop a skilled and competitive workforce. In addition to a poor educational system, the nation also has some of the lowest secondary and tertiary enrollment rates in the world. The nation received poor ratings for its inability to attract talent or to properly match-up pay to productivity, among other factors. However, Mauritania's worst problem may be the still prevalent

system of slavery, which was only legally abolished in 1981 and officially criminalized in 2007. As recently as 2012, between 10% to 20% of the population, or as many as 680,000 people, were still enslaved, according to a CNN report on Mauritania.

7. Angola

- > **GCI score:** 3.15
- > **GDP per capita:** \$5,873 (71st lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 29.3% (39th lowest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 16.9% (39th lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Corruption

Angola spent more than a quarter century dealing with a bitter civil war that resulted in as many as 1.5 million deaths. Since the end of the civil war in 2002, the nation has become a major producer of oil and has been a member of OPEC since 2006. However, the country still lacks some of the key elements needed to promote competitiveness, including strong auditing mandates and corporate checks-and-balances. The nation also was ranked as having the lowest quality of infrastructure of any nation, with one of the lowest quality of electricity supply and relatively few mobile telephone subscribers, at 48.6 per 100 residents.

6. Haiti

- > **GCI score:** 3.11
- > **GDP per capita:** \$759 (17th lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 15.4% (17th lowest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 10.9% (25th lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Access to financing

In 2010, Haiti was rocked by an earthquake that is estimated to have killed more than 300,000 people. The nation was hardly well-off before the earthquake — it was already exceptionally poor and among the least developed nations in the world. Today, access to even basic requirements of a functional economy are limited. Haiti's ports and roads are among the worst-rated in the world, while its electricity supply and telephone lines are also limited. Additionally, only one nation, Venezuela, rated worse for protecting property rights. Haiti also received poor scores for its limited judicial independence and for the limited trust in politicians, who are believed to be more likely to ask for bribes or misuse public funds than their counterparts in most other countries.

5. Sierra Leone

- > **GCI score:** 3.01
- > **GDP per capita:** \$613 (11th lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 44.5% (68th highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 1.3% (4th lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Access to financing

Sierra Leone was one of only three other countries studied by the WEF to have a negative gross national savings score in 2012. It also had some of the worst inflation rates in the world, with consumer prices rising by 13.8% in 2012, higher than all but eight other countries. In terms of health care, Sierra Leone consistently ranks close to the bottom. Malaria is relatively common, and there are more than 700 cases of tuberculosis per 100,000 people, a rate surpassed by only South Africa

and Swaziland. Sierra Leone has the worst infant mortality rate, and the life expectancy at birth is just 47.8 years, the worst out of the 148 countries studied.

4. Yemen

- > **GCI score:** 2.98
- > **GDP per capita:** \$1,377 (31st lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 46.7% (55th highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 17.4% (42nd lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Police instability

When Yemen residents were asked to identify the most problematic factor for doing business, most respondents said police instability. Inadequate supplies of infrastructure and corruption followed closely as obstacles for conducting business. Yemen's business transactions are plagued by bribes and under-the-table dealing, while the legal system cannot be relied on for help. Yemen's government also is considered to be excessively wasteful, and public funds are frequently misused. Violence in the region and the presence of extremist groups have made it difficult for residents to innovate or accomplish very much at all in the way of business. The business costs of crime, violence and terrorism were judged to be higher in Yemen than most other nations.

3. Burundi

- > **GCI score:** 2.92
- > **GDP per capita:** \$282 (2nd lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 32.0% (40th lowest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 1.2% (3rd lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Access to financing

Burundi did less to promote economic efficiency than any other nation in the world, according to the WEF. Access to financing and corruption were by far the most selected problematic factors for doing business; the availability of financial services in Burundi was ranked among the worst in the world. Burundi is the world's second-poorest nation in terms of GDP per capita, behind only Malawi. Residents of Burundi said their judiciaries were heavily influenced by members of government, more than those in almost any other country. The poor reliability of Burundi's police services — second worst out of 148 countries — and low scores for ethical behavior in Burundian businesses make doing business in the country extremely difficult.

2. Guinea

- > **GCI score:** 2.91
- > **GDP per capita:** \$519 (7th lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 43.0% (74th highest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 1.5% (6th lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Corruption

The quality of infrastructure in Guinea is exceptionally bad. The country has one of the least reliable electrical supplies in the world, one of the lowest numbers of fixed telephone lines per 100 residents and some of the worst roads in the world. Its health care is not much better. In 2010, there were nearly 38,000 incidents of malaria for every 100,000 people in the country, the most severe locus of malaria cases in the world. Poor health and primary education mean workers are sick more often and less likely to adapt to new work environments.

1. Chad

- > **GCI score:** 2.85
- > **GDP per capita:** \$1,006 (23rd lowest)
- > **Debt as a pct. of GDP:** 34.5% (53rd lowest)
- > **Pct. of residents using Internet:** 2.1% (8th lowest)
- > **Biggest problem in doing business:** Access to financing

Chad has the worst infrastructure in the world, according to the WEF. Electricity, fixed and mobile phone lines, and transportation options are all extremely limited in the sub-Saharan nation. Diversion of public funds also is considered a major problem in the country, as is the weak protection of citizens' property rights. Chad also ranked as the worst nation for illicit payments and bribes. No country received a worse grade than Chad in health and primary education. The nation had more than 36,000 cases of malaria per 100,000 residents in 2010, and a life expectancy at birth of less than 50 years in 2011.

Very rarely do I single out a single issue, but when the House of Representatives voted to kill the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly food stamps, I had to agree with **The Huffington Post's** article – ***Picking on the Poor*** – as the bill would cut SNAP by nearly \$40 billion over the next 10 years. And these cuts would hurt millions of people, namely seniors and the poorest among us. But it will most heavily affect low-income families with children where the parent(s) work for a living but don't make enough to adequately feed their families. Working families with kids are 72 percent of all SNAP beneficiaries. According to the Census Bureau, food stamps kept 4 million people out of poverty last year. The Congressional Budget Office reports that the House proposal would cut assistance to nearly 4 million low-income people in 2014 and an average of 3 million more each year for the next decade.

Christian leaders across the evangelical, Catholic, Protestant, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American church spectrum are reacting with moral outrage at this assault on the people that Jesus specifically instructs us to protect. Many of these leaders are from the Circle of Protection, a coalition of more than 65 heads of denominations and religious organizations, plus more than 5,000 church pastors. We have been working for more than two years to resist federal budget cuts that undermine the lives, dignity, and rights of poor and vulnerable people. Who are the pastors? They run across the political spectrum, but are characterized by one thing -- they actually know poor people, work with low-income families, and have SNAP beneficiaries in their congregations. All of the pastors I've ever talked to who know, work, and worship with those affected are adamantly opposed to these cuts because they know what they will mean to people they love.

One pastor I spoke to recently, a good man and friend, told me he was worried about government dependence, like the food stamp program. When I told him that the vast majority of food stamps go to working families with young children, and that they are usually only on the program temporarily during hard economic times; he said, "*You should get that out.*" He didn't know the facts and the faces of SNAP. So many of us in the faith community have worked to tell the facts and show the faces -- to share our stories, to "get that out."

The program has enjoyed bipartisan support through the years, but now congressional Republicans are determined to cut these critical nutrition programs to America's hungry. Although SNAP benefits are modest (an average of less than \$1.50 per person per meal), SNAP is the nation's foremost tool against hunger and hardship, particularly during recessions and periods of high unemployment. Currently, 47 million Americans benefit from SNAP, but that number is expected to be greatly reduced once the economy recovers. SNAP is designed to expand in periods of great need and contract when the economy is better.

Is it ignorance of how deep the problem of "food insecurity" or hunger is in America now? Is it just ideology against government per se? Because many poor people do have to turn for help to their governments, anti-government rhetoric can often turn to anti-poor rhetoric. Have you seen the **Fox News "face"** of a SNAP recipient -- a young blond California surfer who brags about cheating on food stamps? Why is Fox News lying? Why don't they tell the real facts and show the real faces of kids who are still hungry even though their parents work?

If you know the facts and faces of the hungry families that are helped by SNAP, I believe it is a moral and even religious problem to vote to cut funding for the program. The Bible clearly says that governmental authority includes the protection of the poor in particular, and instructs political rulers to promote their well-being. So the argument that the poor should just be left to churches and private charity is an unbiblical argument. I would be happy to debate that with any of our conservative Congressmen who keep telling our churches that we are the only ones who should care for the poor. To vote against feeding hungry people is un-Christian, un-Jewish, and goes against any moral inclination, religious or not.

Finally, for politicians to defend these SNAP cuts because of our need to cut spending in general is un-credible and incredible. These same politicians are not willing to go to where the real money is: the Pentagon budget, which everyone knows to be the most wasteful in government spending, or the myriad subsidies to corporations, including agribusiness subsidies to members of Congress who will be voting to cut SNAP for the poor.

Tea Party-elected Rep. Stephen Fincher, (R-Tenn.), who likes to bolster his anti-poor rhetoric with misused Bible verses, collected \$3.5 million in farm subsidies between 1999 and 2012, according to the New York Times. Fincher is helping to lead the effort to cut food stamps to working families with children by illogically quoting: "*The one who is unwilling to work should not eat,*" all the while collecting millions of dollars in agricultural subsidies. Congressman Fincher's position is hypocritical - and it's this kind of hypocrisy that makes Christians look bad and turns young people away from the church.

For many House conservatives this isn't really about SNAP, but about their opposition to the idea that as a society we have the responsibility to care for each other, even during the hard times or when resources are few. Conservatives know their ideas for privatizing Social Security or cutting funding to Medicare and Medicaid are politically unpopular, but their ideology of individualism that borders on social Darwinism remains unchanged. SNAP is the perfect target for them. The image of what it does and whom it serves has been widely distorted by the media, while the people who benefit from it have little influence in the halls of Congress and pose little risk to the political careers of Republican members.

They are going after cuts to the poor and hungry people because they think it is politically safe to do so. So let's call that what it is: moral hypocrisy. Our job, as people of faith, is to protect the poor and to make it politically unsafe for politicians to go after them -- to pick on the poor. So we will be watching who votes against feeding the hungry this week and will remember to bring that to public attention when they run for re-election. When I was growing up, the thought of picking on the less/least fortunate was un-American and today we as a nation have to make it politically untenable for our politicians to pick on the programs that help the poor because they are easy prey.

INTERESTING MAP

Penis Map Of The World Exposes Weenie Size In Each Country

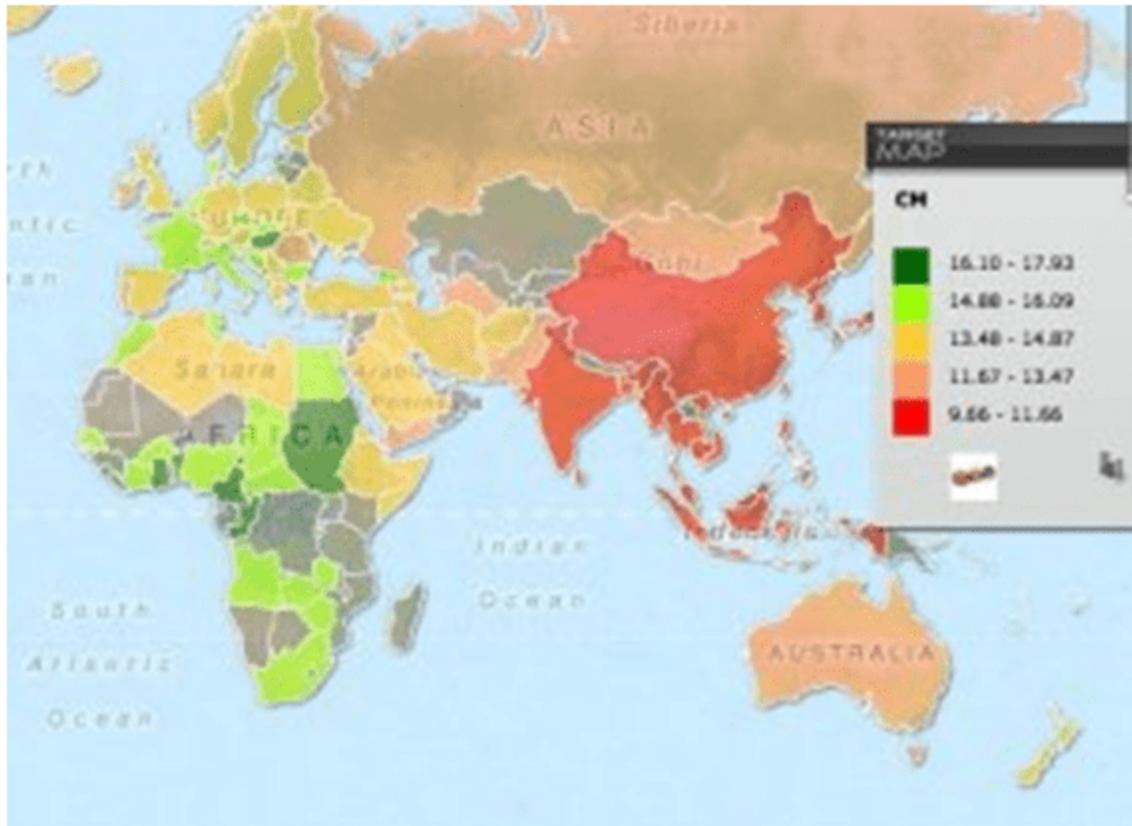
Ever wanted to plan your trip based on the likelihood that you'll encounter, you know, something *big* to write home about?

Now you can, thanks to a fabulously informative map from Twitter user [@onionslayer](#).

The [map](#) provides detail on willy size for nearly every country on Earth, assigning each nation a color code and measurement range in centimeters.

The top of South America -- Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela -- form a cluster of dark green, the color code for the planet's biggest penises. Meanwhile, China and India are a sea of red, meaning they are home to the world's teeniest weenies.

How does your next destination, ahem, measure up?



Please see interactive map:

THIS WEEK'S QUOTE

We have to ask ourselves, why has hate, become the national pastime..... I think that the problem is this. We just found out that the percentage of Americans who describe themselves as poor has doubled in the last five years, which is very significant because in the past, the poor consistently and erroneously described themselves as middle class because they had hope, because they still believe in that *Ponzi Scheme* formally known as the *American Dream*, but now they are finally get it that the fix is in and that the *Two Americas* thing is kind of true and they are in the wrong one. Apple just released two new iPhones. An expensive gold one *for the haves* and *for the serfs* a shitty plastic lime green one that looks like your phone is wearing crocks. But here is the good news, wages may not go up again, good jobs may never come back but you now can get and iPhone for 99 bucks. And you can use it to tell Betty White to *go fuck herself*.....

Bill Maher (September 20, 2013)

THIS WEEK'S MUSIC

This week I would like to share with you the music of Judy Collins who I really came to love in the fall of 1969 when I was introduced to her songs, ***My Father, Someday Soon, Pretty Polly*** and ***Both Sides Now***, all which are still on my iPod today. In 1961, Judy Collins released her first album, ***A Maid of Constant Sorrow***, at the age of 22 and began a thirty-five year association with Jac Holzman and Elektra Records. She interpreted the songs of fellow artists - particularly the social poets of the time such as Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs and Tom Paxton. Judy was instrumental in bringing other singer-songwriters to a wider audience including poet/musician Leonard Cohen – and musicians Joni Mitchell and Randy Newman. Judy Collins is also noted for her rendition of Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now" on her 1967 album, ***Wildflowers*** which has since been entered into the **Grammy Hall of Fame**. Winning "***Song of the Year***" at the **1975 Grammy Awards** was Judy's version of "***Send in the Clowns***," a ballad written by Stephen Sondheim for the Broadway musical "***A Little Night Music***." For more than 50 years Judy Collins has thrilled audiences worldwide with her unique blend of interpretative folksongs and contemporary themes. Judy Collins, now 71, is still writing, performing, and nurturing fresh talent. She plays 80 to 100 dates a year around the country. Judy Collins, a relentlessly creative spirit, is a modern day Renaissance woman who is also an accomplished painter, filmmaker, record label head, musical mentor, and an in-demand keynote speaker for mental health and suicide prevention. She continues to create music of hope and healing that lights up the world and speaks to the heart. With this said, I invite you all to enjoy the music of Ms. Judy Collins.

Judy Collins – ***Both Sides Now*** -- <http://youtu.be/z8jGFu7ys64>

Judy Collins – ***My Father*** -- <http://youtu.be/CdqJZRHJcu4>

Judy Collins – ***In My Life*** -- <http://youtu.be/iRYMdaQWsmc>

Judy Collins – ***Send in the Clowns*** -- http://youtu.be/cIqx5_w-dnk

Judy Collins, Steven Stills & Graham Nash – ***Someday Soon*** -- <http://youtu.be/gQ7rrszpJII>

Judy Collins – ***Who Knows Where The Time Goes*** -- <http://youtu.be/onKhceL303M>

Judy Collins & The Boys Choir of Harlem – ***Amazing Grace*** -- <http://youtu.be/p5NcYUrhoGY>

Judy Collins – ***Suzanne*** -- <http://youtu.be/NkamRumVXn4>

Judy Collins – ***Turn, Turn, Turn*** – <http://youtu.be/K3kKqfTjsj0>

Judy Collins & Leonard Cohen – ***Hey, That's No Way To Say Goodbye*** -- <http://youtu.be/IVJImYNGqwk>

Judy Collins with Stephen Stills – ***Pretty Polly*** -- <http://youtu.be/ZU2axJCyg6k>

Judy Collins – ***Secret Gardens*** -- <http://youtu.be/UV1bMaOZYB8>

Judy Collins – ***Don't Cry for me Argentina*** -- <http://youtu.be/-IZE6FcLRWA>

Judy Collins – ***Early Morning Rain*** -- <http://youtu.be/m0nGMLEMYec>

Judy Collins – ***Mr. Tamborine Man*** -- <http://youtu.be/tG7fCcMHs38>

Judy Collins & Ari Hest – ***Helplessly Hoping*** -- <http://youtu.be/TRfIETZW3Fw>

I hope that you enjoyed this week's offerings and wish you a great first day of autumn and a wonderful week....

Sincerely,

Greg Brown

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