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Sheltered: An Investigation Of Homelessness In The United States

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Sheltered:

An Investigation of Homelessness in the United States

by

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Supervised by

Dr. Jillian Morrison

Statistical & Data Sciences, minoring in Sociology

Table of Contents

Abstract

The purpose of this project is to investigate the connection between the social and statistical findings regarding the issue of homelessness in the United States. Because of the inconsistencies with how homelessness is tracked, two government provided sources were used. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness provides general data of homelessness, while the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development data shows the reported usage of homeless by the programs themselves. In addition, I also investigate the social impact and experiences of this issue to provide a more dynamic view of the problem of homelessness in the states. It was found that several factors are related to the increasing homeless rate in both the general homeless population as well as the chronically homeless nationwide. States with densely populated cities were found to most frequently have a higher homeless population. Investigating prominent identities of this population showed that K-12 students had the highest population, showing to be 14 times larger than that of the chronically homeless population. When looking at the historical political affiliation of states, Democratic states were found to have the highest number of homeless people, while Republican states had the highest homeless proportion. When considering the social implications of this issue, it was found that there is a general mistrust among shelter service workers and the homeless population, minority students are more likely to experience homelessness than their white counterparts, and substance abuse in Missouri is a high contributor to the states 15% homeless rate. Homelessness is difficult to track but investigating the statistical *and* social implications allows us to better grasp the underlying factors of this timeworn issue.

Link to Website: https://sheltered.us/

Acknowledgements

I have been so grateful for the love and support I have received during this intense process. First, I would like to thank my brother Anthony as he has always supported me in every aspect of my life. It would be impossible to have gotten through this without his support. To my momma, Paula, I am so grateful for the encouragement you have given me to keep pushing forward through this process. To Ramona, I would like to show my gratitude to you for being supportive throughout my college career and showing your outmost love and support for everything that I do. I would also like to thank my grandparents for constantly sending love, support, and delicious food.

Aside from support from my family, I would like to thank my advisor for sticking with me since my first data science class, Dr. Jillian Morrison. She has always given me the opportunity to prove that I can work hard, even if I wasn't the most knowledgeable in the room. She has been an amazing example of what I wish to be in my professional life. Another professor I would like to acknowledge is Dr. Marian Frazier. Through the many classes I have taken with her, I have been challenged and encouraged to do my very best. Her support was essential to my growth as a student and a person. Though I met her as a mentor first, Dr. Laura Sirot is another professor that has greatly contributed to my success here at the college. She has been with me every step of the way and I would not have gotten through my educational hiccups without talking out my social troubles with her. She will always have a place in my heart. The last person I would like to thank is Dean Jennifer Bowen. When I had lost focus for my career path at the college, her advice recommending the new Statistical and Data Science major changed everything. I couldn't imagine being here, 3 years later with an alternative Senior I.S. if it had not been for her support during that meeting and throughout my college career. Lastly, I want to thank the entire Statistics and Data Science department for allowing me to do my Senior I.S. in this format. The support has been appreciated and was vital for expressing my vision for this project.

Executive Summary

Homelessness is difficult to track. These individuals must get creative when figuring out how best to survive, all while juggling other factors that make this task strenuous. There are various options to choose from, but even those options have unexpected barriers. The purpose of this project is to investigate the connection between the social and statistical findings regarding the issue of homelessness in the United States. Because of the inconsistencies with how homelessness is tracked, two government provided sources were used to collect data for this project. One source is the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness which gives the general scope of homelessness nationwide. The second source is provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which shows the reported usage of homeless aids and facilities by the various shelters and programs themselves. In addition, I also investigate the social impact and experiences of this issue to provide a more dynamic view of the problem of homelessness in the states. Determining causality is not as relevant in this project as is uncovering factors that relate to the problem, which is often overlooked in purely statistical analyses.

When first considering the statistical results, it was found that states with densely populated cities were often found having the highest rates of homelessness. This general idea was expanded upon by investigating the identities of homeless individuals, how homelessness differs by a state's historical political affiliation, and by looking at how facilities and shelters themselves report how often their services have been used. Though it is difficult to trace, most individuals experiencing homelessness seek housing by Doubling Up, or finding housing in groups with others who may not be experiencing homelessness with them. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness determined that in 2020 roughly 1.04 million people were doubled up,

while only 166,389 were said to be in shelters. Reports from this council also found that less than 13% of individuals in the data reported living in a shelter, while around 4% were unsheltered.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development gave a more detailed explanation of how facilities were being used by collecting the number of beds used directly from the facilities and shelters themselves. 6 categories were provided to differentiate the options that individuals have to choose from, depending on their situation and which aid they need. Permanent Supportive Housing (where housing assistance and supportive services are to provide housing stability for those with disabilities) was found to be the most common aid used nationwide. This type of aid was closely followed by Emergency Shelters, a more common aid often referred to when discussing the issue of homelessness. In 2020, over 745,000 were said to have used programs for Permanent Supportive Housing while just over 600,000 were said to have used the services of emergency shelters.

As stated in the general findings of this project, states with dense city populations were found to have the highest number of homeless individuals. To account for the population difference, proportions were used. With this, the political affiliation from the past 5 elections were considered when assigning a state to its historical political affiliation. This comparison was done to find differences within the nation based on which way the state had elected. Doing this allows us to investigate how states statistically show to be handling homelessness. The investigation of political affiliation across states revealed that though Democratic states with large general populations and dense cities had the most homeless individuals, Republican states were shown to have the highest ratio of homeless to general population nationwide. Democratic states, in 2020, showed to have 1,338,528 homeless individuals which was 15.34% of their general population. Republican states within the same year reported having 803,631 homeless

people which made up 17.45% of the general population. Missouri, a state determined to be historically Republican, was found to have the highest homeless to general population rate at 15.68% over the following Democratic states: District of Colombia (6.71%), New York (5.17%), and Oregon (4.26%).

When the identities of homeless individuals were investigated, it was found that K-12 students were most common identity as reported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This identity was almost 14 times the size of the chronically homeless population. The vast difference in numbers may be attributed to the sheer number of students in the United States: 51.3 million. Around 1.38 (2.86%) of this population were considered homeless: residing in shelters or doubled up. The chronic homeless population came to roughly only 0.034% of the general population. The homeless veteran population made up even less of the general population at 0.011%. The political affiliation between these identities did not vary much other than with homeless students. 14.62% of the homeless student population resided in Republican states while 9.51% of homeless students resided in Democratic states.

Understanding these results are important but recognizing who these statistics represent is just as important. The sociological perspective of homelessness is investigated to give an opportunity for the lesser heard perspective of this issue to be recognized. It was found that there is a general mistrust among shelter service workers and the homeless population. (Kryda, 2008) This caused many of the homeless to reject or deny aid from service workers who would mistreat them. This would come in forms of stereotyping and sometimes being denied access to certain types of aid based on discriminatory practices. This related to another study which found that minority students were found to be more likely to experience homelessness than their white counterparts. It was found that 1 of 10 K-12 students were homeless, while 1 of 6 student were

homeless if they were an underrepresented minority. Other factors that are often discussed with the topic of homelessness is substance abuse. When investigating Missouri comparatively high homelessness rate, it was found that 55% of participants in a study focused on homeless individuals in St. Louis tested positive for cocaine use. It was found after tracing the behavior of the participants, that 82% of homeless cocaine users were unable to attain and retain stable housing after two years. This correlates directly with the state's high chronic homeless rate.

Some limitations of this study were missing variables in the data that would have been useful in determining more direct correlations to the conclusions found. My study was not able to compare the racial differences throughout the nation's homeless population due to this data not being available. This, alongside having an income variable, would have been essential to drawing conclusions on low-income minorities' usage of facilities, homeless programs, and shelters. This might have also brought clarity to assumptions made about Republican states in the south, as there is a historical correlation to the low-income minorities in these areas. Other variables that would have been useful to have in this study would be age and gender. These variables would have allowed for a better understanding to what demographics most often utilize homeless facilities, programs, and shelters. We would have been able to compare, for example, how older white men gain access to resources in comparison to younger minority women.

Importance of Alternative Format

To best achieve the purpose of this project, interactive data visualizations were created using Tableau, a data visualization tool. Doing this allowed for big picture conclusions to be seen in an instant, effortlessly giving users the option to inquire about specific states and statistics. Having stagnant screenshots of the visualizations takes away from the overall experience of this study. For example, even though nationwide statistics show that both the general homelessness rate and chronic homeless rate increased over the 4-year period, Maryland, among other states, showed to have decreasing rates. Formatting the visualizations on a website, as opposed to the standard thesis format, accentuates bringing an informative and often misleading topic to a universal platform, where users may inquire further and are able to make quick, comparative assessments. Having a user-friendly approach to showcasing my findings on this topic was crucial to spread well-documented information to the public. This format also allows me to express my stylistic touches on data science, making data science palatable for those without degrees in the field.

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Website Screen Shots
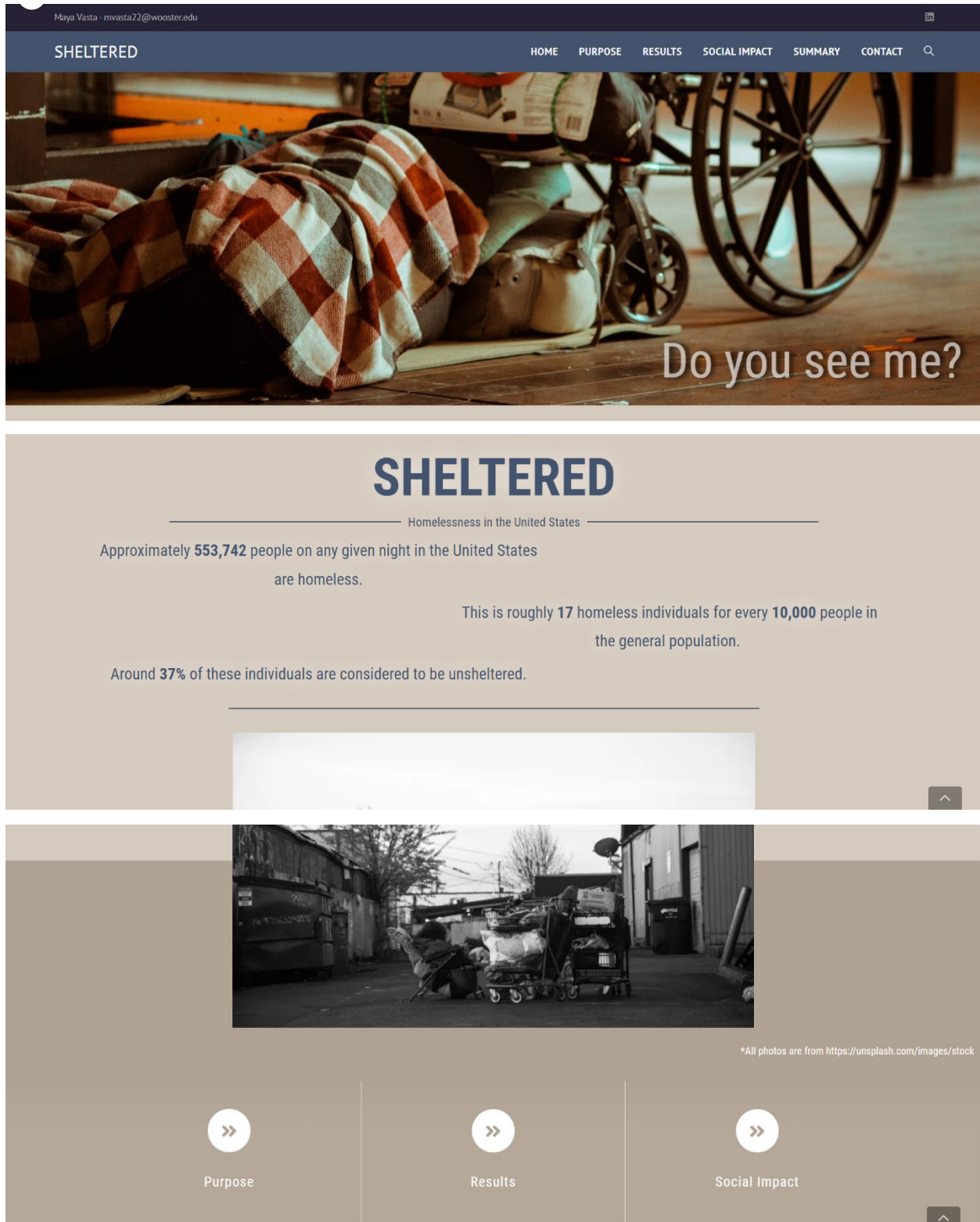
My Purpose

Homelessness is difficult to track. This can be attributed to homeless individuals having to be resourceful when finding how best to survive. This could be in shelters, hotels or motels, and as most commonly depicted, unsheltered or on the street.

579,259

people were reported as being homeless in 2020*

*According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The purpose of this project is to investigate the connection between the social and statistical findings regarding the issue of homelessness in the United States.

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*All photos are from https://unsplash.com/images/stock

About me…

My name is Maya Vasta. I am a Statistical and Data Sciences major with a minor in Sociology at The College of Wooster in Wooster, OH. The connection of social issues and data interested me since taking Social Statistics my sophomore year. Recognizing that each number in a dataset represents a real person, it was important for me to emphasize the data as well as who the data is representing. With this project, I hope to uncover the realities of homelessness, both from a data standpoint as well as the social impacts experienced. Displaying my findings in this format allows for the results to be accessible to a larger audience in hopes of giving new insight to this timeworn issue.
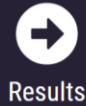
→ Results

My Results

The following page displays my findings of homeless trends in the United States in the form of data visualizations. The general aspects of homelessness are explored as well as more in-depth concerns with the facilities and the other identities of people experiencing homelessness in this study.

What is Homelessness?

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development breaks homelessness down into two definitions.

Sheltered Homeless Persons: Persons residing in an emergency shelter or in transitional/supportive housing for homeless persons designated to provide temporary living arrangements.

Unsheltered Homeless Persons: People with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.

First let's take a look at homelessness across the nation!

In yellow, we see the nationwide reported homelessness in the U.S. from 2017-2020. In red, we see chronic homelessness during the same period.

One may be determined *chronically* homeless if they have been homeless for over one year's time.
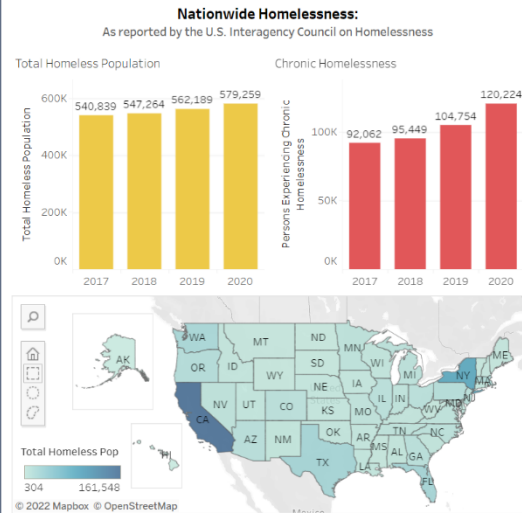
We can see from these charts that nationwide homelessness increases over the four years for the general homeless population and the chronically homeless.

It should be noted that due to COVID-19 cases significantly rising in 2020, homeless rates in the United States may have been effected by this.

This visualization is interactive!

On the map, click the state of your choosing to see the two bar charts change according to that state. Hover over states to quickly see each reported homeless population. To view nationwide statistics, click on the reset arrow or the white space within the map.

*For even more details, click the ▶ icon in the left sidebar on the map. Here you will be able to select a dotted shaped. This allows you to select a region of your choosing.

Nationwide Homelessness:
As reported by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

Total Homeless Population — Chronic Homelessness

Total Homeless Population: 2017: 540,839; 2018: 547,264; 2019: 562,189; 2020: 579,259

Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness: 2017: 92,062; 2018: 95,449; 2019: 104,754; 2020: 120,224

Total Homeless Pop: 304 — 161,548

© 2022 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Some things to notice...

Though nationwide we see homelessness shows to be increasing over the four-year period, there are states that show to be decreasing over this time period. For example, Florida (one of the top five states for homelessness) shows a decrease in the total homeless population. Another state to note, among others, to show similar trends was Maryland! States with dense populations such as California and New York have the highest homelessness rates nationwide. The trends within these two states differ: In California, the trend increases with a dip in 2018, while in New York the trend stays relatively constant with variations across the four years.

Where Are They Sleeping?

Four different categories were provided by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness to differentiate where individuals were sleeping. The categories consist of: Doubled Up, Shelter, Hotels/Motels, or Unsheltered. Below are some quick statistics on where individuals were reported sleeping in 2020.

1,040,247 Doubled Up

166,389 Shelter

94,729 Hotels/Motels

54,678 Unsheltered

Homeless NightTime Residents in the United States:
Where are the homeless sleeping according to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness?

Nighttime Residents by Facility Type

Doubled Up: 981,453; 1,110,269; 1,036,992; 1,040,247

We see here that there is a drastic difference between homeless individuals who are "doubled-up" or sharing a living arrangement as opposed to being in a shelter, hotel or motel, or being unsheltered.

This option may be most viable to individuals as this option may be safer and more cost-efficient.

Shelter: 184,641; 181,431; 165,373; 166,389

Hotels/Motels: 84,522; 101,578; 94,722; 94,729

Unsheltered: 42,995; 54,239; 54,678

2017   2018   2019   2020

■ **Doubled Up:**
Refers to shared living arrangements, some of which may be considered homeless, while others may not be, depending on various factors

■ **Shelter:**
Adults, children, and unaccompanied children who, on the night of the count, are living in shelters for the homeless

■ **Hotels/Motels:**
Sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation such as hotels and motels

■ **Unsheltered:**
Residing in a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings (on the street)

+‖+ +ableau

Getting a general understanding of homelessness allows us to more easily understand the other aspects of this issue.

I was interested in understanding the full scope of this issue from as many perspectives as possible. One of the main focuses of the study was to investigate the generalization of homeless shelters.

They are most often referenced to be the intended aid for the homeless population, but in comparison to the abundance of homeless individuals, how many of them have access to these resources? Is it possible to give every person a place to lay their head? What are these facilities and how do they differ from one another?

Homelessness within Facilities

The purple graph on the left shows us how many beds homeless facilities across the nation reported filling between 2017 to 2020.

◆ ◆ ◆

Because only homeless individuals who utilized the services of shelters were reported, as this data was collected internally from shelters and facilities themselves, we can see that the reported totals for all beds and chronically homeless beds are less than when the entire homeless population was considered.

◆ ◆ ◆

Facility Usage Nationwide:
As reported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Total Year Round Beds Used by Year
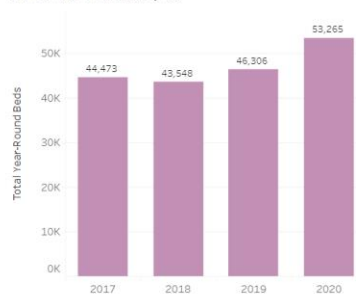
Chronically Homeless Beds
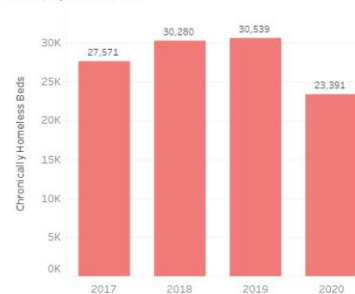
With this, we can still see that the overall trend are similar but have minor inconsistencies. From the perspective of the facilities, there was an increase from 2017 to 2019, then a significant decrease in 2020, where when the total homeless population was considered, both total and chronic homelessness was shown to increase over the 4 year period.

◆ ◆ ◆

One major similarity, regardless of the perspective, is the consistency that states with major cities and dense populations have with maintaining the highest totals nationwide.

Hover over each hexagon to see how many beds were reported in each state.

New York, California, Texas, and Florida show to have the most beds reported by the facility. We can assume these higher numbers are to account for the higher populations within the dense cities respectively.
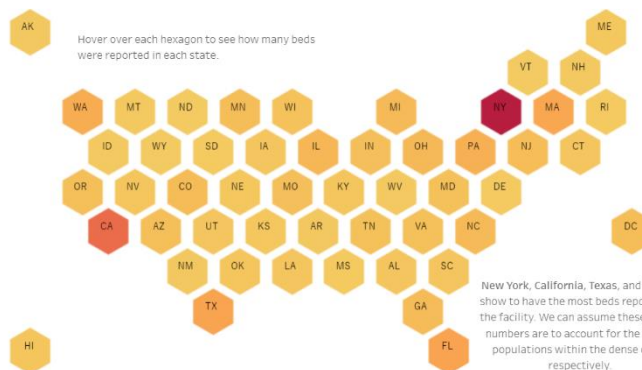
Breakdown of Facility Types

Wait.. emergency shelters aren't the only form of housing aid for homeless people?

The U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided **6** categories of facilities and programs that are intended to help the homeless population. With specific types of housing programs, special consideration for those with disabilities, substance abuse, or other disorders are the focus of the program. Below we see the usage of these facilities and programs over a four year period in the United States.

Total Beds by Facility Type from 2017-2020

Permanent Supportive Housing:
Housing assistance (long-term leasing or rental assistance) and supportive services are provided to assist households with at least one member (adult or child) with a disability in achieving housing stability

707,600 — 722,772 — 738,586 — 746,060

Emergency Shelter:
Any facility, the primary purpose of which is to provide a temporary shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless

555,074 — 572,406 — 583,674 — 603,178

Year: 2017
Total Year-Round Beds (ES): **555,074**

The total beds reported by each type of homeless facility are shown here from 2017 to 2020. Though Emergency Shelters are the most discussed facility, Permanent Supportive Housing is the most popular aid used to help homeless individuals according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Rapid Re-Housing:
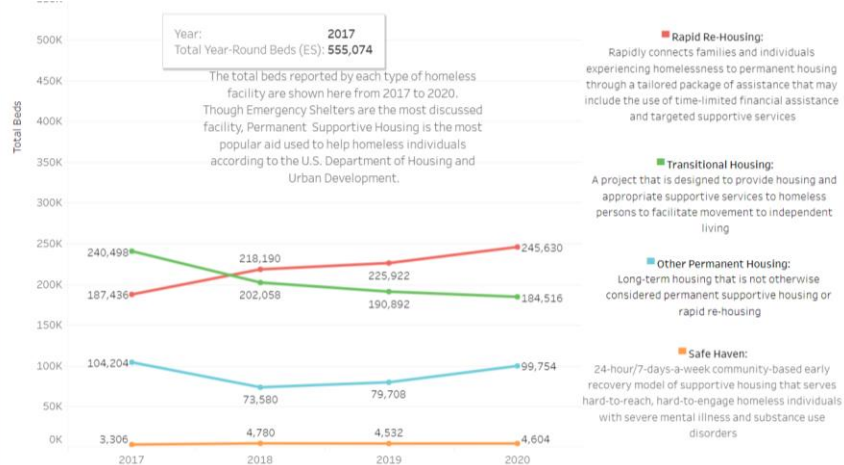Rapidly connects families and individuals experiencing homelessness to permanent housing through a tailored package of assistance that may include the use of time-limited financial assistance and targeted supportive services

Transitional Housing:
A project that is designed to provide housing and appropriate supportive services to homeless persons to facilitate movement to independent living

Other Permanent Housing:
Long-term housing that is not otherwise considered permanent supportive housing or rapid re-housing

Safe Haven:
24-hour/7-days-a-week community-based early recovery model of supportive housing that serves hard-to-reach, hard-to-engage homeless individuals with severe mental illness and substance use disorders

240,498 — 218,190 — 225,922 — 245,630
187,436 — 202,058 — 190,892 — 184,516
104,204 — 73,580 — 79,708 — 99,754
3,306 — 4,780 — 4,532 — 4,604

2017 — 2018 — 2019 — 2020

Total Beds

By knowing the different options for programs and housing provided to homeless individuals, we get a better understanding of what individuals used as aid for their situation. Whichever option one chooses may be determined by the other issues they may be having aside from being homeless. Having programs in place for those struggling with substance abuse, for example, gives them a better chance of recovering and overcoming homelessness.

Roughly half of individuals who overcome homelessness were reported returning to their shelter within the same year.

But who are these individuals? They may hold identities that are more familiar than you think.

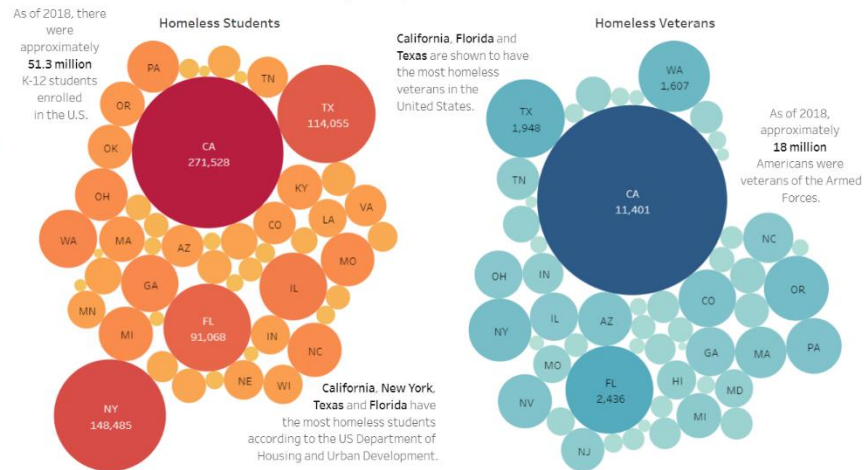## Faces of the United States

1,380,432 students were reported as being homeless in 2020.

In the same year, 37,335 veterans were reported to be homeless.
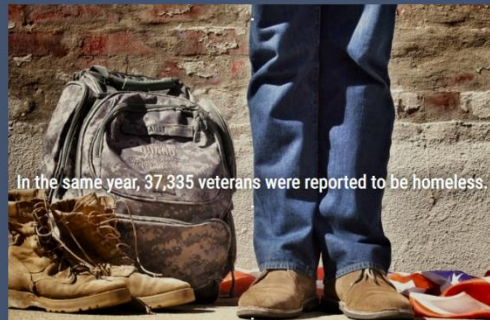
Comparing these two groups gives us a face to those who are so often overlooked on the street. These are students, ranging from kindergarten to the 12th grade, trying to get an education and veterans who fought for our country. The following visualization displays how many students and veterans, respectively, were reported being homeless in the United States in 2020. Each state's reported homelessness is represented by the size of the bubbles.

Comparison between Homeless Students and Veterans :
Two Impactful Populations in the United States

As of 2018, there were approximately **51.3 million** K-12 students enrolled in the U.S.

Homeless Students

California, New York, **Texas** and **Florida** have the most homeless students according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

California, **Florida** and **Texas** are shown to have the most homeless veterans in the United States.

Homeless Veterans

As of 2018, approximately **18 million** Americans were veterans of the Armed Forces.

Looking at the number of homeless students in the data may be shocking to some. We can put things into perspective by understanding that these statistics represent children who are a part of homeless families, families where the parents or guardians may have more than one K-12 student. The parents or guardians caring for them are registered as homeless once they use shelters and other housing assistance programs. Though there are 1.38 million *homeless* students, there are 51.3 million students in the general population. The ratio of homeless students to total students is 2.69%, while the homeless veteran ratio is 0.21%.

We can see that the states with the highest population density consistently show to have the highest homeless population throughout the data. We notice here, upon comparing the two charts, New York's homeless veteran rates are less than expected in comparison with less densely populated states.

Hover over the bubbles to display states with smaller homeless rates for students and veterans.

Political Parties on Homelessness

GOVERNMENT WATCH / INSTAGRAM / POLITICS

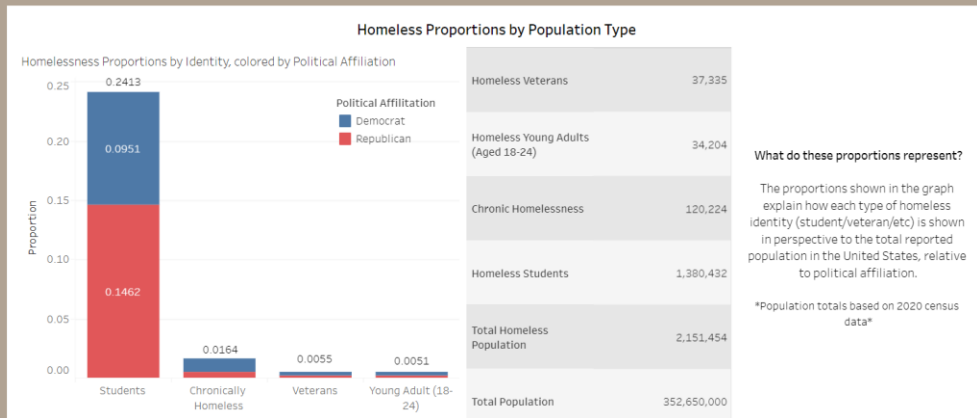### As Progressive Cities Are Overrun with Homelessness, Will Enabling Democrats Face a Reckoning?

Posted Tuesday, November 23, 2021 | By AMAC Newsline | 83 Comments

One of the many ways we differentiate our values within our nation is by adopting a political affiliation. Though there are many registered political parties, the most recognized parties

nationwide are Democrat and Republican. There have been many conversations disputing how red or blue states approach the problem of homelessness.

Throughout the results, we see that states such as California, New York, and Texas display having the highest homeless population most often.

By using proportions, we get a better understanding of how homelessness varies by state. This way, California and New York's populations do not draw unclear conclusions about Democratic states, just as the high general population in Texas does not lead to unclear conclusions about Republican states.

In the visualization below, homelessness by raw numbers and proportions are compared. It was found that though Democratic states accounted for a larger number of homeless individuals nationwide, Republican states were found to have a higher homeless to general population ratio.

The map displays, according to the past 5 elections, each state's historical political affiliation, Republican or Democrat. The shade of the states represents the density of the general population. Hover over each state to compare the homeless population to that of the general population as reported in 2020 by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

As expected, we still see states with densely populated cities appearing at the top of the list: District of Colombia, California, and New York. 6 of the top 10 states shown in the rightmost graph are Democratic states, while the other 4 are Republican. Surprisingly, Missouri shows to have the most homeless individuals to general population ratio. This midwestern state has almost 43,000 homeless individuals to a little over 1 million people in the general population.

Homeless Proportions by Population Type

Homelessness Proportions by Identity, colored by Political Affiliation

Political Affiliation
- Democrat
- Republican

	Proportion
Students	0.2413 / 0.0951 (Democrat) / 0.1462 (Republican)
Chronically Homeless	0.0164
Veterans	0.0055
Young Adult (18-24)	0.0051

Population Type	
Homeless Veterans	37,335
Homeless Young Adults (Aged 18-24)	34,204
Chronic Homelessness	120,224
Homeless Students	1,380,432
Total Homeless Population	2,151,454
Total Population	352,650,000

What do these proportions represent?

The proportions shown in the graph explain how each type of homeless identity (student/veteran/etc) is shown in perspective to the total reported population in the United States, relative to political affiliation.

Population totals based on 2020 census data

Looking at the differences between the identities gives us a clearer perspective on how students make up the majority of homeless individuals out of the identities displayed. A "student" is defined in the data by any individual who in enrolled in public school: education levels K-12. This may account for why the proportion is higher compared to other identities; there are significantly more students because by law, students in the United States are required to go to school.

The distribution between how Democratic and Republican states contribute to this issue is relatively balanced. We do see that when taking the general population into consideration, there shows to be a higher ratio of students in Republican states and a slightly higher ratio of chronically homeless individuals in Democratic states.

Results Recap

Grasping the concepts of homelessness from the perspectives discussed allows us to get a better scope of this issue. It was found that states with densely populated cities were often found having the highest rates of homelessness. This general idea was expanded upon by investigating the identities of homeless individuals, how homelessness differs by a state's historical political affiliation, and by looking at how facilities and shelters themselves report how often their services have been used. Though it is difficult to trace, most individuals experiencing homelessness seek housing by Doubling Up, or finding housing in groups with others who may not be experiencing homelessness with them. Reports from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness found that less than 13% of individuals in the data reported living in a shelter, while only around 4% were reported as unsheltered.

Data reported by the homeless facilities themselves gave a more detailed explanation to some options that individuals have to choose from, depending on their situation and what aid they need. Permanent Supportive Housing (where housing assistance and supportive services are to provide housing stability for those with disabilities) was found to be the most common aid used nationwide. This type of aid was closely followed by Emergency Shelters, a more common aid often referred to when discussing the issue of homelessness.

The identities of homeless individuals were explored and it was found that students, followed by chronically homeless individuals were most common as reported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The investigation of political affiliation across states as it related to this issue revealed that though Democratic states with large general populations and dense cities had the most homeless individuals, Republican states were shown to have the highest ratio of homeless to general population nationwide. After looking at proportions, we found that Missouri had the highest ratio of homeless individuals to general population, followed by other expected states with densely populated cities.

Understanding these results are important, but recognizing who these statistics represent is just as important. The sociological perspective of homelessness is investigated in order to give an opportunity for the lesser heard perspective of this issue to be recognized.

Social Impact →

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Social Impact

The homeless population often is the topic of conversation but those experiencing it rarely are listened to. Hearing their perspective is essential to understanding the full extent of this issue as a whole. Below are real examples of what homeless people have experienced as well as studies related to why homelessness is prevalent in the United States.
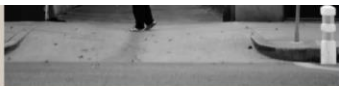
Substance Abuse within the Homeless Community in St. Louis, Missouri

Missouri was found to have the highest homeless rate in the United States at a staggering 15.68%. For this reason, connections associated with the high homeless rate and persistence of the issue was explored. In "A Prospective Study of Substance Abuse and Housing Stability in a Homeless Population" by Carol S. North, homeless individuals St. Louis, Missouri were assessed over a two-year period to examine substance abuse with the attainment of stable housing.

"Recent research has suggested that in the homeless population, the prevalence of substance use and substance use disorders may be evolving, particularly since the 1980s." (North, 2009)

Over the two-year period, 55% of homeless individuals in the study tested positive for cocaine use. In addition to the substantial cocaine use, there was an exponential amount of evidence that alcohol use strongly contributed to chronic homelessness. While 82% of cocaine users were not able to attain and retain stable housing over the two-year period, 22% of all participants were able to find and keep stable housing. With the results from this study, we can attribute some causality to the high homeless rate, as well as the high presence of chronic homelessness, to the existence of alcoholism and substance abuse within the homeless community in St. Louis.

Mistrust with Service Workers in Manhattan, New York

Chronic homelessness showed to be most prevalent in New York and California in the results. Though resources show to be available and increasing, a study done in Manhattan, New York uncovered that these services are being refused by chronically street homeless individuals due to **"a pervasive mistrust of outreach workers and the agencies that employ them, as well as prominent lack of confidence in available services"** (Kryda, 2008).

After conducting 24 interviews with homeless individuals, it was found that participants did not believe that the available services would be able to help them and were incompatible. Most of the interviews conjured consistent experiences for how the participants reported feeling when encountering service workers. Service workers were said to have lacked empathy, projected stereotypes, and failed to present participants with viable alternative options. Normally, only service workers who had previously been homeless were deemed trustworthy otherwise, the workers showed to deliver empty promises and were largely motivated by their paychecks. Workers would recommend unsafe shelters or services that were short-term solutions. In essence, participants felt that they were being used for financial gain with no intentions to help them overcome homelessness. When discussing what they would like to see from service workers, they described workers who did not have preconceived notions about being lazy or addicted to drugs. Participants reported needed workers who could develop a trusting relationship by speaking to them as a person, designating more time to them, and having workers show effort in trying to make a change.

From this study, we see that even though the number of spots may rise in a shelter or service, the quality of the relationships between the homeless and the workers is what determines whether the service is successful in giving people a second chance at a fruitful living experience.

Procedures in Homeless Shelters Limit Access to Those in Need

Though shelters were found to be the second most used form of housing, behind "Doubling Up", homeless individuals are often suggested to turn to shelters when in need. Unfortunately, the process of getting into shelters are not as simple as the general public may imply. In "Waiting for Shelter", Molly Brown, among others, investigated the lengthy waitlists and other shelter processes that prohibit any immediate resolutions to those seeking shelter.

Some requirements to receive and retain one's spot on the waitlist often show to be tedious and prone to potential barriers. Individuals may be on a waitlist for **2 to 4 weeks** before gaining access to a space. Within that time, facilities may require that wait-listers abide by certain protocols or risk being removed from the list. This may include calling weekly during a certain period in the day or regularly checking one's status online. An individual who was removed from the waitlist reported a lack of communication with the shelter.

"Someone needs to actually answer the phone so we know accurately the calls are being taking down in an orderly time" – Participant in Brown's study

The implementation of these procedures are to "weed out" individuals who no longer show to be in need of the service, however these procedures disproportionately affect those who have high service needs. These people often do no have the time to wait in lines (as the lines are generally first-come, first served basis) or have the resources to follow procedures as often as is required. With this, participants in the study reported how shelters would often relay a sentiment that shelters were trying to keep certain people from accessing the service. Shelters would often say that they were "helping the right people" which were people who were not "using [drugs/alcohol] as much." (Brown, 2017) From this study, it can be recognized how exhaustive and particular the processes for gaining access to a shelter can be and how it quickly limits who is allowed to access this resource.

Structural Limitations' and its Connection to Homeless Students in Michigan

Students were found to have the highest represented identity within the homeless population. To further investigate this issue, I found research done on homeless students based out of Michigan. "No Place Called Home" by Michael Evangelist and H. Luke Shaefer of the University of Michigan explored the relationship between student homelessness and structural correlates. With this, their study found that there was a higher chance of being homeless student if they were Black or Hispanic.

"Close to 1 out of 10 students overall and 1 out of 6 black students experienced some form of homelessness while enrolled in school." (Evangelist, 2016)

Doubling up was found to be a common alternative to emergency shelters in this study, just as it was found to be in my research. Evangelist gives insight to the realities of this seemingly preferable option.

"Although doubling up may seem like a more welcome alternative to living in a shelter, it is also associated with interpersonal conflict, overcrowding, and domestic violence and is often a precursor to literal homelessness." (Wright et al. 1998, as sighted in Evangelist, 2016)

From this study's findings, it could be concluded that if the student was a minority or facing financial disparity, the student was more likely to be vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. This vulnerability is what allows these individuals to fall victim to exploitative relationships from those with money and power, as opposed to impersonal economic forces being to blame. Structures such as labor markets, housing markets, and predatory lending practices were found to often take advantage of individuals by racializing them and limiting their access to resources disproportionately to their white counterparts.

Economic Conditions of Veterans

The homeless veteran population was significantly less than that of chronically homeless individuals and students as shown in the results, but it is still important to understand how these people with relatively high paying job and stable employment when in service sometimes become financially burdened and homeless post-service. In "Economic Conditions of Military Families", James Hosek investigates the economic conditions of families and how it can be effected by one's rank, service-related disabilities (such as post traumatic stress disorder – PSTD), and family life after leaving the service. Military personnel are paid based on the ranking system relative to each branch. Junior enlisted ranks in this study, "**...report financial distress, and a handful even qualify for food stamps**". (Hosek, 2013) The military offers a number of financial support systems that are in place to alleviate the stresses of civilian life for serving their country. This includes having programs such as the GI Bill, which helps with college expenses, and a comparatively low-cost health care coverage for families.

After leaving the service, most veterans are paid less from their civilian job or have trouble finding work. "**Because of the military's high wages, those who enlisted often experienced a significant drop in earnings when they left the Army, and the decrease was steeper the longer they served.**" (Hosek, 2013) Few, however, become homeless from this as supported by the findings in my results. Hosek reports that resources have been directed to combat the financial disparities faced by junior enlisted ranks and families dealing with combat injuries or readjustment problems post-deployment.

Summary

− References

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Summary

Homelessness is difficult to track. These individuals must get creative when figuring out how best to survive, all while juggling other factors that make this task strenuous. There are various options to choose from, but even those options have unexpected barriers. The purpose of this project is to investigate the connection between the social and statistical findings regarding the issue of homelessness in the United States. Because of the inconsistencies with how homelessness is tracked, two government provided sources were used to collect data for this project. One source is the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness which gives the general scope of homelessness nationwide. The second source is provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which shows the reported usage of homeless aids and facilities by the various shelters and programs themselves. In addition, I also investigate the social impact and experiences of this issue to provide a more dynamic view of the problem of homelessness in the states. Determining causality is not as relevant in this project as is uncovering factors that relate to the problem, which is often overlooked in purely statistical analyses.

When first considering the statistical results, it was found that states with densely populated cities were often found having the highest rates of homelessness. This general idea was expanded upon by investigating the identities of homeless individuals, how homelessness differs by a state's historical political affiliation, and by looking at how facilities and shelters themselves report how often their services have been used. Though it is difficult to trace, most individuals experiencing homelessness seek housing by Doubling Up, or finding housing in groups with others who may not be experiencing homelessness with them. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness determined that in 2020 roughly 1.04 million people were doubled up, while only 166,389 were said to be in shelters. Reports from this council also found that less than 13% of individuals in the data reported living in a shelter, while only around 4% were reported as unsheltered.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development gave a more detailed explanation of how facilities were being used by collecting the number of beds used directly from the facilities and shelters themselves. 6 categories were provided to differentiate the options that individuals have to choose from, depending on their situation and which aid they need. Permanent Supportive Housing (where housing assistance and supportive services are to provide housing stability for those with disabilities) was found to be the most common aid used nationwide. This type of aid was closely followed by Emergency Shelters, a more common aid often referred to when discussing the issue of homelessness. In 2020, over 745,000 were said to have used programs for Permanent Supportive Housing while just over 600,000 were said to have used the services of emergency shelters.

As stated in the general findings of this project, states with dense city populations were found to have the highest number of homeless individuals. To account for the population difference, proportions were used. With this, the political affiliation from the past 5 elections were considered when assigning a state to it's historical political affiliation. This comparison was done to find differences within the nation based on which way the state had elected. Doing this allows us to investigate how states statistically show to be handling homelessness. The investigation of political affiliation across states revealed that though Democratic states with large general populations and dense cities had the most homeless individuals, Republican states were shown to have the highest ratio of homeless to general population nationwide. Democratic states, in 2020, showed to have 1,338,528 homeless individuals which was 15.34% of their general population. Republican states within the same year reported having 803,631 homeless people which made up 17.45% of the general population. Missouri, a state determined to be historically Republican, was found to have the highest homeless to general population rate at 15.68% over the following Democratic states: District of Colombia (6.71%), New York (5.17%), and Oregon (4.26%).

When the identities of homeless individuals were investigated, it was found that K-12 students were most common identity as reported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This identity was almost 14 times the size of the chronically homeless population. The vast difference in numbers may be attributed to the sheer number of students in the United States: 51.3 million. Around 1.38 (2.86%) of this population were considered homeless: residing in shelters or doubled up. The chronic homeless population came to roughly only 0.034% of the general population. The homeless veteran population made up even less of the general population at 0.011%. The political affiliation between these identities did not vary much other than with homeless students. 14.62% of the homeless student population resided in Republican states while 9.51% of homeless students resided in Democratic states.

Understanding these results are important but recognizing who these statistics represent is just as important. The sociological perspective of homelessness is investigated to give an opportunity for the lesser heard perspective of this issue to be recognized. It was found that there is a general mistrust among shelter service workers and the homeless population. This caused many of the homeless to reject or deny aid from service workers who would mistreat them. This would come in forms of stereotyping and sometimes being denied access to certain types of aid based on discriminatory practices. This related to another study which found that minority students were found to be more likely to experience homelessness than their white counterparts. It was found that 1 of 10 K-12 students were homeless, while 1 of 6 student were homeless if they were an underrepresented minority. Other factors that are often discussed with the topic of homelessness is substance abuse. When investigating Missouri comparatively high homelessness rate, it was found that 55% of participants in a study focused on homeless individuals in St. Louis tested positive for cocaine use. It was found after tracing the behavior of the participants, that 82% of homeless cocaine users were unable to attain and retain stable housing after two years. This correlates directly with the state's high chronic homeless rate.

Some limitations of this study were missing variables in the data that would have been useful in determining more direct correlations to the conclusions found. My study was not able to compare the racial differences throughout the nation's homeless population. This, alongside having an income variable, would have been essential to drawing conclusions on low-income minorities' usage of facilities, homeless programs, and shelters. This might have also brought clarity to assumptions made about Republican states in the south, as there is a historical correlation to the low-income minorities in these areas. Other variables that would have been useful to have in this study would be age and gender. These variables would have allowed for a better understanding to what demographics most often utilize homeless facilities, programs, and shelters. We would have been able to compare, for example, how older white men gain access to resources in comparison to younger minority women.

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