

State of Obesity, a joint project of the Trust for America's Future and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has released a fascinating [report](#) about adult obesity. There are large national disparities. The obesity rate is over 35% in West Virginia and Mississippi, but only 21% in Colorado. Despite these disparities, obesity rates have grown everywhere since 1990, just about doubling in most places. In 2000, only one state was above 25%, now it's 42%.

In most places, the trend line shows a fairly steady increase, but there are some interesting deviations. A number of places have more or less leveled off (though some at high levels): Alaska since 2006, California since 2003, D.C. since 2000, Minnesota since 2003, North Carolina since 2009. Some of these may be statistical blips; others may reflect demographic shifts. To the extent that any of the changes can be traced to lifestyle or policy shifts, however, they might have lessons for others. There are some indications that adult obesity rates are leveling off nationally, and childhood obesity rates have been level for a decade. But the challenge will be to reduce the rates.

Demographic factors are clearly important too. The obesity rate is higher for Latinos and African Americans than for whites, while Asians have much lower rates. Sex makes a small difference among Latinos and White but has a dramatic impact among African Americans, among whom 37% of men but 56% of women are obese. Low income and lack of education are also risk factors. The result is that some communities are much more heavily impacted than others. It's unfortunate that organizations like the NAACP that represent these communities have sometimes been on the forefront of opposition to efforts to reduce obesity, such as restrictions on high-sugar beverages.

Interest in the subject of food law is growing in law schools. But obesity issues also implicate environmental law, particularly in terms of measures to get people out of their cars. Creating more walkable neighborhoods with access to public transit is good for the environment, but also good for public health. Meanwhile, healthier diets could help reduce the environmental footprint of American agriculture. Thus, the obesity issue does have an environmental dimension.