

WHEN THE PHONE IS THE INTERNET

Smartphone dependency shows who owns a smartphone but does not use home broadband. The numbers reveal a digital divide that mobile access alone does not solve.

2021 HIGHLIGHT

27%

4.5x the rate of adults earning \$75K+

of adults earning less than \$30K were dependent.

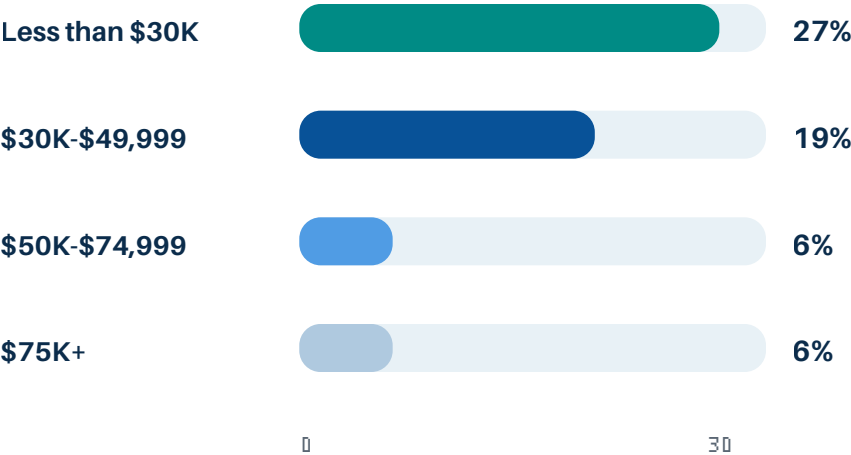
THE STORY

The phone can be a bridge to the internet, but it is not equal to a home broadband connection. Dependency is highest among groups facing economic and access barriers.

Use this data story to frame smartphone ownership as a technology and culture issue: connection is widespread, but full digital access is still uneven.

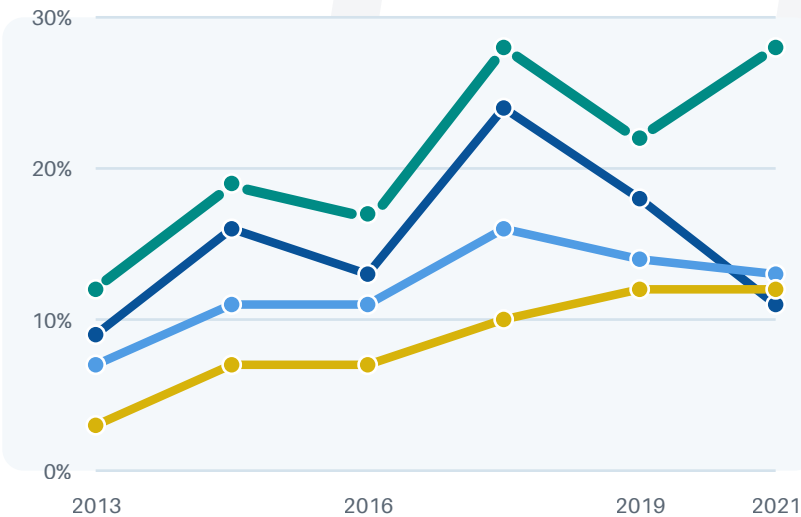
1. Income shapes dependency

Lower-income adults were most likely to rely on a smartphone without home broadband.



2. Younger adults lead the trend

Adults ages 18-29 remained the highest group across available years.



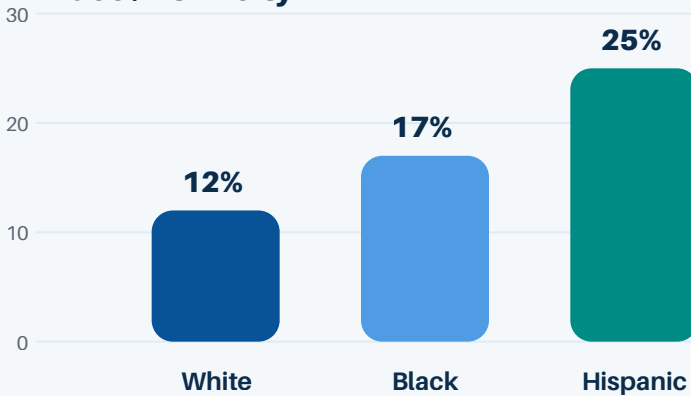
Key finding:

Smartphone dependency is not just a mobile trend - it is an access gap shaped by income, age, race/ethnicity, and place.

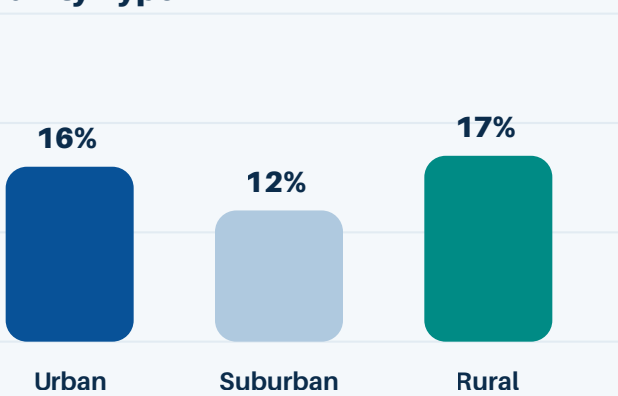
3. 2021 Snapshot: Access is uneven across groups

Hispanic adults and rural/urban adults show higher dependency than White and suburban adults.

Race / Ethnicity



Community Type



WHAT THIS MEANS

Smartphone ownership can hide barriers. A mobile-only connection may limit work, school, health, and financial tasks that depend on reliable home broadband.

