

"NO ONE'S EVER ASKED ME BEFORE"

Conversations with North Carolina's Rural Communities



2018 Report Findings
www.downhomenc.org

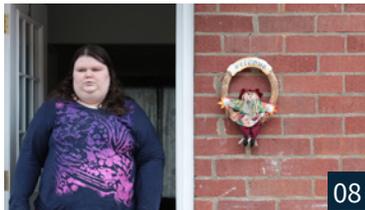


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Once viewed as a bastion of progressive politics in the South, North Carolina has become a laboratory for some of the country's most regressive and reactionary policies. Though the state's reputation as a onetime home of progressivism may be exaggerated, it is hard to overstate the influence of the right on the current policy landscape.

Funded by ultra-rich donors and corporations, this shift has involved a redrawing of the political map, racist voting policies, attacks on the rights of LGBTQ people, and, not least, a hollowing-out of economic supports for working-class people of all races. These shifts have hit rural and small-town North Carolinians particularly hard, compounding the loss of manufacturing and farming jobs in recent decades.

In many ways, the right wing capitalized on a void left by the lack of progressive investment in rural and small-town communities. Where progressive organizing might have offered working-class residents of rural counties opportunities for engagement, white supremacist and neo-Confederate groups have stepped in. Meanwhile, reactionary groups more broadly have seized on the absence of progressive infrastructure to spur a backlash targeting the state's most marginalized communities and shredding the state's safety net.

Down Home North Carolina (DHNC) – founded in 2017 to build the power of the state's multiracial working class in small towns and rural areas – plans to reverse this trend. This report offers findings and recommendations to help progressive organizations connect with rural residents and gain a new footing in North Carolina. It shares the results of an in-person survey of 1,384 residents of Alamance and Haywood Counties, conducted from June through November 2017. Both counties include areas of high poverty and unemployment. Both have organized white supremacy groups, and both are being closely watched by observers as the political tides continue to shift.





KEY FINDINGS:

- **Residents of rural counties are more unified than might be expected.** Although rural North Carolinians are racially divided, their shared experience of poverty provides opportunity for multiracial organizing. Solution categories focusing directly on meeting basic needs receive support from strong majorities across race and gender.
- **The dominant concerns of those surveyed were about economic pressures.** Six-out-of-ten (59 percent) of those surveyed say they regularly worried about “losing access to healthcare, Medicaid or Medicare. Almost half (48 percent) have regular concerns about “not having a job that pays enough money.” More than 40 percent say the worry regularly about “putting good food on the table” and “having a roof over your head.”
- **Rural North Carolinians have complex feelings about government** – but expect government to act on their behalf. Though 45.3 percent believe the federal government has failed them, they want and expect government to address their essential needs, such as health care. Respondents prioritize solutions that would have government work for working people – taxing the rich, making it easier for working people to run for office, putting people over profit.
- **President Trump is blamed most overall**, but black and Latino respondents blame him much more than whites. Still the data demonstrates strongly that when people of all races step back from the President, there is great unity on underlying concerns and solutions. Residents also assign blame to the “rich and powerful” and “giant” corporations.
- **Solutions that focused on meeting basic economic needs were far and away the most popular.** A sizeable majority (64 percent) of total respondents supported “guaranteeing healthcare for all.” A full 65 percent of respondents support “raising wages and benefits;” 70 percent of respondents below 65 years of age supported this solution.
- **“Overcoming prejudice and racism” stood out as one of the top-three solutions, identified by half (50 percent) of respondents**, more than many policy-specific fixes. Respondents of all races ranked this highly. While our conversations with respondents revealed a wide range of experiences that were interpreted as “prejudice and racism,” the broad concern underscores the importance to people in North Carolina’s rural communities of addressing the impact of prejudice and race in their lives.
- **There exists a strong relationship between poverty, participation, and hope** – or lack thereof. Respondents who reported struggling to meet their basic needs were less likely to express confidence in political solutions to their problems. People earning less than \$20,000 a year were the least likely to worry about “having a voice and a vote that matters” or express confidence that “electing working people” could help solve their problems. At the other end of the spectrum, higher income respondents were much more likely to see “having a voice and a vote that matters” as a problem.



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THESE FINDINGS:

- **Invest in rural organizing.** Many of our survey respondents told us no one had ever asked them to share how they feel about their lives or asked them about the changes they would like to see. This failure to engage excludes large swaths of North Carolina's population from the progressive movement and cedes territory to the far right.
- **Organize a multiracial working-class base.** Our response data indicate that experiences of poverty, hardship, and scarcity are shared across race, and different racial groups support common solutions to associated challenges, such as accessing health care or raising wages. Multiracial organizing oriented around shared economic interests may be the only real antidote to ideologies that seek to form dangerous divides between rural whites and everyone else.
- **Use language that reflects the way rural North Carolinians think and talk about issues and solutions.** Common progressive framing that identifies "Wall Street" and "the 1 percent" as the culprit is less compelling for rural North Carolinians than pointing to "the rich and powerful." Almost 40 percent of respondents (39.3 percent) identify with the latter, compared to less than 20 percent pointing to Wall Street or the 1 percent. The willingness of respondents to blame the rich and powerful, and to name "taxing the rich" as a solution (39.3 percent supported), suggests that these straightforward messages are more powerful and possibly less divisive than is commonly thought.

CONTEXT OF NORTH CAROLINA'S RURAL PLACES & RIGHTWARD SWING



North Carolina is locked in a long-term battle for its political soul. As recently as 2010, North Carolina enjoyed a national (if exaggerated) reputation as a progressive outpost among its southern neighbors, leading the region in higher education and voter turnout.

This progressive reputation began to break down in 2010, when the Tea Party wave swept through North Carolina and gave Republicans control of both houses of the state's General Assembly for the first time since 1870. In 2012, the Republicans completed their takeover of North Carolina's government, capturing the governor's mansion and securing super-majorities in both houses of the General Assembly. What followed was a flood of far-right legislation that kept North Carolina in the national headlines and gave the state a new reputation as one of the most reactionary states in the union.¹

North Carolina's regressive sea change wasn't an accident of politics but the product of a well-funded strategy executed by super-rich, ultra-right ideologues, who saw an opening in the state's economically struggling small towns and rural places. Following the election of Barack Obama, and in the aftermath of the 2008 recession and bailout, right-wing strategists of all stripes turned their attention to majority white rural areas. North Carolina was hit hard by NAFTA, the dismantling of the social safety net, and the decline of manufacturing and small farms. Some 350,000 jobs had fled the state since 1990, and 42 percent of manufacturing jobs were gone, mainly from small towns.² In their wake, white nationalist and neo-Confederate organizations intensified recruitment efforts and began the path to resurgence. Wealthy right-wing elites also sensed an opportunity and made a play that would upend North Carolina's electoral politics.

Immediately after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down limits on corporate campaign spending in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, far-right activists accelerated their secretive REDMAP plan, targeting North Carolina, where political redistricting was pending. Regressive advocacy groups swung into motion, flooding rural local house and senate races with an unprecedented amount of cash. At the center of the effort was local multimillionaire Art Pope, who commands an extensive advocacy network that includes the John Locke Foundation, Civitas, and Real Jobs NC. Together with immediate members of his family and his advocacy network, Pope, also a board member at the right-wing Americans for Prosperity, contributed nearly \$2.3 million to conservative challengers, most of whom were running in rural areas.³ Outside spending in North Carolina's 2010 election quadrupled from 2006, the previous comparable election.⁴

¹<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/10/10/state-for-sale>

²<https://www.facingsouth.org/2016/03/trade-deals-have-hit-north-carolina-harder-than-mi>

³<https://www.facingsouth.org/2011/10/explainer-how-much-did-art-popes-network-really-sp.html>

⁴<https://www.followthemoney.org/research/institute-reports/independent-spending-in-north-carolina-2006-2010/>

In the end, seven Republicans defeated Democratic incumbents in the state senate, all of whom received major contributions from Pope and his family, and all of whom were elected in predominantly rural districts. In the state house, 12 Republicans defeated Democratic incumbents, eight of whom received major Pope-linked money, and seven of whom were elected in predominantly rural districts.⁵⁶

For example, Johnathan Jordan, who served as the research director for the John Locke Foundation in the late 1990s, received \$16,000 from the Pope family, plus an additional \$91,500 from Civitas and Real Jobs NC in his successful bid for state house.⁷ The Pope-linked cash did not only flip seats; it also pushed the entire ideological spectrum to the right. Pope money was used to target some of the most conservative Democrats in the state. This was the case in senate district 50, where conservative Democratic incumbent John Snow found himself attacked and defeated by challenger Jim Davis, who seemed to possess “unlimited” money for strident, race-baiting attack ads.⁸

Having secured North Carolina’s legislature, the political right drew up new voting maps, using sophisticated computer programs to systematically weaken the power of voters of color and illegally pack districts by party affiliation. While the Supreme Court and federal courts would eventually find these maps to be unconstitutional gerrymanders on both racial and partisan grounds, North Carolinians were forced to vote with undemocratic, racist maps from 2010 through at least 2018.⁹¹⁰ In the meantime, the far right moved quickly to enact the most extreme voter suppression efforts in the country.¹¹

With super-majorities in both houses and an electorally crippled opposition, North Carolina’s far-right legislature unleashed a vicious culture war that took advantage of polarized maps and sought to pit the state’s progressive urban pockets against rural voters, particularly on social issues. The most notable example was HB2; passed in 2016, it made national headlines as the “bathroom bill” for denying transgender individuals access to their preferred public bathroom. The bathrooms may have gotten the headlines, and motivated North Carolina’s more regressive voters, but it also served corporate inter-

ests by stripping local governments of their ability to protect workers by raising the minimum wage for private employers.¹²

This urban/rural culture war has been a key strategy of the far right since at least 2012, when Pope-funded groups successfully passed Amendment 1, prohibiting state recognition for same-sex marriages and unions.¹³ The Amendment, approved by North Carolina voters, but vacated as unconstitutional in 2014, was redundant on its face, since state law already defined marriage as between a “male and female person.”¹⁴¹⁵ But it did serve to drive a wedge between the rural and urban Carolinians and helped to turn out the hard right base on Election Day.

Amendment 1 should have served as a wake-up call to progressives: the lack of organizing in rural areas and small towns presented a major liability. It seems this lesson is still being learned in the aftermath of the 2016 election.

In the end, North Carolina’s rightward turn serves only the corporations (such as Duke Energy) and multimillionaires (such as Art Pope) that bankrolled it. Across the state, it is people of color, queer folks, workers, and the poor who have been hurt the most. Even though North Carolina’s urban and rural populations appear bitterly divided, poor and working people are suffering in the cities and in the countryside alike.

North Carolina’s legislature has refused to expand Medicaid (and may institute work requirements), done away with the earned income tax credit, narrowed unemployment eligibility standards, ended federal unemployment benefits, and slashed taxes for the wealthiest five percent of North Carolinians.¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸¹⁹

The state’s standout public education system has been attacked and damaged repeatedly, as has women’s health access.

For the last eight years, the interests of corporations and the ultra-wealthy have dominated North Carolina. Capitalizing on the economic decline of small towns and rural areas, and noting the lack of progressive organizing in those places, the far right used a long-term strategy and a lot of cash to divide and capture our state. It will take a lot of small town and rural organizing, community-building, and our own long-term strategy to make North Carolina work for its people.

⁵ https://ballotpedia.org/North_Carolina_2010_legislative_election_results

⁶ <https://www.cache.wral.com/asset/news/state/nccapitol/2011/06/14/9729092/PopeArtFamilyContrib20092010.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/06/art-pope-north-carolina-judicial-elections-public-money/>

⁸ <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/10/10/state-for-sale>

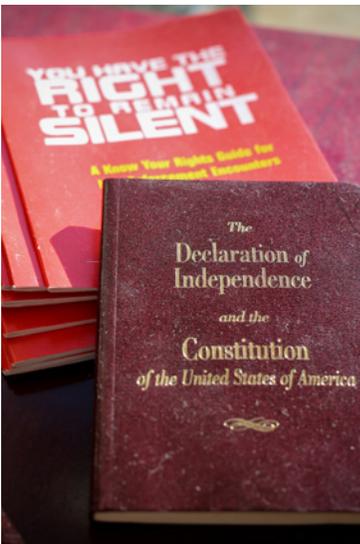
⁹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/north-carolina-gerrymandering/527592/>

¹⁰ <http://www.jurist.org/paperchase/2018/02/supreme-court-partially-stays-north-carolina-gerrymandering-ruling.php>

¹¹ <https://thinkprogress.org/north-carolina-voter-law-dead-6dc027569681/>

¹² <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/politics-government/article68401147.html>

¹³ <https://www.facingsouth.org/2016/05/art-popes-money-helped-create-north-carolinas-bath>



ABOUT DOWN HOME NORTH CAROLINA & THE METHODOLOGY FOR THIS REPORT

In today's environment of economic desperation and racial scapegoating, there is no clear pathway for people in North Carolina's rural communities and small towns to fight for their interests as part of a multi-racial bloc of progressive power in North Carolina. North Carolina has the second-lowest union membership rate in the country. Progressive infrastructure needs strengthening outside cities like Raleigh or Charlotte. Both major political parties are pursuing pro-corporate agendas that often leave the issues of rural and working people unaddressed.

Down Home North Carolina was launched in June 2017 with a mission to build the power of the multiracial working class in North Carolina's small towns and rural areas. We are a base-building, membership-led organization. Utilizing the strategies of voter engagement, leadership development, multiracial movement building, and strategic campaigns, we are building permanent infrastructure and a multiracial base that reflects the demographics of the counties and state.

Through a network of county-based chapters, we are growing a statewide movement to advocate for the issues of North Carolina's small town and rural working people. For too long, working North Carolinians haven't had an organization that they lead, that truly represents them, and that fights for their issues with the urgency they require. We believe such an organization is necessary if North Carolina is ever to achieve a measure of racial, economic, and gender justice. The realization of this vision is Down Home North Carolina's mission.

Down Home North Carolina launched our organizing in two counties: Alamance, in the state's central Piedmont region, and Haywood, in the Appalachian mountain west. While the counties have major differences in their demographic makeup, they share a few key factors that were the basis for their selection: **1) They have high rates of unemployment, poverty, and low-wage work, the product of a decline in manufacturing; 2) they have documented incidents of recent white supremacist recruitment activity; 3) they are located in state legislative districts that are competitive in the**

¹⁴ http://www.greensboro.com/news/amendment-one-struck-down/article_40763ce2-5099-11e4-84c9-001a4bcf6878.html

¹⁵ <http://sogpubs.unc.edu/electronicversions/pdfs/pelb39.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/business/article194766654.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.employmentlawalliance.com/firms/parkerpoe/articles/north-carolina-overhauls-unemployment-benefits>

¹⁸ <http://www.wral.com/nc-alone-in-choice-to-end-extended-unemployment-checks/12574715/>

¹⁹ <http://www.ncjustice.org/?q=budget-and-tax/fact-sheet-current-north-carolina-tax-and-budget-proposals-could-mean-cuts-public>

near term; and, 4) they are close to major urban areas in North Carolina and could be brought into relationship with urban-based groups (Alamance is near Durham; Haywood near Asheville).

Instead of entering these counties with a predetermined issue agenda, Down Home NC conducted an extensive community-listening project between June and November 2017. As a base-led organization, we wanted to respond to the real, expressed needs and experiences of working people living in Alamance and Haywood. We also wanted to understand how rural and small-town Carolinians responded to different progressive messaging frames, to tailor our organizing, campaign work, and communication to their experiences and values.

The following results are based on 1,384 surveys collected between June 23 and November 7, 2017.

In addition, we matched 560 of the surveys with records about voter participation in the VAN database and analyzed how these responses matched with actual participation in the last three general election cycles.

The vast majority of our survey responses were collected as part of a door-to-door listening canvass, conducted at people's front doors, on their porches, and in their living rooms. All told, we knocked more than 4,000 doors. We also collected surveys in front of local offices of the Department of Social Services, Walmart, and at food

banks. Some surveys were collected by Down Home NC members at their workplaces. Finally, we collected 105 surveys through our statewide email list.

Beyond collecting demographic and contact information, we asked people to answer three core questions, each with a subset of 11-12 answers. Respondents could check all answers that applied, or submit their own in an open-field text box.

The questions asked were:

- *What issues concern you or your family on a regular basis?*
- *Who do you feel is responsible for causing these problems?*
- *What solutions would help solve the problems?*

This survey was equal parts deep listening experiment and organizing tool. Based on an individual's responses, we were able to initiate a conversation about their experiences with a given problem or solution, assess their commitment to the issue, and begin to build a deeper relationship. In the survey, we asked respondents if they'd be interested in joining Down Home NC, or an organization that worked on the issues they cared about. These conversations led to hundreds of one-to-one follow-up meetings, and helped Down Home NC develop our member-leader base.



FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THOSE SURVEYED:

Compared with North Carolina as a whole, the survey population included more black respondents (34% in the survey v. 22% stateside) and fewer whites (44% in the survey with 64% statewide). The proportion of Hispanic respondents in the survey population of 11% is about the same as North Carolina statewide, 9%. (In addition, 9% of those surveyed did not list a racial group).

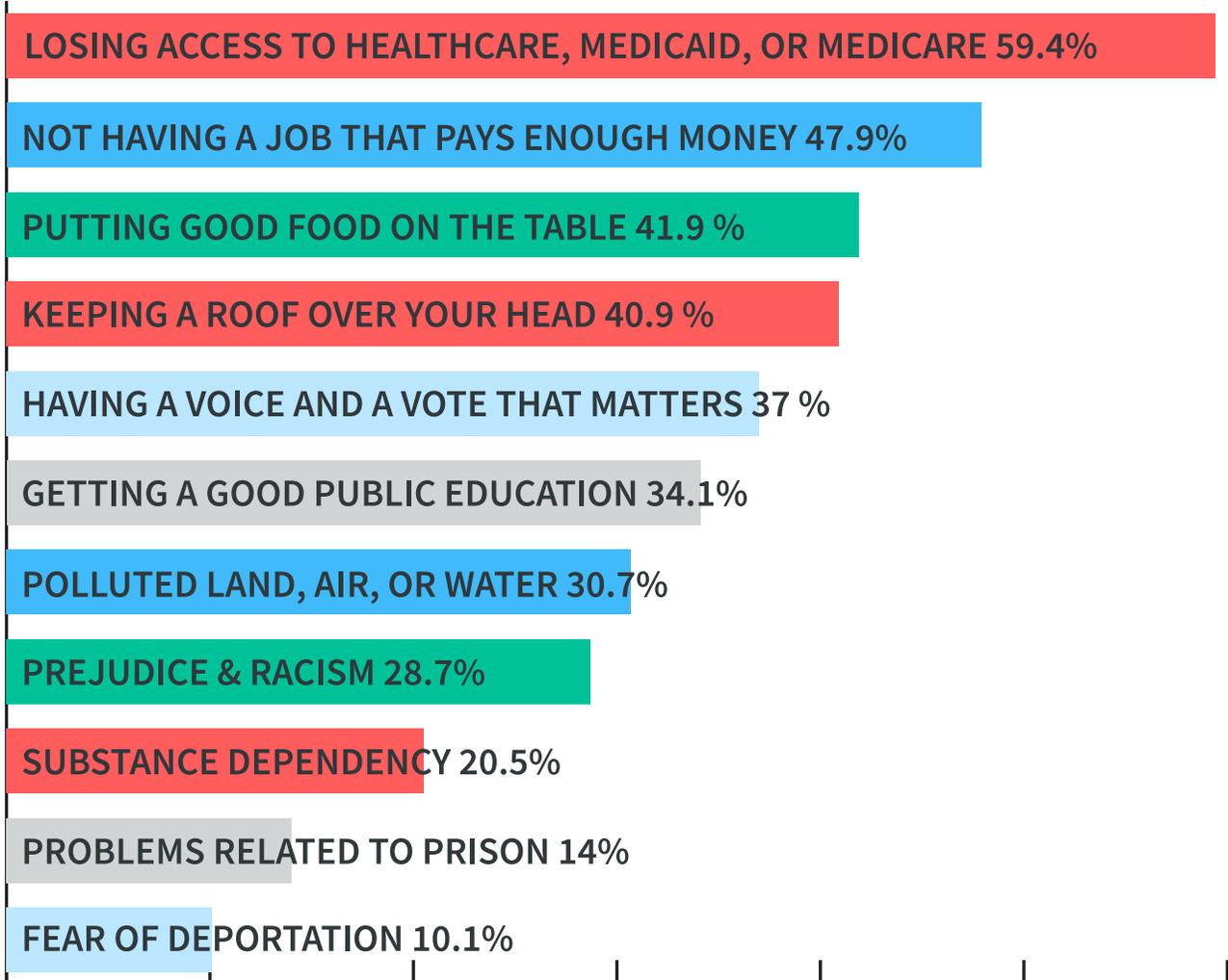
The surveyed population included a higher percentage of women (56%) and a lower percentage of men (40%) than North Carolina's statewide percentage, which are 51% women and 49% men. (In addition, the survey included 1% other and 7% no response).

Compared with the state's population, the survey included fewer people under age 26, more people age 26-35, and more people between 46-55 years of age. Other age groups were represented proportionally to all of North Carolina.

As the following table shows, one-in-three (34%) surveyed were very low income, under \$25,000 and another one-in-five (18%) low income. Middle income people made up another one-in-five of those who responded, with higher income only 3%.

INCOME OF THOSE SURVEYED	SURVEY
\$0-25,000/YR	35%
\$25,000-36,000/YR	18%
\$36,000-\$58,000/YR	14%
\$58,000-\$93,000/YR	5%
\$93,000+/YR	3%
NO RESPONSE	25%

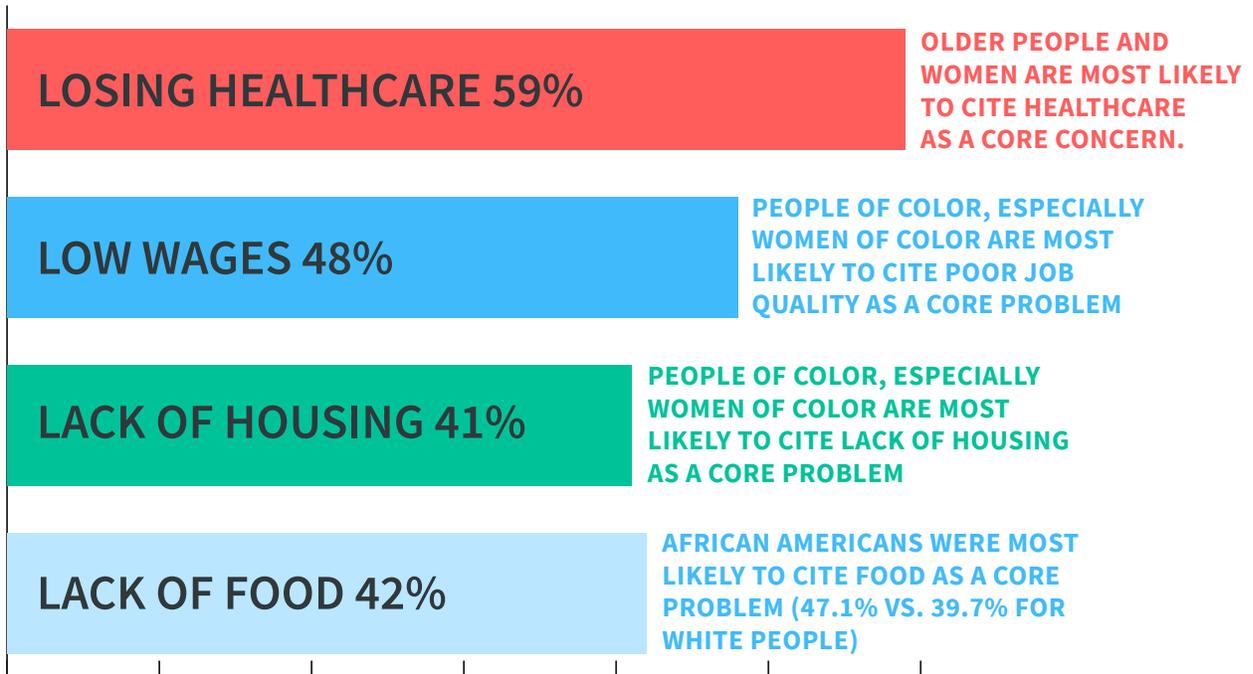
PROBLEMS: WHAT ISSUES CONCERN YOU OR YOUR FAMILY ON A REGULAR BASIS?



MEETING BASIC NEEDS IS A KEY CONCERN

A majority of our respondents rated “losing access to healthcare, Medicaid, or Medicare” as their top concern. Additionally, nearly half of our respondents (47.9 percent) indicated that “not having a job that pays enough money” was a top concern for them, and over 40 percent cited a lack of affordable housing or difficulty keeping good food on the table as a major concern. Large portions of survey respondents are struggling to meet their basic needs on a day to day basis.

MORE THAN 2 OF EVERY 5 RESPONDENTS HAD TROUBLE MEETING THEIR BASIC NEEDS

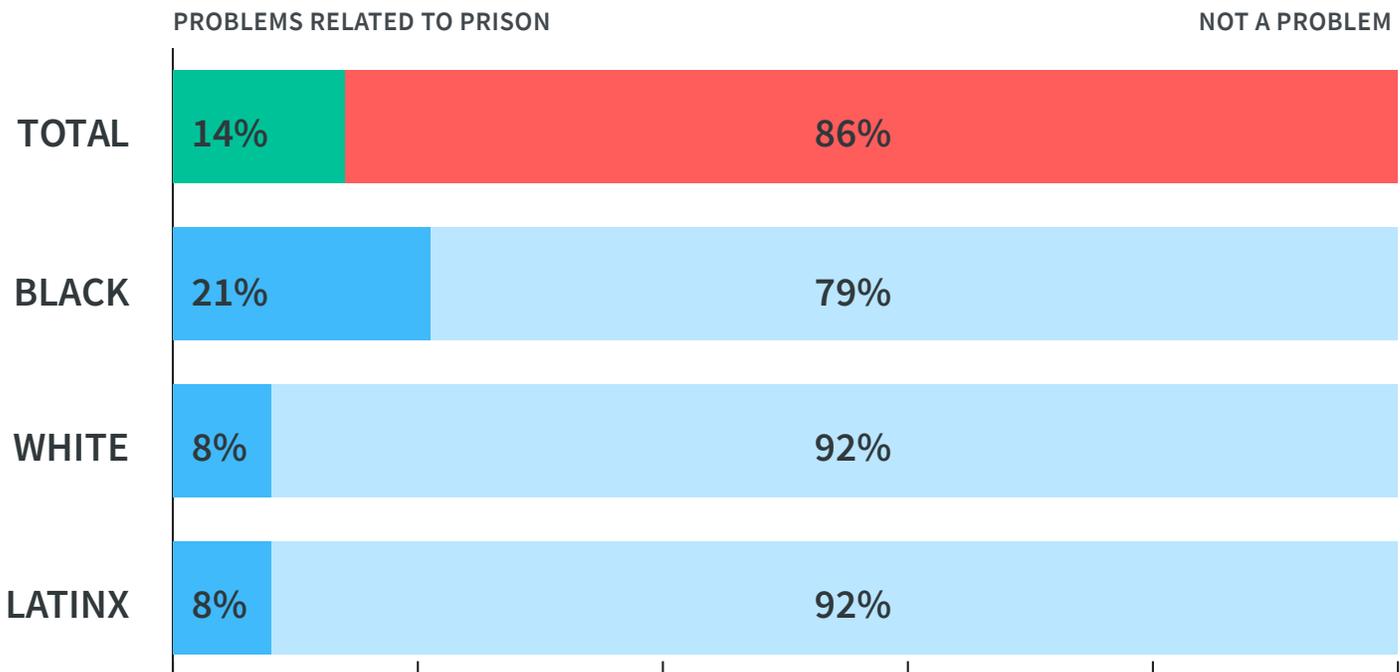


One-in-five black respondents identified problems relating to prison as a regular concern, significantly more than Whites or Hispanics.

Respondents who speak Spanish were most likely (61%) to identify “racism and prejudice” as a regular problem. White and black respondents both identified this as a problem about the same percentage of the time (26% and 28%).

One other demographic data difference worth noting is that higher income residents were more likely to identify “having a voice and a vote that matters” as a major concern.

BLACK RESPONDENTS WERE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO CITE PROBLEMS RELATED TO PRISON AS A CORE PROBLEM THAN ANY OTHER GROUP



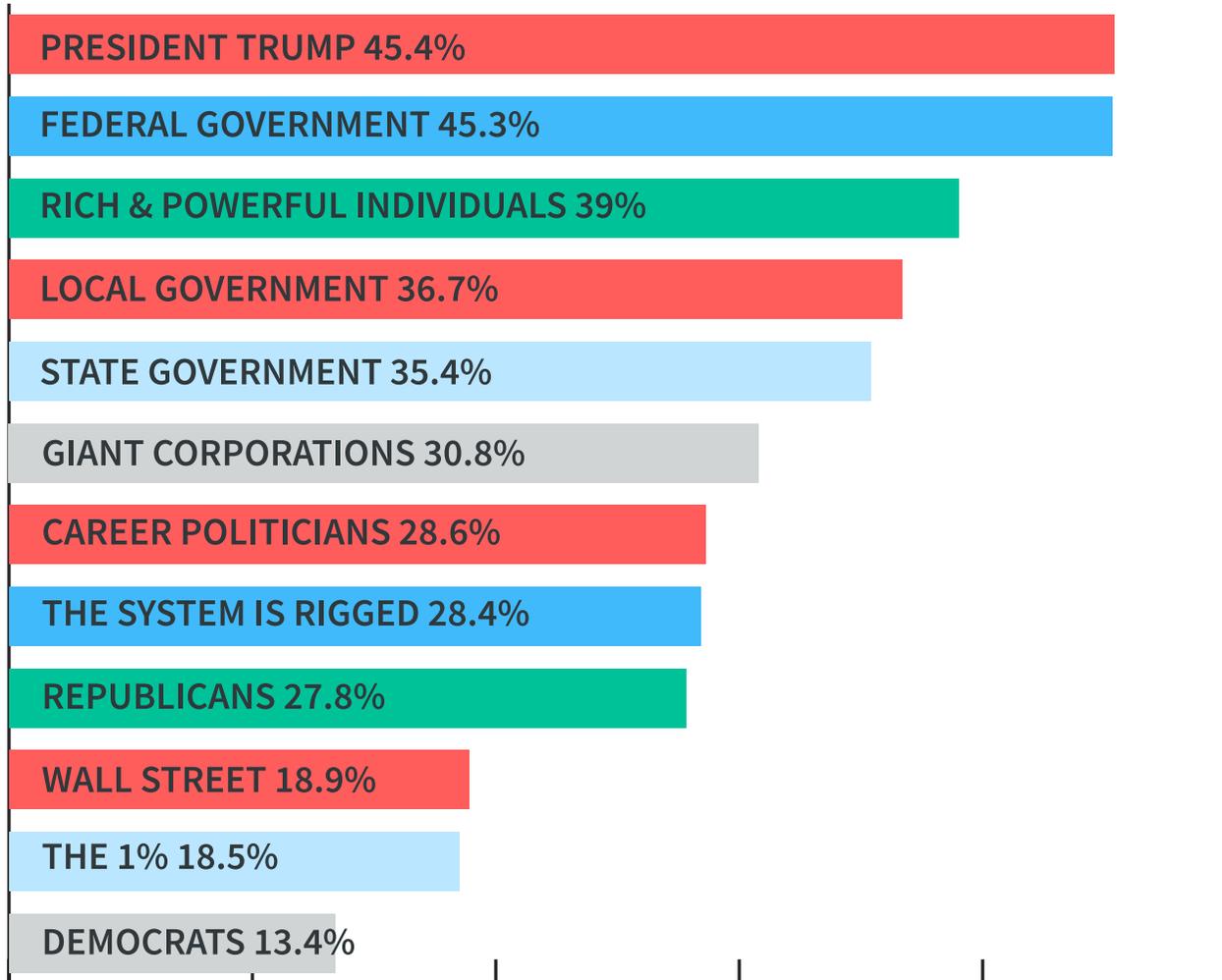
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"No future. I know a whole generation of young people probably never worked a day in their life. I just couldn't fathom that when I was younger, but I see why it happens...the economic and political system that we live under has such a surplus of people they can choose from, and they can wipe out a whole generation of folks.

People just get into a survival mode, trying to make it from one day to the next."

- Brenda, Burlington

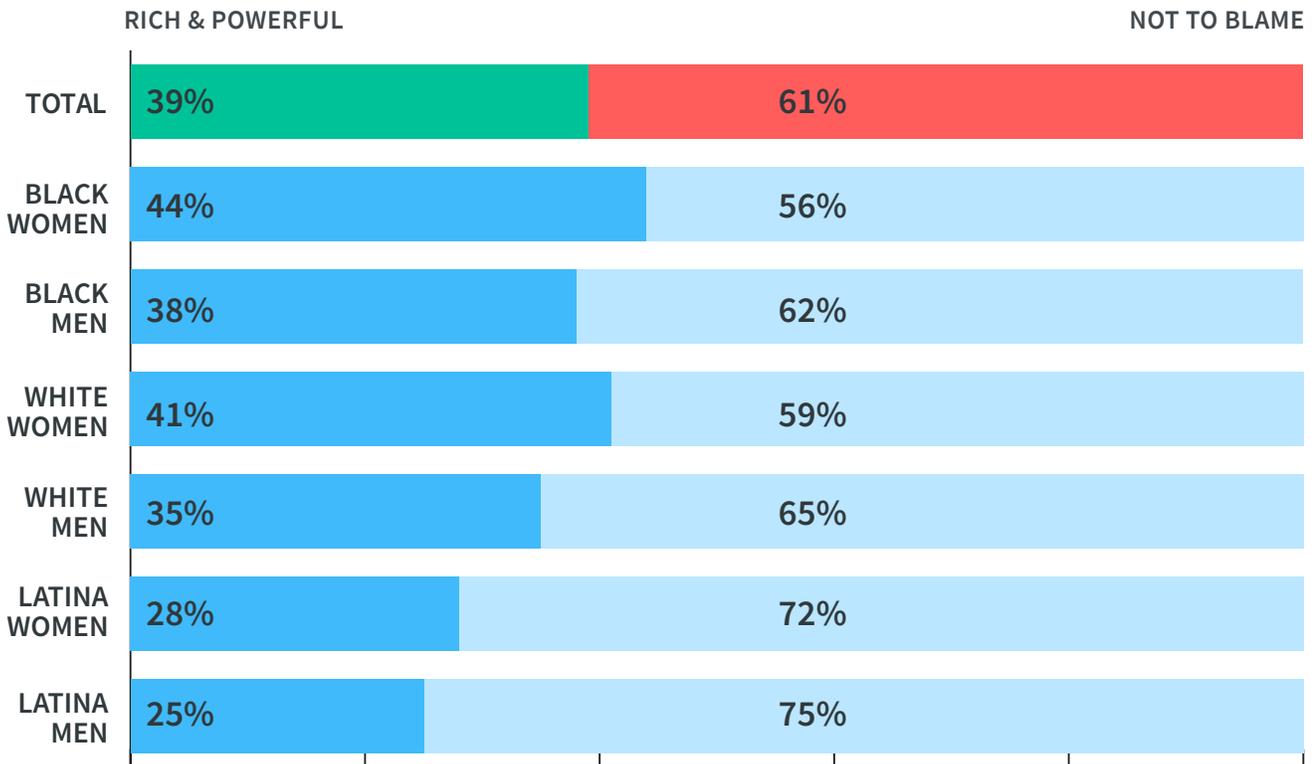
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CAUSING THESE PROBLEMS?



PRESIDENT TRUMP AND GOVERNMENT MOST BLAMED

“President Trump” received the greatest share of blame for the struggles of working people, but the results were quite skewed along racial lines. Fully 60 percent of black respondents blamed Trump, as did 48 percent of Latinx respondents, compared with just 33 percent of white respondents. Trump won Alamance County with 55.2 percent of the vote, a margin of 12.9 percent over Clinton. Trump carried Haywood County with 62.5 percent of the vote, with a 28 percent margin over Clinton.²⁰

WOMEN AND OLDER RESPONDENTS BLAMED “RICH AND POWERFUL INDIVIDUALS” SLIGHTLY MORE OFTEN



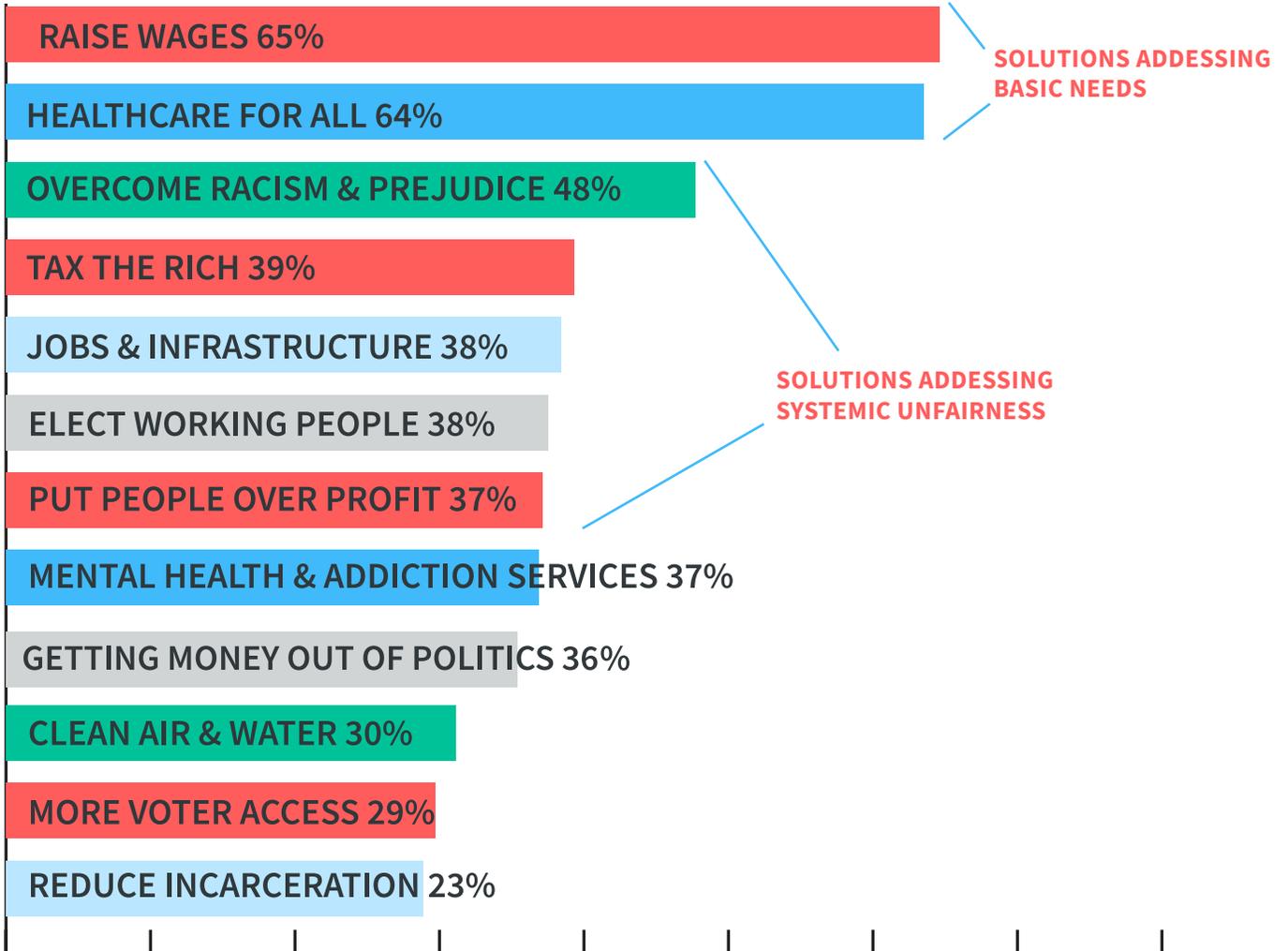
In comments from people during the survey, we heard many complaints that government is not concerned with their struggles, is unfair, inefficient, or serves only the rich and powerful. Women are more likely than men to blame the “rich and powerful.” Other descriptions, “Wall Street” and “the 1%,” were identified much less.

“Giant corporations” were more likely to be identified as being responsible by middle and upper income people, including by half (49%) of those who earned between \$58,000 and \$93,000. White Women (39%) also identified giant corporations, significantly more than other groups.

²⁰ <https://www.politico.com/2016-election/results/map/president/north-carolina/>

WHAT SOLUTIONS WOULD HELP SOLVE THE PROBLEMS?

THE ONLY SOLUTIONS SUPPORTED MORE STRONGLY BY PEOPLE OF COLOR THAN WHITE PEOPLE WERE RAISING WAGES AND OVERCOMING RACISM



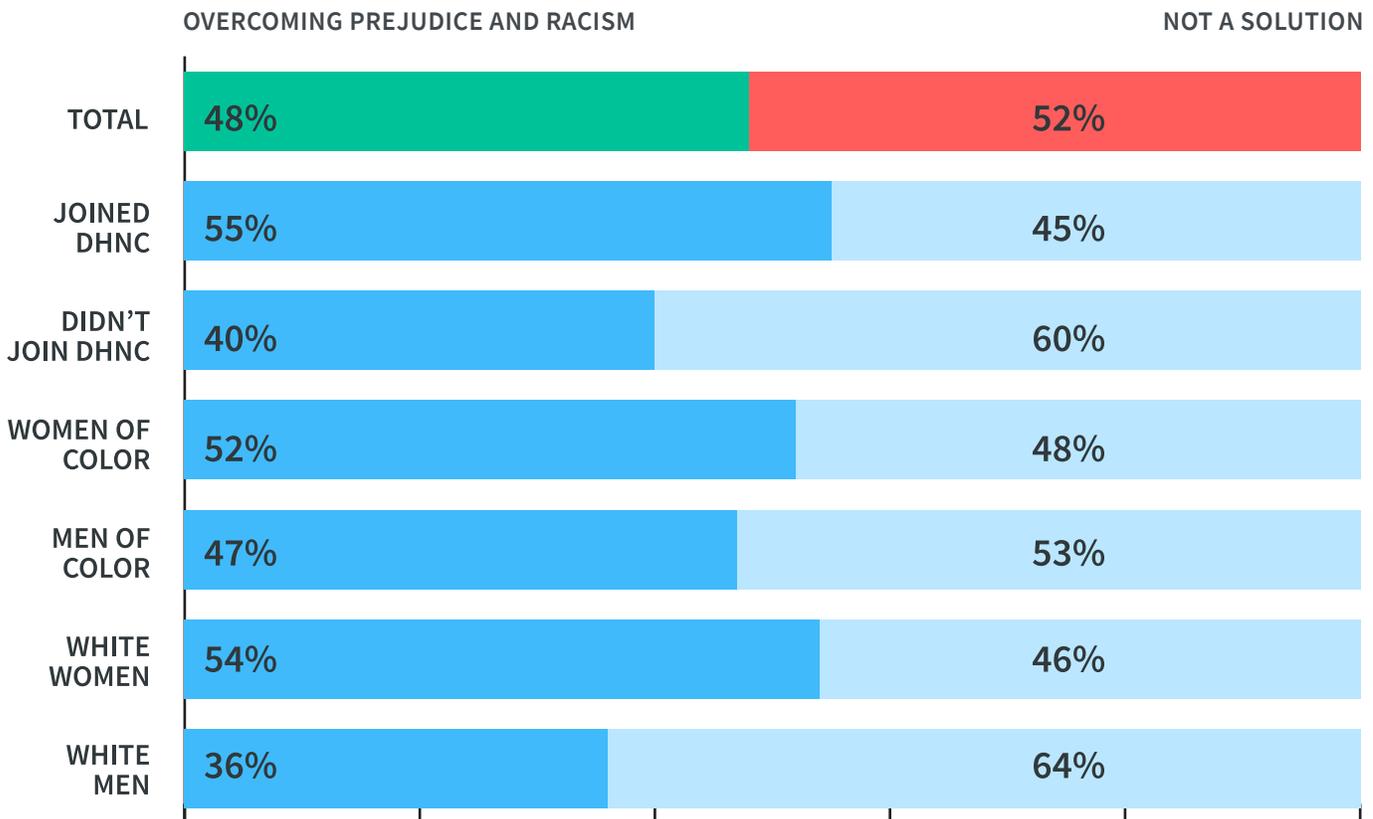
GOOD WAGES AND GUARANTEED HEALTH CARE TOP PRIORITIES.

With people identifying economic pressures as most pressing, it is not surprising that they also identify economic solutions as priorities. “Raising wages and benefits” was named as priority for about two-out-of-three (65%) of respondents and by more than 70% of blacks respondents. A related solution, “investing in jobs and infrastructure,” was also a top priority.

Also, almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) named “guaranteeing health care for all,” with even higher percentages of support from black and white women and people older than 45.

Three other popular choices prioritize economic solutions aimed at lifting working people and correcting for the power of the rich and powerful: “taxing the rich,” “electing working people,” “putting people over profit,” and “getting money out of politics.”

NEARLY HALF SUPPORT "OVERCOMING PREJUDICE AND RACISM" AS SOLUTION



White men were the one group much less likely to prioritize. Women as well as older folks and wealthier people were likely to cite this as a solution. People who identified this as a priority were also more likely to be willing to join Down Home North Carolina, when asked later in the survey.

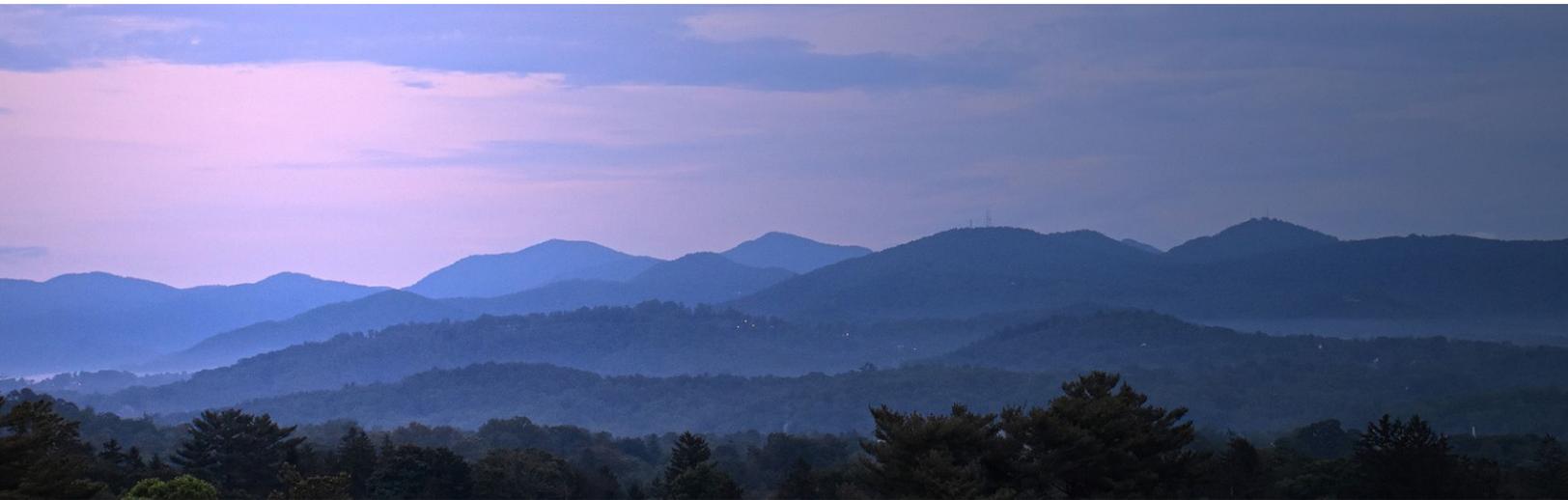
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"I got involved [with Down Home NC] because of my son, and all the friends he brings around me and how they're complaining about not being able to find employment, which I know is a fact.

And hearing the people out here and the children telling me how they don't have healthcare. I think everybody should have some form of healthcare whether they contribute to it or not. If they can't contribute to it they should be given it anyway."

- Marta Concepcion, Burlington





PLACE MATTERS

County was a top-significance variable across the dataset. While there was broad agreement across the statewide dataset, county-based differences were observable, suggesting that local, lived experiences are also place-specific.

For example, Haywood respondents were more likely to be concerned with “losing access to healthcare, Medicaid, or Medicare” compared with Alamance respondents. This is likely because Haywood has a higher proportion of Medicare recipients than Alamance (14.8 percent of population vs. 6.2 percent, respectively), and skews comparatively older.^{21,22} Haywood respondents also cited “substance abuse” as a problem at higher rates (29.9 percent) than did Alamance (19.1 percent), reflecting the relative intensity of the opioid crisis in that Appalachian county.

Compared to Haywood, Alamance respondents were more likely to identify problems directly associated with the experience of poverty, including “not having a job that pays enough money” (44.3 percent in Alamance vs. 30.3 percent in Haywood), “keeping a roof over your head” (43.7 percent vs. 34.4 percent), and “putting good food on the table” (44.3 percent vs. 30.3 percent). This difference can be at least partly explained by the relative poverty of Alamance County, where an average worker earns \$1,000 less per year compared with Haywood workers, as well as by relative age, as some members of Haywood’s older population may be out of the workforce.^{23,24}

It is also worth noting that Alamance County is much more racially diverse than Haywood County. Where Haywood County is 96.3 percent white, Alamance is 74.8 percent white, 20 percent black, and 12.6 percent Hispanic or Latinx.²⁵ The majority of Spanish-language responses came from Alamance County, which reported “fear of deportation” at 11.2 percent to Haywood’s 7.7 percent.²⁶ While only 8.8 percent of English-speaking respondents fear deportation, fully 48.8 percent of Spanish-speakers reported living with this fear.

The unequal racial dimensions of poverty, policing, and prison also came into focus in the Alamance data (92.2 percent of black respondents were in Alamance vs. 64.5 percent of white respondents). Black and brown respondents were more likely than white respondents to report “not having a job that pays enough money” (40.2 percent of whites vs. 56.2 percent of black respondents, 55.2 percent Latinx, 41.7 percent of API, 62.5 percent Native, 64 percent of mixed race). When compared to white respondents, black respondents in particular reported more trouble “putting good food on the table” (47.1 percent vs 39.7 percent), “keeping a roof over your head” (50.1 percent vs. 36.4 percent), and “problems related to prison” (20.7 percent vs. 8.4 percent). These numbers, self-reported by black North Carolinians, track with the well-documented history of race-based discrimination in housing, policing and incarceration rates, and higher rates of poverty among black Americans.

²¹ <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/haywood-county-nc/#>

²² <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/alamance-county-nc/#>

²³ <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/haywood-county-nc/#>

²⁴ <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/alamance-county-nc/#>

²⁵ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/alamancecountynorthcarolina/PST045216>

²⁶ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/haywoodcountynorthcarolina/PST045216>

BIG TAKEAWAYS

MORE UNIFIED THAN COMMONLY THOUGHT

While the status quo public narrative often highlights deep and seemingly insurmountable division across gender and racial lines, our survey exposes major areas of agreement among the majority of the multiracial working class.

Gender was not a significant factor in determining responses; only a few questions produced responses that were statistically different based on gender.

Race was a more significant variable in general, but, on many questions, the differences across race were less pronounced than often thought. Most significantly, meeting basic needs was a challenge for large majorities of respondents of all races. Solution categories that focused directly on meeting basic needs received support from even greater majorities of respondents across race and gender.

Perhaps surprisingly, “overcoming prejudice and racism” stood out as a top-three solution, outranking more policy-specific fixes. Race was not a statistically significant variable in the response to this question among women; people of color and white women people think this is an important solution.

However, our conversations with respondents revealed a wide range of experiences that were experienced as “prejudice and racism.” For example, a white male respondent cited his being stigmatized as a “redneck”

in response to this solution. Our anecdotal information suggests that racial categories, as well as class-discrimination, language and other social markers informed the support for “overcoming prejudice and racism”

Even though race was a statistically significant variable in most solution categories, indicating a racially-linked difference in the experiences of respondents, we still saw broad agreement across race when it came to top choices for both problems and solutions. We believe that these findings of broad commonality, with observable differences across race and gender, underscore the importance of: 1) building campaigns for universal programs, such as raising the minimum wage or guaranteeing health care for all, 2) acknowledging that people experience issues and oppression in unique and specific ways that are often related to gender and race. We share issues, and they impact us differently and to varying degrees.

One question in which race was an enormous determinate was among those who blamed President Trump. Trump was blamed more than any other group overall because of his strong unpopularity with black and Latino respondents. One in three white respondents blamed him, a much smaller relative share. We believe these discrepancies reflect Trump’s intentional appeal to white supremacist explanations for economic pain and present another major challenge to a multiracial movement for economic justice.



GOVERNMENT BLAMED BUT PROGRESSIVE POPULIST SOLUTIONS RESONATE

While government was most often blamed, the findings indicate that people link the problem of government to the disproportionate power of the wealthy and big corporations. Taking on these powerful groups through tax policy and by changing the way government works showed up as unifying solutions.

While many respondents assigned blame to the “rich and powerful,” the same is not true for similar frames often used by progressives. Less than 20 percent of respondents blamed “Wall Street” or “the 1%.” The frame “rich and powerful” seemed to connect to working class respondents’ experiences of poverty, disinvestment and disenfranchisement in a way that “Wall Street” or “the 1%” did not. The willingness of respondents to blame the rich and powerful, and to name “taxing the rich” as a solution (39.3 percent supported) suggests that these straightforward messages are more powerful and possibly less divisive than is commonly thought.

“ALL OF US”

When asked who was to blame for problems, many respondents chose to write in a response. The most popular write-in responses were some variation on reflexive self- or communal-blame, including “all of us,” “myself,” and “lack of education” or “ignorance.” In our reading, this tendency to blame oneself for the systemically-driven experience of poverty indicates how successfully far-right narratives about individual and personal responsibility have taken root in working-class communities. We see this as a major challenge that organizers need to overcome as we work toward collective and systemic interventions.

However, this same belief in collective responsibility for problems also indicates that there is an opportunity to present collective action as a solution to the challenges we face. For example, the following quote from a woman living in Alamance County seems to acknowledge that things could change for the better if low-income people discovered the power they can wield together:

Q: Who do you feel is responsible for causing these problems?

A: “The lack of knowledge within yourself. People don't use their voice because they're conditioned to believe because they are not wealthy, they can't change anything.”



CONNECTION BETWEEN POVERTY, PARTICIPATION, AND HOPE

Overall, respondents who reported struggling to meet their basic needs were less likely to express confidence in political solutions to their problems. People earning less than \$20,000 a year were the least likely to worry about “having a voice and a vote that matters” or express confidence that “electing working people” could help solve their problems. At the other end of the spectrum, higher income respondents were much more likely to see “having a voice and a vote that matters” as a problem. Just one-third of the lowest income respondents chose this as a problem, while nearly half of the highest income respondents chose this option.

These self-reported attitudes were borne out when we matched respondents with VAN voter file data. We discovered that the lowest-income respondents had the highest levels of non-participation in voting over the last three general elections, as well as the lowest levels of high participation. In fact, as income rose, so did rates of voter participation; 94.7 percent of the highest earners voted in at least two of the past three general elections, compared with 64.1 percent of the lowest-income respondents.

It is well-established that lower-income and working people face substantial barriers in accessing the ballot, particularly under North Carolina’s voter suppression laws. While these barriers likely were a factor in the voter participation data, they do not fully explain the skeptical attitudes low-income people expressed about electoral change. Instead, we believe they are explained by feelings of despair and a sense of betrayal by their own government and elected officials. We submit that this is not a reason to ignore these people, but rather reason to begin building power through relational organizing. We must move people to action by rebuilding the belief that participation can make a difference in the issues that impact people’s daily lives.

At the same time, skepticism about the system’s ability to respond to the needs of poor and working people showed up when we asked people if they would “Join Down Home NC.” Overall, respondents who reported struggling to meet their basic needs were less likely to say that they would join. For example, respondents

who struggled with “Keeping a roof over your head” were less likely to join. Furthermore, the likelihood that a respondent agreed to join tended to increase by annual income level, rising from just under 30 percent of the time in the lowest income bracket up to over 44 percent in the highest bracket.

We also discovered a strong correlation between the likelihood that a person would join Down Home NC and their concern for voting rights and elections. Respondents were dramatically more likely to join if they cited “having a voice and a vote that matters” as a problem; 45 percent of joiners indicated this was a problem, versus 29.6 percent of non-joiners. People who saw a solution in “electing working people” were more like to join Down Home NC than those who did not (42.9 percent vs. 32.4 percent), and those who selected “making it easier for people to vote” were twice as likely to join. As elsewhere, income was a factor: the belief that “making it easier to vote” would help solve problems rose with income (34.5 percent in the lowest income bracket versus 46.5 percent among the highest bracket).

Judging by this data, people who struggle to stay housed and meet other basic needs face significant barriers to participation. Those who are struggling the most are also often the most disempowered and disaffected. As people reported fewer basic challenges, or higher incomes, their ability and willingness to join Down Home NC increased, as did their confidence in voting and political action as a potential solution.

This underscores the importance of meeting struggling people where they are, in their experience of poverty, if we hope to include the most marginalized and struggling members of the multiracial working class. For Down Home NC, this means focusing our work on the basic needs of good wages, affordable housing, food, and health care. It means we need campaigns and messages that are connected to the daily struggles of families that are working paycheck to paycheck, trying to find work and fighting to keep their basic needs met.

It also drives our commitment to starting with relationship-based organizing, which we see as the best way to move people from isolation to an understanding of how their individual struggles are connected and the product of domination by corporations and the wealthy. We believe that rebuilding faith in collective action is the best antidote to the despair and disengagement of poor and working people, and a critical task for the progressive movement.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUR MOVEMENT

In the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, much ink was spilled speculating about what has become of small town and rural America. Some observers were eager to write off huge swaths of the country as beyond redemption and hopelessly backward. Others pointed to the need for renewed commitment to understanding and addressing the issues of rural communities.

When Down Home NC started our listening survey, we were interested in discovering which personally-held issues (if any) poor and working people in small town and rural North Carolina might share with existing, mostly urban movements for racial and economic justice. Additionally, we wanted to probe the depths of division in counties notorious for white supremacist organizing and racial oppression. How divided are North Carolina's communities, really? Is it possible to build multiracial solidarity in historically oppressive towns? Can we really move rural white folks to act in common cause with people of color?

While we have yet to definitively answer these questions, we are more convinced than ever that working people are less divided than is usually assumed, even across racial and urban/rural divides. Moreover, we are

confident it is possible (and necessary) to build multi-racial organizations and movements that begin at the overlap of poor and working people's interests.

Overall, it is pride of place and a shared experience of poverty and disenfranchisement that has provided the common starting place for Down Home NC's white, black, and brown coalitions and county chapters.

We believe that a massive investment by progressives in rural and small town organizing is long overdue. Many of the people we spoke with told us that no one had ever asked them to share how they feel about their lives, and what changes they want to see. This failure to engage excludes massive swaths of North Carolina's population from participating in the progressive movement, and cedes a lot of power to our opposition. It is up to us to correct this lapse.

In our conversations with North Carolina's small town and rural working class, we heard that many people are fed up with settling for less and with being exploited by capital and politicians alike. In areas often written off by mainstream progressive organizations, we found that nearly half of everyone we asked was willing to join our

organization. Most of Down Home NC's members are participating in politics, and collective public efforts, for the first time. This speaks to the hunger for collective action and hope in these places.

At Down Home NC, we believe that when government truly reflects and serves the people, it can be a powerful instrument for good. But progressive movements must recognize and learn to navigate the feelings of betrayal, distrust and outright dislike of a government that has failed in its obligation to improve people's lives for so long. Distinguishing between how government works now and how government could and should work will be key to advancing public solutions to the crises our communities face.

However challenging, we must find a way to rebuild a public vision for the potentially transformational benefits of government action if we are to undermine the right's push to gut public services and protections. We need a better counter-narrative to the right's message that private corporations can always do things better and that government should deregulate and get out of way of the "free" market.

We are also optimistic about the prospect of building multiracial unity among working-class communities in small towns and rural areas. Our response data indicates that experiences of poverty, hardship, and scarcity are shared across race, and that different racial groups support common solutions to associated challenges, such as accessing health care or raising wages. In our real-world organizing experiences, we have witnessed a budding solidarity among our multiracial membership that stems from shared economic conditions.

For example, a black female member of Down Home NC was surprised to witness the living conditions of a fellow white member, while visiting their home in a local trailer park. She reflected on the "thinness" of white privilege among members of the working class, and expressed a deepened commitment to shared struggle on the basis of class.

Similarly, a rural white leader gave up her precious time off from her four minimum-wage jobs and duties as a single mother of four to travel more than 40 miles to join rally in defense of DACA recipients. Increasingly, Down Home NC's members are comfortable articulating the ways in which racism, misogyny, and homophobia have been deployed to divide the working class for the benefit of the rich.

Our experience teaches us that organizing in rural areas is not only possible; it is a necessary endeavor. We are aware that a failure to invest in rural organizing carries major perils. Frankly put, it will not be possible to change the balance of power in North Carolina without strong rural participation; 80 of the state's 100 counties are considered rural.²⁷ What's more, in the absence of alternatives to far-right narratives, toxic ideologies fester. These range from internalized oppressive narratives about low-income or rural identities, to victim-blaming, to misplaced anger at communities of color.

Far-right and white supremacist organizers have correctly identified an opportunity in disaffected and struggling white rural populations. During the past six months, both of our counties witnessed white nationalist or neo-Confederate rallies and recruitment efforts – for instance, when Identity Evropa flyered a Christmas parade in Canton and dropped banners in Graham and Boone.^{28,29,30,31} Multiracial organizing oriented around shared economic interests may be the only real antidote to ideologies that seek to form rigid, permanent, and dangerous divides between rural whites and everyone else.

With real love for the work, and in the hope that others will take up the challenge of organizing small towns and rural areas, we offer up the following theory of change and development process that has evolved from our field experiences with Down Home NC.

²⁷ <https://www.nccommerce.com/lead/research-publications/the-lead-feed/article/11056/articleid/123/rural-center-expands-its-classification-of-north-carolina-counties>

²⁸ <http://myfox8.com/2017/12/12/white-supremacist-fliers-found-at-north-carolina-christmas-parade/>

²⁹ <http://college.usatoday.com/2017/08/24/appalachian-state-students-greeted-by-white-supremacy-banner/>

³⁰ <http://www.thetimesnews.com/news/20170527/corps-condemns-marines-behavior>

³¹ <http://college.usatoday.com/2017/08/24/appalachian-state-students-greeted-by-white-supremacy-banner/>





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"I've changed my perspective on residents of Alamance County, because of the stories that I've heard. I sat in homes with people that didn't look like me. I sat in homes with people who were older than me, who were younger than me. But we all have very similar issues.

I think I'm more shocked to know that we get along way more than the media would like to portray. I feel like Down Home, as cheesy as it sounds, Down Home has give me an opportunity to use my voice. I know that it's given a lot of people in Alamance County, and will grow to give a lot of people to be heard and use their voice and to impact each other in a positive way. And fight for things that matter to us most. That's why I'm a member of Down Home."

-Kischa Peña, Mebane

1 WE COME TOGETHER.

The actual process of gathering a group of people together for the purpose of transforming small towns and rural areas is no easy task. In our case, it took hundreds of knocked doors and hundreds of one-to-one meetings to identify and mobilize our first leaders. We have learned that, in the absence of experience with the concept “organizing,” and in areas of low population density, it takes a much longer time to establish a center of gravity. Building these relationships takes time, but there is no substitute for deeply grounded human connections and trust. Lastly, we place a high value on ensuring that, when Down Home NC gathers, the experiences and people in the room match that of the broader community. To form deep connections that can overcome generations of distrust and oppression, our organizing must include the full extent of the multiracial working class from the very beginning. It also means creating a space controlled by and dedicated to the experiences of low-income people. We are clear with our wealthier allies that their best role is to support Down Home NC’s member-leaders, but not to try to join their ranks.

2 WE DISCOVER OUR SHARED INTERESTS.

We believe that multiracial work must be predicated on well-established areas of mutual concern. Only with a shared anchor point is it possible to bring people together from different communities and perspectives into a cohesive team. We have been able to navigate the unique and varied experiences of oppression that have shaped the lives of our members by encouraging and centering personal storytelling as a way to elucidate an individual’s history, surface commonalities, and foster empathetic connection between members. Through political education workshops, we uncover “the lies we have been told” that are designed to keep the multiracial working class divided and powerless. Collectively, we delve into who really benefits from oppression and a divided working class: rich and powerful elites who want to maintain their dominance. And, of course, we explore the antidote to division: solidarity.

3 WE GROW OUR SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE.

We have a strong emphasis on continual leadership development, strategy, and skills training. Staff organizers work to provide support for any effort that local members chose to undertake. We have incorporated training into our monthly all-chapter meetings, and are launching permanent infrastructure in the form of quarterly leadership and organizing intensives. We train with the understanding that every member is a leader, and that they are on a long-term pathway to power. We work to quickly transition decision-making and organizing responsibility to leaders who are ready to direct their own local chapters.

4 WE BUILD OUR POWER.

While our opposition has nearly limitless financial resources, working people have the numbers. Winning justice for working people will require mass movements, so we emphasize the need to bring our neighbors, family, and coworkers into the work of Down Home NC. This practice of member-driven relational organizing also deepens community and individual stake in the local chapter.

5 WE FIGHT.

Campaigning for change on the issues that matter to our members is an imperative. Only through conflict with the establishment can members discover the shape of their own power. In order to truly build mass-based organizations, communities must witness the possibility of winning on issues that matter to them. As a multi-issue organization, responsive to the needs of our members, we resist categorization by issue silo. We embrace electoral contests as a path to power, but also understand elections as just one important strategy among many. We will work for change at any level of government, or place of decision, that we are able to influence.

6 WE WIN!

We believe that real change and transformation is possible for small towns and rural communities. We also believe that the path to a wider social transformation must run through the main streets and byroads of rural places. If we as a movement are serious about winning for all of us, we must support, seed, and sustain multiracial movement-building in small towns and rural areas, for the long haul.



APPENDIX I: PROFILES OF ALAMANCA & HAYWOOD COUNTIES



COUNTY PROFILES

ALAMANCE COUNTY

Alamance County is located in North Carolina's central Piedmont geographical region, situated between Greensboro and Durham. Its areas of urban development and economic activity lie primarily along the I-40/85 corridor, which bisects the county at its middle.³² At the center of Alamance County is Burlington, the county's largest city with a population of 52,709.³³ Other towns along I-40/85 include Graham, the county seat, and Mebane, on Alamance's western border with Orange County. Alamance's northern and southern areas are primarily rural. The total population of Alamance County is 158,276.³⁴

Since 1840, much of Alamance's economy has been based on textile manufacturing. The county was home to North Carolina's first textile, cotton, and hosiery mills. By 1950, there were more than 54 hosiery manufacturers in Alamance County, making Burlington the "hosiery center" of the American south.³⁵ In 1970, local textile company Burlington Industries was the largest textile-manufacturing corporation in the world.³⁶ During the middle part of the 20th century, nearly everyone in Alamance County could count on steady and reliable work in the textile industry.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the American textile industry entered a period of sustained decline, marked by mergers and takeovers. By 1994, NAFTA and other treaties hastened this decline as the American market was flooded with cheap fabric imports. More than 100,000 North Carolina textile jobs, and more than 70,000 apparel jobs, were lost between 1997 and 2002.³⁷ In 2001, Burlington Industries entered Chapter 11 bankruptcy.³⁸

The decline in Alamance's textile manufacturing industry occurred simultaneously with a decline small farming in the county. In 1983, Alamance was home to 56 dairy farms and 4,500 acres of tobacco fields, which provided difficult but reliable work for farm laborers.³⁹ Since then, many dairy and tobacco farms have closed, their owners facing prohibitive financial pressures. This decline has dried up another traditional field of work for Alamance residents.

Simultaneous with the NAFTA-hastened decline of textile manufacturing in the mid-1990s, Alamance saw a rapid increase in Hispanic and Latinx immigration to the county. In 1990, less than 1 percent of the county was Latinx, today immigrants primarily from Mexico and El Salvador make up nearly 13 percent of the county's population.⁴⁰ Between 2000 and 2010, the population grew by a rate of 53 percent.⁴¹

Alamance's newest Spanish-speaking residents showed up during a time of deep economic strife. Between 2001 and 2015, Burlington experienced an economic transition that has been called bottoming up; a dramatic decrease in high paying and middle-income jobs (-47.9 percent and -14.2 percent respectively), combined with a growth in low-wage work (+15.3 percent).⁴² In the same period, the Great Recession of 2008 destroyed significant reserves of middle-class wealth.

In an atmosphere of great economic stress and precarity, some of Alamance's native-born workers began to place blame for their decline on the recently arrived immigrants. Economic tensions were further exacerbated by cultural tensions; many new arrivals did not speak English and were criticized as being unwilling to integrate into the fabric of Alamance life.

These tensions reached a peak in 2010, when the U.S. Department of Justice opened an investigation into county Sheriff Terry Johnson, alleging unconstitutional prejudicial policing in the detention, targeting, treatment, and deportation of Alamance County's Latinx population under a 287(g) federal immigration partnership. The program deputized local sheriffs as Immigration and Customs Enforcement, effectively turning traffic stops into immigration checks. The DOJ suit was settled in 2016 and the 287(g) partnership was ended.⁴³ In late 2017, Sheriff Johnson re-entered into a 287(g) partnership with the Trump administration's Immigration and Customs Enforcement.⁴⁴



The difficult immigrant experience in Alamance County mirrors the county's long history of race-based oppression. While antebellum Alamance was home to anti-secessionist sentiment and abolitionist activism, 1,200 Alamance natives fought for the Confederacy, often under conscription laws.⁴⁵ In 1870, under North Carolina's first reconstruction governor, Ku Klux Klan members lynched prominent local black leader Wyatt Outlaw on the Alamance County courthouse lawn, touching off what became known as the Kirk-Holden war, a watershed struggle that inaugurated the era of Jim Crow and Klan terror in North Carolina.⁴⁶ From that time through the present, the specter of the Klan has stalked Alamance County, peaking in the 1960s, when the North Carolina Klan counted 10,000+ members and was known as "Klansville, USA."⁴⁷ Today, openly white supremacist and neo-Confederate organizations like Alamance County Taking Back Alamance County (ACTBAC) remain visible and active in the county.⁴⁸

Alamance County in 2018 remains a place of significant challenges, but also real opportunity. Locals often ruefully refer to their home as "No Chance Alamance," a reflection of the lack of jobs, and preponderance of low-waged and exploitative working conditions. The county continues to struggle with race-based divisions, even as its large working class, which makes up 42 percent of the county's population, share experiences of poverty and disenfranchisement.⁴⁹ Down Home NC's organizing has led to the formation of a powerful, multiracial and multilingual cohort of leaders and a growing chapter. In 2018, Alamance County chapter members are focused on base-building, resisting the new 287(g) provisions, and bringing demands for a higher minimum wage and Medicaid expansion into the electoral arena.



³² http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=7&ved=2ahUKEwi57suHnJXZAhUGbK0KHR5ICXkQFJAgegQIBRAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fhealthyalamance.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2015%2F10%2FAlamance-County-Community-Assessment-2015.pdf&usq=AOvWaw3x3O3lhZPGJ_oKb8s1Zny

³³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/burlingtoncitynorthcarolina/PST045216>

³⁴ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/alamancecountynorthcarolina/PST045216>

³⁵ https://localwiki.org/alamance/Textile_Mill's_History

³⁶ <http://www.ncglobaleconomy.com/textiles/overview.shtml>

³⁷ <https://www.ncpedia.org/textiles-part-4-decline>

³⁸ <https://www.bizjournals.com/triangle/stories/2001/11/12/daily34.html>

³⁹ <http://businessnc.com/the-land-of-plenty/>

⁴⁰ <http://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/631834>

⁴¹ <https://healthyalamance.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Alamance-County-Community-Assessment-2015.pdf>

⁴² <https://ag-econ.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/nceconomy-percapitay.pdf>

⁴³ <https://www.justice.gov/crt/file/886406/download>

⁴⁴ <http://www.wfmynews2.com/news/local/alamance-co-sheriffs-office-reapplying-to-immigration-enforcement-program/490595017>

⁴⁵ <http://gm5-ncwebvarnish.newscyclecloud.com/news/20170831/forum-examines-race-relations-in-alamance-county>

⁴⁶ <https://cwnc.omeka.chass.ncsu.edu/exhibits/show/republicans-kkk/wyatt-outlaw>

⁴⁷ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/klansville/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2017/2/17/1634670/-The-Southern-Poverty-Law-Center-this-week-put-ACTBAC-NC-on-its-online-hate-map>

⁴⁹ http://www.ncjustice.org/sites/default/files/BTC/County-Economic-Snapshot/2017/ALAMANCE_2017%20County%20Snapshots_Final.pdf

Connie lives in low-income housing inside a former yarn mill

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"That's ironic itn't it...my daddy once worked exactly where I live at. My sister worked here for a while, she was like 'you know daddy worked here?' And then on other side of him, his brother worked. A lot of my family...this was it. 75% of this mill was probably someone kin to me.

This was a yarn mill. This was a very hustle-bustle yarn mill.They made good money too. My daddy worked 7 days a lot. Mother worked in a little hosiery mill across the road over there.

A lot of my family worked here...fed and raised me, I guess you could say.

I know why it happened...they sent it overseas to cheaper labor. Even though they don't want to admit that, we all know. Even A.O. Smith...it was a pretty busy mill, my sister worked there 27 years, even it closed up, but the work went to Mexico. Cheaper labor. That's where everything is went, to cheaper labor. I don't think we have anything...do we have anything that manufactures around here anymore?"

- Connie Lee Moore, Mebane



COUNTY PROFILES

HAYWOOD COUNTY

Haywood County is located in North Carolina's mountain west, amidst the Blue Ridge mountain range of the Appalachians and bordering Tennessee at its northern edge. The county seat of Waynesville has a population of 9,985 people and is situated about forty minutes west of Asheville, a growing and prosperous tourism destination in neighboring Buncombe County.⁵⁰ Haywood County's total population is 59,036, 96.3 percent of which is white.⁵¹

Like many Appalachian counties, Haywood was slower to modernize, and most of its economic history has been dominated by farming; to this day, Haywood County is home to more than 700 individual farms.⁵² Furniture manufacturing and export logging took hold in Haywood

once the county was connected to North Carolina's railroads following the Civil War.⁵³ Furniture manufacturing provided many families with reliable work until the 1990s, when Haywood's manufacturing sector experienced a decline. The town of Canton nearly lost its paper manufacturing plant, and longtime anchor manufacturers Dayco, Wellco, and Lea Furniture left town, ripping a huge hole in the economic lives of blue collar workers.⁵⁴ Today, manufacturing jobs are harder to come by and increasingly specialized; the sector accounts for 12.3 percent of Haywood's total employment. Other major employment sectors include the county's education system, healthcare, low-wage retail like Wal-Mart, and accommodation work related to a Haywood's tourism industry.⁵⁵ (The county is home to a portion of Smoky Mountain National Park and North Carolina's first commercial ski slope.)

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"There are a lot of people that don't have a job — they have skills but they don't have anywhere to use them because they don't have options. Most folks do what they have to do to survive around here.

I'm struggling just like everyone else is. I struggle to pay my rent, to keep food in the fridge, to keep my lights on. I live on SSI because I am totally blind and have health issues, but I don't want people to feel sorry for me. I know what it's like to go without food for weeks, and there are a lot of people that know that struggle. When people tell me that I can't do something I am going to prove them wrong. Some people don't have sympathy for others, but we need to learn how to help others and care for each other."

- Sam Wilds, Canton



With the decline of manufacturing, Haywood experienced a painful economic transition that has been described as “bottoming up.” While high-income job rates remained static, middle-income jobs fell by 31 percent, and there was a growth of 11.5 percent in inadequate low-wage jobs.⁵⁶ Much of this low-wage work can be attributed to retail and service jobs.

Haywood County’s recent past reflects national patterns of rural poverty: as younger residents follow the technological revolution and leave in search of better jobs, much of Haywood’s remaining population is older, dependent on social support, and lacking access to opportunities that would allow them to compete for higher-wage jobs. As a result, many are leaving the area while rural residents of Haywood are stuck in a persistent state of poverty and vulnerability, competing for jobs that offer insufficient wages and benefits.

In an atmosphere of pernicious rural poverty, poorer communities in Haywood are suffering through the worsening opioid dependency crisis that is especially acute in the Appalachian region. Twenty percent of babies born in Haywood between July and September 2017 were found to be substance affected.⁵⁷ Many residents are at risk of death by overdose, or of becoming infected by Hepatitis C or HIV. As part of an emerging attempt to deal with the crisis, Waynesville police are experimenting with a diversion program to move dependent persons into treatment instead of prison.

As is the case elsewhere, far-right white supremacist elements have seen an opportunity in the economic desperation of Haywood’s white working class and poor populations. The proto-fascist “white identity”

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"I was born addicted to drugs. The longest I was ever clean from drugs was when I was born to the day I turned 13. That’s when I started using and I haven’t been clean for very long since. I still use methadone every day so I’m technically not clean now, even though I get it through a legal clinic. That’s why I wanna help people. From my life in the drug world, all the stuff that I’ve lived — going to jail, going to drug court — I know how it works, I know how people feel. I know what to look for. The person walking down the street looking sick isn’t the addict, they are the person trying to get better.

The people profiting off of our struggles are pharmaceutical companies, doctors, pharmacies. It’s the big businesses. A lot of [the opioid crisis] goes back to Big Pharma and doctors that overprescribe. I had a prescription to opioids that led to my addiction. It’s affected a lot of people in such a bad way that... I don’t have words for how bad it is. And if someone doesn’t take responsibility for what’s happening, then we’re going down a dark path. Teenagers are being held responsible for this crisis and getting thrown away when they get caught with drugs."

- Sam Malone, Waynesville



organization, Identity Evropa, has been actively and openly working to recruit community college students over the past year via flyering and banner-drop publicity stunts.⁵⁸

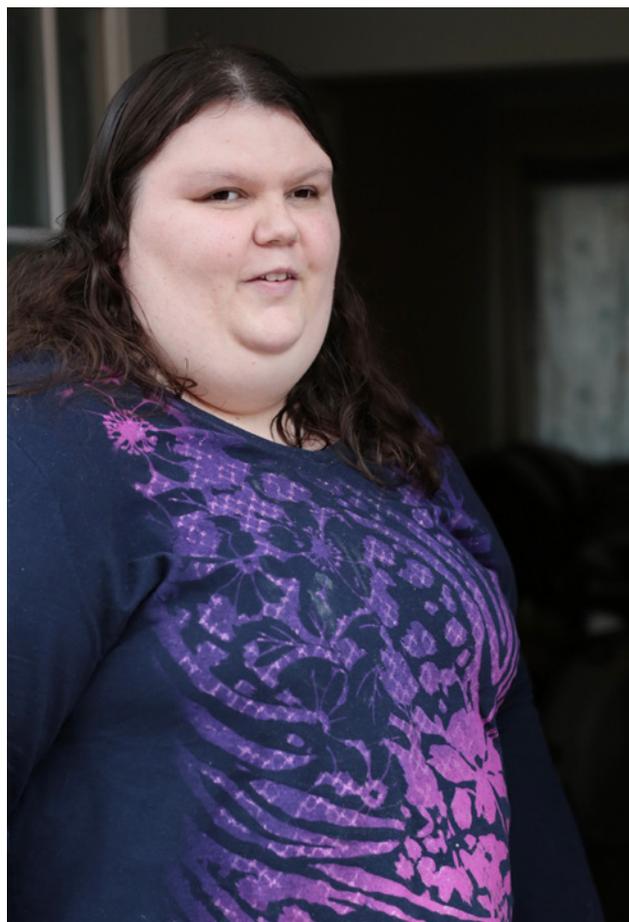
Haywood County in 2018 has presented significant opportunity for creating a cultural shift and overcoming a history shaped by racism and capitalist exploitation. Although the economic and political struggles have often left people questioning the impact of their voice, recent organizing has exposed a passion for creating change by joining together. Down Home NC has united a coalition of diverse leaders from within the community, and continues to develop a growing membership committed to a more inclusive and progressive Haywood County.

In the coming year, local Haywood County chapter members are focused on developing a thriving base that can take on the opioid crisis, raise wages, defend health care and expand Medicaid, and hold our elected officials accountable through voter engagement and education.

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"If we can figure out solutions to healthcare, to opioids, to giving people places to live, too making sure there are jobs, then we could respect one another and love one another more. We are gonna win no matter what as long as we stick together."

- Sam Wilds, Canton



⁵⁰ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/waynesvilletownnorthcarolina/PST045216>

⁵¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/haywoodcountynorthcarolina/PST045216>

⁵² <http://haywoodedc.org/agriculture/>

⁵³ http://www.carolana.com/nc/counties/haywood_county_nc.html

⁵⁴ <http://www.smokymountainnews.com/news/item/19838-the-past-present-and-future-of-haywood-county-s-economic-development>

⁵⁵ https://datausa.io/profile/geo/haywood-county-nc/#category_industries

⁵⁶ <https://ag-econ.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/nceconomy-percapitay.pdf>

⁵⁷ http://www.themountaineer.com/news/haywood-leaders-meet-to-discuss-opioid-crisis/article_c64e2300-ba60-11e7-8fbc-87bfc7b3f647.html

⁵⁸ <http://myfox8.com/2017/12/12/white-supremacist-fliers-found-at-north-carolina-christmas-parade/>



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"The reason why I am involved is because I believe that if we can figure out solutions from day to day about how we can make this world work better for everyone. If we can figure out solutions to health care, to opioids, to giving people places to live, to making sure there are jobs, then we could make sure that no one is poor."

- Sam Malone, Waynesville

APPENDIX II

DEMOGRAPHIC COMPARISON OF NORTH CAROLINA AND SURVEY POPULATION BY COUNTY

Tables: Race, gender, age, income, and county-specific count and demographic breakdown. Should include the baseline NC statistics for comparison.

	WOMEN	MEN	OTHER	NO RESPONSE	WHITE	BLACK	NATIVE	ASIAN PACIFIC	HISPANIC	MIXED	NO RESPONSE
NORTH CAROLINA ⁵⁹	51%	49%			64%	22%	2%	3%	9%	2%	
SURVEY RESULTS	56%	40%	1%	1%	44%	34%	1%	1%	11%	2%	9%

AGE	NORTH CAROLINA ⁶⁰	SURVEY RESULTS
0-25	24%	14%
26-35	10%	18%
36-45	12%	13.7%
46-55	25%	15.1%
56-64	13%	12.1%
65+	16%	16.9%
NO RESPONSE		10.2%

⁵⁹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045216>

⁶⁰ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045216>

**Note: although we sought to collect surveys from enough people of all racial backgrounds, we do not have enough surveys from Native people, Asian Pacific Islander people and people of mixed race to feel confident in reporting conclusions based on our data, beyond the response of white people, black people, and Hispanic people.*

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