

# Understanding Chronically Poor Places:

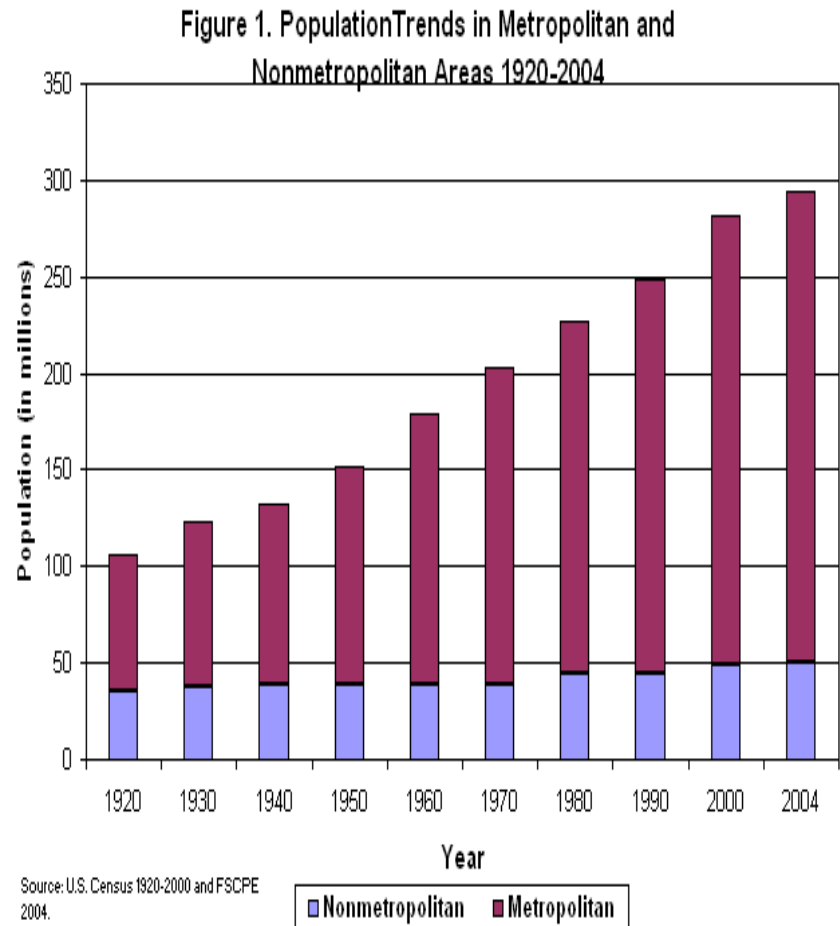
Encouraging More Voice and  
Commitment to Change

# What I will do today

- Briefly review trends in rural America and present a typology of rural communities
- Look more closely at chronically poor rural communities such as those Hilda works with in West Virginia
- Talk about the communities I know in Appalachia and the Delta, and
- Connect my research to Hilda's work and the challenges you all face in recruiting and retaining health professionals in remote places

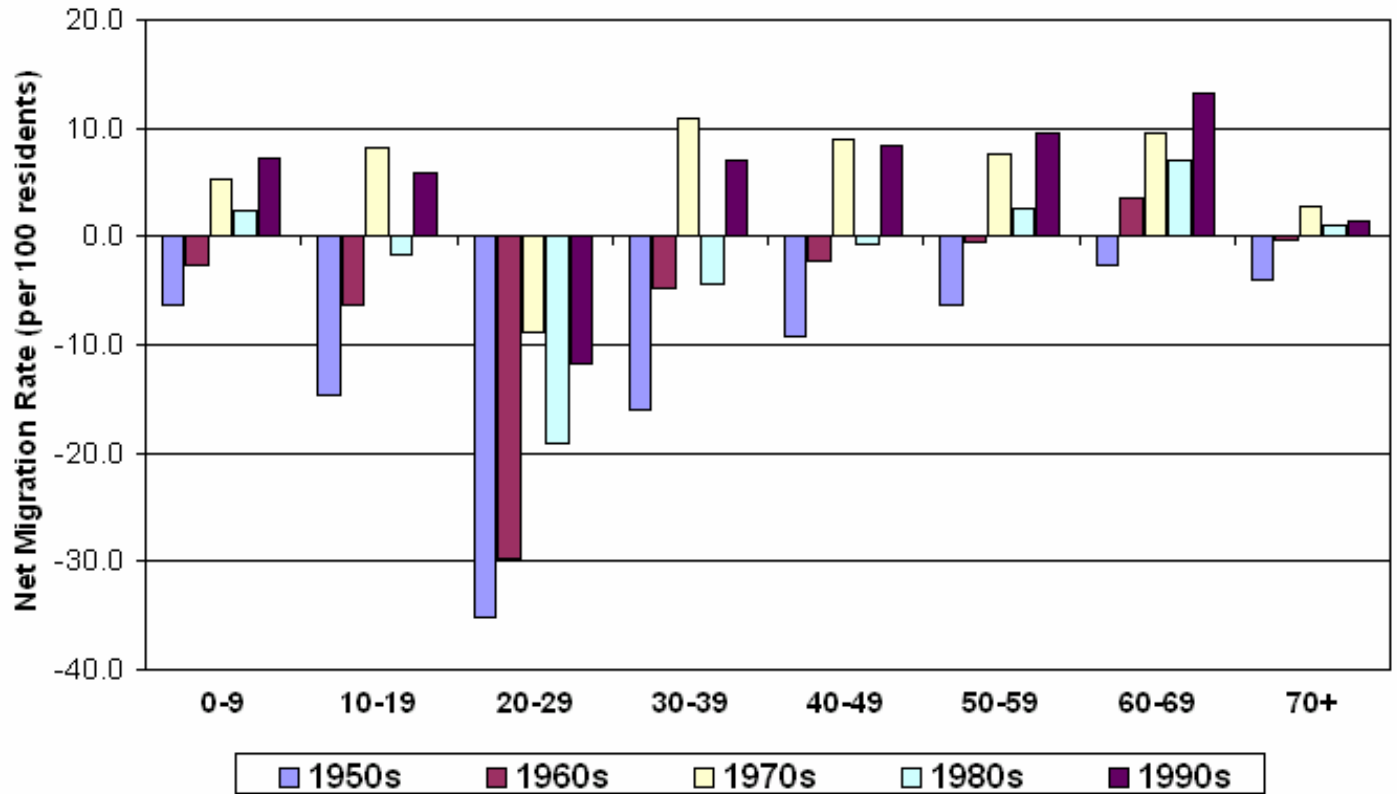
# Rural America Today

- 50 million people live in small town and rural communities, 17% of the US population, on 80% of the land
- Slow growth over the last century, compared to urban America
- Trends vary by region and type of rural community



# Young adults still leave, older people come, especially to places with natural amenities

Though youth outmigration is declining overall...and other age groups are coming into rural communities



Source: Johnson et. al., 2005.

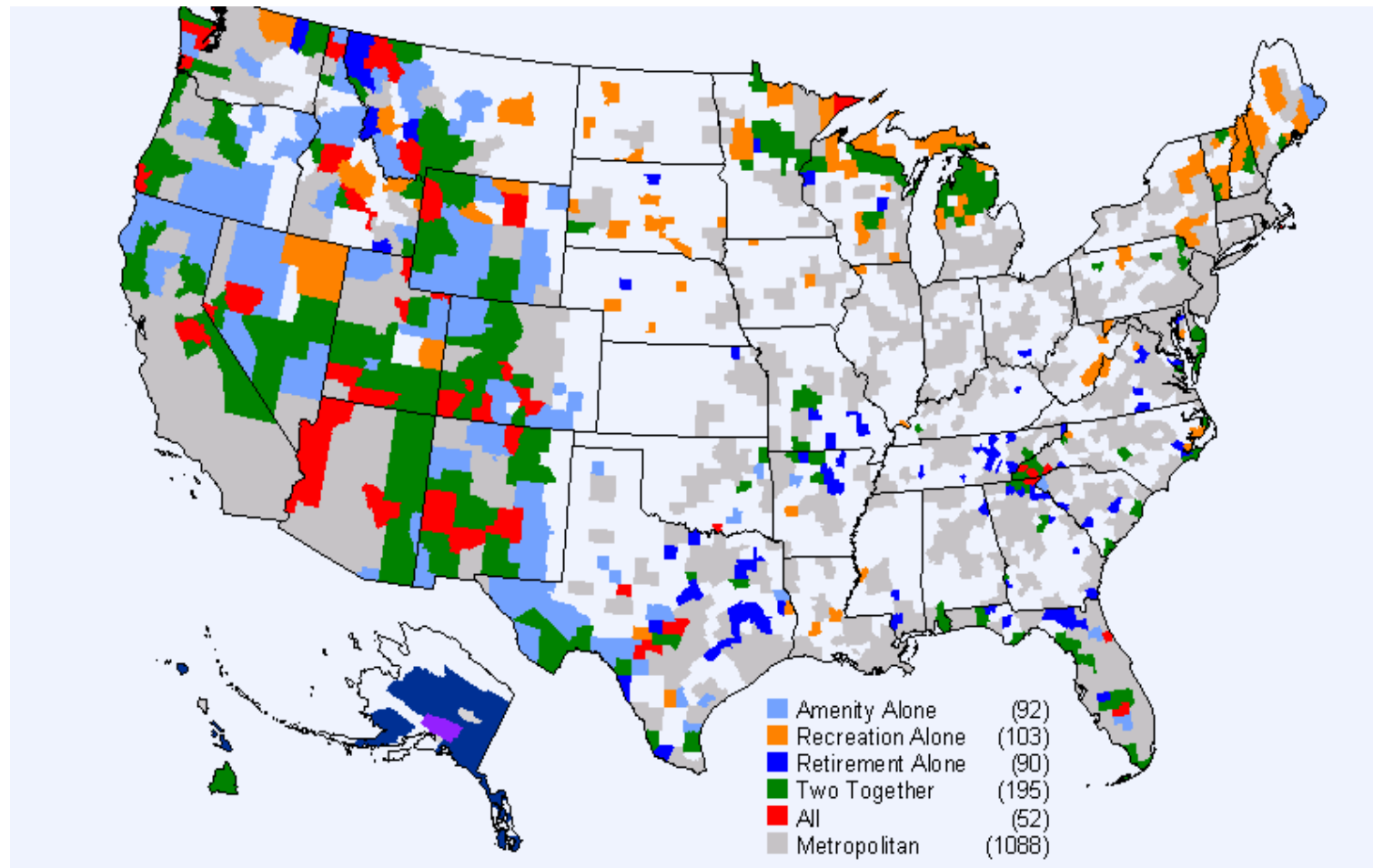
# Rural communities face big new challenges

- Globalization means the loss of traditional jobs
- Demographic shifts – both in- and out-migration – are changing communities' age and ethnic profiles, meaning opportunities for some, greater challenges for others
- The legacy of chronic underinvestment in both human and social capital leaves persistently poor communities with dim prospects in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

# Three Rural Americas

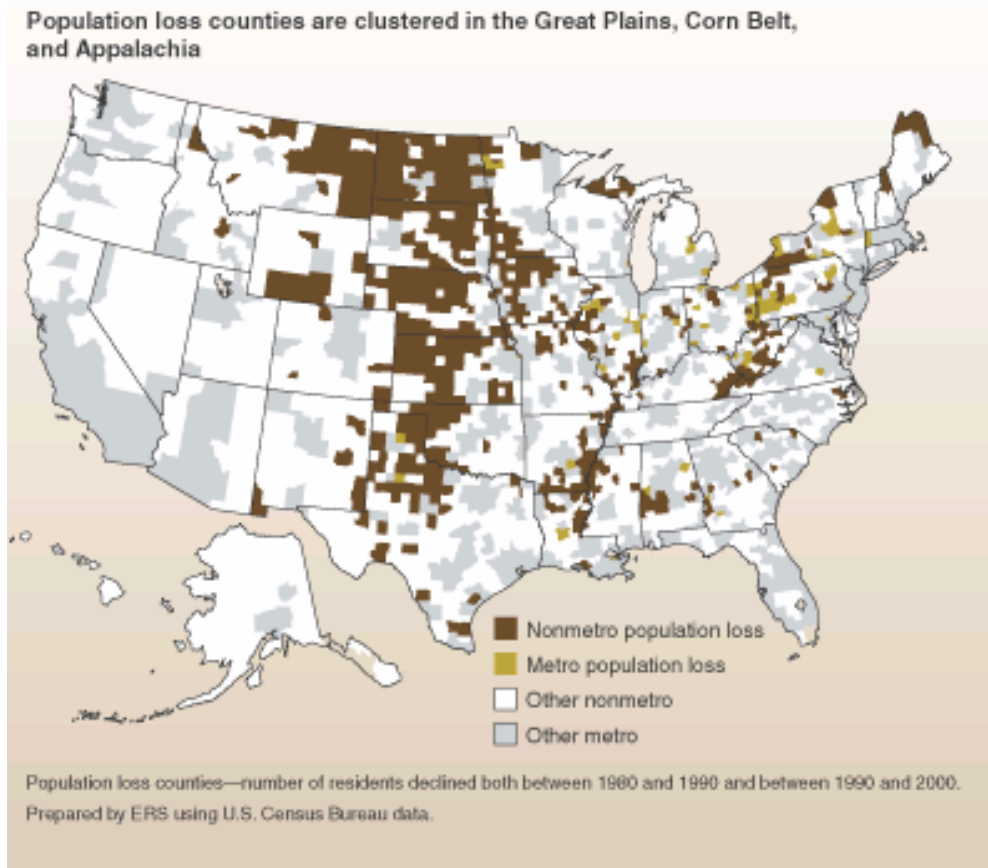
- **Amenity rich areas** that are growing as baby boomers retire, as more people buy 2<sup>nd</sup> homes, and as “footloose professionals” choose to settle in small town communities with rich natural amenities or just on the periphery of large cities
- **Declining resource dependent areas**, where once agriculture, timber, mining or related manufacturing industries supported a solid blue collar middle class, now losing population steadily
- **Chronically poor communities**, places with majority people of color, as well as Appalachia and the Ozarks, where decades of resource extraction and underinvestment have left a legacy of poverty, low education and broken civic institutions

# Amenity-rich areas are growing and likely to grow more over the next decade



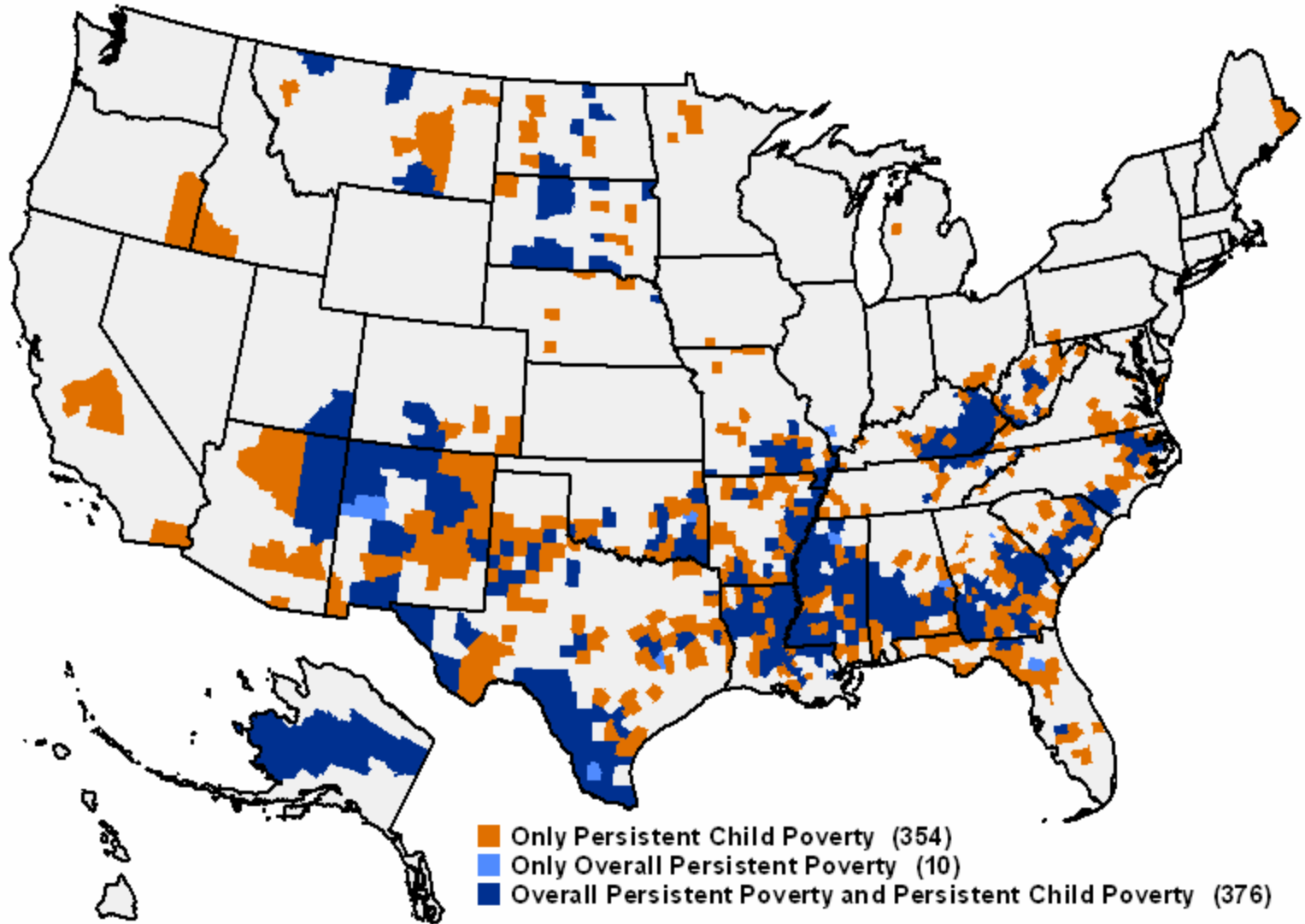
# Persistent population loss plagues other resource dependent areas

- Loss is concentrated in the Great Plains, parts of the Corn Belt, the lower Mississippi Valley, and Appalachia





## Counties with Overall Persistent Poverty and Persistent Child Poverty

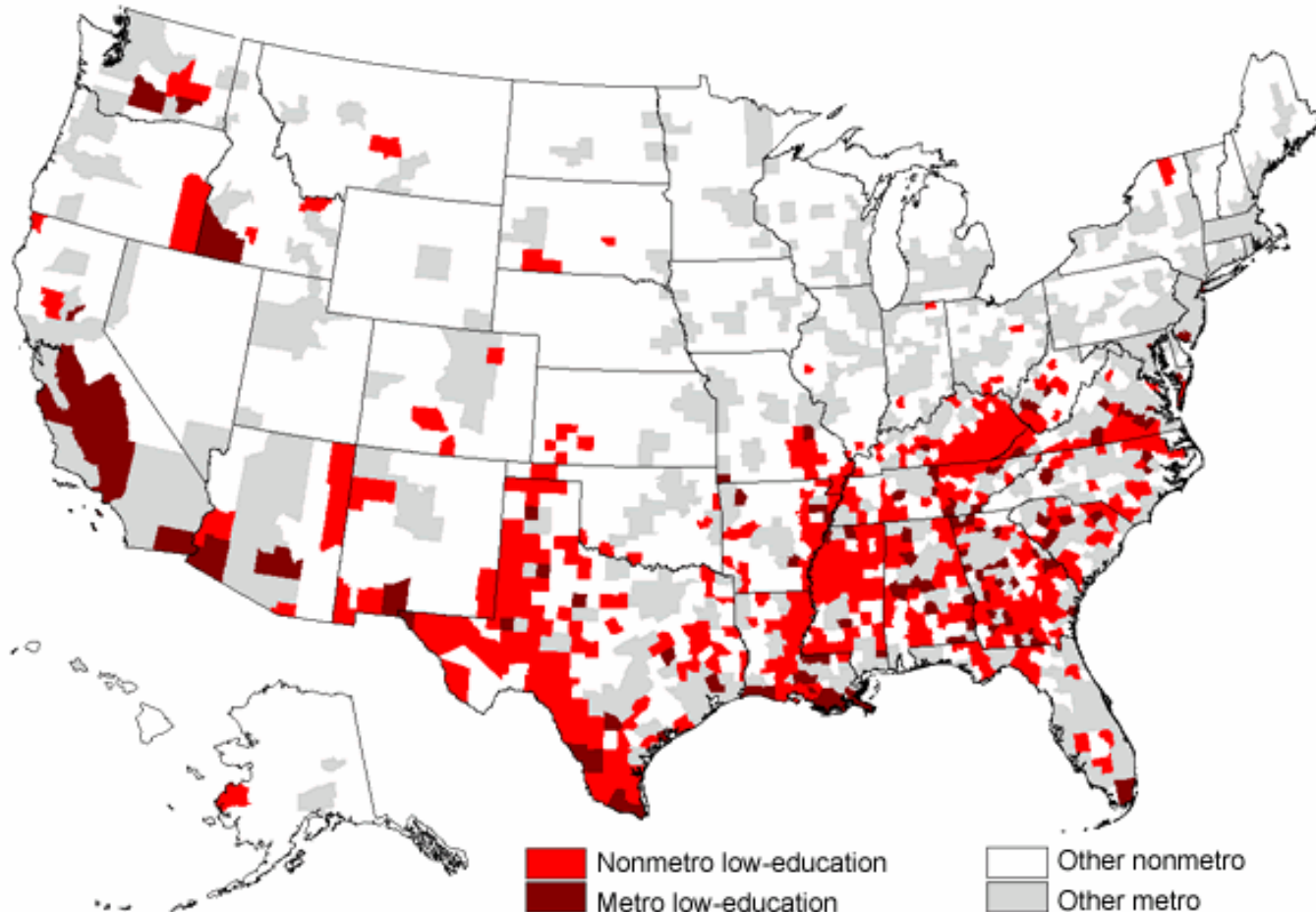


Data: Census data supplied by Economic Research Service, U.S.D.A

Analysis: K.M. Johnson, Carsey Institute, Univ. of New Hampshire

And these are the places where ¼ or more of working age adults have dropped out of high school

**Low-education counties, 2000**



Low-education counties--25 percent or more of residents 25-64 years old had neither a high school diploma nor GED in 2000.

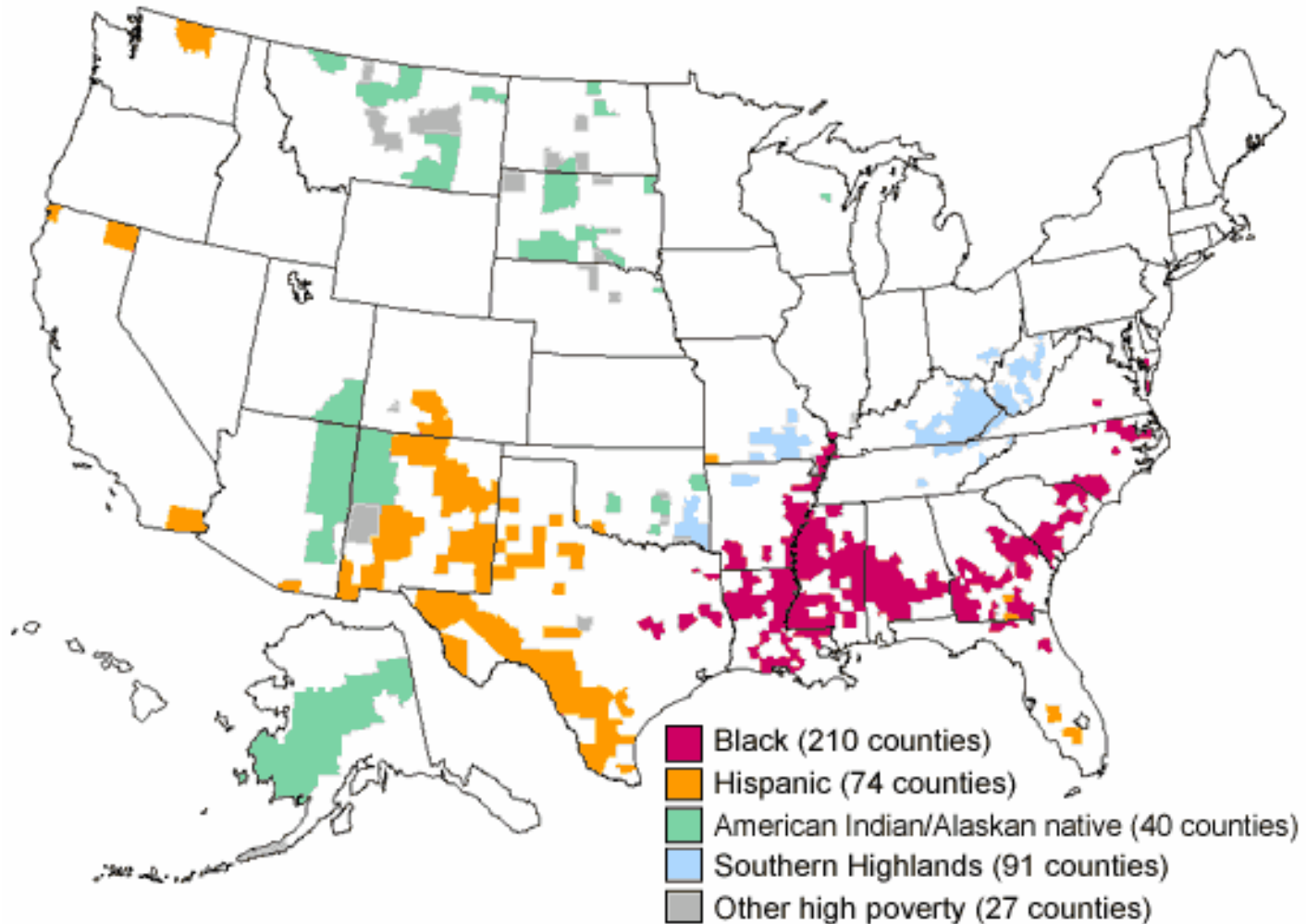
Source: Economic Research Service, USDA.

# The Rural Poor: a National Snapshot

- 7.5 million rural poor
- 20% of rural kids (2.6 million)
- Poverty is high for rural minorities:
  - 33% of rural Blacks are poor; almost ½ of Black children
  - 35% of Native Americans
  - 27% of Hispanics
  - Compared to 11% of non Hispanic whites

# High poverty has plagued rural America for decades – especially among communities of color

Nonmetro counties with high poverty, 2000



Source: Calculated by ERS using Census 2000 data, U.S. Census Bureau.

Note: High poverty is defined as a poverty rate of 20 percent or more.

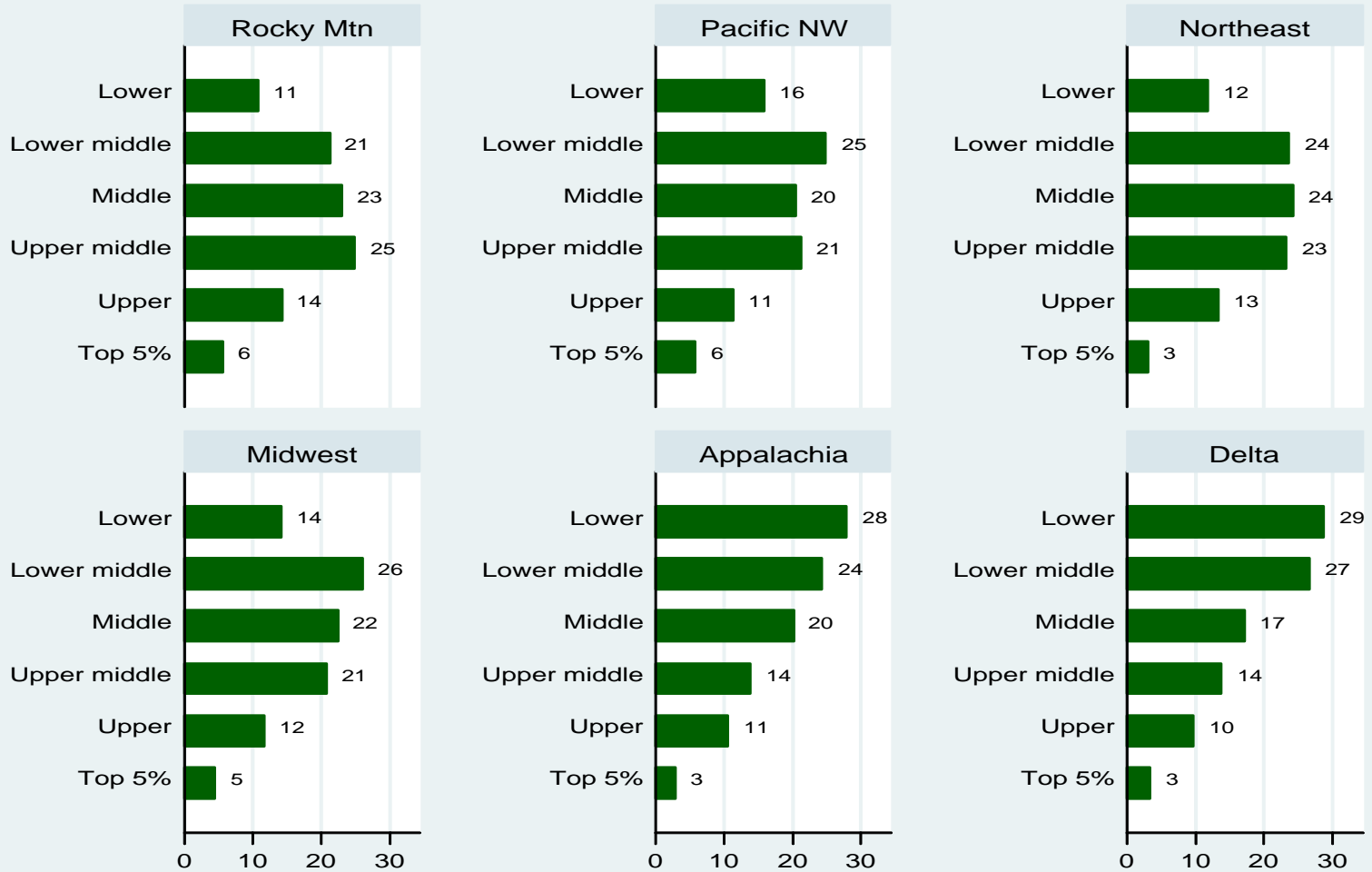


# Closer Look at The Three Rural Americas: Carsey Institute Survey of 6,500 rural adults

	Popn change 1990-05	25-34 year olds change 1990-05	Pct 16-64 Working 2000	Pct Poor 2004
Amenity Boom Rocky Mtn	+71%	+41%	72%	10%
Amenity and Decline Pacific NW	+12%	-1%	68%	14%
Amenity and Decline Northeast	+3%	-24%	73%	12%
Decline Midwest	-19%	-50%	78%	11%
Chronic poverty Appalachia	-12%	-28%	43%	27%
Chronic poverty Delta	-3%	+2%	56%	29%



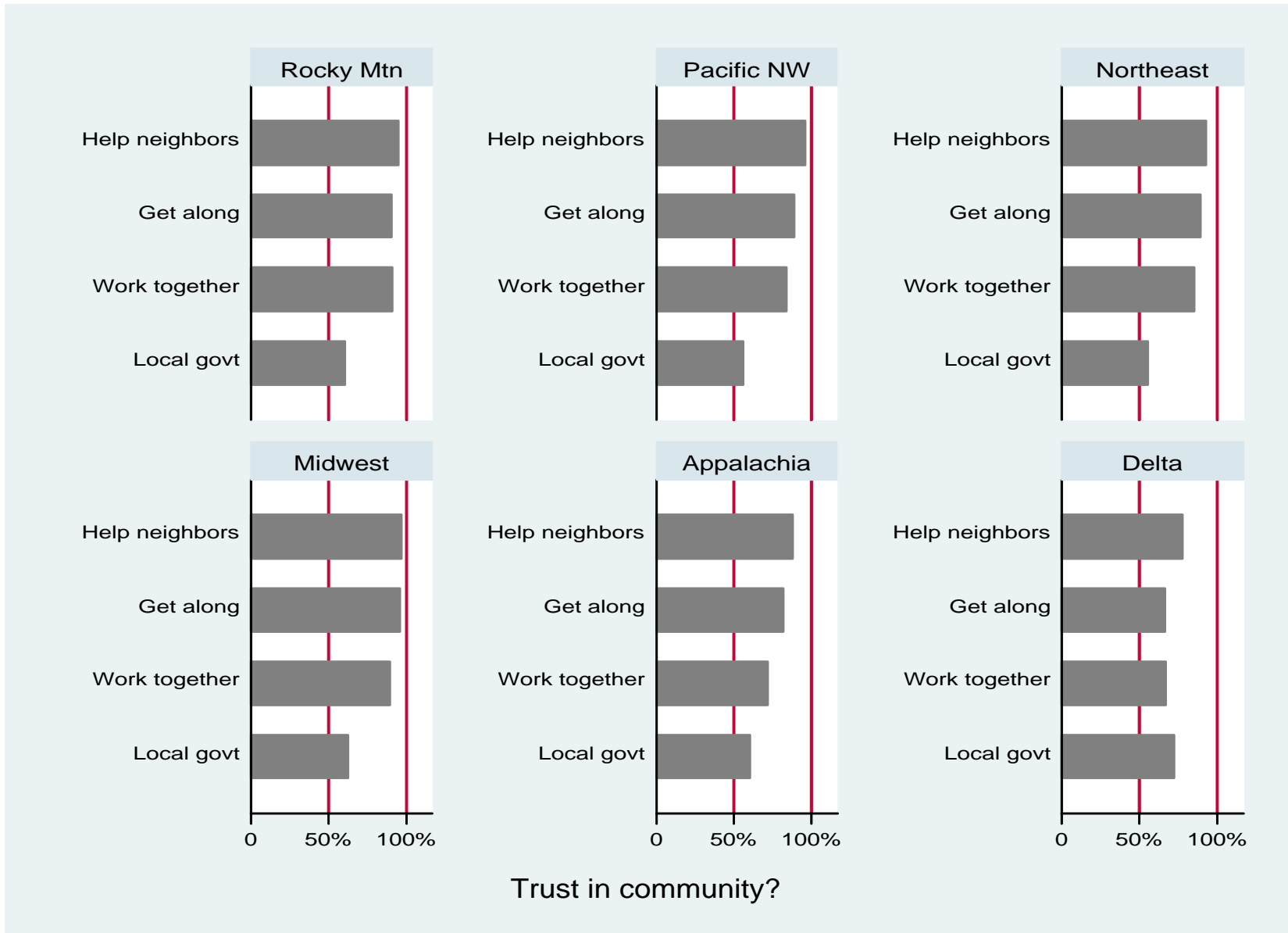
# Different socio-economic profiles



Economic class, income quintiles (percent)

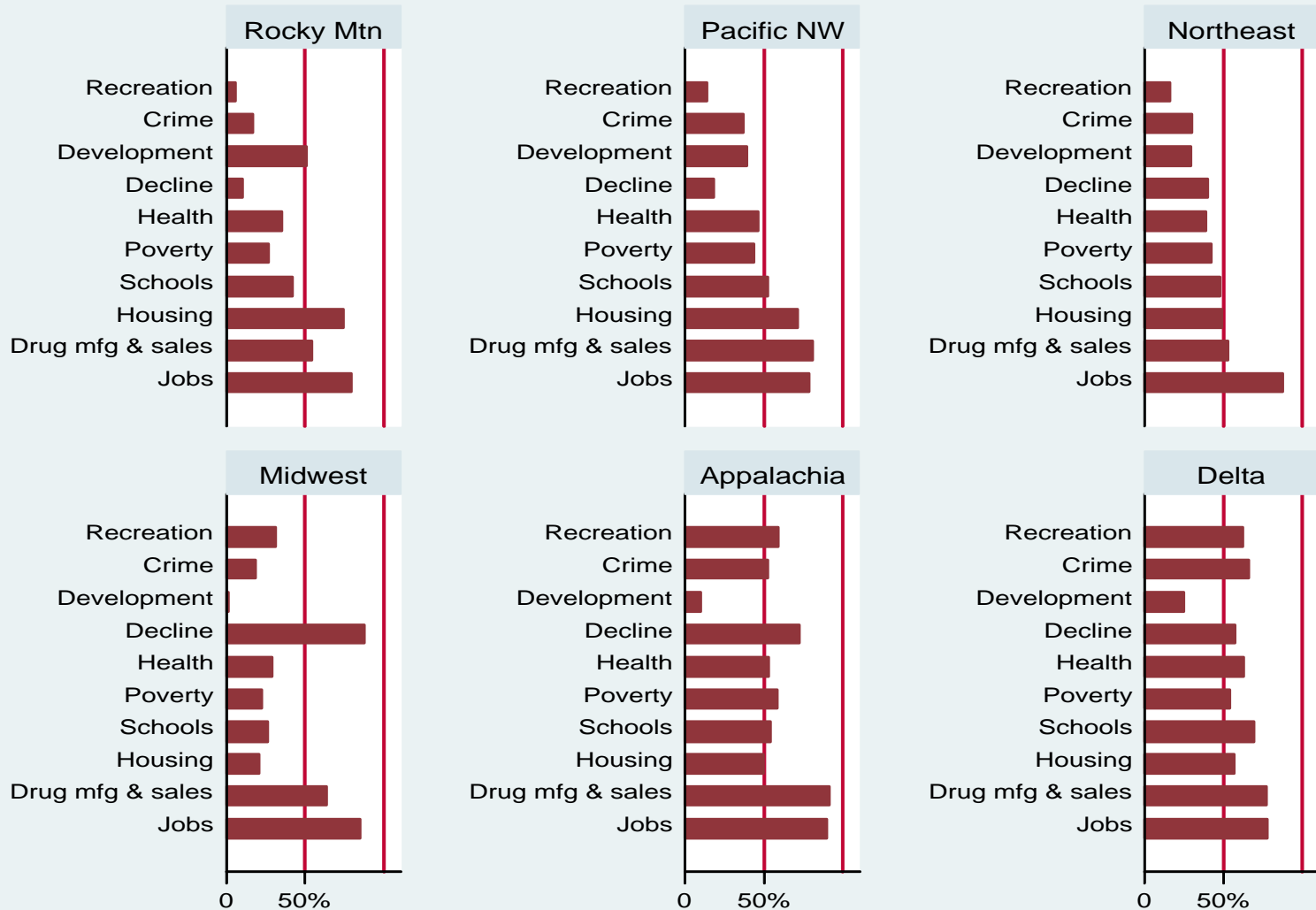


# Trust is high, but lower in poor areas





# Problems in poor rural areas resemble poor urban areas – crime, drugs, health care access, no jobs

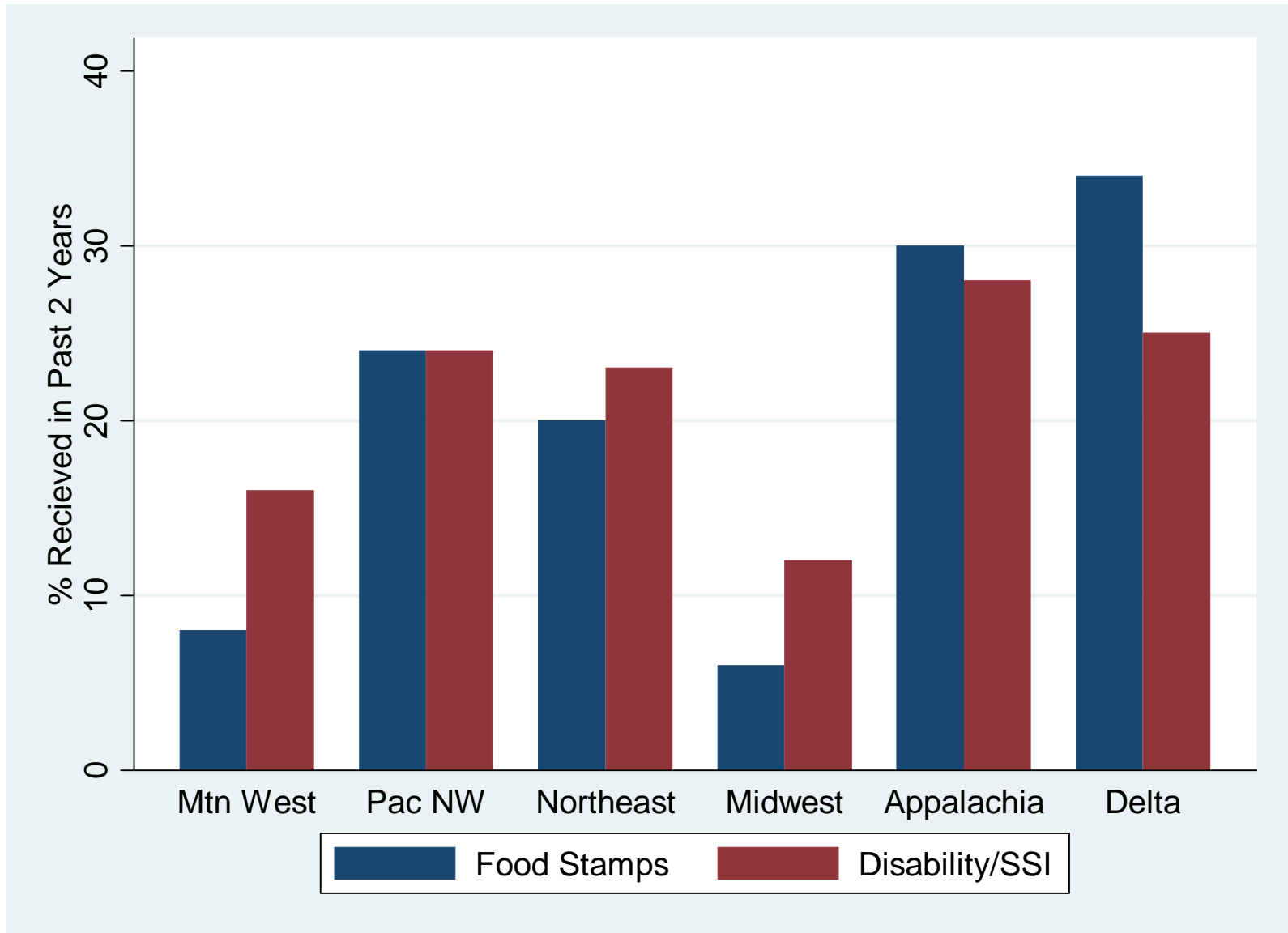


Important problems facing your community?



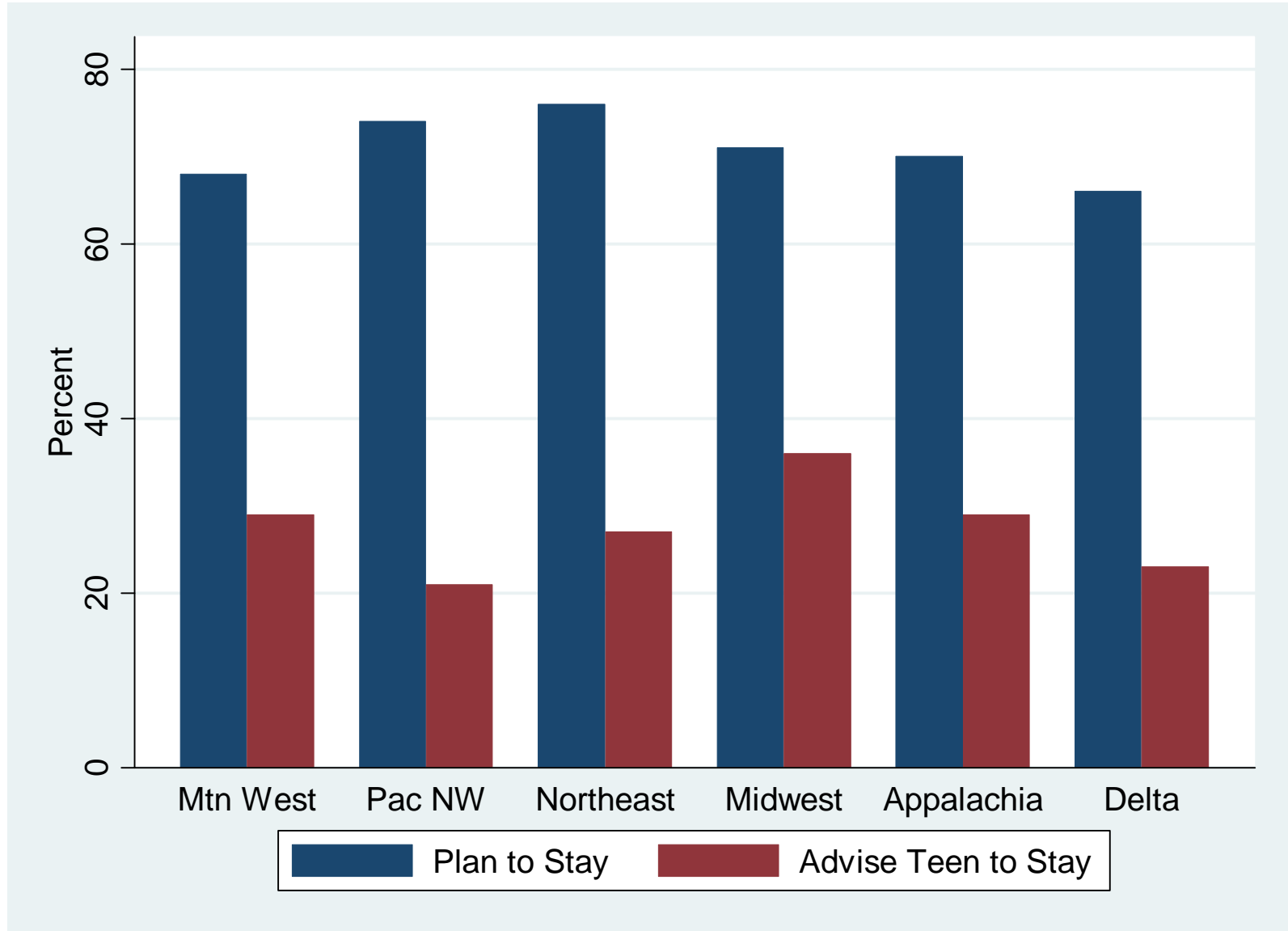


~ 30% rely on food stamps and SSI in poor areas





# People everywhere see little future for youth

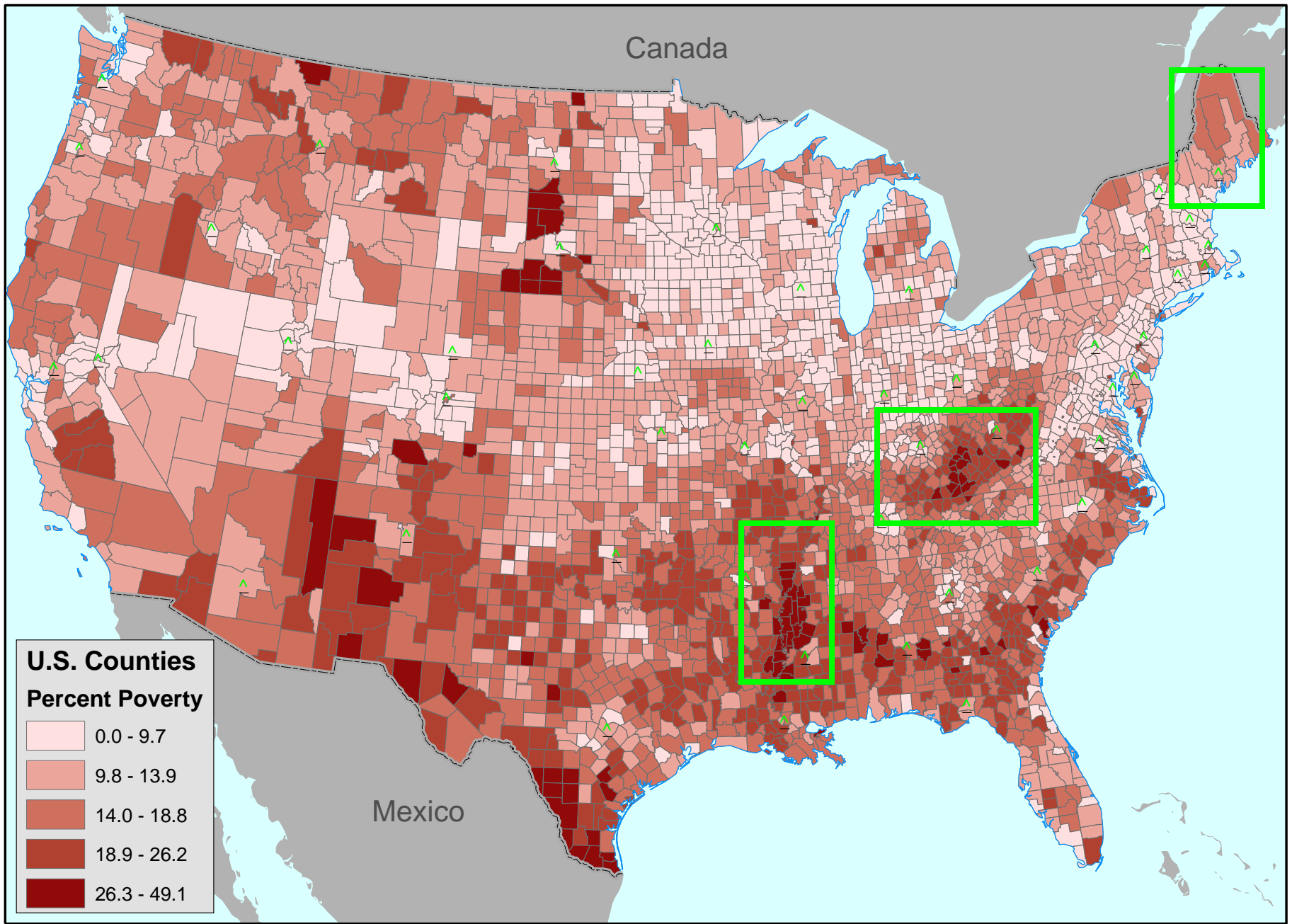


# Poverty as Exclusion

“Poverty is the lack of adequate resources to participate in the accepted ways in society.”

– British sociologist Peter Townsend

Policy makers and scholars in Europe and Britain refer to this notion as “social exclusion” – being cut off from, left out of, the mainstream and participation in the wider society – economically and socially.



Source: U.S.Census <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html> Map created in ArcGIS 9 using ArcMap

Persistently poor rural places are divided into ***the haves*** and ***the have-nots***

- The poor are socially isolated, worlds apart from the haves
- They rely on different institutions, schools, churches, programs
- The have-nots are hard pressed to develop the skills, habits and contacts that they need to participate in the mainstream.

# Culture: the Tool Kit Perspective on how people make choices about family, education and work

- Culture as a “tool kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views.”
- Skills and habits, not preferences and wants – human and cultural capital
- What we know of the world, how it works, where we fit
- What people like us do

# Civic culture – how the community works – shapes the cultural tool kit

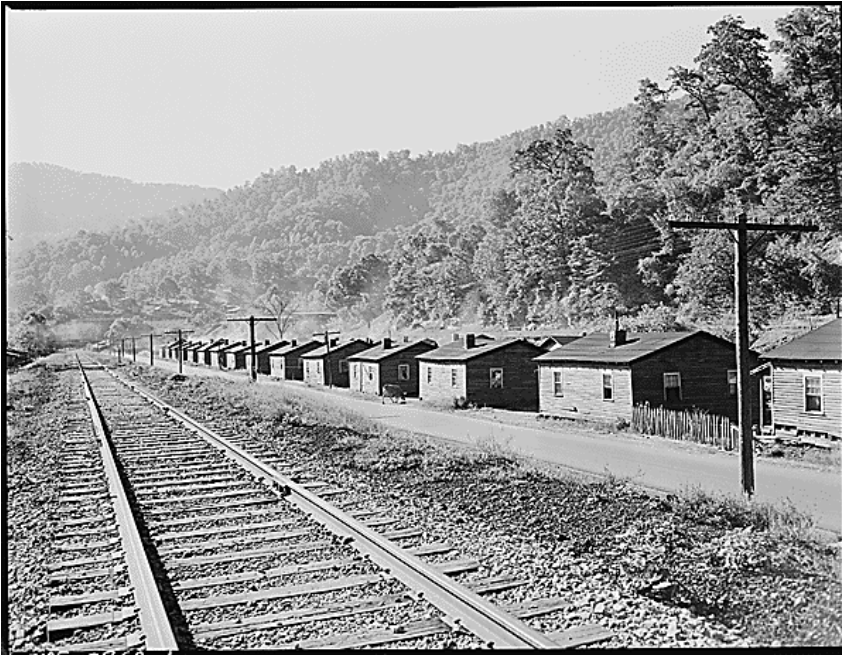
- To what extent do people trust and help one another?
- To what extent do people from all walks of life participate in community affairs and decisions? *Inclusion...*
- To what extent do people invest in the community – in building the common good?

# The middle class is missing in poor rural communities (like inner cities)

- Those with middle incomes ally themselves with the elite, so there is no middle class to hold public officials and employers accountable.
- You get jobs by whom you know, what your family reputation is, and what political faction you support. The public sector is corrupt.
- Civic culture is weak, community institutions are undermined, and fail to build human capital for the poor.



# Appalachia: family name matters



- *“A lot of times you can hear somebody’s last name and before you even meet, you’ve already got the idea that they’re either a good person or they’re sorry as can be.”*
- *Those that have a family with a horrible name, when they come in, we know them, and they’re not worth two cents. They’re sorry as can be – Stealing, selling dope, bootlegging, picked up for driving drunk, in and out of bankruptcy court.”*

# Family, not community, concerns

*“I see people very, very concerned about their own families, and their concern stops there. They’re strongly family oriented here. And they would do anything for their family.*

*They have a great concern for their own family. I've talked to my congregation. This concern ought to go beyond family.”*

*-- Minister in Appalachia*

# Delta: Blacks are the have-nots, and they are still vulnerable



*“If one of the blacks was to piss Jimmy off--you know he drives for a farmer--he could make it hard on him if he said something to his boss. He could make it really hard on the boy, make him get fired.*”

*It’s just over here the blacks don’t have the opportunities that whites does. They’re really disgraded.”*

*--Truck driver’s wife in the Delta*

# Change comes slowly

*Our black middle class are the ones who left.*

*Blacks who have known only the plantation and a life in which they relied on the bossman will vote with him out of habit and deference. ...*

*Uneducated people need to go through someone, they need to get help from Toms that have been there for a long time and the whites have gained control of them.”*

*--African American leader in the Delta*

Places with a middle class have trust and invest in the common good, so the poor can build cultural tool kits that equip them for mobility



*“We're a working community... There's very little difference between people... That's one nice thing about the town, that there doesn't seem to be any class-level distinctions. We have a broad, working middle-class. Most of the people who live here feel that they're part of the community.”*

*You know the people next door and you trust the people next door. We're a small, somewhat isolated community, and therefore, people tend to get along, are open with each other.”*

*-- small business leader in northern New England mill town*

What can bring about change in persistently poor communities?

Development Economist Albert Hirschman talked about the politics of change:

- Exit
- Loyalty and
- Voice

How do these ideas apply to Appalachia (and the Delta?)

# In Appalachia

- Scarce jobs
  - Can't buy a job
  - Even men have a hard time finding work here
  - Work odd jobs, *“scratch is all you can do”*
- Elite say people don't want to work
  - Those that “draw”
  - The “low element”
- People want to work
  - WVA guaranteed income; FSA and TANF

# Enormous Education Challenges

- Broken schools (“nice people” don’t get involved because it is politics)
- The poor are isolated and stigmatized
- Recall cultural tool kit
- High dropout rates
- Illiteracy among even those who graduate



# Opportunities Hilda's Program Taps

- Ties to family and mountains
- Desire to go home and again, “have a dog”
- Eager for opportunity at home
- Hope for kids, “*see that my kids get the opportunity to make something of themselves*”
- And, deep desire for respect, for dignity

# Cultural Tool Kit and Mentors

- Joanne and John in Worlds Apart
  - Benefited from mentors and caring adults who intervened
  - Push and prod others to work, not to give up, not to take handouts
- Expand the tool kits, one conversation at a time
- Good works, but deep change? Where is the scale?

# Civic Culture and Achieving Scale

But community matters. The politics that accompanies inequality in a job scarce environment undermines the civic culture, destroys the social fabric.

How do you change that? You build the middle class through creating middle class jobs. Jobs in the health profession?

Development Economist Albert Hirschman  
talked about the politics of change:

- Exit
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# Thank you

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