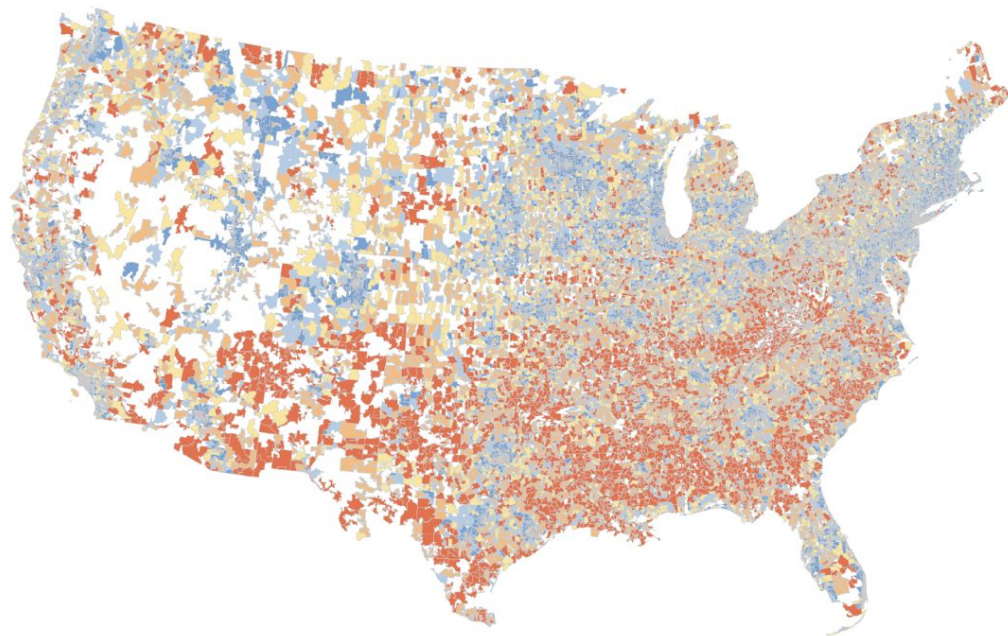


Distressed Communities Index



Key findings

- ❖ **51m Americans**, or 15% of the population, lives in a distressed community.
- ❖ Mountain West states like **Utah** lead the nation on community well-being.
- ❖ Distressed ZIP codes are diverging from the national economy in key ways, notably **population, job, and business growth**.
- ❖ **Young people** are overrepresented in distressed communities.
- ❖ Nearly two-thirds of **suburban** residents live in prosperous or comfortable communities.
- ❖ The **gender gap in educational attainment** widens as communities grow more distressed.
- ❖ Residents of the most well-off counties can **expect to live over 5 years** longer than those in the most distressed.

Components of the DCI



No high school diploma

Share of the 25+ population without a HS diploma or equivalent



Median income ratio

Median household income as a share of metro area median household income



Housing vacancy rate

Share of habitable housing that is unoccupied, excluding unoccupied properties for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.



Change in employment

Percent change in the number of jobs over the past five years.



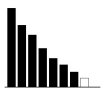
Adults not working

% of the prime age (25-54) population that is not employed



Change in establishments

Percent change in the number of business establishments over the past five years.



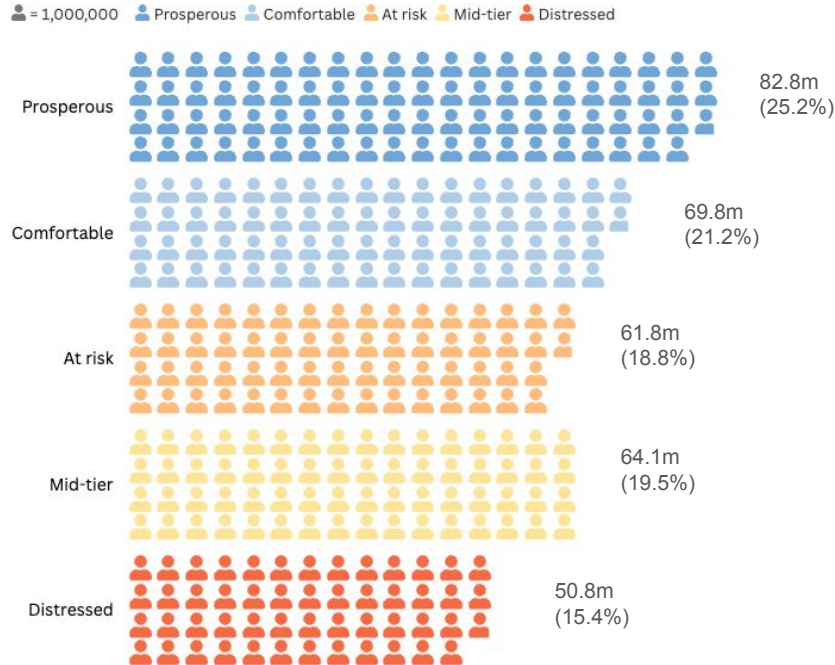
Poverty rate

% of the population below the poverty line

The DCI ranks ZIP codes on each indicator, combines them, and then places each community into quintiles reflecting where it stands on the national spectrum of well-being.

50.8 million Americans live in distressed ZIP codes...

Population by DCI quintile



...but Americans gravitate to communities with higher levels of well-being.

One-quarter of the U.S. population resides in a prosperous top-quintile ZIP code.

Wide gaps in well-being stratify American communities.

Distressed ZIP codes contend with net job losses and business closures, even as the national economy grows around them.

Quintile mean of each component of the DCI

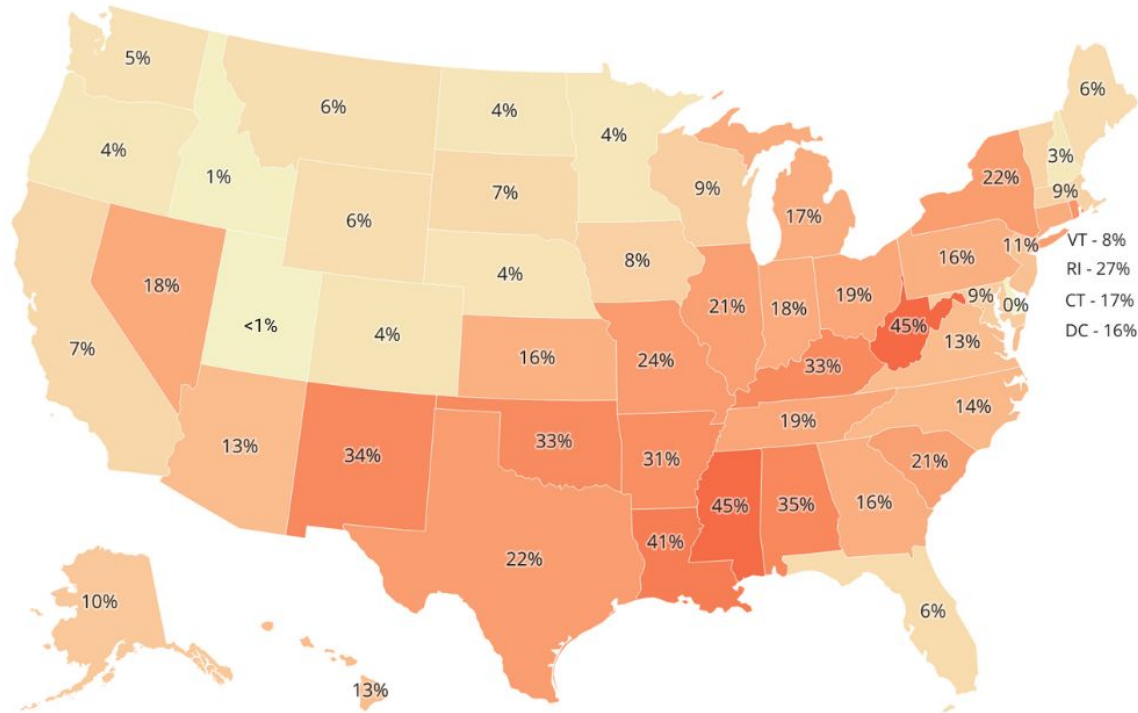
Quintile	No high school diploma	Poverty rate	Housing vacancy rate	Median Household Income	Prime age adults not working	5-year change in employment	5-year change in establishments
Prosperous	4.4%	4.9%	4.0%	\$113,278	14.4%	22.3%	14.0%
Comfortable	7.1%	7.7%	6.1%	\$89,307	17.2%	12.4%	8.5%
Mid-tier	9.8%	10.6%	7.9%	\$72,862	20.5%	9.8%	6.8%
At risk	13.2%	14.3%	10.0%	\$61,930	25.3%	5.7%	3.9%
Distressed	17.8%	21.8%	14.1%	\$48,252	33.4%	-3.2%	-2.2%
National	10.5%	11.8%	8.4%	\$77,128	22.2%	9.4%	6.2%

Where are Distressed Communities?



Nationwide, 15% of the population lives in a distressed ZIP code. This varies across states from 45% in Mississippi to less than 1% in Utah.

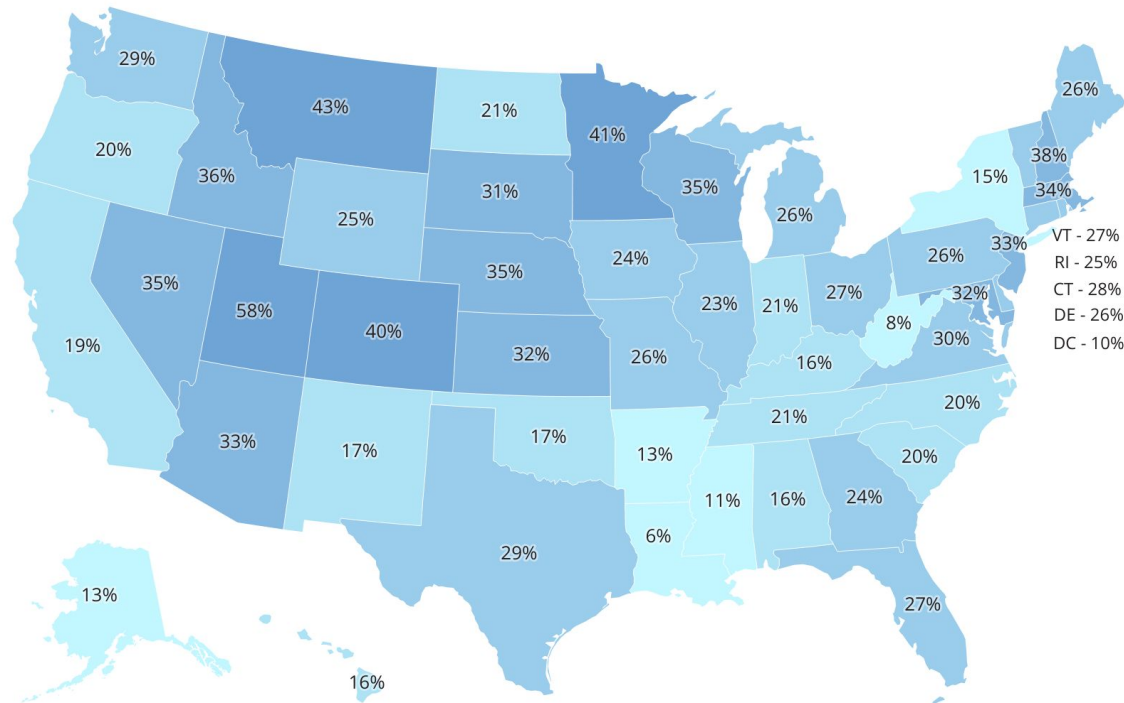
Share of state population residing in distressed (bottom quintile) ZIP codes



Source: EIG analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data

Nationwide, 25% of the population lives in a prosperous ZIP code. This varies across states from 58% in Utah to 6% in Louisiana.

Share of state population residing in prosperous (top quintile) ZIP codes

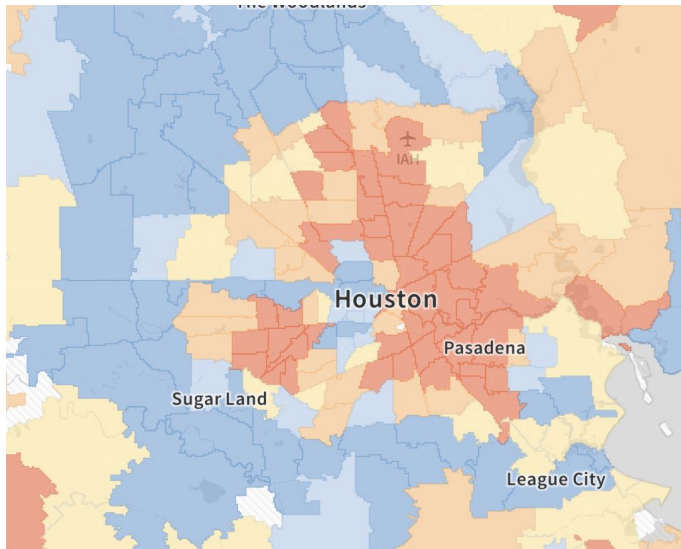


Source: EIG analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data

Large Sun Belt counties feature large divides in well-being.

Harris County, TX

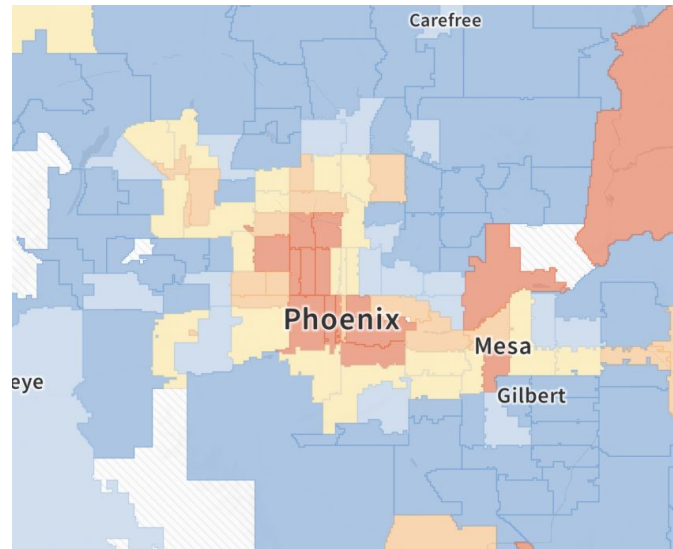
Largest total number of distressed community residents



1.4m in distressed ZIP codes
1.1m in prosperous ZIP codes

Maricopa County, AZ

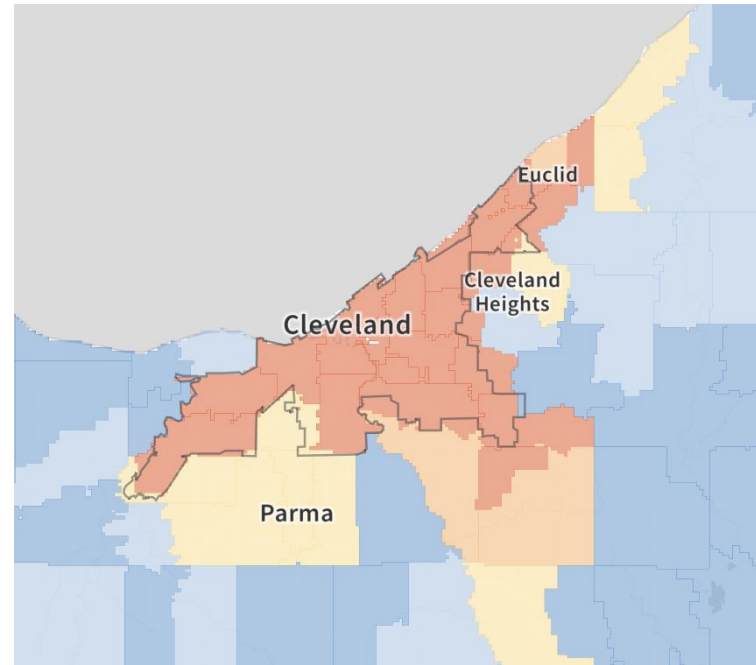
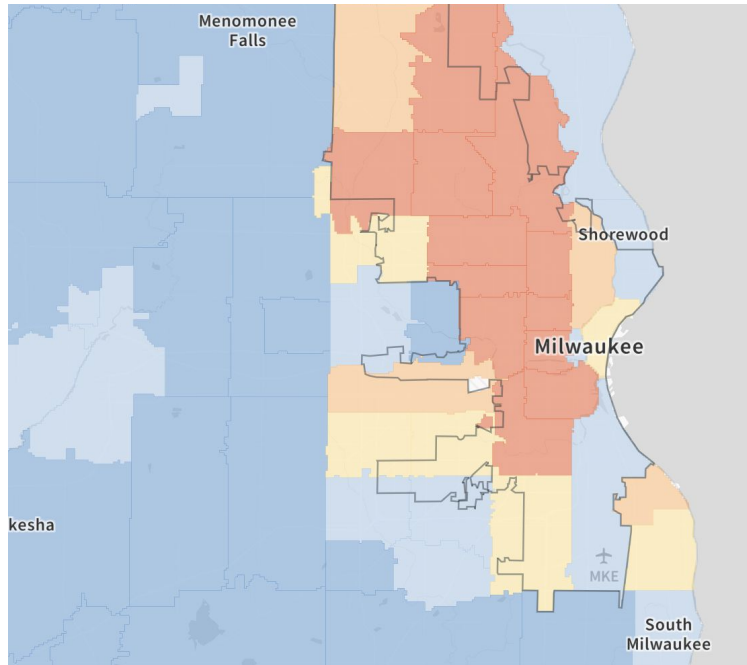
Largest total number of prosperous community residents



1.8m in prosperous ZIP codes
450k in distressed ZIP codes

Economic distress closely follows municipal boundaries.

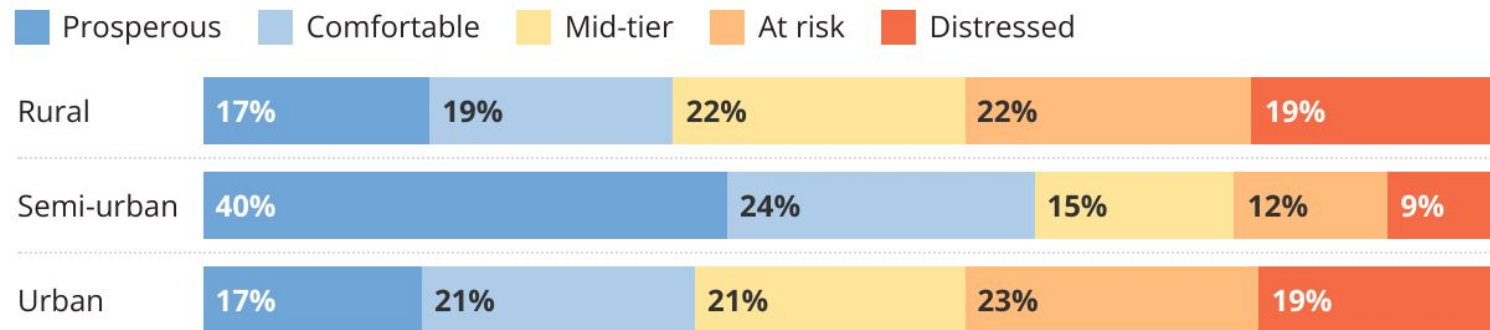
The pattern is especially common in older cities in the Northeast and Midwest



Semi-urban (mainly suburban) areas dominate the landscape of American prosperity.

Nearly two-thirds of people living at semi-urban densities are in prosperous communities.

Share of the population in each density category by DCI tier

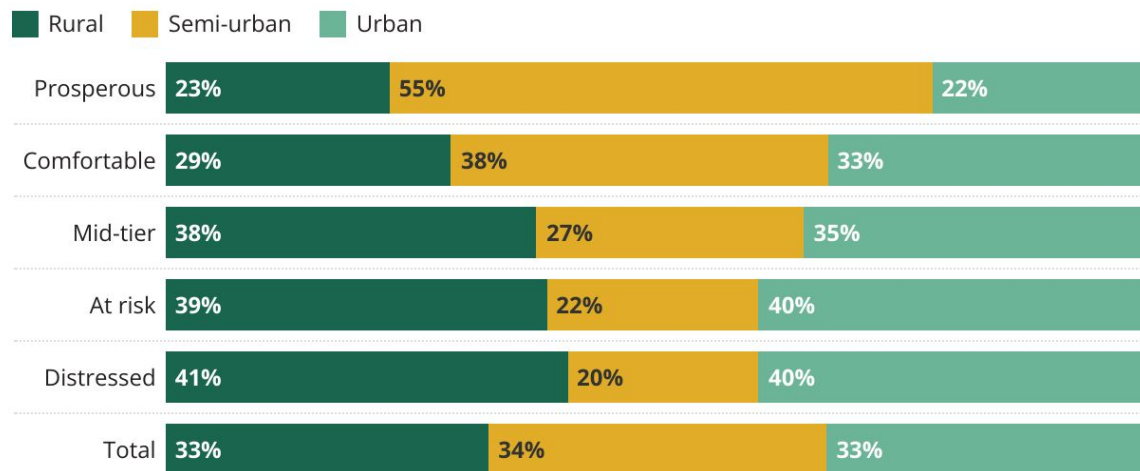


Note: semi-urban includes suburban, exurban, and small town areas, but suburban is the predominant form.

Source: EIG analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data

Suburban communities contain more than half of all Americans who live in prosperous ZIP codes.

Density distribution of each quintile's population



Residents of distressed ZIP codes are evenly split into urban and rural settings, with only a sliver in suburban ones.

Note: semi-urban includes suburban, exurban, and small town areas, but suburban is the predominant form.

Source: EIG analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data

The most prosperous U.S. counties are on the fringes of high-income metro areas. The most distressed are all in the rural South.

10 most prosperous U.S. Counties

	County	Population	Distress Score
1	Lincoln County, SD	68K	0.00
2	Wasatch County, UT	36K	0.03
3	Boone County, IN	73K	0.06
4	Oconee County, GA	43K	0.10
5	Nantucket County, MA	14K	0.13
6	Loudoun County, VA	427K	0.16
7	Washington County, MN	272K	0.19
8	Delaware County, OH	221K	0.22
9	Dallas County, IA	104K	0.26
10	Douglas County, CO	368K	0.29

10 most distressed U.S. counties

	County	Population	Distress score
1	Dimmit County, TX	9K	100.00
2	Wheeler County, GA	7K	99.97
3	East Carroll Parish, LA	7K	99.94
4	Claiborne Parish, LA	14K	99.90
5	Buchanan County, VA	20K	99.87
6	Jim Hogg County, TX	5K	99.84
7	Holmes County, MS	17K	99.81
8	Claiborne County, MS	9K	99.78
9	Lee County, AR	9K	99.74
10	Lake County, TN	7K	99.71

Note: ACS 5-Year Estimates are used for population as well to maintain source consistency across the DCI.

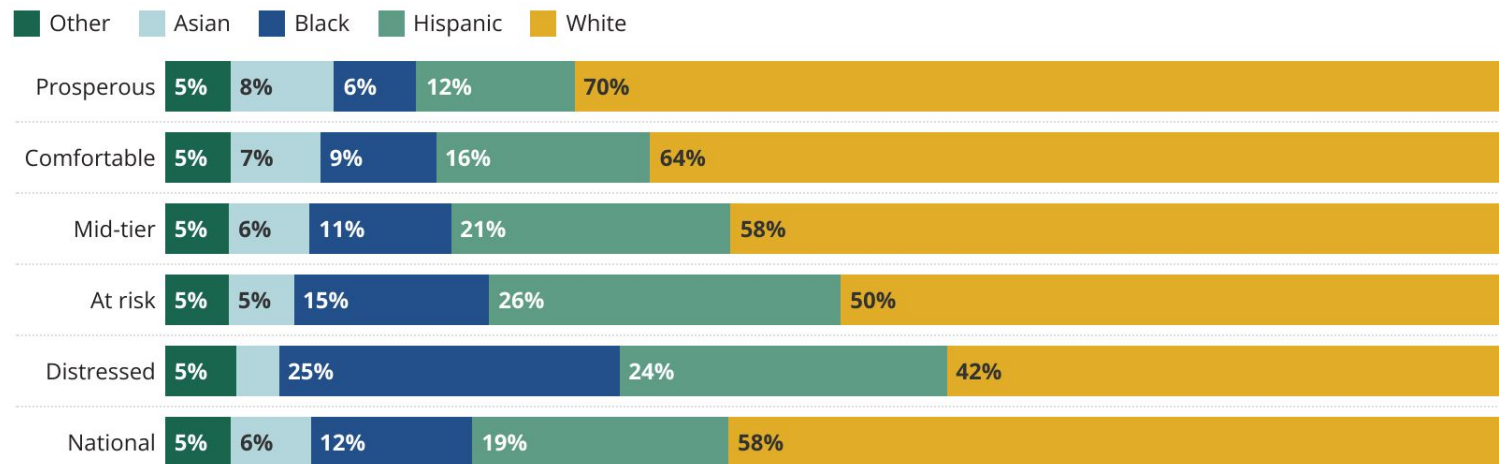
Source: EIG analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

Who lives in Distressed Communities?



Blacks and Hispanics represent one-third of the nation's total population but more than half of those in distressed ZIP codes.

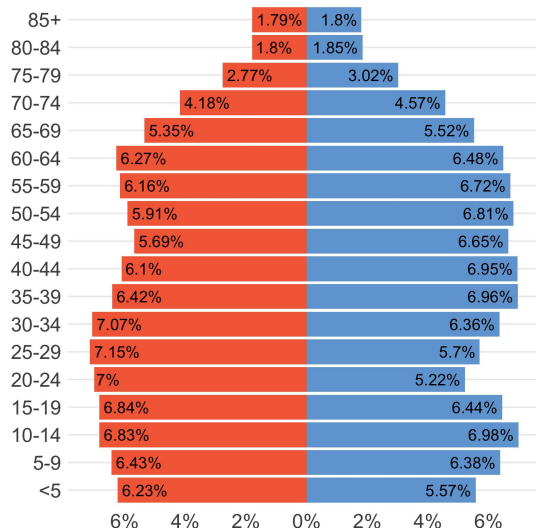
Race distribution across distress quintiles



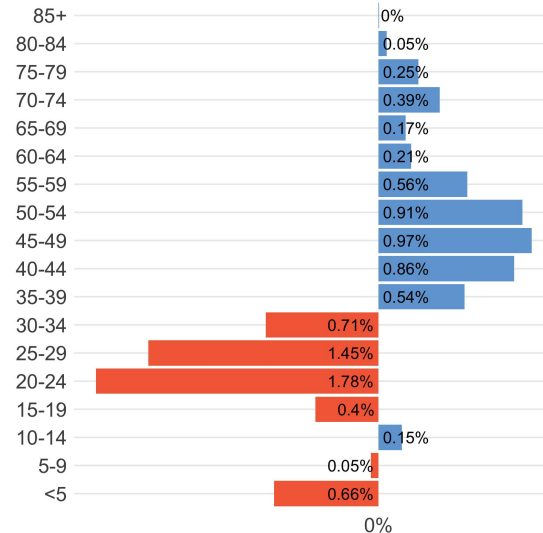
Young children and young adults are over-represented in distressed communities; middle-aged Americans concentrate in prosperous ones.

Age distribution for Distressed vs Prosperous ZIP codes

Age distribution

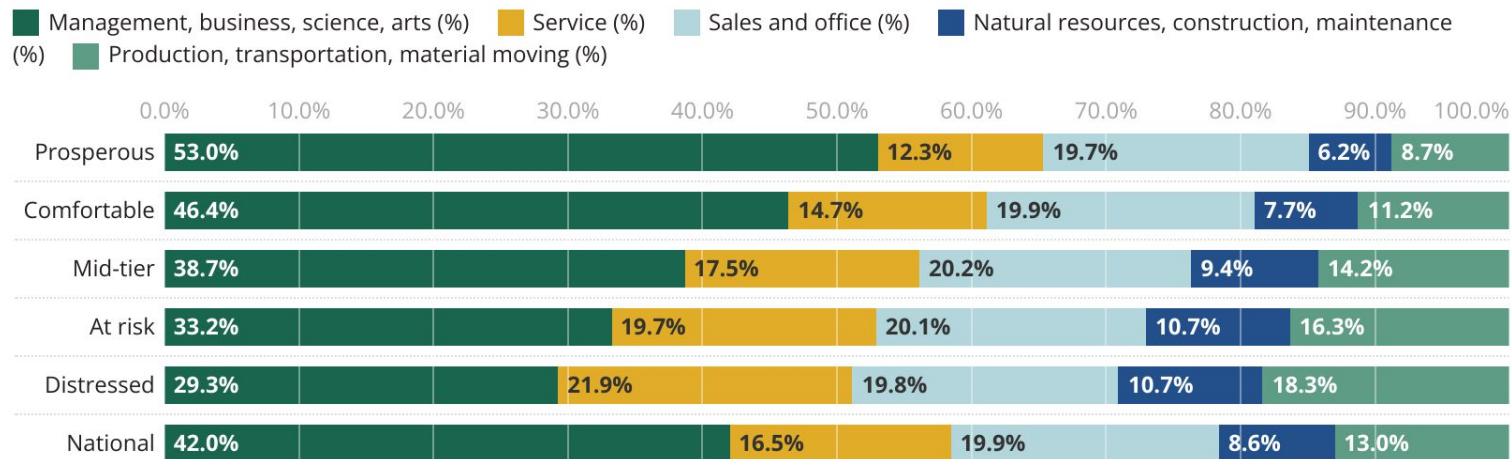


Difference



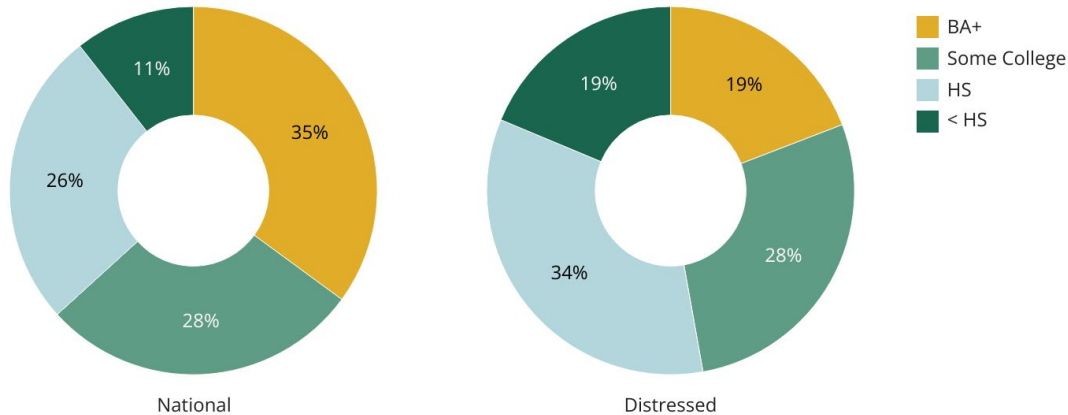
Adults in distressed ZIP codes are the most likely to work in lower-wage service occupations or production industries.

Distribution of the share of employed 16+ population by occupation and DCI quintile



53% of adults in distressed communities have completed a high school education *at most*.

Highest level of adult educational attainment



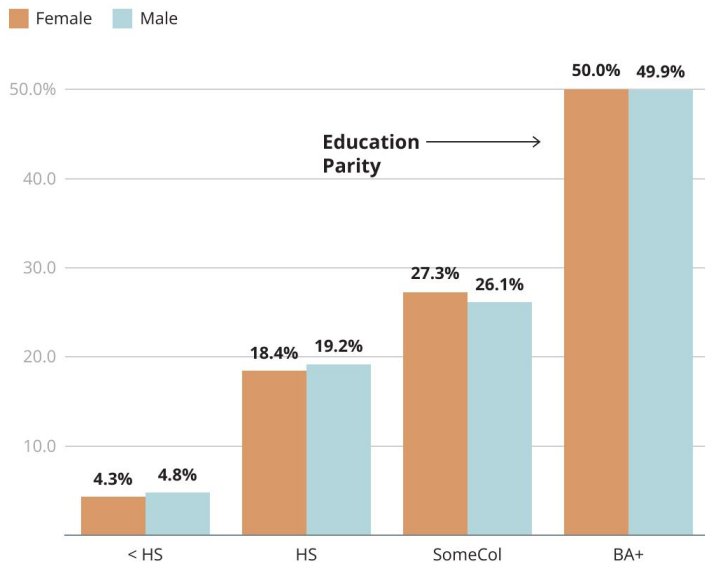
Nationally, 63% of the population has at least some college education...

...but in distressed communities, only 47% do.

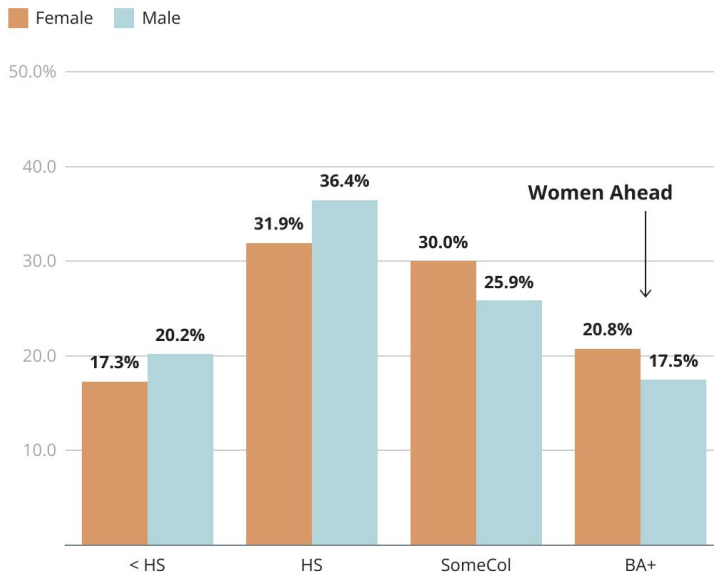
In prosperous communities, men and women have similar levels of education. In distressed ones, women are ahead.

Gender gap in adult educational attainment (women - men)

Prosperous ZIP codes



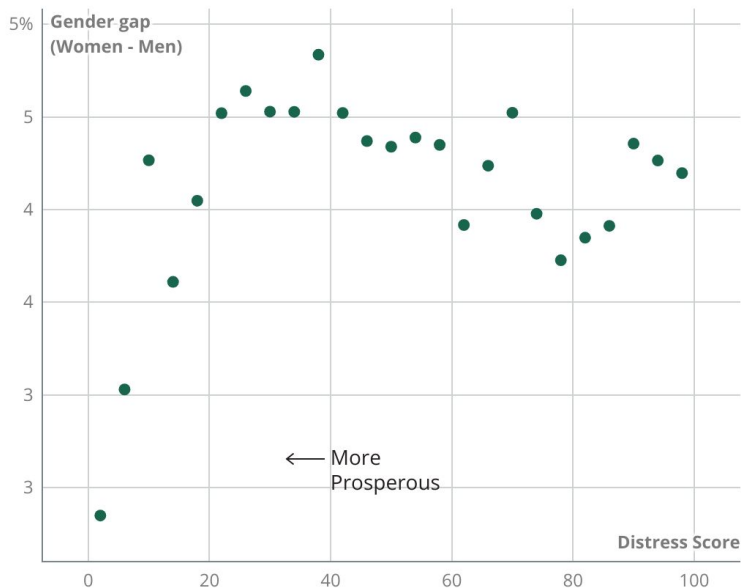
Distressed ZIP codes



In prosperous communities, men and women have similar levels of education. In distressed ones, women are ahead.

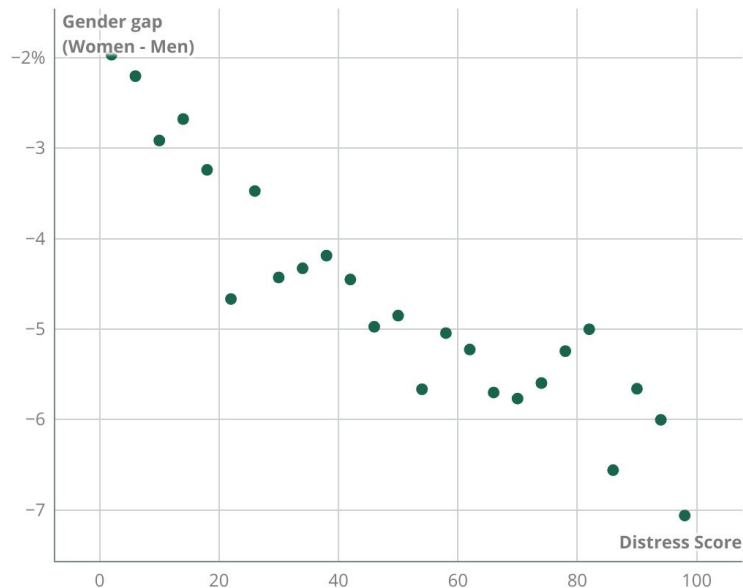
Gender gap in % of adults with a BA+

Binned scatter



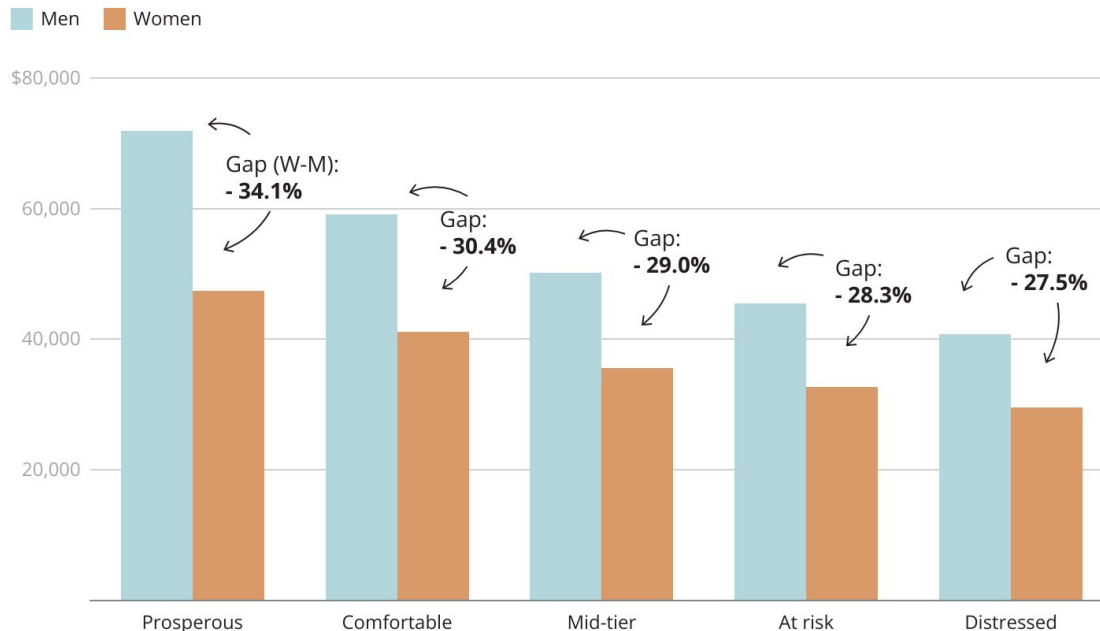
Gender gap in % of adults with a HS diploma

Binned scatter



Despite educational parity, women confront the largest earnings gap in prosperous communities.

Gender gap in median earnings by distressed quintile



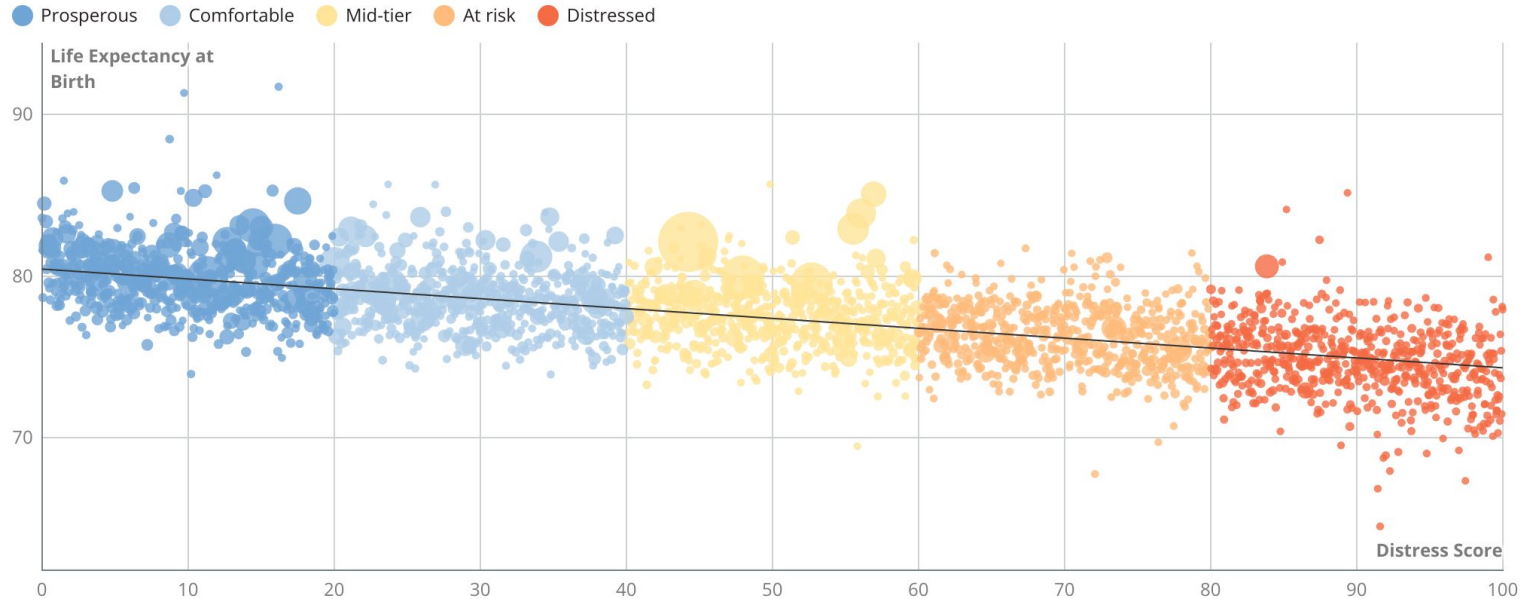
Even in distressed communities, women's educational advantage isn't enough to close the earnings gap.

What can the DCI tell us about inequality?



Residents of distressed counties live about 5 years shorter on average than those of prosperous counties.

Life expectancy at birth by DCI score (0-100)

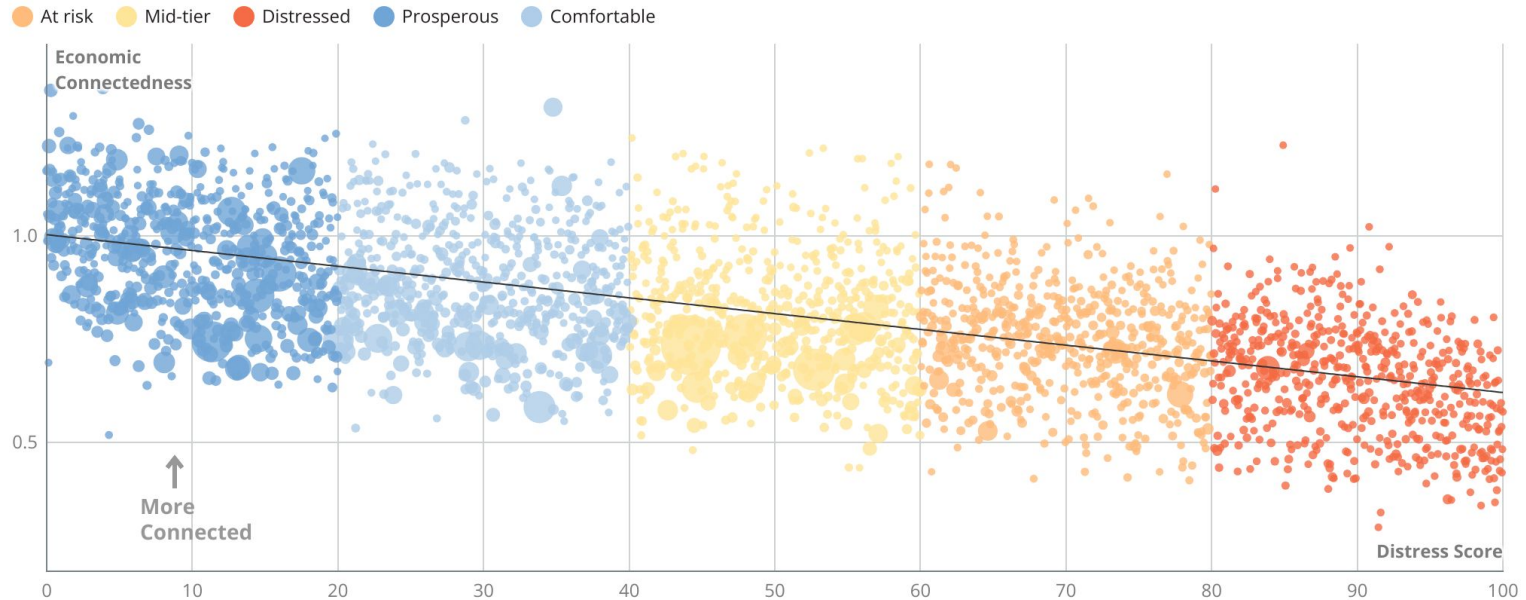


Note: County-level data.

Source: EIG analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. Life expectancy data provided by Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation

Residents of distressed areas have fewer social ties to people higher up the earnings distribution.

Economic connectedness by DCI score (0-100)



Note: County-level data.

Source: EIG analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. Connectedness data provided by Opportunity Insights

Income growth over the past decade has been strongest in mid-tier communities...

Median household income growth

Average ZIP code in each quintile, 2013-2023

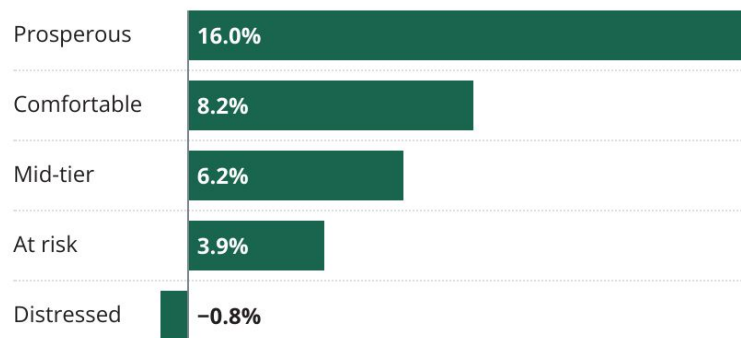


...but population growth has been strongest in prosperous ones.

Today's top ZIP codes have added more than twice as many people over the past decade as any other tier.

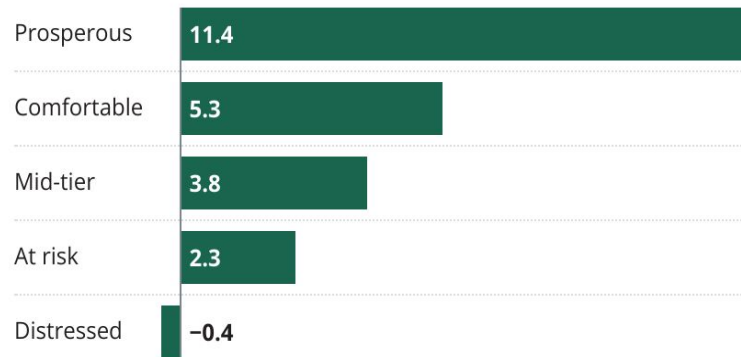
Population growth rate

By quintile, based on current distress scores
2013-2023



Total population growth (millions)

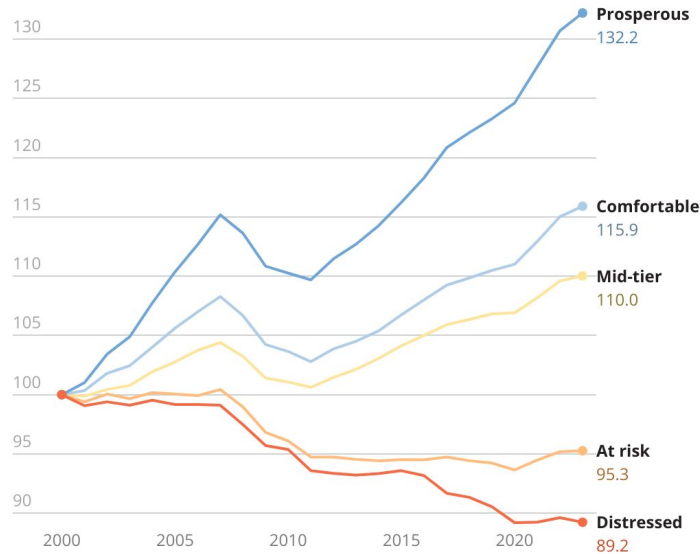
By quintile, based on current distress scores
2013-2023



Distressed counties have 10 percent fewer jobs and businesses than they did in 2000, while prosperous ones are up 30 percent.

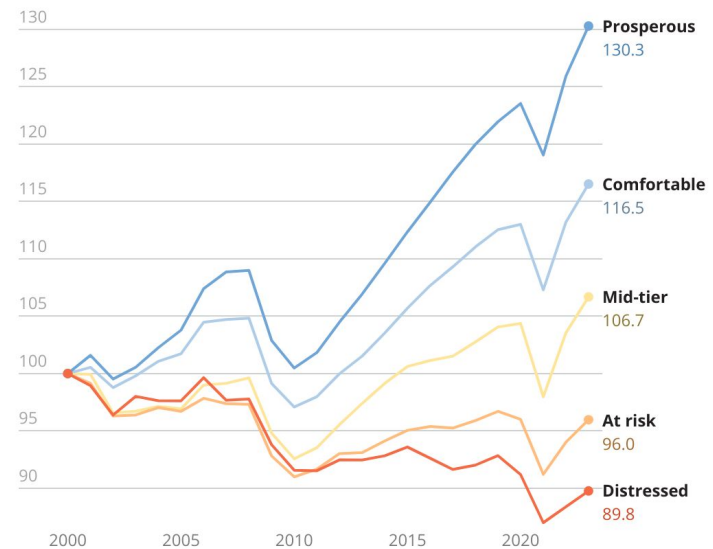
Change in establishments

By quintile, based on current distress scores
(indexed levels with 2000 = 100)

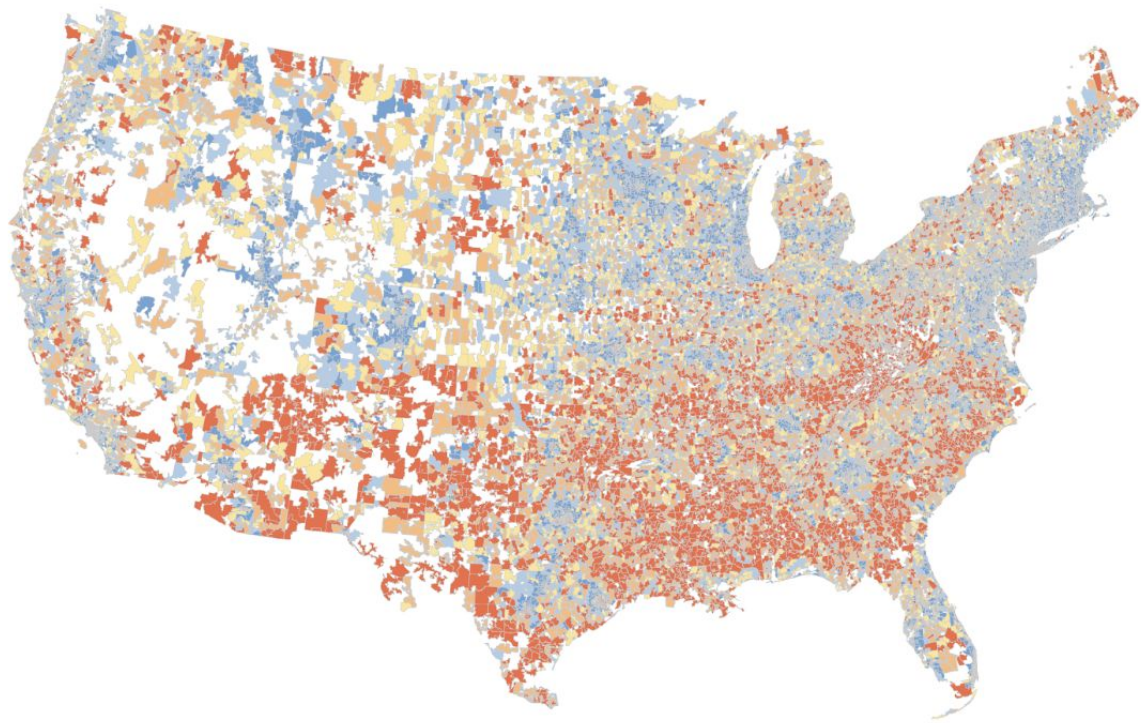


Change in employment

By quintile, based on current distress scores
(indexed levels with 2000 = 100)



Distressed Communities Index



Explore the interactive
map and learn more at
eig.org/dci

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