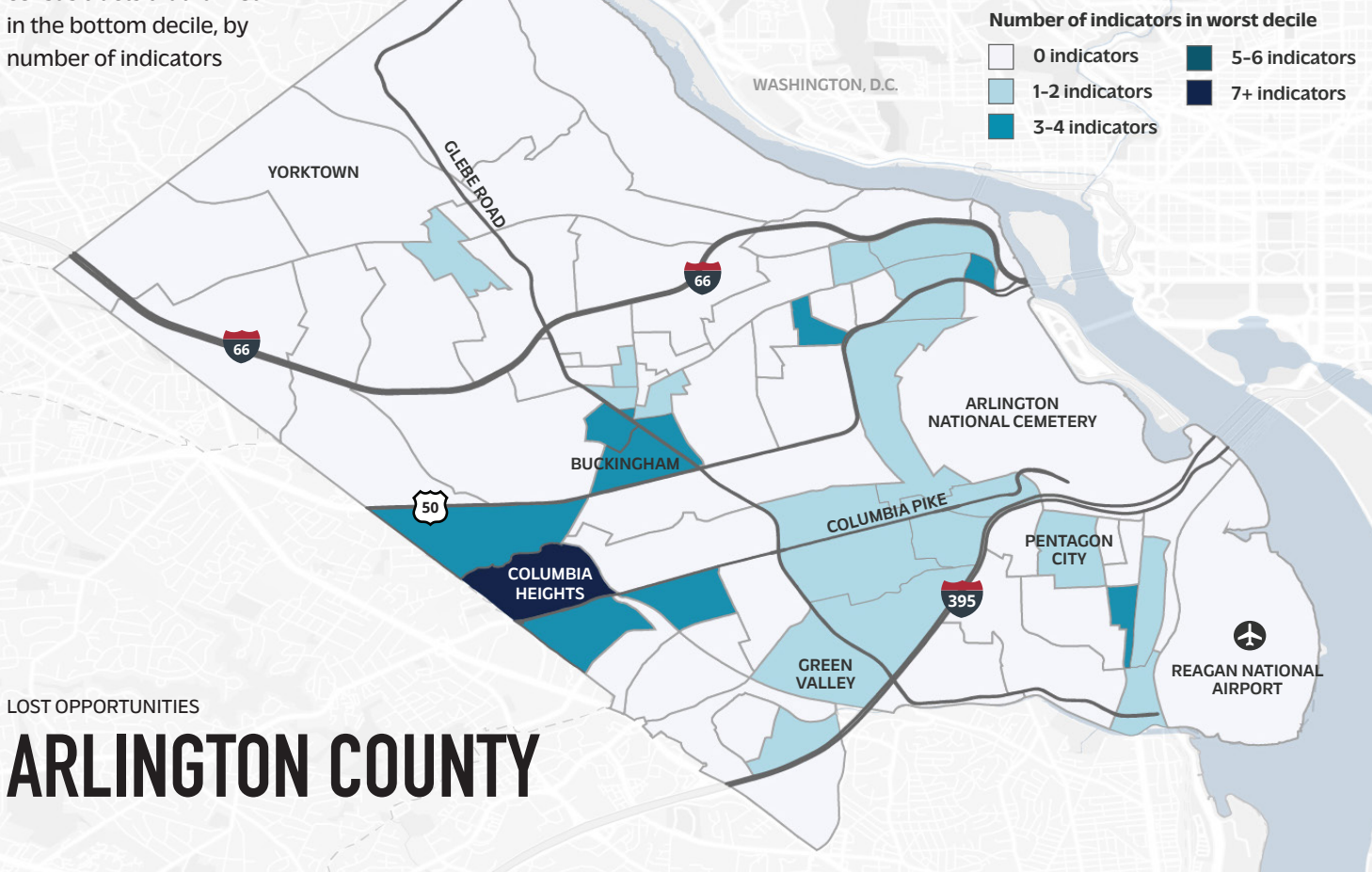


Figure 1. Arlington County census tracts that ranked in the bottom decile, by number of indicators



THE PERSISTENCE OF DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBORHOODS IN ARLINGTON COUNTY

Arlington County is known for its good health, but health statistics at the county level can hide stark disparities. Life expectancy varies by 11 years across the county and premature death rates vary more than 5-fold. These disparities exist largely because of differences in social and environmental conditions that affect health, from education and income to housing and transportation. A 2017 report commissioned by the Northern Virginia Health Foundation identified “islands of disadvantage” across Northern Virginia. That report was based on census data collected over five years in 2009–2013. The foundation’s new report examines data from 2017–2021 to identify areas that have experienced progress and setbacks over the decade. The report divides the region’s tracts into deciles. Deciles were used to group data into ten equally sized groups of census tracts. For each indicator, the bottom decile represented the 10% of tracts in Northern Virginia with the worst outcomes.

The new report found that areas of concentrated disadvantage persist in Arlington County. Figure 1 highlights tracts in Arlington County that ranked among the bottom 10% on multiple indicators in 2017–2021. Tracts with the darkest shading were in the bottom decile on seven or more indicators. For example, census tract 1022 in the Arlington Mill area along Columbia Pike ranked among the bottom 10% on nine indicators, with a poverty rate of 19%. Only 29% of adults had a Bachelor’s degree, 9% of housing was

overcrowded, and 23% of the population was uninsured. In that Arlington Mill tract, 13% of the population was Asian, 20% was Black, and 45% was Hispanic.*

During this period, Arlington County became more racially and ethnically diverse. The maps in Figure 2 show which areas of the county experienced growth in each racial and ethnic group. Socioeconomic progress occurred in areas of Arlington County that were identified as “islands of disadvantage” in the Northern Virginia Health Foundation’s 2017 report. For example, census tract 1020.03 in Buckingham, where 19% of the population was Black and 26% was Hispanic, saw its poverty rate fall from 21% to 14%. Median household income increased from \$38,125 to \$56,207. Some of this progress may reflect efforts in Arlington County to increase investments in marginalized communities and adopt equity-oriented policies

However, many tracts that were already struggling in 2009–2013 experienced further economic setbacks. For example, in census tract 1036.02 in the National Landing area of Crystal City[†], the poverty rate rose from 9% to 19%, the share of households with limited English increased from 3% to 15%, and overcrowded housing increased from 3% to 7% (Table 1). These conditions disproportionately affected people of color. While the share of the population that was White decreased from 75% to 36%, the share that was Hispanic increased from 3% to 24%, the share that

was Asian increased from 15% to 28%, and the share that was Black increased from 3% to 11%.

Setbacks of this sort occurred throughout Arlington County. Low-income tracts in Hall’s Hill, Lyon Park/Fort Myer, and Columbia Pike experienced increases in poverty between 2009–2013 and 2017–2021.

The period examined in the new report included the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the region experienced devastating health and socioeconomic setbacks. The pandemic also brought federal, state, and local “COVID relief” programs. Low-income households experienced an increase in benefits through SNAP, Medicaid, and other federal supports that were discontinued in 2023. It is unclear whether the footprint of disadvantage in Arlington County will shift as these benefits expire.

Gentrification

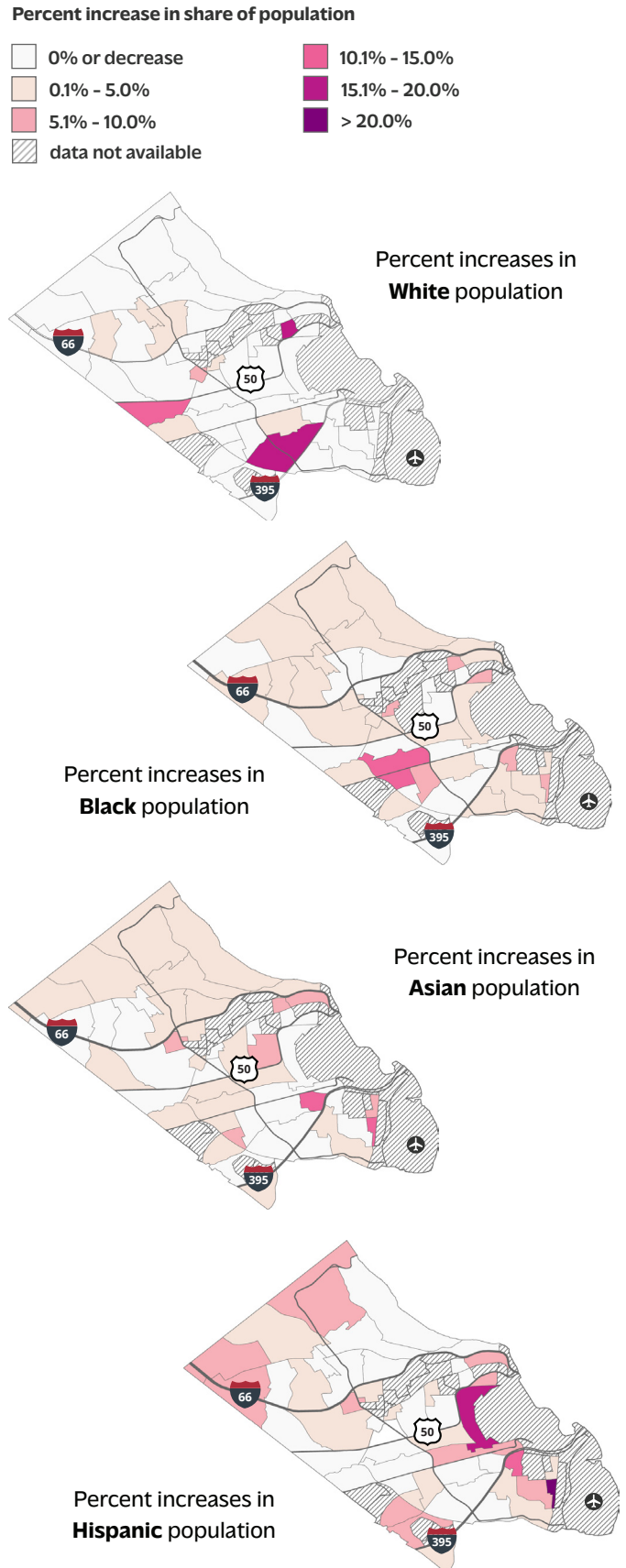
Progress in some areas likely reflected gentrification. For example, in tract 1031 in Green Valley/Nauck, the poverty rate fell from 18% to 10% and the share of adults with a Bachelor’s degree increased from 42% to 64%. However, the share of the population that was White grew from 24% to 41%, while the Hispanic, Black, and Asian populations declined.

The persistence of concentrated areas of disadvantage in Arlington County underscores the need for targeted investment in marginalized neighborhoods. Key priorities to expand opportunity and health across Northern Virginia include investments in education, food security, employment opportunity and benefits, affordable housing, access to health care, environmental justice, and attention to systemic racism and inclusive policies. Arlington County government and local organizations have launched a variety of initiatives in pursuit of these goals, but more must be done. All residents of Arlington County deserve the opportunity to pursue a better life and good health.

Table 1. Socioeconomic conditions in census tract 1036.02 (National Landing)		
	2009-2013	2017-2021
Limited English	3%	15% ↑
Single-parent household	14%	19% ↑
Poverty (all ages)	9%	19% ↑
Reliance on public assistance	1%	4% ↑
Overcrowded housing	3%	7% ↑

*Some of the observed changes in National Landing may relate to land use policy associated with the establishment of the Amazon HQ2 headquarters in the area (e.g. expansion of mixed-income housing).

Figure 2. Census tracts that experienced an increase in racial-ethnic composition between 2009–2013 and 2017–2021



*All references to Asian, Black, and White populations refer to those who do not identify as Hispanic.