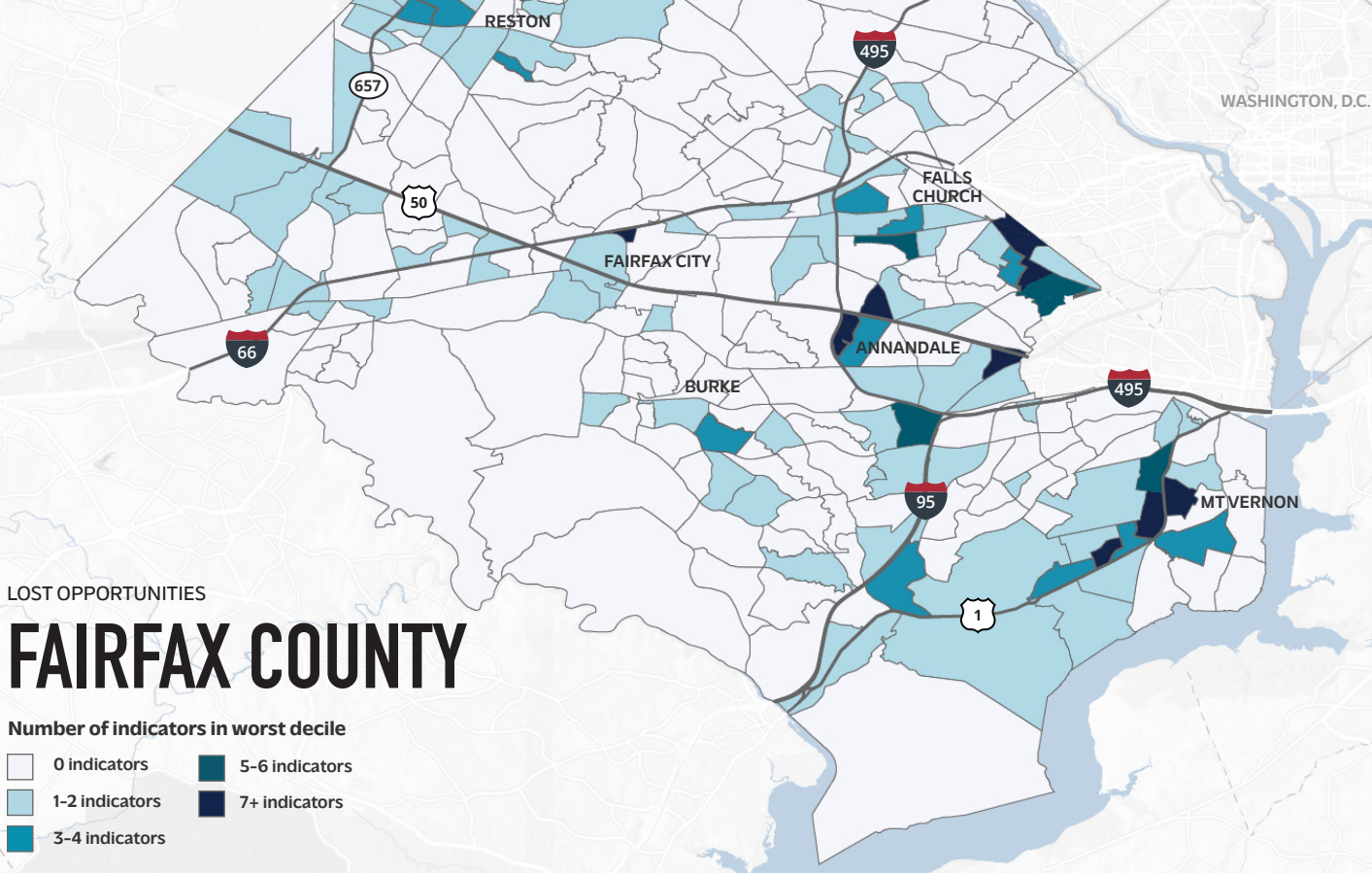


**Figure 1.** Fairfax County census tracts that ranked in the bottom decile, by number of indicators.



## THE PERSISTENCE OF DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBORHOODS IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

Fairfax County is known for its good health, but health statistics at the county level can hide stark disparities. Life expectancy varies by 15 years across the county and premature death rates vary 6-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 Fairfax County. Figure 1 highlights tracts in Fairfax 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 4516.01 in Bailey’s Crossroads ranked among the bottom 10% on 10 indicators,

with a poverty rate of 40%. Nearly half (47%) of adults lacked a high school diploma and only 21% had a Bachelor’s degree. People of color and immigrants were disproportionately exposed to adverse living conditions. In that Bailey’s Crossroads tract, 85% of the population was Hispanic.\*

During this period, Fairfax 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 Fairfax County that were identified as “islands of disadvantage” in the Northern Virginia Health Foundation’s 2017 report. For example, census tract 4916.01 in Chantilly, where 45% of the population was Asian and 25% was Hispanic, saw its poverty rate fall from 23% to 3%. Median household income increased from \$70,000 to \$81,618. Some of this progress may reflect efforts in Fairfax 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 4154.01 in Hybla Valley, the poverty rate rose from 15% to 17%, median household income decreased from \$60,800 to \$59,390, and the share of adults with a Bachelor’s degree decreased (Table 1). These conditions disproportionately affected people of color. While

the share of the population that was White decreased from 42% to 22%, the share that was Hispanic increased from 25% to 55%.

Setbacks of this sort occurred throughout Fairfax County. Low-income tracts that experienced increases in poverty between 2009–2013 and 2017–2021 were located in Herndon/Reston, Centreville, Fair Oaks/Fairfax, Merrifield, West Springfield, Bailey’s Crossroads, Annandale, Franconia, Hybla Valley, Fort Belvoir, and Lorton.

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 Fairfax County will shift as these benefits expire.

### Gentrification

Progress in some areas likely reflected gentrification. For example, in tract 4822.01 in Reston, the poverty rate fell from 28% to 8% and median household income climbed from \$73,906 to \$95,250. However, the share of the population that was White grew from 46% to 55%, while the Hispanic and Black populations declined.

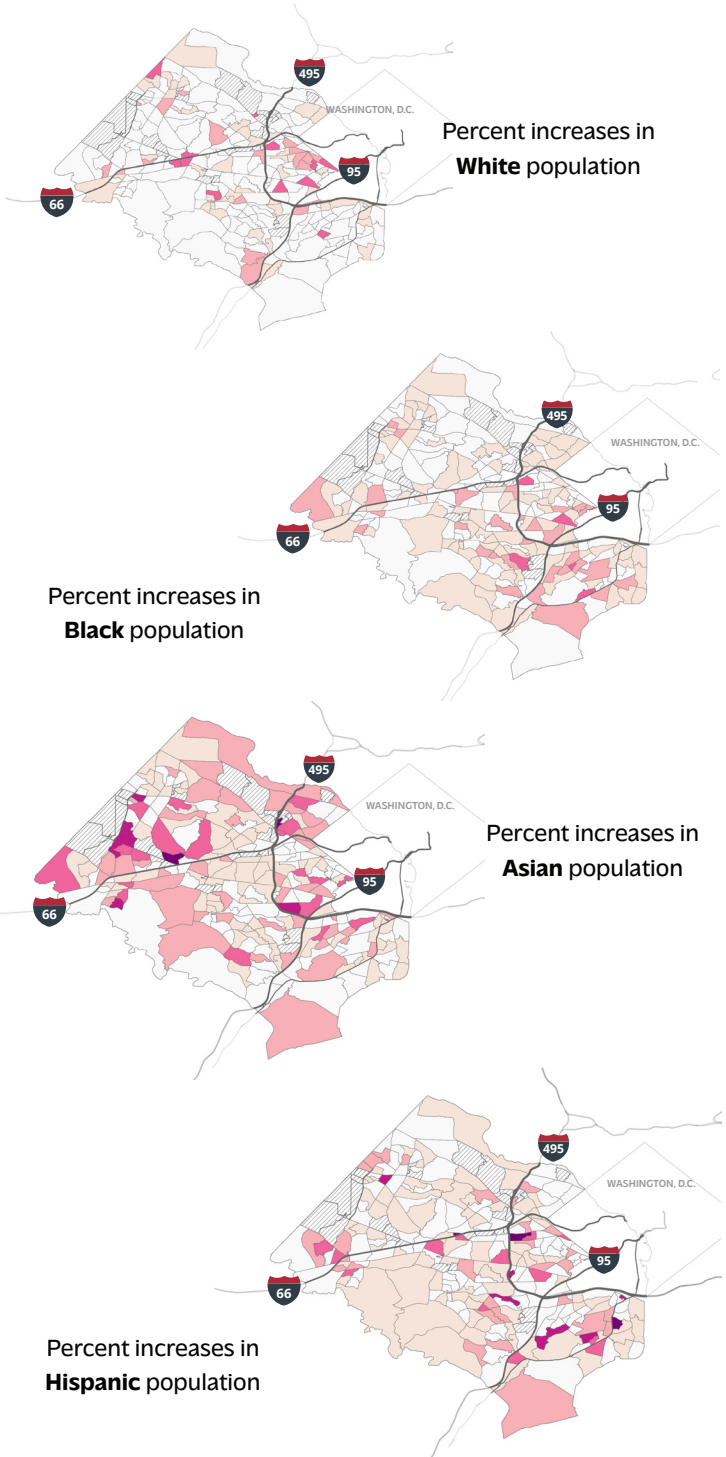
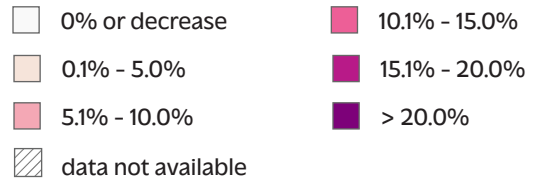
The persistence of concentrated areas of disadvantage in Fairfax County underscores the need for targeted investment in marginalized neighborhoods. Key priorities to expand opportunity and health across Northern Virginia include investments in education, food security, employment opportunity and benefits,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

**Table 1. Socioeconomic conditions in census tract 4154.01 (Hybla Valley)**

	2009-2013	2017-2021
Bachelor’s degree	39%	27% ↓
Limited English	8%	16% ↑
Median household income	\$60,800	\$59,390 ↓
Poverty (all ages)	15%	17% ↑
Reliance on public assistance	5%	17% ↑
Overcrowded housing	11%	15% ↑
Uninsured	15%	32% ↑

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

### Percent increase in share of population



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