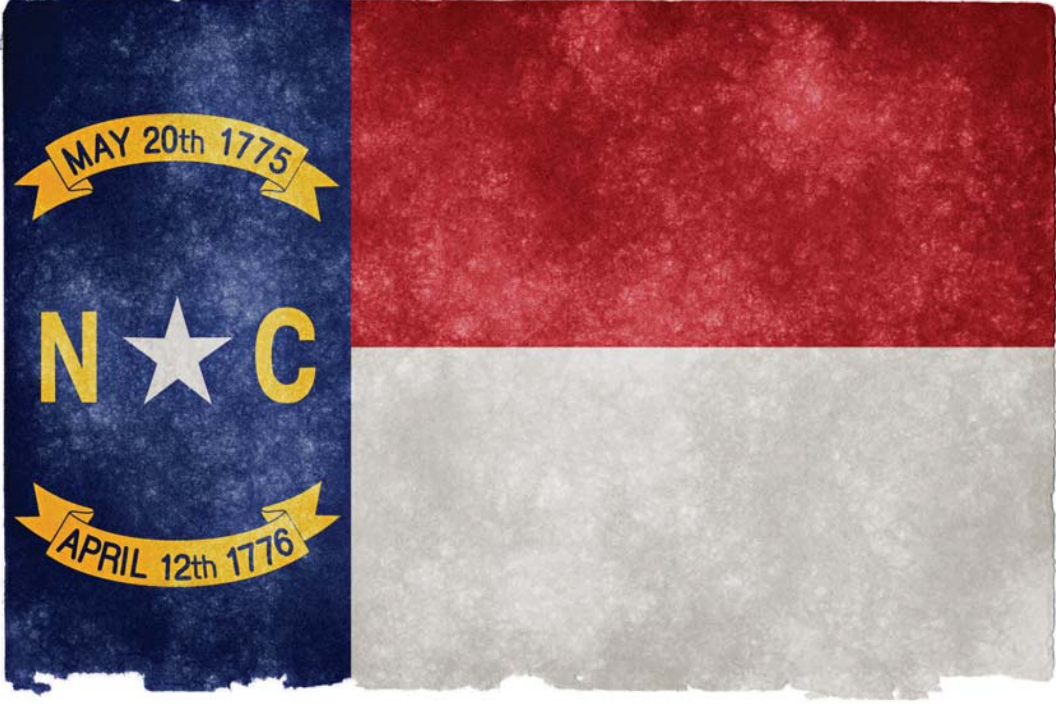




NORTH CAROLINA'S DISTRESSED URBAN TRACTS: A VIEW OF THE STATE'S ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

By William High and Todd Owen
Center for Urban & Regional Studies
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
February 2014

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By
William High
Todd Owen

Center for Urban and Regional Studies
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Campus Box 3410
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
Tel: (919) 362-3074
Fax: (919) 962-2518
curs.unc.edu

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METHODOLOGY

This study updates a 2005 report, *The State of North Carolina Urban Distressed Communities*, prepared by UNC city and regional planning students Allen Serkin and Stephen Whitlow for the North Carolina Metropolitan Mayors Coalition.

Serkin and Whitlow developed a definition of economic distress for their 2005 report that identified distressed Census tracts in North Carolina. They compared the characteristics of urban distressed tracts with North Carolina as a whole and with distressed rural tracts.

This study uses the same definition. To be considered distressed, tracts must meet three criteria:

- **Unemployment** that is 50 percent greater than North Carolina's unemployment rate of 9.7 percent (greater than or equal to 14.5 percent).
- **Annual per capita income** that is one-third lower than North Carolina's per capita income of \$25,256 (less than or equal to \$16,921).
- **Poverty rate** that is 50 percent greater than North Carolina's poverty rate of 16 percent (greater than or equal to 24 percent).

Census Tract Data Analyzed

This report examines Census tract data, rather than metropolitan or county-level data, to gain a more detailed portrait of local conditions for poverty, income, and unemployment.

The Census tract is the smallest geographic unit for which all of the necessary data are available for analysis (some data at the narrower Census-block level are not available because of privacy concerns).

Data for this study are pulled from the 2007-2011 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates. These estimates are extrapolated from household surveys of a sample of the population to provide economic, social, racial, and ethnic characteristics of Census tracts. The 2007-2011 ACS is based on 2010 Census tracts. (Note: Because of this, comparisons cannot be made between findings contained in this report and the 2005 report, which was based on 2000 Census tracts and U.S. Census data, not ACS estimates.)

Urban and Rural Tracts Compared

A key feature of this report is the comparison of distress among urban and rural tracts. The report defines "urban" tracts as those that fall within a Census-designated "urbanized area." The Census defines urban areas as those that:

"...comprise a densely settled core of census tracts...that meet minimum population density requirements, along with adjacent territory containing non-residential urban land uses as well as territory with low population density included to link outlying densely settled territory with the densely settled core."



Photo: Disability Rights Galaxy

The Census classifies urbanized areas as having 50,000 or more people and urban clusters as those with 2,500-50,000 people. For the purposes of this study, all tracts that do not fall within or intersect an urban area are designated "rural." Additionally, this study, in keeping with the 2005 report, defines a county with greater than 200 persons per square mile as "urban" and those with fewer people as "rural."

The report focuses on two primary comparisons:

- Distressed urban tracts compared to North Carolina overall.
- Distressed urban tracts compared to rural tracts.

The report ranks distressed tracts on three criteria (unemployment, per capita income, and poverty rate), then averages those rankings to yield an overall ranking.

INTRODUCTION

North Carolina's shift in recent decades from an agricultural economy based on textiles, tobacco, and light manufacturing to one dominated by technology, pharmaceuticals, and financial services created an economic divide.

Urban counties, particularly those in the Research Triangle and Charlotte areas, became more prosperous while small towns and rural communities across the state struggled to find their footing in the new economy. State and local leaders and policymakers responded with a range of policies, programs, and funding aimed at correcting the economic disparity between rural and urban areas.

This report examines poverty, unemployment, and per capita income at the U.S. Census tract, rather than county, level in North Carolina, updating a 2005 report. This deeper dive into the state's most distressed areas using tract-level data reveals pockets of extreme distress in the state's urban areas. Despite the prosperity of their surrounding communities, these urban tracts are

even more distressed than their counterparts in rural counties.

Among the report's findings:

- 65 percent (106 of 162) of the state's severely distressed census tracts are located in urban areas.
- 20 of the 25 most distressed tracts in North Carolina are urban.
- Per capita income in urban distressed tracts is \$1,300 lower than in rural distressed tracts.
- While urban counties have lower rates of poverty overall, urban distressed tracts experience poverty at a rate that is 10 percent greater than rural distressed tracts.

These findings do not diminish the economic distress suffered by the state's rural areas, but they do shed light on an issue worthy of more research and policy attention.

Overall, more than half a million people in North Carolina live in economically distressed

tracts, defined as having high unemployment and poverty and low per capita income. The people living in these tracts, both urban and rural, are disproportionately persons of color.

Areas of concentrated poverty tend to have higher crime rates, lower housing quality, and poor health outcomes. With high levels of unemployment, more than 50 percent of children living in poverty, and low levels of education, these tracts offer diminished social and economic opportunity, especially for their youngest residents.

This report summarizes key findings about the state's distressed areas and their economic and social conditions to shed light on the economic disparity that exists in both urban and rural areas. It provides information on housing, transportation, and demographic characteristics of these tracts that may be useful in identifying both the causes of economic disparity and solutions.



Photo: James Willamor, Wikimedia

DISTRESSED URBAN TRACTS

The 2010 Census designated 18 urban areas in North Carolina. Each of these areas contains at least one distressed tract.

The urban areas are:

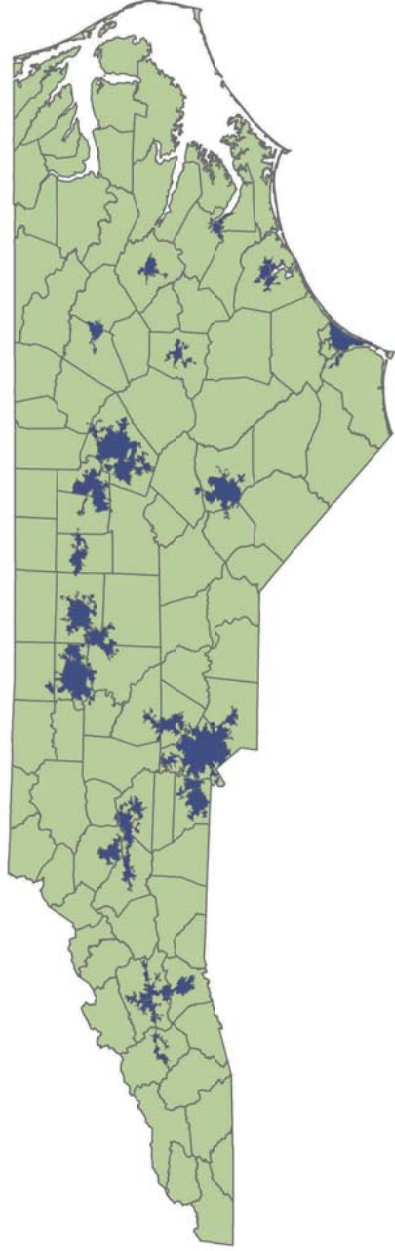
Asheville	Greenville
Burlington	Hickory
Charlotte	High Point
Concord	Jacksonville
Durham	New Bern
Fayetteville	Raleigh
Gastonia	Rocky Mount
Goldsboro	Wilmington
Greensboro	Winston-Salem

The latest Census dropped Kannapolis and added Concord and New Bern to the list of urban areas designated in the 2005 report, which was based on the 2000 Census.

This study finds a total of 162 distressed tracts in North Carolina, 14 more than in the 2005 report. Urban areas contain 65 percent (106) of the state's distressed tracts. Of the remaining 56 tracts, 45 are in Census-designated urban clusters. Only the remaining 11 are located in truly rural areas.

The map below shows the location of North Carolina's 18 urban areas. Appendix I contains maps highlighting distressed tracts in each urban area.

Urban areas contain 65 percent of the state's distressed tracts.



COMPARISON OF REPORTS

The last decade of recession took a clear economic toll on North Carolina, as evidenced by the three key indicators examined in this report:

- The state's poverty rate rose from 12 percent to 16 percent.
- Per capita income fell 7.8 percent, from \$27,417 to \$25,256 (2011 dollars).
- Unemployment nearly doubled, from 5.3 percent to 9.7 percent.

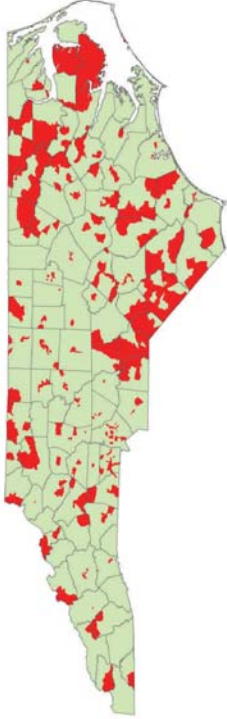
Based on those outcomes, one would expect the number of distressed tracts to increase. However, because the statewide average for those indicators changed since the last re-

port, as shown in this chart, the threshold for designating a tract as distressed rose significantly.

If criteria from the 2005 report were applied to the 2007-2011 ACS data used in this report, the number of distressed tracts in the state would increase from 162 to 413, representing 1.7 million residents.

The map on the left below shows which tracts would qualify as distressed if the 2005 criteria were applied to the 2007-2011 ACS survey used for this report.

The map on the right shows the distressed tracts identified using the current criteria.



Current N.C. distressed tracts using 2005 criteria



Current N.C. distressed tracts identified for this report

Distressed Tract Criteria		
Survey Indicators	2000 Census	2007-2011 ACS
Poverty Rate	18.45%	24%
Per Capita Income	\$13,606 (2011 dollars)	\$16,921 (2011 dollars)
Unemployment	5.1%	14.5%

COUNTY-LEVEL COMPARISON

Seventy-four of North Carolina's 100 counties are considered rural, a legacy of the state's agricultural history. However, 66 percent of the state's 9.4 million residents live in urban counties (counties with 200 persons per square mile or greater).

While the past decade has been difficult for the state as a whole, rural counties have had greater difficulty shaking off the effects of the economic downturn that began in 2008.

A comparison of urban and rural county-level data reveals that rural counties fare worse in every area examined.

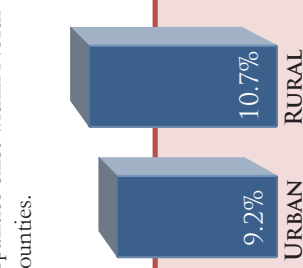
Rural areas have higher unemployment and poverty rates and lower per capita income. They have a higher percentage of older residents and lower percentage of residents aged 18-64, the group considered necessary to sustain a vibrant economy. In fact, the rate of people 65 or older in rural counties is higher by half than in urban counties (10 percent vs. 15 percent).

In addition, only 46.5 percent of the population in rural counties is in the workforce, compared to 51.7 percent of the urban county population.

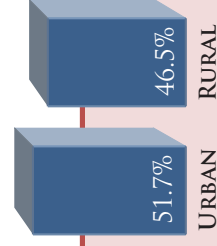
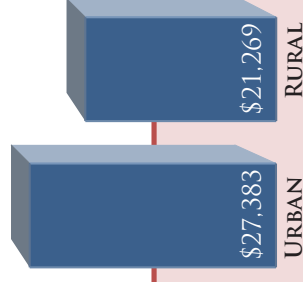
Taken on their own, the county-level data paint a much more favorable picture of life in North Carolina's metropolitan areas. Given those statistics, it is easy to see why economic

development and poverty reduction efforts have focused on rural areas.

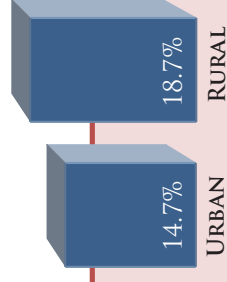
However, these same statistics, analyzed along with data for urban Census tracts, reveal that great disparities exist within North Carolina's urban counties.



PER CAPITA INCOME FOR NORTH CAROLINA COUNTIES



POVERTY RATE FOR NORTH CAROLINA COUNTIES



DISTRESSED TRACTS AND COUNTIES

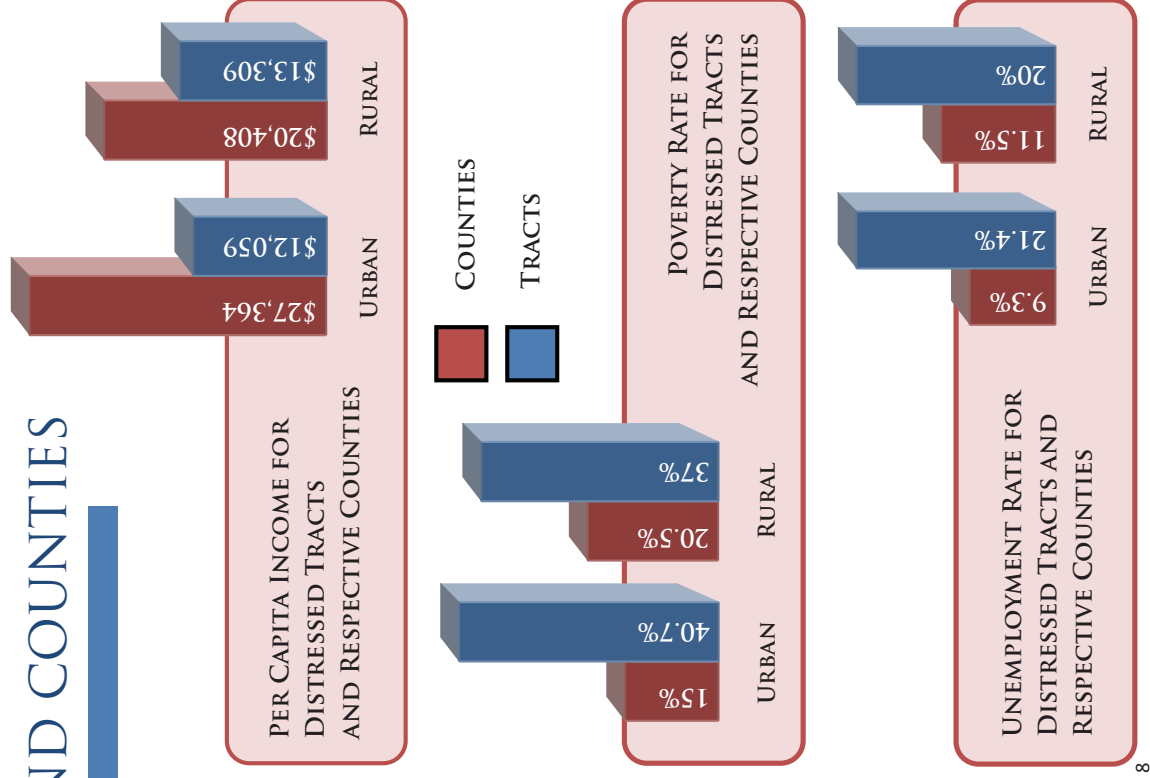
A comparison of tract-level per capita income, poverty, and unemployment data from distressed tracts within North Carolina's urban and rural counties paints a very different picture of prosperity than the county-level comparison.

Per capita income in urban distressed tracts is \$1,300 lower than in rural distressed tracts. In addition, the per capita income gap between urban distressed tracts and urban counties is more than twice that of rural areas (\$15,304 vs. \$7,099).

The poverty rate for urban distressed tracts is more than twice that of the urban counties. Despite urban counties having lower rates of poverty overall, the urban distressed tracts experience poverty at a rate 10 percent greater than rural distressed tracts.

The unemployment rate in urban distressed tracts is more than double that of the urban counties.

As these charts show, not only are urban distressed tracts worse off than rural distressed tracts, but the difference between the tracts and their neighbors is much greater in urban counties.



DEMOGRAPHICS

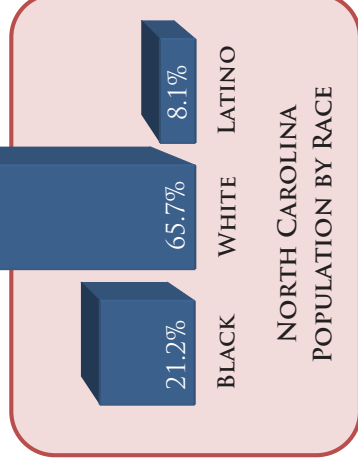
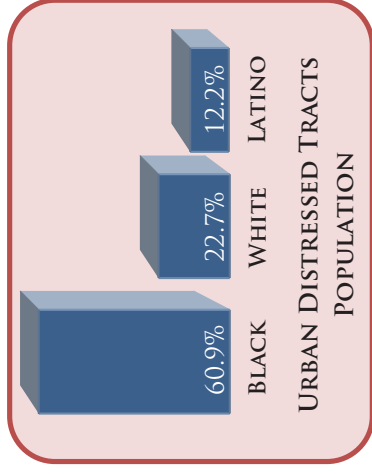
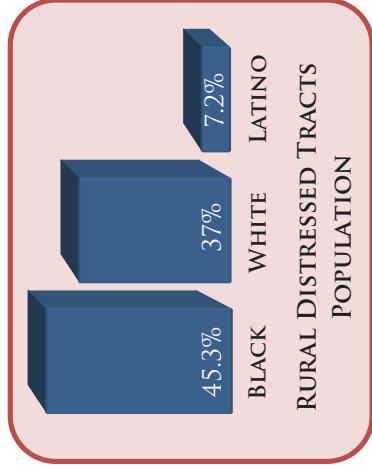
Nearly 580,000 North Carolina residents – more than six percent of the state’s population – live in distressed tracts. That is 30,000 more people than in the 2005 study.

Of these, 357,306 (62 percent) live in urban distressed areas; 221,949 (38 percent) live in rural distressed tracts. By contrast, 53 percent of residents living in distressed tracts in 2000 lived in rural areas.

Residents of distressed tracts are disproportionately minority. In particular, black residents comprise slightly more than 20 percent of all North Carolinians but represent 61 percent of the residents living in urban distressed tracts and a majority of those living in distressed tracts statewide. Notably, nearly 16 percent of all black residents in North Carolina live in a distressed tract.

Latino residents are disproportionately represented in urban distressed tracts, though by a much smaller degree than black residents.

White residents represent 65 percent of the state’s population but only a small share (3 percent) of the distressed population.



ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

North Carolina's distressed tracts, both urban and rural, lag the state as a whole in key economic indicators.

Residents in both urban and rural distressed tracts experience unemployment at more than twice the statewide rate of 9.7 percent.

Despite greater access to potential jobs, residents in urban distressed tracts experience higher rates of unemployment than residents in rural distressed tracts.

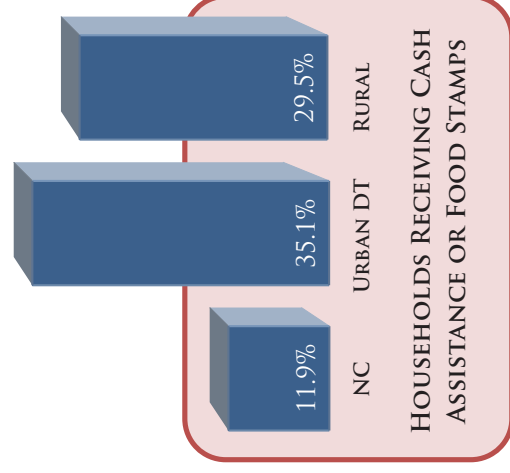
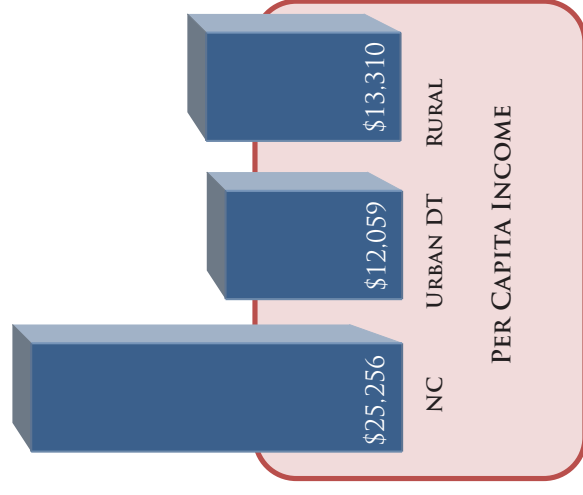
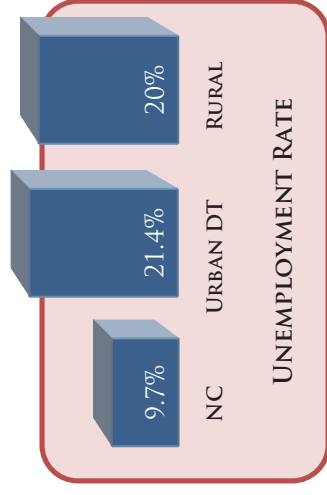
Per capita income in urban distressed tracts is less than half the per capita income for the state as a whole. Higher costs of living in the state's metropolitan areas compound the prob-

lem for the residents of distressed urban tracts, who have lower income levels than their rural counterparts.

Not surprisingly, urban and rural distressed tracts have significantly higher percentages of households receiving cash assistance or nutritional support than the state as a whole. Urban distressed tracts experience greater rates of public assistance than rural distressed tracts.



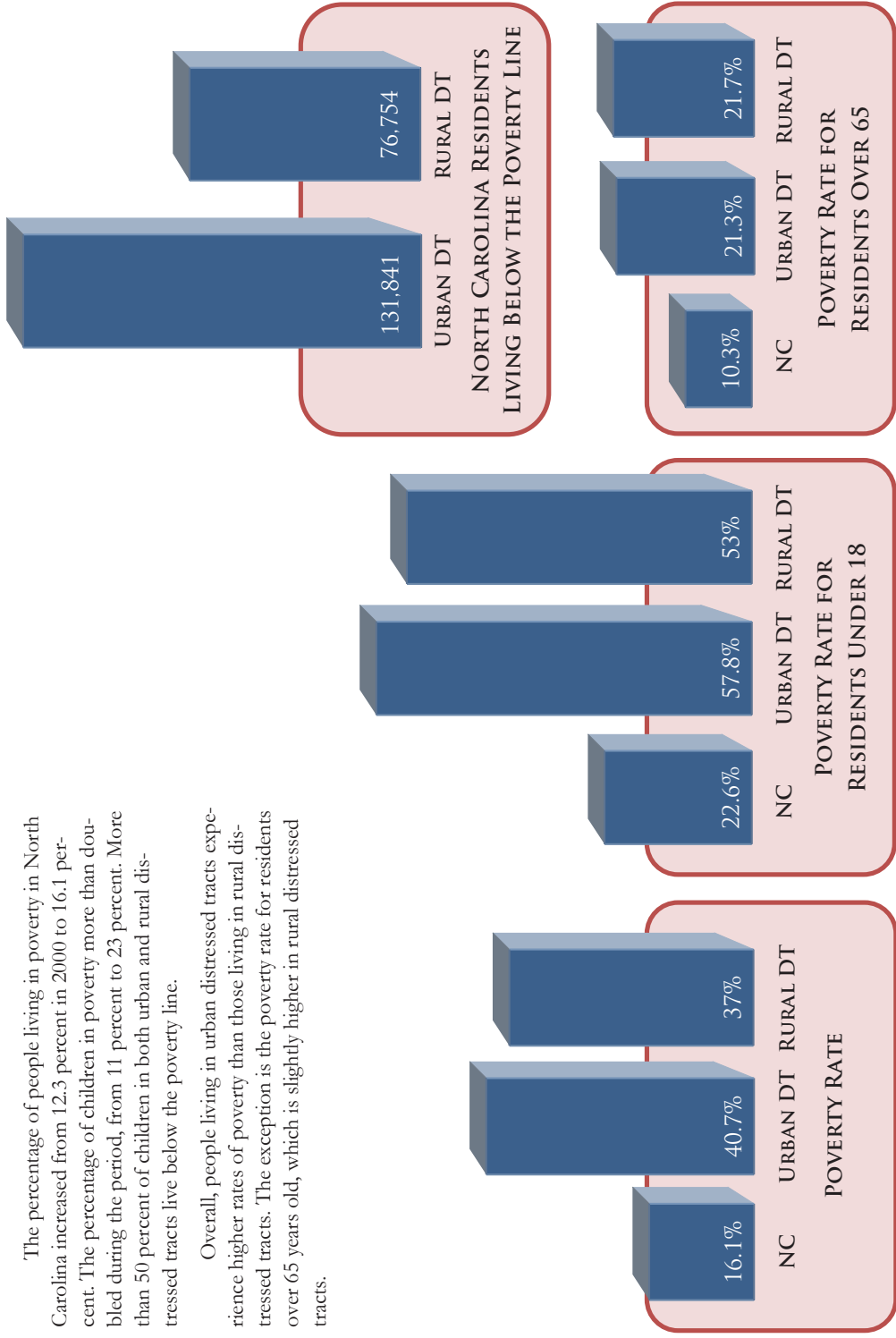
Photo: Jon Platek, Wikimedia, Creative Commons



ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The percentage of people living in poverty in North Carolina increased from 12.3 percent in 2000 to 16.1 percent. The percentage of children in poverty more than doubled during the period, from 11 percent to 23 percent. More than 50 percent of children in both urban and rural distressed tracts live below the poverty line.

Overall, people living in urban distressed tracts experience higher rates of poverty than those living in rural distressed tracts. The exception is the poverty rate for residents over 65 years old, which is slightly higher in rural distressed tracts.



SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Social indicators, such as education and household characteristics, provide useful context and information for understanding both the causes of and potential solutions for mitigating economic disparity.

In North Carolina, the percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree increased from 22.5 percent in 2000 to 26.5 percent, while the percentage of residents with high school degrees grew from 78.1 percent to 84.1 percent.

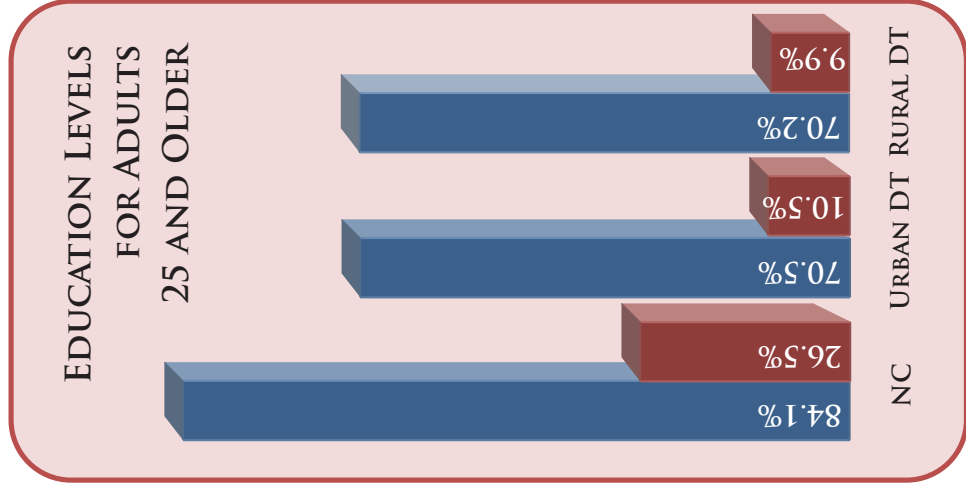
Rural and urban distressed tracts post notably lower rates of educational attainment than the state as a whole.

Urban and rural distressed tracts do not vary greatly in education levels, although the percentage of adults with at least a high school degree is more than 15 percent lower in distressed tracts compared to the state overall.

The divide is greater when considering attainment of a college degree. The percentage of adults with at least a bachelor's degree is more than two and a half times greater for the state as whole than for distressed N.C. tracts.



Photo: Alex Sandifer, Wikimedia, Creative Commons



SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

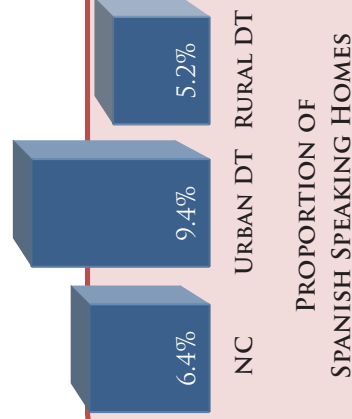
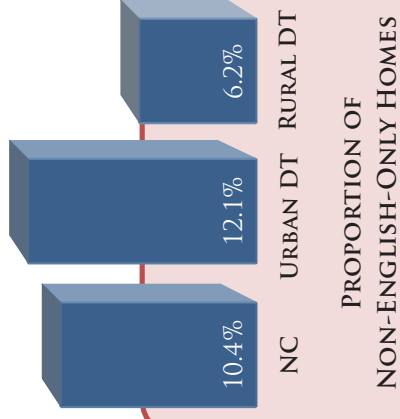
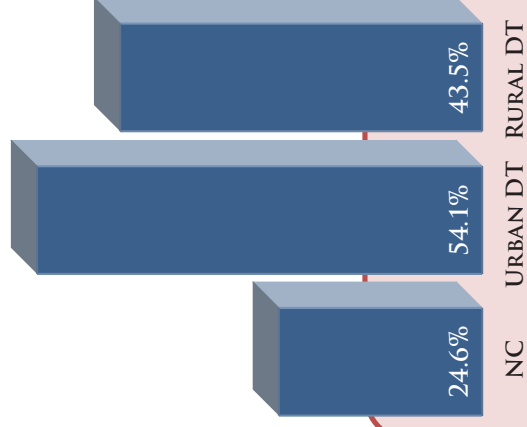
Other notable social characteristics for distressed tracts include the proportion of households that do not speak English exclusively.*

Since 2000, the proportion of non-English-only homes has increased by 25 percent in North Carolina, reflecting a burgeoning immigrant population. Interestingly, during the same period, the percentage of non-English-only homes in distressed tracts declined, both in rural and urban tracts.

The majority of non-English-only homes in the state speak Spanish. That holds true for both urban and rural distressed tracts. However about 40 percent of non-English-only homes in the state do not speak Spanish, indicating that North Carolina is home to an increasingly varied immigrant community.

The percentage of families with children headed by a single mother has dropped for both urban (54 percent) and rural (44 percent) distressed tracts since the 2005 report. Statewide, that percentage has risen by more than 15 percent.

Despite the drop, however, families with children headed by single mothers are disproportionately represented in both urban and rural distressed tracts. Three of five families with children in urban distressed tracts are headed by single mothers. This is more than twice the statewide rate and 23 percent higher than in rural distressed tracts.



* ACS Table B16002: Household language by households in which no one 14 and over speaks English only or speaks a language other than English at home and speaks English 'very well'.

HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION CHARACTERISTICS



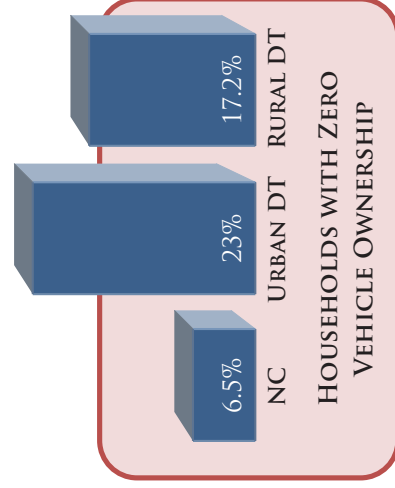
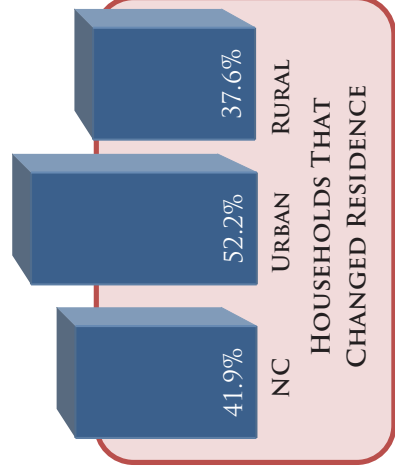
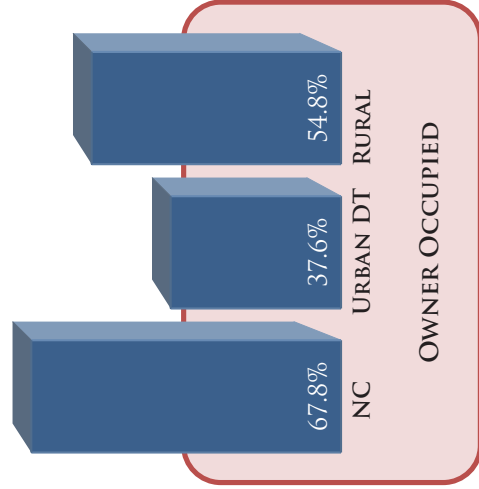
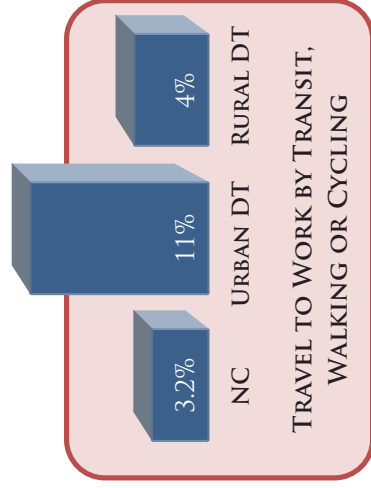
Photo: By Patriarca12, Wikimedia, Creative Commons

Housing and transportation significantly impact employment and economic mobility and provide indicators of economic health and potential.

Urban distressed tracts in North Carolina have lower rates of home ownership (38 percent) than the state as a whole (68 percent) and nearly one-third lower rates than rural distressed tracts (55 percent).

Urban distressed residents are also the most transient, with a rate that is 39 percent higher than that of rural distressed tracts. Higher rates of homeownership in rural distressed tracts may contribute to less transience. Urban areas also offer more rental housing, which may enable residents to relocate more easily.

The percentage of households without a vehicle is greater in urban distressed tracts than in rural, which results in a greater reliance on public transportation.



CONCLUSION

Revitalizing economically distressed communities is of prime importance to local, state, and national policymakers.

In North Carolina, the predominance of rural counties and the widening economic gap between urban and rural areas has prompted state and local officials to focus significant attention and resources on the state's more rural areas.

This report seeks to expand the conversation on economic opportunity and disparity in North Carolina by shedding light on an issue of urban disparity that has been largely hidden from view. Earlier analyses using county-level data failed to reveal the depth and severity of distress experienced by these urban tracts.

Not fully explored in this report is the geographic nature of many of the urban distressed tracts. While the Research Triangle region has only 12 distressed tracts, the Charlotte area contains 20, and the Triad has 34 distressed tracts. Winston-Salem has more distressed tracts than any urban area in the state except Charlotte.

The growing disparities among urban and rural counties and within the state's major metropolitan areas present a great challenge for North Carolina. More research and policy analy-

sis is needed to understand the causes and recommend solutions for policy and action.

It is in the best interest of both the state and the metropolitan areas to find appropriate and effective interventions that can provide opportunity and spark economic revitalization in these critically distressed areas. Understanding the problem and issues more clearly is a first step.



Photo: US Army photo by SGT. 1st Class Joel Quebec, Wikimedia, Creative Commons

APPENDIX I: MOST DISTRESSED TRACTS

These are rankings of the 10 most economically distressed tracts in both urban and rural areas of North Carolina. The rankings are calculated by taking the average of each tract's ranking on three criteria: poverty rate, per capita income, and unemployment. Overall rankings show the how each tract ranks among all of North Carolina's distressed tracts. Eight of the state's 10 most economically disadvantaged tracts are urban.

Urban Tract Rank	Overall Rank	County	City	Tract	Neighborhood or Area
1	2	Mecklenburg	Charlotte	52	Lockwood
2	3	Mecklenburg	Charlotte	56.04	University City South and College Downs
3	4	Guilford	High Point	139	Leonard Ave.
4	5	Forsyth	Winston-Salem	8.01	Woughtown and Columbia Heights
5	6	Mecklenburg	Charlotte	23	Grier Heights
6	8	Mecklenburg	Charlotte	39.03	Capitol Drive, Jackson Homes, and Boulevard
7	9	Wake	Raleigh	509	Central Raleigh and South Park
8	10	Forsyth	Winston-Salem	5	Northeast Winston
9	11	Forsyth	Winston-Salem	7	East Winston
10	11	Guilford	Greensboro	110	Cumberland

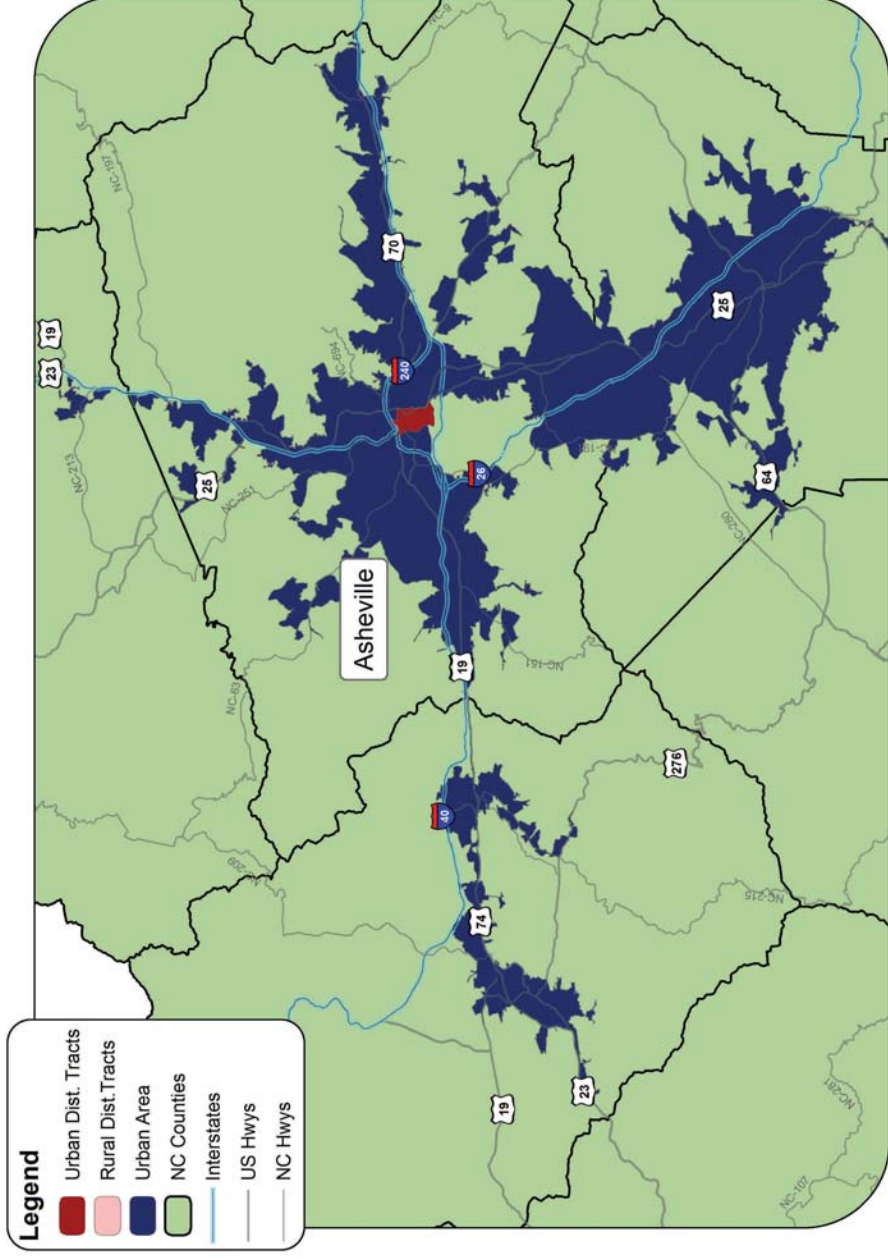
Rural Tract Rank	Overall Rank	County	City	Tract	Neighborhood or Area
1	1	Lenoir	Kinston	103	East Kinston
2	7	Wilson	Wilson	2	Downtown, Rountree, and Richardson Square
3	14	Watauga	Boone	9205	West Boone and University area
4	16	Lee	Sanford	303	S. Horner Blvd. area
5	20	Richmond	Rockingham	9706	E. Broad area
6	26	Wilson	Wilson	7	East Wilson
7	33	Wilson	Wilson	8.01	Pender Place, Rountree, and Freeman Property
8	34	Cleveland	Shelby	9509	North Shelby
9	42	Lenoir	Kinston	104	East Central Kinston
10	43	Vance	Henderson	9607	South Central Henderson

APPENDIX II: MAPS OF URBAN DISTRESSED TRACTS

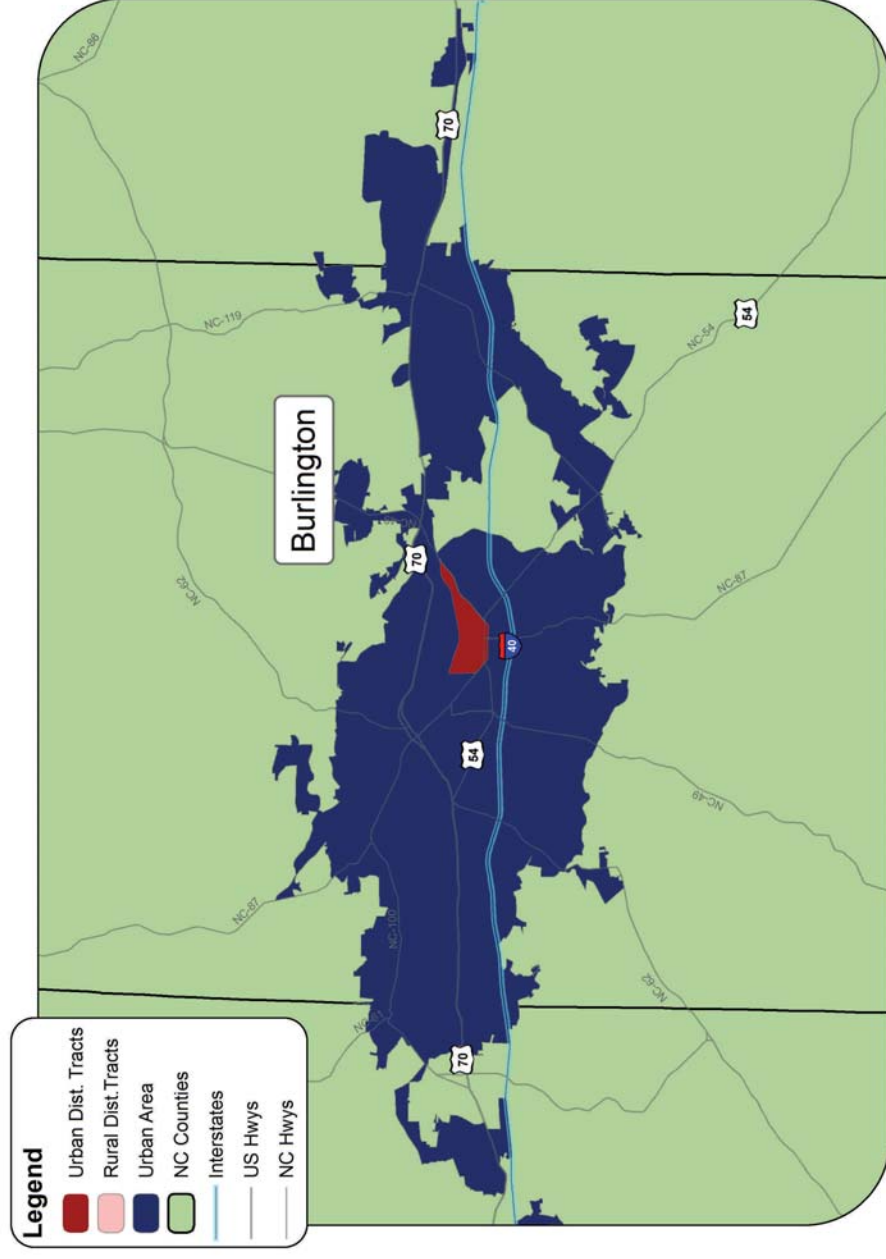


The following pages contain maps showing the location of distressed tracts in North Carolina's 18 urban areas.

ASHEVILLE



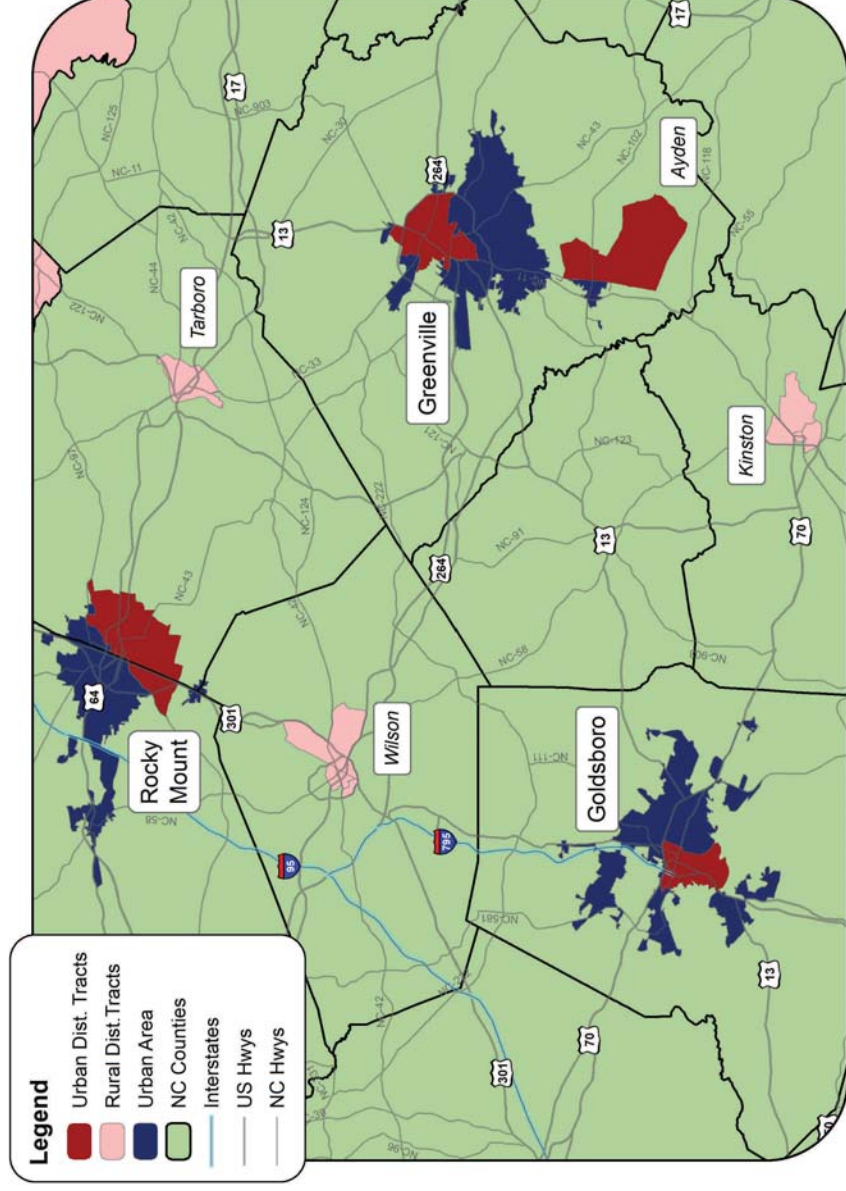
BURLINGTON



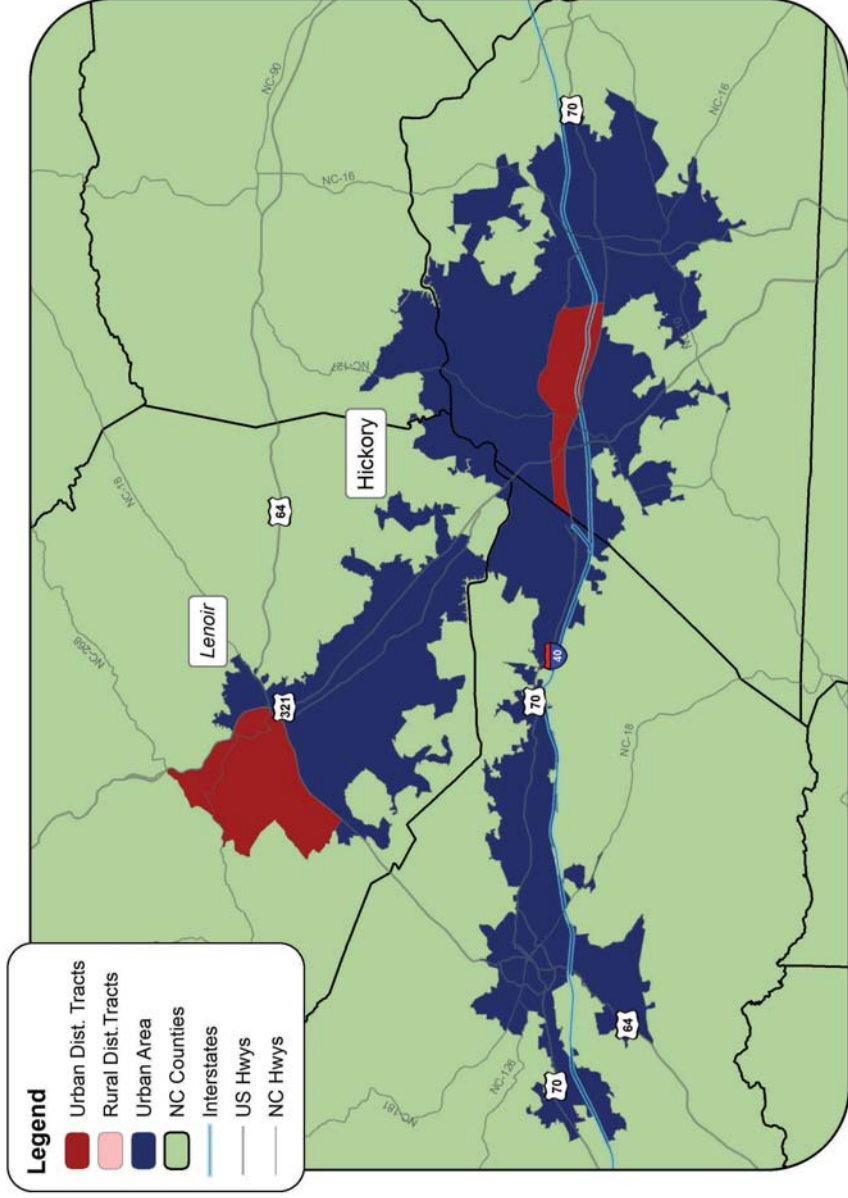
Government	Percentage
Current government	85%
Previous government	15%



GREENVILLE, GOLDSBORO, & ROCKY MOUNT

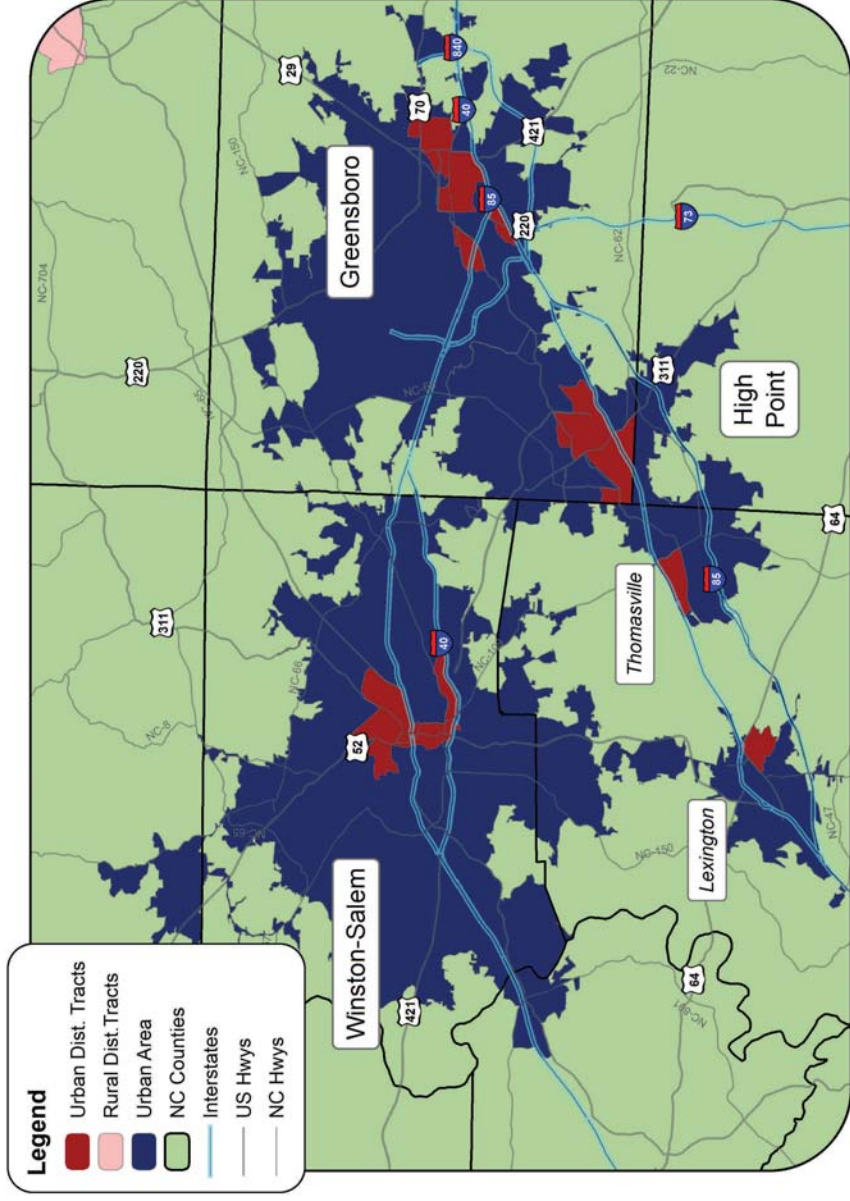


HICKORY

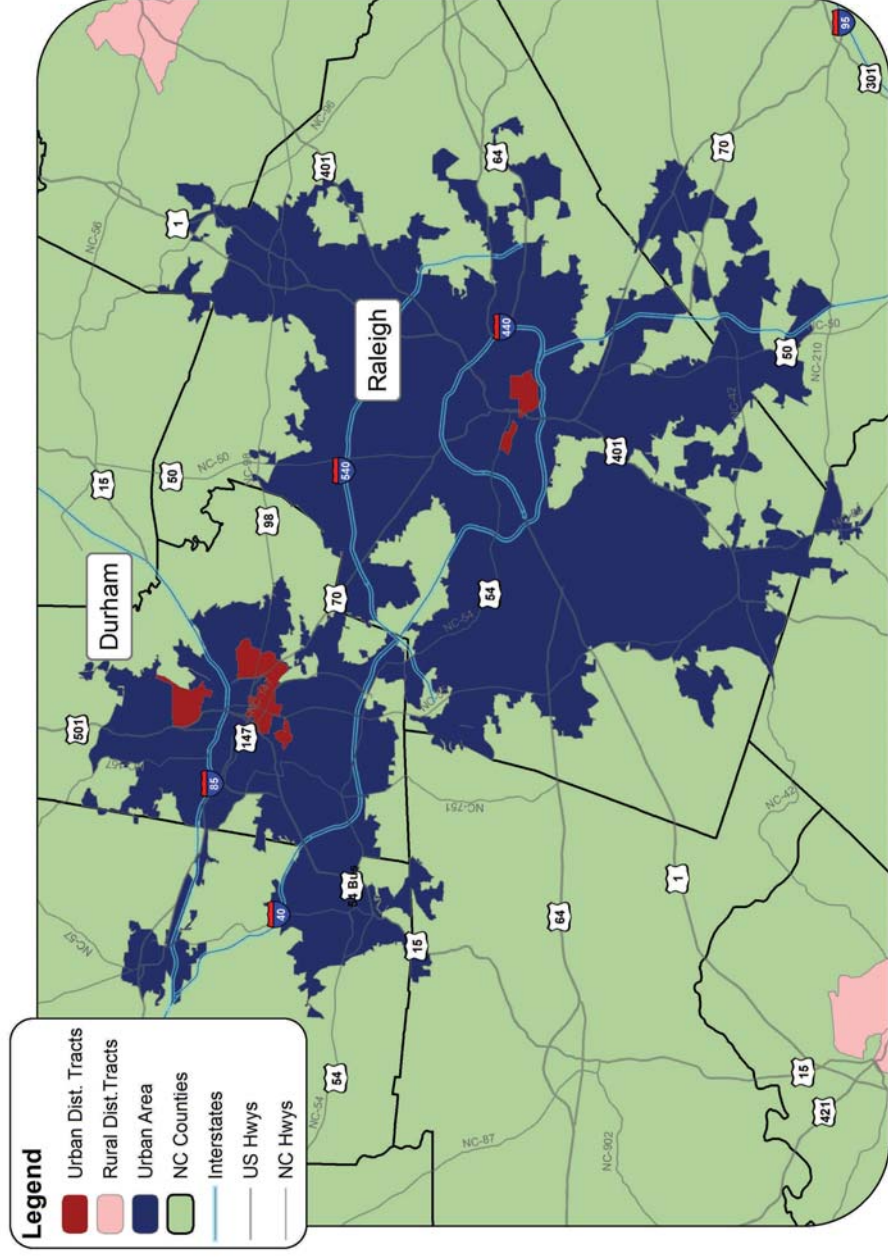




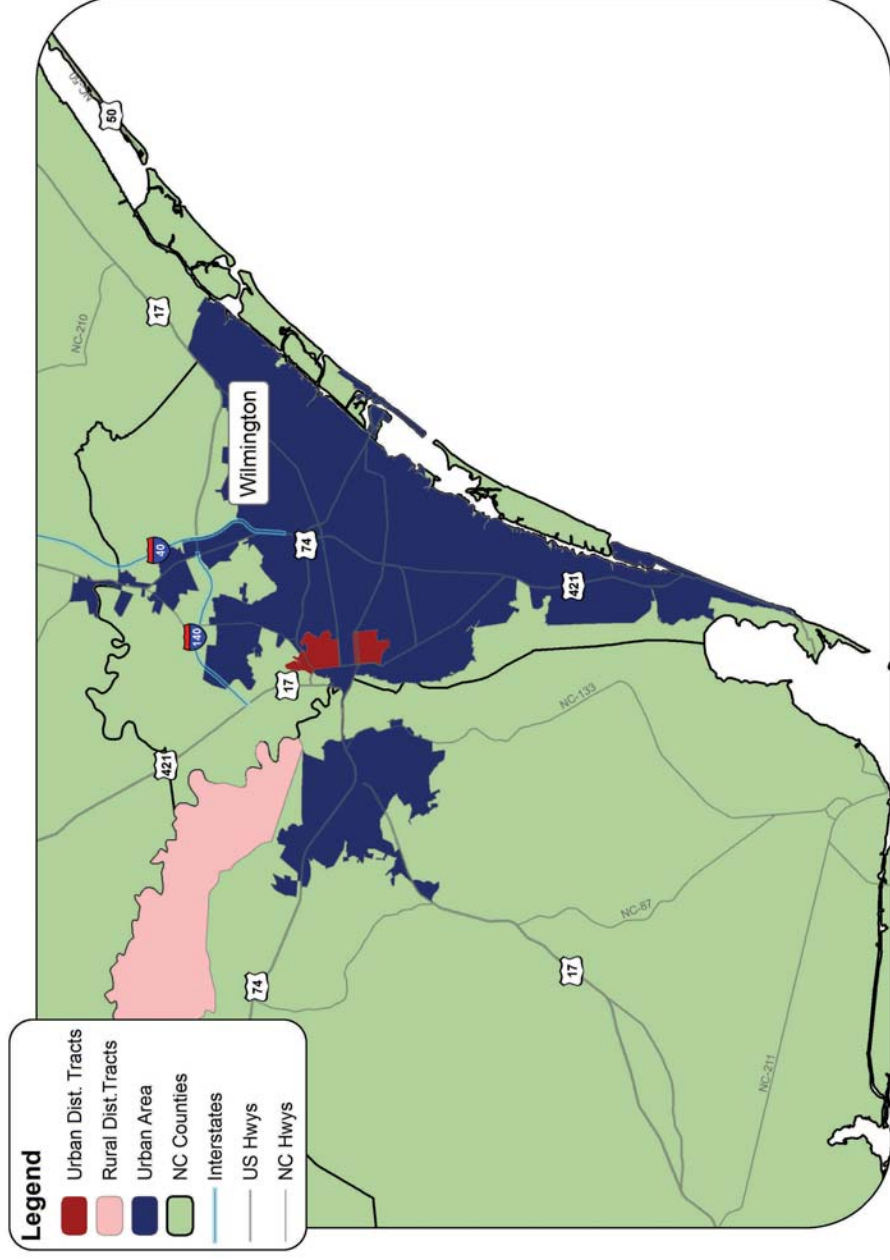
THE TRIAD



THE TRIANGLE



WILMINGTON



APPENDIX III: URBAN DISTRESSED TRACTS

Alamance County, Tract 210	Durham County, Tract 18.02	Guilford County, Tract 116.02	Mecklenburg County, Tract 53.01
Buncombe County, Tract 9	Durham County, Tract 23	Guilford County, Tract 126.08	Mecklenburg County, Tract 53.08
Cabarrus County, Tract 410	Edgecombe County, Tract 202	Guilford County, Tract 126.11	Mecklenburg County, Tract 56.04
Cabarrus County, Tract 419.01	Edgecombe County, Tract 203	Guilford County, Tract 127.06	Mecklenburg County, Tract 58.24
Cabarrus County, Tract 419.02	Edgecombe County, Tract 204	Guilford County, Tract 127.07	Mecklenburg County, Tract 60.06
Cabarrus County, Tract 421.01	Forsyth County, Tract 16.02	Guilford County, Tract 136.01	Mecklenburg County, Tract 61.09
Caldwell County, Tract 301	Forsyth County, Tract 17	Guilford County, Tract 138	Nash County, Tract 102
Caldwell County, Tract 302	Forsyth County, Tract 19.01	Guilford County, Tract 139	New Hanover County, Tract 101
Catawba County, Tract 107	Forsyth County, Tract 3.01	Guilford County, Tract 142	New Hanover County, Tract 110
Catawba County, Tract 109	Forsyth County, Tract 3.02	Guilford County, Tract 143	New Hanover County, Tract 111
Catawba County, Tract 110	Forsyth County, Tract 34.04	Guilford County, Tract 144.08	New Hanover County, Tract 114
Cleveland County, Tract 9505	Forsyth County, Tract 4	Guilford County, Tract 145.01	Onslow County, Tract 26
Craven County, Tract 9608	Forsyth County, Tract 5	Guilford County, Tract 145.03	Pitt County, Tract 1
Cumberland County, Tract 10	Forsyth County, Tract 6	Mecklenburg County, Tract 16.08	Pitt County, Tract 14.02
Cumberland County, Tract 11	Forsyth County, Tract 7	Mecklenburg County, Tract 23	Pitt County, Tract 7.01
Cumberland County, Tract 2	Forsyth County, Tract 8.01	Mecklenburg County, Tract 37	Pitt County, Tract 7.02
Cumberland County, Tract 22	Forsyth County, Tract 8.02	Mecklenburg County, Tract 38.02	Pitt County, Tract 8
Cumberland County, Tract 38	Gaston County, Tract 318	Mecklenburg County, Tract 38.08	Rowan County, Tract 504
Cumberland County, Tract 5	Gaston County, Tract 319	Mecklenburg County, Tract 39.02	Wake County, Tract 507
Davidson County, Tract 608	Gaston County, Tract 332.04	Mecklenburg County, Tract 39.03	Wake County, Tract 508
Davidson County, Tract 614	Guilford County, Tract 107.02	Mecklenburg County, Tract 42	Wake County, Tract 509
Durham County, Tract 10.01	Guilford County, Tract 110	Mecklenburg County, Tract 43.02	Wake County, Tract 511.02
Durham County, Tract 11	Guilford County, Tract 111.01	Mecklenburg County, Tract 45	Wayne County, Tract 15
Durham County, Tract 13.01	Guilford County, Tract 112	Mecklenburg County, Tract 46	Wayne County, Tract 18
Durham County, Tract 13.04	Guilford County, Tract 113	Mecklenburg County, Tract 47	Wayne County, Tract 20
Durham County, Tract 14	Guilford County, Tract 114	Mecklenburg County, Tract 50	
Durham County, Tract 17.09	Guilford County, Tract 115	Mecklenburg County, Tract 52	

APPENDIX IV: RURAL DISTRESSED TRACTS

Ashe County, Tract 9703	Pasquotank County, Tract 9604	Wilson County, Tract 7
Beaufort County, Tract 9303	Pender County, Tract 9202.04	Wilson County, Tract 8.01
Bertie County, Tract 9603	Randolph County, Tract 303.02	
Brunswick County, Tract 201.01	Richmond County, Tract 9703	
Caswell County, Tract 9302	Richmond County, Tract 9706	
Chowan County, Tract 9301.01	Richmond County, Tract 9707	
Cleveland County, Tract 9509	Robeson County, Tract 9604.01	
Cleveland County, Tract 9511	Robeson County, Tract 9605.02	
Columbus County, Tract 9310	Robeson County, Tract 9607.02	
Edgemcombe County, Tract 209	Robeson County, Tract 9608.01	
Franklin County, Tract 603.02	Robeson County, Tract 9617	
Halifax County, Tract 9301	Robeson County, Tract 9620.02	
Halifax County, Tract 9304	Rockingham County, Tract 412	
Halifax County, Tract 9305.01	Rutherford County, Tract 9608	
Halifax County, Tract 9309	Rutherford County, Tract 9611.01	
Halifax County, Tract 9311	Sampson County, Tract 9709	
Harnett County, Tract 714.02	Scotland County, Tract 102	
Hoke County, Tract 9704.02	Scotland County, Tract 105	
Lee County, Tract 303	Vance County, Tract 9606	
Lee County, Tract 304.01	Vance County, Tract 9607	
Lenoir County, Tract 102	Vance County, Tract 9608	
Lenoir County, Tract 103	Warren County, Tract 9501.03	
Lenoir County, Tract 104	Watauga County, Tract 9205	
Lenoir County, Tract 105	Wilkes County, Tract 9607	
Montgomery County, Tract 9604.01	Wilson County, Tract 1	
Northampton County, Tract 9202	Wilson County, Tract 2	
Pasquotank County, Tract 9603	Wilson County, Tract 3	