

# Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



*We hope this discussion guide will help you to understand how poverty and barriers to prosperity affect your neighbors in Alabama.*

These discussion questions are designed to be used in conjunction with Alabama Possible's Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet. You can use these questions in remote learning environments and in discussion with your household.

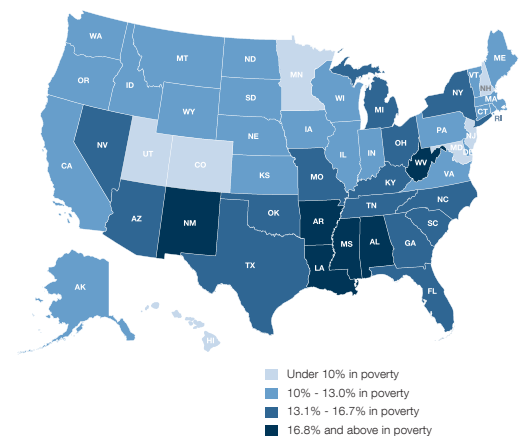
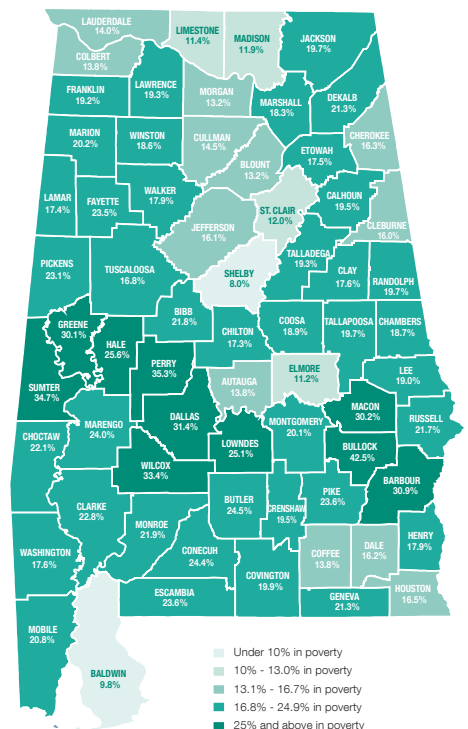
### Learning objectives

By the end of the discussion, learners will be able to:

1. **Describe** the rates of poverty in Alabama across different groups and contexts such as education, employment, and food security.
2. **Interpret** how the data about poverty in Alabama translates into real-world living conditions for people and communities.
3. **Identify** through critical reflection the influence of personal biases and values toward those living in poverty.

### Discussion Questions

1. The official definition of poverty used by the Census Bureau draws an income line each year, and households falling below that line are considered to be experiencing poverty. In the Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet, we contrast the total population with the number of people, children, and seniors in poverty. What is the advantage of looking at the different poverty rates across different groups?
2. There is much stigma surrounding people experiencing poverty. Research has shown that when a group is stigmatized, the general public often disassociates itself from that group. Why do you think having a discussion on lived experiences with poverty is so difficult?
3. Look at the poverty rate of your home county. What might be some other circumstances and factors that contribute to poverty? Support this discussion with education and labor force participation rates of the same county.
4. When you look at poverty rates among different race and ethnic groups, what do you notice? Among which groups of people is the median household income highest? Why do you think this is so?



5. Black Belt counties experience a significant black-white poverty gap. A 2013 study by Equality of Opportunity Project showed upward mobility is lowest for people who live in communities with high-poverty. For example, in Lowndes County the white poverty rate is 5.8 percent while the black or African American poverty rate is 35.1 percent. What other counties have similar disparities?
6. There are many circumstances that can produce poverty-level income. Sometimes the causes are personal, such as poor health. Other cases result from economic events, such as a factory shutdown. But much poverty is less event-specific and more related to the effect of long-established factors such as the legacy of race discrimination, or low-wage regional and rural economies in which even full-time workers may receive only poverty-level incomes. What circumstances do you think affect poverty in these Black Belt Counties?
7. Shelby County is the richest county in Alabama, while Wilcox County is the poorest, based on median household income. Take a look at the data of these two counties. What are the differences in poverty rate, labor force participation rate, and educational attainment?
8. The United States currently expends among the fewest resources within the industrialized countries in terms of pulling families out of poverty and protecting them from falling into poverty. (Compare and contrast the poverty rate with SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) participation rates of two counties. What effect does this federal program have on poverty in these counties?
9. As noted in the data sheet, Alabama is the nation's fifth poorest state. Why do you think this is so? What circumstances that lead to poverty are more likely to affect Alabamians than other states?
10. Education is frequently noted as a key factor in being lifted out of poverty. And, indeed, in virtually every county, the poverty rate decreases as educational attainment rises. But counties with dynamic economies do a better job of providing higher-paying jobs at all education levels. The poverty rate of those with less than a high school diploma in Shelby County is 23.4 percent. List at least 5 counties whose poverty rate is higher than 23.4 percent among those with at least a high school diploma. What does this indicate about the differences between these counties?
11. The persistence of poverty in the state has inspired many reform efforts, ranging from private charity (food pantries, thrift stores, clothing closets) to systemic attempts to change the economic systems put in place. What are some ways that poverty can be addressed in Alabama?
12. This data was gathered before COVID-19 impacted Alabama's economy. More than 400,000 Alabamians lost their jobs between early March and early May. How do you think families are coping with the resulting financial disruption? How are they meeting their basic needs for food, shelter, health care, and education? What kind of long-term impact could the pandemic have on their economic security, including the ability to save and pay down debt?

Adapted from the *Educator's Guide for Alabama Possible's Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet*. You can download the full guide, including worksheets designed for secondary and postsecondary students, at [alabamapossible.org/datasheet](http://alabamapossible.org/datasheet).

