Economic Class and Voting Access in the 2020 Election

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Berkshire Bridges Working Cities
Berkshire Bridges Working Cities

Berkshire Bridges Working Cities is a cross-sector collaboration where all partners work together toward the goal of a just, thriving, and safe community. We view Berkshire County as a community of hope and opportunity, where all residents are actively engaged in shaping their city. We work to:

• Break down barriers to opportunity and participation in the civic infrastructure of the community.

• Value resident voices and include residents in decisions that impact the community.
Poverty Data

Berkshire County
# Berkshire County Income and Poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median Household Income:</th>
<th>Poverty Rate:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Great Barrington: $47,917</td>
<td>• US 12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pittsfield: $46,871</td>
<td>• Berkshire County 12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• North Adams: $38,744</td>
<td>• North Adams 18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Massachusetts: $79,835</td>
<td>• Pittsfield 16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• United States: $57,652</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census 2018
Poverty is Concentrated

- Median household income: $55,190 (Berkshire County); $57,652 (US)
  - By gender
    - Men: $60,070 (average salary)
    - Women: $45,028 (average salary)
  - By census track (2015)
    - 9002 (Pittsfield Morningside): $28,347
    - 9001 (Pittsfield Downtown): $17,813
    - 9006 (Pittsfield Westside): $24,351
    - 9353 (North Adams north side): $39,547
    - 9213 (North Adams east side): $27,938
    - 9201.02 (Williamstown and west): $84,018
    - 9351 (New Ashford and Hancock): $80,968
  - Surrounding downtown Pittsfield to the west and south, average income is upward of $65,000

https://datausa.io/profile/geo/berkshire-county-ma/
## Living Wage in Berkshire County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hourly Wages</th>
<th>1 Adult</th>
<th>1 Adult 1 Child</th>
<th>1 Adult 2 Children</th>
<th>1 Adult 3 Children</th>
<th>2 Adults 1 Working</th>
<th>2 Adults 1 Working 1 Child</th>
<th>2 Adults 1 Working 2 Children</th>
<th>2 Adults 1 Working 3 Children</th>
<th>2 Adults 2 Adults 1 Child</th>
<th>2 Adults 2 Children</th>
<th>2 Adults 3 Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living Wage</td>
<td>$12.76</td>
<td>$27.71</td>
<td>$32.09</td>
<td>$38.45</td>
<td>$19.43</td>
<td>$23.43</td>
<td>$25.94</td>
<td>$29.22</td>
<td>$9.71</td>
<td>$15.16</td>
<td>$17.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Wage</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
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<td>$12.00</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: MIT Living Wage Calculator (2019) [http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/25003]*
Housing Wage

In Massachusetts, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment is $1,847. In order to afford this level of rent and utilities — without paying more than 30% of income on housing — a household must earn $6,158 monthly or $73,890 annually. Assuming a 40-hour work week, 52 weeks per year, this level of income translates into an hourly Housing Wage of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metro Area</th>
<th>Hourly wage for 2 BR FMR</th>
<th>2 BR FMR</th>
<th>Annual Income needed</th>
<th># Hours needed at $12.75/hr</th>
<th>Estimated hourly mean renter wage</th>
<th>Rent affordable at mean renter wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berkshire County</td>
<td>$21.31</td>
<td>$1,108</td>
<td>$44,320</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>$12.41</td>
<td>$645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsfield HFMA</td>
<td>$19.73</td>
<td>$1,026</td>
<td>$41,040</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>$12.41</td>
<td>$645</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Out of Reach, National Low Income Housing Coalition: [https://reports.nlihc.org/oor/massachusetts](https://reports.nlihc.org/oor/massachusetts)
Voter Turnout by Family Income
2016 Election

EconoFact econofact.org
The bar chart shows the percentage of votes received by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in different income brackets. The data is as follows:

- Under 30,000: Clinton 53%, Trump 41%
- 30,000 to 49,999: Clinton 51%, Trump 42%
- 50,000 to 99,999: Clinton 46%, Trump 50%
- 100,000 to 199,999: Clinton 47%, Trump 48%
- 200,000 to 249,999: Clinton 48%, Trump 49%
- 250,000 or more: Clinton 46%, Trump 48%
Why do you think there is poverty in the U.S.?

Share one or two causes with the group.
Equality vs. Equity
Community Costs of Inequity

• Who can work from home and who cannot?

• Who can access information and services online and who lacks technology, internet, or ability to pay for things online with credit/debit cards?

• Who has childcare or can teach their children at home?

• Who has access to quality health care or nutritious food?

• Who has a safe place to sleep, eat, exercise and socially distance?
Causes of Poverty

- Political/Economic Structures
- Human Exploitation
- Absence of Human and Social Capital Within the Community
- Behaviors of the Individual
“The extent to which an individual, organization, or community does without resources,” that is, with not enough resources to meet their basic needs.

Adapted from Bridges, page 11
What it means to be under resourced
“Poverty and all its related concerns require so much mental energy that the poor have less remaining brainpower to devote to other areas of life.”

“When your bandwidth is loaded … you’re just more likely to not notice things, you’re more likely to not resist things you ought to resist, you’re more likely to forget things, you’re going to have less patience, less attention to devote to your children when they come home from school.”

Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much by Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir
FINANCIAL
Being able to purchase the goods and services of that class and sustain it.

EMOTIONAL
Being able to choose and control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior. Shows itself through choices.

MENTAL
Having the mental abilities and acquired skills (reading, writing, computing) to deal with daily life.

SPIRITUAL
Believing in (divine) purpose and guidance.

PHYSICAL
Having physical health and mobility.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS
Having friends, family, and backup resources available to access in times of need. These are external resources.

RELATIONSHIPS/ROLE MODELS
Having frequent access to adult(s) who are appropriate, nurturing, and who do not engage in destructive behavior.

KNOWLEDGE OF HIDDEN RULES
Knowing the unspoken cues and habits of a group.  

*Bridges, page 11*
Mental Models of Economic Class

OBJECTIVES

1. Explore the language and political constructs around poverty.
2. Explore a mental model of not enough.
3. Explore a mental models of enough and more than enough.
4. Understand the interactive nature of the models and the demands of and by the individuals and organizations.
Mental models are human operating systems. They are both personal and social.

- networks of complex instructions for living that run our everyday lives
- interacting principles and persistent ways we think, feel and act
- instructions that function primarily in the background
- patterns that form the basis for how we perceive the world and our place in it
In 2018, 38.1 million people lived in poverty in the USA. That means the poverty rate for 2018 was 11.8%.

https://www.povertyusa.org/facts
Perspectives of Economic Class in the U.S. using Mental Model lenses

Developed by Phil DeVol

Enough resources to cover basic needs sees the world through an **Achievement Lens**

Not Enough resources to cover basic needs sees the world through a **Relationships Lens**

With More Than Enough resources to cover basic needs sees the world through a **Connections Lens**
OBJECTIVE
Understand the consequences of the hidden rules of the three economic class environments.
What is a Hidden Rule?

I'm sorry I stabbed your hand with my fork when you reached for my food.

By Kathy Simon - originally posted to Flickr as Viola and Mina share food, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7170232
## Some Examples of Hidden Rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSSESSIONS</th>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Middle Class</th>
<th>Wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People.</td>
<td>Things.</td>
<td>One-of-a-kind objects, legacies, pedigrees.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONEY</td>
<td>To be used, spent.</td>
<td>To be managed.</td>
<td>To be conserved, invested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONALITY</td>
<td>Is for entertainment. Sense of humor is highly valued.</td>
<td>Is for acquisition and stability. Achievement is highly valued.</td>
<td>Is for connections. Financial, political, social connections are highly valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL EMPHASIS</td>
<td>Social inclusion of people who are liked.</td>
<td>Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency.</td>
<td>Emphasis is on social exclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOOD</td>
<td>Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important.</td>
<td>Key question: Did you like it? Quality important.</td>
<td>Key question: Was it presented well? Presentation important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOTHING</td>
<td>Clothing valued for individual style and expression of personality.</td>
<td>Clothing valued for its quality and acceptance into norm of middle class. Label important.</td>
<td>Clothing valued for its artistic sense and expression. Designer important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>Present most important. Decisions made for moment based on feelings or survival.</td>
<td>Future most important. Decisions made against future ramifications.</td>
<td>Traditions and history most important. Decisions made partially on basis of tradition and decorum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>Valued and revered as abstract but not as reality.</td>
<td>Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money.</td>
<td>Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE</td>
<td>Casual register. Language is about survival.</td>
<td>Formal register. Language is about negotiation.</td>
<td>Formal register. Language is about networking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY STRUCTURE</td>
<td>Tends to be matriarchal.</td>
<td>Tends to be patriarchal.</td>
<td>Depends on who has money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORLDVIEW</td>
<td>Sees world in terms of local setting.</td>
<td>Sees world in terms of national setting.</td>
<td>Sees world in terms of international view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOVE</td>
<td>Love and acceptance conditional, based upon whether individual is liked.</td>
<td>Love and acceptance conditional and based largely upon achievement.</td>
<td>Love and acceptance conditional and related to social standing and connections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Visible Rules

- What are the hidden rules of the U.S. political system?
- How do people break these hidden rules?
- What can we do to expose them?
Pattern of Discourse

FORMAL

CASUAL

START

FINISH
Based on the proposed Bridges Out of Poverty concepts what public policies support people in poverty voting?

What public policies discourage people in poverty from voting?
Based on the proposed Bridges Out of Poverty concepts, how might the experience and daily life of poverty impact an individual when it comes to:

- Getting involved in the political process
- Feeling empowered to make demands of elected officials
- Deciding whether to vote or how to vote
- Deciding who to vote for
Based on the proposed Bridges Out of Poverty concepts what public policies could we put in place that would encourage voting?

What public policies would you change in regard to:

- Public benefits
- Education
- Housing
- Health Care
Further Information and Resources

Center for Budget and Policy Priorities
https://www.cbpp.org/

Food Research Action Center
https://frac.org/

Urban Institute
https://www.urban.org/

Economic Policy Institute
https://www.epi.org/
1. Use the lens of economic class to understand and take responsibility for your own societal experience while being open to the experiences of others.

2. At the intersections of poverty with other social disparities (racial, gender, physical ability, age, etc.), address inequalities in access to resources.

3. Define poverty as the extent to which a person, institution, or community does without resources.

4. Build relationships of mutual respect.

5. Base plans on the premise that people in all classes, sectors, and political persuasions are problem solvers and need to be at the decision making table.

Source: Bridges Out of Poverty Training Supplement, p. 25
6. Base plans on accurate mental models of poverty, middle class, and wealth.

7. At the individual, institutional, and community/policy levels: Stabilize the environment, remove barriers to transition, and build resources.

8. Address all causes of poverty (four areas of research).


10. Build economically sustainable communities in which everyone can live well.

Source: Bridges Out of Poverty Training Supplement, p. 25
“If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound together with mine, then let us work together.”

–Lila Watson
"Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s."
How to Be Involved

• Join us for Virtual Working Cities Wednesday networking events –every Wednesday on Zoom (see chat for links).
  • July 22 at 5:30 pm in Spanish
  • July 29 at 12:30 pm in English

• Bring the concepts you learned today back to your community and be the driver of change where you are.

• Schedule a full training for your organization or business.

• Lift resident voices
  • Address barriers for under-resourced community members to gain full access to opportunities and services.
  • Value resident voices at your table.
  • Mentor neighbors and help them build connections and opportunity.
Contact Us

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