**The ten places with the lowest rates of employment among whites**

Martha Ross and Natalie Holmes

Following the 2016 election, much of the analysis has focused on the role of white working class voters in rural areas or small towns, with varying degrees of attention to their economic woes and racial isolation. The white population is indeed more heterogeneous than indicated by top-line comparisons, which typically show that whites have higher education levels and earnings than people of color, especially blacks and Latinos.

Labor market statistics at the local level bear out these differences among whites in the U.S. The following analysis focuses on what we’ll call large jurisdictions for simplicity’s sake, referring to cities and counties with populations over 500,000, comprising a total of 128 places. Together, they account for about half of the nation’s population and include big cities (New York City, Chicago, and so on), smaller cities (Nashville, TN; Louisville, KY), dense urbanized counties (Alameda, CA; Fulton, GA), exurbs (??), down to places with a small-town or rural feel (Stanislaus County, CA; Lancaster County, PA). [doublecheck these descriptors]

Among these jurisdictions, the share of working-age adults of all races/ethnicities who have a job ranges from about half (51 percent in Detroit, MI) up to 83 percent (Johnson County, KS). The numbers for white adults skew higher but still show substantial variation. Detroit again anchors the low end: 61 percent of white adults have a job in Detroit, compared to a high of 88 percent in Washington, D.C.

**Jurisdictions with the lowest employment rates among whites, 2015**



With the exception of Detroit, large jurisdictions with the lowest rates of white employment are clustered in the Sunbelt region that stretches from California through the South to Florida. Metropolitan economies in the Sunbelt boomed prior to the Great Recession, fueled by low-wage job growth in housing construction, hospitality, and goods movement. These places all pass the 500,000 population threshold, but with a few exceptions (San Bernardino and Riverside counties in California and Detroit) are not among the nation’s most densely developed places or largest metropolitan areas.

They are generally weak economic performers; employment rates are low not only for whites, but for the overall population and typically for other races/ethnicities as well. Detroit’s story is well-known: it has been battered by declining employment in manufacturing overall and changes in the automobile industry, more particularly*.* Goods movement, particularly low-wage logistics jobs in warehouses, concentrate in San Bernardino and the cities of El Paso and McAllen (in Hidalgo County) along the Mexican border. Construction is a major part of the economic base of all the Florida counties represented and some in California and Texas (Riverside, Kern, and El Paso counties), and hospitality is strong in the Florida counties of Lee and Brevard, as well as in El Paso. These industries were among the hardest hit by the housing bust and Great Recession, which caused a sharp decline in housing construction and had a chilling effect on consumer spending, reducing demand for hospitality services and consumer goods. Economies based largely on consumption and/or housing are not well-positioned to participate in economic growth based on technology, innovation, and professional services. Many of mid-sized places [specify that it’s these or some portion of them?] lack economic assets like research universities or clusters of advanced industries that support innovation and trade.

In short, the problems of depressed employment among white people is also a story about depressed local economies. It sounds obvious, but the story differs by race. For example, black people have below-average employment rates in places with strong economic bases, such as San Francisco, Chicago, and Philadelphia. In these cases, the issue is to ensure that all residents share in regional economic growth and prosperity. For the places described in this blog post, however, the problem is somewhat different: it is to build on local assets and link these economies—along with their residents—to the forces propelling economic growth at the national level.