

Poor People's Campaign

A NATIONAL CALL for MORAL REVIVAL

NATIONAL FACT SHEET • 2023

In 2019, before the pandemic hit, 140 million Americans were living in poverty or just one emergency away from economic ruin: 60% of Black people (24 million), 64% of Hispanic/Latino people (38 million), 40% of Asian people (8 million), 60% of Indigenous and Native people (2 million) and 33% of white people (66 million).^{*} These tens of millions of people live in every region, state and county in the country. **Poverty was the fourth leading cause of death, claiming more lives than homicide, gun violence, diabetes or obesity. Long-term poverty was responsible for 295,000 deaths a year - or over 800 deaths a day.**

The pandemic festered in these fissures, taking root in systemic racism, poverty, the denial of health care, ecological devastation, wealth inequality and rampant military spending. During the first two years, governments at all levels responded to the crisis by expanding access to health care, housing, water, food and utilities. These overdue changes proved that in the world's richest country, we can ensure a dignified life for all. But these pandemic programs were temporary. When they ended abruptly, poverty and related interlocking injustices began to rise once again.

While millions of people remain without work, living wages, housing, clean water, food or health care, corporations and the wealthy are doing exceedingly well. **Between 2020-2022, billionaire wealth grew by \$1.5 trillion - more than \$2 billion a day.**

Religious and moral texts are clear that making policy that does not protect the rights of the poor and puts the cause of the wealthy first is evil and wrong. Isaiah 10 says, "Woe to those who legislate evil, who make unjust laws to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed." Jeremiah 22 reminds us, "Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor those who have been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." Matthew 25 tells us, "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

Indeed, the first governing principle of the US Constitution is to establish justice.

If we do not want to enable this wrongdoing, we must speak out and stand up against it. This is why the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival is organizing across the nation: to reveal these injustices, change the narrative, and build our power.

Fight Poverty, not the Poor!

^{*}The PPC:NCMR created this fact sheet using the most comprehensive and current publicly available data through May 2023. Where possible, data is disaggregated to reflect the complex reality of the interrelated injustices contained in this document. Unfortunately, there are significant gaps in racial, ethnic and other demographic data, reflecting gaps in data collection and statistical methodologies, which the PPC:NCMR cannot control. We continue to push for improvements to fill those gaps.

Poverty and Low-Wages: *Poverty is a policy choice, reflecting both low wages and high costs of living. These two conditions make it hard to meet basic needs and easy to fall into debt.*

- In 2021, 112 million people, or one-third of the nation, were poor or low-income, a decline from the 140 million figure in 2019, including: 48% of Black people (19 million), 52% of Latino/Hispanic people (31 million), and 25% of white people (51 million) and 34% of people who identify as other. However, the programs responsible for this decline were temporary, some lasting for less than a year. By 2022, poverty was again on the rise.**
- To meet their basic needs, two adults living with two children must each earn over \$25/hour. However, the federal minimum wage is only \$7.25. At this wage, an individual must work 96 hours/week to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment.
- Nearly one-third of the workforce, or 52 million people, earn less than \$15/hour. This includes 47% of Black workers, 46% of Hispanic workers, 20% of Asian American and Indigenous workers, 40% of working women and 50% of working women of color.
- In 2022, average household debt rose 7% to \$59,580. Average student debt remained flat at \$5,640 due to a pandemic pause in loan payments that is now ending. By early 2023, total household debt was \$17.05 trillion. This includes more than \$12 trillion in housing debt and \$1.6 trillion in student debt.
- Approximately 100 million Americans struggle with medical debt, which is conservatively estimated to be between \$88 billion-\$140 billion, including: 41% of all adults, 56% of Black adults, 50% of Hispanic adults and 37% of white adults. About 80% of this debt belongs to households with zero or negative net worth.



SOMEBODY'S HURTING OUR PEOPLE

Health Care and the Pandemic: *Although people are still dying from Covid every week, millions of people lack access to adequate and affordable health care. This has contributed to a dramatic decline in US life expectancy and exacerbated long-standing inequities.*

- In May 2023, the pandemic health emergency was officially ended, even though the virus was killing 1,000 Americans a week. During the pandemic's deadliest phases, death rates in poor and low-income counties were up to 5 times higher than higher-income counties. At least 330,000 lives were unnecessarily lost due to the denial of health care.
- At the beginning of 2023, nearly 93 million people were enrolled in Medicaid, including 7 million children, to access free and affordable health care. However, between April 2023 and March 31, 2024, an estimated 15-18 million people are expected to lose Medicaid access with the end of a policy that made it easier for states to keep people enrolled during the pandemic emergency. This is expected to affect over 5 million children, 6.6 million white people, 4.6 million Hispanic/Latino people, 2.2 million Black people and over 500,000 Asian and Native people, who are all at risk of losing their health care.
- Currently, 2.1 million people, 60% of whom are people of color, fall into the Medicaid coverage gap, meaning they have incomes above their state's eligibility for Medicaid but are ineligible for Affordable Care Act (ACA) subsidies.
- Approximately 75% of workers (105 million people) do not have paid family and medical leave, including 92% of the lowest-paid workers.
- US life expectancy has been declining for years and was accelerated by Covid. In 2021, average US life expectancy was 76.1 years, its lowest since 1996. Between 2019-2021:
 - Life expectancy for Native/Indigenous people dropped 6.6 years to 65.2 years.
 - Life expectancy for Black people dropped 4 years to 70.8 years.
 - Life expectancy for Hispanic/Latino people dropped 4.2 years to 77.6 years.
 - Life expectancy for white people dropped 2.4 years to 76.4 years.
 - Life expectancy for Asian people dropped 2.1 years to 83.5 years.
 - Two of the poorest states in the country, West Virginia and Mississippi, had the nation's lowest life expectancies, 4 and 5 years less than the national average.

WE WON'T BE SILENT ANYMORE

Climate Crisis and Ecological Devastation: *In the US, extreme heat, storms and drought are becoming more common, with poor and low-income communities at greatest risk.*

- Across the country, heat waves have become more frequent, growing from an average of 2 per year in the 1960s to 6 in the current decade. The average duration of these heat waves has increased from 23 to 72 days, causing an average of 1,373 additional deaths a year between 2008 and 2017.
- Water-related severe weather events have grown in both frequency and severity. A 2018 report found that in 2016 and 2017, there were six storms that caused more than \$1 billion in damage, the highest number in US history.
- Sea level along US coasts is projected to rise 10-12 inches over the next 30 years, which will bring tide and storm surges further inland. Major flooding will occur about 5 times more frequently than it does today.
- There are significant racial and economic disparities in climate effects, with Black and Hispanic/Latino populations, non-US citizens, and households with lower socioeconomic status hardest hit.
- Indigenous communities are particularly hard hit by climate change and pollution from fossil fuels, the key drivers of the climate emergency, including: facing displacement and relocation; disproportionate impacts of wildfires, as well as oil and gas drilling flares, with related toxic air pollution; and the devastating consequences of mineral extraction. In 2023, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals denied the Apache Stronghold's appeal to stop the destruction of their sacred lands by a multinational copper mine. The mining company joined the US government in a lawsuit against the Apache.
- Water and energy are becoming increasingly unaffordable, especially for poor and low-income households:
 - From 2011 to 2021, bills for water utilities went up by 39% for all households. The lowest-income households saw their water bills increase by more than 46%.
 - In 2022, one in five US families could not afford to pay at least one energy bill. By early 2023, one in six households (19.6 million households) were behind on their electric bills. Consumer utility debt has grown to \$19.5 billion.

Militarism: *Government spending that prioritizes war, mass incarceration, excessive policing, and anti-immigrant forces is contributing to greater violence, fear and criminalization of the poor.*

- At least \$21 trillion has been spent on war, prisons, surveillance and militarism since 2001.
- In 2023, \$1.1 trillion, or more than 62 percent of the discretionary budget, will be allocated to militarism, including war and weapons, law enforcement, mass incarceration, deportations and detention.
- The suicide rate for veterans is dramatically higher than for non-veterans. Since 2001, more than 127,000 veterans have died by suicide.
- Billions of dollars of military equipment used in war (tanks, helicopters, combat rifles, and ammunition) have been transferred to local police departments across the country.
- In 2022, police killed 1,239 people, more than 3 people per day. Although the greatest number of people killed were white (422), Black (275) and Hispanic/Latino (175), Native Americans are 2.2 times more likely to be killed by police than white Americans and 1.2 times more likely to be killed by police than Black Americans.
- From January to May 2023, at least 17,500 people have been killed by gun violence, including 628 teens and 109 children.
- Over the past decade, more than 240,000 people have died from gun violence. Black Americans are 10 times more likely than white Americans to die by gun violence, while 4.5 million women alive today report being threatened with a firearm.
- One-third of the US population (113 million people) has an immediate family member who has been in prison or jail.
- There are 1.9 million people currently incarcerated in the US. This population is overwhelmingly (75%) poor and low-income and disproportionately (40%) people of color.
- More than 400,000 people are held in pre-trial detention: many of them are held in jail because they cannot afford bail. Although innocent, they are too poor to be free.
- In 2022, there were nearly 130,000 unaccompanied migrant children who were held in US custody. At least 3 children have died in US immigration custody in 2023.
- In 2022, ICE arrested 142,750 people and deported 72,000, with Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala as the top countries of origin. There are currently 26,000 people in ICE detention and over 4.7 million awaiting decisions on their deportation cases.

Democracy: A surge of attacks on voting rights and on the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people are denying basic rights to millions of people and constraining our ability to participate in democracy.

- Since 2020, there have been over 1,000 voter suppression bills introduced across all 50 states. Eighty of those bills have been enacted.
- As of June 2023, at least 19 states have enacted partial or full bans on abortion after the Supreme Court reversed Roe v. Wade: AL, AR, AZ, FL, GA, ID, KY, LA, MO, NC, NE, ND, OK, SD, TN, TX, UT, WI and WV.
- As of June 2023, at least 555 anti-trans bills have been introduced in 47 states across the country. Seventy-eight of these bills have been passed in the following states: AL, AR, FL, GA, IA, ID, IN, KS, KY, MO, MS, MO, ND, NE, OK, SD, TN, TX, UT, WV, WY.



**EVERYBODY'S
GOT A RIGHT
TO LIVE**

This is not how it has to be. There is an abundance of wealth and resources to meet our basic needs and ensure we all survive and thrive.

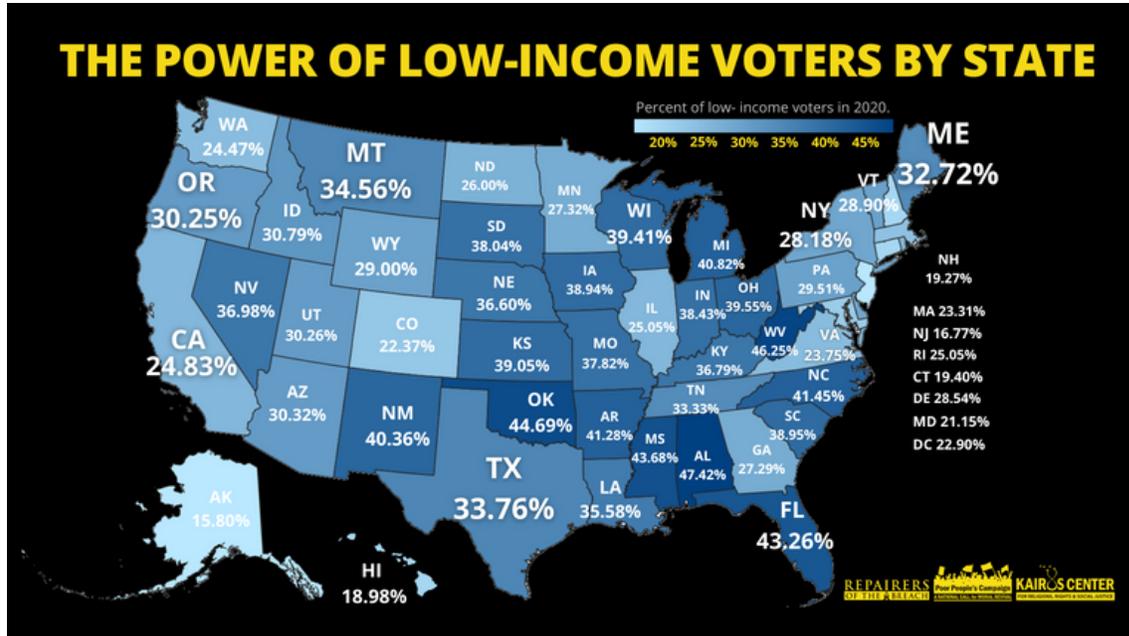
- America has more than 700 billionaires. A proposed tax on their annual wealth gains would generate an estimated \$557 billion over 10 years. Raising the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28% would generate another \$1.3 trillion.
- A ten percent reduction in the current \$920 billion military budget could cover Medicaid for all of the 15-18 million adults now at risk of losing their health insurance.
- In 2023, taxpayers will give \$26 billion for deportations and border control, a sum that could instead cover the cost of subsidies for more than 3 million public housing units; \$40 billion going to the biggest weapons contractor, Lockheed Martin, could pay the salaries of more than 440,000 schoolteachers; \$32 billion for nuclear weapons could provide health insurance for 11 million children; and the \$8 billion going to federal prisons could instead power over 24 million households with solar energy, reducing our climate footprint.
- In 2021, the federal government allocated \$350 billion for state and local government fiscal relief. As of May 2023, approximately \$200 billion is still on the table. These funds could be used to raise public sector wages; provide paid leave, affordable housing or clean water; and meet public health needs. If not allocated by state and local governments by the end of 2024, these funds will be lost.

Moving these resources, and investing more, to fully meet all of our needs will save lives and revive our economy.

- During the pandemic, eviction moratoria and moratoria on utility disconnections saved lives. If enacted earlier, they could have reduced Covid deaths by 40% and 15%, respectively. Universal health care could have saved another 330,000 lives during the pandemic.
- Enacting Medicare for All will save \$450 billion in health care costs and 68,000 lives per year.
- Ending mass incarceration could raise average US life expectancy by five years.
- Providing permanent safe housing delivers lifelong benefits to children and families at an average cost of \$12,800 per person per year, far less than the cost of crisis services for those suffering chronic homelessness.
- Paid family and medical leave improves employment, especially among women, increases child well-being and protects against poverty when health challenges arise.
- Increasing resources for poor and low-income households stimulates the economy much more than making the rich even richer, because these households spend nearly everything they earn. Every dollar going to a low-wage worker adds \$1.20 to the economy overall. Every dollar spent on food stamps generates \$1.50-\$1.80 in economic activity.
- Expanded unemployment insurance during the pandemic protected 5.1 million jobs by boosting economic activity.
- The expanded Child Tax Credit was estimated to have a greater impact on the economy than military spending.
- Overdue improvements to TANF could more than double its reach to include another 2.38 million families nationwide.
- Freedom from debt would allow more people to start small businesses and move around the country to take better jobs, strengthening our economy and workforce.
- Every dollar invested in providing families clean water and proper sanitation yields 5 times as many returns to the US economy.



There are **85 million poor and low-income people** who are eligible to vote in this country. Together, we account for **one-third of the electorate**. Together, we can ensure that the days of poverty and low-wages - and the unnecessary cruelty of abandonment amidst abundance - are numbered. Together, we can revive the heart and soul of this democracy to ensure dignity and justice for all. **Forward together, not one step back!**



Key Resources

Poverty and Low Wages

Living Wage Calculator: <https://livingwage.mit.edu/>

Hours of Work to Afford Housing: <https://nlihc.org/oor>

Workers Earning Less than \$15/Hour: <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/the-crisis-of-low-wages-in-the-us/>

Household and student debt: <https://www.newyorkfed.org/microeconomics/hhdc.html>

Rolling Back on Basic Needs

Impact of the EITC and CTC: <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/monthly-poverty-march-2022>

SNAP Cuts: <https://frac.org/research/resource-library/snap-ea-state-fact-sheets>

Tracking Evictions: <https://evictionlab.org/eviction-tracking/>

Cost Benefit Analysis of TANF: <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/costs-of-cutting-tanf>

Health Care and the Pandemic

Medicaid Eligibility Rollback: <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/how-many-people-might-lose-medicare-when-states-unwind-continuous-enrollment/>

Medicaid Coverage Gap: <https://www.healthinsurance.org/medicaid/>

Paid Family and Medical leave: <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/key-facts-paid-family-and-medical-leave.pdf>

US Life Expectancy: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/20220831.htm

Poverty as Fourth Leading Cause of Death: https://bradydave.files.wordpress.com/2023/04/bradyetal_preprint.pdf

Militarism

State of Insecurity report: <https://ips-dc.org/report-state-of-insecurity-cost-militarization-since-9-11/>

Warfare State: <https://ips-dc.org/report-warfare-state-how-funding-militarism-compromises-welfare/>

Veteran Suicide Data: https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp

Military Equipment Transfers: <https://www.dla.mil/Disposition-Services/Offers/Law-Enforcement/Public-Information/>

Gun Violence Archive: <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>

Mapping Police Violence: <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>

Prison Policy Initiative: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/US.html>

Immigration Detentions: <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/quickfacts/>

Democracy

Voter Restrictions: <https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/pending/search>

Abortion Bans: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/us/abortion-laws-roe-v-wade.html>

Anti-Trans Legislation: <https://translegislation.com/>

Poor People's Campaign Resources

The Souls of Poor Folk: Auditing America: <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/resource/the-souls-of-poor-folk-audit/>

Poor People's Moral Agenda and Demands: <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/about/our-demands/>

Poor People's Moral Policy and Jubilee Platform: <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/about/jubilee-platform/>

A Poor People's Moral Budget: <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/resource/poor-peoples-moral-budget/>

A Poor People's Pandemic Report: <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/pandemic-report/>

Waking the Sleeping Giant: Poor and Low-Income Voters in the 2020 Elections:

<https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/waking-the-sleeping-giant-poor-and-low-income-voters-in-the-2020-elections/>

Compilation of Fact Sheets: <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/resource/factsheets/>

For more information and resources, visit poorpeoplescampaign.org.