

\*\*\* NEW FROM THE INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES\*\*\*

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Press contact at end

## **NEW REPORT: “Homecoming: The Greater Birmingham Community Speaks on Regional Cooperation and a More Inclusive Economy”**

*The Institute for Policy Studies and Alabama Arise’s professional study findings expose the critical issues that impact Greater Birmingham residents — and the solutions they want to see.*

*Birmingham, Alabama* — On November 17, the **Institute for Policy Studies** and **Alabama Arise** released the results of a comprehensive [study](#) highlighting the critical problems that impact Greater Birmingham residents — and the solutions they want to see.

[Read the full report.](#)

The main findings of the report will be announced in a virtual press conference, open to all media, on **Nov. 17, 2022, at 11 a.m. ET/10 a.m. CT. To RSVP as press, email [olivia@ips-dc.org](mailto:olivia@ips-dc.org) with "RSVP: Homecoming Press Conference" to be added to the attendee list and receive a link.**

After decades of economic stagnation, Greater Birmingham, Alabama (defined in the survey as Jefferson County, the City of Birmingham and 33 other municipalities within Jefferson County’s boundaries) has experienced a recent resurgence in economic growth and civic engagement.

Yet the benefits of this new prosperity are not widely shared with the people living in the region. Economic opportunity and financial vulnerability vary widely by race, gender, and geography.

**And Greater Birmingham residents know it. Three quarters of residents say the region’s economic resources are not distributed fairly and only a quarter say they are personally included in Greater Birmingham’s economic revival.**

“The results of this comprehensive study of the issues facing Greater Birmingham residents speak volumes, especially in the wake of the results of the midterms, about where communities stand on the major issues that impact not only Alabama, but our country as a whole,” said **Marc Bayard, Associate Fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and co-author of the report.**

“Alabama’s economy is growing, but ordinary people aren’t seeing the same changes to their bottom line. We see the real-life effects of economic and racial inequality, and we also see the profound need for change in how the government responds to the most urgent needs and concerns of Alabama residents.”

This [study](#), which included a professional survey of **1,024 Greater Birmingham residents**, conducted in 2022, focuses on ensuring broad representation across race, gender, political ideology, and geography (perhaps most important, given Greater Birmingham's fragmented governance).

"Too many people are being left behind in Birmingham's economy these days. The region needs broadly shared prosperity that creates good jobs that provide a living wage and upward mobility," said **Allan M. Freyer, PhD., Visiting Fellow with Alabama Arise and lead author of the report**. "Our study provides local governments across the Birmingham area with a toolbox of potential strategies for promoting equitable economic growth that benefits everyone. Better transit, access to healthy foods, affordable housing, accountability for development projects, and more local authority are the key to a more prosperous, thriving region."

#### **Participants represent three basic areas:**

- **Urban Core**, the predominantly Black urban areas (including the cities of Birmingham and Bessemer)
- **Over the Mountain**, the mostly white suburbs such as Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, and Homewood
- **Largely Rural Outlying Areas** of Jefferson County, such as Oak Grove, McCalla, and Williamsburg

#### **Key findings:**

- **Two-thirds of survey respondents** identified **transportation**—especially the lack of public transit—as the top challenge facing Greater Birmingham, one of the country's most auto-dependent metro areas.
- **More than 55% of residents** cited the **lack of access to healthy food** in certain neighborhoods as a significant problem facing Greater Birmingham residents.
- **Almost 80% of respondents** identified **rising housing costs** as a problem. Another **73%** said the same about the **overall lack of affordable housing**.
- **More than 73% of survey respondents** rated **lack of good jobs** as at least somewhat of a problem, including **82% of Black respondents** and **62% of white respondents**.
- **Nearly 60% of survey respondents** stated that **gaining access to job training programs is a challenge**, and those fortunate enough to complete these programs might not find available jobs calling for their new skills.
- **More than 60% saw child care as a significant challenge for the Greater Birmingham economy.**
- **More than three-quarters of residents want their local government to make sure companies create the jobs they promise in** exchange for public subsidies or tax incentives—and require those jobs to pay living wages.
- **A super-majority of residents (nearly three quarters) oppose preemption (through which state governments can limit the authority of local governments) and support home rule (where local authorities are relatively autonomous).** Large

majorities of Black and white residents alike want local governments to be able to set their own minimum wage.

“Hope for a brighter future is a value shared by people of every race and in every part of the Greater Birmingham area,” said **Robyn Hyden, Executive Director of Alabama Arise**. “For prosperity to be shared more broadly, residents are telling us we need to invest in recruiting high-quality, better-paying jobs. We can support workers in getting to those jobs with better public transportation and stronger investments in child care and affordable housing.”

## **Methodology:**

To best capture ideas and perspectives, IPS:

- **Commissioned a professional survey in 2022 of 1,024 Greater Birmingham residents** to understand the challenges residents are facing and the policy solutions they support.
- **Conducted 12 focus groups with key categories of stakeholders** to learn more about the biggest challenges facing Greater Birmingham area residents. We engaged approximately 80 people, including corporate leaders, business owners, faith leaders across the racial spectrum, grassroots activists, leaders of women’s groups, youth development groups, and other nonprofit leaders working in various aspects of equitable development across the area.
- **Conducted two dozen one-on-one interviews with community leaders**, including staff at local governments, regional foundations, regionwide civic initiatives of all kinds, grassroots activists, policy advocates, nonprofit leaders, neighborhood association presidents, and local developers to hear their concerns and solutions.

[Read the full report.](#)

To speak with report authors **Marc Bayard and Dr. Allan Freyer** about IPS and Alabama Arise’s new report on these critical findings about how Greater Birmingham residents view critical economic and social issues in their communities, and how these findings reflect larger trends in how communities prioritize those issues, contact **Olivia Alperstein** at (202) 704-9011 or [olivia@ips-dc.org](mailto:olivia@ips-dc.org).

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## **About the Institute for Policy Studies**

For nearly six decades, the [Institute for Policy Studies](#) has provided critical research support for major social movements and progressive leaders inside and outside government and on the ground around the United States and the world. As the United States' oldest progressive multi-issue think tank, IPS turns bold ideas into action through public scholarship and mentorship of the next generation of progressive scholars and activists.

## **About Alabama Arise**

[Alabama Arise](#) is a statewide, member-led organization advancing public policies to improve the lives of Alabamians who are marginalized by poverty. Its membership includes faith-based, community, nonprofit and civic groups, grassroots leaders, and individuals from across Alabama.