

Toward a Healthier, More Inclusive Florida

All Floridians deserve to be safe and healthy. We deserve safe space to shelter, food in our bellies, the means to take care of our families, and the ability to seek care when we're sick.

While access to these human rights and to democracy were by no means universal in Florida before the pandemic, the coronavirus has deepened these democratic deficiencies and exacerbated inequities in access to the resources and rights we need to lead full, healthy lives. This is especially true for Black and Brown communities in Florida.

As the coronavirus pandemic was escalating, New Florida Majority Education Fund stopped all canvassing and pivoted a team of over 200 democracy organizers to doing wellness calls to people in the communities we serve. Between March and May 2020, New Florida Majority Education Fund democracy organizers called over 1 million Floridians and spoke with over 21,000 Floridians to ask them a set of questions about how the pandemic was affecting their lives and well-being. We have continued making calls to check in on Floridians and to provide resources and support to meet our community's needs. To date, we have called approximately 1.4 million Floridians, speaking with and attempting to support more than 40,000 Floridians struggling to take care of their families and communities.

In our initial conversations as the pandemic was unfolding this spring, we found that, while Floridians of all races, ethnicities, and ages are struggling to feed our families, stay in our homes, find safe work, and access the supplies needed to keep ourselves and our communities safe, the harmful impacts of COVID-19 are hitting Black and Brown Floridians hardest. We also found that Floridians are civically

engaged, filling out their census forms to ensure they are counted and making plans to vote by mail so their voices will be counted, too, this critical election year—but that the coronavirus is likely creating challenges in these areas as well.

This report presents our findings from those surveys conducted in in the early days of the pandemic, from March through May, and paints a picture of the ways COVID-19 is impacting various communities in Florida.



Key Findings:

- *Employment Status:* People who self-identified as Black or Latinx shared experiences of layoffs and reduced work at higher rates than white respondents, across all age groups. Black respondents are being laid off at higher rates than any other racial or ethnic group surveyed, and those that have retained employment report to work in-person more than any other group surveyed.
- *Housing Stability:* Black and Latinx respondents reported not being able to pay rent at higher rates than white respondents—in the case of Latinx respondents, more than 4 times the rate of white respondents. Black and Latinx women, as well as Black and Latinx respondents whose gender is unknown or unreported, both reported higher rates of inability to pay rent than men.

- *Food Security*: Black and Brown respondents reported not having enough food to feed their families at nearly twice the rate of white respondents.
- *Access to Cleaning Supplies*: Black and Brown respondents reported not having access to cleaning supplies at more than twice the rate of white respondents. Latinx respondents reported not having enough cleaning supplies at a rate 14 percentage points lower than white respondents.
- *Top Issues of Concern*: Significant portions of both Black and Brown respondents and white respondents reported that health care and financial/job security were the top concerns as COVID-19 was unfolding. Respondents also reported being concerned about access to food, being able to pay their rent or mortgage, and their mental health, among other issues.
- *Civic Engagement*: Fewer Black and Latinx respondents have completed their census than white respondents, and Black respondents reported not having received their census form at rates 4-5 percentage points higher than white and Latinx respondents. Sixty-one percent of Floridians surveyed plan to vote by mail, but young voters plan to vote by mail at lower rates than older voters, and young Black and Brown voters report planning to vote by mail at the lowest rate of any racial or age group.

This survey was conducted in the earliest days of the coronavirus pandemic. Months later, Florida has emerged as a national hotspot of the virus. At the height of the pandemic in mid-July, Florida suffered a staggering 15,300 new cases per day and had lost more than 4,200 lives.¹

At the time of this writing, Floridians are suffering about 2,600 new cases daily and have lost a devastating more than 15,000 lives in our communities.² Just as the day-to-day impacts of the coronavirus detailed in this report are hitting Black and Brown Floridians hardest, chronic disinvestment and systematic inequity means these same Floridians are also facing higher rates of infection and death.³

Following the completion of this survey, research studies and news reports have showcased a continued widening of the racial disparities with COVID-19 and the harsh reality that Black and Brown communities are made to endure. As we face systemic inequalities, the harder times that Floridians are now facing call for immediate and holistic interventions, as detailed in the recommendations section of this report.

The Survey

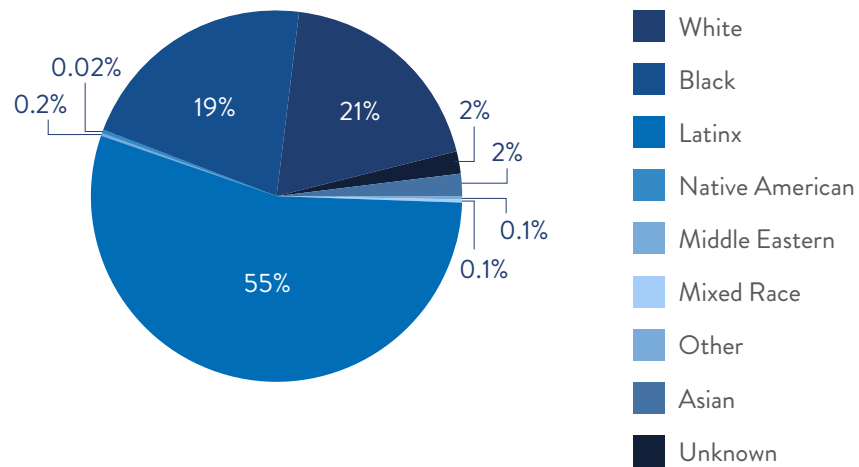
Between March and May 2020, New Florida Majority Education Fund democracy organizers contacted more than 1 million Floridians and had in-depth conversations with more than 21,000 Floridians. On average, our organizers spoke with the Floridians we called for 15 minutes to ask a set of questions about the impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods, including their needs and priorities, and their plans to be civically engaged this year through the census, voting, and volunteering. The more than 1 million Floridians we called represent New Florida Majority Education Fund members and supporters, as well as a sample of Floridians from the voter rolls who are not connected to the New Florida Majority Education Fund.

The Data

The majority of Floridians surveyed live in 5 counties with significant Black and Brown populations—Broward, Duvall, Leon, Miami-Dade, Palm Beach—and the findings highlighted in this report represent respondents only from those counties. Since the principal pursuit of this analysis was to understand how COVID-19 may have impacted racial and ethnic groups differently in its early months, we analyzed only surveys in which respondents reported a race and/or ethnicity. After narrowing for both geography and for race and ethnicity, the full data set we analyzed contains approximately 12,700 unique observations.

In our analysis, we looked at racial disparities between Black and Brown Floridians and white Floridians, and specifically at the experiences of Black and Latinx Floridians. If we do not specify that findings reflect Black and Latinx respondents, but instead share findings about Black and Brown Floridians, we are talking about people who identify as Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian, Middle Eastern, Mixed Race, or other. Figure 1a describes the distribution of race and ethnicity that respondents identify with. Most respondents identified as Latinx (55 percent), Black (21 percent), or white (19 percent). Survey respondents whose reported race and ethnicity are unknown make up 2 percent of respondents.

FIGURE 1A.
Race & Ethnicity of Floridians Highlighted in Report



We also considered age and gender in our analysis. Figure 1b describes the distribution of ages among survey respondents. In our analysis, the youngest share were respondents ages 19-24, who made up 9 percent of those analyzed. Another 16 percent were ages 25-34, 19 percent were ages 35-49, and 22 percent were ages 50-64. The largest share of respondents analyzed, 34 percent, were age 65 or older.

FIGURE 1B.

Age in Years of Floridians Highlighted in Report

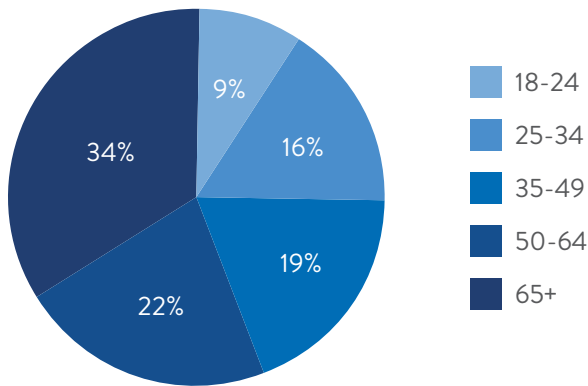
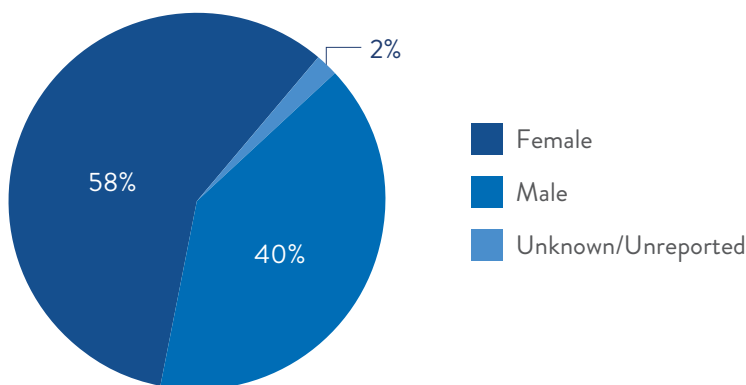


Figure 1c shows the gender distribution among survey respondents analyzed in this report. A majority (58 percent) of respondents identified as female, while 40 percent identified as male. The gender is unknown or unreported for 2 percent of the survey respondents analyzed.

FIGURE 1C.

Gender of Floridians Highlighted in Report

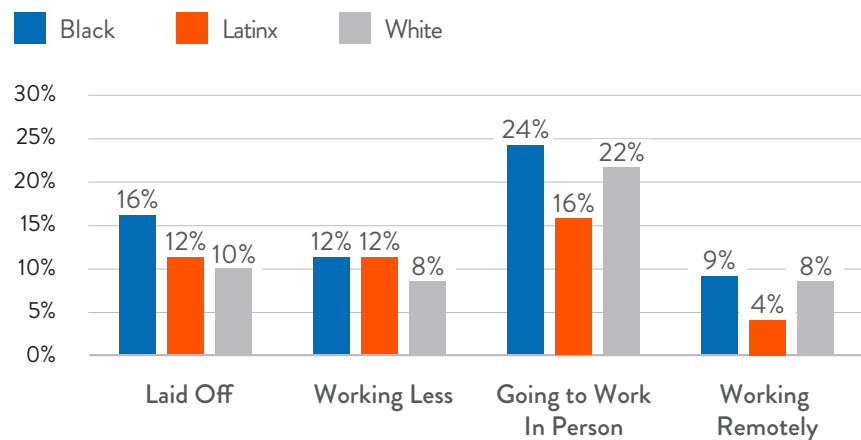


COVID-19 Impact on Employment

As are communities across the country, Floridians are experiencing extreme disruptions in their employment, in many cases with dire consequences. Many of the troubling statistics in the rest of this report—including unstable housing, limited access to food, and inadequate cleaning supplies—are a direct result of the inability of many Floridians to work and, in turn, bring home a paycheck. Alarming numbers of respondents across races and ethnicities reported being laid off or having their hours cut, but our analysis finds these cuts are hitting Black and Latinx Floridians hardest, as Figure 2 shows. Sixteen percent of Black respondents and 12 percent of Latinx respondents reported being laid off since the pandemic began, compared to 10 percent of white respondents. Twelve percent of both Black and Latinx Floridians surveyed reported working less because their hours were cut, compared to 8 percent of white Floridians surveyed. Further, Black respondents reported going to work in person at higher rates than any other respondents—24 percent—a finding that comports with what we know to be true about the racial makeup of frontline workers.⁴ This means Black Floridians in particular are at increased risk of contracting the virus while working so that they can take care of themselves, their families, and our communities.

FIGURE 2.

Employment Status During COVID-19



Note: percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could also answer "other," and some did not answer this question.

Racial disparities in layoffs and reduced hours hold up across every age group, as reflected in Figures 3a-3c. Black and Brown respondents ages 18-34 reported being laid off and working fewer hours at 4 percentage points higher than white respondents in that age group. Black and Brown respondents ages 35-64 also reported being laid off at rates 4 percentage points higher, and working fewer hours at rates 6 percentage points higher, than white respondents ages 35-64. Only among the oldest workers, many of whom are not working formally anymore, do these gaps narrow somewhat, though racial disparities still persist among respondents ages 65 and above.

FIGURE 3A.

Laid Off and Reduced Work Rates Among Floridians Ages 18-34

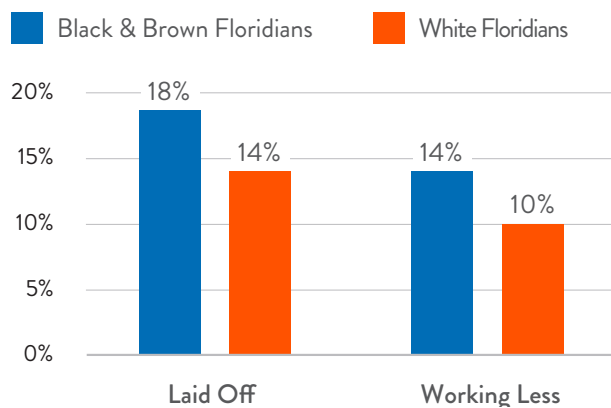


FIGURE 3B.

Laid Off and Reduced Work Rates Among Floridians Ages 35-64

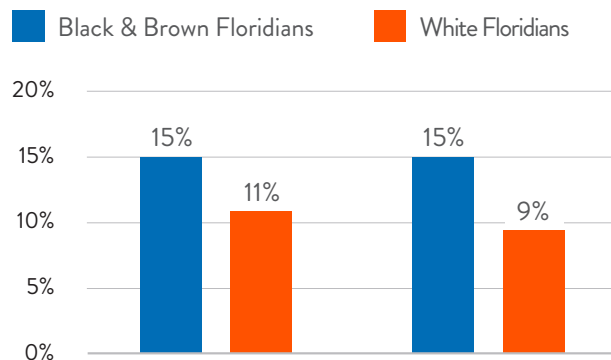
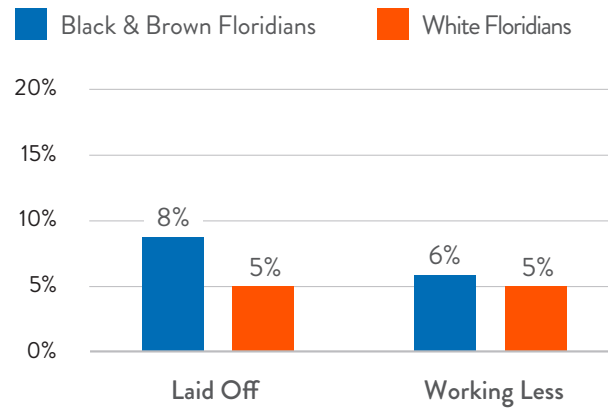


FIGURE 3C.

Laid Off and Reduced Work Rates Among Floridians Ages 65+



Housing Stability During COVID-19

Respondents' access to stable housing also varied by race and ethnicity (see Figure 4a). While only 2 percent of white respondents reported not being able to pay their rent, 5 percent of Black respondents and 8 percent of Latinx respondents reported not being able to pay rent. Among those surveyed, Black people reported not being able to pay rent at more than twice the rate, and Latinx people at 4 times the rate, of white people.

Disparities in ability to pay rent are even more extreme when considering gender (see Figure 4b). Nine percent of Latinx women and 6 percent of Black women in Florida cited not being able to pay rent, compared to just 2 percent of white women. Two percent of respondents have not disclosed their gender. Of the population of people without reported gender, 9 percent of Black respondents cite inability to pay rent, 3-4 percentage points higher than reports of Black women and men. Latinx respondents whose gender is unreported cite inability to pay rent at rates 1-3 percentage points higher than Latinx women and men. Some of those whose gender is unreported may be gender-nonconforming Floridians. These data suggest that the intersecting discriminations of racism, sexism, and cissexism mean Black and Brown women, as well as gender nonconforming people in Florida, as everywhere, are the hardest hit by the pandemic.

FIGURE 4A.

Inability to Pay Rent

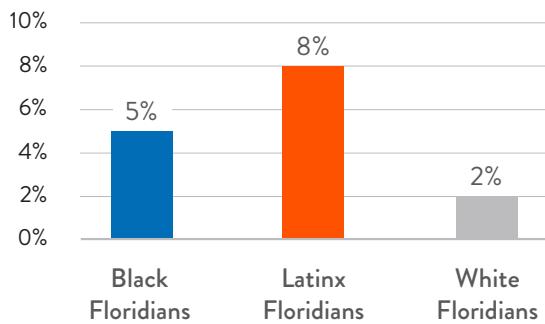
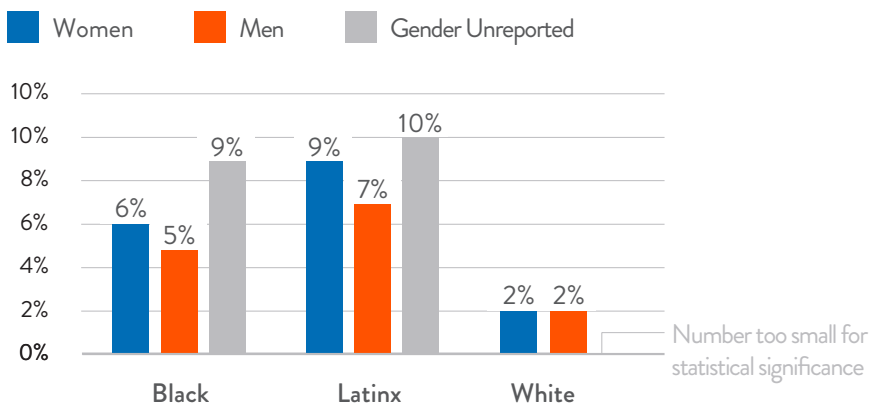


FIGURE 4B.

Inability to Pay Rent



Census data on housing insecurity show the worsening crisis of evictions and homelessness in Florida—more than 7 percent of adult Floridians report not being current on rent or mortgage payments, or having slight or no confidence that their household can pay next month’s rent or mortgage on time.⁵ When COVID-19 daily cases were at their highest in Florida in mid-July, Black and Latinx renters were more than twice as likely to be on the brink of homelessness as their white neighbors.⁶ These disparities are not accidental; they are by design. Centuries of discriminatory zoning and housing policies and practices mean that Black and Latinx families have been systematically prevented from homeownership and the opportunities for wealth building that so many white families have enjoyed. The housing crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic has also laid bare the long-standing racial and gender inequities that permeate all our systems and institutions.

Food Security During COVID-19

Black and Brown respondents were also less likely to report having enough food to feed their families over the next few weeks, as Figures 5a-5c show. Seventy-five percent of Black and Brown respondents (combined) said they had enough food, compared to 81 percent of white respondents. Meanwhile, Black and Brown respondents reported not having enough food at nearly twice the rate of white respondents (12 percent to 7 percent, respectively). Black respondents alone reported having enough food at a rate a full 10 percentage points lower than that of white respondents: 71 percent of Black respondents, compared to 81 percent of white ones

FIGURE 5A.

Have Enough Food for Family, Black & Brown Floridians

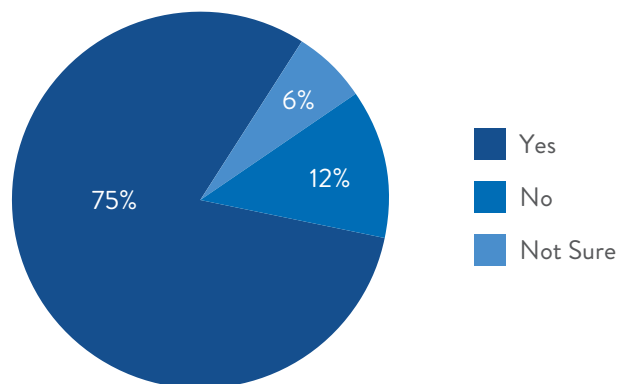


FIGURE 5B.

Have Enough Food for Family, White Floridians

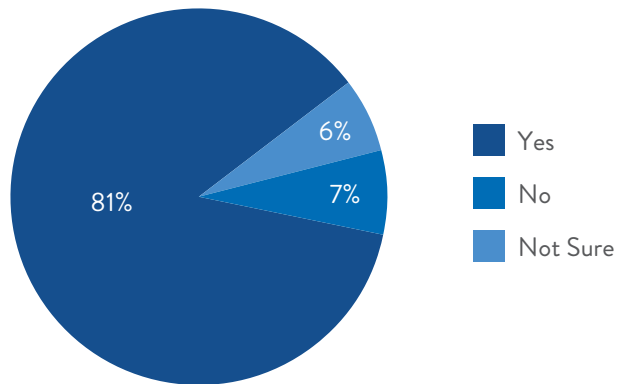
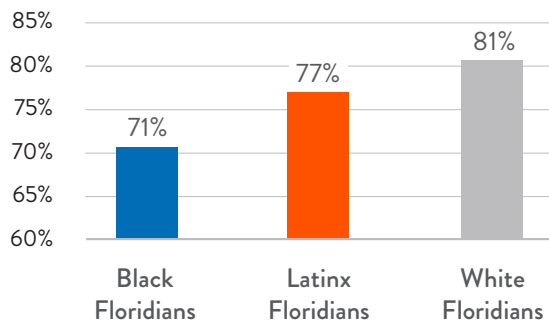


FIGURE 5C.

Have Enough Food for Family



Note: percentages do not add up to 100% because some respondents did not answer this question.

Access to Cleaning Supplies During COVID-19

Similarly, Black and Brown respondents were less likely to report having adequate access to cleaning supplies—including personal protective equipment like masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, and approved disinfectants—a critical component of keeping our families and communities safe during a global pandemic. While 83 percent of white respondents said they had access to cleaning supplies, only 70 percent of Black and Brown respondents (combined) reported having that access. Only 69 percent of Latinx respondents alone had adequate access to cleaning supplies, a full 14 percentage points less than white ones (see Figures 6a-6c).

FIGURE 6A.

Access to Cleaning Supplies,
Black & Brown Floridians

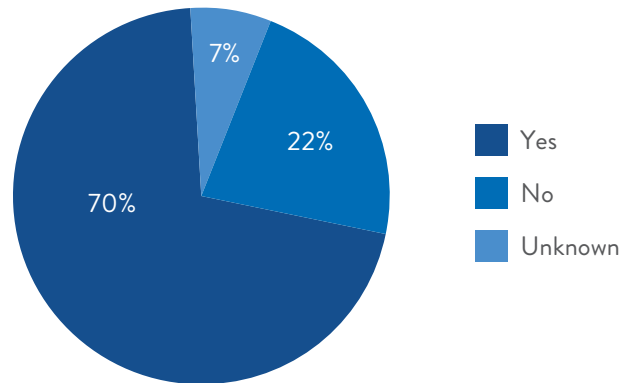


FIGURE 6B.

Access to Cleaning Supplies,
White Floridians

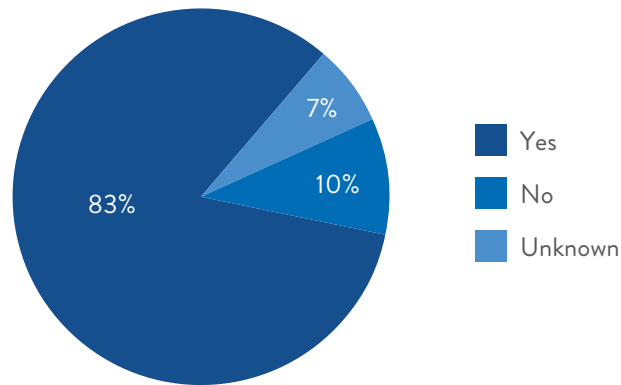
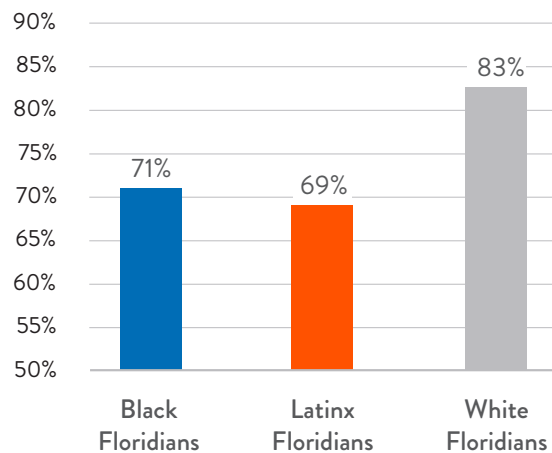


FIGURE 6C.

Access to Cleaning Supplies



Issues of Most Importance During COVID-19

Across race and ethnicity, Floridians surveyed are deeply concerned about access to quality health care and about job and financial security. Respondents also cited access to food, ability to pay their rent or mortgage, and mental health as important issues in their lives (see Figures 7a-7c). A significant portion of respondents chose “other” or did not answer the question, so we know Floridians were grappling with a number of serious issues as COVID-19 was unfolding—issues that were only likely to have been exacerbated as the infection rates in Florida skyrocketed

FIGURE 7A.

Most Important Issues During COVID, Black Floridians

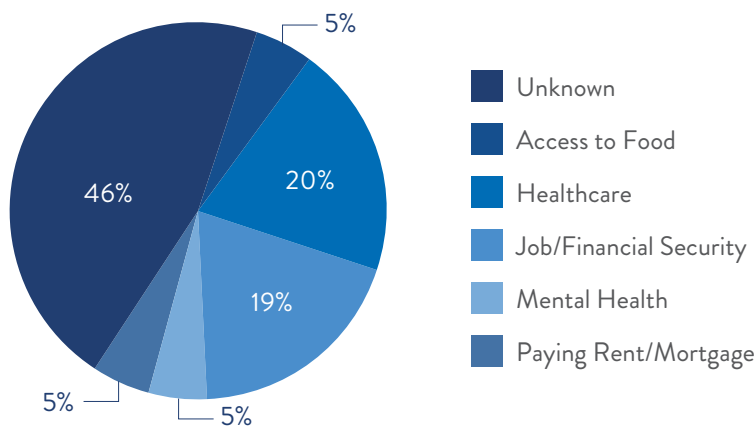


FIGURE 7B.

Most Important Issues During COVID, Latinx Floridians

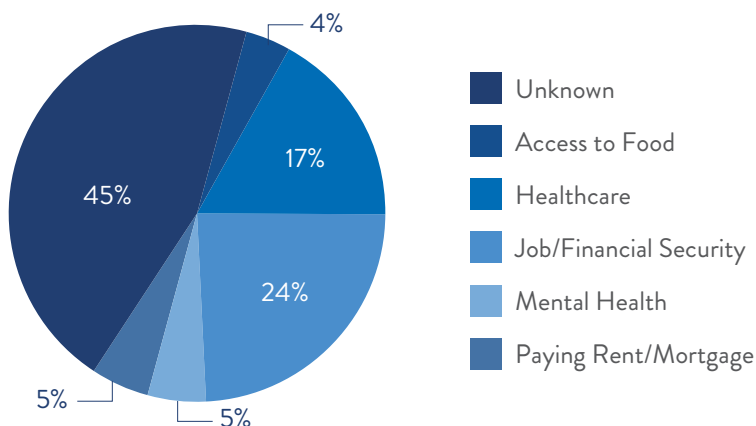
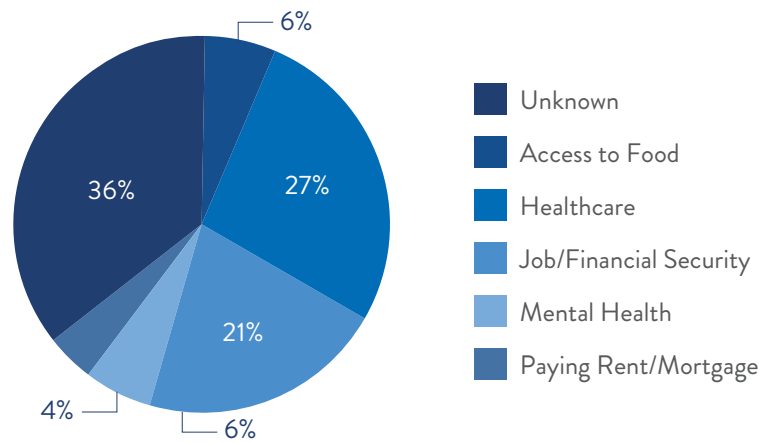


FIGURE 7C.

Most Important Issues During COVID, White Floridians



Census Completion During COVID-19

During the survey period (March – May, 2020), 61 percent of survey respondents overall said they had completed the U.S. Census. Broken out by race and ethnicity, however, we see disparate rates of completion among communities. Sixty-five percent of white respondents reported having filled out and submitted their census, compared to 62 percent of Latinx respondents and 56 percent of Black respondents. This may be partly explained by the fact that Black respondents re-

ported not yet having received their census form at higher rates than both Latinx and white respondents—18 percent of Black respondents had not yet received their census form, compared to 13 percent of Latinx respondents and 14 percent of white respondents. The fact that so many Black respondents had not yet received their census form almost certainly contributes to a deep and enduring distrust of the government and political process that was not designed and has never fully served Black and Brown people in this country. These disparate delivery and completion rates likely mean the government will once again fail to accurately count Black and Brown communities.

FIGURE 8A.

Have Completed the Census

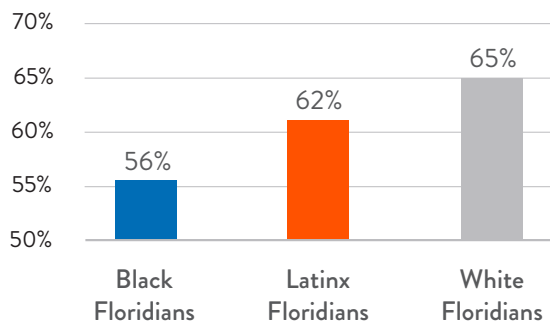
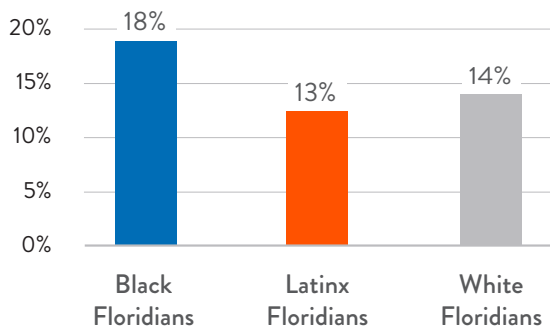


FIGURE 8B.

Have Not Received Census Form

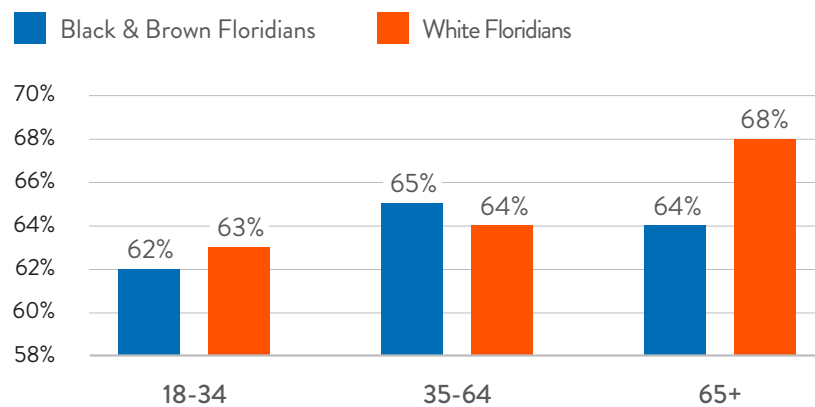


Vote by Mail During COVID-19

Our survey also asked about respondents' plans to vote by mail in 2020. Overall, 64 percent of respondents indicated they plan to vote by mail. However, there are gaps between age groups and within each age group, and between Black and Brown respondents and white respondents in terms of who plans to vote by mail, as indicated in Figure 9. Younger voters, ages 18-34, plan to vote by mail at lower rates than older voters. Most dramatically, 62 percent of young Black and Brown respondents plan to vote by mail, compared to 68 percent of older white voters (age 65 and above), a 6 percentage point difference.

FIGURE 9.

Plans to Vote by Mail by Age Group



Recommendations

Dozens of organizations and unions—representing millions of working-class people and Black and Brown people across the state—are working together as Florida Coronavirus Action to make sure everyone in the state is protected during the coronavirus pandemic. This coalition has identified the following community priorities that Governor DeSantis, the Florida legislature, and local leaders across the state must meet to take care of Floridians now and build a brighter future:⁷

- A Budget for Working People
- A Permanent Unemployment Insurance Fix
- Protection for Our Essential Workers
- Moratorium on Utility Shut-Offs
- Protection for All Working Families
- The Right to Health Care
- Cancel Rent and Mortgages
- Save Florida's Small Businesses
- A Sustainable & Resilient Recovery
- Voters' Rights
- Restore Local Governments' Ability to Rebuild
- A Seat at the Table
- The Right to Information
- A Plan For Vulnerable Populations, including our children, college and university students, immigrants, incarcerated people, those without a vehicle, Floridians with disabilities, those facing domestic abuse, the houseless, the food insecure, LGBTQ+ people, sex workers, our seniors.

Our state has all the resources it needs to see us through this crisis and those after. We can ensure every Floridian has access to testing and care, a safe place to stay, and direct assistance. There is enough for all of us to get through this time of crisis together, and it is our right.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting all sectors in the communities of Florida. The findings from this survey support findings from other reports at the national level on the disproportionate impact on Black and Brown communities. Further investigations and rapid response are needed to address the impact, challenges, and immediate needs that communities in the State of Florida face to survive this pandemic and be in a better position to handle potential and future disasters.



Endnotes

- ¹ “Impact of Opening and Closing Decisions by State,” Florida on July 12, 2020, Johns Hopkins University & Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/state-timeline/new-deaths/florida>.
- ² *Id.*, Florida on October 7, 2020. Note: Official tallies of infections and deaths almost certainly undercount the true impact of the coronavirus outbreak due to limited testing availability.
- ³ Racial Data Dashboard, “The COVID Tracking Project,” <https://covidtracking.com/race/dashboard>.
- ⁴ Hye Jin Rho, Hayley Brown, and Shawn Fremstad, *A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Frontline Industries*, The Center for Economic and Policy Research, April 2020. <https://cepr.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-04-Frontline-Workers.pdf>.
- ⁵ Household Pulse Survey, Week 15 (September 16 – 28, 2020), U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/hhp/#/?measures=HIR>.
- ⁶ Demos analysis of Household Pulse Survey, Week 12 (July 16 – 21, 2020), U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp12.html>.
- ⁷ COVID-19 Community Priorities from Grassroots Organizations, Florida Coronavirus Community Action, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GexI13cBwzb5vjTWJ109f3do-b5PbojI/view>.

Dēmos

We are a dynamic “think-and-do” tank that powers the movement for a just, inclusive, multiracial democracy.

Through cutting-edge policy research, inspiring litigation and deep relationships with grassroots organizations, Dēmos champions solutions that will create a democracy and economy rooted in racial equity.

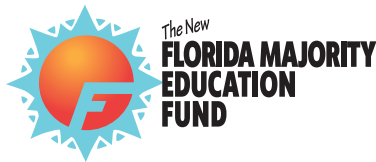
Our name means “the people.” It is the root word of democracy, and it reminds us that in America, the true source of our greatness is the diversity of our people.

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The New Florida Majority-Education Fund (NewFM-EF), established in 2011, is an independent nonpartisan 501(c)3 multiracial, community-centered racial justice organization dedicated to creating an inclusive, equitable, and just Florida by building up the unified power of the state’s historically marginalized groups. NewFM-EF works to increase the political voice and well-being of communities of color, and build multi-racial unity across the state through issue campaigns in the arenas of democratic rights, criminal justice reform, economic justice, climate justice, gender justice and immigrant justice.

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