THE CRISIS OF COVID-19 AND SOUTHEAST LOS ANGELES

A Survey Report

SELA COLLABORATIVE

CAL STATE LA
PAT BROWN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Unleashing the Power of Participation

Latino Decisions

SUPPORTED BY A GRANT FROM:

California COMMUNITY Foundation

Introduction

Over the past year, the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State LA, the SELA Collaborative, and Latino Decisions have fielded two groundbreaking surveys that explore life in Southeast Los Angeles (SELA). The surveys were completed with funding from the California Community Foundation. In both cases, our goal has been to unearth the voices of SELA, to gain insight into the problems and issues facing this historically underserved region, and to generate conversations that will strengthen our communities.

The first survey, "Living and Working in SELA," reached 1,017 SELA residents and was conducted before the coronavirus pandemic hit the United States.

Released in February 2020, the findings showed SELA as a struggling community contending with longstanding and persistent inequities. Specifically, we found that:

A large percentage of SELA residents lacked healthcare coverage.

Annual household income was markedly lower than the Los Angeles County average.

Homeownership rates were relatively low.

The majority of respondents worried about environmental hazards.

Working residents faced long commutes.

Introduction

At the same time, there were signs of hope; more than half of residents indicated that their economic circumstances had improved in the past five years.

Given the vulnerabilities illuminated in the first survey, it was apparent that the pandemic's impact would be felt all the more acutely in SELA. This made it critical to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the community and highlight opportunities for recovery. We conducted a second survey between May 8 and May 14, 2020 to assess the state of SELA during this ongoing public health and economic catastrophe.

Both surveys were conducted under the direction of Dr. Matt Barreto and Ms. Claudia Rodriguez of Latino Decisions, the leading national survey firm specializing in the Latinx community. The second survey reached 500 SELA residents through a mixed mode of cellphone, landline, and Internet interviews. Surveys were conducted in English and Spanish, according to respondents' preference. The margin of error was +4.4 percentage points.

The highlights of the survey were presented to the public on June 4th, 2020. In this report, we dig deeper into the data.

Introduction

This report summarizes the primary results of the second survey and spotlights the key social, economic, and public health issues that SELA residents are facing during the current crisis. It is intended to help government officials, community-based organizations, business and labor, and philanthropy to develop a policy framework to envision and implement a more equitable future for residents of SELA. On a larger scale, a window into SELA can help us better understand the challenges that other largely working-class, suburban communities of color throughout California face.

A Report by the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State LA

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SELA

is a largely Latino, working-class community

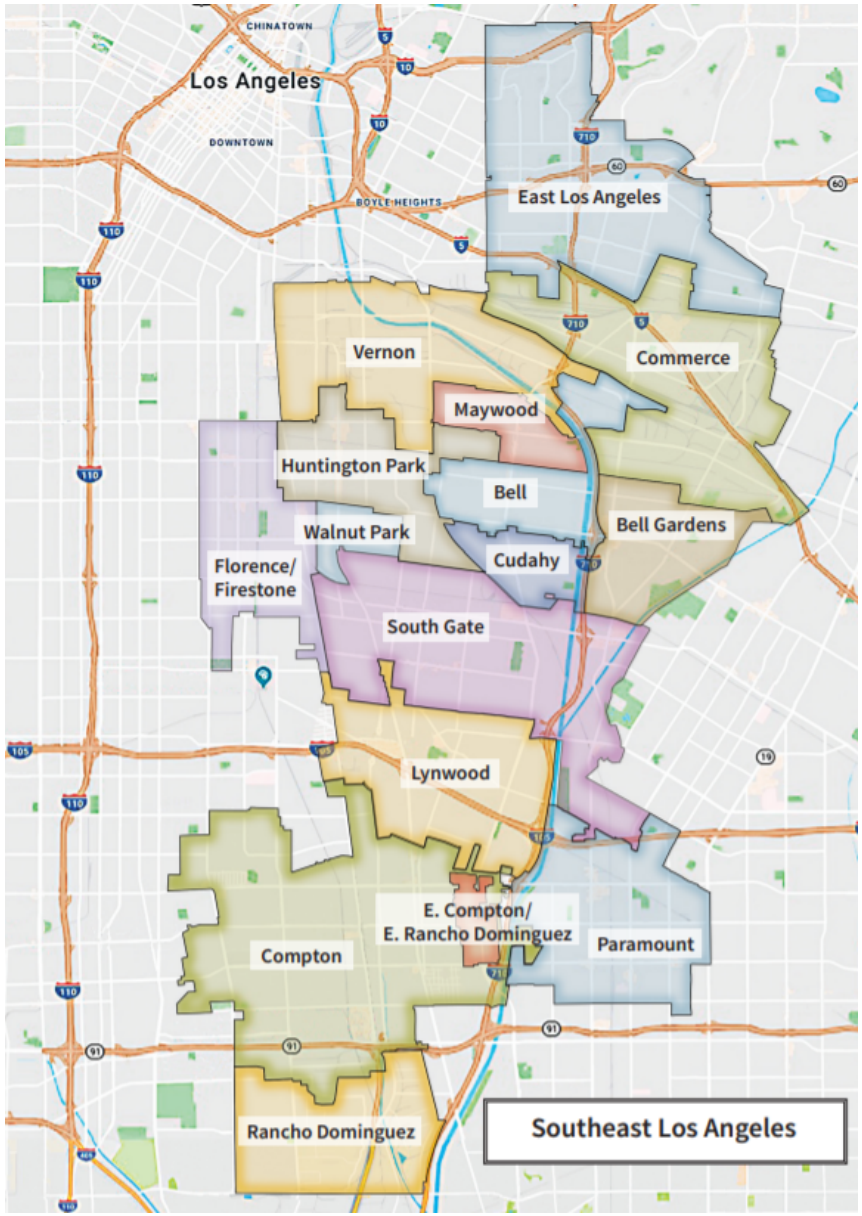
Our first survey found that

89%

of respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino

and the average annual household income ranged from

$40,000 to **$50,000**



First Survey Found Signs of Optimism

The Institute's first survey of SELA, which was conducted before the pandemic, found that while this working-class community was economically stressed, there were also signs of optimism.

63%

of the respondents in the first survey stated that their personal economic situation had improved over the past five years.

Due to COVID-19, Many Economic Gains Have Been Reversed

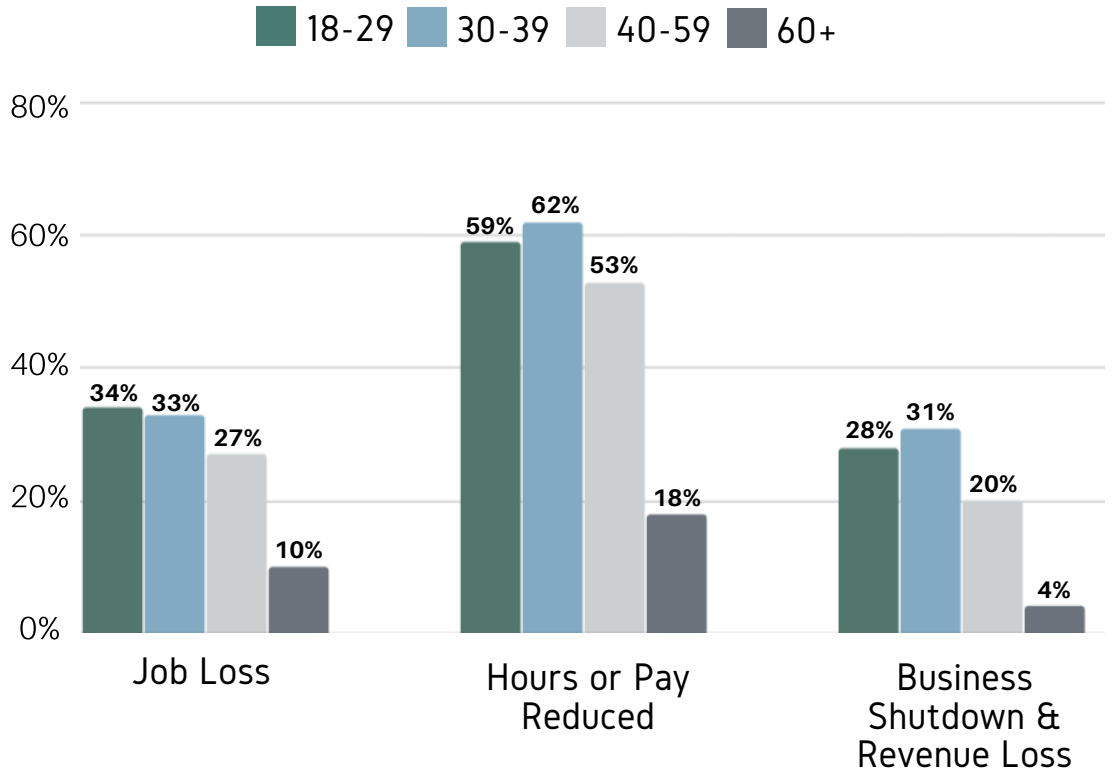
AMONG RESPONDENT HOUSEHOLDS:

25%
reported job loss

45%
had work hours cut or pay reduced

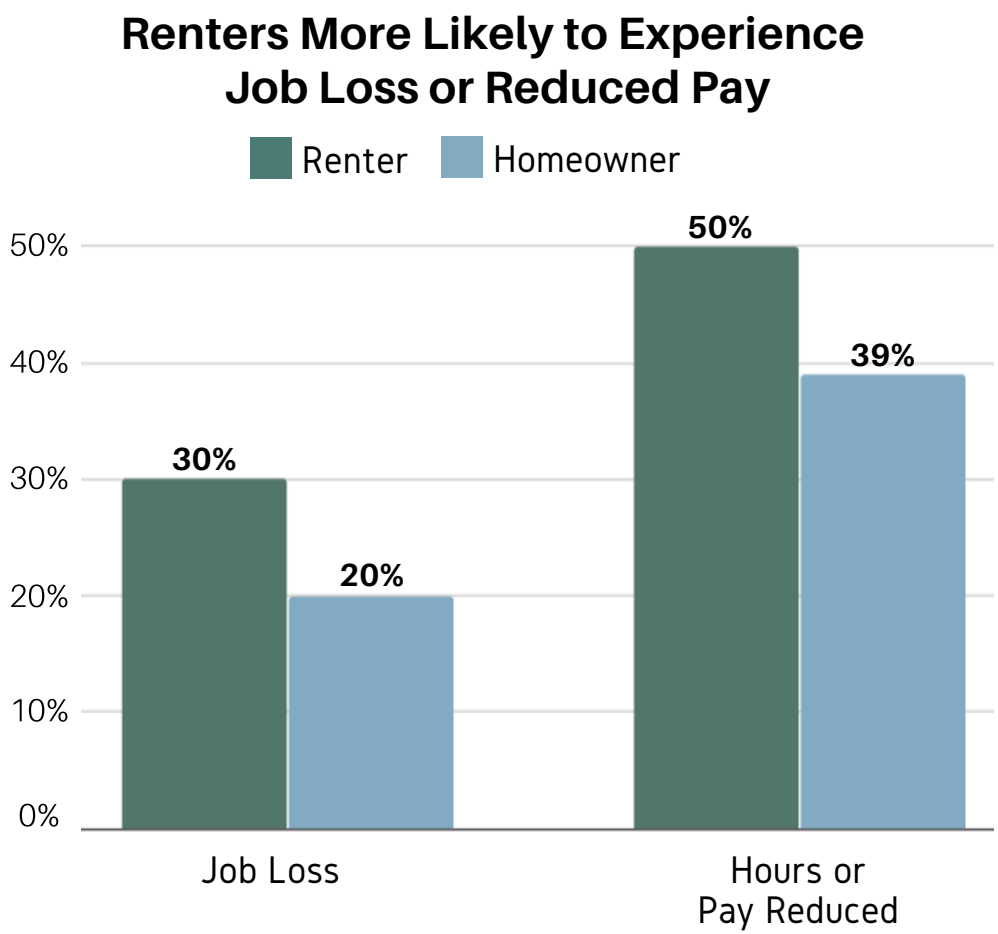
19%
owned a business that shut down or lost revenue

Residents Ages 39 and Under More Likely to Live in a Household Where Someone Has Experienced Economic Loss



- Among those who have lost their job or business, 25% worked in retail and sales, while 19% were employed in the restaurant and food service industry.

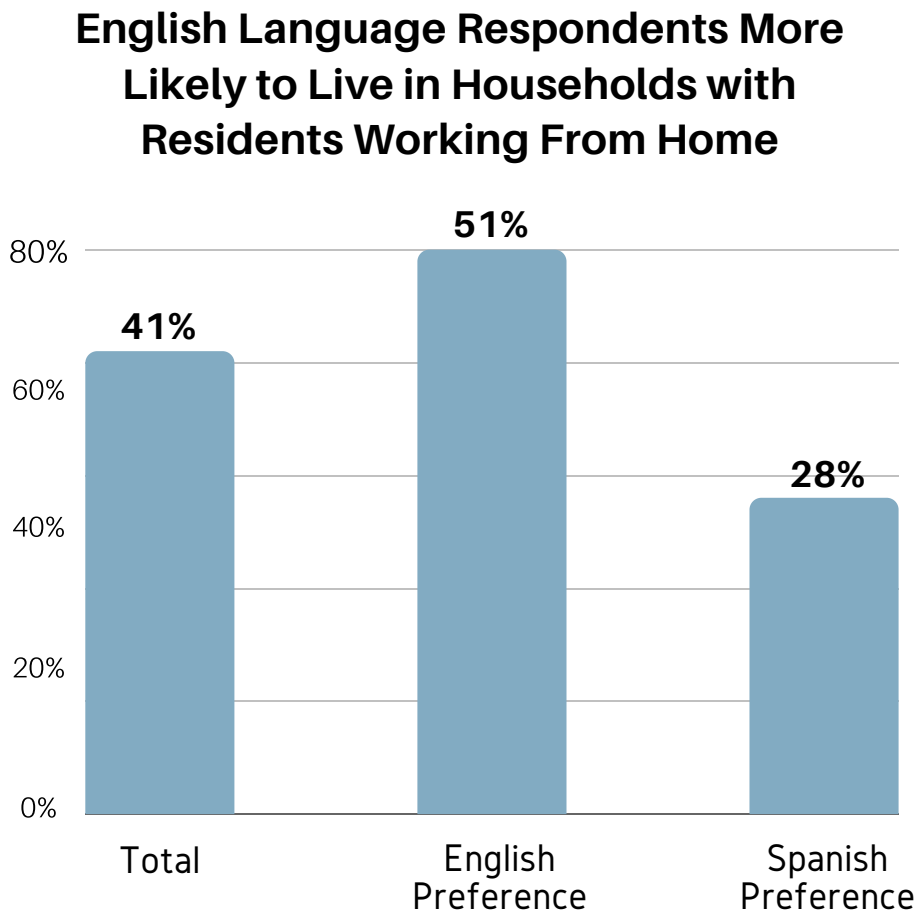
Renters Have Experienced Severe Economic Loss



Majority Live in Households Where No One Is Able to Work From Home

Compared to Spanish language respondents, those who took the survey in English are more likely to live in a household where someone is able to work from home.

While 76% of college graduates live in a household with someone working from home, only 36% of those with some college and 31% of respondents with a high school degree or less were in that situation.



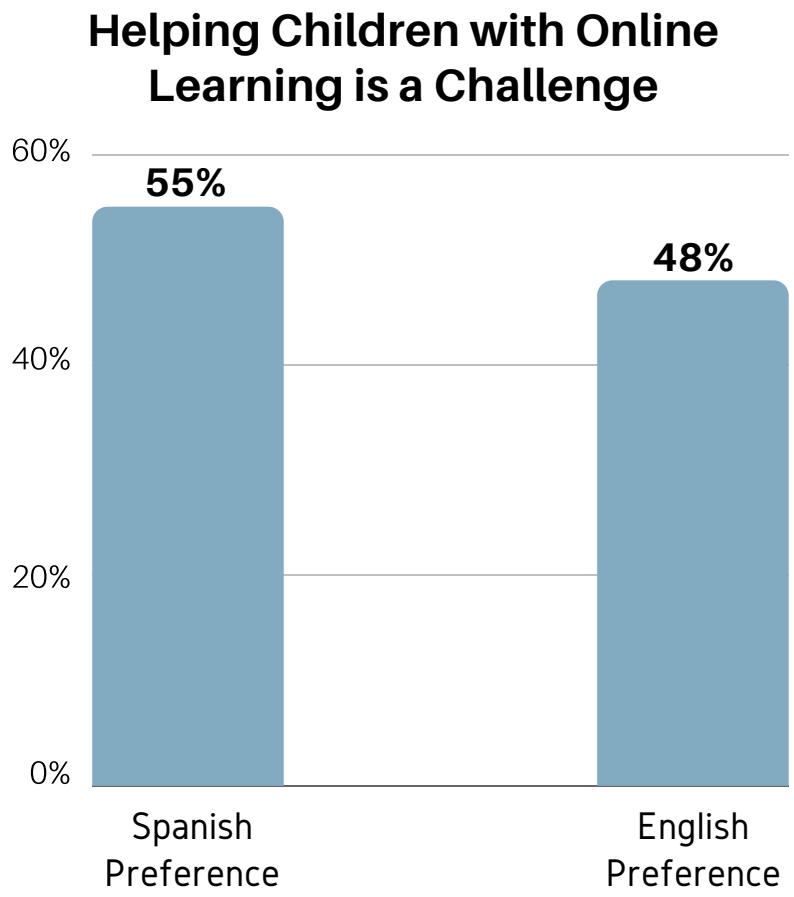
For Those Working or Attending School Online, Assistance is Inadequate

7% say that work or school is helping to pay for cellphone or internet bills

27% state that there are NOT enough computers, laptops, or tablets for multiple people

6% are receiving a computer or tablet to use from home

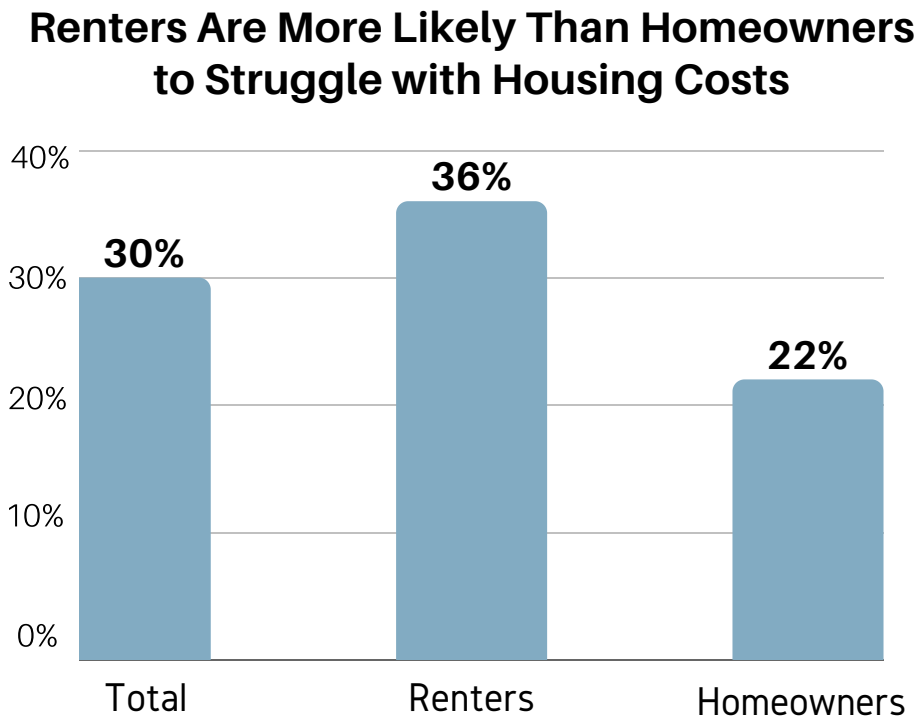
Pandemic Poses Unique Issues for Households with Young Children



Half of households with children had difficulty helping children with online schooling because they lacked familiarity with the subject matter.

Those who took the survey in Spanish were seven percentage points more likely than English-language interviewees to find it difficult to help children with online learning.

Residents Struggle with Housing Costs



30%

of respondents live in households that have struggled to pay rent or mortgage during the coronavirus pandemic.

This is especially true of renters; they are 14 percentage points more likely than homeowners to have trouble with housing payments.

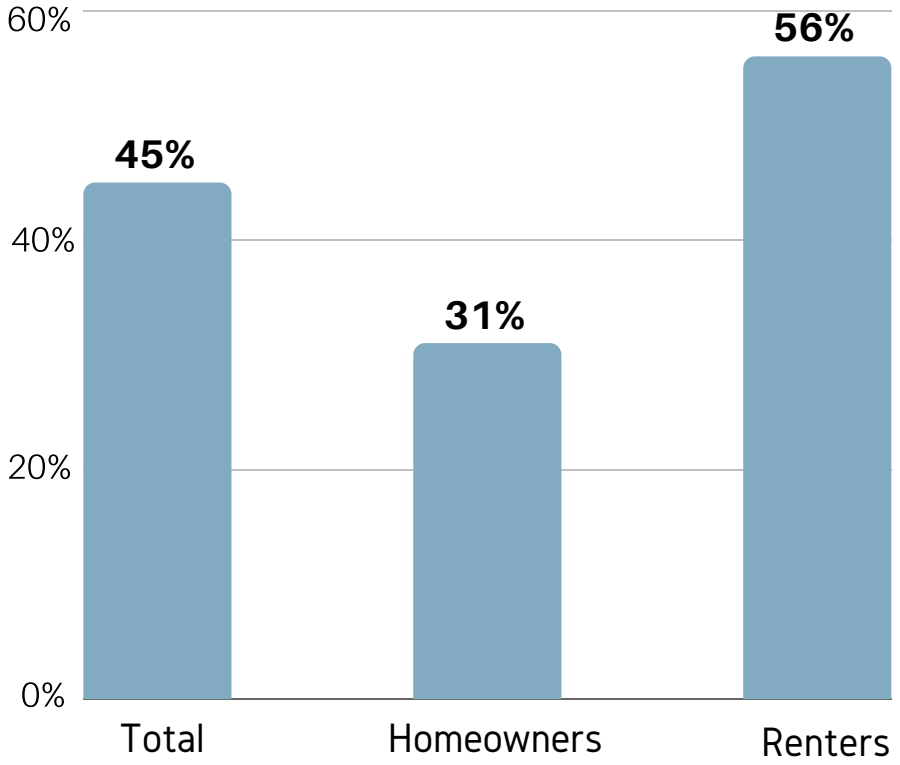
Residents Struggle with Housing Costs

At the Same Time

45%

of respondents state that their bank or landlord has not allowed for pandemic-related adjustments to rent or mortgage. Renters were considerably more likely than homeowners to be in this predicament.

Large Percentage of Residents Have to Pay Monthly Housing Costs in Full



Personal Emergency Funds are Limited

Emergency Savings are Extremely Low



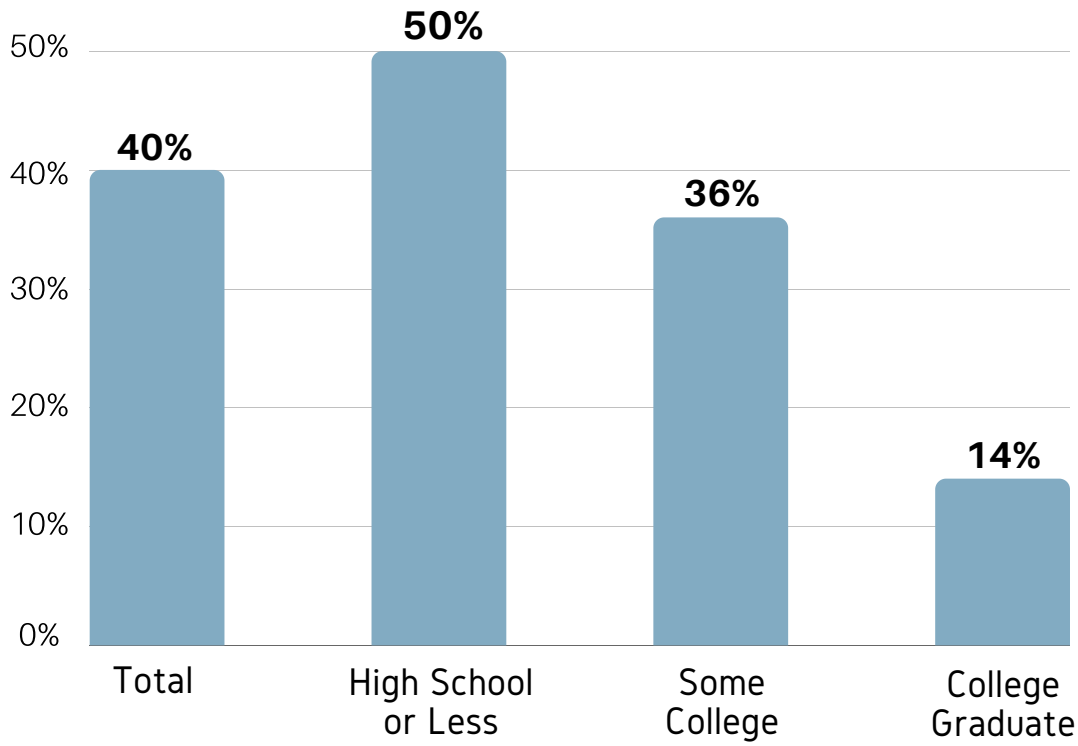
25%
of respondents have less than $100 in savings.

51%
of respondents had less than $1,000 on hand for emergencies.

Residents in households that have experienced job loss were more likely to have less than $1,000 in emergency savings.

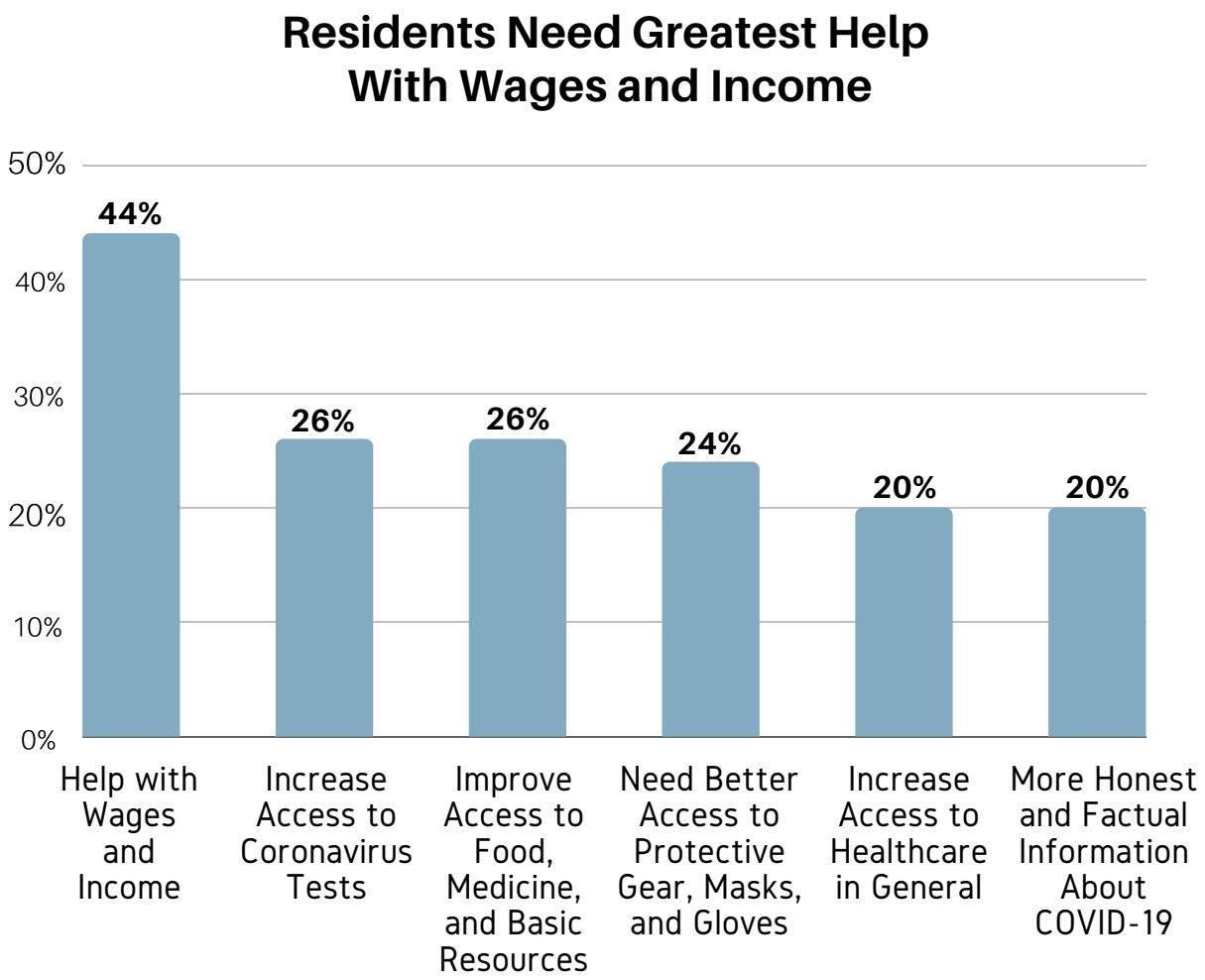
Personal Emergency Funds are Limited

Those with Lower Levels of Educational Attainment Are More Likely to Have $500 or Less in Savings



Half of respondents without any college experience have $500 or less on hand for emergencies.

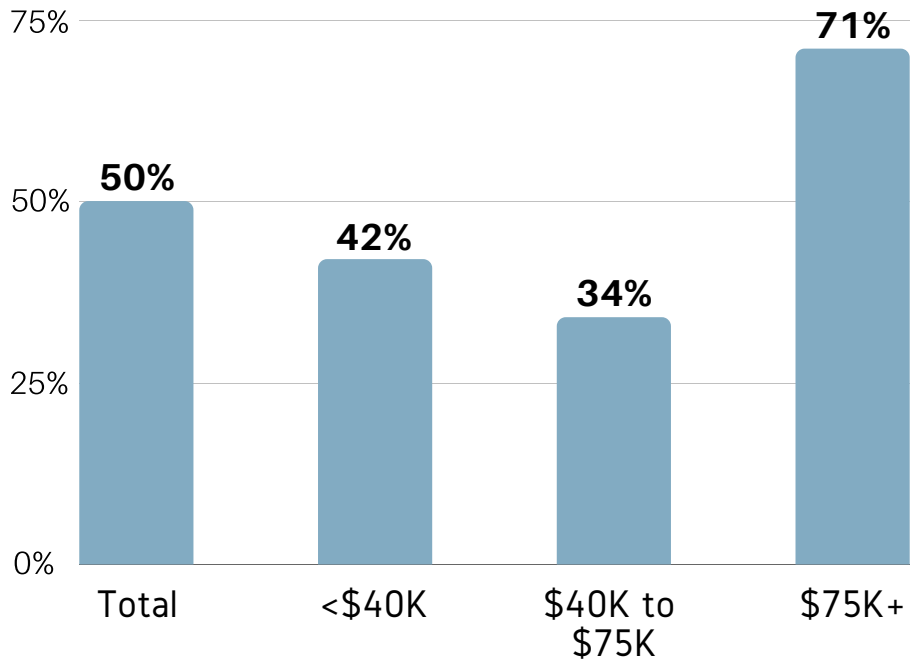
Residents Want Government to Help with Wages and Income



The Social Safety Net is Badly Strained

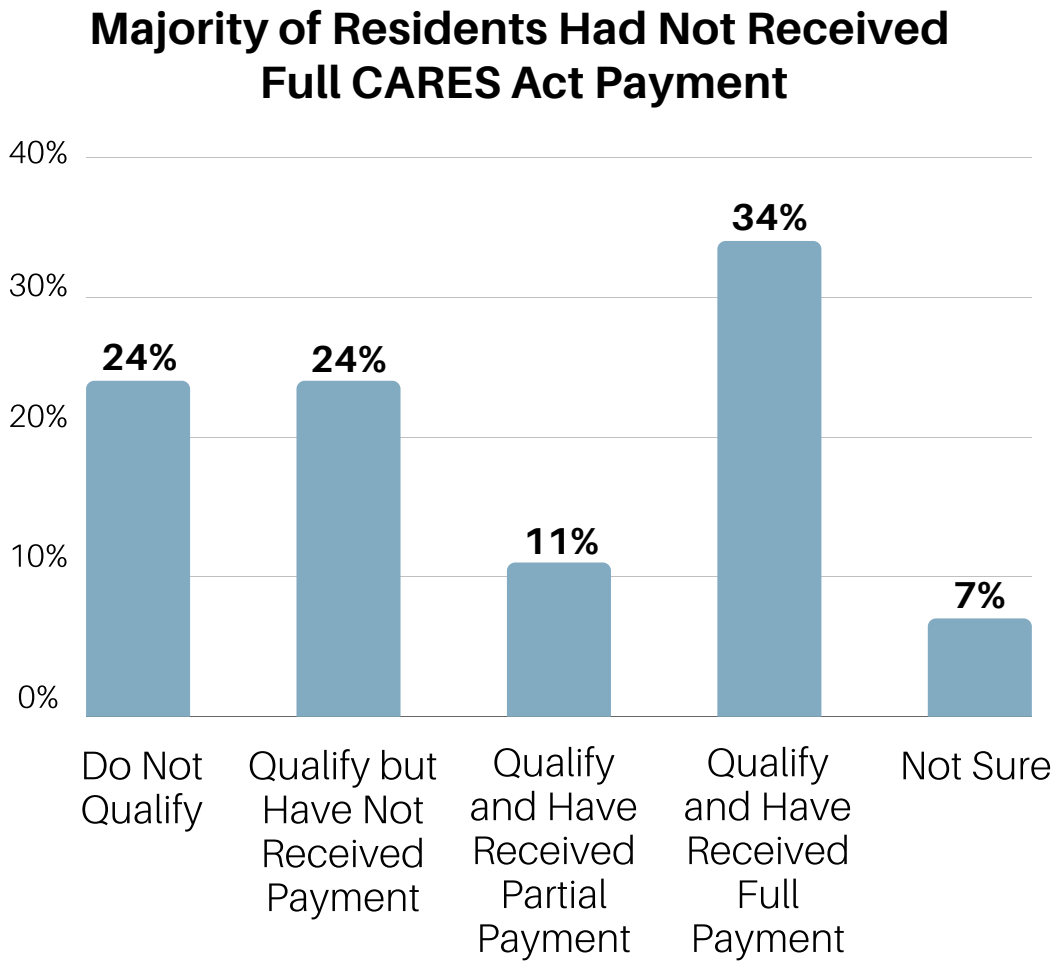
Government safeguards and programs have not sufficiently supported SELA throughout the crisis. In households where someone has lost their job and subsequently applied for unemployment insurance, only half had received these benefits at the time of the survey.

Residents in Lower-Income Households Less Likely to Receive Unemployment Benefits



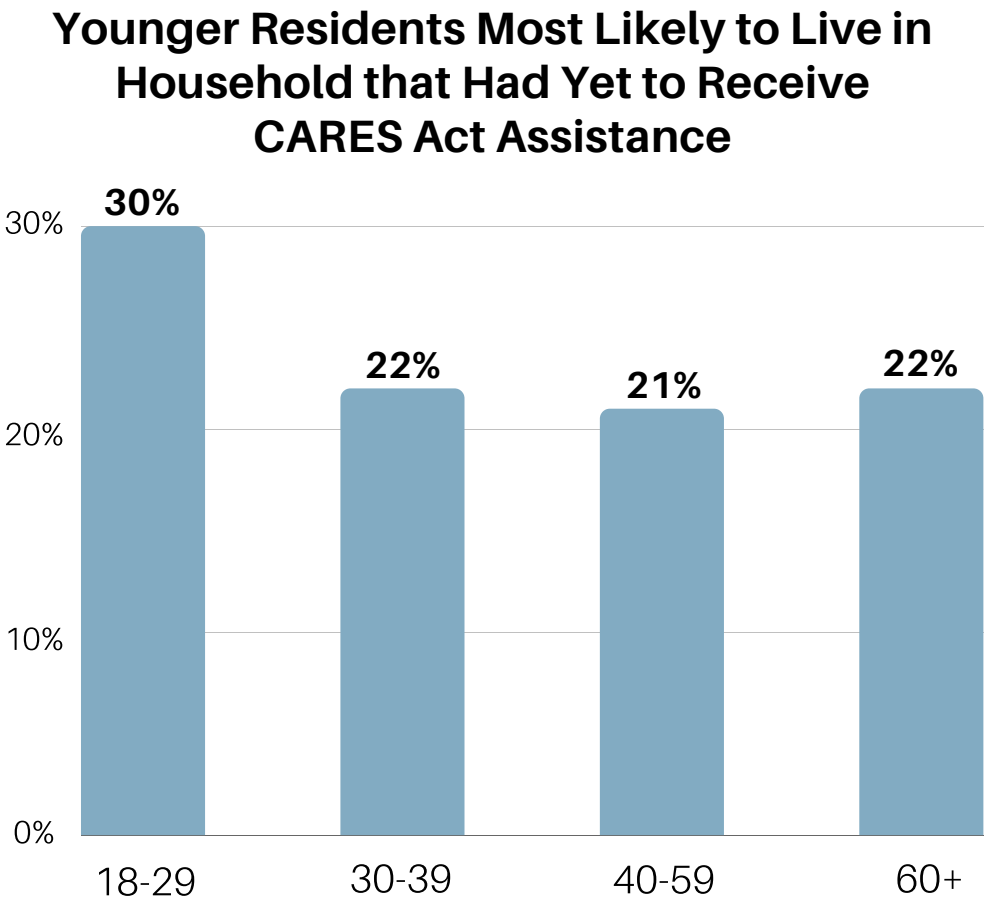
- Among those who have applied for unemployment insurance, residents with a household income over $75,000 were more likely than lower-income residents to have received payments.
- Respondents who opted to take the survey in Spanish were eight percentage points less likely than English language interviewees to have received unemployment benefits.

CARES Act Assistance Inconsistent for SELA



- About one quarter of respondents who qualified for assistance had not yet received their payment; another 11% had received only a partial payment.
- 24% of SELA residents did not qualify for financial assistance from the federal government.

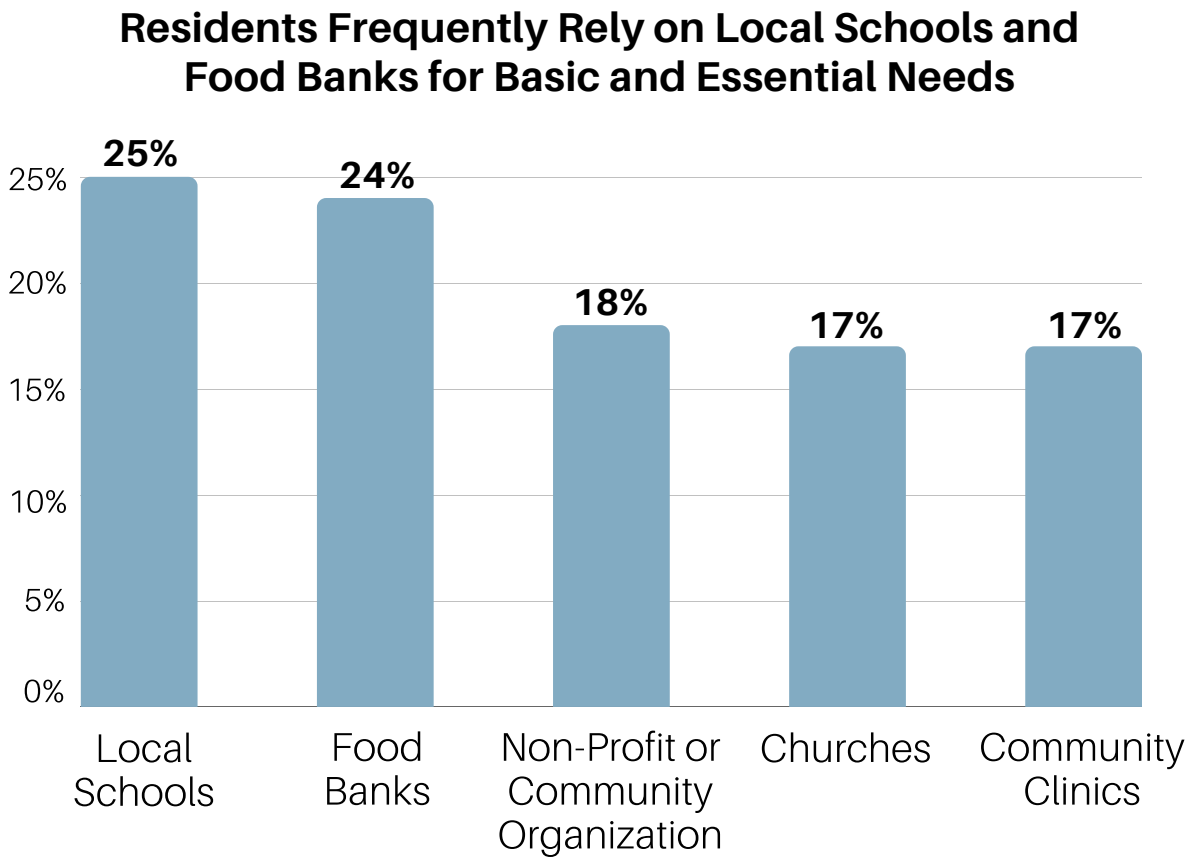
CARES Act Assistance Inconsistent for SELA



- 18-to-29 year-olds were most likely to live in a household that qualified for CARES Act assistance but had not yet received a payment.

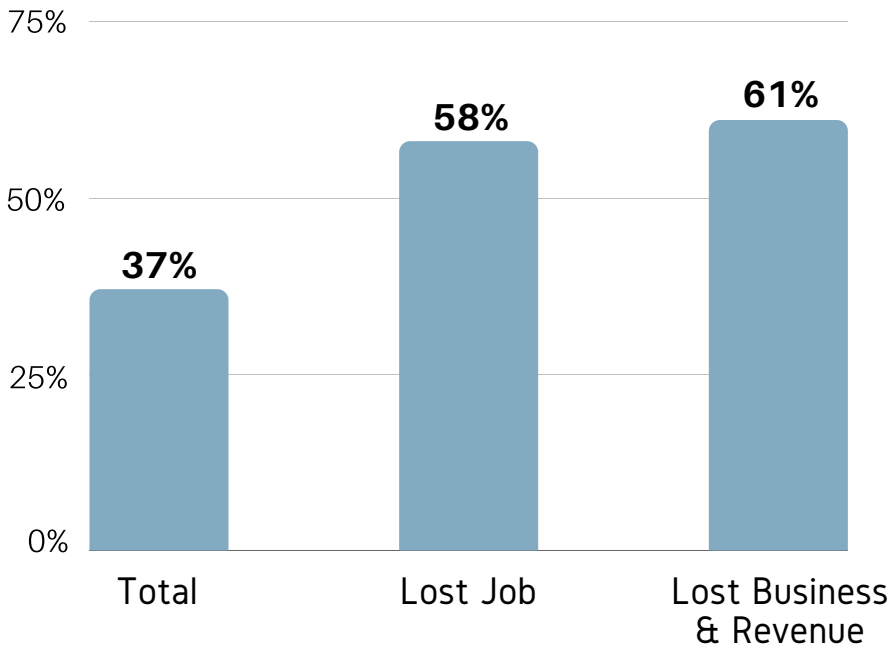
Many Relying on Community-Based Organizations for Assistance

A large percentage of households have turned to non-profits, local schools, clinics, churches, and food banks for basic needs such as cash, health care, and food.



Many Relying on Community-Based Organizations for Assistance

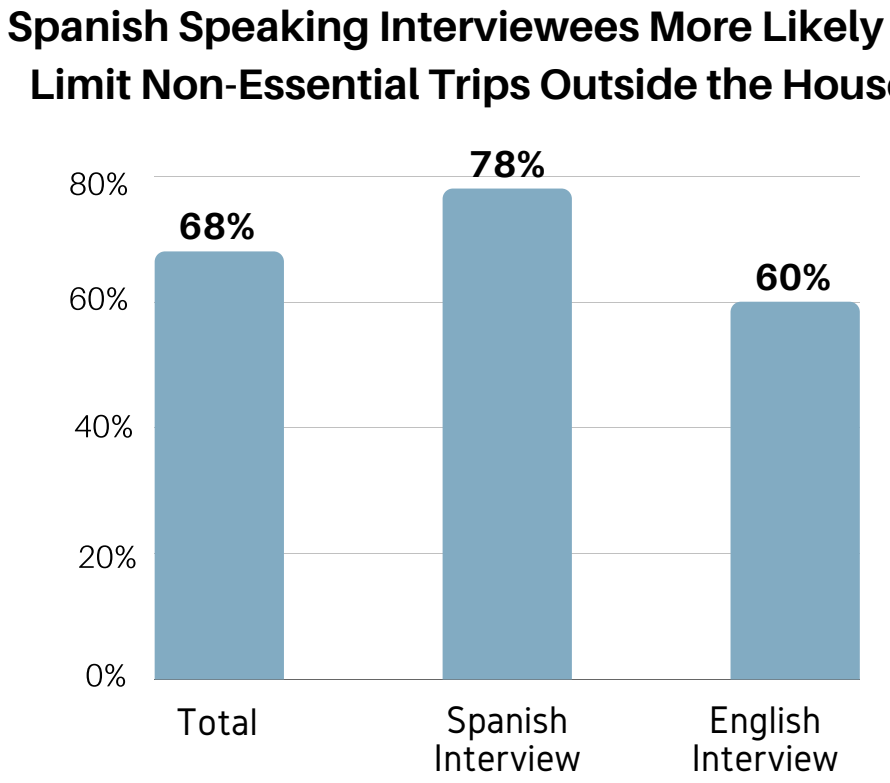
Majority of Those Who Have Lost a Job or Business Have Turned to A Community Organization



Among those in a household where someone has lost their job or business due to COVID-19, reliance on these community-based organizations is especially high.

While 37% of all respondents have turned to community-based organizations for cash, health care and food, this number rises to 62% among 18-to-29-year-olds.

Majority in SELA Limiting Trips Outside the Home

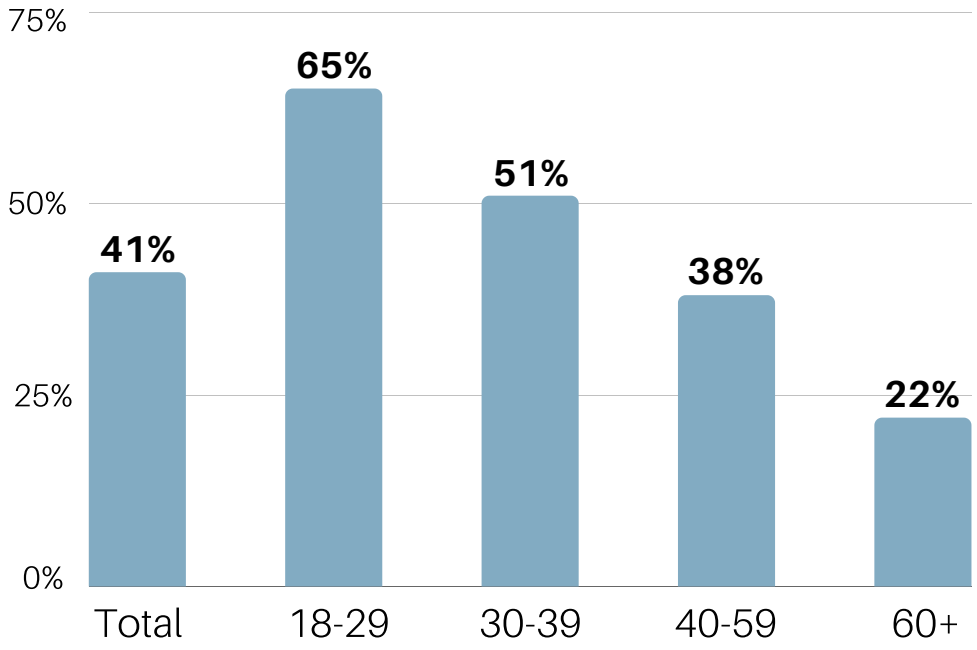


Respondents who opted to take the survey in Spanish were more likely than English language interviewees to limit non-essential trips outside the home.

An especially high percentage (73%) of residents 60 and older are taking precautions by limiting non-essential trips outside the home.

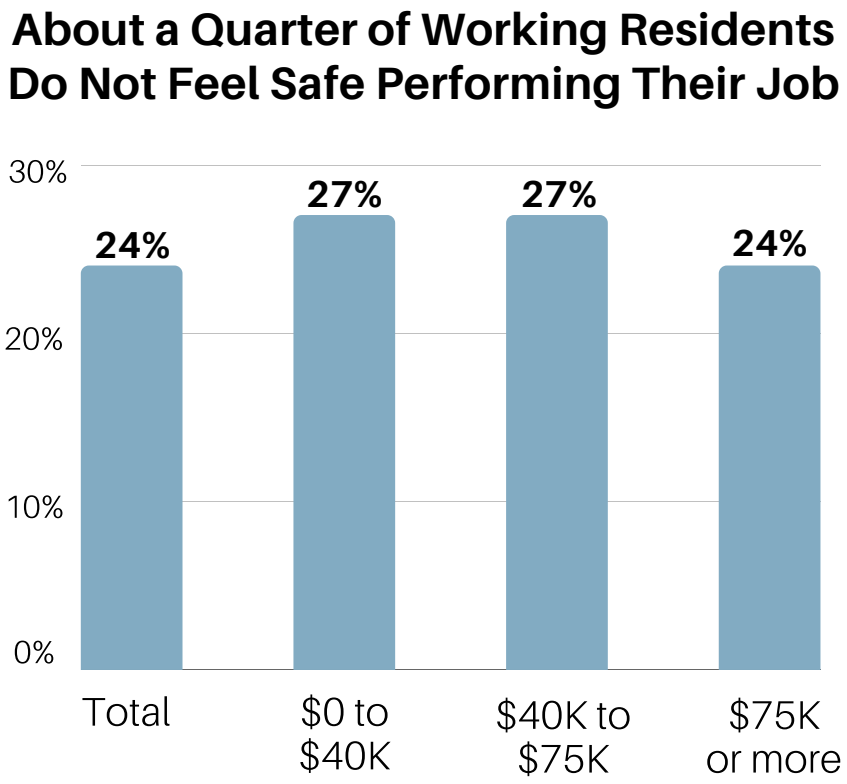
Residents Face Challenges Balancing Work and Health

Younger Residents More Likely to Live in Household With Someone Who Works Outside the Home



- Among respondents, 41% live in households where someone continues to go to work outside the home.
- A majority of 18-to-29-year-olds live in households where someone works outside the home.
- A large percentage of SELA residents working outside the home are employed in “high-risk” professions such as health care (12%), restaurant and food service (18%), and janitorial/cleaning (12%).

SELA Susceptible to Health-Related Consequences of Pandemic



About a quarter of those working outside of the home do not feel safe performing their jobs. They believe their workplace does not have the proper equipment or procedures to protect them from contracting COVID-19.

Concern about workplace safety is reflected across income brackets.

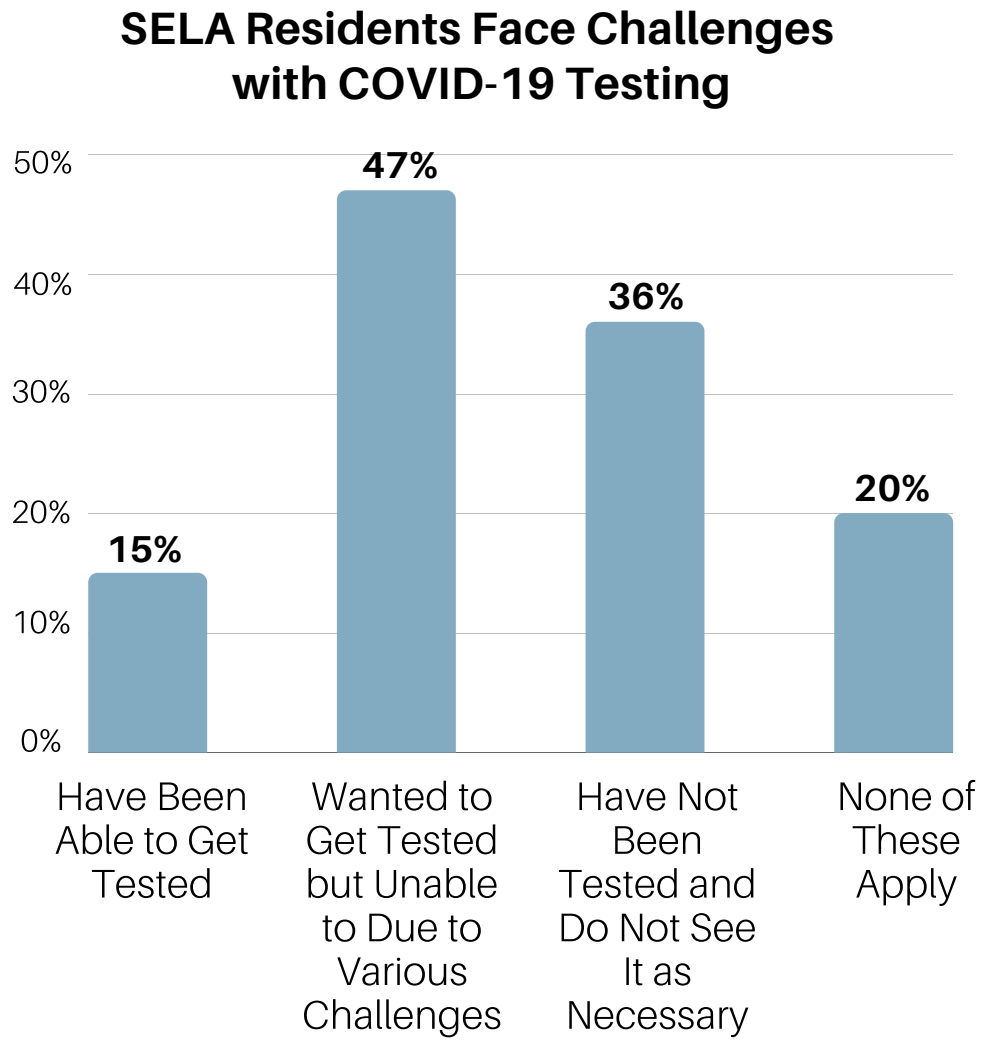
Testing Has Been Inadequate

Of those survey respondents who wanted to be tested, many faced barriers such as not meeting testing criteria or not knowing how to make an appointment.

Overall, only

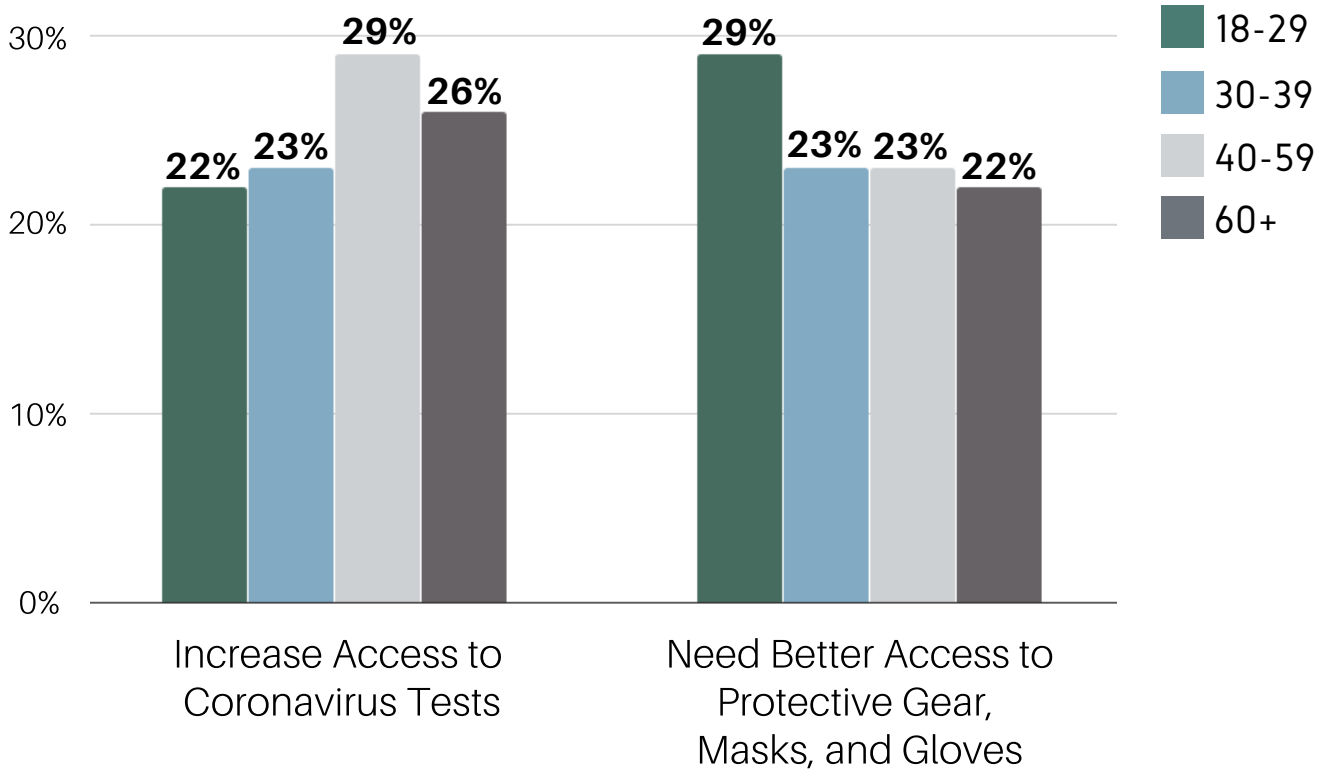
15%

of SELA residents had been tested



Many Think Government Should Better Address Public Health Crisis

Older Residents Highly Concerned About Testing, While Younger Residents Prioritize Need for Protective Gear, Masks, and Gloves



Many Want Government to Better Address Public Health Crisis

- About a quarter of residents believe that it should be a priority for the government to improve access to protective gear, masks, and gloves.
- 18-to-29-year-olds want better access to these items.
- Among respondents, 20% want the government to provide more accurate information about COVID-19.
- 26% of respondents believe that the government needs to do more to effectively increase access to COVID-19 tests. 40-to-59-year-olds are most likely to call for increased access to testing.
- In the months since the survey was conducted, with the assistance of Los Angeles County, a number of new testing sites have opened to serve SELA residents.

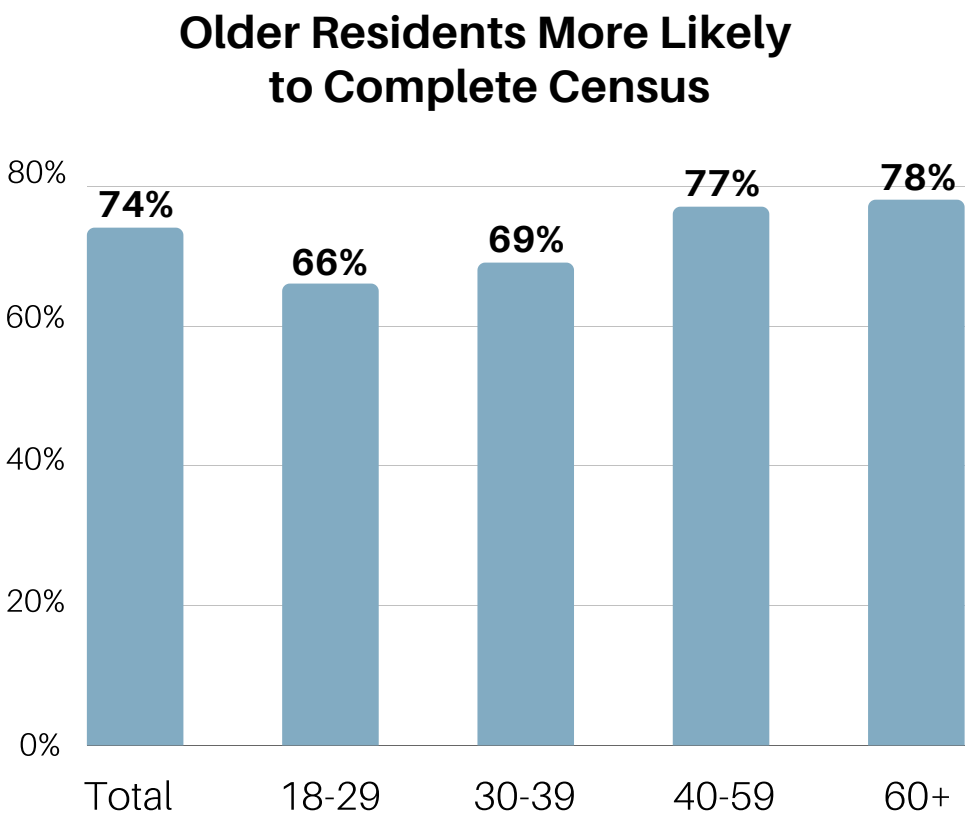
PBI's first survey of SELA residents, which was conducted before the census count officially commenced, found that 76% of respondents indicated a strong likelihood of completing the 2020 Census. We surveyed 500 SELA residents six months later, in the midst of the census campaign.

In the second survey, 74% reported that they had already completed the census while 22% said that they had not yet completed the form. We compared these results against actual completion (self-response) rates.

Based on Advancement Project California's data from July 15, 2020, we estimated that 57% of SELA residents have completed the 2020 Census.[1] Our survey respondents seemed to overreport their census completion. Yet, we can still gain valuable insight about census behavior in SELA by looking at sub-groups.

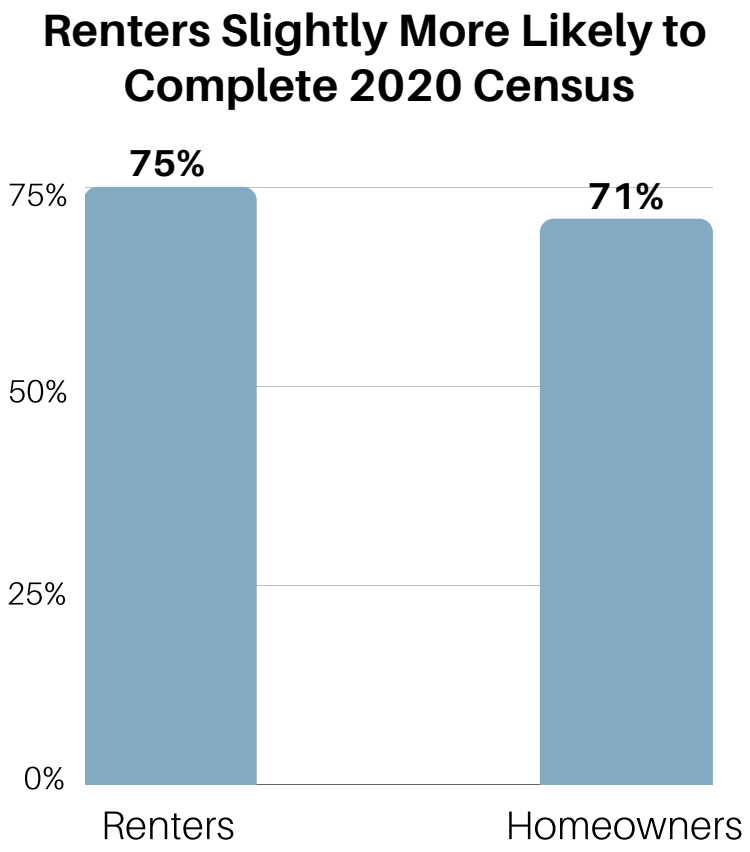
[1] To arrive at this estimate, we averaged the census response rate for all areas that we surveyed.

COVID-19 Impacts the Census



Younger SELA residents express a lower likelihood of completing the census than older SELA residents.

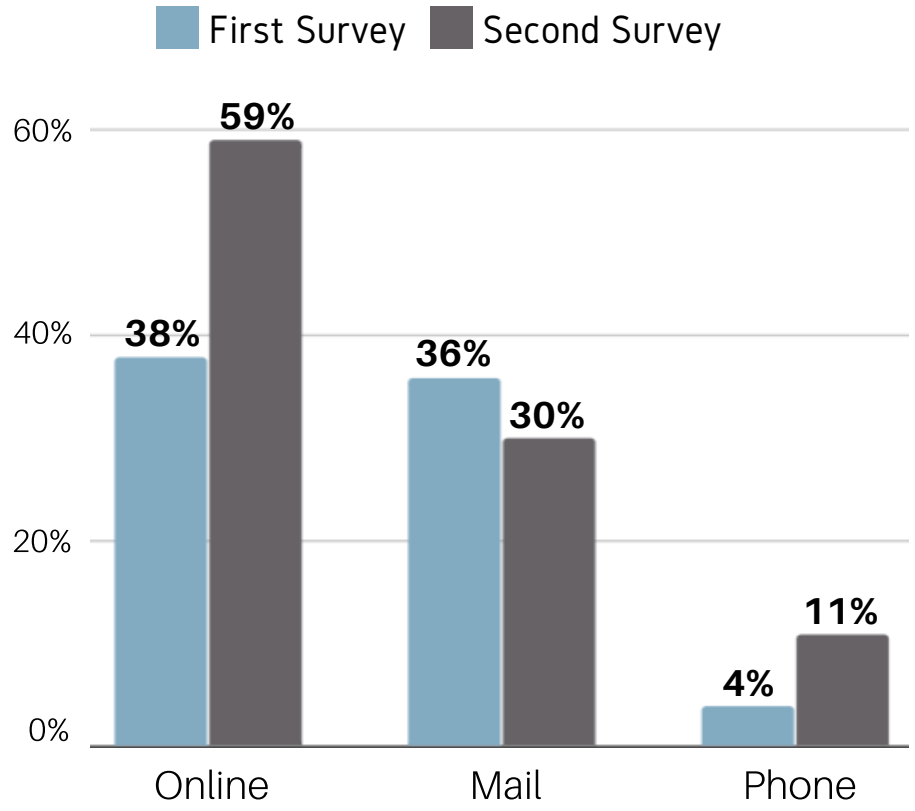
COVID-19 Impacts the Census



Renters were slightly more likely than homeowners to report that they completed the census.

We asked those who indicated that they had not yet completed the census if they intended to do so. While 75% said that they still planned to fill out the census, 20% stated that they did not intend to participate.

Preference to Complete the Census Online Or by Phone Increased in the Second Survey



Our first survey found that 22% of respondents indicated that they preferred to complete the census through in-person visits. Since the coronavirus pandemic hit, in-person counting has been reduced and preference for completing the census online or by phone has risen.

Conclusion

Southeast Los Angeles County (SELA) is a largely working-class Latinx community. Long before the outbreak of COVID-19, the region' s residents faced serious social, health, and socio-economic hardships. Our survey found, not surprisingly, that the pandemic has made daily life in SELA all the more difficult. The challenges include, but are not limited to: substantial job loss, difficulty paying rent or mortgage, limited cash reserves, a fraying and unreliable social safety net, and inadequate public health resources.

The task of steering SELA through this crisis is a difficult one. We believe that this report will not only help local leaders effectively respond to and address the concerns of SELA residents but ensure that they do so in a way that creates a more resilient community for the years to come.

Our report offers a roadmap for shaping and informing the work of government, community-based organizations, business and labor, and the philanthropic sector during this perilous time. Indeed, it provides the foundation for an equity-focused policy agenda that can help address the following:

Recommendations



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