



Black  
Futures  
Lab

# More Black than Blue:

Politics and Power in the  
2019 Black Census

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Demos



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# Introduction



[The Black Futures Lab's](#) Black Census Project is the largest survey of Black people conducted in the United States since Reconstruction. Reached through online outreach methods and community partnerships, over 30,000 Black people from across the country participated in the Black Census Project, providing experiences, views and opinions about politics, society, and the opportunities and challenges facing Black communities and the nation. The Black Census Project amplifies the concerns and aspirations of the most politically and civically engaged Black adults in the U.S., revealing issues critical to activating and engaging Black communities in the years ahead.



**The [Black Futures Lab](#) works to make Black communities powerful in politics.** Launched in 2018, the Black Futures Lab strengthens the capacity of Black communities across the United States to build independent, progressive, Black political power. We know that the challenges facing Black communities are complex, and the solutions to those challenges require innovation, experimentation, and Black political power.

To conduct the Census, the Black Futures Lab worked in partnership with more than 30 grassroots organizations serving Black communities nationwide. The Black Futures Lab also partnered with 2 of the largest online civil rights organizations serving Black communities and their allies—PushBlack and Color of Change. As a result, the Black Census includes populations that are usually not represented or are underrepresented in traditional surveys, such as homeless people, incarcerated people, LGBTQ people, Black Republicans and conservatives, Black immigrants, and mixed-raced people with a Black parent, among others. The Black Census is not a traditional probabilistic survey sample, which often fails to fully represent populations whose experiences are important to understanding the complexity of Black life. Instead, the Black Census utilized unique survey collection methods that drew on robust online networks and sent local organizers into Black businesses, churches, libraries, barbershops and other community gathering places from North Carolina to Nevada, providing a rare and important opportunity to hear and learn from voices too often at the margins of America's political debate.

This is the first in a series of reports on the Black Census, focusing on the most pressing economic and criminal justice issues among Black Census respondents, with a spotlight on how respondents are engaged in the electoral process.

The report reveals that many Black Census respondents are **highly engaged in elections**: Not only did more than 73 percent report voting in 2016, but 40 percent also report some other form of electoral activity, such as engaging as donors, volunteers, or canvassers. Yet despite the notable level of participation, most respondents believe that the Black community is not highly valued in return: 52 percent of Black Census respondents say that **politicians do not care about Black people**, and an additional 35 percent assert that politicians only care a little.

There is a high degree of agreement among Black Census respondents—including those most engaged in elections—on both the prescription of ills in the community and the potential policy solutions to those challenges. **In other words, Black Census respondents know what to do to address the problems Black communities face and many are actively engaged in the political and electoral system to bring about change.** Yet too often, urgent concerns go unheard: It is vital that the political system listen, engage and respond to the concerns and needs of Black communities. **As the unwavering base of the Democratic Party, if the politically engaged Black population ceased to vote and gave up on the system, it would upend the Democratic Party and have devastating effects on our democracy as a whole.**

# Drawing on Black Political Networks: Black Census Project Methodology

The Black Census is a self-administered survey conducted online and in person in 2018. It was originally developed by Darnell Moore, Brittney Cooper, Bryan Epps, Kasim Ortiz, Melanye Price, Julie Martinez, and Edgar Rivera Colon for the Black Lives Matter Global Network, and was adapted with permission by the Black Futures Lab in partnership with Color of Change, Dēmos, and Socioanalítica Research. Socioanalítica Research re-designed the survey.

Respondents were able to access the Black Census in a number of ways. The Black Futures Lab and its partners conducted a dynamic online outreach effort to promote the Black Census Project website ([www.blackcensus.org](http://www.blackcensus.org)) including texts, email blasts, and a social media strategy with custom graphics and influencers deployed to promote the site. About two-thirds of respondents accessed the Black Census by visiting the website landing page. The other third of respondents took the survey through the Black Census partners in the field. Black Census Project respondents were reached in person by trained Black organizers in 28 states. The Black Futures Lab worked with Celeste Faison and Associates to train 106 Black organizers in the survey methodology alongside community organizing methods. The partners who fielded the survey included organizations such as the Hood Incubator in California, Friends and Families of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) in Louisiana, the TAKE (Transgender Advocates Knowledgeable Empowering) Resource Center in Alabama, the Miami Workers Center in Florida, and Southerners on New Ground (SONG) in Georgia. (See the Appendix for a full list of partners.)

Partner organizations developed field plans that took them into communities to administer the survey. People taking the survey in person were given iPads to collect responses, using an app that could be used with or without internet access. People reached by the organizers were also given the option to answer the survey online with a referral link unique to each organization. Finally, some partners also distributed surveys among incarcerated Black people. The reach of the partners and the diverse Black communities they serve allowed the Black Census to reach various Black communities and Black people from diverse backgrounds. Respondents were not paid incentives to participate.



It was important to the Black Futures Lab not to conduct a traditional probabilistic survey sample, as traditional methods can exclude important information about communities that are under-represented. The Black Futures Lab was intentional about oversampling communities where rich information about their experiences, the challenges they face, or their vision for the future is often not available. Surveys are themselves political—for example, some Census surveys were used to justify the classification of Black people as mentally unfit.<sup>1</sup> The Black Census Project designed a survey that was intended to serve a political purpose: to make the case that Black communities are not getting our needs met from politics, and this impacts the way that Black communities understand the challenges that our communities face, and the solutions needed to address those problems. The broad sample size and diversity of respondents makes it possible to analyze various segments of the sample with confidence, focusing on how segments of respondents differ from one another. On some issues, the differences are minor between various segments of respondents. On other questions the social, economic, political, and lived experiences come to the fore and shed light on how these differences shape many of the debates within the wider Black community.

# Who Are the Black Census Respondents?

Because traditional surveys too often erase the diverse experiences of Black people and particular segments of the Black community, the Black Census Project intentionally oversampled certain populations: Black Census respondents are younger, more likely to be female, and more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ than the Black population as a whole. The Black Census sample has a higher educational attainment than the adult Black population nationally (nearly a fifth has earned an advanced degree), yet respondents report slightly lower household income than the typical Black household and are less likely to be homeowners—factors which may be related to the relative youth of Black Census respondents. These divergences illuminate the differences within the Black community, enabling the Census to include communities that are often left out and to understand the diversity of the Black community in ways that traditional surveys often fail to capture. This section provides a look at who Black Census respondents are demographically, and how respondents compare to the national adult Black population.

The Black Census respondents on average are younger than the adult Black population nationally. Respondents ranged from 18 to 99 years old (the highest allowable age entry), but had a median age of 38. The median age for the adult Black population nationally is 43.<sup>2</sup>

Nearly 60 percent of the Black Census respondents are Black women. It is widely recognized—if often taken for granted—that Black women are a crucial component of political and electoral organizing in Black communities.<sup>3</sup> Black Census respondents are also much more likely to report being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender than are the respondents of other surveys. Fifteen (14.5) percent of Black Census respondents report being LGBT, while in other surveys about 4 to 5 percent of the adult population of all races report the same.<sup>4</sup> The 14.5 LGBT percentage in the Black Census does not include all of those who report “other” for their sexual orientation, or “gender non-conforming” or “different” for their gender.<sup>5</sup> The LGBT percentage plus these other categories total 18.5 percent.

The Black Census sample has a higher educational attainment than the adult Black population nationally. Nearly a fifth (18.4 percent) of Black Census respondents report having a degree beyond a bachelor’s degree, but only 6.9 percent of Black adults nationally have these advanced degrees. Nineteen (18.5) percent of Black adults did not complete high school, but only

2.6 percent of Black Census respondents did not complete high school. In spite of having a higher educational attainment than Black people nationally, the economic condition of Black Census respondents seems to be worse. The Black Census sample reports slightly lower household income than Black adults nationally: 57.2 percent report earning less than \$50,000, while 53 percent of Black adults nationally report the same. Most Americans rely on homeownership to build the majority of their wealth.<sup>6</sup> The homeownership rate for the Black Census respondents is also lower than that of Black adults nationally. Black Census respondents report a homeownership rate of 28.5 percent, but Black adults nationally have a rate approaching 2 times that percentage—45.7 percent.<sup>7</sup>

## “The median age for the adult Black population nationally is 43.”

Looking at the distribution of Black Census respondents by state, there are similarities and differences with the Black adult population nationally. The shares are fairly similar in New York and Florida. New York has 7.8 percent of the adult Black population, and 7.6 percent of the Black Census respondents, while 8.1 percent of the Black Census sample lives in Florida, and 9.3 percent of Black adults reside there. On the other hand, we see significant differences in states like California and Georgia. While 5.8 percent of African Americans reside in California, 8.8 percent of Black Census respondents are located in the state. Nearly 8 percent of Black people live in Georgia, but only about 5 percent of Black Census respondents live in the state.

One of the most striking differences between Black Census respondents and the Black population as a whole is the degree of engagement with elections and the electoral process. In 2018, 85.6 percent of Black Census respondents were registered to vote, 20.3 percentage points higher than for the population of Black adults nationally.<sup>8</sup> In the 2016 election, 73.5 percent of the Black Census respondents voted, 17.6 percentage points higher than for Black adults nationally.<sup>9</sup> The next section explores electoral engagement among Black Census respondents in more detail.

# A Closer Look at Electorally-Engaged Black Census Respondents

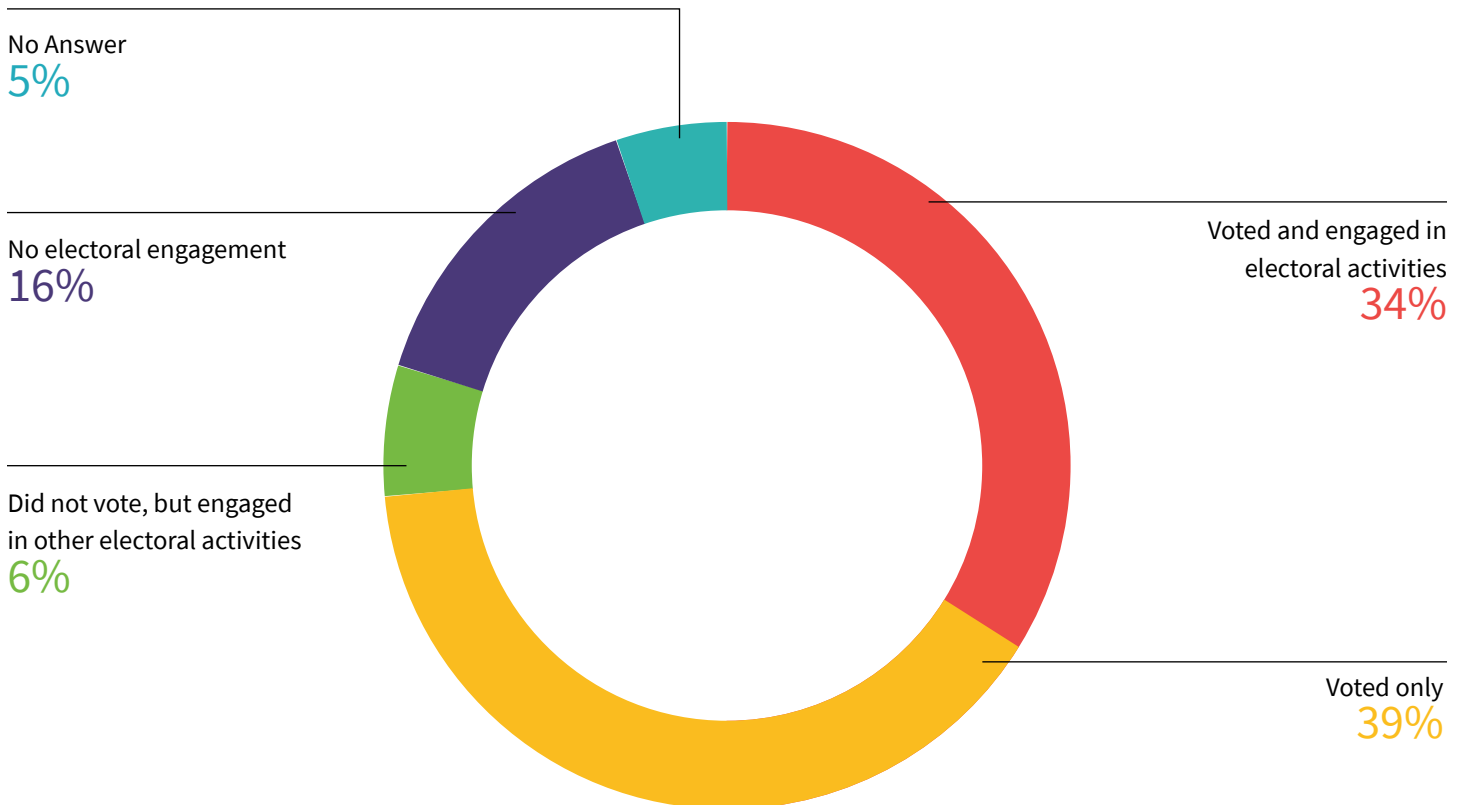
Nationally, Black voters are a key part of the American electorate, making up about 11 percent of registered voters overall and 19 percent of voters who are registered as Democrats or say that they lean Democratic, and about 2 percent of the Republican party base.<sup>10</sup> The Pew Research Center projects that there will be 30 million eligible Black voters in 2020—the key question is how many will be motivated to come out and vote.<sup>11</sup> Black Census respondents, who are highly engaged in elections and the electoral process, may hold the answer to this question. Nearly 9 in 10 (85 percent) Black Census respondents reported being registered to vote. Almost three-quarters (73 percent) reported voting in the 2016 presidential election. Yet while voting is the most common form of electoral engagement, many Black Census respondents are far more involved.

A third (34 percent) of Black Census respondents has a high level of engagement around elections—these respondents voted in 2016 *and* reported engaging in one or more of the following activities:

- helped in a voter registration drive
- gave people a ride to the polls on Election Day
- contributed money to a political candidate
- attended a fundraiser for a candidate
- handed out campaign material or placed campaign material on cars.

**Fig 1. Black Census Respondents by Electoral Engagement**

Only 16 percent of Black Census respondents report not voting in 2016 and having no other involvement in electoral-engagement activities.





These levels of electoral engagement illuminate important differences within Black communities. Black women accounted for 57 percent of Black Census respondents, but Black women account for 63 percent of electorally engaged voters. Black men represent one-third of Black Census respondents, but men are overrepresented among respondents who are not electorally engaged. Four in 10 (41 percent) respondents who did not vote or engage in any of the electoral activities listed above are Black men.

However, age is the basis for the most striking differences between respondents who are electorally engaged and those who are not. Roughly 3 in 10 (29 percent) Black Census respondents are young people between the ages of 18 and 29. This group accounts for just 18 percent of electorally engaged voters among Black Census respondents. However, young people account for almost half (49 percent) of Black Census respondents who are *not* engaged electorally. Black respondents over the age of 45 account for a majority (52 percent) of electorally engaged Black Census respondents, and just 21 percent of respondents who are not electorally engaged. Black people over 45 account for 39 percent of all Black Census respondents

Despite these differences, the concerns and priorities of respondents are very similar regardless of respondents' level

of electoral engagement. Low wages are considered the most pressing economic problem among Black Census respondents, with 90 percent viewing it as a problem, including 85 percent who consider it a major problem. Among respondents who are electorally engaged voters, this proportion increases to 97 percent, while 92 percent of Black Census respondents who are not engaged also say that low wages are a problem.

**“Low wages are considered the most pressing economic problem among Black Census respondents, with 90 percent viewing it as a problem, including 85 percent who consider it a major problem.”**

These findings suggest that addressing these issues is vital to reaching Black people. Because those who are highly electorally engaged share concerns with those who are not engaged with elections, the latter are the key to activating the Black community.

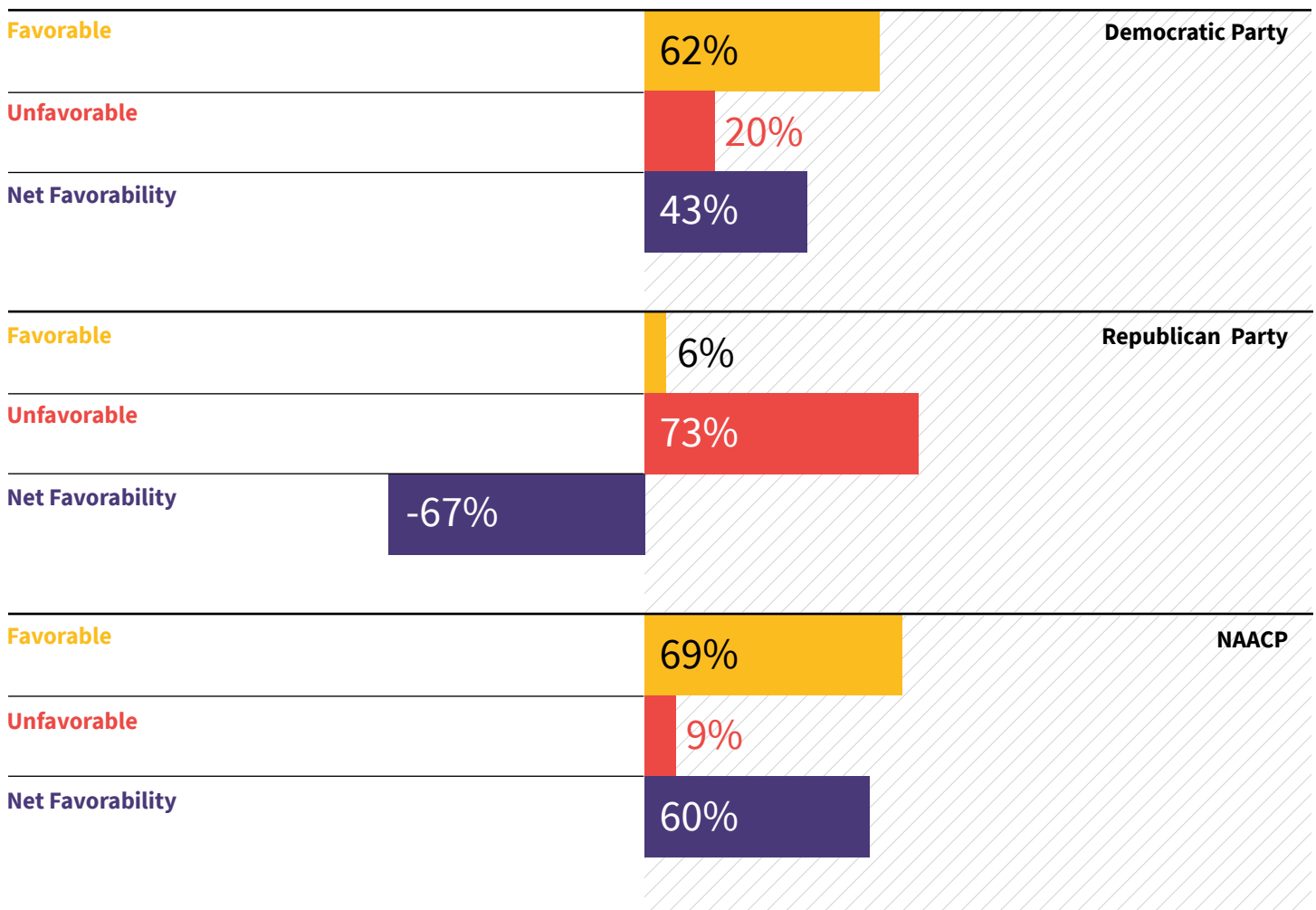
# Diversity of Political Affiliation

While only 2 percent of Black Census respondents identify politically as Republicans, the remainder are not all Democrats. Nearly a quarter identify as independents. About 60 percent identify as Democrats. Another 6 percent have allegiance to some other political party.

Black Census respondents are more positive toward the Democratic Party than the Republican Party, but nearly a

fifth have unfavorable views toward the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party has a net favorability rating (favorable percentage minus unfavorable percentage) of 43 percent, much better than the Republican Party's net favorability rating of minus 67 percent. However, if one compares the Democratic Party's 43 percent net favorability rating to the NAACP's 60 percent, it becomes clear that there is room for improvement in the Democratic Party in the eyes of the respondents.

Fig 2. Favorability of Political Parties and Organizations



Among the findings:

### On economic policy:

- Nine in 10 Black Census respondents (90 percent) view **wages too low to sustain a family** as a problem in the community, and a large majority (85 percent) support **raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour**.
- More than 80 percent of respondents see **rising college costs** as a problem in the community (85 percent), and a similar percentage favor **making college affordable for any person who wants to attend** (84 percent).
- Most of the respondents agree that the **lack of affordable health care** is a problem in the community (86 percent),

### On criminal justice policy:

- The vast majority of Black Census respondents see the **excessive use of force by police officers** (83 percent) and **police officers killing Black people** (87 percent) as problems in the community.
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73 percent) agree that **holding police officers responsible for the misconduct** would improve police-community relations, while 60 percent favor **requiring police officers to wear body cameras**.

and nearly all consider it the **government's role to provide health care** for all Americans (90 percent).

- Almost 9 in 10 say that the **lack of affordable housing** is a problem in the community (86 percent), and agree that the **government should provide adequate housing** (87 percent).
- More than three-quarters **support increasing taxes on individuals earning \$250,000 or more**, and nearly 60 percent oppose reducing corporate taxes.
- Nearly 90 percent of Black Census respondents view **gun violence** as a problem in the community.
- Respondents express strong **support for the Black Lives Matter movement** (85 percent favorable) and a majority (55 percent) have an **unfavorable opinion of the NRA**.
- More than 4 in 5 Black Census respondents (84 percent) favor **restoring the voting rights of formerly incarcerated people**.

Overall, Black Census respondents are deeply concerned about the economic hardships in Black communities and the unjust and ineffective policing of Black neighborhoods. Respondents are worried about low wages that aren't enough to sustain Black families and about the high cost of living, including the cost of college education, health care, and housing. Respondents want to see the restoration of the voting rights of family, friends, and community members who have returned from prison. Respondents are also frustrated by the seemingly intractable problems of unjust policing that leads to police killings and brutality toward Black people, and a failure to address gun violence. These same concerns are mirrored among the respondents who are most engaged with the electoral process—people who not only vote but are engaged as donors, volunteers, or canvassers. This agreement suggests that electorally engaged respondents do not need to convince those who are less engaged about what problems are

**“Nearly 90 percent of Black Census respondents view gun violence as a problem in the community.”**

important or even which solutions to adopt, but rather about the effectiveness of taking action. Said simply, ignoring the concerns and needs of Black communities leads to cynicism about change being possible in the current political system, and is a key barrier to Black political participation. **Political leaders who rely on the political participation of Black people must pay attention and act on the concerns of Black Census respondents if they want Black communities to remain engaged or mobilize further.**

# Economic Policy Priorities

Economic issues rank among the most pressing problems that Black Census respondents identified in Black communities. The experience of economic insecurity is personal for many respondents: Nearly half (48 percent) report living in a household that lacked enough funds to pay a monthly bill in the last 12 months, and 31 percent personally cut back on food to save money. Respondents strongly support policies that would make Black people more economically secure, including guaranteeing higher wages and increasing the affordability of housing, health care, and college. Additionally, respondents favor increasing taxes on the rich as a means of raising revenue to address these policy priorities.

When asked about the single most pressing problem facing Black communities, Black Census respondents were more likely to identify **low wages** than any other problem. Nearly 9 in 10 (85 percent) respondents say that wages that are not enough to sustain a family are a “major problem.” Another 5 percent see low wages as a “minor problem.” Widespread concern about low pay makes sense considering that 14 percent of Black workers are not paid enough to lift a family out of poverty.<sup>12</sup> Pay discrimination is a very real barrier to economic security: Black workers are paid 16.2 percent less than white workers even after gender, education, age, and geography are taken into account, and wage gaps for Black women are even greater.<sup>13</sup>

**Fig 3. The Most Pressing Economic Problems in Black Communities**

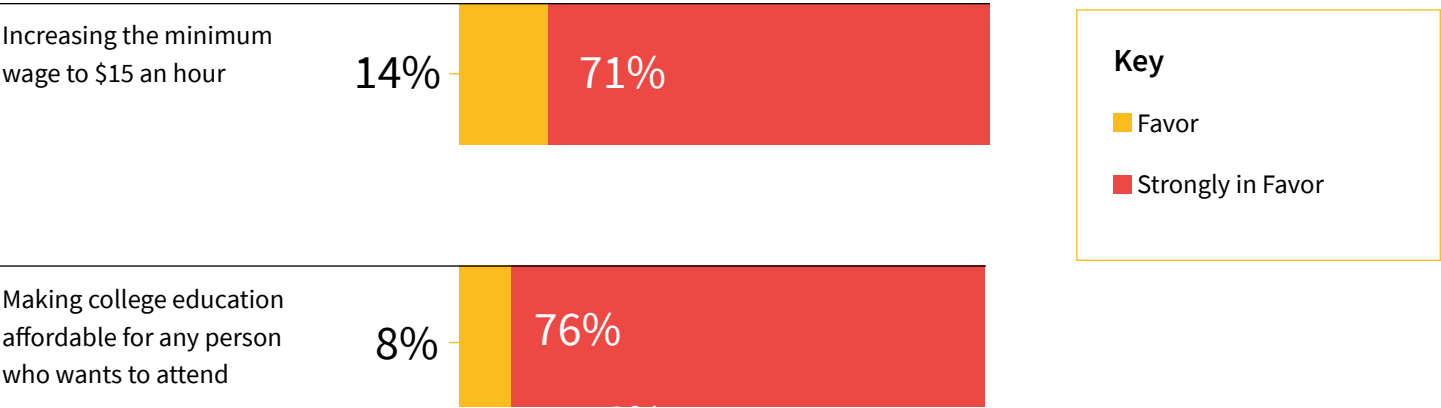


Black Census respondents support increasing the minimum wage to **\$15 an hour** to begin addressing the issue of low wages. More than 7 in 10 (71 percent) respondents “strongly favor” increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, while an additional 14 percent “favor” the policy. In total, 85 percent support a \$15 minimum wage.

Higher education can be a powerful gateway to economic mobility. Indeed, the percentage of Black students pursuing and earning college degrees has steadily increased in recent decades.<sup>14</sup> Yet as states invest less in public higher education,

the cost of attending college, including community college, has grown dramatically.<sup>15</sup> With less household wealth to draw on, Black students typically need to borrow more money to attend college than students of other backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> Almost 9 in 10 (85 percent) Black Census respondents see **rising college costs** as a problem for the community. Seventy-seven percent see it as a major problem, and 8 percent see it as a minor problem. To address this problem, 84 percent of respondents favor **making college education affordable** for any person who wants to attend.

Fig 4. Support for Economic Policy Solutions



The high cost of health care is another pressing economic concern. Again, the issue is personal for Black Census respondents: Nearly 1 in 3 (32 percent) has put off seeing a doctor for financial reasons in the last 12 months, and another 14 percent lives with someone who has. Although the Affordable Care Act contributed to substantial gains in health insurance coverage among Black people, Black people remain less likely than white people to have health coverage.<sup>17</sup> And even among those with health insurance, uncovered procedures or providers, high deductibles, and out-of-pocket cost sharing contribute to unaffordable health care costs and medical debt.<sup>18</sup> In fact, older Black adults are nearly 3 times as likely as older white adults to have medical debt.<sup>19</sup>

Black Census respondents recognize that we do not have a health insurance system that provides the needed care at an affordable cost for all Americans, and are aware that the system disproportionately fails Black people. Nearly 90 percent of Black Census respondents see the **lack of affordable health care** as a problem in the community. This problem is of

particular concern for Black Census respondents over the age of 60. Eighty-four percent of senior respondents say the lack of affordable health care is a “major problem,” while 73 percent of young respondents under age 30 say the same.

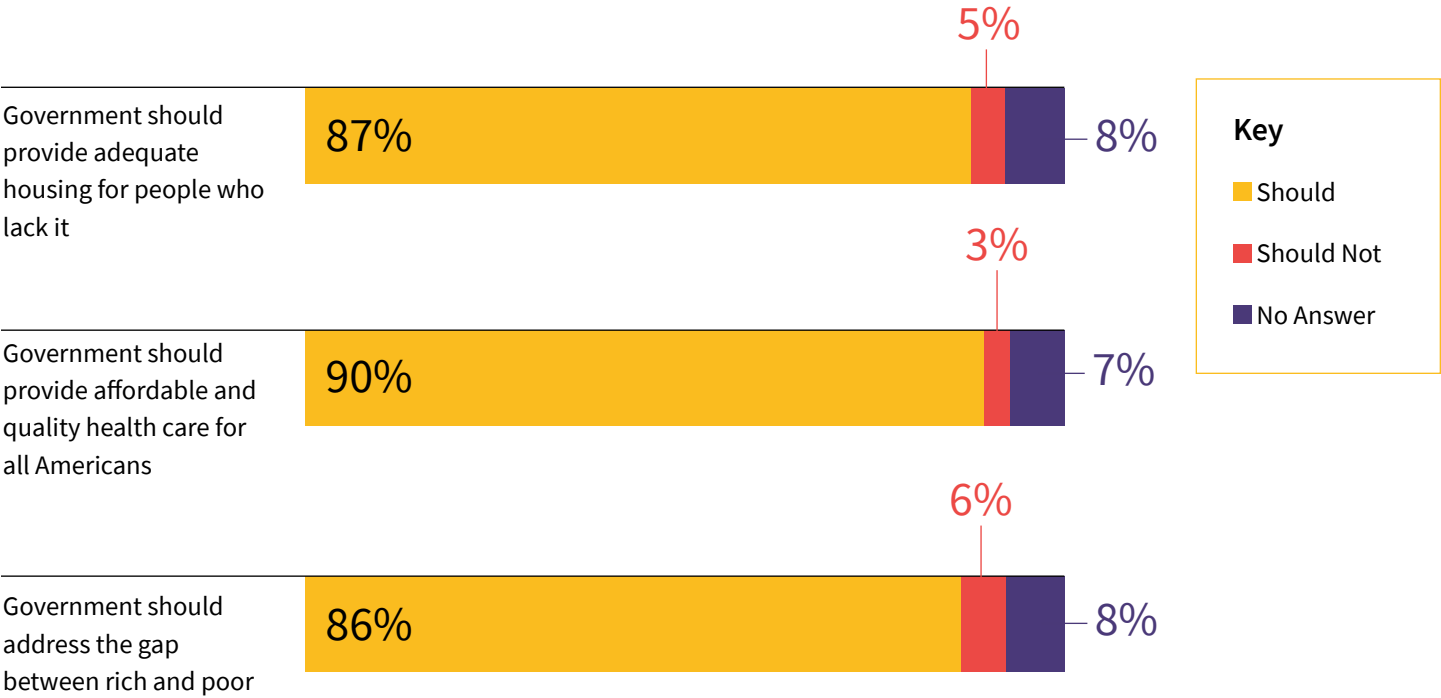
To improve access to affordable health care, 90 percent of Black Census respondents support the idea of the **government providing affordable and quality health care**. Within this high level of agreement, there are small differences among generations. Black Census respondents over the age of 60 are nearly unanimous (96 percent) in the belief that government should provide health care. Among the youngest respondents (18-29) that agreement is a still-strong 86 percent.

A majority of Black people live in a rental home, and most Black renter households spend a disproportionate amount of total income on rent.<sup>20</sup> For a large share of the Black population, “the rent is too damn high.” Nearly a third (31 percent) of Black Census respondents report being unable to pay the rent or mortgage in the last 12 months or having someone else in the

household unable to pay. Nearly 90 percent of Black Census respondents see the **lack of affordable quality housing** as a problem in the community. On this question there are modest, but important, differences between respondents who are homeowners and those who are not. Three-quarters of respondents who are homeowners think the lack of affordable

housing is a major problem, but among those who do not own their home, this proportion increases to 81 percent. As a solution to this issue, 87 percent of respondents believe in a right to housing: The **government should provide adequate housing** for people who do not have access.

Fig 5. Support for a Government Role in Solving Economic Problems



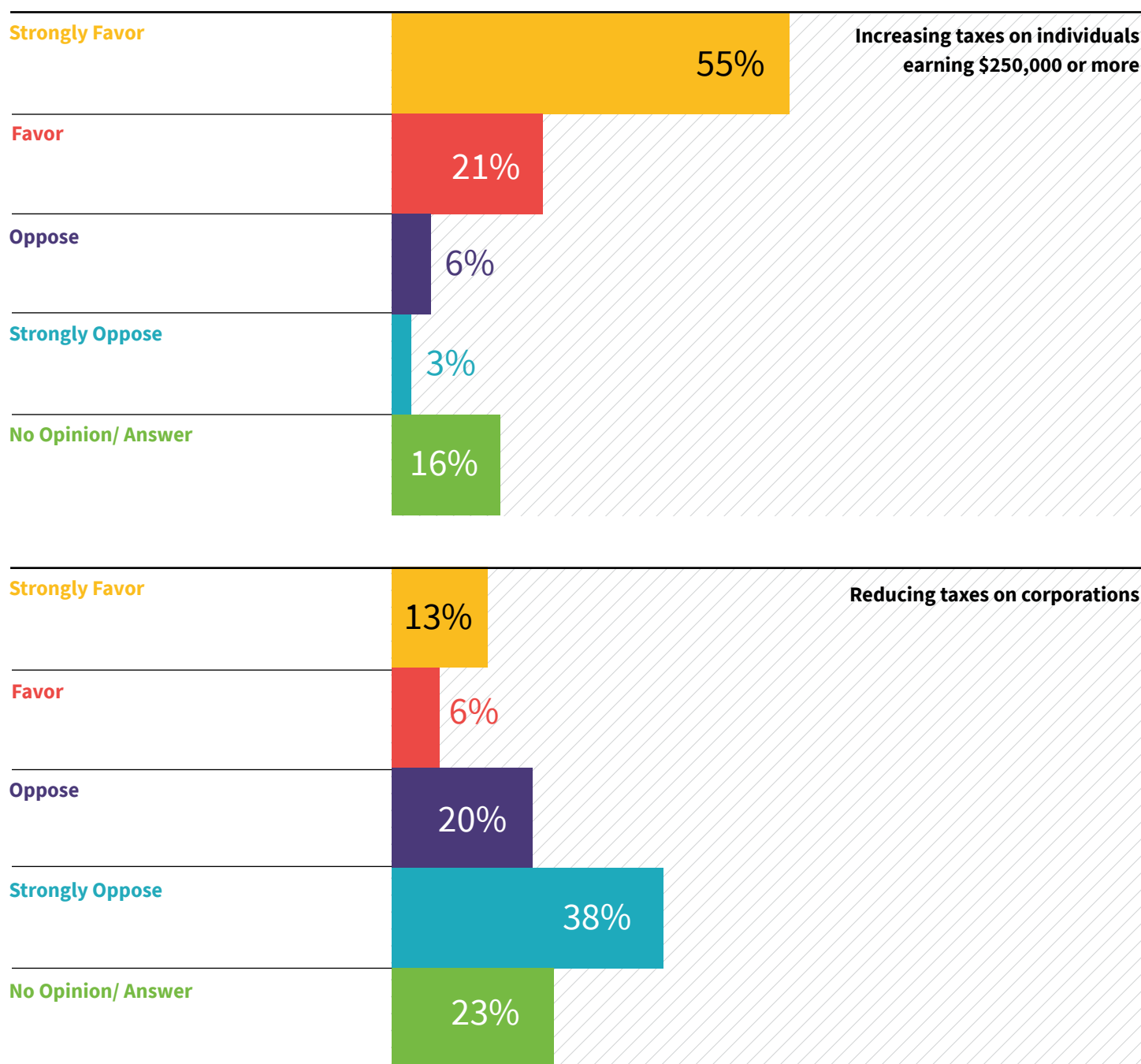
Black Census respondents do not see the economic challenges of Black communities in a vacuum. Respondents understand that economic inequality is at the heart of many of these problems, and respondents prefer redistributive solutions. Eighty-six percent of respondents think it is the role of government to address the gap between the rich and the poor. Black Census respondents also strongly support a tax system that demands more from the wealthy to fund public goods, an improved social safety net, and a reduction in inequality.

More than three-quarters (76 percent) of respondents **favor increasing taxes on individuals earning \$250,000 or more**, including a majority (55 percent) who strongly favor this policy. While there is major agreement, there are some telling differences in intensity regarding this policy. At least 6 in 10 respondents from all income groups strongly favor increasing taxes on the wealthy, with the exception of those earning

more than \$100,000. Only a majority (53 percent) of this group strongly favors increasing taxes on the wealthiest Americans, but overall agreement with the policy is still in line with the larger sample of Black Census respondents.

In addition to favoring increased taxes on the wealthy, Black Census respondents oppose corporate tax cuts that fuel growing inequality in the country. Nearly 6 in 10 (58 percent) assert that the government should **not cut corporate taxes**. The main opposition to corporate tax cuts comes from respondents with high incomes. More than three-quarters (76 percent) of Black Census respondents with incomes over \$100,000 oppose reducing taxes on corporations; only 9 percent favor this policy. Black Census respondents with the lowest incomes (less than \$15,000) are divided in opinion, while generally opposed: 45 percent are opposed and 36 percent are in favor.

**Fig 6. Support for Taxing the Wealthy and Subsidizing Business**



Black Census respondents have a coherent view of the economic problems of Black communities and see economic issues as interrelated. Respondents recognize that Black people suffer from low incomes, low wealth, high debts, and economic insecurity. To address these issues, Black Census

respondents support progressive economic solutions that would increase the incomes and economic security of Black people in the United States.

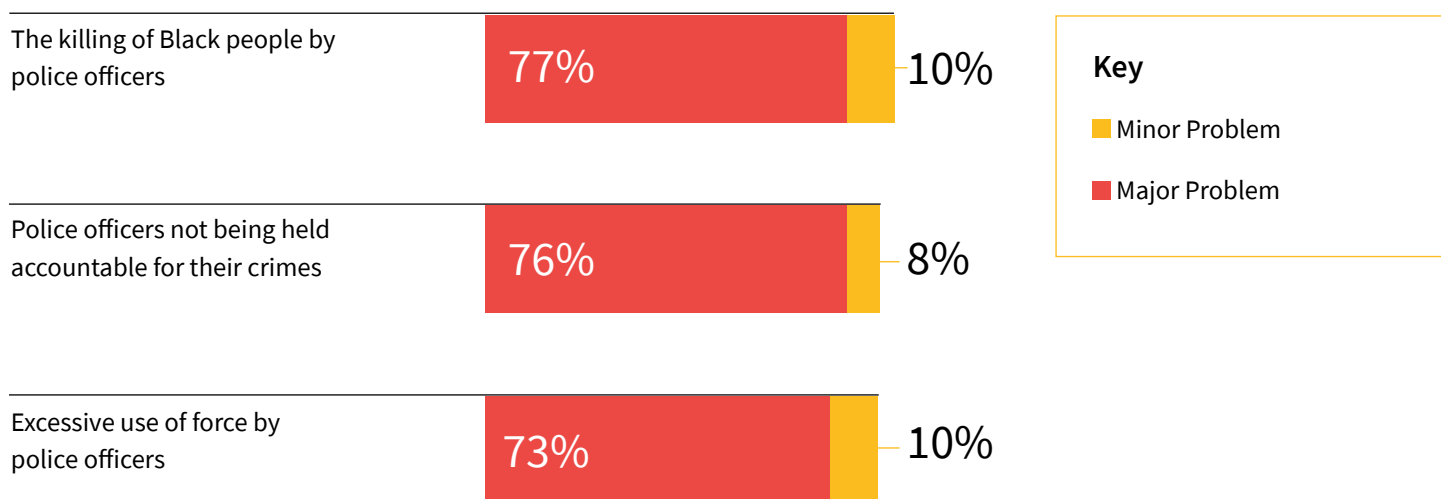
# Criminal Justice Priorities

Black Census respondents express deep concern on criminal justice issues, including the illegitimate use of force by the police and the prevalence of gun violence in Black communities. Recognizing the impact of mass incarceration on political power, respondents also want voting rights restored to formerly incarcerated people.

Policing is a major area of concern for Black Census respondents. More than 8 in 10 respondents consider **police officers killing Black people** a problem in the community (87 percent). Eighty-four percent say that **police officers not**

**being held accountable for their crimes** is a problem, while 83 percent describe **excessive use of force by police officers** as a problem. More than half (55 percent) of respondents have personally had a negative interaction with the police at some point, and 28 percent have had at least one negative interaction in the last 6 months. More than a third (38 percent) of Black Census respondents had their first negative interaction with the police before the age of 18. Younger respondents are also more likely to report recent negative police interactions, with 38 percent describing a negative encounter with police in the last 6 months.

Fig 7. Criminal Justice and Policing Problems in Black Communities



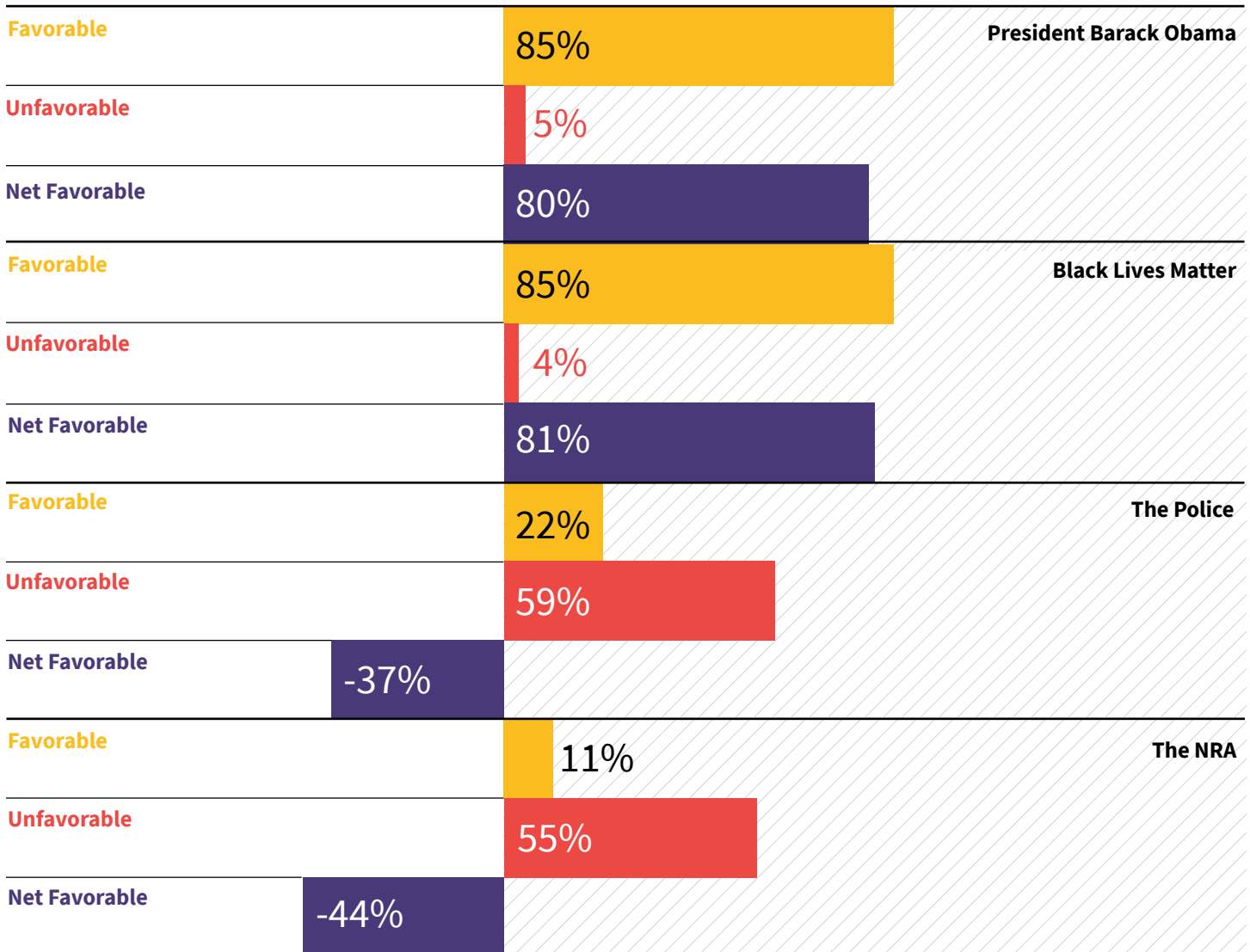
Policing in Black communities has always been a site of contention. From the nation's earliest history of slave patrols searching for and punishing enslaved people they thought were trying to escape, police forces have too often been deployed to suppress the rights of Black people in the United States rather than to improve public safety in Black communities. Today, systemic racism continues to permeate police departments across the country: Unarmed Black people remain far more likely to be victims of police violence than their white counterparts.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the uprisings in the 1960s were sparked by police brutality. For example, when a white police officer repeatedly shot unarmed 16-year-old Matthew Johnson in San Francisco in September 1966, the killing sparked the Hunters Point uprising

and helped to inspire the formation of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense one month later.<sup>22</sup> An immediate end to police brutality was central to the Black Panthers' Ten-Point Program, as members organized armed patrols of Black community members to counter police violence.<sup>23</sup>

Today, the Black Lives Matter movement is shining a powerful spotlight on the persistence of police violence and misconduct. Black Census respondents **strongly support Black Lives Matter**, giving the movement a net favorability (favorable percentage minus unfavorable percentage) rating of 81 percent, which is about the same rating as the respondents give to **President Barack Obama**. Meanwhile, net favorability toward **the police** is minus 37 percent.

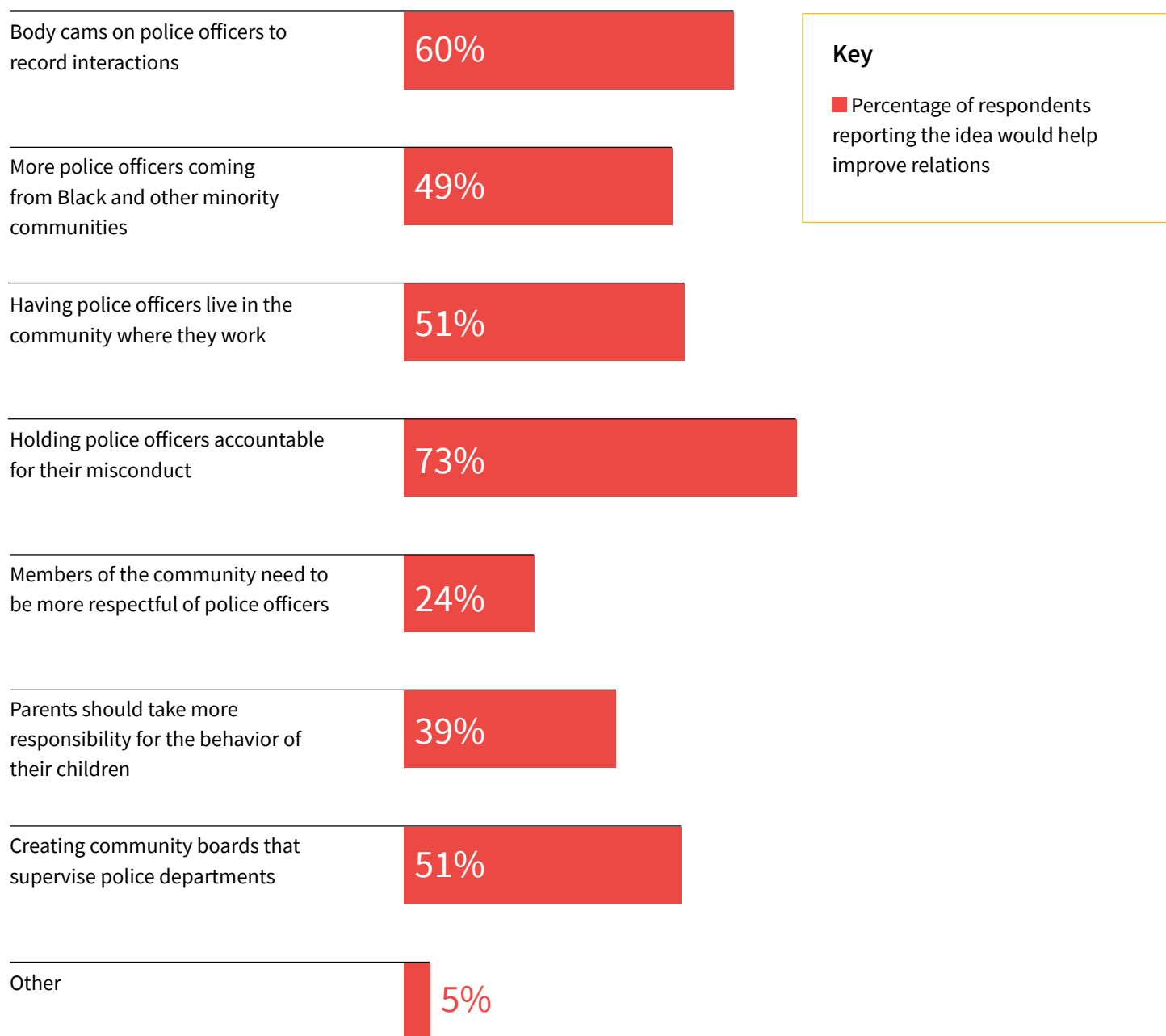
Fig 8. Selected Favorability Ratings



Despite an unfavorable view of police departments, most Black Census respondents believe that relations between police and local Black communities *can* be improved (only 7 percent of respondents assert that “I don’t think the relationship between the police and Black people in my community can improve,” and an additional 5 percent maintain that the relationship needs no improvement). The most popular proposal for improving relations with the police is **ensuring that officers are held accountable for their misconduct**, endorsed by 73 percent of Black Census respondents. In addition, 60 percent of respondents believe that **requiring police officers to wear body cameras** to record interactions with the community would improve relations. While individual-level body cameras clearly cannot address systemic racism in policing, many

proponents see them as tools to hold law enforcement broadly accountable for their actions, potentially changing the culture of policing. About half of respondents recommend measures such as having police officers live in the communities where they work, recruiting more police officers from Black and other minority communities, and creating community boards to supervise police departments. About half (53 percent) of respondents over the age of 60 believe that police-community relations would be improved if parents took more responsibility for the behavior of their children, but younger respondents were less supportive of this approach. Only 24 percent of respondents believe that relations would improve if members of the community were more respectful of police officers.

**Fig 9. Ideas to Improve Relations between Black Communities and Police**



**Gun violence** is an area of deep concern, described by nearly 90 percent of Black Census respondents as a problem in Black communities. Three-quarters of respondents see it as a major problem. In nearly half of states, the Black firearm death rate is 2 or more times the white rate.<sup>24</sup> Gun violence is the single most common cause of death for Black children and teenagers.<sup>25</sup> In response to this epidemic, Black communities across

the country have mobilized for years against gun violence, pioneering the use of restorative justice practices, violence interrupters, and other innovative strategies to address the prevalence of gun violence. Congresswoman Lucy McBath (D-GA), whose 17-year-old son, Jordan Davis, was murdered by Michael Dunn, a white man enraged by his loud music, was elected to office in 2018 on a gun control platform.

Yet politicized narratives blame Black communities for violence, ignoring the systemic factors that contribute to its persistence: High rates of gun violence are rooted in poverty, inequality, and racial segregation.<sup>26</sup> Neighborhoods that are isolated from basic services and provide little access to stable, well-paid employment experience more violence.<sup>27</sup> Thus, while the Black Census did not ask respondents directly about policy solutions to address gun violence, many of the policies respondents most strongly support—such as raising pay and guaranteeing quality and affordable housing, health care, and education in Black communities—in fact show great promise in reducing violence.<sup>28</sup> Improving police-community relations, through efforts such as reliably holding police accountable for their misconduct, can also help establish a foundation for preventing gun violence.<sup>29</sup>

Researchers find that the states with the highest rates of firearm deaths are also among the states with the weakest gun control laws—even though gun dealers also purchase weapons in states with weak laws to sell in cities and states with stronger regulations.<sup>30</sup> The National Rifle Association (NRA) is the nation's leading lobbying group opposing strong gun regulations, leading many Black Census respondents to disapprove of the organization.<sup>31</sup> The NRA's net favorability rating among Black Census respondents is minus 44 percent, with only 12 percent expressing a favorable opinion of the group.

Politicians pursuing the War on Drugs and “tough on crime” policies in the 1980s and 90s produced dramatic growth in U.S. prison and jail populations. Today, the U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country, locking up 2.2 million people nationwide. Black communities feel the harshest impact of mass incarceration because poverty, unemployment, and de facto segregation drive crime, while racial bias in rates of arrest, charging, conviction, and sentencing increase rates of Black incarceration further.<sup>32</sup> As a result of this systemic racism throughout the criminal justice system, Black men are 6 times as likely to be incarcerated as white men, and Black women are nearly twice as likely to be incarcerated as white women.<sup>33</sup> After incarcerated people return to their communities, many states do not automatically restore their rights to vote until parole and probation are complete: 12 states go even further and restrict voting rights even *after* a person has completed a prison sentence and is no longer on probation or parole.<sup>34</sup> Felony disenfranchisement laws were enacted in many southern states as part of a deliberate effort to exclude the growing number of Black voters after Reconstruction.<sup>35</sup>

These laws continue to operate as designed: 7.4 percent of the Black voting-age population was disenfranchised in 2016 due to felony convictions.<sup>36</sup> This percentage translates to 2.2 million Black citizens who are not allowed to vote. In fact, 6 percent of Black Census respondents who did not vote in 2016 indicated that the reason for not voting was ineligibility due to a felony conviction.

**“7.4 percent of the Black voting-age population was disenfranchised in 2016 due to felony convictions. This percentage translates to 2.2 million Black citizens who are not allowed to vote”**

**Restoring the voting rights of formerly incarcerated people** is popular among Black Census respondents. Eighty-four percent of respondents favor this policy, including 63 percent who strongly favor it. Among Black Census respondents who reported being ineligible to vote in 2016 due to a felony conviction, almost 8 in 10 strongly favor restoring voting rights (79 percent). Across the country, Black-led organizations are mobilizing to restore voting rights to people with past criminal convictions: In 2018, the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, led by Desmond Meade, won a critical victory with the passage of a ballot proposition that restored voting rights to over 1.4 million Floridians and is expected to substantially increase Black political power in the state. In Georgia, Stacey Abrams is advancing an even broader vision of free and fair elections, combatting unfair laws and practices that disproportionately restrict the voting rights of Black citizens.

Black Census respondents' views on policing and criminal justice stem from lived experiences. While most Black Census respondents want to address matters of crime and safety in their community, such as the violence from gun use, respondents also seek policing that is respectful of the community. Respondents want to see officers held accountable for misconduct and abuse that too often targets Black communities.



## Conclusion

With its unprecedented look at the priorities and concerns of Black people in the U.S., the Black Census reveals a high level of agreement about the problems confronting Black communities and the solutions required to address them. It is notable that the most electorally engaged respondents—people who not only vote but also work to register voters, contribute money to political candidates, and hand out campaign material—are largely aligned in concerns and policy

preferences with respondents who are less politically engaged. Highly engaged respondents do not need to convince those who are less engaged about what problems are important or even which solutions to adopt, but rather about the effectiveness of taking action. If political leaders are ready to listen to the issues and concerns of Black Census respondents, the community is ready to mobilize.

# Appendix: Black Census Project Partner Organizations

The following partner organizations mobilized to collect responses to the Black Census, both in person and online.

African Career and Education Resource, Inc. (Minnesota)	New Florida Majority (Florida)
Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (online-only)	NextGen America (online-only)
Auburn Seminary (online-only)	Ohio Organizing Collaborative (Ohio)
Black LGBTQIA Migrant Project (Michigan)	One Struggle KC (Missouri)
Black Lives Matter Paterson (New Jersey)	Picture The Homeless (New York)
Black Visions Collective (Minnesota)	Power U/Highlander Center (Florida)
Brooklyn Movement Center (New York)	PROOF Inc (Georgia)
Dignity & Power Now (California)	PushBlack Network (online-only)
Equity and Transformation (EAT) (Illinois)	Southerners On New Ground (SONG) (Georgia)
Faith in Indiana (Indiana)	TAKE Resource Center (Trans United) (Alabama)
Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) (Louisiana)	Texas Organizing Project (Texas)
Houston Justice Coalition (Texas)	The Hood Incubator (California)
Ignite (North Carolina)	The People's Advocacy Institute (Mississippi)
Make it Work Nevada (Nevada)	Trans Sistas of Color Project-Detroit (Michigan)
Maryland B.L.O.C. (Maryland)	Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP) (California)
MassVOTE (Massachusetts)	Ubuntu Village NOLA (Louisiana)
Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES) (Michigan)	WEPOWER (Missouri)
Miami Workers Center (Florida)	WHEW Women Healing & Empowering Women (Texas)
Michigan Voices (Michigan)	
National Awareness Alliance (New Jersey)	

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There's an adage that says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." The Black Census Project was made possible by a team of people and organizations who decided and agreed to go far and go together and collectively, we made it possible to complete the largest survey of Black people in America in 154 years.

There's something special that happens when people take a leap of faith, together, with our ancestors at our backs cheering us on and pushing us forward. Deep bows and endless gratitude to the following organizations, institutions and individuals (and to our ancestors):

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- 31,800 Black Census Project respondents and the more than 30 Black-led, grassroots organizations that collected survey responses (see Appendix for a full list of mobilizing partners)
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  - PushBlack
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  - Faison and Associates, Inc
  - Mijente
  - Center for Empowered Politics and Chinese Progressive Association
  - Tides Center and Tides Advocacy
  - African Communities Together
  - Fanm Saj, Inc.
  - Carinne Issanda
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    - Akonadi Foundation
    - Rosenberg Foundation
  - Women Donors Network
  - Marguerite Casey Foundation
  - Wellspring Philanthropic Fund
  - Carnegie Corporation
  - Rockefeller Brothers Fund
  - NEO Philanthropy
  - NextGen America
  - The Workers Lab
  - Open Society Foundation
  - Nathan Cummings Foundation
  - Roddenberry Foundation
  - Atlantic Philanthropies
  - Arcus Foundation
  - Irvine Foundation
  - Hertz-Gilmore Foundation
  - Kovin Foundation
  - Ford Foundation
  - Public Welfare Foundation
  - Shanthony Art + Design
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