



Black  
Futures  
Lab

# When the Rainbow is Not Enough:

LGB+ Voices in the  
2019 Black Census

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Demos



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# Introduction



As part of the Black Census—the largest survey of Black people conducted in the United States since Reconstruction—the [Black Futures Lab](#) worked with partners across the country to survey more than 5,400 Black people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or describe their sexual orientation as “other.” The Black Census includes populations that are usually not represented or are underrepresented in conventional 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. For more on the unique survey collection methods of the Black Census, see the initial report, [More Black Than Blue: Politics and Power in the 2019 Black Census](#).

Unlike the dominant media image of LGB+ people that focuses on white gay men primarily concerned about the right to marry, the Black Census reveals the need for a broader racial justice agenda and an analysis that accounts for intersections of race, class, sexual orientation, gender and gender identity. Even as the perspectives of white LGB+ people prevail in most media narratives, the Black Census showcases the underexplored, but no less important, viewpoints and experiences of Black LGB+ communities. A forthcoming report will explore the distinct concerns and experiences of Black Census respondents who identify as transgender, gender non-conforming, or identify their gender as “different” from male or female. Highlighting these findings in their own report provides an opportunity to shine a spotlight on a community that is too often marginalized, even in discussions about LGBTQ+ people.

While LGB+ Black Census respondents strongly support existing laws enabling gay and lesbian couples to marry legally, respondents are even more concerned about bread-and-butter economic issues like low pay, unaffordable health care, and access to housing. Police violence and impunity—and broader societal violence that targets the LGBTQ+ community—are also urgent concerns. Confronting multiple types of discrimination on a daily basis, LGB+ Black Census respondents report frequent experiences of disrespect and harassment in the course of daily life. **Too often, Black LGB+ people are perceived as distinct and separate from the larger Black community. The Black Census reveals that, despite some differences, LGB+ Black Census respondents strongly identify with the Black community.**

# 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, Demos, 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 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.

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. This was particularly important in the case of the LGB+ population: While researchers estimate that anywhere between 2.4 percent and 10 percent of U.S. residents are gay, lesbian, or bisexual, 17 percent of Black Census respondents identify with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual.



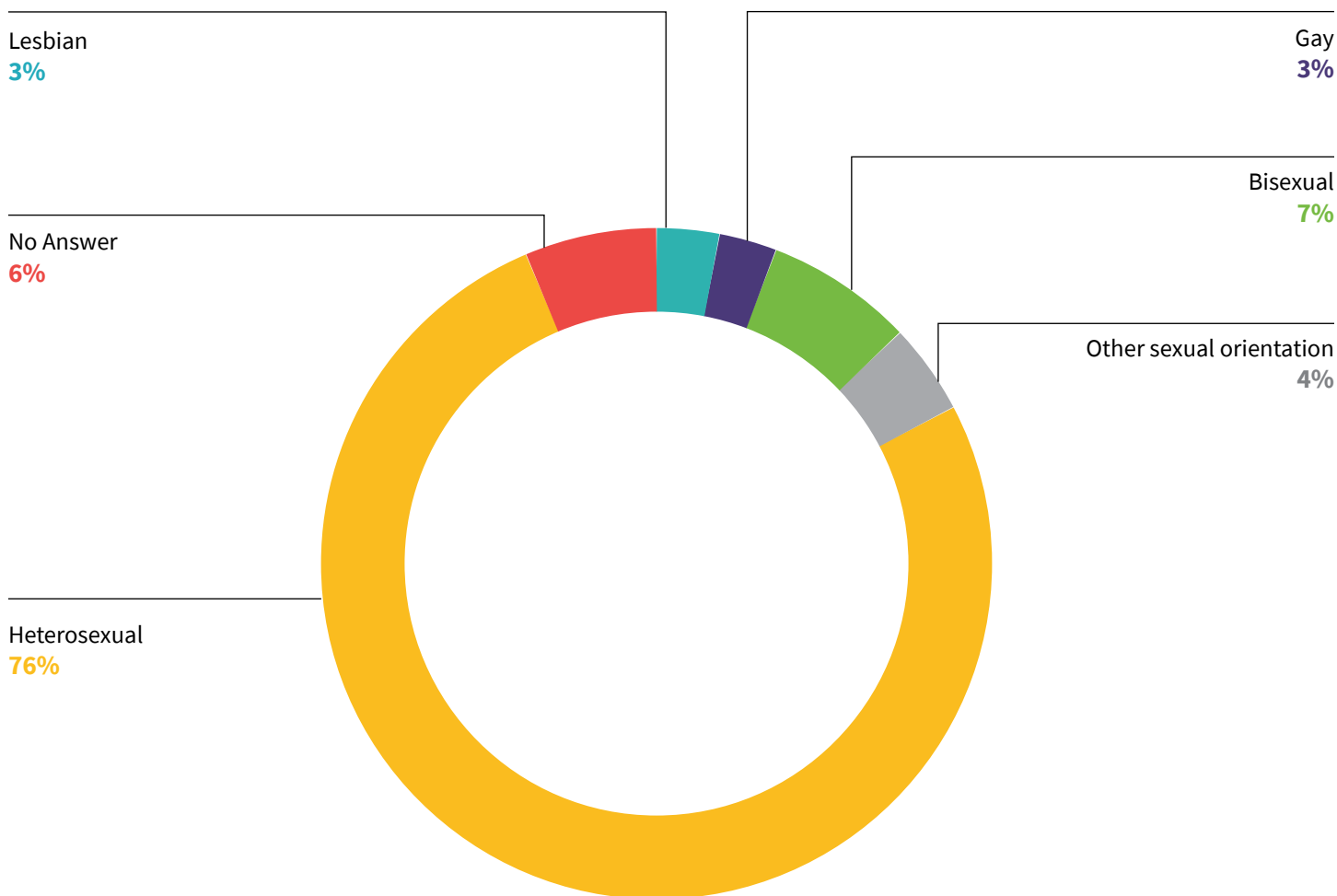
# Who Are LGB+ Black Census Respondents?

This report explores the perspectives of more than 5,400 Black Census respondents who identified with a sexual orientation of lesbian, gay, bisexual or other. The Black Census offered “other” as an option for respondents with a sexual orientation that is not captured by the pre-defined categories offered. The “other” category also represents a recognition that sexual orientation can be fluid and expansive and that people may identify in different ways at different points in time. It is worth noting that LGB+ Black Census respondents may identify with any gender: While transgender and gender non-conforming people are frequently combined with LGB+ people into a single group (often described as LGBTQ+), Black Futures Lab has chosen to consider gender identification separately from sexual orientation in order to highlight in a separate report the

distinct viewpoints of Black Census respondents who identify as transgender, gender non-conforming, or identify with a gender different than male or female. Because many outside studies conflate gender identity and sexual orientation, this report occasionally refers to research referencing the LGBT or LGBTQ+ population as a whole.

Overall, 17 percent of Black Census respondents identify with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, including lesbian (3 percent), gay (3 percent), bisexual (7 percent), and other (4 percent). Seventy-six percent of Black Census respondents identify as heterosexual. An additional 6 percent of Black Census respondents chose not to answer the question on sexual orientation, as Figure 1 shows.

**Fig 1. Black Census Respondents by Sexual Orientation**





LGB+ Black Census respondents are typically younger than Black Census respondents who identify as heterosexual. Fifty-six percent of bisexual respondents, 51 percent of respondents with a sexual orientation of “other,” 46 percent of gay respondents, and 35 percent of lesbian respondents were under the age of 30, compared to 24 percent of respondents who identified as heterosexual. Heterosexual respondents were more likely than LGB+ respondents to be age 60 or older. The finding that young adults are significantly more likely than older people to identify as LGB+ is consistent with other survey research. **The greater share of young respondents who identify as LGB+ may be a reflection of generational change, with younger respondents coming of age in a more welcoming atmosphere that makes it easier to openly identify as LGB+.** If this is the case, then an increasing population of Black people would be expected to identify as LGB+ as more young people come of age.

**LGB+ Black Census respondents are more likely to have lower incomes than Black Census respondents who identify as heterosexual.** Sixty-nine percent of gay respondents, 68 percent of bisexual respondents, 63 percent of respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other” and 62 percent of lesbian respondents report household incomes below \$50,000, compared to 58 percent of heterosexual respondents. Lower incomes may be a result of LGB+ Black

Census respondents’ relative youth, of anti-LGB+ bias in the job market, or of some other factor. Lower incomes among LGB+ Black Census respondents parallel the conclusions of other studies which find that LGB+ people of all racial backgrounds have lower incomes than heterosexual adults and were more likely to face economic hardship, such as food insecurity or eviction. Similarly, the little research available on the Black LGB+ population finds that Black people in same-sex couples report lower median incomes than their Black counterparts in different-sex couples. LGB+ Black Census respondents generally have similar education levels to Black Census respondents who identify as heterosexual.

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# Beyond the Black Census: Facts About Black LGB+ People

Myths and stereotypes about LGB+ people remain widespread. To further illuminate the findings on LGB+ Black Census respondents, this section draws on a range of data sources to clarify some common misconceptions.

- **Sexuality is different from gender identity.** Being gay, lesbian, or bisexual is not the same thing as being transgender. Sexual orientation (whether someone is gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, or identifies in some other way) describes who a person is attracted to romantically, emotionally, and sexually. Gender identity is about a person's understanding of themselves as male, female, or not conforming to either male or female. When the male or female sex a person is assigned at birth matches their gender identity, the person is called cisgender. When a person's assigned sex differs from their gender identity (for example, their assigned sex is male, but their gender identity is female), it is called being transgender. People who identify as neither male nor female may self-describe as gender non-conforming, genderqueer, or prefer not to use a gender label.
- **Black people are more likely than white people to identify as LGBT.** Media portrayals often depict LGBT people as overwhelmingly white. Yet the reality is very different: According to the most recent data from the Gallup Daily Tracking Poll, 5 percent of Black people identify as LGBT compared to 4 percent of white people. Latinx and Asian adults are also more likely than their white counterparts to identify as LGBT. While the LGBT percentage has increased among all racial and ethnic groups since 2012, Black people have consistently been more likely than white people to identify as LGBT.
- **Many Black LGB+ people are raising children.** In contrast to stereotypes of all LGB+ people as freewheeling singles, 41 percent of Black same-sex couples are raising children, and Black same-sex couples are more likely to raise children than same-sex couples of any other race or ethnicity. Because of limitations on available data, the study did not capture the experience of LGB+ Black people who are raising children outside of a same-sex couple, such as LGB+ single parents.

## LGB+ Black Census Respondents Support Marriage Equality—but are Even More Concerned About Making Ends Meet

Black LGB+ people face substantial economic barriers: Persistent racial discrimination in employment, housing, health care and credit undermines the ability of Black people to build economic security. For Black LGB+ people, illegal racial discrimination is compounded by discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, which is still permitted in many states. The overlapping forms of discrimination faced by Black LGB+ people—who are impacted by both homophobia and racism and often other types of oppression as well—are best understood through the lens of intersectionality, a term

pioneered by Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how multiple forms of exclusion shape people's lives. While it is frequently difficult to pinpoint exactly how discrimination based on race and sexual orientation intersect, the cumulative impact is clear: Researchers find that Black LGBTQ+ people face higher unemployment rates, are more likely to experience economic hardship, and are less likely to have health care coverage than the general population. Studies also suggest that both race and sexual orientation affect workers' paychecks, driving up poverty rates and further

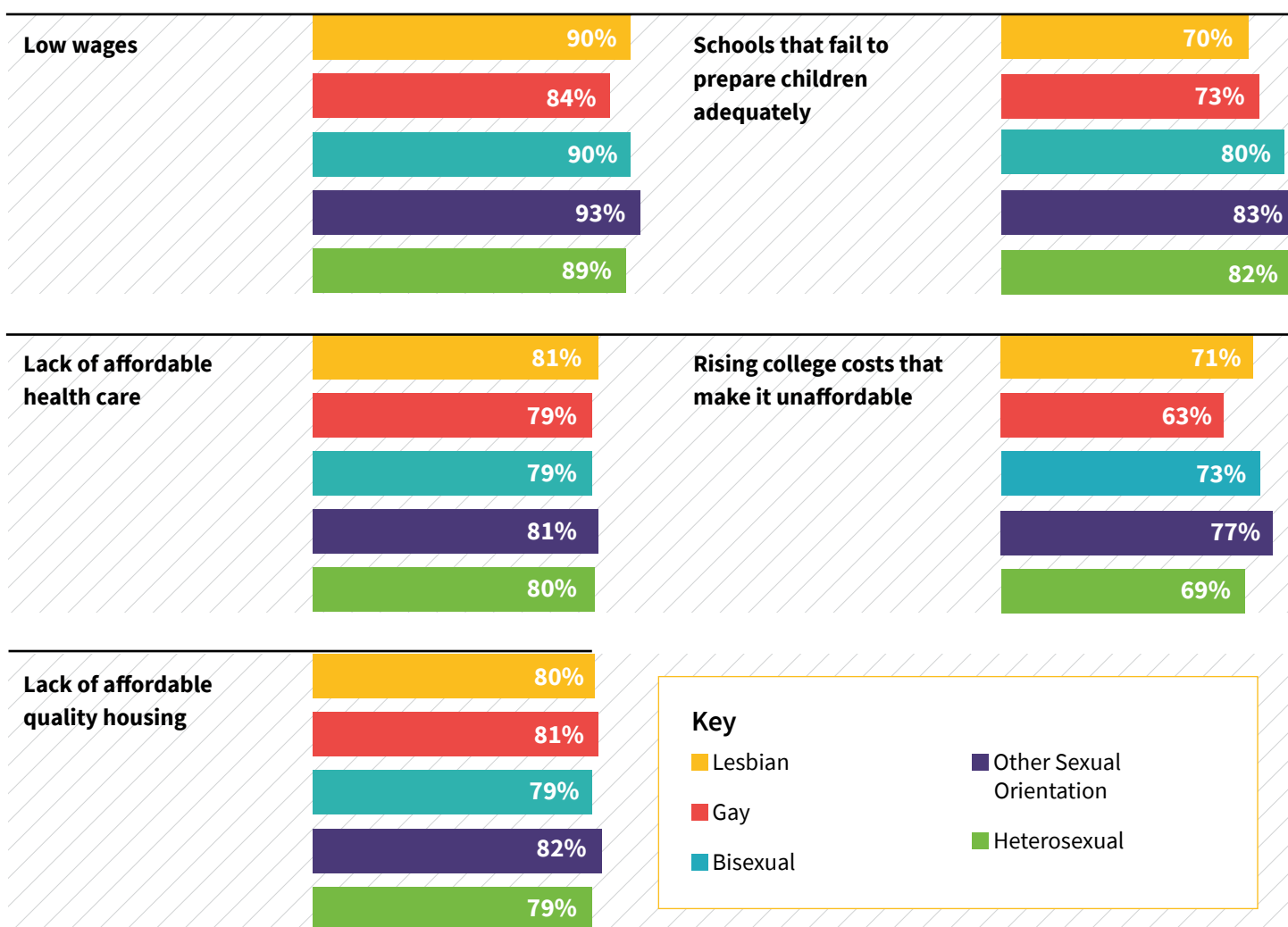
undercutting the ability of Black LGB+ workers to support families and loved ones. For Black LGB+ workers who are living with HIV and AIDS, this status may pose another stigma, as well as higher health care costs that can hinder economic security.

LGB+ Black Census respondents are more likely to identify **low wages as the biggest problem** the community is facing, rather than any other issue. More than 90 percent of LGB+ Black Census respondents report that low pay is a problem in the community, with the vast majority saying it is a major problem. Other economic concerns also rise to the top: Like Black Census respondents as a whole, LGB+ Black Census respondents assert that **lack of affordable health care** (80 percent) and **lack of affordable housing** (79 percent) are major problems in the community. Black Census respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other” are the

most likely to say that **schools that fail to prepare children adequately** are a major problem (83 percent), followed by bisexual Black Census respondents (80 percent)—perhaps because respondents with these orientations tend to be younger and have more recent experience as students. Bisexual respondents (73 percent) and respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other” (77 percent) are also the most likely to identify **rising college costs** as a major problem. Seventy-one percent of lesbian respondents and 63 percent of gay respondents agree that rising college costs are a major problem. Overall, LGB+ Black Census respondents are largely aligned with heterosexual respondents in assessing the most pressing economic issues facing Black communities, as Figure 2 illustrates.

LGB+ Black Census respondents are committed supporters of

**Fig 2. The Most Pressing Economic Problems Identified by LGB+ Black Census Respondents were defined as a major problem or a minor problem in their communities**

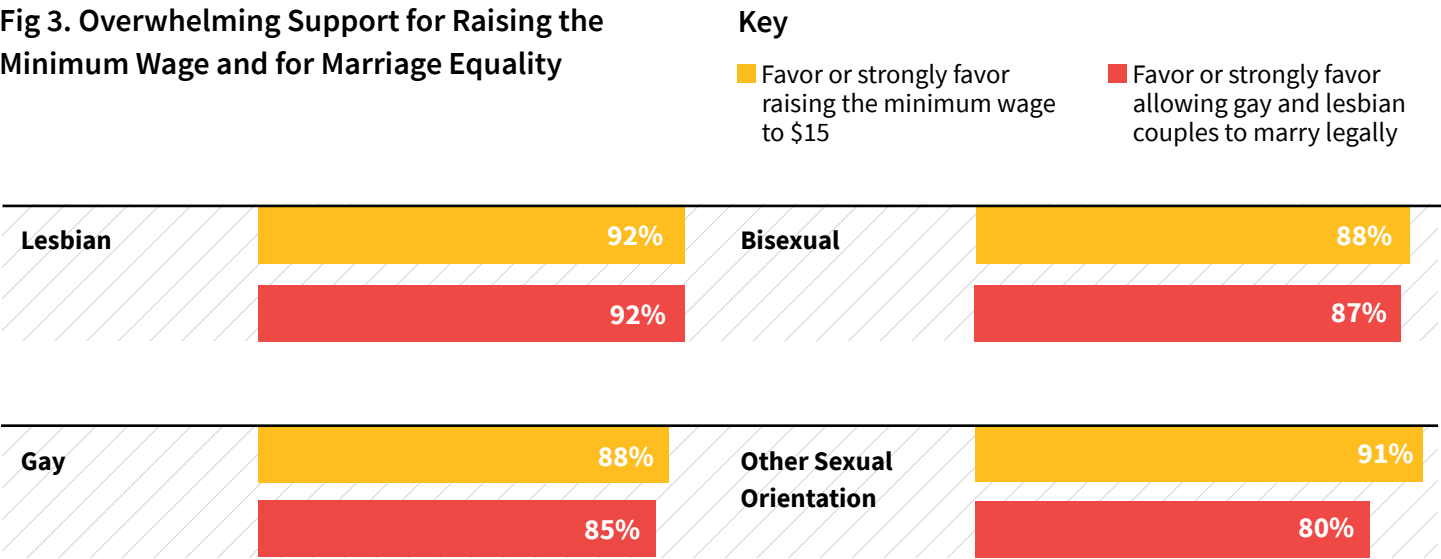


**marriage equality:** 80 percent or more of LGB+ respondents favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally, with lesbian respondents (92 percent) the most likely to support marriage rights. Yet, as Figure 3 shows, LGB+ respondents are equally if not more committed to increasing the minimum

wage to **\$15 an hour**, a policy supported by 92 percent of lesbian respondents, 88 percent of gay respondents, 88 percent of bisexual respondents and 92 percent of respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other.”

Policies to make basic needs easier to access and afford are

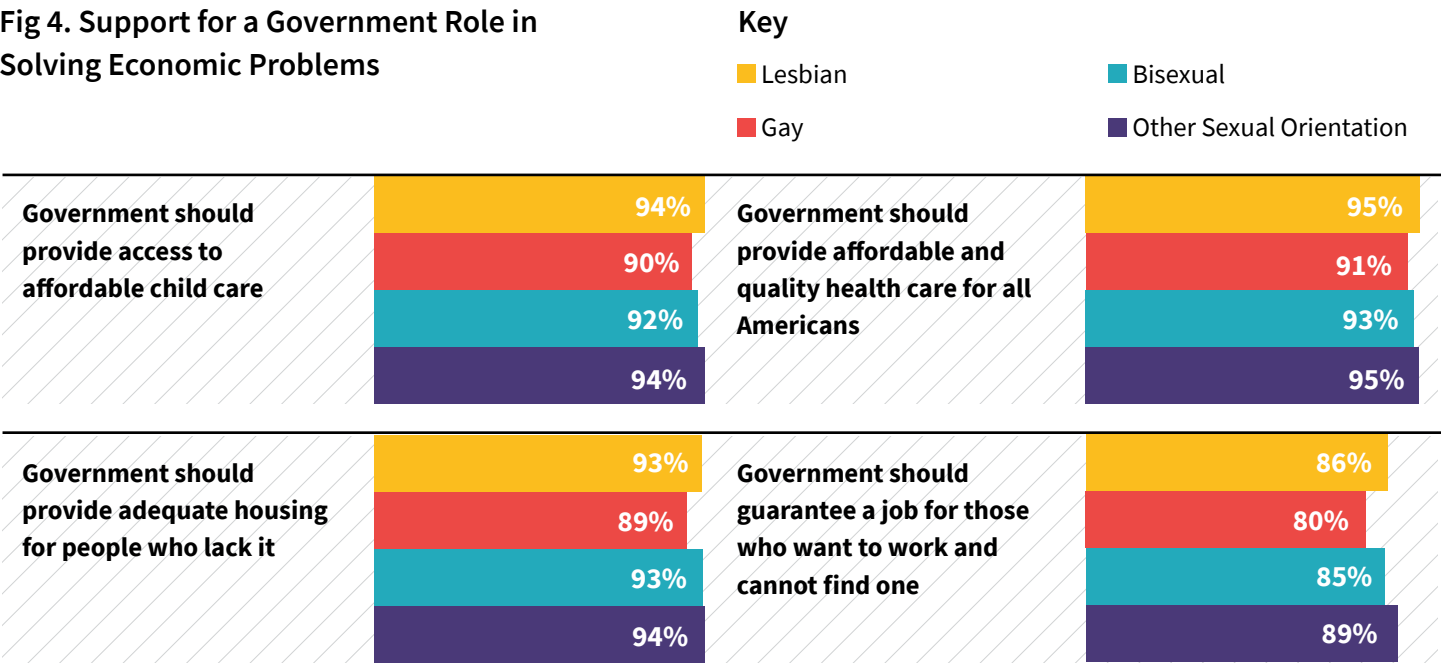
Fig 3. Overwhelming Support for Raising the Minimum Wage and for Marriage Equality



also overwhelmingly popular among LGB+ Black Census respondents: More than 90 percent say the **government should provide affordable, quality, health care, adequate housing for people who lack it, and public access to affordable childcare**. More than 80 percent of respondents who identify as LGB+ say the government should **guarantee**

**a job for anyone who wants to work.** On each of these questions, respondents who identify as gay are somewhat less likely than other LGB+ respondents to support a government role in addressing problems, although gay support for public sector action is never less than 80 percent (see Figure 4).

Fig 4. Support for a Government Role in Solving Economic Problems





**Hostile policymakers in the White House and many state governments are dismantling protections for LGB+ people, threatening to make LGB+ people of all racial backgrounds even more vulnerable to discrimination. The U.S. Department of Justice has recently argued that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 doesn't protect LGBTQ+ workers from discrimination and that businesses—specifically, a** Christian bakery owner in Colorado who refused to make a cake for a gay couple's wedding—should be able to discriminate against LGB+ customers. As the forthcoming paper on transgender Black Census respondents will describe, recent efforts to roll

**“Hostile policymakers in the White House and many state governments are dismantling protections for LGB+ people, threatening to make LGB+ people of all racial backgrounds even more vulnerable to discrimination.**

back the rights of transgender people have been even more aggressive. A key policy solution is **the Equality Act**, which recently passed the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill

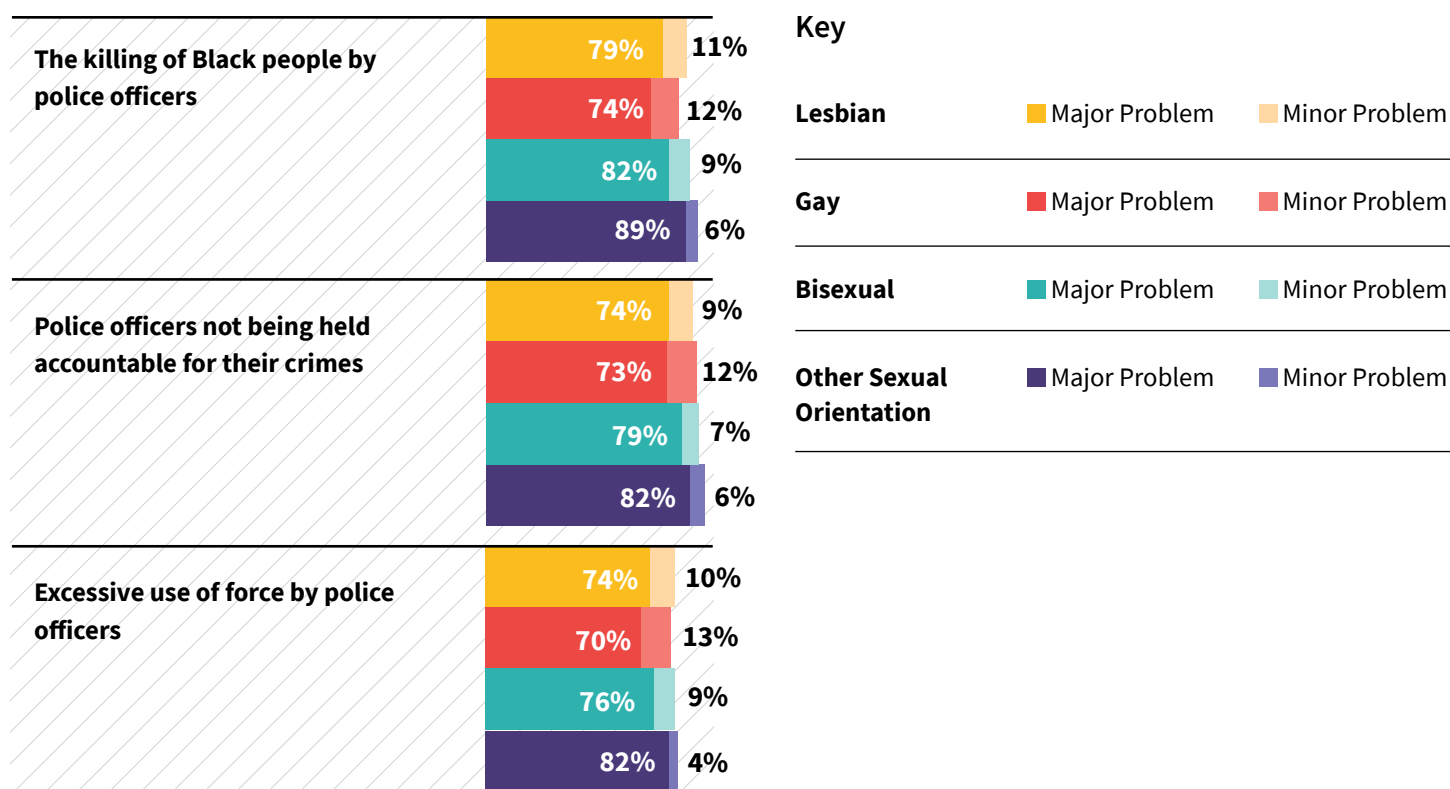
clarifies that discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is a form of unlawful sex discrimination. As a result, the bill clearly prohibits discrimination in employment, housing, credit, education, public spaces and services, federally funded programs, and jury service based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. The continued discrimination that Black people confront shows that simply outlawing discriminatory behavior is not sufficient to uproot it; however, clarifying that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is unlawful is an important step toward improving economic security for Black LGB+ people, and provides additional tools and resources to all LGBTQ+ people who continue to face unfair treatment at work and in the broader economy.

# Police Misconduct is Another Leading Concern for LGB+ Black Census Respondents

Anti-LGBTQ+ stigma and racism in schools, communities and families combine with discriminatory laws and policing strategies to raise the risk that Black LGB+ people will be exposed to police stops, arrest and incarceration. This unfair criminalization is particularly acute for Black LGB+ youth and people living with HIV/AIDS. **Police misconduct** is a major concern for all Black Census respondents. As a result of being targeted by law enforcement in multiple ways,

LGB+ respondents are even more likely than respondents who identify as heterosexual to have experienced a negative interaction with the police in the last 6 months. Black Census respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other” were the most likely to report a recent negative interaction with law enforcement: 42 percent compared to 28 percent for heterosexual respondents, as Figure 5 illustrates.

Fig 5



Like heterosexual Black Census respondents, LGB+ Black Census respondents see **excessive use of force** by police officers (more than 70 percent among all LGB+ respondents) and **police officers not being held accountable for misconduct** (also more than 70 percent among all LGB+ respondents) as major community problems. The vast majority of LGB+ Black Census respondents also report that **police**

**killings of Black people** are a problem in the community (90 percent of lesbian respondents, 86 percent of gay respondents, 91 percent of bisexual respondents, and 95 percent of respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other”); in each case, more than three-quarters say it is a major problem.

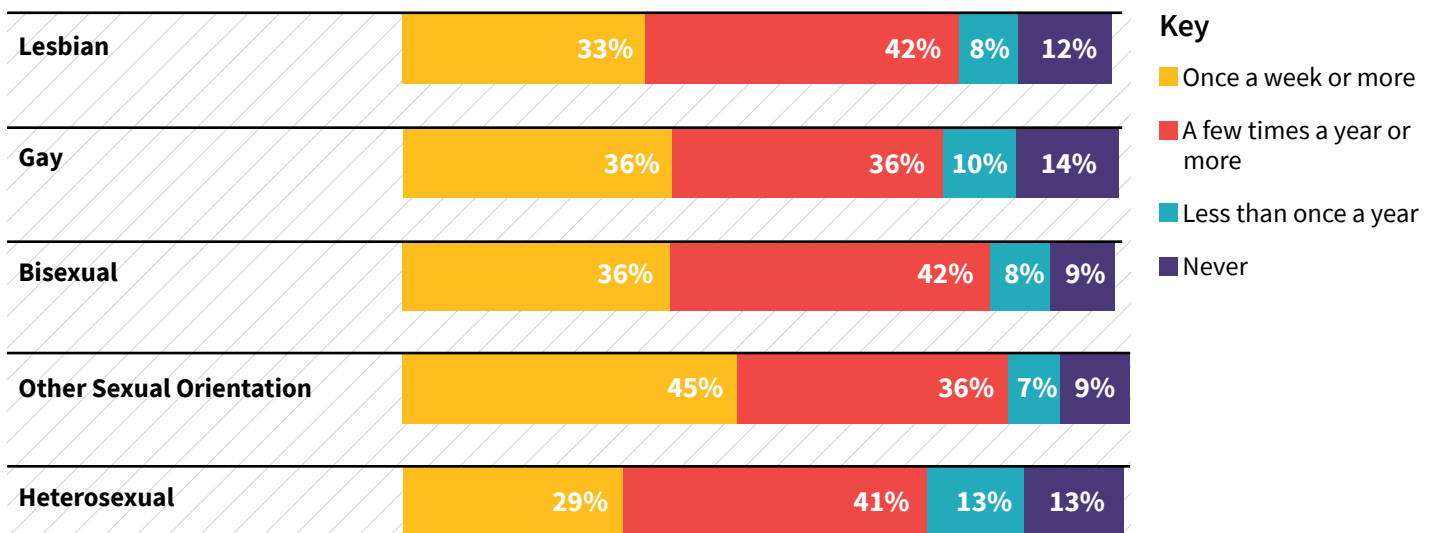
# LGB+ Black Census Respondents Report High Rates of Disrespect and Harassment, and Violence is a Major Concern

Confronted with multiple types of discrimination and prejudice, LGB+ Black Census respondents report frequent experiences of disrespect and harassment in daily life. Everyday experiences of racism, sexism and homophobia take a steep toll, not only on the economic lives of Black LGB+ people and encounters with the criminal justice system, but also on ordinary social life, health, and mental health. Researchers have linked racism to elevated rates of stress and anxiety among Black people, while discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is linked to higher rates of psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, and suicide, especially among young people.

Black Census respondents as a whole regularly experience racist treatment, and report being treated as dishonest, less intelligent, or dangerous on a weekly and even daily basis, and LGB+ respondents report disrespect at even higher rates.

For example, 45 percent of Black Census respondents who identify as heterosexual report having been **treated with less courtesy** than other people at least a few times in a given month—this may be due to race, gender, or any combination of reasons. LGB+ Black Census respondents are more likely to report discourteous treatment, with 53 percent of lesbian respondents, 52 percent of gay respondents, 57 percent of bisexual respondents, and 63 percent of respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other” reporting being treated with less courtesy a few times a month or more, as Figure 6 shows. Nearly a quarter (23 percent) of respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other” report experiencing a lack of courtesy almost every day, which may be a result of sexual orientation, race, gender, or a combination of factors.

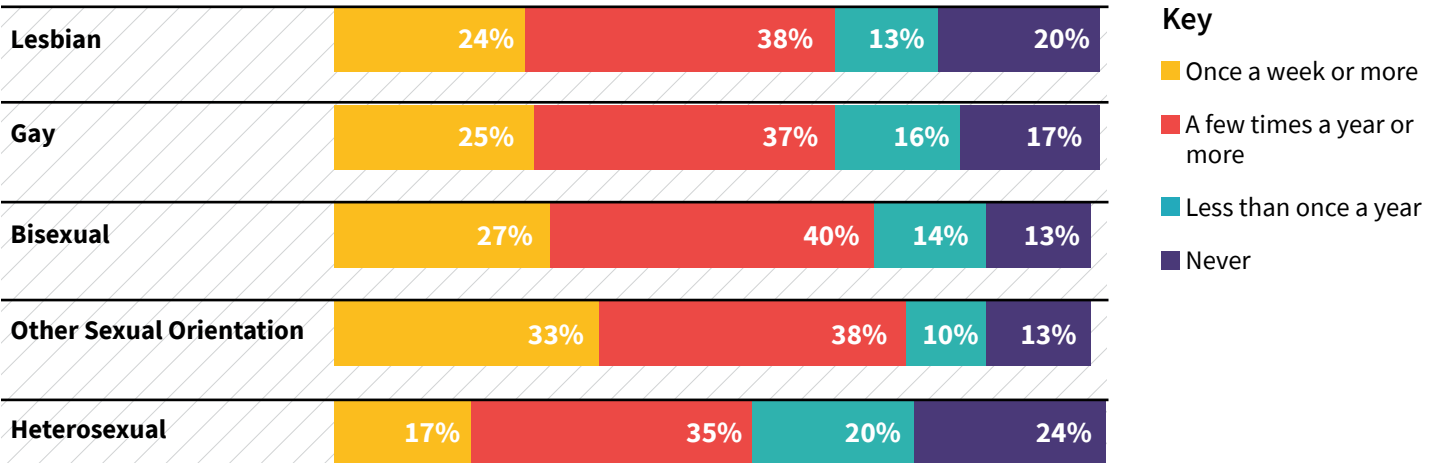
Fig 6: Frequency of Being Treated with Less Courtesy than Other People



Worse still, biased treatment can escalate into **threats and harassment**: 62 percent of gay and lesbian Black Census respondents report having felt threatened or harassed at least a few times a year, as do an even higher 67 percent of bisexual

respondents and 71 percent of respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other.” Fifty-two percent of Black Census respondents who identify as heterosexual reported feeling threatened or harassed at least a few times a year (see Figure 7).

Fig 7: Frequency of Feeling Threatened or Harassed



At their most extreme, threats and harassment spiral into actual violence. Emboldened by hateful rhetoric in the White House, white supremacists, anti-LGBTQ+ bigots, and other extremist individuals and groups are perpetrating an escalation of hate violence against many marginalized communities, including a documented rise in anti-Black hate crimes and hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people. The **National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs documents 52 reported anti-LGBTQ+ homicides in 2017 alone—60 percent of the victims were Black, with Black transgender women killed the most frequently. Yet murderous hate crimes are only the most extreme form of more pervasive violence targeting the Black LGBTQ+ community.**

More than 78 percent of LGB+ Black Census respondents report that **violence against gays, lesbians, and transgender people** is a problem in the community, and 62 percent or more say it is a major problem. This reveals real concern about personal safety and the safety of LGB+ friends and family—alongside concern about the economy and police violence and impunity.

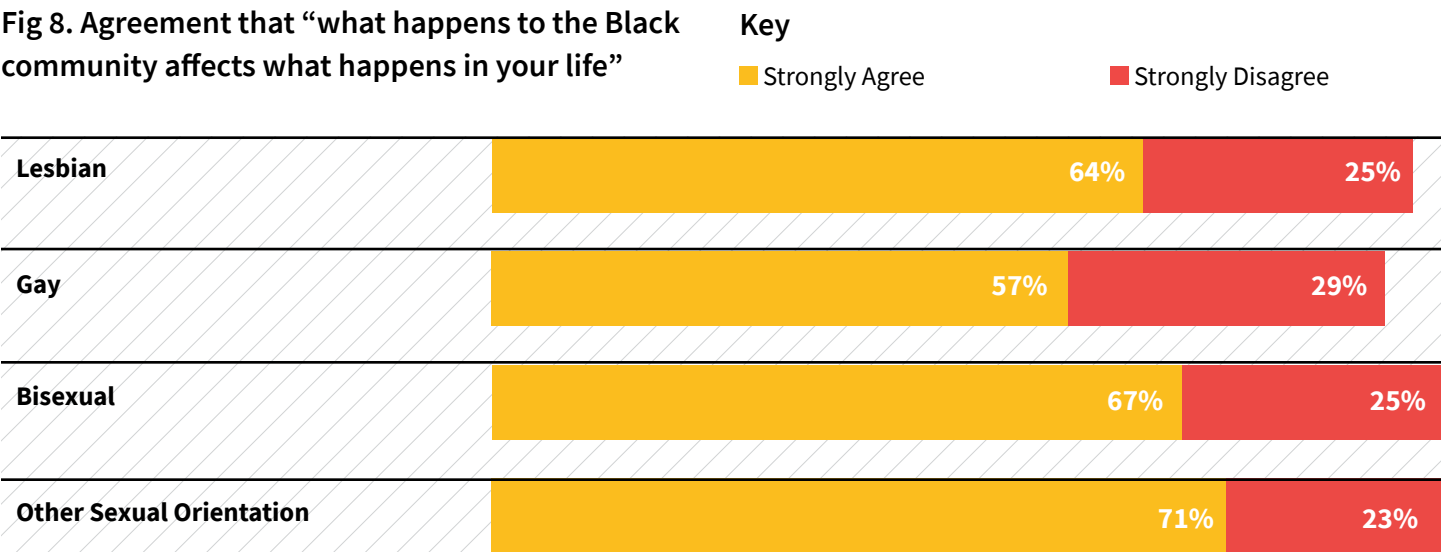
**“More than 78 percent of LGB+ Black Census respondents report that violence against gays, lesbians, and transgender people is a problem in the community”**

LGB+ Black Census Respondents Strongly Identify with the Black Community—in Many Cases, They are Embraced in Turn

Too often, Black LGB+ people are perceived as distinct and separate from the larger Black community. The Black Census reveals that, despite some differences, LGB+ Black Census respondents strongly identify with the Black community. More than 85 percent of LGB+ Black Census respondents agree that **“what happens to the Black community affects what happens in your life.”** Respondents who identify their sexual orientation as “other” are the most likely to strongly agree with this statement, at 71 percent, as Figure 8 illustrates.



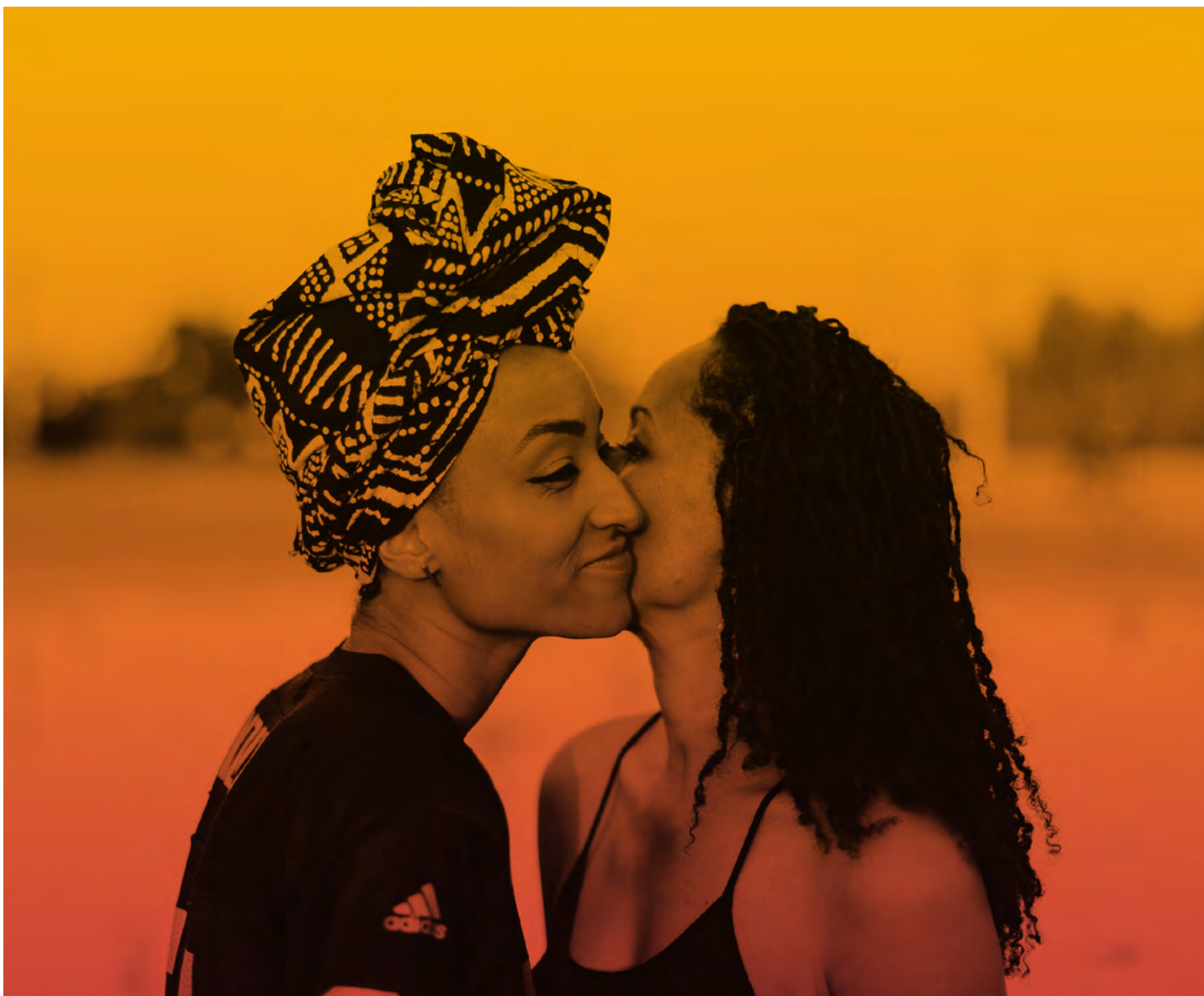
Fig 8. Agreement that “what happens to the Black community affects what happens in your life”



In addition, LGB+ Black Census respondents are among the **strongest supporters of Black Lives Matter**, with 90 percent expressing a favorable opinion of the movement. LGB+ Black Census respondents are more likely to report a very favorable opinion of Black Lives Matter than heterosexual respondents: While 55 percent of heterosexual Black Census respondents view Black Lives Matter very favorably (and an additional 32 percent have a favorable view), 63 percent of lesbian respondents, 59 percent of gay respondents, 66 percent of bisexual respondents and 59 percent of respondents who describe their sexual orientation as “other” report viewing Black Lives Matter very favorably.

“In addition, LGB+ Black Census respondents are among the strongest supporters of Black Lives Matter, with 90 percent expressing a favorable opinion of the movement.”

Anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry must be combatted in every community, yet there is little evidence that it is dramatically more virulent in Black communities than elsewhere. In reality, Black people in the U.S. are seldom the ones holding the social, financial and legal power that fuels homophobia. Defying widespread stereotypes about Black homophobia, 72 percent of Black Census respondents who identify as heterosexual nonetheless recognize that **violence against gays, lesbians, and transgender people** is a problem facing the community. A majority (58 percent) of Black Census respondents who identify as heterosexual **support marriage equality** and only 19 percent oppose it (22 percent had no opinion or chose not to answer the question).



## Conclusion

The Black Census provides an exceptional view of the experiences, perspectives, and opinions of more than 5,400 Black people across the United States who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual or describe their sexual orientation as “other.” Overall, the Black Census reveals that LGB+ Black Census respondents strongly identify with the Black community. Like most Black Census respondents, LGB+ respondents are deeply concerned about police violence and impunity as well as broader societal violence that targets Black and LGBTQ+ communities. At the same time, economic issues like low pay,

unaffordable health care, and access to housing are urgent concerns. Confronting multiple types of discrimination on a daily basis, LGB+ Black Census respondents report frequent experiences of disrespect and harassment in their lives. Policy agendas that address Black LGB+ people must consider intersections of race, class, sexual orientation, gender and gender identity, and must focus on economic justice and police accountability as well as on efforts to address racial bias and discrimination due to sexual orientation.

# Acknowledgements

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):

- 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)
- **Our core partners:**
  - SocioAnalitica Research
  - Demos
  - Color of Change
- PushBlack
- Dancing Hearts Consulting and Esperanza Tervalon-Garrett
- Celeste Faison
- 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
- **Our philanthropic partners:**
  - NoVo Foundation
  - Akonadi Foundation
- Rosenberg Foundation
- Women Donors Network
- Marguerite Casey Foundation
- Anonymous
- 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
- A/B Partners
- Moodie-Mills Strategies
- W. Kamau Bell
- Van Jones
- Jessica Morales Rocketto
- Ai-jen Poo
- Mir Harris
- TIMES UP, with a special shout out to Tracee Ellis Ross, Shonda Rhimes, Ava Duvernay, and Amandla Stenberg
- **Black Futures Lab Advisory Board**
  - Anthony Thigpen
  - Melissa Harris Perry
  - Tracy Sturdivant
  - Maya Harris
  - Lateefah Simon
  - Tim Silard
  - Rashad Robinson
  - Heather McGhee
- The staff of the Black Futures Lab - Demetria Huntsman, Brittany Ferrell, Devonte Jackson, Robbie Clark, Sessen Holloway

# Endnotes

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