

# 2023 Black Census

Executive Summary

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# Introduction: The importance of grassroots research

The **Black Census Project (BCP)**, initiated by the **Black Futures Lab (BFL)**, is a comprehensive grassroots data collection and organizational effort aimed at amplifying the voices of Black Americans. This project follows the 2018 Black Census, marking it as the largest survey of Black people in the United States since the Reconstruction era. From February 2022 to October 2023, BFL, along with a network of online and on-the-ground partners, successfully engaged over 200,000 Black individuals through a variety of outreach methods, including in-person campaigns, extensive text messaging, collaborations with Black influencers, and online advertising.

In addition to the broad-reaching survey, the BCP also conducted focus groups in November 2023. These focus groups provided deeper insights and context to the data collected from the survey, helping to clarify and expand upon the survey findings. The primary mission of BFL through the Black Census Project is to transform Black communities into powerful constituencies capable of influencing political power on local, state, and national levels. BFL emphasizes the importance of inclusive representation by ensuring all voices within the Black community are heard, regardless of their background or circumstances.

**The Black Census Project aimed to capture the diverse experiences of Black Americans, which are often overlooked in traditional surveys due to their small sample sizes and limited reach. Traditional surveys tend to miss out on the full spectrum of Black experiences, leading to a homogenized view of Black public opinion. The BCP sought to rectify this by employing a variety of methods to reach traditionally hard-to-reach populations within the Black community. These included urban and rural residents, immigrants and U.S.-born individuals, LGBTQ and straight people, and those who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated.**

A key component of the BCP's success was its partnership with local community groups. These groups acted as vital links between the BFL team and the community, helping to build trust in a population that has often been let down by researchers. Historical abuses, such as harmful studies or research conducted for academic advancement with little benefit to the community, have left many Black Americans wary of participating in surveys. By involving trusted community organizations, the BCP was able to overcome this skepticism and ensure a more comprehensive representation of Black voices.

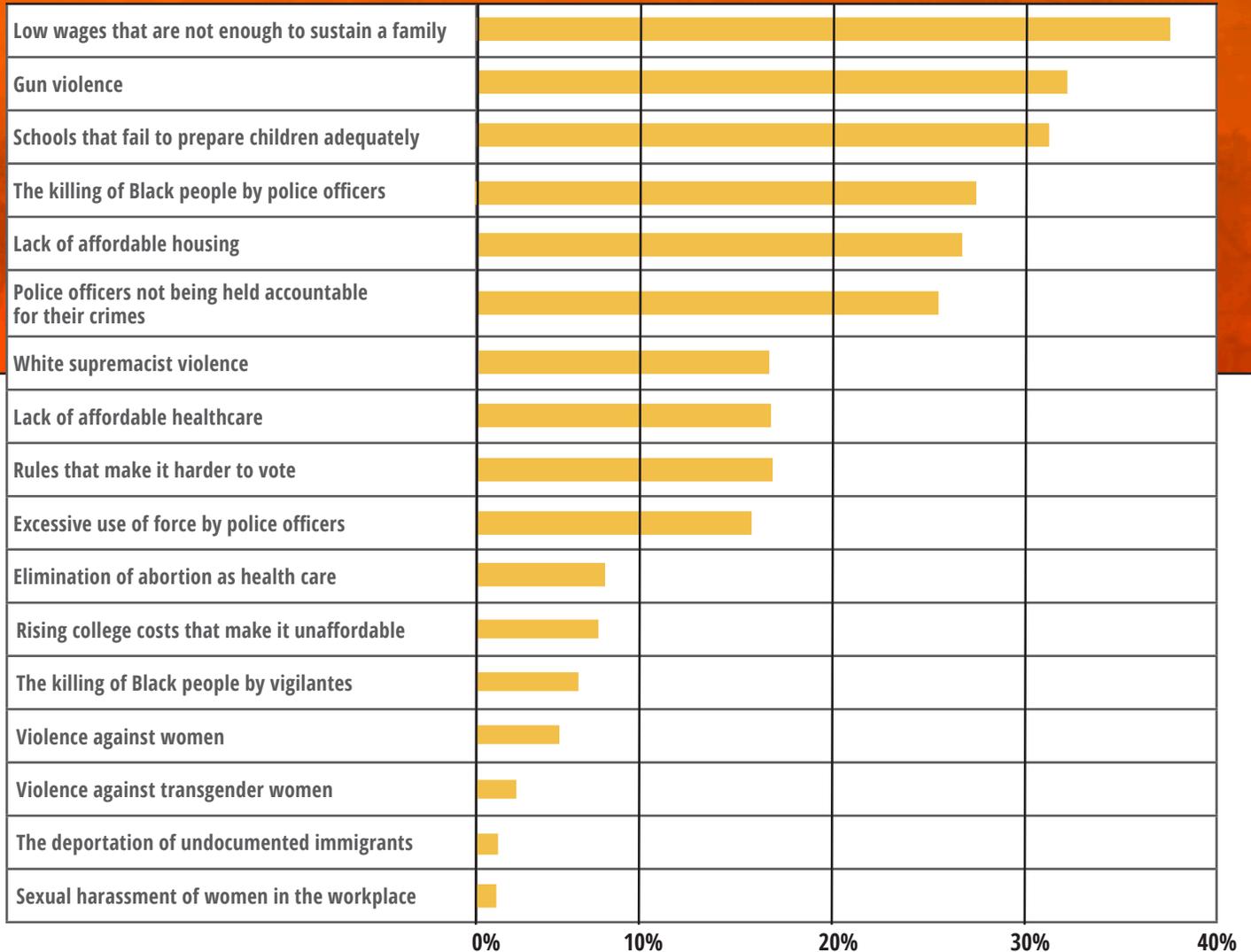
The outreach methods used in the BCP were diverse and tailored to effectively reach various segments of the Black community. These methods included word-of-mouth campaigns, social media engagement, text message banks, partnerships with Black influencers, and participation in community events. The result was a rich and varied dataset that captures the broad spectrum of experiences and opinions within the Black community, providing invaluable insights for advocacy and policy-making.

Overall, the Black Census Project represents a significant effort to elevate the voices of Black Americans and ensure they are heard in political and social discourse. By leveraging extensive community partnerships and employing innovative outreach strategies, BFL and its partners have created a powerful tool for advocacy and change, highlighting the importance of inclusive and representative data collection in empowering marginalized communities.



# Priorities and Policies

## Economic concerns are top of mind among respondents

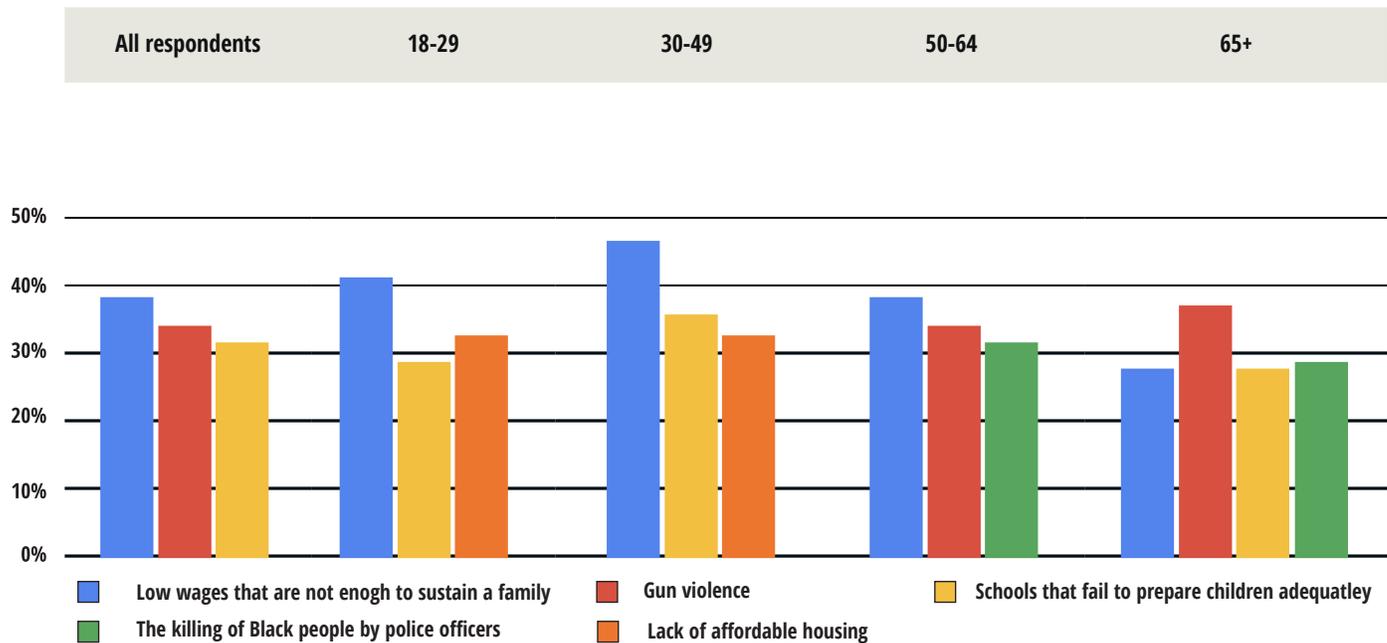


The consensus among Black Census respondents is that low wages is the highest-ranking of their top three concerns in the survey. Nearly four in ten (38%) respondents mention that low wages are not enough to sustain a family as their top concern. Gun violence (33%) and schools that fail to prepare children adequately (31%) round up the top three.

Low wages are the top concern for Black Census respondents across demographics and geography. Low wages were not the top concern among senior respondents (65 years or older), though it still ranked among their top three. Among respondents ages 30-49, nearly half (47%) selected low wages as one of their top three concerns.

# What do you think are the three most important problems affecting Black people in the country today?

## By Age Categories



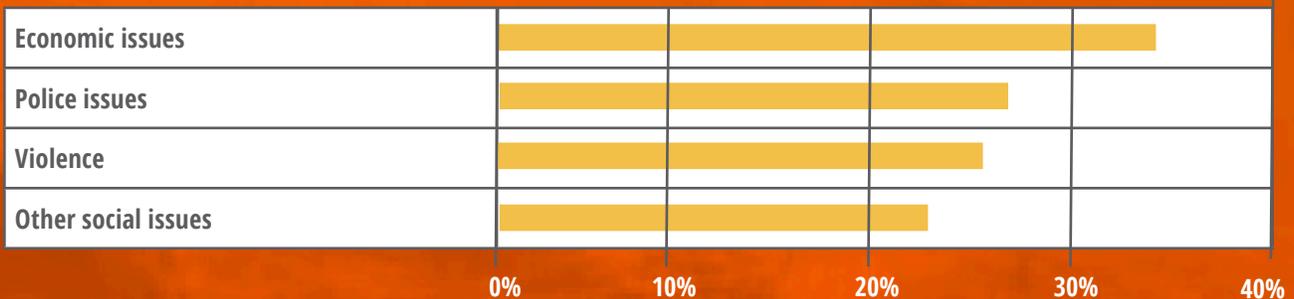
Participants in the focus groups explained in their own words the role of wages in their lives. They raised concerns about inflation and the rising cost of living. Even when the news and other reports show indicators suggesting the economy is strengthening, many working people have not felt the “relief.” Housing, food, and transportation are expensive, and jobs do not pay well enough to catch up. These participants linked the low wages many in the community get paid as the source of many economic problems. Qualitatively speaking, they do not consider any problem more important than the other. Still, they see the genesis of their struggles in the fact that working people, especially Black people, are not paid enough for their hard work.

In the survey component of the Black Census, these subjects are reflected in the distribution of responses. Looking closely at the categories of issues people mentioned, nearly one-third (32%) of all unique mentions referred to economic issues. The top issue among the economic matters selected is low wages, which account for 43% of economic mentions, while 31% of economic mentions were about unaffordable housing. In other words, nearly three-quarters (74%) of economic mentions were about wages and housing. These accounted for 25% of all mentions across all issues polled.

<sup>1</sup>The 17 response options were divided into four larger categories for this calculation. Five options (White supremacist violence, The killing of Black people by vigilantes, Violence against transgender women, Gun violence, and Violence against women) comprise the category “Violence.” Three response options (The killing of Black people by police officers, Police officers not being held accountable for their crimes, and Excessive use of force by police officers) are part of the category “Police.” Four response options (Low wages that are not enough to sustain a family, Lack of affordable healthcare, Lack of affordable housing, and Rising college costs that make it unaffordable) comprise the category “Economic Issues.”



## Total Mentions by Issue Topic

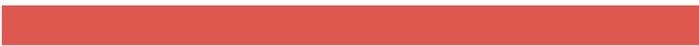


With some variation, these top concerns are shared across a broad spectrum of respondents, showing how widespread these concerns are within the various Black communities we spoke with. Concerns about gentrification and how communities are being disrupted by not being able to continue living in places they have been for decades or generations are central to housing issues. Rent is hard to keep up with and does not allow people, even with good-paying jobs, to afford to buy their own homes.

# Respondents overwhelmingly support policies that address their concerns.

Consistent with their ranking of issues, Black Census respondents are clearly in favor, by wide margins, of the policies that will alleviate or solve their economic concerns. Some of the most popular policies, with the highest ratios of support, include increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour (95%), increasing and expanding unemployment insurance (90%), increasing and expanding government aid (94%), and increasing taxes on individuals earning \$250,000 or more a year (85%).

## Support for Policy Proposals Percent who Strongly or Somewhat Favor

Making college education affordable for any person who wants to attend		97%
Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour		95%
Granting the right to vote to formerly incarcerated persons		95%
Increasing and expanding government aid for people who need it		94%
Increasing and expanding unemployment insurance		90%
The up to \$300 per month, per child payments that families who qualified received from July to December 2021		90%
Ensuring access to a safe and affordable abortion		87%
Increasing taxes on individuals earning \$250,000 or more		85%
Getting rid of laws that protect police officers from being punished for crimes		81%
Schools requiring mask mandates for staff and students		75%
Governments requiring all employees such as teachers and police who do not have a medical exemption to receive the coronavirus/COVID-19 vaccination		64%
Businesses and organizations requiring all employees who do not have a medical exemption to receive the coronavirus/COVID-19 vaccination		59%
Businesses requiring all customers to show proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test before entering		44%
Increasing taxes on large corporations		16%



**In the same way that low wages were the top concern of Black Census respondents, increasing the minimum wage is their most favored policy by wide margins. While the minimum wage has increased in various cities and states compared to the Federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hour, wages are still low, and after years of fighting for a \$15 minimum wage, various groups are now pushing for a \$20 minimum to counter the increases in cost of living since the start of the “Fight for \$15” campaign. The centrality of economic concerns in the lives of Black Americans is reflected in the popularity of two other policy solutions to alleviate need and poverty in the country.**

The vast majority of respondents favor increasing and expanding government aid, which can be interpreted in various ways. Though the survey results are not specific enough to know what this help is, we can see other responses, comments in the focus groups, and previous research conducted by [Black to the Future Action Fund](#) to understand what respondents think about what aid means.

Healthcare is a major concern, and a strongly preferred policy solution is increasing healthcare access. This is another issue that, in the focus groups, we found that Black people have strong thoughts about the need for a healthcare system that is not for profit but is interested in serving people’s needs.

During the peak of the pandemic in 2021-22, the Temp Check Poll conducted by Black to the Future Action Fund, Black Futures Lab’s c4 arm, and Socioanalítica Research asked 6,000 Black people about their needs and preferences. A favored policy was a \$2,000 monthly payment, which they reported would mostly be used for paying rent, food, and utilities.

Another way the government could help Black people is by expanding unemployment insurance. Work and wages loom large in Black communities. Not only is pay low, but also jobs are precarious. Focus group respondents often complained about their work and how hard it was to find a good one. This is especially true among young people. While 14% of Black Census participants report that they have worked in the gig economy, whether as drivers, taskmasters, or delivery persons, one-quarter (25%) of participants under 30 report working in the gig economy the previous year.

# Black Census respondents on leaders and institutions



## Favorability ratings of politicians

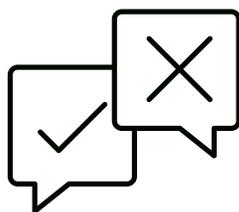
Black Census respondents were asked about a series of political figures and institutions. The results show that Democratic Party figures tend to be more liked than Republican Party figures by wide margins.

Starting with the parties, the Democratic Party has a net favorability of +47 percentage points (69% favorable and 22% unfavorable). The Republican Party has a net unfavorability of -77 percentage points (7% favorable and 84% unfavorable).

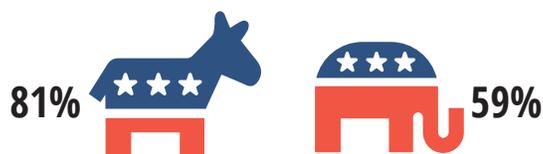
### Democrats vs Republicans



69% Favorable  
22% Unfavorable



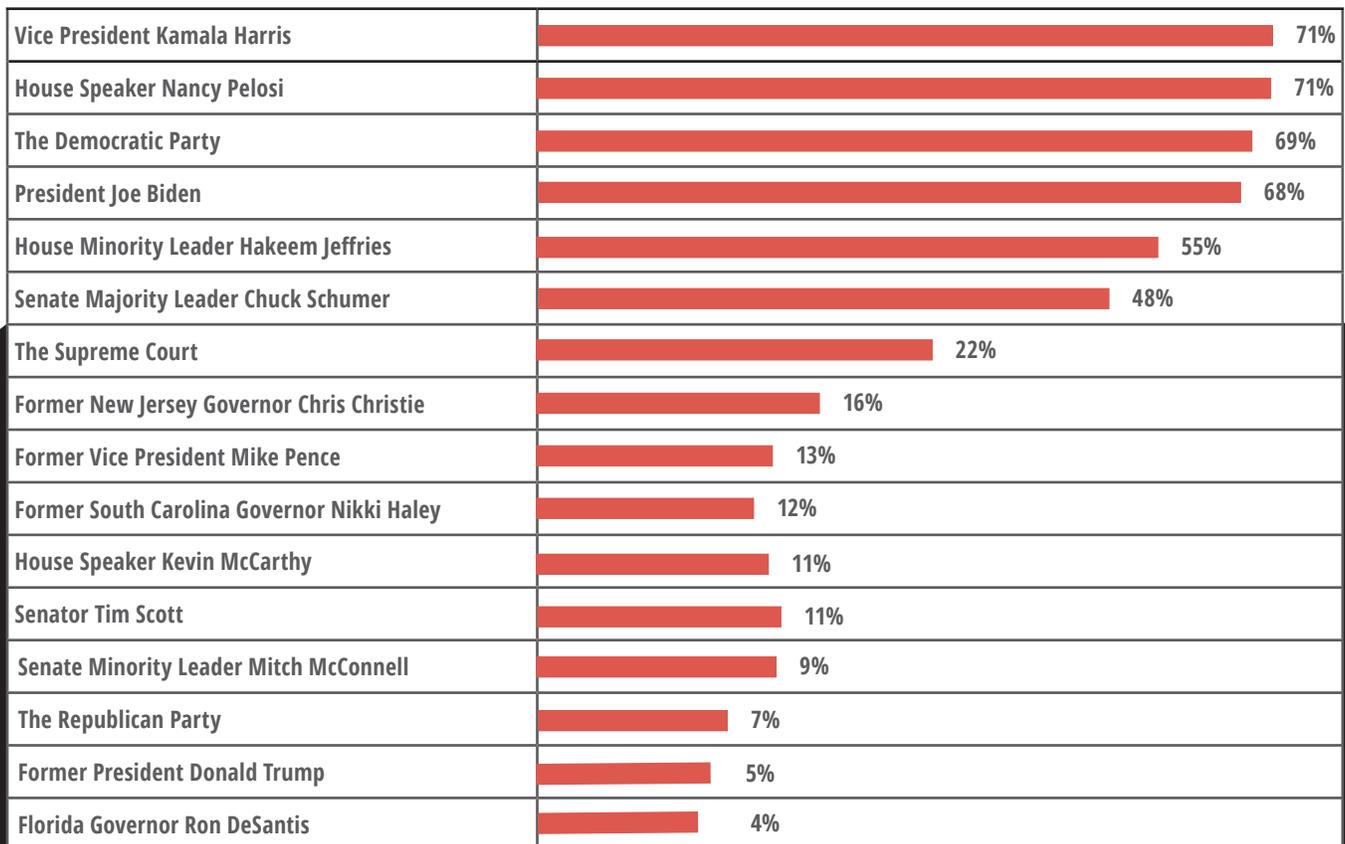
7% Favorable  
84% Unfavorable



Partisans have a favorable opinion of their respective political parties: 81% of Democrats and 59% of Republicans have a favorable opinion of their respective party.

# What do Black Census respondents think about our leaders?

Do you have a very favorable, unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of....?



Among Democratic Party politicians, Vice President Kamala Harris (71%) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (71%) are the ones viewed most favorably. More than two-thirds also have a favorable opinion of President Joseph Biden. Most Black Census respondents have a favorable opinion of House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (55%), and only 12% have an unfavorable opinion of him, though nearly three in ten respondents (28%) have never heard of him. A plurality has a favorable opinion of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (48%), though a significant share has an unfavorable opinion of him (39%).

Donald Trump is the most disliked figure among Black Census respondents. Only five percent of respondents have a favorable opinion of the former president, while 85% have an unfavorable opinion. Though Trump is viewed more favorably by Black Census respondents who identify as Republican, his net favorability, even among this cohort, is just +3 (46% favorable, 43% unfavorable). Respondents who identify as independents but say they lean toward the GOP have an overall negative view of Trump, as 38% have a favorable opinion of him and 54% have an unfavorable opinion (-16 points net favorability). Only nine percent of respondents who identified as independents had a favorable opinion of Trump, compared to 29% of independents who viewed President Biden favorably.



## What respondents think about the Supreme Court?



Nearly seven in ten (69%) of respondents have an unfavorable opinion of the Supreme Court.



Respondents who identify as independents who lean toward the Democratic Party have the most negative opinion of the Supreme Court (80%).



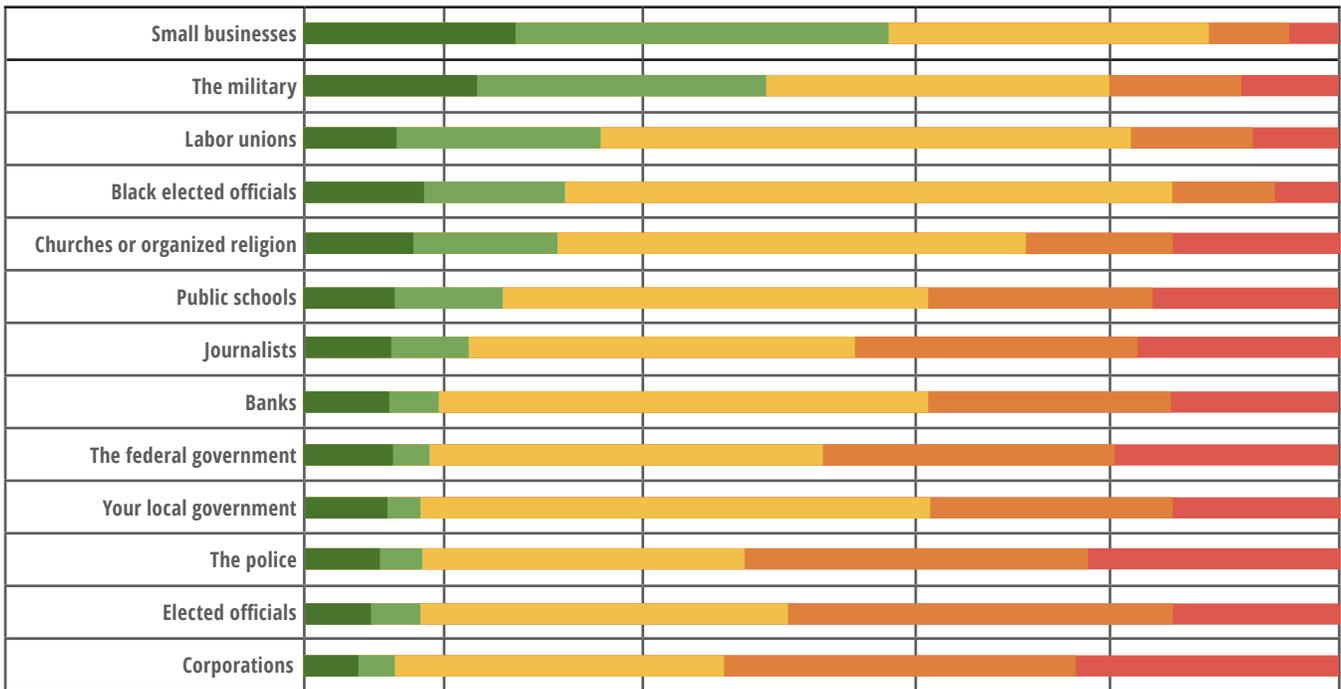
Even among respondents who identify as Republicans, more than four in ten (41%) have an unfavorable opinion, and a plurality (48%) have a favorable opinion.



# Confidence in institutions

In recent decades, Americans' trust in their social, economic, and political institutions has been declining, and Black people are no exception. In the last two decades, we have suffered through a major housing crisis, a recession that in Black communities and other communities of color was an economic depression, an ineffective political system that has bailed out the banks and other wealthy interests at the expense of people, and a judicial and police system that punishes Black people while letting the agents of the state get away with murder. It is not surprising that among the twelve institutions we asked Black Census participants to assess their confidence in, corporations and the police ranked the lowest.

## How much confidence do you have in each of these institutions, groups or organizations?



■ A great deal   
 ■ A lot   
 ■ Some   
 ■ Very little   
 ■ Not at all



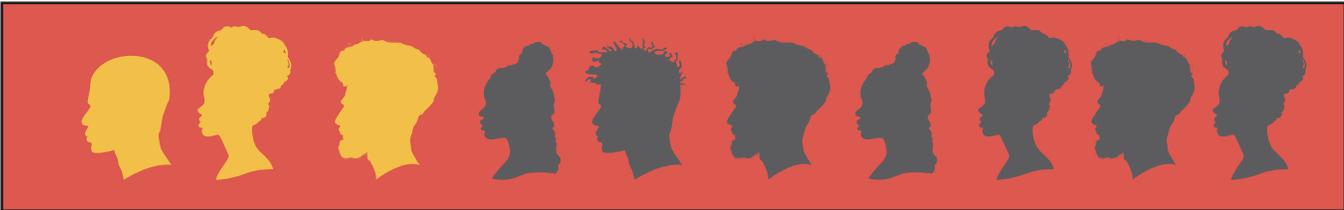
Among respondents who offered an opinion, only six percent reported trusting corporations a great deal or a lot, while about one-third (32%) said they have some trust, and 62% said they trust corporations very little or not at all. The police had the second-highest levels of distrust among Black Census respondents. Only nine percent of Black Census respondents say they have a great deal or a lot of confidence in the police, while 58% say they have little or not at all. One-third (33%) of respondents say they have some confidence in the police. These were the only two institutions that most Black Census respondents distrusted.

More than four in ten Black Census respondents distrust these other institutions. Forty-seven percent have little or no trust in the federal government and elected officials, 44% say the same of banks, and 42% distrust their local governments.

On the flip side, some institutions are, on balance, more trusted than distrusted by Black Census respondents. Half of the respondents (50%) say they have a great deal or a lot of confidence in small businesses, while only nine percent say they have little or no confidence in them.

## Respondents who only trust three other institutions ?

■ Respondents trust only three other institutions      ■ Respondents who did not answer



**At least three in ten respondents trust only three other institutions. Thirty-eight percent have a great deal or a lot of confidence in the military, 34% say the same about unions, and 30% trust Black elected officials.**

That Black Census respondents' most trusted institutions are small businesses is unsurprising. In both the survey and focus groups, respondents and participants discussed at length the importance of businesses to empower the community. One of the most common responses to the Black Census open question about what respondents wanted to improve in their community was incentives to create businesses or the need for businesses to keep the community's wealth within. Focus group participants expanded on this idea, even discussing how the pandemic allowed many community members to turn their side hustles into full businesses once they had the time.

# Political participation

## Partisanship

Black women are the backbone of the Democratic Party. Three-quarters (75%) of women respondents in the Black Census identify as Democrats, and an additional 16% identify as independents but lean toward the Democratic Party. Overall, 91% of Black women prefer the Democratic Party.

Black men who responded to the Black Census are also heavily Democratic. Still, they are more likely than Black women respondents to be independents and lean toward the Democratic Party than outright identify with the Party. Six in ten Black Census male respondents identify as Democrats, and an additional 25% are independents who lean toward the Democratic Party.



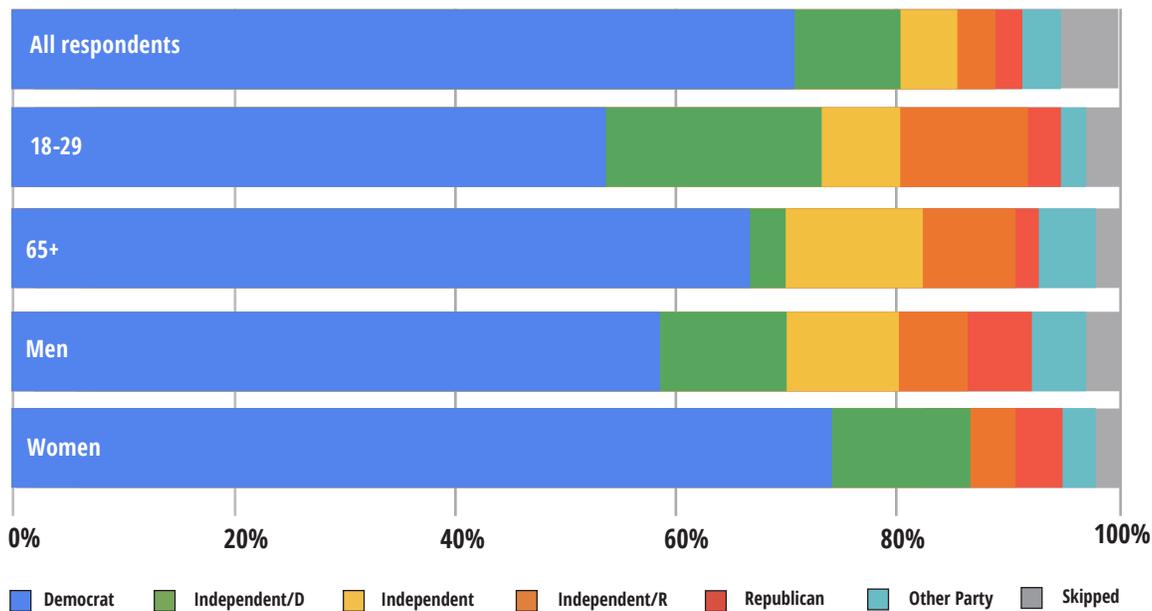
**Eighty-five percent of Black Census male respondents identify or lean toward the Democratic Party.**

The differences between Black Democrats, Republicans, and independents are stark when it comes to participation in elections. Most respondents reported being registered to vote at similar rates regardless of partisan affiliation, ranging between 79% for no-lean independents and 82% for self-identified Democrats. Democrats and Democratic-leaning Black Census respondents were the most likely to report having voted in 2018 (84%), 2020 (95%), and 2022 (86%), Democratic-leaning independent respondents voted at slightly lower rates in 2018 (74%), 2020 (88%), and 2022 (75%). By contrast, Republican and independent (including Republican-leaning) respondents were less likely to say they voted in the three previous elections. Black Census respondents who identify as Republican were 13 points less likely to report voting in 2022 than Democrats (73%), 15 points less likely in 2020 (80%), and 20 points less likely to vote in 2018 (64%). Respondents who identified as independents or Republican-leaning independents were the least likely to report voting in the previous three elections. About six in ten (62%) reported voting in 2022, 78% reported voting in 2020, and 62% in 2018. Overall, Black Census respondents who identify as Democrats seem more motivated to participate in elections than those who identify as Republicans or independents.

Independents, here defined as respondents who won't identify or lean toward any of the two major political parties, have a negative opinion of both. 62% of independents have a negative opinion of the Democratic Party, and 77% have a negative opinion of the Republican Party. When looking at the policy preferences and issues these respondents care about, this dual negative perception of the parties among pure independents contains elements of rejection and disappointment. Black independent respondents reject the policy positions of the Republican Party and agree with the policy prescriptions that Black Democratic respondents tend to support. Yet, they are disappointed with the Democratic Party for failing to deliver.

# Party Identification

## By Selected Age and Gender



## There are also differences in party identification between younger and older Black Census respondents.

Older Black Census respondents

**82% Democrat**



Older respondents, particularly those 65 and older, are the most likely to prefer the Democratic Party. Eighty-two percent identify as Democrats, and an additional 11% say they lean toward the Democratic Party for an overall Democratic Party alignment of 93%.

Younger Black Census respondents

**53% Democrat**



Younger Black Census respondents, ages 18-29, are less likely to have a partisan affiliation than their older cohorts. A majority (53%) identify as Democrats, and an additional 32% lean toward the party.

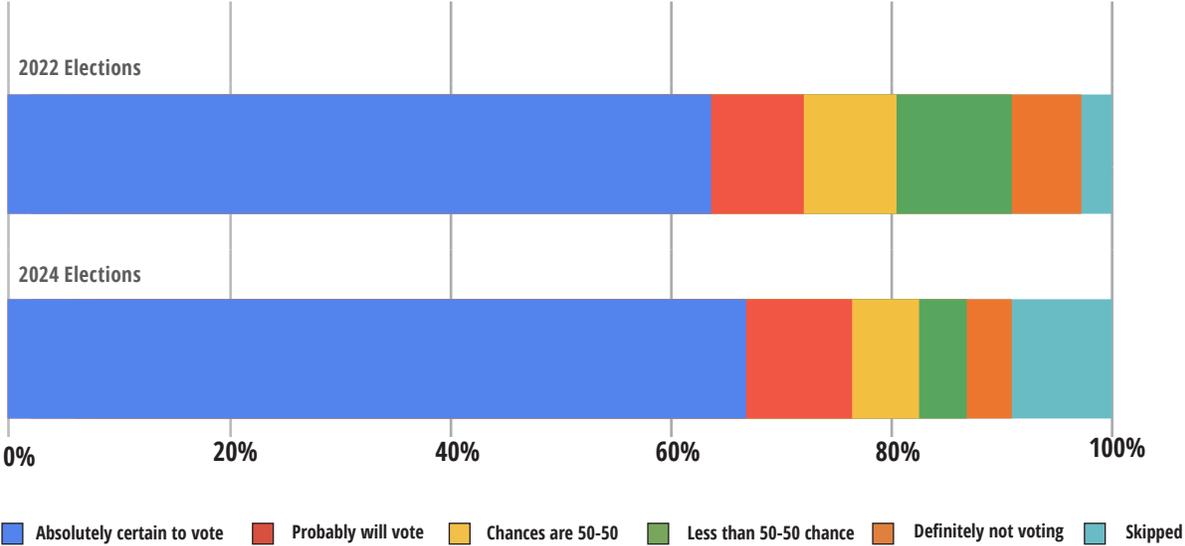
Younger Black Census respondents' looser political affiliations may be due to their alienation from politicians and politics, as they see that their main concerns are not addressed. For example, younger Black respondents express concerns such as education and housing that are now in crisis.



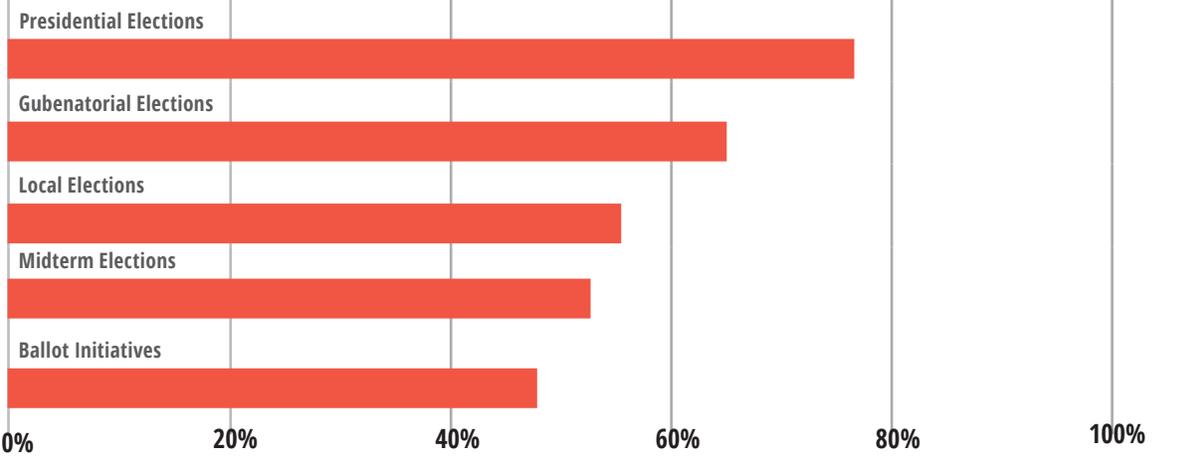
# Voting and Elections

Black voters are the backbone of American democracy in their consistency at the polls. Most Black Census respondents reported voting in the 2022, 2020, and 2018 elections, and the vast majority reported a likelihood of voting in the 2024 elections.

## How likely are you to vote in...

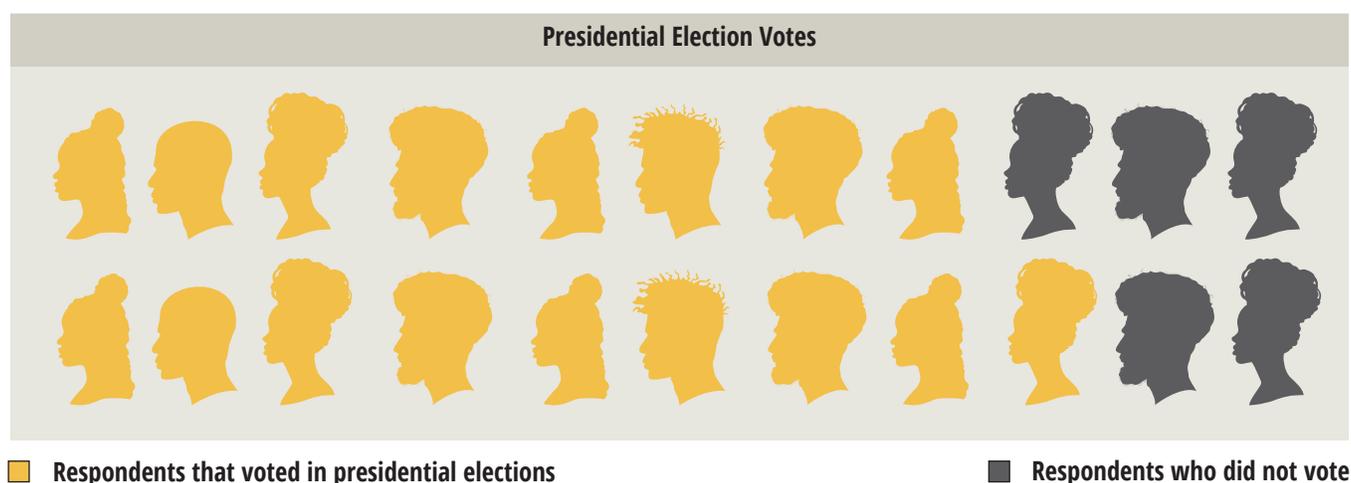


## How likely are you to vote in...





**However, while Black Census respondents certainly show a high propensity to vote in high-stakes elections at the national level, their participation levels drop in other types of elections.**



More than three-quarters (77%) of Black Census respondents say they vote in presidential elections all the time, and a majority say they vote in all of the gubernatorial (62%), mayoral (57%), and congressional midterm elections (56%). Fewer Black Census respondents reportedly vote in ballot initiatives or referenda (47%). Given that many of the issues and the policy prescriptions occur at the state and local levels, lower levels of participation in these elections, in contrast with presidential elections, indicate a dilution of the Black vote to the detriment of their interests.



There are significant differences, particularly in age and partisanship. Democrats are the most likely to report voting consistently in elections, while independents who lean toward neither party have the lowest voting propensity. A similar pattern occurs with age, whereas younger voters are less likely to report a high propensity to vote than older voters. These cohorts of voters are also more likely to exhibit lower levels of confidence in institutions and unfavorable views of politicians and need to be engaged.



# Methodology

## Survey

The Black Census Project was conducted between February 28, 2022, and October 31, 2023. A total of 211,219 interviews were completed. These results are based on the 181,109 highest-quality responses. Data were collected online through the following campaigns:

Black Census Ad Campaign	118,883
Black Census Landing Page	22,859
Black Census Partners	17,477
Black Census Text Campaign	10,307
Black Census Influencer Campaign	8,158
Black Futures Lab Social Media	3,425

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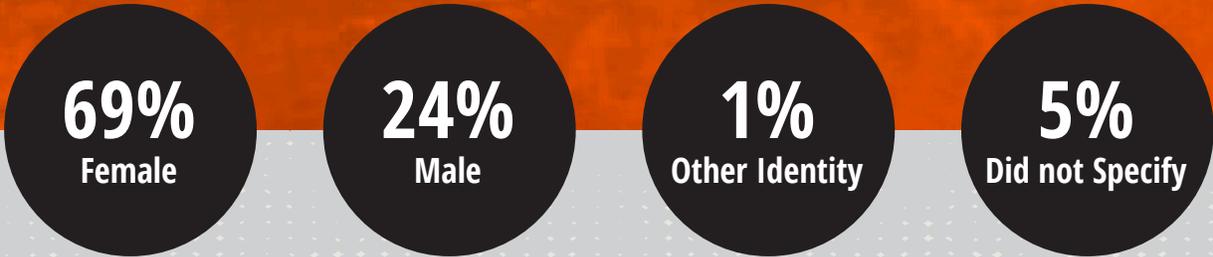
<sup>2</sup>The advertisement campaign was conducted mostly through Facebook and Instagram, though other social media platforms also featured BCP advertisement. People arrived at the landing page through a variety of methods: radio and video promotions in shows where people were directed to the main page, flyers and other physical media promoting the BCP, and word of mouth. The text campaign sent 2,748,276 text messages during the entirety of the campaign.

# The demographic distribution of the sample is as follows:

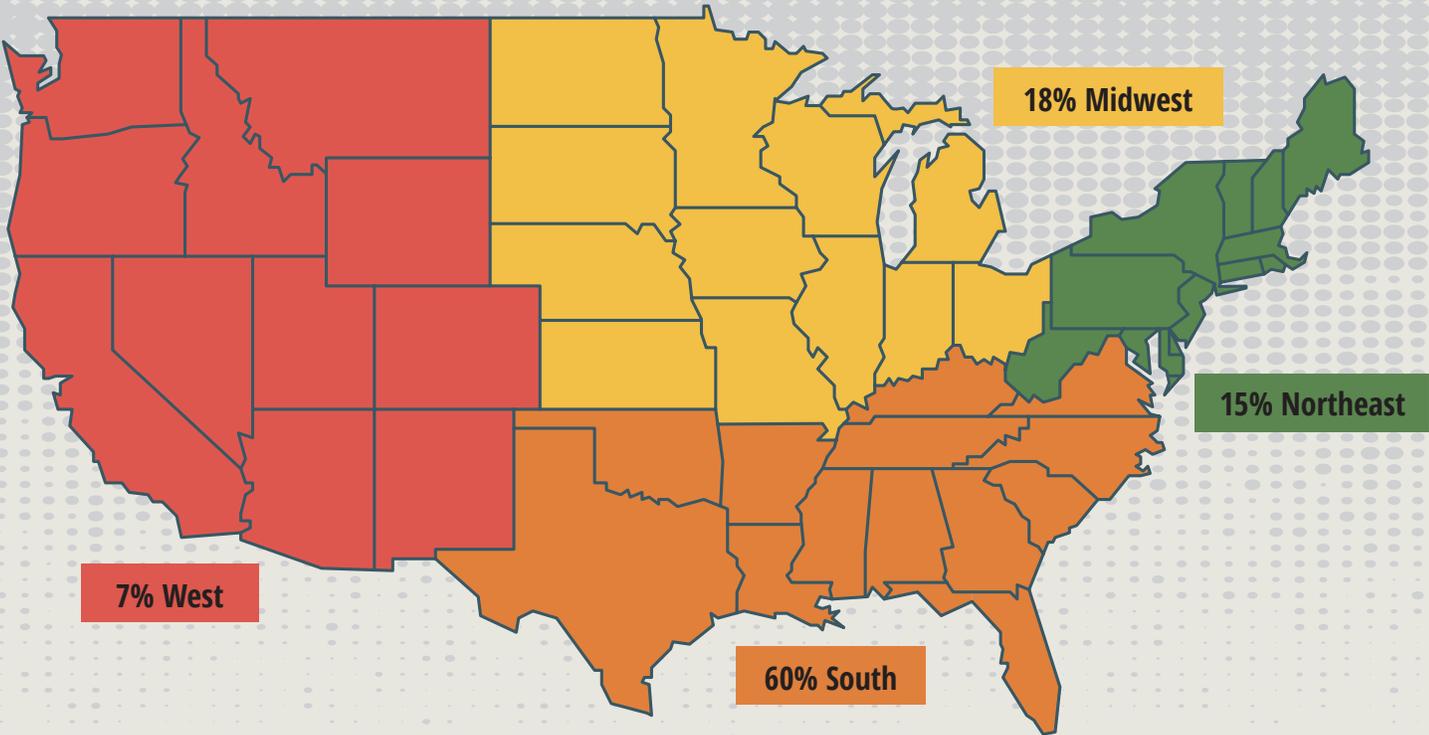
## Age



## Gender ID



## Region



# About Black Futures Lab

## Who We Are

The [Black Futures Lab](#) is an innovation and experimentation lab focused on new ways of engaging Black communities civically and building our capacity to be powerful in politics. We close the gap between our communities and the tools we need to build power.

## Why Now? Why Us?

If we've learned anything from recent years, it's that collective Black power is key to improving our communities and our lives. Despite the obstacles we face—state violence, mass incarceration, voter suppression, and disproportionate poverty—increased power for our communities is within our grasp. Most importantly, building power must come from us and by us: we know what we want, we know what we need, and we have the resources in our neighborhoods to build Black political power.

We engage Black voters over the long term, we empower Black voters to shape the policy discussions that affect our lives, and we energize a new generation of leaders, officials, and decision makers who care about issues facing Black communities. We experiment with policy solutions and community alternatives that can be put into place at the local and state level.

And we will know we have achieved success when Black people are making decisions on our own behalf, when we are represented by people who have our best interests at the forefront of the policy agenda, when our communities are actively and consistently engaged, and when the conditions in our communities allow Black people to thrive.

This is why we built the Black Futures Lab.

We help build our power, amplify our power, and direct our power.

## Our Strategy

To make Black communities powerful in politics we:



**Educate, Activate, And Motivate Black Voters**



**Build The Capacity Of And Invest In Black Organizing Infrastructure**



**Collect And Use Relevant Data To Transform Our Communities**

# National Partners

Church of our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, Inc

COGIC World Missions

Justice for Julius Jones

Live Free USA

NAACP

# Regional Partner

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. - Northeastern Region (GA, NC, SC, AL, MS)

# State Partners

**Alabama:** Faith In Action Alabama, Selma Center for Nonviolence, Truth & Reconciliation

**Arkansas:** Visibility Outreach Touch Engage South Arkansas (VOTE SoAR)

**California:** Faith in the Valley, The Transgender District

**Connecticut:** Full Citizens Coalition (FCC), Nancy Kingwood Ministries

**Florida:** Helping Others Make Everything Right (HOMER), Women With Broken Heals (WBH)

**Georgia:** Barred Business, Georgia Strategic Alliance for New Direction and Unified Policies (Georgia STANDUP), New Georgia Project

**Illinois:** Live Free Illinois, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc.

**Indiana:** Faith In Indiana

**Kentucky:** BLM Louisville, Life Coach Each One Teach One Re Entry Fellowship, Play Cousins Collective

**Louisiana:** Power Coalition for Equity and Justice

**Missouri:** Missouri Faith Voices

