

THE TIME IS NOW

*BIPOC Community Perspectives on
Environmental Justice in Georgia*

BACKGROUND

For decades, corporate actors, mainstream environmental organizations, and white activists have dominated decision-making regarding climate policy, even as Indigenous, Black, Brown and immigrant communities experience the brunt of the climate crisis and have been at the frontlines of the environmental justice movement.¹ The exclusion of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color's (BIPOC) experiences, perspectives, and leadership from environmental policy and conservation has created significant gaps that further perpetuate inequality, particularly in the U.S. South.²

From hurricanes to wildfires and extreme winter storms, climate disasters are more frequent and increasingly severe. As frontline communities that experience the consequences of environmental degradation most acutely, BIPOC, immigrant, and low-income communities are uniquely capable of leading the charge toward sustainable and equitable environmental protections.³

WHY THIS STUDY NOW

It is time for BIPOC Southerners to collectively take control and create thoughtful climate change solutions. To that end, Democracy Lab South (Demo Lab South) and its partners conducted the first and only multilingual statewide environmental justice survey of Georgia's BIPOC and immigrant communities. The study established a baseline understanding of current perceptions, needs, practices, and potential localized climate solutions throughout Georgia's diverse BIPOC community.

By centering the experiences of BIPOC communities and co-designing policy solutions with them, policymakers can better understand how individuals experience environmental harm, build the leadership and capacity of marginalized communities to implement solutions, and contextualize outcomes.

- ¹ The Environmental Protection Agency defines environmental justice as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." U.S. EPA (2015). Learn About Environmental Justice [Overviews and Factsheets]. <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/learn-about-environmental-justice>
- ² Jones, R. (2020, July 29). The environmental movement is very white. These leaders want to change that. History. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/environmental-movement-very-white-these-leaders-want-change-that>
- ³ HIVE Fund, (2022) Hive Fund Triennial Report 2022. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d6d29ecf8d59d00010ff612/t/638a925ed857a032c8235549/1670025911387/Hive+Fund+Triennial+Report+2022.pdf>

It is our hope that the study and resulting report will serve as a catalyst for building a robust statewide environmental movement that centers those most affected by climate and environmental issues.

PARTICIPANT SNAPSHOT

 **1,145 participants**
47 counties  **in Georgia**
 **66% were low income**
48% born outside the U.S.

*An equal number of Asian **33%**; Black, African American, or diasporic African **32%**; and Latinx or Hispanic **34%** residents participated in the survey.*

*The participants reported their political ideology and there was a slightly higher representation of Moderates: Conservatives **24%**, Moderates **40%**, and Liberals **37%**.*

BIPOC ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE STUDY

The BIPOC Community Environmental Justice Study was developed to learn about community opinions about environmental issues, climate change, recycling, and transportation. We also collected participants' political tendencies, age, race, income level, place of birth, voting eligibility, and zip code of residence. This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Kennesaw State University. To ensure linguistic inclusivity of Georgia's diverse communities, the survey was conducted in English and also translated into eight languages (Bengali, Mandarin, Hindi, Gujarati, Korean, Laotian, Spanish, Vietnamese) to facilitate participant engagement.⁴

Participants were recruited during door-knocking and voter outreach activities by community organizers who were trained in research ethics, data collection, and recruitment. These organizers were linguistically and interculturally competent to interface with the varied target populations.⁵

KEY FINDINGS



TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES



1 AIR POLLUTION



2 LACK OF CLEAN DRINKING WATER



3 HIGH ENERGY/UTILITY BILLS

7 out of 10 GA BIPOC residents reported that environmental justice issues affected them personally.

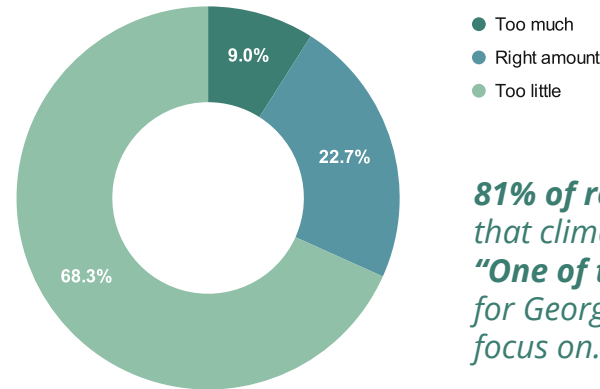
⁴ The questions were adapted from Pew Research Center's study on climate and transportation and Wick's Nationwide Public Opinion Survey. The survey was translated using forward- and backward-translation methods.

⁵ Data collectors were trained in COVID-19 protocols and adhered to state and CDC guidelines.



CLIMATE CHANGE

How much is the U.S. government doing to protect the rights of BIPOC communities from environmental injustices?

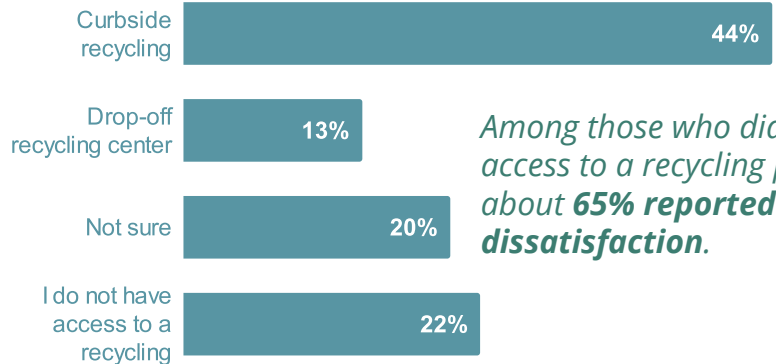


81% of respondents said that climate change should be "One of the Top 3 Priorities" for Georgia elected officials to focus on.



RECYCLING

Recycling Program Accessibility



Among those who did not have access to a recycling program, about 65% reported their dissatisfaction.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy recommendations are critical opportunities to integrate BIPOC communities into the larger environmental justice movement:

- 1. Implement a multilingual statewide public education campaign on air pollution, public transit, clean drinking water, and utility burden.**^{6,7} Build awareness about voting, advocacy, and other civic engagement activities that can drive lasting change for environmental justice issues.
- 2. Support more expansive research and educational programs that connect environmental justice, climate justice, and its impact on Georgia's BIPOC communities.** Dedicate research funding and staffing for rural areas and communities with limited English proficiency. Detailed data at the local and state level can best inform equitable policy recommendations.⁸
- 3. Support leadership programs that develop the next generation of environmental justice leaders in Georgia.** Provide BIPOC youth with the resources they need to work directly with their communities to address the most pressing environmental issues that affect them.
- 4. Access, leverage, blend, and braid federally funded programs with state opportunities to alleviate utility burden for Black residents, especially in South Georgia.** Utilize federal investments from both the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Infrastructure Investment in Jobs Act (IIJA) to alleviate individual costs and support energy infrastructure that centers equity.
- 5. Support a capacity building and technical assistance network for Georgia's community organizations and associations** to competitively apply for IRA funding to support community-based programs that address sustainability, environmental, and climate issues.
- 6. Pass Georgia HB 260 during the 2023 legislative session which would create an Environmental Justice Commission** consisting of members from the African American, Asian American, Indigenous, and Latinx communities. This Commission should be tasked with promoting equity and advancing environmental justice through a more inclusive decision making lens.

6 9to5. (2021 July). People over Profit: The Campaign for Utilities Justice in Albany, GA bit.ly/3Cudbjw

7 The Climate + Clean Equity Fund (no date). Energy Justice: An Evolved Model <https://www.theequityfund.org/utility-system>

8 The Climate + Clean Equity Fund. (2022 February). Air Quality and Climate Change Policy Brief 3: Policy Solutions. <https://www.theequityfund.org/air-quality-and-climate-change-briefs>



TRANSPORTATION

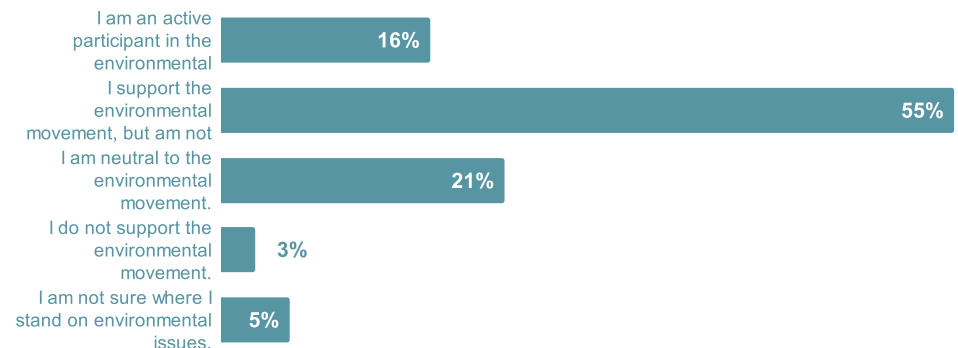
8 out of 10 GA BIPOC residents owned or shared a car as well as traveled by car.

Most **did not use public transportation** recently because either they had a car they could use or because **public transportation was not available** in their communities.



ATTITUDES TOWARD ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Attitudes toward the Environmental Movement



CONCLUSION

The work to cultivate a robust statewide environmental justice ecosystem that builds representation of BIPOC communities is just beginning. It is urgent and necessary to expand our existing knowledge of BIPOC communities and invest deeply in BIPOC leadership and movement infrastructure.

We are deeply thankful to our organizational partners who worked diligently to get out into community spaces, those who helped us design the survey and most importantly, all the Georgians who lent their time and voices in sharing what environmental justice issues look like to them and the healthy communities they are hoping to build in the future.

About Demo Lab & Partners

Demo Lab South, is a movement incubation hub that builds power, strategy, and infrastructure alongside Queer, Trans, & Gender Non-Conforming (QTGNC) and BIPOC-led, community organizations in the U.S. South. We envision a Southern movement ecosystem where QTGNC and BIPOC leadership and brilliance can grow.

Demo Lab South partnered with community organizations across Georgia on the BIPOC Environmental Justice Study. These organizations included: 9to5-Georgia Chapter, Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta, Black Voters Matter, Coalition for Peoples' Agenda, Down by the River Collective, Georgia Conservation Voters, and the Latino Community Fund. All organizations are led by people of color and work to support, organize, and protect BIPOC communities in Georgia. These partnerships were especially critical in connecting with immigrant, limited-English proficient, and/or non-English speaking communities across the state.

TO LEARN MORE

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