

**From Data to  
Action: Addressing  
Austin's  
Interconnected  
Community  
Challenges**

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Austin Area Sustainability  
Indicators

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CENTRAL TEXAS  
**CATALYST  
SUMMIT** 20  
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# Background & Purpose

What is A2SI, and how do we collect the data?

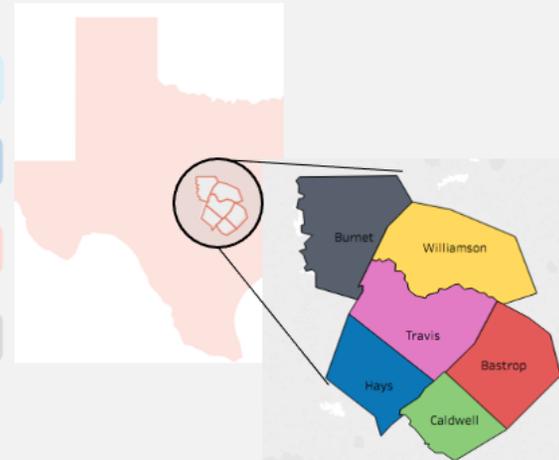
## 8 Waves of Survey Data (2004 – 2024)

 Telephone (call and text): 791 participants (67%)

 Online panel (CoA): 240 participants (20%)

 Postcard mailer (10,000): 50 participants (4%)

 Community ('44 & '53): 101\* participants (9%)



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- A2SI was launched over 20 years ago with the purpose of measuring quality of life and sustainability trends in Central Texas over time.
- The idea was that this data would serve as the foundation to identify and address challenges facing residents
- This information primarily comes from a community survey to residents across six counties pictured here
- Data is collected every 2-3 years, with 8 waves of survey data between 2004 to 2024

# Community Survey Findings

Workforce Development (employment, education, and childcare)  
Food and Housing Affordability and Access  
Health and Well-being  
Environmental Concerns and Climate Change

## Issues identified by Community Surveys

- Disparities across income (driven by education, employment, and workforce opportunities) exacerbate other community issues:

Food and  
Housing  
Affordability

Health and  
Healthcare  
Access

Environmental  
Concerns and  
Exposure

- Less income and fewer resources can limit access to healthcare, food, housing.
- Environmental issues (e.g., pollution, climate change impacts) can exacerbate these disparities.

## Income Disparities are a driver of Other Issues

Education is a significant predictor of household income.

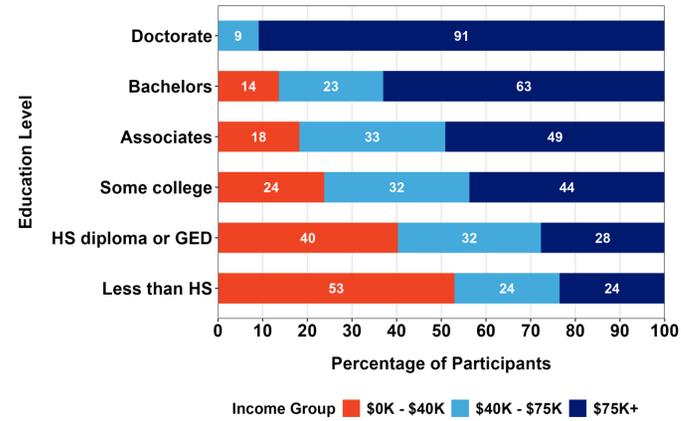
### Who reports higher income:

- White residents
- Men
- Williamson county

Caldwell & Travis: most people reporting < \$40,000 / year

### Disparities in income, opportunities, and employment contribute to inequities in:

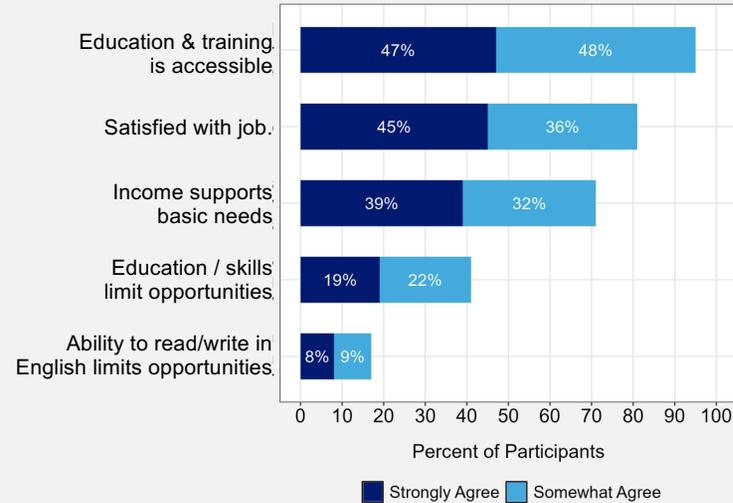
- Food and housing insecurity
- Less emergency preparedness
- Worse health & environmental outcomes



Income and available resources are an underlying driver of many issues facing Central Texas communities.

# Employment & Education

- Most Austin residents are satisfied with their jobs.
- 29% say their income does not support their needs.
- 74% report flexible sick leave, though 28% could lose their job or pay for taking sick time.



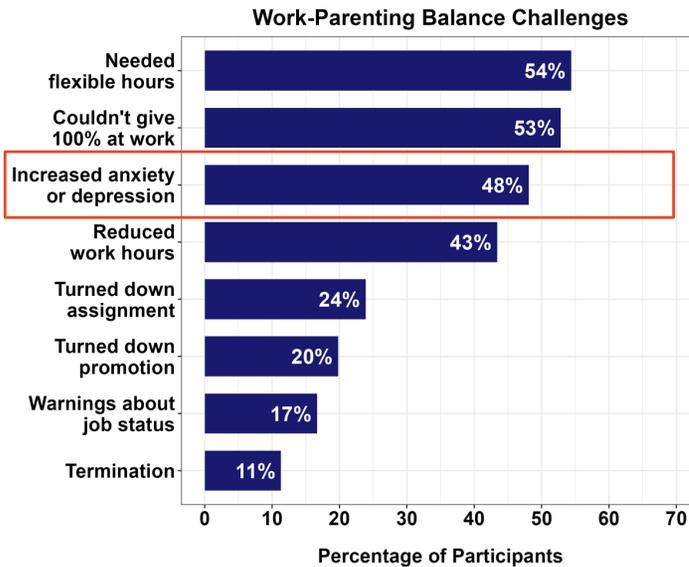
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- The figure on the right shows the percent of participants who strongly or somewhat agree with five statements about employment. Percent of participants is on the x axis.
- Most residents are satisfied with their jobs, but nearly 1 in 3 say their household income does not support their needs.
- About 3 quarters have flexible sick leave but over a quarter say they could be penalized for taking sick time
- We see that educational attainment is increasing over time and more accessible for white residents.

**Half of parents experienced at least 1 challenge from balancing work and parenting.**

- Women report more barriers
- Avg cost for infant care: \$777 / month (~\$9,300 / year)\*\*
  - Median household income = \$67,000
- 5,000 TX childcare centers closed 2020-2023\*\*
- Every 100 families, only 12 spots for subsidized care\*\*

\*\*Source: (Pedigo et al 2024 – report from UT Austin LBJ Urban Lab)



- Over half of parents surveyed report at least once challenge due to balancing work and parenting.
- Figure on the right: percent of participants on x axis. Challenges on the y axis. Participants could select more than 1.
- Most parents needed flexible work hours and couldn't give 100% at work. Nearly half report increased anxiety or depression (tied to health)
- Avg cost for childcare is a significant portion of household income
- While childcare resources vary by county, overall across Texas, affordable and subsidized childcare is harder to access

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Housing  
Affordability

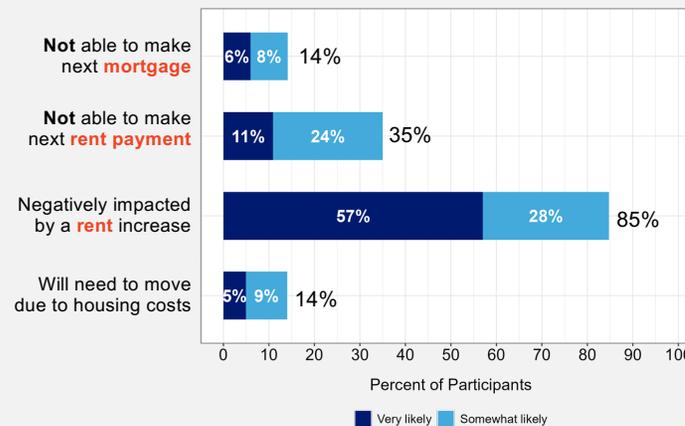
Health and  
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## Most residents can afford their rent or mortgage, though 1 in 3 renters still struggle.

- 6% unlikely to make **mortgage**
- 11% - unlikely to make **rent**
- **Most report an increase in rent**
  - Hispanic residents more likely to report a **rent increase**.
  - 59% say rising **rent** has forced neighbors to move.
- 71% say government doesn't do enough for affordable housing.
- 35% are worried about losing housing due to rising costs.



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Starting with housing: most of our participants were homeowners.

The figure on the right:

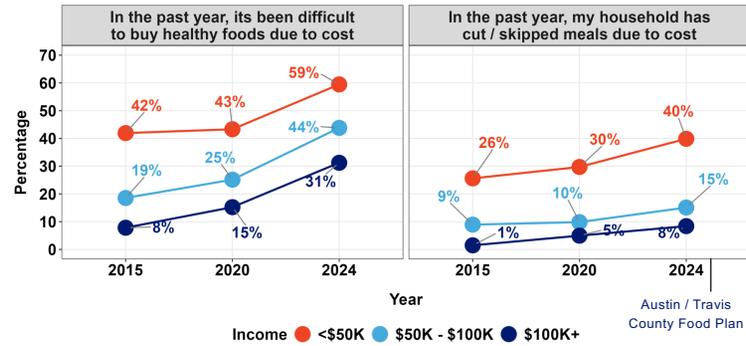
- There are housing statements on the y axis (ability to pay rent/mortgage)
- Percent of participants is on the x axis, showing what percent say not likely, somewhat likely, or very likely.
- While most people say its very likely they can pay rent/mortgage, 11% say its not likely they can pay their next rent payment on time.
- The majority of folks say a rent increase would negatively impact their finances.
- 14% expect they might need to leave their home in the next few months due to inability to afford housing.

### A2SI Data Findings

- **74%** homeowners
- **24%** renters

## Food insecurity has increased over time, even amongst higher income households.

- Those experiencing **more food insecurity**:
  - lower household income
  - Identify as Hispanic
  - No reliable car
  - Children under 6
- Households reporting difficulty buying healthy food has increased:
  - 17% more households making <\$50,000 / year compared to 2015
  - 25% more for \$50K - \$100K
  - 23% more for over \$100K households



Food insecurity has increased over time.

The figure shows the percent who agree with 2 statements – difficult to buy healthy food or having to skip meals

- Percent on y axis
- Survey year on x axis
- Divided by household income

Those experiencing more food insecurity

- have lower household income
- Identify as Hispanic
- Children under 6

A food plan was implemented in 2024, so hopefully we'll see an effect in the next round of data collection

## Issues identified by Community Surveys

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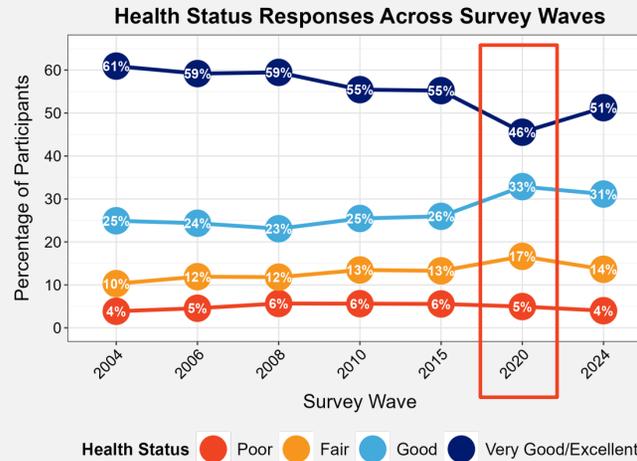
**Those reporting 'very good' or 'excellent' health has decreased over time, but back on the rise.**

**More likely to report very good / excellent health status and have access to healthcare:**

- Higher household income
- Identify as white
- Identify as male
- Have insurance

**Cost is the biggest barrier to accessing healthcare**

- 16% of Texans are uninsured



**Healthcare access** (healthcare, prescriptions, mental health services) **more difficult** for:

- Lower income households
- High school diploma / GED or less
- Identify as not male
- Identify as Hispanic or race/ethnicity other than White, Hispanic, or Black

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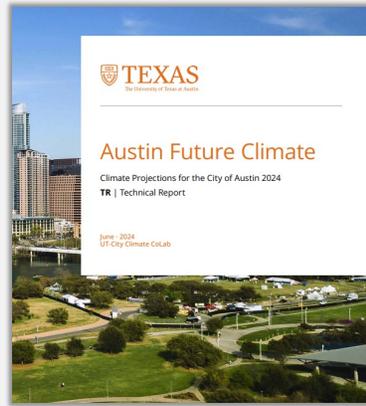
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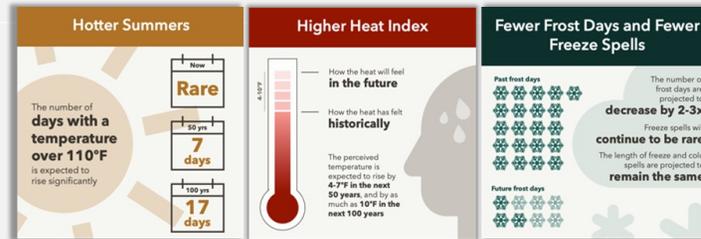
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# Climate Change and Environmental Issues



Austin Future Climate: Climate Projections For the City of Austin, June 2024, available from UT-City Climate CoLab: <https://texcolab.org/colab/>



UT-City Climate CoLab released climate projections for Austin.

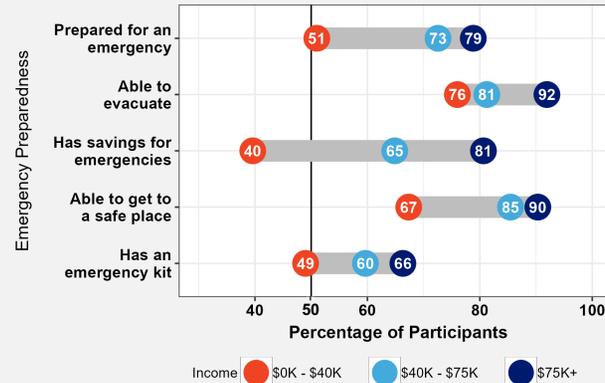
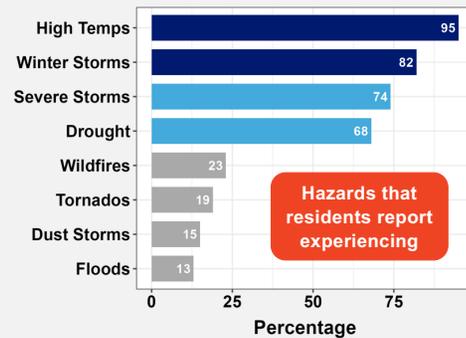
**Over the next 50 years, Austin will experience:**

- Hotter summers
- More heat waves
- Fewer frost days and freeze spells overall – will still experience severe and more frequent winter storms

- Our lab collaborates with the UT City Climate CoLab - partnership with the city of austin).
- Climate scientists that estimated how the Austin area would be impacted by climate change over the next 50 years.
- We can expect:
  - Hotter summers and more heat waves,
  - Fewer frost days and freeze spells
- This can exacerbate disparities by resulting in higher energy bills or a higher risk of heat-related illnesses

## Fewer low-income households are able to get to a safe place (67%) compared to high-income households (90%).

Most participants have experienced higher temperatures, storms, and droughts.



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- Residents were asked what environmental hazards they've experienced. High temperatures, winter storms, severe storms, and drought were the top 4 (figure on the left). These environmental hazards will become more frequent and severe as climate change worsens.
- We also asked how prepared residents are for emergencies (such as the hazards in the graph on the left).
  - Participants were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statements on the y axis.
  - This graph shows the percent who agree (or strongly agree).
  - Broken down by income category
  - We see that residents with more income are more prepared.

## Social capital is a solution to increase resilience.

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**Social capital- or social connection-** is social resources a household can access- like personal networks, neighborhood cohesion, and trust

**We use survey questions to measure:**

- **Cohesion:** shared values, belonging, working together on solutions,
- **Trust:** willingness of self & neighbors to help others, feeling at home in community
- **Networks:** interaction, resource sharing, and communication

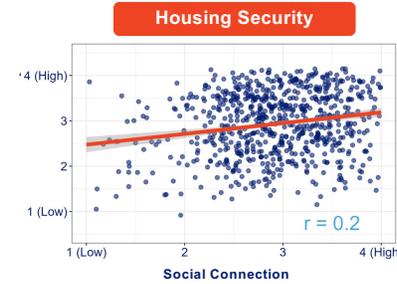
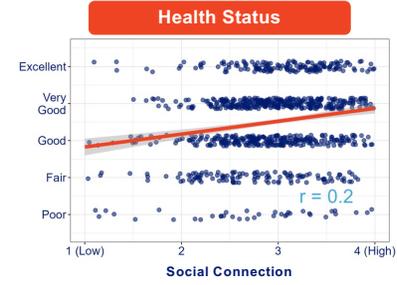
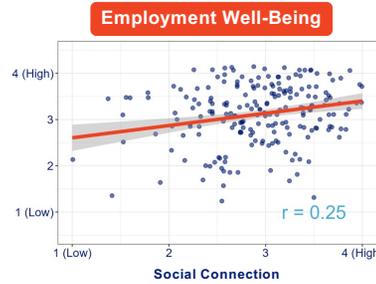
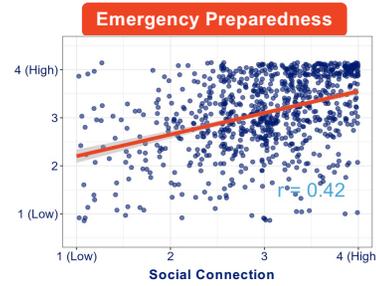
## Social capital correlates with positive outcomes.

Graphs show correlations between social capital and:

- Emergency preparedness
- Employment
- Housing
- Health

Orange line shows the strength of the relationship

**Steeper orange line = stronger relationship**



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## Why Social Capital Matters for Central Texas? (Cohesion, Trust, and Networks)

### Workforce Development & Economic Mobility:

Opportunities and mentorship; support with childcare or other challenges (e.g., transportation); access to information

### Housing and Food Security:

Displacement disrupts residents' networks; communities can advocate for affordability; share resources and knowledge to navigate housing or food crises and programs

### Health & Healthcare:

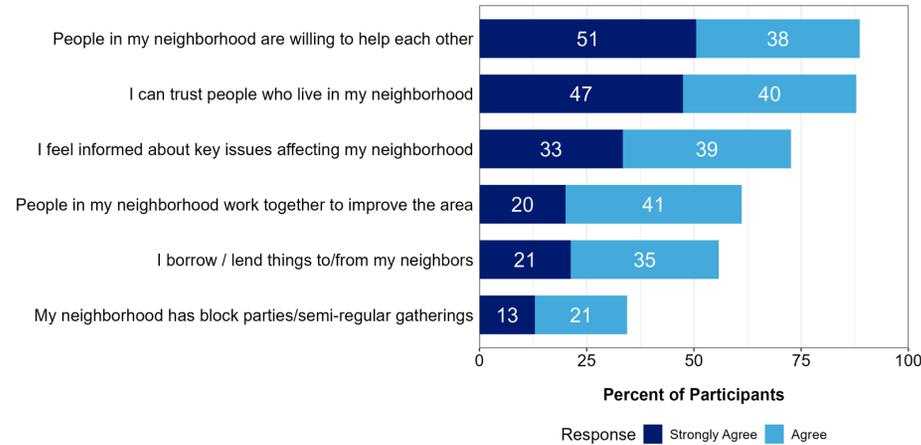
Social support improves mental and physical health; help with navigating healthcare access barriers; trusted relationships improve health information sharing

### Environmental Resilience:

Better prepared for extreme weather; collective action on environmental issues; resource sharing during emergencies and recovery

- We know social capital is tied to positive outcomes
- We know not everyone has social capital.

## Residents trust their neighbors, though social organizing and interaction is less reported.



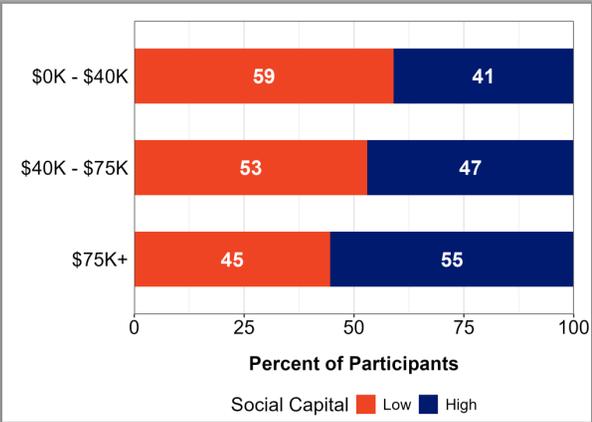
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- Renters are more likely to be lower income
- More Hispanic residents report a rent increase
- The majority say rising rent costs have caused neighbors to move, and nearly 3 quarters don't think the government has done enough to ensure affordable housing.

# Social capital is not equitably distributed.

## Who has less social capital?

- Households with lower-income
- Those who identify as female, transgender, or non-binary
- Younger adults



Social capital is tied to positive outcomes, though we do see differences on who has more social capital

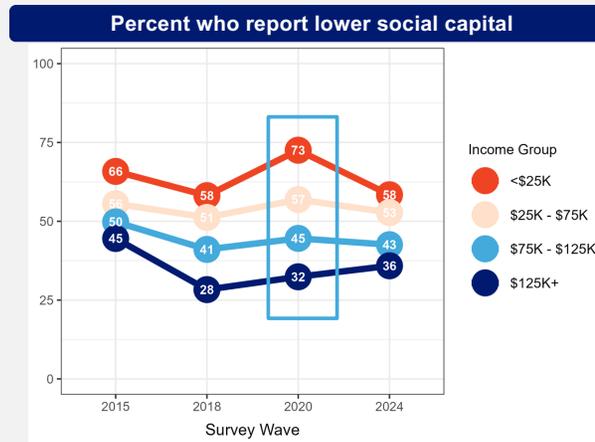
## Social capital has shifted over time.

Residents were divided into those with *low* vs *high* social capital.

Over time, the percent with low social capital has decreased

### Low-income households are resilient.

- Increase in those reporting less social capital in 2020
- Returned to pre-Covid levels by 2024
- Increase potentially due to:
  - Less in-person opportunities
  - Closed facilities
  - Workforce / employment impacts



Social capital is tied to positive outcomes, though we do see differences on who has more social capital

## How do we build social capital for resilient communities?

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**Social Infrastructure:** physical conditions that allow social capital to develop (e.g., libraries, parks, sidewalks, rec centers, affordable gathering spaces)

**Community-based programing/initiatives:** foster trust and collaboration

- Neighborhood-level organizing and block parties
- Skill sharing workshops, community gardens, intergenerational programs
- Mutual aid networks, local business support/entrepreneurship programs

**Policy / Institutions:** provide funding, incentives, and infrastructure for social capital to develop, invite community to participate in decision making, support community-owned assets

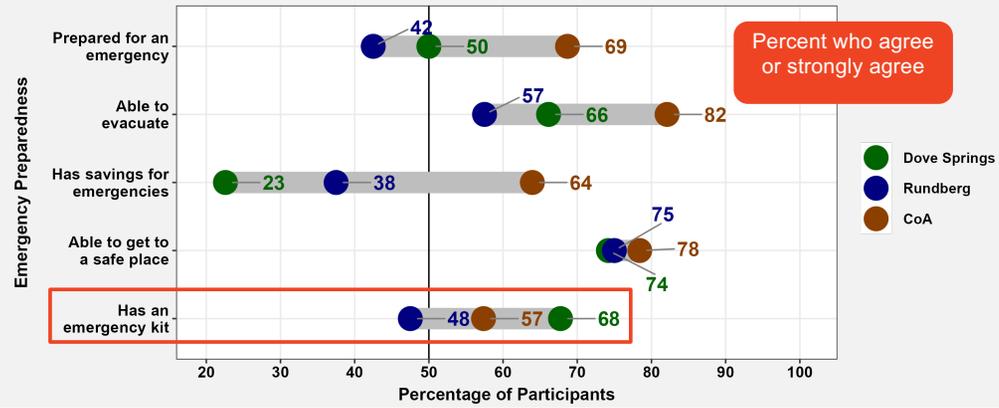
**Business / Industry:** partner and collaborate on events, support local initiatives, invest in mentorship programs

What ideas do you have?

- We know social capital is tied to positive outcomes
- We know not everyone has social capital.

# Examples of Social Capital in Action

## Go Austin Vamos Austin and Emergency Preparedness



# Key Take-Aways

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**Social connectedness emerges as a crucial factor**, helping communities be more resilient across all these challenges.

**Income disparities amplify challenges** across housing, food security, healthcare, and environmental resilience.

**Systemic inequities persist**, with consistent patterns showing worse outcomes for lower-income residents, communities of color, and women

**Multiple crises compound each other**. Barriers around childcare, housing, food, and healthcare access create interconnected challenges that require coordinated solutions.

**Community resilience requires economic opportunity and social connectedness** to effectively address sustainability challenges.

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That was a lot of data and information. Here are a few key take-aways:

- Income disparities amplify challenges across housing, food, healthcare, and environmental resilience
- Systemic inequities persist, with worse outcomes observed for lower-income residents, women, and communities of color
- Multiple issues compound each other, happening concurrently and disproportionately impacting residents
- We won't get into social connectedness until the Catalyst summit, but community cohesion – or connectedness- can help communities be more resilient to challenges.

**Executive Summary  
Report & Slides  
from Today's Talk**



**Thank you!**

**Have questions? Interested  
in the data?**

**Contact:**

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Or go to our website:

<https://a2si.lbj.utexas.edu/>



**Additional Slides and Analysis  
can be found at:**

<https://utexas.box.com/s/w78dckzinmifxf2qb1y8le77nwmqb29e>