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

Austin Area Sustainability Indicators

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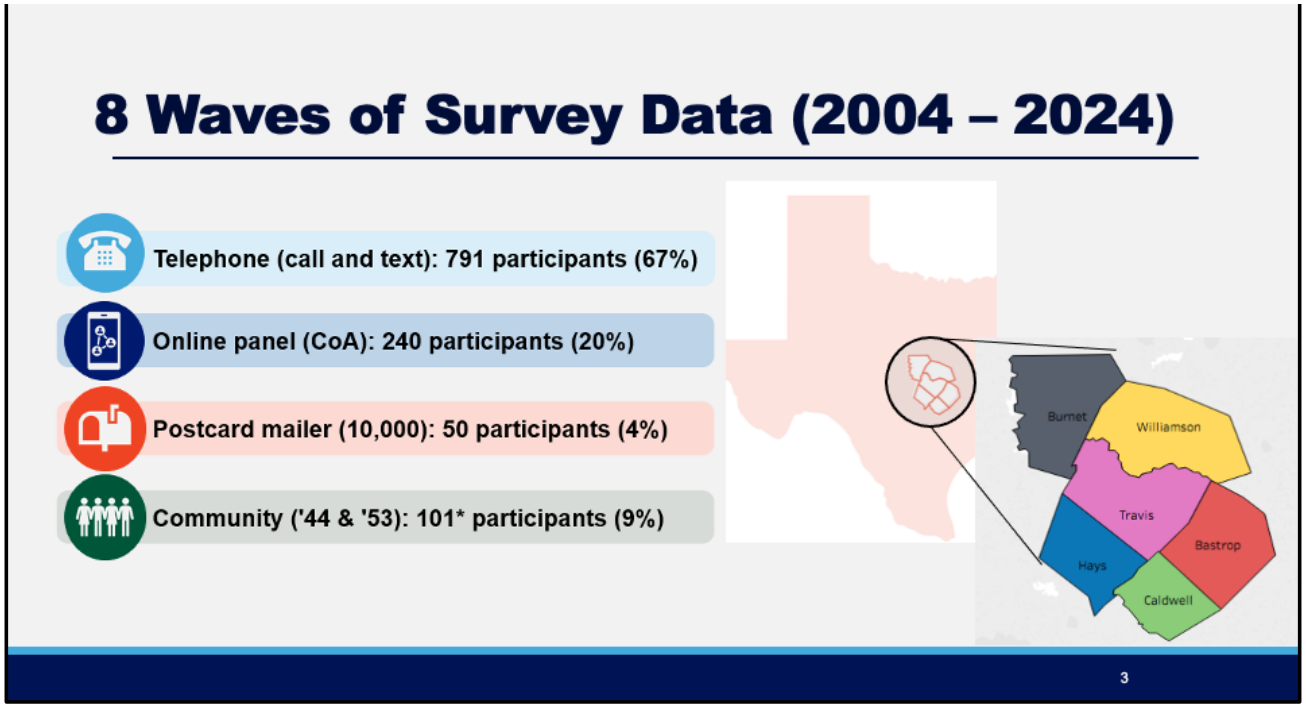
Background & Purpose

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



- 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:

- 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.

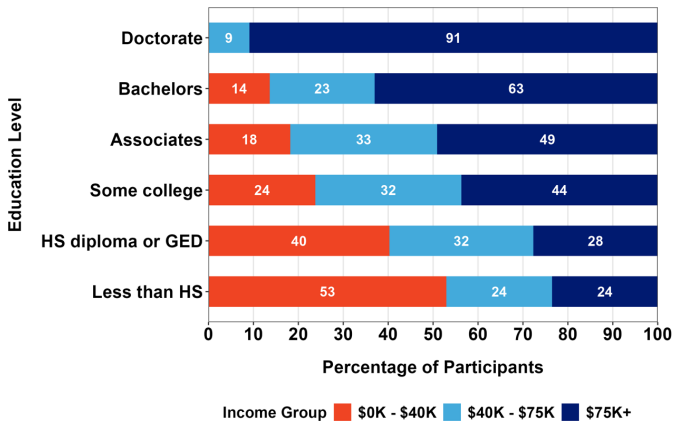
Who reports higher income:

- White residents
- Men
- Williamson county

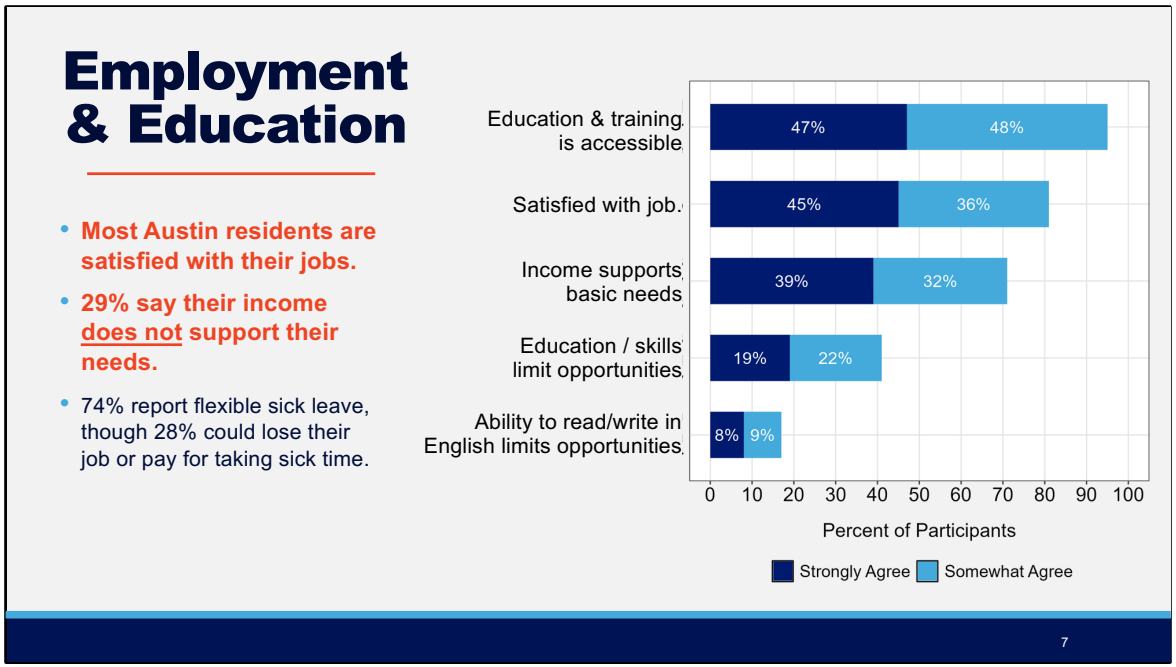
Caldwell & Travis: most people reporting < $40,000 / year

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

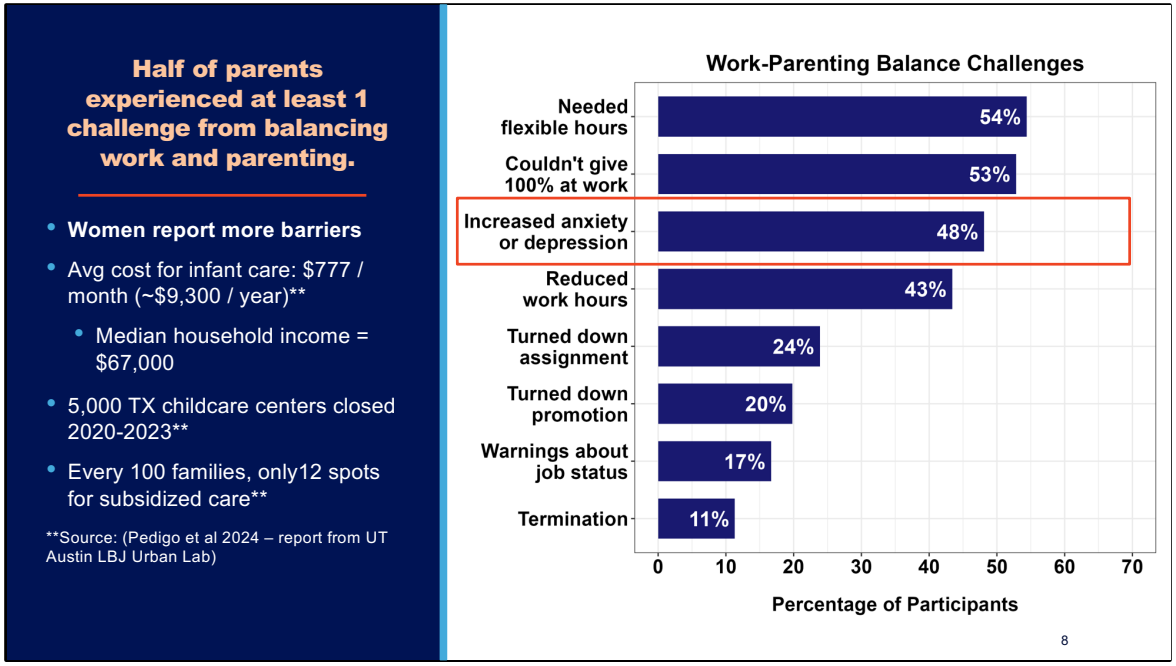
- Food and housing insecurity
- Less emergency preparedness
- Worse health & environmental outcomes



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



- 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.



- 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

Issues identified by Community Surveys

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Food and Housing Affordability

Health and Healthcare Access

Environmental Concerns and Exposure

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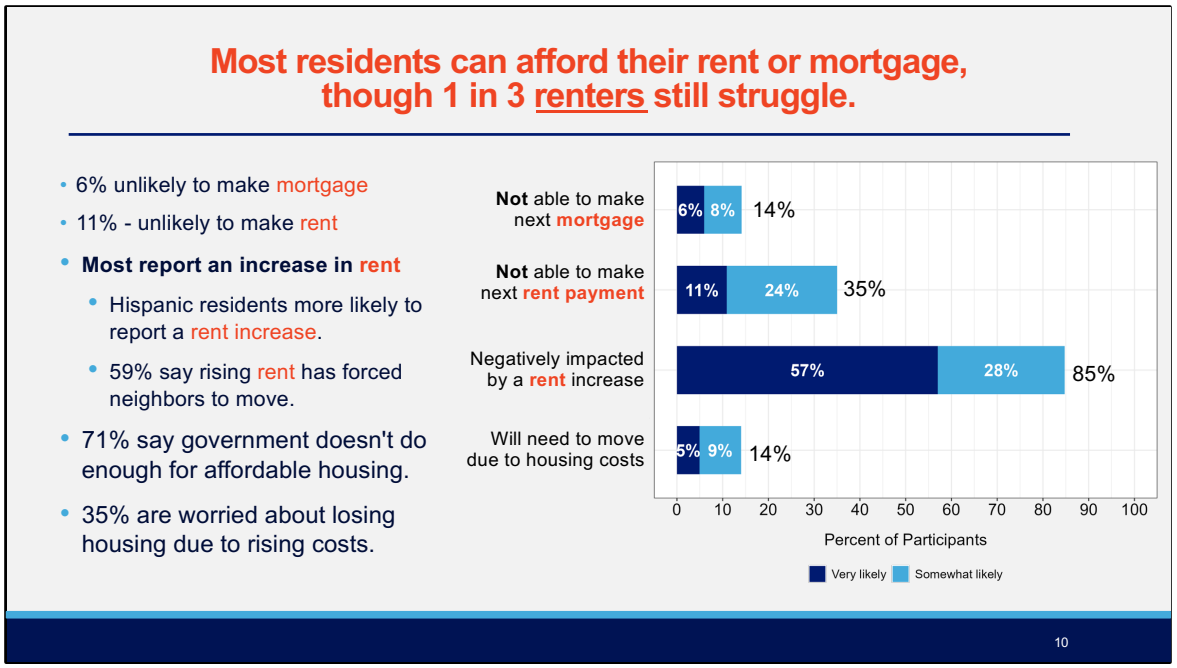
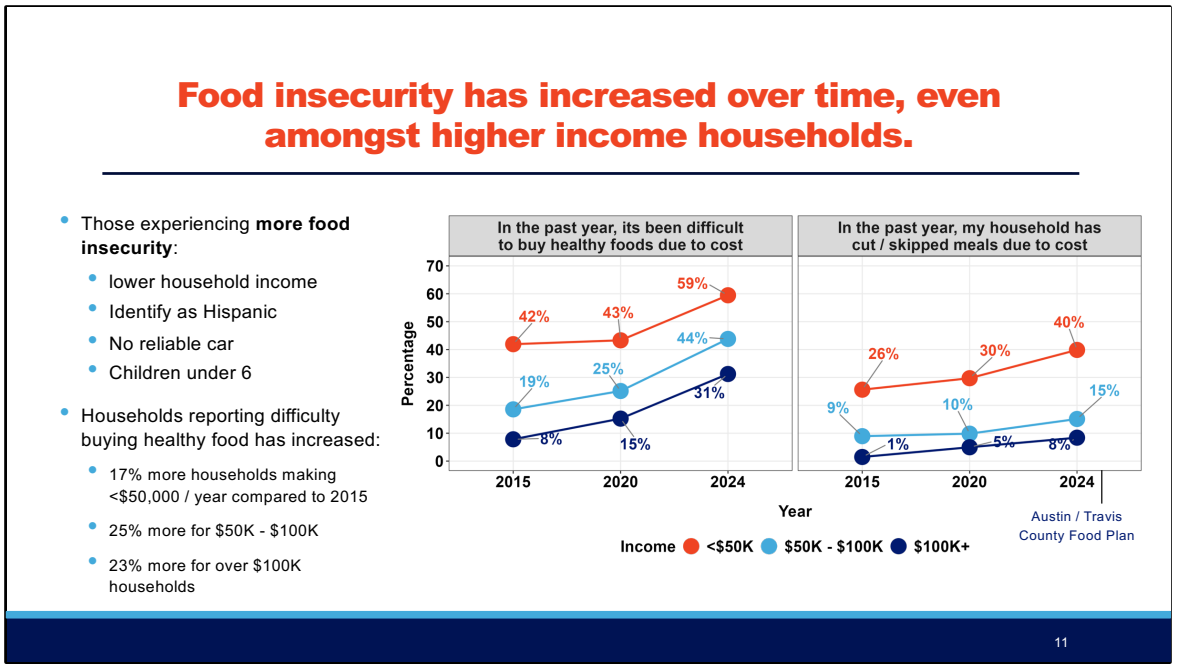


Starting with housing: most of our participants were homeowners.
The figure on the right:

- 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.

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

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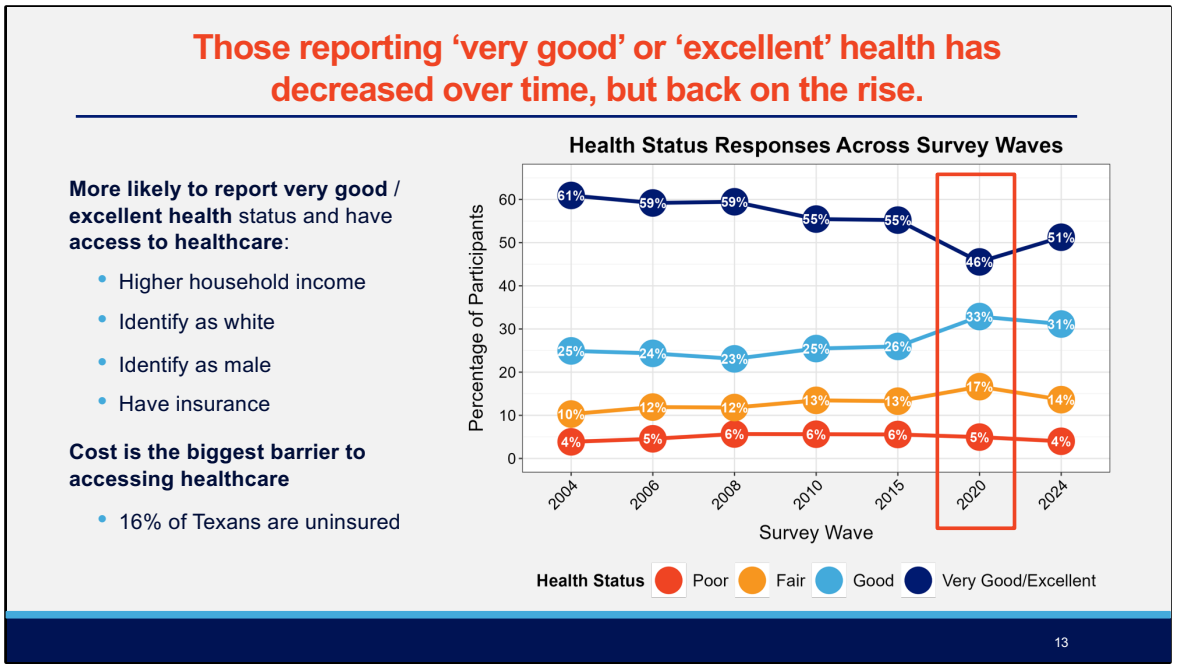

Healthcare access (healthcare, prescriptions, mental health services) **more difficult** for:

- 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

Cost is the most prominent barrier to accessing healthcare

16% of Texans are uninsured

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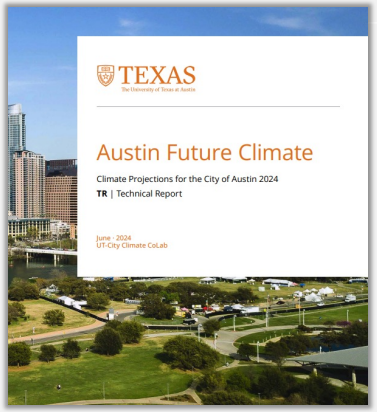
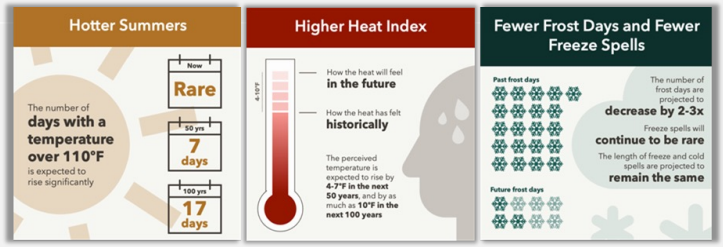
Climate Change and Environmental Issues



Austin Future Climate: Climate Projections For the City of Austin. June 2024. available from UT-City Climate CoLab [https://texuslab.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

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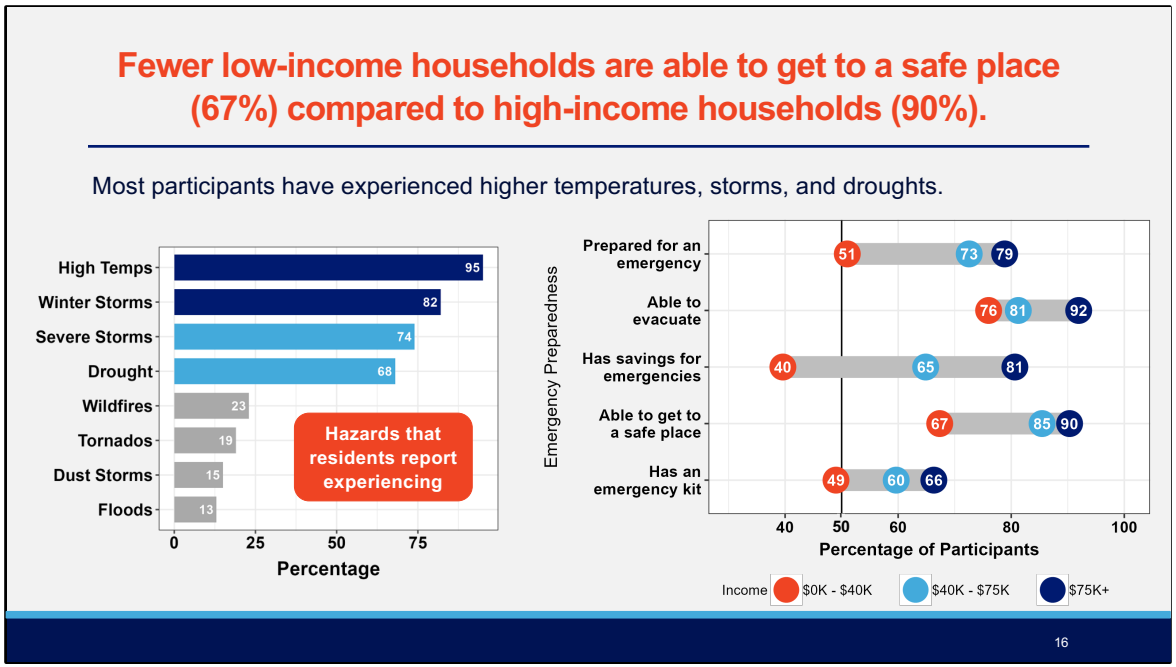
- Our lab collaborates with the UT City Climate Colab - partnership with the city of austin).
- Climate scientists that estimated how the Austin area would be impacted by climate change over the next 50 years.
- We can expect:
    - Hotter summers and more heat waves,
    - Fewer frost days and freeze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



- 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.

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.

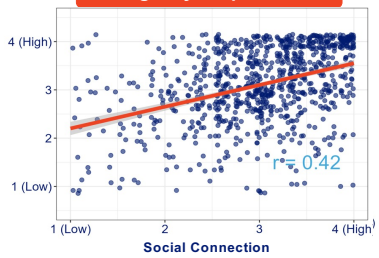
Graphs show correlations between social capital and:

- Emergency preparedness
- Employment
- Housing
- Health

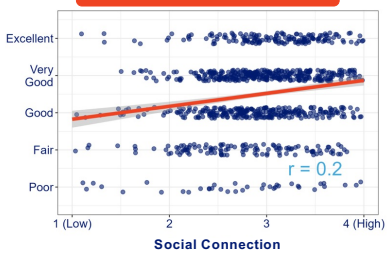
Orange line shows the strength of the relationship

Steeper orange line = stronger relationship

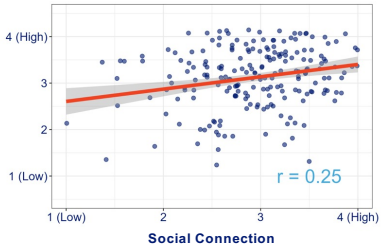
Emergency Preparedness



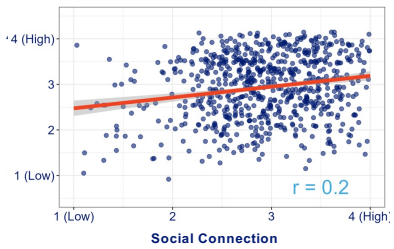
Health Status



Employment Well-Being



Housing Security



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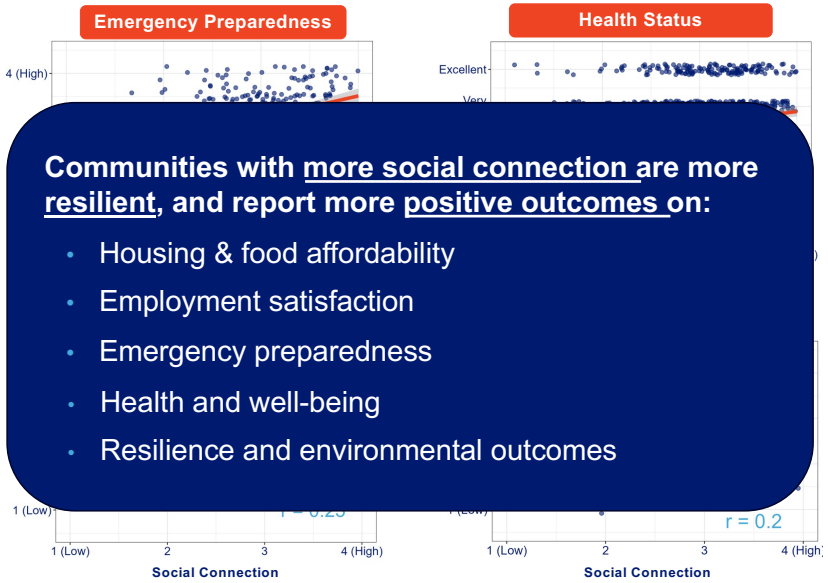
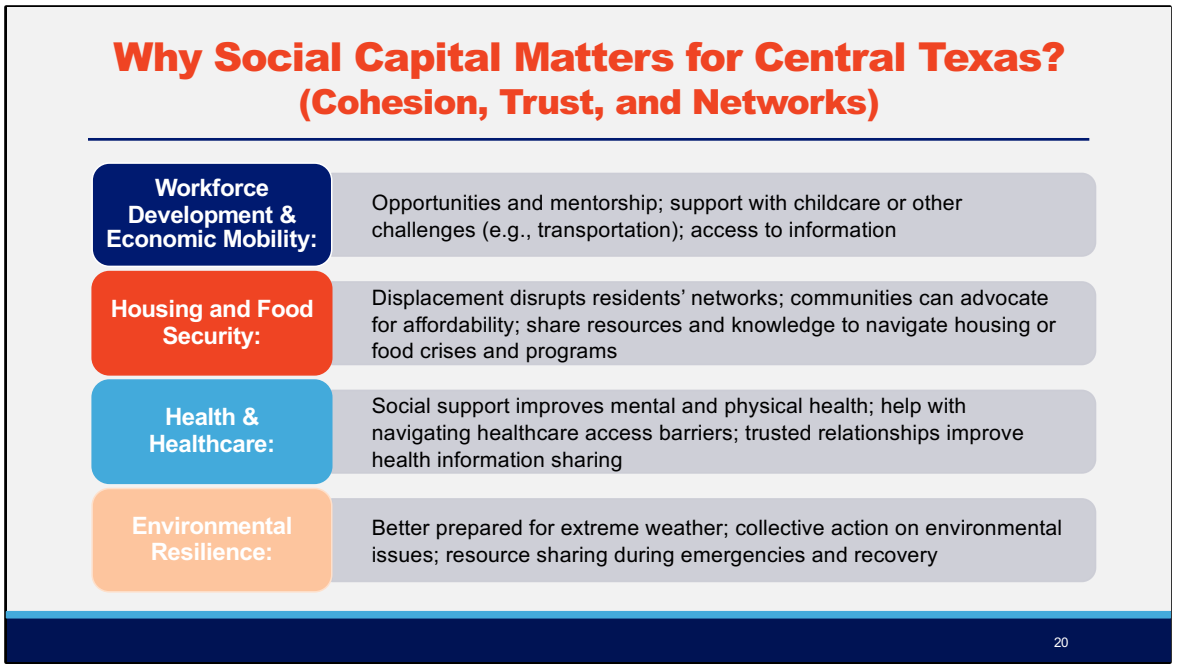
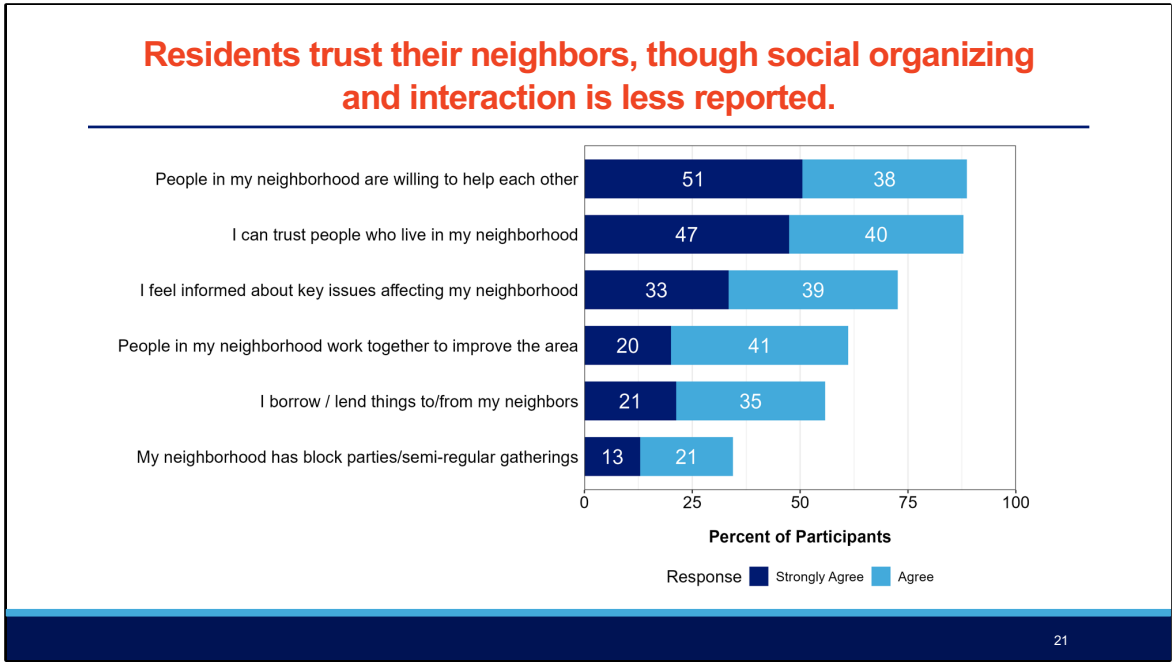


Communities with more social connection are more resilient, and report more positive outcomes on:

- Housing & food affordability
- Employment satisfaction
- Emergency preparedness
- Health and well-being
- Resilience and environmental outcomes



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

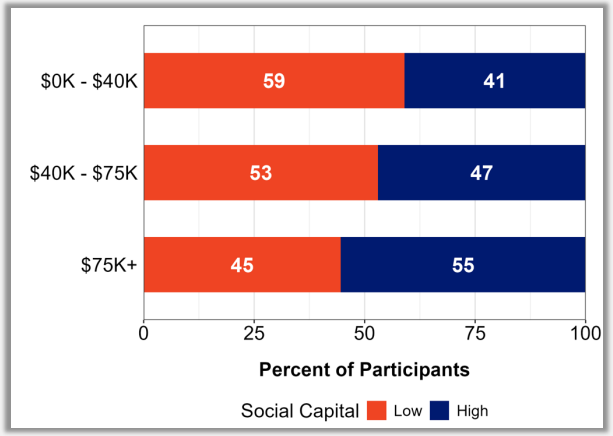


- Renters are more likely to be lower income
- More Hispanic residents report a rent increase
- The majority say rising rent costs have caused neighbors to move, and nearly 3 quarters don't think the government has done enough to ensure affordable housing.

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.

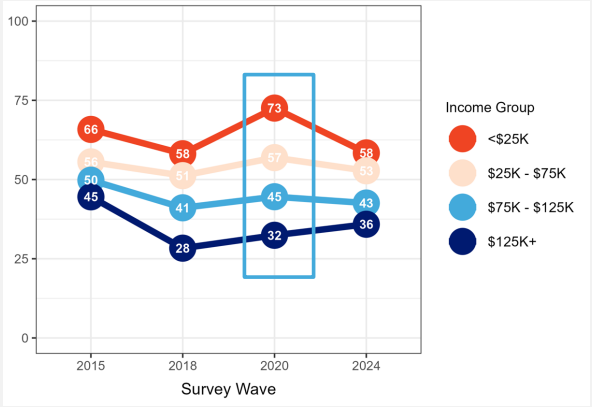
Residents were divided into those with *low vs high* social capital.

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

Percent who report lower social capital



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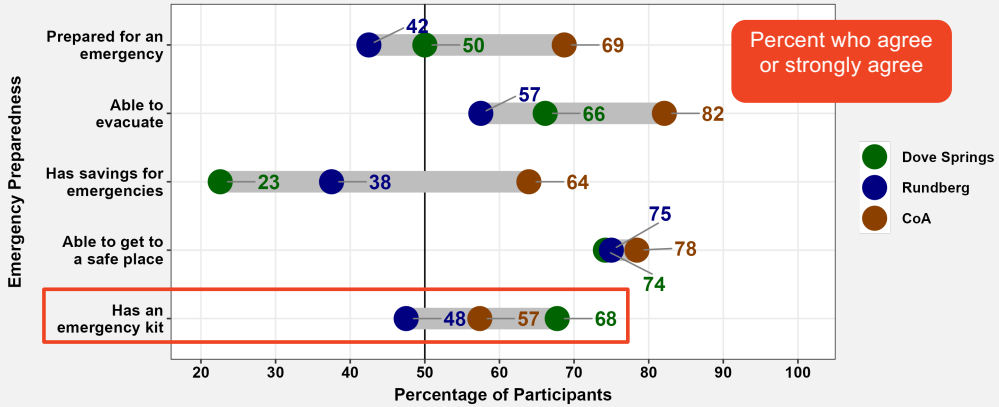
Examples of Social Capital in Action

Go Austin Vamos Austin and Emergency Preparedness



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/w78dckzinmifxf2qb1y8le77nwmgb29e