



# Buscando El Sueño

Listening to Working-Class Latino Miami

UNITEHERE!

32BJ  SEIU

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# WHO WE ARE



**UNITE HERE LOCAL 355** is the hospitality workers union in South Florida, representing 7,000 workers in hotels, airports, casinos, stadiums, and arenas. We are the housekeepers, maintenance workers, bartenders, casino cashiers, airport cashiers, bellmen, dishwashers, banquet servers, cocktail servers, doormen, food runners, housemen, cooks, and slot attendants in some of the most prominent companies in South Florida. We are proudly a multiracial union with members and leaders who descend from nations all over the world. UNITE HERE Local 355 is an affiliate of UNITE HERE, which represents approximately 300,000 hotel, food service, and gaming workers across the United States and Canada.



**SEIU 32BJ** is the largest union of property service workers in the U.S., whose members primarily work as cleaners, property maintenance workers, doormen, security officers, airport workers, window cleaners, building engineers, and school and food service workers.



**Shared Future** partnered on this Deep Listening Campaign — supporting research, strategy, and storytelling to lift up the voices of working-class Latino Miami and turn what residents shared at the door into this report.

# INTRODUCTION



## **AN AMERICAN DREAM** INCREASINGLY OUT OF REACH.

Miami is known for its sunny beaches, vibrant nightlife, and one of the largest tourism industries in the nation. Miami is also known for its historic Black history and as the home of diasporas: Cuban, Haitian, Venezuelan, among many others. Recently, Miami has made headlines as a place where billionaire CEOs relocate and buy lavish homes and offices.<sup>1</sup> What is less reported is that Miami is at the epicenter of an acute economic and humanitarian crisis.

The broader Miami area recently surpassed New York City to become the most expensive major metropolitan area in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> In South Florida, the top 1% of earners make nearly 40 times as much as the bottom 99%; with the highest earners taking home an average of over \$1.5 million annually, and the bottom 99% averaging roughly \$39,000.<sup>3</sup>

Incomes fall drastically short of actual survival needs. According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, a single adult with no children must earn at least \$25.98 an hour (over \$54,000 annually) to cover basic necessities in Miami-Dade County, and that requirement skyrockets to \$42.27 an hour for a single adult with one child. This affordability gap has pushed the City of Miami's overall poverty rate to 19.4%, with the burden falling disproportionately on the most vulnerable demographics: close to one-third of all children and seniors in the city currently live in poverty.<sup>4</sup>

# THE GUTTING OF SENIOR SAFETY NETS

This profound economic vulnerability among older adults has been exacerbated by sweeping cuts to social safety nets. In Miami-Dade County, 58.8% of elderly people rely on Medicaid—the highest share of any county in Florida. While 51% of Medicaid funding nationally is devoted to senior citizens, in Florida, that number jumps to 78%. Recent Medicaid cuts have directly targeted seniors. As a Kaiser Family Foundation report explained, losing this coverage "poses unique challenges for seniors and people with disabilities, people who are likely to live on fixed incomes, have high health care spending, and rely on Medicaid for coverage of long-term care."

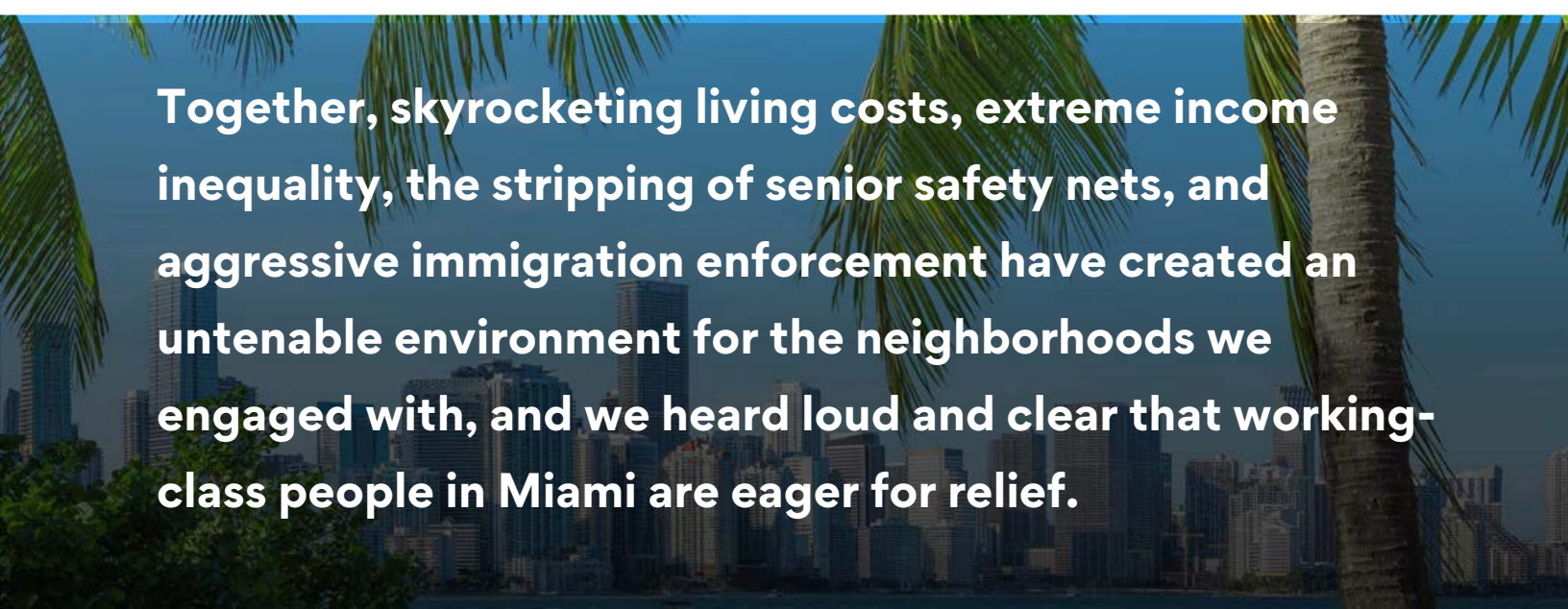
Simultaneously, a hunger crisis has gripped older residents due to the reduction of SNAP benefits. Miami-Dade County has a higher share of SNAP households that include at least one person over the age of 60 than any other county in the U.S., encompassing 224,000 older beneficiaries locally.<sup>5</sup> While work requirements for SNAP previously applied only to those under 55, the implementation of 2025's HR1 (the "One Big Beautiful Bill") expanded these requirements to include people aged 55-64. In the fall of 2025, the state of Florida estimated that 55,000 people in this age bracket would lose their food stamps<sup>6</sup>—a reality that has now played out. When the cuts were looming, the CEO of the Alliance for Aging warned that "we are on the cusp of a hunger crisis here in Miami-Dade,"<sup>7</sup> stressing that "without access to SNAP benefits, many older adults in need will go to bed hungry"—a grim prediction that has become a daily reality for many.



# A COUNTY OF IMMIGRANTS.

Compounding this financial and healthcare pressure is a climate of deep instability for the communities that form the backbone of Miami. Miami-Dade is the most populous county in Florida and is fundamentally defined by its diversity. Approximately 70% of residents in both Miami Dade County and the City of Miami identify as Hispanic or Latino,<sup>8</sup> with 67% of Miami-Dade County residents and 70% of City of Miami residents speaking Spanish at home. As the only U.S. county with an immigrant majority population (over 54% foreign-born), this vital demographic is under siege. The Miami area now leads the nation in immigration arrests, recording over 41,000 ICE arrests since early 2025 due to local law enforcement cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

This has escalated further with the recent elimination of various programs to protect legal immigration. Since 2025, sweeping policy changes and court rulings have dismantled legal protections for hundreds of thousands of immigrants who were previously authorized to live and work in the United States. Between the termination of the CHNV humanitarian parole program<sup>10</sup> and the rolling expiration of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designations,<sup>11</sup> over 1 million individuals nationally have either lost their status or are in the immediate process of losing it.<sup>12</sup> This includes tens of thousands of people who descend from Cuba, Venezuela, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Haiti, encompassing some of the largest diaspora immigrant communities in Miami.



**Together, skyrocketing living costs, extreme income inequality, the stripping of senior safety nets, and aggressive immigration enforcement have created an untenable environment for the neighborhoods we engaged with, and we heard loud and clear that working-class people in Miami are eager for relief.**

# SOMOS MIAMI

## Deep Canvass Project

**UNITE HERE Local 355** members and canvassers – immigrant workers descending from Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic – helped lead this historic Deep Canvass from March to June of 2026, knocking on over 30,000 doors across Miami.

We asked working-class Latino voters how the cost-of-living crisis is affecting their lives, their hopes for Miami, whether they would support various policy proposals, and how they felt about immigration enforcement policies happening in our community and across the U.S..





# METHODOLOGY

This report draws on insights from **2,730 conversations** and **2,381 completed surveys** with voters in neighborhoods across Miami, conducted between March 21 and June 27th, 2026. The survey questionnaire included both quantitative (rate from 1–5) questions and open-ended qualitative questions. Canvass teams received training in organizing and deep-listening skills and participated in debrief sessions to share data and stories from their conversations.

**31,789**

doors knocked

**2,730**

conversations

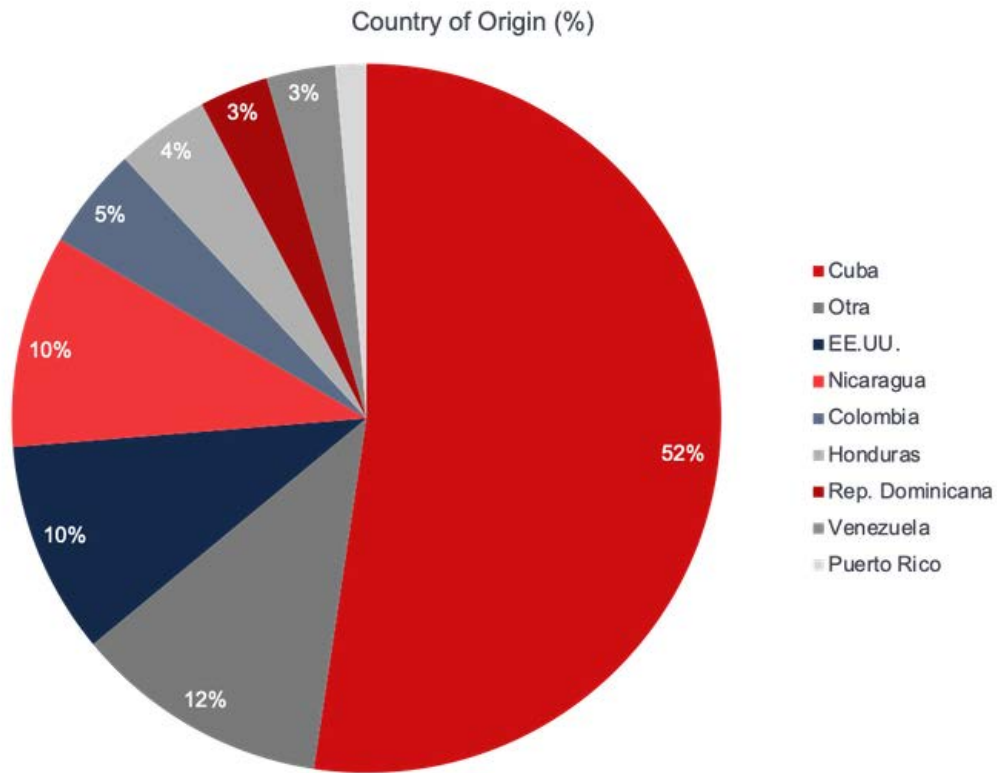
**2,381**

completed surveys

**1,435**

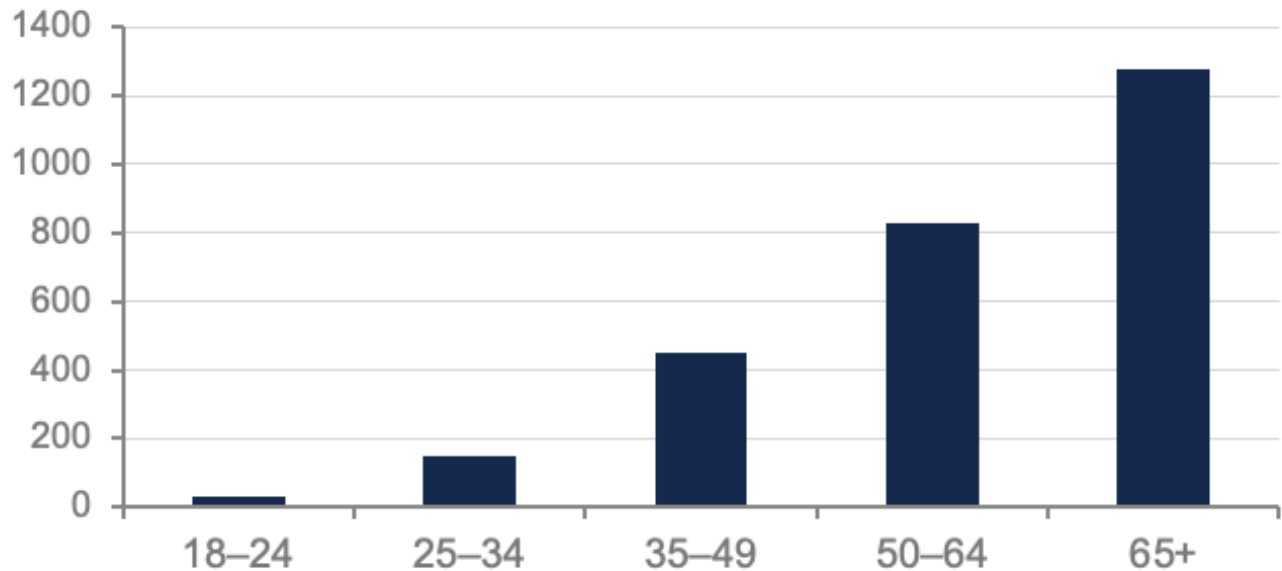
commitment cards

# WHO WE SPOKE WITH

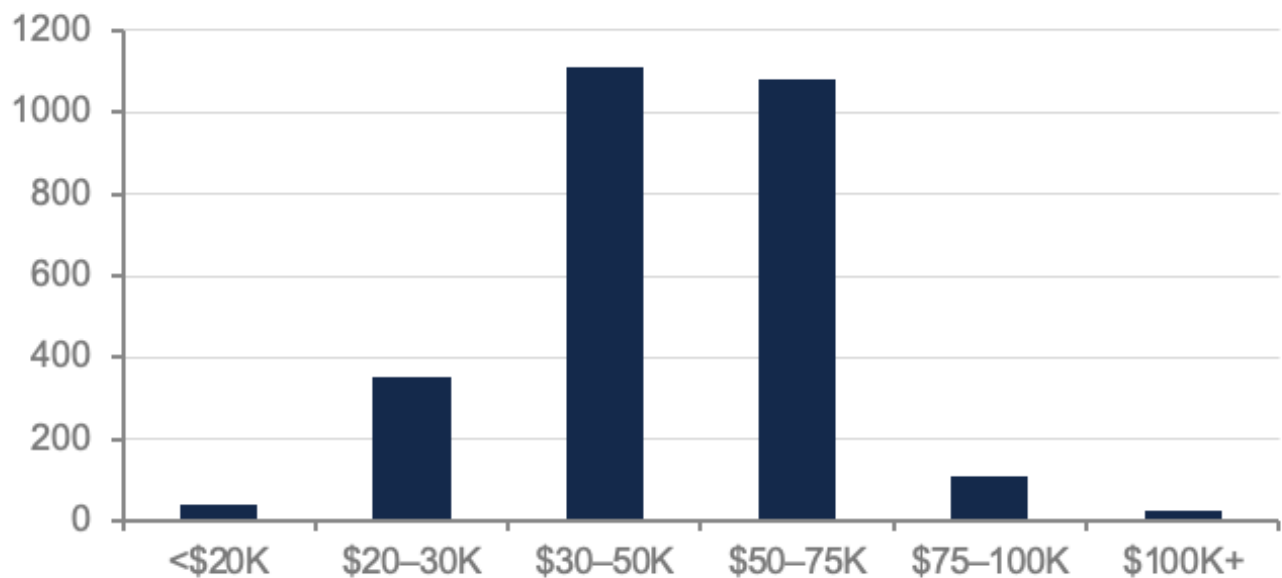


# WHO WE SPOKE WITH

Age of Survey Participants



Household Income



# KEY FINDINGS: SUMMARY

## 1 THE ECONOMY

Over three quarters of those surveyed think economic conditions in the U.S. are getting worse; only 5% think they are improving. Top cost-of-living issues: food and elder/child care; housing and utilities; health insurance; transportation and gas.

## 2 DREAMS & FUTURE PARTICIPATION

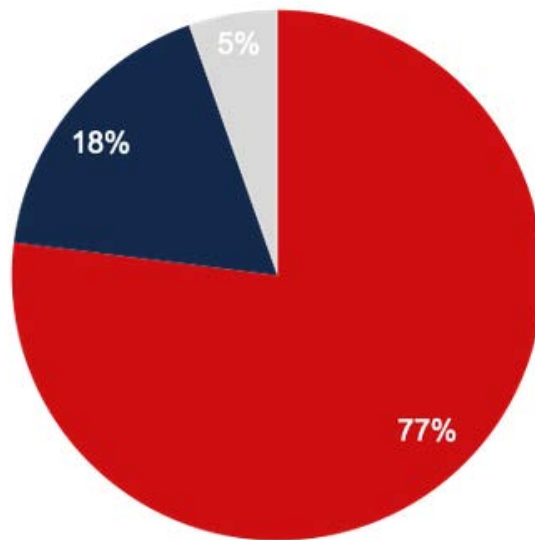
Almost a third of participants dream of getting out of debt and almost a quarter of buying their own homes. 60% filled out a commitment card pledging to join future events and meetings to help advance changes they want to see in Miami.

## 3 IMMIGRATION

An overwhelming majority of working-class Latino voters said immigration is important to them. Asked how they feel about what is happening with immigration in the U.S. now, 58% responded “disappointed” and 19% “angry.”

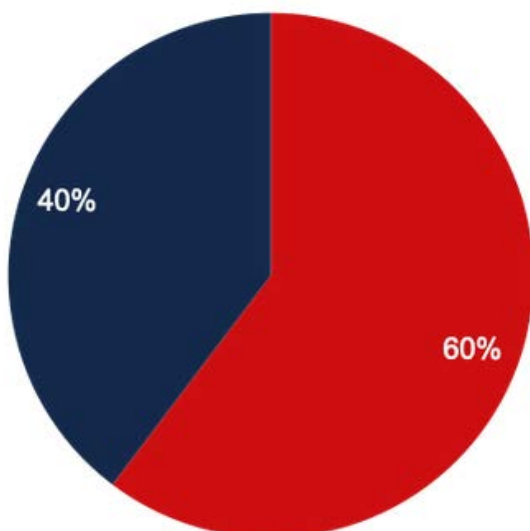
# KEY FINDINGS: BY THE NUMBERS

The economy is getting worse



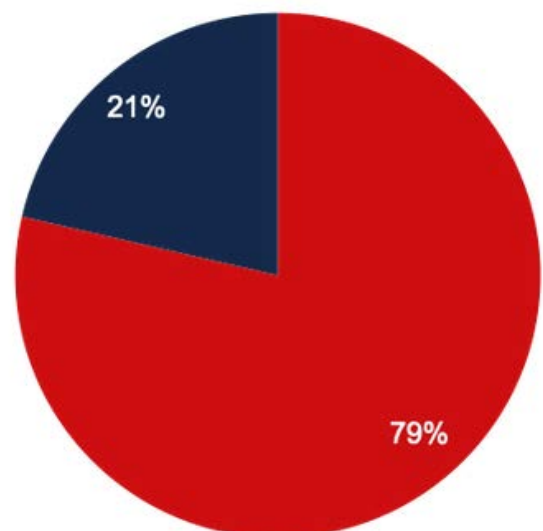
■ Getting worse ■ Staying the same ■ Improving

Signed a commitment card



■ Signed ■ Did not sign

Immigration is important to me



■ Rated 5 of 5 ■ All other

# KEY FINDINGS: BY THE NUMBERS

## 1,435 Survey Respondents

filled out a pledge card to be invited to future events and meetings on the changes they want to see in Miami.

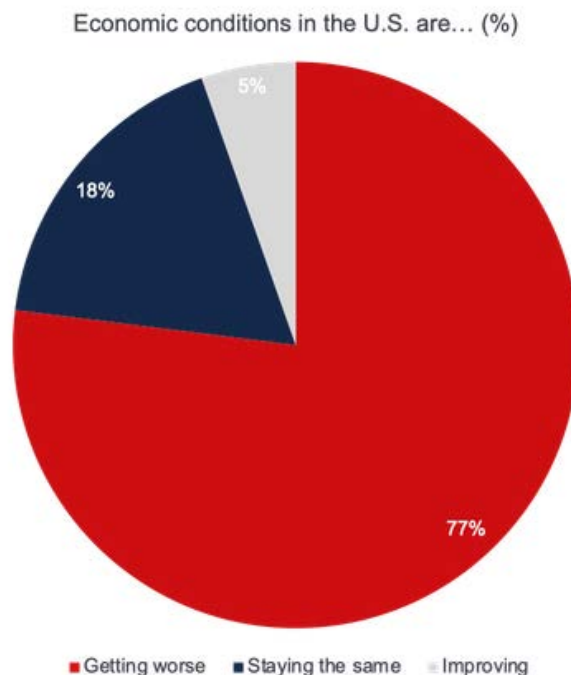


# KEY FINDINGS: THE ECONOMY

## Survey Question

*“On a scale of 1 to 5, how difficult is each of these issues for you and your family? Housing & utilities? Health insurance? Food? Child or elder care? Transportation & gas?”*

**Over three quarters of those surveyed think that economic conditions in the U.S. are getting worse**, while only 5% think conditions are improving. The top cost-of-living issues for these Miami residents are: food and elder/child care; housing and utilities; health insurance; transportation and gas.

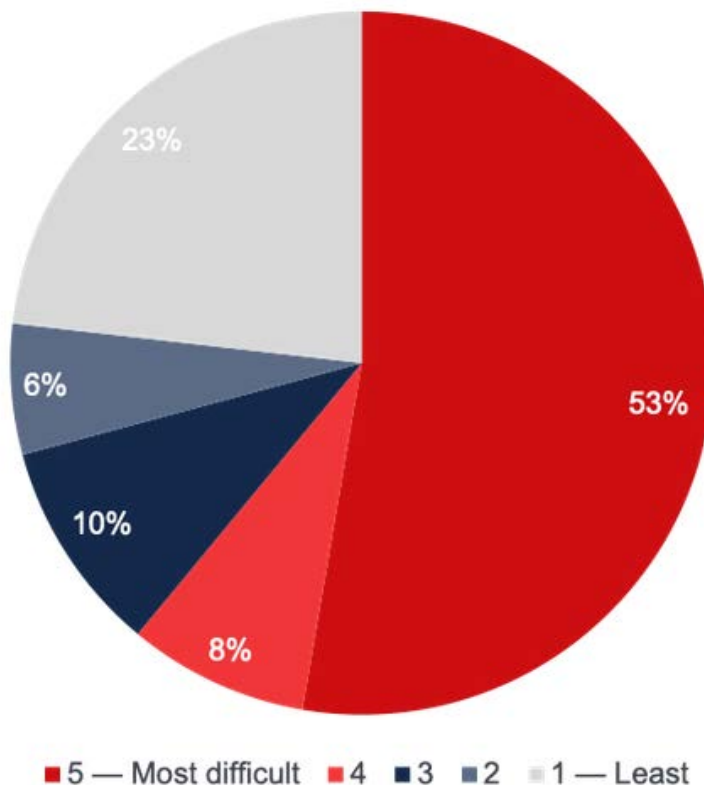


# KEY FINDINGS: THE ECONOMY

## Cost of Food, Child & Elder Care

Food costs weigh on nearly every household we surveyed. **85% rated food expenses a 5 out of 5 in difficulty.** More than half of the families who reported struggling with child or elder care rated it the most difficult issue they face.

Difficulty of child / elder care costs (%)

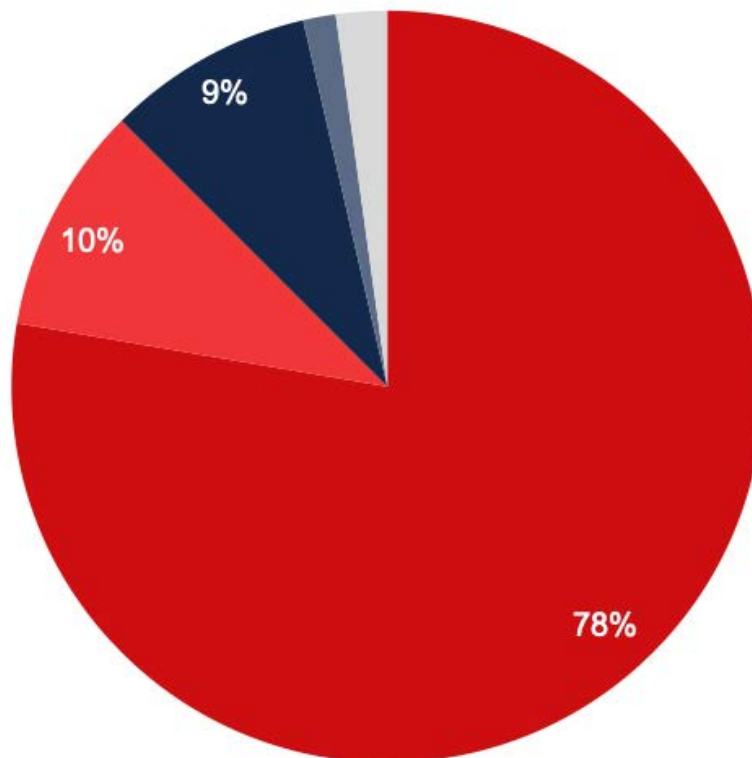


# KEY FINDINGS: THE ECONOMY

## Cost of Housing & Utilities

Housing is the most universal burden: **nearly four in five of the respondents (78%)** rated the cost of housing and utilities as the most difficult issue facing them and their families.

Difficulty of housing & utility costs (%)

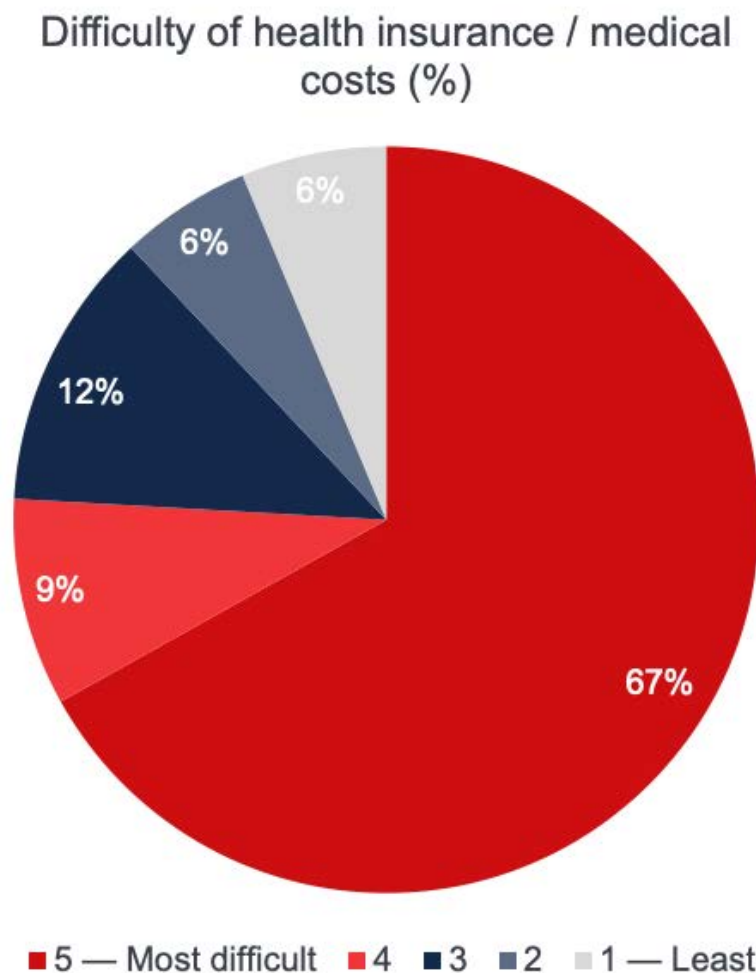


■ 5 — Most difficult ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Least

# KEY FINDINGS: THE ECONOMY

## Cost of Health Insurance & Medical Expenses

**Two thirds of respondents (67%)** rated the cost of health insurance and medical expenses among the most difficult burdens their families face.

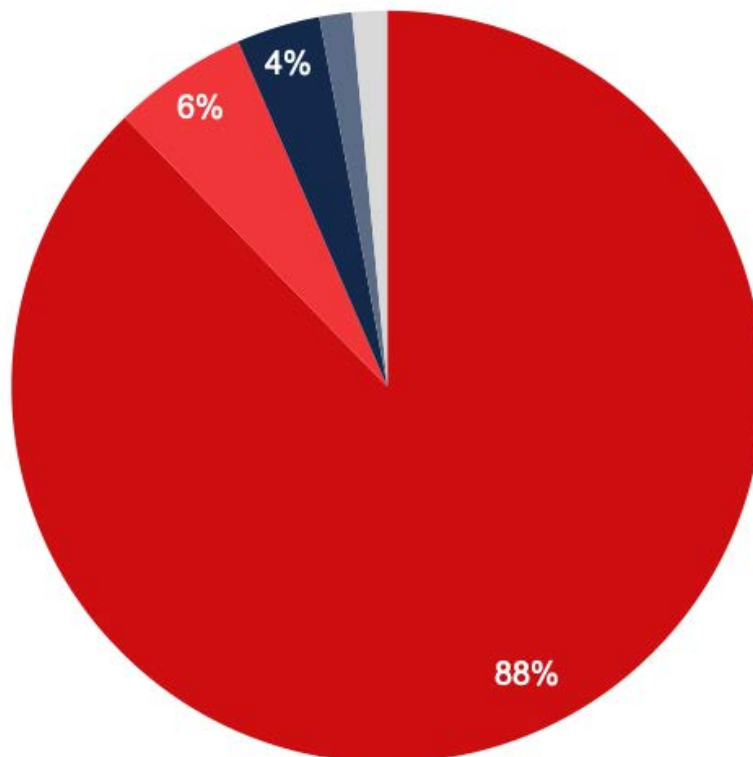


# KEY FINDINGS: THE ECONOMY

## Cost of Transportation & Gas

Transportation costs hit hardest of all for respondents. **88%** rated the costs of gas and transportation a **5 out of 5**, the most difficult issue for their families.

Difficulty of transportation & gas costs (%)



■ 5 — Most difficult ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Least



# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“The first thing we heard on the doors was how high prices have become in Miami, including increases in rent. People mentioned how they used to be able to fill shopping carts at the grocery store and now they are barely able to purchase enough to survive week to week. Many of the older community members we met on the doors are living with their children or relatives to get by.

***People told us they want to see a more affordable Miami.”***

Flor Ramirez — UH355 Member, MIA Airport Worker

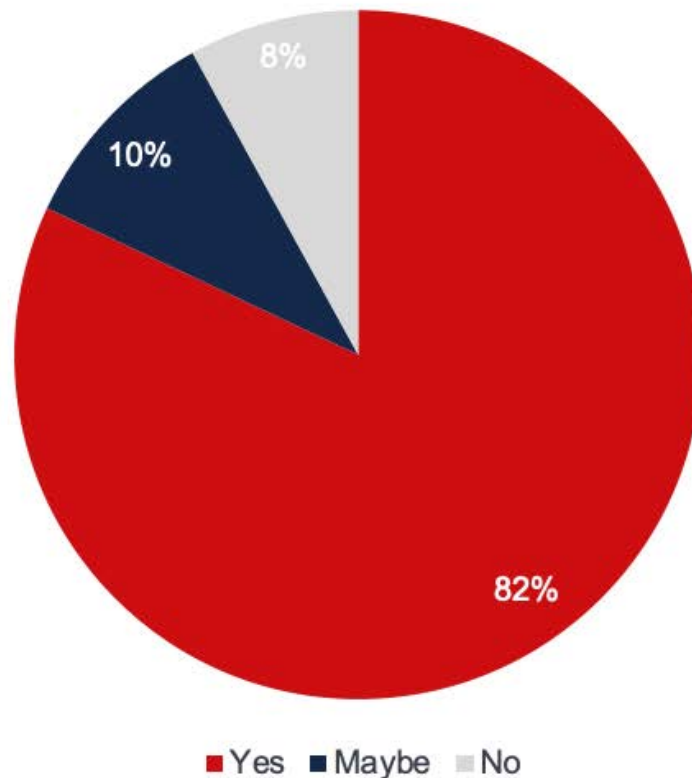


# POLICY PROPOSAL

## RENT CONTROL

**82% of people** who were asked at the doors said they would support placing limits on how much landlords could increase rent, while 10% said they would “Maybe” support such a policy, and 8% said they would not support such a policy.

Would you support this policy? (%)

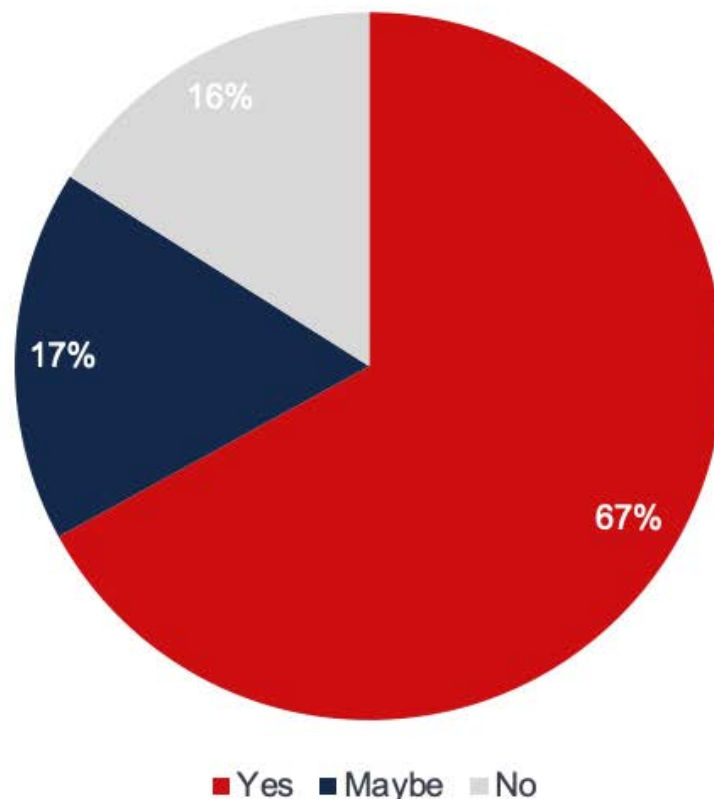


# POLICY PROPOSAL

## RAISING TAXES ON MULTI-MILLIONAIRES

**67% of people** who were asked at the doors said they would support increasing taxes on millionaires and multimillionaires, 17% said they would “Maybe” support such a policy, and 16% said they would not support raising taxes on millionaires and multimillionaires.

Would you support this policy? (%)

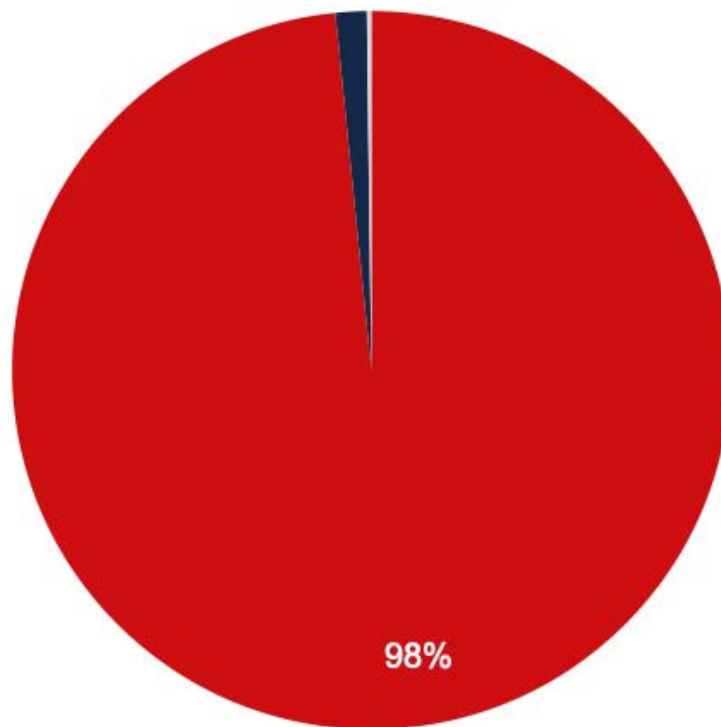


# POLICY PROPOSAL

## PROTECTING MEDI- CARE AND MEDICAID

**98% of people** who were asked at the doors said they would support protecting Medicare and Medicaid, 1% said they would “Maybe” support such a policy, and less than 1% said they would not support protecting Medicare and Medicaid.

Would you support this policy? (%)

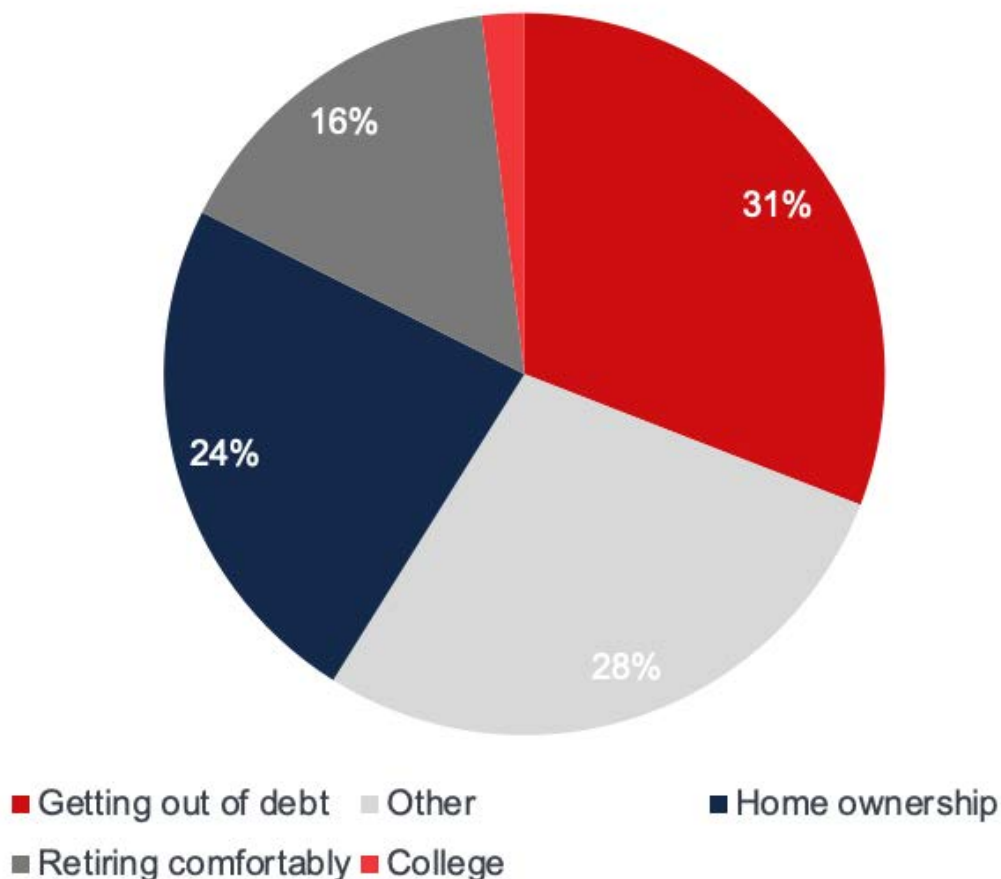


■ Yes ■ Maybe ■ No

# KEY FINDINGS: DREAMS & FUTURE PARTICIPATION

Even under pressure, these neighborhoods are planning for the future — getting out of debt and owning a home top the list of family dreams, and **a strong majority (60%) want to stay involved and join future meetings.** 1,435 commitment cards were collected with contact information to follow up.

What financial goals or dreams do you have? (%)



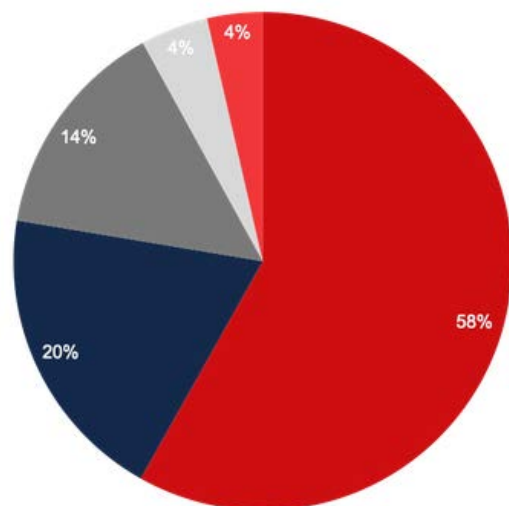
# KEY FINDINGS: IMMIGRATION

## Survey Question

*“When you hear news about what is happening with immigration in the country, what feelings does it provoke in you? Select the word that best describes how you feel: Scared, Disappointed, Happy, Angry, Uncertain.”*

An overwhelming majority of working-class Latino voters in these neighborhoods stated that immigration is important to them — **78% rated it 5** out of a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being of highest importance to them as an issue. Asked to choose the word that best describes how they feel about what is happening with immigration / immigration enforcement in the U.S. now, **58% chose “disappointed”** and **19% chose “angry.”**

How do you feel about immigration in the U.S. now?  
(%)



■ Disappointed ■ Angry ■ Uncertain ■ Happy ■ Scared



# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“When I was knocking on doors, I heard from voters who felt that many elected leaders were not paying attention to their struggles. People were worried about rising rent, the cost of food and gas, and low wages. Many were also unhappy with the way immigrants are being treated and persecuted.

As an immigrant myself, I came to this country looking for safety, stability and the opportunity to contribute. Immigrants do some of the hardest jobs in this country—caring for the elderly, growing our food, making air travel possible, and keeping our buildings safe and clean. **The people I spoke with understand the contributions immigrants make and how much they have helped build South Florida. They don’t want division or hatred. They want elected leaders to focus on policies that help all families prosper.”**

Clarissa Perez — SEIU 32BJ Member, Janitor





# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I heard from many other Cubans on the doors during this survey process, I myself am Cuban, who feel betrayed with what they are seeing happen with immigration enforcement right now. Especially because so many have family members who came to Miami legally on humanitarian parole who have now lost their status and don't know what to do and feel like they are being treated like criminals. They never imagined the United States would be this way — they came here looking for the American Dream, for liberty. This is in addition to many older Cuban voters we spoke with who have recently had cuts to their SNAP benefits and now barely have enough money to purchase food and their medicine. **This is not what people think living in this free, great country should be like, and they feel betrayed.”**

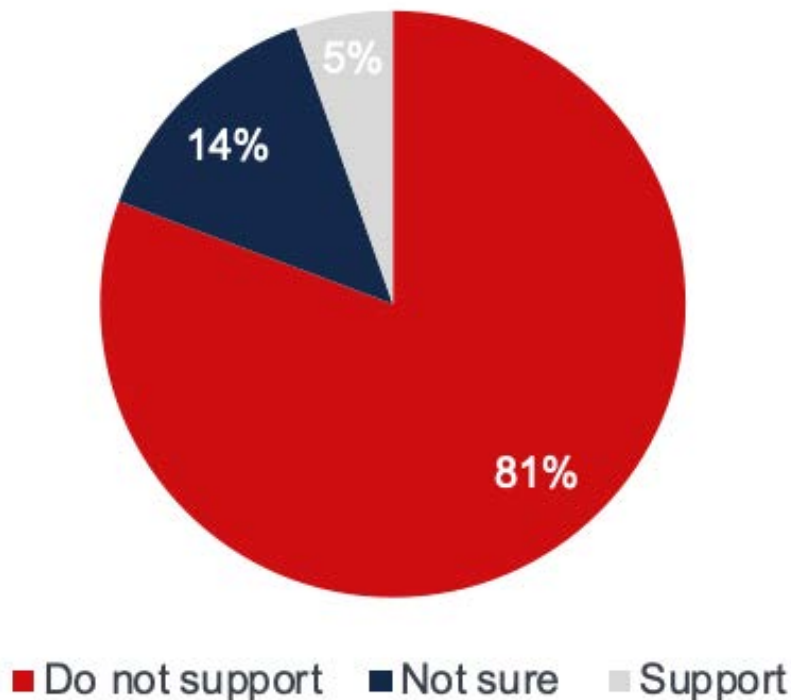
Martha Cabrera —UH355 Member



# KEY FINDINGS: IMMIGRATION

In May, survey questions were added to ask voters across Miami how they felt about a component within the proposed “Dignity Act” legislation that would mandate that immigrant workers participating in the so-called ‘Dignity Program’ pay \$1,000 annually (for seven years) to continue to work legally in the United States without any path toward receiving a permanent legal status or path to citizenship. **81% of surveyed respondents said they did not support that segment of the proposed law.**

Support for the Dignity Act \$1,000/year fee (%)



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Working-class Latino community members across Miami emphasized that the cost-of-living crisis and aggressive immigration enforcement have reached a tipping point. They want lawmakers to urgently prioritize economic stability and family protection. Policymakers should protect immigrant families by:

## **1 EXPAND TPS AND PATHWAYS TO LEGAL STATUS**

Expanding access to Temporary Protected Status (TPS) alongside clear legal pathways to permanent residency and citizenship.

## **2 TACKLE COST OF LIVING AND RAISE THE WAGE**

Tackling everyday expenses by reducing the cost of housing, utilities, and other basic necessities, and raising the minimum wage while enforcing worker rights.

## **3 EXPAND HEALTHCARE ACCESS**

Expanding access to affordable, quality healthcare through Medicare, Medicaid, and healthcare subsidies.

## **4 STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN & SENIORS**

Strengthening relief and care programs available for children and seniors — like SNAP — to relieve the financial strain on working families and ensure long-term community resilience.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report and Deep Listening Campaign would not have been possible without the dedication of member leaders from UNITE HERE, SEIU 32BJ, and volunteers from Miami Freedom Project, Miami Workers Center, Power U, WeCount!, Florida Rising, Miami PACT, Engage Miami, and Miami Power Research.

**Towards a more just and equitable Miami  
where all working people can thrive.**

**¡Sí se puede!**



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