

Hunger Among Adults Age 50-59 in 2020

FEEDING
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Dr. Craig Gundersen
Baylor University

Dr. James P. Ziliak
University of Kentucky

Hunger Among Adults Aged 50-59 in 2020: An Annual Report

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Dr. Craig Gundersen
Baylor University

Dr. James P. Ziliak
University of Kentucky

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, we provide a broad overview of the extent and distribution of food insecurity among individuals between the ages of 50 and 59 in the United States in 2020, along with trends over the past decade and a half using national, state-level, and metropolitan-level data from the December Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS). This study complements the annual report on senior hunger from Ziliak and Gundersen (2022).

We concentrate on two measures of food insecurity: food insecurity and very low food security (VLFS). These are based on the full set of 18 questions in the Food Security Supplement (FSS), the module used by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to establish the official food insecurity rates of households in the United States. We define food insecurity by three or more affirmative responses and very low food security as eight or more affirmative responses in households with children or six or more in households without children. All VLFS persons are also included in the food insecure category.

In 2020, we find that:

- Out of 41.2 million persons between ages 50 and 59, 10.4% are food insecure and 4.2% are VLFS. This translates into 4.3 million and 1.7 million persons, respectively.
- From 2019 to 2020, there was a 0.9 percentage point increase in food insecurity and this is statistically significant. The decline in VLFS is statistically insignificant.
- Compared to 2001, the fraction of food insecure and VLFS persons between ages 50 and 59 increased by 35% and 59%, respectively. The number in each group rose 74% and 106%.
- We find that food insecurity is greatest among Blacks and Hispanics, those with lower incomes, and those who are renters.
- State-level food insecurity rates range from a high of 16.9% (Arkansas) to a low of 4.2% (Maine and New Hampshire).
- Metro-level food insecurity rates range from a high of 17.6% (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) to a low of 2.8% (Denver, Colorado).
- Compared to persons ages 60+, rates of food insecurity among 50-59-year-olds are higher, but the increase since 2001 is greater among seniors, especially VLFS. In addition, the number of food-insecure seniors exceeds that of 50-59-year-olds because of a larger population of those 60+ in America.

The Covid-19 Pandemic was a major health and economic shock, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths. This health shock resulted in higher food insecurity among 50-59 year olds, but no change in the share very low food secure, unlike we saw in the Great Recession of 2007-2009. This likely reflects the nature of the coronavirus shock insofar as the financial situation of many adults did not materially change, and the massive infusion of government aid, including a major increase in food assistance benefits, unemployment insurance, and direct payments. However, unlike the population overall, rates of food insecurity and VLFS among 50-59 year olds still have not returned to their pre-Great Recession levels, and thus millions still remain vulnerable to food hardships and the associated negative health consequences. Older adults, especially those with front-line employment responsibilities, remain particularly vulnerable to

the virus and thus their food and health security status require ongoing monitoring in the coming years.

I. FOOD INSECURITY IN 2020

We document the state of food insecurity among adults between the ages of 50 and 59 in the United States spanning 2001-2020. This study complements our annual report on food insecurity of seniors ages 60+ (Ziliak and Gundersen, 2022), and is the fourth annual report for this age group.

In December of each year, households respond to a series of 18 questions (10 questions if there are no children present in the household) that make up the Food Security Supplement (FSS) in the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a nationally representative survey conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, providing employment, income and poverty statistics. Households are selected to be representative of civilian households at the state and national levels, using suitably appropriate sampling weights. The CPS does not include information on individuals living in group quarters, including nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Each question on the FSS is designed to capture some aspect of food insecurity and, for some questions, the frequency with which it manifests itself. Respondents are asked questions about their food security status in the last 30 days, as well as over the past 12 months. Following the standard approach used by the USDA, we focus on the questions referring to the past year. The questions from the FSS are found in Appendix Table 1. Because our focus is on food insecurity among those between 50 and 59 years of age, in 2020, this results in 10,426 sample observations. Appendix Table 2 presents selected summary statistics for the CPS sample, adjusted using the FSS survey weight to make the sample nationally representative among 50-59-year-olds.

Based on the full set of 18 questions in the FSS, the module used by the USDA to establish the official food insecurity rates of households in the United States, we concentrate on two measures: food insecurity (three or more affirmative responses) and very low food security (VLFS; eight or more affirmative responses in households with children; six or more in households without). All VLFS persons are also included in the food insecure category and, thus, VLFS seniors constitute a subset of those food insecure.

In Table 1, we present estimates of food insecurity among adults ages 50 to 59 in 2020. We find that 10.4% were food insecure (4.3 million) and 4.2% were VLFS (1.7 million). These rates are greater than rates for seniors ages 60+ as reported in Ziliak and Gundersen (2022). Among seniors, we found that 6.8% were food insecure and 2.6% were VLFS. However, since the population of those 60+ is substantially greater than those ages 50-59, there are more seniors who are food insecure (5.2 million) and VLFS (2.0 million).

The table also presents estimates of food insecurity across selected socioeconomic categories. Here, we see great heterogeneity across the population. For example, for those with incomes below the poverty line, 46.5% were food insecure and 21.4% were VLFS. In contrast, for those with incomes greater than twice the poverty line, these numbers fall to 4.5%, and 1.5%. The food insecurity among Black older adults is more than 2 times the food insecurity rate for white older adults. Similarly, Hispanic older adults (of any racial category) have food insecurity rates that are higher than non-Hispanic older adults, though rates of VLFS were comparable.

Table 1. The Extent of 50-59 Food Insecurity in 2020

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
Overall	10.4%	4.2%
By Income		
Below the Poverty Line	46.5	21.4
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	26.1	11.1
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	4.5	1.5
Income Not Reported	8.5	3.2
By Race		
White	8.9	3.8
Black	19.1	6.5
Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi- racial	12.6	4.3
By Hispanic Status		
Hispanic	16.1	4.9
Non-Hispanic	9.4	4.0
By Marital Status		
Married	7.2	2.3
Widowed	17.7	8.5
Divorced or Separated	15.6	7.6
Never Married	16.4	6.6
By Metropolitan Location		
Non-Metro	11.8	4.7
Metro	10.2	4.1
By Age		
50-54	11.0	4.1
55-59	9.9	4.2
By Employment Status		
Employed	6.4	2.0
Unemployed	25.6	13.4
Retired	5.8	1.3
Disabled ¹	25.0	11.7
By Gender		
Male	10.3	4.3
Female	10.5	4.0
By Grandchild Present		
No Grandchild Present	9.9	4.0
Grandchildren Present	23.8	6.6
By Homeownership Status		
Homeowner	6.8	2.5
Renter	22.9	9.7
By Veteran Status		
Veteran	6.8	3.5
Not a Veteran	10.7	4.2
By Disability Status ²		

Without a disability	8.4	2.8
With a disability	26.4	14.6

Source: Authors' calculations from 2020 December Current Population Survey. The numbers in the table show the rates of food insecurity under two measures for various groups.

¹Disabled employment status means the person is out of the labor force because of a disability or other reason.

²Disability status refers to those with limitations on select activities of daily living.

Food insecurity among persons age 50-59 who are divorced or separated, widowed, or never married are up to two and a half times higher than among those who are married in this age range, and even wider among the more severe VLFS category. As age increases, food insecurity rates fall slightly, from 11.0% for the 50-54 category to 9.9% for the 55-59 category. VLFS rates are essentially the same, 4.1% and 4.2%. In terms of employment categories, the rates are much higher for persons who are unemployed or report being out of the labor force due to a disability in comparison to those who are retired or employed. For persons between the ages of 50 and 59 with a grandchild present, food insecurity rates for both measures are much higher than when no grandchildren are present, especially for the food insecurity measure. Renters have food insecurity and VLFS rates that are more than three times higher than homeowners. Non-Veterans have slightly higher food insecurity and VLFS rates than Veterans. We also include an additional disability measure that defines an individual as having a disability if they report any of the following limitations on daily activities (ADLs): hearing, visual, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, independent living. Older adults with ADLs have food insecurity rates more than three times as high and VLFS rates more than five times as high as those without ADLs. This is an astonishing difference, and much higher than we see among those 60 and older.¹

Table 2 presents the distribution of food insecurity among those between 50 and 59. In other words, out of those who are food insecure (or VLFS), what proportion fall into a particular demographic category? As seen in the table, the majority in either food insecurity category have incomes above the poverty line—out of those reporting income, almost two-thirds of food-insecure persons have incomes above the poverty line. Compared to those ages 60+, a larger share of the food-insecure 50-59 year-old population have incomes above 200% of the poverty line. A similar story holds for race—while Black older adults are at greater risk of food insecurity under either measure than white older adults, over two-thirds of food-insecure or VLFS persons are white. Looking at disability status, 40.2% of the VLFS category has an ADL. This is especially stark insofar as persons with ADLs in the VLFS 50-59 group are 14.6% of the population.

Table 2. The Distribution of 50-59 Food Insecurity in 2020

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
By Income		
Below the Poverty Line	26.7%	30.8%
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	27.6	29.5

¹ We note that those adults who are out of the labor force due to disability likely overlap with the group reporting ADLs. The fact that their rates of food insecurity are higher than the rate overall for those with ADLs suggests that disability associated with labor force exit is likely more severe.

Above 200% of the Poverty Line	24.8	20.0
Income Not Reported	21.0	19.6
By Race		
White	67.2	71.9
Black	22.1	18.8
Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial	10.7	9.2
By Hispanic Status		
Hispanic	24.0	18.2
Non-Hispanic	76.0	81.8
By Marital Status		
Married	43.6	35.8
Widowed	4.8	5.8
Divorced or Separated	30.2	36.7
Never Married	21.4	21.7
By Metropolitan Location		
Non-Metro	16.1	16.1
Metro	83.9	83.9
By Age		
50-54	51.6	48.6
55-59	48.4	51.4
By Employment Status		
Employed	44.1	35.1
Unemployed	10.9	14.4
Retired	3.5	1.9
Disabled ¹	41.4	48.6
By Gender		
Male	48.0	50.2
Female	52.0	49.8
By Grandchild Present		
No Grandchild Present	90.6	93.4
Grandchildren Present	9.4	6.6
By Homeownership Status		
Homeowner	50.1	46.7
Renter	49.9	53.3
By Veteran Status		
Veteran	4.4	5.6
Not a Veteran	95.6	94.4
By Disability Status ²		
Without a disability	71.0	59.8
With a disability	29.0	40.2

Source: Authors' calculations from 2020 December Current Population Survey. The numbers in the table show the distribution of food insecurity under two measures for various groups.

¹Disabled employment status means the person is out of the labor force because of a disability or other reason.

²Disability status refers to those with limitations on select activities of daily living.

Table 3. State-Level Estimates of 50-59 Food Insecurity in 2020

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure		Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
AL	14.2%	5.3%	MT	8.5%	4.9%
AK	11.7	3.1	NE	14.0	5.8
AZ	10.0	4.4	NV	10.8	3.6
AR	16.9	10.2	NH	4.2	2.0
CA	10.0	3.3	NJ	9.7	4.4
CO	4.4	2.2	NM	12.3	6.7
CT	9.7	5.2	NY	10.5	3.8
DE	11.7	4.0	NC	11.1	2.4
DC	9.1	2.1	ND	7.4	2.2
FL	8.0	3.7	OH	10.2	5.6
GA	10.9	4.3	OK	14.6	7.2
HI	6.3	0.8	OR	7.4	4.1
ID	9.3	4.2	PA	7.2	4.0
IL	10.3	4.9	RI	11.7	4.9
IN	10.4	5.3	SC	10.8	6.4
IA	8.2	3.7	SD	9.4	3.3
KS	11.1	5.5	TN	12.5	4.6
KY	15.5	6.0	TX	11.8	4.6
LA	11.1	5.8	UT	9.0	2.7
ME	4.2	2.9	VT	9.4	3.7
MD	6.5	2.7	VA	7.8	1.8
MA	7.6	2.7	WA	7.8	2.5
MI	10.5	5.7	WV	14.0	6.7
MN	5.8	1.7	WI	9.2	3.1
MS	11.8	5.9	WY	8.7	4.8
MO	13.4	7.0			

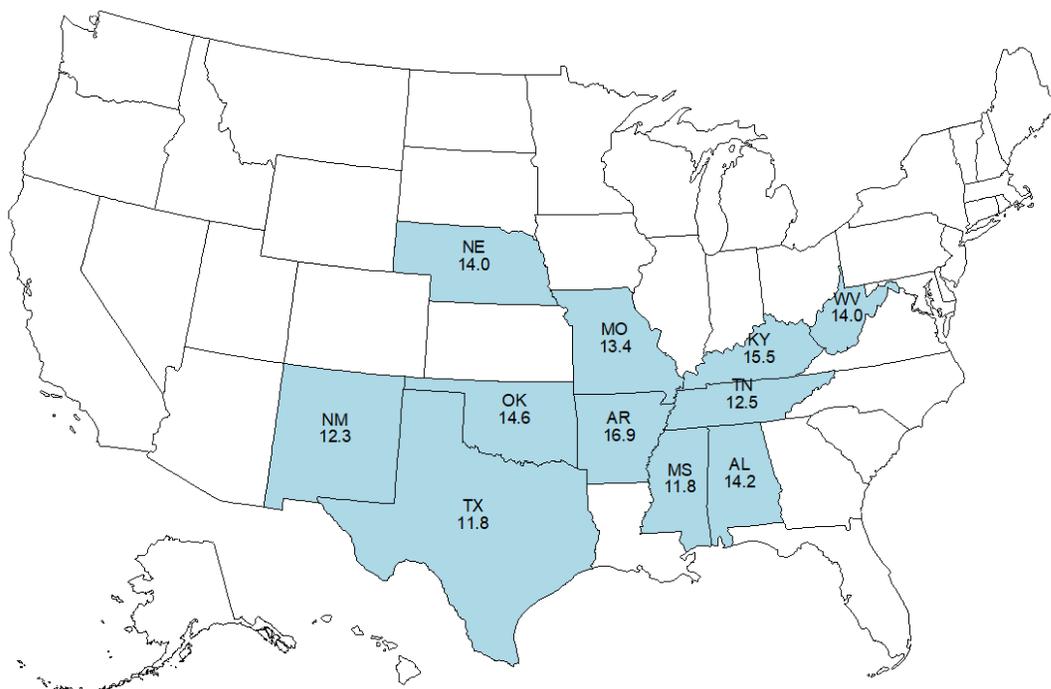
Source: Authors' calculations. The numbers are two-year averages found by summing the number of food-insecure seniors in each category by state across the 2019-2020 December Current Population Surveys and dividing by the corresponding total number of seniors in each state across the two years.

In Table 3, we present state-level estimates of food insecurity among those between 50 and 59 for 2020 based on averages of 2019-2020 data. The range for food insecurity spans from 4.2% in Maine and New Hampshire to 16.9% in Arkansas and, for VLFS, from 0.8% in Hawaii to 10.2% in Arkansas. This cross-state range of food insecurity and VLFS exceeds that found among seniors ages 60+. However, after adjusting for the differences in means, the level of cross-state inequality in food insecurity is actually higher among seniors 60+, but the same for VLFS.

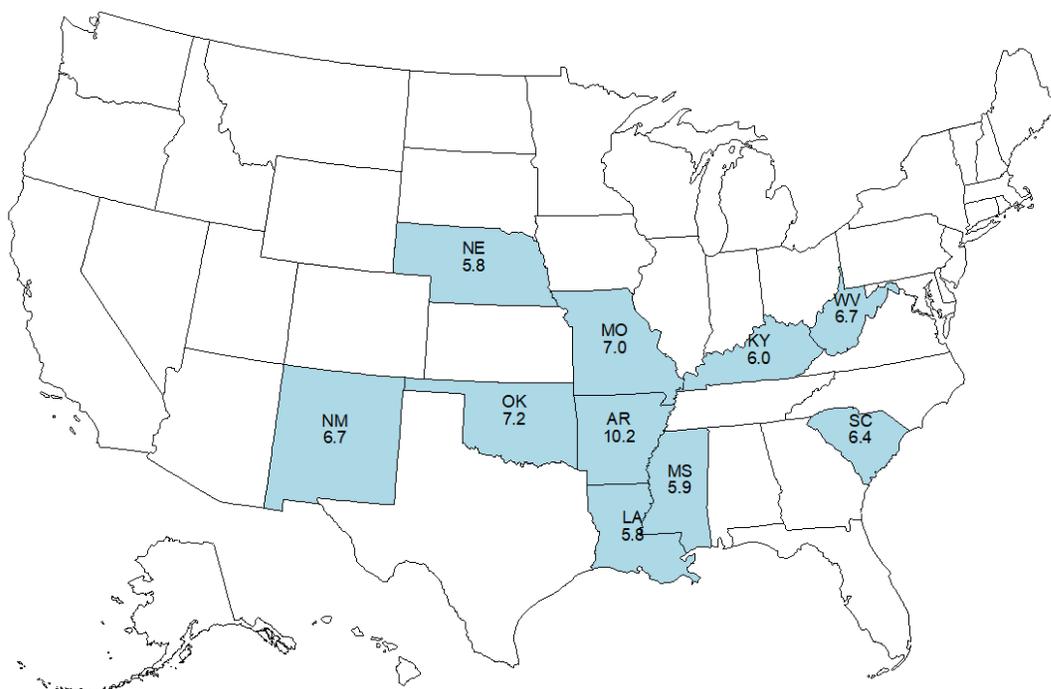
In the maps below we highlight the ten states with the highest rates of hunger among those between 50 and 59 in 2020 (includes an eleventh because of a tie). For food insecurity, nine of the states are located in the South and Southwest. The ten-highest states for VLFS are equally

concentrated in the South. For the past three years, Kentucky has led the nation with the highest rates of food insecurity and VLFS among 50-59 year-olds, but Arkansas has supplanted Kentucky in 2020 in this measure of hardship among older adults.

Map 1. Top 10 States for Rates of Food Insecurity among 50-59 Year Olds*



* 11 states are depicted, reflecting a tie.

Map 2. Top 10 States for Rates of Very Low Food Security among 50-59 Year Olds

We now turn to food insecurity and VLFS rates by large metropolitan areas (i.e., more than 1 million in total population) for persons between the ages of 50 and 59. These are based on data from 2016 to 2020. This is found in Table 4. Like with state rates, there is a wide range of estimates. For food insecurity, the highest rate, in the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma metro area, is over six times higher than the lowest rate, in Denver, Colorado (17.6% versus 2.8%). (These are the same two metro areas as last year.) For VLFS, the highest is again in the Oklahoma City metro area and the lowest is, like last year, Raleigh, North Carolina (8.4% and 0.9%).

Table 4. Estimates of 50-59 Food Insecurity in Metropolitan Areas >1,000,000 Persons in 2020

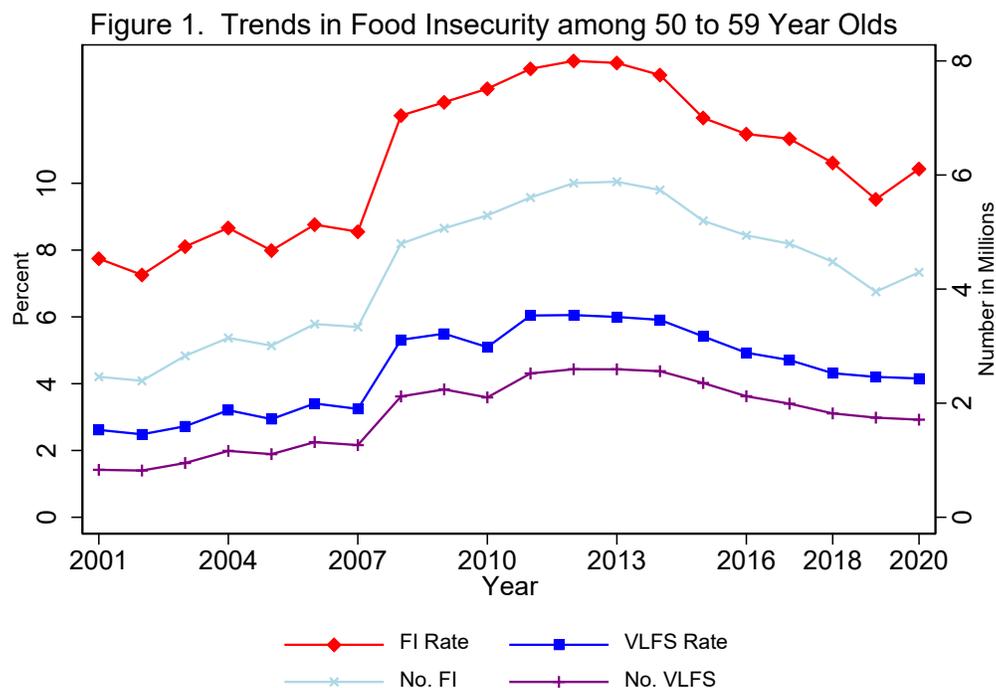
	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	8.3%	3.5%
Austin-Round Rock, TX	5.6	2.5
Baltimore-Columbia-Towson, MD	13.3	6.2
Birmingham-Hoover, AL	13.4	4.2
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	7.6	3.1
Buffalo-Cheektowaga-Niagara Falls, NY	10.4	3.5
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC	6.5	2.7
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	9.1	4.1
Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN	10.6	3.8

Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, OH	10.0	5.7
Columbus, OH	11.1	4.8
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	8.8	2.6
Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO	2.8	1.8
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	10.3	5.2
Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, CT	14.9	6.2
Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land, TX	12.5	5.0
Indianapolis, IN	12.9	6.4
Jacksonville, FL	11.0	3.0
Kansas City, MO-KS	14.5	5.5
Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV	10.8	3.9
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	11.2	4.5
Louisville, KY-IN	8.4	4.3
Memphis, TN-MS-AR	14.8	8.3
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	11.6	2.0
Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI	8.3	4.5
Minneapolis-St Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	6.2	3.1
Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro, TN	6.9	1.8
New Orleans-Metairie, LA	12.3	6.4
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	9.0	3.3
Oklahoma City, OK	17.6	8.4
Orlando, FL	6.5	2.0
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE	7.4	3.1
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	13.0	6.6
Pittsburgh, PA	8.9	5.5
Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA	8.1	3.7
Providence-Warwick, RI-MA	12.9	5.0
Raleigh, NC	8.4	0.9
Richmond, VA	4.2	2.7
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	10.8	4.0
Rochester, NY	12.1	4.2
Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Roseville, CA	6.3	3.2
St. Louis, MO-IL	8.5	4.4
Salt Lake City, UT	10.1	4.2
San Antonio, TX	9.3	4.6
San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA	6.9	2.6
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	5.9	1.6
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	6.6	1.1
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	6.4	1.7
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	7.6	4.3
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC	13.9	7.2
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	5.7	2.5

Source: Authors' calculations. The numbers are five-year averages found by summing the number of food-insecure seniors in each category by metro areas across the 2016-2020 December Current Population Surveys and dividing by the corresponding total number of seniors in each metro area across the five years.

II. FOOD INSECURITY OVER TIME

To better understand how the 2020 food insecurity and VLFS estimates compare to prior years, in Figure 1 we provide estimated trends in food insecurity since 2001. We display results for all those between ages 50 and 59 in terms of the percentage (left-hand axis) and number in millions (right-hand axis). The figure shows that there was a sharp increase in both food insecurity and VLFS with the onset of the Great Recession in 2008, and these rates continued to increase until 2012, before declining starting in 2014. Food insecurity and VLFS rates remain statistically significantly higher than before the Great Recession. This differs from the general population where the rates reached an all-time low in 2019 (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2021). Like the 50-59 group, seniors also continue to have rates higher than in 2007 (Ziliak and Gundersen, 2022). Since 2001, the fraction of older adults experiencing food insecurity and VLFS has increased by 35%, and 59%. In terms of the number of food insecure persons, this rose in each group rose by 74%, and 106%.



In Table 5, we take a deeper look into underlying changes in the composition of food insecurity among 50-59-year-olds from 2019 to 2020. The table presents percentage point changes in both categories of food insecurity by the same set of socioeconomic characteristics in Table 1. The increase of 0.9 percentage points in food insecurity was borne by certain groups more so than

others. For example, the following groups had statistically significantly larger increases above 4 percentage points: those below the poverty line; Black persons; and Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial. For VLFS, since the overall change was small and statistically insignificant, there weren't many statistically significant changes in this group. The only group seeing a large decline were those without a disability (3.1 percentage points).

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
Overall	0.91*	-0.05
By Income		
Below the Poverty Line	5.12*	2.08
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	2.08	0.81
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	0.46	-0.01
Income Not Reported	0.31	-1.06
By Race		
White	0.03	-0.08
Black	4.09**	-0.48
Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial	4.17**	0.67
By Hispanic Status		
Hispanic	2.50	0.35
Non-Hispanic	0.61	-0.12
By Marital Status		
Married	1.58***	0.38
Widowed	1.79	0.42
Divorced or Separated	-1.37	-1.25
Never Married	0.23	-0.76
By Metropolitan Location		
Non-Metro	-0.84	-1.06
Metro	1.21**	0.12
By Age		
50-54	1.47**	0.12
55-59	0.38	-0.20
By Employment Status		
Employed	0.83*	-0.16
Unemployed	5.52	3.46
Retired	-1.46	-1.09
Disabled ¹	-1.63	-1.46
By Gender		
Male	1.93***	0.84*
Female	-0.06	-0.89**
By Grandchild Present		
No Grandchild Present	0.67	-0.10
Grandchildren Present	6.12*	0.98
By Homeownership Status		
Homeowner	1.22***	0.25
Renter	-0.17	-1.09
By Veteran Status		
Veteran	-1.87	-0.88
Not a Veteran	1.11**	0.01

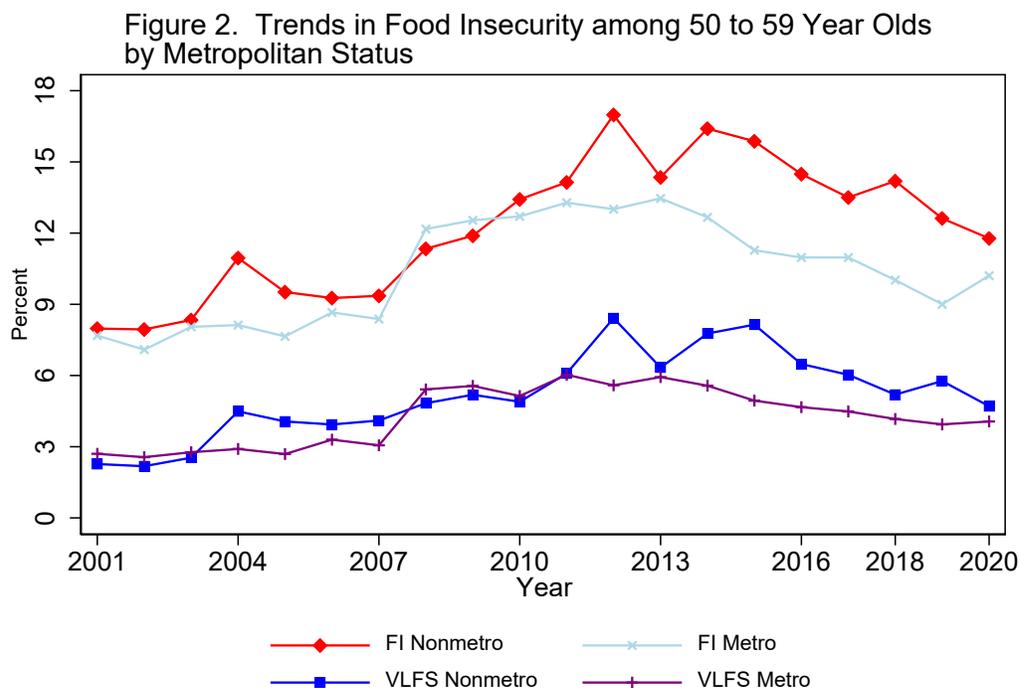
By Disability Status ²		
Without a disability	-5.22**	-3.06*
With a disability	1.69***	0.33

Source: Authors' calculations. The numbers in the table reflect percentage point changes from 2019-2020. The asterisks denote statistical significance at the following levels: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

¹Disabled employment status means the person is out of the labor force because of a disability or other reason.

²Disability status refers to those with limitations on select activities of daily living.

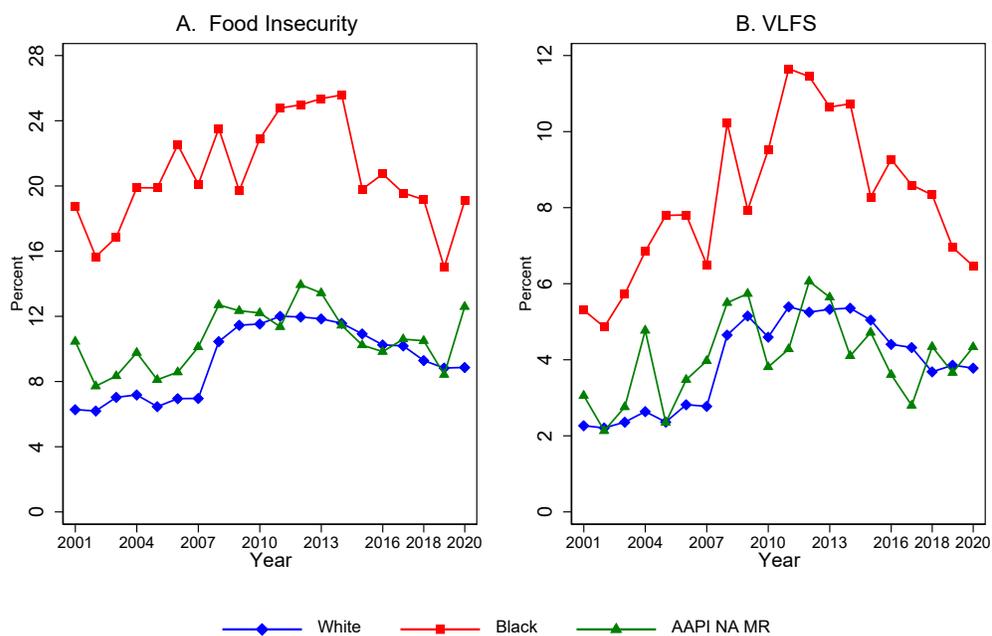
In the next set of figures, we examine trends in food insecurity since 2001 across a variety of subpopulations found in Tables 1 and 5. We begin in Figure 2 with trends in food insecurity for those living in metropolitan areas versus nonmetropolitan areas. The figure shows that for most years, food insecurity rates were higher in nonmetro areas, and every year after the Great Recession. For VLFS, a similar pattern holds, with rates being higher in nonmetro areas every year since 2011. In 2020, the gap did narrow though under both measures.



Panel **a-A** of Figure 3 depicts trends in food insecurity across different races and panel **b-B** is for VLFS. As discussed above, food insecurity and VLFS for Black older adults are substantially higher than for white older adults. These figures reveal that these differences were present in each year from 2001 to 2020. Looking at 2001 versus 2019, though, the food insecurity rates rose for white but not Black older adults over this time period; in fact, Black food insecurity rates are lower in 2019 than in 2001. (The rates for Blacks did increase substantially, though, in 2020.) For VLFS, though, both Black older adults and white older adults have higher rates in 2020 than in 2001. Comparing white older adults and the older adults in the category Asian American,

Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial, rates are generally higher among the latter category. This didn't hold in 2019 but it did in 2020 due to the large increase in food insecurity among those in the category of Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial.

Figure 3. Trends in 50 to 59 Year Olds Food Insecurity by Race



Note: 'AAPI NA MR' denotes Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial

In Figure 4, we present trends broken down by Hispanic status. For food insecurity, the rates are higher among Hispanic than non-Hispanic adults age 50-59 in all years, albeit this gap narrowed dramatically starting in 2014 when rates for Hispanics declined substantially and stayed relatively similar for non-Hispanics. The trends in VLFS are similar up until 2014 when the rates become almost identical.

Figure 4. Trends in 50 to 59 Year Olds Food Insecurity by Hispanic Ethnicity

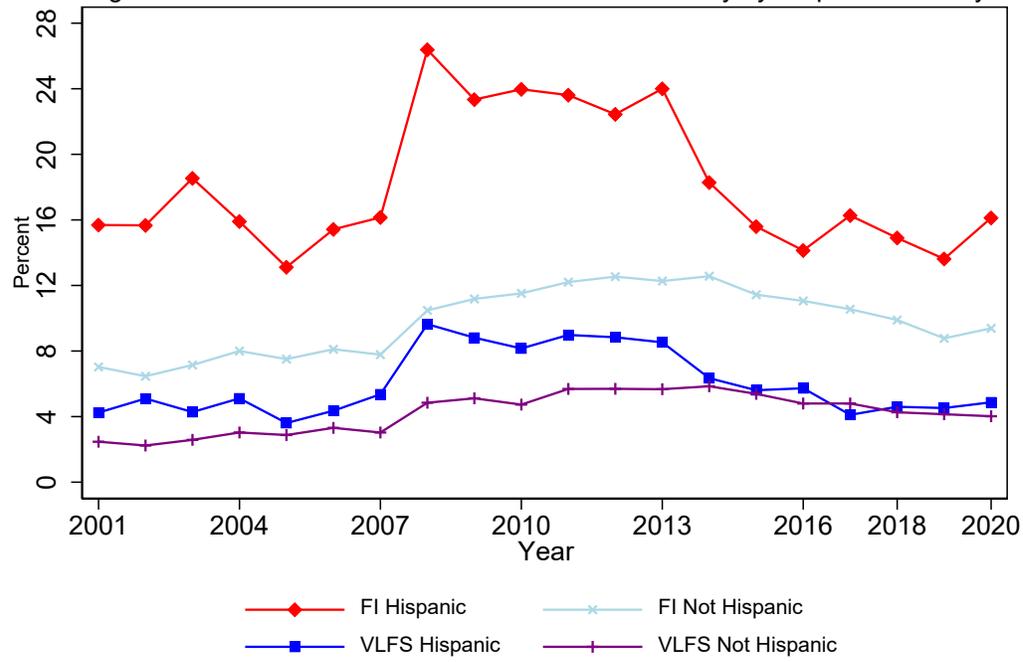
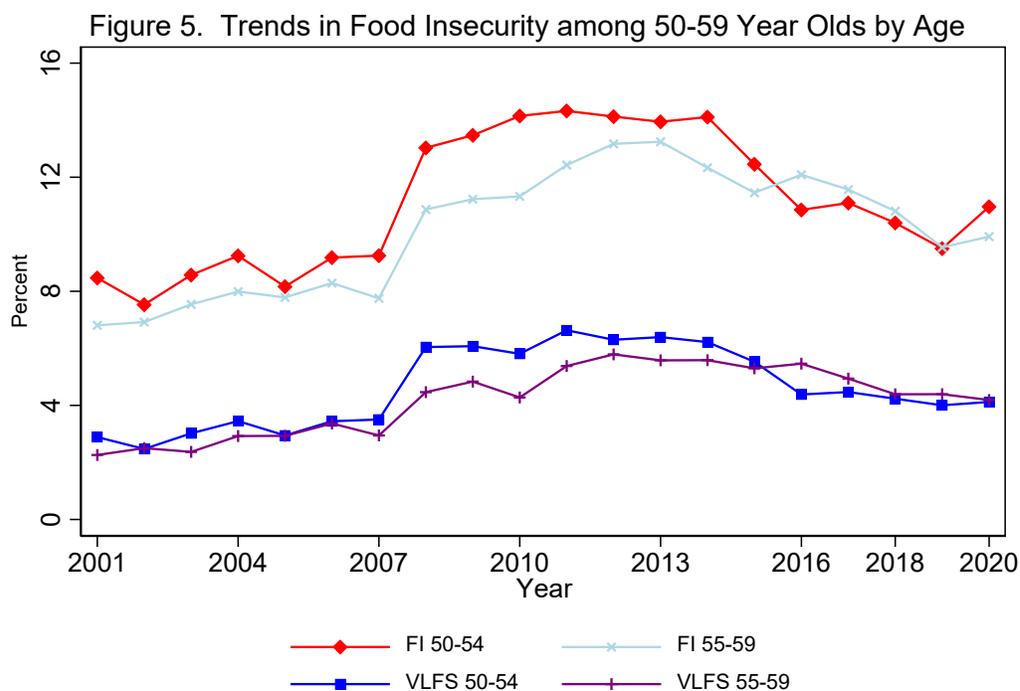


Figure 5 presents a parallel set of results broken down into two age groups—50-54 year-olds and 55-59 year-olds. For the 60+ group in every year rates of food insecurity and VLFS are highest for those 60-69, then 70-79, then 80+ (Ziliak and Gundersen 2022). In contrast, for the two age groups in Figure 5, with the exception of the years surrounding the Great Recession when food insecurity and VLFS were higher among 50-54 year-olds compared to 55-59 year-olds, the rates were quite similar across the two age groups. There was, however, a larger statistically significant increase in the food insecurity rates of those in the younger age cohort in 2020 than in the older age cohort.



III. CONCLUSION

This report demonstrates that food insecurity is an ongoing challenge among those between the ages of 50 and 59 in America. Just under one in ten persons between the ages of 50 and 59 were food insecure in 2020, which is 35% higher than in 2001. VLFS has grown even more, up 59% since 2001. Gundersen and Ziliak (2015) surveyed the research literature on the links between food insecurity and health outcomes in the United States. They note that compared to children and seniors there is comparatively less research on health outcomes of food-insecure non-elderly adults, but there does appear to be evidence that food insecurity is associated with reduced nutrient intakes, heightened mental health challenges and depression, and risk of diabetes and related health outcomes. Many of these studies rely on data that pre-dates the stark rise of food insecurity during the Great Recession, suggesting more rigorous analyses on updated data are

necessary to better inform public health policy on the consequences of rising food insecurity among older adults.

As noted in our report on senior food insecurity (Ziliak and Gundersen, 2022), a particular concern at this writing is the ongoing global pandemic brought about by the novel coronavirus, which continues to impose great costs in terms of lost life and economic security. The ramifications of the crisis for adult food insecurity are still being borne out at this time, though with the robust recovery in labor markets, one might expect some improvement in food insecurity in 2021. However, these gains in employment and wages have been met with the highest increases in inflation in four decades, which could deteriorate household budgets and exacerbate food insecurity. This underscores the need for ongoing monitoring of food insecurity among older adults separate from seniors.

APPENDIX

The Current Population Survey (CPS) is a nationally representative survey conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, providing employment, income, and poverty statistics. Households are selected to be representative of civilian households at the state and national levels, using suitably appropriate sampling weights. The CPS does not include information on individuals living in group quarters including nursing homes or assisted living facilities. For this report and previous reports, we use data from the December Supplement which contains the Food Security Supplement (FSS). The questions from the FSS are found in Appendix Table 1. Our CPS sample is restricted to those between the ages of 50 and 59. In 2020, this results in 10,386 sample observations. Appendix Table 2 presents selected summary statistics for the CPS sample.

Appendix Table 1: Questions on the Food Security Supplement

Food Insecurity Question	Asked of Households with Children	Asked of Households without Children
1. “We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.” Was that often, sometimes , or never true for you in the last 12 months?	x	x
2. “The food that we bought just didn’t last and we didn’t have money to get more.” Was that often, sometimes , or never true for you in the last 12 months?	x	x
3. “We couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” Was that often, sometimes , or never true for you in the last 12 months?	x	x
4. “We relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed our children because we were running out of money to buy food.” Was that often, sometimes , or never true for you in the last 12 months?	x	
5. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in the household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)	x	x
6. “We couldn’t feed our children a balanced meal, because we couldn’t afford that.” Was that often, sometimes , or never true for you in the last 12 months?	x	
7. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)	x	x
8. (If yes to Question 5) How often did this happen— almost every month, some months but not every month , or in only 1 or 2 months?	x	x
9. “The children were not eating enough because we just couldn’t afford enough food.” Was that often, sometimes , or never true for you in the last 12 months?	x	
10. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry, but didn’t eat, because you couldn’t afford enough food? (Yes/No)	x	x
11. In the last 12 months, did you lose weight because you didn’t have enough money for food? (Yes/No)	x	x
12. In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of any of the children’s meals because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)	x	
13. In the last 12 months did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)	x	x
14. In the last 12 months, were the children ever hungry but you just couldn’t afford more food? (Yes/No)	x	
15. (If yes to Question 13) How often did this happen— almost every month, some months but not every month , or in only 1 or 2 months?	x	x
16. In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever skip a meal because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)	x	
17. (If yes to Question 16) How often did this happen— almost every month, some months but not every month , or in only 1 or 2 months?	x	
18. In the last 12 months did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)	x	

Notes: Responses in bold indicate an “affirmative” response.

Appendix Table 2: Selected Characteristics of 50-59 Year Olds in 2020

Income Categories	
Below the Poverty Line	0.06
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	0.11
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	0.57
Missing Income	0.26
Racial Categories	
White	0.79
Black	0.12
Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial	0.09
Hispanic Status	
Hispanic	0.16
Non-Hispanic	0.84
Marital Status	
Married	0.63
Widowed	0.03
Divorced or Separated	0.2
Never Married	0.14
Metropolitan Location	
Non-Metro	0.14
Metro	0.86
Age	
50 to 54	0.49
55 to 59	0.51
Employment Status ¹	
Employed	0.72
Unemployed	0.04
Retired	0.06
Disabled	0.17
By Gender	
Male	0.49
Female	0.51
Grandchild Present	
No Grandchild Present	0.96
Grandchild Present	0.04
By Homeownership Status	
Homeowner	0.77
Renter	0.23
By Veteran Status	
Veteran	0.07
Not a Veteran	0.93
By Disability Status ²	
Without a disability	0.89
With a disability	0.11

Source: Authors' calculations from 2020 December Current Population Survey.

¹Disabled employment status means the person is out of the labor force because of a disability or other reason.

²Disability status refers to those with limitations on select activities of daily living.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Craig Gundersen, Ph.D., is the Snee Family Endowed Chair at the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP) and a Professor in the Department of Economics at Baylor University. He is also on the Technical Advisory Group for Feeding America, the lead researcher on Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap project, the Managing Editor for Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy, a Round Table Fellow of the Farm Foundation, and a Faculty Affiliate of the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at the University of Notre Dame. His research concentrates on the causes and consequences of food insecurity and on the evaluation of food assistance programs, with an emphasis on SNAP. Gundersen is a Fellow of the Agricultural and Applied Economic Association (AAEA).

James P. Ziliak, Ph.D., holds the Carol Martin Gatton Endowed Chair in Microeconomics in the Department of Economics and is Founding Director of the Center for Poverty Research at the University of Kentucky. He received his BA/BS degrees in economics and sociology from Purdue University, and his Ph.D. in Economics from Indiana University. He served as assistant and associate professor of economics at the University of Oregon, and has held visiting positions at the Brookings Institution, University College London, University of Michigan, and University of Wisconsin. His research expertise is in the areas of labor economics, poverty, food insecurity, and tax and transfer policy. Recent projects include the causes and consequences of hunger among older Americans; trends in earnings and income volatility in the U.S.; trends in the antipoverty effectiveness of the social safety net; the origins of persistent poverty in America; and regional wage differentials across the earnings distribution. He is editor of *Welfare Reform and its Long Term Consequences for America's Poor* published by Cambridge University Press (2009) and *Appalachian Legacy: Economic Opportunity after the War on Poverty* published by Brookings Institution Press (2012), and co-editor of *SNAP Matters: How Food Stamps Affect Health and Well Being* at Stanford University Press (2015).

Contact information:

Dr. Craig Gundersen
Baylor University Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty
One Bear Place #97320 Waco, TX 76798
Craig_Gundersen@baylor.edu

Dr. James P. Ziliak
Center for Poverty Research, University of Kentucky
550 South Limestone St
Gatton Building, Suite 234
Lexington, KY 40506-0034
Phone: (859) 257-6902
Email: jziliak@uky.edu

