

SOUTHERN MOVEMENT BUILDING LANDSCAPE SCAN

State Profiles- Georgia and Florida



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>02</u>	Context
<u>03</u>	Demographic Shifts in the South
<u>04</u>	Surviving the Pandemic
<u>05</u>	Resurgence of the Racial Justice Cause
<u>06</u>	State Profile: Georgia
<u>09</u>	State Profile: Florida

LOCAL ORGANIZING IN SOUTHERN STATES



A key finding of the Southern Landscape Scan research project is the region's long-standing racial justice organizing and its underfunded reality. A few Southern states (such as Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, and Virginia) have seen the benefits of building up local social justice infrastructures. However, more than half of these thirteen Southern states are still lagging in this direction, with South Carolina and West Virginia having the weakest social justice infrastructure.

Context

Understanding the racial justice and power-building infrastructure of today's Southern states requires knowledge of its formative history. Beginning in the colonial era, Indigenous communities suffered oppressive and unjust practices at the hands of the colonizers. Many practices were later codified into laws. The South has inherited this legacy of White Supremacy which was exacerbated by capitalism in the form of the lucrative agriculture industry of the region. In the decades since, national and state-level policies have both explicitly and implicitly discriminated against non-White communities such as Asian immigrants, the Latinx community, and Indigenous people, among others.

Even until today, the shadow of colonialism, slavery and segregation looms large. Discriminatory housing policies and practices, gentrification, white flight, and economic divestment have continued to lock Black families in areas of high poverty rates, underfunded schools, poor transportation, lack of healthcare access, and low economic opportunities.

In the midst of economic crises, Southern politicians have always been advancing their political agendas. For example, many Southern states have imposed unnecessary legal restrictions to reproductive care for women. Republican-controlled states have enacted voter suppression laws whereby voting locations become inaccessible for low-income and BIPOC communities, among other restrictions. Explicit fear mongering targeted at Black, Latinx, Asian, and other communities deemed "problematic" by elected officials and other leaders, has given rise to violence and intimidation by individuals and local police.



LOCAL ORGANIZING IN SOUTHERN STATES



❖ Demographic Shifts in the South

According to Census data, the Southern population has grown by 35%, outpacing the Midwest and northeast parts of the nation. In 2020, as many as 16 states saw a shift in congressional reapportionment. This means that Southern politics may play an even bigger role in the U.S. However, the Census did a poor job in capturing certain disadvantaged populations in the South as the Census Bureau identifies them as “hard to count.”¹ This may directly change the amount of federal dollars that are allocated to Southern communities.

The region’s growing minority communities affect every aspect of its racial justice organizing landscape. The present social justice infrastructure has supported local organizing despite having limited resources. A key question is what could more resources mean to existing social justice infrastructure. The overall racial and ethnic diversity of America has increased since 2010. This trend also applies to a few Southern states, such as Texas, Georgia, and Florida.

Between 2010 and 2020, the Two or More Races (Multiracial) population has increased by 276%¹. It was measured at 9 million people in 2010 and is now 33.8 million people in 2020. The next largest racial populations

were the Asian alone or in combination group (24 million), the American Indian and Alaska Native alone or in combination group (9.7 million), and the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone or in combination group (1.6 million).

The Hispanic or Latino population, which includes people of any race, was 62.1 million in 2020. The Hispanic or Latino population grew 23%, while the population that was not of Hispanic or Latino origin grew 4.3% since 2010. The White Alone population declined by 8.6%.

As Southern demographics shift to higher populations of BIPOC residents, younger residents and a higher population of female voters, the potential to build power is increasing, yet rural organizing remains a challenge in the mostly rural Southern region. These demographic shifts are also being met with intentional attacks on a myriad of progressive efforts and initiatives to organize a growing progressive base.

1 Quoted in Donna M. Owens, “[The Pandemic May Leave Communities of Color Undercounted](#),” Vox, May 12, 2020.

2 U.S. Census Bureau [website](#).

LOCAL ORGANIZING IN SOUTHERN STATES



✦ Surviving the Pandemic

Pandemic challenges have disproportionately impacted BIPOC Communities in the South. Disparities in both infection and death rates among Black and Hispanic/Latino residents of the South are associated with a range of social factors that have caused inequitable access



to food, jobs, housing, tools of transportation and health care.³ According to [the Southern Economic Advancement Project](#) which surveyed participants in 12 Southern states, food insecurity and child care have been the two most challenging issues during the pandemic.

Systemic racism in the healthcare system has been revealed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as one of America's underlying conditions. Many Southern states have seen the highest infection rates in the nation.

With the South also having the highest rates of uninsured population due to poverty,

access to healthcare continues to be inequitable based on income and race. The disproportionately high rate of COVID cases and deaths among BIPOC communities in the South are partly due to racialized residential segregation. Over-policing of black bodies and police brutality add more trauma to this national crisis.

The American economy has seen small, minority-owned businesses being disproportionately impacted as large corporations receive over \$500 billion of relief. The worsening economic crisis in the South, where employer discrimination is rampant, heightened the “zero-sum” mentality among people who want to protect the status quo, systemic racism and corporate control of government.

Meanwhile, global warming caused catastrophic changes to the climate, and BIPOC communities in the South are at the frontline to experience these impacts. The year 2020 is known to be the most active hurricane season on record. This climate crisis has been exacerbated by economic investment in fossil fuels and corporatized agriculture. As extractive industries expanded throughout the region, especially in Appalachia and along the Gulf Coast, more and more Southerners are faced with choosing between jobs and a healthy environment to live in.

³ Blake Farmer, “[The Coronavirus Doesn't Discriminate, But U.S. Health Care Showing Familiar Biases](#),” NPR News, April 2, 2020.

STATE PROFILE: GEORGIA



For funders who want to support racial justice organizing in the South, there are certain key strategic target regions that are particularly important in the coming years. Take Georgia and Florida for example. The politics in these two states are in flux, and progressive movements are at a critical point of making political changes. They also have relatively mature social justice infrastructure which funders can help strengthen and solidify.

THE STATE OF GEORGIA

Key Issues and Trends

High Incarceration Rate

Georgia has our nation's fifth largest prison system and leads our nation in persons under correctional supervision. Blacks comprise 32% of Georgia's overall population, yet they comprise 51% of our local jail population and 60% of our state prison population.⁵ Over one half million Georgians are either in jail, prison, on parole, or probation, far surpassing the national average. Of that number 61.21% are Black people.⁶

Youth Incarceration

Georgia's own Criminal Justice Coordinating Council reports that minority youth disproportionately outnumber those who are white at every stage of its juvenile justice system.⁷

Housing Insecurity

Low- and moderate-income households and BIPOC communities face increasing housing challenges, including eviction, displacement and rent arrearages. For example, according to the Atlanta Region Eviction Tracker, around 11,000 evictions have been filed by landlords as of September 2021, a 30% increase from the previous month.

Exclusion in Schools

In Georgia's public school system, students of color have been proportionately targeted by discipline, suspension and exclusion.

⁵ ["Incarceration Rates in Georgia."](#) The Vera Institute.

⁶ ["Racial & Ethnic Disparities in State Prisons."](#) The Sentencing Project, 2016.

⁷ ["Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System,"](#) National Conference of State Legislatures, July 15, 2020.

STATE PROFILE: GEORGIA



State Politics

❖ Citizen's Arrest Law Overturned

Although the tragic killing of Ahmaud Arbery led to the enactment of a historic hate crimes law in Georgia, lawmakers are yet to overhaul the state's Civil War-era citizen's arrest law, which was originally designed to capture enslaved Black people. Later the ACLU led the overturning of this law.⁸

❖ Voter-suppression Laws

In 2021, Georgia passed a restrictive voting law Senate Bill 202. Since then, voting rights activists have been demanding more action from Congress to pass national voting rights legislation. They have also been urging major Georgia-based corporations to act.⁹

❖ Anti-immigrant Laws and Sentiments

Georgia passed an anti-immigrant law in 2011. Although these laws were later found to be unconstitutional, Republicans in Georgia have continued to run anti-immigrant political campaigns.

❖ Exclusion in Schools

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Social Justice Infrastructure

❖ Historic Investment

In May of 2021, Georgia Power and its foundation announced their plan to invest \$15 million a year for the next five years to advance racial equity and social justice efforts in Georgia.¹⁰

❖ Emerging Support from Business Sector

ATL Action for Racial Equity rallied over 250 businesses in the metro Atlanta area to sign on to a racial equity initiative.¹¹

8 ACLU Georgia, [Annual Report: 2019-2020](#).

9 Hannah Miao, "[Georgia Voting Rights Activists Pressure Big Corporations to Oppose GOP-backed Ballot Restrictions](#)," CNBC, March 14, 2021.

10 Maria Saporta, "[Georgia Power to Invest \\$75 Million in Racial Equity, Social Justice Efforts](#)," Saporta Report, May 24, 2021.

11 [ATL Action for Racial Equity website](#)

STATE PROFILE: GEORGIA



🗘 ACLU

[ACLU Georgia](#) has played a significant role in defending basic civil liberties that have been impacted by regressive legislations in the state. For example, in 2020, following the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, ACLU Georgia joined the campaign to help Glynn County pursue a Citizens' Police Review Board.¹² In the same year, after Georgia lawmakers introduced two bills seeking to criminalize the right to assemble, ACLU Georgia led efforts to successfully stop these bills.

🗘 HBCUs

Georgia is home to 10 HBCUs. Since 2018, over 100 schools have re-emerged as centers of youth activism. TIME magazine identified them as “school-to-activism pipelines.”¹³ In 2021, scholars at Atlanta HBCU Spelman College and Georgia State University will use a \$250,000 grant to archive Black women’s religious activism.¹⁴

🗘 Voting Rights Activism

Georgia has been leading the nation’s voter registration campaigns in recent years, thanks to the efforts of many 501c3 organizations, including the [New Georgia Project](#), [ProGeorgia](#), [Latino Community Fund Georgia](#), etc.

Recent Local Organizing Efforts

🗘 In 2019, the Communities Over Cages and Close the Jail ATL Campaign won legislation to close the Atlanta City Detention Center (since 1996) through a community-led taskforce. Activists have since proposed to repurpose the facility into a Center for Wellness & Freedom and reallocate the operation funds (\$32.5 million) back into the community.¹⁵

🗘 The 287 (g) program has been part of an anti-immigrant agenda that attacks detained immigrants and denies them food and medical care. In 2021, advocates in Georgia pushed a Say No to 287(g) campaign, leading to the closure of 39 ICE detention facilities.¹⁶

12 ACLU Georgia, [Annual Report: 2019-2020](#).

13 Maya Rhodan, “[A New Era of Protest Is Energizing Historically Black Colleges and Universities. But There Are Challenges](#),” TIME magazine, May 22, 2018.

14 Emil Moffatt, “[Spelman, Georgia State Researchers to Archive Black Women’s Religious Activism Across US](#),” WABE, December 14, 2021.

15 [Community Over Cages website](#), 2022.

16 “[ACLU Statement on DHS Plan to End 287 \(G\)](#),” ACLU.com, May 20, 2021

STATE PROFILE FLORIDA



THE STATE OF FLORIDA

Key Issues and Trends

📊 Increase in Population and Diversity

According to the 2020 Census, Florida was the third-largest state with a total population of 21.5 million.¹⁷ Almost all of Florida's population growth is from net migration. The 2020 Census data also shows that Florida is becoming more and more diverse than 2010.¹⁸

📊 Climate Injustice and Gentrification

Florida is on the front lines of sea-level rise and is seeing more extreme weather events. The environmental crisis has implicated the region's energy, transportation and water systems that support the economy. Cities like Miami have been seeing historic rising rent, driving out middle-class professionals. Low-income areas inhabited by mostly Black and Latino residents also bear the brunt of extreme temperatures. Local infrastructure has not been sufficient to handle heat emergencies.

📊 Poor Infrastructure

In 2018, the state's overburdened and aging infrastructure received a C grade

from the American Society of Civil Engineers. Florida's transit system ranks 19th nationally, just behind Georgia. The transportation problem is more acutely felt in low-income areas and BIPOC communities.

📊 Pandemic Job Loss and Education Delays

Florida's tourism-sensitive economy is particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline of tourism in Florida has led to significant job loss in related sectors. By the end of 2020, Florida had a significant percentage (14.1%) of long-term unemployment. During the pandemic, Florida has had the 27th highest economic exposure to COVID-19 (of all states in the US) based on the percentage of the state's employees in sectors with a high or medium-high level of exposure to COVID-19. The pandemic has also led to learning delays and disparities among children in Florida. For example, in 2021, 57,000 fewer children passed kindergarten readiness assessment compared to the previous year.¹⁹

¹⁷ "Florida Was Third-Largest State in 2020 with Population of 21.5 Million," U.S. Census Bureau website, August 25, 2021.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Danielle J. Brown, "More Than 40 Percent of FL Kindergarteners Are Not Ready for Kindergarten," Florida Phoenix, March 10, 2021.

STATE PROFILE: FLORIDA



❖ Low Wage

Florida's average annual wage has typically been below the US average. The most recent data showed that Florida's average wage, relative to the US average, was 87.4% in the 2019 calendar year. This has to do with the types of employment opportunities that have been growing the fastest in Florida. For example, the Accommodation & Food Services employment sector is large and has been growing faster than other industries because it is closely related to Florida's

tourism industry. But this sector has the lowest average annual wage.

❖ Housing Inequity

Florida has a housing affordability crisis that has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Since the pandemic, around 18% of renters and 12% of homeowners with a mortgage fell behind on their payments.²⁰ This crisis is also very much conditioned on race. For example, Black Florida families have the lowest homeownership rates in the state.²¹

State Politics

❖ Progress and Regress

In 2018, voters in Florida passed Amendment 4 of its Constitution. It could have been the largest act of enfranchisement in the U.S. for the last five decades, but a later law deprived residents with previous felony convictions due to remaining court debt. In February of 2022, the Florida House voted to pass HB 5, a bill to ban abortion. A month later, both the Florida House and Senate passed the Parental Rights in Education Bill (also known as the "Don't Say Gay" bill) which limits what classrooms can teach about sexual orientation and gender identity.²²

The average sentence length has also been increasing. Minority youth have been disproportionately involved with the Juvenile Justice System. Florida's voting ban against people with prior felony convictions has deprived many racial minorities of their right to vote.

❖ Racist Legislatures

In 2022, the state proposed Bill SB 242/ HB 57 to prohibit discussion of race and sex discrimination with the intention to penalize institutions and individuals for discussing the root causes of lasting social and economic implications of racism and sexism. This legislation shows the persistent pressure of white supremacy and patriarchy.

❖ Youth Incarceration

Florida has a high incarceration rate of African Americans in its prison systems.

20 "[Home Matters: 2021 Report from the Florida Housing Coalition](#)," released by the Florida Housing Coalition, 2021.

21 Ibid.

22 Kiara Alfronseca, "['Don't Say Gay' Bill Passes Florida Senate](#)," ABC News, March 8, 2022.

STATE PROFILE: FLORIDA



Social Justice Infrastructure

🔲 Growth

Since the 2000s, Florida has seen the growth of a social justice infrastructure consisting of worker centers, working-class grassroots community organizing groups, faith-based worker rights groups, and labor-community coalitions.

🔲 Strong Clusters

Florida has a clustering of organizations doing racial justice work, including ACLU Florida, United Way of North Central Florida, YWCA South Florida, Florida NOW, Florida Rural Legal Services, Florida Law Schools' Consortium on Racial Justice, Community Justice Project (Miami), Florida State University's Racial

Justice Advocacy Fund, South Florida Racial Justice Table, etc. Statewide voting rights organizing groups such as [Florida Rising](#) also played an important role.

🔲 Fragmented Ecosystem

Nonprofit leaders mention the fragmentation of Florida's nonprofit ecosystem as one challenge. There are not enough connecting tissues or partnerships.²³

🔲 Weak Infrastructure

Based on our interviews, South Florida and Orlando areas have weak progressive infrastructure but the needs are great.

Recent Local Organizing Efforts

🔲 In 2019, the Republican-led Florida Legislature passed Bill 7030 over the objections of local residents. This bill was introduced by the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD) Public Safety Commission, which was established after a mass school shooting at MSD. Dominated by law enforcement officials, the Commission introduced more

policing of schools. This went counter to many evidence-based and expert-informed solutions. Parents and educators considered such over-policing dangerous because police disproportionately arrest children of color and children with disabilities. They demonstrated in front of the school.²⁴

²³ Interview with an Executive Director of a South Florida-based nonprofit, April 2022.


²⁴ "Safe For Whom? How the MSD Commission Is Putting Florida's Children in Danger," a report released by the Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019.

STATE PROFILE: FLORIDA



- ✦ From June to September of 2020, ACLU of Florida organized multiple campaigns to urge state officials divest from policing and invest in communities.
- ✦ In March of 2021, the Florida Housing Coalition launched a Center for Racial Equity to address racial disparities in housing. The center will serve as a platform for the Coalition's efforts focused on race and equity in public and private investments, regulations, and policies.
- ✦ The Fight for \$15 campaign advocates for Florida's essential workers in service industries. Here the federal minimum has remained stuck at 2009 levels. Millions of Latino and Black residents are disproportionately represented in the low-way sector. As the Fight for \$15 movement grew to the largest protest movement in U.S. history nationally, Florida is the first state in the south to adopt such a measure. Big corporations including Amazon, Target and Walt Disney have raised or promised to raise their minimum wages to \$15.²⁵

25 Michael Sainato, "[Fight for \\$15 Minimum Wage Boosted in Florida But Biden Faces Tough Task](#)," The Guardian, November 23, 2020.



Converge specializes in supporting funders' strategy development to promote system change. We follow a proven methodology of **Racial and Intersectional Equity**© in building and shifting power to communities of color. Through our copy-righted **Power in Place**© learning community, Converge also provides training and coaching to grantee cohorts sponsored by funders who want to empower BIPOC leaders in system change work.

If you are a funder who is interested in developing system change strategies or in sponsoring a grantee cohort to learn about movement building, please contact us at info@convergeforchange.com