



COVID-19 Pandemic - CA statewide lockdown
March 16, 2020



2020 Los Angeles County WIC Survey:
July - Dec 2020

Food insecurity is defined as the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food¹. Food security is measured at the household level, differentiated into 4 categories: High, marginal, low, and very low food security. For the purposes of this brief, high and marginal food security are combined and high and food insecurity is defined as either low or very low food security.

Levels of Food Security

High Food Security: food secure households have access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.

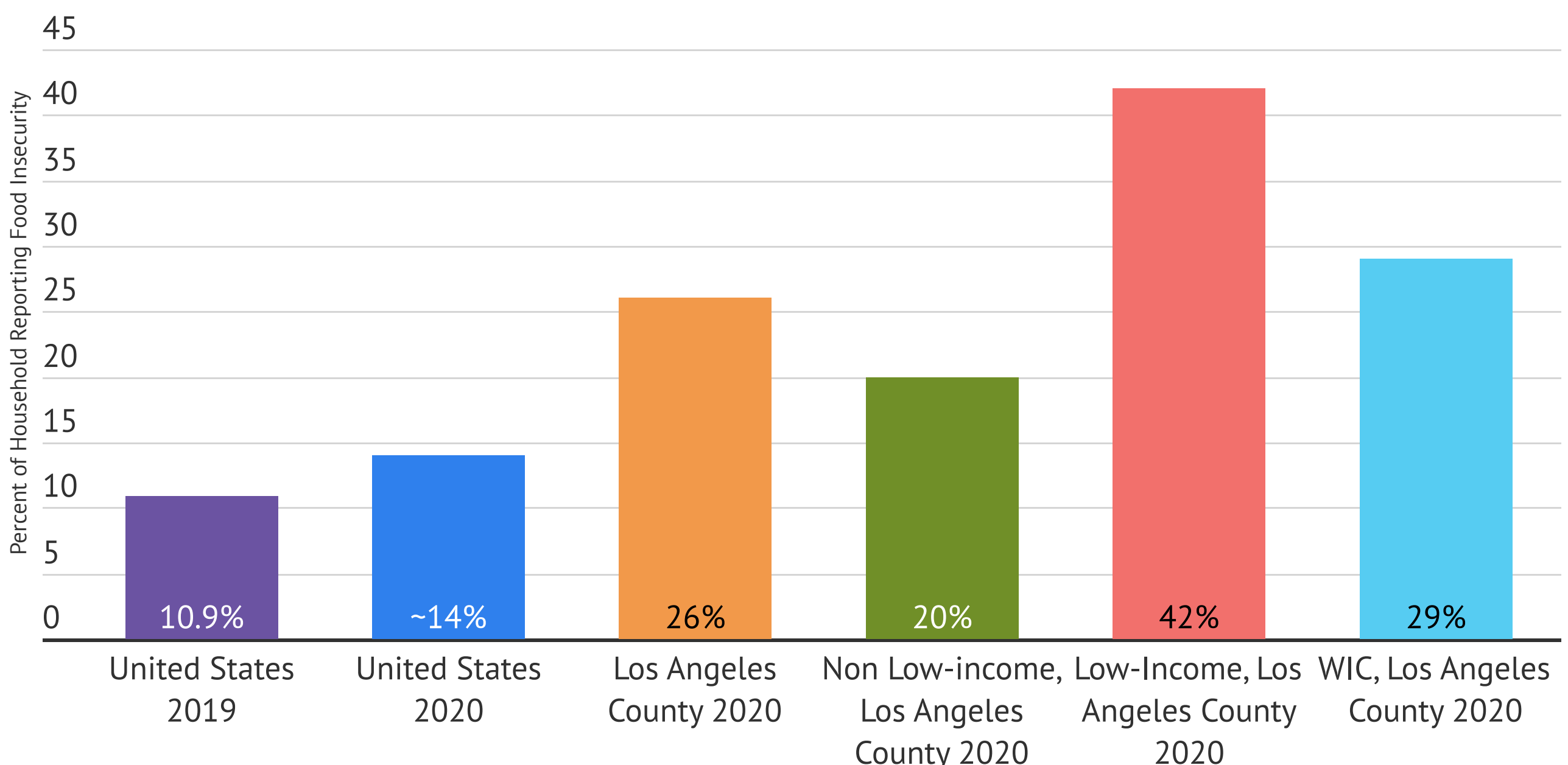
Marginal Food Security: household members express anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house but does not lead to a disruption in their eating patterns or food intake.

Low food security: households where eating patterns or reduction in food intake is not substantial but still disrupted in two months or less within the past year.

Very low food security: households are food insecure to the extent that normal eating patterns of some household members were disrupted in three or more months throughout the past year, with members reporting less than the adequate amount of food intake.

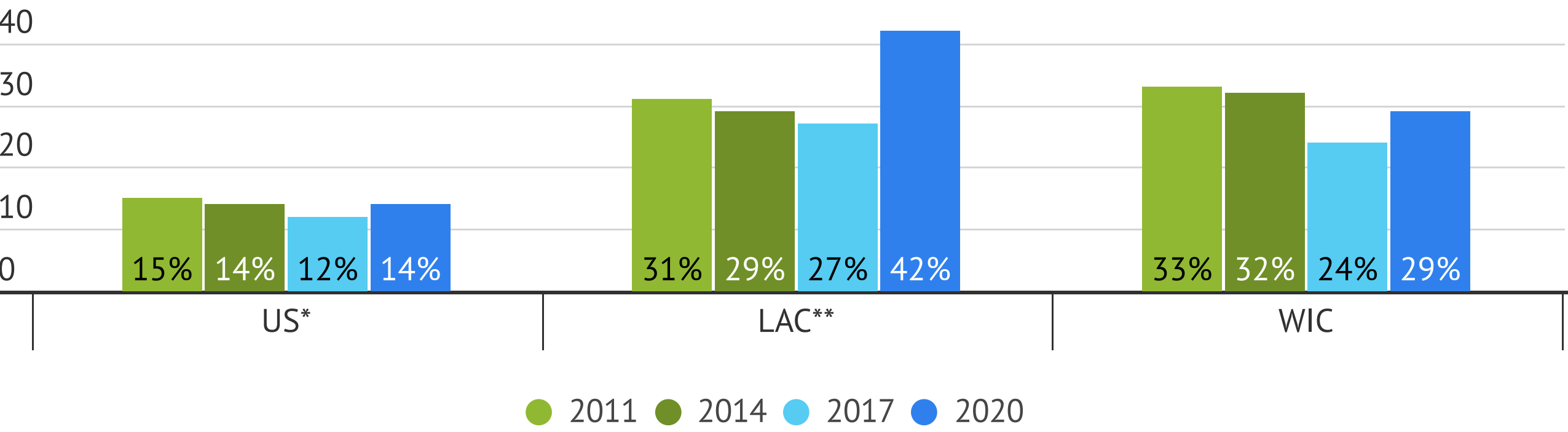
A household is classified as food insecure if members are uncertain of having, or unable to achieve the adequate food intake needs at some time in a given year. In March 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic leading to closures and stay-at-home mandates. Many families faced a reduction in their household income due to the loss of jobs and increased rates of poverty due to the economic impact of the pandemic. The Los Angeles County Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS) released a report stating that 716, 000 jobs were lost and unemployment peaked at 21.1% in 2020³. Unemployment is highly correlated with food security and it is estimated that 26% of all Los Angeles County (LAC) households and 42% of low-income households in the county experienced an instance of food insecurity from April to July 2020⁴. As a reference point, food insecurity affected 28% of low-income households in all 12 months of 2018⁴. This means that of all 3.3 million LAC households, more than 850,000 households experienced some form of food insecurity during the pandemic⁵.

Region & Population Specific Food Security



The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a resource for low-income families to access nutritious food and reduce the burden of food insecurity among women and children under the age of five. The aim of this brief is to illustrate food security trends among WIC participants in Los Angeles County, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collected from 4 administrations of the Los Angeles County WIC Survey in 2011, 2014, 2017, and 2020 were analyzed. In each survey year, over 6000 WIC participants answered the USDA 6-item food security tool for determining a household's food security level⁶. Among WIC participants, food insecurity had declined from 2011 to 2017. The pandemic is associated with a spike in the proportion of WIC households who reported some degree of food insecurity in 2020. The pandemic had a tremendous impact on families and the disparities that existed pre-pandemic were exacerbated. The 2020 Los Angeles County WIC Survey found that among WIC participants, 29% of households were considered food insecure.

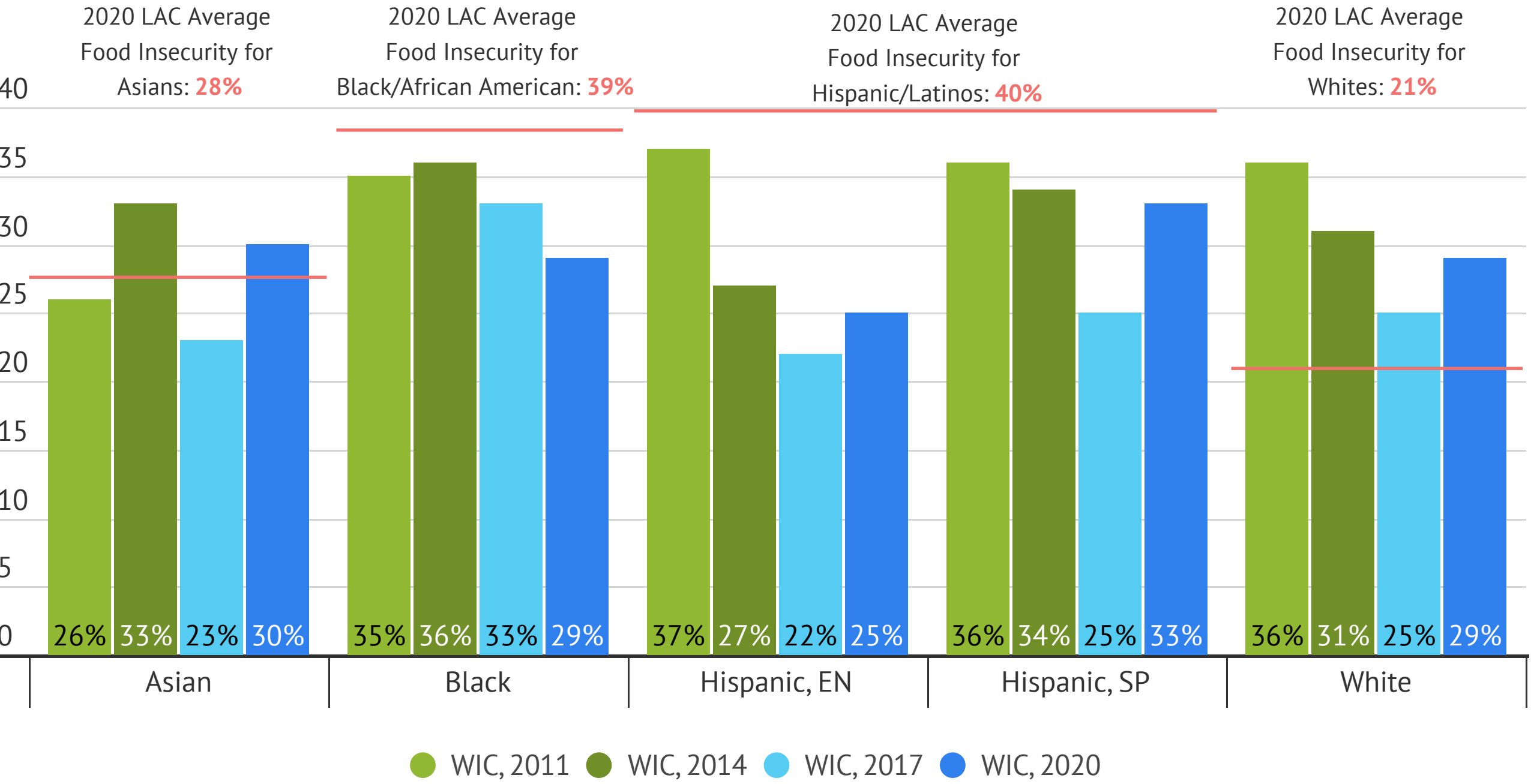
Food Insecurity Trends Compared Across Survey Years



*United States Food Security data from the USDA, Economic Research Service. Source: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/interactive-charts-and-highlights/>
 **Los Angeles County numbers are from the years 2011, 2015, 2018 & 2020. Food security for LA County was only captured in these years and historically has only been monitored for low-income families. Source: <https://healthpolicy.usc.edu/research/diet-changes-in-l-a-county-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-2/>

Food Insecurity and Race & Ethnicity

Historically, Hispanic and Black households have been at a higher risk of being food insecure and the pandemic has increased this disparity. Throughout Los Angeles County, Non-Hispanic Whites had the lowest rates of food insecurity after April 2020 at 21%, compared to 40% of Hispanic/Latinos, 39% of Blacks/African Americans, and 28% of Asians⁴. Los Angeles County WIC participants are over 80% Hispanic and 8% Black and this disparity has been apparent since 2011: Blacks and Hispanic/Latinos had the highest rates of food insecurity across every survey year. Due to the cultural differences that may exist among Hispanic English-speaking and Spanish-speaking households, food insecurity prevalence is shown separately by language. During the pandemic, Hispanic-Spanish speaking households saw the greatest increase in food insecurity while Black/African American households continued to decrease. Being able to provide supplemental food for these communities is essential to provide equal opportunities for all families to have an adequate access to affordable and nutritious foods.



1. "Food Security." https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/food_security. Oxford, 2018. Web. 12 July 2021.
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 3. Sedgwick, S., Girard, A., Ramsey, J., Larson, J., Sanchez, L., Laferriere, T. (2020). Pathways for economic resiliency: Los Angeles County 2021 – 2026.
 4. De la Haye, K., Miller, S., Saw, H., Kapteyn, S., Livings, M., Bruine de Bruin, W., Wilson, J., Weber, K., Frazzini, A., & Babboni, M. (2021). A Year of Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Racial and Ethnic Minorities Have Been Hardest Hit. White Paper, USC Leonard D. Schaeffer Center
 5. U.S. Census Bureau (2019). QuickFacts, Los Angeles County, CA (2010-2019). American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/losangelescountycalifornia>
 6. Coleman-Jenson A, Gregory CA, Rabbitt M. Definition of Food Security. 2018. Available from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>.