# Transcript - [The racial hunger gap in American cities and what do about it](https://theconversation.com/drafts/161202/edit).

<https://theconversation.com/the-racial-hunger-gap-in-american-cities-and-what-to-do-about-it-podcast-161202>

*In this episode, we look at some of the reasons behind racial disparities in U.S. food insecurity and hear from experts with their suggested solutions.*

Begins 4.39mins

To find out more I called up one of the U.S.‘s leading experts on food insecurity.

Craig Gundersen: My name is Craig Gunderson. I’m the ACES distinguished professor in the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois and I do research on the causes and consequences of food insecurity and on the evaluation of food assistance programs with an emphasis in the largest food assistance program, SNAP, formerly known as the food stamp program.

Gemma: Official statistics on food insecurity during the pandemic are yet to be published, Craig and his colleagues have been tracking what’s been going on. Remember, before the pandemic, food insecurity rates had been at an all-time low.

Craig: In 2019, to be more precise about this, there was about 35 million Americans who were food insecure. Now due to COVID, what we’re projecting is that they’ll probably be an increase in food insecurity. So we anticipate that probably about this has risen to about, between 40 and 45 million Americans are food insecure.

Gemma: 10.9% of Americans didn’t have enough food in 2019. Craig’s projections are that this rose to 13.9% in 2020 and will fall slightly to 12.9% in 2021. This is definitely a worrying increase, but Craig says that the general impression that food insecurity rates would sky-rocket during the pandemic, just hasn’t happened.

Craig: We just really didn’t see that and it’s for three main reasons. The first is that the U.S. government, the Trump administration, the Congress put together the stimulus package, which dramatically raised a lot of people’s income, especially for poor households. In some sense, they actually had more money after COVID than they did before COVID, which allowed them to purchase more food than they otherwise would.

A second reason is that unemployment benefits were being paid to people who are unemployed. And the reality is these unemployment benefits were higher than what they had when they were working and therefore that also give them more money to spend on food. A third and something that’s oftentimes overlooked, is the fact that there wasn’t any sort of rapid pricing increase. The agricultural supply chain in the United States is just remarkably vibrant. And so, because of this, we didn’t see increases in food prices. We didn’t see shortages at our food stores and all these other things. So really it was, it was pretty amazing that things weren’t worse during COVID.

Gemma: But dig down deeper and there’s a worrying trend. Craig projects that the rate of food insecurity for Black Americans will fall slower than that for white Americans this year. This feeds into some of his wider research on racial disparities in food insecurity.

Craig: I think probably the two groups that we see the most concern are Black persons and American Indians. So let me first begin with American Indians. Rates of food insecurity amongst American Indians have remained stubbornly high since we began measuring food insecurity.

Gemma: The official figures for indigenous communities can be difficult to unpick because of the way statistics are collected, but one recent study found the rate of food insecurity among American Indians and Alaskan Natives averaged 25% between 2000 and 2010.

Craig: America has something called Map the Meal Gap, which provides county-level estimates of food insecurity. And what you see is like these pockets in the United States, where overall you have low rates of food insecurity, then you have these areas with really high rates of food experience. Those are American Indian reservations.

Gemma: In Craig’s analysis, even after controlling for income and a host of other factors, Native Americans still have higher rates of food insecurity.

Craig: I think a lot of this probably comes down to location issues. Oftentimes American Indians are living in areas where there aren’t many jobs in those areas. There’s unlikely to be jobs in the near future. These are areas that have been poor for decades.

Gemma: The other group with high levels of food insecurity are Black Americans.

Craig: What we see is the main story about Black persons in the United States is incredibly high rates of food insecurity in the upper Midwest, like in the Chicago, the Milwaukee, the Minneapolis, the Detroit, and relatively lower, much lower rates of food insecurity in the South in Atlanta, in Charlotte and Birmingham and all these other cities that are in the South. So in other words, it’s really a story, a tale of two different situations. These northern cities have long histories of really serious segregation. And you just don’t see that in southern cities, you just don’t see these patterns of racial segregation that you see in Northern cities. So I think that that’s has a lot to do with it. Is that just that, you know, these areas are cut off from jobs, cut off from economic opportunities.

But another component of this is that in the United States, of course, the South is the booming area. I mean, if you see it in terms of growth patterns, the South is growing, this is where the future of our country is in the South. It’s not in the North.

And if you actually look at it at even a more granular level at the zip code level, you really see these sharp, sharp, just racial disparities that exist in a lot of Northern cities. Areas that are predominantly white, have really low rates of food insecurity in these cities. Areas that are predominantly Black, have really, really high rates of food insecurity.

Ends 9.47 mins