



HUNGER AMONG ADULTS AGE 50-59 IN 2021

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Hunger Among Adults Age 50-59 in 2021: An Annual Report

Prepared for Feeding America

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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 2021, 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 (2023).

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 2021, we find that:

- Out of 41.0 million persons between ages 50 and 59, 9.4% are food insecure and 3.3% are VLFS. This translates into 3.8 million and 1.3 million persons, respectively.
- From 2020 to 2021, there was a 1.1 percentage point decrease in food insecurity and this is statistically significant. The 0.9 percentage point decline in VLFS is also statistically significant.
- Compared to 2001, the fraction of food insecure and VLFS persons between ages 50 and 59 increased by 21% and 24%, respectively. The number in each group rose 56% and 60%.
- We find that food insecurity is greatest among adults age 50-59 who are Black or Hispanic, have lower incomes, and are renters.
- State-level food insecurity rates range from a high of 19.8% (Arkansas) to a low of 4.0% (New Hampshire).
- Metro-level food insecurity rates range from a high of 17.2% (Oklahoma City) to a low of 3.7% (Richmond, Virginia).
- 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 long recovery of food insecurity among 50-59 year olds from the economic jolt of the Great Recession was temporarily halted by the Covid-19 health pandemic in 2020, but the decline resumed in 2021 so that food insecurity rates were just above those before 2008. However, in 2022 the economic headwind of high inflation may portend worse food security. This suggests that continued monitoring of food insecurity among adults ages 50-59 will be necessary to understand the wider implications of material well being after Covid-19.

I. FOOD INSECURITY IN 2021

We document the state of food insecurity among adults between the ages of 50 and 59 in the United States spanning 2001-2021. This study complements our annual report on food insecurity of seniors ages 60+ (Ziliak and Gundersen, 2023), and is the fifth annual report for this age group.

In December of each year, households in the Current Population Survey (CPS) 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), the module used by the USDA to establish the official food insecurity rates of households in the United States. 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 2021, this results in 8,776 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, 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, the VLFS adults age 50-59 constitute a subset of 50-59 year olds who are food insecure.

In Table 1, we present estimates of food insecurity among adults ages 50 to 59 in 2021. We find that 9.4% were food insecure (3.8 million) and 3.3% were VLFS (1.3 million). These rates are greater than rates for seniors ages 60+ as reported in Ziliak and Gundersen (2023). Among seniors, we found that 7.1% were food insecure and 2.7% 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 (5.5 million) and VLFS (2.1 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, 33.5% were food insecure and 13.7% were VLFS. In contrast, for those with incomes greater than twice the poverty line, these numbers fall to 4.3% and 1.2%. The food insecurity rate 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. These patterns are similar to those age 60+.

Table 1. The Extent of 50-59 Food Insecurity in 2021

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
Overall	9.4%	3.3%
By Income		
Below the Poverty Line	33.5	13.7
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	23.3	9.0
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	4.3	1.2
Income Not Reported	8.0	2.3
By Race		
Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial	11.6	4.6
Black	16.3	6.2
White	8.0	2.6
By Hispanic Status		
Hispanic	15.5	5.2
Non-Hispanic	8.2	2.9
By Marital Status		
Divorced or Separated	16.1	7.2
Married	6.4	1.7
Never Married	13.3	4.9
Widowed	11.9	3.2
By Metropolitan Location		
Metro	9.2	3.2
Non-Metro	10.4	3.9
By Age		
50-54	9.0	3.0
55-59	9.8	3.5
By Employment Status		
Disabled ¹	20.4	8.5
Employed	6.5	2.0
Retired	6.1	1.1
Unemployed	23.8	9.0
By Gender		
Female	10.5	4.1
Male	8.2	2.3
By Grandchild Present		
Grandchildren Present	15.4	5.2
No Grandchild Present	9.1	3.2
By Homeownership Status		
Homeowner	6.4	1.9
Renter	19.8	8.0
By Veteran Status		
Not a Veteran	9.6	3.4

Veteran	5.8	1.9
By Disability Status ²		
With a disability	26.1	12.5
Without a disability	7.2	2.1

Source: Authors' calculations from 2021 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 rates 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 VLFS category. In a reversal from earlier years, as age increases among those in this age category, food insecurity rates increase, from 9.0% for the 50-54 category to 9.8% for the 55-59 category. For VLFS they increase from 3.0% to 3.5%. Ziliak and Gundersen (2023) report a similar change in age patterns among seniors, with those age 80+ with rates the same as those 70-79, which differs from past years when the oldest seniors had significantly lower rates of food insecurity. 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. Renters have food insecurity and VLFS rates that are more than three times higher than homeowners. Non-Veterans have 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 activities of daily activities (ADLs): hearing, visual, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, independent living. Older adults with limitations on ADLs have food insecurity rates more than three times as high and VLFS rates almost six times as high as those without limitations on 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. Like with income, while Black older adults are at greater risk of food insecurity under either measure than white older adults, over two-thirds of food-insecure are white. Looking at disability status, 43.9% of the VLFS category has a limitation on ADLs. This is especially stark insofar as persons with a limitation on ADLs in the VLFS 50-59 group are only 11.4% of the population.

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

Table 2. The Distribution of 50-59 Food Insecurity in 2021

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
By Income		
Below the Poverty Line	27.0%	31.8%
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	25.2	28.2
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	26.3	21.9
Income Not Reported	21.4	18.1
By Race		
Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial	11.2	12.8
Black	21.8	24.0
White	66.9	63.2
By Hispanic Status		
Hispanic	26.6	25.8
Non-Hispanic	73.4	74.2
By Marital Status		
Divorced or Separated	33.3	43.0
Married	43.7	33.4
Never Married	19.6	20.9
Widowed	3.4	2.6
By Metropolitan Location		
Metro	85.3	84.2
Non-Metro	14.7	15.8
By Age		
50-54	47.3	46.3
55-59	52.7	53.7
By Employment Status		
Disabled ¹	39.0	47.1
Employed	51.0	44.3
Retired	4.2	2.3
Unemployed	5.8	6.3
By Gender		
Female	57.6	64.9
Male	42.4	35.1
By Grandchild Present		
Grandchildren Present	6.1	6.0
No Grandchild Present	93.9	94.0
By Homeownership Status		
Homeowner	52.9	45.4
Renter	47.1	54.6
By Veteran Status		
Not a Veteran	95.8	96.0
Veteran	4.2	4.0
By Disability Status²		
With a disability	31.8	43.9

Without a disability

68.2

56.1

Source: Authors' calculations from 2021 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 2021

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure		Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
AL	14.4%	5.6%	MT	8.7%	4.8%
AK	8.0	2.8	NE	13.1	4.7
AZ	8.5	4.9	NV	11.3	3.3
AR	19.8	9.6	NH	4.0	2.3
CA	10.4	3.9	NJ	10.5	3.8
CO	8.2	4.0	NM	13.0	6.9
CT	8.8	4.6	NY	10.8	3.7
DE	14.9	3.4	NC	10.6	2.5
DC	10.3	4.6	ND	6.2	2.6
FL	6.7	2.3	OH	11.6	4.8
GA	8.5	2.5	OK	14.7	5.6
HI	7.9	1.7	OR	6.3	2.5
ID	9.1	4.2	PA	6.4	1.4
IL	8.7	3.9	RI	8.6	4.2
IN	10.1	6.0	SC	12.0	6.4
IA	7.0	1.8	SD	10.6	5.7
KS	7.9	4.5	TN	11.1	3.6
KY	14.6	5.1	TX	14.0	4.4
LA	8.4	3.6	UT	7.4	1.8
ME	5.3	3.0	VT	12.7	5.6
MD	9.8	1.4	VA	7.1	2.5
MA	9.0	3.1	WA	6.9	2.2
MI	8.7	3.0	WV	14.1	5.8
MN	5.3	0.8	WI	6.6	3.8
MS	13.2	6.6	WY	7.6	4.4
MO	12.6	6.2			

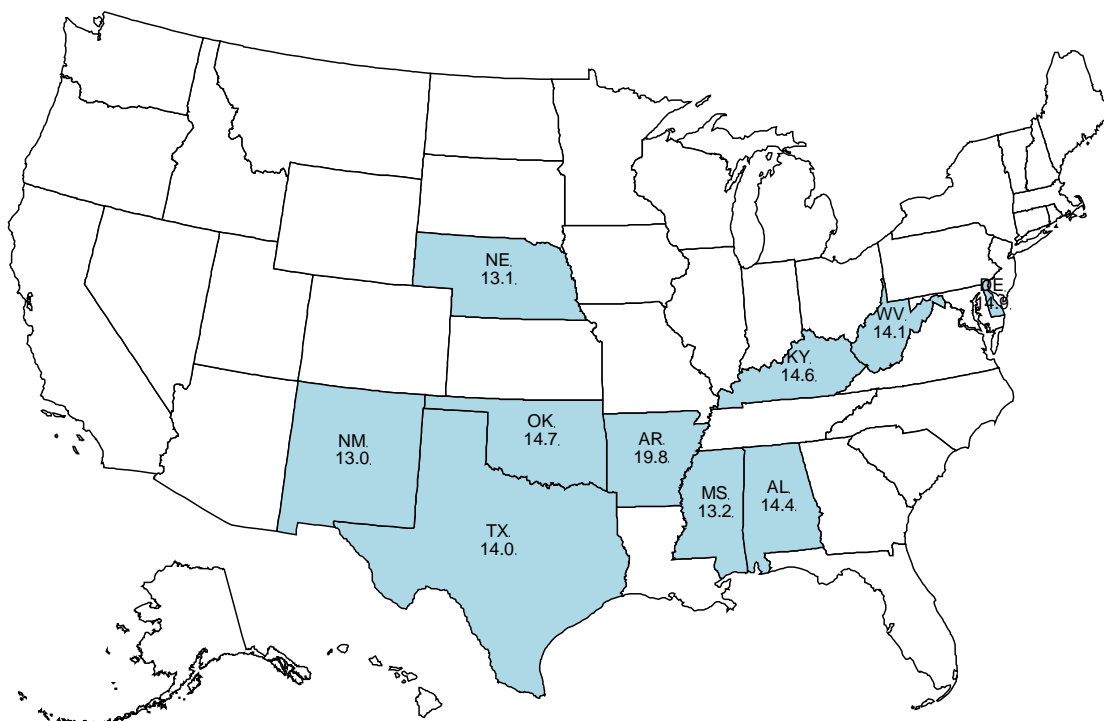
Source: Authors' calculations. The numbers are two-year averages found by summing the weighted number of food-insecure 50-59 year olds in each category by state across the 2020-2021 December Current Population Surveys and dividing by the corresponding weighted total number of 50-58 year olds in each state across the two years.

The next two tables and figures examine the geographic variation of food insecurity among 50-59 year olds across states and large metropolitan areas. In Table 3, we present state-level estimates of food insecurity among adults between age 50 and 59 for 2021 based on averages of 2020-2021 data. The range for food insecurity spans from 4.0% in New Hampshire to 19.8% in Arkansas and, for VLFS, from 0.8% in Minnesota to 9.6% in Arkansas. This cross-state range of

food insecurity and VLFS exceeds that found among seniors ages 60+. However, after adjusting for the higher average rates of food insecurity and VLFS among 50-59 year olds, the level of cross-state variation in food insecurity is actually higher among seniors 60+, though lower for VLFS.²

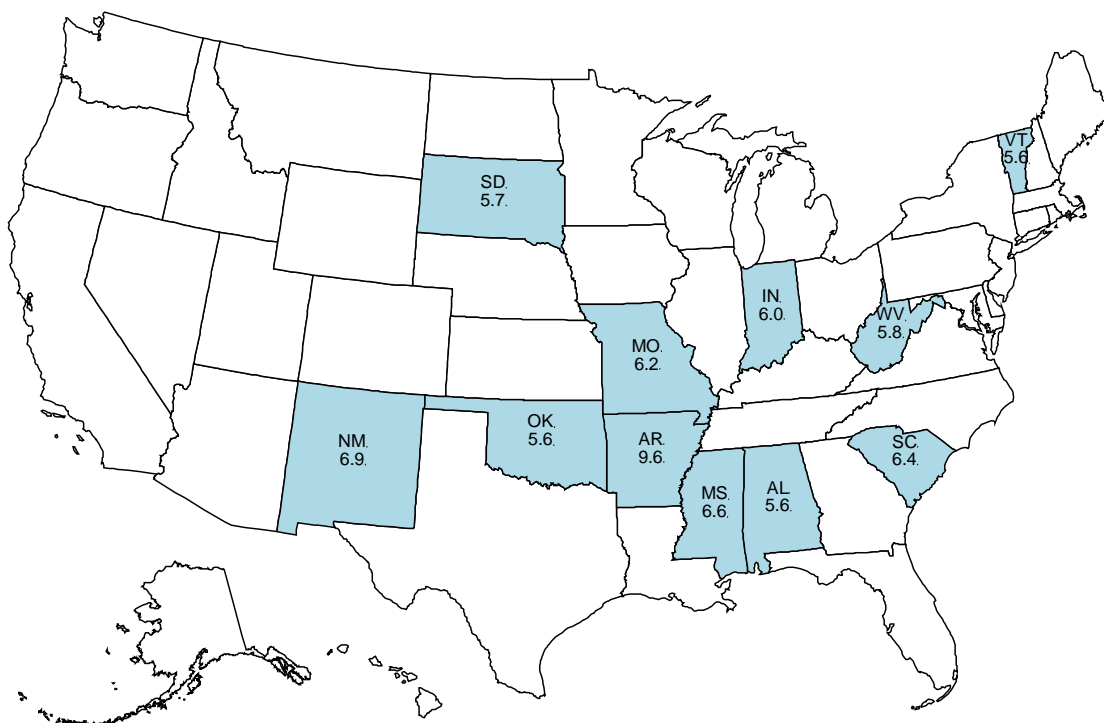
In the maps below we highlight the ten states with the highest rates of food insecurity and VLFS among those between 50 and 59 in 2021 (includes an eleventh VLFS state because of a tie). For food insecurity, eight of the states are located in the South and Southwest, with Arkansas leading in this category with the highest food insecurity for the past two years. The ten-highest states for VLFS are more geographically dispersed. This is in contrast to previous years when these states were geographically similar to food insecurity.

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



² This is determined by the coefficient of variation (CV), which measures the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean. The cross-state CV for food insecure 50-59 year olds is 0.32, while it is 0.43 for VLFS. Among those ages 60+ the respective CVs are 0.36 and 0.41.

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



* 11 states are depicted reflecting a tie.

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 2017 to 2021. 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 metro area, is nearly five times higher than the lowest rate, in Richmond, Virginia (17.2% versus 3.7%). For VLFS, the highest is the Memphis metro area and the lowest is, like last year, Raleigh, North Carolina (8.7% and 0.7%).

Table 4. Estimates of 50-59 Food Insecurity in Metropolitan Areas > 1,000,000 Persons in 2021

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	7.3%	2.9%
Austin-Round Rock, TX	7.3	2.4
Baltimore-Columbia-Towson, MD	13.9	5.4

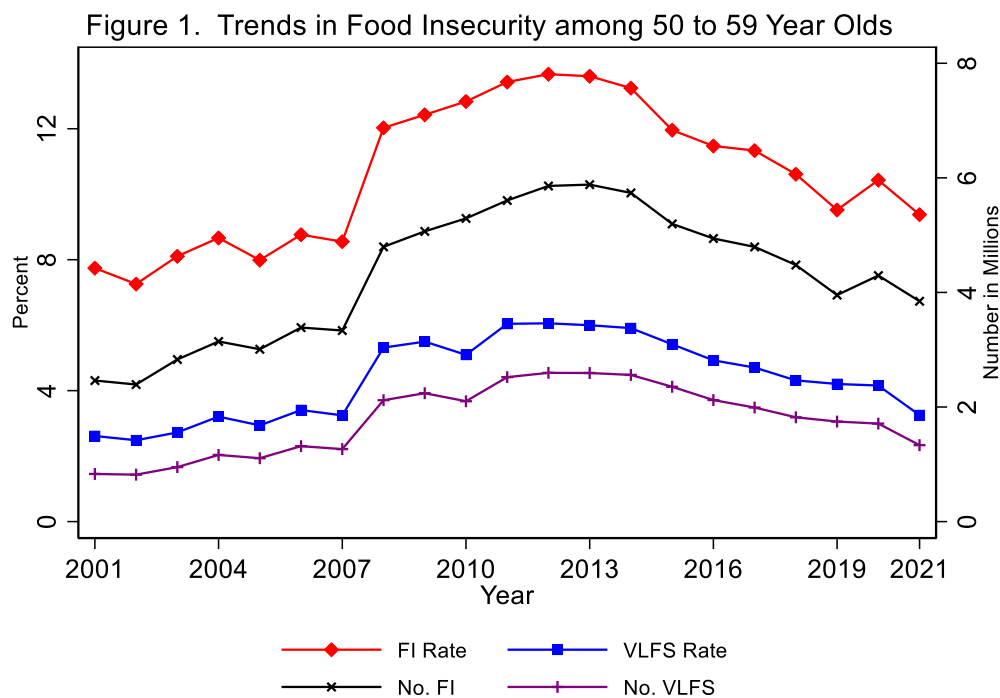
Birmingham-Hoover, AL	14.1	3.8
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	8.6	3.4
Buffalo-Cheektowaga-Niagara Falls, NY	10.5	2.8
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC	6.3	2.8
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	8.7	3.7
Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN	10.3	4.1
Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, OH	11.4	5.7
Columbus, OH	11.1	4.5
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	10.1	2.4
Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO	4.5	2.8
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	9.1	4.4
Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, CT	14.1	6.3
Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land, TX	12.6	4.8
Indianapolis, IN	11.9	5.8
Jacksonville, FL	9.0	2.4
Kansas City, MO-KS	12.8	4.8
Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV	11.2	3.9
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	10.4	4.1
Louisville, KY-IN	10.6	3.8
Memphis, TN-MS-AR	17.1	8.7
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	10.8	2.1
Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI	9.4	6.1
Minneapolis-St Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	6.5	2.9
Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro, TN	6.7	1.5
New Orleans-Metairie, LA	11.7	5.8
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	9.2	3.3
Oklahoma City, OK	17.2	7.9
Orlando, FL	6.1	1.6
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE	7.3	2.7
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	11.2	6.1
Pittsburgh, PA	8.3	4.6
Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA	7.8	3.3
Providence-Warwick, RI-MA	11.6	4.5
Raleigh, NC	7.9	0.7
Richmond, VA	3.7	2.3
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	11.6	5.3
Rochester, NY	11.1	4.2
Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Roseville, CA	6.0	2.6
St. Louis, MO-IL	9.2	4.9
Salt Lake City, UT	9.8	3.7
San Antonio, TX	10.4	4.8
San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA	8.2	3.3
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	6.5	1.8
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	6.2	0.9
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	6.2	1.7

Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	7.4	3.8
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC	12.6	7.1
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	6.2	2.3

Source: Authors' calculations. The numbers are five-year averages found by summing the weighted number of food-insecure 50-59 year olds in each category by metro areas across the 2017-2021 December Current Population Surveys and dividing by the corresponding weighted total number of seniors in each metro area across the five years.

II. FOOD INSECURITY OVER TIME

To better understand how the 2021 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 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 2021 (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2022). Unlike seniors who continue to have food insecurity rates significantly higher than in 2007 (Ziliak and Gundersen, 2023), adults ages 50-59 seem to be following the pattern of the general population with declining trends of food insecurity after a temporary increase in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since 2001, the fraction of older adults experiencing food insecurity and VLFS has increased by 21%, and 24%. In terms of the number of food insecure persons, this rose in each group by 56%, and 60%. Each of these increases are attenuated compared to those age 60+.



In Table 5, we take a deeper look into underlying changes in the composition of food insecurity among 50-59-year-olds from 2020 to 2021. The table presents percentage point changes in both categories of food insecurity by the same set of socioeconomic characteristics in Table 1. Overall there was a 1.1 percentage point decline in food insecurity from 2020-2021, and a 0.9 percentage point decline in VLFS. Both changes are statistically significant. The declines in food insecurity and VLFS among persons with incomes below the poverty line were especially large in 2021 in comparison to 2020. They were, respectively, a 13.0 and 7.7 percentage point declines³. Both of these declines were statistically significant. Other statistically significant declines were seen for whites, non-Hispanics, married persons (VLFS only), widows (VLFS only), never married (food insecurity only), those in metro areas, 50-54 year olds, 55-59 year olds (VLFS only), persons not in the labor force due to a disability, men, households without grandchildren present (VLFS only), households with grandchildren present (food insecurity only), homeowners (VLFS only), renters, non-veterans, and persons with a disability.

Table 5. Percentage Point Changes in the Composition of 50 to 59 Food Insecurity from 2020 to 2021

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
Overall	-1.05**	-0.90***
By Income		
Below the Poverty Line	-12.99***	-7.74***

³ This is by far the largest change we have had since we began these reports. As such, we would urge caution when interpreting these changes.

Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	-2.77	-2.07
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	-0.21	-0.21
Income Not Reported	-0.45	-0.81
By Race		
Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial	-0.98	0.26
Black	-2.76	-0.25
White	-0.86*	-1.16***
By Hispanic Status		
Hispanic	-0.63	0.34
Non-Hispanic	-1.18**	-1.15***
By Marital Status		
Divorced or Separated	0.52	-0.32
Married	-0.79	-0.65**
Never Married	-3.02*	-1.68
Widowed	-5.80	-5.34**
By Metropolitan Location		
Metro	-0.98*	-0.90***
Non-Metro	-1.42	-0.85
By Age		
50-54	-2.00***	-1.08**
55-59	-0.13	-0.73*
By Employment Status		
Disabled ¹	-4.58***	-3.11***
Employed	0.12	-0.06
Retired	0.29	-0.11
Unemployed	-1.78	-4.46
By Gender		
Female	0.00	0.10
Male	-2.16***	-1.96***
By Grandchild Present		
Grandchildren Present	-8.40**	-1.43
No Grandchild Present	-0.71	-0.87***
By Homeownership Status		
Homeowner	-0.39	-0.61**
Renter	-3.03**	-1.76*
By Veteran Status		
Not a Veteran	-1.06**	-0.86**
Veteran	-0.98	-1.54
By Disability Status ²		
With a disability	-1.15**	-0.75***
Without a disability	-0.31	-2.10

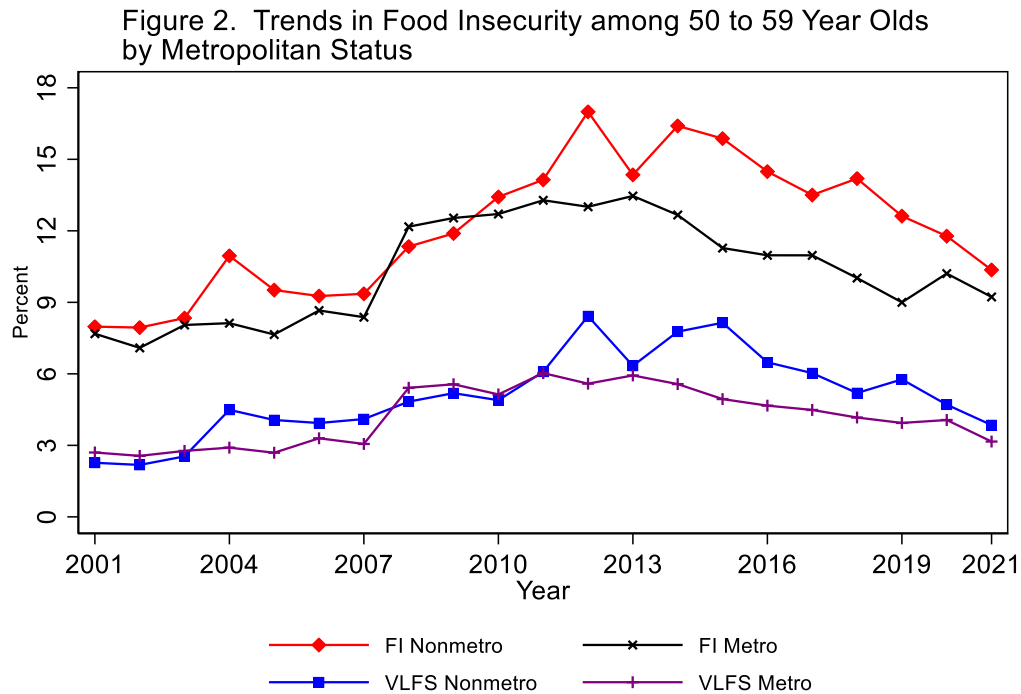
Source: Authors' calculations. The numbers in the table reflect percentage point changes from 2020-2021. The asterisks denote statistical significance at the following levels: *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.1.

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.

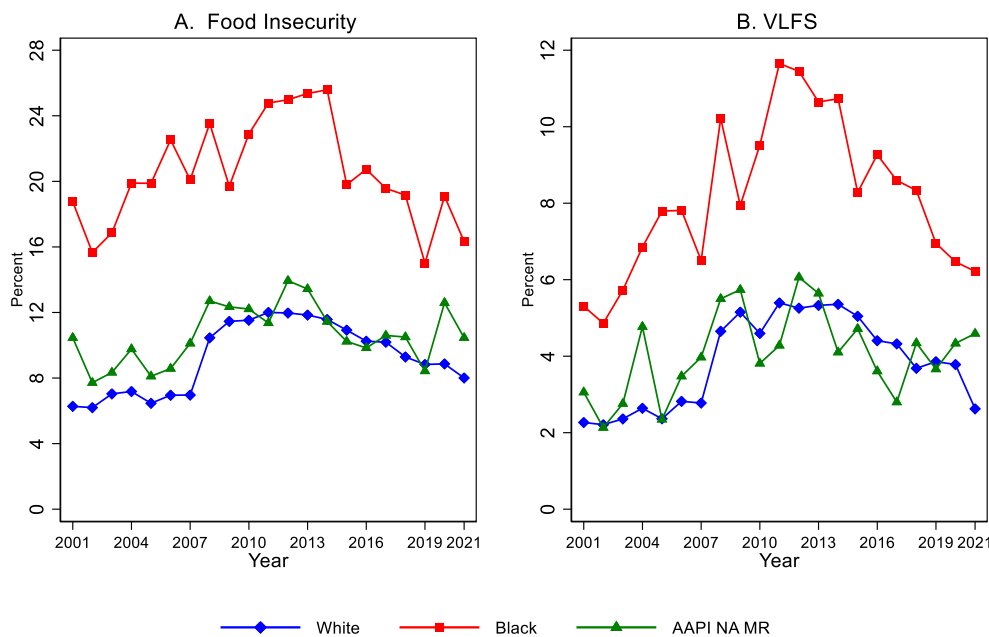
In the next set of figures, we examine trends in food insecurity since 2001 across a variety of subpopulations found in Tables 1 and 5. We begin in Figure 2 with trends in food insecurity for those living in metropolitan areas versus nonmetropolitan areas. The figure shows that after 2012, food insecurity and VLFS rates have been higher in nonmetro than metro areas. For VLFS, a similar pattern holds, with rates being higher in nonmetro areas every year since 2011.

In both cases, though, this gap has narrowed because food insecurity has declined more rapidly in non-metro locations in recent years.



Panel A of Figure 3 depicts trends in food insecurity across different races and panel B is for VLFS. As discussed above, food insecurity and VLFS rates 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 2021. 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 older adult food insecurity rates are lower in 2021 than in 2001. For VLFS, though, both Black older adults and white older adults have higher rates in 2021 than in 2001. A comparison of white older adults and the older adults in the category Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial, differs by choice of measure. While food insecurity rates are lower among white older adults in almost all years, for VLFS which group is higher varies by year. This differs from those over the age of 60 whereby the rates of whites are lower in almost every year.

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 older adults than non-Hispanic older adults in all years, albeit this gap narrowed dramatically starting in 2014 when rates for Hispanics declined substantially and stayed relatively similar for non-Hispanics. For VLFS, starting in 2014, rates have been similar for Hispanics and non-Hispanics and, in 2017, were lower for Hispanics. Since 2019, though, rates have begun to diverge.

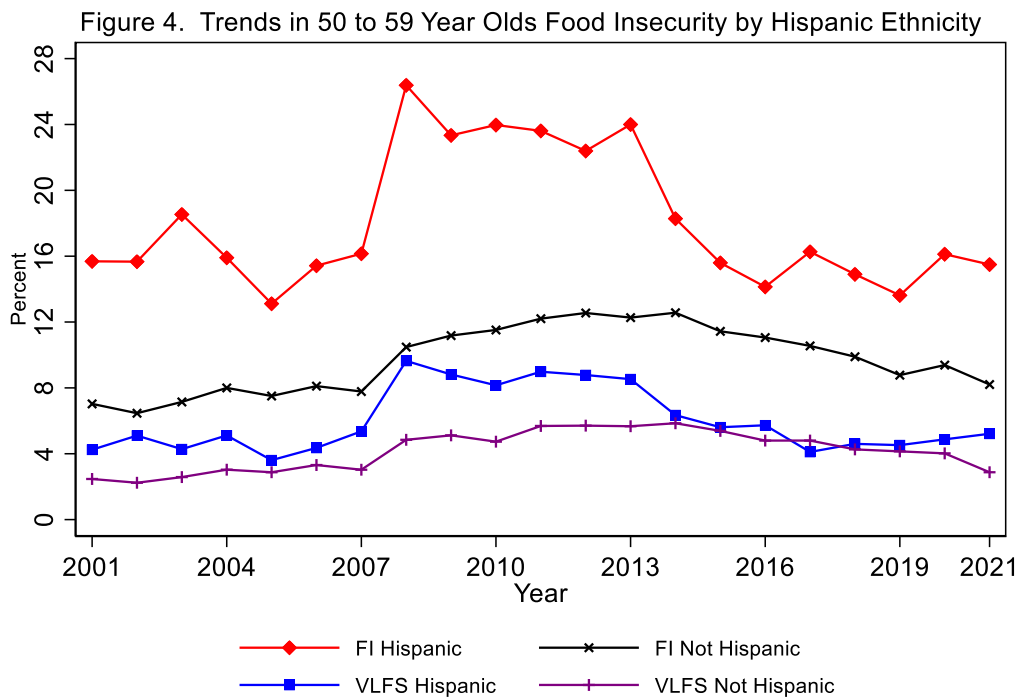
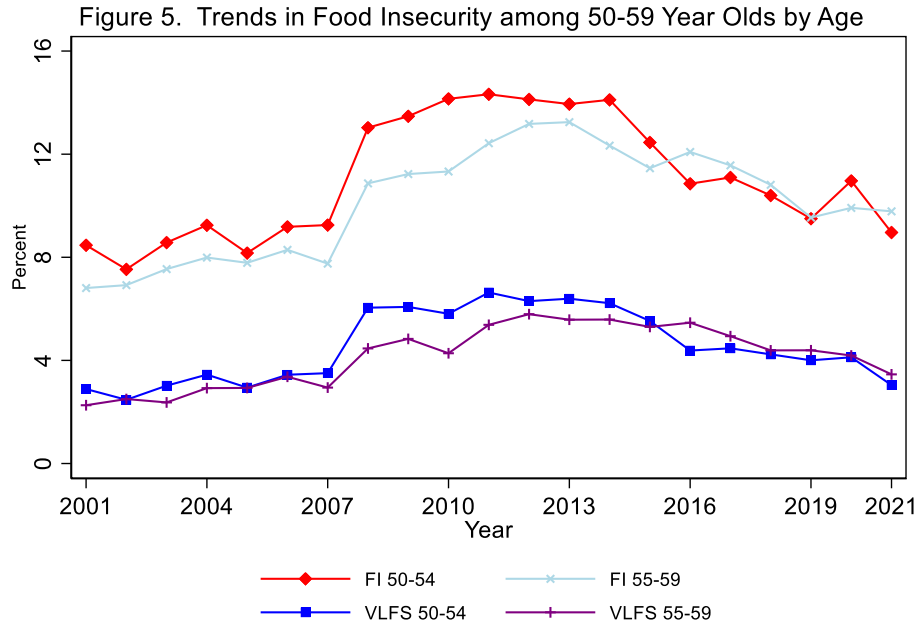


Figure 5 presents a parallel set of results broken down into two age groups—50-54 year-olds and 55-59 year-olds. For the 60+ group in every year rates of food insecurity and VLFS are highest for those 60-69, then 70-79, then 80+ (Ziliak and Gundersen 2023).⁴ In contrast, for the two age groups in Figure 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.

⁴ In 2021, the rates were the same for 70-79 year olds and for those 80 and older.



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 2021, which is 21 percent higher than in 2001, and over 3 percent faced the threat of hunger, an increase of near one quarter since 2001. Because of population growth, this means that there has been an increase of over 50 percent in the number of 50-59 year olds experiencing food insecurity.

As noted in our report on senior food insecurity (Ziliak and Gundersen, 2023), a particular concern at this writing are economic headwinds of high inflation and declining income support as the public health emergency of Covid-19 winds down. Whether this translates into a reversal of recent trends of declining food insecurity among adults ages 50-59 will require ongoing monitoring.

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 2021

Income Categories	
Below the Poverty Line	0.08
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	0.10
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	0.57
Missing Income	0.25
Racial Categories	
Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial	0.09
Black	0.13
White	0.78
Hispanic Status	
Hispanic	0.16
Non-Hispanic	0.84
Marital Status	
Divorced or Separated	0.19
Married	0.64
Never Married	0.14
Widowed	0.03
Metropolitan Location	
Metro	0.87
Non-Metro	0.13
Age	
50 to 54	0.49
55 to 59	0.51
Employment Status ¹	
Disabled	0.18
Employed	0.73
Retired	0.07
Unemployed	0.02
By Gender	
Female	0.51
Male	0.49
Grandchild Present	
Grandchild Present	0.04
No Grandchild Present	0.96
By Homeownership Status	
Homeowner	0.78
Renter	0.22
By Veteran Status	
Not a Veteran	0.93
Veteran	0.07
By Disability Status ²	
With a disability	0.11
Without a disability	0.89

Source: Authors' calculations from 2021 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.

Appendix Table 3. The Extent of 50-59 Food Insecurity in 2021 by Combined Race/Ethnicity Categories

	Food Insecure	Very Low Food Secure
Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, and people who identify as multi-racial, non-Hispanic	10.4	3.5
Black, non-Hispanic	16.0	6.0
Hispanic	15.5	5.2
White, non-Hispanic	6.5	2.2

Source: Authors' calculations from 2021 December Current Population Survey. The numbers in the table show the rates of food insecurity under two measures for various groups.

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