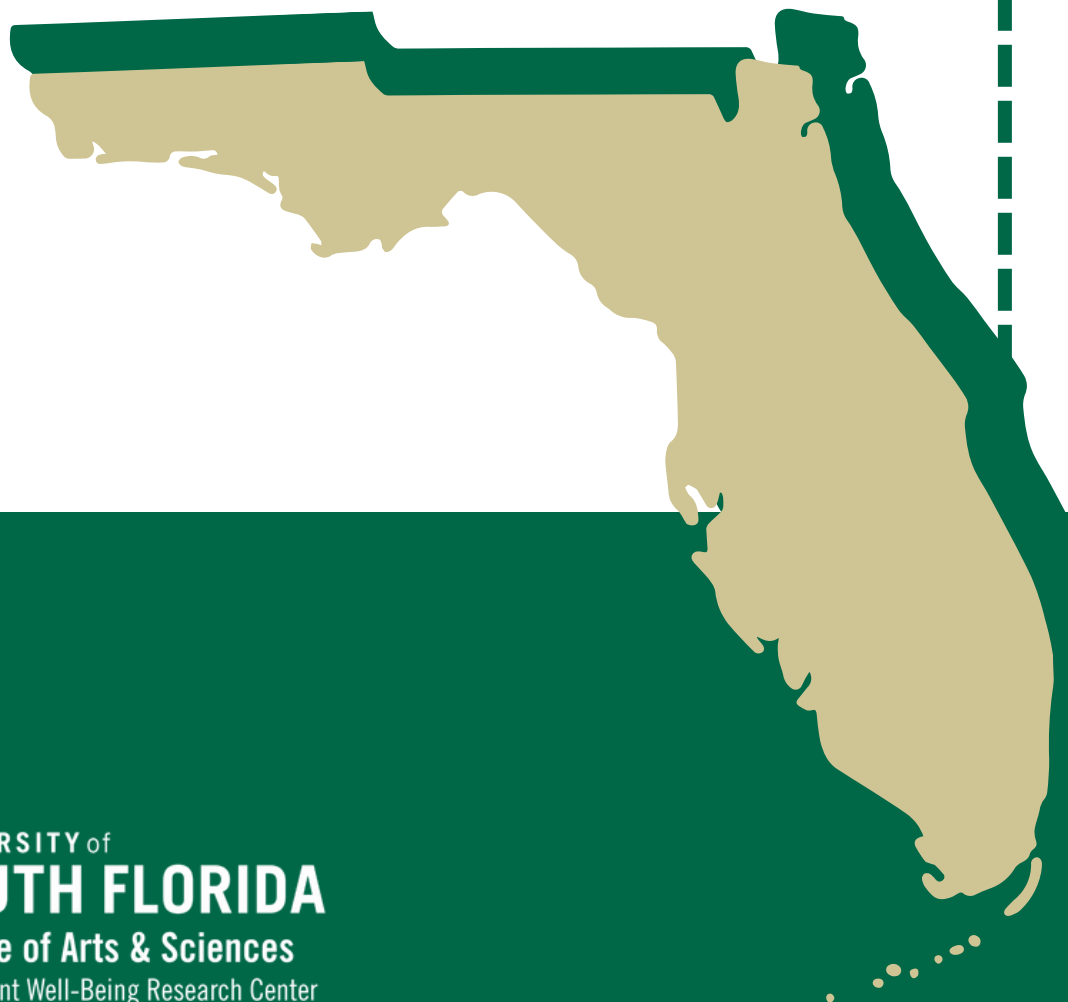


REPORT

THE IMPACTS OF **FLORIDA'S SB 1718** ON IMMIGRANTS' WELL-BEING



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ABOUT THE FLORIDA IMMIGRATION POLICIES PROJECT

The Florida Immigration Policies Project is a collaborative research study conducted by researchers at the Im/migrant Well-Being Research Center in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Florida (USF). It was supported by a grant made by the USF College of Arts and Sciences, Centers and Institutes. We thank several non-profit organizations for supporting our recruitment efforts, such as Faith in Florida, Mujeres Restauradas por Dios, Hispanic Services Council, and NicerFL.

The project team surveyed immigrants from 31 countries, including Argentina, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Spain, Trinidad/Caribbean Islands, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Vietnam to understand the effects of Florida's Senate Bill 1718, signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis in 2023.

The research team hopes to share the insights of the project's findings with policy-makers, advocates, counselors, the academic community, and community members to address the needs and experiences of immigrants as they adapt to this law.

For more information, visit usf.to/SB1718Report or scan the QR code.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In May 2023, Governor Ron DeSantis signed SB 1718 into law, enacting strict immigration provisions that criminalize the transportation of undocumented individuals, mandate E-Verify for larger employers, and require information about immigrants' legal status when seeking healthcare services. The law sparked widespread concern within immigrant communities.
- The Im/migrant Well-Being Research Center at the University of South Florida conducted a research study that examines the **social, economic, and psychological effects** of SB 1718 on immigrants and U.S. born adult children of immigrants living in Florida. Data were collected from 466 participants between May and July 2024.
- The sample included both **documented and undocumented immigrants**, with diverse legal statuses, including **U.S. citizens**. Participants represented diverse regions/countries of origin, including Cuba, Caribbean countries, Central American countries, and countries in Africa and Asia. Participants lived in the U.S. for an average of 17 years.
- Many participants reported **job insecurity and financial stress**, with significant trends observed across legal statuses. Among non-citizens, a majority expressed concerns about job prospects and experienced increased financial stress. **Spillover effects**--effects observed in populations that were not targets of the law--were evident among a portion of U.S. citizens reporting increased financial stress since the law passed. Moreover, both non-citizens and U.S. citizens had **considered leaving Florida** due to the law.
- The majority of non-U.S. citizens **hesitated to seek medical care** due to concerns related to the law, which also affected a portion of U.S. citizens, highlighting again the spillover effects on mixed-status families.
- **Psychological distress was prevalent**, with over half of the sample reporting increased distress since the law's passage; non-U.S. citizens reported the highest distress levels, and one-third of U.S. citizens reporting heightened anxiety. **Fear of detention, deportation, and family separation contributed to this anxiety**, with nearly half of non-U.S. citizens and one quarter of U.S. citizens expressing concern for themselves or a loved one.
- **Family separation** emerged as a significant concern, with almost half of non-U.S. citizens affected, and a segment of the U.S. citizen population also reporting family separation experiences, which contributed to elevated distress levels.
- Compared to the prior year, **most participants believed life for immigrants in Florida had become more difficult**. Job insecurity, access to services, and psychological stress worsened for most respondents. Worries about driving and being stopped by authorities increased across several groups.
- The overall findings indicate that the **effects of SB 1718 are not limited to non-citizen groups**; U.S. citizens also reported significant disruptions in various areas of life, demonstrating the wide-reaching impact of the law.

FLORIDA SENATE BILL 1718

On May 10, 2023, Governor Ron DeSantis signed **Senate Bill 1718** into law, instituting several measures:

- A. classifies as a “human smuggler” anyone who crosses the state line into Florida with someone they know who is undocumented (SB 1718, Chapter 2023-40, Section 10)
- B. does not recognize out-of-state licenses lawfully issued to undocumented immigrants in other states (Section 3)
- C. requires hospitals that are recipients of Medicaid funds to ask about prospective patients’ immigration status on registration or admission forms (Section 5)
- D. bars local governments from funding community IDs (Sections 1 and 2)
- E. allocates \$12 million dollars in taxpayer funding for a program to remove migrant families from the state by transferring them to other states – known as the Unauthorized Alien Transport Program (Section 21)
- F. expands E-Verify to employers with over 25 employees and public agencies (Section 7)
- G. creates a third-degree felony for undocumented individuals who knowingly use false identification or fraudulently use another person's identification to obtain employment (Section 6)
- H. requires employers to submit quarterly reports to the state if they knowingly employ unauthorized workers, with penalties such as license suspension or revocation for repeat offenders (Section 6)
- I. mandates that anyone in the custody of law enforcement and subject to an immigration detainer must submit a DNA sample upon booking into a jail, correctional, or juvenile facility (Section 18) (The Florida Senate, 2023)

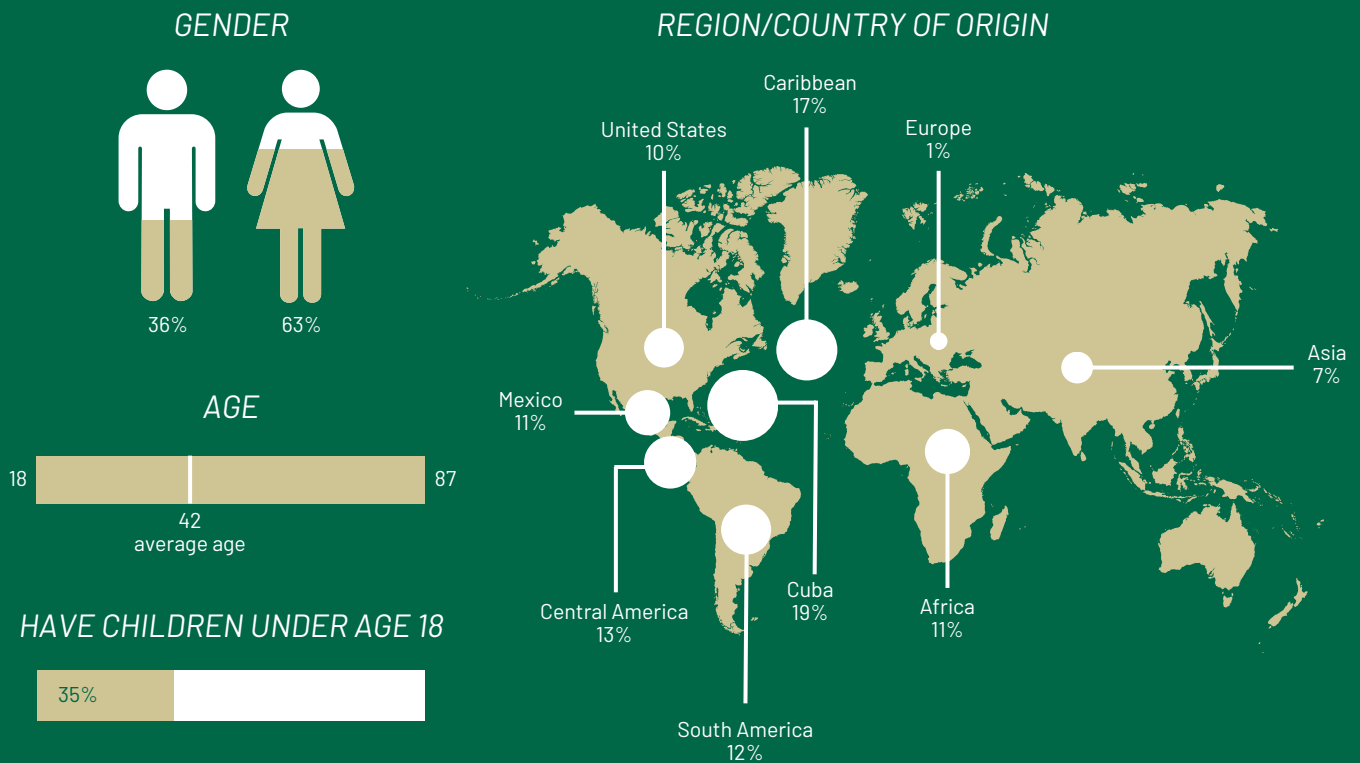
Critics of the law have claimed that SB 1718 would have **severe economic and social consequences**, disproportionately affecting industries reliant on immigrant labor and causing widespread fear and uncertainty among immigrant communities, which could prompt many to leave Florida. For instance, the Florida Policy Institute issued a report stating that the impact of the E-Verify mandate could cost Florida’s economy \$12.6 billion in one year, primarily affecting industries like construction, agriculture, and hospitality, which are heavily reliant on undocumented workers (Tsoukalas & Santis, 2023). Over the past year, several news outlets have reported the law’s stringent impact on immigrants’ lives. NPR reported that many immigrant workers were leaving the state out of **fear of legal repercussions** (Romo, 2023). Moreover, the provision that classifies the transportation of undocumented individuals into Florida as human smuggling has caused deep concern among mixed-status families, who may travel together across state lines. Florida Republicans have since attempted to reassure immigrants, claiming that the bill includes several “loopholes” and was not intended to be fully enforced (Romo, 2023). However, these reassurances have done little to stem the exodus of immigrant workers, which has had a significant impact on sectors like agriculture (Romo, 2023). The human smuggling section of the law has been temporarily blocked by a federal court since May 2024 (American Immigration Council, 2024). Additionally, the Center for American Progress (CAP) reported that the law could lead to **significant disruptions in Florida’s economy and heightened uncertainty among the state’s immigrant communities** (Rodriguez, 2023). According to CAP, the law not only targets undocumented immigrants but also has broader ramifications for businesses, forcing immigrants to flee Florida and leave their jobs and lives behind.

With funding from the University of South Florida, College of Arts and Sciences’ Centers and Institutes, researchers from the Im/migrant Well-Being Research Center designed a survey to measure the impacts of the law on several dimensions of immigrants’ lives, including their job prospects and economic standing, the likelihood that they utilize healthcare services, their psychological well-being, and aspects of their daily lives such as driving, experiences with discrimination, and attitudes toward maintaining their residence in the state. This report documents the outcomes of this study.

METHODS AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The research team that conducted this study obtained approval for the study of human subjects from the USF Institutional Review Board. Data collection began in May of 2024 and concluded near the end of July 2024. The criteria for participation in the study included a minimum of one year of residency in Florida, that participants had to either be born in another country or be the adult child of an immigrant to the United States, and all participants had to be above the age of 18. A variety of methods were utilized to recruit participants for the study. The research team reached out to several non-profit organizations that serve immigrant populations so they could disseminate the link to access the survey, which could be taken online. However, the primary method of recruitment involved identifying public spaces in immigrant communities and verbally administering the survey to participants. Some of the research sites included a *botanica*¹ located in an immigrant community, the clubhouse of a neighborhood in which many immigrants resided, as well as other commercial businesses that granted the research team permission to approach their clients. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, this report does not discuss the areas where the research team recruited participants, except to say that most participants resided in Hillsborough County.

In total, 466 immigrants completed the survey. Forty-seven percent completed it in English, and 53% in Spanish. Ninety percent of the sample was born in countries outside the U.S., and 10% was born in the U.S. or U.S. territory (e.g., Puerto Rico) to parents who were immigrants. Participants had lived in the U.S. for an average of 17 years, ranging from 1 to 71 years. Below, we describe the demographic characteristics of the sample and other important information that reveals how SB 1718 has impacted immigrants and their families, which include U.S. citizens.



¹ A *botanica* is a shop that specializes in religious and spiritual items, often associated with Afro-Caribbean, Latin American, or folk traditions. These stores typically sell herbs, oils, candles, statues, and other ritual objects used for healing, prayer, and spiritual ceremonies. Botanicas are also known for providing spiritual consultations, including readings and advice from practitioners.

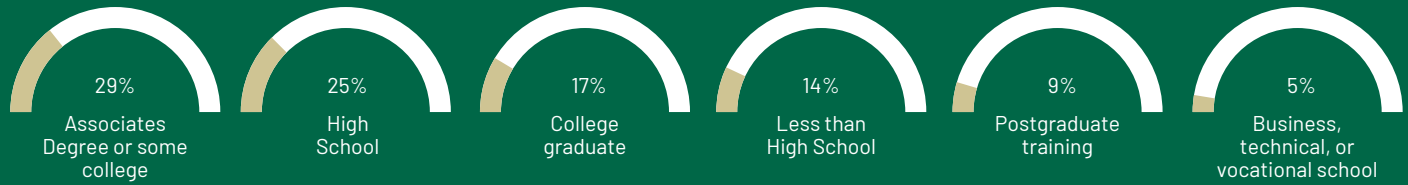
EMPLOYMENT STATUS



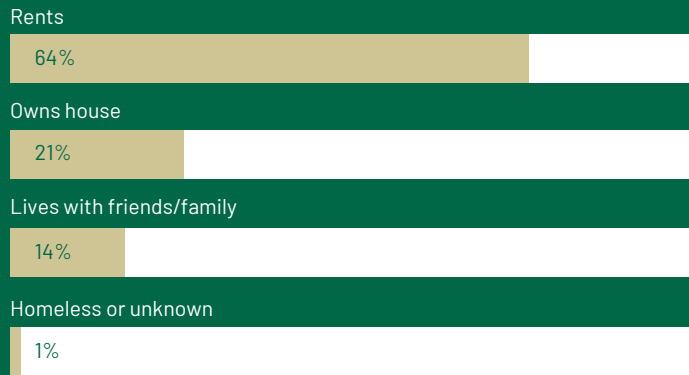
LEGAL STATUS



EDUCATION



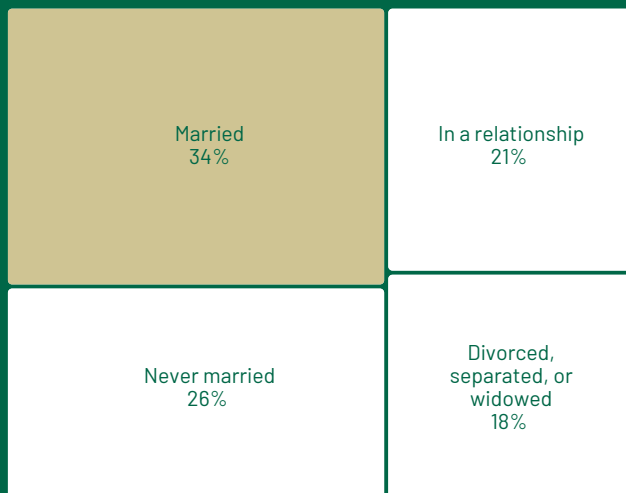
HOUSING



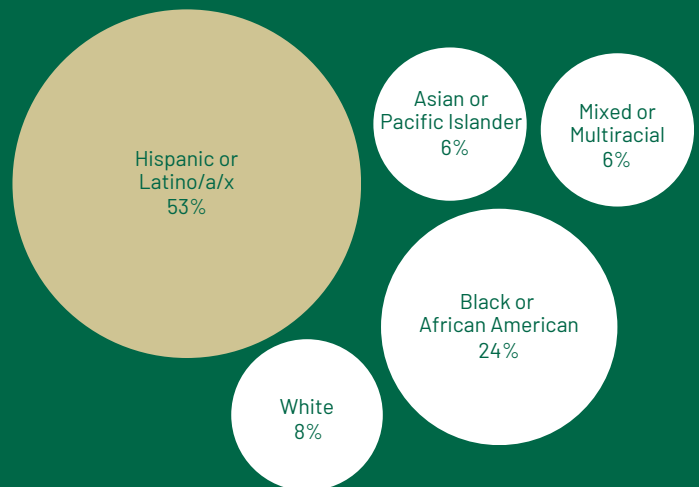
ENGLISH PROFICIENCY



MARITAL STATUS



RACE***



*Includes U.S.-born and naturalized citizens

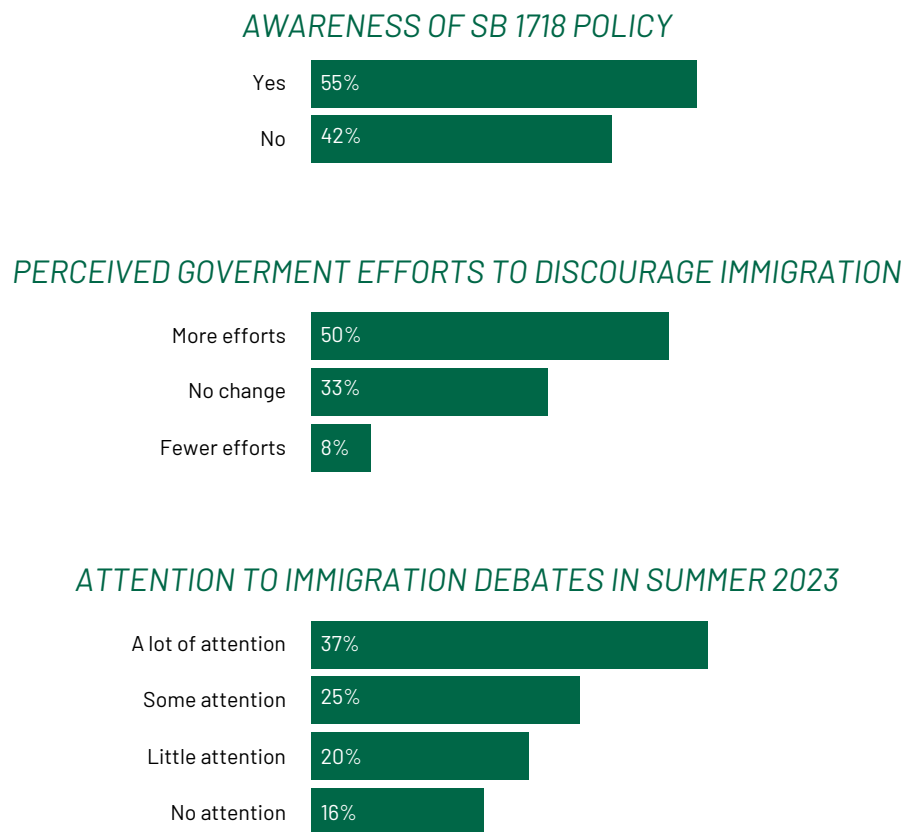
**The visa holder category may include both immigrants on active visas (e.g., U Visa) and immigrants who came into the country on active visas, but that have overstayed them

***This question asked how others perceived their race

AWARENESS OF AND CONCERNS OVER SB 1718

Participants were asked about their awareness and knowledge of SB 1718. Fifty-five percent of participants were aware that SB 1718 had been signed into law in 2023, while 42% were not aware of the law. When asked about the government's efforts to regulate immigration to the state, half of the sample reported that the government had made more efforts in the past year to discourage undocumented migration, while 33% believed that these efforts had remained the same. A smaller portion—8%—felt that efforts had declined, and another 8% were unsure. When asked how much attention participants had paid to debates about undocumented migration in the state legislature in the news during the Summer of 2023, 37% reported paying a lot of attention, 25% paid some attention, 20% paid little attention, and 16% paid no attention at all (Figure 1).

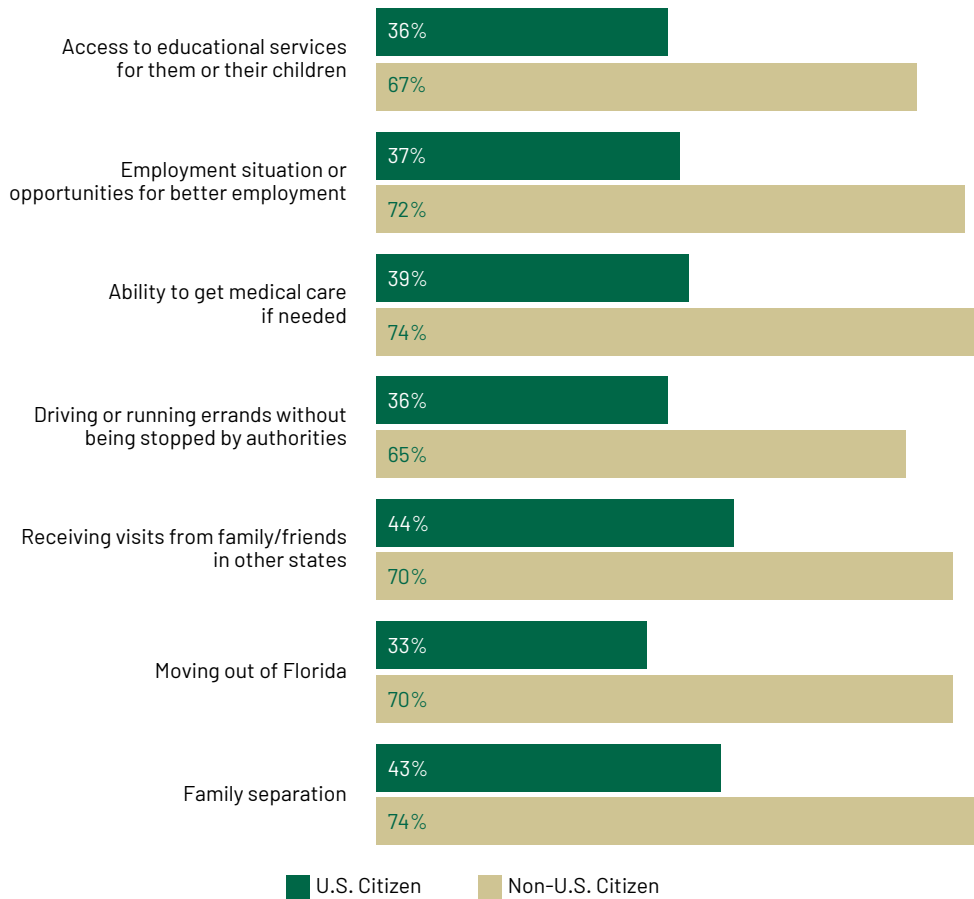
FIGURE 1. AWARENESS, PERCEPTION OF, AND ATTENTION TO SB 1718



To effectively gauge if respondents were concerned about the law and how the law affected their lives, and to address any misinformation about the law, survey administrators explained to all respondents the various provisions of SB 1718. Respondents were then asked how concerned they were about possible consequences of the law. Fifty-six percent reported feeling concerned or very concerned about the law's effects on their ability to access educational services for themselves or their children; 59% were concerned or very concerned about the effects on their employment or opportunities to attain better jobs; 61% were concerned or very concerned about their ability to get medical care should they need it because of the law; 55% were concerned or very concerned about the effects of the law on their ability to drive and run errands without being stopped by authorities; 61% were concerned or very concerned about how the law affected their ability to receive visits from out-of-state friends or family; 57% were concerned or very concerned about having to move out of Florida because of the law; and 63% were concerned or very concerned about the law resulting in the separation of their families.

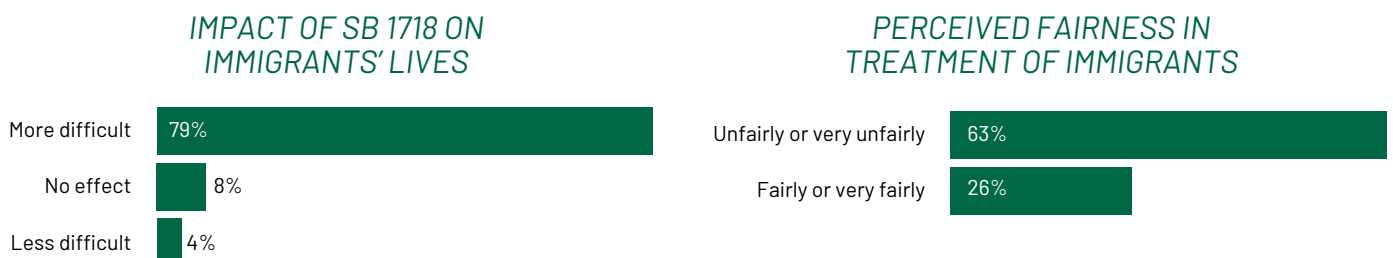
When analyzing these outcomes by legal status, it was found that SB 1718 had far-reaching effects. While 67% to 74% of non-citizens expressed concerns about the law’s impact across areas such as employment, healthcare, and family separation, a significant proportion of U.S. citizens also reported concern. Specifically, 33% to 44% of U.S. citizens expressed worry about accessing medical care, securing employment, and the possibility of family separation, highlighting the broader consequences of the law on mixed-status families and communities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. CONCERNS ABOUT SB 1718 BY LEGAL STATUS



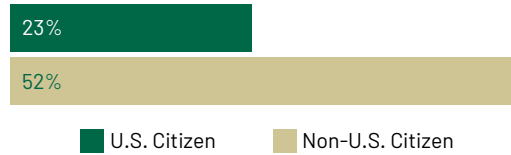
When asked how the debates surrounding immigration, and SB 1718 in particular, had affected immigrants, the majority (79%) believed it had made life for immigrants in Florida more difficult. In contrast, only 4% stated that these debates had made life less difficult, while 8% reported no effect, and 9% were unsure. Further, when asked if the state of Florida treated immigrants fairly or unfairly, 63% reported that the treatment was unfair or very unfair, while 26% thought the treatment was fair or very fair (see Figure 3). Finally, among U.S. citizens, nearly 48% felt that the state government treated immigrants unfairly or very unfairly.

FIGURE 3. PERCEIVED IMPACT OF SB 1718 AND TREATMENT OF IMMIGRANTS IN FLORIDA



Critics of SB 1718 have expressed that the law could lead to immigrants who work in critical industries leaving the state. When asked about this, 46% of the sample reported knowing immigrants who had moved out of the state of Florida due to the passage of SB 1718. When asked if they were more likely to consider moving out of Florida, 41% of the sample reported that they were more likely to do so. Among non-U.S. citizens, 52% considered leaving Florida, compared to 23% of U.S. citizens (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. INDIVIDUALS CONSIDERING LEAVING FLORIDA

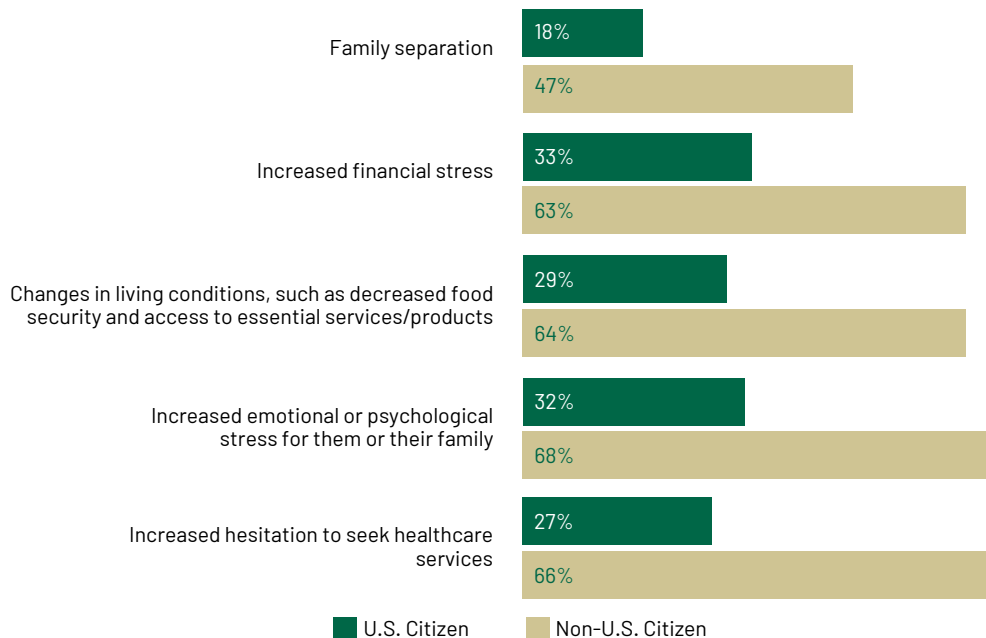


PERCEPTIONS OF IMPACTS OF SB 1718

Survey participants were asked to assess how SB 1718 affected various aspects of their lives, including the law’s impact on family separation, financial stress, living conditions, emotional or psychological well-being, and the likelihood that they would seek healthcare. Results indicated that 37% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the law led to family separation, while 52% reported increased financial stress in their households. Additionally, 51% felt that their living conditions worsened—expressing concern over food security and access to essential services—and 55% reported increased emotional or psychological stress due to the law. Moreover, 52% revealed that they hesitated to visit a hospital when needed given the law.

Further analysis broken down by legal status revealed significant spillover effects. While 47% to 68% of non-citizens agreed that SB 1718 led to family separation, increased financial stress, negatively impacted living conditions, heightened emotional strain, and resulted in increased hesitation to seek healthcare services, a considerable portion of U.S. citizens also shared these concerns. Notably, 18% of U.S. citizens indicated that they had experienced family separation, 33% reported increased financial stress, 29% noted worsened living conditions, 32% reported increased psychological stress, and 27% indicated increased hesitation to seek healthcare services, highlighting the far-reaching effects of the law even on populations beyond its intended targets (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. EFFECTS OF SB 1718 ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF LIFE BY LEGAL STATUS



CONCERNS OVER DETENTION AND DEPORTATION

We asked survey respondents if they or someone close to them ever felt fear or concern about being detained by immigration authorities or deported. Of the whole sample, 39% responded yes to this question. When examining these responses by legal status, 47% of non-U.S. citizens reported such concerns compared to 26% of U.S. citizens (Figure 6).

To ascertain to what extent these fears had changed in the last year since the law took effect, we asked participants who reported fears, if they had improved, worsened, or stayed the same in the past year. In general, 64% indicated that their fears had worsened, while 27% said their concerns remained unchanged. Among non-U.S. citizens, 74% reported that their fears had worsened, compared to 34% of U.S. citizens (Figure 7).

FIGURE 6. FEAR OF DETENTION/DEPORTATION BY LEGAL STATUS

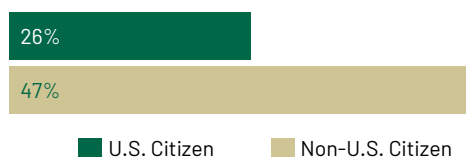
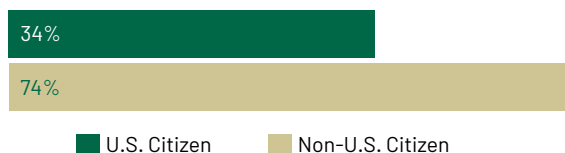


FIGURE 7. FEAR OF DETENTION/DEPORTATION WORSENERD IN THE LAST YEAR BY LEGAL STATUS



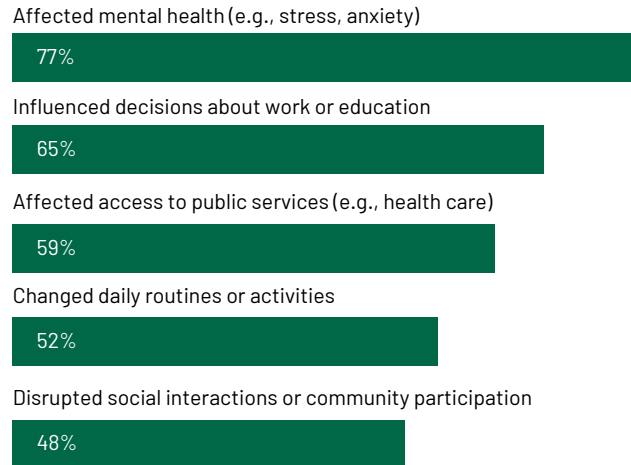
Participants were then asked what the primary sources of their fears were regarding detention or deportation. As reported in Figure 8, 78% pointed to changes in immigration policies as the main source of concern. News and media reports were cited by 75%, while 57% noted personal or family experiences with immigration enforcement. Additionally, 54% reported that stories or experiences shared within their communities contributed to their fears, and 32% mentioned advice or warnings from legal or immigration advisors.

FIGURE 8. SOURCE OF DETENTION/DEPORTATION FEARS



Participants also described how these fears affected their daily lives. As shown in Figure 9, 77% reported that these concerns negatively impacted their mental health, contributing to stress and anxiety. Additionally, 65% said their fears influenced decisions related to work or education, while 59% reported that access to public services, such as healthcare, was affected. Some respondents (52%) indicated that their fears disrupted their daily routines, and 48% said social interactions or community participation were impacted as a result.

FIGURE 9. EFFECTS OF FEAR OF DETENTION/DEPORTATION



Respondents were asked if they had taken any specific actions to address their fears. Sixty-six percent said they had sought legal advice or services, 52% avoided certain places or activities, 46% prepared emergency plans or documents, and 43% changed their communication habits (e.g., social media, phone calls).

Finally, participants were asked how they or people close to them coped with the fear of detention or deportation. Seventy-six percent reported that they talked to family or friends, and 70% sought information or advice from reliable sources. Almost half (48%) joined community or support groups, and 43% used stress-reducing techniques, such as meditation or exercise, to manage anxiety.

SOCIAL CLIMATE AND EXPERIENCES IN THE LAST YEAR

Given the passage of SB 1718 and the anti-immigrant rhetoric surrounding its passage, study participants were asked questions about their experiences in the past year to ascertain how the social climate in Florida communities might be affecting these experiences. When participants were asked if they had experienced more trouble getting or keeping a job in the past year, 33% reported more difficulty compared to the previous year, while 51% reported that the situation remained the same. When analyzed by legal status, 47% of non-U.S. citizens and 9% of U.S. citizens reported more difficulty keeping or finding a job in the last year (Figure 10).

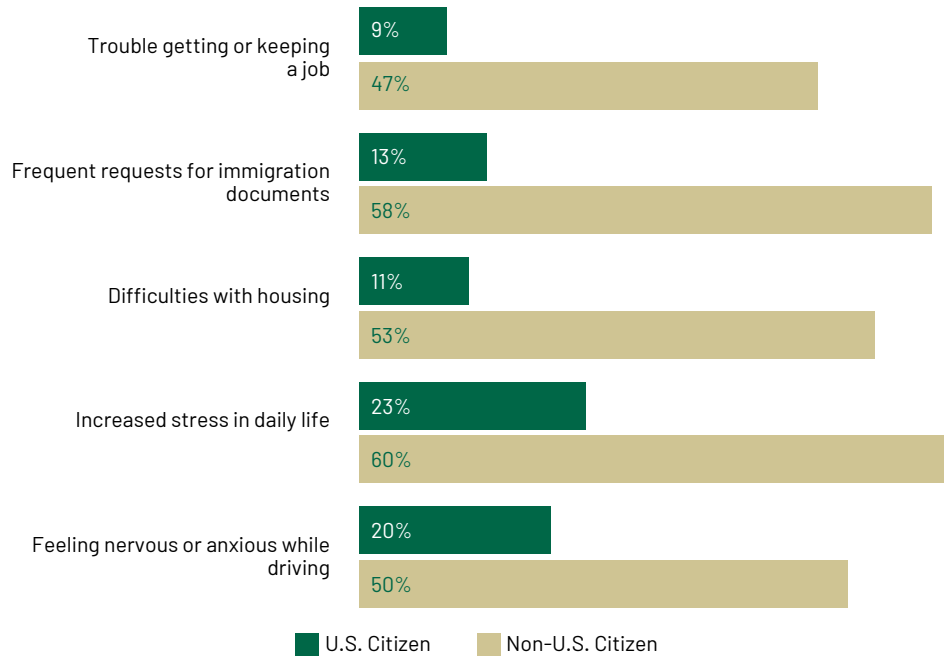
In response to whether they were asked more frequently for documentation to prove their immigration status, 42% of the sample reported an increase compared to the previous year. By legal status, 58% of non-U.S. citizens and 13% of U.S. citizens reported being asked for their documents more frequently.

Regarding housing, 38% of participants reported increased difficulty in finding or keeping housing. In terms of legal status, 53% of non-U.S. citizens and 11% of U.S. citizens reported greater housing difficulties.

When participants were asked about daily stress levels over the past year, 47% reported feeling more stress. The majority of non-U.S. citizens (61%) reported increased stress in their daily lives. Notably, 23% of U.S. citizens also reported this outcome.

Participants were also asked if they felt more nervous or anxious while driving in the past year; 39% of the sample reported an increase in such feelings. Half of non-U.S. citizens reported this increased anxiety, as well as 20% of U.S. citizens.

FIGURE 10. CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN THE PAST YEAR BY LEGAL STATUS



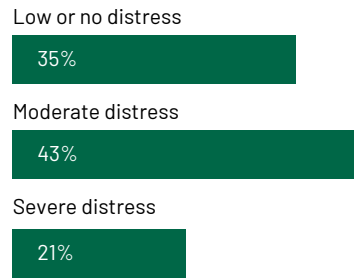
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Given the passage of SB 1718, the research team wanted to ascertain immigrants’ and U.S. citizen adult children’s psychological well-being. The Kessler Distress Scale (K6) was used to assess psychological well-being among participants.² General findings reveal that 43% of participants reported moderate distress, while 21% experienced severe distress. Only 35% of participants reported low or no distress (see Figure 11).

Among non-U.S. citizens, 26% reported severe distress, with 48% experiencing moderate distress. In contrast, U.S. citizens exhibited lower distress levels, though almost half were in the moderate and severe distress categories.

² The Kessler Distress scale consists of six questions that evaluate how frequently individuals have experienced feelings of nervousness, hopelessness, restlessness, depression, feelings of worthlessness, and the perception that everything is an effort in the past 30 days. The responses to these questions were collected using a 5-point Likert scale and were categorized into three levels: Low or No Distress, Moderate Distress, and Severe Distress. The responses to assess distress based on the Kessler scale were scored from 0 to 4 (0 = None of the time, 1 = A little of the time, 2 = Some of the time, 3 = Most of the time, 4 = All of the time). Participants' scores across the six items were summed, resulting in a total score ranging from 0 to 24. The higher the total score, the greater the level of mental distress experienced by the participant (Prochaska et al. 2012; Umucu et al., 2021). To classify participants into meaningful categories of distress, we followed standard practices in using the K6 scale. Based on their total score, participants were categorized as follows: **Low or No Distress:** Participants scoring between 0 and 4 were considered to have low or no mental distress; **Moderate Distress:** Participants scoring between 5 and 12 were classified as experiencing moderate mental distress. This level suggests that while participants may not meet the criteria for severe mental illness, they are experiencing a clinically relevant level of distress that may require mental health intervention; **Severe Distress:** Participants scoring between 13 and 24 were classified as experiencing severe mental distress. This group is at higher risk for serious mental health issues, and individuals in this category are likely in need of urgent mental health support or intervention. The six questions that comprise the Kessler Distress Scale (K6) are as follows: Approximately how often during the last 30 days: did you feel nervous?; did you feel hopeless?; did you feel restless?; have you felt so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?; did you feel like everything was an effort?; did you feel worthless?

FIGURE 11. PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS LEVELS



CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate significant impacts of SB 1718 on the lives of immigrants as well as U.S. citizens across multiple domains, including employment, housing, healthcare access, and psychological well-being.

When examining the data by legal status, non-U.S. citizens consistently reported greater difficulties across various domains, including increased challenges in securing or maintaining employment, and higher levels of anxiety and stress in daily life and while engaging in essential activities, such as driving. However, there also were spillover effects on U.S. citizens, as seen in the areas where U.S. citizens reported negative outcomes as well.

Nearly one-quarter of U.S. citizens experienced increased daily stress levels, and over half reported moderate or severe emotional distress. These findings emphasize the broad-reaching impacts of SB 1718, affecting not only immigrants but also U.S. citizens, particularly those with close connections to immigrant communities.

These findings suggest that SB 1718 not only disrupts the lives of immigrants but also introduces broader socio-economic instability within Florida's workforce and communities. As noted by participants and documented in previous studies, the forced departure of immigrant workers from the state threatens key industries, including agriculture and hospitality, exacerbating economic stress. Notably, over half of non-U.S. citizens reported considering leaving Florida due to the law, alongside almost one quarter of U.S. citizens, reflecting the broader impact on the state's labor force. Given the complexity of these issues, it is essential for policymakers, advocates, and community organizations to address both the direct and indirect impacts of SB 1718. This report aims to inform stakeholders by offering insights into the lived experiences of immigrants and their U.S. citizen kin in Florida, providing a foundation for future advocacy and policy reform.

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