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<u>The Sunrise Transit Project</u>
Connecting Broward County from the Beach to the Everglades

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The City of Sunrise is situated in Broward County, approximately 10 miles west of downtown Fort Lauderdale and 35 miles north of Miami. Incorporated in 1961 as Sunrise Golf Village, the city began as a modest community on Broward County's remote western edge, originally attracting homebuyers with model homes. By 1967, it had grown to a population of 4,300 residents and spanned an area of 1.75 square miles. However, the 1970s marked a period of significant expansion as Broward County pushed westward. Through strategic annexations, Sunrise expanded to over 18 square miles.

By 1984, Sunrise's population had escalated to approximately 50,000. This rapid growth led to financial difficulties, limited job opportunities, and a shortage of community facilities. In response, the city's leadership undertook a major revitalization in the early 1990s, aimed at stabilizing the city's finances, enhancing infrastructure, and positioning Sunrise as a burgeoning center for corporate headquarters. This transformation was largely successful by the mid-1990s, partly due to major commercial developments like the Sawgrass International Corporate Park, which attracted numerous businesses and helped create a robust job market.

A landmark development was the opening of the Sawgrass Mills Mall in 1990, now one of the largest shopping malls in the United States and a major tourist draw, particularly for Latin American visitors. This mall is renowned as the second most visited attraction in Florida, trailing only Walt Disney World ("Departments/Services"). The 1998 opening of Amerant Bank Arena,

located directly across from the mall, further elevated Sunrise's status as a tourist and entertainment hub. This arena, which is the nation's fourth largest, serves as the home for the Florida Panthers NHL team and hosts numerous other events, significantly contributing to the city's economic profile.

In recent years, my professional involvement with the Florida Panthers organization has deepened my connection to Sunrise, despite the demanding commute from Coral Gables. The Sawgrass district, in particular, has seen notable urbanization efforts, with over 140 acres of swampland being transformed into residential, office, and commercial spaces (Huriash). High-rise developments resembling those in Miami's Brickell neighborhood have begun to redefine the city's skyline, alongside projects like the Metropica complex, which offers condos and commercial spaces, signaling a move towards greater urban density.

Due to its constant development and densification, traffic in Sunrise is worsening, leading to congestion on major thoroughfares such as Sunrise Boulevard and Oakland Park Boulevard and shining light on the severe lack of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. The sprawling layout forces pedestrians to navigate long, wide roads that are often equipped with insufficient crosswalks, exposing them to risky situations where cars impatiently try to turn right on red. The city's public transportation system, primarily consisting of the unpopular and unreliable bus routes managed by Broward County Transit (BCT), forces residents to depend on personal vehicles (Christensen). This over-reliance on cars worsens traffic congestion and increases risks to pedestrian safety.

The necessity for Sunrise to develop a robust public transit system capable of supporting its growing population and workforce is evident. This is not only a local concern but a county-wide issue, as Broward County similarly lacks comprehensive transit solutions beyond buses. Implementing innovative urban planning and improved transportation infrastructure will

ensure that Sunrise becomes a truly navigable, attractive urban hub integrated seamlessly into the

broader South Florida area.

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During a busy evening at Amerant Bank Arena, a conversation with a seasoned Sunrise

police officer brought to light the worsening traffic conditions, a symptom of unchecked

development across South Florida. Recounting the "controlled chaos" on event days, he

reminisced about less hectic times, marking a stark contrast to today's routine congestion.

Motivated by these observations, I used Social Explorer to analyze employment numbers, current

public transit usage, and population density growth trends in Sunrise and Broward County.

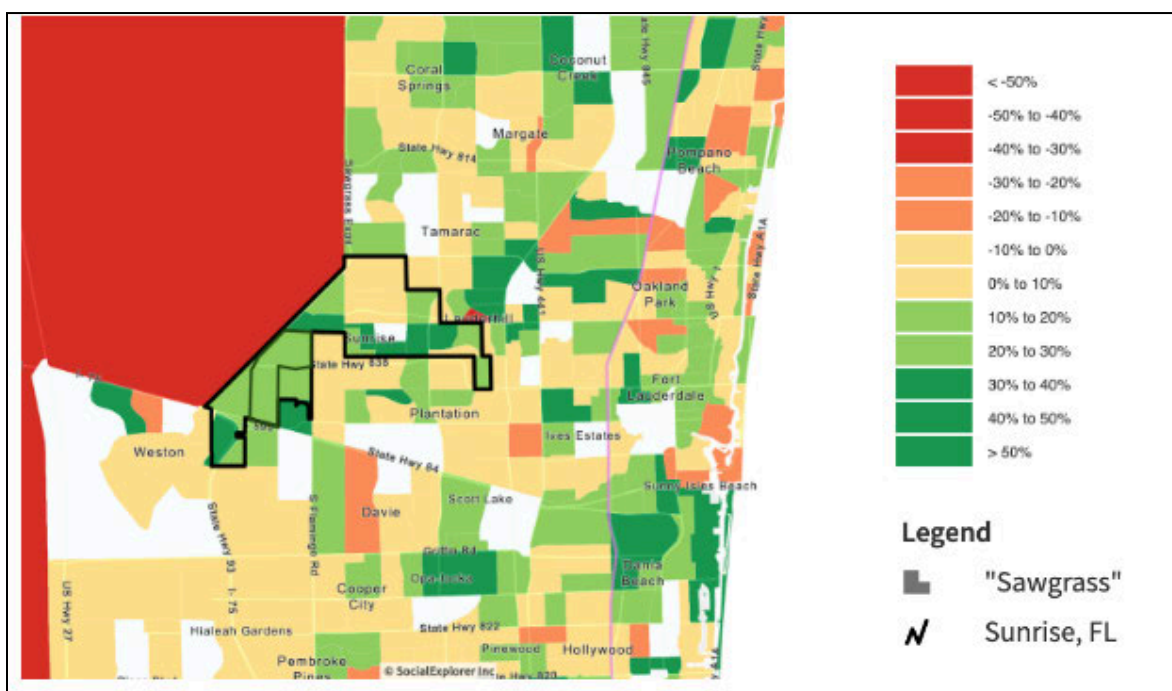Figure 1: Percent Change of Population Density in Broward County, 2010-2022

Figure 1 shows the percent growth/decline of population density in Broward County

between 2010 and 2022. Over this period, population density in Sunrise saw an overall increase

of 14.5% and now rivals its eastern Broward counterparts. The census tract just north of the

Sawgrass district (traced in dark green) is home to much of the new construction the city wants

to replicate across the area. This tract saw its population density double from about 4,700 people

per square mile to just under 10,000 per square mile. This explosive growth in population

mirrors the growth of the larger Miami metro area, especially after the COVID pandemic (Stein).

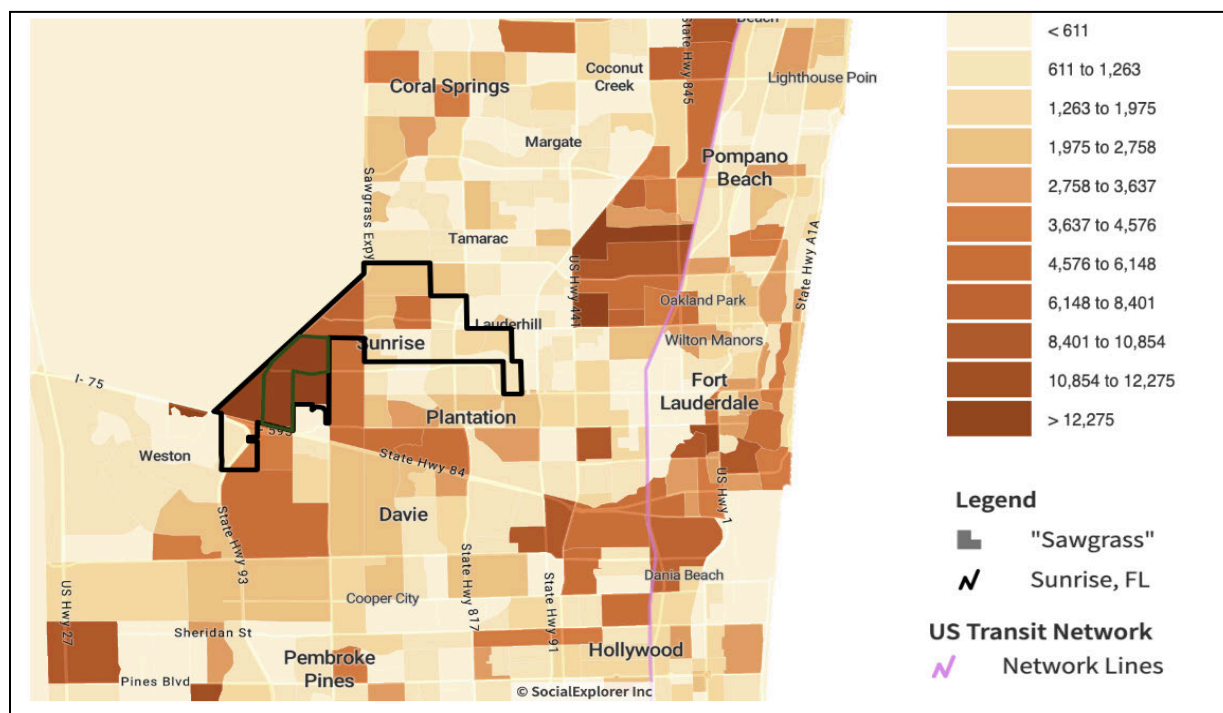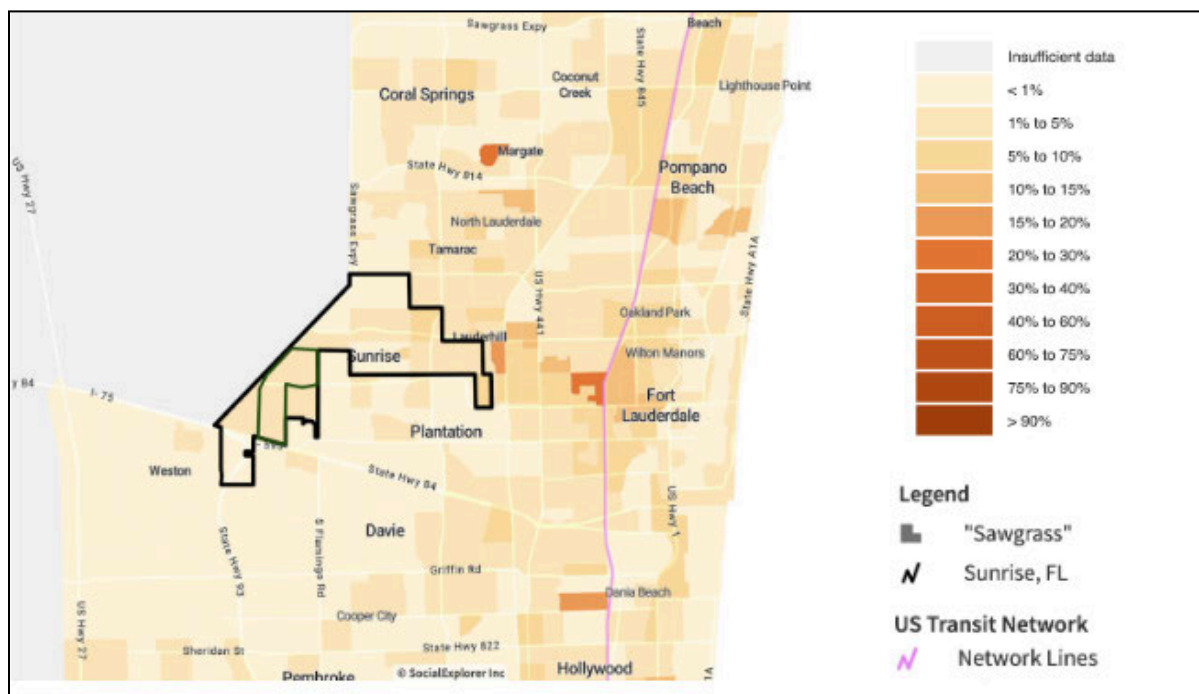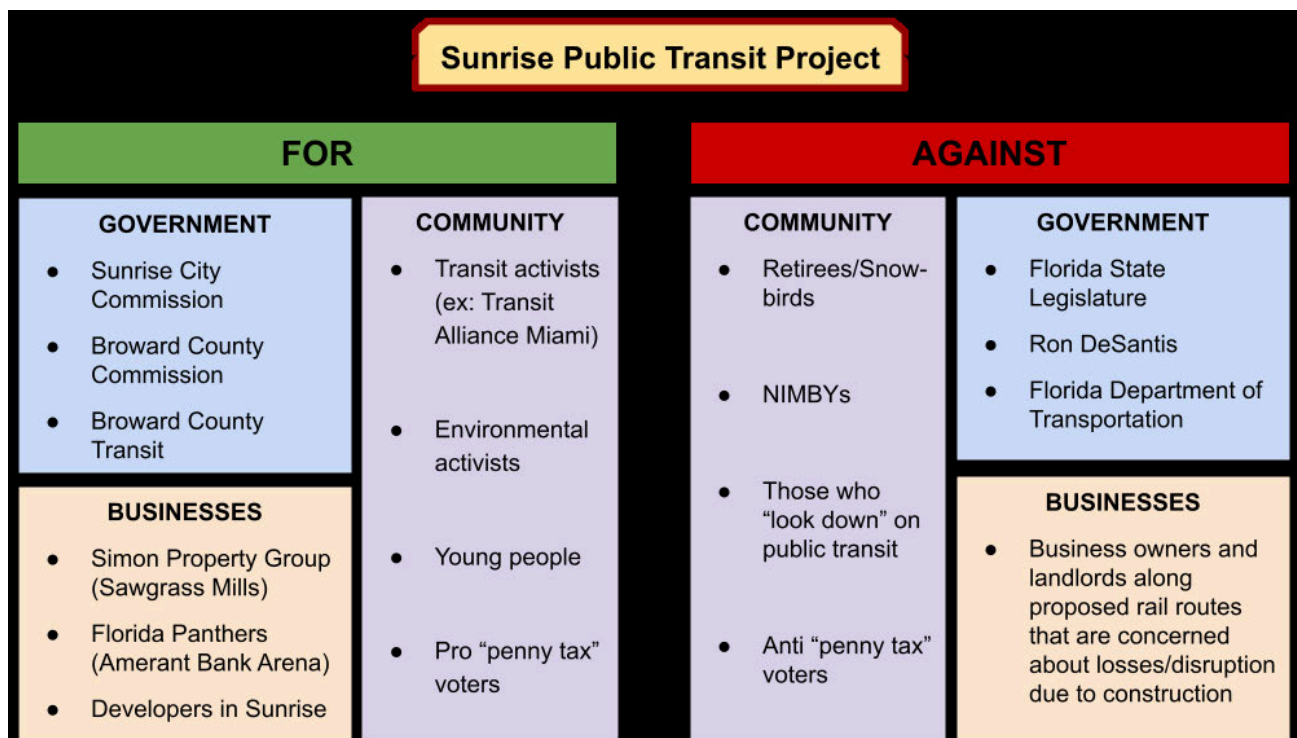Figure 2: Employment Distribution in Broward County, 2022

Figure 3: Percentage of Broward Commuters that use Public Transit, 2022

Further analysis from Figure 2 highlights the Sawgrass district as Broward County's predominant employment hub in 2022, with over 15,000 workers, making it a focal point for regional economic activity and suggests that a lot of people commute there for work on a daily basis. Despite this, Figure 3 indicates a glaring deficiency in public transit usage across the county, where a vast majority of commuters depend on personal vehicles, contributing to significant traffic congestion and environmental issues. This figure also reveals that higher public transit usage correlates strongly with proximity to Tri-Rail stations in Pompano Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Dania Beach, suggesting that expanded and reliable transit options could be embraced by South Florida communities and considerably alter commuting behaviors and reduce reliance on cars. Given this potential, engaging with stakeholders is crucial to determine if these implications will translate into sustainable results.

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Figure 4: Stakeholder Diagram

Sunrise Public Transit Project

FOR			AGAINST	
GOVERNMENT	**COMMUNITY**		**COMMUNITY**	**GOVERNMENT**
• Sunrise City Commission	• Transit activists (ex: Transit Alliance Miami)		• Retirees/Snow-birds	• Florida State Legislature
• Broward County Commission				• Ron DeSantis
• Broward County Transit	• Environmental activists		• NIMBYs	• Florida Department of Transportation
BUSINESSES			• Those who "look down" on public transit	**BUSINESSES**
• Simon Property Group (Sawgrass Mills)	• Young people			• Business owners and landlords along proposed rail routes that are concerned about losses/disruption due to construction
• Florida Panthers (Amerant Bank Arena)	• Pro "penny tax" voters		• Anti "penny tax" voters	
• Developers in Sunrise				

After identifying stakeholders, I separated them into two separate groups concerning the Sunrise public transit project. Proponents include Broward County public officials and the Sunrise City Commission, who both see public transit as vital for managing the region's growth. Major businesses like Simon Property Group, owners of Sawgrass Mills, alongside residents who supported the 2018 "penny tax" for transit improvements, also favor expansion (Moss). In general, young people and older people have opposite views on public transit, with young people supporting and older people opposing (Reynolds). However, substantial opposition comes from residents and businesses worried about construction disruptions and increased development. Additionally, skepticism about the reliability of Broward County Transit, and the preference for road infrastructure by conservative groups, including the state government led by Governor Ron DeSantis, further complicates consensus building (DeLisa). This divide is reminiscent of challenges faced by projects like New York's Second Avenue Subway, where local resistance significantly influenced development decisions.

Securing buy-in from residents and businesses in Broward County and Sunrise presents a unique challenge despite the established support from county and city officials. Communication strategies that emphasize the benefits of public transit are vital, especially in the context of rising traffic congestion and environmental concerns. For instance, traffic in Miami surged by 30% from 2021 to 2022, a trend that undoubtedly affects the broader metropolitan area, including Broward County (Ogle). Moreover, cars are responsible for 63% of air pollution in Broward County, stressing the need for sustainable transportation solutions ("Educational Programs Report Smoking Vehicles"). It is also important to communicate that public transit will not totally replace the automobile, but it will present a less-stress, cost-friendly alternative to driving.

My focus on major businesses in Sunrise as key stakeholders for the public transit project stems from their large influence on the initiative's success and accessibility for collaboration.

Among these stakeholders, the Florida Panthers stand out, enabled by my connection with John

Colombo, Vice President of the Florida Panthers Foundation and Community Relations. I made

this choice with the understanding that securing buy-in from an influential organization could

trigger broader public support by leveraging their platform to advocate for the project's benefits

across the community.

Before the workday began, I had the opportunity to engage in a 30-minute conversation

with Colombo. We dived deep into the subject of public transit's potential to transform access to

Amerant Bank Arena and its ripple effects on the broader community. Colombo shared, "You

know, public transit would really change the game for getting to the arena, especially when you

think about how all our big events seem to overlap with rush hour." His words echoed the

congestion that grips South Florida at dusk and how a shift towards public transport could ease

this daily gridlock and enhance the event-going experience for fans.

This conversation took place amidst long-standing discussions among influential business

groups in Sunrise and Broward County, notably concerning the county's early 2000s pledge to

link east and west Broward via rail. Evidently, this commitment saw no materialization, but there

is some hope. Recent conversations between BCT officials, the Panthers organization, and other

critical stakeholders in Sunrise have rekindled hopes. Colombo informed me, "BCT has already

engaged with us and other businesses around the idea of a light rail line connecting the [Fort

Lauderdale-Hollywood International] airport to Sawgrass Mills." The commitment is substantial,

with BCT earmarking $4.3 billion for the project over the next 15-20 years ("BCT Transit

Development Plan"). However, despite these promising talks and financial commitments, the

actual construction work has yet to commence.

As such, our conversation naturally veered towards the broader challenges of

transportation in Broward County, where Colombo expressed a mix of frustration and hope. "It

feels like the state is always playing catch-up, constantly widening highways like the [Florida] Turnpike and the Sawgrass Expressway," he observed, "They're stuck in a loop. Every few years, we see FDOT pour money into expanding roads instead of investing in ways to get cars off them." His understanding of the county's infrastructure woes was not just observations but reflections of a more profound concern for the community's well-being, especially those living near high-traffic areas that bear the brunt of noise and pollution. "I hear it all the time, especially from folks living close to the county's busiest streets. They're tired of the noise, the air getting thicker," Colombo said, "We should be looking at cutting down these issues, not just widening lanes as if that's going to fix everything." His role at the Florida Panthers Foundation brings him into close contact with environmental conservation efforts. "You'd be surprised how often this comes up at our environmental fundraisers," he shared. "People really care about preserving what we've got, and they see the constant road expansions as contrary to that spirit."

We then delved into Sunrise's evolving aspirations to transform into the "downtown" of West Broward. I was curious about his thoughts on how the city could enhance its transportation infrastructure to support this growth, improve walkability, and ensure pedestrian safety, as well as the potential role of the Panthers and other local businesses in these developments. Other professional sports franchises have embraced connectivity around their venues, and I pointed out the Tampa Bay Lightning to Colombo as a prime example of such success. "That's one thing they do better than us," he laughed, acknowledging the rivalry between the two teams but also the respect for their efforts. The TECO Streetcar System in Tampa provides free streetcar service that links key points of interest and major city landmarks, including the Lightning's home venue, Amalie Arena. The streetcar system plays a role in decreasing car traffic in downtown Tampa during events (Wronka). This service owes its cost-free status to an FDOT grant and strategic sponsorships, including significant support from the Tampa Bay Lightning, among others. The

Lightning's partnership with the TECO Streetcar System shows the significant impact that accessible public transit can have on stimulating economic growth within the urban core.

Following this, Colombo expressed some reservations about the immediate acceptance of public transit within Broward County. "I'm not entirely convinced everyone would jump on board with using public transit right away," he admitted, recognizing the deeply ingrained car culture in the area. "But I can see it catching on after people see the benefits and it becomes part of their daily routine." Colombo pointed out several hurdles that could dampen initial enthusiasm, such as the potential for limited service areas at the outset, concerns over safety and reliability, and the challenge of changing long-standing travel habits. "There's also the aspect of timing and frequency of service," he noted, "People won't wait 30 minutes for a ride. It has to be convenient." Despite these obstacles, Colombo remains optimistic about the long-term potential of public transit to reshape the community's approach to mobility. "Once it's up and running, and people start to appreciate the ease and savings, both in time and money, I think we'll see a shift in mindset." Columbo expressed a cautious yet hopeful outlook on the role of public transit in fostering a more connected Sunrise, acknowledging that while immediate widespread adoption may be ambitious, the foundation for a sustainable urban future lies in persistence, strategic planning, and community engagement.

To conclude our conversation, Colombo emphasized the Florida Panthers' commitment to supporting public transit initiatives. He expressed the organization's readiness to actively promote public transit options and explore incentives for fans who adopt sustainable travel methods to attend games and events. "Just as the Marlins have partnered with Brightline and the Heat with the Metrorail, this would be a unique opportunity for the Panthers to encourage public transit use among our fans. We would assure Broward County of our full support."

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Building on this commitment from a key stakeholder, my policy proposal aims to enhance the transportation infrastructure in Sunrise and Broward County. The primary goal of this initiative is to reduce dependency on personal vehicles and promote the use of environmentally friendly transport options, which will enhance the livability and accessibility of the community for both residents of Sunrise and the broader Broward County area.

Figure 5: Proposed Transit System for Sunrise and Broward County
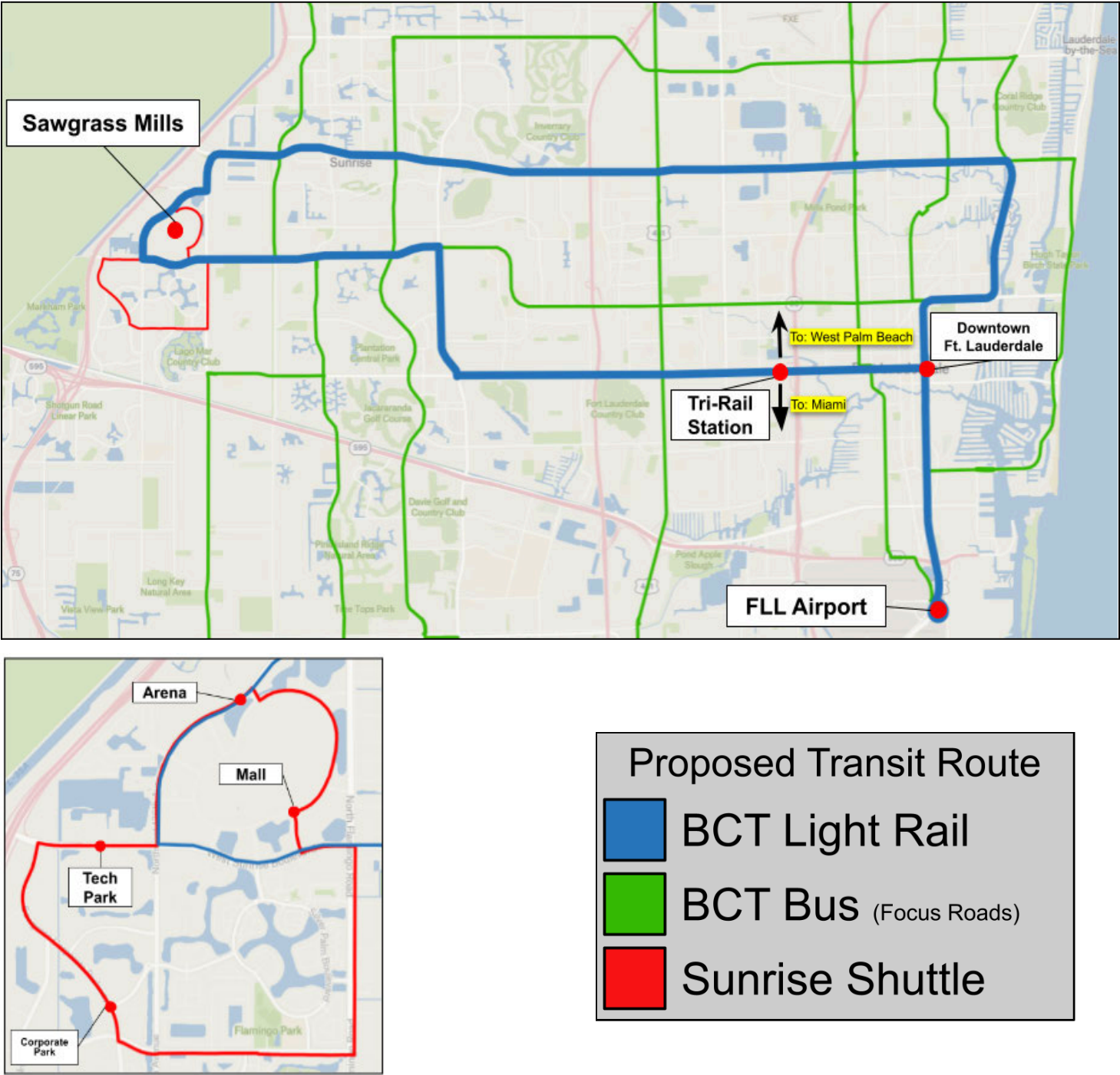
My proposal, pictured above in Figure 5, includes the development of a light rail line that would serve as a connection between Sunrise and greater Broward County, linking Downtown Fort Lauderdale and the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport directly to Sawgrass Mills. This rail connection is designed to integrate seamlessly with existing Tri-Rail and Brightline services, enhancing accessibility to major urban centers such as Miami, West Palm Beach, and Orlando. Strategically utilizing either an above-ground alignment along major boulevards like Broward Boulevard and Oakland Park Boulevard, or a light rail format that repurposes existing roadway space, the rail line would extend its benefits to neighboring communities such as Plantation, Lauderhill, Lauderdale Lakes, and North Lauderdale, effectively drawing these areas into a cohesive transit network.

In tandem with the rail development, a comprehensive overhaul of the Broward County Transit bus system is proposed to complement and enhance the rail service. Drawing from successful models in cities like New York, where buses effectively connect residential areas to railway lines, the plan reimagines BCT's operations by shifting focus from slow, east-west routes to prioritizing efficient, north-south routes that feed directly into rail stations. Some east-west routes will still exist on major roads that do not have rail like Commercial Boulevard. This shift aims to reduce redundancy, improve reliability, and increase the overall efficiency of public transit by making buses a convenient feeder system into the rail network. Alongside these changes, the proposal includes the introduction of local shuttle services within the Sawgrass district to improve mobility, connecting major commercial and office areas. To further enhance pedestrian safety and promote a walkable urban environment, the plan also calls for the construction of pedestrian bridges and the implementation of traffic regulation changes such as prohibiting right turns on red and lowering speed limits. These infrastructure improvements aim

to transform the Sawgrass district into a more vibrant, accessible, and pedestrian-friendly urban area and aligns with the city leadership's vision for Sunrise's future development.

Implementation will be led by a concerted effort from Broward County Transit, the Broward County Commission, and the Sunrise City Commission. It will start with feasibility studies and stakeholder engagement in 2025-26 to analyze proposed routes, assess environmental impacts, and consult with the community. Design and construction will be phased, targeting completion by 2035, beginning with connections to Sawgrass Mills and considering future extensions to Coral Springs, Pompano Beach and possibly linking with the Miami Metrorail.

Funding for this ambitious project will primarily utilize the Broward "penny tax," estimated to generate $350 million each year, contributing significantly to the projected $15 billion over its 30-year lifetime specifically earmarked for transit improvements (Sweeney). Additionally, leveraging part of the $16.2 billion allocated to Florida from President Biden's infrastructure bill could further support this initiative. The project will also pursue other state and federal grants. While state support for the rail project may be limited due to Florida's political environment, which favors cars, the shuttle service within Sunrise presents a more feasible option, likely to attract more immediate state backing given its lower initial costs and minimal infrastructure requirements. Private investments from large businesses that stand to benefit from the enhanced infrastructure, such as Simon Property Group, can also contribute to aspects like station maintenance and beautification—for instance, funding the beautification of the Sawgrass Mills' station. In the long term, maintenance and operation of the transit system will be supported by rider fares, ensuring continuous improvement of the service for Sunrise and Broward County.

To conclude, this policy proposal is designed with the primary goal of mitigating traffic congestion, which has become increasingly problematic as Sunrise continues to develop and

densify. By enhancing public transportation options through the introduction of a light rail line, an overhauled bus system, and local shuttle services, the proposal aims to ease the daily commutes of residents and spur economic growth by making the area more accessible and attractive to businesses and tourists. Integrating Sunrise into a broader, more efficient public transit network will facilitate smoother connections to major urban centers, potentially transforming Sunrise and Broward County into a true metropolis. These improvements would significantly enhance the quality of life for all residents by providing more reliable transportation options, reducing travel times, and promoting a safer, more pedestrian-friendly environment. Furthermore, this modernization will help Broward County combat air pollution and manage land scarcity issues, as South Florida is geographically constrained by the Everglades from expanding westward. By enabling healthy densification, this transformation will benefit both current inhabitants and attract new residents and businesses, ensuring a bright future for Sunrise and its neighboring communities across Broward County and the South Florida area.

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POL 574: Urban Politics

Dr. Matthew Nelsen

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Gentrification: Residential SES and Artificial Community Development in Overtown, Miami

What can gentrification tell us about the socioeconomic status (SES) of residents living within an urban area? An observation of a recent expansion of a historic Miami neighborhood, Riverside, shows the relationship between low SES and the success of nearby gentrification projects. Because of their proximity, minimum wage workers, and residents living in inadequate public housing assist in generating success of gentrification projects that simultaneously cause local disinvestment and exploit limited available resources. Gentrification is dependent on exploited resources from underdeveloped communities (Chong, 2017). I argue that local, low-income residents are denied equitable access to important urban resources. These resources encompass a wide spectrum of space and time-related assets, including social capital, infrastructure, urban transportation/mobility, and labor. Local lower-class residents are not the target population for nearby gentrification projects. The continuous preservation of development projects in absence of development that affects the SES status of residents is directly correlated with lower quality of life, negative health outcomes, health risk behaviors, and socioeconomic challenges. As businesses and private markets flourish economically, they often extract living, economic, and social value from established low-income neighborhoods. This unequal tradeoff of resources is a barrier to overall health and wellbeing for low-income and working-class urban residents.

The Problem: Exploitation of Limited Resources in Underinvested Neighborhoods

The purpose of this study is to declare gentrification as problematic and detrimental to residential SES and wellbeing while advocating for proper allocation and reinvestment from gentrification projects into community preservation for longstanding residents of Overtown. The geographical analysis comprises of two main components: the delineation of neighborhood boundaries in Overtown, and the examination of how this expansion correlates with the influx of racially and economically diverse residents. In this paper I

utilize two variables, race, and housing quality, to substantiate the unequal tradeoff of resources that occurs between residents and developers. In my examination of the relationship between race and housing quality, I observe that the expansion of neighboring areas like Riverside correlates with the recent influx of White-Hispanic residents and the growth of gentrification initiatives. To maintain the perception of Overtown's boundaries as more desirable, local policymakers present new neighborhood signs throughout the area to promote a "feeling" of new neighborhood. The influx of racially and economically diverse residents drives the utilization of local land to continue marketing to affluent Miamians and tourists.

I argue that developers and local policymakers have formed an alliance focused solely on maintaining merely the appearance, desirability and profit of their urban communities. This superficial and profit-based partnership is responsible for the lack of investment in the health and wellbeing of residents in Overtown. By exploiting affordable land for financial gain, developers are fueling widespread gentrification in Miami's low-income neighborhoods. Emerging businesses cater primarily to outsiders, neglecting the local community and exacerbating preexisting issues such as low SES among residents and food deserts. The exploitation that occurs once developers invest in businesses with an affluent crowd, not only erodes Black culture in Overtown, but also depletes resources within the neighborhood. Gentrification is a multifaceted issue that causes further issues beyond displacement. Gentrification involves sharing resources crucial for the well-being of urban residents with affluent consumers. This permits local level policymakers and developers to focus on enhancing the appeal of the urban community while inconveniencing residents' low SES status.

Gentrification in Miami presents a complex situation where the traditional pattern of relocation is not a feasible option for residents within low-income neighborhoods. Due to rent surges, gentrification in Miami does not always act as a catalyst for displacement. Miami is an example of a city where developers are building exclusively around and taking various resources from lower-income racially diverse communities. Due to the absence of access to affordable housing, residents are forced to stay in their neighborhoods as rent prices increase (Miami Herald, 2023). The displacement that is typically associated with gentrification develops into an inequitable struggle over limitedly available resources between

residents, business owners, developers, and consumers. Developers utilize low land costs in low-income areas to increase profit on business ventures (Land Zero). Due to gentrification projects increasing the influx of affluent locals in low-income neighborhoods, limited resources are shared. Harboring profits for touristic developments are correlated to the deprivation of land for local low-income residents.

Background / History

Miami is *known* as one of the most beautiful and innovative cities in the U.S. (Forbes, 2021). With a combination of beautiful weather, modern architecture, and an abundance of beaches, Miami is a go-to vacation spot at any time of the year. Miami is also home to an abundance of development projects, ranging from condos to luxury shopping centers. This ever-growing development that takes place in Miami is part of the reason why the city attracts tourists and seekers of business opportunities. This narrow view of Miami does not consider the beauty of Miami's cultural diversity. Miami houses various Black, and Caribbean ethnic lower-class communities throughout the city in various culturally rich neighborhoods (Mas, 2022). As an outcome of the influx of expensive rent prices in Miami, residents of low SES status are clustered together in racially segregated neighborhoods shaped by the government agencies sustaining historic patterns of redlining (Mohl, 2021). Many of South Florida's low-income neighborhoods are concentrated in the center of Miami, including Allapattah, Little Haiti, Liberty City, and Overtown, which are inhabited by Black, Latinx, and Caribbean communities.

Overtown, Miami is both a historic and modern example of how the distribution and quality of shared resources after gentrification impact residents. Much of Overtown's "urban renewals" are historically efforts to either drive out or decrease social and economic value among Black residents (Segregated by Design). The 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act established legal "slum clearance" of Black residents in Overtown, Miami, Florida. "The Harlem of the South," a cultural refuge for segregated Miamians of color, ended abruptly after the construction of I95 across 6th Ave. The process of "urban renewal" in Overtown leads to urban decline. Due to significant disinvestment, Overtown in Miami has transitioned from a thriving area where middle-class Black Americans lived and worked to an abundance of public housing and corner stores.

Variables

The status of race and housing quality has changed many because of gentrification. To capture how local level policymakers and developers are building around low-income Black residents and its negative implications, I focus on visualizations that reveal patterns of race placement and infrastructure quality. The variables, race and housing quality will provide background for a various key ideas. The first being, how developers in alliance with local committees are approving modern infrastructural projects that are exclusively centered around low SES residents. This is creating an environment where Black residents are clustered in the middle of Overtown, Miami with depleting resources. Secondly, urban planners in alliance with local committees are ambiguously expanding nearby neighborhoods, I argue, to appease affluent tourists and Miamians. The implications of the ambiguous expansion of nearby neighborhoods speak to how local urban planners are aiming to market to tourists. Using outlines, I will show where developers and urban planners are Lastly, using maps created via Social Explorer, I will show that the first two key ideas are either shaped around the preexisting racial distribution or whether the desire to attract a more affluent population has created the state of racial makeup. Overall, this evidence merely provides background and justification for the ongoing resource exploitation that urban low SES residents experience while facing gentrification they cannot afford to move away from.

Race and Housing Quality in Overtown, Miami

Statistically, Overtown lacks racial and economic diversity. When describing Overtown, many refer to it as a predominantly Black low-income neighborhood. My observations of Overtown bring a contrasting conclusion: Overtown has recently become a diverse neighborhood. The demographics of Overtown have changed dramatically over time. What was once known as a sanctuary for Black residents facing racial segregation in Miami, is now home to Black, White, Latinx and Carribean people. Historically, the racial demographic of Overtown *is* predominately Black. Overtown, Miami, once regarded as the Southern Harlem, was a hub for Black residents of various economic backgrounds. Much of Overtown's "urban renewals" are historical efforts to either drive out or decrease social and economic value among Black residents (Segregated by Design).
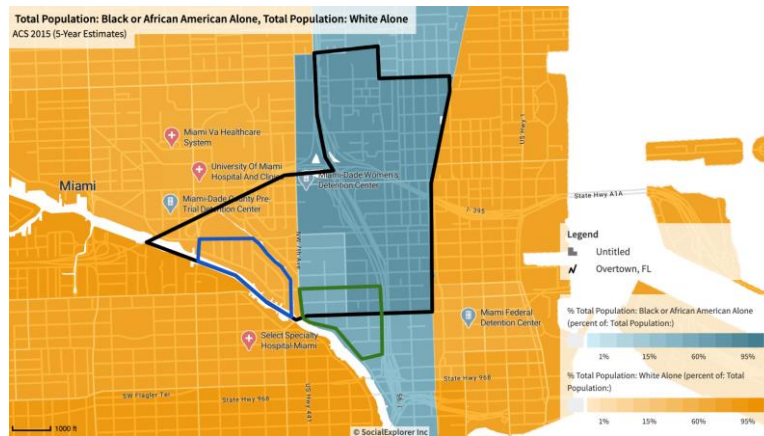
Figure 1, Racial demographics of Overtown, Miami, 2015

In 2015, Overtown was inhabited by (mostly) Black residents, in contrast to a nearby neighborhood, Spring Garden. Figure 1 displays the racial makeup of Overtown, Miami in 2015. Figure 1 also displays additional neighborhood boundaries. The blue line in Figure 1 represents Spring Garden. The green line in Figure 1 represents the expansion of Riverside. Spring Garden is a small historic neighborhood between the hospital district and Overtown housing a primarily White demographic. This marked disparity between the proportion of Black and White residents is correlated to Spring Garden's proximity to a nearby hospital district. Less than a mile away is the University of Miami's "Health District." University of Miami's "Health District" is comprised of various hospitals, clinics, schools, and research centers. The Health District employs a myriad of affluent doctors, nurses, health care managers, etc. The total salary range for physicians working at UHealth is between 140-260k a year (Uhealth, 2022). Spring Garden is a historically a predominately White affluent neighborhood with expensive homes.

Figure 1 shows the racial distribution of Black and White residents in Overtown, Miami. The areas of Overtown that are closer to the Health District show a higher proportion of White residents. The remaining demographic of Overtown are Black residents. As of today, the demographic of Overtown has changed dramatically. I used 2015 to display the racial makeup of Overtown, Miami, before its major wave of gentrification began around 2016.
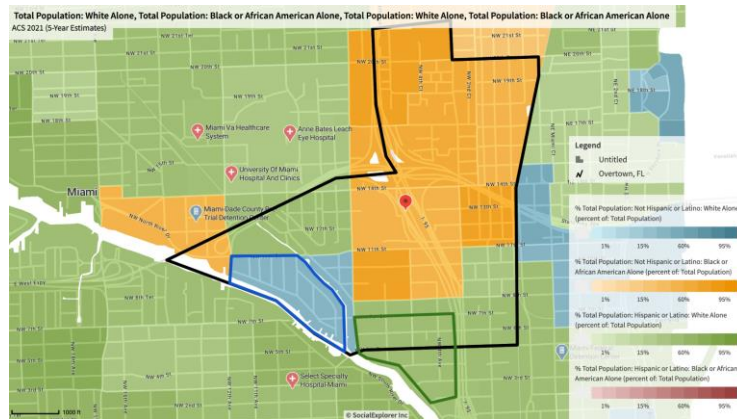
Figure 2, Racial demographics of Overtown, Miami, 2021

Today, Overtown, Miami, is diverse. As a result of gentrification and the recent expansion of Riverside, Overtown has undergone an influx of Latinx and Caribbean residents. In addition to a shift in where White residents are staying. Figure 2 displays the racial distribution of residents in Overtown as of 2021. Though there are a range of factors to consider when considering the influx of racially diverse residents, I argue that the wave of gentrification produced after 2016 is one of the more important reasons as to why the racial makeup of Overtown has changed drastically. From my own living experience, like most neighborhoods that house low SES (socioeconomic status) Black residents, Overtown is known for being bad or dangerous. This is a common belief among Miami natives, and tourists as well. Most of the time we allude to poor neighborhoods in Miami in class, it does not take long for someone to mention Overtown. Beyond personal conceived notions about Overtown, the media often plays into such narratives by categorizing Overtown as "crime ridden." Having a sense of common beliefs around the safety and overall living conditions of Overtown, I contend that newer residents are lured by proximity to gentrification projects. In return, there is a higher demand to appease affluent residents with more gentrification projects.

Housing in Overtown, Miami

Most of the structures near these gentrification projects are government funded public housing. These low-income public housing projects are visibly older than newer infrastructure nearby. Most of the gentrification in Overtown takes place along NW North River Drive, along the Miami River. Restaurants

like Kiki's on the River market itself by advertising its waterfront side to Yacht owners living and visiting in Miami. The area where newer structures are present is the area of Overtown where local level policy makers have approved other projects such as Lummus River Park and the 5ᵗʰ street bridge. Other areas within Overtown, with higher proportions of older homes and Black residents are not undergoing much development.
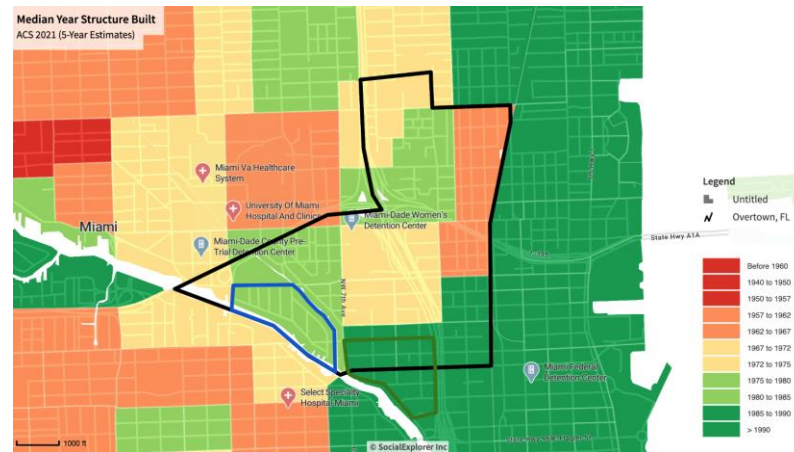

Figure 3, Median Year Structure Built in Overtown, 2021

Figure 3 shows the median year of structure built for homes in Overtown. The influx of White, Hispanic, and affluent residents is correlated to the presence of newer homes. The center and Northeastern region of Overtown, two areas where the proportion of Black residents has not changed, are where most older homes are.

Profit-Motivated Expansion of Racially Diverse Areas

Lastly, I bring attention to the expansion of Riverside within Overtown, Miami. Maps indicate that the boundaries of Overtown reach the Miami River along NW North River Dr, yet new signs have appeared throughout both the avenue before and streets further down implying that Riverside begins before the river. Notably these signs appeared in areas where restaurants are utilizing residential parking for valet parking for their businesses on the weekend. The sign has various implications/outcomes. It attracts a more affluent crowd because they have a sense of being in a different neighborhood. The affluent consumers do not feel unsafe parking their cars in Riverside, but they may feel unsafe parking it in Overtown.
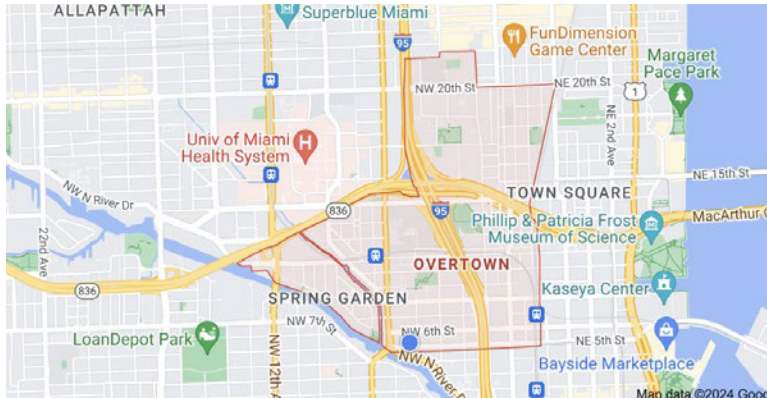
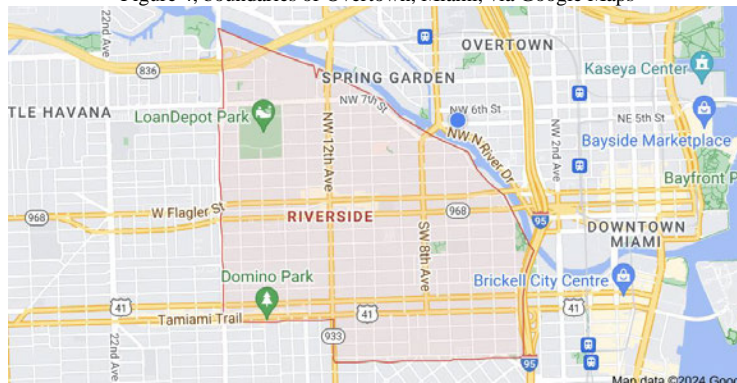Figure 4, boundaries of Overtown, Miami, via Google Maps

Figure 5, boundaries of Riverside, Miami, via Google Maps

Figure 6, 5th Ave once a part of Overtown, now a part of Riverside after influx of nearby gentrification projects on the following street (North River Drive).

Therefore, these variables and maps help to justify my claim that local level policymakers and developers are creating businesses that appease affluent consumers. This influx of a Whiter and more affluent population may also account for the increase in racially diverse living in Overtown, Miami. Higher proportions of White residents are associated with nearby residents feeling "safer" (Krysan, 2009).

Highlighting variables like race and housing quality, I argue that the interaction between developers and local level policymakers is geared towards preserving the appearance and financial gain of their urban

communities. As a result, low SES Black residents in Overtown, Miami, have undergone an influx of White affluent residents in addition to a wave of gentrification projects that make living in Overtown bearable. Local level policymakers are not making investments in projects that positively impact the quality of life for Overtown residents. The gentrification projects that are growing along NW North River Drive are not designed to keep residents with low SES status in mind. By showing that attempts to "encourage and support housing, job creation, economic and business development, educational opportunities, and historic and cultural preservation-regarding activities, developments, and improvements within, or impacting the residents of the Overtown area," are short-lived by a stronger desire to maintain projects and relationships with affluent developers.

Figure 7, NW 7th Street and 5th Ave, Overtown, Miami, FL

Figure 8, NW 4th St North River Drive, Riverside, Miami, FL

Figures 7 and 8 offer insight into the infrastructural contrasts within Overtown. Both images are within the neighborhood boundaries of "Overtown," yet they both show distinct levels of investment. Local

gentrification projects are decreasing the socioeconomic status for residents. There is a "pseudo visualization' of community development that is accompanied with tolerable disadvantages such as: loud music from nearby restaurants, increase in road and water traffic, lower access to local transportation, etc.

Stakeholders

To effectively address the outcomes linked with gentrification, a stakeholder analysis will help identify and classify the key stakeholders involved. Various groups of individuals both are affected and contribute to the distribution of resources in Overtown, Miami. First, the purpose of this study is to advocate for Black residents and employees with low SES. By doing so, I recognize Overtown residents who have lived in Overtown before 2016 and servers and bussers working at either, Kiki's on the River, Casablanca, and Sea Spice. These groups of individuals are recognized to advocate against local gentrification projects that do not directly impact these [people] positively. On the other hand, I recognize primarily the Overtown Commitee Board, who has the main responsibility for approving developments in Overtown. Additional committees that have previously worked in Overtown or actively working alongside developers are, Omni Community Redevelopment Agency, Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency, and the City of Miami. Lastly, developers responsible for creating businesses such as Brightline Station, Kiki's on the River, etc. These developers are Michael Simkin's Lion Development Group, Property Markets Group and Alex Karakhanian's Miami Based Landmark Development.

Figure 9 Stakeholders for addressing gentrification in Overtown, Miami.

Figure 9 is a visualization of grouping the stakeholders into broader categories: local policymakers, (local) residents and housing (agents). Local policymakers are local board groups responsible for promoting equity in Overtown, Miami, by approving projects centered around enhancing the quality of life for local Overtown residents. Housing is concerning developers responsible for all infrastructural developments in Overtown, Miami, after 2010. For this paper, there are two coalitions. One, residents seeking infrastructure and developments that aid in bettering the quality of life. Secondly, local level policy makers and developers are seeking to maintain profit and business relationships that help sustain the appearance of urban communities. For this research study I am advocating for residents and infrastructure that positively impacts and can improve their SES. Advocating against developers is correlated with finding ways to ensure that the living quality of Overtown residents is not jeopardized by the desire to uphold profit. Working with these stakeholders is essential to maintaining the health of residents clustered in the middle of Overtown,

with minimal knowledge of local level policies and diminishing resources. The unequal distribution of resources in Overtown benefits developers. Doing so also allows local level policy makers to

Local Level Policy Makers, Developers and Misuse of "Investments"

There are several local level committees whose missions' plans are to sustain the quality of life and economic opportunities within Overtown. The Overtown Community Oversight Board (OCOB) is significant in this analysis because it is the committee responsible for the entire region of Overtown, Miami. The OCOB is responsible for approving business projects throughout the neighborhood in a coalition with the City of Miami and fellow nearby committee board. The OCOB is responsible for: "encouraging and support housing, job creation, economic and business development, educational opportunities, and historic and cultural preservation and to provide written recommendations to the City Commission regarding activities, developments, and improvements within, or impacting the residents of the Overtown area. (City of Miami).

Next is two of three of Miami's redevelopment committees. The first is the Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency (SOPWCR). SOPWCR is responsible for redevelopment in the southern region of Overtown. This area of Overtown is close to Wynwood, and downtown, by Park West. This committee has a responsibility to maintaining the quality of life for residents in Overtown, Miami. Via the SOPWCR board website, "the CRA's main mission is to enhance the quality of life of residents within the Redevelopment Area by expanding the tax base, creating job opportunities, promoting dynamic economic growth, and fostering safe neighborhoods. In furtherance of this mission, the CRA has implemented a variety of new development and redevelopment undertakings, to increase accessibility to quality affordable housing for residents of low and moderate income." In other words, this committee focuses primarily on investments in Overtown that are not strictly for affluent community members.

Communication to Stakeholders

To contact other stakeholders such as those within the housing and local policy group, I will need to attend or listen to any upcoming council meetings. In addition, I can reach out to these stakeholders, specifically local level policymakers, with my research to show how detrimental specific development projects can be. Also, I can contact these stakeholders, specifically local level policymakers, with my research to show how detrimental specific development projects can be. Now, I hypothesize that such committees have a better standing relationship developer than they do with community members. Within my survey, I plan to ask community members about their knowledge of local level policies. I also hypothesize here that many residents are not familiar with the abundance of committees that work to sustain residential quality of life. This is a result of there being a lack effort towards genuinely improving living standards for Native Overtown residents.

Community Voices

Residents are on the receiving end of poor urban management. The boundary between Riverside and Overtown shows a vast divide between investment and disinvestment in the 33136-area code. Along NW North River Drive is a newly developed riverfront park. Like Kiki's on the River, this area is utilized for yacht and boat drivers to dock and pick up customers for boat rides. The Wharf, a riverside bar, is located a few steps away from this river. These developments are the only developments that have taken place around this location. Residents can feel the disinvestment, but do not have the resources to relocate. I hypothesize that residents are not aware of the duty local level committees must maintain the status of quality of life for residents. The influx of an affluent population, and higher levels of traffic, for example, are unfavorable outcomes that residents with minimal knowledge of local level policies passively endure.

To capture the experience of residents living in Overtown, I plan to create a survey based around SES and quality of life in consideration of nearby gentrification projects. To adequately address the status of quality of life for residents in the Overtown region. I recognize Overtown residents who have lived in Overtown before 2016 and servers and bussers working at either, Kiki's on the River, Casablanca and Seaspice. Angela, a resident within the 33136-zip code for over 15 years is a stakeholder that can help with addressing concerns with the differences in infrastructure and developments between NW North River

Drive and the rest of the neighborhood. First, I describe Angela, a resident of 33136, not Overtown, Miami, because she lives where an abundance of new neighborhood signs has popped up. Along 6th street, where she lives, both sides of her apartment complex show two vastly different urban settings. On the west side, she overlooks various public housing projects, and open lots. On the east side, she has a direct view of Kiki's on the River, Seaspice and the 5th street bridge. When questioned about what it is like to live in this ambiguous neighborhood with minimal resources, Angela has a lot to say. Though Angela does not engage in local level politics, she does condemn "whoever is responsible" for their inability to level the quality of infrastructure throughout the neighborhood.

> **Angela**: I think most of these developments have nothing to do with the residents around them. I have personally only been to Casablanca once, and it was not a wonderful experience (laughs). Beyond the fact that I did not enjoy the food, it was extremely expensive. It makes me wonder what other residents think about it too. I would much rather go to a grocery store there.

> **AAH**: These are great points. What do you appreciate about living in this neighborhood?

> Angela: Our proximity to the rest of the city is by far the best aspect of living here. I wish that us residents got to benefit from being proud about living here. The only thing that brings pride to this area are fancy projects that make living here easier to talk about. So many people think poorly of Overtown and most "ghettos," but I look out my window and beyond the restaurants, I see the river and trees, we have great greenery. We are lucky and I can see others want to take advantage of that.

> **AAH**: What do you think of the sudden neighborhood change on 5th street?

> **Angela**: That sign is in place to make rich people who come here feel safe. Rich customers would not park their Bentleys in Overtown, but they do not think twice about parking along Riverside. The sign change came with the rich crowd, so I am not surprised that whoever is in charge is putting signs up to make rich customers feel safer. They do not care about us.

> **AAH:** Do you think that living in public housing makes your opinion less valuable?

> **Angela**: That is what others would think and say but I am still a resident and I deserve to see my neighborhood upgraded and changed and feel excited about being a part of it. These rich places do not appeal to me, they are designed to push me away.

Interview Regarding Policy Proposal:

Angela: To be honest, this sounds like a dream. This is ideal but something tells me that although local committee board members are responsible for "taking care of us," they too somehow benefit from the gentrification projects.

       AAH: What makes you come to this conclusion?

Angela: I am living this reality now. It is crazy to learn so many committees exist with this same duty but none of them do anything for "us." They let developers take over. They are building another restaurant nearby and it makes my heart sink, my time here is limited.

       AAH: What would you change about my policy?

Angela: Sadly, I feel we have to make it work for them for anything to work for us. So, I am just not sure they would want to share their profit with the same people they are pushing out. At the same time, it is a great idea and in the real world it can provoke a lot of the change that we all want. So instead, we just need to mobilize. I am not sure it is a great idea, but I am not optimistic anymore.

From firsthand experiences and years of observations, I can conclude that local lower-class residents are not the target population for nearby gentrification projects. I come to this conclusion because most of the structures near these gentrification projects are government funded public housing. These low-income public housing projects are visibly older than newer infrastructure nearby. Residents within my apartment building are wearing the uniform of nearby restaurants, yet, when waiting for the bus which is placed right in front of Kiki's on the River, I rarely see my neighbors stopping by to get food. So, in addition to our inability to afford to enjoy new local gentrification projects, residents are then subjected to an increase traffic times in residential areas, lack of parking, increase in boat traffic, modified bus routes, low minimum wage from local booming businesses, lack of social familiarity due to influx of affluent locals and lastly, disinvestment in management of public housing.

This urban decline happens simultaneously as nearby extended neighborhoods grow economically, due to value gained from shared resources. In neighborhoods where gentrification is driving profit, there is a correlation between geographical expansion (with a focus on sustaining tourism profits), urban decline, and low SES status in newly shaped middle-class areas. Underdeveloped communities are involved in sustaining urban profit that is continuously disinvested from neglected areas. These communities are barely livable (low walkability, poor transportation, inadequate housing), most people are living to pay their bills,

and therefore, their lives revolve around work. The neighborhood "grows and becomes more beautiful," around the abundance of poorly managed public housing.

Policy Proposal

The Overtown Advisory Board/Overtown Community Oversight Board (OCOB) is responsible for supporting, "housing, job creation, economic and business development, educational opportunities and historic and cultural preservation." (City of Miami). Activities, developments, and improvements are reviewed by the OCOB for approval. My policy proposition would demand that developers seeking to build or improve infrastructure in the Overtown area invest a portion of their profits back into community-based investments that can increase the living value for residents.

As a local resident of Miami, and University of Miami student conducting research with combined disciplines of urban politics, geography, and global health, I can create and provide survey data of both local and residential attitudes about local developments, status of infrastructure, and knowledge of local-level politics. By creating a policy idea, I can begin to advocate for my community members by attending various City Board meetings, such as city commission meeting, OMNI CRA meetings, Historic Environmental Preservation Board Regular meetings, and Southeast Overtown Park West meetings. Survey data in addition to observation of resource deprivation and its relationship to low SES and gentrification can shed light on the devaluation of social value for Black residents throughout Miami. ⌷

It is known that Developers capitalize on profit opportunities by investing in low-income neighborhoods. I argue that because multiple developers often control businesses within a given area, they have the capacity to reinvest a portion of their profits back into the neighborhood from which they extract resources. Implementing such a policy is crucial as it mirrors the process of resource exploitation. Investors extract resources that affect the socioeconomic status of residents, while residents benefit financially from development projects. This exchange is key to balancing out the disinvestment in Overtown, Miami.

I propose that developers are responsible for a percentage of their earnings on a repetitive cycle (monthly, biweekly, etc.) to ensure similar upkeep to neighborhood resources. For example, developers

may be responsible for reinvesting 10% of earnings to the neighborhood in Overtown. These reinvestments can be implemented in numerous ways. To begin with, local policymakers can use empty land that developers and restaurant managers use for parking to build plazas with multiple businesses for residents. This can include a grocery store, a laundromat, tutoring center, athletic centers, etc. That way residents can benefit from proximity to grocery stores as well as an influx of job opportunities.

The policy timeline would have to consider community meetings first. Mobilizing community members is an important function of democracy. It allows those creating policies to get true insight on the feasibility and overall potential outcomes of said policy. I would begin my process by conducting a survey where I ask comparable questions to the ones that I asked Angela. Those being, "What do you think of the sudden neighborhood change on 5th street?", and "Do you think that living in public housing makes your opinion less valuable?." This would help me understand how residents perceive their status in Overtown. Afterwards, I intend to mobilize community members interested in advocating for a policy like this. I am interested in working with local level policymakers to ensure that community voices are heard. Following, I would hope that such advocacy does allow for local level policymakers to address the disinvestment that has taken place over the past couple of years, and that is a key point for holding them to their duty to maintain the wellbeing of their residents.

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Urban Politics

May 2nd, 2024

Breaking The Chains: Holistic Approach to Miami-Dade Welfare Programs

Miami-Dade County, and the city of Miami in particular represent a dichotomy - a place that seems to exist on two poles. On one hand, it is the home to some of the wealthiest people in the US, and the primary vacation destination for others, known for its good weather, rapidly growing economy, lenient COVID regulations, and legendary party scene. On the other, as soon as you cross the lines meticulously drawn by the hand of Jim Crow, you step into a different world, where very little of the glamour and shine of paradise is left.

Miami is unlike any other place in the world. Still, I believe it to be a city that reflects challenges shared by the world - climate change, crime, immigration, socio-economic disparities and poverty; it flames battles fought in political arenas; it highlights the most pressing of needs, and often it sets an example to follow - Miami-Dade local government is aware of this, and therefore puts large sums of money towards funding numerous welfare programs. However, do those programs offer what people actually need? And, simply put, are they efficient?

This question and my interest in the topic were sparked in a rather spontaneous manner. I volunteered at the food drive in Allapatah, when suddenly a woman's car broke down out of nowhere, as she tried to pull up. She, visibly horrified, could not stop apologizing, so I hurried in hopes of reassuring her all was fine. In return, I had the privilege of hearing her story, which I cannot put into words other than devastating and unfair. When I asked her if she could receive

any help, she replied with exhaustion: "It [bureracracy] is exhausting, it makes you feel

humiliated, and at some point, you start wondering – is it even worth it?." She explained that

social services are inaccessible in so many ways, and when one does get access, the experience is

"dehumanizing, overwhelming, and highly bureaucratic."

I. Poverty - variable selection and geographical analysis.

According to the US Census Bureau, "poverty thresholds were derived from the cost of a

minimum food diet multiplied by three to account for other family expenses." Essentially it is

expressed as one number - income, not accounting for numerous factors - and therefore begging

for a question of its accuracy and adequacy, since it is a detrimental measure regarding who shall

receive assistance, food, and medical care. I examine variables that, in my opinion, are inevitably

connected to poverty and assist me in showcasing the multifacetedness of problems Miami-Dade

County encounters.

First, to provide a few focal points during map analysis in Social Explorer I outlined race

and class subjugated communities of Miami-Dade County - predominantly black Liberty City,

Gladeview, and Little Haiti and predominantly Hispanic Allapattah, Homestead, and Little

Havana, as they are some of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country. I must also mention, that

because of the specifics of the selected topic and the structural peculiarities of the local

government, I have decided to select the whole county as a geographical area analysed. Doing

otherwise would significantly limit the number of programs I could research, and thus eliminate

an important part of this project.

The next variables I selected are poverty and income. Usually, these are the most basic

variables to look at - and often they are the only ones being looked at. The poverty rate in

Miami-Dade County is 14.2% (US Census 2022), which may not seem like a significant number in comparison to the national average of 12%. However, even if I were to dismiss mentioned earlier inadequacy of this measure, the distribution of income among the population still draws my attention. For example, over 42% of households make less than $35,000, while at the same time, about 43.5% make more than $100,000, pointing to the extreme socioeconomic gap. (Fig. 1) To take it even further, I decided to look at the distribution of children under 18 years old living in poverty (Fig, 2) and individuals aged 18 to 64 (Fig. 3) separately. In the abovementioned communities consistently over 40% of both adults and children live below the poverty threshold.

Housing is a variable that depends largely on income, therefore the pattern I discovered when looking at the statistics was not surprising. I decided to examine two categories - home ownership, and the percentage of income that goes towards rent. Although rent in Miami-Dade County, and the city of Miami in particular is much higher than the national average - about $2,300 per month for a one-bedroom apartment, for outlined communities the average is less than $1,100. Still, most of their residents' rent makes up half of their income (Fig. 4), when the suggested percentage is 25-30%. Moreover, over 90% of residents of those communities do not own a home. (Fig. 5)

Education is the next factor that I considered. I mapped the highest educational attainment for people older than 25, looking specifically at the percentage of people who did not get a high school diploma, got a diploma only, and received a four-year degree. (To make the distinction clearer, I divided those 3 variables into 2 separate maps, with "no high school

diploma" being a separate map) The highest level for over 60% of residents of race and class-subjugated communities is a high school diploma or no diploma at all. (fig. 6, 7)

Many think that all of these numbers can be explained by unemployment, so it's the last variable I examined. However, when it showed up on my screen all I saw was light beige (an indication of an insignificant number), so I had to auto-adjust it to be able to detect any difference or assumed pattern. Even then, 15% unemployment is as high as data goes. (fig. 8) A maximum of 15% of residents are unemployed, but over 40% live below the poverty threshold

Poverty is not just a statistic - it can't be explained in one sentence or with one number. On the contrary, it is a complex cycle rooted in history, solidified by political practices and gently weaved into our everyday life, as if it's something problematic, shameful, and still normal. The absence of access to education led to low salaries, low salaries and high housing costs led to poverty, and poverty led to the absence of access to education. Like some hereditary illness, it affects generation after generation, preventing those infected from living rather than existing, building familial wealth and bringing back to the community. Therefore, welfare programs designed to combat poverty should be as complex as the issue they aim to solve.

II. For and Against - stakeholders report

When I walked into a tiny apartment located in Little Havana, I was greeted by loud laughter, Cuban music, and the brightest smile of a little girl. "Are you the lady that wants to interview us?" - she asked with evident pure excitement in her voice. "Kind of," - I answered, unsure whether the interview was an appropriate word to describe something I thought of as a "casual sit-down with questions." I was invited to this home when I reached out to Natasha, a woman whose car broke down during a food drive in Allapatah, and asked if she would be up to

continue our conversation and help me out. Our first encounter inspired me to learn more about social services and look for ways to improve it, so it seemed right to talk to her and her family as stakeholders in a future policy.

That evening, besides Natasha and her daughter I also got to meet her mother, sister, niece, and grandparents, who all shared three bedrooms and couldn't stop apologizing for the lack of space - as if they were to blame for it. "You probably think – why in the name of Christ would y'all live together in this shoebox?" – asked Laura, Natasha's mother: "We just look after each other, you know, because who else would?" She was partially disabled after battling cancer and surviving a stroke, and her parents, whom everyone lovingly called Nana and Papa, required constant care - but what Natasha and her sister were making was barely enough to secure food and rent. Retirement facilities and even daycare for children in their universe were luxuries.

For purposes of this project, one of the topics I focused on was social services and welfare programs, referencing back to the description of them I was given. Why are they "dehumanizing, overwhelming, and highly bureaucratic"? To answer this question Laura decided to show me what it actually takes to register for one of the tax-filing assistance programs. After all of the research, I've done I expected it was going to take a lot of time, but I didn't understand how much - not just to fill out the application, but to find the program, documents, instructions for the application, google the terms, then apply to get documents that are missing, and possibly repeat this process few more times. "You don't get it, *this* is not that bad!" - Laura exclaimed as I was struggling to scroll through instructions on the website. She explained then, that online applications are relatively simple, and require less time than offline or over-the-phone ones. "What needs to change for those programs and/or services to be helpful?" - I asked, without

having any concrete answer in mind, and without expecting to receive one right on the spot. Nevertheless, the family had the insight that I didn't, and a variety of experiences all of which had led me to one conclusion: to create programs that are efficient, we need to involve those, most affected by the policy, in its development, make social services accessible and treat a person seeking help holistically, as an individual not merely a problem.

After talking to Natasha's family and getting to know their experiences with social services, I decided to talk to someone who works within social services - Camilo Mejia, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Catalyst Miami, an oranization whose mission strongly relates to the one I've set for this project - to break the cycle of poverty. Mr. Mejia and I were able to talk for about an hour over Google Meet, a big part of which was spent sharing our experiences - his, during the current position, and mine from working on developing this policy. One of the focal points of our conversation, nevertheless, was my previous interview with Natasha's family and first-hand experience of applying for a tax filing program. "The process is extremely time-consuming for the applicant, even if you have all the documentation and speak the language" - he agreed, also confirming that the program I described is not the most complicated to apply for. "What if we had created a database- one place for all documents to just be redirected?" - I asked and hoped it could be a part of my proposal. "That is a great point, but you need to take into consideration a lot of things." He then proceeded to ask me whether the database would be used for only local, government-funded projects/federal programs or private non-profits, and if so, what would it mean for funding and policy "enforcement." While this makes developing a cohesive policy complicated, it could also be a way to address the existing barriers to communication: "You could use obstacles as an opportunity to get supporters. Be sure

to connect with welfare programs, organizations, and county offices; ask them for advice, or simply inform them about your policy proposal. Try to include them, so you could get allies instead of possible enemies." He also advised me to be very open, and persistent, but at the same understanding and careful with language nuances: "People working in social services are often underpaid and overworked - and they will not *love* hearing the product of their work be described as dehumanizing (referencing Natasha's description), even if it's true."

My first conversation with stakeholders in this policy, however, happened during the final event of the Civic Synergy program when with my group, I presented a rough sketch of our project aimed at combatting crime in Miami-Dade County through supporting families that live in difficult circumstances. We focused a lot on existing welfare programs in South Florida and only briefly touched upon the possibility of connecting them under one "umbrella program". Nevertheless, it was enough to spark a debate among lawmakers and government officials who attended our presentation and whom I now consider stakeholders. Our idea was faced with seemingly patronizing comments by West Miami Mayor Eric Diaz-Padron and scepticism from South Miami Vice Mayor Lisa Bonich. While Mr. Diaz-Padron's only recommendation was to "be creative, kids, and use AI!", because we live in the century of innovations, during private conversation Ms. Bonich actually provided me with some constructive criticism and possible ways to improve the proposal. "Here, in South Florida, especially after the pandemic, people are reluctant to support anything that may affect their own money - be that business, individual, or sales tax. You want to use the resources that are available or convince stakeholders that this is an investment that will pay off. Literally." She also cautioned me about the nuances of political

messages and recommended tailoring the program accordingly to the audience and political climate in South Florida overall.

Below, as a conclusion to interviews, I created a stakeholders table where I briefly describe each of them, and their relationship to the future policy, position, and reasons. When creating a policy proposal, addressing concerns expressed and recommendations given was my main priority, to ensure public support and establish grounds for compromise.

Stakeholder	Relationship	Priorities	Position*	Recommendations
Race and class subjugated communities of Miami-Dade County	Those in need of a policy, and directly affected by it	1. Accessibility - physical (location, especially in areas of no municipality), financial (taking into account people without a car, or computer) 2. Time - application, documents, drive, processing 3. Holistic approach - "viewed as individuals not just problems"	For	1. Database 2. Official excuse for work, temporary daycare for the processing period 3. One assigned case officer for all services 4. Professional training opportunities
Business owners and upper-level residents*	Those possibly affected by the tax or new policy	1. Development of business 2. Taxes 3. Not-in-my-backyard - public housing, food assistance, etc.	Against	1. Incentives and collaboration with businesses 2. Usage of existing resources, no effect on taxes
Social services and workers	Those currently working in the sphere of social services, and who in the future would be affected by any changes to the system	1. Salary and funding - no cuts to the salary, or funding that current programs receive 2. Workload and job security 3. Results and recognition - an effort to be recognized and not belittled by any changes	Divided	1. Budget to maintain current salaries of social workers (or increase them) 2. Increase the number of social workers or decrease workload 3. Provide incentives of any kind
Lawmakers, directors, and government officials	Those who work as politicians in Miami-Dade would be deciding on and implementing the policy, if it comes to that	1. Public opinion - does the general public accept the policy 2. Political image - how well does the policy support party	Divided	1. Bipartisan or moderate policy, without any controversial wording 2. Address concerns

		alliance and campaign values 3. Cost and benefit		and gain the support of all the other stakeholders first 3. Transparency and openness to collaboration 4. Don't try to cover everything

** *In no way do I mean to generalize every business owner and upper-class resident of Miami - this is just a quick summary of comments I've been given by those, who I'd classify as belonging to this category. The same applies to every other category of stakeholders.*
* *Position at the moment of original sketch presented to stakeholders, without any changes that would address concerns/recommendations/priorities.*

III. Policy Proposal - United Miami-Dade Welfare Programs

Gestalt psychology is a school of thought that is built upon the principle that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." When it comes to therapy, practising specialists trained in this school do not attempt to treat individual problems, concerns or selected parts of interest, but instead look at the person holistically, considering the full picture, rather than individual elements. This vision, which may seem unrelated to urban politics, is precisely what shaped my vision for this policy.

Miami-Dade County offers a variety of social services that are supposed to help people in need of assistance, be it housing, rent, domestic abuse, addiction, taxes, language, health, etc. And whatever is not offered by the county directly, can be found through non-profits, private organizations or federal agencies. Nevertheless, all of these services/programs are described as highly inaccessible, and inefficient by those whom they intend to serve. There are several possible reasons for that I can think of, but the biggest one is a fragmentation of the structure. Every program and every office operates as a separate entity in silos, lacking meaningful interaction, communication and coordination. Individuals who come to seek these services are

met with thousands of exceptions, nuances and limitations caused by this separation, and as a result are forced to jump over impossible hurdles, to achieve any kind of outcome.

In the policy, I attempt to address this particular inefficiency, by proposing to unite all social services of Miami-Dade County under one umbrella program, thus encouraging collaboration, breaking the silos, and establishing a holistic approach focused on meaningful outcomes. This strategy is innovative, and still feasible because I do not seek to propose additional welfare programs (although they too may be much-needed), but simply utilize the ones that are already available in a manner that will tackle the roots of systematic issues.

The policy would be best implemented by Miami-Dade County's Mayor's Office, as they have launched numerous welfare programs before, and still have executive power over those. The beauty of local politics, nevertheless, is the ability to make a meaningful impact, so later it seems fairly plausible that federal and state programs, as well as local non-profits (all of which do not fall under the jurisdiction of the office mentioned above), could collaborate or join the unified programs. It's safe to assume that the territory affected by the policy is Miami-Dade County itself, with small divisions/offices in separate neighbourhoods, and territories that fall under no municipality. The target population of this policy is rather broad. First of all, it is aimed at serving members of race and class subjugated communities who happen to be trapped in the cycle of poverty, however, it would also be open to anyone who might need it. Additionally, one of the important steps in implementing this policy would be an evaluation of the criteria needed to be met to qualify for different services under the umbrella.

Now that I have identified and described the main idea of the policy, I want to dive into its specifics, which are greatly defined by the vision of interagency collaboration and

accessibility. Central to this vision is the implementation of a universal database that gathers and stores every piece of information from an individual or family seeking services - documents, forms, reports - and consolidates eligibility criteria, available services and individual needs without usual redundancy, thus saving a lot of time to those who seek support and those who work to provide it. Besides, the data collected in the database could also provide important insight into the community's most pressing needs, thus allowing for more efficient allocation of resources and informing future policies. As a result, social workers would be able to dedicate more time to each person, now being able to advise or refer them to any service under an umbrella and view their case holistically.

The timeline of the policy would be fairly flexible, as a transition like this is not a small one. Still, it is vital to determine the main goals of the program and the steps that need to be taken in a certain period. The main concerns expressed by social workers and people working in the realm of welfare programs were funding cuts, higher workloads, and loss of jobs. To address these issues, policy implementation needs to be smooth and every step of it - highly supervised. First, simple encouragement of collaboration, and learning of the new database, referrals and other programs under the umbrella would be sufficient. Then, with time most workers would slowly be retrained to "general", meaning they would work not with specific programs, but rather with individuals, seeking to combine multiple services, refer to appropriate ones and understand the person as more than just issues they come to find solutions for. Finally, quality assessments would be used to mark progress achieved by the program. Circling back to the concerns, the development of a single database and this restructuring would not cause job or pay cuts, as the need for specialists would still be great - nevertheless, it would not increase workload

either, but rather make it less dispersed and more outcome-oriented.

One of the other major concerns expressed by policy stakeholders was its financial viability. Business owners and upper-class households in general assumed that such a program would require a lot of additional capital and as a consequence lead to higher taxes. While I am fairly certain that this policy would not require a significant increase in funding since it is merely a reformation of current programs and a reallocation of already designated resources, I recognize it is necessary to analyze where would the funding come from if it is needed.

The main objective while raising the budget, as I mentioned above, would be to avoid increasing taxes, but considering that 50% of the county's funding comes from taxes it is fairly impossible. Therefore I looked at some unconventional solutions, such as a tax on the purchase of homes worth over $1 million (with some exceptions), or a tourism tax, which would not harm the majority of the locals. However, it is still a 'tax', meaning that framing of the policy, transparency of information and incentives would be crucial to gain public support. For example, it would be worth mentioning that the program could increase revenues in the long run by permanently decreasing poverty rates (and therefore having fewer needing help). For businesses, incentives could be offered, such as publicity, a streamlined permitting process, and tax credits in exchange for jobs provided through the program.

While developing this proposal I was forced to step out of my comfort zone and have conversations that were as difficult as the topic itself. Almost tangible awkwardness fell like a weight on my shoulders, and shame slid into the corners of my mind as I listened to different people telling their stories. Still, afterwards, I felt inspiration and hope. While I realize that this policy is far from perfect, I believe it provides a fresh vision formed by not simply evaluating

statistics and looking at hard evidence, but by listening to people's stories and opening one's mind to difficult conversations and various perspectives. In a rapidly changing world, the importance of building strong and prosperous communities cannot be underestimated - still, it cannot be achieved either without bringing comprehensive, bold and perhaps unconventional ideas to the table. The United Welfare Programs of Miami-Dade County is an example of such an idea, that attempts to break chains of poverty and move towards a brighter future.

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Appendix

Households by Income
County: Miami–Dade
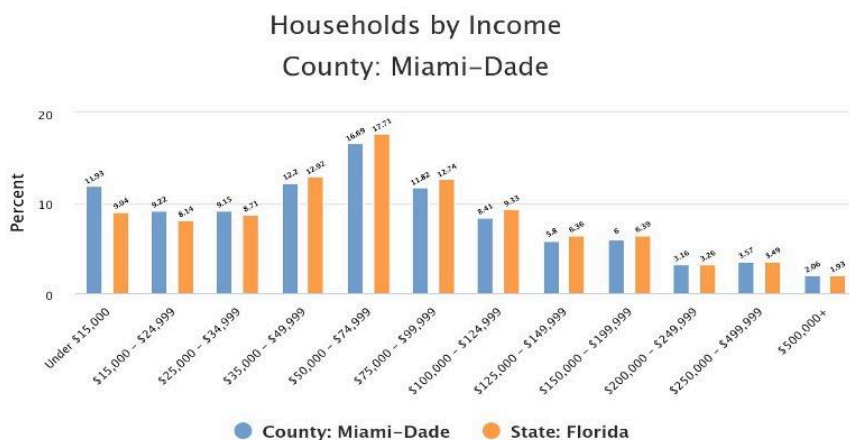
Claritas, 2023. www.miamidadematters.org

Fig. 1, Bar chart of households by income in Miami-Dade County, Claritas 2023, www.miamidadematters.org
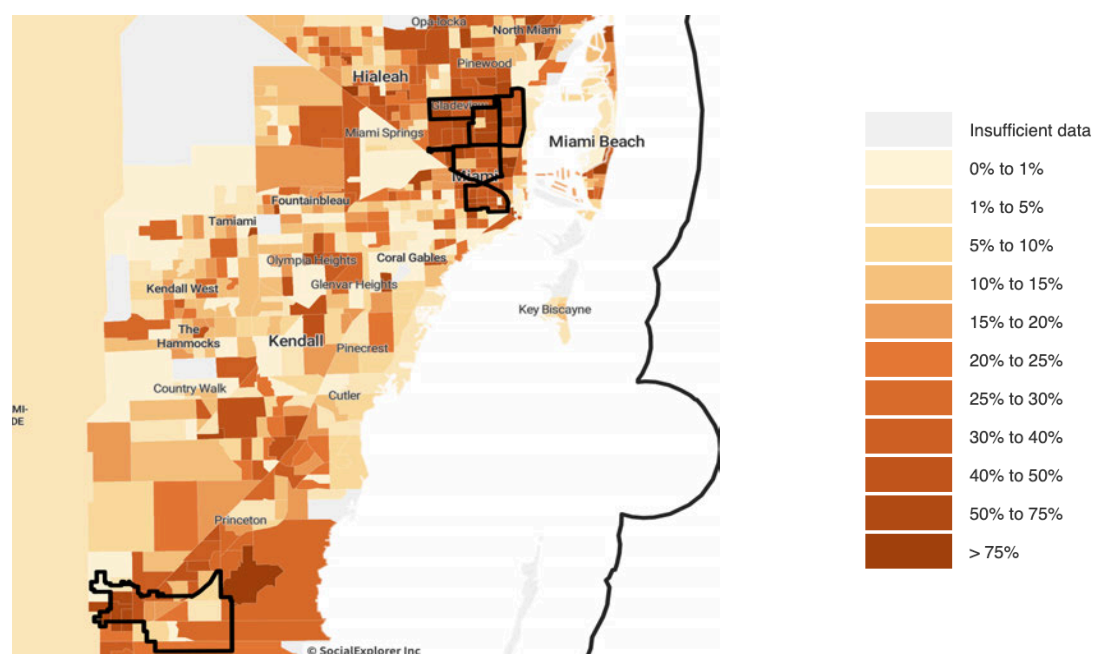
Fig. 2, Map of Miami-Dade, the percentage of population under 18 years living below the poverty line as of 2021, annotated in black are neighbourhoods: Little Haiti, Liberty City, Gladeview, Little Havana, Allapattah, Homestead, accessed through www.socialexplorer.com
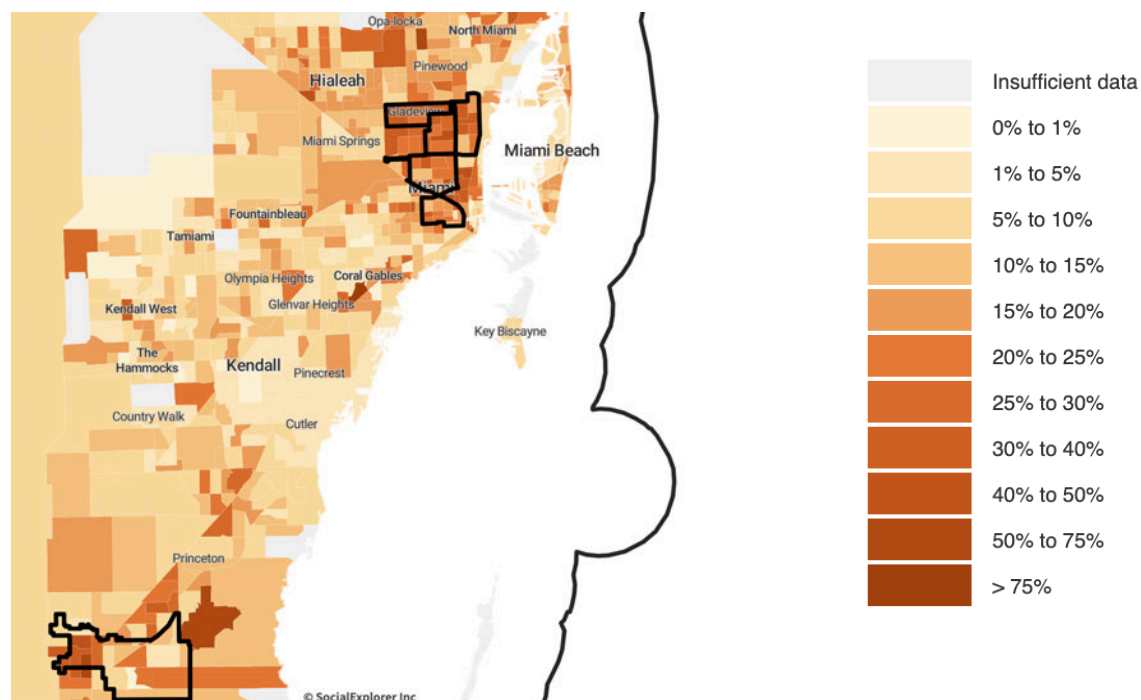
Fig. 3, Map of Miami-Dade, the percentage of population ages from 18 to 64 years living below the poverty line as of 2021, accessed through www.socialexplorer.com
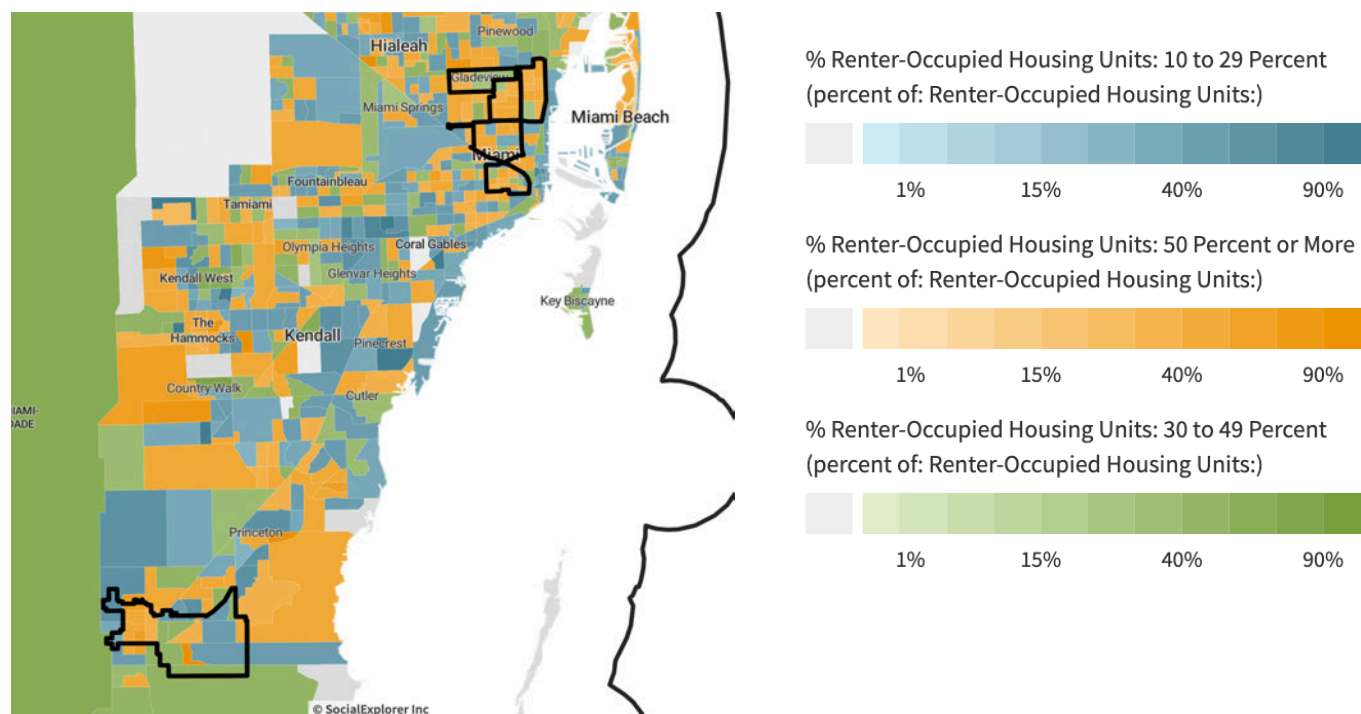
Fig. 4, Map of Miami-Dade, the percentage of the population that puts certain percentage of their income towards rent as of 2021, accessed through www.socialexplorer.com
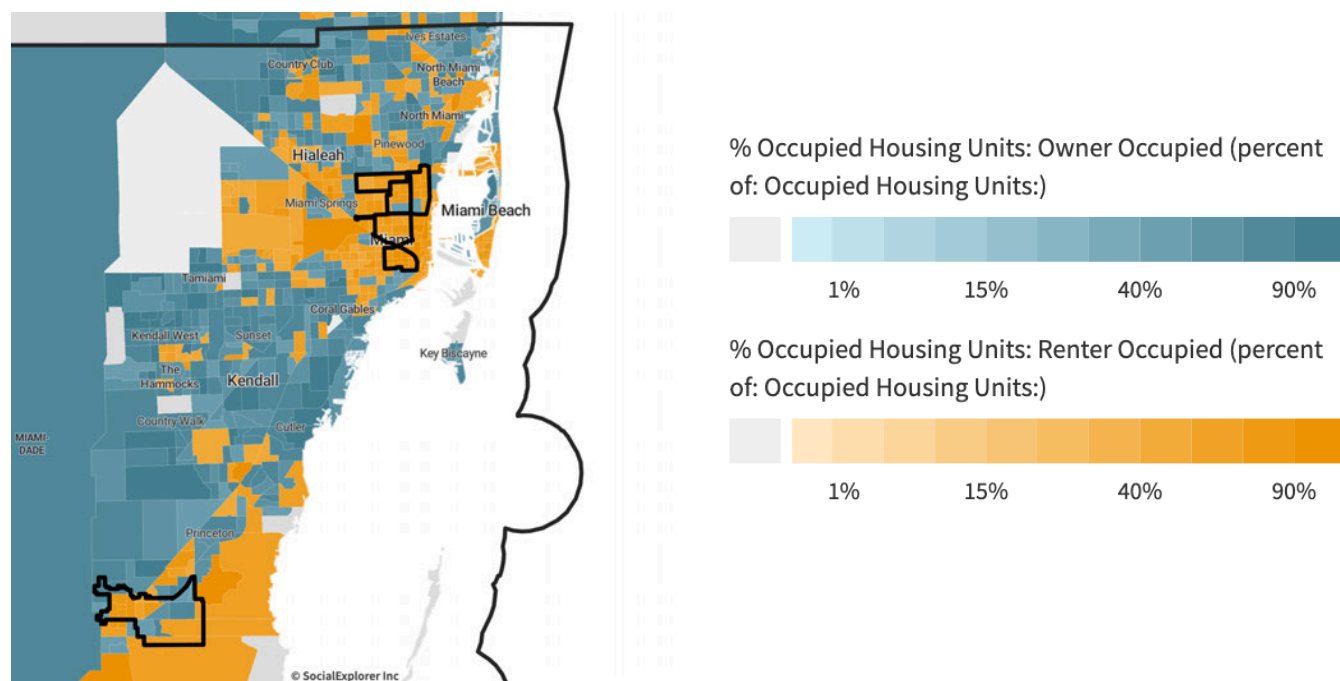
Fig. 5, Map of Miami-Dade, the percentage of the population who owns a home and rents as of 2021, accessed through www.socialexplorer.com
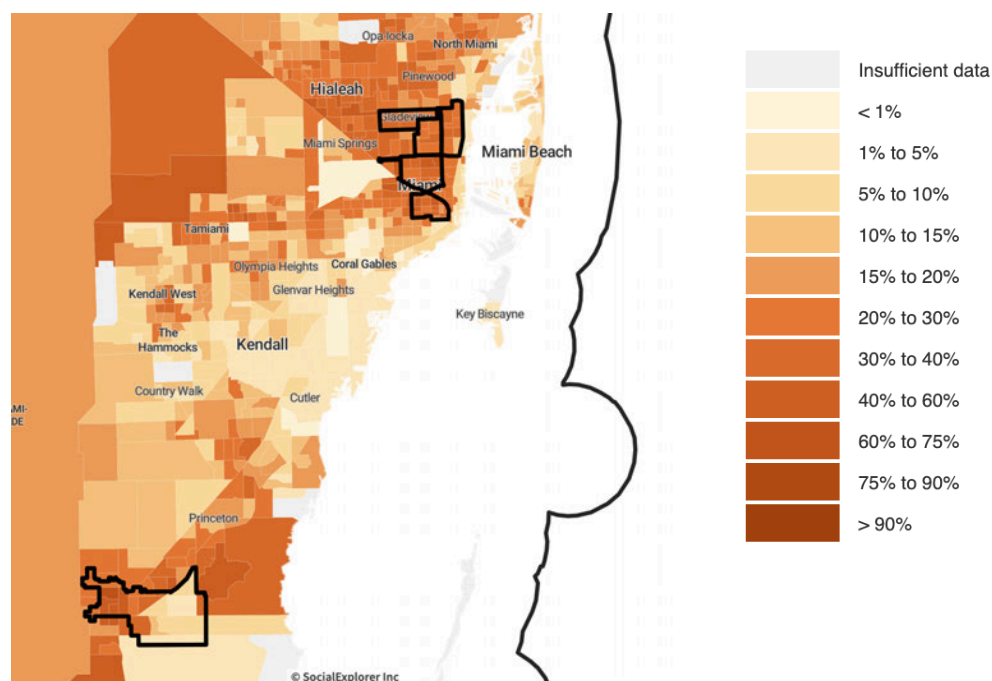

Fig. 6, Map of Miami-Dade, the percentage of the population over 25 years old whose level of education is less than high school as of 2021, accessed through www.socialexplorer.com
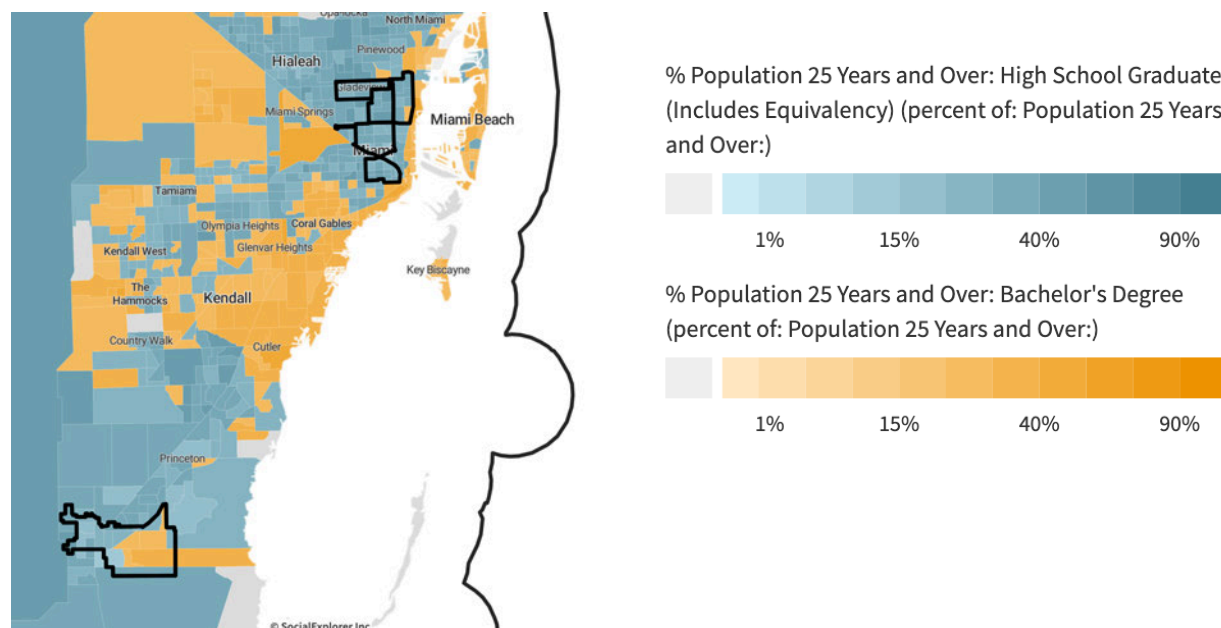
Fig. 7, Map of Miami-Dade, the percentage of the population over 25 years old whose highest level of education is either a high school diploma or bachelor's as of 2021, accessed through www.socialexplorer.com
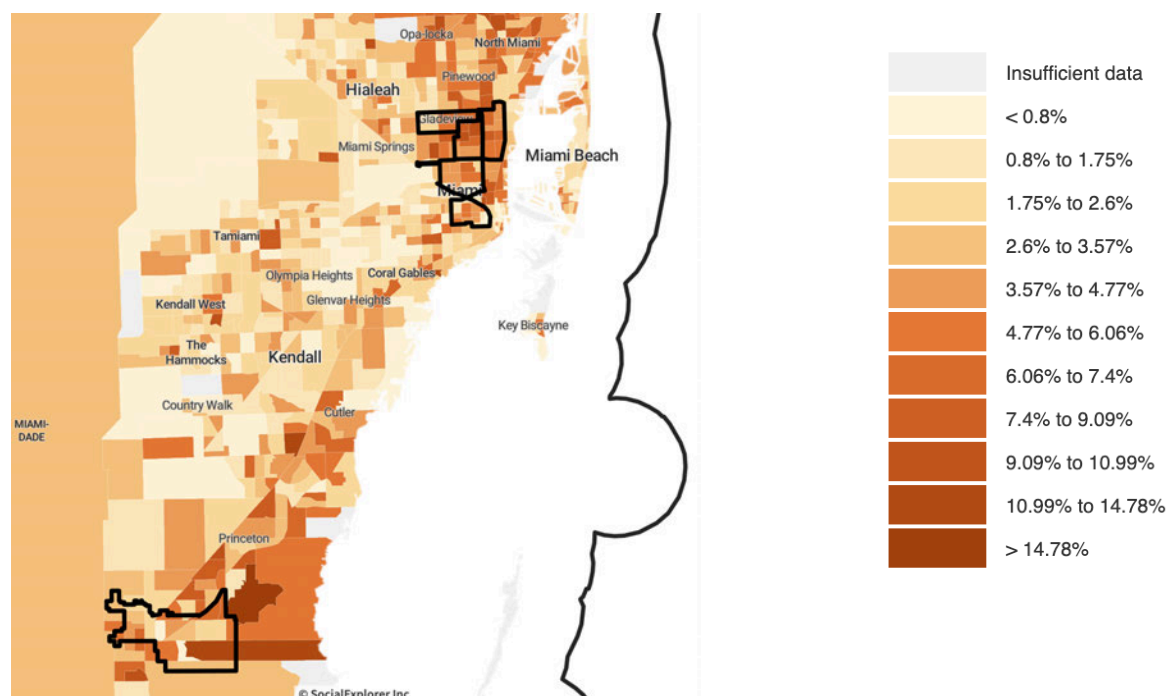

Fig. 8, Map of Miami-Dade, the percentage of the population over 16 years old considered unemployed as of 2021, accessed through www.socialexplorer.com