National Consumer Law Center
Fighting Together for Economic Justice

Energy Insecurity on the Rise: Preliminary Findings from the 2024 Residential Energy Consumption Survey

March 2026

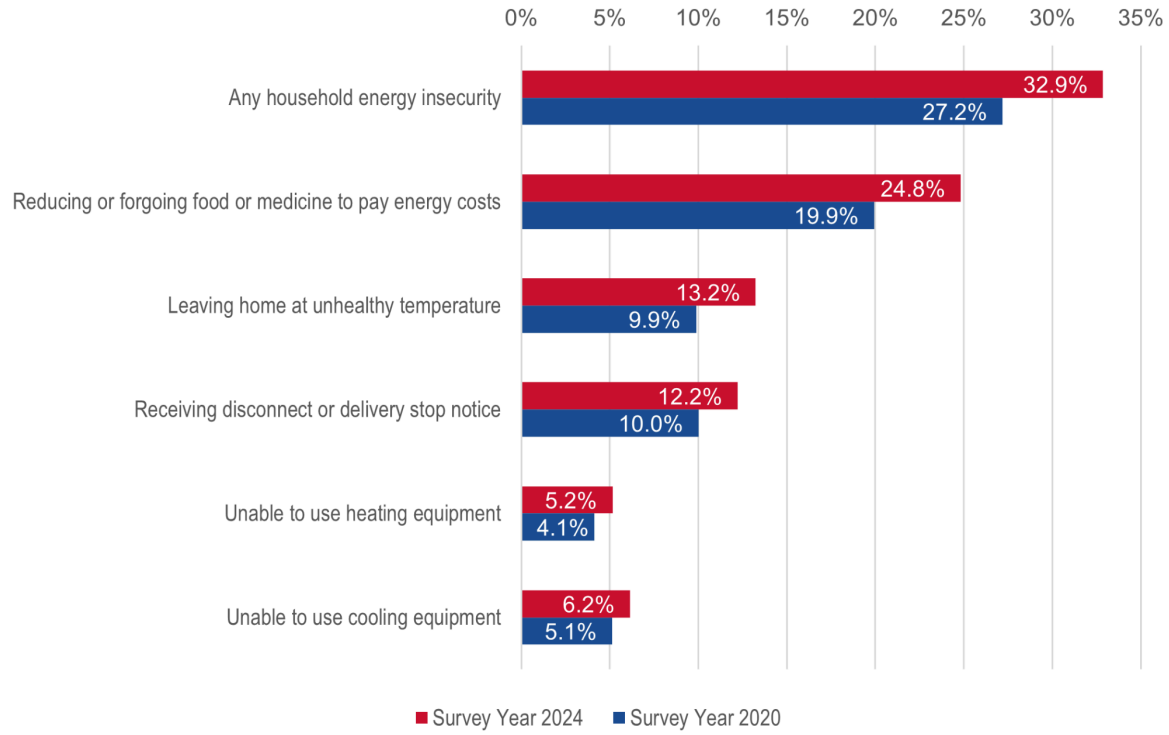
Every few years, the U.S. Department of Energy tasks its Energy Information Administration (EIA) with surveying American households about energy use and affordability. This month, EIA released new data from the most recent survey in 2024. This new data, the first of the 2024 Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS) data,[1] paints an alarming picture of growing energy insecurity challenges for families.

Only preliminary data is currently available and the ability to conduct analysis that is more detailed will follow as EIA releases more of the data. The preliminary release includes compilation of responses to survey questions regarding "energy insecurity." EIA's energy insecurity indicators include

- Foregoing necessities to pay for home energy,
- Maintaining unhealthy indoor temperatures,
- Receipt of disconnection notices, and
- Inability to use heating or cooling equipment because of utility service disconnection, inability to afford bulk fuel delivery, or broken equipment.

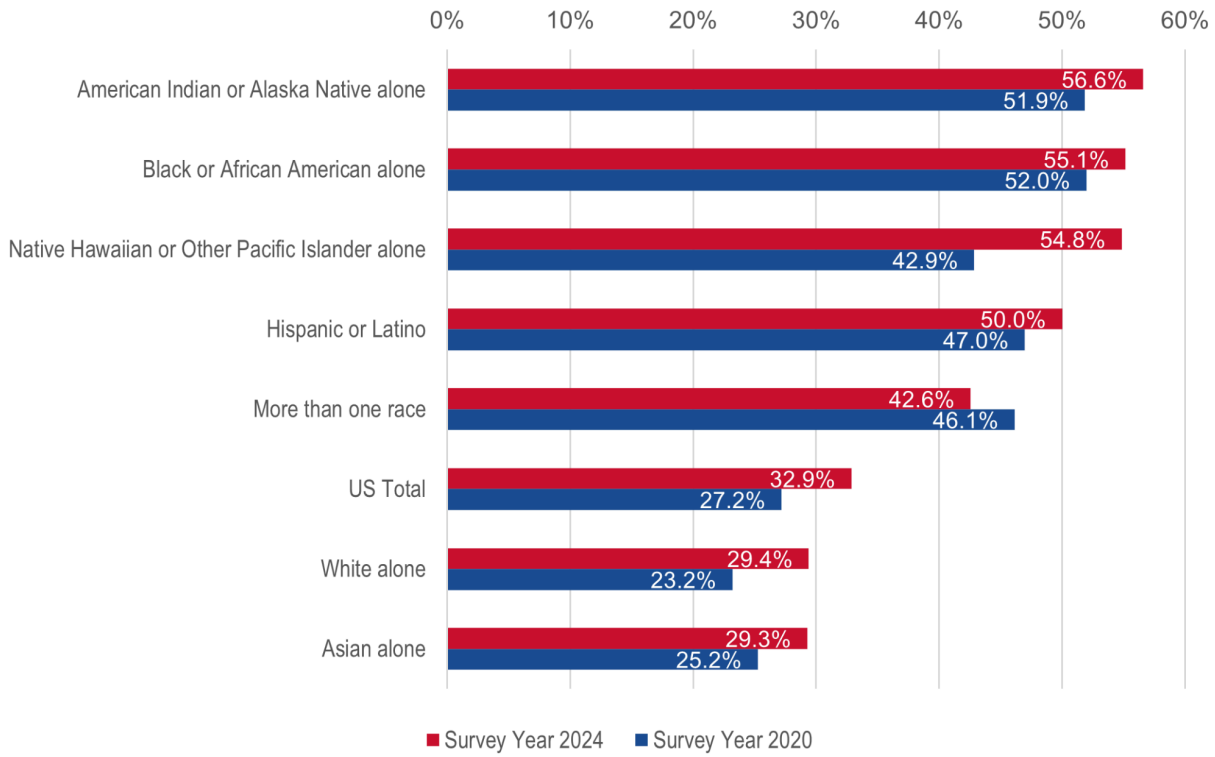
Comparison of preliminary results from the 2024 survey to results from the 2020 survey clearly indicate that ***the percentage of U.S. household experiencing energy insecurity is increasing***. Results of the 2020 RECS reflected energy insecurity in about 27% of US households. The 2024 results show energy insecurity in 33% of households. This substantial increase in energy insecurity predates the recent, sharp increase in energy and utility prices that will clearly exacerbate previous levels of home energy insecurity.

Reported U.S. Energy Insecurity - 2024 and 2020 Residential Energy Consumption Survey Results



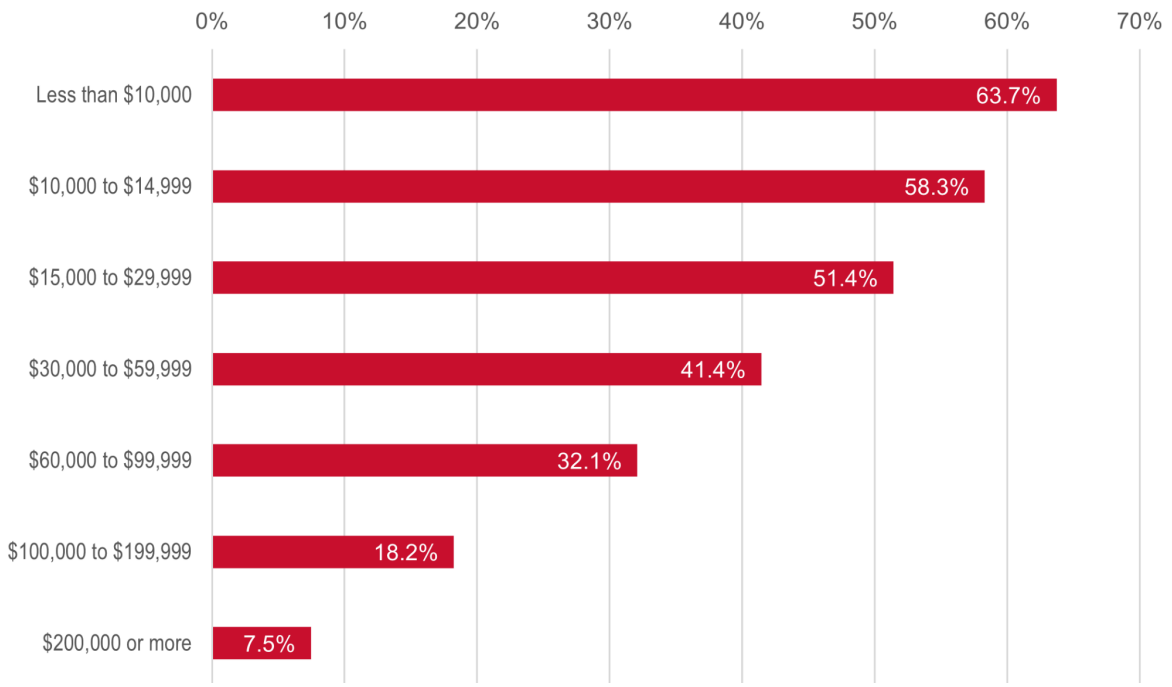
The 2024 RECS, as was the case in previous releases, demonstrate that energy insecurity is disproportionately concentrated among households of color, particularly Black and Native American households. For example, Native American households experienced at least one form of energy insecurity at a rate of 56.5% and Black households at a rate of about 55% - nearly twice the rate applicable to all U.S. households.

2024 and 2020 Energy Insecurity by Race or Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity



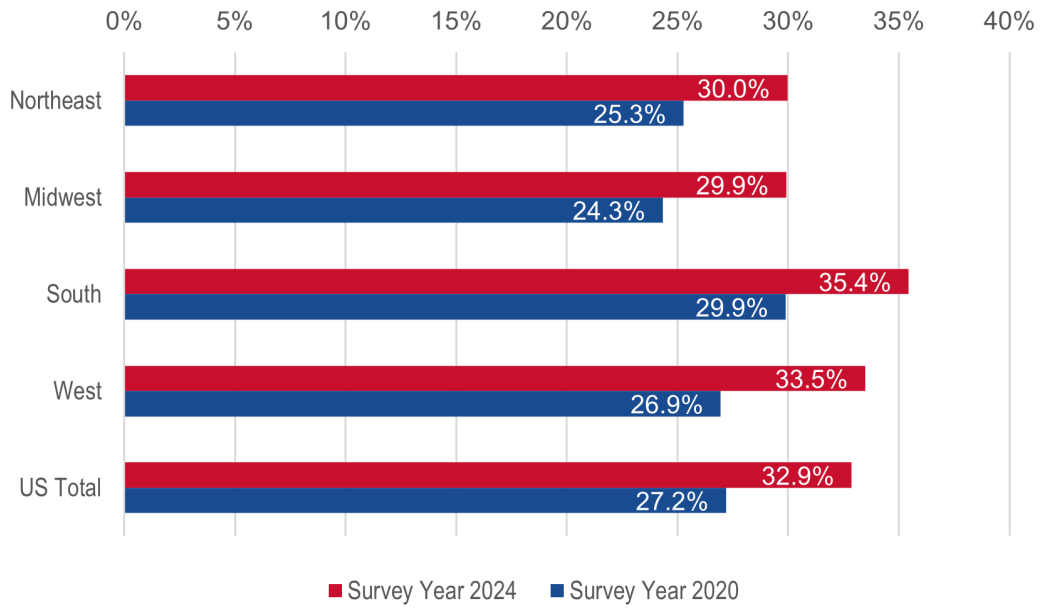
Households with very low income of less than $10,000 in 2024 experienced energy insecurity at a rate of nearly 64%, twice the rate of households with income between $60,000 and $100,000.[2]

Percentage of U.S. Households Reporting Any Household Energy Insecurity by Annual Household Income



Energy insecurity is most severe in the South Census Region, with its concentration of African American and low-income households.

2024 and 2020 Energy Insecurity by Census Region



Similarly, results of the 2024 survey indicate that other historical disparities persist. Renter households, those with children under 18 years of age, those living in mobile homes, and in housing units with poor or no insulation experienced elevated level of energy insecurity. Energy insecurity increased between 2020 and 2024 in every region of the U.S. and for each of these household types.

Energy insecurity presents tremendous financial and personal challenges for those that grapple with it.

> In the United States, those experiencing energy insecurity feel uncomfortable, exposed, marginalized, and dehumanized. The nature of energy insecurity can vary from a seasonal anxiety to an ever present symptom of individual misfortune. …Energy insecurity sometimes becomes a source of shame that leads individuals to hide their substandard living conditions from friends and family.
>
> *Diana Hernandez, Jennifer Laird, Powerless: The People's Struggle for Energy, p. 2.*

Energy insecurity stems from a number of sources, including systemic racial injustice and wealth divide, insufficient household income to pay for necessities including unaffordable utility bills, substandard housing stock, and investment in expensive, polluting energy resources. Rising utility costs exacerbate these problems.

Intentional, proactive, coordinated and targeted program and policy initiatives are required to reverse long-standing injustices and make home energy more affordable and accessible, including:

- **Effective bill assistance and arrearage management** reduce unmanageable energy burdens faced by those with insufficient income to make ends meet.
- **Deep, whole house energy efficiency retrofits and upgrades**, coupled with housing repairs needed to make such upgrades effective, lower home energy costs while improving indoor comfort, health and safety.
- **Regulatory utility consumer protections limiting service disconnections**, particularly for those households facing historically high shut-off rates and extreme temperature conditions are required.
- **Utility ratemaking mechanisms** that reward utilities for reducing disconnections in geographic areas with the highest disconnection rates can help to reverse historic inequities.
- Utility late payment fees are far in excess of the cost of carrying past due balances, penalize those who can least afford to pay them, and have not been shown to modify customer payment behavior. These **utility junk fees should be eliminated** as part of a broad effort to mitigate energy insecurity in the U.S.
- **Investment in utility-scale wind and solar generation** is cheaper on a levelized cost basis than fossil fuel and nuclear generation. Such investment is required to reduce reliance on polluting, volatilely priced resources and mitigate energy insecurity challenges.

While implementation of each of these program and policy initiatives requires public discourse and debate, they are all within reach and would reflect a national commitment to energy systems are designed to stop the growth of energy insecurity reflected in recent survey data.

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Endnotes

1. The 2024 RECS reflects information collected from a representative sample of U.S. households in 2024 and 2025.
2. Comparison of 2020 and 2024 RECS energy insecurity by income is not possible because EIA utilized different income tiers in the respective surveys.