



# Florida League of Cities Center for Municipal Research Research Article Journal | 2021 Edition

The **Florida League of Cities' Center for Municipal Research** (CMR) connects you with the latest local government data and statistics. The Center provides Florida's city officials with the municipal data resources needed to effectively lead their local governments. The Center also offers Florida's government research institutes opportunities to collaborate with municipal government practitioners across the state.

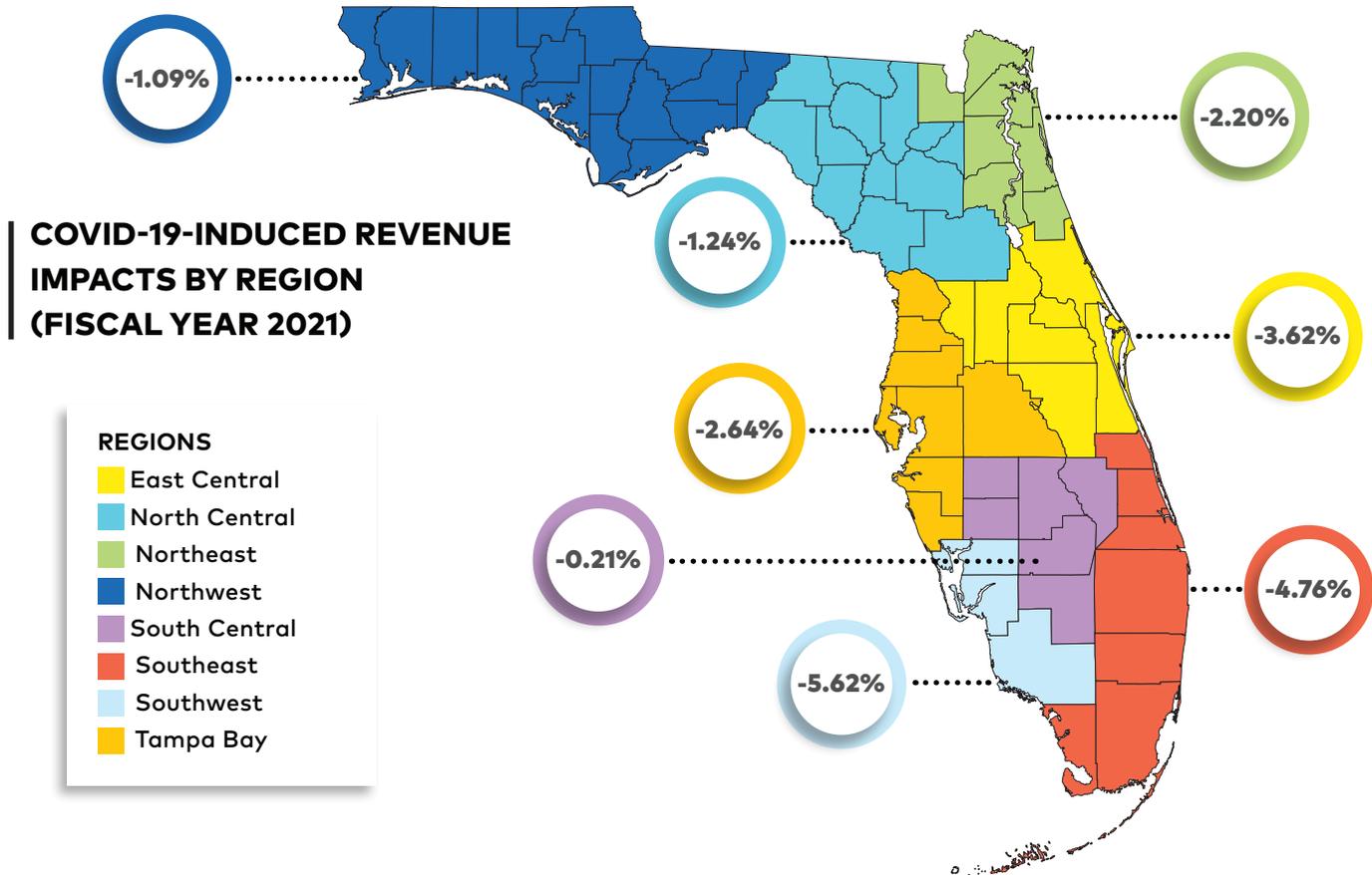
The cornerstone of the Center's research is the annual CityStats survey, which collects data on municipal operations, budgets, policies and services. The CityStats survey forms the basis for the State of the Cities report and the online Find A Peer City database tool.

Through the Center's Partners in Municipal Research program, a regular research column is published in the League's Quality Cities magazine featuring articles from our research institute partners. The following is a compilation of the articles featured in 2021.

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**FLORIDA LEAGUE OF CITIES CENTER FOR MUNICIPAL RESEARCH**

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**COVID-19**

# Forecasting Municipal Revenue

A new FLC report gives valuable information for budget planning

by Chris L. Holley II  
Florida League of Cities

No magic crystal ball reveals what the future holds when it comes to municipal revenues. Most forecasts rely on a host of local economic factors and historical trends that provide a basis for making the best decisions possible. The challenge in 2021: There aren't trends that match what local economies had to endure in 2020.

The Florida League of Cities' Center for Municipal Research has worked with the brightest minds in our state – experts in public administration and economics – to publish a report forecasting the impact of COVID-19 on municipal revenues over the next three fiscal years. *A Recovery Landscape – Forecasting Florida Municipal Revenue Impacts from COVID-19* provides a point of reference when discussing your upcoming budget picture.

Every budget is as unique as the city it is built for, relying more heavily on one revenue or fee over another. Even with these different financial structures, a vast majority of cities will face some decrease in revenues in Fiscal Year 2021, and by FY 2023 Florida's municipal governments in total could see a decrease of close to \$4 billion.

**METHODOLOGY THAT WAS USED**

In May 2020, the National League of Cities conducted a study forecasting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on municipal revenue, based on national unemployment data. The foundation behind the research was sound. The Florida League of Cities developed a report using a similar research model with a more local focus, one that provides Florida cities with another tool to use when forecasting revenues.

FLC-sponsored researchers looked at collections in 21 revenue categories over 11 years (2008-2018) for the state's 411 municipalities. By examining data at the county level and analyzing the impact of the unemployment rate on revenues, researchers identified correlations that can be applied to the latest unemployment forecasts. This process adds new insights into future revenue streams, using projected unemployment rates that more closely match each city's experience rather than relying on a national-level or even state-level forecast.

More simply put, the report built a local trend analysis, using local unemployment data as a basis for forecasting revenues.

In certain revenue categories, local forecasts were built from state-level forecasts provided by the **Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research**. These included discretionary sales surtaxes, local option fuel taxes and communication services taxes.

## **FINDINGS OF THE REPORT**

Florida cities will sustain reduced revenues totaling approximately \$3.90 billion over the next three fiscal years (FY 2021, FY 2022 and FY 2023), according to the projections. In FY 2021 alone, excluding property taxes due to the lag in the effects, municipal revenues are projected to decline by more than \$1.72 billion.

Each region of the state will feel the impact of the pandemic differently. Areas with an economy tied to tourism may take longer to recover. So, too, will areas that are more densely populated. Cities with populations greater than 100,000 are likely to see approximately twice the percent reduction in revenue collections than the average Florida city.

Some regions of the state will see a somewhat modest 1% decline in total revenues, while others could see a decline that exceeds 5.5%. The variance of revenue impacts across the state is significantly larger when looking at individual communities with forecasted declines of up to almost 20% in some instances versus others forecasted to see even an incremental increase in revenue collections. (Data is reliable at a regional and county level. Forecasts at the individual municipal level do not reflect the intricacies of state revenue share formulas and should be used as supplemental information.)

## **USE THE INFORMATION YOU HAVE WISELY**

There is no question that challenging budgetary decisions are on the horizon. The key to tackling them is to obtain as much information as possible. Consider every element that affects your local economy and let that information guide the decision-making process about your city's financial future. The hope is that city leaders find this report a useful tool as they work to steer their municipalities into the future.

The report, *A Recovery Landscape – Forecasting Florida Municipal Revenue Impacts from COVID-19*, can be found online at [flcities.com](http://flcities.com) under “Research + Resources” and was written through the Center for Municipal Research by **Richard Feiock, president, Local Governance Research**, along with **David Gao, professor, Florida International University**, and **Can Chen, assistant professor, Florida International University**, both of whom are participants in the League's university research partner program.



Chris L. Holley II is manager, research and innovation at the Florida League of Cities. 

## CENSUS

# Showing Communities They Count

Florida A&M University applies data for cities' benefit

by Nathan J. Francis  
Florida A&M University



In 1790, the U.S. census was primarily responsible for the headcount of residents around measures of race, age and sex. Today, the **U.S. Census Bureau** compiles a series of complex reports. The data gathered by the Census Bureau is instrumental in determining political representation and how more than \$400 billion is distributed among thousands of local communities in the United States.

With the 2020 decennial census collection concluded, policymakers at the state and local government levels will use data for critical tasks. At the state level, for example, officials seek data to guide them in their redistricting efforts. Similarly, local government officials hope to understand better how shifts in population and demographics in their communities impact the need for services and allocation of resources.

For these policymakers and the citizens they represent, the ability to access, understand and use census data is of great importance. Nowhere is this more true, perhaps, than in the minority and historically underserved communities where this data may prove invaluable to their representatives in making their cases for more significant government and business investment. Unfortunately, these are the same communities where skepticism regarding the purpose and use of census data is at its highest and response rates are lowest.

For more than two decades, the **Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University Census Information Center** has worked to reduce skepticism about the census

and demonstrate its importance to communities in their efforts to improve the quality of life. Since 2000, FAMU has participated as a member of a national data dissemination network for the Census Bureau. FAMU serves as an official source for population, housing and economic data for Florida with an emphasis on **Gadsden, Franklin, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor and Wakulla counties.**

As one of only two census information centers in Florida and 52 nationally, the FAMU-CIC's mission is to "aid in the democratization of data by helping underserved and disadvantaged populations learn how to use census data; to empower themselves." It achieves this mission by exploiting technology to disseminate data, promoting the availability of census data as an analytical tool for multiple stakeholders and providing access to data for members of the FAMU community and community-based organizations, educators, students and the general public.

Housed in FAMU's Department of History, Political Science, Geography and African-American Studies within the university's College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, the FAMU-CIC provides a space to access census data. On a for-fee basis, Center staff can assist with accessing and interpreting data to meet specific client needs using data at the most granular level available. In some instances, this assistance may include data at the zip-code level.

The Center's core staff consists of **FAMU-CIC Co-Directors Abdul Sharif and Brandon Armstrong, assistant professors**

**of political science.** FAMU-CIC staff works collaboratively with interdisciplinary faculty members from schools and departments throughout the university to conduct research and participate in activities promoting census data.

The U.S. census has changed dramatically in scope and substance since 1790. More than a simple count of residents, the census has evolved into a powerful data tool for researchers, policymakers and citizens alike. As the Census Bureau prepares to release data from the 2020 decennial census over the coming months and to update this data over the next decade, the Center will continue its mission to serve its on-campus and off-campus stakeholders by packaging census data in ways that make it – and its implications – accessible and understandable.

By partnering with researchers and organizations on and off campus, Center staff hopes to empower minority and historically underserved communities by providing them with vital data for identifying and articulating localized needs. In short, the FAMU-CIC will strive to show members of these communities that when it comes to census data, all communities count.

Nathan J. Francis, MPA, CPM, is a visiting professor in the Department of History and Political Science at Florida A&M University. For more information about the FAMU-CIC, contact Abdul Sharif, at [abdul.sharif@famuedu](mailto:abdul.sharif@famuedu) or Brandon Armstrong, at [brandon.armstrong@famuedu](mailto:brandon.armstrong@famuedu). 



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ENVIRONMENT

# Regulating Single-Use Plastics

Survey shows Floridians favor Home Rule

by Stephen Neely  
University of South Florida

In 1987, **Berkeley, CA**, became the first American municipality to restrict the use and sale of polystyrene products (such as plastic foam) within its jurisdiction. Since then, hundreds of local governments throughout the United States have followed suit in an effort to reduce pollution and protect endangered wildlife.

To date, approximately 400 U.S. cities have placed local restrictions and prohibitions on single-use products such as plastic bags, food containers and straws. But not here in the Sunshine State. That's because Florida is one of several states

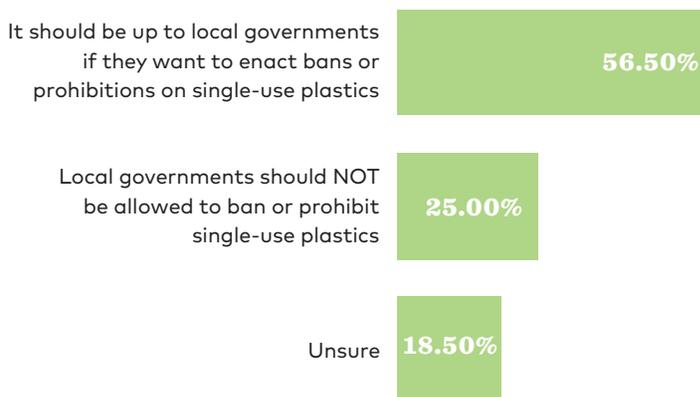
that maintain a preemptive ban on such ordinances. The state forbids local jurisdictions from establishing their own policies to govern the use and sale of these products. While recent proposals in the state Legislature have sought to reform this policy, preemptive bans such as Florida’s are often buoyed by support from the business community, as well as influential interests in the plastics industry.

In a recent survey conducted at the **University of South Florida**, we asked residents whether the state’s preemptive ban on single-use plastic restrictions should be maintained or whether local jurisdictions should have the authority to set their own policies. The survey responses – summarized in this article – show strong support among Floridians for lifting the state’s preemptive ban, including relatively strong bipartisan support among Democrats, Independents and Republicans. As the environmental challenges that accompany Florida’s rapid population growth continue to compound, it appears that most Floridians favor Home Rule and localized policy solutions when it comes to these specific environmental protection efforts.

**FINDINGS EXPLAINED**

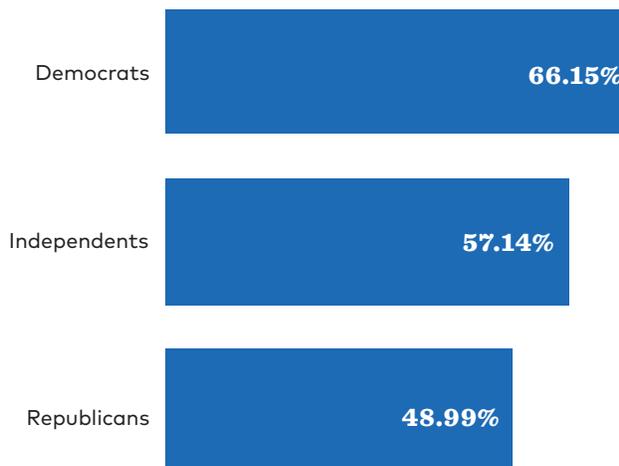
A majority of respondents (56%) said that “it should be up to local governments if they want to enact bans or prohibitions on single-use plastics.” Only a quarter of respondents (25%) said that the state’s preemptive ban should be upheld, while 18% indicated that they were “unsure.” (See Figure 1.) Support for local discretion was relatively high across political affiliations, with 66% of Democrats and 57% of Independents saying that the decision to restrict single-use plastics should be left to local jurisdictions. (See Figure 2.) Republicans were somewhat more split on the issue, though a plurality (49%) said that they, too, would support local discretion in establishing these policies compared with only 35% who favored maintaining the state’s preemptive ban.

**Figure 1. A MAJORITY OF FLORIDIANS OPPOSE THE STATE'S PREEMPTIVE BAN ON SINGLE-USE PLASTICS RESTRICTIONS**



Source: Florida Public Policy Survey, 2021 (n = 600)

**Figure 2. SUPPORT FOR HOME RULE ON SINGLE-USE PLASTICS**



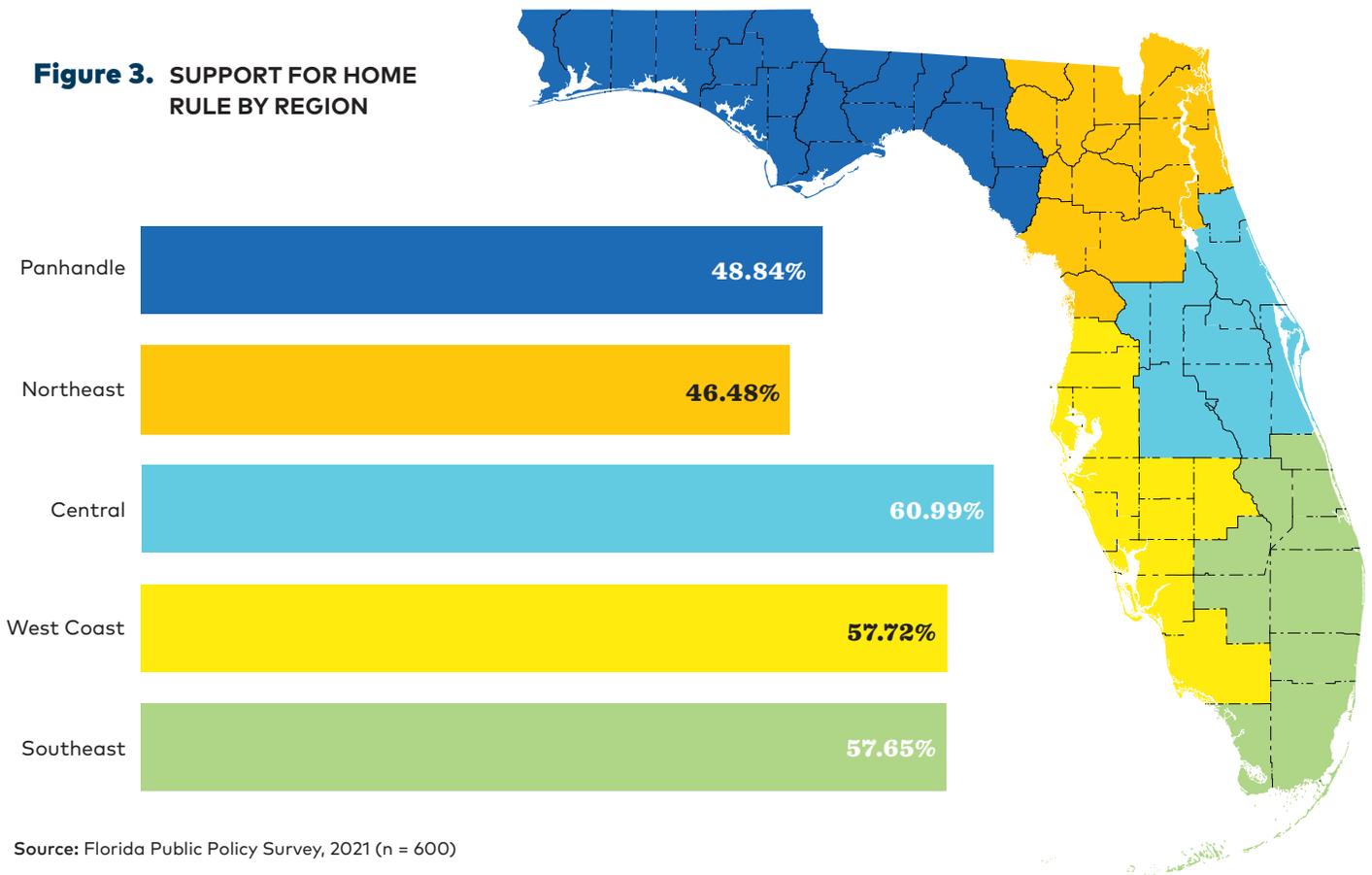
Source: Florida Public Policy Survey, 2021 (n = 600)

Some minor differences were noted across regions of the state, though a plurality of respondents in each region favored a reversal of the state’s preemptive ban on single-use plastics restrictions. (See Figure 3 and map.) Support for local discretion was highest in the Central (61%), West Coast (58%) and Southeastern (58%) regions of the state, while support was slightly below 50% in the Panhandle (49%) and North-eastern regions (46%). These differences are correlated with the observed partisan differences noted above.

**CONCLUSION: MOST FAVOR HOME RULE**

The survey results show that a majority of Floridians favor Home Rule when it comes to setting local environmental policies, such as single-use plastics bans. However, in recent years, Florida has opted instead for state-level mandates that limit the ability of local agencies to craft unique policy solutions to fit the needs and preferences of their communities. Along with the preemptive ban mentioned earlier in the article, the state government in Tallahassee has also adopted “one-size-fits-all” preemptions that limit the ability of local governments and private organizations to adopt individualized policies related to mask mandates and COVID-19 vaccines.

**Figure 3. SUPPORT FOR HOME RULE BY REGION**



Source: Florida Public Policy Survey, 2021 (n = 600)

Our survey results suggest that Floridians might prefer a less heavy-handed approach from Tallahassee. In the case of single-use plastics, a less centralized policymaking environment makes intuitive sense, as the demographic and cultural factors that shape both citizen preferences and patterns of consumption can vary widely across diverse localities. Lifting the state’s preemptive ban on single-use plastic restrictions

would allow local agencies to exercise greater control over the environmental health of their communities while also accounting for the diverse needs and perspectives of the constituents they serve.

Stephen Neely is an Associate Professor at the University of South Florida School of Public Affairs. [@C](#)

**Sources**

- ▶ Associated Press. Florida Population Boom Boosts Its National Political Clout. U.S. News & World Report. [bit.ly/3gJZbJJ](https://bit.ly/3gJZbJJ).
- ▶ A third of the US has laws preventing plastic bans. *EarthDay.org*. [bit.ly/3t1bc2w](https://bit.ly/3t1bc2w).
- ▶ Nicol R. Linda Stewart, Mike Grieco push bills to allow local governments to ban single-use plastics. Florida Politics. [bit.ly/3jwMOxL](https://bit.ly/3jwMOxL).

**Survey Details**

The survey, which examined a range of conservation and environmental policy issues in the state, was conducted July 15-25, 2021. Respondents were asked to share their opinions on the state’s preemptive ban and whether local governments should be allowed to adopt tighter restrictions on

the sale and consumption of single-use plastics within their own jurisdictions.

The survey was conducted online through Prodege, a leading market research provider. A representative sample of 600 Floridians was contacted using a stratified quota

sampling method. The sample was carefully constructed using balanced quotas (stratified by region of the state) based on age, gender, race, ethnicity and political affiliation. Based on the sample size, the results are reported with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error +/- 4.