CEJST: A Simple Map with BIG Implications

March 14, 2023

Today, we'll:

- **Give a brief background on Justice40 & the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool**
- **Highlight challenges & limitations of the current version of CEJST**
- **Share recommendations on where adjustments to the CEJST could be helpful in advancing Justice40**

Why Race?

"…..the discriminatory policies and practices that constitute environmental racism have disproportionately burdened communities of color, specifically Black Americans, American Indians/Alaska Natives (AIs/ANs), Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and [Latino/a] populations."

Confronting Environmental Racism - NIH funded research.

## People of Color and Proximity to New Jersey Superfund Sites
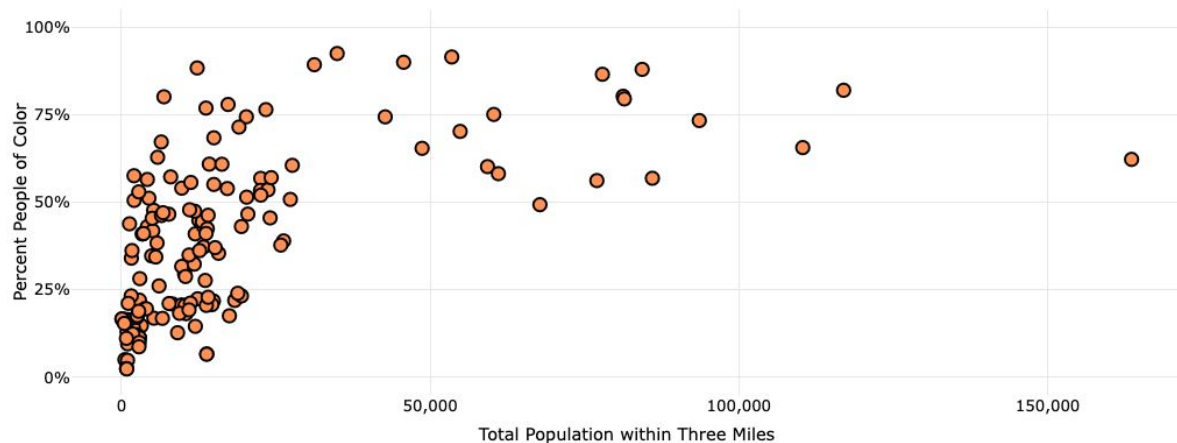
Source: The Commons, Accessing Environmental Datasets

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.
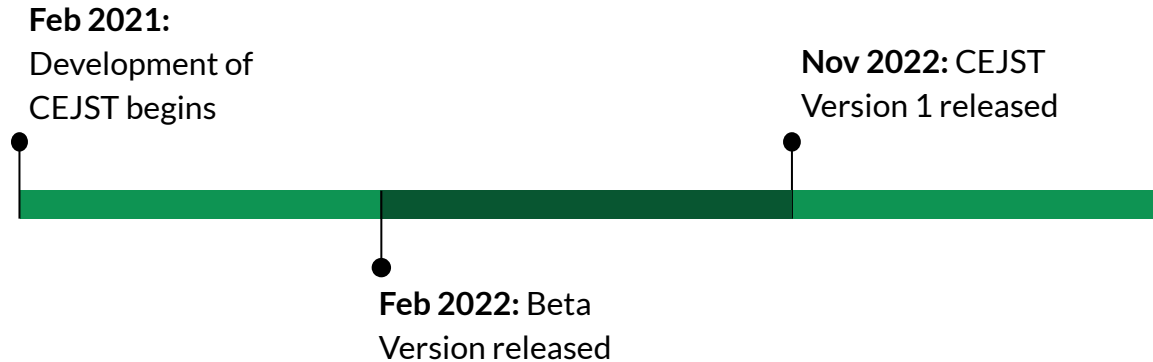*- Title VI, Civil Rights Act of 1964*

Equity Tools and Policy

Tools (and their methodologies) are written into policies.
We historically scrutinize the policies, but not the tools!

First introduction of directing benefits to disadvantaged communities came from California's Cap & Trade Program in 2012 - yet the question still remains *"how do we define disadvantaged communities?"*
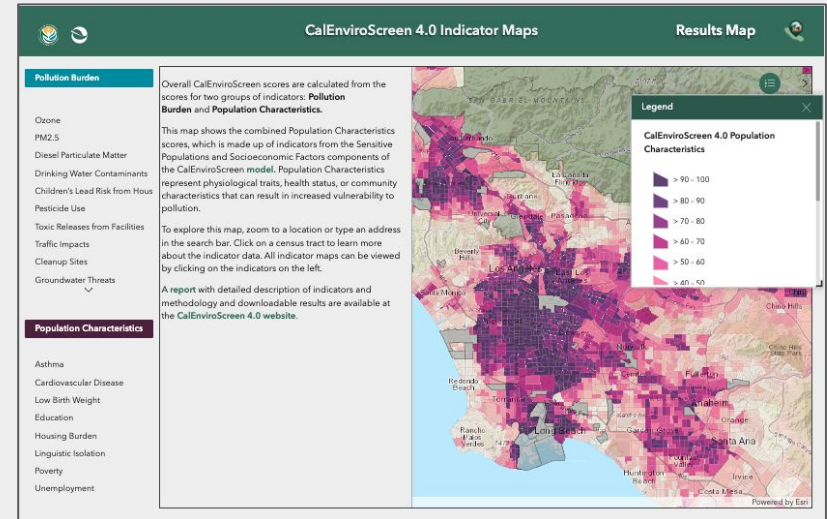
To help Federal agencies identify *disadvantaged communities* to prioritize funding allocations as part of the Justice40 initiative, the [Council on Environmental Quality](#) directed the [US Digital Service](#) to create the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#).

Feb 2021: Development of CEJST begins

Feb 2022: Beta Version released

Nov 2022: CEJST Version 1 released

How does CEJST work? A community is considered disadvantaged if:

Categories of Burden

There are eight "categories of burdens" and 34 datasets that quantify the burden "thresholds"

- Climate Change
- Energy
- Health
- Housing
- Legacy Pollution
- Transportation
- Water & Wastewater
- Workforce Development

&

Low Income

If a census tract is at or above the 65th percentile for low income

(as defined by household income at or below 200% of the Federal poverty level)

Also if:
- It is completely surrounded by DACs and is at or above the 50% percentile for low income
- If they are on land within the boundaries of Federally Recognized Tribes
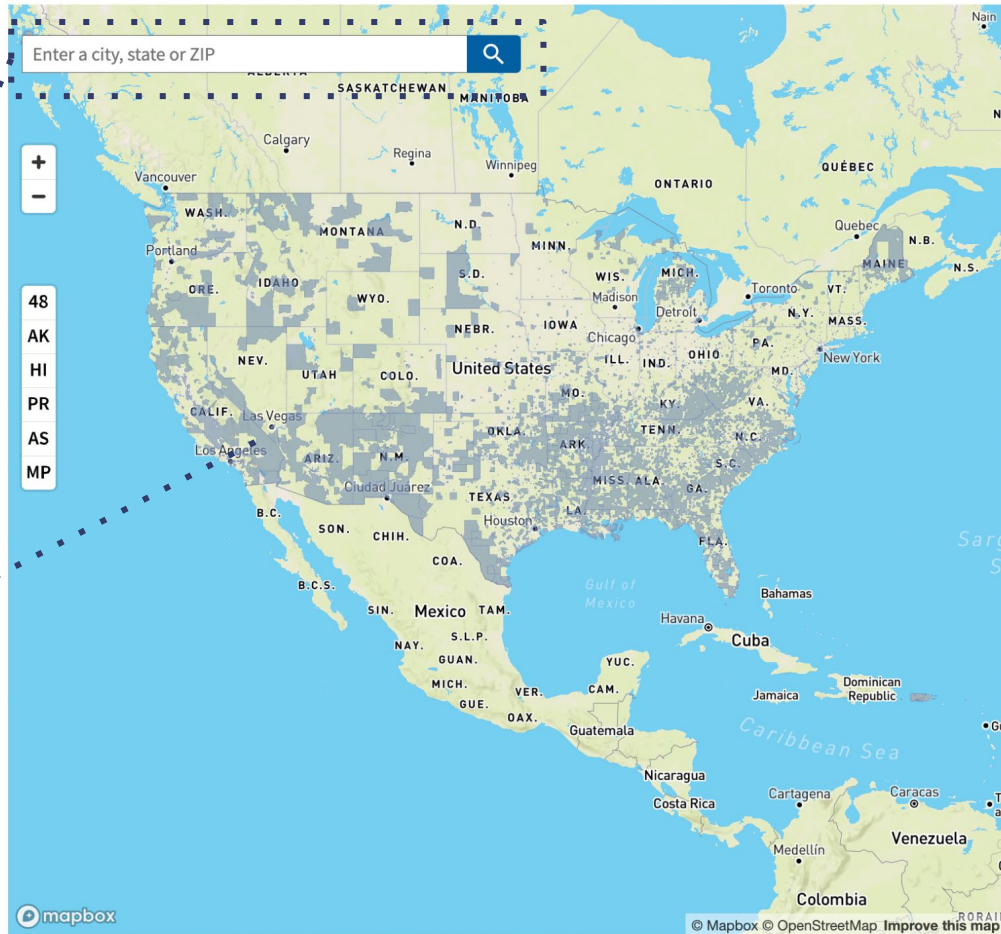
1. Visit https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/

Enter a city, state or ZIP

2. Go to your Area of Interest

Go to your location of interest by:
- Entering your address or ZIP

OR

- Zooming into your region

Things to know

This tool identifies communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. These communities are located in census tracts that are at or above the thresholds in one or more of eight categories of criteria.

The tool uses census tracts that represent about 4,000 people, which is the smallest unit of geography for which consistent data can be displayed on the tool.

The tool ranks each census tract using percentiles that show how much burden each tract experiences relative to all other tracts, for each criteria.

Percentages are used for

2. Evaluate census tracts and what qualifies communities as disadvantaged

The areas highlighted in "BLUE" means a census tract qualifies as "disadvantaged"

When you click on the blue census tract, you can see WHY it counts as disadvantaged & HOW MANY criteria it meets

The blue categories show which thresholds the census tract exceeds

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Release, Revise, Repeat

Equitable, data-driven decision making is not easy, and it'd be a miracle if we got it right the first time. Understanding where improvements can be made will get us one step closer towards realizing the vision for Justice40.

Kudos to the Council on Environmental Quality, the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council and US. Digital Service on potentially having the fastest turnaround time on a federal tool!
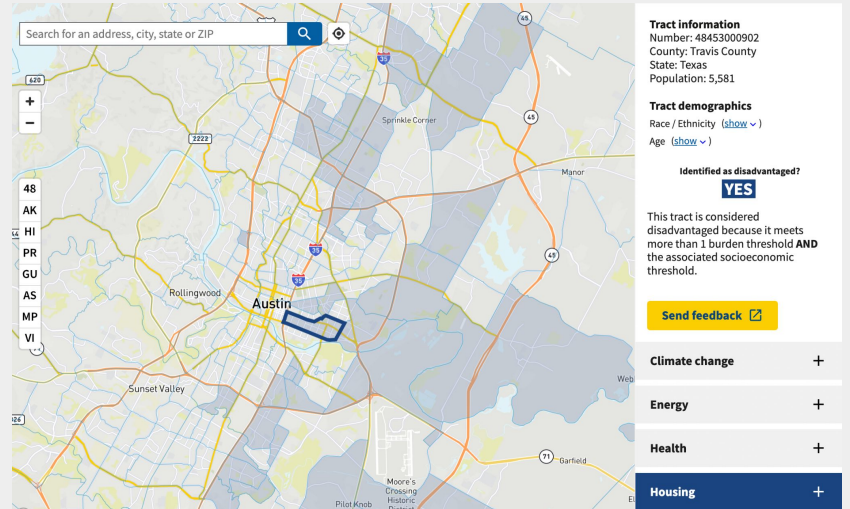
Show data cumulatively.

CEJST's binary categorization hides significant racial and income inequity. Showing data cumulatively will enable users to view and prioritize funding to those most affected by systemic environmental injustices.

Show data cumulatively.

Currently, CEJST does not adequately account for the disproportionate effects of climate and economic justice on Black and Brown communities.

Tracts with less than six thresholds met..

Look a lot different than tracts with six or more thresholds exceeded...

% of Population

Total Threshold Criteria Exceeded

Demographics ● Below 200% of Federal Poverty Line ● Percent Black or African American alone ● Percent White
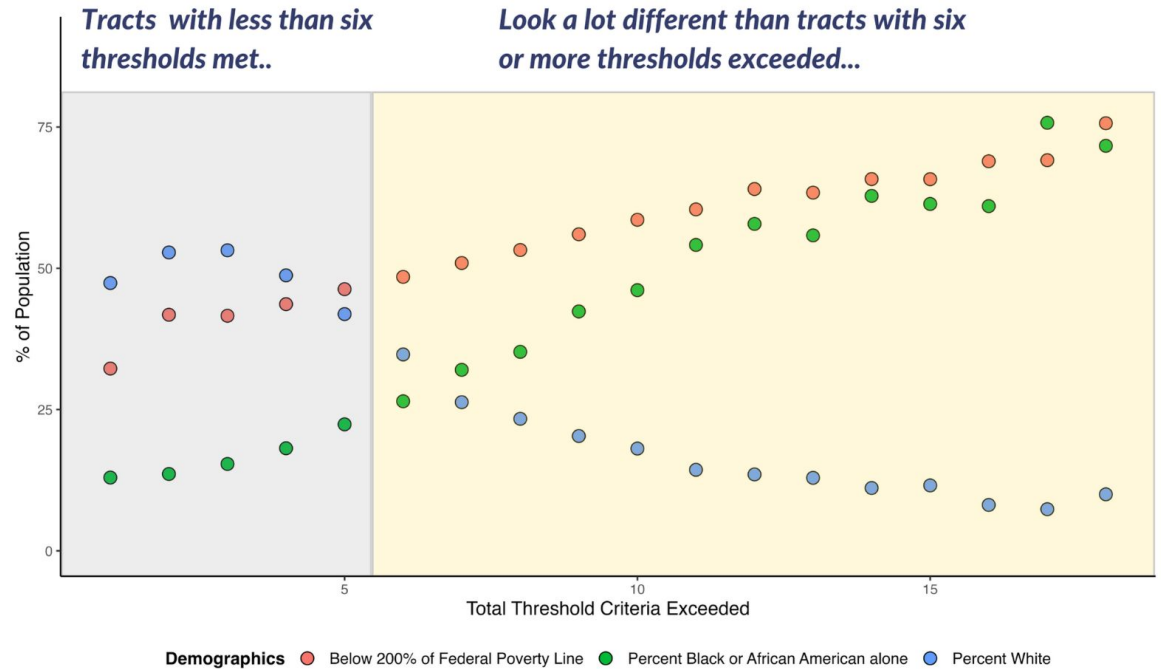
Show data cumulatively.

Additions to disadvantaged areas between the Beta version and Version 1.0 are majority white.

This is largely because most tracts exceeded a small number of threshold criteria.

The qualifying areas in the Beta were majority people of color...
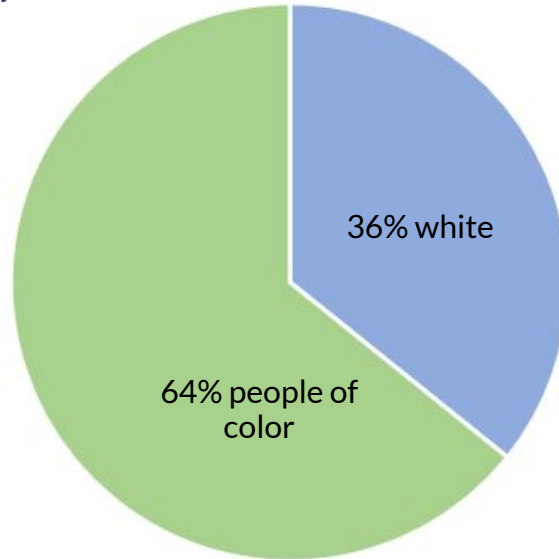
...but those added in Version 1.0 were majority white.
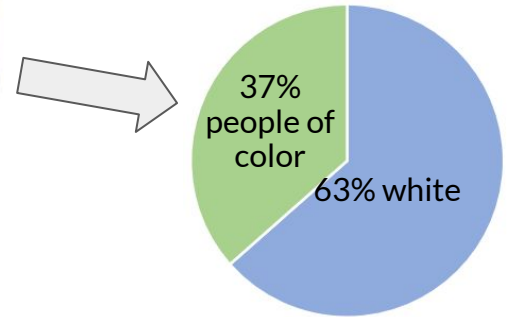
Show data cumulatively.

The communities newly added in Version 1.0 contain a population of more than 15 million people; however, the racial composition of the newly qualified additions differ significantly from the original Beta population.

When we dive into what this looks like in practice, we can see that where there is a higher percentage of non-white residents, there is higher climate and economic burden.

Legend

Non-White Residents
- <20%
- 21-40%
- 41-60%
- 61-80%
- >80%

Total CEJST Catagories
- 0 - 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - 8

Northern Manhattan and The Bronx , NY
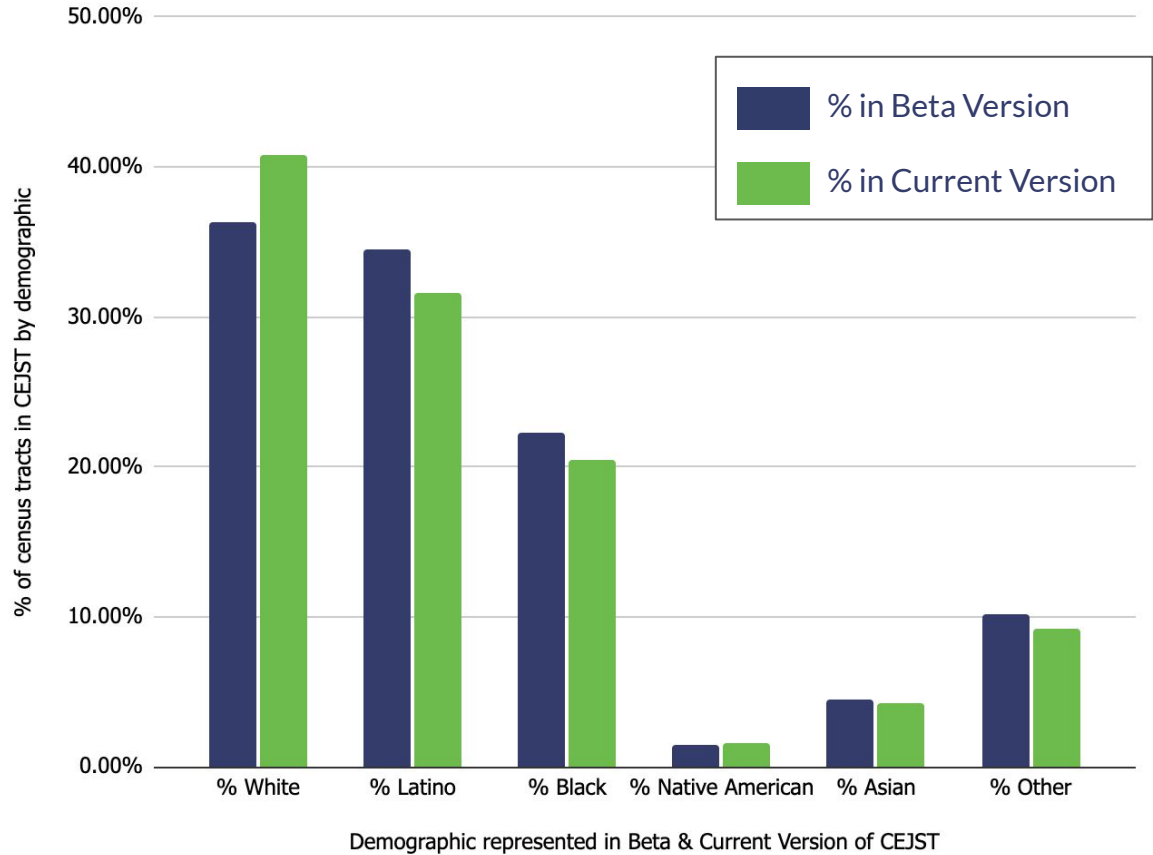
This is true in several other cities as well.

Houston, TX

Detroit, MI
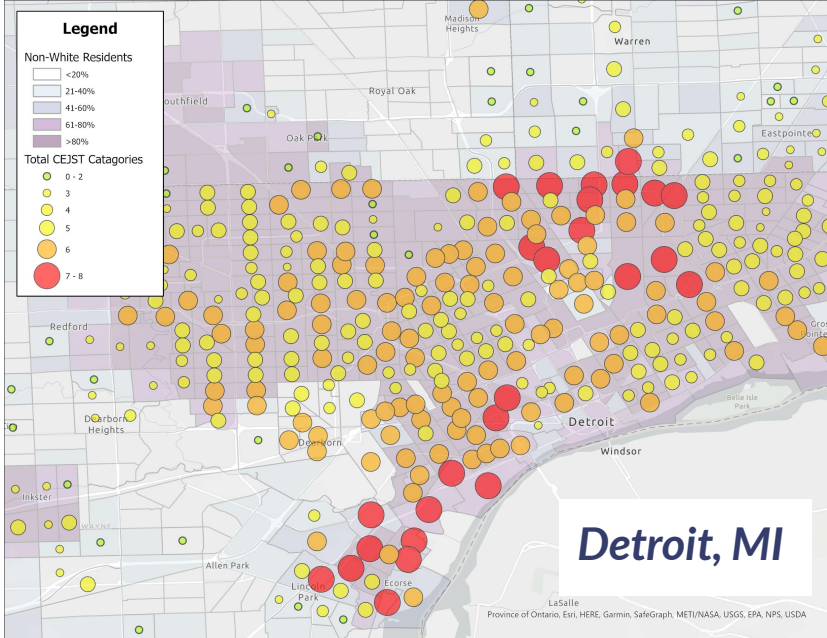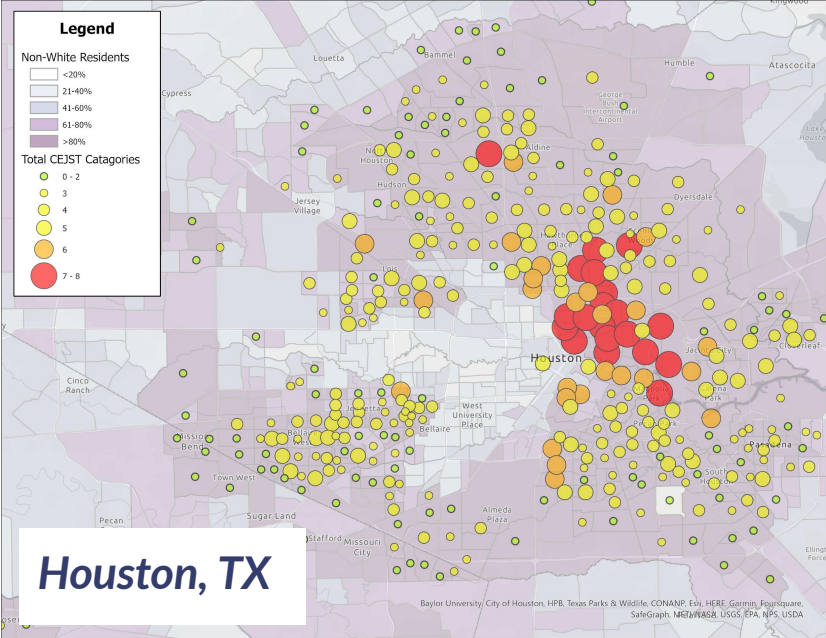
Recommendation: Restructure the tool to focus on areas exceeding multiple criteria, rather than a single threshold approach.

Revise economic screening approach.

Currently, there is too much sensitivity around one single indicator - there needs to be a less simplistic approach for income qualification.

Revise economic screening approach.

A single indicator, the 200% poverty measure, overwhelms all of the others - and is not necessarily the best way to identify low-income tracts.

Qualifies using 200% poverty, but not 80% AMI: 5,400 tracts
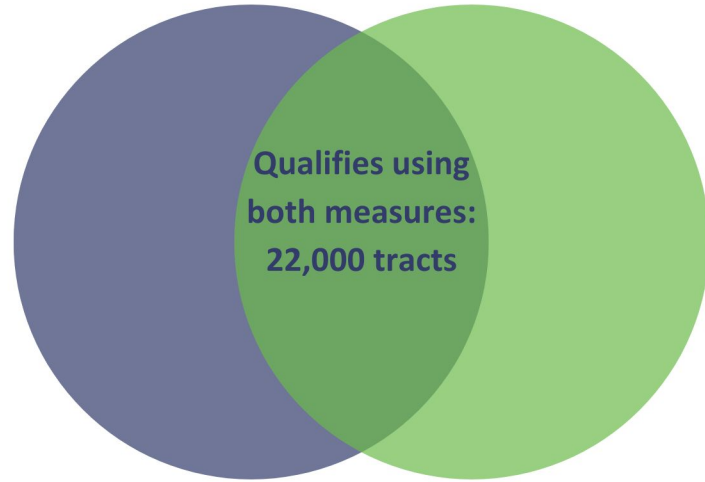
Qualifies using both measures: 22,000 tracts

Qualifies using 80% AMI, but not 200% poverty: 4,600 tracts

Interactive web tool for Further CEJST Analysis

apps.cnt.org/justice40

Some highly impacted areas are excluded.
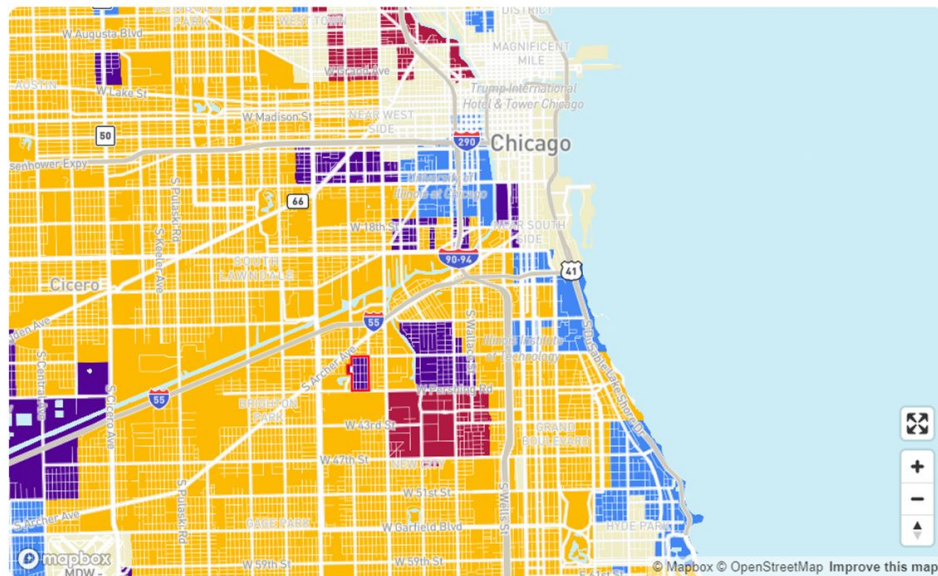
Identified as:
- Disadvantaged
- Not disadvantaged

Not identified as disadvantaged, but overburdened with:
- Cumulative environmental burdens (5 or more indicators)
- High concentration of people of color (over 50%)
- Cumulative environmental burdens and high concentration of people of color

Census tract: 17031590600

Search

Not Justice40 Disadvantaged, but nearly meets its criteria

This census tract *is not* considered disadvantaged by Justice40 criteria.

However, this area has both significant cumulative environmental justice burdens with thresholds in 5 of 8 categories met and 1 of 8 nearly met and has a high concentration of people of color (above the 65th percentile).

How is Justice40 criteria defined?

Justice40 Qualifications

✓ Meets criteria (5)   ! *Nearly* meets criteria (1)

1) Environmental and Climate Indicators

At least one indicator from any of environmental and climate categories below must reach the 90th percentile. Those that reach the 80th percentile are also shown to better demonstrate cumulative impacts.

What if cumulative impacts were considered?

Communities with environmental justice concerns are usually not burdened by a single environmental problem, but by many which have occurred over time and which exacerbate each other. The Justice40 screening tool does not consider this.
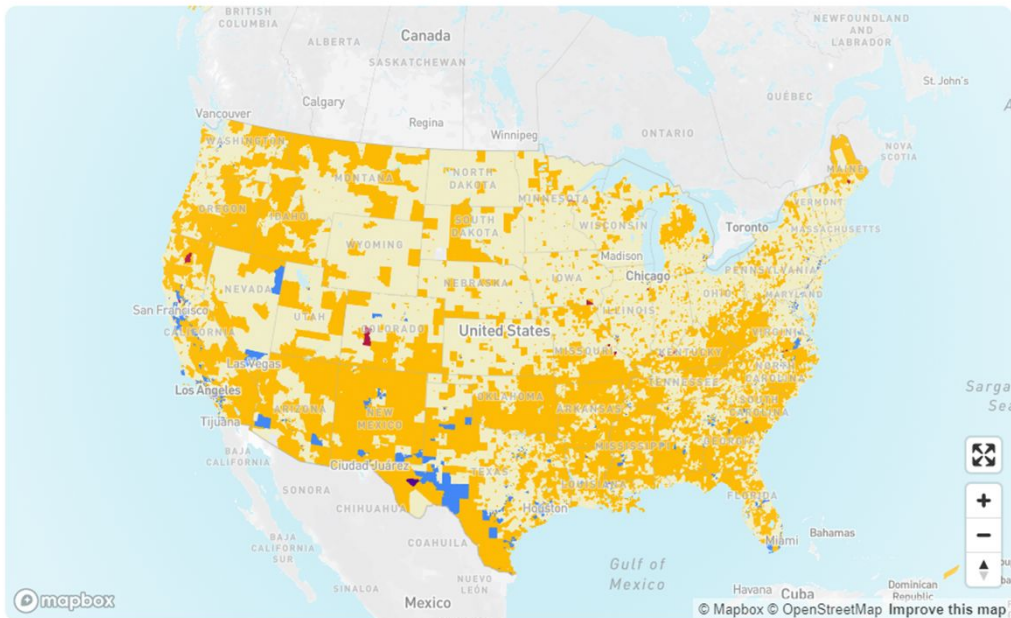
Number of categories reaching the 90th percentile: **5 of 8**

Number of categories reaching the 80th percentile: **1 of 8**

✓ Climate change   show details

! Cli...   show details

CNT web tool allows filtering by indicator.

…if 80% AMI were <u>added</u> as a qualifying factor, the purple, red, and blue areas above would also be disadvantaged
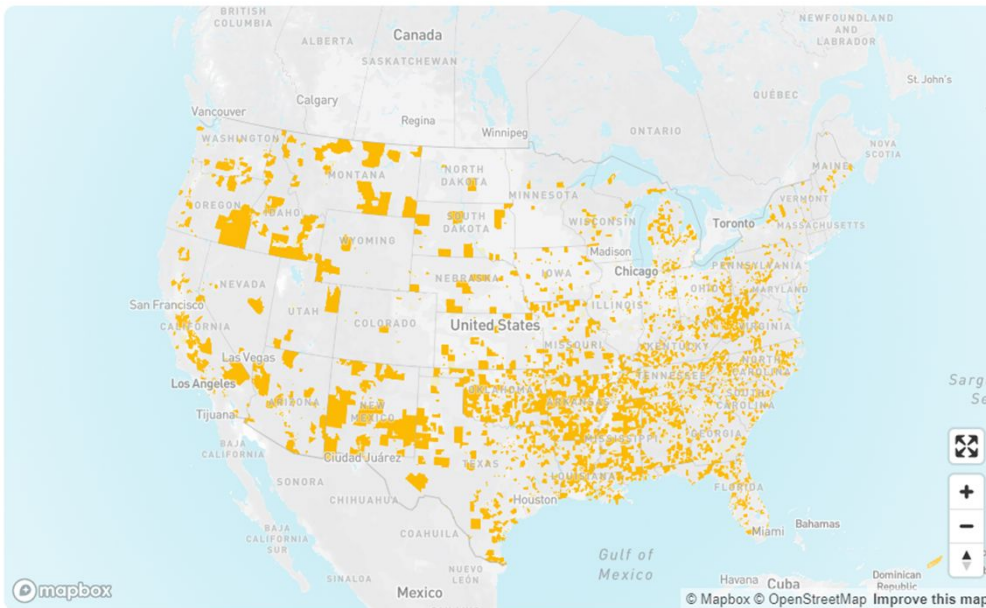
…if 80% AMI <u>replaced</u> 200% poverty as a qualifying factor, the orange areas above would <u>no longer</u> be disadvantaged

Adjusting economic indicator has a major impact.

Recommendation:
The single economic indicator is as influential as all of the climate indicators combined, and a more complex approach is needed.

**Explore how much individual indicators affect disadvantaged status:**
apps.cnt.org/justice40

Include filters by category.

The CEJST interface only shows a specific community's burden categories, rather than communities by a burden category. Viewing the data through filters by category would reveal regional and state trends, and facilitate issue specific advocates to prioritize 'hotspots' for investment.

The state breakdown of most-prominent category shows…

Most Prominent CEJST Category by State
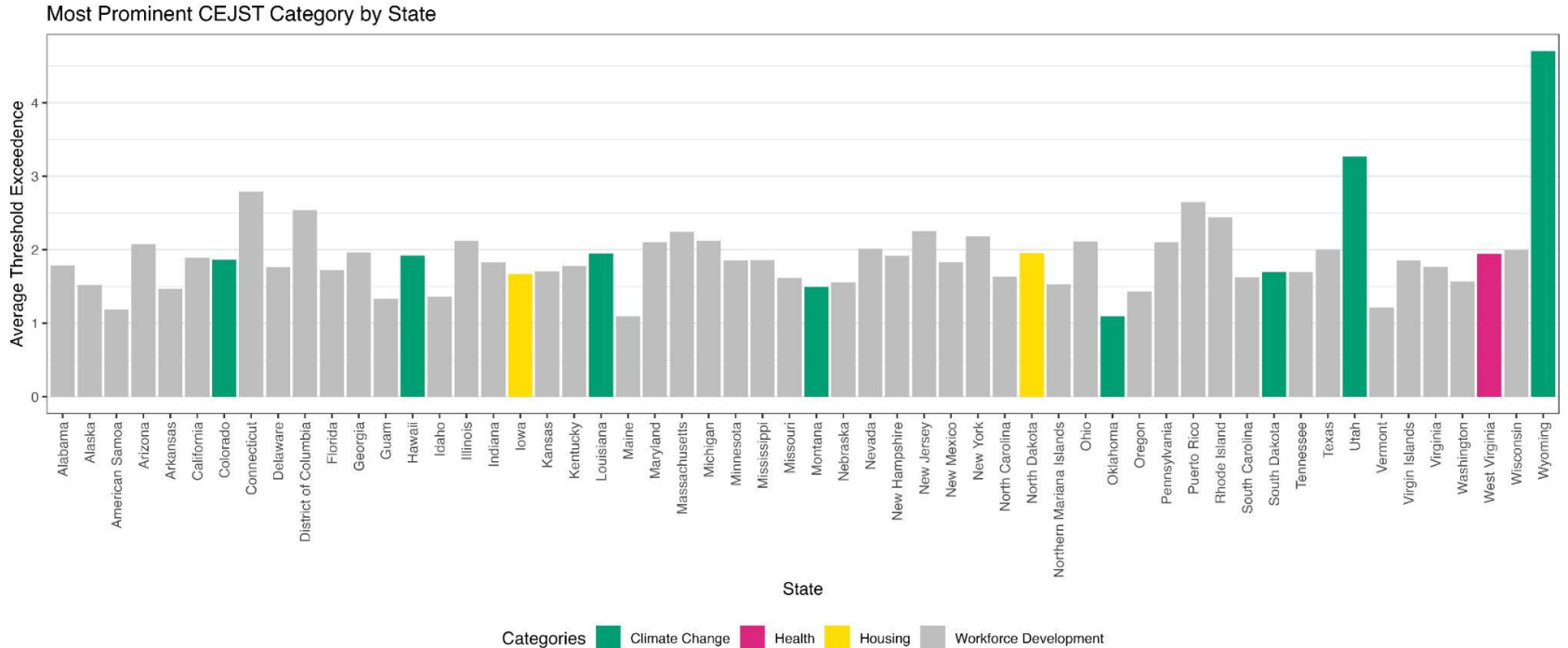
...in 80% of states, workforce development is the single most common category, with climate and housing coming in second and third, respectively.

When workforce development is excluded as a category, users can see the other categories states are most impacted by:

Most Prominent CEJST Category by State (Excluding Workforce Development)
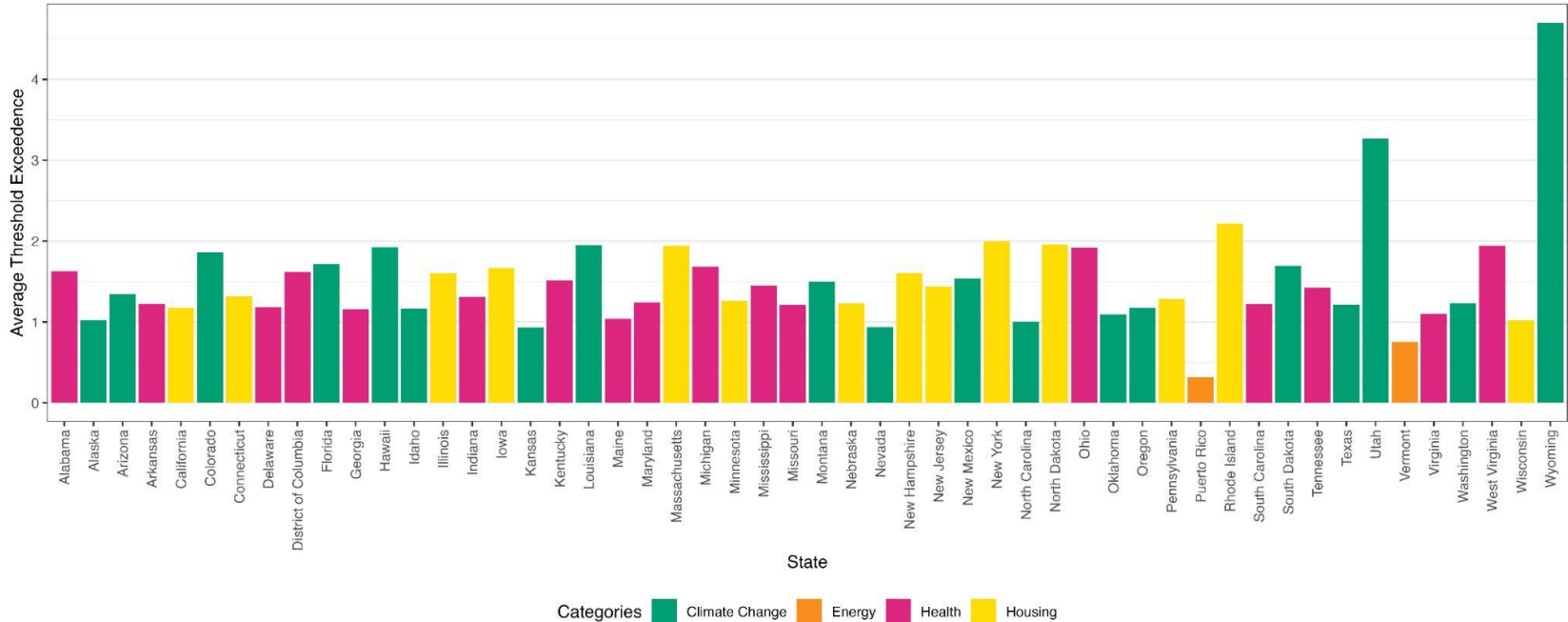
Recommendation:
Enable category filtering to show regional trends of impact to more easily inform program and funding prioritizations.

Prioritize community engagement & agency guidance

Despite the national coverage of the tool, it falls short in reflecting the inherent regional nuances associated with environmental justice issues. Federal agencies can continue to improve in involving communities in refining this tool.

Prioritize community engagement.

While useful, Google Groups and public comments biases towards groups with awareness and capacity.

- ❏ Lean on trusted partners and perform outreach with compensation → There is precedent for doing so. ([Link](#))

- ❏ Leverage higher quality *local* data when available → Incorporate local layers from states or municipal tools

- ❏ Collect data on who uses CEJST → This could inform who isn't currently using the tool, but should?

Prioritize community engagement.

Local validation by environmental justice experts who live in the nation's most burdened communities should be CEQ's north star. Making the 'self designation' process clearer would be a significant start.

Currently, requests for additional data and self designation is buried in the About section....

For example, Illinois makes this process much clearer for stakeholders.

Improve agency guidance.

While the guidance does assist with CEJST usability, it falls short for how agencies should analyze the data and implement within their programs or how it relates to existing tools an agency may have.

There are upwards of 30 different, local, state and federal screening tools...

☑ Cities and Counties
☑ Federal
☑ States

UNITED STATES

...knowing when or how to use one tool versus the other is valuable guidance the White House could provide.

Recommendation:
CEQ can continue improving community involvement when refining the tool & set clearer guidance on how various screening tools relate to one another.

Discussion

(and thank you for your engagement thus far!)

For follow-up or questions:

gabe@policyinnovation.org
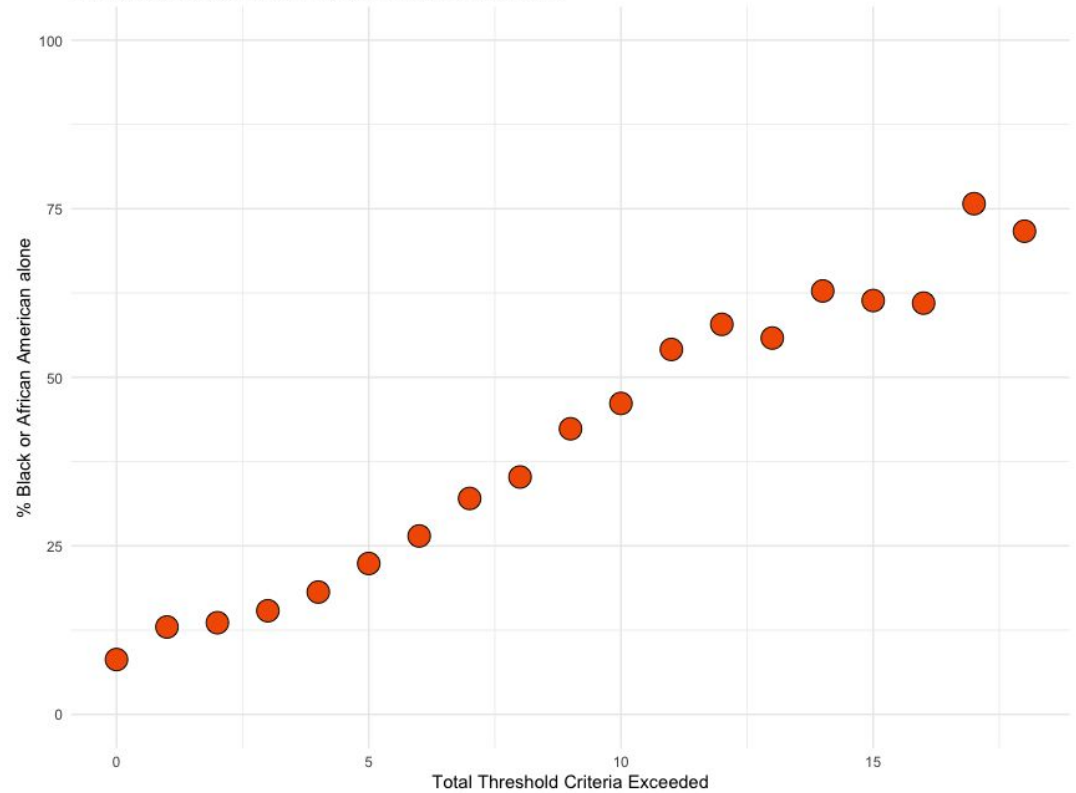bobdean@cnt.org
manuel.salgado@weact.org

Appendix

Additional graphs illustrating analysis.

Show data cumulatively.

Overview:

CEJST Census Tract Threshold Count and Percent Black
CEJST's binary catagorization hides significant racial inequity

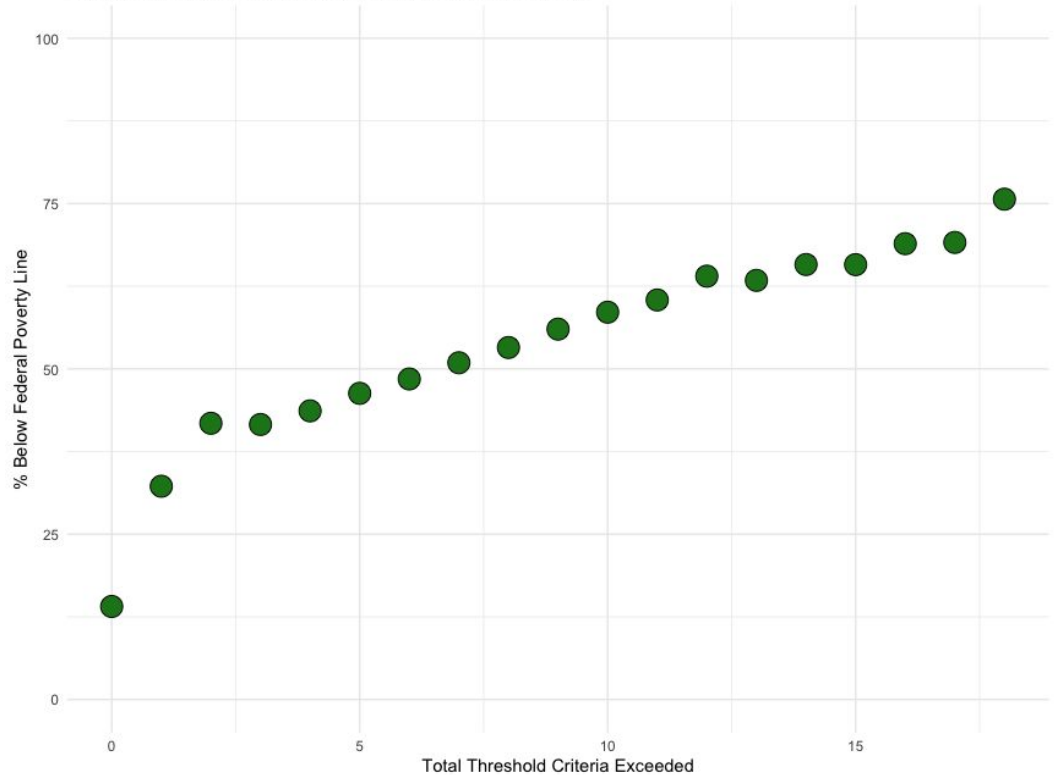CEJST Version 1 data accessed 02.01.2023, analyzed by Environmental Policy Innovation Center

Recommendation

Show data cumulatively.

Overview:

Why it matters?

CEJST Census Tract Threshold Count and Individuals 200% Below Federal Povery Rate
CEJST's binary catagorization hides significant economic inequity

CEJST Version 1 data accessed 02.01.2023, analyzed by Environmental Policy Innovation Center