DRIVING DANGER

How Uber and Lyft create a safety crisis for their drivers

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STRATEGIC ORGANIZING CENTER

CALIFORNIA ★ GIG ★ WORKERS ★ UNION

Chicago Gig Alliance

CWA

DRIVERS DEMAND JUSTICE

GIG WORKERS RISING

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The **Strategic Organizing Center (SOC)** is a democratic coalition of three labor unions: Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Communications Workers of America (CWA) and United Farmworkers of America (UFW). Together, SOC-affiliated unions represent more than 2.5 million workers. The SOC is a labor union innovation center dedicated to improving the lives of working people, partnering with its affiliates to develop effective strategies to support workers organizing for better lives for themselves and their families. We stand against structural racism and fight not only for jobs, but good jobs: safe, equitable workplaces where all employees are respected, paid living wages and have real power at work.

The **California Gig Workers Union/SEIU** is the collective voice of tens of thousands of Californians who work for gig economy corporations like Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, Instacart, and others. We are organizing a union in California to win fair wages, increased flexibility, health benefits, and basic worker protections — which gig companies and others have spent millions of dollars to deny us. The California Gig Workers Union is affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Chicago Gig Alliance, a project of The People's Lobby, is in its third year of working to improve conditions for gig workers working for companies like Uber, Lyft, Doordash and Instacart and we are closer than ever to achieving our goals. We have talked with thousands of rideshare drivers about the issues impacting their economic security, and worked with them to create a priority list of changes. Drivers drafted and are fighting for a City ordinance that would give workers a living wage (including yearly raises with inflation); put a 20% cap on how much the companies can take from each fare; improve app safety; create an excluded worker safety committee; institute an appeal process for deactivations and increased transparency for both workers and passengers.

Colorado Independent Drivers United (CIDU) is a Union by and for Rideshare, Delivery, Pedicab, Taxi, and Limousine drivers. We are an open union for any and all full-time and part-time drivers in Colorado. We are joining together and using collective action to fight for fair pay & mileage rates, affordable healthcare & benefits, health & safety protections, and a voice in the development and regulation of the autonomous vehicle market. Colorado Independent Drivers United is affiliated with the Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7777.

Drivers Demand Justice is a driver-led coalition of labor unions and allied community groups fighting to win collective bargaining rights and advance justice for rideshare drivers. It currently represents over 4,000 frontline Massachusetts drivers organizing together to transform their industry.

The **Gig Workers Rising** campaign launched in 2018 to support app-based workers who are organizing for better wages, working conditions, and respect on the job. The campaign is grounded in the belief that everyone who works via an app deserves a real voice in their job and the freedom that comes with good pay and real benefits. Since launching, GWR has organized app-based workers at airports, parking lots and online groups and is committed to building the power of app-based workers as they organize for better wages, transparency, a seat at the table, and safer working conditions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More and more drivers who work on ridesharing apps like Uber and Lyft are revealing the stark reality of the dangers they face on the job because of how Uber and Lyft design their apps. Rideshare drivers, especially Black and brown drivers, are frequently harassed.[1] Some drivers are also assaulted, carjacked, and even killed while driving for these platform giants.[2] In Chicago, almost 80 percent of app-based drivers report feeling unsafe at least once a month.[3]

Because Uber and Lyft's drivers need to work to provide for themselves and their families, they will accept whatever work they can from the apps despite the violence and threats they may experience on the job. Uber and Lyft, which comprise nearly 100 percent of the US rideshare market,[4] use algorithms that dictate the passengers, route, and pickup and drop off locations of every ride. And the algorithms are not designed to take into account the state that passengers may be in when they request a ride—intoxicated, belligerent, or showing other behavior that could be dangerous to drivers. Drivers fear that if they need to cancel a ride with a violent passenger and subsequently receive a negative review or complaint, the corporations will end up punishing them through deactivation. Both Uber and Lyft explicitly state that if drivers fall below a certain customer rating, they may be deactivated.[5] In 2023, drivers reported negative customer complaints as the leading cause for deactivation.[6]

> **The results show that rideshare drivers are regularly threatened, harassed, robbed and physically assaulted, and that workers of color are at even higher risk.**

In order to understand the experience of and safety concerns of app-based drivers, the Strategic Organizing Center conducted **the largest national safety survey of current app-based drivers to date.** The survey was conducted in March 2023 and included over 900 app-based rideshare drivers, across 35 states and the District of Columbia. The results show that these rideshare

drivers are regularly threatened, harassed, robbed and physically assaulted, and that workers of color are at even higher risk.

The results also show that the threat of deactivation leads many drivers to accept rides offered—even ones they fear they may be unsafe—because they simply cannot afford to lose work. App-based workers, in general, struggle more financially than other service-sector workers.[7] App-based drivers in particular depend on the income they get from the apps for basic living expenses.[8] As a result, the drivers feel that the threat of deactivation on Uber and Lyft's apps squeezes them into choosing their livelihoods over their own safety.

Uber and Lyft do not publicly acknowledge the impact that their app design has on their drivers' safety. In fact, these rideshare giants refuse to admit there are pervasive safety risks for their drivers at all: Uber and Lyft's own figures on the safety and health of their drivers are outdated and fail to capture real time risk.[9] They also report on a narrow range of incidents that fail to capture the full spectrum of threats and harm that their drivers face. Both Uber and Lyft's safety reports were created using data that was two to four years old, and only captured incidents of sexual assault and fatalities.

KEY FINDINGS

Rideshare work is unsafe, especially for people of color.

▶ Two-thirds of all rideshare driver survey respondents were threatened, harassed, or assaulted in the last year.

▶ A majority of driver respondents were verbally abused, more than a quarter were verbally threatened with physical harm and 14 percent were grabbed, groped, or hit.

▶ A higher proportion of drivers of color reported experiencing some type of threatening, harassing or violent behavior (72%) compared to white drivers (63%), and almost one-in-five drivers of color reported being grabbed, groped, or hit.

Deactivation motivates drivers to take unsafe rides.

▶ Fifty-nine percent of all drivers who accepted rides they felt were unsafe did so because they were concerned about negative reviews leading to deactivation. For drivers of color, this rate was seventy percent.

▶ Eighty-three percent of rideshare drivers reported concern about deactivation by their app-based corporations, with over half being 'very' or 'extremely' concerned.

▶ Three-in-four rideshare drivers reported that the ability to deny or cancel rides without consequence if they feel threatened or unsafe would make them feel safer on the job.

INTRODUCTION

As the growth of the app-based economy continues to outpace the growth of the overall economy in the US, more and more workers are subjected to low wages, unsafe working conditions, and few company-provided protections.[10] In fact, it has been estimated that the gig economy has more than doubled in size since 2018 from $204 billion to $455 billion.[11]

For app-based drivers in particular, drivers are confined with customers and cannot readily defend themselves as they operate their vehicles. In 2021, the Pew Research Center found that about half of app-based drivers in the US have felt unsafe on the job, with workers of color reporting feeling unsafe and experiencing unwanted sexual advances on the job more often than white workers.[12] Among drivers in California, East Asian drivers experienced the highest rates of customer bias or discrimination within their ethnicity group, followed closely by South Asian drivers.[13] Researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that in Chicago, 79 percent of app-based drivers felt unsafe and that female app-based drivers experience higher rates of sexual harassment.[14]

From 2017 to 2022, *The Markup* found over 350 carjackings or attempted carjackings of delivery and rideshare drivers in the US while on the job, with rideshare drivers experiencing more carjackings than delivery drivers.[15] Some app-based rideshare and delivery workers, especially workers of color, pay the ultimate price for trying to earn a living: from 2017 to 2022, 50 app-based workers in the United States lost their lives while working for platforms including Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, and Grubhub.[16] Sixty three percent of drivers who died on the job were people of color.[17]

> **Neither Uber nor Lyft assure drivers that the rides refused or ended early due to safety concerns are not calculated into deactivating drivers.**

Instead of providing meaningful protection for drivers, platform corporations like Uber and Lyft pass the responsibility onto their drivers by assuring them that they can pass on or cancel any ride that feels unsafe. Though drivers technically can do this on the apps, these corporations fail to mention that cancelling rides can lead to drivers being temporarily or even permanently barred from using the apps, known as deactivation. And

because most drivers depend on app-based work to pay for basic living expenses like food and housing, deactivation can be devastating for drivers and their families.[18]

In Uber's tips for safety while driving, it tells drivers to "[t]rust your instincts and experience…if you feel unsafe you can end the ride at any time."[19] Similarly, Lyft's "Ratings and Cancellations" web page states that "[y]our passenger mak[ing] you feel uncomfortable … is one of a number of concerns that are perfectly acceptable if you need to cancel a ride." But both Uber and Lyft's websites on deactivation explicitly state that if drivers fall below a certain customer rating, they may be deactivated, with Lyft's also stating that drivers who cancel more than 15 rides may put their account "at risk."[20] And neither Uber nor Lyft assure drivers that the rides refused or ended early due to safety concerns are *not* calculated into deactivating drivers.[21] Additionally, as discussed in more detail below, Uber and Lyft's own figures on the safety and health of their drivers minimize the risk of violence, harassment, and threats that their drivers actually encounter on a regular basis.

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Given the growing weight of testimony and research showing Uber and Lyft workers are at risk, the app giants like Uber and Lyft are facing more scrutiny than ever before. Early in 2023, President Biden signed a Congressional bill instructing the Government Accountability Office to study rates of violence on drivers by passengers in ridesharing vehicles.[22] In 2022, Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, Senator Edward Markey, and Senator Elizabeth Warren published an open letter to Uber and Lyft raising concerns over the role of deactivations in creating unsafe conditions for workers and demanding disclosures of how they respond to incidents of worker safety.[23]

As a part of the Chicago Rideshare Living Wage and Safety Ordinance currently being considered, drivers in Chicago have demanded an "excluded worker safety committee" which would study safety issues facing app-based workers.[24] The proposed ordinance also includes a requirement for platforms to notify drivers of suspensions ahead of time and guarantee the right to appeal.[25]

This report seeks to capture the full range of safety issues that rideshare drivers face across as many states and communities as possible, and how the structure of rideshare work creates these unsafe conditions. The report describes types of threats and violence experienced by drivers, the role that deactivations play in motivating them to accept unsafe rides while working for the app, and the kinds of safety measures that drivers wish they had from Uber and Lyft to make their jobs safer. The results of this study seek to shed more light on the safety experiences of app-based rideshare drivers, particularly drivers of color.

NATIONAL SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The SOC conducted a national survey of app-based rideshare drivers about their experiences with and concerns about driver safety. The survey was conducted between February 23 and March 17 of 2023 and utilized advertisements on Meta platforms Facebook and Instagram. The survey was conducted in Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Somali in addition to English.

A total of 906 rideshare drivers across 35 states and the District of Columbia responded to the survey. Of the survey respondents, 86 percent reported driving for Uber, 65 percent for Lyft and one percent for other app-based rideshare corporations. All the survey respondents have been active drivers within the last three months.
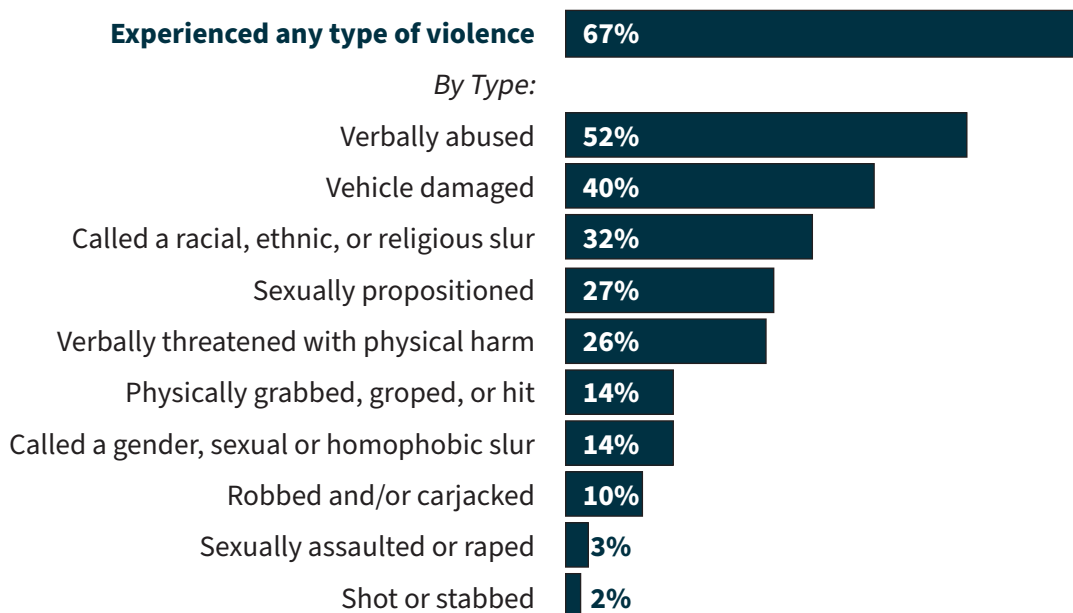
Of the respondents who provided demographic information, 78 percent identified as male, 21 percent identified as female, and 1 percent identified as non-binary. The racial breakdown of respondents was 42 percent white and 58 percent nonwhite. The nonwhite racial category, referred to in this report as drivers of color, included those who identified as Black/African American (23%), Asian (16%), Middle Eastern/North African (8%), Native American (3%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (2%), more than one race (17%) and other (31%). Half of respondents were born outside of the US.

RIDESHARE DRIVERS EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANT VIOLENCE, HARASSMENT AND THREATS AT WORK

Health and safety risks are pervasive for app-based drivers. Given the way that Uber and Lyft structure their apps, drivers are subject to all types of conditions while driving and are vulnerable in the confines of their vehicles. Driver respondents in this study reported feeling scared that, because of the way the app is structured, they have no way of choosing where they pick passengers up or verifying who gets into their vehicle. They also have very little agency to eject a passenger if they start acting aggressively.

The SOC asked rideshare drivers about whether they have experienced various forms of physical violence, harassment or threats on the job in the last year. **Sixty-seven percent of rideshare driver respondents reported having experienced some kind of violence, harassment or threatening behavior in the last year.**

FIGURE A: Rates of Violence, Harassment and Threats Experienced by App-based Rideshare Driver Respondents (n=906)

Experienced any type of violence	**67%**
By Type:	
Verbally abused	**52%**
Vehicle damaged	**40%**
Called a racial, ethnic, or religious slur	**32%**
Sexually propositioned	**27%**
Verbally threatened with physical harm	**26%**
Physically grabbed, groped, or hit	**14%**
Called a gender, sexual or homophobic slur	**14%**
Robbed and/or carjacked	**10%**
Sexually assaulted or raped	**3%**
Shot or stabbed	**2%**

As shown in Figure A, the most common violent, harassing or threatening behaviors experienced by app-based drivers included being verbally abused (52%), having vehicle damaged (40%), being called a racial, ethnic, or religious slur (32%), and being sexually propositioned (27%). Even more astonishing, fourteen percent reported being grabbed, groped, or hit, ten percent reported being robbed or carjacked, three percent reported being sexually assaulted or raped and two percent reported being shot or stabbed in the last year alone.

It is no surprise that 55 percent of rideshare driver respondents reported personally investing in equipment in their vehicle to protect themselves from potential violence from passengers.

EMILIO, PLAINFIELD IL

Emilio was born in Mexico City and has been driving for both Uber and Lyft since 2019. He works on the apps between 40 and 55 hours a week. Emilio has also been threatened by a passenger with firearm but chose to complete the ride to stay safe: "**He pulled a gun** and made me drive a different route. I drove and dropped them at their destination but **it was terrible**."

He became an app-based driver due to an injury that rendered him paralyzed from the waist down. One day suddenly, Uber deactivated his account following an unremarkable trip with no explanation: "I went to the Uber office on North Ave in Chicago and I found out why they deactivated my account— for accusations the rider said I was masturbating in my car. How is this possible? I'm handicapped." He was frustrated by his lack of options to defend himself: "I told them this is a totally false accusation and they didn't respond … I sent letters, I called them—**I told them I feel discrimination, I have family and bills and mortgage payments**. I don't have any options for how to make this right. The passenger's word is the final word and that's it."

App-based drivers of color most at risk

Black and brown app-based rideshare drivers experience violence, harassment, and threats at a higher rate than white app-based rideshare drivers. Figure B depicts the share of app-based drivers who reported experiencing various specific types of violent, harassing, or threatening behavior by race.

FIGURE B. Rates of Violence, Harassment and Threats Reported by App-based Rideshare Driver Respondents, by Race
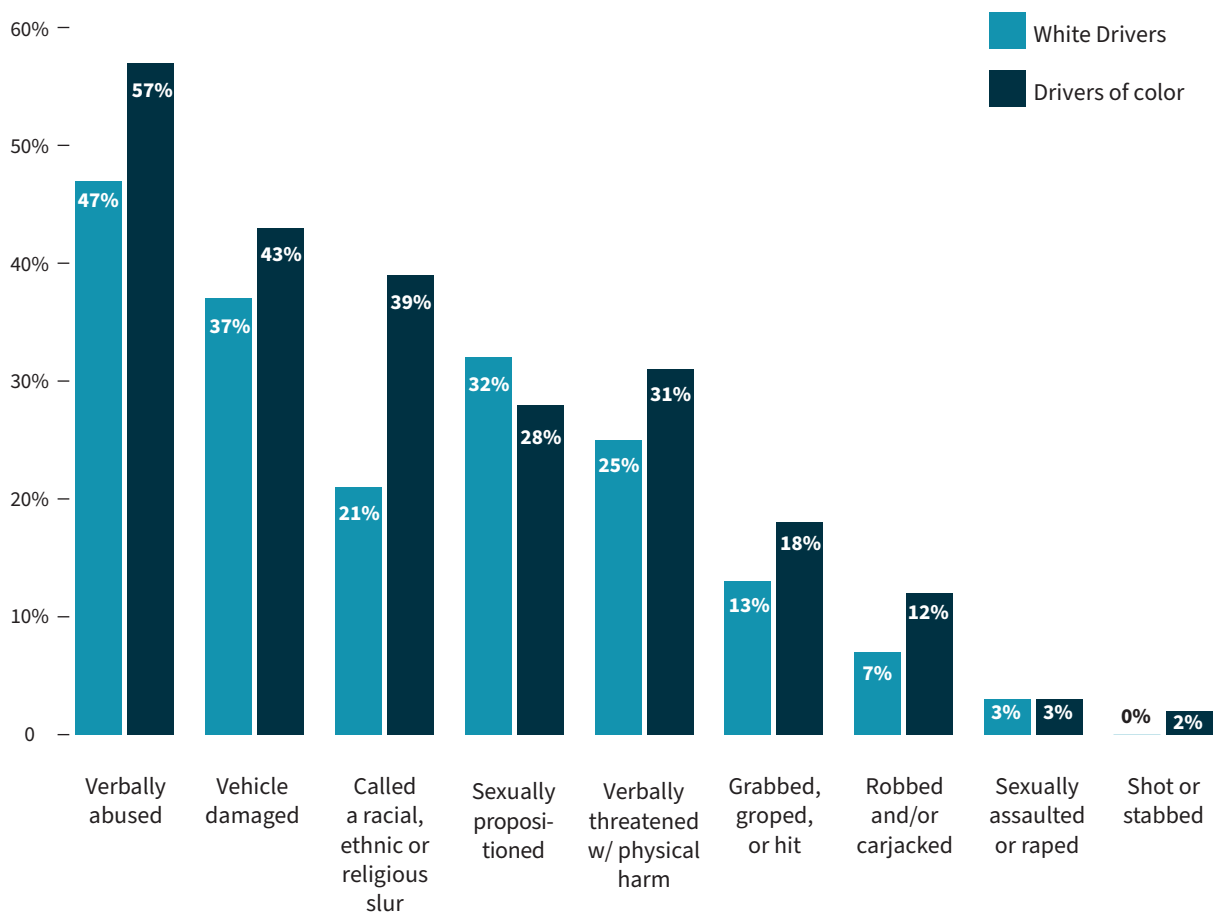
In nearly all the violence and harassment categories, a larger proportion of Black and brown drivers report experiencing violent or threatening behaviors than white drivers. For example, 60 percent more drivers of color reported being robbed or carjacked in the last year compared to white drivers. Drivers of color were also 86% more likely than white drivers to report being called a racial, ethnic or religious name or slur. One-in-five drivers of color report being physically grabbed, groped or hit, which is 37 percent more than white drivers. Drivers of color also reported being verbally threatened with physical harm 24 percent more than white drivers. Drivers of color are also three times more likely to have been shot or stabbed than white drivers in the last year.

ROSINE, OAKLAND CA

Rosine emigrated from Burkina Faso and currently resides in Oakland, CA. She has driven for Uber and Lyft for over six years, and in the past year has focused only on driving for Uber. She drives over 40 hours a week, which is still not enough to make ends meet. In addition to driving, she sells fresh ginger juices at markets and festivals and is affectionately known as "The Ginger Lady."

Rosine is no stranger to the risks of being a rideshare driver: "Sometimes you pick up a person who is in a bad mood or they have certain conditions. **You don't know if they will jump on you or do something bad to you.** You're keeping one eye on them and one eye on the road." On one ride, a single male passenger provoked her while she was driving: "I was scared something was going to happen … is he a murderer? Is he going to kill me?"

Another time, the boyfriend of a belligerently drunk passenger threatened her with a weapon: "**He came outside with a weapon** … his hand in his pocket … I don't want to be the victim."

Because Uber provides little to no support for drivers, she and her driver friends pay for safety equipment—cameras, self-defense weapons and the like—out of their own pockets, and keep one another company on the phone during rides in case something dangerous happens.

MARIANNA, SAN FRANCISCO CA

Marianna is a 40-year-old Latina woman born and raised in San Francisco. She's been driving since 2016, used to drive for both Uber and Lyft, and now focuses on Uber. She drives for over 40 hours a week. She has had to tolerate a lot of unwanted sexual advances while driving that made her feel unsafe: "I went to pick up some men, they were at a bar. They were straight drunk, shitfaced. **One guy got in moaning my name …** They're behind me, I don't know what they're going to do, they were leaning over the seat and everything." Another time, a passenger cornered her and was insistent that she give him her phone number: "he gets all behind my seat … he hands me the phone and he's that close to me. I know how to maneuver myself, I'm not a damsel in distress, but **I just don't know what he could do if I stand up to him.**"

Another safety concern for Marianna is how not knowing where she is driving to means that she won't know when she will get home to take care of her children: "They show you where to pick the person up, and they don't tell you it's in another city … The safety part, **I have kids I have to get home to**."

Marianna knows her experiences are not unusual for an app-based driver, and that some drivers have had even worse experiences. "**Everyone deserves respect.** Just because it's a service doesn't mean you have to treat people like shit, you know … A lot of people take Uber or Lyft when they drink and that's safer for them, but it's sometimes a problem for the drivers. … I feel bad for the people who went out there and did their rides and … didn't make it home."

DEACTIVATION THREAT BY APP-BASED CORPORATIONS PUSHES DRIVERS TO ACCEPT UNSAFE RIDES

Given the prevalence of violence, harassment and threats experienced by rideshare drivers, one might expect drivers to be more cautious in providing rides to passengers that threaten their safety. However, the threat of deactivation—the process by which app-based corporations temporarily or permanently block driver access to their platforms—prevents drivers from avoiding unsafe rides. Drivers on both apps fear that if they need to cancel a ride with a violent passenger and subsequently receive a negative review or complaint, the corporations will end up punishing them through deactivation. Both Uber and Lyft explicitly state that if drivers fall below a certain customer rating, they may be deactivated.[26] In 2023, drivers reported negative customer complaints as the leading cause for deactivation, many of which were discriminatory or retaliatory in some way to the driver.[27]

When drivers are deactivated, the corporations remove them from the apps, blocking their ability to do their job, and thus unable to earn income needed to provide for themselves and their families. With the choice between earning a living or accepting rides from passengers who they believe may pose a safety risk, app-based drivers often feel compelled to give rides that make them feel unsafe to avoid deactivation by the corporations they drive for.

> **60% of app-based rideshare drivers reported accepting rides from passengers who made them feel unsafe.**

In fact, according to the SOC survey, 60 percent of app-based rideshare drivers reported providing rides to passenger(s) that made them feel unsafe—including passengers who appeared intoxicated or who exhibited aggressive or other concerning behavior. For app-based drivers of color, the share of respondents who reported providing rides that made them feel unsafe in the last year was even higher—64 percent—compared to 55 percent for white drivers.

The survey asked drivers whether they accepted rides that made them feel unsafe and also why they chose to accept such rides. As shown in Table 2, the most common reason for accepting a

ride that made drivers feel unsafe—cited by 59 percent of respondents—was fear that passengers might leave negative reviews leading to deactivation. Two other deactivation-related reasons were also frequently cited: concerns that their cancellation rates would increase above acceptable levels (49%) or that their ride acceptance rates would decrease below acceptable levels (43%), both leading to deactivation.

Table 2: Reasons Cited by App-based Rideshare Driver Respondents for Providing Ride(s) to Passengers that Felt Unsafe, by Race

Concern	All Drivers	White Drivers	Drivers of Color
Concerned passenger(s) would leave negative reviews, which might lead to deactivation	59%	54%	70%
Concerned about losing income	57%	54%	62%
Concerned passenger(s) would respond violently toward me or my vehicle	57%	61%	63%
Concerned cancellation rate would increase, which might lead to deactivation	49%	51%	56%
Concerned about falling below allowable ride acceptance rate, which might lead to deactivation	43%	40%	51%
n	536	133	216

When providing rides to passengers that made them feel unsafe, driver respondents of color cited the threat of deactivation as a reason more often than white drivers. Specifically, drivers of color were more concerned about getting a negative review, increasing their cancellation rate, or decreasing their acceptance rate than white drivers.

As Table 2 shows, drivers also reported that they feared losing income by not picking up passengers who made them feel unsafe. Overall, 57 percent of driver respondents indicated losing income as a factor in accepting unsafe rides; a larger share—62 percent—of drivers of color indicated this reason.

JC, CHICAGO IL

JC is a 56-year-old Black man who has been driving for Lyft for 7 years. He believes most people do not think about the risks to drivers' personal safety and how one-sided and arbitrary deactivation can be. On one ride, he picked up a single male passenger and "[w]e got into a verbal altercation. I pulled over and asked him to leave … **It occurred to me at that moment that it's very difficult to force someone out of your car** … [d]idn't have a whole lot of options." When they got to his destination, "he hit me over the head from the back seat" and when he got out "he picked up a brick and threw it at my car."

JC reported the incident to Lyft and was told he would not pair with that passenger again. He noted how unfair it is that drivers are constantly threatened with automatic deactivation, which severely impacts their livelihoods, meanwhile passengers don't get so much as a slap on the wrist. "It struck me that it's a double standard. **If it had been the other way around, I would've immediately been deactivated but a passenger can assault the driver and their only solution is they won't match you with that passenger anymore.**"

Deactivation experienced by 40% of drivers

For many drivers, concerns about deactivation are not theoretical. A full 40 percent of rideshare driver respondents indicated being deactivated by their rideshare corporations in the past year, while 56 percent reported being threatened with deactivation in the past year.

It is no surprise that driver respondents indicated significant concern with deactivation in general. For example, as shown in Figure 3, five-in-six rideshare drivers (83%) reported concerns about deactivation by their app-based corporations, with 51 percent indicating they were 'extremely' or 'very' concerned.

Drivers of color expressed a higher level of concern about the threat of deactivation compared to white drivers. Eighty-eight percent of drivers of color indicated concern with deactivation, with 62 percent indicated they were 'very' or 'extremely' concerned.

Table 3: Level of Rideshare Driver Respondent Concern about Threat of Deactivation by App-based Companies

Level of Concern	All Drivers	White Drivers	Drivers of Color
Extremely concerned	32%	21%	40%
Very concerned	20%	18%	22%
Somewhat concerned	18%	20%	16%
Slightly concerned	13%	20%	10%
Not concerned at all	17%	22%	12%
n	815	245	340

ANONYMOUS, SACRAMENTO CA

This driver is a white man who is 50 years of age. He has been driving for Uber and Lyft for just under 6 years. He has had multiple instances where passengers have complained and gotten aggressive with him. In one instance, he said "**I had to call 911.** I told them 'I'm calling the police now' and the couple ran away." In another instance, a customer who was yelling at him "got right behind me so that I couldn't see him and he could have done anything to me! … **I felt scared the whole way**. I was thinking 'What is this guy going to do to me?'"

He knows that when he drives for Uber and Lyft, he is forced to accept the danger that comes with working on the app. "**We tell our kids not to get into cars with strangers and then that's what we're doing all day, having strangers get into our cars.**" It's frustrating for him that drivers like him are subject to Uber and Lyft's strict policies around ride acceptance and cancellation in order to not get deactivated, but passengers aren't held accountable in the same way. Therefore, they can act however they want: "[I]f I get deactivated, the way they track that is it goes off my social [security number] … If the customer gets kicked off the app … they can just get a prepaid card, get a burner phone and open a new account … **You don't know who these people are.**"

The ability to deny or cancel rides without consequence is most supported safety measure

App-based rideshare respondents were asked about measures that they believed would make their jobs safer or help them deal with the hazards of the job.

Table 4: Share of App-based Rideshare Drivers who Support Specific App-based Company-provided Measures to Make Drivers Feel Safe (n=684)

Recommendations/Solutions	All Drivers
Ability to deny/cancel rides without consequences drivers feel threatened	76%
Guaranteed compensation if injured or hurt while working	69%
Passenger verification	66%
Guaranteed compensation for family in cases of prolonged recovery or death	64%
Company-provided alert system/panic button	54%
Hazard pay	50%
Company-provided dividers in vehicles	32%

Note: Calculated from respondents who indicated support for at least one safety measure.

The most popular safety measure—the ability for drivers to deny or cancel rides without consequence in cases where the driver feels threatened—was overwhelmingly supported by three-of-four (76%) driver respondents. Guaranteed compensation if workers were injured or hurt while working was the second most common response (69%).

ANONYMOUS, CO

This driver is a Black woman. She started driving for Uber and Lyft in 2018 and now mostly drives for Uber. She feels the pay with the apps doesn't justify the physical harm she endures on the job: "I was assaulted and you know … I don't get paid enough." In one instance, a passenger "**started punching me in the back and shoulder**. I'm elbowing him trying to get him back in the back seat. **Then he tries to choke me.**" In that instance, she kept driving before going to the police "because I needed a couple more rides to get a bonus." She was insulted by Uber's response to her physical assault. "Having Uber say to you someone who physically assaults you that you won't be matched with this person again. Are you serious?"

She feels that the apps give her little option to cancel a ride if she feels unsafe. She said when she tries to cancel a ride because she feels unsafe or is worried a passenger may damage her car, the app offers no such option. And when she did select an option that most closely matched her situation, "it affected my cancellation rate … **I shouldn't have to take somebody if I'm afraid**."

She explained that safety is compromised when "[y]ou won't find out where the person is going until you get there." This causes safety concerns because for her choosing to drive someone within the city is very different from how conditions can be in the mountains. "Everything falls on the driver … This is a way that [the app corporations] can get over on people for doing very little. **That's how slave owners behaved** … **Everything is about fleecing the worker and taking everything from the worker.**"

UBER AND LYFT DOWNPLAY DRIVER SAFETY ISSUES

In contrast to the stark survey findings and stories that drivers themselves report, Uber and Lyft depict a much more flattering image of working on their platform. The corporations' own self-reporting on driver safety minimizes the serious real-time risks for their drivers by offering narrowly-defined and outdated numbers.

Uber and Lyft's own safety reports only cover three categories of health and safety incidents: (1) fatalities in Uber or Lyft-related motor vehicle crashes, (2) physical assault fatalities and (3) sexual assaults. Additionally, Lyft claims that "safety incidents are statistically very rare."[29] Their reporting is also significantly delayed: Uber's Safety Report for 2019–2020 was not released until 2022, and Lyft's most recent Community Safety Report covers data from 2017–2019 but was not issued until 2021.[30] By presenting data that is outdated and incomplete, Uber and Lyft make it difficult for drivers and public officials to identify solutions to protect drivers' safety and health.

Both corporations have resisted public safety disclosure, even when it has required lengthy legal battles or expensive settlements. In 2020, Uber engaged in an 18-month legal battle in California to resist the disclosure requirements regarding sexual assault and harassment cases before ultimately acquiescing and paying $9 million in penalties.[31] In 2022, Lyft agreed to a $25 million settlement after shareholders alleged that they hid safety problems on their app prior to its public offering in 2019.[32]

What is most troubling about Uber's reporting is that it quietly acknowledges a crisis for drivers but fails to seriously address it. Buried on page 59 of its own report, Uber admits the majority of sexual assault complaints—56 percent—were submitted by drivers, with the remaining 43 percent of these complaints were submitted by riders and third parties.[33] Despite this admission, Uber focuses singularly on passenger concerns above driver safety in its safety report. In fact, both corporations frontload mentioning their rigorous driver background checks above other safety measures on their corporate sites.[34] Neither corporation performs the same background checks on passengers and both corporations only sometimes require passengers to submit photos of some sort of identification.[35]

The data in this report reflect what Uber and Lyft are reluctant to admit: that drivers face serious safety risks. Uber and Lyft should be held accountable to create solutions that address the real risks that their drivers endure every time they accept a ride on the app.

CONCLUSION

Drivers nationwide agree that working for rideshare apps like Uber and Lyft is dangerous. Drivers are routinely threatened, harassed, robbed, and sometimes experience worse forms of violence by passengers during rides over which they have very little control. Drivers of color report experiencing these safety risks at an even higher rate.

Though the corporations tell drivers they can decline any ride they feel is unsafe, or cancel a ride that is in progress if they feel threatened, they do not ensure that the actions these workers take to protect themselves will not lead to deactivations or suspensions from the apps, thereby depriving them of their ability to work. For drivers, especially drivers of color, who rely on income derived from rideshare driving to make ends meet, deactivation simply is not an option.

In reality, drivers are forced to keep driving despite the risks, accepting any rides they can get to maintain their livelihoods, even if that means putting their lives on the line. Uber and Lyft refuse to admit that the structure of their algorithms put their drivers in harm's way. Instead, these corporations fight common sense disclosures that would shed more light on drivers' safety concerns.

App-based rideshare drivers, on the other hand, are unequivocal about the connection between the app corporation algorithms and their safety: **above all, drivers nationwide identified eliminating the threat of deactivation as the most effective measure the corporations could take to make their rides safer.**

The app corporations have invested millions of dollars in perfecting their algorithms and reassuring the public that ridesharing is safe for passengers. But it need not be a choice: driver safety is not antithetical to passenger safety. Uber and Lyft must be held accountable for the conditions under which app drivers work and the safety risks they endure each day while making the app corporations billions in revenue.
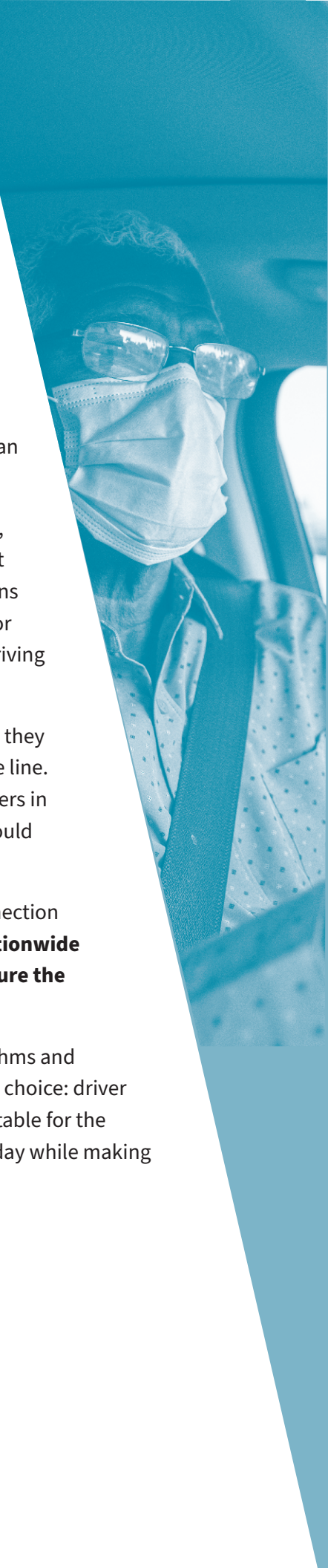
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