

Harnessing the Treasure in the Golden Tidal Wave

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Civic Engagement on the Wane in American Cities

- Decreased levels of voting
- Reduced levels of volunteerism
- Less time spent on activities with neighbors

The American Democracy Project: Civic Engagement, Higher Education and the 21st Century. A cooperative project of the AASCU and New York Times.

Benefits for Residents From Civic Engagement (Volunteerism)

- Higher levels of mastery, self-esteem, life satisfaction and energy (Moen & Fields, 2002)
- Better health, lower functional dependency and less depression (Morrow-Howell et al. 2003)
- Better health, higher levels of physical function and fewer depressive symptoms (Lum & Lightfoot, 2005)

All citations taken from: Rozario, PA. Volunteering Among Current Cohorts of Older Adults and Baby Boomers. *Generations* Vol. xxx, No 4, pages 31-36.

Outcomes for Communities with Strong Civic Engagement

- Government is “more effective and more innovative”
- Less crime
- Less poverty
- More employment
- Better and more sustainable policies
- More frequent resident cooperation

Adapted from: ASPA Task Force on Civic Education in the 21st Century and Putnam, R.B. *Bowling Alone, America's Declining Social Capital*. *Journal of Democracy*.

Goals of Civic Engagement Study

Utilize a large dataset of resident opinions and behaviors related to civic engagement to:

- Assess current trends of civic engagement in older adults and their younger counterparts
- Identify the characteristics of individuals and communities which may foster civic engagement
 - Added in more data on race/ethnicity after forum
- Explore individual and community outcomes associated with civic engagement



- ICMA/NRC initiative
- Primary purposes of the survey
 - Track resident perspectives about quality of community characteristics and amenities
 - Evaluate local government and resident participation in local activities
- Scientifically reliable sounding of residents
- Normative Database: Surveys from 150,000 residents from more than 200 communities across the nation
 - 26K are 65 years+; 17.5K are 55-64 years old



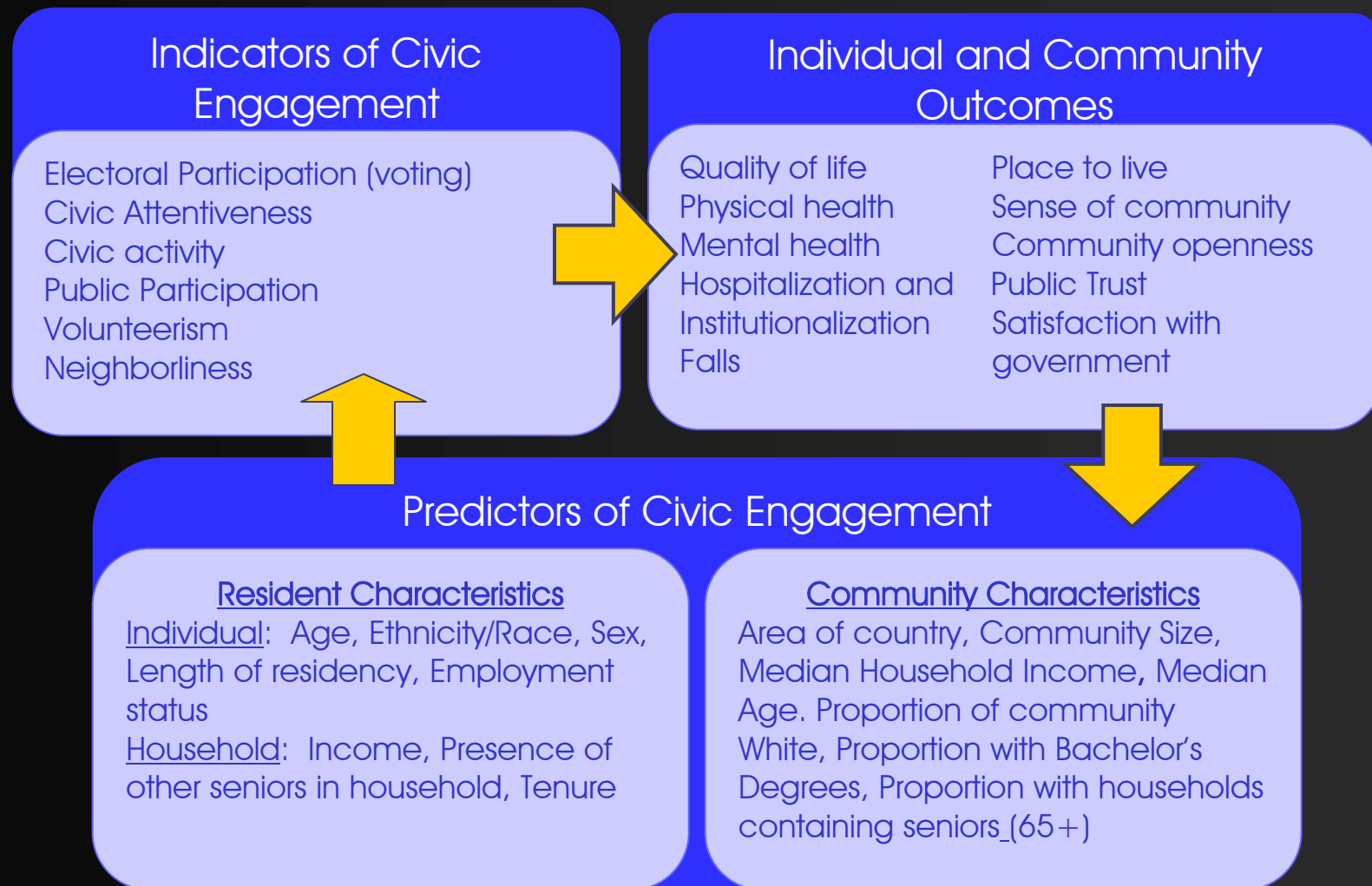
Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults™

- Low-cost turnkey older adult household survey
- Primary purposes of the survey
 - Gauge community strengths and needs
 - Identify older adult needs
 - Measure older resident participation in local activities
- Normative database has opinions of 38,900 older residents (55 years +)

Limitations of Data

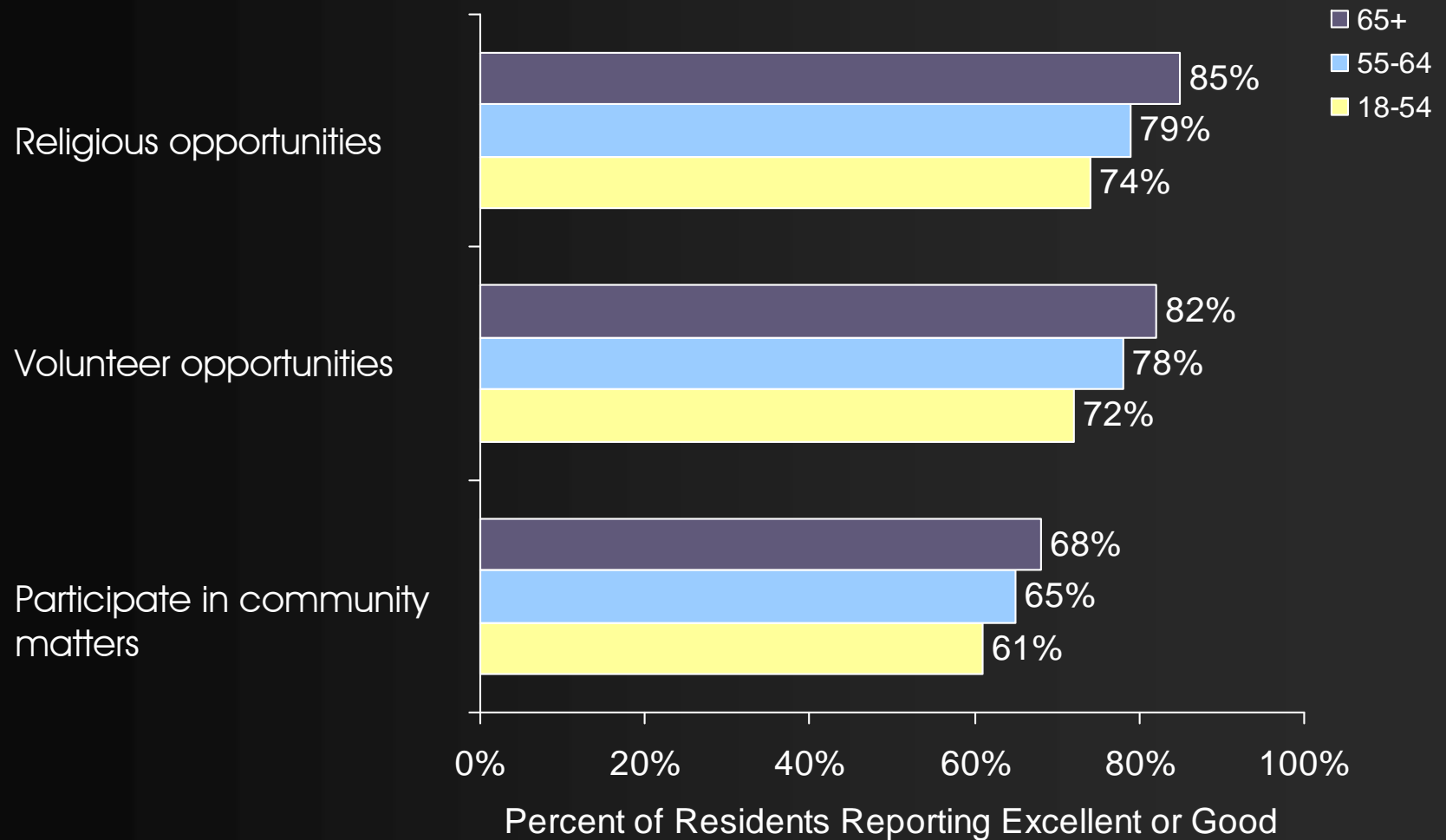
- Omnibus citizen survey; broad older adult needs assessments
- Based on civic behavior
 - Difficulties getting surveys completed by younger and the oldest residents, more transient residents, less educated residents and residents of color
 - Best matches: sex, Hispanic origin
 - Slightly off: more 65-74 year olds, fewer Black/African Americans (6% vs 9%), fewer Asian/Pacific Islanders (2% vs 4%)
 - Older adults in group quarters not included

Civic Engagement Analysis

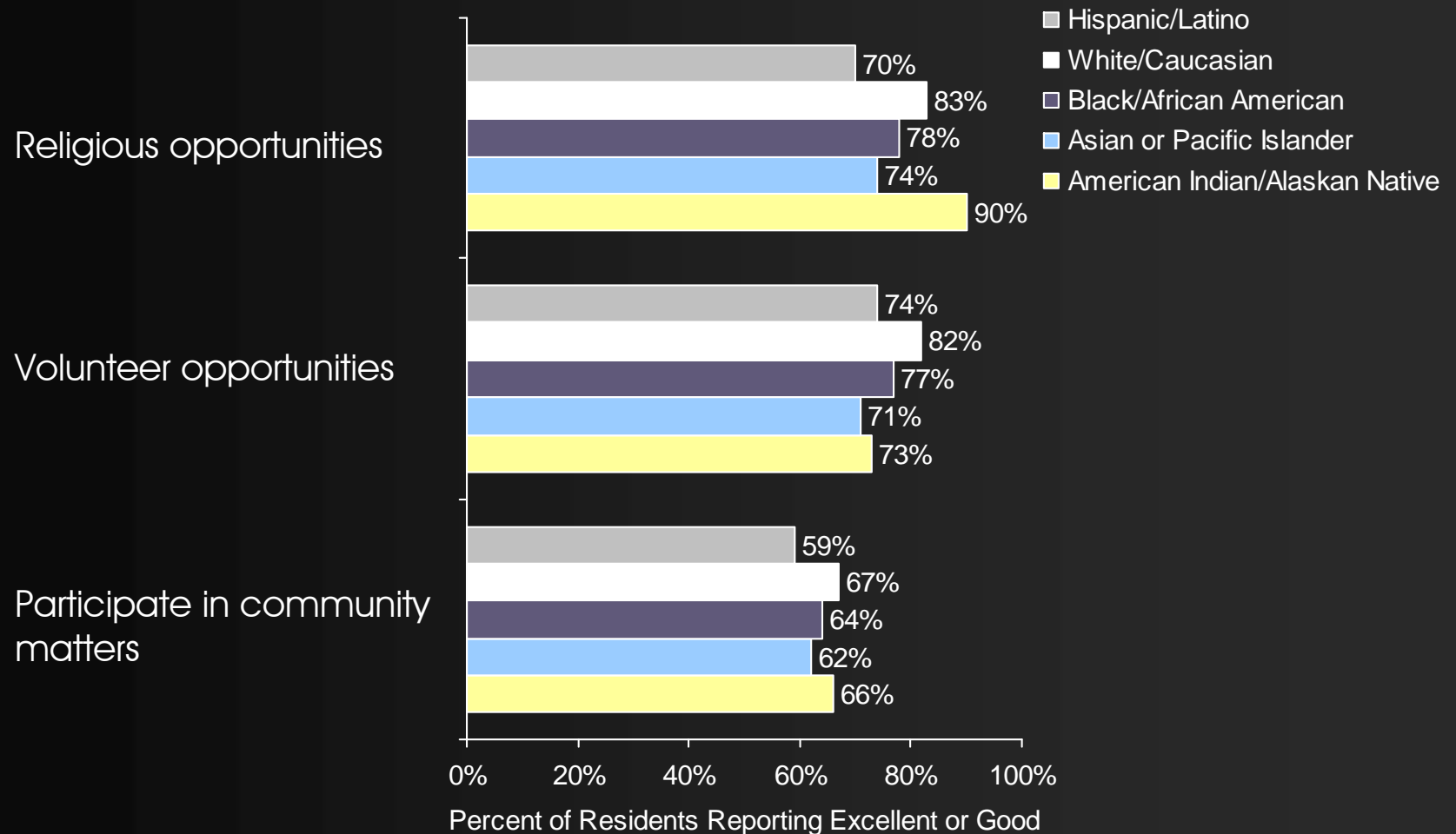


Civic Engagement Opportunities

Rating of Civic Opportunities by Age

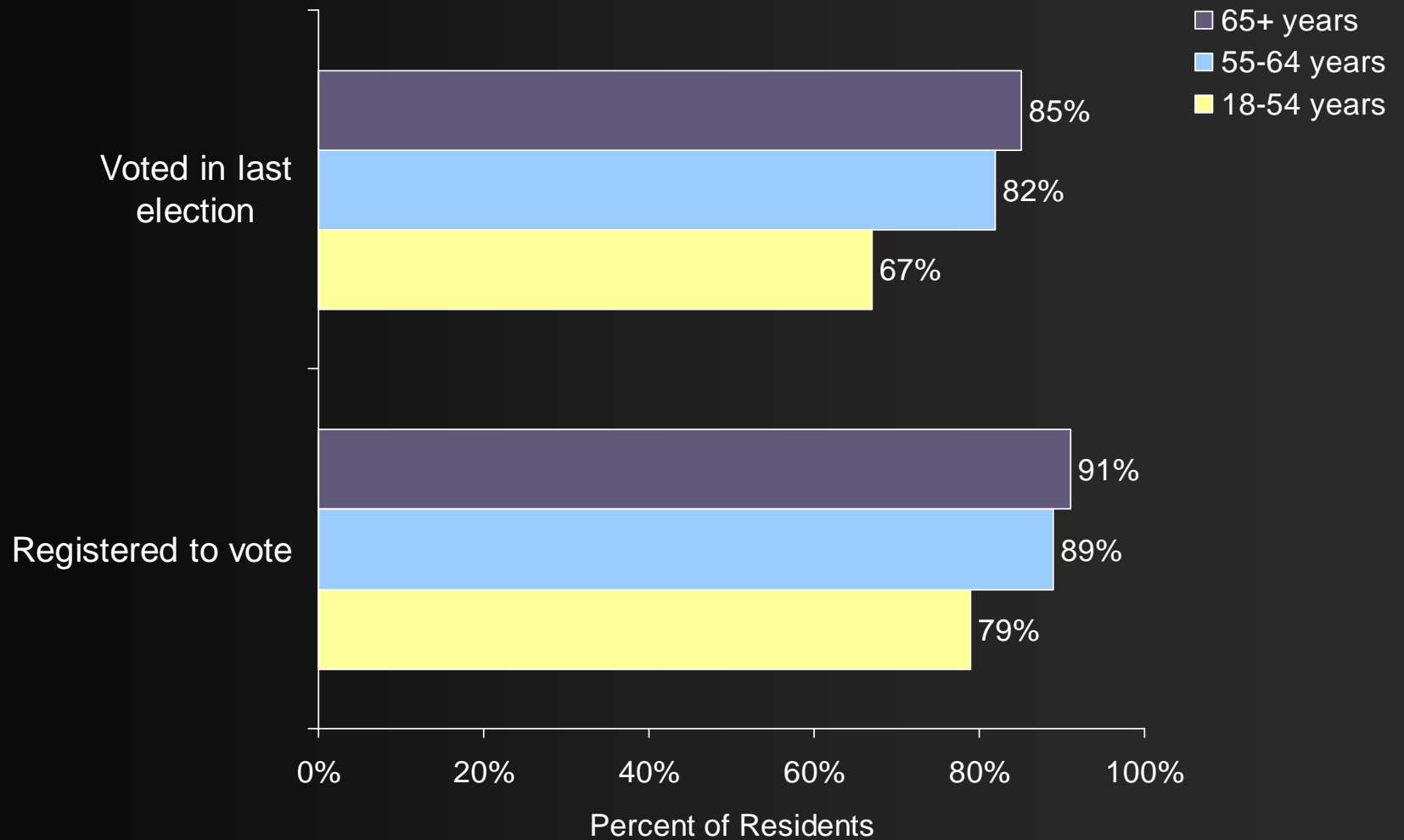


Rating of Civic Opportunities by Race/Ethnicity

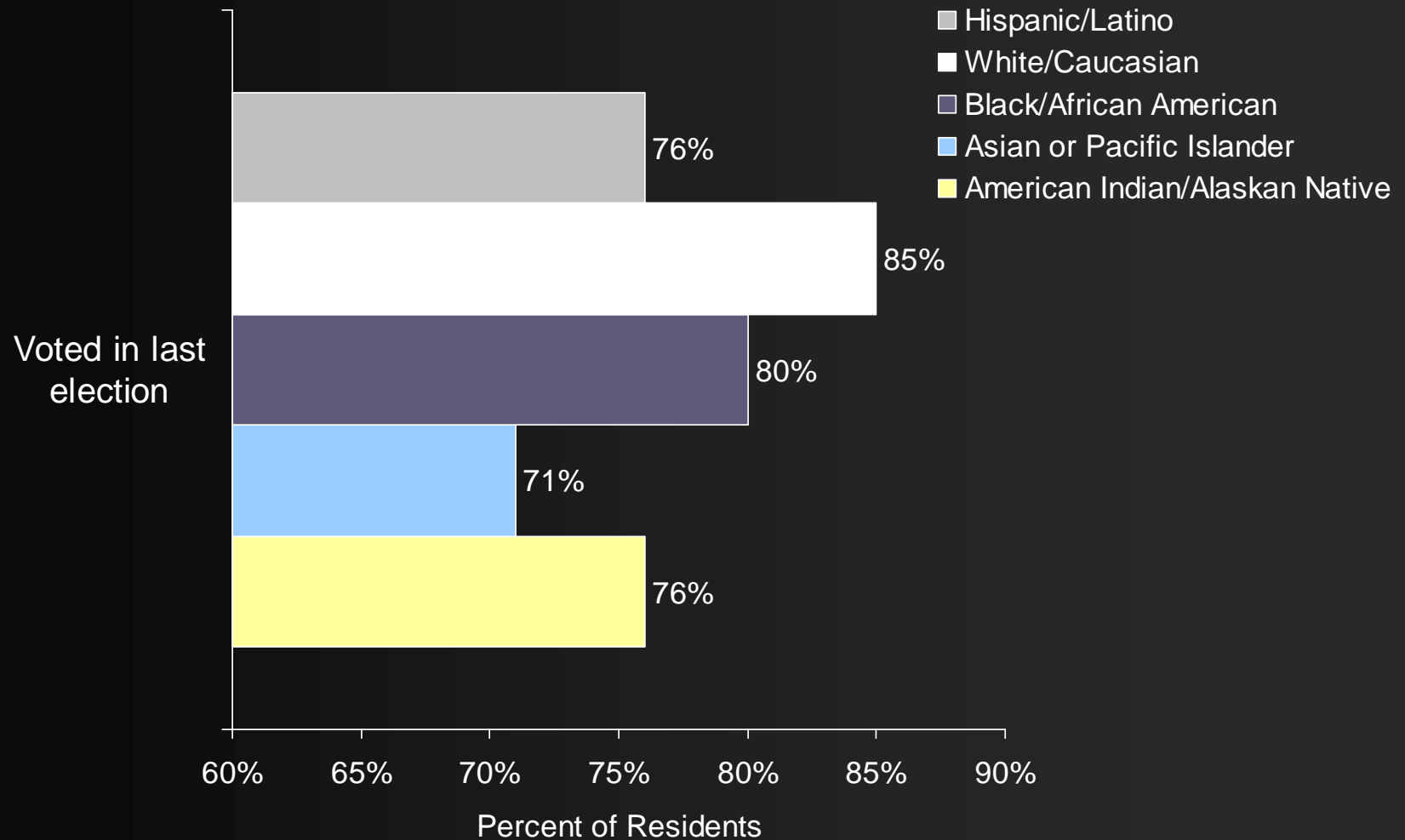


Patterns of Civic Engagement

Electoral Participation by Age



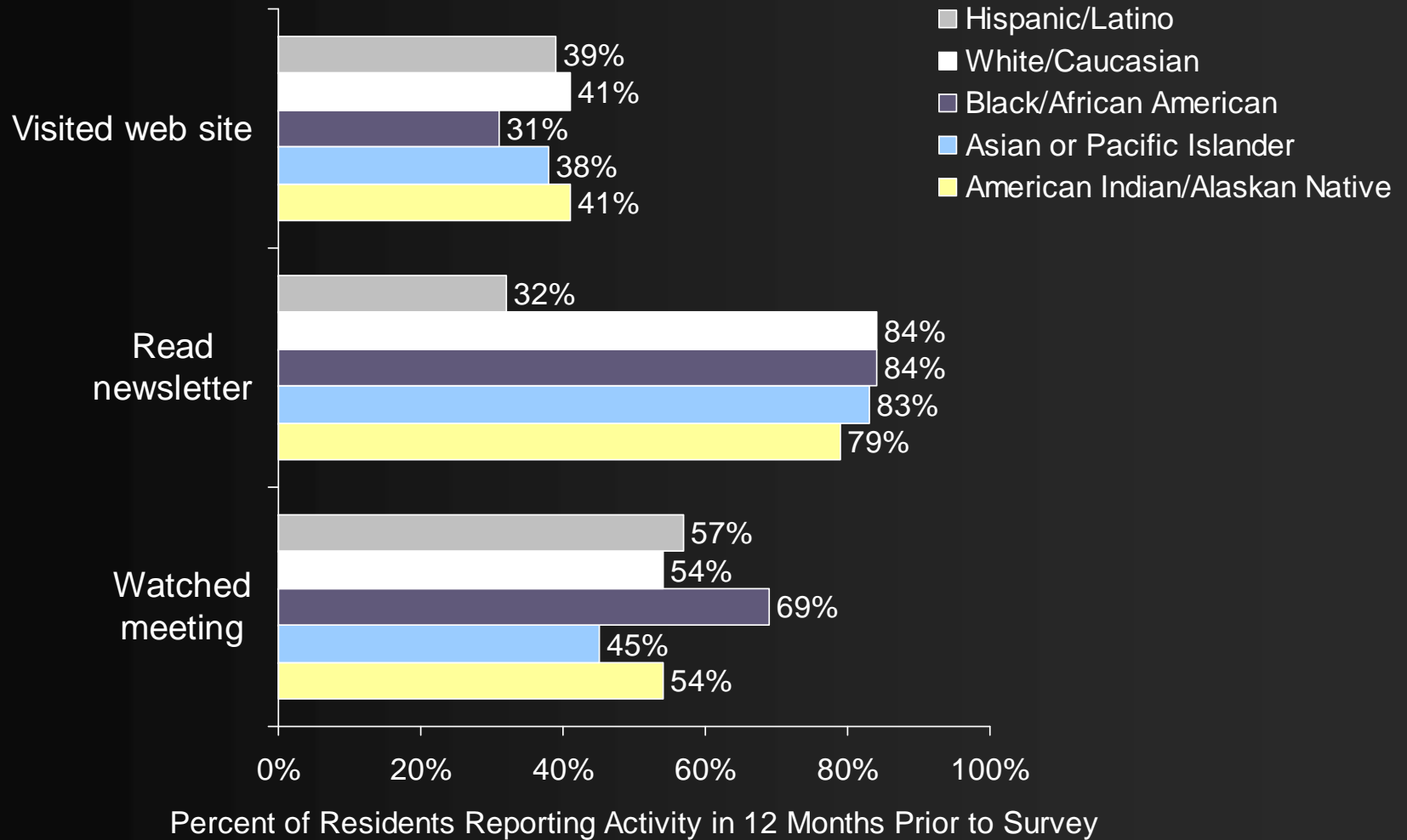
Electoral Participation by Race/Ethnicity



Civic Attentiveness

Indicators of Civic Attentiveness	18-54 Years	55-64 Years	65+ Years
Read jurisdiction newsletter	77%	84%	84%
Visited jurisdiction web site	68%	55%	29%
Watched a meeting of local elected officials or other local public meeting on cable television	42%	54%	57%

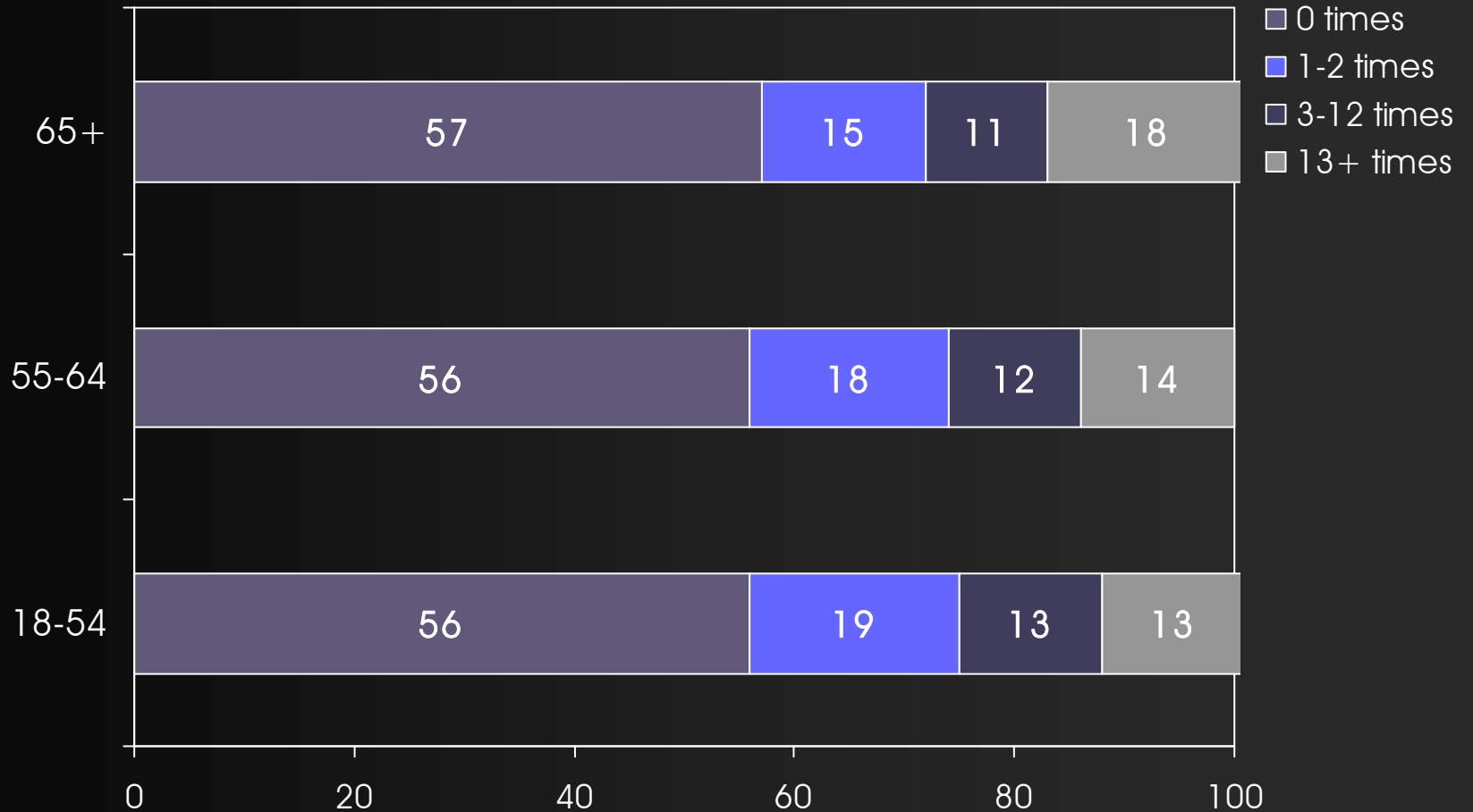
Civic Attentiveness by Race/Ethnicity



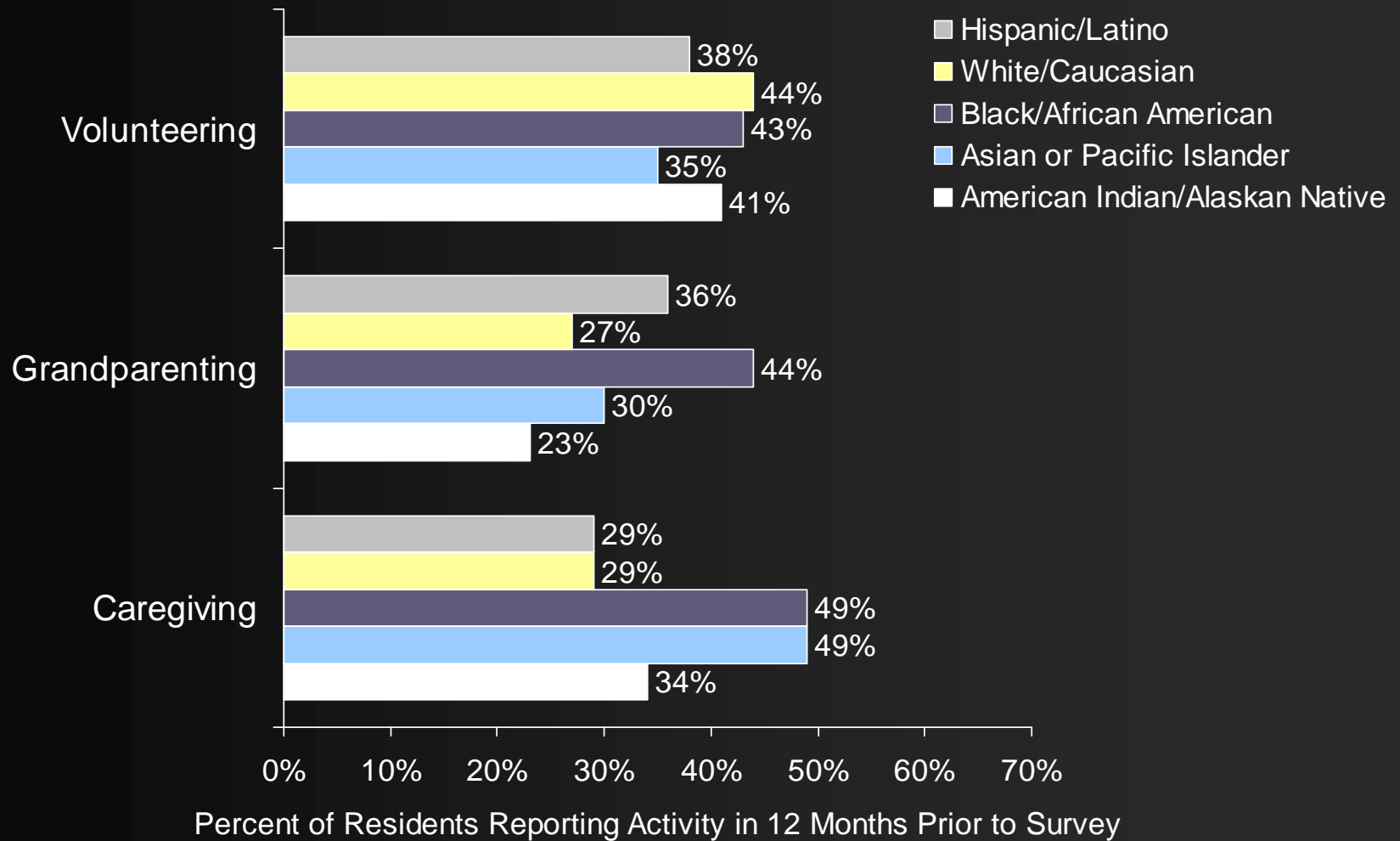
Civic Activity

Indicators of Civic Activity	18-54 Years	55-64 years	65+ years
Volunteered	44%	44%	43%
Provided help to friends or neighbors	94%	95%	94%
Caregiving	NA	36%	27%
"Grandparenting"	NA	33%	24%
Participation in a club or civic group	30%	35%	43%
Participation in religious activities or spiritual activities	50%	55%	64%
Attended a meeting of local elected officials or other local public meeting	25%	35%	35%

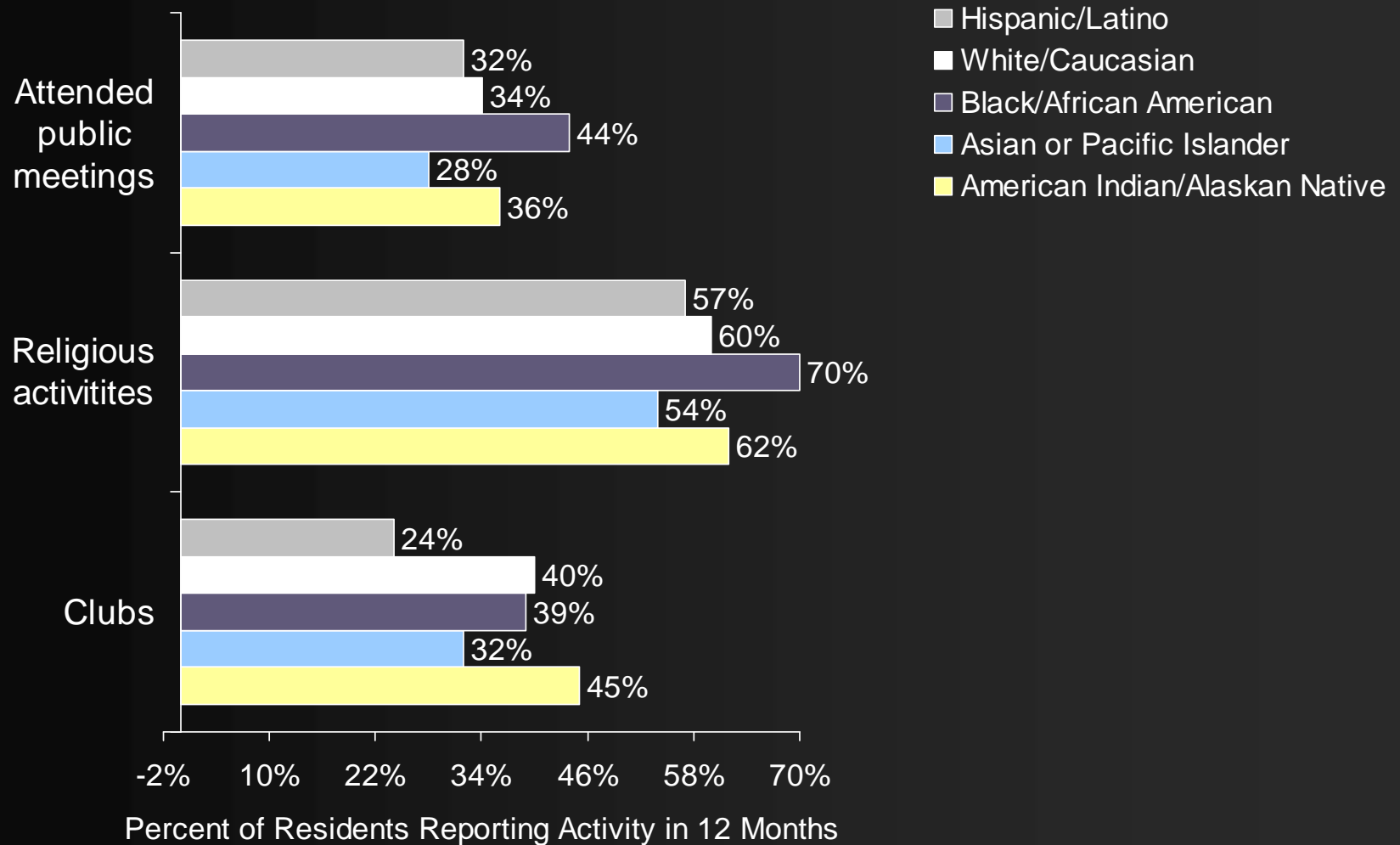
Volunteerism (12 months prior to survey)



Civic Behavior by Race/Ethnicity



Civic Behavior by Race/Ethnicity



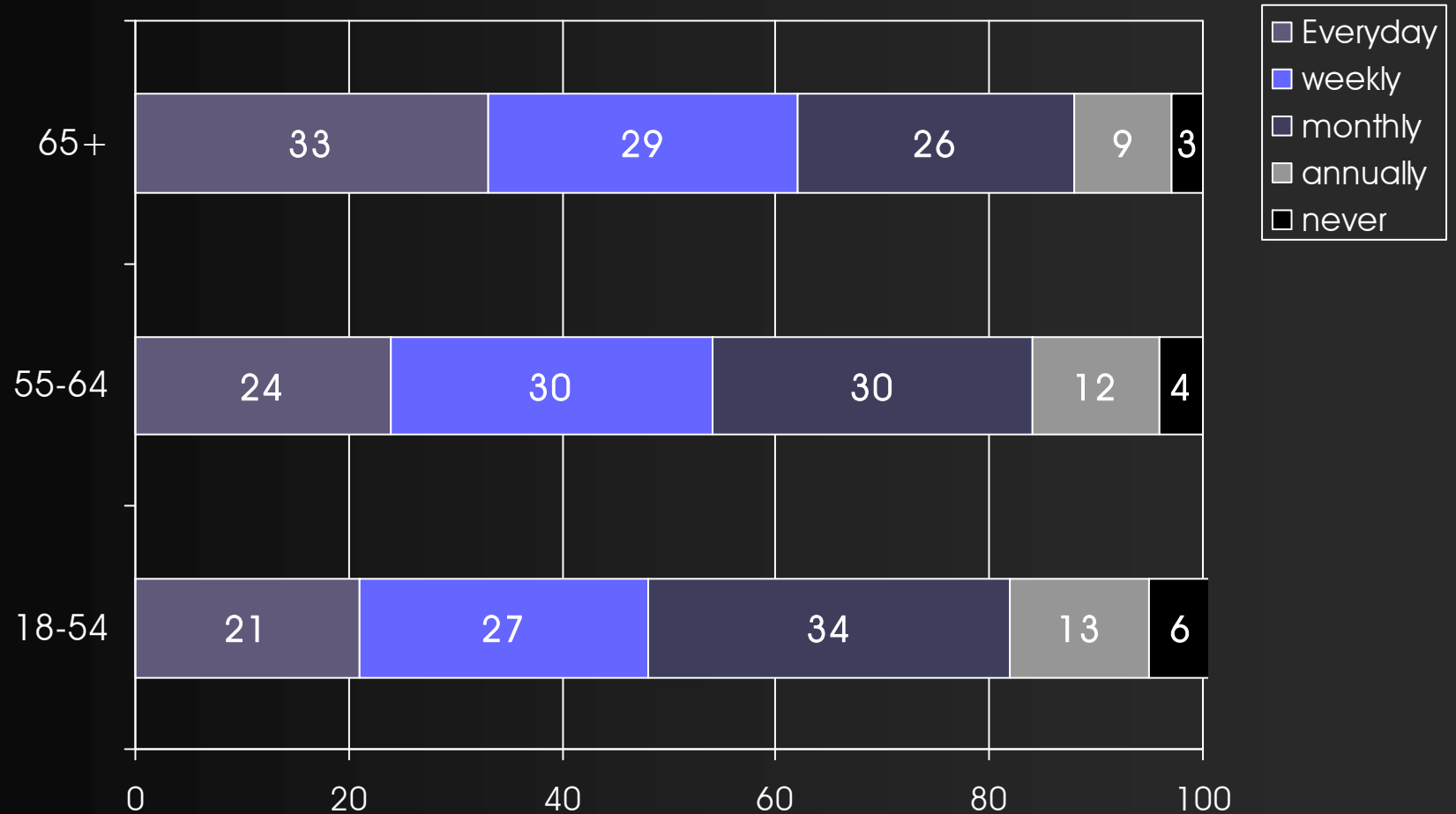
Participation in Community Life

Community Amenity	18-54 years	55-64 years	65+
Public libraries	74%	73%	71%
Recreation centers	59%	59%	48%
Recreation programs or activities	50%	43%	39%
Parks	90%	83%	72%
Senior centers	NA	11%	26%

Participation in Community Life

Community Amenity	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Black/ African American	White/ Caucasian	Hispanic/ Latino
Public libraries	67%	72%	68%	72%	69%
Recreation centers	47%	50%	53%	49%	54%
Recreation programs or activities	39%	40%	47%	40%	42%
Parks	73%	80%	74%	77%	79%
Senior centers	46%	27%	28%	34%	49%

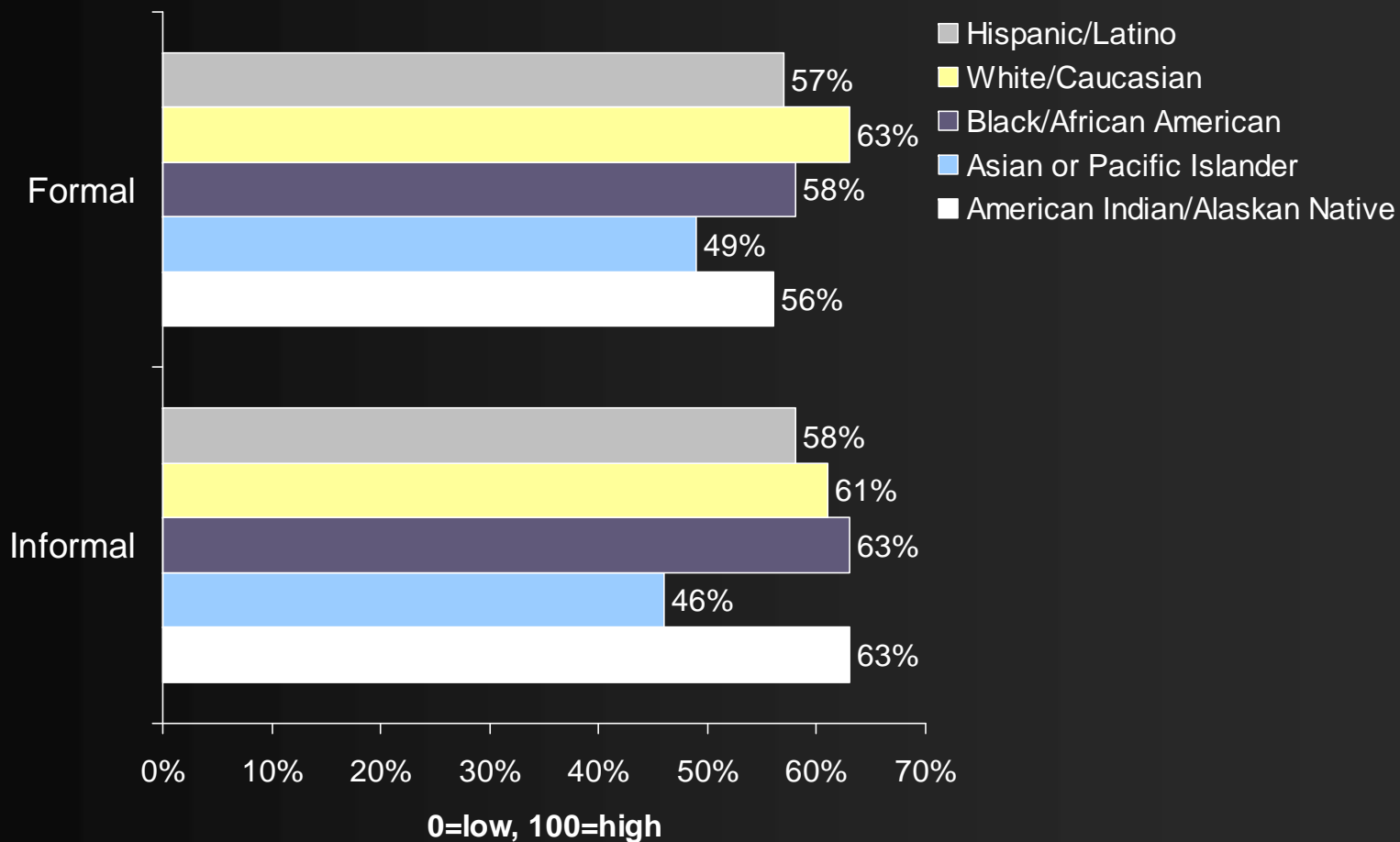
Neighborliness (How often visit with immediate neighbors)



Neighborliness

Community Amenity	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Black/ African American	White/ Caucasian	Hispanic/ Latino
Median visiting	Several times a week	Several times a month	Several times a week	Several times a week	Several times a week
% Never visiting	10%	6%	12%	3%	4%

Formal and Informal Civic Activity by Race/Ethnicity



Predictors of Civic Engagement

Older Residents with Higher Levels of Civic Engagement Tended to Live in Households:

- Longer term residents (except for voting)
- Own their homes
- Are not Hispanic/Latino
- Live in households with higher incomes
- Older (65+)
- Live in households with other seniors
- More educated

Income!

Higher Levels of Civic Engagement

➤ Sex

- Females: civic activity and volunteerism
- Males: voting

➤ Working for Pay

- Employed residents: community participation, neighborliness, and volunteerism
- Non-employed residents: civic attentiveness and civic activity

Communities with Higher Levels of Civic Engagement tended to be:

- Smaller in population size
- Live in households with higher median incomes
- Have higher proportions of White residents
- Have a higher proportion of educated residents
- Have a higher proportion of senior households
- Have a lower median age
- Live in regions other than the South

Potential Benefits of Civic Engagement

Relationship of Civic Engagement to Older Resident Quality of Life

- Volunteerism, participation in community life, civic activity and neighborliness all had significant positive relationships with self-reported physical health status, mental health status, and quality of life
- Relationships with hospitalization and institutionalization were negative but non-significant
- Falls were negatively associated with neighborliness

Relationship of Civic Engagement to Community Quality of Life

- Volunteerism, participation in community life, civic activity and neighborliness all had significant positive relationships with:
 - Sense of community
 - Openness and acceptance towards older residents of diverse backgrounds
 - Community as a place to live
 - Satisfaction with local government services
 - Measures of public trust

Conclusions

- Older adults are not necessarily less civically active
- Residents of color are civically engaged in many areas
- Other demographics are stronger predictors of civic activity – income, length of residency, age, tenure

A Few Ideas

- Focus on a broader definition of civic engagement
- Small steps
- Design opportunities to meet Baby Boomer values
- Design opportunities which facilitate inclusiveness (race, income, age, etc.)
- Consider community design and its role in building community
- Collaborate with atypical partners
- Look at other models of community action to find successful strategies for mobilizing

The Socio-Ecological Model



Picture from: www.balancedweightmanagement.com/TheSocio-EcologicalModel.htm

Thank you!



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"Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."

*Civic Responsibility and Higher Education, edited by
Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000*

Correlates of Electoral Participation

Older Residents More Likely to Vote:

shorter term residents, owned their homes, lived with other seniors, were Non-Hispanic White, were younger, had higher incomes, were male

Lived in Communities with:

smaller populations, larger proportions of senior residents, more educated residents, a higher proportion of White residents, higher median incomes

Correlates of Civic Attentiveness

Older Residents More Likely to Attend to Civic Information:

longer term residents, owned their homes, lived with other seniors, were not working for pay, were younger

Lived in Communities with:

smaller populations, a younger median age, larger proportions of senior residents, a higher proportion of White Residents, more educated residents, higher median incomes

Correlates of Civic Activity

Older Residents More Likely To Be Civically Active:

longer term residents, owned their homes, did not work for pay, were Non-Hispanic White, were female, were younger, had higher incomes

Lived in Communities with:

a younger median age, more senior residents, more educated residents, higher median incomes, a lower proportion of White residents, smaller populations

Correlates of Volunteerism

Older Residents More Likely to Volunteer:

longer term residents, owned their homes, worked for pay, were Non-Hispanic White, were female, were younger, had higher incomes

Lived in Communities with:

smaller populations, a younger median age, more senior residents, a higher proportion of White residents, more educated residents, higher median incomes

Correlates of Participation in Community

Older Residents More Likely to be Participants:

Longer term residents, owned their homes, lived with other seniors, worked for pay, had higher incomes, were Non-Hispanic White, were younger

Lived in Communities with:

smaller populations, an older median age, more senior residents, a higher proportion of White residents, more educated residents, higher median incomes

Correlates of Neighborliness

Older Residents More Likely to be Neighborly:

longer term residents, owned their homes, lived with other seniors, worked for pay, were Non-Hispanic White, were older, had higher incomes

Lived in Communities with:

smaller populations, an older median age, a larger proportion of senior residents, a higher proportion of White residents, more educated residents, higher median incomes