

# Driven Into Poverty

A Comprehensive Study of the Chicago Taxicab Industry

Report IV: Law Enforcement

RITZ-CARLTON



University of Illinois at Chicago  
School of Labor and Employment Relations

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## **I. Introduction: History of the Taxi Worker Organizing Project**

The initial idea for the for American Friends Service Committee's (AFSC) Taxi Worker Organizing Project came about in 2006 when leaders from its partnering organization, the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC), urged AFSC to publically respond to the violent murder of cabdriver, Haroon Paryani. The Council has functioned as an advocacy group for the city's roughly 60 percent of cabdrivers who are Muslim.

AFSC and CIOGC decided to jointly respond to the murder of Haroon Paryani and address other problems plaguing Chicago cabdrivers. These problems included crimes in the form of physical violence as well as poor working conditions, racial profiling, and anti-cabdriver media bias.

Under the auspices of AFSC's national Human Migration and Mobility/Project Voice program a partnership was built between the two organizations to develop a long-term strategy to organize Chicago cabdrivers for the purpose of attaining better working conditions and respect for the rights of the mostly immigrant worker population.<sup>1</sup> The partnership produced the Taxi Worker Organizing Project.

In 2007, CIOGC stepped back from its role as an active partner while AFSC continued to be at the forefront of the project. In December 2007, the Taxi Worker Organizing Project was instrumental in persuading the suburban Village of Skokie to partially overturn its ban on street parking for cabs. A few months later, leaders of what would soon become the United Taxidriviers Community Council and Taxi Worker Organizing Project staff worked with the City of Chicago to come to a resolution to stop ticketing drivers for parking while they were praying at the O'Hare Airport Staging Area.

In January 2008, the United Taxidriviers Community Council (UTCC) was formed after core leadership from the Taxi Worker Organizing Project campaigns met to discuss a long-term strategy to organize cabdrivers. A top priority of AFSC-UTCC was to collect

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<sup>1</sup> Project Voice is a program that focuses on immigrants' and workers' rights.

reliable data on the working conditions experienced by city cabdrivers. While a few studies have reported on cab drivers in other major urban areas, this is the first comprehensive study of Chicago taxicab drivers.

## **II. Survey Methodology**

AFSC-UTCC set out to design an unprecedented baseline study of Chicago taxi drivers addressing issues of *income, leasing, violence, and interactions with law enforcement*. In early 2008 the organization developed and piloted an initial questionnaire. Subsequent to the piloting period, AFSC-UTCC met with faculty at the University of Illinois' School of Labor and Employment Relations (LER) to assess the survey and recommend substantive changes. At that point LER faculty in Chicago agreed to assume direction and control of the survey project. The final product was a 49-item survey instrument that was administered to 920 taxi drivers between June and August of 2008.<sup>2</sup> According to statistics that the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (formerly the Department of Consumer Services) provided to AFSC-UTCC, there were approximately 10,500 licensed taxi drivers in Chicago at the time the survey was conducted. The number of survey responses therefore represents 8.76 percent of the total population.

It is important to note that AFSC-UTCC did not have access to drivers' names, mailing addresses or phone numbers. Therefore randomly drawing a sample population to survey was impossible. Instead, survey recipients were approached and interviewed in person by AFSC employees, predominantly at the taxi staging area of O'Hare International Airport. The majority of interviews occurred between the hours of 12:00pm and 3:30pm and took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

This survey was not assessed by the UTCC or AFSC. Although this does not ensure survey validity or eliminate all response biases, the independent origin of the analysis work does provide some important mitigation against such problems. In addition, all responses were recorded anonymously thereby protecting the respondent from first-

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<sup>2</sup> All questions may be directed to Dr. Robert Bruno, Director of the Labor Education Program at the School of Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

person pressure to answer as he or she believed was expected. It is also important to note that responses originated from within a unitary population, i.e., Chicago taxi drivers. As a largely single site survey (O'Hare International Airport), the sample responses can better approximate the actual assessment of the larger population than questionnaires spread across multiple groups and locations. The same survey conducted at multiple locations, would, in effect, be a series of separate surveys with likely very low response rates. Instead, the interviewers based themselves almost solely at one location over the 2008 summer months, which encouraged drivers who were initially suspicious or doubtful of the interviewers' intentions to choose to participate in the study. We believe this method mitigates against a group sampling bias skewing the final results.

The survey included the following eight control variables: country of origin, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, fluency in other languages, residential zip code, voter registration or eligibility, age, and gender. All responses were selected from closed-choice items except language and age. Those questions concerning country of origin and religion also allowed for self-reported specification of "other."

This particular report is specific to drivers who and their interactions with law enforcement, which includes suburban police and City of Chicago Police Department, as well as officers from the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection.

Variables related to law enforcement in the survey included both objective and subjective questions. Objective variables included; numbers of tickets within a given time period, ticket costs, ticket types, types of law enforcement encountered, numbers of traffic stops, and reasons for tickets issued by the DBACP.

The subjective variables included drivers' opinions of law enforcement officers' treatment of drivers. Drivers were also asked to rate, on a scale of one to five, one indicating "strongly disagree" and five indicating "strongly agree," how they felt in regards to a series of statements which included items such as "Chicago police officers treat cab drivers fairly" and "Tickets issued by the DCS are excessive and unfair." In

addition, multivariate analysis of covariance was also run using the demographic characteristics of the respondents as the independent variable to determine if any particular items explained the observed outcomes. It is important to take note that in this particular report, in order to acquire the most accurate information possible, the data regarding specific lease items and shift durations was obtained during the driver interviews from the actual lease agreements. Participant anonymity is a high priority; therefore interviewers did not collect any driver identification information.

In order to address the overall topic of Chicago taxicab drivers' interactions with law enforcement, the study findings are divided into three subsections. The first subsection addresses tickets, the second addresses traffic stops by law enforcement officers, and the third subsection addresses attacks and threats made against drivers and the frequency of reporting to the police. These subsections are further broken down, exploring factors such as race, religion, or country of origin, and addressing more specific items such as ticket types and costs, types of law enforcement, treatment of drivers by law enforcement officers, and the outcomes of traffic stops.

While the Taxi Driver study is a comprehensive examination of issues related to income, leasing, violence, and interactions with law enforcement, separate reports will be developed and issued on each subject. The report included below focuses on drivers' experiences with law enforcement.

### **III. Data Set**

There are 920 taxi drivers participating in this survey. The taxi drivers participating in this survey are a very diverse group representing 76 countries and demonstrating fluency in over 100 languages. The most common foreign languages<sup>3</sup> (Chart 1.1 All charts and tables are in an appendix following this report.) are Arabic (17.7 percent), Yoruba (13.8 percent), Urdu (13.7 percent), and French (12.6 percent). The majority of drivers (53 percent) were born in Nigeria (18.3 percent), United States (9.9 percent), Pakistan (9.8

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<sup>3</sup> Respondents were asked the open-ended question, "What language(s) do you speak fluently other than English?"

percent), Somalia (8.2 percent) and Ghana (6.8 percent) (Chart 1.2). A majority of the respondents who were born in the United States (Chart 1.3), were African-American (51.6 percent), however, they are closely followed by Caucasian drivers (38.7 percent).

Respondents are overwhelmingly male (98.3 percent). Drivers' age ranges from 20 to 78 years, with the average age being 42 years.

Survey participants are slightly more Christian (42.0 percent) than Muslim (37.0 percent). Some drivers self-identify as having no religious affiliation (11.4 percent). There were also small numbers of drivers self-identifying as Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, and Sikh (Chart 1.4).

Respondents included both seasoned and newer drivers, but this survey (Chart 1.5) captured a majority of newer drivers who began driving within the past 6 years (53.2 percent). A slight majority of respondents are registered voters (50.9 percent), while 12.5 percent are eligible (Chart 1.6) but not registered to vote.

Drivers' residences are dispersed over a large area (Chart 1.7). Respondents live within 142 different zip codes. The most common residential zip codes of Chicago taxi drivers are 60660, 60625, 60626, 60659, 60645 and 60640 (42.3 percent of respondents). These zip codes make up an area of Chicago's far north side, bordered by Lake Michigan to the east, Montrose Avenue (4400 North) to the south, Pulaski Road (4000 West) to the west and Touhy Avenue (7200 North) to the north.

#### **IV. Taxicab Law Enforcement Report Findings**

The lease study had two objectives. The first objective was to create a baseline survey of Chicago taxi drivers' experiences with law enforcement over the one year period prior to the administration of the survey, including information on tickets, traffic stops, and incident reporting. The second objective was to determine how drivers were treated by law enforcement officials, including officials from the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (DBACP).

In order to address the overall topic of Chicago drivers and their experiences with law enforcement, the authors took into account many factors. The first subsection focuses on *tickets* and is broken down further into several types of tickets; parking tickets, traffic tickets, and tickets given by the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (DBACP). The second subsection discusses *traffic stops* with an additional breakdown of the various outcomes of traffic stops, including treatment of drivers by law enforcement officials. The third subsection discusses the *reporting of incidents of attack or threat*.

## **Tickets**

A large majority of drivers, 85.56 percent, received some sort of ticket over the course of the year leading up to the date of the survey. This includes parking tickets, traffic tickets, or tickets issued by the DBACP. The total number of tickets received was 7,136 with an average of nine tickets per driver. The total cost accrued by taxi drivers in this survey was \$515,487.50 with an average cost of \$654.17 per driver. A breakdown of total ticket costs can be found in Chart 2.1

### **Parking Tickets**

Drivers were asked to indicate the number of parking tickets they received in a one year period (the twelve months leading up to the date of the survey) and 75.2 percent of drivers received one or more parking tickets within a one year period with an average number of 6 tickets per driver. The highest reported number of tickets per driver is 156. The average cost of parking tickets per driver per year is \$395.67 and the highest reported cost per driver is \$10,000. It is important to note that ticket violation fees double in cost if unpaid within a set time period. It is even more notable that business owners of fleet vehicles are able to participate in a service that will allow them to be notified of all violations within a one month period in a one-time consolidated mailing. Though the notifications are made monthly, the time periods and ordinances are similar to that of a

regular notice.<sup>4</sup> This type of notification, which puts the responsibility for notification to drivers in the hands of the fleet owner/lessor, is problematic in that the violations are time sensitive, and delayed notification results in higher ticket fines.

### **Traffic Tickets**

Drivers were asked to report the number of traffic tickets they received in the twelve month period leading up to the date of the survey, and to indicate the total cost they accrued in traffic tickets over this same period of time. Nearly half (49.82 percent) of all drivers received one or more traffic tickets in a one year period. The average number of traffic tickets per driver is 1.42 and the maximum number of tickets received by one driver is 189. The average traffic ticket costs per driver came to \$126.12, and the maximum sum paid by one driver is \$1,500.

Additionally, drivers were asked a series of questions about their opinions on a series of issues identified as being problematic for drivers. In response to the statement “Tickets cost too much,” 57.14 percent (464/813) selected “Strongly Agree” and 34.96 percent (282/813) selected “Agree” (Chart 2.2) The actual traffic stops resulting in traffic tickets will be discussed in a subsequent section of this report.

### **DBACP Tickets<sup>5</sup>**

Drivers were asked to report the number of tickets they received from the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection in the twelve month period leading up to the date of the survey, and to indicate the total cost they accrued in DBACP tickets over this same period of time. Roughly half (48.10 percent) of the drivers received a DBACP ticket within a one year period. Drivers averaged one ticket per driver and the maximum number of tickets for one driver was 20. The average cost of DBACP tickets per driver for a one year period was \$219.16 and the highest cost for one driver was \$3,100.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> City of Chicago Department of Revenue Consolidated Noticing for Businesses.

<sup>5</sup> The survey questions and anecdotal comments from drivers will refer to DBACP and DBACP tickets as DCS and DCS tickets. The name was changed from the Department of Consumer Services to the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection.

<sup>6</sup> These cost figures are not the cost per ticket, but per driver and allow for the possibility of multiple tickets per driver.

Drivers were also asked to list what types of tickets they received. The most common type of DBACP ticket reported (43.14 percent) is for “unsafe or unclean vehicle,” including any inspection citation. Additionally, 31.8 percent of drivers who received a DBACP ticket for “unsafe or unclean vehicle” are lease drivers whose maintenance costs are included in their leases. Figures for the various types of DBACP tickets are available in Chart 2.3.

In cases where the lessor is responsible for maintenance he/she is also to be held accountable for violations. It is pertinent to note that all cabs must be in safe and clean condition or lessors can face medallion suspension.<sup>7</sup> All cabs must also be equipped with working air conditioning to comply with city regulations.<sup>8</sup> Periodic inspections are required by the City of Chicago Municipal Code. A licensee’s failure to bring in a vehicle for inspection or reschedule will result in a \$300 fine and a two day license suspension. Inspection failure will incur a \$50 re-inspection fee.<sup>9</sup> No licensee may discriminate against a lessee for filing a report regarding vehicle conditions.<sup>10</sup> One driver noted that the lessor makes him pay for the lessor’s DBACP tickets in addition to the driver’s own tickets. Additionally, drivers were asked a series of questions about their opinions on a series of issues identified as being problematic for drivers. In response to the statement “Tickets issued by the DCS are excessive and unfair,” 55.15 percent selected “Strongly Agree” and 30.78 percent selected “Agree.” (Chart 2.4)

### **Traffic Stops**

Nearly half of all drivers, 48.3 percent were pulled over by law enforcement within a one year period leading up to the administration of the survey. The average number of traffic stops per driver was 2.3, with the maximum number of stops for one driver reaching 25.

A large majority (83.55 percent) of traffic stops resulted in the driver being ticketed.

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<sup>7</sup> City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection Public Vehicle Operations Division Rules and Regulations for Taxicab Medallion License Holders Section II, Rule 2.13

<sup>8</sup> City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection Public Vehicle Operations Division Rules and Regulations for Taxicab Medallion License Holders Section II, Rule 2.02

<sup>9</sup> City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection Public Vehicle Operations Division Rules and Regulations for Taxicab Medallion License Holders Section II, Rule 2.10

<sup>10</sup> City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection Public Vehicle Operations Division Rules and Regulations for Taxicab Medallion License Holders Section VII, Rule 7.06

Drivers were also asked about the types of law enforcement officials they encountered during their most recent traffic stops (Chart 3.1). Respondents answered in the following way:

- 1 percent were stopped by Aviation Dept. Police
- 3.62 percent were stopped by DBACP Enforcement
- 5.78 percent were stopped by suburban police
- .75 percent were stopped by another type of law enforcement officer
- 4.52 percent were stopped by a State Trooper
- 84.92 percent were stopped by Chicago Police

### **Traffic Stop Outcomes<sup>11</sup>**

Drivers were asked the outcome of their most recent traffic stop (Chart 3.2). As previously mentioned, 83.55 percent of traffic stops resulted in a ticket. The various outcomes for drivers' most recent traffic stops were as follows:

- 3.3 use percent of drivers' cars were searched/inspected
- 83.55 percent of drivers received tickets
- 1.3 percent were arrested
- 8.61 percent received a warning
- 8.83 percent were let off without any of the above
- .52 percent reported being "roughed up"
- .26 percent had his vehicle impounded
- 1.3 percent reported "other"

Also, 46.13 percent of drivers answered "yes" to the question "Did you feel any of these outcomes were unfair?" If drivers felt the outcome was unfair, they were asked to

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<sup>11</sup> Outcomes include the possibility of more than one consequence per traffic stop such as vehicle inspection and ticket, etc.

expound on this matter in their own words. Drivers' responses were recoded into general categories (Chart 3.3). The three most common explanation drivers gave for why they felt the outcomes were unfair were unsubstantiated reasons for being stopped or ticketed, feeling like targets because of their profession and disrespect/hostility from officers. 46.76 percent of drivers noted a response which involved being pulled over or ticketed for "no reason," or "unfair charges." 6.47 percent of drivers indicated being targeted due to being a taxi driver, and 5.76 percent of drivers felt the traffic stop outcome was unfair due to police hostility and disrespect.

### **Traffic Stops by Demographic**

Nearly half (47.3 percent) of the smaller number of drivers (N = 91) born in the United States had been pulled over in the year leading up to the administration of the survey. A higher percentage of black U.S. born drivers had been pulled over (41.17 percent), than white US born drivers (34.61%) (Chart 4.1)

However 39.9 percent of a significantly larger number of drivers born outside the United States (N = 897) had been pulled over in the year leading up to the administration of the survey. A full breakdown of the foreign origins of drivers who were pulled over is provided in Chart 4.2.

There was little statistical difference in the pull over rates of drivers by religious identity (42.06 percent of Muslims, 51.06 percent of Christians, 40.95 percent of drivers with no religious affiliation identified; see Chart 4.3).

### **Interactions with Officers during Traffic Stops**

When asked the question "Were you treated fairly?" in regards to the most recent traffic stop, 41.2 percent of drivers said "no." If drivers answered "no" they were asked to explain in their own words. What number responded with explanations? How many on each of these? In this section, several drivers noted that they felt discriminated against because they were taxi drivers and were pulled over for "no reason." Drivers noted disrespect, rudeness, and a lack of professionalism on the part of officers.

Additionally, when asked to state their opinions on a series of questions regarding issues facing cab drivers, 27.20 percent reported that they “disagree” and 22.78 percent “strongly disagree” that “Chicago Police officers treat cab drivers fairly” (Chart 5.1). In response to the statement “Suburban police officers treat cab drivers fairly,” 21.5 percent of drivers indicated that they “disagree” and 20.18 percent indicate that they “strongly disagree” (Chart 5.2).

In 3.07 percent of interactions drivers were questioned about their immigration status, and 66.67 percent (N = 8) of them were from Sub Saharan Africa. Another 10.67 percent experienced hostile comments about their race, religion, ethnicity, or apparent country of origin from an officer, with 60.47 percent of these drivers immigrating from Sub Saharan Africa (Chart 5.3). Finally, 17.87 percent experienced other abusive language from an officer and 45.84 percent of the drivers were from Sub Saharan Africa (Chart 5.4).

### **Attacks/Threats and Reported Incidents**

While a previous report discussed violence against taxi drivers, it is important to look at the frequency of reported incidences of violence against drivers and how it relates to their experiences with law enforcement. While 41.72 percent of drivers reported being attacked or threatened while driving their cabs, 65.76 percent were never reported. While drivers were not asked why they did not report incidences of violence or threats, several drivers were forthcoming with anecdotal responses such as “might make more trouble” indicating that reporting an incident to the police would make matters worse. Other drivers who did report attacks and threats indicated that the police were slow or unresponsive and wrote comments such as “I called the police, waited for almost 2 hours and they never showed up” and “told police, didn’t do anything.” Another driver noted an incident during which he was attacked, fought back in self-defense, and was arrested while the attackers were released from police custody.

## **V. Conclusion**

Significantly, 80.78 percent of drivers responded that they had some sort of encounter with the law (i.e., a parking ticket, a ticket from the Department of Business Affairs and

Consumer Protection, an experience being stopped by a law enforcement official, or a traffic ticket, usually the result of a traffic stop) within the year period prior to responding to the survey. In looking at the survey responses of these drivers it is clear that taxi drivers do not feel that they receive fair treatment and respect from law enforcement. It is relevant to note that the most negative response from drivers was directed at the DBACP, with more than 85 percent of drivers indicating that DBACP tickets are “excessive and unfair.”

The report also reveals a possible disturbing pattern of racial profiling. The majority of drivers who received hostile comments or abuse (i.e., racially motivated or otherwise) from law enforcement officials, were from Sub Saharan Africa, and presumably black.

The interaction that law enforcement officials have with the city’s “mobile ambassadors” takes place at the intersection of a contested public space. For drivers, it is where they work, earn a living and provide an essential service. It is also where city officials enforce traffic laws, manage traffic flow, and protect public safety. While these two uses of the public space are not inherently contradictory, when they become antagonistic it is damaging to the overall performance of the taxi industry. The fact that 2 out of every 3 assaults on a taxi driver go unreported to the police is a shocking admission that the workers do not regard the city as a legitimate defender of drivers’ safety.

Based on the experiences of the majority of drivers in this survey, law enforcement officials, particularly those at DBACP have created a hostile working environment for cab drivers. In this survey drivers show cause for believing that the city is significantly hampering their ability to provide cab service by administering an unwarranted degree of “street-level” supervision.

Traffic law enforcement is an unquestionable right and responsibility of the city. But when that right is not used to make travel by taxi safer and more efficient, it becomes a hidden “tax” on the labor process. The “tax” is paid twice by the drivers. First, drivers are directly burdened by having to pay the actual cost of the tickets and then they also

lose time (i.e., earnings) on the road when they are unfairly stopped by city officials.

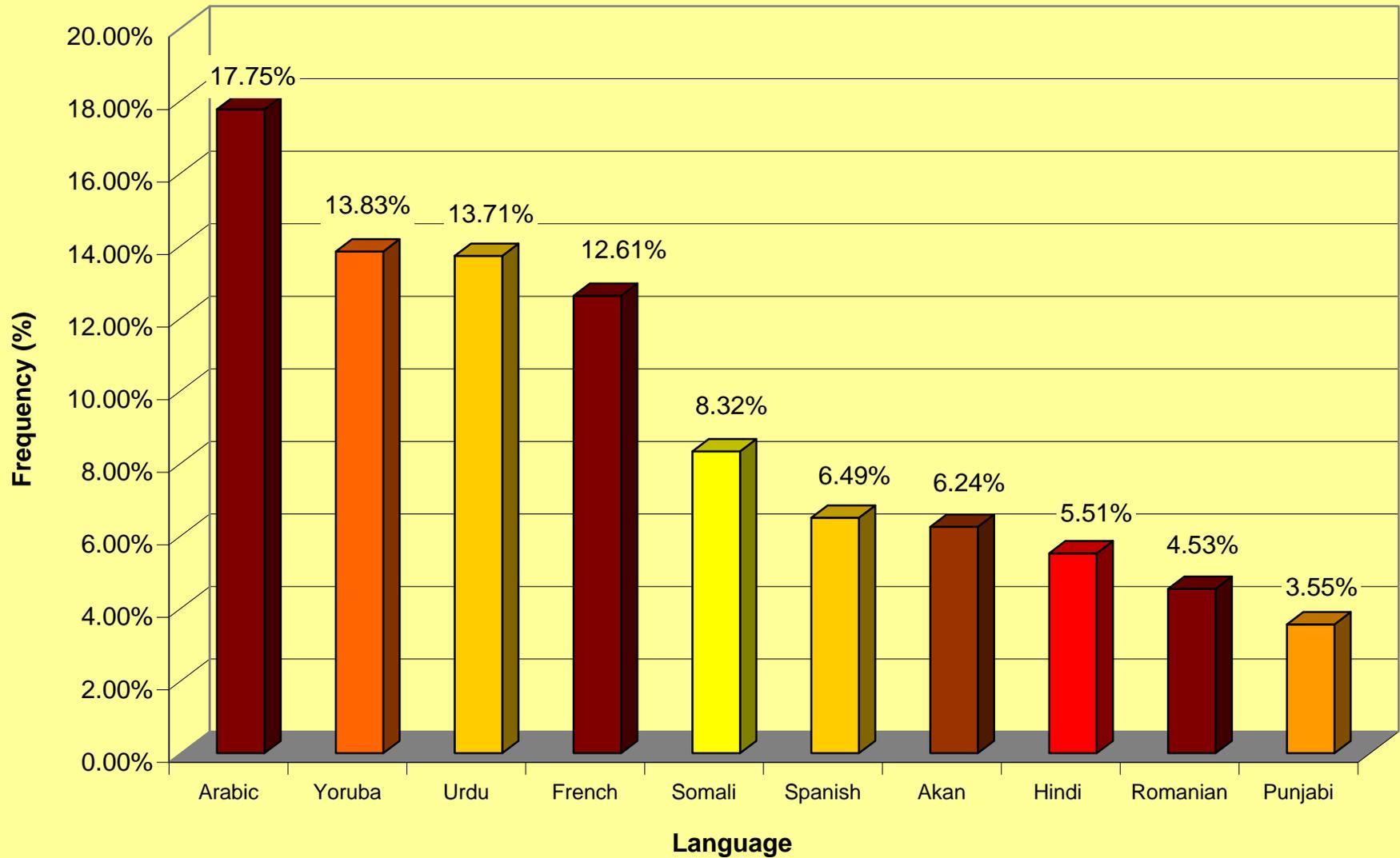
This tax creates three negative outcomes for drivers and the industry; (1) the tax reduces drivers' earnings, (2) unnecessarily interrupts the work process flow and (3) increases the difficulty of doing the job of a cabbie.

Traffic enforcement and industry regulation should serve a rational public service that improves both job performance and the quality of the work environment. Unfortunately, as reported by cab drivers the officials at the DBACP appear to be misusing their regulatory authority and treating drivers as unwanted interlopers instead of valued service providers.

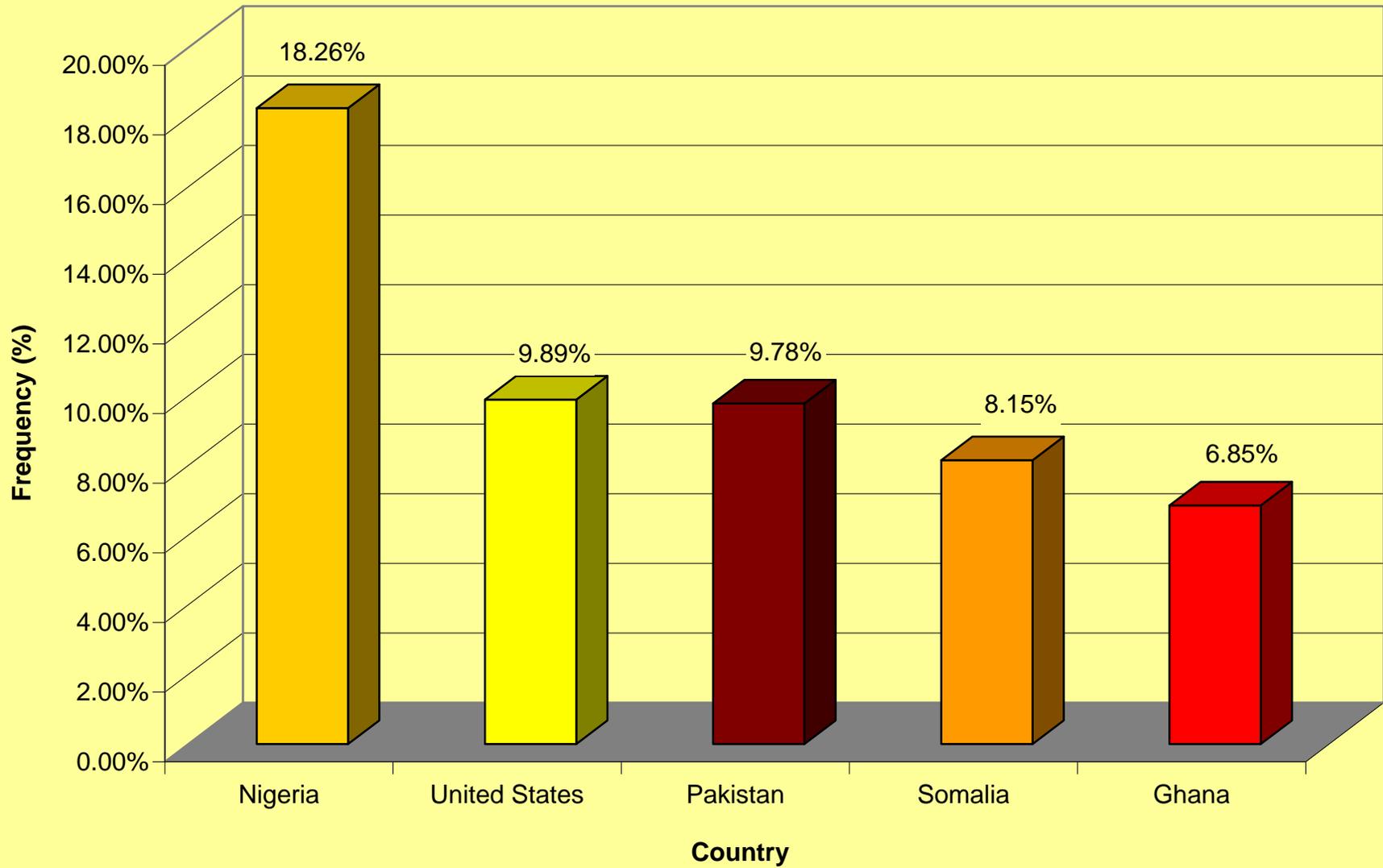
# Charts Section

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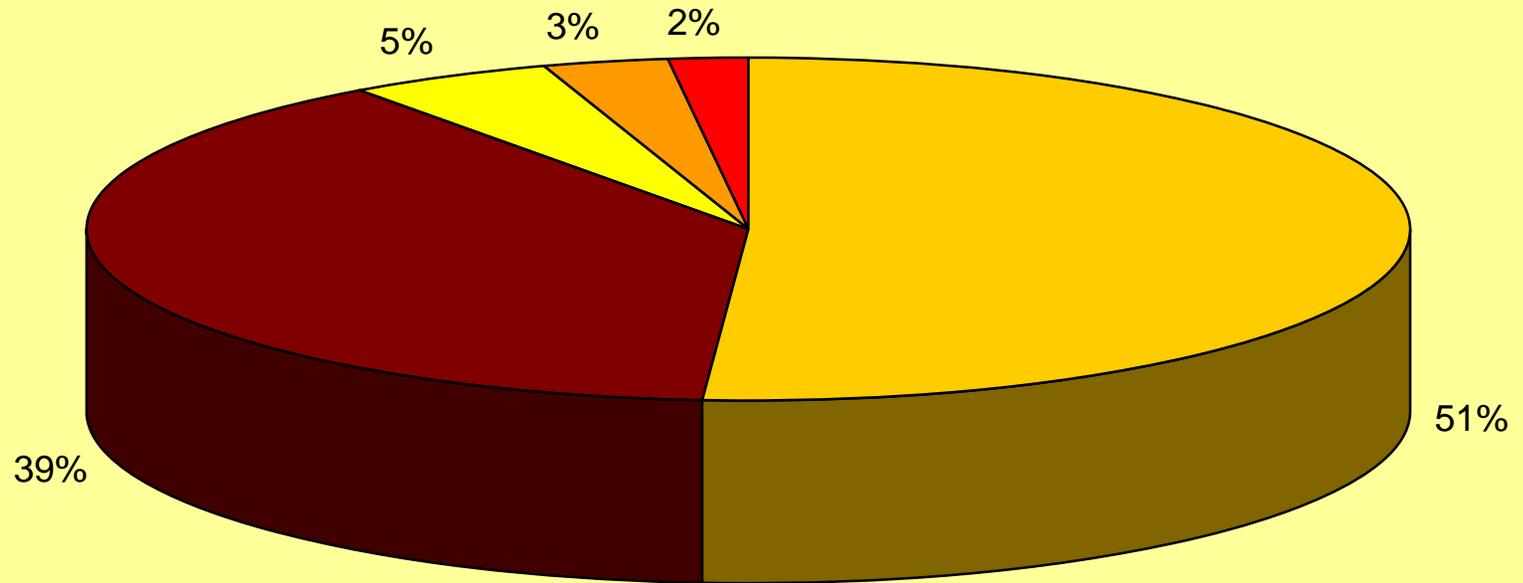
**Chart 1.1 Most Common Foreign Languages Spoken**



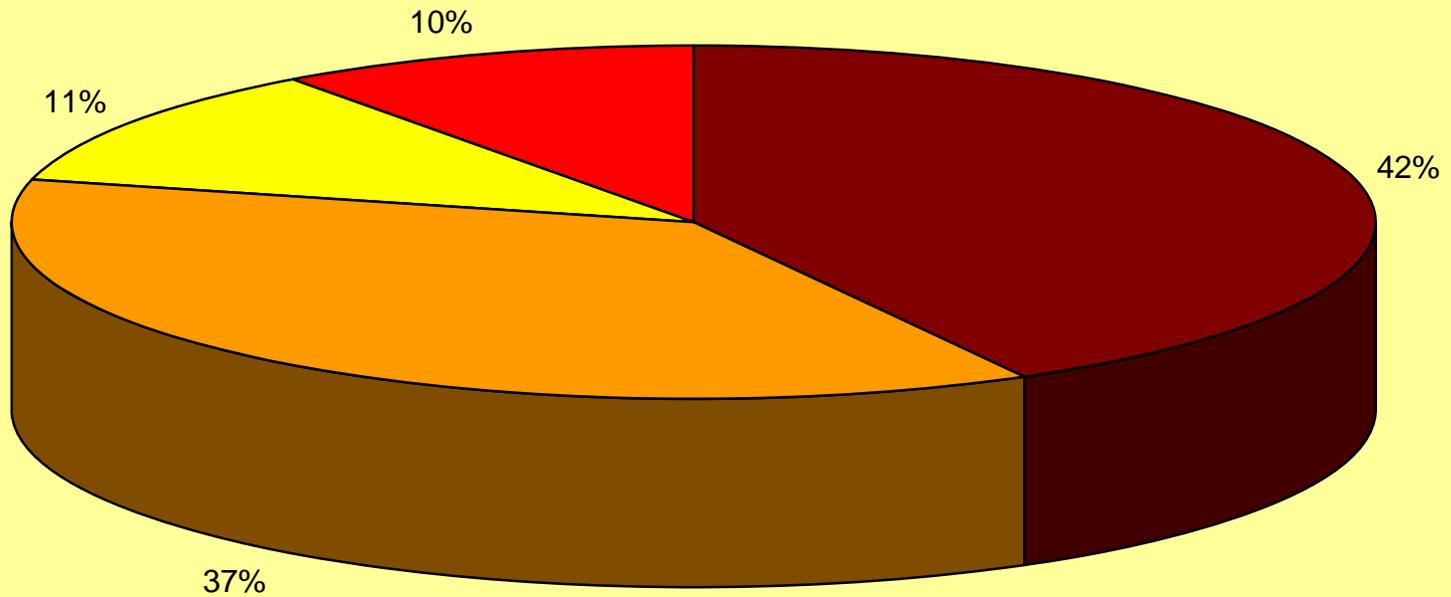
**Chart 1.2 Most Common Countries of Origin**



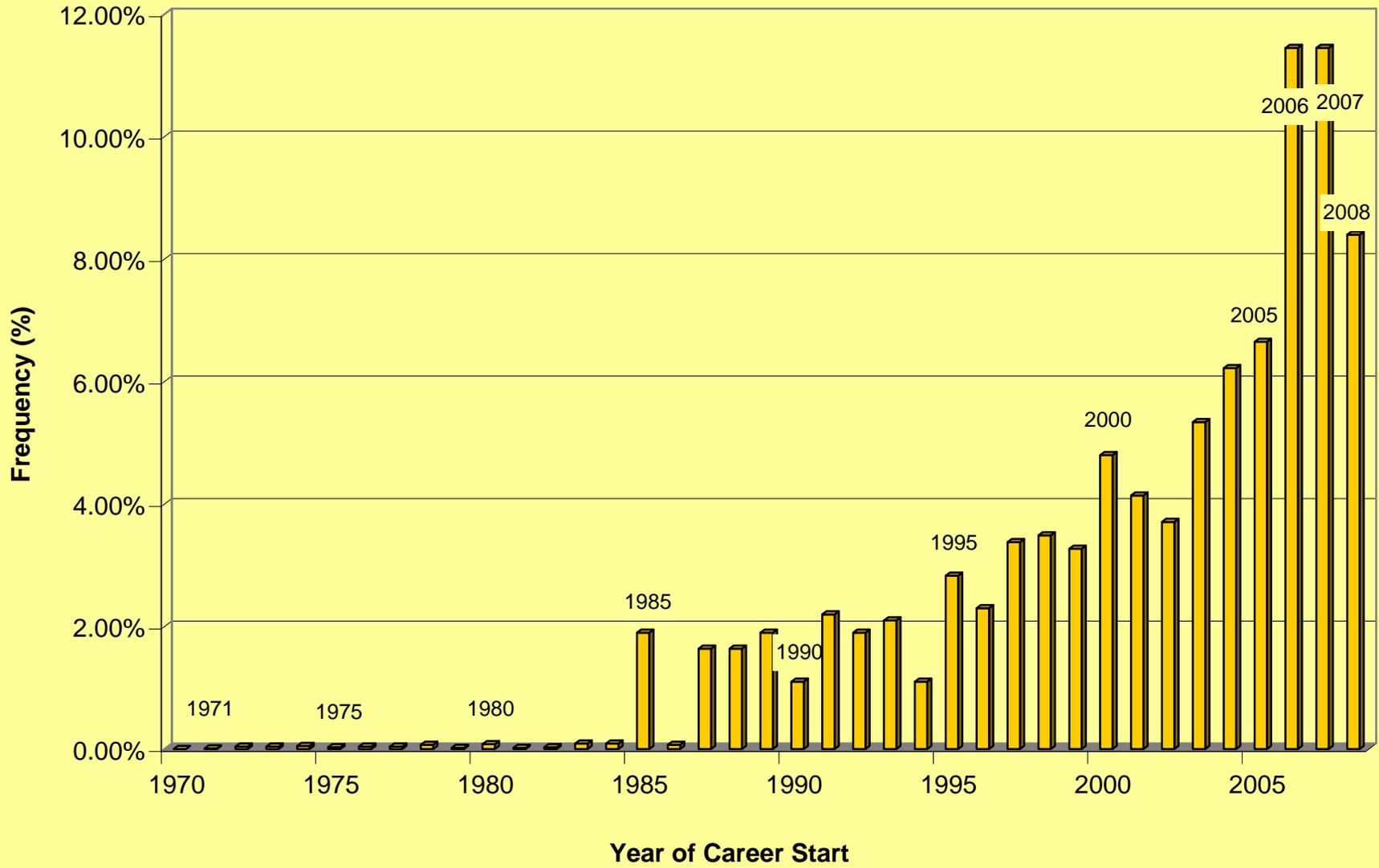
**Chart 1.3 Race/Ethnicity of American Born Drivers**



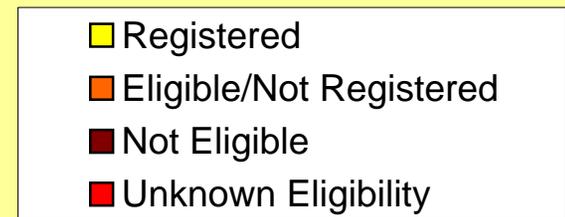
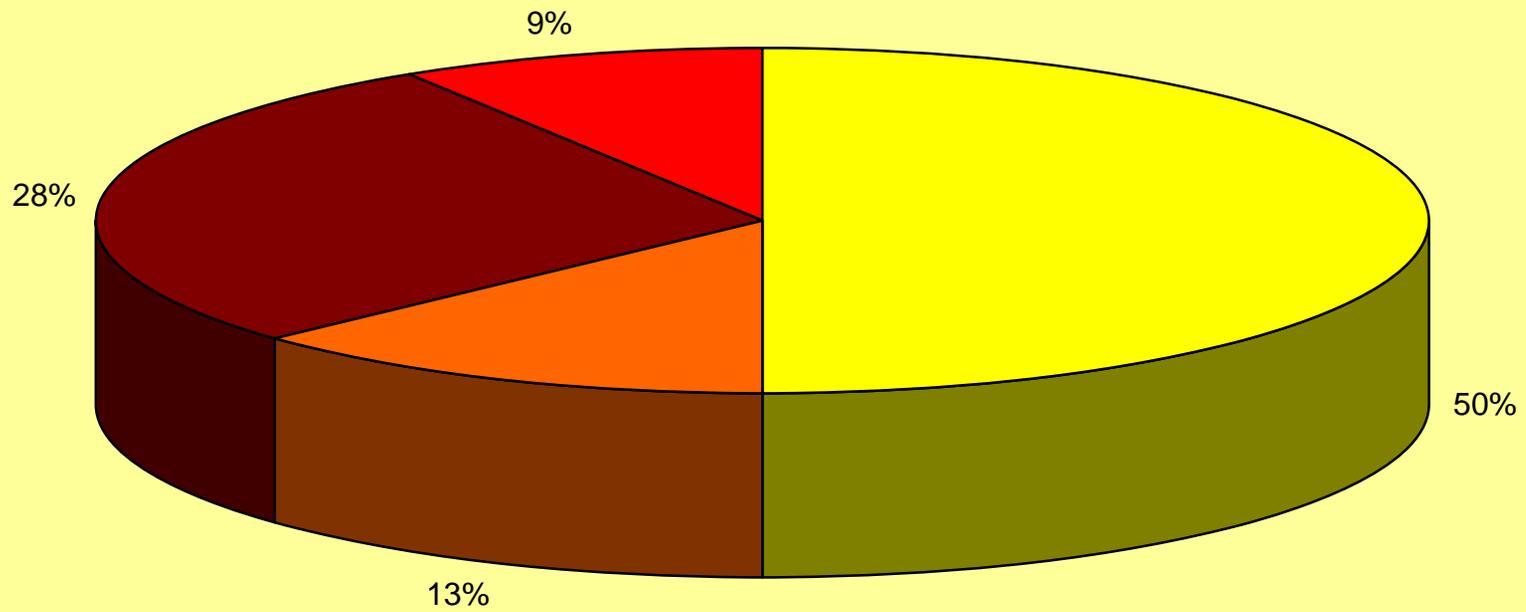
**Chart 1.4 Religious Affiliations**



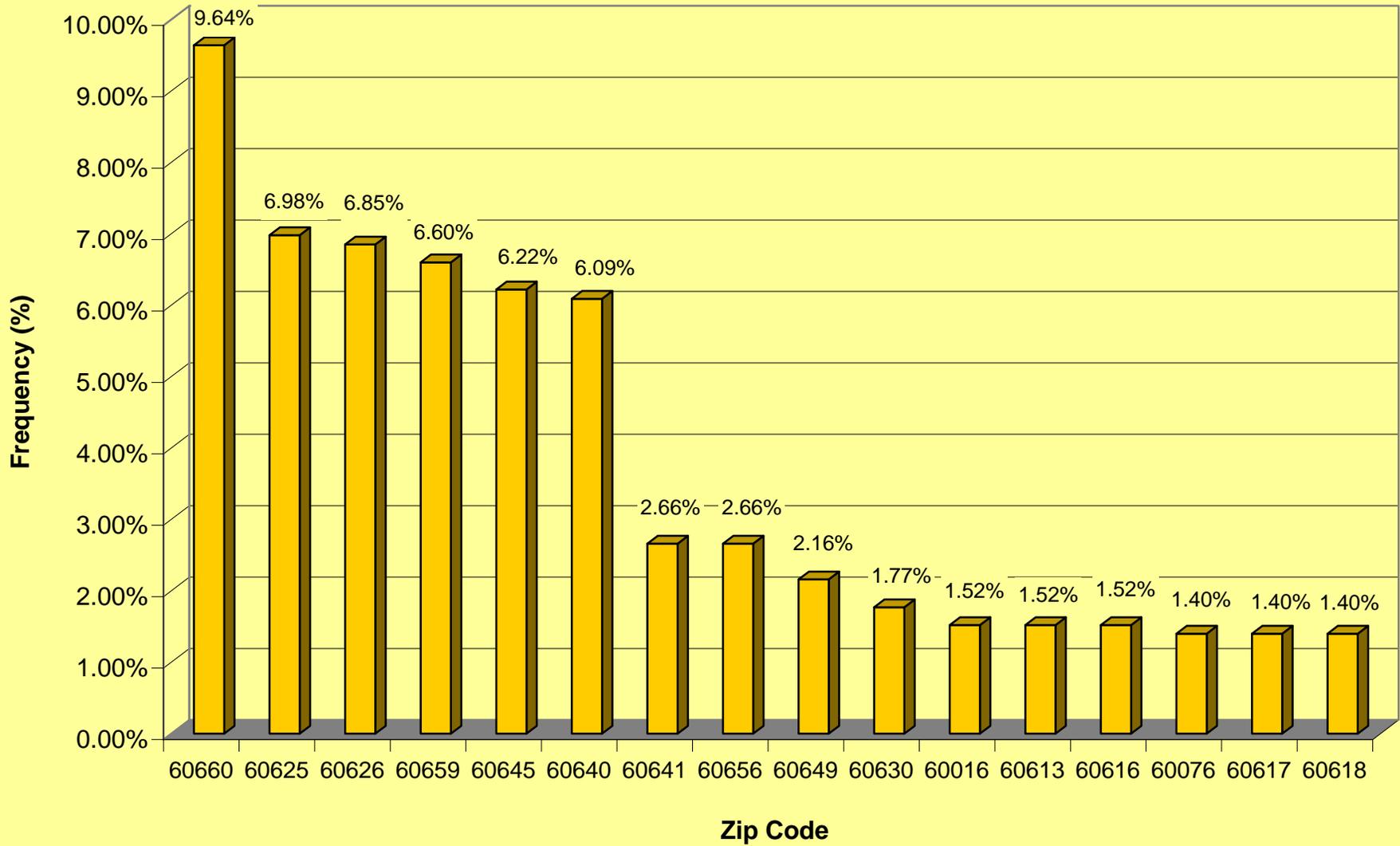
**Chart 1.5 Length of Tenure**



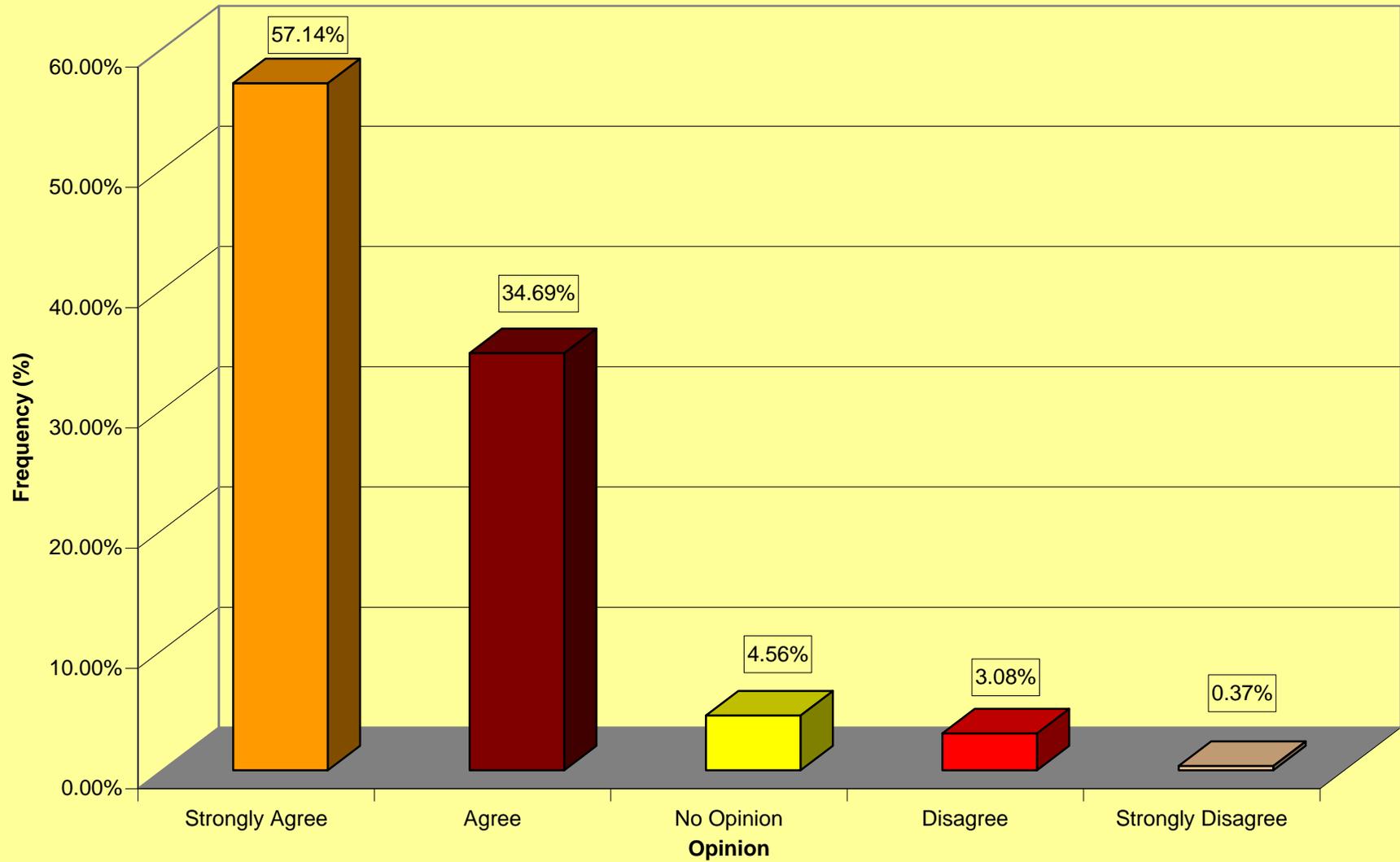
**Chart 1.6 Voter Registration**



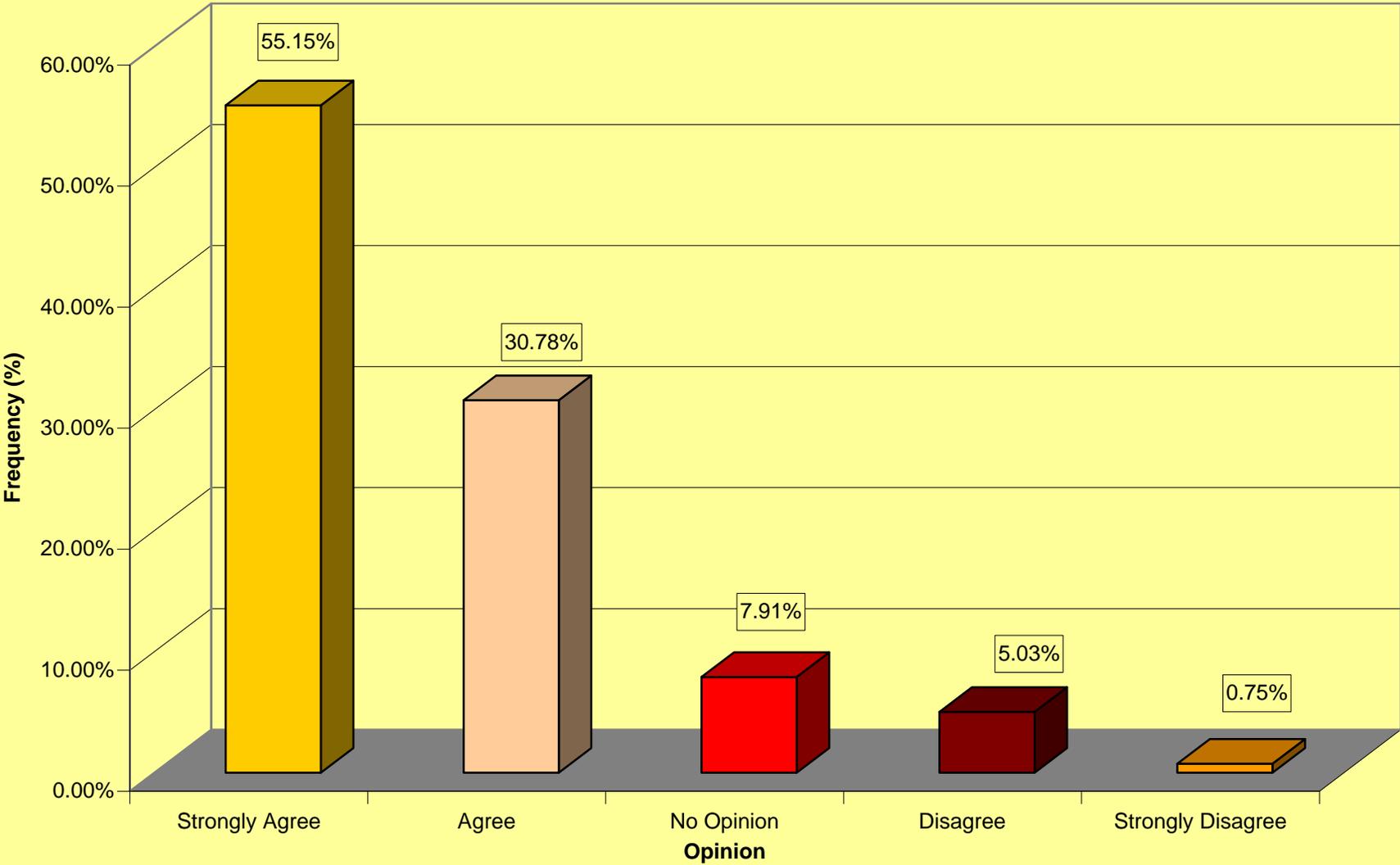
**Chart 1.7 Most Common Residential Zip Codes**



**Chart 2.1 Tickets Cost Too Much**



**Chart 2.2 DCS Tickets Are Excessive and Unfair**



**Chart 3.1 Law Enforcement Types During Traffic Stops**

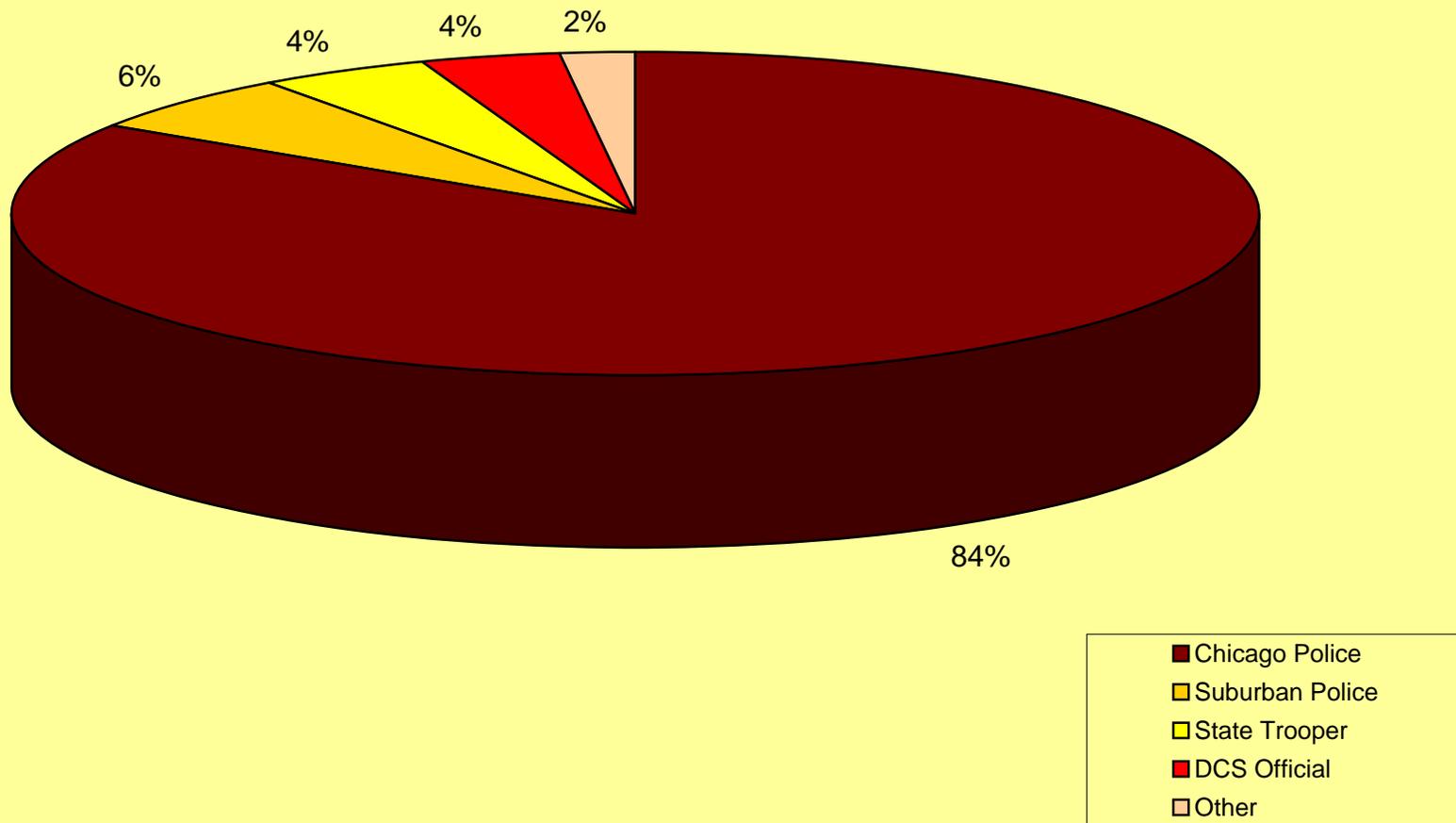
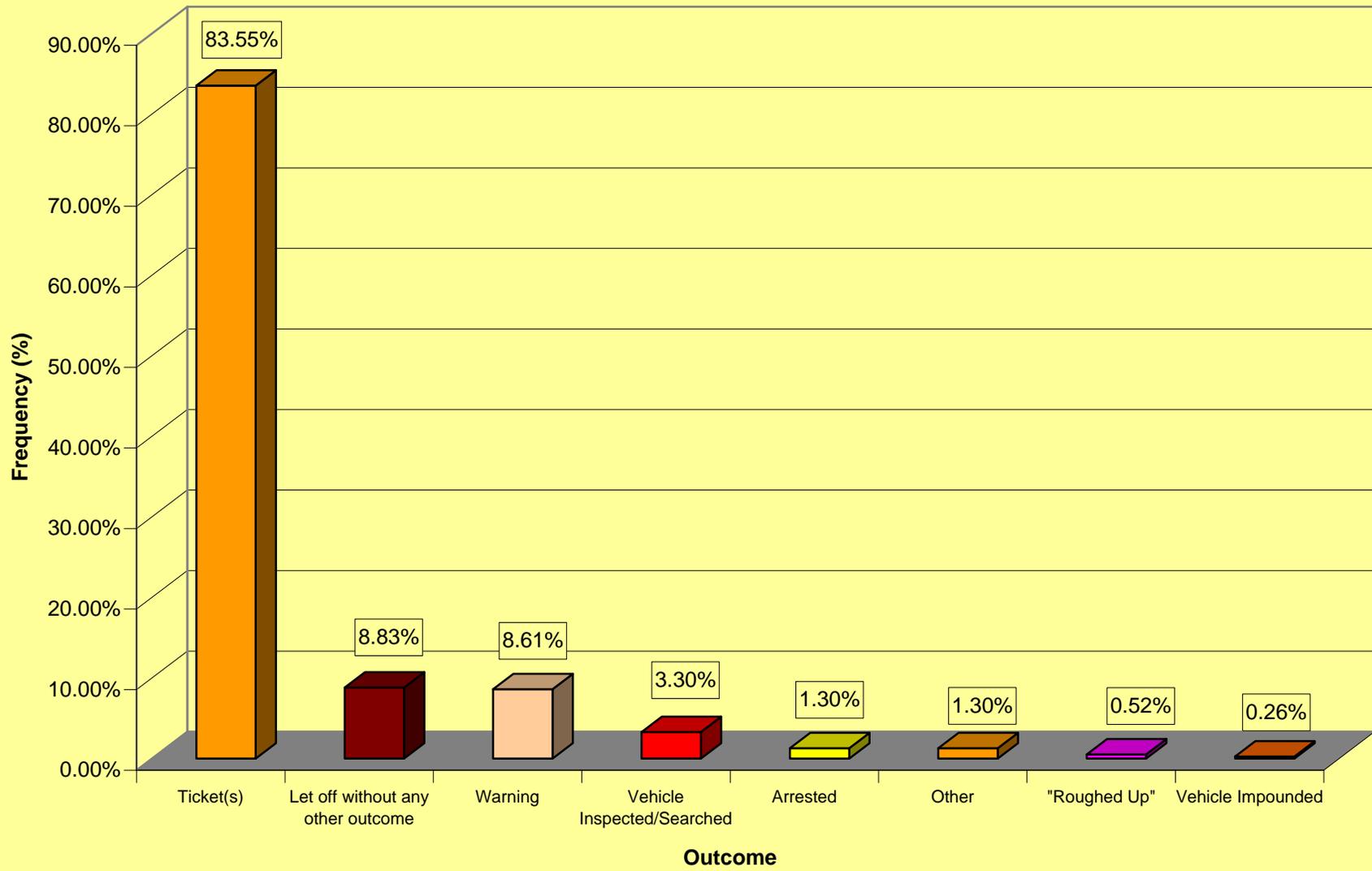
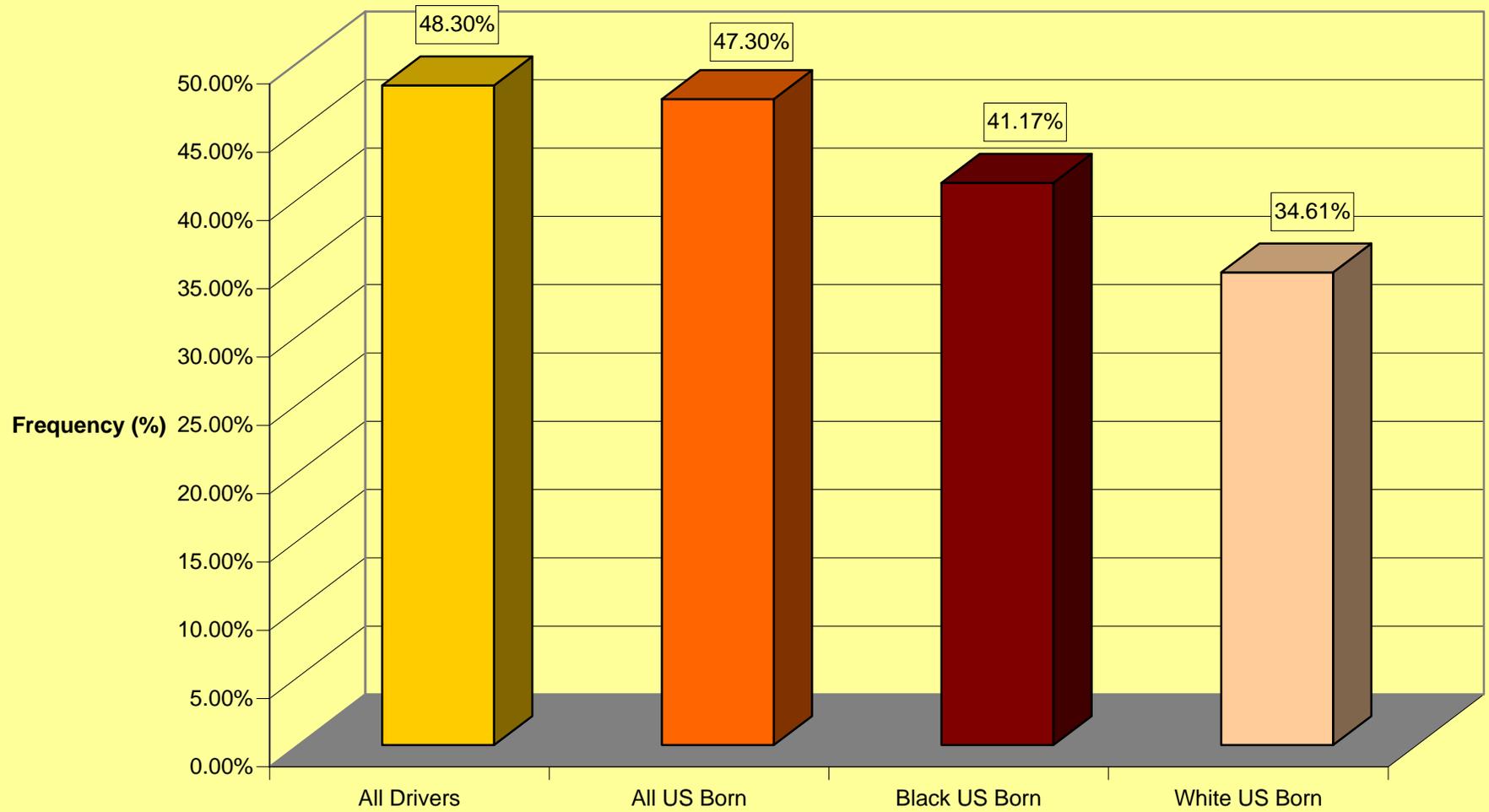


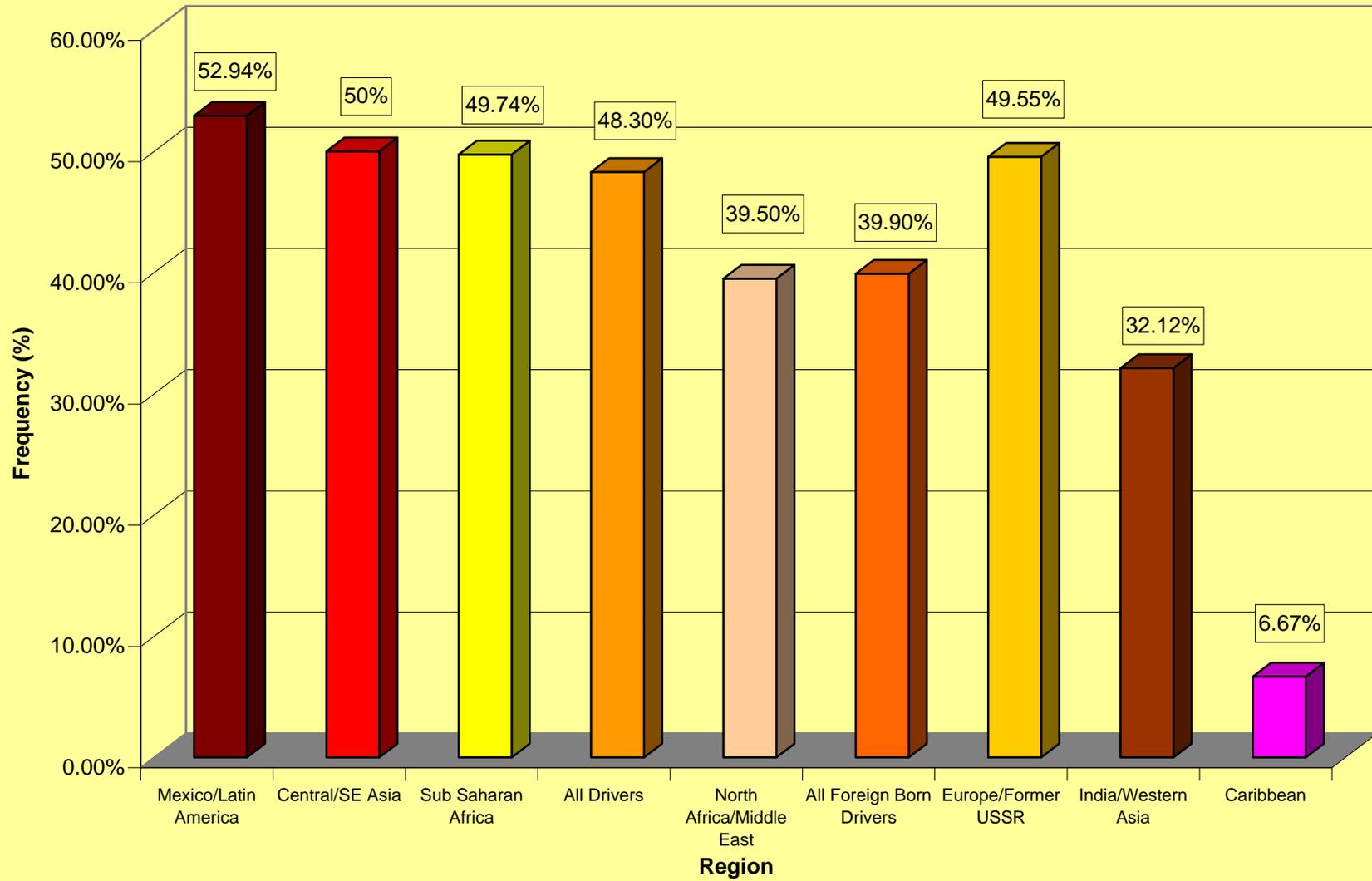
Chart 3.2 Traffic Stop Outcomes



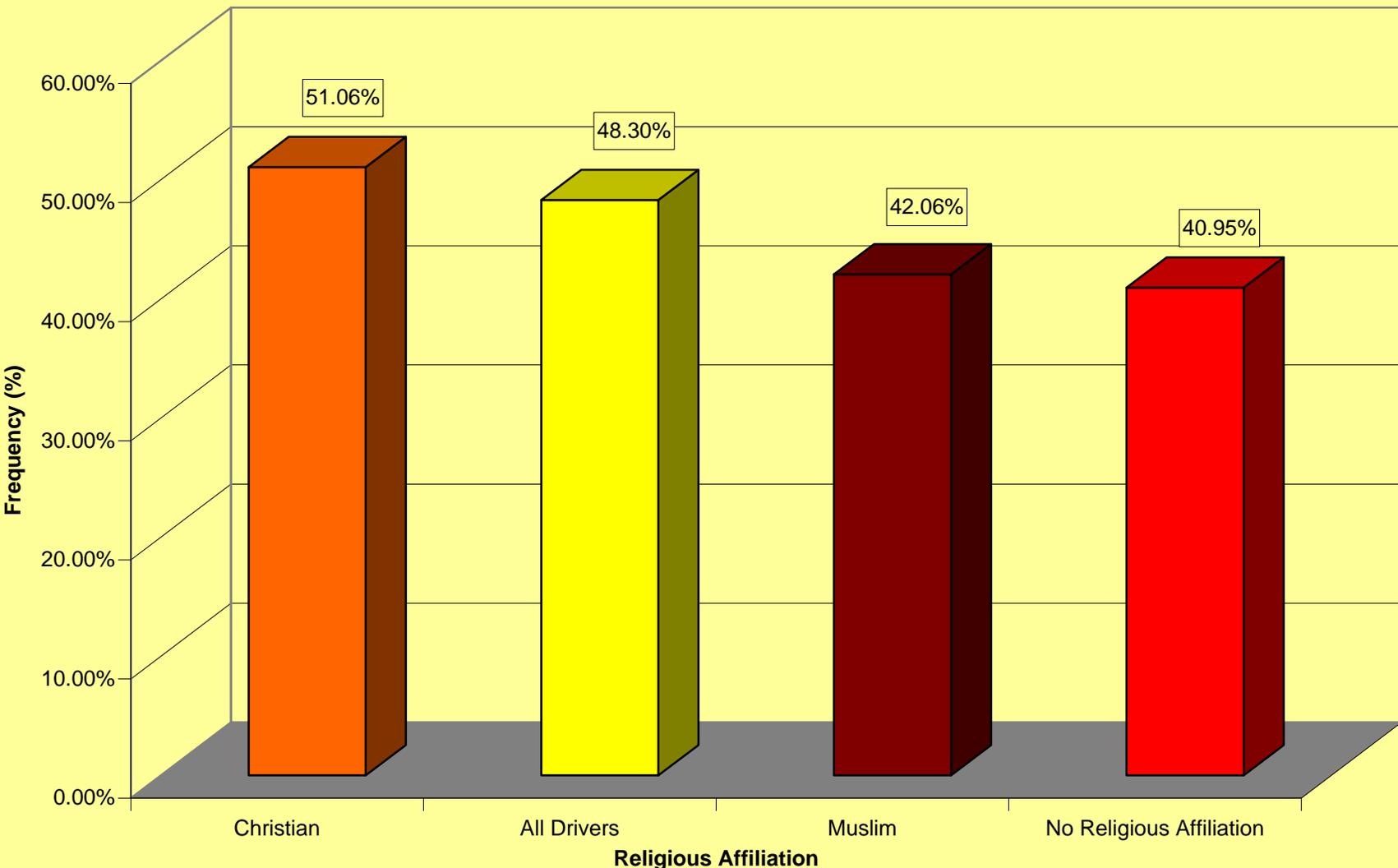
**Chart 4.1 Traffic Stop by Race- US Born Drivers**



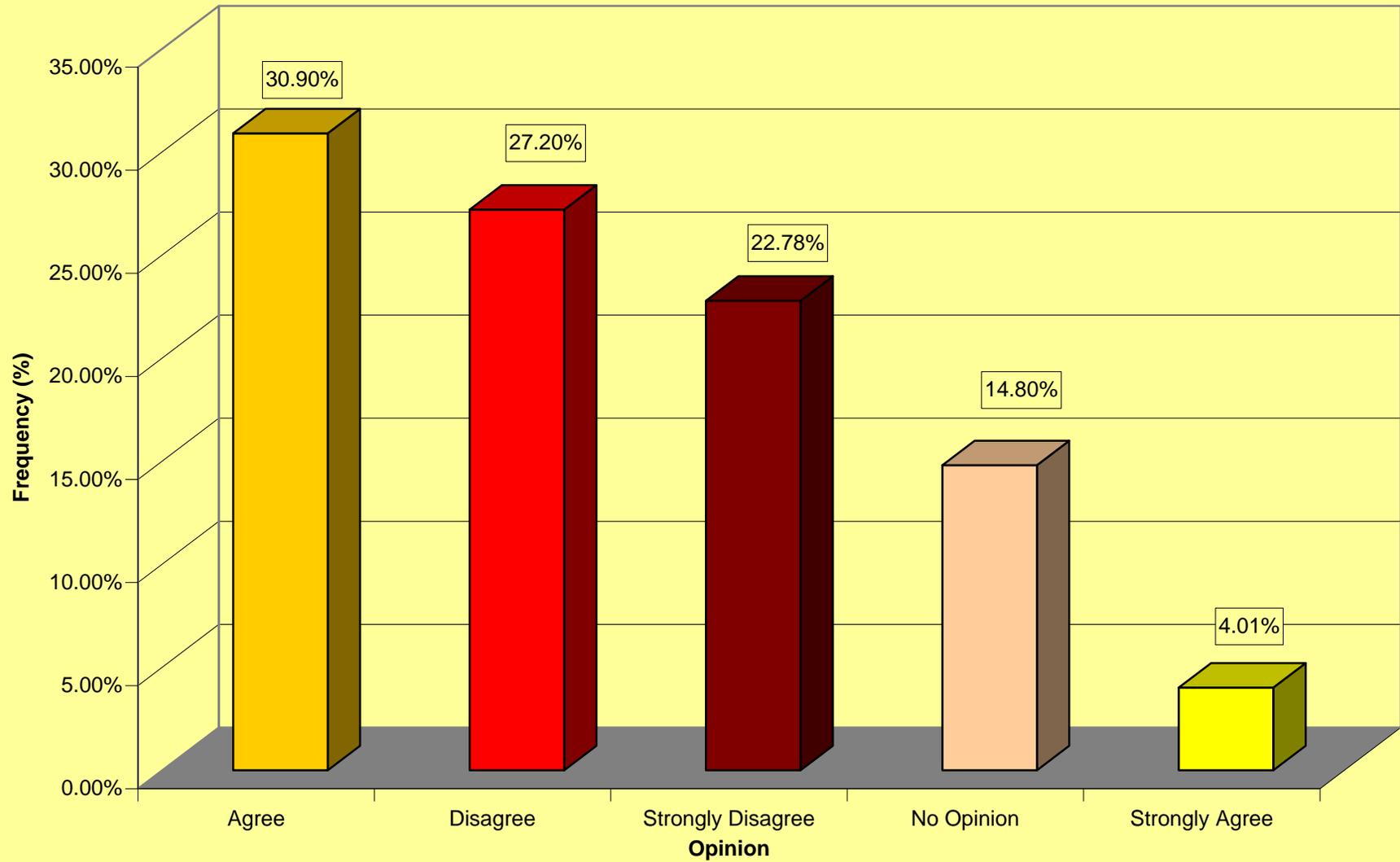
**Chart 4.2 Traffic Stop by Origin- Non US Born**



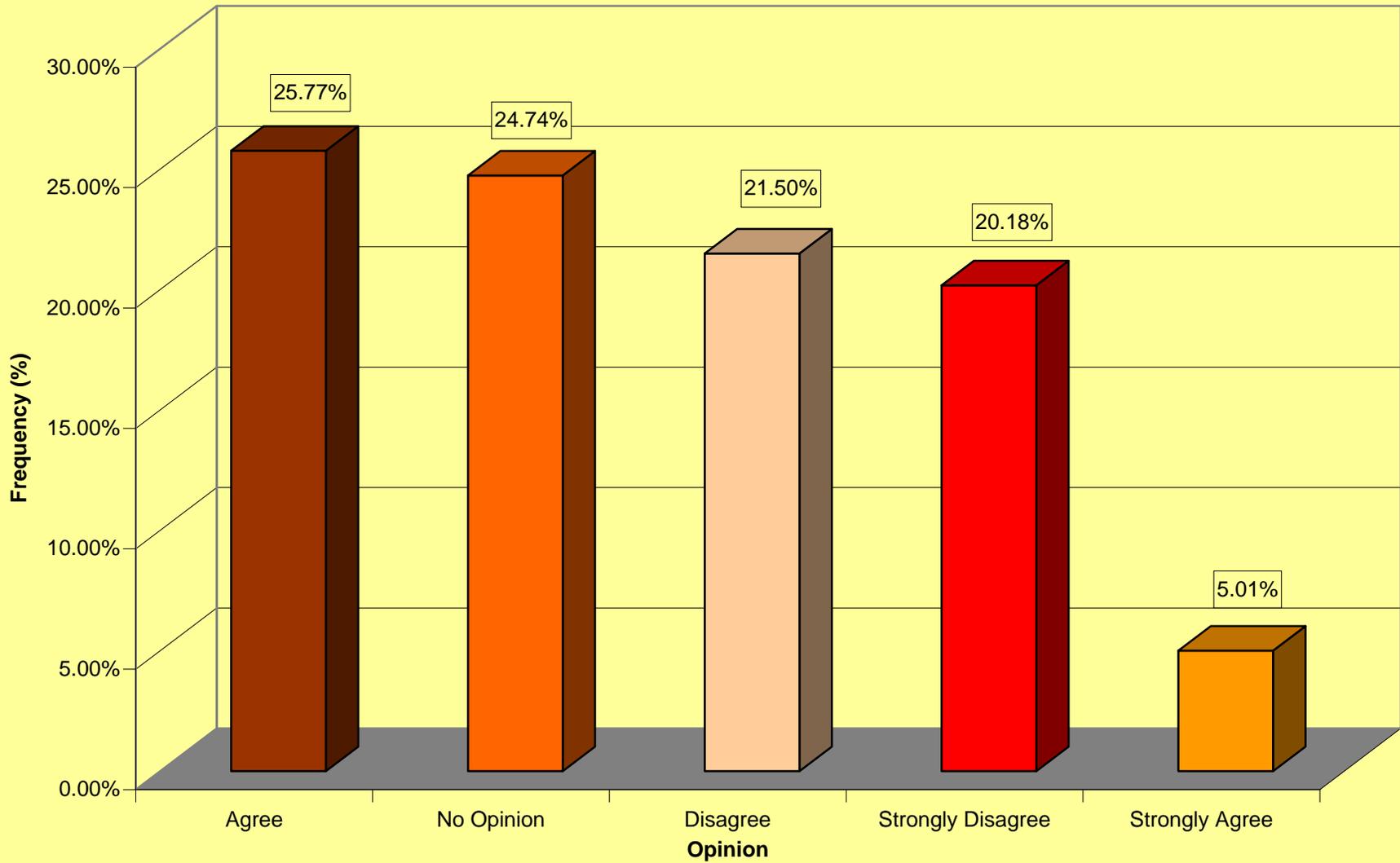
**Chart 4.3 Traffic Stop by Religion**



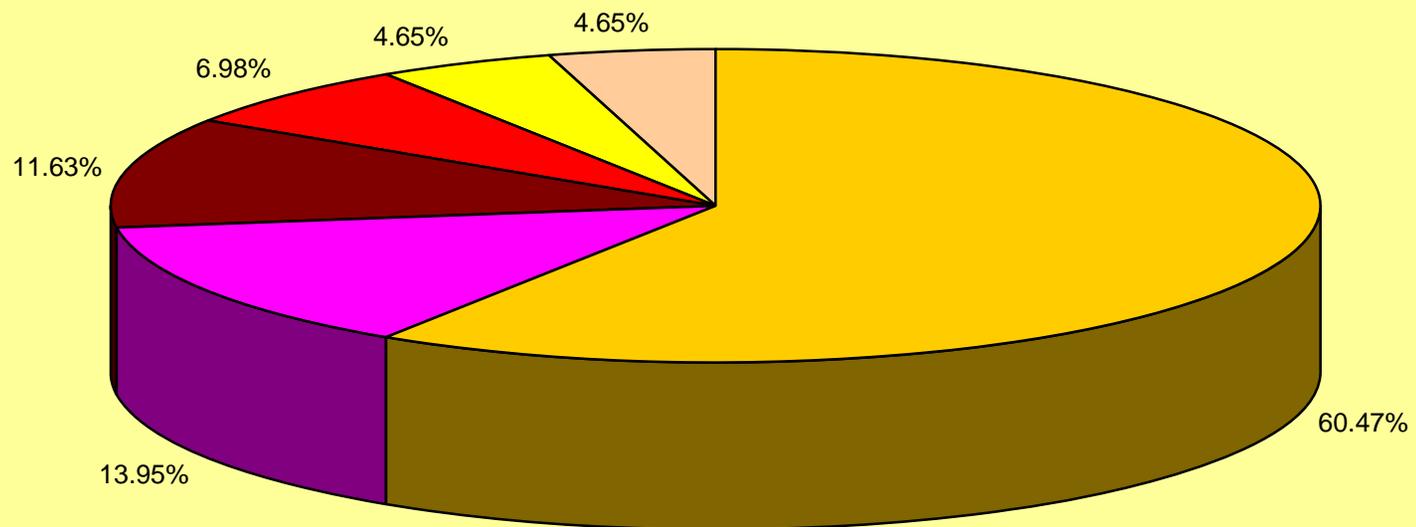
**Chart 5.1 Chicago Police Officers Treat Cab Drivers Fairly**



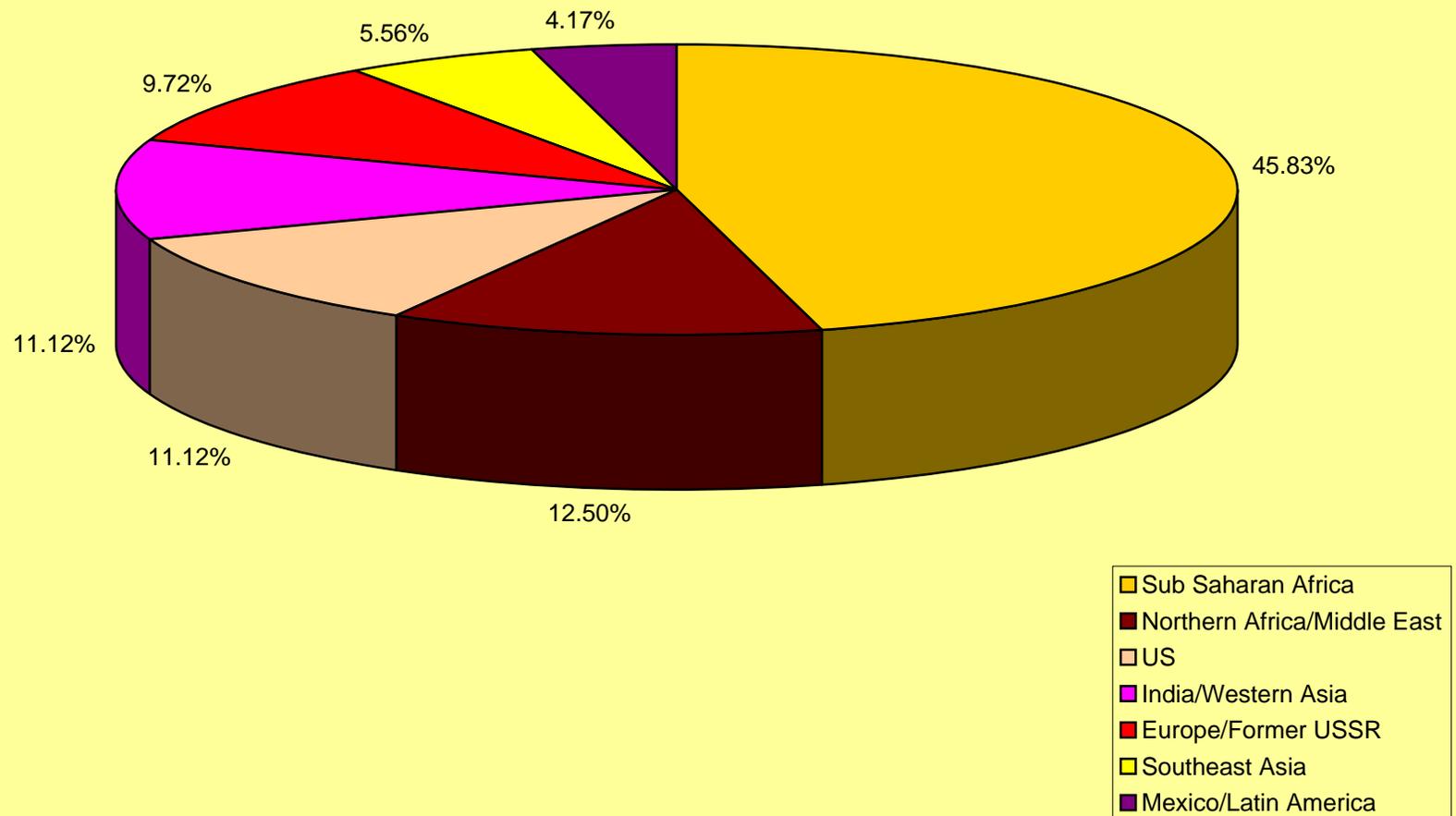
**Chart 5.2 Suburban Police Officers Treat Cab Drivers Fairly**



**Chart 5.3 Hostility Regarding Race, Religion, Ethnicity or Apparent Country of Origin  
(Breakdown by Percent of Drivers Receiving Hostile Comments)**



**Chart 5.4 Non Racial Hostility and Abusive Language  
(Breakdown by Percent of Drivers Receiving Hostile Comments)**





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