

Driven Into Poverty

A Comprehensive Study of the Chicago Taxicab Industry

Report II: Violence



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 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.

Stories like Paryani's are not uncommon. As will be demonstrated in this report, many taxicab drivers revealed their own encounters with violence. Drivers described being "shot," or being assaulted "because of hair on [your] face." Drivers acknowledged that customers had attacked them with hostile racial comments "every week," and for some, "every day."

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.¹ 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 Taxidriers 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 Taxidriers 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 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.

¹ Project Voice is a program that focuses on immigrants' and workers' rights.

II. Survey Methodology

AFSC-UTCC set out to design an unprecedented baseline study of Chicago taxi drivers addressing issues of *income, violence, leasing 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 2008.² According to statistics that 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 predominately 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-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 single-site method mitigates against a group sampling bias skewing the final results.

The survey included the following eight demographic 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."

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 violence.

Addressing violence in the Chicago taxi industry is appropriate because taxicab drivers as a whole encounter significantly more workplace violence and threats when compared to other workplaces. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Taxi and livery drivers are 60 times more likely than other workers to be murdered while on the job.²

Variables related to violence in the survey included both objective and subjective questions. Objective variables included; the frequency of “hostile comments about [...] race/ethnicity, religion, or apparent country of origin,” the frequency of “threats or physical attacks [...] while [...] *driving* a taxicab,” the frequency of “threats or physical attacks [...] while [...] *walking home* from [his/her] parked taxicab,” the years in which attacks or threats occurred, injuries resulting from attacks, medical attention required as a result of attacks, stolen money, presence of weapons, and whether the attacks were reported.

Subjective variables included drivers’ opinions on safety shields, cameras, ideas on cab safety, drivers’ opinions on the frequency of “racial insults and abuse,” drivers’ opinion on their need for “an organization to represent them and advocate for their rights,” and drivers’ ideas for improving the taxicab industry for drivers and the public. 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.

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 (Chart 1.1. All charts and tables are in an appendix following this report.). The most common foreign languages³ (Chart 1.2.) 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 percent), Somalia (8.2 percent) and Ghana (6.8 percent). 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).

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, *Current Intelligence Bulletin 57: Violence in the Workplace-Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies*, Publication No. 96-100, Cincinnati, OH, 1996.

³ Respondents were asked the open-ended question, “What language(s) do you speak fluently other than English.”

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 nearly equal numbers Christian (42.0 percent) and 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. For clarity in this report, we grouped residential zip codes into residential regions.

IV. Violence Report Findings

The violence study had two objectives. The first objective was to create a baseline survey of Chicago taxi drivers' experience with violence. The second objective was to collect feedback from drivers on the effectiveness of current safety methods, such as the installation of a protective shield and camera within the car.

The study findings are organized into five different sub-sections. First, we examine *hostile racial comments*, then incidents of *physical attacks inside the taxicab*, followed by *physical attacks at the end of the shift*, and also *threats of violence inside the taxicab and threats of violence at the end of the shift*. Finally we address the perceived effectiveness of particular *safety devices* installed in the cars, including the camera, shield, and a notification placard.

Hostile Racial Comments

Nearly half (42.6 percent) of drivers responded, “Yes,” when asked if they have been “subjected to hostile comments about [his/ her] race/ethnicity, religion, or apparent country of origin [...] during the past twelve months.” This does not include hostile comments regarding topics outside of race, religion or country of origin. (e.g., hostile comments about driving technique, driving speed or the taxi fare are not addressed in this topic). Drivers were also asked about *the frequency* of hostile racial comments (“How many different times did this occur in the past twelve months?”). A majority (51.5 percent) of the drivers who have been subjected to hostile racial comments said they’ve been subjected to hostile racial comments two times in the past twelve months.

More than two-thirds (71.6 percent) of drivers have been subjected to at least one hostile racial comment. Arab/Middle Eastern/North African (47.7 percent), African/Black (46.9 percent) and Central/ Southeast Asian (41.0 percent) drivers were more often subjected to at least one hostile racial comment than White/Caucasian/European (29.2 percent)⁴ (Graph 2.1). It should also be noted that 7.9 percent of all drivers responded that they were subjected to hostile racial comments on *at least 25* separate occurrences in the past 12 months. Also, 14.3 percent of Arab/Middle Eastern/ North African drivers responded that they were subjected to hostile racial comments on *at least 25* separate occurrences in the past 12 months, as compared to 9.3 percent of Central/ Southeast Asian drivers, 7.1 percent of Hispanic/Latino drivers, 7.0 percent of African/Black drivers and 6.3 percent of White/Caucasian/European drivers.

Also 43.9 percent of immigrant drivers have experienced hostile racial comments from customers, as opposed to 30.3 percent of drivers born in the United States.

We also examined the effect of a driver’s religious affiliation in regards to hostile racial comments. Although a customer may not be fully aware of a driver’s religious background, they may take note of a driver’s religious adornments (e.g., a Christian driver wearing a cross or a Muslim driver’s prayer beads hanging from the rearview mirror) and subsequently ascribe a religious affiliation. When religious affiliation is taken into account (in addition to race), stronger correlations emerge. African/Black Muslim drivers endure the most frequent hostile comments, with 68.1 percent experiencing 2 or more hostile racial comments in the past 12 months. Muslim taxicab drivers in general experience a higher frequency of hostile racial comments than their Christian counterparts (Graph 2.2).

⁴As only 3.5 percent of drivers self-described as Hispanic/Latino and also responded to a question about hostile racial comments, we can *not* infer how frequently Hispanic/Latino drivers are subjected to hostile comments as compared to drivers of other racial and ethnic groups. Future research in this field should focus on a larger pool of Hispanic/Latino respondents.

Physical Attacks Inside the Taxicab

Slightly more than one in five (22.1 percent, n = 174) drivers have been physically attacked while driving their taxicab and these respondents reported a total of 428 attacks. More Central/ Southeast Asian drivers (27.7 percent) encountered attacks while driving than any other racial or ethnic group (Graph 2.3). Also, more Muslim drivers (23.4 percent) have been physically attacked than Christian drivers (19.0 percent).

Nearly half (43.7 percent) of those drivers attacked while driving said the attack was “accompanied by hostile comments about [their] race, ethnicity, religion and/or apparent country of origin.” Additionally 47.0 percent of immigrant drivers who were physically attacked stated that the assailant used hostile racial comments during the attack, while approximately 1 in 5 (19.4 percent) US-born drivers who were physically attacked experienced hostile racial comments. Muslim drivers reported a significantly higher rate of hostile racial comments when attacked (52.8 percent) than Christian drivers (39.5 percent). According to Illinois state law, these attacks are hate crimes, as they are “an act or an attempted act by any person against the person or property of another individual or group which in any way constitutes an expression of hostility toward the victim because of his or her race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, gender, or ethnicity.”⁵

Although this survey took place during the summer of 2008, we were able to interview many drivers who had started their taxicab driving careers as early as 1971. While 17.8 percent of drivers could not recall the year in which an attack occurred, according to the study the earliest recalled physical attack occurred in 1978. Based on the drivers who reported being attacked and could identify the year (82.2 percent) it is possible to speculate on the existence of peak years for cab driver attacks. For example in 1988, 5 drivers were physically attacked compared to 32 drivers in 2007 (Graph 2.4). We can also assume that the number of taxicab drivers physically attacked within our survey population in 2008 (n = 22) is greater than represented by our data, as 2008 data was collected midyear. Therefore, we predict that 2008 will eclipse 2007 in attacks on taxicab drivers inside the taxicab. Despite the annual number of reported attacks because of the data limitations and the single baseline quality of this study we can not with a high level of certainty comment on the relative frequency of cabdriver attacks over time.

Of the drivers physically attacked while driving, 36.5 percent were robbed of money, one out of 5 was injured (20.5 percent) and 22.1 percent required medical attention.

⁵ The Commission on Discrimination and Hate Crimes. 2004. State of Illinois. 27 May 2009. <<http://www.state.il.us/cdhc/definitions.htm>>.

In 37.9 percent of the attacks that occurred while driving, the assailant possessed and either threatened to use or did use a weapon against a driver. Guns (50.4 percent) were the most frequently wielded weapon against taxicab drivers, followed closely by the use of knives (37.0 percent) (Graph 2.5). In collecting data, we found a variety of other weapons used against taxicab drivers, including a “baseball bat,” “crowbar” and “ice pick.” Weapons were most frequently used against Central/ Southeast Asians (51.6 percent of the attacks that included the use of a weapon), including Indian and Pakistani, drivers (Graph 2.6). Barely half of drivers attacked while driving (52.3 percent) reported the incident to the authorities. One driver said, “Told police. Didn’t do anything.” Another driver said he did not report it because it “might make more trouble.”

Physical Attacks at the End of the Shift

It is also important to be aware that almost half (47.7 percent) of drivers have to walk home at the end of their taxi shift. This is due to different regulations throughout the many Chicago wards and suburban counties with regards to parking a commercial vehicle (such as a taxicab) overnight on a street zoned as residential or business. In 46 of the 50 Chicago Aldermanic wards, municipal codes prevent taxicab drivers from parking in residential areas, “for a longer period than is necessary for the reasonably expeditious loading or unloading of such vehicle.”⁶ In the remaining four wards, taxicab drivers are only allowed to park overnight in residential areas if they own their medallion and apply for a permit. The City of Chicago Municipal Code also states that in 49 of the 50 wards, “It shall be unlawful to park any taxicab on any business street in the city for a period longer than two hours between the hours of 2:00 A.M. and 7:00 A.M.”⁷

Approximately 6.1 percent of drivers who have to walk one or more residential blocks home have been “physically attacked while walking home from [his/her] parked taxicab.” Although it is debatable whether these attacks are happening at the workplace, it is apparent that they are happening as a result of being a taxicab driver.

How far drivers have to walk home at the end of a work shift appears related to their likelihood of being a victim of violence. Drivers reside in many zip codes in all parts of the Chicago and in many suburbs. For the simplicity and clarity of this study, the authors re-categorized drivers’ residential zip codes into the following residential regions:

⁶ Municipal Code of Chicago, MCC 9-64- 170(a). <http://www.chicityclerk.com/municipalcode.php>

⁷ Municipal Code of Chicago, MCC 9-64- 170(b). <http://www.chicityclerk.com/municipalcode.php>

<i>City of Chicago Residential Regions</i>	
North	(North of North Ave, East of Ashland, South of Touhy)
Northwest	(North of North Ave, West of Ashland, East of Harlem, South of Touhy)
Central/Loop	(East of Ashland, between Chicago and Roosevelt)
South	(South of Roosevelt, East of Ashland, North of 120th)
Southwest	(South of Roosevelt, West of Ashland, East of Harlem)

<i>Suburban Counties Residential Regions</i>
Cook County
Lake County
Will County
McHenry County
DuPage County
Kane County

Four out of five drivers residing in suburban areas (80.4 percent) walk “zero blocks” (park in garage/ driveway or driven by a friend) from their parked car to their home. Drivers living in the suburbs do not walk far when compared to the city-dwelling drivers who walk much longer distances to get home from their parked car (Graph 2.7).

Some of the same zip codes in which drivers have to walk longer distances to get home (i.e., Chicago zip codes in the North and Northwest regions) are the zip codes where drivers reported more frequent attacks while walking home from their car (Graph 2.8).

One-third (31.9 percent) of drivers who walk more than one residential block to get home and have been attacked have also been robbed while walking from their parked taxicab. Twice as many Muslim drivers (40.9 percent) were robbed of money while walking home from their parked cab as Christian drivers (20.0 percent).

Threats of Physical Violence Inside the Taxicab

Overall 31.8 percent of drivers stated that they have been “threatened ... with physical harm” while driving their taxicab. On average, drivers reported experiencing 3.48 threats during their driving careers, with some experiencing as many as 60 threats during their career.

Threats of Physical Violence at the End of the Shift

Another 8.6 percent of drivers have been “threatened while walking home from [their] parked taxicab,” with 2.09 threats on average per driver.

Summary of Violence Experienced by Taxi Drivers

It is important to note that 3 out of 5 drivers (58.7 percent) have experienced some kind of violence (including “hostile racial comments,” “physical attacks,” and “threats”) during their career (Graph 2.9).

Safety Devices

The questionnaire was designed with a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Although closed-ended questions generally illicit a higher response rate, open-ended questions allow respondents to answer in their own words. As this is a baseline study, open-ended questions allow the authors to explore the workplace conditions of taxicab drivers.

When asked, “Which one is better for driver safety – a safety shield or a camera?” nearly every driver had an opinion (95.3 percent). Although there is no strong preference among the number of drivers who prefer the shield (34.1 percent), the camera (34.9 percent) or feel “both are the same,” (30.2 percent), the high overall response rate speaks to the significant need for safety devices in taxicabs.

It is important to recognize that assaulting an on-duty cab driver is now a class-3 felony. Taxicab drivers are advocating for a sign in the back of cabs indicating the new law in the hopes that it will keep them safer. As discussed in the *Physical Attacks Inside the Taxicab*, *Physical Attacks at the End of the Shift*, *Threats of Physical Violence Inside the Taxicab* and *Threats of Physical Violence at the End of the Shift* sub-sections, taxicab drivers are exposed to an extremely high amount of violence on the job.

Drivers were asked the hypothetical and open-ended question, “Do you have any other ideas for how cabs can be made safer?” The most common responses following “camera” and “shield” were; “faster police response” (7.1 percent) and “sign or placard” (6.9 percent).

V. Conclusion

As mentioned in the *Survey Methodology* section, a NIOSH study revealed that taxi and livery drivers are 60 times more likely than other workers to be murdered while on the job.⁸ Our study further examines the details of violence on taxicab drivers, revealing that the extremely diverse (racial, ethnic, and religious) population of taxicab drivers in Chicago is subject to unacceptable levels of violence and harassment.

⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, *Current Intelligence Bulletin 57: Violence in the Workplace-Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies*, Publication No. 96-100, Cincinnati, OH, 1996.

Although this study is broad, there are opportunities for future research on this topic. We did not address the racial/ethnic background, country of origin, gender, or economic status of the people attacking and threatening taxicab drivers. Future studies may also investigate the effectiveness of safety devices and consider devices such as GPS units and “panic” buttons that our study did not explicitly address. Finally, it would be relevant to conduct research on police response time to various emergency calls, comparing taxicab drivers against other calls.

It is important to recognize that the damage done by tolerating workplace violence reverberates well beyond the individual victim and the confines of a work day. A 2005 study conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that 21 percent of private establishments reporting an incident of workplace violence acknowledged that the incident negatively affected the fear level and morale of their employees.⁹

Outside the workplace the costs are equally high. Families which suffer the loss of a primary income earner are at risk for economic and emotional ruin. Providing medical care for drivers victimized by violence on the job extracts an unacceptable and largely preventable cost on the private and public health system. A workplace associated with violence has also a pernicious effect on the psychological security of patrons considering alternative modes of inner-city transportation.

A workplace where 3 out of 5 (58.7 percent) drivers have been physically attacked, threatened with physical violence or subjected to hostile racial comments is demonstrably unsafe. Violence is not only a concern for the drivers but it is also paramount to the ability of the taxi industry to provide the city of Chicago with a reliable means of daily transporting thousands of citizens, shoppers and tourists in a comfortable safe environment. Preventing insult and injury to Chicago’s cab drivers is the best way to insure that the taxi industry is considered a viable option for doing business or pleasure in Chicago.

Taxi drivers in Chicago are obligated to provide safe, high quality transportation service, but in doing so they should not have to navigate through the hostile landscape of a modern American city.

⁹ *Survey of Workplace Violence Prevention*: A special survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics Department of Labor for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services, 2005.

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Chart 1.1: Most Common Countries of Origin

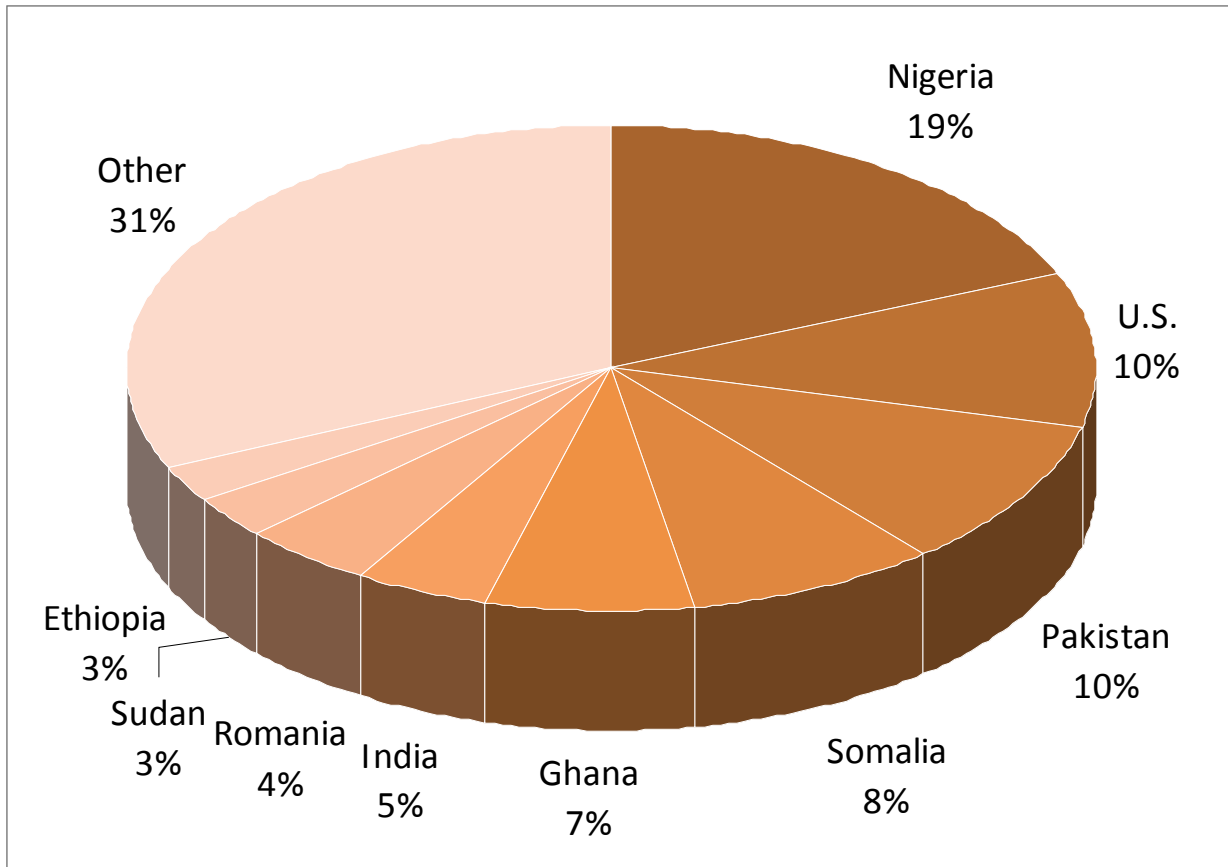


Chart 1.2: Most Common Foreign Languages

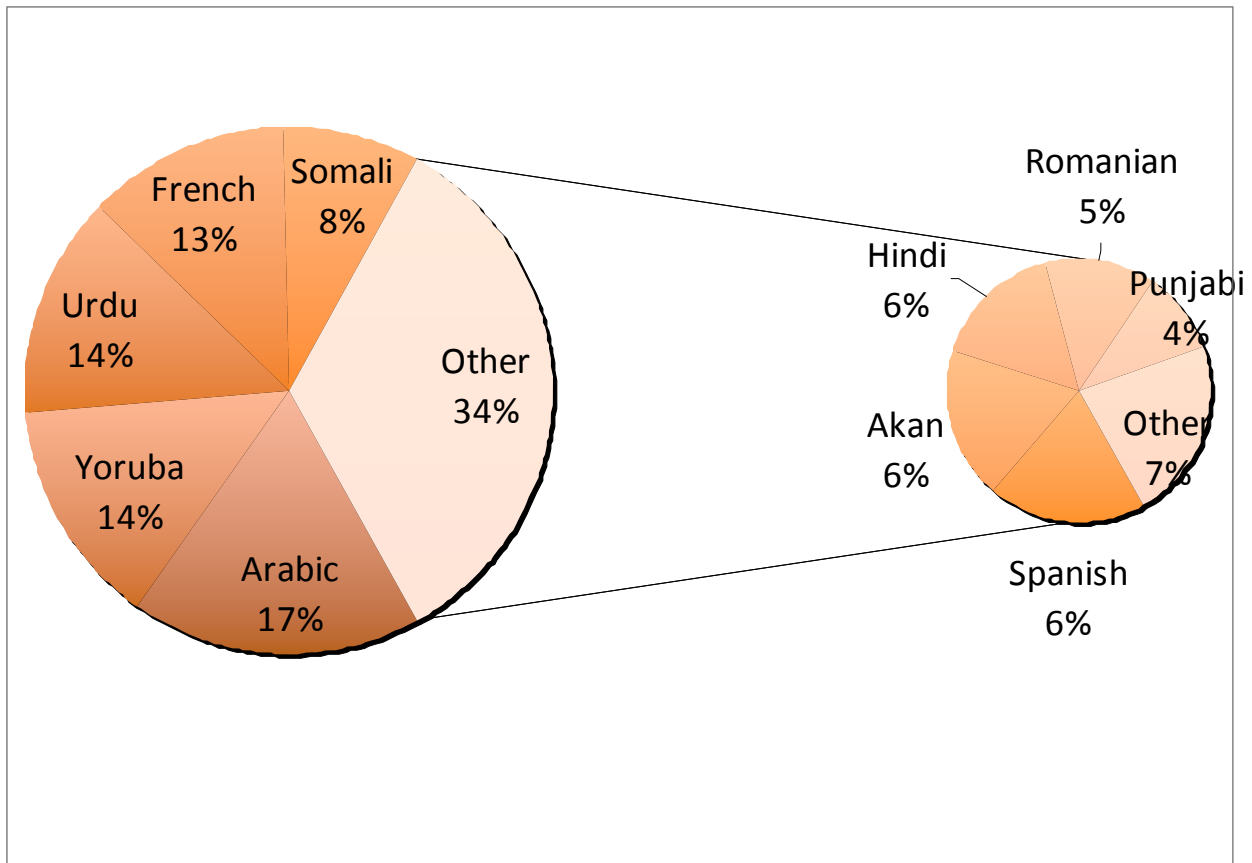


Chart 1.3: Race/ethnicity of American Born Drivers

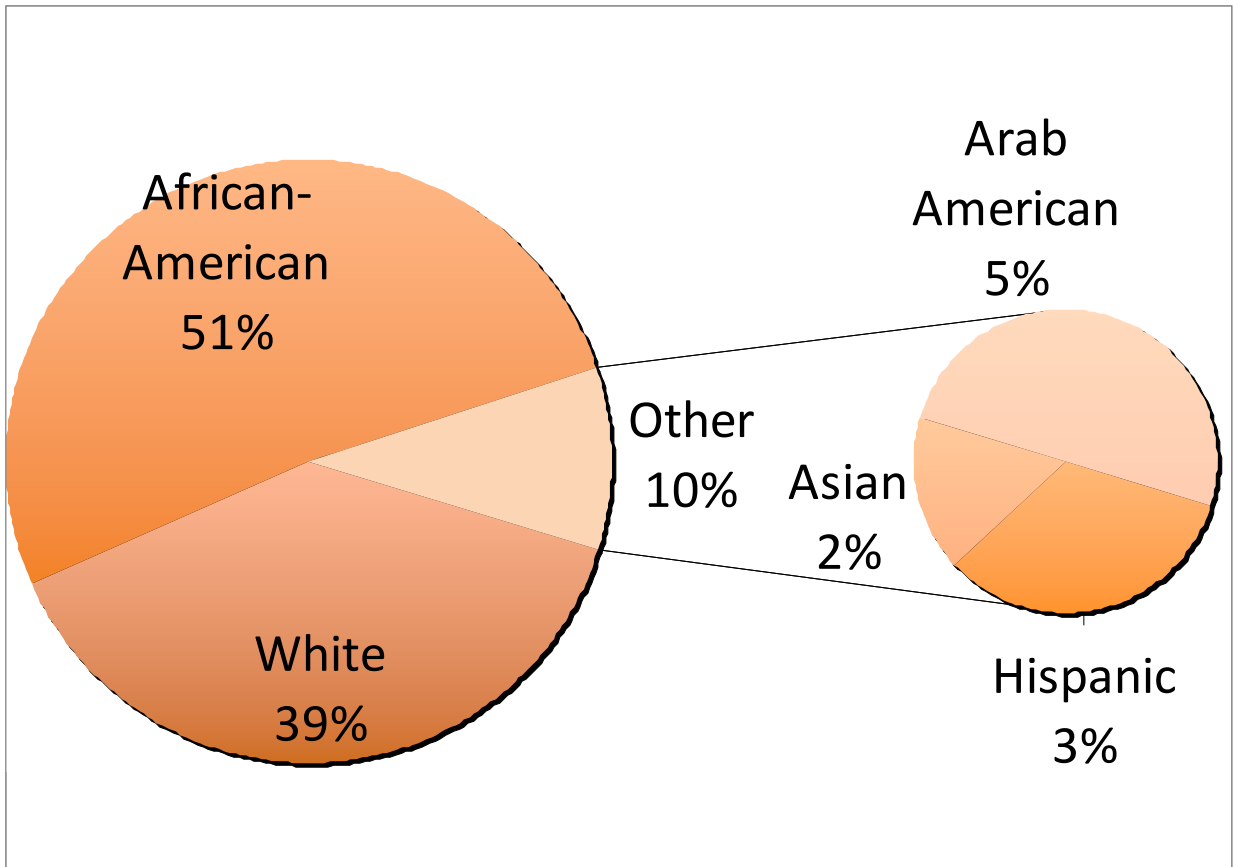


Chart 1.4: Religious Affiliation

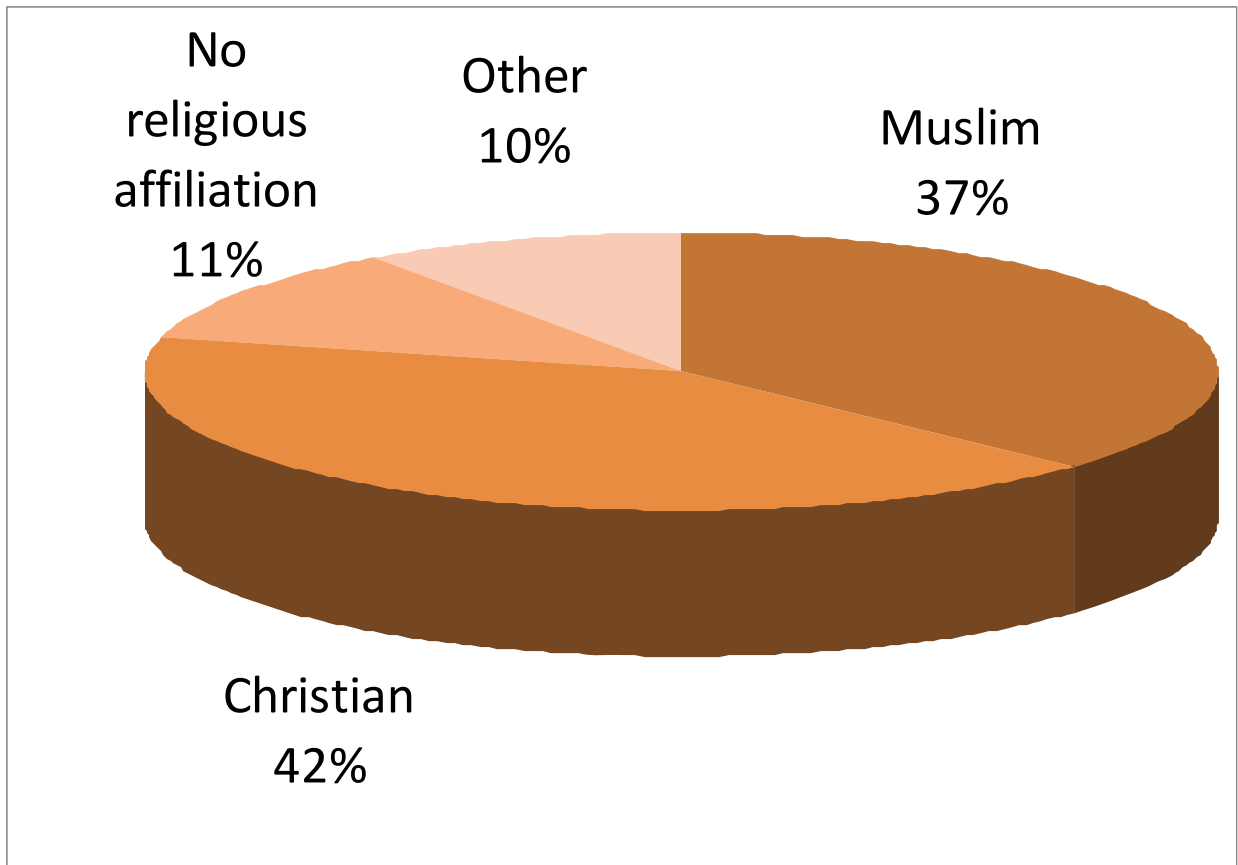


Chart 1.5: Length of Tenure

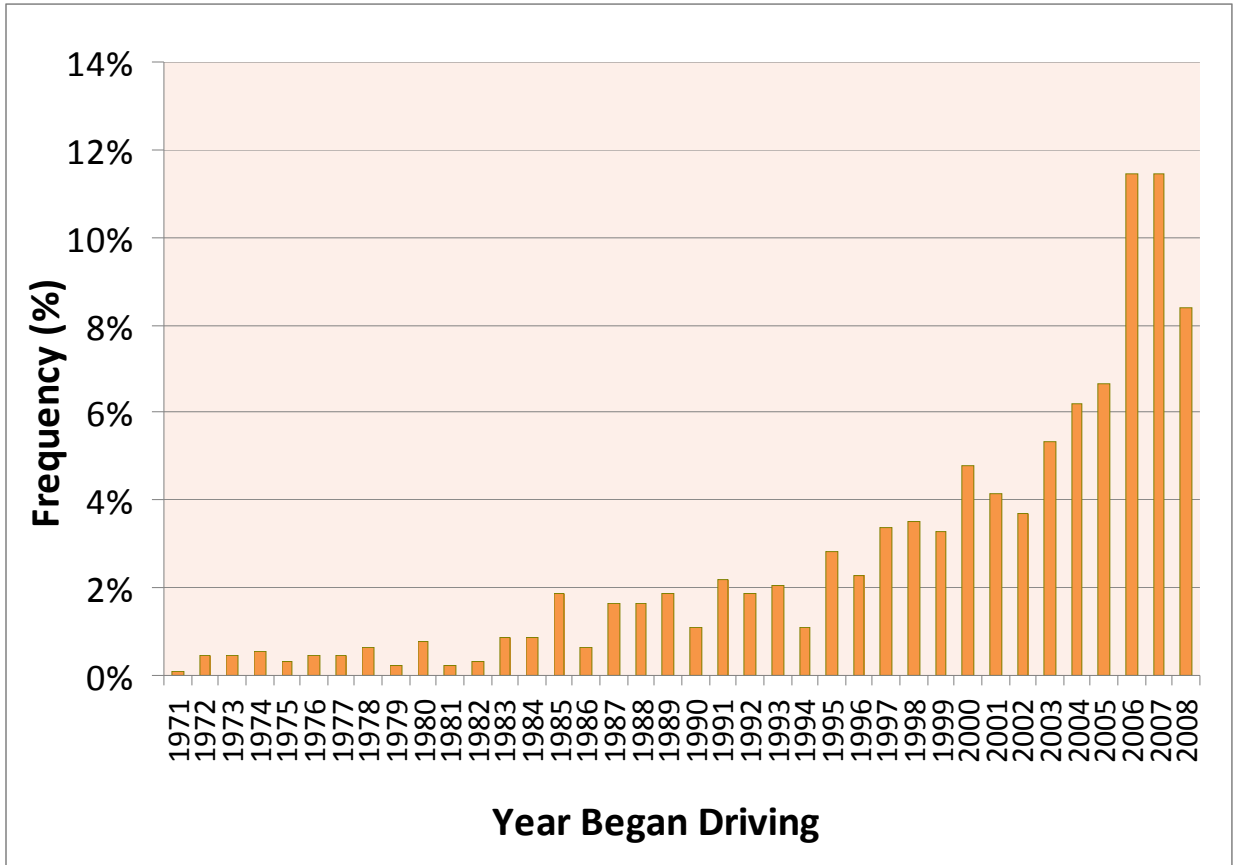


Chart 1.6: Voter Registration and Eligibility

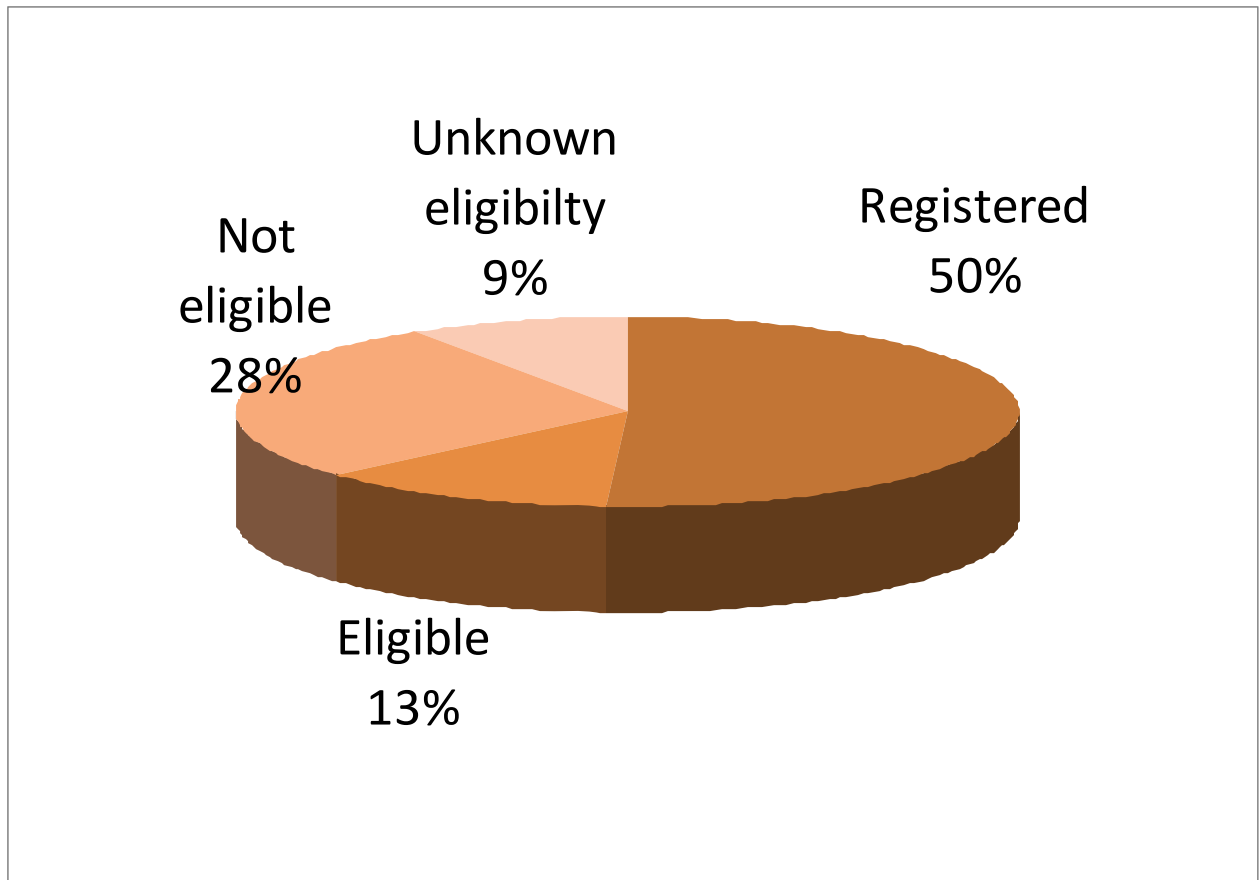


Chart 1.3: Most Common Residential Zip Codes

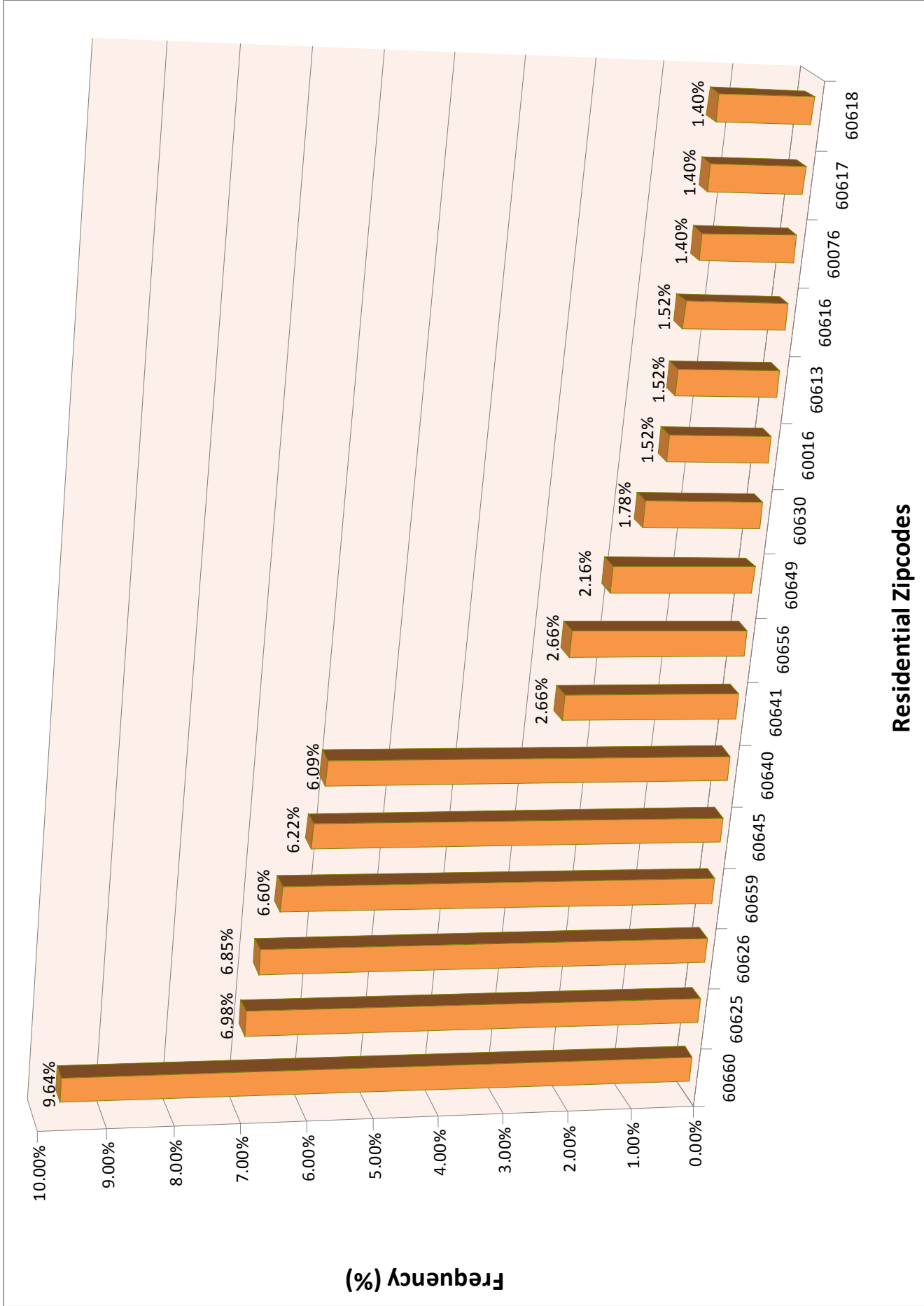


Chart 2.1: Driver's Race or Region of Origin and Hostile Racial Comments

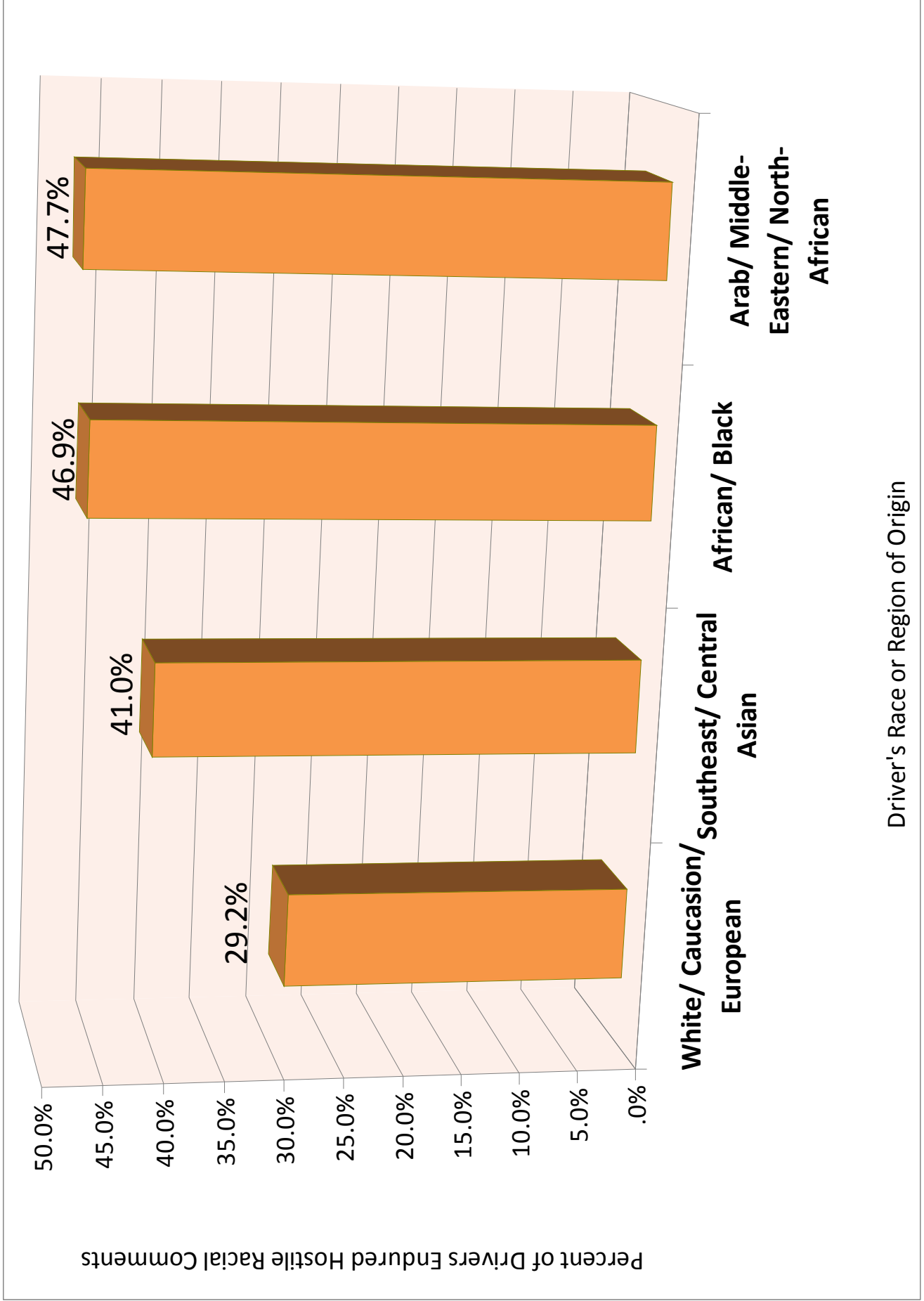
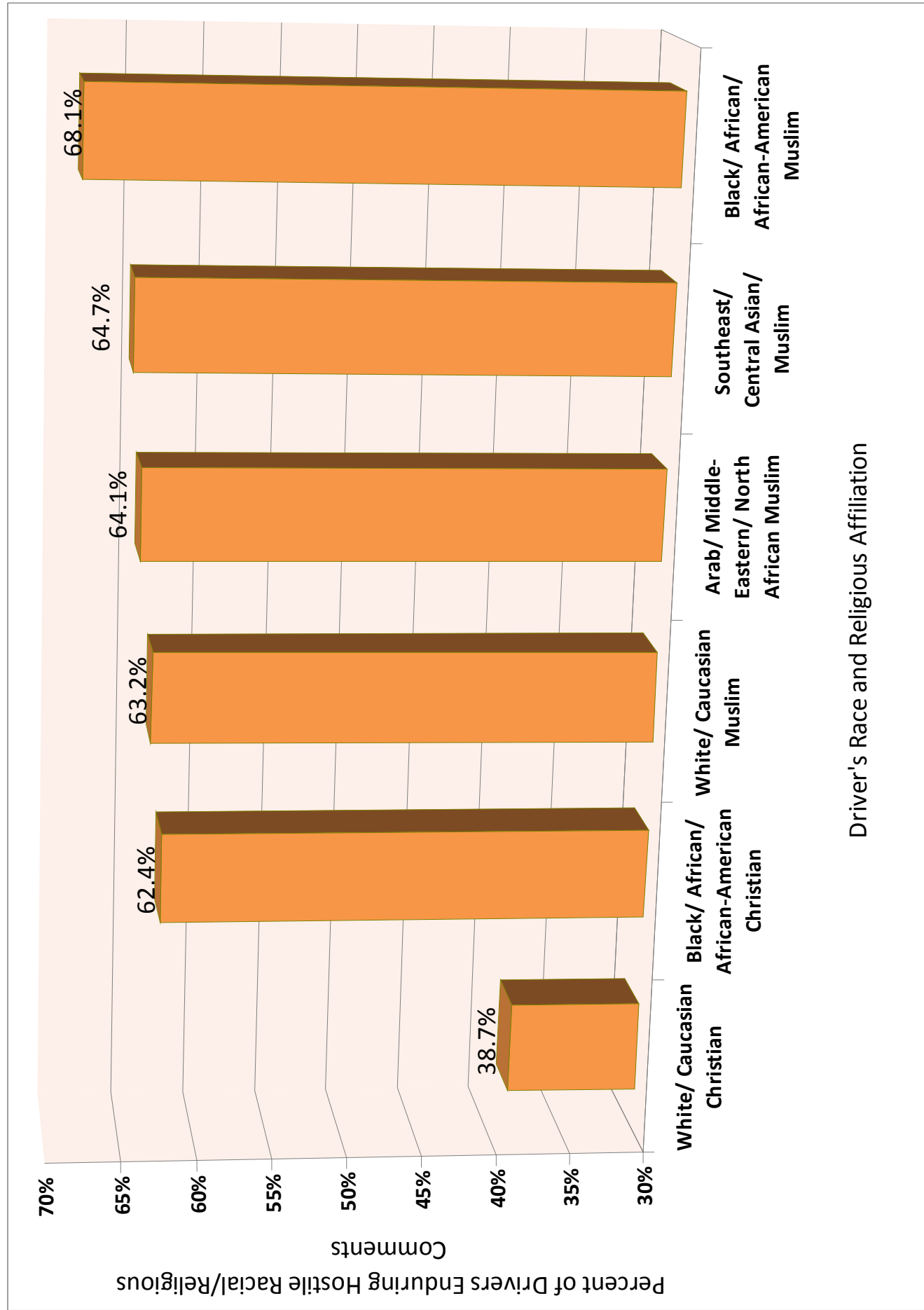


Chart 2.2: Driver's Race and Religious Affiliation and Hostile Racial Comments



Driver's Race and Religious Affiliation

Chart 2.3: Driver's Race or Region of Origin and Physical Attacks

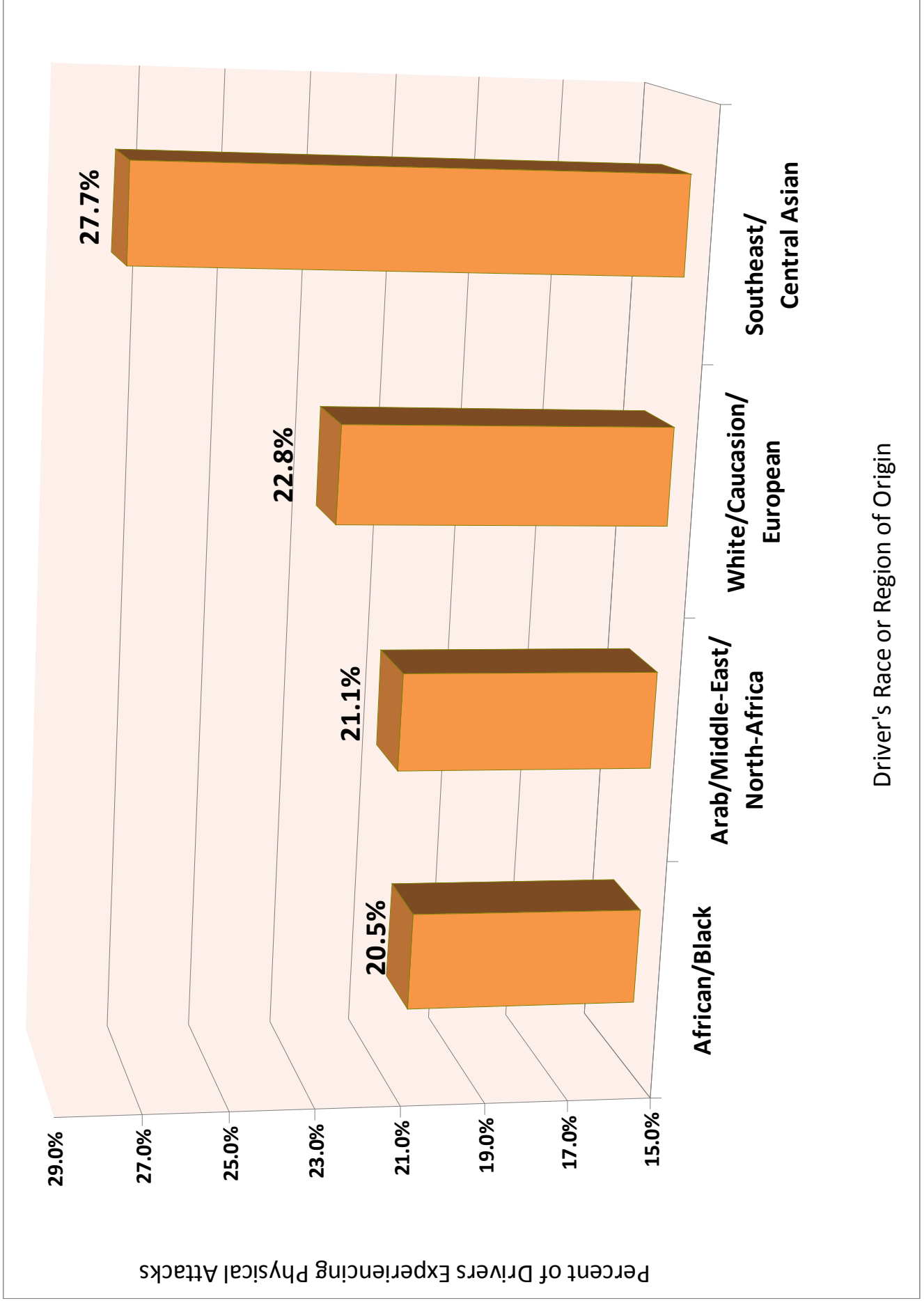


Chart 2.4: Number of Drivers Attacked Inside the Taxicab

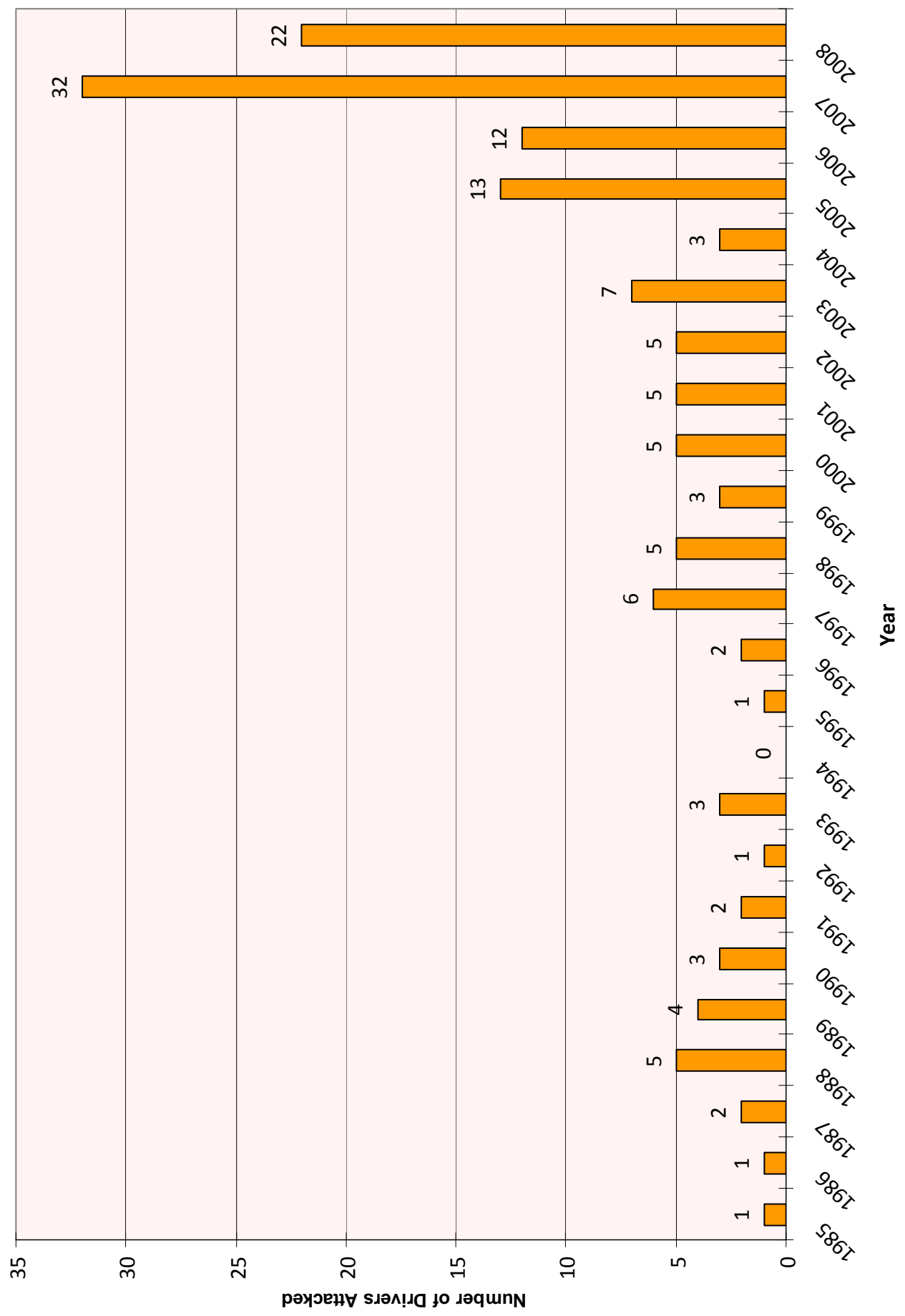


Chart 2.5: Types of Weapons Used in Physical Attacks Inside the Taxicab

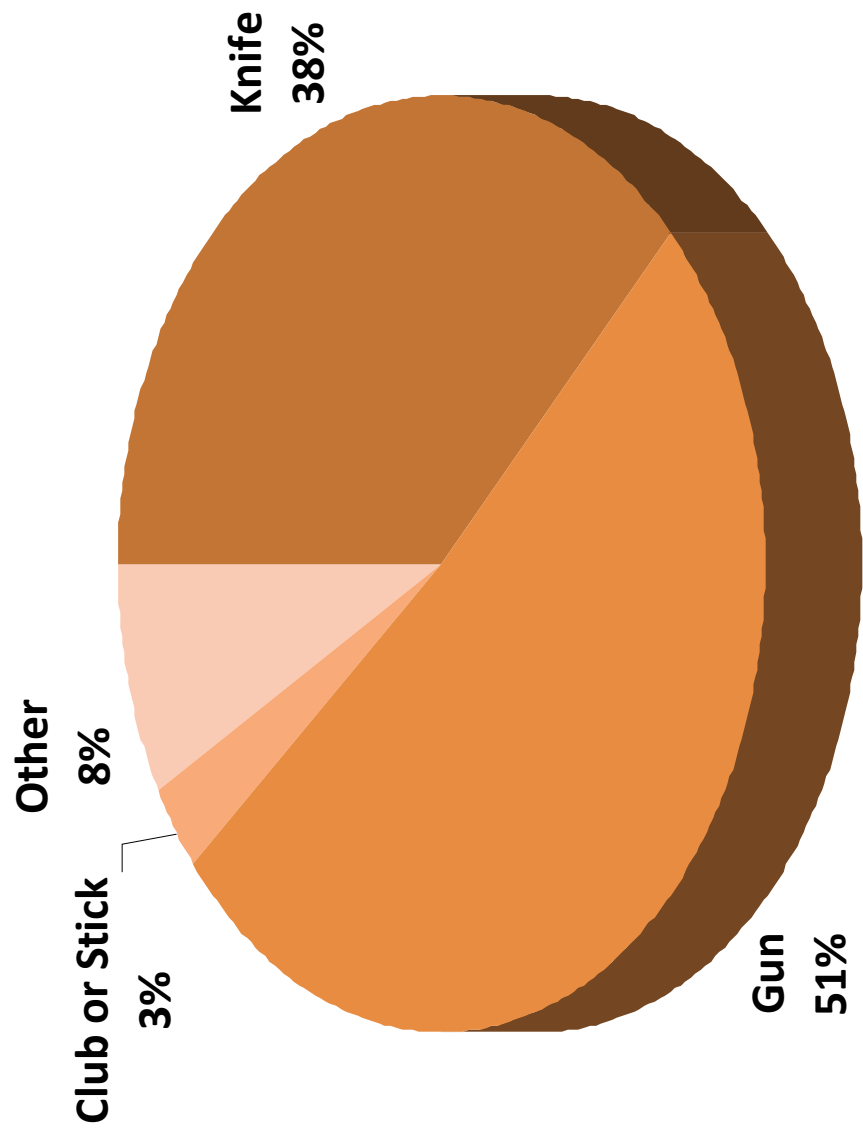
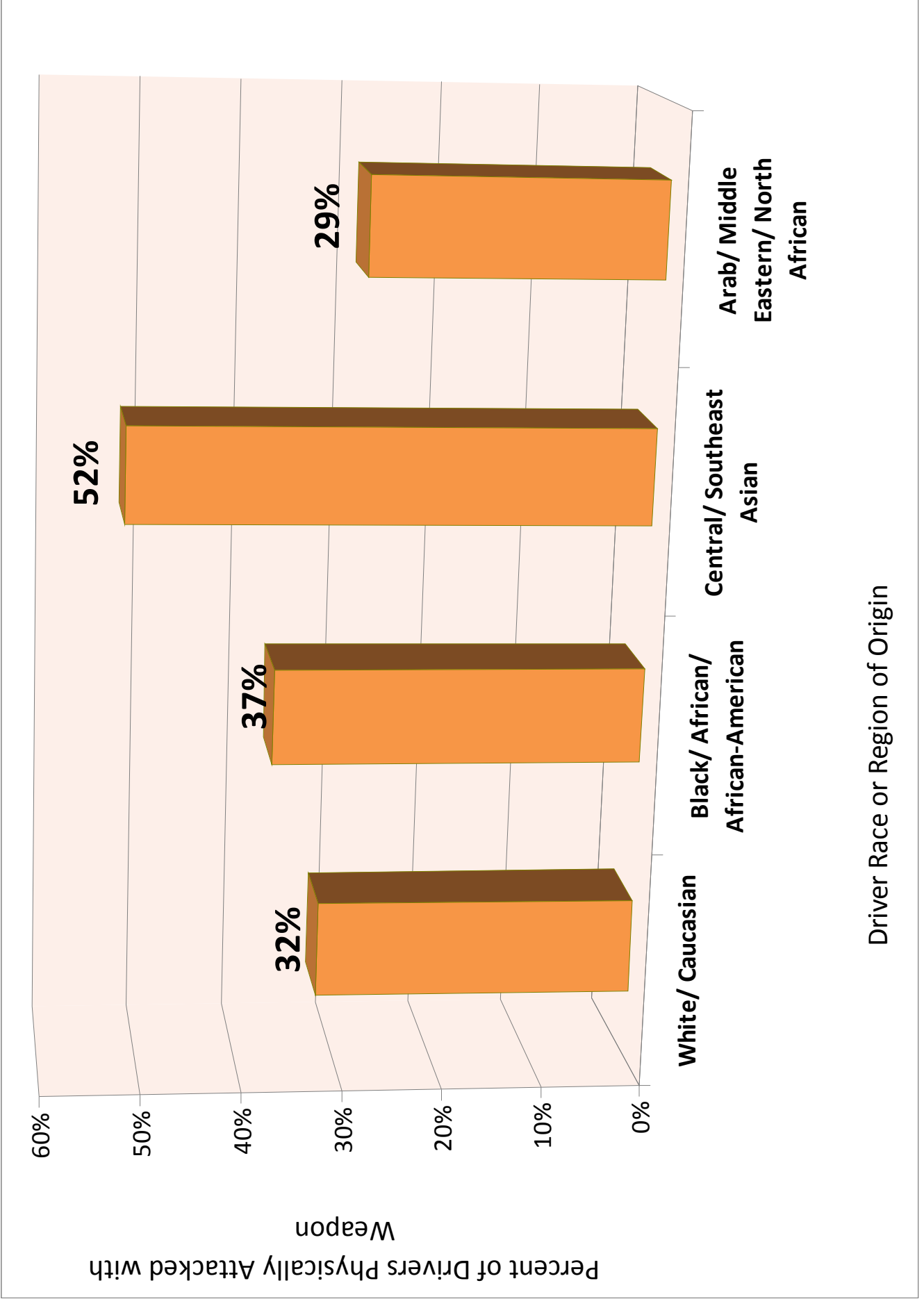


Chart 2.6: Driver's Race or Region of Origin and Physically Attacked with Weapon



Driver Race or Region of Origin

Chart 2.7: Driver's Residential Region and Number of Blocks Walked Home from Parked Taxicab

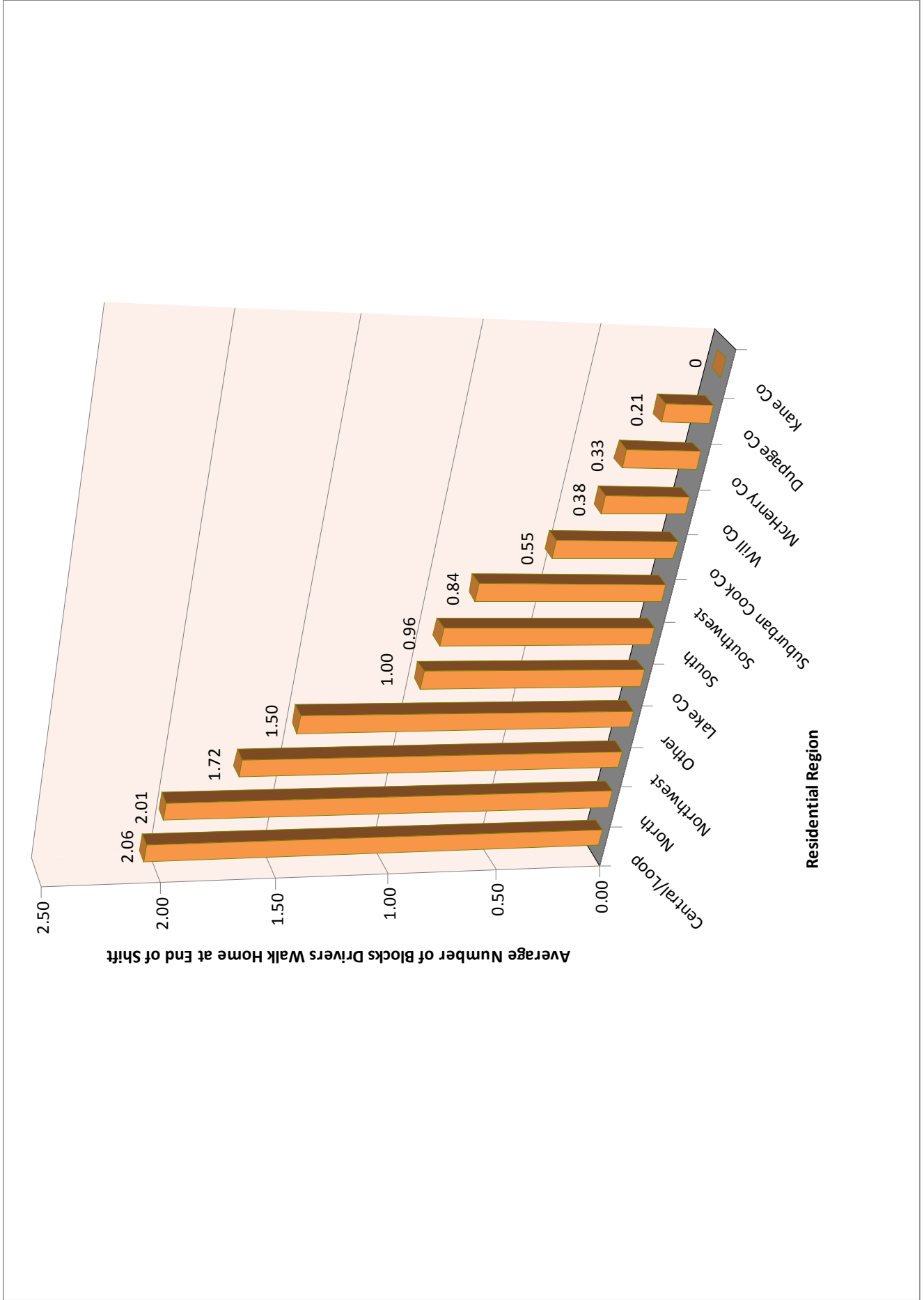


Chart 2.8: Driver's Residential Zip Code and number of Physical Attacks While Walking Home

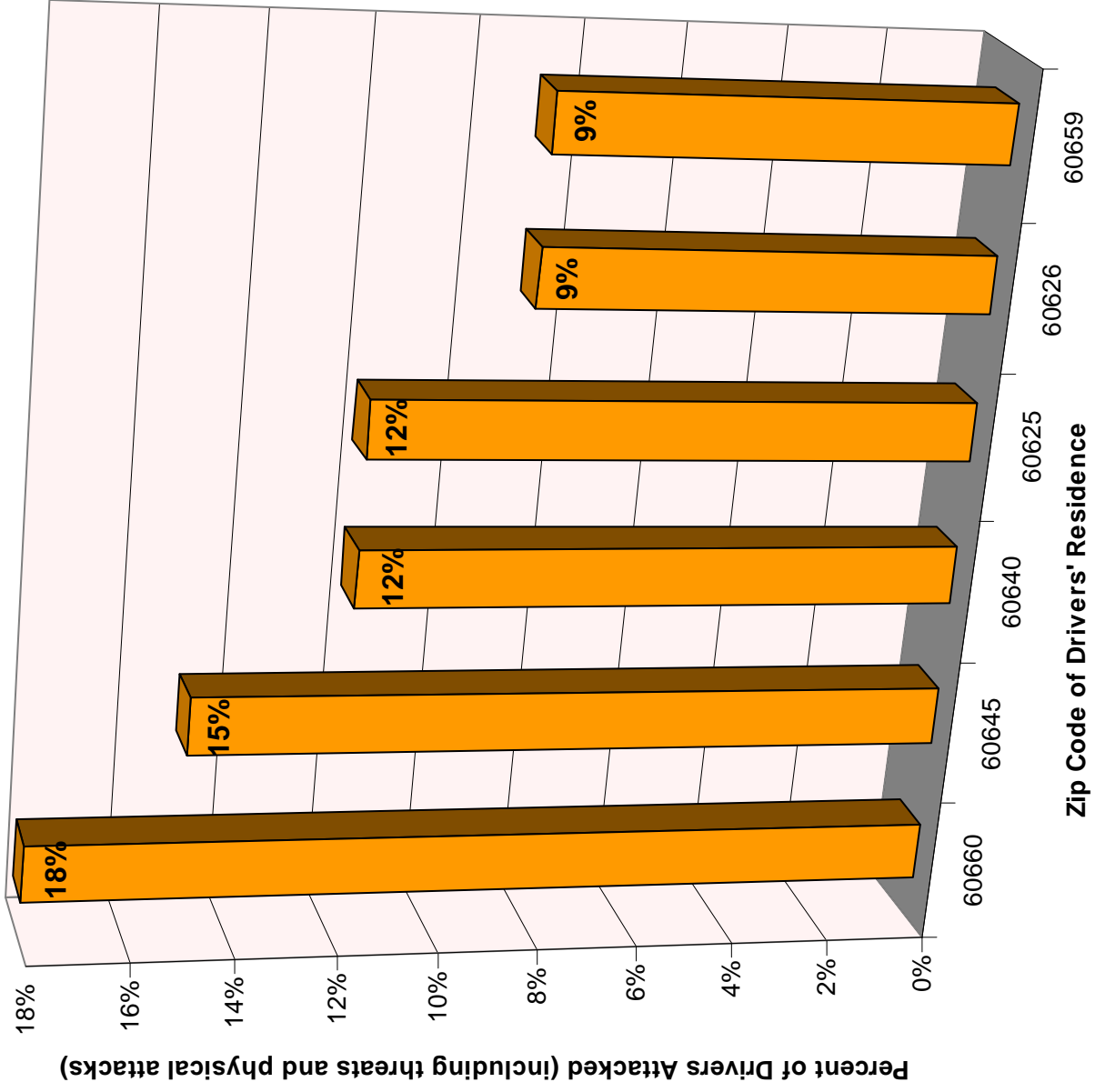
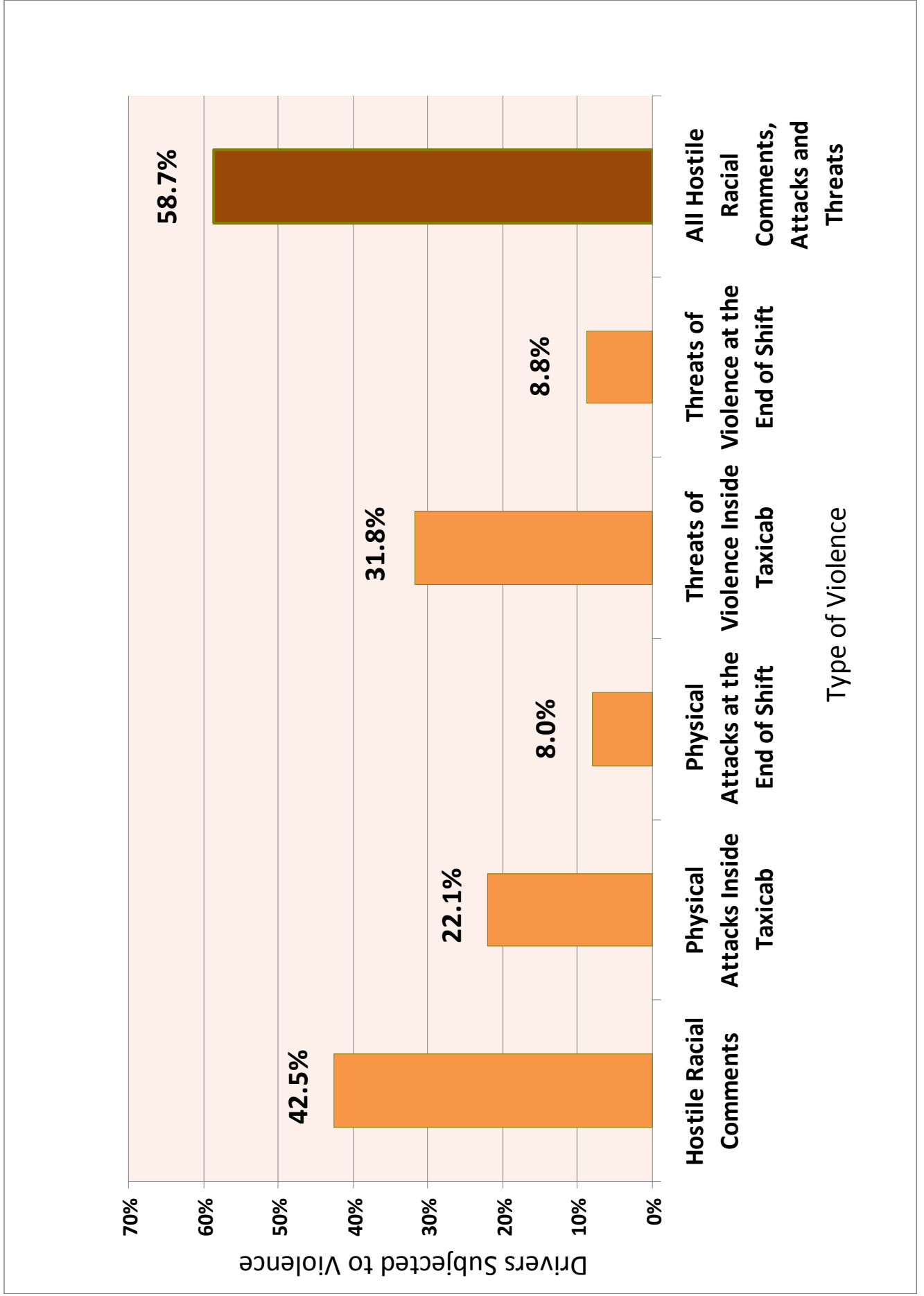


Chart 2.9: Overall Drivers Subjected to Violence





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