



OPINION
RESEARCH
& STRATEGY

SFMTA

Muni Rider Safety and Harassment Research

Preliminary Findings
December 2024

SFMTA's Safety Equity Initiative and Data Collection

There is zero-tolerance for harassment and assault on Muni

In 2022, the SFMTA launched the [Safety Equity Initiative](#) to reduce and prevent harassment on Muni, introducing mechanisms to report harassment directly to the agency for the first time.

In 2023, the Initiative partnered with UCLA's Institute of Transportation Studies to conduct a comprehensive, longitudinal rider safety survey measuring experiences and perceptions of personal security on Muni or at Muni stops.

In 2024, the SFMTA partnered with U.C. Berkeley's Berkeley Innovation, a human-centered design consultancy, to improve the user experience and remove barriers to reporting harassment. The team conducted rider surveys and interviews, which we're incorporating into the data for the Safety Equity Initiative. We expect to implement recommendations in 2025.

Data from harassment reports and our 2023 survey have helped the SFMTA identify and prioritize improvements that can reduce rider harassment, outlined in the [Safety Equity Action Plan](#).

Data collection continues with our 2024/2025 Muni Rider Safety and Harassment Research to build an ongoing understanding of rider safety and harassment. This report includes an initial snapshot of what we are hearing.

Muni Rider Safety and Harassment Survey

The Muni Rider Safety and Harassment Survey collects quantitative and qualitative data in two phases.

To comply with SB434's reporting requirements, this report summarizes data findings through the end of 2024.

The report will be updated with the data from Phase 2 by February 2025.

Phase 1

- November through December 2024
- Primarily online surveys
- Two focus groups

Phase 2

- December 2024 through January 2025
- Online and paper surveys
- Four focus groups



Phase 1: Survey Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of the survey was to understand customers' experiences and perceptions of personal safety on Muni and build on the SFMTA's existing data to inform and prioritize improvements to reduce harassment.

606 multilingual rider intercept interviews were conducted from November 20 through December 10, 2024. **These surveys will continue through the end of January 2025 with a goal of 2,000 total surveys. Additional findings will be added to this report.*

The primary data collection method was multilingual online surveys.

- Ambassadors rode multiple Muni lines collecting responses from riders in an online survey
- Community-based organizations promoted the online survey among their community members
- Surveys were available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Filipino

Two focus groups with a total of 22 people were held – one in Spanish and one Cantonese, facilitated by community-based organizations serving each community respectively.

Phase 1: Rider Survey Highlights



Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Ridership Habits

54% of respondents ride Muni every day, with high levels of frequent ridership across multiple demographic indicators including car ownership.

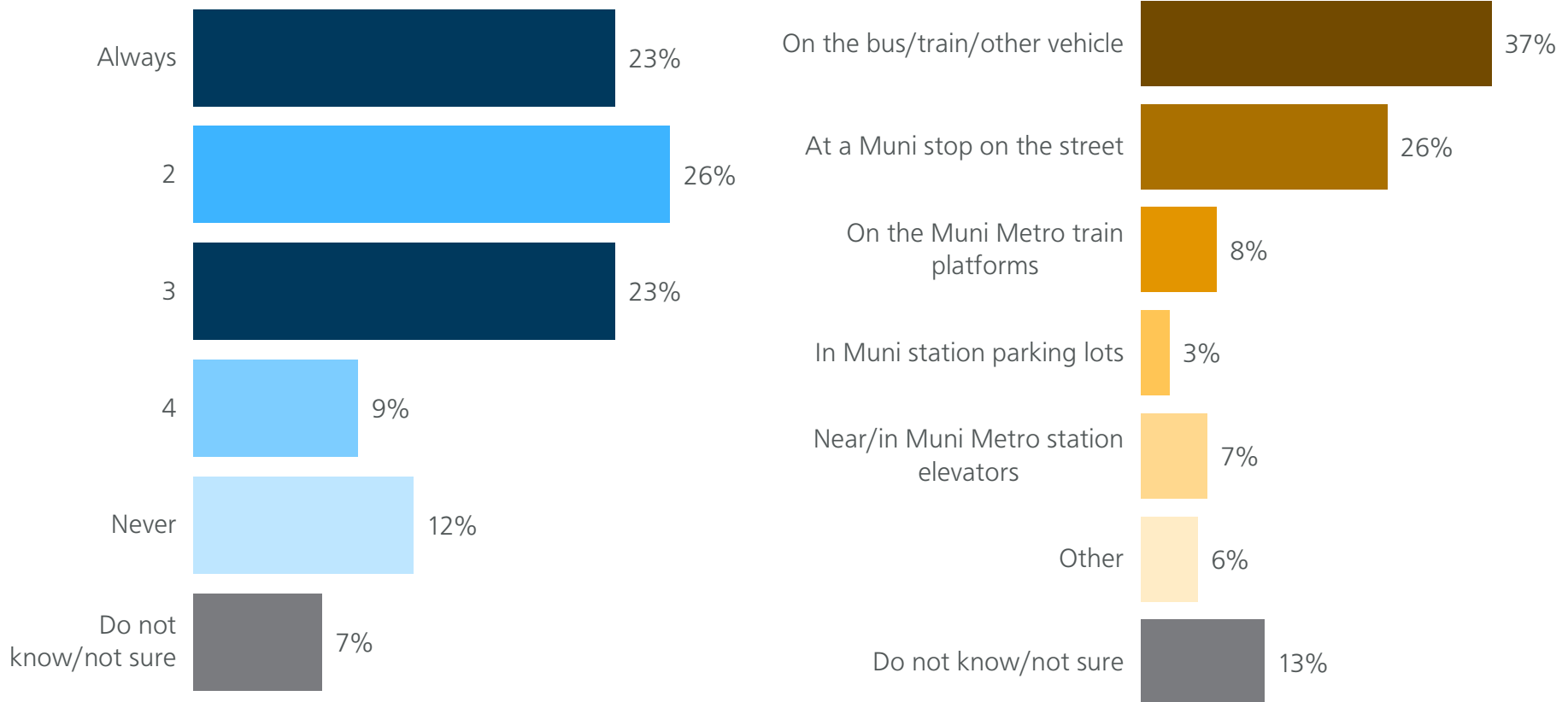
Demographic Group	Weekly or More
Gender	
Men	87%
Women	87%
Other	89%
Disability	
Yes	88%
No	86%
Car Ownership	
Yes	84%
No	89%

Demographic Group	Weekly or More
All Respondents	87%
Age	
<18	93%
18-24	91%
25-34	84%
35-44	87%
45-54	87%
55-64	86%
65+	90%

Demographic Group	Weekly or More
Race/Ethnicity	
Asians/Pacific Islanders	87%
African Americans	90%
Latinos	91%
Whites	82%
All Respondents of Color	89%
Native Language	
English	87%
Chinese	89%
Spanish	90%
All Non-English	88%

Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Perceptions of Safety on Muni

About 49% of respondents feel safe on Muni always or almost always. However, when respondents feel unsafe it is most often on a Muni vehicle.



Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Perceptions of Safety on Muni

Those more likely to feel unsafe are people of color, non-English speakers, people with disabilities, women and nonbinary genders, youth under 18 and people 35-44.

**For this set of data, a high score means a more likely to feel unsafe because 1 = always and 5 = never.*

Demographic	Score
Race/Ethnicity	
Asians/Pacific Islanders	2.8
African Americans	2.5
Latinos	2.6
Whites	2.3
All Respondents of Color	2.7
Native Language	
English	2.4
Chinese	2.8
Spanish	2.7
All Non-English	2.7

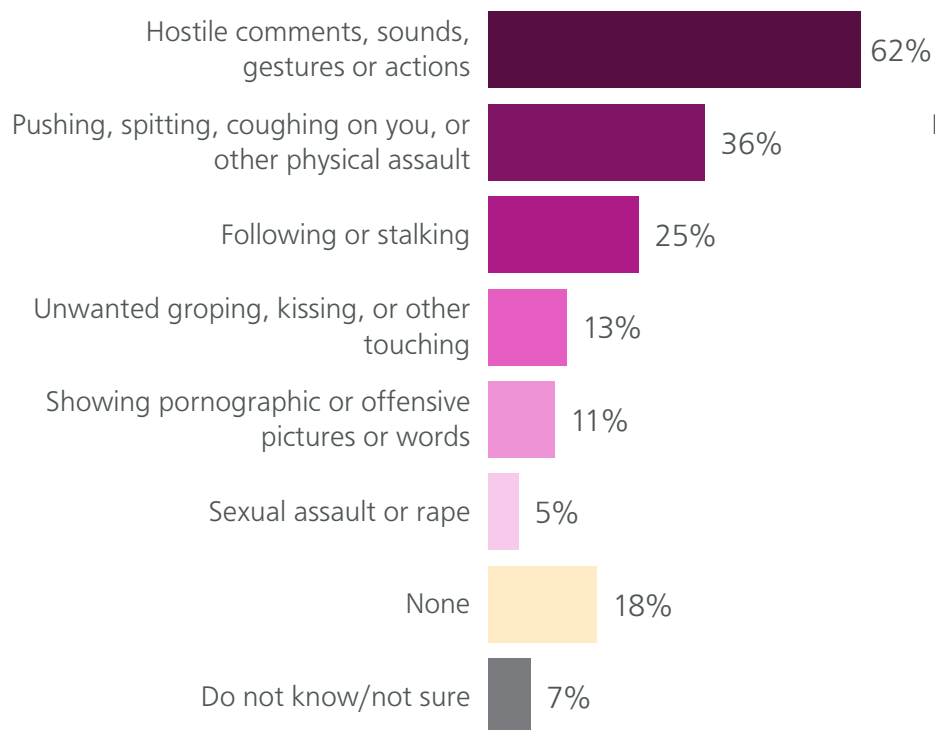
Demographic	Score
Gender	
Men	2.3
Women	2.7
Other	2.8

Demographic	Score
Age	
<18	2.8
18-24	2.5
25-34	2.5
35-44	2.8
45-54	2.6
55-64	2.5
65+	2.3
Disability	
Yes	2.8
No	2.5

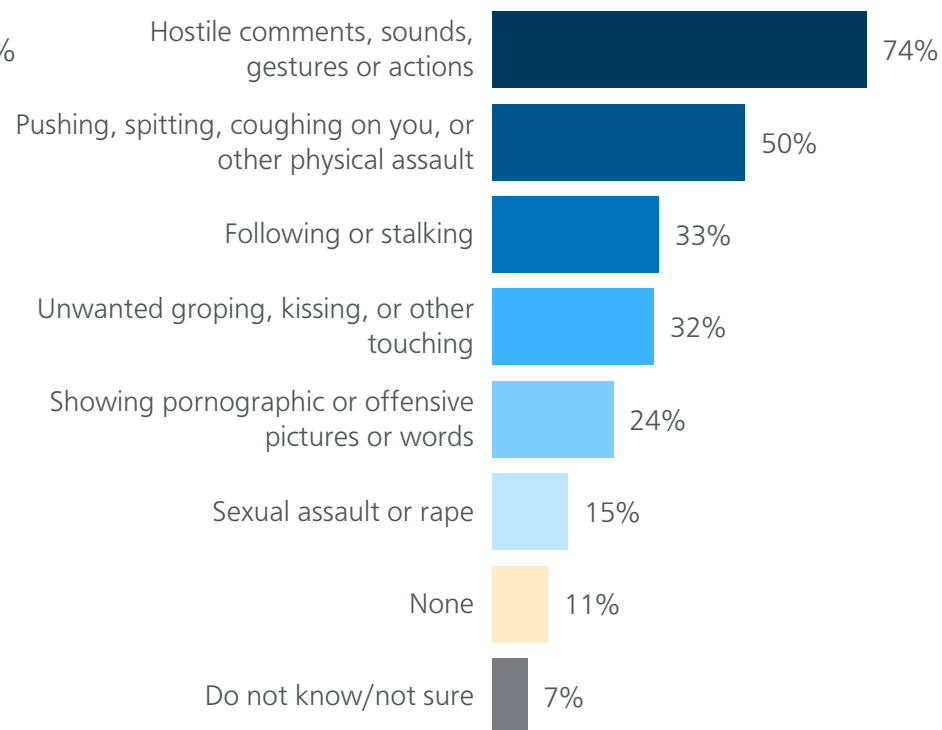
Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Experiences of Harassment on Muni

Many respondents chose not to provide information about harassment they experienced or saw in Muni. Of those who did, **the majority experienced or saw hostile comments, gestures or actions.**

Happened to Me



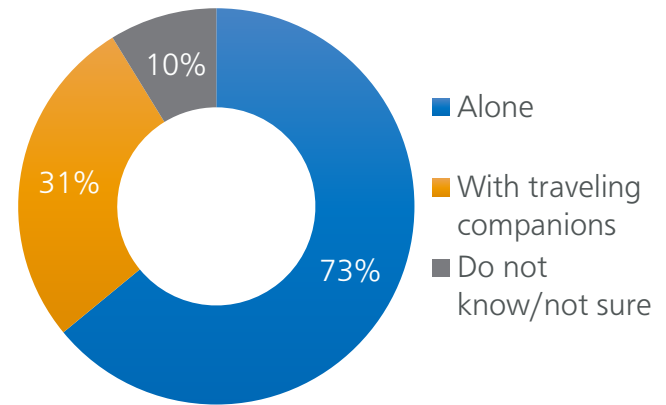
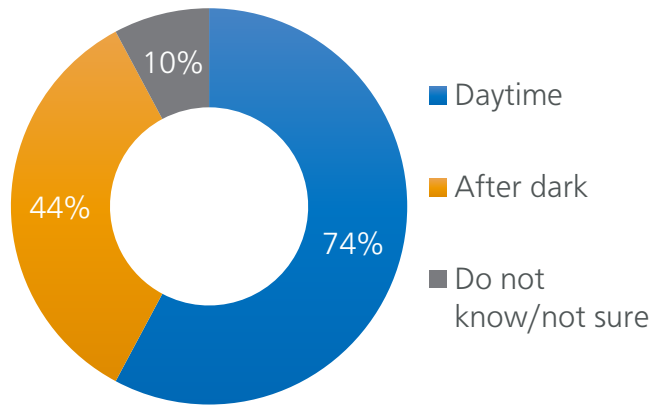
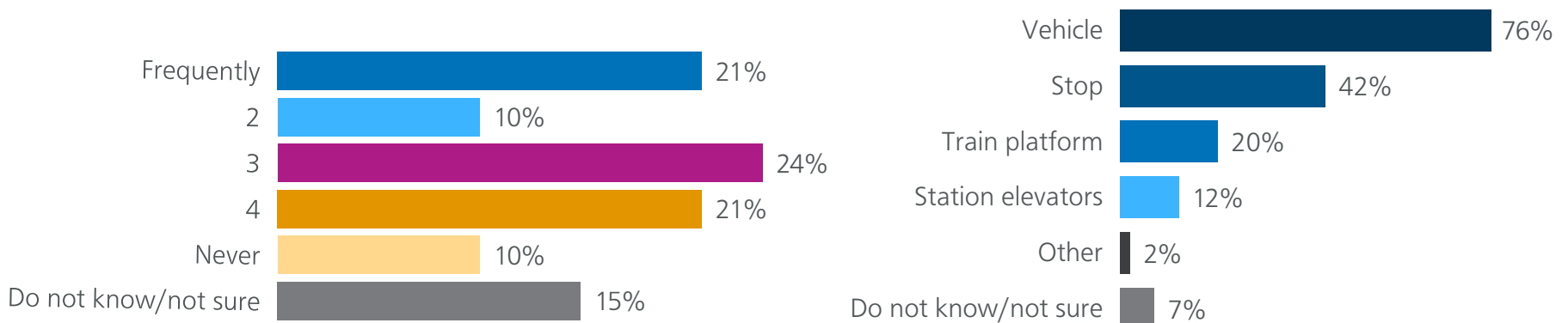
Saw it Happen to Others



(Note: Not all results will sum to 100% due to rounding)

Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Experiences of Harassment on Muni

Respondents were evenly split on how often they experienced or saw harassment on Muni. But a majority indicated that incidents occurred on Muni vehicles, during the day, while traveling alone.



Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Experiences of Harassment on Muni

Those who saw or experienced harassment more often were women, Latinos, Spanish speakers and people with disabilities.

**For this set of data, a low score means higher frequency or harassment because 1 = frequent and 5 = never.*

Demographic	Score
Race/Ethnicity	
Asians/Pacific Islanders	2.9
African Americans	2.8
Latinos	2.7
Whites	3.1
All Respondents of Color	2.8
Native Language	
English	3.0
Chinese	2.8
Spanish	2.6
All Non-English	2.8

Demographic	Score
Gender	
Men	3.0
Women	2.8
Other	3.2

Demographic	Score
Age	
<18	3.3
18-24	3.1
25-34	2.7
35-44	2.8
45-54	2.6
55-64	2.9
65+	3.3
Disability	
Yes	2.6
No	3.0

Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Experiences of Harassment on Muni

Nonbinary genders and people with disabilities experienced harassment more often.

Type of Harassment	All Resp.	Happened to Me				
		Gender			Disability	
		Men	Women	Nonbinary	Yes	No
Hostile comments, sounds, gestures or actions	62%	51%	66%	86%	43%	37%
Pushing, spitting, coughing on you, or other physical assault	36%	32%	36%	57%	25%	21%
Following or stalking	25%	17%	27%	50%	20%	14%
Unwanted groping, kissing, or other touching	13%	9%	15%	36%	7%	8%
Showing pornographic or offensive pictures or words	11%	8%	12%	29%	11%	5%
Sexual assault or rape	5%	3%	4%	21%	5%	2%
None	18%	25%	15%	14%	13%	10%
Do not know/not sure	7%	9%	6%	0%	6%	4%

(Note: Not all results will sum to 100% due to rounding)

Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Experiences of Harassment on Muni

Latinos and Spanish speakers experienced harassment more often.

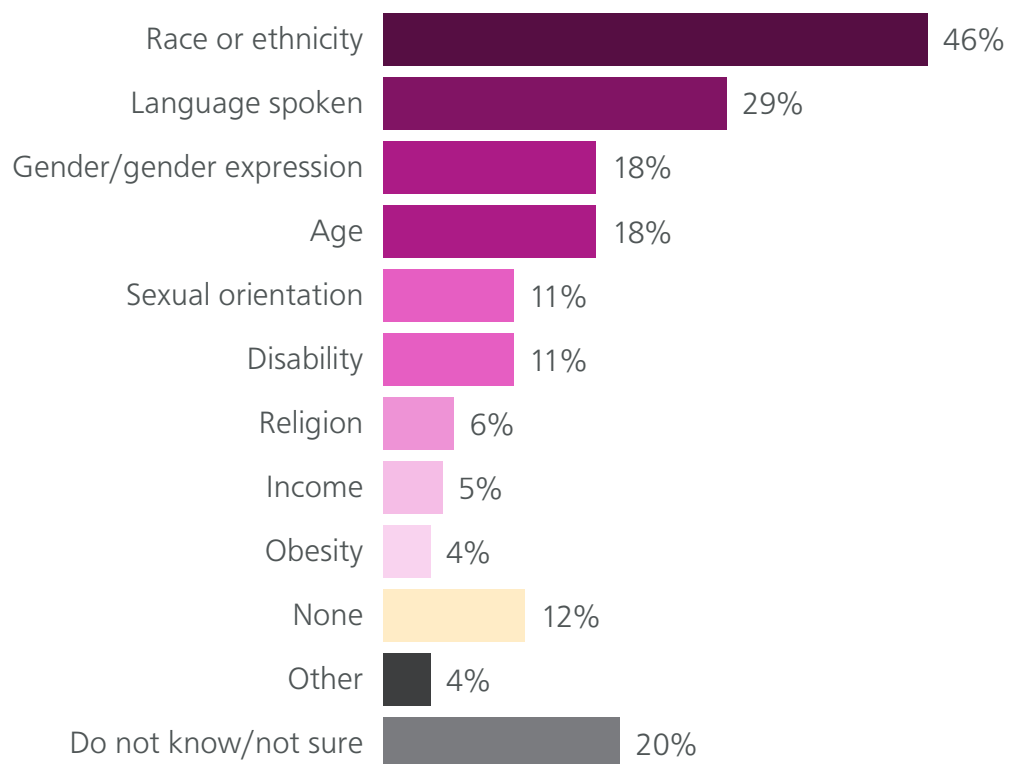
Type of Harassment	All Resp.	Happened to Me								
		Race/Ethnicity					Primary Language			
		Asian/ Pacific Islander	African American	Latino	White	All Resp. of Color	English	Chinese	Spanish	All Non- English
Hostile comments, sounds, gestures or actions	62%	59%	43%	73%	64%	61%	60%	59%	71%	61%
Pushing, spitting, coughing on you, or other physical assault	36%	34%	26%	47%	33%	37%	35%	32%	52%	38%
Following or stalking	25%	25%	9%	33%	18%	26%	20%	22%	37%	27%
Unwanted groping, kissing, or other touching	13%	11%	9%	18%	13%	13%	11%	13%	19%	14%
Showing pornographic or offensive pictures or words	11%	9%	9%	22%	11%	13%	10%	8%	19%	12%
Sexual assault or rape	5%	2%	0%	8%	5%	4%	3%	2%	10%	6%
None	18%	16%	26%	15%	22%	17%	20%	18%	14%	16%
Do not know/not sure	7%	6%	9%	11%	2%	8%	5%	8%	14%	9%

(Note: Not all results will sum to 100% due to rounding)

Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Experiences of Harassment on Muni

Those who saw or experienced harassment felt that race, ethnicity or language may have been prevalent contributing factors.

**Note: This data is based on respondents' perceptions of incidents they saw or experienced. The SFMTA does not have data to confirm motive.*



Race/ethnicity: Asian/Pacific Islanders (API) and Chinese speakers most felt race or ethnicity were factors. Both women and men more often felt race, ethnicity or language were factors, as did people age 35-54.

Language: Over 30% of non-English speakers felt language was a factor, compared to 15% of English speakers. API and Chinese speakers most felt language was a factor. People with disabilities felt language was a factor almost twice more than people without disabilities.

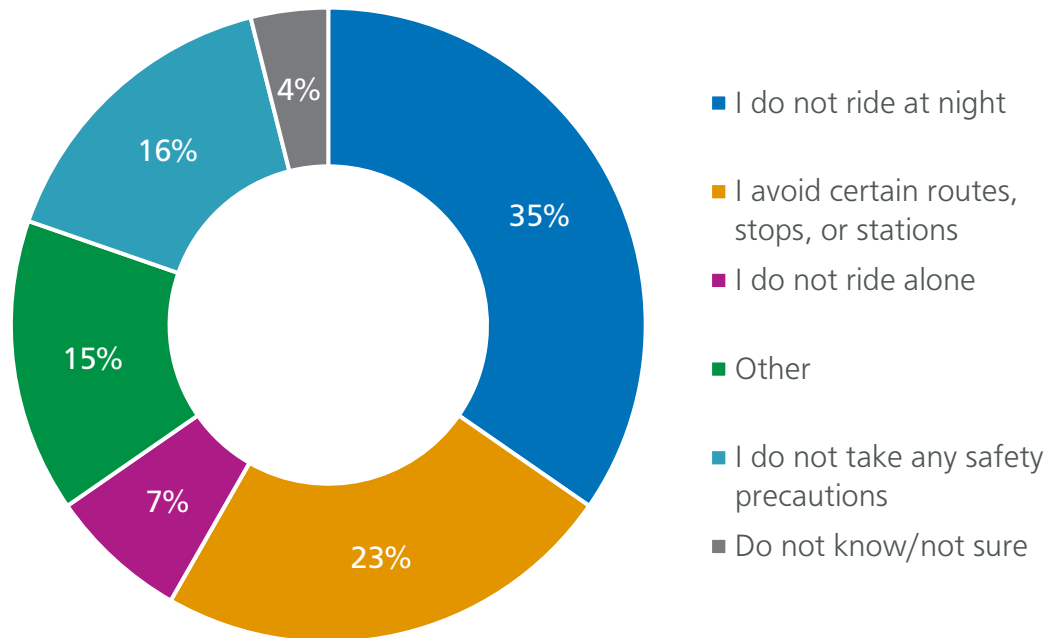
Gender: 50% of nonbinary genders felt gender was a factor compared to 19% of women and 15% of men. Whites, Latinos, English and Spanish speakers more likely felt gender was a factor (20-30%), as did people age 18-34 (up to 36%)

Age: People age 55+, Whites, people with disabilities and English speakers more often felt age was a factor.

Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Rider Precautions

74% of women take safety precautions, in general, compared to 47% of men. Of those, **53% of women do not ride at night**, compared to 30% of men.

People of color were more likely not to ride at night compared to white people. Of those, **Black/African Americans were most like not to ride at night**.



Black/African Americans were more likely to avoid certain routes, stops or stations.

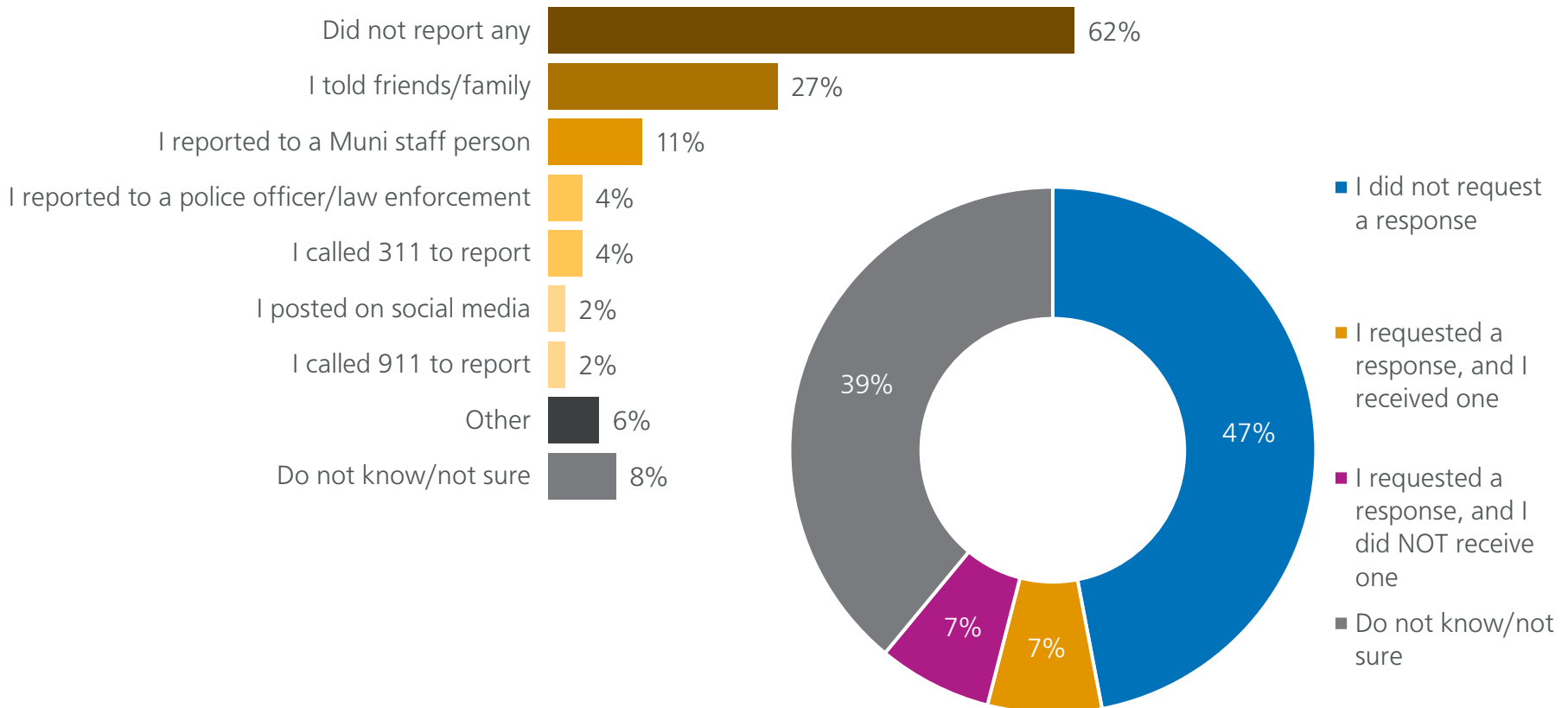
Asian/Pacific Islanders were more likely to not ride alone.

Whites were more likely to take no precautions or “other” precautions.

Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Harassment Reporting

Latino and Spanish speaking respondents were least likely to report incidents.

Of those who did report an incident to Muni or 311, 50% did not request a response.



(Note: Not all results will sum to 100% due to rounding)

Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Harassment Reporting

Most often, those who did not file reports said they did not know how or they did not think their report would make a difference.

Women, Latinos, Spanish speakers and people without disabilities were more likely to not know how to file a report.

Men, White people, English speakers, and people without disabilities were more likely to think reporting would not make a difference.

White people, English speakers, people without disabilities and people across all gender identities were more likely to think the situation wasn't serious enough to report.



(Note: Not all results will sum to 100% due to rounding)

Phase 1 Survey Highlights: Key Takeaways

- A majority of riders say they feel safe most of the time on Muni, although women, Asian/Pacific Islanders and those living with a disability report feeling less safe than other demographic groups.
- Riders are most likely to feel unsafe on a vehicle and at a stop; the broad majority take safety precautions, particularly avoiding riding at night.
- The most common form of harassment was hostile comments and most say they have been more likely to see or experience these while on transit, during the daytime and when traveling alone.
- The broad majority did not report the incident for a wide variety of reasons, including not knowing how to do so and not feeling like it would make a difference.

Phase 1: Focus Group Highlights



Cautions on Interpreting Results from Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is inherently subjective and reflects the opinions, attitudes and experiences of the individual participants. These may suggest broader community sentiment but should be taken with caution.

Qualitative research does not directly measure the frequency by which opinions, attitudes and experiences may exist within the large population.

The results of these focus groups may be considered suggestive of the attitudes of Muni users in these populations, but they cannot be considered to represent the community's views with any kind of statistical precision – even on questions where their views are quantified.

However, they **provide helpful insights into language, core values, perceptions and the why community members may feel certain ways.**

Phase 1: Focus Group Approach and Composition

In December 2024, **two community focus groups, with 10-12 participants each**, were hosted with Muni users.

Participants were recruited through partnerships with community-based organizations that served Cantonese and Spanish populations in San Francisco, and **the focus groups were held entirely in Cantonese and Spanish, respectively.**

Community-based organizations were asked to recruit a diversity of genders, ages, abilities, incomes and education levels. Ultimately, focus group **participants were selected from the pool of community members who volunteered or expressed interest**, which may or may not have included a representative sample of the population.

Conversation topics covered **perceptions of safety on Muni and experiences with harassment on Muni or other SFMTA property** including parking lots and transit stops and stations.

Cantonese Focus Group Highlights

- All participants experienced or witnessed harassment, females experienced sexual harassment and many experienced racially targeted harassment after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Perceptions of safety and/or experiences of harassment depend on time of day
 - Daytime feels safer while evenings feels unsafe or less safe.
 - The T Third Muni Metro in Chinatown feels unsafe without staff present.
- To avoid harassment, participants sit near operators, pair up, or carry pepper spray
- Reporting harassment was challenging because of language barriers, or the rider's location on the bus.
 - Some participants didn't know how to report while some participants were aware that harassment can be reported by calling 311.
 - Most participants have not seen safety or reporting messaging
- Generally, staff intervention made participants feel safer while using Muni.

Spanish Focus Group Highlights

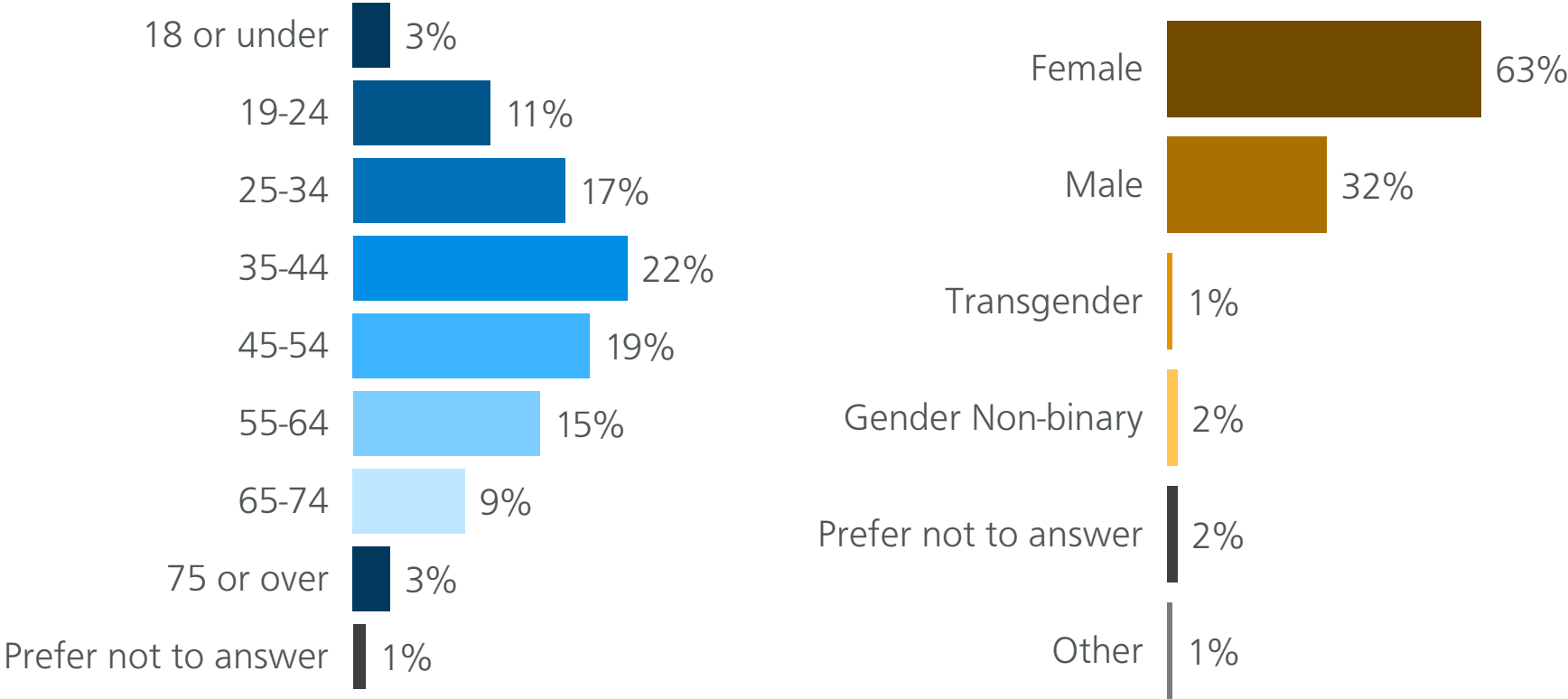
- Most participants feel safe occasionally while riding Muni.
 - Staff intervention can make some participants feel safer, while some believe nothing will make them feel safe.
 - Buses feel less safe when they are crowded or when there are other riders engaging in illegal activity.
- Participants avoid harassment by exiting the bus, avoiding eye contact or sitting near the front of the bus.
- If participants experienced or witnessed harassment, they did not report it
 - Participants largely have not heard of Muni safety messages or how to report harassment.
 - About half of the group are aware of how report harassment and the other half were not.

Phase 1 Survey Demographic Information



Phase 1 Survey Respondent Demographics

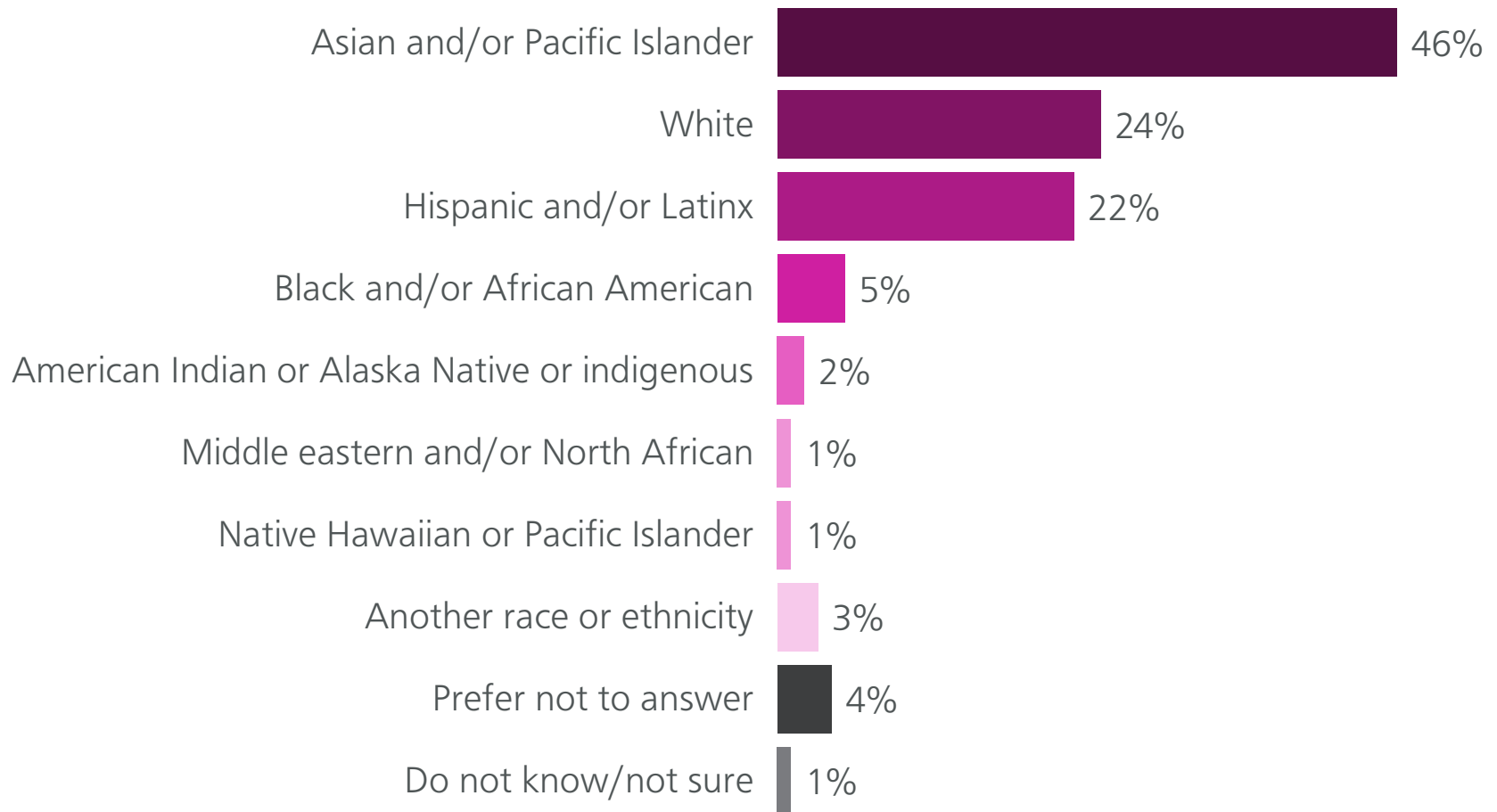
Age and Gender



(Note: Not all results will sum to 100% due to rounding)

Phase 1 Survey Respondent Demographics

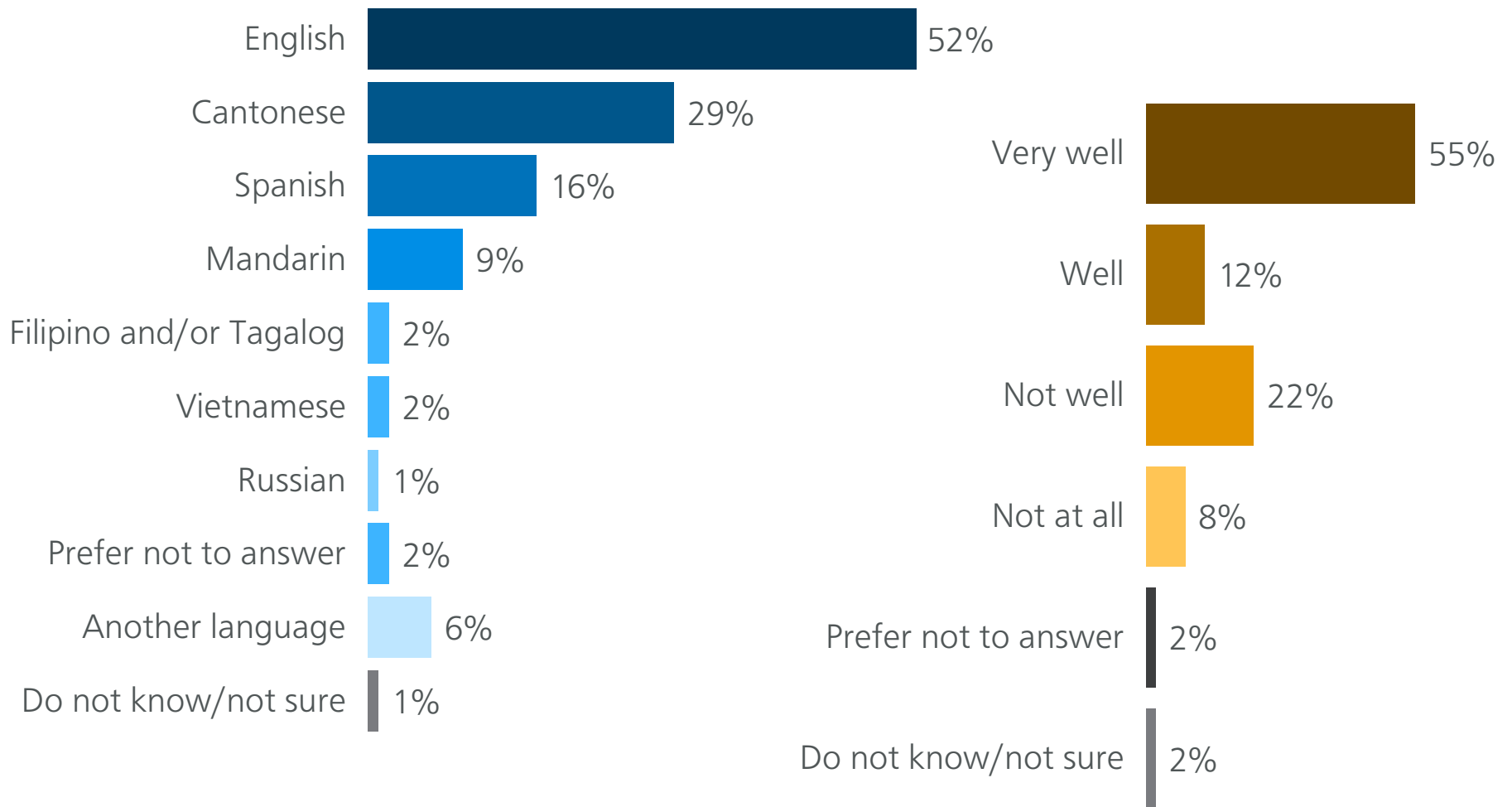
Race/Ethnicity



(Note: Not all results will sum to 100% due to rounding)

Phase 1 Survey Respondent Demographics

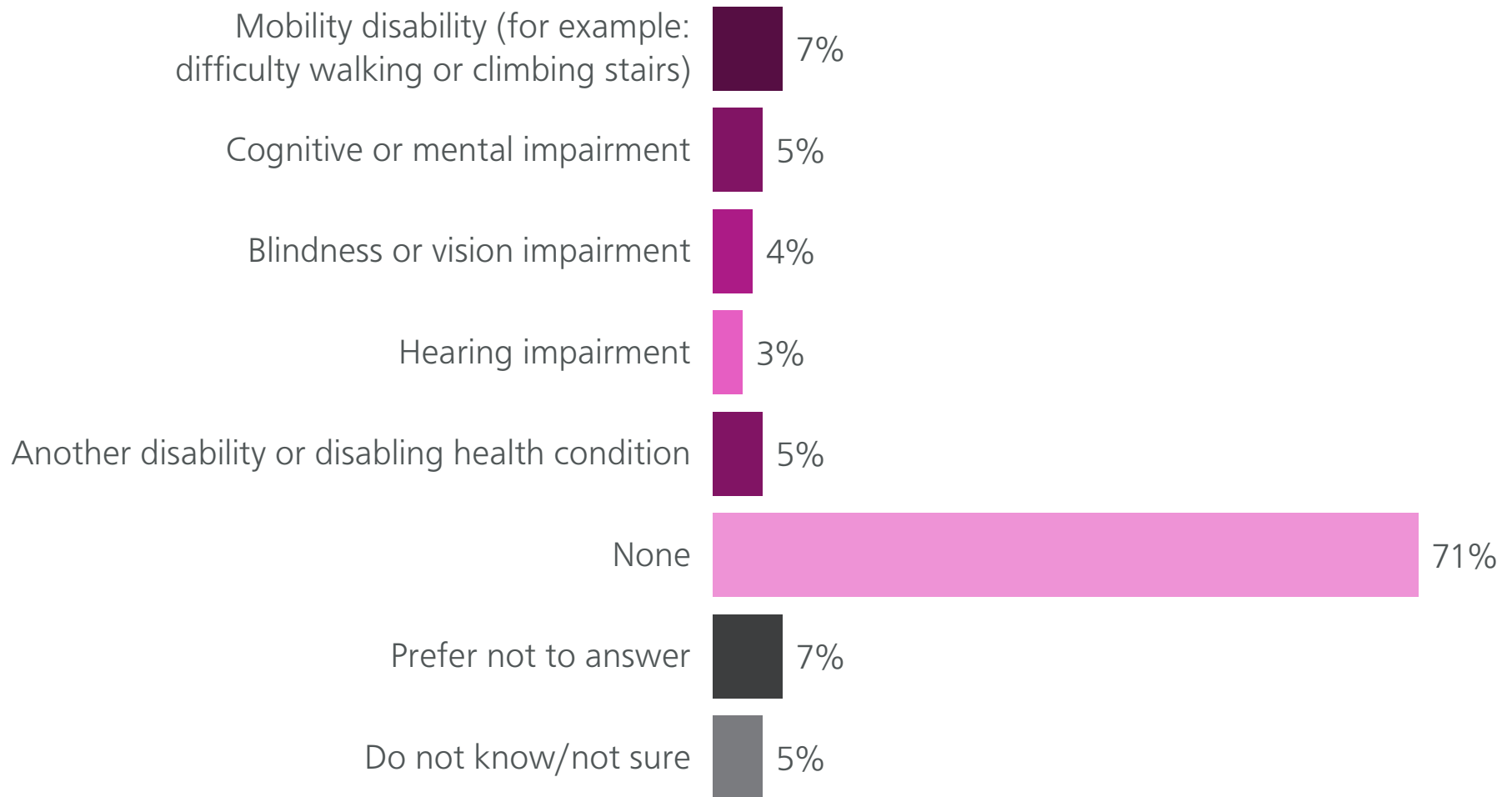
Native Language and English Proficiency



(Note: Not all results will sum to 100% due to rounding)

Phase 1 Survey Respondent Demographics

Disability Status

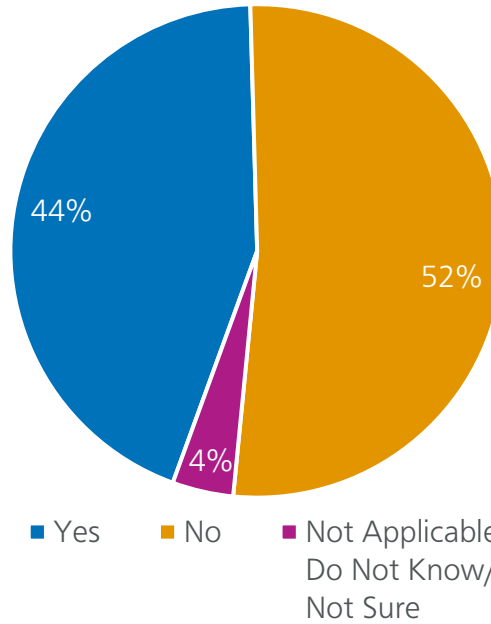


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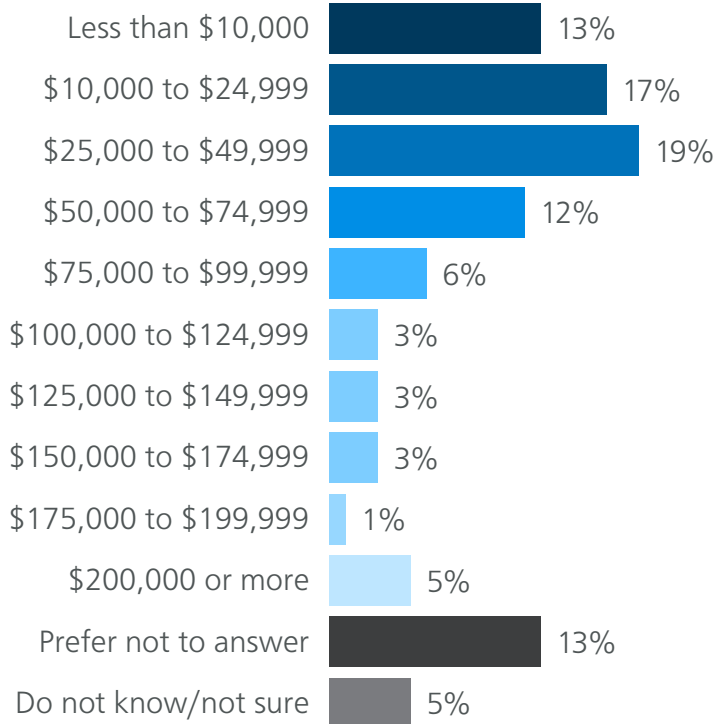
Phase 1 Survey Respondent Demographics

Car Ownership

**Those under age 45, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and those with incomes over \$50,000 were more likely to own a car.*



Household Income



Household Size

