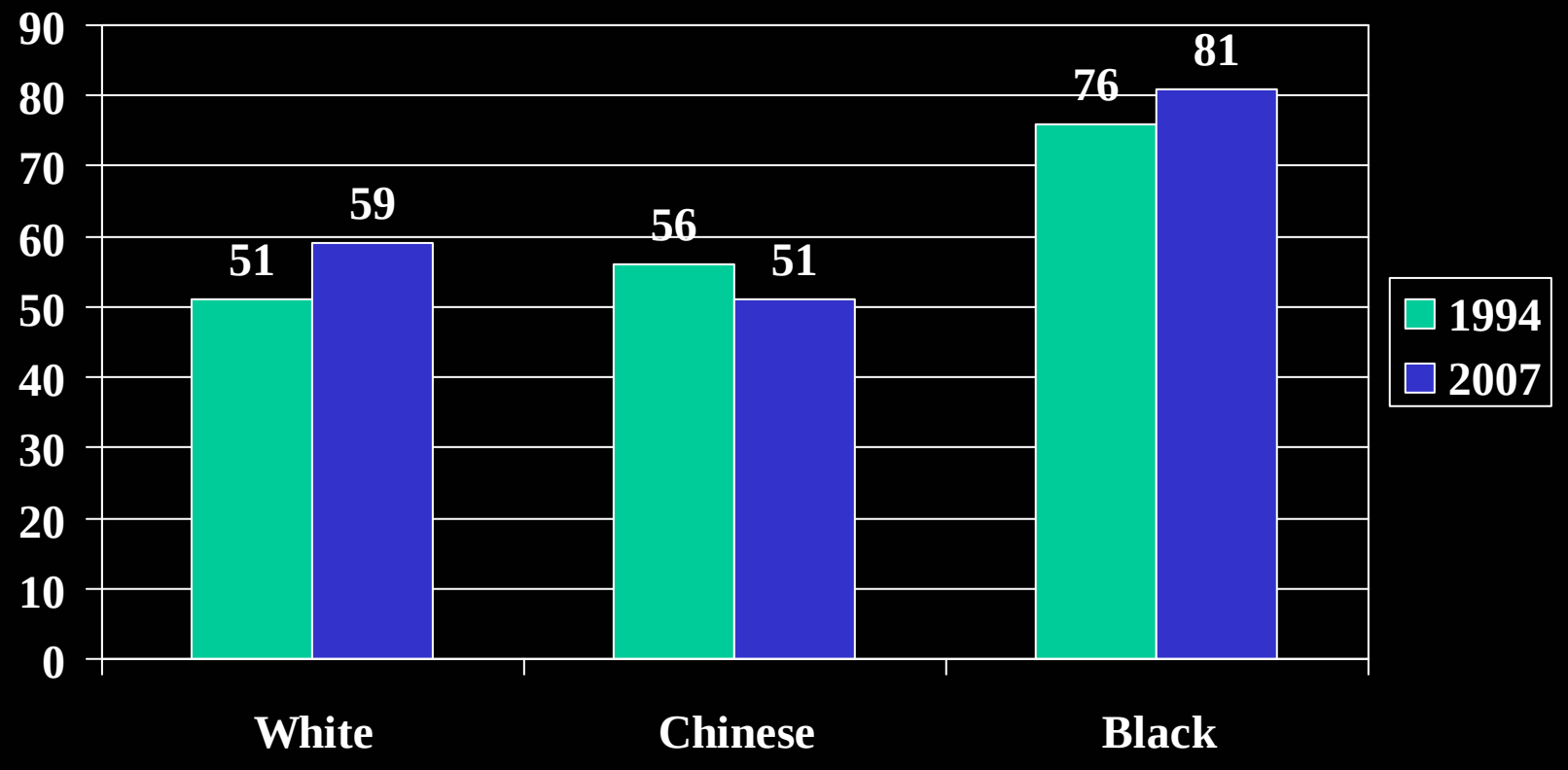
Racial Bias in Policing

Scot Wortley
Centre of Criminology
University of Toronto

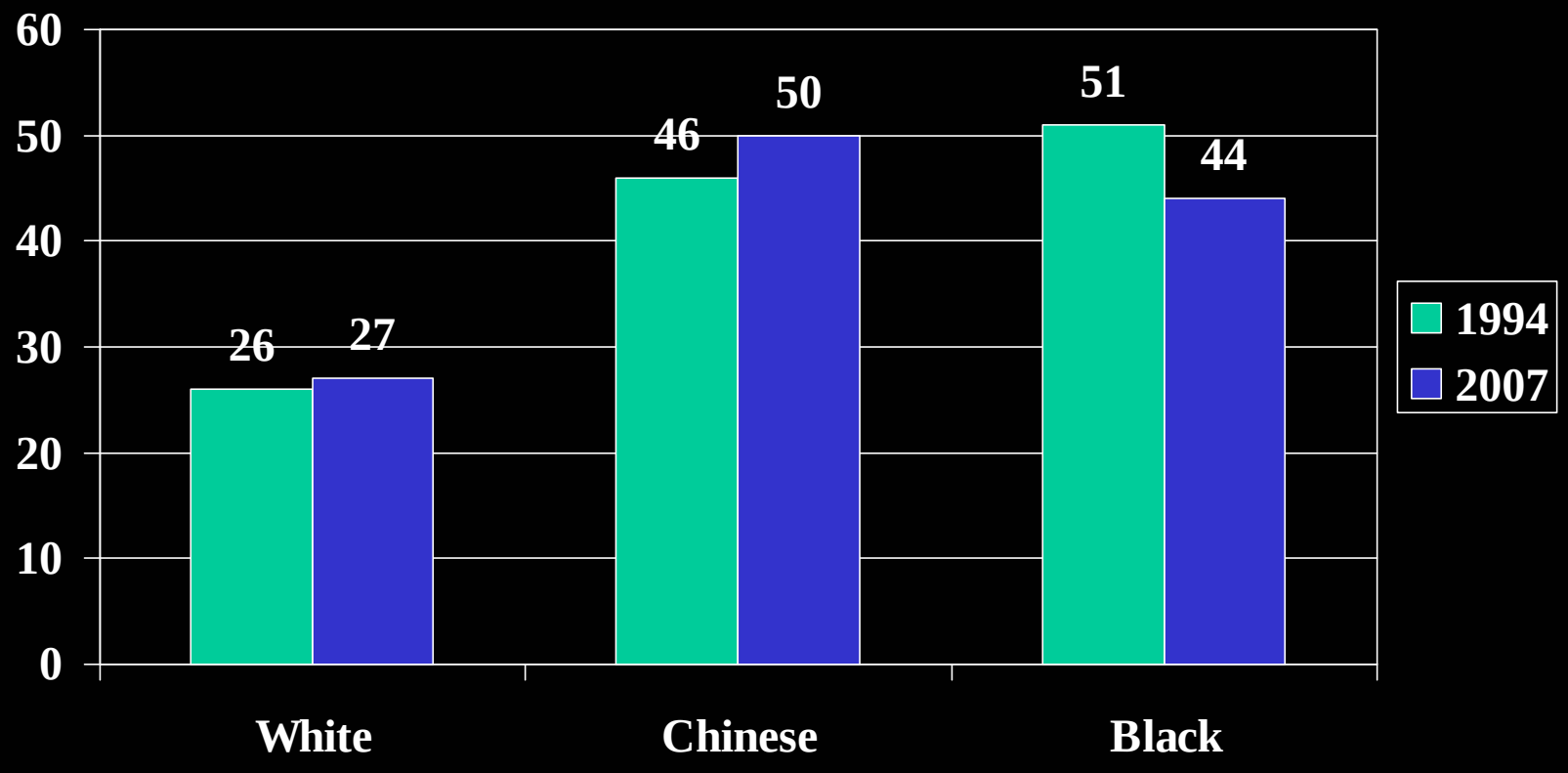
QUESTIONS

- To what extent does the general public perceive racial bias in policing?
- Do some racial groups perceive more racial bias in policing than others?
- Have perceptions of police racism increased or decreased over the past 20 years?

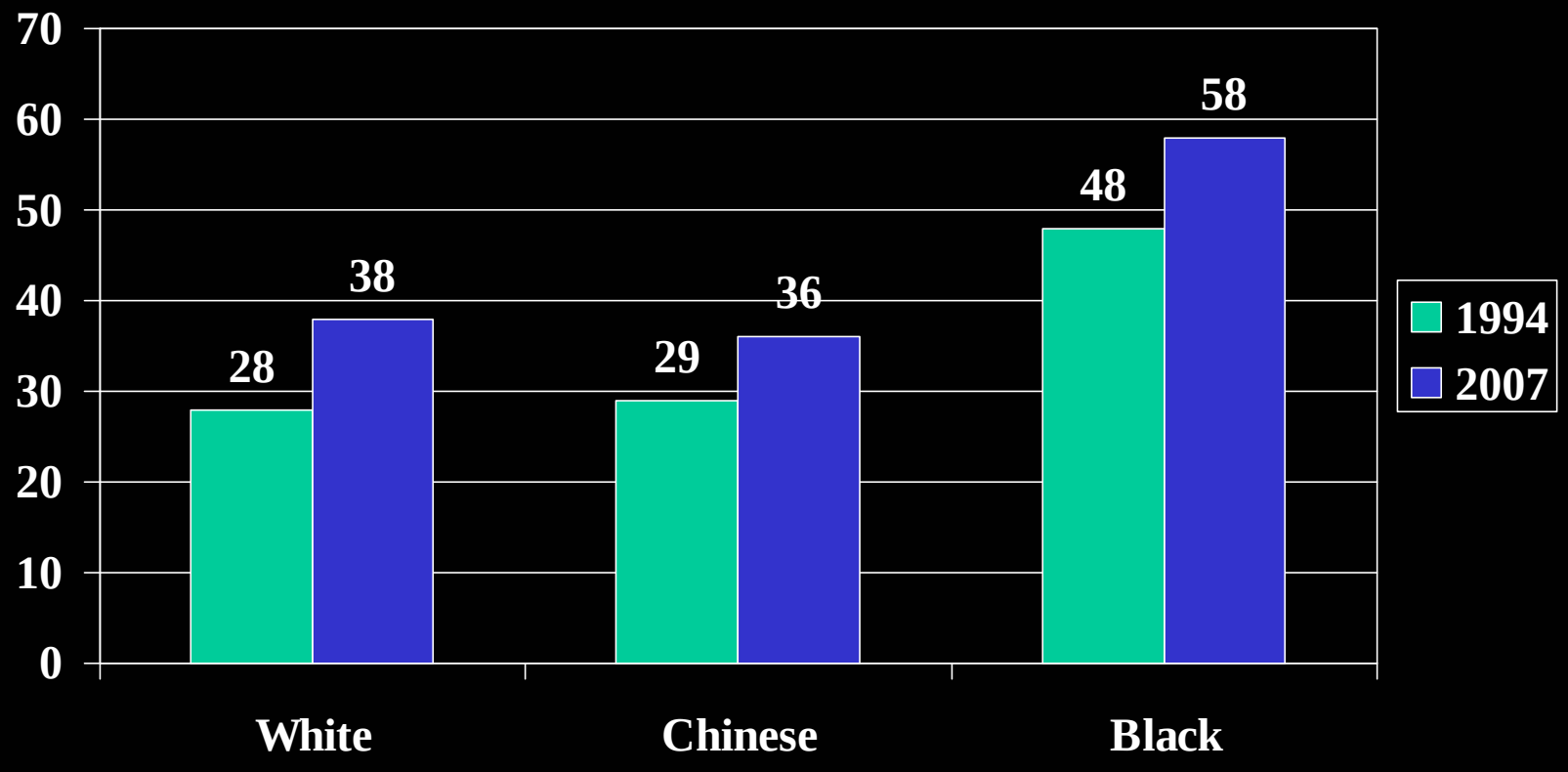
Percent of Respondents Who Believe that the Police Treat Black People Worse than White People



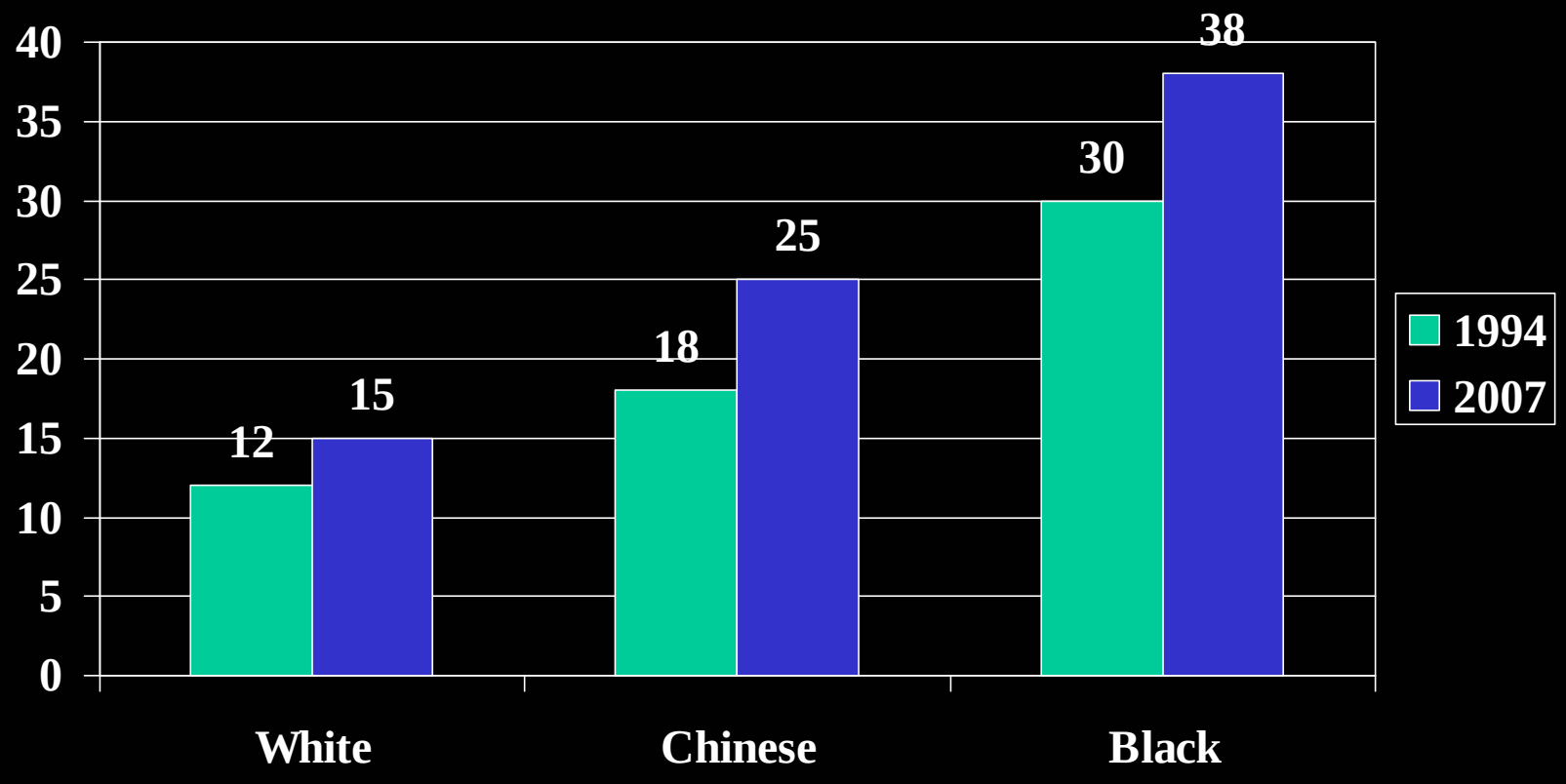
Percent of Respondents Who Believe that the Police Treat Chinese People Worse than White People



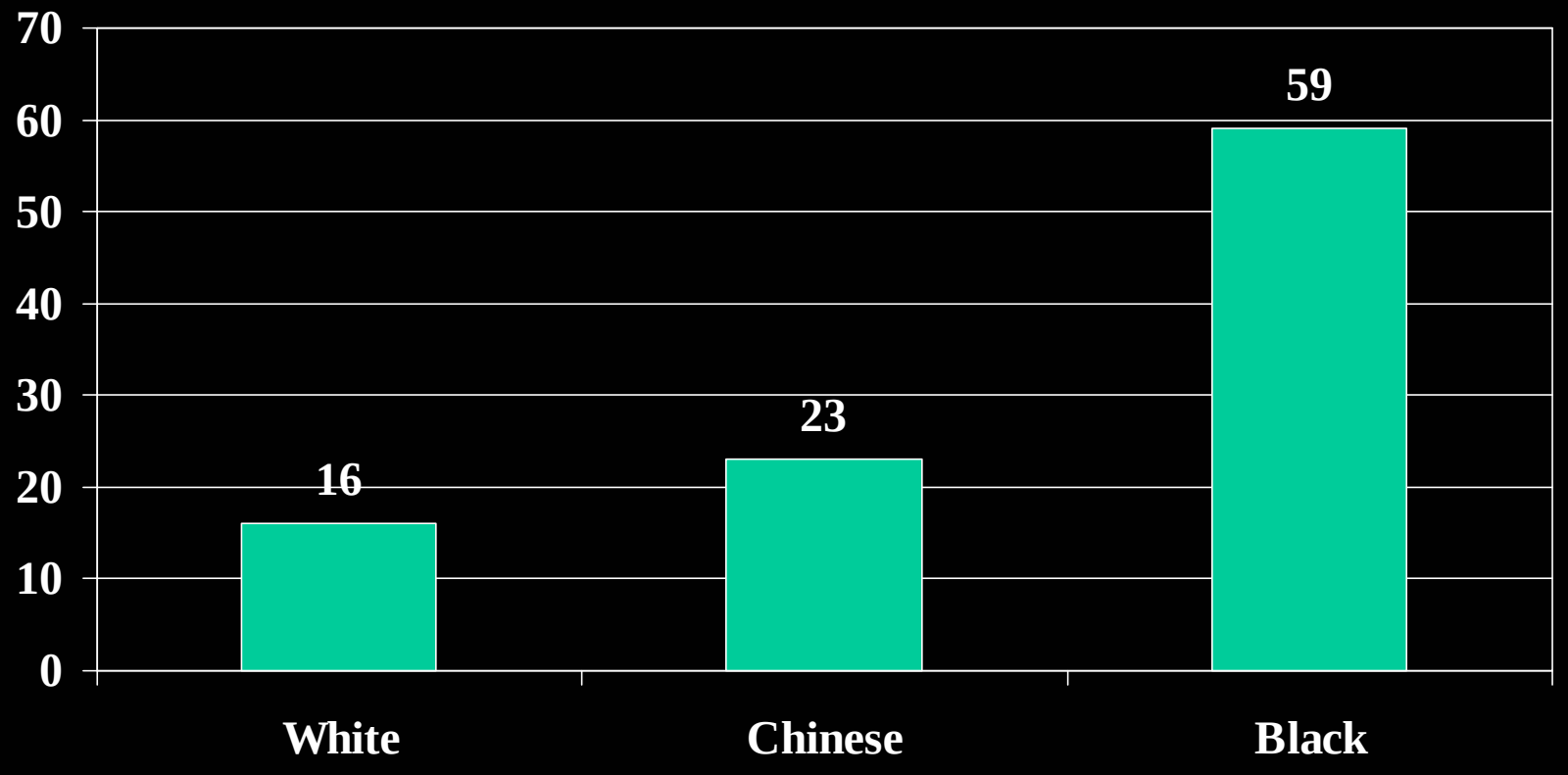
Percent of Respondents Who Believe that a Black Person Would Receive a Harsher Sentence Than a White Person Convicted of the Same Crime



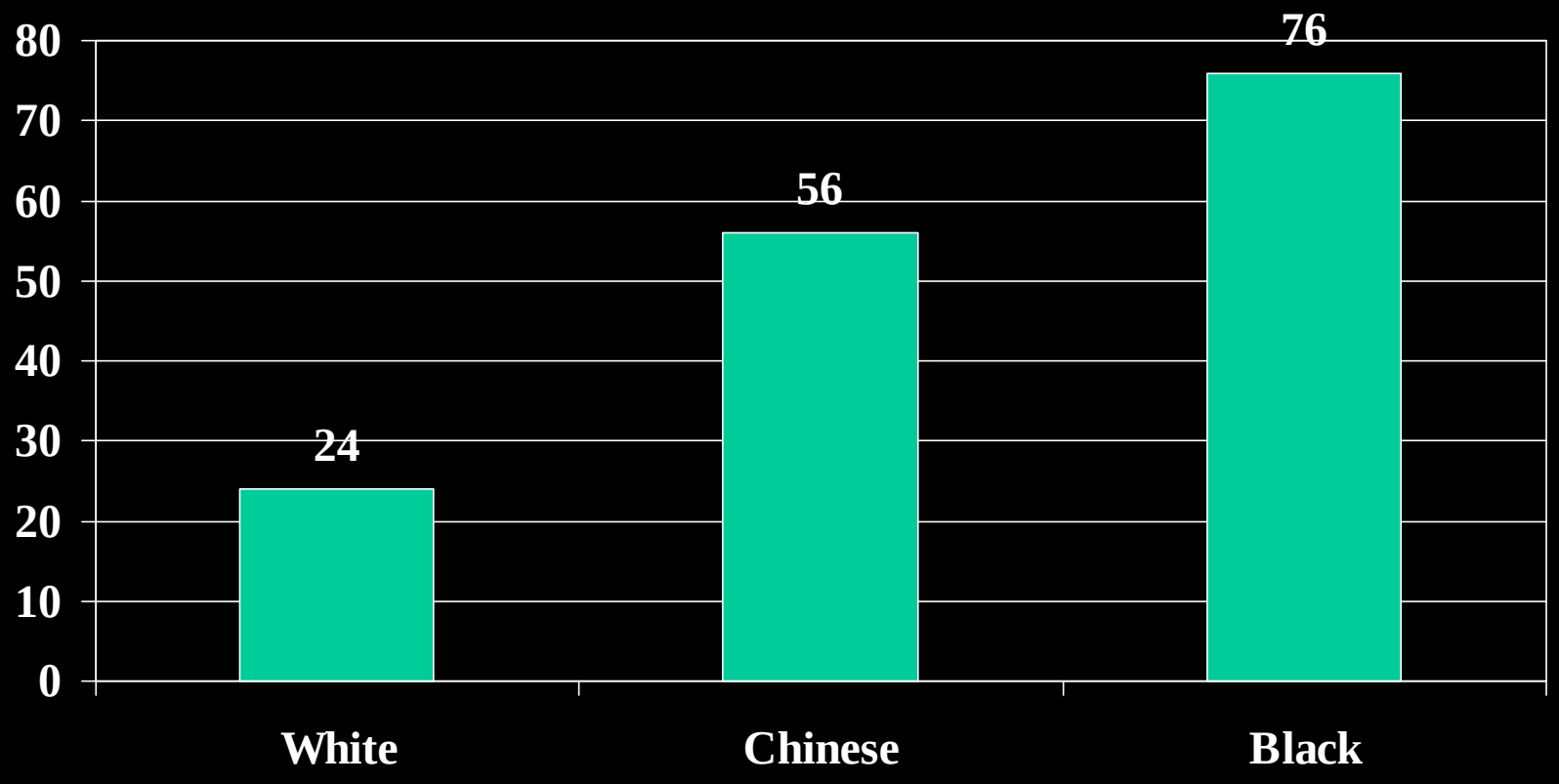
Percent of Respondents Who Believe that a Chinese Person Would Receive a Harsher Sentence Than a White Person Convicted of the Same Crime



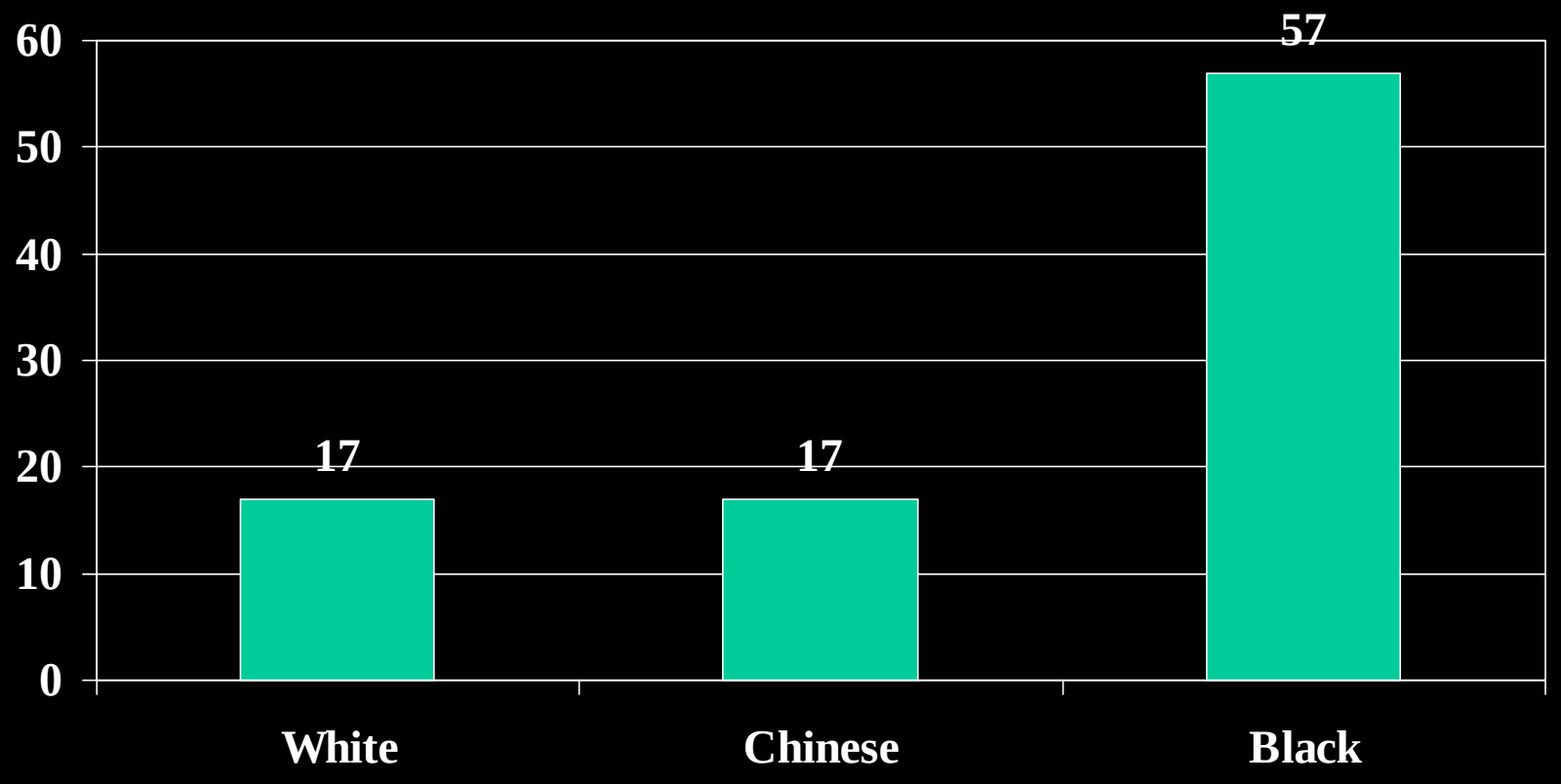
Percent of Respondents from the 2007 Survey Who Agree or Strongly Agree that Discrimination Makes it Difficult for People From Their Racial Group to Get a Good Education



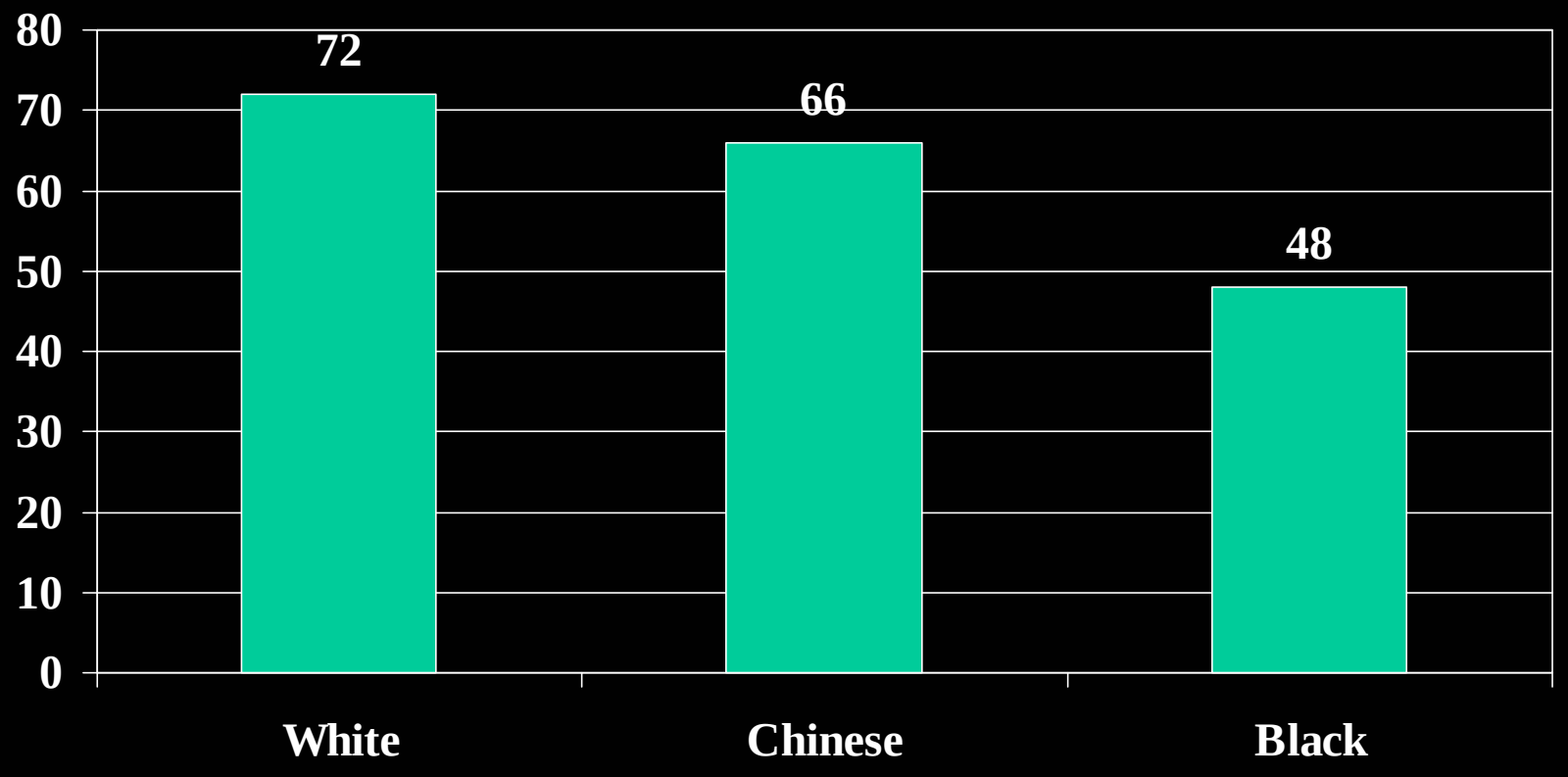
Percent of Respondents from the 2007 Survey Who Agree or Strongly Agree that Discrimination Makes it Difficult for People From Their Racial Group to Get a Good Job



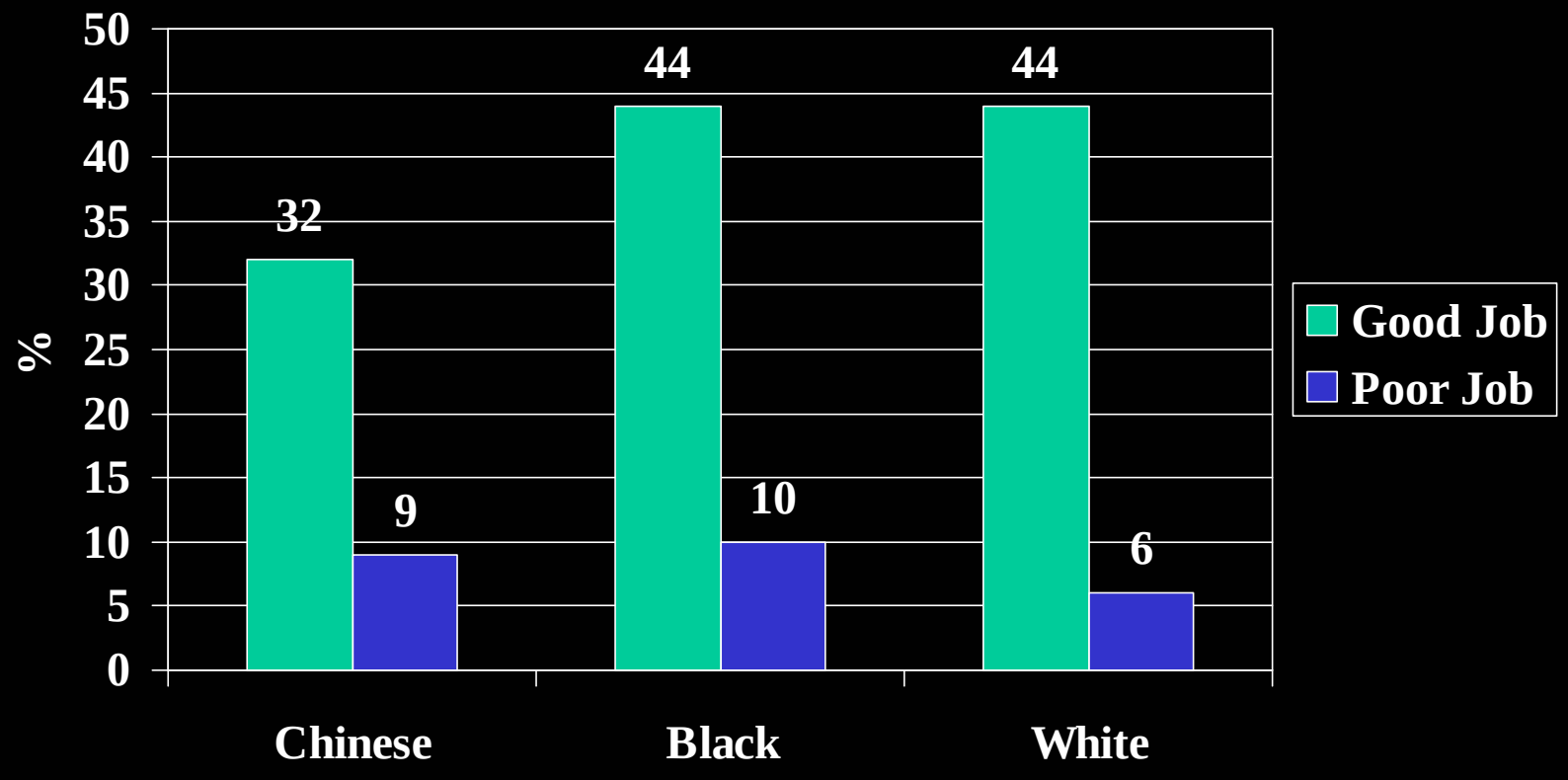
Percent of Respondents from the 2007 Survey Who Agree or Strongly Agree that Discrimination Makes it Difficult for People From Their Racial Group to Get Good Housing



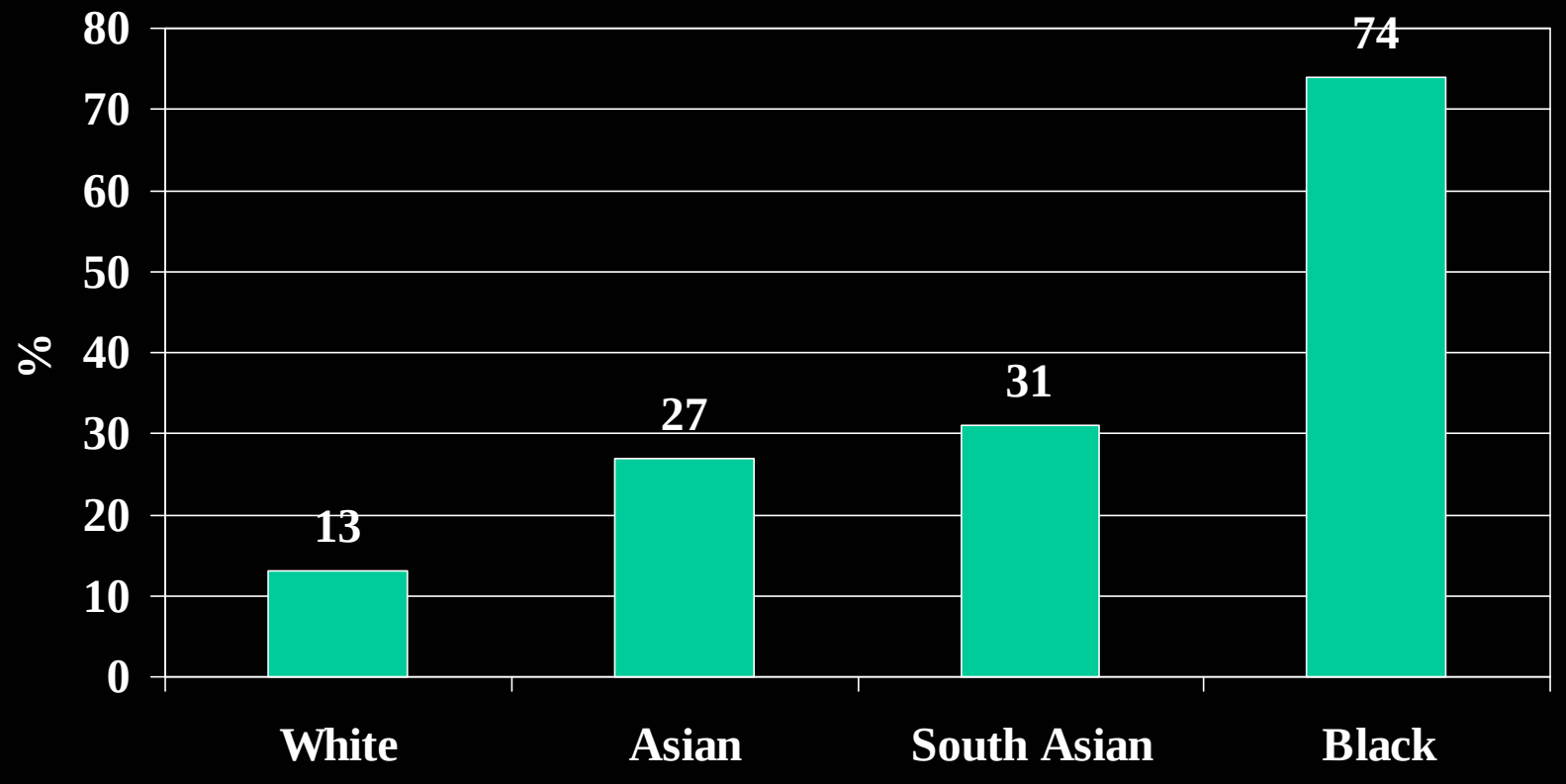
Percent of Respondents from the 2007 Survey Who Agree or Strongly Agree that Racism is a Bigger Problem in the U.S. than in Canada



% of Toronto Residents Who Think the Police are Doing a Good Job Keeping their Community Safe (1994 Survey)



Percent of Toronto High School Students Who Perceive that the Police Treat Members of Their Racial Group Worse than Others (2000 Survey)



- Why is the perception of police racism so widespread?
- Why do some people believe that there is racism in Canadian policing?

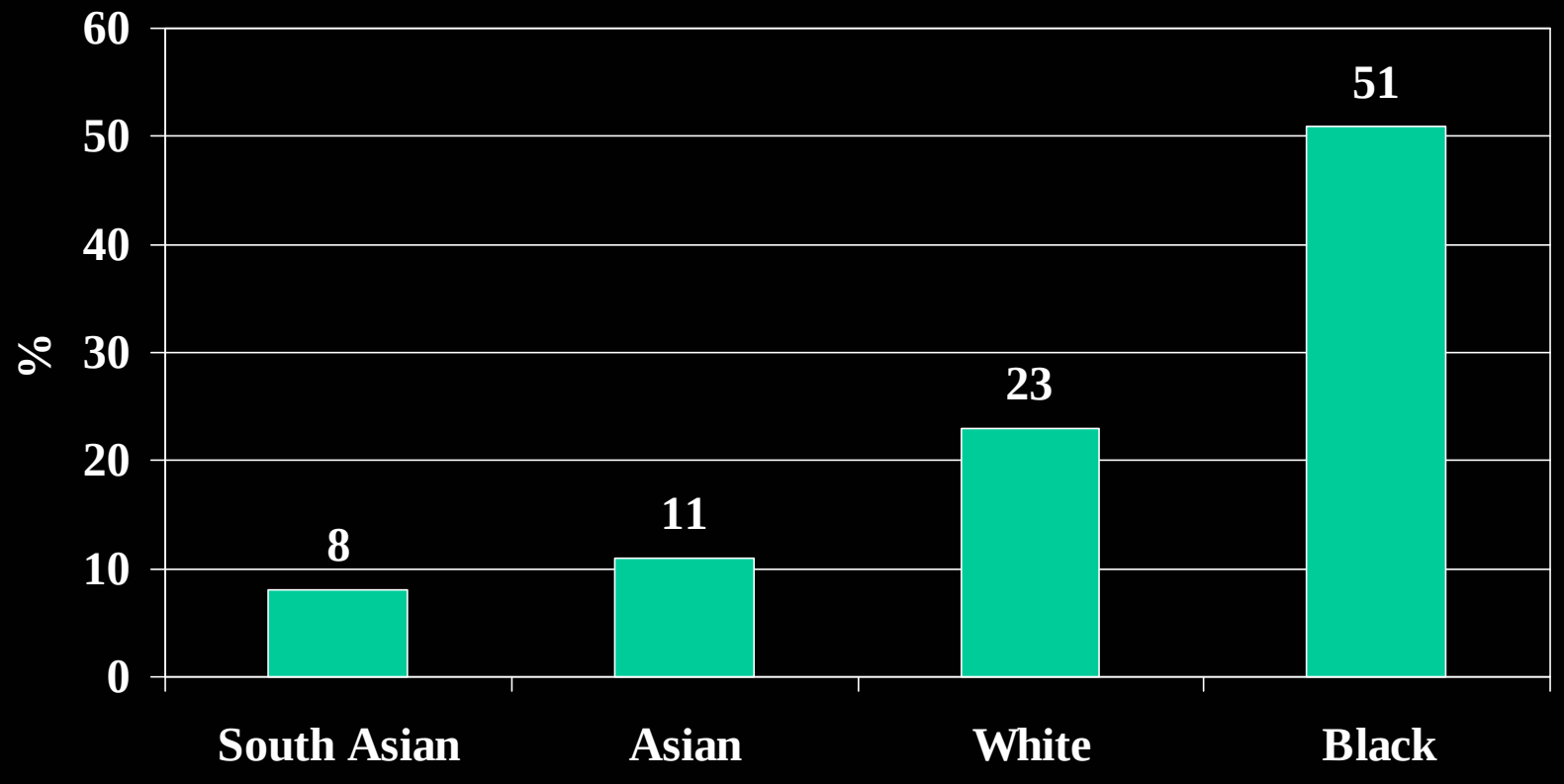
Why the Perception of Bias?

- Exposure to the American Media?
- Experiences in country of Origin?
- The memory of our colonial/racist history?
- Parental/Peer Socialization?
- Personal Experiences of Racial Discrimination?
- Playing the “race card.”

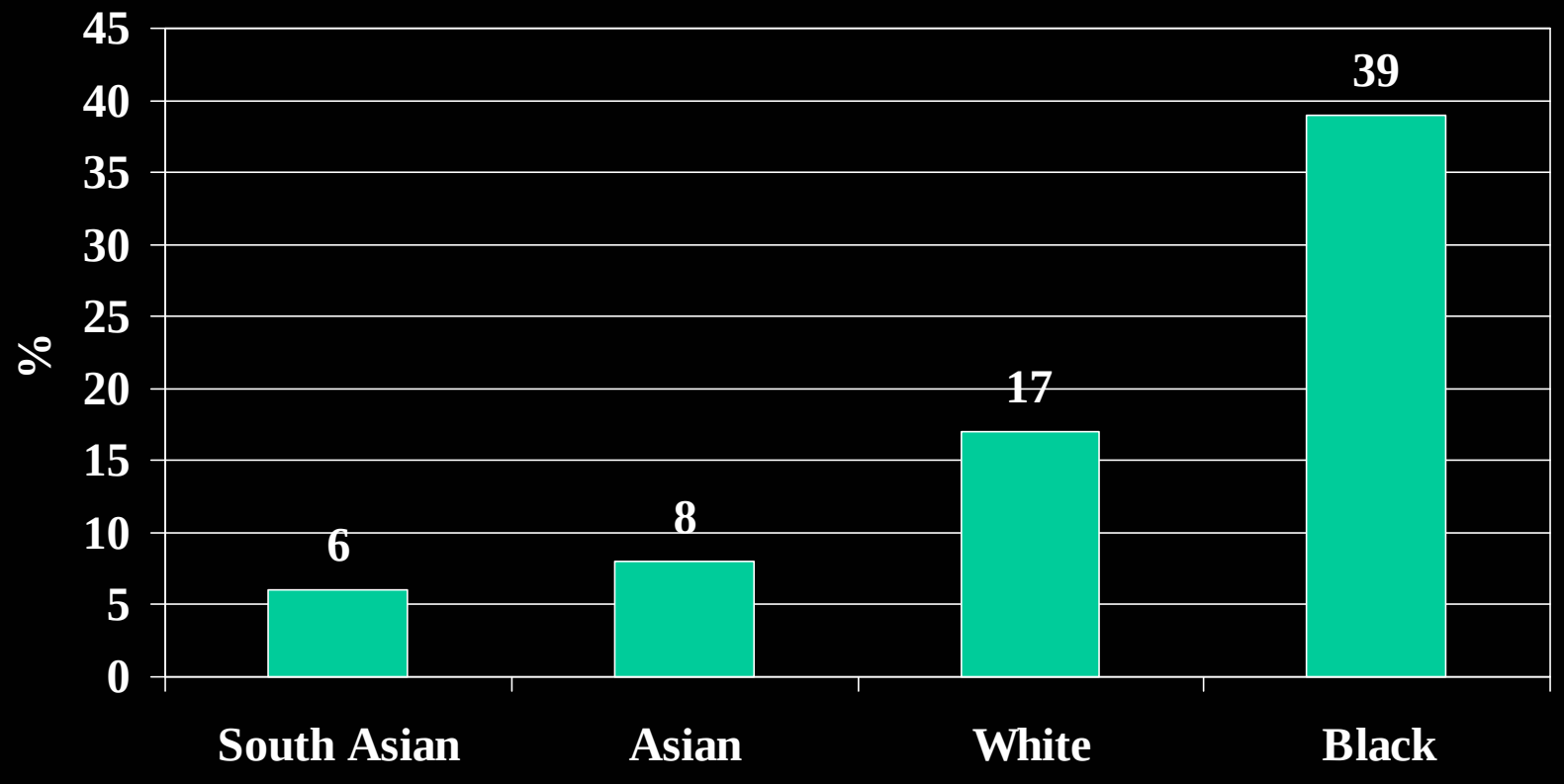
Toronto Youth Crime and Victimization Survey

- Stratified Random Sample of 3,400 high Toronto high school students.
- Response Rate = 84%
- Diverse sample: 1,313 white students, 486 black students, 421 South Asians, 662 Asians, etc.

Percent of Toronto High School Students Who Have Been Stopped and Questioned by the Police on 2 or more Occasions in the Past Two Years



Percent of Toronto High School Students Who Have Been Stopped and Searched by the Police in the Past Two Years



Race and Crime

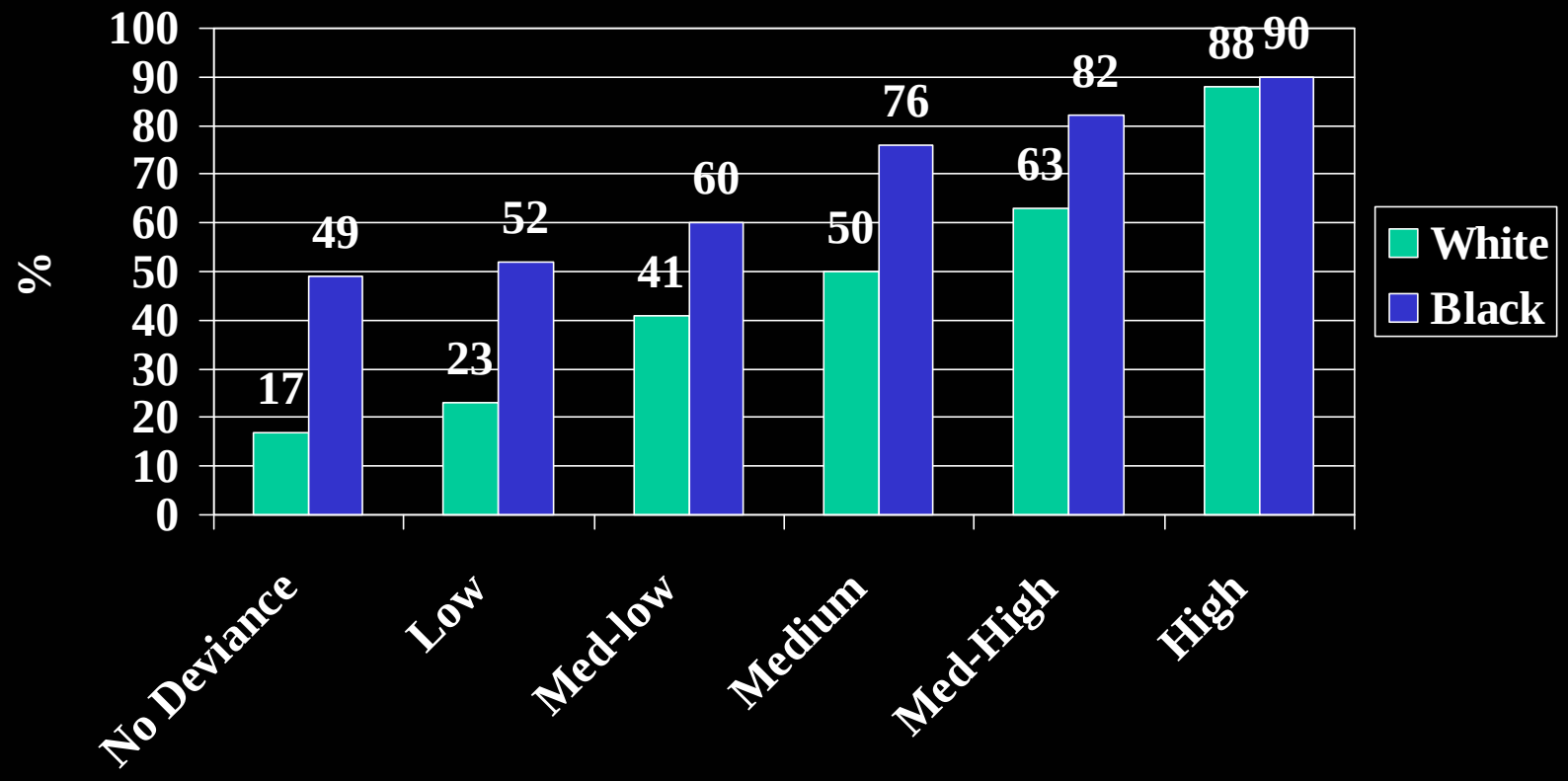
- “If police pay special attention to blacks, is it because, statistically and pragmatically, blacks commit more crimes than others? Or because they don’t like blacks?” (Worthington, *Sun*, Oct. 21).

- “Look, everyone knows there is a huge amount of black-on-black crime going on in this city and it is a problem that needs to be addressed. That’s not racism. That’s police doing their jobs” (Goldstein, *Sun*, Oct. 29).

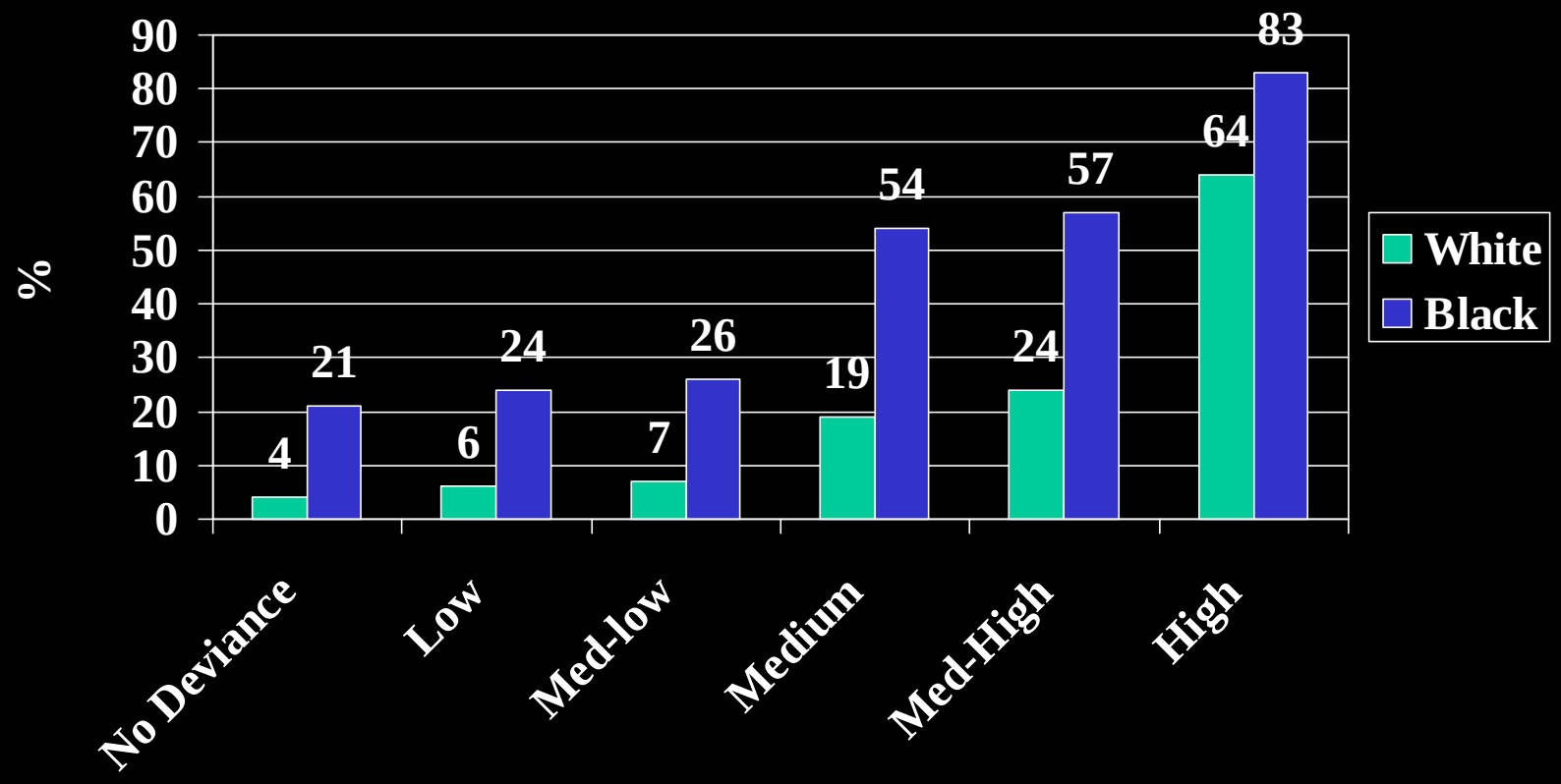
Multivariate Analyses

- Controlled for social class, leisure activities, gang membership, drug and alcohol use and criminal behaviour.
- All are strongly related to police contact.
- However, they do not reduce the impact of race. In fact, the impact of race on police stops get *stronger* after statistically controlling for other factors.

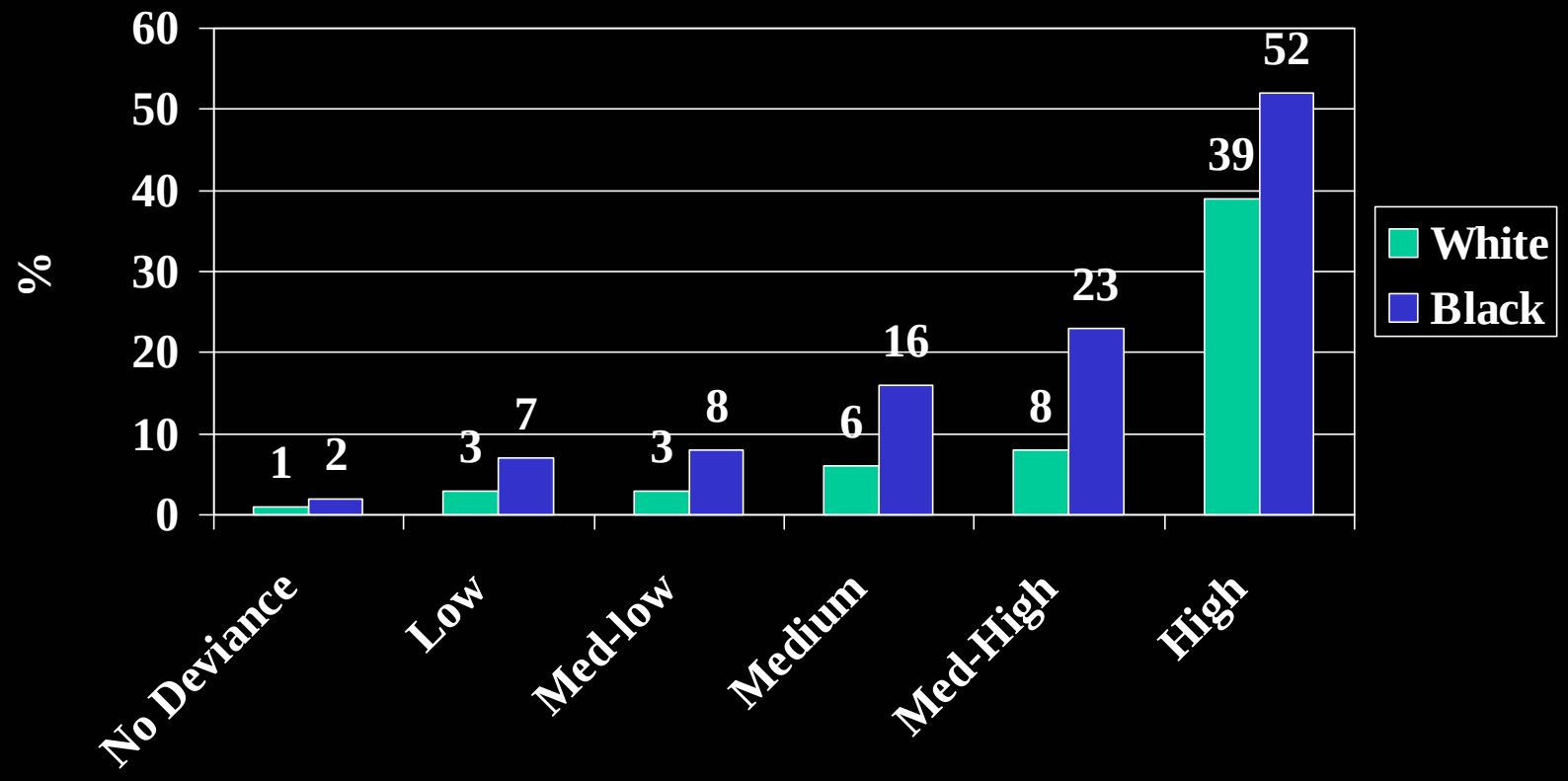
Percent of Toronto High School Students Who Have Been Stopped by the Police in the Past Two Years, by Level of Deviance



Percent of Toronto High School Students Who Have Been Searched by the Police in the Past Two Years, by Level of Deviance



Percent of Toronto High School Students Who Have Been Arrested or Charged by the Police, by Level of Deviance



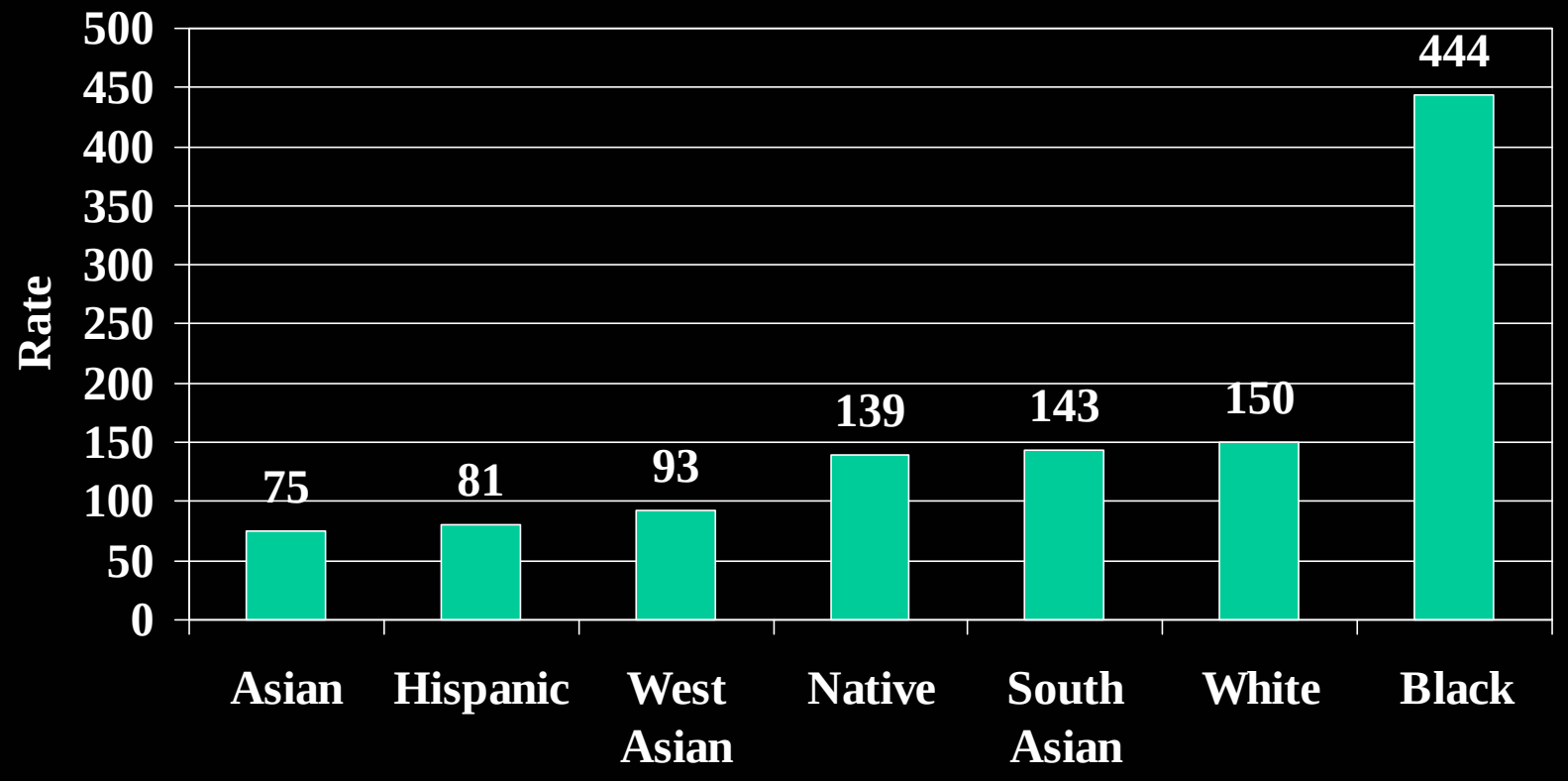
The Kingston Pilot Project

- An investigation of all stops conducted by Kingston police officers from October 1, 2003 to September 30, 2004.
- A contact card or OV record was supposed to be completed every time a civilian was stopped by the police and questioned in any manner.
- “Casual contacts” with civilians were not recorded. Stops initiated by RIDE programs were not supposed to be recorded.

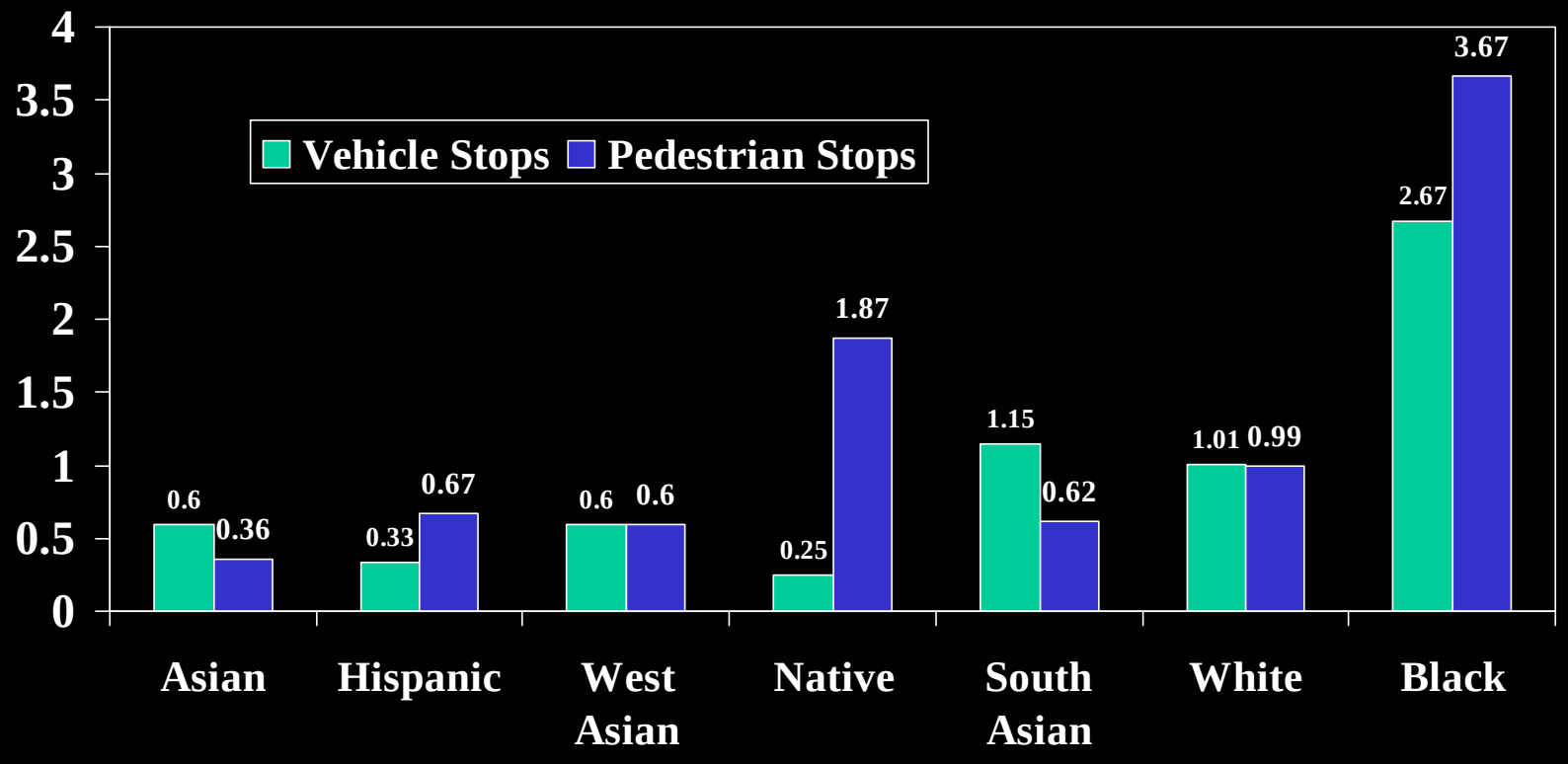
The Kingston Pilot Project

- For each contact, officers were supposed to record the name, residential address, age, gender and race of the person stopped – as well as the location of the stop, the reason for the stop and the final disposition of the case.
- Final *Merged dataset* consists of 16,616 cases.
- An average of 95 stops per Kingston Police officer; 208 stops per patrol officer.

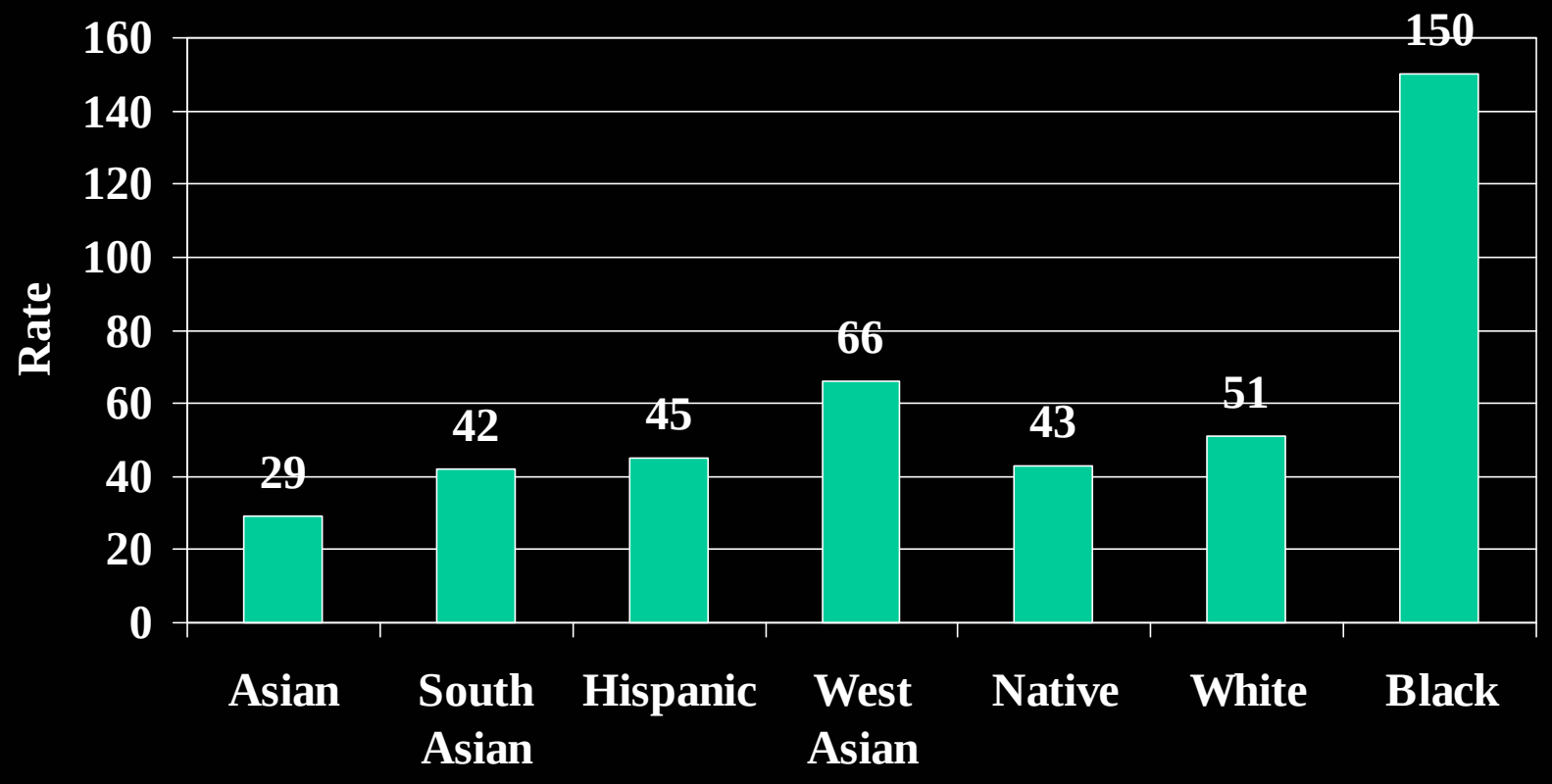
Stop Rate (per 1000), by Race, City of Kingston Census Benchmark (Merged Data)



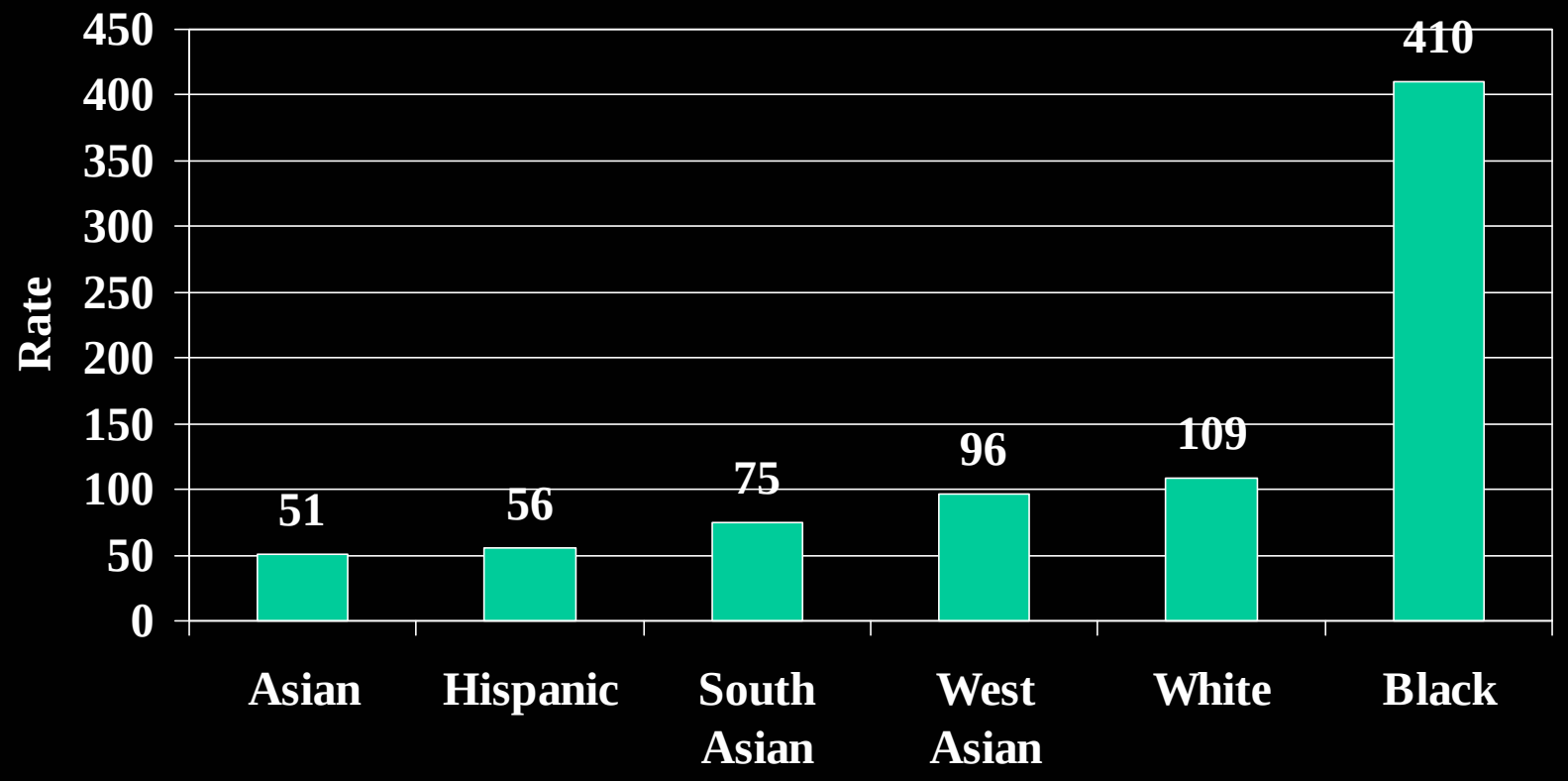
Odds Ratios, by Type of Stop and Race, City of Kingston Census Benchmark (*Merged Data*)



Individual Stop Rate (per 1,000), Kingston Residents, By Race (*Contact Cards*)

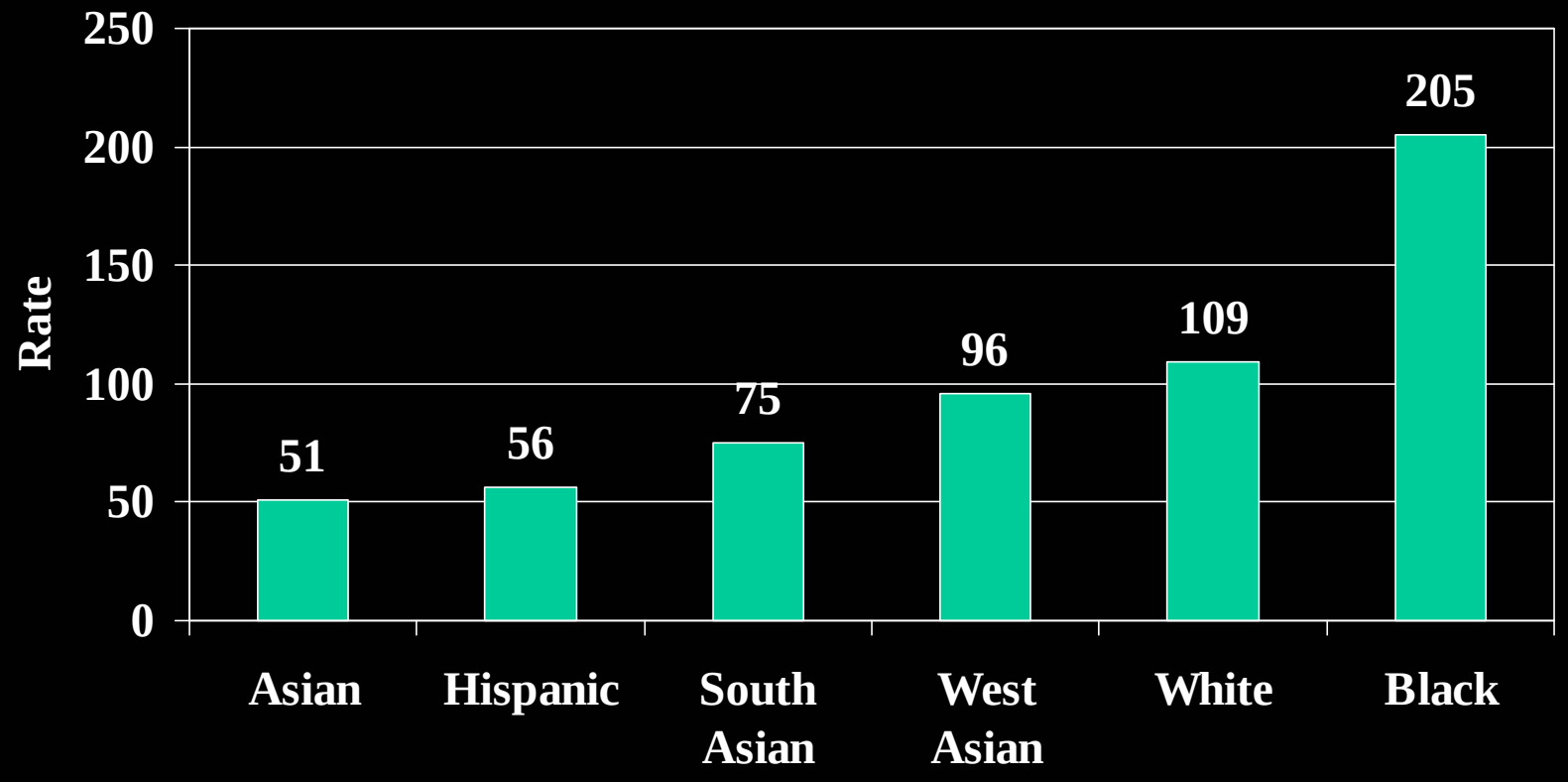


Individual Stop Rate (per 1,000), 15-24 Year-Olds, by Race, Kingston CMA Residents Only



Adjusted Individual Stop Rate, 15-24 Year-Olds, by Race, Kingston CMA Residents Only

(doubles the size of the Black population estimate for this age group – a hypothetical 100% error rate)



Some Concerns about the Kingston Data

- Kingston only has a small number of black and other racial minority citizens.
- More observational benchmarking needed.
- Study limited to a one year period.
- Possible resistance to data collection from police officers. Possible reduction of minority stops as result of study.

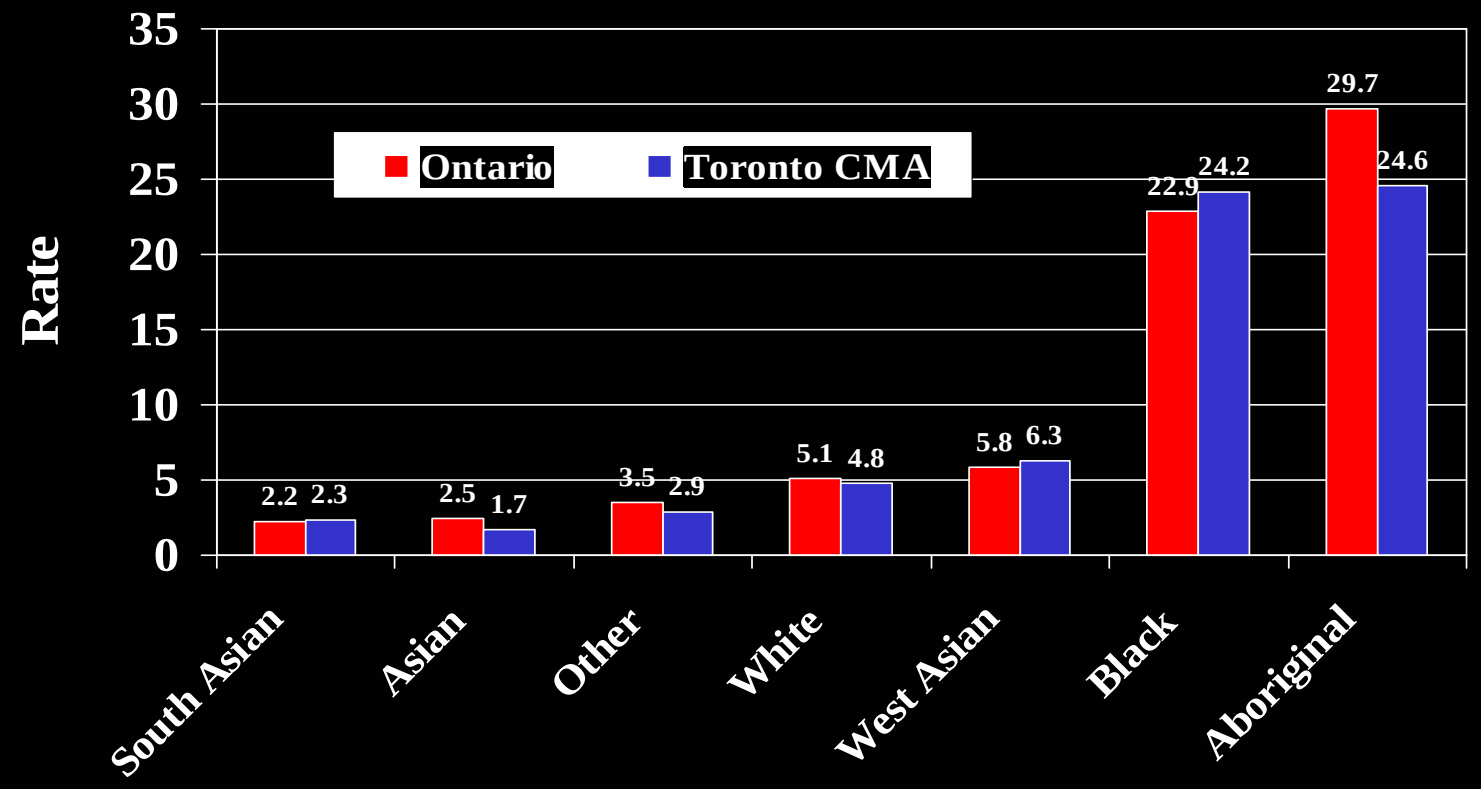
TOTAL SIU INVESTIGATIONS: Ontario, 2000-2006

RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	8,944,190	79.3	457	58.3	0.73
Black	411,095	3.6	94	12.0	3.33
Aboriginal	188,315	1.7	56	7.1	4.18
Asian	803,310	7.1	20	2.5	0.35
South Asian	554,870	4.9	12	1.5	0.31
West Asian	155,640	1.4	9	1.1	0.78
Other	228,130	2.0	8	1.0	0.50
Missing	----	----	128	16.3	----
TOTAL	11,285,550	100.0	784	100.0	1.00

TOTAL SIU INVESTIGATIONS: Toronto CMA, 2000-2006

RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	2,915,125	62.7	139	47.9	0.76
Black	310,500	6.7	75	25.9	3.87
Aboriginal	20,300	0.4	5	1.7	4.25
Asian	656,805	14.1	11	3.8	0.26
South Asian	473,805	10.2	11	3.8	0.37
West Asian	95,820	2.1	6	2.1	1.00
Other	175,605	3.8	5	1.7	0.45
Missing	----	----	38	13.1	----
TOTAL	4,647,960	100.0	290	100.0	1.00

Total SIU Investigation Rate (per 100,000), by Race of Civilian, Ontario and Toronto CMA, 2000-2006



Questions

- Should we encourage more research on the issue of racial bias within policing and the criminal justice system? Why or why not?
- Should Canada begin to collect “race-crime” statistics (including data that would capture racial differences in criminal justice outcomes)?

Questions

- How can you ensure that racial bias is eliminated from the justice system?
- How can you convince the public that racism does not exist?
- How can you eliminate racism – or the public perception of racism – without alienating the rank-and-file?
- How should we evaluate program effectiveness?

Solutions?

- Improved screening of new recruits.
- Recruitment of racial minority officers.
- High quality cultural sensitivity training.
- Field-training officers who are trained to deal with the issue of race and racism.
- Monitoring of street activities (i.e., stop and search activities).

Solutions?

- Revise police complaints process (i.e., civilian investigation and review).
- Community outreach programs.
- Public punishment of officers found guilty of racist activity.
- Media relations campaign that attempts to demonstrate the unbiased nature of police work.

Potential Benefits of Data Collection and Research

- Provides Transparency.
- Might eliminate or reduce some forms of racially biased policing.
- Could help improve minority perceptions of police practices.
- Could reduce racial disparities in arrest statistics.
- Could improve minority recruitment.

The Argument Against Data Collection and Research

- Compromised security/public safety
- De-policing
- Damage to officer morale
- Too expensive
- Could hurt conviction rate
- Could increase number of civil claims
- Data too difficult to collect properly
- Data will be misinterpreted

Conclusion

- Denial of the problem will not work.
- If the issue of racially biased policing is not taken seriously we are doomed to repeat the “crisis cycle.”