# *Information or Obfuscation: What Do Community Demographics Tell Us About Program Participants?*
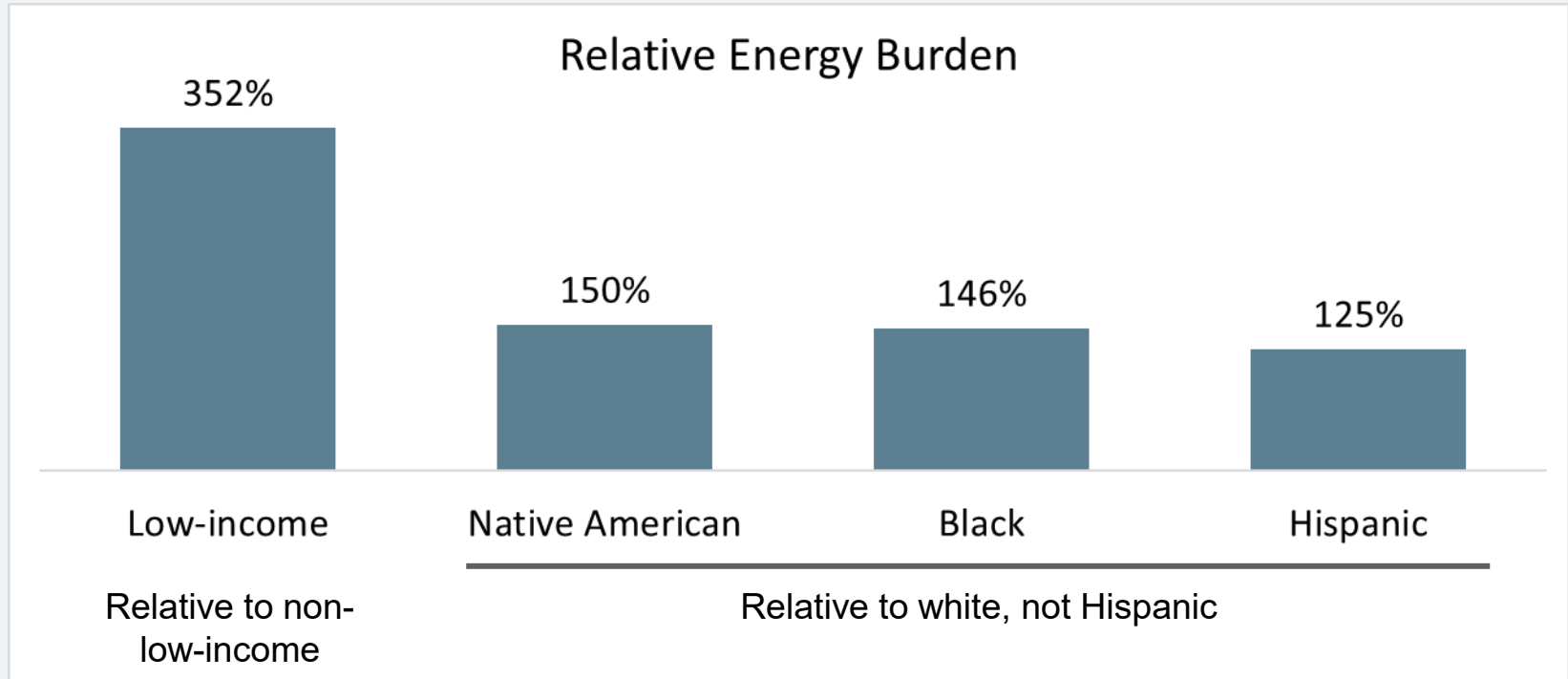
*November 2, 2022*

**Ryan Bliss, ADM Associates**
**Dan Rubado, Energy Trust of Oregon**

# *Energy Inequity Is a Growing Concern*

## Relative Energy Burden

352%

150%    146%    125%

Low-income    Native American    Black    Hispanic
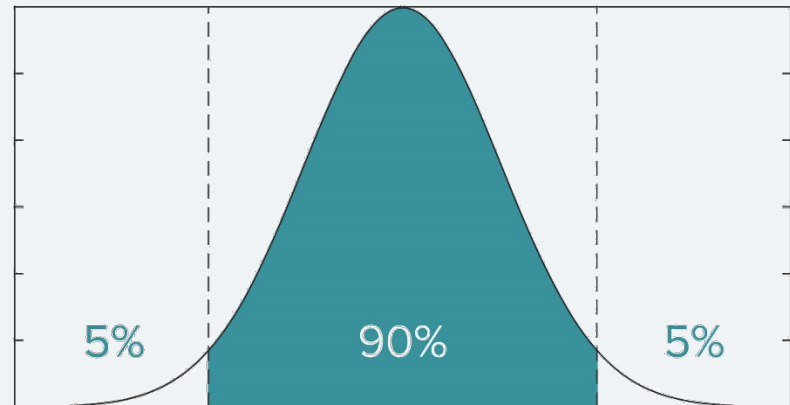
Relative to non-low-income

Relative to white, not Hispanic

Adapted from Drehobl et al. (2020). "How High Are Household Energy Burdens?" *ACEEE Research Report*, September 10, 2020. Available at: https://www.aceee.org/research-report/u2006.

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# *How Do We Know Who is Being Served?*



Not through program applications

Customer surveys often have limited precision
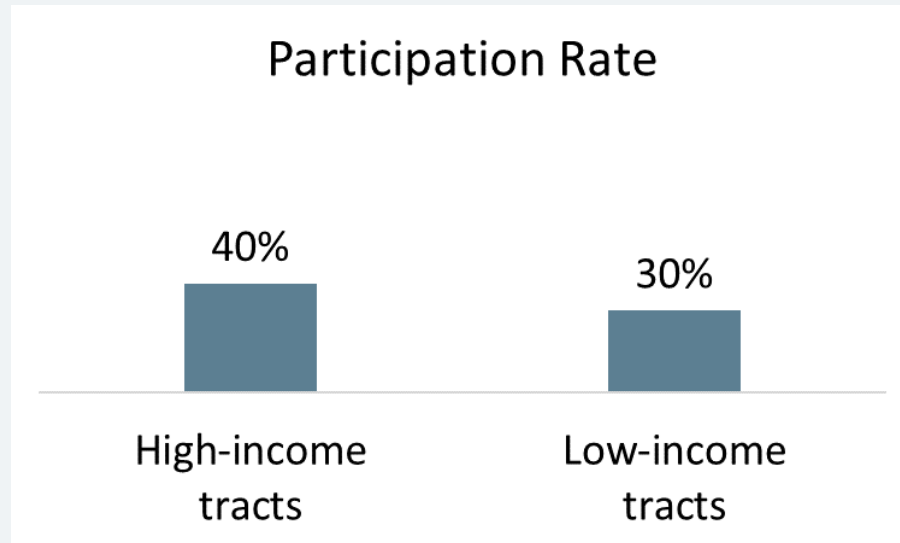


5%    90%    5%

80% ±10% are white means

70% to 90% are white

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# Using Census Data to Assess Equity

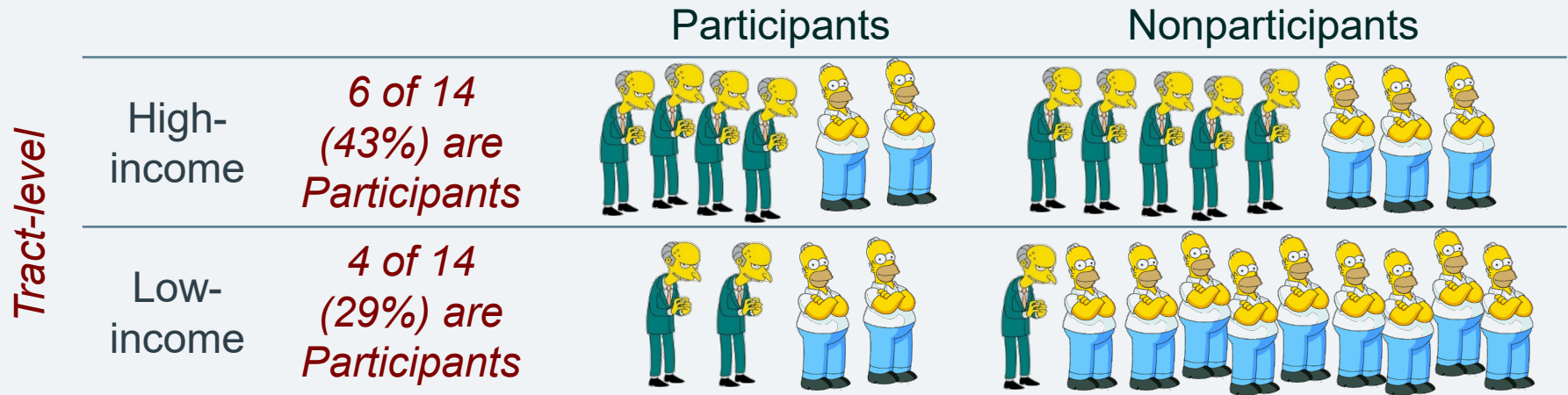| Study | Higher Participation in Areas with… |
|---|---|
| CA Utilities 2001 | Higher income, white, non-Hispanic, rural/suburban |
| Energy Trust of Oregon 2018 | Higher income, moderate-to-high racial diversity |
| MA Program Administrators 2020 | Higher income, homeownership, greater English proficiency |

*Broad strokes…*

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# *What About the Degree of Inequity?*

**Participation Rate**

40%

30%

High-income tracts

Low-income tracts

- Does this tell us the difference between high- and low-income households?

- Epinoistic model (Groening, 1989).

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# From Greek Epinoiste (Invented, Fake)



Participation more strongly related to income in low-income tracts
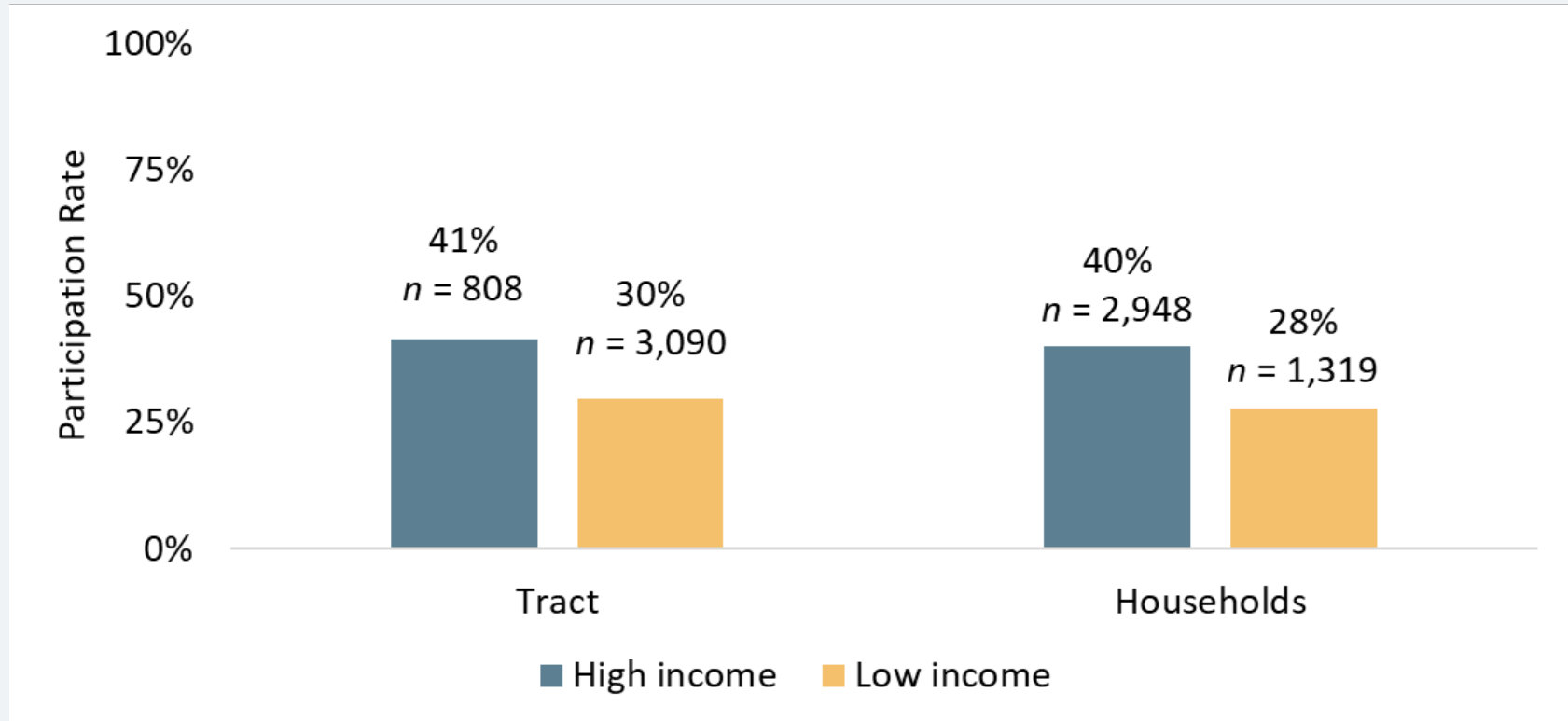
# *Energy Trust of Oregon 2020 Customer Insights Study*

Surveyed 7,257 households:

- Stratified on Census tract, weighted on income & race
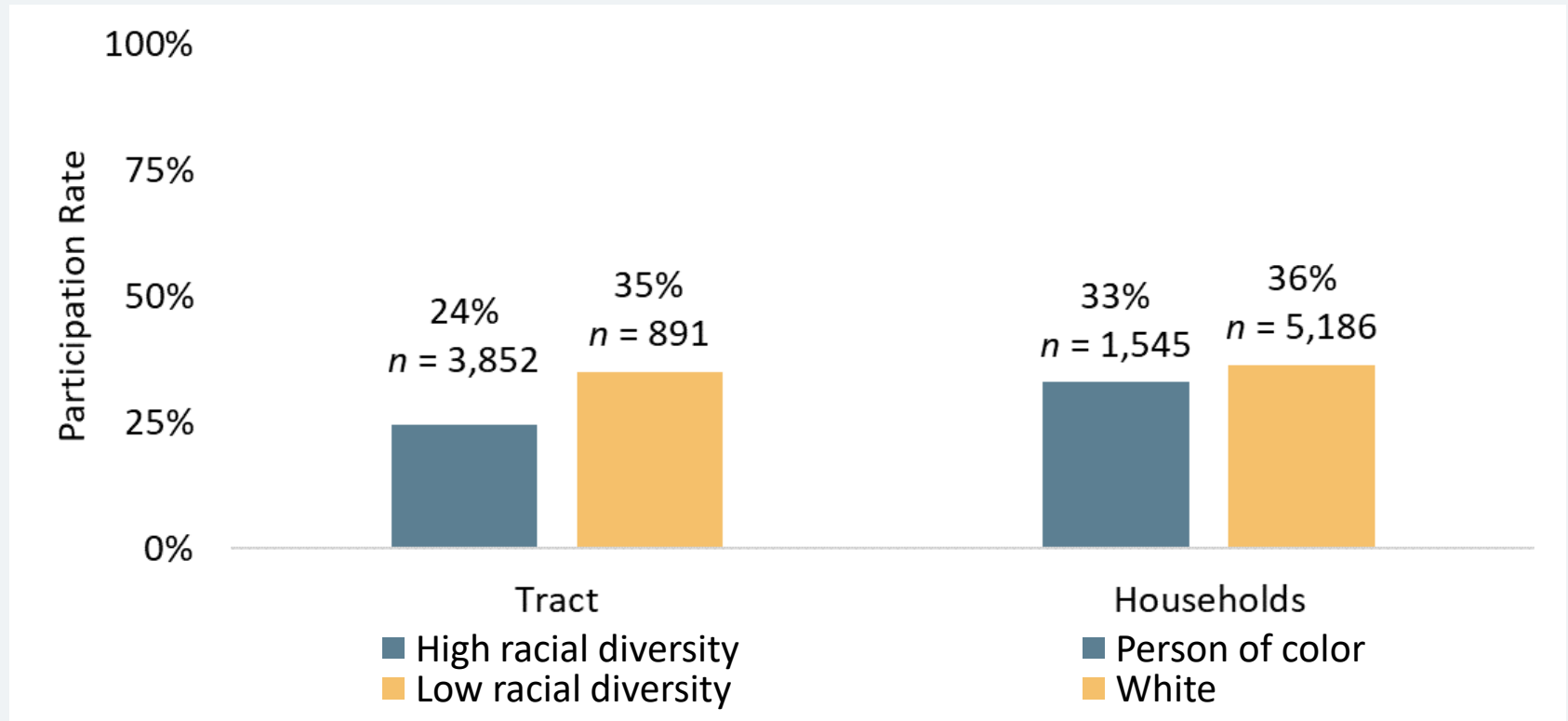
- Assessed program participation rate by:

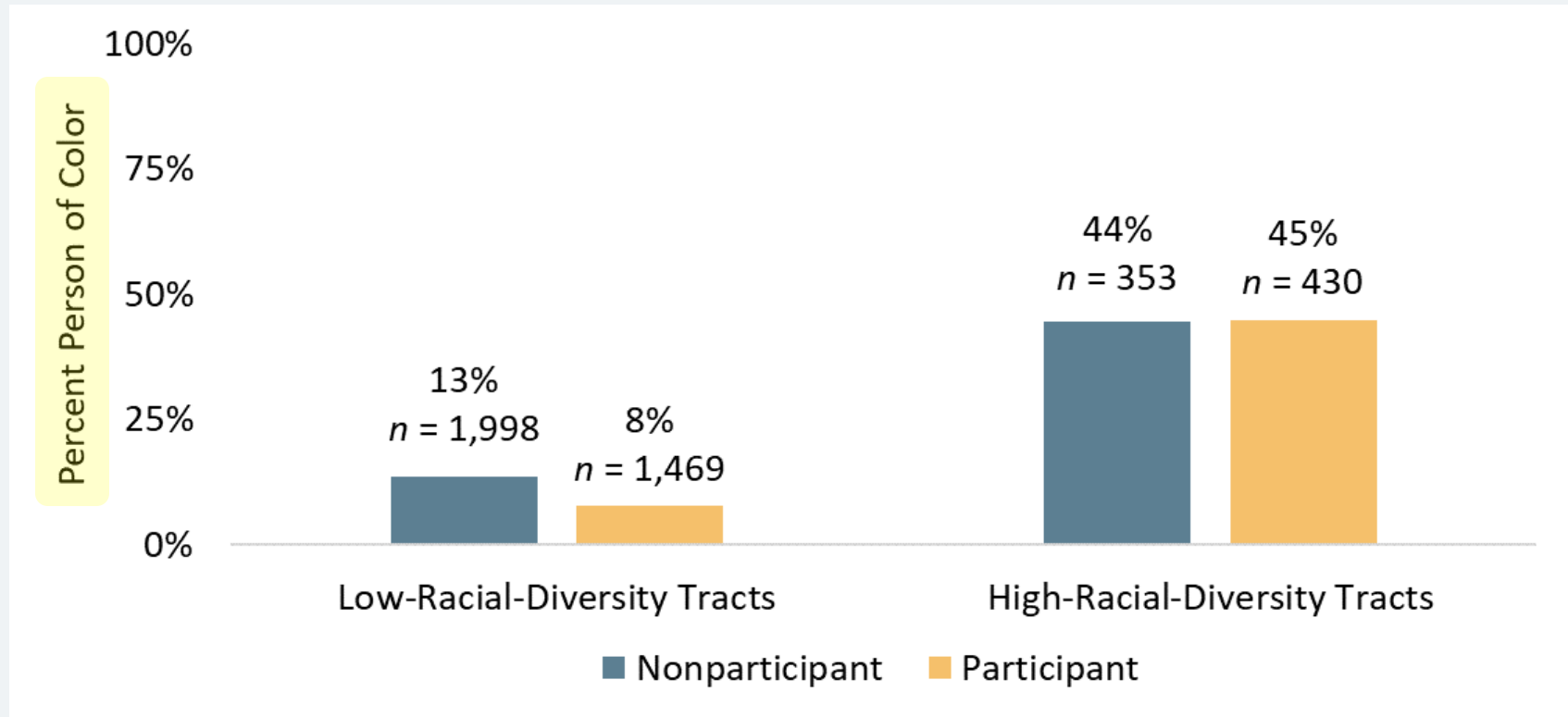|  | Income Level | Race/Ethnicity |
|---|---|---|
| Census tract | Highest or lowest income on 5-point index | Highest or lowest racial diversity on 5-point index |
| Self-report | High or low based on self-reported household income & size | POC only or White only |

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# Results: Income



*Tract-level and household-level differences are close*

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# Results: Race



*Tract-level and household-level differences are not so close*
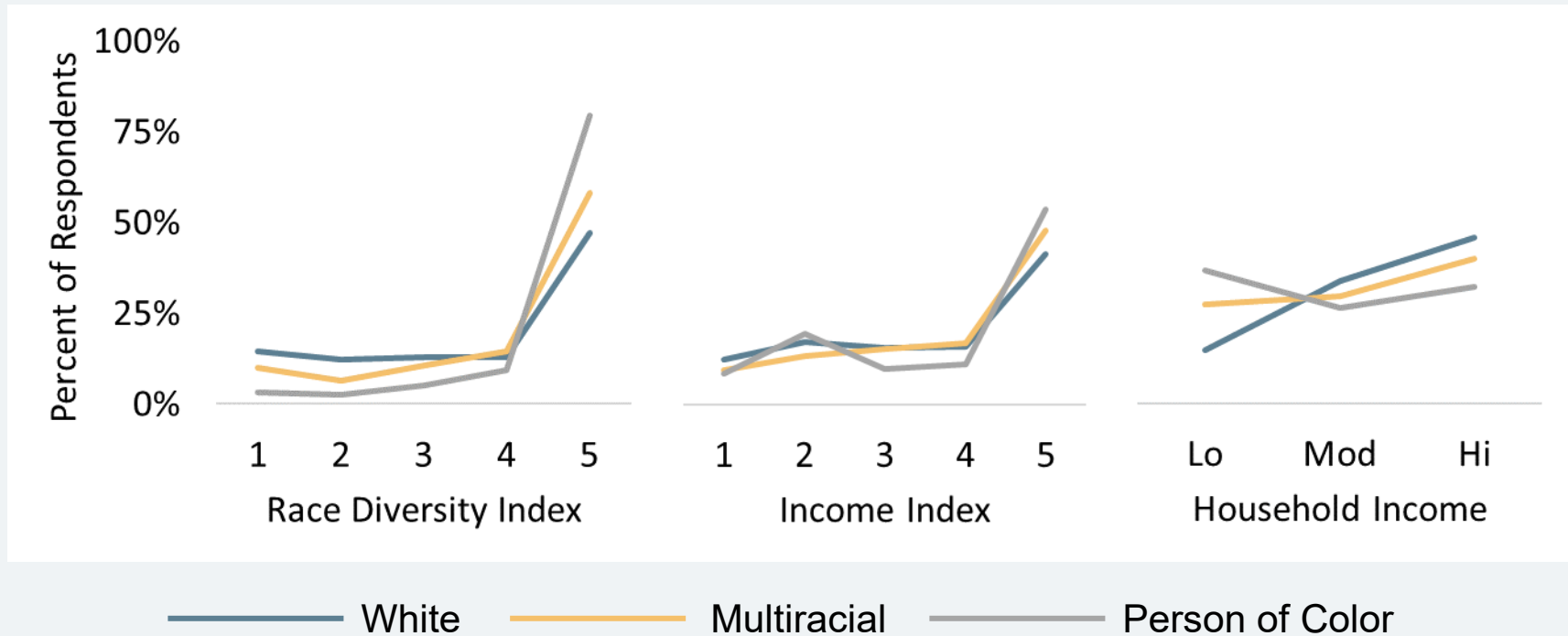
# *Looking at It from Another Angle*



*In low-diversity tracts, stronger skew in participation away from persons of color*

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# Is This Why Census Is a Better Proxy for Income than Race?

| Income | Modal Income (Survey) | Mean Income (Tract) |
|---|---|---|
| Low | ≤$50K | ~$41k |
| High | $100-199k | ~$106k |

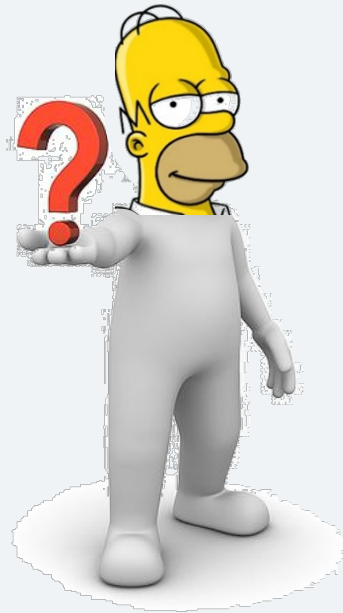| Race | % POC (Survey) | % POC (Tract) |
|---|---|---|
| High diversity/POC | 100% | 31% |
| Low diversity/White | 0% | 8% |

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# What about Multiracial Respondents?

# *Summary and Conclusions*

- Tract-level difference is an okay proxy for household level difference in income.

- But not so much for race.

  ➲ Participation skews more-white in low-diversity tracts.

- You can't identify a Census tract as "white" or "of color."

- Multiracial respondents complicate the analysis.

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# *Questions?*



**Thank you!**