

Public Safety for All

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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SOCIAL JUSTICE**

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MA

AGENDA

- Introduction and Methodology
- High level takeaways
- Preliminary Findings
 - Perceptions of Safety
 - Encounters with Police
 - Perceptions of Police
- Appendix
- Open Data

Introduction

Methodology

RESPONDENTS REFLECT OUR POPULATION WELL!



1,296 total responses

Goal was to get at least 30 respondents in each group of interest so we can analyze them independently.

- Generally representative across ward, race, age, disability status
- Generally over-sampled traditionally under-represented groups

Chose to report demographic groups **separately** instead of weighting.

- *Weighting: a statistical technique in which datasets are adjusted through calculations in order to bring them more in line with the population being studied.*

HIGHEST-LEVEL TAKEAWAYS

- **Respondents positively rate their perceptions and encounters with the Somerville Police Department (SPD) and public safety in Somerville as a whole.**
- **Certain respondent groups report more negative perceptions and experiences.**
 - Differences not random and fall along demographic distinctions.
 - Further studies are necessary.

Preliminary Findings

Perceptions of Safety

MAIN FINDINGS ON PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

Feelings of safety vary across contexts (time of day, place, etc.)

- Some contexts also vary by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and LGBTQIA+ status.
- Do not appear to vary substantially or consistently by Ward, age, immigration, or disability status.

Main concerns are traffic safety, followed by theft and burglaries, housing security, gun violence, and illegal drug activity.

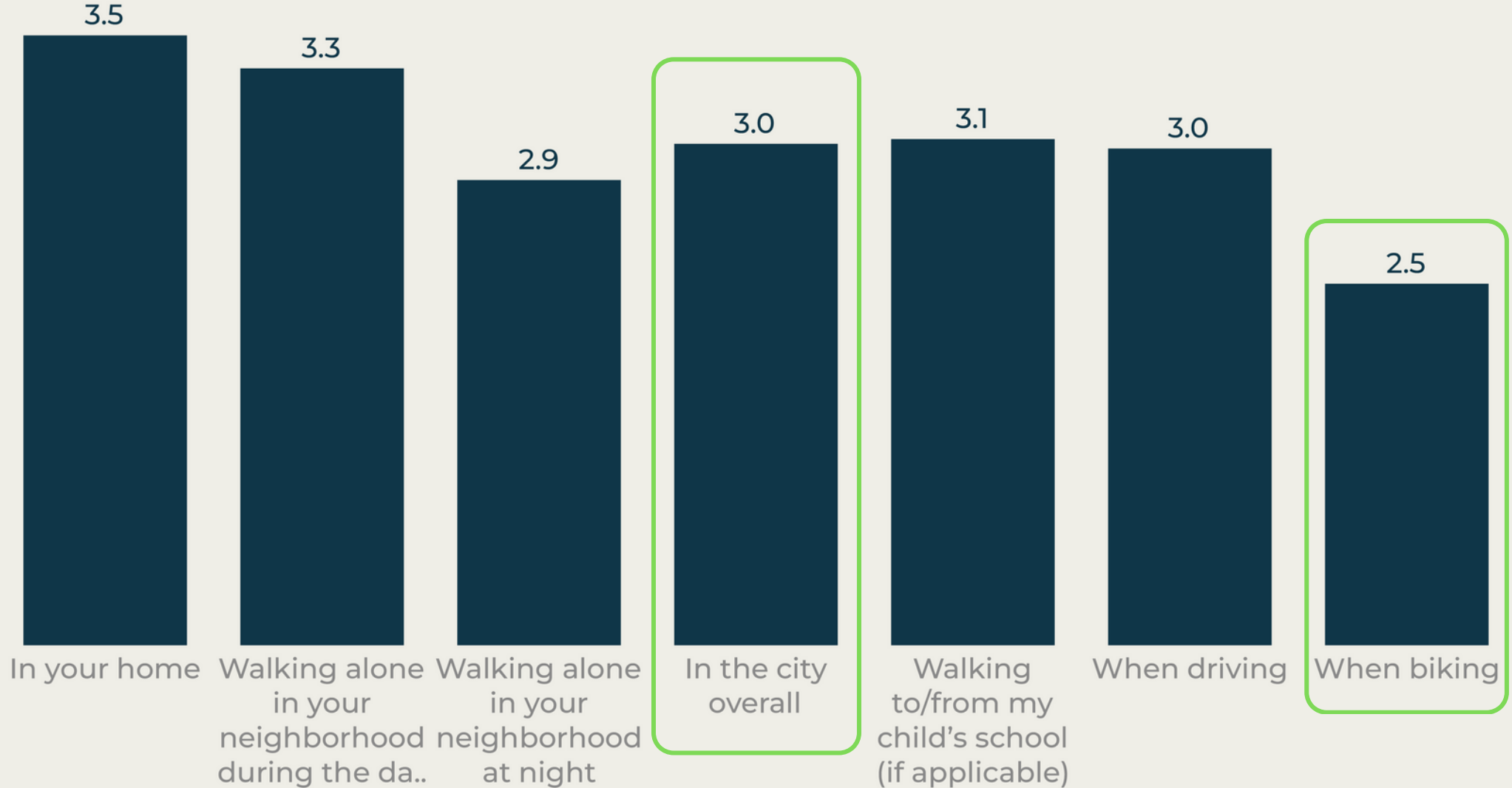
PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY VARY ACROSS CONTEXTS

Respondents, on average, report feeling somewhere between safe (3.0) and very safe (4.0), with respondents feeling **safest at home** and **least safe when biking**.

Ratings of Safety in the Following Situations:

Average (On a Scale of 1 to 4), n=1045

1 = Very unsafe
2 = Unsafe
3 = Safe
4 = Very safe



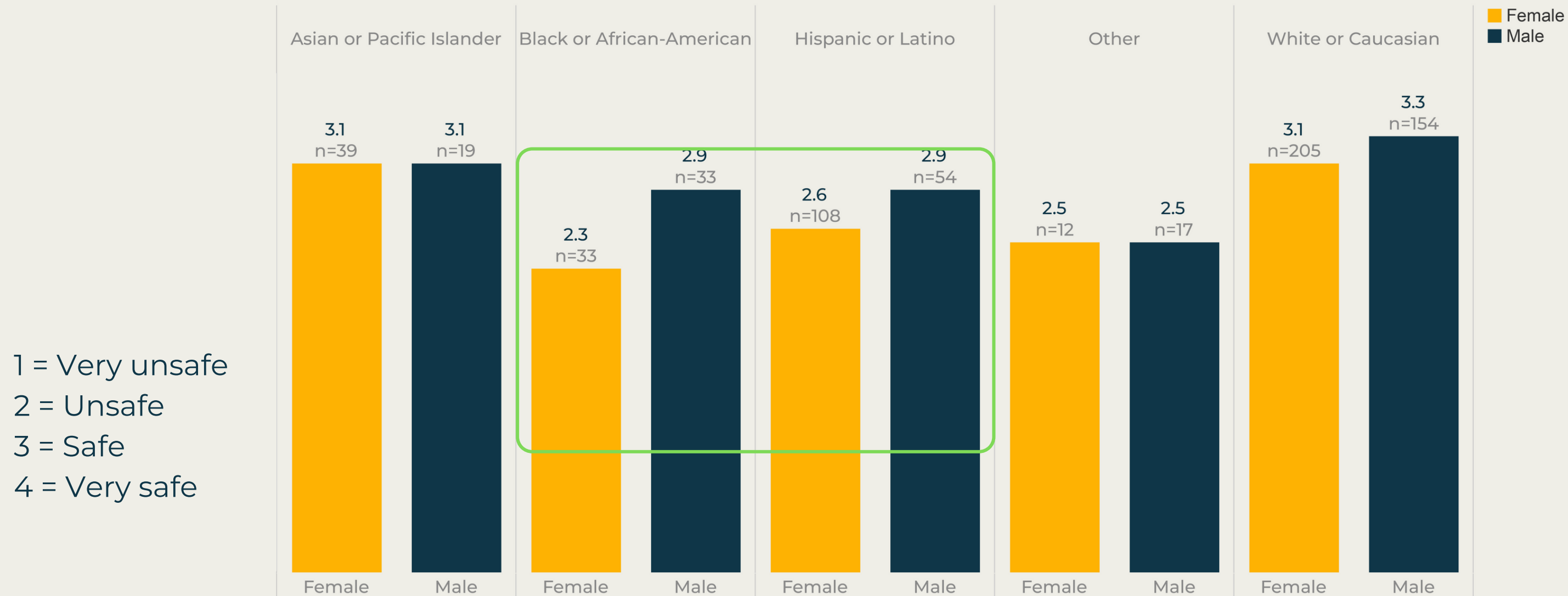
PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY - OVERALL

RATINGS BY RACE & GENDER (LGBTQIA+ NOT INDICATED)

Black, Hispanic, and Other Race respondents have **lower average feelings of safety** than Asian, White, and respondents of Two or More Races.

Black and Hispanic women report **much lower ratings of safety** in the City overall than Black and Hispanic men.

Ratings of Safety in the City Overall, Race/Ethnicity and Gender Effects for *LGBTQIA+ Not Indicated*
Average on a scale of 1 to 4



Encounters with Police

MAIN FINDINGS ON ENCOUNTERS WITH SPD

- Perceptions of encounters vary by gender, LGBTQIA+ status, and disability status.
- Nonbinary, LGBTQIA+, and disabled respondents report much lower perceptions of encounters with SPD.
Removing these demographic groups, we can find no more differences across Race/Ethnicity or binary Gender categories.
- There does, however, continue to be a difference observed among different age groups and to a lesser degree across some other characteristics.

WHY DID NONBINARY, LGBTQIA+, AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CONSISTENTLY REPORT MORE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES?

Further studies are necessary.

There are substantial differences across gender, LGBTQIA+ status, and disability status on this measure.

PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

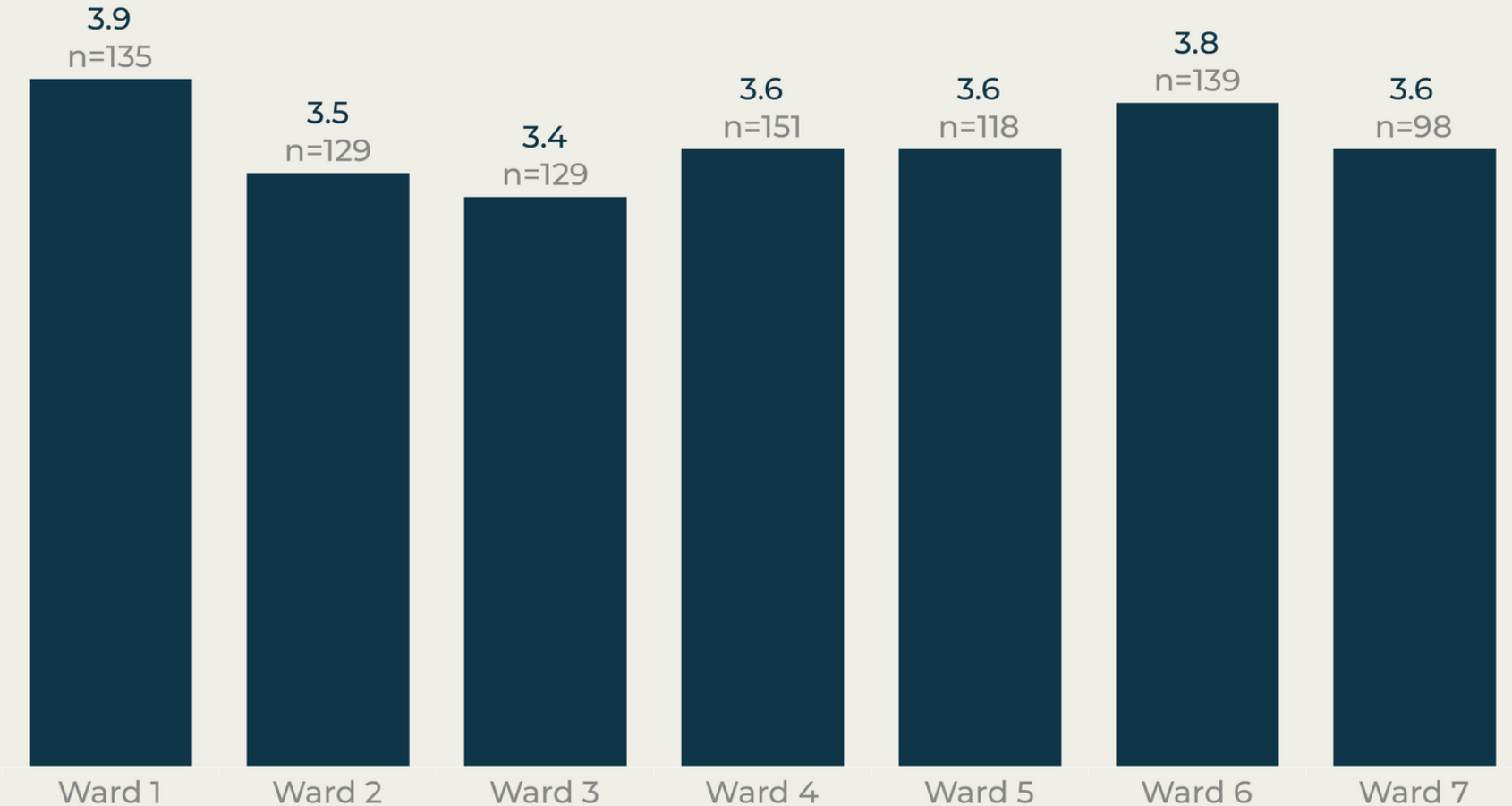
RATINGS BY WARD

Ratings of encounters with police in the dataset were on average a **3.7 (between Neutral and Somewhat positive)**.

There was some variation by ward, with Wards 2, 3, and 5 on the lower end, and 1 and 6 on the higher.

- 1 = Very negative
- 2 = Somewhat negative
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Somewhat positive
- 5 = Very positive

Was your encounter a positive or negative experience?
(Average on a scale of 1 to 5)



PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

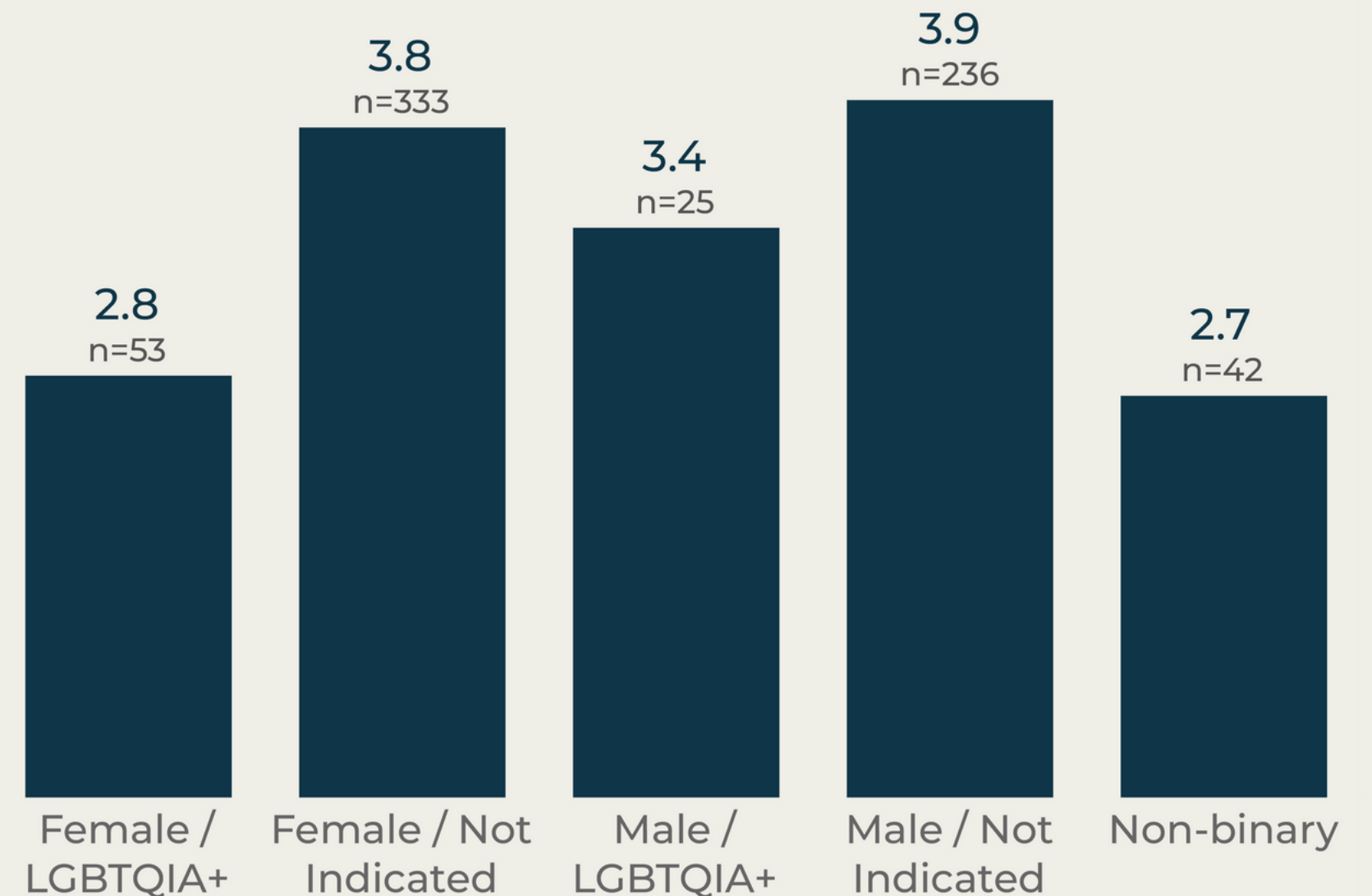
RATINGS BY GENDER & LGBTQIA+ STATUS

Among LGBTQIA+ and Non-binary respondents, the average rating ranged from **slightly below neutral** for Non-binary and Female respondents respectively to a high of **slightly above neutral** for Male respondents.

There is no substantive gender difference observed for those who did not indicate LGBTQIA+ status.

- 1 = Very negative
- 2 = Somewhat negative
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Somewhat positive
- 5 = Very positive

Was your encounter a positive or negative experience?
1 (Very Negative) to 5 (Very Positive)
n=689



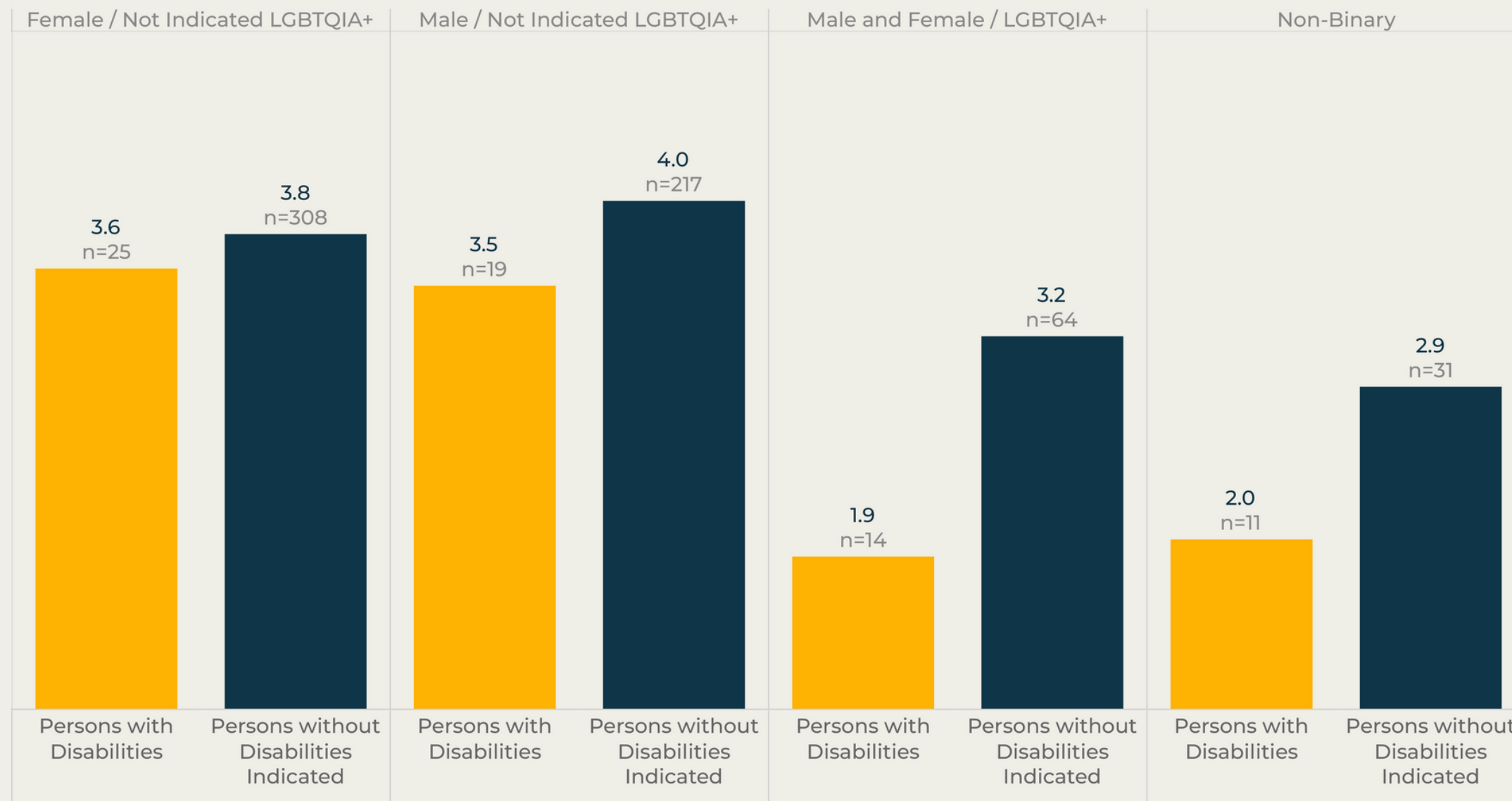
PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

RATINGS BY DISABILITY STATUS

Across most gender & LGBTQIA+ status categories, people with disabilities report **lower overall ratings** than their counterparts who did not identify as people with disabilities, but this effect is much more profound for those who also identified as Non-binary or LGBTQIA+.

Ratings of Police Encounters, disability effects within LGBTQIA+ & Gender

Average on a scale of 1 to 5



1 = Very negative
 2 = Somewhat negative
 3 = Neutral
 4 = Somewhat positive
 5 = Very positive

Perceptions of Police

MAIN FINDINGS ON PERCEPTION OF SPD

Perceptions of SPD vary by Gender & LGBTQIA+ status, Disability status, and immigrant status, as well as age.

MAIN FINDINGS ON PERCEPTION OF SPD

Removing nonbinary, LGBTQIA+, respondents with disabilities, and immigrant respondents, **we can find minor, if any, differences across Race/Ethnicity or binary Gender categories.**

PERCEPTIONS OF SPD - GENERAL

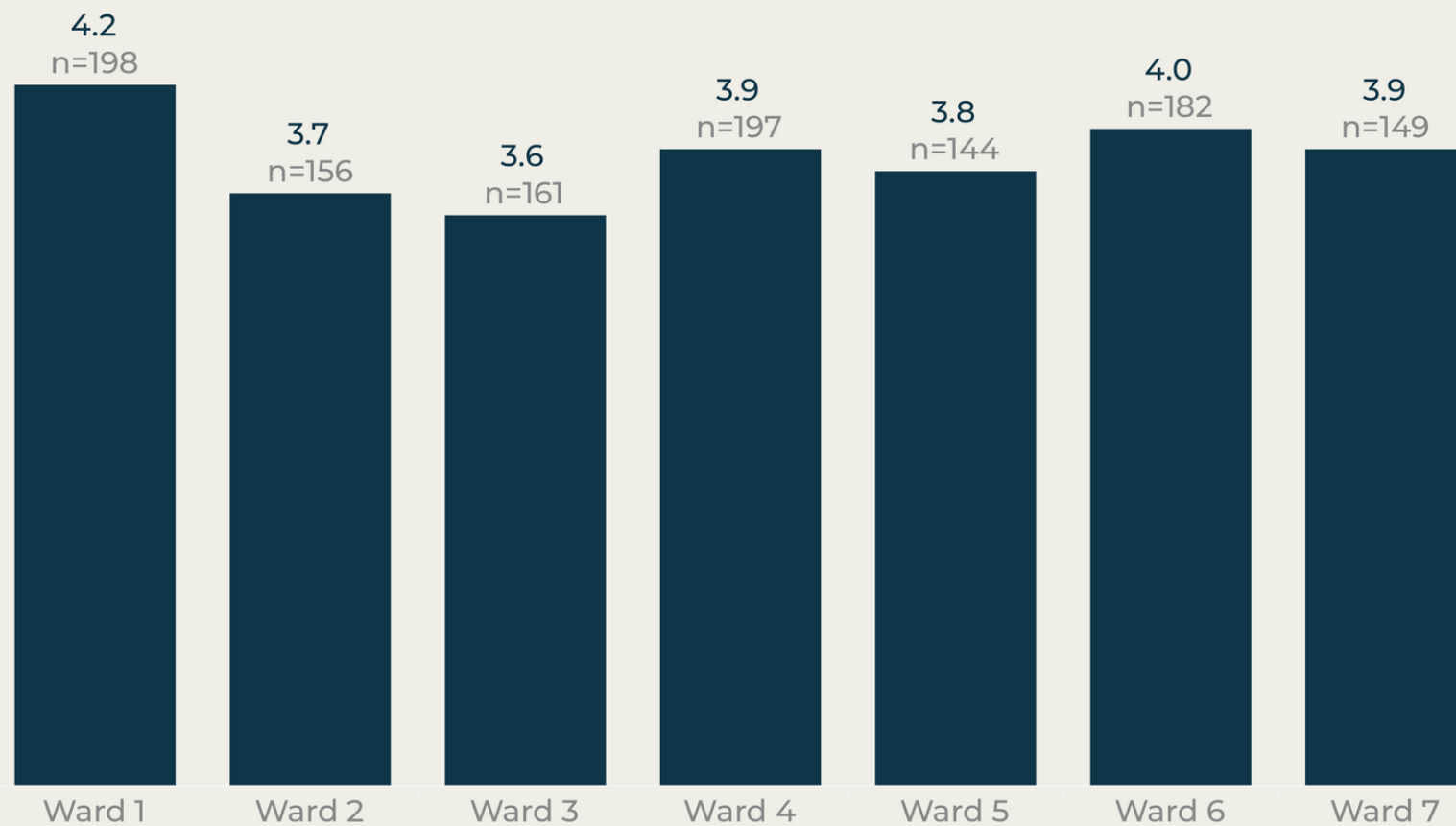
RATINGS BY WARD

In general, respondents reported that the SPD **“Almost always”** treats people in their neighborhood with respect, and between **“Sometimes”** and **“Almost always”** makes the respondent feel safe.

Ratings of feeling safe are generally lower than ratings of treating people with respect, but follow a **similar pattern across wards**.

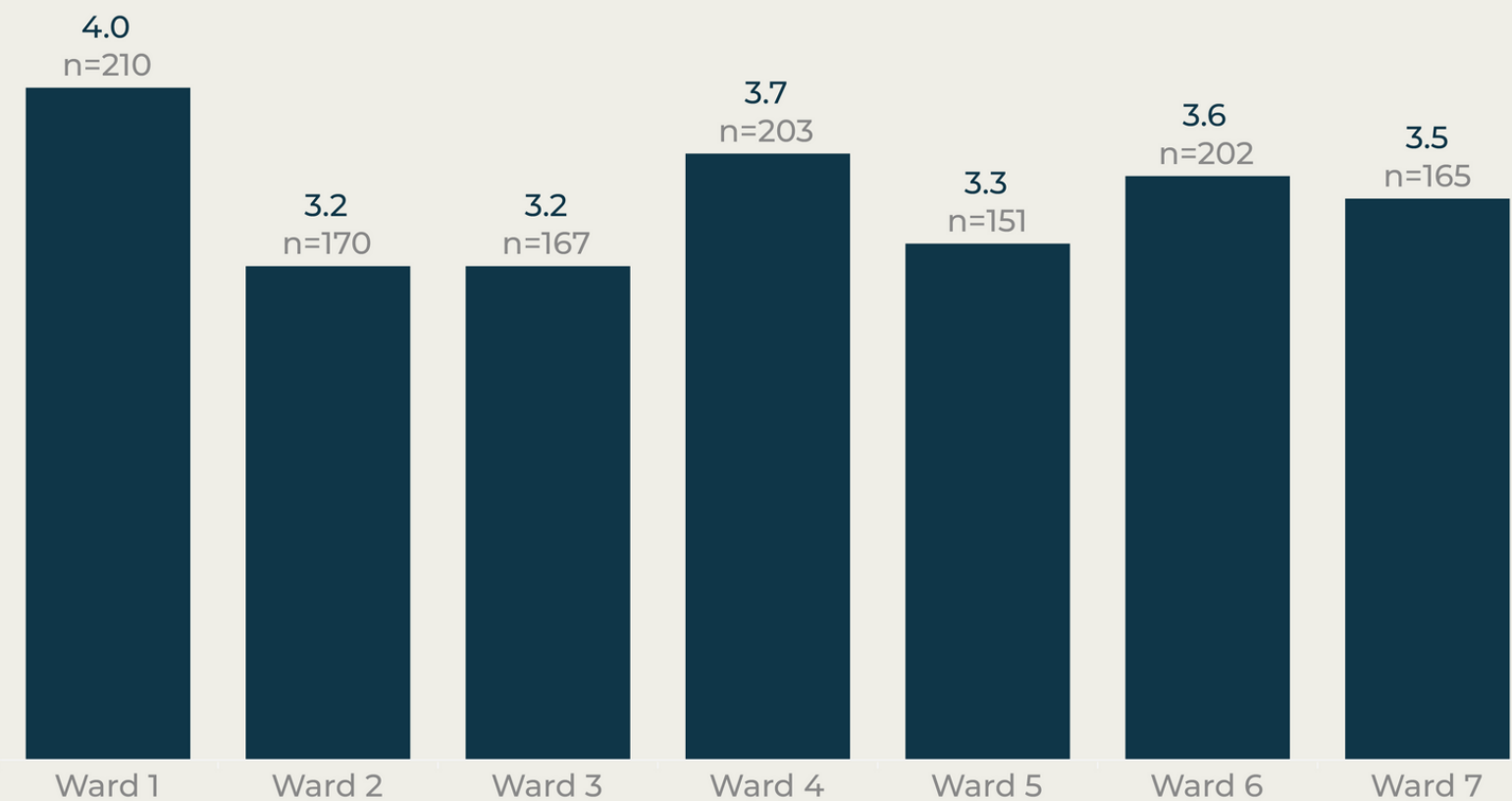
Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?

(Average on a scale of 1 to 5)



Do the Somerville Police Department officers in your neighborhood make you feel safe?

(Average on a scale of 1 to 5)



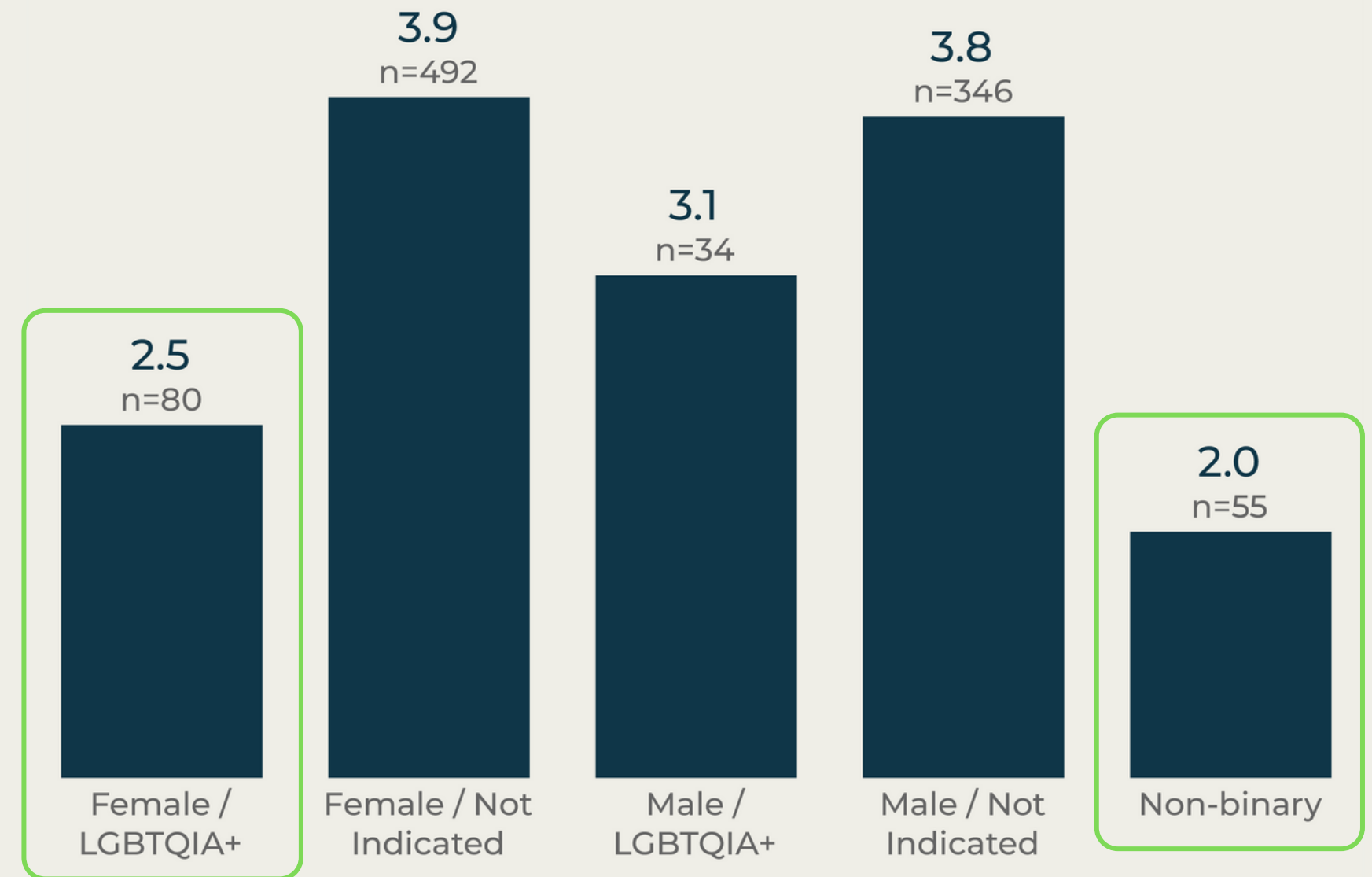
PERCEPTIONS OF SPD- FEELING SAFE

RATINGS BY GENDER & LGBTQIA+ STATUS

Non-binary and LGBTQIA+ respondents report a lower rating for police making them feel safe.

Do the Somerville Police Department officers in your neighborhood make you feel safe?
n=1,007

1 = Never
2 = Almost Never
3 = Sometimes
4 = Almost Always
5 = Always



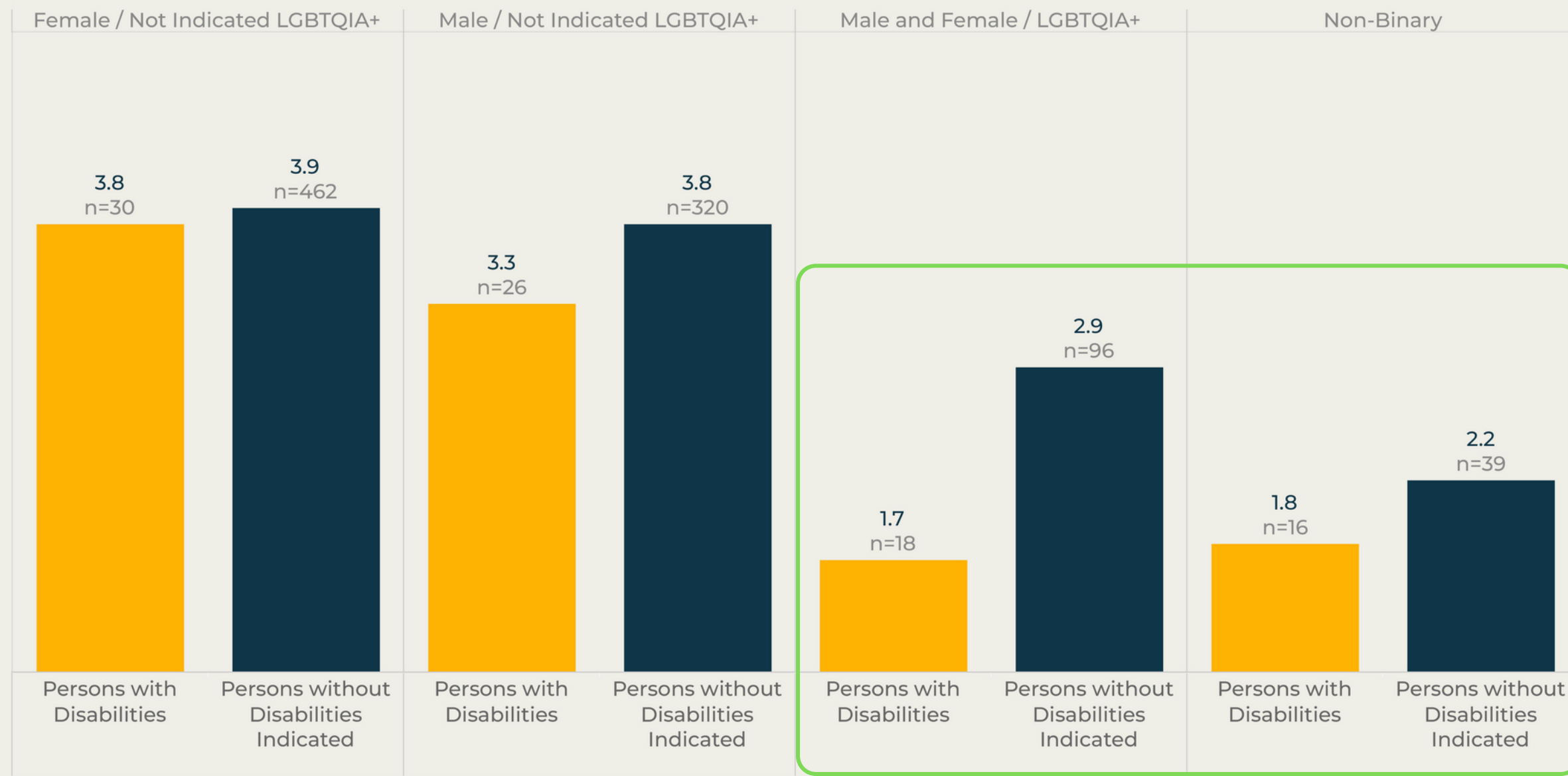
PERCEPTIONS OF SPD - FEELING SAFE

RATINGS BY DISABILITY, GENDER, & LGBTQIA+ STATUS

The differences across disability status for SPD making them feel safe are even more pronounced, with LGBTQIA+ and Non-binary people with disabilities reporting **very low averages**.

Do the Somerville Police Department officers in your neighborhood make you feel safe? Disability effects within LGBTQIA+ & Gender

Average on a scale of 1 to 5



- 1 = Never
- 2 = Almost Never
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Almost Always
- 5 = Always

PERCEPTIONS OF SPD BY RACE/ETHNICITY

For respondents who don't identify as Non-binary, LGBTQIA+, or as having a disability, there is **not substantial variation in Race/Ethnicity ratings for general perceptions of police.**

SUGGESTIONS FOR SPD IMPROVEMENT - BY RACE

Notably, adding social workers or mental health professionals to response teams **did not make the top 3** for Black or African American race respondents.

Asian or Pacific Islander

n=91

1. Social workers on response teams **(42)**
2. Mental health professionals on response teams **(39)**
3. Transparency / Community Policing **(Tie, 35)**

Black or African American

n=84

1. Community policing **(43)**
2. Increase police presence **(33)**
3. Youth voice / Community events / Mental health crisis training **(Tie, 28)**

Hispanic or Latino

n=214

1. Community policing **(104)**
2. Mental health professionals on response teams **(87)**
3. Mental health crisis training **(81)**

White or Caucasian

n=662

1. Mental health professionals on response teams **(404)**
2. Social workers on response teams **(379)**
3. Mental health crisis training **(332)**

Other

n=37

1. Community policing **(21)**
2. Mental health crisis training **(20)**
3. Mental health professionals on response teams **(18)**

Two or More Races

n=49

1. Mental health crisis training **(33)**
2. Mental health professionals on response teams **(32)**
3. Social workers on response teams **(31)**

SAFETY AND POLICE PERCEPTION

Respondents who feel more safe in the City overall feel **less safe around police.**



Respondents who feel less safe in the City overall feel **more safe around police.**

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- Presented data to PSFA Task Force and some City Departments - *October 2023*
- Upload preliminary results to PSFA Micro Page - *November 2023*
- Share with Civilian Oversight Task Force and Anti-Violence Working Group - *November 2023*
- Share with City Departments and Community Partners - *Winter and Spring 2024*
- Share survey report and Public Safety for All Study - *Early 2024*
- Host constituent Webinar (virtual) and Public Meeting (in-person) - *TBD*

Appendix

Perceptions of Safety

PLEASE SHARE ANY OTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT POLICING IN SOMERVILLE:

Question 11: Based on your personal experience, please rate how safe you feel in Somerville's streets in the following situations:

- In your home
- Walking alone in your neighborhood during the day
- Walking alone in your neighborhood at night
- In the City overall
- When you are in a park alone
- Walking to/from my child's school (if applicable)
- When driving
- When biking

Question 13 asked respondents about their top five concerns regarding public safety in their neighborhood. Options ranged from Animal Complaints to Gun Violence to Traffic Safety.

PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY - OVERALL

RATINGS BY RACE & GENDER (LGBTQIA+)

Respondents who indicated LGBTQIA+ status show a similar Race/Ethnicity difference (Nonwhite respondents have a lower average rating of safety in the City)

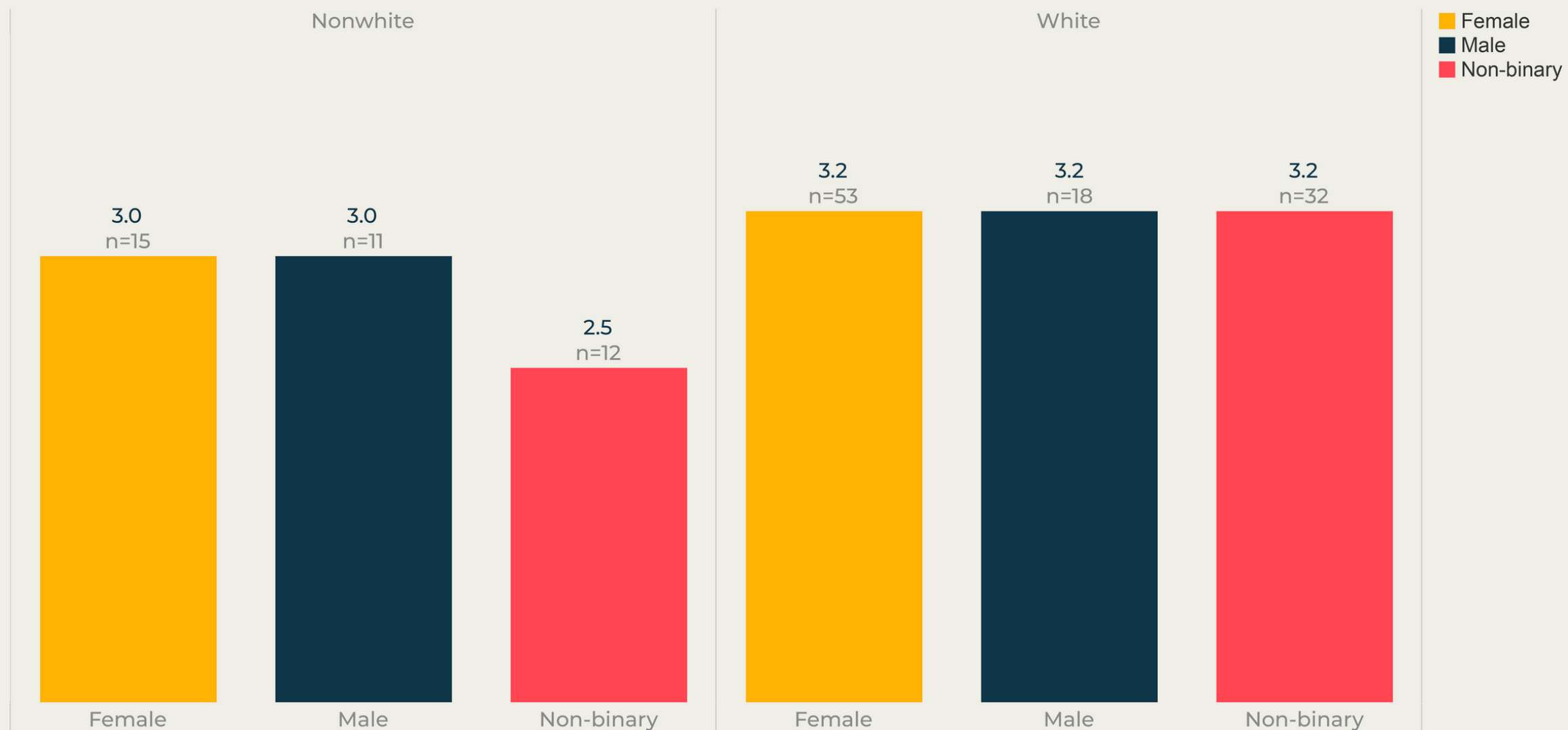
These respondents do not show Gender differences within Race/Ethnicity categories. They report a very **similar level of safety rating** for the City overall.

Ratings of Safety in the City Overall, Race/Ethnicity effects for LGBTQIA+ Respondents

Respondents

Average on a scale of 1 to 4

1 = Very unsafe
2 = Unsafe
3 = Safe
4 = Very safe



PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY - OVERALL

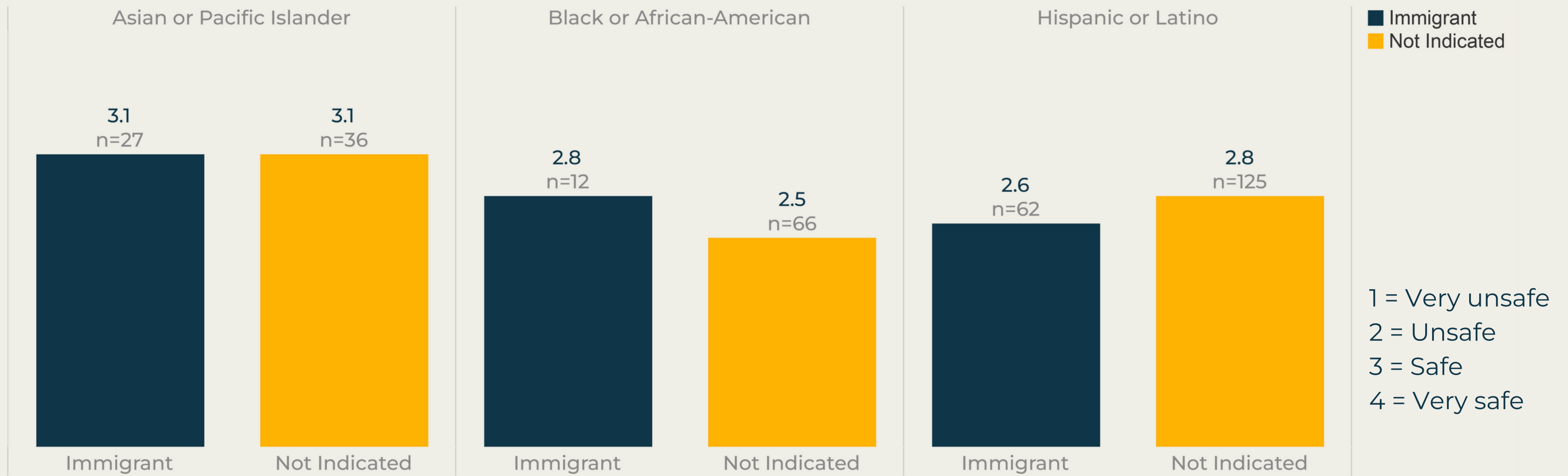
RATINGS BY IMMIGRATION

In ratings of safety in the City overall, Asian and Black immigrant respondents report **equal or higher levels of safety** than those who didn't indicate Immigrant status, and Hispanic and White immigrant respondents report lower levels of safety.

Other Race/Ethnicity categories did not have enough Immigrant respondents for comparison.

Ratings of Safety in the City Overall, by Immigration

On a scale of 1 to 4



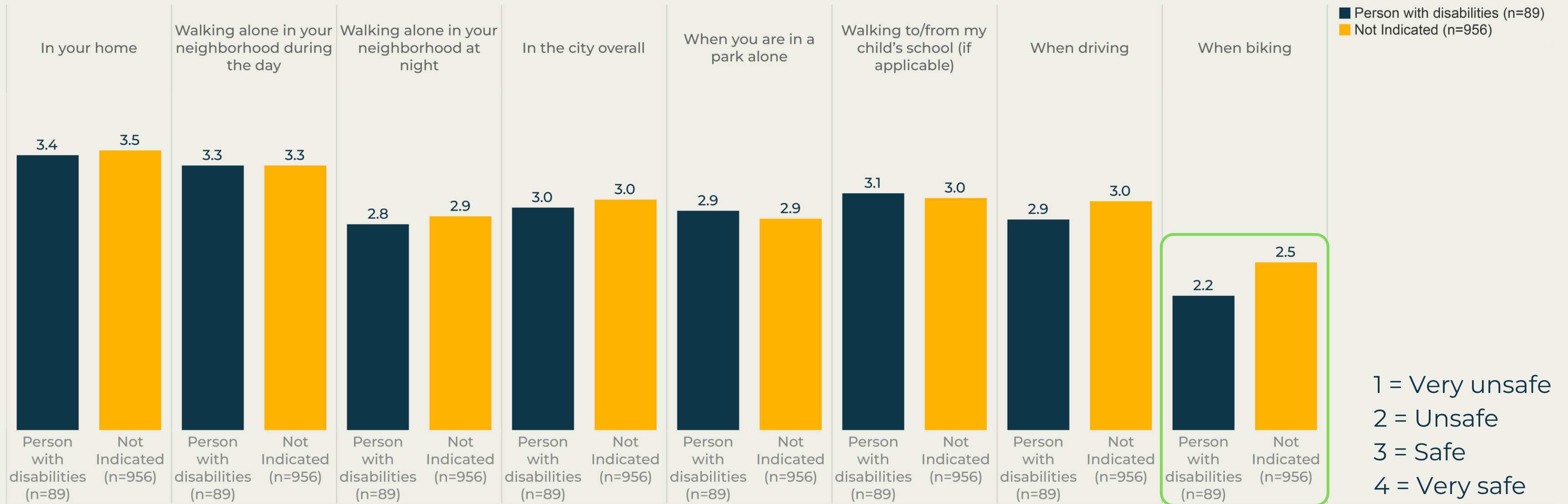
PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY - OVERALL

RATINGS BY DISABILITY

Aside from safety when biking, **there are no observed differences across reported disability status on safety ratings.**

Safety Ratings by Disability Across Contexts

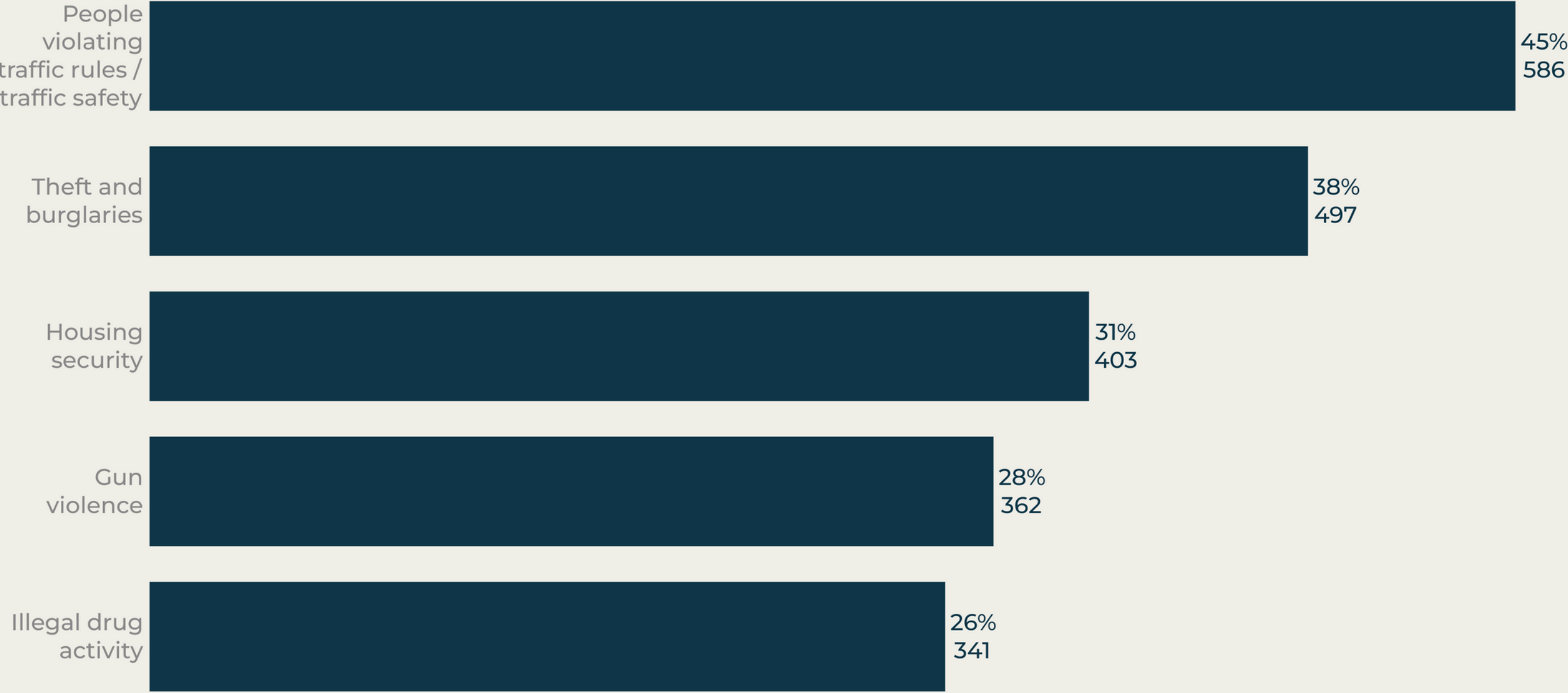
On a scale of 1 to 4



TOP SAFETY CONCERNS - OVERALL

Traffic safety was indicated as the **largest area of concern**, with 45% of respondents selecting this option, followed by theft and burglaries; housing security; gun violence; and illegal drug activity.

Overall - Top 5 Safety Concerns (n=1296)



TOP SAFETY CONCERNS - BY RACE

Asian or Pacific Islander

1. Housing Security
2. Traffic Safety
3. Theft and burglaries
4. Gun violence
5. Animal complaints

Black or African American

1. Gun Violence
2. Violent crime
3. Theft and burglaries
4. Housing security
5. Illegal drug activity

White or Caucasian

1. Traffic safety
2. Theft and burglaries
3. Housing security
4. Domestic violence
5. Gun violence

Hispanic or Latino

1. Illegal drug activity
2. Theft and burglaries
3. Gun violence
4. Traffic safety
5. Housing security

“WHAT KIND OF PROGRAMS DO YOU THINK WOULD HELP BUILD A SAFER COMMUNITY?”

150 of 650 responses mention community, community events, and more social support between constituents and City government.

Respondents suggested...

“Community drop- in centers for people of all ages to meet and socialize that offer refreshments, occasional entertainment, have chess or other games, magazines, newspapers, tables and chairs of course and some comfy ones to read and relax in.”

“WHAT KIND OF PROGRAMS DO YOU THINK WOULD HELP BUILD A SAFER COMMUNITY?”

127 respondents mention affordable housing.

Respondents suggested...

“Rent assistance, rent stabilization, subsidies for obtaining electric and non-electric bicycles, more housing everywhere in the city, fewer restrictions on upzoning or starting a commercial entity in neighborhood zones.”

“Rent assistance for tenants and landlords who otherwise would be moving towards evictions, eviction moratoria, better community health protections.”

“WHAT KIND OF PROGRAMS DO YOU THINK WOULD HELP BUILD A SAFER COMMUNITY?”

Others called for increased:

- mental health services **(103)**,
- increased policing **(100)**,
- youth programming **(97)**,
- and traffic safety **(73)**.

“WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL SAFE AT HOME, IN YOUR COMMUNITY, AND AT WORK?”



604 respondents

The biggest theme that came up (**313 responses**) was that respondents’ communities make them feel safe, including knowing their neighbors, government involvement, a sense of personal safety, and having their basic needs and those of their neighbors met.

102 write in responses indicate that police and fast police response times make them feel safe.

Other responses discussed: alternatives to policing (**36**), traffic safety (**34**), the perceived lack of crime in Somerville (**34**), lighting, cameras, or security systems (**25**).

“PLEASE SHARE ANY OTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT PUBLIC SAFETY IN SOMERVILLE.”

- Respondents share specific safety concerns (**113 responses**), including traffic safety, affordable housing, food security, infrastructure, mental health, Safe Consumption Sites / Overdose Prevention Centers (both pro and against), and more.
- **61** responses report the desire for **alternatives to policing/alternate response models**.
- **46** responses call for **increased policing**.
- **38** respondents report **satisfaction** with the current state of safety in Somerville.
- **32** respondents note the opposite, describing feeling **unsafe** in the City.

Encounters with Police

ENCOUNTERS WITH POLICE - SURVEY QUESTIONS

Question 3: Have you ever had a personal encounter with an Somerville police officer?

Question 4: Was your encounter a positive or negative experience?

- 1 = Very negative
- 2 = Somewhat negative
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Somewhat positive
- 5 = Very positive

WHY DID NONBINARY, LGBTQIA+, AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CONSISTENTLY REPORT MORE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES?

- COVID and public health concerns: Some participants recalled that officers were unmasked during encounters that occurred in 2020-2021.
- Protests: Some participants described encounters at protests.
- Anxiety: Some participants described feeling increased anxiety in the presence of police.
- Suspicion: Some participants felt the police treated them with unnecessary suspicion.
- Bicycles: Bicyclists perceived a difference in treatment based on their mode of travel.

PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

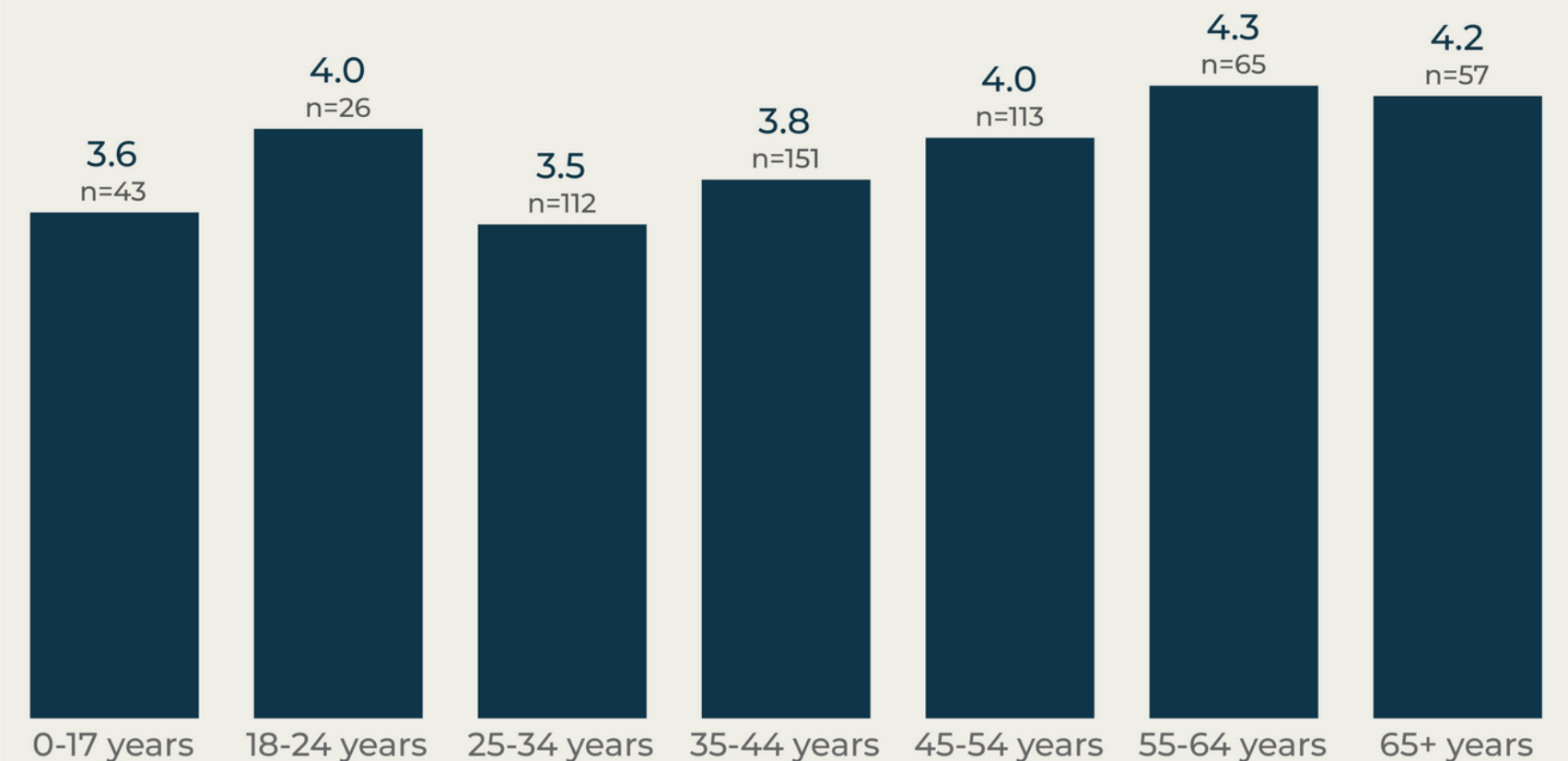
RATINGS BY AGE FOR RESPONDENTS WHO DON'T IDENTIFY AS NON-BINARY, LGBTQIA+, OR HAVING A DISABILITY

For respondents who don't identify as Non-binary, LGBTQIA+, or as having a disability, **more positive ratings of police encounters tend to increase with age.**

Specifically, there appears to be a cut-off of <45 and 45+ years old, where the average rating for <45 is **between Neutral and Somewhat Positive**, and the average rating for 45+ tends to be at **Somewhat Positive or above.**

- 1 = Very negative
- 2 = Somewhat negative
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Somewhat positive
- 5 = Very positive

Was your encounter a positive or negative experience?
1 (Very Negative) to 5 (Very Positive)
n=567



PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

RATINGS BY RACE & GENDER FOR RESPONDENTS WHO DON'T IDENTIFY AS NON-BINARY, LGBTQIA+, OR HAVING A DISABILITY

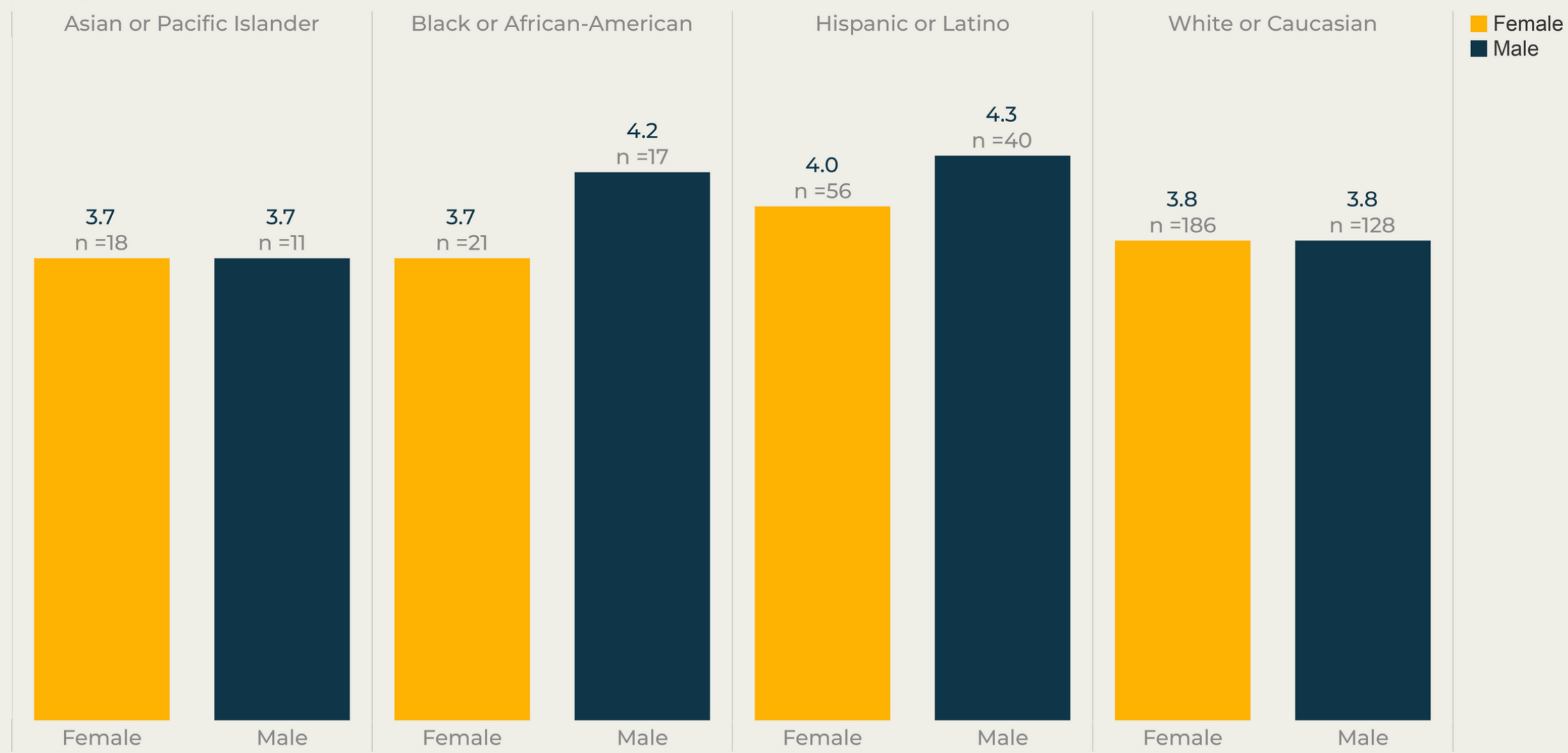
There is not substantial variation in Race/Ethnicity ratings for police encounters.

In general, all Race/Ethnicity and gender groups rate police encounters around “Somewhat Positive”.

High scores for Hispanic respondents largely come from those who identify as immigrants.

Ratings of Police Encounters, Race/Ethnicity & Gender Effects

Average on a scale of 1 to 5



1 = Very negative
2 = Somewhat negative
3 = Neutral
4 = Somewhat positive
5 = Very positive

WAS YOUR ENCOUNTER A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE? PLEASE EXPLAIN:



486 respondents

169 reported positive interactions with SPD

- Saying officers are “always professional and helpful”

162 reported neutral interactions with SPD

- “Nothing stands out to me; I don’t recall it as a particularly positive or negative experience”

124 reported negative interactions with SPD

- Describing officers as “rude, made me feel unsafe rather than safe,” or “condescending, yelling”

Perceptions of Police

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE - SURVEY QUESTIONS

Question 1: Perceptions of the Somerville Police Department (items 1, 2):

- Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?
- Do the Somerville Police Department officers in your neighborhood make you feel safe?

1 = Never

2 = Almost Never

3 = Sometimes

4 = Almost Always

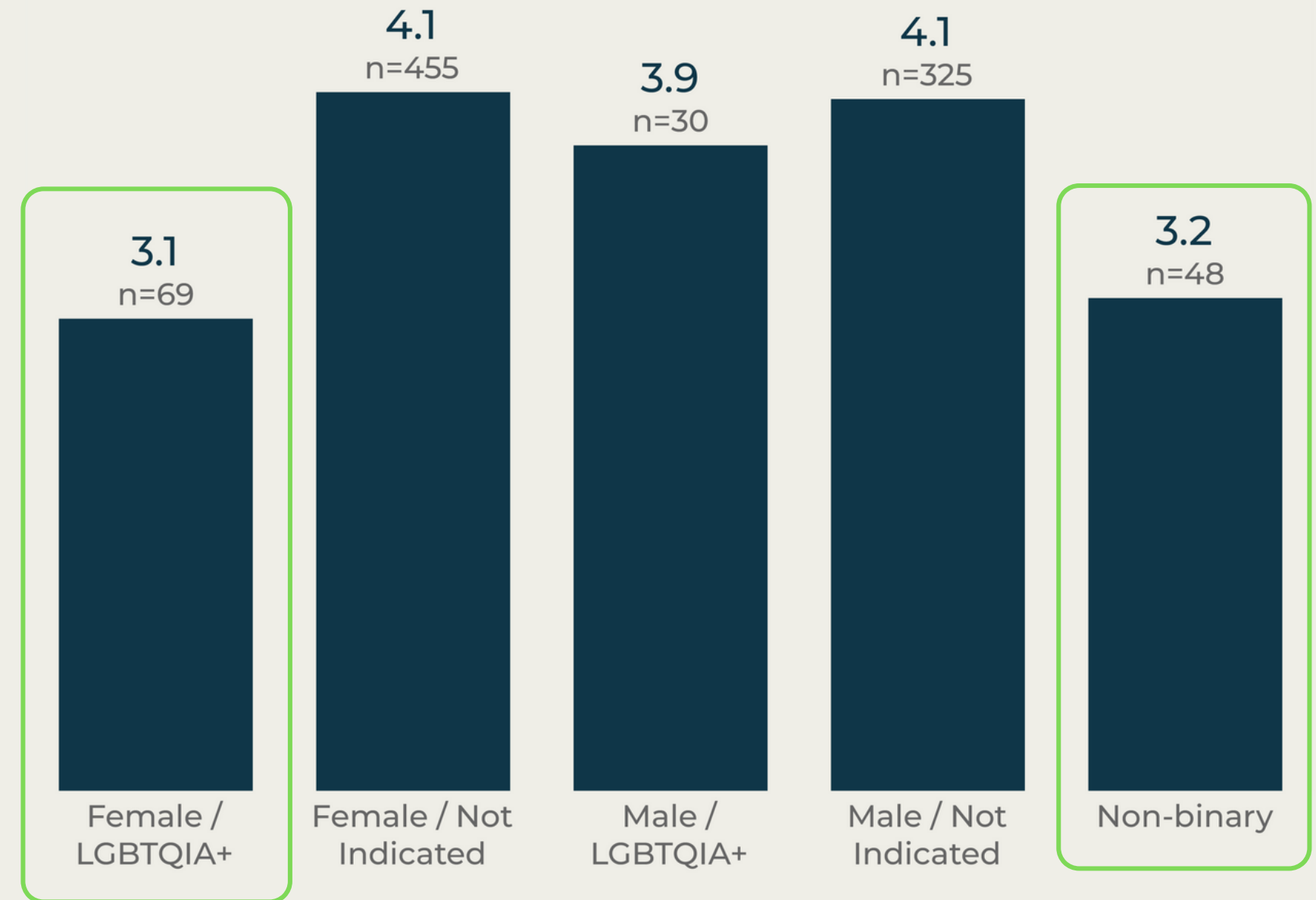
5 = Always

PERCEPTIONS OF SPD- RESPECT

RATINGS BY GENDER & LGBTQIA+ STATUS

Non-binary and Female LGBTQIA+ respondents report a **lower average rating** of SPD treating people in their neighborhood with respect than the rest of the respondents.

Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?
n=927



- 1 = Never
- 2 = Almost Never
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Almost Always
- 5 = Always

PERCEPTIONS OF SPD - RESPECT

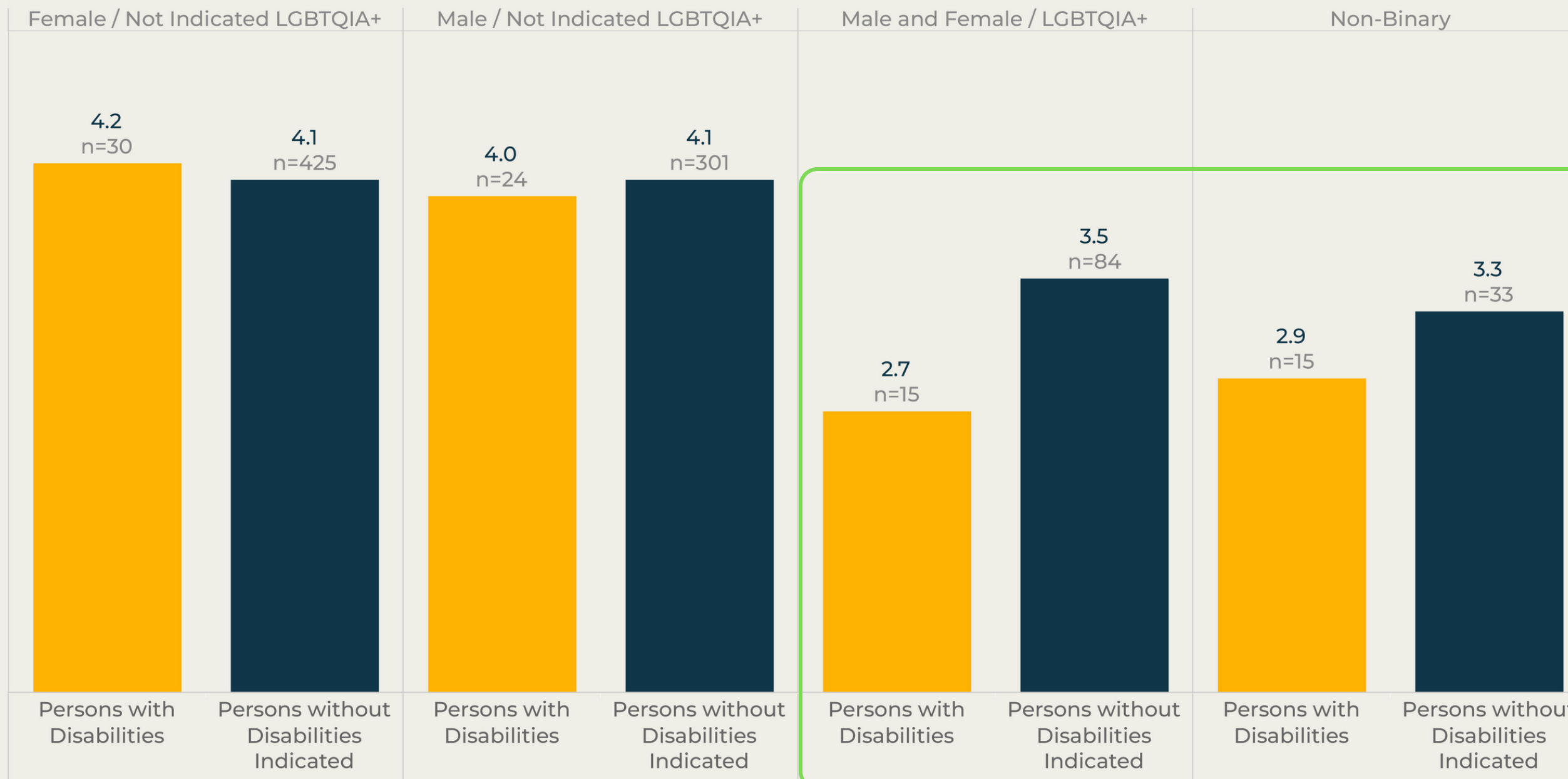
RATINGS BY DISABILITY, GENDER, & LGBTQIA+ STATUS

There is a marked difference in perceptions of police treating people with respect by disability status, but **only for Non-binary and LGBTQIA+ respondents.**

Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?

Disability effects within LGBTQIA+ & Gender

Average on a scale of 1 to 5



1 = Never
 2 = Almost Never
 3 = Sometimes
 4 = Almost Always
 5 = Always

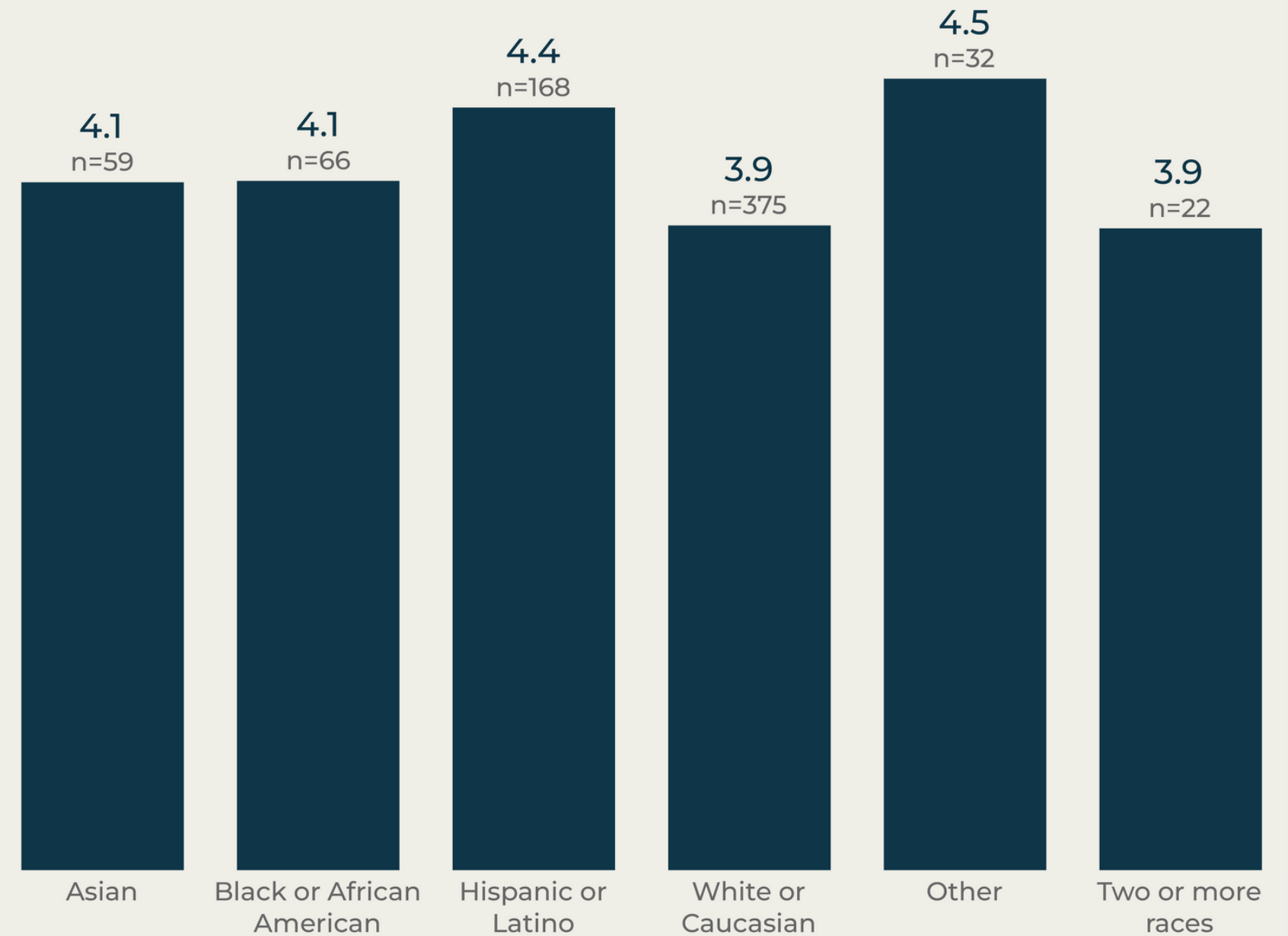
PERCEPTIONS OF SPD BY RACE/ETHNICITY (RESPECT)

Non-white Race/Ethnicity groups tend to have slightly higher ratings of police treating people with **respect**.

This difference is driven in large part by immigrant respondents (similarly to ratings of police encounters).

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Almost Never
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Almost Always
- 5 = Always

Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?
n=722



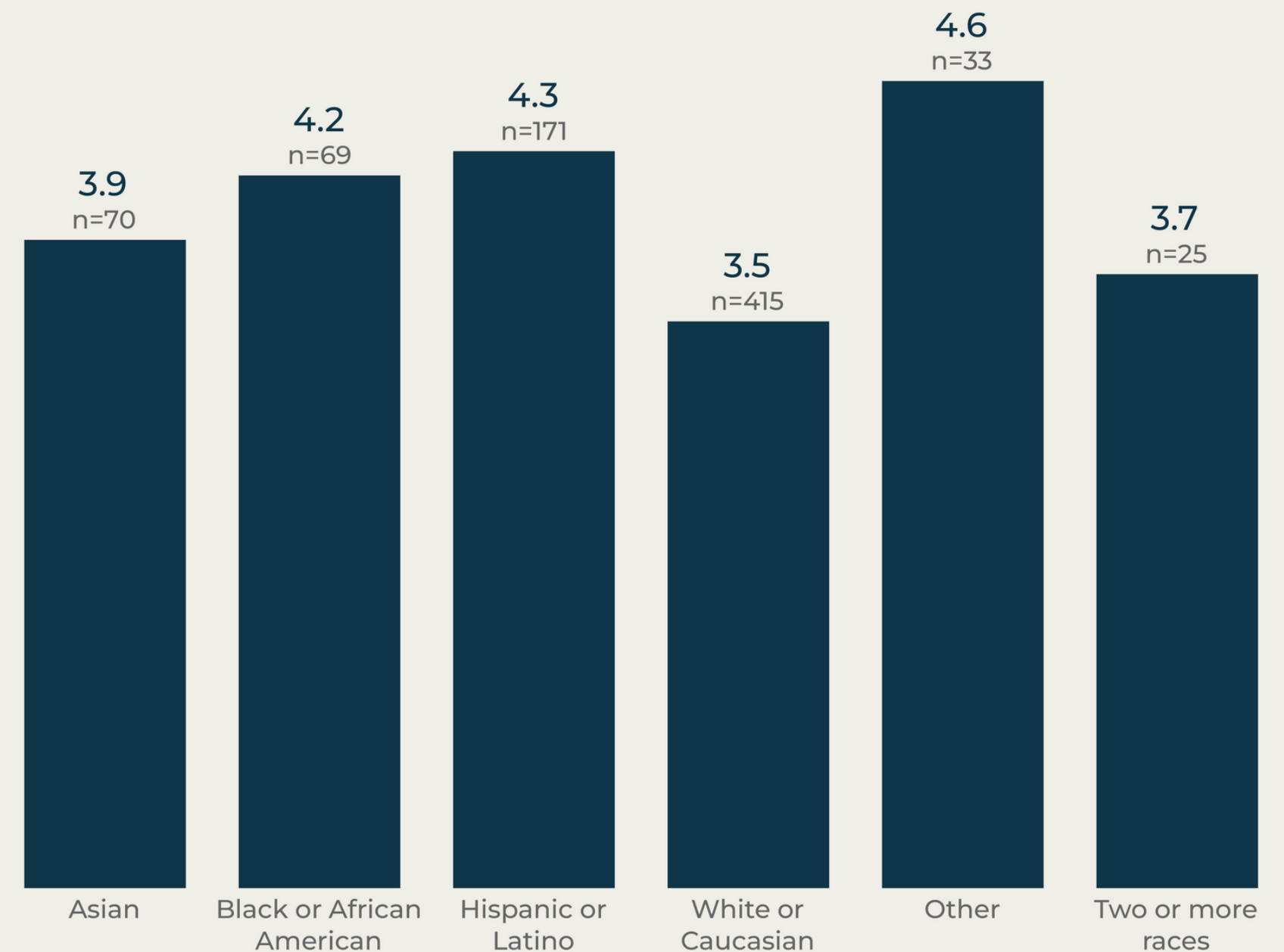
PERCEPTIONS OF SPD BY RACE/ETHNICITY (SAFETY)

Again, non-white Race/Ethnicity groups have slightly higher ratings of whether SPD makes them feel **safe**.

Similarly to the question of respect, this difference is driven in large part by immigrant respondents.

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Almost Never
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Almost Always
- 5 = Always

Do the Somerville Police Department officers in your neighborhood make you feel safe?
n=783

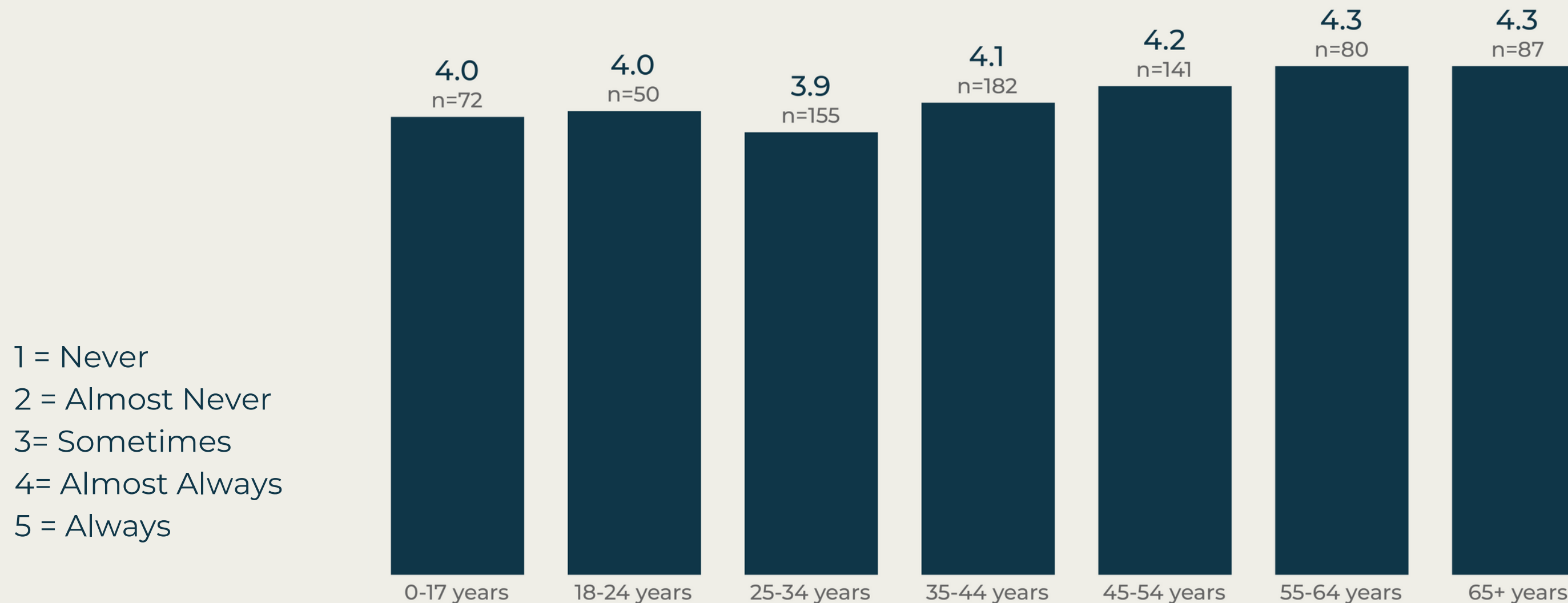


PERCEPTIONS OF SPD - RESPECT

RATINGS BY AGE

Ratings of police treating people with respect shows a minor difference by age, if any.

Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?
n=767

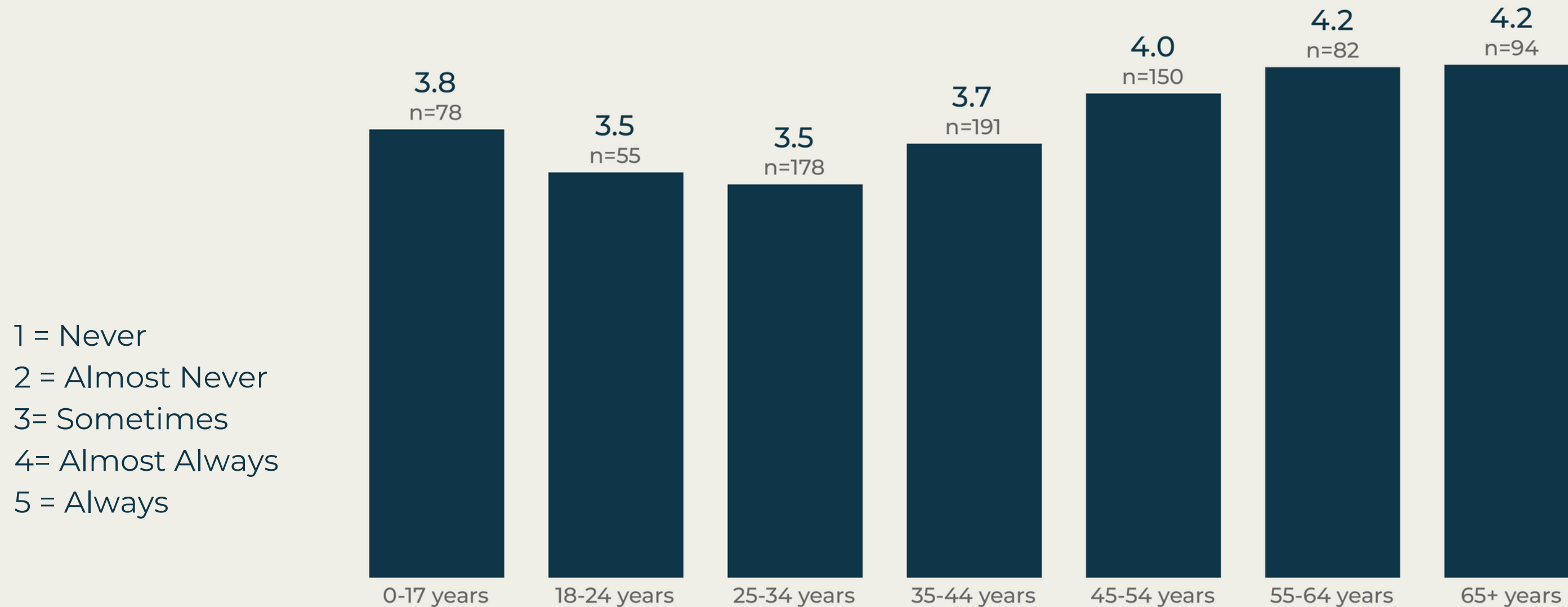


PERCEPTIONS OF SPD - FEELING SAFE

RATINGS BY AGE

However, the ratings of whether SPD makes them feel safe do vary by respondent age, with those 45+ reporting **higher average ratings** than those below 45.

Do the Somerville Police Department officers in your neighborhood make you feel safe?
n=828



WRITE-IN PERCEPTIONS

Respondents left comments to the question:

“Is there anything else about your relationship/experience (positive or negative) with the Somerville Police Department that you would like to share with us?”

This question received 395 write-in responses.

WRITE-IN PERCEPTIONS

116 responses consist of positive praise for SPD, citing their professionalism, helpfulness, and respectfulness.

One respondent wrote, **“Somerville police have always been extremely professional, kind, and respectful. I truly believe we have one of the best police forces; they always put our city first!”**

WRITE-IN PERCEPTIONS

67 responses indicate a negative relationship with SPD.

Respondents indicate instances where SPD officers are perceived to neglect their duty, display bad attitudes or behaviors. Still others call for reform to SPD, defunding SPD, or abolishing SPD.

WRITE-IN PERCEPTIONS

44 responses mentioned specific reforms desired for SPD.

Some of these reforms include hosting events to foster relationships with police, ensuring police are enforcing traffic laws on details, training (anti-bias, mental health, crisis intervention), and language capacity.

PLEASE SHARE ANY OTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT POLICING IN SOMERVILLE:

Question 10 served as a catch-all for additional feedback about policing in Somerville not captured by previous questions. **371 respondents wrote in answers, taking this space to:**

- Call for alternatives to policing **(77 responses)**
- Mention reform and training **(59 responses)**
- Request increased policing **(54 responses)**
- Praise SPD **(52 responses)**
- Defund SPD **(42 responses)**

Open Data release:

- Dataset
- Data dictionary
- Data explorer / visualization



OPEN DATA: PUBLIC SAFETY FOR ALL DATASET

- Open Data contains one row per survey response
- Data has been cleaned to preserve anonymity, combine small groups, and enable calculation



	Always	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never	N/A
Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

EXAMPLE DATA

Language	Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?	Have you ever had a personal encounter with an Somerville police officer?	How old are you?
English	3	No	35-44 years
Portuguese	5	Yes	25-34 years
Haitian Creole	3	Unsure	55-64 years

OPEN DATA: PUBLIC SAFETY FOR ALL DATA DICTIONARY

The data dictionary, released with the [open data](#), explains how to interpret the data table and how it relates to the survey.

SURVEY

1. Perceptions of the Somerville Police Department

	Always	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never	N/A
Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do the Somerville Police Department officers in your neighborhood treat people in your neighborhood with respect?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

DATA DICTIONARY

Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?

Question Number: 1

Matrix Text: Perceptions of the Somerville Police Department

Question Text: Does the Somerville Police Department treat people in your neighborhood with respect?

Question Type: Multiple Choice (Single Selection) Matrix

Options

Data Value	Option Text
(null)	N/A (or skipped the question)
1	Never
2	Almost Never
3	Sometimes
4	Almost Always
5	Always

OPEN DATA: PUBLIC SAFETY FOR ALL DATA EXPLORER

Our Tableau Public visualization allows you to explore all scale questions by any demographic.



OPEN DATA: PUBLIC SAFETY FOR ALL DATA EXPLORER

Additional views allow you to see effects for selected demographics and questions, with filters for some of the frequently noted demographic groups.

Combinations of groups with <10 people are removed from the visualization.

