



**Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation
Research Report:**

Proliferation of Hunting With AR-Platform / Modern Sporting Rifles



**Conducted by:
Responsive Management**



for Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation

**Proliferation of Hunting
with AR-Platform /
Modern Sporting Rifles**

Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

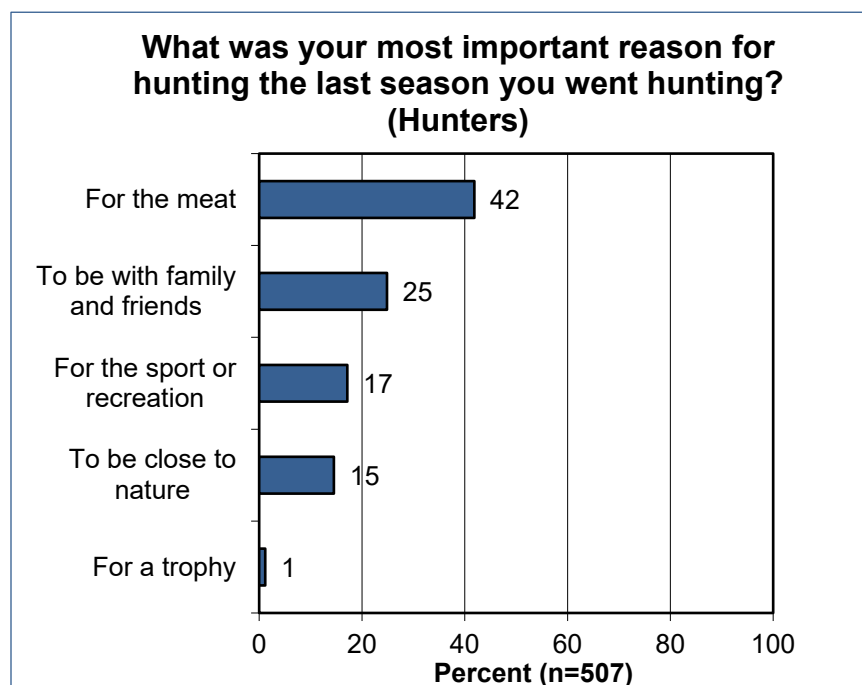
This study was conducted by Responsive Management for the Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation, Inc., to measure hunters' motivations for hunting, their participation in hunting using various types of firearms, their use specifically of an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt, and their likelihood of using an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt if they have not previously done so. The purpose of this study is to proactively track trends and to accurately update our understanding of hunters' use of and opinions on AR-platform / modern sporting rifles for hunting to assess how they impact R3 efforts. This study entailed a scientific, probability-based multi-modal survey of U.S. hunters aged 18 and older.

In the survey, the AR-platform / Modern Sporting Rifle (sometimes abbreviated as MSR in the graphs for legibility) was defined as semi-automatic rifles, in particular AR-15 platform semi-automatic rifles.

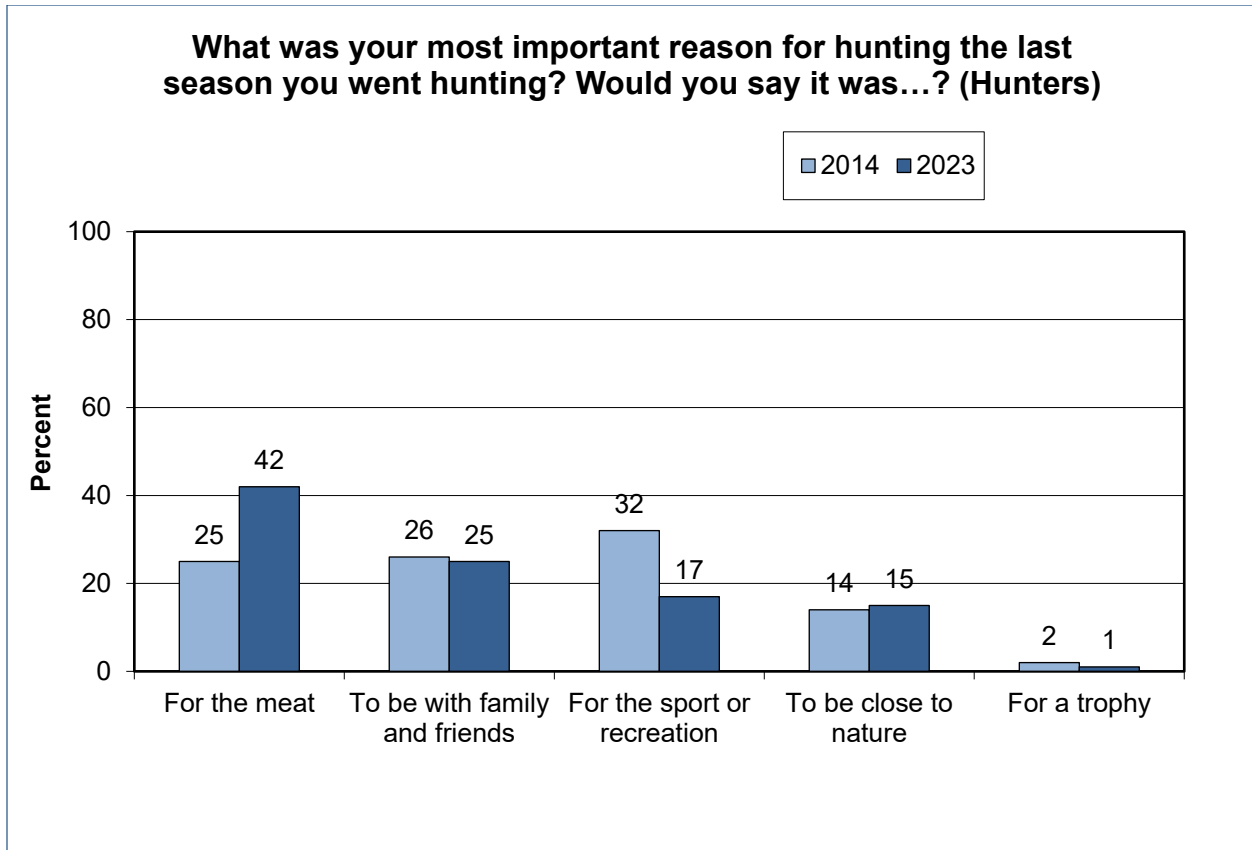
Responsive Management and the Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation developed the telephone and online survey questionnaires cooperatively, based in part on previous surveys as well as the research team's familiarity with hunting. The overall sample of hunters consisted of U.S. residents aged 18 and older who consider themselves to be hunters. The samples (telephone and online) were obtained from and maintained by Marketing Systems Group, a firm that specializes in providing scientifically valid samples for survey research.

The analysis of data was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics as well as proprietary software developed by Responsive Management.

REASONS FOR HUNTING

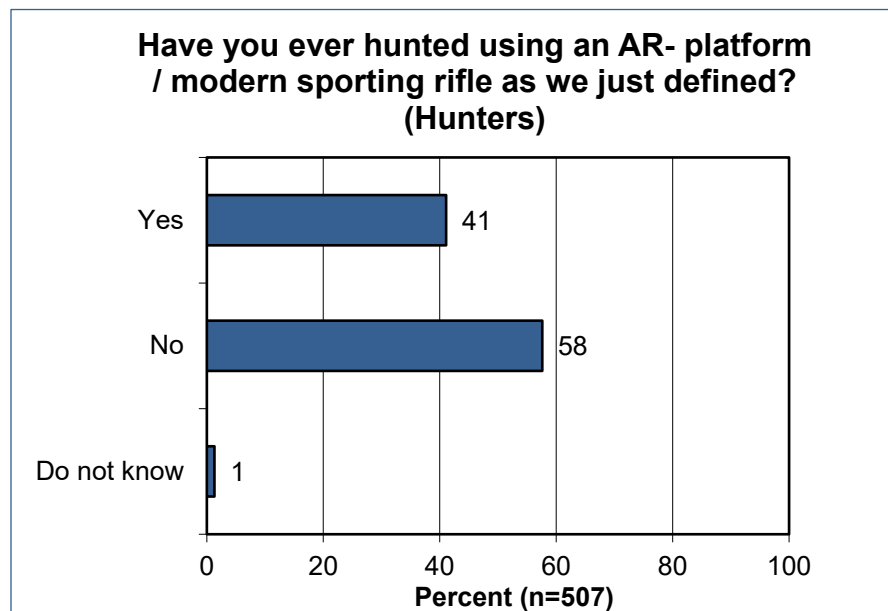


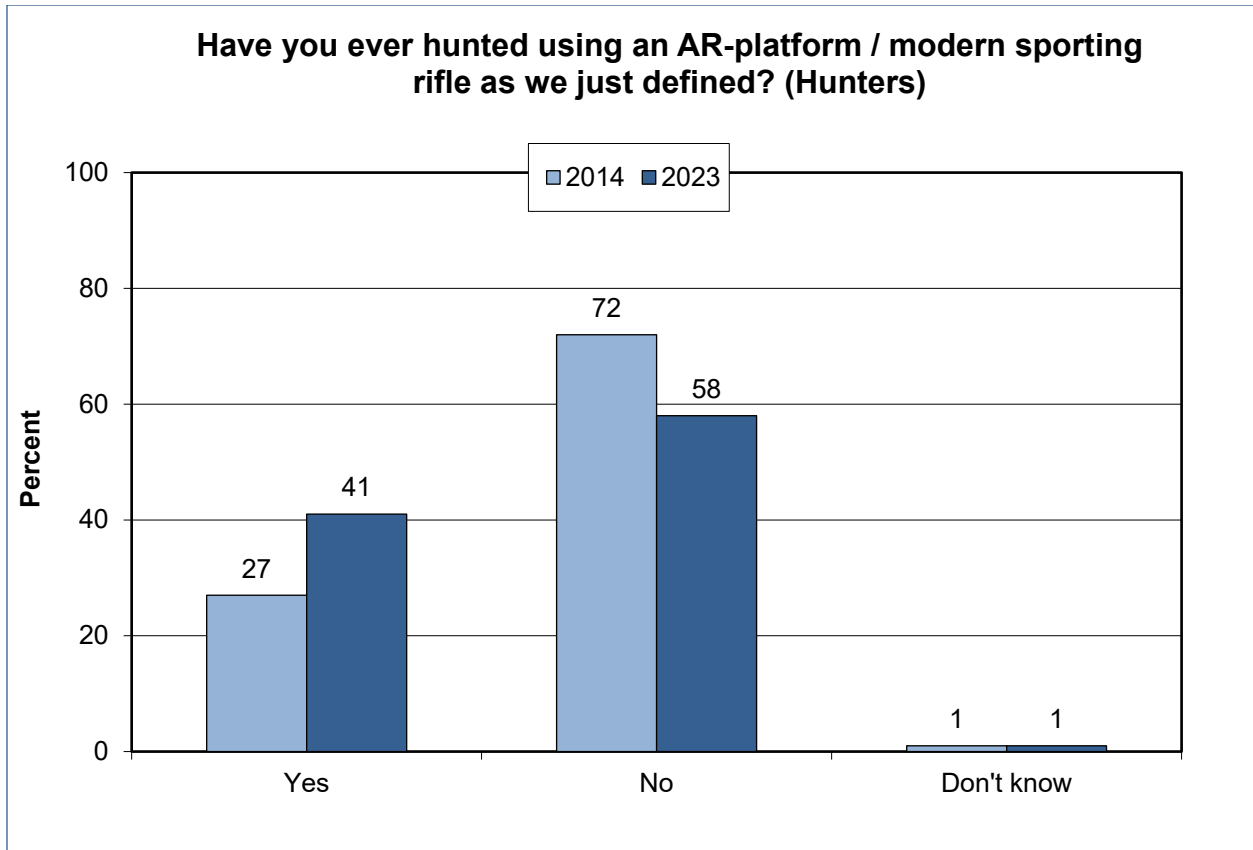
Hunting for the meat was the top motivation in the survey, when hunters were asked to name their single most important reason. The trends (following page) suggest that this motivation—for the meat—was increased at the expense of hunting for the sport or recreation.



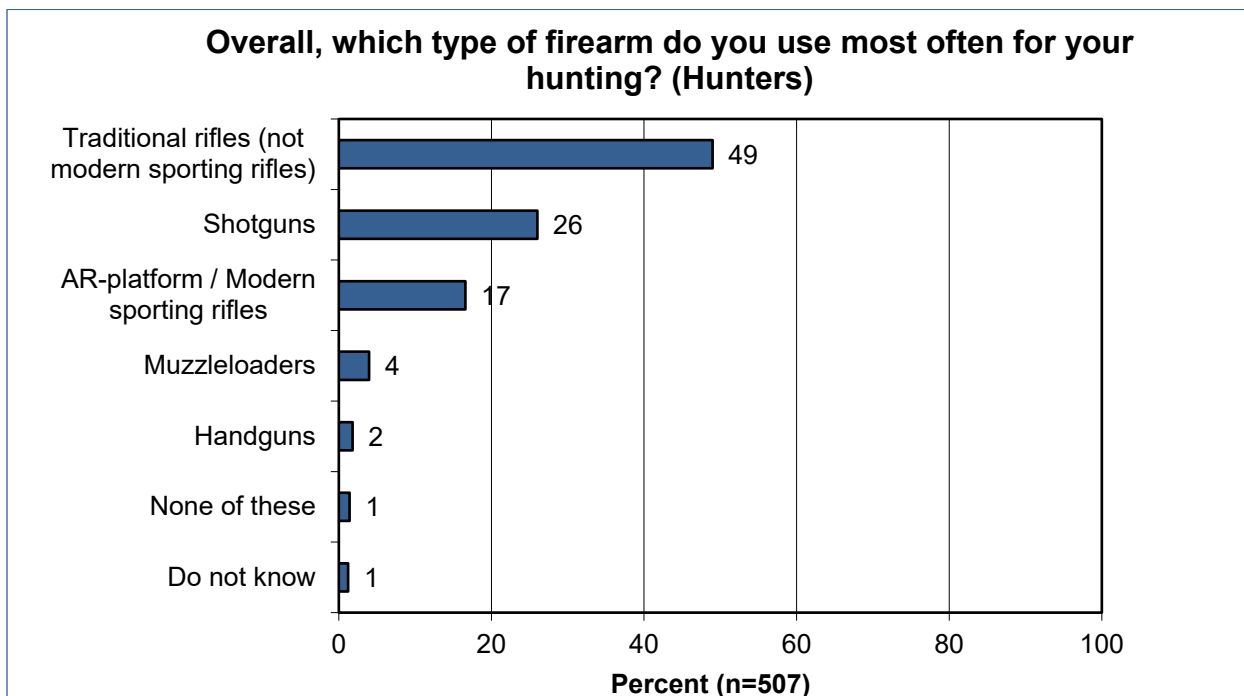
USE OF AR-PLATFORM / MODERN SPORTING RIFLES FOR HUNTING

The analyses of data from this study in context with other studies released by Responsive Management and the National Shooting Sports Foundation suggests that about 2 in every 5 hunters has used an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle for hunting at some time. The trends graph (next page) shows that this percentage has risen since 2014.

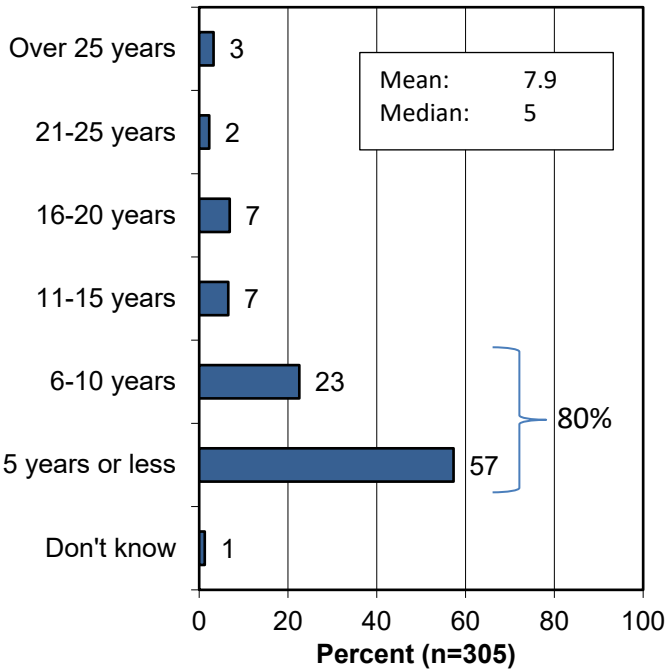




Other types of firearms commonly used in hunting are traditional rifles and shotguns. When asked which type of firearm they use the most, including AR-platform / modern sporting rifles, the most commonly used type is a traditional rifle (used mostly by about half). This is followed more distantly by shotguns (26%) and AR-platform / modern sporting rifles (17%).

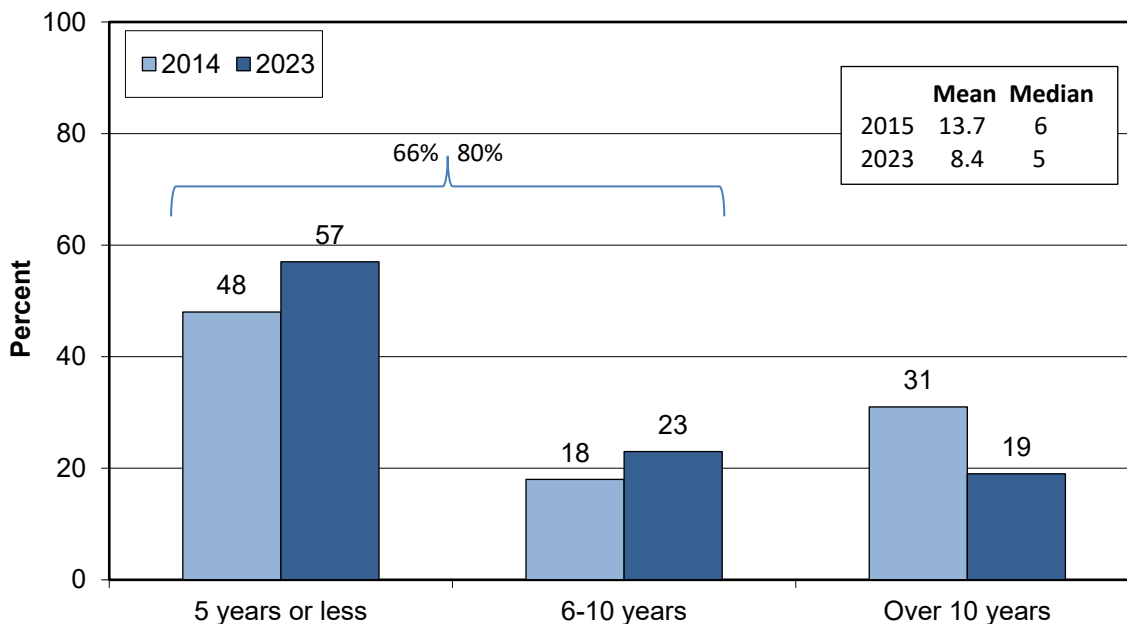


Approximately how long have you been using an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt with? (Asked of those who have hunted with an MSR.) (Hunters)

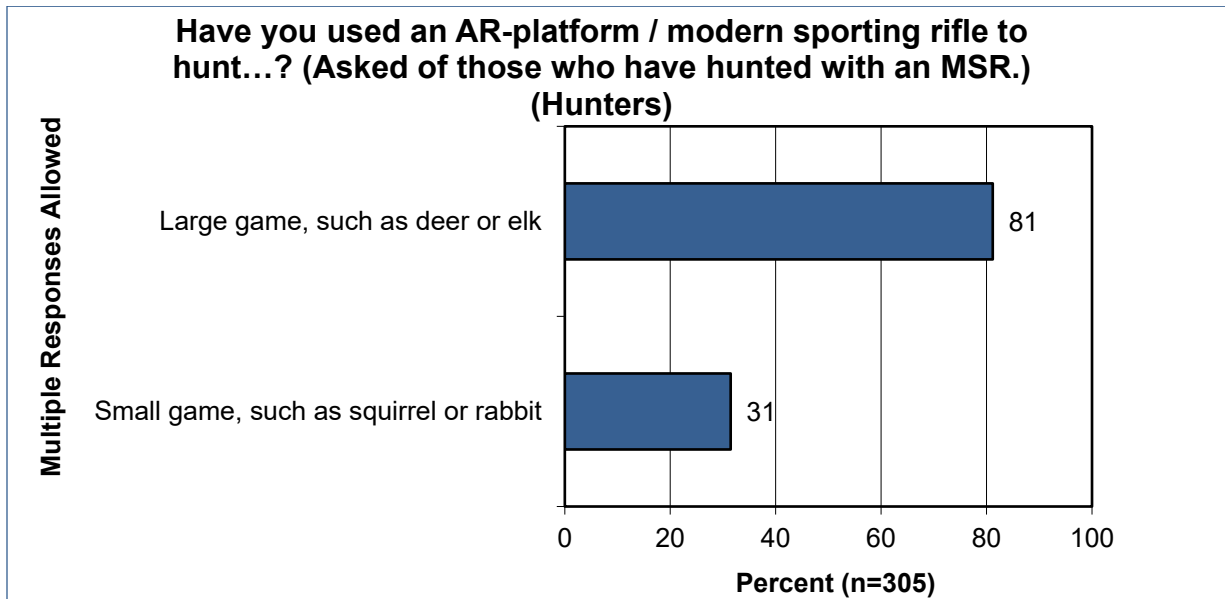


Most hunters who have been using an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt have been using that type for 10 years or less (80% have done so). The mean number of years of use is 7.9 years, and the median is 5 years. Likely due to the influx of newer hunters using AR-platform / modern sporting rifles, the mean number of years of use has declined since the 2014 survey.

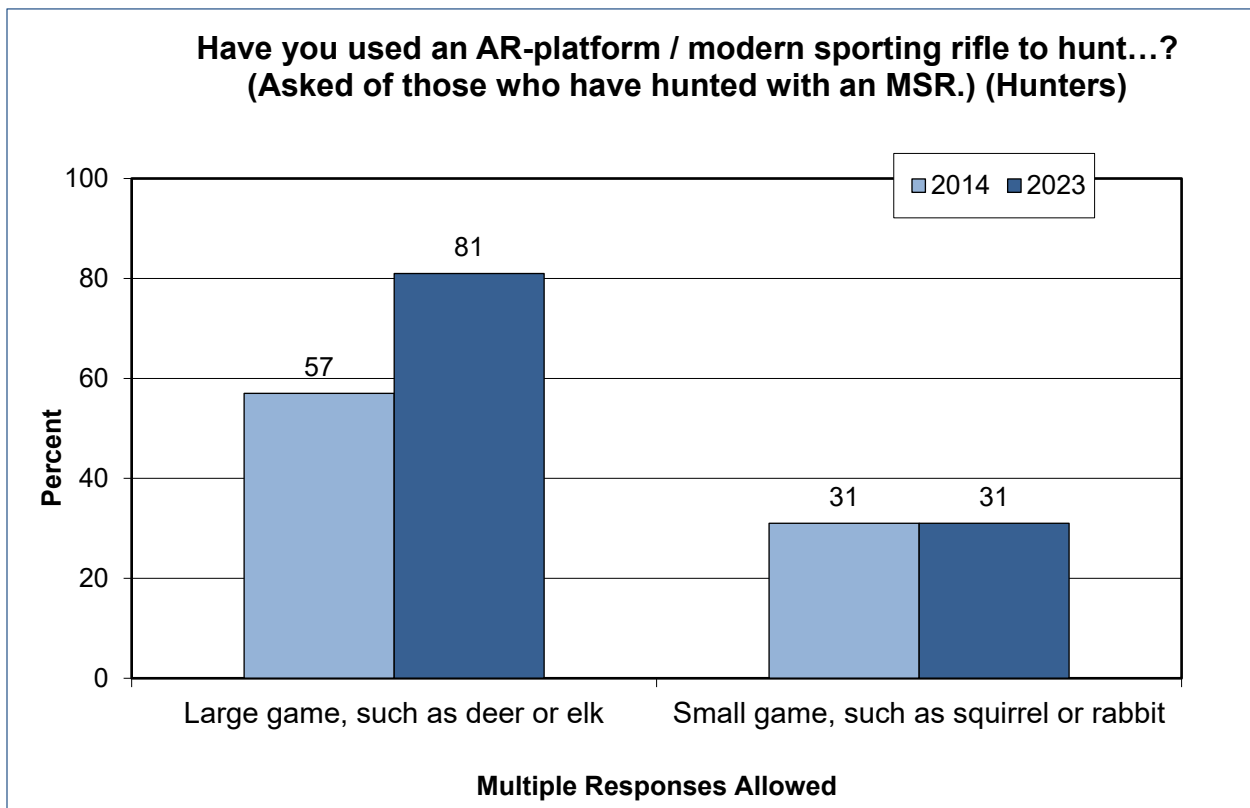
Approximately how long have you been using a modern sporting rifle to hunt with? (Asked of those who have hunted using a modern sporting rifle.) (Hunters)



Large game is more commonly hunted than is small game with an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle. The trends show that use of AR-platform / modern sporting rifles for large game has increased since 2014.

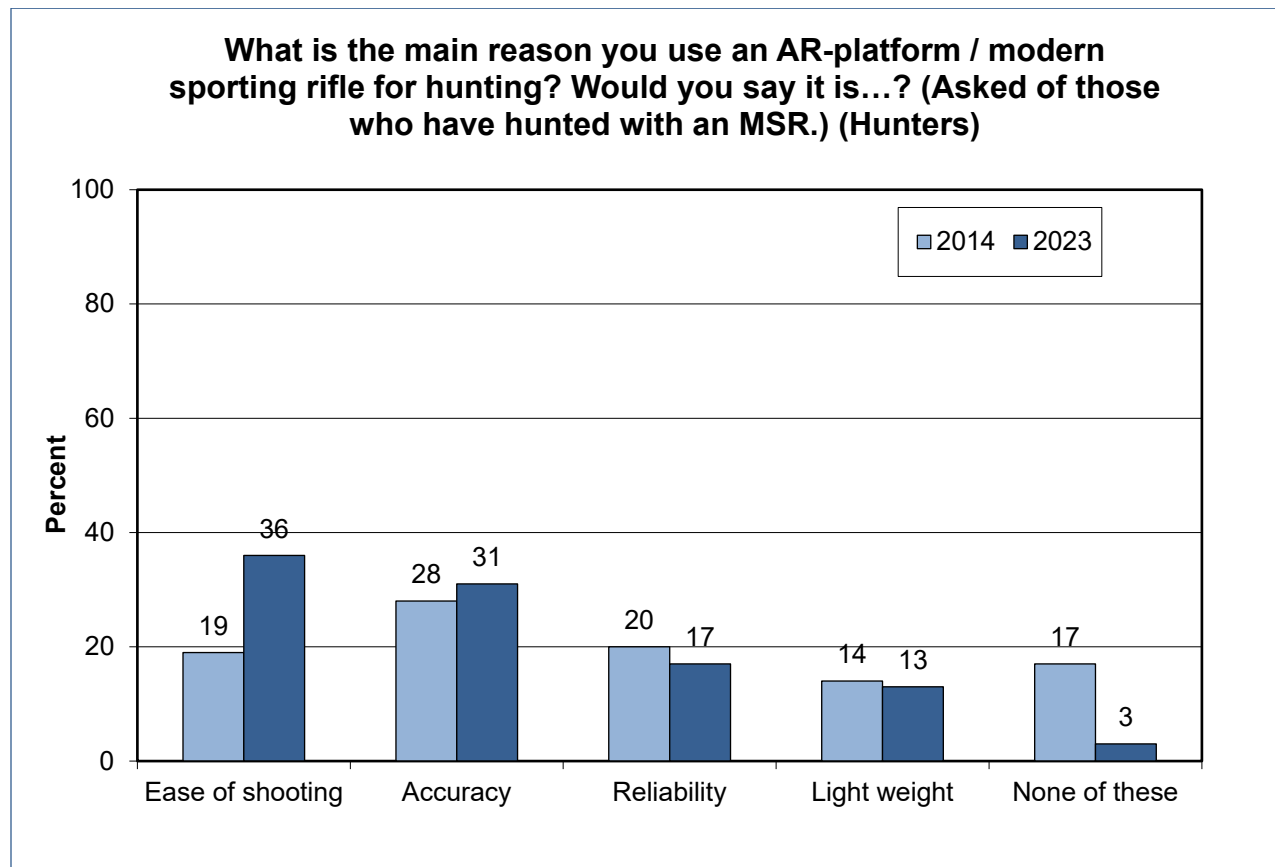
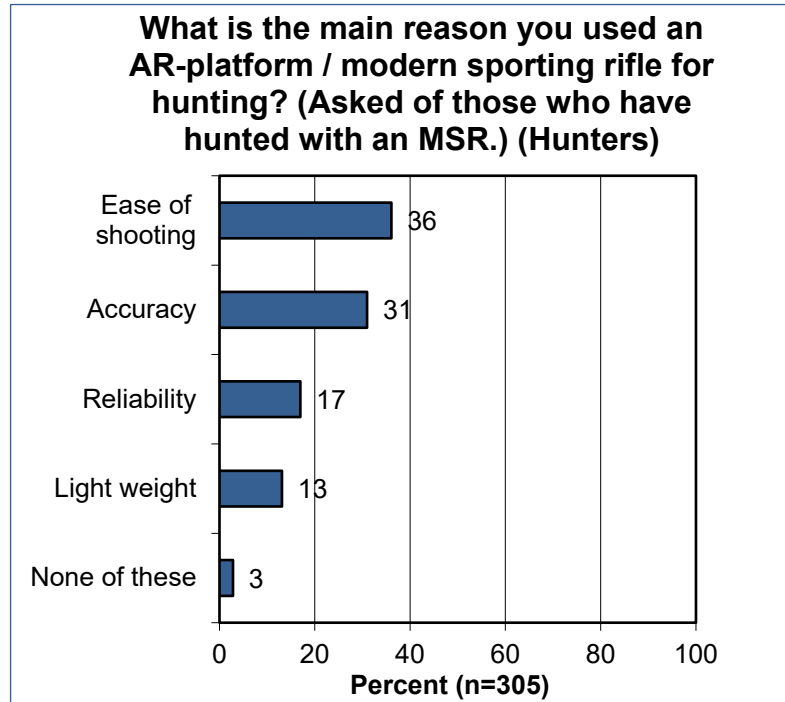


“Do not know” and miscellaneous responses not shown.

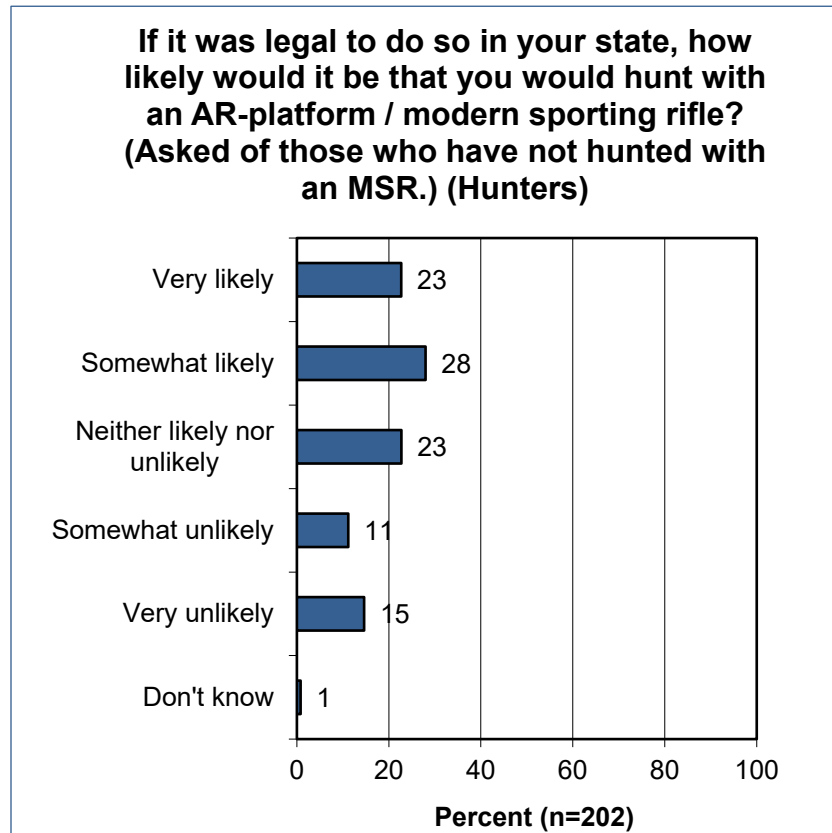


“Do not know” and miscellaneous responses not shown.

Ease of shooting and accuracy are the top reasons that hunters use AR-platform / modern sporting rifles for hunting. The ease of shooting has increased as a main reason for hunting using AR-platform / modern sporting rifles.



INTEREST IN USING AR-PLATFORM / MODERN SPORTING RIFLES FOR HUNTING



Just over half of hunters (51%) indicate being very or somewhat likely to hunt with an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle, if legally allowed to do so in their state.

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by Responsive Management for the Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation, Inc., to measure hunters' motivations for hunting, their participation in hunting using various types of firearms, their use specifically of an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt, and their likelihood of using an AR-platform / Modern Sporting Rifle to hunt if they have not previously done so. Responsive Management has previously measured use of AR-platform / Modern Sporting Rifles for hunting, and the current study establishes trend data for the activity. Identifying the trends in the use of various types of firearms, including AR-platform / Modern Sporting Rifles, is important for developing, managing, and assessing Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3) programs for hunting in the continually changing social and political climates of the United States. The purpose of this study is to proactively track these trends and to accurately update our understanding of hunters' use of and opinions on AR-platform / Modern Sporting Rifles for hunting to assess how they impact R3 efforts. This study entailed a scientific, probability-based multi-modal survey of U.S. hunters aged 18 and older.

In the survey, the AR-platform / Modern Sporting Rifle (sometimes abbreviated as MSR in the graphs to shorten labels) was defined as semi-automatic rifles, in particular AR-15 platform semi-automatic rifles. Popular makers of these semi-automatic rifles are Colt, Stag Arms, and Rock River Arms. Instructions in the survey emphasized that this definition did *not* include more traditional semi-automatic rifles, such as a Browning Mark II or Ruger 10-22. After this definition was provided to hunters, they were asked to confirm whether they understood the definition. The definition was reiterated, if necessary, until respondents could confirm they understood. Respondents could proceed with the survey only after this confirmation.

The project was funded by a Multistate Conservation Grant, a program funded from the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, and jointly managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. A previous similar survey was conducted in 2014 by Responsive Management and funded by the National Shooting Sports Foundation and is used to establish trends in this study.

A discussion of the specific aspects of the research methodology follows.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Responsive Management and the Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation developed the telephone and online survey questionnaires cooperatively, based in part on the previous survey as well as the research team's familiarity with hunting. The questionnaires, in part, included questions from a previous survey to allow for a trend analysis. There are slight differences between the telephone and online versions of the survey to accommodate each survey mode, but otherwise the surveys are identical. Responsive Management conducted pre-tests of the questionnaires to ensure proper wording, flow, and logic in the survey.

SURVEY SAMPLES

The overall sample of hunters consisted of U.S. residents aged 18 and older who consider themselves to be hunters. The samples (telephone and online) were obtained from and maintained by Marketing Systems Group, a firm that specializes in providing scientifically valid samples for survey research.

For the telephone portion of the survey, the sample used a probability-based selection process that ensured that all U.S. residents with a telephone had an approximately equal chance of being selected for the purpose of identifying those who consider themselves hunters. For the process of identifying hunters to respond to the survey, both landlines and cell phones were sampled in their existing proportions in the population.

The online survey provides a greater opportunity to reach more hunters, particularly younger hunters, who may be more likely to complete the survey online.

MULTI-MODAL SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

The survey was conducted by telephone and online. The version of the survey conducted by telephone was coded for integration with Responsive Management's computer-assisted telephone interviewing process. The online version of the survey was coded in an online platform by Responsive Management and was administered to the online sample. An important aspect of both the online and telephone versions of the survey is that the computer controls which questions are asked and allows for immediate data entry.

Surveys conducted by telephone are administered by a live interviewer. Telephone interviews were conducted Monday through Friday from noon to 9:00 p.m. and Saturday from noon to 7:00 p.m., local time, using interviewers with experience conducting computer-assisted surveys about conservation and outdoor recreation. A five-callback design was used to avoid bias toward people easy to reach by telephone and to provide an equal opportunity for all to participate. When a respondent could not be reached on the first call, subsequent calls were placed on different days of the week and at different times of the day. The survey was conducted at the time of initial contact, or a callback time was set that was more convenient for the respondent.

The online survey was closed, meaning it was available only to respondents who were specifically selected for the survey. Respondents could complete the survey only once. The survey could not be accessed through a general internet search.

The survey was conducted and released in 2023. Responsive Management obtained 507 completed questionnaires.

SURVEY QUALITY CONTROL

For both the online and telephone versions of the survey, the questionnaire was programmed to branch and substitute phrases in the survey based on previous responses to ensure the integrity and consistency of the data collection. The survey questionnaire also contained error checkers and computation statements to ensure quality and consistent data.

For quality control of the telephone surveys, Survey Center managers monitored some of the interviews in real time and provided feedback to the interviewers. To ensure that the data collected by telephone are of the highest quality, the interviewers are trained through lectures, role-playing, and video training, according to the standards established by the American Association for Public Opinion Research. Methods of instruction included lecture and role-playing. The Survey Center managers and other professional staff conducted briefings with the interviewers prior to the administration of this survey. Interviewers were instructed on type of study, study goals and objectives, handling of survey questions, interview length, termination points and qualifiers for participation, interviewer instructions within the survey questionnaire, reading of the survey questions, skip patterns, and probing and clarifying techniques necessary for specific questions on the survey questionnaires.

For quality control of the online surveys, an additional question developed by Responsive Management was used to identify and filter out bots that may be automatically generating illegitimate results. In this “error check” question, respondents were instructed in the question to provide a specific answer. Therefore, any human respondent could provide the correct answer, while any incorrect responses signifying that a bot is most likely responding were removed from the survey.

Finally, after the surveys were obtained, the Survey Center managers and statisticians checked each completed survey to ensure clarity and completeness and to filter out any invalid respondents. Analysts reviewed all individual survey responses to identify other potential red flags. This entailed a review of survey responses to identify red flags, such as surveys that were completed in an unrealistically brief timeframe, which suggests that respondents were clicking through responses without reading and evaluating the questions, or “straight-lining” of responses, which is when respondents select (for example) the first or same response options throughout the survey. Also, open-ended responses to the final question asking for additional comments were used to identify and remove invalid respondents. All completed surveys of questionable quality were removed prior to data analysis.

SAMPLING ERROR

Throughout this report, findings of the telephone survey are reported at a **95% confidence interval**. For the entire sample, the **sampling error is at most plus or minus 4.35 percentage points**. This means that if the survey were conducted 100 times on different samples that were selected in the same way, the findings of 95 out of the 100 surveys would fall within plus or minus 4.35 percentage points of each other. Sampling error was calculated using the formula described below, with a sample size of 507 hunters 18 years old and older in the U.S.

Sampling Error Equation

$$B = \left(\sqrt{\frac{N_p(.25) - .25}{N_s}} \right) (1.96)$$

Where: B = maximum sampling error (as decimal)
 N_p = population size (i.e., total number who could be surveyed)
 N_s = sample size (i.e., total number of respondents surveyed)

Derived from formula: p. 206 in Dillman, D. A. 2000. *Mail and Internet Surveys*. John Wiley & Sons, NY.

Note: This is a simplified version of the formula that calculates the maximum sampling error using a 50:50 split (the most conservative calculation because a 50:50 split would give maximum variation).

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The analysis of data was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics as well as proprietary software developed by Responsive Management.

In examining the results, it is important to be aware that the questionnaire included several types of questions:

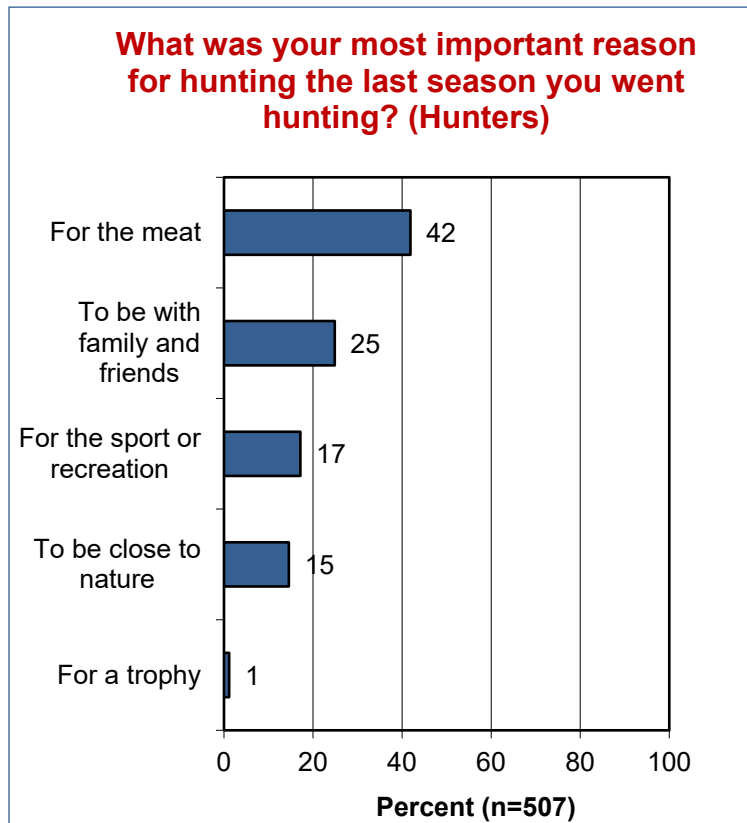
- Single response questions: Some questions allow only a single response.
- Multiple response questions: Other questions allow respondents to give more than one response or choose all that apply. Those that allow more than a single response are indicated on the graphs with the label, "Multiple Responses Allowed."
- Closed-ended questions have an answer set from which to choose.
- Open-ended questions are those in which no answer set is presented to the respondents; rather, they can respond with anything that comes to mind from the question.
- Scaled questions: Many closed-ended questions (but not all) are in a scale, such as one that ranges from very important to not at all important.
- Series questions: Many questions are part of a series, and the results are primarily intended to be examined relative to the other questions in that series (although results of the questions individually can also be valuable). Typically, results of all questions in a series are shown together.

Results are shown for nationwide results, weighted by demographic and participatory variables to be fully representative of hunters nationally. Trends graphs are included to compare and contrast 2023 results with results from Responsive Management's 2014 study. Note that not all survey questions have trend data available from 2014. When 2014 trend data were available, comparisons were made.

The report also includes special graphs that show how various demographic groups respond to certain questions, hereinafter simply referred to as demographic-participatory analyses graphs. Only select questions that were determined to be of the most interest or utility were analyzed in this way.

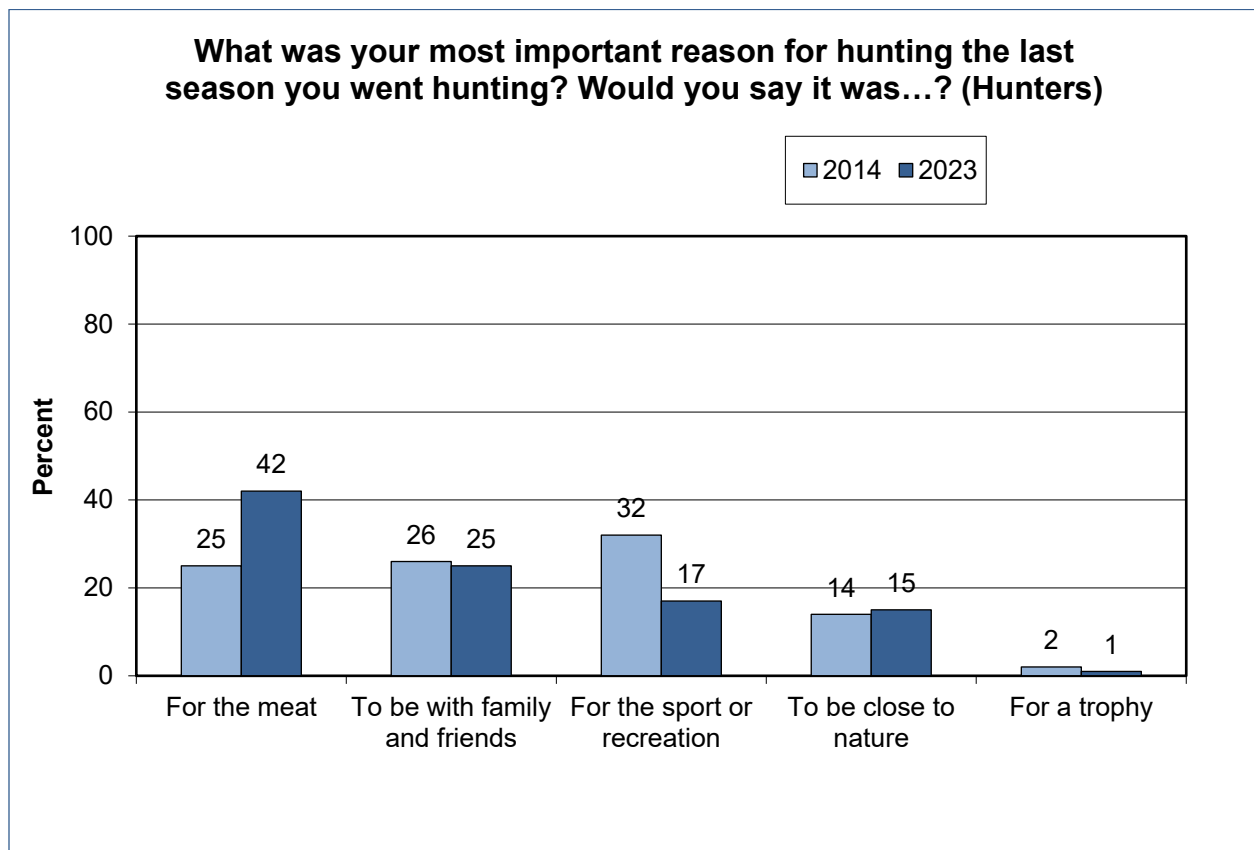
In such graphs, when one group is above the overall bar, its counterpart or one of its counterparts will be below the overall bar. The distance from the overall bar matters, as well. If a group is close to the overall bar, then the group should not be considered markedly different from respondents overall. A rule of thumb is that the difference should be 5 percentage points or more for the difference to be noteworthy.

REASONS FOR HUNTING



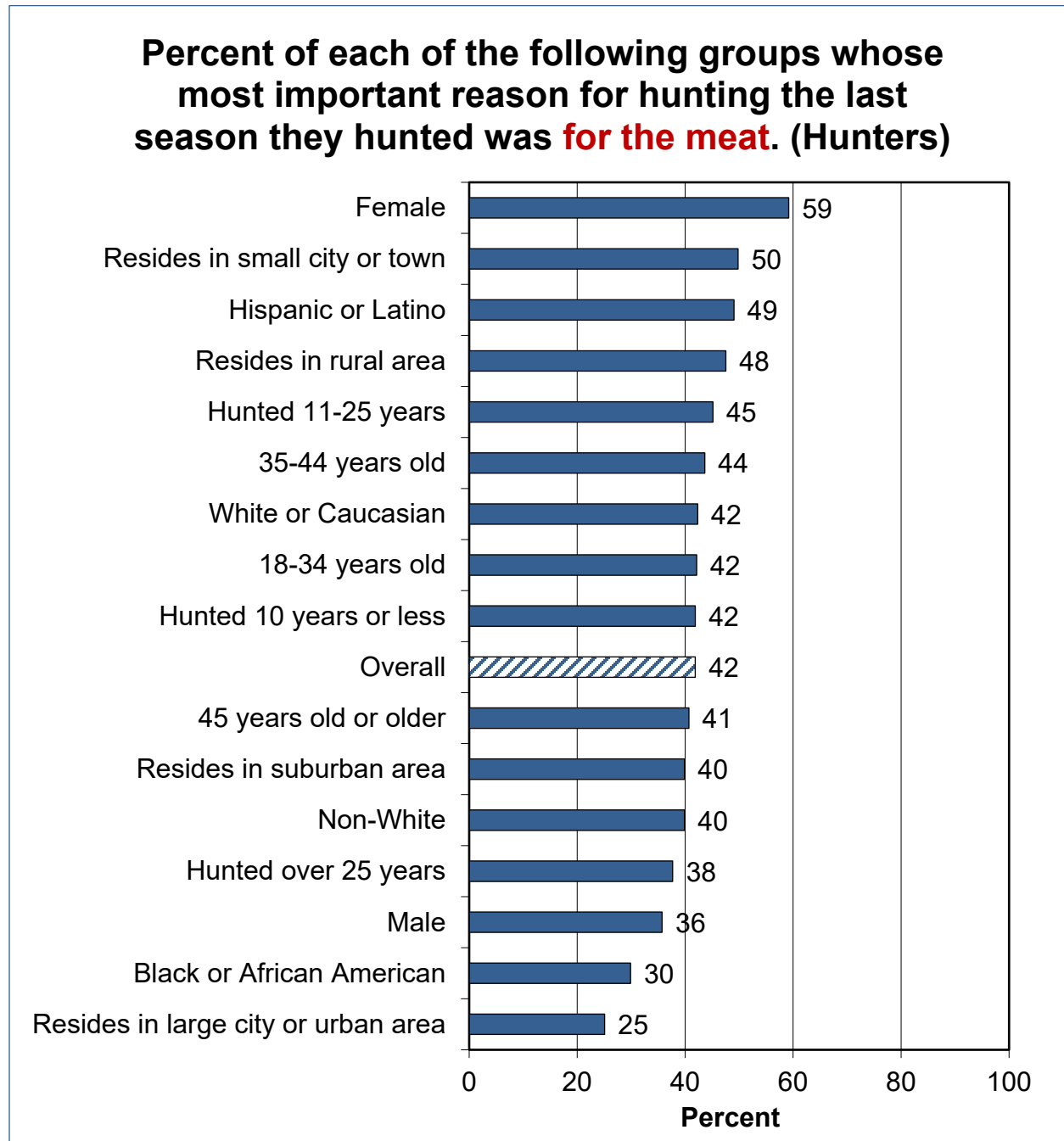
Hunting for the meat was the top motivation in the survey, when hunters were asked to name their single most important reason.

The trends suggest that this motivation—for the meat—was increased at the expense of hunting for the sport or recreation.

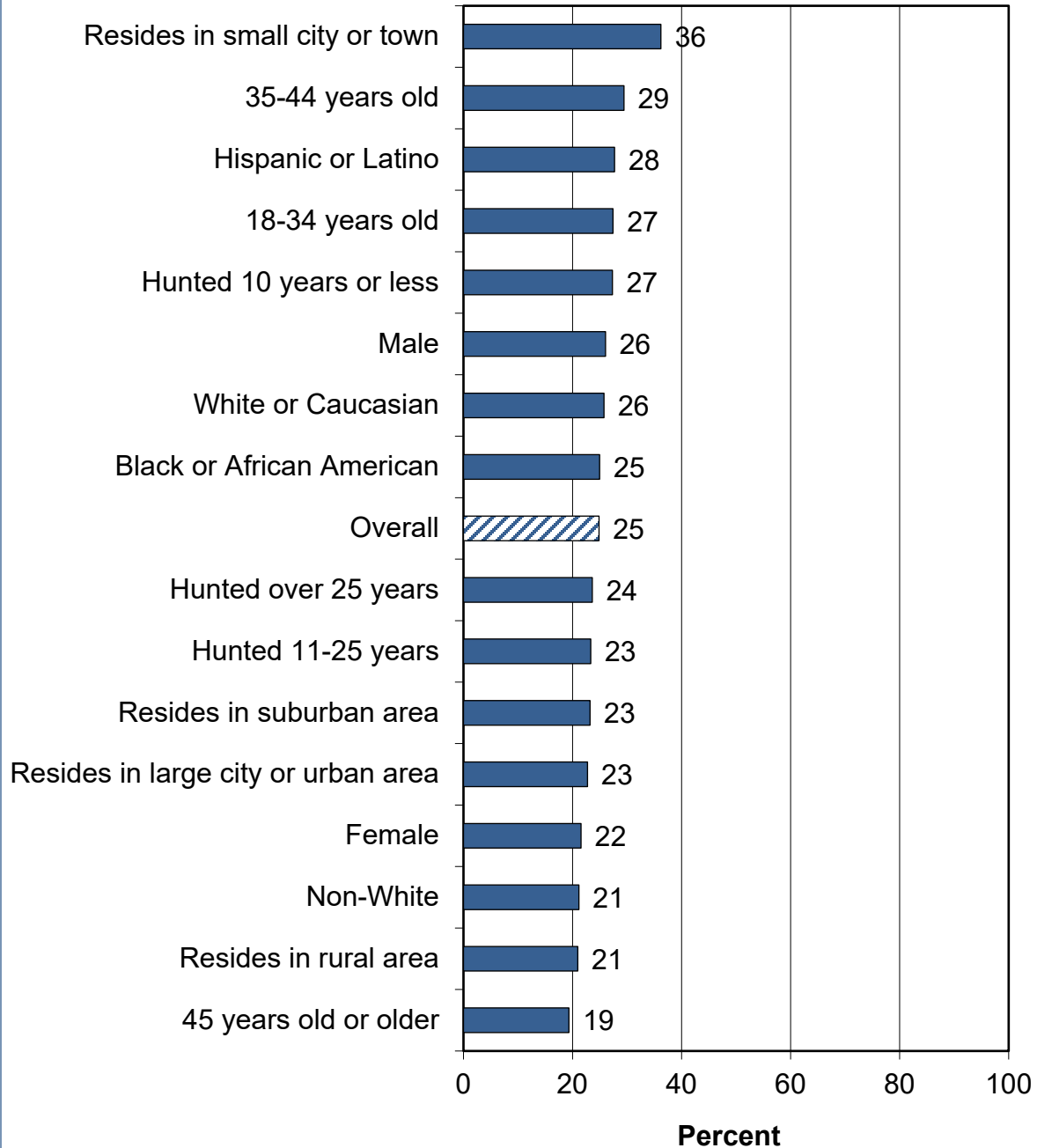


The demographic-participatory analyses graphs show the following:

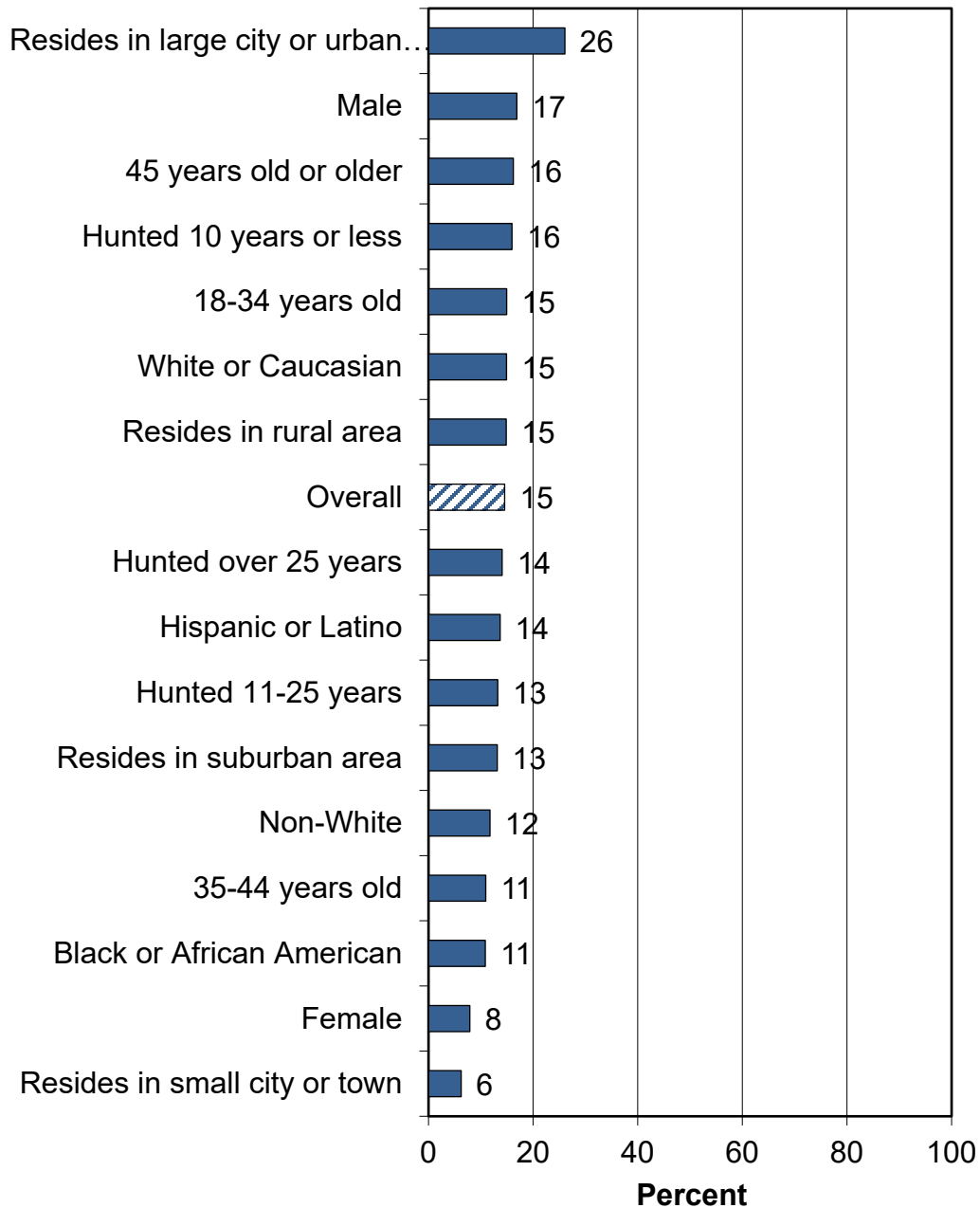
- Hunter groups with high percentages who hunt primarily for the meat are females, those who reside in less urban areas (small city/town or rural), and Hispanic hunters.
- At the top of the ranking in hunting primarily to be with family and friends are residents of a small city/town.
- Hunting to be close to nature is highest among urban residents.



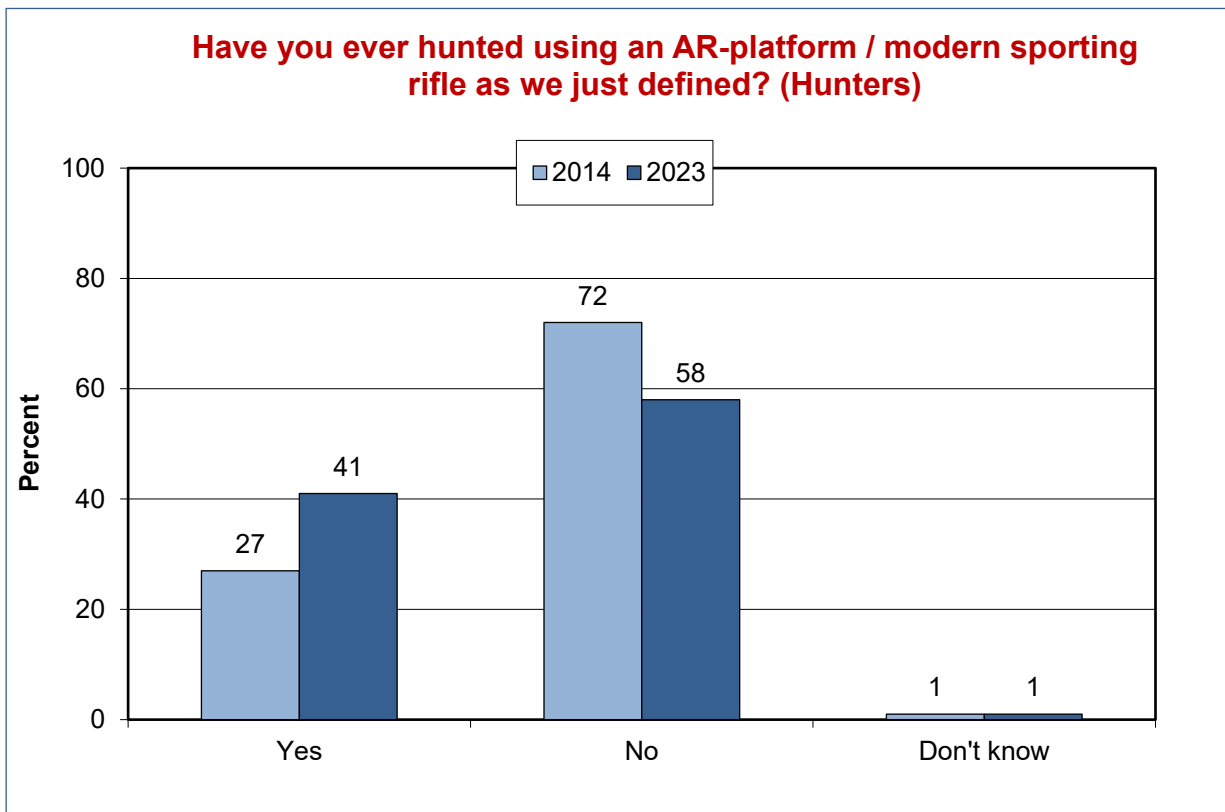
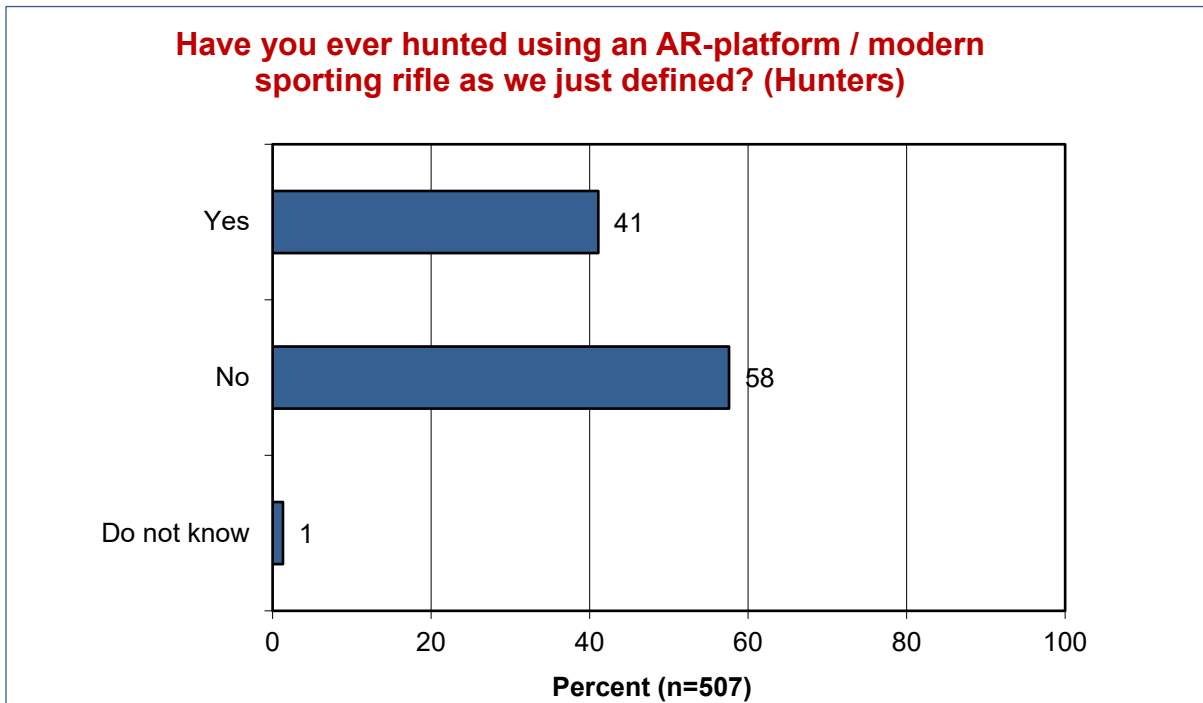
Percent of each of the following groups whose most important reason for hunting the last season they hunted was **to be with family and friends. (Hunters)**



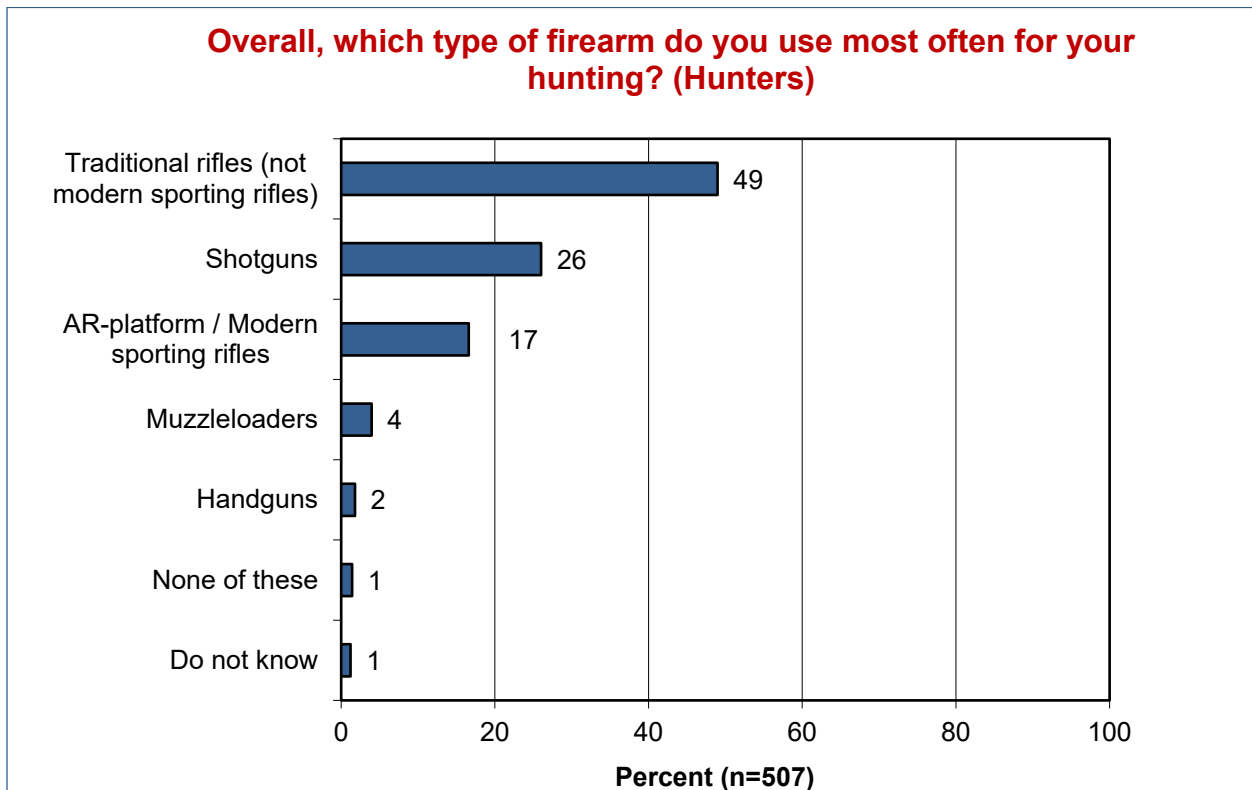
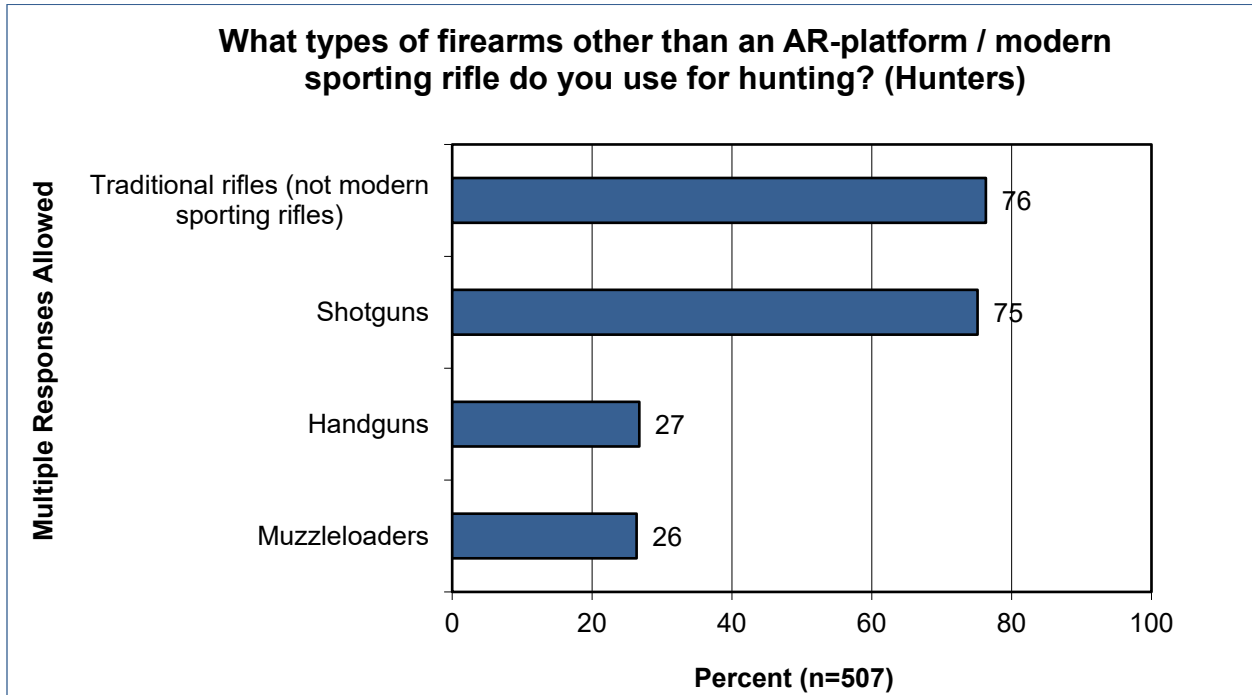
Percent of each of the following groups whose most important reason for hunting the last season they hunted was **to be close to nature. (Hunters)**



USE OF AR-PLATFORM / MODERN SPORTING RIFLES FOR HUNTING

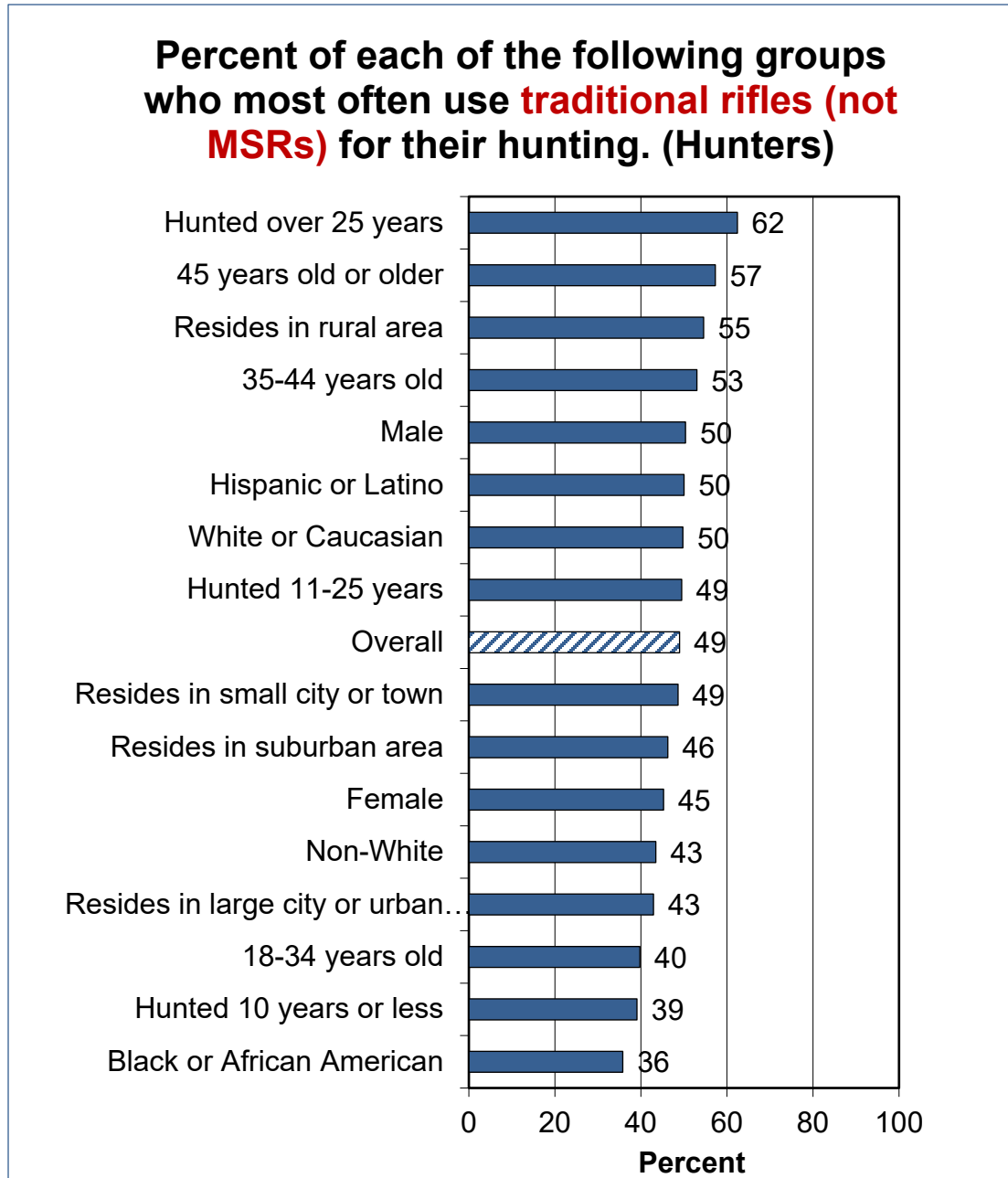


Other types of firearms commonly used in hunting are traditional rifles and shotguns. When hunters were asked which type of firearm they use **the most**, including AR-platform / modern sporting rifles, the most commonly used type is a traditional rifle (most often used by about half). This is followed more distantly by shotguns (26%) and AR-platform / modern sporting rifles (17%).

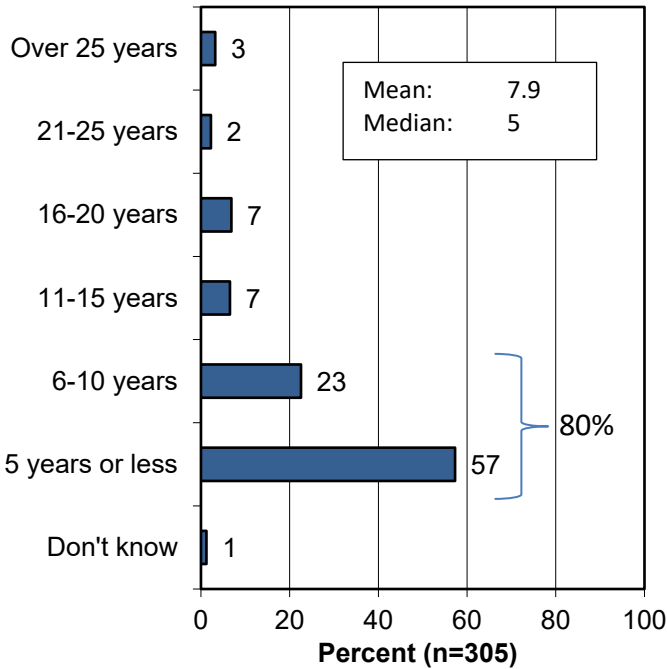


A demographic-participatory graph is included for most often using a traditional rifle. Among the findings:

- Traditional rifles are prevalent among older, established hunters and hunters who reside in a rural area.



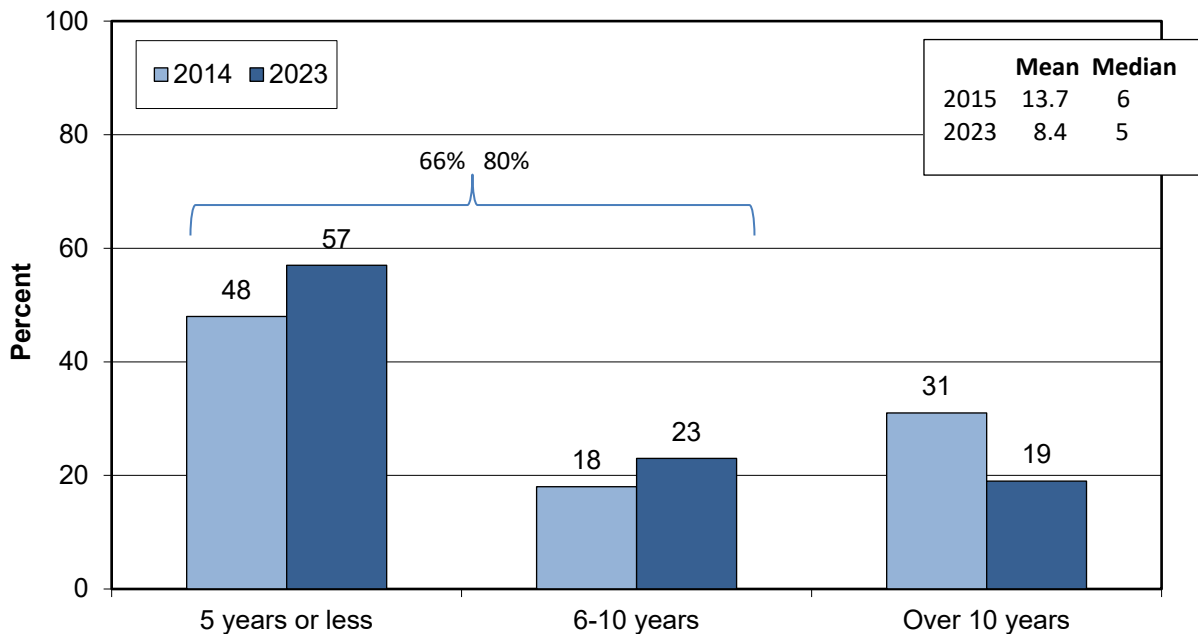
Approximately how long have you been using an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt with? (Asked of those who have hunted with an MSR.) (Hunters)



Most hunters who have been using an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt have been using that type for 10 years or less (80% have done so).

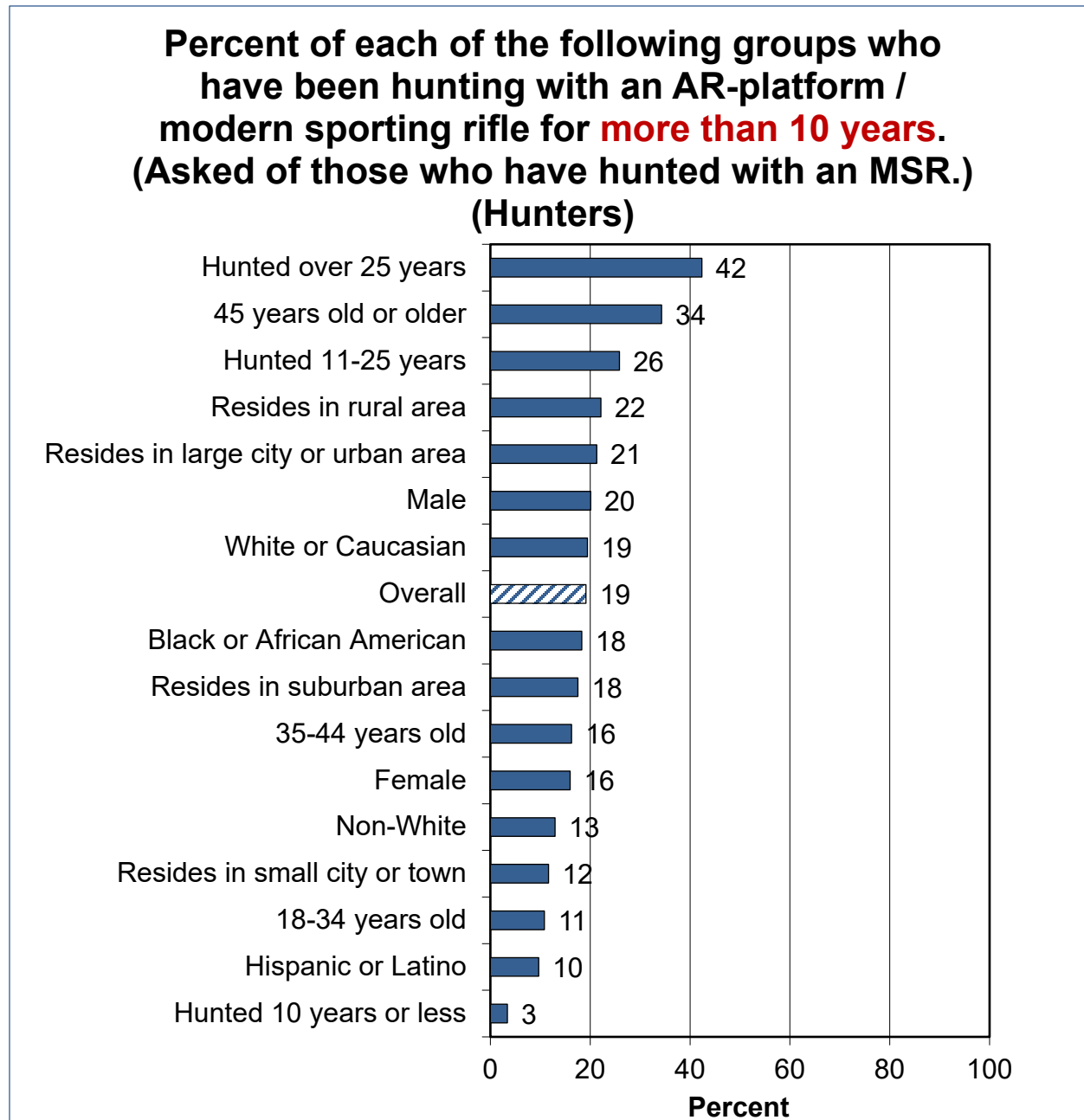
The mean number of years of use is 7.9 years, and the median is 5 years. Most likely due to the influx of newer hunters using AR-platform / modern sporting rifles, the mean number of years of use has declined since the 2014 survey.

Approximately how long have you been using a modern sporting rifle to hunt with? (Asked of those who have hunted using a modern sporting rifle.) (Hunters)

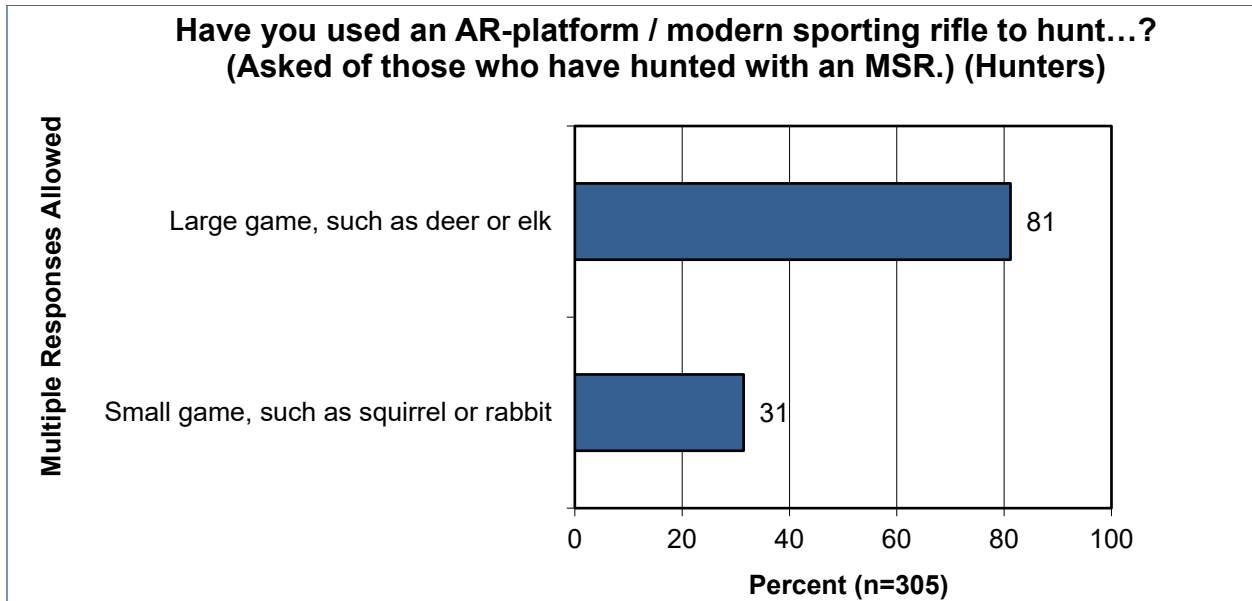


A demographic-participatory analyses graph is included for those who have used AR-platform / modern sporting rifles for more than 10 years.

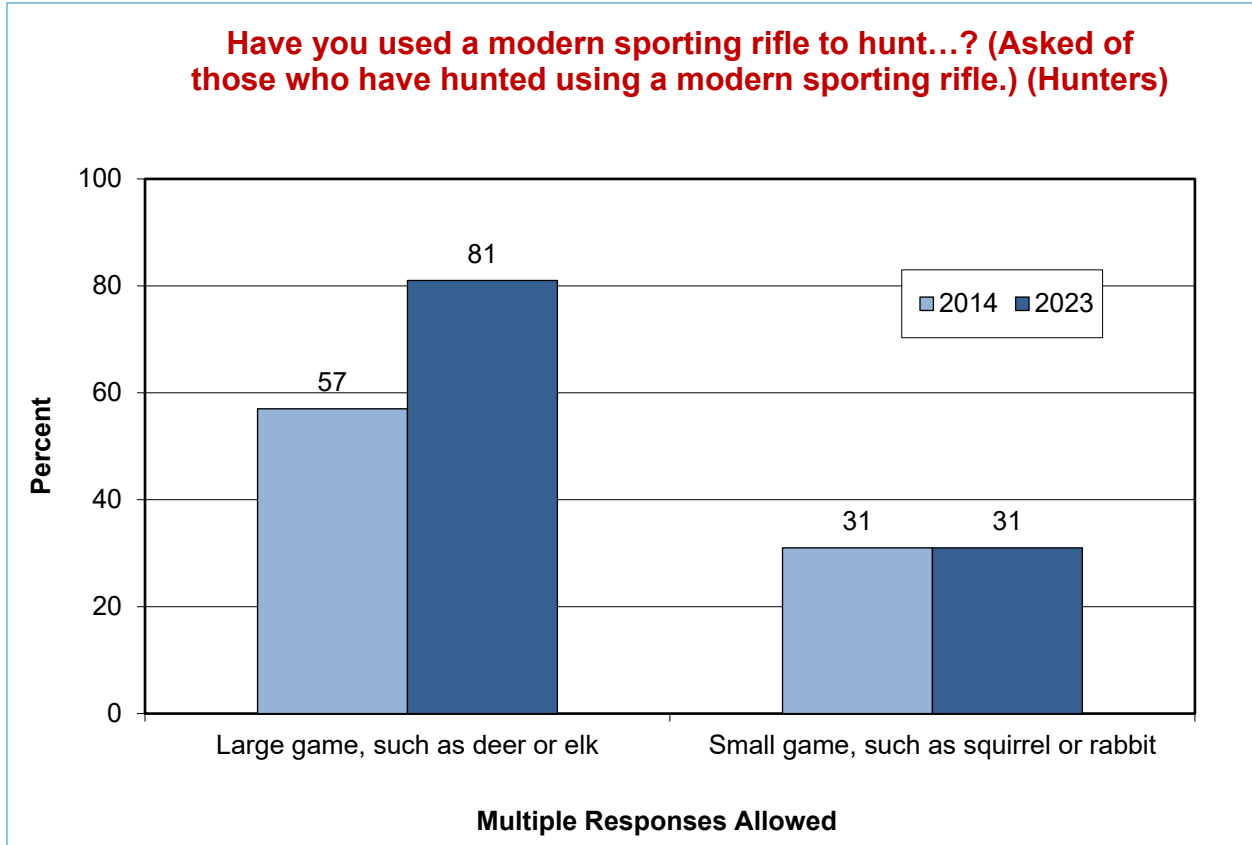
- Longer-term use is correlated to having hunted for a long time and being older.



Large game is more commonly hunted than is small game with an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle. The trends show that use of AR-platform / modern sporting rifles for large game has increased since 2014.

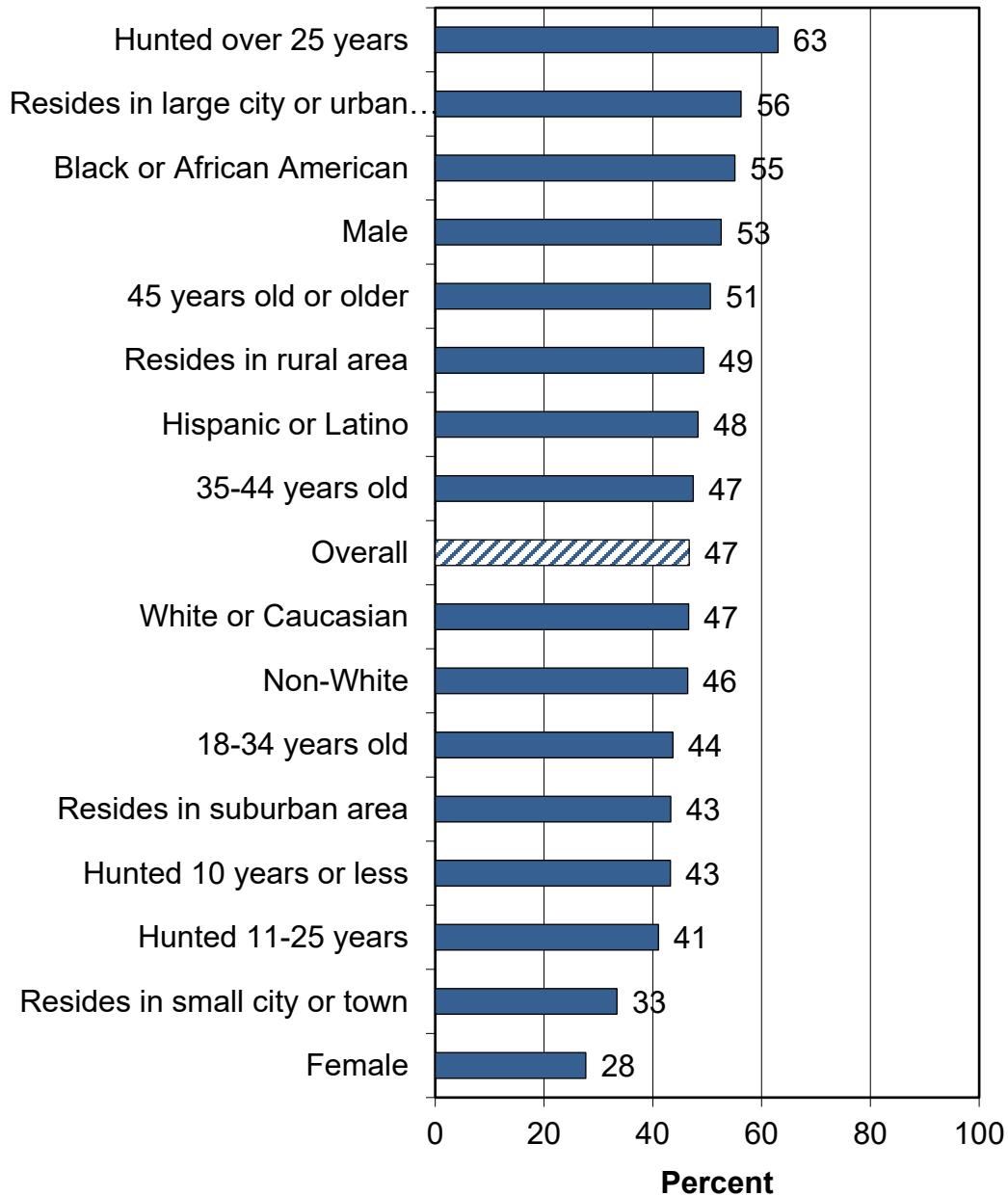


“Do not know” and miscellaneous responses not shown.



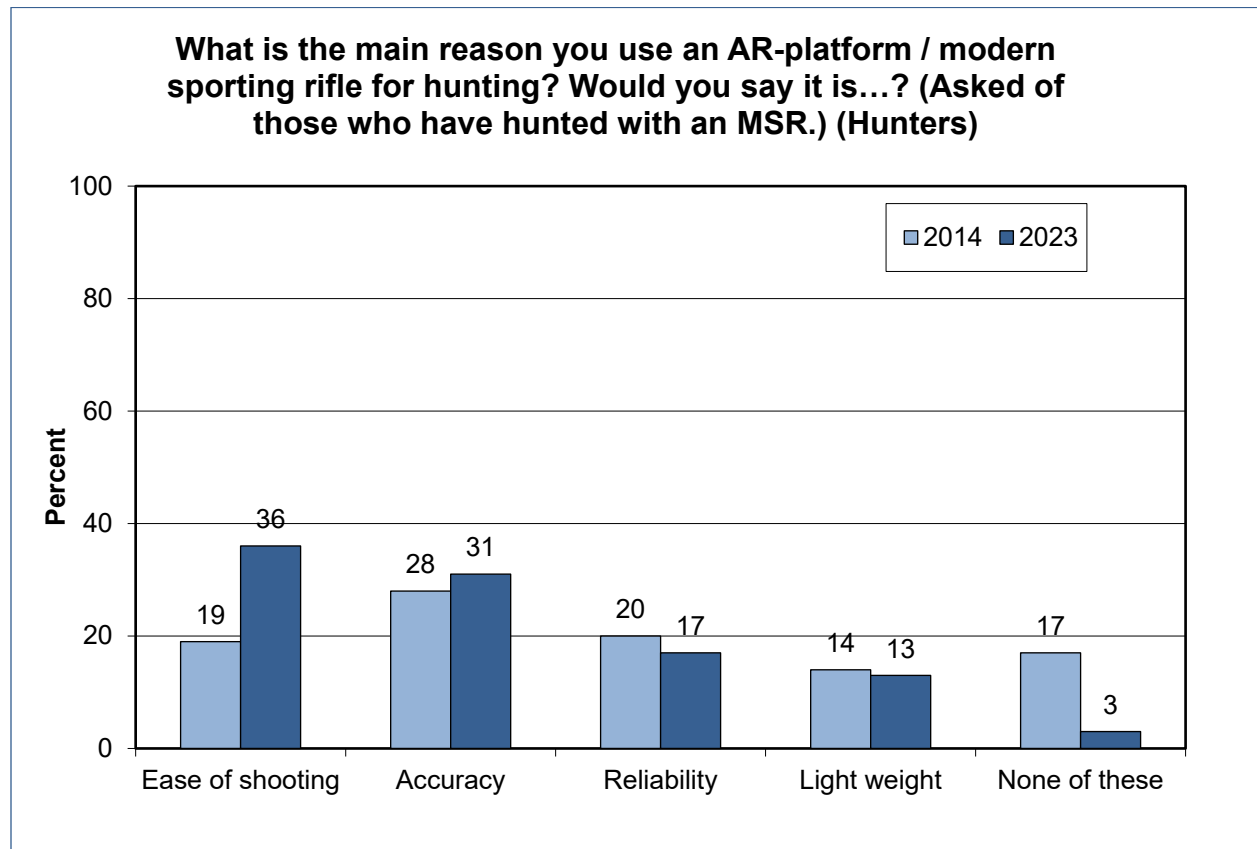
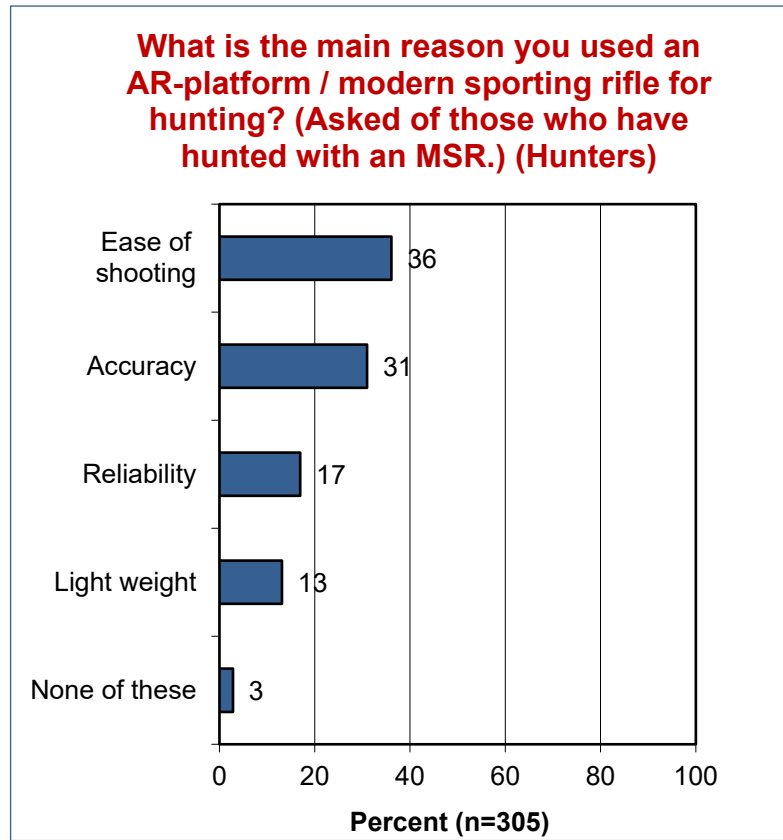
“Do not know” and miscellaneous responses not shown.

Percent of each of the following groups who have used an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt varmints, such as coyote or hog. (Asked of those who have hunted with an MSR.) (Hunters)



Ease of shooting and accuracy are the top reasons that hunters use AR-platform / modern sporting rifles for hunting.

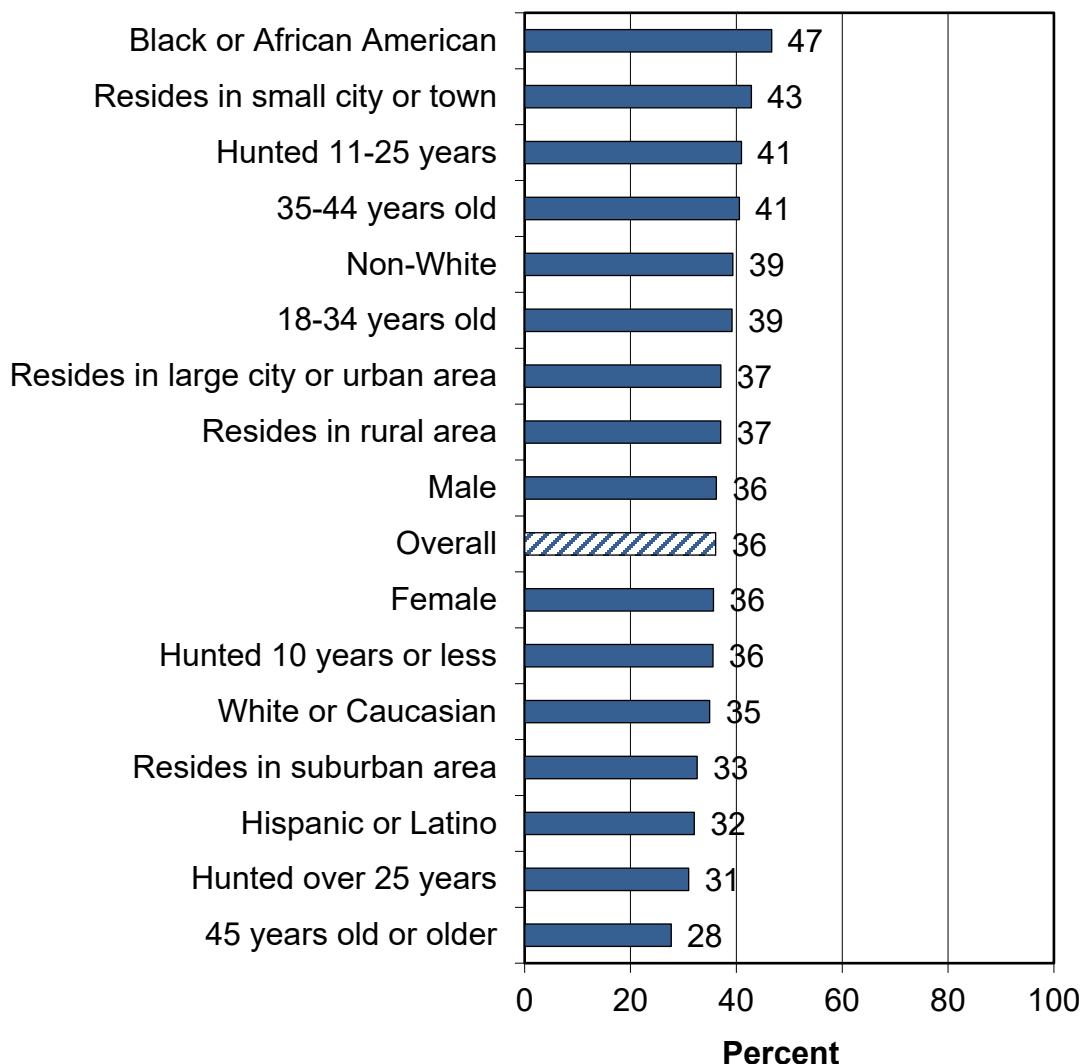
The ease of shooting has increased as a main reason for hunting using AR-platform / modern sporting rifles.



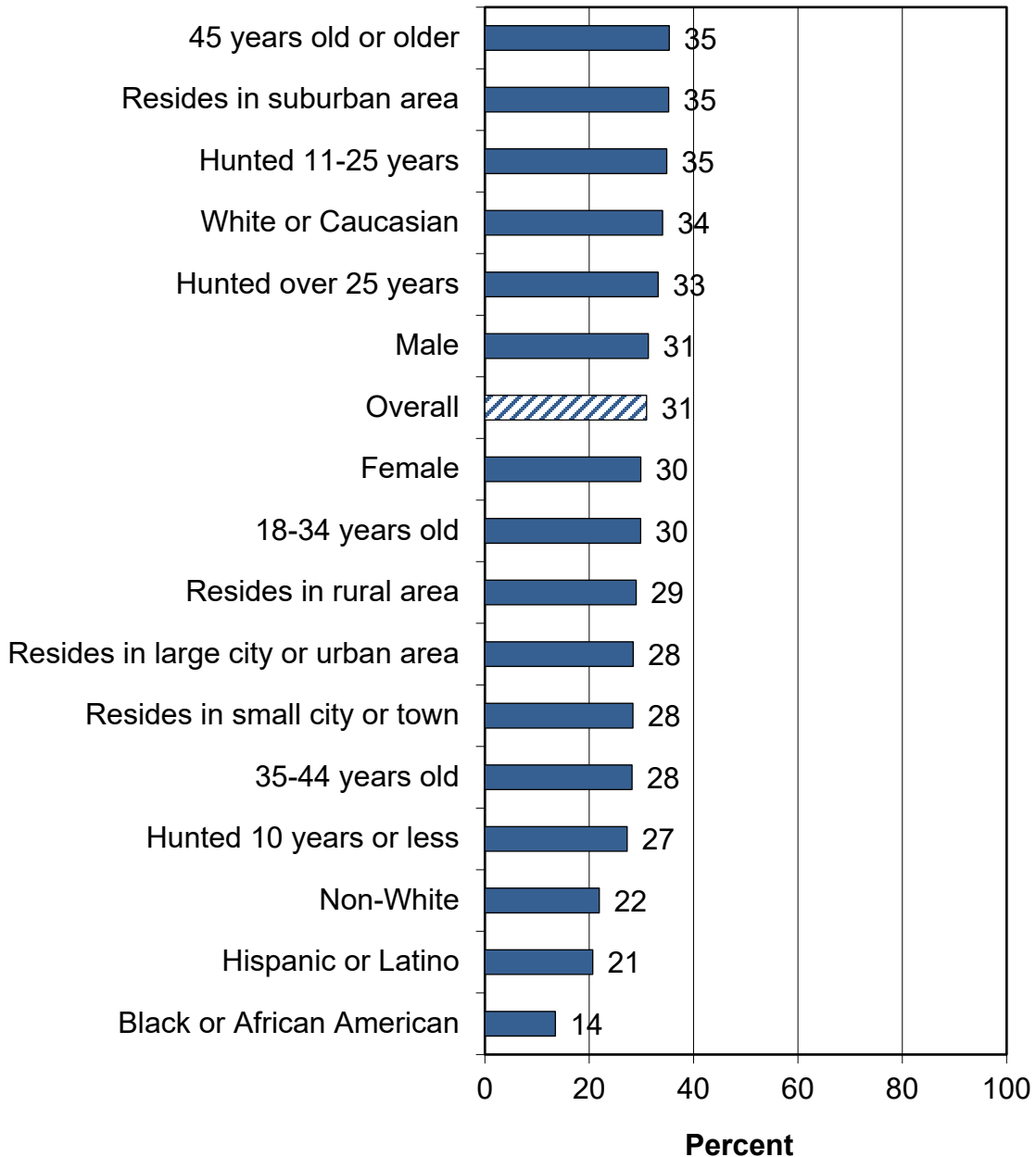
A demographic-participatory analyses graph is included for each reason for using AR-platform / modern sporting rifles. Among the findings:

- Ease of shooting is particularly liked by Black/African American hunters and residents of small cities/towns.
- Accuracy has no group markedly higher than hunters overall as a reason for using modern sporting rifles.
- Reliability as a reason is particularly liked by Hispanics/Latinos.
- The light weight of AR-platform / modern sporting rifles is particularly liked by Blacks/African Americans and urban residents.

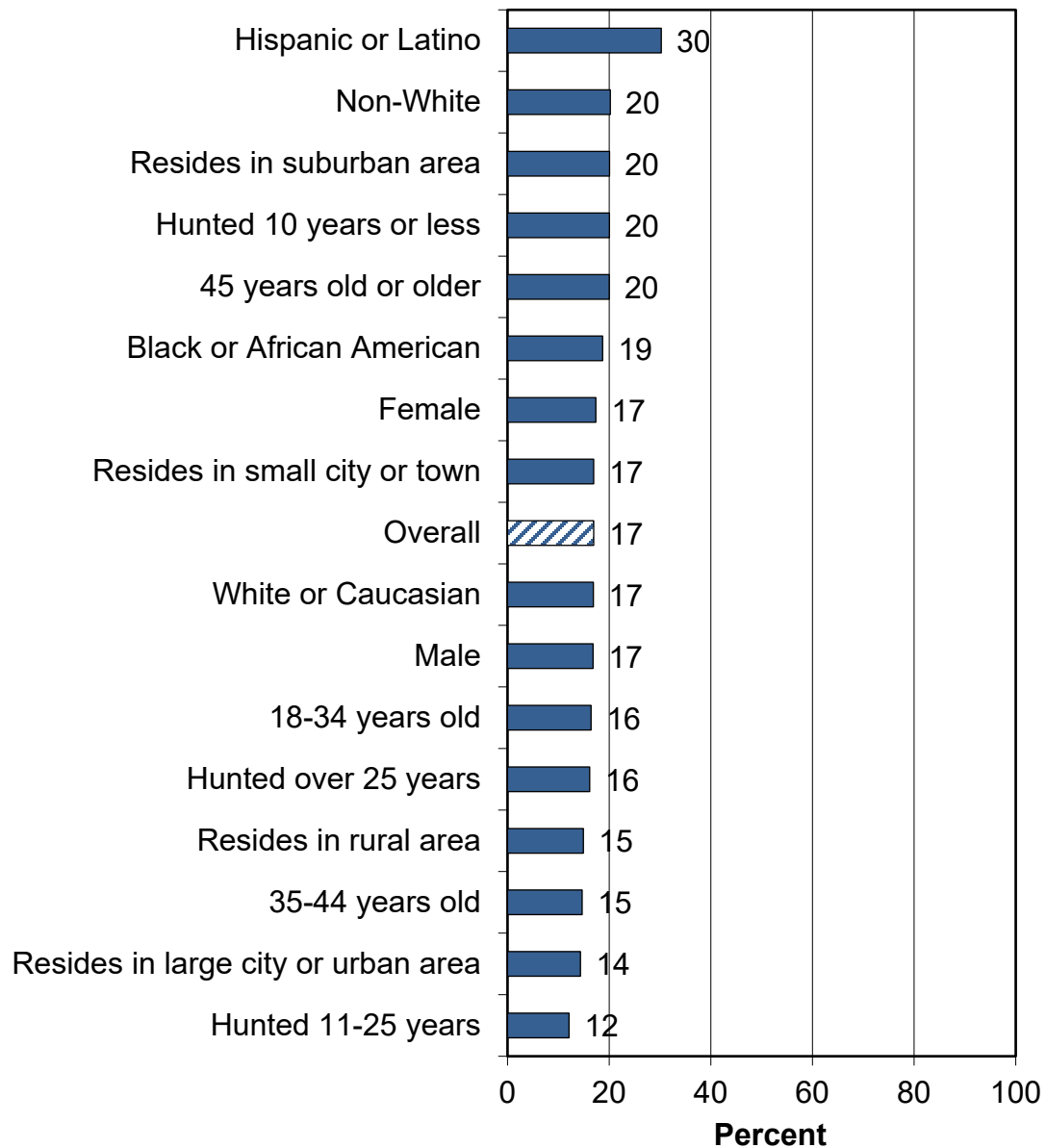
Percent of each of the following groups who have mainly used an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt because of its **ease of shooting. (Asked of those who have hunted with an MSR.) (Hunters)**



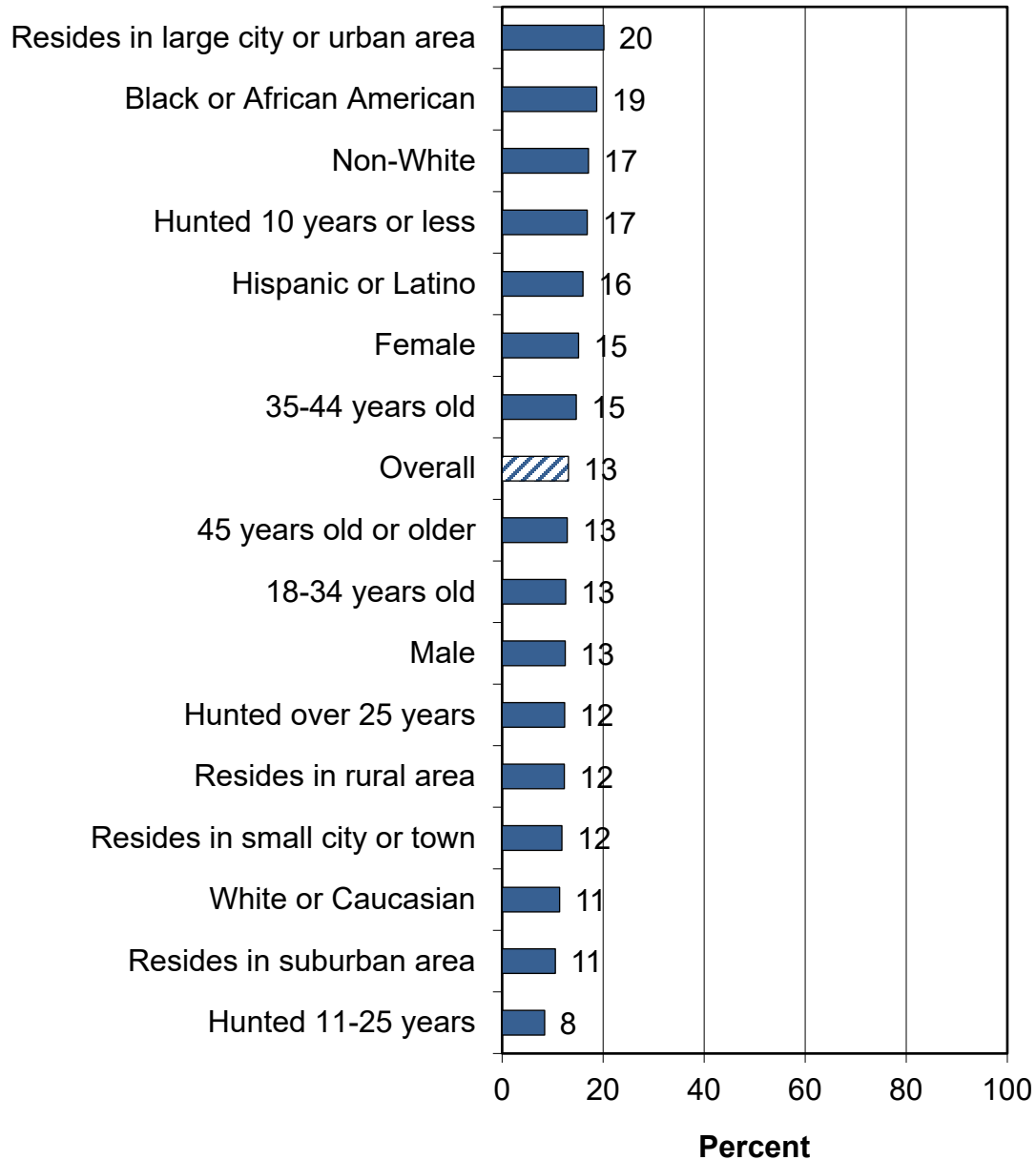
Percent of each of the following groups who have mainly used an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt because of its accuracy. (Asked of those who have hunted with an MSR.) (Hunters)



Percent of each of the following groups who have mainly used an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt because of its reliability. (Asked of those who have hunted with an MSR.) (Hunters)

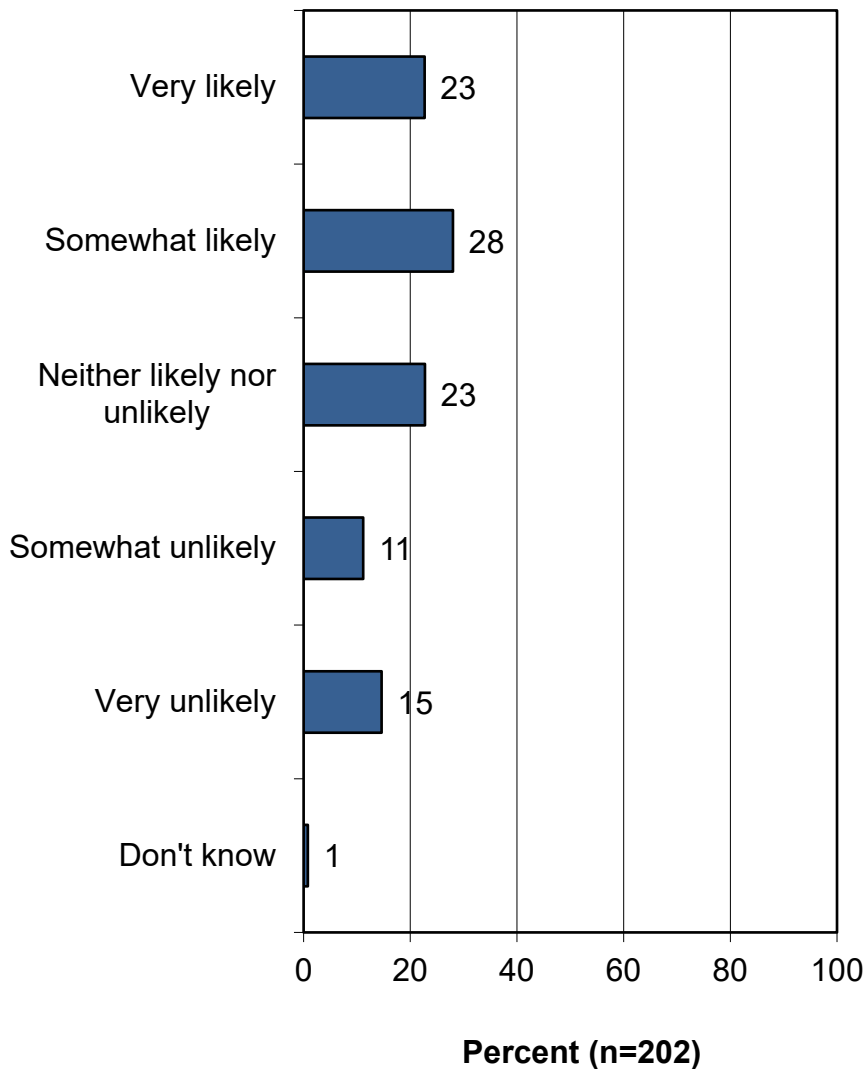


Percent of each of the following groups who have mainly used an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle to hunt because of **its light weight. (Asked of those who have hunted with an MSR.) (Hunters)**



INTEREST IN USING AR-PLATFORM / MODERN SPORTING RIFLES FOR HUNTING

If it was legal to do so in your state, how likely would it be that you would hunt with an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle? (Asked of current hunters who have not yet hunted with an MSR.)

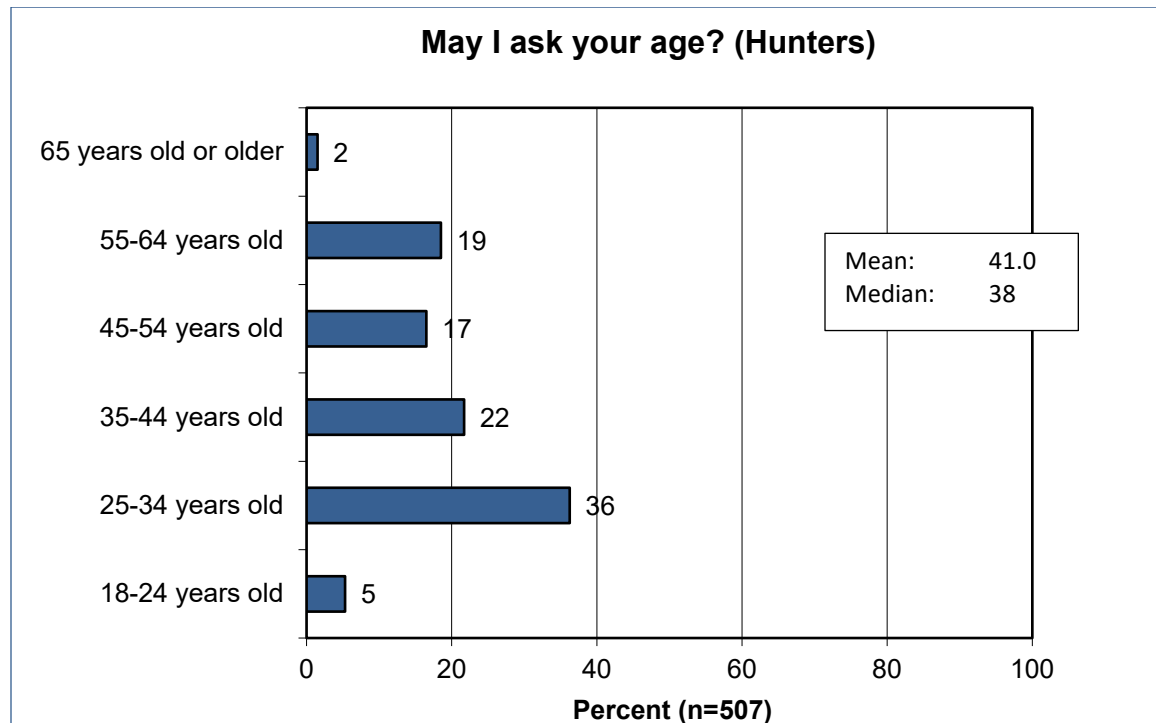
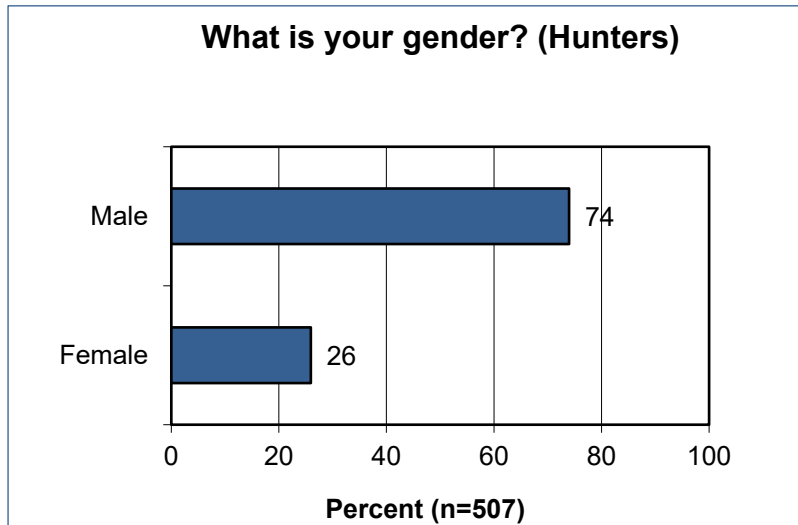


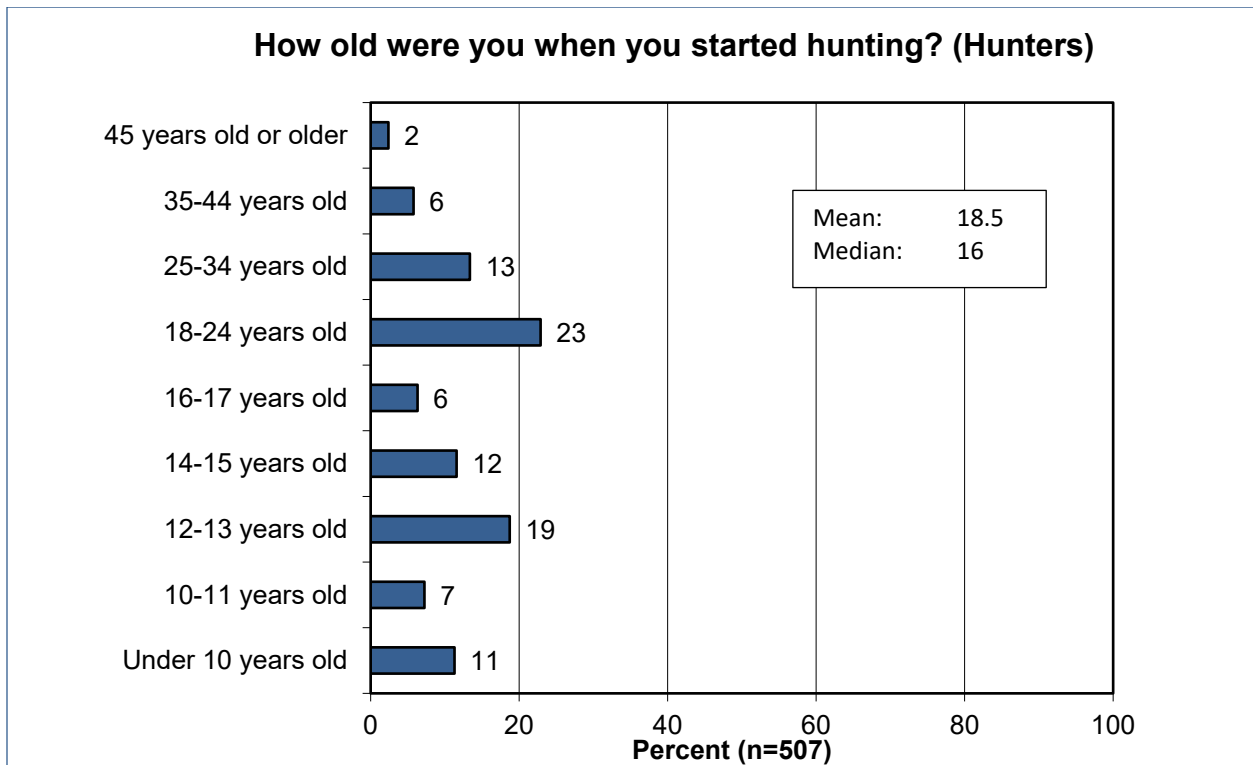
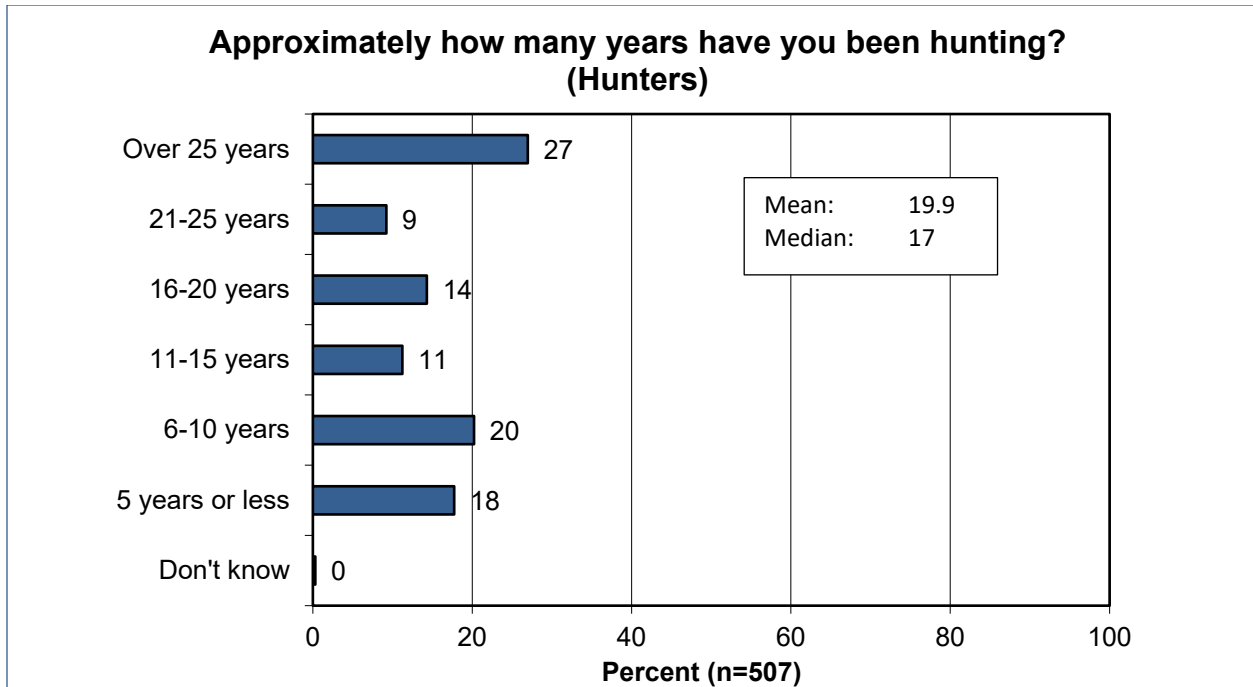
Just over half of hunters (51%) indicate being very or somewhat likely to hunt with an AR-platform / modern sporting rifle, if legally allowed to do so in their state.

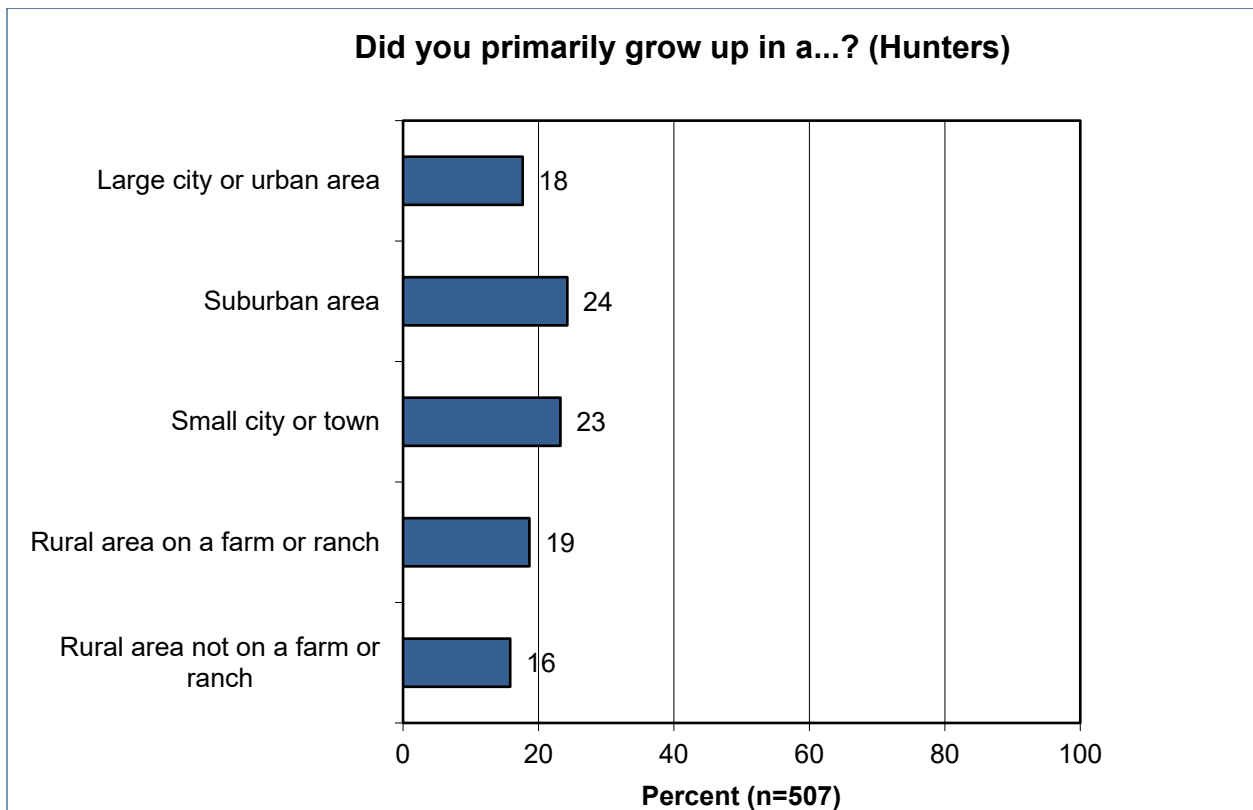
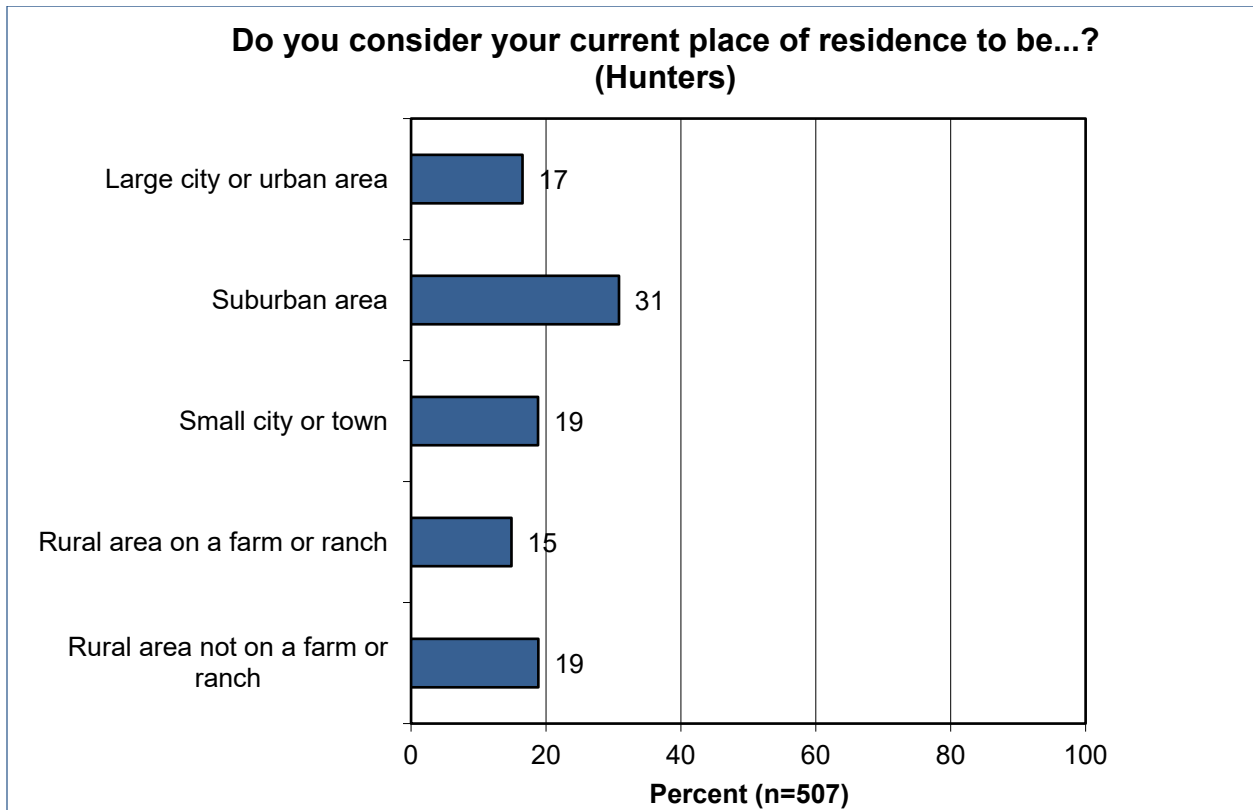
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The demographic information listed below was gathered primarily for crosstabulations and further analyses. The data obtained were:

- Gender.
- Age.
- Years of hunting experience and age when started.
- Residential area (urban-rural continuum) live in now and grew up in.







ABOUT OUTDOOR STEWARDS OF CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation (OSCF) is an IRS registered 501c3 nonprofit organization that has a mission to use research-based communication and engagement programs to recruit the next generation of Hunters, Anglers, Trappers and Shooters (HATS™) and promote the fact that HATS are primary funders and stewards of land, fish and wildlife conservation in America.

OSCF works towards its mission by conducting a variety of timely and accurate research as well as with programs such as:

- 1) **“Connecting with Conservation”** is a video series that showcases industry and agency partners informing and thanking their customers for being primary funders of conservation through the purchase of hunting/fishing licenses and excise taxed products.
- 2) **“Fill A Bag While Filling Your Tag”** national conservation engagement program distributes reusable biodegradable bags to HATS across America and asks them to take a piece or two of trash out of nature while they are outdoors participating in hunting, fishing, trapping or recreational shooting. HATS post photos and videos to their social media of the #TrophyTrash they take out of nature to get credit for being stewards of conservation.
- 3) **“Come With!”** is a national recruitment campaign that activates America’s 60 million HATS to invite someone new to Come With! them when they head to the woods, water or range.
- 4) **“Outdoor Industry Communication Council”** (OICC) is a partnership between OSCF and Wildlife Management Institute to form a consortium of industry, agency, media and NGO organizations to promote OICC developed materials that promote positive contributions of HATS.

Learn more at www.OutdoorStewards.org and Follow on Instagram @OutdoorStewards

ABOUT RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT

Responsive Management is an internationally recognized survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues. Our mission is to help natural resource and outdoor recreation agencies, businesses, and organizations better understand and work with their constituents, customers, and the public.

Focusing only on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues, Responsive Management has conducted telephone, mail, and online surveys, as well as multi-modal surveys, on-site intercepts, focus groups, public meetings, personal interviews, needs assessments, program evaluations, marketing and communication plans, and other forms of human dimensions research measuring how people relate to the natural world for more than 30 years. Utilizing our in-house, full-service survey facilities with 75 professional interviewers, we have conducted studies in all 50 states and 15 countries worldwide, totaling more than 1,000 human dimensions projects *only* on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues.

responsivemanagement.com



For additional research please visit www.OutdoorStewards.org