

Food Insecurity Among Older Adults

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Four Central Questions

- What is the extent of food insecurity among seniors in the United States?
- What are the causes of food insecurity among seniors?
- What are the consequences of food insecurity for seniors?
- What approaches can be used to address food insecurity among seniors?

The Measurement of Food Insecurity in the United States

Definitions of Categories of Food Insecurity

- A household is placed into food security categories based on responses to 18 questions on the Core Food Security Module (CFSM)
- Examples of questions
 - “I worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more”
 - “Did you or the other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food”
 - “Were you ever hungry but did not eat because you couldn’t afford enough food”
 - “In the last 12 months did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?”

Definitions of Food Insecurity Categories

- Marginally food insecure (Facing threat of hunger)
 - 1 or more affirmative responses to CFSM
- Food insecure (At-risk of hunger)
 - 3 or more affirmative responses to CFSM
- Very low food secure (Hunger)
 - 8 or more affirmative responses to CFSM (households with children)
 - 6 or more affirmative responses to CFSM (households without children)

Extent of Senior Hunger

Current Population Survey

- December Supplements from 2001 to 2011
 - Supplements used to establish the official estimates of food insecurity in the United States
- Combined cross-sections
- Nationally representative (with weights)
- Full set of questions from Core Food Security Module

Figure 1. Trends in Threat of Hunger Among Senior Americans

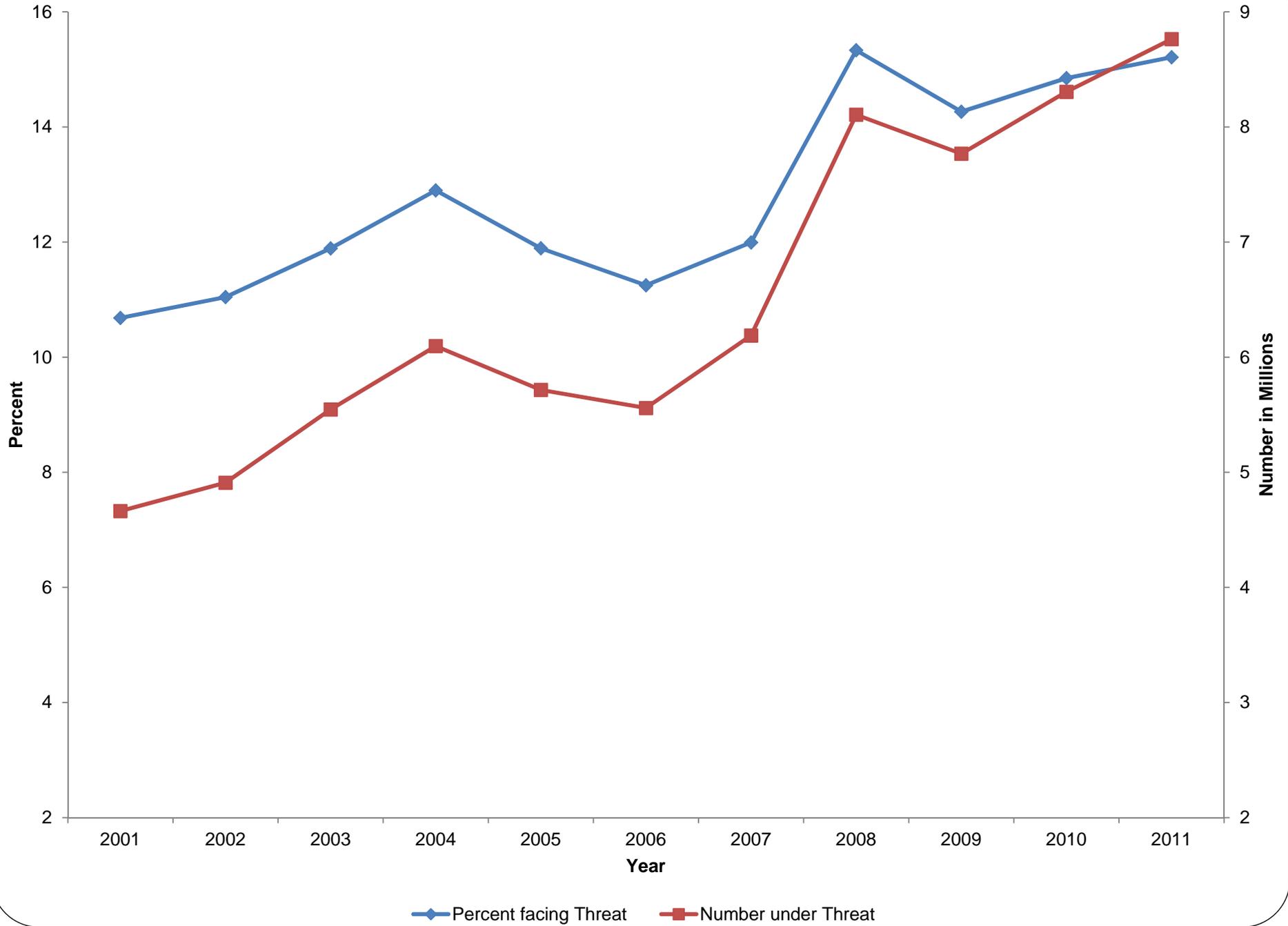


Figure 2. Trends in Threat of Hunger among Senior Americans by Metropolitan Status

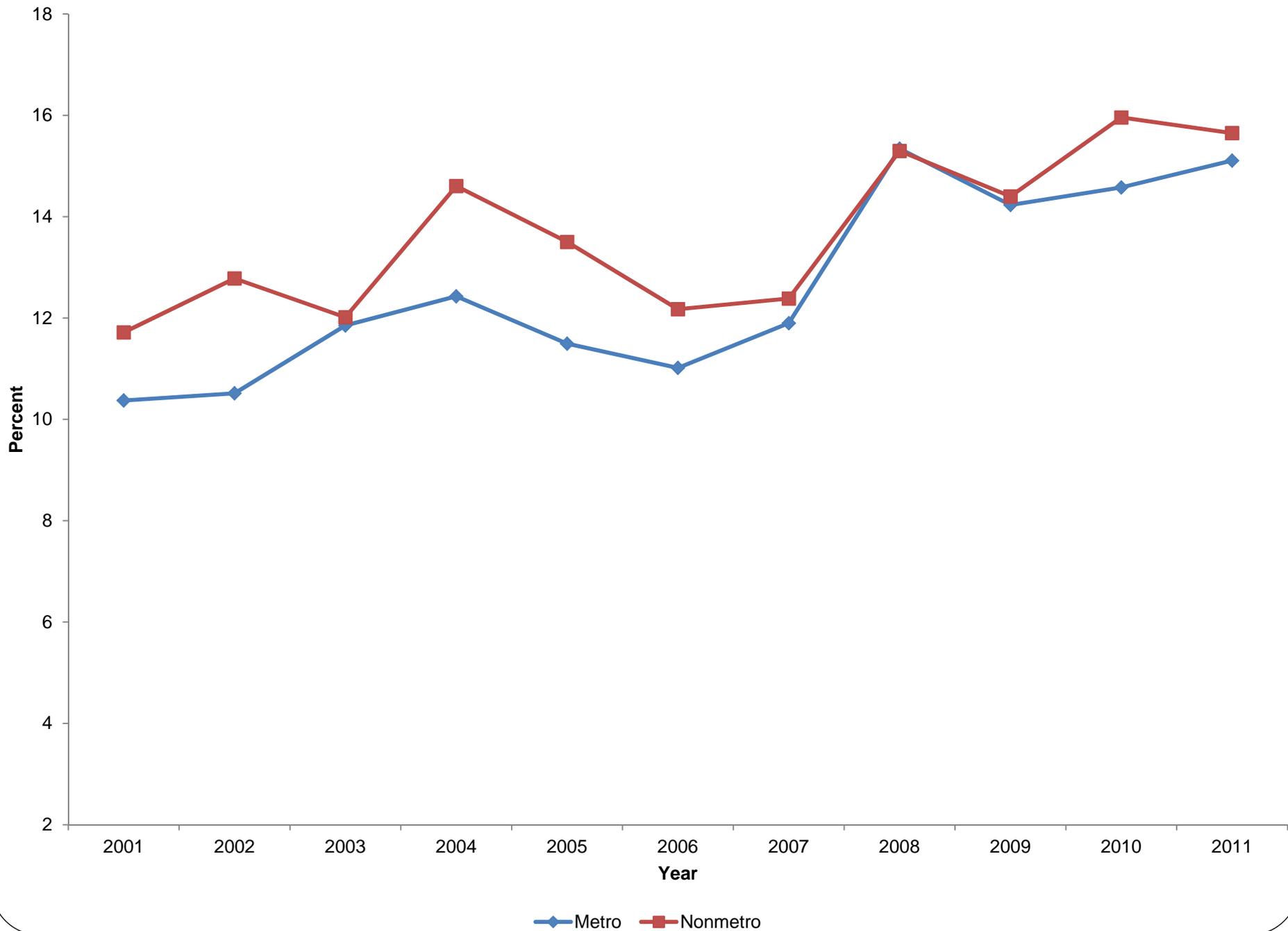


Figure 3. Trends in Threat of Hunger among Senior Americans, by Race

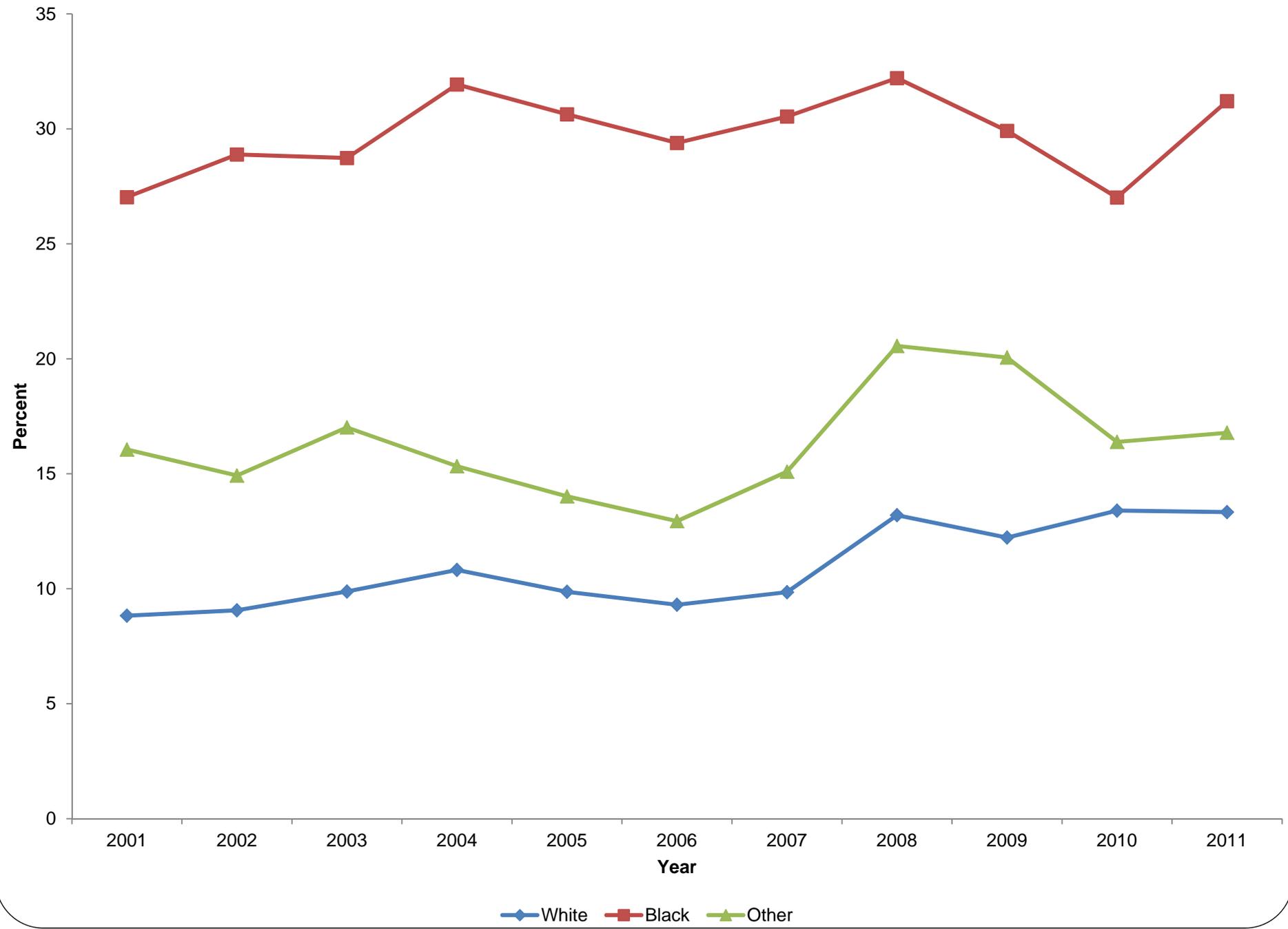


Figure 4. Trends in Threat of Hunger among Senior Americans, by Hispanic Ethnicity

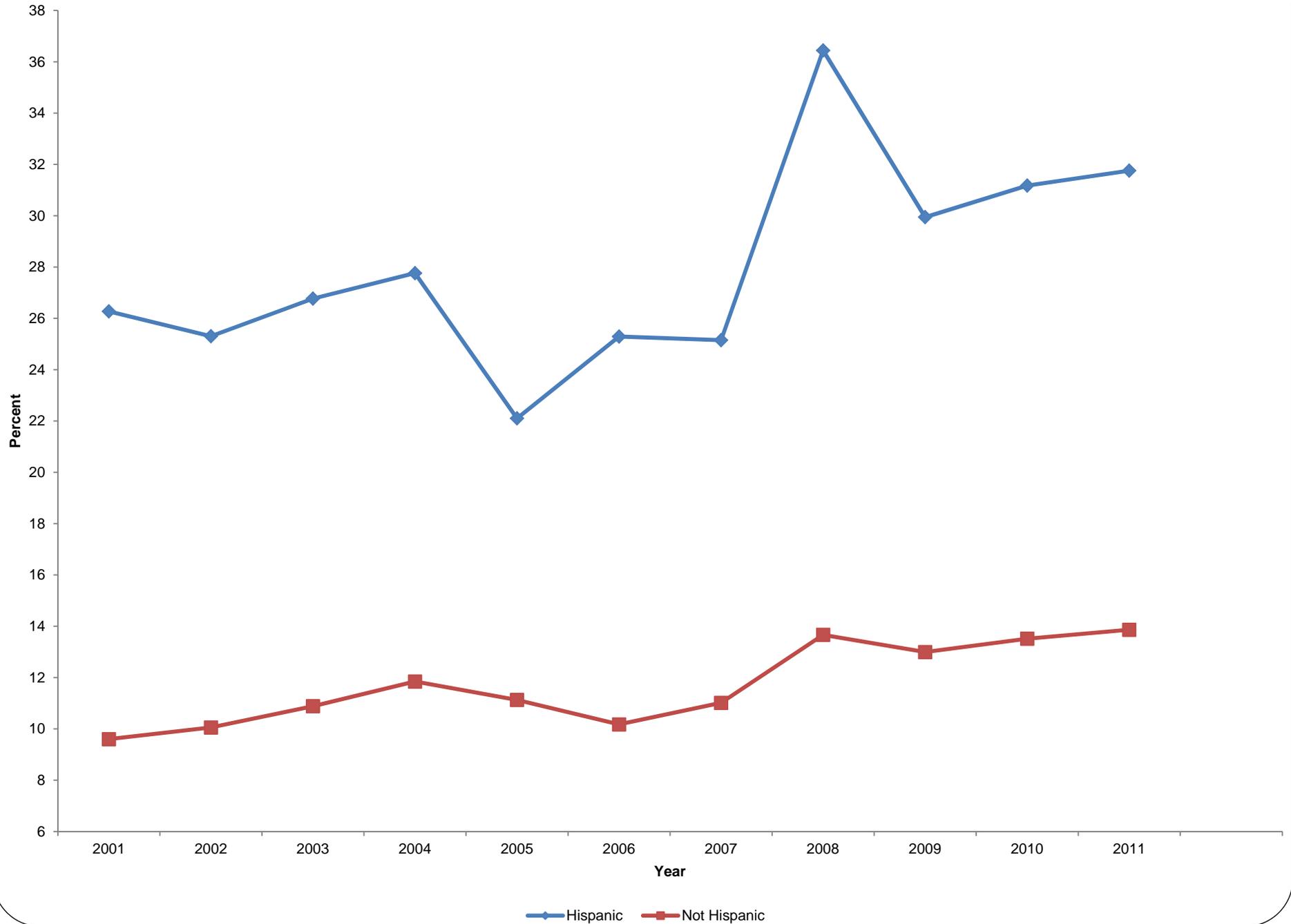


Figure 5. Trends in Threat of Hunger among Senior Americans, by Age

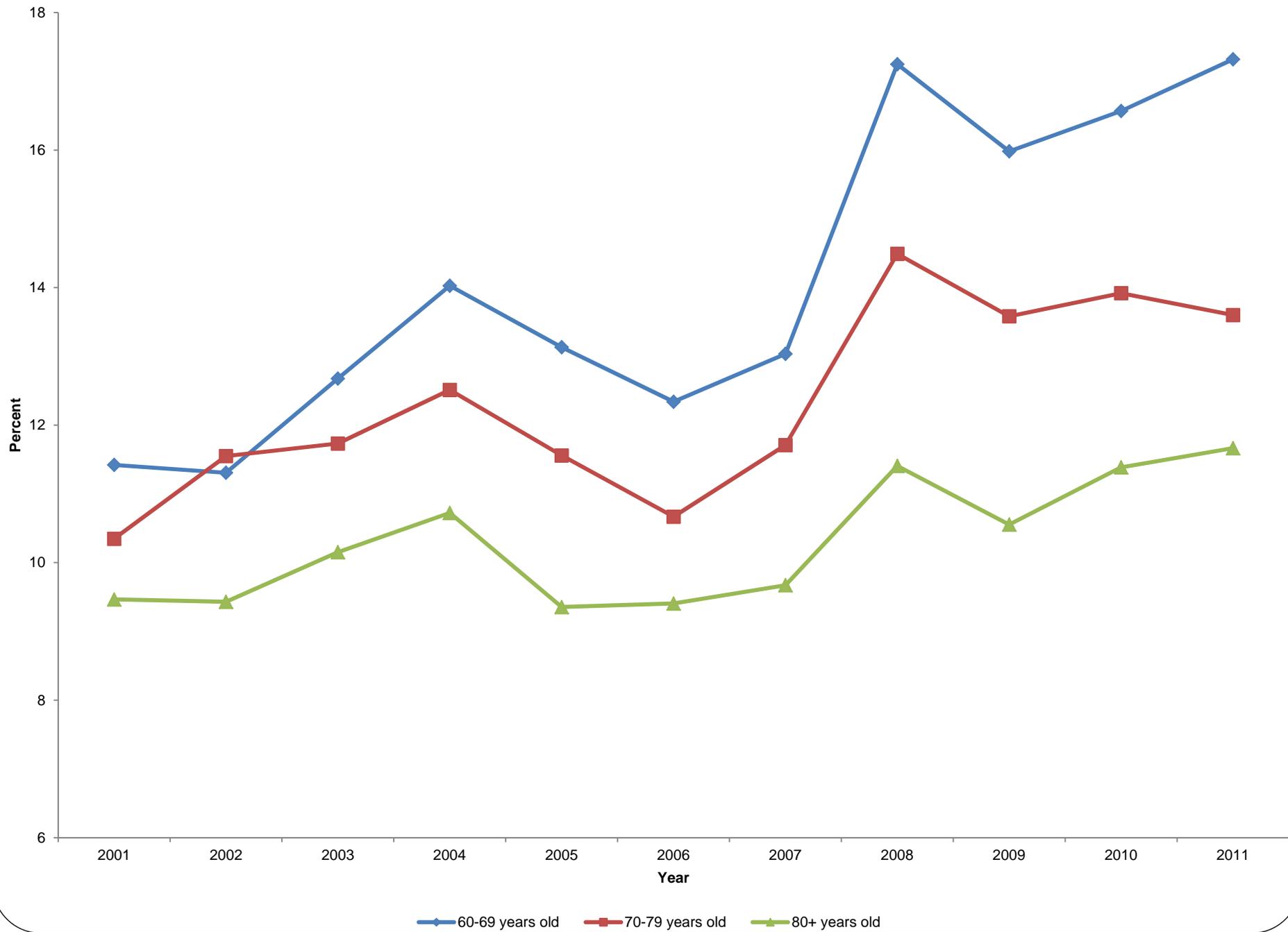
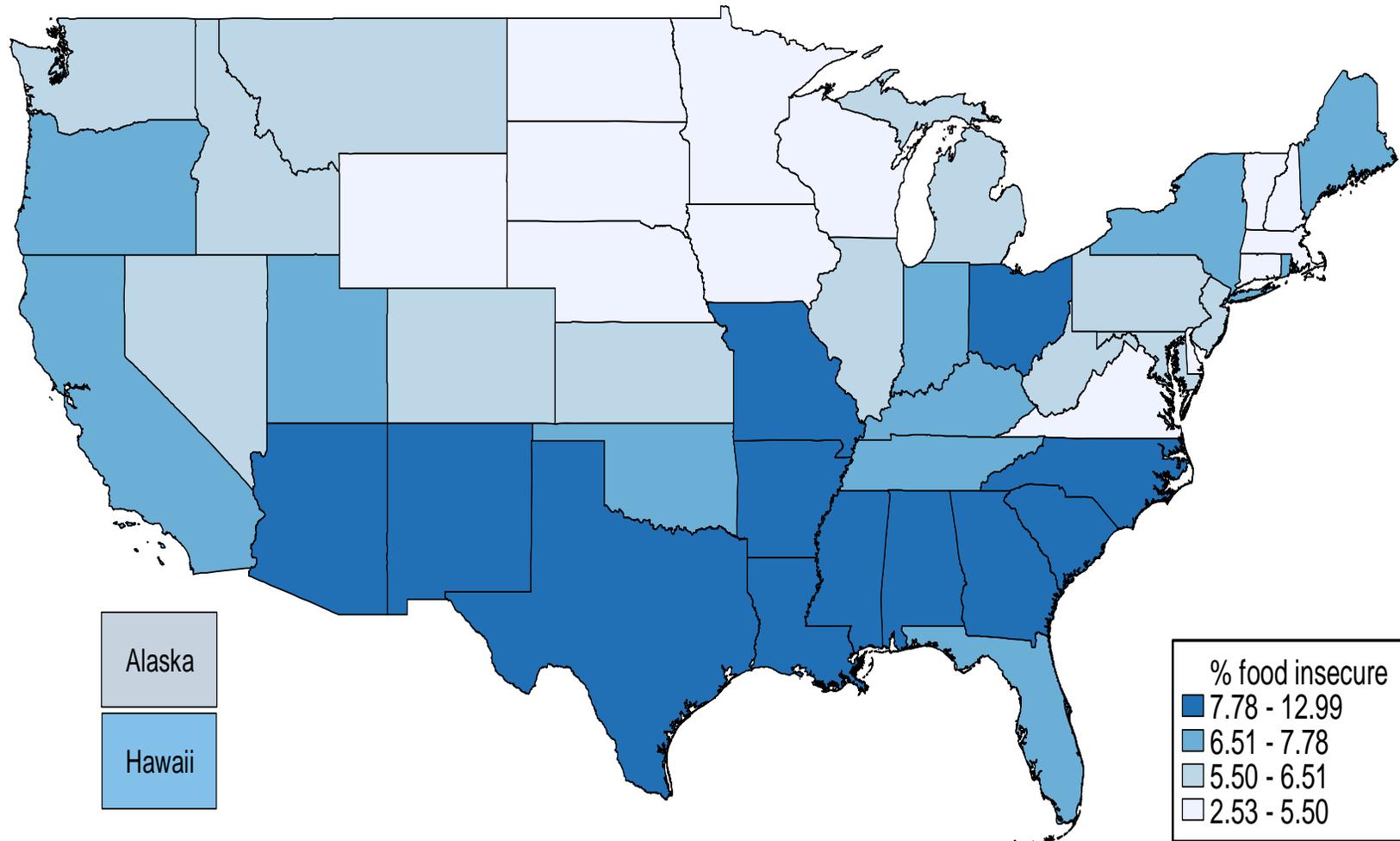
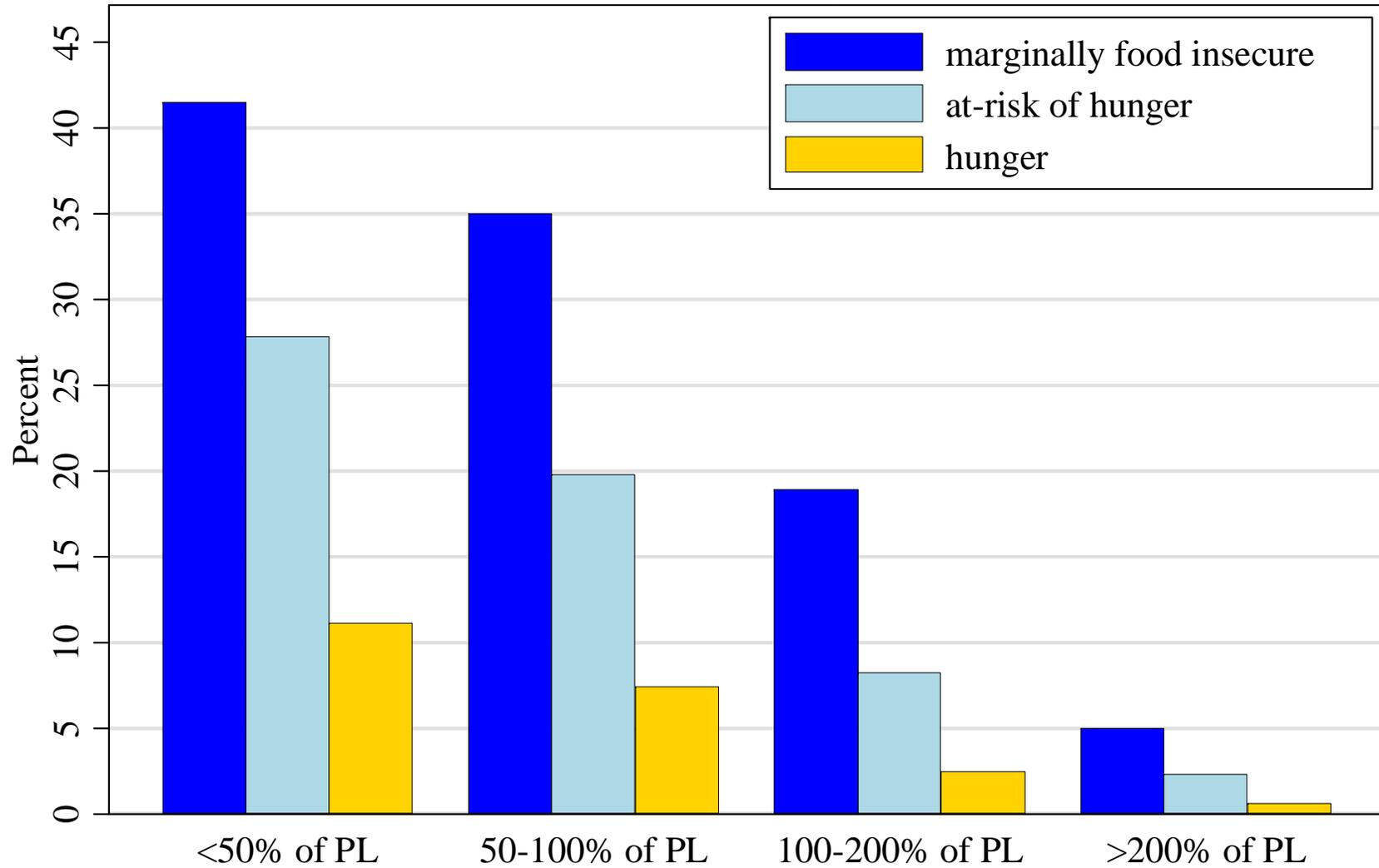


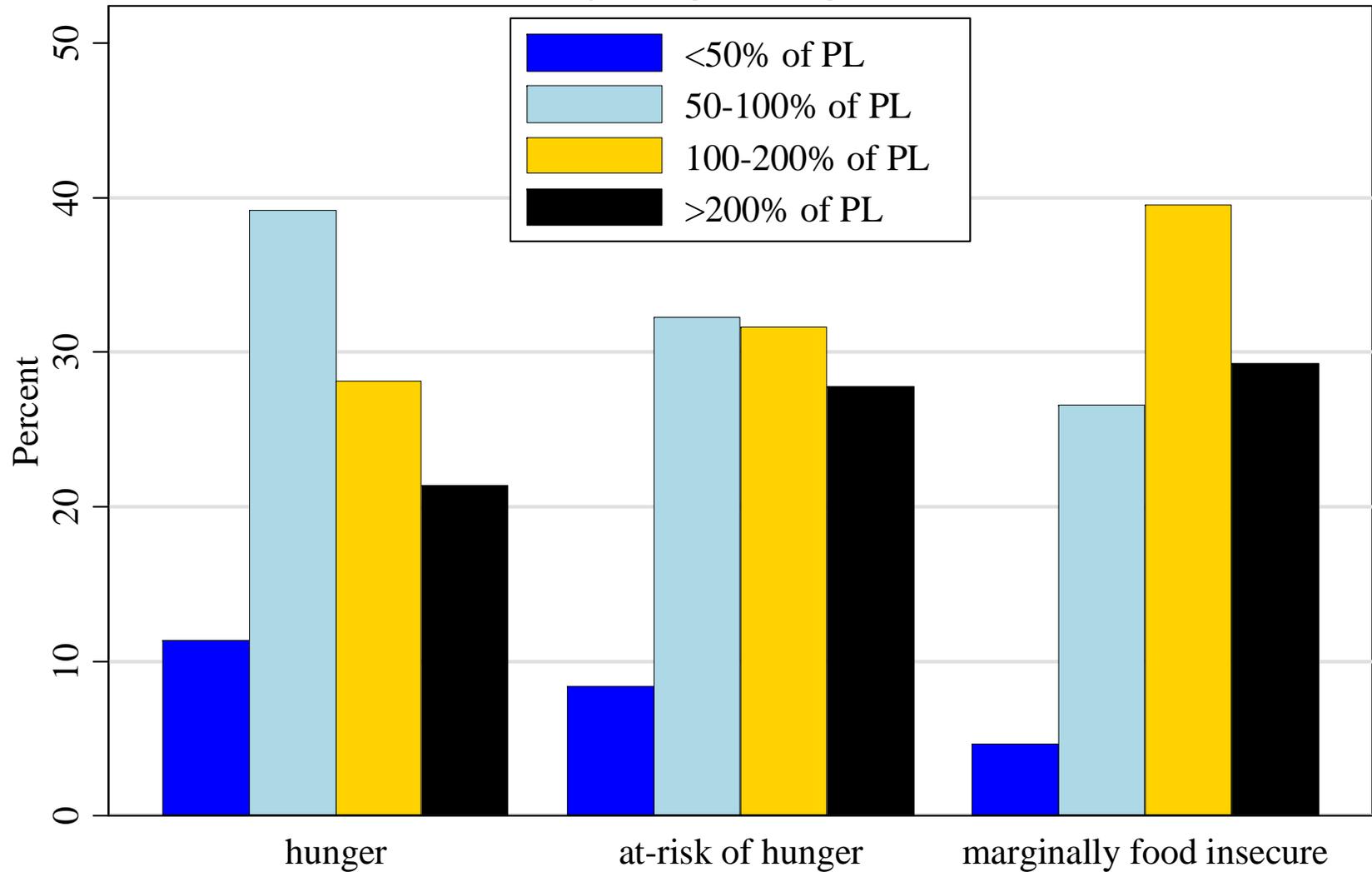
Figure 8b: State Food Insecurity Rates for Adults Age 50 and Older



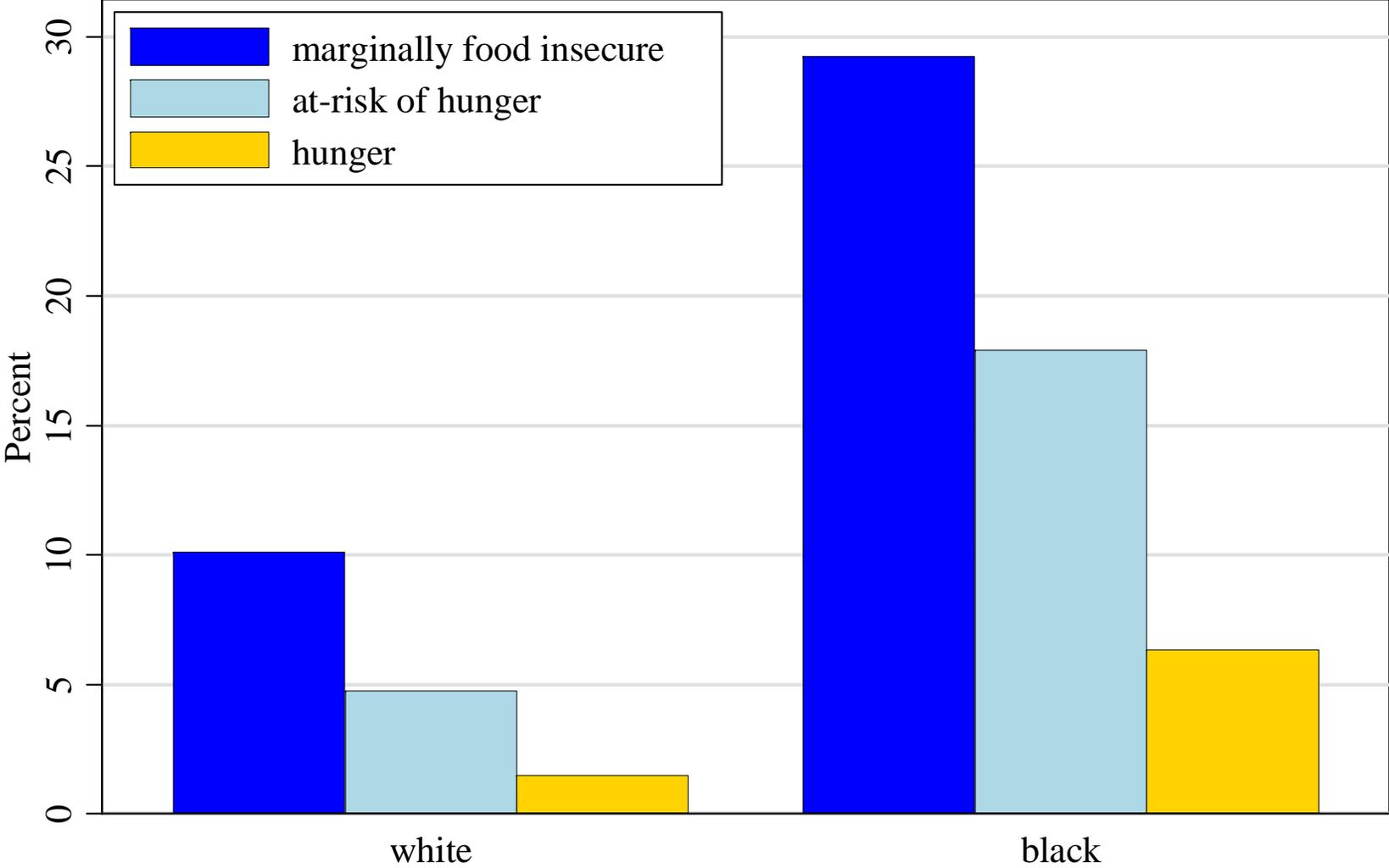
Hunger Rates By Income Categories



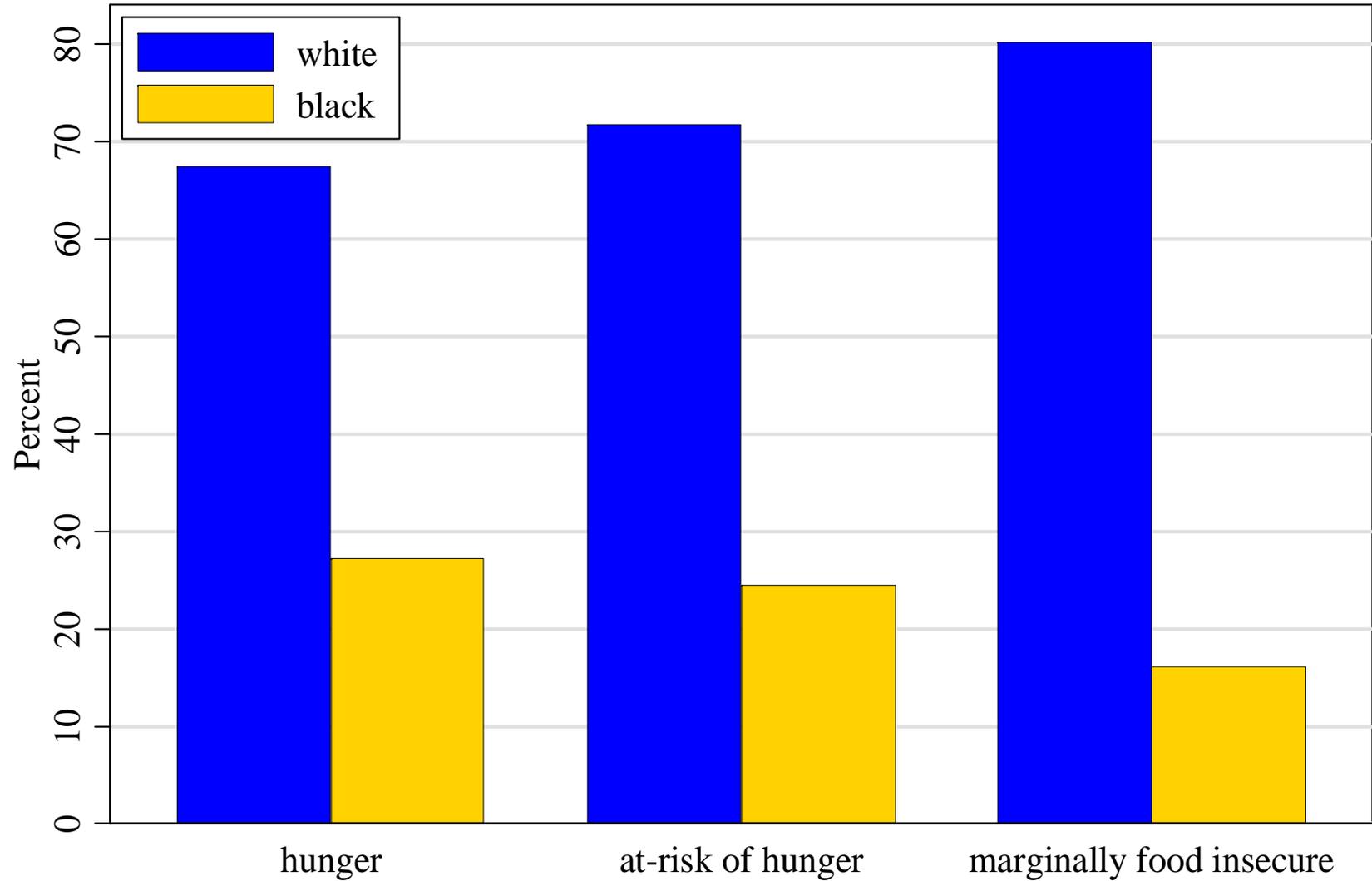
Distribution of Income Groups By Hunger Categories



Hunger Rates By Race Categories



Distribution of Race Categories By Hunger Categories



Determinants of Senior Hunger

Multivariate Regression Models

- Controlling for other factors we find that food insecurity is more likely among older adults
 - Living at or below the poverty line
 - Without a high school degree
 - Who are African-American or Hispanic
 - Who are divorced or separated
 - Who have a grandchild living in the household
 - Who are younger

Health Consequences of Food Insecurity

National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)

- Nationally representative
- Medical information collected by trained personnel
- Full set of questions from CFSM
- 1999-2008

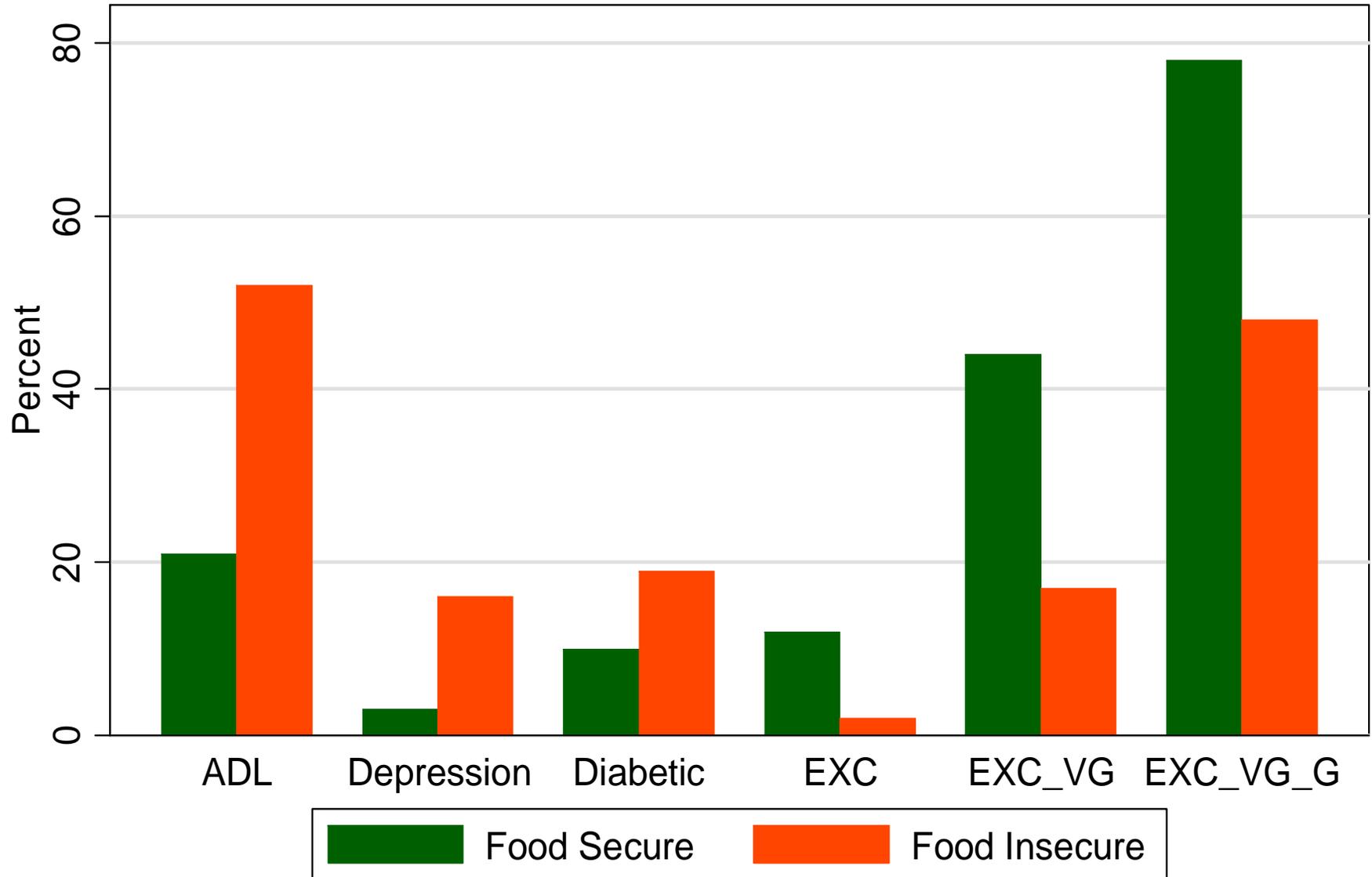
Nutrient Intakes

- Statistically significant differences in nutrient intakes between food secure and food insecure persons between 50 and 59
 - Vitamin A
 - Thiamin
 - Vitamin B6
 - Calcium
 - Phosphorous
 - Magnesium
 - Iron
- Differences are not large in magnitude
- When restrict to those below 200% of the poverty line
 - No statistically significant differences

Nutrient Intakes

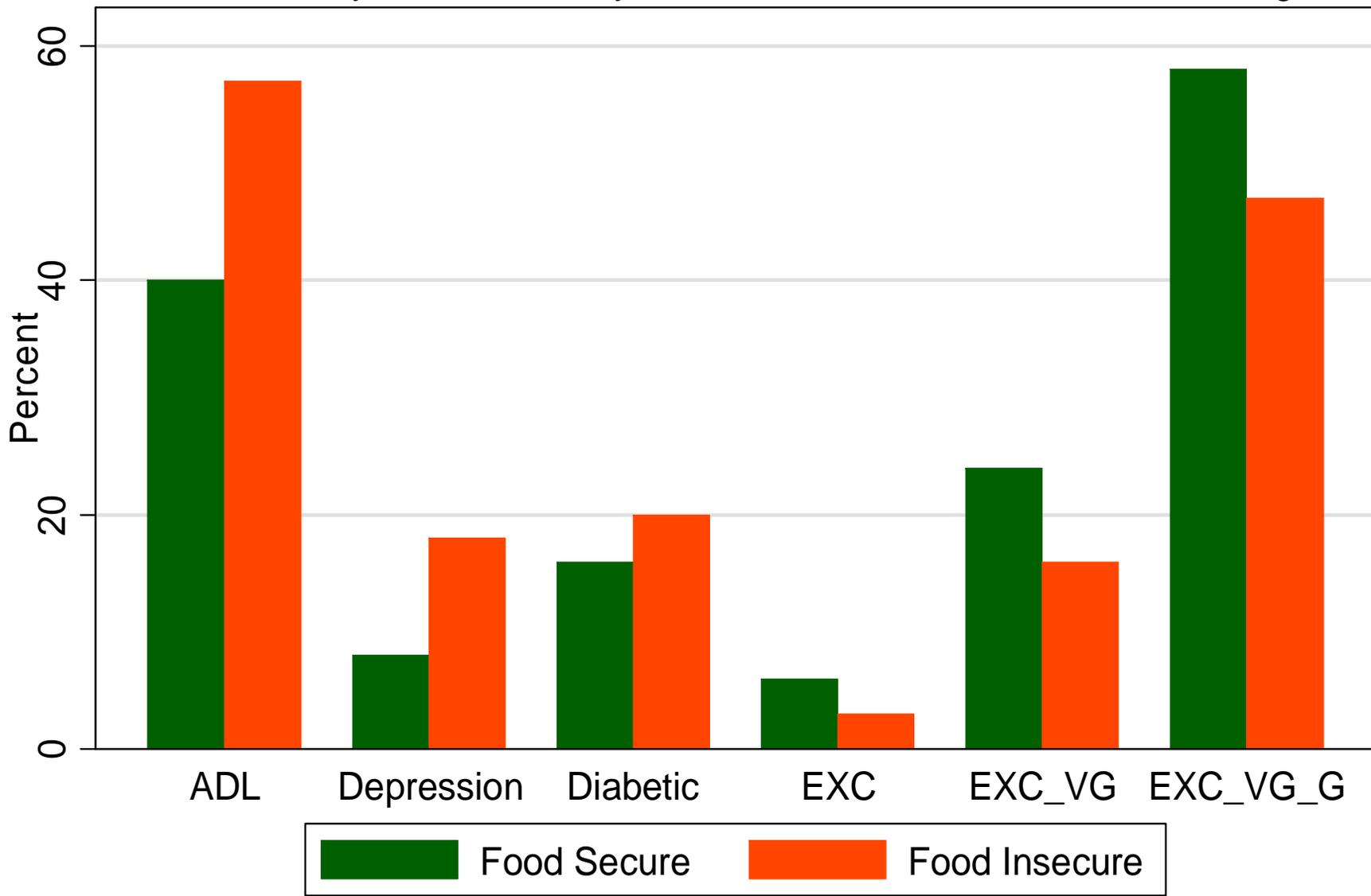
- Contrast with
 - Food insecure persons have substantially lower food intakes than food secure persons in the age 60 and above group
 - For all nutrients
 - No statistically significant difference for any nutrient by food insecurity status in the 40-49 age group

Health Outcomes by Food Insecurity Status: Ages 50-59



ADL denotes at least one ADL limitation, EXC denotes in excellent health, EXC_VG denotes in very good or better health, EXC_VG_G denotes in good or better health

Health Outcomes by Food Insecurity Status, Incomes Under 200% of PL: Ages 50-59



ADL denotes at least one ADL limitation, EXC denotes in excellent health, EXC_VG denotes in very good or better health, EXC_VG_G denotes in good or better health

Multivariate regression models

- Controlling for other factors food insecure persons between the ages of 50 and 59:
 - Do not have lower nutrient intakes
 - In contrast, effects are statistically significant and negative for older seniors
 - Are less likely to be in excellent or very good health
 - Roughly equivalent to about \$12,000 less income
 - Are more likely to be depressed
 - Roughly equivalent to being divorced or never married
 - More likely to have ADL limitations
 - Roughly equivalent to being 13 years older

Multivariate regression models

- Food insecure seniors are
 - Significantly more likely to have lower intakes of energy and major vitamins
 - Across all the measures, the effect of being marginally food insecure is over twice as large (and generally much larger) than a move in income from one-to-two times the poverty line
 - Significantly more likely to be in poor or fair health
 - The effect of being marginally food insecure is similar to not having graduated from high school
 - Significantly more likely to have limitations in activities of daily living (ADL)
 - The effect of being marginally food insecure is roughly equivalent to being 14 years older

Concluding Remarks on Food Insecurity

- Food insecurity is a serious problem facing millions of seniors
 - Dramatic increase from 2007 to 2008/2009
 - Can identify those most at risk
 - Need to be cognizant of non-poor seniors in danger of food insecurity
- The risk of food insecurity among households with grandparents and grandchildren is especially high
 - Rising number of households in this situation
- Consequences of hunger are evident for millions of seniors
 - Further argument for why services are needed
- In 2025, hunger will continue to face millions of seniors
 - Need to continue efforts to reduce this problem

Alleviating Food Insecurity

SNAP

- Primary goals are to alleviate hunger and improve the well-being of poor people
- By far, largest food assistance program in the United States
 - Benefit levels
 - function of income and family size
 - maximum benefit level is \$668 for a family of four
 - average benefit level is about \$288 for a family of four
 - Size of program
 - serves about 45 million persons
 - largest near-cash assistance program

SNAP

- Eligibility Criteria
 - Gross income test
 - Gross monthly income less than 130 percent of the poverty line
 - Higher in some states
 - Net income test
 - Net monthly income (after various deductions) less than the poverty line
 - Asset test
 - Less than \$2,000
 - Waived in many states
- Reasons for non-participation
 - Stigma
 - Transactions costs
 - Low benefit levels

Importance of SNAP for Seniors

- SNAP is designed to help people across the age spectrum
 - For older Americans, only large scale nutrition program
- SNAP has a positive effect on nutrition and food security
 - Empirical evidence
 - Presumption of program
- Increased emphasis on SNAP as nutrition program for seniors
 - Phasing out of other programs
 - Increased outreach to elderly
 - Less strict eligibility criteria

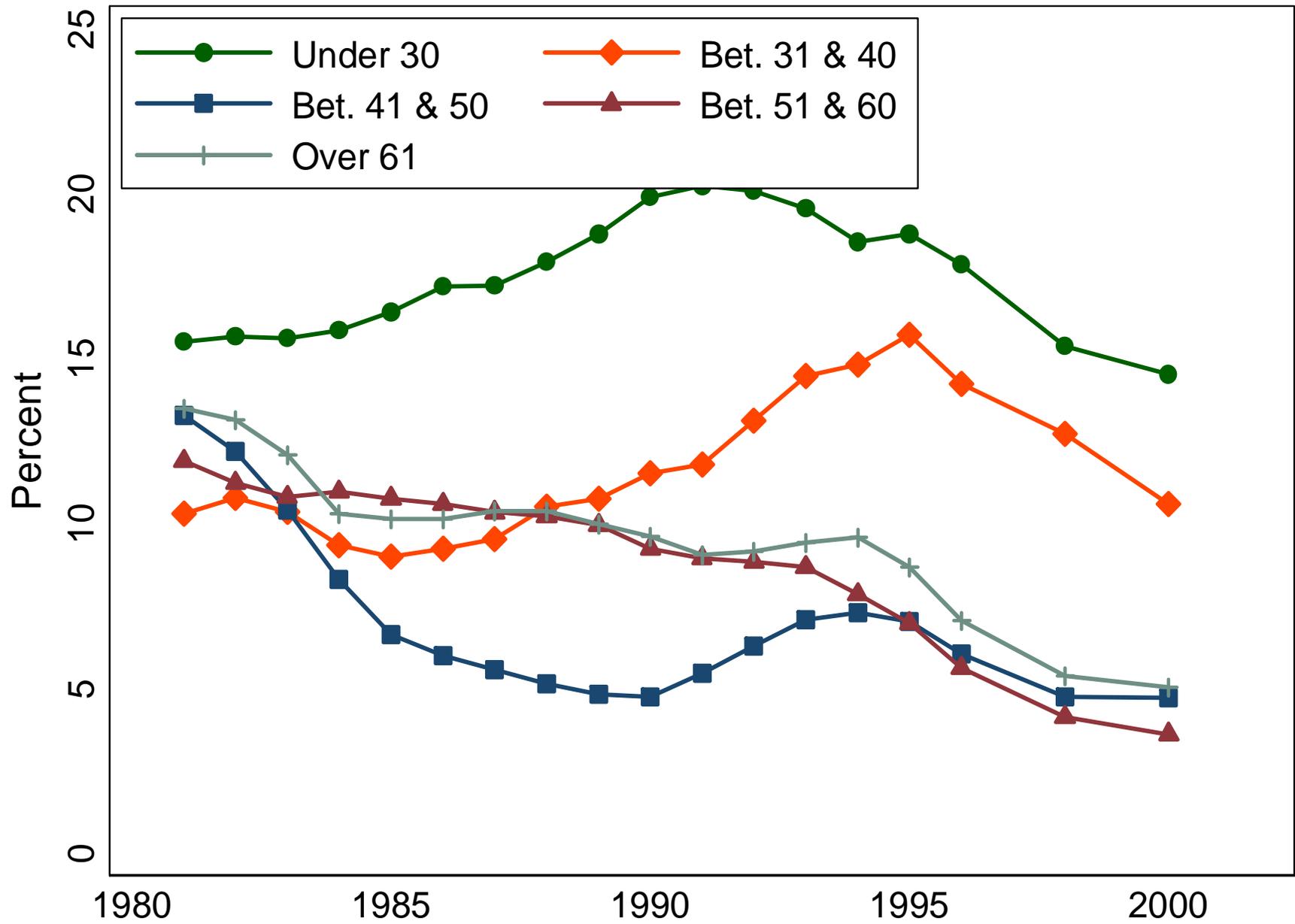


Figure 1. Food Stamp Participation Rates by Age, Full Sample

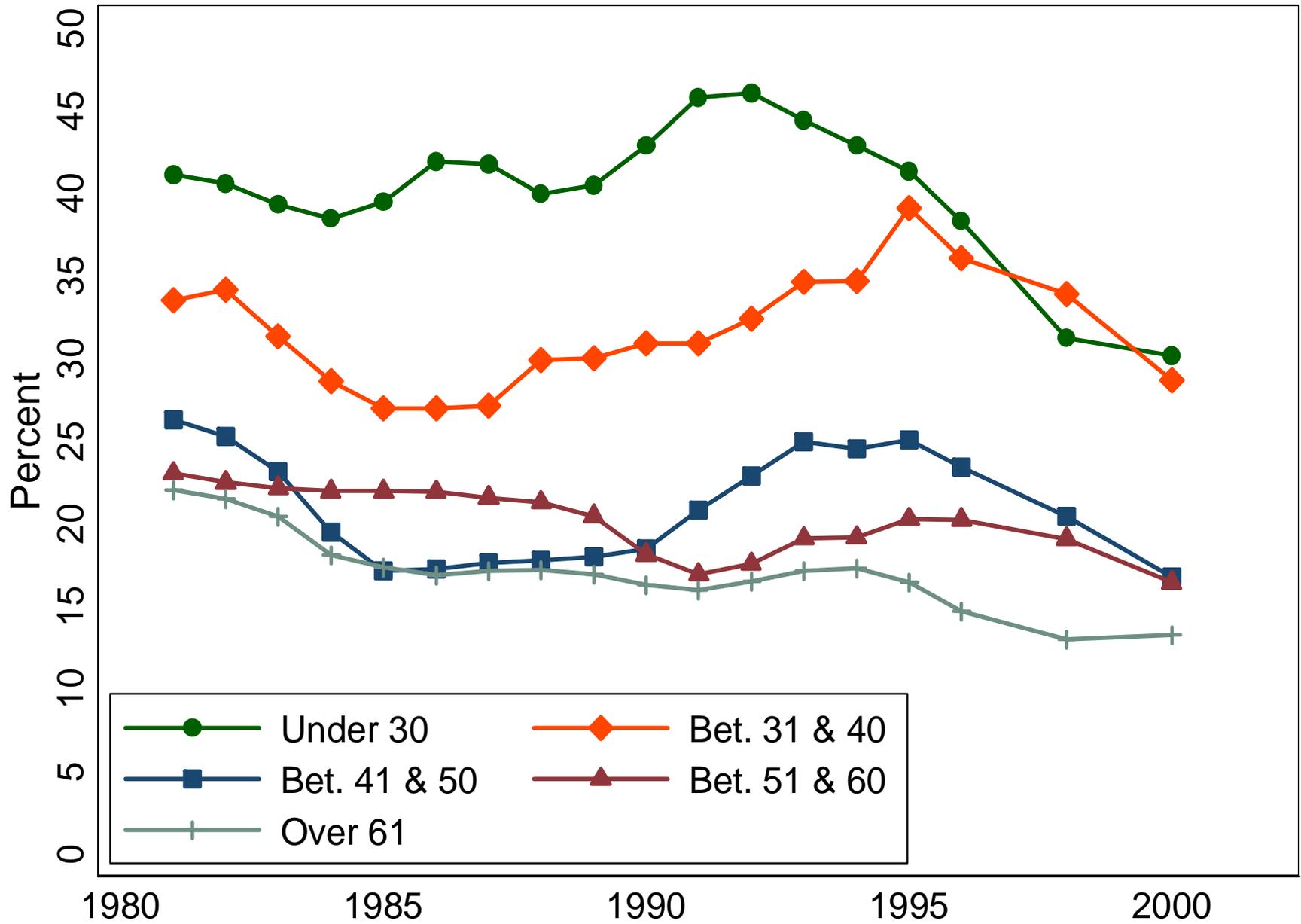


Figure 2. Food Stamp Participation Rates by Age, Low Education Sample

Why are Participation Rates Lower?

- Possible explanations
 - Diminished need for SNAP
 - Stigma
 - Transactions costs
 - Low benefit levels
- Still, differences are largely unexplained
- Consider two other explanations
 - Reductions in income volatility among older Americans
 - Greater experience with SNAP over time

Importance of Food Banks for Seniors

- As substitute for SNAP
 - Many seniors in need are ineligible
 - Some seniors in need decide to not receive SNAP
- As complement to SNAP
 - Benefits received may not be sufficient to avoid food insecurity
- Can be more innovative and responsive

Concluding Remarks

- Food insecurity rates decline with age
 - Need to take into consideration when constructing policies
 - Importance of SNAP for this age range
- Outreach for SNAP
 - Important across age range
 - May be less of issue in future for older Americans
 - Encourage participation among those with low levels of income volatility
- New efforts may also be pursued
 - Increase SNAP minimum levels?