



# Data Literacy for State Municipal League Leaders

October 2025, Christine Baker-Smith, PhD



# GOALS FOR TODAY

## Part 1: FINDING DATA FOR POLICY-MAKING (Data 101)

- What's out there?
- What can it tell me?

## Part 2: USING DATA FOR POLICY-MAKING (Stats 101)

- What can I learn from a graph?
- What do I need to ask?



NLC

# Making meaning with numbers

Who?

When?

Why?

How  
much?

How  
many?

NLC

“ *What are other causes of this trend?* ”

“ *Who is missing?* ”

**Questions  
to ask**

# EXERCISE #1:

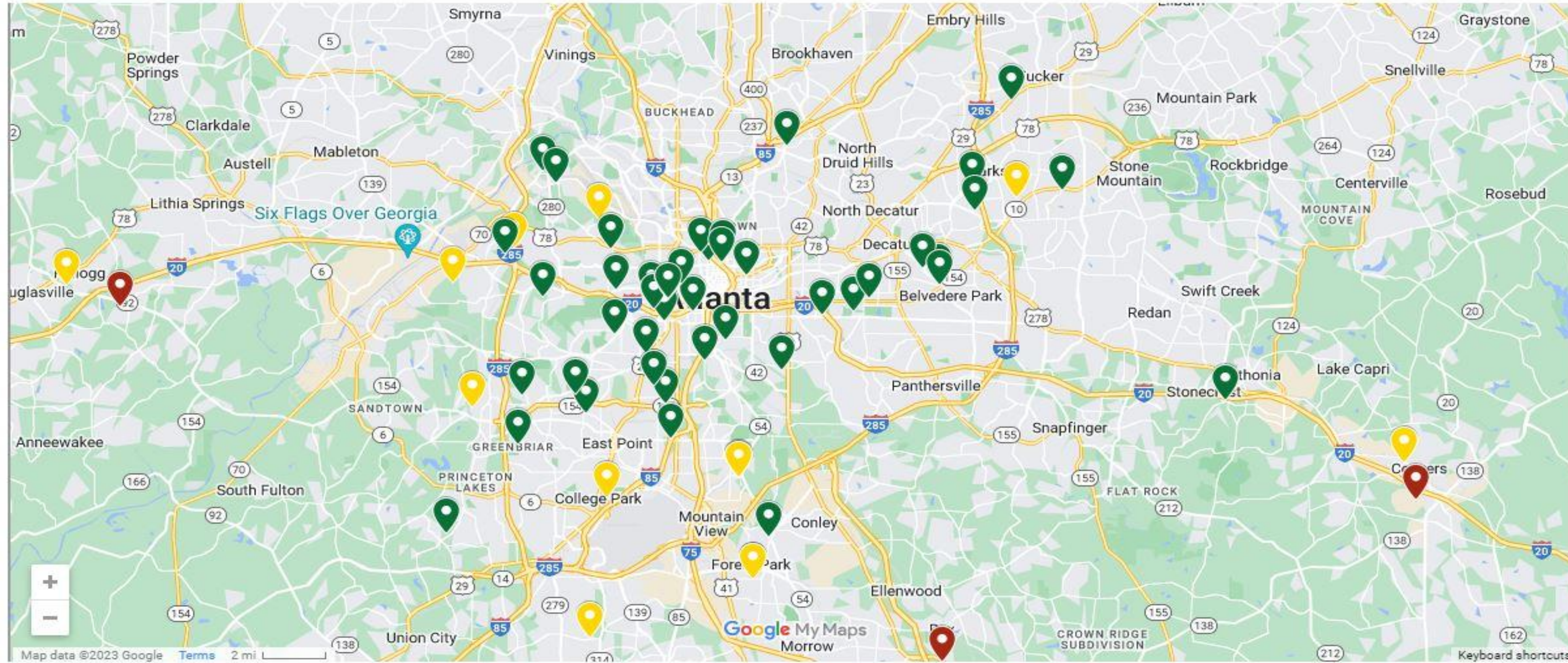
*Write it down!*

WHAT IS ONE (1) POLICY DECISION DO YOU NEED TO MAKE WHEN  
YOU GET HOME?



**WHAT CAN DATA DO FOR YOU?**

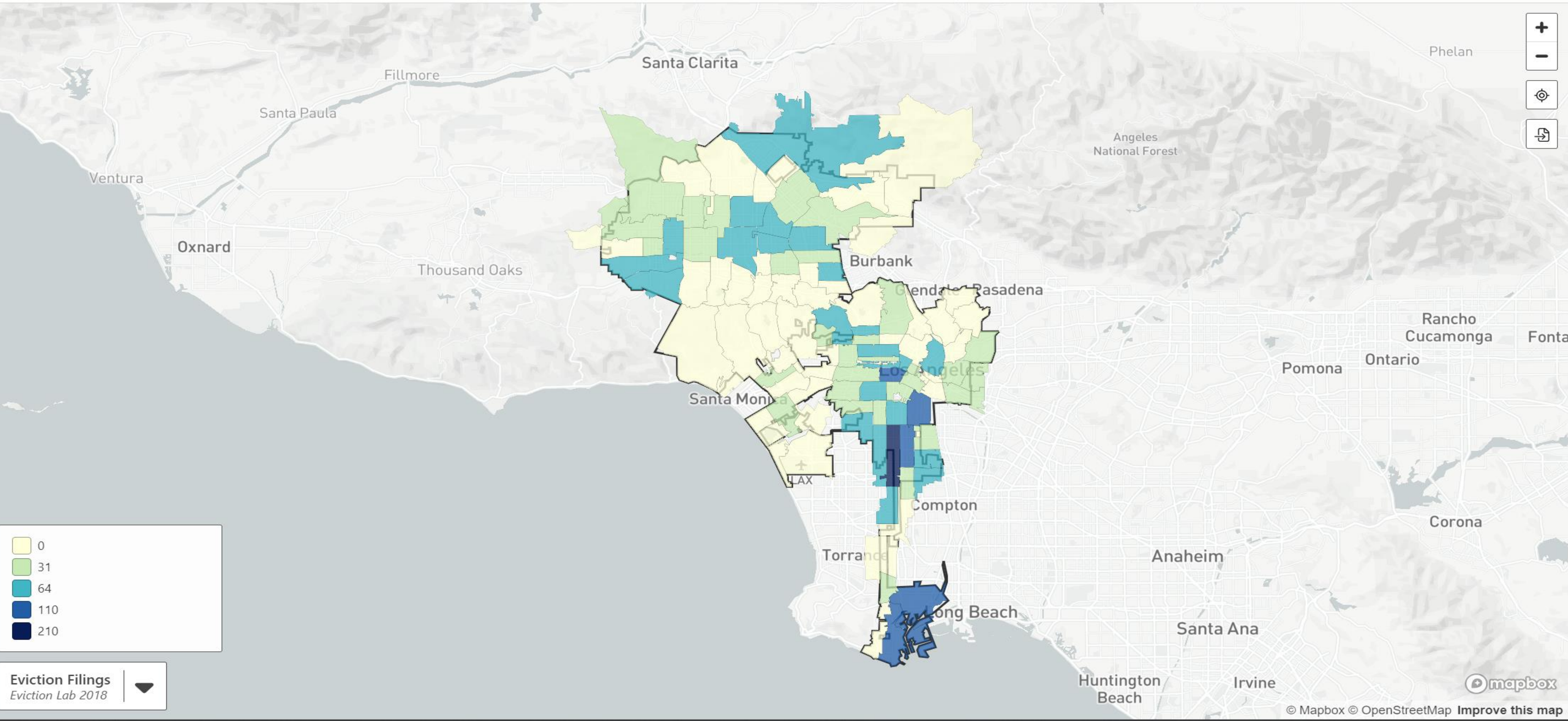
**NLC**

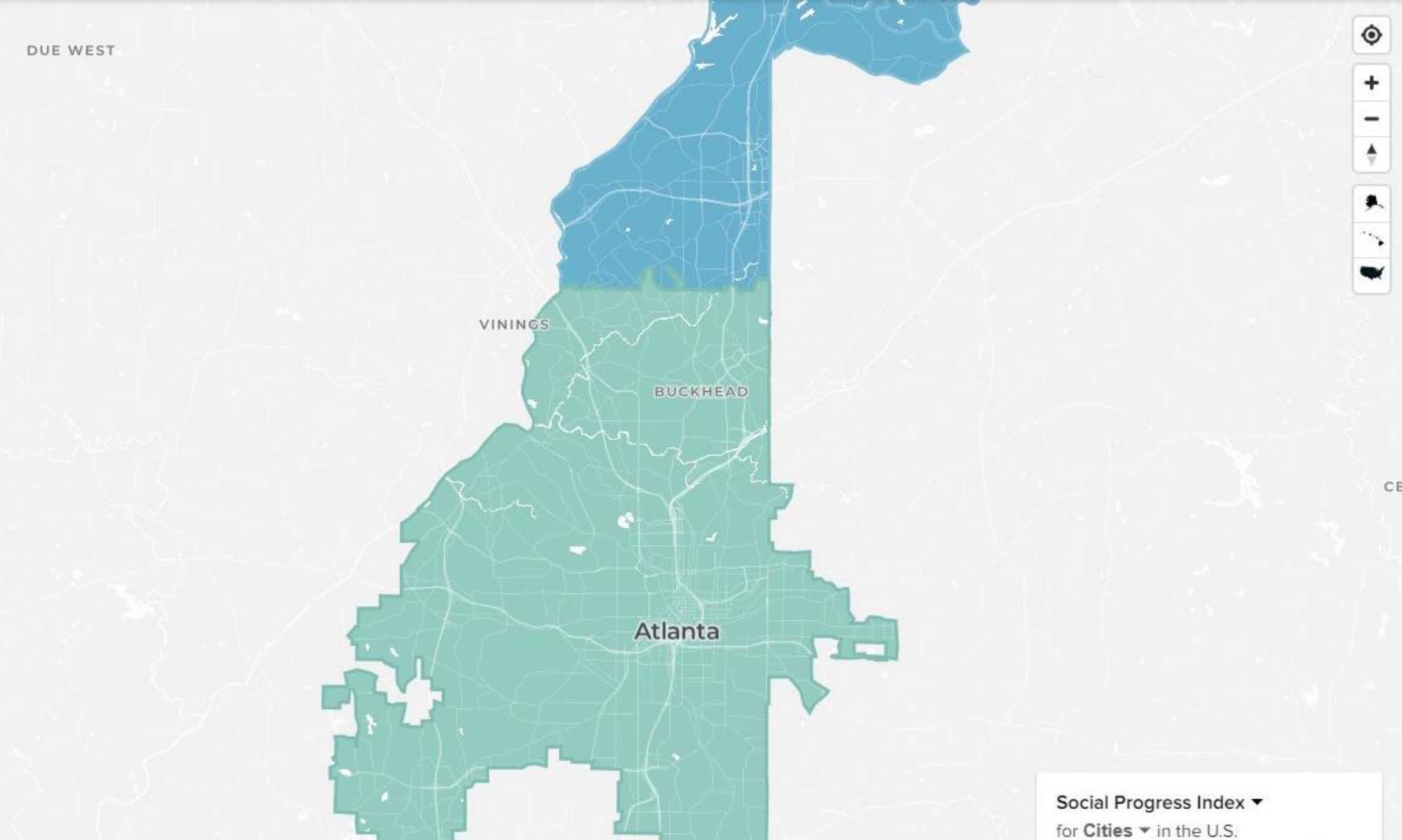


● **Within 0.2 miles** ● **Between 0.2 miles and 1 mile** ● **Between 1 and 5 miles** ● **No Nearby Transit Found**

# CIVIC MAPPING INITIATIVE

# PUBLIC DATA, mySidewalk





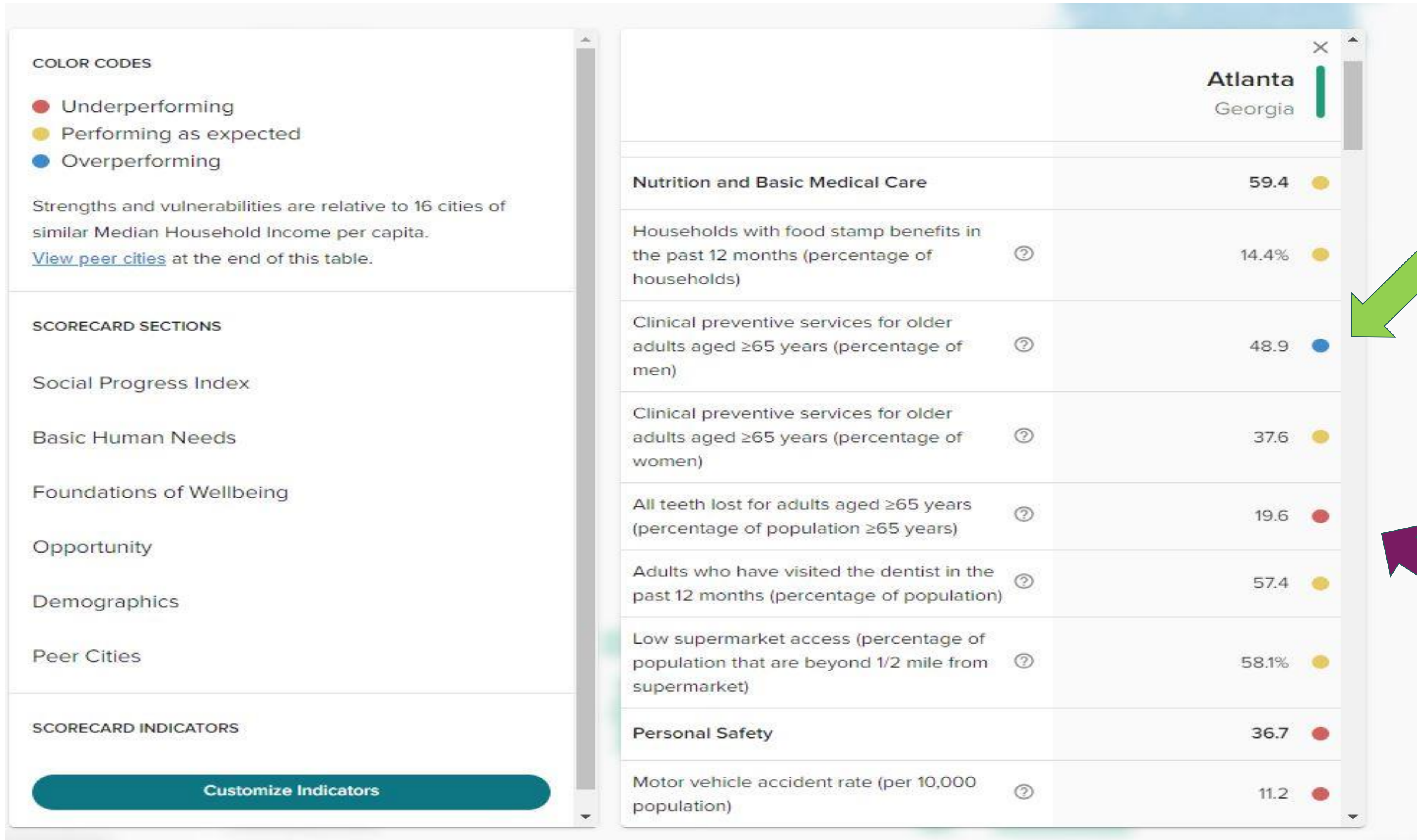
Social Progress Indicators

Filter indicators...

Expand all Collapse all

- Social Progress Index
- Basic Human Needs
- Foundations of Wellbeing
- Opportunity

# SOCIAL PROGRESS IMPERATIVE



# SOCIAL PROGRESS IMPERATIVE

## EXERCISE #2

WHAT KIND OF DATA MIGHT HELP YOU ANSWER THE QUESTION YOU  
HAD IN EXERCISE 1?  
(name some “variables”)

# EXERCISE #2: WE NEED

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- What can I learn from a graph?
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NLC



# Generalizability

Who?



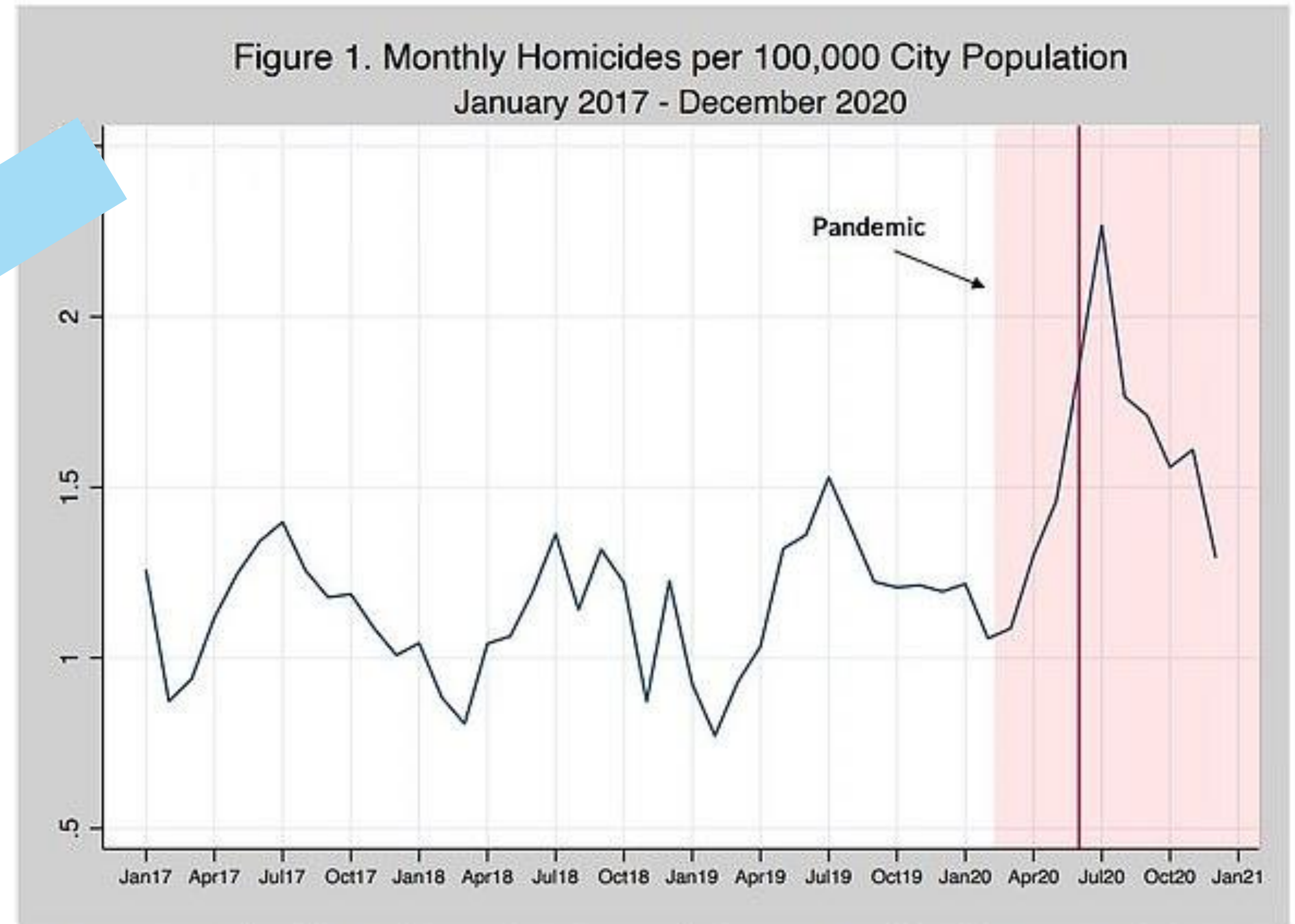
*Who is missing?*



# Ice cream and Murder: Correlation and Causation



What are other causes of this trend?

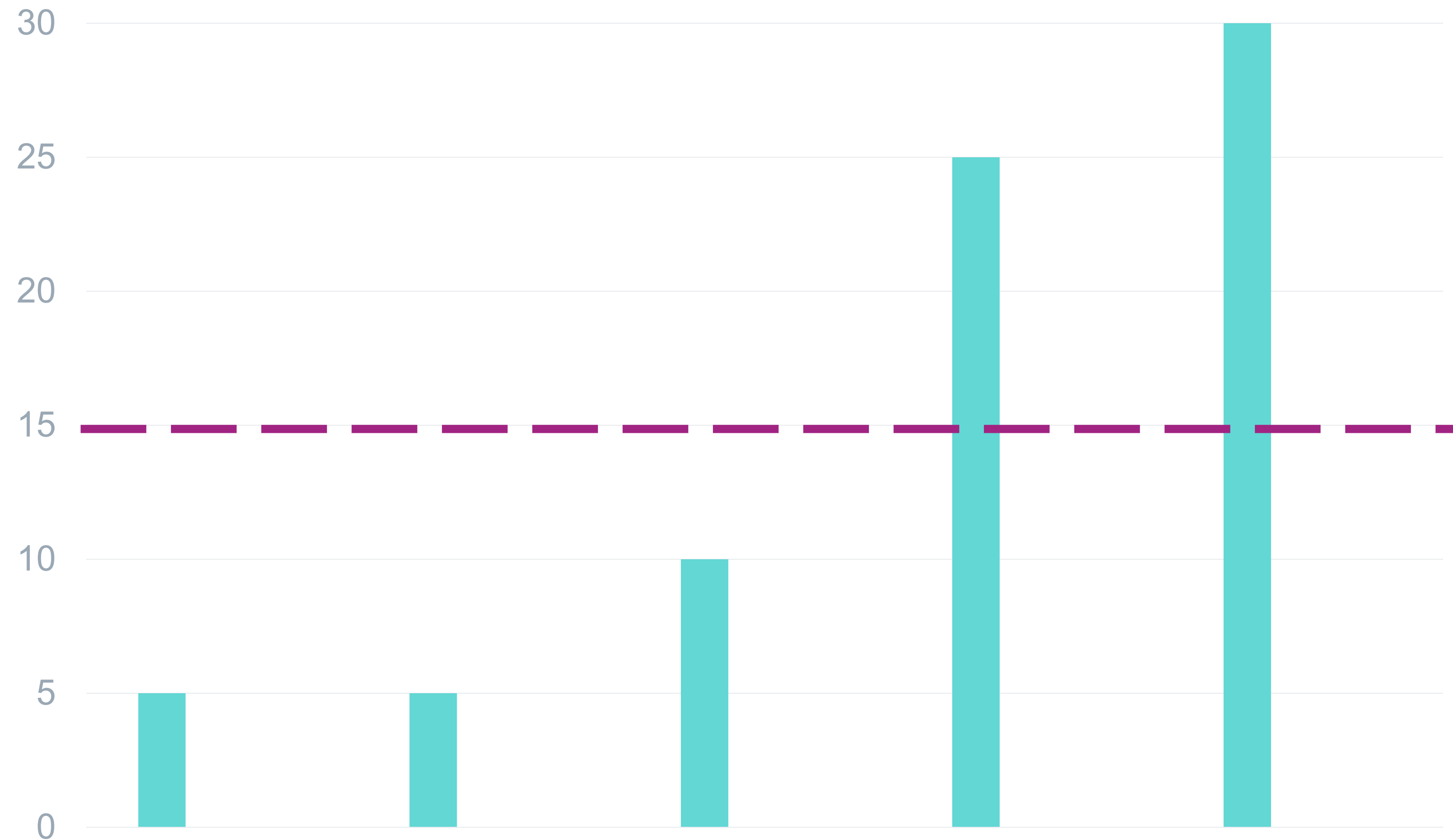
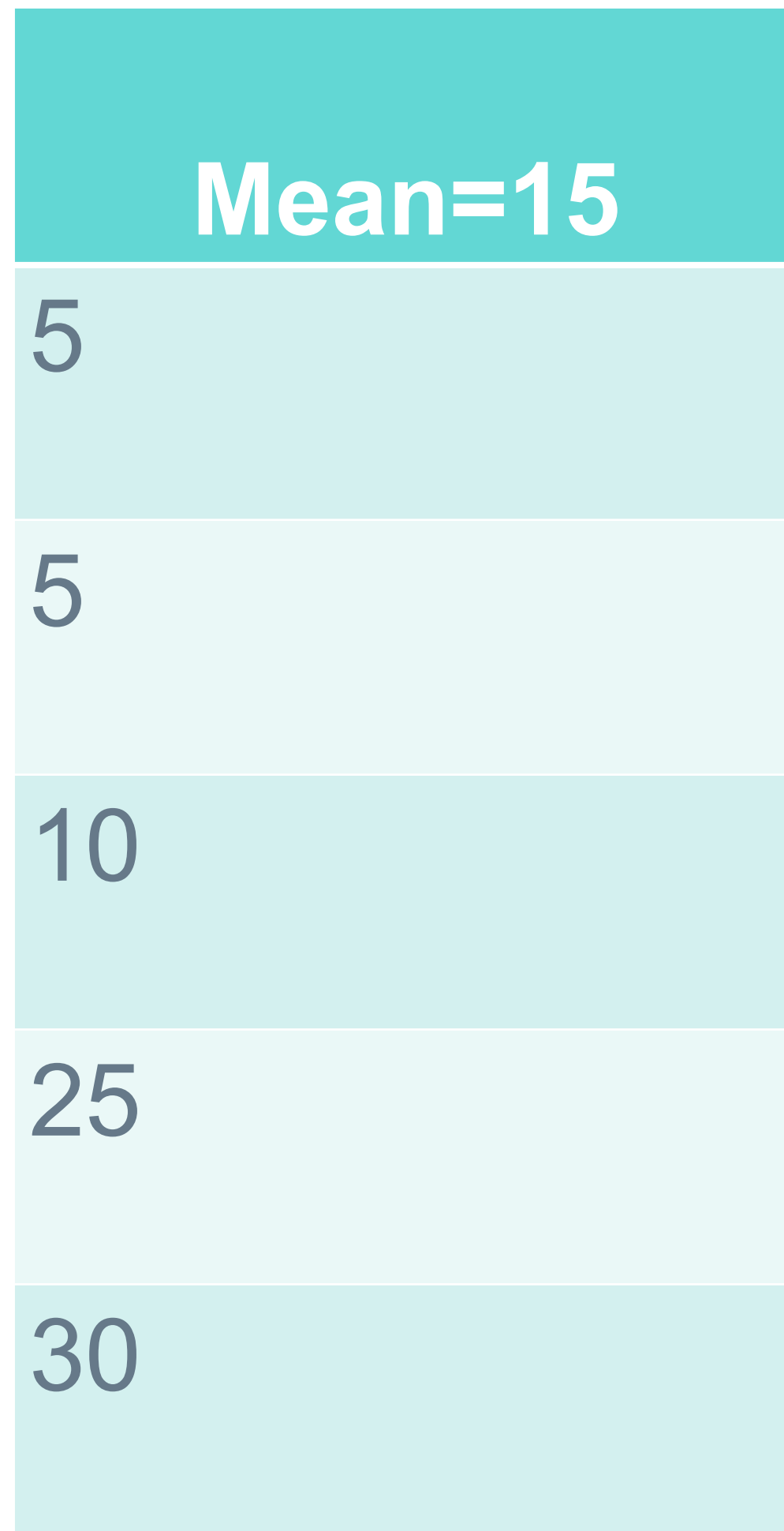


Note: Vertical red line indicates the point at which a structural break occurs in the data.

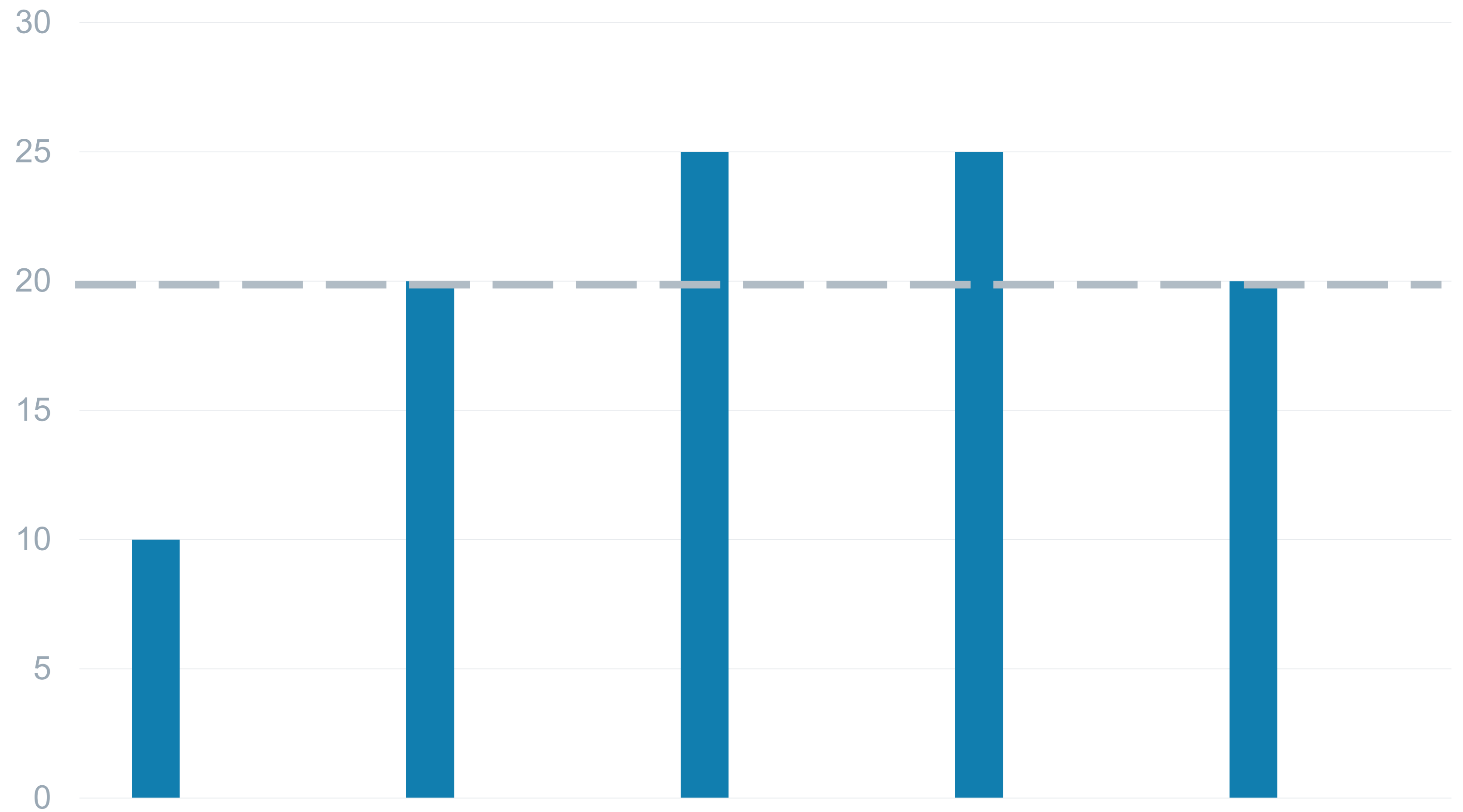
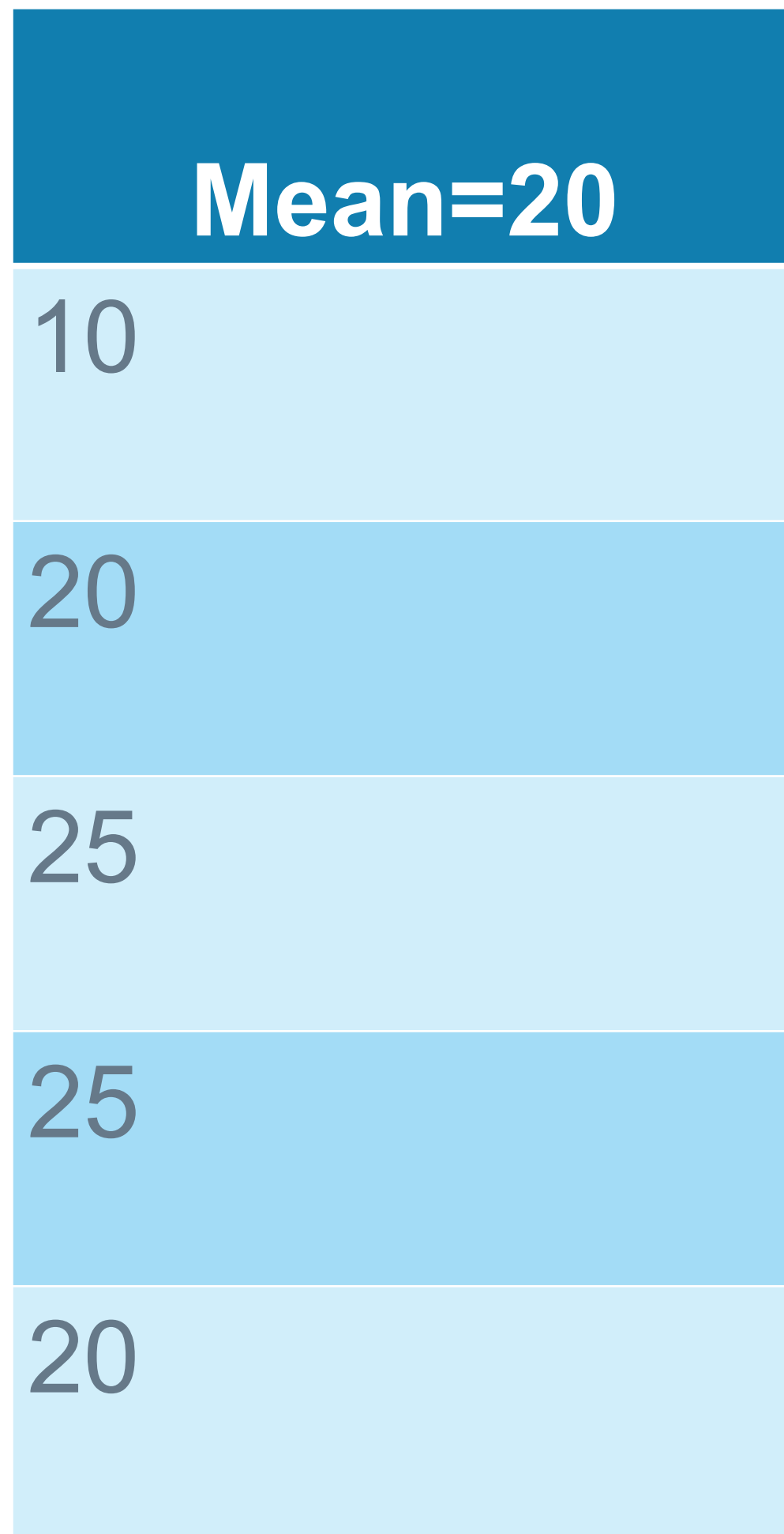
# Food stamps / SNAP usage in your community



# *What does the mean mean?*



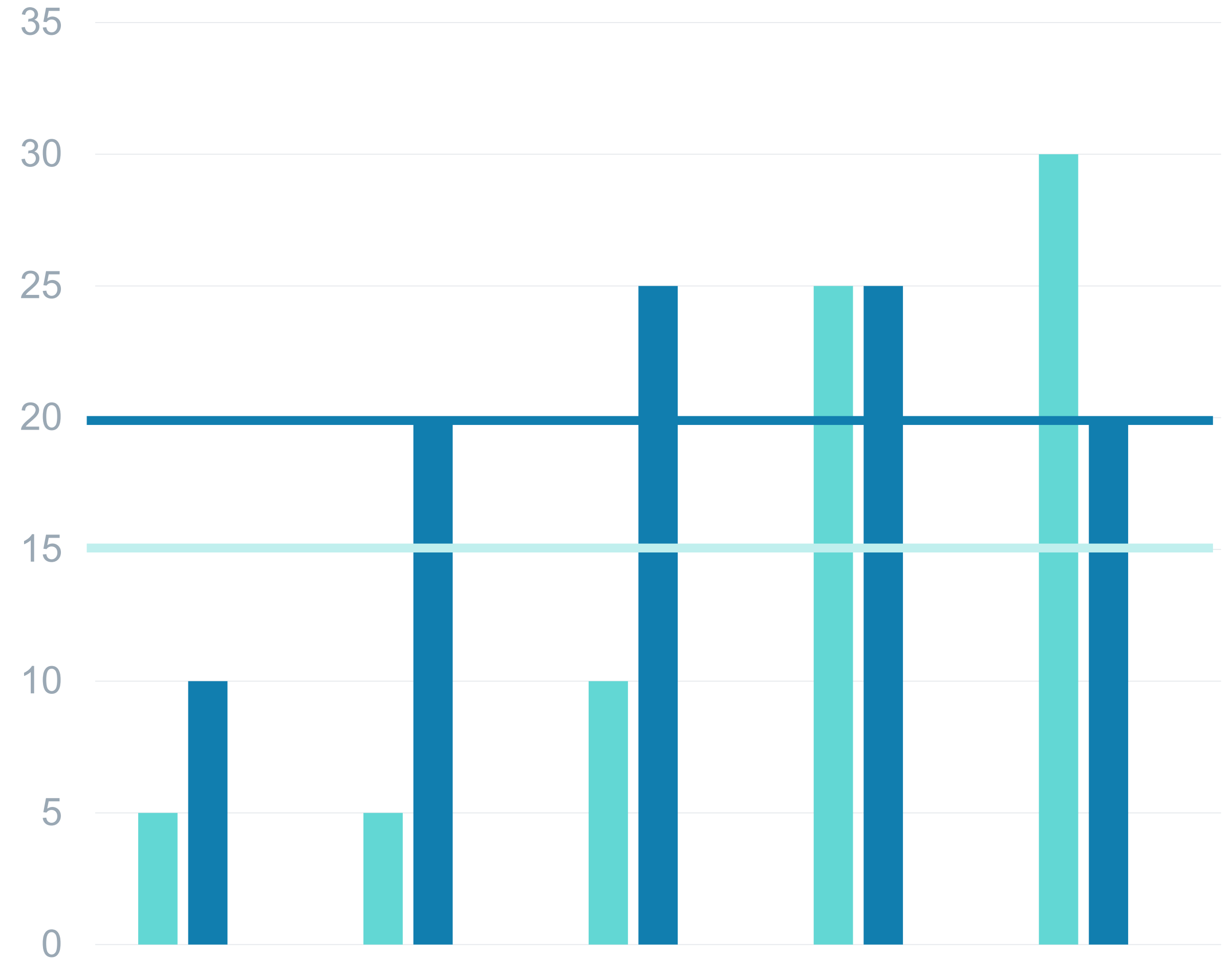
# *What does the mean mean?*



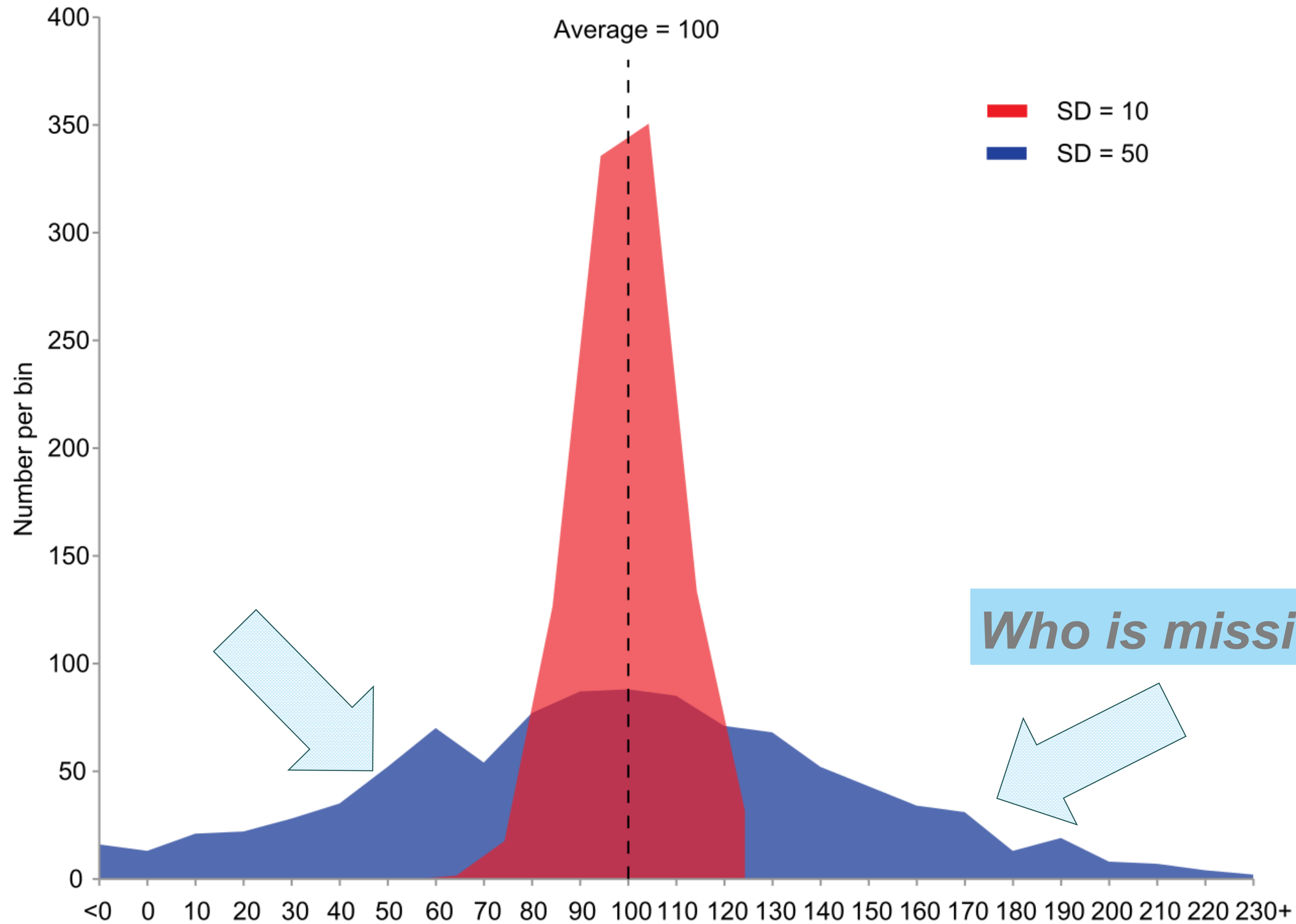
# *What does the mean mean?*

## *ACTIVITY*

Mean=15	Mean=20
5	10
5	20
10	25
25	25
30	20



# What does the mean mean?



# *What does the mean mean?*

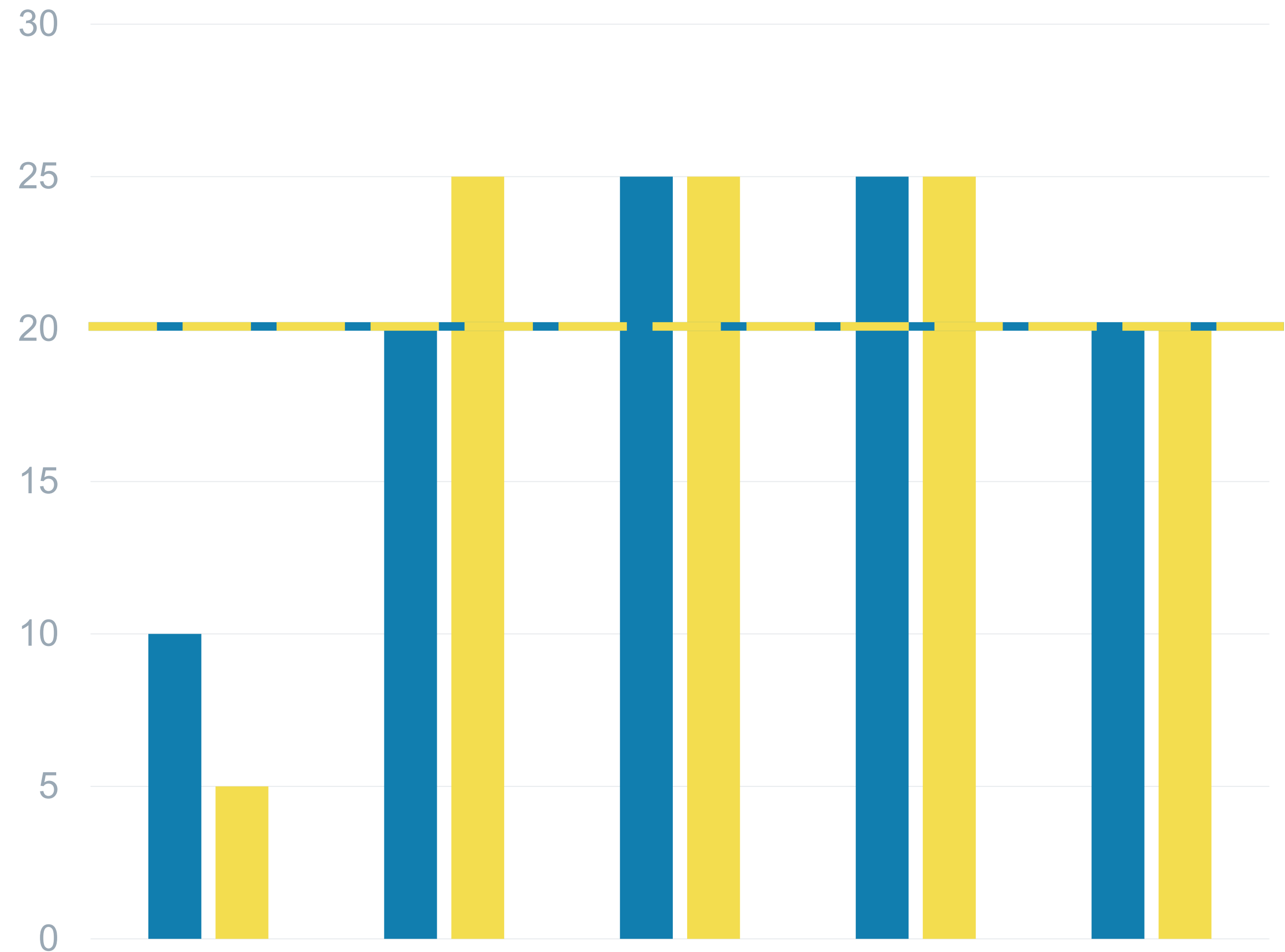
Same mean, different values

Mean=20
10
20
25
25
20

Mean=20
5
25
25
25
20

# *What does the mean mean?*

Mean=20	Mean=20
10	5
20	25
25	25
25	25
20	20



“ *What are other causes of this trend?* ”

“ *Who is missing?* ”

Questions  
to ask

# EXERCISE #3

## SEND AN EMAIL!

- You wrote down a policy question you had . . . .
- And the data (variables) you would need to answer it . . . . .
- Email your staff now and ask them to get you the data to answer that question!

# EXERCISE #3

Sample email:

Dear XXXX,

I am thinking about a policy to address XXXX.

To do this I need an analysis of ARRESTS for our city. I need to know the average NUMBER PER DAY and overall average for the last 3 years for our city. If possible, please provide a breakdown by type of ARREST for each of these numbers.

Thank you,

Your Municipal Leader



## UPCOMING COURSES:

102: Data Learner-identifying key metrics

103: Data Advocate-leading data culture in your city

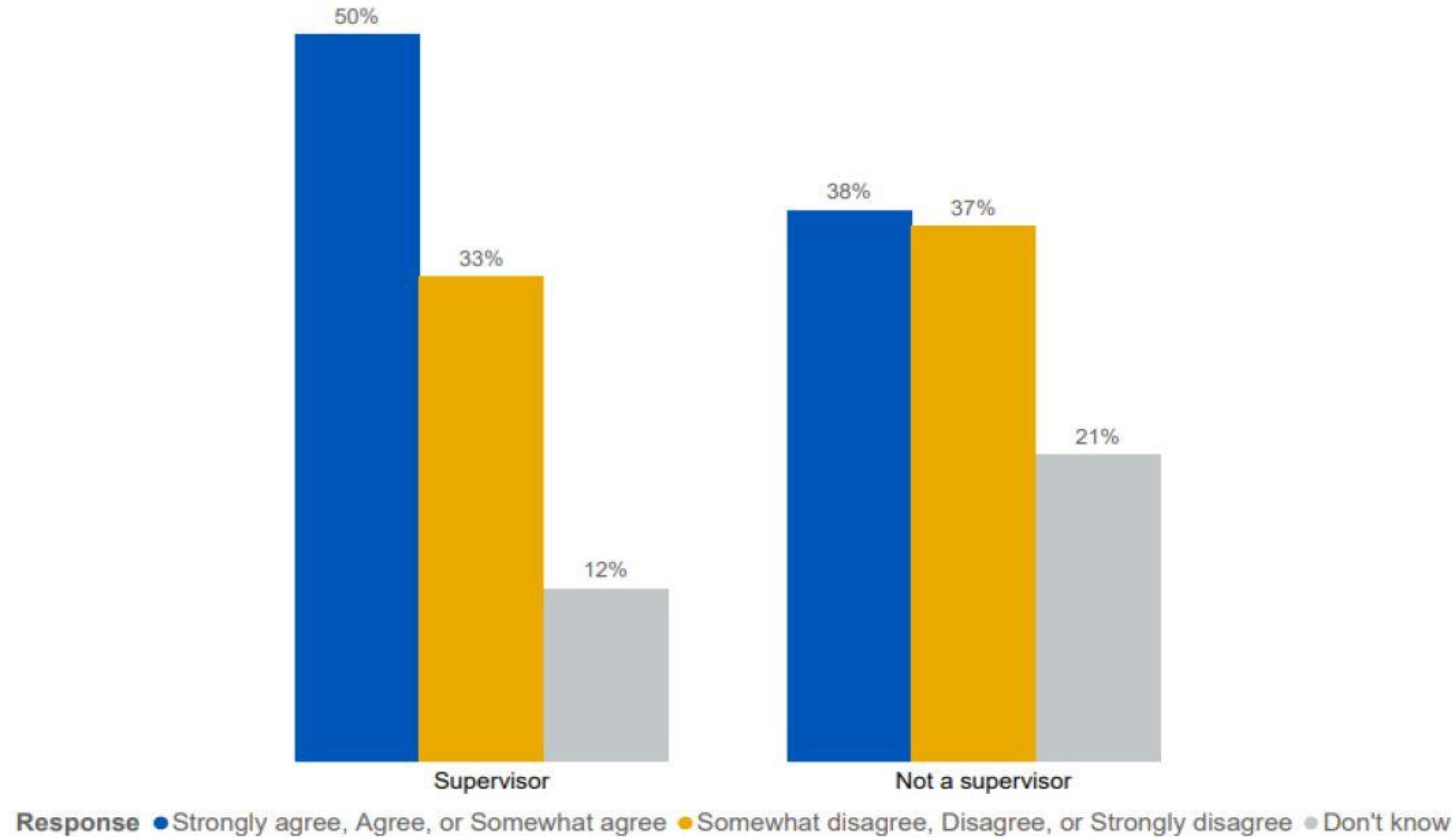
104: Data Connector-data integration for policy-making

# THANK YOU!

Christine Baker-Smith

Director of Research, NLC

The racial demographics of employees within my department reflect the diversity of our community.



What can we learn from this graph, what can't we learn?

**EXERCISE #4: practice**