

General Online Research Conference



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## Asking sensitive questions in a recruitment interview for an online panel: The income question

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# Agenda

1. GESIS – Online Access Panel Pilot
2. CATI – Recruitment Interview
3. The income question
4. Research question
5. The experimental design
6. Results
7. Conclusions

# GESIS - Online Access Panel Pilot

- Probability-based online access panel for the social sciences
- Sample frame: general population of German-speaking Internet users (18+)
- Two step sampling approach:
  - RDD sample (“Gabler-Häder-Design”) of landline and mobile phones
  - CATI recruitment interview
  - Request to join the online access panel

# The CATI recruitment interview

Goal: Maximizing panel recruitment

Interview should

- be short and entertaining
- contain no bothering questions
- establish trust in the survey organization

# Questionnaire Overview

Topic: Life and Internet usage in Germany

1. Attitudinal and behavioral questions
2. Demographic questions
3. Income question
4. Request to join the online access panel

# The importance of the income question

- Standard demographic information in the social sciences
- Sample quality, e.g. nonresponse bias

# Reasons for not asking about income

- Sensitive question
  - high item nonresponse
    - e.g. up to 20 percent in the ALLBUS
- Sensitivity as invasion of privacy

# Indications for the existence of a problem with income question

Participation rates in an online follow-up  
(ALLBUS 2008)

- 22% of those who refused to provide income information
- 47% of those who answered the income question

→ Problem: No experimental setting



# Research questions

1. Is there a negative effect of the income question on recruitment success?
2. Is there a difference between respondents who provide the income information and those who refuse to answer?

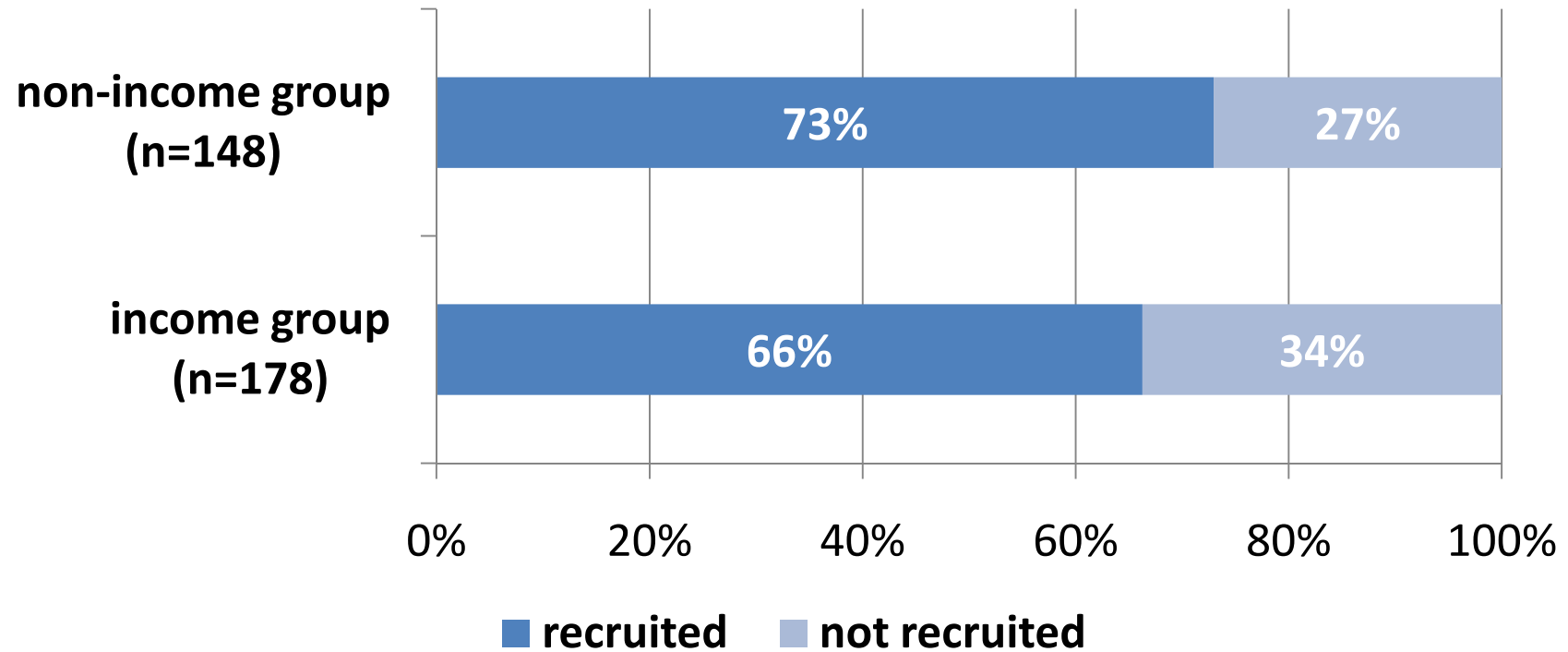
# The experimental groups

Income Group	Non-Income Group
Attitudinal and behavioral questions	Attitudinal and behavioral questions
Demographic questions	Demographic questions
Income question - categorized	
Request to join the online access panel	Request to join the online access panel

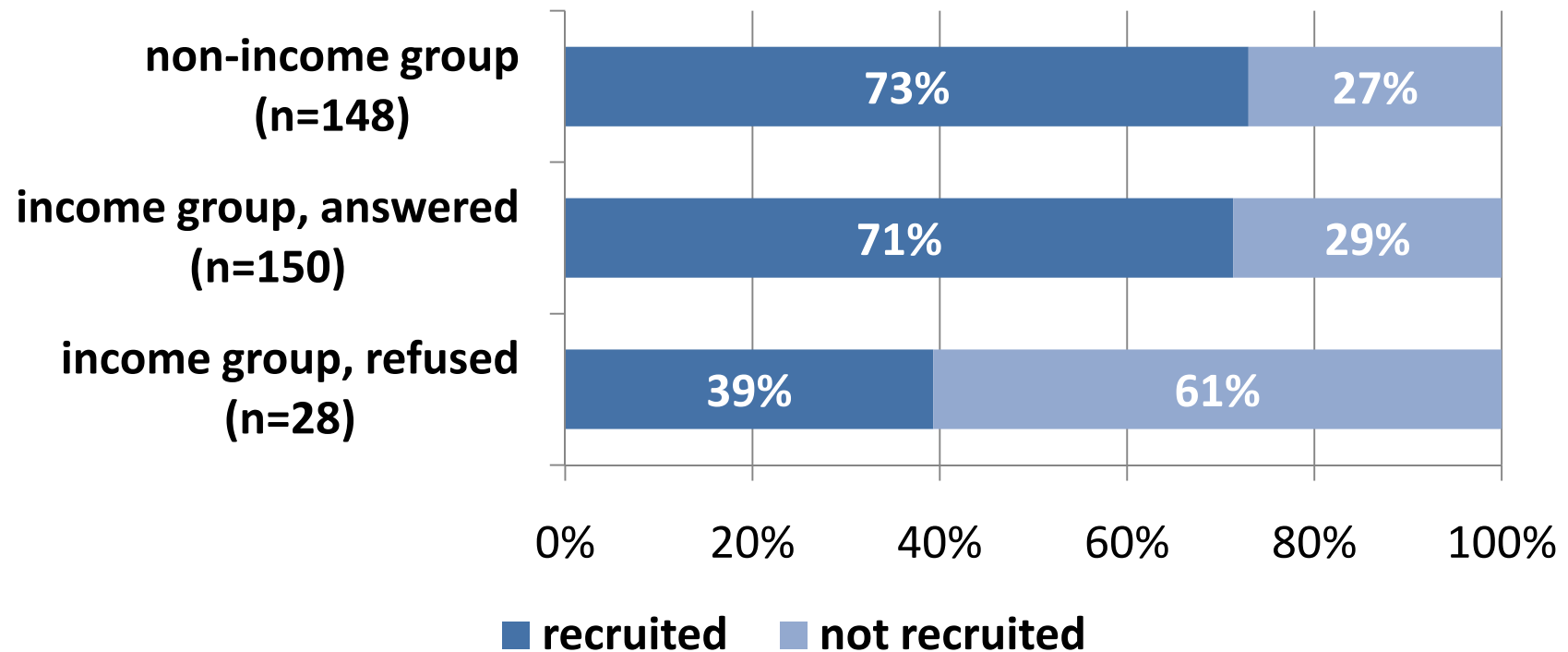
# Results: Income Question

- Non-income group n=148
- Income group n=178
  - 84% answered (n=150)
  - 16% refused (n=28)

# Results: Research Question 1



# Results: Research Question 2



# Results – summed up

## Research question 1:

- Descriptive tendency of lower willingness to participate when income was asked beforehand

## Research question 2:

- Asking about income has no negative effect on online participation for those who are willing to answer
- Those who refuse to provide income information do have a far lower probability to participate
- Controlling for age, education and sex there are no differences between income refusers and those who answered

But this is not the end of the story...

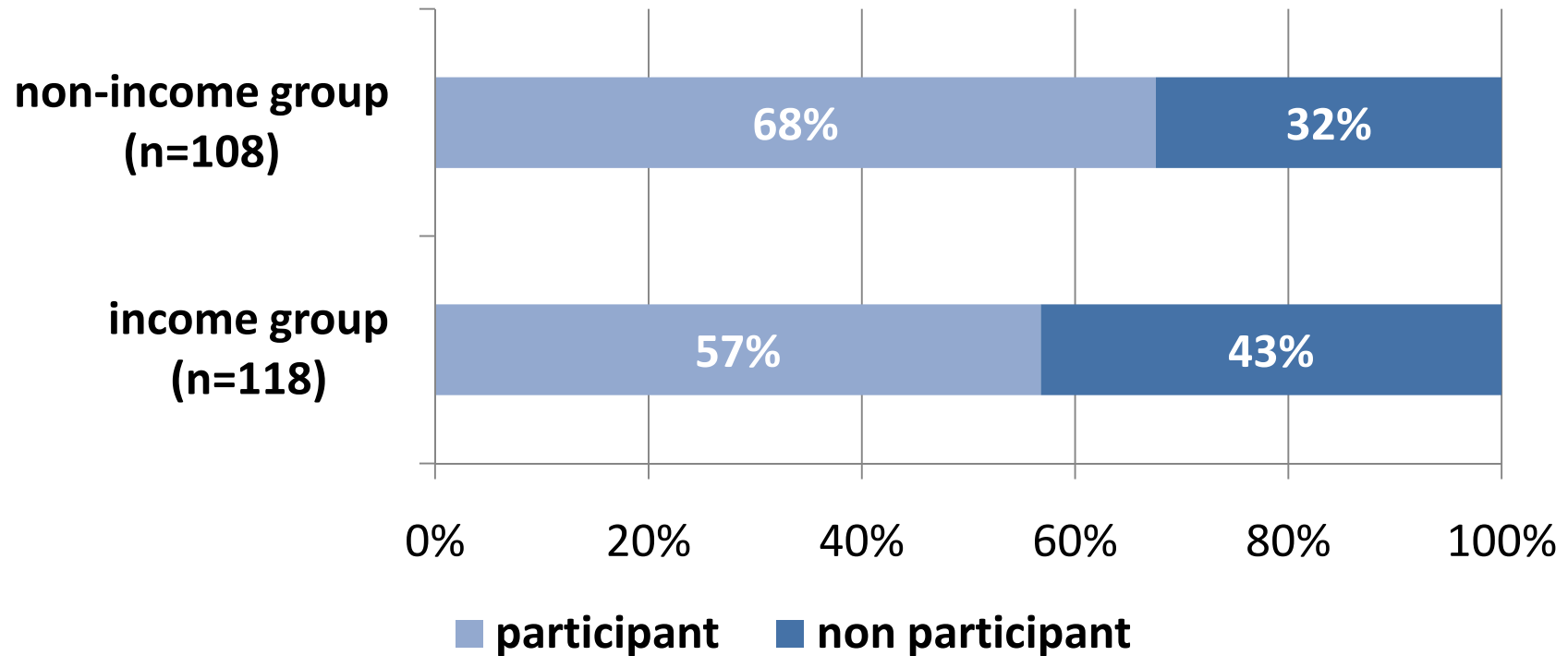
What about actual panel participation?

# Actual online participation

- 226 CATI respondents provided their email address
- 62% completed the first online questionnaire



# Actual online participation of those willing to participate



# Concluding Remarks

Asking the income question does make a difference

- **Short term effect** on participation willingness for those who refuse income question
- **Long term** negative effect on actual participation

→ If it is not absolutely necessary to get the information in the first interview, wait until the second contact when trust is established!

Thank you for your attention!

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