

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS SURVEY (FY 2018) REPORT



Research Brief

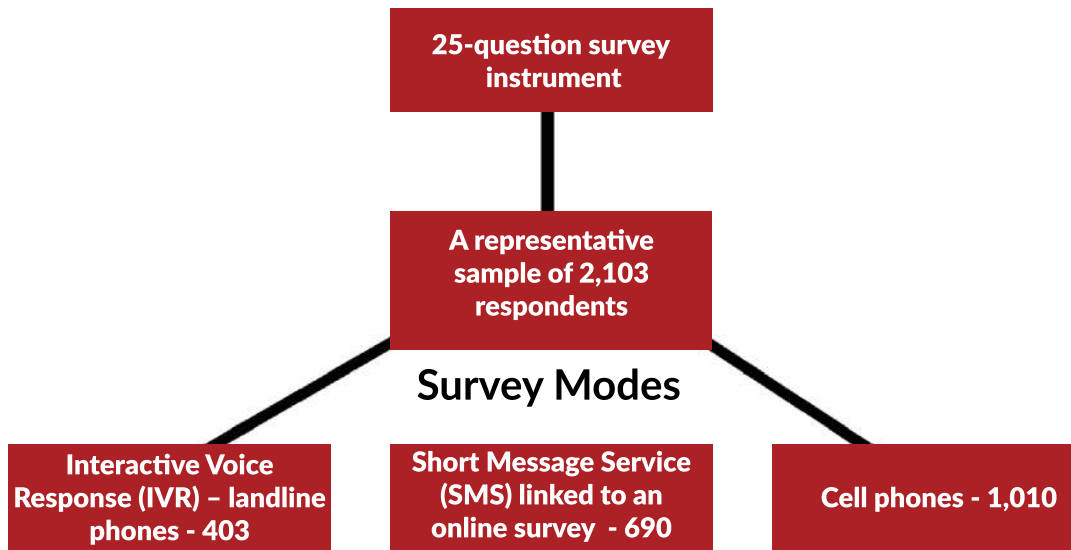
This brief provides a snapshot of the detailed report (see <https://cjcc.dc.gov/page/statistical-analysis-center>), pursuant to the Neighborhood Engagement Achieves Results Amendment Act of 2016, on the current state of police-community relations in the District of Columbia.

March 2019



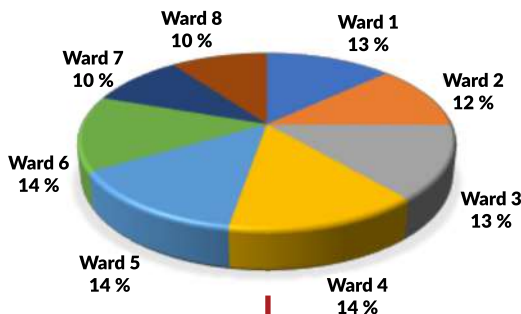
CRP, Incorporated

ABOUT THE SURVEY

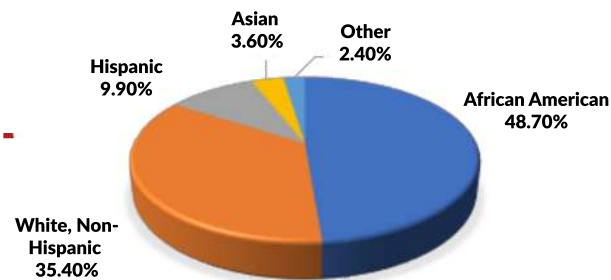


In June 2018, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) contracted with CRP, Incorporated (CRP) to conduct a survey of District of Columbia residents to obtain their perspectives on police-community relations, consistent with the mandate of the Neighborhood Engagement Achieves Results Amendment Act of 2016. The goal of the study was to explore and document views of D.C. residents on police-community relations, including perceptions of community policing, procedural fairness, and legitimacy about the police agencies with jurisdiction in the District of Columbia. The survey design, content, and analytical focus were informed by a comprehensive review of the research literature. The study included a representative sample with high statistical precision (margin of error of +/-2.13% with a 95% confidence level).

SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY WARD

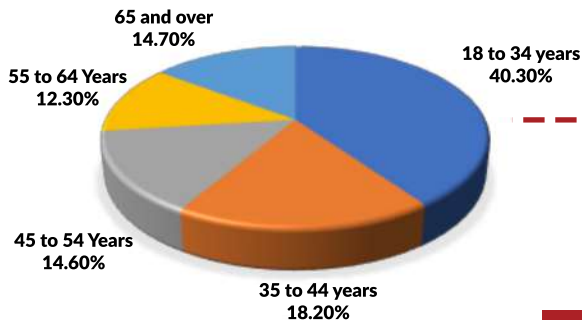


SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

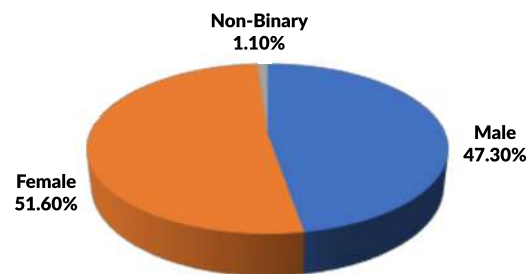


Weighted Demographic Variables

SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY AGE



SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY GENDER



About three of every four (74.1%) respondents reported their primary contact was with MPD, whereas just 10.0% reported their primary contact was with a police agency other than the MPD, such as US Capitol Police, Metro Transit Police, etc.

SALIENT SURVEY FINDINGS: A SCHEMATIC SUMMARY

The scientific literature on police-community relations demonstrates that community perceptions of the police are influenced by several interrelated factors: community policing, procedural justice, and legitimacy, all of which are influenced by perceptions about fairness and equity. Accordingly, the survey instrument included items reflective of these important constructs, including both general perceptions and experiences with the police. In addition, the survey captured demographic factors so that comparisons could be made across questions by Ward, race/ethnicity, age, gender, and household income. The results of the survey indicated that D.C. residents generally have positive views of the police, rating their interactions with police in routine, non-emergency situations as positive, reporting trust in the police (e.g., willing to provide information about criminal activity with the police), and a willingness to obey the police, and more. The findings for all groups were generally positive, though the results also indicated some disparities based on race, with African Americans being significantly more likely than Whites to report having been stopped by the police in the past year, and having less favorable views of the police across a number of questions.

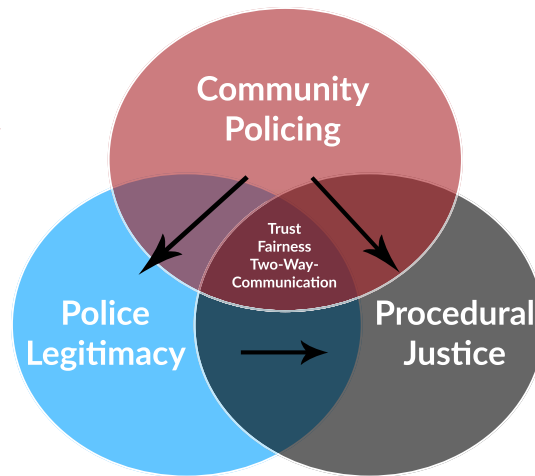
Relationships Among Factors Shaping Community Perceptions of Police

Community Policing

Procedural Justice

- 83% would provide information about criminal activity to the police.
- 83% of those requesting police assistance felt police addressed their concerns.
- 73% had positive interactions with police in routine, non-emergency situations.
- 54% felt police do a good job working with community to solve problems.
- 51% felt police share relevant/necessary information with the community.
- Asian and White residents were more likely (71.6% and 86.0%, respectively) than African-American residents (56.3%) to agree that the police do a good job working with the community to solve local problems.

The more strongly respondents felt police do a good job working with the community, the more likely they were to report that officers act fairly when stopping residents, and that they get a more fair outcome (thus, community policing matters).



- 69% felt the officer listened carefully in stops by the police.
- 68% found the police to be fair and unbiased.
- 65% reported that police provided a reason for the stop.
- 54% felt the officers' actions in stops were fair and justified.
- African Americans were much more likely to be stopped by police than Whites (22% vs. 7%.)
- White and Asian respondents were more likely (81.4% and 88.2%, respectively) than African-Americans (67.0%) to agree that the police are fair and unbiased.
- Whites were more likely to indicate that officers clearly explained the reason for the stop than were African Americans (82.7% vs. 60.9%, respectively).
- African Americans (48.6%) were less likely than Whites (73.1%) and Asians (100.0%) to agree that officers' actions in stops were fair and justified.

The more strongly residents felt that the police provided clear explanations for stops, the more likely they were to believe the officers' actions were fair, and that the police are generally fair and unbiased (thus, procedural justice matters).

Legitimacy

- About 86% of respondents agreed that they have an obligation to obey the police and that they should comply with their lawful requests.
- Whites from the youngest age group (18-34) felt considerably less strongly (79%) that they should comply with lawful requests by police (even when they disagree with them), as compared to African American respondents of the same age group (93%).
- Males and females were considerably more likely (95.6% and 90.0%, respectively) than the non-binary identified individuals (52.2%) to agree that it is appropriate to comply with a lawful request by a police officer, even if they do not agree with it.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCING POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Opportunities for Addressing Issues Identified in the Survey, and Best Practices. The authors point out opportunities for addressing some of the issues in the survey. However, this analysis was based solely on the findings and does not take into consideration any initiatives, data collection processes, training, or policies already underway or completed in any of the law enforcement agencies operating in the District of Columbia.

Research and Data Collection

- **In-Depth Analysis of MPD-Specific Data.** Disaggregating survey responses of residents who primarily interacted with MPD would illuminate specific challenges and opportunities for MPD, given that 75% of respondents indicated that their primary contact is with the MPD.
- **In-Depth Ward Comparative Analysis.** An analysis of group differences between the four wards in which the residents are predominantly African American compared to those in which most residents are White would likely yield a better understanding of the relationship between race and community context (as demonstrated in other jurisdictions), and may provide more specific actionable data.
- **Multi-Year Analysis of Stops by MPD.** Any stop data collection and analysis effort conducted in response to the NEAR Act should cover a period of at least three years, and capture officer characteristics such as officer age, years of experience, race, ethnicity, and gender (consistent with best practices) as well as shift worked, average hours worked (including overtime and off-duty employment), as these may be informative in interpreting the analysis, context, and characteristics of stops.
- **Focus Group Research With Younger Residents.** While African American and Whites aged 18–34 differed on some responses, it may be useful to gather additional information through more targeted questions in focus groups. Conducting separate focus groups for African Americans and Whites may help to better understand concerns and experiences regarding safety and perceptions of police.
- **Focus Groups with Under-Represented Groups in the Survey.** Most of the data analysis in the survey was limited by the low numbers of those identifying as Hispanics and Asians, as well as those identifying as non-binary gender. The number of respondents to some questions was often too low to demonstrate statistical differences across groups, and therefore any real group differences in perceptions for these groups would not have been detected (or shown as statistically significant). As such, additional focus groups with each of these populations separately may provide more detailed information on the concerns and experiences regarding safety and perceptions of the police.
- **Ongoing Community Input.** Community surveys regarding policing are part of a continuous improvement and/or feedback process that can provide Police Executives with information that may be useful in developing strategies or approaches. Many experts have recently emphasized the importance of ongoing data collection, or more frequent periodic assessments, typically at least every three years and preferably annually or more frequently. Ideally, agencies could benefit from being able to compare their data over time, as well as to other agencies. Any mechanism for being able to glean that information might prove useful to the D.C. government or other law enforcement agencies operating in D.C.
- **Police Officer Perceptions and Experiences.** While there is considerable concern over community perceptions of police nationwide, less attention has been paid to the internal agency climate. Nevertheless, it can be very helpful to police leaders to routinely assess officers' perceptions about the internal climate, procedural justice internally, and other specific concerns (e.g., health and safety, technology concerns, etc.). A consideration of that opportunity may prove useful to agencies operating in the District of Columbia in shaping policies, procedures, and/or identifying opportunities for training or other interventions to ensure optimal officer performance.

Training and Policy

- **Policy/Procedure about Explaining Reasons for Stops.** The survey demonstrated that the extent to which officers clearly explain the reasons for the stop improved overall perceptions of procedural justice and fairness of the police. This finding suggests that a policy in which officers are required to explain reasons for each stop (including stops made of pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists), may enhance residents' perceptions of the police.
- **Training in Specific Communication Skills.** While communication involves a two-way process, much of police training is focused on the content of the communication instead of the process. However, this survey illuminated the importance of both explaining reasons for stops and listening to explanations, justifications, or questions of residents. However, without sufficient emphasis on these skills, well-intentioned officers are met with frustration on the part of residents. To gain the trust, confidence, and cooperation of the community, it is important to assure that skills to establish greater rapport and two-way communications is a component of police training.
- **Modeling of Internal Procedural Justice.** Recent research on supervisory modeling of procedural justice within a police department led to reduced use of force and discretionary arrests and was inexpensive compared to classroom training. Exploring this research might be useful to law enforcement agencies operating in D.C.
- **Sharing the Results of this Survey (or the MPD-Specific Analysis).** It may be helpful to all LEAs operating in the District if they could review the findings of this survey. In addition, residents and police commanders could also potentially benefit from reviewing this study; residents will see validation that their input is sought and commanders (especially in MPD districts) could examine whether the results provide any insights that may be useful in neighborhood policing.
- **Model Policies.** Resources of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, their Law Enforcement Policy Center, and other organizations like the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (in Fairfax, Virginia) might be helpful to some of the police leaders from law enforcement agencies operating in the District because these are routinely updated based on scientific evidence on what works in policing (termed "evidence-based policing").

For a copy of the full report, with detailed recommendations, visit <https://cjcc.dc.gov/page/statistical-analysis-center>.