

Perceptions of Police Activities: Recommendations

The Policing in America Survey demonstrates the value of collecting perception and experience information at the local level. The survey, based on consultation with expert advisors, identified multiple, high-priority questions that can be asked by police departments across the country with consideration about how different groups would respond:

- To what extent are our local residents satisfied with the level of community policing and responsiveness? What strategies can be adopted to improve satisfaction?
- Do residents feel safe in their neighborhoods?
- What do residents perceive the police should be spending resources on, and how does that compare to actual resource allocations?
- To what extent do residents observe perceived or actual misconduct from officers and how does that affect perceptions of policing and local law enforcement?

Answers to these questions obtained through low-cost random-sample surveys can provide the basis for both identifying problems and also developing real, meaningful solutions in policy or practice at the local, state, and national level that promote trust and safety for entire communities, including those who may be disproportionately affected today. Seven recommendations are included to suggest how federal, state, and local authorities can work with the evidence-building community to ensure our country has needed information and evidence to improve safety for the American people.

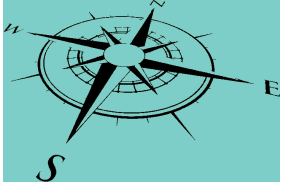
In February and March 2021, residents in portions of two large metropolitan areas in the United States were surveyed about public perceptions and experiences with the police: Cook County, Illinois, in the Chicago metropolitan area and Dallas County, Texas, in the Dallas metropolitan area. While the two geographies included in the Policing in America Survey are unique in their demographic composition, history, culture, economic circumstances, and police activities, the majority of findings were similar in both counties while the magnitude of between group differences varied on some measures. Key findings include:

- Black and Hispanic residents were less likely than white residents to feel safe in their neighborhood.
- White residents were more likely to be satisfied with the police activity in their neighborhood, compared to Black & Hispanic residents.
- Black and Hispanic residents were more likely to witness police misconduct than white residents.
- Black and Hispanic residents were more likely than white residents to expect police to use force during the majority of arrests.
- No differences by race and ethnicity in residents' intentions for using 911.
- General agreement on the leading activities police should prioritize, while Black residents were more likely than white residents to prioritize police walking around the neighborhood and talking to neighborhood members about their concerns.

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DEMONSTRATION ONLY



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American People :

The American people, policymakers, and police officers all deserve high-quality, reliable information about how police activities align with expectations for a government that reasonably and equitably serves its citizens and residents.

Policymakers

Police Officers

Police Departments :

By collecting data about perceptions and aligning that information with real activities and behaviors, police departments around the country can support and continue to adopt increasingly evidence-based practices that adequately and responsibly provide for community safety for all residents in the population.

Communities

Federal Authorities

State Authorities

Local Authorities

Vision

Community safety for all residents

Mission

To suggest how federal, state, and local authorities can work with the evidence-building community to ensure our country has needed information and evidence to improve safety for the American people

Values

Perceptions

Experiences

Attitudes

Public Safety

DEMONSTRATION ONLY

1. Performance Indicators

Establish performance indicators for policing based on community satisfaction and perception

Stakeholder(s)

Communities

Recommendation #1: Local governments should establish clear performance indicators for policing based on community satisfaction and perception. Based on initial data collection at the local level about perceptions from the Policing in America Survey, this type of survey instrument and approach offers the potential to provide policymakers clear, relevant insights about the public's experiences with policing. Once baseline data are collected and identified, local governments can use random selection survey-based data collection approaches to implement low-cost performance monitoring systems. Local entities may choose to partner with universities or trusted partners in communities to both uphold pledges of confidentiality in survey responses and also deploy sound research methods. Policymakers at the local level can then establish benchmarks to improve satisfaction and perception over time, aligned with policy strategies and community policing efforts aimed at improving these metrics.

2. Evaluation & Improvement

Develop “learning agendas” to establish cycles of continuous evaluation and improvement

Stakeholder(s)

Local Government Policymakers

Police Departments

Recommendation #2: Local government policymakers and police departments should develop “learning agendas” to establish cycles of continuous evaluation and improvement. Policymakers and police departments should identify core questions about practices and communities where better information could improve or strengthen decision-making capabilities. Collating such information into a transparent, publicly- available plan called a learned agenda is one approach to outlining a multi-year strategic plan for research and evaluation activities aimed at continuous improvement.[30] While some questions identified may extend beyond survey-based data collection to other research approaches or impact evaluations, identifying the questions relevant to the public’s perceptions and experience with policing is a starting point to plan a coherent research framework that can align the research community’s expertise with policymaking needs, all while incorporating community and stakeholder feedback. The Policing in America Survey may provide a useful instrument to begin such discussions, or local officials may determine additional questions or approaches are preferable.

3. Surveys

Allocate resources for survey-based data collection about perceptions, experiences, and attitudes

Stakeholder(s)

Local Governments

Recommendation #3: Local governments should allocate resources for relevant survey-based data collection about perceptions, experiences, and attitudes. Building evidence to support decision-making needs and uses is admittedly not zero cost, however, such approaches also need not crowd out funding for police operations. The bipartisan U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking concluded that good data management and evaluation activities are essential for effective program management.[31] Applied to all levels of government and topical policy domains, it is incumbent on policymakers to ensure high-quality data are being collected to address important, timely matters, while also generating the insights that are relevant for future decisions before the decisions need to be made. In other words, local policymakers should allocate resources to ensure data are collected about perceptions, experiences, and attitudes. Local officials should also plan for maximizing the credibility and independence of such efforts, which may involve partnerships with research or academic institutions.

4. Data Collection

Provide support to local governments in collecting perception and attitudinal data

Stakeholder(s)

U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Justice Statistics

Recommendation #4: The U.S. Department of Justice and Bureau of Justice Statistics should provide support to local governments in collecting perception and attitudinal data at the local level. As local governments and police departments undertake new data collection activities to understand perceptions, satisfaction, and attitudes at the local level, experts in federal agencies can support high-quality data collection and analysis through technical assistance. The Bureau of Justice Statistics at the U.S. Department of Justice, for example, is one of the existing federal statistical agencies with considerable experience in designing surveys related to the criminal justice system, collecting data through household surveys, protecting confidential records, and conducting statistical analysis of survey results that can inform performance monitoring. This expertise should not only be made available to local governments in expanding their evidence-building capacity, but perhaps should be explicitly identified as a future role of agencies in the federal statistical system to support intergovernmental data collection and analysis when there are also clear benefits for federal agencies from enhanced local data collection.

5. Research

Conduct research activities to improve services

Stakeholder(s)

U.S. Department of Justice

Recommendation #5: The U.S. Department of Justice should include research activities related to improving services that over time enrich attitudes and perceptions as part of the departmental learning agenda and annual evaluation plan. In addition to local-level learning agendas, the Department of Justice is formulating its own multi-year learning agenda and annual evaluation plans as required by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act). In accordance with that law, the Justice Department should ensure that questions about attitudes and perceptions relevant for federal policymaking are included explicitly in the learning agenda. The Justice Department should also be clear to intentionally articulate relevant group-level analysis and stratification of characteristics across the population that may be relevant for understanding different perspectives and experiences across communities. In accordance with the Evidence Act, the Justice Department should also ensure effective stakeholder communication and feedback on its learning agenda (see also Recommendation #6).

6. Strategies

Identify additional strategies for enhanced data collection, management, and use

Stakeholder(s)

U.S. Department of Justice

DOJ Statistical Official

DOJ Chief Data Officer

Local Government Policymakers

DOJ Evaluation Officer

Police Departments

Recommendation #6: The U.S. Department of Justice’s Chief Data Officer, Evaluation Officer, and Statistical Official should convene a forum with local government policymakers and police departments to identify additional strategies for enhanced data collection, management, and use. The evidence-building community in the federal government should continue to provide resources, expertise, and coordination to local officials also seeking to understand community perceptions and to take evidence-based practices for improving overall effectiveness of policing activities. One productive opportunity to both encourage dialogue but to also build a community of practice for the evidence-building community interested in policing is for the Chief Data Officer, Evaluation Officer, and Statistical Official at the Justice Department to convene local officials in a forum. A coordinated, well-organized, and honest forum would likely identify topics and issues relevant for the Justice Department’s learning agenda (Recommendation #5) as well as local level plans (Recommendation #2).

7. Funding

Appropriate funding to support state and local data about attitudes and perceptions, and resources for program evaluation of policing activities

Stakeholder(s)

Congress

Recommendation #7: Congress should appropriate funding to support state and local data about attitudes and perceptions, and resources for program evaluation of policing activities. While local governments should be expected to allocate resources to support evidence-building activities, Congress and federal agencies should also be expected to align grant funding mechanisms to support collection of data about attitudes, perceptions and satisfaction at the local level. Part of the additional resources could, for example, bolster common data standards and elements for reporting to better understand landscapes at the state and national levels. In addition, resources should be allocated to support additional program evaluation of local policing activities.

Administrative Information

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