

Survey of Public Opinion and Experience of Law Enforcement in Oneida and Herkimer Counties

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A Report of the College-Community Partnership for Racial Justice

in cooperation with

The Law and Justice Lab of the Levitt Center for Public Affairs at
Hamilton College

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Survey Report

Results from Zogby Survey

Methodology Statement

John Zogby Strategies was commissioned by the Levitt Center at Hamilton College to conduct a poll of 500 Oneida and Herkimer County adult residents August 28th through August 30th of 2020. All calls were made using CATI (live call – reaching both landline and cell phones) and overall results have a margin-of-sampling-error of +/- 5 percentage points. Subsets of the data have a larger margin of error than the whole data set.

Using sample records purchased from an affiliate, JZS made calls to a random sample of 50,000 phone records in Oneida and Herkimer Counties, stratified to be representative by location. Fifty percent of the respondents were pre-stratified to be from Utica/Rome, 25% from the rest of Oneida County, and 25% from Herkimer County. Efforts were made to target those under age 40 by calling cell phones. One-fifth of the total sample are from respondents reached through cell phones.

Because race/ethnicity, and opinions that may be related to one's racial/ethnic identity, were of particular interest in this survey, efforts were made to recruit a racially diverse sample. Of the 500 people interviewed, 423 identified as white, 66 identified as Black, Hispanic, or Other (11 declined to answer). *As a rule, the validity of very small subsets cannot be guaranteed, especially groups smaller than 70 respondents.* At that size, estimations can be made based on the data, but the data must be interpreted with caution.

The basic demographics for this sample are as follows:

- 87% identify as white;
- 65% report household incomes of \$60,000 or less;
- the sample is split roughly equally between males and females;
- 31% have a bachelor's degree or higher; an additional 44% have some college or an associate's degree.

In the analyses, slight weights were applied to age, gender, race, and education to more closely reflect the population in both counties utilizing the Census data.

Highlights of Results

- By and large, Oneida and Herkimer residents report the quality of life in their neighborhoods has remained the same (60%) in the past year. However, by a factor of two to one (25% to 13%), they feel that the quality of life has declined rather than improved. It is 31% to 16% in the cities of Rome and Utica.
- Overall, a substantial minority of residents has taken measures in the past two years to

protect themselves, notably installing locks (28%), alarm systems (23%), and purchasing firearms (30%). Regarding firearms, this includes 34% of 18-39-year-olds and 40% of parents with children under 17 living at home.

- Overall, 9% report having been a victim of a crime in the last 12 months.
- A supermajority agrees (84%, when combining strongly and somewhat) that the relationship between the police and their neighborhood is excellent.
- A substantial minority agree that domestic violence is a serious problem in their community.
- In a series of questions (notably questions 30, 33, 34, 35, and 36) about criminal justice reform, substantial majorities agree that entities other than the police may be more effective in handling domestic violence and mental illness calls, and that individuals re-entering the community after time in the criminal justice system should receive more assistance, especially in terms of education and housing.
- A majority of residents disagree with the notion that ethnic bias is a serious problem in this area. On the other hand, a majority agree that a person's race or ethnicity will determine how they are treated by law enforcement, and just shy of a majority agree race or ethnicity determines how the local court system treats people.
- A supermajority of residents believes both that the police that serve the area can be trusted and that police should live in the area they serve.

It is important to emphasize that 87% of the sample is white while 13% is non-white (black, Hispanic, and other). As stated in the methodology section above, it is unwise to draw firm conclusions from subgroups smaller than 70; however, those that make up the category “non-white” are close enough to the number 70 to make some qualitative observations.

There is noticeable divergence by racial identity on the following key questions:

- *The relationship between the police and my neighborhood is excellent* (question 26) – when combining strongly agree and somewhat agree – while both have large majorities, there is a substantial difference (87% agreement from whites vs. 69% non-white).
- *Domestic violence is a serious problem in my community* (question 28) – 58% of non-whites agree vs. 35% of whites who agree.
- *The police that serve my area can be trusted* (question 42) – supermajorities of both white and non-white agree (though there is greater intensity from whites as evidenced by a much

higher level who strongly agree compared to non-whites).

Conclusion and Takeaways

Striking results from this survey are noted in responses to questions 18 and 37.

- *Have you ever been stopped by the police?* Results between whites and non-whites are almost mirror images.
- *Racism and ethnic bias are a serious problem in this area?* Again, results between whites and non-whites are almost mirror images.
- While there is significant divergence between whites and non-whites in the results as reported above, there is considerable convergence in areas that could be considered counter-intuitive.
- Again, Zogby's report emphasizes that sample of non-whites is not statistically significant. The report recommended expanding the survey to increase responses in more diverse areas, such as Cornhill.

Results from the 211 Survey

Methodology Statement

Substantial effort was made to solicit wide community participation in the survey—to allow all citizens to have a voice. The opportunity to take the survey via the 211 (texting) option was publicized by the United Way, the Oneida County Sheriff's Department, billboards, public service announcements and radio interviews with coalition members, and an Op-Ed that ran in the Observer-Dispatch. It was also mentioned in each of the weekly webinar programs that the College-Community Partnership ran in the fall of 2020. In total, 150 community members completed the survey using the 211 option.

The composition of the 211 sample is dramatically different from both the Zogby and Cornhill samples in the following ways:

- 55% have a bachelor's degree or higher; an additional 39% have some college or an associate's degree;
- 85% identify as White, 8% as non-white (7% declined to answer);
- 66% report total household income of \$60,000 or more (more than half of these report incomes of at least \$100,000);
- Nearly two-thirds are female.

Highlights of the Results

Similar to the Zogby results, the majority (55%) felt that their quality of life had remained the

same; the remainder (two to one) felt their quality of life had declined rather than improved. Nearly 90% felt very or somewhat safe in their homes. Nearly 80% felt very or somewhat safe *outside* their homes. Twenty percent reported that they had installed an alarm system or purchased a firearm in the last year, but few had made any other changes in the last year. Only 9% reported being a victim of a crime. Other notable results:

- 21% reported being treated inappropriately by the police;
- 78% strongly or somewhat agreed that the relationship with police in their neighborhood is “excellent;”
- 45% strongly or somewhat agreed that domestic violence is a serious problem in my community;
 - Interestingly, 61% strongly or somewhat agreed that it is best if police handle domestic violence situations, *and* 63% strongly or somewhat agreed that other forms of intervention should be used in domestic violence situations;
- when asked about misbehavior by people with mental illness, 41% strongly or somewhat agreed that it is best if police handle this behavior, but 78% strongly or somewhat agreed that other forms of intervention should be used in these situations.

Large majorities strongly or somewhat agreed that people in prison should have access to education (65%) and receive assistance with jobs and housing when they leave prison (82%). Seventy-two percent strongly or somewhat agreed that restorative justice options should be pursued in place of conventional criminal justice remedies.

A majority of the sample strongly or somewhat agreed that racial bias is a serious problem in this area (55%) and that race/ethnicity determines how a person is treated by the police (57%) and the courts (57%).

A majority of the sample strongly or somewhat agreed that police that serve their area can be trusted (76%) and that police should live in the area that they serve (70%).

Results from the Cornhill Survey

Methodology Statement

The survey of Cornhill residents was initiated by the Community Foundation and conducted by Patrick Johnson and members of Johnson’s Street Team (a part of the Save-Our-Streets initiative). Cornhill residents were surveyed between September 5th and September 20th, 2020. The Street Team identified a perimeter of Cornhill that included Oneida Street, Kimball Street, and Hobart Street with the goal of surveying residents within a 15 minute distance of this perimeter. Patrick Johnson and eight members of the Street Team collected a mix of random and non-random survey responses by either knocking on doors or asking passersby if they would be willing to complete the survey. Surveys were conducted on paper. The work of the Street Team resulted in 94 surveys responses. One key difference of the Cornhill sample is that the majority of respondents are non-White, which is important given that non-Whites (particularly African-Americans) enter into the criminal justice system at higher rates than White individuals.

Composition of the Cornhill Survey Respondents:

- 66 % identify as African-American, 8% as White, 2% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 16% as Other/ Mixed Race (8% declined to answer)
- 3% have a bachelor's degree or higher; an additional 36% have some college or an associate's degree
- 34% report a total housing income between \$10,000 and \$40,000. Nearly 52% report a housing income of less than \$10,000.
- Similar to the Zogby survey, the gender breakdown is near even with 51% identifying as male and 47% identifying as female (with 2% identifying as transgender/binary/other).

Highlights of Results

Unlike the Zogby and 211 survey results, the modal response to the quality of life survey question was that the quality of life had **declined** (47%); 34% reported that the quality of life stayed the same and 10% felt that their quality of life had improved. Majorities report feeling safe inside and outside of their homes, however, at lower rates than the Zogby and 211 survey respondents. Sixty-one percent of respondents reported feeling very safe or somewhat safe outside of their homes, and 78% report feeling very safe or somewhat safe inside of their homes.

- A higher portion of respondents in the Cornhill survey group reported installing an alarm system to protect themselves (30%); however, a comparatively lower portion of residents reported purchasing firearms (8%) as compared to the Zogby and 211 survey results. Similar to the Zogby respondents, 30% of respondents report installing locks.
- Eighteen percent of Cornhill respondents report being the victim of a crime in the past 12 months (the highest percentages of the three surveys).
- Majorities agree that domestic violence (60%) and misbehavior by people with mental illness (67%) is a serious problem in their community.
- Similar to the Zogby and 211 survey results, in the series of questions about criminal justice reform (30, 33, 34, 35, and 36), majorities agree that entities other than the police may be more effective in handling domestic violence calls (80%) and mental illness calls (79%). Supermajorities also agree that individuals re-entering the community after time in the criminal justice system should receive education (91%) and housing assistance (95%).
- A supermajority of Cornhill respondents agree that racism and ethnic bias is a serious problem in the area (87%). Similarly, majorities also agree that a person's race or ethnicity will determine how they are treated by law enforcement (83%) and the local court system (82%).

Police and Public Relations

Substantial differences emerge in how respondents reply to some of direct questions concerning law enforcement (as compared to the other surveys).

- In contrast with the Zogby and 211 survey results, a majority of the Cornhill respondents *disagree* that the relationship between the police and their neighborhood is excellent (57% when combining strongly disagree and somewhat disagree).
- Approximately 60% of Cornhill respondents *disagree* that the police that serve their area can be trusted. Whereas majorities in the Zogby and 211 survey report that the police that serve their area can be trusted.
- A majority (53%) report being stopped or questioned by the police.
- Fifty-six percent of respondents felt that they had been treated inappropriately by the police (a higher rate than the Zogby and 211 survey respondents.)
- However, similar to the other surveys, a clear majority (70%) of Cornhill respondents agree that police should live in the area that they serve.

Conclusions and Takeaways

In the comparing the results across all of the surveys, it is important to acknowledge the differences in the way in which the surveys were collected (and sample sizes). Unlike the Zogby and 211 Surveys, the Cornhill respondents are majority non-White and majority low income. As noted above, key differences emerge in the Cornhill survey results regarding views on how race affects treatment by the criminal justice, and views on the relationship between the police and community. Clear supermajorities of the Cornhill respondents feel that race and ethnicity will affect treatment by the criminal justice system. The Cornhill respondents also report a decidedly more pessimistic view of the quality of the relationship and level of the trust between the police and the community.