

On Community Satisfaction with CPD Service

At the community meeting on January 19, 2006, Professor Robin Engel of the University of Cincinnati noted that it is important to put the RAND Corporation's 2005 findings from Cincinnati public opinion polls into the context. Specifically, the findings resulting from the community survey should be placed alongside recent social science literature. In order to provide this context, this memo gives a general overview of recent research regarding public attitudes toward police. Due to the volume of studies that covering the subject of community satisfaction with policing, this memo will not provide an exhaustive review of all of this literature.

Two of Dr. Engel's graduate students at the University of Cincinnati (Cody Stoddard and Troy Payne) summarized a sample of the relevant literature as follows. RAND found that 55% of Cincinnati residents hold "favorable" views of police (Riley et al., 2005). To get this measure, RAND combined two responses (excellent and good) to the question "How well do police address local crime problems". These responses were measured from four possible responses ranging from excellent, good, fair, to poor. As Table 1 shows, Cincinnati's 55% favorability rating is lower than similar public opinion polls that have been conducted over the past decade, both in Cincinnati and elsewhere.

Table 1; General attitudes toward police

	<u>% Favorable</u>	<u>Author</u>
Cincinnati		
2005	55	RAND
1997	63-74, depending on race	Frank et al.
1996	61, juveniles only	Hurst & Frank
1995	82	Brandl et al.
National sample		
2004	73-86, depending on race	Weitzer & Tuch
Chicago		
2001	77	Skogan
Texas		
2000	91	Longmire
1994	82	Longmire
Madison, Wisconsin		
1998	75	Madison Police Department
Charleston, West Virginia		
2000	70	Berhie & Haliu
A western state		
1997	87	Reisig & Corriea

When polled, residents of most cities have attitudes toward police that are generally very positive. Table 1 shows that between 70-90% of persons in these cities rate their attitude towards police as positive. RAND's description of the majority of Cincinnati citizens' as having positive attitudes is misleading when it is not viewed in this broader context. 55% of Cincinnati

residents rate their attitude toward how Cincinnati police address crime as good or excellent. At 55%, the survey really demonstrates that people are much more dissatisfied with police services in Cincinnati than they are in other cities around the country. Given the large number of persons dissatisfied with policing in Cincinnati (in comparison to most other cities), saying that a majority of residents have positive attitudes towards the police may make some citizens feel as though their voices are not being heard. Furthermore, it also allows the police department to place a positive spin on survey findings when it really should interpret those findings as a significant problem.

The UC graduate students note, however, that Table 1 should be interpreted with some caution. Public attitudes toward police are not measured uniformly across studies. Some studies use a four-item scale (e.g., very good, good, fair, poor) while others use a five-item scale (e.g., excellent, above average, adequate, below average, poor). To increase consistency across these varying methodologies, the table above includes the middle category (where studies used a five-item scale) in the percent favorable number. Although it is correct to say that Cincinnati residents generally have less favorable views toward police than residents of many other cities, RAND's study shows more negative attitudes toward police than previous studies performed in Cincinnati in the mid to late 1990's.

The UC graduate students also found it difficult to make direct comparisons between studies due to the lack of a standard measure and the varying goals of each study. The questions asked do vary somewhat by study, as do the sample sizes and other methodological details. Rand asked "How well do police address local crime problems?" 55% of respondents said excellent or good. Frank et al. (2005) asked "In general, how satisfied are you with the police?" 63-74% of respondents (depending on race) were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied. There are clearly differences between "addressing local crime problems" and general satisfaction with police, but both questions tend to tap the same concept of general attitudes toward the police.

Finally, the two graduate students note that in addition to non-uniform measures, some authors do not report statistics that are easily comparable to the measures provided by RAND. Many studies are concerned with specific aspects of public attitudes toward police instead of the general attitudes that RAND's study taps. Often, proportions are not reported for general attitudes or several specific attitudinal measures are combined into an index. Such studies show that the public has favorable views toward the police, usually overwhelmingly so. These studies are not easily compared to the RAND study findings and have been excluded from this brief (for examples, see Chamlin & Stormann, 2000; Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Cheurprakobkit & Bartsch, 2001; Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, & Chiricos, 2002; Hawdon & Ryan, 2003; Hennigan, Maxson, Sloane, & Ranney, 2002; Jesilow, Meyer, & Namazzi, 1995; Miller, Davis, Henderson, Markovic, & Ortiz, 2004; Michael D. Reisig & Parks, 2000; Taylor, Turner, Esbensen, & Jr., 2001; Torres & Vogel, 2001; Webb & Marshall, 1995).

Plaintiffs' do not wish to suggest that the survey is inaccurate. Rather, that the interpretation of what those findings mean about the state of police-citizen relations in Cincinnati was not properly described once placed in the broader context of these types of measures.

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