



2021

How Residents See Public Safety Services Within Their Communities

 National Research Center

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New Police Study Shows Significant Changes in American Opinions on Public Safety Services

A recently published police study reveals sweeping changes in resident satisfaction and experiences with law enforcement in their communities.

- By Brian Smith, Graphics by Parker Quinn -

Residents across the nation are asking for more constructive relationships with police, after a year greatly marked by social unrest over reports of police violence.

In general, Americans say they want police to increase connections with the community and find better ways of collaborating with residents.

They also expect more access to information about police services and better transparency within police departments.

This shift in rising expectations for community-centered policing is one of many results from a 2020 study by National Research Center (NRC) at Polco. Analyses of The National Police Services Survey (The NPSS) results examine residents' evolving opinions and experiences with local law enforcement.

In general, residents across the nation show less satisfaction with law enforcement in several key areas. Those areas include sense of safety, quality of service, trust in police and more.

Residents Propose Changes for Community-Centered Policing

There is good news, however. As residents signal to police that they desire change, they also identify several key solutions.

These survey results can help law enforcement officials and local government leaders understand and meet the needs of residents. Findings from the study can also help local police departments achieve a community-centered policing model.



Michelle Kobayashi
Sr. VP of Innovation for Polco

“We’re noticing there is more mistrust of the police than we’ve seen in the past. That’s something we know we need to work on as a nation,” said Michelle Kobayashi, Sr. VP of Innovation for Polco. Kobayashi is a leading survey scientist with more than two decades of experience.

“The results point to residents wanting much more of a relationship with police. They want police departments to communicate, collaborate and make things more equitable and transparent,” she said.

Data Come From The National Police Services Survey

Experts in the fields of public opinion research and law enforcement developed The NPSS to help police leaders move forward with their communities. Leaders from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Executive Session on Police Leadership (ESPL) also helped guide the creation of The NPSS.

Data analyzed for the nationwide study come from this survey conducted in 2018 and again in 2020. NRC researchers developed this as a benchmarking survey. It gives insight into



resident views on community safety and values, helping align police and public priorities. Data from these surveys represent the opinions of millions of residents across the United States.

“The differences between the years were surprising,” Kobayashi said. “When we began analyzing the data, we expected to see a change in the resident perceptions in 2020. But we did not expect the change to be so dramatic. These data demonstrate why local governments need to assess the relationship between their police and residents and identify ways to strengthen that connection.”

A Strained Relationship with Community

Researchers conducted the 2020 study as news about protests over police violence and calls for reform spread across the country.

“The media and national events are powerful influencers when it comes to resident perceptions,” Kobayashi said. “National issues and trends can have significant impacts on local perceptions and we believe that is what we’re seeing here.”

Data show the relationship between law enforcement and the community has strained. And publicized tensions have likely influenced those differences in the survey data. In fact,

most ratings of police and public safety services changed between 2018 and 2020. For instance, residents previously rated the overall quality of police services highly (79%), but that figure dropped by 23 percent in 2020.

Two of the major factors contributing to that drop are how police communicate with residents and the way in which police are perceived, said Chief Anthony Holloway of the St. Petersburg, Florida Police Department. Police need to be seen in the community being proactive instead of only responding to a crisis, he said.

Chief Holloway is a thought-leader in law enforcement with well over 30 years experience. He's taught best practices for equitable, community-centered policing to government and community organizations nationally and internationally. He says it's up to police departments to lead the way for positive change.



Chief Anthony Holloway
St. Petersburg, Fla. Police

"Much of what the community knows is what they see on television," Holloway said. "That's a perception that turns into reality when an officer only comes into the community to take someone to jail. So we have to change that perception. Law enforcement is there to help you."

Changing Perceptions Affect Community Desirability

Along with the decrease in police service ratings,

residents changed their opinions of how safe they feel in their neighborhoods.

How residents perceive their own level of safety greatly contributes to how desirable a place is to live, according to analyses of The National Community Survey (The NCS). For nearly two decades, Americans responding to The NCS consistently rank safety as the most important factor for a livable community.

On The NPSS in 2020, residents reported feeling less safe overall than they did in 2018. Many residents also rated their communities lower as desirable places to live and raise children.

In both surveys, about half of residents said they had contact with law enforcement within the year prior. In 2018, eight in 10 residents rated their interactions with police positively. In 2020, that decreased to six in 10.

"What we see is that in addition to reporting less positive interactions with police, residents' trust in law enforcement has been damaged," Kobayashi said. "It is important for police leaders to understand those trends if they want to improve them."

Residents' Expectations Regarding Ethics and Trustworthiness

Residents reported less trust in law enforcement in 2020 compared to 2018. They also reduced ratings given to police officers for measures of ethics.

Residents rated several aspects of trust in police lower. Aspects that saw significant declines include

General ratings of police services

2018 vs 2020

Polco NRC



Trust in police

Please rate your community's police department on the following.

2018 vs 2020



acting within the law, trustworthiness, acting in the best interest of the community, and using appropriate force. In many cases, the study finds decreases of 20 percent or more in these areas. Less than half of respondents (46%) in 2020 felt that their local police department or sheriff's office did an excellent or good job holding officers accountable for their actions.

Holloway said police departments should engage the community more about officer accountability and discipline. For example, St. Petersburg Police have a citizen review committee that oversees discipline for officers.

"People hold us at a higher standard, but they forget sometimes that we are human like they are," Holloway said. "So it comes down to educating the

officers and also educating the community."

Praise for Core Services, But Community Outreach Needs Improvement

The study also assessed the quality of specific policing services. All ratings were 13% to 28% lower in 2020 compared to 2018.

The biggest slide in results came when respondents considered how police and residents collaborate to make neighborhoods safer. Residents dropped their approval rating of that factor from 67% to 39%.

In both studies, residents gave the highest ratings to quick emergency response, maintaining public order, and assisting victims of crime.

The issues residents rate lowest include inviting community input, responding to interactions with people who are homeless, and providing public information and education.

"The story that this data tells is that police generally are doing a good job serving the community's core public safety needs. But more work must be done in community outreach and involvement," Kobayashi said.



Residents Readjust Rankings for Crimes

Between 2018 and 2020 there were only minor changes in the community safety issues residents ranked as problems.

In both studies, residents ranked 34 public safety problems and the level of impact on their community.

In both years, drug abuse ranked as the top problem, while DUIs and domestic violence were also among the top five. In 2018, the top five list also included traffic problems and homelessness. In 2020, child abuse and human trafficking ranked among the top five problems.

Three problems saw modest changes in residents' rankings. Respondents ranked domestic violence 11 percent higher and child abuse ranked 15 percent higher. Gun violence, poorly kept houses and disorderly conduct all ranked lower as problems.

"Of all the areas of public safety that we examined, these rankings changed the least," Kobayashi said. "To me this indicates broad agreement in the types of crime that residents feel impact their communities most. What has changed is where residents would like police to focus their efforts."

Amid Changing Views, Priorities Change

Analysis between the two studies shows residents are changing their priorities for public safety.

Residents rated seven of nine priorities as less important in 2020 than in 2018. Issues such as traffic enforcement, drug enforcement, school safety and controlling juvenile crime all dropped by 20 percent in importance.

In 2020, residents said they wanted police to be more connected with the community, have better access to police and police-related information, and demonstrate better transparency.

"In order for police departments to meet these requests, they need to make sure they have the right tools, processes and resources," Kobayashi said.

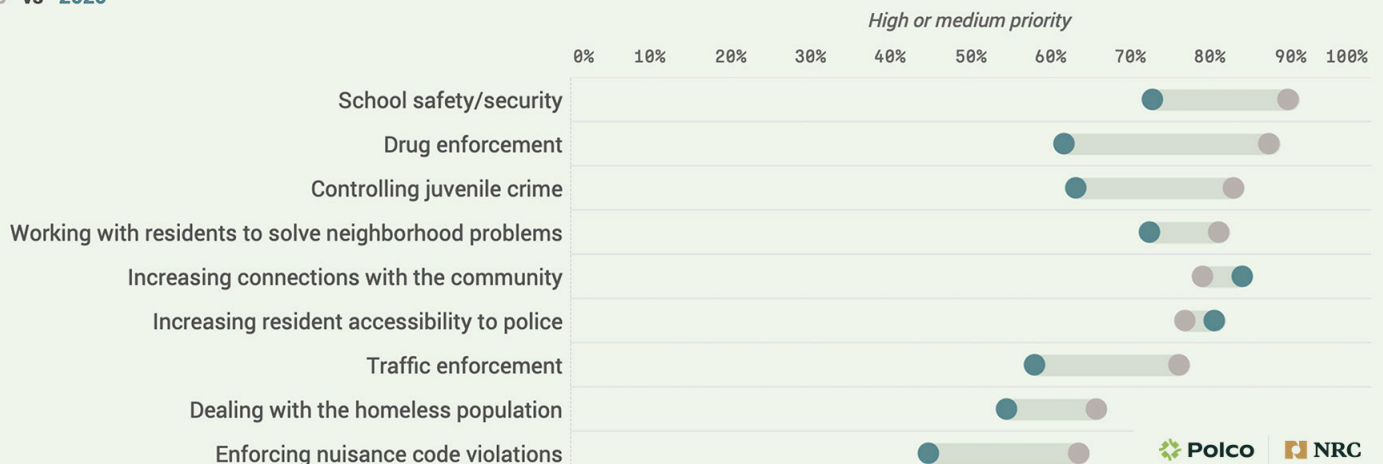
Bringing Residents and Police Together

It is crucial residents understand the enormous challenges modern day police departments face, Kobayashi said. Residents should be educated about issues such as hiring, resources, training, and new technologies (like body cams).

Resident priorities

How much of a priority, if at all, should the police department in your community place on each of the following in the next two years?

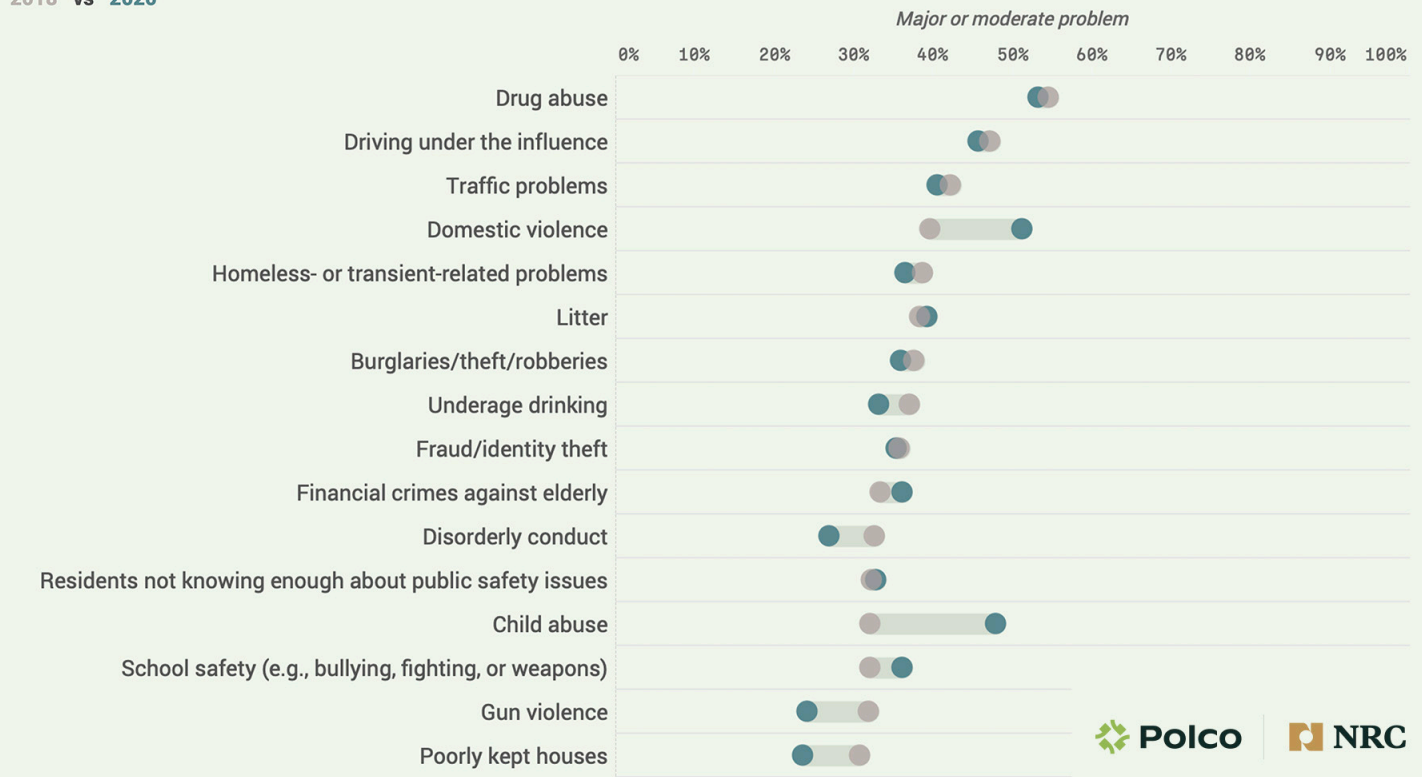
2018 vs 2020



Perceptions of community safety issues

How much of a problem, if at all, are these issues in your community?

2018 vs 2020



Understanding public safety challenges will help to unite residents and law enforcement and bring them closer together to find solutions. But key to that process is reaching out to disenfranchised residents, Kobayashi said.

“Police departments should work really hard with groups in the community that represent diverse residents,” she said. “Invite some of those folks not often heard to participate in decisions about community safety and policing. Make sure they are at the table when you’re deciding how to utilize resources, how to make new policies, and how to evaluate police performance.”

Involving the community more across all facets of law enforcement can improve trust, feelings of safety, and general satisfaction with law enforcement efforts. Kobayashi urged police departments to do a baseline assessment to better understand local voices, opinions and needs. Strategic planning involving residents and stakeholders can help align community priorities with resources as well as strengthen much

needed relationships.

“Action plans related specifically to improving the relationship between police and residents are also a good idea for many communities,” she said.

These data provide a blueprint for how public safety leaders can both improve community relations and restore public trust in law enforcement.

“These data indicate there’s room for improvement, but we’re optimistic that police departments can create the kind of connection residents seek,” Kobayashi said. “Resources like The NPSS create an opportunity for police to survey residents in their own communities. Having that local data is crucial to moving your community forward.”

For more information, or to conduct The National Police Services Survey visit:
<https://info.polco.us/the-national-police-services-survey>



Police Study Report: Opinions of Law Enforcement Differ Between Races

- By Brian Smith, Graphics by Parker Quinn -

White and black Americans' opinions of law enforcement have changed significantly during the last several years, a new police study report shows.

A greater number black Americans are wanting police to focus more on creating positive, proactive community relationships. This societal shift comes after recent protests over police violence and calls for police reform.

This finding is one of many results from a national

survey on policing services. The police study report, from The National Police Services Survey (The NPSS), reveals significant differences between black and white Americans' opinions on law enforcement. The differences in ratings between races on issues such as crime, trust in police, ethics, feelings of safety and priorities for public safety have changed greatly over the last two years.

A disparity between how black and white residents experience police has always existed, said Michelle Kobayashi, Sr. VP of Innovation for National Research Center (NRC) at Polco.

But research indicates new trends. One such change is that white residents have become more empathic about the relationship police have with black residents, she said.



Michelle Kobayashi
Sr. VP of Innovation for Polco

“Now in 2020, people from majority groups are understanding more of the experiences of people of color. More people these days agree that it’s important for us to reach out to folks in the community of all backgrounds, ethnicities and races to make sure that we’re representing everyone’s values in community policing,” Kobayashi said.

Michelle Kobayashi has designed and conducted scientific survey research, analyzed and reported

results to governments for more than 30 years. She says the amount of change between the 2018 and 2020 survey data are noteworthy.

Analyzing Results from The National Police Services Survey

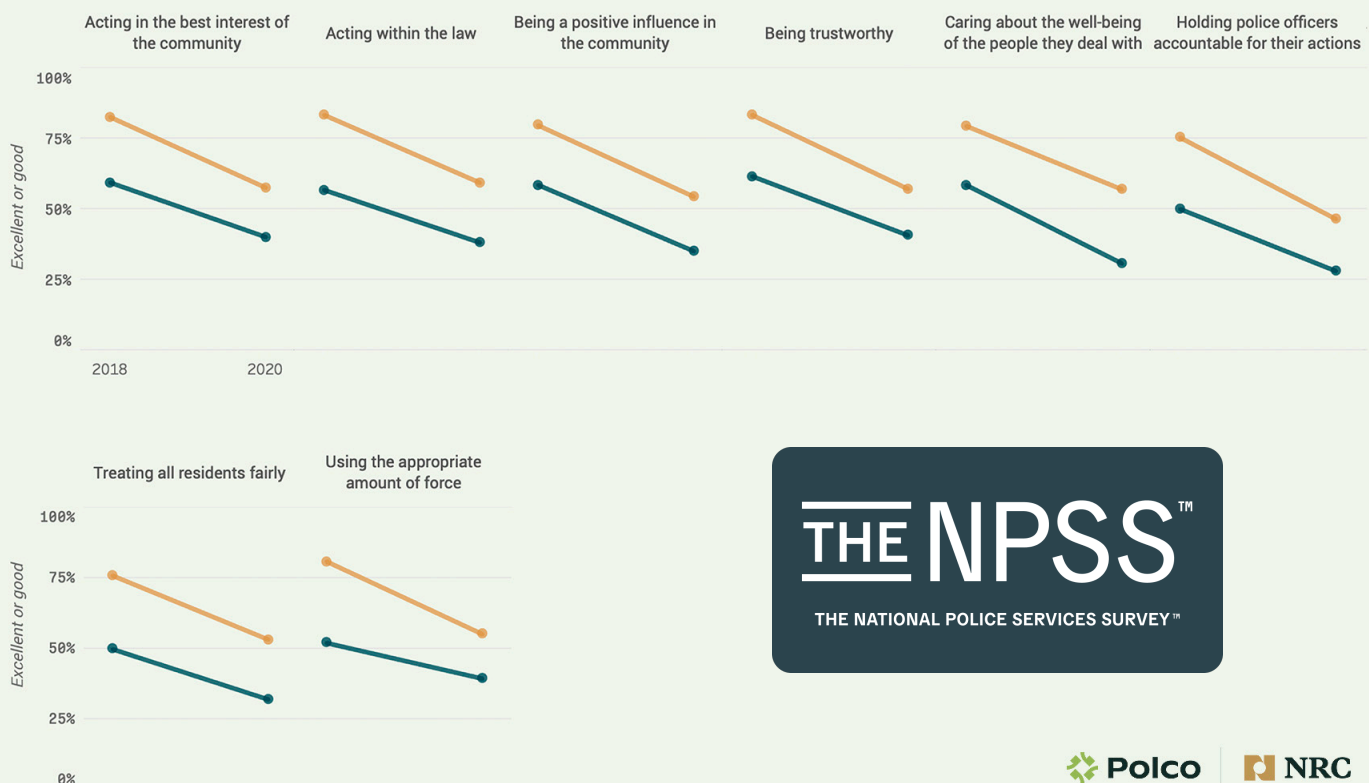
This police study is the second of its kind. National Research Center (NRC) at Polco conducted two nationwide surveys — one in 2018 and 2020 — and compared the results. Data from these surveys are weighted to represent the opinions of millions of Americans.

These data come from The National Police Services Survey (The NPSS). Expert survey scientists and law enforcement thought-leaders developed this survey. Leaders from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Executive Session on Police Leadership (ESPL) also helped guide the creation of The NPSS. It gives insight into

Trust in police

Please rate your community's police department on the following.

black residents ●
white residents ●



resident views on community safety services and values, and helps align police and public priorities.

Residents Change Ratings of Police, Crime

Overall, residents changed many of their perceptions of public safety factors over the last two years. In 2018, about 80 percent of all

residents were satisfied with the quality of police services in their community. That figure dropped by more than 23 percent in 2020.

Both studies ask residents how much of a problem various crimes or issues are in their communities. In 2018, black and white residents agreed much more closely on those issues than in 2020.

In 2020's study, black residents rate most facets

Perceptions of community safety issues

How much of a problem, if at all, are these issues in your community?

black residents ●

white residents ●



of crime more of a problem than white residents. White residents either rate those facets as less of an issue than before, or about the same. Those issues include drug abuse, domestic violence, school safety, disorderly conduct, gun violence and more.

About half of black residents indicate that lack of knowledge about public safety issues is a problem. That's more than a 10-percent increase from 2018. Only about 30 percent of white residents rate that aspect as a problem in both surveys.

To counteract that lack of knowledge, residents and police must collaborate on prioritizing safety issues for the community, said Chief Anthony Holloway of the St. Petersburg, Florida Police Department. "I think you have to ask that community what they perceive safety as," he said.



Chief Anthony Holloway
St. Petersburg, Fla. Police

Chief Holloway has certainly seen relationships between diverse residents and police evolve over the years, since he began his career 35 years ago. As a successful leader in the field, he's taught best practices in law enforcement to government and community organizations nationally and internationally. He also serves multiple state level organizations dedicated to promoting diversity and advancing racial and ethnic equity, on the state level.

Both Races Report Decreased Trust in Law Enforcement

In 2018, black and white residents differed significantly in their trust of police. White Americans rated aspects of trust highly. But black residents rated their trust in police significantly lower — by as much as about 30 percent less in some areas.

In 2020, however, residents of both races have become more aligned in their opinions, yet a sizable gap persists. Across the board, both races rate their trust in police significantly less than before.

Now, less than half of black residents positively rate their levels of trust in police. These issues include acting within the law, being trustworthy, using appropriate force, and being a positive influence in the community.

Only about 30 percent of black residents feel that the police care about the well-being of the people they work with, and that police officers are held accountable for their actions.

White residents have reduced their trust in police in all cases by about 20 percent or more. Most residents who are male, or white, or homeowners, or who live in higher income households tend to give the most favorable ratings to safety and police service.

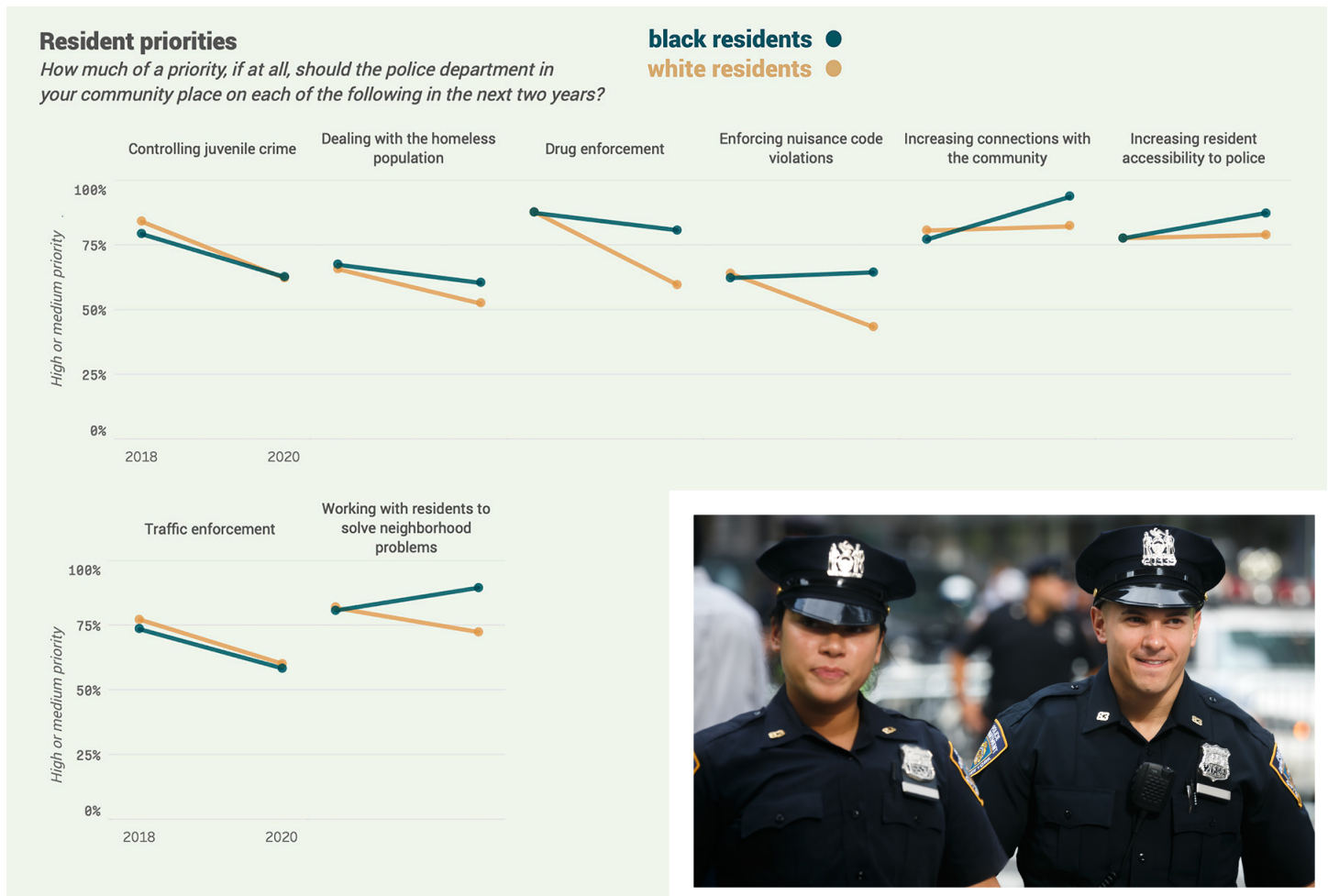
Black Residents Want More Police Community Connections

Both races shifted their opinions of what law enforcement's priorities for the community should be, between 2020 and 2018.

In 2018, black and white residents aligned more closely on the importance of issues such as school safety, drug enforcement, working with residents to solve neighborhood problems and more.

In 2020, however, black residents rated more priorities higher than white residents. Black residents placed more importance on issues such as increasing connections with the community, and working with residents to solve neighborhood problems.

Holloway said he's found that police and residents generally agree on what they want. "When you talk to the people in the community,



they don't want to become victims of a crime," he said. "So they want to know what you are doing, how exactly you are doing it and how can we help you and work together."

Policing in Partnership With All Residents

Holloway said change will come from officers becoming more proactive in the community. From that steady, positive presence comes trust, he said.

"You've got to be there and stand and talk to people in the community," Holloway said. "I'll go back to a Dr. [Martin Luther] King Jr. quote that people fear each other because they don't know each other and they fail to communicate together. That's the breakdown right there."

Kobayashi said police departments and

government officials should use this data to help them collaborate more with people of all backgrounds.

"A goal would be to collaborate, communicate and be transparent," she said. "Speak with the people who have not traditionally been at the decision making table. Invite the black community, where there have been more breakdowns in relationships. Ask a more representative group of residents to help make decisions about priorities, resource allocation, performance measurement, accountability and more. This collaboration will help reduce the disparities in police trust and perceptions over time."

For more information, or to conduct The National Police Services Survey visit:
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How Skokie's Award-Winning Public Safety Campaign Led to Safer Streets

-By Julia Steege-Reimann-

Skokie, Illinois transforms village safety through a focus on positive police interactions and neighborhood maintenance.

What do a hot dog cookout, library card registration drives, and tree trimming have in common?

These are just some of the steps that Skokie's Police Department took in their successful public safety awareness campaign: Many Cultures, One Community.

"There has been a positive change in the

[community] since we began [the public safety awareness campaign]," said Deputy Police Chief Brian Baker. "The quality of life seems to be much better. Families are out, kids are out playing, parks are fun, and not a place for conflict. The change is dramatic."

"Skokie should be very proud of their thoughtful and systematic public safety campaign," said Jade Arocha, Senior Research Analyst for Polco/ National Research Center.

Data show that Skokie's efforts are paying off. Indeed, when the program first began, the police reported a 22 percent reduction in calls in the focus areas when comparing the

beginning of the summer to the end of that same summer.

Additionally, the Village of Skokie regularly conducts The National Community Survey (The NCS) to gather feedback from community members. These efforts have led to improvements on multiple aspects of safety between 2015 to 2018, as indicated by The NCS. Such components include overall feeling of safety, police, crime prevention, and animal control.

This leadership led to a 2019 Voice of the People Award for Transformation in Safety. This is the only national award that honors local governments based on feedback from residents. The award is presented by Polco / National Research Center (NRC) and the International City & County Management Association (ICMA). This award acknowledges local governments that make significant improvements on The NCS ratings and that take the best actions on behalf of their communities.

Developing the Plan

In October 2014, the Village's Public Safety Commission's began to shift its focus to develop a plan for the public safety campaign.

The commission includes community members and village staff liaisons. When developing the plan, commission meetings included presentations from numerous guests including a Northwestern University public safety expert.

After six months, the commission concluded that centering efforts on the highest-needs portions of the community would maximize the campaign's impact.

To determine which parts of the community to prioritize, the Skokie Police Department developed a map showing several densely-populated, multi-family area neighborhoods with concentrations of various crimes including

battery, aggravated battery, assault, robbery, and burglary.

During the summer of 2015, the police department decided to narrow their efforts to a few neighborhoods on the map. In 2016, the public safety efforts expanded to include other neighborhoods identified.

Positive Interactions in the Neighborhoods

A major focus of the campaign includes increasing positive interactions between police and residents in their communities.

Police began to make regular visits to the focus-area neighborhoods. During the first two years, the police department published the visit schedule each week.

During these visits, police officers set up a table in local parks with crime prevention literature, multilingual village information, opportunities to sign up for email alerts, as well as treats and prizes. Officers also walk the neighborhoods and knock on doors to greet residents. Often the village manager, police chief, and other elected officials join the officers during these visits.

Between 2015 and 2017, Skokie police officers spent a total of nearly 1,250 hours in the neighborhoods and made contact with more than 7,300 residents.

Partnerships

To enhance the neighborhood visits, the Police Department partners with multiple organizations.

For example, the Skokie Park District and the Police Department host multiple free hot dog cookout events each year at focus area neighborhood parks. The events include free games and lots of food. The Skokie Park District

also reconstructed a playground and installed improved lighting in a playground in the focus area.

The Skokie Public Library holds periodic children's story time and library card registration drives during police visits to the neighborhoods.

And, multiple organizations including Asian Human Services, faith communities, and parent groups partner with the Police Department to provide information during neighborhood visits.

Maintenance

In addition to increasing positive interactions in the community, the campaign also focuses on neighborhood maintenance.

The Public Works Department frequently paints

curbs and signposts, fills potholes, and refreshes pavement markings. They improve street lighting through frequently trimming trees, checking for burned out bulbs, and adding additional street lights.

And the Village's Beautification Commission organizes a clean-up project in a focus area park each year.

To build on the efforts related to maintenance in focus area neighborhoods, the Village passed a Neighborhood Integrity Ordinance in 2014. This ordinance requires landlords to maintain properties and increases communication between landlords, inspectors, and the police. As part of this ordinance, property standards inspectors give warnings and citations to landlords for overgrowth of weeds, litter, peeling paint, broken windows, and more.

Request Info

info.polco.us/request-information

These Data Come From



The National Police Services Survey (The NPSS) strengthens community relationships, aligns resident and government priorities, and increases community safety. It provides a picture of resident opinions related to community police services. Drawing from a large database, The NPSS compares your local results with benchmarks compiled from a national survey panel.



The National Community Survey (The NCS) provides a comprehensive picture of livability and resident perspectives about local government services, policies and management. It was developed by experts to produce clear, unbiased, actionable results. The NCS also offers insights into the perspective of residents on public safety in their communities.

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National Research Center (NRC) at Polco gives local governments, and other public sector organizations, the data they need to make more informed decisions. NRC is the research branch of Polco. Together they offer the best in survey research alongside today's most innovative online civic engagement capabilities.