

Brief Report for Yonkers Police Department

Police Legitimacy in Yonkers, NY: Evidence from the Community Vitality Survey

30 April 2022

Legitimacy – an individual’s belief that another individual, group, or institution has the authority to dictate their behavior and demand their cooperation – is vital for the effective functioning of police departments (1-3). When police lack legitimacy, trust in the police is low and residents are less likely to cooperate with police investigations and comply with the law (4-6). Moreover, police-community interactions charged with distrust and fear are more likely to escalate into violent conflicts that can lead to the injury or death of both officers and civilians (1, 7-8). These negative interactions fuel a vicious cycle of mutual disrespect that further undermines police-community relations and public safety (6,9).

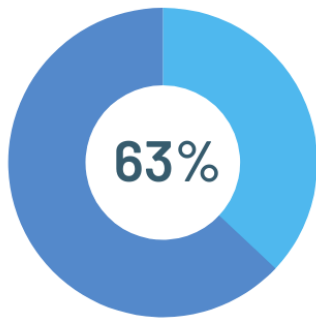
In this brief report, we provide a quantitative description of police legitimacy in Yonkers, community residents’ trust and confidence in the Yonkers Police Department (YPD), and their willingness to cooperate with police officers. We do so by presenting a broad overview of Yonkers residents’ attitudes toward the YPD and its officers using data collected from 1,413 community residents surveyed during the summer of 2021. Residents’ attitudes toward police were measured using multiple validated indicators derived from prior surveys of civilians conducted at both the local and national levels (3-4, 7, 10).

Although highly correlated, these attitudes – trust and confidence in the police, legitimacy, and willingness to cooperate – are conceptually distinct. We therefore partition this report into two sections. **Part I** examines residents’ trust and confidence in the YPD and compares this with reported levels of trust in other institutions and organizations, as well as recent estimates of trust in the police at the national level. **Part II** examines perceptions of police legitimacy in Yonkers, and residents’ willingness to cooperate with officers from the YPD.

Key Takeaways:

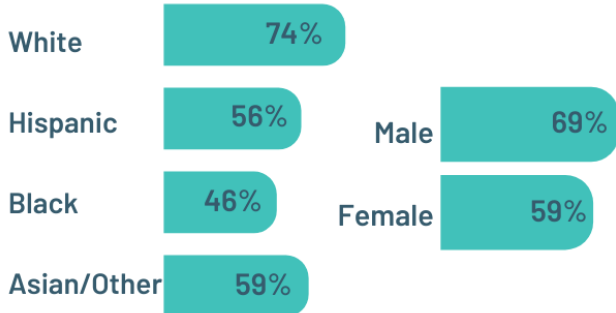
- Most residents surveyed reported high levels of trust and confidence in the YPD. However, there were important differences by race and ethnicity: trust was highest among White respondents and lowest among Black respondents.
- Trust in the YPD was, on average, significantly higher than a number of other public institutions, including the City of Yonkers and Yonkers Public Schools. Yonkers’ residents trust and confidence in the police was somewhat lower than the national average.
- Residents’ perceptions of police fairness are low. Although the majority of those surveyed (67%) said that officers made them feel safer in their neighborhoods, only 38% felt that officers treated people equally. Fewer than half (43%) agreed that officers make fair and impartial decisions when dealing with people. This is an important area for further investigation.
- Willingness to cooperate with the YPD is high. For example, 83% of those surveyed said they would provide police with information about a suspect if they knew where that individual was located. Although there are important differences between Whites and non-Whites, the vast majority of those surveyed were willing to cooperate with the YPD across multiple scenarios.
- Although White residents have generally favorable views of the YPD and its officers, there are large and statistically significant differences between Whites and non-Whites. Black residents in particular have the lowest levels of trust and confidence in the police, and are significantly less likely than White respondents to cooperate with the Yonkers police.

Part I: Trust and Confidence in the Yonkers Police Department



OF YONKERS RESIDENTS TRUST YPD

"most of the time" or "always", compared to 19% who trust them "about half the time", and 18% who trust them "only sometimes" or "never".



(Percentages include those who responded "most of the time" or "always")

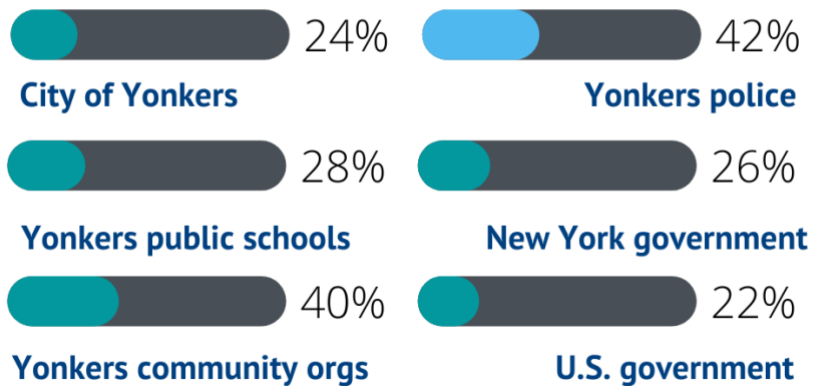
Additional measures also allowed us to make comparisons between residents' trust and confidence in different institutions and organizations, and to benchmark against recent estimates from national surveys. According to this measure, trust and confidence in the YPD (42%) was, on average, significantly higher than trust in any other public institution that was measured. For additional context, 51% of the U.S. adult population reported "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of trust and confidence in the police in recent national surveys (13). We also find significant differences across sub-groups of respondents, with Black (27%), Hispanic/Latino (33%), and AAPI/Other (41%) residents reporting significantly lower trust in the police than White (53%) respondents. Males also reported more trust than females by about 10 percentage points.

Most residents surveyed reported high levels of trust in the YPD. Overall, 63% percent stated they trusted the YPD to do what is right "most of the time" (52%) or "always" (11%). Approximately 19% reported they could trust the YPD "about half the time", and 16% felt they could only trust the YPD "sometimes". Only 2% of respondents reported they could "never" trust the YPD.

However, consistent with national surveys (11-13), we found significant differences across sub-groups of respondents. For example, 74% of White respondents reported they could trust the YPD "most of the time" or "always", compared with 46% of Black residents – a statistically significant difference of roughly 28 percentage points. We also observed that female respondents reported lower trust than male respondents – a statistically significant difference of 10 percentage points.

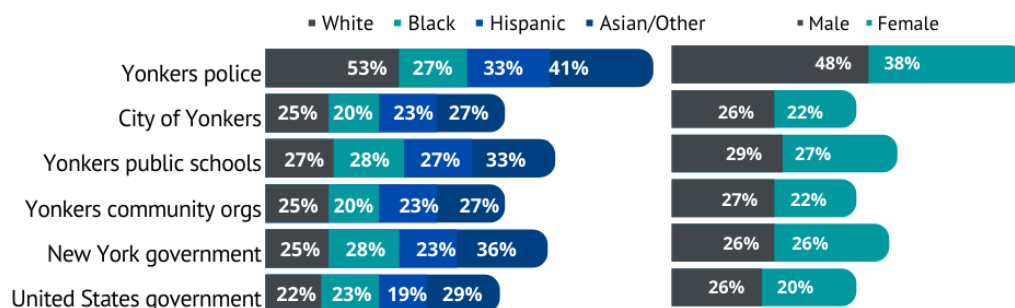
Trust and Confidence in Institutions

% of Yonkers residents who reported quite a lot or a great deal of trust:



Trust and Confidence in Institutions: Race/Ethnicity and Gender Differences

% of Yonkers residents who reported quite a lot or a great deal of trust:



What might explain low levels of trust and confidence in police? We examined this using four additional questions: 1) whether officers make residents feel safer in their neighborhoods; 2) whether residents feel that officers are trying to make their community better; 3) whether they feel officers respect the people in their community; and 4) whether they feel officers treat people equally.

A majority agreed that officers were trying to make their community better (59%), respected people in their community (58%), and made them feel safer (67%). However, only 38% felt that officers treated people equally. This is an important area for improvement as the belief that police treat people fairly is a fundamental component of police legitimacy.

There were again differences across sub-groups. Racial and ethnic minorities reported significantly lower levels of trust than Whites. The largest gaps were again between White and Black respondents. Males were also more likely than females to feel protected and respected by the YPD, to view people as being equally treated, and to perceive the YPD as trying to better their community.

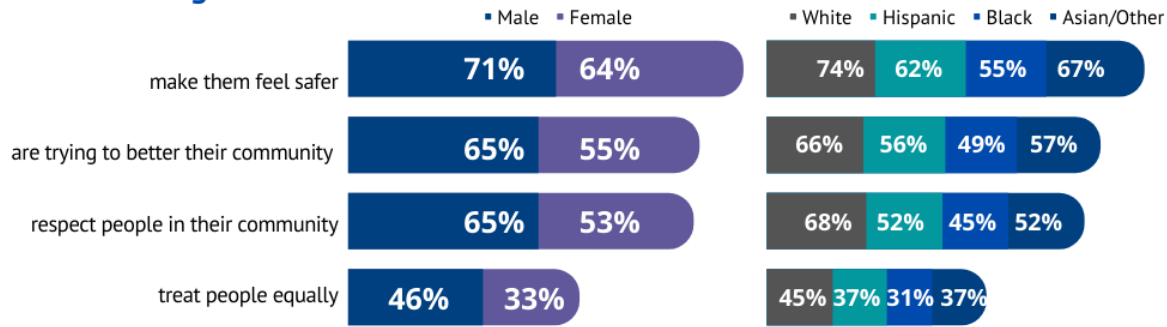
Confidence in Yonkers Police

% of residents who agree that Yonkers police....



Confidence in Yonkers Police by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

% who agree that Yonkers Police....



(includes people who answered somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree)

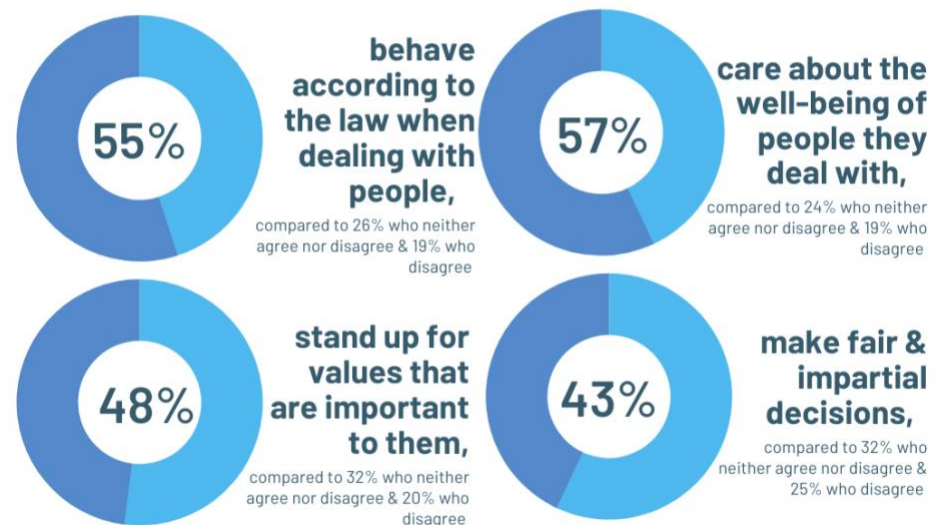
Part II: Legitimacy and Cooperation

We measured police legitimacy by examining residents' agreement with four statements about police in Yonkers: 1) "They behave according to the law when dealing with people"; 2) "They care about the well-being of people they deal with"; 3) "They stand up for values that are important to you"; and 4) "They make fair and impartial decisions."

Notably, less than half of respondents indicated any level of agreement with the last two statements. Importantly, only 43% agreed that police in Yonkers made fair and impartial decisions when dealing with people.

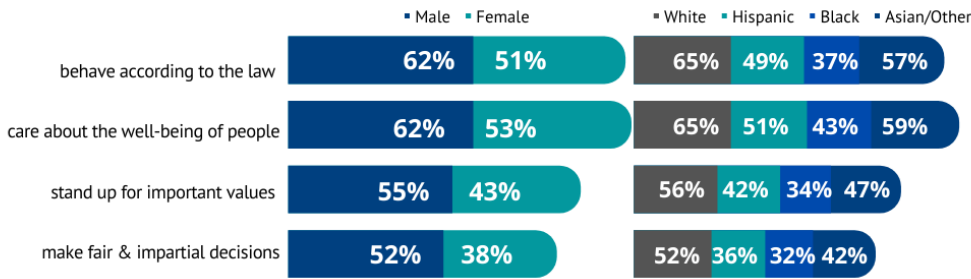
Police Legitimacy in Yonkers

% of residents who agree that Yonkers police....



Police Legitimacy by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

% who agree that Yonkers Police....



(includes people who answered somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree)

There were also statistically significant differences in police legitimacy ratings by race/ethnicity and gender. White respondents, and males, scored highest across each legitimacy dimension, and Black respondents, and females, scored lowest.

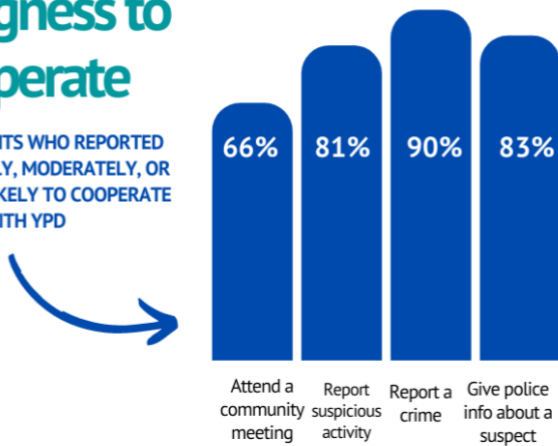
Finally, respondents were asked to report their likelihood of cooperating with YPD in four different scenarios: 1) attending a

community meeting to discuss neighborhood problems; 2) reporting suspicious activity, 3) reporting crime; and 4) providing police with information about a suspect who was hiding if they knew where the individual was located. On average, we observed high levels of willingness to cooperate across all four scenarios. A majority of respondents reported they would be “slightly”, “moderately” or “extremely” likely to attend a community meeting with police (66%), to report suspicious activity (81%), to report a crime (90%), and to help police locate a suspect who was hiding (83%).

While there were no statistically significant differences in reported cooperation between males and female respondents, there were again significant differences between Whites and non-Whites. For example, 90% of White respondents said they would provide police with information about a suspect if they knew where the individual was located, compared to 75% of Black respondents. Importantly, however, the majority of individuals in each race/ethnicity group reported a willingness to cooperate with police across each of the four scenarios.

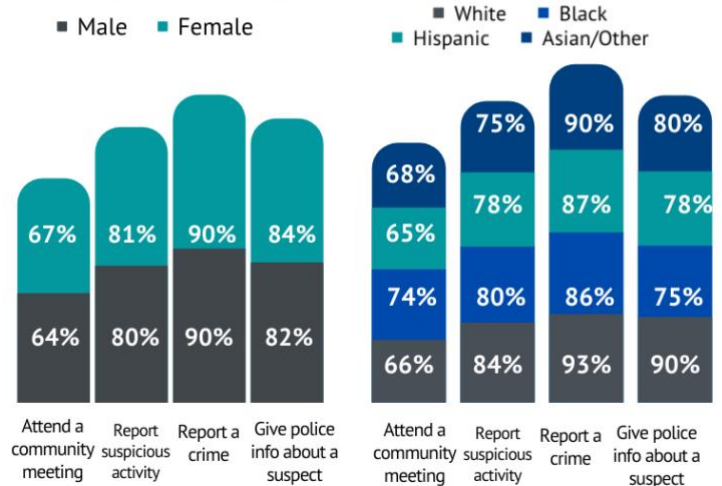
Willingness to Cooperate

% OF RESIDENTS WHO REPORTED BEING SLIGHTLY, MODERATELY, OR EXTREMELY LIKELY TO COOPERATE WITH YPD



Willingness to Cooperate by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

% of residents who reported being slightly, moderately, or extremely likely to cooperate with YPD:



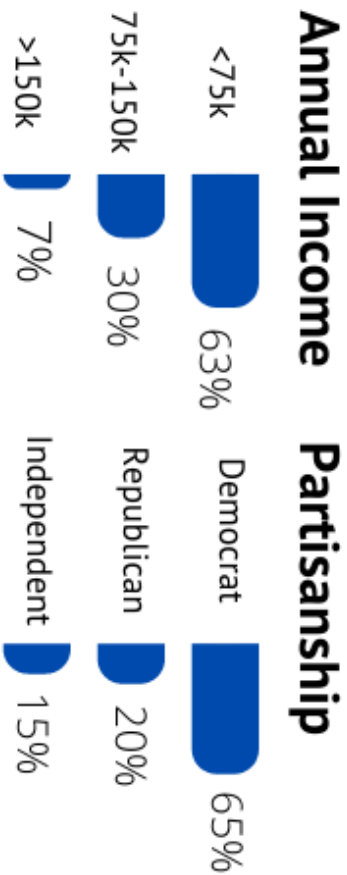
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Average time spent
living in Yonkers:
23.6 years

WHO TOOK THE COMMUNITY SURVEY?

1,413 Yonkers residents

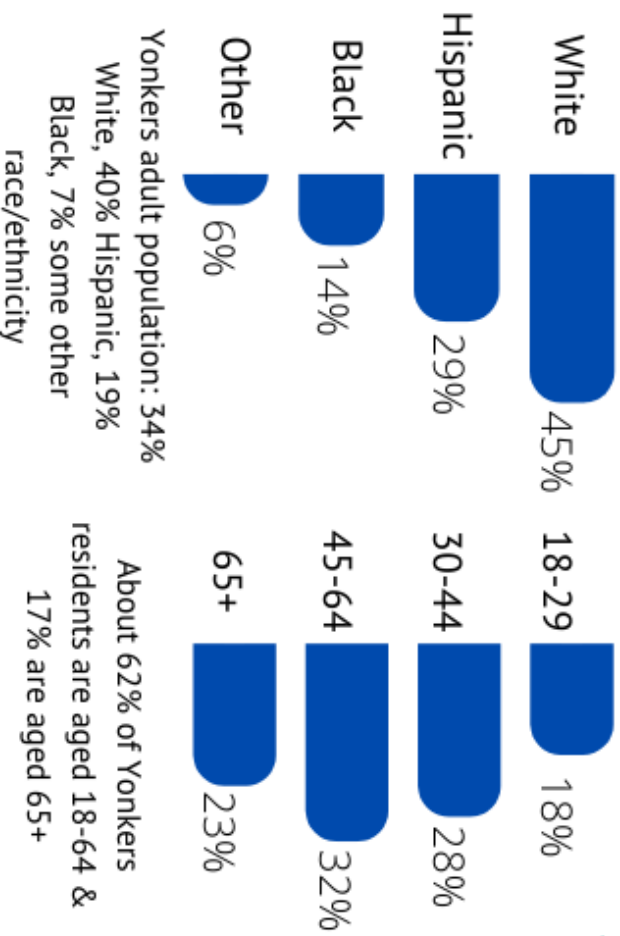


Gender Female: 59% Male: 41%

The adult population in Yonkers is 52% female and 48% male

Race/Ethnicity

Age



Homeownership Owners: 58% Renters: 42%

70% had
completed
some form
of post-
secondary
education

62% were
employed,
20% were
retired, and
18% were
not working

