

Brief Report for Yonkers Police Department

Crime, Safety, and Policing in Relation to Police Legitimacy in Yonkers, NY: Evidence from the Community Vitality Survey

21 September 2022

Our first brief report focused on police legitimacy, which is vital for the effective functioning of police departments. Police legitimacy has been shown to be affected by people's experiences with and views about crime, safety, and law enforcement.^{1,2} In this brief, we quantify Yonkers residents' perceptions of safety and experiences with crime and the police to explore how these factors relate to people's views about police legitimacy and related measures. **Part I** examines residents' perceptions of safety and experiences with crime and the YPD using data collected from 1,413 community residents surveyed during the summer of 2021. **Part II** examines the associations between these indicators and legitimacy, trust and confidence, and willingness to cooperate with the YPD, which were the focus of our first report.

Key Takeaways:

- Most residents surveyed reported interacting with the YPD less than once a year or less. Nearly 40% of residents reported having recent contact with the YPD, and over half reported knowing one or more Yonkers police officers (at least as an acquaintances).
- About 4% of those surveyed had been arrested by the YPD, compared to 32% who had been victimized in Yonkers. About three-quarters of residents who reported being victimized said they reported their victimization to the YPD. Less than 15% of residents who were surveyed reported ever having unfair police contact with the YPD. There were important differences by race and gender in terms of police contact, with Black individuals experiencing more arrests and unfair police contacts than Whites, and males being more likely than females to report being arrested and victimized.
- Most Yonkers residents reported feeling at least moderately safe walking alone in their neighborhoods at night. Hispanic, Black, and female respondents had lower ratings of safety than White and male respondents.
- While victimization experiences were not related to police legitimacy, Yonkers residents who have been arrested and who feel unsafe had significantly lower police legitimacy ratings than those who have not been arrested and those who feel safe.
- Yonkers residents who have been arrested and victimized, and residents who did not report their victimizations to the YPD, reported lower levels of trust in the YPD than people without these experiences. People who feel unsafe walking in their neighborhoods at night also reported lower levels of trust in the YPD than people who reported feeling safe.
- People who have been arrested and who reported feeling unsafe were less likely than those who have not been arrested and who feel safe to cooperate with the police across different scenarios. Compared to people who have not been victimized, people with victimization experiences reported being more willing to attend a community meeting to discuss neighborhood problems.

Part I: Policing, Crime, and Safety

Experiences with the police and crime. Nearly three-fourths of residents surveyed reported interacting with the YPD less than once a year or never. About 17% and 6% come into contact with the YPD a few times a year or yearly, respectively, and about 6% come into contact with YPD either monthly (3%), weekly (2%), or daily (1%). About 90% of the 39% of residents who reported recent contact with the YPD reported that they had in-person contact. About 46% of residents reported not knowing any YPD officers (at least as acquaintances), compared to 28%, 13%, 8%, and 6% who reported knowing one or two officers, three or four officers, between five and nine officers, and 10 or more officers, respectively.

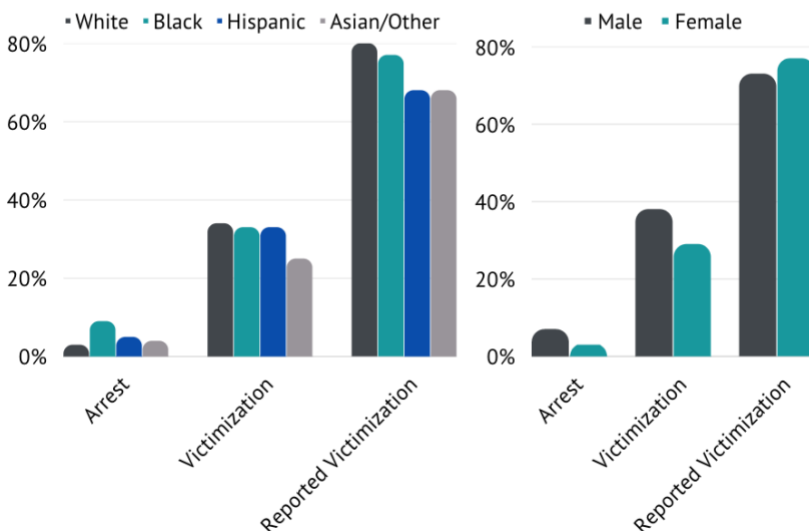
About 14% of residents who were surveyed reported ever having unfair contact with YPD, and 4% and 32% of residents reported having been victimized in Yonkers and arrested by the YPD, respectively. Of the residents who reported being victimized, 75% said they reported their victimization to the YPD.

Consistent with prior surveys and our first report, we found significant differences across sub-groups of respondents, particularly in regard to race and ethnicity.^{3,4} For example, White respondents were significantly more likely than Black respondents to report experiencing recent police contact (44% vs. 30%, respectively; $p < 0.01$) but significantly less likely than Black respondents to have ever experienced *unfair* police contact (9% vs. 24%, respectively; $p < 0.001$). Black respondents were also significantly more likely than Whites to report being arrested (9% vs. 2.5%, respectively; $p < 0.001$) and less likely than Whites to report knowing YPD officers (44% vs. 57%, respectively; $p < 0.05$).



Crime and Police Experiences by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

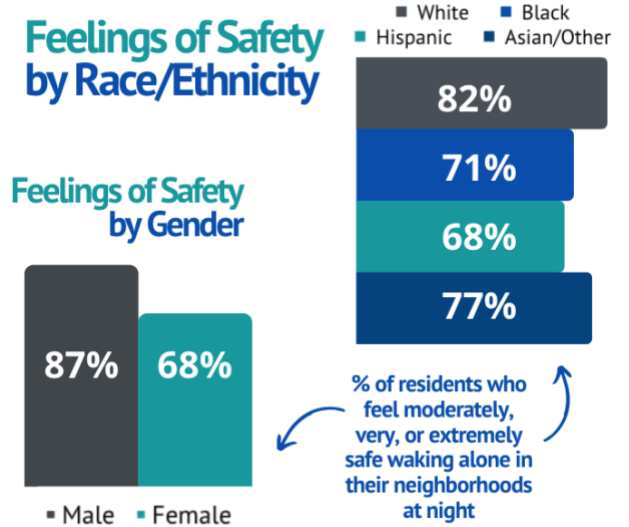
% of residents who reported the following experiences in Yonkers:



Though we did not find statistically significant differences between racial/ethnic sub-groups in regard to victimization or reporting of victimization (perhaps due to the small sample sizes of victims), it is important to note that only 68% of AAPI and Hispanic respondents reported their victimizations to the YPD, compared to 77% and 80% of Black and White respondents, respectively ($p = 0.05$). Males and females reported roughly similar levels of acquaintanceships with YPD officers, recent contacts with YPD, and unfair YPD contacts. However, statistically significant differences by gender were found in analyzing experiences with crime, with males being more likely than females to report being arrested and victimized (7% and 38% vs. 3% and 29%, respectively; both $p < 0.001$).

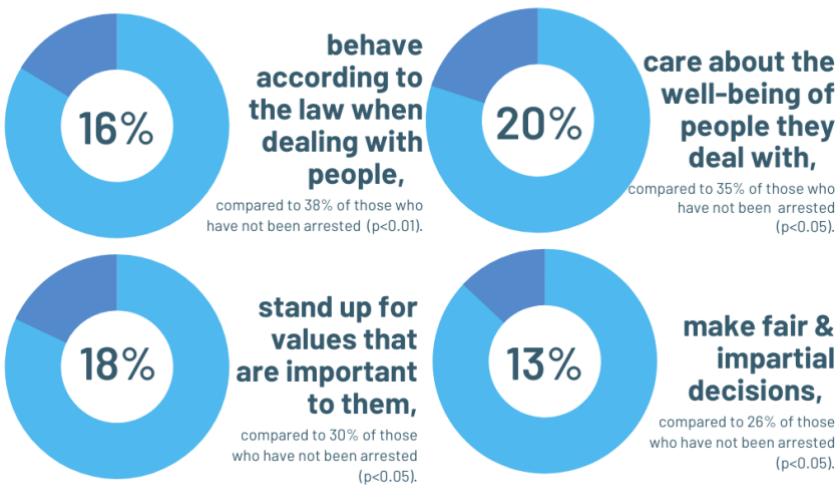
Perceptions of safety. When Yonkers residents were asked how safe they feel walking alone in their neighborhoods at night, over three-quarters of respondents reported feeling moderately, very, or extremely safe, compared to 24% who reported feeling slightly or not at all safe.

In line with prior research, feelings of safety differed by race and ethnicity, with Hispanic and Black respondents being significantly less likely than Whites to report feeling safe walking alone in their neighborhoods at night (68% and 71% vs. 82%, respectively; $p < 0.001$).^{5,6} In terms of gender differences, females were significantly less likely than males to report feeling safe walking alone in their neighborhoods at night (68% vs. 87%, respectively; $p < 0.001$).



Police Legitimacy Among Those Arrested

% of residents who have been arrested and agree or strongly agree that YPD officers....



Part II. Crime, Safety, and Policing in Relation to Police Perceptions

How are people's experiences related to their views about the police? We explored how experiences with crime, police, and safety – specifically, people's victimization and arrest experiences, and their feelings of (un)safety – relate to police legitimacy, confidence and trust, and willingness to cooperate with the police.

Police Legitimacy Among Those Who Feel Unsafe

% of residents who feel unsafe walking alone at night in their neighborhoods and agree or strongly agree that YPD officers....



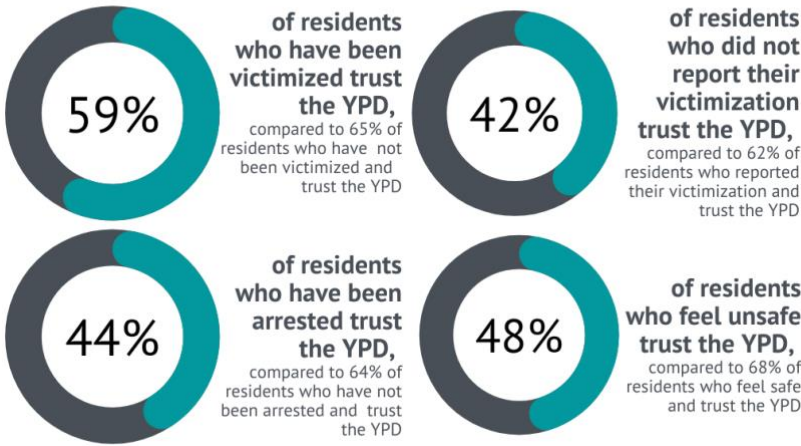
Legitimacy. Recall from Report 1 that less than 60% of all respondents indicated agreement with the notions that YPD officers behave according to the law when dealing with people, care about the well-being of people they deal with, stand up for values that are important [to respondents], and make fair and impartial decisions. Here, we found that while victimization experiences did not significantly relate to legitimacy, arrest experiences and feelings of unsafety did. On all four dimensions of legitimacy, those who have been arrested and who feel unsafe had significantly lower legitimacy ratings than those who have not been arrested and those who feel safe (all $p < 0.05$).

Trust and Confidence. Report 1 showed that most respondents (63%) trusted the YPD. In looking at sub-group differences, we found that people with victimization or arrest experiences, people who did not report their victimizations, and people who reported feeling unsafe were significantly less likely to trust the YPD than people who did not report these experiences or feelings (all $p < 0.05$). There

were also differences across sub-groups in regard to more detailed confidence and trust measures. People who have been arrested and who feel unsafe reported significantly lower levels of trust than those who have not been arrested

Relating Crime, Safety, and Police Experiences to Trust in the Police

(includes residents who report trusting the YPD most of the time or always compared to residents who report trusting the YPD about half the time, only sometimes, or never)



and who feel safe, and victims reported significantly lower agreement about the YPD trying to make their community better than non-victims (all $p < 0.05$).

Cooperation. Report 1 showed that a majority of Yonkers residents were willing to cooperate with the police on various dimensions. We again looked at sub-groups and found that while there were no statistically significant differences between victims and non-victims for reporting suspicious activity, reporting a crime, or giving the police information about a suspect if they knew where the individual was located; those who have been victimized were significantly more likely than non-victims to report being willing to attend a community meeting (52% vs. 45%, respectively; $p < 0.05$).

Significant differences were also found between sub-groups by safety and arrest. People who feel unsafe and who have been arrested were significantly less likely than people who feel safe and have not been arrested to give the police information about a suspect if they knew where the individual was located (71% vs. 77% and 57% vs. 76%, respectively; $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$) and report a crime to the police (77% vs. 84% and 66% and 83%, respectively; both $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that efforts to improve cooperation among arrested and unsafe-feeling individuals are likely well-founded.

An Aside on Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Recall from the Report 1 that there were statistically significant differences in police perceptions by race/ethnicity and gender. For example, White respondents, and males, scored highest across each police legitimacy dimension, and Black respondents, and females, scored lowest. The findings shown here suggest that while racial/ethnic minorities' disproportionately high levels of arrest and disproportionately low feelings of safety may be related to their lower ratings of legitimacy, among males, legitimacy may not be related to arrest experiences, but rather feelings of safety (as males rank higher than females on legitimacy, arrest, and safety).

Confidence in Yonkers Police

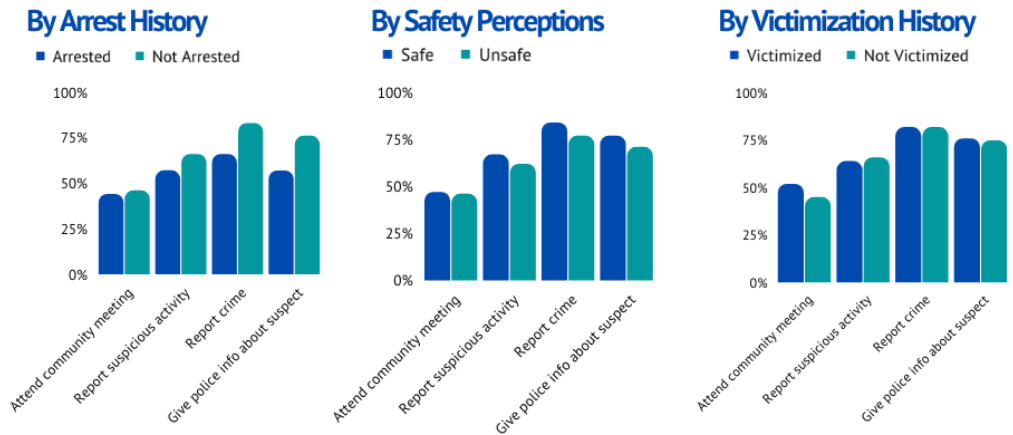
Note: These visuals only show significant differences at the 0.05 level

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



Willingness to Cooperate

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



Furthermore, the large differences in trust found between those who have and have not been arrested, and those who feel safe versus unsafe, may help to explain why racial and ethnic minorities report significantly lower trust in the police (see Report 1). Interestingly, males reported more trust than females by about 10 percentage points, though they reported higher levels of arrest and victimization.

In addition, the lower levels of confidence and trust found among those who have been arrested and who feel unsafe provide a clearer picture of why Black respondents – who are disproportionately likely to experience these – may have lower ratings of trust and confidence compared to Whites. However, males’ disproportionately high experiences of arrest and ratings of feelings of protection and respect by the YPD, equal treatment by YPD, and perceptions of the YPD as trying to better their community, again call into question the relationships between arrest and confidence and trust in the police (though, again, their higher safety ratings are in line with their higher ratings on these measures).

Cooperation willingness was lower for racial and ethnic minorities on certain dimensions, such as reporting suspicious activity (see Report 1). It may be that Black and Hispanic respondents are less likely to cooperate due to their disproportionately high perceptions of unsafety (and, for Black respondents, levels of arrest). Interestingly, however, Black residents reported being significantly more likely than White residents to attend a community meeting to discuss neighborhood problems, which may stem from their desire to feel safer (see Report 1).

Finally, while the focus of this part of the report is on residents’ formal interactions with the police (e.g., arrest, reporting crime), our finding that Black individuals are less likely than White individuals to personally know YPD officers is notable and may relate in some way to police legitimacy. In addition to further exploring the ways in which police legitimacy perceptions can be strengthened among demographic sub-groups and sub-groups of victims, offenders, and people who feel unsafe, efforts should be made to better understand the relationships between legitimacy perceptions and police acquaintanceships within and across various sub-groups.

References

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