



Portland State
UNIVERSITY

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE POLICE BUREAU AND CRIME IN PORTLAND, OREGON

2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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On September 12, 2012 the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) filed a complaint in the Federal District Court for Oregon asserting that the City of Portland has engaged in a pattern and practice of unnecessary or excessive force against persons experiencing a mental health crisis. This survey is the result of a settlement agreement between Portland's City Council and the DOJ which specified the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) develop a means of assessing public perceptions.

This report examines public perceptions of PPB across four content areas that are highlighted in the DOJ settlement agreement. Data for the report were obtained from a postal survey sent out in July of 2013 to a random sample of Portland addresses, including an oversampling of Census tracts with higher percentages of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and younger residents.

Key Findings:

- Legitimacy & Trust
 - The majority of residents believe the Portland Police are fair and trustworthy.
 - Most residents believe they, or people like them, would be treated respectfully by local police officers.
 - Most residents would report a crime to PPB and help PPB identify a person who committed a crime in their neighborhood.
 - Less favorable attitudes about legitimacy and trust in Portland police officers were found among younger residents and among racial/ethnic minorities.
- Evaluation of PPB's Performance
 - A majority of residents rated PPB's performance over the past year as "good" to "very good" in several areas including fighting crime, dealing with neighborhood problems, being available, and understanding community concerns.
 - Weaker performance ratings were given for building community trust, diversifying workforce, communicating with the public, involving community in crime prevention efforts, and training related to working with diverse racial/ethnic populations and helping people experiencing a mental health crisis.
- PPB's Use of Force
 - More than two-thirds of residents felt that PPB is doing a "fair" to "very good" job reducing use of force by police officers
 - About one quarter of the residents surveyed believed that Portland's police officers use more physical force than necessary when dealing with community members in general.
 - Almost one half of those surveyed believe that local police use more force than necessary against racial or ethnic minorities; and half of respondents endorsed this opinion for people experiencing a mental health crisis.

- Perceptions of Safety

- The majority of residents in Portland feel safe in their neighborhood during the day and at night, even when walking alone.
- Fewer people felt safe walking alone downtown during the day and at night.

Based on these survey findings the research team offers two general categories of recommendations for PPB to enhance relations with Portland residents: *1) Ensure Quality Police-Public Encounters* and *2) Increase Public Knowledge of PPB's Efforts and Successes*. Public perceptions of police are informed through direct personal encounters with officers, but also through indirect sources like friends, neighbors, family, and media. It is important, therefore for the Bureau to expand their efforts to train, monitor, and reinforce officers for engaging in appropriate communication practices and problem-solving techniques during all public contacts. In addition, the City and Bureau should take a more active role in highlighting positive organizational changes that are being made in response to the DOJ settlement agreement.