

SYSTEMSTATS

North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center

Governor's Crime Commission

North Carolina Citizens' Perception of Crime and Victimization

Introduction

Results of the 1999 North Carolina Citizens' Perception of Crime and Victimization Survey indicate that the criminal justice system in North Carolina is perceived by many to be effective in controlling crime. In 1999, 51.0 percent of respondents indicated that the criminal justice system was effective, up from 36.7 percent in 1997.

Moreover, North Carolina citizens believe schools are safe places or at least as safe as any other public area. Only 11 percent of respondents indicated that they felt the schools were unsafe places. In addition, only 7.2 percent of parents of school-aged children indicated that their child had been a victim of school violence. In the home, 77.3 percent of respondents indicated that they feel safe in their own home from people who want to take their possessions. Likewise, 89.7 percent of respondents feel safe in their communities in the daytime and 58.9 percent feel safe at night.



Statistics show the criminal justice system is effective in controlling crime, up from 40 percent in 1997.

Criminal Victimization

Victimization Trends

Criminal victimization in North Carolina has remained fairly constant over the period 1991 to 1999 according to the North Carolina Citizens' Perception of Crime and Victimization Survey. In 1991, 0.8 percent of respondents indicated that something had been taken by force. This level increased to 1.2 percent in 1999. Likewise, both in 1991 and in 1999, only 1.4 percent of respondents indicated that they had been knifed, shot at, or attacked. Table 1 shows the number of victimizations including percent of those sampled for each crime type included. The largest percent of criminal victimization involved persons reporting that someone had broken-into their home/car or attempted to break in (Table 1). In 1999, 10.6 percent of respondents reported such a crime occurring.



The largest percent of criminal victimization involved persons reporting that someone had broken-into their home/car or attempted to break in.

	Something taken by force	Robbed by force	Knifed, shot-at, attacked	Hit, attacked, beat up	Threatened	Home, car broken into	Sexual assault (women only)
Yes	36 (1.2%)	30 (1.0%)	43 (1.4%)	51 (1.7%)	105 (3.4%)	324 (10.6%)	7 (0.5%)
No	3018 (98.8%)	3024 (99.0%)	3011 (98.6%)	3003 (98.3%)	2949 (96.6%)	2730 (89.4%)	1481 (99.5%)

Table 1: Number of victimizations by type, 1999

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Victim Characteristics - gender

The characteristics of crime victims differ based on the type of criminal victimization (Tables 2 and 3). Of those reporting being victimized, males and females had similar victimization levels for most crimes except

being knifed, shot at, or attacked and being threatened with a weapon whereby males had a significantly higher level of victimization (Table 2).

Non-white respondents between the ages of 25 and 34 indicated higher victimization rates. Males and females had similar victimization rates.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of victims, 1999

Valid percent of victims by gender, age, race, and Hispanic origin - 1999								
Characteristic of victim	Percent of sample	Something taken by force	Robbed by force	Knifed, shot-at, attacked	Hit, attacked, beat up	Threatened with weapon	Home, car broken into	Sexual assault (women only)
Gender								
Male	51.3	47.2	56.7	76.7	56.9	64.8	52.2	-
Female	48.7	52.8	43.3	23.3	43.1	35.2	47.8	-
Age								
18-24	7.5	11.1	10.0	30.2	15.7	20.0	12.1	14.3
25-34	18.3	47.2	43.3	32.6	31.4	27.6	23.9	28.6
35-49	32.9	25.0	30.0	32.6	39.2	35.2	36.0	57.1
50-64	24.1	11.1	10.0	4.7	9.8	9.5	19.6	0.0
65-93	17.2	5.6	6.7	0.0	3.9	7.6	8.4	0.0
Race								
White	78.5	69.4	56.7	55.8	66.7	68.6	78.3	100.0
Black	18.5	22.2	36.7	34.9	23.4	22.9	17.7	0.0
Other	3.0	8.4	6.6	9.3	3.9	8.5	4.0	0.0
Hispanic origin								
Hispanic	1.7	8.6	6.7	14.0	4.0	5.8	2.5	14.3
Non-Hispanic	98.3	91.4	93.3	86.0	96.0	94.2	97.5	85.7

Victim Characteristics - age

Persons over age 50 were less likely to have been victimized in all offenses examined relative to their percent of the population (Table 2). Persons between ages 25 and 34 were most likely to have been victimized, followed by persons aged 35-49. The majority of women who were the victims of sexual assault fall in the 35-49 age category.

Victim Characteristics - Race and Hispanic origin

Non-white respondents (black and other) indicated higher victimization rates than their proportion of the population in all crimes except having their cars broken into and sexual assault where whites had higher rates of victimization (Table 2). Similarly, Hispanic respondents were more likely to be victims of crime in all categories reported as compared to their proportion of the population. Also, Hispanic respondents were most likely to be victims of being knifed, shot at, or attacked and sexual assault.

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Victim Characteristics - income

Income had varying effects on the percent of persons reporting victimization (Table 3). Persons with low income (less than \$15,000) were less likely to be victims of monetary crimes; something taken by force, robbed by force, and home/ car broken into. However, persons

of low income were more likely to be victims of violent crimes such as being knifed, shot at or beat up and being threatened with a weapon. Persons with high incomes (\$50,000 or more) were less likely to be victims of violent crime but more likely to have their home or car broken into.

Persons with high incomes were less likely to be victims of violent crimes. Persons with graduate degrees were less likely to be crime victims.

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of victims, 1999

Valid percent of victims by income, education, and region, 1999								
Characteristic of victim	Percent of sample	Something taken by force	Robbed by force	Knifed, shot-at, attacked	Hit, attacked, beat up	Threatened with weapon	Home, car broken into	Sexual assault (women only)
Income								
Less than \$15,000	9.0	0.0	8.0	16.2	8.9	11.2	7.6	0.0
\$15,000 - \$24,999	16.9	21.4	28.0	27.0	22.2	19.4	14.8	42.9
\$25,000 - \$49,999	43.1	53.6	32.0	29.7	48.9	48.0	42.4	28.6
\$50,000 or more	31.1	25.0	32.0	27.0	20.0	21.4	35.2	28.6
Education								
Some grade school	3.6	5.6	6.7	2.3	2.0	5.7	1.2	0.0
Some high school	12.0	16.7	6.7	18.6	21.6	8.6	14.2	0.0
High school	24.7	25.0	30.0	30.2	27.5	32.4	21.0	0.0
Some college	14.1	13.9	13.3	16.3	17.6	22.9	13.0	28.6
Voc. Training	2.3	2.8	3.3	2.3	2.0	2.9	3.4	0.0
Assoc. degree	12.8	13.9	6.7	2.3	15.7	11.4	15.4	42.9
Bach. degree	20.1	22.2	30.0	18.6	9.8	11.4	20.4	28.6
Grad. degree	10.4	0.0	3.3	9.3	3.9	4.8	11.4	0.0
Region								
Eastern	23.5	19.4	26.7	18.6	15.7	18.1	22.5	28.6
Central	53.9	50.0	46.7	53.5	58.8	51.4	52.8	57.1
Western	22.5	30.6	26.7	27.9	25.5	30.5	24.7	14.3

Victim Characteristics - education

The level of education also affected a respondent's victimization rate (Table 3). Persons with graduate degrees were the least likely to be crime victims relative to their percent of the population in all crime types except having their home or car broken into. However, the effects of education differ based on crime type for all other educational attainment levels.

Victim Characteristics - region

The region in which the respondent lives also affects victimization levels (Table 3). North Carolina was divided into three regions representing the east, central, and western portions of the state. The effect of region differed based on crime type. The eastern portion of the state had a higher proportion of

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robbery by force and sexual assaults than their proportion of the population. The central portion of the state had a larger number of assaults and sexual assaults than their proportion of the population, Finally, the western portion of the state had higher rates of victimization for all crimes except sexual assault.

Victim/ Offender Relationships

The relationship between the victim and the offender indicates that most crimes, except sexual assault, are committed by strangers or unknown persons (Table 4). Over half of all cases where a person was knifed, shot-at or attacked with a weapon, the offender was a stranger. Over 80 percent of break-ins were committed by strangers. The offenses of being hit, attacked or beat up and threatened with a weapon had a larger degree of variation in the victim- offender relationship. In cases of sexual assault, family members constitute the majority of offenders followed by well-known persons.

Perception of Crime

Trends in Perception

Although reported victimization has remained fairly constant from 1997 to 1999, the perception of violent crime in the community had decreased. In 1997 only 5.8 percent of respondents reported that they believe violent crime in their community had decreased over the past three years. Whereas in 1999, 12.6 percent of respondents indicated that violent crime had decreased over the prior three years. Similarly, in 1997, 55.7 percent of respondents indicated that over the prior three years violent crime had increased, whereas, in 1999, only 38.9 percent of respondents indicated an increase in violent crime. Finally, over the period 1997 to 1999 the percent of persons indicating that crime remained the same increased by almost 10 percent (from 39% in 1997 to 48% in 1999).

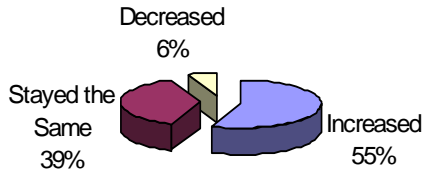
Table 4: Victim-offender relationships, percent of victims by relationship type

Characteristic of offender	Knifed, shot-at, attacked	Hit, attacked, beat up	Threatened with weapon	Home, car broken into	Sexual assault (women only)
Stranger/ unknown person	55.8%	33.3%	33.3%	80.9%	14.3%
Casual acquaintance	23.3%	15.7%	31.4%	9.6%	14.3%
Well-known person	16.3%	31.4%	26.7%	7.1%	28.6%
Family member	4.7%	19.6%	8.6%	2.5%	42.9%

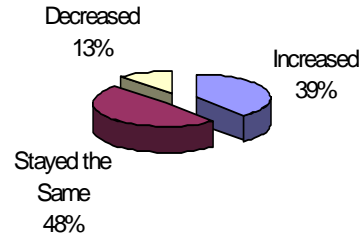
Most crimes are committed by strangers. North Carolina citizens perceive the trend of crime as either decreasing or remaining the same over the next three years.

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Perception of violent crime over the prior three years, 1997



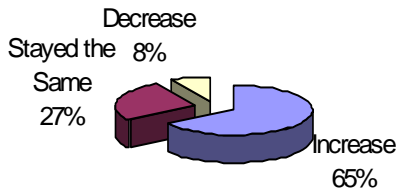
Perception of violent crime over the prior three years, 1999



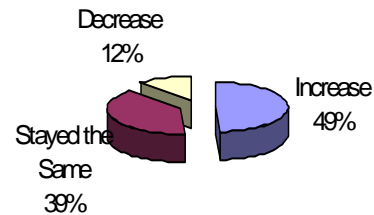
North Carolina citizens perceive the trend of crime as either decreasing or remaining the same over the next three years. In 1997, 65.3 percent of respondents indicated that they believed violent crime would increase over the next three years. In 1999 this dropped to only 48.8 percent of respondents believing there will be an increase in violent crime.

North Carolina citizens worry a great deal about personal safety from crime or criminals.

Perception of violent crime over the next three years, 1997

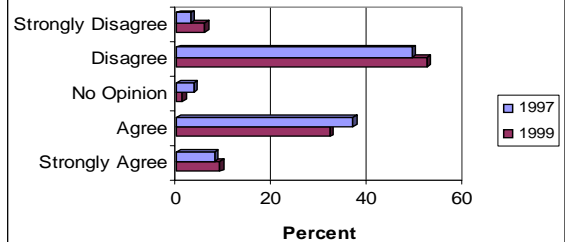


Perception of violent crime over the next three years, 1999



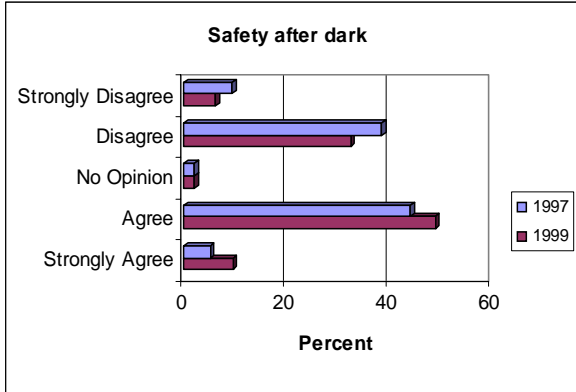
Although respondents indicated that they perceived a continuing decrease in violent crime, there are mixed findings related to the level of worry related to personal safety. More respondents in 1999 than in 1997 strongly agreed with the statement, "I worry a great deal about my personal safety from crime or criminals." However, more respondents also strongly disagreed with the statement in 1999.

Worry about personal safety

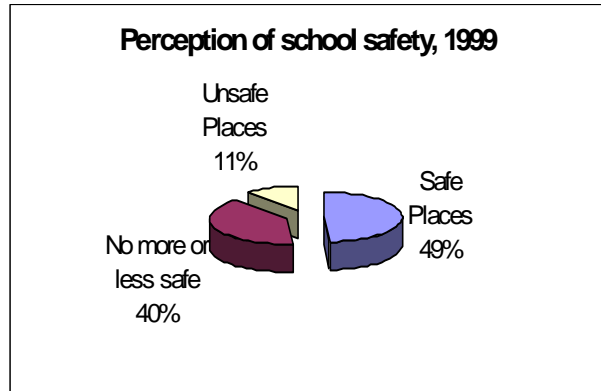


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Perceived crime at night has also decreased over the period 1997 to 1999. A larger percentage of respondents reported in 1999 that they feel safe going anywhere in their community or neighborhood after dark than in 1997.

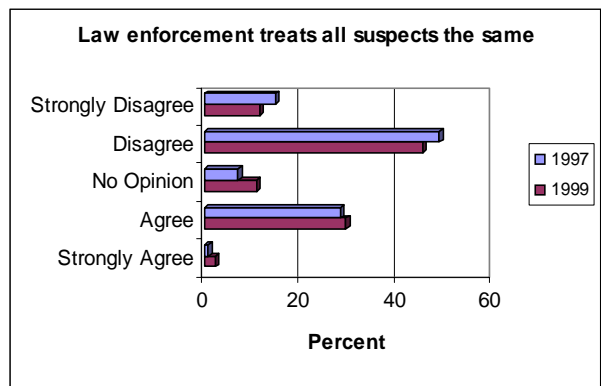
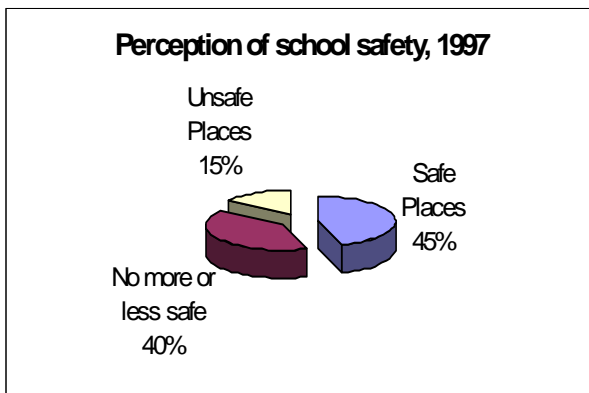


In addition to an increased perception of safety within the community, citizens of North Carolina also reported a greater perception of safety in the schools. In 1997, 14.9 percent of respondents reported that the schools in their community were unsafe places, whereas in 1999 only 11.2 percent indicated that the schools were perceived to be unsafe.



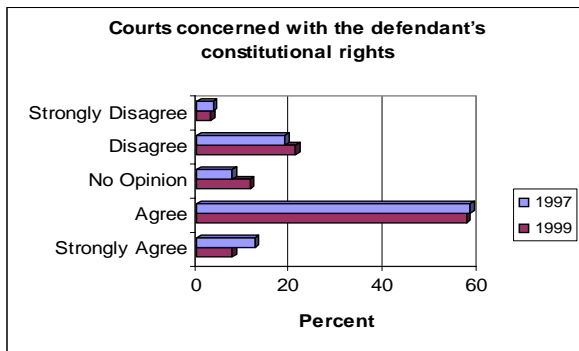
In addition to the perception of school safety, the number of respondents with school aged children indicating that their child had been the victim of school violence has decreased. In 1997, 8.1 percent of respondents had children who were victimized. In 1999, this level dropped to 7.3 percent.

Although, opinions regarding law enforcement officers treating all suspects the same are more negative than desired, there has been improvement from 1997 to 1999. In 1997, less than one percent strongly agreed with the statement, "Law enforcement officers treat all suspects the same." In 1999, 2.4 percent of respondents strongly agreed with the statement. However, it is important to note that the majority of respondents do not believe that law enforcement treats all suspects the same.



North Carolina Citizens' Perception of Crime and Victimization

The perception of the courts protecting the constitutional rights of defendants has decreased from 1997 to 1999. In 1997, 70.3 percent of respondents indicated that they agreed that the courts showed concern, however, in 1999, only 64.8 percent agreed with that statement. Although the perception of court concern for constitutional rights has decreased, the majority of respondents believe that the courts are concerned with defendants' rights.



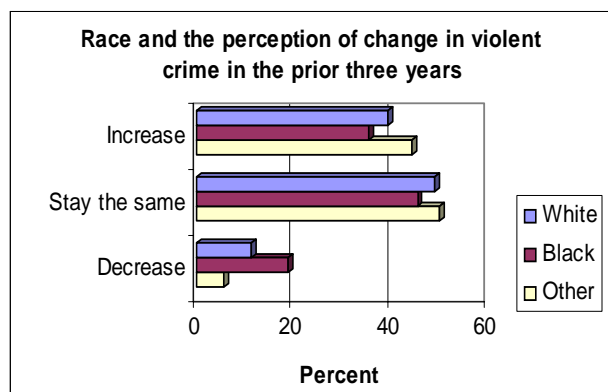
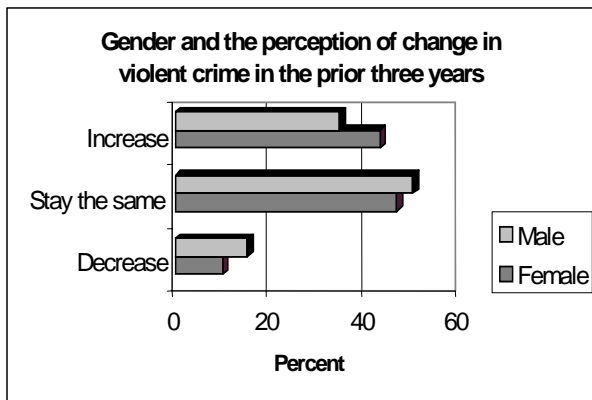
Demographic Characteristics and Perception

Personal perception related to crime and the criminal justice system is dependent on a number of factors including gender, race, education, income, and age.

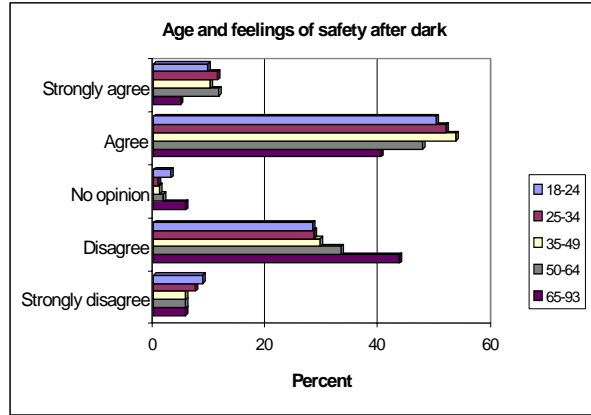
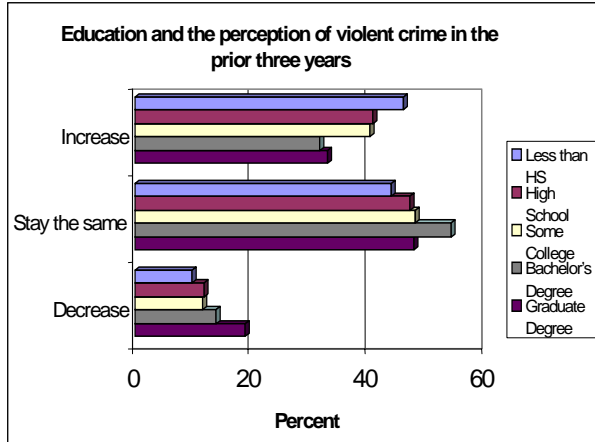
A respondent's perception as to whether there has been a change in the number of violent crimes over the prior three year period differs for males and females. Of the female respondents, 43.3 percent indicated that there has been an increase in violent crime over the past three years, compared to 34.7 percent of males.

Race also has a significant effect on whether or not a respondent indicated that violent crime has increased. Persons of other races (44.3%) and whites (39.5%) perceived violent crime increasing more so than black respondents (35.4%). However, in all race categories, the majority of respondents indicated that violent crime has remained the same.

The effect of education on the perceived level of violent crime indicates that persons with higher educational levels are less likely to believe violent crime has increased than persons with lower levels of education.

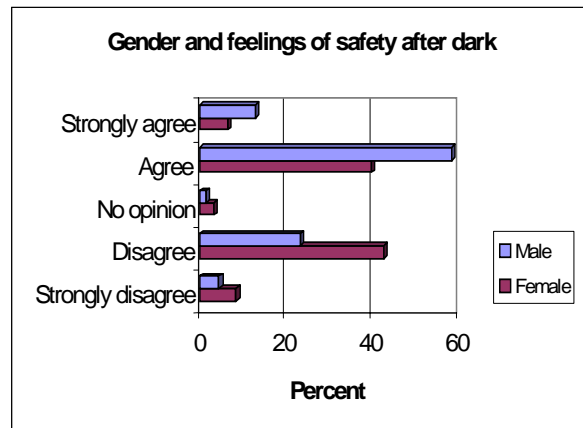
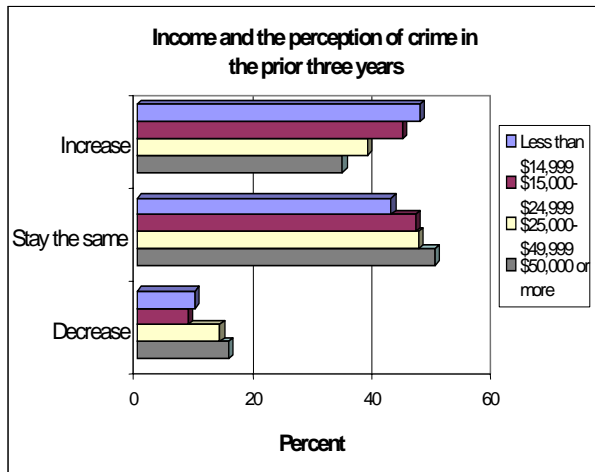


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When considering income levels, persons in households with incomes less than \$25,000 were less likely to indicate that there has been a decrease in violent crime.

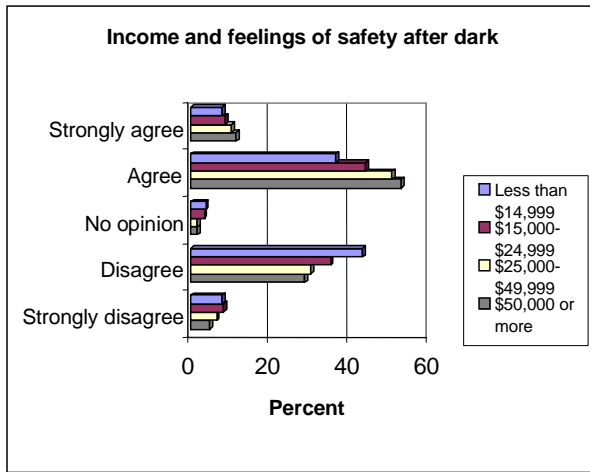
Gender of the respondent also impacted the respondents perceived safety at night in their community. Female respondents were more likely to feel unsafe when compared to male respondents. When asked if the respondent feels safe going anywhere in their community or neighborhood after dark, 50.6% of female respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement whereas, only 27.5% of males disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.



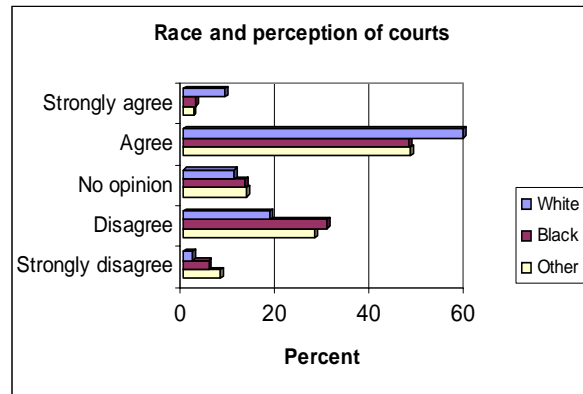
A person's perceived level of safety in the community is dependent on a number of factors including age. When asked if the respondent feels safe going anywhere in their community or neighborhoods after dark, older respondents were more likely to disagree with this statement than younger respondents.

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Income also had a significant effect on whether or not respondents felt safe in their communities at night. Persons with higher incomes were more likely to feel safe in their neighborhoods than persons with low incomes.

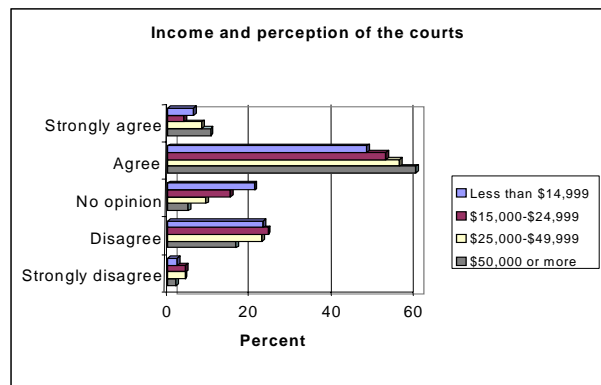
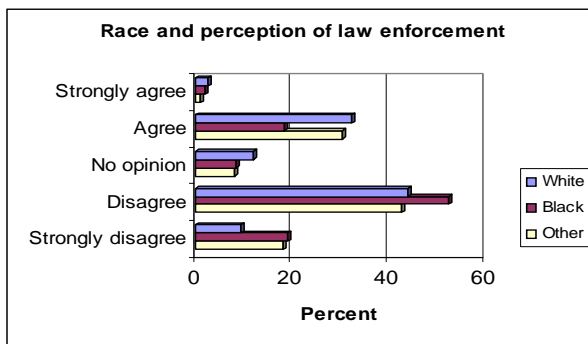


Perception of the courts protecting the constitutional rights of defendant's also differs based on several demographics including race and income. Although the majority of respondents agree that the courts are concerned with the constitutional rights of defendants, 36.1% of black respondents disagree that the courts are concerned. This is compared to only 20.6% of white respondents. Persons reporting another race had perceptions similar to black respondents.



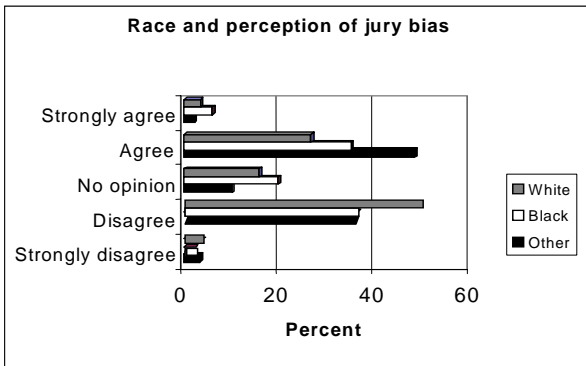
Citizens' perception of law enforcement differs substantially based on race. When asked if law enforcement officers treat all suspects the same, black and other minority respondents were more likely to disagree with the statement. Also noteworthy, white respondents were more likely than other races to have no opinion on the question (11.8%). However, over half of all respondents indicated that they perceive that police do not treat all suspects the same.

Persons with lower incomes also tend to disagree that the courts are concerned with the constitutional rights of defendants. Also noteworthy, a larger percent of lower income respondents indicated they had no opinion on the issue. When excluding persons with no opinion, 31.7% of respondents with incomes below \$15,000 indicated that they disagree or strongly disagree that the courts protect the constitutional rights of defendants compared to only 18% of persons with incomes over \$50,000 disagreeing with the statement.

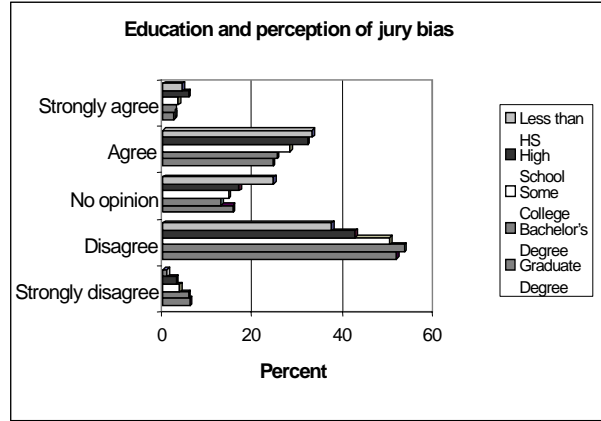


North Carolina Citizens' Perception of Crime and Victimization

The perception of bias in juries was also influenced by the race and education level of the respondent. Black respondents as well as other minorities were more likely to indicate that juries were biased than whites. Over half of white respondents (53.9%) disagreed with the statement that juries are biased as compared to 39.2% of black respondents and 39.4% of other respondents.



The education level of the respondent also has an effect on the perception of bias in juries. Persons with lower levels of education are more likely to perceive that there is bias in juries as compared to persons with higher income levels.



This study was conducted by Dr. Michael Vasu, Meredith B. Weinstein and Matthew Zingraff Ph.D. at North Carolina State University and was completed in late 1999. 3,000 people were randomly selected, within each of the three geographic regions of the state, and voluntarily answered the phone survey questions. Funds for this study were provided by the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Federal Bureau of Assistance. A larger and more complete report can be obtained from the Governor's Crime Commission.

Persons with lower levels of education are more likely to perceive that there is bias in juries as compared to persons with higher income levels.

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SYSTEMSTATS

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Governor's Crime Commission
Department of Crime Control and Public Safety
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The Governor's Crime Commission was established in 1977 by the North Carolina General Assembly under G.S. 143B-479. Its primary duty is "to be the chief advisory body to the Governor and the Secretary of the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety for the development and implementation of criminal justice policy." The Crime Commission is always open to comments and suggestions from the general public as well as criminal justice officials. Please contact us and let us know your thoughts and feelings on the information contained in this publication or on any other criminal justice issue of concern to you.

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