

AZ Views

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Arizona Indicators Panel

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What Do Arizonans Think About Crime, Safety, and Trust?

Any community's perception of its levels of crime and public safety is critical to its functioning in virtually all domains, from neighborhood cohesion to political stability to everyday commerce. It reflects the fundamental concern about personal and property security that has informed all societies in every age. Arizona today is no different: Majorities of all panelists statewide named crime/public safety as among the chief indicators of "quality of life" and as among the top issues their officials should address. Nearly half said they thought crime was getting worse. But looking beneath these overall views reveals a pair of seeming paradoxes. The first is that, despite their strong concerns about crime, most respondents also said that their own neighborhoods are relatively safe places, and that they felt safe walking alone at night. This could reflect a belief that even crime occurring elsewhere can have an impact—social, political, economic—on one's own neighborhood.

The second paradox is that, generally speaking, those Arizonans who are less personally liable to become victims seem more emphatic in their concern about crime than those who seem more likely to be victimized. In short, older, majority-group Arizonans and those with higher incomes and education levels and homes in Maricopa County (not including Phoenix) were more likely than other respondents to report concerns about crime and safety—even though most such individuals have

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Data reported here come from the Arizona Indicators Panel. This is a *statewide* representative sample of Arizonans. Panel members have agreed to be surveyed online several times a year across many topic areas. This enables great depth and exploration of topics with the same sample group and solves some of the problems experienced in random sample telephone surveys. The results reported here come from two rounds of panel questions and were collected in May and July 2008. The results summarized here contain the statistically significant differences on selected demographic characteristics of panel participants that can be found at the end of this report.

Arizona Indicators is a partnership of Arizona State University, *The Arizona Republic*, Arizona Community Foundation, Valley of the Sun United Way, and Arizona Department of Commerce.

been repeatedly found by other research to be generally less likely to become actual victims. Younger, non-working, and minority-group panelists with low incomes and little education were less likely to express concern about crime, even though they tended to feel less safe in their areas and were more likely to report that they actually had been victimized. Researchers call this finding the “fear/risk paradox.”

Past research has repeatedly shown the importance of perception—note the “broken windows” theory—in people’s evaluation of crime and public safety. It may simply be that older respondents feel more vulnerable to crime and other misfortune. It may be that people with higher incomes (and presumably greater assets) worry more because they feel they have “more to lose” relative to others. Perhaps the results reflect a resigned acceptance by lower-income and minority-group residents of a certain level of crime as inevitable and thus less remarkable. A related explanation would be that lower-income, less-educated residents have other pressing concerns that occupy them as much as crime does. Another frequently voiced explanation is that most of us form views on crime based in part on its prominent coverage in the news media, so we worry about crime as an abstract danger even while our own neighborhoods seem relatively crime-free.

Crime and Public Safety Are Much on Arizonans’ Minds

“Public safety and crime” ranked number one, reflecting the prominent place that this issue occupies in the minds of the majority of state residents. Further analysis showed that Phoenix residents and older residents were more likely to cite crime as of top importance. Younger, less-educated, and lower-income residents were less concerned about public safety and crime.

- Panelists earning \$30K or less were less likely to choose crime as of high importance than those earning \$30K-\$60K or those earning \$60K and above.
- Non-working panelists were less likely to name crime as of high importance than working ones or retirees.
- Panelists with a high school education or less were less likely to choose crime as being of high importance than those with some college or with a college degree.
- Panelists under 30 were less likely to choose crime as important than older ones, while those 60 or over were more likely to do so than younger groups.

Rate the following on their importance (10 is highest) to quality of life in the area where you live.	
Quality of life item	Average
Public safety and crime	8.4

n=642

What one thing would you suggest to improve the quality of life for everyone in the area where you live?			
Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Economy	96	15	18%
Transportation	83	13	16%
Criminal Justice and Public Safety	54	8	10%

n=595

Arizonans were united across most demographic groups in choosing “Criminal Justice and Public Safety” in third place. That is, old and young residents, more- and less-educated ones, urban and rural ones, and those at different income levels all cited crime as of high importance. However,

majority-group members (14%) were more likely than minority-group members (3%) to name crime as a key element of improving quality of life.

Looking ahead in the next year or so, where do you feel are the most important issues that leaders should be working on to solve in Arizona? Please list the most important choice first.						
Suggestion	1 st Choice		2 nd Choice		3 rd Choice	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Immigration	164	27%	93	16%	44	8%
Economy	123	21%	114	20%	123	22%
Health	90	15%	72	12%	33	6%
Crime and Safety	65	11%	59	10%	49	9%

n=636-650

The current controversy over immigration and concern with the slumping economy were foremost in the minds of respondents to this question, though many Arizonans of all types cited crime and safety as among their major issues. This was especially true of majority-group and employed residents with middle and higher incomes.

- Majority-group panelists were more likely (50%) than minority-group ones (36%) to choose crime and safety among their top three.
- Non-working panelists were less likely (31%) to choose crime and safety among their top three than working people (51%) or retirees (44%).
- Lower-income panelists were less likely (28%) to choose crime and safety than middle-income ones (49%) or upper-income ones (51%).

Though Concerned, Most Arizonans Feel Safe At Home

Few Arizonans think that the crime problem is getting better where they live. Nearly half say it's getting worse—despite the fact that most or all official measures of crime have reported that crime rates either continue to drop in America or at least are not appreciably growing (the latter would agree with the “staying about the same” choice above). Majority-group residents, women, and Arizonans living outside of the two metro areas were most concerned about crime.

- College graduates (61%) were more likely to say crime remained the same than those with some college (44%) or with a high school diploma or less (39%).
- Majority-group residents were more likely (50%) than minority-group members (40%) to say that crime was getting worse.
- Panelists living outside of Maricopa County and the City of Tucson were least likely (1%) to say that crime is getting better, compared to Phoenix (11%), Maricopa County outside Phoenix (9%), and Tucson (9%); they were also the most likely (53%) to say that crime is getting worse.

In the area where you live, would you say each of the following items is getting, better, staying about the same, or getting worse?			
Issue	Getting better	Staying about the same	Getting worse
Crime	7%	46%	46%

n=637

Nearly 3 out of 4 respondents said they felt very safe or somewhat safe walking at night in their neighborhoods. Further analysis found that women and young adults tended to feel less safe than men and older residents. On the other hand, upper-income Arizonans were more likely to say they felt safe than those lower down on the income scale.

- Non-working people were more likely (14%) to say they felt “very unsafe” than working people (6%) or retirees (7%).
- More highly educated people tended to feel safer than less-educated ones. For example, 40% of college graduates said they felt “very safe” compared to 13% of those with a high school diploma or less.
- Majority-group residents reported higher percentages of feeling both “very safe” (29%) and “not at all safe” (10%) than minority-group members, 19% of whom said they felt “very safe” and 5% of whom said they felt “not at all safe.”
- One third (33%) of Maricopa County residents outside of Phoenix said they felt “very safe”, compared to 15% of Phoenix residents.

How safe do you feel walking alone at night in your neighborhood?	
Very safe	25%
Somewhat safe	49%
Somewhat unsafe	17%
Not at all safe	8%
Subtotal	98%
Missing	2%
Total	100%

n=639

Again, males and upper-income respondents were more likely than women or than middle- or lower-income respondents to say that they felt safe walking after dark. Panelists with a college degree or higher were also more likely to feel safe than those with less education. Those with less than a high-school education were more likely than more educated respondents to say that they did not feel safe.

- Panelists under 29 were more likely (39%) than older ones to say they did not feel safe walking at night, and were less likely (61%) than older ones to say they did feel safe.
- Panelists living outside of Maricopa County or Tucson were more likely (86%) than those in Phoenix (67%), the rest of Maricopa (78%), or Tucson (66%) to say they felt safe walking after dark.

Do you feel safe walking down your street after dark?	
Yes	No
75%	25%

n=552

Some Arizonans Are More Likely to Become Victims

As elsewhere, property crime was more common in Arizona than violent crime, and few respondents reported being victims of violence. When violence was reported, minority-group residents, women, and lower-income residents were more likely than others to be victims. As for property crime, the overall responses show that larceny (“money or property stolen”) is the most common offense—again, as elsewhere. Here, younger residents, working people, and minority-group residents were more likely to be victims.

- Residents aged 30 to 44 were more likely than other age groups to say they had money or property stolen.
- People aged 18 to 29 were more likely to report a home break-in than residents over 30.
- Minority-group residents were more likely than majority-group members to report a home break-in.

In the past year, have you or a member of your family had...?	
Money or property stolen	14%
Other crime	10%
Home broken into	5%
Physically attacked or mugged	3%
Car stolen	1%

n=646-650

- Younger people were more likely than those 30 and older to report being the victim of some other crime.

Some Trust Their Neighbors More Than Others

Just more than half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their neighbors are trustworthy, although nearly a third thought otherwise and 16% indicated that they didn’t know their neighbors well enough to judge. Younger and lower-income Arizonans were least likely to agree.

- Lower-income panelists were less likely (0.9%) to “strongly agree” than middle-income (7%) or higher-income (3%) people; they also were more likely (22%) to “strongly disagree” than middle- (7%) or higher-income panelists (4%).

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
People in this neighborhood can be trusted	4%	50%	22%	8%	16%

n=547-552

- Younger residents were less likely to “agree” (23%) than older residents, and more likely (58%) to “disagree.”
- Panelists living in Maricopa County outside of Phoenix were more likely (9%) than those from Phoenix (3%), Tucson (2%) or the rest of the state (1%) to “strongly agree.”

A high percentage of Arizonans said their area is known for being safe, which is related to, but different from, whether or not it is safe. While 79% is a high number, it’s worth noting that more than one in five Arizonans believe that they’re living in an unsafe area.

- Upper-income panelists were more likely (92%) to say their area was known as safe than middle- (79%) or lower-income (50%) ones.
- Phoenix panelists were more likely (40%) to say their area does not have a reputation as a safe place than other Maricopa County panelists (10%), Tucson residents (26%), or panelists living in the rest of the state (10%).

Does your area have a reputation for being a safe place?	
Yes	No
79%	21%

n=548

Most Tend to Trust Their Leaders

Police officers received the strongest ratings of all the officials listed, a result that is in keeping with most survey findings. Healthcare professionals, school officials and religious figures also rated well. Panelists were less enthusiastic about businesses, but reserved their severest judgment for elected officials—again, a common result in such surveys.

- Female panelists (18%) were more likely than males (6%) to say they trusted police officers “not much.”
- Panelists under 30 were less likely (65%) to say they trusted police than those aged 30-44 (93%), aged 44-59 (79%), or aged 60+ (96%).

- Upper-income panelists were more likely (94%) to say they trusted the police than middle-income ones (77%) or lower-income ones (81%).
- Panelists living in Tucson (3%) and outside of Tucson and Maricopa County (1%) were less likely to say they trusted their local elected officials than those in Phoenix (8%) or elsewhere in Maricopa (15%).
- Panelists with less than a high school education were more likely (51%) to trust local schools than those with a diploma (20%), with some college (21%) or with a college degree or higher (30%).
- Lower-income panelists were more likely (69%) to trust local businesses than either middle-income (37%) or upper-income (58%) ones.

How much do you trust each of the following to act in the best interests of your community?	Great Deal	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all	Don't know
Local police officers	44%	41%	12%	2%	1%
Local hospitals	29%	52%	8%	2%	10%
Local schools	25%	47%	13%	5%	9%
Local religious organizations	24%	42%	16%	3%	16%
Local nonprofit community organizations	19%	53%	16%	1%	11%
Local businesses	14%	53%	22%	4%	8%
Local elected officials	7%	47%	31%	7%	7%

n=545-551

Key Questions Remain

The responses to these questions closely track those recorded in Morrison Institute's Quality of Life series—consisting primarily of public opinion surveys administered four times in Maricopa County between 1997 and 2004. These surveys found that Valley residents ranked “public safety and crime” as first, second, or third in importance out of nine issues. In 2004, 85% of respondents called fighting crime very important to their quality of life. The surveys also reported slight majorities of Valley residents responding that crime is getting worse. Nearly half—46%—said they had been, or knew someone who was, a crime victim in the previous year. As in the above responses, women worried more about crime than men, and older residents more than younger ones. In addition, national opinion polls have repeatedly found that most Americans feel safe at home and in their neighborhoods.

The findings of this survey touch upon much that remains to be learned about how people form their opinions about crime and public safety. Why is it that people seem to fear crime in general while considering their homes and neighborhoods safe? Why should people less likely to become victims consider crime as more of a critical issue than those more likely to be victimized? Why, as research shows, do most people have such an inaccurate picture of actual crime incidence? Other research has also linked variations in fear of crime to age, socioeconomic status, location, and other factors like those found in this research. The answers to these questions are important: While Arizonans' views about crime may not be as significant as the state's actual incidence of crime, it exerts great

influence over how we respond to this critical public issue, and has extensive effects upon neighborhood stability, public trust, and virtually all other aspects of civic life.

Panel Data Participant Demographic Variables ¹					
Demographic Characteristics		First round – May 2008		Second round – June 2008	
Gender	Male	309	48%	268	48%
	Female	342	52%	288	52%
Age	18-29	98	15%	75	14%
	30-44	210	32%	188	34%
	45-59	184	28%	156	28%
	60+	158	24%	136	24%
Education	High school diploma or less	267	41%	241	43%
	Some college	208	32%	162	29%
	College degree+	176	27%	152	27%
Household Income	Up to \$30K	156	24%	11	20%
	\$30-60K	224	34%	198	36%
	\$60K+	271	42%	248	45%
Race/ethnicity ²	Majority	401	62%	365	66%
	Minority	250	38%	191	34%
Employment ³	Working	371	57%	306	55%
	Not-working	152	23%	145	26%
	Retired	128	20%	105	19%
Region ⁴	Phoenix	149	23%	158	29%
	Rest of Maricopa	195	30%	167	30%
	Tucson	134	21%	88	16%
	Rest of state	170	26%	140	25%
Total		n=651		n=556	

¹ These data are weighted to be representative of Arizona as a whole.

² Majority comprises “White, non-Hispanic” (61.6%); Minority comprises, “Black non-Hispanic” (4.1%), “Other, non-Hispanic” (7.0%), “Hispanic” (26.0%), “two-races, non-Hispanic” (0.9%). Percentages are for first round.

³ Working comprises “Working as a paid employee” (49.7%) and “Self-employed” (7.3%); Not Working comprises “Not working, looking for work”(8.4%), “Not working, disabled” (7.8%), and “Not working, other” (7.1%); Retired is 19.6%. Percentages are for first round.

⁴ Regions were defined from a combination of zip code and county information. Phoenix was defined as all of the panelists living in Phoenix zip codes (23%) and Rest of Maricopa as all of the Maricopa County residents not in Phoenix (30%). Tucson was defined as all of the panelists in Tucson's zip codes (21%) and Rest of State as any panelists not living in the other three categories (26%). Percentages are for first round.



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