

2008 Public Survey of Policing Services
A COMPAS Report to the Ottawa Police Service



COMPAS Inc.
Public Opinion and Customer Research

Highlights Report

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Purpose

- ❑ This document reports on the findings from an Ottawa Police Services (OPS) mail-back survey among a representative sample of approximately 2,500 residents of the City of Ottawa with fieldwork completed in January 2009.
- ❑ The OPS distributed the 2008 Public Survey questionnaire to 7,217 households selected by postal code, 304 in each of 23 wards, plus an extra 75 in each of Rideau-Vanier, Somerset and Capital wards to ensure adequate response in those particular wards). Completed surveys were received in December and early January and analyzed at the division, district, and ward level geography.
- ❑ A total of 2,508 individuals participated in the survey, representing a high response rate of 35%. By convention, surveys of 2,508 respondents are deemed accurate to within approximately 1.9 percentage points 19 times out of 20. Therefore, references to 'residents' represent extrapolated feedback from all residents within each administrative boundary.
- ❑ In addition, the 2008 questionnaire allows a comparison among wards, a provision that did not exist in the previous OPS studies.

Perceptions of Crime in City of Ottawa as a Whole

- ❑ A bare majority of residents (52%) say that crime has not changed in the past three years or that they do not know enough to answer the question about it. Among the remainder, those who say that crime increased outnumber those who say that crime decreased by a factor of 4 to 1.
- ❑ Our analysis also looked at individual crimes and individual social conditions arousing residents' concerns. **The individual crimes or social conditions arousing the most concern are: presence of drugs/drug dealers, youth crime, speeding cars, robbery, and homelessness.** The four crimes and social conditions provoking the least concern are terrorism, prostitution, panhandling and protests/demonstrations.
- ❑ **Compared to concerns about crime in the neighbourhood, discussed separately, Ottawa residents place more emphasis on violence-related crimes when thinking of the City. When thinking of the neighbourhood,**



they place more emphasis on crimes normally perceived as property-related. Opinion is largely homogeneous across the city. Cumberland Ward residents appear to report greater concern than others wards about a variety of crimes and conditions: youth crime, speeding cars, violent robbery, gun violence, homicide, Internet crime, family violence and terrorism. Rideau Vanier residents express marginally more concern than others about homelessness, prostitution, and panhandling and less about Internet crime and terrorism.

Perceptions of Crime in Residents' Own Neighbourhoods

- Ottawans are much less likely to perceive crime as increasing in their neighbourhood (20%) than across the City of Ottawa (37%).** A fifth (20%) perceive crime as rising in their neighbourhood while 12% perceive it as falling with the remainder reporting no change or not knowing. Perceptions vary little by district with a hint that residents of Central West District may be more confident than others about rising crime in their neighbourhoods, just as they may be about crime across the city.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents (85%) feel that their neighbourhood has about the same amount or less crime than other neighbourhoods with only 6% perceiving crime to be higher in their own neighbourhood than in others. Rural residents are especially convinced that crime is lower in their neighbourhoods than in others. In Central East, more than one-quarter of residents perceive their neighbourhood as having more crime than others, and only 36% believe that their neighbourhood has less crime. The pattern of neighbourhood crime perceptions by ward parallel perceptions by district.
- A near consensus of Ottawa residents report that they feel safe walking alone in their neighbourhood during the day.** Residents of the Central East district appear to be less sanguine about personal safety during daylight; 21% of residents of Central East do not report feeling safe or very safe walking during the day compared to 8% across the city as a whole. Residents of Rideau Vanier are also the least likely to report feeling safe.
- Reported perceptions of safety dropped when respondents were asked how safe they feel walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark— 64% feel “very safe” during the day but only 23% at night. Opinion is homogeneous except for a tendency of rural residents to feel less unsafe at night than others and for residents of Central East and Rideau Vanier Ward to feel more unsafe than others.



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- The most widespread concern about crime and social conditions among residents is about speeding cars and aggressive driving;** 60% of respondents report concern for this stress. Approximately 50% of respondents report concern about break and enter (51%), theft from vehicles (49%), vandalism (49%) and identity theft (46%).
- Different stresses top the list for different wards.** Rideau Vanier residents report the most concern about the presence of drugs and drug dealers (69%); Barrhaven and Somerset residents report the most concern about vandalism to property, 70% and 69%, respectively; and residents from Cumberland, West Carleton-March and Gloucester-South Nepean report the most concern about speeding cars and aggressive drivers, 69%, 52% and 60%, respectively.
- Asked to rank the top five reasons that best explain their concern about crime and/or personal safety in their neighbourhood, **two-thirds of respondents report being unconcerned.** Among those with a concern, nearly 50% of report being a previous crime victim as the main reason for such concern.

Precautions Taken by Residents

- As a result of concern about crime, most respondents take precautions to ensure their personal safety. The most frequent precautions are concealing items of value (61%) and adding security devices to their home (53%).

Rating Police Performance

- The OPS earns high performance scores—68% perceive the performance of the OPS to be good or very good.** Almost none perceive OPS performance to be poor or very poor (3%).
- The OPS receives the highest performance scores for being approachable and easy to talk to (67%), enforcing the law (59%), police presence in vehicles (57%), and doing everything they can to help people (57%).
- Ottawans assign the lowest performance scores for helping victims of a crime (26%), finding information on Ottawa Police website (25%), and providing services in other languages (12%). A high proportion of respondents reported “don’t know” when asked to rate the performance of the OPS with respect to these categories. For this reason, these areas rate much lower than other services of the OPS.



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- ❑ Performance scores provided by residents are homogeneous across divisions with very modest differences among districts and wards. One modest difference among districts involves Central East, where residents report top performance scores for the police presence in police vehicles. Residents of Gloucester-South Nepean appear to report slightly higher than average performance scores for the OPS's being approachable and easy to talk to, apprehending criminals, and enforcing traffic laws. Rideau Vanier residents give marginally higher performance scores for police presence on foot or bicycle; Barrhaven residents give lower than average scores for police presence in vehicles.

Residents' Satisfaction with Police

- ❑ **Paralleling high performance scores, noted above, are high satisfaction scores.** An overwhelming majority of residents are either satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of service (86%). Almost no residents report dissatisfaction (4%). For comparison purposes, the 'Don't know' responses were excluded from analysis.
- ❑ Almost no Ottawa residents report that the quality of police service is deteriorating (3%). More than one-quarter report that service has improved over the past three years. Compared to the 2002 and 2006 Public Surveys, the 2008 survey appears to have a modestly larger percentage of Ottawans who perceive the quality of police services to have improved (43%).
- ❑ More than half of residents report having made contact with an OPS officer in the past three years (56%). Asked for the reason, most report being stopped for a traffic violation (22%) or receiving police assistance (20%). Just under one-seventh of residents report being the victim of a crime as the main reason for contact with the OPS officer.
- ❑ **The majority of residents with OPS contact report that the officer was courteous and professional (90%) and that they were confident in the officer's ability to handle the situation (84%).** Over 80% report being at least satisfied.
- ❑ A factor analysis revealed one underlying pattern of thinking about the Ottawa Police station front desk. Thus, people who rated highly any one aspect of their front desk experience tended to rate highly all others.
- ❑ Residents report moderate awareness of the OPS's two dedicated telephone numbers for emergency police services. Nearly three-fifths of Ottawans (56%) report awareness.



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- Among Ottawans who made an emergency call, the majority agree that the 9-1-1 operator answered the call promptly (92%); 91% agreed that the operator was courteous and professional; and 89% were satisfied overall with the quality of the telephone service.
- Almost one-fifth of Ottawa residents (18%) report having called the police on a non-emergency matter, less than a majority (44%) about a crime.
- The OPS telephone service and operators receive high assessment scores from residents who called the police for a non-emergency reason. The majority of these residents gave top scores to the operator for being courteous and professional (90%), and the call being handled in a timely manner (87%). Almost all (84%) were satisfied with the overall quality of the telephone service.

Priority Concerns

- Despite some fluctuations to the order of concerns, City and neighbourhood level priorities remain relatively consistent since 2002.
- Two concerns have emerged as a priority since 2006 at both the City and neighbourhood level. Identify theft has increased as a neighbourhood priority while homelessness has emerged as a concern at the City level.

Victimization

- Approximately one-fifth (21%) of Ottawans report that they or a member of their family have been a victim of a crime in the past three years.** Residents of Rideau Vanier and Somerset wards appear to report a moderately higher than average incidence of being the victim or having a family member that had been the victim of a crime.
- Theft (value of \$5,000 or less) (40%), breaking and entering (20%), robbery (10%) and assault (other than sexual assault) (10%) emerge as the types of crimes most experienced by against Ottawans or their immediate families.
- The majority of residents (80%) report that the most recent crime that they or a family member experienced did not involve a weapon. Of crimes involving a weapon, two-fifths involved a knife, and one-fifth, a gun.
- Nearly three-quarters of residents report notifying the police in the event of a crime (70%). Of those Ottawans who did not notify the police, the majority report not believing that the police could do anything (32%) or there was



nothing of real value that was stolen or damaged (24%). The percentage of residents reporting a crime to the OPS is uniform across districts with the exception of Rural East District. It appears as if Rural East residents are more likely to notify the OPS in the event of a crime.

- ❑ **Crime victims report a mediocre level of satisfaction with actions taken by the police.** Just over 50% of residents report being satisfied or very satisfied while almost one-fifth report being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Central East residents appear to be more satisfied than average with the actions that the police took. Residents of Rural East District appear to be more dissatisfied than average.

Crime Prevention

- ❑ An overwhelming majority of residents report feeling safe or very safe in their own home during the day (92%) and after dark (84%). Irrespective of the time of day, almost no residents report feeling unsafe or very unsafe in their own home.
- ❑ An overwhelming majority of Ottawa residents take security measures. **The most common measures are; exterior lighting (79%), deadbolt locks (75%), getting to know your neighbours (75%), and using curtains or shades on windows (74%).**
- ❑ Residents report relatively high awareness of two crime prevention programs, Neighbourhood Watch (62%) and Crime Stoppers (59%). Moderate awareness is reported for Child Print (31%) and Operation Identification (27%).
- ❑ Participation in crime prevention programs however, is modest. Within the past three years, almost four-fifths of Ottawa residents report not having participated in any crime prevention programs. The crime prevention program with the highest reported participation is Neighbourhood Watch (8%).
- ❑ Few Ottawans (4%) report having a Home Security Inspection conducted by a volunteer from a local Community Police Centre. For those residents that have conducted a Home Security Inspection, the majority (80%) report not being victim of a break and enter since the inspection.
- ❑ Ottawans report considerable interest in information about the following: Crime alerts (80%); Crime prevention tips and programs (80%); 'Ottawa Crime' maps (73%); and Crime statistics (70%). Residents report less interest in Restorative justice programs (63%) and Community Police meetings and events (57%).

