COOK COUNTY COMMUNITY SURVEY ANNUAL REPORT *2025*

COOK COUNTY COMMUNITY SURVEY

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

The Cook County Community Survey is an annual survey of Cook County residents and is made possible by generous support from the Leibman family. The purpose of the survey is to shed light on residents' personal circumstances and experiences, as well as their perceptions regarding features of their local environment including the quality of public services, schools, and crime and safety.

The survey also serves as an opportunity for students at Loyola University Chicago to gain first-hand experience analyzing data and reporting findings. Each section of this report was written by a small team of students, under the guidance of Professors David Doherty and Dana Garbarski. We invite readers to further explore the data from the 2025 survey, as well as previous years, here: https://cccs.sites.luc.edu/dashboard.html

The 2025 survey was fielded online from January 14 – February 5, 2025. Participants were recruited by Dynata (https://www.dynata.com/) to be demographically representative of the Cook County population on age, race, and gender. All analysis reported here uses survey weights to adjust for any remaining differences between our sample and Census estimates of the cross between race and gender, educational attainment, age, and whether respondents resided in Chicago or suburban Cook County. See the next page for further details.

Thank you for your interest in the Cook County Community Survey! Please do not hesitate to reach out to Professors Doherty (ddoherty@luc.edu) or Garbarski (dgarbarski@luc.edu) if you have questions!

David Doherty and Dana Garbarski

Sample Weighting

All analyses presented in this report use survey weights. Here we illustrate the unweighted distribution of key demographic characteristics, as well as the distribution once we apply weights. Note that we succeeded in recruiting a diverse sample. Thus, our weights are generally modest and do not radically alter conclusions from our analysis.[1]

Race x Gender Identity

	Unweighted				Weighted			
	Man	Woman	Other	Total	Man	Woman	Other	Total
White	41.7% (257)	36% (208)	60% (3)	39% (468)	41.3% (238)	40.1% (247)	64.7% (5)	40.8% (490)
Hispanic	22.7% (140)	26.5% (153)	20% (1)	24.5% (294)	27.6% (159)	24.8% (153)	16.6% (1)	26.1% (313)
Black	28.1% (173)	27.7% (160)	0% (0)	27.8% (333)	20.5% (118)	24.4% (150)	0% (0)	22.4% (268)
Asian	5% (31)	8.7% (50)	20% (1)	6.8% (82)	7.5% (43)	7.8% (48)	18.7% (1)	7.7% (92)
All Other	2.4% (15)	1.2% (7)	0% (0)	1.8% (22)	3.2% (18)	2.9% (18)	0% (0)	3% (36)
Total	100% (616)	100% (578)	100% (5)	100% (1199)	100% (577)	100% (615)	100% (7)	100% (1199)

Frequencies in parentheses.

Age

	Unweighted	Weighted
18-24	6.3% (76)	11.3% (135)
25-34	17.4% (208)	20.3% (244)
35-44	23.6% (283)	17.6% (211)
45-54	15.1% (181)	15.8% (189)
55-64	16% (192)	15.7% (188)
65-74	15.4% (185)	11.3% (136)
75+	6.2% (74)	8% (96)

Education

	Unweighted	Weighted
25+, No College Degree	45% (540)	42.1% (505)
25+, College Degree	48.6% (583)	46.6% (559)
18-24 years-old	6.3% (76)	11.3% (135)

Chicago v. Suburbs

	Unweighted	Weighted
Chicago	60.1% (721)	52.1% (625)
Suburbs	39.9% (478)	47.9% (574)

[1] More than 90 percent of our respondents are assigned weights between .5 and 2.

Economic Circumstances and Most Important Issue

Ava Bartuch, Lexi Schnelker, Jessica Flores-Perez

This report will analyze data from a section of the survey that asked respondents about access to food in their household, certainty in their ability to pay an unexpected $400 expense, and what the most important issue facing residents of Cook County. The first two questions are used to gauge respondents' economic circumstances, while the third seeks to find what issues are viewed as the most pressing throughout the county. Understanding the challenges that residents face regarding finances, basic needs like food, and other salient issues is an essential first step in remedying these challenges and improving the overall quality of life in Cook County. Two questions ask for respondents' perceptions of their economic circumstances regarding food access and emergency savings. Kolak et al. (2018) demonstrate an association between food access and socioeconomic status, a relationship we think might influence respondents' answer to the food in household question. We will further examine this connection in the demographic breakdown of responses. Understanding residents' perceptions of the most pressing issues facing Cook County is important because these opinions shape local policies and can help assess whether the work being done in Cook County reflects residents' interests. Research shows that people are more likely to take political action for issues that are salient to them, and that issue salience can affect policy outcomes at the national level (Weaver, 1991; Lazarus, 2013).

It is also important to note demographic disparities for the most important issue, as this could provide insights into whether certain issues impact Cook County residents of certain demographics more than others. For example, one interviewed respondent noted, "We're swimming in money. It is just not getting to people that need it most...we're not getting healthcare to the right people...we have food deserts that aren't being addressed." We will analyze response distributions to these questions and compare distributions between respondents in four demographic categories: Chicago vs. suburbs, age, political party, and educational attainment. First, we will present the overall response distributions to the questions, then we will breakdown responses by demographic groups.

OVERALL RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS

Figure 1.1 shows the distribution of responses to the question asking about household food access. Most respondents (54%) reported having enough of the kinds of food they wanted to eat. About a third of respondents (32%) reported having enough food, but not always the kinds of food they wanted to eat, and 11% reported sometimes or often not having enough food to eat.

Figure 1.1: Distribution of Food Access in Households Among Cook County Residents

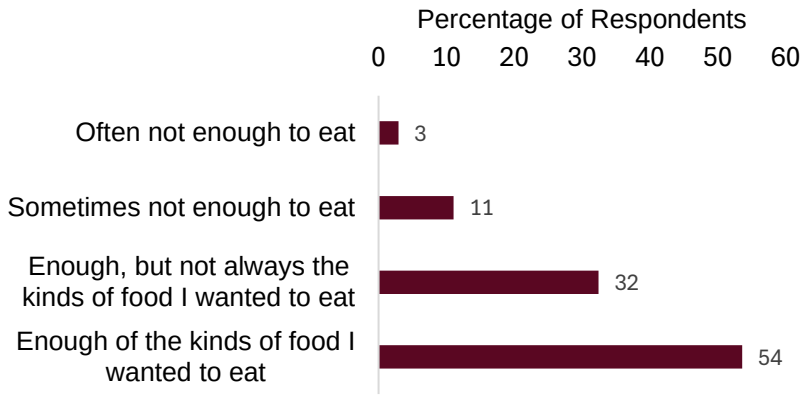


Figure 1.2 shows the distribution of responses to the question asking respondents how certain they are in their ability to pay an unexpected expense of $400. About a third of respondents (34%) were a little certain or less, 16% were somewhat certain, and most respondents (51%) were very certain or more.

Figure 1.2: Distribution of Ability to Handle Unexpected Expense

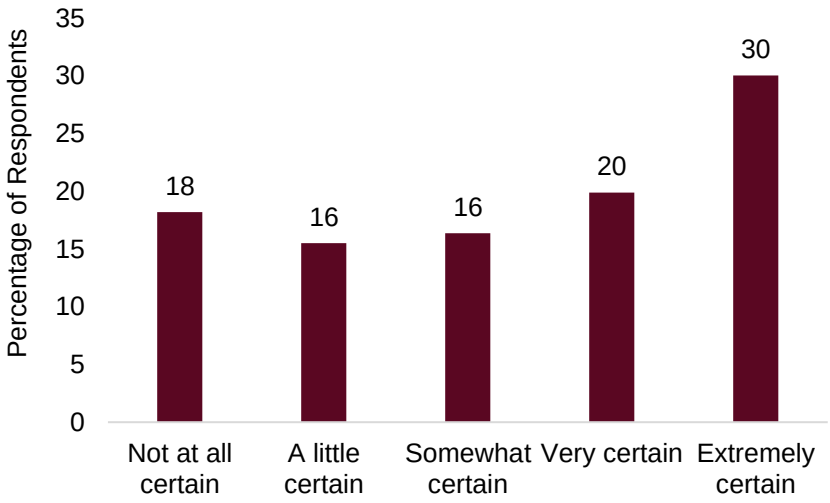
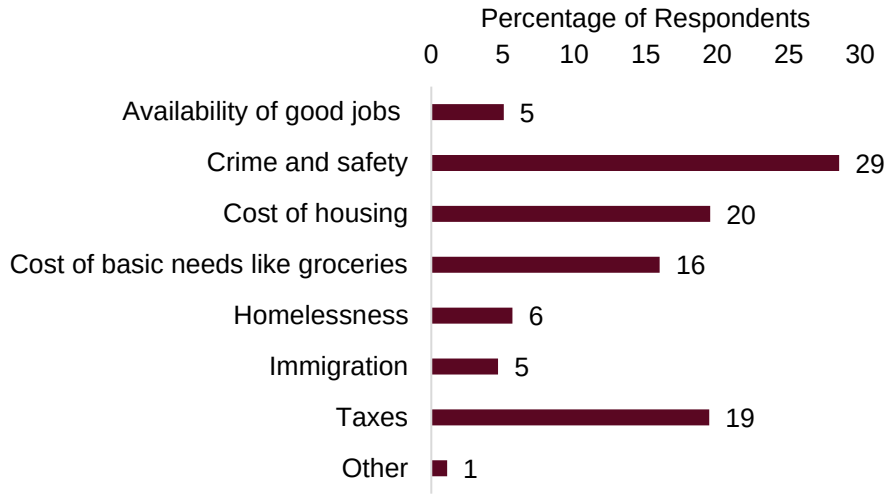


Figure 1.3 shows the distribution of responses to the question asking what the most important issue facing Cook County is. The issue selected by the most respondents (29%) was crime and safety, followed by the cost of housing (20%) and taxes (20%). Next was the cost of basic needs like groceries (16%), homelessness (6%), and availability of good jobs (5%). The least reported issue was immigration (<5%).

Figure 1.3: Distribution of Most Important Issue



Regarding safety, one interviewed respondent said, "If you're just a pedestrian… you have to always be aware of the cars. There's a lot of bad drivers I've noticed in Chicago lately." A respondent who identified the cost of housing as the most important issue said, "People are working full-time, two-full time jobs or full-time and part-time just to make basic rent." Similarly, regarding cost of basic needs one interviewed respondent stated, "I think there is rising panic amongst the whole middle class around the cost of living here and whether that cost can be restrained or whether the rate of increase could be stemmed." These interviewees' statements reflect the broader concerns captured in the survey data, highlighting the safety issues and financial strain that many residents face.

While these figures present insightful top-level patterns in Cook County residents' economic circumstances and most important issues, more understanding can be provided when examining how different demographic groups responded to these questions. In the next section, we will present these distributions broken down by demographic groups.

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

We consider responses to these questions based on four demographic breakdowns: Chicago vs. suburbs, age, educational attainment, and political party. We expect to see disparities is responses to all questions based on age and educational attainment, as education is a facet of socioeconomic status and age tends to correlate with socioeconomic status (American Psychological Association, 2017). Socioeconomic status broadly impacts people's life experiences; therefore, we expect it to have an effect on the issues residents face and care about. We also expect to see differences based on the Chicago vs. suburbs demographic breakdown, as this could potentially reflect socioeconomic differences and different on-the-ground realities that could influence responses to the most important issue question. Lastly, we are interested in

assessing response distributions based on political party, particularly for the most important issue question. In the wake of the 2024 election, it is insightful to see how Cook County residents of different political leanings feel about the issues facing their community and whether those issues align with party platforms.

Chicago vs. Suburbs

Figure 1.4 shows the distribution of responses to the food in household question broken down by whether the respondent lives in Chicago or a suburb. While distributions are largely consistent between both groups, a greater proportion of respondents living in the suburbs (59%) reported having enough of the kinds of food they wanted to eat than respondents living in Chicago (48%). These differences might be impacted by disparities in grocery store access and income between Chicago and the suburbs.

Figure 1.4: Distribution of Food Access in Household by Chicago vs. Suburbs

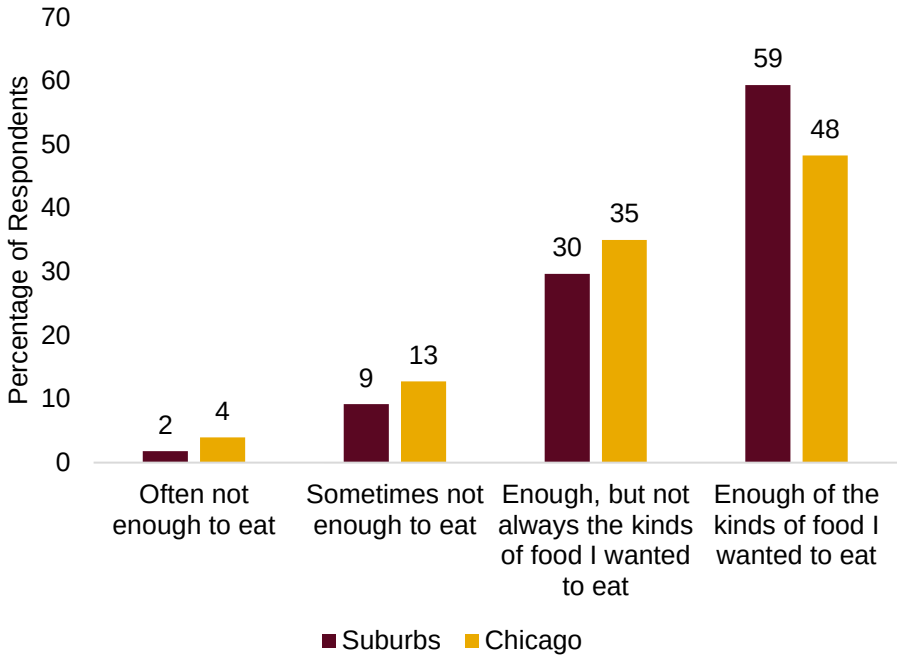


Figure 1.5 shows a disparity in Chicago and suburban respondents' certainty in being able to pay an unexpected expense. More suburban respondents (56%) reported being very certain or more that they could pay the expense than Chicagoans (45%). As we anticipated, there is a potential difference in average socioeconomic status between Chicagoans and suburbanites.

Figure 1.5: Distribution of Ability to Handle Unexpected Expense by Chicago vs. Suburbs,

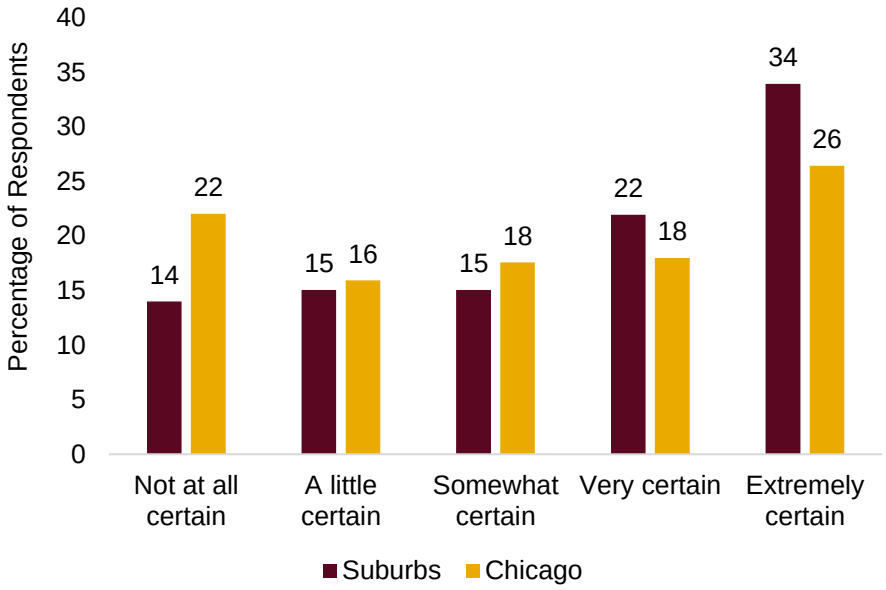
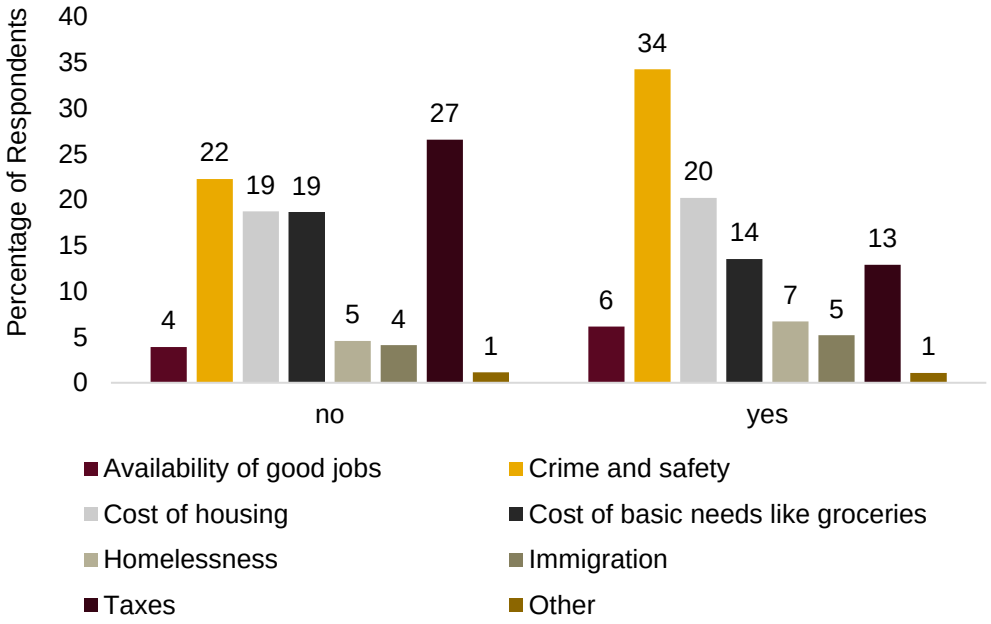


Figure 1.6 shows differences in the most important issue for respondents living in Chicago and those in the suburbs. The most selected issue for Chicagoans was crime and safety (35%), while the top issue for suburbanites was taxes (27%). This disparity might reflect the realities on the ground for city dwellers and suburbanites, as crime rates are higher in the city and property taxes are higher in the suburbs (Pistone, 2024).

Figure 1.6: Distribution of Most Important Issue by whether Respondent lives in Chicago



Age

Figure 1.7 shows a distinct difference in household food access between younger and older Cook County residents. The age variable was further categorized into three groups spanning young adults, middle-aged individuals, and respondents over 65, who are more likely to receive government benefits as they qualify for Medicare and social security. 19% of respondents aged 18-34 reported sometimes having not enough to eat compared to 9% of respondents aged 35-64 and 3% of respondents 65 and older. Most 18-34 respondents (59%) reported sometimes having not enough to eat or having enough but not of the kinds of food they wanted to eat. Comparatively, most older respondents (35-64 and 65+) reported having enough food to eat. We theorize that this is a result of socioeconomic differences between older and younger populations, with older populations being of higher socioeconomic status after spending more time in the workforce, thus being more able to afford greater food access.

Figure 1.7: Distribution of Food Access in Household by Age

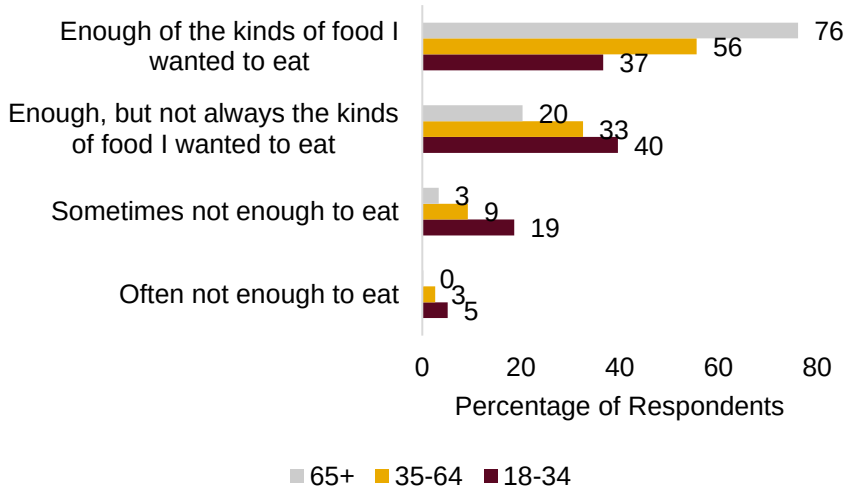
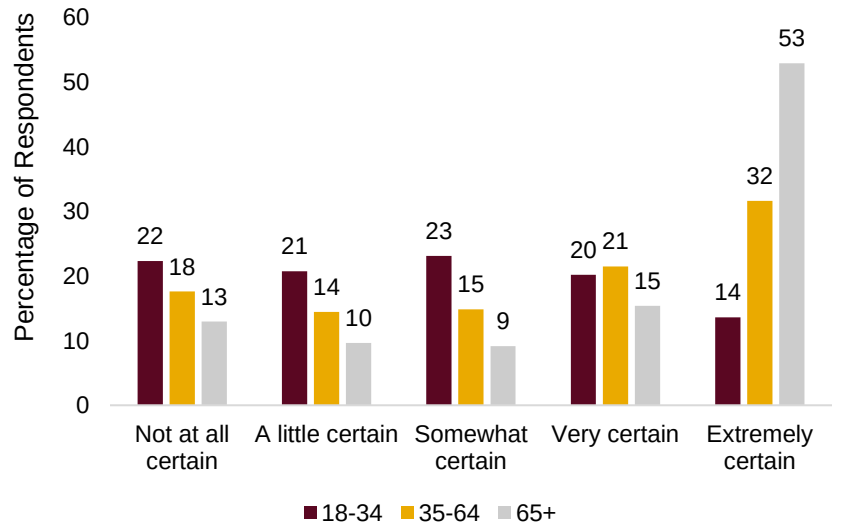


Figure 1.8 shows a discrepancy between older and younger respondents in their certainty in paying an unexpected expense. Over two thirds (68%) of respondents over 65 reported being very certain or more that they could pay the expense, while nearly half (43%) of respondents ages 18-34 reported being

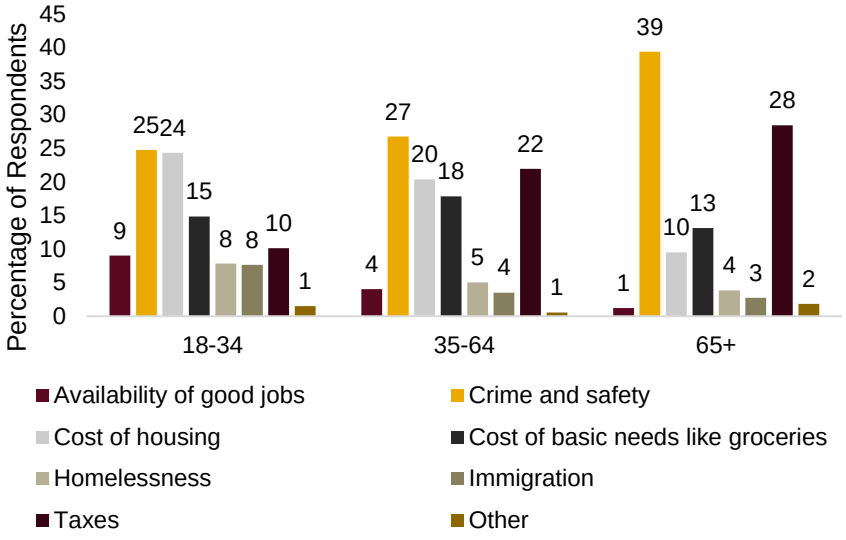
Figure 1.8: Distribution of Ability to Handle Unexpected Expense by Age



only a little certain or less. Again, we expect this to be a result of socioeconomic differences between older and younger respondents.

Figure 1.9 shows disparities in the most important problem for respondents of different ages. More older respondents (ages 65+) reported crime and safety (40%) and taxes (29%) as their top issue than younger and middle-aged respondents. Comparatively, more younger respondents (25%) and middle-aged respondents (20%) reported the cost of housing as the most important issue than older respondents. Younger and middle-aged Cook County residents are more likely to be renters or in the process of purchasing a home than older residents, therefore the cost of housing is likely a more relevant issue for them.

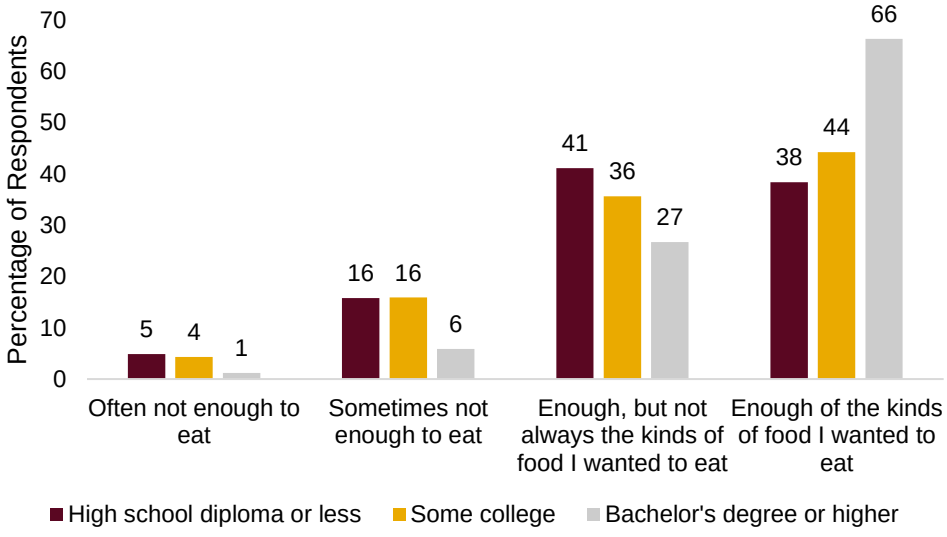
Figure 1.9: Distribution of Most Important Issue by Age



Educational Attainment

Figure 1.10 shows a disparity in household food access across educational attainment, with respondents with bachelor's degrees or higher reporting having the most access. 66% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher reported having enough of the foods

Figure 1.10: Distribution of Food Access in Household by Educational Attainment



they wanted to eat. Comparatively, only 38% of respondents with a high school diploma or less reported having enough of the food they wanted to eat. 16% of respondents with some college and respondents with a high school diploma or less reported sometimes not having enough to eat, compared to only 6% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher. We expect this being a result of educational attainment being a signifier of socioeconomic status. Those with higher educational attainment tend to have higher socioeconomic status and thus have a greater ability to afford adequate food access.

Figure 1.11 shows a disparity between respondents of different educational attainments in their certainty that they could pay an unexpected expense. Most respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher (66%) reported being very certain or more compared to respondents with less education. Comparatively, nearly half of respondents (49%) with a high school degree or less reported being a little certain or less that they could pay the expense. Again, this is likely a result of socioeconomic differences between respondents of differing educational attainment.

Figure 1.11: Distribution of Ability to Handle Unexpected Expense by Educational Attainment

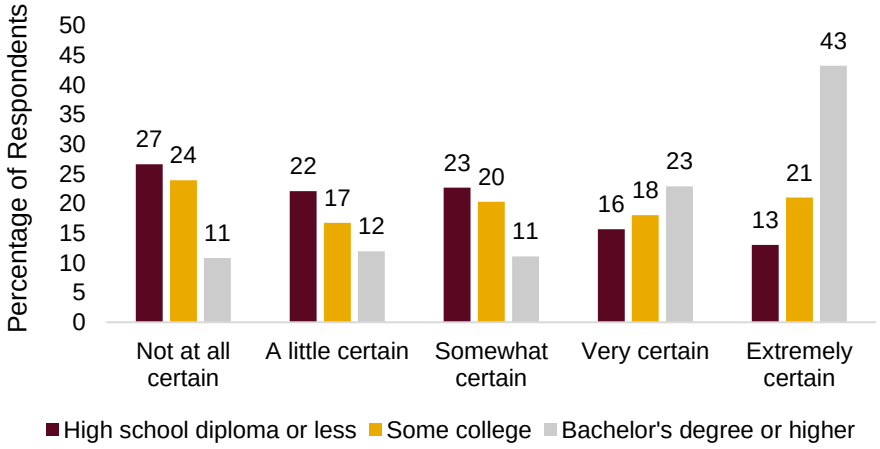
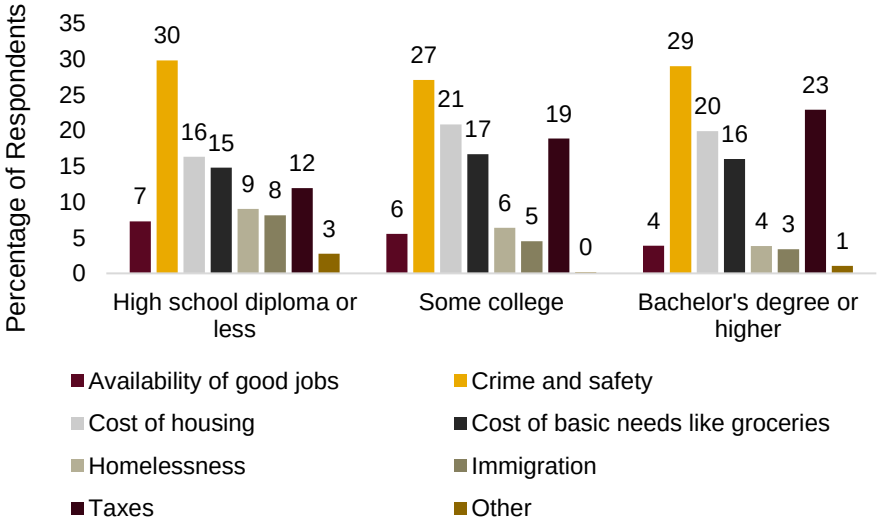


Figure 1.12 shows how responses to the most important issue item vary across levels of educational attainment. Crime and

Figure 1.12: Distribution of Most Important Issue by Educational Attainment



safety remains the most important issue across the board, being chosen by 31% of respondents with a high school diploma or less, 27% of respondents with some college education, and 29% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher. As the level of educational attainment increases, so does the percentage of respondents who selected taxes as the most important issue. Educational attainment is a major component of socioeconomic status, so respondents with higher levels of education likely pay more in taxes than those with lower levels of education, thus the issue may be more relevant to them.

Political Party

Figure 1.13 shows a largely consistent distribution of responses to the food in household question across political parties. The greatest disparity is that 59% of Democrat respondents reported having enough of the kinds of foods they wanted to eat, compared to 46% of Republicans and 49% of other parties.

Figure 1.13: Distribution of Food Access in Household by Political Party

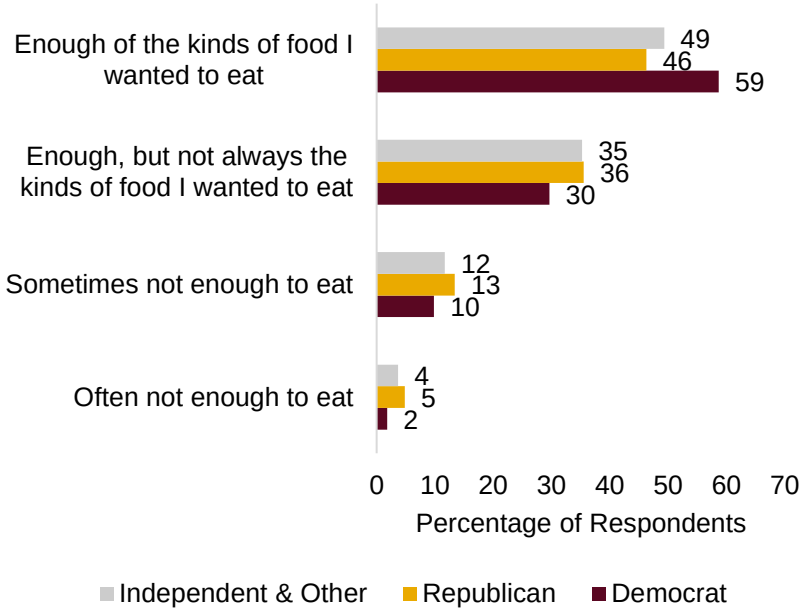


Figure 1.14: Distribution of Ability to Handle Unexpected Expense by Political Party

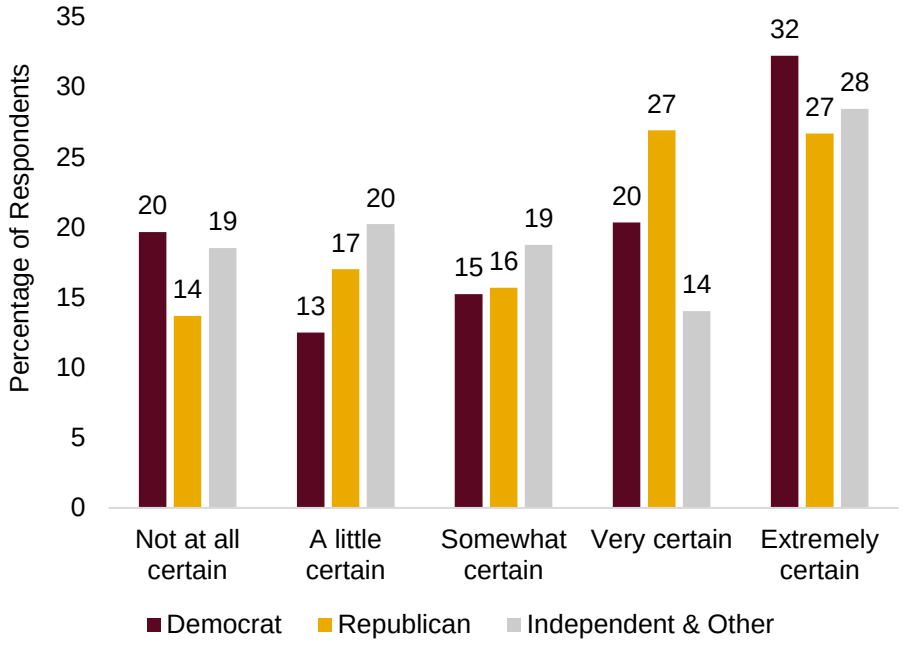


Figure 1.14 shows fairly consistent certainty in paying an unexpected expense between respondents of different political parties. Around 30% of Democrats, Republicans, and other parties reported being a little certain or less that they could pay the expense, and around 50% of each group reported being very certain or more.

Figure 1.15: Distribution of Most Important Issue by Political Party

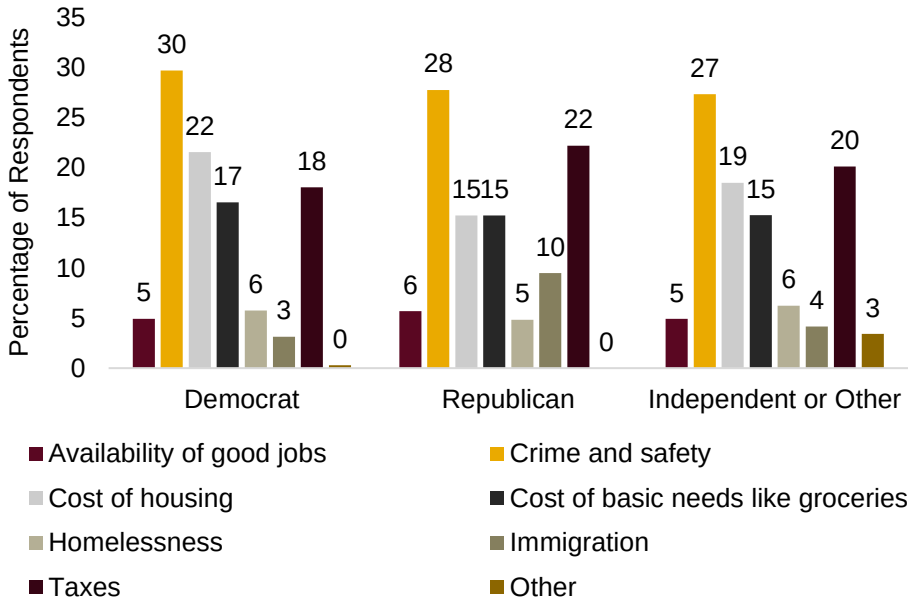


Figure 1.15 shows how responses to the most important issue item vary across different political parties. Again, crime and safety was the most commonly cited problem across all party groups. Following the 2024 Presidential Election, we expected issue importance to be more distinctly partisan, but our results show otherwise. Across political divides, Cook County residents care

broadly about crime and safety, cost of housing, and taxes. Republicans, however, are more concerned with the issue of immigration than other groups as this issue was selected by 10% of Republicans compared to 3% of Democrats and 4% of others. This is in line with the Republican party platform, which prioritized immigration as a top national issue during the 2024 election. Thus, Republicans in Cook County might care more strongly about immigration than residents of other parties.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the 2025 Cook County Community Survey reveal notable disparities in food security, financial stability, and issue prioritization across demographic groups. While most respondents reported having enough food to eat, Chicago residents and those with lower educational attainment face greater food insecurity. These disparities highlight how socioeconomic factors can influence the daily lives of Cook County residents, particularly in communities affected by food deserts. Similarly, financial stability varied significantly across groups with younger respondents, those with lower educational attainment, and Chicago residents expressing greater uncertainty about their ability to handle an unexpected $400 expense. When asked about the most important issue facing Cook County residents, crime and safety emerged as the top concern, though responses varied based on location, age, education, and slightly on political affiliation.

Overall, these findings emphasize the need for targeted policy responses that address the needs of and challenges faced by Cook County residents. By recognizing and responding to the diverse perspectives of the populace, local leaders can work towards policies that promote economic security, equitable access to resources, and a more responsive government for all Cook County residents.

Quality of Neighborhood Features

Max Falkenholm, Mihaela Plesca, J.J. Whiteside

Cook County, home to approximately 5,000,000 documented citizens, places paramount importance on maximizing the quality of life for its residents. Neighborhood quality perception serves as a crucial indicator of the efficacy of local policies. The environment one surrounds oneself with is crucial to leading a fulfilled life. Studies suggest that individuals tend to report high rating levels when their immediate needs—access to clean water, air quality, a clean/hygienic environment in the neighborhood, and proximity to essential services like grocery stores—are fulfilled. Monitoring data on neighborhood quality levels can be used for the assessment of whether conditions and current policies are conducive to improvement**.** Given the segregated nature of Cook County, particularly in the city of Chicago, neighborhood quality is closely correlated with socioeconomic and sociodemographic factors. The predominantly white population residing in the inner city and north side, while the non-white populations are concentrated in the south and west sides, underscores the significance of considering residents' perceptions of neighborhood quality in identifying and addressing discriminatory instances. The minority (non-white) populations primarily reside in indignant neighborhoods, which are often exposed to hazardous and deterring environmental conditions due to inadequate funding. These conditions negatively impact the quality of life by compromising hygiene and contaminating water sources. The quality of environmental conditions directly reflects the effectiveness of safety regulations implemented by the local government. Public perceptions regarding tap water and flood mitigation appear consistent with current issues policy makers are attempting to filter that remove lead from tap water. In response to these concerns, the city of Chicago plans to distribute $50 coupons for water filters to eligible residents in over 90,000 households. (Chicago Sun-Times, 2024)

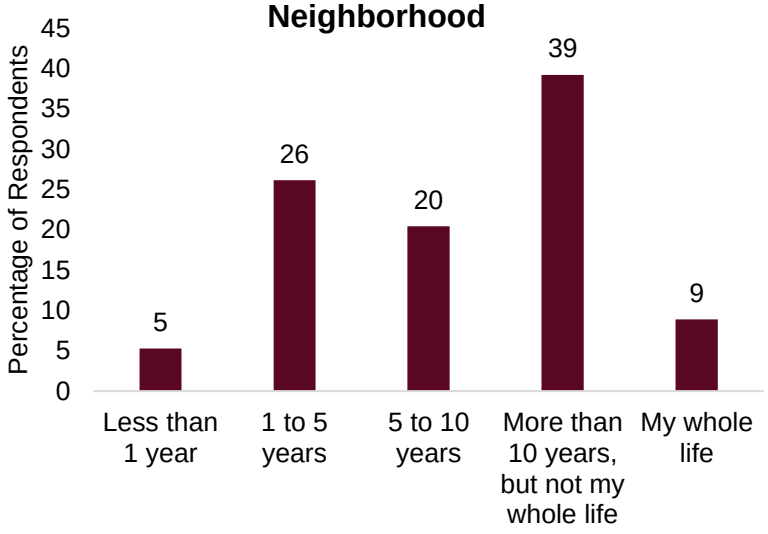
The impetus of the first module of the Cook County Community Survey (CCCS) is the quality of life its residents enjoy. The first module gauges resident perceptions of public utilities, services, and the accessibility of amenities. This report will focus on the quality of three compiled variables: utilities (garbage/recycling, street maintenance, flood mitigation system), environment (water, air), and accessibility to essential services (grocery stores, public transport, parks and outdoor spaces). This report first discusses univariate distributions of relating to the topic of neighborhood quality as a whole. Data regarding respondents' lengths of residency, overall satisfaction, and ratings of the compiled variables is presented. The focus then shifts to bivariate analysis of the relationships between the compiled variables and key demographic variables.

Finally, this report is capped off with an analysis of the findings and their sociological implications on Cook County.

OVERALL RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS

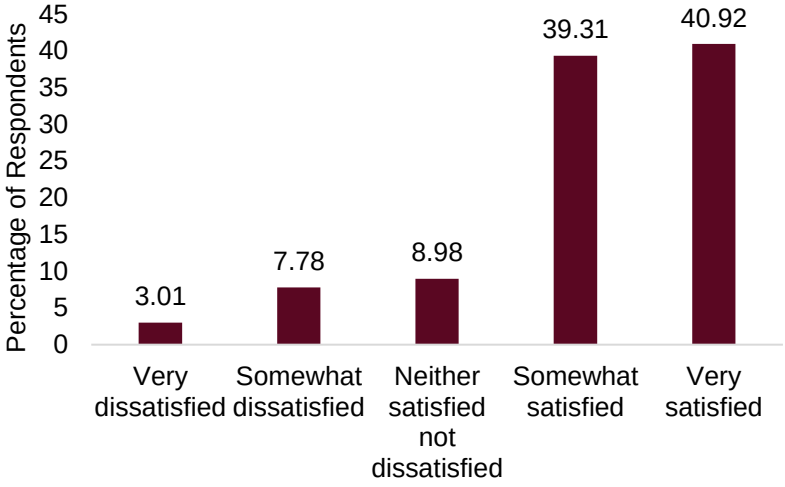
The first question in the module asked survey respondents, “How long have you resided in your neighborhood?” For clarity, the term “neighborhood” was defined as the half-mile area surrounding the respondent’s current residence. Approximately 39% of respondents indicated that they have lived in their neighborhood for “more than 10 years, but not my entire life” (Figure 2.1). The remaining 20% of survey respondents have resided in their neighborhood in Cook County for “5 to 10 years,” while 26% have lived in their current neighborhood for “1 to 5 years.”

Figure 2.1: Length of Residence in Neighborhood



Presumably, many respondents have either migrated to Cook County and subsequently settled or relocated within the region while remaining within Cook County.

Figure 2.2: Neighborhood Satisfaction By Percentage



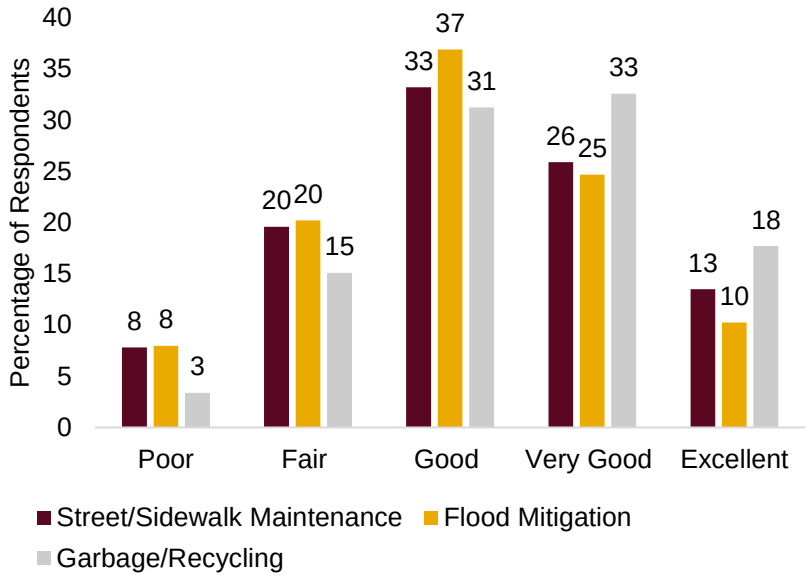
In addition to the length of their residence in their respective neighborhoods, we inquired of participants, “Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your neighborhood as a place to live?” Respondents were given the option to select answers ranging from “very dissatisfied” (1) to “very satisfied” (5). The distribution of responses suggests that the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated high ratings, with 80% of respondents expressing either “very satisfied” (39%) or “somewhat satisfied” (41%). Conversely, only 3% of survey participants residing in Cook County indicated that they were “very dissatisfied,”

reflecting overwhelmingly positive attitudes of Cook County residents toward the neighborhoods in which they reside.

The subsequent survey question prompted participants to evaluate the quality of various aspects within their neighborhood. These included (1) the quality of the neighborhood; (2) parks and open spaces; (3) garbage and recycling services; (4) tap water quality; (5) grocery stores; (6) street and sidewalk maintenance; and (7) flood mitigation systems. Participants were provided with the option to rate each aspect on a numerical scale, with 1 indicating poor quality and 5 representing excellent quality.

In Figure 2.3 we see that residents generally perceived street and sidewalk maintenance, as well as garbage and recycling services, of high quality. Notably, garbage and recycling services were the highest-rated utility service in Cook County." Data indicated that 82% of individuals rated their garbage and recycling utility service as "good" or better, with approximately 18% rating it as "excellent." Similarly, about 73% of respondents rated the quality of sidewalk and street maintenance in their neighborhood as "good" or better. A female resident of Cook County, a participant in the survey who was interviewed, reveals that "there is always a snowplow. There is always salt on the ground when it is icy, the streets are always clear of debris and leaves." Only about 8% identified the maintenance of streets and sidewalks as "poor." This finding was surprising, considering the city's age and harsh weather conditions, which often lead to the erosion of sidewalks and streets. Consequently, high levels of car traffic contribute to street damage. The final utility measure tested for was the quality of flood mitigation, which elicited polar responses. 28% of respondents rated the quality of their flood mitigation system as "poor" or "fair," 35% rated it as "very good" or "excellent," and 37% rated it as "good." This approximately equal distribution of ratings suggests disparities in funding allocations within Cook County regarding the

Figure 2.3: Compiled Utilities Ratings By Percentage



establishment and maintenance of adequate flooding systems to combat adverse weather conditions.

Figure 2.4: Compiled Environment Ratings By Percentage

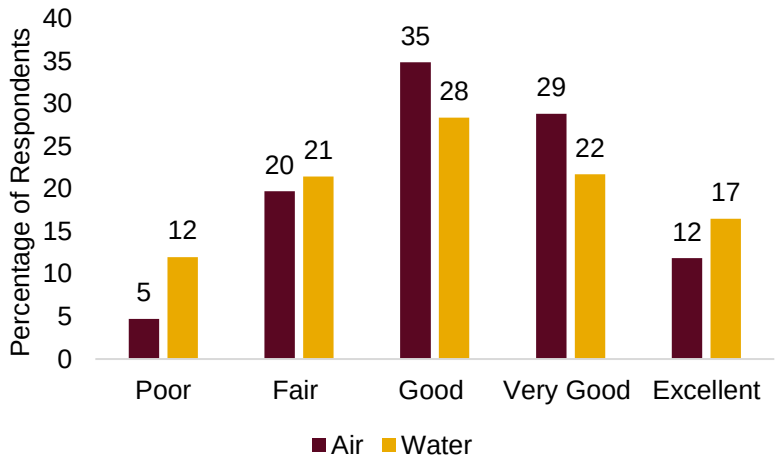
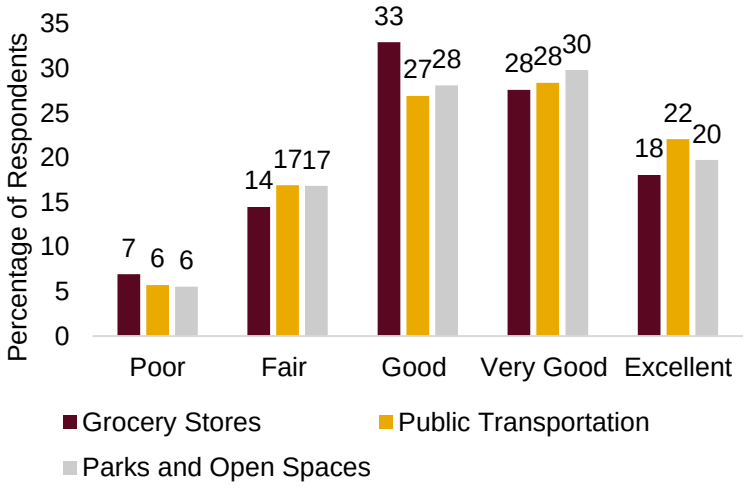


Figure 2.4 shows that residents of Cook County generally perceive their neighborhood's environmental quality, particularly the water and air quality, as favorable. Notably, the quality rating of Cook County residents with their environment is more favorable regarding air quality compared to water quality. The water quality received a higher quality rating percentage of responses in both the most positive and most negative categories, while the ratings of air quality encompass a broader range. The air ratings suggest a more general trend among the Cook County residents. Overall, 76% of respondents indicated that their air quality was "good" or better. Conversely, only 7% identified their air quality as "poor," and 14% rated it as "fair." However, the discrepancies in the ratings of the water quality among respondents remain evident. Approximately 33% of residents identified their water quality as "fair" or "poor," while 38.2% of residents rated the water quality as "very good" or "excellent." While these disparities may be attributed to residents' greater concern for water quality compared to air quality, resulting in less specificity in rating air quality, they highlight the varying levels of water quality among neighborhoods in Cook County.

Figure 2.5: Compiled Accessibility Ratings By Percentage



Finally, in Figure 2.5, we see that perceptions of neighborhoods accessibility were quite favorable among respondents. Ratings of public transportation and parks/open spaces followed similar overall trends, with the highest

percentage of respondents rating the quality as “very good,” followed by “good,” “excellent,” “fair,” and “poor.” Grocery stores exhibited a different pattern, with the ratings falling in the order “good,” “very good,” “excellent,” “fair,” and “poor.” This suggests that grocery stores generally received lower ratings, but the ratings were still concentrated among the highest categories.

79% of the survey respondents rated their accessibility to grocery stores as “good” or better. Similarly, approximately 78% rated the quality of parks and open spaces as “good” or better. The highest percentage of respondents rated their parks and open spaces as “very good” (30%), and the consecutive falling ratings were “good” (28%), “excellent” (20%), “fair” (17%), and “poor” (6%). Public transportation received an unexpected positive rating, with 22% of residents rating it as “excellent” and 55% rating it as “good” (26%) or “very good” (22%). Public transportation has the most favorable rating among the accessibility groups in the survey.

Question 1 and 2 of the survey inquired about the duration of participants’ residence in the neighborhood and their overall satisfaction with their living conditions. Residents identified their length of residence on an array ranging from “less than one year” (1); to “1 to 5 years” (2); “5 to 10 years”(3); “more than 10 years but not my whole life” (4); and “my whole life” (5). Data from Figure 2.1 revealed that the mean residence length was 3.13, suggesting that most survey respondents had lived in the neighborhood for about 5 to 10 years. The neighborhood length variable had a standard deviation of 1.15.

Figure 2.2 depicted the overall neighborhood satisfaction level, with an average rating of 4.0 (with a maximum of 5) and a high standard deviation of 1.05. While the mean value indicates a level of “somewhat satisfied” residents, the substantial standard deviation highlights discrepancies in satisfaction ratings among residents.

To facilitate analysis in the univariate section of this report, variables with common themes were systematically categorized into three categories for convenience and brevity. The first category, *utilities*, encompasses neighborhood services such as “sidewalk maintenance,” “flood mitigation,” and “garbage/recycling.” The average rating of the quality of the utilities summary measure yielded a score of 3.12 (out of 5), with a standard deviation of 0.95. The second category, *pollution/environment,* includes variables such as “water quality” and “air quality.” The quality rating of the environment exhibited the highest standard deviation and lowest mean among all summary variables, resulting in a standard deviation of 1.01. This high standard deviation indicates a wide range of responses regarding the quality of the environment. The average rating was 3.07 (out of 5), suggesting a neutral perception of environmental conditions. The third category, which serves as a catch-all for remaining items, includes variables such as “grocery stores,” “public transportation,” and “parks and open spaces.” This summary measure had an

average rating of 3.36, with the lowest standard deviation of 0.91. The median for both the environment variable and utilities variable concluded to be 3. The 50th percentile of survey respondents rated their accessibility as 3.33 (out of 5).

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

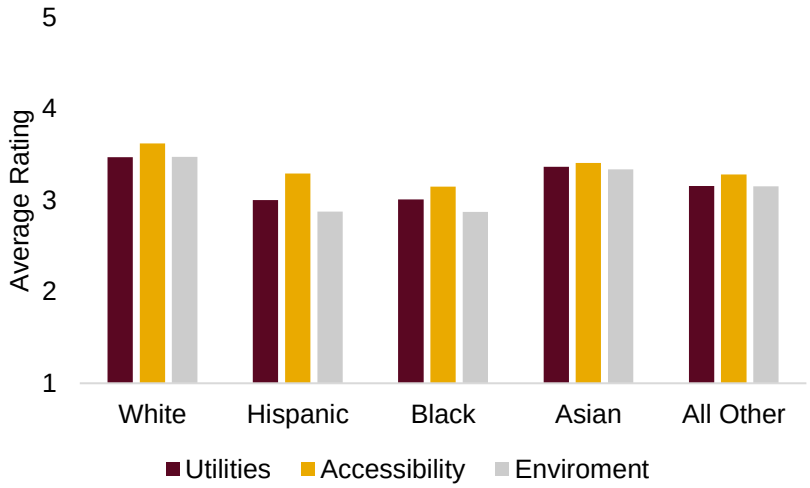
The bivariate section of the report will analyze the relationship between demographic factors, including ethnoracial identity, location (suburbs versus city), educational attainment, and political identity, with the quality rating of the summary measures (utility, accessibility, and environment) herein mentioned. To conduct bivariate analysis between the ordinal summary measures (utilities, pollution/environment, and garbage and recycling) and the continuous demographic variables (educational attainment; political alignment; residence location; and ethnoracial identity) included in the survey, a table of means approach was employed to average out the responses per category. The data presented in section III is provided both in raw format and as a visualization. Bivariate analyses were conducted between each category and demographic variable to identify correlations between quality rating and the respondent's particular characterizations and confirm a hypothetical relationship between them.

Ethnoracial Identity

To begin with, the demographic of ethnoracial identity was isolated and compared with the ratings of the summary measures: utilities, accessibility, and environment. Our initial hypothesis was that white respondents would generally rate specific aspects of their neighborhood higher than other ethnoracial groups. This is because historically, racial segregation has geographically isolated certain racial groups. Racial segregation in Chicago has clearly correlated with other inequalities such as housing and income inequality, creating an ongoing social problem that Chicago grapples with to this day. Neighborhoods with higher levels of racial diversity have been devalued by the city and received less attention pertaining to neighborhood quality and upkeep. Beyond the city, segregation patterns persist to surrounding suburbs.

We see support for this hypothesis in Figure 2.6. Respondents identifying as White reported generally higher levels of quality of utilities, accessibility, and environment than any other ethnoracial identity group. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest possible rating and 1 being the lowest possible rating, white respondents rated all categories higher at 3.5 or higher. The mean rating across all categories for white respondents was 3.5. Asian respondents also rated each category above average (3), but the mean was slightly lower at 3.4. Hispanic and black respondents both rated the environmental measures slightly below average at 2.9, and utilities and accessibility measures barely above average. A 57-year-old Black resident of Cook County reveals, “The trash in the parks, unwanted people, things like that, and just the complete safety of the park” are contributing factors to his unlikelihood of attending the park at nighttime and his dissatisfaction with the public parks in his neighborhood. The mean rating across all categories for Hispanic and Black respondents was 3, or exactly average.

Figure 2.6: Ethnoracial Identity vs. Neighborhood Ratings



Combining the total rating scores across all categories for each race, White respondents had the highest total (10.56) and Black respondents had the lowest total (9.03). However, Hispanic respondents were not much higher, with their total score numbering 9.17. These scores help to prove the hypothesis that racial segregation has shaped the way our city functions today, and that unfortunately this had effects on the quality of life for residents of different races within Cook County.

A contributory factor to higher ratings among White respondents could be the county’s economic disparity. Housing and income inequality is an ongoing social problem Chicagoland grapples with stemming from the gentrification present in the city’s history. Furthermore, respondents belonging to one ethnoracial group may not understand the experience of the others because different groups tend to be localized in different areas of the city. This may have led to

the ratings being given based on one's own lived experience rather than an understanding of the city as a whole.

Chicago v. Suburbs

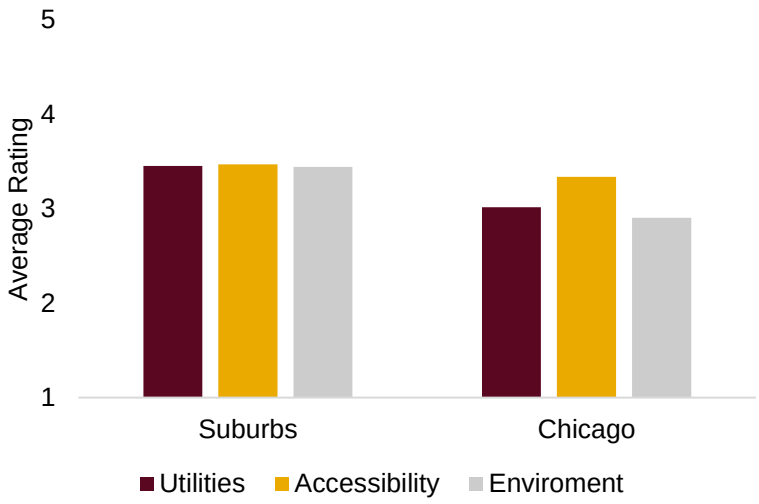
Residents of Suburban Cook County are expected to enjoy a superior quality of life compared to their urban counterparts. This disparity is particularly evident in the realm of water quality, where suburban environments tend to offer cleaner water sources than urban areas. Residents of Chicago are at risk of lead and copper contamination in their water supply due to the erosion of water pipes. In contrast, suburban neighborhoods have alternative water pipes, as the use of lead in water supply pipes was prohibited prior to the construction of Suburbia. Additionally, Chicago's geographical location, situated on Lake Michigan, which also serves as its source of fresh drinking and tap water, provides residents with a clear understanding of where their water originates and the water purification process. Three billion gallons of water each day undergo an intensive filtering and cleaning process at the Jardine Water Purification Plant, located at Navy Pier. The city of Chicago conducts yearly water reports to ensure the water's quality meets acceptable standards. These factors may lead to residents of Chicago being more critical of the quality of their water simply because they are more aware of its source and the potential issues. (Water Treatment)

Furthermore, the constrained spatial area and highly industrialized environment of suburban areas are determinant to satisfaction concerning flood mitigation. It is expected that data will conclude discrepancies in the flood mitigation system when comparing the suburban with the urban environment. Urban areas, such as the city of Chicago, are prone to flooding as natural landscape areas that store water are replaced by buildings and infrastructure that promote water surface runoff. Suburban architecture has adopted channel improvements, which drain water more effectively through area systems, decreasing the likelihood of flooding.

Figure 2.7 presents the average response regarding the utility quality rating of suburban respondents, which is 3.45 (out of 5). This indicates that most residents perceive their water and air quality as between "good" and "very good." In contrast, Chicago residents had an average of 3.01 (out of 5) when asked to rate the quality of their utilities, suggesting an overall perception of "good" quality trending towards "fair." Furthermore, the average accessibility rating is 3.74 in the

suburbs, while it is 3.39 in Chicago. The environment rating yielded a higher discrepancy between the suburban villages (mean = 3.44) and Chicago (mean = 2.90), a difference of 0.54 of the mean.

Figure 2.7: Neighborhood Quality Rating Based on Location

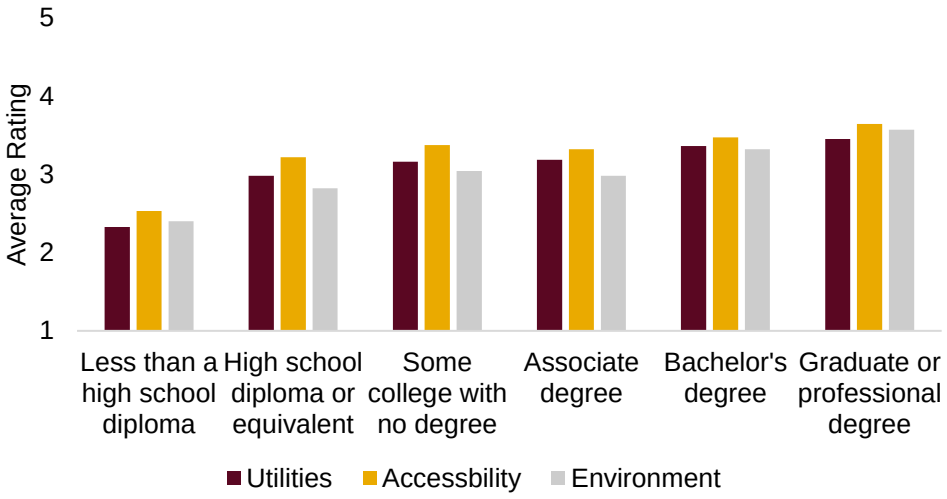


The data from the survey is congruent with our hypothesis that the quality of utilities, environmental conditions, and accessibility ratings are higher in the suburbs compared to the city. A suburban resident of Cook County would describe his water quality as “very safe, and … drink it sometimes unfiltered. It’s very good,” while an urban resident of cook county would suggest that there is “lead content within the piping going into the house” which is “sort of a concern.”

Educational Attainment

The next analysis focuses on the educational attainment of the respondent in relation to their neighborhood quality rating. Higher educational achievement is associated with mobility, financial freedom, and an increase in appealing living conditions. By conducting research that uses educational attainment as a demographic variable, we hypothesize that the stigma that a higher degree of educational attainment results in higher satisfaction with living conditions

Figure 2.8: Neighborhood Quality Rating on Educational Attainment



will be confirmed. The survey question asked the residents of cook county “what is the highest level of school you have completed?” Survey participants were presented with the option of: (1) less than a high school diploma; (2) high school diploma or equivalent; (3) some college with no degree; (4) associate’s degree; (5) bachelor’s degree; (6) graduate or professional degree.

Figure 2.8 illustrates a substantial disparity in the quality ratings of utilities, accessibility, and environmental conditions across various educational levels. Survey respondents with a “graduate or professional degree” consistently rated their utilities quality on average at 3.45, with a maximum score of 5. Similarly, their accessibility rating averaged 3.65, and their environmental rating was 3.57. In contrast, survey respondents with “less than a high school diploma” reported significantly lower average ratings for all three categories: utilities quality (mean = 2.32), accessibility rating (2.53), and environmental rating (2.4). The difference between the ratings of respondents with a ‘graduate or professional degree’ and ‘less than a high school diploma’ is more than a whole point. Notably, higher educational attainment appears to be positively correlated with improved quality ratings.

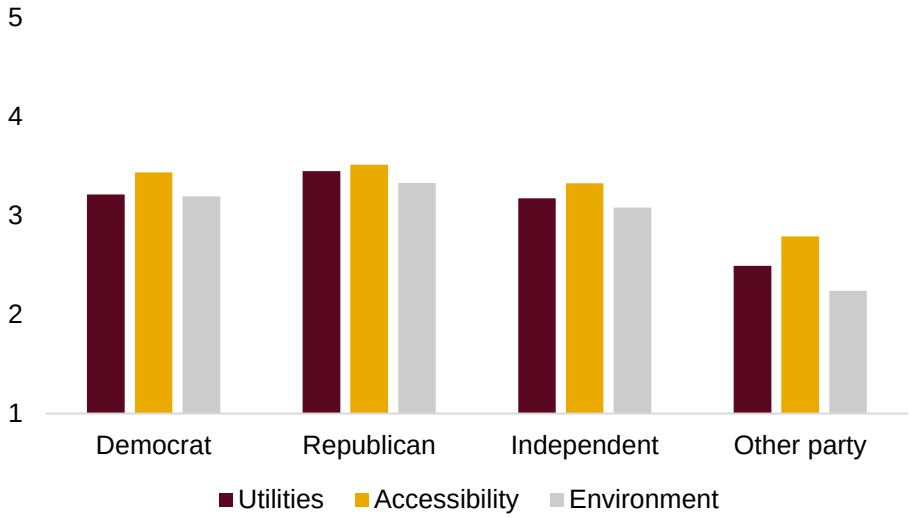
Overall, the data aligns with the hypothesis suggesting that higher education attainment levels have a positive relationship with quality ratings.

Partisanship

Lastly, political identity was taken in consideration. Individuals with a Republican political affiliation tend to prioritize less government intervention and focus on personal responsibility regarding environmental regulations. In comparison, Democrats and Independents tend to have higher expectations regarding public services and an increased government intervention in environmental preservation. One’s party affiliation could affect one’s neighborhood satisfaction rating as they have different expectations, which skew their perception of the adequacy and

sufficiency of public services. Based on this, we hypothesized that Republican respondents might rate aspects of their neighborhoods higher than respondents from other parties.

Figure 2.9: Neighborhood Quality Rating Based on Political Identity



Republicans report higher satisfaction in each category than their bipartisan counterparts. Their utility, accessibility, and environment ratings are 3.44, 3.51, and 3.32, respectively. However, among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, the differences were very small. For Utilities, the margin was only 0.27, for Accessibility it was 0.19, and for Environment it was 0.24. This analysis was performed on a 5-point scale and all the margins fall below 0.5, proving that while there is a difference, it is very small. The difference in the ratings among the parties is evident among this survey's respondents, but the margins are minuscule. Although theoretically there are differences in how political affiliation would affect one's expectations of their neighborhood, within Cook County this demographic did not prove to be as connected with neighborhood opinions as other demographics. Cook County is a generally liberal county because the majority of the county falls within Chicago, a major city, and major cities often tend to lean liberal rather than conservative. Illinois is a decidedly Democratic state and has voted Democrat in Presidential elections since 1992. This may have been a contributing factor to the data collected, as a greater percentage of respondents identifying as a certain political party would have an effect on the data collected. Although this data generally supports the hypothesis that Democrats and Independents may be more critical of their neighborhoods due to higher expectations of government intervention, the margins are very slim. This data suggests that there is very little correlation between Political Identity and Neighborhood Ratings.

DISCUSSION

Through our analysis of the data pertaining to Neighborhoods and Neighborhood ratings, some themes have become evident. The highest percentage of respondents have lived in their neighborhoods for over 10 years and, therefore, have extensive experience evaluating the local conditions of their neighborhoods. In general, the large majority of residents of Cook County responded that they were satisfied with their neighborhoods, and only about 11% of respondents were dissatisfied. Overall, the ratings of different neighborhood qualities were consistent across all categories. Regarding the Utilities category, which included street/sidewalk maintenance, flood mitigation, and garbage and recycling services, the highest number of respondents reported their utilities to be 'good'. The response categories in falling order are as follows: 'very good', 'fair', 'excellent', and 'poor'. The pattern is similar among Environmental Concerns (which included air and water quality): the highest number of respondents rated environmental satisfaction concerns to be 'good', followed by 'very good', and 'fair'. The quality of accessibility elicited higher quality ratings than the other categories. Within this category, which included grocery stores, public transportation, and parks and open spaces, the highest percentage of respondents rated these to be "very good," with 'good' and 'excellent' not far behind.

While differences in variables are evident, like ethnic identities, there is generally high satisfaction among Cook County residents. Among the respondents of this survey, White respondents reported the highest overall neighborhood ratings, and the difference between the total quality ratings across all categories (utilities, accessibility, and environment) for the highest (White) and lowest (Black) is 1.53, which on a 5-point scale is very notable. The racial differences are suggestive of the history of racial segregation in Chicago. Historically, Black communities have experienced continual segregation in the form of redlining, restricting them to less coveted neighborhoods that were not as well maintained. The residual effects of this could be a possible explanation for the discrepancies in neighborhood quality ratings between different racial groups. Related categories such as Educational Attainment and Location support this argument. Location is related, as respondents living in the suburbs rated their neighborhood satisfaction higher across all categories (utilities, accessibility, and environment). Particularly, the discrepancies between the suburbs and the city in the utilities quality rating is evident of a deficiency in allocating for funds to combat flooding and design preventative measures. The polarized rating of the water quality is another indicator of the inequality among the neighborhoods of Cook County. The city of Chicago has historically experienced "white flight", where White residents who can afford to do

so moved to the suburbs to avoid the desegregation of other neighborhoods in the city. This history is evident in the differences in responses between residents of the city and residents of the suburbs, as residents of the suburbs consistently rated every category notably higher than their counterparts in the city. Residents of the suburbs generally are of higher incomes than residents of the city, as they must be able to afford housing costs as well as transportation costs, often relying on a car rather than public transportation as a cheaper option. In our data, Educational Attainment positively correlates with average ratings, likely because those with higher education have higher salaries and can afford to pay more for housing in more luxury neighborhoods. Although we hypothesized that political identity would have an effect on the way residents rated aspects of their neighborhood, we found that the data disproved this. Although Republican respondents' ratings were slightly higher, the margin was too slim to reflect any true correlation.

To conclude, residents of Cook County are very satisfied with their neighborhoods and highly rated specific aspects of their neighborhoods. However, differences in the ratings across demographic categories can provide clues as to how aspects of one's identity shape their opinions of the spaces in which they live.

Ratings of Neighbors and Neighborhoods

Holden Green, Ethan Jackson, and Nate Taylor

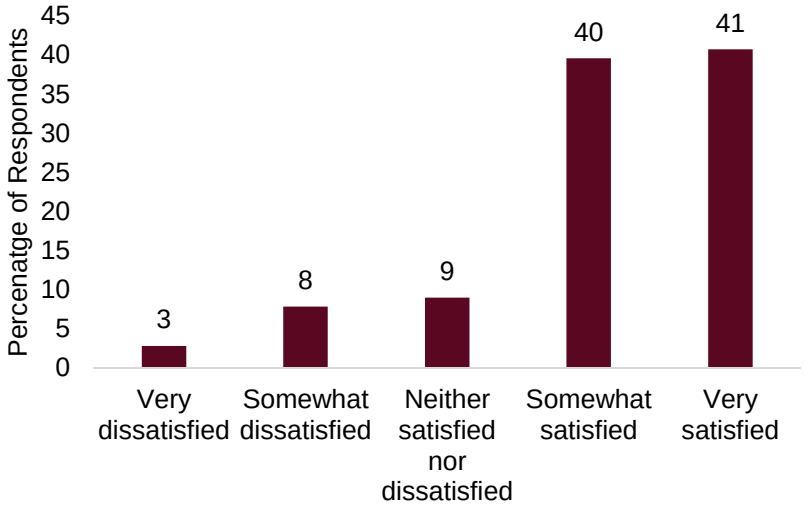
As political polarization grows, disagreement becomes an unfortunate inevitability for most Americans. From murmurs in the workplace, to bumper stickers in the parking lot, the divide in society becomes ever more transparent each day of the week. This growing trend of animosity seems to know no bounds as the digital world of online forums and social media groups provide a fertile breeding ground for increased aggression. From this, small local issues are elevated to a national audience – a trend seen last year when a few comments on a Facebook post in an Ohio community group about the behaviors of Haitian immigrant members of the community snowballed its way onto the 2024 presidential debate stage.[1]

The 2025 Cook County Community Survey allows us to test the limits of this modern hostility by helping discover residents' attitudes around not just their neighborhood, but the people who live within it. As neighborhood strength occupies the core of a community, testing whether people operate as a body of individuals, or a collective group of support and engagement can be a test of the community present within. Positive feelings surrounding a neighborhood and its residents can be a solidifying and signaling force for success and unity possibly placing opposition to the theory around growing levels of modern hostility. Through our module, we aim to test what factors play into these feelings, not only whether this divide has found its way into our neighborhoods but what factors motivate such a divide. By isolating certain characteristics and demographics, we aim to highlight the unconscious motives that shape these feelings and attitudes, allowing for a deeper understanding of how societies current shift varies across different groups.

OVERALL RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS

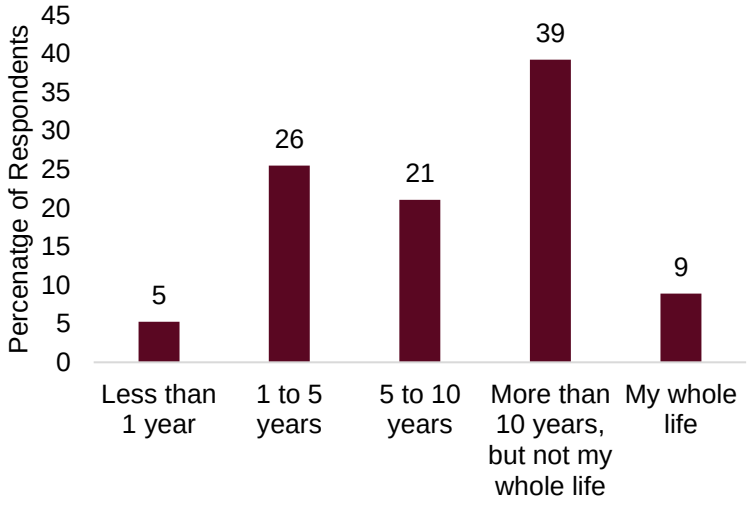
Figure 3.1 shows responses to this survey question: “Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your neighborhood as a place to live?” It represents how satisfied respondents are with their neighborhood as a whole. As shown in the Figure 3.1, people tend to be satisfied with the place that they are currently living, either because it is a genuinely good place to live, or because of the human tendency to believe that what they currently have is somehow better than what they had before. Overall, the respondents were hesitant to indicate that they were very dissatisfied, and less than 3% chose this option. Conversely, over 80% of respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with the place that they lived in general.

Figure 3.1: Neighborhood Satisfaction Distribution



The second question asked: “Please think about your neighborhood as the half-mile area surrounding where you live. First, how long have you lived in your neighborhood?” This question is crucial to understanding why someone might feel more or less connected to their neighbors and their neighborhood than others. The majority of respondents fall somewhere between one year and greater than ten but not their entire life. Respondents who are in Cook County for job opportunities or school but are not necessarily planning on making it home for ever would easily fill the 1 to 5 years category, and also partially explain the dip at the 5-to-10-year bar. More than

Figure 3.2: Length of Time in Neighborhood Distribution



10 years would include anyone who is living in the neighborhood “permanently” but did not have the rare distinction of living in the neighborhood continuously for their whole life.

Figure 3.3: Familiarity Perception of Neighbors

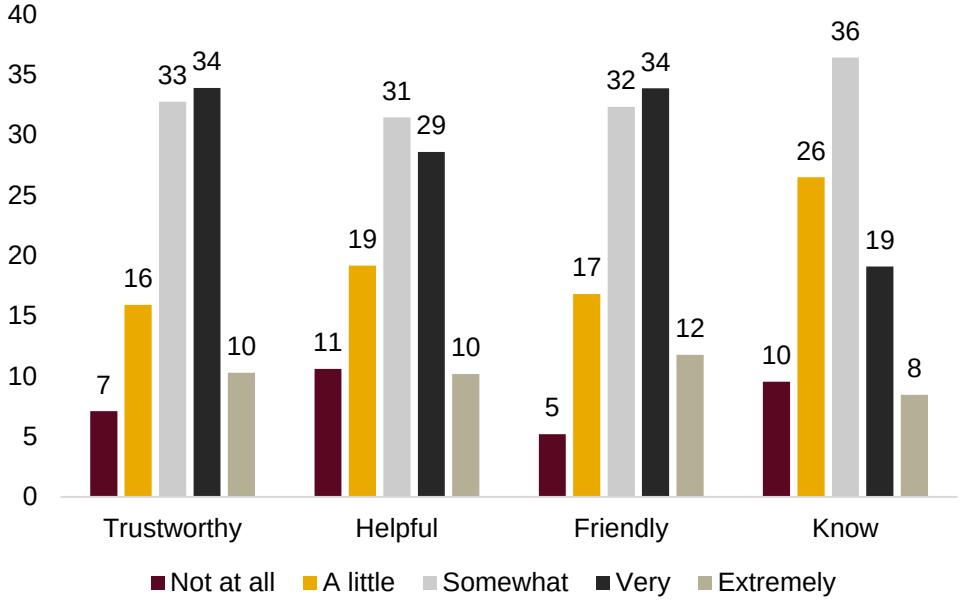


Figure 3.3 is a summary of four separate questions asked in the survey: “How well do you know your neighbors?”, “How trustworthy are your neighbors?”, “How helpful are your neighbors?”, and “How friendly are your neighbors?” As seen on the graph, ratings of trust, helpfulness, and friendliness look strikingly similar. Someone that respondents think is trustworthy and helpful would likely also answer that they see their neighbors as friendly. Knowledge, or respondent’s familiarity with their neighbors, looks markedly different than the other attitude distributions. While the other three describe feelings toward neighbors, familiarity is a more personal, concrete predictor. A respondent might be friendly with their neighbors and their neighbors friendly in return, but that seems to be distinctly separate from familiarity in the respondent’s eyes.

For that reason, we created a summary variable of only the first three questions, which gauge respondent’s perceived trustworthiness, helpfulness, and friendliness for their neighbors. This summary will allow for easier comparison to the six predictors in our bivariate analysis below. The summary was condensed onto a 1 to 5 scale to allow for a more streamlined analysis of the differences compared to new predictors. The mean in this summary variable was 3.21, with a standard deviation of 0.98. A number closer to 5 reflects the variable in question is more likely to assume their neighbors are trustworthy, helpful, and friendly.

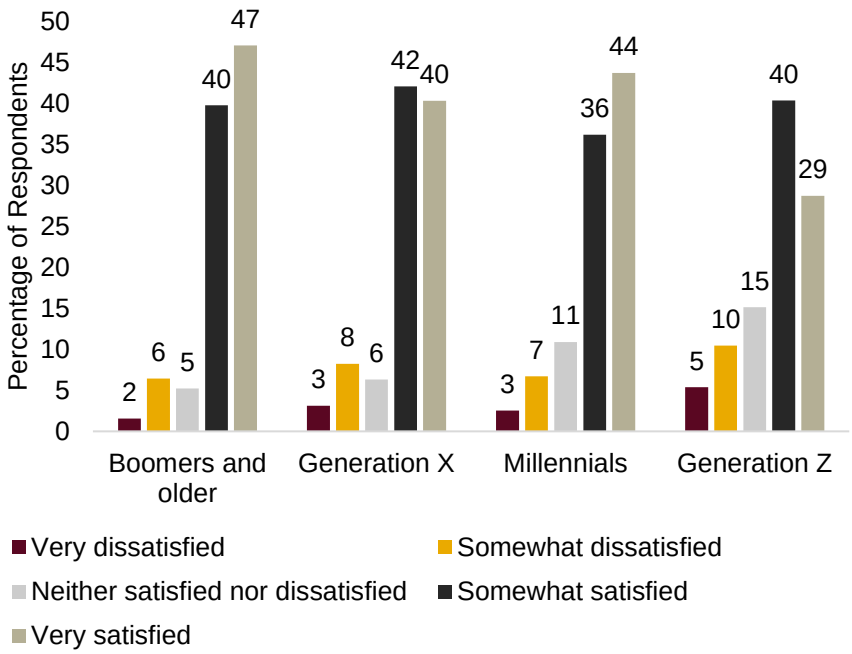
DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

Generational Age Group

The first predictor that we examined is age, a factor that has much to do with how people frame their view of the world and their fellow neighbor. Those of different generations hold wildly different understandings and lived experiences, which inform their opinion toward the community around them. We separated respondents into the following generational groups: Baby Boomers and older (1928 - 1964), Generation X (1965 - 1980), Millennials (1981 - 1996), Generation Z (1997 - 2007). The Silent Generation made up a very small portion of our total sample but are nonetheless important in understanding the relationship age has with our three modules. For simplicity's sake, we included them in the 'boomers and older' category, and the trends remain relatively the same. We can expect age to be a highly responsive predictor to our questions. In general, older people are more likely to be solitary for longer periods of time. While younger generations have to travel for work, schooling, or life changes, the older generations are more likely to be property owners with a sedentary lifestyle. Younger people are also trying out new places, learning what they like and don't like, whereas older people are likely to have found a situation they are comfortable with. Given this, we can expect the data to reflect older respondents being more favorable to their neighborhood and neighbors than younger respondents.

This assumption rings true for the first outcome: satisfaction. Figure 3.4 shows that among the oldest category of respondents, 47% indicated that they were very satisfied with their neighborhood, with a cumulative 87% that were somewhat or very satisfied. This summary number declines with each subsequent younger generation. Generation Z was the most likely to indicate dissatisfaction of any kind towards their neighborhood at a cumulative 16% responding in the negative. Apart from some

Figure 3.4: Satisfaction in Neighborhood by Generation



deviation in Generation X's 'very satisfied' response compared to Millennials, this data suggests that increased age has a positive correlation with neighborhood satisfaction.

Our second analysis examines how much knowledge rating of neighbors is affected by our respondent's age. Our hypothesis that the outcomes would all have a positive relationship with our predictors does not fit as well when examining familiarity with neighbors, as seen in Figure 3.3. The millennial respondents were quite divided in how familiar they were with their neighbors, being simultaneously the most familiar with their neighbor respondents and second highest to respond 'not at all' at around 10%. Boomers and older were more likely to be familiar with their neighbors than Generation Z, but not compared with Generation X and Millennials. Clearly, familiarity with neighbors among all age groups is not the deciding factor in our respondents expressing high levels of satisfaction with their neighborhood, considering the lukewarm knowledge rating compared to the resounding satisfaction levels.

Figure 3.5: Knowledge Rating of Neighbors by Generation Age

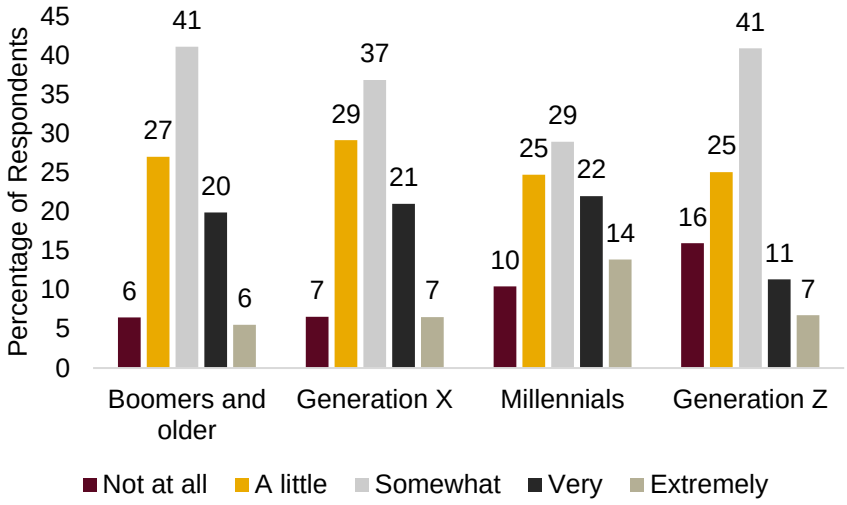
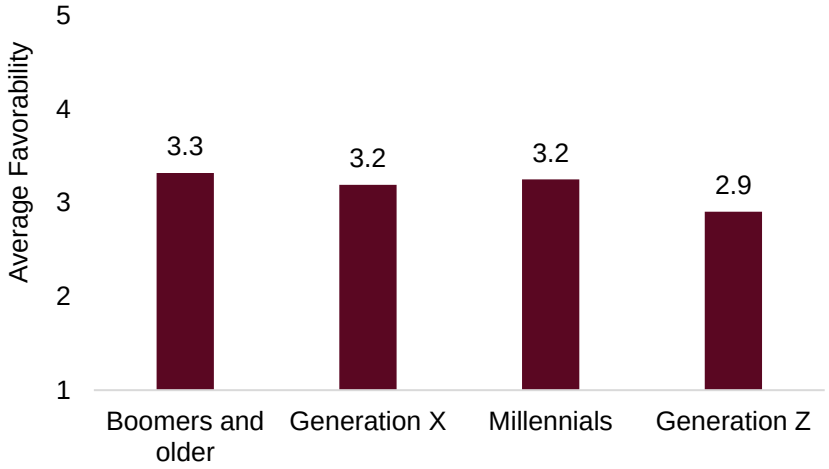


Figure 3.6 using the summary index described earlier of how positively each respondent felt towards their neighbors is shown on the left. Moving from oldest to youngest, there is a general downward trend in feelings of trustworthiness, helpfulness, and kindness, and friendliness perceptions. This data roughly reflects the hypothesis that older respondents are inclined to hold more positive attitudes towards their neighbors than their younger counterparts, despite a small deviation with Millennials' average neighbor perception.

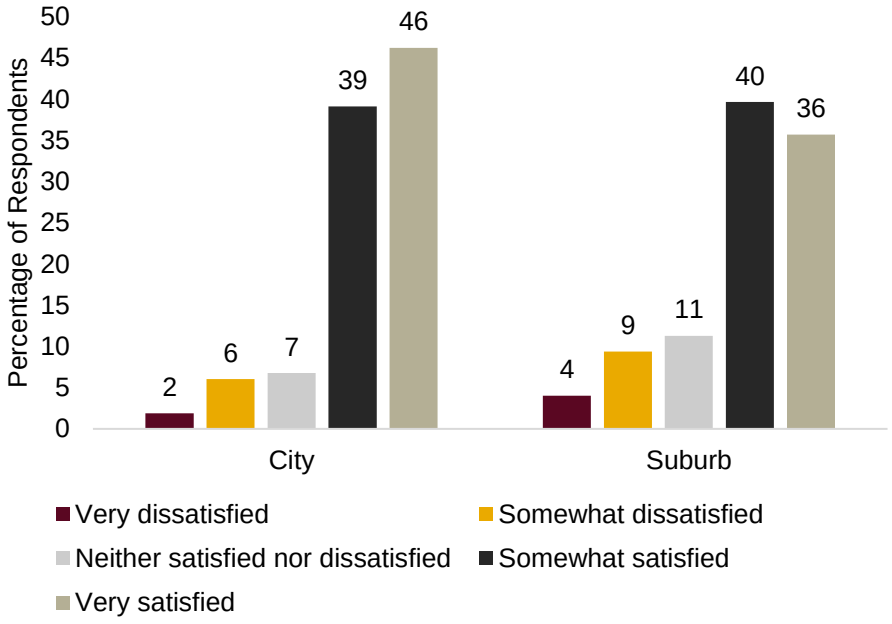
Figure 3.6: Mean Favorability Towards Neighbors by Generation



Chicago v. Suburbs

This section analyzes differences in neighborhood satisfaction, neighbor perception, and neighbor knowledge between Chicago and suburban Cook County residents. We might expect to see that neighborhood satisfaction between the two groups is somewhat similar. Both the city proper and the suburbs have robust distributions of wealth and options for housing; it's likely that most of those who live in the city choose to live in the city, and those who live outside the city choose that

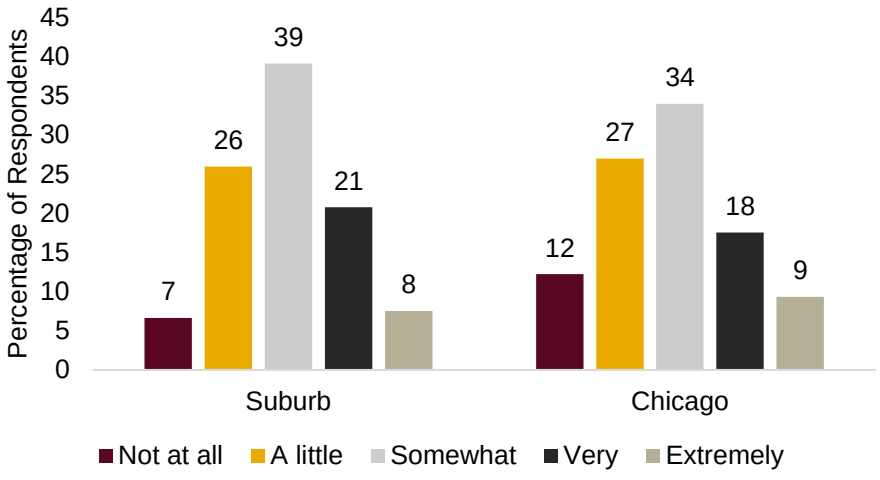
Figure 3.7: Satisfaction in Neighborhood by Location



option. We might expect, however, that those outside of Chicago report more positive perceptions of their neighbors as suburbs are often smaller, local communities. The “small-town feel” effect – and the fact that travel distances are further between different suburban town centers than those in the city – can make people feel more connected to the people immediately around them. Whereas those in the city might have friends all over the city, and thereby interact less closely with their immediate neighbors, those living in the suburbs are likely to be more connected based on geographic nearness and a sense of shared community. When one interviewed respondent was asked about why he felt less connected in the city than his old suburban home, he stated, “I'd be out doing more yard work and lawn work outside. Today, I don't have to, because it's all done for me right now. I have an attached garage before I didn't have an attached garage, so now you go in. You go into the garage; you go into your house. Before, the garage was detached, and as I was coming into the house, I would see people and talk more. So that doesn't happen anymore.” For the some of the same reasons he described, we would likely expect those outside the city to report knowing more about their immediate neighbors than those in the city.

The first premise seems to ring true. Although the distributions are not identical, both those outside the city and inside the city largely report being either “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their neighborhoods. Over 75% of suburban residents report being in one of these two categories, as do over 85% of city residents. There are higher levels of satisfaction among city residents compared to suburban residents, but, overall, both groups’ responses show the same trends and demonstrate overall satisfaction with their chosen neighborhoods.

Figure 3.8: Knowledge Rating of Neighbors between Residents of Chicago and Cook County Suburbs

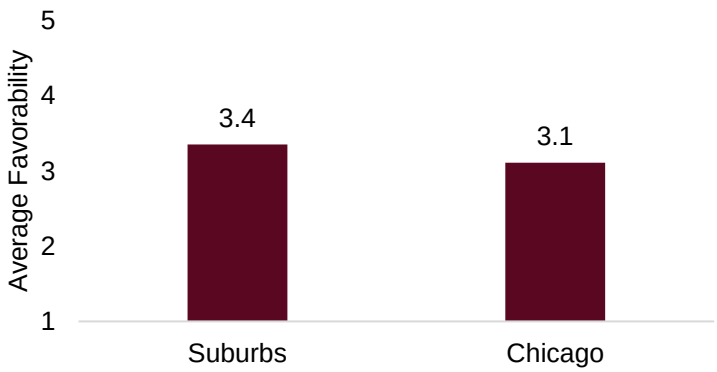


When looking at differences among knowledge of neighbors. This chart seems to also agree with the hypothesized trends outlined above. More than 12% of Chicago residents reported knowing their neighbors “not at all,” compared with only 7% of suburban residents. Conversely, over 28% of suburban respondents responded either “very” or “extremely” while just under 27%

of city residents responded the same. Although there are some slight differences, which agree with some possible causes outlined above, the differences between the two groups are not very dramatic. Both groups' most common response was "somewhat" and least common was "not at all," with the other positions in the order shared across the two groups. Although suburban residents might be more likely to base their communities on geographic nearness, people living in the city also have similar levels of knowledge of their neighbors.

Finally, when comparing average perceptions of their neighbors, our previously analyzed trend appears to hold true as well. The two means are within 0.25 units of each other, but suburban respondents report slightly higher ratings, on average, than city residents. Both groups are just above the midpoint in the range, which indicates that, on average, both suburban and city residents have slightly more positive than negative perceptions of their neighbors.

Figure 3.9: Mean Favorability toward Neighbors by Chicago vs. Suburbs

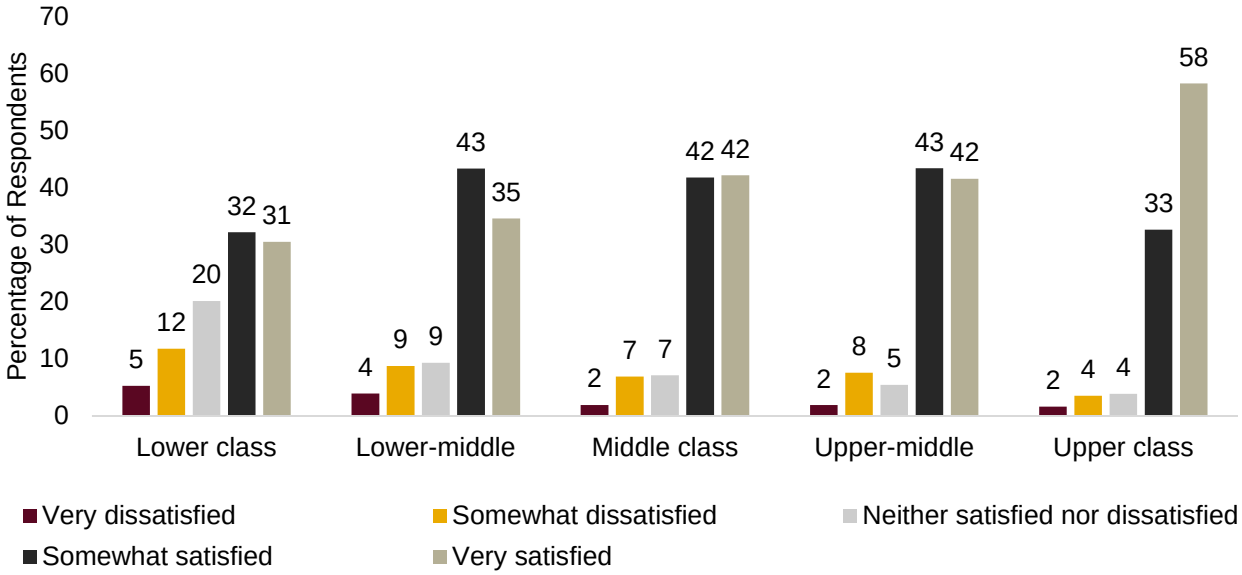


Annual Family Income

Next, we looked for any patterns between our outcome variable and the income brackets of respondents. We distributed income into 5 groups (Figure 3.10). We would expect that, the higher someone's income is, the more satisfied they are with their neighborhood. When someone's income is higher, they are likely to be more able to afford more desirable places to live. This would have a direct impact on neighborhood satisfaction – if someone has the means to live in any neighborhood they please, it's much more likely they'll be able to choose one they like. We might expect an opposite trend for knowledge of neighbors. Upper class neighborhoods are usually accompanied by large lot sizes and robust fences/security systems. When people are more physically distanced by land between houses, we would expect a direct impact on knowledge of neighbors. Finally, we would expect a higher perception of neighbors for those with higher incomes.

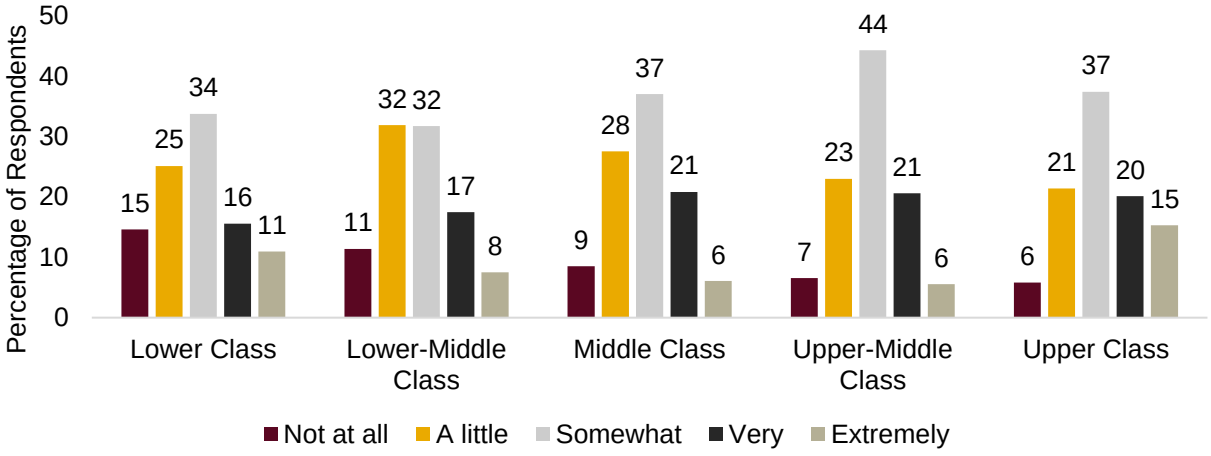
In the case of satisfaction in neighborhood by income bracket, the expected trend is followed. The distribution chart shows that 58% of those in the “upper class” category reported

Figure 3.10: Satisfaction in Neighborhood by Income Bracket



being “very satisfied” with their current neighborhood. This figure was nearly halved for those in the lowest income group, with only 31% reporting being “very satisfied”. Additionally, 91% of the highest earning respondents reported being either “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their neighborhoods. Another apparent trend seems to follow common logic – as the income

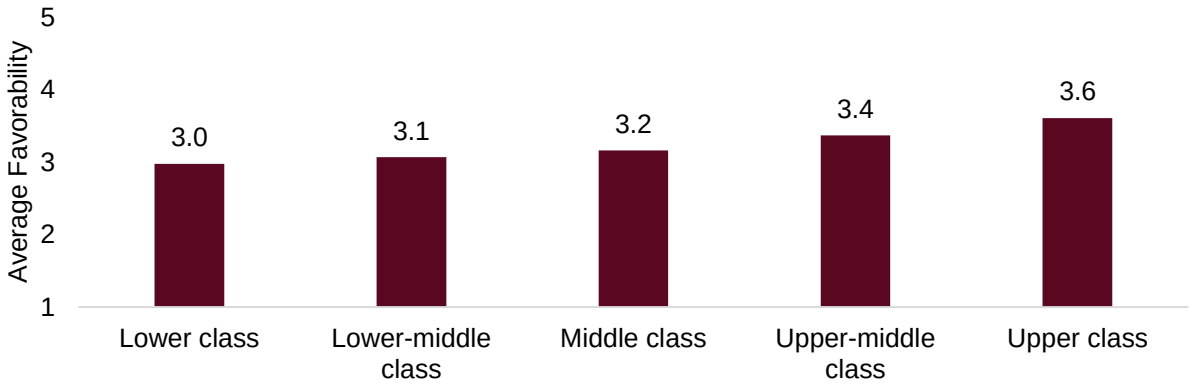
Figure 3.11: Knowledge Rating of Neighbors by Family Income Group



brackets lower, the share of respondents reporting satisfaction with their neighborhood shrinks and the share reporting dissatisfaction with their neighborhood increases.

Looking at how well respondents know their neighbors yields interesting results. In this data, the hypothesized trend appears to not be true. People in the lowest income group had the highest share of “not at all” responses when asked how well they know their neighbors at nearly 15%. The share of respondents reporting not knowing their neighbors at all decreased with each

Figure 3.12: Mean Favorability toward Neighbors by Income Group



consecutive income group, with only 5% of upper-class people reporting not knowing their neighbors at all. Rather, more than 15% of upper-class people reported knowing their neighbors “extremely” well – the highest share of any group. The share of upper-class respondents who responded “very” are also within 1% of the other highest shares for this response – all hovering just above 20%. It appears instead that upper class people are more likely than lower income people to know their neighbors.

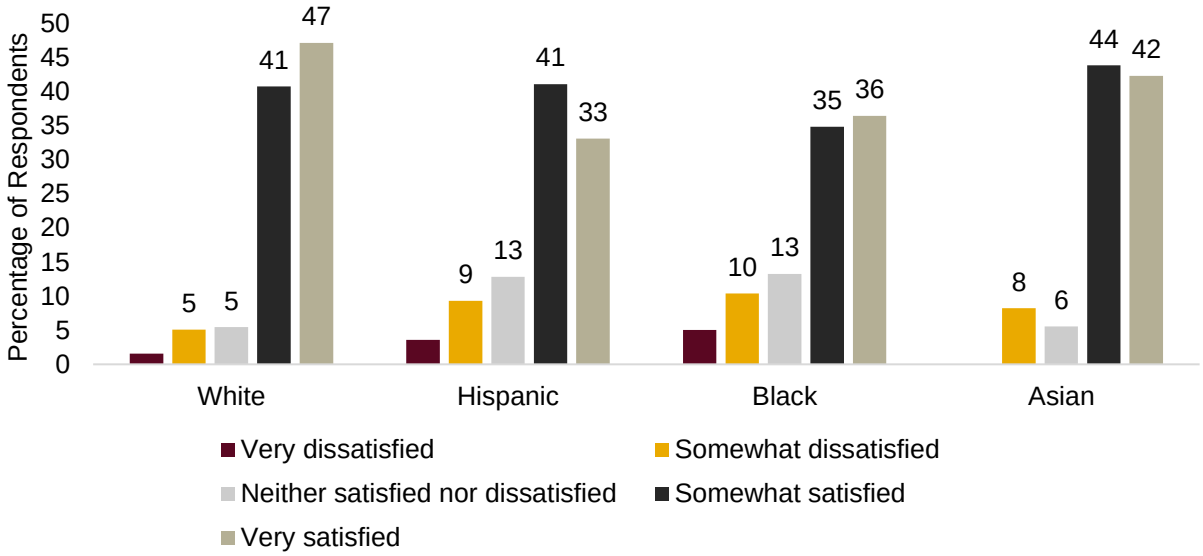
The hypothesized trend is observed, however, when analyzing respondents’ perceptions of their neighbors. We see a positive correlation between the average ratings and the income groups – lower income respondents had the lowest average perception of their neighbors at 2.98, and each successive income group sees an increase in average mean. Upper class respondents had the highest perceptions of their neighbors with a mean of 3.61.

Ethnoracial Identity

Ethnoracial divergence on the topic of neighborhood satisfaction, knowledge of neighbors, and familiarity regarding neighbors is of particular interest and could have many root causes. The primary hypothesis is that there will be significant divergence on the three outcomes among White, Hispanic, Black, and Asian respondents. There are certainly other factors that could

explain why, say, Black and White respondents indicate different attitudes on our three outcomes like socioeconomic factors, neighborhood homogenization in certain communities, or a history of structural racism and segregation that perpetuated existing problems of neighborhood division. Non-White respondents are more likely to have experienced redlining, community division for development projects, or other forms of structural racism that led to increased neighborhood division. On the other hand, that same redlining could have the inverse effect of only allowing Black respondents to live in certain areas which increases social homogenization and positive attitudes towards their neighbors and neighborhood. Both theories should lead to measurable

Figure 3.13: Satisfaction in Neighborhood by Race

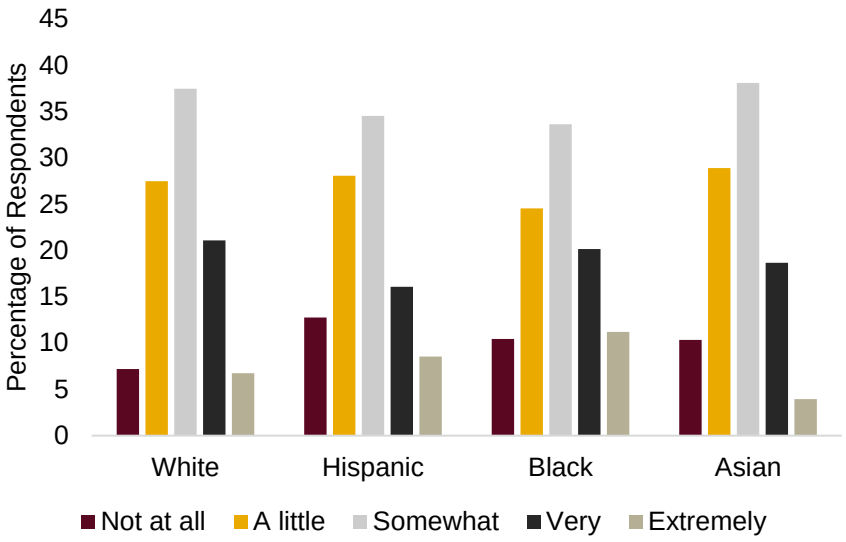


differences in the responses between Cook County residents of different races.

In the case of neighborhood satisfaction along racial lines, the data shown in Figure 3.13 appears to reinforce the first hypothesis that neighborhood dissatisfaction would be more widespread among Black and Hispanic respondents, possibly as a result of structural racism that White and Asian respondents are often not subject to in Cook County. Black respondents were most likely to be somewhat or very dissatisfied with their neighborhood at over 15% and Hispanic respondents at 13%, whereas Asian respondents had no level of ‘very dissatisfied’ and only about 8% for somewhat. This data thus suggests that Asian and White respondents are more likely to be satisfied with their neighborhood than Black and Hispanic respondents in the same county, although the condition of respondent’s neighborhood is likely as important of a factor to their answer as their race is.

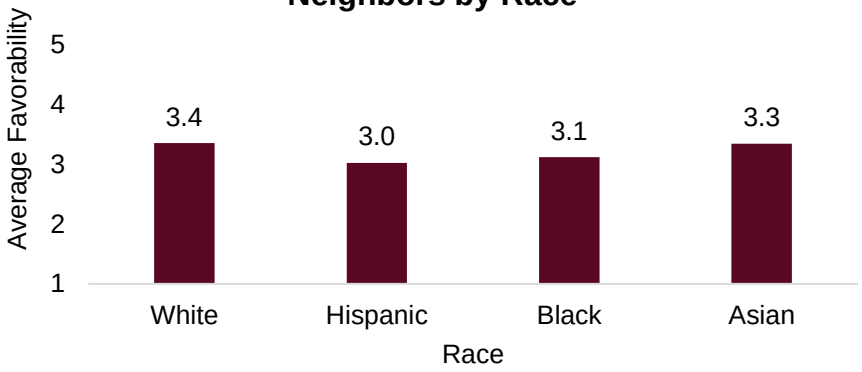
The knowledge rating of neighbors according to the ethnoracial predictor is more similar to our second hypothesis that suggested those who are in dense, racially homogenous communities, which are common in metropolitan Chicago in the villages of Pilsen, Little Village, and Humboldt Park for Hispanic communities and much of the South Side for Black communities, are more cohesive when it comes to familiarity. They also have cultural differences that might make them feel like they know their neighbors better. Black and Hispanic respondents indicated that they knew their neighbors extremely well more often than Asian and White respondents. While respondents of all races indicated that they knew their neighbors very well 16%-22% of the time, there was noticeable aversion among White and Asian respondents to describe their level of familiarity with their neighbors at the highest level ("extremely well"), unlike Hispanic and Black respondents.

Figure 3.14: Knowledge Rating of Neighbors by Ethnoracial Identity



The mean perception that different races have towards their neighbors generally also aligns with the first hypothesis that Black and Hispanic respondents rate their neighbors less favorably than White and Asian respondents. Hispanic respondents were the least likely to express that their neighbors were friendly, helpful, or trustworthy out of all races examined with an average of only 3.02 on a 5-point scale. Asian

Figure 3.15: Mean Favorability toward Neighbors by Race



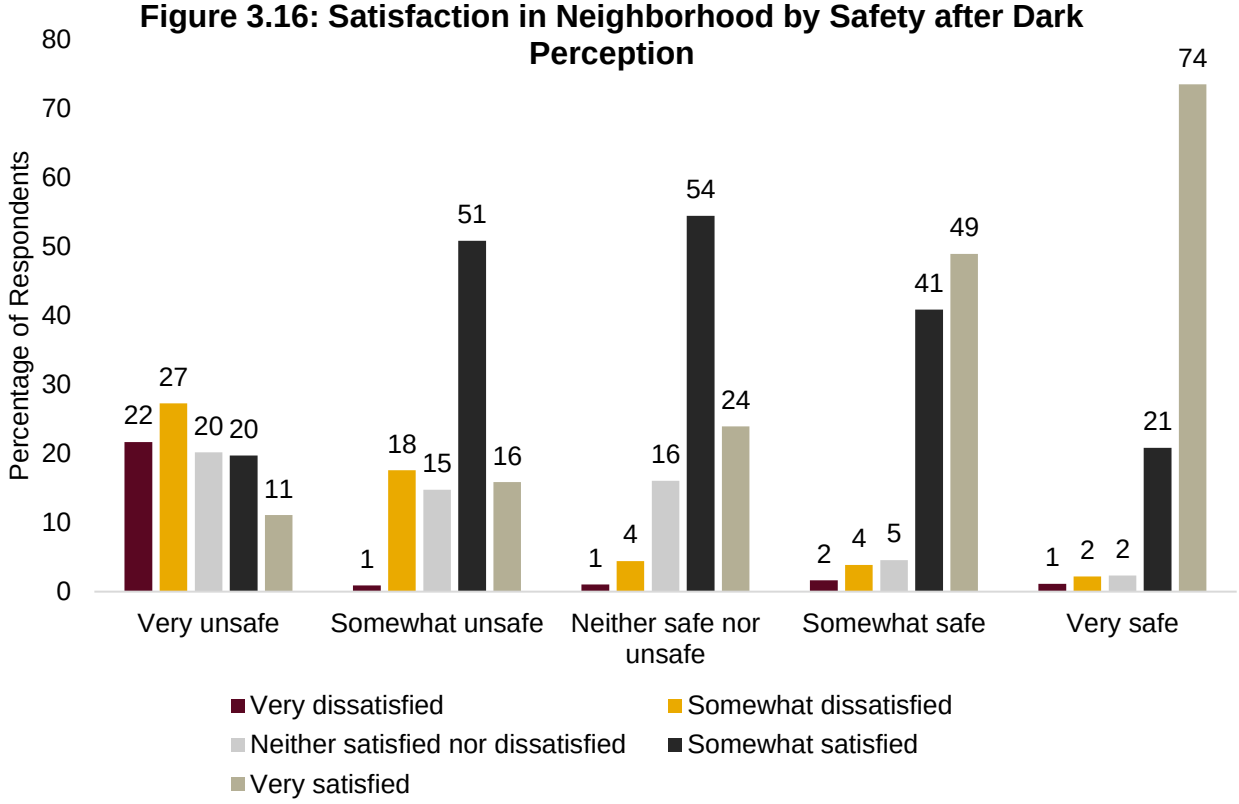
and White respondents followed a similar trend predicted in the first hypothesis of being more likely to associate positive attributes to their neighbors.

Assessments of Neighborhood Safety after Dark

For this section, we examined respondents' personal feelings of safety when walking around in their neighborhood after dark as a predictor. While the battery of questions in the survey aimed to gauge levels of safety across multiple situations, such as walking around during the day and riding public transportation, we solely focused on safely while walking after dark as it captured a better sense of the environment in the neighborhood. Here we aimed to analyze how personal feelings of safety affected respondents' views of their neighbors and neighborhood with our initial hypothesis being a positive correlation between the two variables. Since safety, or rather feeling safe, is a favorable concept, as that as those feelings of safety increased, so would favorable opinions regarding the neighborhood and neighbors. The inverse of this hypothesis rests on the idea that as people feel more unsafe about their neighborhood, they would be less connected to the community present, potentially from levels of apprehension and fear, and harbor less favorable opinions towards the neighborhood.

For neighborhood satisfaction specifically, the assumption was that as people feel greater levels of safety in their neighborhood, they would be more satisfied of the area they live, same pattern assumed to be true for the inverse. Turning to Figure 3.16, we see the results are concurrent with our hypothesis. Looking at those who felt 'very safe' while walking at night, roughly 95% of respondents were satisfied (either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied) with their

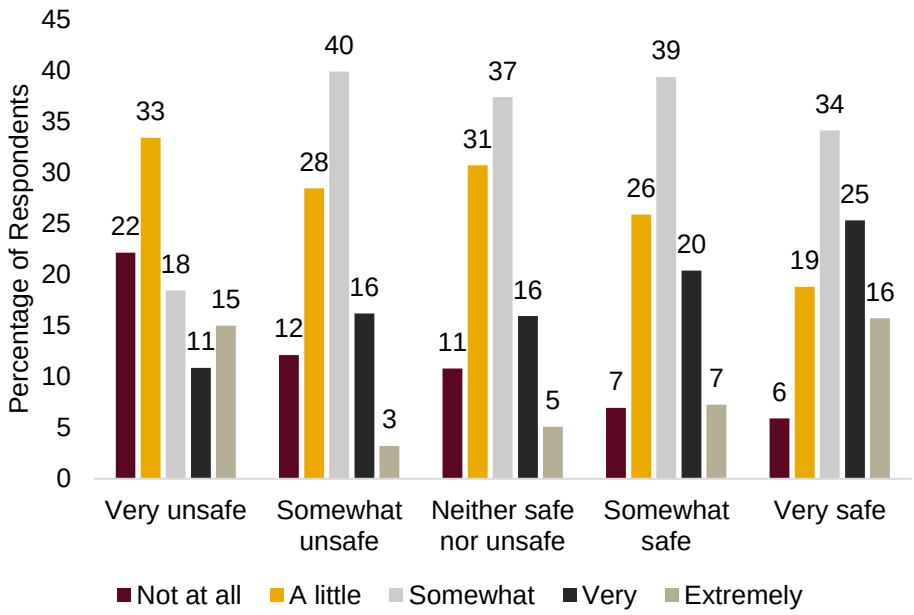
Figure 3.16: Satisfaction in Neighborhood by Safety after Dark Perception



neighborhood as a place to live. Moving towards the other end of the spectrum, we see a gradual decrease in satisfaction that drops to a low of roughly 31% for neighborhood satisfaction of those who feel 'very unsafe' waking in their neighborhood after dark. For those who felt 'very unsafe', the majority response was somewhat dissatisfied at roughly 27% with a summary percentage of 49% dissatisfied when combining the responses of very dissatisfied and somewhat dissatisfied.

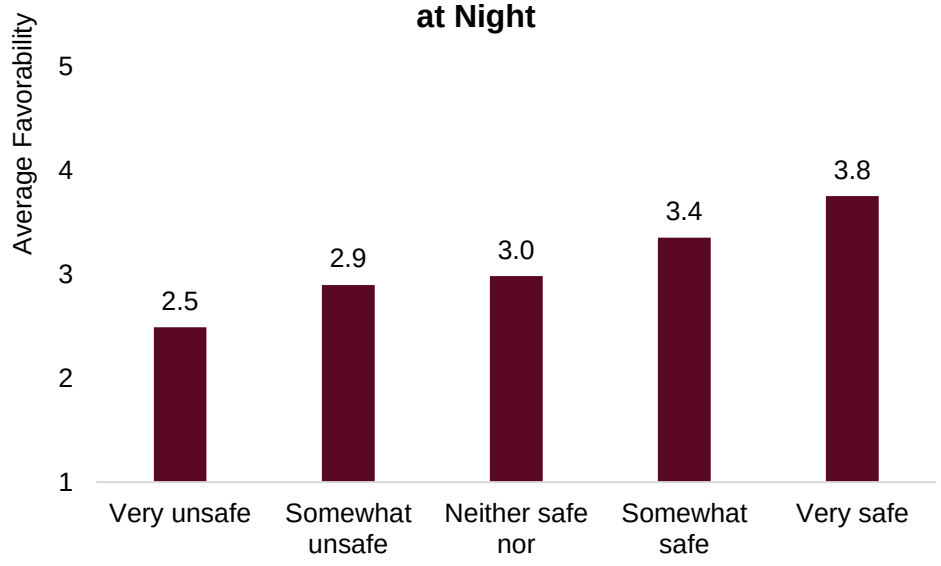
Our hypothesis regarding knowledge of neighbors is not as conclusive here as it was in the previous analysis, but a similar pattern is present within Figure 3.17. Beginning with those who feel 'very unsafe' while walking at night, a majority of respondents report knowing their neighbors "A little" at roughly 33%

Figure 3.17: Knowledge Rating of Neighbors by Personal Level of Safety while Walking at Night



and when framed as those who know their neighbors less than somewhat, the number increases to 55% of respondents who claimed feeling 'very unsafe'. Going from left to right, as the level of safety increases, the trend is not directly evident, but those who claim knowing their neighbors very well increase steadily with safety, the same is true for those who know their neighbors extremely well, with an outlier under the 'very unsafe' label. This trend goes along with our initial hypothesis that as residents feel more unsafe in their neighborhood, they will know their neighbors less. As for the outlier 'very unsafe' there is a possibility that in neighborhoods where residents feel low levels of safety there exists a

Figure 3.18: Mean Favorability toward Neighbors by Perception of Safety Walking in Neighborhood at Night



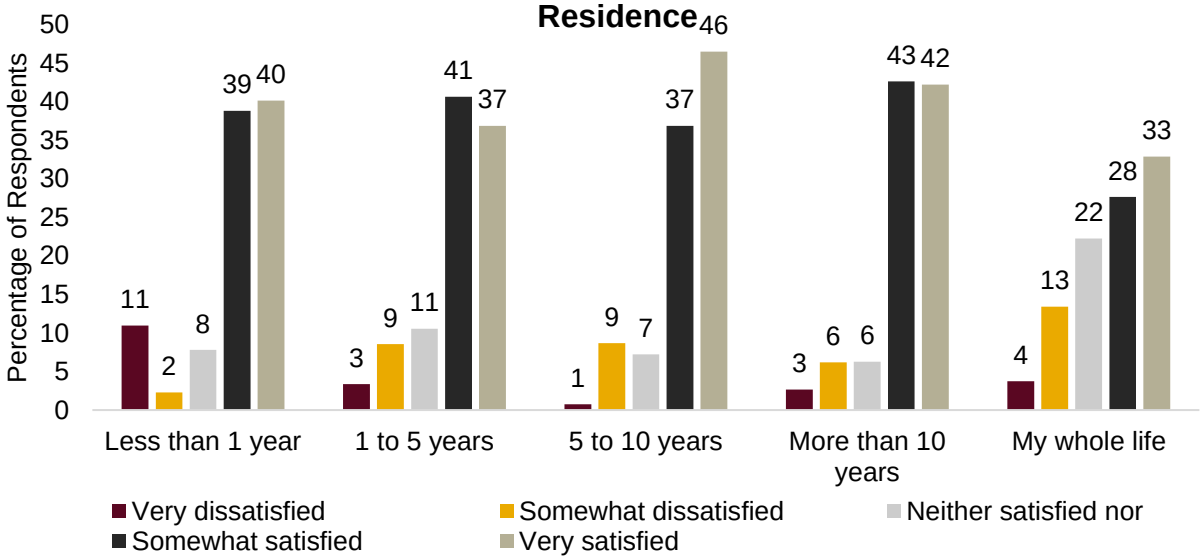
neighborhood watch element where residents know each other and watch over each other, but there is no evidence to further prove this claim. While the direct cause of this correlation remains unknown, feeling unsafe in a neighborhood or in any situation can lead to people being more protective and isolated, removing them from the possibility of connecting and interacting with their neighbors, to high levels of safety encourage residents to be out engaging with one another, increasing the levels of familiarity amongst the group.

The pattern remains true when observing favorability of neighbors as seen to the left, the level of favorability around their neighbors decreases as they report their neighborhood being more unsafe, and so for the inverse. Once again, the direct cause is unknown, but the findings can be attributed to the same reasons that were elaborated on above.

Length of Neighborhood Residency

In this final section we examine the effects that varying lengths of neighborhood residency have on our core questions regarding neighborhood satisfaction and neighbor attitudes. Prior to any examination, we hypothesized that if one decided to remain in their neighborhood for a substantial amount of time, they would likely be satisfied and content with their surroundings. Once again, this hypothesis is one of a positive correlation, that as time in a neighborhood increases, so would levels of satisfaction and feelings about their neighbors.

Figure 3.19: Satisfaction with Neighborhood by Length of Residence

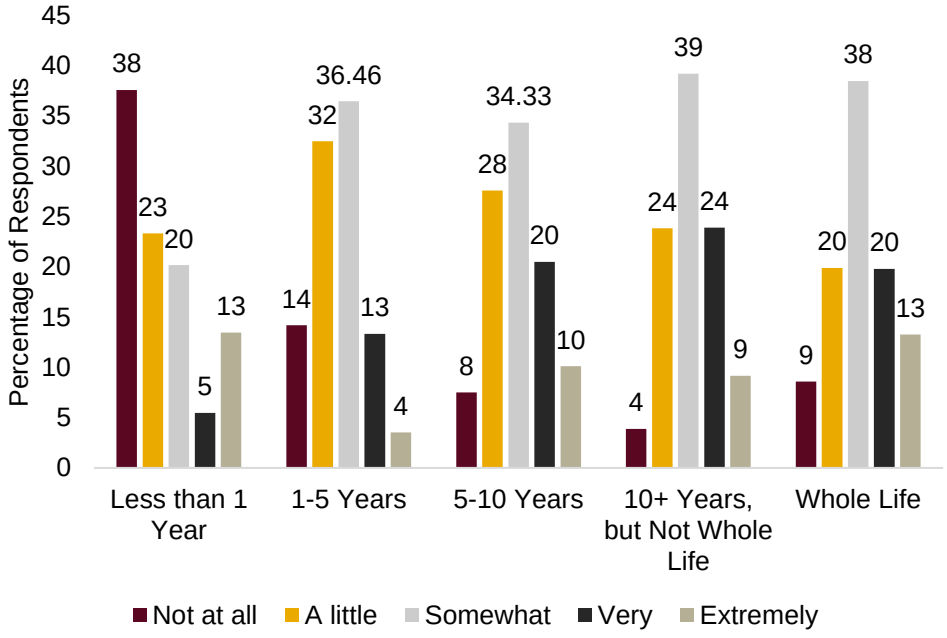


As seen in Figure 3.19 and contrary to our initial hypothesis, satisfaction and neighborhood residency seem to have little correlation between one another. Across the five brackets of time, we see little change in the levels of satisfaction with those reporting “My whole life” having the lowest level of combined satisfaction at roughly 61% compared to the highest

combined satisfaction rating of 85% for those who have lived in their neighborhood for more than 10 years but less than their whole life. Given that those who answered “My whole life” represents a small sample of the respondents, no conclusions should be drawn there, but regardless, there is little correlation present between length of residency and overall neighborhood satisfaction. There is something to be said about the 11% under less than one year having the highest level of those who said ‘very dissatisfied’ as it may signal that respondents under this category are moving for work, renters, or new homeowners who have yet to spend time getting to know their area and consequently have lower levels of satisfaction. However, the results here are not enough to signal a definite correlation.

Our hypothesis doesn’t hold up quite as well either, see Figure 3.20, as for the length of neighborhood residency, the majority response was the respondent reporting “Somewhat” when asked about their knowledge of their neighbors. However, if we combine the levels of “Very” and “Extremely” into those who have more than some knowledge of their neighbors, we see a positive correlation between knowledge level and length of residency. As these differences remain quite small, difference of only 16% between those under the category of 1-5 Years and Whole Life, there is little support for a strong claim regarding length of residency effects on levels of familiarity. Now, the category of “Less than 1 Year” fits with our initial assumptions but is not all that surprising as recent additions to a neighborhood take time to acclimate and get to know those around them. Also important to note, that while people may move around often, and fall under the category of “Less than one year” it is not to say that they are not still living within or around the same community. Yes, they may have moved residences as rent increases or housing demands change and exited the half

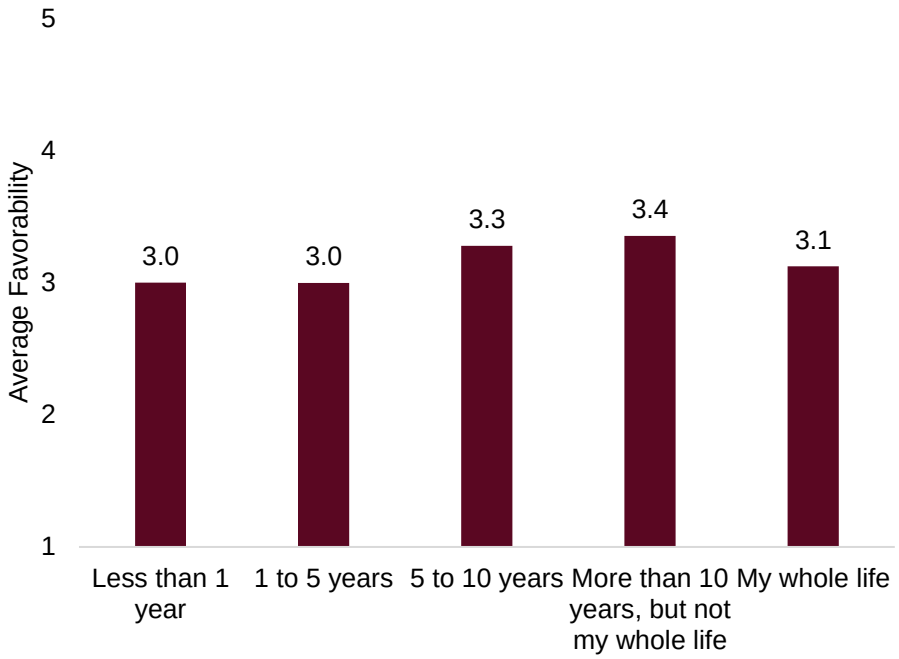
Figure 3.20: Knowledge Rating of Neighbors by Time of Neighborhood Residency



mile radius around where they live, but they still may have ties to the people around them and still consider them to be neighbors. While unaccounted for in the survey, it could possibly explain the lack of a strong correlation in the data.

Opinions of neighbors based off our summary variable is also inconclusive with little to no change based off the different brackets of residency. The highest value regarding favorability levels, being those who contain feelings that are the most favorable of their neighbors, is found under the category of those who have lived in their current neighborhood “More than 10 years...” but not their entire left does hint as potential evidence for our hypothesis, but as the difference remains quite minimal, there is no solid base for which to prove this.

Figure 3.21: Mean Favorability toward Neighbors by Length of Residency



DISCUSSION

Neighborhoods are the center of local community. They encompass our homes, favorite restaurants, and local business, providing us with countless opportunities to interact, come together, and share our lives with one another. However, as people become ever more so divided and alienated from each other, the incentive to get to know the people around you diminish. Instead of stirring up conversation with a stranger at the deli, your headphones take you away, occupying your time and leaving you safe from the risk of conversation. While waiting for the bus, it is easier to get lost scrolling through your favorite social media app rather than risking an interaction with another commuter. Each day we are presented with numerous opportunities for interaction, from the deli to your home street, people exist everywhere with an inherent social nature within them. Man is inherently a social animal, one that lives from a community of social

beings, existing together as a united group. While this tenet has existed long before we understood it's importance, our nature to be social does not change. Despite any political differences, rivalries, or petty feuds, this nature remains. Yet, we find ourselves divided more times than not.

Through examination of this module, we aimed to shed light on this modern hostility. Does the perceived animosity and divisiveness hold up in the field or are people more driven by their inherent social nature? Using the data collected about neighborhoods, we were able to do this from a lens that highlights the community; whether residents are happy where they are, surrounded by the people around them or if they are displeased and disconnected from those same people. The data reflects the fact that generally, people are pleased both with their neighborhood and neighbors. While there may be signs of societal fragmentation in all of the visible spaces in the media and online, normal people tend to think positively of those around them. Our module also proved that many of the factors that drastically change someone's favorability towards their neighbors or neighborhood are ones they cannot often control. Race and age are immutable characteristics that have concrete effects on how respondents chose to answer our neighborhood related questions. Even the more malleable characteristics like income, location, and safety after dark (which is highly subjective to location), are all tied indirectly to early family socio-economic factors that are once again outside of our respondent's control. Notwithstanding the many differences Cook County residents have, many seemed inclined to be positive towards their neighborhood when given the choice.

As the different demographics vary, and different backgrounds arise, a community is not a one size fits all concept. A community is shaped directly by the people within it to serve the needs of each member. It is made for them and from them. As one interviewed respondent put it regarding community, "it's very important … you want to live in a pretty safe and stable area, you want to make sure that the people around you, they're respectful, kind, and understanding". Community preservation is essential, providing the bedrock for each and every person, as well as the building blocks for a city, state, and nation as a whole. Given this great responsibility, preservation of a healthy community is an existential task for all people.

Ratings of Schools

Abigail Crozier, Willa Poland-McClain, Teo Soto

Public education is foundational to children's access to resources, social and intellectual development, and community. The functioning of public schools relies not only on educators, but also on policymakers who are responsible for consequential decisions regarding school funding, curriculum, and teacher support. Locally, the public elects school board members, while state legislation can decide funding and curriculum issues and the federal government may also determine funding and educational standards. Policymakers and constituents alike recognize how present educational decisions ripple into the future through their impacts on the nation's youth. Public opinion on education is important to track because it explains constituent behavior. For example, parents of school-age children may choose to move neighborhoods in pursuit of what they perceive as the highest quality schools. In addition, public opinion on education can inform policy decisions, such as what school-related issues lawmakers should prioritize and what should or should not go into school curriculum.

Towards this end, this report considers the relationship between respondent characteristics and their opinions on schools in their neighborhoods, Chicago, and the United States. Respondents were asked whether they have any children under 18 and if so, what grades their children are in. This illustrated the demographic characteristics of respondents. Then, respondents were asked to rate their neighborhood, Chicago, and US schools on a scale of A through F, in parallel to an academic grading scale. We examine the association between ratings of schools and sociodemographic characteristics: whether respondents have children, respondent race, family income, neighborhood, and educational attainment.

We expect that perceptions of schools will vary across these sociodemographic characteristics because of the differences in respondents' personal experiences with schools. Perceptions of neighborhood schools in particular will likely vary across respondents' sociodemographic characteristics because of the inequalities inherent in where people live that are aligned with these characteristics. However, it is unclear whether there are differences across sociodemographic groups in how people perceive schools in Chicago and schools in the US. As one Cook County resident told us, finding a school that felt welcoming to his family's particular demographic identities informed where his family chose to live: "We are from a mixed-race, LGBT family, so we wanted that to feel comfortable. So that's why we went to this neighborhood." As these experiences influence voting behavior and civic engagement, this report provides valuable insight into Cook County residents' perspectives that can be used by educators, policymakers,

and researchers concerned with providing education that responds to the needs of the Cook County community.

OVERALL RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS

First, respondents were asked how they would rate schools in their neighborhood, Chicago, and the US, on a scale of A through F. They were then asked whether they have children under 18. Understanding these characteristics contextualizes the data through providing a broad picture of the opinions of all Cook County residents on schools, which will later be compared with analyses of the opinions of subgroups within the data. Furthermore, knowledge of how many respondents have children under 18 adds insight into participant proximity to Cook County schools, as respondents with school-age children may be more familiar with or opinionated on schools.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of Ratings of Education

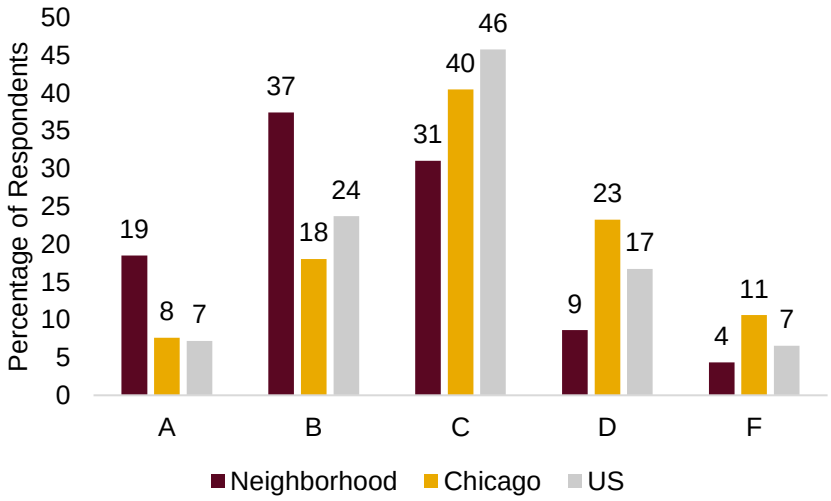


Figure 4.1 shows differences in respondents' opinions on neighborhood, Chicago, and US schools. Respondents rated neighborhood schools more favorably than Chicago and US schools, and the distribution of ratings of neighborhood schools has a positive skew. Figure 1 shows that 19% of respondents gave neighborhood schools an "A" (compared to Chicago [8%] and US [7%] schools), and 37% gave neighborhood schools a "B" (compared to Chicago [18%] and US [24%] schools). In contrast, respondents rated Chicago schools least favorably. 23% of respondents rated Chicago schools a "D" (compared to neighborhood [9%] and US [17%] schools), and 11% of respondents rated Chicago schools an "F" (compared to neighborhood [4%] and US [7%] schools). In sum, views of neighborhood schools tended to be more positive, while views of Chicago schools were the least favorable. This indicates a preference in respondents toward their neighborhood schools.

The majority of survey respondents did not have children under 18. 27% of respondents said they had children under 18, in comparison with the 73% of respondents who did not. The

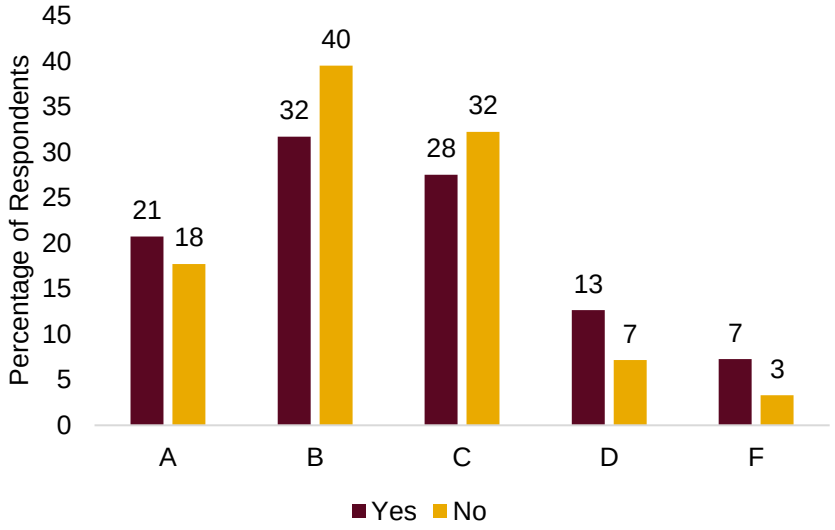
following section (Figures 2, 3, and 4) will explore potential impacts of this factor on respondent opinions.

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

To understand opinions of neighborhood, Chicago, and US schools by Cook County residents, we analyzed differences in opinion based on whether respondents have children under 18, respondent race, educational attainment, family income, and neighborhood (Chicago vs. suburbs). These predictor variables are relevant to understanding Cook County resident educational opinions because of the demonstrated relationships between factors such as poverty, racial and income segregation, and educational quality in the city of Chicago. For instance, previous research found correlations between neighborhood income inequality, school economic segregation, and educational inequality (Owens 2016). Furthermore, a legacy of racial inequality has contributed to unequal educational outcomes for Black and Hispanic students in Chicago. Mass school closures on Chicago's South and West sides due to budget deficits and falling enrollment have disproportionately impacted Black and Hispanic students (Lutton 2018), despite evidence that a history of racial segregation has kept predominantly non-white schools under-resourced and increasingly segregated (Danns 2007). These intersecting factors can help contextualize differences in opinions of and experiences in schools between demographic groups.

Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 compare ratings of schools by participants with and without children under 18. We might expect that participants with children under 18 have stronger positive or negative opinions of schools than respondents without children because they have firsthand experience with schools as parents. For the same reason, respondents with children under 18 may feel more strongly about

Figure 4.2: Ratings of Neighborhood Schools by "Have children 18 or younger?"



their neighborhood schools than they do about Chicago and US schools when compared to respondents without children.

In Figure 4.2, respondents with school-age children were more likely to have strong opinions of neighborhood schools, as reflected in the slightly higher percentage of respondents choosing “A”, “D”, and “F” for those with children under 18 compared to those without. For example, more respondents with children rated neighborhood schools “A” (21%), compared to 18% of respondents without children. Respondents without children were more likely to give neighborhood schools moderate ratings of “B” or “C”, with 40% of respondents without children rating neighborhood schools “B” (compared to 32% of respondents with children) and 32% rating neighborhood schools “C” (compared to 28% of respondents without children). These data indicate that respondents with children under 18 were more likely to have strong positive or negative opinions on neighborhood schools than respondents without children. A respondent’s proximity to their neighborhood schools through their experience as a parent may make them feel more comfortable offering strong support or criticism. Ratings for neighborhood schools had a positive skew among all participants, showing a generally positive perception of neighborhood schools.

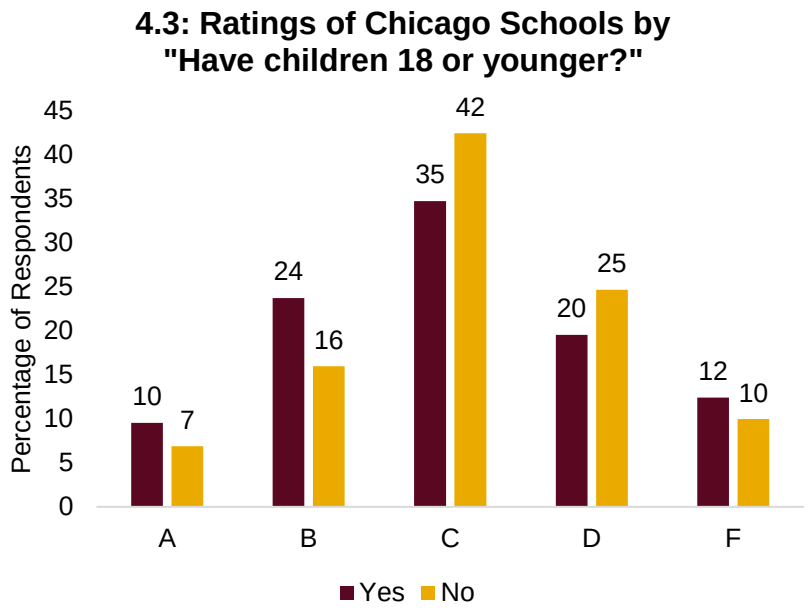
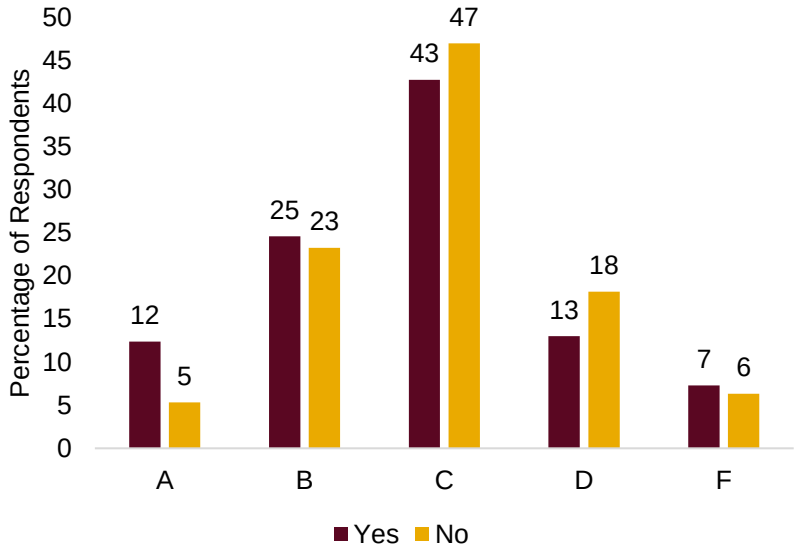


Figure 4.3 shows that respondents with children tended to feel more positively about Chicago schools than respondents without children. Among respondents with children, 33% rated Chicago schools “A” or “B”, compared to 23% of respondents without children. Respondents without children were more likely to give Chicago schools a “C” or “D” (67%), compared to 54% of respondents with children. This indicates that parents of school-age children hold more favorable views of Chicago schools than individuals without school-age children. Like in Figure 2, respondents with children were more likely to have strong positive or negative opinions of Chicago schools, indicating that a respondent’s familiarity with schools is likely to influence their opinions on schools in their neighborhood and in Chicago. Ratings of Chicago schools skewed less positively than ratings of neighborhood schools, especially among

respondents without school-age children. This could indicate a general negative perception of Chicago schools that is not necessarily connected to individual firsthand experience.

Figure 4.4, which shows ratings of US schools, indicates that respondents with children have more positive opinions on US schools than respondents without children. The biggest difference in opinion is in the "A" category, where 12% of respondents with school-age children rated schools "A", compared to only 5% of respondents without children. The majority of respondents across both categories rated US schools "C". More respondents without children gave US schools a "D", but there were minimal differences in the number of "F" ratings between groups.

Figure 4.4: Ratings of US Schools by "Have children 18 or younger?"



Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 show that, across both groups, opinions of neighborhood schools were more favorable than opinions of Chicago and US schools. For neighborhood schools, participants with school-age children were more likely to have strong positive or negative opinions. Ratings of Chicago and US schools also showed that parents tended to feel more positively about schools than non-parents. This indicates that having school-age children may increase investment in schools, leading to stronger opinions on school quality.

Figures 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7 examine the relationship between respondents' ethnoracial identity and their opinions on neighborhood, Chicago, and US schools. We might expect to see trends in which participants Black and Hispanic participants feel less positively about neighborhood schools due to the impacts of racial segregation and limited funding for predominantly non-white schools in Chicago (Danns 2007, Lutton 2018). We may also expect to see greater differences in opinion by ethnoracial identity for neighborhood and Chicago schools compared to US schools due to the localized impacts of educational inequality.

The distribution of Figure 4.5 shows stark differences in opinions on neighborhood schools between ethnoracial groups. White and Asian respondents were more likely to rate their schools with an "A" than other groups, with 30% for Asian and 23% for white respondents (compared to Hispanic [16%] and Black [11%] respondents). On the lower end of the grading scale, an inverse pattern appeared. For ratings of "D" and "F", Hispanic and Black respondents were the largest proportions. 21% of Hispanic and 15% of Black respondents rated their neighborhood schools "D" or "F", compared to white (8%) and Asian (6%) respondents. Generally, higher ratings among white and Asian respondents and lower ratings among Black and Hispanic respondents could reflect the history of unequal availability of school funding across Chicago's neighborhoods and its connection to racial segregation (Danns 2007). The suburbs are also impacted by these dynamics: in suburban Cook County, an increase in Black residents from 2010 to 2020 could in-part stem from their dissatisfaction with schools in Black neighborhoods within Chicago (Associated Press 2022), denoting perceived higher quality of suburban schools. It is also important to note that, across all racial categories, ratings of

Figure 4.5: Ratings of Neighborhood Schools by Respondent Race

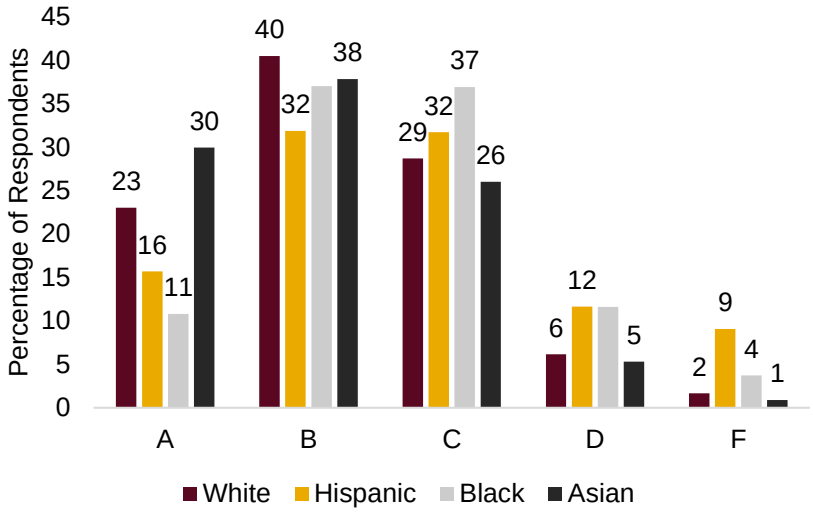
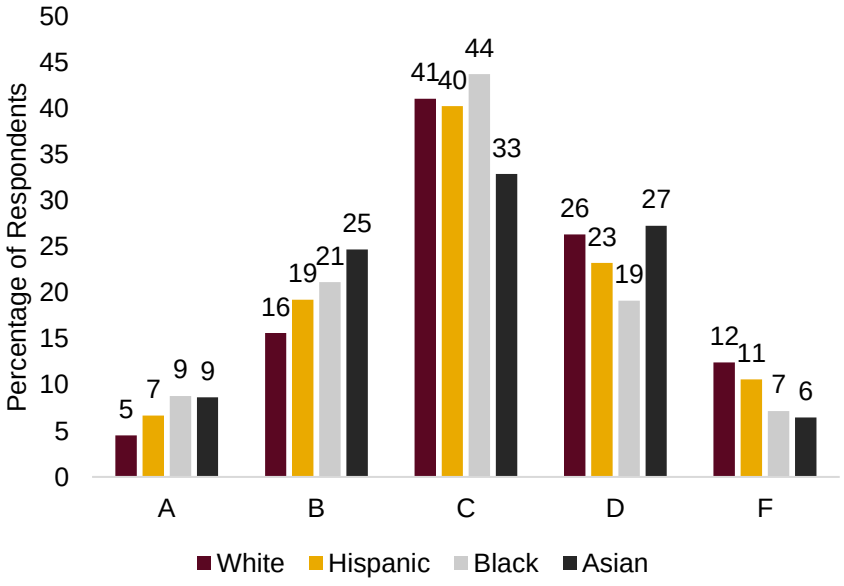


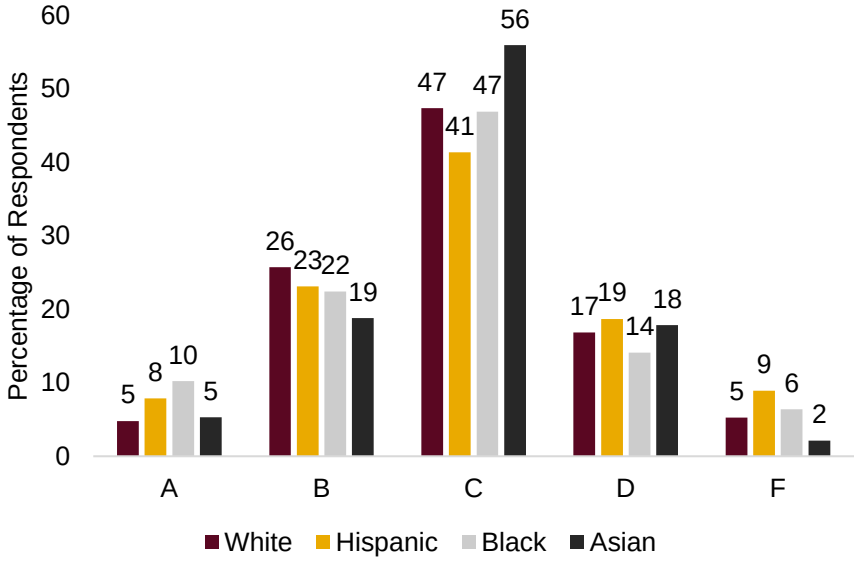
Figure 4.6: Ratings of Chicago Schools by Respondent Race



neighborhood schools were generally favorable.

In Figure 4.6, the majority of respondents across categories rated Chicago schools a “C”. For “A” and “B” ratings, Asian respondents were the most likely to give these positive ratings (33%), compared to Black (30%), Hispanic (26%), and white (20%) respondents. Among more negative ratings, white respondents were most likely to rate Chicago schools a “D” or “F” (39%), compared to Hispanic (34%), Asian (34%), and Black (30%) of respondents. White respondents’ tendency to rate Chicago schools more negatively in comparison to their ratings of neighborhood schools in Figure 5 may indicate a perception among white respondents that their neighborhood schools are better than Chicago schools generally. However, across racial categories, responses skewed less positively than for neighborhood schools, indicating a general tendency for respondents to rate their neighborhood schools more positively and Chicago schools more moderately.

Figure 4.7: Ratings of US Schools by Respondent Race



Like the previous figure, Figure 4.7 indicates moderate opinions of US schools across racial categories. The modal category across racial groups was “C”, with Asian respondents (56%) most likely to give US schools this rating. Like Figure 4.6, this figure shows that respondents were more likely to have strong opinions on their neighborhood schools and to feel more moderately toward Chicago and US schools. Ratings of neighborhood schools skewed positively and displayed differences in opinion between racial categories, while ratings across racial categories in this figure showed moderate perceptions of US schools across racial groups.

Figures 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10 examine the relationship between respondent household income and opinions on each of the three types of schools. We may see that opinions for neighborhood schools are stronger than opinions turn more general when grading Chicago public schools and US public schools. We also might expect to see respondents with a higher income having a higher percentage rating the public schools in their neighborhood more positive

and the inverse with respondents in the lowest income group due to the process of how school districts are funded through property taxes and how higher property taxes means more money going to the school district.

Figure 4.8: Ratings of Neighborhood Schools by Respondent Household Income

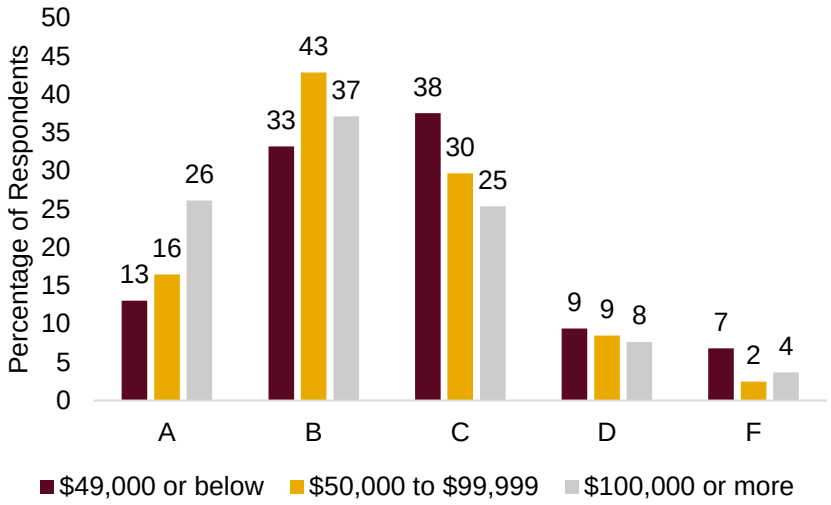
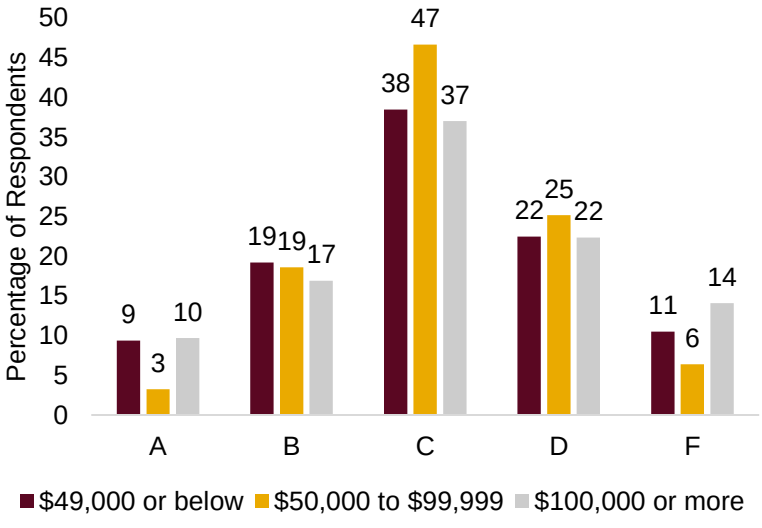


Figure 4.8 shows that a higher household income is related to higher grading of neighborhood public schools. The results for grading schools an "A" and grading schools a "C" best prove this relationship. The percentage of respondents in the lowest income group who rated their neighborhood public schools with an "A" is 13%, and the percentage increases as income does. The percentage of those in the middle income group is 16% and the largest income group is 26%. The same pattern is shown among "C" ratings, but this time it is inversed with higher income correlating with lower percentages of respondents that gave their neighborhood public schools a grade of "C". The percentage of respondents in the lowest income group who graded their neighborhood public schools with a "C" is 38%, 30% of those who are in the middle income group graded their neighborhood public schools a "C", and then 25% of highest income residents. It is also very important to recognize that respondents in the lowest family income level have their greatest percentage of respondents giving the grade of "C" while all other income levels

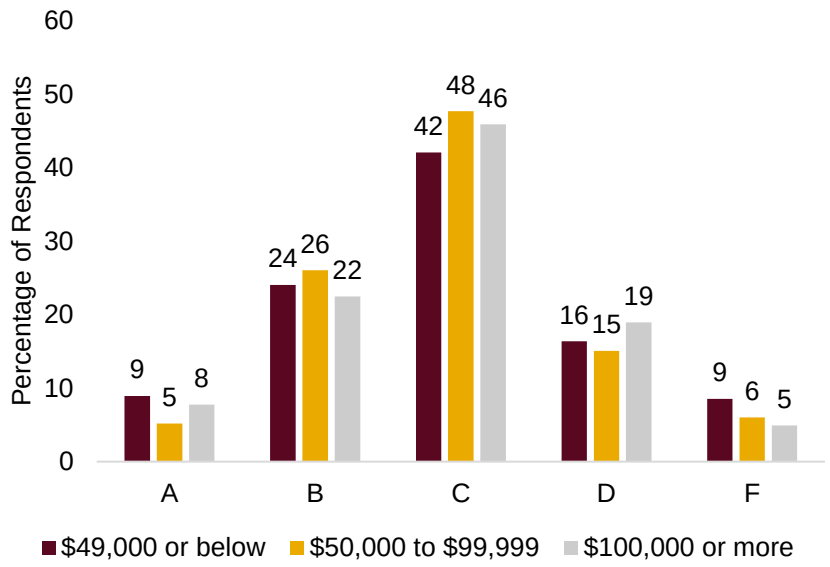
Figure 4.9: Ratings of Chicago Schools by Respondent Household Income



have their greatest percentage of respondents giving the grade of “B”. Overall Figure 4.8 shows that those with higher incomes tend to rate their neighborhood schools more favorably.

Figure 4.9 shows a normal distribution between the ratings of Chicago public schools by the respondent’s family income. The grade of “C” is the mode for all ranges of incomes, but the middle income residents have a higher percentage rating Chicago public school a “C”. The lowest and highest income residents have a larger percentage of respondents rating Chicago schools an “A” or “F”. Those distributions are what causes the percentage of respondents rating schools with a “B” or “D” to be constant. Overall, we are seeing how respondents who fall in either the highest household income group or the lowest household income group tend to have more extreme opinions about Chicago public schools in comparison to respondents who fall in the middle two income groups.

Figure 4.10: Ratings of US Schools by Respondent Household Income



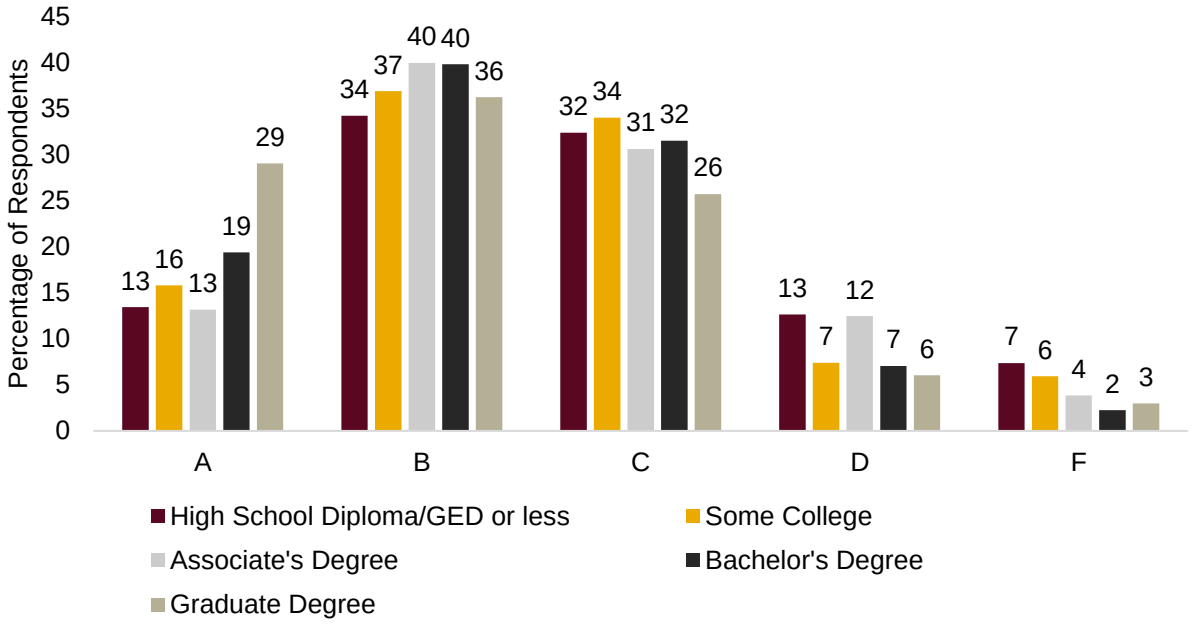
Similarly to Figure 4.9, Figure 4.10 has a normal distribution with the mode grade for United States public school ratings for all incomes falling under “C”. An interesting point from the data is how ratings from the two lowest household income groups skew slightly positively. 9% of residents in the lowest income group rated United States public schools with an “A” and 24% rated them with a “B”. While the middle household income group has only 5% rating United States public schools an “A”, they have the largest percentage of respondents rating Unites States public schools a “B” with 26%. We know from looking at Figure 4.9 that lower household income is correlated with lower neighborhood public school ratings, combining that information and how Figure 4.11 is showing a more positive skew for the two lowest household income groups can lead to the conclusion that people in a lower income bracket feel as though they have access to a lesser education than the general public.

Figures 4.11, 4.12, and 4.13 show the relationship between educational attainment and opinions on schools. We can expect to see higher educational attainment be related to higher

percentages of respondents grading neighborhood schools more positively because of how higher education is related to higher income and how school districts are funded by property taxes. We also may see that opinions will get more general when expanding to all Chicago public schools and all US public schools.

Figure 4.11 shows the relationship between respondent's educational attainment and how they rate public schools in their neighborhood. This distribution is positively skewed with the modes of all levels of educational attainment landing in the grade of "B". There is a jump in the percentage of respondents with a graduate degree rating the schools in their "A" compared to the other educational attainments. 29% of respondents who have a graduate degree gave their

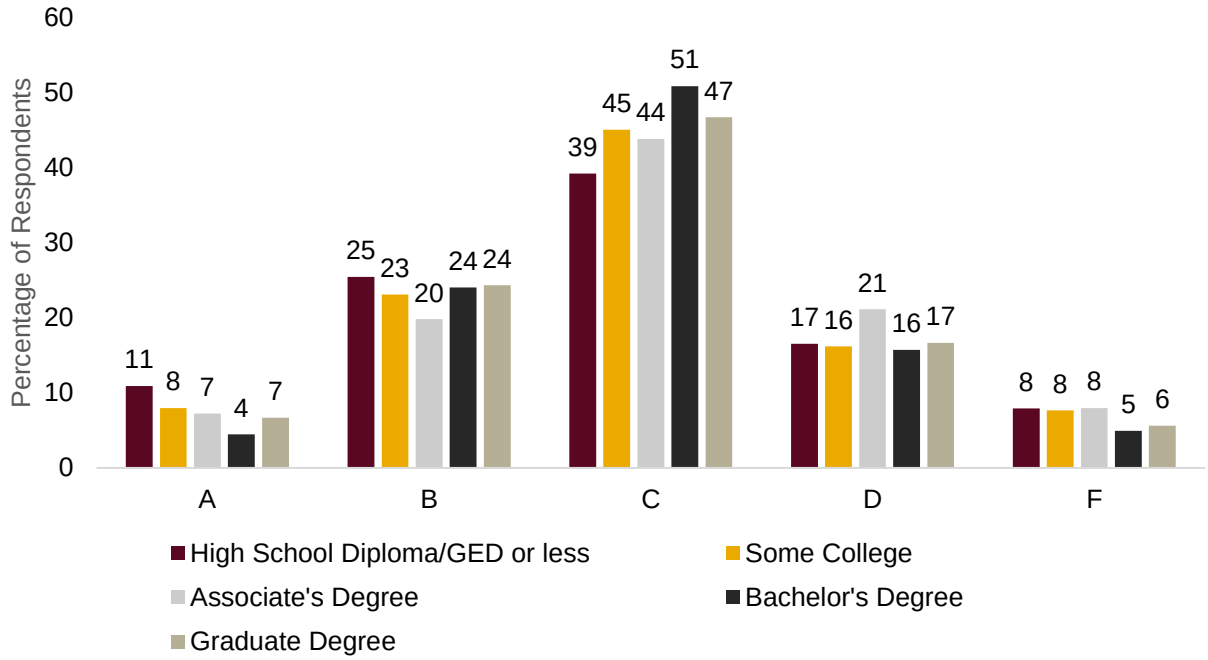
Figure 4.11: Ratings of Neighborhood Schools by Respondent Educational Attainment



neighborhood public schools an "A" while the rest of the respondents only had at most 19.37% grade their neighborhood public schools an "A". The difference of the percentage of people rating schools with a "B" or "C" is much smaller for the two lowest levels of educational attainment, high school diploma or less/GED and some college with no degree. The ratings for respondents with an associate's degree has a larger percentage rating schools a "D" than respondents with a bachelor's or graduate degree. This is important because it is showing how those with higher educational attainment are rating their neighborhood schools better, meaning they on average have access to public education than those with a lower educational attainment.

Figure 4.12 shows that the distribution of ratings of Chicago public schools and educational attainment is normal. The distribution of respondents with a graduate degree skews

Figure 4.13: Ratings of US Schools by Respondent Educational Attainment



more negatively. When comparing that distribution to how in Figure 4.12 respondents with a graduate degree rated their neighborhood schools with higher grades we can come to the conclusion that those with higher educational attainment in Cook County are more likely to have more successful public schools than the rest of Chicago because they have 9% more respondents rating their neighborhood schools an “A” or “B” than they do rating all public schools in Chicago with an “A” or a “B”.

Figure 4.13 shows the distribution of US public school ratings is a normal distribution. The mode for all educational attainment levels falls under the grade “C” and with the two highest educational attainments having the highest percentage in the “C” grades it accounts for them having the lowest percentages in the “A” and “F” grades. This is showing how those with higher educational attainments are less likely to have very extreme feelings when it comes to rating schools across the United States. The distribution of respondents who have a high school diploma/GED or less has a slightly positive skew meaning they are more likely to rate public schools in the United States with a higher grade. This pattern was also seen with respondents in the lower income bracket, meaning we can come to the same conclusion that those with less

educational attainment feel as though they have access to a lesser education than those with higher educational attainment.

Figures 4.14, 4.15, and 4.16 demonstrate differences in opinion on schools between respondents from Chicago and the Suburbs. We expect to see Suburban respondents rate their neighborhood schools and the schools in general higher due to their access to adequately funded schools in the smaller municipal boundaries. Compared to Chicago respondents due to the reputation and the faults of the Chicago public school system, and its funding being spread across a larger school and student population.

Figure 4.14: Ratings of Neighborhood Schools by Chicago v. Suburbs

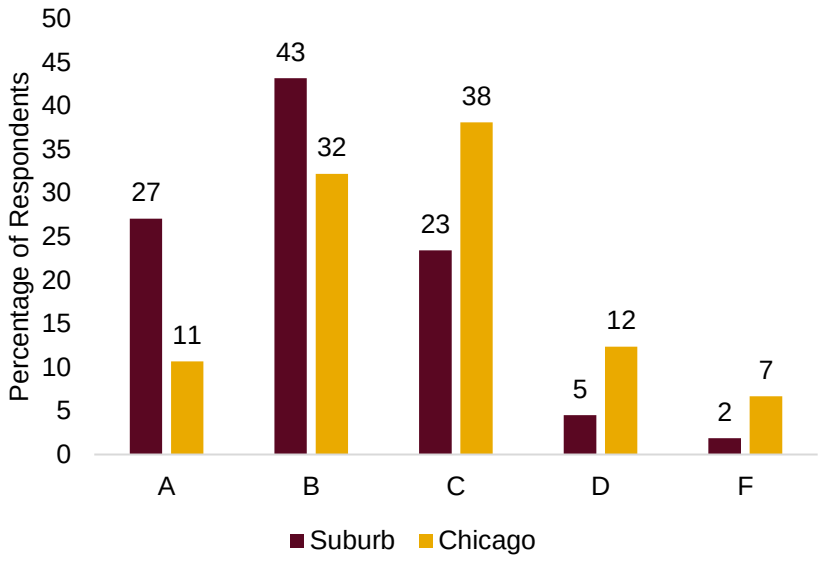


Figure 4.14 shows the distribution of grade ratings for neighborhood schools by Chicago residents and suburban residents. There is a sizeable difference in community-level ratings for schools in respondents' neighborhoods. Looking at the percentages for the letter grade “A”, suburban respondents rated their schools in their neighborhood highly, with 27% of suburbanites giving their school rating “A”. Of Chicago respondents, 11% graded in their school “A”, showing that suburbanites saw their school as an “A” double the time. On the other hand, for the grade letter “F”, the proportion of suburbanites who responded with this grade was only 2%, while 7% of Chicagoans gave their schools a “F”. Figure 4.14 suggests the significant disparities in education quality seen through suburban and urban environments, with respondents on both ends having highly different opinions of their local schools. Also for the grade letter “B” 43% of suburban respondents rated their school a level of “B” which was 11% higher than the 32% of Chicagoans who rated their school a grade letter of “B”. Overall Suburban respondents rated their school higher on the grade scale compared to Chicago respondents.

Figure 4.15 shows the distribution of grade ratings for Chicago Schools by Chicago residents and suburban residents. Both Chicago respondents and Suburban respondents rated Chicago school similarly. The letter grade of "D" it can be seen that Suburban respondents rated Chicago schools a grade latter D more than Chicagoans, with 26% of suburbanites rating Chicago schools "D", which is over 4% more than the 21% of Chicagoans who rated Chicago schools "D". Chicagoans rated their schools higher compared to suburban respondents who rated them lower.

Figure 4.15: Ratings of Chicago Schools by Chicago v. Suburbs

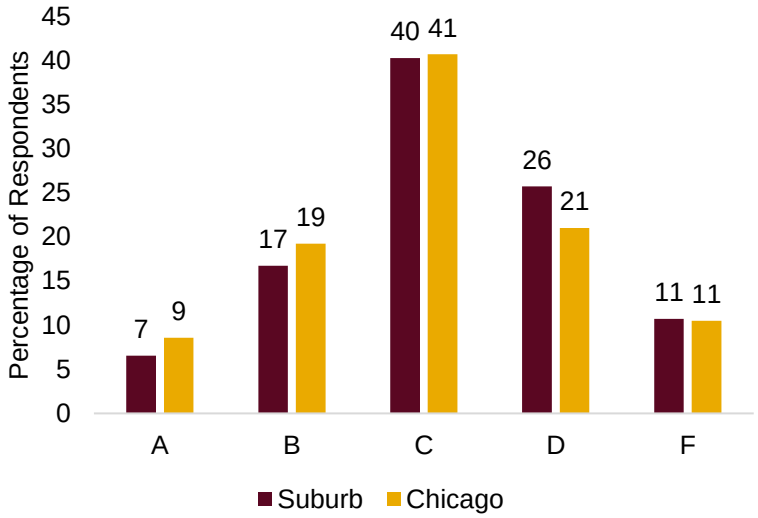
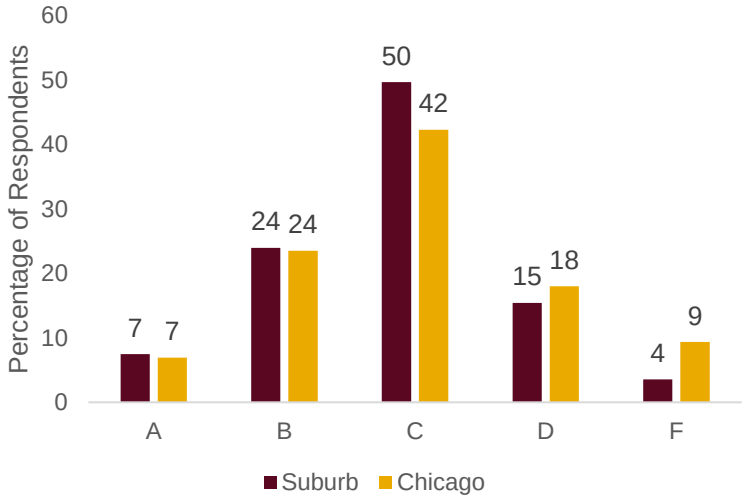


Figure 4.16 shows the distribution of letter grades for US school quality by Chicago residents and suburban residents. The first two letter grades of "A" and "B" are the two most equally distributed; both their differences in percentage are less than 4%. The significant differences in opinions are with the letter grade of levels of "C" and "F". Looking at "F", 9% of Chicagoans ranked US school quality a "F", showing that more of Chicago residents are not satisfied with the US school quality compared to 4% of suburbanites. For letter grade "C", 50% of suburbanites said that US school quality is at an average level compared to 42% of Chicagoans.

Figure 4.16: Ratings of US Schools by Chicago v. Suburbs



DISCUSSION

The analysis above shows stark differences in opinion of neighborhood schools among participants by race, income, educational attainment, and neighborhood. The demographics previously listed were purposely chosen because of how past research has shown the relation between socioeconomic status and access to education. This indicates that differences in participant demographic characteristics influence their opinions or experiences of school quality in their neighborhoods. Furthermore, through examining the changes in opinion by groups between neighborhood, Chicago, and US schools, the data reveal how demographic groups may view their neighborhood schools in comparison to other schools in Cook County or the US. These results provide important insight for researchers and policymakers interested in understanding the specific opinions and needs of different demographic groups in Cook County in relation to public education.

The education section of the 2025 Cook County Community Survey shows noteworthy differences in opinions on school quality, particularly when it comes to neighborhood schools. Most people gave Chicago and US schools middling grades, with smaller numbers rating them either very favorably or unfavorably, but opinions of neighborhood schools tended to be more positive. However, there was also noteworthy variation in respondent opinions of neighborhood schools across demographic groups. White and Asian respondents reported the most favorable opinions of neighborhood schools and less favorable opinions of Chicago schools, while an inverse pattern appeared among Black and Hispanic respondents. Furthermore, people with higher levels of education and higher family incomes were more likely to have positive perceptions of neighborhood schools than people with lower levels of education and lower incomes. Finally, respondents from the suburbs rated their neighborhood schools more favorably and Chicago schools more negatively, compared to Chicago residents. Differences in perception of schools at the neighborhood level could point to disparities in school funding and resource availability between the demographic groups studied. They suggest a relationship between racial inequality, income inequality, and access to quality education.

These results are important because they show that not all Chicago residents feel that they are equally served by their neighborhood schools. As one Cook County resident told us, “We still have a fundamental problem in Cook County and really in Illinois, that we have inequitable funding … Until that is addressed, where there is a narrowing of the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest school districts, they’re always going to have these problems.” By focusing on neighborhood-level opinions we can understand constituents’ personal educational experiences and then look closer at how different demographics are correlated with certain opinions about

public education. This deepens knowledge of how factors such as racial and income inequality impact individuals' experiences with schools and their ability to receive what they recognize as a quality education. When considering how to improve public education in Cook County, policymakers and researchers should look at disparities between neighborhoods. Ultimately, this information should prompt more specific and targeted measures for improving educational experiences for groups who tend to feel less favorably about their schools. Thus, the findings in this report and its relation to past research about socio-economic inequalities and their impact of public education provide crucial information that will allow policymakers and educators to address educational inequality in Cook County.

Confidence in Institutions

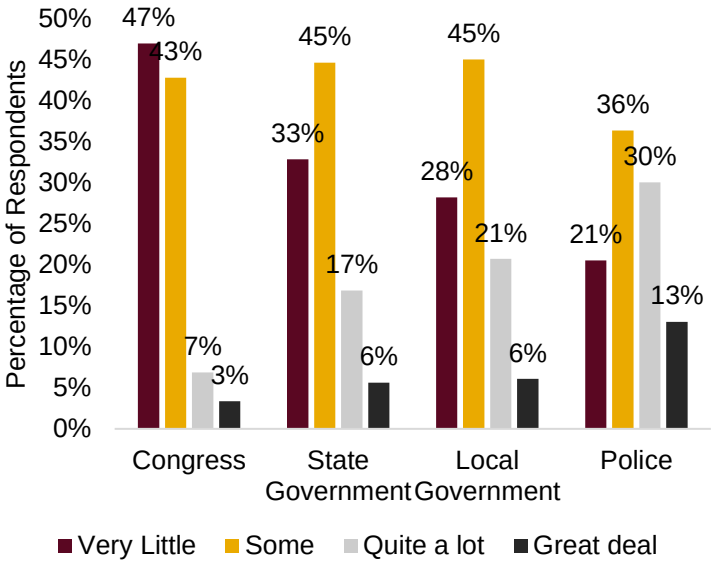
Luke Cesich and Will Quinn

The measurement and documentation of public confidence in government institutions is essential for maintaining the efficacy of the social contract between the sovereign people of the United States and their elected representatives. In an era characterized by increasing threats to the foundations of our constitutional framework, understanding the extent to which the institutions responsible for safeguarding access to and protection of inalienable rights can be trusted by the populace is crucial for preserving the integrity of the union. Over the past several decades, confidence in these institutions to fulfill their assigned responsibilities has been in decline in the United States (Gallup). For elected officials, understanding constituents' perceptions of appropriate actions can inform strategies that have a lasting impact on the lives of many individuals. While institutional confidence may vary across a host of demographic characteristics, the demographics focused on in this report are: Political Party, Education, Age Group, and Income levels. We expect that these will be potent explanatory demographic variables as they cover differences in values, knowledge level, experience level, and behavioral tendencies. Institutional confidence is low overall, but these characteristics provide insight into what may be affecting the public's confidence in government institutions.

OVERALL RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS

In the *Cook County Community Survey*, institutional confidence is assessed through four questions pertaining to the U.S. Congress, the Illinois State Government, the respondent's local government, and the police in the respondent's area. Individuals were asked to respond with one of four options: "Very little" (1), "Some" (2), "Quite a lot" (3), and "A great deal" (4). In general, we observe a trend towards higher levels of confidence as the

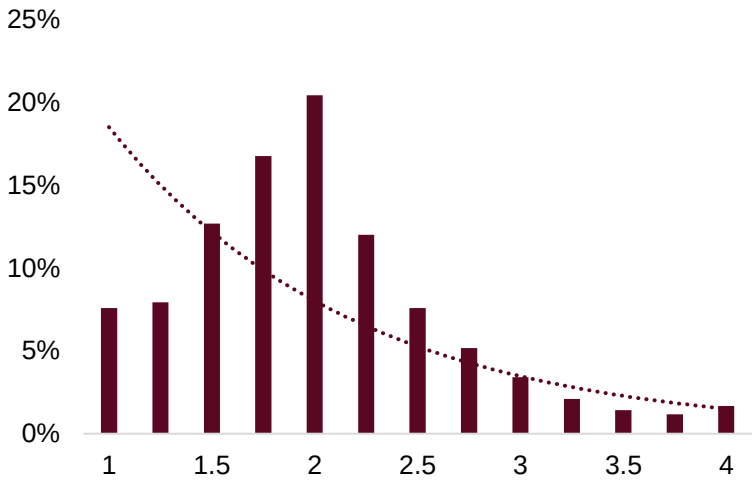
Figure 5.1: Confidence by Institution



institutions become more local to respondents; respondents have the lowest levels of confidence in Congress and the highest levels of confidence in their local police.

To better understand the general state of institutional confidence in Cook County, it is pertinent to average institutional confidence overall. The average of all respondent values across institutions ranging from one to four showed that approximately fifty percent of respondents have between 1.5 and 2 levels of confidence. However, as we break down our analysis across individual institutions, a discernible preference emerges, particularly when considering locality. The police have a higher average confidence rating over Congress by .68 levels of confidence, and an average of .35 confidence levels over State and Local governments. Fittingly, the average level of confidence increases as the institutions become more local. It may be relevant to consider the difference in locality between "Local Government" and "Local Police." The public may see or interact with the police on a more regular basis than local elected officials, thus making the Police a somewhat more "Local" institution than mayors, alderpersons, etc. Findings discussed throughout this report will further highlight the relationship between locality and confidence in an institution.

Figure 5.2: Average Confidence



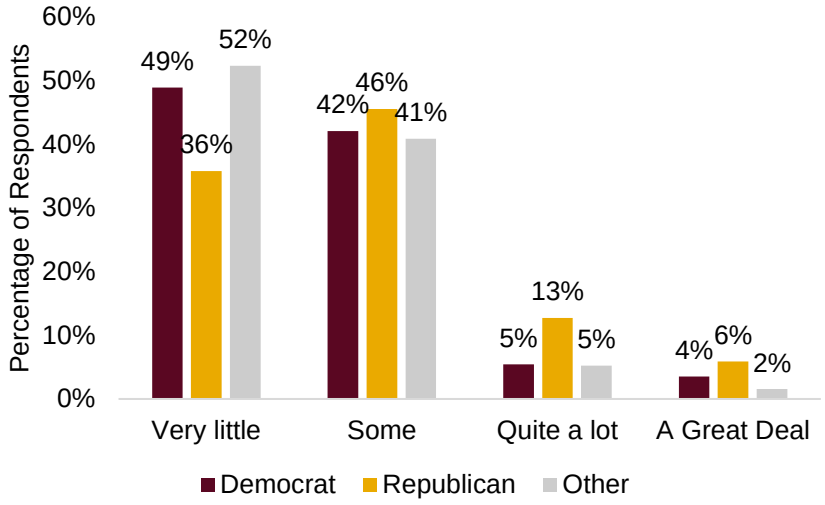
DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

We selected four primary demographic characteristics to explore potential correlations evident within the dataset. Our explanatory variables are political affiliation, educational attainment, age group, and income levels. We posit that these demographic characteristics represent the most pertinent variables for examination, given their generalizability beyond the context of the Cook County Community Survey. Political Party membership is typically a divisive topic among Americans; therefore, we expected a large difference between political parties and their institutional confidence. Educational attainment is one of two variables that begin to paint a picture of what may lead to increased institutional confidence, we believe that education suggests somewhat higher levels of political salience or greater awareness of institutional responsibilities and actions. The age group demographic further confirms our suspicion of a relationship between

political salience and institutional confidence, we believe that older individuals are more likely to have the time to be concerned with the actions of various public institutions. We anticipate that income levels may be a significant predictor of confidence in government institutions because of the growing cost of living crisis (Brenan 2024). We stratified income level into four distinct groups: Low Income ($39,999 or less), Low-Middle Income ($40,000-$99,999), High-Middle Income ($100,000-$199,999), and High income ($200,000 or more). Our analysis aims to delineate the ways in which demographic trends may either persist or fluctuate across different institutional contexts. We will first cover bivariate relations of interest in regard to institutional confidence levels for Congress, followed by the Illinois State Government, Local Government, and Police.

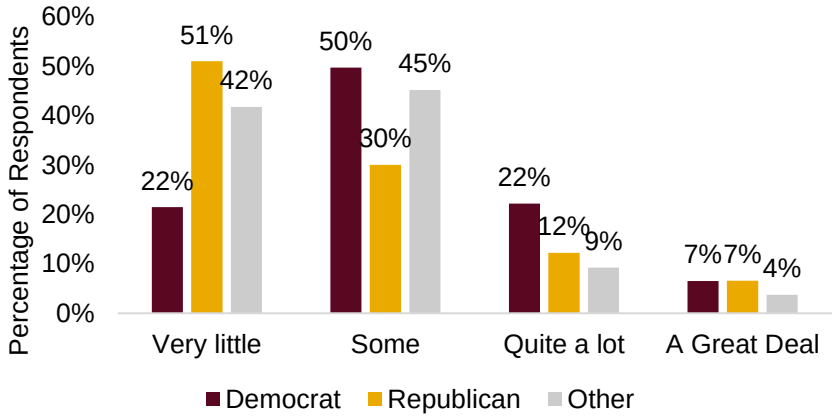
While overall ratings for Congress are low, significant divergent trends in confidence levels exist across political affiliations. Both Democrats and “Independents/Other” tend to report lower levels of confidence in Congress, with "Very little" being the most prevalent response among both groups (49% and 52%) compared to Republicans (36%). Notably, Republicans account for a majority of respondents who rated Congress at or above "Quite a lot" (13%). The analysis of institutional confidence by political parties may indicate a correlation between the majority party in Congress and the confidence levels expressed by respondents from that party. However, the difference in confidence in Congress between political parties was not as large as we expected which emphasizes the dramatic lack of confidence in Congress among Cook County Residents. For the remaining bivariate analyses in this report, institutional confidence in Congress is not presented due to minimal distinction across the demographics. The analysis of confidence in Congress by Political Party is representative of what confidence in Congress looks like across each of the other variables. Furthermore, this is the only explanatory variable with significantly unique variations in relation to confidence levels in congress.

Figure 5.3: Confidence in Congress by Political Party



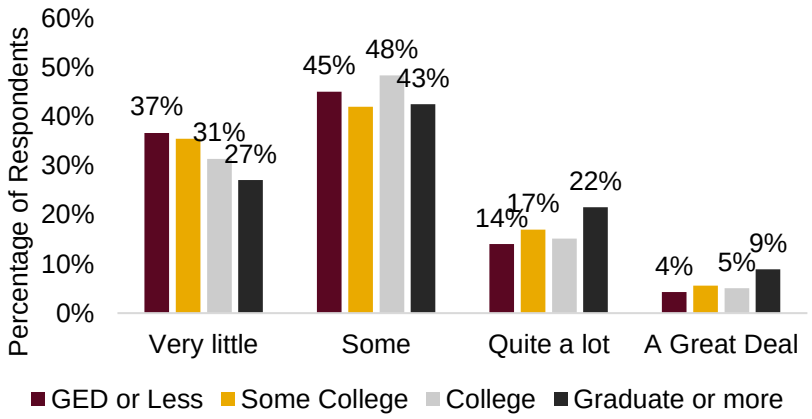
Confidence in State Government against political party shows divergent trends in relation to those seen for Congress. Republican responses constitute roughly half of respondents with confidence levels at “Very little”. Notably, while Democrats and “Other” exhibit similar proportions of respondents indicating "some" confidence, there is a pronounced divergence beyond this category, with “Other” respondents adopting a significantly more critical stance toward the Illinois state government. In fact, when assessing the mean confidence level in state government “Other” respondents and Republicans have a nearly identical value.

Figure 5.4: Confidence in State Government by Political Party



The data appears to show a positive relationship between higher education levels and increased confidence in State Government. Individuals possessing a GED or less demonstrate lower levels of confidence in the State Government (82% “Very Little” & “Some”). For respondents with Some College and a College degree completed, they typically share close levels of confidence. “Some” was the most frequent response for both Some College (42%) and College degree (48%), this was also the largest difference in response percentages (6%) between them. Notably, the data shows that respondents with a graduate or professional degree have greater levels of confidence in their state government, approximately 30% indicating their confidence at “Quite a lot” or “A Great deal” which is nearly 10% greather than other education level responses. This significant

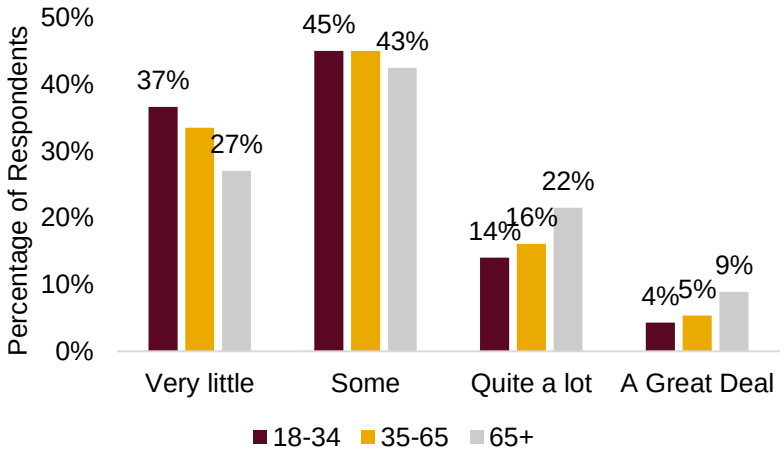
Figure 5.5: Confidence in State Government by Education



increase between respondents with Some College and a College degree to those with eduation beyond an initial degree is what stood out to us as evidence for a relationship between education and institutional confidence. Our inference would be that as educational attainment increases, so does confidence in public institutions because of a greater political salience and awareness.

Trends in confidence ratings varied only slightly for the Illinois State Government across different age groups. Younger respondents (18-34) tend to express lower levels of confidence (82% Very Little & Some), whereas older age groups (65+) consistently demonstrate a more favorable disposition (32%) towards "Quite a lot" and "A Great Deal" of confidence. Respondents with ages between 35 and 65 land almost perfectly between the younger and older age groups' confidence in State Government. Individuals aged 65 and older constitute more than half of the respondents who report a high degree of confidence in the Illinois State Government.

Figure 5.6: Confidence in State Government by Age Group



When analyzing trends in institutional confidence in state government across income levels we find that income largely has no direct effect on confidence. However, 11% of High-Income respondents rated their confidence at “A Great Deal”, while the other income levels range from 4%-6%. While this is not statistically indicative of a relationship between income and institutional confidence, it helps understand what may truly affect the public’s confidence in government institutions. The rising cost of living and inflation over recent years may be perceived by a lack of institutional actions by the public, resulting in lower confidence. Economic hardships are felt by all income levels, but low-income individuals face the most hardship during times of inflation or recession; this likely explains the lower levels of confidence from these income levels.

Figure 5.7: Confidence in State Government by Income

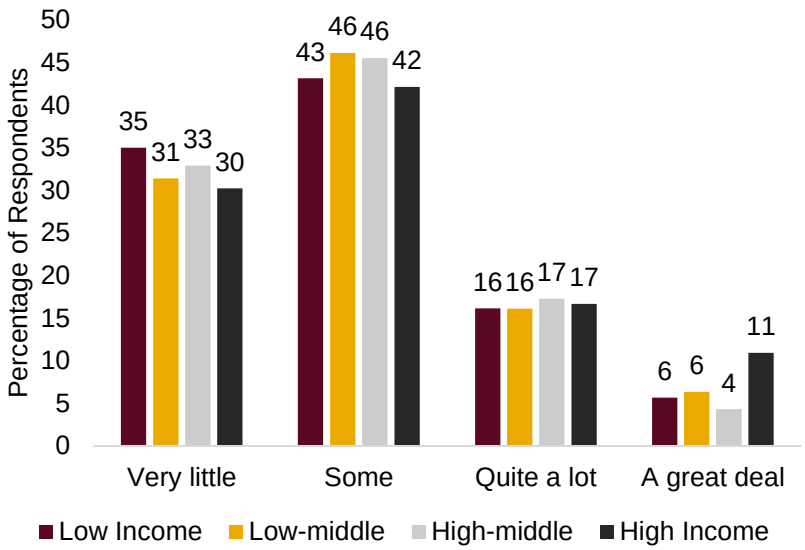
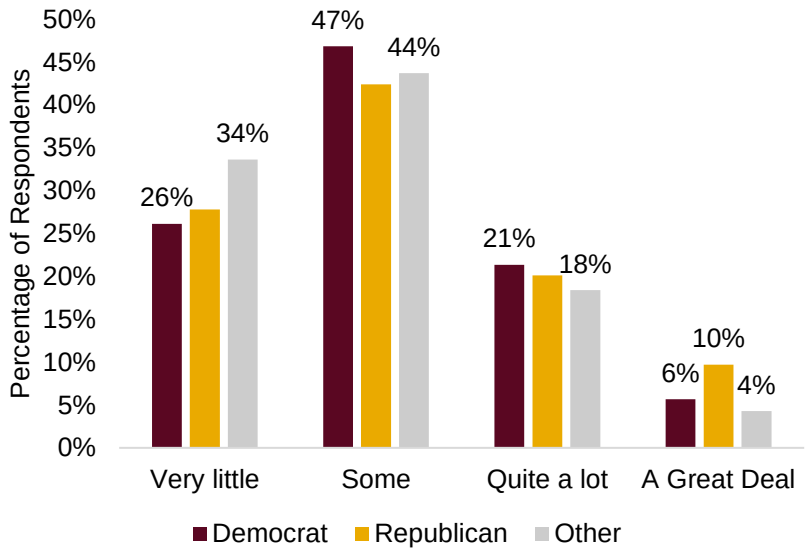


Figure 5.8: Confidence in Local Government by Political Party

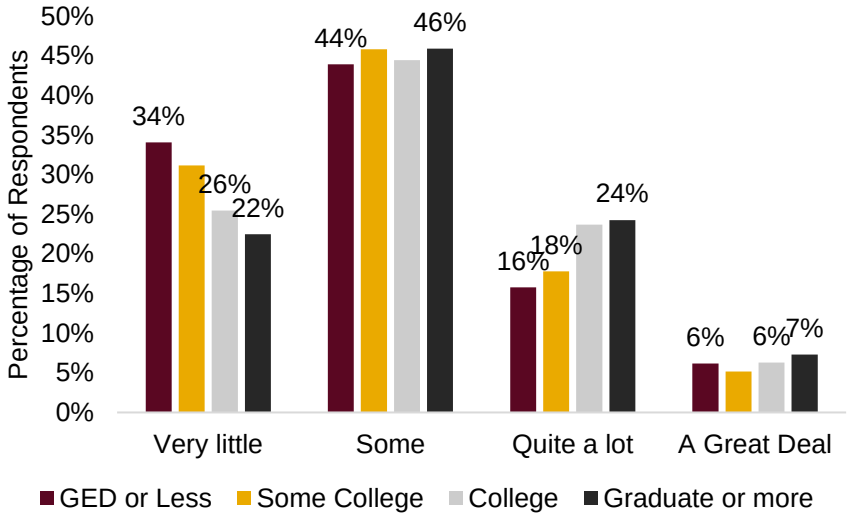


Confidence levels in Local Government are similar across political parties. Respondents who fall into the “Other” category have the highest rate of “Very Little” confidence at 34%. All three political party categories have the most responses fall into the “Some” level of confidence for Local Government, 47% of Democrats fall into this

confidence level. Republicans demonstrate a slight inclination to rate their confidence in local government more favorably with 10% at “A Great Deal.”

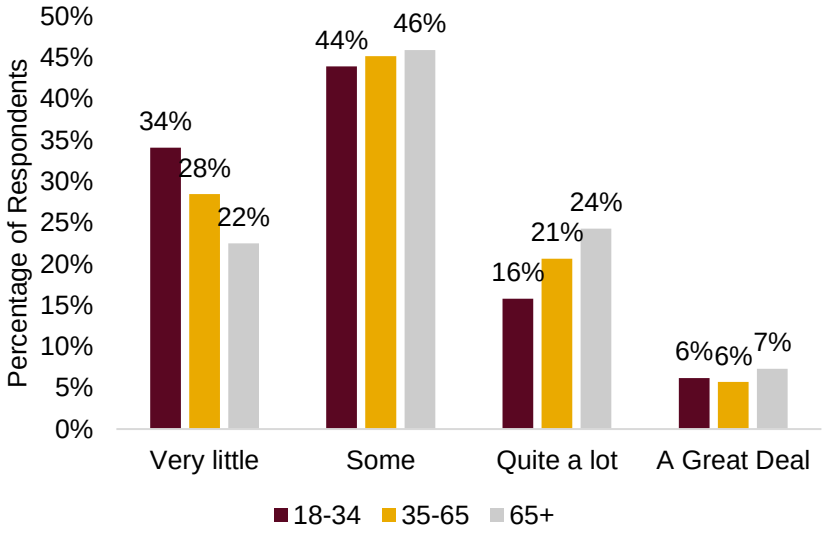
Confidence rating trends in Local Government across education levels act in a uniform fashion with little variance other institutions. We observe that an increase in general education level corresponds with a tendency to rate local government more favorably. The visualization shows that most respondents, regardless of educational attainment, rate their confidence in their Local Government at “Some”, suggesting an overwhelming desire for improvement from local elected officials.

Figure 5.9: Confidence in Local Government by Education



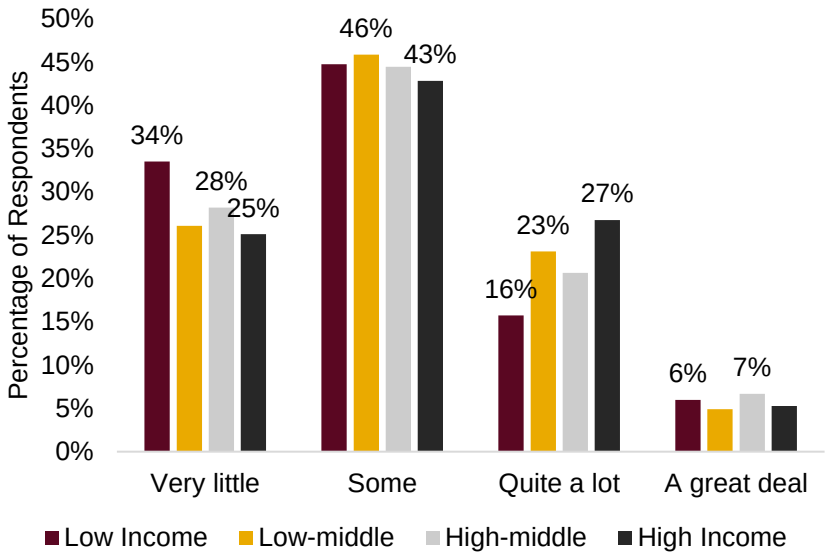
Trends across age groups for confidence ratings in the local government are like those seen for the police and the Illinois State Government. We see a primary divergence along the lines of age for those who answer, “Very little” and “Quite a lot”. Focusing on these categories, we look through a microscope into what the larger picture for institutional confidence by age group appears to be. Younger age groups show a tendency to have less confidence while those in older groups consistently respond with higher levels of confidence.

Figure 5.10: Confidence in Local Government by Age



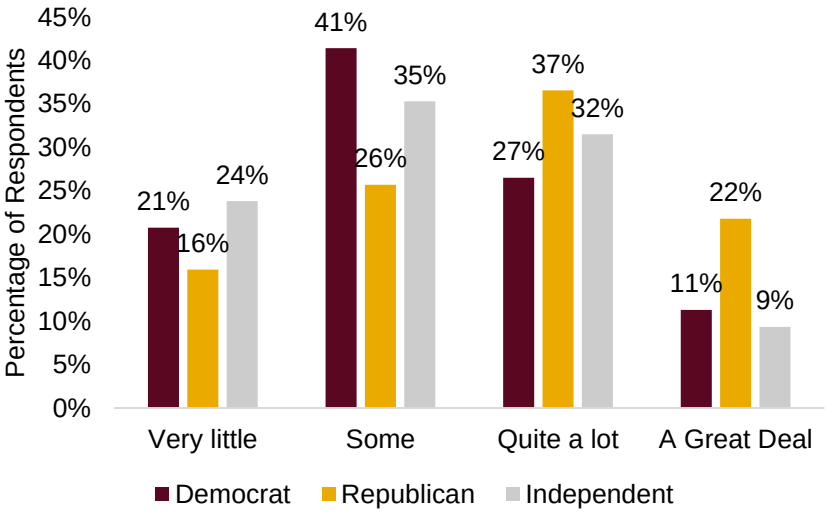
When analyzing confidence in Local Government across income levels we find that there is a clearer positive correlation between income level and confidence. High income individuals have a much higher number of respondents (27%) who have “Quite a Lot” of confidence in Local Government over Low-Income individuals (16%). This variation remains consistent when analyzing proportions for those who have very little confidence in their local institution. Approximately 34% of Low-Income respondents have Very Little confidence in their Local Government, while only 25% High-Income respondents share that level of confidence. Overall, the data for confidence in Local Government by Income levels is close to the average distribution of confidence levels among all respondents.

Figure 5.11: Confidence in Local Government by Income



The variation in confidence levels for the Police are the most easily to observe when visualizing the data. For confidence in Police by Political Party, the chart closely resembles a normal distribution. A relatively small number of respondents rated their confidence at “Very Little”, While we see minimal variance in some response catagories, Democrats and Independents typically exhibit lower levels of confidence,

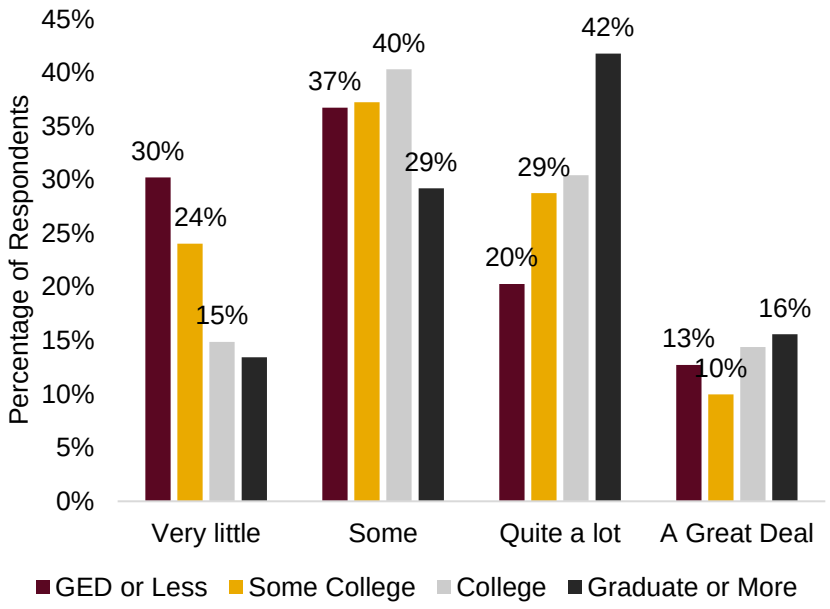
Figure 5.12: Confidence in Police by Political Party



with "Some" being the most frequently selected response. In contrast, Republican respondents who indicated "A great deal" of confidence and "Quite a lot" identified as the most prevalent response rating choices. The graphical representation illustrates a nearly perfect reversal in confidence levels by political party; Republicans have more confidence in local police and Democrats have less.

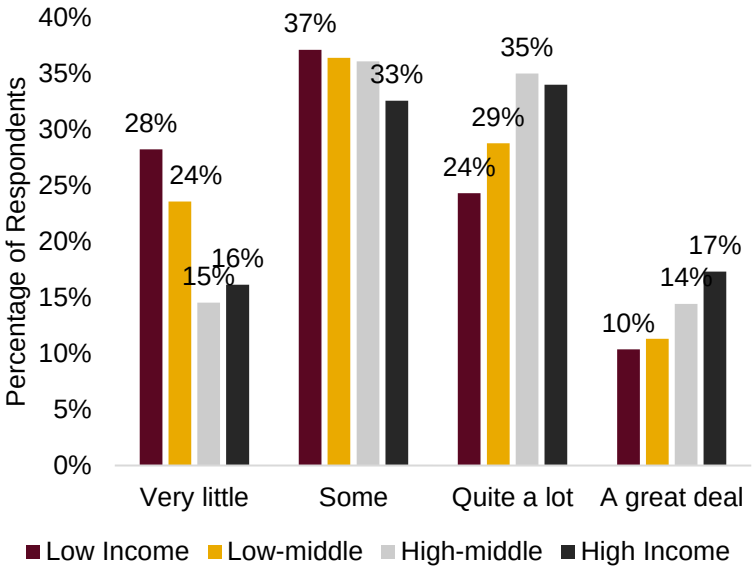
We observe a general upward trend in confidence ratings as educational attainment increases concerning the Police. Individuals possessing a graduate or professional degree exhibit an average confidence rating 0.4 points higher than those with a GED or less. The visualization of this data shows that individuals with a GED or less tend to have less confidence in the Police, and those with a graduate degree or more tend to have more confidence in the Police. An aspect that is not represented in this data collection is the income of respondents overlapped with their educational attainment. If the income levels among respondents show a positive relationship with educational attainment, then it may be appropriate to expect income to be a more direct predictor of institutional confidence.

Figure 5.13: Confidence in Police by Education



Institutional confidence level trends in police across income exhibit the highest degree of positive correlation when looking at income group as an explanatory variable. Low-income respondents proportionally have double the respondents than both high-middle- and high-income respondents when looking at those who have very little confidence in the police. Inversely, high-middle- and high-income respondents have a clear tendency to support the police at greater rates.

Figure 5.14: Confidence in Police by Income



DISCUSSION

The data reveals significant trends in confidence in the Police when analyzed by age groups. A pronounced tendency is observed in which younger individuals display lower confidence in Police, whereas older individuals demonstrate the opposite trend. Notably, the proportion of respondents aged 18 to 34 who indicated “Very little” confidence is more than double that of respondents aged 65 and older. Conversely, a similar trend is evident in the responses categorized as “Quite a lot,” with individuals aged 65 and older reporting a positive response at twice the rate of those aged 18 to 34. It is clear from the chart that the 65+ age group has an exorbitantly higher level of confidence in Police than those younger than 65.

The public’s confidence in government institutions is low. Among political parties, the confidence for institutions filled by elected officials is generally lower than institutional confidence overall. The confidence levels seen for Local, State, and Congress across the variables examined in this report provide us with two discernable conclusions: frequency of interactions and locality are likely important factors, and that these institutions have a path forward towards rebuilding confidence. The difference between confidence levels for the Police and these elected official institutions may result from the role that the institutions play in the daily lives of Cook County residents. It can be inferred that an increase in an intentional presence in the salience of the public

from elected officials may cause an increase in confidence. Furthermore, an increase in public knowledge of political issues could potentially lead to greater political participation which slightly increases political confidence.

The findings in this report are beneficial reference points for elected officials and policymakers, as well as media outlets or prospective politicians looking to seek election. The field of institutional confidence is an easier one to trek when confidence is low, public perception of potential changes is more likely to be seen as positive. We see this observation in play currently with the actions of the new executive branch, despite many of the changes not being directly beneficial to the public, supporters of the current administration largely like seeing changes taking place regardless of what they are. Data from the latest Harris poll show that Republicans and Independents are extremely confident in the path that the country is on since the start of this administration. This increase in public opinion tracks with the findings presented by the data in this report. The deterioration of institutional confidence may be result of direct political stagnation, meaning that the lack of polices that directly benefit the public or disrupt the status quo has increased the desire for any form of action or change on behalf of government institutions. This is simultaneously an advantageous opportunity for elected officials to make changes that were potentially seen as detrimental previously, but it is also a predicament that is susceptible to rhetoric of populism, the likes of which have been seen in the political campaign and media from the current presidential administration.

Perceived Safety in Public Spaces

Madeline Grace, Kendall Moore, Minnie Spremich

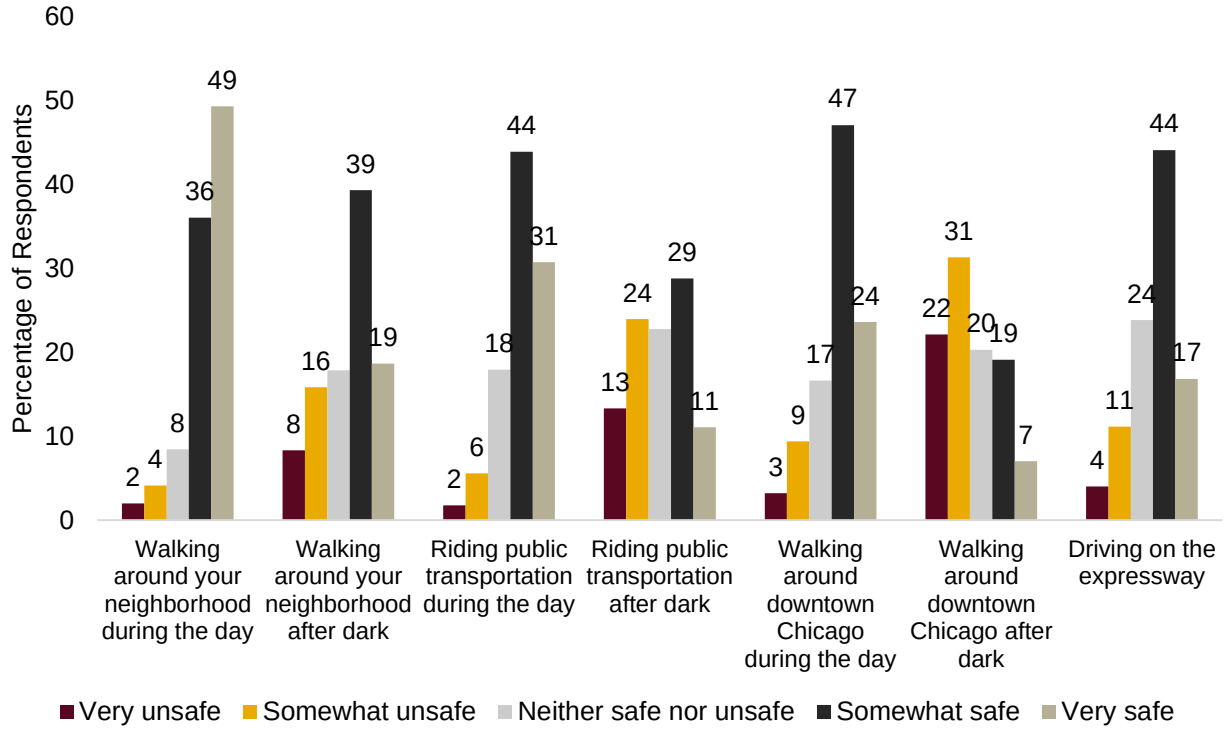
Safety in public settings is a major concern for many Americans, especially when violent and property crimes dominate news discourse. Chicago, often perceived as one of the most dangerous cities in the United States, has its national perception largely influenced by dramatic news reporting and glorified media portrayals of crime. These representations of Chicagoland can intensify fears and misconceptions about crime in the city. Understanding the nuances behind these perceptions and what may impact them is crucial, as feeling safe in one's city is greatly linked to quality of life, mental well-being, and community engagement.

Previous research has revealed that residents' feelings of safety are influenced not only by crime statistics, but also by personal experiences, community engagement, and socioeconomic status. While University of Chicago's 2024 Crime Lab Report reveals that violent crime rates have been declining since 2021, fear within the community remains high (Ander et al., 2024). This paradox requires a critical examination of the factors contributing to growing fears despite declining crime rates. In this report, we will utilize data from the Cook County Community Survey (CCCS) to investigate perceptions of safety across different public settings and demographic groups. The survey includes questions about how safe or unsafe residents feel in different everyday public settings, such as walking around their neighborhoods, using public transportation, and navigating downtown areas during the day and after dark. We will first examine the univariate distributions of all item responses to determine which public setting receives the highest perception of safety and why that might be. Next, we will explore some bivariate relationships of safety perceptions in public settings across four demographic groups: ethnoracial identity, gender, age, and area of residence. By analyzing these responses, we aim to identify patterns in safety perceptions among various demographic groups and provide a clear understanding of the factors that contribute to feeling safe and unsafe in public places. Our report will conclude with suggestions of interventions and strategies to address this issue and foster a stronger sense of security among Chicago's residents.

OVERALL RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS

Figure 6.1 shows distributions of responses to questions about how safe one would feel in seven different safety situations. For most items in the set, respondents reported feeling either very safe or somewhat safe. However, this was not the case when respondents were asked about feelings of safety when taking public transportation after dark or walking around downtown Chicago after dark.

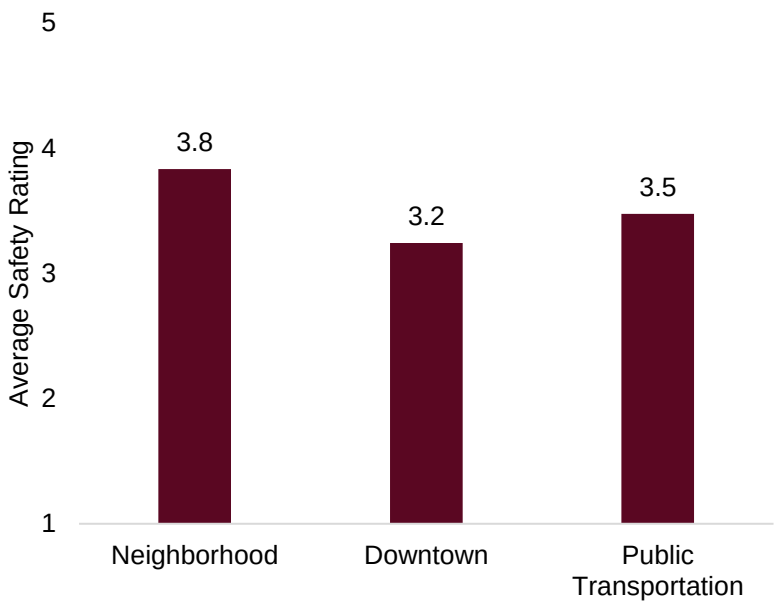
Figure 6.1: Perception of Safety in Different Situations



In all scenarios that took place after dark, respondents were more likely to report feeling unsafe in comparison to perceptions of the same situation taking place during the day. The difference in safety perceptions between daytime and after dark is especially notable for the scenario of walking around downtown Chicago. Only 12.6% of respondents stated they would feel either “somewhat unsafe” or “very unsafe” walking around downtown Chicago during the day, while 53.5% reported that they would feel “somewhat unsafe” or “very unsafe” in that scenario after dark. In comparison, 24.14% of respondents reported feelings of unsafety when walking around their own neighborhoods after dark, and 37.31% of respondents reported feelings of unsafety taking public transportation after dark.

These differing perspectives on safety based on setting led us to building our summary measures. While we will discuss these measures in greater depth in our bivariate analysis, the mean responses to them are shown Figure 6.2. Like the results of the original distributions in Figure 6.1, the greatest levels of safety are seen for scenarios involving walking in one's own neighborhood, while the lowest levels of safety are seen for scenarios involving walking in downtown Chicago.

Figure 6.2: Average Safety Ratings by Location



Respondents were also asked about perceptions of safety when driving on expressways in the area. Unlike the other safety situations, this scenario did not have a time of day connected to it. Due to this, we will not be including it in our summary measures because it cannot easily be combined with another question. Generally, the distribution of responses to this scenario looks fairly similar to the scenarios that took place during daytime. However, nearly a quarter (23.85%) of respondents reported feeling "neither safe nor unsafe" driving on expressways in the area. I would be curious to further investigate if this large number of responses in the middle could be associated with residents who do not have cars.

Overall, somewhat safe is the greatest response in the distributions across all of the situations. For some respondents that we interviewed, a lack of victimization experiences and the feeling of potential for victimization compelled respondents to choose "somewhat safe" over "very safe' or any form of "unsafe."

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

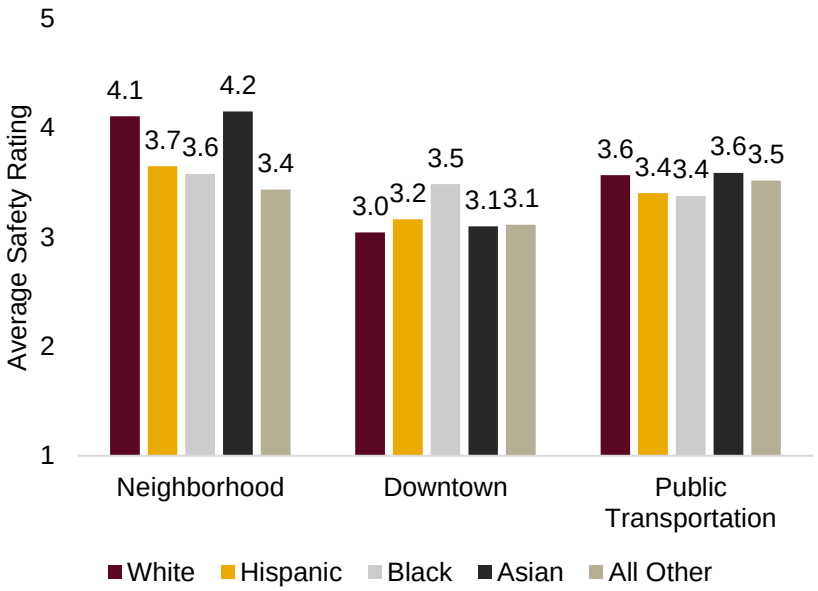
Next, we turn our attention to the relationships between a number of individual characteristics and safety perceptions. To simplify our analysis, we created summary measures of safety perceptions in each of three settings: walking in one's neighborhood, downtown, and on public transit. In each case, we averaged reported perceptions of safety during the day and perceptions of safety after

dark. Each of these outcomes will be measured on a scale of 1 (very unsafe) to 5 (very safe). For the summary measures, the mean response of each question in the measure was averaged together.

Ethnoracial Identity

The first demographic characteristic we will analyze is ethnoracial identity. In looking at the three different public setting situations alongside ethnoracial identity, we might expect to see split senses of safety in neighborhoods. White individuals might experience a heightened sense of safety in their neighborhoods because they are more likely to live in gentrified areas of the city or in the suburbs, making their neighborhoods homogeneous and with less population turnover, as explained through Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw and McKay 1942). On the other hand, neighborhoods with a majority of Black and/or Hispanic individuals are more likely to experience poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, and police presence, which could be factors in an increase of crime or heightened concerns about crime. With downtown serving as a tourist attraction and the constant bustle of people, one might expect individuals to feel safer downtown, generally. In terms of public transportation, we might expect to find that individuals of color experience less feelings of safety because there are more police and security officers present in the CTA, and Black and Hispanic men are more likely to be victims of racial profiling through policing as seen in a 2024 study about traffic stops in Chicago (Xu et al., 2024). Different racial and ethnic groups have distinct histories with law enforcement, crime, and safety policies, shaping how they interpret risks in different areas.

Figure 6.3: Average Safety Ratings in Public Settings by Ethnoracial Identity



When asked about walking around your neighborhood, White and Asian individuals are more likely to report feelings of safety with high means of over 4.0. These two bars stand in stark contrast to the remaining three race categories that land closer to the 3.5 mark. In the middle section, we see that Black individuals report the highest feelings of safety when walking around downtown with a mean of 3.49. The other four race categories average closer to the 3.0 mark, with White individuals at the lowest feeling of safety at 3.04. Lastly, all the race categories hover around a 3.5 mean of feeling safe riding on public transportation. The Black and Hispanic categories have the lowest means at 3.38 and 3.40, respectively. Generally, ethnoracial identity seems to affect feeling safe riding public transportation the least compared to the other two outcomes.

Now, let's take a deeper dive into the individual race categories and how their perception of safety changes in each situation. For White and Asian individuals, there is almost a 1.0 point difference between the neighborhood and downtown categories. This difference between the settings could be attributed to living in gentrified and ethnic homogeneous neighborhoods, as mentioned previously, so downtown Chicago then feels more unsafe in comparison. The Hispanic race category follows this same pattern, but with half of the difference between neighborhood and downtown (a decrease of 0.5). Another pattern of note is how the average safety ratings for Black individuals stay within a 0.20 range, meaning their perception of safety does not really change between situations. Overall, these findings suggest that ethnoracial identity influences perceptions of safety across different public settings, with the most pronounced differences occurring in neighborhood contexts, while feelings of safety in downtown and on public transportation remain more stable across groups.

Gender

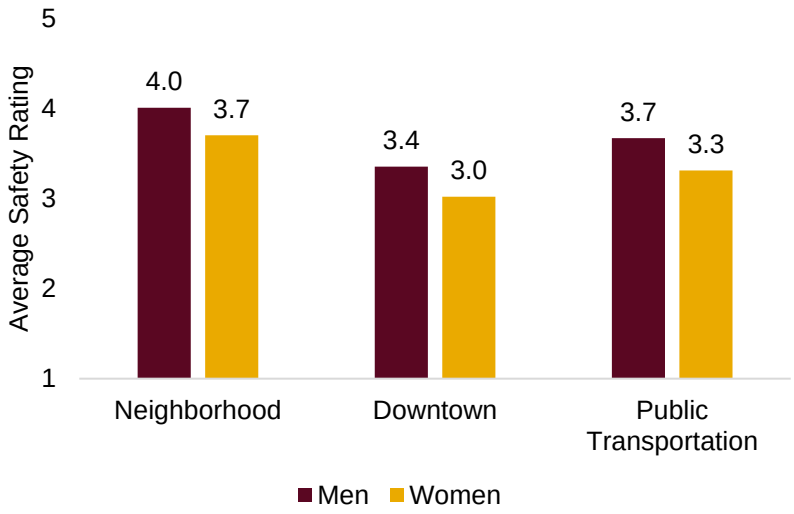
It is important to note that, for the purposes of this analysis, we did not include data from individuals who identified as neither male nor female, because there were so few respondents who identified as such.

Across all three settings, men had greater mean safety ratings, compared to women. The gaps in safety perceptions between men and women were also fairly similar across all three settings. Nonetheless, the gap in safety perceptions was slighter greater for public transit than the other two settings, with women having a 0.36 point lower safety rating than men. It is possible that, compared to the other settings, women may have had more negative experiences on public transit, compared to men, that led to an increased gap in feelings of safety between genders.

2019 data from the U.S. Census Bureau found that women were slightly more likely to take public transit than men (Burrows et al., 2021). Because women may take public more often, they may have had more experiences where they felt unsafe than men.

Although only slightly smaller, the smallest gap in safety perceptions between men and women was in the setting of walking around one's own neighborhood. In this setting, women reported a 0.31 point lower mean safety rating compared to men. Because of the consistency of gaps in safety perceptions, it is evident that the gendered differences in safety perceptions are not significantly changed based on setting.

Figure 6.4: Safety Ratings in Public Settings by Gender



In many ways, this gender gap in safety perceptions was not surprising to us. In fact, one may have expected an even higher gender gap in responses. Women might be taught to be more cautious about their safety in public, especially at night, which could make them feel less safe. It could also be possible that gender could be associated with experiences with victimization, which could impact feelings of safety.

Age Groups

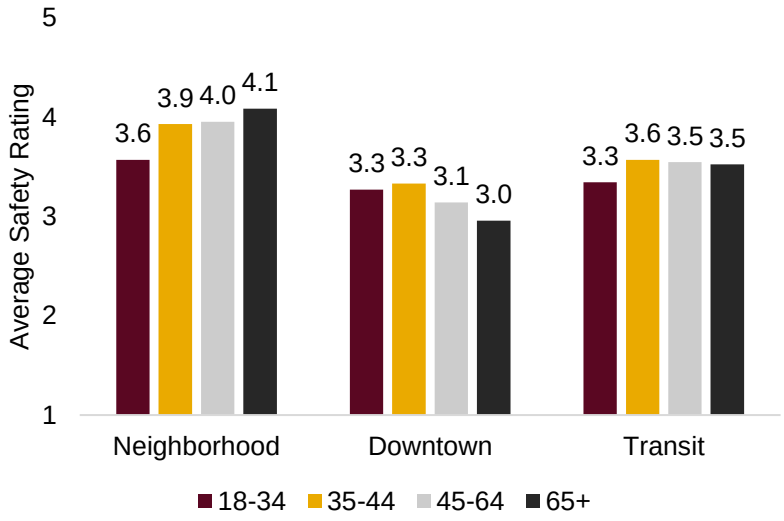
The next demographic characteristic that we will be discussing is age. In particular, we will be looking at comparisons between different age groups, rather than focusing on age as a numerical value. Interestingly, across the three settings, the data follows significantly different patterns.

When walking around one's own neighborhood, perceptions of safety increase with age, with a 0.52 point difference in safety ratings between the youngest group and oldest group. Although, for age groups between the age of 35 and 64, perceptions of safety walking in one's own neighborhood between the groups stay fairly consistent, with only a 0.03 point increase between the 35-44 group and the 45-64 group. There are a number of possible reasons for these patterns. For one, it is possible that age could be connected to neighborhood or area. The oldest

group of adults might also have lived in their neighborhood for longer and have more trust in those around them, which could explain their high (4.02) mean safety rating when walking around their own neighborhood.

In contrast, an increase in age is not connected to an increase of perceptions of safety for those walking downtown. In fact, the lowest rating of safety for this setting was reported by the age group of those 65 and older. Overall, data from the oldest age group (65+) shows very interesting differences in perceptions of safety across the three settings. For example, those 65+ report a 1.13 point higher safety rating for walking around their own neighborhoods than their safety ratings walking downtown, which is larger than the range of safety ratings seen for the other age groups between the different settings.

Figure 6.5: Safety Ratings in Public Settings by Age Group



Compared to the other settings, the mean of safety ratings between age groups had the smallest range for the setting of public transit. The lowest mean (3.35) was reported by the 18-34 age group and the highest (3.57) was reported by the 35-44 age group. However, similar mean safety reported we reported between all three groups ages 35 and older. According to a report published in 2021 by the U.S. Census Bureau, those under the age of 35 were more likely to take public transportation than other age groups (Burrows et al., 2021). Because young adults are more likely to take public transit, it is possible that they may have experienced more situations on public transit where they felt unsafe, which could explain their comparatively lower mean safety rating in that setting.

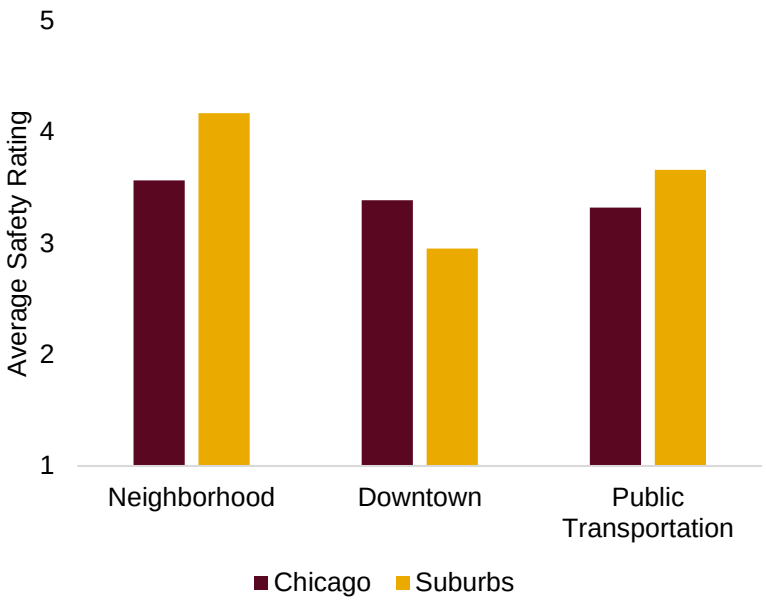
Chicago v. Suburbs

The last demographic group we will be examining is area of residence, more specifically, comparing safety perceptions between individuals who live in Chicago and individuals who live in the suburbs. Before interpreting the results, we would expect to see suburban residents report feeling less safe downtown and on public transport than Chicago residents, but more safe in their

neighborhoods. We hypothesize these results primarily because we assume Chicago residents are more familiar, and therefore more comfortable, with downtown areas and public transportation. Moreover, suburban neighborhoods are more residential, feature a greater concentration of wealth, and have lower crime rates, which leads us to believe that their residents feel safer in their communities than Chicago residents.

Through a quick look at the graph provided above (Figure 6.6), it is clear that Chicago residents hold steady perceptions of safety across all public settings, maintaining safety ratings ranging from 3.3 - 3.5. Conversely, suburban residents' safety perceptions notably vary across the three setting categories, with safety ratings ranging from 2.9 - 4.1. Both groups report the highest perceptions of safety walking in their neighborhood, which could be explained by familiarity with one's local landscape and feeling a sense of community in their neighborhood. However, despite both groups reporting the greatest perceptions of safety walking in their neighborhood, this response category is where we see the largest discrepancy in responses, a difference of 0.6. Looking at the other two categories, Chicago residents have a higher perception of safety than suburbanites walking downtown by 0.43, while suburban residents have higher perceptions of safety riding public transportation than Chicagoans by 0.33. These figures match our expectations of suburban residents feeling more safe in their neighborhoods and Chicagoans feeling more safe downtown.

Figure 6.6: Safety Ratings in Public Settings by Area of Residence



Chicago residents report greater feelings of safety walking downtown than suburban residents, which could be explained by various reasons. For one, Chicago residents could have more experience walking downtown during the day or night and are therefore more familiar with downtown's landscape, making the area less intimidating. Additionally, downtown it could be considered their area of residence, resulting in more comfortable feelings. Another point to

consider would be that Chicago and suburban residents could interpret the area of “downtown” differently, leading to variation in their responses.

On the other hand, suburban residents report higher feelings of safety in both their neighborhoods and on public transportation compared to Chicago residents. Though we expected suburban residents to have higher feelings of safety in their neighborhoods, the results regarding public transportation are more shocking. However, this pattern could be impacted by a variety of factors. First, suburban residents could feel more safe in their neighborhoods than Chicago residents because there is increased wealth in the suburbs, and higher rates of homeownership and large families. These factors, along with the suburbs being less densely populated, could make suburban dwellers feel more safe in their neighborhoods. Next, higher feelings of safety on public transportation could be related to suburbanites having less experience with public transportation than Chicago residents as they are more likely to own cars and therefore, avoid use of public transportation. Further, suburban transit lines, buses, and train stations could experience less crime and foot traffic, contributing to high confidence in safety.

Overall, the two public settings in which suburban residents report the highest feelings of safety are walking in their neighborhoods and riding public transportation. Further, the two public settings Chicago residents report the highest feelings of safety are walking in their neighborhoods and walking downtown.

DISCUSSION

Each of the demographic characteristics we analyzed proved to have an interesting association with perceptions of safety. The data highlights the significant role of ethnoracial identity in shaping perceptions of safety, particularly within one’s neighborhood, where disparities are most pronounced. With downtown and public transportation showing less variation in perceived safety, the data suggests that structural factors such as neighborhood composition, policing, limited community investments, and redlining contribute to these differing perceptions. Examining gender also provided interesting results. Safety ratings for women were lower across all three settings, and both men and women report higher safety ratings walking around their own neighborhoods than in other settings. Interestingly, the gap in safety perceptions between men and women was similar across all three measures. We would be curious to potentially further explore if there are additional demographic characteristics that may affect responses when intersecting with gender.

In contrast to the analysis of gender, when looking at age groups, different patterns emerged across the three measures. Feelings of safety walking in one’s own neighborhood generally increase with age. However, we do not find a relationship between age and perceptions

of safety downtown or taking public transportation. Investigating perceptions of safety based on area of residence resulted in an unexpected pattern of suburban residents feeling more safe in most public settings than Chicago residents. Though Chicagoans reported higher feelings of safety walking downtown throughout the day, suburban residents reported higher feelings of safety riding public transportation. This surprising result could be influenced by various factors, including both groups defining “public transportation” differently. Both groups reported the highest feelings of safety walking in their neighborhoods, however in that category, suburban residents maintain greater safety ratings than Chicagoans.

These findings have significant implications. In addition to feelings of safety impacting personal well-being, they could also affect the choices that individuals make. For example, feeling unsafe on public transit could cause an individual to choose to drive places instead. It is also possible that perceptions of safety could affect political decisions, as those who feel more unsafe might prioritize being “harsh on crime” as a policy issue. However, this would need to be further researched, as, in this group analysis, we did not look at associations between political party and safety perceptions. Lastly, feeling fearful in one’s local environment could deter individuals from engaging with community efforts and spaces. For instance, participation in neighborhood third spaces could be impacted by high fear of crime as residents might choose to spend less time in public spaces, potentially resulting in weak community ties. Moreover, as argued by Bastidas et al. (2023), Chicago residents’ perception of social and political circumstances influences individual environmental engagement, including participation in community protests and public meetings. Along similar lines, high fear of crime and low feelings of safety could contribute to a lack of community driven environmental action.

Relative Crime Perceptions and Victimization Experiences

Delaney Costa, Jerell Rogers

Addressing the challenge of extreme, persistent segregation by race, ethnicity, and income across Chicago's neighborhoods is necessary for producing a sustained reduction both in the city's overall level of violence and in the disparities in the levels of violence faced by different neighborhoods. — (Sharkey & Marsteller 349)

Understanding Cook County residents' perceptions and experiences of crime is crucial for researchers and stakeholders to consider when addressing public safety challenges. Crime and safety are perennial concerns across the country, particularly in major metropolitan areas like Cook County, Illinois. Residents' perceptions and personal experiences with crime are pivotal for policymakers, law enforcement, and community leaders to use in implementing effective crime prevention strategies. Additionally, residents' perceptions of crime in their communities can be socially contingent. Ethnoracial identity, age, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) are important factors for understanding who is victimized by crime at higher rates. These predictors, and their impacts on crime, do not exist independently of policy, history, and broader institutions.

Chicago's history of racial segregation manifests today: a disparate spatial distribution of crime, economic prosperity, and racial inequalities. The geographic distribution of wealth in Chicago is highly correlated with racial differences—i.e., areas with lower levels of educational attainment, and income are areas with higher rates of crime. This phenomenon has been studied by researchers for decades both nationwide and in Chicago specifically, underscoring the need for a contextual understanding of the causes of crime in major metropolitan areas.

The Cook County Community Survey contains the following questions:

- Thinking about the neighborhood where you live, would you say that **property crime**—for example, theft—is higher or lower than in other areas of Cook County?
- Thinking about the neighborhood where you live, would you say that **violent crime**—for example, a person being physically attacked—is higher or lower than in other areas of Cook County?

Then, the survey asks respondents if they had been the victim of one of four types of crime—verbal sexual harassment, theft, physical assault, and verbal threats—and then asks if these crimes happened in the respondent's own neighborhood, or in another part of Cook County.

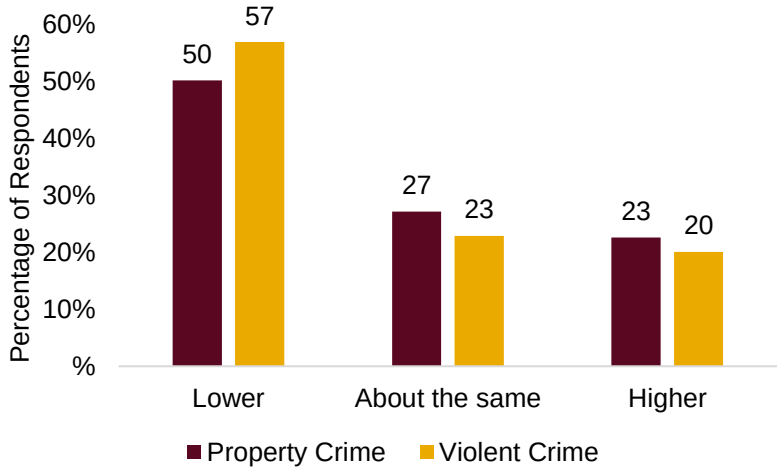
These data work together to provide insight into how residents of Cook County perceive the relative safety of their own neighborhoods, and how their experiences with crime compare with these perceptions.

OVERALL RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS

This section covers the three main questions of the crime perceptions and experiences unit. These figures are shown with percentages. Relative perceptions of property and violent crime refer to the survey questions asking respondents to compare these types of crime in their neighborhoods to the rest of Cook County.

Figure 7.1 shows how respondents rated property and violent crime levels in their neighborhoods compared to the rest of Cook County. The survey asked people about their personal views on crime, specifically whether they thought their neighborhood had more or less crime than the county overall. About 50% of respondents believed property crime was lower in their neighborhood, while 57% said the same for violent crime. Around 27% and 23% said property and violent crime levels were about the same, respectively. Meanwhile, 23% of respondents thought property crime was higher, and 20% believed violent crime was higher in their area. These response rates suggest that respondents tend to rate their neighborhoods as having relatively less violent crime than property crime compared to other areas of Cook County.

Figure 7.1: Relative Perceptions of Property and Violent Crime



We created a measure of crime victimization that identifies respondents who experienced at least one of four threatening experiences—verbal sexual harassment, theft, threats, and physical assault—in the last year. Crime victimization is a “yes” or “no” index. 30% of respondents reported being victimized by crime, which could be any one or more of the aforementioned crimes. The majority (70%) of respondents did not report experiencing any of the crimes listed in the survey question.

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

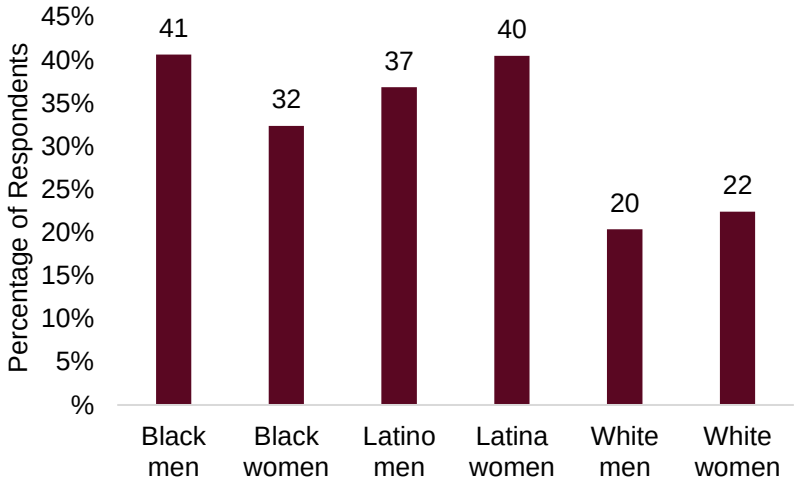
Next, we examine the relationships between each of four demographic variables and our measures of crime perceptions and experiences. These demographics are ethnoracial identity crossed with gender (race-gender), level of educational attainment, urban versus suburban Cook County, and age groups. The goal of these analyses is to better understand how each of these four predictors relate to outcomes, and find unique patterns related to these groupings.

Race and Gender

The gender and ethnoracial analysis will be limited to white men and women, Latino men and women, and Black men and women. Other ethnoracial groups (Asian, Middle Eastern/North African, and Indigenous groups) had sample sizes too small for sufficiently confident statistical analysis. The inclusion of both ethnoracial identity and gender comes from extensive analysis across academic subfields showing distinct crime trends across perpetrators, victims, and communities. We hypothesize that men are more likely to be victimized by violent crime, whereas women are more likely to experience verbal sexual harassment. Intra-community crime plays into these patterns as well. Generally, communities tend to have similar ethnoracial makeup, leading to more crime within groups as opposed to outside groups (Papachristos, Smith and Scherer). Analyzing crime victimization by race and gender, then, is important to better understand how different communities in Cook County experience crime at disparate rates.

Figure 7.2 shows the overall crime victimization rate—experiencing at least one of four types of crime in the previous 12 months—controlled for ethnoracial identity and gender. Research has shown that Black and Latino individuals are far more likely to be victimized by crime than white individuals, which is further supported by these survey findings.

Figure 7.2: Experienced Crime Victimization



White respondents reported experiencing crime at a far lower rate than Black and Latino respondents. Latina and Black women were more likely to have experienced crime, at 41% and 32% respectively, than white women (22%). Black women

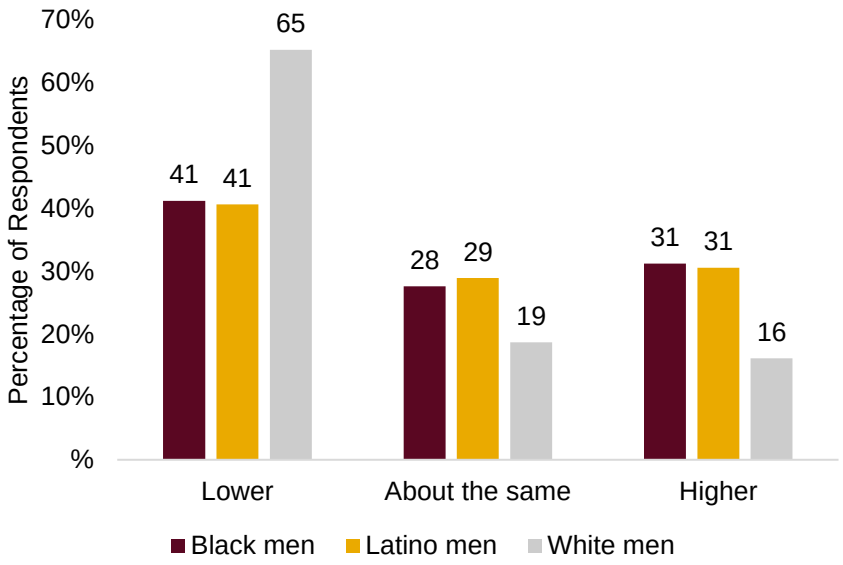
experienced less crime than Latina women, which is explained by Latina respondents having experienced verbal sexual harassment at the highest rate of all gender/race groups at 25%. Latina and white women experienced more crime than men of their same ethnoracial identity. Black women, however, reported a near 8% lower rate of victimization than Black men.

The gendered ethnoracial breakdown shows particularly that Black men are the most likely to be stolen from (33%) and physically assaulted (15%) (not shown). Latino men experienced slightly lower levels of overall victimization, with 25% reporting experiencing theft. Latino men reported the second-highest levels of physical assault at 6%, a sharp decrease from the same measure in Black men. Black and Latina women experienced higher levels of verbal sexual harassment at 20% and 25%, respectively. Black and Latina women's high rate of victimization compared to white women is significantly composed of this difference in verbal sexual harassment.

Black men (41%) and Latina women (41%) were victimized the most of these subgroups and at comparable rates. White men had the lowest rate of victimization at 20%. Black men reported experiencing crime at about double the rate of white men.

Figures 7.3 and 7.4 show relative perceptions of property crime in respondents who identify as white, Black, and Latino, split by gender.

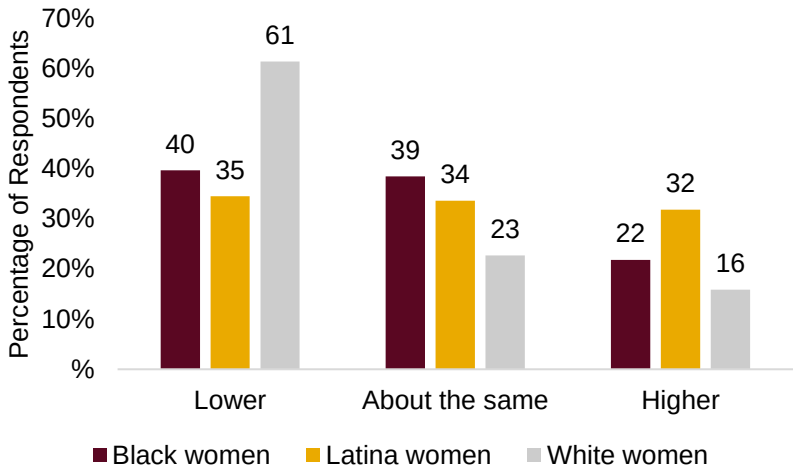
Figure 7.3: Relative Perceptions of Property Crime by Ethnoracial Identity (Men)



These figures show how men and women of different racial groups perceive property crime. Among men, 65% of white respondents believed property crime was lower in their neighborhood, compared to 41% of both Black and Latino men. Among women, 61% of white respondents said crime was lower, while only 40% of Black women and 35% of Latina women felt the same. Black women were the least likely to say their

neighborhood had high property crime, while Latina women were the most likely. The distribution indicates that white respondents feel significantly safer than Black and Latino respondents.

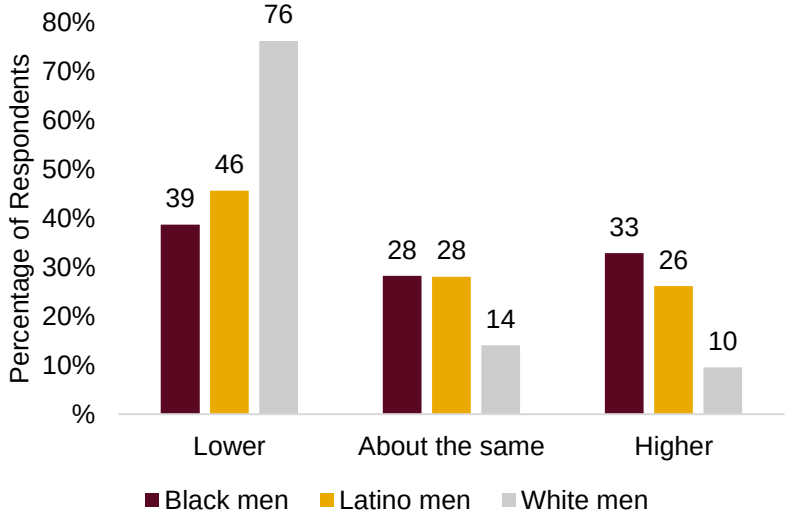
Figure 7.4: Relative Perceptions of Property Crime by Ethnoracial Identity (Women)



Black men were more likely than Black women to say that their neighborhood had higher levels of property crime (31% compared to 22%). Of Latino and Black respondents, Black women were the group least likely to identify their neighborhoods as having higher levels of property crime, and Latina women were the most likely to say this (32%). This is a similar pattern to the previous section, where Black women had the lowest rate of victimization among Black and Latino respondents.

Figures 7.5 and 7.6 show relative perceptions of violent crime in white, Black, and Latino respondents, split by gender. These figures display how different groups perceive violent crime in their neighborhoods. White respondents overwhelmingly reported lower crime compared to Black and Latino respondents, with 76% of white men and 71% of white women saying crime was lower. In contrast, only 39% of Black men and 42% of Black women shared this view. Among Latino respondents, 46% of men and 43% of women said crime was lower, while 26 and 28% thought crime was higher. The responses show a clear pattern where white respondents feel their neighborhoods to be the safest, while Black and Latino individuals are more likely to

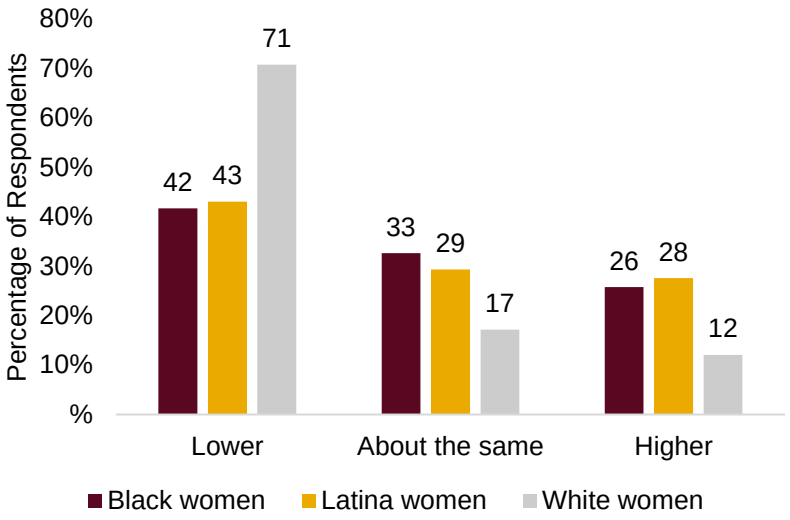
Figure 7.5: Relative Perceptions of Violent Crime by Ethnoracial Identity (Men)



perceive higher crime levels. Overall, white respondents were much more likely to say that violent crime in their neighborhoods was somewhat and much lower than other race-gender groups.

The ethnoracial and gender differences in perceptions of crime and victimization are noticeable. White respondents reported the lowest rate of victimization and perceived their neighborhoods to have far less violent and property crime than Black and Latino respondents. Black men had far high er rates of victimization and higher perceptions of neighborhood crime than Black women. Latina women had crime victimization rates comparable to Black men.

Figure 7.6: Relative Perceptions of Violent Crime by Ethnoracial Identity (Women)

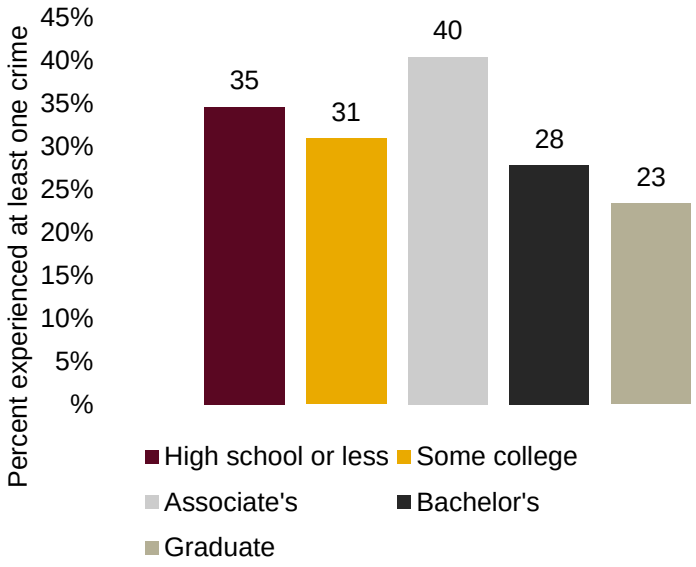


Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is an important element of an individual's socioeconomic status (SES). Educational attainment, like ethnoracial identity, is spatially correlated. This means that neighborhoods tend to have similar educational levels (Papachristos, Smith and Scherer). Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with neighborhoods with less crime (Sharkey and Marsteller).

Figure 7.7 shows a significant gap in crime victimization across

Figure 7.7: Individuals Who Experienced Crime Victimization



educational attainment. This figure highlights how crime victimization is strongly correlated with educational attainment. More than half (56%) of those with less than a high school diploma reported experiencing crime. Victimization rates decrease as education levels rise, except for those with associate's degrees, who reported a higher rate (40%) than all other groups. Graduate degree holders had the lowest victimization rate at 23%. The distribution suggests that lower education levels are linked to higher crime victimization.

Figure 7.8 shows respondents' relative perceptions of property crime by educational attainment. As educational attainment goes up, respondents are more likely to rate their neighborhoods as having relatively less property crime. 40% of graduate degree holders said their neighborhoods had somewhat lower crime, followed closely by bachelor's degree holders at 36%. About 41% of people with a high school diploma or less thought crime was lower, compared to 65% of those with graduate degrees. Those with associate's degrees were the most likely to say their neighborhoods had higher crime 35%. The general trend is that people with more education are more likely to feel their neighborhoods have less property crime. This suggests a strong connection between educational attainment and perceptions of neighborhood criminality.

Figure 7.8: Relative Perceptions of Property Crime

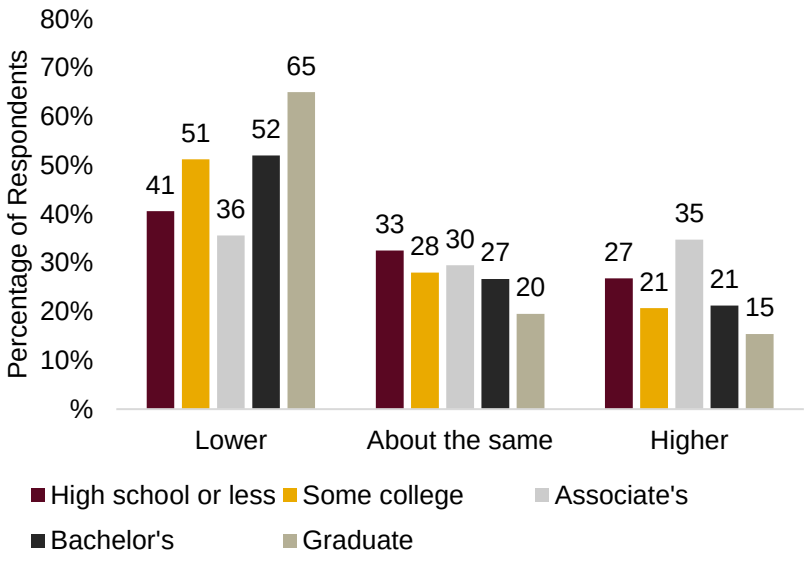
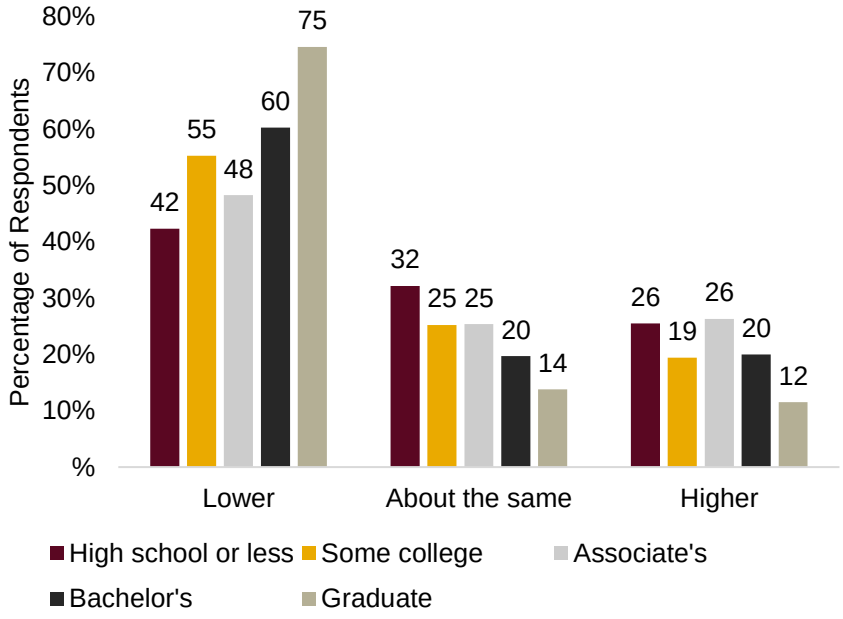


Figure 7.9 shows relative perceptions of violent crime, broken down by level of educational attainment. Graduate degree holders are the most likely to report their neighborhoods as having much lower or somewhat lower rates of violent crime, followed by bachelor's degree holders. Respondents who only finished some college rated their neighborhoods more similarly to bachelor's degree holders than respondents who have an associate's degree.

Figure 7.9: Relative Perceptions of Violent Crime



This figure examines how education influences perceptions of violent crime. Those with a high school diploma or less were the least likely to rate their neighborhoods as having less violent crime at 42%, compared to 75% of graduate degree holders. The distribution shows that people with more education tend perceive the neighborhoods they live in as safer.

Chicago vs. Suburbs

Whether respondents lived in urban or suburban Cook County also influences perceptions of and experiences with crime. Crime rates tend to be higher in urban Cook County than in the suburbs, potentially due to factors such as population density, policing differences, and neighborhoods' cost of living (Maly and Leachman). Suburban areas often offer more robust economic structures, educational opportunities, which can decrease residents' likelihood to commit crime, and thus decrease perceptions and experiences of crime. These geographic differences shape the respondents' experiences and outcomes, making location a key factor in demographic and socioeconomic analyses.

The crime victimization rate by those that live within Cook County urban (40%) and suburban (20%) environments shows a significant increase in victimization for those in urban Cook County. The data highlights a significant disparity in perceived crime victimization rates

between Chicago residents and those living in the Cook County suburbs. With 40% of Chicago respondents reporting at least one crime experience compared to 20% of suburban respondents, urban residents were twice as likely to report experiencing crime.

Figure 7.10 compares relative perceptions of property crime in suburban versus urban Cook County residents. Suburban respondents view their neighborhoods having less property crime than urban residents of Cook County. A majority (66%) of suburban residents said their neighborhood had lower crime, while only 36% of urban residents responded in the same way. Meanwhile, 30% of urban residents thought crime was higher in their area, compared to just 15% of suburban respondents. The distribution highlights that suburban residents feel their neighborhoods are significantly safer than urban residents.

Figure 7.10: Relative Perceptions of Property Crime

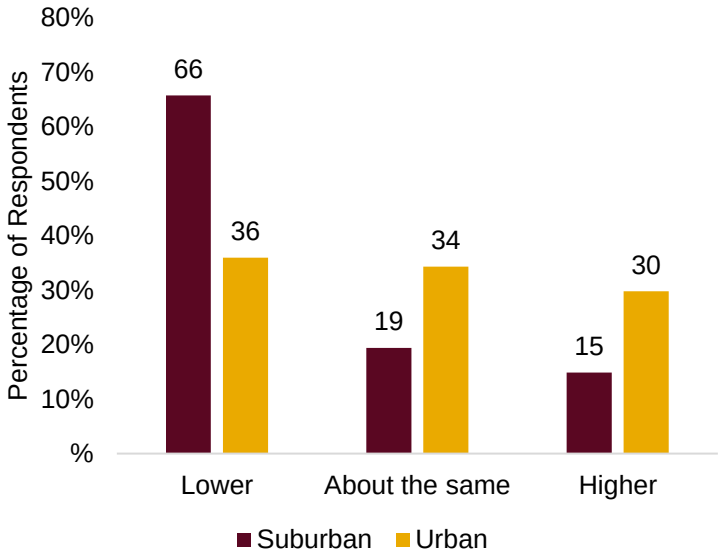
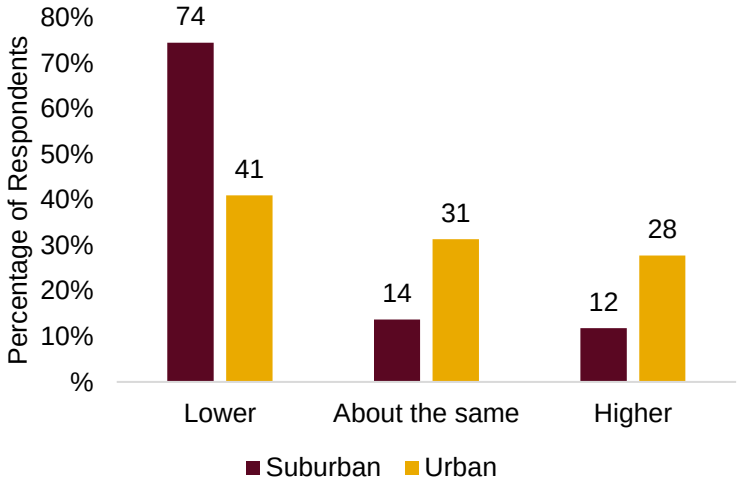


Figure 7.11 shows the relative perceptions of violent crime in suburban versus urban Cook County residents. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of suburban respondents view their neighborhoods as having lower levels of violent crime than other areas of Cook County, compared to only 41% of urban residents. About 28% of urban residents thought violent crime was higher, compared to just 12% of suburban respondents. The numbers reveal a large gap in how safe people feel depending on where they live.

Figure 7.11: Relative Perceptions of Violent Crime



Suburban respondents generally see their communities as having less violent crime than those in urban areas.

Age

Age is another correlating factor of crime victimization and neighborhood safety. Age is a crucial predictor variable alongside gender/racial identity and educational demographics because older individuals are less likely to be victimized (Rocque, Posick and Hoyle). Younger individuals are more likely to live in neighborhoods with more crime due to lower financial stability (ibid).

Figure 7.12 shows how crime victimization rates change with age. A clear trend emerges, showing that younger individuals are more likely to report crime victimization than older individuals. Younger people were the most likely to be victims of crime, with 42% of those aged 18-44 reporting at least one crime experience. Victimization rates dropped to 23% for those aged 45-64 and to just 13% for those 65 and older. The numbers show that younger respondents are more likely to be victimized, possibly due to lifestyle choices and neighborhood environments. Older people may live in safer areas or report crime less often.

Figure 7.12: Experienced Crime Victimization

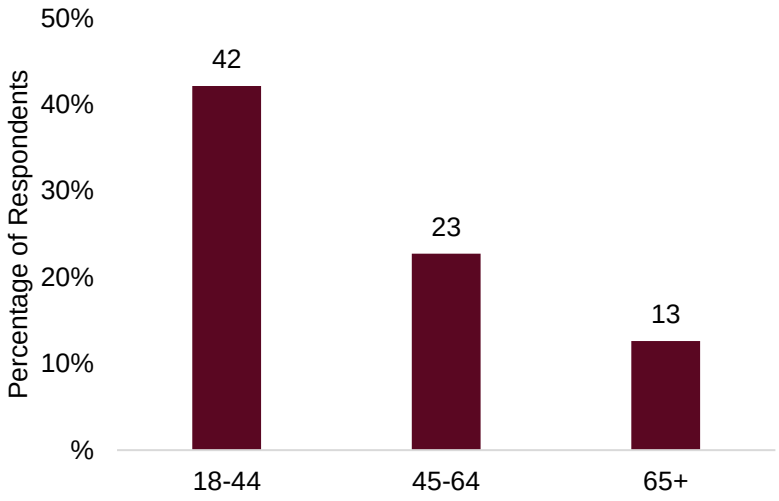


Figure 7.13 displays how people of different ages perceive property crime in their neighborhoods. Among respondents aged 65 and above, 66% believed property crime was lower where they lived, compared to only 39% of those aged 18-44. Younger age groups were more likely to say their neighborhoods had higher crime, with 29% of those aged 18-44 responding in

this way. The numbers indicate that older residents generally feel safer than younger ones. This may be because they have lived in their neighborhoods longer or live in less crime-prone areas.

Figure 7.14 illustrates how people's views on violent crime change with age. Around 74% of those 65 and older believed crime was lower in their neighborhood, compared to 44% of respondents aged 18-44. Meanwhile, 28% of younger respondents said crime was higher, while only 9% of older respondents agreed. The trend suggests that older people feel much safer in their communities than younger people. This could be because of differences in where people live or how they interpret crime in their area.

Figure 7.13: Relative Perceptions of Property Crime

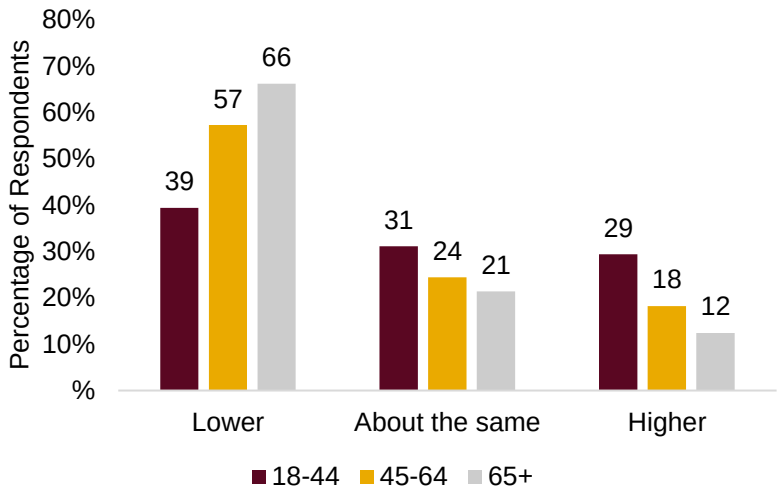
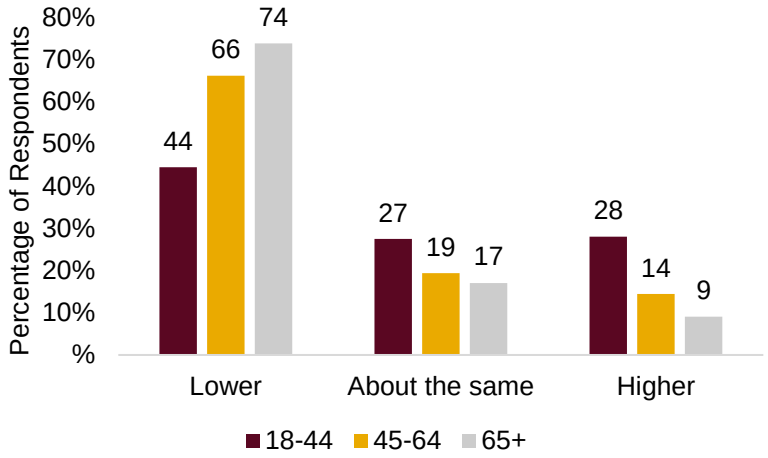


Figure 7.14: Relative Perceptions of Violent Crime



DISCUSSION

This survey section shows that crime victimization and perceptions of crime are not the same for everyone in Cook County. White respondents reported fewer experiences with crime and saw their neighborhoods as safer compared to Black and Latino respondents. The data also found that Black men and Latina women were more likely to experience crime than other groups. Education played a role too; people with lower education levels were more likely to be victims of crime. Where someone lives also matters. People in Chicago were almost twice as likely to

experience crime as those in suburban Cook County. This difference may be due to factors like population size, economic conditions, and how law enforcement operates in different areas.

These findings are important because they show that crime does not affect all people equally. Race, gender, education, and location all impact how safe people feel and how often they experience crime. Policymakers, law enforcement, and community leaders can use this information to create safety plans that help the people most at risk. By focusing on these differences, they can work to reduce crime, improve trust in public safety, and create fairer communities. Solving these problems will make Cook County a safer place for everyone.

Understanding perceptions of property theft, crime violence, and crime victimization is essential for assessing community safety in Cook County. By examining how residents compare property and violent crime in their neighborhoods to other areas, these insights reveal differences in perceived security and risk. Additionally, collecting data on individuals' personal experiences with crime over the past year provides a clearer picture of how crime directly affects different communities. This information is crucial for policymakers and law enforcement to address discrepancies between perceived crime rates and actual victimization, ensuring that safety initiatives align with residents' concerns. Ultimately, these findings help guide crime prevention strategies, enhance community policing efforts, and allocate resources effectively to improve public safety.

Voting and Participation

Rachel Krzesinski, Cole Hartsfield, and Cleo Slaughter

Voting behavior and participation in local politics have significant impacts on elections, political decisions, and the lives of American citizens. The United States' Representative Democracy is strengthened when its citizens engage with the political system, making their stances on important topics known to those representing them. Political behavior sheds light on what political issues are at the forefront of public concern and inform local and federal government decision making. Cook County, Illinois, is home to the third largest city in the country; thus, carrying tremendous influence in elections, as well as public opinion. Analyzing voting and political participation behaviors provides insight into which groups are more likely to vote or engage in local politics. A thorough examination into this topic can reveal which groups are being heard the loudest, who is likely to get involved, and whom political entities can encourage to participate to better represent the experiences and backgrounds of all Cook County residents.

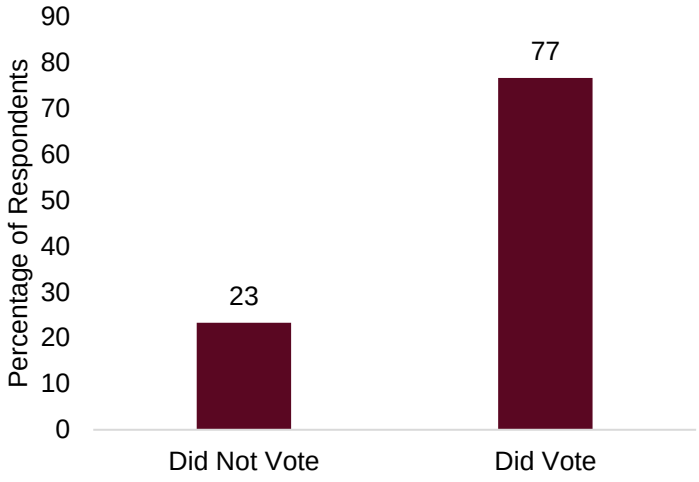
The Voting and Political Participation module of the 2025 Cook County Community Survey includes variables measuring voter turnout, distribution of votes among presidential candidates, and a set of questions regarding respondents' local political activity. The battery is composed of four questions surveying respondents' participation in various activities over the previous 12 months – joining in protests, demonstrations, or marches regarding a local political issue, discussing a local political issue with a neighbor in-person or online, contacting a local political official, and attending a public meeting about a local political issue. We begin by summarizing overall patterns of participation in Cook County. Then we examine how these patterns varied across key demographics including age, educational attainment, political identity, and ethnoracial identity to establish a more detailed understanding of Cook County political participation.

OVERALL RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS

The 2024 General Election was historic in more ways than one. For the first time in the country's history, a woman of color was a presidential nomination, a Primary winner withdrew from the race, and a former President was running a third campaign after losing the incumbency reelection. The Presidential Election was the subject of considerable discussion and in Cook County, Illinois, this was no different. Home to the city of Chicago and surrounding suburbs, we examined presidential voting behavior to get a sense of how residents voted in the election. While there may still be relatively high rates of voter turnout given the popularity of a Presidential Election, we might suspect Cook County's reported turnout to be slightly lower than the national average as a result of Chicago's history of systemic racial and economic inequality, likely creating barriers for many

Cook County residents during election cycles. Additionally, Illinois's reputation as a prominent Democratic state has led some to theorize that voters assume the state will stay blue regardless of whether they vote. Thus, a significant number of voters will diffuse responsibility onto others when the election comes around. (Wall 2024). For this reason, we, too, could expect relatively low reported turnout for a Presidential race.

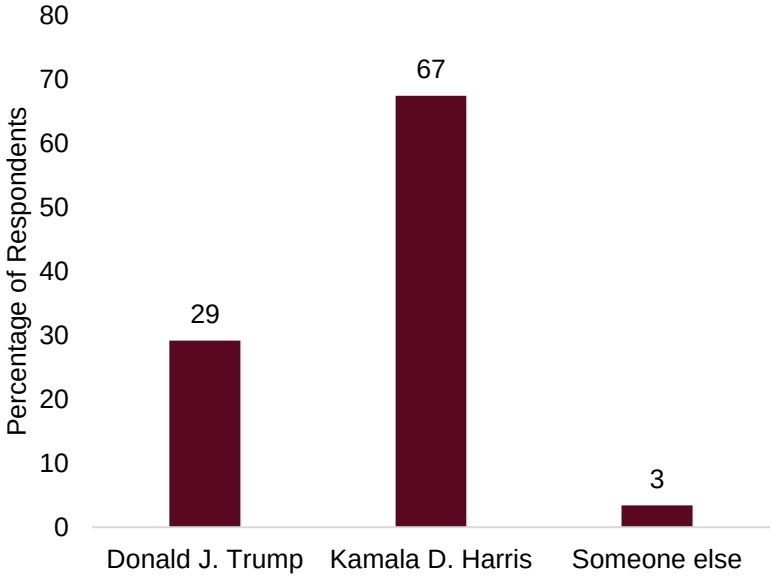
Figure 8.1: Distribution of Voting Behavior in the 2024 Presidential Election



However, when looking at Figure 8.1, we do not see this phenomenon emerge. In fact, the weighted distribution of responses reveals that the majority, 77%, of respondents said they voted in the election. (Figure 8.1). This is notably above the 2024 national voter turnout of 64%. (Ballotpedia, 2025). A likely possibility is that people overreported their turnout or the highly anticipated Chicago School Board Elections on the ticket this year drew Cook County residents to the polls. (Wall, 2024).

Given Chicago's Democratic pattern of voting, one could expect much of the vote share going to Harris. Although the majority of Cook County residents voted for Harris (67%), she received less than 70% of votes while 29% voted for Trump in the November 2024 Presidential Election and 3% of respondents reported that they voted for someone else (Figure 8.2). Considering that Trump received the popular vote and won the electoral college in the 2024 election, these findings align with data on decreased Democratic vote share

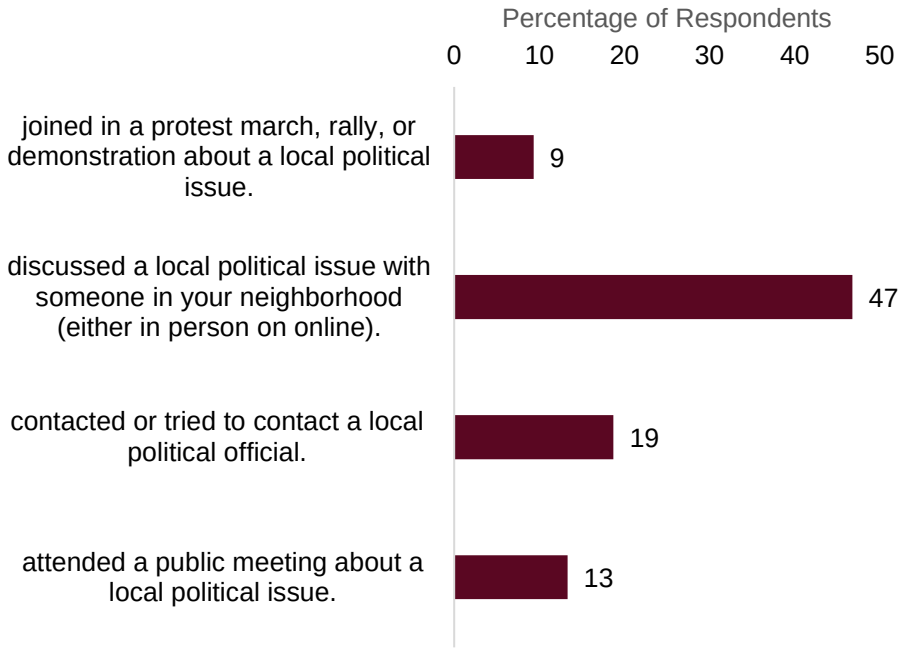
Figure 8.2: Distribution of Votes for Presidential Candidate



in Chicago from 2020 to 2024 reported on in a news article by Jared Rutecki of WTTW News. (Rutecki 2024). According to data provided by the Cook County Clerk's Office, 74% of those who cast their vote in Cook County in 2020 did so for Biden, while 70% of those who cast their vote in 2024 did so for Harris. (Gordon, 2025). Although in Chicago, according to Amy Qin of the Chicago Sun-Times, "Vice President Kamala Harris' vote total was more than 205,000 votes behind President Joe Biden's in 2020", Figure 8.2 shows that Cook County still votes majority Democratic and remains a Democratic stronghold. (Qin 2024).

Finally,, we analyzed a battery of four questions that asked respondents whether they have joined a protest, rally, or demonstration, discussed a local political issue with a neighbor, contacted or tried to contact a local political official, or attended a public meeting about a local political issue within the last 12 months. Within each variable, the respondent is more likely to report non-engagement than participation, which suggests a low measure of engagement within Cook County. Out of each of the actions measuring engagement, respondents are least likely to participate in a protest, march, or rally about a political issue with only 9% of respondents reporting participation. Protests or similar demonstrations require a high-level of effort and flexibility from an individual; therefore, it may be more difficult for respondents to participate in this action even if they may be willing. Participants are most likely to discuss local politics with someone in their neighborhood either in-person or online. Individuals are around 28 percentage points more likely to discuss political issues with neighbors than the next most reported action. Discussing political views is a relatively low-effort form of local participation - it requires the least amount of commitment from the individual and can be more easily integrated into daily life. The distribution of responses in this chart

Figure 8.3: Distribution of Local Political Activity

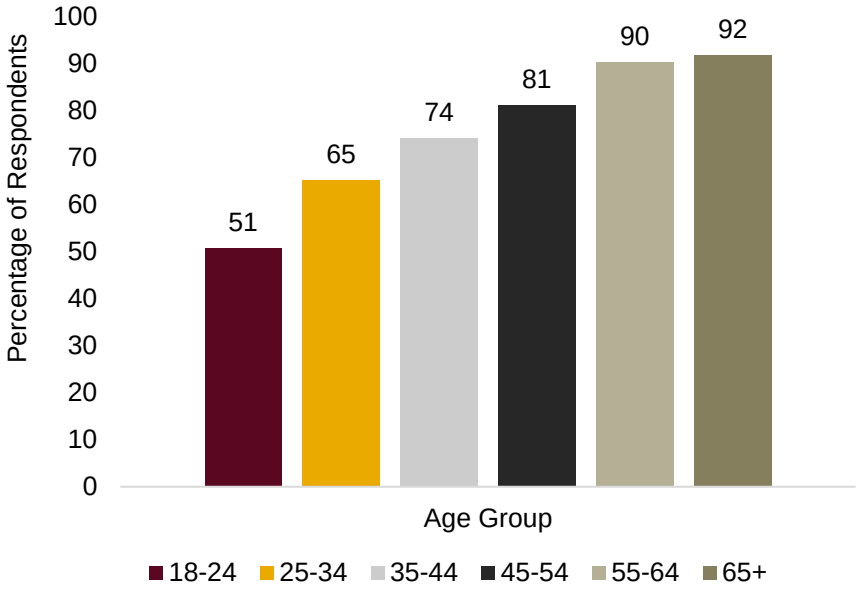


demonstrates that the CCCS respondents report a relatively low level of local civic participation, and the most common form of local political engagement is discussing an issue with a neighbor.

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

To have a more comprehensive understanding of political involvement among Cook County residents, we observed how different demographic groups behaved in terms of turnout, vote choice, and local political participation. First, we analyze the relationship between age and these outcomes. Young voters display lower rates of voter turnout compared to older age groups for a myriad of reasons such as having less experience and, thus, comfortability with the electoral process. The 2024 Chicago primaries proved no different, as the youngest group of voters comprised less than 4% of the ballots. (NBC Chicago 2024). Thus, we should expect to see a similar pattern for the 2024 Presidential Elections. When considering age, it is also expected that the younger the voter, the more likely they will vote liberal or Democratic, whereas the older the voter, the more likely they will vote conservative or Republican. This is because young people tend to be more accepting of new ideas and open to change. Local participation is also likely to vary across age groups impacted by contrasting responsibilities. Typically, younger individuals are characterized as the most politically charged; therefore, it can be assumed that participation in local political events would report the largest mean of political participation.

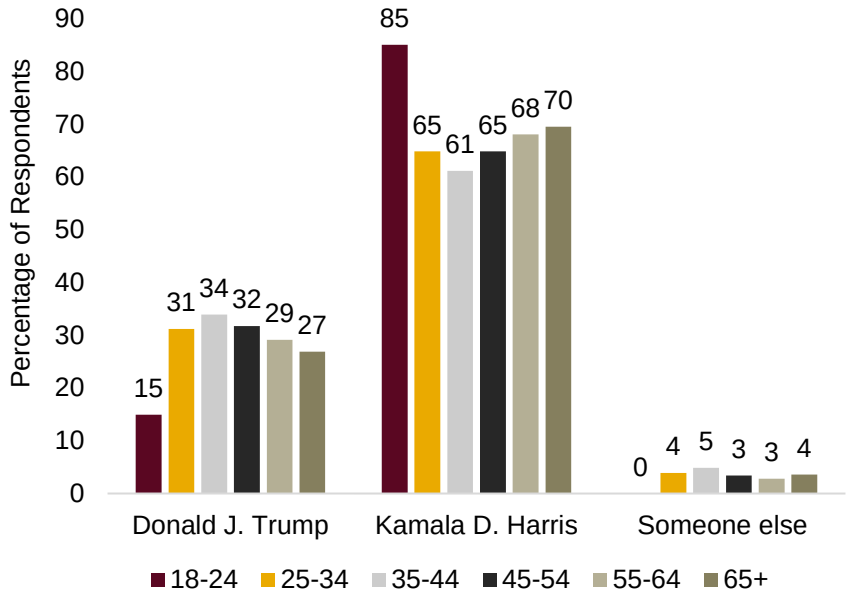
Figure 8.4: Percentage of Voter Turnout in the 2024 Presidential Election by Age



As expected, age has a positive relationship with voter turnout. Figure 8.4 expresses that the older the voter, the more likely they were to have voted in the recent election. While over 50% of voters aged 18-24 reported voting in the 2024 Presidential Election, they still represented the group with the lowest turnout while 92% of residents 65 or older reported having voted.

The findings from the data also align with the expectation that younger voters are typically more inclined to vote for the Democratic candidate. According to Figure 8.5, the majority of Cook County residents who voted in the November 2024 Presidential Election cast their vote for Harris, as at least 61% of those who cast their ballot, in all age groups, did so for Harris. (Figure 8.5). 85% of Cook County residents ages 18-24 who voted cast their ballot for Harris, signaling a higher preference for Harris than Trump among younger voters (Figure 8.5). Considering all other age groups among voters in Cook County, the vote margin between Harris and Trump remained relatively constant, with vote shares for Harris ranging from 72% and 61% across the remaining age groups. No respondents in the 18-24 group reported voting for someone other than Harris or Trump, while Cook County voters of all age groups cast their ballot for someone other than Harris or Trump at or below 5%.

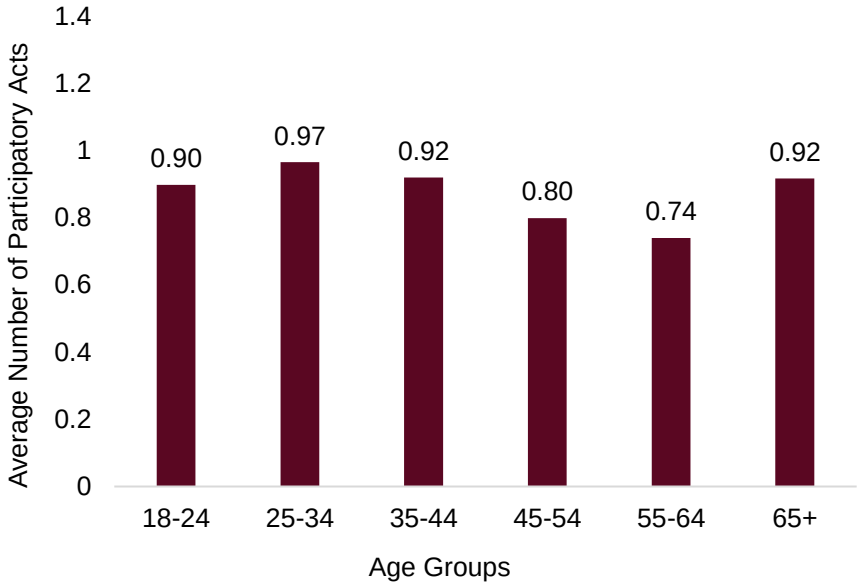
Figure 8.5: Distribution of Votes for Presidential Candidate by Age



Amongst those aged 18-24, respondents had a lower reported mean of participation than we might assume (0.89). A study done by Princeton University suggests that civic engagement amongst young adults has decreased because of the societal change in the “transition to adulthood” (Flanagan & Levine 2010). Elements of traditional adulthood can include factors -- children, living separate from parents, attending college -- that could further motivate individuals to ensure policies are benefiting unique aspects of their lives. As the transition to adulthood has shifted to an older age, younger individuals may be less inclined to become involved civically especially at the local level.

While voter turnout is expected to increase as individuals age, the opposite effect can be seen when looking at local participation among Cook County respondents. In Figure 8.6, the expectation of younger individuals choosing to be more politically active is supported by the steady decline in participation as aging occurs. Unexpectedly, respondents who classified as 65 or older reported a mean of 0.17 higher than those aged 55-64. The rebound in political participation is significant and could occur due to the 65+ age range being a time when individuals typically decide to retire, therefore, more time can be allocated to participating in local issues. Low engagement among the mid-age range can occur for assorted reasons including time constraints, familial responsibilities, cemented political beliefs, or economic pressure. Many pressing policy debates can impact those above 65 like healthcare or retirement, which can lead to an upshoot of participation after 64.

Figure 8.6: Mean Distribution of Local Participation by Age

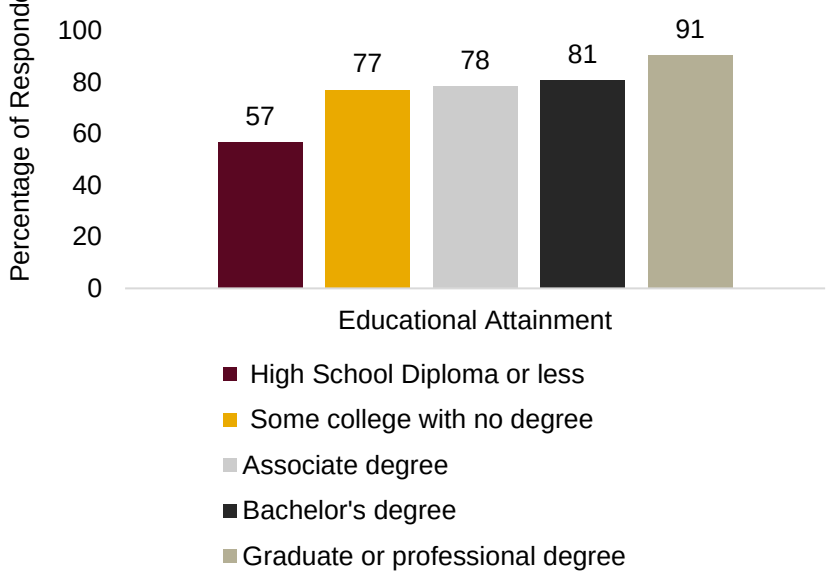


Additionally, we compare voters with varying levels of educational attainment to determine if knowledge impacts political participation. The process of voting can be overwhelming, with several sets of rules and regulations around who is eligible to vote, the different avenues one can take to vote early, by mail, or at the polls, and the difference in candidate policies. We should expect that as people receive more education, they are better able to confidently maneuver the oftentimes confusing electoral process. Another possibility is that the higher a voter's level of educational attainment, the more likely they will vote liberal or Democratic; whereas, the lower a voter's level of educational attainment, the more likely they will vote conservative or Republican. Historically, educational attainment has been one of the strongest signifiers of increased political participation. Typically, higher education increases political participation due to secondary institutions teaching processes of civic engagement and informing individuals of their civic duties. Access to institutions that fostered political participation have not always been available to the

entirety of the population and the rise in tuition for secondary education has continued this pattern into the modern day.

The percentage of voter turnout in the 2024 Presidential election compared across educational attainment confirms the expected pattern detailed above. Respondents with higher levels of education are more likely to have reported voting in the 2024 Presidential Election than those with lower levels. As seen in Figure 8.7, those with a high school education or lower had the lowest reported turnout with only 57% having reported voting compared to 78% of those with an associate's degree, while a staggering 91% of residents with a graduate or professional degree said they turned out to vote.

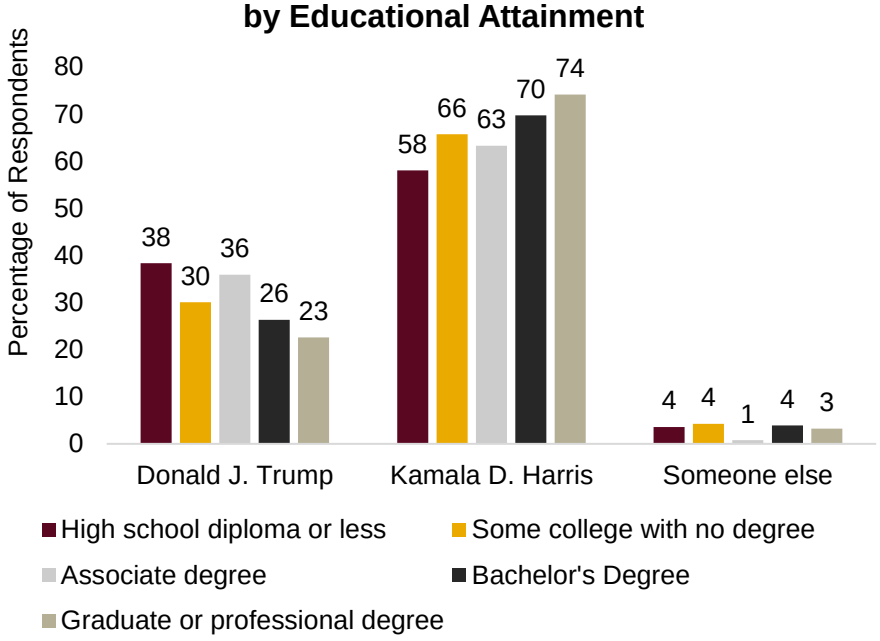
Figure 8.7 Voter Turnout in the 2024 Presidential Election by Educational Attainment



According to our findings, overall, Cook County voters were more likely to vote for Harris as their level of educational attainment increased. Conversely, Cook County voters were more likely to vote for Trump as their level of educational attainment decreased. Harris was least popular among respondents with a high school degree or less, earning 58% of their votes. She was most popular among those with a graduate or professional degree, earning 74% of their votes (Figure 8.8). Meanwhile, Trump was most popular among respondents with a high school degree or less, earning 38% of their votes. He was least popular among those with a graduate or professional degree, earning only 23% of their votes (Figure 8.8). Therefore, our expectation that those with increasing levels of educational attainment were more likely to vote for Harris is supported. A small minority of respondents voted for someone other than Harris or Trump. Respondents with some college with no college degree were most likely to vote for someone other than Harris or Trump (4%), but there is no significant trend revealed from the data between level of educational attainment and voting for someone else or third party (Figure 8.8).

Interestingly, Figure 8.8 also shows that 63% of Cook County residents who voted and have an associate's degree cast their ballot for Harris, a similar rate as those with a high school diploma or less, at 58% (Figure 8.8). Meanwhile, 66% of those who voted and have some college with no degree cast their ballot for Harris, more similar to those with a bachelor's degree, at 70% (Figure 8.8). This trend may be rooted in how those with an associate's degree tend to have income levels more comparable to high school graduates than bachelor's degree holders. Concerns about the economy and cost of living was likely an influential factor for many voters in how they cast their vote in 2024. The Associated Press reported that among Illinois voters, 35% said the economy was the most important issue facing the country in 2024. (AP News 2025). This may explain why those with lower income levels -- often with a high school diploma or less or an associate's degree -- cast their votes for Harris at a lower rate than those with higher income levels -- those with some college with no degree and those with a bachelor's degree.

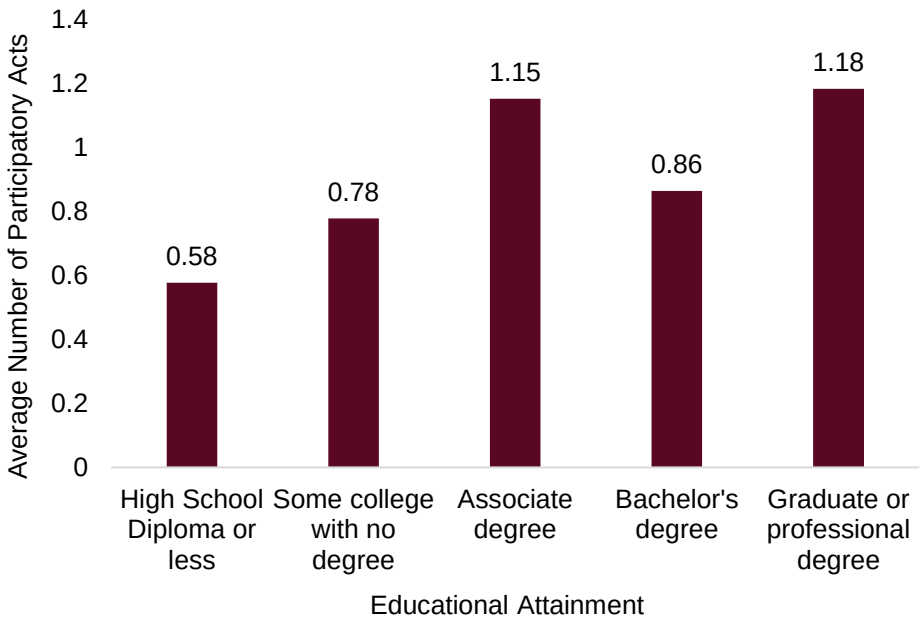
Figure 8.8: Votes for Presidential Candidates by Educational Attainment



Similar to voter turnout, education has a positive relationship with local participation as demonstrated in Figure 8.9. Respondents who identified as having a high school education or less reported a lower mean than respondents in the higher education categories (0.58). Respondents who have obtained an associate's degree have unique levels of engagement within the assumed pattern of higher education leading to greater political participation. Associate degree holders reported a high engagement mean (1.15) compared to the groups of lower levels

of educational attainment and have an almost identical mean to those who hold a graduate or professional degree (1.18).

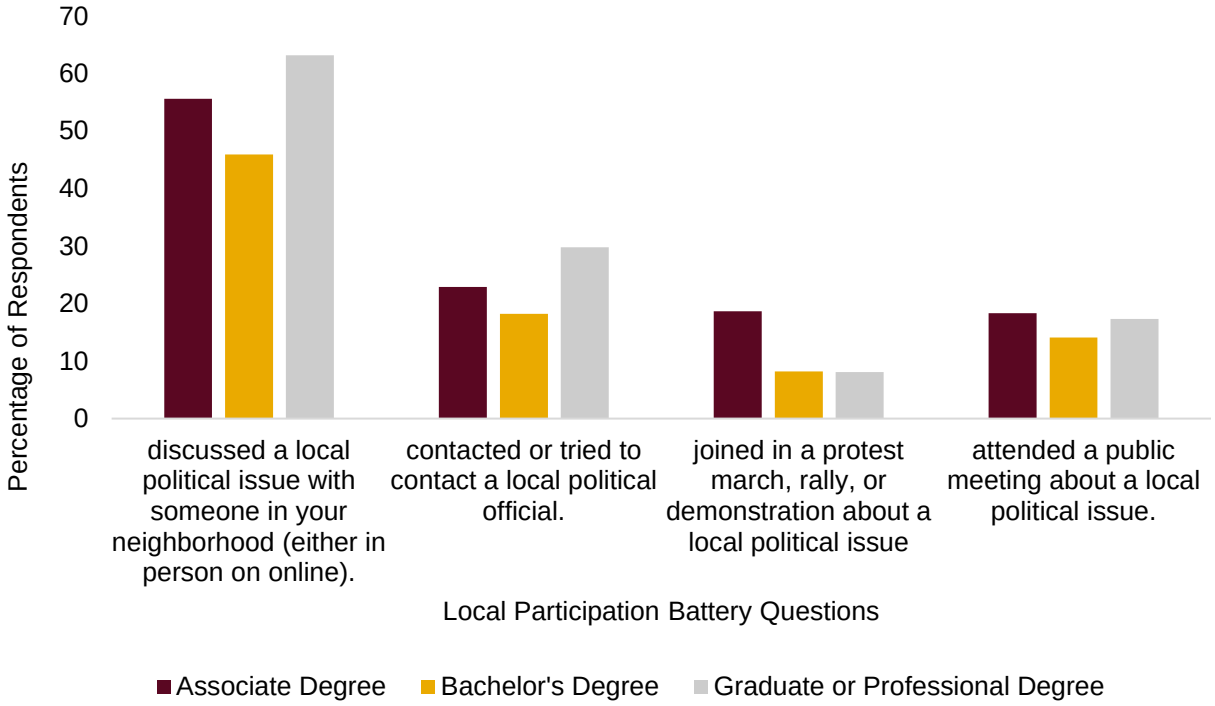
Figure 8.9: Mean Distribution of Local Participation by Educational Attainment



While the reported mean for political participation among those who hold a bachelor's degree (0.86) is in line with the expected pattern, it is still a smaller difference between those with some college experience than we might assume. Bachelor's degree holders might be more engaged on a national level than they are at a local level. Traditionally, individuals might move to a new city post-graduation from a bachelor program and consequently become less involved in local politics as they have less ties to the new location. Figure 8.9 demonstrates the pattern of political participation increasing as higher education is attained with a stark increase amongst those who obtained an associate's degree in Cook County.

Although higher education typically leads to further political participation, as Figure 8.10 demonstrates, Cook Country respondents with an associate's degree seem to break from the expectation. Figure 8.10 illustrates the distribution of participation in the four local participation battery questions by higher educational attainment. Among each local political action, associate's degree holders surpass bachelor's degree holders. Additionally, individuals who have obtained an associate's degree are the most likely to report attending a local public meeting about a political issue and joining a protest, rally, march, or demonstration about a local political issue. Although it is not always true, those who seek an associate's degree most often stay close to home or within the community in which they grew up. This could lead to those with an associate's degree being more closely connected to their community and, consequently, more motivated to hold local officials accountable for political issues.

Figure 8.10: Local Participation by Educational Attainment



Moving on, we break down our outcomes by political party identification, examining the behavior of those who identify as Democratic, Republican, or Independent. When examining how party affiliation relates to voter turnout, two feasible outcomes could have occurred. Cook County has a Democratic majority, with 56% of survey respondents having labeled themselves as a Democrat. 19% identified as Republican and 25% considered themselves Independent. On one hand, the possibility of electing a woman of color as president could have ignited the large Democratic base to participate in the historic election, where Democrats would have a significantly higher turnout. Opposingly, Republicans might have showed up at the polls in large numbers to make their presence known to Illinois and Cook County lawmakers. As one 71-year-old, White Cook County Community survey respondent noted, “I wish there was more representation of Republicans in the state of Illinois… I guess it just doesn't seem Republicans have any foothold in Illinois, so that's sort of disappointing in a way”, highlighting possible motivation behind Republican participation in Cook County. We predict that voters’ choice of presidential candidate will closely align with their political party affiliation. We expected to find that those who identify as Democrats will vote for Harris and those who identify as Republican will vote for Trump. Civic engagement among political parties tends to vary depending on the specific political act. While Democrats might be more likely to join a local protest, it is more common for Republicans to participate in local governance particularly in rural areas. Growing polarization between the two

parties has had an unexpected impact of increased political participation (Phillips 2024). It is expected that Democrats and Republicans will participate on a similar level due to the politically charged environment that intensified over the previous year.

In examining the data from Figure 8.11, there is not sufficient evidence to support our expected patterns, as Democrats and Republicans reported turning out to vote in relatively similar percentages -- 83% and 80% respectively -- in the 2024 Presidential Election, while only 66% of Independents reported voting. We might conclude that counteracting a motivation to vote for the first female President by the Democrats were other Democrats who were unhappy with the change in party candidate after Biden won the primaries. Similarly, there were likely Republicans who were less enthusiastic about a more extreme candidate at the top of the ticket, combating the excitement other conservatives had for a Trump reelection. The similar balance between vigorous and indifferent voters in the Democratic and Republican parties likely led to the similar reported turnout rates between these groups.

Figure 8.11: Voter Turnout in the 2024 Presidential Election by Political Identification

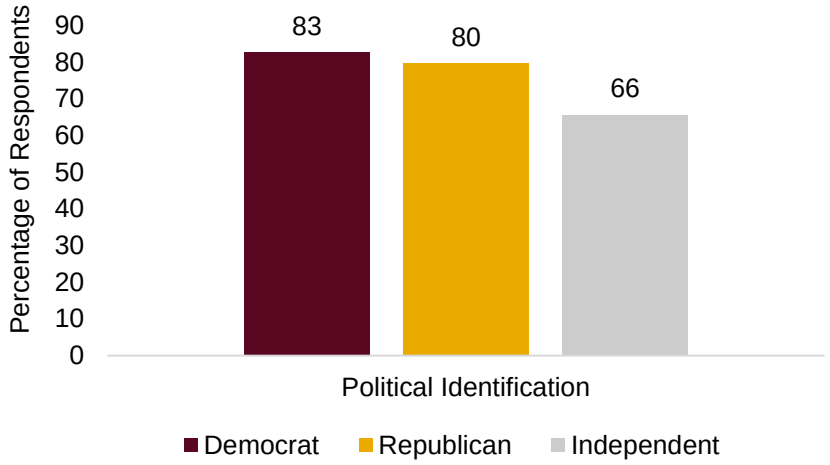
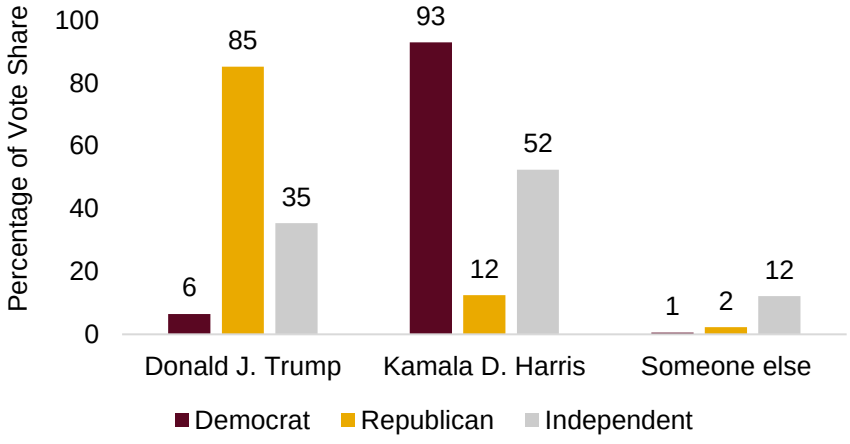


Figure 8.12: Distribution of Votes for Presidential Candidate by Political Identification

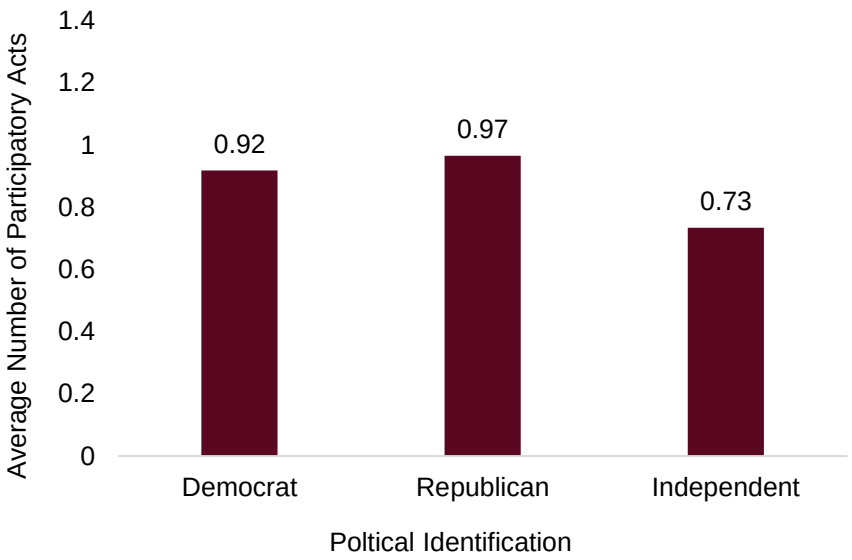


The expected trend for party identification and vote choice is supported by the data as revealed in Figure 8.12. A larger percentage of Democrats voted for Harris (93%) than Republicans voted for Trump (85%). Relatedly, a larger percentage

of Republicans voted for Harris (12%) than Democrats voted for Trump (6%). This means that Democratic respondents were less likely to vote for the opposing political party's candidate than Republican respondents; thus, revealing that Harris drew a larger proportion of voters from the Republican voter base than Trump did from the Democratic in Cook County. Notably, Independent respondents were more likely to vote for Harris (52%) than Trump (35%). Despite these trends, overall, voters who identified with a political party where overwhelmingly most likely to vote for that specific party. Those who voted for a candidate other than that of their personal political affiliation were in the minority.

As expected, no patterns arise in the difference of local participation between Democrats and Republicans. Figure 8.13 demonstrates that Democrats and Republicans have similar participations trends, yet Independents are much less likely to participate than their counterparts. This is surprising for the past year as there was a large push towards independent candidate Jill Stein due to dissatisfaction of the Democrat and Republican candidate proposed policies. Independents' low level of participation could be due to a lack of mobilization, loose party ties, or simply political disengagement.

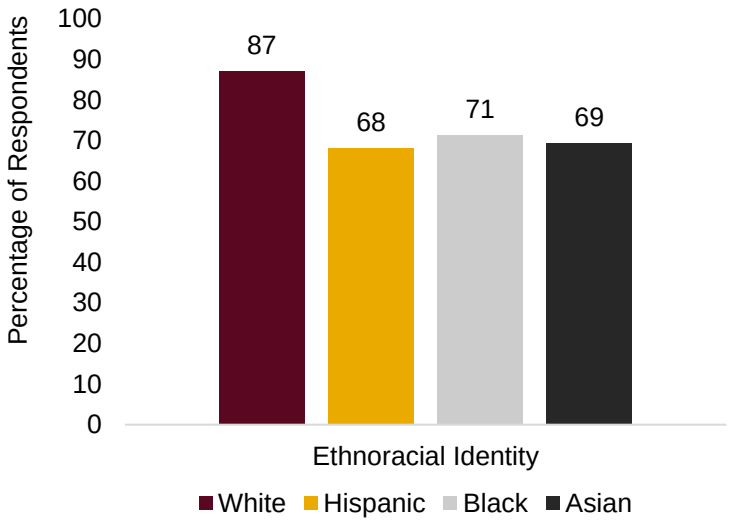
Figure 8.13: Mean Distribution of Local Participation by Political Identification



Given Chicago's racial diversity, we analyze the differences in behavior between ethnoracial identities to see if groups vote or participate politically in distinct ways. Understanding the difference in local political participation among ethnoracial groups can help to identify barriers impacting participation to creative more inclusive motivational strategies to increase civic engagement. One possibility is that in conjunction with Cook County's Democratic majority and racial diversity, voters of color, specifically Black and Asian voters, would have high voter turnout rates with Harris at the top of the ticket. On the other hand, a study conducted found in the British Journal of Political Science finds that white individuals have a significantly higher level of

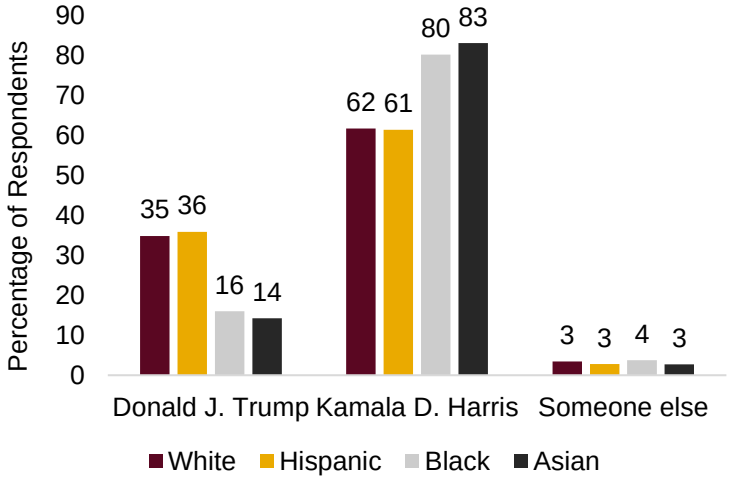
participation compared to Black and Hispanic individuals (Verba et al. 1993). The study also compares resources that facilitate participation across groups and determines that majority of these resources are unequally provided for white communities (Verba et al. 1993). With unequal access to these resources, another possibility is that the lack of these resources can lead to lower participation from Black and Hispanic voters specifically. Historically, voters who belonged to an ethnoracial minority group such as Hispanic, Black, and/or Asian voters were more likely to vote for the Democratic presidential candidate while White voters were more likely to vote for the Republican presidential candidate. Instead, White voters had the highest turnout, with nearly 90% casting a ballot, while less than 70% of Hispanic, Asian, and other racial-identifying residents voted in the Presidential Election. Black voters had a slightly higher rate of turnout with 71% having voted. (Figure 8.14). Either descriptive representation was not the driving force behind racial-minority voters, or these voters faced disparate income levels and access to necessary voting resources that made it difficult or nearly impossible to vote.

Figure 8.14: Voter Turnout in the 2024 Presidential Election by Ethnoracial Identity



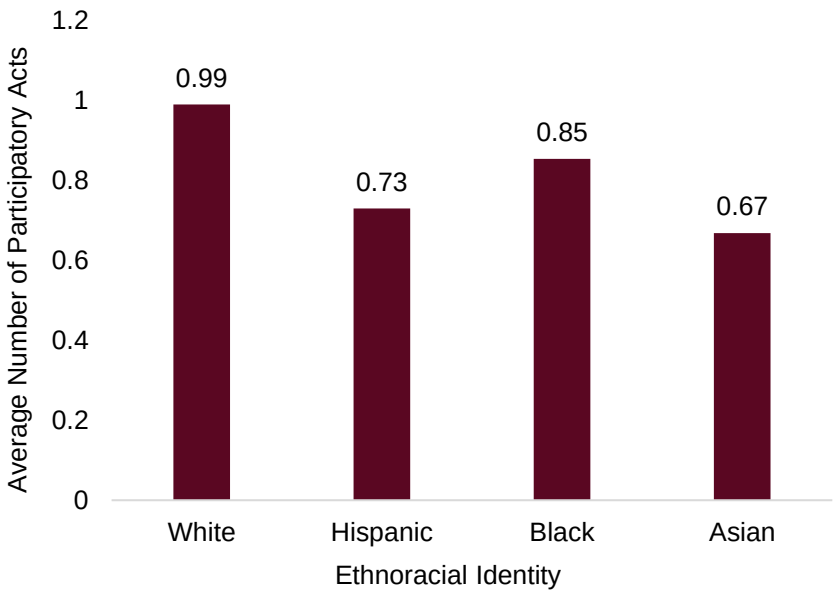
Furthermore, our expected trend between ethnoracial identity and vote choice is not supported when analyzing the results in Figure 8.15. A majority of every ethnoracial group in Cook County voted for Harris in the November 2024 Presidential Election. Harris won at least 25 percentage points more of the vote share from every racial group compared to Trump. Among Black voters in Cook

Figure 8.15: Votes for Presidential Candidate by Ethnoracial Identity



County, Harris earned 64 percentage points more votes than Trump, and 69 percentage points more votes from Asian voters than Trump. However, Harris only won a vote margin of 27 percentage points among White voters and a vote margin of 26 percentage points among Hispanic voters in Cook County. Interestingly, in Cook County, the margin of votes between Harris and Trump was at its least with Hispanic voters. These findings agree with data provided by Navigator that reveal that Harris performed particularly worse than Biden with Black and Hispanic men, with Harris earning a voting margin 35% less than Biden's margin among both Black men and Hispanic men. (Cousens 2024). This difference in the vote between 2020 and 2024 may be indicative of the shift that earned Biden the presidency in 2020 but earned Trump the presidency in 2024.

Figure 8.16: Local Partcipation by Ethnoracial Identity



While it was expected that the racial diversity of Chicago would lead to higher participation among non-white respondents, the findings in Figure 8.16 do not support this claim. Asian and Hispanic respondents reported the lowest mean levels of participation with a 0.67 mean among Asian respondents and a 0.73 mean among Hispanic respondents. White respondents have faced fewer historical barriers to civic engagement and are the ethnoracial group represented the most descriptively in legislative bodies. It is no surprise that the historical lack of systemic barriers has allowed continued elevated levels of participation with white respondents reporting a mean of 0.99.

Black respondents reported a comparatively high mean of participation amongst non-white respondents (0.85) and falls only 0.14 behind their white counterparts. In a study surveying Black Americans conducted by the Pew Research Center, almost half of the individuals who defined an issue important to their community held their community leader's most responsible for addressing the issue at hand (Cox & Tamir 2022). Additionally, 52% of individuals surveyed agreed that where

they live is extremely important to themselves and their self-image (Cox & Tamir 2022). Findings by the Pew Research Center allude that Black respondents could have stronger ties to their community and be more inclined to hold local leaders responsible for issues facing Cook County.

DISCUSSION

Across voter turnout and local participation, the common theme of disengaged young voters was prevalent in our findings. The issues young voters care about deserve to be heard and represented, but this can only be achieved through civic engagement or political participation. While young voters may have had the lowest voter turnout, they made up the largest share of support for Harris. Thus, Democratic organizations and candidates have an incentive in future elections to expand programs aimed at encouraging young participation in politics. However, to be truly democratic, young Republican and Independent voters should equally be encouraged to get involved. In fact, such efforts are already underway, as the nonpartisan project, Mikvah Challenge, engages high school students by training them to work election polling places. Consequently, young adults build necessary civic skills and confidence to participate in politics as they reach voting age. (NBC Chicago, 2024).

Moreover, we found that education played a significant role in political participation, as those with increased levels of educational attainment had higher voter turnout and engaged in a higher average number of local participation acts. Individuals with higher levels of education were more likely to vote for the Democratic presidential candidate and more likely to engage civically. This pattern points to increasing partisan realignment where education is becoming a strong predictor for party affiliation. Lower education levels can also reduce participation among each political identity group due to a lack of information on avenues of participation and lower social mobilization. To mitigate these consequences, civic participation must be taught and encouraged at all levels of schooling. Government cannot be truly representative of the people if some do not have their voices stemming from a lack of educational attainment. Especially in the city of Chicago where there are substantial education disparities vis-à-vis race, residents should not be dissuaded from getting involved simply because they lack necessary resources such as time, money, or higher education.

For the newly elected representatives of Cook County to work effectively on behalf of their constituents, they must understand the wide range of issues voters care about. Barriers to civic participation make it difficult for everyone’s values to be taken into consideration, which is why future county-wide programs should focus on encouraging groups that participate in lower numbers feel confident and motivated to get involved politically.

Health and Stress

Marylynn Kumediro, Hunter Minné, and Orly Wolf

In this report, we will analyze stress and health outcomes among Cook County residents, and the predictors that influence these outcomes. Over time, public awareness of health and stress-related issues has increased, with society acknowledging their significant impact on daily life. Conditions such as high blood pressure and depression are now widely recognized as consequences of chronic stress and poor health (Mayo Clinic). Despite this growing awareness, many questions still remain unanswered, particularly when there are consistent evolving societal factors that influence and keep altering these case sensitive outcomes. This underscores the need for an in-depth exploration of individuals' self-perceived health levels to uncover unique patterns that may contribute to poor health. Similarly, understanding the distinctive patterns of stress and its effects, as these patterns can inform more effective interventions and insight for future research. By identifying these patterns, we can support the broader development of education and practices in both health and stress.

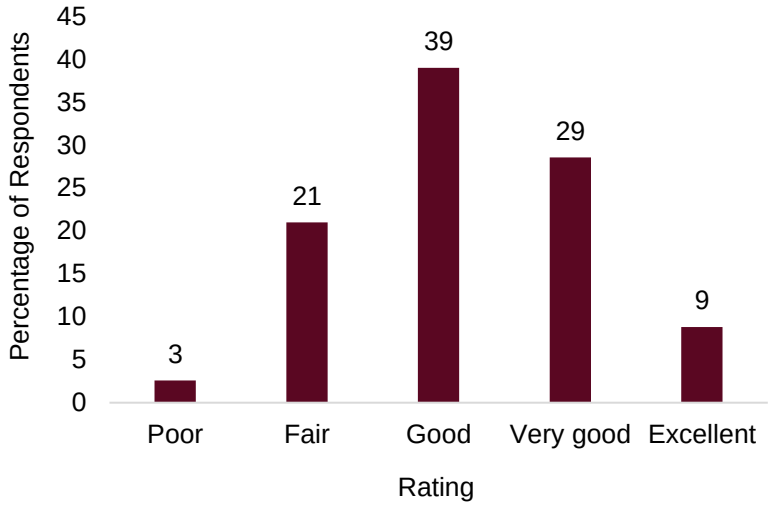
First, we begin by analyzing stress and health independently, as it's important to understand each variable before considering their interaction with other factors. In the 2025 Cook County Community Survey, both health and stress are measured using the outcomes gathered from Module 9. Specifically, health is measured using a question that asked respondents to rate their overall health on a scale ranging from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). While stress is assessed through participants' self-reported data on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4), with stress levels ranging from a minimum average score of 1 (lowest perceived stress) to a maximum of 5 (highest perceived stress). The outcomes for both health and stress are analyzed alongside key predictor variables, such as race, age, education, income, and socioeconomic status (SES) changes, to examine how these factors may influence self-reported stress levels. These variables are handpicked, as we suspect analyzing these factors may lead to interesting findings, as previous research has shown they can deeply impact both stress and health. Studies show that racial discrimination can lead to more stress and worse health (D. Williams). Young adults experience heightened stress due to work and family pressures, while older adults often face stress related to health issues and social isolation (Medaris). Higher education promotes better health and lower stress by fostering knowledge, coping skills, and financial stability (Center on Society and Health). Income affects access to healthcare, food, and proper housing, making financial struggles a major source of stress and health issues (Ryu and Fan). Additionally, shifts in socioeconomic status,

such as job loss, can also further lower stress and health levels (American Psychological Association). By using data from Module 9, including self-rated health and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4), we aim to understand patterns in our study and analyze how different social factors influence them. Through our analysis, we hope to provide readers with a clearer understanding of how stress and health are impacted by unique and ever-changing social determinants that shape these outcomes.

OVERALL RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS

The first question in the stress and health module asked, “In general, would you say your health is poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent?” When asked to rate their general overall health, the lowest rating a participant could choose, “poor,” was the least frequently chosen rating (2.6 percent). The most frequently chosen rating was “good” (39 percent). The next most common answer was “very good” (28.58 percent). 21 percent of respondents rated their health as “fair,” 8.83 percent rated their health as excellent, and 2.58 percent of respondents rated their health as “poor.”

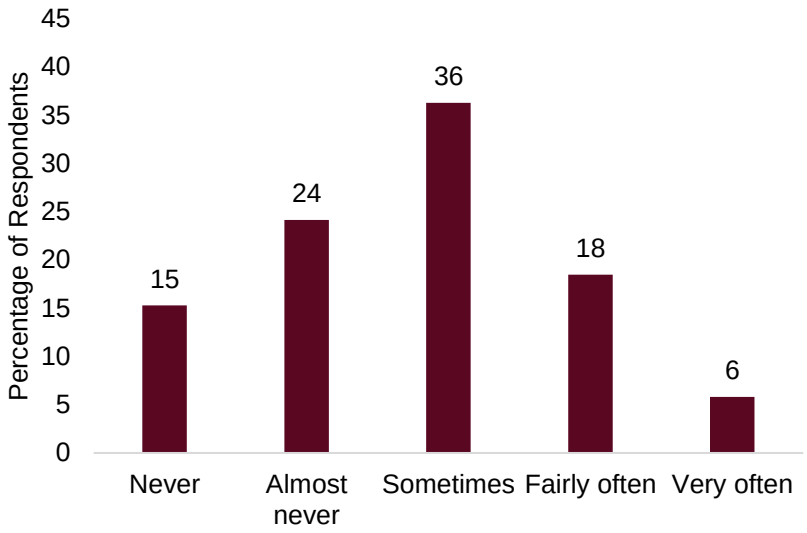
Figure 9.1: Overall Health Ratings



The second portion of the health bloc was a battery of four questions asking respondents to rate how often they encountered certain personal stressors over the previous month using a 5-point scale from “Never” to “Very often.” The one item in this battery asked how often respondents felt unable to control the “important things” in their lives. As shown in Figure 9.2, the most common

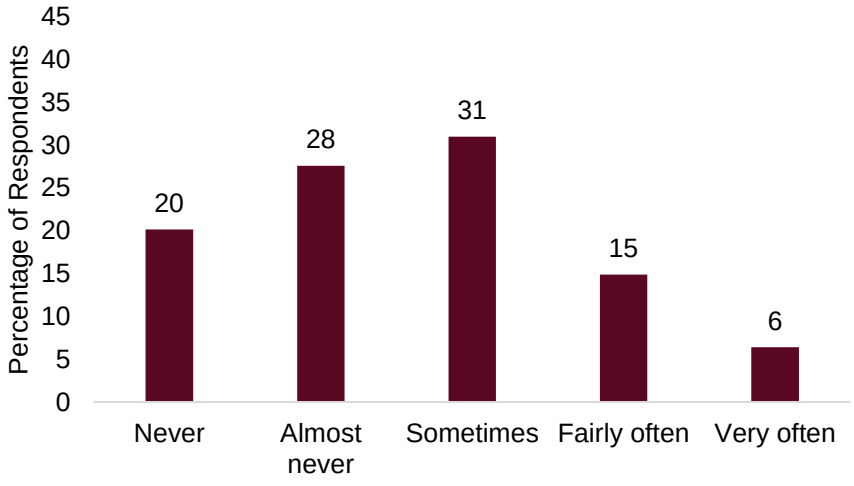
single answer was “Sometimes” at 36% but the combined responses denoting infrequency – “Never” and “Almost never” – was together more common at 39%. The combined responses denoting frequency of feeling unable to control important things – “Fairly often” and “Very often” – together equaled just 24% of respondents. The least common individual responses are the extremes of “Never” with 15% and “Very often” with 6%.

Figure 9.2: How often "felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life."



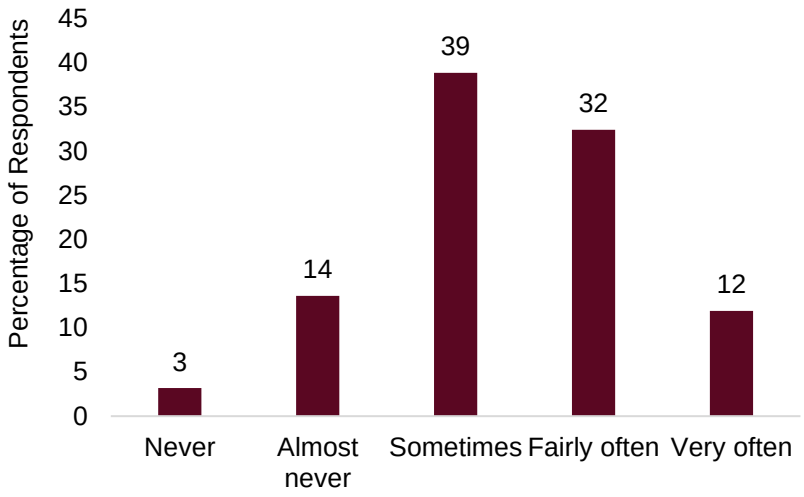
The next question in the battery asked respondents how often they had felt over the last month difficulties had been piling up so high they could not overcome them, and like the previous question is querying respondents about how frequently they felt negative emotions. Similar to the previous question, the combined responses for the “Never” and “Almost never” which denote infrequent feelings are the most common answers – together reaching 48% of responses. Again the most common single response was “Sometimes” at 31% while the frequent suggestive answers “Fairly often” and “Very often” are the least common bloc at a combined 21%. The frequent denotive answers are also the least common individual responses with “Fairly often” garnering only 15% and “Very often” again just 6%.

Figure 9.3: How often "felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?"



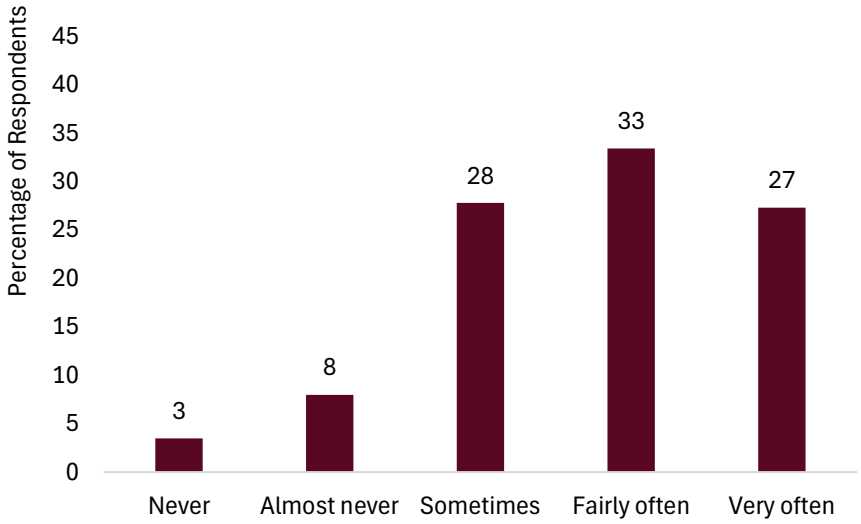
Another question in the battery asked respondents how often they felt that things were going their way over the last month. This question is one of two on the personal stress scale included on the CCCS that measures how frequently respondents encountered positive emotions. In contrast to the previous two figures, the combined responses for the answers indicative of frequency are now the largest bloc with “Fairly often” and “Very often” together making up 44% of responses. Once again the most common single response was “Sometimes” with 39%, while similar to the unable to control things question the least common individual responses are the extremes of “Almost Never” at 14% and “Never” at only 3%.

Figure 9.4: How often "felt that things were going your way?"



The final question in the personal stress battery asked respondents how often they had felt confident about their ability to handle their personal problems. Like the previous question, this one also measures how many times respondents had encountered positive emotions. And just as with the previous question about a positive emotion, the largest combined bloc is the responses indicating frequency as “Fairly often” and “Very often” together are 60% of respondents. This question is the only one in the battery where “Sometimes” wasn’t the most common single response, and instead “Fairly often” was the most common individual response at 33%. Similar to the difficulties piling up question, the least common responses for this question

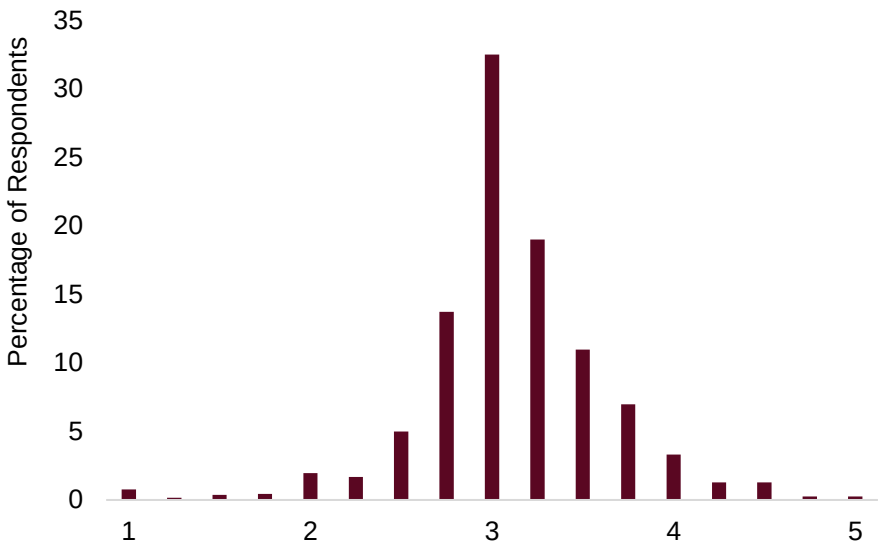
Figure 9.5: How often "felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?"



are not the extremes but are both the opposite bloc as the infrequency responses of “Almost never” is just 8% and “Never” is once again just 3% of responses.

Using the battery of four perceived stress scale questions, it is possible to determine an aggregate stress total per respondent which can measure average stress levels. This summary stress variable is created by tallying up respondents’ answers on each question in the battery, with answers indicative of higher frequency encounters of stress adding more points to their total, then dividing by the total number of questions in the battery to get an average stress rating on a scale from one through five. For the two questions which measure positive feelings, the order of the scale must be reversed so lower answers which indicate less encounters with those positive emotions now add more points to the total stress summary measure. This variable creates the above figure. Few respondents indicated extreme lacks of stress, as the left side of the figure from 1-2.75 has only a combined 24.15% of respondents. This is less than the most common single average score by far, 3 with over 32% of respondents and less than the combined number of respondents who received scores indicated above average stress from 3.25-5 on the scale, 43.27%.

Figure 9.6: Distribution of PSS=4 Average Stress Measure

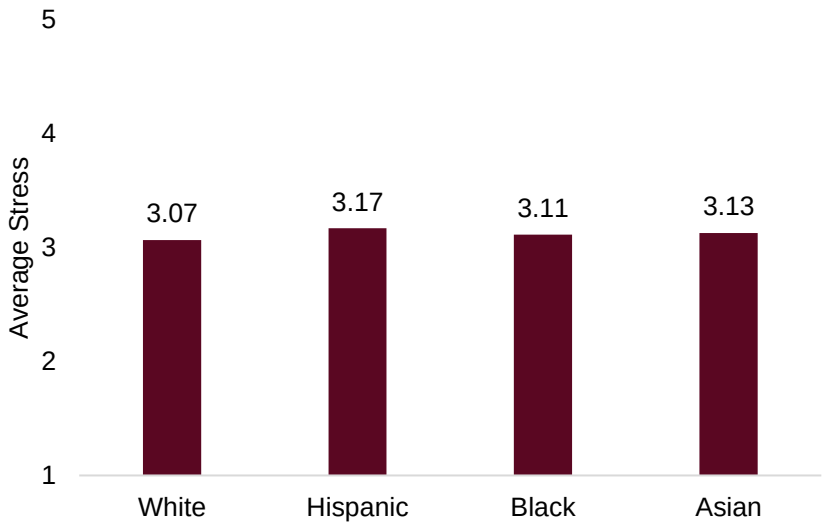


DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWNS

Race

Race is often linked to disparities in stress levels due to factors such as discrimination, socioeconomic inequality, and more. Issues such as racial discrimination are reported to be linked to higher psychological distress, so experiencing discrimination can lead to increased feelings of stress or anxiety through previous studies (D. Williams). Our goal is to explore whether there are additional connections between race and stress that have not been clearly examined in existing research.

Figure 9.7: Mean PSS-4 Score by Race



White respondents report the lowest mean perceived stress at (3.07). Whereas people of color such as Hispanics report (3.17), Black respondents (3.12), Asian respondents (3.13). This displays a slight disparity from White respondents perceived stress and people of color. However, there is a small but still noticeable variation in stress levels among different racial minority groups, with Hispanic respondents reporting slightly higher perceived stress compared to Black or Asian respondents.

These findings are significant as they demonstrate that race is not only a social identity, but also a factor influencing stress and mental health outcomes. The slightly higher stress levels among people of color could be closely tied to experiences of discrimination and social inequalities that disproportionately affect these groups. Numerous studies support this notion, such as one found, where “23% of Blacks, 19% of Hispanics, and 11% of Asians and non-Hispanic whites reported that they experienced everyday discrimination almost every day or at least once a week” (D. Williams). Yet that study and many others, Black respondents are for traditionally reporting the highest stress levels, but the 2025 CCCS survey reveals that Hispanic respondents have a slightly higher mean perceived stress (3.17) compared to Black respondents (3.12). This shift in the data is particularly interesting considering there were more Black respondents (333) than Hispanics (294), and their stress levels were marginally lower. This shift in data could be

theorized as an indicator that racial stress levels are shaped by both general discrimination and group-specific factors, particularly the heightened stress many Hispanics may experience due to increased exposure to discrimination in the current political climate.

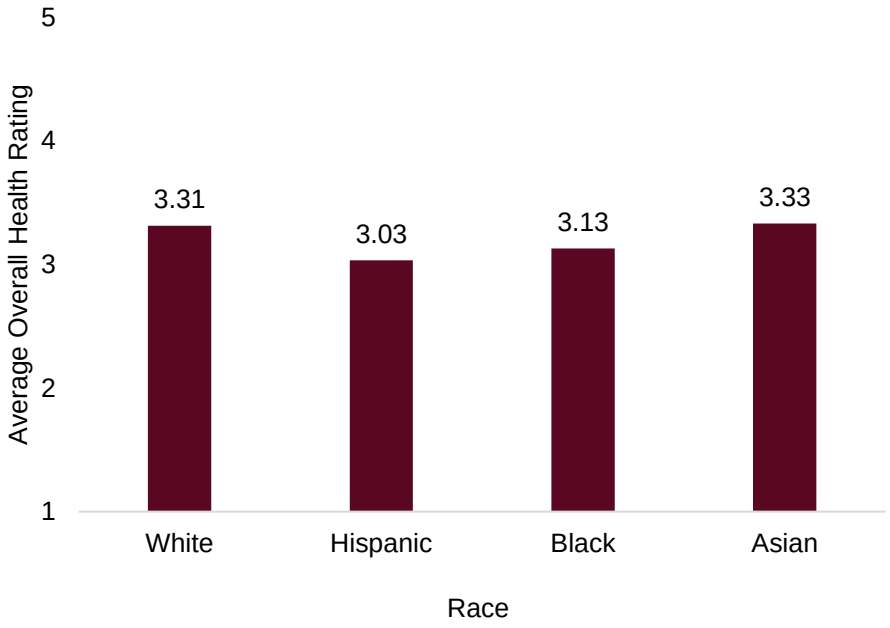
This theory is supported by demonstrating how heightened vigilance and the increased threat of exposure to discrimination can result in more stress. For instance, a study on “Latino college students [found they] expected discrimination before an interaction experienced heightened emotional and physiological stress responses—both before and after an encounter” (D. Williams). And other race such Black individuals express similar issues. Similarly, Black individuals also can report higher stress-indicator due to heightened vigilance. As “Black adults in Baltimore were found to have higher levels of heightened vigilance than whites, and this vigilance was positively associated with depressive symptoms, contributing to racial disparities in mental health” (D. Williams). This evidence suggests that the potential for encounters involving racism and discrimination truly does contribute to stress. With, the current political climate, marked by rising violence and policy debates—including the threat of deportation—may explain why Hispanic respondents report higher stress levels. As many may fear potential discrimination, racial profiling, or deportation of family members (Mann-Jackson et al.). This could also explain why Black respondents report less stress: while they are still affected by discrimination, the focus on deportation policies is more directly impacting the Hispanic population, potentially contributing to their higher stress levels.

Health disparities are well-documented across racial lines, with racial and ethnic minorities in the United States experiencing higher rates of certain health conditions. For example, African Americans are more likely to suffer from obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes, while Mexican Americans face disproportionate rates of diabetes (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine). Statistics like these clearly highlight the health disparities that exist based on race. Our goal is to determine whether similar trends are evident in our data.

Interestingly, the disparity between white health and that of other racial groups is less evident in this study. Asian respondents reported the highest a mean of (3.33), which falls under the "Good" health category. White respondents followed closely behind with a mean of (3.31), while Black respondents were (3.12) and Hispanic (3.03) a bit lower. Despite these variations, all groups seem to perceive their health similarly, with most reporting a rating within the “Good” health range (mean of 3).

While there are slight differences between the racial groups, overall, individuals from different racial backgrounds tend to perceive their health in a similar way. This could lead one to speculate that other factors may play a more significant role in shaping how individuals report their health in surveys. One such factor is socioeconomic status, which has been shown to have a substantial impact on health outcomes. For instance, research suggests that Asian Americans' have a "comparatively high socioeconomic status SES [which] has been suggested as a cause of this group's better health" (Crimmins et al.). Higher SES is often associated with better access to healthcare, which highlights an important factor for one's physical health to be determined as "good" or (a high mean of 3). Our data highlights this notion by suggesting with Asians participants mean score of (3.33). This indicates that the trend of better health perceptions can be inked to higher SES is also reflected in this group, expressing the importance of socioeconomic factors in shaping health outcomes. Similarly, one's social environment and access to resources most likely determined by income could explain why participants from other racial backgrounds report similar levels of "good" health. This similar pattern can also be found in Black individuals. A 2023 study highlighted some important health insurance trends among non-Hispanic Black/African Americans. It found that 56.8% of this group had private health insurance, a factor that is closely linked to better healthcare access and outcomes (Office of Minority Health). Overall, studies show how having access to health resources through higher socioeconomic status plays a crucial role in promoting better health and longer life expectancy. These findings underscore there could be a strong relationship between role of income and education in facilitating access to essential healthcare and resources, which in turn leads to better our participants health outcomes and perceptions.

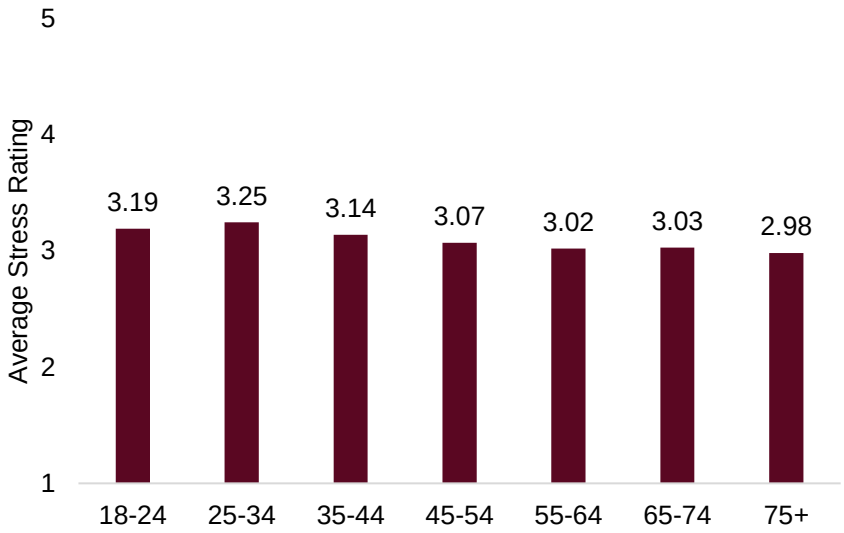
Figure 9.8: Average Overall Health Rating by Race



Age

The averaged summary measure for perceived stress averages ranges from 1-5, but the average total perceived stress by age group ranges from roughly 8-12. The youngest age group, 18–24-year-olds, have the highest mean perceived stress and almost with each increasing age group the average total stress levels decreases. The only exception to this decrease is the 65–74-year-old age group which is lower than the subsequent 75+ age group and is the age group with the lowest average stress levels. The oldest age group still indicated 3.3 less signs of stress than the youngest age group.

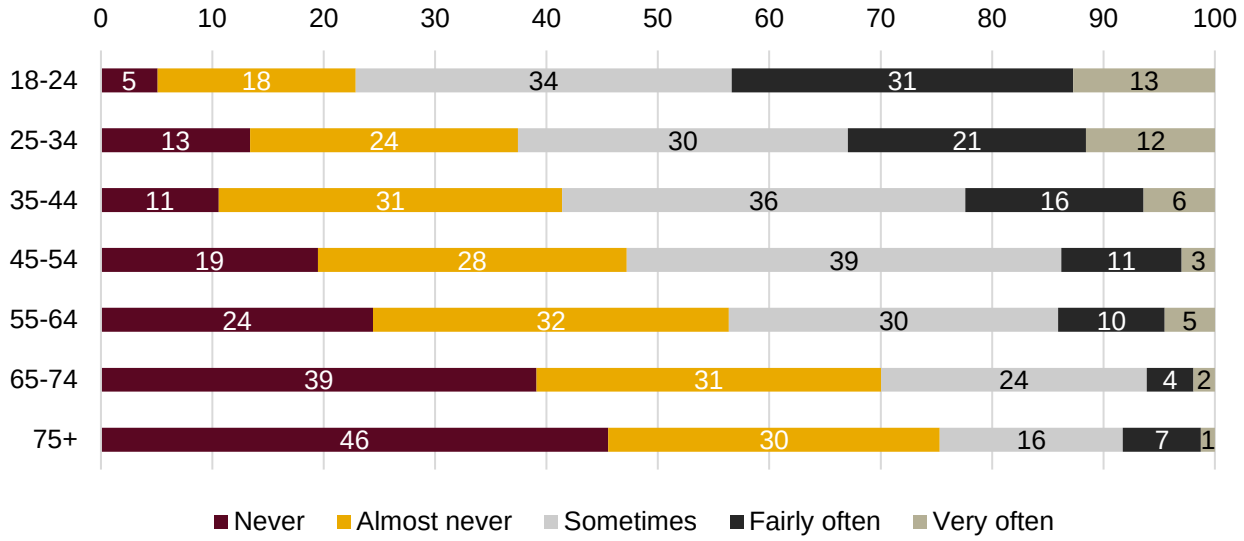
Figure 9.9: Average Stress by Age Group



In a similar pattern, the younger generations much more frequently indicated encountering stress while older generations indicated widely indicated not feeling a stressor. For the two infrequency answers of “Never” and “Almost never,” 75+ responded a combined 76% while 18-24 responded a combined 23%. With each younger age group, the size of the combined “Never” and “Almost never” bloc decreases from its peak with the eldest generation. For the frequency answers of “Very often” and “Fairly often,” 75+ responded a combined 8% while 18-24 responded a combined 44%. As the respondents age, the size of the combined “Very often” and “Fairly often” bloc decreases from its peak with the youngest age group. The youngest indicate feeling

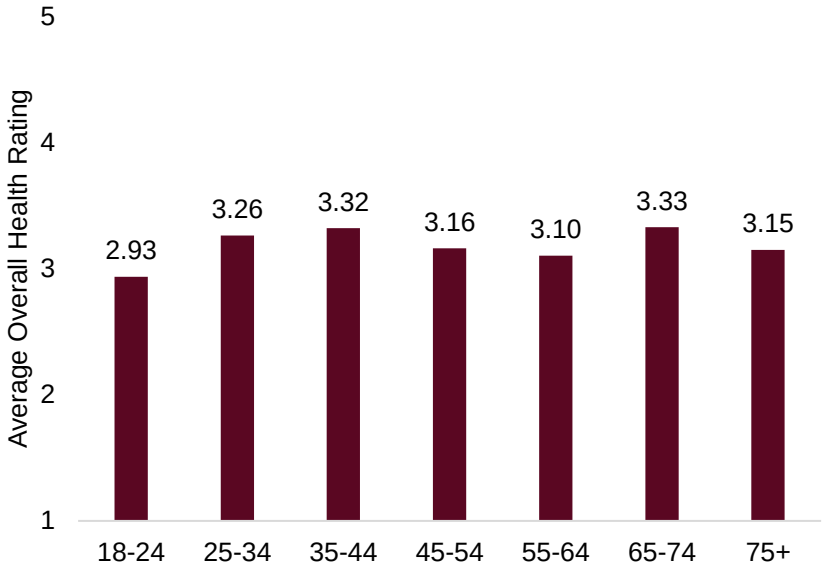
difficulties pile up the most while the eldest indicate never or barely ever feeling their difficulties pile up.

Figure 9.10: Feelings of Difficulties Piling Up By Age Group



A similar but less defined pattern emerges when analyzing the average self rated health scores across the various age groups. With this measure, lower scores indicate lower health instead of with stress where higher scores indicate worse health through the presence of more stressors. So similar to the personal stress scale, the youngest age group expressed the worst personal health but the trend was not a steady increase. The next eldest age groups, 25-34 and 35-44, both rated moderately high personal health at 3.26 and 3.32 respectively. This was followed by two decreases with the next eldest age groups, 45-54 and 55-64, at 3.16 and 3.1 respectively. The highest personal health rating was the second oldest age group of 65-74-year-olds at 3.33 followed by another decrease

Figure 9.11: Overall Self Rated Health by Age

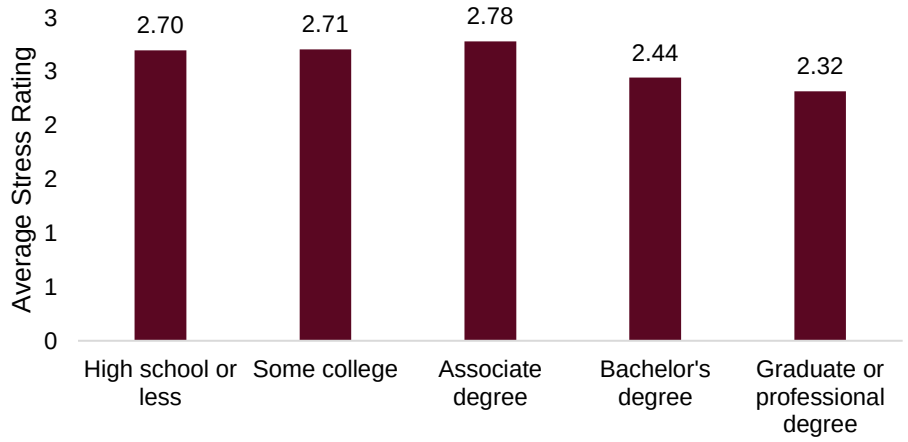


with 75+ at 3.15. So while there was a general increase from the youngest to the oldest, the increase was not consistent between each age group and wavered several times.

Education

Education plays a crucial role in shaping stress levels. Individuals with higher education levels often have better access to healthcare, greater job stability, and lower financial stress, all of which contribute to improved overall health and lower perceived stress. These “educated people have a greater number of choices and thus more control over their lives and better security…[whereas] low education has been linked to a lack of a sense of control and resilience” (N. Williams). We aim to determine whether the same patterns hold or if we can identify new patterns between the two. Our findings demonstrate a pattern like previous research expressed with our data. Graduate or professional degree holders report the lowest stress, with a mean score of 2.32. Similarly, bachelor‘s degree holders also report relatively low stress, with a mean of 2.44. In contrast, participants with lower education levels report higher stress. Those with Highschool diploma or less identifies having the highest stress, with a mean of 2.70.

Figure 9.12: Average Stress by Educational Attainment



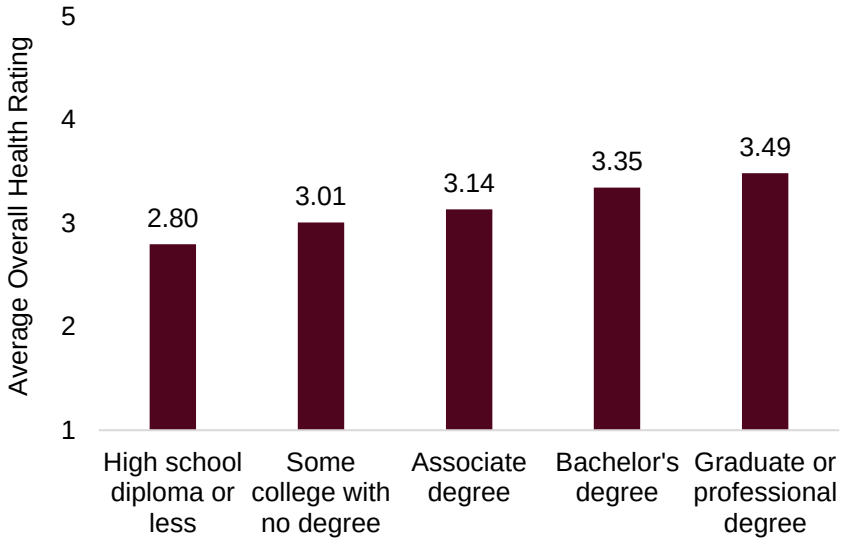
It can be theorized that education may serve as a protective factor against stress, likely due to better job opportunities and improved working conditions. Individuals with higher levels of education often have access to jobs that provide greater financial stability, job security, and workplace benefits, all of which can contribute to lower stress levels. On the other hand, those with lower education levels are more likely to work in physically demanding jobs, which can have both positive and negative effects on their health and stress levels. This idea is evident in the Salveo study which analyzed data from 37 companies in Canada relationship between Health and Stress Management (HSM) practices and mental health claims of the workers (Marchand, Alain, et al. 571).

However, the opposite may also be true. People who engage in physically demanding jobs not by choice, but out of necessity due to limited education and job opportunities, may experience higher stress levels. These jobs often come with irregular work hours, lower wages, job insecurity, and a lack of employee benefits, all of which contribute to increased physical and mental strain. Additionally, physically challenging jobs can lead to chronic fatigue, workplace injuries, and long-term health problems, further exacerbating stress. Unlike individuals in higher-paying jobs with flexible work arrangements, those in physically demanding roles may have less autonomy and fewer opportunities to balance work and personal life, making it more difficult to manage stress effectively (Marchand, Alain, et al. 574-575). This dynamic highlight a complex relationship between education, job type, and stress, expressing how access to better job opportunities through education can ultimately lead to improved mental health and stress levels.

It is important to look at perceived health disparities in one's educational attainment, as previous studies show adults with higher educational attainment live healthier and longer lives compared to their less educated peers. The disparities are large and widening, emphasizing the need to understand the educational and macro-level contexts in which this association occurs to reduce health disparities and improve population health (Zajacova and Lawrence). This displays the already is a relationship, but I wanted to see if there are any differences in our data.

The data illustrates that is no different based on the results of other studies, higher Education does result in better health. Those with a than a high school diploma or less report an average health score of (2.80). Meanwhile, those with a graduate or professional degree report an average health score of (3.49). The overall average is (3.16), meaning individuals with lower education levels fall below the average, while those with higher degrees surpass it. Surprisingly, those with high school diploma or less (2.80) to some college with no

Figure 9.13: Average Overall Health by Educational Attainment



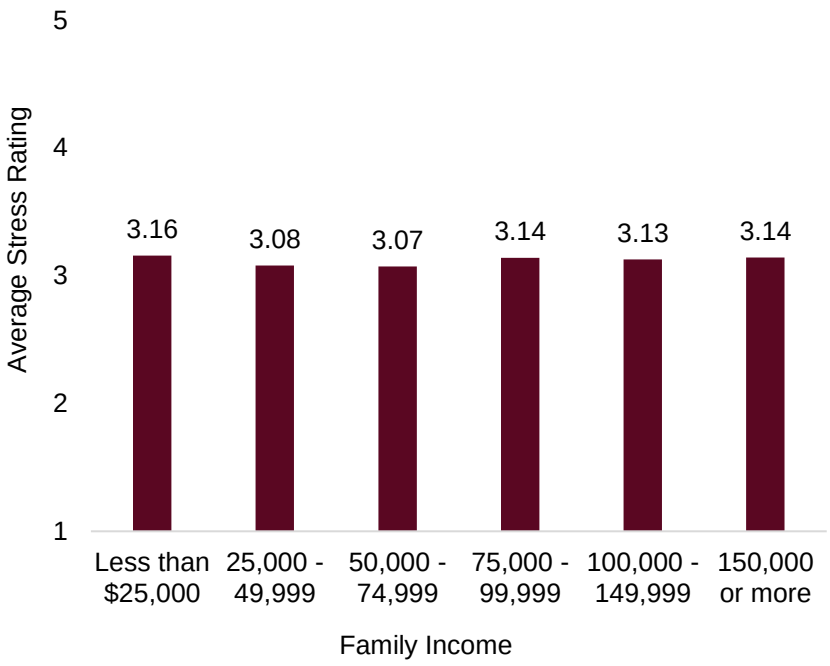
degree (3.01), this indicates that even partial college education can have noticeable differences in one's perceive health.

These findings emphasize that even if participants don't graduate with a degree, they are still more likely to have better health than those who do not. Specifically, individuals with some college but no degree reported a mean health score of (3.01), higher than those with a high school diploma or less, who reported a mean of (2.80). This could lead one to believe that the difference could stem from the various types of jobs that people with some college education can secure, which often offer better working conditions and more stability compared to the limited opportunities available to those without a degree. Once again, by referring to the Salveo study, there could be a possible connection to our findings. As individuals with less education are more likely to be employed in physically demanding jobs, which may have long-term negative effects on their health. While physical activity is generally considered beneficial, jobs that require excessive physical labor—especially without proper workplace accommodations—can lead to chronic fatigue and hypertension over time (Cunningham, Thomas R et al. 2). This aligns with previous studies that highlight the impact of job conditions on health, suggesting that not only do lower-wage jobs come with stress, but they may also contribute to physical health deterioration. Ultimately, reflecting a possible indirect impact of the types of jobs available to individuals with less education.

Income

Surprisingly, there does not seem to be a significant association between mean PSS-4 (stress) score and family income. Respondents earning less than $25,000 a year did have the highest mean PSS-4 score, but respondents with the highest income did not have the lowest mean PSS-4 score. The respondents with the lowest mean PSS-4 score (3.07) were those earning $50,000-74,999 a year. The second highest mean PSS-4 score was reported by respondents that earned either between $75,000-99,999 a year or those that earned $150,000 or more.

Figure 9.14: Average Stress by Family Income



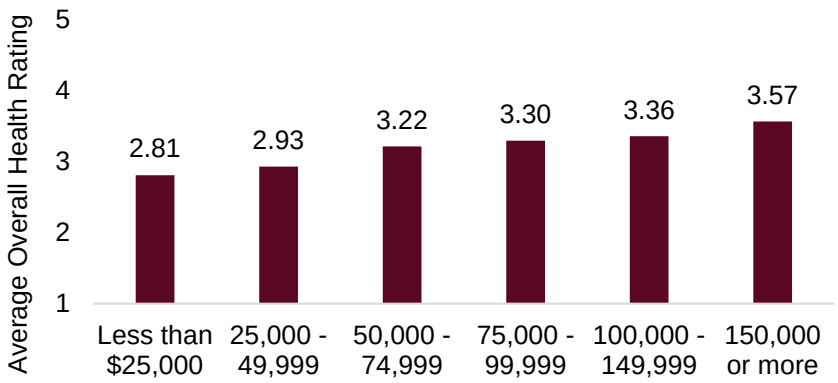
Respondents in the lowest income category having the highest PSS-4 score makes sense, as individuals with lower incomes tend to have greater financial insecurity and less access to resources than those with higher incomes, which can be a strong source of stress. However, it is interesting that respondents with the highest incomes would have a similar mean PSS-4 score. This could be because many high-paying jobs can also be very demanding ones, with significant responsibilities and pressures that could increase an individual's stress levels. It may also be because individuals earning higher incomes may feel pressure to maintain a certain lifestyle and appearance.

Income may also be related to overall health because it can affect many determinants of health, such as access to healthcare and health literacy. The lower a respondent's family income, the lower their mean overall health rating tends to be, and the higher their income the higher their mean overall health rating tends to be. Respondents earning $25,000 a year or less had a mean overall health rating of 2.8, and respondents earning $150,000 a year or more had a mean overall health rating of 3.6.

A higher income being associated with a higher rating of one's overall health makes sense for several reasons. One is that having a higher income means someone generally has better

access to healthcare. They probably have health insurance through their job and can see high quality providers. A higher income can also mean access to healthier and higher quality foods as well as better living conditions.

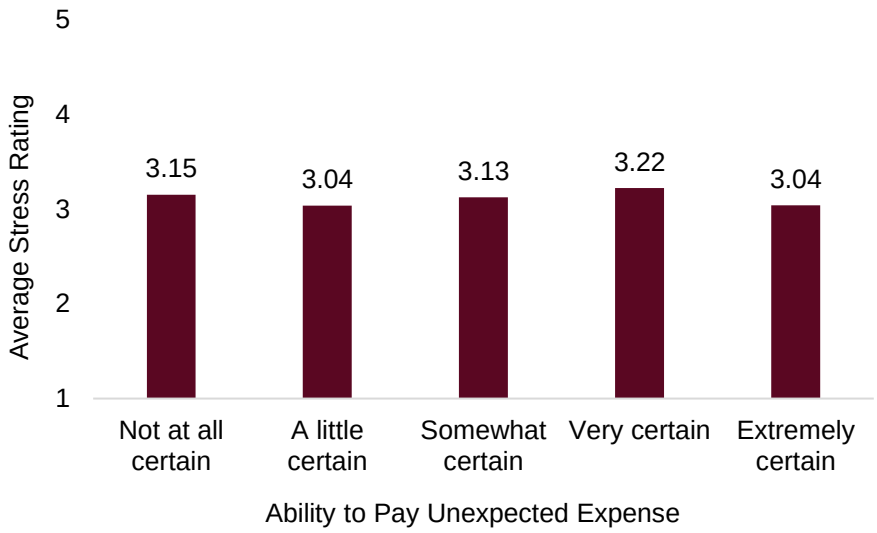
Figure 9.15: Average Overall Health Rating by Family Income



Respondents who were “extremely certain” they would be able to pay an unexpected expense of $400 had a mean PSS-4 (stress) score of 3.04, the same mean score as respondents who were only “a little certain” they would be able to pay the same expense. Respondents who were “not at all certain” they would be able to pay had the second highest mean PSS-4 score (3.15), but did not have the highest score. The highest mean PSS-4 score (3.22) was that of respondents that were “very certain” they would be able to pay an unexpected expense.

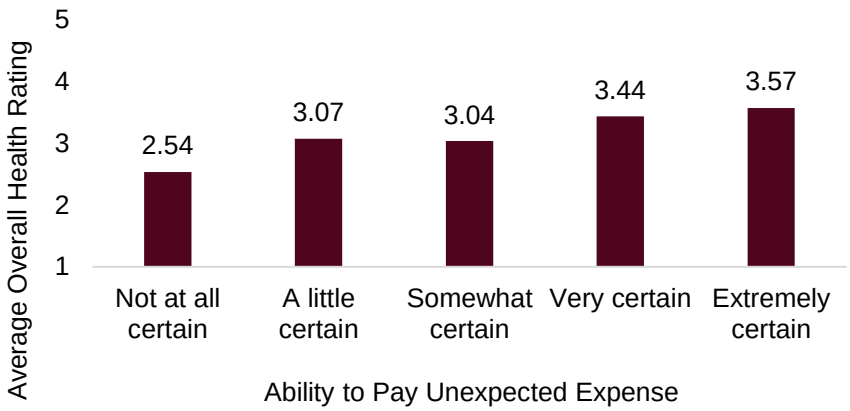
There is an association between self-rated overall health and certainty about the ability to pay an unexpected expense. The higher a respondent rates their overall health, the more likely they are to feel certain they can pay an unexpected expense. Respondents that were “not at all certain” they could pay an unexpected expense had the lowest mean overall health rating (2.5), while respondents with the highest overall health rating were “extremely certain” they could pay an unexpected expense.

Figure 9.16: Average Stress by Ability to Pay Unexpected Expense



Financial security can be a predictor of overall health rating. Individuals with greater financial security often have greater access to resources such as healthier food, stable housing, and access to healthcare providers.

Figure 9.17: Average Overall Health Rating by Ability to Pay Unexpected Expense



Age

If a respondent did signify they encountered more stress, they were more likely to be from a younger age group than an older one. There was strong correlation with younger age groups and higher average perceived stress and older age groups with lower average perceived stress. On one particular question on the battery that asked about frequency of feeling difficulties piled up higher than one could handle, there was a steady increase in the percent of respondents who said they felt this way frequently as the age of the respondents decreased and the percentage of respondents who very infrequently felt this way steadily decreased as their age increased. This shows how age is a strong identifier of whether a respondent will say they felt stress, as the eldest felt little to none while the youngest very commonly were stressed. Similarly, younger age groups rated their health moderately worse than older age groups, but there was much more fluctuation as the respondents aged and no steady decrease. This shows people's feelings about their health changes both positively and negatively as they age.

DISCUSSION

The analyses show associations between health and stress and several variables, including race, age, education, income, and the ability to pay unexpected expenses. There are particularly strong associations between race and stress, age and stress, education and health, family income and stress, family income and health, ability to pay unexpected expenses and stress, and ability to pay unexpected expenses and health.

The variables examined in this analysis may be considered strong predictors of outcomes for overall health and self-perceived stress. A higher socioeconomic status, which involves income

and educational attainment, is associated with better outcomes of stress and health, likely due to increased access to resources and a higher ability to meet needs, such as housing and food. Access to healthcare is affected by aspects such as race and income as well. Though income is a strong predictor of stress and health, we also examined the ability to pay an unexpected expense because we wanted to see if there was a difference between the two, and if there was an association between income and the ability to pay an unexpected expense. There is an association between the two, with a lower income meaning a respondent is less likely to be certain they can pay an unexpected expense of $400, but there were respondents who reported earning $150,000 or more that were not at all certain they would be able to pay that unexpected expense (1.85 percent), and respondents who reported earning less than $25,000 that were extremely certain they would be able to (3.93 percent) (Figure 9.16).

Overall, stress and health outcomes can be predicted using variables such as race, age, education, income, and the ability to pay an unexpected expense of $400. These factors all interact to shape an individual's access to resources that can affect their stress and health.

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