COOK COUNTY COMMUNITY SURVEY ANNUAL REPORT *2026*

COOK COUNTY COMMUNITY SURVEY

Overview

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 2026 survey, as well as previous years, here: https://cccs.sites.luc.edu/dashboard.html

The 2025 survey was fielded online from January 8 – February 2, 2026 (N=1,182). 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 (N=1,182) 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	48.51%	46.01%	71.43%	47.29%	41.76%	40.52%	67.79%	41.28%
Hispanic	18.84%	22.69%	28.57%	20.98%	27.29%	24.61%	32.21%	25.94%
Black	26.12%	23.63%	0.00%	24.62%	20.28%	24.28%	0.00%	22.21%
Asian	4.10%	6.10%	0.00%	5.16%	7.50%	7.74%	0.00%	7.58%
All Other	2.43%	1.56%	0.00%	1.95%	3.17%	2.86%	0.00%	2.99%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Age

	Unweighted	Weighted
18-24	9.24%	11.29%
25-34	21.36%	20.27%
35-44	21.27%	17.59%
45-54	14.24%	15.80%
55-64	13.64%	15.72%
65-74	13.05%	11.31%
75+	7.20%	8.02%

Education

	Unweighted	Weighted
25+, No College Degree	45.69%	42.10%
25+, College Degree	45.09%	46.61%
18-24 years-old	9.22%	11.29%

Chicago vs. Suburbs

	Unweighted	Weighted
Chicago	61.59%	52.10%
Suburbs	38.41%	47.90%

[1] More than 90 percent of our respondents are assigned weights between 0.6 and 1.7.

Ratings of Neighborhood Amenities

Matthew Slattery, Katie-Rose Bolda, Sammy Parr

Introduction

Social services and resource distribution can greatly affect how people perceive their neighborhood, since this directly affects residents' quality of life. Poor quality of essential resources like water, air, and grocery stores can lead to long-term health issues or public health crises, while poor quality of non-essential amenities like access to green spaces can greatly impact the perception of an area, by both its residents and the greater public.

This report will explore data regarding overall neighborhood satisfaction, as well as respondents' satisfaction with their neighborhood amenities pertaining to the environment, public infrastructure, and day-to-day services. This data allows us to get a clearer picture of if resources are insufficient in Cook County, and if certain social groups may be disproportionately affected by how local governments are choosing to allocate resources. Our analysis of this data can be helpful for policy makers and urban planners in terms of setting annual financial budgets, deciding what services need to be improved and where, as well as providing a general temperature check on how satisfied residents are with Cook County as a place to live. We will also be examining how these ratings vary based on respondents' ethno-racial identity, how long they have lived in their neighborhood, and whether they live in Chicago or the suburbs.

This report will be analyzing responses from two questions from the survey. The first question asked was "Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your neighborhood as a place to live?". Participants also responded to a battery of questions that asked, "How would you rate the quality of each of the following in your neighborhood?" Respondents rated 8 features of their neighborhood, including: air quality, parks and open spaces, garbage/recycling services, drinking water from the tap, grocery stores, street/sidewalk maintenance, access to public transportation, and systems to reduce flooding. For both questions, respondents were asked to rate on a five-point scale; (1) poor, (2) fair, (3) good, (4) very good, and (5) excellent.

Overall Response Distributions

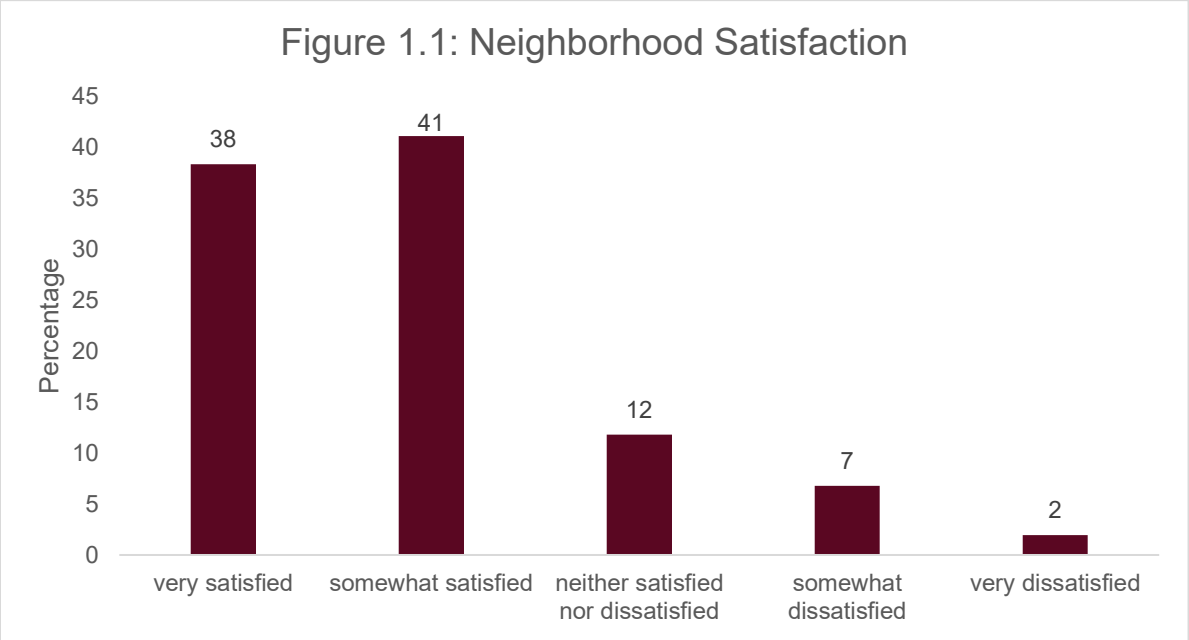


Figure 1.1 describes how satisfied people in Cook County are with their neighborhoods. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction levels on a five-point scale ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. Most respondents, around 79 percent, are either very (38%) or somewhat (41%) satisfied with the neighborhoods they live in. On the opposite end, a much smaller percentage, around 9 percent, were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with their neighborhoods. Thus, leaving just 12 percent of respondents who stated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their neighborhoods.

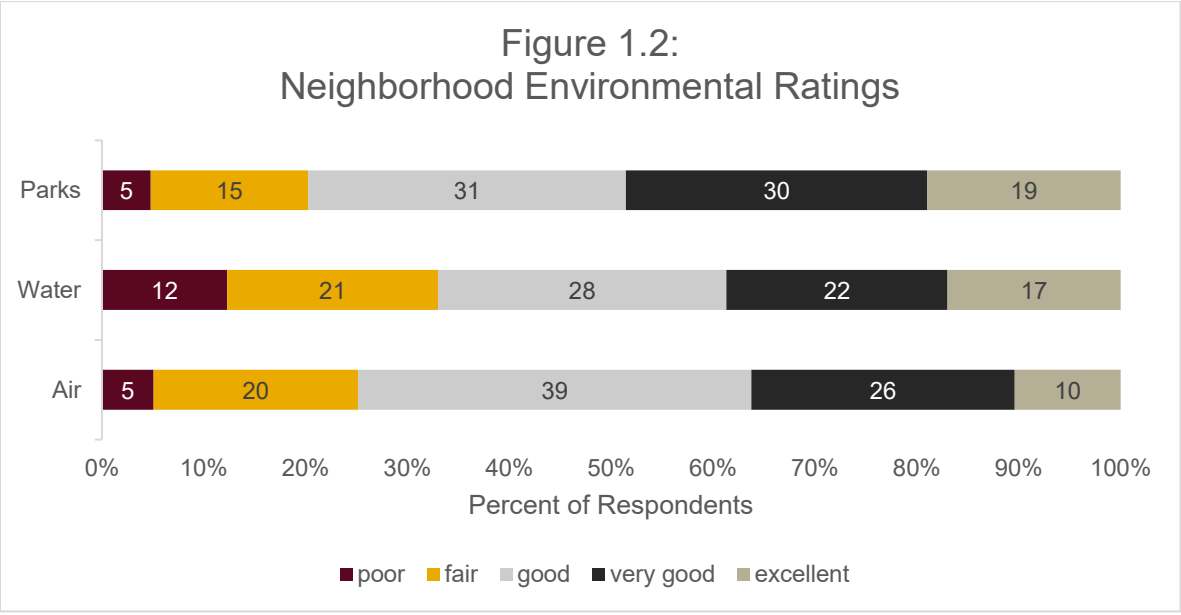


Figure 1.2 describes how people in Cook County rate the quality of water, air, and parks (Environmental Conditions) in their neighborhoods. Respondents were asked to rate eight different aspects of their neighborhood on a five-point scale ranging from poor to excellent. Overall, a high percentage of people perceived the environmental conditions positively. Out of the three Environmental Ratings, parks highest percentage of very good/excellent from the respondents, at 49 percent. This number is high when compared to the 39 and 36 percent of respondents who had the same ratings for water and air. While water had a slightly higher percentage of respondents who rated the condition as very good or excellent as air, it also had 8 percent more respondents rate the condition as poor or fair than air (33% versus 25%). This might suggest that water quality in Cook County is more varied than the other two conditions.

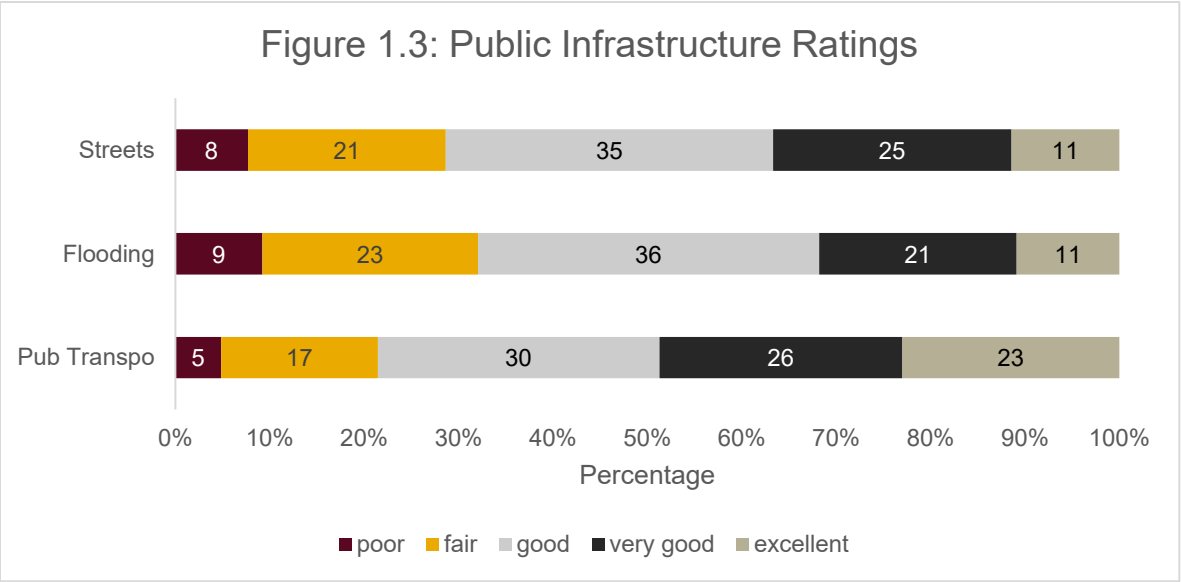


Figure 1.3 describes how people in Cook County rate the quality of the streets and sidewalks, flooding infrastructure, and access to public transportation (Public Infrastructure) in their neighborhoods. Public transportation sticks out as highly rated with around 49 percent of respondents rating this aspect of their neighborhood as very good or excellent. Only 32 and 36 percent of respondents said the same about flooding infrastructure and streets. Conversely, 32 and 29 percent of respondents had negative ratings (poor or fair) of their neighborhoods flooding infrastructure and streets. Public transportation had a comparatively lower number of negative ratings with 22 percent of respondents describing the condition as poor or fair.

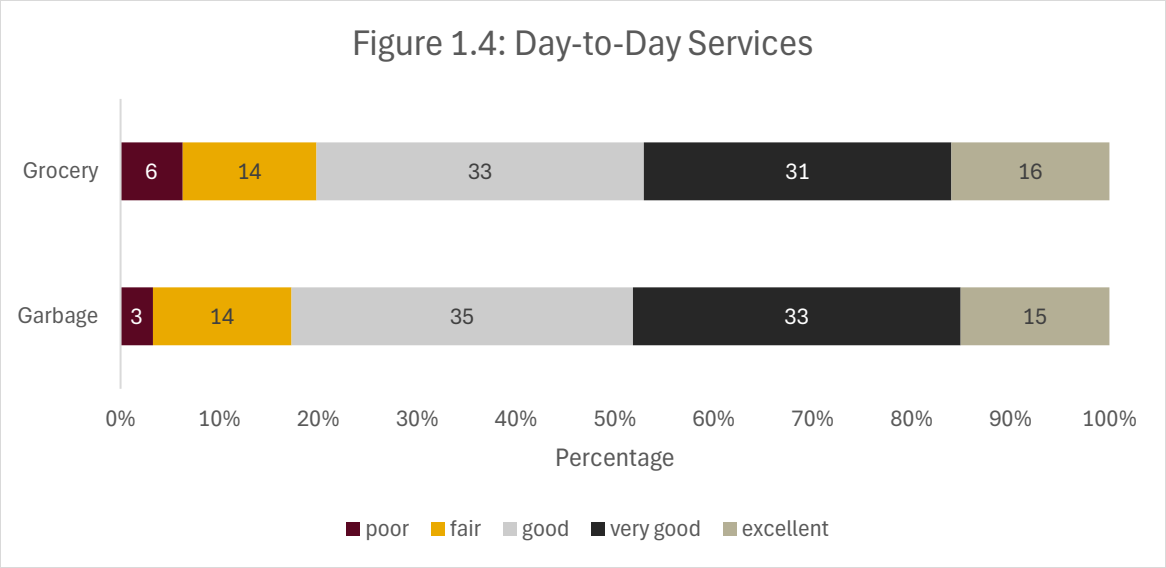


Figure 1.4 describes how people in Cook County rate the quality of the grocery and public garbage services (Day-to-Day Services) in their neighborhoods. Overall, respondents rated both services very highly and very similarly with 47 and 48 percent of residents rating their grocery and garbage as either very good or excellent. About one-fifth of residents rated their day-to-day services negatively, (poor/fair). In comparison with our other six aspects of neighborhoods, garbage and grocery are rated highly, as the two services had a relatively small percentage of residents rate them negatively, and a large percentage of residents rate them highly. Only parks and public transportation were rated as highly as garbage and grocery.

Demographic Breakdowns

We created summary measures of items included in the battery that address similar issues. The summary measure titled “Environmental Issues” includes ratings of air quality, drinking water, and parks/open spaces. The summary measure titled “Public Infrastructure” includes ratings of access to public transportation, street and sidewalk maintenance, and flood reduction systems. Finally, the summary measure titled “Day-to-Day Services” includes ratings of grocery stores and garbage/recycling services. The average ratings of these summary measures, as well as general neighborhood satisfaction, will be presented in sections based on the three predictor variables: Chicago vs. suburbs, how long a respondent has lived in their neighborhood, and ethno-racial identity.

Chicago vs. Suburbs

The first predictor that we will be examining is if living in Chicago or the suburbs affects how respondents rate their environmental services, public infrastructure, and day-to-day services. We anticipate that suburban residents will rate their services more favorably than residents who

live in Chicago. The Cook County suburbs have significantly smaller populations in each municipality than the city of Chicago. Because of these smaller populations, the density of buildings including homes and businesses is more spread out, since there is a smaller population to service, and spatial efficiency is less of a factor in terms of urban planning. We think that lower populations and lower infrastructural density in the suburbs allow for more space for better amenities like parks and large grocery stores, which are key for positive opinions among residents about where they live.

Suburban respondents rated their neighborhood more favorably than their Chicagoan counterparts, with suburban neighborhoods receiving an average of 4.2 out of 5, and the Chicago neighborhoods receiving an average of 3.96 out of 5. Some factors, outside of the services we are analyzing, that may explain these results could be that respondents living in the suburbs may perceive their town as being very safe, or they may feel more connected with their neighbors or their community, which are social factors that can sometimes get lost in an urban setting. Additionally, the suburbs may have better public facilities, infrastructure, community events, or other resources that are less available in the city that contribute to the positive feelings of suburban respondents that can be observed above.

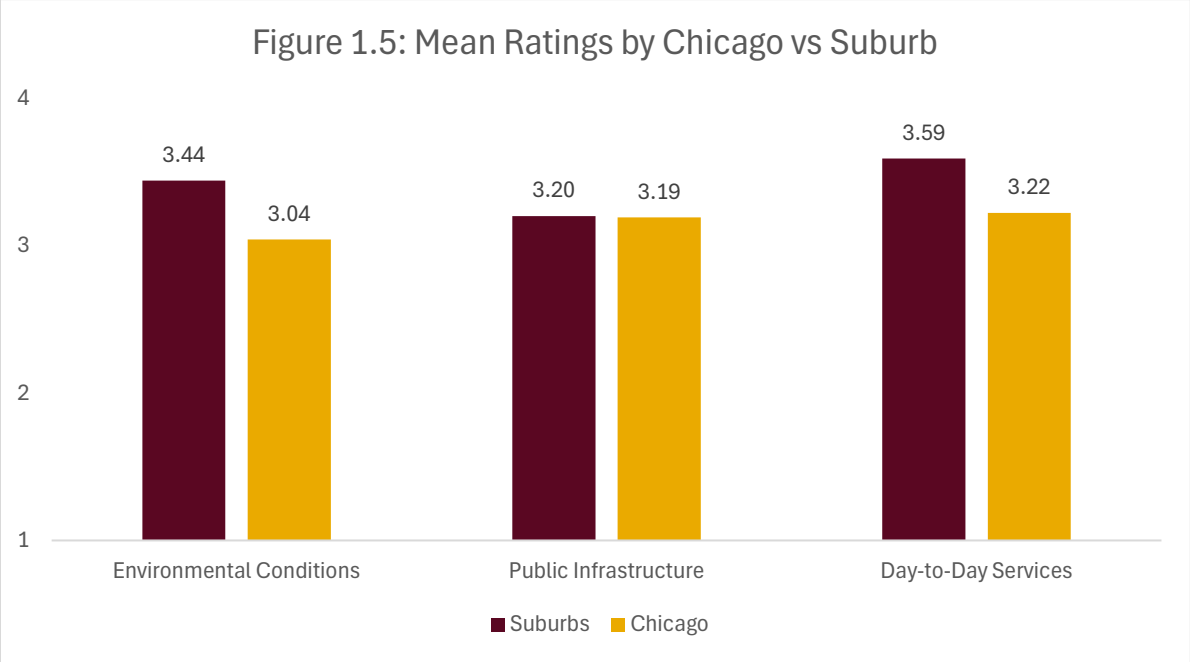


Figure 1.5 shows that suburban respondents, at a mean rating of 3.44, felt a bit more favorable about their neighborhood's environment than the urban mean of 3.04. Higher suburban ratings than city ratings are consistent with the general trend we have seen across similar Chicago

vs. suburb analysis. Notably, the difference in means of 0.4 is the largest gap of any rating by Chicago vs. suburb which suggests that Environmental factors represent the biggest disparity between the two regions.

This supports our hypothesis that suburban residents will have more positive ratings of the environmental factors than Chicago respondents. This could be particularly due to the less dense layout of suburbs meaning better access to open spaces and parks. The suburbs could also be distanced from heavy industrial sectors or heavy traffic areas that could contribute to a more positive perception of air quality than the city. This might also indicate evidence for our theory that the lower socio-economic status of certain urban areas contributes to worse resource and amenity distribution.

Our analyses found that there is little to no difference in mean ratings of public infrastructure between suburbs and the city. This is notably different from our other dependent variables where with suburbs had consistently higher ratings than the city. Those from the city gave their public infrastructure a mean score of 3.19 while those from the suburbs gave a score of 3.20. A mean rating that is higher by a score of 0.01 is not enough to extrapolate a conclusion on public infrastructure standards from suburbs to city. However, it might suggest that differences in one of the aspects of our public infrastructure summary variable might offset other aspects and is a topic further analysis. For instance, public transportation might be rated with a mean score of equal greatness in cities as streets are in suburbs.

Suburban Cook County residents rated their day-to-day services much higher than Chicago residents, with the ratings among suburban respondents being 3.59 out of 5, and the ratings of Chicagoan respondents being 3.22 out of 5.

One factor that could explain these results is spatial differences between the suburbs and Chicago. One of the variables examined in this section is the quality of grocery stores. The city is far denser in terms of infrastructure and population, and there is not enough room for big box grocery stores. Instead, the city is reliant on small-scale versions of big box stores like Jewel Osco and Trader Joes, or local grocers like Devon Market in Rogers Park. These stores can be a good place to purchase basics; however, shoppers may not be able to purchase everything they need in one place, which is a luxury that can be afforded in the suburbs, where the grocery stores are much larger and offer more products.

Spatial differences may also be affecting ratings in garbage and recycling services between the suburbs and the city. As mentioned before, Chicago has a higher population and population density than the suburbs, which means that garbage removal companies must work harder to properly service city residents. Since they must service areas

with higher populations, there could be efficiency issues that city residents experience that suburban residents do not, which could be contributing to lower ratings among respondents who live in the city. Additionally, garbage services in Chicago are run by both the Department of Streets and Sanitation, as well as private companies. Since there are multiple bodies governing this process, efficiency and quality could be impacted, leading to lower ratings from respondents in Chicago. Additionally, it is possible that not every household in Cook County has access to recycling, which could negatively impact these ratings, because you cannot rate what you do not have.

Time Lived in Neighborhood

We expect that the time spent living in neighborhood will have a generally positive effect on perceived neighborhood conditions as residents may be more appreciative of a neighborhood's positive aspects over time. As people continue to live in their neighborhood for extended periods of time, they may feel very connected to, or proud of their community, which could prevent people from speaking negatively about it. Simultaneously, residents may begin to grow complacent and overlook negative issues as they have had to adjust to living with them. We also have reason to expect the opposite; residents may become more cognizant of issues the longer they live somewhere and may become more critical as the new neighborhood shine wears off.

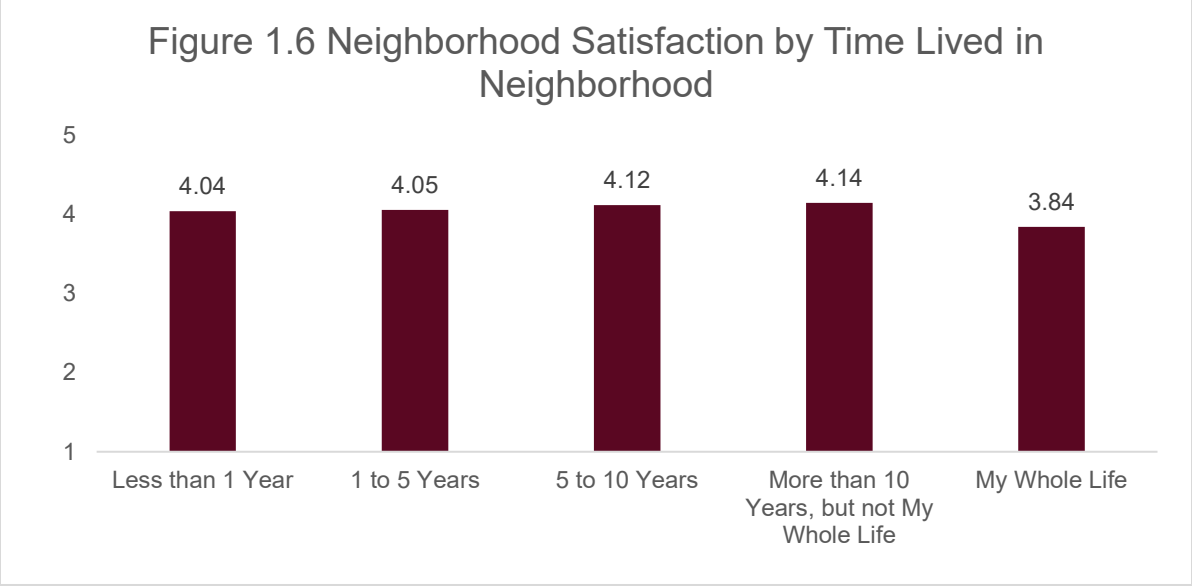


Figure 1.6 shows the distribution of the average neighborhood satisfaction of the respondents based on how long they have lived in their neighborhood. Respondents who have lived in their neighborhood for more than 10 years, but not their whole life rated their neighborhood the most favorably of the groups observed, with an average rating of 4.14 out

of 5. Respondents who have lived in their neighborhood for their entire life rated their neighborhood the least favorably, with an average of 3.84 out of 5.

The initial minor upward trend supports our first hypothesis that people who have lived in their neighborhood their entire life may feel proud of their community, or their neighborhood may be such a good place to live, that they chose to continue living there into adulthood. However, the more substantial drop from more than 10 years to whole life supports the second hypothesis that residents will become more aware and critical of issues the longer they live there. One thing that could explain these results is that people who have lived in their neighborhood for their entire lives may not be living there by choice, but rather they might not have the financial means to move. If this is the case, it would make sense that they would feel dissatisfied with their area, since low-income neighborhoods tend to have fewer social services, poorer infrastructure, and higher crime rates. One limitation is we expect some reverse causality. Those who feel positively about their neighborhood are less likely to move. So, the respondents who have lived in their neighborhood for long periods of time may be self-selecting.

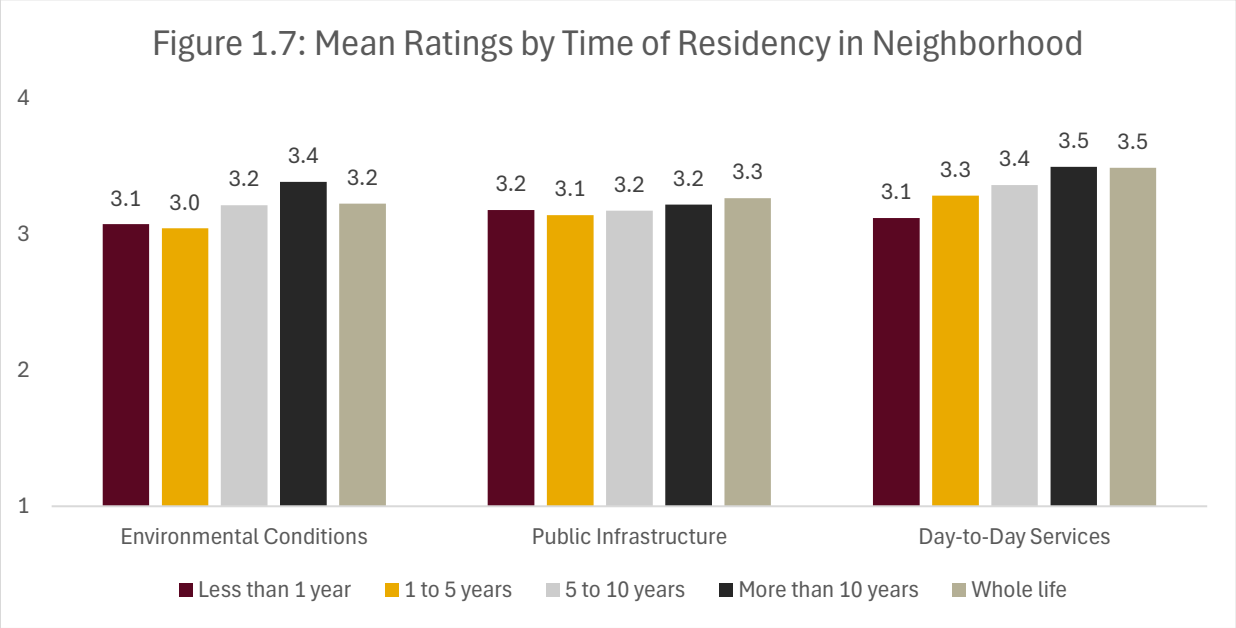


Figure 1.7 shows that there is a general upward trend in Environmental Ratings by time lived in neighborhood; generally, the longer a respondent has lived in their current neighborhood the more positive they feel about the environment of their neighborhood. Ratings start at 3.07 for those who have lived in their neighborhood for “less than 1 year” and rises to 3.38 by the time respondents have lived in their neighborhood for “more than 10 years.” However, residents who have lived in their neighborhood for their “whole life” feel slightly less positive about their neighborhood’s environment and their mean decreases to 3.22.

This generally fits with our original hypothesis that those who live in their neighborhood develop more positive feelings. The trend of “whole life” residents having a relatively less positive opinion continues here and could be attributed to lower socio-economic status and inability to move as previously discussed.

In general, all people of varying duration of neighborhood residency rated their public infrastructure similarly with means ranging from 3.14 (1-5 years) to 3.27 (whole life). However, we do see a gradual increase in the rating of public infrastructure as we move chronologically from respondents with a neighborhood residency of 1-5 years to respondents who have lived in their neighborhoods their whole life. The only exception being that respondents who have lived in their neighborhoods for less than 1 year had relatively high ratings of their public infrastructure, with a mean score of 3.18. These results might suggest a honeymoon phase, where people who have just recently moved into their neighborhoods have good things to say. Regardless, these results buck the trend we have seen where the gradual increase of mean scores with time does not continue with the “whole life” group and instead drops. This could suggest that public infrastructure has generally more consistent quality, even in low socio-economic neighborhoods where people are unable to move away from.

The longer someone has resided in their neighborhood, the more positively they rate day-to-day services. There is about a 0.37 unit increase between the group who rated their services the least favorably (those who have only lived in their neighborhood for less than one year), and those who rated their services the most favorably (those who have lived in their neighborhood for over 10 years and those who have lived in their neighborhoods their whole lives rated their services the same).

The services being examined in this section could be contributing to the “pull factors” that may encourage a resident to stay in their neighborhood. Access to grocery stores and garbage and recycling services are essential in everybody’s daily life. If someone has easy access to quality groceries and they have efficient garbage services that also provide recycling, it could encourage people to stay in their neighborhoods long term.

Ethnoracial Identity

Our knowledge of the disparities in material neighborhood quality between ethnic groups prompts us to anticipate that those who identify as Hispanic or Black will rate their neighborhood quality the lowest across general and specific aspects of neighborhood satisfaction compared to the other groups. These expectations are grounded in Chicago’s history of redlining, which is a form of housing discrimination that is typically based on race or socioeconomic standing. The legacy of redlining in Chicago has institutionalized racial segregation throughout the city, and its

effects are largely felt today. Neighborhoods, typically on the south and west sides of the city, that have poorer infrastructure, social services, and higher crime rates, often have large Black and Hispanic communities and small White and Asian communities.

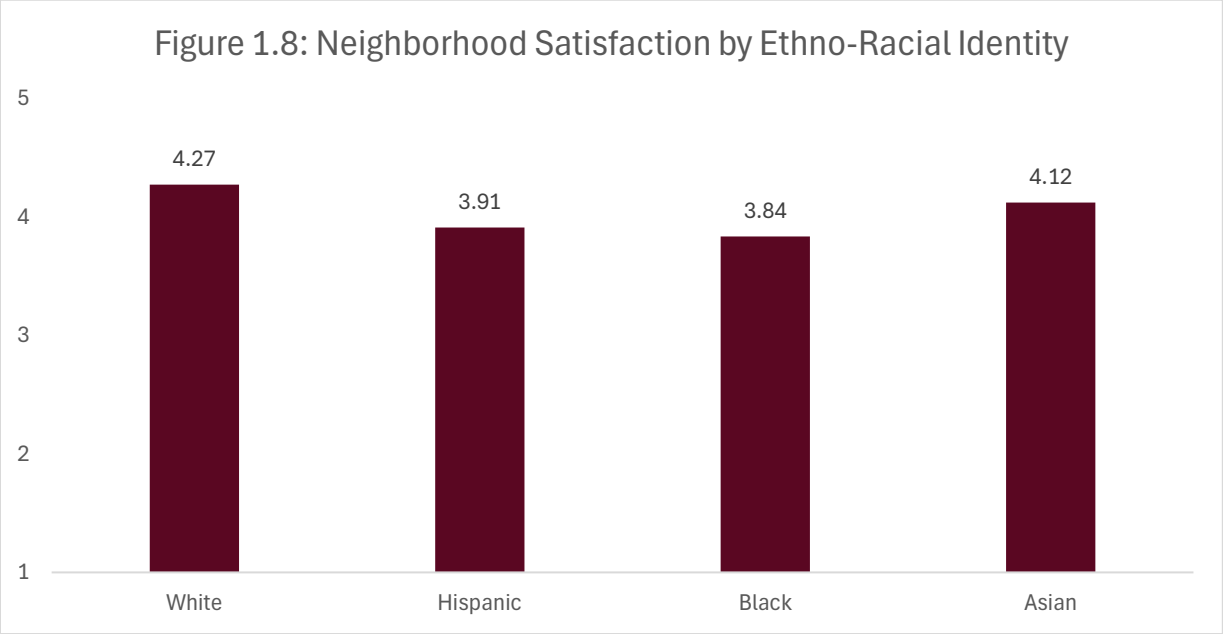


Figure 1.8 shows the distribution of the mean level of general neighborhood satisfaction by the respondents' ethno-racial identity. Of the groups observed, White and Asian respondents rated their neighborhoods the most favorably, with average ratings of 4.27 and 4.12 out of 5, respectively. Hispanic and Black respondents rated their neighborhoods the least favorably, with average ratings of 3.91 and 3.84 out of 5, making them the only two groups to rate their neighborhoods under a 4 out of 5. There is a 0.43-unit difference in ratings between the groups who rated their neighborhood the most and least favorably, which is notable because these ratings only span a 5-point scale.

This is in line with our hypothesis and could point towards systemic issues with neighborhood segregation. The legacy of institutionalized segregation has likely led to the conditions in neighborhoods largely inhabited by Black and Hispanic people to be poorer than those inhabited primarily by White and Asian people.

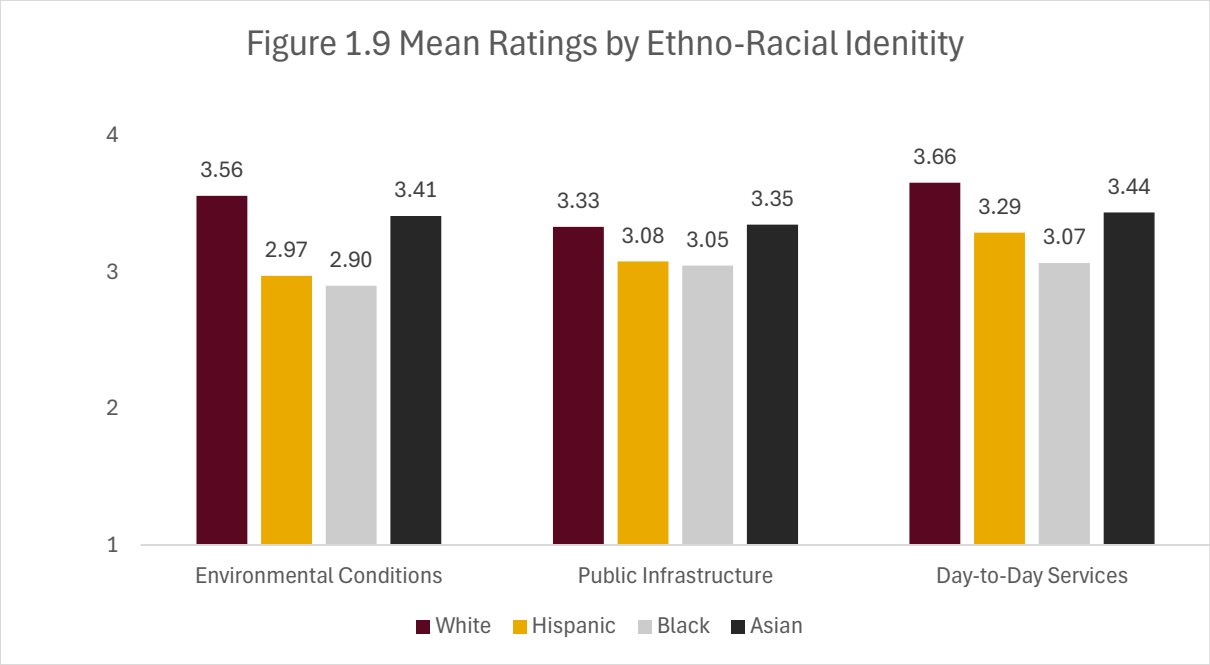


Figure 1.9 shows the mean value of the "Environmental Ratings", "Public Infrastructure", and "Day-to-Day Services" across categories of race. White and Asian respondents generally felt the most positive about their neighborhood's environmental conditions at a mean 3.56 and 3.41 (good to very good range) respectively on a 1-5 scale. Hispanic and Black respondents rated their neighborhood's environmental conditions a bit less favorably than either White or Asian residents, with averages of 2.97 and 2.9 (good), respectively.

This supports our original hypothesis and is similar to the general trends we've seen in other areas of our race-based analysis. Specifically in terms of the environment, predominately Black and Hispanic neighborhoods may be systemically underserved in services related to regulating environmental resources like air and water quality. These two issues are of particular importance as they make up a major portion of residents' base needs and have major effects on long-term health.

White and Asian respondents generally rated their neighborhoods public infrastructure the highest with a mean score of 3.33 and 3.35 (good to very good range). Hispanic and Black respondents rated the public infrastructure conditions slightly lower, with a mean score of 3.08 and 3.05 (good range). Public Infrastructure such as public transportation, street and sidewalk maintenance, and systems to reduce flooding are all funded by government entities. Cook County is comprised of the city of Chicago and surrounding suburbs, both of which contain ethnic enclaves (whether due to redlining or not). The poor funding of public infrastructure by government institutions in the neighborhoods (both city and suburbs) that Hispanic and Black populations

currently occupy might explain the noticeably lower ratings of from respondents who identified with those groups. Regardless, these disparities in public infrastructure ratings further support the trends we have seen across similarly constructed analysis: ethno-racial identity has a significant effect on perceived standard of living in Cook County.

Again, White and Asian respondents rated their day-to-day services the most favorably, rating them a 3.66 and 3.44 out of 5, respectively. Once again, Hispanic and Black respondents rated their services the least favorably, with Hispanic respondents rating their services a 3.29 out of 5, and Black respondents rating their services a 3.07 out of 5. There is a significant gap between the group who gave the highest ratings and the lowest ratings. Black respondents rated their services over half a unit lower than White respondents, which on a five-point scale, is a very notable difference.

These results can also be linked to redlining and the lack of resources provided in neighborhoods that are largely inhabited by Black and Hispanic people. Redlining has historically caused certain neighborhoods to be seen as “undesirable” due to their ethno-racial makeup and income levels, and since grocery services are controlled by the private sector, they have a bit more freedom in where they decide to place storefronts. This could be causing food deserts, grocery stores with low quality products, or an over-reliance on local grocers that are unable to carry a diverse selection of products in areas that are heavily impacted by the legacy of redlining.

One notable difference is that Hispanic respondents rated notably higher in comparison to Black respondents considering day to day services than we saw in the analyses rating environment and infrastructure, where they rated relatively similarly. This might suggest that Black respondents are particularly underserved in areas such as grocery stores, and predominantly Black neighborhoods may need special attention to ensure they do not fall into food deserts.

Discussion

Based on the data presented in this report, we can draw numerous conclusions. The first being that Cook County residents, in general, are moderately satisfied or satisfied with the conditions of their neighborhoods and suburban towns. An interesting phenomenon that can be observed is that the average neighborhood satisfactions across most predictors are typically above a 4, whereas the ratings of services are usually less than 4. This indicates that there may be factors about neighborhoods that cause respondents to rate them higher when speaking generally, that we did not examine in this report. Some examples could be closeness with neighbors or perceived safety.

Of all the predictors we analyzed, distributions that had ethno-racial identity as the predictor variable showed the most consistent pattern. Black and Hispanic respondents consistently rated their neighborhood and its services noticeably lower than White and Asian respondents, who rated their neighborhoods positively. The averages in ratings between Black and Hispanic respondents and White and Asian respondents, respectively, were often very similar, which indicates that neighborhoods with poorer services are largely inhabited by Black and Hispanic communities, and neighborhoods with higher quality services are largely inhabited by White and Asian communities, which is likely an effect of redlining and Chicago's history of housing discrimination. Policymakers should aim to address disparities of these services along the lines of race which may be caused by historical practices of redlining and current socio-economic boundaries.

When examining our city vs suburb bivariate distributions, our findings indicated that, in comparison to city residents, suburban residents have high neighborhood satisfaction levels and feel very positive about their neighborhood's environmental conditions and day-to-day services. Further distance from air pollution sources, better water systems maintenance (lead pipe replacement), lack of food deserts, smaller scope of garbage collection, and greater area for green space and park systems may explain this. However, this trend of suburban superiority does not continue when examining how respondents rated their public infrastructure. Rather, city and suburb residents rated their public infrastructure nearly identically, with mean scores of 3.19 vs 3.20. The most pertinent explanation is tied to access to public transportation, which had some of the most positive ratings in our univariate distributions (see figure 3). Because of the existence of the CTA, we suspect that access to public transportation is rated with such approval in the city of Chicago as to counteract suburban primacy in how respondents rated street maintenance and systems to reduce flooding. Variables that would most likely be favorable in suburban neighborhoods due to reduced time, cost, and scope needed for maintenance and implementation by their respective government agencies.

How long respondents lived in their neighborhood had varying effects across different categories. Of note was how in some areas those who lived in their neighborhood their "whole life" had lower favorability of neighborhood services. However, this was not fully consistent, and concerns around limitations regarding a strong potential for reverse causality deter us from making any strong conclusions.

Ratings of Neighbors

Charlotte Fithian & Camila Ucros

Introduction

The relationship between a person and their neighbors is indicative of the quality and connectivity of a community. Being able to trust your neighbor is a key element in feeling positive about the neighborhood you live in. It can be tied to feelings of safety, civic participation, and quality of life in one's neighborhood. Examining perceptions of neighbors can aid in learning about the factors that contribute to a thriving, connected, and involved community.

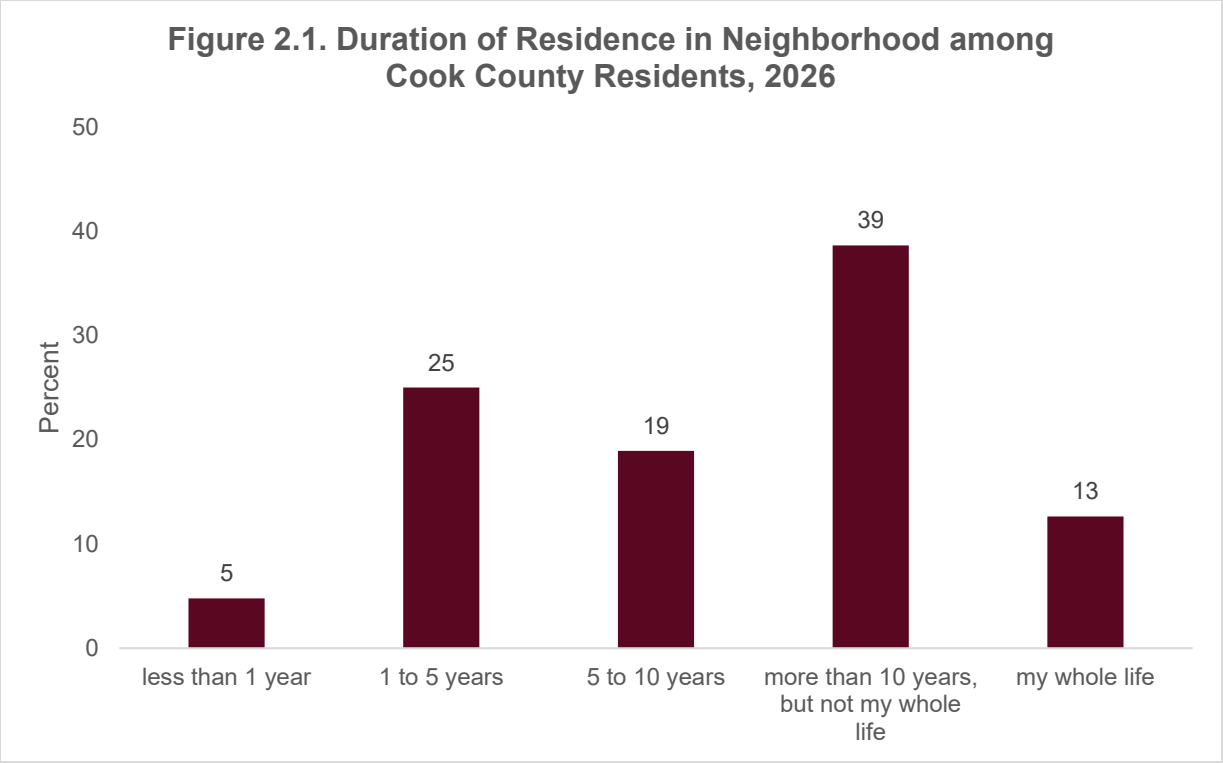
Today, the rise of social media and changing behavioral norms have contributed to a shift towards more individualistic lifestyles, where many people are neglecting their relationships with those who live right next door. This may deteriorate frequency and depth of interaction with neighbors, leading to weakened social bonds. An understanding of resident's attitudes towards their neighbors could prove useful in expanding community outreach and connection, leading to more positive perceptions of one's neighbors and neighborhood overall.

The 2026 Cook County Community Survey addresses this, asking respondents how well they know their neighbors, and whether they would consider them to be trustworthy, helpful, and friendly. Coupled with a question regarding how long someone has resided in their neighborhood, we can consider the connections between length of residence and feelings about neighbors, and broader questions about the relationship between demographic factors such as race or city residence on perceptions of neighbors.

Overall Response Distributions

Duration of Residence

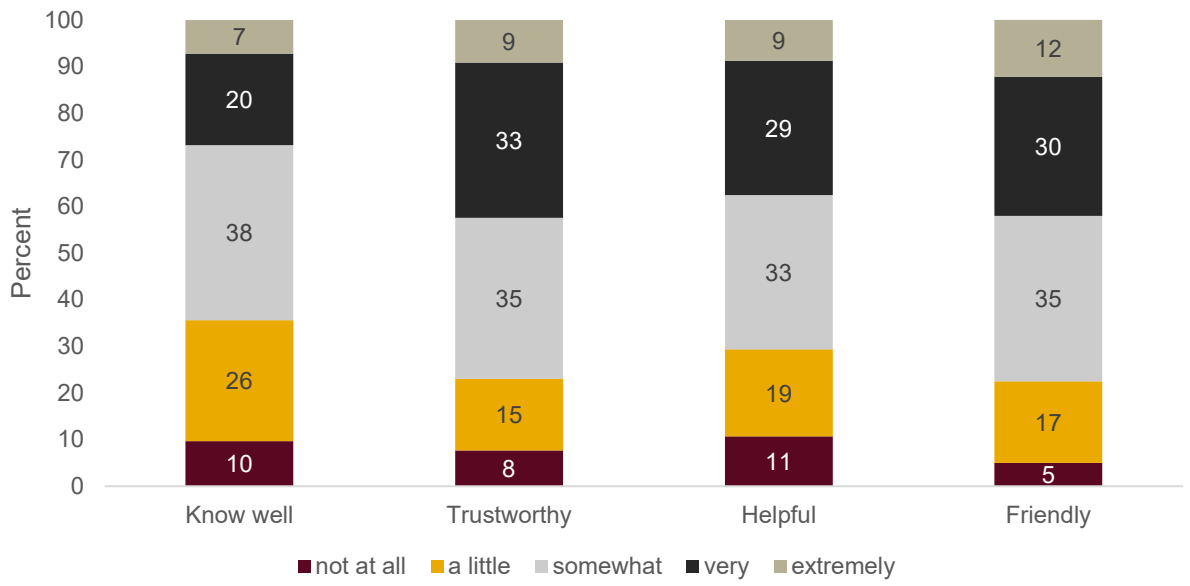
To begin with, respondents were asked how long they had lived in their neighborhood. *Figure* 1 shows that over half (52%) of respondents have resided in their neighborhood for at least ten years. Overall, respondents were most likely to have lived in their neighborhood for more than ten years but less than their entire life (39%) or one to five years (25%).



Neighbor Ratings

Survey respondents were next presented with a matrix of questions that asked about their feelings towards their neighbors, how well they know their neighbors, and how trustworthy, helpful, and friendly they are. We report the distribution of responses to each question in *Figure 2*. For the latter three questions, respondents viewed their neighbors similarly in their levels of trustworthiness, helpfulness, and friendliness. Overall, 38% to 42% of respondents indicated their neighbors were “very” or “extremely” trustworthy, helpful, or friendly, with 29-33% selecting “somewhat.” This shows that around three-quarters of respondents feel that their neighbors are at least “somewhat” trustworthy, helpful, or friendly. In contrast, only 27% of respondents said they knew their neighbors “very” or “extremely” well, along with 38% who selected “somewhat.” Overall, this shows that 65% of respondents felt they knew their neighbors at least “somewhat” well.

Figure 2.2. Distribution of Neighbor Ratings among Cook County Residents, 2026



Given that these variables all measure a similar concept of neighbor trust and familiarity, we combined them into a mean index measuring neighbor ratings by averaging them together. Ranging from 1 to 5, with higher numbers corresponding to more positive ratings, this summary measure has a mean of 3.12.

Demographic Breakdowns

Next, we consider how ratings of neighbors vary with three characteristics: ethnoracial identity, city vs. suburbs, and duration of residence in neighborhood.

Ethnoracial Identity

Given Chicago's diverse neighborhoods, ethnoracial identity is an important predictor to consider. Due to Chicago's history of racial residential segregation, we expect that non-white respondents may be more constrained in respect to neighborhood choice, thus rating their neighbors less positively. We expect residential inequality in Cook County to play a role in shaping less favorable perceptions of neighbors among marginalized groups, who have been disproportionately impacted by redlining.

Figure 2.3. Distribution of Neighbor Ratings Across Ethnoracial Identity Cook County, 2026

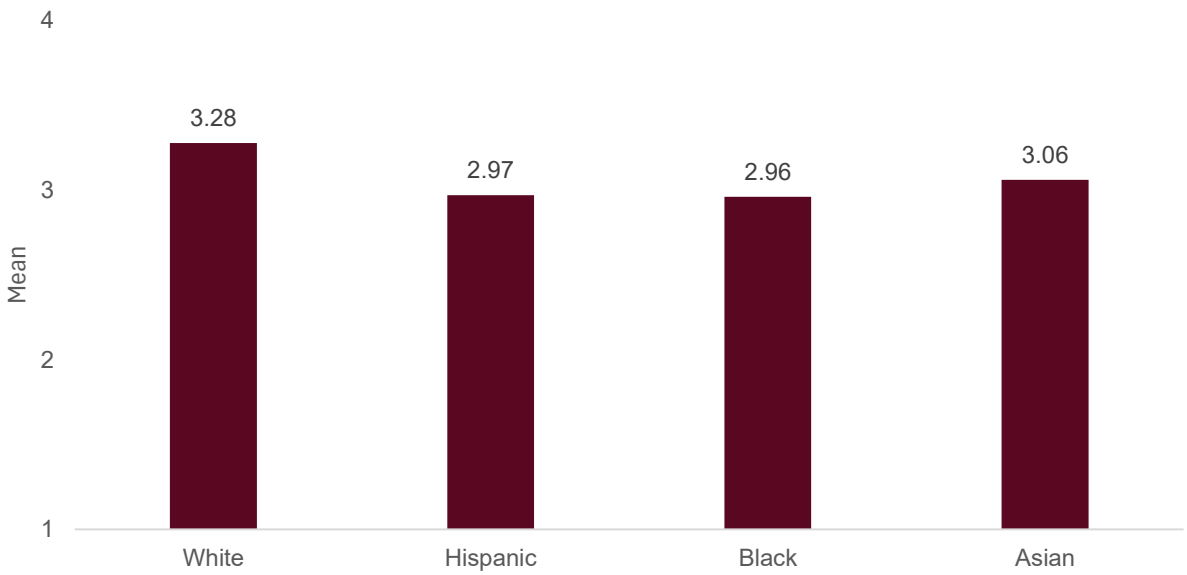
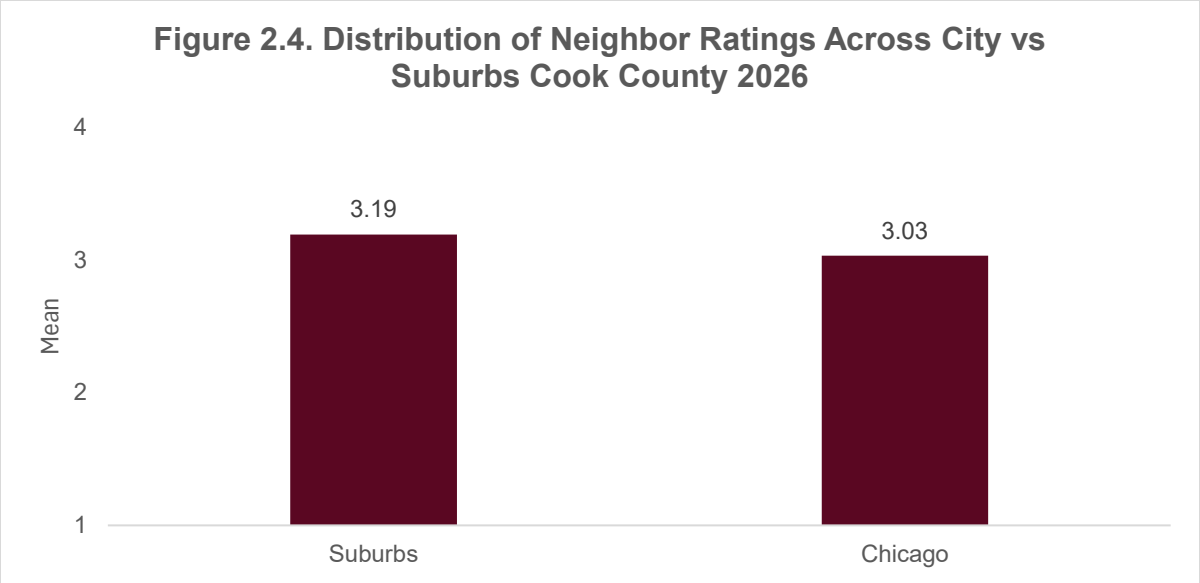


Figure 3 compares neighbor ratings across ethnoracial groups. Consistent with our expectations, White respondents rated their neighbors slightly more favorably than other ethnoracial groups. Hispanic, Black, and Asian respondents all rated their neighbors similarly, with only a 0.1-unit difference across the three groups. The largest gap (0.32 units) was between White and Black respondents, which is a moderate difference on a 1 to 5 scale.

City vs. Suburbs

When comparing those who live in the city of Chicago and those who live in the suburbs, we expect the former group will feel more positively about their neighbors. City dwellers, who live in more densely populated neighborhoods, may interact more frequently with their neighbors due to closer proximity. As a result, this physical proximity could foster more interactions between neighbors, leading to more positive neighbor ratings among city residents. Conversely, suburbs may foster tight-knit communities and opportunities for residents to get to know their neighbors better in contrast to those living in urban areas.

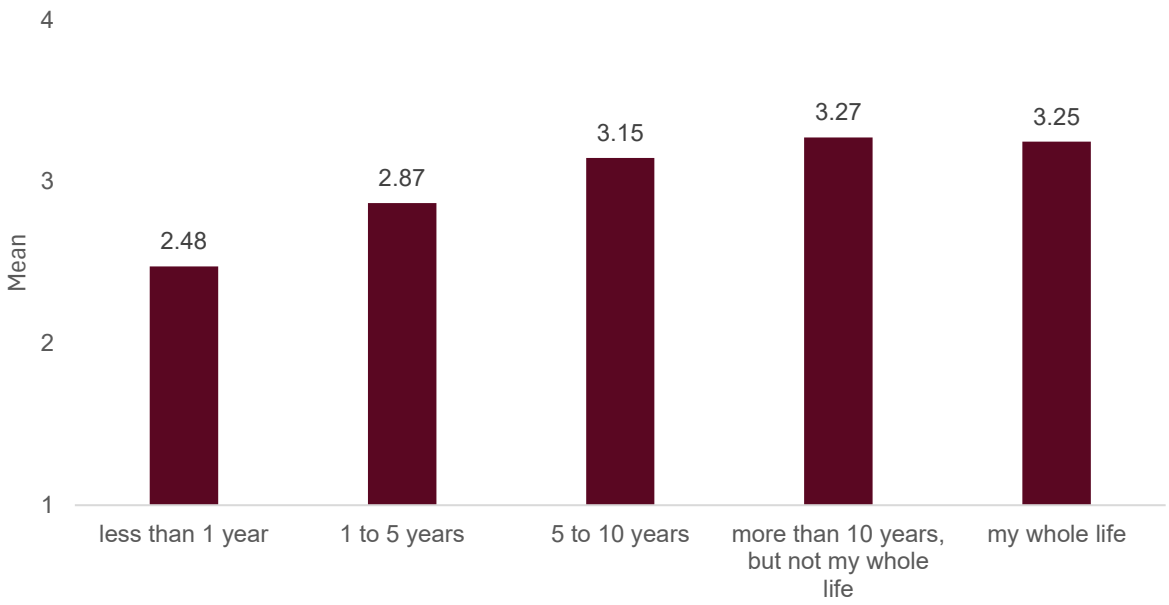


In *Figure* 4, we evaluate neighbor ratings across Chicago and suburban residents. Contrary to our expectations, differences between suburban and city dwellers were minimal. Both groups on average felt "somewhat" positively about their neighbors. Respondents in the suburbs only rated their neighbors 0.16 units more favorably than respondents who reside in the city, which is a minimal difference on a 1 to 5 scale.

Duration of Residence

In examining feelings towards neighbors across duration of residence, we expect those who've lived in their neighborhoods longer to hold more positive perceptions of their neighbors. Longer residence in one's neighborhood comes with increased interactions and relationships with one's neighbors, and thus more positive feelings about their levels of trustworthiness, helpfulness, and friendliness. Further, those who choose to continue residing in their neighborhood may do so because they're satisfied. Conversely, increased exposure to neighbors doesn't necessarily ensure positive feelings, rather it could foster increased distrust. Additionally, longer residence in a neighborhood could be attributed to a resident's inability to relocate rather than their contentment with conditions.

Figure 2.5. Distribution of Neighbor Ratings across Duration of Residence Cook County, 2026



In *Figure* 5, we assess how average ratings of neighbors varies by how long respondents have lived in their neighborhood. Consistent with our expectations, we find that those who have lived in their neighborhood longer tend to report more positive feelings towards their neighbors. Neighbor ratings increased along with duration of residence, with a notable difference between residents of under and year and those who had lived in their neighborhood for over ten years. Overall, respondents who had lived in their neighborhood their whole life rated their neighbors substantially (0.77 units) higher than those who'd resided in their neighborhood for less than a year. As the 'my whole life' category does not conform to the same incremental increase as the other groups, we cannot discern how many years these respondents have actually resided in their neighborhood.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that Cook County residents overall do not have strong negative or positive ratings of their neighbors. Respondents largely felt they knew their neighbors "somewhat" well, and that they were "somewhat" trustworthy, helpful, and friendly. Differences between city and suburban residents were inconsequential, while comparison of ethnoracial groups indicated some difference in neighbor ratings between white and non-white respondents. The largest differences we found across groups were tied to Duration of Residence, with a notable 0.77 unit increase in ratings across length of residence from less than one year to more than 10 years.

It is evident that duration of residence is a strong factor in increased positive perceptions of one's neighbors. One explanation for this pattern may be that as residence in a neighborhood continues, residents become more familiar with their neighbors, thus trusting them more. Housing affordability and gentrification in Cook County pose threats to forming long-term neighborhood ties. The role of duration of residence in building positive feelings about one's neighbors is an important factor for policymakers and city officials to consider when proposing new building upgrades and infrastructure projects. A neighborhood is defined by the people in it, and advocating for affordable housing and legislation that protects residents from gentrification is crucial in continuing to strengthen neighborhood ties.

Quality of Education and Institutional Confidence

Penelope Brazelton, Jon Colson & Michael Dolan

Introduction

Over the past decade citizens have reported being less confident in key governmental institutions such as Congress and the Supreme Court (Gallup, 2025a). According to national data gathered by Gallup, trust in Congress has been on the decline, with only 10% of Americans surveyed reporting high confidence in Congress, down from around 30% in the early 2000s (2025a). Additionally, the same data shows that over half of Americans report having very little confidence in Congress (Gallup, 2025a). In a democratic society like the U.S., governmental institutions at all levels, ranging from local, state, and federal, must work to maintain the confidence of their citizens in order to function properly. By providing services for the public and remaining accountable to promises made, these various levels of government can build trust and confidence among their constituents. In addition to governmental bodies, law enforcement serves as another institution within American life, and the public's confidence is necessary for them to fulfill their role in providing security. In 2023, following a general decline from the early 2000s, a poll published by Gallup showed that roughly 43% of Americans expressed having high amounts of trust in the police (Gallup, 2024). This is especially important as police are a highly public facing institution, and their effectiveness is contingent upon the public's interaction and cooperation.

Similarly, the education system serves as a major institution in the U.S., as most Americans pass through a government managed K-12 curriculum. Like their confidence in institutions, Americans' satisfaction with schooling has fallen in recent years. Based on another dataset gathered by Gallup, only 35% of Americans reported being satisfied with K-12 education in the U.S., which is a sharp decline from the 40-50% of the 2000s and 2010s (Gallup, 2025b). This could be related to shifts in education funding and policy across presidential administrations, or to the general downturn in confidence in governmental institutions that Americans are displaying.

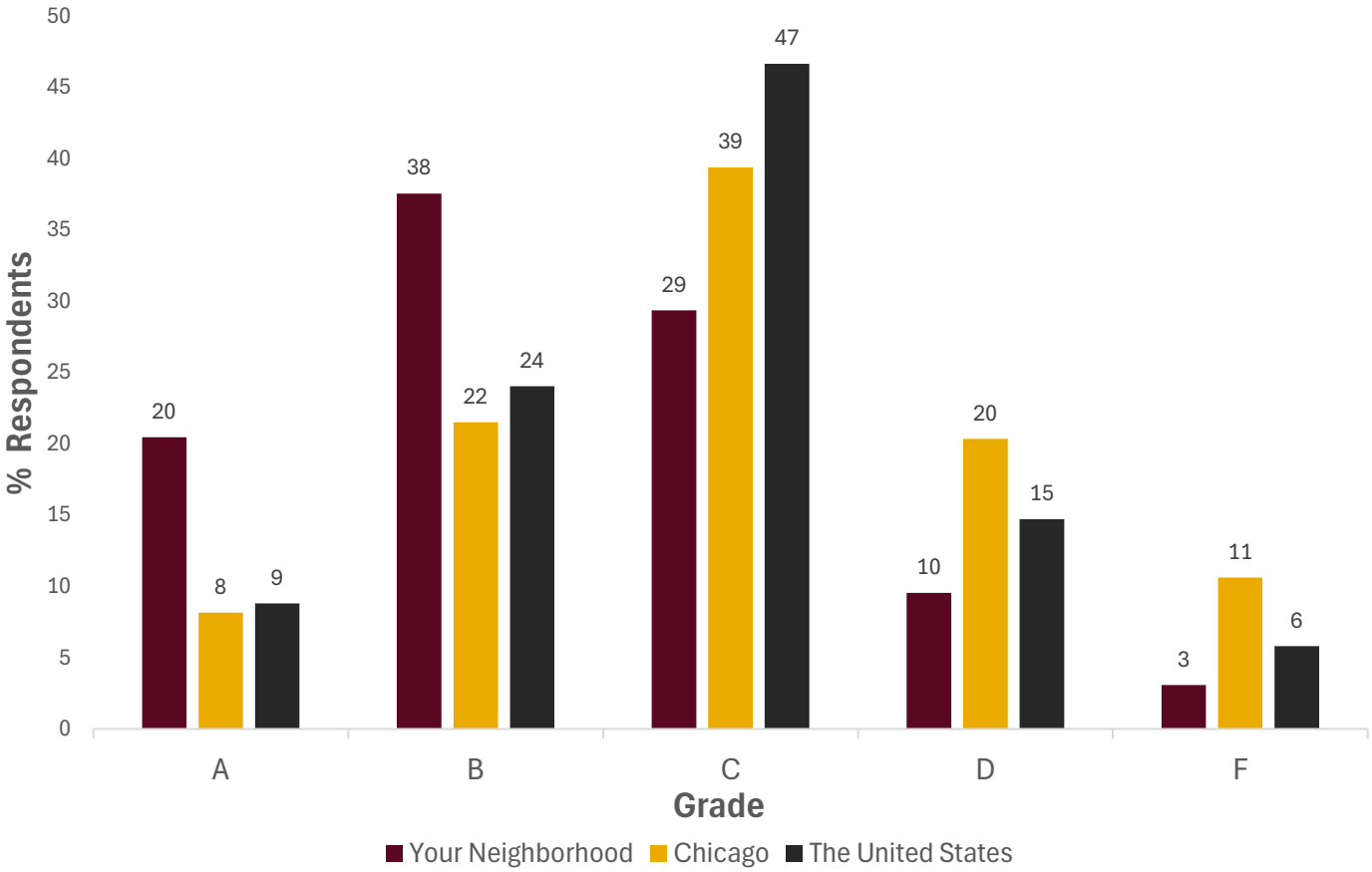
With these matters in mind, this report will use data gathered from the 2026 Cook County Community Survey (CCCS) to explore confidence in institutions, such as government and police. Additionally, we will use data from the same report to assess how county residents rate schools in their neighborhood, in Chicago, and across the United States. Then we explore how citizens' confidence in institutions and views on education differ based on race, educational attainment, and residency in Chicago versus its adjacent suburbs.

Overall Response Distributions

Education in Cook County

Respondents were asked to rate schools in their neighborhood, public schools in Chicago, and public schools nationwide by assigning each system a grade from A through F. In Figure 3.1,

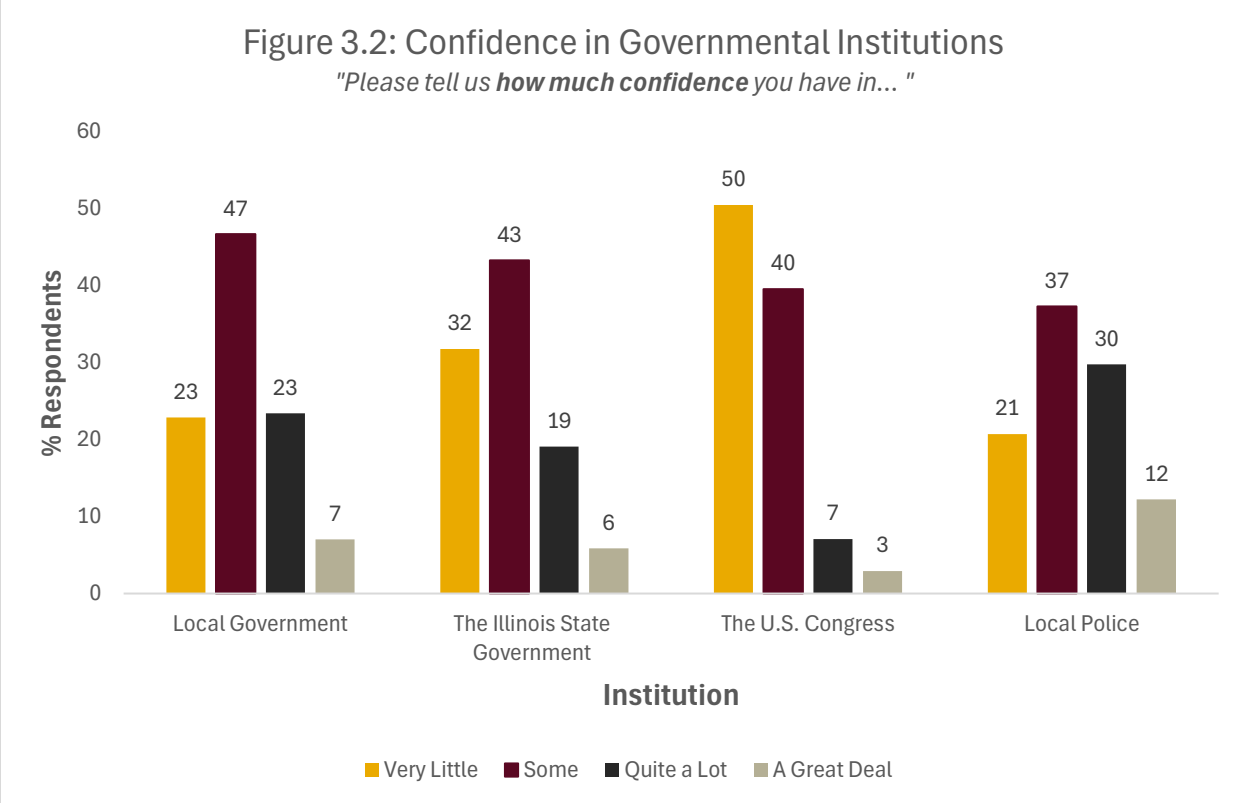
Figure 3.1: Opinions of Public Schools at Local, Municipal, and National Levels
What grade would you give to public schools in...



we see that Cook County residents graded the schools in their neighborhood more favorably than those in Chicago or across the United States. According to Figure 3.1, the public schools in a respondent's neighborhood received the highest grades of "A's" (20%) and "B's" (38%). In comparison, only 8% of respondents gave Chicago's school an "A," and 22% of respondents assigned them a "B." Nationwide schools got positive grades of "A" & "B" at similar rates to schools in Chicago, but were by far the most likely to be given a grade of "C," as US schools were given a "C" by 47% of respondents. On the other end of the scale, Chicago schools were the most likely to receive a D or F (31%) compared to schools in the US (21%) or neighborhood schools (13%).

Institutional Confidence in Cook County

Cook County residents were asked to rate their confidence in governmental institutions at the local, state, and federal levels along with the police in their area from “Very Little”, “Some”, “Quite a Lot”, to “A Great Deal.” Figure 3.2 shows that 30% of residents have clear confidence in their “Local Government” with their favorability decreasing when the governmental institutions begin to serve a greater number of constituents as 25% of respondents are confident in “The Illinois State Government.” While this shift to lower confidence at the state level may not seem large, it is drastically heightened when respondents are asked about their confidence in “The U.S. Congress” as only 10% of residents have any kind of strong confidence in this federal institution. Residents’ favorability toward local governmental institutions compared to those at the state and federal levels is reinforced by their ratings of “Local Police,” the enforcement mechanism for local laws. Of residents, 42% are confident in “Local Police,” further showcasing that respondents have greater confidence in local institutions likely due to the smaller size of the constituencies they serve. The broader a governmental institution’s constituency is, like at the state and federal levels, the less confidence residents have potentially due to their diminished voice in a larger pool of voters.



Demographic Breakdowns

As noted above, respondents gave “grades” ranging from “A” to “F” based on how they perceived public schools in their neighborhood, Chicago and the United States were performing. These grades were then collected and recoded to create an average score, ranging from 0 (F) to 4 (A), mirroring the GPA system used across the US schooling system. In figures 3.3 through 3.5, these GPA scores were compared between respondents based on their ethnoracial identity, level of educational attainment and their residence in Chicago versus its suburbs to understand how these demographic factors impact how individuals view schooling.

School GPA Ratings

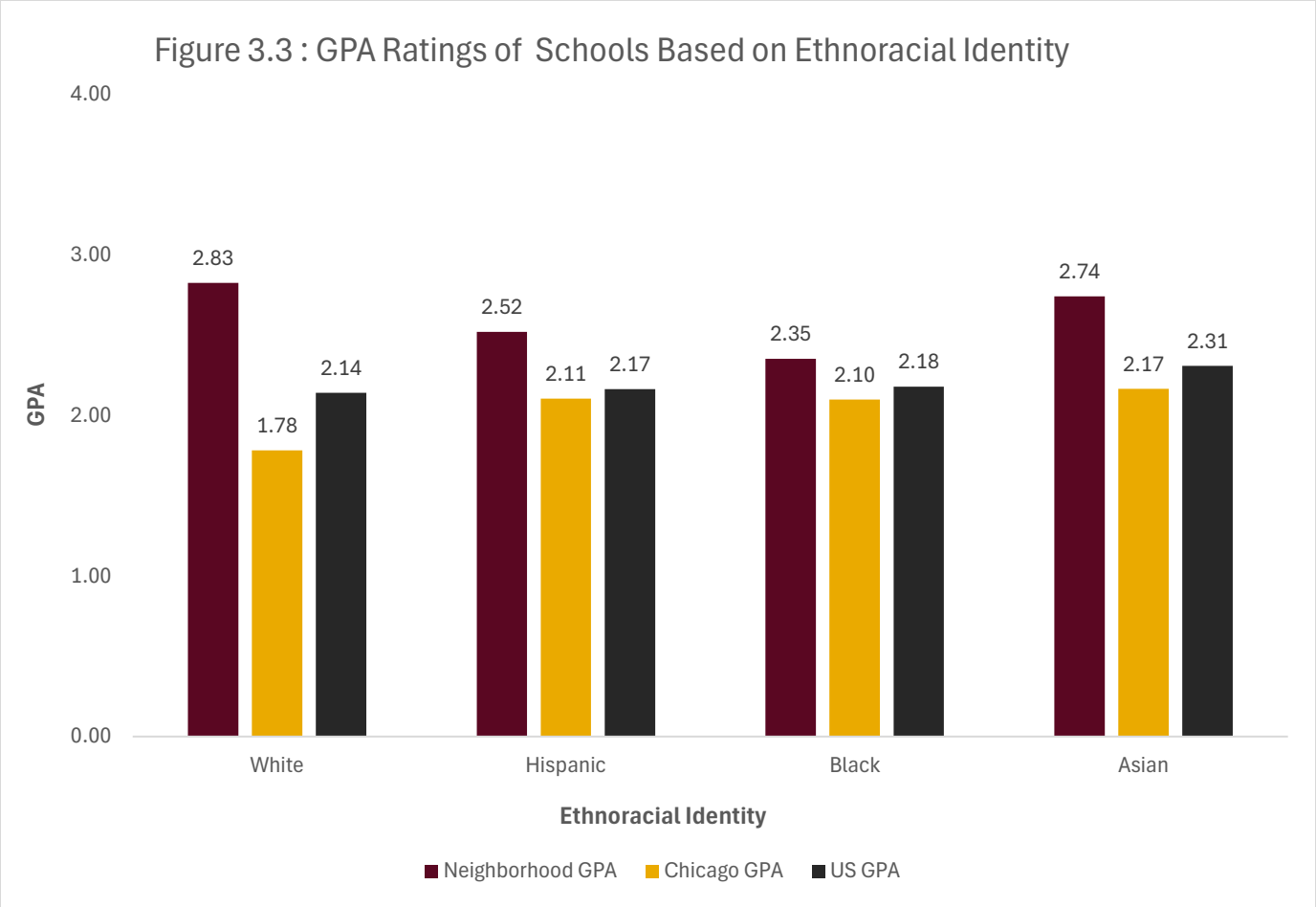
To begin, Figure 3.3 shows the relationship between self-reported ethnoracial identity and how people graded schools at the local and national level. Given that minority communities in Chicago face higher rates of poverty (Hill, 2023), public schools in these areas are more likely to receive less income from property taxes, which serve as their primary source of funding. Additionally, mass school closures in the early to middle 2010s primarily impacted low-income and minority communities (Karp et al., 2023), which likely has influenced accessibility, effectiveness and perception of schooling. With these matters in mind, we expect a difference in GPA ratings for neighborhood schools and Chicago schools based on respondents’ ethno-racial identity, with minority respondents rating schools lower than their white counterparts . Finally, we expect that perceptions of efficacy of US schools will remain similar across ethnoracial groups, as schooling is administered primarily at the local and state level, making it a very local issue.

Across all ethnoracial groups, neighborhood schools achieved the highest GPA compared to Chicago’s schools and schools across the US. Within this distribution, White residents of Cook County rated their schools the highest, giving them a GPA of 2.83, which would correspond to a rough average grade of “B-“. Looking particularly at White respondents’ ratings, these are likely very related to high levels of school funding, as some of Cook County’s highest performing public high schools, such as Lincoln Park High and New Trier are located in high income, primarily white neighborhoods and suburbs. Meanwhile, Black and Hispanic respondents’ ratings for the schools resulted in notably lower GPAs - 2.52 and 2.35 respectively. As highlighted above, this is likely due to these minority populations being at higher risk for poverty and more likely to live in lower income neighborhoods with lower property taxes, which leave their schools with less funding as compared to higher income areas.

Across minority groups, GPA ratings of Chicago’s public schools remained surprisingly similar. Black and Hispanic respondents both scored the city’s schools around 2.1, and Asian

respondents gave them slightly higher scores at 2.17, both of which correspond to about a “C”. However, white respondents gave Chicago’s schools notably lower ratings with an average GPA of 1.78, far below any other score in Figure 3.3. These ratings, as well as their differences can likely be traced back to the demographics of Chicago’s public schools. Broadly, Chicago Public Schools (the organization) and the schools it administers are primarily minority serving institution, as over 80% of the district’s enrollment consists of students of color (Chicago Public Schools, 2025). This high proportion of minority students within public schools is likely related to why these populations give the city’s schools relatively high (and similar) ratings. Meanwhile, despite high income, high performing public schools exist in Chicago, many white students end up enrolled in costly private schools outside of the city’s public school system. Data from Francis W. Parker School and the Latin School of Chicago, two of the city’s most prominent private schools show that both of these schools have over 50% white enrollment (Francis W. Parker School, 2025; Latin School of Chicago, 2025). These enrollment statistics show that white respondents’ low ratings of Chicago’s public schools could be the result of a lack of interaction or intentional distancing from them.

All 4 ethnoracial groups tended to give schools across the US very similar ratings, with scores hovering around 2.2, and Asian respondents giving them the highest GPA at 2.31. This lack of difference aligns with our prediction regarding perceptions of national level schooling and is likely rooted in the fact that education is a locally administered service and citizens rarely interact with school systems beyond those in their locality.



Next, Figure 3.4 measures the calculated GPA of schools based on respondents' level of education. Broadly, educational attainment can serve as a proxy for income level, as based on NCES data, there is a relatively linear relationship between the two with Americans with more education having a greater income (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). With this in mind, we expect that ratings for neighborhood schools will be higher for more educated respondents, as they are likely to have higher incomes and live in areas with stronger schools. Meanwhile, we also predict a similar trend for GPAs for Chicago's public schools. Finally, we predict a trend of similar GPAs assigned to schools at the US level, much like those explored in the prior figure.

At the neighborhood level, respondents who earned a bachelor's degree or above graded their neighborhood schools the most positively, giving them a GPA of 2.75, which equates to a "B-". This is once again likely due to the generally linear relationship between education and income and the fact that educated, high earning residents are likely to send their children to higher performing, better funded schools. Interestingly, our middle category, respondents who had some

college experience or an associate's degree rated their neighborhood schools slightly lower than respondents with a high school diploma or below (2.48 vs 2.57).

Looking at Chicago's public schools, GPA ratings across groups remained similar, with a range of about 0.2 points on a scale of 4. Respondents with a high school diploma or below gave the city's schools a rating of 2.07, the highest among the three groups, while respondents with a bachelor's degree or above rated them at 1.97. Once again, though a difference of less than 0.1 points, respondents in our middle category had the lowest rating of Chicago's public schools. Finally, ratings of US schools once again remained similar, with a range of 2.07 (some college to associate's degree) to 2.32 (high school diploma or below).

One interesting trend that arose in our data was that respondents who received some college education or an associate's degree rated all three categories of schooling the lowest as compared to respondents with more or less education.

Figure 3.4: GPA Ratings of Schools Based on Educational Attainment

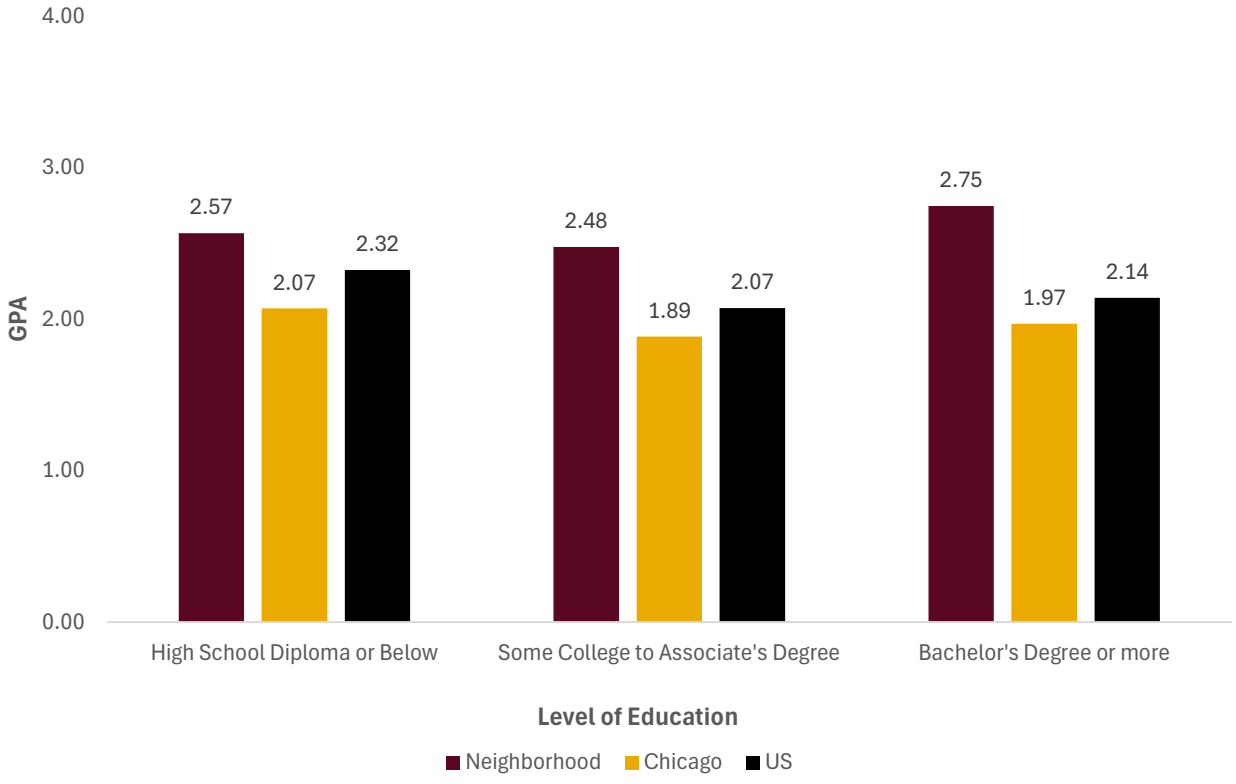


Figure 3.5 examines how respondents' residence in Chicago versus its adjacent suburbs impacted their perception of schooling at the three levels. Given that the average household income in suburban Cook County is around $99,000 (Cook County Department of Public Health,

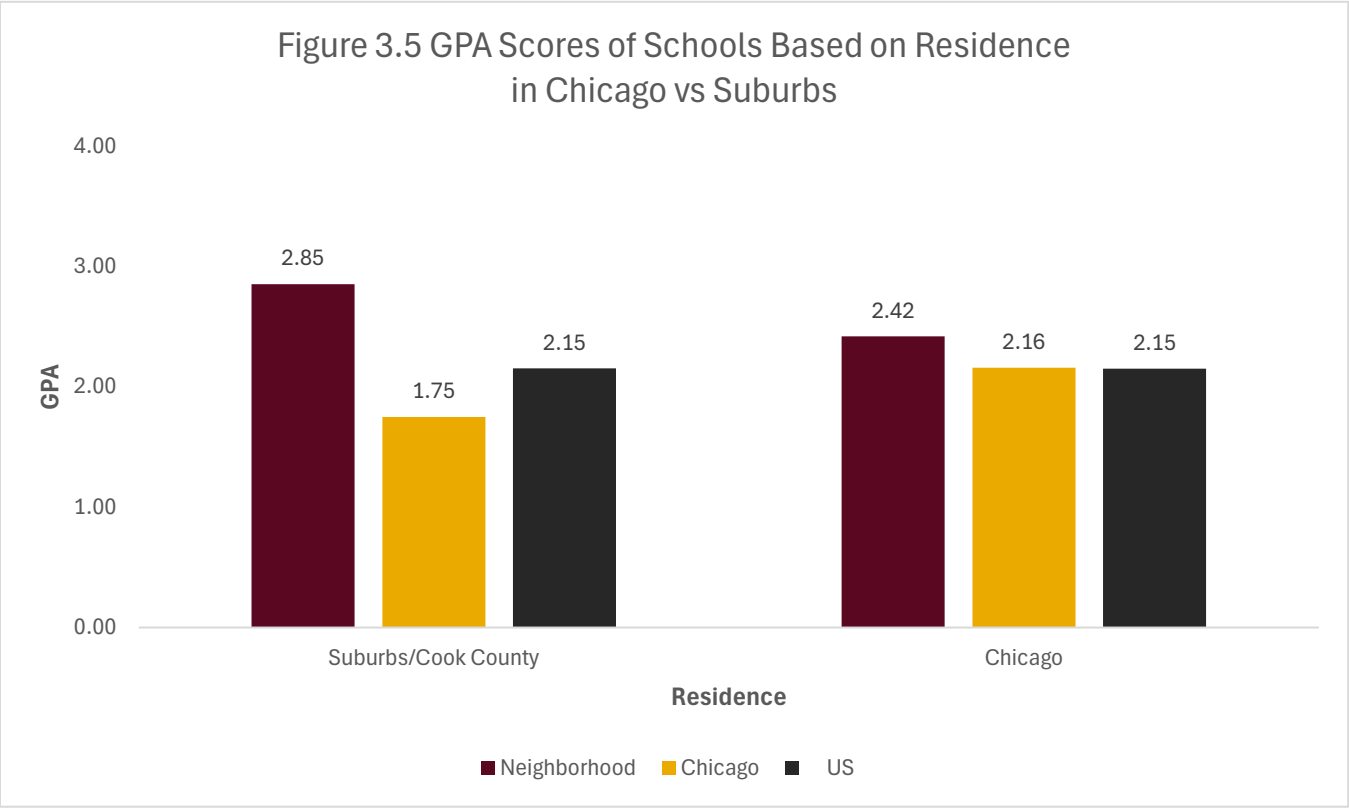
2026), which is much higher than Chicago's median income of $77,000 (Chicago Department of Public Health, 2026), we predict that residents of the suburbs will rate the quality of their neighborhood schools to be much higher than other schools listed. With this in mind, we also predict that suburb residents will rate Chicago's public schools lower their neighborhood schools.

In alignment with our above predictions, residents of Cook County's suburbs assigned much higher grades to schools within their neighborhoods, resulting in a notably higher GPA of 2.85 (about a "B-") as compared to Chicago resident's ratings of their neighborhood schools, which sat at 2.42, which comes out to be a "C+". This stark difference can likely be attributed to the vast differences in income and property tax revenue between the city and the suburbs, as the high incomes of the suburbs likely lead to higher property values and taxes to fund schools.

A second trend can be seen in respondents' ratings of Chicago's public schools. Here, the reverse of the prior pattern is seen, as respondents from Chicago rate the city's schools much more positively than residents of the suburbs. Chicago residents rate the city's public schools with a GPA of 2.16 ("C"), while the grades that suburb residents assigned them resulted in a GPA of 1.75, which corresponds to a "C-". Much of this difference can likely be attributed to proximity, as residents of the city are more likely to have closer interaction with its schools compared to residents of the suburbs, who are likely to only receive accounts of Chicago's public schools from mass media, which may sensationalize or overinflate problems within the city.

Finally, GPA ratings of the United States' schools remained entirely the same across city and suburb residents, mirroring the above trend of similar ratings of national level schooling. Once

again, this is likely due to the localized nature of education, as citizens generally do not have any interaction with schools at a national level.



Confidence in Governmental Institutions

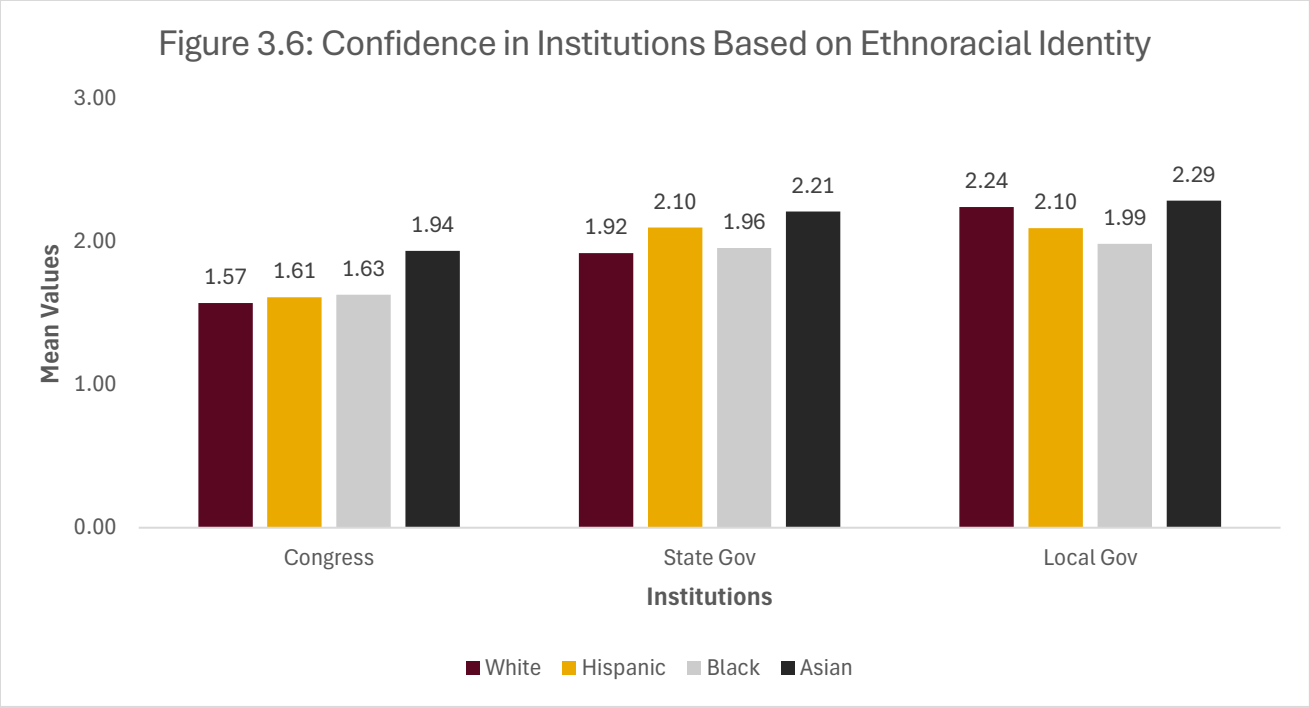
Next, we investigated the relationship between confidence in governmental institutions and respondents' racial identity. Individuals in ethnoracial minority groups are often disadvantaged in the United States due to systemic racism. Historically, many laws and policies in the US have been created in ways that limit the success of minority groups. Inequality that has been engrained into the system can impact many areas of a person's life, including their health, education, careers, and access to food (Hartman et al., n.d.) In fact, minority communities in Chicago specifically are found to experience higher poverty rates than white communities (Hill, 2023). Because living in poverty can affect the quality of life of an individual, including the neighborhood in which they live, we expect that minority respondents would have lower confidence in institutions as they are more likely to live in areas that are underserved, and may have fewer positive experiences involving the government.

This expectation was not supported by the data we collected. Respondents were asked to "rate" their confidence in institutions from a 1-4 scale, with 1 being the least confidence and 4

being the most. It is clear that no matter the racial group, respondents trended towards increased confidence in “smaller” forms of government. Confidence in local government was the highest across the board. This is likely because local government may be seen as more responsive to individual communities, leading to overall increased interaction between local government and constituents and therefore greater trust. There is often a large-scale narrative that national government is untrustworthy and that individual votes are not important in determining what happens, leaving constituents feeling out of control and therefore less confident.

As per figure 3.6, we observed that every ethnoracial group had the lowest confidence in Congress. White, Hispanic, and Black respondents all rated Congress around the same. However, Asian respondents were an outlier. In fact, we can see that Asian respondents had the most confidence in all institutions when compared to White, Black, and Hispanic respondents. While this data may indicate something about Asian respondents in Cook County, it does not point to a clear conclusion for a few reasons. Firstly, there were substantially fewer Asian respondents in comparison to other groups. This means that the data may not be truly representative of the population. Also, “Asian” is a very broad racial group- there is a vast range of potential cultural backgrounds that these respondents are coming from. However, from the observed data, they were overall the most trusting.

Interestingly, contrary to our initial hypothesis, White respondents did not show excessively high confidence levels. In fact, they had the lowest confidence in both State government and Congress out of all racial groups. We also saw that Black respondents had the least confidence in Local Gov, while White respondents had the second highest. This is potentially because of racial distribution in Cook County neighborhoods- White respondents are, on average, more likely to live in higher income areas, which means that they are more likely to have better government provided amenities, schools, and infrastructure than many Black respondents. This would explain there was a large difference in trust in local government even though state-wide and nationally they responded similarly. However, although Hispanic respondents are also a minority, they showed consistent ratings across the levels of government. In fact, they rated State and Local Gov the exact same. Their ratings were also not particularly unique, and mostly in the middle when compared to the other groups. However, it is important to keep in mind that the overall variation was minimal between groups; on a scale from 1-4, a 0.14 difference is slim. Therefore, while the data suggests possible trends, it is not entirely concrete.

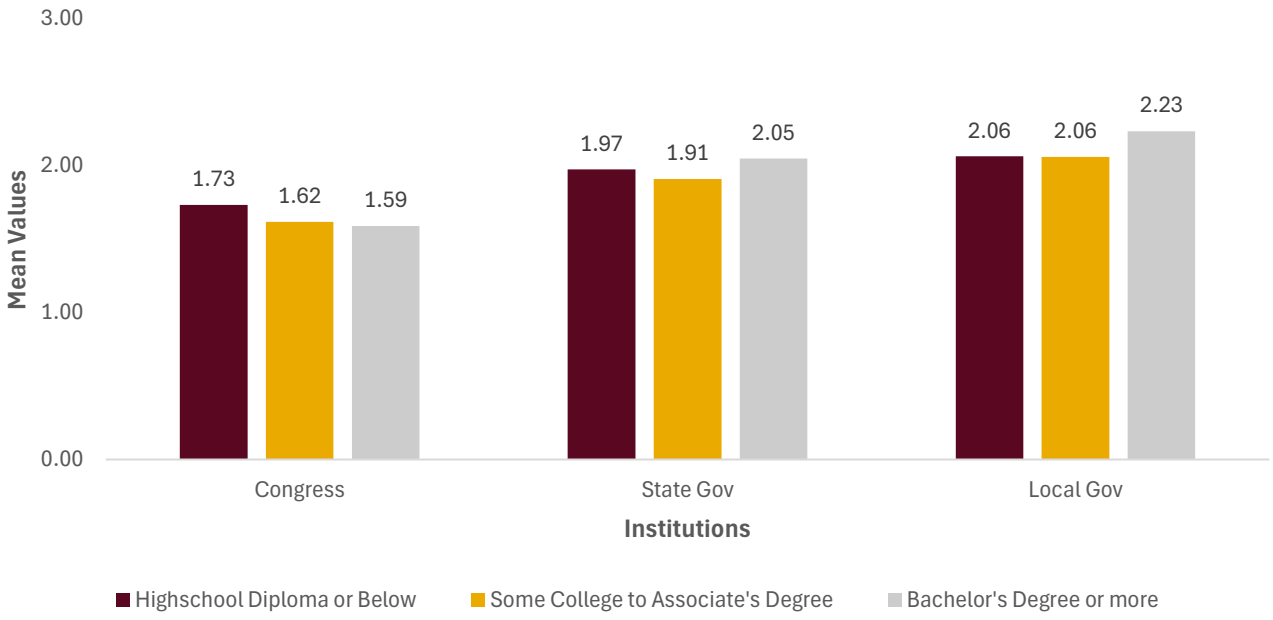


We also investigated the difference of confidence in institutions based on the respondent's educational level. We had three categories- "High School Diploma or Below", "Some College to Associate's Degree", and "Bachelor's Degree or More". We expected to see that the more educated a respondent was, the more confidence they would have in institutions. This is because they might understand the governmental systems and what to expect of government better, but also because they might know how to participate more strongly in governmental processes, feeling more involved and better represented. This could lead to more confidence in institutions. Furthermore, higher education levels are associated with higher income, leading to individuals with more education receiving the benefits of living in a nicer area and having more confidence in government.

In figure 3.7, we see that our expectation of more education leading to more trust was only partially true. Overall, the observed differences between all levels of education were extremely slim- all below 0.2%. However, there were minor differences. When looking at Local Government, we see that the group with the highest education did in fact have the highest confidence, with "Highschool" and "Some College" just behind it. However, when looking at Congress, the more educated respondents were, the less confident they were, which is a reversal of what we saw with Local Government. State Government did not have a clear pattern of confidence changing as education increased or decreased. The alignment of the Local Government data with our expectations versus the reversal of our expectations with Congress could potentially have an

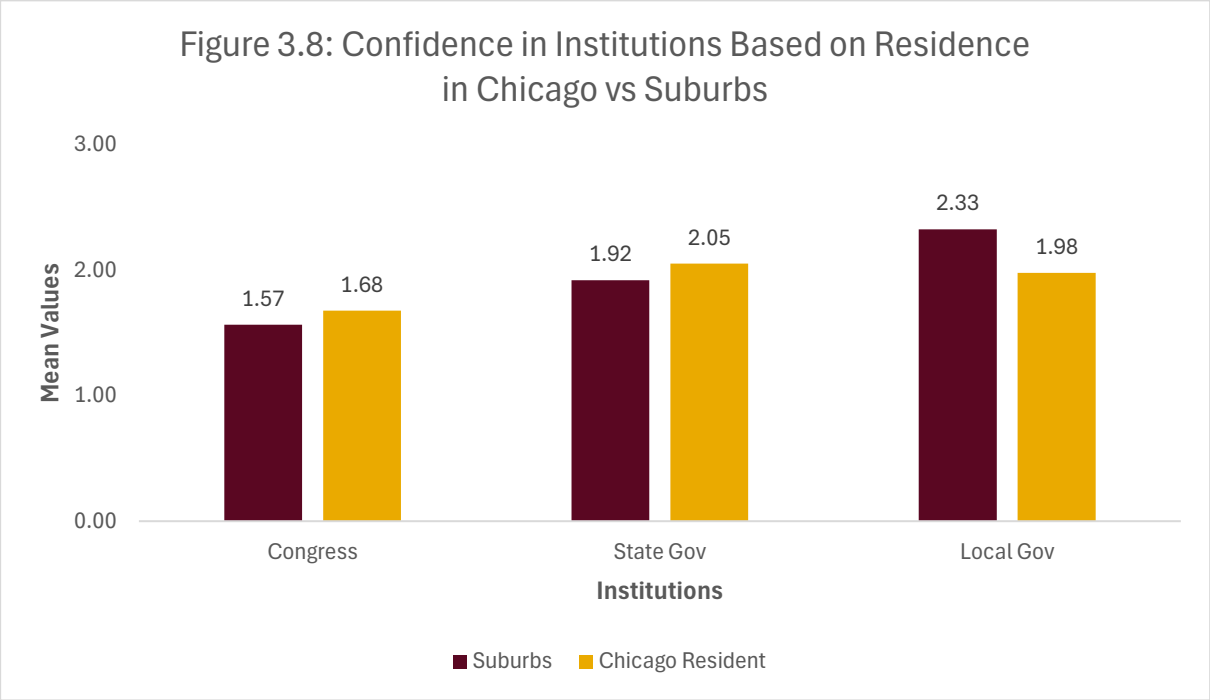
explanation. Congress is the most discussed in the media, meaning that you might not have to put in as much time into finding information about what is happening in it. Also, because it is so broadly discussed, individuals may require less education to be able to understand and form opinions on the actions of Congress, leading to people with only a high school degree to have more trust due in it. On the other hand, Local Government is not talked about as much, therefore individuals would have to put much more time and effort in to be able to understand what it is doing, and more educated individuals would thus have higher confidence.

Figure 3.7: Confidence in Institutions Based on Educational Attainment



Lastly, we compared confidence in institutions to whether respondents lived in the suburbs or in the city of Chicago. We expected to see that those that live in the Chicago suburbs might have similar confidence levels in State Gov and Congress, as they likely share similar broad interests with respondents who live in the city of Chicago. However, in figure 3.8, the data shows that while respondents in the suburbs were more confident in local government, Chicago respondents were more confident in both Congress in State Gov. This may be explained in part by income inequality/ neighborhood quality in the suburbs and in the city. The suburbs of Chicago are wealthier than the city, and therefore similarly to what can be seen in the theorizing about racial demographics, those who live in wealthier neighborhoods are likely to feel more supported by local government because they have better infrastructure and amenities. Therefore, suburban

respondents would have more confidence in Local Government than Chicago residents. However, Chicago residents rated Congress and State Government slightly higher could potentially be because Chicago residents simply do not trust in Chicago City government or may overall be unhappy with Chicago city government because of policy choices.

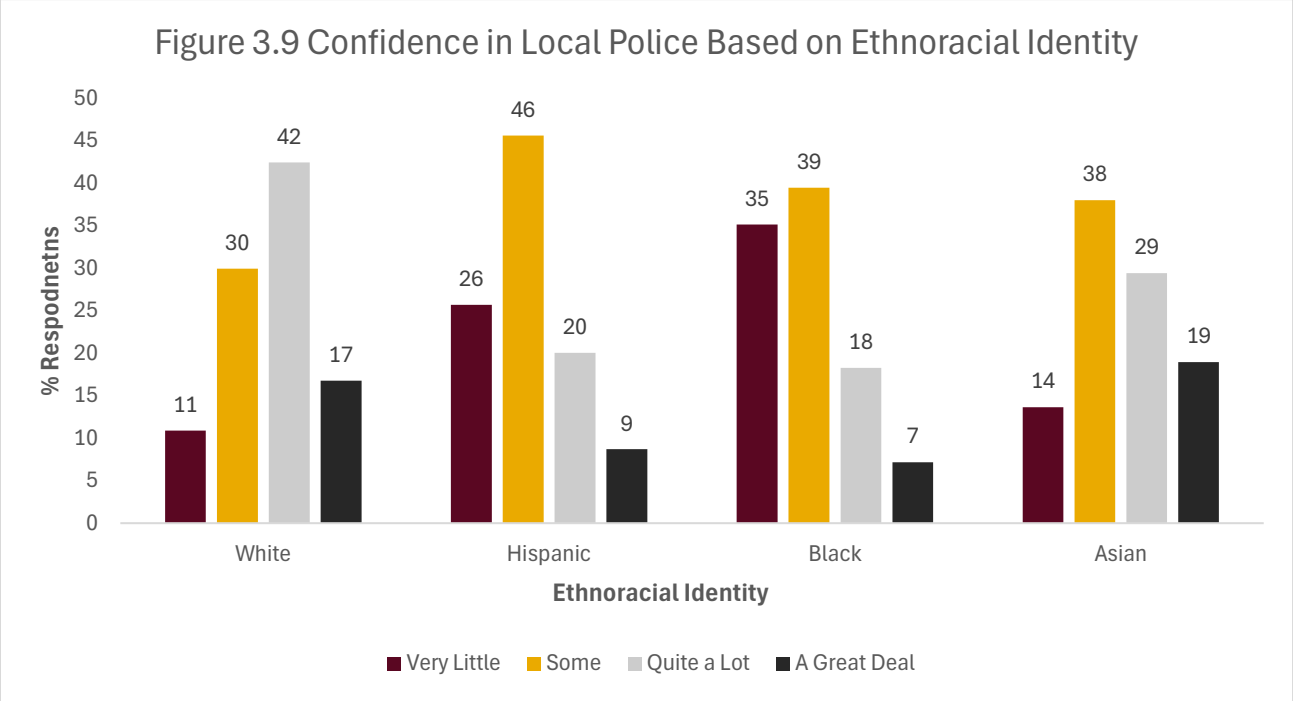


Confidence in Police

Figure 3.9 displays differences in confidence in local police among Cook County residents based on their ethnoracial identity. We expect that White residents would have greater confidence in their local police while members of racial minority groups, including Hispanic, Black, and Asian respondents, would be less confident due to their history enduring unjust police treatment throughout the Chicagoland area. In Chicago alone, residents who identify with a racial minority group, especially if they are Black and Hispanic, are more likely to be forcefully confronted by the police than White residents (Thor, 2026). With actions taken in Chicago having an influence on the rest of Cook County, we expect that respondents identifying with a racial minority group would be less confident in the police in their area than White residents.

Our expectation is mostly fulfilled by Figure 3.9 as a combined 59% of White respondents have “Quite a Lot” or “A Great Deal” of confidence in their local police while Hispanic, Black, and Asian residents are less confident. Of Asian residents, 48% are confident in their local police, demonstrating a decrease in confidence from the results offered by White respondents. Similarly, 29% of Hispanic residents and 25% of Black residents are confident in their local police, showcasing less confidence in the police among respondents who identify with a racial minority

group. This decrease in confidence based on differences in ethnoracial identity contributes to residents' overall lack of confidence in the police even though, as seen in Figure 3.2, 42% of Cook County residents are more confident in their local police than in other governmental institutions. The lower confidence in the police held by Hispanic, Black, and Asian residents, likely associated with unjust police treatment toward members of a racial minority group, highlights the noncomparative and general lack of confidence residents have in their local police.



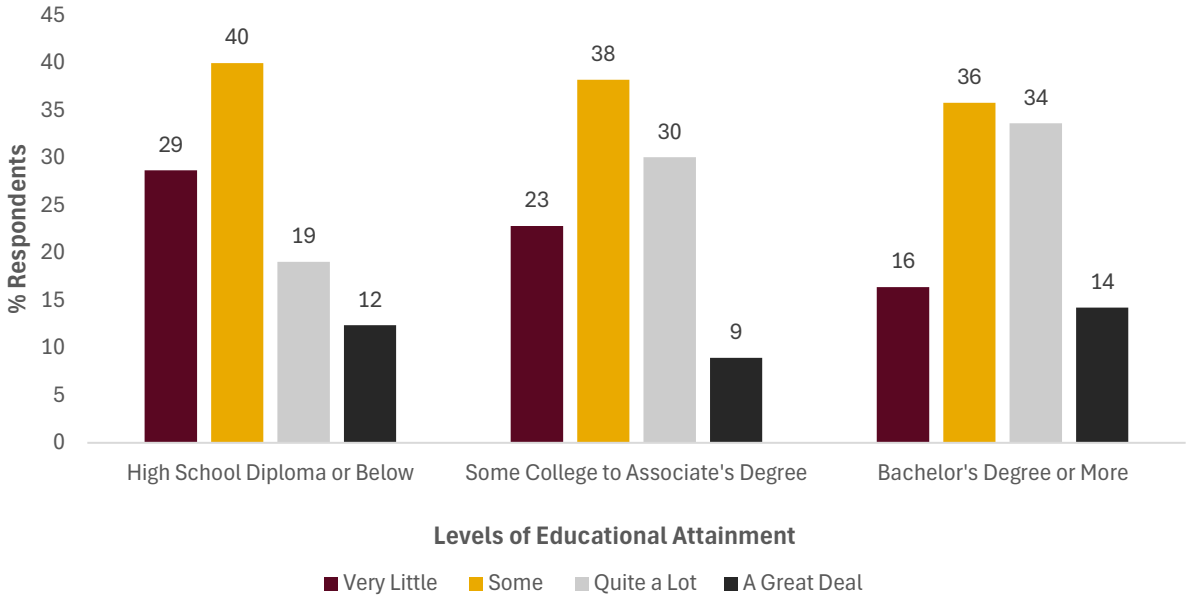
Investigating the impact of a Cook County residents' educational attainment on their responses in this survey, Figure 3.10 showcases the relationship between respondents' levels of education and confidence in the police in their area. We expect that a resident would be more confident in their local police when they reached greater educational attainment since they would possess more knowledge regarding the basics of the law and the importance of its enforcement in their neighborhood. With the promotion of the rule of law being incorporated into education in general (UNESCO, 2023), a resident with higher education is expected to have greater confidence as they may be more familiar with the police's enforcement responsibilities in the criminal justice system.

Our expectation is fulfilled by Figure 3.10 as it shows how Cook County residents' confidence in their local police increases with the more education they possess. A combined 31% of respondents with a "High School Diploma or Below" had "Quite a Lot" or "A Great Deal" of confidence in the police in their area. Similarly, when shifting to residents with greater education,

39% of respondents with “Some College to Associate’s Degree” have robust confidence in the police. Residents’ confidence increases with their further completion of higher education as 48% of residents with a “Bachelor’s Degree or More” have clear confidence in the police. In accordance with our expectation, the more education a resident possesses, the more confident they are in their local police.

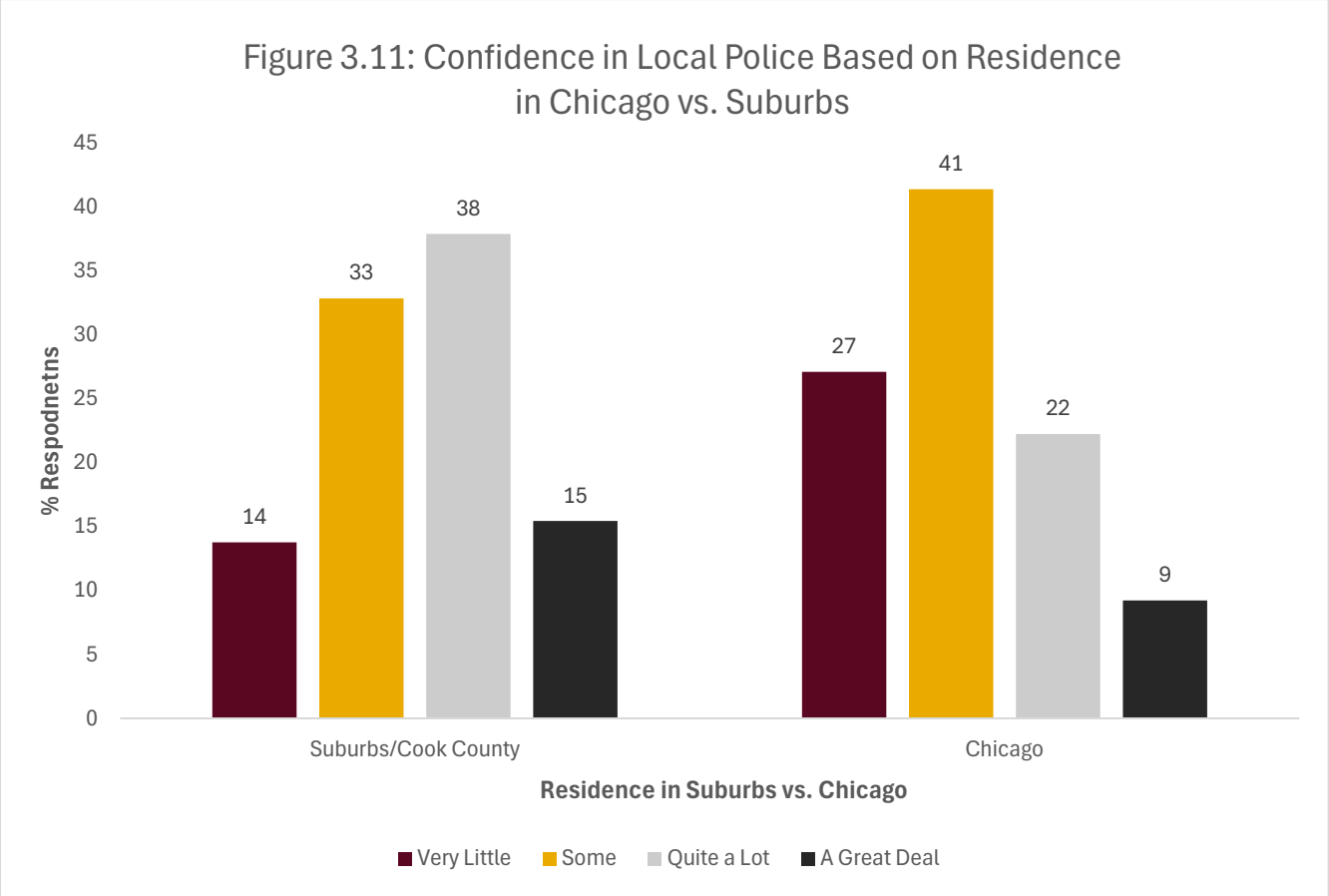
Figure 3.10 provides insight into the direct influence a resident’s educational attainment has on their confidence in the police in their area. As shown in Figure 3.10, the percentage of respondents with greater confidence in their local police increases as they pursue higher education. This increased confidence associated with higher education likely stems from a resident’s knowledge of their community’s criminal justice system and the general importance of the police in upholding the law.

Figure 3.10: Confidence in Local Police Based on Educational Attainment



Analyzing the influence of a respondent’s residence in either Chicago or its suburbs, Figure 3.11 displays the relationship between this difference in residency and Cook County residents’ confidence in the police in their area. We expected that respondents living in the suburbs would have greater confidence in their local police compared to those in Chicago as they may perceive their smaller, less urban, community to be safer as a result of their local police’s actions. In Chicago, we expected residents to have lower confidence in their local police due to their potential perception of greater crime in this urban setting and, like in our analysis of police ratings based on ethnoracial identity, the Chicago Police Department’s history of unjust practices.

Figure 3.11 fulfilled our expectation as it shows that 53% of suburban residents are clearly confident in their local police compared to 31% of Chicago residents. In the suburbs, residents are more confident in their local police likely due to their perception of greater safety attributed to the police's actions in a less urban environment, especially when it may be compared to a larger municipality like Chicago. Respondents living in Chicago are less confident in their local police potentially due to the city's history of unjust police treatment toward residents and its own densely populated urban environment which may be more prone to initially unaddressed crimes.



Discussion

Overall, the data reveals that local institutions, like local government, neighborhood schools, and police, are the most trusted by residents of Cook County. This indicates that actions made by local governmental agencies are the most noticeable by residents and therefore impact their confidence in them the most. Politics and governmental services on a large scale are often broader and may be perceived to be less impactful on an individual level. This is supported by the observed lack of confidence in Congress and the low ratings of US schools.

However, there were notable differences between demographic groups. In looking at ethnoracial identity, educational background, and residence in Chicago versus Suburbs, there appears to be an underlying reasoning as to why these groups might have had more or less confidence in institutions, which is economic status. Racial minorities often experience income inequality in the United States. This means that they may have less access to higher education, nicer neighborhoods, and better schools, which are services that are provided by local government. This can be seen by our findings in figure 3.6, as minority groups had less confidence in local government than white respondents. Racial discrimination by the police force is also exacerbated by living in lower income, minority dominated neighborhoods, which was supported by the data found in figure 3.9, where Black and Hispanic respondents had substantially lower trust in police than white respondents. We also observed a difference that was potentially related to economic status in our findings pertaining to rating of education and Chicago residence demographics. People who lived in the suburbs, which are generally wealthier areas, rated their neighborhood schools more highly than people in Chicago did, indicating that wealth may be tied to access to better education. People with higher education levels often have higher incomes, living in nicer areas and therefore having more positive experiences with local government and with their local schools. Because of systemic racism, people experiencing poverty are often minority groups who do not have access to these things, leading to less trust in local institutions. Therefore, the data indicates that economic status may be the overarching underlying factor in Cook County resident's trust in institutions, specifically, local government, neighborhood schools, and police.

References

Chicago Department of Public Health. (2026). *Median Household Income*. Chicago Health Atlas. https://chicagohealthatlas.org/indicators/INC?tab=map

Chicago Public Schools. (2025). *Stats and Facts | Chicago Public Schools*. Chicago Public Schools. https://www.cps.edu/about/stats-facts/

Cook County Department of Public Health. (2026). *Median household income*. Suburban Cook County Health Atlas. https://cookcountyhealthatlas.org/indicators/INC

Francis W. Parker School. (2025). *Discover Parker*. Francis W. Parker School. https://www.fwparker.org/admission/discover-parker

Gallup. (2025a). *Confidence in Institutions*. Gallup.Com. https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/Confidence-Institutions.aspx

Gallup. (2025b, September 17). *Record-Low 35% in U.S. Satisfied With K-12 Education Quality*. Gallup.Com. https://news.gallup.com/poll/695174/record-low-satisfied-education-quality.aspx

Gallup, G. (2024, July 15). *U.S. Confidence in Institutions Mostly Flat, but Police Up*. Gallup.Com. https://news.gallup.com/poll/647303/confidence-institutions-mostly-flat-police.aspx

Hartman, T., Hart, S., Marte, J., & Schneider, H. (n.d.). The race gap. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/graphics/GLOBAL-RACE/USA/nmopajawjva/#life-expectancy

Hill, B. (2023, November 8). Black, Brown Chicago neighborhoods endure highest poverty rates. *Illinois Policy*. https://www.illinoispolicy.org/black-brown-chicago-neighborhoods-endure-highest-poverty-rates/

Karp, S., Issa, N., FitzPatrick, L., & Loury, A. (2023, May 18). *Chicago closed 50 public schools 10 years ago. Did the city keep its promises?* Https://Graphics.Suntimes.Com/. https://graphics.suntimes.com/education/2023/chicagos-50-closed-schools

Latin School of Chicago. (2025). *At a Glance*. https://www.latinschool.org/about-us/at-a-glance

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024, May). *COE - Annual Earnings by Educational Attainment*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cba/annual-earnings

Thor, B. (2026, February 23). *Police Reform Advocates Say CPD Progress Too Slow Following Study Showing Disproportionate Use of Force*. WTTW News. https://news.wttw.com/2026/02/23/police-reform-advocates-say-cpd-progress-too-slow-following-study-showing

UNESCO. (2023, April 20). *How education can strengthen the rule of law.* https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/how-education-can-strengthen-rule-law

Perceptions of Safety and Crime

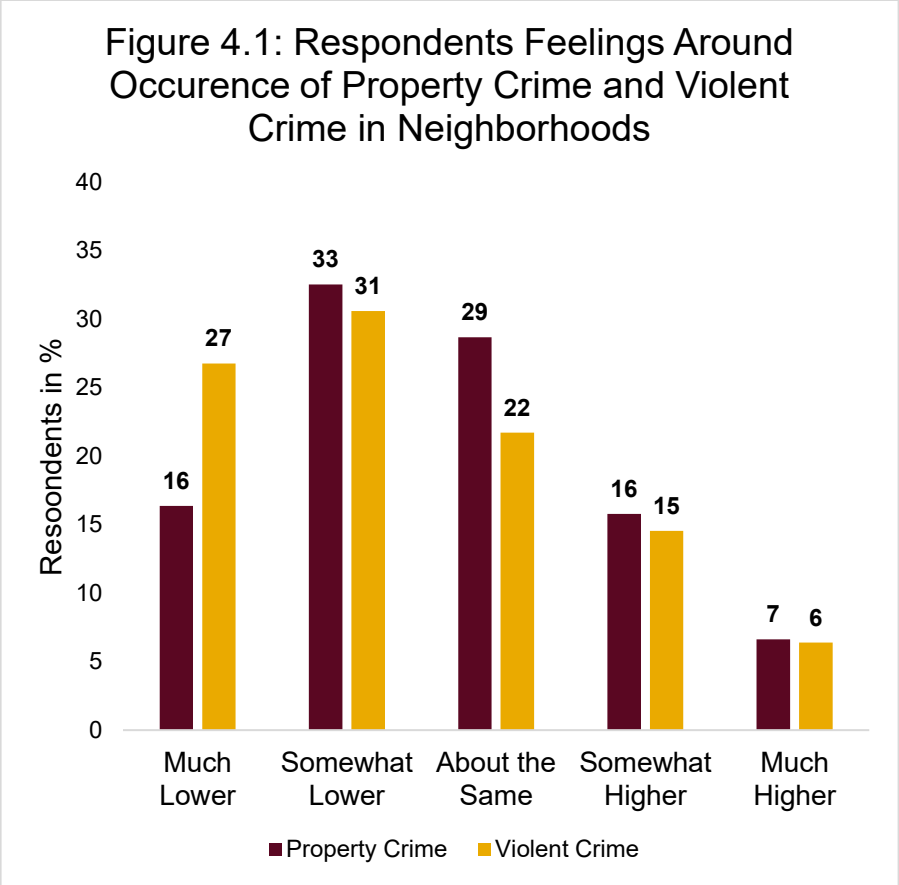
Brenna Regan, Vincent Valera de Barrett, Sam Wilfley

Introduction

Safety in public places and residential areas is a key concern for Americans across the United States. In the past year, the Chicagoland area was attacked by the Trump administration and framed as a bastion of criminal activity. However, these claims of rampant crime in the city were contradicted by dropping crime rates in the Chicago area. In the first six months of 2025, Chicago saw a 33% reduction in homicides and a 38% reduction in shootings (Mayor's Office, 2025, p.1). Due to the contentious discourse on crime and safety in Cook County, residents' perception of crime and safety levels within their neighborhoods need to be evaluated. These perceptions provide insight into the true feelings held by Cook County residents about the safety and crime levels in their neighborhoods. Criminal behavior is disruptive at the individual and community level. Crime impacts the quality of life in communities, the mental well-being of residents, and prevents engagement with neighbors. These negative impacts may be unequally distributed across groups, as neighborhood location, socioeconomic status, and lack of access to resources can contribute to crime and make residents feel unsafe. Taking these factors into consideration, we examine the perceptions of safety and crime across Cook County using the Cook County Community Survey.

Overall Response Distributions

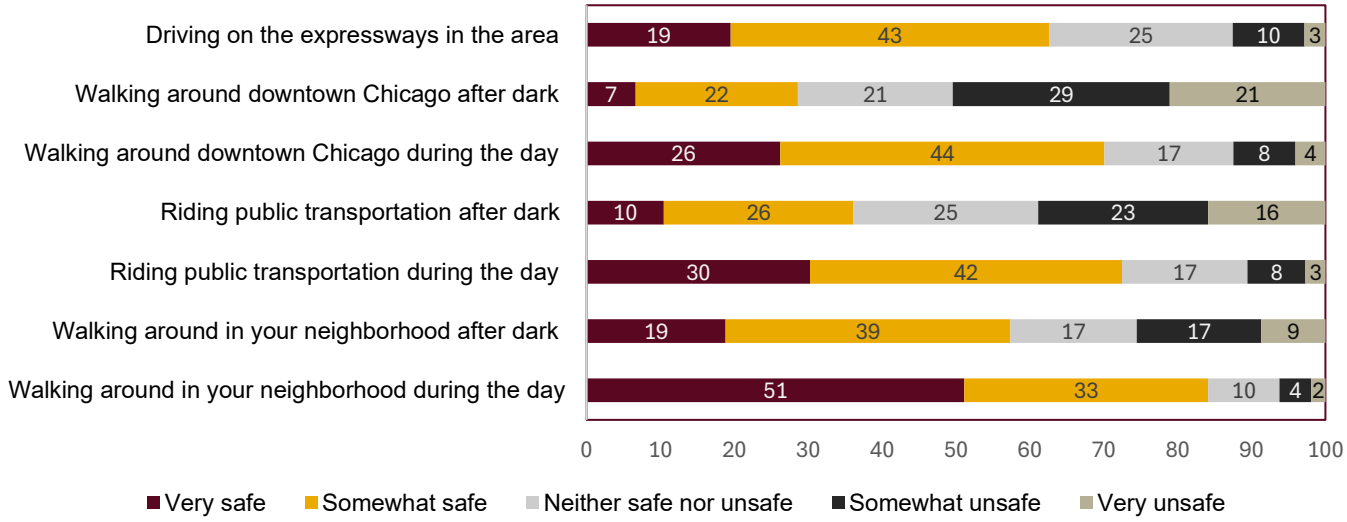
To measure perceptions of safety, respondents were asked how safe they feel in a variety of situations on a scale ranging from "very safe to very unsafe." These situations include walking during the day and evenings, taking public transportation, spending time downtown, and navigating expressways. The perception of crime levels in respondents' neighborhoods in comparison to other areas in Cook County are measured on a scale ranging from "much lower" (1) to "much higher" (5). The perception of crime includes the level of both violent and property crime in neighborhoods.



Number of Respondents: 1,180

Respondents were asked two questions regarding their perceptions of crime in their area and how it compares to other areas of Cook County. One question asked about property crime, the other violent crime. Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of respondents' answers. Twenty-seven percent of respondents said that violent crime is much lower in their neighborhood compared to other areas of Cook County. In contrast, only 16% of respondents viewed property crime as being lower. In the larger picture, 49% of respondents said that property crime was much or somewhat lower, while 58% of respondents said the same regarding violent crime. Overall, the data also shows that only less than ¼ of respondents believe crime in their neighborhood is higher than elsewhere in the county. This finding shows that Cook County residents generally feel that crime is low in their respective neighborhoods.

Figure 4.2: Feelings of Safety During Activities and Times of Day



Number of Respondents (top to bottom): 1,179, 1,180, 1,179, 1,180, 1,180, 1,180, 1,180.

To evaluate feelings of safety, responses were measured across four different situations: driving on the expressways in the area, walking around downtown Chicago, riding public transportation, and walking around one's neighborhood. For each location except the expressways, respondents were also asked how safe they felt during the day and at night Answers ranged from "very safe" to "very unsafe." Figure 4.2 shows the percentage distribution of said answers. Across all day scenarios, respondents felt the safest in their own neighborhoods; Eighty-four percent are at least somewhat safe when walking around their neighborhood during the day. Seventy-two percent of respondents felt at least somewhat safe when riding public transportation during the day. Similarly, 70% of respondents felt somewhat safe when walking around downtown Chicago during the day. During the night, respondents still felt the safest in their own neighborhoods. General feelings of safety dropped during the night, however; only 58%, 36%, and 29% respondents felt somewhat or very safe, respective to the daytime activity order. Respondents perceived walking around downtown Chicago after dark to be the most unsafe activity overall, with 50% feeing some level of unsafe. Lastly, driving on the expressway is considered somewhat or very safe as 62% of respondents categorized this activity as such. Almost a quarter of respondents considered driving on the expressway to be neither safe nor unsafe; most respondents feel safe on expressways regardless of the time-of-day use.

Summary Measures

In the next section, we will consider how these crime and safety perceptions vary with respondents' race, gender, and whether they live in Chicago or the suburbs of Cook County. To

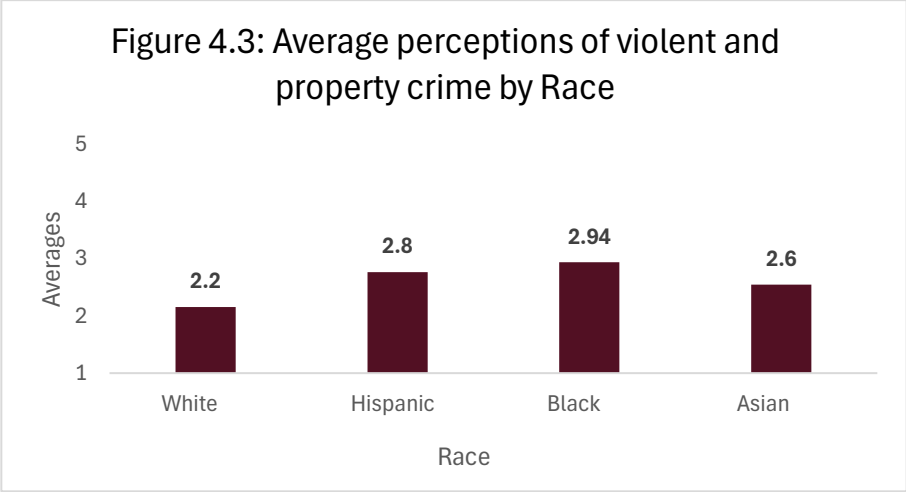
simplify our analysis, we created several summary measures. We averaged respondents' perceptions regarding how violent and property crime in their neighborhood compares to other locations. This index ranges from 1 to 5, with a higher value corresponding to higher perceptions of general crime in the area. The crime index has a mean (average) of roughly 2.53, a standard deviation of 1.09, and a median of 2.5. We also created summary measures averaging respondents' ratings of safety in each of three locations: 1) downtown, 2) in respondents' neighborhoods, and 3) on public transit. All three measures range from 1 to 5, with higher values corresponding to higher perceptions of safety. Perceived safety within downtown Chicago has a mean of roughly 3.22, standard deviation of 0.99, and median of 3. Perceived safety on public transportation has a mean of roughly 3.41, standard deviation of 1.00, and median of 3.5. Perceived safety in one's own neighborhood has a mean of roughly 3.85, standard deviation of 0.97, and median of 4.

Demographic Breakdowns

Perception of Crime Levels

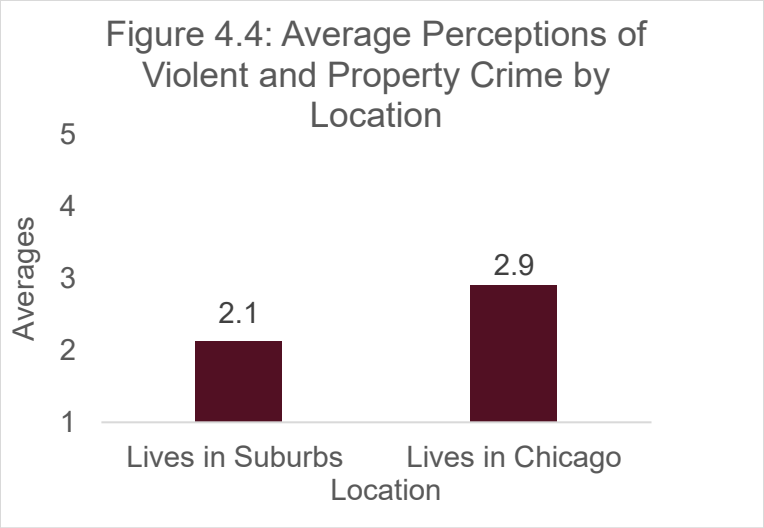
Throughout this analysis we consider how respondents perceive levels of crime in their neighborhoods in comparison to other areas of Cook County. We analyzed this question across demographic characteristics including race, gender, and location. We hypothesize that nonwhite respondents, female respondents, and respondents living in Chicago will report higher levels of crime in their neighborhoods than male, white, and suburban respondents. Nonwhite and female Cook County residents have different experiences due to their race and gender. For instance, female and nonwhite respondents may experience gender and race-based threats that white and male respondents may not experience. For this reason, nonwhite respondents and female respondents may be more vigilant of crime in their community. Similarly, cities tend to have greater crime rates than suburban areas. This could be tied to the greater concentration of people in dense urban areas which makes witnessing or experiencing crime more likely.

Figure 4.3 demonstrates the average responses given by respondents about the relative perception of crime in their neighborhood in comparison to other areas of Cook County. Figure 4.3 specifically measures relative perceptions of neighborhood crime across races. We theorize that nonwhite respondents will report higher levels of crime in their neighborhoods than whites. Historically, formerly redlined neighborhoods have a greater concentration of Black and Hispanic residents and greater rates of crime. The discriminatory practice of redlining depreciated property values, reduced access to resources, and trapped Black Americans into poverty specifically. The historical relevance of redlining may also impact relative perceptions of crime levels across races.



Number of Respondents: 1,180

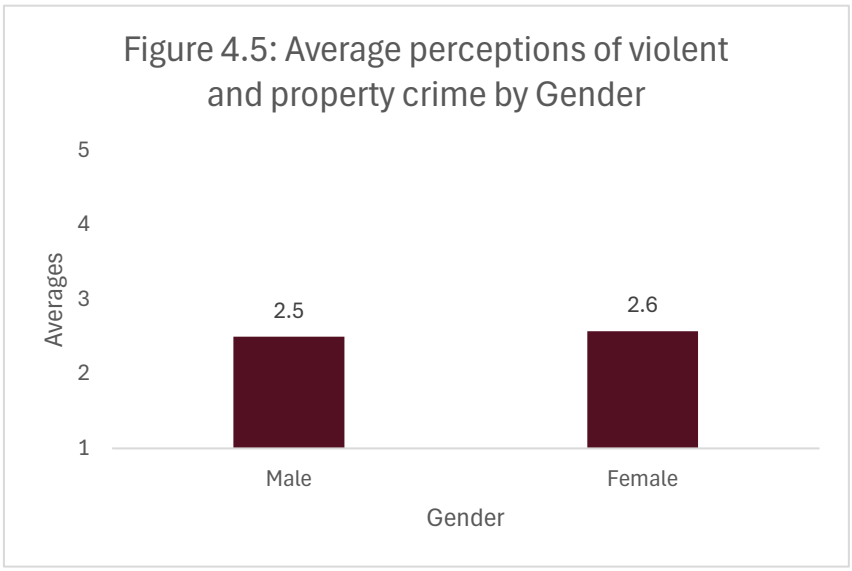
We find a 0.6 difference between the responses of white and Hispanic respondents. This variation indicates that the relative perceptions of crime among Hispanic respondents is .6 units higher than white respondents. Similarly, a 0.74 difference exists between the responses of white and Black respondents. This indicates that the relative perception of crime levels among Black respondents is 0.74 units higher than white respondents. These results support our hypothesis that nonwhite respondents report greater levels of relative crime in their neighborhoods than white respondents. These differences across racial identities could have a relationship with neighborhood location and the concentration of races in certain neighborhoods that have greater levels of crime. These responses may also reflect different experiences of white, Black, Hispanic respondents in their neighborhoods regarding their proximity and experience with crime.



Number of Respondents: 1,180

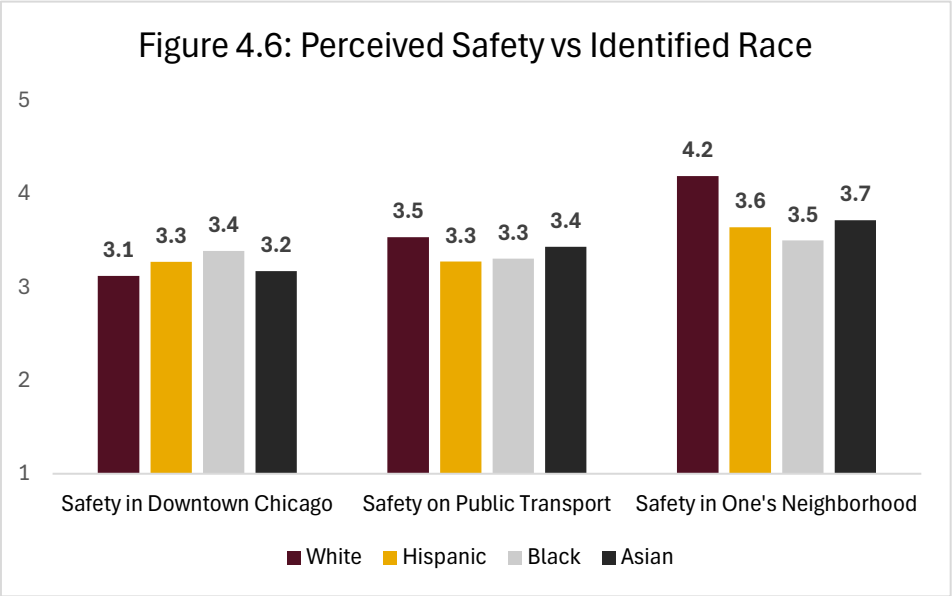
Living in the city or suburbs also produces different perceptions of the relative levels of crime in respondents' neighborhoods in comparison to other areas of Cook County. Figure 4.4 illustrates the average responses given by respondents about crime in their neighborhood based on location. We theorize that respondents living in the City of Chicago will report higher levels of relative crime in their neighborhoods than their suburban counterparts in Cook County. Generally, large cities like Chicago have more crime than suburban areas. This could be correlated with population density in cities, proximity to gangs, and socioeconomic conditions that are unique to urban areas. On average, those outside Chicago in the suburbs of Cook County perceive their neighborhoods to have less crime than those living in Chicago. There is a 0.8 difference in the relative perception of crime between respondents in suburban Cook County and those who live in Chicago. This variation indicates that relative perception of crime among respondents who live in Chicago were 0.8 units higher than suburban Cook County respondents. These results support the hypothesis that respondents who live in the City of Chicago would report higher perceptions of relative crime levels in their neighborhood in comparison to other areas of Cook County. Respondents who live in the city may experience more crime on average than those in the suburbs. Cities are more densely populated and much more economically diverse than suburban areas. For this reason, Chicagoans may be exposed to several types of property and violent crime at a greater rate than suburban respondents.

Figure 4.5 illustrates the perceptions of relative crime levels in respondents' neighborhoods in comparison to other areas across Cook County. Figure 4.5 measures perceptions of crime across gender identities. We predict that female respondents will report higher perceptions of crime in their neighborhoods in comparison to their male counterparts. Gender may impact the relative perception of crime in respondents' neighborhoods in comparison to other areas of Cook County. This is because female respondents are forced to navigate threats of gender-based and sexual violence more frequently than male respondents. For this reason, more women than men may perceive their neighborhood to have greater levels of crime in comparison to other areas of Cook County. A 0.07 difference exists between the female and male respondents. This variation indicates that the relative crime perceptions of female respondents were 0.07 units than male respondents. This variation could be tied to experiences of sexual harassment or gender-based violence that may cause female respondents to perceive crime to be higher in their neighborhood than male respondents.



Number of Respondents: 1,180

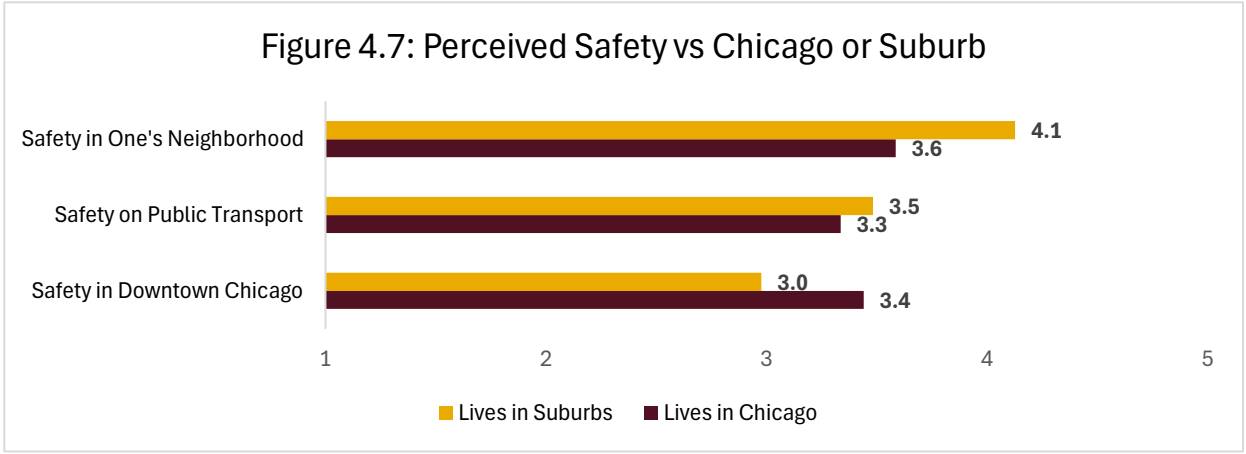
Perceptions of Safety



We analyzed perceptions of safety across activities through lenses of race, location, and gender, which produced noticeable patterns.

Figure 4.6 shows perceptions of safety based on race. In comparison to the other racial groups, White respondents felt the safest on public transportation (3.5) and in their own neighborhood (4.2). White respondents, on average, reported feeling safer in their own neighborhoods than all other groups. A difference of at least 0.44 exists between whites and other racial groups measured in the "safety in one's neighborhood" category. This shows that on average, White respondents feel safer in their neighborhoods than their Hispanic, Black, and Asian counterparts. However, all groups have a similar perception of safety on public transportation, ranging from 3.5 to 3.3. Black respondents feel the safest in downtown Chicago but also the least safe in their own neighborhood. When comparing the racial groups, Hispanic and Black respondents had the most similar responses, only a 0.12, 0.03, and 0.14 difference exists across the groups for each safety scenario. Every other comparison of racial groups had greater differences.

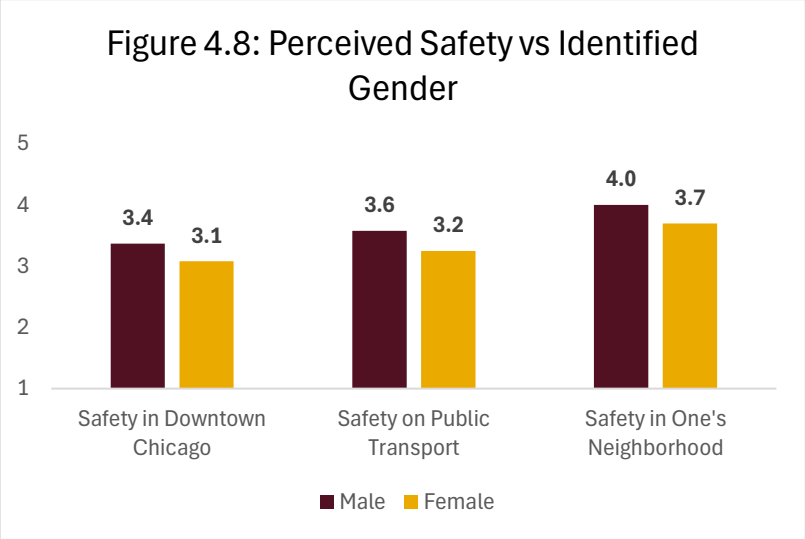
Figure 4.7 shows perceptions of safety based on whether respondents live in the city of Chicago or the suburbs of Cook County. Respondents who live in the suburbs felt the safest in



Number of Respondents (top to bottom): 1,180, 1,180, 1,179.

their own neighborhoods (4.1), but this safety scenario also has the highest difference from Chicago-based respondents at 0.54. Chicagoan respondents consider downtown Chicago to be safer (3.44) than those in the suburbs (2.98). Perceptions of safety on public transportation saw the least amount of difference between the groups, with a difference of only 0.14. Respondents who live in the suburbs have a greater variance in their perceptions of safety across each of the scenarios (with a difference of 1.15) than those who live in Chicago (0.25).

Figure 4.8 shows perceptions of safety based on the respondents' gender. Respondents identifying as neither female nor male were excluded due to a lack sufficient respondents in that category (only 7 out of 1,182 respondents, unweighted). Across each of the safety scenarios, male respondents' average perceptions of safety were slightly higher than female respondents. The difference male and female between respondents was largely the same, being 0.29, 0.32, and 0.31. The greatest difference between men and women's perceptions of safety was on public transportation (0.32), but even this amount is negligible. While the difference in safety perceptions is consistent, its narrowness is potentially a sign of gender equality improvements.



Number of Respondents (left to right): 1,180, 1,180, 1,179.

Discussion

Analysis from the survey indicates that most people perceive property and violent crime as lower in their neighborhood than in other parts of Cook County. Similarly, many respondents feel safe in most areas of the city. However, respondents feel notably less safe at night, especially on public transportation and downtown.

We also find some notable differences across groups. After measuring the perception of violent and property crime across races, the data shows Black and Hispanic respondents perceive higher levels of relative crime in their neighborhoods in comparison to other areas of Cook County. Additionally, on average, Black and Hispanic respondents reported higher levels of relative crime in their neighborhoods than white respondents. Respondents who lived outside the city also signaled lower levels of violent crime compared to city dwellers. For safety across groups, white respondents report feeling less safe downtown than in their own neighborhoods. Blacks, in

comparison, feel safer downtown than they do anywhere else. The data also shows female respondents reported feeling broadly less safe than males. The most fascinating find, however, is when we look at perceived safety and one's location. Respondents living in Chicago reported feeling remarkably less safety in their own neighborhood when compared to suburban respondents. However, respondents that live in Chicago feel safer downtown than suburban residents.

Overall, Cook County residents report feeling safe within their neighborhoods and the city. This contradicts the crime-ridden narrative expressed about the Chicago area by the Trump administration. Respondents within demographics, however, give us a greater insight into how characteristics can change perceptions of safety. This shows that demographic characteristics and the location respondents reside can affect how safe they feel at any given moment.

References

City of Chicago: Office of the Mayor. Fact Sheet: City of Chicago continues to record historic declines in violent crime under Mayor Brandon Johnson. August 25, 2025. https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/Press. Accessed March 1, 2026.

Past Crime Experiences

Shannon Letourneau, Renee Steinbrueck, Sebastian Vargas

Introduction

Crime is a highly salient issue for much of the public, due in part to the significant impact of crime on not just individuals but society as a whole. Crime can leave people physically harmed, cause them to lose valuable possessions, and be detrimental to their sense of peace or security. These factors can breed distrust and decrease feelings of safety among members of the community, which stands to damage relationships and the broader social fabric of a community. For these reasons, it is valuable to understand which crimes are most common and who among our neighbors are most vulnerable.

This section of the 2026 Cook County Community Survey asked respondents whether they had experienced four types of crime in the past year: 1) being physically attacked, 2) threatened in public, 3) sexually harassed in public, or 4) experiencing a theft. If a respondent reported having had a particular experience, they were then asked where that crime occurred: in the neighborhood they reside in or somewhere else. This allows us to assess the prevalence and location of different crimes among Cook County residents in the past year. Furthermore, we compare patterns in crime experiences across different subpopulations in Cook County tied to: ethnoracial identity, gender, and socioeconomic status (as measured by self-identification). Identifying potentially vulnerable populations allows for further analysis that can provide insight into how to better protect these groups. Overall, this data provides insight into Cook County residents and different sociodemographic groups in Cook County have experienced crime, which can be used to bring awareness to this issue and create initiatives to help protect potentially vulnerable groups.

Overall Response Distributions

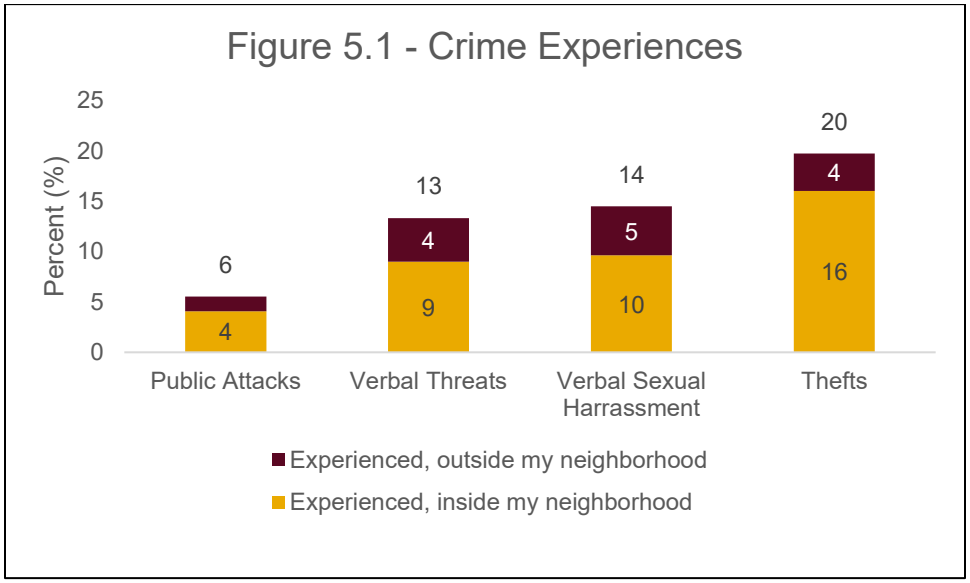


Figure 5.1 displays the percentage of respondents experiencing each type of crime: physical attacks, public threats, and unwanted sexual comments (which may heretofore be referred to as sexual harassment for the sake of brevity), and thefts. The most prevalent crime among individuals surveyed was theft, with nearly 1 in 5 respondents stating that they had been stolen from at least once within the past 12 months. Sexual harassment (14%) and public threats (13%) are slightly less common. Physical attacks were the least common crime experienced by far, experienced by 6% of those surveyed. It is notable that most people (68%) reported that they had not been the victim of a crime in the past 12 months.

Regarding data collected on the location of these events, most crimes occurred in the respondent's neighborhood. This is likely explained by the fact that people spend more time in their neighborhoods than in other areas. However, some crimes are more likely than others to occur in another location. Property crime was the least likely to occur outside of one's own neighborhood, with 19% of thefts happening elsewhere. Physical attacks are also less likely than other types of crime to happen outside one's neighborhood, with about 25% of attacks occurring in some other location. Sexual harassment was the most likely of any crime assessed to occur outside one's own neighborhood, at a rate of about 1 in 3. Similarly, approximately 30% of those who reported being verbally threatened indicated that the event occurred outside their neighborhood. These results seem consistent with the fact that threats and sexual harassment more often manifest as passing comments, whereas thefts and physical attacks require physical action, and thus more thought or premeditation, which could be associated with proximity and increased exposure. These conditions may make crimes which demand more physical effort more

likely to occur in one's own neighborhood rather than another location, as opposed to those that do not.

Demographic Breakdowns

Ethnoracial Identity

Understanding the relationship between race and the occurrence of people being victimized provides insight into whether certain ethnoracial groups are more likely to be victims of crime. We predict that white individuals are less likely to have experienced crime than people of color. In addition, among non-white respondents, our prediction is that black individuals will be the most likely to have experienced crime. This prediction is derived from systemic racism, and the legacy of discrimination and harm that black individuals have faced in the United States. Black Americans are significantly more likely than other ethnoracial groups to experience poverty (Semega et al 2018), and household poverty is associated with increased likelihood of victimization (Harrell et al 2014).

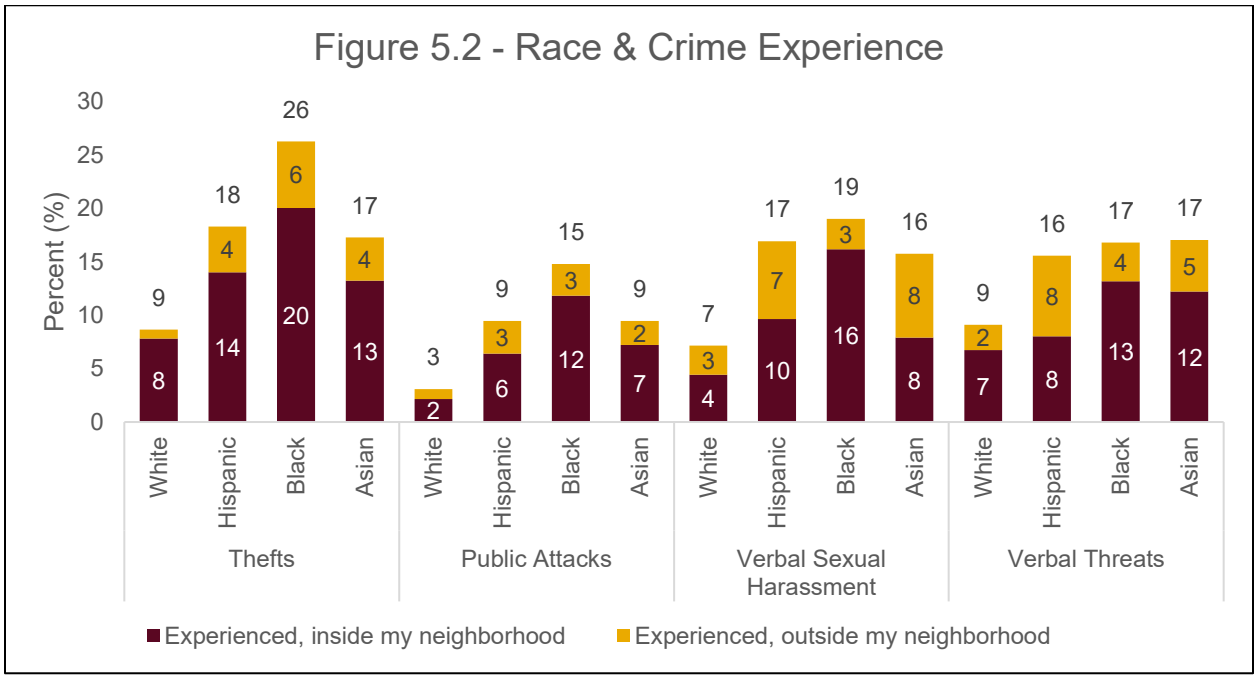
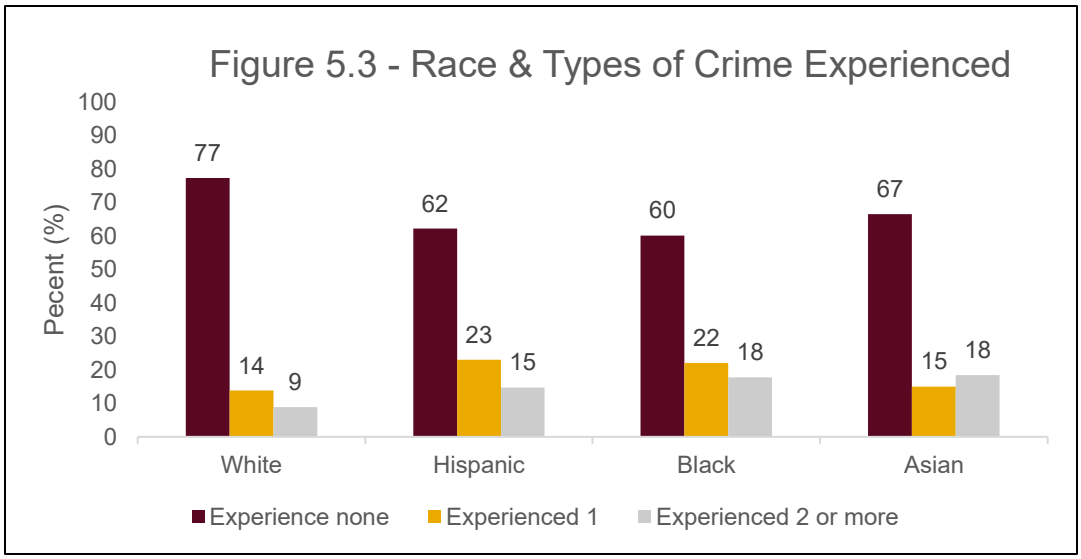


Figure 5.2 examines the crime experiences of respondents broken down by ethnoracial categories; white, Hispanic, black, and Asian. White respondents were significantly less likely to experience each type of crime (at less than 10% in each category) than respondents who identified as black, Hispanic, or Asian. Among people of color, Black respondents were more likely to be the victims of physical crimes (namely physical attacks [15%] and thefts [26%] than Hispanic or Asian respondents. The experiences of people of color are similar for verbal crimes. People of color reported approximately the same level of public verbal threats (16% to 17%) and sexual

harassment (ranging from 16% to 19%). There are several potential reasons why one might observe this pattern, one being neighborhood and community safety, which is supported by the evidence that black respondents are more likely than other groups assessed to experience crime, even passing ones such as threats and sexual harassment, in their neighborhoods. Compared to white families, black and Hispanic families require higher levels of income to live in similarly



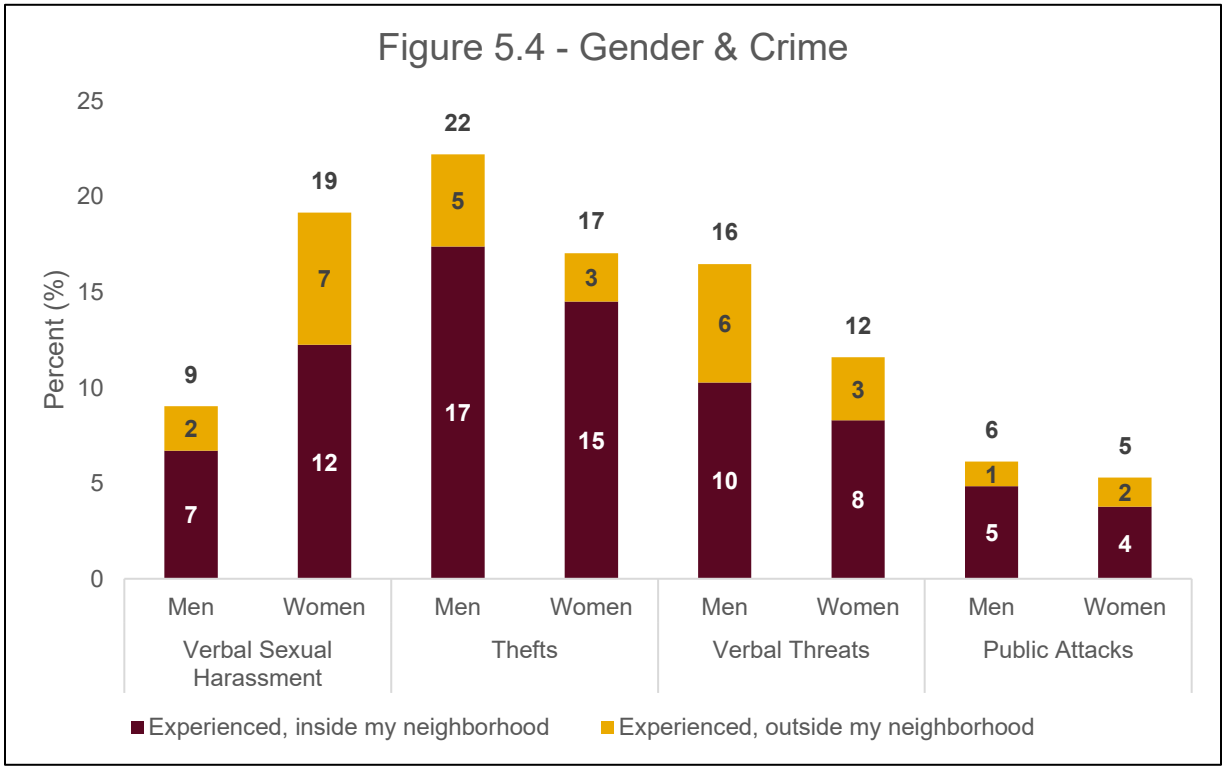
affluent neighborhoods (Reardon 2015). This barrier to entry results in increased numbers of black and Hispanic people living in low-income areas (Logan et al 2014), contributing to social problems through decreased access to resources (Beyer 2020) and increased exposure to crime.

Figure 5.3 examines how many types of crime respondents of different ethno-racial categories experienced. For all groups, the majority of individuals reported not having experienced any of the four crimes, with white respondents being the most likely to have experienced none (77%). Forty percent of black respondents report experiencing at least one crime in the last year, as well as 38% of Hispanic respondents and 33% of Asian respondents (compared to 23% of white respondents). Hispanic and black respondents experienced any crime at 38% and 40% respectively, Asian respondents at 33%, and white respondents (23%) were less likely to experience more types of crime. Respondents who identified as people of color were all more likely to have experienced two or more crimes (15% of Hispanic respondents, and 18% of black and Asian responses compared to 9% of white respondents. While it appears here than Asian respondents may be more likely to have experience two or more crimes than just one, it is important to note that the smaller sample size of Asian respondents means estimates for this group are less precise.

Gender

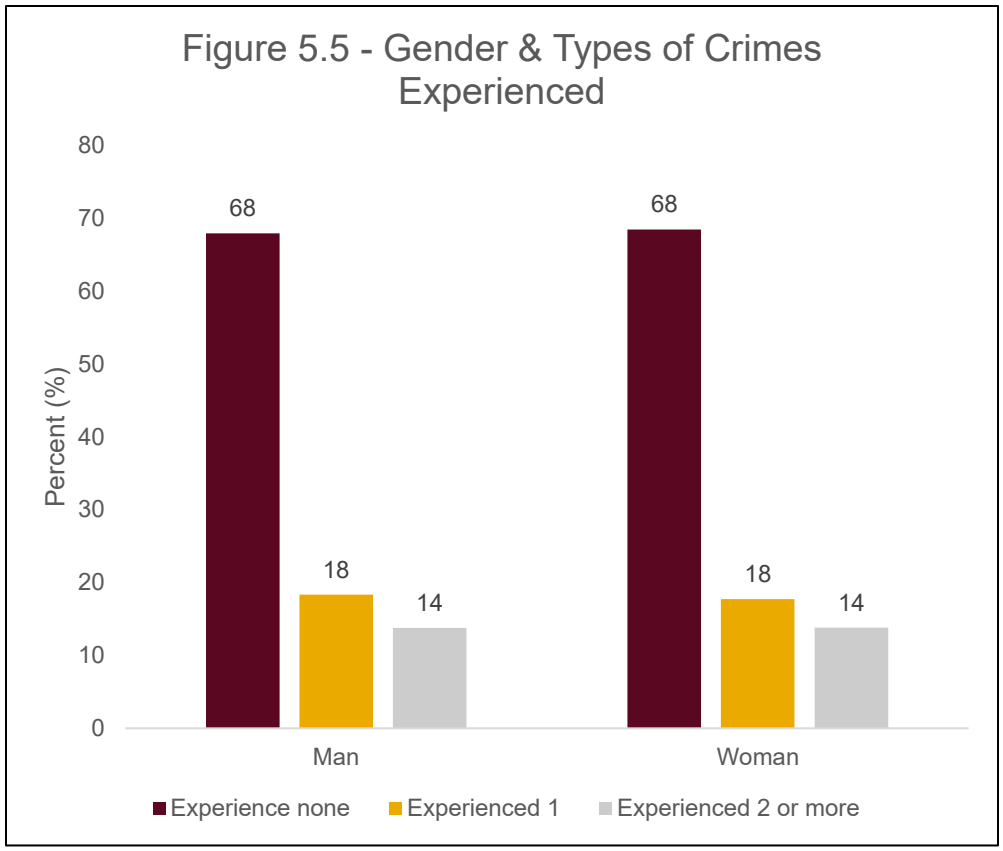
When comparing the experience of crimes by gender, we predict that there will be variations between different types of crimes. For being threatened, attacked, and having an item stolen, we predict that men will experience these crimes more than women. This prediction stems from the assumption than men may be more likely to engage in verbal confrontation that will then lead to physical conflict, while women are generally more averse to conflict (Björkqvist 2018). However, we predict that women will have a significantly higher rate of being spoken to in an inappropriate sexual manner than men. This predication is based on evidence and anecdotal experience that women are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment than men.

In Figure 5.4, we see gender differences in the types of crimes experienced. Male residents of Cook County are more likely to be the victims of theft, verbal threats, and physical attacks than are female residents. These gaps are wider for thefts and threats (22% & 16% of men and 17% & 12% of women, respectively) than for attacks (6% of men and 5% of women). However, female respondents were over twice as likely to have experienced sexual harassment



in the past year (19%) than their male counterparts (9%). This indicates significant disparities in the crime experiences of men and women in Cook County..

However, in Figure 5.5, both genders seem to have the same rate of overall crime experiences. This graph groups respondents first by gender and then by the number of crime categories they experienced (none of them, one, or two or more), and the responses of men and women are identical. Sixty eight percent of both male and female respondents reported that they had not experienced any of the crimes assessed in the past 12 months, 18% said they

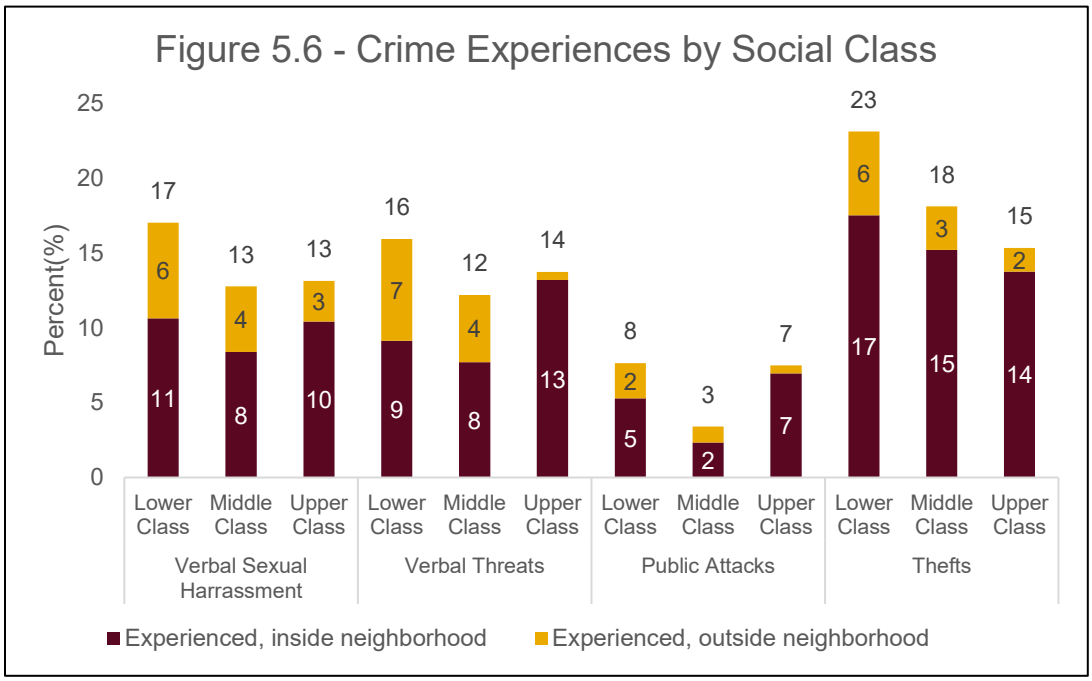


experienced one, and 14% experienced two or more. In other words, the amount which women experience sexual harassment is enough to close the gap with men in overall crime experiences, despite men experiencing all other types of crime assessed at higher rates.

Social Class

Additionally, we predict that the relationship between social class and crime varies by type of crime. For threats and attacks, we predict that lower-class individuals will be more likely to experience these types of crimes because they live in less safe neighborhoods, given the relationship between neighborhood poverty and crime (Harrell et al 2014). However, having an item stolen is predicted to occur more often among people of a higher class, as they have more wealth which makes them more desirable targets for theft. Finally, we predict that sexual harassment will have little variation between classes. This predication stems from the assumption that victims of sexual harassment are not chosen based on economic status and instead based on who looks most vulnerable or other circumstantial factors like surroundings at the time of an incident. Unlike rape and sexual assault, where the assailant is more often familiar with the victim prior to the attack (Jones 2004), victims of verbal sexual harassment often experience it at the hands of relative strangers (Raj 2024).

Figure 5.6 displays a bivariate distribution of a social class variable made using self-reported socioeconomic class data from respondents, and all crime experience variables. The socioeconomic status variable was created by merging those who identified as upper-middle and

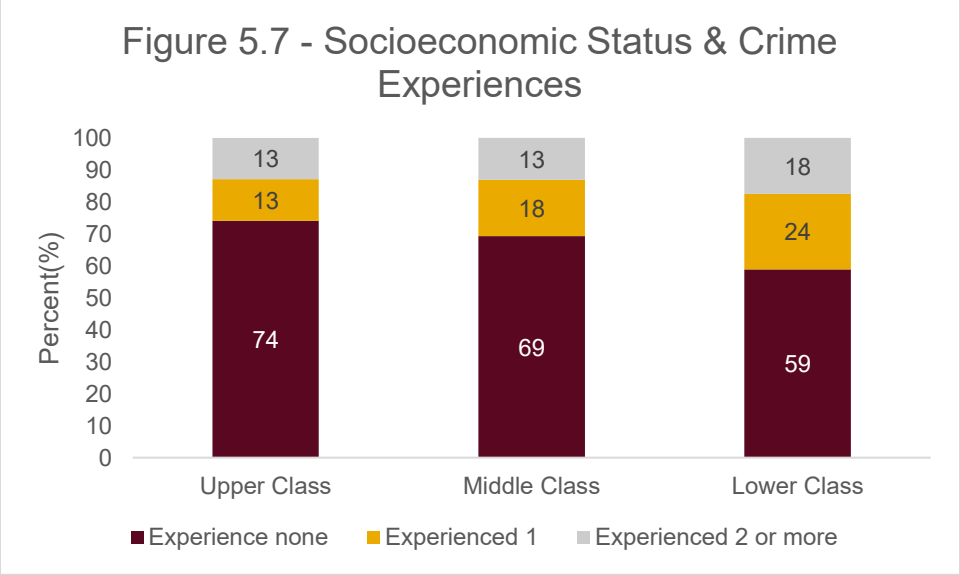


upper class into one category (now upper class), and well as those who identified as lower class and working class (now lower class), creating a three-response variable. In contrast to our hypothesis, those who reported being lower class found themselves experiencing theft about 8 percentage points more, than respondents who said they were upper class (23% total compared

to 15% total). This could be due to those of lower class having less money to pay for more secure ways of protecting their property and/or living in areas where it may occur more frequently. For all other crimes there is a slight difference in distribution. For sexual harassment we see that lower class respondents are still the highest at 17% affected, however it's also shown that middle class and upper-class respondents have a similar experience of it at 3% to 4%.

This pattern continues when looking at respondents who were threatened, lower class respondents are still the highest affected at 16%, and middle class and upper class are still affected at similar rates 13%. The data that stands out most appears to be the experience of an attack as middle class respondents reported being attacked the least at 3% compared to the other socioeconomic classes who experienced it at 8%. Possible explanations for this similarity could be those in lower classes live near or in more precarious places, and those in the upper class can afford to dress nicer, possibly inviting possible conflict, with middle class having neither, explaining why rates of victimization are lower.

Figure 5.7 looks at the overall crime experiences of respondents compared to reported



themselves to be lower class were often more likely to experience crime compared to respondents who put themselves as higher class. Approximately 42% of respondents who reported being lower class experienced one or more crimes, as opposed to 31% of middle-class respondents and 26% of upper-class respondents. There are many factors which may contribute to this, one being neighborhood safety. If an individual is wealthier, they may be more likely to live in an area which is more expensive and potentially better secured than someone who does not have the same level of wealth and therefore has access to choice.

Discussion

Theft was the most reported crime among respondents, at 20%, whereas public physical attacks appear to be the least prevalent at 5%. Crimes which do not require physical action, namely public threats and public sexual harassment, occur at similar rates. Cook County residents are most likely to experience crime in the neighborhood they live in, but nonphysical crimes are more often experienced outside one's own neighborhood than their physical counterparts. However, not all Cook County residents experience crime in the same way.

Residents of Cook County who identify as people of color are more likely to be the victims of crime than their white counterparts, with black residents being most affected in every category but verbal threats. Men are more likely to experience all types of crime except for sexual harassment, which is experienced by women at nearly double the rate than that of men. Individuals of lower socioeconomic status are generally more likely to experience crime than their more well-off counterparts, but those of higher socioeconomic status were more likely to experience crime within their own neighborhoods.

Crime is a key issue for much of the American public, and the residents of Cook County are no different. Understanding the experiences that Cook County residents have regarding crime can help identify groups and populations that may be particularly vulnerable to victimization. This increased capacity for identification of vulnerable populations can help to inform policy makers and community leaders and allow them to better ensure the safety of their constituents and neighbors. These factors make it all the more important to accurately analyze and explain this data in a way that can be used to meaningfully help inform journalists, policymakers, and the public at large about how crime impacts their community. Working to raise awareness and meaningfully address social issues like poverty and education disparities will, among other positive effects, reduce rates of crime and victimization in Cook County.

References

Beyer, D. (2020). The Economic State of Black America in 2020. U.S. House of Representatives, Joint Economic Committee. https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/ccf4dbe2-810a-44f8-b3e7-14f7e5143ba6/economic-state-of-black-america-2020.pdf

Björkqvist, K. (2018). Gender differences in aggression. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 19, 39-42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.03.030.

Harrell, E., Langton, L., Berzofsky, M., Couzens, L., & Smiley-McDonald, H. (2014). Household Poverty and Nonfatal Violent Victimization, 2008-2012. U.S. Department of Justice, *Bureau of Justice Statistics*. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/hpnvv0812.pdf

Jones, J. S., Wynn, B. N., Kroeze, B., Dunnuck, C., & Rossman, L. (2004). Comparison of sexual assaults by strangers versus known assailants in a community-based population. *The American journal of emergency medicine*, *22*(6), 454–459. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajem.2004.07.020

Logan, J. R., Stults, B. D., & McKane, R. (2025). Contributors to concentrated poverty of Blacks and Hispanics in metropolitan America, 1980-2020. *Journal of urban affairs*, 47(6), 2149–2169. https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2023.2250031

Reardon, S.F., Fox, L., & Townsend, J. (2015). Neighborhood Income Composition by Race and Income, 1990-2009. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 660(1), 78-97.

Semega, Jessica, Melissa Kollar, John Creamer, and Abinash Mohanty, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-266(RV), *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2020. https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-266.pdf

Political Priorities and Participation

Matthew Erlec, Nick Jindrich, Elise Swartzmiller

Introduction

It is important for policymakers to understand Cook County residents' political priorities, as well as who is most likely to actively advocate for those preferences. Identifying which issues residents view as most important and how their political views vary across groups can help policymakers better understand where concerns are concentrated and how priorities differ across groups. Additionally, examining local political participation reveals how connected residents are to local governance and whether some groups are more engaged than others.

Here, we begin by analyzing what residents believe is the most important issue facing the county and how they describe their political ideology. We will then examine how those views differ between age groups and residents living in the city of Chicago and those living in suburban Cook County, as well as across political party identification for the most important issue only. Then, we will analyze participation in local politics over the past 12 months and examine differences in participation across age groups, Chicago and suburban residency, and between respondents with and without children under the age of 18.

Overall Response Distributions

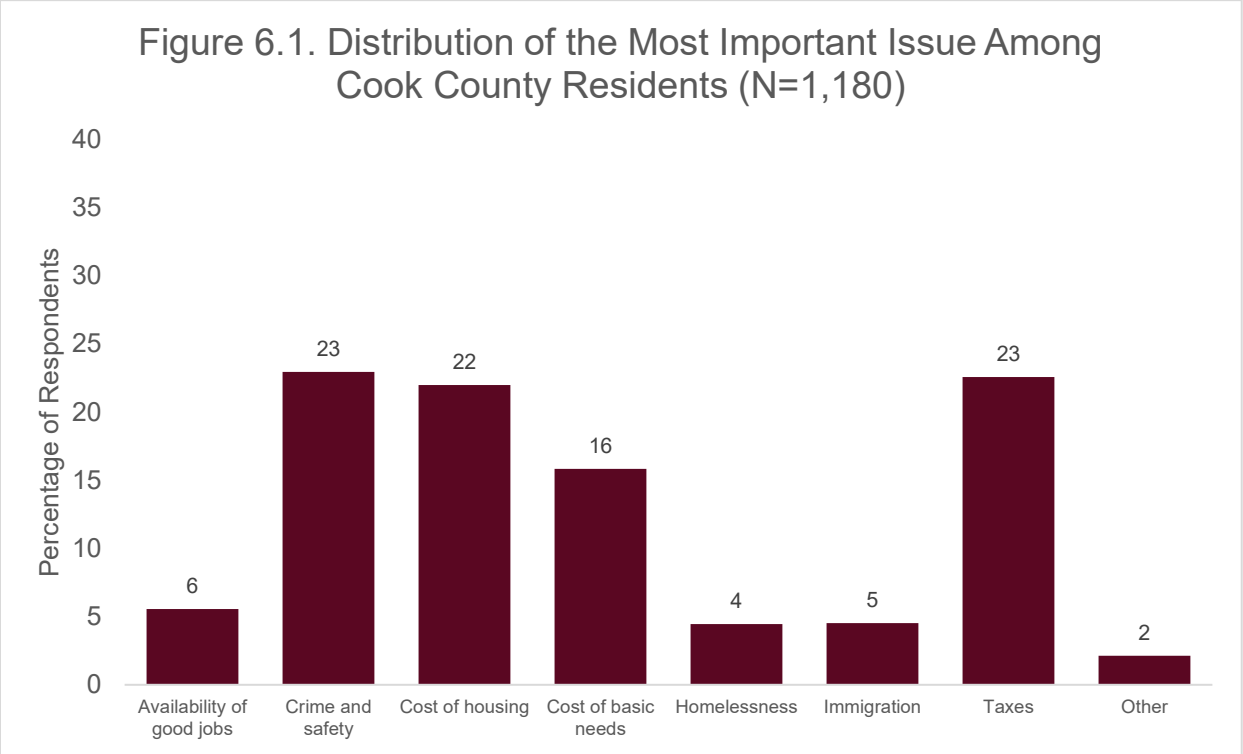
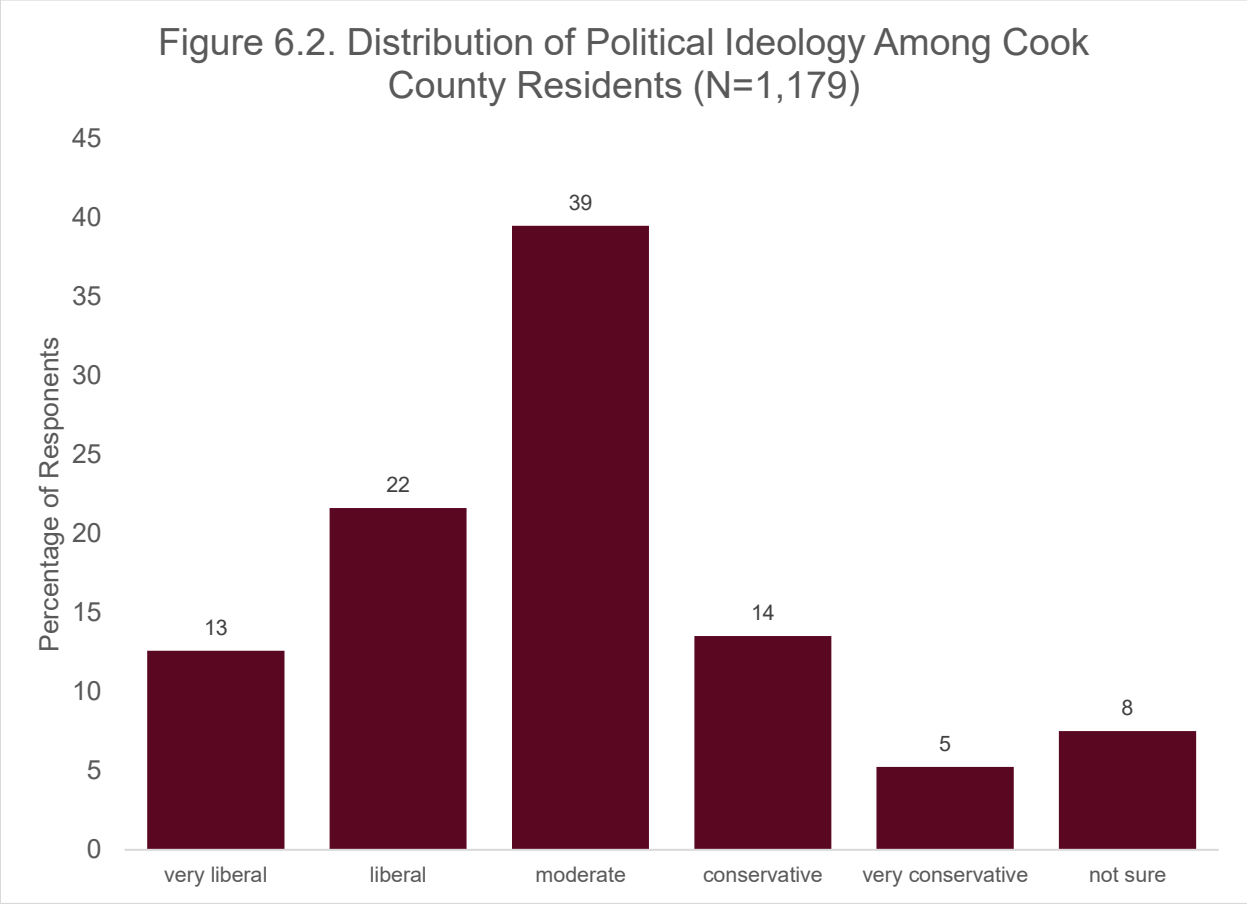


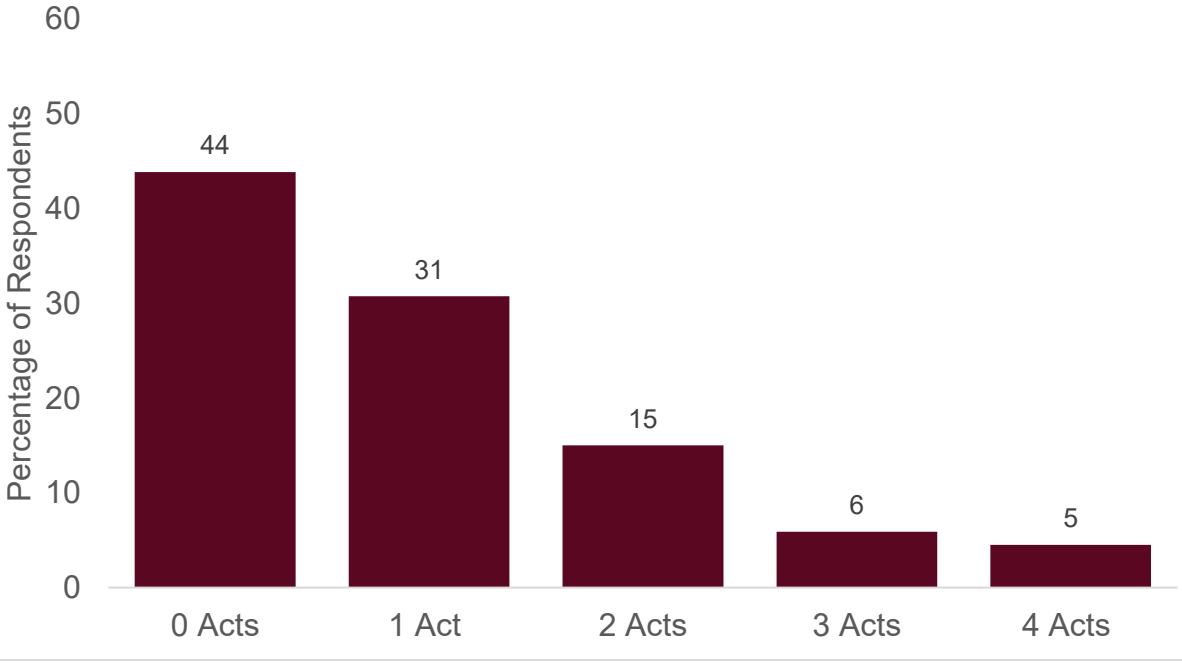
Figure 6.1 displays responses to the question asking respondents to identify the most important issue facing Cook County residents. A substantial share of respondents identify crime and safety as the most important issue, with 23% selecting this category. However, residents appear to be most concerned about economic issues. Taxes (23%), cost of housing (22%), and cost of basic needs make up 63% of respondents together, showcasing that a majority of respondents care about household economic issues. In contrast, a small share of participants selected homelessness (4%), immigration (5%), or the availability of good jobs (6%). Overall, most residents view economic concerns and public safety as the most pressing issues facing Cook County.



Respondents were also asked to place their political ideology on a scale from very liberal to very conservative. Figure 6.2 shows that liberal-leaning identifications are more common than conservative ones, with 35% of respondents identifying as liberal or very liberal compared to 19% identifying as conservative or very conservative. However, the most frequently selected category is moderate, with 39% of respondents placing themselves in this group, indicating that moderate identification is more common than either ideological extreme. Additionally, only 18% of respondents identify as either very liberal or very conservative, suggesting that relatively few respondents place themselves at the ideological extremes. This variation in ideological orientation provides a baseline that helps us better interpret differences across age, political party, and residency location.

Respondents were also asked whether in the past 12 months they had engaged in four types of participation involving city or county political issues. Forty nine percent discussed a local issue with someone in their neighborhood, 19% contacted or tried to contact a local official, 16% attended a meeting, and 13% protested. For simplicity, the forthcoming analyses will use respondents' total number of local participatory acts.

Figure 6.3. Distribution of Local Political Participatory Acts Among Cook County Residents (N=1,180)



In terms of participating in local politics, Cook County residents are more likely to do so than not, as 56% of respondents engage in at least one type. Participation appears to be largely driven by residents talking to their neighbors about local political issues, with half of respondents saying they did, compared to between 13% and 19% for all other kinds. Additionally, residents tend to engage in fewer acts, with only 5% doing all four.

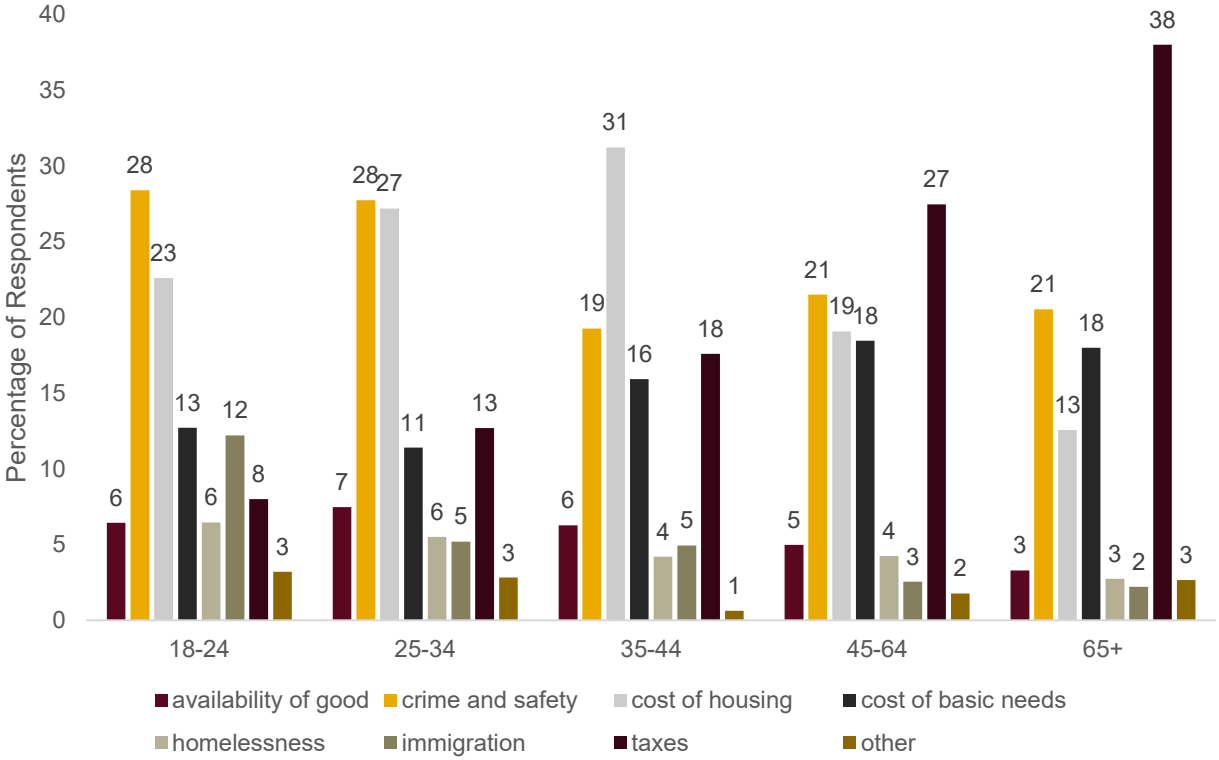
Demographic Breakdowns

Most Important Issue and Political Ideology

First, we will consider how political priorities vary with age. We expect political issues to differ based on age group since individuals experience different challenges at different stages of life. For instance, younger people may be more concerned about public safety as they are more likely to use public transportation, while older people may care more about taxes as they are more likely to own property and pay property taxes. Additionally, we expect housing costs to be particularly important for younger individuals who have not yet had the opportunity to purchase a home. These expectations are supported by prior research. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that people ages 18 to 29 make up 18% of the population but account for 29% of violent crime victims, suggesting younger residents may be more sensitive to public safety concerns. The Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University (2023) reports that approximately 79% of

households age 65 and over are homeowners and notes that property taxes are a significant and sometimes rising burden for older homeowners, particularly those on fixed incomes.

Figure 6.4. Distribution of the Most Important Issue Among Cook County Residents by Age Group (N=1,180)



This figure illustrates the most important issue facing Cook County residents based on their age group. We compare the 18 to 24 year old group, the 25 to 34 year old group, the 35 to 44 year old group, the 45 to 64 year old group, and the 65 year old group and above. We expect the political issues to differ based on the age group since they experience different challenges. For instance, younger people could be more concerned about issues related to public safety as they are more likely to use public transportation, while older people could likely care more about taxes as they are more likely to own their property and thus pay property taxes. These expectations are supported by data from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, which reports that persons ages 18 to 29 make up 18% of the population but account for 29% of violent crime victims, suggesting that younger residents may be more sensitive to public safety concerns. The Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University (2023) also reports that approximately 79% of households age 65 and over are homeowners and notes that property taxes are a significant and sometimes rising cost burden for older homeowners, particularly those living on fixed incomes.

This figure illustrates the most important issue facing Cook County residents based on their age group. We compare the 18 to 24 year old group, the 25 to 34 year old group, the 35 to 44 year old group, the 45 to 64 year old group, and the 65 year old group and above.

The results reveal clear differences by age. Younger adults are more likely than older adults to consider crime and safety the most important issue. Twenty-eight percent of those ages 18 to 24 and twenty-eight percent of those ages 25 to 34 consider crime and safety the most important issue compared with 21% of those ages 45 to 64 and 21% of those 65 years old and above.

Conversely, older adults are considerably more likely than young adults to consider taxes the most important issue. Thirty-eight percent of those 65 years old and above consider taxes the most important issue compared with 27% of those ages 45 to 64, 18% of those ages 35 to 44, 13% of those ages 25 to 34, and only 8% of those ages 18 to 24, creating a large gap of 30 percentage points between the youngest and the oldest groups.

Housing costs are a major concern among younger and middle-aged populations, with 23% of those ages 18 to 24, 27% of those ages 25 to 34, and 31% of those ages 35 to 44 considering the cost of housing the most important issue, while there is a noticeable decline among those ages 65 and above. This pattern aligns with our expectation that younger individuals face greater barriers to homeownership and rising housing expenses.

Concerns about the cost of basic needs also show a modest increase with age, particularly among middle-aged and older groups. Immigration and homelessness have low support levels across all age groups, though younger populations prioritize them slightly more.

Overall, the data supports our expectation that political priorities vary across age groups. In contrast to the salience of crime and housing for younger residents, taxes are a major priority for older respondents, indicating the role of age in shaping how residents think about problems.

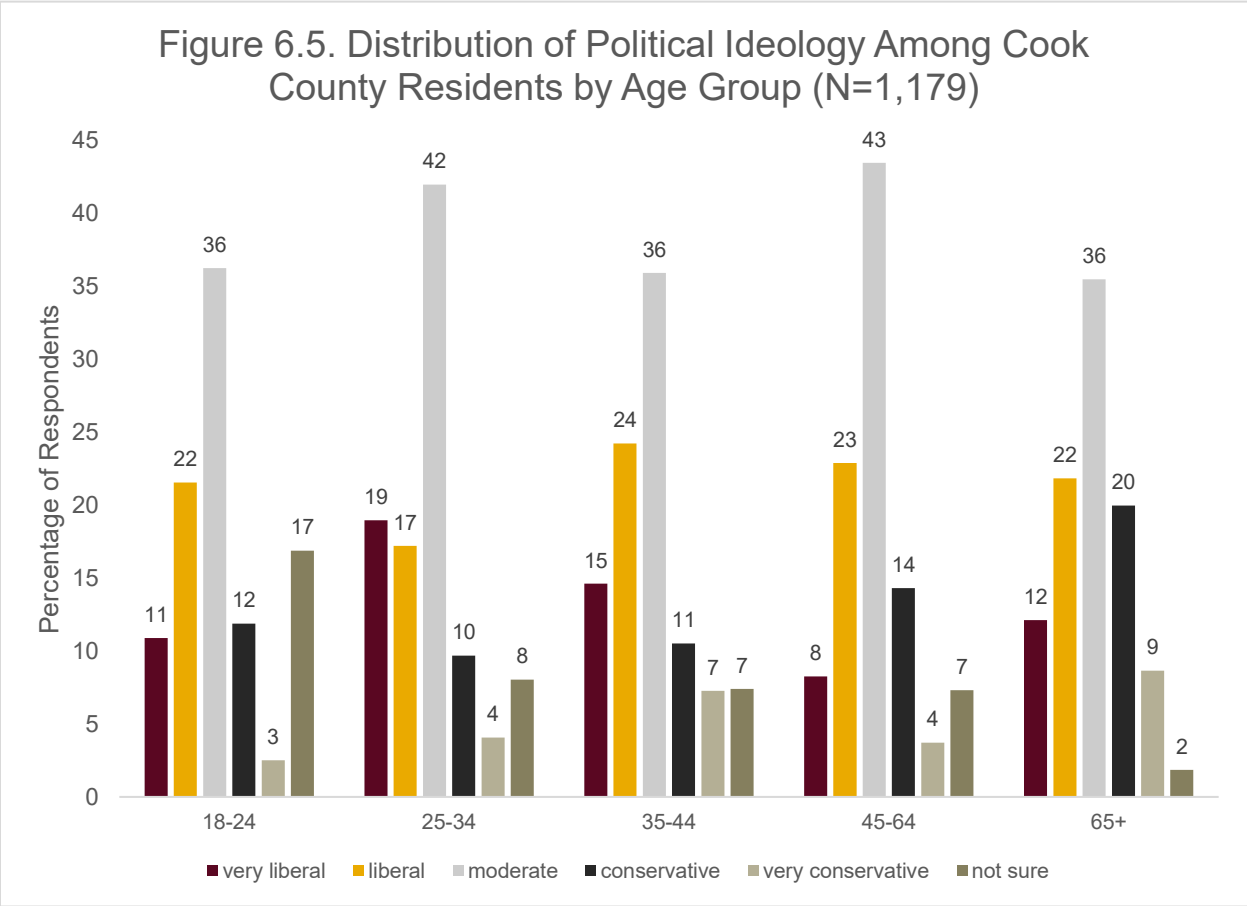
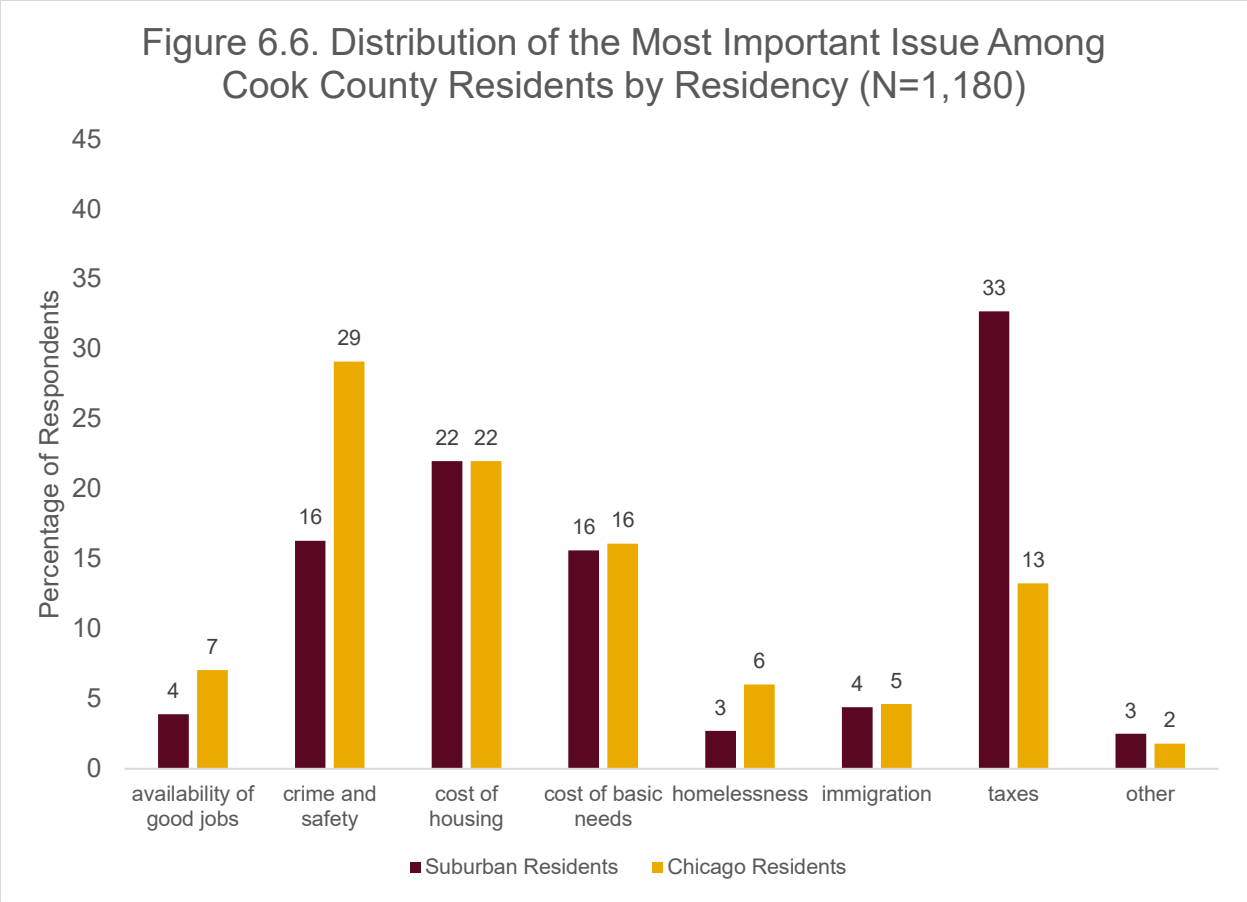


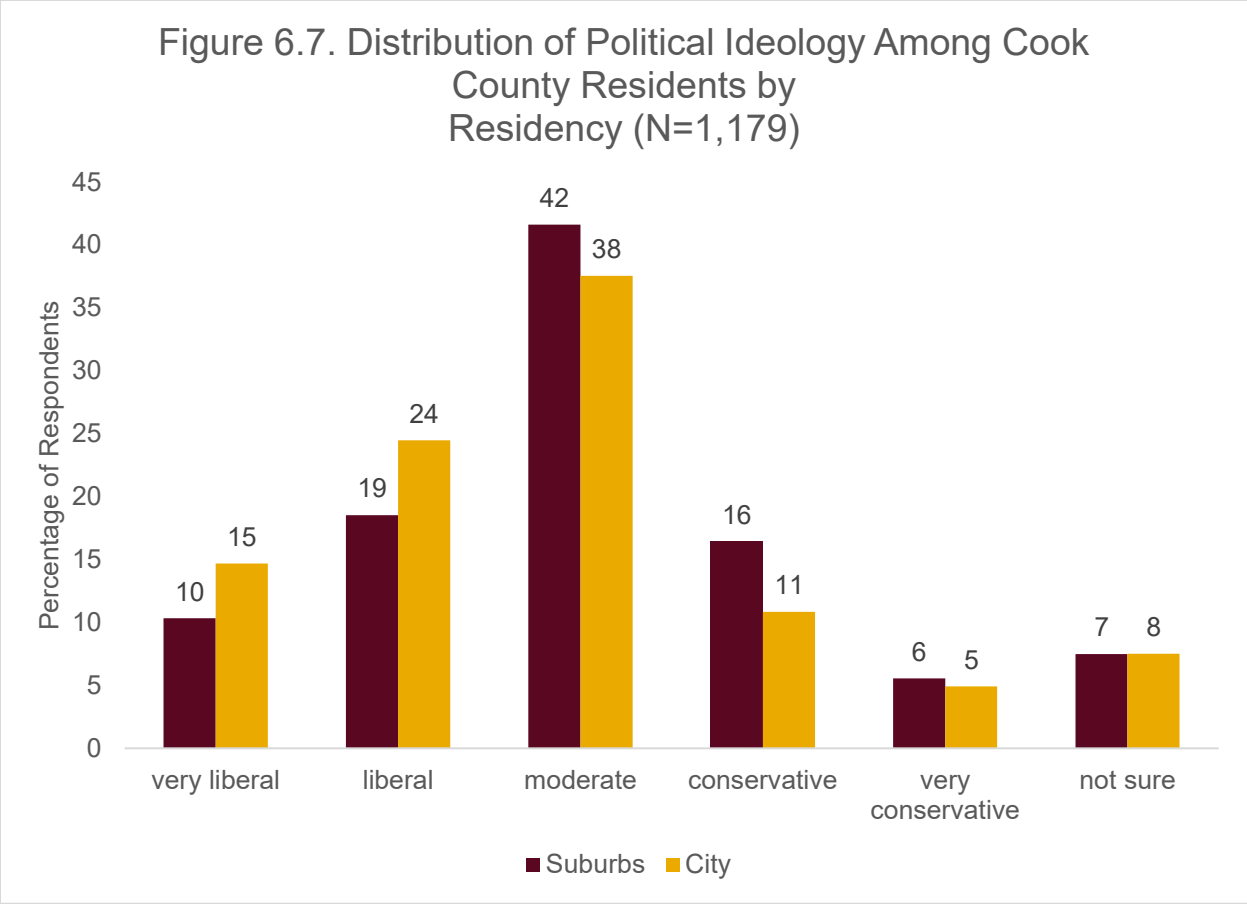
Figure 6.5 shows that the largest differences across age groups appear at the ideological ends. Residents ages 18–34 are much more likely to identify as very liberal (16%) than those 55+ (9%), while the 35–54 group falls in between (13%). In contrast, older residents (55+) are notably more likely to identify as conservative (19%) than both younger groups (10% for ages 18–34 and 35–54). The 55+ group is also slightly more likely to identify as very conservative compared to younger respondents. Finally, younger residents are more likely to select “not sure” than older residents, suggesting greater ideological uncertainty among the youngest age group.

Next, we consider differences between Chicago and suburban residents. When identifying their most important issue, we expect suburban residents to be more likely to select taxes. Suburbs usually have increased levels of homeownership and property tax rates, meaning that they tend to have greater tax burdens (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2023). As a result, we believe that this issue will be more salient for suburban Cook County residents. For residents of Chicago, we predict they will be more likely to identify crime or homelessness as their most important issue as urban residents tend to prioritize issues related to crime and social welfare (Parker et al., 2018)



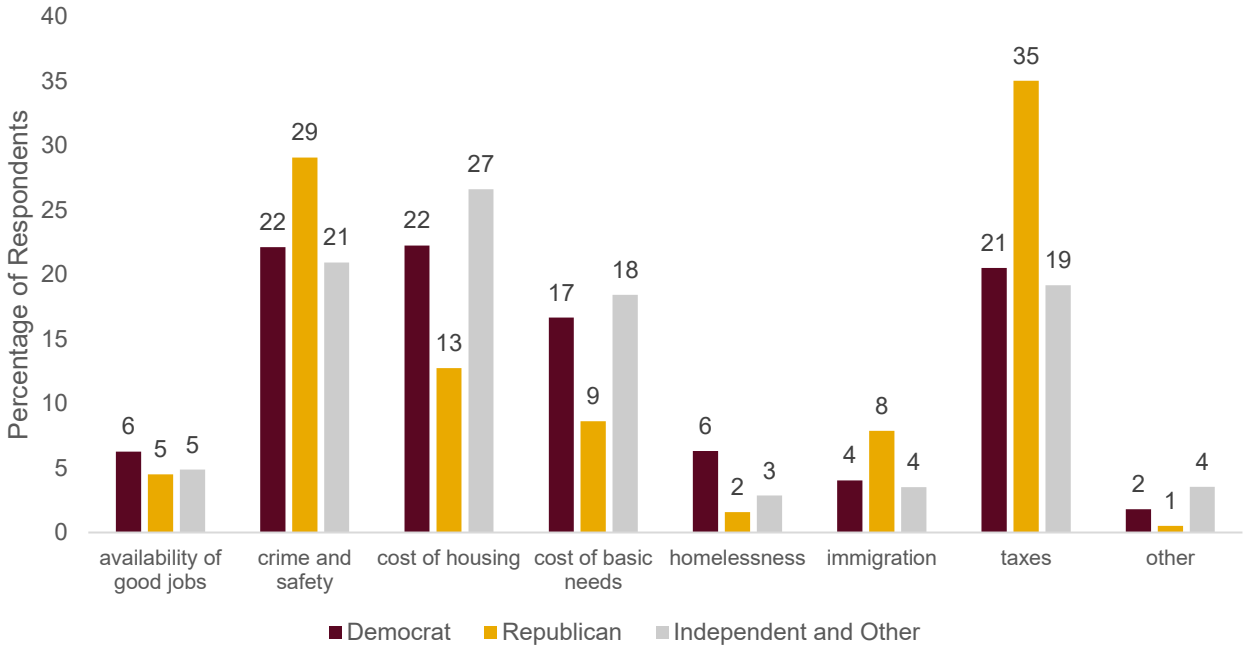
The results in Figure 6.6 show that suburban residents were much more likely to select taxes as their most important issue, with 33% selecting it compared to only 13% of Chicago residents. Additionally, 29% of Chicago residents, compared to only 16% of suburban residents, considered crime and safety most important. Similarly, Chicago residents were twice as likely to choose homelessness as the most important issue. These results are consistent with our hypothesis and display that residency location has strong influence on issue priority.

Furthermore, we expect Chicago residents to be more likely to identify as liberal and suburban residents more likely to identify as moderate or conservative. Pew Research Center analyses consistently show that urban residents report more liberal political orientations, while suburban residents exhibit more ideologically mixed or centrist profiles (Pew Research Center 2018). We expect that Cook County will mirror broader patterns in political values.



The results in Figure 6.7 show clear differences in political ideology by residency location. Chicago residents are more likely than suburban residents to identify as very liberal, 15% compared to 10%, and liberal with 24% compared to 19%. In contrast, suburban residents are more likely to identify as conservative, with 16% selecting this category compared to 11% of Chicago residents. Moderates make up the largest share in both groups, though moderation is more common among suburban residents (42%) than among Chicago residents (38%). Very conservative identification is relatively uncommon in both groups but is slightly higher among suburban residents. Overall, these findings are consistent with our expectations and suggest that residency location is associated with meaningful differences in political ideology.

Figure 6.8 Distribution of the Most Important Issue Among Cook County Residents by Political Party (N=1,180)



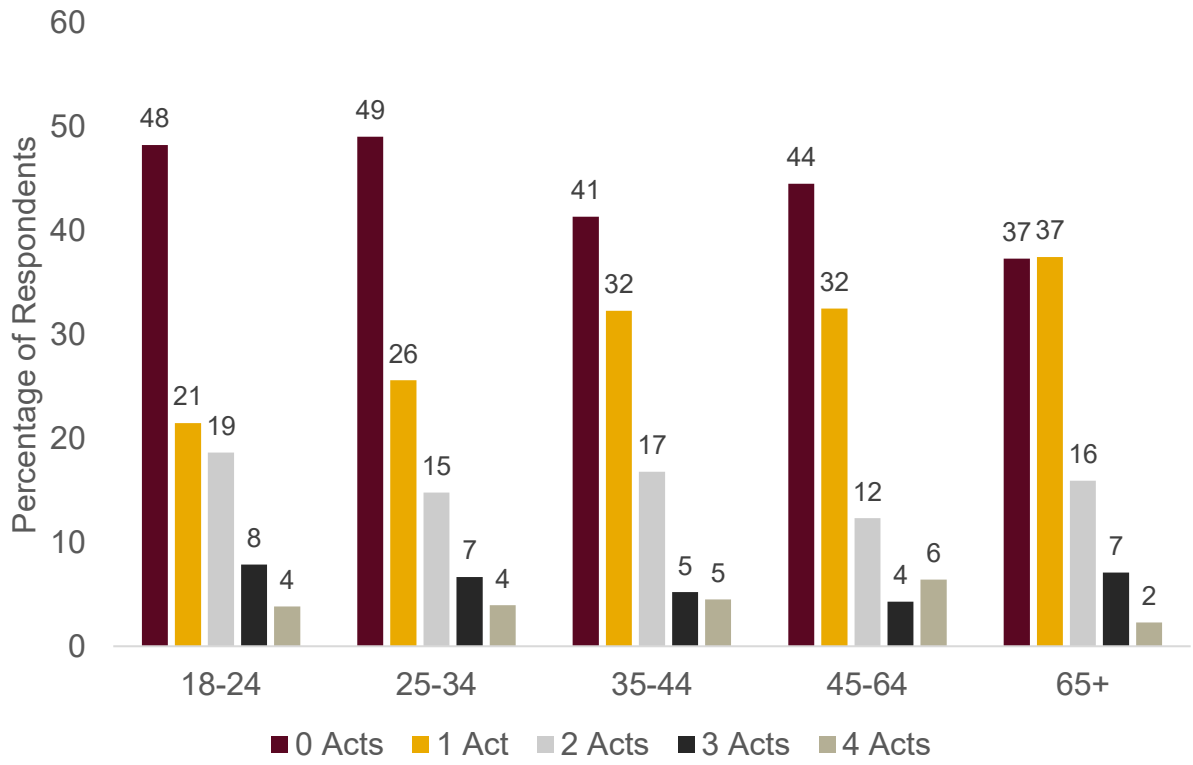
This figure shows the differences in opinions about the most important issue in Cook County amongst residents based on their party affiliation. The results from the figure indicate that the partisan groups hold different priorities. We expect Republicans to prioritize taxes, crime and safety, and immigration as these are issues generally focused on by the Republican Party at the national level, while Democrats will likely focus on the cost of basic necessities and the cost of housing. This expectation is consistent with Pew Research Center (2024), which finds that 76% of Republicans prioritize immigration and 68% prioritize reducing crime, compared to 39% and 47% of Democrats, while Democrats are substantially more likely to prioritize reducing health care costs (70% vs. 49% of Republicans) and dealing with problems of the poor (55% vs. 31%). Taxes emerged as the most important issue in the county among 35% of Republicans and only 21% of Democrats and Independents. This shows that there are significant partisan differences in attitudes about fiscal topics with a Democrats are more likely than Republicans to consider housing cost to be the most important issue in the county, with 22% of Democrats choosing housing cost compared to only 13% of Republicans. On the issue of the cost of basic necessities, Democrats (17%) and Independents (18%) are more likely to consider it the most important issue in the county compared to Republicans (9%).notable difference of 14 percentage points between Democrats and Republicans.

It is evident from the figure that crime and safety are considered the most important issue in the county by all three groups. At 29%, Republicans are also more likely to consider it the most important issue in the county compared to Democrats and Independents who sat at 22%. Although Republicans are more likely to consider immigration the most important issue in the county at 8%, Democrats are more likely to consider homelessness the most important issue in the county at 6%. Economic and fiscal priorities vary significantly among the three groups in the county. This shows that the party to which a resident belongs affects their perception of these issues in the County. Notably, crime is an issue in the County that is prioritized across party lines.

Political Participation

We expect that as people age, they will have higher rates of participation. As they get older, it is likely that people will be able to accumulate knowledge and experience with local issues. Ultimately, this might make them feel more comfortable and less intimidated about participating.

Figure 6.9. Distribution of Local Political Participatory Acts by Age Group Among Cook County Residents (N=1,180)



The results in Figure 6.9 showcase differences in participation across age groups. Among respondents ages 18 to 24 and 25 to 34, only half reported participation in the past year. In contrast, respondents ages 35 to 44 and 45 to 64 show higher levels of engagement, with larger shares reporting one or more participatory act (59% and 56%). However, residents ages 65 and

older stand out as the most engaged group, with the highest share reporting some degree of participation (63%) Overall, these patterns are consistent with our hypothesis and indicate that political participation generally increases with age.

Additionally, there are key differences in the utilization of different participatory methods across age groups. Younger participants appear less likely than other groups to talk to neighbors about local issues, while individuals over 65 are less likely to protest. Only 44% of respondents ages 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 talked to a neighbor about a local political issue, compared to 51% of respondents 35 to 44, 48% from 45 to 64, and 58% of those over 65. One reason might be the life stage of younger people shifting conversations toward education, children, and early career experiences. In contrast, only 7% of respondents over 65 protested, while 12% did in the next closest group. This could be because of the physical demands associated with protesting, such as standing for long periods, being more salient.

Next, we predict that people living in Chicago will be more likely to participate. Since cities tend to be more concentrated, urban residents might be more likely to have places to participate closer by, such as political offices, easing the burden and effort needed to do so.

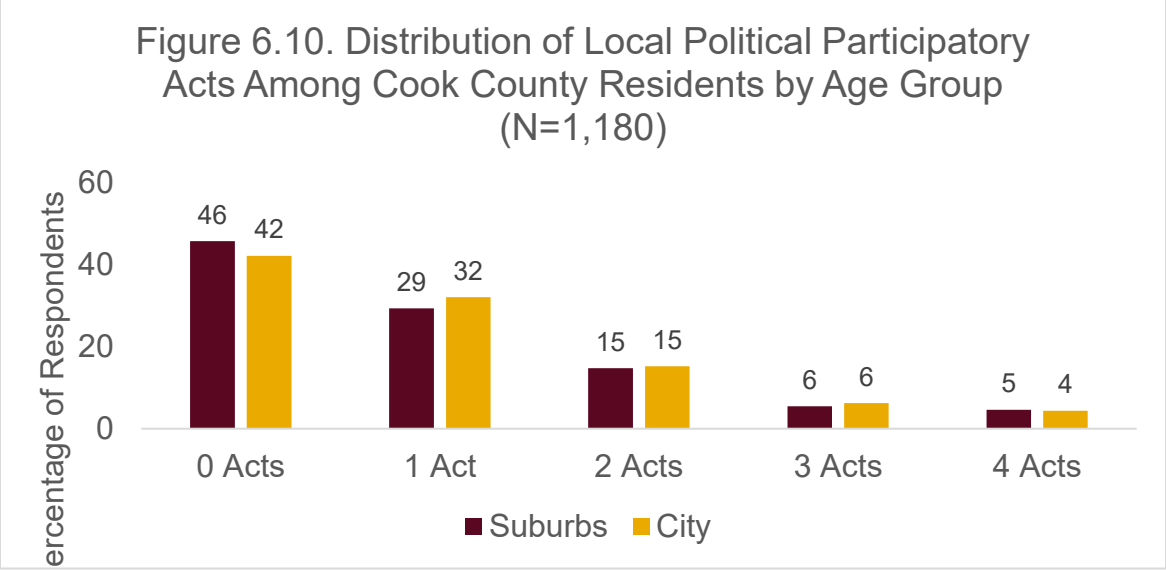
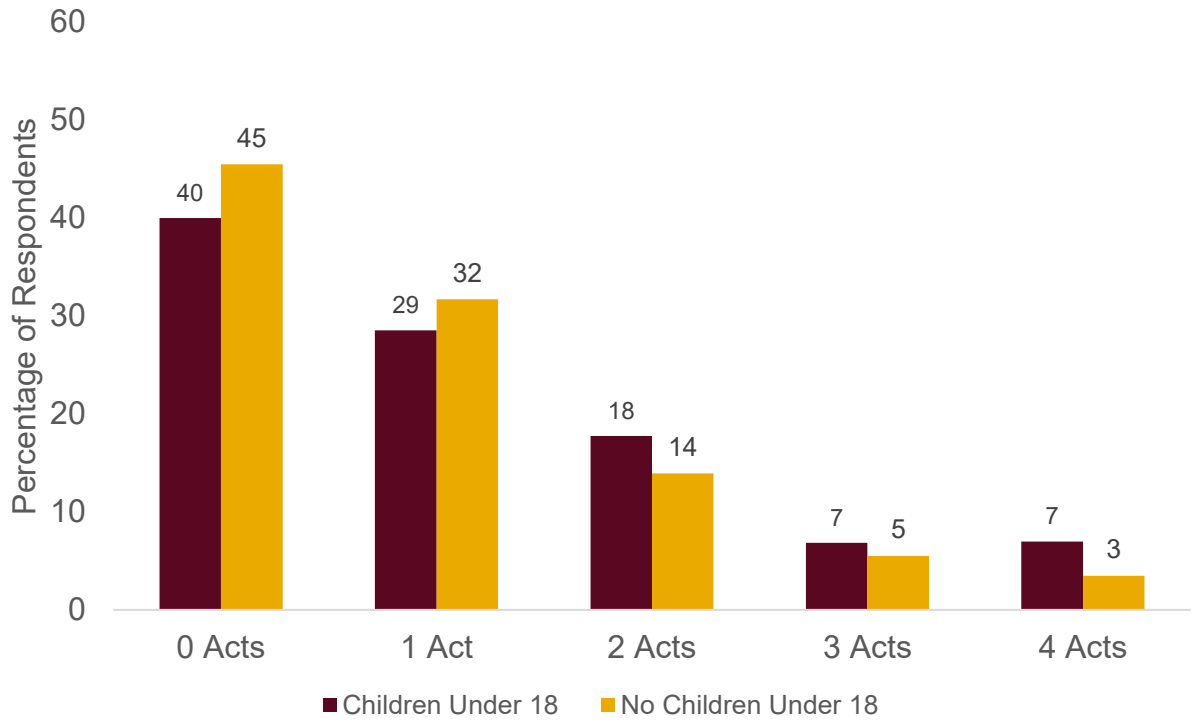


Figure 6.10 shows that city residents are slightly more likely to engage in some degree of participation. While 54% of suburban residents report one or more participatory acts, that value is 58% for Chicago residents. While this difference is small, it aligns with our prediction that Chicago residents are more likely to participate. However, this difference appears to be tied to protesting, with 14% of Chicago residents compared to only 11% of suburban ones taking part. This could potentially have to do with Chicago's walkability being more conducive to protests.

Finally, we expect that people with children under 18 will tend to participate less overall. Children often require a lot of time and energy, including getting to and from school and events, helping with homework, and being supervised. As a result, participating might be only possible through less time-intensive means, such as talking to a neighbor, or not at all.

Figure 6.11. Distribution of Local Political Participatory Acts Among Cook County Residents by Parental Status (N=1,180)



Interestingly, figure 6.11 suggests that residents with children under 18 tend to participate at slightly higher rates than those without. Whereas 55% of non-parents engaged in some form of participation, that number is 60% for parents. This appears to be driven by parents being more likely to protest and attend a local meeting, which they are six and ten percentage points more likely to do. As a result, those broader differences might be explained by increased social networks from their children's school and activities, which could make them more aware of protest opportunities, as well as many of them having more reason to go to a school board meeting due to having a child in school.

Discussion

In this module, we sought to collect data on citizens of Cook County's ideological political affiliations, their salient political priorities, and the ways in which they locally participate in the

politics of Cook County. Nearly equal numbers of respondents in the County said that they prioritize the issues of crime and safety (23%), taxes (23%), and the cost of housing (22%). The cost of basic needs lagged just behind. Ideologically, the majority of the County describes themselves as holding moderate beliefs. Liberals take second place for popularity in the County while conservatives lag behind significantly. Political participation is present in the County but it is uneven. Although a slight majority reports engaging in at least one participatory act, those who sustain multiple acts are very limited.

We find that age is a significant factor in shaping both political priorities and engagement. Younger residents are more likely to prioritize crime and housing costs, while older residents are much more concerned about taxes. Political participation increases with age and is more prevalent amongst parents, revealing that the stage of one's life and how embedded they are in institutions drives participation. Residents in the City of Chicago and the surrounding suburbs have differences in what issues they view as most salient. Suburban residents were particularly likely to cite taxes as their top concern, while in Chicago crime and safety were most likely to be selected as the most pressing topic. Chicago residents were also more likely to cite homelessness as the most important problem than suburban residents. The political party affiliation of residents drives their concerns as well. Republicans show a large share focused on prioritizing taxes, while many Democrats are worried about the cost of housing. They both, however, have a notable focus on crime, with Republicans being slightly more concerned. This suggests a clear partisan divide on fiscal issues, with Republicans prioritizing taxes more heavily while Democrats place greater emphasis on cost-related concerns, even as crime and safety remains a shared priority across party lines.

We interpret these findings as having multi-faceted implications. There are shared concerns across the county amongst all groups, particularly on the issues of safety and affordability. This implies that residents are focused on day-to-day tangible issues as opposed to abstract political debates. However, demographic and geographic differentiators show that the pressures of these issues are not uniform. Younger adults have distinct constraints from those experienced by older, retired individuals, while urban residents differ from those in the suburbs who often own their homes. Political engagement increases with age and parenthood, indicating that those who rely on public institutions for senior services and entitlements or public education for their children are more likely to articulate their concerns. Cook County as a whole is not ideologically extreme but instead leans moderate in political beliefs. Policymakers might consider this when introducing or weighing out different solutions in the County. While the County is

demographically diverse, most people are concerned with the most immediately pressing issues that impact their financial livelihood and ability to live safely.

References

Housing America's older adults 2023 | joint center for housing studies. (n.d.). https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/housing-americas-older-adults-2023

Nadeem, R. (2024, April 9). *1. the partisanship and ideology of American voters*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/04/09/the-partisanship-and-ideology-of-american-voters/

Parker, K. (2018, May 22). *2. urban, suburban and rural residents' views on key social and political issues*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/05/22/urban-suburban-and-rural-residents-views-on-key-social-and-political-issues/

Health, Stress and Socioeconomic Status

Kat Wade, Adeline Trammell, and Anna Bullock

Introduction

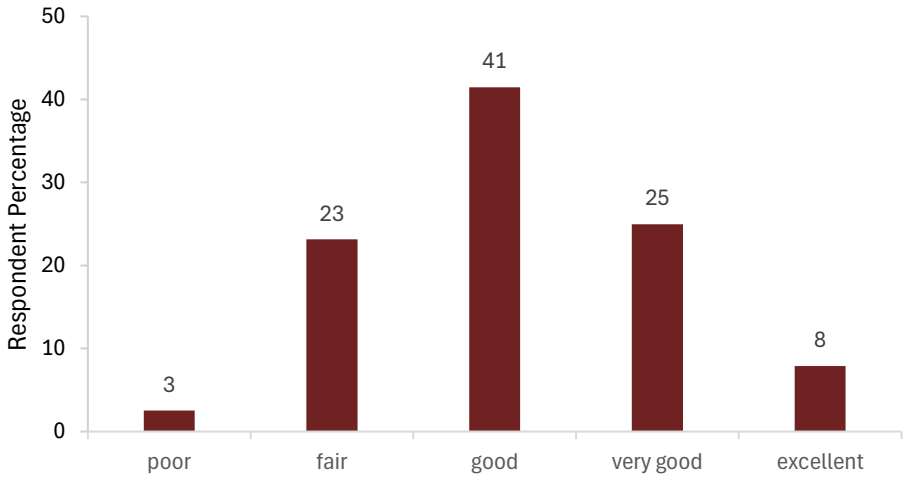
As inflation and the cost-of-living climbs across Illinois' Cook County and the greater United States, food security, public health, and socioeconomic status have become focal points of public concern. These issues have been particularly relevant with the shifting priorities of the Trump administration and economic strains, including federal funding cuts to SNAP and the Affordable Care Act, which directly impacts Cook County residents' who rely on the federal government for assistance. Access to high-paying job opportunities, quality healthcare and housing, as well as social standing within a community may be impacted by socioeconomic status, and negative health conditions can create unlivable conditions for vulnerable citizens.

Knowing which populations are most vulnerable is important in determining the next steps to improve developmental opportunities and the quality of life within a community. Through insights provided by the Cook County Community Survey, (CCCS), leaders can pinpoint those most affected by medical and financial inequalities, and work to address them by providing social services as well as making more educated policy decisions, bringing a more equitable society. Participants were asked several questions to assess their living circumstances, physical and mental health, and factors determining socioeconomic status to understand the abilities and needs among the residents, and to examine the intersections between them. These items include overall health, food security, class identification, their ability to pay an unexpected expense, and a series of questions regarding stress level.

Overall Response Distributions

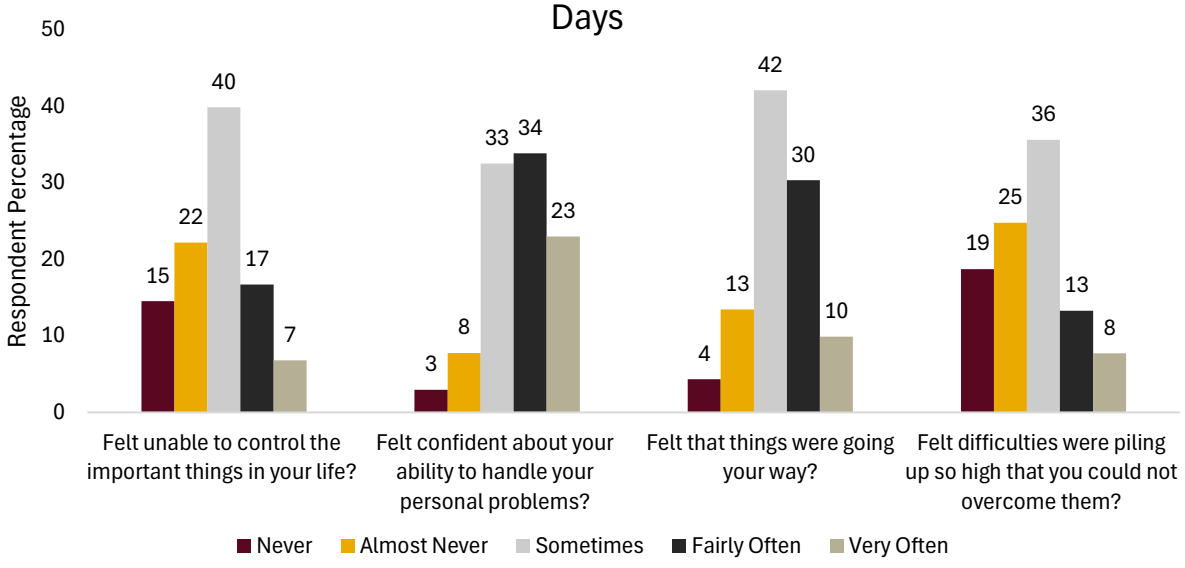
To gauge overall health, CCCS participants were asked: "In general, would you say your health is poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent?" Figure 7.1 below displays the distribution of responses. The data appears to fit a normal distribution with the most frequent response being "good health" at 41%, and the least frequent responses at either end of the ranking, 8% for "excellent" and 3% for "poor". The remaining respondents were split similarly between the "fair" and "very good" categories.

Figure 7.1: Overall Health



To assess the mental component of health, stress levels were compiled by asking CCCS participants how often they experienced four thoughts or feelings associated with stress. The distribution of stress responses is displayed on the x-axis of Figure 7.2 below, on a frequency

Figure 7.2: Frequency of Stress Related Feelings in the Last 30 Days

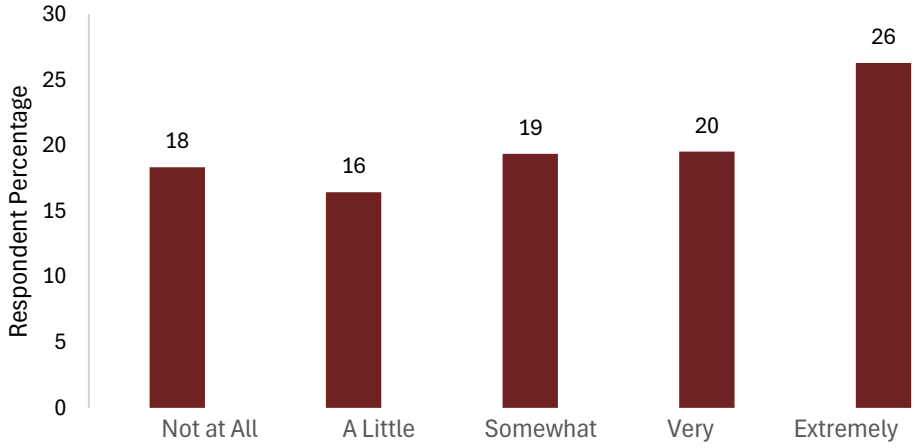


scale from “never” to “very often”. This figure illustrates the respondents’ reported frequency of these thoughts and feelings during the past 30 days.

Questions 2 and 3 assessed respondents’ confidence in their abilities to problem-solve personal issues, and if they felt things were working in their favor. These two questions have the highest amount of “fairly often” and “very often” responses across the four items, confidence in problem-solving held 57% of responses and 40% for things going their way. Participants used these ratings the least regarding feelings of a lack of control and helplessness, questions 1 and 4, at 24% and 21%, respectively. Similarly, for questions 1 and 4, 37% reported “never” and “almost never” having experienced feelings of helplessness, and 44% reported “never” and “almost never” feeling a lack of control. This juxtaposes the percentage of “never” and “almost never” responses for questions 2 and 3, only 11% and 17% of respondents. The confidence displayed in respondents’ control over personal circumstances and in their ability to tackle challenges with success suggests Cook County respondents have low stress levels regarding these topics.

Figure 7.3 below shows the distribution of responses to the question, “If you had an unexpected expense of $400 today, how certain are you that you would be able to come up with the money to pay for it?”. Responses were quite split, ranging from 16% to 26% across the categories. Less than half of CCCS participants, about one in four, reported they were “extremely certain” they would be able to cover an unexpected $400 expense. Meanwhile, over half of the respondents expressed financial uncertainty and a lack of confidence in their ability to address this situation, with 18% reporting they are “not at all” certain they could pay the expense, and only 2% more respondents answering they were “very” certain. This data is important as economic stability and resilience are factors in determining socioeconomic status, and the range of certainty may suggest there is variability among the financial situations of CCCS participants. Overall, the

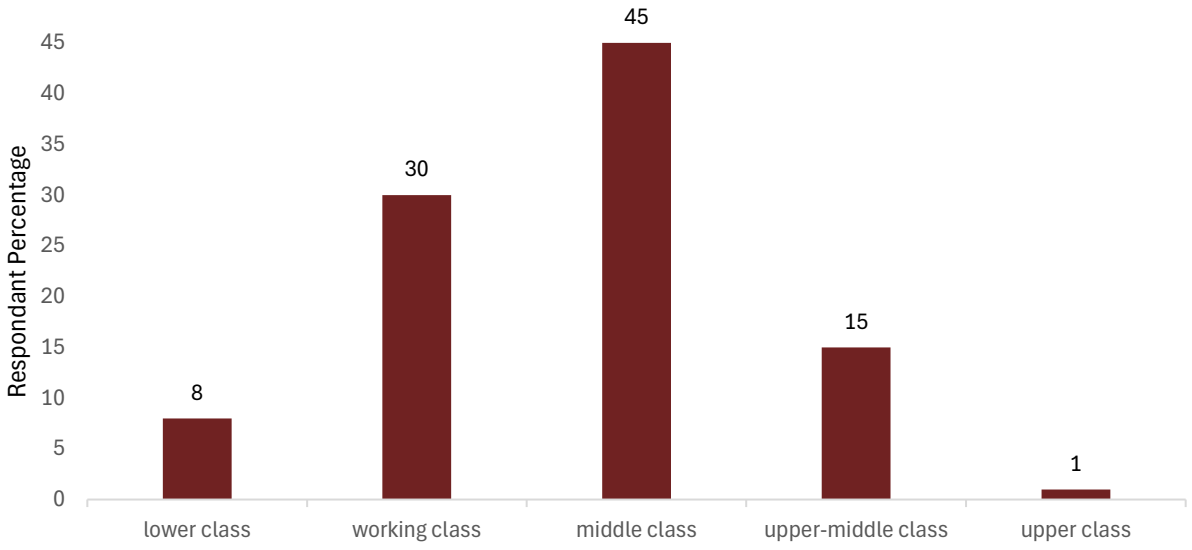
Figure 7.3: Ability to Cover Unexpected $400 Expense



data indicates that a meaningful percentage of residents have accessible funds to address unanticipated issues, however, the variance may suggest economic inequalities within Cook County and some financial vulnerability for respondents.

CCCS participants were asked to self-report their social class from five options, “lower class”, “working class”, “middle class”, “upper-middle class” and “upper class”. Figure 7.4 below displays the distribution of responses.

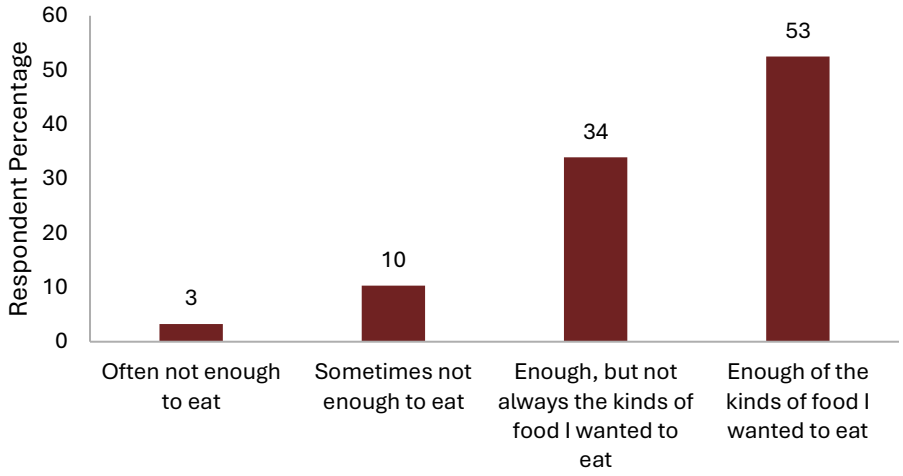
Figure 7.4: Self-Reported Social Class



From this, most respondents consider themselves to be Middle Class, at about 45%. However, this distribution has a greater combined number of participants who label themselves as part of the lower categories of class than upper: those who identify as “working” or “lower” class, make up about 38% compared to the “upper” and “upper-middle” classes, which make up only around 16% of respondents. This is an important data point, as it suggests respondents feel they share social identity in the middle class. Also meaningful is the lean in responses toward “working” and “lower” class, as it suggests more respondents see themselves as disadvantaged in their social standing rather than advantaged.

To determine food security among CCCS participants, respondents were asked: “In the last 30 days, which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household?”. This data comes in an overt, positively scaled pattern. Most respondents indicated having access to enough food to eat during that period, at 87%, and a high number indicating they also had the desired kinds of food to eat, at 53%, as illustrated in Figure 7.5. However, 13% of respondents reported they were food insecure during the 30-day period, “sometimes” or “often not having enough food to eat”. This data suggests CCCS participants are generally food secure. This data is meaningful as this general food security may indicate financial security of Cook County respondents when addressing dietary needs.

Figure 7.5: Food Security among Respondents



Demographic Breakdowns

Perceived stress, overall health, food access, and ability to handle an unexpected $400 expense were analyzed using social class as one predictor variable, then all the items including class were analyzed across two more predictor variables: ethno-racial identity, and gender. It was hypothesized that these demographic predictors greatly dictate access to essential resources such as healthcare, food, emotional wellbeing, and financial stability. We expect these characteristics to be related to individuals’ health and stress levels, as well as their access to food and financial circumstances first due to the overarching history of racial discrimination in the United States. Within Chicago, redlining and segregationist policies resulted in social and medical discrimination for people of color and unequal access to financial resources. Due to the recent nature of the Civil Rights Act, we expect to find residual effects of this history on people of color in Cook County today. Additionally, total financial independence is a relatively recent development for women in the United States, with many women, past and present, taking up multi-faceted homemaker roles that we expect to impact stress and financial capacity.

Social Class

When looking across social class, we expect populations to present higher stress levels, more financial instability; demonstrated through their ability to cover an unexpected expense, as well as less secure food access and lower overall reported health. Although expected to be present, differences in food security are expected in the form of variety more than access, given that government benefits such as SNAP benefits and government issued stipends. Despite these benefits, we expect a lack of a safety cushion, as lower income leaves less room to create general savings or a financial cushion for households, especially for those with additional expenses. The same goes for healthcare, where accessing healthcare services may be avoided until conditions reach a point of higher severity.

The overlap of these factors and other compounding issues of lower income brackets are expected to affect stress. Similar results are expected when analyzing across race, given the history of oppression surrounding people of color, particularly black respondents. Given the systemic exclusion of people of color, particularly Black and Hispanic groups, from social services, federal benefits, and a healthcare system designed around white standards that has limited its access and historically excluded people of color, we expect not only lower overall wellbeing (health, financial stability and food security), but also higher levels of stress that could be related to these variables as well as constant direct and systemic racial discrimination. In comparing the responses of female and male respondents, the differences were hypothesized to be smaller than those for socioeconomic status and ethno-racial identity due to intersections with class and race. Cross analysis of the data with the selected demographic predictors was conducted with the aim of identifying patterns that point towards relevant issues for local leaders to more effectively target social services, make equitable policy decisions, and improve community quality of life.

Given the small size of the upper-class respondent group, purposes when analyzing across Class distributions we condensed the class selections into three groups. Those who identified as Lower or Working class have been categorized into “Lower Class”, those identifying as Middle Class will be categorized as such, and respondents in Upper-Middle and Upper Class

have been combined into the “Upper Class” category. The figure below displays the relationship between socioeconomic class and respondent self-rated overall health, ranging from “poor” to “excellent”. There is a clear gradient in perceived health quality, with respondents in the higher-class tiers most likely to characterize their health as “excellent.” 14% of the upper class rated their health in this category, nearly doubling the responses from those who reported excellent health in the middle class (8%). Only 4% of those who identified as lower class reported they were in “excellent” health. The lower class shows to be disproportionately represented in the overall lower health categories; 33% of the lower class reported “fair” health, and 6% reported “poor” health. Conversely, less than 1% of middle class and upper-class respondents reported poor health. These findings suggest that lower socioeconomic status remains a strong predictor of poorer health outcomes.

Figure 7.6: Overall Health by Class

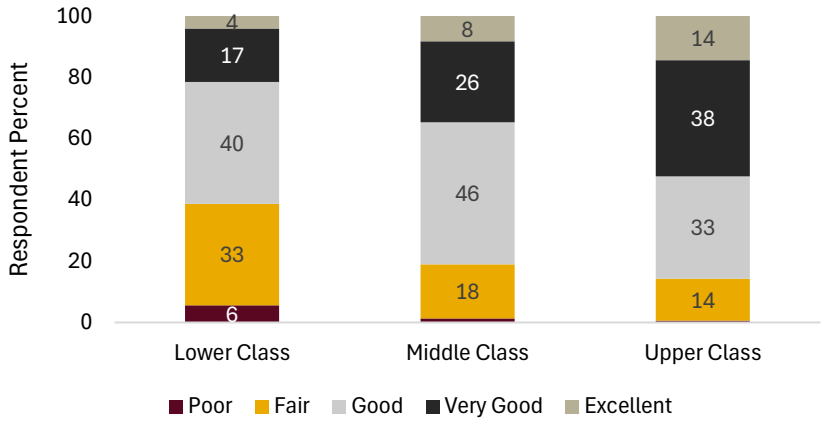
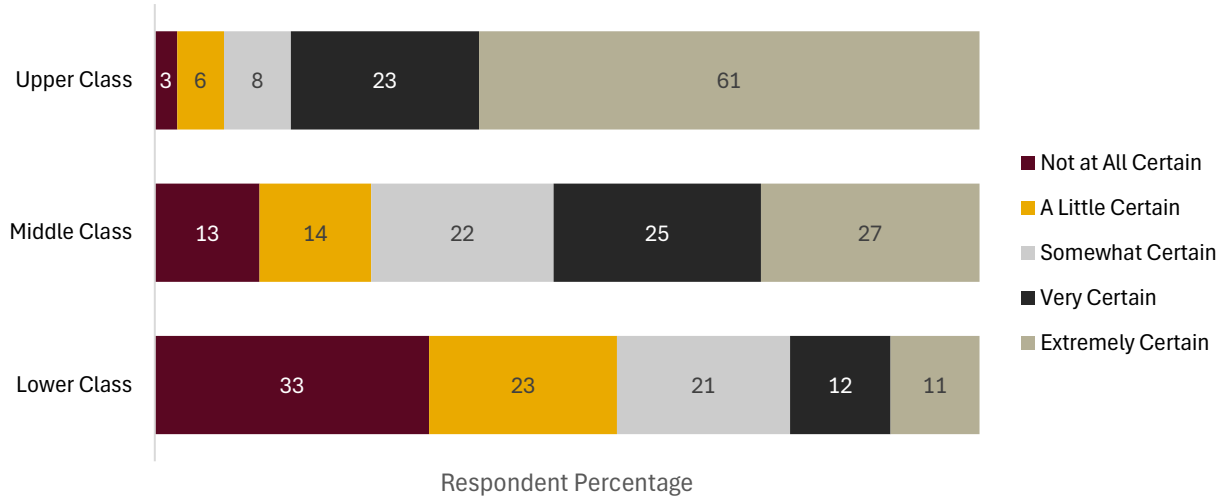


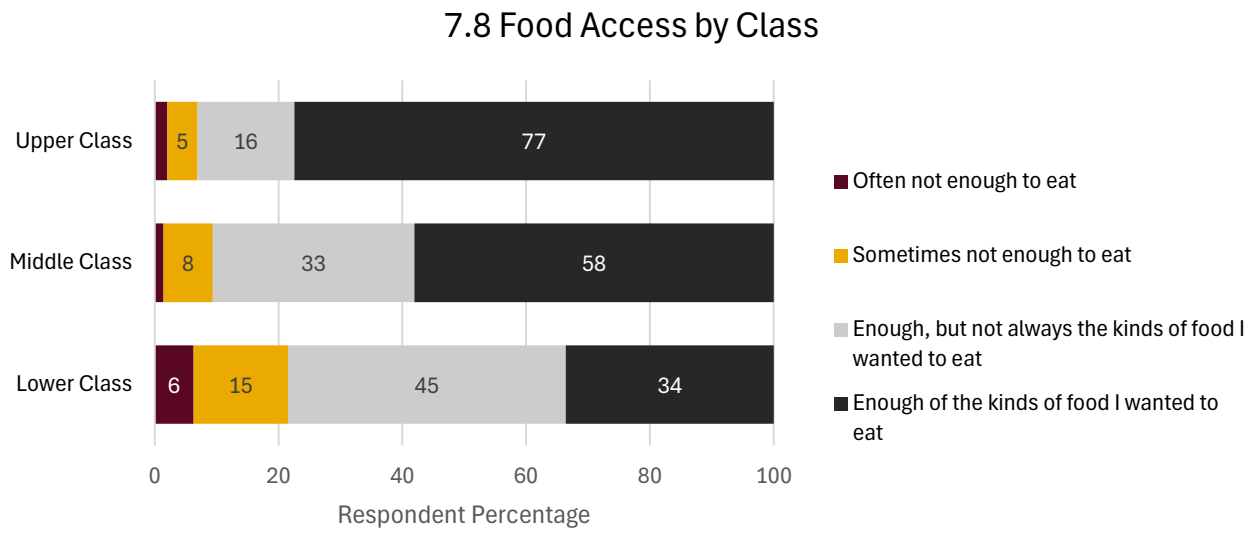
Figure 7.7. looks at how the level of certainty respondents have in their ability to cover an unexpected $400 expense varies across socioeconomic class. Respondents in the upper class

7.7: Ability to Cover an Unexpected Expense by Class



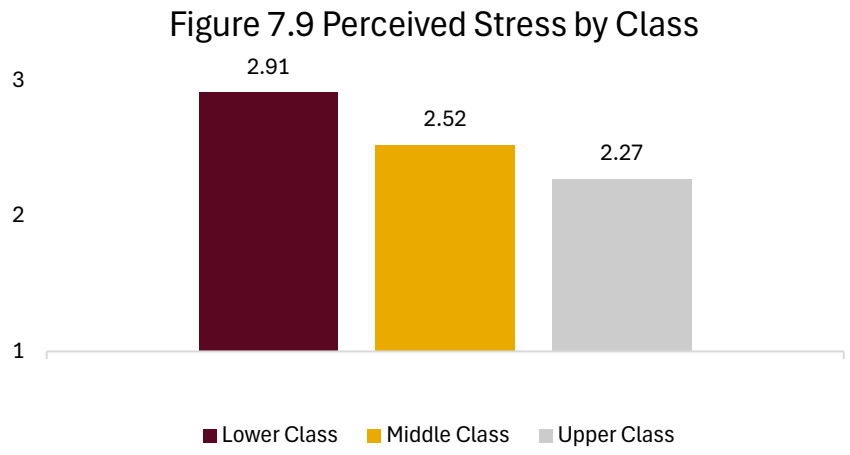
express the highest levels of confidence, with 61% reporting they are “extremely certain” they could manage such an expense, and 23% reporting to feel very certain. Financial vulnerability is most present in the lower class, where only 23% of respondents identify their certainty in covering the expense as “extremely certain” (11%) or “very certain” (12%).On the flip side, 33% of lower class respondents are “not at all certain” of their ability to pay, that is more than upper and middle class combined. The lower class also had 23% of respondents be “a little certain”, meaning that at least 56% of those in the lower financial categories face significant pressure regarding the certainty of their financial cushion, suggesting that accessibility to a safety net of emergency savings is largely concentrated among the middle and upper socioeconomic tiers.

Figure 7.8 examines the distribution of respondent food access over the 30-day period prior to the survey, cross analyzed with considering respondent’s class. As shown, 77% of the upper class reported having enough of the “kinds of food they wanted”, compared to 34% of the lower class. Conversely, 45% of respondents in the lower class reported that while they may have enough food, it is often “not the kind they wanted to eat”. Notably, the latter experiences the highest frequency of food insecurity, with 21% reporting they often (6%) or sometimes (15%) do not have enough to eat, which points out a critical gap in basic needs across class. The data



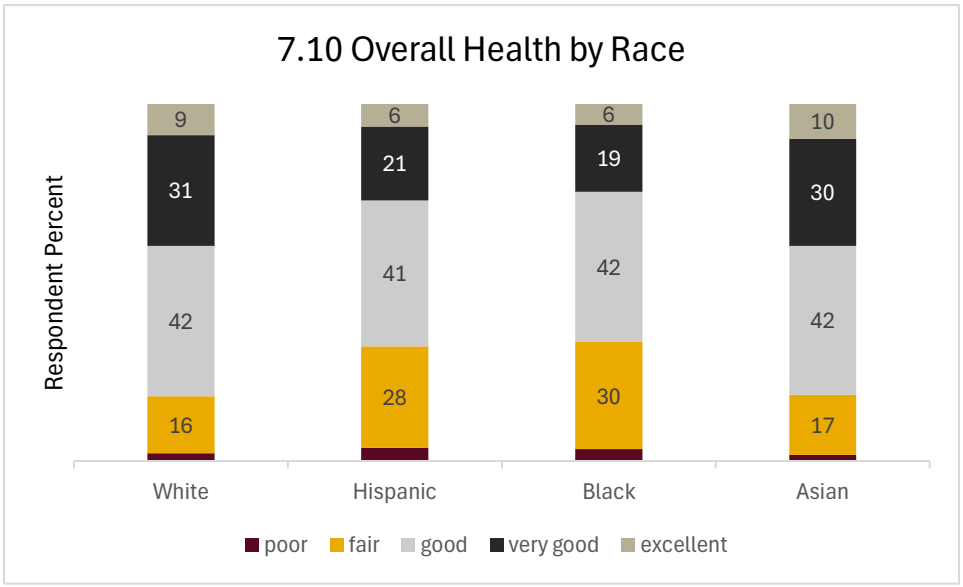
reveals an important disparity in food access, where those in higher social classes are far more likely to report having enough of the specific types of food they desire.

Figure 7.9 considers how stress levels vary across groups. To simply our analysis, we combined the four initial questions that measure stress associated feelings (shown in figure 7.2). The result is a measure of stress that ranges from 1 (lowest stress levels) to 5 (highest). The results indicate that perceived stress increases steadily as social class decreases. While the upper class reports the lowest average stress levels with a mean score of 2.27, there is a rise in the psychological burden for those in lower classes. The middle class had an average stress score of 2.52, and the lower class reported the highest mean stress at 2.91. These results suggest that chronic stressors are more present and are more of a burden for those with lower income and in a lower socioeconomic standing, and that lower class status reflects not only in the physical and financial, but also in the mental wellbeing of residents.



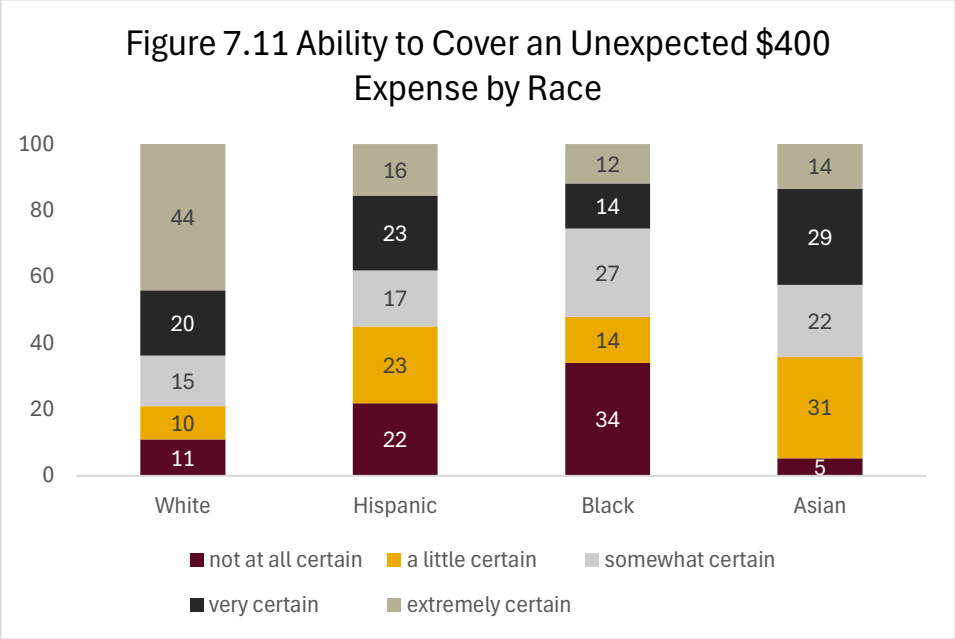
Ethnoracial Identity

Overall health reports were analyzed using the demographic predictor variable, ethnoracial identity. Figure 7.10 displays those who identified as White or Asian displayed similar distributions, with 40% each indicated they had either "very good" or "excellent" health. In contrast, 27% of Hispanic, and only 25% of Black CCCS respondents indicated they had "very good" or "excellent" health. Black participants also had the highest frequency of "poor" and "fair" responses, at 33%, compared to White



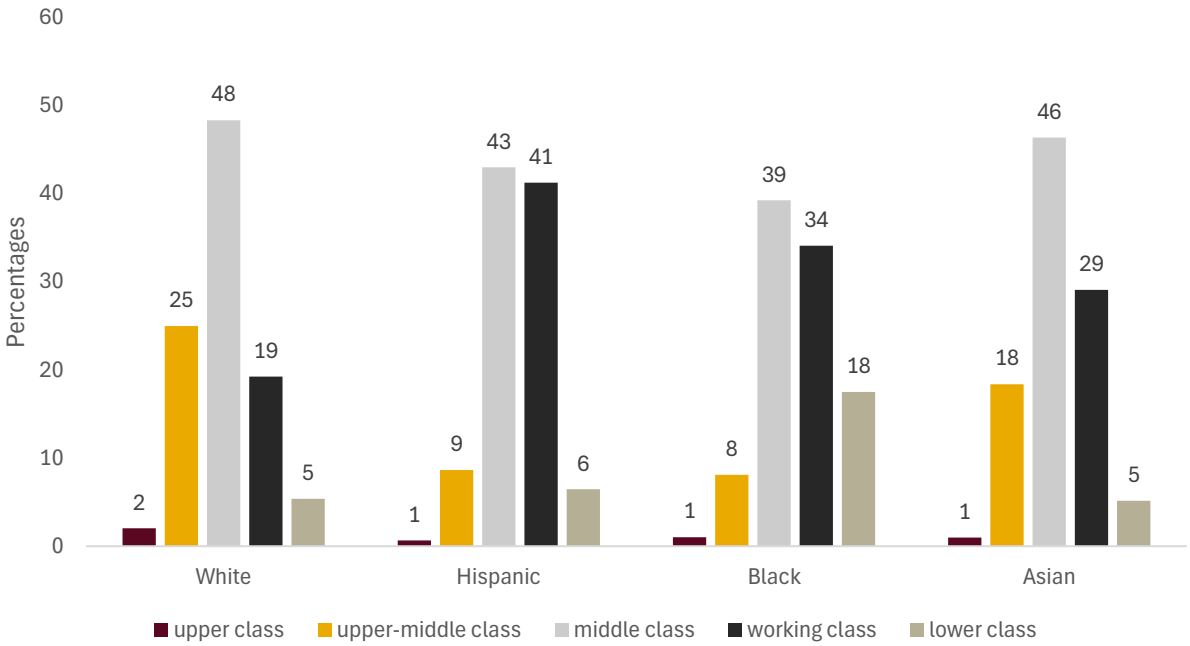
respondents at 18%. The largest percentage of respondents across ethno-racial groups- 42% of White, Black, and Asian, and 41% of Hispanic participants- indicated their health was “good”, the middle option of the scale. This indicates that while many Cook County residents believe they are in decent health, a larger section of historically marginalized people of color believe they are in overall worse health, particularly Black respondents.

Next, we assessed how reported ability to cover an unexpected $400 expense varies across ethno-racial groups. The highest level of uncertainty was displayed among respondents of color, with 34% of Black respondents answering they were “not at all certain” they would be able to pay it, followed by 22% of Hispanic respondents. 44% of White respondents, were “extremely certain” they would be able to pay- only 16%, 12%, and 14% of respondents of color identified with this category. This variability suggests there may be meaningful financial inequalities among Cook County residents, especially impacting historically marginalized residents of color.



Class identification was measured alongside ethno-racial identity. The distribution of class is displayed in Figure 7.12 below.

Figure 7.12: Class by Race



Despite the appearance of financial variability among Cook County respondents as described in Figure 7.3, the highest percentage of respondents in each ethno-racial category described themselves as “middle class”, ranging from 39% to 48%. Despite this similar identification, however, the other responses are scattered: 27% of White respondents reported being in the two upper class categories, while only 9% of Black respondents did the same. Hispanic respondents had the highest identification with “working class”, with 41%, followed by Black and Asian respondents, who all identified more with the two lowest classes than White respondents, who leaned in favor of the upper classes. This data may suggest that a large part of Cook County participants view themselves similarly to one another, while the more extreme disparities may suggest that a not-insignificant portion of respondents of color view themselves to be socially or financially disadvantaged.

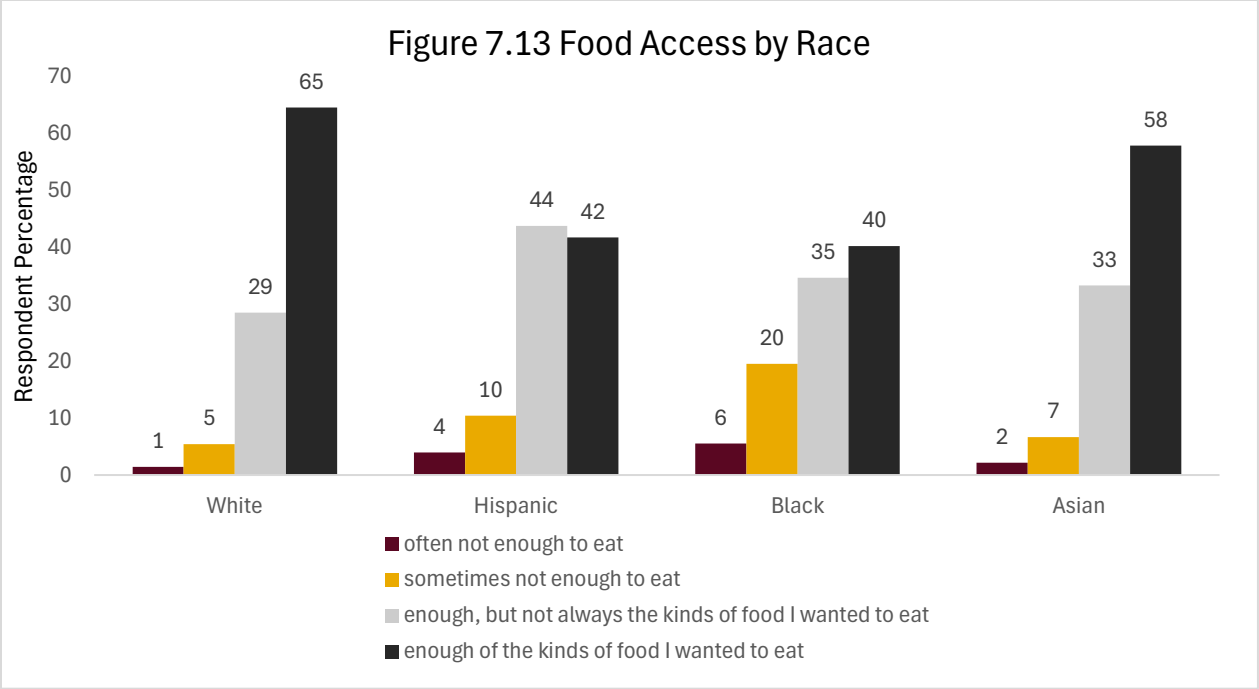
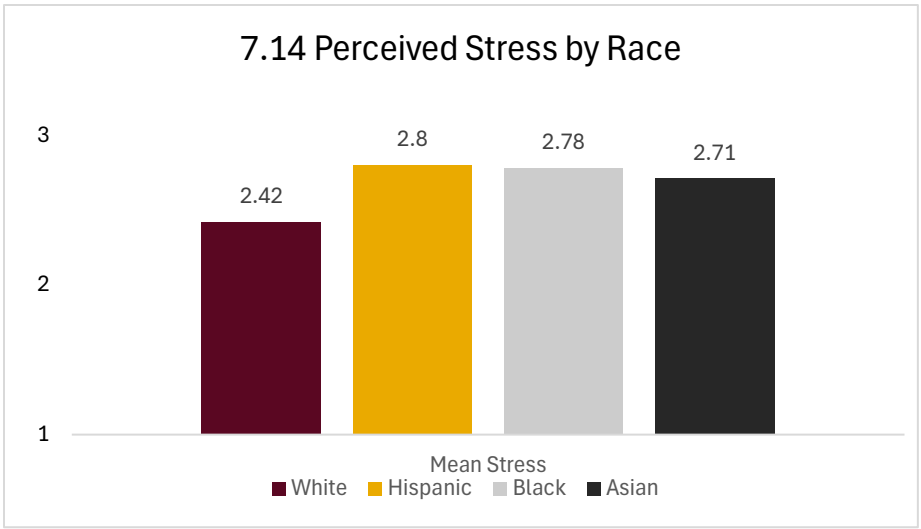


Figure 7.13 displays the distribution of responses to food security by ethno-racial identity. White respondents had the highest response to "enough of the kinds of food" they wanted, at 65% and the lowest rates of being food insecure, at 6%. This distribution most closely matches participants who identify as Asian, 18% and 16% higher than Black and Hispanic participants in this category. The most food insecure were Black respondents, 26% indicating they either "sometimes" or "often" did not have enough to eat. Despite this high number, the largest percentage of each ethno-racial category reported having enough to eat, even if not the kinds of food they preferred. This suggests that CCCS participants are generally food secure, although respondents of color are more likely to suffer from insufficient portions or unsatisfying food.

Figure 7.14. displays the Perceived Stress summary measure alongside the ethno-racial identity demographic. The disparity between respondents of color and White respondents is striking. Mean stress is highest among Hispanic and Black participants, at 2.8 and 2.78 on a 5-point scale, and lowest among the



White respondents at 2.42. As illustrated in Figure 7.2, overall perceived stress among Cook County residents is relatively low. However, the gap in how much stress one experiences between White respondents and those of color is meaningful to assess the mental wellbeing of residents, as it suggests people of color in Cook County experience stressors at a higher level than While respondents. This stress gap could signal a higher need for mental health resources in communities of color.

Gender

Figure 7.15 depicts self-identified overall health of CCCS participants by gender. Men reported to have higher positive overall health, with 78% reporting their health at "good", "very good", or "excellent" compared to 71% of women. However, the gender differences in each individual health response category are minimal.

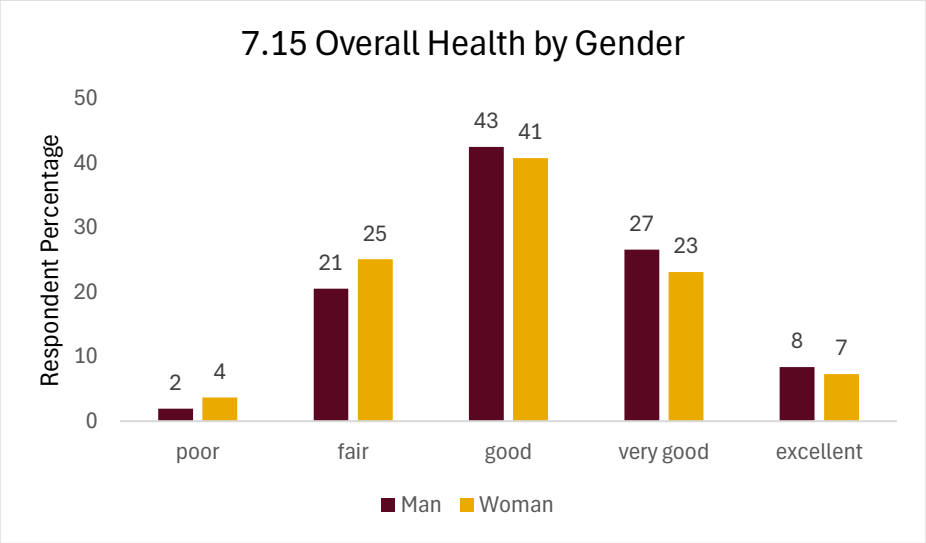
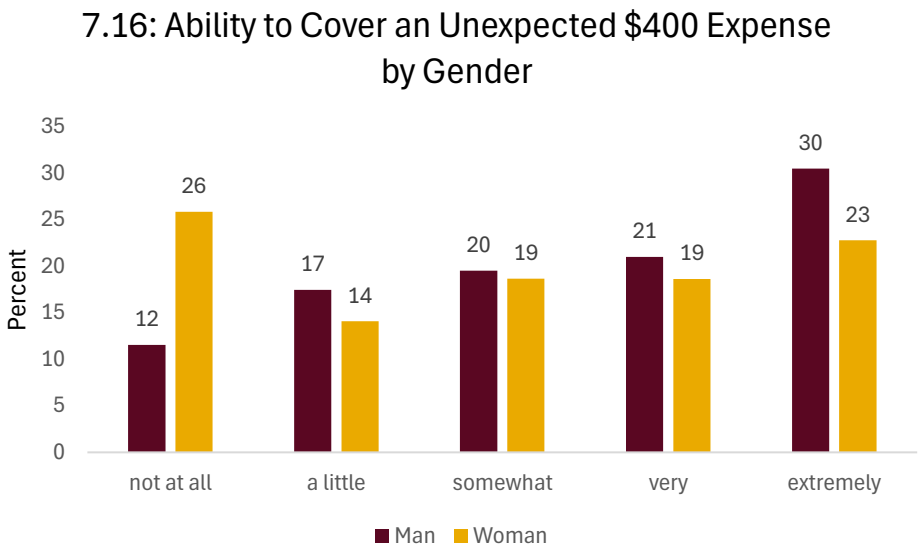


Figure 7.16 shows certainty in the ability to cover an unexpected $400 expense by gender. Mid tier responses for this question across men and women are fairly similar, with gaps of 3% or less, which remains consistent with the small differences in our other analyzed variables. However, there is a substantial gap at the far ends of this spectrum, with differences between 7% and 14% in the "not at all certain" and "extremely certain" categories. We found



female respondents to be over twice as likely to say they were “not at all confident”, at 26%, compared to only 12% of male respondents. They were also much less likely than the male respondents to be “extremely confident” in their ability to pay a large, unexpected expense, with 30% of men and only 23% of women falling into this category.

Figure 7.17 outlines the class distribution of male and female respondents. We can see that the differences between the two are not extreme, but still exist. 41% of women reported being “lower” or “working” class compared to the 36% of men. Correspondingly, more men (19%) answered that they belonged to the “upper” or “upper-middle” class, with only 16% of women landing in these categories. This may be a result of the gender-wage gap, discrepancies in employment opportunity, or having financial dependents.

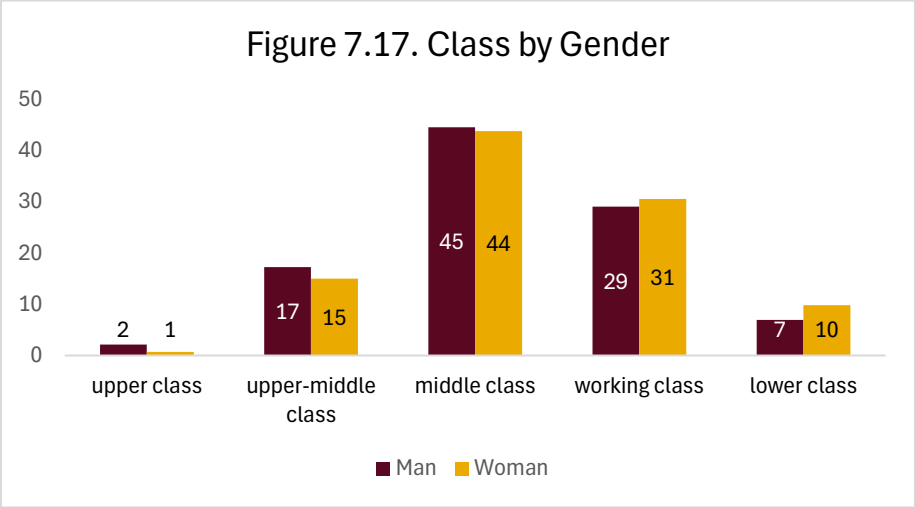
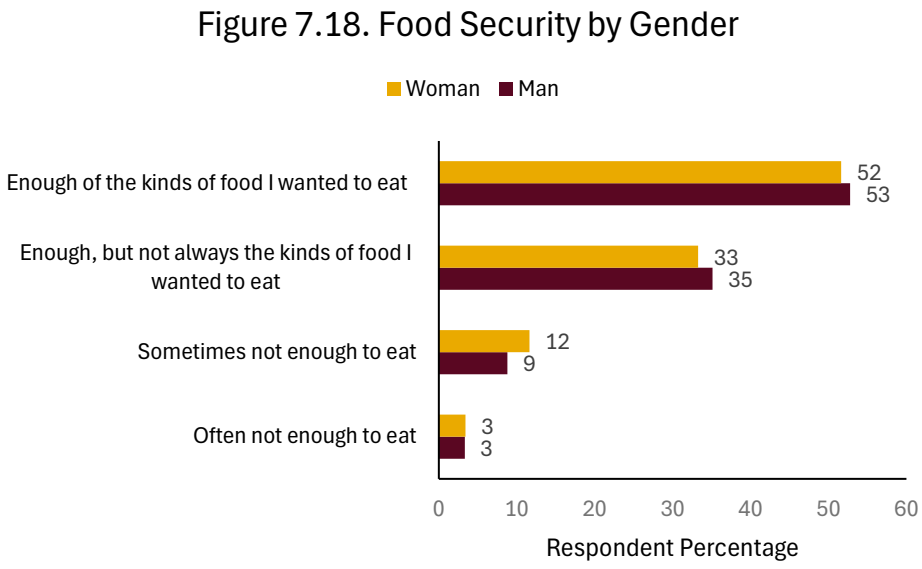


Figure 7.18 depicts food access and security as reported by each gender. Food security does not seem to be affected substantially by gender, with men and women being less than 5 points separated in every level of food security. The largest gap appears in the respondents who say they “sometimes” do not have enough to eat, with 12% of women, but only 9% of men reporting this circumstance.



The Perceived Stress summary variable was also applied to gender. We find that men and women reported similar levels of stress (averages of 2.6 and 2.66, respectively). No striking disparity was found to indicate gender has a meaningful impact on stress among the residents of Cook County, especially when compared to other variables like class and race.

Discussion

In examining the intersections between class, race, and gender, the aim was to test the hypothesis that historic racial oppression and systemic privilege continue to manifest as modern disparities in health and financial well-being. Meaningful disparities were found at the intersection of both race and class. Black respondents are disproportionately represented in lower socioeconomic categories, while White respondents are far more likely to identify with upper-middle class positions. Hispanic and Asian respondents fall more heavily in working class categories, which further points at the uneven distribution of economic position across these racial groups. Together, these patterns are telling about the intersectionality of financial inequalities in Cook County. Additionally, lower-class respondents reported worse overall health, higher stress, greater financial precarity in the face of modest emergencies, and more insecure access to food, while economic stability and physical well-being are concentrated in the upper-class tiers. It is important to recognize that class doesn't just speak for a person's income, it directly reflects in one's physical and mental state, as well as in the ability to meet basic needs.

The most striking gender disparity appeared in the responses to the question regarding the ability to pay for an unexpected $400 expense. This has large implications for healthcare, where emergency expenses of that size or larger are frequent. Particularly for women, this monetary restriction can further limit reproductive healthcare during a period where care is already being restricted (Washburn, 2025). Incidentally, women account for a larger share of emergency healthcare spending than men. In 2021, aggregate emergency room costs totaled $44.5 billion for women, compared to $36.2 billion for men (Roemer, 2024). Although the gender differences in self-identified class position are not dramatic, they follow a consistent pattern of women being placed in lower class categories and being less likely than men to identify with higher ones, suggesting that gendered economic stratification still exists in subtle yet patterned ways.

These results could prompt further research to understand the factors that create and perpetuate the revealed imbalances and inform equitable distribution of county resources according to need. Being able to identify which communities are struggling and what aspects of their lives are being affected can guide decisions regarding aid and social services in order to

more effectively address the causes of health and socioeconomic disparities, ensuring the well-being of Cook County residents across demographics.

References

Roemer, M. (2024). *Costs of Treat-and-Release Emergency Department Visits in the United States, 2021*. Retrieved from https://hcup-us.ahrq.gov/reports/statbriefs/sb311-ED-visit-costs-2021.pdf

Washburn, K. (2025, January 23). Planned Parenthood of Illinois to close four clinics. Retrieved from NPR Illinois website: https://www.nprillinois.org/illinois/2025-01-23/planned-parenthood-of-illinois-to-close-four-clinics