

‘Fragile Community’ Residents Feel Criminal Justice Discrimination

Residents of “fragile communities” in the United States are more likely to feel the criminal justice system discriminates against them, according to a report published May 9 by the Center for Advancing Opportunity ([CAO](#)) and Gallup.

Fragile communities are defined as places in the U.S. “characterized by high proportions of residents struggling in their daily lives and possessing limited opportunities for social mobility.”

A majority (70%) of fragile-community residents are from traditional minority groups: 37% black, 30% Hispanic and 3% Asian. Another 29% are white.

These communities have lower income (only 18% have household incomes of \$60,000 or higher, compared to 52% of all U.S. households) and less education (only 12% hold a bachelor’s degree, compared to 33% of the U.S. population).

Yet, when asked about social safety net programs, less than half of fragile-community residents reported receiving assistance.

Medicaid was the most common program used, with 40% noting someone in their household had received these benefits.

By comparison, 39% received food assistance, 20% supplemental security income, 20% disability, 12% housing assistance and 8% unemployment.

CAO and Gallup received nearly 5,800 survey responses from fragile-community residents in U.S. cities who answered questions related to economics, criminal justice, health, education and business ownership.

Overall, a majority of fragile-community residents said police (74%) and courts (66%) treated them fairly; yet, this is much lower than the rate for non-fragile-community residents: 87% and 80%, respectively.

Blacks living in these fragile communities were more likely than whites and Hispanics to report experiencing discrimination in policing and sentencing.

“Half of black FC [fragile-community] residents (50%) say they know ‘some’ or ‘a lot’ of people who have been unfairly sent to jail – a far higher proportion than the 17% of white residents or 28% of Hispanic residents who give one of these responses,” the report said. “Further, 60% of black residents say they know some or a lot of people who have stayed in jail because they didn’t have enough bail money, as do 47% of Hispanic residents and 36% of white residents.”

Overall attitudes toward local police were mixed, with 56% of all fragile-community respondents viewing them positively and 44% negatively.

At 70% positive, whites were the most affirming fragile-community residents regarding policing, compared to 55% of Hispanics and 44% of blacks.

Through a series of questions about perceived treatment, the report compiled a Criminal Justice Index (CJI) to gauge overall confidence in the justice system among fragile-community residents.

Only 18% of residents were categorized as “trusting” of the system, with 45% designated as “skeptical” and 37% “distrusting.”

Blacks were most likely (52%) to be classified as “distrusting” of the police and justice system in the CJI, compared to 34% of Hispanics and 21% of whites in fragile communities.

Despite this skepticism, when asked about their desire for police to spend more time in their neighborhoods, black and Hispanic respondents (both at 59%) were more likely than whites (50%) to desire more police presence.

“The finding that black and Hispanic FC [fragile-community] residents are more likely to feel people like them are treated unfairly by the legal system than by their local police may surprise some,” the report said. “Incidents involving alleged mistreatment of minorities by the police are more likely to draw media coverage, but minority residents, especially blacks, are more likely to be worried about being treated unfairly in other aspects of the criminal justice system, such as pretrial procedures, bail requirements, sentencing and parole.”

The full report is available [here](#).