



Newark residents report feeling safer, but many still don't trust cops

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Newark residents feel safer overall and are less concerned that officers will use excessive force, according to a report released Friday. Tensions remain, however, as the department continues its now three-year-long overhaul.

Just over half of residents surveyed in September reported feeling “very safe” at home at night, an 8-point increase from the year before. About 7% feel “not safe at all.”

More than a third said they were “not at all concerned” about cops using excessive force on them, a 10-point increase, while 29% remained “very concerned.”

Suffolk University interviewed 700 people for the survey, which was commissioned by the monitoring team overseeing police reforms in Newark. The team was formed after a federal report found a pattern of unconstitutional policing within the state’s largest city, and this report covered the last three months of 2018.

The results were sometimes contradictory. While some residents said seeing patrolling officers made them feel more secure, the presence of a cop concerned others.

“Newark appears to be a city that has grown more distrustful in the past year,” the researchers wrote, and “respondents feel less safe this year than last year while in the presence of an NPD officer.”

Part of that distrust stemmed from where residents got information, according to the survey. People who watched TV news generally believed that complaints against officers were investigated, for example, while those who relied on social media tended to believe the opposite.

In a statement sent by a spokesman, Newark Public Safety Director Anthony Ambrose said “the deterioration of public trust amongst police is systemic in American policing.”

He wrote that it would take time and effort to change people’s attitudes toward officers, but he said the department was working to increase both transparency and trust.

The report also reiterated concerns that Newark needs more officers. Although the department recently opened two new precincts, the report said, researchers faulted the city for not spending more money to hire a staffing expert.

A city spokesperson did not immediately return a request for comment. Capt. Brian O'Hara, who leads Newark's reform efforts, faulted the monitoring team for not doing more to help Newark improve its staffing, according to an email provided by the department.

The monitoring team also wrote that the department continues to train officers on new policies but said it still has a ways to go in how it collects data.

The department has spent \$5.8 million so far making changes, according to a statement sent Aug. 2 by a spokesman. It highlighted the increased use of body-worn cameras, the department's new LGBT policy and its collaboration with the city's Civilian Complaint Review Board.

A judge ruled in June that civilians should be able to investigate Newark cops. The police union has appealed that decision to the state Supreme Court.

Almost every type of crime is down this year in Newark when compared to 2018, according to police data, and crime overall hit a five-decade low last year.

A survey of Newark officers, and their feelings about the department's leadership, will be included in a future report.

NJ Advance Media staff writer Karen Yi contributed to this report.