



POLICE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

The 15th Annual Springfield Police Department Survey of Residents

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Introduction

In 1994, the first annual citizen survey was conducted to determine the needs and concerns of residents with regard to the Springfield Police Department. This year marks the 15th consecutive year that the survey has been distributed to Springfield residents. The purpose of this report is to discuss the findings of the survey. A sample survey may be found in Appendix A

Methodology

A systematic sample of 4,000 households was drawn from the Springfield area and surveys were mailed to all 4,000. Of those households, an estimated 200 (5%) were undeliverable. Of the remaining 3,800 surveys, 947 were returned for a response rate of 25%. The response rate for the 2007 survey was also 25%.

Since 1999 zip codes 65802, 03, and 06 have been oversampled to obtain a more geographically representative sample of completed surveys, but surveys were skewed towards senior citizens. In fact, 32% of all respondents were over age 65. As in years past, a mutual decision was made by the researchers and the Springfield Police Department to delete 75 surveys completed by seniors. Removing these surveys left an adequately large sample (872) while reducing the proportion of older respondents to 27%. An overall profile of the respondents is given below:

- 48% were male; 52% were female.
- Racial breakdown was as follows: 1% each African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Multiracial; 2% American Indian; 93% Caucasian; and 2% Other.
- 12% lived in Springfield for less than 5 years, 51% for more than 25 years.
- 21% were age 40 or under; 18% were between 40 and 50; 35% were between 51 and 65; 27% were over the age of 65.
- 45% lived in “north” Springfield, as defined by zip codes 65802, 03, and 06; 55% lived in “south” Springfield—zip codes 65804, 07, 08, 09, and 10.

Findings

In addition to providing total percentage responses for each question, bivariate analyses were also conducted using the variables listed below:

- gender
- how many years the respondent had lived in Springfield
- age
- zip code

The results were analyzed question-by-question and are presented in that format with statistically significant differences noted. Although race was also included as a demographic variable, there were too few non-white respondents for bivariate analysis.

There were almost no differences by gender and very few by length of residence. Most differences were for age and zip code.

Indicate whether each of the following is a big problem, somewhat of a problem or not a problem in your neighborhood.

Fourteen items were listed on this question, ranging from *drug activity* to *police patrol*. Respondents were asked whether each was a problem in their neighborhood. As seen in Table 1 and Figure 1, respondents were most concerned with *theft from vehicles*, *burglaries*, *drug activity*, *vandalism* and *noise*. It is likely a reflection of a poor economy that *theft from vehicles* and *burglaries* moved ahead of *drug activity*, which was the top rated item in 2007.

This question was asked using a three-point scale, and a response category of “don’t know” was also included. For analysis, the “don’t know” responses were not included. Therefore, the number of usable responses for this question ranged from a low of 413 (*child abuse*, in which fewer people had an opinion) to a high of 808 (*noise*, in which nearly everyone had an opinion).

Several differences were found by demographic groups. Although some differences were found by age, the most pronounced differences were by geographic location, as seen below:

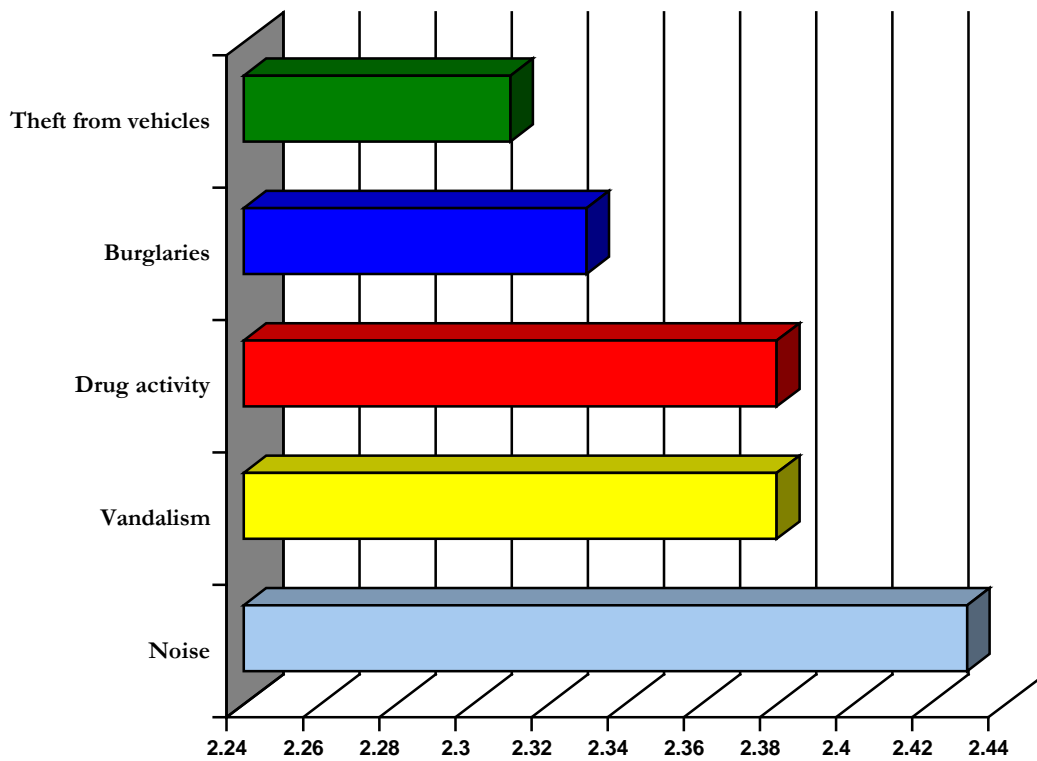
Survey item	“Not a problem” ratings	
	North Springfield	South Springfield
Drug activity	37%	67%
Burglaries	36	48
Assaults	66	85
Child abuse	63	82
Gang activity	63	81
Domestic violence & fighting	45	72
Noise	48	61

TABLE 1

Indicate whether each of the following is a big problem, somewhat of a problem or not a problem in your neighborhood

Survey item	Percent ranking item as “big” problem	Percent ranking item as “not” a problem	Mean	Number of responses
Theft from vehicles	13%	45%	2.31	653
Burglaries	10	43	2.33	647
Drug activity	16	53	2.38	559
Vandalism	10	48	2.38	704
Noise	12	55	2.43	808
Domestic violence & fighting	10	59	2.49	524
Drunk driving	9	63	2.54	591
Traffic accidents	6	63	2.57	725
Police patrol	8	65	2.57	683
Gang activity	8	73	2.65	575
Cruising	8	74	2.66	735
Child abuse	8	74	2.66	413
Auto theft	5	75	2.70	543
Assaults	6	77	2.72	571

FIGURE 1
Top five problems:
Highest mean responses



How much do you think you and your neighbors can do to reduce crime in your neighborhood?

This question was added to the 2007 survey. Responses this year were very similar:

	2007	2008
A lot	22%	26%
Some but not very much	41	35
Very little	16	19
Nothing	3	4
Don't know	17	16

A solid majority (61%) felt they could take at least some action to reduce crime in their neighborhoods. A difference in responses was found by age. Interestingly, only 8% of residents under the age of 30 gave a response of “don’t know,” while 25% of residents 65 and over gave the same response.

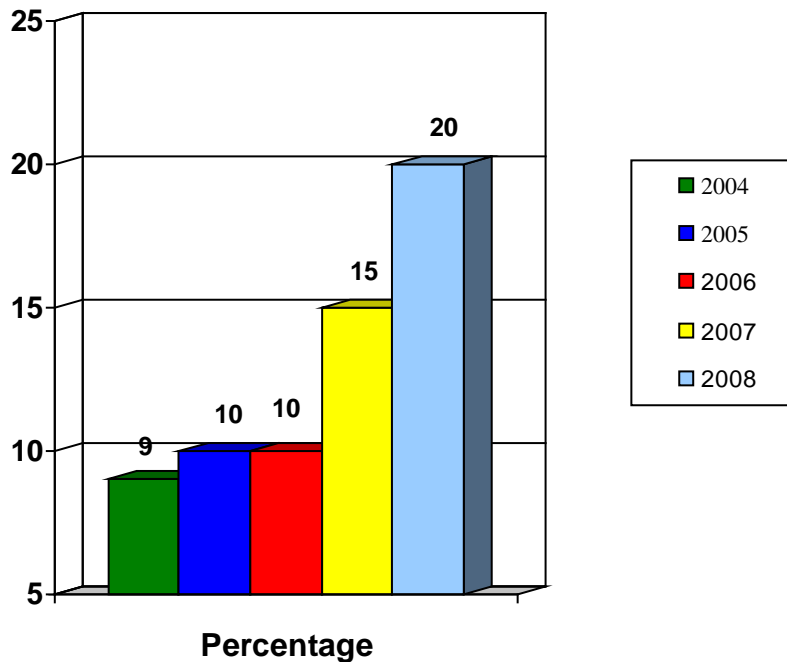
In the past 12 months would you say the level of crime in your neighborhood has increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Twenty percent of respondents felt that crime had *increased* in their neighborhoods, while 4% reported that crime had *decreased*. Fifty-one percent of respondents felt crime in their neighborhood had *stayed about the same*. 768 residents responded to this question.

The percentage of residents reporting an increase in crime has risen in recent years. Again, this may be a reflection of our current economic problems.

Respondents were more likely to report an increase in crime if they were male or under age 30. Twenty-four percent of male respondents reported a crime increase, as did 23% of those under age 30.

Crime increasing in neighborhood

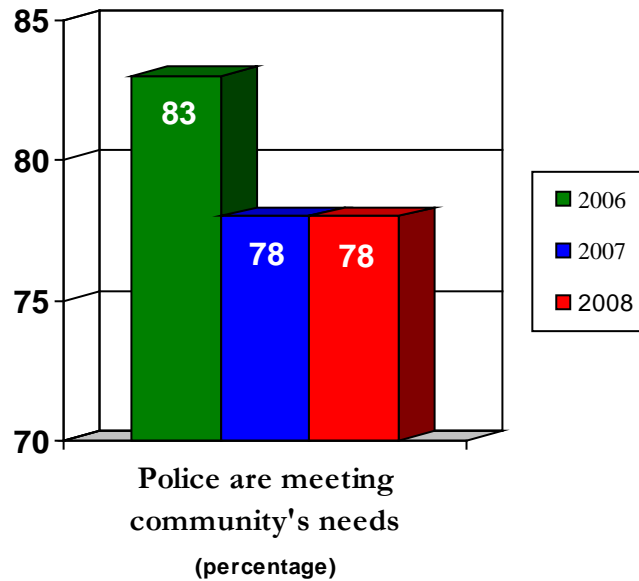


Overall, do you feel the police are serving the community's needs?

Seventy-eight percent of respondents reported that the police are serving the community's needs. Twenty-two percent of respondents said *no* to this question. This is the same response as the 2007 survey and a slight decrease from 2006. It should be noted that only 750 respondents answered this question, leaving an unusually high number of "missing" cases.

The reason for this is not clear. There was not a "don't know" response for those who were not sure how to answer the question, but there has not been such a response for this question in recent years.

Respondents were more likely to say that the police were meeting the community's needs if they were older or lived in south Springfield. In fact, 84% of senior citizens responded 'yes' to this question, compared to 66% of respondents under the age of 30, while 82% of south side residents responded 'yes' compared to 74% of north side residents.



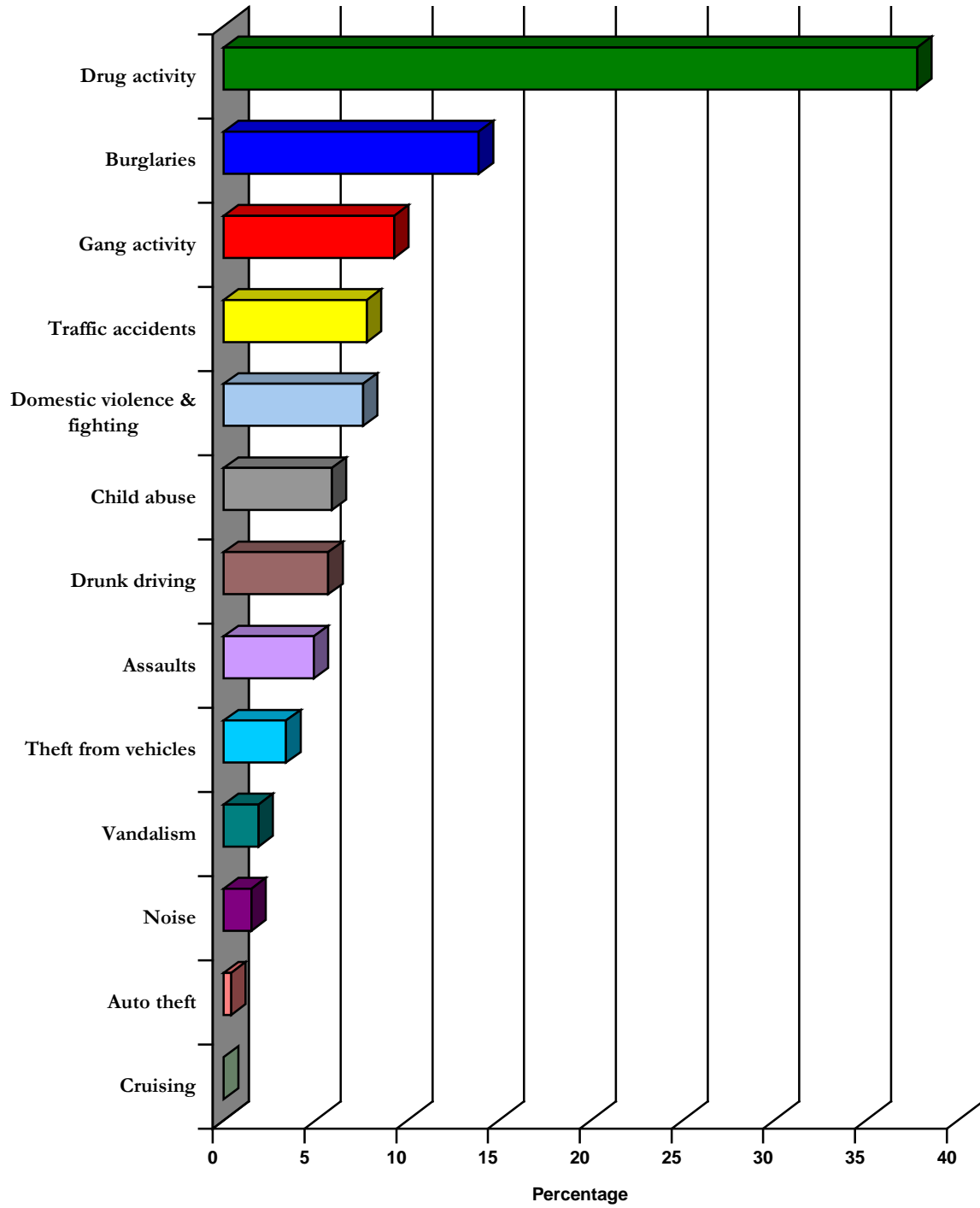
In your opinion, what is the number one crime problem in Springfield, not just your neighborhood?

In past surveys, this question has been open-ended, and the number one problem identified each year has been *drug activity*. In 2007 the question was changed to the same closed-ended list used in a previous question which asked about neighborhood problems. This year the order of the thirteen responses was changed to an alphabetized list. As seen in Figure 2, *drug activity* remains the clear number one crime problem in Springfield according to respondents. Although this was a lengthy list of 13 items and the response order was changed from last year, the responses were remarkably similar. In the rank order, *traffic accidents* and *gang activity* changed places, as did *domestic violence* and *drunk driving*. Otherwise, the order of the items was the same.

The mission of the Springfield Police Department is to provide quality services which involve the community in problem solving and enhancing public safety. How would you like the Springfield Police Department to direct its services?

This year's survey included the same six items as the 2007 survey. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of each service, with '1' being the highest and '6' being the lowest.

FIGURE 2
Top crime problems in Springfield



Consistent with responses to other questions, the highest rated services dealt with crime solving, drugs, and gangs. The services, in ranked order, are listed below:

- 1 Heavy enforcement of drug activity (288 #1 rankings)
- 2 Control gangs and thugs responsible for assaults and shootings (246 #1 rankings)
- 3 Solve crimes with arrests (190 #1 rankings)
- 4 Involve police in neighborhood crime problem-solving (104 #1 rankings)
- 5 Give more attention to enforcing traffic laws and decreasing accidents (89 #1 rankings)
- 6 Provide more information about crime prevention (35 #1 rankings)

Please rate Springfield police officers on the following.

Respondents were asked to rate Springfield police officers on six services based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being excellent). As seen in Table 2, *Quick response to emergency or life threatening situations* and *Performing duties without regard to race...* were ranked as *excellent* by the largest percentage of respondents. Thirty-two percent of respondents ranked police officers as *excellent* in these areas. *Effectively investigating crimes in the city* had both the smallest percentage of respondents who felt that service was *excellent* (14%) and the highest *poor* rankings (12%).

Respondents were far more likely to rate police officers as *excellent* if they were senior citizens. For example, *excellent* ratings from respondents aged 65 and over were as follows:

Overall competence and job performance	32%
Providing protection	26
Understanding community crime problems	29
Effectively investigating crimes in the city	23
Performing duties without regard to race...	42

TABLE 2
Please rate police officers on the following

Survey item	Percent ranking officers 1 (excellent)	Percent ranking officers 2	Percent ranking officers 3	Percent ranking officers 4	Percent ranking officers 5 (poor)	Mean	Number of responses
Quick response to emergency and life threatening situations	32%	36%	19%	7%	6%	2.20	571
Overall competence and job performance	22	40	25	7	6	2.36	696
Providing protection	17	36	26	11	9	2.59	710
Understanding community crime problems	19	37	25	10	9	2.53	672
Enforcing traffic laws	18	33	27	11	11	2.63	748
Effectively investigating crimes in the city	14	30	31	13	12	2.80	626
Performing duties without regard to race, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, age, cultural group or disability	32	34	17	9	9	2.30	607

If you could make one suggestion to the Springfield Police Department about how they could improve service to your neighborhood, what would it be?

As in previous years, a majority of respondents (546) answered this question. Respondents gave a variety of answers. (A complete list of responses may be found in Appendix B.)

Realizing the limits of the software used to analyze this open-ended question, it was nonetheless interesting to see what the most common responses were. A theme clearly emerged, with the following exact phrases given by more than one respondent:

- More officers (7)
- Hire more officers (6)
- More patrols (4)
- More police (4)
- More visibility (4)
- More police officers (3)
- Enforcing traffic laws (2)

As always, many of the responses focused on *patrolling* (81 responses), *neighborhoods* (77 responses), *traffic* and *speeding* (46 responses each), and *drugs* (41 responses).

In the last 12 months have you had contact with a police department officer?

Forty-nine percent of respondents had had contact with the police; 51% had not. Respondents who had contact were instructed to answer the next series of questions, while respondents who had not had contact were instructed to skip ahead several questions.

If yes, what was the reason for the contact?

If respondents had contact with the police, they were asked about the nature of that contact. This question allowed multiple responses. As seen below, the most common response was *other*, followed by *general public contact* and *as a victim of crime*.

Traffic enforcement	12%
Involvement in a traffic accident	13
As a victim of crime	21
Arrested or charged with a crime	.3
General public contact	24
Other	27

Respondents who answered “other” were asked to provide detail of their contact with the police. Nearly 150 responses were given, which covered a wide range of issues. Some of the most common reasons for contact were *security alarm*, *reported a crime*, *witnessed an accident*, or *neighbor* issues.

A complete list of responses may be found in Appendix C.

I agree or disagree with the following statements based on my contact with the department within the last 12 months.

The three items comprising this question have been included for many years on the survey. Responses are detailed in Table 3 and Figure 3 and are comparable to previous surveys. Means dropped slightly from 2007 but are not meaningful declines given the smaller number of respondents to these particular questions.

If you have had contact with the Police Department within the last 12 months, please rate the overall quality of assistance you received.

This question required respondents to rank the quality of assistance they had received if they had contact with the police department in the last year. Respondents ranked services on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being excellent). As seen in Table 4 and Figure 4, the highest *excellent* rating was given for *spoke with 911 communications call taker* and *spoke with officer who responded to your call in person* (45% and 43%, respectively). The lowest ratings were given to *requested information from the Records Section* and *spoke with a crime prevention officer* (19% each).

It should be noted that the percentages listed in Table 4 and Figure 4 do not contain “not applicable” responses.

On what have you based your opinions in this survey?

The responses to this question are listed below. Since the question was designed in a “mark all that apply” format, it could not be analyzed by demographic variables.

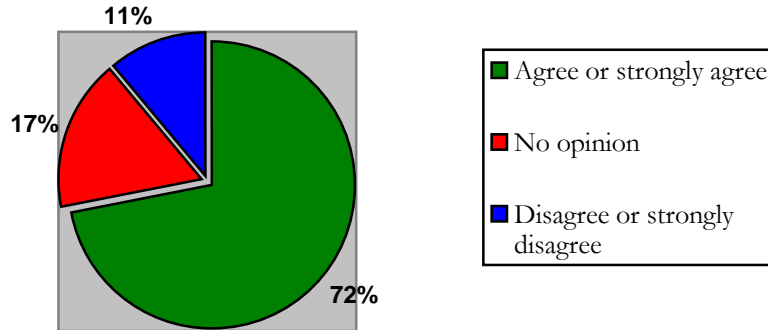
Personal observation	38%
Observation	35
Word of mouth	13
Newspaper	12
TV	.2

TABLE 3
Ratings of Police Service

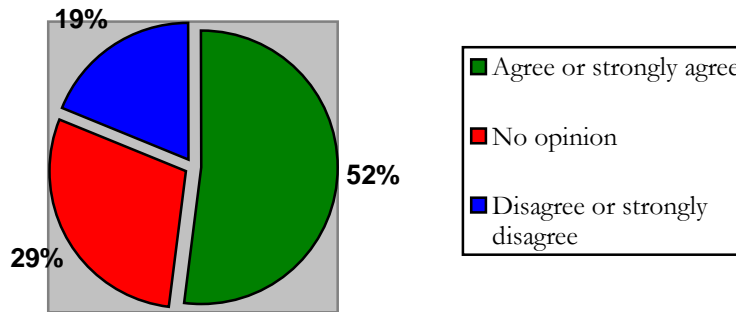
Survey item	Percentage who 'agree' or 'strongly agree'	Percentage who 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'	Mean	Number of responses
Department representatives were fair, courteous, and respectful in their dealings with me during the last twelve months.	72%	11%	2.07	382
The amount of time it took police to respond to my call was satisfactory.	52	19	2.50	368
I feel satisfied with the police handling of the incident.	57	21	2.47	362

FIGURE 3

Department representatives were fair, courteous, and respectful



The amount of time it took police to respond to my call was satisfactory.



I feel satisfied with the police handling of the incident.

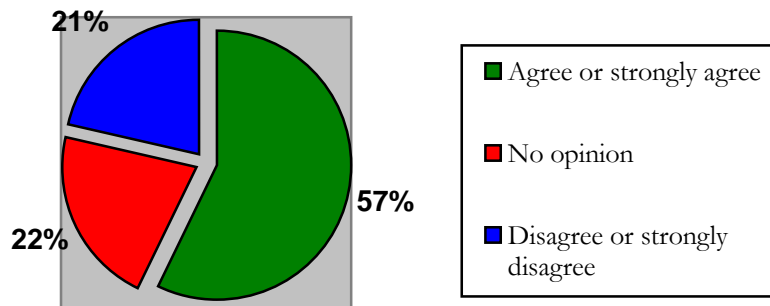
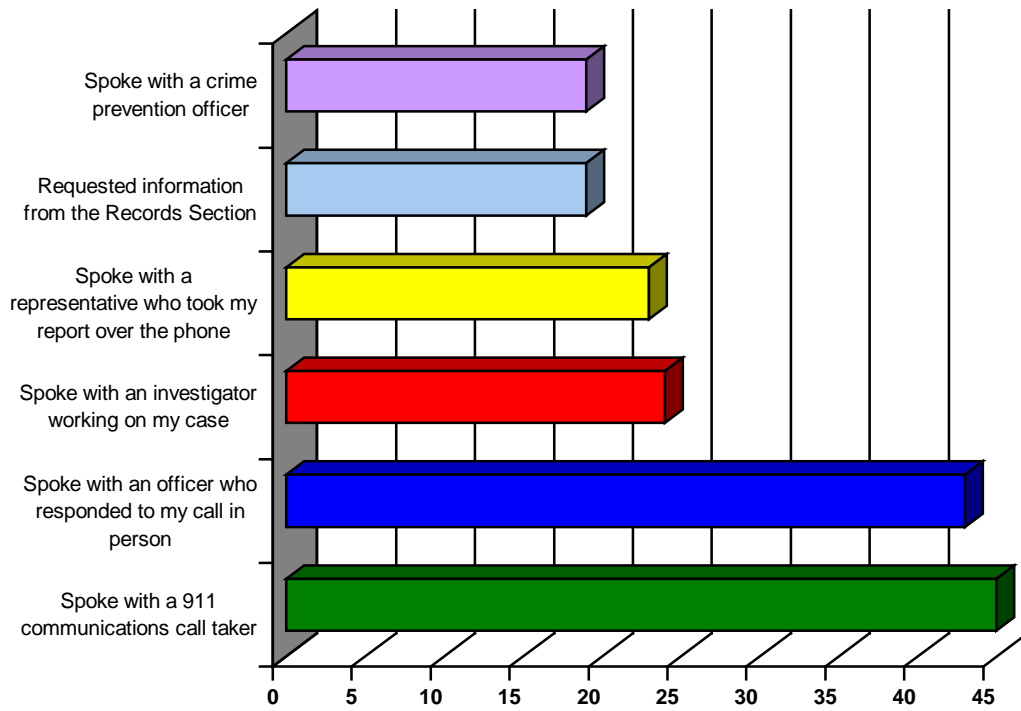


TABLE 4
Quality of assistance received
from the Police Department

Survey item	Percent rating service 1 (excellent)	Percent rating service 2	Percent rating service 3	Percent rating service 4	Percent rating service 5 (poor)	Mean	Number of responses
Spoke with a 911 communications call taker about my needs	45%	35%	11%	4%	5%	1.88	199
Spoke with an officer who responded to my call in person	43	32	14	5	6	1.99	211
Requested information from the Records Section	19	24	30	16	11	2.75	83
Spoke with a representative who took my report over the phone	23	31	27	7	12	2.53	124
Spoke with an investigator working on my case	24	25	24	6	21	2.76	109
Spoke with a crime prevention officer	19	24	32	10	15	2.78	72

FIGURE 4
'Excellent' ratings



What is your main media source of information about the department?

This question was new to the survey in 2007. As seen below, responses were similar this year, with a slight increase in respondents who said their main source of information about the police was through television.

	2007	2008
TV	60%	67%
Radio	8	7
News-Leader	29	24
Website	2	3

Responses differed significantly by age:

	Aged 18-30	Aged 65+
TV	60%	70%
Radio	13	1
News-Leader	21	28
Website	6	1

Differences were also found by geographic location. Residents of north Springfield were more likely to report *TV* as their main media source of information (76% versus 59% of south Springfield residents) and less likely to report the *News-Leader* (15% versus 30% of south side residents).

How often do you visit the Police Department website?

One percent of respondents said they visited the police website *frequently*, while 7% reported visiting the website *occasionally*. Sixteen percent said they *seldom* visited the website, and 76% had *never* visited the police website.

Conclusions

The consistency of responses to the Springfield Police Department citizen survey continues this year. After 15 years of administering the survey, the issue of *drugs* continues to dominate, but economic-related issues are on the rise as well. *Drug activity* topped a list of crime problems in Springfield, with nearly 40% rating it as the number one problem in the city. Given a list of 14 neighborhood issues, the top rated items were *theft from vehicles*, *burglaries*, and *drug activity*. Finally, when asked to rank six police services, *heavy enforcement of drug activity* remained number one.

The percentage of respondents who believe that the police are serving the community's needs was the same in 2008 as in 2007 (78%). One area of concern is the apparent rise in the number of residents who believe that crime is increasing in their neighborhood. Poor economic conditions undoubtedly influenced some of the responses this year.