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**1999 CRIME REPORT:
ATTITUDES TOWARD POLICE DIFFER BY RACE,
VICTIMIZATION RATES STEADY,
SUPPORT FOR PRISON CONSTRUCTION DROPS**

While Arizonans generally have a favorable view of the police, whites and people of other races differ substantially in their perceptions of how police handle their jobs, according to results of a study recently conducted by Northern Arizona University researchers. People of other races are less likely than whites to see the police as friends, more likely to believe the police are tougher on people of color, and more likely to know someone that has been physically mistreated or abused by the police. Victimization rates have steadied in Arizona with most Arizonans believing the level of crime in their neighborhood has stayed the same over the past 12 months, and less than one-quarter reporting that they or another member of their household were victims of crime recently. In addition, the study found that most Arizonans prefer education and prevention programs as a strategy for reducing crime. Support for prison construction has dropped since a similar study was last conducted in 1997.

The 1999 Arizona Crime Report is the third in a series of studies conducted by researchers at the Social Research Laboratory and the Department of Criminal Justice at Northern Arizona University. The statewide telephone survey of 433 randomly selected Arizonans took place between February 8 and 12, 1999. The results are accurate at a +/- 5% margin of error with a 95% confidence level. Results from the current study are compared to results from similar studies conducted in 1994 and 1997.

RACE GAP IN PERCEPTIONS OF HOW POLICE HANDLE THEIR JOBS

Most people in Arizona have a favorable impression of their local police department. Eighty-eight percent of the public says they have either a very favorable or somewhat favorable impression of their local police. The study found that impressions vary by race. People of color are twice as likely as whites to have an unfavorable impression of their local police (18 percent versus 9 percent).

Most people in Arizona (59%) think of the police more as friends than as enemies. Here again, there is a racial divide. Almost two-out-of-three whites (62%) believe the police are their friends, while only 44 percent of people from other races share this belief. Half the people of color in the study (49%) say the police are neither their friends nor their enemies, while 35 percent of whites share this view.

A majority of whites in Arizona (57%) say the police treat all people, regardless of race, the same. Less than half of people from other races in Arizona believe this to be true (46%). Thirty-five percent of people from other races believe the police are tougher on people of color than on whites. Twenty-three percent of whites share this view.

Perceptions of police abuse appear to be widespread, according to study findings. One-third of people of color in the study (33%) and 19 percent of whites say they personally know someone who has been physically mistreated or abused by the police.

“Our study indicates that there is a large racial gap in Arizona when perceptions of how the police handle their jobs are considered. The fact that different racial groups hold such diverse perceptions of the police in Arizona is a cause for concern,” said Fred Solop, co-director of the NAU study.

VICTIMIZATION RATES STEADY

Almost three-quarters of Arizonans (73%) believe crime in their neighborhood has stayed the same over the past 12 months, according to the study. Only one-fifth of Arizonans (20%) think crime has increased during this period. Two years ago, a similar study found 63 percent of the public saying crime has steadied in their neighborhood and 27 percent believing crime has increased.

Less than one quarter of the state population (22 percent) now report that they or a member of their household was a victim of crime during the past 12 months. This finding is consistent with results from the 1997 study.

The survey asked people whether they personally were the victim of specific crimes during the past year. The categories of harm investigated ranged from theft to violence to sexual harassment. For most of these categories, equal numbers of Arizonans today report being victimized during the past year, compared to a similar survey taken in 1997. These numbers are generally lower than study results from 1994. Two categories of crime stand out, however, from

previous results. Fewer people today report having had something stolen from where they live, their car or some other place than in previous studies (23% today compared to 28% in 1997 and 38% in 1994). More people report being cheated by a business or landlord today compared to 1997 results (21% versus 10% in 1997).

Among the list of eight offenses investigated, theft is the harm most often experienced by Arizonans. Still, the rate of theft has decreased substantially when findings from this survey are compared to findings from previous years. Other harms most often experienced by Arizonans include being cheated by a business or landlord (21%) and being made sick by some kind of pollution (17%

Other harms were reported less frequently. Six percent of people say someone broke into their home during the last year, 5 percent were treated unfairly or made to feel uncomfortable because of their sex, and 4 percent say an employer or co-worker directed unwanted sexual advance to them. Small proportions of people were also victims of more violent crimes during the past year. Four percent said someone they know actually hit, kicked, stabbed or fired a weapon at them, and three percent said a stranger actually hit, kicked, stabbed or fired a weapon at them. These numbers are highly consistent with findings from the 1997 and 1994 crime studies undertaken by the NAU researchers.

ARIZONANS SUPPORT EDUCATION AND PREVENTION PROGRAMS WHILE SUPPORT FOR PRISON CONSTRUCTION DROPS

When it comes to fighting crime, Arizonans have a loud and clear message to send policy-makers: “Fight crime with education and prevention programs rather than building more

prisons and locking more people up.” People clearly prefer trying to reduce crime by spending more money on public school education (84%), drug prevention programs (71%), and gang prevention programs (70%). More than two-thirds want to reduce crime by spending more money on pre-school programs (69%) and violence prevention programs (67%). Sixty-four percent want to increase the number of police officers available, and half want to increase support for single parents (50%)

Other crime fighting strategies receive less support in Arizona, including reducing unemployment (42%) and spending more money for prison construction (40%). Not only is prison construction the crime fighting strategy least supported by Arizonans, but support today is significantly lower than in previous years. Forty-eight percent of the public supported prison construction in 1997.

Dr. Nancy Wonders, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Northern Arizona University and co-director of the study, had this to say about the results, “Given the steady nature of crime rates over the last two decades, the message from the Arizona public is that state dollars should be directed toward improving education, crime prevention programs, and social services that help to ensure that all of Arizona’s children have a fair chance to grow up to be contributing crime-free citizens. The time is ripe to stop constructing new prisons and to start focusing on prevention.”

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February 18 1999

THE ARIZONA CRIME REPORT

A STATEWIDE TELEPHONE POLL

Social Research Laboratory
Northern Arizona University

BACKGROUND MEMO

1-NAU014/Spring

The Arizona Crime Report was conducted between February 8 and February 12, 1999. A random sample of 433 Arizonans was interviewed by telephone. Figures of this sampling size are subject to a sampling error of about +/- 5 percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in the population versus a scientific sample taken from the population. Sampling error does not take into account additional sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The data referred to in this release are presented below.

Is your overall opinion of your local police department very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

	Total	White	Other Race
Very Favorable	27%	29%	21%
Mostly Favorable	61%	61%	60%
Mostly Unfavorable	7%	6%	12%
Very Unfavorable	4%	3%	6%
Don't Know	2%	2%	1%
Total	101%	101%	100%
	(N = 433)	(N=340)	(N=82)

Do you generally think of the police more as friends, more as enemies, or don't you think of them in either of these ways?

	Total	White	Other Race
Friends	59%	62%	44%
Enemies	2%	2%	4%
Neither	38%	35%	49%
Don't Know	1%	1%	4%
Total	100%	100%	101%
	(N = 433)	(N=340)	(N=82)

Do you think the police in Arizona are generally tougher on whites than on people of color, are tougher on people of color than on whites, or do the police treat everyone the same?

	Total	White	Other Race
Tougher on Whites	1%	1%	4%
Tougher on People of Color	25%	23%	35%
Everyone Treated the Same	55%	57%	46%
Don't Know/Refused	19%	19%	16%
Total	100%	100%	101%
	(N = 433)	(N=341)	(N=83)

Do you personally know anyone who has been physically mistreated or abused by the police?

	Total	White	Other Race
Yes	22%	19%	33%
No	78%	81%	66%
Don't Know	1%	---	1%
Total	101%	100%	100%
	(N = 433)	(N=341)	(N=83)

In the past 12 months, do you feel that crime in your neighborhood has increased, decreased, or remained about the same as it was before?

	Increased	Decreased	Stayed the Same	DK/Refused	(N)
February 1999	20%	5%	73%	2%	433
<i>March 1997</i>	27%	7%	63%	4%	402

In the past 12 months, were you or any member of your household the victim of a crime, whether you reported it to the authorities or not?

	Yes	No	DK/Refused	(N)
February 1999	22%	77%	15%	433
<i>March 1997</i>	23%	77%	---	402

Please tell me whether or not each of the following did or did not happen to you during the last year.

	(1999) Did Happen	<i>(1997) Did Happen</i>	<i>(1994) Did Happen</i>
You had something stolen from where you live, your car, or some other place.	23%	28%	38%
You were cheated by a business or a landlord.	21%	10%	22%
You were made sick by some kind of pollution.	17%	17%	19%
Someone broke into your house.	6%	7%	7%
You were treated unfairly or made to feel uncomfortable at work because of your sex.	5%	3%	6%
Someone you know actually hit, kicked, stabbed, or fired a weapon at you.	4%	4%	6%
An employer or co-worker directed unwanted sexual advances toward you.	4%	3%	9%
A stranger actually hit, kicked, stabbed, or fired a weapon at you.	3%	5%	9%

I am going to read a list of programs and activities that different people think may reduce crime in your community. Please tell me whether Arizona should spend more money or less money on these programs and activities in the future.

	(1999) More Money	<i>(1997) More Money</i>	<i>(1994) More Money</i>
Public School Education	84%	78%	81%
Drug Prevention Programs	71%	72%	79%
Gang Prevention Programs	70%	75%	76%
Pre-School Programs	69%	67%	68%
Violence Prevention Programs	67%	62%	72%
Increasing the Number of Police Officers	64%	64%	69%
Support for Single Parents	50%	48%	47%
Reducing Unemployment	42%	51%	63%
Prison Construction	40%	48%	47%