

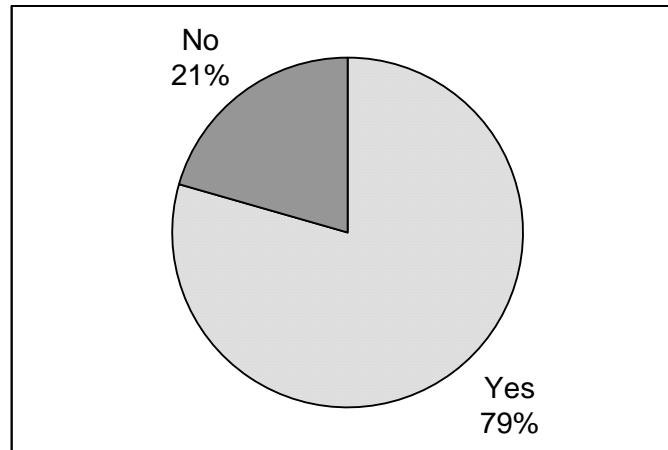


METROPOLITAN CRIME COMMISSION, INC.  
*Crime and Safety in Central City: A Community's Perspective – Jan 2007*  
Executive Summary

An examination of feelings about crime and police among residents the New Orleans neighborhood Central City reveals a community fearful of criminal activity and skeptical of the ability of the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) to prevent crimes from occurring. Between August and November 2006, the Metropolitan Crime Commission (MCC) conducted a survey in Central City that yielded responses from 324 residents. These results largely mirror the concerns expressed by New Orleans citizens at a community march on City Hall that occurred January 11, 2007 in response to a nine (9) killings in the first 8 days of 2007.

- A 79% majority of Central City residents are afraid of crime, and more residents are afraid of crime today than before Hurricane Katrina.
- The main neighborhood problems identified by Central City residents are drug distribution, murders, not having enough positive activities for young people, and too much trash littering the area. Meaningful resolution to these specific problems would most benefit residents' the sense of safety and security.

**"Are you afraid of crime in Central City?"**



- Although most regularly see the NOPD on patrol in Central City and believe that the police are effective at responding to emergencies, only 38% indicate that the police do a good job of preventing crime.
- Solutions sought by neighborhood residents include increased police patrols, more opportunities for area youth to apply themselves, cleaning up trash and blighted properties in Central City, and improvements in the criminal justice system such as a police department with better community relations and more effective removal of dangerous criminals from the streets.
- Central City residents express that they are very interested in a neighborhood watch program to better combat crime and to build a stronger sense of community.

The primary goal of this MCC research endeavor is to identify the problems of greatest concern to Central City residents and the solutions to these problems that community members feel would be most effective. It is hoped that this research process can contribute to the implementation of

solutions that have the greatest value and impact to Central City residents. Two community groups, the Central City Renaissance Alliance and the Young Leadership Council partnered with the MCC in this project. The participation of these and other community groups, as well as Central City residents, is critical to achieving positive changes that directly address the needs and wishes of neighborhood residents.

**Who Responded the Survey?**

The 324 respondents comprised a racially diverse mix of individuals of which 81% were black, 15% were white, and 4% were of another race. Most (85%) lived in Central City prior to Hurricane Katrina and returned after the storm. An examination of respondents' addresses shows that people from throughout Central City answered surveys.

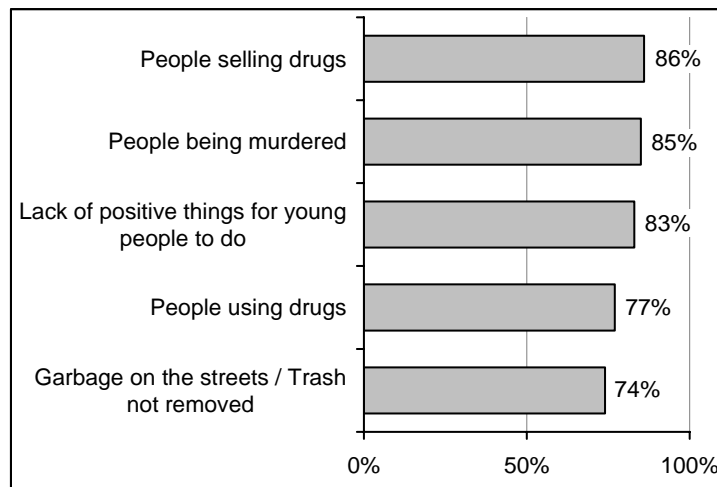
**Crime in Central City**

Fear of crime is a pervasive concern among Central City residents. In addition to having a 79% majority state that they are afraid of crime, Central City residents indicate that their fear of crime has increased since their return to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. When asked how safe from crime they felt in Central City before and after Hurricane Katrina, 45% stated that they felt somewhat or very safe before the storm but only 31% report feeling safe in their neighborhood after the storm.

The main neighborhood problems identified by Central City residents include specific crime and quality of life issues that, if properly addressed, can remedy many residents' safety concerns:

- The prevalence of drug activity is one of the main problems in Central City. Eighty-six percent (86%) indicate that drug distribution is a problem in the neighborhood, and it is the most frequently identified issue. Additionally, 77% see drug use as a major neighborhood problem, which may make drugs the primary crime issue to Central City residents.

**Percent of Residents Identifying the Following as Problems in Central City**



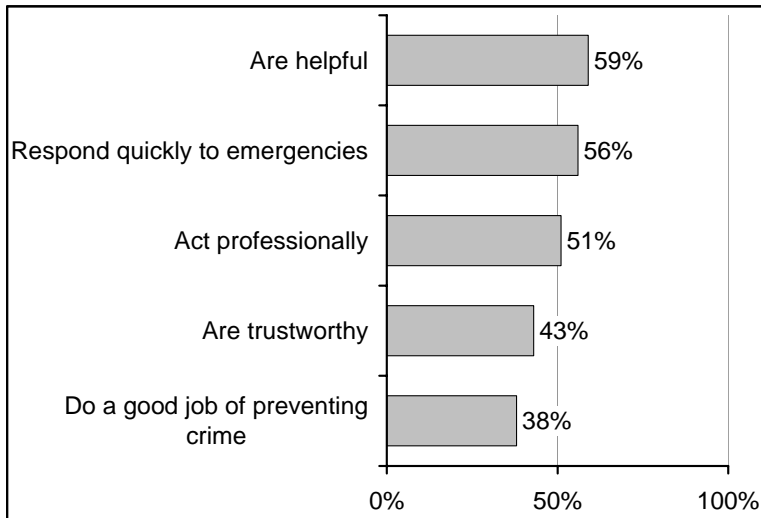
- Murders, cited by 85%, is the other dominating crime issue creating fear in Central City.
- The quality-of-life issues of a lack of activities for children (cited by 83%) and overabundant trash (cited by 74%) in Central City are also seen as significant neighborhood problems. Residents see aimless youths and frequent litter as problems that exacerbate the crime problems and degrade the overall enjoyableness and sense of security within Central City.

**Perceptions of Police in Central City**

The success of the criminal justice system hinges on trust and cooperation received from the public. Without citizens reporting crimes and providing information, evidence, and testimony, it is unlikely that the criminal justice system will ultimately be able to remove criminals from the community and deter criminal activity. The New Orleans Police Department (NOPD), as the frontline representatives of the criminal justice system, have the most community contact and are the criminal justice system’s most crucial link to the community, which makes public opinion of the NOPD critically important to combating crime.

Residents of Central City give moderate ratings of the NOPD with 71% rating their performance as either “okay” (45%) or “good” (26%), and another 29% giving the police a “bad” job performance rating. As shown the in figure below, Central City residents have varied opinions about different aspects of NOPD.

**Percent Agreeing That, “Since Hurricane Katrina, the NOPD in Central City . . . ”**



- Survey respondents report NOPD strengths to be police’s helpfulness and ability to quickly respond to emergencies. Over half agree that the NOPD are effective in these areas.

- Significantly, 62% do not think NOPD is effective at preventing criminal activity. Improving the perception that the NOPD does not do a good job of preventing crime is pivotal to earning the confidence of the community.

- Other areas of concern regarding the NOPD’s overall image pertain to perceptions of the department’s general professionalism. Only half (51%) of respondents indicate that officers act professionally and only 43% see police as trustworthy. Of particular concern is that 57% indicate that the police are not trustworthy. This lack of trust for the NOPD can undermine law enforcement’s ability to be an effective crime fighting force in the community.

The culmination of these ratings of the NOPD shows that Central City residents do not have an altogether negative impression of the police, but they see many areas in which the NOPD can improve its service to the community. Community views of the NOPD’s professionalism, trustworthiness, and ability to prevent crime are the most important areas to address when seeking to build a more positive public image for the police department.

### **Community Sought Solutions**

Through responses to open-ended survey questions, residents provide feedback that describes their views of how to best improve the safety of their neighborhood and make Central City a better place to live. The community-generated recommendations listed below provide concrete ideas on how to improve life for Central City residents:

- The request for a stronger police presence in Central City is the most common recommendation of survey respondents. The primary way to make Central City residents feel safer is through greater visibility of NOPD officers. Survey results also show that people who report seeing police more often are more likely to give favorable ratings of NOPD job performance.
- Residents emphasize the importance of providing constructive activities for area youths as another significant way to improve life in Central City.
- Residents express a desire to rid their community of trash and blighted housing to improve appearance and overall quality of life in Central City.
- Many state that an improved criminal justice system that more effectively removes criminals from the streets and has a police department with a better relationship with the community would greatly improve conditions in Central City.
- A majority of residents indicate that they feel a neighborhood watch program would improve the crime problem in Central City, and most would join a neighborhood watch program.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Residents portray Central City as overwhelmed with prolific drug activity and murders, coupled with many quality of life concerns such as a lack of positive activities for area youth and problems with lighting, trash, and blighted housing.

The positive finding in these results is that many express a willingness to be actively engaged in addressing crime problems by joining a neighborhood watch program and a vast majority of those currently living in Central City chose to return after Hurricane Katrina, even though most were fearful of crime before the storm.

The principal recommendation of this research is for the NOPD to proactively address community misgivings about police through building greater community awareness of their presence and activities. The MCC also recommends recording Officer and suspect interactions with dashboard-mounted video cameras in police units, which will memorialize police encounters with citizens and should improve police/citizen interactions. Earning the trust and confidence of the community is critical in the criminal justice system's efforts to curtail criminal activity. In addition, the MCC respectfully recommends that city leadership and community groups and leaders take the actions necessary to clean up Central City, involve more neighborhood children in constructive activities, work to improve police/community relations, and develop a neighborhood watch program to unite this community against crime.

These results benchmark Central City residents' perceptions of crime and law enforcement before the January 11, 2007 march upon City Hall and before city leadership announced several changes that they will apply to their crime fighting strategies. The MCC will follow-up this research in 2008 to document the impact with the public of new community policing initiatives and other initiatives to better address crime in New Orleans.

*Please visit our website to view the full report: [www.metropolitancrimecommission.org](http://www.metropolitancrimecommission.org)*