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Deputies' Perceptions of Citizens' Attitudes Toward Service

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FINAL REPORT

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Boise State University

College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs

Deputies' Perceptions of Citizens' Attitudes Toward Service

The Research Project

In 1996 the Boise State University Department of Criminal Justice and the Ada County Sheriff's Office met to assess the viability of a collaborative research partnership. From that and subsequent meetings, a collaborative relationship was formed. The goals of the relationship were: 1) form a research-practitioner partnership to contribute to policy-relevant research and evaluation on behalf of the Ada County Sheriff's department and 2) use the partnership to develop a pool of research ideas of long-term usefulness to the Sheriff's Office.

One of the first efforts of the partnership was to apply for a partnership grant from the National Institute of Justice. A collaborative review of research ideas suggested by the Sheriff's Office resulted in the selection of two associated projects appropriate for solicitation. First was a citizen survey assessing citizen fear of crime, perceptions of police practices, knowledge of crime control service, and community policing initiatives by the department. The second was the construction and implementation of a Internet web page site. The partnership grant was awarded by the National Institute of Justice in 1997.

A secondary goal emerged during the research process. The first product of the grant, a random survey of citizens' perceptions of Sheriff's services, was completed in September, 1997. In a subsequent meeting between the Sheriff's Office and BSU staff,

the question was raised as to the extent to which Sheriff's deputies' attitudes mirrored citizens' attitudes. We were curious about whether Sheriff's deputies had accurate perceptions of citizens' attitudes. We decided to produce a third project that emerged naturally from the research frame. This reflected a two-part query of substantive policy importance: (1) were deputies giving citizens the service they wanted, and (2) did deputies have accurate perceptions of citizen's service needs? This document is a summary of our findings.

Methodology

The Citizen Survey

A "Citizen Fear of Crime and Satisfaction With Sheriff Services Survey" was conducted in 1997 by the Social Science Research Center at BSU. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information regarding public fear of crime, attitudes towards police practices, and knowledge of services offered by the Sheriff's Office. The survey was randomly distributed to Ada county residents where the Sheriff's Office had primary patrol responsibilities. Data from 806 residents was collected, and findings were presented to the Sheriff's Office in a previous document titled "Citizen Fear of Crime and Satisfaction With Sheriff Services Survey."

The Sheriff's Survey

In meetings with the Sheriff's Office and Boise State University personnel, various parties indicated an interest in Deputies' perceptions of services. Since we had data on citizens' attitudes about services, we wondered if deputies shared citizens'

views or were aware about how citizens perceived their work. We were also curious about whether or not Deputies' perceptions of citizen's attitudes were consistent with what citizens actually thought. We took questions 91 through 107 under subtitle *Section II: Sheriff's Office Service Needs* from the citizen's survey (see Appendix B). These questions assessed the general public's perceptions of Sheriff's services. This part of the survey became the instrument that we distributed to Sheriff's deputies.

One of the methodological issues we addressed was if we should ask deputies about their perceptions of the importance of these items, or if we should ask them how they thought citizens would respond. The two questions would provide different kinds of information. The first -- what deputies thought -- tells us about differences in perspectives between Sheriff deputies and citizens. The second -- Sheriff's deputies perceptions of citizens' attitudes -- tells us about the extent that deputies correctly assessed citizens' perceptions. We decided to ask the second question.

The deputy's survey was dispersed by team sergeants at the Ada County Sheriff's Office. Deputies were asked by the sergeants to respond in terms of how they thought citizens would answer the questions in the citizen's survey. Fifty-six surveys were distributed and 41 were returned for a response rate of 73%.

Items in both surveys were scaled on a five point Likert Scale, with a range of 1, "strongly disagree" to 5, "strongly agree." All items were scored so that higher values indicated agreement with the questions being asked. Surveys were compared using a two-tailed t-test for equality of means assuming non-equal variances.

Findings

Findings are organized into two sections. Section 1 looks at questions where there are significant differences between deputy and citizen perceptions. Section 2 looks at areas where there are no differences between deputy and citizen perceptions.

Section 1

The following questions showed significant differences between citizen's responses and how deputies thought citizens would respond.

Question:	Most citizens are really interested in the problems faced by the Sheriff's Office.	
Finding:	Citizen's actual score: 3.45	What deputies thought citizens would score: 2.71
Interpretation:	Citizens were much more interested in the problems faced by the Sheriff than deputies thought they would be.	

Question:	There are few dependable personal ties between the Sheriff's deputies and the public.	
Finding:	Citizen's actual score: 3.24	What deputies thought citizens would score: 2.56
Interpretation:	Deputies under-judged citizen's perceptions of dependable ties between them. Citizens were more positive than deputies thought they would be.	

Question:	Friendship between the Sheriff's office and citizens is easy to develop.	
Finding:	Citizen's actual score: 3.53	What deputies thought citizens would score: 3.85
Interpretation:	Though the difference is small, citizens thought that it was slightly more difficult to form friendships with deputies than deputies expected.	

Question: Deputies seem content staying in their patrol cars rather than interacting with citizens.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 3.24 What deputies thought citizens would score: 2.66

Interpretation: Citizens thought that deputies were content staying in their patrol cars to a greater degree than deputies. The implication is that citizens are supportive of more personal interactions with the police.

Question: Sheriff deputies are usually intimidating.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 2.96 What deputies thought citizens would score: 2.07

Interpretation: Deputies were more intimidating than they thought they were.

Question: Deputies show concern when asked questions.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 4.12 What deputies thought citizens would score: 3.83

Interpretation: Citizens thought that deputies were concerned to a greater degree than deputies expected.

Question: Deputies should spend more time talking to people about their problems.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 3.61 What deputies thought citizens would score: 3.10

Interpretation: Deputies underestimated how important citizens thought it was to talk to people about their problems.

Question: Deputies should give tickets for even minor law violations so that people will obey laws in the county.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 2.89 What deputies thought citizens would score: 2.41

Interpretation: Citizens were more crime-control oriented on tickets than deputies thought they would be.

Section 2:

In the following questions, citizens' actual responses were not significantly different from what deputies thought they would be. In other words, there was a high correspondence between deputy and citizen perceptions.

1) Sheriff deputies are usually courteous.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 4.28 What deputies thought citizens would score: 4.29

2) Sheriff deputies are usually honest.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 4.18 What deputies thought citizens would score: 4.32

3) Sheriff deputies are usually fair.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 4.05 What deputies thought citizens would score: 4.29

4) Deputies should spend more time working with individuals and groups to solve problems.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 3.90 What deputies thought citizens would score: 3.59

5) Deputies should spend more time than they do investigating serious crime, serious criminals, and suspicious persons.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 3.78 What deputies thought citizens would score: 3.44

6) Citizens and Sheriff's deputies work together in solving problems.

Finding: Citizen's actual score: 3.75 What deputies thought citizens would score: 3.46

Discussion

Overall, deputies' estimations of citizens' attitudes were remarkably close to how citizens actually felt. Where we found differences, those differences usually occurred

in a way that showed higher levels of positive sentiments from citizens than deputies expected.

The following implications can be drawn from the data:

- Across all scores, both significant and non-significant, citizens showed higher scores than deputies thought they would. This means that they consistently felt stronger about the items than expected. This is particularly the case with regard to the question asking about how intimidating deputies were. This suggests that, in deputy-citizen interactions, deputies have a stronger impact on citizens than they think they do. Deputies should recognize that, even in the most friendly encounters, citizens are intensely aware of who they are dealing with and are sensitive to even the smallest gestures.
- Four questions assessed citizens perception of ethical qualities of deputies. There were courtesy, honesty, fairness, and concern. These four items were the highest scoring of all items in the survey, scoring over 4 in each case – meaning that the most likely outcome was "strongly agree," followed closely by "agree." These are very strong findings, and speak favorably about the Sheriff's Office's training and conduct in citizen-deputy interactions.
- Citizens would like to have more contact with deputies than they currently have. They are interested in working with deputies to identify and solve problems they

confront. This kind of contact is always a dilemma for the police, since their extra and unsupervised time is limited, and usually spent on patrol or doing paperwork. However, any activity that increases citizen contact would be well-received by citizens. Findings also suggest that citizens would be receptive to the kind of police-citizen programs characteristic of community policing endeavors.

- Citizens are more supportive of crime control than deputies think they are. This is not surprising. Other surveys have found that citizens are more supportive of "tough" law enforcement than police expect them to be. Also, it is not surprising that citizens support traffic tickets for even "minor" offenses, since the #1 problem identified in the original citizen survey was "speeding."

Appendix A

Independent Samples Test

<u>Question</u>	<u>Mean Difference</u>	<u>Mean (Citizens)</u>	<u>Mean (Deputies)</u>
Most citizens are really interested in the problems faced by the Sheriff's Office.	.74	3.45	2.71
There are few dependable personal ties between the Sheriff's deputies and the public.	.68	3.24	2.56
Friendship between the Sheriff's office and citizens is easy to develop.	-.33	3.53	3.85
Deputies seem content staying in their patrol cars rather than interacting with citizens.	.58	3.24	2.66
Citizens and Sheriff's Deputies work together in solving problems.	.28	3.75	3.46
Sheriff Deputies are usually fair.	-.25	4.05	4.29
Sheriff Deputies are usually courteous.	.08	4.28	4.20
Sheriff Deputies are usually honest.	-.13	4.18	4.32
Sheriff Deputies are usually intimidating.	.88	2.96	2.07
In general, Deputies treat all citizens equally according to the law.	-.11	3.64	3.76
Deputies show concern when asked questions.	.29	4.12	3.83
Deputies should spend more time talking to people about their problems.	.51	3.61	3.10

Appendix A (continued)

<u>Question</u>	<u>Mean Difference</u>	<u>Mean (Citizens)</u>	<u>Mean (Deputies)</u>
Deputies should spend more time than they do investigating serious crime, serious criminals, and suspicious persons.	.34	3.78	3.44
Deputies should spend more time working with individuals and groups to solve problems.	.31	3.90	3.59
Deputies should give tickets even for minor law violations so that people will obey laws in the county.	.47	2.89	2.41
Deputies should spend more time on traffic enforcement.	.06	3.16	3.10

Appendix B

"Citizen Fear of Crime and Satisfaction With Sheriff Services Survey."

		Strongly Agree	Neutral			Strongly Disagree			
		5	4	3	2	1			
				<u>Average</u>	5	4	3	2	1
91.	Most citizens are really interested in the problems faced by the Sheriff's office.			3.45	17.1	36.2	20.7	19.4	5.2
92.	There are few dependable personal ties between the Sheriff's's deputies and the public.			3.24	9.1	27.5	24.8	20.5	11.2
93.	Friendship between the Sheriff's office and citizens is easy to develop.			3.53	21.0	33.0	18.4	16.9	7.6
94..	Deputies seem content staying in their patrol cars rather than interacting with citizens.			3.24	15.6	22.3	22.8	20.0	13.5
95.	Citizens and Sheriff's deputies work together in solving problems.			3.75	20.3	38.5	22.5	10.8	3.5
96.	Sheriff deputies are usually fair.			4.05	28.2	45.7	15.6	4.6	2.1
97.	Sheriff deputies are usually courteous.			4.28	41.2	42.4	10.3	2.0	1.5
98.	Sheriff deputies are usually honest.			4.18	33.4	43.4	16.0	2.0	1.1
99.	Sheriff deputies are usually intimidating.			2.96	12.4	24.4	17.2	24.7	18.5
100.	In general, deputies treat all citizens equally according to the law.			3.64	22.2	37.3	14.4	13.5	8.3
101.	Deputies show concern when asked questions.			4.11	30.4	43.7	15.8	2.9	2.4
103.	Deputies should spend more time talking to people about their problems.			3.78	24.2	30.6	25.1	8.7	5.3
104.	Deputies should spend more time than they do investigating serious crime, serious criminals, and suspicious persons.			3.60	20.5	32.5	23.7	11.7	7.2
105.	Deputies should spend more time working with individuals and groups to solve problems.			3.90	24.7	38.7	21.5	6.7	3.3
106.	Deputies should give more tickets for even minor law violations so that people will obey laws in the county.			2.89	12.4	22.0	18.0	27.2	18.5
107.	Deputies should spend more time on traffic enforcement.			3.16	13.5	26.3	23.1	23.7	10.8

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Appendix C

"Sheriff's Deputy Survey"

		Strongly Agree	4	Neutral	2	Strongly Disagree						
		5		3		1						
							<u>Average</u>	5	4	3	2	1
1.	Most citizens are really interested in the problems faced by the Sheriff's Office.					2.71	0	26.8	24.4	41.5	7.3	
2.	There are few dependable personal ties between the Sheriff's deputies and the public.					2.56	2.4	9.8	41.5	34.1	12.2	
3.	Friendship between the Sheriff's office and citizens is easy to develop.					3.85	24.4	46.3	19.5	9.8	0	
4.	Deputies seem content staying in their patrol cars rather than interacting with citizens.					2.66	0	22.0	26.8	46.3	4.9	
5.	Citizens and Sheriff's deputies work together in solving problems.					3.46	4.9	48.8	17.1	26.8	0	
6.	Sheriff deputies are usually fair.					4.29	43.9	46.3	7.3	0	2.4	
7.	Sheriff deputies are usually courteous.					4.20	26.8	68.3	2.4	2.4	0	
8.	Sheriff deputies are usually honest.					4.32	46.3	43.9	4.9	4.9	0	
9.	Sheriff deputies are usually intimidating.					2.07	0	7.3	19.5	46.3	26.8	
10.	In general, deputies treat all citizens equally and according to the law.					3.76	14.6	58.5	14.6	12.2	0	
11.	Deputies show concern when asked questions.					3.83	12.2	61.0	24.4	2.4	0	
12.	Deputies should spend more time talking to people about their problems.					3.10	4.9	29.3	48.8	9.8	7.3	
13.	Deputies should spend more time than they do investigating serious crime, serious criminals, and suspicious persons.					3.44	17.1	34.1	31.7	9.8	7.3	
14.	Deputies should spend more time working with individuals and groups to solve problems.					3.59	17.1	39.0	34.1	4.9	4.9	
15.	Deputies should give tickets for even minor law violations so that people will obey laws in the county.					2.41	2.4	12.2	31.7	29.3	24.4	
16.	Deputies should spend more time on traffic enforcement.					3.10	7.3	26.8	39.0	22.0	4.9	