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## Survey studies race relations

*By Dave Flessner Staff Writer*

Most Chattanooga residents say they are satisfied with their lives, and a third of city residents say racial inequities in the Scenic City are narrowing, according to a recent survey of city residents.

But a telephone poll commissioned by the Chattanooga Human Rights and Relations Commission found a majority of black residents said they still don't think police deal fairly with minority races. "There's certainly some encouraging signs of improving race relations," said Hal Baker, an executive at Orange Grove and chairman of the city's Human Rights and Relations Commission. "But we still have some real challenges ahead, especially in the area of police dealings with minorities."

The human rights panel hired the Community Research Council last year to conduct the survey, which has an overall margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percent.

Among the 712 randomly selected adults responding to the poll, 95 percent said they would welcome someone of a different race living next door. Eighty percent of respondents thought employers should set goals and policies to create a diverse staff. Seven of every 10 Chattanooga residents polled said they work and socialize with people of another race.

When asked to compare race relations with five years ago, 33 percent said it has improved, 53 percent said there were no changes and 14 percent thought race relations had worsened. The survey found the racial divide was greatest in how respondents perceive the police. Only 37 percent of blacks said local law enforcement agencies treat minorities with respect, compared to 60 percent of whites and 68 percent of Hispanics. Less than half of black respondents were confident the Chattanooga Police Department is taking actions to improve race relations, compared to 75 percent of whites and 53 percent of Hispanics.

Among black respondents, 54 percent said police are frequently unfair in their dealings with minorities. By comparison, 24 percent of the white respondents said police frequently are unfair.

Police dealings with minorities were perceived to be the most unfair among eight areas of community life sampled in the survey, including shopping, employment, housing and education.

The survey results reflect sentiments similar to those voiced over the weekend

by many participants in the Chattanooga African-American Summit.

"There's always been this disconnect between communities of color and the police," said Vic Bumphus, an associate professor of criminal justice at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and a member of the summit's crime task force. "There tend to be more police in inner-city, minority neighborhoods, and for many African-Americans they feel there are inequities in the way they are treated by police."

Frank Hill, a safety strategist in four inner-city neighborhoods being refurbished with help from the Community Impact Fund, said he hears frequent complaints about city police profiling black people and stopping or arresting people of color more often.

"If you are black or meet some other similar profile, you are more likely to be pulled over, questioned or arrested," he said. "It's a real problem." Chattanooga Police Executive Chief Freeman Cooper suggested the problem may be more perception than reality. He said police are taught not to use racial profiling in stopping or arresting individuals suspected of a crime.

"If we stop somebody, it's going to be based on a violation. It's never based on race," Chief Cooper said.

But state Rep. Tommie Brown, D-Chattanooga, said she thinks police dealings with the minorities have worsened since Ralph Cothran was Chattanooga police chief in the 1990s.

"When I survey my constituents, police brutality and crime issues are always the top concerns," she said. "We need the police to help reduce crime in our neighborhoods, but there is still too much fear of the police because of the sense that they are more likely to use force against people of color."

Warren Logan, president of the Urban League of Greater Chattanooga, said blacks disproportionately are filling America's prisons.

An estimated 12 percent of all black males in their 20s are in jails or prisons, compared with 3.7 percent of Hispanic males and 1.6 percent of white males in that age group. Minority inmates comprise 68 percent of the U.S. jail population, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The higher crime rate in minority communities stems, in part, from problems in education, jobs and family support, Mr. Logan said.

"Chattanooga has come a long way, but we also have a long ways to go," he said.

Overall, 44 percent of black respondents, 46 percent of Hispanic respondents and 21 percent of white respondents reported that they had been treated unfairly in Chattanooga over the past year due to their race, religion, sex or national origin.

Despite the perceived inequity by many persons, 90 percent of all respondents still said they were either very or somewhat satisfied with life in general in Chattanooga.

Two-thirds of white respondents said Chattanooga will be a better place in five years, but less than half of black respondents thought Chattanooga would be better.

"The disparities today are not so much between blacks and white as they are between haves and have-nots," said Floyd Kilpatrick, president of the local Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. "We're making progress. But more certainly needs to be

done."

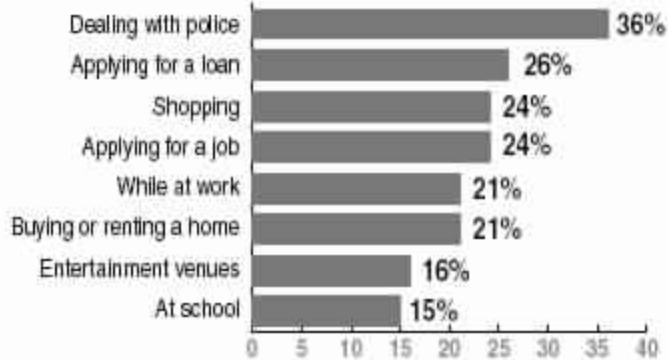
Staff writer Candice Combs contributed to this report.

E-mail Dave Flessner at [dflessner@timesfreepress.com](mailto:dflessner@timesfreepress.com)

## Perception of unfairness

More than a third of Chattanoogaans said they believe the police unfairly treat minorities, more than twice the share that believe schools are unfair to minorities.

### Percent of respondents who said minorities are treated unfairly when:



SOURCE: RESULTS BASED UPON RANDOM TELEPHONE SURVEY OF 712 CHATTANOOGA ADULTS CONDUCTED BY THE COMMUNITY RESEARCH COUNCIL, INC. IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2004. THE SURVEY HAS A MARGIN OF ERROR OF 3.7 PERCENT WITHIN GENERALLY ACCEPTED MEASURES.

STAFF GRAPHIC BY BECK TOWERY