

Community Fact Sheet

Race and Ethnicity Matter: What NWA Residents Are Saying About Quality of Life

Kevin M. Fitzpatrick, Ph.D, Emily Hallgren, and Don Willis

Volume 3, Issue No. 2

Since 2007, The Community and Family Institute (CFI) at the University of Arkansas has been interested in examining the quality-of-life in Northwest Arkansas. In 2010, CFI constructed the Northwest Arkansas Community Survey (NWACS) as a tool to assess quality-of-life in the Northwest Arkansas (NWA) region (for the full report see <http://sociology.uark.edu/1003.02.nwacsforweb.pdf>). The survey consisted of questions concerning neighborhoods, community involvement, as well as perceptions of services provided and community cohesion.

Quality of Life Survey

The survey was administered to adult residents of Benton and Washington County, Arkansas. Adults with a valid street address or post office box were considered to be residents of NWA and therefore eligible to be surveyed. To be certain that African American and Hispanic populations were adequately represented, these groups were oversampled.

Over 2,600 residents were mailed a survey and from that group, 52.4 percent (634) from Benton County and 52.5 percent (623) from Washington County completed the survey. The average age of respondents was 48 for Benton County, and 50.7 for Washington County. Females made up 45.4 percent (279) of Washington County and 40 percent (250) of Benton County. Respondent level of education was also measured; forty-three percent of respondents from Washington County had earned a high school diploma, while 49.2 percent (303) had earned one in Benton County. Total household income was assessed and 13 percent (74) of Benton County respondents had a total household income below

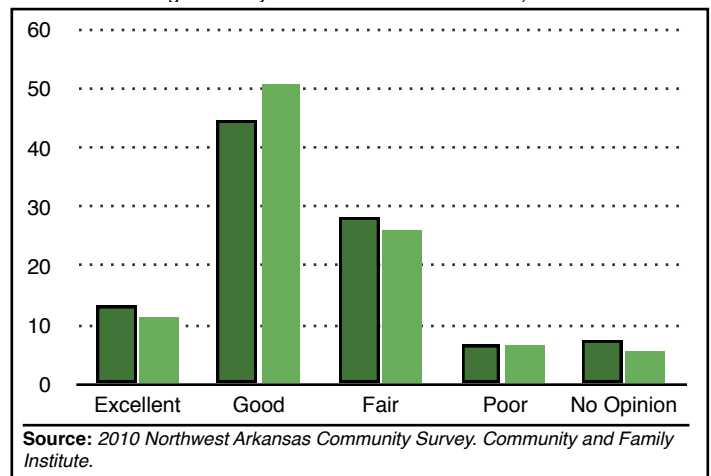
\$20,000. The majority of respondents had a total household income between \$20,000 and \$74,900. This income bracket made up 56.8 percent (325) of Washington County respondents and 58.1 percent (330) of Benton County respondents.

Why Race and Ethnicity Matter

Racial and ethnic relations are an essential element of the quality of life of a community. As our communities in the United States grow more diverse each year, it is important to cultivate healthy racial and ethnic relationships in order to foster a high quality of life in our communities. In order to assess the quality of racial and ethnic relations in the communities of Northwest Arkansas, the 2010 Northwest Arkansas Community Survey asked a variety of questions related to racial and ethnic relations, including questions on respondent's personal feelings toward people of differing races, and their assessment of their community's treatment of people of different races and ethnicities.

Figure 1.1

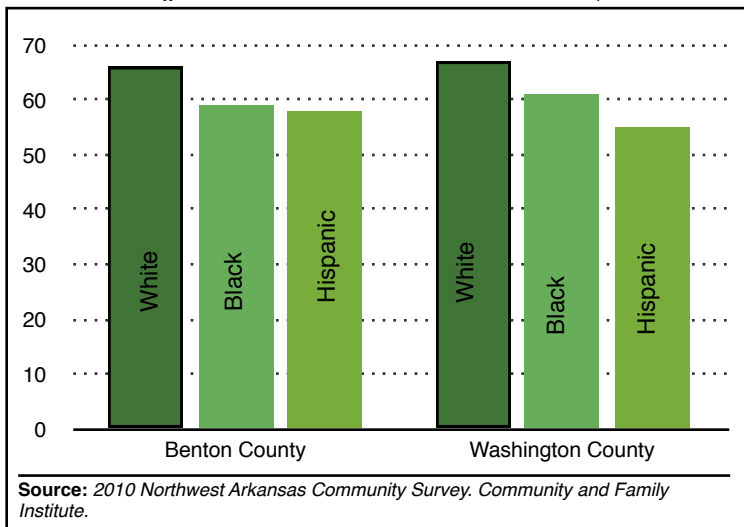
Residents' Ratings: Quality of Race Relations in NWA, 2010



Results in Figure 1.1 show residents of Northwest Arkansas generally perceive race and ethnic relations in their communities to be good. About 60 percent of all respondents rated relationships between people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds as “good” or “excellent”. Nevertheless, a sizable percentage of respondents, 26 percent in Washington County and 28 percent in Benton County, rated these relations as just “fair”, and nearly 7 percent of all respondents rated race and ethnic relationships as “poor” in the region.

Figure 1.2

Residents' Ratings: Satisfied with Treatment of Others in NWA, 2010



In Figure 1.2, we can see that the majority of respondents in both counties were satisfied with the treatment of whites, blacks, and Hispanics/Latinos. However, there was some discrepancy in the satisfaction of treatment for each group. Over two-thirds of each county reported satisfaction for the treatment of whites. Satisfaction for the treatment of Blacks was around 10 percent less than for the treatment of whites. The least satisfied with regards to how they were treated was the treatment of Hispanics which was 55 percent for Washington County and 58 percent for Benton County.

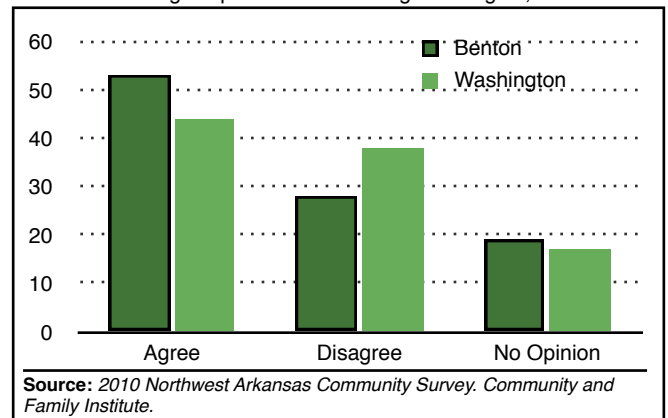
While there appears to be a general sense of satisfaction with how others are treated, the percentages in Figure 1.2 seem to reveal a perceived inequality of treatment of minorities in Northwest Arkansas. Respondents showed less satisfaction in the treatment of non-whites. At first, the lower satisfaction could be interpreted as respondents wanting better treatment for non-whites. However, their dissatisfaction might also be attributed to feelings that treatment of non-white people was possibly too high.

Immigrants and Equal Rights

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement, “Immigrants are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.” The results in Figure 1.3 show a large percentage of respondents agreed with the statement. Just over half the respondents from Benton County agreed with the statement, while just over 40 percent of Washington County respondents agreed. These results seem to suggest that even though the majority of those surveyed reported high levels of satisfaction with the way that other races were being treated, they do not necessarily feel that treatment needs to be improved and in fact perceive that immigrants are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.

Figure 1.3

Residents' Ratings: Opinions about Immigrants Rights, 2010



Community Implications

The community’s responses to these racial and ethnic relations questions tell a complex story. While race relations were rated as “good” or “excellent” by approximately 60 percent of respondents, nearly half reported discontent with immigrants’ demand for equal rights. Furthermore, a fair amount of Northwest Arkansans personally reported greater distrust for non-white people than for white people.

To address this inconsistency, Northwest Arkansas may need to create structural and institutional change to ignite changes in sentiment at the individual level. The inconsistencies between views towards race relations in the community and personal attitudes towards other races, suggest that diversity awareness programs would be beneficial--helping create a stronger more inclusive region.