

*Civilian Oversight of the
Marin County Sheriff's Office*

Preliminary Results of the Community Outreach Survey

February 10, 2023

Elise White, Ph.D.
Deputy Research Director

Rachel Swaner, Ph.D.
Research Director

 Center
for
Justice
Innovation



Center for Justice Innovation

- Creates programs to test new ideas and solve problems
- Performs original research to determine what works and what doesn't
- Provides expert assistance to justice reformers around the world

Scope of Work

- Center for Justice Innovation was brought in to assist the Marin County Board of Supervisors and the working group collect data on community perspectives on effective civilian oversight of the Marin County Sheriff's Office (MCSO).
- This is exploratory research.
- Goals, time, resources, and people-power all influence study design and implementation.

Limitations

- Budget and time precluded the possibility of obtaining a probability sample that would have been representative of Marin County residents.
- Additional qualitative data (e.g., focus groups) would have provided additional context for some of the numbers presented here.
- The survey could only be completed in English, Spanish, simplified Chinese, and Vietnamese. This meant that those whose primary language was something else may not have been represented.

Community Outreach Survey Results

- Survey administered in December 2022 and January 2023
- 526 **online and paper surveys** collected in English, Spanish, and Chinese (Vietnamese was also available, but received 0 responses)
- Half of total respondents came from **two neighborhoods**
 - San Rafael = 25%
 - Novato = 24%
 - Mill Valley = 9%
 - Marin City = 9%
 - San Anselmo = 5%
- 49% reported living in an unincorporated part of Marin County

Demographics of Survey Respondents

- **Primary language at home:** 91% English, 8% Spanish, 1% Mandarin or Chinese
- **Gender:** 56% male, 43% female, 1% other
- **Race/ethnicity:** 70% White, 16% Black, 13% Latino/Latinx, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Indigenous, 0.5% Multiracial; 18% of respondents did not answer
- **Age:** median age = 61 years old
 - 18-24 years old = 3%
 - 25-39 years old = 12%
 - 40-59 years old = 32%
 - 60-69 years old = 23%
 - 70 and older = 30%

Most Common Forms of Contact with the MCSO

Contact in the last 5 years	
Community event	26%
Asked for help	24%
Traffic stop	19%
Traffic control	13%
In court (sheriff's deputy)	8%
Evacuation/emergency management	6%
Street/sidewalk stop	5%

Respondents described their contact:

53% Positive

22% Negative

14% Neutral

11% Mixed

Context for Perspectives on Engagement with MCSO

- Positive – generally focused on “professional” and “helpful” aspects of MCSO
 - *My 10-year-old daughter was sexually harassed in the woods in a very scary incident. The Sheriff's office was responsive, they communicated well, assigned a specialist and followed through with professionalism. We feel safe in our community because of how they handled the case. Cordial officers, helpful and responsive - responded within 5 minutes of call.*
 - *Deputy came to a Neighborhood Association meeting; was friend[ly] & professional and conveyed the [...] spirit of public service I would expect from someone trusted with such authority.*
- Negative – generally focused on “arrogance” and “disrespectful” treatment by MCSO, with some reflections on differential treatment based on race
 - *At a peaceful rally for George Floyd, I witnessed a large number of Sheriff deputies dressed in camo fatigues and carrying weapons like a paramilitary group. I found this both racist and intimidating. Paramilitary groups have no place in a peaceful society.*
 - *I was pulled over and screamed at. A friend of mine, an Indonesian immigrant, was arrested and held in jail overnight. His family didn't hear from him till the next day and were terrified especially because he has crucial cancer medication he needs to take.*

53% Reported Not Knowing MCSO Had a Complaint Review Process

Have you ever done any of the following?	
Wanted to file a complaint but did not because I was scared to do so	11%
Thought about filing a complaint with the MCSO but did not begin the process	8%
Wanted to file a complaint but did not because I did not know how to do so	5%
Filed a complaint with the MCSO	5%
Tried to file a complaint with the MCSO but did not complete the process	2%
None of the above	70%

Experiences with the Existing Complaint Process

- 67 people responded to the related open-ended question exploring respondents' experiences with the existing complaint process
- Some described choosing not to file due to **lack of trust in MCSO and the process**
 - *Complaints to the offender makes no sense to me when the offenders show clear disregard and disinterest regarding my objections during the encounters.*
- Some described choosing not to file **due to fear of retaliation**
 - *The Sheriff and department have a scary reputation.*
 - *I made a full stop and they said I didn't stop. Accused me of smelling of alcohol - I had not had alcohol. Tested, let me go and forgot all about false stop sign. Attorney advised me not to complain because of likely retribution.*
- The few who had used the process described it as **not yielding any results**
 - *Complaint filed, nothing done about it. No response.*
 - *I was physically assaulted and sexually assaulted [by an officer] and filed a complaint. No one has responded. Also filed public records request for body cam footage they refuse to release to me. Marin sheriffs are corrupt and crooks.*

Preferred Current Methods for Filing a Complaint Against MCSO

Top Three Methods

- Fill out and submit a form online (52%)
- Download an electronic form and email it to the Marin County Sheriff's Office (26%)
- Download an online form, and print, complete, and mail it to the Marin County Sheriff's Office (20%)

Some reported they **wouldn't file a complaint** due to:

- Lack of trust (15%)
- Fear (11%)

Important Roles and Responsibilities for Civilian Oversight of MCSO

Top 5	
Independently investigating complaints made against employees of the Marin County Sheriff's Office	74%
Independently investigating complaints made against the Marin County jail	73%
Issuing public reports on both internal and external complaints, investigation outcomes, and other work of the community oversight body	73%
Creating a process for an independent office to receive complaints made by community members against the Marin County Sheriff's Office	72%
Reviewing the policies, practices, and training programs of the Marin County Sheriff's Office and make recommendations on policy, practices, and training	70%

Public Reports the Oversight Committee Should Release

Top 5	
Injuries and deaths of people incarcerated in Marin County jail	63%
Violence and use of force in the Marin County jail	62%
Jail conditions	59%
Community policing initiatives	57%
Work and major initiatives of the Civilian Oversight Committee	56%

Mandatory Training for Oversight Committee

Individuals serving on the committee should receive training on...	
Constitutional principles of policing (for example, stops, detention, search and seizure, rights of arrestee) and racial bias	77%
State laws governing law enforcement transparency and confidentiality	76%
Use of force law, policy, and tactics	76%
Marin County Sheriff's Office training, policies, and procedures	76%
Jail tours and ride-alongs with law enforcement	70%
Ethics	70%
Criminal justice process (arrest, booking, arraignment, bail, etc.)	69%
Confidentiality	68%
Constitutional conditions of confinement in American jails and prisons	62%
Trauma and trauma-informed jail programming and policing	57%

Perspectives on Whether the Diversity* of the Oversight Committee Should Reflect the Diversity of the Marin County Community

- Yes = 67%
- No = 23%
- Unsure = 10%

(*In terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, income level, justice system impacted, and direct experiences with law enforcement)

Differing Opinions on How Diversity Should be Conceptualized

- Demographic representation of the county
 - *So if 30% of the county is over 70, then 30% of the committee should be so, and so forth. Same thing with racial, and most of the other categories. Several of the proposed categories are objectionable as they are subjective. Stick with standard demographics (age, race, sex).*
- Demographic representation of those involved in the criminal legal system
 - *Reflect the makeup of the statistically arrested/cited/incarcerated categories, not just population to be more equitable not just equal.*
- Diversity should be prioritized over matching demographics of county
 - *The Oversight Committee should [be] far more diverse than the County -- there is very little meaningful diversity in the County. That has been much of the problem behind how underrepresented populations have been treated by the Sheriff's Office.*

Final Memo Contents

- All quantitative information presented here
- Additional context derived from targeted open field questions
 - More detailed description of respondents' contact with MCSO
 - More detailed description of respondents' experiences with/perceptions of the existing complaint process
- Synthesis of responses to final open-ended question organized by theme
- Addendum of all responses organized by question