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Tangled Lines: Unraveling the Racism and Discrimination Divides in Timmins

What Makes a Welcoming Community? (Series)

By: Rachel Rizzuto



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We recognize and appreciate the historic connection that Indigenous peoples have to these territories. We support their efforts to sustain and grow their nations. We also recognize the contributions that they have made in shaping and strengthening local communities, the province, and Canada.

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NPI is pleased to have the support of FedNor for this important work to assess the impact of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot in Northern Ontario.

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Executive Summary

Creating welcoming communities requires the participation of all community members. As such, Northern Policy Institute and Environics Research asked the question, what are the current racism and discrimination realities in Northern Ontario communities that might impact welcoming efforts?

Online and telephone surveys were conducted in February 2022 as part of a broader initiative to collect comparable, consistent data across the regions of Northern Ontario. The results of the Anti-Racism Survey indicated that overall, the community of Timmins was welcoming and that the situation will continue to improve over the next ten years. Though, there were still some concerns noted by respondents.

For example, the experiences of Indigenous peoples tended to be relatively negative compared to the experiences of visible minorities. For example, a higher percentage of respondents believed Indigenous peoples were treated less fairly than visible minorities at work, school, and public places. Additionally, respondents stated that individual prejudice was a bigger issue for visible minorities and Indigenous peoples compared to discrimination built into laws and institutions.

Based on the findings, there were several recommendations provided.

- Aim for a higher number of responses from visible minorities and Indigenous peoples.
- Continue measuring racism and discrimination in the community.
- Further investigation into media confidence.
- Continued public education in all spaces.
- Ask who is not around the table and why.
- Spotlight what works and implement where possible.



Introduction

Confronting racism and discrimination takes more than just words on a page. They are issues that require continued effort by everyone. The purpose of this paper is to help define a starting line in order to measure racism and discrimination moving forward.

In February 2022, Northern Policy Institute (NPI), in partnership with organizations across the regions of Northern Ontario, carried out a survey initiative aimed at collecting consistent, comparable data about racism, discrimination, welcoming communities, and the like to inform decision-making at the local, regional, provincial, and national levels.

As many of Northern Ontario's regions are experiencing an aging workforce, out-migration among younger generations seeking education or employment, and declining birth rates, it is more important than ever that resources be focused on ways to attract and retain individuals and families. Ensuring northern communities are welcoming is a key part of this effort. Anti-racism, anti-discrimination and reconciliation are components of a welcoming community.

Naturally, a part of this work involves understanding and measuring racism and discrimination in communities. The Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination survey focused on not only what current interactions are like between peoples of different racial backgrounds, but how welcoming a community is, if all individuals are set up for success, confidence in local institutions, and how well one's community is expected to mitigate racism and discrimination going forward.

The focus of this paper will be on the community of Timmins in Northeastern Ontario. Similar papers are available for Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, and North Bay.

Finally, some of the themes in this paper may evoke an emotionally upsetting response given the sensitive nature of this topic. If at any point you need support, please reference the list of supports provided by the Canadian Mental Health Association (ontario.cmha.ca/provincial-mental-health-supports).

Methodology

The Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination survey was distributed online via a survey link and administered via telephone. The survey was conducted in partnership with Environics Research.¹ The Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination survey is part of a six-year project that includes two surveys that will alternate each year. There is the survey that measures racism and discrimination and a second survey that measures attitudes towards immigrants.

The link to the online survey was made available on NPI's website and was also distributed via partner organizations, newsletters, and through targeted advertisements on social media and Google. Direct follow ups were also conducted. For the telephone survey, Environics Research targeted 250 responses in each of the communities of Thunder Bay, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, and North Bay via landline. These

communities are the five largest centres in Northern Ontario and act as hubs for surrounding communities. They are also the communities participating in the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot program, which is an initiative focused on attracting and retaining newcomers to Canada to help address labour market gaps.

The Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination survey was open from February 1 to February 22, 2022, and anyone residing in Northern Ontario was eligible to complete it. The survey was available in English and French. Overall, from the City of Timmins, there were 250 unique responses collected via the telephone survey, and five responses for the online survey. Given the low online responses, and following standard data privacy practices, any response number that is five and under is suppressed. As such, this paper will focus only on the telephone responses.

¹ For further information, please visit <https://environics.ca/about-us/>.

Snapshot of Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Efforts in Timmins

Back in early March 2021, the Timmins Economic Development Corporation (TEDC) announced a project to address racism and discrimination in the community called the Timmins Diversity Awareness Project (TEDC, 2021). Later that year, the TEDC also released results of a survey that sought to identify and measure racism and discrimination in Timmins. Results showed that the majority of “incidences of racism and discrimination were based on ethnic or cultural background as well as skin colour or race” (Baiguzhiyeva 2021).

In addition to the Timmins Diversity Awareness Project, several years prior, Northern College conducted a study with NPI asking why Indigenous learners were choosing other colleges than Northern College in Timmins. The results indicated that one reason was that racism in the Timmins community was a deterring factor (Penner 2017, 9).

These examples highlight some of the initiatives that the community is undertaking to make Timmins a welcoming community.

Findings

Demographics

Timmins is the fifth largest community in Northern Ontario. In 2021, there were just over 41,000 residents. Despite a slight bump up in population from 2006 to 2011, the community has experienced a gradual decline in the total population over the past 10 years (Statistics Canada, various censuses).

Nearly half of the respondents were over 55 years old, followed by those who were between 35-54 years of age. Most (95 per cent) were born in Canada, and the majority identified as White² (84 per cent). Only a small number of individuals (10 per cent) identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit.

Additionally, 40 per cent of people who spoke English could speak French fluently or at an advanced level. Finally, there was a close split between males and females, and just over 40 per cent of respondents to the survey had a household income of up to \$60,000 per year.

Overall Welcoming

When asked about the overall ‘welcoming-ness’ of one’s community to visible minorities^{3,4} and Indigenous peoples, the majority of respondents said the community is either very or somewhat welcoming. Welcoming-ness towards visible minorities was higher than towards Indigenous peoples (86 per cent of respondents versus 66 per cent).

Diving into this a bit further, the survey found that slightly over half of people felt that *discrimination against visible minorities was no longer an issue* in Timmins. When asked whether *discrimination against Indigenous peoples was no longer an issue*, 63 per cent disagreed. Of those who *disagreed* that discrimination was no longer an issue faced by Indigenous peoples, more people strongly *disagreed* than somewhat *disagreed*.

Figures 1 and 2 further break down the telephone responses by racial background. In total, there were fewer Indigenous and other visible minority respondents than there were those who identified as white. When comparing the percentages of Indigenous and white respondents that *disagree discrimination against visible minorities is no longer an issue* compared to the percentage of visible minorities in Figure 1, the first two respondent groups answered more in the negative. Finally, a significant majority of both Indigenous and white respondents disagree that discrimination is no longer an issue for Indigenous peoples (Figure 2).

² Caucasian, European, Italian, Polish, Scottish Swedish.

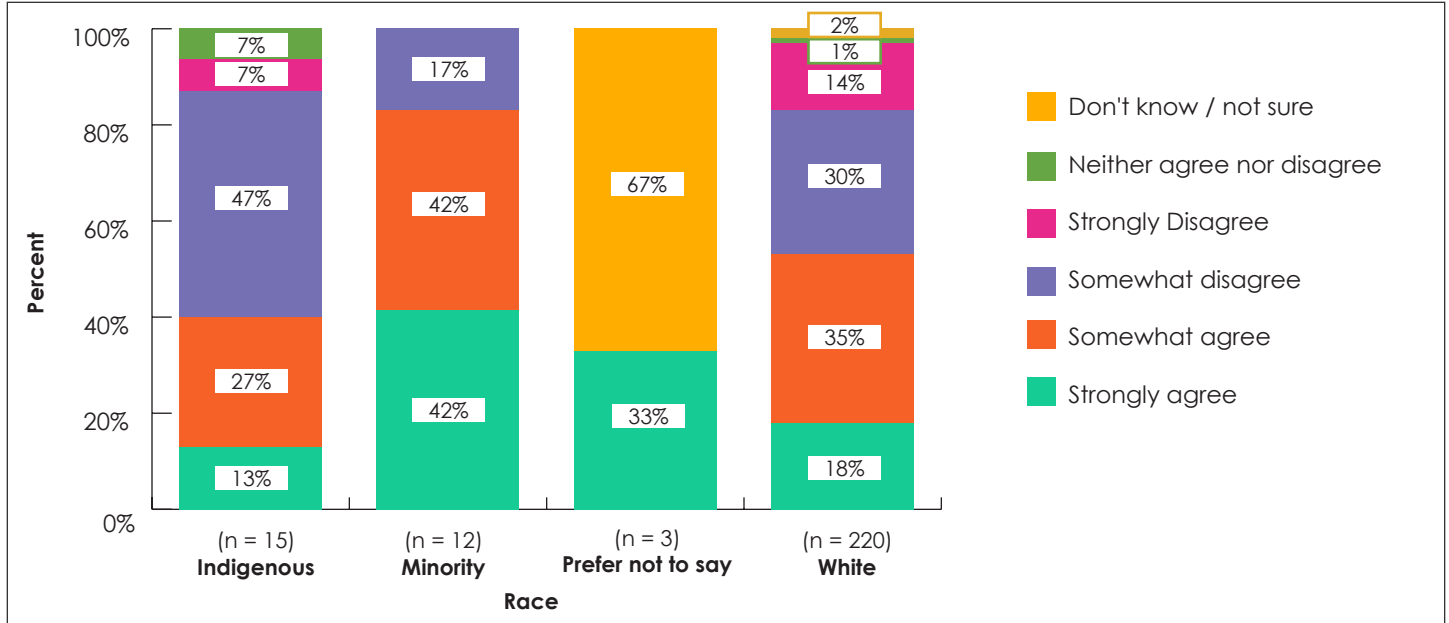
³In the survey, whenever a question was asked about visible minorities, three groups were specified: Black, Chinese, and South Asian. It is important to note that there may be other visible minorities who identified with a particular community and/or group that completed the survey.

⁴The author wishes to acknowledge that concerns have been expressed about the use of the term “visible minority”. The term remains, however, the standard data label used by Statistics Canada and is used here for data comparability and consistency. Statistics Canada cites the Employment Equity Act for the definition of the term for research purposes.

Figure 1: Discrimination against Visible minorities No Longer an Issue – categorized by Racial Background of Telephone Respondents

Timmins

Discrimination against visible minorities is no longer a problem

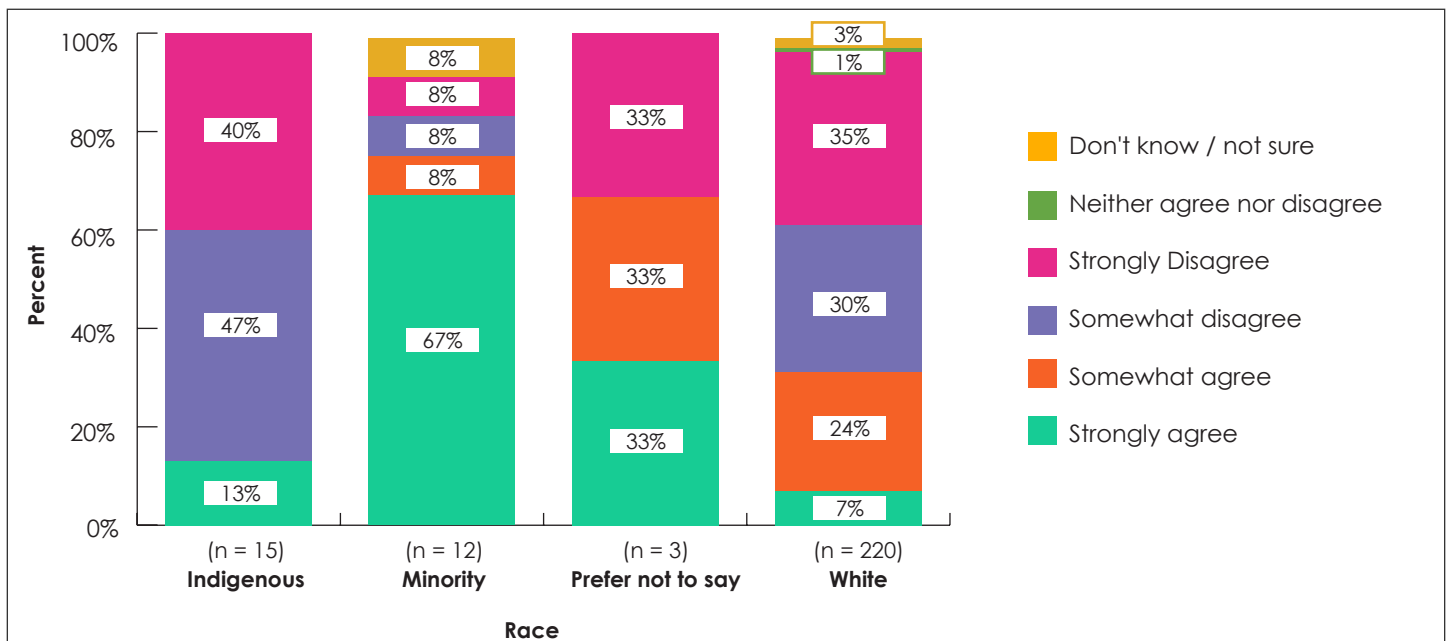


Note: n=250

Figure 2: Discrimination against Indigenous peoples No Longer an Issue – categorized by Racial Background of Telephone Respondents

Timmins

Discrimination against Indigenous people is no longer a problem



Note: n=250

Respondents were also asked what they felt was the bigger problem facing visible minorities and Indigenous peoples: individual prejudice or discrimination built into laws and institutions. For both visible minorities and Indigenous peoples, most respondents felt *individual prejudice* was the bigger issue.

Interactions, Experiences and Treatment

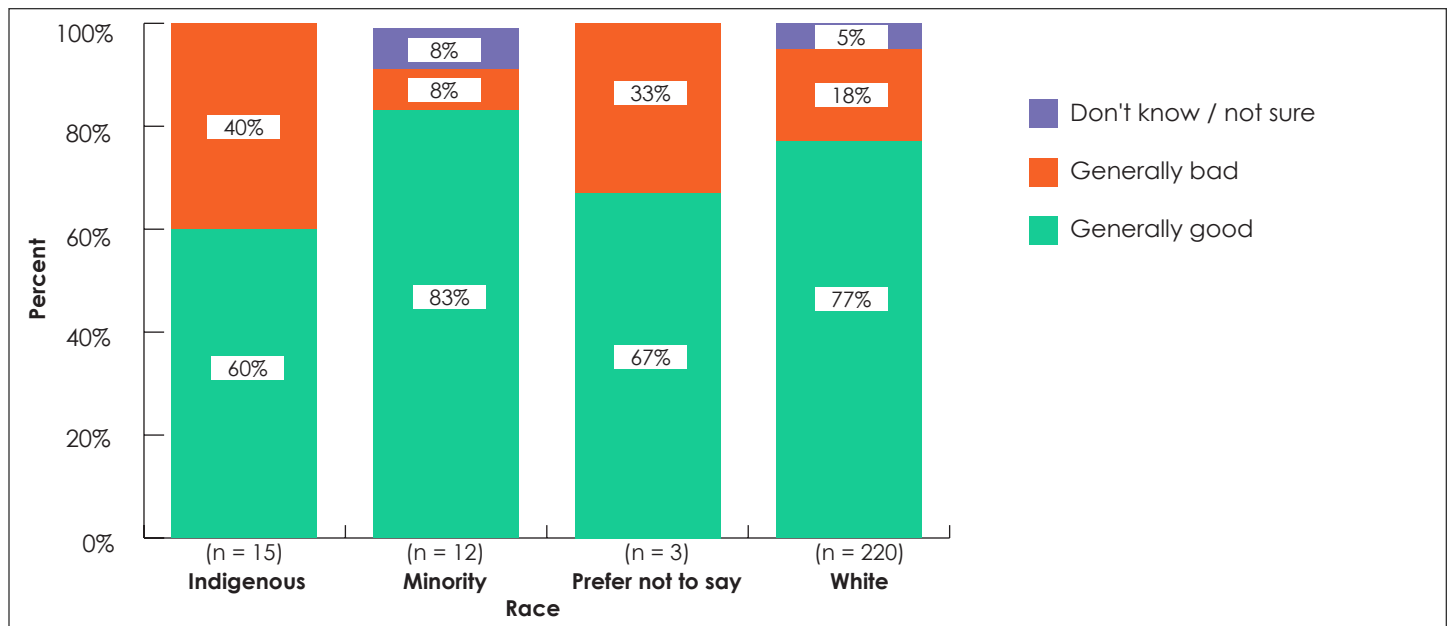
When respondents were asked how well people of different racial backgrounds get along, the majority of people said *generally good* (76 per cent). Figure 3 shows a percentage breakdown of telephone respondents by racial background. Although the overall picture seems to show that relationships are *generally good*, it may be due in part to the percentage of White respondents answering in the positive. There is a higher percentage of Indigenous respondents stating relations are *generally bad* compared to the percentage of visible minority respondents.

Relatedly, when asked how frequently respondents are in contact with people of different racial backgrounds, 86 per cent of people said *often* or *occasionally*.

Figure 3: How Well People from Different Racial Backgrounds Get Along, Telephone Respondents

Timmins

Race relations in terms of how well people from different races get along



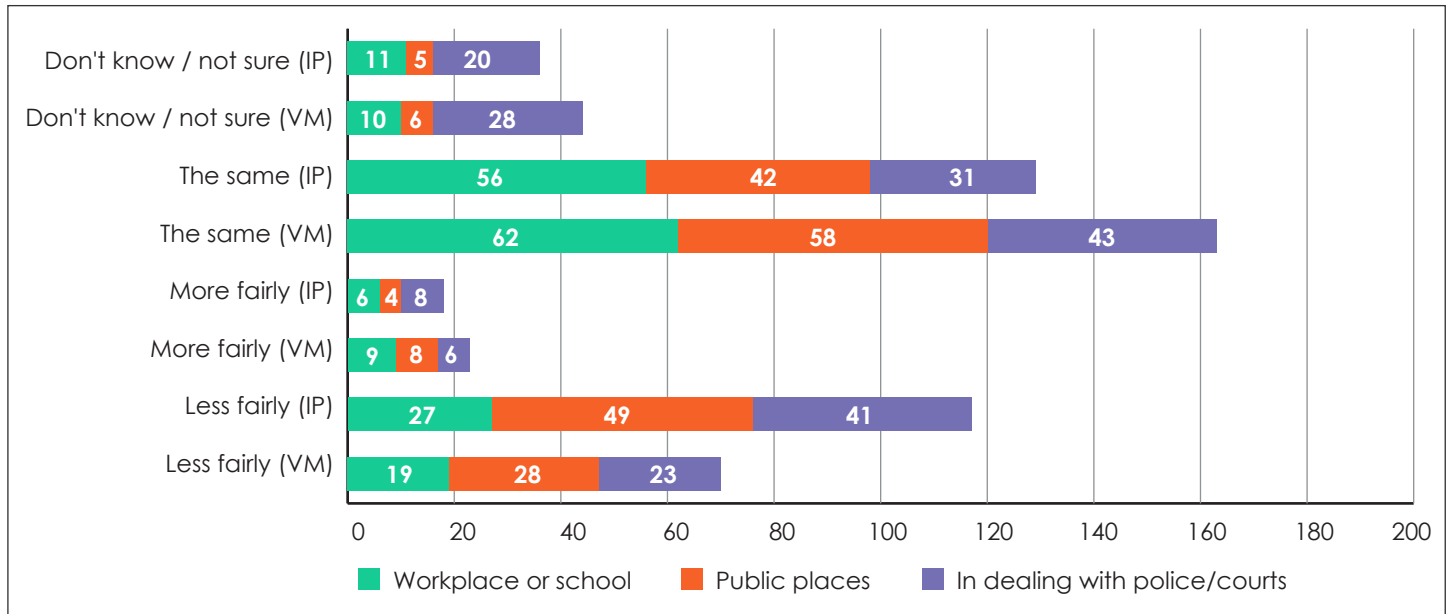
Note: n=250

When asked if they had witnessed or experienced racism, most respondents have witnessed acts of racism either on *occasion* (33 per cent) or *rarely* (30 per cent). When asked if they have personally experienced racism, more than half of respondents said *never*, followed by 23 per cent who said *rarely*. Once again, one reason for these results may be due to the number of respondents being White.

There are issues concerning the treatment of visible minorities and Indigenous peoples. Are visible minorities and Indigenous peoples treated the same as white people? Less respondents said visible minorities and Indigenous peoples were treated *the same* when dealing with the police and compared to work, school, or public places (see Figure 4).

Additionally, the experiences of Indigenous peoples tended to be *relatively negative* compared to the experiences of visible minorities. For example, a higher percentage of respondents said they were treated *less fairly* than visible minorities at work, school, public places, and in dealing with the police/courts. A final observation of note is that when it comes to dealing with the police and the courts, the percentage of people that responded *don't know* or were *unsure* was higher than the other two locations.

Figure 4: Treatment of Visible Minorities and Indigenous Peoples compared to White Individuals (%)



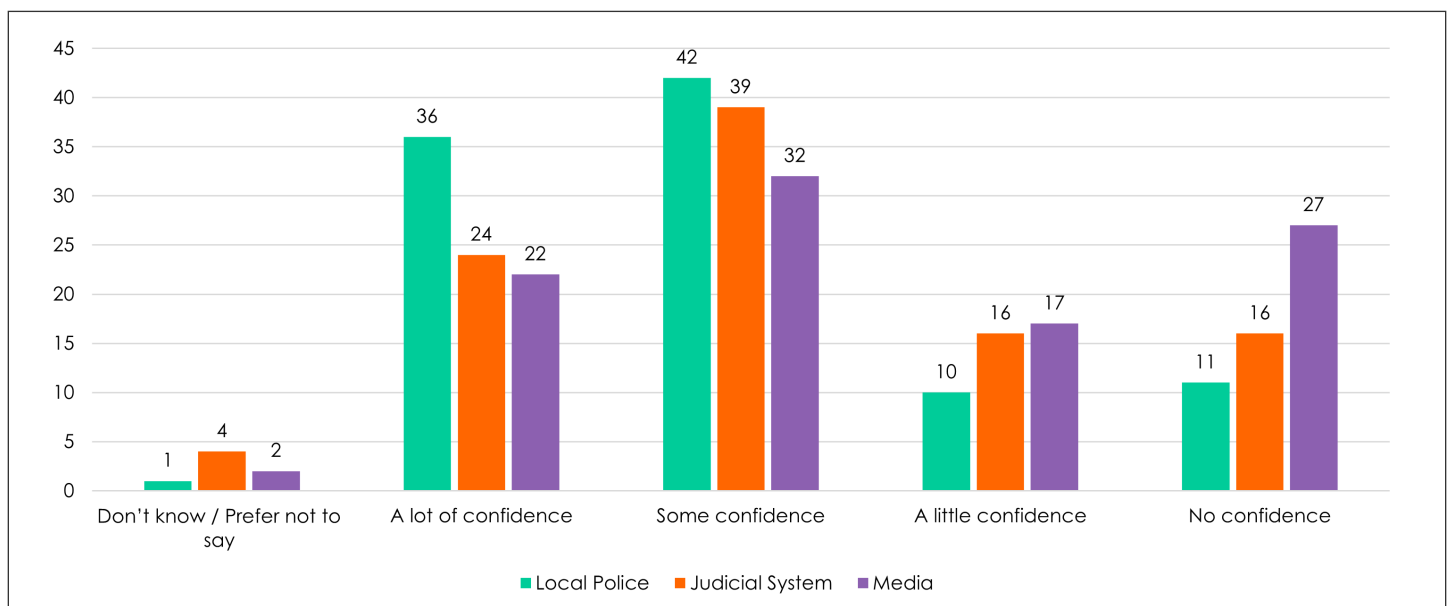
Note: VM = Visible minorities and IP = Indigenous peoples. N = 250

Confidence in Local Systems and Institutions

In general, people were asked about their confidence in the police, the justice system, and the media. Most Timmins respondents were *confident* in the police and the courts – 78 and 63 per cent respectively. More respondents indicated some confidence as opposed to a lot of confidence.

When it comes to the media, confidence decreases. Fifty-four per cent of people were *confident*. The percentage of those who had *no confidence* at all in the media was 27 per cent, much higher than in the case of police and the justice system (11 and 16 per cent, respectively).

Figure 5: Confidence in the Local Police, Judicial System, and Media (%), Telephone Survey



Note: n=250

Setting up for Success

Not everyone is at the same starting line as it relates to how well all citizens are set up for success. There are various socio-economic reasons as to why this line differs among people. In this same vein, the survey wanted to know whether relations between different races are generally good or generally bad in terms of people of all racial backgrounds having an equal chance to succeed in life. In Timmins, 74 per cent of respondents said *generally good*.

People were also asked if things have changed over the past 10 years. Forty-one per cent of respondents said the *situation has improved* while 15 per cent said things *had worsened*.

Finally, people were asked if the way Timmins addresses racism and discrimination will have improved over the next 10 years. Just over half of respondents felt things will improve while 34 per cent felt that things would stay the same.



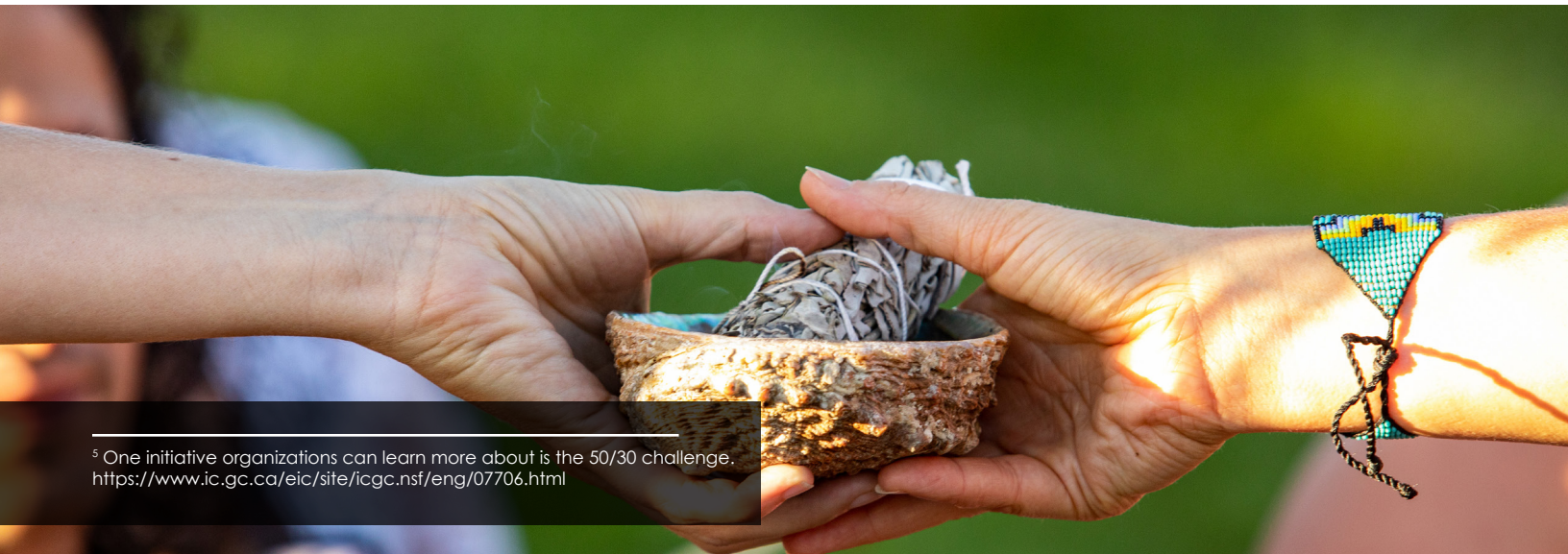
Conclusion

Overall, based on the online and telephone survey results, there are clearly areas of concern, particularly regarding Indigenous peoples. There are also concerns around confidence in the media and individual prejudice against visible minorities and Indigenous peoples in the community.

Based on these findings, to address racism and discrimination, there are several recommendations that ought to be carried out in tandem with concrete actions. By no means are these recommendations the be-all-end-all nor can they all be completed immediately. Addressing the issues of racism and discrimination, which can be generational, takes time.

- **Aim for higher responses from visible minorities and Indigenous peoples.** Of course, this is not so straightforward. There are many reasons why we may not have a greater number of responses from these groups. Individuals may not feel comfortable coming forward or may feel the survey is simply another checkbox exercise; or perhaps they did not receive the survey. Targeted and meaningful efforts are required on this front moving forward. As well, these results could help decision-makers and others build and strengthen meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples in the community and address continuing areas of concern.
- **Continue measuring racism and discrimination in the community.** If we are to understand if the needle is moving on these issues, continued measurement is required. This information can inform local decision-making on ongoing and future initiatives.
- **Further investigation into media confidence.** Whether it be the influence of “fake news” dialogue, the feeling that media is only sharing one side of the story, or other reasons, the relationship between media and the people is not overly strong at the moment. Further research into why this is could be beneficial for both residents and media institutions.
- **Continued public education in all spaces.** Given the concerns around individual prejudice, continuing to educate all community residents about, among other things, cultural practices, beliefs, existing resources and initiatives is a must. However, it cannot just be passive messaging. Ensuring there are opportunities for residents to be together in safe and open spaces is a way to encourage learning opportunities.
- **Ask who is not around the table and why.** Whether it be your Board of Directors, a networking event, or a working group, it is important to ask who is not currently at the table and why.⁵ Diverse backgrounds and experiences can provide new insight as well as aid individuals to see others of similar culture, linguistic, ethnic, gender, and so on in various roles. However, a key point here is that these actions ought to be meaningful in order to build strong and sustainable relationships.
- **Spotlight what works and implement where possible.** If a local organization is undertaking a successful initiative focused on diverse youth leadership, highlight that success. If a town elsewhere in Canada has completed a successful pilot project on anti-racism practices that have proven to work, consider scaling it to the Timmins community. Now, of note, spotlight and implementing initiatives should not be the responsibility of one. If funding is a concern, consider partnering with like-organizations or ones that have similar programming available.

⁵ One initiative organizations can learn more about is the 50/30 challenge. <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/icgc.nsf/eng/07706.html>



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