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Tangled Lines: Unraveling the Racism and Discrimination Divides in Sault Ste. Marie

What Makes a Welcoming Community? (Series)

By: Rachel Rizzuto



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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 most respondents felt Sault Ste. Marie is welcoming and people of different backgrounds generally get along. While this is certainly a positive sign for the community, there were a few concerns respondents brought up. Specifically, concerns were raised around the experiences and discrimination towards Indigenous peoples.

For example, just over half of respondents felt that discrimination against visible minorities was no longer a problem. For Indigenous peoples, responses were split down the middle: 48 per cent of respondents agreed and 48 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement. Finally, most respondents felt that individual prejudice against visible minorities and Indigenous peoples was a bigger issue than 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 Sault Ste. Marie in Northeastern Ontario. Similar papers are available for Thunder Bay, Timmins, 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 also 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 Sault Ste. Marie, there were 250 unique responses collected via the telephone survey, and seven responses to the online survey. Given the low number of online responses, it is difficult to extrapolate from seven responses. The primary focus of this paper, therefore, will be on the telephone survey results.

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

Snapshot of Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Efforts in Sault Ste. Marie

Located on the campus of Algoma University, the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre was borne of decades-long efforts after the closure of the Shingwauk Indian Residential School in 1970 (Algoma University n.d). The space is meant to educate residents of the site's history and of the experiences of individuals who went through the Shingwauk Indian Residential School. The Centre is "one of the largest archives of residential school life in all of Canada", containing photographs and other materials (Algoma University n.d). Initiatives such as this are critical in educating the public about Canada's history.

Another program is the Racism in Sports presentation by the Sault Ste. Marie Indian Friendship Centre. The presentation focuses on how racism in sports plays out and how to proactively prevent racism and similar issues (McCleary 2022). While these are but a few examples, they highlight some of the initiatives that the community is undertaking to make Sault Ste. Marie a welcoming community.

Findings

Demographics

Sault Ste. Marie is the third largest community in Northern Ontario and in 2021, there were 76,731 residents. Since 2006, the community has been experiencing a gradual decline in total population (Statistics Canada, various censuses).

Sixty-six per cent of respondents were over 55 years of age, followed by those 35-54 years old. Most (86 per cent) of people were born in Canada, and the majority of people identified as White² (82 per cent). A small number of individuals (seven per cent) identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit.

Of those who spoke English, very few spoke French fluently or at an advanced level. Just over 50 per cent of people said they had no proficiency in French. Finally, the gender split was nearly even with 56 per cent identifying as female. Twenty-two per cent of respondents' yearly household income was between \$35,000-\$60,000, followed by 19 per cent making between \$60,000-\$90,000 per year.

Overall Welcoming

When asked about the overall welcoming-ness of one's community to visible minorities^{3,4} and Indigenous peoples, a large majority of respondents said the community is either very or somewhat welcoming. The welcoming-ness towards visible minorities was higher than for Indigenous peoples (92 per cent vs. 84 per cent).

The survey results indicated that slightly over half of respondents felt that discrimination against visible minorities was no longer a problem (a greater number of those indicating somewhat agree over strongly agree). For Indigenous peoples, responses were split down the middle: 48 per cent of respondents agreed and 48 per cent of respondents disagreed. Overall, people tended to lean toward the middle in the range of somewhat agreeing or somewhat disagreeing, indicating fewer people feeling strongly one way or the other.

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. A greater percentage of responses from Indigenous peoples somewhat and strongly disagreed that discrimination against visible minorities was no longer an issue compared to visible minority respondents. When considering discrimination against Indigenous peoples, a significant percentage of Indigenous respondents strongly disagreed. Based on responses, it appears that most white respondents settled in the middle – either somewhat agreeing or somewhat disagreeing.

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

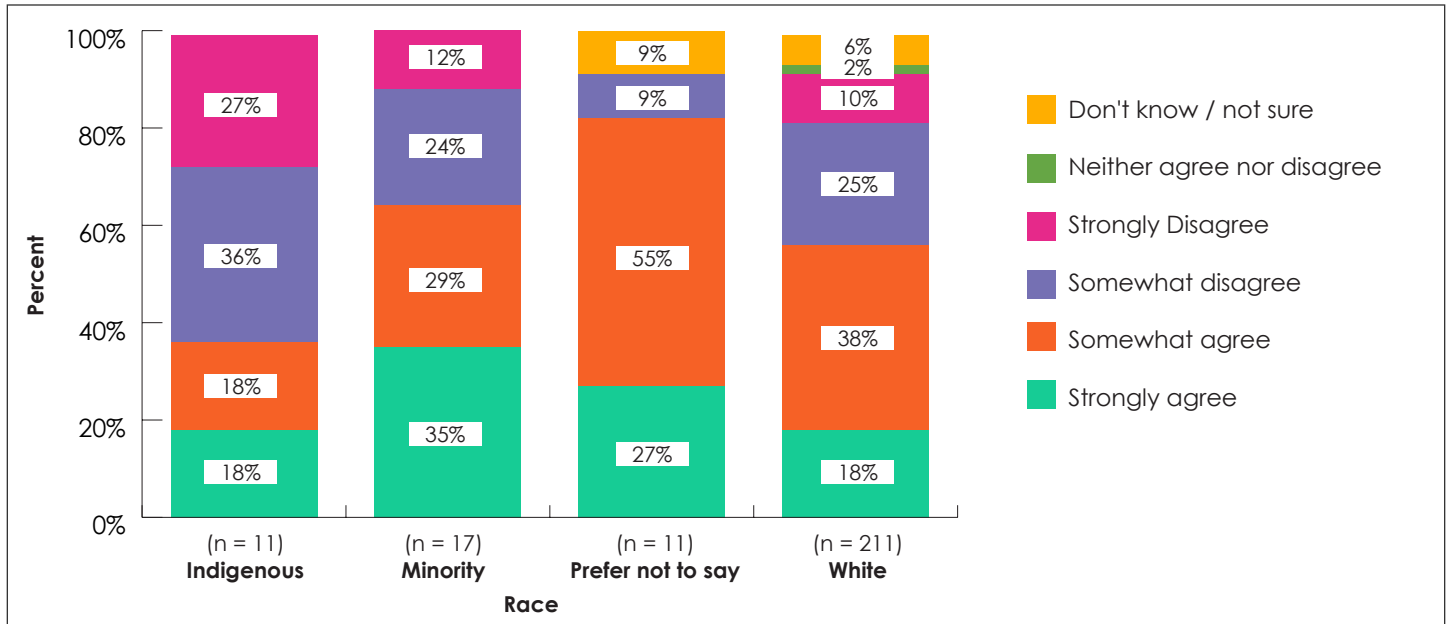
⁴ The author wishes to acknowledge that concerns have been expressed about the use of the term "visible minority". The term remains, however, the standard data label used by Statistics Canada and is used here for data comparability and consistency. Statistics Canada cites the Employment Equity Act for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

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

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

Sault Ste. Marie

Discrimination against visible minorities is no longer a problem

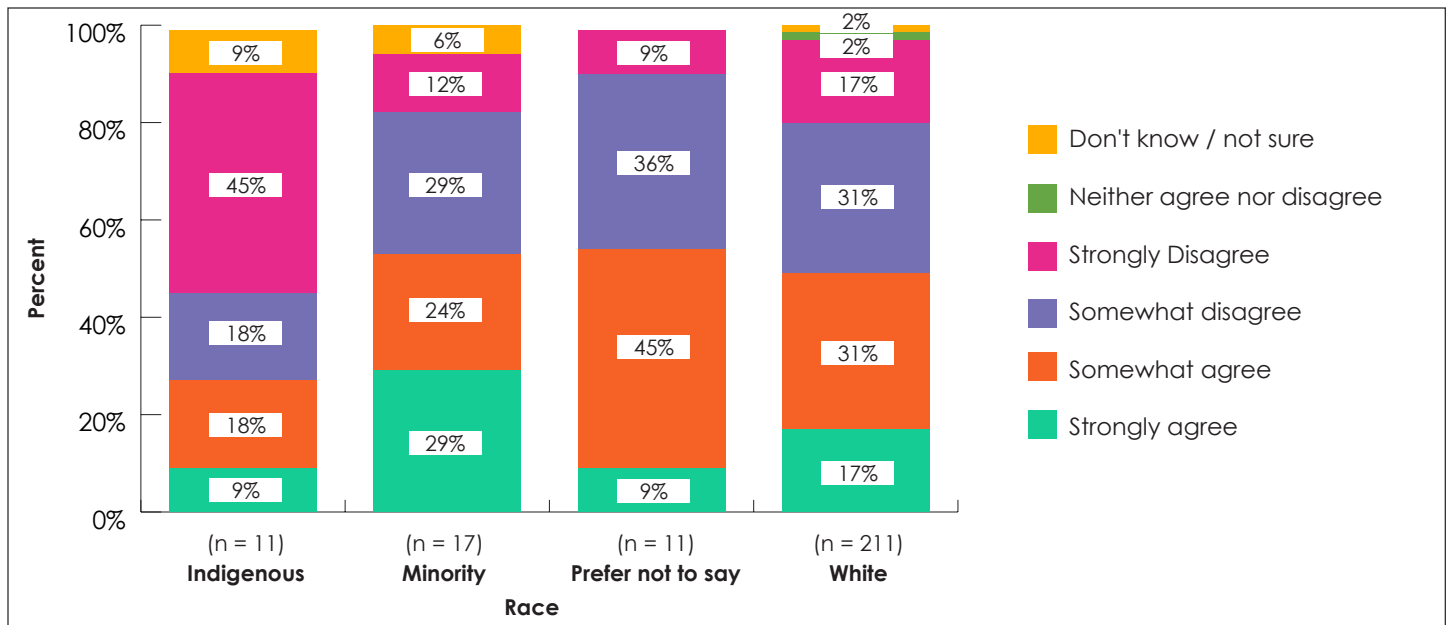


Note: n=250

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

Sault Ste. Marie

Discrimination against Indigenous people is no longer a problem



Note: n=250

Respondents were then 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, the majority of respondents felt that individual prejudice was the bigger issue. Very few respondents said both issues are equally a problem.

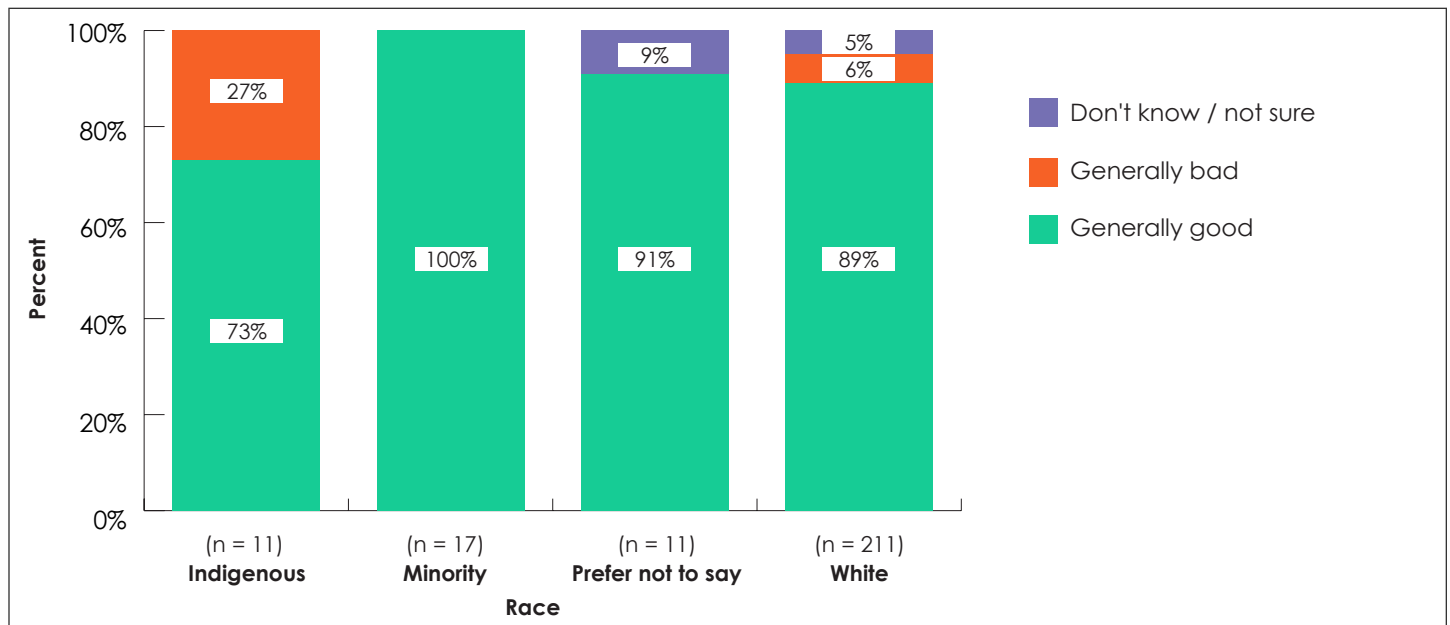
Interactions, Experiences and Treatment

When respondents were asked how well people of different racial backgrounds get along, a significant majority of people said *generally good* (89 per cent). Figure 3 shows a percentage breakdown of telephone respondents by racial background. Relatedly, when asked how frequently they are in contact with people of different racial backgrounds, 84 per cent of respondents said *often* or *occasional* in contact. Fifty-seven per cent of responses showed that contact was often.

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

Sault Ste. Marie

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



Note: n=250

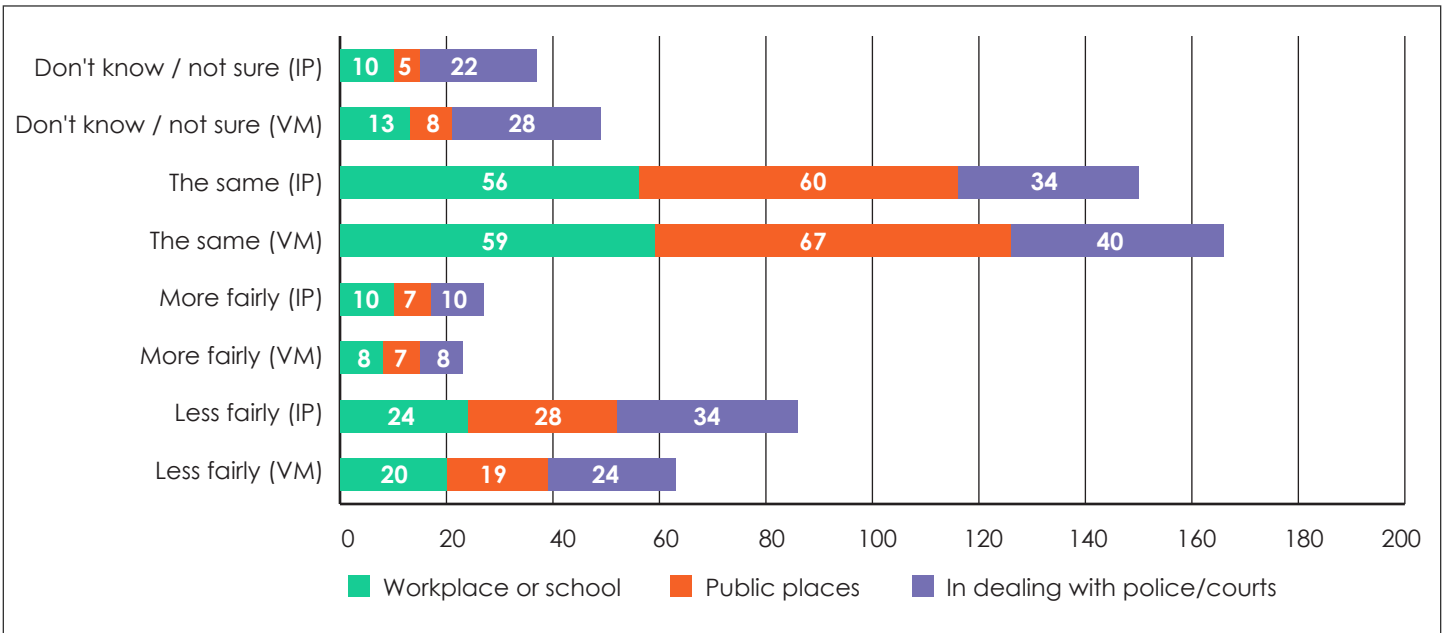
When asked if they had witnessed or experienced acts of racism, most respondents said *rarely* or *never*. Specifically, 44 per cent indicated they rarely ever see acts of racism while 30 per cent stated never. When asked if they had personally experienced racism, 49 per cent of people said never, followed by 31 per cent that said rarely.

Regarding whether visible minorities and Indigenous peoples were *treated the same* as white people, between 59 to 67 per cent of people said that visible minorities are treated the same at work, school, and in public places more generally. When asked about dealing with the police or the courts, a higher percentage of respondents said they didn't know compared to the percentages of the other two situational categories. Whether this is due to media or another reason is an

answer worth pursuing. Finally, 40 per cent of respondents felt treatment was the same for visible minorities when dealing with the police or courts.

For Indigenous peoples, 56 per cent of respondents said Indigenous peoples are *treated the same* at work or school. When it comes to treatment in public places, it was similar to visible minorities. When dealing with the police and the courts, there was a bit of a split. Thirty-four per cent of respondents felt Indigenous peoples were treated *less fairly* while 34 per cent of respondents felt they were treated the same. Like visible minorities, the percentage of those who said they *didn't know* or *weren't sure* increased to 22 per cent when considering treatment by the police or courts – higher than at schools and at work.

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

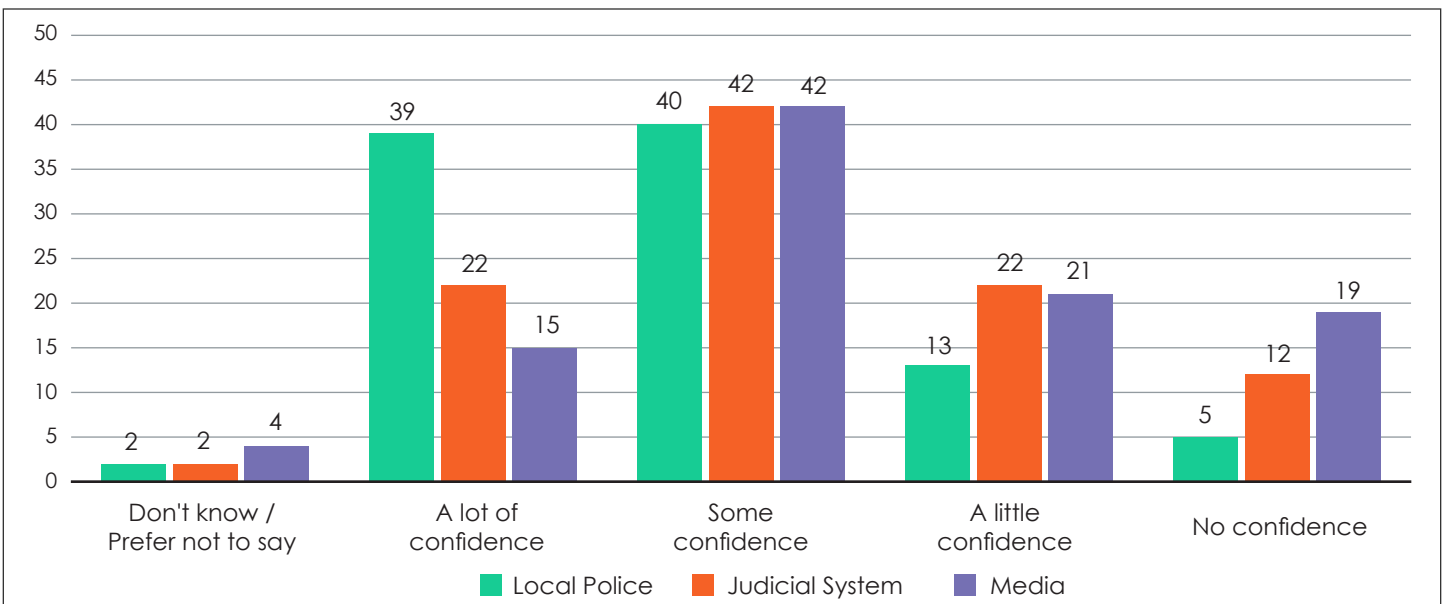


Note: VM = Visible minorities and IP = Indigenous peoples. N = 250

Confidence in Local Systems and Institutions

In general, people were asked about their confidence in the police, the justice system, and the media. Overall, responses tended to be more middle ground (some confidence). It is also notable the sharp percentage contrast in those who have a lot of confidence in the police versus the other two categories. The percentage of those who had no confidence was highest in the case of media.

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 why this line differs among people. The survey set out to determine if relations between different races are generally good or generally bad when it comes to people of all racial backgrounds having an equal chance to succeed in life. In Sault Ste. Marie, 84 per cent of people stated *generally good* – a positive sign. On a related note, people were also asked whether relations have changed over the past 10 years. Just over half said the *situation has improved* while 37 per cent said it has *stayed the same*.

Finally, people were asked if the way Sault Ste. Marie addresses racism and discrimination *will have improved* over the next 10 years. Sixty-three per cent of respondents said things will have improved – four per cent said *things will be worse*.



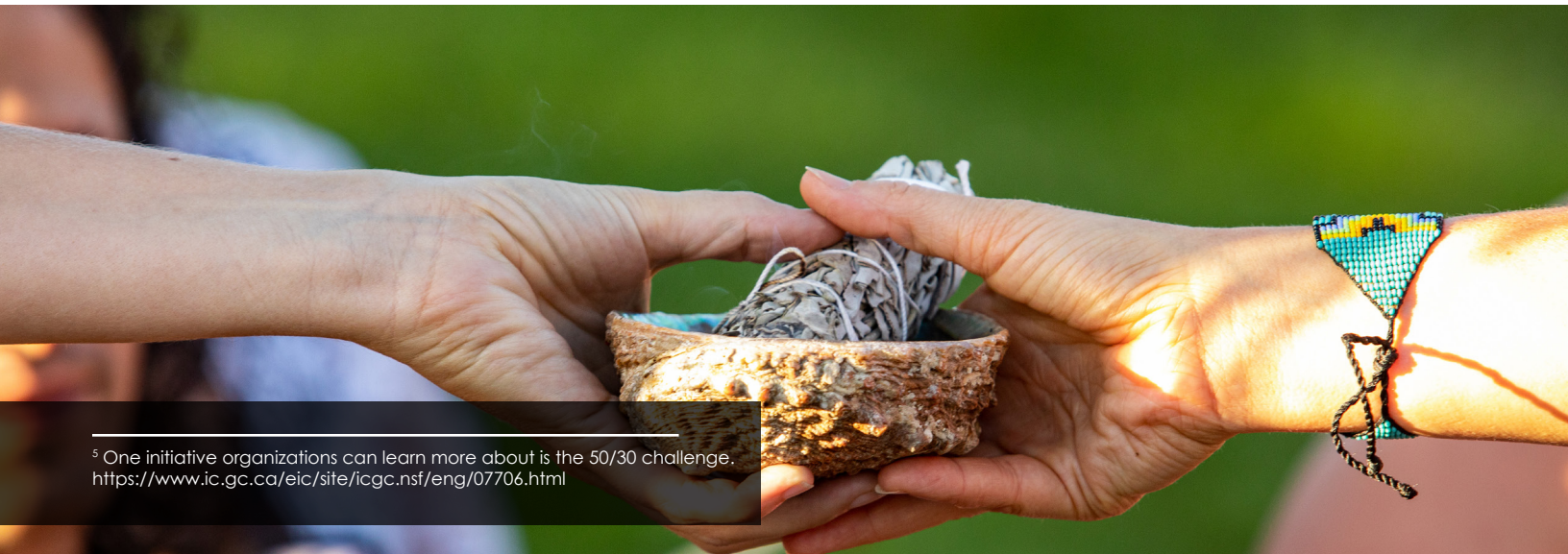
Conclusion

Overall, based on the survey results, while the majority of respondents felt their community is overall pretty welcoming and will continue to improve in this regard, there are still areas of concern, such as 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 or 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 concern around individual prejudices, 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 Sault Ste. Marie 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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