Tangled Lines: Unraveling the Racism and Discrimination Divides in Thunder Bay

What Makes a Welcoming Community? (Series)

By: Rachel Rizzuto

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ENVIRONICS RESEARCH

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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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About the Author

Rachel Rizzuto

Rachel Rizzuto is the former Research Manager for Northern Policy Institute. Originally from the United States, Rachel attended the University of Guelph and the University of Waterloo, earning her B.A. (Honours) and M.A. (co-op) in Political Science, respectively. Throughout her academic and professional careers, Rachel has pursued the study of community and economic development, an enthusiasm borne out of travel throughout rural and urban China. Rachel provides research expertise and passion for seeing northern and rural communities thrive.

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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 respondents felt things have been improving in the community and were expected to continue to improve. Though, areas of concern were still noted.

For example, respondents felt that discrimination is still an issue for visible minorities and Indigenous peoples. As well, individual prejudice was noted as a bigger issue than discrimination built into laws and institutions, although some people noted both were equally a problem related to the treatment of Indigenous peoples. Finally, when asked in general if their community was welcoming towards specific groups, more people agreed this was the case for visible minorities compared to Indigenous peoples.

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 Thunder Bay in Northwestern Ontario. Similar papers are available for Sault Ste. Marie, 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 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, for the City of Thunder Bay, there were 250 unique responses collected via the telephone survey, and 38 unique responses to the online survey.

Snapshot of Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Efforts in Thunder Bay

Alongside the City's Anti-Racism and Respective Advisory Committee, Thunder Bay created the Thunder Bay Anti-Racism & Inclusion Accord, which is a document where members of the Anti-Racism & Inclusion Coalition commit to actions focused on addressing racism, supporting truth and reconciliation processes, and annual reporting on efforts (Thunder Bay n.d.).

As well, an education campaign was announced last year that focused racism and hate in the community, based on recommendation 112 of the Seven Youth Inquest (NNL Staff 2021). The recommendation:

"[C]alls on the City of Thunder Bay to support the combined efforts of the Anti-Racism & Respect Advisory

Committee and the Community Safety and Well-Being Advisory Committee to consult with community partners to develop a public education campaign about racially motivated crimes, specifically those involving the Indigenous communities residing in and around the City of Thunder Bay."

Furthermore, the Lakehead Social Planning Council offers residents a way online to submit incidents of racism, personally experienced or witnessed. Reports can also be provided over the phone (LSPC n.d.). Finally, several events have taken place in the community to promote diversity such as the Festival of India and Wake the Giant, the latter of which is a part of a larger movement. While these are but a few examples, they nevertheless highlight some of the initiatives that the community is undertaking to make Thunder Bay a welcoming community.

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

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Findings

Demographics

Thunder Bay is the second largest community in Northern Ontario and in 2021, there were 123,258 residents. From 2006 to 2011, the total population declined by 1.1 per cent, but since 2011 it has gradually grown (Statistics Canada, various censuses).

Between the telephone and online surveys, there were a few differences. Notable factors are those who were born in Canada and those who were not. As well, the primary age of respondents differed between the surveys.

Table 1: Demographics of Telephone vs Online Survey

Characteristic	Online	Telephone
Age	Primarily under the age of 35.	Just over half were 55 years of age and over, followed by those who were aged 35-54.
Language	More people spoke English at a fluent or advanced level, however, less than five people could speak fluently in either official language. Six people said they could speak a non-official language.	12 per cent of English speakers indicated they could speak French fluently or at an advanced level. Almost 50 per cent of English speakers said they had no language proficiency in French.
Citizenship	Slightly more people indicated they were born out-side of Canada. Of those not born here, most have been here less than 10 years.	Majority of respondents said they were born in Canada. Of those not born here, most indicated they've lived here for more than 20 years.
Ethnic Background	Almost 40 per cent of people stated they were White[2] while a little over half identified as a visible minority.	Majority of respondents indicated they were White (84 per cent).
Gender-Identity	58 per cent of respondents stated they were female.	There was an even split between males and females.
Income	28 per cent of people's household income was more than $125,000 per year, and 26 per cent made between $35-60,000. 21 per cent stated they made under $35,000.	Those who made more than $125,000 every year in household income and those who made between $35-60,000 were both 18 per cent. Only 12 per cent indicated less than $35,000.

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

Overall Welcoming

When asked about the overall "welcoming-ness" of one's community to visible minorities[3],[4] and Indigenous peoples, most people in the online survey felt that the community is welcoming to visible minorities. However, for Indigenous peoples, there was a split in agreement with slightly more saying the community was not. Interestingly, of those that said the community was not welcoming, 14 said not very welcoming while only a few said somewhat. On the opposite end of things, of those that said it was welcoming, very few said very welcoming.

Similar results were found with the telephone survey. A large majority of people (86 per cent) said the community was welcoming to visible minorities while a little over half said the community was welcoming to Indigenous peoples. Of note, for those that said the community was welcoming to visible minorities, more people leaned towards somewhat as opposed to very.

Diving into this a bit more, the online survey found that the majority of people disagreed that discrimination against visible minorities was no longer a problem in Thunder Bay. For Indigenous peoples, there was a strong disagreement. Of the 31 respondents who disagreed, 26 said they strongly disagreed.

For those that answered the telephone survey, only 50 per cent of people disagreed for visible minorities while 45 per cent agreed. Similar to the online survey, however, many respondents disagreed it was no longer a problem for Indigenous peoples – 76 per cent. Of that, 47 per cent of people strongly disagreed.

A factor to note about the differences that sometimes can be found between the telephone and online survey respondents is mode effect. In a nutshell, someone may provide more civil answers over the phone when responding to a survey of sensitive nature given the personal interaction. Comparatively, online surveys have a greater sense of anonymity, thus producing more candid responses (Keeter 2015).

Figures 1 and 2 break the telephone responses down a bit more by racial background. While the total Indigenous and other visible minority respondents are lower compared to those who identified as white, there are some notable observations. In Figure 1, a significant percentage of visible minority respondents strongly disagree discrimination against visible minorities is no longer an issue. Additionally, Figure 2 highlights there is considerable concern across all respondent groups about discrimination against Indigenous peoples.

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

Thunder Bay

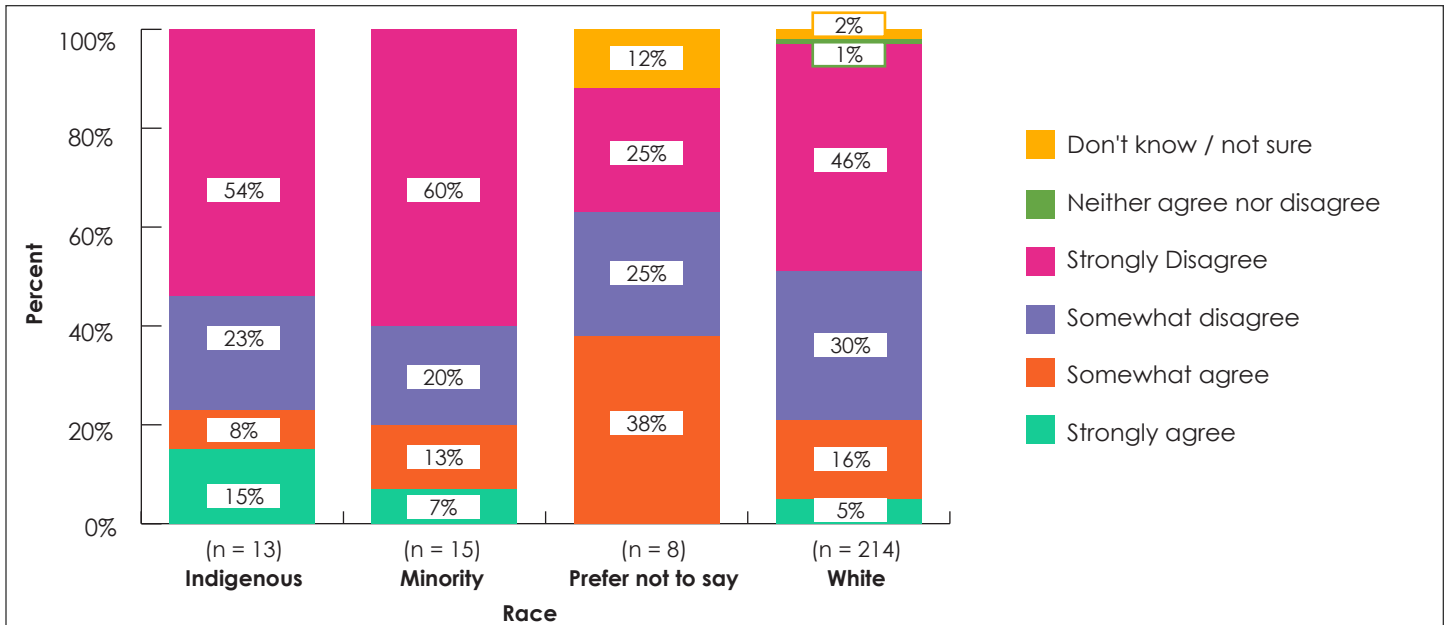**Discrimination agaist visible minorities is no longer a problem**
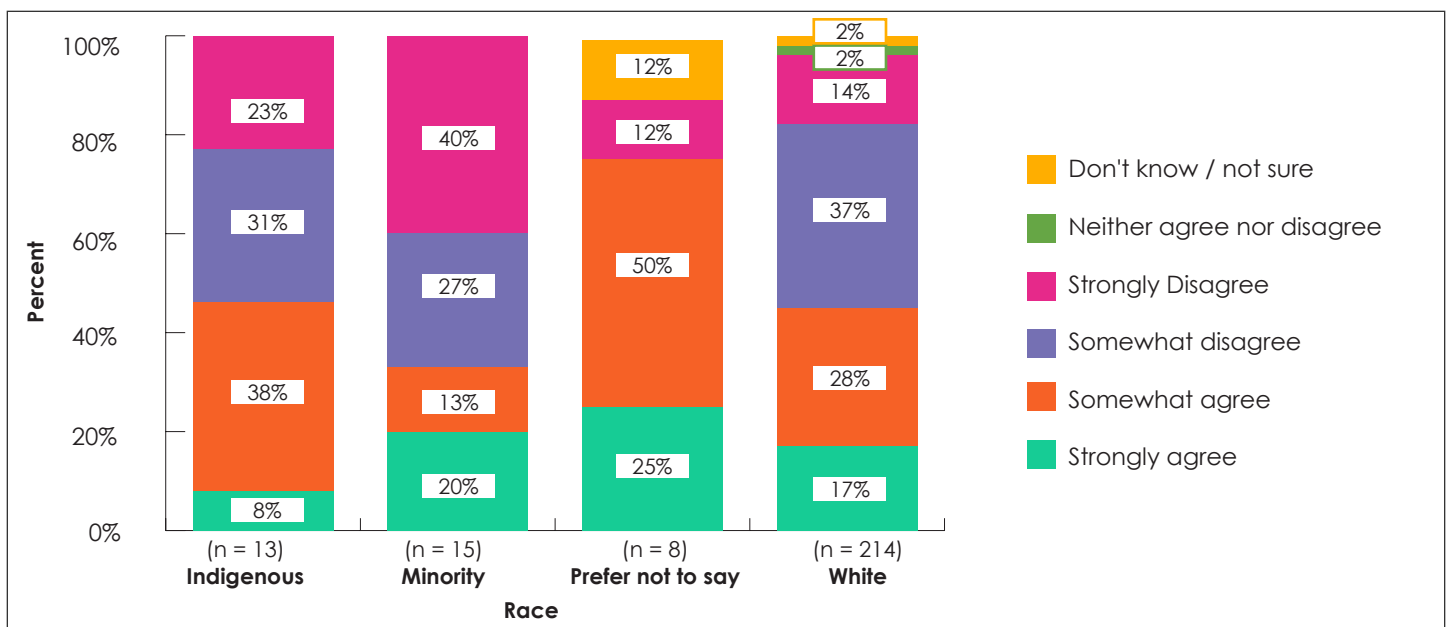
Note: n=250

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[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.

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

Thunder Bay

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 the online survey, 18 out of 38 people said *individual prejudice was the bigger issue for visible minorities*, followed by 12 people who said *individual prejudice and institutionalized discrimination were equally a problem*. For Indigenous peoples, a similar number of people said *individual prejudice and institutional discrimination are equally a problem*. As for the telephone survey, more people felt that *individual prejudice was the bigger problem for both groups* (73 per cent regarding visible minorities and 62 per cent regarding Indigenous peoples).

# Interactions, Experiences and Treatment

When respondents were asked how well people of different racial backgrounds get along, online and telephone responses were split between generally good or generally bad. Figure 3 shows a percentage breakdown of telephone respondents by different racial backgrounds. Indigenous and visible minority respondents tend to answer *generally bad*.

Relatedly, when asked how frequently they are in contact with people of different racial backgrounds, the majority of respondents to both surveys stated that they have *frequent or occasional* contact.

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

Thunder Bay

Race relations in terms of how well people from different races get along
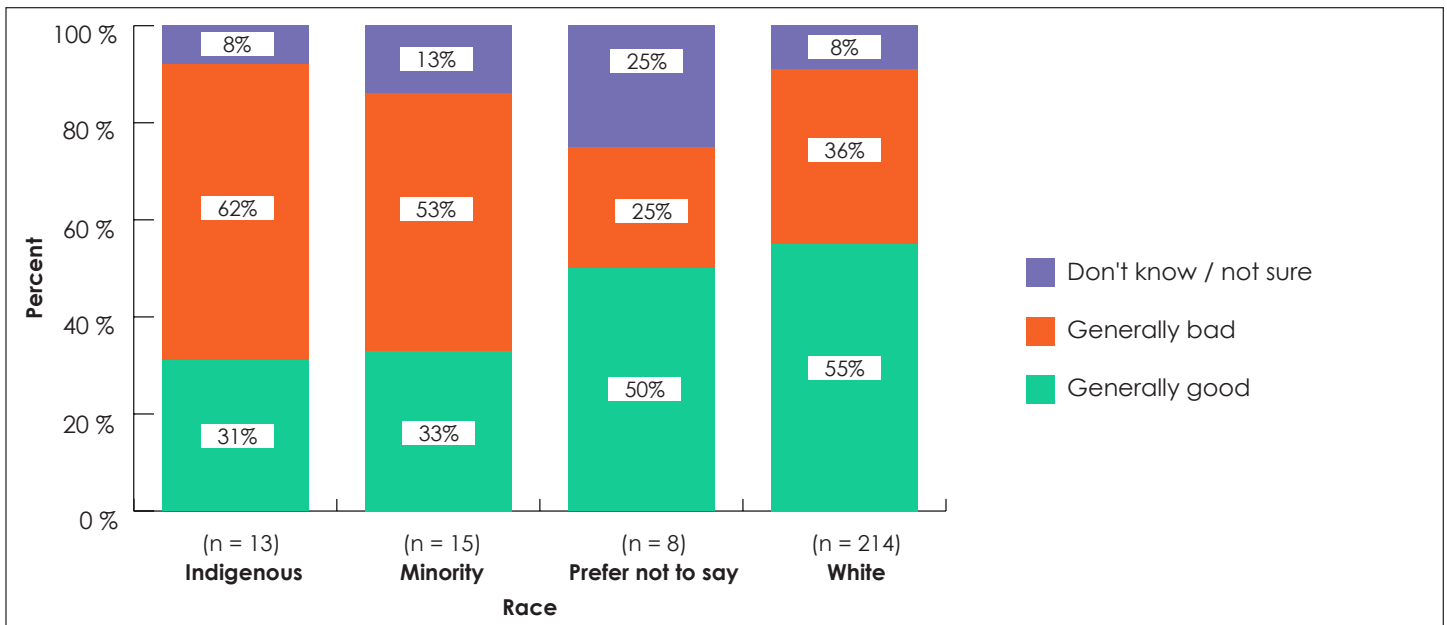
Note: n=25

When asked if they had witnessed or experienced acts of racism, 29 out of 38 people in the online survey said they have *occasionally* (18) or *frequently* (11) witnessed acts of racism. The telephone survey differed somewhat as a slight majority of people said *rarely* or *never* (56 per cent).

Just over half of the online survey respondents had *occasionally* or *frequently* experienced racism (20 out of 38). Most of these individuals were of a visible minorities. As for the telephone survey, most people said *never* (44 per cent) or *rarely* (30 per cent). Immigrants that answered the telephone survey tended to *rarely* or *never* experience racism, similar to that of Canadian-born residents.

Regarding whether visible minorities and Indigenous peoples were treated the same as White people, online survey respondents tended to lean towards *less fairly* when it comes to visible minorities at work, school, and public places. Many respondents didn't know or preferred not to say when it came to dealing with police or the courts. For Indigenous peoples, slightly more respondents said *less fairly* when considering treatment at work or school. However, in public places, a large majority of respondents stated *less fairly*. As for dealings with police or the courts, more often than not, respondents stated *less fairly*.

Table 2: Treatment of Visible Minorities and Indigenous Peoples compared to White Individuals (#), Online survey

	Less fairly (VM)	Less fairly (IP)	More fairly (VM)	More fairly (IP)	The same (VM)	The same (IP)	Don't know / not sure (VM)	Don't know / not sure (IP)
Workplace or school	19	15	-	-	10	13	-	7
Public places	21	23	-	-	7	-	-	6
In dealing with police/courts	9	18	-	-	6	-	21	14

Note: VM = Visible minorities and IP = Indigenous peoples. N = 38. Any results 5 and under were suppressed and noted with "-".

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With regard to the telephone survey there were some slight differences. Majority of respondents stated that visible minorities were treated *the same* at work, school, and in public places. As for the courts, only 42 per cent of people said visible minorities were treated *the same* while 35 per cent said treated *less fairly*. For Indigenous peoples, only a slight majority of people stated that they were treated *less fairly* in public places and in dealing with the police or the courts. In school or at work, almost 50 per cent of respondents said treated the same.

Figure 4: Treatment of Visible Minorities and Indigenous Peoples compared to White Individuals (%), Telephone survey
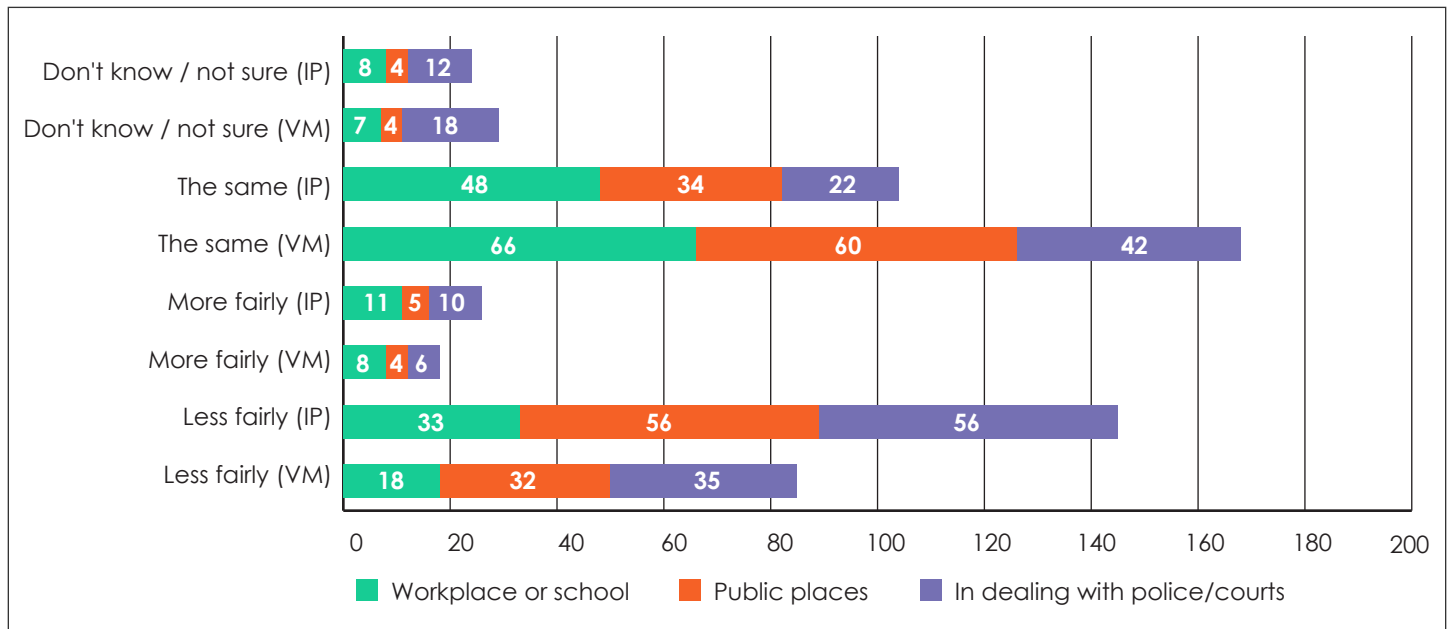
Note: VM = Visible minorities and IP = Indigenous peoples. N = 250

Confidence in Local Systems and Institutions

In general, people were asked about their confidence in the police, the justice system, and the media. For the online survey, respondents tended to stay somewhere in the middle with some or a little confidence.

Table 4: Confidence in the Local Police, Judicial System, and Media (#), Online survey

	Local Police	Judicial System	Media
Don't know / Prefer not to say	-	-	-
A lot of confidence	9	6	-
Some confidence	19	15	14
A little confidence	-	13	13
No confidence	-	0	-

Note: N= 38. Any results 5 and under were suppressed and noted with "-".

Similar to the online survey, respondents for the most part had confidence in all three systems, albeit media was the lowest.

Figure 5: Confidence in the Local Police, Judicial System, and Media, Telephone Survey (%)
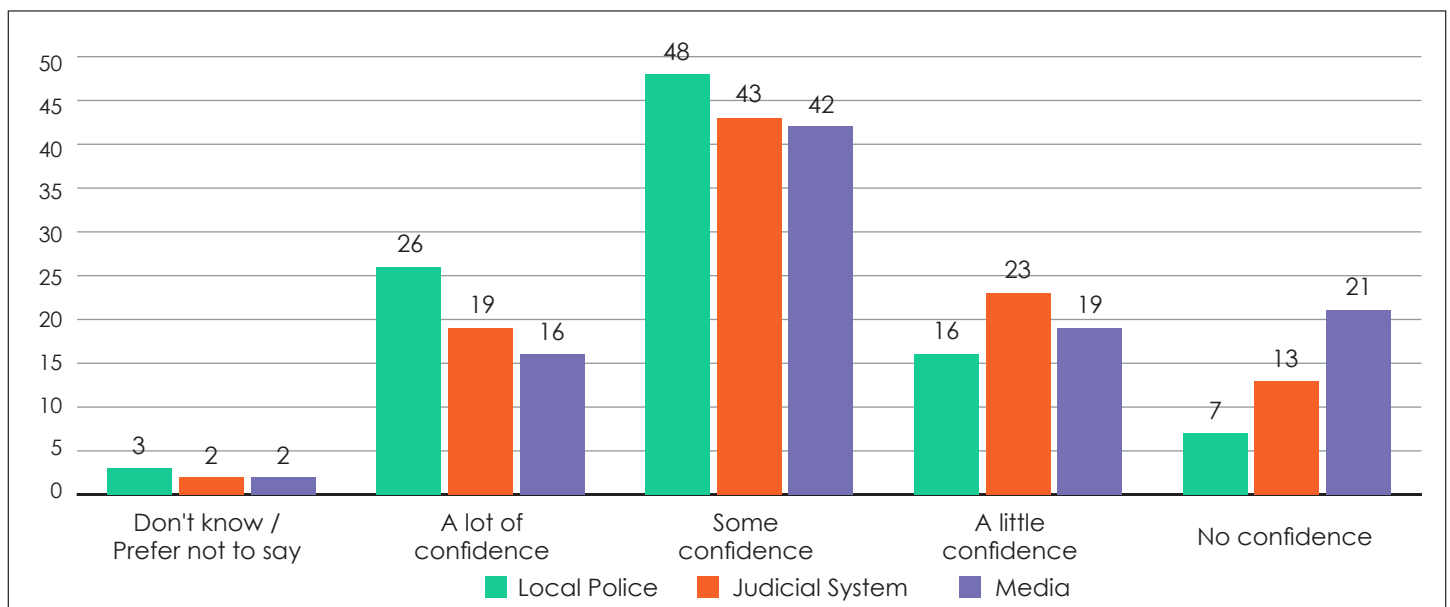
Note: n=250

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. In this same vein, the survey wanted 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 Thunder Bay, just over half of online respondents said things are *generally bad*. For the telephone respondents, it was flipped – 60 per cent said *generally good* as opposed to 38 per cent that said *generally bad*.

People were also asked if the situation has changed over the past 10 years. A similar breakdown was found between both surveys – between 44 to 48 per cent of people said *things have improved*, followed by 23 to 38 per cent of people saying *things have stayed the same*.

Finally, people were asked if the way Thunder Bay addresses racism and discrimination will improve over the next 10 years. Half of the online respondents said things will *have improved* while 61 per cent of telephone respondents felt things will *likely have improved*.

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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 Thunder Bay 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.

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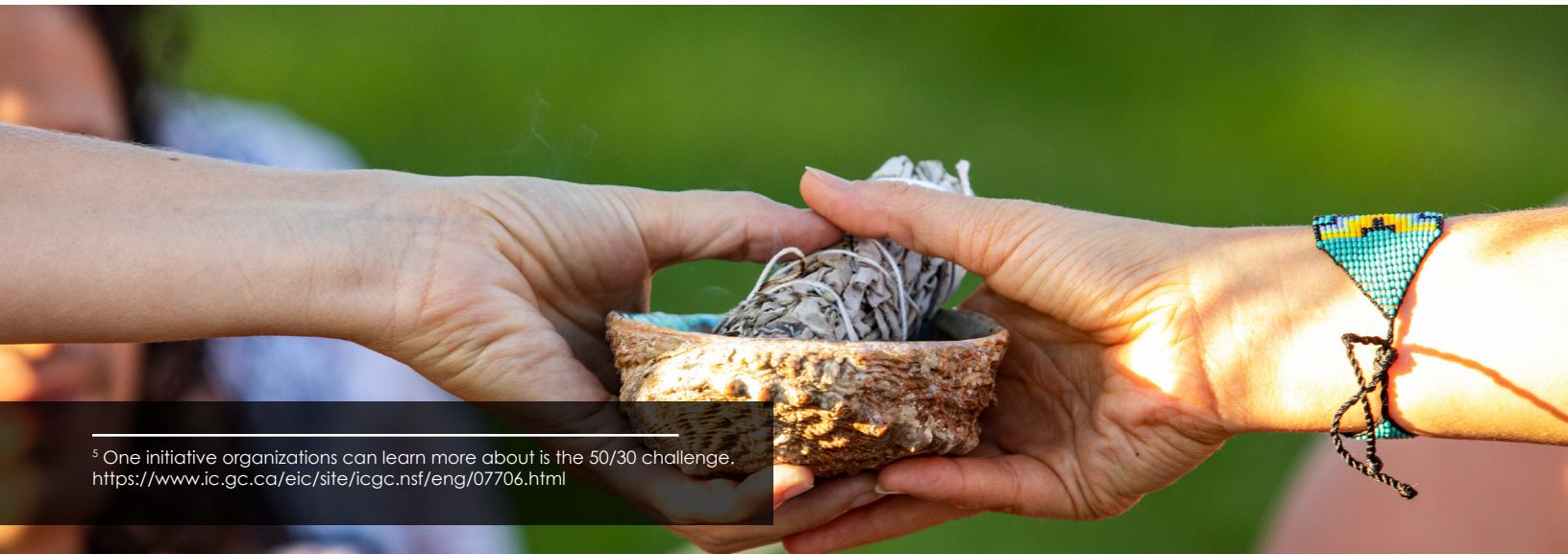
[5] One initiative organizations can learn more about is the 50/30 challenge.
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About Northern Policy Institute

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent, evidence-driven think tank. We perform research, analyze data, and disseminate ideas. Our mission is to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts our communities, our province, our country, and our world.

We believe in partnership, collaboration, communication, and cooperation. Our team seeks to do inclusive research that involves broad engagement and delivers recommendations for specific, measurable action. Our success depends on our partnerships with other entities based in or passionate about Northern Ontario.

Our permanent offices are in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and Kirkland Lake. During the summer months we have satellite offices in other regions of Northern Ontario staffed by teams of Experience North placements. These placements are university and college students working in your community on issues important to you and your neighbours.

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