

OCTOBER 2021



**OKC4HR**

COMMUNITIES FOR HUMAN  
RIGHTS, OKLAHOMA CITY

# **2021 Human Rights Study, Oklahoma City**

Prepared by:  
the Communities for  
Human Rights,  
Oklahoma City

# A Note from the Authors

We are grateful for the research partnership with Communities Foundation of Oklahoma (CFO) and the Arnall Family Foundation (AFF). Without their support, the insights about the status of human rights in Oklahoma City highlighted throughout this report wouldn't have been possible.

The study would not have depth and breadth without the community trust brokers, individuals and organizations on the frontline of civil liberty protections, who assisted with focus group recruitment, provided valuable input and feedback on discussion points and created space for vulnerability.

To each survey respondent and focus group participant, thank you for sharing your truths in a way that can enlighten us all. It is our hope that your bravery and courage is paid forward inspiring others to take intentional action.

*Communities for Human Rights, Oklahoma City, also referred to as OKC4HR, is a nonpartisan group of organizations, businesses and constituents asking the City of Oklahoma City to support human rights and improve quality of life for all residents.*

It is our belief that understanding the necessity of human rights and civil liberty protections must first begin by understanding, measuring and monitoring awareness of, attitudes towards, and personal experiences with discrimination.

It was important that this was community-based research. OKC4HR desires a data analytic process that uplifts underheard voices and experiences.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The purpose and intent of this human rights study is to establish a baseline for the status of human rights in the city of Oklahoma City today.*

The purpose and intent of this human rights study is to establish a baseline for the status of human rights in the city of Oklahoma City (OKC) today; to provide a useful indicator for data-informed decision making; and to support a localized human rights framework that would monitor and document human rights issues including but not limited to racial discrimination. Findings and outcomes from this community-based research project on the status of human rights in OKC include:

- 4 out of 5 respondents believe harassment or discrimination is a problem in OKC.
- More than 1 in 3 respondents believe that human rights are poorly or not protected at all.
- Majority support human rights and civic education, as well as additional protections of human rights and liberties, across race, political affiliation, etc.
- Self-reported discrimination or harassment victimization is highest among Black, Hispanic and LGBTQ+ respondents, and most commonly occurring at work or in public.



# PROJECT OVERVIEW



Communities for Human Rights, Oklahoma City (OKC4HR) was awarded a grant to perform quantitative and qualitative research, data analysis and reporting to determine the current state of human rights and racial equity in Oklahoma City and identify recommendations for improvement. Understanding the necessity of human rights and civil liberty protections, which begins by understanding, measuring and monitoring awareness of, attitudes towards, and personal experiences with discrimination, it is important that this is community-based research. OKC4HR desires a data analytic process that uplifts underheard voices and experiences.

The organizers for this campaign and principal investigators for the research project are Maurianna Adams, MPA and Andrea Benjamin, Ph.D. Our Project Manager is Veronica Laizure.

# OUR TEAM

## **Maurianna Adams**

Maurianna Adams, MPA, earned her Master in Public Administration at the University of Central Oklahoma. Her studies included Research Methods, Public Program Evaluation, Public Executive Leadership and Public Finance & Budgeting. Adams has facilitated or contributed to local, state and national research studies including the National Birth Equity Collaborative's "Mothers Voices Driving Birth Equity" project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as recent as 2019. In her profession, she focuses on assets-based community development, neighborhood revitalization and public-private partnerships. Maurianna Adams is currently serving as Co-Chair of Oklahoma City Human Rights Commission Task Force of Oklahoma City.



## **Dr. Andrea Benjamin**

Andrea Benjamin, Ph.D., earned her Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of Michigan in 2010. In addition to her quantitative and qualitative research methods courses in graduate school, she took classes on Survey Design, Focus Group, and Interviewing through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, which is held each summer at the University of Michigan. Her first book, *Racial Coalition Building in Local Elections: Elite Cues and Cross-Ethnic Voting* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2017. Dr. Benjamin has been involved in Community Led Research projects in Durham, NC since 2013 and is currently working on a book which considers how local community members can gain better political representation and outcomes from local governments.



# CURRENT CONTEXT

OKLAHOMA CITY



**Out of the 100 largest cities in the United States, the vast majority use a board or commission to investigate, educate, and enforce human and civil rights.**

**Although Oklahoma City is the 22nd largest city by population size, it does not currently have such a governing body. Its Human Rights Commission, established in 1963, was disbanded in 1996 amidst debate regarding extended protections for LGBTQ+ city residents.**

**A task Force was established by Mayor David Holt of Oklahoma City in July 2020 to explore the reestablishment of the defunct Human Rights Commission in the City of Oklahoma City.**

According to the Oklahoma Statewide Incident Based Reporting System (SIBRS), there were 11 reports of hate crimes reported to the Oklahoma City Police Department in one single year (2020). The human rights study found that an overwhelming percentage of respondents choose not to report hate or discrimination to the authorities; nonetheless, the available data is important. In more than 50% of the incidents, the bias motivation indicator was categorized as "anti-black," 27% anti-white, 18% anti-LGBT and 9% anti-Hispanic (SIBRS, 2020).

# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFINED

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1

”

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A) as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected.

According to the United Nations, human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is the principal human rights treaty regarding economic and social rights, and protects the rights to housing, work, social security, the highest attainable standard of health and the continuous improvement of living conditions. The ICESCR prohibits all forms of discrimination in the enjoyment of these rights.

# WHY HUMAN RIGHTS

*"For far too long economic and social objectives have been framed as antagonist of one another when the reality is that they depend upon one another in the pursuit of a healthy, growing society."*

Oklahoma City is experiencing rapid population growth and change, specifically increased youth and racial diversity. As a result, there is critical work in progress within the city's economic and social infrastructure. The mutual relationship between economic development and human development, reflecting negatively and positively on the other, serves as an indicator for growth potential and sustainment. Human rights thread through civil, political, economic, social and cultural conditions creating the potential for vulnerability or opportunity.

Human rights rely on mutual accountability, whereby all actors, including citizens, communities, organizations and the government, are responsible for respecting and fulfilling mutually agreed human rights obligations. The City of Oklahoma City cannot be a sole actor in advancing civil liberties and human rights, however it can be a catalyst. The City has embraced courageous conversations with those most impacted by discrimination, however courageous actions must follow suit in its pledge to "improve the quality of life for every Oklahoma City resident."

As it currently stands, there is limited understanding of how different people and groups perceive and experience human rights in Oklahoma City. While secondary sources of data may depict disparities at varying levels (i.e. national, regional, state, county, city or zip code) based on population-level outcomes, which is undoubtedly valuable, this research has its limits. In addition, first-hand or primary sources of data are limited at the local level even if conducted periodically. The 2021 Human Rights Study seeks to fill this critical gap.

# HUMAN RIGHTS STUDY

## OKLAHOMA CITY

This study received an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through the University of Oklahoma in order to protect the rights and welfare of humans participating as subjects in the research. To protect participants, they will remain anonymous and while the survey questions did capture participants' experiences, it did not require them to reveal specifics.



# METHODOLOGY

OKC4HR was awarded a grant to perform quantitative and qualitative research, data analysis and reporting to determine the current state of human rights and racial equity in Oklahoma City and identify recommendations for improvement. OKC4HR conducted research to gauge and give voice to people's attitudes - both positive and negative - about human rights in Oklahoma City. In particular, constituents' human rights awareness, attitudes towards groups, and about personal experiences of discrimination. Using grant funds, OKC4HR utilized a mixed-methods approach implemented across 3 phases.

## PHASE 1



In Phase 1, SoonerPoll (a local survey firm) conducted cell phone, landline, and online surveys with a representative sample of the city. SoonerPoll is Oklahoma's only independent, non-partisan pollster that performs political and issue-oriented polling for the state's news media and various associations and interest groups in the state.

The survey was generally proportionate to Oklahoma City's actual population in terms of gender, age groups, ethnic and racial identities, disability status, foreign-born populations, education and income levels, and regional distribution. The data was weighted by U.S. Census stratas and includes bi-lingual interviewers.

The survey questionnaire was adapted and modified from The Ontario Human Rights Commission survey, as a source. The data was aggregated and classified by sub-group, analyzed and summarized findings can be found in this report.



# METHODOLOGY

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## PHASE 2

In Phase 2, OKC4HR used the survey results to determine which groups were either underrepresented due to complex challenges or were identified to have disproportionate experiences with human rights issues. Based on these results, the researchers delved deeper into the communities of interest through six (6) targeted focus groups.

Using a Community Engaged Research framework, community partners were engaged and trained as facilitators to develop supplemental focus group questions. It was an iterative process, as a few questions were specifically crafted for a sub-group. Focus groups were held virtually via zoom due to Covid-19.

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## PHASE 3

In Phase 3, we analyzed secondary data and human rights best practices. We compiled our findings, drafted a report and presented our results.



# PARTICIPANTS

Sample Size= 1004  
 Margin of Error (MoE) ± 3.09%  
 Fielding from January 18th-  
 February 25th, 2021

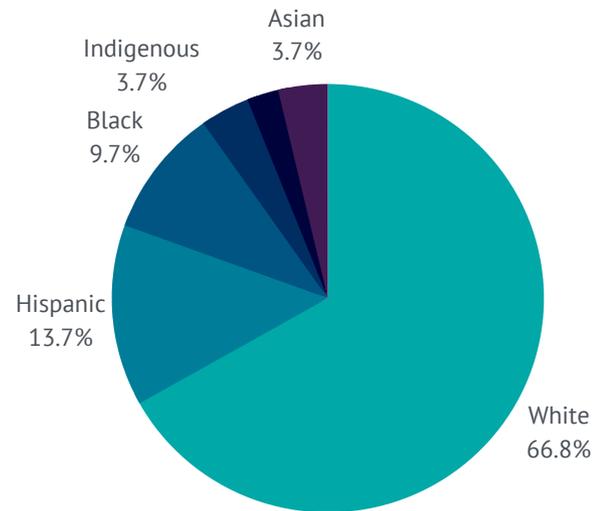
## SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

### Gender You Live As

Male - 49.1%  
 Female - 50.9%

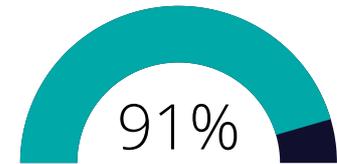
### Ancestry, Ethnicity or Place of Origin

Indigenous/Native American - 3.6%  
 White - 64.8%  
 Asian - 3.6%  
 Black/African or Afro Caribbean - 9.4%  
 Hispanic - 13.3%  
 Multi-Race - 2.8%  
 Other - 2.3%



### Level of Education

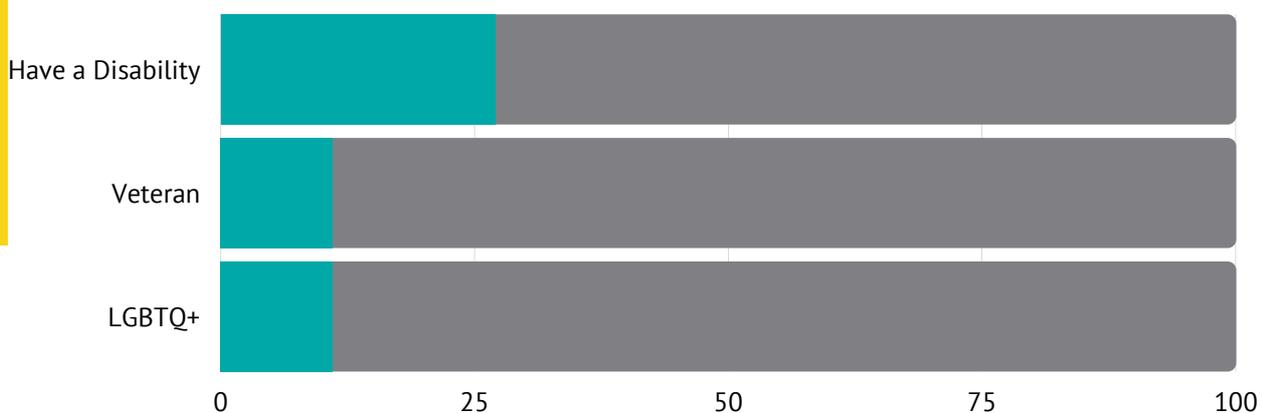
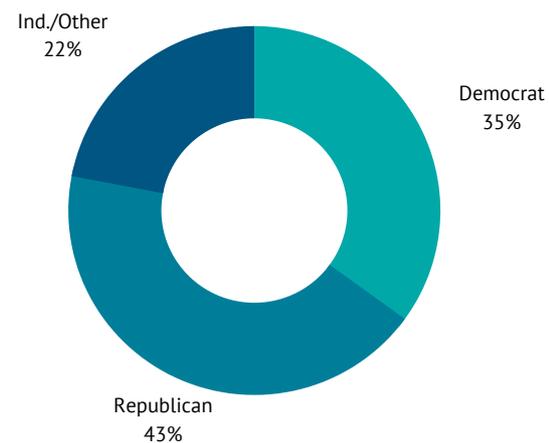
Some high school - 2.1%  
 High school graduate - 16.8%  
 Some college or university - 27.6%  
 College or technical school - 18.8%  
 University bachelor's degree - 20.5%  
 Post graduate university degree/  
 professional designation - 14.1%



Registered to vote

### Political Views

Very Liberal - 9.6%  
 Liberal - 22.6%  
 Moderate - 27.0%  
 Conservative - 31.6%  
 Very Conservative - 6.4%  
 Did not respond - 2.7%



# PARTICIPANTS

## FOCUS GROUPS



Based on our initial findings, it was determined that the following populations were underrepresented and/or expressed a disproportionate impact related to human rights that needed to be explored further. We conducted six (6) focus groups between April through September 2021. They are specified by community below:

- Black Males
- Muslims
- Jews
- Indigenous or Native Women
- 2SLGBTQ+
- Formerly Incarcerated

The meetings were co-facilitated by a trusted member (or resource) of that community. The co-facilitator, or trust broker, was compensated for their time, along with participants (approximately 40). The membership of the focus groups varied from varying levels of disenfranchised overlapped with class, education and different varying levels of access to opportunity.



DATA

“

*For the city of Oklahoma City to make it a priority I think you can advance human rights just by putting it in the spotlight. So often things don't happen unless you focus on them.*

”

The Oklahoma City human rights study's findings include:

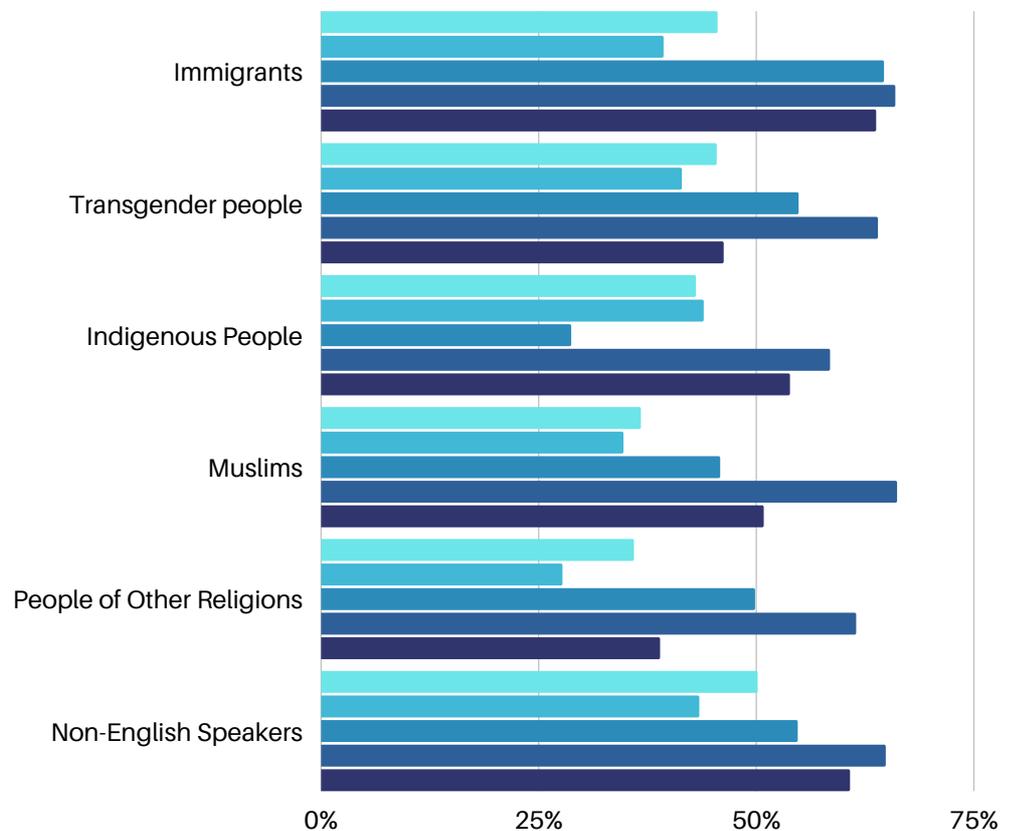
1. 67% of all respondents believe harassment or discrimination is a problem.
2. More than 1 in 3 respondents believe that human rights are poorly or not protected at all.
3. Support for human rights and education, as well as additional protections of human rights and liberties, across race, political affiliation, etc.
4. Self-reported discrimination or harassment victimization is highest among Black, Hispanic and LGBTQ+ respondents, and most commonly occurring at work or in public.
5. The general notion of “performative progression” that occurs at the interpersonal level but doesn’t translate structurally.

# DATA

## BELIEFS

A majority of racial ethnic groups, age groups, partisans, men, and women all agree that we do not do enough to accommodate people with physical disabilities, people with learning disabilities, people with mental health disabilities, and Veterans.

Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Americans were more likely to agree that we do not do enough to accommodate immigrants, transgender people, and non-English speakers than Whites and Native Americans. When we asked about accommodating Muslims a majority of African Americans agreed that we do not do enough to accommodate them. This was not the case for the other racial/ethnic groups.



When we asked about accommodating Indigenous people, a majority of African Americans and Hispanics agreed that we do not do enough to accommodate them. This was not the case for Whites, Native Americans, or Asian Americans.

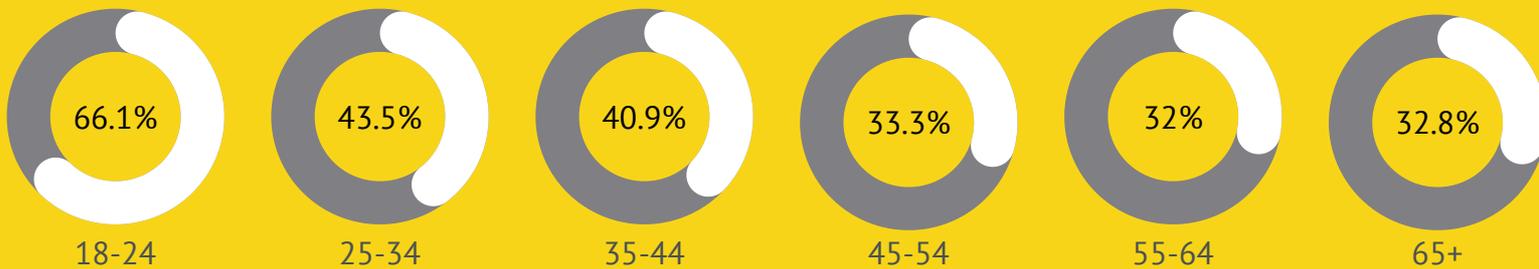
# DATA

# BELIEFS

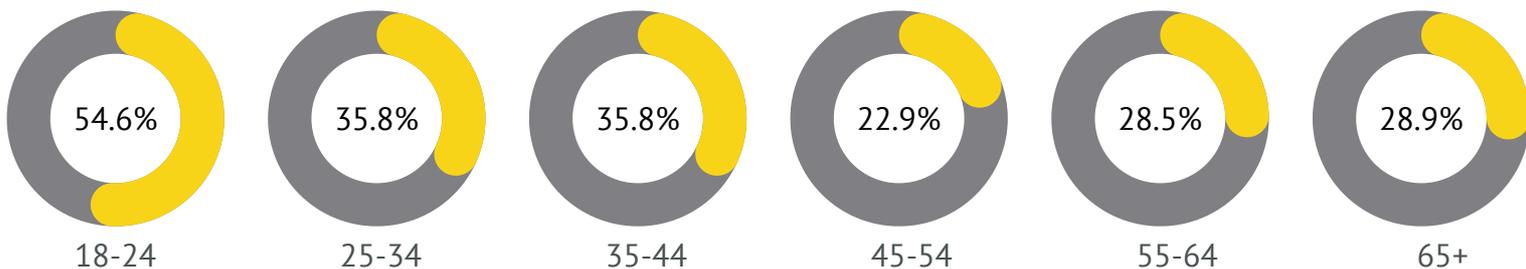
Democrats were more likely than Independents and Republicans to agree that we do not do enough to accommodate these marginalized groups.

Younger people in our sample were more likely than older people to agree that we do not do enough to accommodate immigrants, transgender people, indigenous people, and non-English speakers. When we asked about accommodating Muslims and people of other religions, only the 18-24 year olds said we do not do enough to accommodate those groups, while less than half of those over the age of 25 agreed with these statements.

## We do not do enough to accommodate Muslims in our community.



## We do not do enough to accommodate people of other religions in our community.



# DATA

## ATTITUDES

Overall, regardless of age group, people expressed more positive **personal feelings** towards people from different ethnic origins, Native Americans, Blacks, Asian people, people of color, people from a different religion. Younger people (under the age of 44) expressed more positive personal feelings towards Arab people, Muslims, immigrants, refugees, and members of the 2SLGBQ+ community than those over the age of 45.

When it came to personal feelings towards people on social assistance, only those 18-24 expressed positive personal feelings towards that group. Those 34 and under expressed more positive personal feelings towards transgender people.

*Percentage of respondents by race who expressed positive feelings about (?):*

	Native American	White	Asian	Black	Hispanic
Muslims?	44.8%	46.5%	64.6%	59.2%	51.8%
Immigrants?	53.5%	50.3%	70.9%	59.3%	56.8%
Refugees?	50.5%	49.2%	56.3%	54.9%	51.5%
People on Social Assistance?	43.8%	44.4%	59.8%	54.0%	50.9%
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual People?	51.0%	47.6%	75.1%	55.4%	71.2%
Transgender People?	45.2%	43.2%	65.4%	46.9%	55.6%

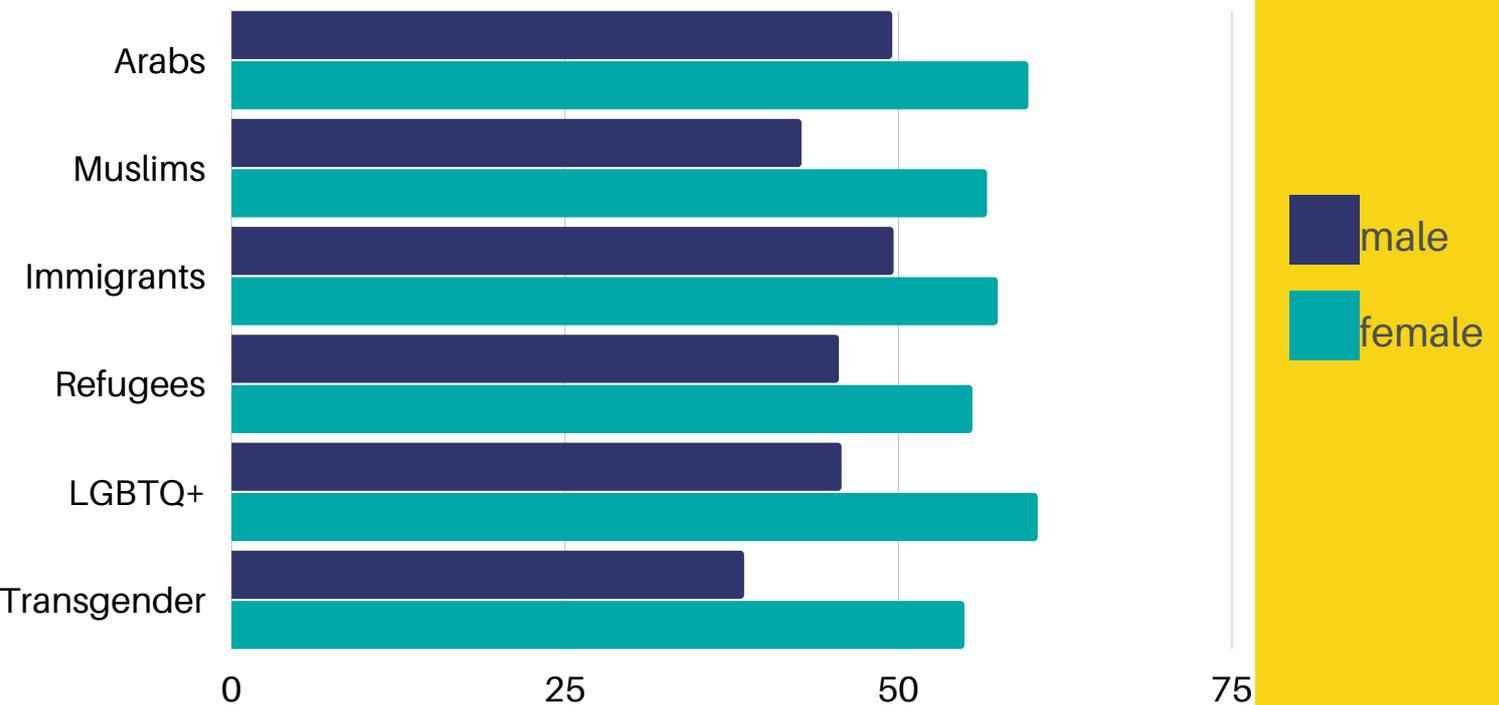
# DATA

# ATTITUDES

A majority of racial ethnic groups, age groups, partisans, men, and women express positive feelings towards people with physical disabilities, people with learning disabilities, people with mental health disabilities, and Veterans.

Women expressed more positive personal feelings towards Arabs, Muslims, immigrants, refugees, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and transgender people.

Percentage of respondents by gender who expressed positive feelings about (y):



While most respondents expressed very positive feelings about veterans and people with disabilities, they were less positive about people on social assistance, Muslims, and transgender people.

“ I always think when things are going on internationally, I am thankful that people can't just look at me and know that I'm Jewish. Whereas, I feel for people of color where they can't hide it. I can blend in. I don't have to wear a kippah, I don't have to wear my Star of David. And so that makes me very upset. ”



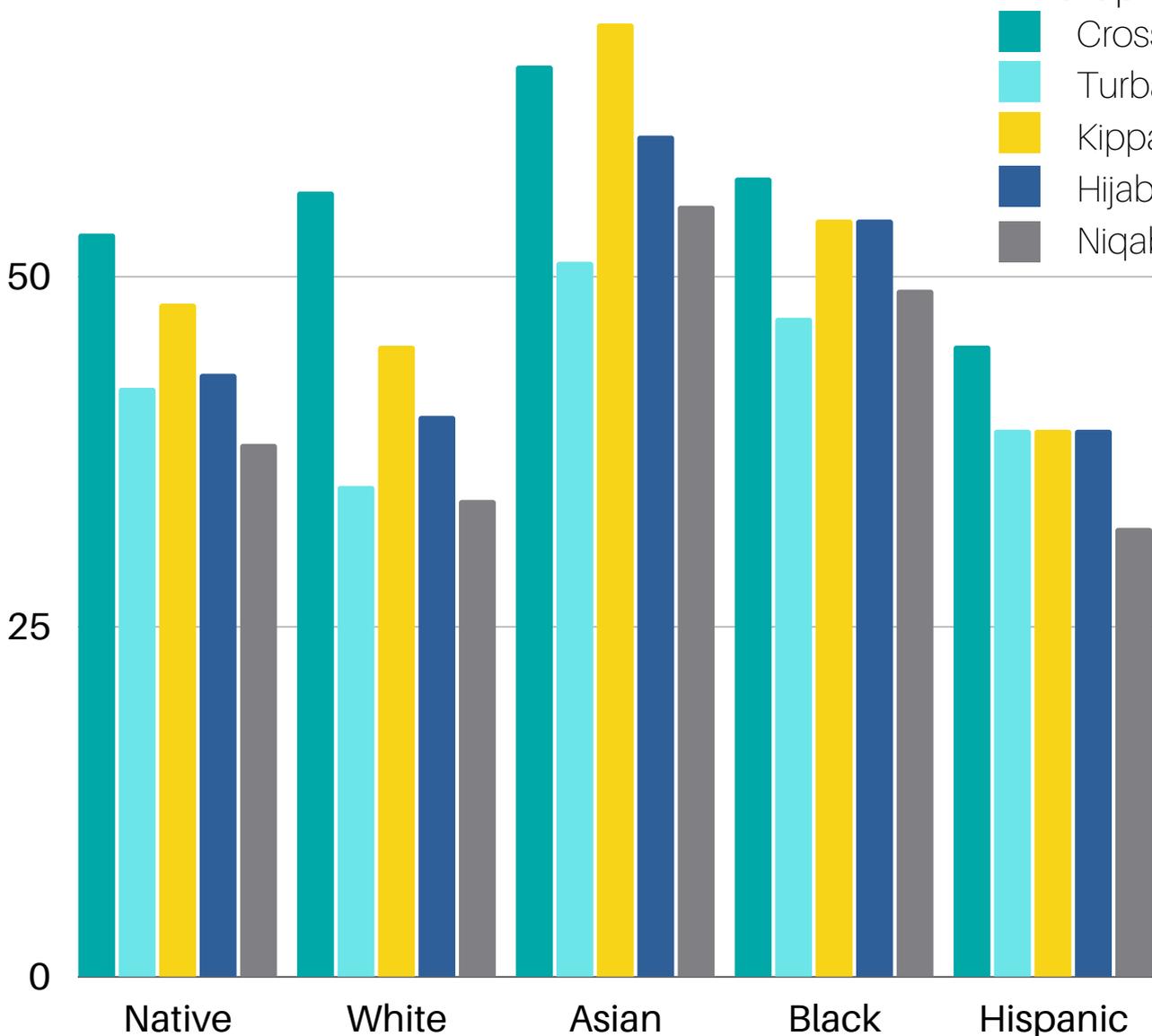
Across races and ages, respondents expressed the lowest level of comfort with people who wear hijab or niqab, compared with a cross, turban, or kippah.

75

Percentage of respondents by race who expressed comfort when (x) is worn:

Graph Key

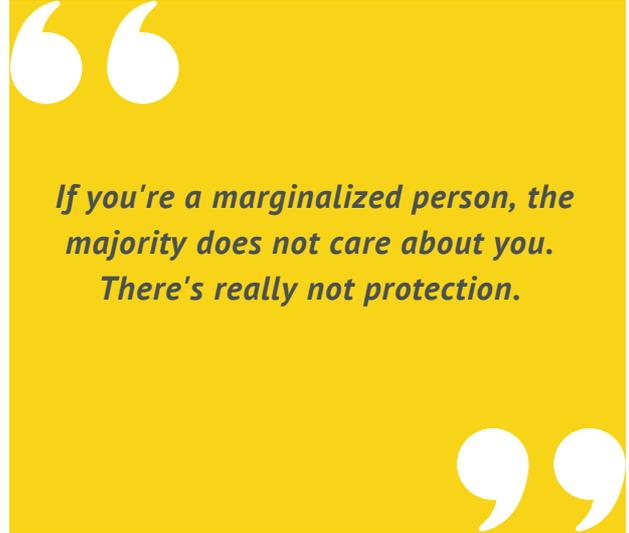
- Cross
- Turban
- Kippah
- Hijab
- Niqab



# DATA

When asked about the sources or reasons why one might experience discrimination, all racial/ethnic groups, ages, and partisanship groups were clear on the sources of discrimination: Race or color was the top reason for all groups, followed by sexual orientation for all groups except those over 65 (they said Sex was their #2). The third answer was Being Transgender for Native Americans, Asians, 18-24 year olds, 35-44 year olds, 45-54 year olds, those over the age of 65, and Independents. Sex was the third answer for Whites, Blacks, 25-34 year olds, 55-64 year olds, Democrats, and Republicans. Only Hispanics said Citizenship status as their third choice.

# PERCEPTIONS



67% of all respondents believe harassment or discrimination is a problem in OKC.

## Native American

1. Race or Color 70.9%
2. Sexual Orientation 43.2%
3. Being Transgender 24.3%

## White

1. Race or Color 73%
2. Sexual Orientation 39.1%
3. Sex 30.1%

## Asian

1. Race or Color 80.5%
2. Sexual Orientation 43.7%
3. Being Transgender 23.4%

## Black

1. Race or Color 94.1%
2. Sexual Orientation 29.6%
3. Sex 27%

## Hispanic

1. Race or Color 77.7%
2. Sexual Orientation 53.5%
3. Citizenship Status 28.8%

# 33%

More than 1 in 3 respondents believe that human rights are poorly or not protected at all.

# DATA

## EXPERIENCES

Even though there was some consensus among all groups on the likely sites and sources of discrimination (Race or Color, Sexual Orientation, Sex, Being Transgendered, and Citizenship status), when we asked about **personal past experiences with discrimination**, we found that people from a variety of groups felt that they had been discriminated against based on their political beliefs.

More whites indicated they had NOT experienced any discrimination (34.2%), compared to 21.7% of Native American, 14.7% of Asian Americans, 8.6% of Blacks, and 5.9% of Hispanics. So to think about this another way, a majority of all those in our sample have experienced some sort of discrimination. Still, 78.3% of Native Americans, 85.3% of Asians, 91.4% of Blacks, and 94.1% of Hispanics in our sample have experienced some type of discrimination compared to 65.8% of Whites.

However, these experiences are not being reported. When asked they reported their experiences to the Attorney General (the current mechanism in place) more than 90% said no.



“*Literally it's like fight or flight or that freeze moment where you freeze and it's always the regret of, "Man, I should've said something."*”

# DATA

*The most common places where people experienced harassment are at work and in public places.*

*“I know we're talking about basically is there equity after being discriminated against, do we have opportunity to defend ourselves and what not. I would say that we don't at all, because as we saw last year, people being discriminated against on a constant basis and then getting discriminated against by the system just for literally trying to fight for their right to exist.”*

# EXPERIENCES

*Top three reasons for self-reported personal past experiences with discrimination by race:*

## **Native American**

1. Your Political Beliefs 32.9%
  2. Your Age 17.9%
  3. The Color of Your Skin 15.3%
- Never Experienced Discrimination 21.7%  
Made a Complaint to the Attorney General 2.2%

## **White**

1. Your Political Beliefs 21.1%
  2. Your Age 21%
  3. Your Sex 13.3%
- Never Experienced Discrimination 34.2%  
Made a Complaint to the Attorney General 3.8%

## **Asian**

1. Your Political Beliefs 45.2%
  2. The Color of Your Skin 44.6%
  3. Your Ancestry 35.5%
- Never Experienced Discrimination 14.7%  
Made a Complaint to the Attorney General 10.5%

## **Black**

1. The Color of Your Skin 77.9%
  2. Your Gender Identity 22.4%
  3. Your Political Beliefs 22.4%
- Never Experienced Discrimination 8.6%  
Made a Complaint to the Attorney General 2.4%

## **Hispanic**

1. Your Age 34.9%
  2. The Color of Your Skin 31.4%
  3. Your Ancestry 30.6%
- Never Experienced Discrimination 5.9%  
Made a Complaint to the Attorney General 0%

# DATA

# EXPERIENCES

Men and Women were equally likely to indicate they had **experienced discrimination** (69.5%).

## Men

1. Your Political Beliefs 24.9%
2. The Color of Your Skin 20.5%
3. Your Age 19.6%

Never Experienced Discrimination 30.5  
Made a Complaint to the Attorney General 2.4%

## Women

1. The Color of Your Skin 25.8%
2. Your Sex 24.5%
3. Your Age 23.4%

Never Experienced Discrimination 30.5  
Made a Complaint to the Attorney General 3.7%



# 50%

Half of respondents have never heard of a local or statewide human rights commission.

# Limitations

Telephone survey methodology has traditionally been criticized as biased against those without phones and unreliable when asking complicated or sensitive issues. Nonetheless, this methodology is widely and increasingly used, as demonstrated by the Census Bureau. Over 84% of Oklahoma households have a cellular device. In addition, the surveyor's participant pool represented a significant rate of registered voters (91% of survey respondents were registered to vote, 9% not registered to vote). This is not representative of the larger population, and an assumption could be made that registered voters are more engaged or aware of civic matters. Those who are not registered to vote often represent the most vulnerable portion of the population.

To address underrepresentation, several focus groups were conducted. The membership of the focus groups varied from varying levels of disenfranchised overlapped with class, education and different varying levels of access to opportunity.

Lastly, we are currently in an era of unprecedented economic, social and political times that may contribute to skewed responses. Caution should be taken in generalizing findings, particularly to other settings and contexts.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the current environment and state of human rights in Oklahoma City, our data and international best practices, our recommended actions include:

- **Adopting mutually agreed human rights obligations;**
- **Engaging in human rights and civic education;**
- **Improving referral coordination and communication between agencies given authority to investigate civil rights and local civic groups;**
- **Incorporating public awareness campaigns to strengthen outreach efforts regarding reporting;**
- **Monitoring, documenting and analyzing human rights issues; and**
- **Assessing local policy and practice in light of international standards.**

Additional:

[State and Local Human Rights Agencies: Recommendations for Advancing Opportunity and Equality through an International Human Rights Framework](#)

Human rights rely on mutual accountability because they exist and are influenced by all levels of an ecosystem, or community. As themes emerged across focus groups concerning right holders' (defined as Individuals or communities whose rights have been violated or are most at risk) calls-to-action, it was necessary to recognize the complex interplay between these levels. We utilize the Socio Ecological Framework to note individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. It allows us to understand the range of factors that put people at risk for human right violations or protect them from experiencing or perpetrating harm.

“

*I think a big one would be fixing our education system, because what kids are taught now will be reflected in our government and our country decades from now.*

”

# WHAT WE HEARD

“Just imagine a world of everybody having the ability to be happy and healthy, just exist with those needs met. Which seems very simple but is not what we experience throughout our world.”

## INDIVIDUAL/INTERPERSONAL

Focus group members expressed:

- A desire for open dialogue or conversations about racial justice
- The urgency for safety regarding religious expression and need for inclusive interfaith language
- The right to the mic that rightsholders must have

## COMMUNITY

Focus group members expressed:

- The importance of community pride, recognition and public display
- A desire for civic engagement opportunities

## INSTITUTIONAL

Focus group members expressed:

- A need to continue seeing diverse representation among decision-makers and better communication with their constituents
- The necessity for comprehensive history courses

## PUBLIC POLICY

Focus group members expressed:

- A desire to see revitalization that benefits the entire community
- The urgency of police reform
- The importance of accountability mechanisms for human rights violations
- The need for adequate resource distribution to communities most in need

# CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by understanding, measuring and monitoring awareness of, attitudes towards, and personal experiences with discrimination, we understand the necessity of human rights and civil liberty protections at the local level. This human rights study found that discrimination is widespread, however minority groups are likely to experience and underreport discrimination. There is some dissent regarding who should be protected from discrimination and what levels of protection should be instituted. Nonetheless, residents of Oklahoma City don't believe enough is being done to protect human rights, and this is in part shaping resident's lived experiences and perceptions. More can be done and is desired regarding human rights education and public awareness. There is willingness across groups to work together and make our city a better place.





**OKC4HR**

COMMUNITIES FOR HUMAN  
RIGHTS, OKLAHOMA CITY