
Survey Methodology and Results

APPENDIX A

As part of this review of prosecuting non-felony offenses in Minnesota, we surveyed county attorneys and a sample of city prosecutors. We conducted mail surveys of these two populations in October and November 1996. Because we wanted data on an entire year's worth of prosecution activities, we asked respondents to provide information for the 1995 calendar year.

CHOOSING A SAMPLE

We mailed surveys to Minnesota's 87 county attorneys and to a stratified, random sample of 533 cities around the state. We stratified the cities in three ways. The first stratum included those relatively few cities with somewhat unique prosecution arrangements. In this stratum we included 17 cities that we knew had their own in-house prosecutors, special joint contracts, or joint powers agreements for prosecution services.

We grouped the remaining cities first by each of the 10 judicial districts. This helped us ensure that the sample was representative of the state's geographic regions and the judicial districts. Then, within each judicial district we divided cities by size into one of three groups. Large cities were the 149 cities with populations of at least 3,000; medium cities were the 162 cities with between 1,000 and 2,999 population; and small cities were the 527 cities with populations of less than 1,000. This ensured that the sample contained a representative mix of all sizes of cities. Within these strata we randomly selected about 60 percent of all cities.

CONDUCTING THE SURVEY

On October 22, 1996 we mailed the survey instrument and a cover letter to the county attorneys and cities in our sample, asking them to return the

survey at the end of two weeks. About a week later, we mailed postcard reminders to each of the survey recipients except those from whom we had already received responses. Three weeks after sending the original survey, we sent follow-up letters to prosecutors from whom we had not received a response. We included in this mailing another copy of the survey instrument and asked for a response within a week.

SURVEY RESPONSE RATES

We received responses from 67 of the 87 county attorneys in time for analysis, for a response rate of 77 percent. Results from key questions in the survey of county attorneys have a margin of error ranging between plus or minus 3 and 6 percentage points due to sampling error.

Of the 533 cities we surveyed, 362 returned surveys in time for analysis for a response rate of 68 percent. Results from key questions in the survey of cities have a margin of error ranging between plus or minus 4 and 7 percentage points due to sampling error.

Because respondents chose not to answer all questions in the surveys, the margin of error may be larger for some responses where the number of respondents is relatively low. In addition, the practical difficulties of conducting any opinion survey may introduce other sources of error into the results of either of our surveys.

RESULTS

In the remaining pages of this appendix we present the instruments used to survey county and city prosecutors and the results from each of those groups' responses.