



Fair & Accessible Justice

Objective:

Ensure fair and accessible justice systems

What is happening in King County?

One of King County's guiding principles is to serve all residents by promoting fairness and opportunity and eliminating inequities. Fair and accessible justice systems are very important to that principle.

Fair and accessible justice systems include fair and efficient prosecution, timely case management, the availability of defense for those who need it, and access to therapeutic courts. All of these systems work in concert to ensure that our justice systems hold individuals accountable, protect public safety, and are fair for those accused of crimes.

The courts are a somewhat less visible service provided by King County government. Many individuals are unfamiliar with the courts, either because they have not served as jurors or because they have not been involved in a criminal or civil proceeding. More than half of residents surveyed had a neutral opinion about the court or did not know about the court at all. Of the remaining respondents, about 80 percent reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with both the accessibility and fairness of the courts.

These results are consistent across income categories, underscoring our goal of eliminating income inequities. The perception of access to court systems is much lower for King County residents of Asian/Pacific Islander descent than other ethnic/racial groups. Urban residents appear to be more satisfied with the court system than rural residents. King County strives to provide access to court services throughout King County by maintaining multiple court facilities.

What role does King County play?

King County provides a wide variety of justice system services for King County residents. Our courts work with law enforcement, prosecution, and defense to process criminal, infraction, dependency, parentage, and involuntary commitment cases. In addition, King County courts hear with a wide variety of civil and family law matters for citizens and businesses.

King County Superior Court is the county's general jurisdiction court; it can hear any matter arising under state law. In the criminal arena, it handles felony matters arising anywhere in King County. Felony matters are those which are punishable by a year or more in jail. In the civil arena, it handles most disputes involving more than \$75,000 and shares jurisdiction with King County District Court for cases involving lesser amounts. Superior Court also handles guardianship, probate, family law, and juvenile justice matters.

King County District Court is the county's limited jurisdiction court and the largest court of limited jurisdiction in the State, providing services to more than 1.9 million King County residents. Matters filed with the court include small claims, traffic infractions, protection orders, misdemeanor criminal cases and civil cases up to \$75,000. Criminal and traffic infractions occurring in unincorporated King County or on state roads and highways are filed with district court. The court is also the municipal court for 12 contract cities and has a limited services contract with one city to provide weekend and holiday in custody hearings.

Both courts operate various court-related programs, in addition to hearing cases. These programs include probation services, therapeutic courts (Drug Court, Mental Health Court, and Veterans Court), and programs that assist civil litigants with filing or resolving their cases.

Both courts also are regional courts, serving all residents of King County. Superior Court operates at two general service locations -- the King County Courthouse in Seattle and the Maleng Regional Justice Center in Kent -- and also operates the county's Juvenile Court and its Involuntary Commitment Court at separate Seattle locations. King County District Court currently operates at ten facilities located throughout King County: Aukeen (Renton), Bellevue, Burien, Issaquah, King County Courthouse (Seattle), King County Jail (Seattle), Redmond, Maleng Regional Justice Center (Kent), Shoreline and Vashon Island.

The Prosecuting Attorney's Office is responsible for the prosecution of both felony cases (in the King County Superior Court) and misdemeanor cases that arise in unincorporated areas of King County (in the King County District Court).

The Office of Public Defense contracts with four nonprofit law firms and maintains an assigned counsel panel to provide for indigent defense. As in most urban jurisdictions, an overwhelming majority of felony defendants are not able to afford their own attorney.

The Department of Judicial Administration acts as the Clerk's office for the Superior Court and in that capacity manages the court records and public access to the court, and handles all financial matters in superior court cases.

What else influences these indicators?

King County's criminal justice system is made of many different agencies. Although the prosecution, defense, judicial administration and courts have different roles to play in the administration of justice, all participants have a goal of ensuring the accessibility and fairness of the system for each individual involved.

Law enforcement and the prosecutor drive much of the court workload. There are many law enforcement agencies working in King County, including various municipal police forces, state and federal law enforcement agencies, the Port of Seattle police, as well as King County Sheriff's Office. Both state law and prosecutor filing decisions can impact court workload.

Citizen litigants bring their own matters into King County's civil courts, which drives caseload and for courts and other organizations that provide services for civil litigants.

Related Links

[A Citizen's Guide to Washington Courts](#)

[King County Superior Court](#)

[King County District Court](#)

[King County Sheriff's Office](#)

[King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office](#)

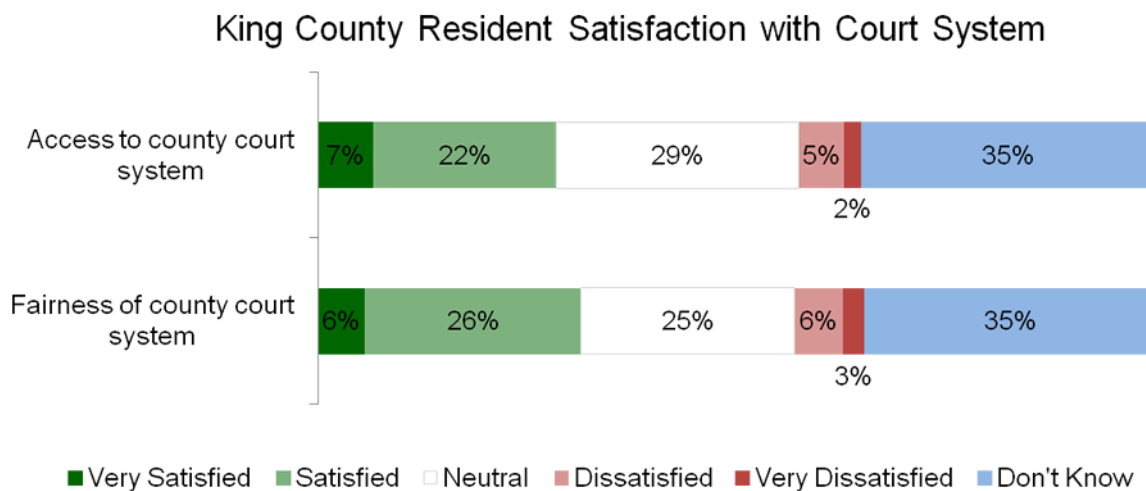
[King County Office of the Public Defender](#)

[Expand to read technical notes](#)

Technical Notes

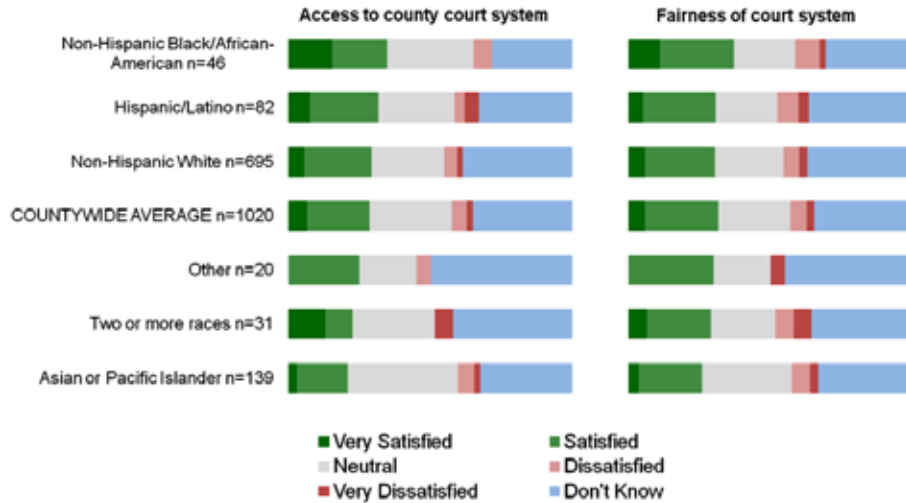
The 2012 King County Resident Survey was conducted in April and May of 2012. Surveys were administered in English, Spanish, and Mandarin. Of the 3,000 households that were selected to receive the survey, 266 completed the survey by mail and 759 completed the survey by phone for a total of 1,025 completed surveys (King County's population is about 1.9 million people). There were at least 250 respondents from Seattle and 125 surveys from each of six other areas. The overall results of the survey were weighted to reflect the actual population of each of the seven geographic areas of the County. The overall results of the survey have a precision of at least +/-3.0% at the 95% level of confidence. The results for the City of Seattle have a precision of at least +/- 6.2% at the 95% level of confidence and the results for each of the other six areas have a precision of at least of at least +/- 8.7% at the 95% level of confidence. The precision of estimates for some income and ethnicity categories is lower than the precision of countywide and regional estimates due to small sample sizes. Categories with fewer than 20 responses are either dropped or combined. All resident survey results reported in AIMS High include "Don't Know" responses in calculations.

Charts and Maps

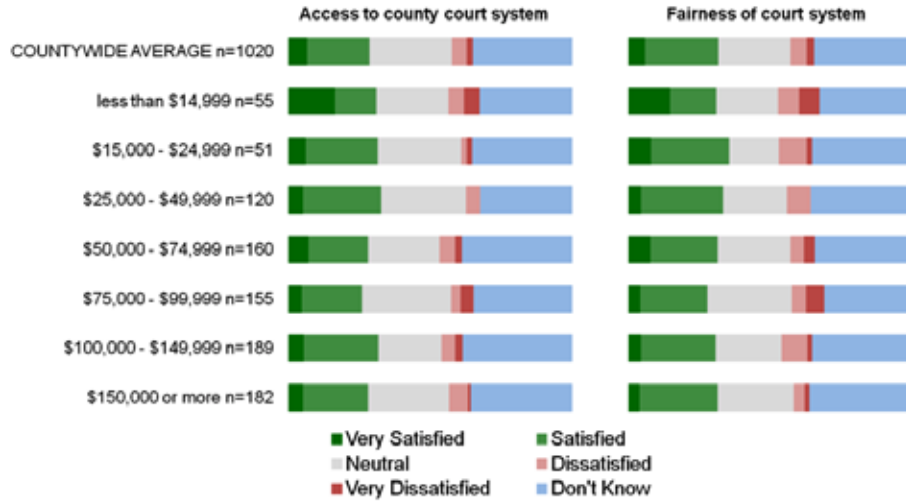


Data Source: 2012 King County Resident Survey

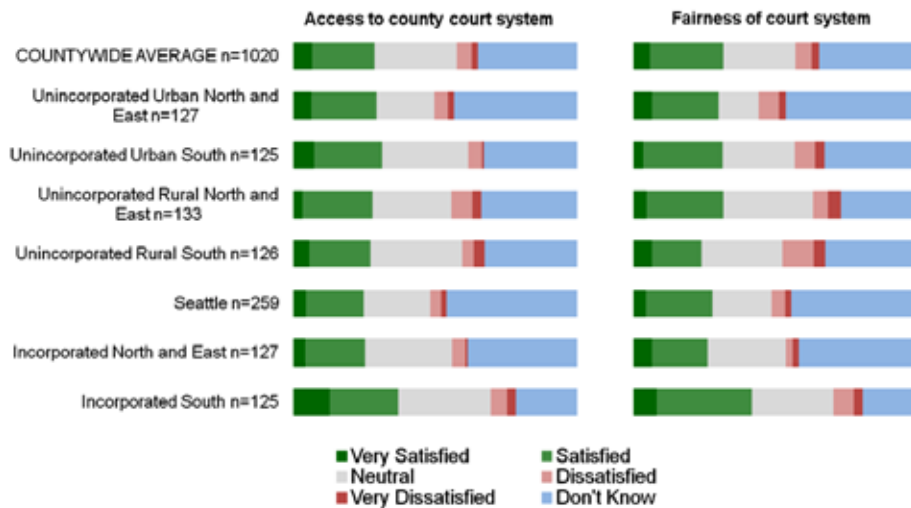
Resident Satisfaction with Courts (by race/ethnicity)



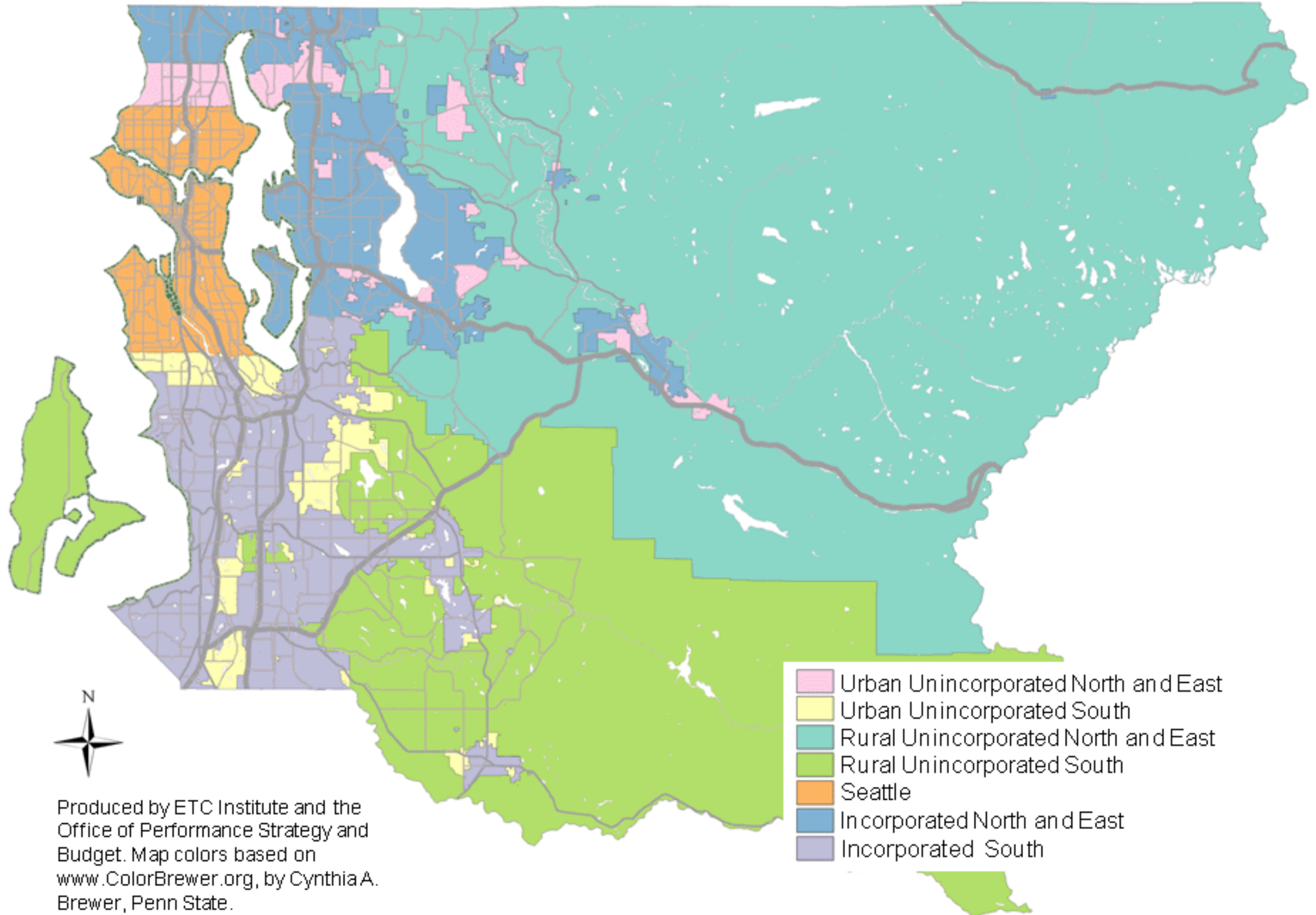
Resident Satisfaction with Courts (by income)



Resident Satisfaction with Courts (by geography)



2012 King County Resident Survey Regions



Produced by ETC Institute and the Office of Performance Strategy and Budget. Map colors based on www.ColorBrewer.org, by Cynthia A. Brewer, Penn State.