

Police, authorities and Chinese community need to work together for a safer New Zealand

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Six in 10 Chinese living in New Zealand—and seven in 10 international students—feel unsafe. Credit: University of Auckland

Chinese studying, working and living in New Zealand need to make sure they report crimes to police, and police need to re-engage with the Chinese community, a researcher says.

Dr Andrew Zhu, political polling expert and honorary research fellow at the University of Auckland business school, is making these calls following the final results from a landmark survey he conducted this week, which found six in ten Chinese living in New Zealand feel unsafe.

He conducted the eight-question online survey through his independent market research company, Trace Research Limited.

The poll ran from 9am Monday 22 August to 5pm Wednesday 24 August on WeChat, a popular Chinese instant-messaging service. It attracted an unprecedented 11,675 responses.

Findings suggest a significant number within the Chinese community have lost faith in the police.

Main findings:

- More than half of Chinese people living in New Zealand feel unsafe in their homes and neighbourhoods. Overall, 62.3 per cent were dissatisfied with public safety. The most worried group were international students, at 70 per cent. Public safety was a concern for fewer Chinese New Zealand citizens, at 53.4 per cent
- The majority of Chinese in New Zealand are not satisfied with punishment for crimes (93.1 per cent), or law enforcement agencies' measures to combat crime (91.3 per cent). Comments on discussion threads reflect a widespread demand for more severe punishments for crime, and the perception that New Zealand is "a heaven" for criminals
- Otago, Wellington, and the Manawatu-Wanganui regions had the highest ratings for [public safety](#), while the West Coast, Auckland and Northland regions received the lowest
- Among the top eight crimes that cause feelings of unsafety, burglary (85.4 per cent) and robbery (83.5 per cent) are most

feared by Chinese in New Zealand

- In Auckland, the CBD, Dominion Road and Northcote Shopping were highlighted as areas where people feel most vulnerable to crime
- When confronted by an attempted robbery, 60 per cent of Chinese say they would not resist and would give their assailants whatever they asked for; 14.7 per cent would defend themselves with force

Dr Zhu was motivated to do the survey following the racially-charged assault of Auckland restaurateur Jenny Li in her Northcote restaurant last Sunday night.

"I wanted to raise awareness among non-Chinese New Zealanders about Chinese groups' experience of life here," he says.

He was shocked by the massive response. "It looks like a build-up, an eruption. Too many crimes involving Chinese have happened in the last six months," he says. "But the Chinese haven't been taking a pro-active approach."

He says comments suggest that many crimes go unreported because of language or cultural barriers – especially among older Chinese who emigrate to join their families.

Another reason why official statistics may not reflect reality came through strongly in the survey: a loss of faith in the police.

"People said they don't rely on police because 'they can't help me', or that cases were reported two years ago and they never heard back, or the response time was too slow, or police didn't come because nobody was hurt."

He says police need to convince the Chinese community to report all crimes, and work to rebuild trust. He was encouraged that police have already been in touch with the Chinese community, and by an open letter by the Prime Minister to the Chinese community, following media coverage of early poll results this week.

Some respondents started discussing on WeChat how to make their own neighbourhoods safer. The survey found a quarter of Chinese are aware of an initiative called Run A Safer Community, which shares information about local crime and organises mass night-time runs.

Dr Zhu says it's important to remember that the survey measured perceptions of crime and safety, rather than actual crime.

He says artificially high expectations of New Zealand as an ultra-safe oasis could inflate perceptions of threat when newcomers inevitably hear reports of crime in the media or social media, or experience it themselves.

"When immigrants come over here they have a really high expectation of zero crime. New Zealand is portrayed as one of the safest countries in the world," he says.

"However, if you asked them would you go back to China because you don't feel safe here, I suspect the answer would be probably not."

The finding that fewer Chinese New Zealand citizens (53.4 per cent) have safety concerns compared to other groups reflects the fact that they have been in New Zealand long enough to be better integrated into society, understand local norms, and know more about how the police and justice systems work.

Dr Zhu says he's received messages from non-Chinese New Zealanders

this week who share safety and crime enforcement concerns.

One reads: "I'm fairly certain you would get the same response from most of non-Chinese people living in NZ and your survey has a lot of people like me interested.

"Most European New Zealand people don't bother ringing the police for anything other than confrontational crimes these days, for example burglaries where no one is home are considered way down the [police](#) priority list."

Provided by University of Auckland

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