

Amid Escalating Crime and a 20% Victimization Rate, Half Want Prevention Over Correction

Blacks Feel Safest and Support Prevention, Asians Feel Less Safe

Crime has escalated since the start of the pandemic. In San Diego County, homicide, rape, and aggravated assault increased 3%, 11% and 12%, respectively, in 2021 according to an April [report](#) released by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). Property crimes shot up by 9% from the previous year. Public safety and law enforcement are poised to play an important role in upcoming midterm elections – particularly at the national level – with many races serving as a referendum on incumbents’ handling of public safety issues. Despite the significant upticks in reported crime, only 3% of San Diegans name public safety as the most important issue. Residents are more focused on homelessness, housing, and economic issues, suggesting those problems are so widespread and severe that crime is overshadowed, even during surging criminal activity.

Crime Victimization

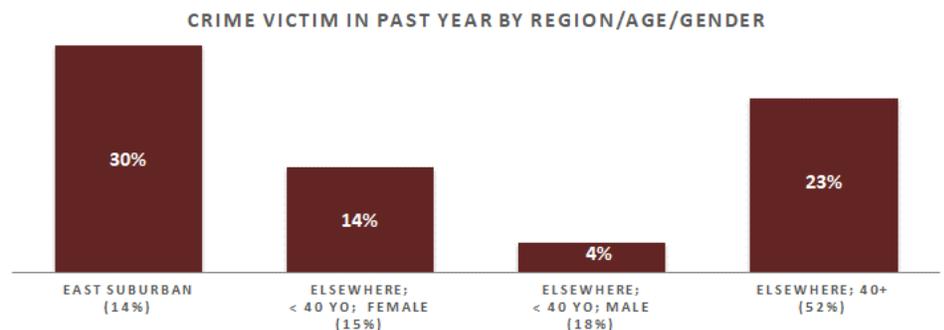
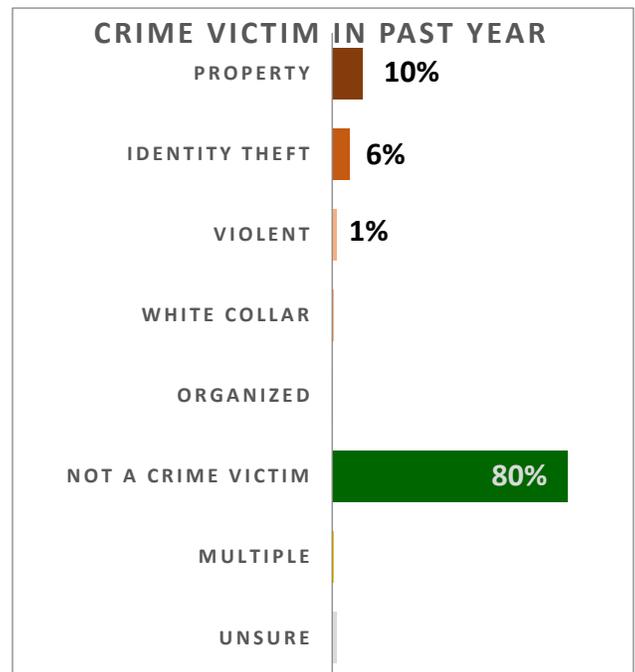
Two-in-ten San Diego County residents –more than a half million adults -- have unfortunately been victimized by crime in the past year.

East suburban communities have been hit hardest, as 30% in those neighborhoods report being a victim. Elsewhere, it’s residents older than 39 who are most often victimized. Among younger residents, women have been victimized three times as often as men.

Property crimes are the most reported incidents, with 10% claiming they have been a victim of this type of crime in the last 12 months. Identity theft is also fairly common, as 6% of San Diegans claim to have had their identity stolen.

Interestingly, Republicans, non-partisans, those with minor parties and unregistered residents (i.e., non-Democrats) who live in the area between the I-8 and SR-52 freeways are the biggest property crime victims. Twenty-six percent in this north San Diego city tier have been subjected to property crimes in the last year compared to one-in-ten non-Democrats in other areas and just 3% of Democrats.

Crimes of identity theft tend to be concentrated in areas surrounding Rancho Santa Fe and San Marcos, as well as in the eastern suburbs. Identity theft victims are twice as common in these neighborhoods as they are among the broader population.



White collar, violent, and organized crime are rarer, as is being the victim of multiple types of crime. Violent crime is more prevalent in the central part of the county as well as the east suburbs where it is more than twice as common compared to elsewhere. Alternatively, white collar crime impacts the population equally: it is no more likely to affect certain groups or areas more than others.

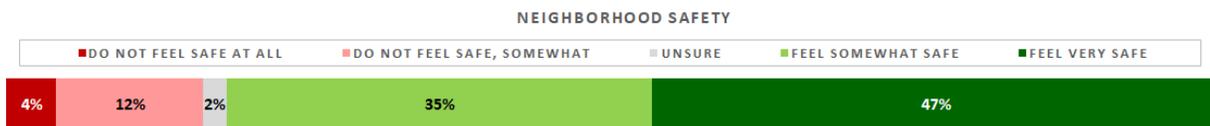
A Closer Look at San Diego’s Communities of Color

- ✓ Blacks are more often victims of multiple crimes
- ✓ AAPI residents are more often the victims of violent crime
- ✓ Latino residents may be a little more susceptible to identity theft

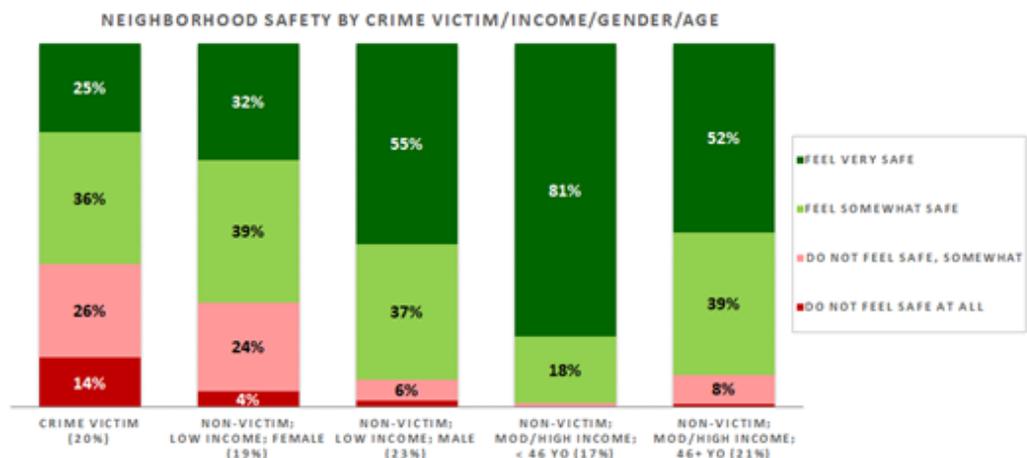
		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
Crime victim in past year	Property	10%	9%	11%	9%	10%
	Identity theft	6%	9%	3%	4%	6%
	Violent	1%	1%	0%	4%	1%
	White collar	1%	0%	3%	0%	1%
	Organized	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
	Multiple	0%	0%	4%	1%	1%
	Not a crime victim	81%	78%	76%	80%	80%
	Unsure	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%

Neighborhood Safety

San Diegans are generally safe in their neighborhood and almost half feel *very* safe. Another 35% aren’t as certain but feel *somewhat* safe. Although 17% of folks feel less safe than that, only a tiny 4% live in *very unsafe* neighborhoods, so almost all residents enjoy a measure of safety in their community.



Whether someone feels safe in their neighborhood has a lot to do with whether they have recently been a crime victim. Victims are anxious about their neighborhood’s safety, as a large four-in-ten *do not* feel safe in their own neighborhood.



Conversely, younger non-victims in areas with higher average incomes feel the safest of all: a whopping 81% feel *very safe* and *none* (in our survey) feel completely unsafe. Their older counterparts also feel safe, although they're more likely to hesitate about their safety. This is understandable given seniors often live alone or have medical conditions or disabilities that make them an easier target for criminals. Even non-victims living in neighborhoods with lower incomes tend to feel safe, but women in these areas are significantly less likely to believe they are *very safe* than are men, so the genders divide when it comes to personal safety.

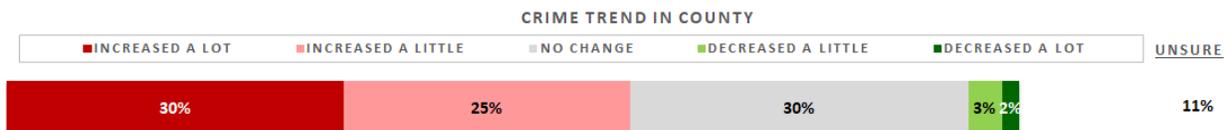
A Closer Look at San Diego's Communities of Color

- ✓ Asian residents tend to feel less safe in their neighborhood
- ✓ Fifty-six percent of Blacks feel *very safe* in their neighborhood, making them safer than the average resident
- ✓ Latinos are in-line with the rest of the county

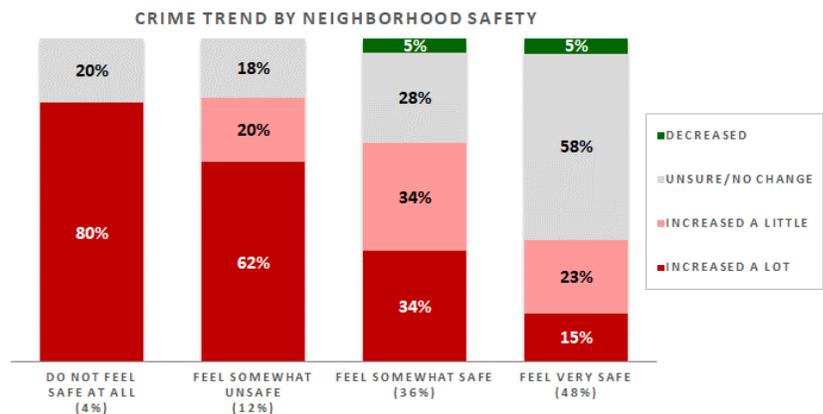
		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
Neighborhood safety	Do not feel safe at all	4%	2%	0%	9%	4%
	Feel somewhat unsafe	10%	16%	2%	15%	12%
	Unsure	2%	2%	1%	0%	2%
	Feel somewhat safe	37%	32%	41%	44%	35%
	Feel very safe	48%	47%	56%	31%	47%

Is Crime Getting Worse?

Most agree crime has increased locally during the past year, and 30% believe it has increased *a lot*. Another four-in-ten feel it has stayed the same, which, in this case, is not necessarily positive because official statistics show crime *increased* from 2020 to 2021. Only a tiny 5% believe there is less crime now, so San Diego isn't deterring or combating crime very well, at least in the eyes of residents.

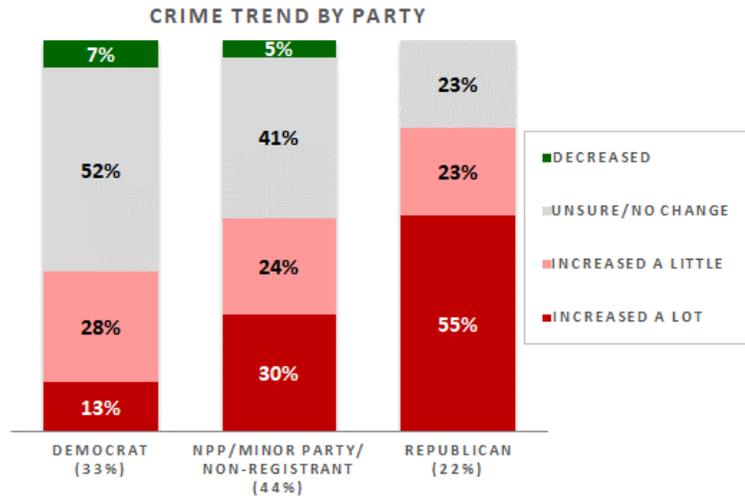


How safe residents feel in their own neighborhood is the biggest factor driving perceptions of countywide crime. People in unsafe areas typically feel violations of the law are increasing and a massive 80% who do not feel safe *at all* say crime has increased *a lot*. Perceptions soften as residents feel safer. People who feel safe in their neighborhoods typically don't



perceive a surge, but even the *very safe* don't believe crime has actually *decreased*. Instead, they tend to feel it hasn't changed in the last year. Even feelings of personal safety are not enough to fully counteract the impact that official statistics and news coverage have on locals' mindsets.

Perceptions of crime are also tied to political affiliation. Republicans believe crime is worsening: a majority say it has increased *a lot* in the last year and *none* think crime has diminished. Although an ample four-in-ten Democrats agree that it has worsened, most believe crime is unchanged from a year ago. In the middle, nonpartisans, minor party voters, and unregistered adults tend to align more closely with Republicans, although their views are less fervent.



Location also factors in, as crime is spreading to the suburbs. Most in the county's central area feel crime levels have stayed the same, while majorities elsewhere believe it has risen. Young women are much more likely to think crime hasn't changed, while their older counterparts typically say it's gotten worse. Lastly, those who took this survey in Spanish are unconvinced crime has increased.

A Closer Look at San Diego's Communities of Color

- ✓ Most Black residents believe crime has stayed the same during the last year, and are less likely than the broader population to think it has increased
- ✓ Views among the Asian community and Latinos reflect those of all San Diegans

		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
Crime trend in county	Increased a lot	31%	28%	17%	31%	30%
	Increased a little	24%	27%	18%	28%	25%
	Unsure/No change	40%	38%	57%	37%	41%
	Decreased a little	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%
	Decreased a lot	2%	3%	3%	0%	2%

San Diego vs Other Large Cities

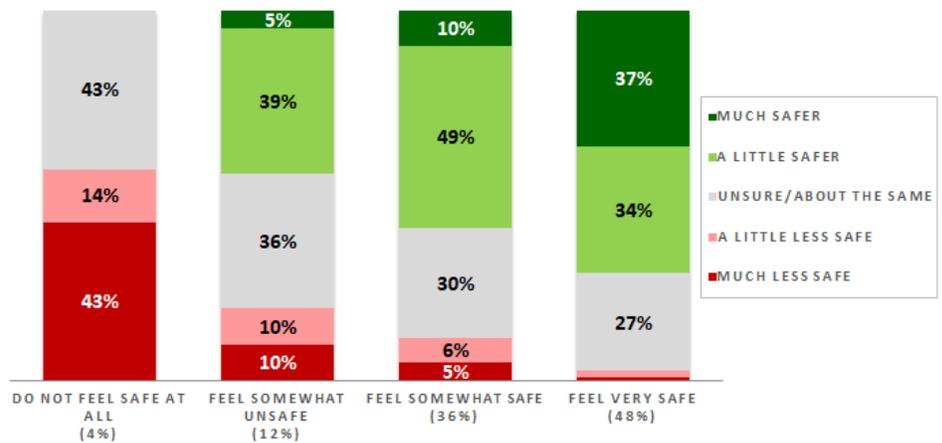
Despite acknowledging that criminal activity has grown, most residents continue to believe San Diego County is safer than other big cities. Another 29% deem it to be as safe as other cities or are unsure (3%), while only one-in-ten think it is less safe. This sounds good, but there is room for improvement: more residents believe the county is only *a little* rather than *a lot* safer than other large cities.

SAFETY COMPARED TO OTHER BIG CITIES



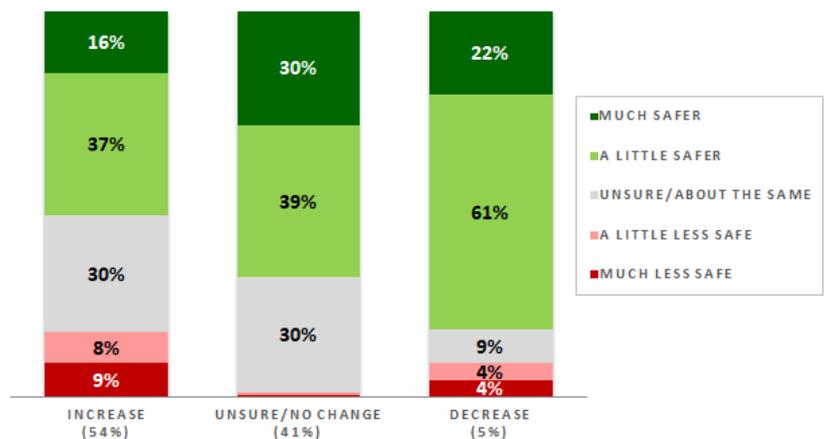
Perceptions of neighborhood safety again drive the comparison to other cities. And once again, residents who feel safe in their neighborhood deem San Diego safer, while those who don't feel safe extrapolate that to the County also being less safe than elsewhere. In general, neighborhood safety dictates broader views of crime.

SAFETY VS OTHER BIG CITIES BY NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY



Perhaps unsurprisingly, opinions on the level of crime also influence views of San Diego's safety. It's much more common for people who feel crime has increased to say San Diego is less safe than other big cities. Yet, a slim majority of them – along with most people who think crime is stable or has declined – say *San Diego is safer*. This sentiment is lukewarm, however, with more saying it is *somewhat* rather than *much* safer so there is ample room to bolster safety efforts. The fact that most of those who feel crime has intensified say San Diego is safer than other metropolises is impressive for the county and speaks well for law enforcement efforts compared to other cities, but some of this may be due to hometown pride.

SAFETY VS OTHER BIG CITIES BY CRIME TREND



Age and partisanship are also influencers, and young Democrats tend to hold much more upbeat views of safety. A large 83% of them believe San Diego County to be safer than other cities, while just 55% of others feel the same.

Income is another important aspect. Residents in affluent neighborhoods (averaging more than \$99,000) tend to think San Diego is safer than elsewhere, while those in less affluent areas more often feel it's only a little safer or about as safe as other large cities.

Finally, like the overall trend in crime, dwelling type is also a piece of the puzzle. Although most homeowners think the county is safer than its competition, they are less bullish on San Diego than those who rent.

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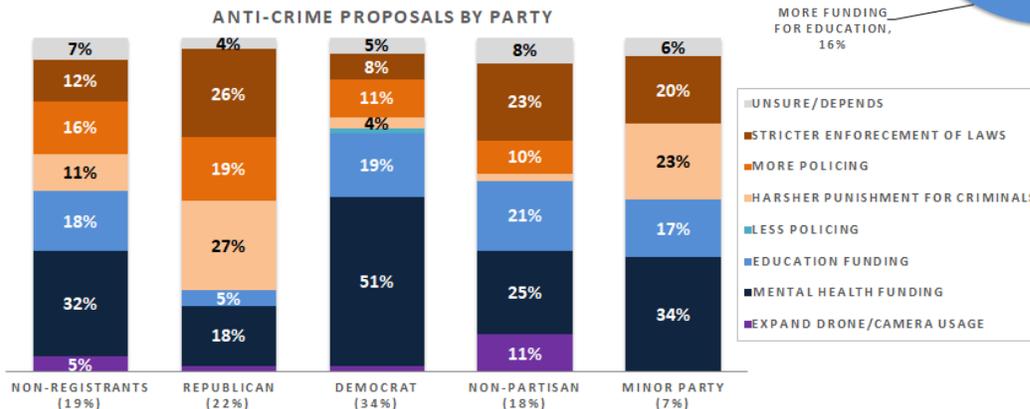
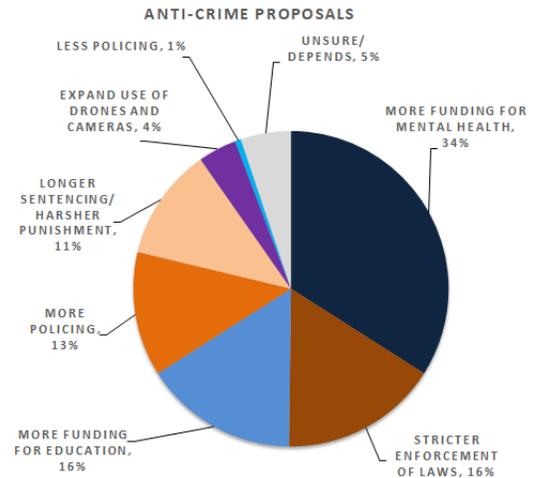
- ✓ The Black community more often thinks San Diego is *much* safer than other big cities and rarely believe it is much less safe
- ✓ Opinions among Asians and Latinos are similar to those of the wider populace

		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
Safety in county compared to other big cities	Much less safe	5%	5%	2%	6%	5%
	Somewhat less safe	25%	29%	24%	30%	27%
	Unsure/about the same	9%	5%	2%	7%	8%
	Somewhat safer	42%	37%	34%	32%	39%
	Much safer	20%	24%	38%	25%	22%

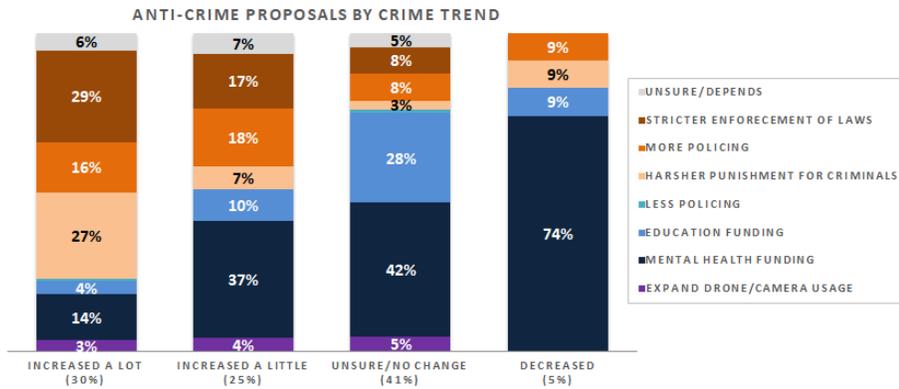
What to do About Crime?

We asked about seven possible ways to deal with crime and additional funding for mental health programs is at the top of the list. A little more than one-third prefer this approach.

Democrats are big proponents of putting more money into mental health programs. Minor party voters and non-registrants also make these programs their top priority, but far from the level that Democrats do.



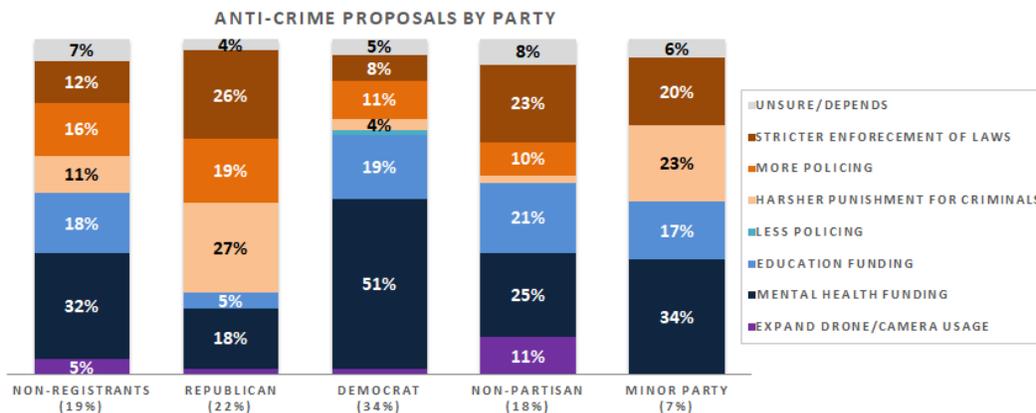
Residents who believe the county's crime rate is *decreasing* are fully engaged on providing more funds to mental health programs. There aren't many in that category, however. Funding mental health is also the top choice of those who haven't seen a change in the amount of crime and even among residents who have seen it increase a little. On the other hand, only 14% who feel crime has increased a lot see mental health programs as the path to safety; they prioritize harsher punishment and stricter enforcement. Mental health funding is also very attractive for younger residents, as half say that's the way to go.



Support for mental health programs also varies by area. North County West residents and those in the central core focus a lot on more funding for mental health programs, while south suburban residents shy away from those.

Sixteen percent, overall, are fans of stricter enforcement of the laws. Residents who see crime increasing are big proponents of stricter enforcement. South suburban residents tend to back stricter enforcement over the other efforts. Support for stricter enforcement increases as neighborhood safety decreases. Only 8% who live in neighborhoods where residents feel very safe want to go with stricter enforcement. That climbs to 18% if the resident feels only somewhat safe, but really skyrockets in unsafe neighborhoods.

Republicans want both longer sentences and stricter enforcement. Longer sentencing gets very little support from residents younger than 45, but, for the elderly, it's the most important thing, along with stricter enforcement, that can be done to curtail crime.



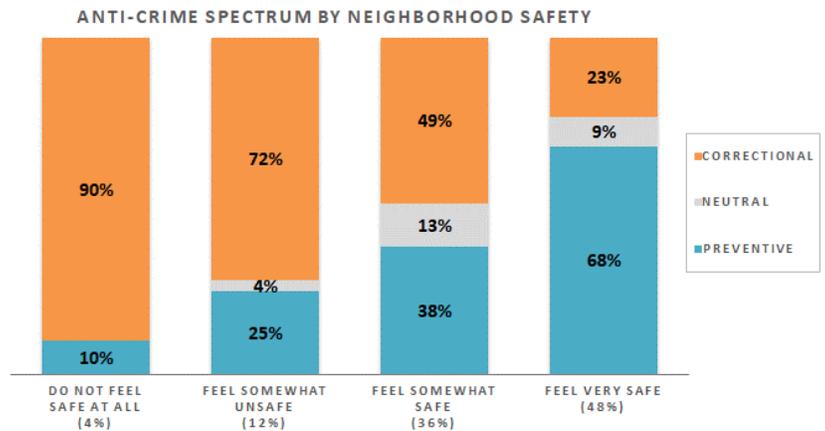
Education funding is seen as the answer by one-in-six residents. Residents younger than 45 are much fonder of this approach, but more education gets almost no support from those 55 and older. Education funding to combat crime is also more popular among residents who took the survey in Spanish. However, more policing has even more fans among Spanish speakers. Geographically, Escondidoans champion more funding for education than any other solution we asked about.

Countywide, 13% prefer more policing to solve crime. Crime victims themselves elevate more policing as a solution, although slightly more would prefer funding for mental health.

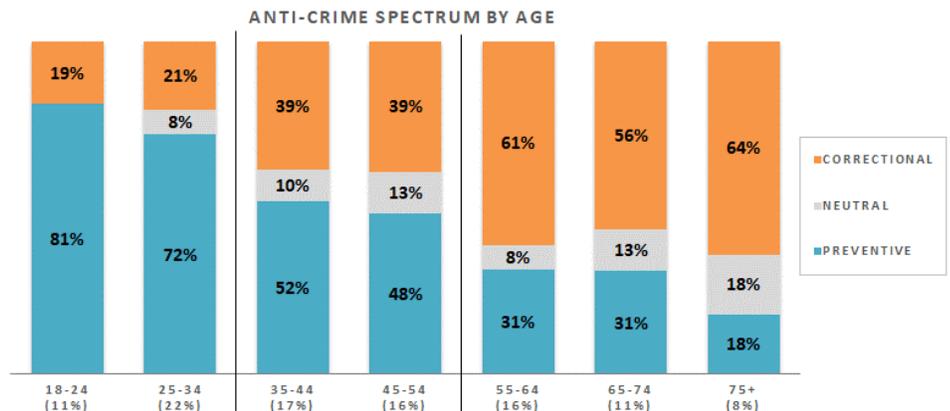
The largest support for expanding the use of drones and cameras comes in Chula Vista, a city which has adopted this approach in an effort to deal with crime. Sixteen percent of Chula Vistans see this as a solution.

More broadly, attacking crime can come in the form of correctional measures -- more policing, stricter enforcement, and harsher punishments – or preventative measures – funding for mental health programs, more education and less policing. Across the county, 41% feel correctional measures are the best way to enhance public safety while half the population believes the preventative approach would be more successful.

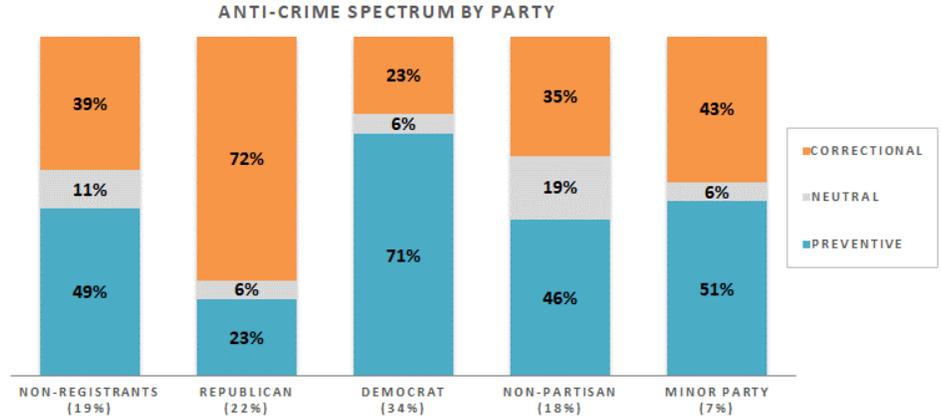
Two-thirds who feel very safe in their neighborhoods back preventative measures, while support for prevention quickly lessens among those who only feel somewhat safe. Support for correctional measures takes over when residents feel unsafe. Because most residents feel very safe, prevention is more often seen as the cure in San Diego. However, if people in those very safe areas began to feel unsafe, support for more correctional methods would grow.



There's a stark generational gap, with those younger than 35 overwhelmingly siding with prevention, but 60% of seniors asking for a firmer hand. About half of residents in their late-30s to early-50s are in the prevention camp, but nearly 40% think a correctional approach is better.



Naturally, politics enters into the picture. Republicans are the only segment that backs the correctional approach, but they do so in a very big way. Seventy-two percent believe that's the way to go. As with so many issues, Democrats are diametrically opposed, embracing preventative measures 71% of the time. Non-partisans, members of minor party and even non-registrants are positioned between the two extremes, not fully embracing prevention, but looking to that more often than correction.



The results also indicate those who see crime as rising want criminals dealt with more sternly, while residents who think crime has remained flat are nearly all-in on prevention. Although White and Asian residents are nearly split between the two camps, Blacks lead the charge on prevention. We also find apartment residents are significantly more supportive of the correctional approach to crime.

A Closer Look at San Diego’s Communities of Color

- ✓ Blacks are huge proponents of more funding for mental health programs, less supportive of more policing and stricter enforcement, and generally want a more preventative approach than correctional measures
- ✓ Opinions among Asians and Latinos are similar to those of the wider populace

		White	Latino	Black	Asian	All
Proposals to reduce crime	Expand drone/camera usage	4%	6%	1%	9%	4%
	Mental health funding	34%	30%	49%	27%	34%
	Education funding	13%	19%	27%	15%	16%
	Less policing	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%
	Harsher punishment for criminals	13%	12%	7%	10%	12%
	More policing	15%	16%	4%	12%	13%
	Stricter enforcement of laws	15%	13%	2%	21%	16%
	Unsure/depends	5%	5%	7%	6%	5%

Findings are based on the results from our scientific poll of 505 San Diego County adult residents. The poll was conducted in English and Spanish by Competitive Edge Research & Communication (CERC), a national research firm based in San Diego, from September 2 through 10, 2022. The maximum margin of sampling error for the total sample is +/- 4.4%. The margin of sampling error for subgroups is larger. Interviews were conducted by trained professionals at CERC’s El Paso, TX, facility, and via the web for residents with an e-mail address or cell phone number in the sample.