

June 2025

# **Making Oakland Safe and its Economy Strong:**

## **A Vision for Lasting Change**



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## About the Bay Area Council Economic Institute

The Bay Area Council Economic Institute is housed at and supported by the Bay Area Council. Since 1990, the Institute has been the leading think tank focused on the economy of the San Francisco/Silicon Valley Bay Area. A forum for stakeholder engagement and a respected source of information and fact-based analysis, the Institute is a partner and adviser to both business leaders and government officials, universities, and overseas partners.

## About this Report

This report was developed by the Bay Area Council Economic Institute in partnership with the Bay Area Council’s Public Safety Committee. While the Committee does take a regional view of crime and public safety, it has identified challenges in Oakland as particularly acute and worthy of a city-level focus – which is the genesis for this report.

The report was authored by Jeff Bellisario, Executive Director of the Bay Area Council Economic Institute, and Laura Hill, Senior Policy Director at the Bay Area Council. The report was sponsored by a coalition of Oakland-based employers, including the Port of Oakland, Kaiser Permanente, Pacific Gas & Electric, Clorox, Delta Dental, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Ellis Partners, Holland Partner Group, TMG Partners, and Union Pacific.

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## Executive Summary

The City of Oakland stands at a crossroads. A stubbornly high crime rate threatens Oakland's economic competitiveness while the city must address a nine-figure structural budget deficit. The city's changing urban fabric in the wake of the pandemic has brought greater attention to Oakland's public safety challenges, which in turn has constrained the city's ability to generate economic activity and its associated tax revenue – making the issues of public safety and budget more intertwined than ever.

For decades, Oakland has attempted to patch together policing solutions without truly adjusting its budget strategies. Most notably, the Oakland Police Department (OPD) is operating with sworn officer staffing that is very similar to levels of the mid-1990s, when the population of Oakland was 50,000 people less than it is today. Status quo policies have resulted in status quo results, as a lack of prioritization of police resources has left Oakland unable to materially shift the public's perception of crime and unable to create lasting reductions in the occurrence of reported crimes.

The dual crises in public safety and budget are playing out in real-time in Oakland. The city has faced a string of shootings in early May 2025, particularly in the downtown area. At the same time, the proposed city budget for the next two fiscal years was released. The budget was billed as prioritizing public safety, however its funding of OPD will only maintain officer ranks at their current levels.

While high crime rates and a budget deficit are not new challenges for Oakland, this report argues that with a new approach – one that places investments in public safety front and center – Oakland can finally move toward a future as a safe city with fiscal stability. This report is the culmination of crime data analysis in Oakland and peer cities, a voter survey of Oakland and East Bay residents, 45 interviews with law enforcement experts and local stakeholders, and research on policing best practices. It presents a case for the need for a new policy and budget approach to policing in Oakland so that residents and businesses regain faith in the city's ability to solve pressing public problems and the city's economy can grow vibrantly.

### Oakland's Crime Context

Despite improvements to crime rates in 2024, which can be partly attributed to strategies that are not feasible to maintain in the long term – like outside support from the California Highway Patrol and considerable private sector investments – crime rates in Oakland remain very high, both historically and when compared to other mid-sized U.S. cities:

- Violent crime rates in 2024 in Oakland were higher than they were in 2003 when OPD first became subject to court supervision.
- Between 2020 and 2023, property crime in Oakland increased by an average of 20% annually.

- Oakland's 2024 property crime rate of 6,519 reported crimes per 100,000 residents is 1.75x the average of 12 other cities analyzed within this report. Oakland also has a much higher property crime rate than both San Francisco (3,864 reported incidents per 100,000 residents) and San Jose (2,633) – showing that property crime in Oakland is not entirely part of a broader regional issue.
- When asked whether they were feeling safer in Oakland when compared to a few years ago, only 11% of Oakland voters and 6% of voters in surrounding cities said they felt safer in a February 2025 survey administered as part of this study – evidence that more work must be done to invest strategically in crime reduction and community safety.

## How Crime Threatens Oakland's Economy

Oakland's major revenue sources are highly tied to the presence of employers – large and small – in the city, with 70% of all general purpose fund revenues derived from property taxes, business taxes, real estate transfer taxes, and sales taxes. In interviews conducted for this report with employers, safety was highlighted as a key negative of the city's business climate. Safety concerns have raised the cost of doing business in the city as private employers increase spending on security; some employers have left altogether as employees refuse to work in what they believe are dangerous conditions; and national press around crime is dissuading employers, visitors, and investors from coming to Oakland.

The following data points highlight how limited budget growth and a downward spiral of investment should be expected to continue if bold action on crime is not taken:

- The number of paying business tax accounts in the City of Oakland has fallen by 14%, from 52,192 in fiscal year 2021-2022 to 45,021 in fiscal year 2023-2024.
- Sales tax receipts in Oakland projected for fiscal year 2024-2025 are roughly on par with levels from fiscal year 2018-2019; yet over that period the nation experienced cumulative inflation of approximately 22%, meaning Oakland's sales tax receipts should be \$15-\$16 million higher if they were following the rate of inflation. Fremont and San Jose have both produced sales tax receipt growth in inflation-adjusted terms over that same period.
- Property tax receipts are heavily reliant on high-tax properties in the downtown area, which has experienced sharp declines in foot traffic when compared to the pre-pandemic period. In the 2025 secured property tax roll, 21.3% of all Oakland's taxable property value is in the 94612 (downtown) and 94607 (Jack London Square, Chinatown, and West Oakland) zip codes.
- Since 2021, asking rents for office space in downtown Oakland have fallen from near \$5 per square foot to well below \$4 per square foot. Effective rents are significantly lower, and many major Oakland office buildings face a vacancy rate above 50%. Several office buildings have been "mothballed" by owners who cannot afford to pay for leasing commissions and tenant improvements from severely reduced rental income streams.

- Oakland office real estate sales averaged \$162 per square foot in 2024 (five transactions), compared with \$563 per square foot in 2019 (11 transactions), according to CBRE. As reduced tenant demand and an inability raise capital for Oakland investments puts continued downward pressure on real estate values, the city's property tax revenue will struggle to maintain its positive trajectory.

Voters shared similar sentiments about moving their economic activity out of Oakland in the February 2025 survey:

- 64% of survey respondents who are employed in downtown say that crime is a deterring factor in their decision to go to work in person.
- 57% of Oakland voters say they leave Oakland and go to businesses, restaurants, and shops in nearby cities because they feel safer.
- 72% of total East Bay respondents say that public safety concerns have played a role in reduced visitation to Oakland businesses in the past few years.
- 61% of East Bay respondents say they are visiting downtown Oakland less to patronize businesses, restaurants, and shops. More than half of those respondents say that crime and public safety is the major driver of their reduced visitation and spending.

## Oakland's Public Safety Challenges

This report identifies three major barriers to achieving a safer Oakland:

- (1) An OPD personnel budget that is too low to address the level of crime in Oakland.**
- (2) More than 20 years of federal court oversight of OPD that has created additional resource and effectiveness constraints within OPD.**
- (3) Multiple layers of oversight of OPD within non-elected bodies that create a patchwork accountability system that is spread across too many actors to be effective at implementing policing best practices.**

Oakland employs 678 sworn officers as of April 2025, but its current operational strength is 540 when taking into account administrative and medical leave and vacation time. Compared to 25 other cities of similar size, Oakland faces disproportionate levels of law enforcement understaffing. At 1.55 sworn officers per 1,000 people, Oakland ranks 21<sup>st</sup> of the 26 cities analyzed. Cities that produced notable reductions in property crime levels over the last 20 years (e.g., Atlanta, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati) each employ more than 2.5 sworn officers per 1,000 people. At 66 serious crimes per officer in 2023, OPD faces more than double the per officer caseload of the average large city in California.

While Oakland's budget has been a major constraint on police staffing, Oakland's public safety landscape has also been shaped by a complex and troubled history, including the events that led

to court supervision under the Negotiated Settlement Agreement (NSA) in 2003, which remains in place today. While this report acknowledges the important reforms that have been made under the NSA, after 20 years it is fair to question whether the costs of continued court oversight – in terms of actual costs to the city and administrative burdens on OPD – are now outweighing the benefits. For example, Oakland’s citizen complaint process yields three times more internal affairs complaints per officer than any other law enforcement agency in California, creating a resource drain for an already understaffed OPD.

Lastly, police accountability in Oakland is accomplished through a fragmented system created by voters. The Police Commission, Community Police Review Agency, and Office of the Inspector General all weigh in on some aspect of policing policy, officer discipline, and compliance with the NSA. After analyzing police oversight structures in other cities, only one other city (Seattle) was found to use a three-pronged approach to civilian police accountability and oversight. Oakland’s oversight structure is not only inefficient, but also prone to creating a bias toward the status quo – a dynamic that is playing out in discussions around OPD’s vehicle pursuit policy. Oakland’s Privacy Advisory Commission, another citizen-led body, has also played a key role in slowing OPD’s adoption of networked cameras and automated license plate readers, which are widely used by law enforcement agencies across the country to make real-time resource deployment decisions.

## Recommendations

This report details a list of 10 recommendations below, which are organized into four categories:

### FUNDING

1. Expand, not just protect, funding for public safety including additional sworn officers
2. Secure future dedicated funding sources for OPD

### GOVERNANCE

3. Create a citywide goal to end federal court oversight of OPD
4. Transition to a police review agency that includes both community members and police representation
5. Clarify processes to update OPD policies and move decision-making power into a single elected body that can act in the public interest more quickly
6. Reform City Charter and police accountability structures, analyzing aspects of police governance that should remain and those that should end after court oversight concludes

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## OPERATIONAL

7. **Focus on strategic law enforcement investments with proven results:**
  - Technology as a force multiplier
  - More investments in a real-time operations center and technology personnel
  - Expansion of Ceasefire and creation of a similar approach to property crime
  - Partnerships with other law enforcement agencies
8. **Optimize police patrol deployment with a revised beat map**

## PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNITY

9. **Grow the Oakland Police Foundation**
10. **Build stronger relationships with the private and philanthropic sectors to make long-term investments in economic opportunity and crime prevention programs**

While this report underscores that it *is* possible for Oakland to dig itself out of its budget and crime crisis, as many other cities have done before, Oakland cannot change its economic downcycle or public safety perceptions and outcomes without prioritization of public safety across city leadership, community stakeholders, and industry partners. The city and its elected and appointed leadership will need to make difficult and bold choices today to preserve and protect Oakland tomorrow. Oakland's future – its economic vitality, financial sustainability, and public confidence – will be defined by whether leaders protect the status quo, which will prolong Oakland's cycles of budget stress and safety challenges, or embrace a new approach that places public safety at the center of all budget and policy decisions.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

The City of Oakland swore in a new mayor on May 20, 2025, though Mayor Barbara Lee will be facing two of the same issues that city leadership has grappled with for decades: a stubbornly high crime rate and an unsustainable budget picture.

In fact, the city finds itself in a very similar position to where it stood 15 years ago in relation to its crime and budget challenges. In 2010, Oakland's \$400 million budget faced a roughly \$30 million deficit.<sup>1</sup> With limited options for cuts – closing all libraries, recreation centers, and senior services would not have closed the budget gap – the city council laid off 80 sworn police officers, reducing the total officer count to 696, and eliminated police academies. The number of sworn officers in the city then fell to its lowest point since the mid-1990s.<sup>2</sup> By 2012, the rates of crime in Oakland spiked to the highest levels of any city in California. Oakland's crime issues became a flashpoint topic, with headlines such as "How Oakland public safety system unraveled"<sup>3</sup> appearing on the opinion pages of the region's newspapers.

While several factors play into the prevalence of crime in any city, research suggests that police staffing levels and crime have an inverse relationship in medium and large cities – i.e., an increase in police staffing at a city level can help to decrease crime rates via deterrence.<sup>4</sup> In Oakland, crime and the budget have an even greater link, as nearly 45% of general fund expenditures go toward police and violence prevention efforts. As such, when Oakland faces fiscal issues, a reduction in public safety spending is one of the few mechanisms available to balance the budget.

In the past, city leaders and policy advocates have first looked for ways out of the budget dilemma by advancing proposals for closing Oakland's deficit – ensuring that the city is taking in more receipts than its planned expenditures – which would then create more funding certainty for public safety. However, those avenues have either not been fully pursued or they require very difficult conversations and political trade-offs as they relate to the city's current and future pension liabilities, labor contracts, and vendor agreements.

Given the longstanding dual issues of crime and budget deficits in Oakland, this report takes the opposite approach: arguing that focusing on improving public safety can offer a more

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<sup>1</sup> Knight, Heather. "Police vs. City Council on Oakland Budget Cuts." *SFGATE*, 18 June 2002, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Police-vs-City-Council-on-Oakland-budget-cuts-3260938.php>.

<sup>2</sup> Cage, Rodney. *Crime Trends in the City of Oakland: A 25-Year Look*. Warren Institute on Law & Social Policy, University of California, Berkeley School of Law, Sept. 2010, [https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Crime\\_Trends\\_in\\_the\\_City\\_of\\_Oakland\\_-\\_A\\_25-Year\\_Look.pdf](https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Crime_Trends_in_the_City_of_Oakland_-_A_25-Year_Look.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Tucker, Jill. "How Oakland's Public Safety System Unraveled." *SFGATE*, 10 Mar. 2013, <https://www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/how-oakland-public-safety-system-unraveled-4340363.php#ixzz2NGAfCt17>.

<sup>4</sup> Chalfin, Aaron, and Justin McCrary. "Are U.S. Cities Underpoliced? Theory and Evidence." *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 100, no. 1, 2018, pp. 167–186. MIT Press, <https://direct.mit.edu/rest/article-abstract/100/1/167/58429/Are-U-S-Cities-Underpoliced-Theory-and-Evidence>.



straightforward path to long-term fiscal solvency as it can lead to enhanced economic activity and higher levels of tax receipts.

While progress has been made on crime in the last year, safety in Oakland remains a major concern for residents of the city itself, those that live nearby, those that work for downtown employers, and those employers themselves. While Oakland sits in a precarious budget situation that severely limits its ability to make costly investments, this challenge should create an opportunity for decision makers to be more willing than ever to break the mold of business as usual, make compromises, and work together in creative ways.

The relatively new leadership in Oakland and Alameda County – Oakland Mayor Barbara Lee is weeks into her position, Alameda County District Attorney Ursula Jones Dickson was sworn in just months ago, and Oakland Chief of Police Floyd Mitchell is one year into his role – also provides an opportune time for the city and its partners to take a deep look at the challenge of crime with new leaders in place that are focused on solutions. Voters have also weighed in, with the recent passages of Measure NN (2024) and Measure A (2025) in Oakland showing that voters have prioritized spending on public safety investments, while the statewide passage of Proposition 36 (2024) signaled a change in the electorate’s view of the criminal justice system. Taken together, there is significant energy in Oakland to move the needle on the city’s crime issues, but big ideas are needed, and bold action is required.

This study seeks to provide data and recommendations that can help to coalesce a direction for Oakland to improve public safety and restore economic and budget stability. The following chapters rely on data points that clearly tie the city’s fiscal crisis to its crime crisis through surveying and city-provided data. Additionally, 45 interviews with law enforcement agencies, city and county staff, businesses, public safety experts, and community groups were completed to better understand the unique public safety challenges that Oakland faces. Comparisons to other cities are used to highlight best practices that could be applicable to Oakland. The study concludes with recommendations for ways the City of Oakland – its elected leaders, governing bodies, and private sector entities – can make improvements that would make the city a safer place to live, work, and visit.

### Oakland & East Bay Public Opinion Survey

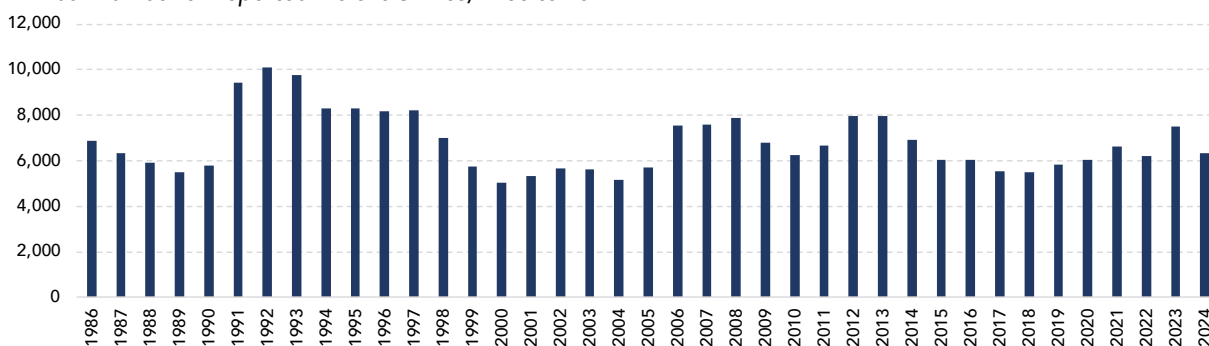
The study incorporates multiple data points from a voter survey that was conducted as part of this research. The voter survey was administered by FM3 Research – an East Bay-based public opinion research firm. The online survey was conducted from February 11 through February 16, 2025, and surveyed 1,229 total East Bay voters, including 818 Oakland voters and 411 residents from the 10 nearby cities, including Berkeley, Hayward, Piedmont, and Walnut Creek. Summary survey results are included in the Appendix. The survey questions were formulated to better understand perceptions of crime in Oakland and how they could be impacting spending and visitation patterns – which have impacts on economic activity and corresponding tax receipts.

## Chapter 2. Public Safety Trends in Oakland

For decades, the City of Oakland has struggled with the issue of crime and safety. The chart below shows that little overall progress has been made in lowering the city's number of reported violent crimes over the last 40 years; violent crimes include homicide, aggravated assault, rape, and robbery by force or threat of force. There are peaks and valleys in the graph, but 2024's number of reported violent crimes (approximately 6,300) is very similar to reported numbers in 2010, and even all the way back to 1987.

### Oakland Police Department - Citywide Reported Violent Crime

Annual Number of Reported Violent Crimes, 1986 to 2024



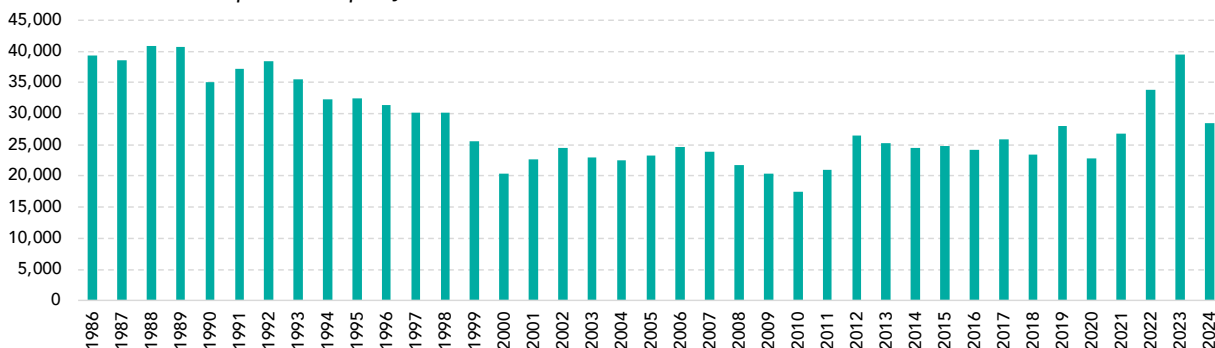
**Source:** Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program; OPD Annual Crime Reports; and Real-Time Crime Index

**Analysis:** Bay Area Council Economic Institute

When looking at property crimes, including burglary, motor vehicle theft, larceny, and arson, Oakland had been making considerable progress in driving down the number of reported property crimes for much of the period from 1986 to 2010. After a spike in 2011 and 2012, reports of property crime remained relatively flat until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, Oakland registered significant increases in reported property crime, culminating in 2023 when nearly 40,000 property crimes were reported. Between 2020 and 2023, property crime increased by an average of 20% annually.

### Oakland Police Department - Citywide Reported Property Crime

Annual Number of Reported Property Crimes, 1986 to 2024



**Source:** Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program; OPD Annual Crime Reports; and Real-Time Crime Index

**Analysis:** Bay Area Council Economic Institute

The increase in reported property crime between 2020 and 2023 is largely the impetus for this report and much of the narrative around safety in Oakland today. However, it must be noted that 2024 yielded much positive progress on crime in Oakland. The Bay Area Council Economic Institute's analysis of Oakland Police Department (OPD) weekly crime statistics shows a 28% decrease in reported property crime and a 16% decrease in reported violent crime between 2023 and 2024. Recently released data from OPD shows this trend continuing into 2025, with a decrease of total reported crimes of 37% in the first quarter of 2025 compared to the same period of 2024.<sup>5</sup>

Understanding the drivers behind this steep decrease in crime during 2024 is constructive in framing recommendations for how the City of Oakland can continue to make progress on public safety. After 2023's significant jump in both property crime and violent crime – as well as a series of incidents that were heavily covered in media – several new interventions were introduced in Oakland that lowered the occurrence of crime:

### (1) Support from Outside Law Enforcement Agencies

In February 2024, Governor Newsom tasked the California Highway Patrol (CHP) to work with local law enforcement in Oakland to saturate high-crime areas with patrolled presence, aiming to reduce roadway violence and criminal activity. In July, Governor Newsom announced the state was ramping up efforts by quadrupling the number of CHP officer shifts to target organized crime, sidschows, carjacking, and other criminal activity in Oakland. CHP's proactive enforcement operation has added special units on the ground and in the air in Oakland that are tracking stolen vehicles and using camera networks to track vehicles suspected of being involved in crime. In April 2025, the Governor's Office announced CHP's increased Oakland operations had resulted in recovering 3,217 stolen vehicles, arresting 1,823 individuals, and confiscating 170 illicit firearms since its launch in February 2024. Widely deemed a success in interviews conducted for this research, the CHP operation in Oakland benefits from the fact that the agency is not subject to the same policing policies as OPD. At the top of this list is the city's pursuit policy, which limits the instances in which police can engage in a vehicular pursuit of suspected offenders and requires supervisor approval to engage in a pursuit over 50 miles per hour.

### (2) Focus on Downtown and Support from the Private Sector

In 2023, the Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce brought together a coalition of downtown stakeholders – employers, institutions, arts groups, merchants, property owners, and business leaders – forming the Downtown Oakland Partnership to address public safety concerns. The partnership successfully raised funds and advocated for a \$1 million budget allocation to

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<sup>5</sup> City of Oakland. "OPD Shares First Quarter 2025 Crime Statistics." *Oaklandca.gov*, 30 Apr. 2025, <https://www.oaklandca.gov/news/opd-shares-first-quarter-2025-crime-statistics#:~:text=However%2C%20our%20Homicide%20Section%20has,like%20crime%20rates%20are%20lowering.>

support critical safety initiatives. Of that amount, \$500,000 was designated specifically for Downtown Oakland, with the remainder supporting efforts in East Oakland and Fruitvale.

This funding led to the creation of the Downtown Corridor Safety Project – a grant-funded collaboration among the downtown business improvement districts (BIDs) and business organizations. The project aims to expand and coordinate existing BID-developed and community-owned security camera networks across downtown, making them accessible to OPD. The goal is to strengthen OPD’s real-time crime response and investigative capabilities through a public-private partnership. Participating organizations include: Koreatown/Northgate Improvement District, Uptown Downtown Oakland Community Benefit Districts, Oakland Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, Oakland Chinatown Improvement Council, and Jack London Improvement District.

Additionally, in March 2024, four of Oakland’s largest employees – Blue Shield of California, Clorox, Kaiser Permanente, and Pacific Gas & Electric announced a collaborative \$10 million investment in public safety in Oakland. The investment included:

- The creation of an Uptown/Downtown Safe Zone in partnership with OPD that will improve visible security in downtown areas. Specifically, the funding supports overtime pay for eight off-duty officers and one sergeant on weekdays from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Expanded safety services through the Oakland Uptown Downtown Community Benefit District, including growth of the ambassador program from 25 to 55 full-time equivalent positions, offering on-demand safety escorts to and from local destinations and expansion of the downtown camera surveillance system for better coordination with OPD.

With a renewed focus on safety in the downtown commercial district, Oakland’s Area 1, which includes the downtown area and West Oakland, produced a significant year-over-year reduction in property crime (40% reduction based on weekly crime data reported by OPD) and a 23% decrease in violent crime from 2023 to 2024.

### (3) More Strategic Allocation of Resources

Many cities across the U.S. have a program that aims to reduce gun violence by targeting individuals involved in gangs and providing them with life coaching, case management, and a focused strategy to deter future gun violence. Research has shown that gun crimes generally involve repeat offenders within a relatively small subset of the population and that a targeted approach toward deterrence can have significant impacts on rates of violent crime. In Oakland, this strategy – called Ceasefire – was implemented in 2012. The model was a proven success in

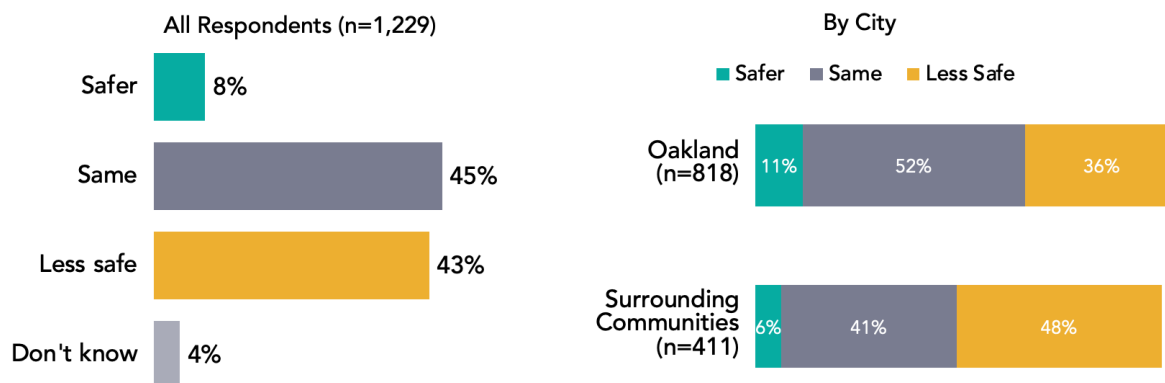
reducing gun crimes, with a study from Northeastern University concluding that Ceasefire was associated with a 31% reduction in homicides in Oakland when controlling for other factors.<sup>6</sup>

After an audit<sup>7</sup> found that the program's resources had waned during the pandemic, OPD made multiple changes in partnership with the Department of Violence Prevention (DVP) – including reinstituting shooting review meetings and establishing more formal collaboration between OPD, DVP, the county's probation department, and local service providers – to more fully commit to the Ceasefire program. In 2024, Oakland's homicide rate fell by 35%, which is more than double the 16% decrease in homicides found via available data across 29 large U.S. cities.<sup>8</sup> Members of OPD and DVP interviewed for this report credited a re-dedication to Ceasefire as a major driver for homicide numbers moving back to their pre-pandemic range.

Though these successes are notable and highlight the desire of stakeholders from across the city to improve public safety, it is also clear from the surveying effort undertaken by FM3 Research that the current level of crime in Oakland – even after the improvements noted – is unsustainable for the city's residents and its economy going forward. When asked whether they were feeling safer in Oakland when compared to a few years ago, only 11% of Oakland voters and 6% of voters in surrounding cities said they felt safer as shown below – evidence that more work must be done to invest strategically in crime reduction and community safety.

### Very few survey respondents feel safer today than they did a year or two ago.

Q: Would you say you feel safer today in Oakland than you did a year or two ago, or would you say you feel less safe?



Analysis: FM3 Research

Note: Survey conducted February 11-16, 2025

<sup>6</sup> Cowan, Jillian, and Anthony A. Braga. *Oakland Ceasefire Strategy: Final Evaluation Report*. City of Oakland, May 2019, <https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Oakland-Ceasefire-Evaluation-Final-Report-May-2019.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> City of Oakland. "In-Depth Audit Paves the Way for the City of Oakland to Resurrect Successful Violence Reduction Strategy and Reduce Crime." *Oaklandca.gov*, 2 Apr. 2024, <https://www.oaklandca.gov/news/in-depth-audit-paves-the-way-for-the-city-of-oakland-to-resurrect-successful-violence-reduction-strategy-and-reduce-crime>.

<sup>8</sup> Council on Criminal Justice. *Crime Trends in U.S. Cities: Year-End 2024 Update*. 2025, <https://counciloncj.org/crime-trends-in-u-s-cities-year-end-2024-update/#:~:text=From%202018%20to%202019%20the,downward%20trend%20continued%20in%202024>.

## Chapter 3. Comparative Crime Statistics in Mid-Sized Cities

To provide additional context on Oakland's crime statistics, this report analyzes crime and public safety data from across a group of 25 other mid-sized U.S. cities with a population between 300,000 and 650,000 residents as of 2023. For context, Oakland's population in 2023 was estimated at 436,500 by the U.S. Census Bureau.

This section relies on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, which collects comparable data from law enforcement agencies across the country. The analyses that follow exclude cities where a full 20-year crime trends dataset was not available or where 2024 numbers were not yet reported in agency data, reducing the comparable jurisdictions to just 13. These 20-year datasets provide the best numbers available, though comparability across jurisdictions is a challenge for several reasons:

- The UCR data does not include 2024 data, so trend lines were supplemented with reporting directly from the cities themselves – meaning the 2024 data may not be fully comparable to previous years depending on internal tracking mechanisms within law enforcement agencies.
- The data only includes reported incidents of crime – meaning numbers are likely understated, particularly for property crime. To make this comparable data useful, it must be assumed that rates of unreported crime across jurisdictions are relatively similar.
- The Oakland Police Department uses a crime reporting methodology that is outdated compared to many other law enforcement agencies in the U.S. In 2021, the FBI declared the National Incident-Based Reporting Standard (NIBRS) as the national standard for crime reporting. As of May 2024, 125 of the 154 police agencies serving cities and counties with a population of 250,000 or more are reporting to NIBRS.<sup>9</sup> Oakland still uses an older reporting standard that limits OPD's ability to mark a single incident under multiple crime categories – thereby understating its total crime numbers. Oakland's Office of the Inspector General has urged OPD to make the transition, though budget, staffing, and technology challenges have slowed the adoption of NIBRS.<sup>10</sup>

The chart below details reported violent crime per 100,000 residents for 20 years in Oakland and 13 other comparably sized cities. Of the group, Oakland has the sixth highest rate of violent crime, joining cities such as Baltimore, Memphis, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Kansas City with violent crime rates in 2024 over 1,000 reported crimes per 100,000 residents. While not shown on the chart, violent crime rates in both San Francisco and San Jose were approximately 580 incidents

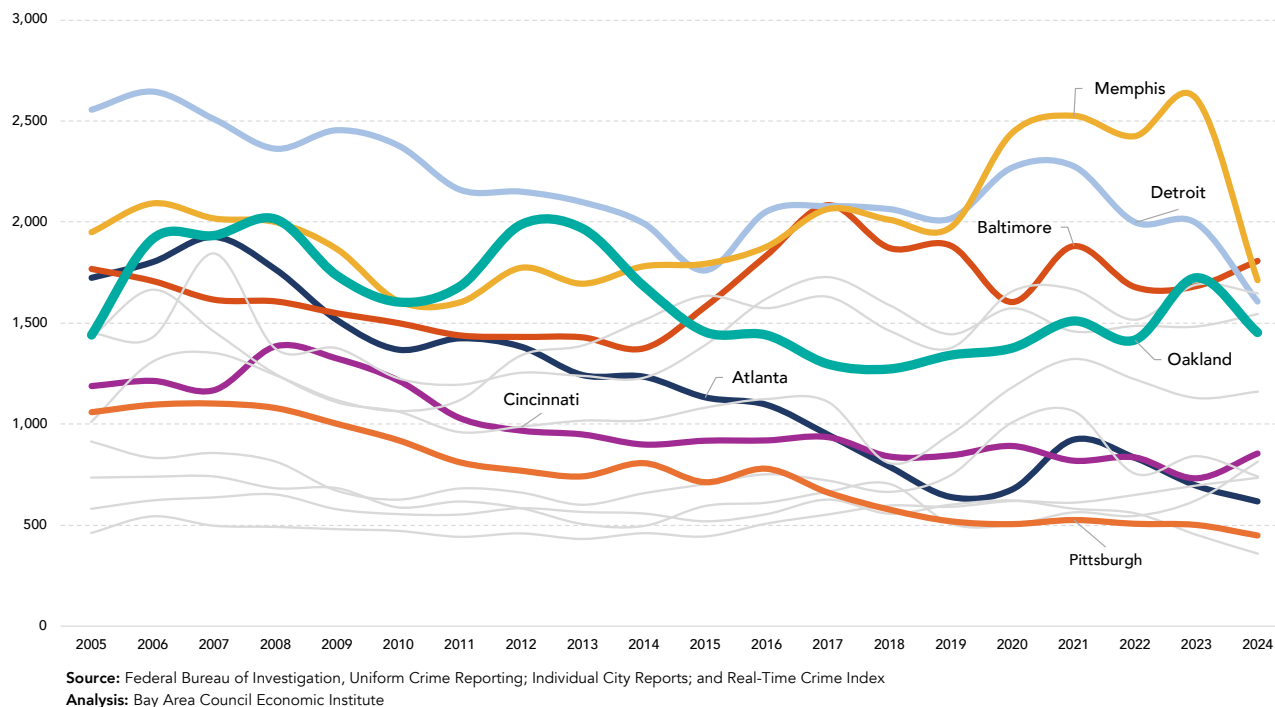
<sup>9</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics. *National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)*. U.S. Department of Justice, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/national-incident-based-reporting-system-nibrs#:~:text=125%20of%20the%20154%20police,more%20than%2076.7%20million%20persons>.

<sup>10</sup> City of Oakland. *NIBRS Memorandum*. <https://cao-94612.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/NIBRS-Memorandum-Final-copy-2.pdf>.

per 100,000 people in 2024 – highlighting that violent crime in Oakland is likely not a product of the region’s overall crime trends.

### Rates of Reported Violent Crime for Mid-Sized Cities

*Violent Crime Per 100,000 Residents for 14 Mid-Sized U.S. Cities, Population 300,000 to 650,000, for 2005 to 2024*

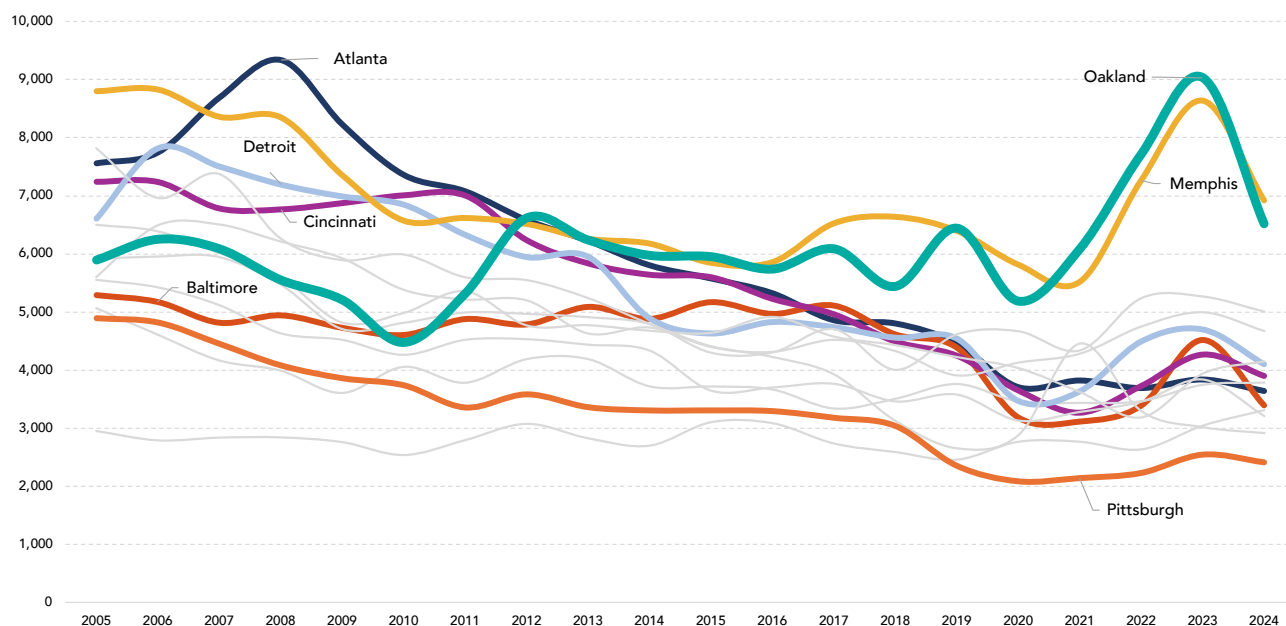


The same chart depicting property crime clearly shows how Oakland’s rate of property crime increased significantly from 2021 to 2023 when compared to peer jurisdictions. While there were post-pandemic property crime spikes in many cities, Oakland and Memphis stand as outliers on this chart. Oakland’s 2024 property crime rate of 6,519 per 100,000 residents is 1.75x the average of the 12 other cities (if Memphis is excluded). Oakland also has a much higher property crime rate than both San Francisco (3,864 reported incidents per 100,000 residents) and San Jose (2,633) – again showing higher rates of crime within Oakland compared to the Bay Area’s other large cities.



## Rates of Reported Property Crime for Mid-Sized Cities

Annual Data for Property Crime Per 100,000 Residents for 14 Mid-Sized U.S. Cities, Population 300,000 to 650,000, for 2005 to 2024



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting; Individual City Reports; and Real-Time Crime Index

Analysis: Bay Area Council Economic Institute

The previous charts highlight six cities in addition to Oakland: Atlanta, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Detroit, Memphis, and Pittsburgh. Atlanta and Detroit were chosen for their notable declines in both reported property crime and violent crime. Like Oakland, Baltimore struggles with high violent crime but has experienced recent success in lowering property crime rates. Also like Oakland, Cincinnati entered into a negotiated agreement with a federal monitor to reform its police force in the early 2000s that has been heralded as a successful example of community-centered policing. Memphis and Pittsburgh are notable for being on the opposite ends of the crime spectrum of all analyzed cities. Throughout this report, case studies of some of these cities and others will show best practices in lowering crime rates and recovering from police department crises.



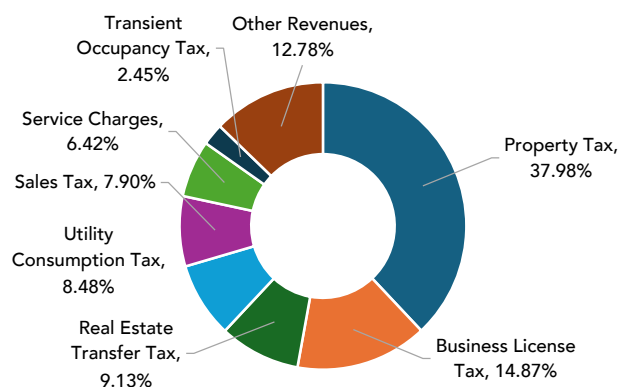
## Chapter 4. How Oakland's Budget Structure Threatens Public Safety Dollars

The City of Oakland operates on a two-year budget cycle, with a mid-cycle reevaluation between the two years. The current cycle (including fiscal years ending in June 2024 and 2025) set a total budget of approximately \$2.1 billion annually. Of that total, approximately \$845 million was originally allocated to the general purpose fund for the 2024-2025 fiscal year – a total that has since been revised down to \$807 million in the mid-cycle revised budget.

Because city leadership has discretion over the use of the general purpose fund (i.e., other city funding sources that are tied to specific taxes, fees, or grants are limited in their use), this section will focus specifically on the sources and uses of funds with the general purpose fund. It should be noted that 95% of the Oakland Police Department's annual budget is tied to the general purpose fund, leaving it little operating support from other sources. The chart on the right below also shows that police and safety spending – inclusive of OPD, Police Commission, Office of the Inspector General, and Department of Violence Prevention – accounts for 45% of all general purpose fund expenditures. Thus, movements in OPD's spending budget are highly correlated with the level of general purpose fund revenues.

**City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Revenues**

*Fiscal Year 2024 - 2025 Midcycle Adopted Budget*

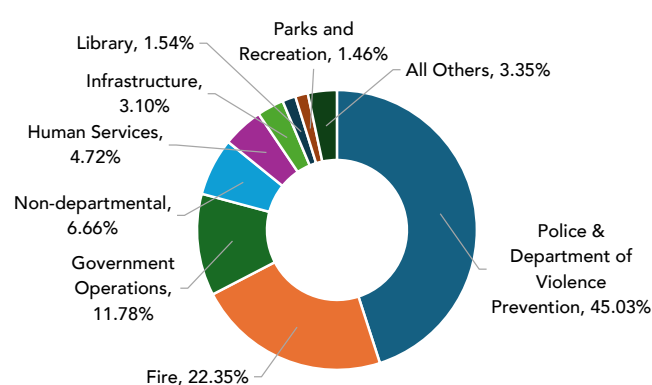


Source: City of Oakland FY24-25 Adopted Policy Budget

Analysis: Bay Area Council Economic Institute

**City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Expenditures**

*Fiscal Year 2024 - 2025 Midcycle Adopted Budget*



Source: City of Oakland FY24-25 Adopted Policy Budget

Analysis: Bay Area Council Economic Institute

On the revenue side of the equation, Oakland's general purpose fund is heavily reliant on property taxes to fund its expenditures, with nearly 38% of all budgeted receipts for fiscal year 2024-2025 stemming from property taxes. Business license taxes make up the only other single funding source to top double digit percentages. Approximately 70% of the city's budgeted general purpose fund is derived from combined property taxes, business license and gross receipts taxes, real estate transfer taxes, and sales taxes. All four can fluctuate with economic

conditions – particularly real estate transfer tax receipts, which are collected when properties change hands.

Like any city, the City of Oakland's budget structure makes it susceptible to economic volatility. When the economy turns down, the city inevitably needs to make cuts or find one-time revenue sources to balance its budget. However, the city has often found itself in a position where its operating uses outweigh its operating sources – thus creating a structural deficit – even when the economy is performing relatively well. The city managed through structural deficits through much of the 2000s and early 2010s, only to again run into budget issues during the pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

As the city nears its 2024-2025 fiscal yearend, it sits squarely in a budget crisis where difficult decisions will need to be made. The latest projections from the city's finance department show an estimated \$55 million revenue shortfall for the fiscal year on overall projected general fund expenditures of \$811 million.

The city has already implemented cuts and fund balancing measures that have brought down the 2024-2025 projected deficit to the current level, though the long-term outlook remains extremely challenged: the finance department projects \$115 to \$130 million in annual structural deficits through 2030. These structural deficits are still projected even after multiple new tax measures were passed by City of Oakland voters in recent years that have brought in additional revenues:

- **Measure T**, passed in November 2022, created a progressive gross receipts tax structure, whereby the largest businesses in Oakland paid higher tax rates and smaller businesses received a small tax break. The measure was projected to produce approximately \$20 million annually.
- **Measure NN**, passed in November 2024 with multi-sector support, maintains and increases a parcel tax and parking surcharge that dedicates funds to efforts to reduce crime, improve emergency response times, and reduce the incidence of human trafficking. The measure also requires the city to budget for, hire, and maintain police staffing at a minimum of 700 sworn officers unless the city can specify certain exceptions. The measure was projected to produce \$47.4 million annually.
- **Measure A**, passed in April 2025, increased the sales tax in Oakland, with the city auditor estimating that \$30 million will be collected from the tax in the first year<sup>12</sup> – meaning Measure A will only lessen, and not solve, the city's fiscal challenges. Measure A receipts will provide general government funding.

Even with these new sources, the actual revenues the city receives have been flat to trending downward when adjusted for inflation – exemplifying the need for difficult cost-cutting to occur.

<sup>11</sup> Neditch, Nicole. "What It Will Take to Close Oakland's Structural Deficit, Part 1: How We Got Here." *SPUR*, 25 Apr. 2025, [www.spur.org/news/2025-01-24/what-it-will-take-close-oaklands-structural-deficit-part-1-how-we-got-here](http://www.spur.org/news/2025-01-24/what-it-will-take-close-oaklands-structural-deficit-part-1-how-we-got-here).

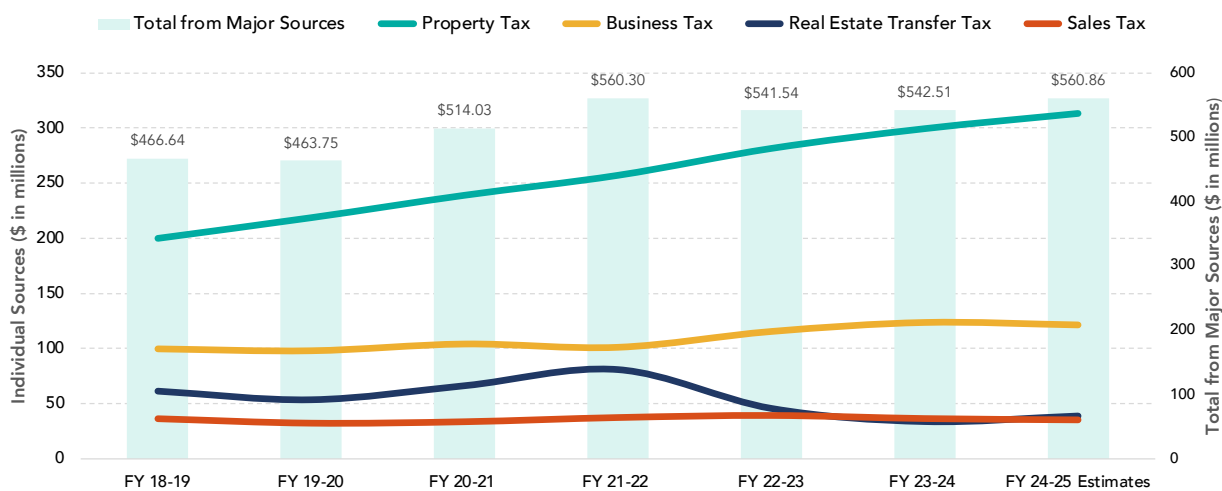
<sup>12</sup> City Auditor of Oakland. *Transmittal Letter Analysis*. City of Oakland, Jan. 2025, [www.oaklandauditor.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/TRANSMITTAL-LETTER-ANALYSIS.pdf](http://www.oaklandauditor.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/TRANSMITTAL-LETTER-ANALYSIS.pdf).

## Chapter 5. How Crime Threatens Oakland's Economy and its Budget

This section focuses on the revenue side of the budget equation to highlight the ways in which public safety (or lack thereof) plays a role in city revenue receipts. This chapter looks specifically at the city's major funding sources that are related to economic activity – i.e., property values, real estate transactions, business activity, and consumer spending. The chart below highlights four of the city's major funding sources in the general purpose fund, which together make up approximately 70% of its annual revenues.

### City of Oakland General Purpose Fund, Trends in Major Revenue Sources

Left axis displays values for each revenue line item; Right axis displays value for the total of the four sources



Source: City of Oakland, General Purpose Fund Major Revenue Sources Overview Report

Analysis: Bay Area Council Economic Institute

All these major revenue sources are highly tied to the presence of employers – large and small – in Oakland. In interviews conducted for this report with employers, safety was mentioned as a key feature of the city's business climate – one that is dissuading business investment, raising the cost of doing business in the city, and forcing some employers to leave altogether. There is a strong group of employers that are committed to seeing a prosperous and safe Oakland – including those that are supporting this report – but they believe safety and economic growth cannot be achieved without additional investments and commitment from the city.

Oakland's challenges with crime are already posing significant costs on employers. For example:

- East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) spends significantly on security for its downtown Oakland headquarters and its field crews that operate with equipment that are often targets for theft. EBMUD projects that its security costs will double in its 2026 fiscal

year compared to 2024 and exceed \$10 million. Many other employers and building owners in Oakland are paying for private security to protect their businesses and property.

- Downtown employers are paying for OPD overtime shifts (which would have otherwise gone unfilled), and the Port of Oakland is doing the same along the Hegenberger Road and 98<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridors to protect employees and customers.
- Businesses ranging from small restaurants to railroads that operate in Oakland are spending on cleanup after acts of vandalism on their property.

Crime is an existential threat for many Oakland employers and the economic activity they provide, and this chapter will show that current crime trends point to limited budget growth and downward spiral of investment if bold action on crime is not taken.

## Property Tax Trends

City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Revenues						
(\$ in millions)	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	FY 24-25 Estimates
Property Tax	218.66	238.93	256.97	281.28	299.15	312.91
Percent of General Purpose Fund	34.6%	34.8%	35.4%	38.6%	40.7%	41.4%

**Source:** City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Major Revenue Sources Overview Report

Oakland's most prominent funding source is derived from real estate values. While overall general purpose fund receipts have remained relatively flat going back to the 2021-2022 fiscal year, property tax receipts have continued to rise, albeit at a relatively modest pace of approximately 5% annually between fiscal year 2022-2023 and the estimated levels for fiscal year 2024-2025. Since 2015, assessed valuations have grown by 7% or more in most years.

Historically, property tax receipts have been a stable source of revenue growth for Oakland, but there are reasons to believe that property tax receipts may stall going forward:

- According to data from the Alameda County Assessor, Oakland has \$89.2 billion of taxable property (in secured and unsecured rolls) as of April 2025. This number is down from \$91.0 billion from the year prior<sup>13</sup> and roughly level with the \$89.9 billion value used by the city for budgeting purposes in fiscal year 2023-2024. Numerous high-tax properties have requested their values be reassessed in the last year, and recent commercial building transactions have occurred at prices well below their assessed values. This finding is contrary to the city's assumption of 3% annual property tax receipt growth in the 2025-2027 proposed budget.

<sup>13</sup> According to Oakland's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report from 2023-2024.

- Property tax receipts are heavily reliant on high-tax properties in the downtown area. In the 2025 secured property tax roll, 21.3% of all taxable value is located in the 94612 (downtown) and the adjacent 94607 (Jack London Square, Chinatown, and West Oakland) zip codes. Of the top 50 most valuable properties in Oakland, 41 are in these two zip codes and account for 9% of the city's secured property tax roll.
- Downtown Oakland's commercial office availability rate is 36.8% as of the first quarter of 2025, according to data from CBRE, which is on par with San Francisco's central business district.<sup>14</sup> The downtown Oakland area has now experienced negative net office absorption (the amount of space leased minus the amount space put up for lease) in each year since the onset of the pandemic. Since 2021, asking rents in downtown Oakland have fallen from near \$5 per square foot to well below \$4 per square foot.<sup>15</sup>
- When rents fall, the value of commercial buildings follows. Office sales averaged \$162 per square foot in 2024 (five transactions), compared with \$563 per square foot in 2019 (11 transactions), according to data from CBRE.
- There have been no construction completions of commercial office space in Oakland since 2022. New construction would normally be a driver of taxable property value growth.
- Regarding residential property, the FM3 survey (see **Appendix**) shows that nearly half of Oakland voters say that they strongly agree or somewhat agree that they are likely to move out of Oakland in the next few years. When those people are asked if they have definite plans to move, 20% respond yes – meaning that 9% of Oakland voters have definite plans to leave the city in 2025. A reduced population likely means reduced demand for housing, which will challenge property value growth assumptions over the long run.

## Business Tax Trends

City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Revenues					
	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	FY 23-24
					<b>FY 24-25</b>
(\$ in millions)					<b>Estimates</b>
Business Tax	98.04	104.11	101.15	115.38	123.48
Percent of General Purpose Fund	15.5%	15.1%	13.9%	15.8%	16.8%
					16.0%

**Source:** City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Major Revenue Sources Overview Report

Taxes directly levied on businesses are the City of Oakland's second largest single source of revenue for the general purpose fund. The business tax is charged annually to Oakland businesses based on a percentage of either gross receipts or rental income. Business tax levels were

<sup>14</sup> CBRE. *Oakland Office Figures Q1 2025*. CBRE Group, 2025, [https://mktgdocs.cbre.com/2299/775c48d0-b163-4f4b-a25d-dd0c932d51e4-640578604/Oakland\\_Office\\_Figures\\_Q1\\_2025.pdf](https://mktgdocs.cbre.com/2299/775c48d0-b163-4f4b-a25d-dd0c932d51e4-640578604/Oakland_Office_Figures_Q1_2025.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Avison Young. *East Bay–Oakland Office Market Report (Q1 2021)*. Avison Young, 2021, <https://www.avisonyoung.com/documents/92502/94959923/East+Bay-Oakland+Office+Market+Report+%28Q1+2021%29/de5f4c09-9686-448e-b8fa-5b61d924ad79>.

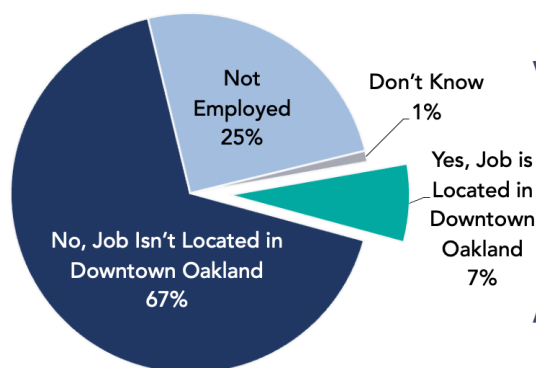
increased by voters in the November 2022 election, via Measure T, which created a progressive taxation structure. This change did result in increased business tax receipts during fiscal year 2022-2023, but estimates for the current year are flat in inflation-adjusted terms from that level. Concerningly, the number of paying business accounts in the City of Oakland has fallen from 52,192 in fiscal year 2021-2022 to 45,021 in fiscal year 2023-2024.<sup>16</sup>

While the City of Oakland does not break out its business tax receipts by geographic area, its reporting does show that nearly two-thirds of all receipts in this category were derived from the professional/semi-professional services sector, corporate administrative headquarters, and commercial rentals. As such, this tax is reliant on businesses that occupy office spaces and the rents that they pay. These same businesses are also highly impacted by crime in the downtown area – particularly as it relates to their employees’ safety in going to and from the workplace. Without the ability to safely bring employees to the office, some employers have chosen to move away from the city or downsize.

The polling effort for this study did show that crime is a factor in employees’ decisions to work downtown less often, as shown below.

### Among those who work in downtown Oakland, nearly two-thirds say safety factors into their decision to go to work in person.

Q: Is your job located in downtown Oakland?

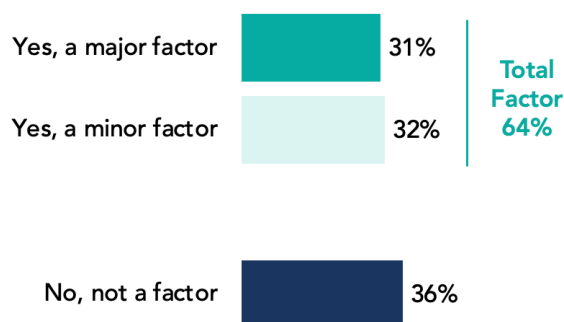


Analysis: FM3 Research

Note: Survey conducted February 11-16, 2025. Initial question has n=1,229.

Q: Are public safety concerns a factor in how often you work in person in downtown Oakland?

(Asked of those with jobs located in downtown Oakland only, n=91)



<sup>16</sup> Taken from City of Oakland Finance Department Memorandum. Subject: SUPPLEMENTAL – Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Midcycle Budget General Purpose Fund Deficit, dated April 11, 2024.

In addition to crime playing a role in larger employers' abilities to successfully operate in Oakland, crime also has impacts on small businesses that operate within Oakland – particularly restaurants, bars, and retail shops. In a survey administered by the Downtown BID Alliance in late 2023:

- Approximately 94% of responding businesses said they were the victim of crime in the last year.
- Approximately 40% of responding businesses said they lost staff due to crime concerns.
- Approximately 51% of responding businesses were considering moving or closing their business.
- One in four responding businesses had made investments in private security, which add to the cost of operations.

## Real Estate Transfer Tax Trends

City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Revenues						
	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	FY 24-25 Estimates
(\$ in millions)						
Real Estate Transfer Tax	91.53	113.36	138.40	78.05	57.61	66.31
Percent of Total	14.5%	16.5%	19.1%	10.7%	7.8%	8.8%

**Source:** City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Major Revenue Sources Overview Report

The city's real estate transfer taxes (RETT) are its most volatile revenue source, and the decline in RETT from fiscal year 2021-2022 to the current estimates is pronounced – representing a more than 50% drop. RETT is paid when a property changes hands, with the total amount payable representing a portion of the sales price. When real estate markets are challenged – like they have been for commercial and residential real estate over the last few years in particular – RETT receipts can decline precipitously.

The chart below highlights the volume and value of property sales transactions in Oakland in the most recent fiscal year compared to fiscal year 2018-2019, when RETT was changed from a 1.61% flat tax to a progressive tax with its highest rate being a 2.50% tax on transactions over \$5 million. The chart depicts how property transactions slowed in fiscal year 2023-2024, and it also shows how a few large commercial property transactions can upwardly skew the city's RETT receipts.

## City of Oakland Real Estate Transfer Tax Details

Sales Price	FY 2018 - 2019		FY 2023 - 2024	
	Gross Sales (millions)	Volume	Gross Sales (millions)	Volume
\$300,000 or below	\$ 68.90	421	\$ 39.28	225
\$300,001 to \$2 million	\$ 3,615.36	4,423	\$ 2,597.53	2,880
\$2 million to \$5 million	\$ 542.70	190	\$ 474.03	179
\$5 million to \$10 million	\$ 281.10	40	\$ 79.17	12
\$10 million to \$100 million	\$ 858.35	36	\$ 344.13	13
Over \$100 million	\$ 1,039.32	5	\$ -	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 6,405.73</b>	<b>5,115</b>	<b>\$ 3,534.14</b>	<b>3,309</b>

**Source:** City of Oakland Quarterly Revenue and Expenditures Report

The latest fiscal year saw no property transactions over \$50 million in Oakland, which would involve large commercial or residential buildings. Most property investors continue to avoid investments in Oakland, citing crime issues and the general uncertainty in the downtown area that they have caused. If large employers shy away from Oakland going forward, the value of some of the city's largest properties could continue to drop further, which would have a simultaneous negative impact on both property tax receipts and RETT.

## Sales Tax Trends

City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Revenues						FY 24-25
(\$ in millions)	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	Estimates
Sales Tax	55.52	57.63	63.78	66.83	62.27	60.37
Percent of Total	8.8%	8.4%	8.8%	9.2%	8.5%	8.0%

**Source:** City of Oakland General Purpose Fund Major Revenue Sources Overview Report

Sales taxes are the smallest of the four sources of revenue analyzed here but are also a key indicator of the general trajectory of Oakland's overall economy. Historically, Oakland has not been a major generator of sales tax due to the lack of big box retail stores within the city limits. Fremont – a city with 226,000 people compared to Oakland's 436,000 – generated nearly \$1 billion more in taxable sales than Oakland in 2024, according to the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration. Oakland does host a Home Depot and shares revenue from multiple stores located at the Emeryville-Oakland border, but the city did experience several high-profile business closures in 2023, notably a Target that closed after being open for only four years.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Li, Roland. "Target to Close Bay Area Stores, Including Oakland Location, Citing Retail Theft." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 Sept. 2023, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/crime/article/bay-area-target-closings-oakland-crime-18391576.php>.

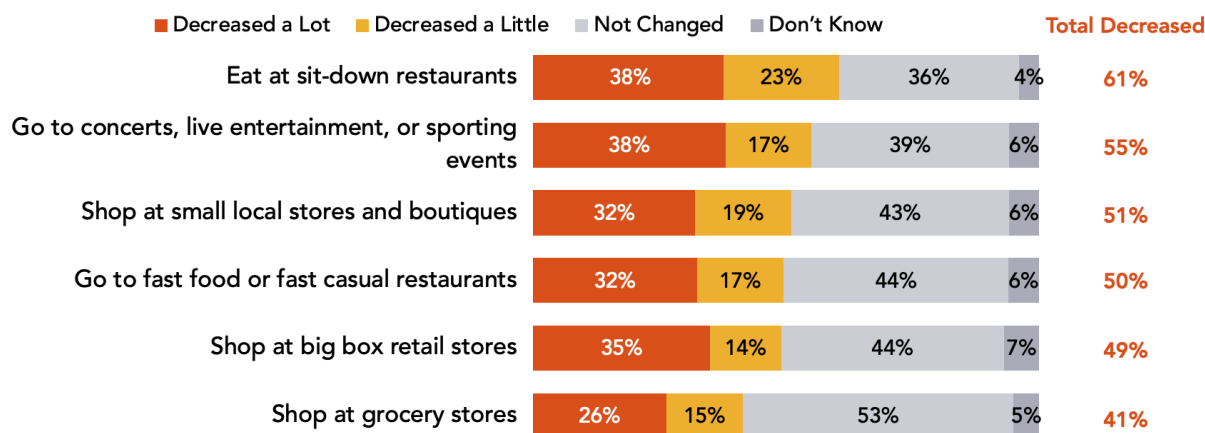


Sales tax receipts in Oakland projected for fiscal year 2024-2025 are roughly on par with levels from fiscal year 2018-2019; yet over that period the nation experienced cumulative inflation of approximately 22%, meaning Oakland's sales tax receipts should be \$15-\$16 million higher if they were following the rate of inflation.

Public safety also plays a clear role as it relates to sales tax receipts, as residents and visitors have choices for how they spend their money. In inflation-adjusted dollars, Oakland has experienced a 20% decline in taxable sales within the city compared to 2019, which is not as large of a decline as San Francisco has experienced (25% decline), but still significantly trails taxable sales trajectories in other cities, such as Fremont (11% growth), San Jose (1% growth), and Walnut Creek (6% decline). The survey results shed additional light on this drop in consumer spending, with a large percentage of respondents saying they are spending less money in Oakland today.

### Majorities say the amount they eat in Oakland restaurants, go to live events, shop, and eat at fast food restaurants has decreased in recent years.

*Q: Here is a list of types of activities and businesses in Oakland. Please indicate if the amount you visit these types of businesses in Oakland has decreased in the past few years:*



Analysis: FM3 Research

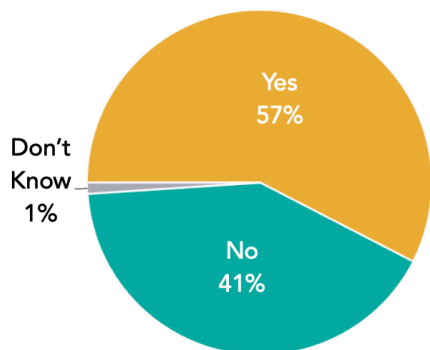
Note: Survey conducted February 11-16, 2025. Question has n=1,229.

When these same questions are asked of non-Oakland East Bay residents, the number of people saying they are not patronizing Oakland businesses goes up – particularly for eating in restaurants. The connection to crime is clear:

- 57% of Oakland voters say they leave Oakland and go to businesses, restaurants, and shops in nearby cities because you feel safer.
- 72% of total respondents say that public safety concerns have played a role in reduced visitation to Oakland businesses in the past few years.

**A majority of Oakland residents say they leave the city to shop in nearby cities because it feels safer, and three-quarters say public safety has played a role in visiting Oakland businesses less in the past few years.**

*Q: Do you ever leave Oakland and go to businesses, restaurants, and shops in nearby cities because you feel safer? (n=818)*

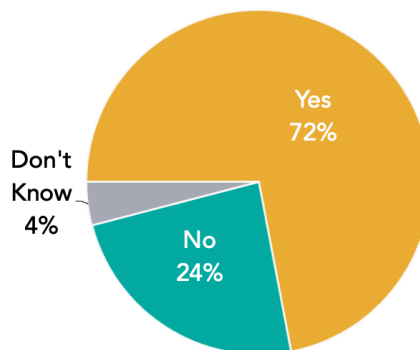


Analysis: FM3 Research

Note: Survey conducted February 11-16, 2025.

*Q: Have public safety concerns played a role in you visiting these kinds of businesses less in the past few years?*

(Asked of those who decreased visits to Oakland businesses only, n=949)



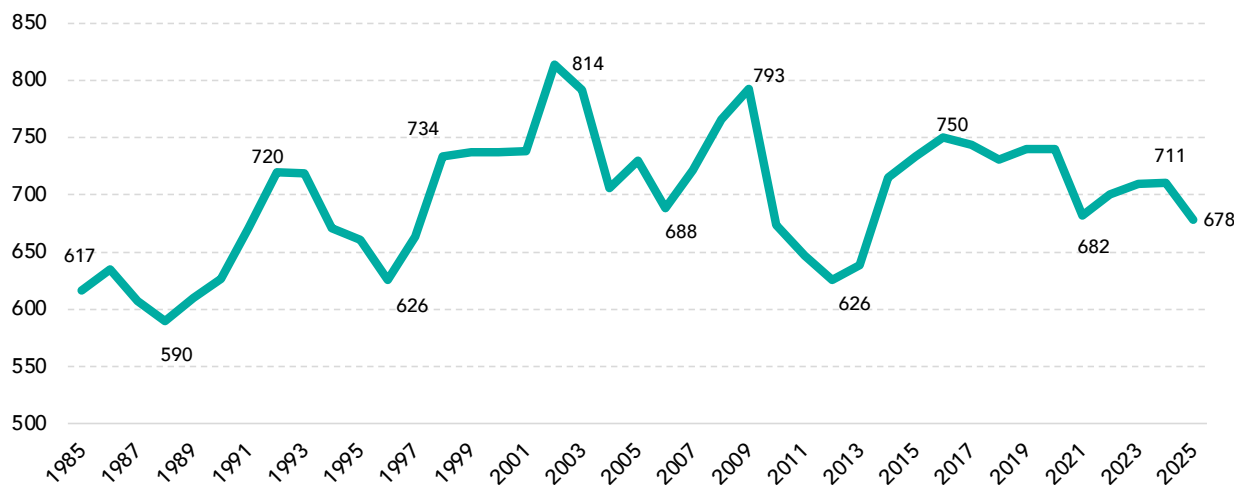
## Chapter 6. Oakland's Public Safety Challenges

This section will highlight three critical challenges that the Oakland Police Department faces: budgetary pressures that have led to shortages of police resources, more than 22 years of federal oversight that draws on the department's already stretched resources, and an overly complex police accountability structure that is not based on results. While hard to quantify, these issues were continuously mentioned in interviews as feeding into low officer morale and limiting the police department's ability to effectively police. One issue that is not covered here but was brought up in interviews – limited prosecution of offenders within the Alameda County District Attorney's Office – has also contributed to low officer morale. However, with a new District Attorney in place in 2025, structural changes are taking place within the county to prosecute offenses.

### Issues Related to the City Budget

When fiscal constraint is required in Oakland – which has been the case multiple times in the last two decades – many cuts fall to OPD given the city's general purpose fund structure. Recently, those cuts have included reductions in budgeted personnel (both sworn officers and civilian positions), elimination of police academies, and reductions in police overtime budgets.

#### Total Sworn Officers in Oakland Police Department



**Source:** Federal Bureau of Investigation, Law Enforcement Employees

**Analysis:** Bay Area Council Economic Institute

With approximately 85% of OPD's annual expenditures connected to personnel and overhead and 92% of OPD's budgeted expenditures stemming from the general purpose fund, OPD's staffing levels are very much a function of the city's fiscal health. This trend is shown in the chart above that tracks the number of OPD sworn officers over the last 40 years, to its current point of

678 as of April 2025. The current level of sworn officer staffing is very similar to levels of the mid-1990s, when the population of Oakland was 50,000 people less than it is today.

When comparing the number of filled, sworn officer positions within OPD to police departments in similarly sized cities, it becomes clear that OPD operates with very lean staffing levels. In the chart below, U.S. cities with between 300,000 and 650,000 people are listed based on their numbers of sworn officers, standardized by population size. At 1.55 sworn officers per 1,000 people, Oakland ranks 21<sup>st</sup> of the 26 cities analyzed. Cities that produced notable reductions in property crime levels over the last 20 years – e.g., Atlanta, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati – have a considerably higher level of sworn officers for their population size.

### Police Department Staffing by Mid-Sized City

	Civilian Staff	Sworn Officers	Population	Sworn Officers / 1,000 people
Detroit	679	2,465	633,218	3.89
Baltimore	474	2,047	565,239	3.62
Newark	183	1,076	304,960	3.53
Cleveland	205	1,175	362,656	3.24
Atlanta	461	1,630	510,823	3.19
Memphis	497	1,945	618,639	3.14
Cincinnati	111	957	311,097	3.08
Milwaukee	231	1,617	561,385	2.88
Miami	353	1,304	455,924	2.86
Pittsburgh	32	777	303,255	2.56
New Orleans	297	910	364,136	2.50
Tampa	265	944	403,364	2.34
Kansas City	562	1,089	510,704	2.13
Tulsa	213	812	411,894	1.97
Louisville	289	1,067	622,981	1.71
Omaha	159	816	483,335	1.69
Wichita	178	634	396,119	1.60
Colorado Springs	355	772	488,664	1.58
Albuquerque	694	881	560,274	1.57
Fresno	369	849	545,716	1.56
<b>Oakland</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>436,504</b>	<b>1.55</b>
Long Beach	275	697	449,468	1.55
Raleigh	98	703	482,295	1.46
Minneapolis	189	571	425,115	1.34
Sacramento	282	678	526,384	1.29
Portland	298	804	630,498	1.28

**Source:** Federal Bureau of Investigation, Law Enforcement Employees

**Analysis:** Bay Area Council Economic Institute

**Note:** Oakland Police Department data is for April 2025. All other data is as of 2023.

Those same departments made significant efforts to increase their sworn officer ranks in the last 15 years, giving them the flexibility to deploy officers strategically to proactively deter crime and enforce the law:

- In Atlanta, the police department began an aggressive recruitment campaign in 2010 and hit its budgeted sworn personnel goal of 2,000 by 2013.<sup>18</sup>
- In Pittsburgh, 2020 saw the city's high water mark for sworn personnel, with multiple academies pushing the sworn officer ranks to 991.<sup>19</sup>
- The City of Cincinnati suspended police recruitment academies between 2009 and 2013 due to budget issues but significantly ramped up recruiting efforts in the following years to move sworn officer numbers back above 1,000.<sup>20</sup>

OPD's staffing challenges are understated in multiple ways when looking only at its level of sworn officers. First, OPD's operational strength is well below 678 sworn officers. As of May 2025, more than 100 sworn employees were on long-term leave – including 36 officers and seven sergeants currently on administrative leave because they are the subject of an internal affairs investigation – meaning the department's operational strength is 540 sworn officers when also considering officers on vacation. Of those 43 sworn personnel on administrative leave, 11 have been on leave for more than one year.

Second, when looking at sworn officers per capita within California cities, Oakland is on par or ahead of its peers – Fresno, Long Beach, and Sacramento. However, when analyzed on a per crime basis, OPD's staffing levels stand out as very low compared to the number of crimes they need to respond to, investigate, and solve. At 66 serious crimes per officer in 2023, OPD faces more than double the per officer caseload of the average large city in California, as highlighted in the chart below.

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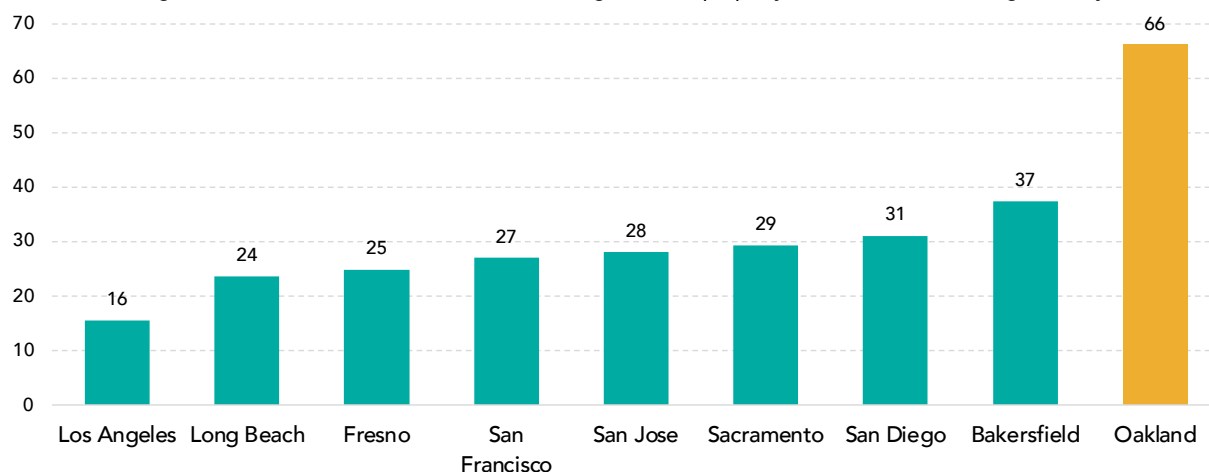
<sup>18</sup> Atlanta Police Department. "APD History." *Atlanta Police Department*, City of Atlanta, <https://www.atlantapd.org/about-apd/apd-history>. Accessed 3 June 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Guza, Megan. "Pittsburgh Police Staffing Dips amid Resignations, Retirements." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 8 Jan. 2025, <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/crime-courts/2025/01/08/pittsburgh-police-staffing-resignations-retirements/stories/202501090025>.

<sup>20</sup> London, John. "Cincinnati Police Department Struggling to Meet Recruiting Goals." *WLWT 5*, 16 Mar. 2023, <https://www.wlwt.com/article/cincinnati-police-department-struggle-to-meet-recruiting-goals/43379952>.

### Annual Index Crimes per Sworn Officer, 2023

For the nine largest cities in California; index crimes are the eight serious property and violent crimes categorized by the FBI



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting and Police Employment Data

Analysis: Bay Area Council Economic Institute

Investigations are severely hampered by OPD's lack of staffing. OPD's homicide clearance rate (arrests per reported crime) between 2020 and 2023 fell below 50% according to State of California Department of Justice data. By comparison, law enforcement agencies across California have produced an aggregate homicide clearance rate of 50-60% over the last few years.<sup>21</sup> With the number of sworn officers likely to fall going forward with limited avenues for replacement via overtime allowances, OPD will have even fewer resources at its disposal to investigate crime.

While OPD has historically juggled relatively low staffing levels by implementing significant overtime – in fiscal year 2023-2024, OPD overtime costs totaled approximately \$50 million – cuts have already limited OPD's budgeted overtime allowance in the current fiscal year by more than half. This budget change has reduced the department's ability to investigate certain types of cases, respond to certain types of calls for service, and allocate time for added field support when necessary.

OPD operates with relatively few sworn officers compared to peer cities, and its personnel levels are unlikely to shift given recent budget cuts and spending proposed in the current budget cycle:

- OPD is currently authorized for only 600 sworn personnel – putting it in a position where it is effectively overstaffed versus budgeted requirements. Measure NN, a parcel tax measure passed by voters in 2024, required the city to budget for, maintain, and hire a police force of at least 700 sworn personnel. However, when the city declared a fiscal emergency, that requirement was lifted.

<sup>21</sup> California Department of Justice. "Crimes & Clearances." *OpenJustice*, State of California Department of Justice, <https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/exploration/crime-statistics/crimes-clearances>. Accessed 3 June 2025.

- All vacant positions at OPD are currently frozen.
- OPD has a historic attrition rate of five officers per month and expects 71 possible retirements during 2025.
- OPD budgets for four police academies each year and usually holds two to three academies per year. The city's latest cost cuts canceled all remaining academies in the fiscal year, reducing the number of police academies to just one in fiscal year 2024-2025. Three academies are budgeted for fiscal year 2025-2026 – a level that may not increase sworn officer levels if historic attrition rates continue and retirements are requested.

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### Ranking Safety Interventions: East Bay Resident Poll Results

Many police departments have struggled to fill sworn officer roles in the last five years – a Police Executive Research Forum of 214 law enforcement agencies found that large agencies with over 250 officers have experienced a 5% reduction in staffing since 2020.<sup>22</sup> Oakland also struggles with recruitment issues – particularly due to administrative conditions imposed by court oversight – though OPD's historic staffing issues have been compounded by fluctuations in budget for sworn personnel.

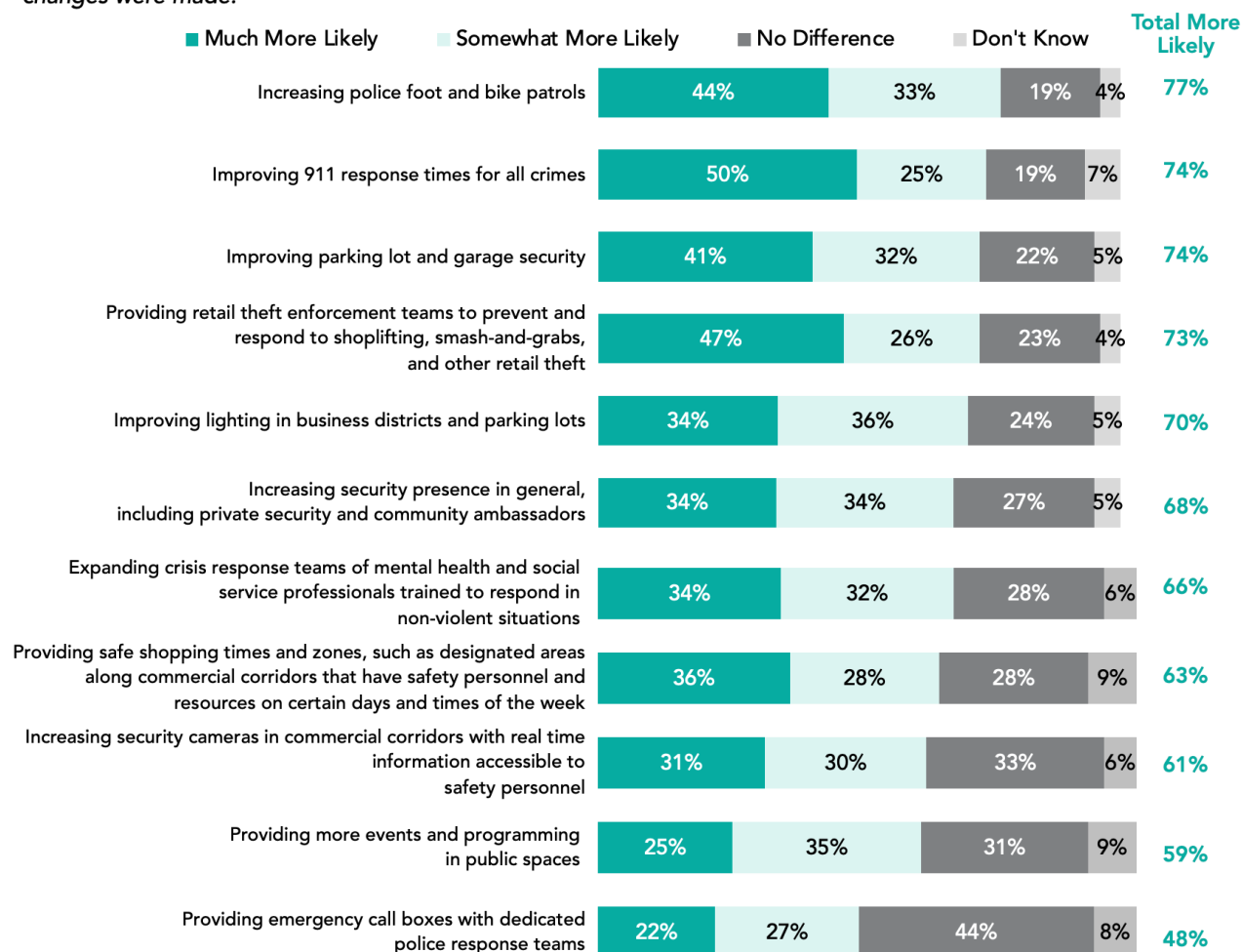
Public safety interventions that require a uniformed officer presence ranked highest among items that would make people feel safe shopping, dining, and spending money in Oakland, as found in the East Bay voter survey administered as part of this research. Softer touch interventions – while still effective in promoting safety – ranked farther down on the list of most effective interventions, as shown in the charts below:

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<sup>22</sup> Police Executive Research Forum. *Police Workforce Trends: PERF Survey Findings, January 2024*. 2024, <https://www.policeforum.org/staffing2024>. Accessed 3 June 2025.

## Voters say that increased police patrols, 911 response times, and parking and garage security would make them more likely to go downtown.

*Q: Here are some changes that could be made in downtown Oakland. Please indicate if you would be much more likely or somewhat more likely to visit businesses, restaurants, and shops in downtown Oakland if each of these changes were made.*



**Analysis:** FM3 Research

**Note:** Survey conducted February 11-16, 2025. Question has n=1,229.



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## Issues Related to the Negotiated Settlement Agreement & Internal Affairs

In 2003, the City of Oakland settled a police misconduct lawsuit (*Delphine Allen et al. v. City of Oakland*, also known as the Riders scandal). As part of the Negotiated Settlement Agreement (NSA) with the plaintiffs, OPD agreed to comply with a series of reforms and an independent court monitor was selected to ensure that OPD complied with the agreement. More than 22 years after the original agreement was put in place, OPD remains under court oversight, which impacts retention and attraction of officers and was generally, creates additional administrative burdens and costs for the city,<sup>23</sup> and was found to have significant adverse effects on police force morale in multiple interviews with OPD conducted during this research.

Of the 51 tasks assigned to OPD to promote police integrity, prevent misconduct, and ensure Constitutional policing, three remain affirmatively assessed by the monitor today. This analysis does not seek to fully analyze the legal history or rationale for OPD remaining under court oversight, though it does seek to better understand how the requirements of the NSA are shaping public safety in Oakland.

In nearly all interviews completed for this work, the requirements of the NSA were brought up as inhibitors to the police force being able to satisfactorily prioritize crime reduction in Oakland. For example, a simple car stop that might have previously taken 5-7 minutes now takes more than twice as long because of paperwork requirements to comply with the NSA. Given OPD's limited staffing, this relatively minor piece of additional work has officers routinely asking whether they should make a car stop if it might impact their ability to respond to a call for service in their area.

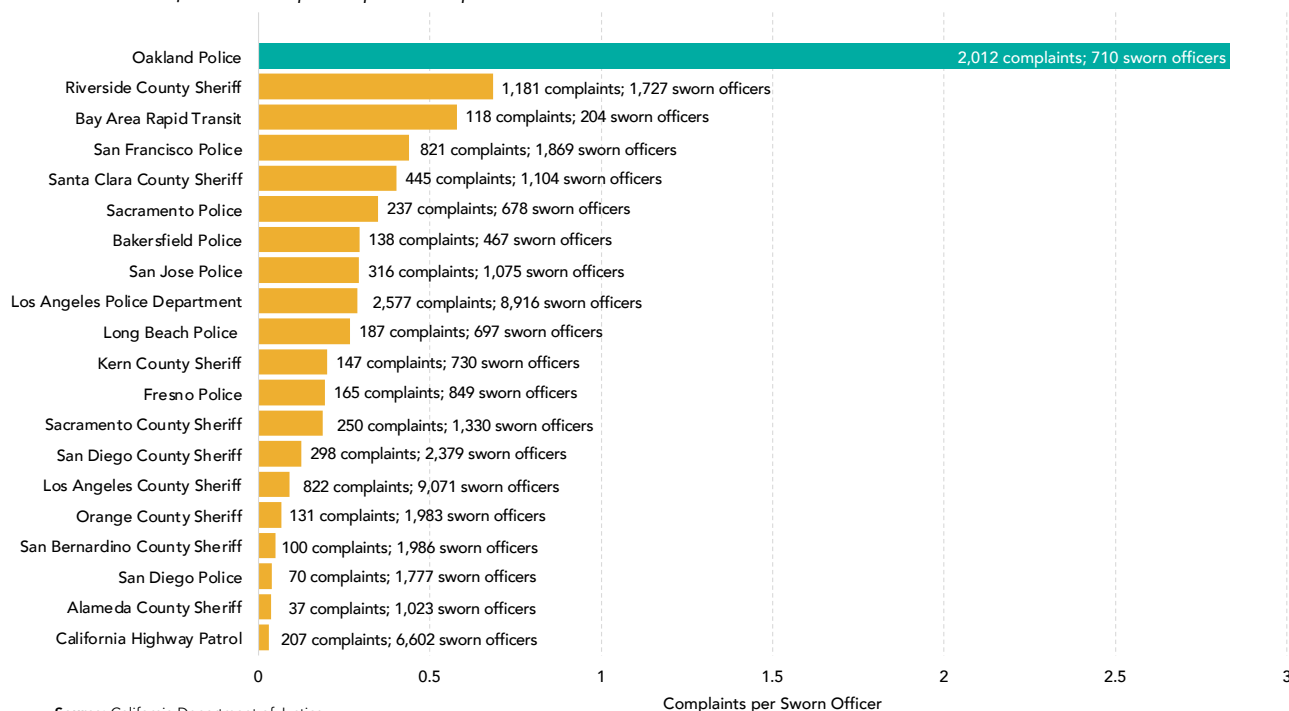
The most significant administrative requirements of the NSA relate to how OPD conducts its internal affairs processes and the ease with which citizens can file complaints against officers. In 2024, OPD closed more than 1,500 internal affairs cases, ranging from use of force and other duty-related complaints to more serious police misconduct. Of those closed cases, approximately 85% were found to be unfounded allegations or the officer was exonerated. The chart below shows that OPD's citizen-generated internal affairs complaints are at least three times higher per officer than other law enforcement agencies in California.

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<sup>23</sup> Cassidy, Megan. "Ouster of Oakland Chief Inflames Tensions over Police Monitor." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 Mar. 2020, [www.sfchronicle.com/crime/article/Ouster-of-Oakland-chief-inflames-tensions-over-15101813.php](http://www.sfchronicle.com/crime/article/Ouster-of-Oakland-chief-inflames-tensions-over-15101813.php).

### Annual Complaints per Sworn Officer in California's Largest Law Enforcement Agencies, 2023

Data based on unique civilian complaint reports and reported sworn officer counts



Source: California Department of Justice

Analysis: Bay Area Council Economic Institute

OPD must review every civilian complaint it receives regardless of its type – as mandated by the NSA – and allegations that are sustained are investigated either through its Internal Affairs Bureau (for serious alleged misconduct) or by assigning investigations out to sergeants within OPD. As of May 2025, OPD has more than 500 open complaint cases, and 162 of these open complaint investigations have been assigned to division sergeants. These investigations can take between 10 and 40 hours, and result in time spent behind a desk rather than in the field.

Public complaints related to use of force, in-custody deaths, racial profiling, false statements, and First Amendment rights are also investigated by the Community Police Review Agency (CPRA) – an independent, citizen-led body that was created in 2016 through the passage of Measure LL. When OPD internal affairs investigations and CPRA investigations lead to different findings or proposed discipline, the case is appealed to the Police Commission via its Discipline Committee. Three discipline committees were convened in fiscal year 2023-2024 to resolve investigative disputes. As of March 2025, CPRA had a total of 119 pending cases in intake or active investigation phases. Of cases completed in March 2025, the average CPRA investigation took nearly 11 months.

In addition to creating resource demands, the requirements of the NSA also include impact personnel policies. A few of these examples are outlined below:

- A patrol sergeant may not supervise more than eight officers and OPD cannot deploy temporary/acting sergeants in patrol. With limitations on staffing, this policy produces a significant amount of overtime because OPD must have five regular permanent sergeants in patrol for every shift to supervise the minimum of 35 officers.
- Task 5 of the NSA (related to complaint procedures) requires that OPD personnel who become aware that a citizen wishes to file a complaint immediately summon a supervisor or a member of the Internal Affairs Bureau – which draws on officer time for administrative purposes rather than policing purposes.

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### Recovering From Crisis: Lessons from the Los Angeles Police Department

The 1992 Los Angeles (LA) Riots were the catalyst for change that eventually led to fundamental and comprehensive shifts to the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) approach to policing. The LA Riots exposed deeply rooted mistrust and tension between Los Angeles' law enforcement personnel and its community members. While still reeling from the LA Riots, the disclosure in 1999 of significant corruption (i.e., excessive force, false arrests, and unreasonable search and seizures) of the anti-gang unit of LAPD's Rampart Division prompted the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to impose a federal consent decree in 2001. Under federal oversight and a stringent set of monitoring guidelines, LAPD would remain under the primary consent decree until 2009, when enough changes had been made to reach compliance and allow the department to enter into a transition agreement until the complete termination of federal oversight in 2013.

Of the reforms implemented, two would rise to the top to become the department's legacy reforms that are still in effect today: the application of CompStat to improve accountability and resource deployment, and a new approach to and an emphasis on community policing. While both are considered effective reforms on their own, the DOJ would later propose that it was the strategic implementation of these reforms together that led the department to successfully build community trust, help to reach compliance with the consent decree, and ultimately make communities safer.

CompStat, pioneered by the New York Police Department (NYPD), is a real-time data analytics platform that collects, analyzes, and maps crime data to better deploy resources and to hold law enforcement leadership accountable. In 2001, NYPD's CompStat model was tailored to fit Los Angeles's department and scale. Its emphasis on data-driven resource deployment and decentralization of decision-making authority to leadership at the district/commander level, which gave them more control over resources while simultaneously holding them more accountable,

ultimately led to a more efficiently and effectively run department and significant improvements to public safety in Los Angeles.

Equally transformative to LAPD was the implementation of a reinvigorated approach to community policing that placed relationships with residents and preventative policing front and center to the department's policing culture and model. LAPD expanded its Senior Lead Officer program to ensure that each neighborhood had a consistent liaison and direct link to LAPD, with a focus on communities that were low income or had a history of being over-policed. LA's Community Safety Partnership – now considered the national model for relationship-based policing – is also credited to be a product of the federal consent decree.

Many other effective reforms resulted from LAPD's consent decree: overhaul of officer training that focuses on constitutional policing, de-escalation, and ethics; the creation of specialized units to handle complaints and investigate use-of-force incidents; among many other changes that are still in practice today. The results of the reforms were tangible – between 2001 and 2013, violent crime decreased by over 54% and crime overall decreased for 11 consecutive years beginning in 2003.

**Application in Oakland:** The Oakland Police Department can take many valuable lessons from LAPD's rebirth after the 1992 LA Riots and 1999 Rampart scandal: strong leadership committed to reform, data-driven personnel and resource deployment, strengthening community trust, and ensuring that reforms are integrated with one another instead of as standalone initiatives.

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## Issues Related to the City's Governance Structures

According to its website, the City of Oakland has 39 commissions and boards made up of non-elected members that oversee a wide variety of issues within the city. While this number is not out of line with similarly sized cities, there are several independent bodies that have some purview over OPD. Combined with the requirements of the NSA, the multiple layers of oversight of OPD create a patchwork accountability system that is spread across too many actors to be effective at implementing policing best practices.

This overly complex system leads to high rates of attrition among sworn personnel – many of whom do not want to make a mistake on the job given the high probability of an internal affairs investigation. It also limits the Chief of Police's power to make and implement recommendations to improve public safety in Oakland – which creates high turnover in that role as well. In the past 15 years, Oakland has had six different police chiefs head OPD (not including interim or acting chiefs), none of whom stayed in the role for more than four years. By comparison, San Francisco has had just three police chiefs in that same period.

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### *Police Commission / Community Police Review Agency / Office of the Inspector General*

In November 2016, Oakland voters approved a measure to amend the city charter to create a Police Commission of civilian commissioners to oversee OPD by reviewing and proposing changes to policies and procedures; requiring the mayor to appoint any new Chief of Police from a list of candidates provided by the Police Commission; and having the authority to terminate the Chief of Police for cause. That same measure created the CPRA, under the Police Commission, to investigate complaints of officer misconduct – which is described in greater detail in the previous section.

Measure S1 in 2020 then expanded the power of the Police Commission and codified its independence from the city administration, while also creating the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), an independent civilian oversight agency that monitors and audits OPD's policies, practices, and procedures. The OIG audits OPD's compliance with the 52 tasks of the NSA and will continue to make recommendations to OPD, the Police Commission, and City Council based on its audits even after court oversight ends.

After analyzing police oversight structures in other cities across the U.S., only one other city (Seattle) was found to use a three-pronged approach to civilian police accountability and oversight. Multiple cities, including Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit take a two-pronged approach: a civilian police commission that has supervisory responsibility and an inspector general or civilian review agency that investigates complaints and audits the police department's policies.

This fragmented oversight structure is not only inefficient, but also prone to creating a bias toward the status quo. This dynamic is playing out in discussions around OPD's pursuit policy, which has become a topic for debate in both Oakland and Sacramento – Governor Gavin Newsom called on the city to revise its policy in late 2024 as a condition for continued support from the California Highway Patrol. The current pursuit policy limits instances that OPD can engage in vehicular pursuit to suspected violent crimes or suspicion that a firearm was used and requires supervisor approval to engage in any pursuit over 50 miles per hour on city streets. As such, suspected perpetrators of property crime are not pursued with vehicles under current policy.

The City Council has directed the Police Commission to bring back recommendations for pursuit policy revisions. This structure does lead to greater citizen involvement and policy debate, though it is more likely to lead to a status quo conclusion – as was the case when the Police Commission first reported to the City Council on this issue in September 2024.

### *Privacy Advisory Commission*

Oakland is unique amongst major U.S. cities in that it has a citizen-led privacy commission that provides advice and technical assistance to the city on best practices to protect citizen privacy rights in connection with the use of surveillance equipment and other technology that collects or

stores citizen data.<sup>24</sup> The Privacy Advisory Commission (PAC) was established in 2016 via City Council ordinance, and it consists of nine volunteer members appointed by the mayor and confirmed by a majority of the City Council.

The PAC has no formal role in approving the city's use of surveillance and other data collection technologies – the city's surveillance ordinance requires departments to submit use and data retention policies for new technologies to the City Council for approval – though it does review the purchases of such technology and advises the City Council. For each approved surveillance technology item, city staff must present a written annual surveillance report to the PAC, and the PAC then makes recommendations to City Council on proposed policy modifications to the use of that technology and whether or not its use should be ceased.

The PAC's oversight of OPD policy has been most notable in the department's use of automated license plate readers (ALPRs), which can be used to detect vehicles that have been stolen or suspected to be involved in a crime and track them in real time. OPD began using ALPR's mounted on vehicles in 2006 but discontinued their use in 2023, which came after disagreement with the PAC and its decision to put a two-year moratorium on ALPR technology in the city.<sup>25</sup>

The PAC eventually did approve an ALPR use policy in 2023 at around the same time the city accepted a loan from the state to deploy ALPR systems in Oakland. Over the course of 2024, Oakland installed 290 ALPRs on city streets and another 190 ALPRs are being used by the California Highway Patrol on state-controlled highways in the East Bay. In interviews with OPD, ALPRs were called "game changers" for OPD in their ability to respond to crime – though their deployment was slow in comparison to other cities that have been using extensive ALPR systems for many years. For example, the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office had installed 500 ALPR systems throughout Pittsburgh by 2019 – a smaller city by area than Oakland.<sup>26</sup>

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### Using Technology as a Force Multiplier: Lessons from Atlanta, New Orleans, and Detroit

Of all the mid-sized cities analyzed within this report, Detroit, Atlanta, and New Orleans are noteworthy for significantly decreasing their rates of property crime over the last 20 years. In Detroit, the property crime rate per 100,000 residents fell from 7,800 in 2006 to under 3,500 by 2020. In Atlanta, the rate per 100,000 residents fell from over 9,000 in 2008 to 3,600 by 2024. And in New Orleans, the rate fell from 7,000 reported property crimes per 100,000 residents in

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<sup>24</sup> San Diego is the only other U.S. city with a citizen-led privacy commission that focuses on data security and surveillance technology.

<sup>25</sup> DeBolt, David. "Lauded as a National Model, Some Question Whether Oakland's Privacy Commission Is Working." *The Oaklandside*, 5 Nov. 2021, [www.oaklandside.org/2021/11/02/lauded-as-a-national-model-some-question-whether-oaklands-privacy-commission-is-working/](http://www.oaklandside.org/2021/11/02/lauded-as-a-national-model-some-question-whether-oaklands-privacy-commission-is-working/).

<sup>26</sup> Kaplan, Josh. "Who's Using License Plate Cameras to Track Cars? Cops, Landlords, and Your Neighbors." *Slate Magazine*, Slate, 10 July 2019, [www.slate.com/technology/2019/07/automatic-license-plate-readers-hoa-police-openalpr.html](http://www.slate.com/technology/2019/07/automatic-license-plate-readers-hoa-police-openalpr.html).

1998 to 4,000 by 2021. All three cities have utilized public-private partnership models to make surveillance cameras an important part of their crime deterrence strategies.

Launched in 2007, Operation Shield in Atlanta is an initiative of the Atlanta Police Foundation and the Atlanta Police Department that allows officers to monitor video feeds from both public and private security cameras through Atlanta's Operation Shield Video Integration Center. Operation Shield has grown to a network of more than 20,000 cameras, providing Atlanta police the opportunity for real-time monitoring and dispatching of police to trouble spots. Operation Shield allows individuals and businesses to register their cameras with the Atlanta Police Department, which enables APD to access the video footage when investigating a crime. A true public-private partnership, approximately 80% of the cost is borne by the private sector.

In New Orleans, the SafeCam NOLA program was originally a partnership between the French Quarter Management District and the police department to share video footage from private cameras, which was launched in 2012. By 2018, the program was expanded citywide with the help of the New Orleans Police and Justice Foundation, allowing private citizens and businesses to share camera networks directly with the police department's real-time crime center. New Orleans has partnered with several certified installation specialists that install cameras for businesses and residences across the city that are compatible with the real-time crime center. Currently, New Orleans has over 6,000 cameras within the SafeCam network.

In Detroit, the Detroit Police Department partnered with eight gas stations to install real-time camera connections with police headquarters beginning in 2016. This partnership between local businesses, the city, and community groups would eventually be called Project Green Light – after the green lights mounted atop the cameras that have become ubiquitous around the city. The city now has over 1,000 cameras installed by local business partners at minimal cost to the city. The Detroit Police Department credits Project Green Light with contributing to the city's 71% decrease in carjackings since 2015 and revitalizing the growth of local businesses that participate in the program as the green lights signal to customers that they are in a monitored location.<sup>27</sup>

**Application in Oakland:** The Oakland Police Department has produced recent successes with the introduction of automated license plate readers across the city and its partnership with downtown businesses that have installed surveillance cameras. However, its use of technology – particularly its ability to monitor the city in real time – remains relatively limited in scope. Atlanta, New Orleans, and Detroit show how public-private partnerships can be deployed to rapidly increase the number of safety cameras in a city. In Oakland, a public-private partnership has created the beginnings of a real-time crime center with a coordinated camera network, though geographic expansion and direct feeds to OPD would significantly bolster the value of these investments in technology.

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<sup>27</sup> Buczek, Joseph. "Detroit Reports Historic Drop in Violent Crime in 2024, Fewest Homicides since 1965." *CBS News*, 3 Jan. 2025, [www.cbsnews.com/detroit/news/detroit-reports-historic-drop-in-violent-crime-2024/](http://www.cbsnews.com/detroit/news/detroit-reports-historic-drop-in-violent-crime-2024/).



## Chapter 7. Recommendations

While progress was made in 2024 on public safety in Oakland because of a renewed focus on crime reduction, deterrence, and enforcement, this study's surveying effort and data collection shows that the occurrence and perception of crime in Oakland is still a very real issue. As such, bold measures need to be taken by leaders across the city to put Oakland on a sustainable path to crime reduction. This can be achieved by ensuring that OPD's operations are funded at sustainable levels, roadblocks to effective policing are removed, OPD's resources are deployed in the most efficient way possible, and outside law enforcement support and private sector investment are both sought out and received.

This report details a list of 10 recommendations below, which are organized in the following four buckets: funding, governance, operational, and partnerships and community.

### FUNDING

The survey effort that accompanies this study found that voters place a strong emphasis on uniformed officer interventions to improve their perception of safety in Oakland. The city's employers share this view, as a number of them have made investments in their own security teams or are directly paying for OPD officers to work overtime. However, the city itself is yet to respond to the public safety crisis by prioritizing investments in the police department.

#### 1. Expand, not just protect, funding for public safety including additional sworn officers

The City of Oakland cannot escape its historic fiscal issues without addressing the city's crime issues. To do so, sworn police staffing should be the key metric. That Oakland needs additional police officers comes as no surprise – particularly in light of a recently-released report commissioned by the city that found the baseline level of sworn officers needed to be 877. That number is more than 200 more than currently employed by OPD, 277 more than currently authorized in budget, and 337 more than OPD's actual operational strength when taking into administrative and medical leaves. While the proposed 2025-2027 budget does protect the current level of OPD sworn officer staffing, that level of investment is likely to produce status quo results – which is not enough to change the perception of businesses to make investments, of workers to arrive at their workplace, and of East Bay residents to dine, shop, and spend on entertainment in Oakland.

Setting a bold, five-year goal and plan for increasing the number of officers is feasible. The plan should outline how the city plans to attract, train, fund, and grow the number of officers in the department. To do so, the city will need to make difficult choices with political costs, but in the long run these decisions must be taken to lead to sustainable progress on safety in Oakland and more stable growth in economic activity. The alternative is that the city will likely see continued



fluctuations in police staffing, jeopardizing the progress it has made on public safety in the last year while undercutting the public's desire to see more progress made on crime. Further efforts should be undertaken to understand how civilian staff can be deployed in additional roles across OPD, but that is only likely to have marginal impacts on policing effectiveness in Oakland as additional sworn officers are the city's greatest need.

## 2. Secure future dedicated funding sources for OPD

The Oakland Police Department is heavily reliant on general purpose funds for its budget. As such, the staffing levels of the department are very much a function of Oakland's economy. Because of this dynamic, budget restraint at OPD has been and will continue to be a topic that arises every few years. Without adding significant dedicated funding for police, the city risks putting itself in a situation where public safety must be sacrificed every time the economy struggles. If public safety is sacrificed, the city's tax receipts are likely to also be sacrificed, creating a negative feedback loop that will further impact police and all city service departments that rely on the general purpose fund.

## GOVERNANCE

Police department oversight and accountability is an important feature of building community trust, which is a key component for effective policing. However, the Oakland Police Department operates under an accountability structure that is spread across numerous entities – including a judicial body, elected officials, and numerous citizen-led commissions. While there are multiple entities weighing in on police policy in Oakland, the city has produced little accountability around safety overall. In fact, crime rates in 2024 in Oakland were higher than they were in 2003 when OPD first became subject to court supervision.

## 3. Create a citywide goal to end court oversight of the Oakland Police Department

Court oversight of a police department is not necessarily unique – there were two dozen departments operating under a federal consent decree, a court-approved plan to remediate misconduct or other unconstitutional criminal justice activities, as of 2022<sup>28</sup> – but Oakland's particular form of court oversight is unique. The Negotiated Settlement Agreement (NSA) is a product of a settlement with plaintiffs rather than the U.S. Department of Justice, which generally brings the lawsuits that result in consent decrees or other police reform settlements. The U.S. Department of Justice usually has a goal of remediating a department and removing it from oversight within a five-year period, though many consent decrees last longer. In Oakland's case, court oversight has lasted more than 20 years. There have been multiple times in the last few

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<sup>28</sup> Salter, Jim. "Are Police Consent Decrees an Asset? Depends on Who You Ask." *AP News*, 23 May 2022, [www.apnews.com/article/covid-politics-health-racial-injustice-discrimination-532532a89e259b67f0ceb7bf333f4e26](https://www.apnews.com/article/covid-politics-health-racial-injustice-discrimination-532532a89e259b67f0ceb7bf333f4e26).

years where the city has come close to exiting oversight, but various scandals have moved the department out of compliance.

This report would be incomplete if it did not mention that court oversight of OPD has successfully led to a number of reforms related to use of force, training, personnel policies, officer supervision, and internal affairs – all of which has served to instill a greater degree of community trust in OPD. Many of these reforms are now codified within the city’s charter, and the Office of the Inspector General was created to ensure that OPD continues to uphold the NSA even after the city exits court oversight.

But if the requirements of the NSA are now a key barrier to more effective policing in Oakland – as was cited numerous times in interviews with law enforcement officials – then a full analysis of the aspects of the NSA that remain valuable and those that do not after 22 years should be undertaken. However, to do such an analysis and to recommend changes would jeopardize the city’s standing with the monitor and would likely lead to continued court oversight.

Oakland must successfully exit court oversight to undertake deeper analysis of its policing policies and governance structures. As court oversight is a judicial process, there are difficulties in having elected officials and other city leaders advocate for the city’s removal from court monitoring. As such, other key stakeholders should insert themselves into the judicial process by showing that court monitoring is no longer necessary in Oakland, and that it may be doing more harm than good to overall public safety structures.

#### **4. Transition to a police review agency that includes both community members and police representation**

Oakland’s current system of conducting internal affairs reviews is a major drag on OPD resources. With OPD burdened by a high number of civilian complaints and the Community Police Review Agency (CPRA) conducting concurrent reviews of many of the same cases, it is clear that the duplicative nature of these reviews is unnecessary. This was also the finding of the city’s Reimagining Public Safety Task Force, which recommended that most of OPD’s internal affairs should be transferred to the civilian CPRA – thereby allowing sworn officers to spend more time investigating crime rather than their peers. This recommendation never did move forward because budget was never allocated to CPRA to take on additional responsibility.

Currently, budget cuts at OPD and CPRA are limiting both groups’ abilities to uphold their missions. OPD must dedicate too many resources to internal affairs and too few to calls for service, while CPRA has a limited number of investigators and a growing case backlog. To remedy this issue, Oakland should look for another model that incorporates an ability for both police and civilian voices in internal affairs investigations. This model is employed in Seattle, where a three-pronged accountability system (including a police commission, police accountability board, and inspector general) already has a similar structure to accountability systems in Oakland. A key

difference lies in Seattle's Office of Police Accountability, which investigates complaints of officer misconduct with a combined staff of police officers and civilians. This mixed approach is also utilized locally by the Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) in its Police Civilian Review Board.

#### **5. Clarify processes to update OPD policies and move decision-making power into a single elected body that can act in the public interest more quickly**

The fragmented police accountability system in Oakland gives rise to a bias toward the status quo, where non-elected bodies have considerable power to weigh in on police policies. OPD's pursuit policy and its use of automated license plate readers are the two most prominent recent examples where non-elected boards had considerable say in police policy. The City of Oakland needs a clearer structure to make these critical decisions, one that is informed by public debate, but that gives an elected body or representative greater discretion in decision-making.

San Francisco, where the Police Commission sets policy for the police department, recently made a similar move to clarify authority over the police's use of drones, access to surveillance cameras, and its pursuit policy. Proposition E, which voters approved in March 2024, limits the amount of time a patrol officer may spend on administrative tasks to 20% of on-duty time; requires written reports for use-of-force events only when a physical injury occurred or if a firearm was removed from an officer's holster; allows body camera footage to satisfy reporting requirements; allows use of drones along with or instead of vehicular pursuits; and allows installation of surveillance and facial recognition cameras without approval from the Police Commission or Board of Supervisors.

While the San Francisco initiative was broad in its application of policy change, a more targeted ballot measure in Oakland could return some power to elected officials or the police department itself to make critical public safety decisions without the delays and bias toward status quo that non-elected commissions create.

#### **6. Reform City Charter and police accountability structures, analyzing aspects of police governance that should remain and those that should end after court oversight concludes**

A patchwork of reforms in recent decades, resulting in excessive, inefficient, and often repetitive layers of oversight, have contributed greatly to delays in adopting new practices, low officer morale, and a city that is less safe. However, in order to make effective reforms to police accountability structures, changes will need to be made to the city's charter. This report joins the chorus of many political leaders and community groups over the past few decades who have called to restructure or clarify the balance of power in Oakland. Charter reforms would need to be approached carefully to ensure that accountability is still in place in a way that is not at odds with ensuring public safety. A long-term recommendation of this report is the formation of a Charter Review Commission, with input from civil rights leaders, legal experts, law enforcement personnel, the community, and elected leaders to ensure that charter reforms maintain and restore trust in officers and the city's ability to keep Oakland safe.

## OPERATIONAL

Deploying new police strategies has historically been difficult in Oakland given the city's funding and governance challenges. With limited funding, burdensome oversight, and low officer morale, Oakland has largely stuck to the status quo in its policing methods. Instead, the city should double down on those initiatives with proven results – particularly low cost interventions that will pay themselves off over time in the form of economic activity and higher tax receipts – and look for new ways to optimize the resources that it does have.

### 7. Focus on strategic law enforcement investments with proven results

- **Technology as a force multiplier:** Oakland has made strides in implementing an automated license plate reader network over the last year and funding a coordinated downtown camera network in partnership with downtown business improvement districts and other business organizations. A next step in the use of technology is the expansion of the camera network to additional parts of the city and the use of drones as first responders. Today, OPD must prioritize violent crime in its response to calls for service due to limited staffing. As such, property crimes usually cannot receive an immediate response, and officers often arrive on scene after suspects have already fled. Use of drones and additions to the surveillance network – from more private, shared, and publicly-owned security cameras – would enable real-time situation analysis, allow for more efficient personnel responses and investigations, and act as a force multiplier at relatively low cost.
- **More investments in real-time operations center and technology personnel:** Oakland currently has an operations center where it can track 911 calls and use data and technology to support law enforcement operations. While camera networks in downtown have proven beneficial, they are not managed by OPD and their use is largely confined to investigations rather than real-time diagnosis. Police departments across the country are making much more significant investments in real-time centers – Chicago has six centers across the city, Los Angeles just unveiled three new centers, New Orleans made a multi-million dollar investment in a new real-time center in 2017, among others – to efficiently plan police response to crime, proactively position officers, and make deployment choices based on real-time information. In New Orleans, the city estimates more than 3,000 manpower hours were returned to the police department officers after public safety efforts were better coordinated by the real-time crime center.<sup>29</sup> Oakland's current deployment of automated license plate readers and other technologies is likely underutilized due to staffing issues, so any move toward inserting more technology into policing should also be accompanied by additional civilian personnel that can leverage the technology effectively.

<sup>29</sup> Taken from SafeCam Platinum FAQs. Accessed at: <https://www.safecamnola.com/faqs/>.

- **Expansion of Ceasefire and creation of a similar approach to property crime:** The Ceasefire program in Oakland has been found to be effective in reducing violent crime, with the partnership between OPD and the Department of Violence Prevention targeting case management for those citizens most likely to be either the victim or perpetrator of violent crime. By targeting a relatively small subset of the population responsible for an outsized portion of violent crime in the city, programs like Ceasefire have significant impacts on reported crime rates. For Ceasefire to continue to be effective, investments in the Department of Violence Prevention should occur simultaneously with investments in OPD. While Ceasefire is exclusively focused on violent crime, Oakland could also explore similar targeted intervention models for people or groups that are known to commit property crime.
- **Partnerships with other law enforcement agencies:** The California Highway Patrol's (CHP) work in Oakland over the last year has been heralded as a significant step forward in enforcing the law in Oakland. This report supports CHP's prolonged involvement in Oakland but recognizes that CHP will not be engaged in Oakland in perpetuity. Without dedicated funding for additional sworn officers, Oakland should look instead to partnerships with other law enforcement agencies to build out mutual aid agreements that are already in place. However, for partner agencies to effectively engage in Oakland when needed, they would require that they not be subject to the various parameters of the Negotiated Settlement Agreement and other OPD policy (e.g., CHP is not subject to OPD's pursuit policy under the current surge).

## 8. Optimize police patrol deployment with a revised beat map

In urban-serving police departments, the beat map dictates how police interact with the community and how policing resources are deployed. In Oakland, the beat map is decades old and was built around census tracts and elementary school zones – its design has little to do with the prevalence of calls for service or important commercial corridors. OPD's own 2021-2024 strategic plan highlighted the need to explore options for revamping the 35 beat, five area patrol deployment plan.<sup>30</sup>

Other departments have used beat map revisions to more effectively deploy police resources. In 2004, Atlanta's beat map was revised for the first time in 30 years, increasing the number of citywide beats from 56 to 66. The change allowed for more targeted policing in specific areas. Likewise, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department introduced a new beat policing map in 2016, with the goal of focusing resources on high-crime areas and areas with significant quality of life issues. The new map divided the 33 patrol zones into smaller beats.

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<sup>30</sup> Taken from Oakland Police Department Strategic Plan, 2021-2024. Accessed at: <https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/OPD-Strategic-Plan-Final-Armstrong-v2.pdf>.

In Oakland, sub-dividing the map and adding beats is not realistic given budget constraints. However, beats could be enlarged in those areas that experience less crime while smaller coverage areas would be beneficial for high-crime neighborhoods and specific commercial corridors. The exercise of re-mapping beats in Oakland could also be an opportunity for important community input that builds trust with OPD.

## PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNITY

Much of the progress made in Oakland on crime in 2024 is attributable to the city accepting assistance from outside agencies and the private sector. For example, the California Highway Patrol surge and the city's ALPR camera network came about because of state support. Locally, the private sector has made investments in downtown safety, and Kaiser Permanente provided a grant to the Department of Violence Prevention to support the Ceasefire program. These types of investments are necessary in Oakland given the city's required fiscal restraint, but direct investment in public safety should not be expected in perpetuity. Private dollars and other partnerships should, though, be used strategically to pilot innovative programs, build community trust with OPD, and to ensure that long-term determinants of public safety are addressed.

### 9. Grow the Oakland Police Foundation

Multiple cities across the U.S. have police foundations – 501c3s that raise private funds for application to public safety efforts – including Oakland. Many of these foundations have focused on the introduction of additional surveillance technologies, improving officer wellness and training, youth diversion programs, violence intervention programs, and community building events. These foundations provide a way for private dollars to be aggregated to address areas of need in partnership with the local police department.

Oakland's police foundation relies on a relatively small endowment of \$1.5 million, allowing it to invest approximately \$100,000 annually on equipment, training, and community events. In comparison, the police foundations in New Orleans, Detroit, and Los Angeles are each investing between \$2 million and \$3 million annually into the police department and the community. While the private sector has been very active in its focus on public safety in Oakland in the last few years, a re-energized Oakland Police Foundation could provide a more sustainable way for the private sector, OPD, and the community to build partnerships and make strategic investments in near-term (e.g., technology and training) and long-term solutions (e.g., youth programming) for public safety.

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## 10. Build stronger relationships with the private and philanthropic sectors to make long-term investments in economic opportunity and crime prevention programs

The recommendations made thus far in this report focus on proactive policing, crime deterrence, and law enforcement. However, they are unlikely to address any of the myriad root causes of crime within Oakland. To do so, Oakland must do more to attract private and philanthropic dollars to place-based strategies that prioritize economic mobility for historically underinvested communities. In East Oakland, community groups have created the 40x40 Initiative and the Rise East Plan to address the systemic issues of racism and displacement in their East Oakland community. Through philanthropic support, the program has received \$100 million over the next five years to invest in brick and mortar improvements to the area – including adding retail, grocery stores, affordable housing, a youth wellness facility, and a job training center for formerly incarcerated individuals. More of this type of investment is needed across Oakland.

The City of Chicago is taking a similar approach but is explicitly tying place-based investments back to public safety through its People's Plan for Community Safety. The city is piloting the place-based components of its plan within a handful of community areas that are most in need of intervention, which includes sustained engagement with the education system, expanded use of job training programs and placement upon completion, and increased access to safe housing for those burdened by violence. The Chicago Mayor's Office of Community Safety is working collaboratively with business leaders, philanthropies, labor representatives, and across city government to ensure that all stakeholders are bought into the process so that it can be rolled out in additional neighborhoods.

In Oakland, additional formal collaboration with the employer community – both large and small – could be beneficial on multiple fronts. First, given the importance of business investments to Oakland's budget and the city's overall vibrancy, closer ties to city leadership could allow the employer community to provide real-time feedback on safety initiatives in Oakland. Second, public-private partnerships will continue to be important as Oakland makes progress on public safety. Partnerships with businesses can extend to longer-term investments, such as job training programs in partnership with Oakland's businesses that can have long-term effects on public safety in the city.



# Views on Public Safety in Oakland and its Economic Impacts

Key Findings of an East Bay Voter Survey  
Conducted February 11-16, 2025




FM3

RESEARCH

OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY

320-1196

## Survey Methodology

Dates	February 11-16, 2025
Survey Type	Online Survey
Research Population	Voters
Total Interviews	1,229 Interviews, 818 Among Oakland Voters and 411 Among Voters in Alameda, Berkeley, Emeryville, San Leandro, Walnut Creek, Orinda, Lafayette, Moraga, Hayward, Piedmont
Margin of Sampling Error	(Full Sample) ±2.8% at the 95% Confidence Level (Oakland) ±3.5% at the 95% Confidence Level (Surrounding Communities) ±4.9% at the 95% Confidence Level
Contact Methods	<div><div> Email Invitations</div><div> Text Invitations</div></div>
Data Collection Mode	<div><div> Online Interviews</div></div>

FM3

RESEARCH

(Note: Not All Results Will Sum to 100% Due to Rounding)

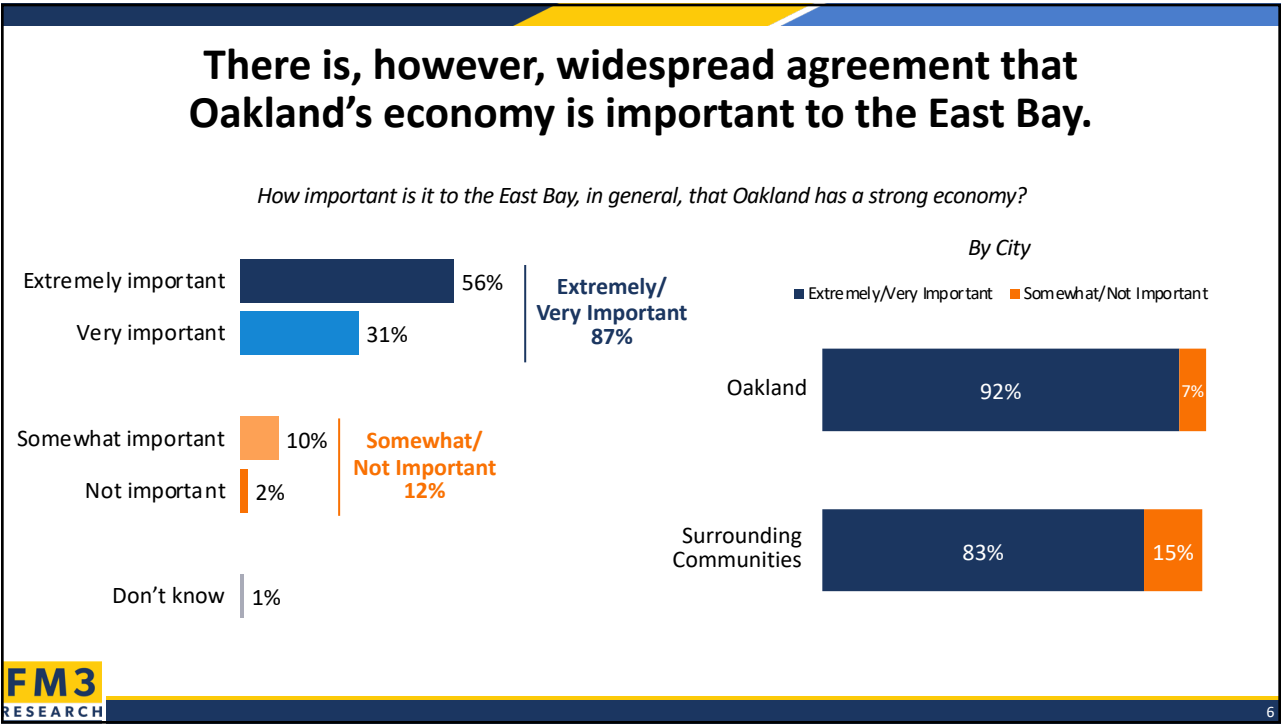
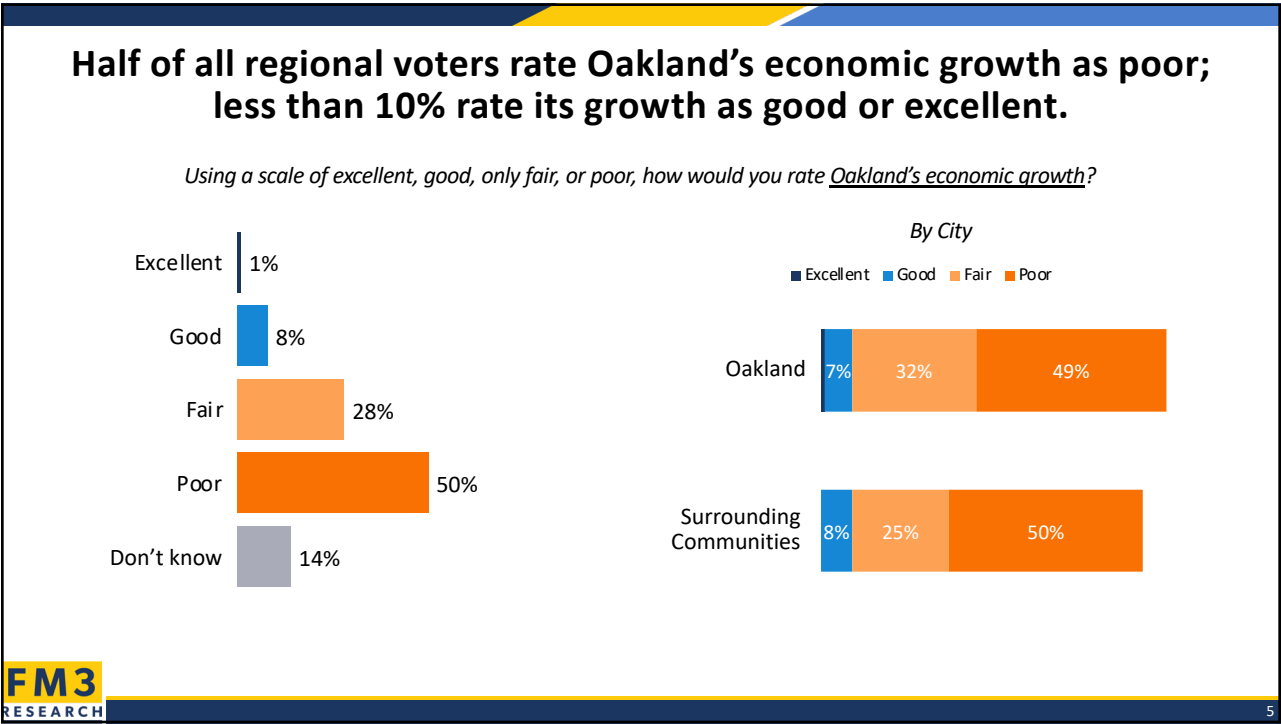
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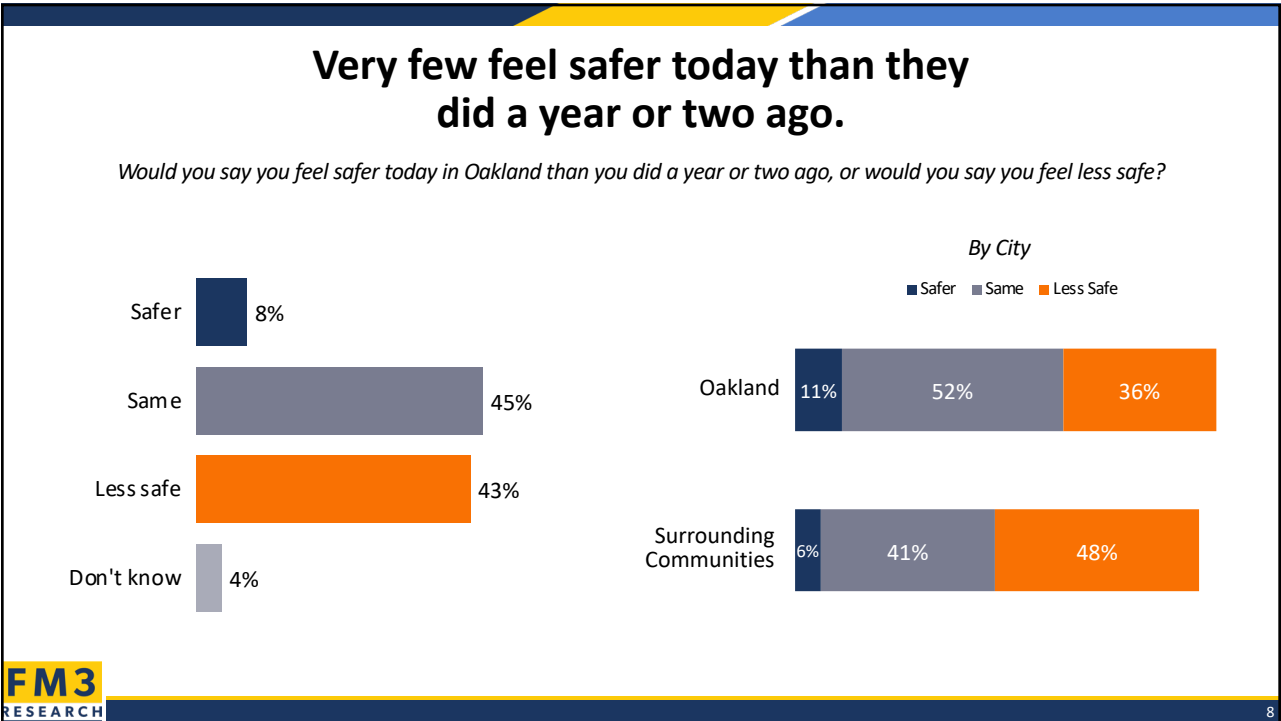
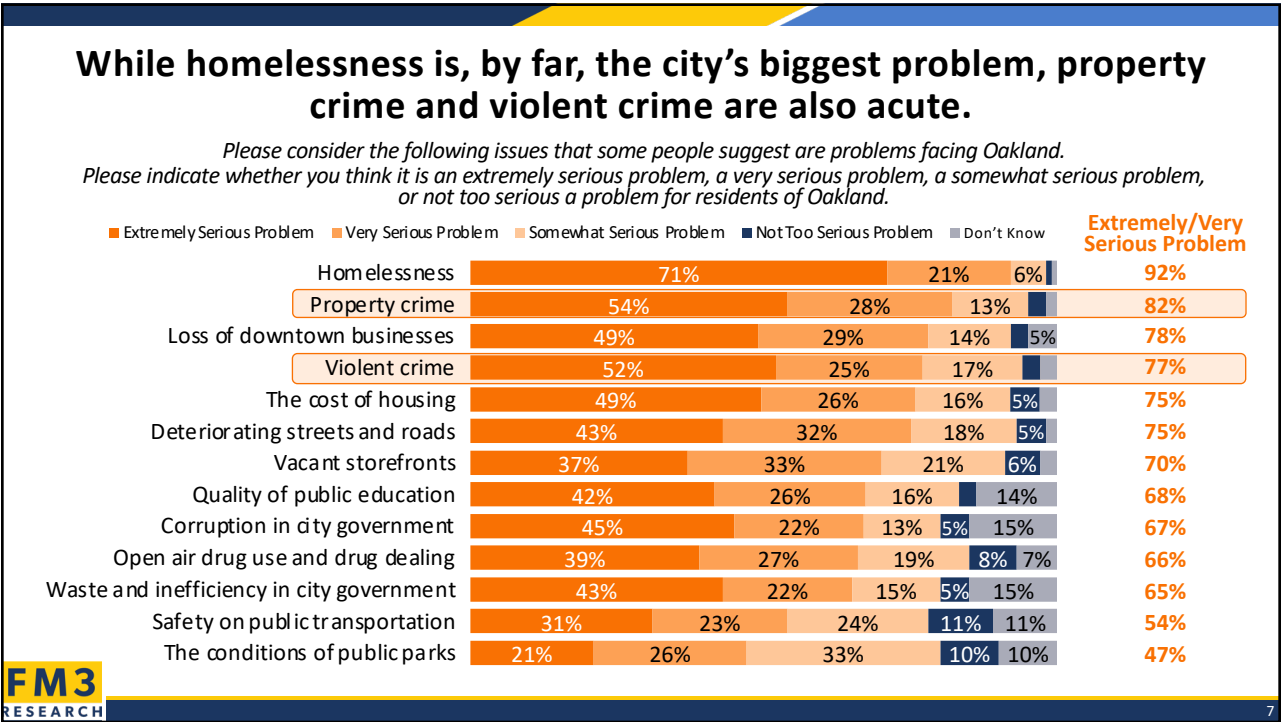


## Survey Sections

1. Issue Context and Views on Safety
2. Public Safety & Economic Behaviors
3. Views on Public Safety Interventions

## Issue Context and Views on Safety

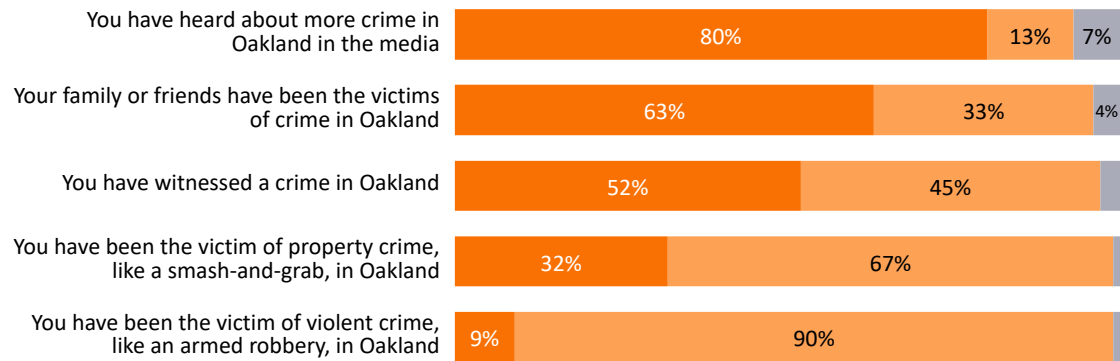




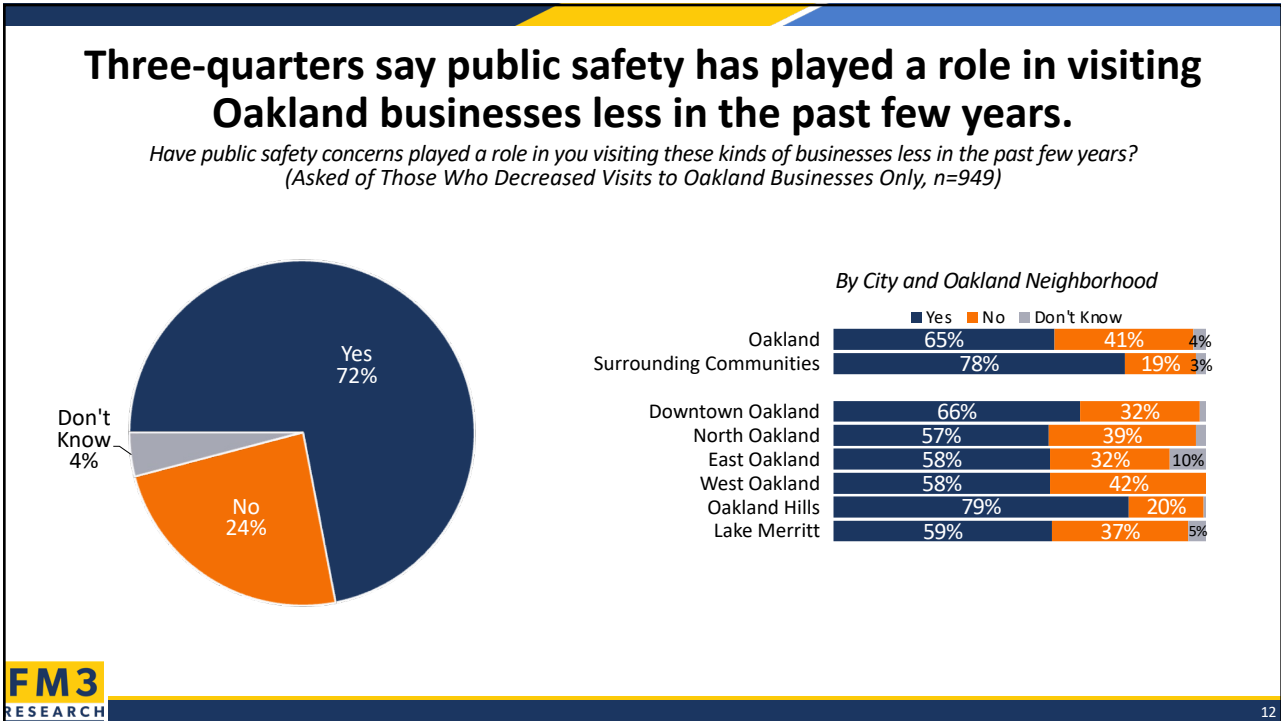
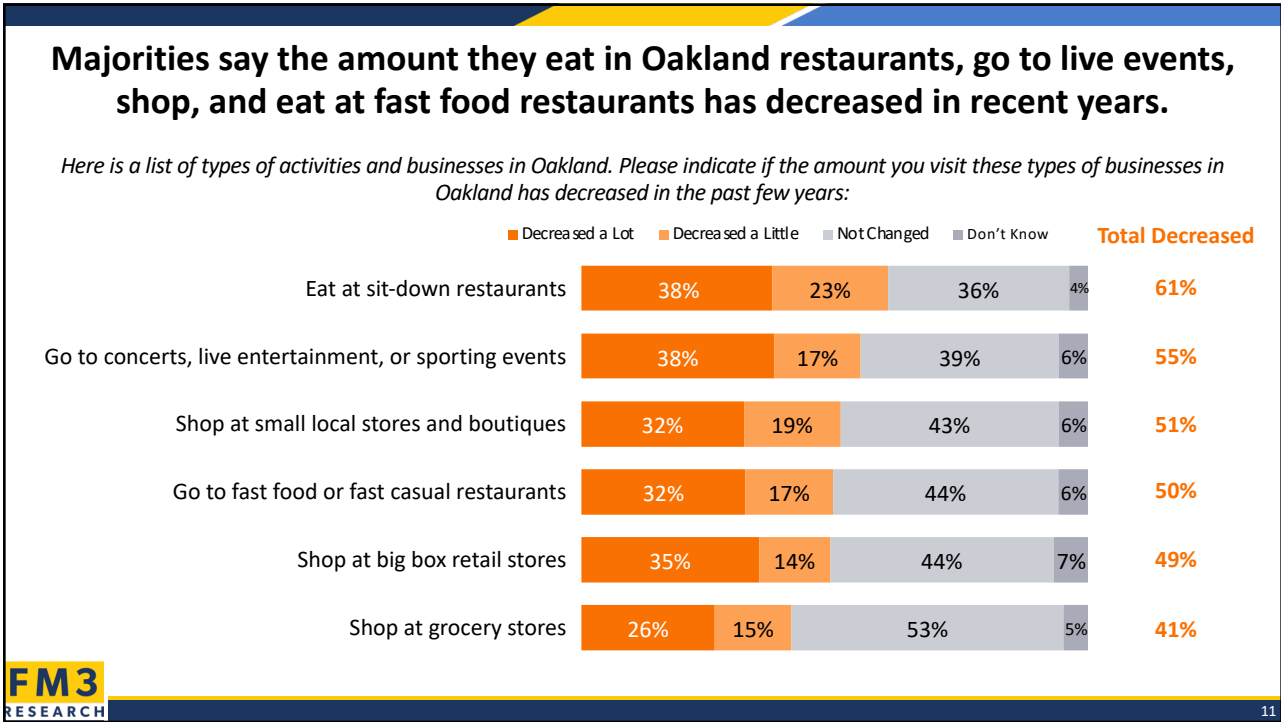
Majority of voters know someone who has been a victim of a crime, and one-third have been a victim of property crime.

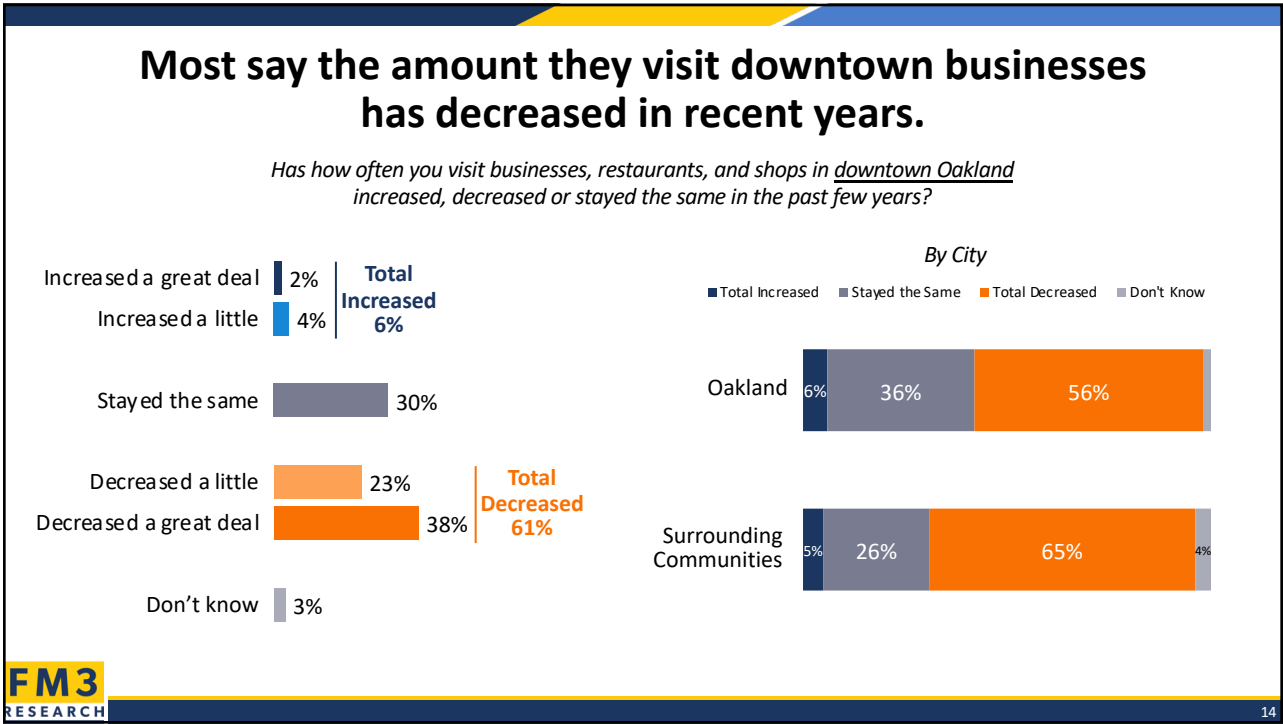
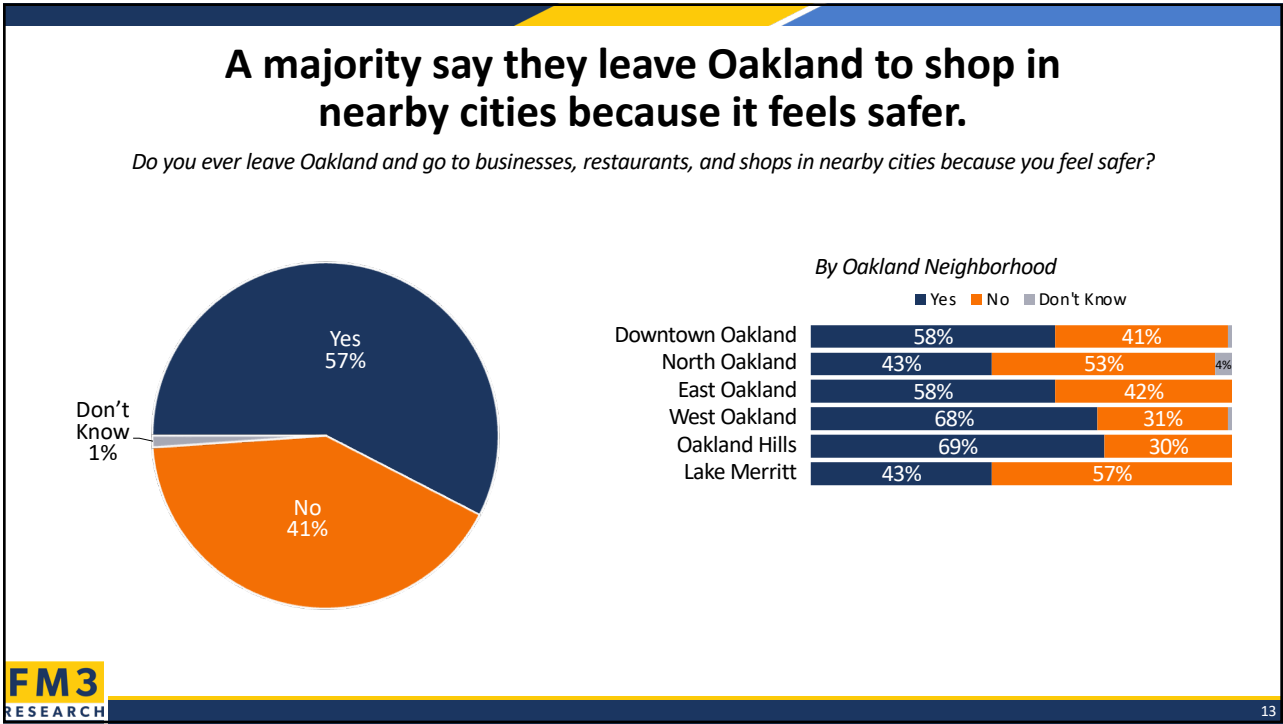
Here is a list of experiences people may have had in Oakland in the past few years. Please indicate if you have had this experience or not in the past few years.

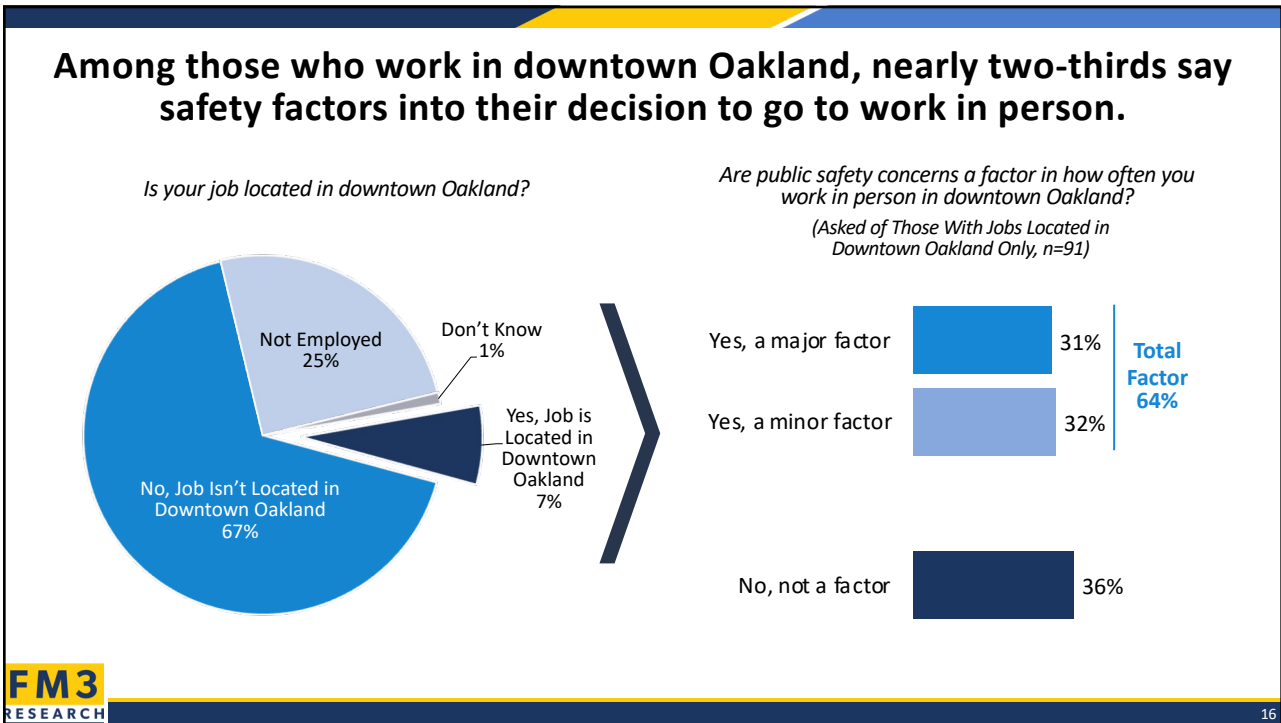
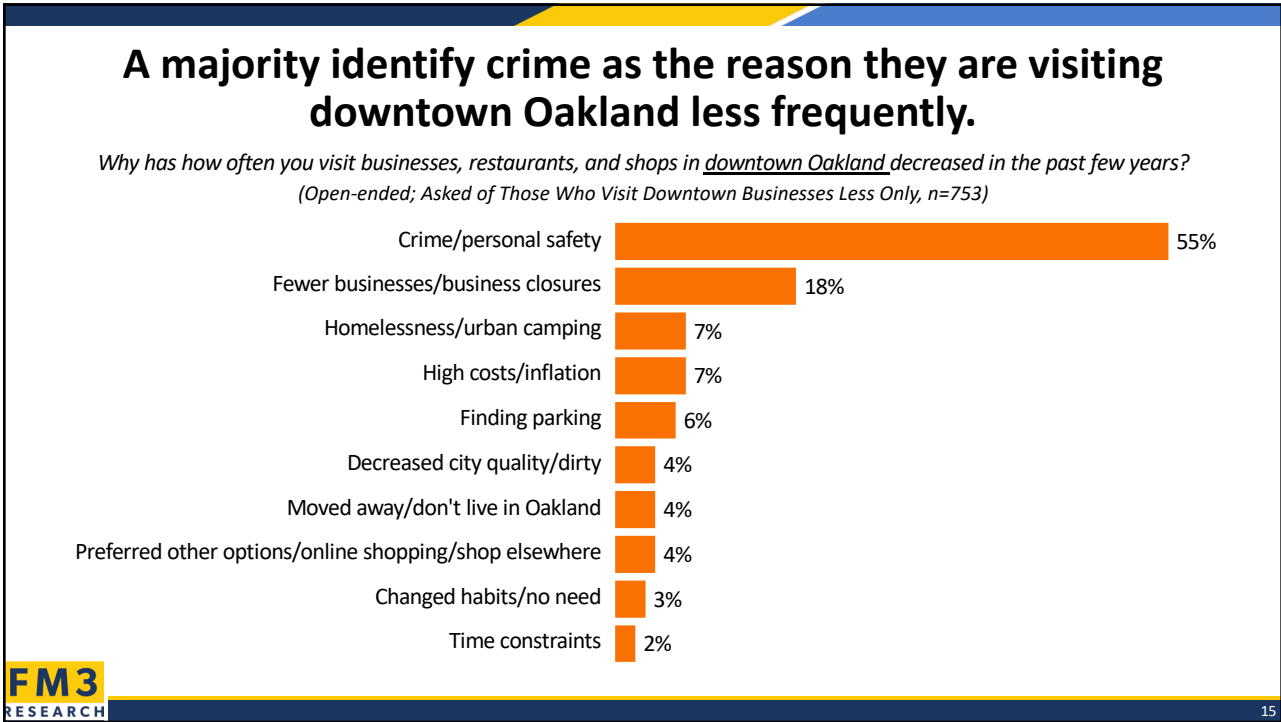
Yes, Experienced    No, Did Not Experience    Don't Know

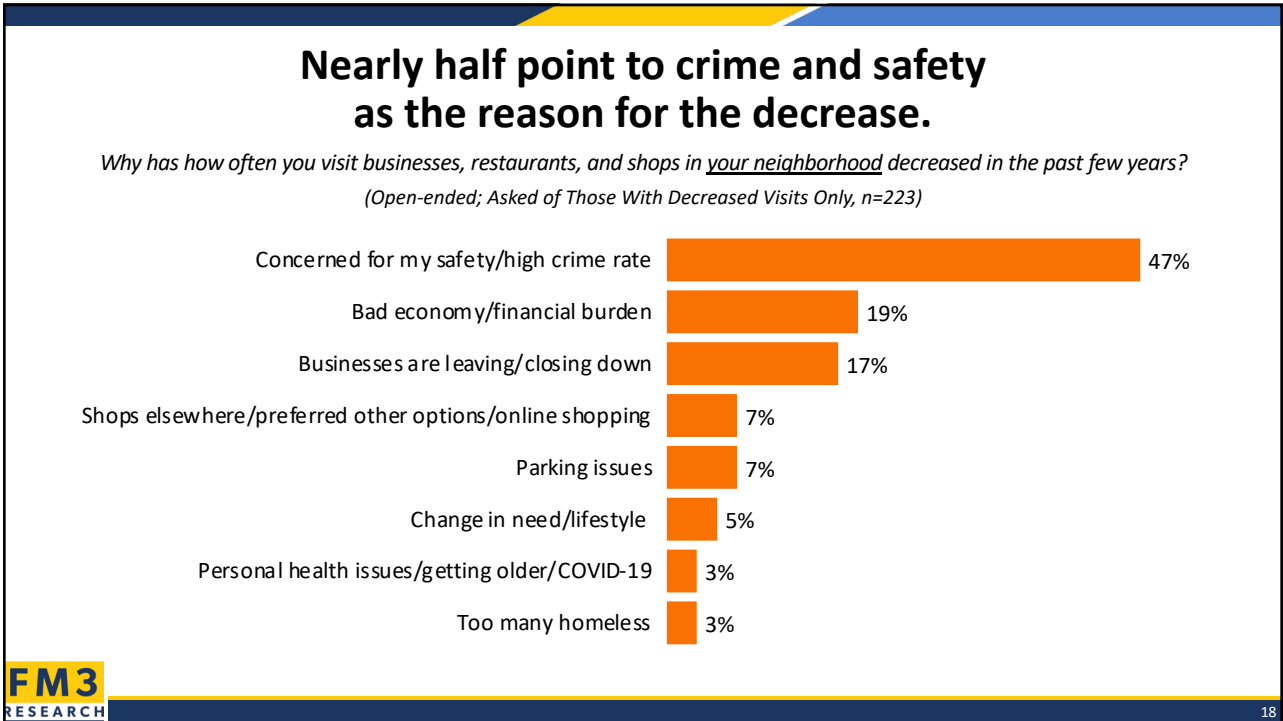
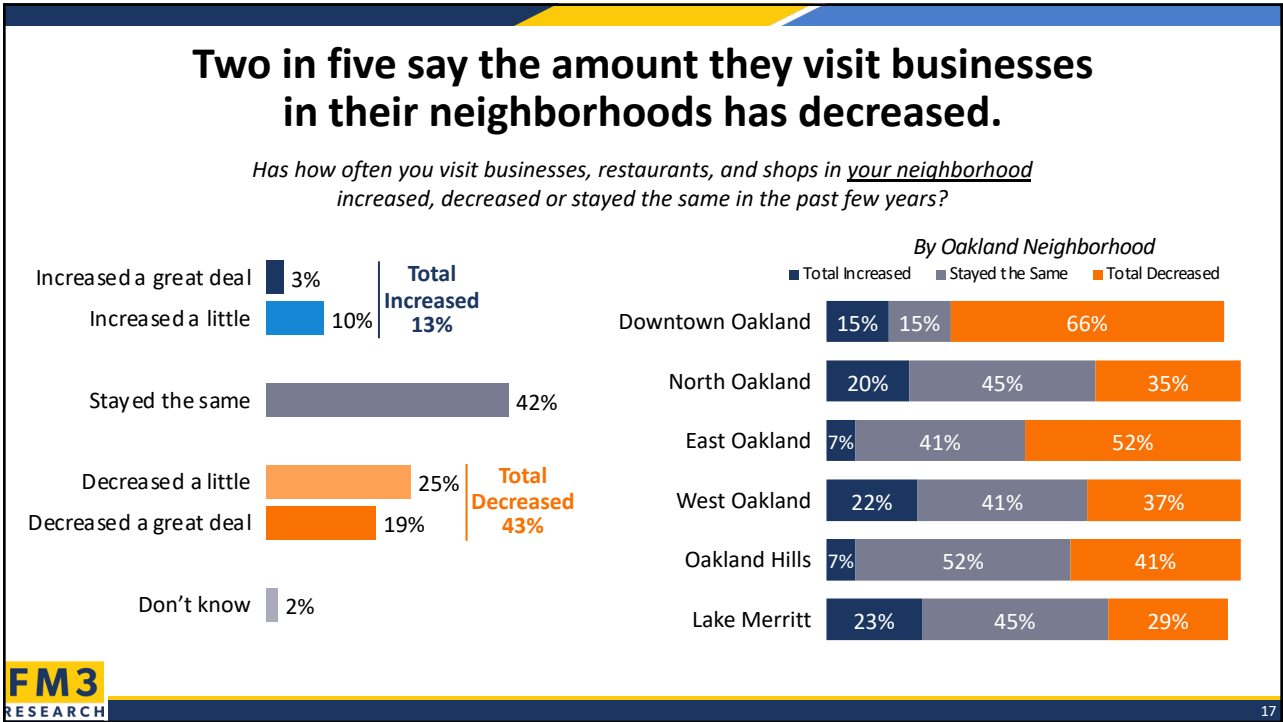


Public Safety & Economic Behaviors in Oakland











# Views on Public Safety Interventions

