



ISSUE BRIEF | AFPI—California

EMPHASIZING PUBLIC SAFETY FOR ALL CALIFORNIA FAMILIES

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The rule of law serves as a foundational pillar of our Republic. For civil society to flourish, citizens must believe that laws will be fairly applied and equally enforced. Strengthening the fabric of justice depends on a robust social contract among American communities, law enforcement, and the criminal justice system. Citizens must respect the law. Law enforcement officers must execute their duties fairly. And the criminal justice system must hold convicted offenders accountable. A nation—or a state—that has lost respect for the rule of law falls victim to chaos.

Unfortunately, for more than a decade, California has turned public safety and criminal justice on its head. The California chapter of the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) is committed to making streets safe again for California families—and most Californians agree about the roadmap ahead: To restore public safety, California must strengthen its laws and appropriately enforce them, while bolstering support for law enforcement.

In 2011, the state legislature passed [AB 109](#), commonly known as “prison realignment,” in response to federal courts ordering the state to reduce its prison population. The law required those convicted of “low-level felonies” to be sent to county jails and rehabilitation programs under local supervision rather than to state prisons. An Alameda County [implementation plan](#) categorized these felonies as “non-violent, non-serious, non-high-risk sex offenses” ([Community Corrections Partnership Alameda County, 2011](#)).

As a (perhaps) unintended consequence, this law permitted dangerous felons, whose convictions related to drug and property crimes, which previously would have made them eligible for state prison, to be put on probation, sometimes with just a short county jail sentence. Also, no punishments were increased for crimes committed while on probation. Prop 47, which voters passed in 2014 under the euphemism of “sentencing reform,” meant that thousands of hardened criminals would be released or never serve prison time, leading to a spike not only in property and drug-related crimes but also in violent crimes.



Simultaneously, several high-profile progressive district attorneys steadfastly refuse to prosecute what they perceive to be “non-violent” crimes, and many of our country’s largest cities actively resisted during the previous presidential administration several federal initiatives to combat crime. Some local lawmakers have vehemently resisted cooperating with federal criminal enforcement initiatives, even as violent criminals and gangs jeopardize the safety of California neighborhoods and the lives of California’s law enforcement officers.

Rising crime rates and diminished support for law enforcement officers have contributed to a deterioration of the legal system and a lack of respect for enforcing laws fairly and consistently. Restoring the rule of law requires a concerted effort to stop the decriminalization of socially harmful activities at the state and federal levels. It also requires a willingness to aggressively enforce the laws currently on the books and on which society depends to ensure safe communities, high quality of life, and respect for law and order. Americans deserve to live in safe communities where the rule of law is respected and promoted.

State residents must be made explicitly aware of what Prop 47 has wrought. AFPI’s polling indicates that many Californians are aware of the increase in crime, either through direct experience or a degree of separation. The California chapter of AFPI will promote educational campaigns showing explicit connections between the early release from prison of thousands of convicted felons over the last decade since the passage of Prop 47 and the corresponding rise in crime. The state must ensure that district attorneys fully prosecute crimes and that their constituents know if their elected district attorneys prioritize criminals over victims through misguided use of prosecutorial discretion.

Restoring state prison sentences for those convicted of so-called “non-violent, non-serious, non-high-risk sex offenses” ([Community Corrections Partnership Alameda County, 2011](#)), who were diverted to county jails or diversion programs under AB 109, would go a long way toward ensuring that dangerous criminals remain off our streets. Reinstating stiffer penalties for drug possession would also give prosecutors a means to prosecute cartels and organized crime units for trafficking. It would also give them a way to convict these individuals of crimes that require a lower burden of proof than more serious crimes.

An RMG Research poll shows that Californians widely agree on the top issues contributing to the state’s crime wave: 70 percent indicated drug use and drug trafficking, 61 percent said homelessness, and 53 percent identified mental health. When asked about their preferences for policy solutions, 66 percent of Californians said the number of police should be increased rather than the police being defunded, while 53 percent agree that prosecutors let criminals off too easily. Poll respondents indicated “homelessness” as a top-level concern, including nearly a quarter of Hispanic Californians—more than any



other group. Tellingly, 61 percent of Californians said that homelessness has played a significant role in increasing crime (RMG Research, Inc., 2023).

THE FACTS

- Major California cities have seen double-digit crime spikes. For example, in 2022, law enforcement agencies statewide [seized](#) 28,765 pounds of fentanyl, a 594 percent increase from 2021.
- The San Francisco Police Department [reports](#) that between 2020 and 2021, homicide arrests were up 16.7 percent, larceny theft arrests up 24.4 percent, and sex trafficking arrests up 28 percent (note that this was the first year progressive district attorney Chesa Boudin took office).
- In [Los Angeles](#), homicides in 2021 were at their highest point in more than a decade, 50 percent higher than in 2019. Similarly, in 2022, robberies involving firearms were up 57 percent from 2020 and up 60 percent from 2019—with hundreds more incidents so far this year than last.
- A May 2023 poll found that 55 percent of respondents statewide say crime is causing businesses to leave the state. And 70 percent of respondents statewide believe drugs are playing a significant role in increased crime. This includes 73 percent of Hispanics, 72 percent of independents, and 76 percent of those who lean Democrat.

([Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 2022](#); [Rector, Oreskes and Wick, 2022](#); RMG Research, Inc., 2023; [San Francisco Police Department, \(n.d.\)](#).)

IN CALIFORNIA, WE SUPPORT POLICIES THAT:

- Combat drug trafficking to reduce organized crime and drug abuse.
- Reverse Proposition 47 and implement strong sentencing to deter crime and make California cities safe and business-friendly.
- Address and reduce homelessness to improve public safety and the livelihoods of all Californians.
- Combat and prosecute human trafficking in California to protect the most vulnerable in society, along with their liberty.
- Eliminate and ban sanctuary state and city laws to make communities safe and keep foreign criminals out of California.
- Protect and respect California law enforcement in order to build a culture of trust between officers and residents.



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