

A Penta White Paper

Penta Policy Insiders

California Insights Review Series

Crime and Public Safety

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Executive summary

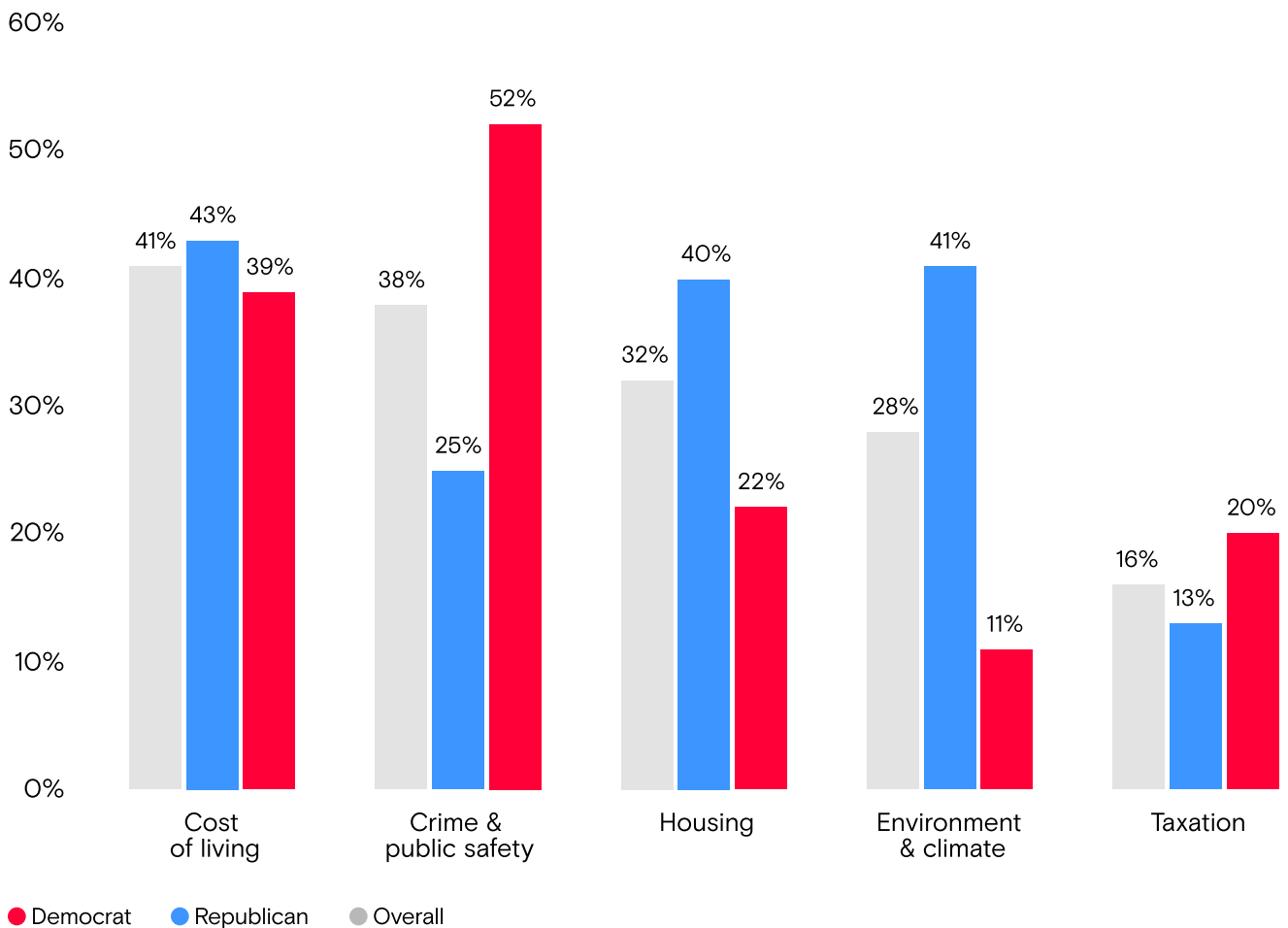
We are pleased to share our findings in the California Insights Review for 2023. From July to October 2023, we surveyed over 300 policymakers in the state about their policy priorities and the top issues facing their communities.

Cost of living is the top concern for California policymakers in 2023, with over 40 percent of policy staff identifying the lack of affordability in the state as a major issue. Additionally, this concern is cited as an underlying contributor to several of the other main priorities for California’s policy leaders – housing, crime and public safety, and taxation. Both parties highlight the inability of many working families to afford rent or purchase a home. This, in turn, can exacerbate homelessness and its perceived connection to increased criminal activity. These themes, according to policymakers, all tie back to Californians struggling with the rising cost of living and needs to be addressed urgently.

This report is the third in a series that examines four of California policymakers’ top priorities, which include (i) cost of living and housing (ii) crime and public safety (iii) taxation and (iv) environment and climate.

Top policy priorities in California

Multiple selections permitted



California deep dive

Crime and public safety

Crime and public safety are key issues for both California policymakers and their constituents. Policy leaders identify several focal areas under the realm of public safety including retail theft, assault, and criminal justice reform.



It's the number one reported issue by our constituents....just rampant crime....theft, assault, all seem to be more prevalent and in people's faces than they ever used to be.

Capitol Director, California State Senate, R



[Crime] is the issue that every single one of the residents is concerned about in my community. And that's followed closely by the connection sometimes perceived between homelessness and crime. **So public safety is the utmost number one right now.** And the state is failing miserably.

Councilmember, California State Municipality, D



"Do you feel like you can go for a walk at 8:00 at night in your neighborhood?... Do you have to have your door locked?... do you feel like you need a chain on your door, or do you need more cameras around your house?.... **how safe do you feel?.... I feel there's a big push for public safety.**

Legislative Director, California State Assembly, R

Criminal justice reform



About 10 years ago now, we started a reformation of our criminal justice system. And for the most part, most categories of crime are down or flat in that time period. the one exception to that that I've seen a dramatic uptick is actual retail crime. So the governor sponsored a task force, he's given some significant amount of money to tackling retail crime. And I think that's one of those things that has to be done if only for keeping businesses happy in the environment in which they're operating in California.

Chief of Staff, California State Senate, D



"State laws, **state court decisions have decriminalized much of criminal behavior without any consequences. So our police can arrest someone, and they can be back on the streets before the police finish their report.** We've seen this in a number of communities, including my community with the major smash-and-grab robberies, where since if they just smash and take merchandise, it's not considered violent. Hence, they don't get any jail time. So **there are no consequences for behavior. There have to be consequences, that does not mean I want everyone in jail.**

Councilmember, California State Municipality , D



For a long time, the state was nothing but Correction and almost no Rehabilitation. They did not have any rehabilitation programs in prison. But **now we're seeing a complete swing where we're focusing 100% on rehabilitation and none of the correction.** And that's equally wrong. So **we would like to see more of a balance where we are treating people humanely. We are punishing, we are keeping them locked up as a punishment for what they did. But we're also investing in the rehabilitation for those who can be rehabilitated...**you can't force someone to be rehabilitated but we also don't believe that you should be the dictator of who qualifies or who doesn't

Capitol Director, California State Senate, R

Spotlight on retail theft

One particular concern for policymakers is the prevalence of retail theft in the state. Not only are many physical stores experiencing an uptick in theft, but some policymakers believe recent legislation has made it even easier for individuals to get away with such crimes.



We're closing these stores because we can't staff them, the staff doesn't feel safe, or everything has had to be put behind lock and key... So for the casual shopper, if you're coming in to buy something, you're going to go, "I can't wait around for an employee to maybe come and unlock this cabinet for me. I'll go buy it online.... And these are pretty serious implications, not just about stores closing and people being laid off, but about stores, particularly - in what might be deemed higher crime areas, lower-income areas - not having services.

Finance manager, Executive, D



Too many laws, especially in California too, decrease the penalties for crimes and all the stuff that goes on, and it's absolutely ridiculous. **In California now you can steal up to \$950 a day where it used to be \$400 a day. It was a felony back then. And now it's \$950 a day and it's misdemeanor. And stores don't even call the cops anymore...**a cop picks them up, takes them, books them, [and] they're out in 24 hours. Criminals know they can steal. \$950 a day in the state of California and penalty systems, it's not going to do a damn thing.

Councilmember, California State Municipality, I

Conclusion

Addressing crime and safety is a crucial concern for California policymakers, with many acknowledging it as a top priority for the constituents they represent. Policy leaders highlight various aspects within the domain of public safety such as retail theft and criminal justice reform.



About Penta Policy Insiders

Penta Policy Insiders provides direct feedback from policymakers to government relations professionals, improving advocates' ability to understand, validate, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their engagement.

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