Law Enforcement Staffing in California
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This fact sheet analyzes the most recent data on law enforcement staffing from 2019, prior to the pandemic.

-Californians share national concerns about community-police relationships.
Following a year of mass protests against racial injustice and police brutality, community-police interactions continue to be a focus of national attention, and calls to reexamine police funding and practices have become common. According to the September 2020 PPIC Statewide Survey, 39% of Californians think the police in their community treat all racial and ethnic groups fairly only some of the time or almost never, an increase of 10 percentage points from May 2019. Only 19% of African Americans say police treat all racial and ethnic groups fairly almost always or most of the time, far lower than among Asian Americans (44%), Latinos (56%), and whites (58%).

-Law enforcement funding mainly comes from local sources.
California cities spent more than $12.4 billion on policing in the 2017–18 fiscal year, counties spent $6.2 billion, and the state spent $2.5 billion on the California Highway Patrol (CHP). While police protection constitutes a very small percentage (less than 1%) of direct expenditures by the state, it accounts for a much larger portion of annual city and county budgets. Police funding is typically the largest spending area for cities, though substantial variation across communities exists. City and county police protection is funded by property, business, and sales taxes; federal and state grants; local fees and fines; and voter-approved increases in general and special sales taxes.

-Local budget cuts may affect future staffing levels.
City and county budgets will most likely be significantly affected by the current recession, which could either slow new hiring or lead to cuts in staffing. During the Great Recession, the state lost almost 4,000 sworn staff and 3,000 civilian staff between 2008 and 2011—declines of 5% and 7%, respectively. Staffing levels never fully rebounded, with nearly 2,000 sworn staff and over 2,300 civilian staff added since 2011.

-Identifying cost-effective ways to prevent crime is vital.
Recent research shows that increased police staffing can help prevent crime: each additional officer reduces crime by 1.3 violent crimes and 4.2 property crimes per year, primarily through deterrence. Research also estimates that the crime-reducing benefits of hiring an additional police officer exceed $300,000 per year, much more than the annual cost of an additional officer. However, the pandemic’s effect on government budgets and the growing concern about police practices and staffing could push communities toward other crime prevention programs and strategies that may also prove cost-effective. Possible approaches include interventions for targeted groups, such as at-risk youth and those with behavioral and substance use challenges.

-Almost half of California’s law enforcement officers work for municipal police departments.
In 2019 there were more than 121,000 full-time law enforcement employees in California; roughly 79,550 were sworn law enforcement officers (with full arrest powers) and about 41,600 were civilian staff. Of all sworn officers, about 48% were municipal police officers, 39% were county sheriff officers, and 9% were with the CHP. About 4% were employed by other agencies, such as university, port, and transportation districts and the State Department of Parks and Recreation.

-Sworn law enforcement staff predominantly work as patrol officers, and most are male.
Of the roughly 79,550 sworn officers in 2019, there were about 68,200 patrol officers (“beat cops”) and over 11,350 officers working in county jails. Of all sworn officers, 68,870 (or 87%) were male. In 2019, there were almost 31,000 civilian staff in municipal police departments, CHP, and other non-jail settings, and 10,600 civilian staff in jails. Of the roughly 41,600 civilian staff, only 15,725 (or 38%) were male.
California’s law enforcement officer staffing did not fully rebound after the Great Recession


California has about as many officers per 100,000 residents as the nation does overall


Notes: The rate for the District of Columbia is not included in this figure (and is not factored into the US-wide rate of officers per 100,000 residents). Because these rates are based on officer and total population counts only from agencies that reported to the FBI, they may not match other sources.


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