



Law Enforcement Staffing in California

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Law enforcement funding mainly comes from local sources.

- ▶ California cities spent more than \$14.8 billion on policing in the 2021–22 fiscal year, while counties spent \$7.5 billion and the state spent \$2.8 billion on the California Highway Patrol (CHP).
- ▶ Police funding is typically the largest spending area for cities, accounting for over 15% of all city spending statewide; fire services are the next largest category of spending (6.5%). However, there is substantial variation across communities.
- ▶ City and county police protection is funded by property, business, and sales taxes; federal and state grants; local fees and fines; and voter-approved general and special sales taxes.

Almost half of California's law enforcement officers work for municipal police departments.

- ▶ In 2022 there were 116,000 full-time law enforcement employees in California; roughly 76,100 were sworn law enforcement officers (with full arrest powers) and about 40,000 were civilian staff.
- ▶ Of all sworn officers, about 49% were municipal police officers, while 39% were county sheriff deputies and 9% worked for the CHP. About 4% were employed by other agencies, such as university, port, and transportation districts and the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

Staffing levels continued to drop in 2022.

- ▶ From 2021 to 2022, the state lost about 1,500 sworn staff and about 100 civilian staff. The decline from 2020 to 2021 was larger—2,100 sworn and 1,100 civilian staff. Over the past two years, staffing levels are down by 4.5% and 3%, respectively.
- ▶ The number of patrol officers per 100,000 is at its lowest point since at least 1991, while the total number of sworn officers per 100,000 residents is at the lowest level since 1994. The steepest declines occurred during the 2007–2009 Great Recession, and levels have not recovered since.
- ▶ Staffing losses are unevenly distributed across law enforcement agencies. Of the 460 agencies that reported staffing numbers in both 2021 and 2022, 203 (44.1%) reported fewer sworn officers, 72 (15.7%) reported no change, and 185 (40.2%) reported more officers in 2022 than 2021.
- ▶ Looking at 2018, the most recent year for reliable data for state and national comparisons, California had fewer officers per 100,000 residents (200) than the nation overall (241)—but more than two neighboring states, Oregon (160) and Arizona (192).

Sworn law enforcement staff predominantly work as patrol officers, and most are male.

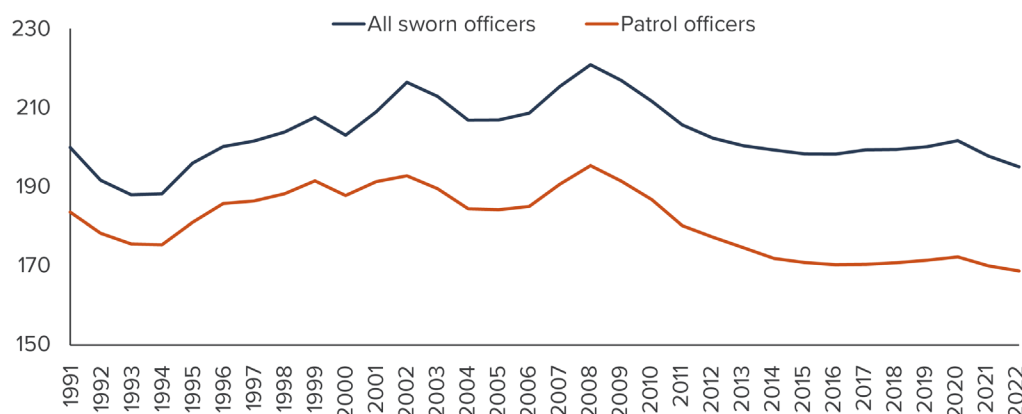
- ▶ Of the roughly 76,100 sworn officers in 2022, about 65,860 were patrol officers and over 10,260 worked in county jails. Of all sworn officers, 65,379 (or 86%) were male.
- ▶ In 2022, there were roughly 29,830 civilian staff in municipal police departments, CHP, and other non-jail settings, and 10,030 civilian staff in jails. Of all civilian staff, 15,134 (or 38%) were male.

Views of local law enforcement have changed over time and differ across racial/ethnic groups.

- ▶ According to the September 2023 PPIC Statewide Survey, half of Californians rate police protection in their local area as either good or excellent. Positive ratings have declined significantly over the past decade: in February 2011, 78% rated local police protection as either good or excellent. This decline has coincided with decreases in the number of officers but dipped further since 2020.
- ▶ Only 36% of Black Californians rate police protection in their area as either good or excellent, compared to 49% of Asian Americans, 44% of Latinos, and 55% of white Californians.
- ▶ According to the February 2022 PPIC Statewide Survey, only 37% of Black Californians think the police treat all racial and ethnic groups fairly most of the time or almost always, compared to majorities of Asian American (56%), Latino (52%), and white (62%) Californians.

The number of patrol officers per 100,000 residents has fallen below 1991 levels

Officers per 100,000 residents

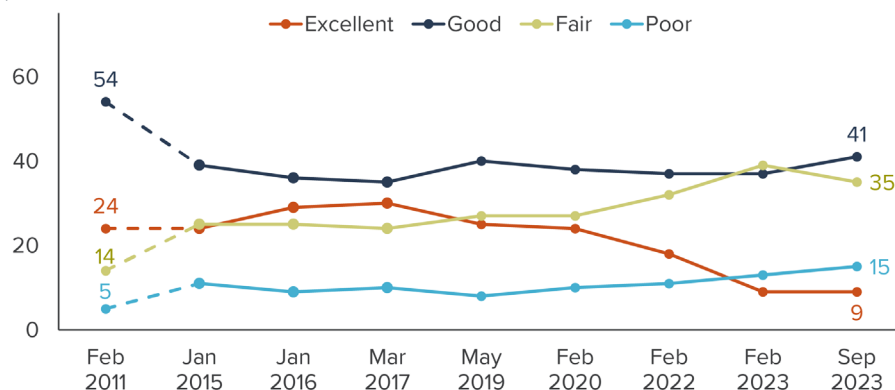


Source: Authors' calculation based on California Department of Justice's Law Enforcement Personnel Survey and California Department of Finance Population Data, 1991–2022.

Notes: The category of patrol officers includes all sworn law enforcement personnel who are not reported as jail employees. A majority of these officers are patrolling highways and neighborhoods, but the category does also include police chiefs, supervisors, and detectives. Data unavailable before 1991.

Most positive ratings of local police protection have declined significantly

Percent (all adults)



Source: PPIC Statewide Surveys, 2011–2023.

Notes: The February 2011 and September 2023 surveys ask: "Now please indicate how you would rate some of the public services in your local area. For each one, please indicate if you think they are excellent, good, fair, or poor. Police protection:" Other surveys ask: "How would you rate the job your local police are doing in controlling crime in your community: excellent, good, fair, or poor?" Dashed line segment signifies that survey question was not asked between February 2011 and January 2015.

Identifying equitable, cost-effective ways to prevent crime is vital.

- ▶ Recent research finds that increased police staffing can help prevent crime: each additional officer results in 1.3 fewer violent crimes and 4.2 fewer property crimes per year, primarily through deterrence. Research also estimates that the crime-reducing benefits of hiring an additional police officer exceed the annual cost.
- ▶ While research finds that increased staffing results in a greater reduction in homicides of Black victims than white victims, it also finds increases in arrests for lower-level offenses like liquor violations and disorderly conduct that disproportionately involve Black residents.
- ▶ Concerns about police practices and staffing could prompt communities to explore other programs and strategies that may also prove cost-effective. [Possible approaches](#) include preventive interventions among at-risk youth, people with behavioral and substance use challenges, and other targeted groups.

Sources: Chalfin and McCrary, "Are US Cities Underpoliced? Theory and Evidence," *Review of Economics and Statistics* (March 2018). Chalfin, Aaron, Benjamin Hansen, Emily K. Weisburst, and Morgan C. Williams Jr., "Police Force Size and Civilian Race," *American Economic Review: Insights*, 4 (2): 139–58. Heaton, "Hidden in Plain Sight" (RAND Corporation, 2010). Mello, "More COPS, Less Crime," *Journal of Public Economics* (April 2019). California Legislative Analyst's Office, *California's Criminal Justice System: A Primer* (2013). California Department of Justice's Law Enforcement Personnel Survey, 1991–2022. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies*, 2018. California Controllers Office, *County and City Financial Reports*, 2021–22. PPIC Statewide Surveys, 2011–2023.