



Opinion Poll

Brick-and-mortar small businesses share views
on public safety in their communities

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Introduction

As narratives and concerns about national crime persist, it's important to take the perspectives of America's entrepreneurs into account. Across the country, headlines report stories of break-ins and smash-and-grab thefts at retail stores with an implication that these crimes are part of a broader issue impacting the small business community. Concurrently, many legislators are adopting a tough-on-crime approach as they seek to reverse criminal justice reforms that gained traction in the Black Lives Matter movement. In upcoming elections, voters will be choosing district attorneys and other decision-makers that will decide the fate of criminal justice reforms in their local communities.

Small Business Majority's new national opinion poll of brick-and-mortar small business owners reveals that they are more concerned about economic issues that impact their businesses than crime in their communities. However, crime does still worry business owners and some note that crime has negatively impacted their revenue, insurance cost and business opportunities. They support the implementation of programs in their communities to support justice-impacted individuals or those struggling with mental health and addiction issues, and a plurality believes that their tax dollars are better spent on alternatives to incarceration than law enforcement and policing activities. This survey is part of Small Business Majority's broader research effort to understand the various ways in which criminal justice reforms impact or present opportunities for small businesses.

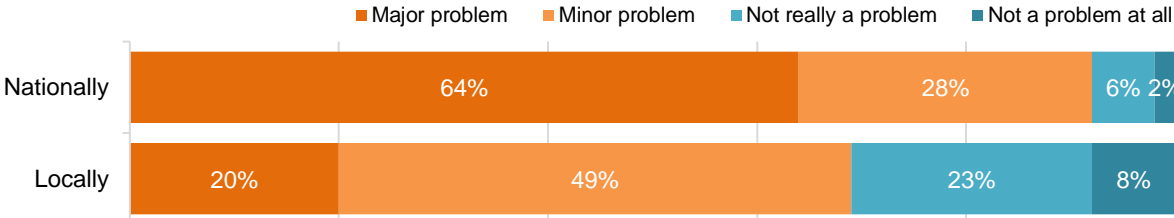
Key findings

- **Small business owners widely support alternatives to incarceration**, with a plurality (46%) believing tax dollars are better spent on rehabilitation and support for individuals dealing with drug addiction, mental health issues and/or homelessness. Another 40% believe tax dollars should be spent equally on law enforcement and alternatives to policing, while just 13% think tax dollars would be better spent on crime enforcement. While Democrats were much more likely to support more spending on alternatives (60% Democrat to 37% Republican), Republican respondents agreed that the spending should be evenly split.
- **While there is a perception that crime is a problem nationally**, when it comes to their local communities where their business is based, small business owners perceive crime to be less of an issue. Similarly, they perceive other business owners in their community to have similar levels of concern about crime locally.
- **Crime ranked low in relation to other economic issues that business owners may be concerned about**, including inflation and the general state of the economy.
- **Still, crime does worry business owners to some extent**. More respondents felt that crime has been getting worse than getting better, though most think it has stayed relatively the same. About a quarter of respondents feel that crime has had negative impacts on their business' revenue, employee morale and lost business opportunities, while nearly 4 in 10 think crime has led to increased insurance costs for their business.
- Respondents were asked about a set of crimes and issues related to crime, including drug addiction and mental health issues. **Respondents largely have a negative view of how local law enforcement and the local government respond to addiction and mental health issues**. Democrats were more likely to view the response poorly (57%) compared to Republicans (46%).
- **A majority of respondents' businesses were located in suburban areas (46%)**, while 30% were in urban areas and nearly a quarter (24%) were in rural areas.
- **The sample leans right**, with 34% of respondents identifying as Republican and 31% Democrat. Of the remaining independents, 31% lean Republican, 24% lean Democrat, while 44% stated they have no party preference.

How small business owners view crime and public safety issues

While nearly two-thirds (64%) of small business owners think that crime is a major problem nationally, many small business owners perceive it as less of a problem on a local level. About half of business owners (49%) think that crime is a minor problem in their local community where their business is based, and only 20% think it is a major problem. Of the small business owners who think crime is a problem in their community, only 4% have considered relocating their business due to crime concerns. When asked about different challenges facing their business, only workforce shortages ranked lower than crime among the issues that small business owners are concerned about. Furthermore, two-thirds (66%) of small business owners feel safe in their communities and only 10% feel unsafe.

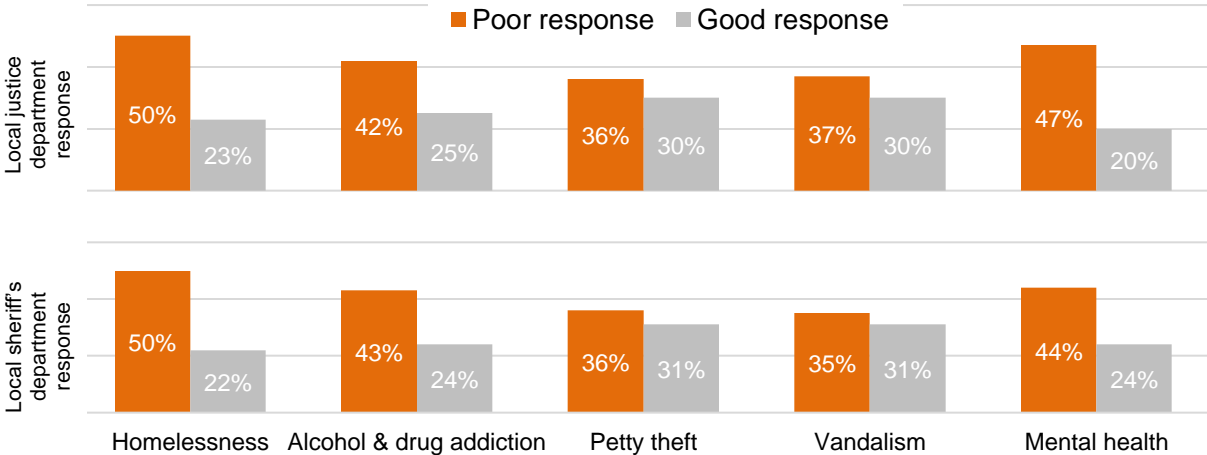
Figure 1: Small business owners’ perception of crime as a problem in their local communities and nationally



The survey also reveals that while crime isn’t a major concern for brick-and-mortar small businesses, it still worries small business owners to an extent. More than 1 in 3 (35%) entrepreneurs report that in recent years, the level of crime in their communities has increased. Small business owners believe that crime has impacted their businesses through increased insurance costs (38%), loss of trust in the community (38%), decreased revenue (23%), negative impact on employee morale (23%) and loss of business (22%). Notably, 31% of entrepreneurs feel that crime has had no impact on their business.

They are concerned about the impact of homelessness (29%), alcohol and drug addiction (30%), petty theft (24%), vandalism (19%) and mental health (33%) on their business. However, a plurality of small businesses think that their local law enforcement and local justice systems don’t respond well to those problems.

Figure 2: Small businesses view local justice system and police department response to community issues as inadequate



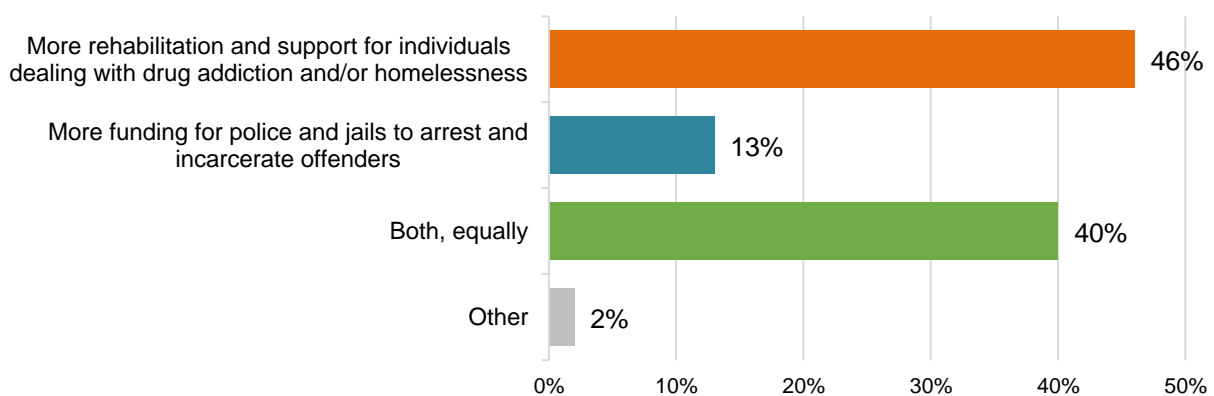
There is a partisan difference in entrepreneurs’ perspectives on the response to these problems, with Democrats were more likely to view it poorly (57%) than Republicans (46%).

Small business owners are divided in their views on the level of support and resources provided by their local government to small businesses that have been affected by crime. Forty-one percent are satisfied, 36% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 23% are dissatisfied.

Small business owners support alternatives to incarceration

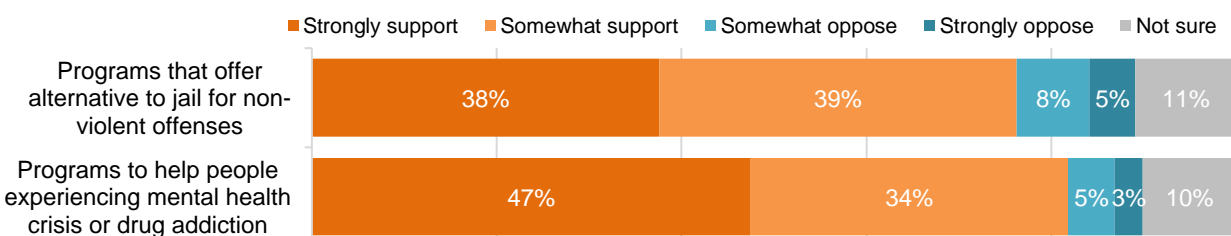
A majority (51%) of small businesses believe that small businesses like theirs have a role to play in supporting individuals who have been involved in the criminal justice system through employment or other means, while one-quarter (25%) do not think that small businesses have a role to play. Small business owners prioritize spending that provides alternatives to incarceration. Forty-six percent believe that their tax dollars are better spent on more rehabilitation and support for individuals dealing with drug addiction and/or homelessness. Comparatively, 13% of entrepreneurs believe that more funding for police and jails to arrest and incarcerate offenders is a better use of their tax dollars. Four in ten think that their tax dollars should be split equally. While Democrats were much more likely to support more spending on alternatives (60% Democrat to 37% Republican), Republican respondents agreed that the spending should be evenly split.

Figure 3: Small business owners believe tax dollars are better spent on alternatives to incarceration



This support translates into programs that entrepreneurs would like to have in their community to prevent incarceration and support justice-impacted individuals. Many communities around the country have implemented programs to send unarmed mental health professionals into the community to help people experiencing a mental health crisis or struggling with addiction. Additionally, many localities have implemented programs that offer community-based programs or initiatives that offer alternatives to jail for non-violent offenses. While only a minority (a respective 23% and 32%) of small business owners say that similar programs exist in their communities, they would overwhelmingly support (a respective 81% and 77%) its implementation.

Figure 4: Support for community-based programs offering help to people with mental health crisis or drug addiction as well as alternatives to jail for non-violent offenses



Conclusion

Small businesses support alternatives to incarceration, with a plurality believing that their tax dollars are better spent on more rehabilitation and support for individuals dealing with drug addiction and/or homelessness. Furthermore, most entrepreneurs think alternatives should be funded, regardless of whether they believe law enforcement funding should also be increased. The report also shows that they still have concerns about crime in their communities and its impact on their businesses, but they largely have a negative view of how local law enforcement and the local government respond to addiction and mental health issues. As decision-makers consider further criminal justice reforms, it's important that small business owners' views on community safety and incarceration alternatives are taken into consideration.

Methodology

This poll reflects a survey of 500 owners and decision-makers of brick-and-mortar small businesses. The poll was an online and phone survey conducted by Chesapeake Beach Consulting between March 19-24, 2024. The margin of error is +/-4% at a 95% confidence level.

Download report topline from our website: <https://smallbusinessmajority.org/our-research/brick-and-mortar-small-businesses-share-views-public-safety-their-communities>