

# The Impact of Crime on Oakland Businesses

Understanding Challenges, Navigating Solutions

Survey: Sept. 19, 2023 to January 5, 2024

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# TABLE OF CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	3
ACKNOWLEDGMENT....	3
METHODOLOGY....	4
SURVEY	
Demographics.....	4
Business Analytics.....	5
Type of Business...	5
Location of Business...	6
BID or Commercial District...	6
Years in business...	7
Types of crimes Experienced...	8
Reported Vs. Unreported...	9
Customer impact + Employee Safety + Drop in Sales...	10
Working in Oakland: Too Much of a Risk...	11
Impact of Crime on personal life.....	12
Business Safety Efforts...	13
Business Closing or Relocating...	14
911 Response Analytics...	15
What can the City do to Help?..	16
Remarks from Respondents...	18
Conclusion....	18
Appendix - Survey Questions.....	20

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Merchant Safety + Crime Experience Survey was conducted in the fall of 2023 and represents a pivotal step towards shedding light on the impact of criminal activity to Oakland businesses. The purpose of this survey was to gather data in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis, ensuring businesses' concerns are heard and addressed effectively. Through an analysis of the survey results, we hope to identify areas of concern and advocate for targeted strategies to address them effectively by sharing the results with key government officials. The survey results raw data was shared with Governor Newsom on January 17, 2024 and contributed to the decision to deploy 120 California Highway Patrol officers to Oakland and additional deputy attorneys general from the California Department of Justice and from the National Guard in order to add capacity to prosecute suspects arrested for serious crimes in Alameda County.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

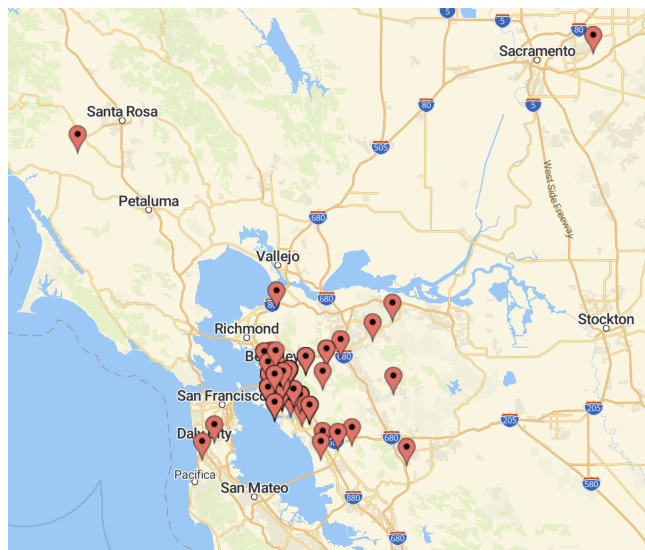
Thank you to all the members of the Oakland BID Alliance, comprising Business Improvement District and Community Benefit District Directors, as well as the Bay Area Chambers, for distributing the survey among your members. A heartfelt thank you goes to Rachel Gregory of the Jack London Improvement District for providing the initial summary. And a special appreciation extends to all the businesses that dedicated their time to complete the survey. Your active involvement has been instrumental in shaping crucial decisions that are making a positive impact on our community. Your participation has demonstrated the transformative power of collective action, driving significant progress forward and effecting meaningful change.

# METHODOLOGY

The vendor survey questions were developed by the KONO Executive Director and subsequently reviewed by the Directors of the Oakland BID (Business Improvement District) Alliance for feedback and revisions. The survey link was then distributed to businesses within the KONO (Koreatown Northgate) Community Benefit district, with a request sent to other Oakland BID/CBD directors and the Oakland Chambers to share the survey with their respective businesses. The survey was accessible from September 19, 2023, to January 5, 2024 (spanning approximately 14 weeks). A total of 132 responses were collected, with an estimated completion rate of 38% and an average completion time of 22 minutes. Distribution channels included email, electronic newsletters, and social media for KONO. In total, the survey comprised 53 questions, which are provided in Appendix 1.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey captured responses from a diverse demographic range, with the majority of participants falling between the ages of 35 and 54. The racial breakdown of respondents indicated that 50% identified as white, 21% as Asian/Asian American, and 10% as Black/African American. Additionally, respondents were asked to provide their residential zip codes, revealing a geographic distribution primarily concentrated in the East Bay area and San Francisco region.

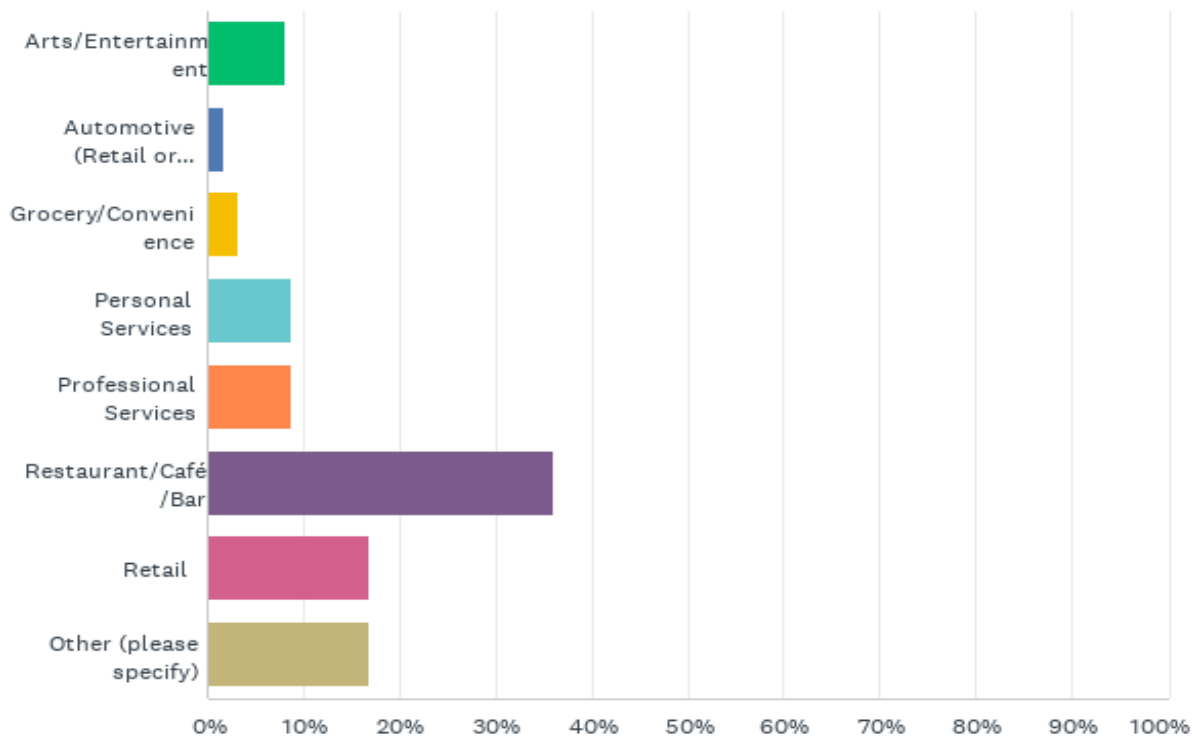


# BUSINESS ANALYTICS

## Type of Business

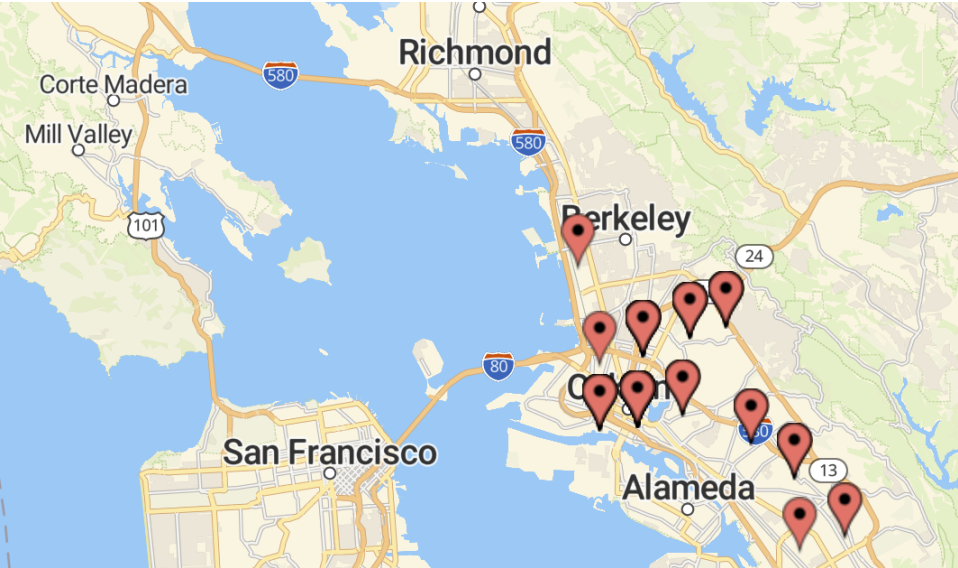
The survey results indicate that the largest proportion of respondents are from the Restaurant/Café/Bar sector, comprising 36% of the total. Following closely behind are retail establishments, representing 16.80% of respondents. Arts/Entertainment, personal, and professional services each accounted for 8% of respondents. This distribution underscores the significance of these industries within Oakland's commercial landscape. Recognizing the prevalence of these businesses is essential for tailoring targeted safety measures and resource allocation to ensure the well-being of both patrons and proprietors alike.

## Q6 Type of Business



# Location of Business

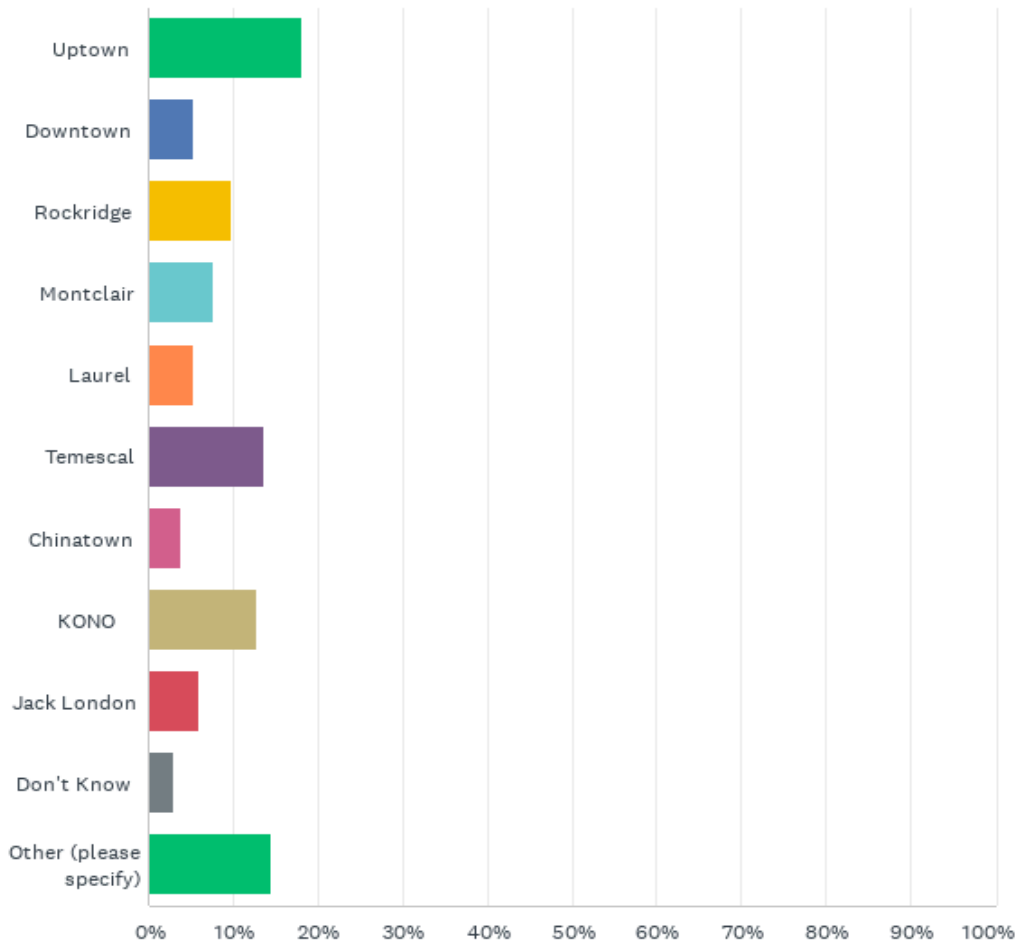
Respondents were requested to provide the zip codes of their businesses, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the geographic distribution across the city. The following map visually demonstrates the broad range of locations represented by the respondents throughout Oakland.



# Commercial District Location

A graphical representation illustrating the distribution of respondents across various commercial districts within Oakland is provided below. This visualization offers valuable insights into the representation of different districts within the survey sample, facilitating a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives and experiences of businesses across Oakland's neighborhoods.

**Q11: Which Business Improvement District/ Community Business district is your business in?**



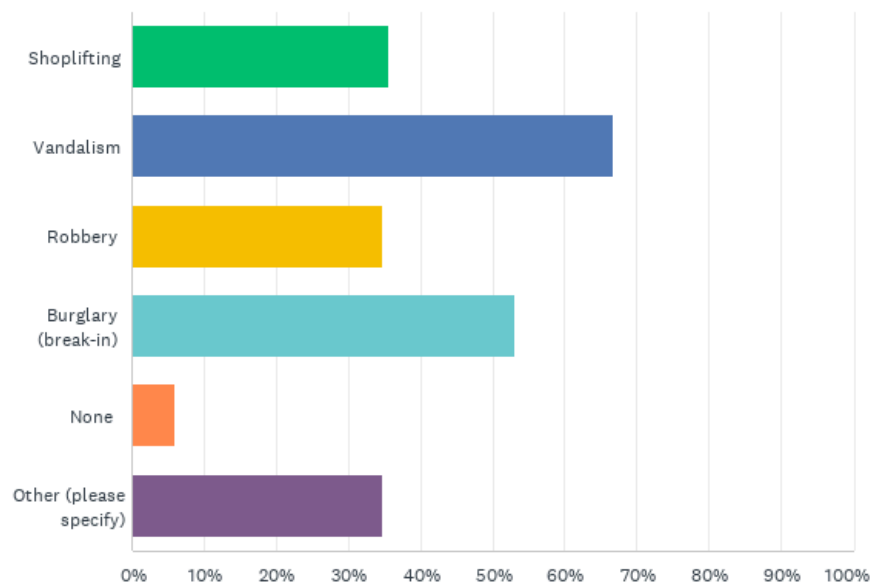
## Years in Business

Participants were queried about the duration of their business ownership, unveiling an average ownership span of 14 years. Moreover, respondents were asked about the length of time their businesses have been operational specifically within Oakland, averaging at 17 years. Notably, the highest reported duration spanned an impressive 170 years, with the second-highest standing at 99 years, reflecting the enduring presence of businesses within the community.

# Oakland Businesses are Being Targeted by Criminals

The following graph illustrates the types of crime experienced by businesses surveyed: 35% of responding businesses have been robbed in the past year, 35% of responding businesses have been shoplifted in the past year, 53% of responding businesses have experienced burglary break-ins, and 67% of responding businesses have experience vandalism in the past year. Only 6% of responding businesses have not experienced being the victim of crime in the past year.

Q12 Has your business experienced any of the following in the past year?



When asked to elaborate on the incidents, the question garnered some notable responses:

*"Starting in early 2022 through all of 2023, Fairyland experienced many breaches of the park, resulting in loss and damage across the park and the retail shop. In addition, car break ins have been terrible Summer-Late Fall. We have had employees robbed at gunpoint on Grand. We have any number of unhoused folks who are also unwell who surround the park and have harassed and menaced employees and guests. We also are a pretty regular recipient of tagging. As a result attendance is flagging, deeply."*



*"Customers' vehicles and employee vehicles get broken into all the time. It makes it hard to retain customers and employees. Death threats to us and our staff on a weekly basis, human feces every other week, bullets shot, found dead body in our parklet, verbal attacks and threats of sexual and physical violence tied to race and gender, windows smashed at least once a year which we have to pay for out of pocket and kills our viability, hostility from white neighboring businesses, fires lit in front of our business and more."*

*"I've had people steal money from the register, steal an employees car from right in front of the business while setting up one morning, people tag up the bathrooms, neon sign stolen from the wall, homeless person came in and pooped on a chair, tip jar has been aggressively broken and stolen, we've been threatened with violence, had a homeless person grab me and start destroying the lobby after being denied free food. Customers have their cars broken into almost weekly while they wait for their food."*

## **Reported vs. Unreported Crimes:**

**69% of businesses that experienced crime in the past year reported at least one incident to the police, which means 31% did not report any incidents of crime.** Reasons cited for not reporting are mainly related to OPD's response: survey participants say that OPD takes too long to respond and even if they do show up, the crime won't be resolved. After reporting a crime, OPD won't follow up with victims in a timely manner, if at all. Some of the responses say that their customers or clients are the victims of the crimes (i.e. auto burglaries, assault) so it's the victim's responsibility to report the crime. There is a general hopelessness and pessimism that reporting crimes won't change anything. Many business owners have called 911 several times in the past year; the more negative experiences our business community has with reporting crimes the less likely they are to report in the future.

For those who did report, 74% of businesses reported 1-3 crimes in the past year, with 26% of businesses reporting 4+ crimes in the past year. Even with these businesses who *have* reported crimes, they can't possibly report all the crimes they experience. **20% of the businesses who have reported crimes in the past year said that they experienced 10+ more incidents that went unreported.** Many businesses noted that there are "too many [crimes] to count" and that

reporting them all would be "time consuming." The majority of incidents not reported were vandalism (61.05%) and shoplifting (31.58%)

The question elicited several other noteworthy responses:

- *“Some things we don't report because we are advised that there wouldn't be follow up.”*
- *“They never show up. I used to report them when I first arrived, but they never ever show up. I get calls from them 8-12 hours after the incident when I'm already home and the business is closed...”*
- *“Many incidents were reported, but we stopped because there was little to no response. Police came to the drive-by shooting about 45 minutes after it was over. Many of the neighbors were trying to call 911 while the shooting was in progress, but the system was overwhelmed, and kept dropping the calls. It took about 20 minutes for me to get an answer to my call to the non-emergency OPD number.”*

## **Customer Impact + Employee Safety + Drop in Sales**

### **Auto-Break Ins and Burglaries Deter Business in Oakland**

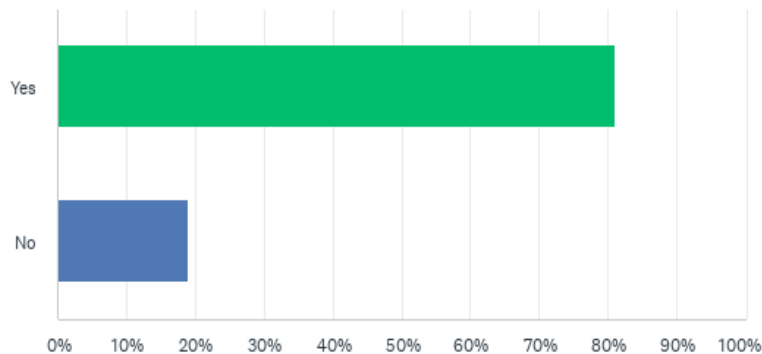
**A staggering 81% of businesses have experienced someone breaking into their customer's car while patronizing their business.** Over 30% of these businesses say that they experience this more than 4 times a week with the majority experiencing this 1-3 times a week, indicating a concerning pattern of vehicle break-ins impacting patrons. Many businesses that have closed or are on the brink of closing cite this type of crime as the reason their sales have plummeted in the past year.

When asked how the occurrence of criminal incidents had impacted customer traffic, over half of respondents said customer traffic had decreased by more than 30% over the past year. Online sales aren't making up for this, with 73% of respondents claiming they haven't seen any increase in online or to-go sales.

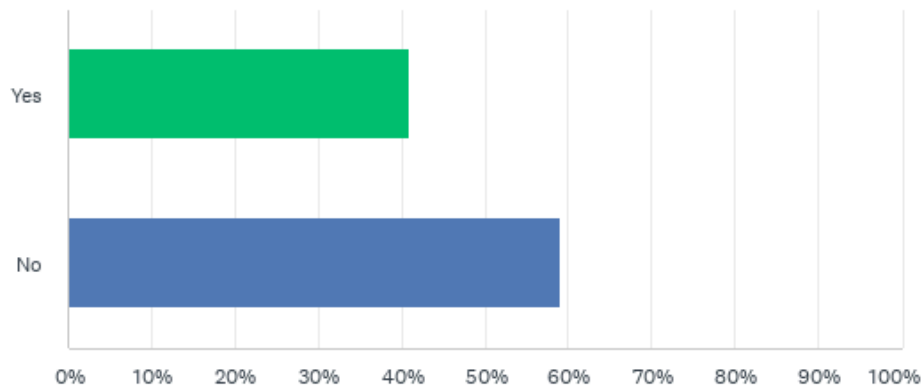
## Working in Oakland: Too Much of a Risk

Additionally, 41% of business proprietors stated that the persistent crime situation has impacted their staff, leading to an increase in resignations. Employees are afraid to go to work and are often the victims of car break-ins and workplace violence or harassment from perpetrators that enter the business. On top of this, **51% of business owners are considering moving their business to another city.** When asked why, one business owner said, *"We love Oakland and don't want to move but Oakland is forcing us to consider closing. We work constantly and can't afford anything. We pay our employees well above minimum wage but it still isn't enough to be a true living wage. Our customers are afraid of violence and we can only raise our prices so much to offset the cost of living and always having to deal with vandalism before we alienate them. And on top of that we face violence every day. We can't catch a break, can't breathe."* Moreover, businesses reported a significant drop in sales in the last year, with a **notable decline of 58%.**

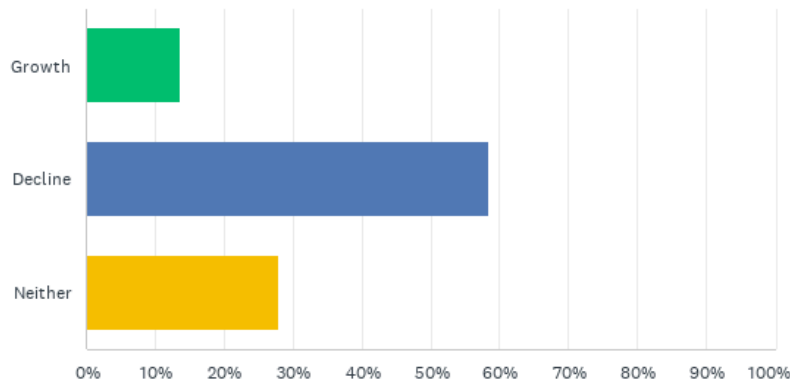
Q26 Have you experienced your customer's vehicle getting broken into?



### Q33 Have you lost any staff due to crime?



### Q47 Have you experienced growth or decline in business sales in the last year?



## Merchants Experience Similar Levels of Crime in Their Personal Lives

The survey also asked questions about our merchant community's experience with crimes outside of their own business, in other parts of Oakland. Survey participants were asked if they had personally experienced or witnessed any of the following: car theft, car vandalism, robbery,

assault, or "other." 87% of survey participants had personal experience with one or more of the aforementioned crimes within the past year. When asked where these crimes had taken place, the answers were widespread; nearly every single neighborhood of Oakland was named. **62% of participants did not report these personal crimes to the police**, citing 911 wait times, lack of OPD response, lack of follow-up, and the sheer frequency of these crimes as reasons for not reporting.

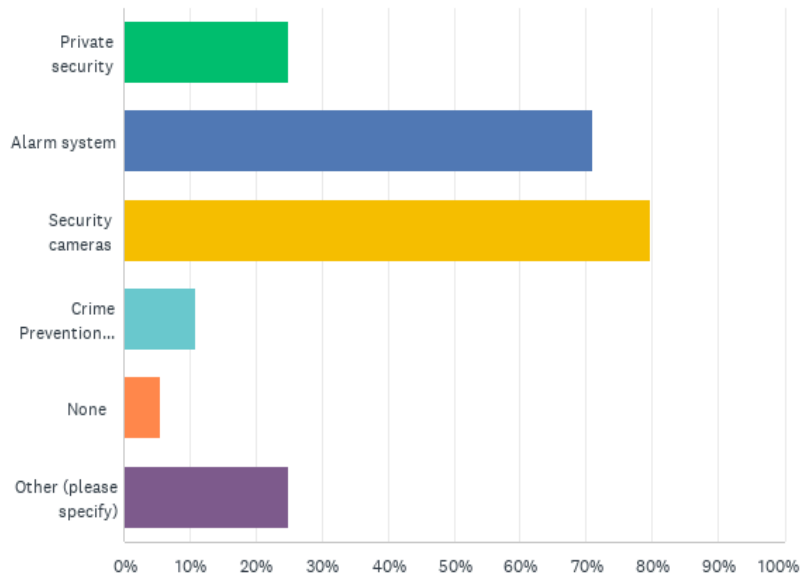
Our merchants and our community members clearly do not feel safe. **Only 2 out of 132 respondents said they feel safe** from criminal activities. The vast majority of respondents feel more vulnerable to criminal activity in the evening and/or in the middle of the night as expected, but 40% still said they feel vulnerable in the morning and 50% said they feel vulnerable in the afternoon.

## **Business Safety Efforts:**

### **Oakland Businesses Heavily Invest in Safety Measures**

Many businesses in Oakland have invested resources in enhancing safety measures. According to the survey, 80% of respondents have installed security cameras, while 71% have implemented alarm systems. Additionally, one out of every four businesses has opted for private security services, despite the potential financial burdens associated with such measures. For the folks who haven't invested in safety features, they cited the high cost, low efficacy, and lack of overall impact on the problem as a few of the reasons why.

Q29 Have you implemented any specific security measures or precautions to prevent criminal activities at your business location? If so, check all that apply.

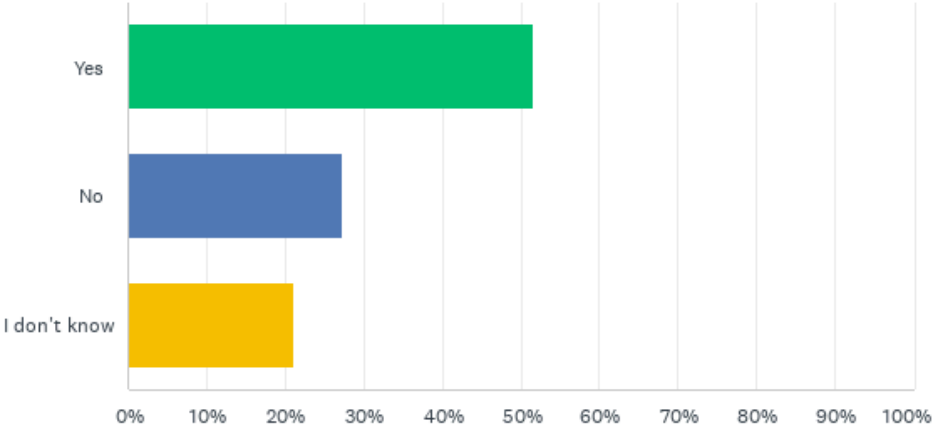


Crime Prevention = Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

## Businesses Closing or Relocating

Furthermore, **51% of business** proprietors are contemplating relocating their businesses to a different city. When asked about their reasons for contemplating such a move, one business owner said: *"After my lease is over in 2 years, I plan on closing. I am tired of running my business in Oakland. I moved to Pleasanton for safer neighborhoods and better schools. I commute every day for my business and all of my clients complain about oaklands plight. I am scared every time I leave my car, and walk to my business. I never feel safe. I see car break-ins, assaults, and homeless people sleeping in front of my business every day."*

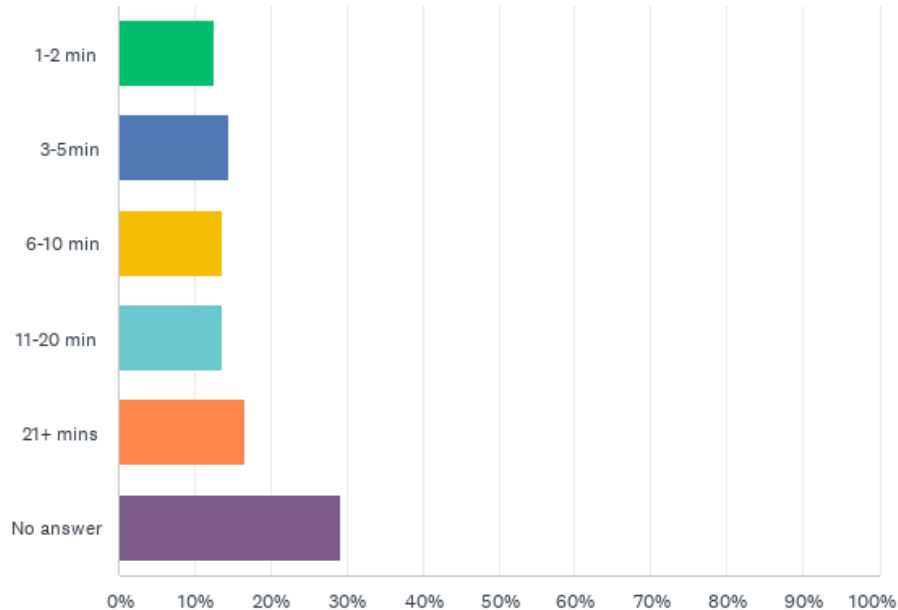
Q45 Are you considering closing or moving your business?



## 911 Response Analytics

A concerning trend emerged regarding emergency response times, with **29% of business proprietors reporting unanswered calls to 911 within the last year**. Additionally, 17% of respondents experienced wait times exceeding 21 minutes, while 13% endured delays ranging between 11 to 20 minutes for a response. These statistics underscore the troubling picture of emergency services' responsiveness in Oakland.

## Q51 How many minutes before someone answered?

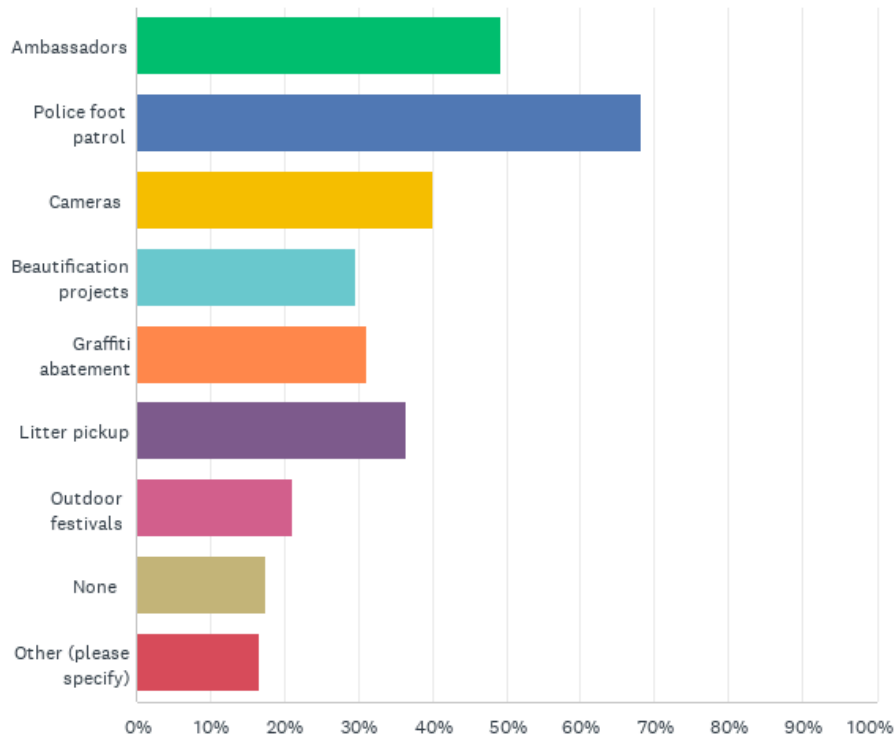


## What Can the City Do to Help?

When asked about existing security measures or initiatives within Oakland's commercial districts that are effective in reducing crime, 68% of respondents identified "Police Foot Patrols" as the most impactful method for crime reduction. Following closely, 49% of participants expressed confidence in the effectiveness of "Ambassadors," referring to Clean and Safe staff overseen by the City's Business Improvement Districts, in deterring criminal activities. These findings suggest that increasing police presence and supporting initiatives such as ambassador programs could significantly contribute to enhancing safety and reducing crime in Oakland's commercial districts.



**Q34: Are there any existing security measures or initiatives within Oakland's commercial districts that you find effective in reducing crime?**



When queried about additional security measures or strategies to improve safety for businesses and customers, the overwhelming consensus among respondents was a call for "increased police presence." This sentiment was echoed in a representative response that encapsulated the prevalent sentiment shared in the short answers.

*“POLICE PRESENCE. We need police presence. We need the police to actually go after these people who are systematically breaking into every single car on the street and holding up traffic as they do so. The do-not-pursue policy has proven catastrophic to our shopping districts, and the complacency by the police is disheartening. We also need license plate readers, and signage to take all valuables out of the car. We also need comprehensive strategies in social support such as mental health, food and shelter services for the homeless and those in need, which would reduce theft and assault.”*

## Other Remarks from Respondents:

- *“The system is so broken. It feels like there is no support for the small businesses or even for the people. Calling the police never makes a difference and the people we are calling the police on know the cops won't show up anyway. I want to say yay for the survey, but it has been so terrible for so long, I don't know how Oakland will actually fix it. There are some of the best cameras mounted on the outside of my building. But that still doesn't stop the people from doing the damage they do. I am losing my faith in Oakland and am just tired of being so worried about my business, my employees, my customers and my own Self.”*
- *“...I really really hope our collective answers make an impact. It is not about covering up graffiti, it is about deep systematic support for people on the ground.”*
- *“Overall, I feel abandoned by the police and city to protect me and my customers from danger and theft”*
- *“I've seen Oakland through a lot of ups and downs in the last 15 years, and have always been a thumper and rooter. This time I'm just exhausted. My heart is broken. But I can't keep sacrificing for it. I give up, planning to leave.”*

## CONCLUSION

The survey results from the Merchant Safety + Crime Experience Survey provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by businesses in Oakland due to criminal activity. Here's a conclusion based on the findings:

The survey highlights the significant impact of criminal activity on Oakland businesses, with vandalism and burglary break-ins emerging as primary concerns. Despite these issues, a notable proportion of incidents remain unreported due to perceived ineffectiveness or delays in police

response. The persistent crime situation has led to a decline in sales, employee morale, and an increased consideration of relocating businesses outside the city.

Furthermore, there are alarming statistics regarding emergency services' responsiveness, with a significant number of business owners encountering unanswered calls or prolonged wait times. This underscores the urgent need for improvements in emergency response systems.

The surveyed businesses overwhelmingly advocate for increased police presence, emphasizing the importance of proactive law enforcement measures to address crime effectively. Additionally, there's a call for comprehensive strategies that address underlying social issues such as mental health support and assistance for the homeless population, aiming to mitigate theft and assault incidents.

It's evident from the responses that there's a sense of disillusionment and frustration among business owners regarding the lack of support from law enforcement and city authorities. There's a plea for meaningful action and systemic changes to restore safety and security for businesses, employees, and customers alike.

In conclusion, the survey results serve as a crucial resource for informing policymakers and stakeholders about the urgent need for targeted interventions to address crime and improve safety in Oakland's commercial districts. The data underscores the importance of collaborative efforts between businesses, the Oakland BID Alliance, Bay Area Chambers, law enforcement, and government agencies to implement effective strategies that safeguard the well-being of the community and foster a thriving business environment.

## APPENDIX

### SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Full Name
2. Age
3. Ethnicity
4. Residential Zip Code
5. Business Name
6. Type of Business
7. Business Address
8. Business Zip Code
9. How long have you owned your business?
10. How long have you been operating your business in Oakland?
11. Which Business Improvement District /Community Business District is your business in?
12. Has your business experienced any of the following in the past year?
13. If yes, please provide a brief description of the criminal incident(s) you have encountered.
14. Did you report the incident(s) to the Oakland Police Department?
15. If no, why didn't you?
16. Which incidents did you not report? Check all that apply.
17. How many incident(s) did you report in the last six months?
18. How many incident(s) did you NOT report?

19. Have you witnessed or personally experienced any of the following in the past year?
20. If yes, where in Oakland did the incident take place. Please provide a brief description.
21. Did you report the incident(s) to the Oakland Police Department?
22. If no, why didn't you?
23. Which incidents did you not report?
24. How many incident(s) did you report?
25. How many incident(s) did you NOT report?
26. Have you experienced your customer's vehicle getting broken into?
27. If yes, how many times during the week on average?
28. Do you have any suggestions on how the police and other leaders could reach out more effectively?
29. Have you implemented any specific security measures or precautions to prevent criminal activities at your business location? If so, check all that apply.
30. If not, why?
31. Are there any particular areas or times of the day when you feel more vulnerable to criminal activities? Check all that apply.
32. Are there any specific types of crimes that seem to be more prevalent within Oakland's Business districts? Pick up to 3
33. Have you lost any staff due to crime?
34. Are there any existing security measures or initiatives within Oakland's commercial districts that you find effective in reducing crime? Check all that apply.
35. In your opinion, what additional security measures or strategies could be implemented within Oakland's Business District to enhance safety for businesses and their customers?

36. If you could list 3 major improvements/changes that would help with security what would they be?
37. Which are the specific activities that you feel make a safer community?
38. Have you seen other cities that you think are doing a great job in creating a safe business district that you think Oakland could use as an example? If so, which cities and what are they doing?
39. What makes you and your customers feel more safe? For example, is it better lighting, less graffiti, more foot patrol?
40. How has the occurrence of criminal incidents impacted your customer traffic?
41. Have you seen an increase in your online & to go sales in the last year?
42. If increase, has the increase offset the loss or increased overall sales.
43. If increased overall sales, What percentage has your overall sales increased?
44. How safe do you feel in Oakland?
45. Are you considering closing or moving your business?
46. If yes, why? If moving, to where?
47. Have you experienced growth or decline in business sales in the last year?
48. If growth, how much?
49. If decline, how much?
50. How many times have you had to call 911 in the last 6 months?
51. How many minutes before someone answered?
52. How satisfied were you with the response and support you received from law enforcement agencies after reporting the incident(s)?
53. Comments, Concerns, Questions about overall Survey