

Metro Vancouver: Full or partial amalgamation supported by half in the region, highest enthusiasm on North Shore

New mayors and councils have work to do on housing, homelessness, crime, as region's top issues

November 2, 2022 – As Metro Vancouver's new and returning municipal leaders begin their term, data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds many citizens hoping for a future with a more consolidated approach to regional politics.

Overall, half of Metro Vancouverites support amalgamation of some sort. The proposals receiving the highest levels of enthusiasm across the metro region are those that would combine the Tri-Cities (35%), the North Shore (34%) or Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge (31%). In the North Shore itself, half (48%) say they support North Vancouver and West Vancouver coming together as one city.

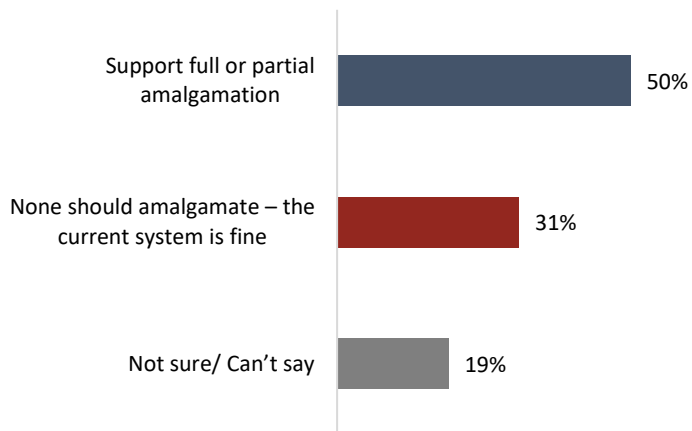
Eight per cent of respondents say they would combine all Metro Vancouver municipalities into one, while three-in-ten say the current system is fine.

That current system recently saw voters in the region participate in 21 separate mayoral and council elections.

When it comes to more immediate priorities, constituents are hoping that their elected representatives will begin the term with a focus on three core issues: housing, homelessness, and crime. Half (49%) call housing policy a top-two priority for their city, while three-in-ten say so of homelessness and poverty (31%) and crime and safety (29%).

Asked to evaluate how their previous governments had been performing on these matters, responses are overwhelmingly negative. Four-in-five (81%) in Metro Vancouver say their local governments performed poorly on housing. Three-quarters (77%) are critical of mayor and councils' performance on poverty and two-thirds (64%) give a thumbs-down to the governance on crime and safety. Negativity is more common in Surrey and the city of Vancouver, where incumbent mayors were ousted, than in other communities in the region.

In your opinion, should the following municipalities amalgamate so they vote for one mayor/city council, or not? (Metro Vancouver, n=1,376)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Oct. 6-12, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 1,376 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- Asked to choose between two options on police spending, three-in-five (59%) believe more resources should be spent on social welfare services, while two-in-five (41%) disagree and believe it should instead go to more police presence in high crime areas.
- While Statistics Canada's Crime Severity Index in Metro Vancouver has fluctuated over the last five years, the majority perception is that crime is increasing in the region. Three-in-five (61%) believe there has been more crime in their community in the last five years.
- Of those who believe crime is increasing, half (49%) believe the trend is specific to Metro Vancouver. Two-in-five (43%) disagree and believe crime is increasing everywhere in Canada.

About ARI

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

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Part One: Amalgamation

As the dust settles from the recent municipal elections in Metro Vancouver, change is in the air for some of the largest jurisdictions. The citizens of Surrey and the city of Vancouver, the two most populous cities in the metro area, [voted out incumbent mayors](#) and much of their city council. TransLink's Mayor's Council, which oversees the Metro Vancouver transportation network, will have [10 new members](#) among its 21-person council.

Half support some form of amalgamation in Metro Van

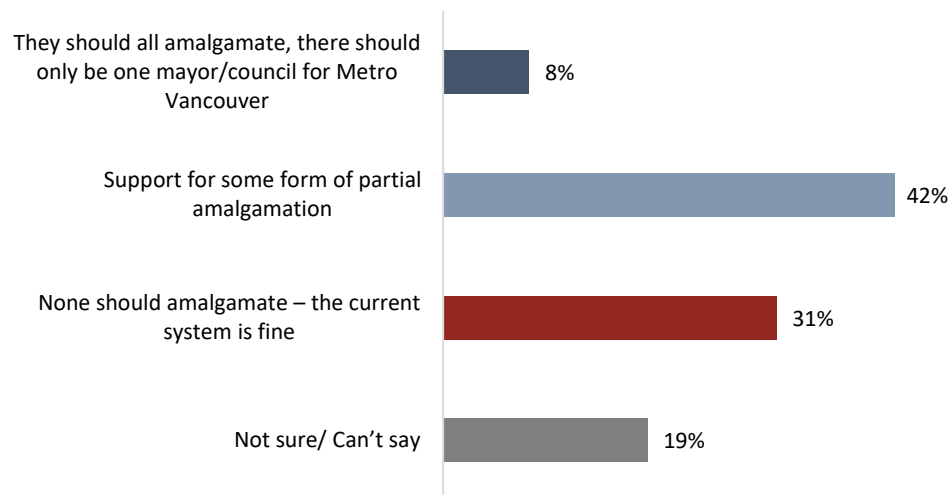
Metro Vancouver is comprised of 21 municipalities, all of which hold separate mayor and city council elections. Vancouver has become [an outlier](#) in this regard, other major Canadian cities – such as [Toronto](#) and [Montreal](#) – have centralized disparate civic governments in one way or another. In Ontario, the provincial government forced the merger of six municipalities into the City of Toronto [in 1998](#). With that historical example in mind, some wonder if B.C.'s government [would do the same](#).

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Half in Metro Vancouver support some sort of amalgamation. Approaching one-in-ten (8%) say all of the metro region should be served by one mayor and city council. Two-in-five (42%) support at least one partial amalgamation scenario, such as the Tri-Cities, the North Shore or Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge merging. Meanwhile, three-in-ten (31%) oppose amalgamation as they believe the current system is fine as is:

**In your opinion, should the following municipalities
amalgamate so they vote for one mayor/city council, or not?
(Metro Vancouver, n=1,376)**



The appetite to merge the Tri-Cities and the North Shore is highest. Two-in-five (41%) in the Tri-Cities believe Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody should merge. Half (48%) in North and West Vancouver believe the North Shore should come together under one municipal government.

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In your opinion, should the following municipalities amalgamate so they vote for one mayor/city council, or not?						
	Metro Vancouver (n=1,376)	City				
		Tri-Cities (n=100)	West Van/North Van (n=114)	Langley/Surrey (n=330)	City of Vancouver (n=460)	Burnaby (n=138)
The Tri-Cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody) should amalgamate	35%	41%	-	-	-	-
The North Shore (North Vancouver city and district, West Vancouver) should amalgamate	34%	-	48%	-	-	-
Langley City/Township and Surrey should amalgamate	23%	-	-	27%	-	-
Vancouver and Burnaby should amalgamate	17%	-	-	-	22%	17%
None should amalgamate – the current system is fine	31%	33%	29%	27%	30%	27%
Not sure/ Can't say	19%	18%	15%	20%	23%	21%

Government satisfaction drives opinion on amalgamation

Those who oppose any form of amalgamation in Vancouver are more positive in their appraisal of their municipal government's recent performance, especially when compared to those who support a merger of the entire metro region.

More than half (56%) of those who oppose amalgamation say their local government has done well on public transit. And while criticism is still high for their government's performance on crime and safety and providing good value for their tax dollars, those who support the status quo are more likely to offer praise on those issues than those who want amalgamation:

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Percentage who believe their municipal government has done a 'good' or 'very good job' on each issue				
	Total (n=1,376)	Stance on amalgamation		
		Support some form of amalgamation (n=688)	All of Metro Van should amalgamate (n=114)	None should amalgamate (n=425)
Public transit	50%	48%	46%	56%
Environmental issues	38%	40%	33%	38%
The economy/Jobs	36%	37%	29%	39%
Transportation/traffic	34%	32%	35%	40%
Crime/Safety	29%	27%	23%	36%
Leadership	28%	27%	22%	33%
Providing good value for my tax dollars	27%	27%	21%	32%
Housing policy – supply, affordability, etc.	13%	14%	6%	13%
Homelessness/poverty	12%	13%	9%	14%
The opioid crisis	12%	13%	9%	12%

Part Two: Top issues in Metro Vancouver

Residents most concerned about, most critical of, housing and affordability policy

If there is an issue that unifies Metro Vancouverites, it's housing affordability. Half (49%) say that this is a top issue facing the region, and it ranks as the top priority in every sub-region canvassed. In the city of Vancouver, where prices hit [an all-time high in April](#) of this year, 57 per cent say housing is their main concern. Residents tend to prioritize homelessness and crime as other top priorities for the region, though there are differences in opinion based on geography, as seen in the table below:

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Thinking of the issues currently facing Metro Vancouver, which one or two would you say are the most important?						
	Total (n=1,376)	City				
		Burnaby/ Richmond/ New West (n=315)	City of Vancouver (n=460)	West Van/ North Van (n=114)	Tri-Cities/ Maple Ridge/ Pitt Meadows (n=130)	Surrey/ White Rock/ Delta/ Langley (n=357)
Housing policy – supply, affordability, etc.	49%	55%	57%	50%	46%	41%
Homelessness/ poverty	31%	23%	38%	26%	35%	28%
Crime/Safety	29%	21%	28%	11%	28%	39%
The opioid crisis	15%	15%	17%	19%	18%	13%
Transportation/ traffic	14%	9%	4%	35%	15%	18%
Providing good value for my tax dollars	13%	18%	12%	9%	11%	12%
The economy/ Jobs	12%	16%	7%	15%	19%	11%
Environmental issues	11%	13%	11%	11%	13%	9%
Public transit	6%	7%	8%	4%	6%	6%
Leadership	6%	5%	7%	2%	2%	10%
Other	7%	8%	5%	6%	4%	8%

Asked to appraise the performance of their local leadership, residents have been deeply dissatisfied. Four-in-five say their previous municipal governments had done a poor job of handling housing policy (81%) and the homelessness (77%). Seven-in-ten (70%) are not happy with action (or lack thereof) on the opioid crisis, including 82 per cent in the city of Vancouver.

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And when it comes to your municipal government, how do you feel it has performed on each of the following issues? (Percent who select 'very poor' or 'poor job' shown)						
	Total (n=1,376)	City				
		Burnaby/ Richmond/ New West (n=315)	City of Vancouver (n=460)	West Van/ North Van (n=114)	Tri-Cities/ Maple Ridge/ Pitt Meadows (n=130)	Surrey/ White Rock/ Delta/ Langley (n=357)
Housing policy – supply, affordability, etc.	81%	80%	87%	78%	65%	84%
Homelessness/ poverty	77%	65%	90%	64%	65%	83%
The opioid crisis	70%	61%	82%	56%	60%	73%
Crime/Safety	64%	53%	70%	45%	51%	74%
Providing good value for my tax dollars	61%	56%	59%	52%	54%	69%
Transportation/ traffic	60%	55%	49%	80%	57%	68%
Leadership	59%	50%	64%	50%	45%	69%
Environmental issues	45%	37%	44%	41%	38%	53%
The economy/ Jobs	44%	46%	40%	49%	34%	50%
Public transit	41%	32%	31%	53%	38%	54%

Crime and safety

Though crime and safety were third on the top selected issues in the metro region, that priority appeared to be a significant factor in recent municipal elections in Vancouver. Indeed, crime and safety played a role in both the defeat of former mayors Kennedy Stewart in Vancouver and Doug McCallum in Surrey. For Stewart, his opponent Ken Sim [was endorsed by the city's police union](#) and promised to [increase the number of officers](#) in the city.

In Surrey, the primary concern [was cost of policing](#). The city had begun a transition to its own municipal police force in 2019. Brenda Locke defeated McCallum in the mayoral race after [she promised](#) to halt that transition and keep the RCMP. Locke says keeping the RCMP will save the city [\\$520 million over four years](#).

Notably, Locke was first elected as a councillor under McCallum as part of the Safe Surrey Coalition, which [campaigns in 2018](#) to make the switch from the RCMP to a city-run police force. Locke quit Safe

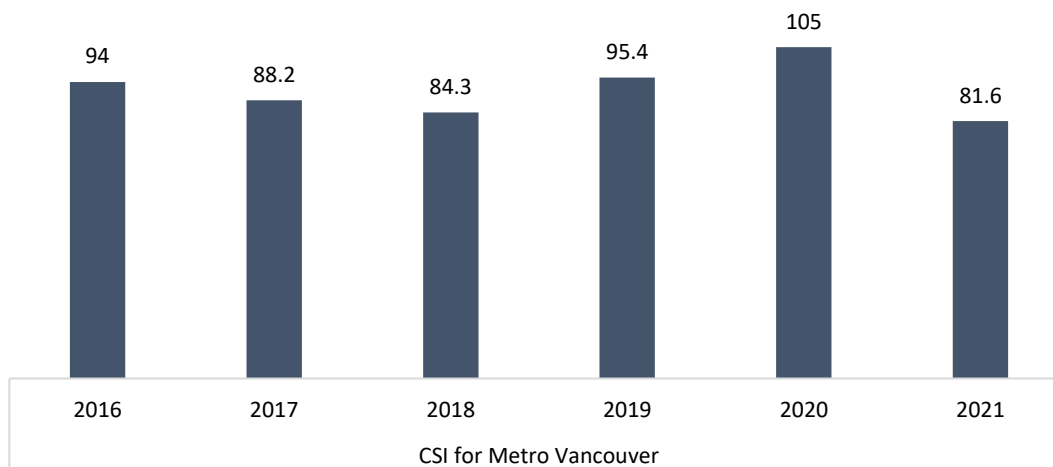
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Surrey in 2019 while criticizing McCallum for [a lack of transparency](#). The Surrey Police Board has said [it expects](#) the transition away from the RCMP to continue despite Locke’s election, with Surrey Police Service Chief Constable Norm Lipinski likening stopping the transition to [“slamming the emergency brake on a car going full-out down the TransCanada Highway.”](#)

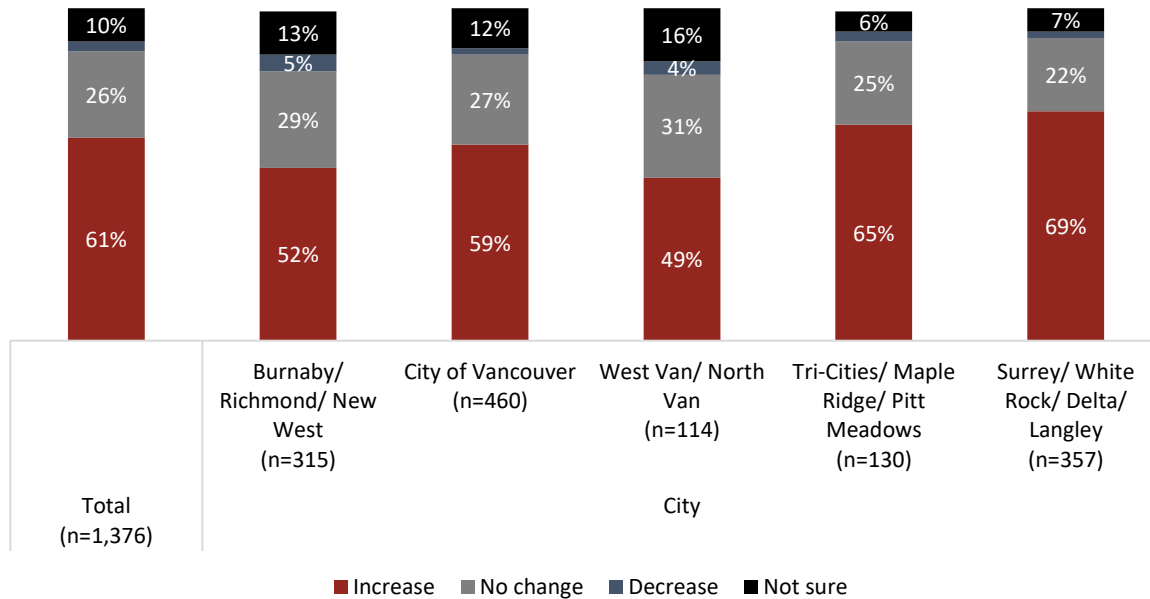
The rate of police-reported crime in Vancouver has fluctuated over the past number of years, rising from 2018 to 2020 before dropping in the 2021. Metro Vancouver’s Crime Severity Index score – [calculated by Statistics Canada](#) – is higher than the national average at 81.6 in the most recent data, but well below [other municipalities](#) like Lethbridge, Kelowna, Moncton and Winnipeg.

Crime Severity Index for Metro Vancouver
(Source: Statistics Canada)



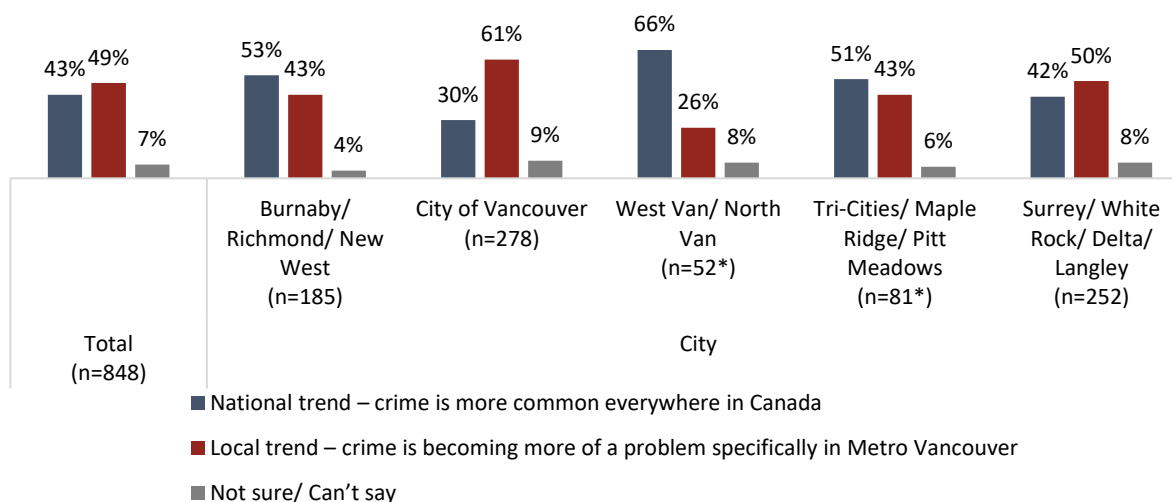
The perception, widely held, is that crime has been increasing over the past five years. Three-in-five (61%) say that crime in their community has been increasing, with the largest number recorded in Surrey where seven-in-ten (69%) report this:

Over the past five years or so, would you say there has been an increase, decrease or no change in the amount of crime in your community?



Those who believe crime is increasing were then asked if they believe this is a local or a national trend. Metro Vancouverites are divided, with two-in-five (43%) feeling this is a national trend and half (49%) perceiving it as local in nature. Notably, police-reported crime – including property and violent crimes – across the country has dropped precipitously compared to rates noted in the 1990s:

**Do you believe this increase is a national trend, or is it more local in nature?
(Among those who believe crime is increasing)**



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Division over police funding, enforcement strategy

Funding for the police has been a controversial issue in Vancouver in recent years. In 2020, Vancouver city council voted against a \$6.4-million budget increase for the Vancouver Police Department. Earlier that summer, amid much global scrutiny of the police in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protest movement, city council ordered the VPD to “decriminalize poverty” and stop street checks. The latter disproportionately target Indigenous and Black people according to the VPD’s own data.

The VPD appealed the budget freeze to the provincial government, who sided with police. This year, the city added \$5.7 million to the VPD budget. New Westminster city council, too, considered freezing the police budget in 2020, but changed course after the police board rejected the idea.

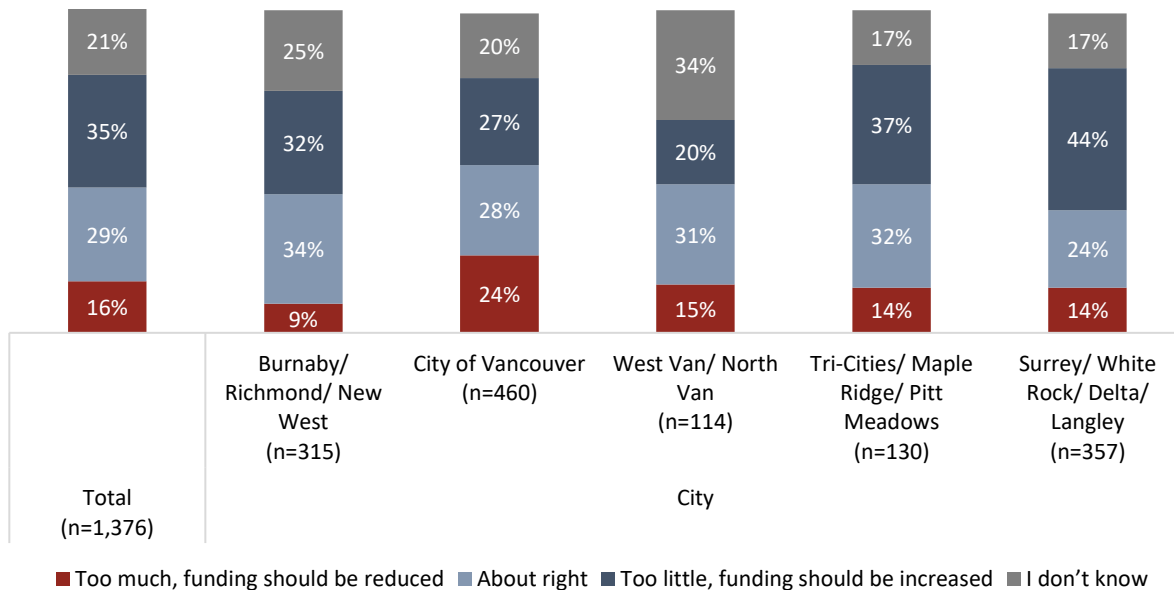
Vancouver’s police union rarely endorses political candidates, but made an exception in the most recent mayoral election, backing eventual winner Sim. Sim campaigned on a platform that included hiring 100 new police officers and bringing back school police liaisons. The latter was ended in 2021 by the Vancouver School Board after school trustees argued the presence of police had a negative effect on visible minority and Indigenous students.

Residents are uncertain about what path to follow when it comes to police funding. One-in-three (35%) would increase the budget for police, while 29 per cent say standing pat would be fine. Fewer than one-in-five (16%) would cut the budget, though this proportion rises to one-quarter (24%) in the city of Vancouver:

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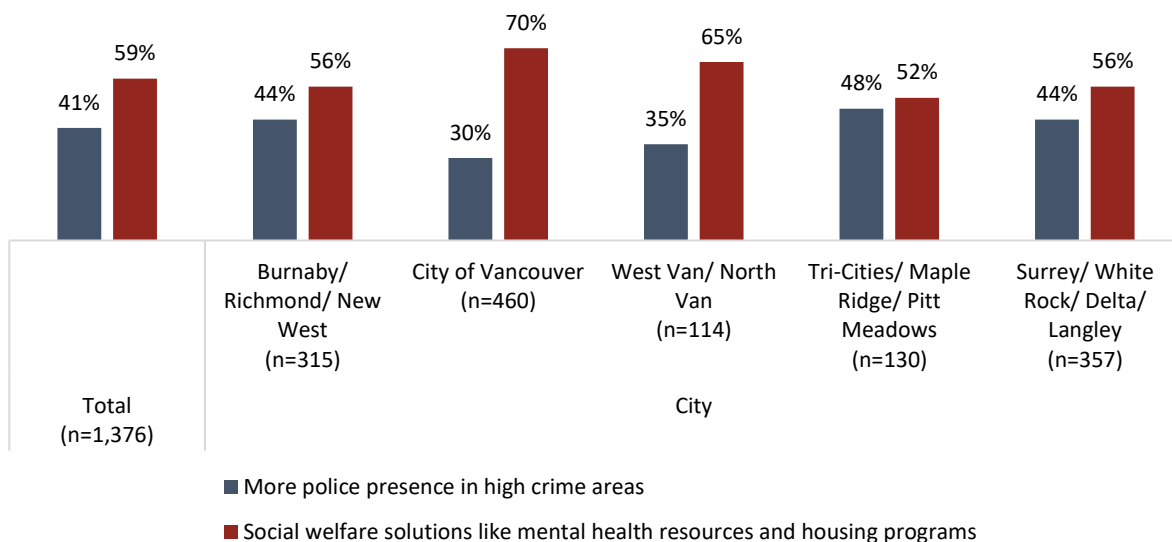
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When you think about the amount of money that is spent on the police in your community, would you say it is...



In terms of the allocation of resources, most residents would rather see police budget used on social welfare solutions as opposed to potentially more punitive approaches. Three-in-five (59%) say they prefer mental health resources and housing solutions instead of an increased police presence:

And when you think about police resources, regardless of whether you would like to see them reduced or increased, would you say money should be allocated more towards...?



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by city, [click here](#).

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