

REIN IN COSTS BY PROSECUTING CRIME

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TOPLINE: Officials should promote order and affordability by upholding property rights and defending against criminality.

BACKGROUND: The protection of property rights is a core function of government. John Locke, whose treatise helped [inspire](#) the Declaration of Independence, [wrote](#):

"The great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property."

Commerce, entrepreneurship, and society itself break down when people can't reasonably expect the fruits of their labor to be safe from theft, destruction, and vandalism. Where criminality runs rampant, possessing something of value makes one a target. It's why, for example, people avoid parking nice cars in high-crime areas.

How Lawlessness Drives Up Prices: Victims of property crimes pay a direct price, but even those who never experience crime themselves pay an indirect price where laws aren't consistently enforced. Retailers that are plagued by shoplifting, looting, vandalism, counterfeiting, and fraud are forced to pass on most of those costs to law-abiding customers, since grocers, for example, have razor-thin margins averaging about [1.3%](#). A National Retail Federation survey found that [64%](#) of retailers report less than half of theft incidents to law enforcement, with [31%](#) citing law enforcement *discouraging* reports of theft as a key reason why. Instead, retailers take countermeasures like hiring security personnel, installing alarms, cameras, and license plate readers, using anti-theft tags, and putting merchandise in locked cases. They may also carry insurance against major losses related to rioting, looting, and arson. The "defund the police" movement and the election of soft-on-crime district attorneys can exacerbate these problems and these costs.

Action Items (Primarily State and Local Officials, Some Federal Nexus):

- **Deter criminality by enforcing the law and holding criminals accountable** for property crimes and violent crimes.
- **Ensure that law enforcement is adequately funded.**
- **Reject efforts to downgrade more property crimes to misdemeanors.**

How It Would Make Life More Affordable:

- It would reduce individuals' risk of home burglary, car break-ins, fraud, and other losses. It would also reduce insurance costs for renters, homeowners, and others.
- It would help bring business and opportunity back to areas facing urban decay.
- It would reduce businesses' costs on measures like locking merchandise in cases, graffiti cleanup, and insurance.

BOTTOMLINE: Officials must make sure that crime doesn't pay; otherwise honest citizens will unwittingly pay the price.