

Chula Vista Community Survey 2024: Drone as a First Responder Addendum

December 2024

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Highlights

- More than a third of respondents were aware of the Drone as a First Responder (DFR) program, but fewer were aware of the policies that govern the use of aerial drones in their community
- Most respondents were supportive of the current operational activities undertaken by the drone program

Executive Summary

This community survey of Chula Vista residents was conducted in 2023 to assess residents' satisfaction with the Chula Vista Police Department (CVPD) and understand their attitudes towards various CVPD initiatives, including the Racial and Identity Profiling Act (RIPA) and the DFR program.

The DFR program received strong support, with over 90% of respondents backing all its current activities, despite only 34% being aware of the program.

Background

In December 2015, CVPD established an Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS) Committee to explore the integration of drone technology into public safety operations. The committee convened multiple times to research and develop best practices, policies, and procedure for the use of the UAS within law enforcement. A significant focus of its efforts was to address public concerns related to trust, civil liberties, and privacy during UAS operations. Before officially launching the UAS program, CVPD engaged in public outreach through media, community forums, and online postings to inform residents about the proposed drone operations.

CVPD initiated the UAS program in the summer of 2017, deploying drones to support tactical operations. On October 22, 2018, CVPD began using drones as part of their DFR program. This initiative, allows drones to be dispatched to 911 calls and other emergency incidents, providing critical real-time information to first responders. The DFR program has since proven to enhance officer and community safety, reduce response times, and deliver valuable situational awareness during emergencies. From October 2018 to December 2023, the DFR program responded to a total of 18,103 calls for service.¹ The findings were made possible through the support of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Smart Policing Initiative program and the RIPA survey conducted by SANDAG.²

¹ CVPD Drone-Related Activity Dashboard: <https://www.chulavistaca.gov/departments/police-department/programs/uas-drone-program>

² This project was supported by Grant No. 15PBJA-21-CG-04378-SMTP awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Sample Description

As described in more detail in Appendix B, this survey used a random sampling methodology to ensure proper representation of the opinions and experiences of the city as a whole. Specifically, in November 2023, a total of 4,000 households across the four Chula Vista council districts (Appendix A) were randomly selected, with a greater number of surveys sent to those areas that previously had a lower response rate. A total of four mailing efforts were attempted to promote survey participation, each including pre-paid postage, with all survey materials, postcards, and outreach efforts provided in English and Spanish; copies of these materials are included in Appendix C. These efforts included a postcard invitation from the Chula Vista Police Chief requesting online feedback, an initial paper survey, a follow-up paper survey to those who did not respond to either of the initial efforts, and a final postcard reminder. Each household was provided with a four-digit identification number and asked to either complete the survey online or return the paper survey.

A total of 453 non-duplicated surveys were completed by Chula Vista residents between November 16, 2023, and December 18, 2023, which represented an 11% response rate overall (range of 10% to 13% across council districts). The majority of surveys were completed in English (98%, with 2% returned in Spanish) and on paper (82%, with 18% completed online).

It should be noted that to ensure generalizability of the results, the data reported here were weighted to reflect the distribution of households across the council districts in the city.³ Appendix D includes all the weighted and non-weighted survey data responses by question.

Respondent Demographics

The gender distribution of survey respondents was representative of the city's population estimates as a whole, though survey respondents were older on average (61.2 compared to 35.9). In terms of their racial/ethnic make-up, White respondents were overrepresented (30% of the sample versus 15% of the population), while Hispanics were underrepresented (42% of the sample versus 60% of the population). Accordingly, while the households invited to participate were random and data were weighted to reflect the city as a whole, it is important to note these response variations may affect response patterns.

To understand how different characteristics may influence attitudes toward law enforcement, several other demographic questions were asked. Nearly three in four (72%) respondents reported English as the language most often spoken in their home, followed by Spanish (21%), Filipino (4%), or some other language (3%). Seven in ten (70%) respondents lived in their current neighborhood for more than 10 years, and over one in three respondents (37%) reported a total annual household income of over \$100,000 in 2023. Additionally, over 1 in 10 respondents (12%) reported having a disability (physical or mental in nature), and 1% of respondents identified as LGBTQ+.

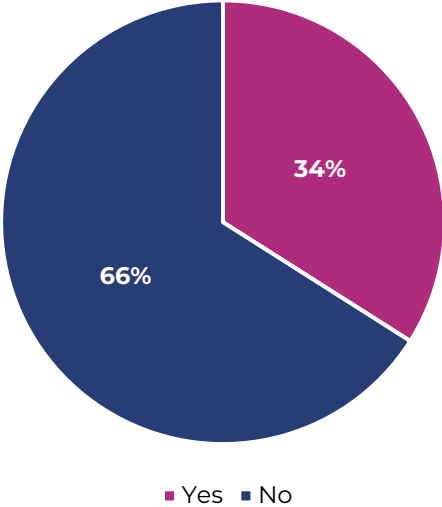
³ Weighting refers to a statistical technique used to adjust the survey results to better reflect the population from which the sample is drawn.

Findings

Level of Awareness and Support for DFR Program

CVPD launched its DFR program in 2018.⁴ While the department views drones as efficient and effective tools to provide law enforcement with critical information when responding to calls for service and emergency situations, the department wanted to gauge the community’s attitudes toward the DFR program. Although more than a third (34%) of respondents were aware of CVPD’s DFR program (Figure 1), fewer (16%) were aware of the policies that govern the use of aerial drones in their community (Appendix Table D1). To gauge the level of support the community has toward the DFR program, respondents were asked to rate their support toward a list of activities currently undertaken by the DFR program on a scale from strongly support to strongly oppose (with an option for no opinion). In this report, strongly support and somewhat support are combined into a single support category. In general, respondents were very supportive; over 9 in 10 respondents were supportive of all current DFR activities (Figure 2, Appendix Table D1).

Figure 1: Awareness of the DFR Program



N=400

Note: Cases with missing information not included.
Source: SANDAG, 2023

⁴ More information about CVPD’s DFR program can be viewed here: <https://www.chulavistaca.gov/departments/police-department/programs/uas-drone-program>

Figure 2: Respondent Support of Current Drone Activities



Note: Cases with missing information not included.

Source: SANDAG, 2023

Key Takeaway

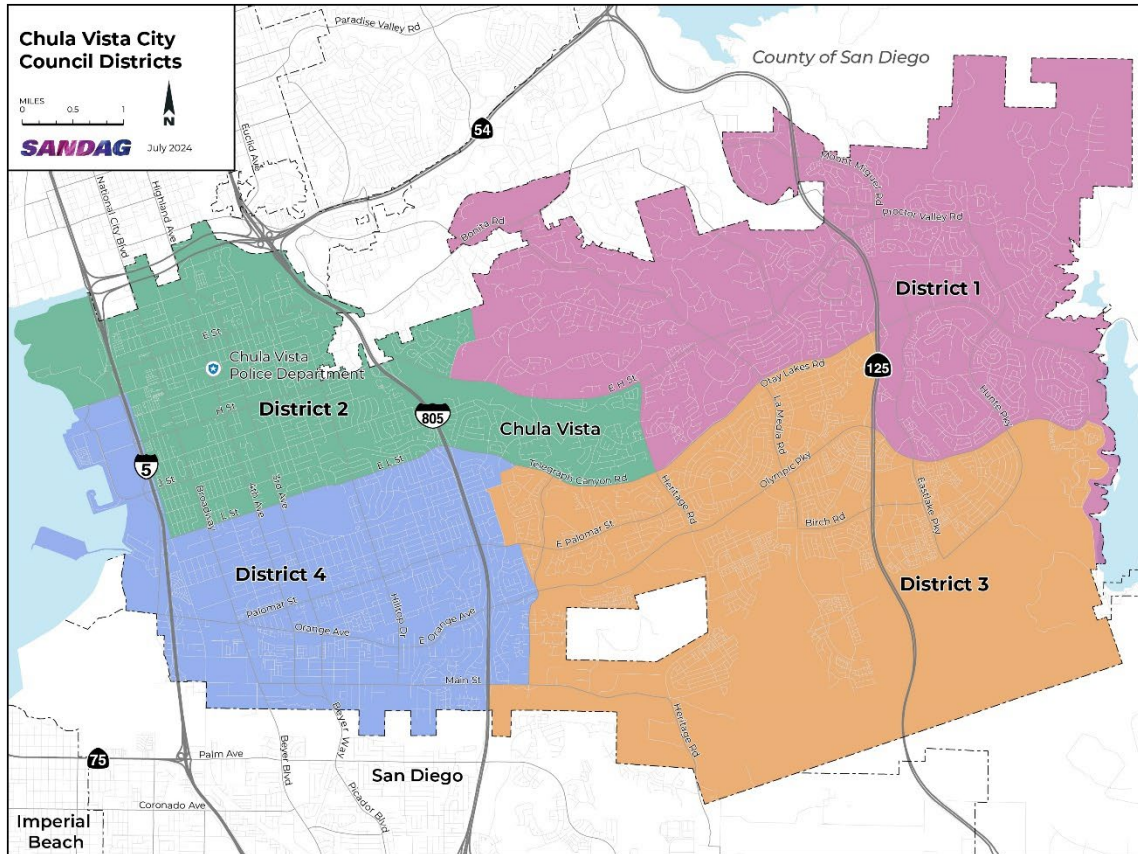
The administration of this community survey allowed residents to express their attitudes and levels of satisfaction toward CVPD. As this report addendum details, respondents were supportive of the DFR program. Below are some key findings from the DFR section of the survey.

In general, respondents were unaware of the DFR program and its policies. However, when they were presented with a list of current activities undertaken by the drone program, they were very supportive. This positive reaction suggests that increasing public awareness could further enhance community backing.

- **Increase awareness and seek community input** – There is a need for more public education and awareness efforts to inform residents about the DFR program and the safeguards in place. This type of communication builds trust with the community and is especially important if CVPD chooses to expand the DFR's operational capacity in the future.

These takeaways suggest that while there is strong support for the DFR program among residents, efforts to increase awareness and transparency are needed to ensure that residents are well-informed about the program and its operations.

Appendix A: Chula Vista Council Map



Appendix B: Survey Methodology

To ensure that the opinions of the entire Chula Vista community were included, a stratified sampling plan was implemented based on prior response rates in the different districts, with a greater number of surveys sent to households in district two, three and four, and fewer to those in one. A total of 453 unduplicated English and Spanish surveys were received between November 16 and December 18, 2023. This reflected an overall response rate of 11%. Of the returned surveys, 82% were paper copies and 18% were electronic. A unique identifier associated with each of the sampled households allowed for duplicate surveys to be removed from the database prior to analysis. In cases with duplicate survey submissions, only the first survey received was included in the analysis.

Appendix Table B1: Sampling and Response Rate by Chula Vista Council District

District	Number of Surveys Mailed	Number of Surveys Returned	Survey Response Rate
One	400	50	13%
Two	1,120	143	13%
Three	1,280	141	11%
Four	1,200	119	10%
Total	4,000	453	11%

Source: SANDAG, 2023

Appendix C: Respondent Demographics

Appendix Table C1: Sampling and Response Rate by Chula Vista Council District

Characteristics	Sample	2022 Population Estimates
Gender		
Male	49%	48%
Female	50%	52%
Non-Binary/Non-Conforming	<1%	-
Prefer Not to Say	%1	-
Race/Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	30%	15%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	42%	60%
Black/African American	4%	4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	18%	16%
Native American	1%	<1%
Other or Mixed	7%	4%
Age (Median)	61.2	35.9
Language Spoken at Home		
English	72%	-
Spanish	21%	-
Filipino	4%	-
Other	3%	-
LGBTQ+ Status		
Yes	1%	-
No	97%	-
Prefer Not to Say	2%	-
Disability Status		
Yes	12%	-
No	85%	-
Prefer Not to Say	3%	-
Years in Current Neighborhood		
0 to 5 years	17%	-
6 to 10 years	13%	-
More than 10 years	70%	-
Annual Household Income		
Under \$35,000	10%	
\$35,000 to \$49,999	7%	
\$50,000 to \$74,999	11%	
\$75,000 to \$99,999	13%	
\$100,000 or greater	37%	
Prefer Not to Say	22%	

Notes: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding. Cases with missing information not included.

Sources: 2023 SANDAG Estimates; 2022 American Community Survey Estimates

Appendix D: Aggregate Data

Appendix Table D1: Drone as a First Responder

Question	Weighted Percentages	Unweighted Data Percentages	Unweighted Data Number
Q20. Are you aware of CVPD's drone as a first responder (DFR) program?			
Yes	34%	36%	142
No	66%	64%	257
Q21. Are you aware of CVPD's policies or regulations that govern the use of aerial drones in your community?			
Yes	16%	17%	69
No	84%	83%	330
Q22. Please circle the number under the response that best describes how you feel toward drone use by the police in these different applications:			
Q22A. Providing an overhead view of an area or incident for ground personnel			
Strongly support	75%	74%	301
Somewhat support	17%	18%	71
Somewhat oppose	3%	3%	11
Strongly oppose	2%	2%	8
No opinion	3%	4%	14
Q22B. Safely clearing the interior of buildings			
Strongly support	74%	73%	295
Somewhat support	17%	18%	74
Somewhat oppose	2%	2%	6
Strongly oppose	2%	2%	6
No opinion	5%	6%	22
Q22C. Providing detailed documentation of crime and accident scenes			
Strongly support	75%	75%	301
Somewhat support	19%	19%	75
Somewhat oppose	1%	2%	6
Strongly oppose	1%	1%	5
No opinion	4%	4%	17
Q22D. Searching for lost or missing persons			
Strongly support	85%	85%	344
Somewhat support	11%	11%	44
Somewhat oppose	0%	1%	2
Strongly oppose	0%	1%	2
No opinion	3%	3%	12

Note: Percentages may not equal to 100% due to rounding.
Source: SANDAG, 2023