Bloomberg Cities
Idea Exchange



EVALUATION REPORT

Ojos en Alerta increases residents' willingness to report incidents

Ojos en Alerta (OEA) enables residents to easily report suspicious activity through Whatsapp and receive a coordinated response from local institutions. Operators review each report, cross-check it against CCTV cameras and 911 data to dispatch municipal police patrols in real time. The model is built for speed: operators aim to respond within 1 minute, and patrols aim to reach the scene within 10 minutes.

The Ojos en Alerta (Eyes on Alert) Program

In the mid-2000s, cities in Argentina lacked vital public safety data. Residents rarely reported crimes, and police often responded slowly, so cities could not accurately target crime hotspots or design effective prevention strategies.

The City of San Miguel launched OEA in 2016 and has since helped spread it to dozens of cities across Argentina, including Mendoza. In 2025, the Idea Exchange Evaluation Fund evaluated the program in San Miguel and Mendoza and found OEA is meeting its primary goal: increasing residents' willingness to report security incidents.

OEA users are **2-3 times more likely to report incidents** than non-users.

OEA increased total reporting and diverted non-emergencies from 911.

A dedicated **preventive police force and rapid response times** are key drivers of OEA's success.

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EVALUATION REPORT FOR OJOS EN ALERTA

Executive Summary

CHALLENGE

In the mid-2000s, cities in Argentina lacked vital public safety data. Residents rarely reported crimes, and police often responded slowly. Without real-time data, **cities could not accurately target crime hotspots or develop effective crime prevention strategies**.

SOLUTION

The City of San Miguel created **a program that combines WhatsApp crime reporting with a coordinated public safety response: "**Ojos en Alerta**" (OEA) or "Eyes on Alert" in English.** Using WhatsApp, residents can share suspicious activity via text, photos, videos, voice notes, and live location. Operators at a monitoring center receive and review reports, cross-check them against closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras and other emergency reports, and coordinate ambulances or municipal police patrols in real time. The model is designed for speed: operators are expected to respond within 1 minute, with municipal police patrols on the scene within 10 minutes. Since its implementation, the City of San Miguel has worked to spread the program to dozens of cities in Argentina, including Mendoza.

IMPACT

We conducted a mixed-methods evaluation that combines contribution analysis with a process evaluation to assess the effectiveness of WhatsApp reporting in two cities: San Miguel and Mendoza. We find **strong evidence that WhatsApp reporting has increased residents' willingness to report incidents.** Users are 2 - 3 times more likely to report incidents than non-users; among victims of crime in San Miguel, 7 in 10 active OEA users reported the incident, compared with 4 in 10 non-users. The program also increased total reporting and diverted non-emergencies from 911.

The impact of WhatsApp reporting on other outcomes is less clear. **Perceptions of safety and trust in police:** For these outcomes, we find that impact is dependent on how the program is integrated into a city's policing system. For example, residents in San Miguel feel safer because the program deploys officers throughout the city and ensures a timely response to security risks. **Crime:** Violent crime is down in both cities. While there is a correlation between OEA activities and lower crime rates, other factors (e.g., police response) are important drivers of results.

DRIVERS OF IMPACT

We identified **a dedicated preventive police force** and **rapid response times** as key drivers of success for WhatsApp reporting programs. We also found that there are tradeoffs in the different ways that cities allow residents to register for WhatsApp reporting; open registration likely drives broader community awareness and use, but requiring training may help set a reporting program up for success during its initial rollout.



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Intervention

The challenge: getting residents involved in public safety

Preventing crime is vital for public safety. A strong police force is important, but municipalities can work even more effectively when they have good information about what is happening on the ground.

Technological advancements have made it easier for municipalities to gather information from residents and more proactively address incidents before they arise or escalate into violence. San Miguel was an early innovator in this space, establishing **Ojos en Alerta (OEA), a WhatsApp-based crime reporting channel**. 80% of the Argentinian population already uses WhatsApp, meaning that OEA is seamless for most residents to adopt. By integrating a popular messaging platform into the city's security infrastructure, the city sought to build stronger relationships between police and residents, and to ensure that information flowed effectively between them.

WhatsApp reporting programs such as OEA fit within a family of policing policies called "community-oriented policing," an approach in which safety authorities build stronger relationships with residents. Community-oriented policing strategies can include facilitating collaborative efforts to assess community safety, encouraging information-sharing through reporting hotlines, or co-designing prevention tactics with residents. These strategies often focus on making it easier for residents to share information with authorities, increasing the likelihood that residents report crimes and share intelligence that can help in crime response.

Intervention in practice: WhatsApp crime reporting and response

Multiple cities in Argentina have adopted OEA, a program for WhatsApp reporting and response. Residents use WhatsApp to report suspicious activity using text, photos, or video (calling is not available). Operators at a monitoring center receive the reports, cross-check information against real-time surveillance feeds, and immediately coordinate ambulances or police patrols. The emphasis on speed is a core feature of the program; operators are required to respond within one minute, with officers expected to arrive on the scene within ten minutes. OEA transforms local police work, shifting the focus toward immediate, data-driven response and accountability.



1. SECURITY INCIDENT



A resident notices a suspicious situation, witnesses a crime, or is a victim of a crime.

2. REPORTING



The resident sends a report via WhatsApp: message, location, photo, video, or voice note.

3. TRIAGE AND RESPONSE



The monitoring center receives the report.



An OEA operator replies and asks follow-up questions to clarify details. Then, they dispatch a patrol unit if it's necessary.



A prevention police officer addresses the report.

4. DATA PROCESSING



An OEA operator records the report and response details.



Police officers use weekly aggregated data to identify patterns, guide patrol deployment, and plan preventive actions.

History of Ojos en Alerta in San Miguel and Mendoza

Public safety has been a major concern for residents across Argentina. As public security is a provincial mandate in Argentina, local governments historically have had a limited role in crime prevention. However, concerns about crime and insecurity became a major issue for Argentinian cities during the 2000s. City officials reported limited presence and slow response times from the provincial police, the sole agency responsible for law enforcement. In addition, there was a significant information gap: during routine meetings with residents, city officials realized many crimes were occurring without their knowledge and never made it into official provincial reports.

The City of San Miguel decided to assume a more direct role in crime prevention, first by creating a preventive police force, and then by establishing and helping spread WhatsApp reporting through OEA.

2007 Mendoza

In 2007, Mendoza established a preventive police force. This force replaced a more general community policing program in the city.

2010 - 2015 SAN MIGUEL

Creating the municipal preventive force: San Miguel introduced local "prevention officers" to expand the City's public safety role. Prevention officers increased overall operational capacity to respond to crime. The City also opened its first monitoring center to track crime data at a local level and inform day-to-day crime prevention activity.

- In **2013**, San Miguel began coordinating municipal crime prevention efforts directly with the provincial police, including pairing prevention officers and provincial police officers on patrols. At this time, the city formalized the preventive task force into a preventive police force under the municipality's Secretariat of Security. To ensure professional standards, new recruits completed a two-month training program covering legal boundaries, self-defense, and patrol driving.

What are "prevention officers"? While most police officers are employed by provinces in Argentina, "prevention officers" are employed by the City. They receive basic training and focus on patrolling neighborhoods. Prevention officers provide a strong community presence, but their authority is limited. They cannot investigate crimes, make arrests, or search private property.

2016 SAN MIGUEL

Ojos en Alerta (OEA) pilot: Even as the preventive police force increased enforcement presence and crime rates fell, an information gap persisted. Local officers still saw neighborhood crimes that never made it into official records, leaving the city with an incomplete picture of local security. San Miguel launched OEA as a pilot program designed to lower crime reporting barriers using WhatsApp. The rollout began strategically with taxi drivers, who were selected for their consistent presence and high visibility across the city. Taxi drivers were required to complete a 1-hour training session before gaining access to the WhatsApp channel. Following initial success, the program was formalized by municipal ordinance in November 2016 and gradually expanded to include other groups, such as waste collectors, newspaper vendors, and city staff.

2018 SAN MIGUEL

City-wide scaling: The City updated its legal framework to scale the program city-wide, making it available to all residents aged 16 and older. Formal training was made optional, a move meant to reduce barriers to entry. All adult residents could now anonymously report suspicious activity via WhatsApp.

2019 SAN MIGUEL

Country-wide scaling: The program received national media attention in 2018. Other cities reached out to San Miguel to learn from their experience. These early collaborations led to the creation of a replication framework. The framework includes formal agreements, operational guidelines, and branding standards to ensure consistency across new locations.

When cities contact San Miguel, the OEA team assesses whether the interested city has the necessary conditions to implement the program. Cities must have sufficient capacity to respond to WhatsApp reports, coordinate closely with provincial police, and reach incidents within ten minutes. To date, OEA has been adopted by more than 100 cities across Argentina.

Mendoza

In 2019, the city increased its investment in the force and crime prevention operations to around 15% of its budget. The City of Mendoza contacted the City of San Miguel in 2019 and quickly decided to adopt OEA, building on its existing monitoring center.

2020 - 2022 Mendoza

Replication in Mendoza: Mendoza launched OEA in 2020 to lower reporting barriers and capture real-time safety data. The OEA launch followed multiple investments in public safety in the preceding years.

- In Mendoza, residents must attend training before gaining access to OEA's WhatsApp channel. During the pandemic, virtual training was challenging and proved ineffective. For this reason, the city has maintained in-person sessions which are mandatory for everyone interested in using the program. Since 2022, city staff have visited schools, businesses and neighborhoods to deliver the training directly.

What makes Ojos en Alerta unique

OEA stands out among other crime prevention initiatives for combining low-barrier resident reporting through WhatsApp, real-time human response, and city-led monitoring capabilities. Other programs have primarily relied on separate mobile applications, which often introduce more friction, or on traditional emergency hotlines, which usually have slower response times.

Elements that differentiate OEA from other crime reporting programs include:

1. Leveraging a widely used channel with multimedia capability

By relying on WhatsApp, a platform very familiar to most residents, the program eliminates the need for users to download a new mobile app or learn a new system. Therefore, OEA has very low barriers to adoption compared to other reporting tools. OEA leverages WhatsApp's built-in features to enable more detailed reporting, including:

- Real-time location sharing
- Photos
- Videos
- Voice notes

These features enable operators and police to pinpoint locations more quickly and identify suspicious individuals more easily.

2. Integration with municipal surveillance infrastructure and traditional hotlines

OEA integrates with the city's broader security ecosystem. Operators can cross-reference resident reports with real-time surveillance footage and other monitoring tools to verify conditions on the ground and coordinate a response. In San Miguel, 911 and OEA operations are closely coordinated so that either provincial or municipal prevention officers can be dispatched in emergencies.

3. Collaborative response by prevention and provincial police officers

San Miguel deploys pairs of officers – one prevention officer from the city and one provincial police officer – to address OEA reports. This setup allows for a dual approach: the prevention officer, who specializes in resident interaction, can focus on conducting interviews and gathering comprehensive data, while the provincial officer, who is trained and equipped for self-defense, handles arrests or escalating situations. This division of roles improves the team's capability to respond effectively to reports.

In Mendoza, some patrols are composed of both a prevention officer and a provincial police officer, but most patrols have only prevention officers. Operators deploy patrols based on the report type and provincial police availability.



Implementation differences across cities

While the core components above are the same in both San Miguel and Mendoza, the cities differ in security contexts and in how they implement OEA.

Table 1. How OEA is implemented in San Miguel and Mendoza

	SAN MIGUEL	MENDOZA
City Context	• **Location**: Outside of Buenos Aires • **Population**: ~328,000 • **Context**: Urban area with higher poverty and inequality than the neighboring capital.	• **Location**: Western Argentina • **Population**: ~ 127,000.As one of the country's main tourist destinations, hundreds of thousands of people visit every year. • **Context**: The city has relatively high living standards compared to other parts of Argentina, but it still faces public safety challenges.
Implementation overview	**Promotion:** City social media, billboards, and print materials **Access:** Unrestricted use for all residents • Any resident can submit a report directly to the OEA WhatsApp phone number • OEA offers training sessions that explain how the program works and how to report effectively, but participation is voluntary • Training is delivered through flexible formats, including targeted sessions for small groups and outreach in public spaces **Coordination with emergency services:** • Fully integrated with 911 response • OEA operators refer reports requiring emergency services directly to 911 dispatch	**Promotion:** City website and social media, bulletins and stickers placed around the city **Access:** Mandatory training required to join • Residents must sign up for training on the city's website and attend a scheduled training • The training session includes an overview of recent investments and improvements to city security, an introduction to OEA, and guidance on reporting criminal activity through the WhatsApp channel • Once residents complete the training, they can start sending reports to the OEA phone number **Coordination with emergency services:** • No integration with 911 services • OEA operators direct users to call 911 if necessary
Launch date + reach	• Launched in **2016** • **25% adoption** across the city	• Launched in **2020** • **10% adoption** across the city
Police response	• **Pairs** of one **municipal** prevention officer + one **provincial** police officer respond to **all** reports (security and non-security related) • Median response time: **9 minutes** in 2025	• A **municipal** prevention officer will respond to all **security related** reports • Median response time: **9 minutes** in 2025

Evaluation Methodology

Lessons from existing evidence

Much research has been conducted about how to prevent crime. However, we did not find causal studies that assessed the impact of reporting tools and digital neighborhood platforms (including WhatsApp groups, city channels, and safety apps) that enhance existing 911 (or comparable) emergency service lines.

Three studies of WhatsApp-based crime prevention tools come from groups in the Netherlands. Distinct from OEA, these WhatsApp-based groups are community-led and moderated. The studies suggest that while these resident-run tools may increase information sharing and perceptions of social cohesion, there is little evidence that they reduce crime. The authors also highlighted potential risks, including increased lateral surveillance, ethnic profiling, vigilantism, and blurred accountability between residents and police.

In Santa Catarina, Brazil, the state has run a community policing program, Rede de Vizinhos **(RdV), that facilitates real-time information sharing through WhatsApp groups with police participation**. RdV allows residents to submit an application to create WhatsApp groups based on their place of residence or business, and to share information with each other and local police. No formal evaluation of the program's overall effectiveness has been conducted, but researchers did evaluate a randomized information campaign to encourage awareness of, and participation in, the program. That study found limited effects of a Facebook messaging campaign on participation in RdV, which researchers hypothesized was because baseline awareness was already high (>50% of residents who saw no messaging were familiar with RdV).

Though evidence of the impact of WhatsApp-based reporting in the field is limited, **a 2025** simulated study in the UK **suggests mechanisms that will make digital reporting tools successful in cities.** Researchers found that tools must be easy to use, demonstrate efficiency in response, and make residents feel respected in order to increase willingness to report and improve trust in municipal response.

These findings suggest that the success of a program is dependent on how an institution responds to the information that residents provide. While we find examples of community policing programs that have failed to build trust or reduce crime, there are other studies that show programs are linked to increased reporting in at-risk communities. Additionally, alternative response models that address non-violent and behavioral health-related reports (e.g., people inebriated in public) have also been successful in reducing arrests and increasing access to medical services.

Our evaluation contributes to this growing, but mixed, body of evidence about how cities should implement successful community-oriented policing programs.

Research goals

We aimed to accomplish the following goals by conducting an evaluation of the OEA program in San Miguel and Mendoza:

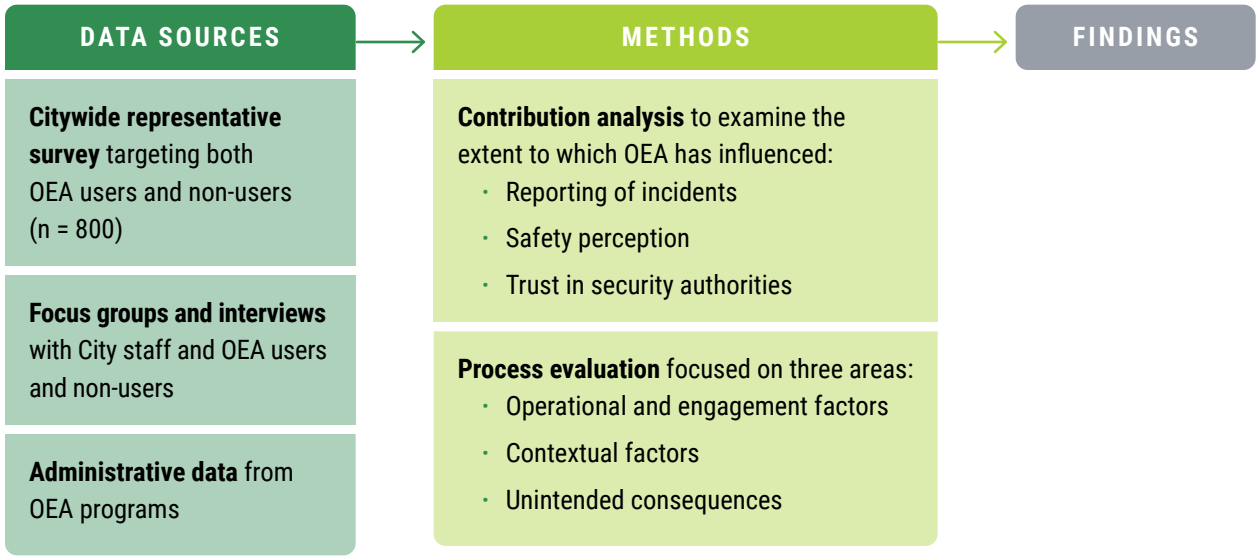
- Assess the extent to which the WhatsApp reporting channel and coordinated response has contributed to:
  - increasing willingness to report,
  - improving safety perception, and
  - strengthening trust in security authorities.

- Assess how operations and resident engagement impact the program's success to identify best practices for other cities.
- Evaluate the extent to which the program has caused unintended adverse effects.

Evaluation methods

We conducted a mixed-methods evaluation. The evaluation design combines contribution analysis and a process evaluation to assess the effectiveness and implications of OEA in San Miguel and Mendoza.

Graphic 1. Overview of data sources and methods



Contribution analysis

We used a contribution analysis[1] to examine the **extent to which OEA has influenced observed outcomes related to reporting, safety perception, and trust in security authorities** in San Miguel and Mendoza. Contribution analysis evaluates an intervention's influence on outcomes, especially when complex environments preclude experimental trials. Rather than proving absolute attribution, it constructs a causal narrative to weigh the intervention's impact against other influencing factors.

We assessed three contribution claims:

- **Contribution Claim 1 - Willingness to report:** OEA has increased residents' willingness to report security incidents and concerns.
- **Contribution Claim 2 - Perception of safety:** OEA has improved community members' perceptions of safety.
- **Contribution Claim 3 - Trust in safety authorities:** OEA has increased trust in security authorities among residents and people who work or study in the city.

1 *Contribution analysis* is an evaluation approach used to assess whether and how an intervention plausibly contributed to observed outcomes, especially in complex settings where experimental designs aren't feasible. Rather than trying to prove causality, it builds and tests a theory-based causal story, using evidence to assess how likely it is that the intervention made a meaningful contribution to an outcome, alongside other influencing factors. Additional information about contribution analysis can be found here.

More information about contribution analyses:

- Appendix D for more detail on how we conducted the contribution analysis.
- Appendix E for detailed results of the contribution analysis conducted for San Miguel.
- Appendix F for detailed results of the contribution analysis conducted for Mendoza.

Process evaluation

We complemented the contribution analysis with a process evaluation to explore how the program is implemented and the factors that shape its performance. The process evaluation focused on three core questions:

- **Operational and engagement factors:** How does the program's delivery approach (e.g., training, communication, responsiveness) shape program performance and user engagement?
- **Contextual factors:** What external dynamics have facilitated or hindered program success?
- **Unintended consequences:** To what extent is there evidence of negative or unexpected outcomes, such as bias in reporting, misuse of the system, or heightened community fears?

Data collection procedures

To inform both evaluation approaches, we collected qualitative and quantitative data. We also analyzed administrative data and program documentation.

Quantitative data

We collected survey data to fill a gap in information on residents' perceptions of safety, trust in authorities, and their relationship to reporting crime. We collected data through a **citywide representative survey** targeting both OEA users and non-users. The survey focused on adult residents aged 18 and older and was designed to capture variation across different resident profiles. In total, 800 residents were surveyed across the two cities: 400 in San Miguel and 400 in Mendoza.

In **San Miguel**, surveys were conducted in-person, using a non-probabilistic quota sampling methodology. The sample was stratified between OEA users and non-users, with quotas set by age group and gender to reflect the demographics of the city. To reduce selection bias during data collection, the fieldwork team applied a systematic household selection approach to in-person data collection: interviewers approached every third residence until completing the quota assigned to each category. Five starting points were strategically distributed across different areas of San Miguel to ensure territorial coverage within the city. Fieldwork was carried out between November 11 and November 23, 2025.

In **Mendoza**, the survey initially was conducted by phone using the municipal database of phone numbers. Quotas were set by age group and gender to reflect the demographics of the city. However, due to low contact and response rates, the methodology was adjusted during implementation. The team shifted to in-person data collection, using a non-probabilistic quota sampling approach, similar to the one applied in San Miguel. They identified five starting points in the city and approached every third residence. This change was introduced to improve survey completion rates and ensure that the target sample of OEA users and non-users could be reached. Fieldwork in Mendoza was conducted between November 24 and December 2, 2025.

Together, these two approaches allowed the study to collect comparable information from OEA users and non-users across both municipalities while adapting fieldwork strategies to the conditions in each location. Table 2 describes the sample of surveyed residents.

Table 2. Survey participants

	SAN MIGUEL		MENDOZA	
Group	**Participants by group**	**Total participants**	**Participants by group**	**Total participants**
OEA Non-users	232 (58%)	400	280 (70%)	400
OEA Users	168 (42%)		120 (30%)	

Because access to OEA differs across municipalities, the definition of an "OEA user" was different in San Miguel and Mendoza. In San Miguel, where residents do not need to complete training to use OEA, users were defined as residents who had used OEA at least once. In Mendoza, where residents must complete a training session to have access to OEA's phone number, users were defined as residents who knew how to use OEA, even if they had not yet sent a report.

Qualitative data

We conducted qualitative methods to understand the mechanisms driving program performance and identify potential areas for improvement. We conducted four qualitative research activities: focus groups with non-users, interviews with program users, in-depth interviews with program staff, and interviews with city staff. Table 3 describes the purpose and participants for each method.

Table 3. Overview of qualitative methods and participants

QUALITATIVE METHODS OVERVIEW			
Method	**Purpose**	**San Miguel Participants**	**Mendoza Participants**
Focus groups with non-users	Provide insight into the reasons for not engaging with the program and identify potential areas for improvement in new-user outreach.	3 focus groups with 4 to 6 participants each (13 participants total)	Not conducted
Interviews with program users	Deepen our understanding of the mechanisms that drive user engagement with OEA, learn about program satisfaction, and identify areas for improvement in program implementation.	5 participants	Not conducted

Method	Purpose	San Miguel Participants	Mendoza Participants
Interviews with program staff	Understand program implementation and identify areas for improvement in program coordination.	6 participants (3 prevention officers and 3 OEA WhatsApp channel operators)	6 participants (3 prevention officers and 3 OEA WhatsApp channel operators)
Interviews with city staff	Examine supplementary strategies that may have contributed to increased perceptions of safety or greater trust in authorities.	2 city staff representing the Department of Social Development and the Department of Public Infrastructure	4 city staff representing the Department of Social Development and the Department of Public Infrastructure



Evaluation Findings

Across the two cities evaluated, we found:

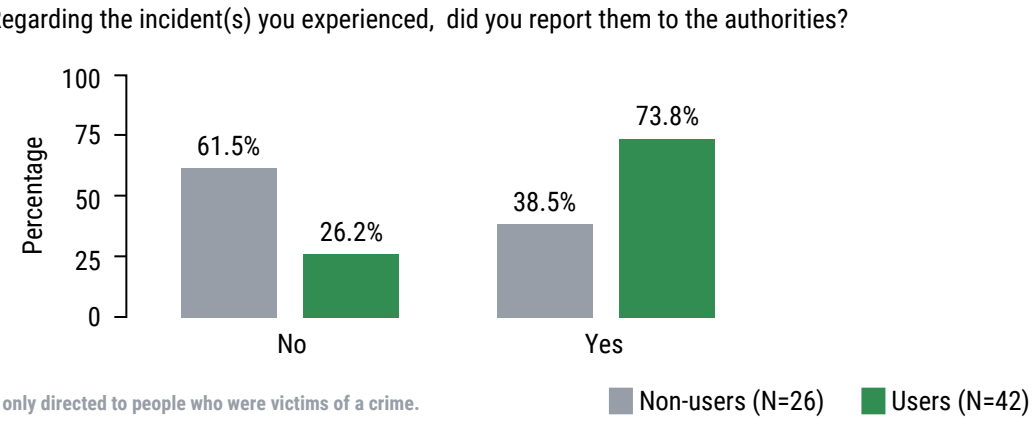
- **WhatsApp reporting channels increased residents' willingness to report security incidents and concerns. This is OEA's primary goal.**
- **WhatsApp reporting channels increased total reporting and diverted non-emergencies from 911.**
- **WhatsApp reporting channels can contribute to an increased perception of safety and trust in authorities, but their impact cannot be separated from parallel investments in the policing system.**
- **Key drivers of program impact include: the presence of a preventive police force, rapid response times to reports, and how program registration occurs (open to the public vs. limited).**

Detailed findings and rationale for these findings can be found in Appendix E (San Miguel) and Appendix F (Mendoza).

WhatsApp reporting channels increased residents' willingness to report security incidents and concerns

There is strong evidence to support the claim that OEA has contributed to increasing residents' willingness to report security incidents, which is the program's primary goal. OEA users are 2 - 3 times more likely to report incidents than non-users in San Miguel. Among victims of crime in San Miguel, 7 in 10 active OEA users reported the incident, compared with 4 in 10 non-users (Graph 1)[2]. In both cities, users also expressed that they would be more likely to report an incident to the authorities if they experienced one. In Mendoza, 44% of OEA users stated they would be very likely to report a security incident, compared to 26% of non-users (Graph 2).

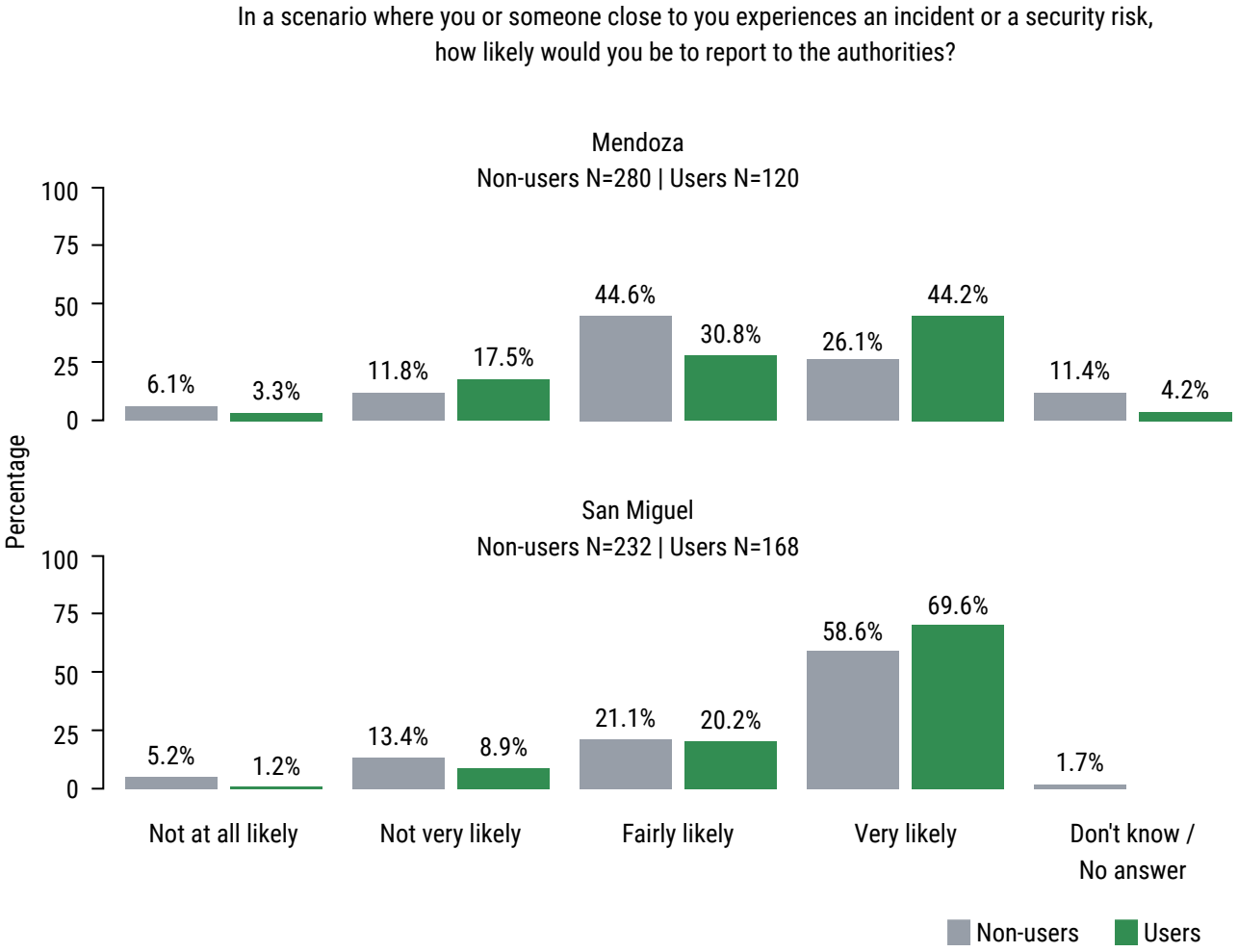
Graph 1. Reporting behavior in San Miguel



N=68
Note: This question was only directed to people who were victims of a crime.

2 In Mendoza, the number of OEA users who reported being victims of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey was very small (n = 15). As a result, percentages for this subgroup are less reliable for interpretation.

Graph 2. Willingness to report in San Miguel and Mendoza



The difference that OEA makes in reporting experiences and intentions represents a major shift, especially in Latin America. A recent Inter-American Development Bank study found that across ten Latin American and Caribbean countries, only 25% of crimes get reported. In Argentina, the estimated overall reporting rate was 37.3%, closely matching our survey's finding for non-users in San Miguel.

Some key drivers of OEA uptake and use include:

- **Ease of use:** In interviews with San Miguel users, we found that users find it easy to submit security reports to OEA through WhatsApp, and they are comfortable sharing information with the channel. Users and non-users perceived the platform as easier to use than traditional reporting channels, such as 911. In interviews, residents indicated that using WhatsApp allows them to report their security concerns much faster compared to traditional channels.
- **Program satisfaction:** In both cities, users were satisfied with the city's response to reports. In San Miguel, 87% of residents who know about OEA held a positive opinion of the program, and 93% of OEA users reported that it met or exceeded their expectations. In Mendoza, 84.5% of OEA users report that it met or exceeded their expectations. One driver of slightly lower program satisfaction in Mendoza may be that OEA is not fully integrated with 911. When OEA operators encounter reports of emergencies, they advise users to contact 911 directly. For residents, this redirection can make it feel like OEA doesn't work.

- **Rapid response times:** Users in both cities described the program as effective, reliable, and providing a rapid response. In 2025, both Mendoza and San Miguel maintained median response times of 9 minutes. When residents perceive that reports are acknowledged and acted upon quickly, reporting becomes more worthwhile, and it increases their motivation to report incidents in the future.
- **Awareness:** OEA has achieved broad awareness in San Miguel, where 93% of the respondents in our survey had heard about the OEA program, regardless of whether they had used it before. During interviews with users and non-users, participants consistently reported that close friends or family members were OEA users and relied heavily on the program for reporting. The belief that others are already using OEA can create a descriptive social norm for crime reporting. Descriptive social norms describe when an individual's beliefs about a group's behavior motivates them to adopt similar behavior. In San Miguel, social norms make it more probable that individuals will report crime through the program. OEA is not yet as prevalent in Mendoza, where just 41% of non-user respondents report knowing about or having heard of OEA.

Box 1. Perceived level of usage of Ojos en Alerta in San Miguel

What have you heard about OEA?

"I haven't used it, but I've seen that everyone uses it."

"I've heard that people use it a lot."

(Anonymous, non-OEA users)

"In my neighborhood, they use it. Both neighbors and family members use it quite a bit."

(Anonymous, OEA user)

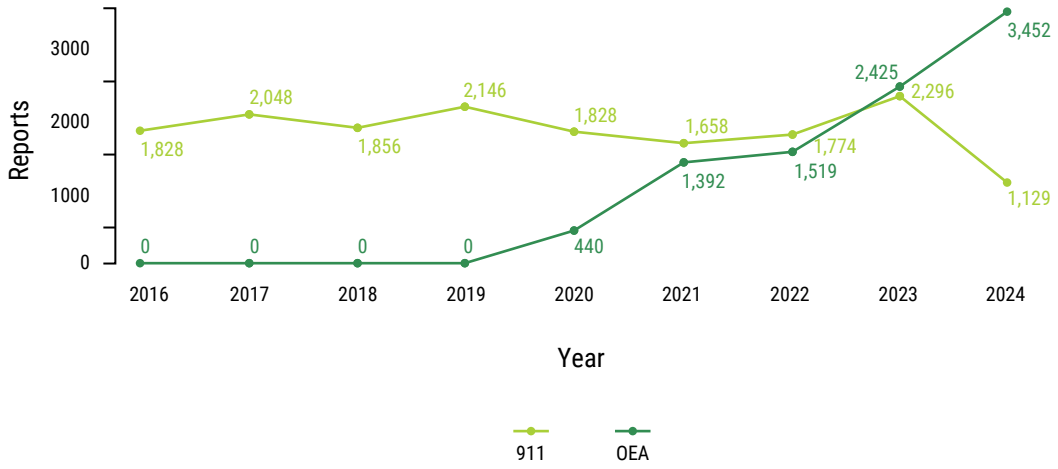
WhatsApp reporting channels increased total reporting and diverted non-emergencies from 911

Increases in willingness to report reflects OEA's implementation, not increased crime rates. Crime trends in Mendoza and San Miguel do not indicate rising insecurity that would independently drive greater reporting. In both cities, homicide rates and property crime rates have decreased or remained stable since the implementation of OEA. Crime data for San Miguel and Mendoza are available in appendices. While it is unlikely that the drop in violent crime rates is directly related to the implementation of OEA, the shift increases our confidence that the higher willingness to report incidents is not due to a significantly larger number of incidents in the city.

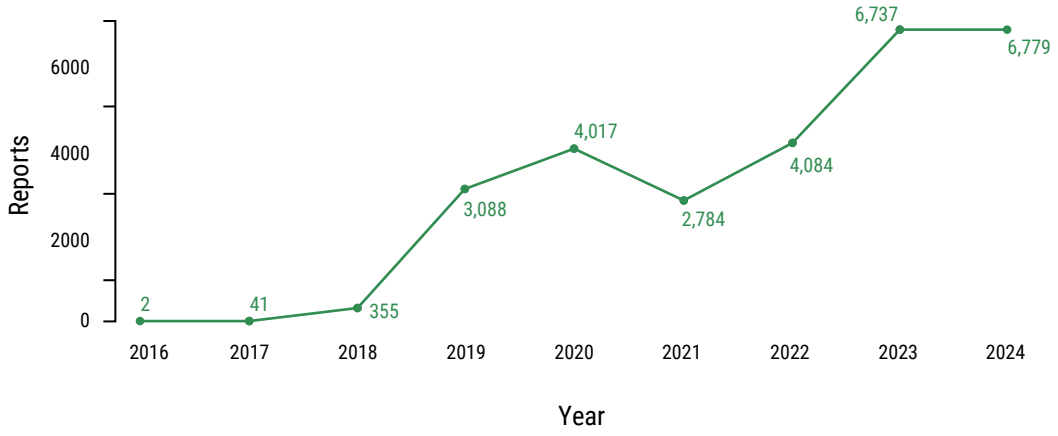
Prior to OEA's launch, residents primarily relied on 911 or police stations to report security incidents. While 911 responds to emergencies and urgent situations, it is not well-suited to addressing suspicious activity before a crime occurs.

Administrative data demonstrates (1) increasing use of WhatsApp reporting, particularly for preventive incidents, and (2) a shift in where suspicious activity reports are directed. In Mendoza, OEA's WhatsApp channel surpassed 911 in 2023 as the primary channel for receiving reports of suspicious activity. This shift has allowed the 911 system to focus more on emergencies that require immediate action, instead of handling low-risk or unclear reports.

Graph 3. Number of reports of suspicious behavior in 911 and Ojos en Alerta by year, Mendoza

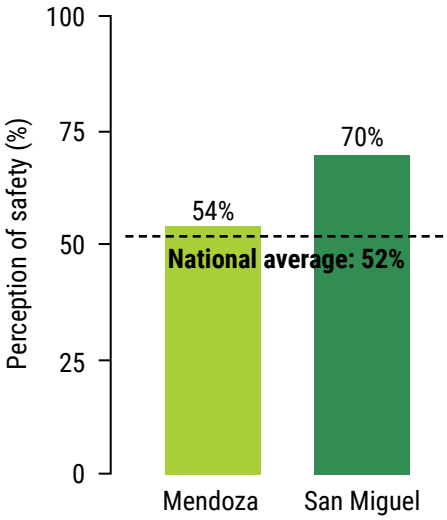


Graph 4. Number of reports of suspicious behavior in Ojos en Alerta by year, San Miguel[3]



3 911 reports are not available from San Miguel

WhatsApp reporting channels can contribute to increased perception of safety and trust in authorities, but their impact cannot be separated from parallel investments in the policing system



There is strong evidence that OEA contributed to improving safety perceptions in San Miguel. Residents now report feeling a high level of safety in their neighborhoods, contrasting with previous years and to other cities in Argentina. Across Argentina, 52% of the population feels somewhat or very safe in their neighborhood.[4] In contrast, our survey in San Miguel showed that 70% of residents feel safe walking alone at night in the city.

There is not enough evidence to determine whether OEA has contributed to improving safety perception in Mendoza, where residents' safety perception is similar to the national average. Mendoza's average levels of safety perception may be due in part to the program's more limited reach (10% of residents in Mendoza use OEA, compared to 25% of residents in San Miguel) and targeted deployment in specific parts of the city.

OEA and improved police performance have complemented each other in improving residents' perceptions of safety. Both cities have invested in building up their preventive police forces. In San Miguel especially, the visibility of security systems and preventive policing has become a visible crime deterrent. OEA works by making that police presence more strategic and responsive. The program gathers data from resident reports and uses it to guide where and when police patrols are deployed.

Box 2. Relationship between safety perception and improvements in security infrastructure

> *"Yes, the city has improved. It's full of cameras and police, constantly monitored... San Miguel is very, very safe. Some time ago, you couldn't really do anything there; at night, we were afraid. This sense of safety is related to the cameras and the strong police presence. The LED lights have changed everything. There's much better lighting, and that improves everything."*
>
> (Anonymous, OEA user in San Miguel)

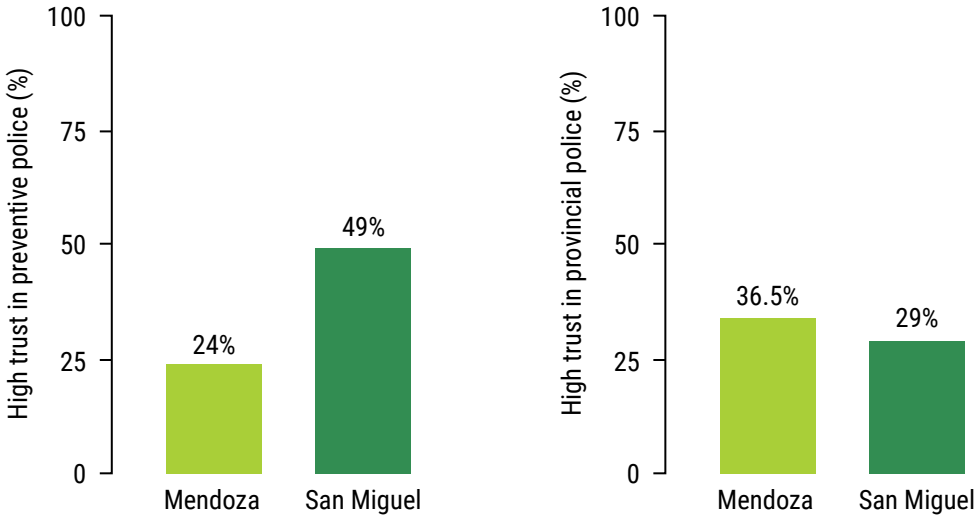
There is moderate evidence that OEA has strengthened trust in security authorities in San Miguel, and limited evidence that OEA has strengthened trust in local security authorities in Mendoza.

Both cities have higher trust in local and provincial police forces than Argentines nationally; only 18% of Argentines report high trust in the national police.[5] However, the evidence is insufficient to conclude that OEA is

4 Statistics from Vanderbilt University LAPOP study, visualized in the AmericasBarometer Data Playground. Variable Insecurity: Perception of Neighborhood Insecurity (aoj11)
5 Statistics from Vanderbilt University LAPOP study, visualized in the AmericasBarometer Data Playground. Variable Evaluations: Trust in National Police (b18)

the main driver of elevated trust levels, because the impact of OEA cannot be separated from parallel investments in police capacity, surveillance, and lighting.

There are two factors that may explain why evidence is limited in Mendoza: lower awareness of the preventive police force (20% of survey respondents were not aware of preventive police), and a more restricted operational role for preventive officers (including restrictions on detaining suspects and entering private homes).



Box 3. Perceived safety perception compared to previous years, San Miguel

"It feels much safer than in previous years. Now I walk around San Miguel with my baby, coming and going on foot, and nothing has ever happened to me. I feel quite protected because there are patrol cars in the area."

(Anonymous, OEA user)

Areas of caution in implementation

Our evaluation also considered unintended outcomes that could threaten OEA's overall impact. While we found no evidence of these issues significantly affecting outcomes in San Miguel or Mendoza, they remain important considerations for other cities implementing WhatsApp crime reporting programs.

1. Preventing the risk of stigmatization of minorities or vulnerable groups

Staff in both cities noted a **risk of stigmatization in reporting**, particularly reports involving **unhoused individuals or clothing styles perceived as suspicious** (e.g., baggy or sports-themed clothing). Although reports linked to homeless people accounted for only 2% of cases in San Miguel in 2025, users sometimes report their presence in public or semi-private spaces as a safety risk.

Prevention officers in both cities typically handle these reports by relocating homeless individuals, and coordinating with municipal social services to ensure a supportive–rather than punitive–response. Strengthening safeguards (e.g., through resident training or in-app guidelines) could help mitigate the risk of stigmatization.

2. Anticipating false reports or misuse of OEA

False reports through OEA's WhatsApp channel appear to be rare (<1% of reported cases in both cities), but can be disruptive. Operators and police described a small number of these cases, including frequent callers or residents seeking greater patrol presence even when there is no immediate security threat.

In both San Miguel and Mendoza, access to CCTV has allowed operators to quickly assess whether reports are potentially false. In Mendoza, operators described an incident in which a report drew attention to one area of the city while criminal activity was taking place in another, illustrating how even rare false reports can be risky. In these cases, rapid authentication through camera footage, combined with sufficient preventive policing capacity, is important to avoid leaving areas of the city unprotected.

3. Ensuring police and monitoring coverage of the whole city to prevent crime displacement

A central concern with crime prevention initiatives is whether interventions reduce crime overall or simply shift crime to areas with lower program presence. This risk is particularly relevant for OEA if program access or coverage is concentrated in specific parts of the city. In the available data, however, we do not see clear evidence of within-city crime displacement, and crime rates have generally declined in both San Miguel and Mendoza. In San Miguel, broad program dissemination and preventive police presence across the city may help mitigate the risk. In Mendoza, where OEA coverage remains more limited, displacement to areas without OEA access remains an important implementation risk to monitor as the program expands.

4. Providing adequate staff training in soft skills and conflict de-escalation

Staff interviews indicated that both operators and prevention officers have to manage challenging situations in which residents are experiencing fear, anger, or conditions that could place them in danger. For example, a resident might try to follow a suspicious person before the police get there. Or, they might voice fear of becoming a victim.

Our review of program documentation identified a gap in staff training focused on these types of resident interactions. In San Miguel and Mendoza, operators and prevention officers reported learning to manage these situations primarily through field practice. Although this remains a highly challenging part of their role, staff manage it by maintaining emotional detachment and relying on peer support when residents become angry or distressed. Targeted training would formalize this process, mitigate staff stress, and ensure residents receive optimal support during high-pressure incidents. Staff noted that clear operational guidelines and protocols would systematically improve their handling of these situations.

Key drivers of program impact

Our evaluation showed that OEA complements public safety infrastructure rather than driving improvements alone. Investments in institutional capacity to open OEA to all residents and to respond to crime quickly are necessary to allow OEA to operate successfully. Cities considering implementing OEA should focus on getting two things right: rapid response times to OEA reports, and the user registration processes.

Prevention officers and rapid response times drive success.

Investments in preventive security tools, staff, and software have been central to OEA's success.

- **Prevention officers:** Prevention officers are necessary in the OEA model. In San Miguel, the establishment of the preventive police force led to an increase in San Miguel's officer-to-resident ratio, adding 1.16 officers per 1,000 residents.[6] Dedicated officers are able to patrol every city block, providing a visible patrol presence and allowing for quick responses to WhatsApp reports.

6 Staffing depends on context and city needs. San Miguel's guidance to cities is to maintain the number of officers necessary to maintain a 10 minute or less response time.

- **Surveillance infrastructure:** In San Miguel and Mendoza, expanded surveillance infrastructure has enabled faster and more accurate responses to WhatsApp reports. CCTV footage allows OEA operators to verify reports, supplement information provided in reports, and identify suspects. Surveillance cameras have become a visible deterrent to crime, with users citing cameras as a key factor in their sense of safety.

Evidence indicates that San Miguel and Mendoza maintain response times under 10 minutes by leveraging their infrastructure and prevention officers. **Quick response times and visible cameras and officers bolster residents' confidence in OEA**, convincing them that WhatsApp reports are taken seriously and resolved promptly. This is a self-reinforcing cycle: if residents believe that OEA reports are acted on, or experience quick responses themselves, it motivates reporting incidents in the future.

Open registration likely drives broader community awareness and use.

San Miguel and Mendoza currently have different approaches to registering users to use the OEA WhatsApp channel. In San Miguel, restrictions on participating in OEA have been lowered over time; anyone can now participate in OEA without any training. In Mendoza, users must still attend training before participating.

User training is designed to improve the quality of WhatsApp reports. WhatsApp reports in both cities can be low quality (e.g., no reported location, insufficient details), which hinders the speed and effectiveness of responses. Furthermore, some users report non-security incidents, such as medical emergencies, noise complaints, or abandoned vehicles. Some non-security related reports occur with either registration approach, but comparative data suggests the training is correlated with higher levels of security related reports. In San Miguel, 61% of all reports were related to security issues compared to 84% in Mendoza.

Based on the experiences of both cities, launching OEA with limited access (e.g., to certain groups, or requiring training) may be a smart choice for cities that are new to the program. Beginning with a training-required registration process allows a city to educate early users and set norms for WhatsApp channel use. It also gives a city time to test and improve OEA operations, especially coordination between operators, prevention police, and provincial police.

After a city has laid a strong foundation for how the WhatsApp platform should be used, there are benefits to making OEA broadly accessible. In San Miguel, where the WhatsApp channel is open to anyone, OEA has achieved broad awareness (88% of non-users in our survey) and uptake (25%) among adult residents. This widespread awareness and uptake is a result of communication campaigns and peer-to-peer sharing. In comparison, only 41% of non-users in Mendoza are aware of OEA, and 10% of the city's population are registered users. Participation in Mendoza skews toward residents who are more concerned about safety issues, and half of the survey respondents who were aware of the program indicated they did not have a need to use it.

Interpretations and conclusions

Our evaluation of the OEA programs in San Miguel and Mendoza found that Whatsapp crime reporting channels reinforce and contribute to public safety in the evaluated cities.

A strong city-led security system can function without a WhatsApp channel, but the channel provides significant value to city authorities and residents. **WhatsApp reporting programs rely on advanced security capabilities, and are unlikely to be effective without them.** It should be seen as a tool to gather more information from residents.This increased reporting provides important data to help law enforcement develop better crime prevention strategies, and deploy more officers where they are needed. Reports that are addressed quickly build trust with residents and increase users' confidence that the city is capable of keeping them safe.

Implementation decisions affect the impact of WhatsApp crime reporting.

The impact of the program is stronger in San Miguel than it is in Mendoza on two key outcomes: willingness to report security incidents and perceptions of safety. Some of the differences in outcomes between the cities can be attributed to program maturity, wider geographic coverage, and higher response capacity in San Miguel. Based on the experiences of both cities, launching WhatsApp channels with limited access (e.g., to certain groups, or requiring training) may be a smart choice for cities that are new to the program. But after a city has laid a strong foundation for how the platform should be used, there are benefits to making WhatsApp channels broadly accessible. At scale, it can also be valuable to integrate WhatsApp response with 911 to seamlessly handover reports between the two channels; in Mendoza, the user experience is more fragmented and sometimes results in frustration among users.

Any city seeking to implement Whatsapp reporting channels should be aware of potential risks, such as reports that stigmatize or profile specific groups, reports that are intentionally false, or the displacement of crime to other areas.

Training requirements for new users do not necessarily prevent misuse of the platform, and the requirements may limit the positive impacts of the program. Cities should consider other ways to upskill users that do not create barriers to usage (e.g., through learning modules or messaging within WhatsApp, broad-based communications, or community-based training). Upskilling efforts directed at users should focus on gaps that San Miguel and Mendoza city staff have identified: how to write detailed and actionable reports, which incidents are appropriate to report through WhatsApp channels, and guidelines on avoiding profiling and stigmatizing specific groups. Additionally, providing program staff training in soft skills and conflict de-escalation can help them deal with distressed and aggressive users most effectively.

WhatsApp reporting and response is a promising strategy for cities looking to increase reporting rates by building on existing investments in public safety.

When WhatsApp reporting programs achieve high-quality service and sufficient reach, they can improve residents' perceptions of safety in their city. By examining San Miguel and Mendoza, two examples of cities with very different constraints and contexts, this evaluation has shown that WhatsApp reporting can positively contribute to public safety systems in many cities.



Further resources

Are you a city staff member interested in learning more about establishing Ojos en Alerta in your city?

- Reach out to the Bloomberg Cities Idea Exchange Evaluation Fund at EvaluationFund@citiesideaexchange.org with additional questions about this work
- Register your city for the Bloomberg Cities Idea Exchange for exclusive access to our full suite of idea-sharing, implementation, and evaluation supports.



APPENDIX A

Implementation and maintenance costs

Below, we share the actual costs San Miguel and Mendoza have incurred to implement OEA. The cost of establishing OEA can be divided into two categories: 1) one-time costs to set up the program, and 2) operational costs to maintain it annually. Technology and equipment comprise the majority of upfront costs, while personnel are the highest ongoing cost. The costs below do not include the costs of the municipal prevention police forces in each city.

Differences in program costs between the two cities can be attributed to the following:

- **Platform costs:** San Miguel's platform costs are higher because they developed a platform from scratch that they are able to share with other cities. In contrast, Mendoza had an existing platform and data processing capacity that the City adapted for OEA.
- **Staffing costs:** Because OEA is integrated with a city's security infrastructure, it can be somewhat difficult to attribute how much staff time goes to OEA or other responsibilities. As such, some of the differences in staffing costs below are based on how each city defines their OEA budget. In its OEA budget, Mendoza includes prevention officers in the number of part-time staff who are responsible for OEA and other tasks, and operators responsible for monitoring CCTV. San Miguel does not attribute these staff costs to OEA. Staff costs also vary regionally and some difference in total cost can be attributed to higher salaries in Mendoza.
- **Communication and outreach costs:** San Miguel's communication and outreach costs are higher because San Miguel promotes OEA broadly, while Mendoza promotes OEA to specific groups.

The total cost of OEA will depend on a city's geographic size, staffing costs, and the volume of reports received. Smaller cities can start with a limited number of operators and scale gradually as participation increases, while larger cities may require a larger team from the outset to meet OEA response time standards.[7]

7 San Miguel has established a ten minute response time goal and suggests that other cities adopting OEA do the same.

Table A1. Estimated implementation and maintenance costs of OEA San Miguel and Mendoza

	SAN MIGUEL		MENDOZA	
SET UP COSTS	**$38,570 approx**		**$7,130 approx**	
Item	**Detail**	**Cost (USD)**	**Detail**	**Cost (USD)**
Report monitoring platform development	Initial design and setup of the report storage system and the data visualization dashboard	$30,000	Initial design and setup of the reporting and storage system within the existing municipal digital platform	$2,380
Equipment for staff	Screens, two phones, dock station	$2,600	2 screens, 2 phones, 2 dock stations, 1 laptop, 1 screen and projector	$4,750
Training for operators	Estimated training costs assuming an average of 40 new officers per hiring round and their wages during the training	$995 / person	N/A	
	SAN MIGUEL		**MENDOZA**	
OPERATING COSTS	**$118,490 / YEAR**		**$187,935 APPROX / YEAR**	
Item	**Detail**	**Cost (USD)**	**Detail**	**Cost (USD)**
Platform maintenance and hosting	Servers and technical upkeep	$18,000 / year	Servers and technical upkeep	$312 / year

Staffing	• Program Operators (6 full time)
	• Monitoring Center Director (1 part-time)
	• OEA Program Director (1)
	• Support staff
	  - 2 full-time
	  - 3 half-time
		$87,600 / year	• Program Operators (8 full time & 8 part-time)
			• Monitoring Center Coordinator (4)
			• Prevention Director (1)
			• Support staff (10 part time, based on demand)
			• Data & IT support teams (part-time)
				$186,373 / year

Communication and outreach	Targeted outreach in low-usage areas to increase adoption and sustain usage	$12,890 / year	Campaigns to sustain usage and reach more residents	$1,250 / year

APPENDIX B

Theory of Change – Ojos en Alerta San Miguel

INPUTS

- WhatsApp OEA channel/profile (non-business account)
- OEA monitoring platform and data visualization dashboard
- 3 full time and 3 half-time OEA Staff Members (who run the program, promote OEA and conduct trainings)
- 4 WhatsApp operators per shift responsible for responding to reports and channeling reports to the prevention and provincial police
- City-wide safety infrastructure & human resources:
  - 24/7 monitoring center with: incident geo-referencing system, connection with camera systems, system that connects to the police dispatchers of the province and prevention police, map of the city's patrols, OEA control station.
  - Communication system and municipal police dispatchers with coordination with provincial police 911 center
  - 1 monitoring center coordinator
  - 1,800 security cameras
  - 96 smart patrols, with 32 operating 24/7
  - 381 prevention police responders
- Municipal police academy and training curriculum for operators
- Operator response protocols
- Curriculum and training content for residents
- Promotional materials to encourage resident usage of OEA (e.g., videos showcasing success cases, flyers explaining the program, billboards promoting the program)

ACTIVITIES

Enabling OEA operation:

- Training of operators to run the Monitoring Center for Ojos en Alerta (for new hires only)
- Deployment of pairs of prevention and provincial police, allowing for preventive tasks, arrests, and self-defense
- Delivery of communication campaigns & community work to publicize OEA
- Delivery of group and 1:1 training sessions on OEA
- Registration of trained users in internal database

Report response:

- Logging of reports in the monitoring center database and continued communication with user to gather details on the report
- Internal coordination (either with prevention police or external agencies) to respond to report
- Response to reports by prevention police or relevant agency
- Updating of the OEA reporting database once each report is addressed

Safety information usage:

- Weekly analysis of OEA data to update police strategies
- Weekly committee to update guidelines for prevention police officers

OUTCOMES

- Residents are familiar with OEA
- Residents are trained to use OEA
- Trained users are registered in the program database
- Residents use OEA for reporting security incidents
- Prevention police or the relevant agency address reports within the established time parameter
- Geo-referenced reports database captures reports and is updated in real time in the monitoring center
- Weekly brief provided to municipal leadership on safety events and pressing issues for San Miguel

RESULTS

- Residents are more willing to report safety risks and criminal activity
- Residents report more potential safety risks and criminal activity
- Reduced response times to criminal activity and threats to residents' safety
- Residents are involved in the prevention and security of their city
- The City has data-driven security response plans that are accurate and comprehensive

IMPACT

- Residents trust the police and other security forces
- Residents trust the City of San Miguel
- Residents perceive San Miguel as a safe city

APPENDIX C

Theory of Change – Ojos en Alerta Mendoza

INPUTS

- 2 WhatsApp OEA profiles (non-business accounts)
- OEA monitoring platform and data visualization dashboard embedded within the municipal data management infrastructure
- 1 full time and 10 part-time OEA Staff Members (who run the program, promote OEA and conduct trainings)
- 4 WhatsApp operators per shift responsible for responding to reports and channeling reports to the prevention and provincial police
- City-wide safety infrastructure & human resources:
  - 24/7 monitoring center with: incident geo-referencing system, connection with municipal camera systems, system to connect to the prevention police, map of the city's patrols, OEA & Community Alarms control station.
  - Communication system and prevention police dispatchers
  - 4 monitoring center coordinators (1 per shift)
  - 600 security cameras (50% of them are City-owned)
  - 30 City-owned vehicles for patrolling and approximately 30 provincial police patrols (variable)
  - 350 prevention police responders
- Operator response protocols & aids
- Curriculum and training content for residents
- Training materials on OEA for residents (e.g., videos showcasing success cases, flyers explaining the program, billboards promoting the program)

ACTIVITIES

Enabling OEA operation:

- Deployment of some pairs of prevention and provincial police
- Delivery of communication campaigns & community work to publicize OEA
- Delivery of mandatory OEA training sessions for residents
- Registration of trained users in an internal database

Report response:

- Logging of reports in the monitoring center database and continued communication with user to gather details on the report
- Internal coordination with prevention police, provincial police, and other external agencies to respond to reports
- Response to report by prevention police or relevant agency
- Updating of the OEA report database once a report is addressed

Safety information usage:

- Periodic analysis of OEA data to update municipal police strategies
- Weekly committee meeting to update guidelines for prevention police officers

OUTCOMES

- Residents are familiar with OEA
- Residents are trained to use OEA
- Users are registered in the program database
- Users employ OEA for reporting
- Municipal institutions address reports within the established time parameter
- Geo-referenced reports database captures reports and is updated in real time in the monitoring center
- Weekly brief provided to municipal leadership on safety events and pressing issues for Mendoza

RESULTS

- Residents are more willing to report safety risks and criminal activity
- Residents report more potential safety risks and criminal activity
- Reduced response times to criminal activity and threats to residents safety
- Residents are involved in the prevention and security of their city
- The city creates data-driven security response plans that are accurate and comprehensive

IMPACT

- Residents trust the police and other security forces
- Residents trust the City of Mendoza
- Residents perceive Mendoza as a safe city

APPENDIX D

Contribution Analysis Methods Detail

We used a contribution analysis[8] to examine the **extent to which OEA has influenced observed outcomes related to reporting, safety perception, and trust in security authorities** in San Miguel and Mendoza. Contribution analysis evaluates an intervention's influence on outcomes, especially when complex environments preclude experimental trials. Rather than proving absolute attribution, it constructs a causal narrative to weigh the intervention's impact against other influencing factors.

We assessed three contribution claims:

- **Contribution Claim 1 - Willingness to report:** OEA has increased residents' willingness to report security incidents and concerns.
- **Contribution Claim 2 - Perception of safety:** OEA has improved community members' perceptions of safety.
- **Contribution Claim 3 - Trust in safety authorities:** OEA has increased trust in security authorities among residents and people who work or study in the city.

We assessed each claim using the *Relevant Explanation Finder (REF)*[9] framework:

1. We analyzed multiple data sources to verify each contribution claim's causal pathways (see Appendix B and Appendix C). We assessed the evidence against the framework's five categories to rank how each step influenced the claim (high, medium, or low). We used these assessments to determine the overall accuracy of the claim.
2. We then reviewed other factors that might have influenced our results. In contribution analysis, these are known as "alternative claims". The table below shows the alternative claims (AC) we assessed for each of our three contribution claims (CC):

CONTRIBUTION CLAIM	ATTACHED ALTERNATIVE CLAIMS
CC1. The OEA reporting system has increased residents' willingness to report security incidents and concerns in San Miguel.	AC1.1 Crime incidence increases, leading residents to experience more incidents, which in turn creates a greater need to report incidents.
	AC1.2 New reporting hotlines or digital channels are introduced in parallel to OEA and CA, making reporting easier and more accessible, leading to an overall rise in willingness to report.

8 *Contribution analysis* is an evaluation approach used to assess whether and how an intervention plausibly contributed to observed outcomes, especially in complex settings where experimental designs aren't feasible. Rather than trying to prove causality, it builds and tests a theory-based causal story, using evidence to assess how likely it is that the intervention made a meaningful contribution to an outcome, alongside other influencing factors. Additional context on how contribution analysis works can be found here.

9 The Relevant Explanation Finder (REF) is an analytical framework used to strengthen the application of contribution analysis in complex and non-experimental settings. REF links observed outcomes to the intervention while accounting for other contextual and external factors. It maps the program's intended mechanism alongside alternative explanations and influencing factors, assessing their relative importance based on five categories: certainty, robustness, range, prevalence, and theoretical grounding. More information available here.

CONTRIBUTION CLAIM	ATTACHED ALTERNATIVE CLAIMS
CC2. The OEA reporting system has improved community members' perceptions of safety.	AC2.1 Improvements to urban infrastructure by the city and residents, including: better street lighting, public space enhancements (parks, graffiti removal, etc.), installation of security cameras or private alarm systems.
	AC2.2 Municipal strategies to address social issues, such as homelessness or addiction, that might lead to changes in safety perception.
CC3. The OEA reporting system has increased trust in security authorities among residents and people who work or study in the city.	AC.3.1 Creation and ongoing strengthening of local preventive forces increases their operational and response capacity to criminal incidents.

The contribution analysis approach helped us analyze how the evidence supports or challenges OEA's role in observed outcomes. We rated the evidence for each contribution claim using three levels:

- **Strong evidence:**
  - Most steps in the causal pathway are true and have a high or medium impact.
  - The contribution claim has a major influence on the outcome.
  - Alternative claims do not conflict with the contribution claim.
- **Moderate evidence:**
  - Some steps in the causal pathway are true and have a moderate impact.
  - The contribution claim has a moderate influence on the outcome.
  - Alternative claims challenge or weaken the contribution story.
- **Low evidence:**
  - The pathway steps have little impact or are not true, resulting in the contribution claim having a low influence.
  - One or more alternative claims directly conflict with the contribution claim.

APPENDIX E

Contribution analysis detail in San Miguel

Our contribution analysis shows that OEA **increased willingness to report incidents and made residents in San Miguel feel safer**. While OEA users saw the greatest impact, positive effects spilled over to all residents. The analysis also shows that **OEA may be helping build trust in safety authorities**. However, this impact cannot be isolated from the ongoing work of the preventative police force that responds to reports. The prevention police in San Miguel are widely regarded by residents as reliable and highly visible. This perception is partially attributable to OEA, but it is also related to the officers' operational methods.

1 OEA lowers reporting barriers and increases residents' willingness to report security incidents

There is **strong evidence** to support the claim that **OEA has contributed to increasing residents' willingness to report security incidents.** We validate our causal pathways and do not find evidence supporting plausible alternative claims that have increased willingness to report. In particular, we find that:

1. Residents are aware that OEA is a channel they can use, and there is a prevalent social norm that it should be used for reporting security incidents.
2. Residents find it easy to submit security reports to OEA, and users are comfortable sharing information with the channel.
3. Users are satisfied with the city's response to reports and hold a positive opinion of the program.

Residents are aware that OEA is a channel they can use, and there is a prevalent social norm that it should be used for reporting security incidents. 93% of the respondents in our survey had heard of OEA, regardless of whether they had used it before. This suggests that the city's communications campaigns have effectively elevated the program's profile across the city. The program's familiarity is also a result of its widespread use, as it currently reaches approximately 25% of the city's adult population and 64,884 residents have been trained in OEA. During interviews with users and non-users, participants consistently reported that close friends or family members are OEA users and rely heavily on the program for reporting. The belief that others are already using OEA can create a descriptive social norm for crime reporting. This type of norm, where beliefs about the group's actions influence individual choices, motivates people to adopt similar behavior. This, in turn, makes it more probable that individuals will report crime through the program.

Box E1. Perceived level of usage of Ojos en Alerta

What have you heard about OEA?

"I haven't used it, but I've seen that everyone uses it."

"I've heard that people use it a lot."

(Anonymous, non-OEA users)

"In my neighborhood, they use it. Both neighbors and family members use it quite a bit."

(Anonymous, OEA user)

Although most residents are aware of OEA, users and staff note that ongoing outreach is still needed to maintain and boost awareness among unreached populations.

Residents find it easy to submit security reports to OEA., and users are comfortable sharing information with the channel. Users and non-users consider the platform easy-to-use and easier than traditional reporting channels, such as 911. In interviews, residents indicated that using WhatsApp allows them to report their security concerns much faster compared to traditional channels. Users also value the ability to report their concerns without revealing their identity, reducing fears of exposure or retaliation. In this way, OEA has made reporting more accessible before, during, and after a crime.

Box E2. Perceived ease of reporting through Ojos en Alerta

"I've never experienced anything suspicious myself, but I would send a message through Ojos en Alerta because with 911, they make you answer a survey and a thousand questions. With Ojos en Alerta, it's immediate."

(Anonymous, non-OEA user)

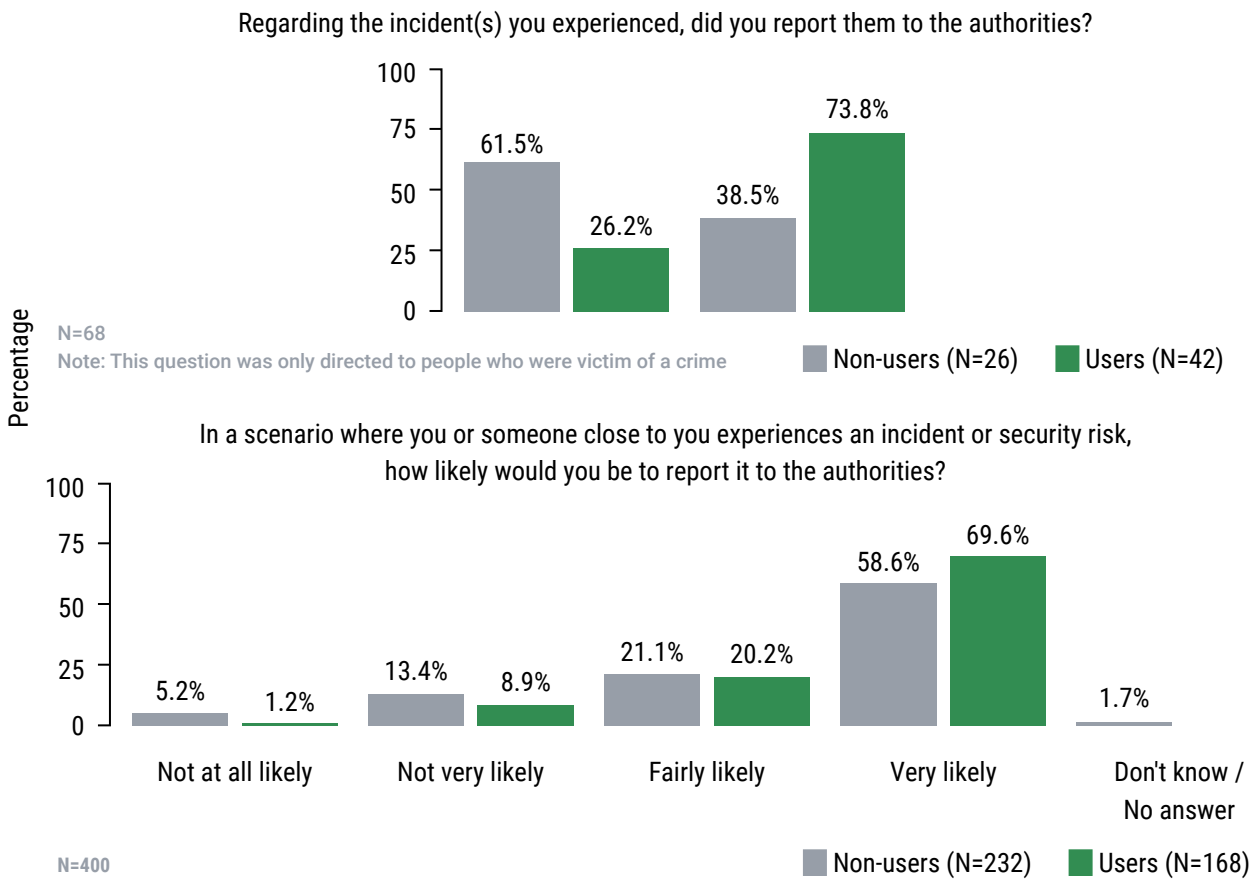
Box E3. Friction and delays in 911 protocol

"[When I called 911] there were many delays in the case..., and it was actually faster to go directly in person; they ask a lot of questions, and it takes time. When you're calling in a moment of desperation, they ask you for many details."

(Anonymous, non-OEA user)

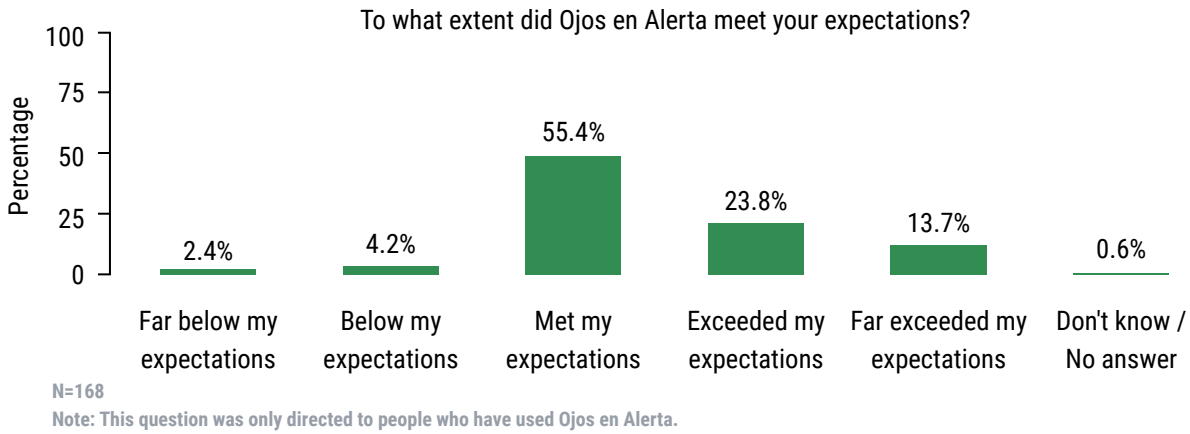
Importantly, we found that OEA users were more likely to report crimes than their non-user counterparts. **Among crime victims, 7 out of 10 active OEA users reported the crime, compared with 4 out of 10 non-OEA users**. This is a considerable shift, particularly given the regional reporting gaps in Latin America. A recent study by the Inter-American Development Bank found that, across ten countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, an average of 75% of crimes go unreported. In Argentina, the rate is estimated to be 62.7%, which is similar to our survey's estimate for non-users.

Graph E1. Reporting behavior



Users are satisfied with the City's response to reports and hold a positive opinion of the program. In our survey, 87% of residents who have heard of OEA held a positive opinion of the program, and 93% of OEA users reported that it met or exceeded their expectations. Users described the program as effective, reliable, and providing a rapid response. They appreciated the many options for reporting: sharing their location, sending a video or photo, or simply submitting a voice note to provide a more accurate description of the situation.

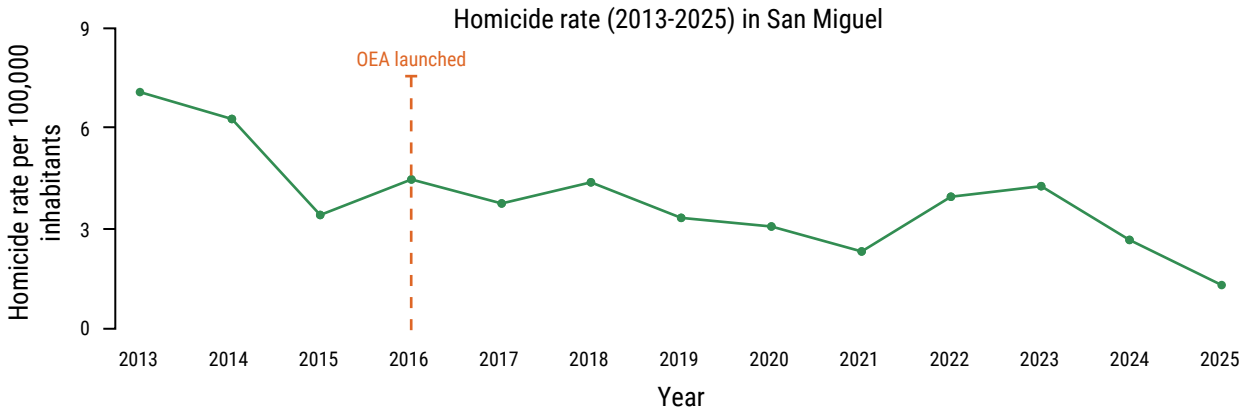
Graph E2. Extent to which Ojos en Alerta met user expectations



In interviews, OEA operators highlighted a mechanism for rapid response: **they do not wait to collect all the details before acting**. It is often possible to dispatch a patrol with limited information from a user, such as a location reference and the incident type. After dispatch, operators continue to gather additional details from the resident and relay updates in real time to the prevention police to support a faster, more accurate response. This reinforces the user's perception that the city can and will take action on the reports they share.

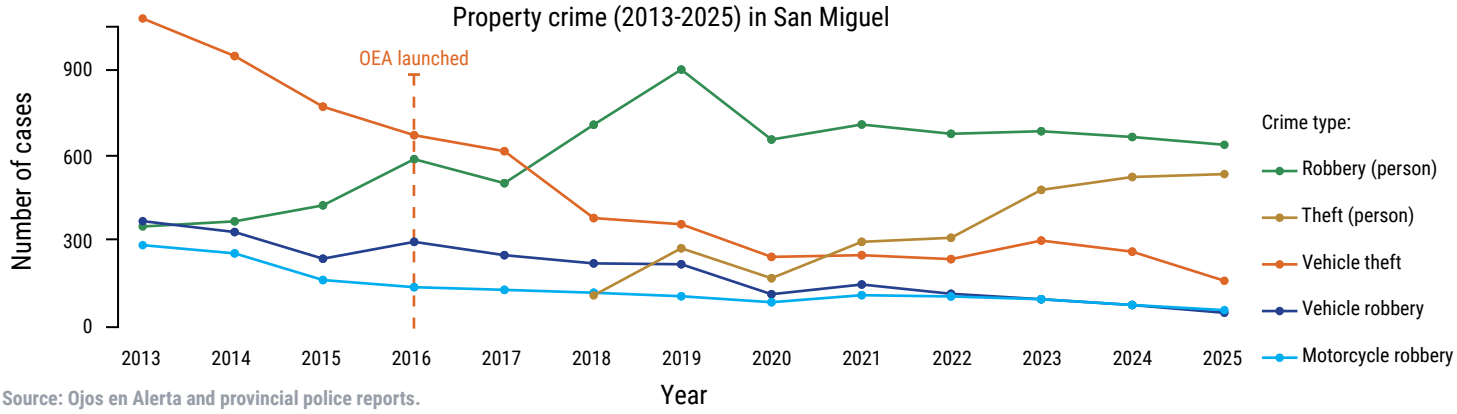
An alternative hypothesis for increased reporting is an overall increase in crime rates. We find no clear evidence that changes in crime rates alone explain the observed willingness to report. Homicide rates in San Miguel have decreased in the time since OEA was implemented. In 2013, San Miguel recorded about 7 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Since then, the homicide rate has steadily decreased, reaching a much lower level of about 1 homicide per 100,000 inhabitants in 2025. Homicide rates are widely considered one of the most reliable indicators of violent crime, as they are typically recorded more consistently and are less affected by underreporting than other crimes.

Graph E3. Homicide rate in San Miguel



Graph E4 displays additional data on non-violent crimes such as property crimes. Non-violent crime rate trends have been mixed since OEA was implemented. Graph E4 also displays incidents reported through OEA and formal complaints filed with the provincial police. While vehicle thefts have drastically decreased, reports of robberies and thefts have increased over time. The decline in vehicle-related robberies is particularly informative, as these crimes are often associated with more organized forms of criminal activity.

Graph E4. Property crime in San Miguel



Source: Ojos en Alerta and provincial police reports.

While it is unlikely that the drop in violent crime rates is directly related to the implementation of OEA, the trend increases our confidence that the observed increase in willingness to report incidents is not due to a significantly larger number of incidents in the city. Levels of reported property crime are steady or increasing, but this could reflect a greater willingness to report. This would align with evidence that non-violent crimes are more likely to go unreported. According to the 2016 National Victimization Survey, nearly 72% of victims of non-violent crimes chose not to involve the authorities, compared to 40% of victims of violent crimes. Our qualitative research supports the idea that OEA can increase willingness to report incidents. Both preventative police and users noted that OEA overcomes obstacles associated with traditional, formal reporting methods. Additionally, OEA users receive support for documenting incidents after they submit their initial report via WhatsApp.

2 OEA strengthens residents' sense of safety through visible and responsive policing

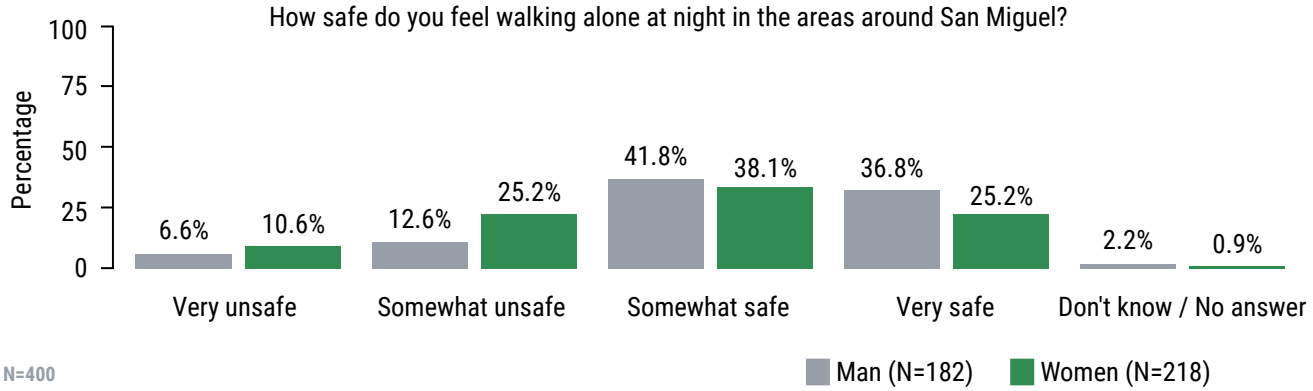
There is **strong evidence that OEA contributed to improving safety perceptions among residents and people who work or study in San Miguel**. Our assessment of the causal pathways leading to enhanced safety perception indicates that OEA and the visibility of police forces are the main drivers. While there is moderate evidence that alternative claims contribute to this improvement, these two factors remain central. Particularly:

1. Residents now report feeling a high level of safety in their neighborhoods, contrasting with previous years and other cities in Argentina.
2. OEA's role should be interpreted within a broader institutional context. Rather than driving improvements in security on its own, OEA builds the city's capacity to prevent and respond to crime.

Residents now report feeling a high level of safety in their neighborhoods, contrasting with previous years and other cities in Argentina. While in Argentina, 52% of the population feels somewhat or very safe in their neighborhood,[10] our survey in San Miguel showed that 70% of residents feel safe walking alone at night in the city. This represents a substantially higher level of perceived safety compared to the national benchmark. While we don't have data on perceptions of safety over time, qualitative evidence (see Box E5) shows that residents felt they had previously lived in a very insecure city and had seen a clear change.

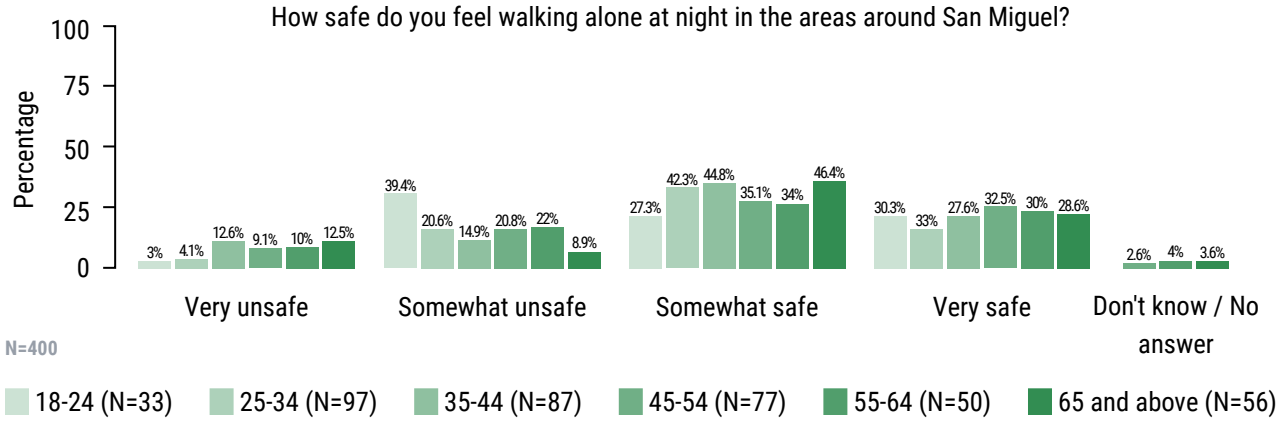
Even though perceptions of safety are largely positive, they vary across groups: women and younger respondents report lower perceived safety when walking alone at night, which may reflect differences in exposure and underlying risk rather than differences in program reach. Particularly, in the case of women they might be more likely to face risks in public spaces, such as harassment which can shape their safety perception.

Graph E5. Safety perception grouped by gender



10 Statistics from Vanderbilt University LAPOP study, visualized in the AmericasBarometer Data Playground. Variable Insecurity: Perception of Neighborhood Insecurity (aoj11).

Graph E6. Safety perception grouped by age cohorts



Even with these differences across groups, one mechanism came through consistently in interviews and surveys: residents know they now have a channel to report incidents that leads to concrete action. This reduces uncertainty about what will happen after a report and increases confidence that help will arrive when needed.

Box E4. Perception of system functionality

"No matter how urgent the situation is, they respond quickly; everything is treated with the same level of importance, whether it's an infrastructure issue or a robbery: within five minutes, a bunch of patrol cars show up to help."

(Anonymous, OEA user)

OEA and improved police performance have complemented each other in improving residents' perceptions of safety. Each week, Municipal Police leadership meet to review OEA reports, identify the areas with the highest alert volume, assess the most common incident types in those zones, and plan how to organize patrols and preventive actions for the week ahead. Therefore, OEA helps make **police presence more strategic and responsive** by providing real-time information to guide where and when patrols are deployed. OEA also coordinates with 911, enabling quicker routing and dispatch when emergency services are needed. This seamless coordination is reflected in high levels of user satisfaction, with users highlighting the program's effectiveness and rapid response.

Box E5. Perceived safety perception compared to previous years

"It feels much safer than in previous years. Now I walk around San Miguel with my baby, coming and going on foot, and nothing has ever happened to me. I feel quite protected because there are patrol cars in the area."

(Anonymous, OEA user)

We also assessed other relevant contextual factors, such as crime reduction, in driving safety perceptions. During the interviews, residents frequently framed their sense of safety in comparative terms, contrasting San Miguel with neighboring municipalities in the province. They often pointed to higher levels of violence and crime in surrounding cities and emphasized that incidents there often go unanswered or receive little visible response. Additionally, the sustained decline in the homicide rate, an indicator of violence, suggests that San Miguel has created a safer environment (see Graph E3). However, evidence from interviews and surveys **indicates that crime levels alone do not fully explain residents' sense of security**. The visibility and responsiveness of local institutions appears to matter equally. The creation of the preventative police in 2015 was a turning point, strengthening security and contributing to the sustained decline in severe crime.

OEA's role should be interpreted within this broader institutional context. Rather than driving improvements in security on its own, **OEA builds on the existing institutional capacity**. It makes public safety efforts more visible and easier for residents to access. In doing so, OEA complements existing policing capacity and helps translate improvements in public safety into stronger perceptions of protection among residents.

An alternative hypothesis for the observed increase in safety perception is that additional infrastructure improvements and public services may be driving residents' perceptions. We did find evidence that these factors improved residents' perceptions; however, OEA contributed as well.

The improvement in safety perception reflects additional factors, such as continued infrastructure improvements in the city, including the installation of better lighting and the improvement and maintenance of public squares, among other initiatives that have enhanced public spaces (see Box E6).

Box E6. Relationship between safety perception and improvements in security infrastructure

> *"Yes, the city has improved. It's full of cameras and police, constantly monitored... San Miguel is very, very safe. Some time ago, you couldn't really do anything there; at night, we were afraid. This sense of safety is related to the cameras and the strong police presence. The LED lights have changed everything. There's much better lighting, and that improves everything."*
>
> (Anonymous, OEA user)

According to the City, urban development investments have been aligned with security concerns, with repairs and upgrades prioritized in avenues, plazas, and areas identified in police reports as having a higher incidence of robberies. In parallel, the city has implemented social programs to address issues related to insecurity, including addiction treatment through a local center and targeted support for people experiencing homelessness.

These efforts likely contribute to perceptions of safety by improving the physical environment and addressing visible social challenges. Interviews and focus groups with residents suggest that these efforts also play a complementary role to OEA.

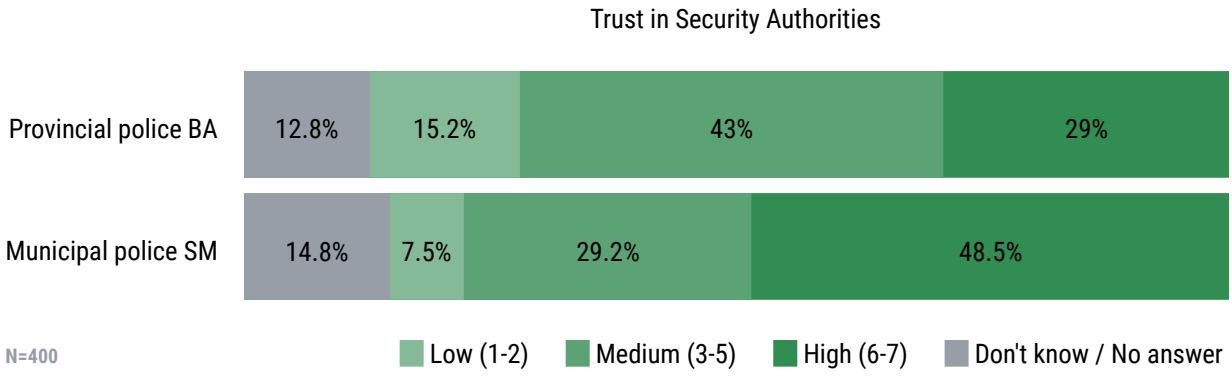
3 OEA contributes to higher trust in local security authorities but its impact cannot be separated from the creation of the new municipal police force

There is **moderate evidence that OEA has strengthened trust in local security authorities**. However, the evidence is insufficient to conclude that OEA is the main driver of these trust levels. We identified that:

1. San Miguel residents have a high trust in the prevention and provincial police forces.
2. The strengthening of local prevention forces has allowed them to respond to and manage criminal incidents, leading to better public opinion of their performance. This positive development complements the key role that OEA has played in improving resident-police relations.

San Miguel residents have high trust in the local and provincial police forces. While only 18% of Argentines report high trust in the national police[11], in San Miguel, 49% of residents report high trust in their local prevention police, and 29% in the provincial police.

Graph E7. Trust in municipal and provincial police



Qualitative findings help explain how OEA strengthens trust in local authorities. Interviews with prevention officers indicate that OEA's core principles shape how officers interact with residents and how they respond to incoming reports. Officers consistently emphasized that any situation can represent a potential security risk and that even seemingly minor alerts may escalate into more serious incidents. For this reason, reports received through OEA are not dismissed or treated lightly. This approach reinforces residents' perception that their concerns are taken seriously and addressed.

The alternative claim for this outcome was that strengthening local prevention forces has boosted their ability to respond to, and manage, criminal incidents, leading to better public opinion of their performance. We found evidence that this hypothesis helps explain why residents in San Miguel trust their police officers. This alternative claim works alongside OEA, meaning both are contributing to the result.

In interviews, residents described fast response times, frequent police presence, and respectful treatment. These perceptions may also reflect broader improvements in the city's policing capacity.

11 Statistics from Vanderbilt University LAPOP study, visualized in the AmericasBarometer Data Playground. Variable Evaluations: Trust in National Police (b18).

Box E7. Perception of the municipal police

"[The municipal police are] very respectful. They are well prepared. Five or six officers arrive, take notes, know where you live, what's going on. They listen and try to help."

(Anonymous, OEA user)

Box E8. Safety perception

"Today, San Miguel feels safe. I was walking through a street and saw a man on a bike get off and go into a restroom without worrying about it. That's not normal unless you feel safe. You can really feel the security. The municipal police have done a great job."

(Anonymous, non-OEA user)

In recent years, San Miguel has invested in a more professional, better-equipped preventative police force, including intelligent patrol units, specialized operational groups, drone support, and the procurement of new equipment, such as non-lethal intervention tools. In 2025, San Miguel allocated 10.5% of its budget to safety. As a point of comparison, we estimated spending for four other cities in Latin America. Cities that are not in charge of their police, like Bogotá and Sao Paulo, invest around 2%-4% of their municipal budget in safety, while cities that have created a local force, such as Buenos Aires and Lima, have budgets closer to 11-15%).[12] **OEA complements police investments by making the system easier for residents to use: it provides a simple channel for reporting concerns, reduces uncertainty about what will happen next, and helps translate the police's capacity into timely, visible responses**.

12 Estimates built with data available on municipal budgets for Bogotá, Lima, Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo.

APPENDIX F

Contribution analysis detail in Mendoza

Our contribution analysis shows that **OEA increased willingness to report in Mendoza,** driven by a growing uptake of the program. However, there are opportunities to improve program awareness and uptake. The analysis **did not allow us to identify the contributions of OEA to improved safety perceptions or greater trust in safety authorities.**

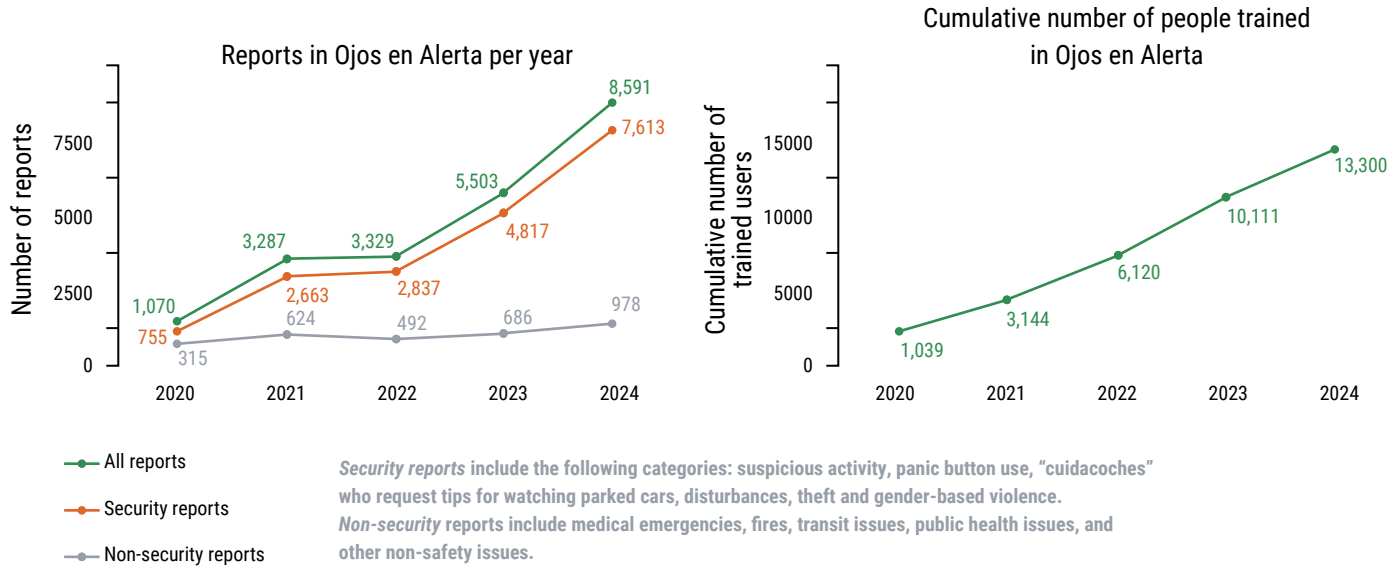
1 OEA contributes to increasing residents' willingness to report security incidents

There is **sufficient evidence** to support the claim that **OEA has contributed to increasing residents' willingness to report security concerns in Mendoza.** We validated most of our causal pathways and do not find evidence supporting plausible alternative claims that have increased willingness to report. In particular, we found that:

1. Program uptake and reporting has grown consistently since OEA launch, leading to a displacement of 911 as the main source for receiving reports of suspicious incidents.
2. Users are satisfied with the city's response to reports and hold a positive opinion of the program.
3. Even though program uptake has increased, many residents are still unaware that OEA is a channel they can use.

Program uptake and reporting has grown consistently since OEA launched in Mendoza in 2020. Since then, the number of annual reports has increased from approximately 1,000 to more than 8,000. The number of trained users has also grown steadily, from 1,039 in 2020 to over 13,000 by the end of 2024.

Graph F1. OEA reports and users 2020 - 2024

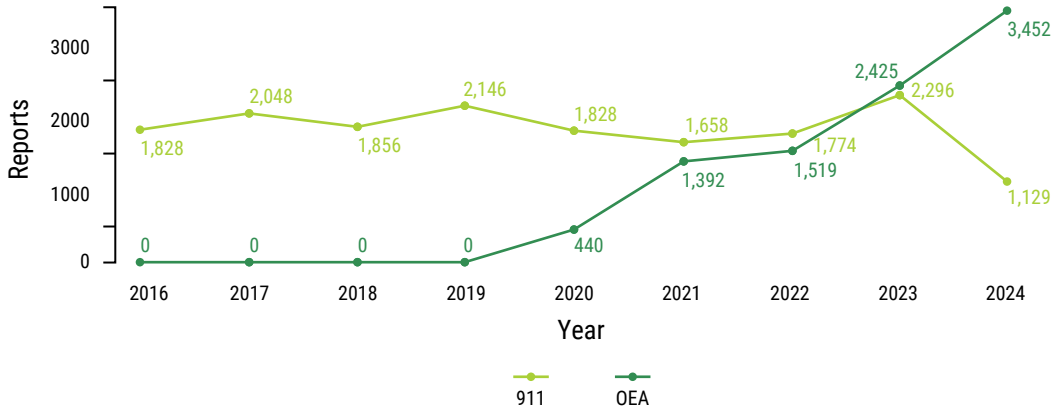


Security reports include the following categories: suspicious activity, panic button use, "cuidacoches" who request tips for watching parked cars, disturbances, theft and gender-based violence. *Non-security* reports include medical emergencies, fires, transit issues, public health issues, and other non-safety issues.

Prior to OEA's launch, residents primarily relied on 911 or police stations to report security-related incidents. While 911 responds to emergencies and urgent situations, it is not set up to respond to early-stage concerns, such as suspicious activity before a crime occurs. There was no dedicated channel or phone number for residents to report preventive security risks as they occurred.

OEA was introduced to fill this gap. It was intended to lower barriers for reporting early-stage risks by allowing reporting on WhatsApp, and providing rapid acknowledgment and preventive patrol response to reports. As a result of OEA's introduction, **we observe (1) increasing use of the channel, particularly for preventive incidents, and (2) a shift in where suspicious activity reports are directed.** As a result, since 2023, OEA has surpassed 911 as the **primary channel for receiving reports of suspicious activity.** These types of incidents are typically preventive, ambiguous, and highly sensitive to friction in the reporting process. Suspicious activity reports shifting to OEA suggests that residents perceive OEA as a more appropriate and accessible channel for reporting early-stage concerns.

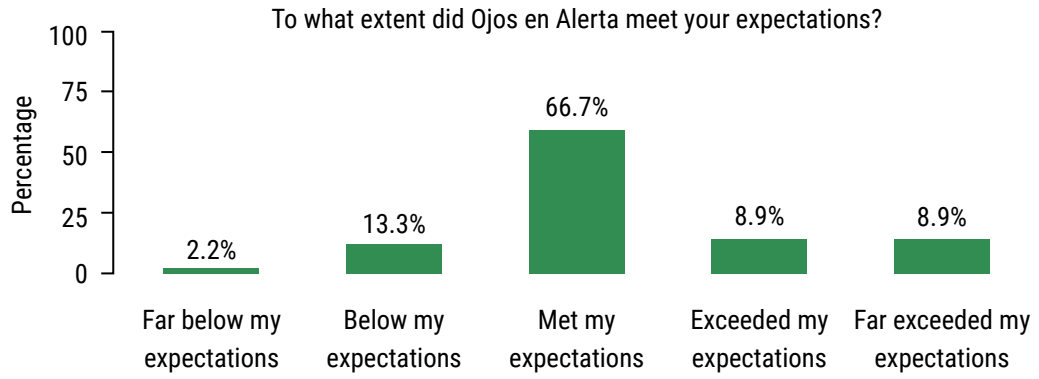
Graph F2. Number of reports of suspicious behavior submitted to 911 and Ojos en Alerta by year



This shift has allowed the 911 system to focus on emergencies that require immediate action, instead of handling low-risk or unclear reports. Given that the provincial police had traditionally controlled all security communications, it was not easy for them to accept OEA as a new channel. According to our interviews with city staff, the provincial police eventually acknowledged that this program, in fact, makes their use of resources more efficient and decreases their effort on prevention activities.

Users are satisfied with the city's response to reports and hold a positive opinion of the program. 84.5% of OEA users report that OEA met or exceeded their expectations, citing its effectiveness, reliability, ease of use, and contribution to improved surveillance. This positive perception is further reflected in feedback collected through the OEA channel one day after each report. Feedback data shows that 88% of users (n = 9,111; 2020–2024) report being satisfied with the service. Where users are dissatisfied with the OEA, frustration generally stems from two core operational areas: the limited scope of prevention officers—which results in unaddressed requests—and the inefficient redirection to 911 services during high-priority emergencies.

Graph F3. Extent to which Ojos en Alerta has met users' expectations

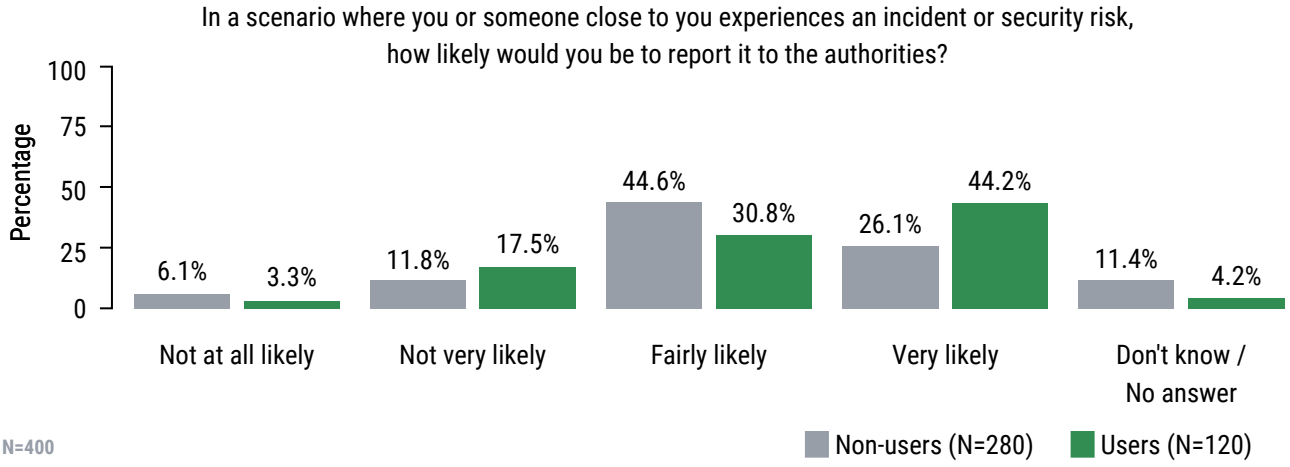


N=45

Note: This question was only directed to people who have used Ojos en Alerta.

Survey results show an increase in users' willingness to report incidents. When asked about the likelihood of reporting an incident experienced by the user or someone close, **44% of OEA users stated they would be very likely to report it, compared to 26% of non-users.** Although a small proportion of users identified OEA as their primary reporting channel and traditional channels like 911 remained dominant, OEA users had higher reporting intentions. These intentions also align with the reasons respondents say they would report an incident: prevent harm, contribute to neighborhood safety, or enable authorities to take action.

Graph F4. Willingness to report a hypothetical incident



N=400

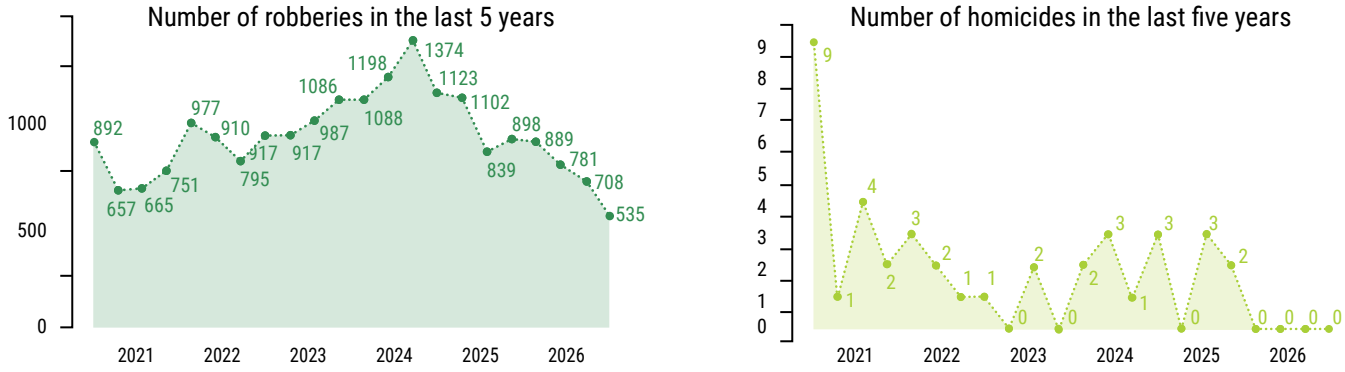
Users describe OEA as **accessible, responsive, and reliable**, and administrative data shows median response times between seven and nine minutes, reinforcing perceptions that reporting can lead to timely action. When residents perceive that reports are acknowledged and addressed, users are motivated to report future incidents.

Program uptake has increased, but many residents are still unaware of OEA. Only about 10% of Mendoza residents are registered OEA users. 41% of non-user survey respondents report knowing about or having heard of OEA. This indicates that awareness does extend beyond active participants, which is likely due to city outreach efforts at neighborhood safety meetings, community centers, and through public communication campaigns. However, there

is room to improve outreach efforts since 59% of surveyed non-users are unaware of OEA's existence and uptake remains low.

An alternative hypothesis for increased reporting is an overall increase in crime rates. We find **no evidence that changes in crime rates alone explain the observed increase in willingness to report.** Crime trends in Mendoza do not indicate rising insecurity that would independently drive greater reporting. Homicide rates have remained low and stable, and property crime-related calls have not sustainably increased during the period of OEA's expansion. Furthermore, among surveyed residents who were aware of OEA, but who have not utilized it, 59% cited their lack of usage as being due to not having experienced an issue that required using the program.

Graph F5. Number of robberies and homicides in the last 5 years



Source: 911 reports

Overall, the evidence suggests that OEA has filled a previously-unmet gap in preventative reporting and appears to be lowering barriers to early-stage security concerns.

2 It is unclear if OEA has contributed to increasing residents' safety perception

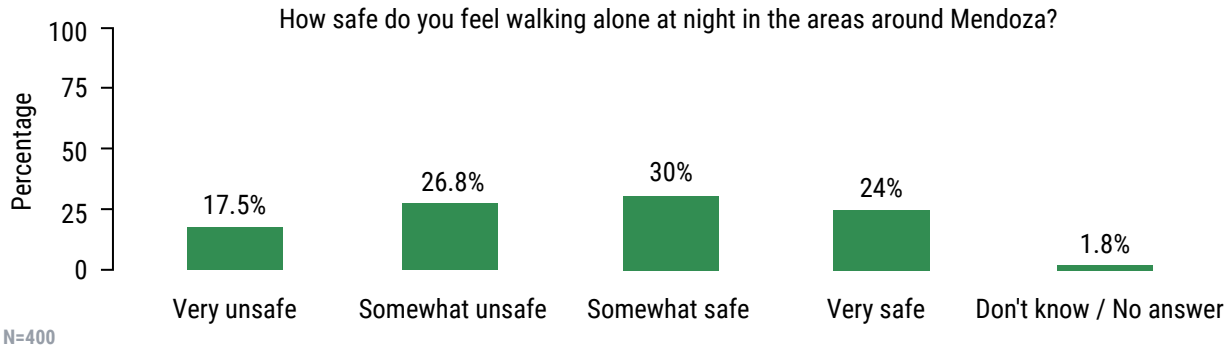
There is **not enough evidence to determine that OEA has contributed to improving safety perception among residents and residents who work or study in Mendoza**. The lack of baseline data and potential self selection of users makes it difficult to assess if there have been changes in safety perception related to OEA usage. Particularly we found that:

1. Mendoza residents' safety perception is similar to the national average, suggesting that OEA hasn't driven changes. Potential reasons for this may include OEA's limited reach in terms of users and geographic coverage.
2. OEA users appear to be systematically different from non-users, with users having lower safety perception than non-users. It is possible that residents with low safety perception are self-selecting into OEA, as opposed to OEA having a negative impact on safety perceptions.

Mendoza residents' safety perception is similar to the national average, suggesting that OEA hasn't driven changes. Potential reasons for this may include OEA's limited reach in terms of users and geographic coverage. About 10% of residents in Mendoza are registered OEA users and can use the channel, leaving close to 90% of the residents unable to use the channel. This level is likely not broad enough to shift safety perceptions across the city.

And indeed, overall perceptions of safety in Mendoza appear similar to national averages. In our survey, **54% of Mendoza residents report feeling "somewhat safe" or "very safe" in their neighborhoods at night**. This percentage is comparable to the national average in Argentina, where 52% of the population reports feeling "somewhat safe" or "very safe" in their neighborhoods at night.[13]

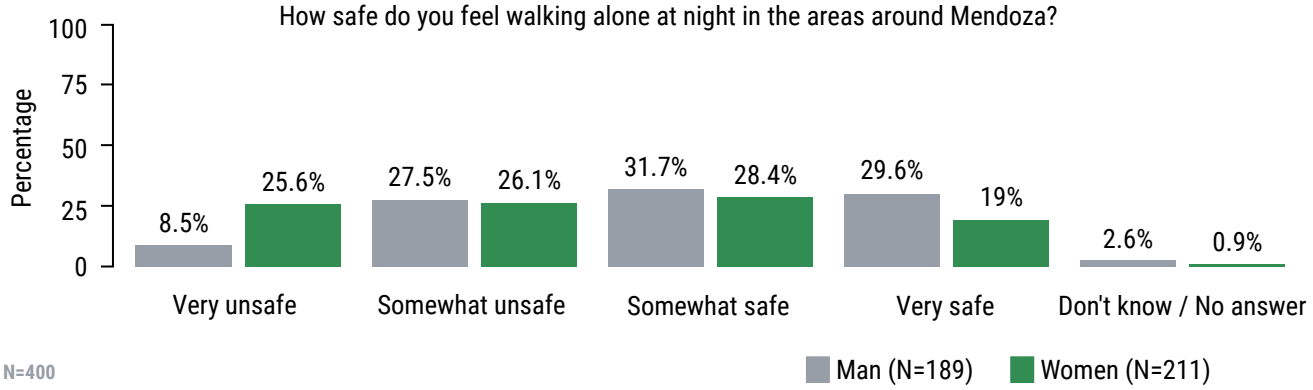
Graph F6. Perception of safety among survey respondents



N=400

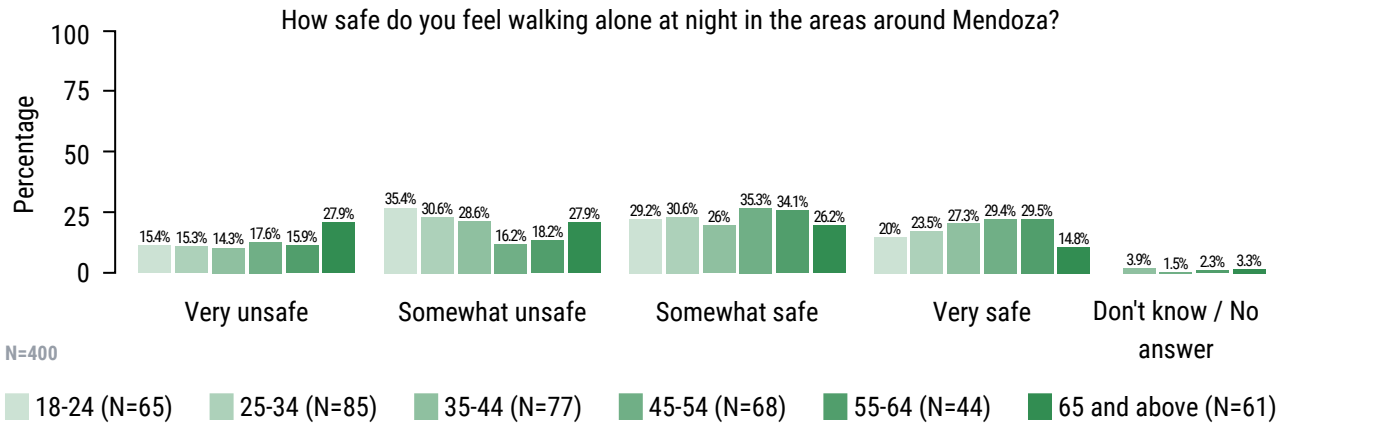
Safety perceptions differ significantly across demographic sectors within broader trends. Specifically, women and the elderly in Mendoza report higher levels of insecurity, with a notable portion of these groups feeling very unsafe compared to others. Public space risks, such as harassment, may disproportionately affect women and consequently influence their perception of safety.

Graph F7. Perception of safety by sex and age



N=400

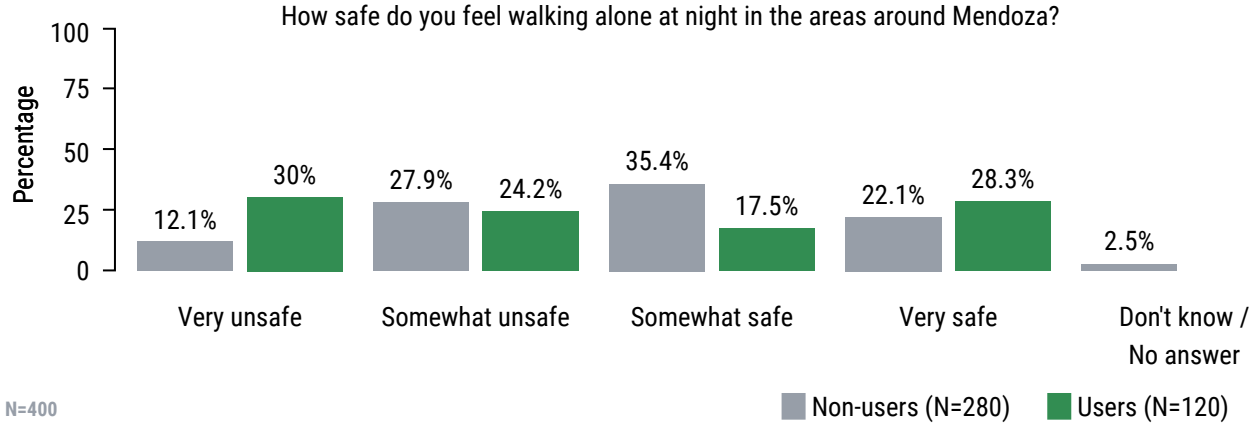
13 Statistics from Vanderbilt University LAPOP study, visualized in the AmericasBarometer Data Playground.



Another reason that OEA does not appear to impact safety perceptions is that **OEA is not yet operational across the city**, particularly in areas with higher crime rates. In these high-crime areas, security is still mainly handled by provincial authorities, with more limited involvement from the municipality. As a result, residents may base their perceptions of safety on experiences in neighborhoods that are widely seen as unsafe and that have not seen significant changes in recent years.

OEA users appear to be systematically different from non-users, with users having lower safety perception than non-users. When we look at differences between users and non-users, we find that OEA users were more likely to report feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods than non-users. While OEA shows high approval among its users, this satisfaction does not appear to have carried over into how users perceive safety in the city.

Graph F8. Perception of safety among OEA users and non-users



It is most likely that residents that feel less safe are self-selecting into OEA, as opposed to OEA having a negative impact on safety perceptions. Residents who are already more concerned about their safety may be more motivated to enroll in OEA because they are more motivated to report suspicious behavior. The lack of baseline data makes it difficult to establish whether using OEA has made these residents feel more safe over time (even if they still have lower perceptions of safety than non-users). However, the literature shows that people who use real-time safety alert

platforms can perceive local crime rates as higher than non-users. Similarly, users of these programs tend to be more concerned about crime than non-users[14].

Qualitative findings provide additional context on this subject. During initial inquiries, OEA users and staff mentioned the increased presence of local authorities, such as the prevention police, and visible safety infrastructure as key factors in making them feel safer in the city.

Box F1. Perception of Mendoza's security infrastructure

> *Mendoza has "preventores", patrol cars, mobile units, infrastructure, and cameras. It has a whole range of tools that other municipalities don't have.... Of course, the [security] system couldn't function without that infrastructure.*
>
> (Anonymous, OEA user)

It is possible that OEA and the additional investments the city has made in safety infrastructure have improved users' sense of safety from an even lower baseline. However, **without baseline data, it is not possible to assess whether participants' perceptions of safety have changed** since joining the program. Although qualitative data shows that community members notice recent safety infrastructure improvements, survey data suggests that the improvements have not reached a level that significantly impacts overall safety perceptions for both users and non-users.

3 It is unclear if OEA has contributed to increasing trust in authorities

There is **limited evidence that OEA has contributed to strengthening trust in security authorities**. Even though trust levels are higher in Mendoza than the average for Argentina, we were not able to link this to OEA's presence. Particularly, we identified that:

1. **Mendoza residents have higher trust in the prevention and provincial police forces, compared to the rest of the country**. The level of trust is higher for provincial police than for prevention police.
2. **The evidence is insufficient to conclude that OEA itself is the primary driver of improved trust.** Provincial police continue to receive higher levels of trust even among OEA users, who should be more familiar with the prevention police responsible for implementing and enforcing the program.

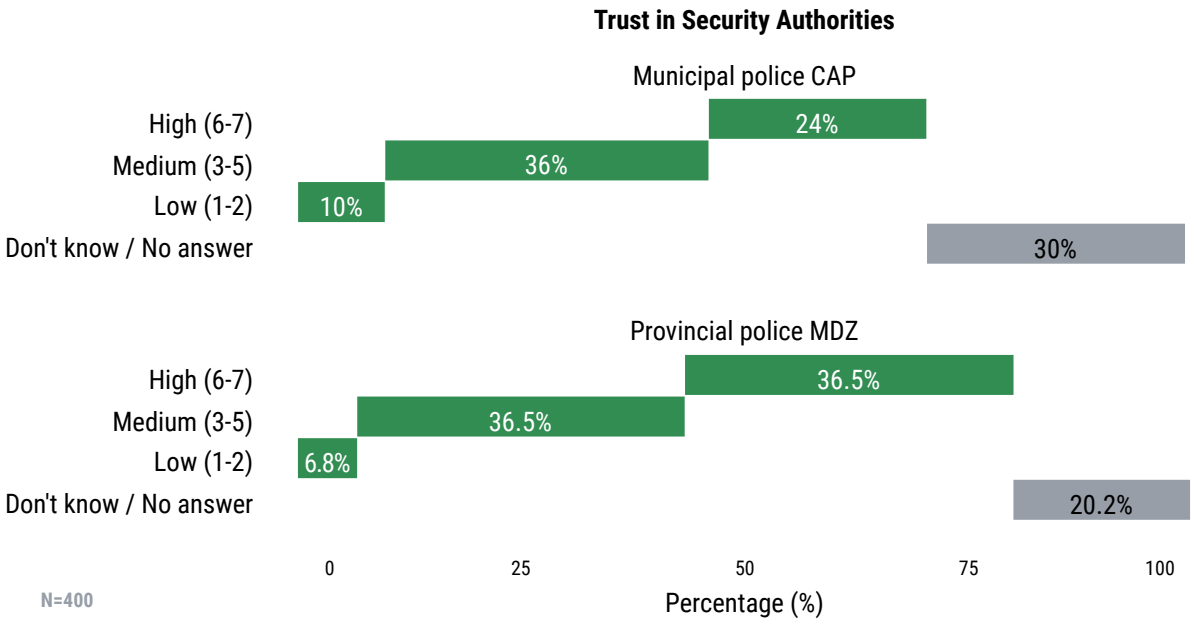
Mendoza residents have higher trust in the local and provincial police forces, compared to the rest of the country. While only 18% of Argentines report high trust in the national police,[15] trust levels in Mendoza are comparatively higher: 36.5% of residents report high trust in the provincial police. Trust in the municipal prevention police has not yet risen as high as provincial police with 24% of residents in our survey reported high trust in municipal police. These figures suggest relatively stronger trust in local security institutions, particularly at the provincial level.

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14 Fetterman, Adam K., Carter D. Baker, and Brian P. Meier. "Crime in your area: Use of neighborhood apps is associated with inaccurate perceptions of higher local crime rates." *Psychology of Popular Media* 13, no. 2 (2024): 269; Violi, Nicholas, Ben Shneiderman, Art Hanson, and P. J. Rey. "Motivation for participation in online neighborhood watch communities: An empirical study involving invitation letters." In *2011 IEEE Third International Conference on Privacy, Security, Risk and Trust and IEEE Third International Conference on Social Computing*, pp. 760-765. IEEE, 2011.

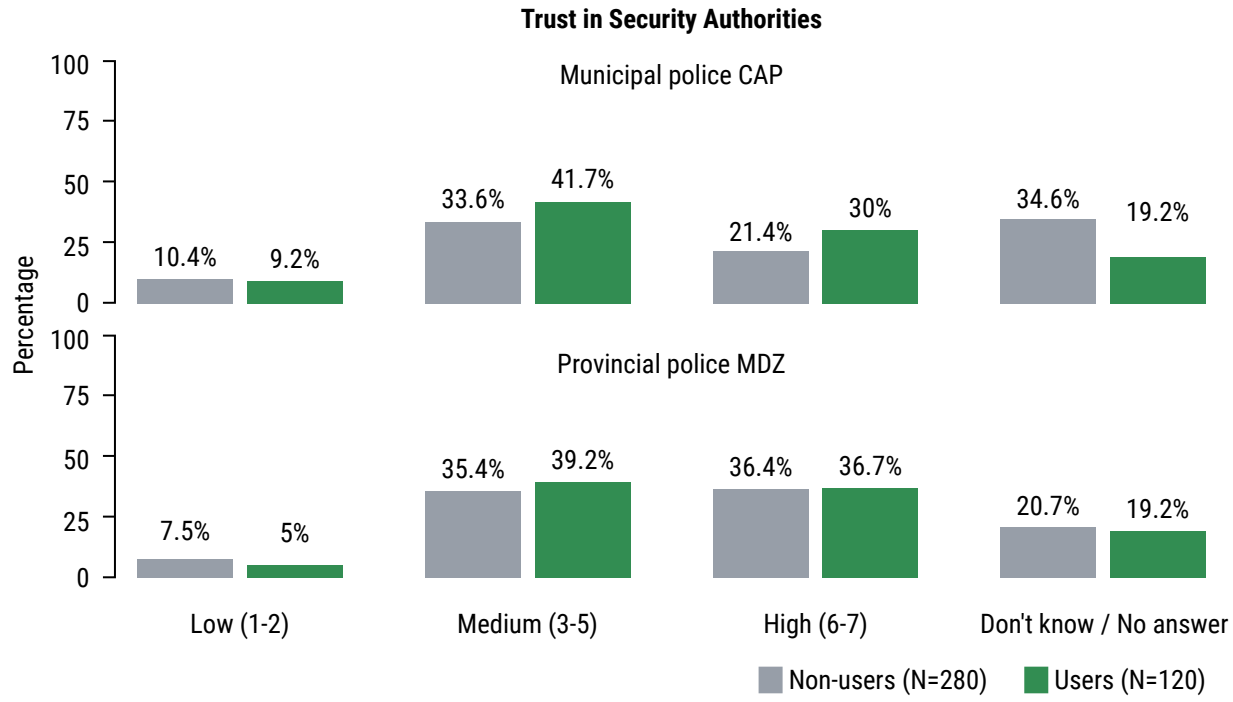
15 Statistics from Vanderbilt University LAPOP study, visualized in the AmericasBarometer Data Playground.

Graph F9. Trust in municipal and provincial police



There is insufficient evidence to conclude that OEA is the primary driver of higher trust in Mendoza. Provincial police continue to receive higher levels of trust even among OEA users, who should be more familiar with the prevention police responsible for implementing and enforcing OEA. If OEA were the main factor shaping trust, we would expect prevention officers—the OEA's primary implementers—to gain the highest levels of trust, at least among program users who are aware of their role. However, this pattern is not observed, as shown in Graph F10.

Graph F10. Trust in municipal (prevention) and provincial police among OEA users and non-users



The evidence points to two main factors that may explain this difference:

1. **Lower recognition of the prevention police:** A higher proportion of respondents report not knowing or not providing an opinion about the prevention police (30%) compared to the provincial police (20%), suggesting lower visibility or familiarity with this force. Lower visibility of the prevention officers may be attributed to two factors: i) the limited reach (10% of the population), and ii) low need. Survey data supports low need as only 16% of residents reported being victims of a crime in the past year (compared to a national average of 33%).[16] Consistent with this finding, over half of the respondents who were aware of OEA indicated they had not used it because they had not needed to do so.
2. **Limited operational role of prevention officers:** Both residents and program operators emphasized that the restricted scope of prevention policing limits its effectiveness in the eyes of the public. This restricted scope (including restrictions on detaining suspects and entering private homes) has been a recurring concern among OEA users, particularly those dissatisfied with the response to their reports.

Box F2. Perceptions of the role of prevention police

The thing is, they don't have weapons either; they don't have much in the way of defense. They can't take action... I think [their role] is persuasive; more than anything, it's persuasive. Because of the presence of the patrol car and all that—the lights and so on...It's a bit like a scarecrow on a farm. But it helps, mind you, I agree, it helps.

(Anonymous, OEA user)

There's a lot of skepticism... about the fact that they don't have a police status. So that's the criticism... What do they come for?

(Anonymous, OEA user)

An additional constraint in capacity is the weak coordination with the provincial police in some cases. Prevention officers report that requests for support from provincial police are sometimes delayed or go unanswered, further limiting their perceived effectiveness.

16 Statistic from Vanderbilt University LAPOP study, visualized in the AmericasBarometer Data Playground.

We explored an alternative hypothesis for higher trust in Mendoza: the ongoing strengthening of the prevention forces increases their operational and response capacity to criminal incidents. Qualitative findings suggest that this might be true. Participants highlighted recent improvements in police capacity and increased investments in security infrastructure, such as cameras and patrol units, as factors contributing to greater confidence in authorities. Current efforts to improve the security center might add to this perception in the future. In addition, prevention officers reported having strengthened relationships with the communities they serve.

Box F3. Relationship between prevention police and residents

I think residents see the prevention police very positively. Having patrol vehicles stationed in specific quadrants, always in fixed locations, helps residents see them more often and ensures that the prevention officer is the first to arrive. So that has been very beneficial.

In my case, most of the residents I interact with are older people. I patrol, greet them, and chat with them. For example, when they take their car out of the garage, I stay there until they close it. I remain in the vehicle, of course, but that makes them feel very safe—very safe.

(Anonymous, prevention police)

