

# Crime and No Punishment: A Voter Revolt in San Francisco



Well, apparently there are limits to what even woke progressives will tolerate, even in a woke, progressive city like San Francisco. Just ask Chesa Boudin, the city's progressive district attorney whom voters just threw out of office in a special recall election.

San Francisco voters had had enough – enough of crime, enough of flagrant drug use by junkies in broad daylight on the city's streets, enough of the squalor that turned one of America's most beautiful cities into a dump, where hordes of homeless people use sidewalks as outdoor bathrooms.

They had had enough of a district attorney who didn't think so-called "quality of life" crimes were serious enough to warrant prosecution – and who seemed to care more about criminals than victims.

At least you have to give Boudin credit for honesty. When he ran in 2019, he didn't hide his intentions. He flat out said

that “We will not prosecute cases involving quality-of-life crimes. Crimes such as public camping, offering or soliciting sex, public urination, blocking a sidewalk, etc., should not and will not be prosecuted.”

In middle America, a politician who said something like that couldn't get elected dog catcher. But in San Francisco, where you'd have a better chance of running into a Martian than a Republican, voters weren't put off by his progressive philosophy. At least not until the woke new world he promised them turned into a reality that invaded their daily lives.

They witnessed “smash and grab” looters hitting high end stores. They saw videos of thieves cavalierly stealing everything they could get their hands on from the shelves of neighborhood stores; one thief rode into a drug store on his bicycle, filled a trash bag with merchandise and cavalierly rode out the front door. So today in San Francisco, even small items in some drug stores, are locked behind plexiglass.

San Francisco voters sent a message to Boudin: They didn't want to live that way anymore. If that was their future, they didn't want any part of it.

I was based in San Francisco a while back when I was a correspondent for CBS News. It was a quirky city, which is why we good-naturedly called it, “Halloween-by-the-sea.”

But it wasn't a lawless city. It wasn't the “shoplifting capital of America,” as it arguably is now. You could walk the streets back then, day or night, and not worry that some deranged homeless person might attack you over who knows what. You could park your car on the street and when you came back the windows were still intact and the stuff you left inside the car were still there.

Last year I wrote that, “San Francisco has long had a bohemian, ‘anything goes’ mentality – but until recently no one thought that meant thieves could walk into a store, take

what they want, and casually walk out.”

And while people who live in that city were becoming more and more agitated, Chesa Boudin, true to his word, averted his eyes. He thought the legal system was racist and that there were too many people in prison. So instead of prosecuting “quality of life” crimes, he chose to help “the city’s more disenfranchised populations,” as one local news report put it.

Now, he’s the one who’s disenfranchised.

There’s a lesson in this recall election that goes way beyond San Francisco, and even beyond Los Angeles, where George Gascon, another soft-on-crime, progressive district attorney – and Boudin’s predecessor in San Francisco – is in the voters’ crosshairs. They’re busy collecting signatures on a petition to have him recalled too. The first time they tried to recall him, they failed. But after Boudin’s ouster, I’m guessing Gascon isn’t sleeping easy anymore.

I get the impression that voters have had enough not only of progressive DAs like Chesa Boudin, but of soft-on-crime Democrats in general. Besides inflation, crime will be on their minds when they go to the polls in November.

San Francisco is a case study of what can happen to a great city when crimes go unpunished because they’re considered too inconsequential to worry about.

But, as I wrote last year, “Societies can’t thrive, they can’t go on indefinitely when people can urinate (and more) on the sidewalk or block streets or pretend that ransacking store shelves and walking out without paying is no big deal – because it’s a very big deal. And once the little things become commonplace, once they become tolerated, it’s not long before bigger, bad things start to happen routinely as well.

“It takes time for societies to fall apart, to crumble. Laws

matter. Order matters. Believing that you live in a safe place where miscreants don't run free ... that matters too."

When a public servant chooses not to prosecute a whole array of crimes we shouldn't be shocked when we get more crime. Criminals may be immoral, but they're not stupid. They make calculations about risks and rewards. And in San Francisco they concluded that crime pays.

Chesa Boudin isn't entirely responsible for the city's rot. But he is responsible for a lot of it.

And I'm pretty sure that it's no longer only law-and-order conservatives who have had enough of crime and no punishment. Americans, I think, have reached a tipping point. Like the voters in San Francisco, they've also had enough.

Chesa Boudin is paying a price for his "enlightened" progressive approach to criminal justice. And I suspect a lot of other Democrats will soon pay a price too.