

Crime Trends in California

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➤ **California's violent crime rate rose in 2016—but it remains historically low.**

California's violent crime rate increased by 3.7% in 2016 to 444 per 100,000 residents. There have been other recent upticks in 2012 and 2015, but the statewide rate is still comparable to levels in the late 1960s. The state's violent crime rate increased dramatically from 1960 to 1980, from 236 to 888 violent crimes per 100,000 residents—a staggering 276% rise. After declining in the early 1980s, the rate rose to a peak of 1,104 in 1992. Since then, violent crime has declined substantially. California's violent crime rate is higher than the national rate of 386 and ranks 15th among all states. In 2016, 60% of reported violent crimes in California were aggravated assaults, 31% were robberies, 8% were rapes, and 1% were homicides.

➤ **The statewide property crime rate decreased in 2016.**

The 2016 property crime rate of 2,545 per 100,000 residents is down 3.3%, about 3.5% above the 50-year low of 2,459 in 2014. Like violent crime, property crime increased dramatically between 1960 and 1980—from 3,140 per 100,000 residents in 1961 to a 50-year peak of 6,900 in 1980. But the property crime rate fell in the 1980s and '90s, and by 2011 it was down almost 63%. California's property crime rate is above the national rate of 2,450 and ranks 27th among all states. Of all reported property crimes in California in 2016, 64% were larceny thefts, 19% were burglaries, and 17% were auto thefts.

➤ **Crime rates vary dramatically by region and category.**

The lowest rates of both violent and property crime in 2016 were in the Sierra region (Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, and Tuolumne Counties) and on the South Coast (Ventura, Orange, and San Diego Counties). Property crime rates in these two regions stood at 1,792 and 1,981 per 100,000 residents, respectively; violent crime rates were 369 and 280. The state's highest rates of property and violent crime were in the relatively poor San Joaquin Valley, at 3,113 and 600 per 100,000 residents. The crime category that varies the most widely across regions is robbery: in 2016, the robbery rate in the Greater Los Angeles Area (172 per 100,000 residents) was five and a half times higher than the rate in the Sierras (31). By contrast, larceny theft rates vary the least: the highest rate in 2016 was 1,898 incidents per 100,000 residents in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the lowest rate, again in the Sierras, was 1,060. The highest auto theft rate was in the San Joaquin Valley (555), while the lowest rate was in the Sierras (181).

➤ **Violent crime increased in a majority of counties ...**

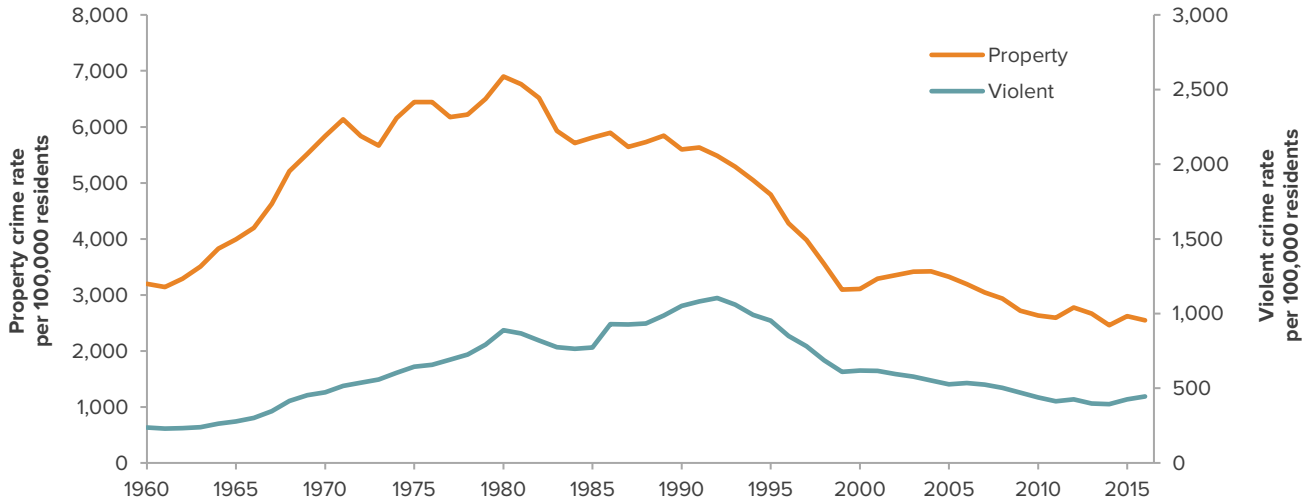
A total of 32 of the state's 58 counties—including 10 of the 15 largest—saw increases in their violent crime rates in 2016. In 19 counties, the violent crime rate increased by more than 10%, while 10 counties saw increases of more than 20%. Most of these larger increases occurred in small counties, which are susceptible to substantial swings in crime rates due to small populations and rare instances of violent crime. Of the state's 15 largest counties, 5 saw decreases in violent crime (Orange, San Diego, San Mateo, Sacramento, and San Francisco). The largest decrease, of 10.1%, was in San Francisco. Statewide, 9 counties saw declines of more than 10%—most are smaller counties such as San Benito, Tuolumne, Nevada, Alpine and Modoc.

➤ **... but property crime decreased in most counties.**

A total of 39 of the state's 58 counties—including 13 of the 15 largest—saw decreases in property crime rates in 2016. In many counties there were significant decreases. In 13 counties, the property crime rate decreased by more than 10%, and 2 counties saw decreases of more than 20% (San Benito and Sonoma). Eight counties, all with fewer than 100,000 residents, saw their property crime rate increase by more than 10%. Only 2 of the 15 largest counties—Kern (8.0%) and Los Angeles (4.2%)—experienced property crime increases.



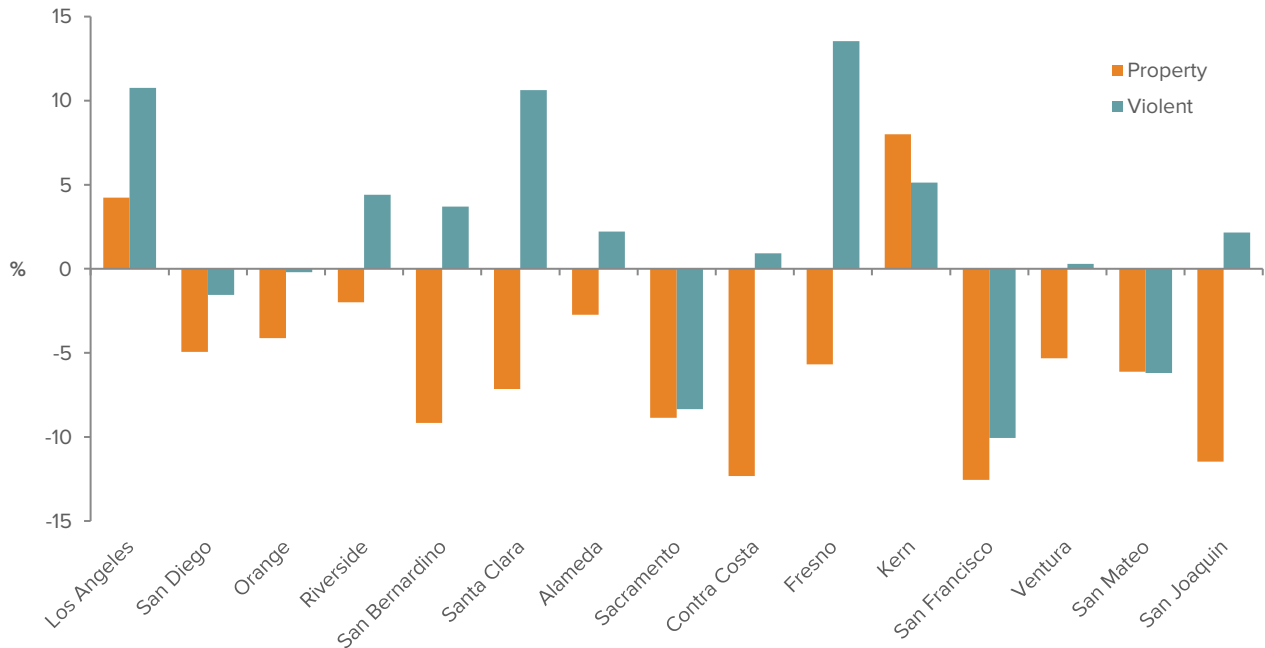
California’s violent and property crime rates are still at historic lows



Source: Author calculation based on Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Report 1960–2002 and the California Department of Justice’s Criminal Justice Statistics Center, California Crimes and Clearances Files, 2003–2016.

Note: Violent crime includes homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault; property crime includes burglary, motor vehicle theft, and larceny theft (including non-felonious larceny theft).

Among the 15 largest counties, only Kern and Los Angeles saw both violent and property crime rates increase in 2016



Source: Author calculation based on the California Department of Justice’s Criminal Justice Statistics Center, California Crimes and Clearances Files, 2015–2016.

Note: Chart shows California’s 15 largest counties, sorted by population size. Violent crime includes homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault; property crime includes burglary, motor vehicle theft, and larceny theft (including non-felonious larceny theft).

Sources: Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Report, California Department of Justice’s Criminal Justice Statistics Center, California Crimes and Clearances Files, and California Department of Finance’s Demographic Research Unit, County Population Estimates.

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