Crime Trends in California

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Given the limitations of the available data for 2021, this fact sheet provides preliminary 2021 trends and focuses on data from 2020.

In 2021, some crime rates seemed to increase, with homicides continuing to rise.

- Preliminary data from four of California's major cities—Los Angeles, Oakland, San Diego, and San Francisco—show increases in property and violent crime numbers in 2021. In particular, the troubling increase in homicides that we saw in 2020 appears to continue—homicides in these cities were up by about 17% in 2021.
- An increase in property crime in 2021, driven by car break-ins and auto thefts, returned property crime numbers close to pre-pandemic numbers. The need to continue monitoring crime trends, investigating underlying causes, and identifying effective solutions remains high.

While California's violent crime rate had decreased somewhat in 2020, homicides and aggravated assaults had increased.

- California's violent crime rate decreased by 0.5% to 428 per 100,000 residents between 2019 and 2020, an unprecedented period marked by the global COVID-19 pandemic. This change was driven by declines in robberies (14.9%) and rape (9.5%).
- Despite upticks in 2012 and from 2015 to 2017, the 2020 statewide violent crime rate was 2.6% below what it was in 2010, before California embarked on significant criminal justice reforms, and comparable to levels in the late 1960s. For 2020, California's violent crime rate ranked 16th nationwide and was higher than the national rate of 387 per 100,000 residents.
- While robbery and rape decreased, homicides increased by 30% and aggravated assaults went up by 7.5%. In 2020, 65% of reported violent crimes in California were aggravated assaults, 26% were robberies, 8% were rapes, and 1% were homicides.


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).
The statewide property crime rate declined in 2020.

- The 2020 property crime rate of 2,071 per 100,000 residents was down 8.9% from 2019, the lowest observed since 1960. California’s property crime rate was above the national rate (1,958 per 100,000 residents) and ranked 18th among all states.
- Larceny dropped sharply in 2020, by 18.4%, and burglary decreased by 4.9%; but motor vehicle theft jumped by 18.4%. Of all reported property crimes in California in 2020, 63% were larceny thefts, 17% were burglaries, and 20% were auto thefts.

Crime rates vary dramatically by region and category.

- At 274 violent crimes per 100,000 residents in 2020, the lowest violent crime rate was on the southern coast and border (Imperial, Orange, San Diego, and Ventura Counties), while the Sierra region had the lowest property crime rate, at 1,510 per 100,000 residents.
- The state’s highest rate of violent crime was in the San Joaquin Valley, which had 559 violent incidents per 100,000 residents, while the highest rate of property crime occurred in the San Francisco Bay Area, which had 2,608 property incidents per 100,000 residents.

Violent crime increased in many counties, but property crime decreased in most counties.

- A total of 37 of the state’s 58 counties saw violent crime rise in 2020, with 16 counties experiencing increases of 20% or more. However, 12 of these 16 counties are smaller counties, which are especially susceptible to wide swings in crime rates due to small populations and rare instances of violent crime.
- Of the state’s 15 largest counties, 6 saw a rise in violent crime while 9 saw a drop in it.
- A total of 45 counties—including 12 of the 15 largest—saw decreases in property crime rates in 2020. In 25 counties—including 6 of the 15 largest counties—the property crime rate fell by at least 10%.
- Only 3 of the 15 largest counties experienced increases in property crimes: Fresno (by 6.1%), Ventura (3.6%), and Orange Counties (3.2%).

Among the 15 largest counties, only Fresno and Orange County saw both violent and property crime rates increase in 2020.

Source: Authors’ calculation based on the California Department of Justice’s Criminal Justice Statistics Center, California Crimes and Clearances Files, 2019–2020.

Notes: 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.