

## Crime Trends in California

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### ➤ California's violent crime rate rose in 2017—but it remains historically low.

California's violent crime rate increased by 1.5% in 2017 to 451 per 100,000 residents. There were also upticks in 2012 and from 2015 to 2017, 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 decreased substantially. California's violent crime rate ranked 16th nationwide and was higher than the national rate of 394 per 100,000 residents. In 2017, 59% of reported violent crimes in California were aggravated assaults, 32% were robberies, 8% were rapes, and 1% were homicides.

### ➤ The statewide property crime rate decreased in 2017.

The 2017 property crime rate of 2,491 per 100,000 residents is down 2.1% from 2016, and only 1.3% 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 was above the national rate (2,362 per 100,000 residents) and ranked 25th among all states. Of all reported property crimes in California in 2017, 65% were larceny thefts, 18% 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 2017 were on the South Coast (Imperial, Orange, San Diego, and Ventura Counties), with rates of 288 and 1,894 per 100,000 residents, respectively. The state's highest rate of violent crime was in the relatively low-income San Joaquin Valley, which had 584 violent incidents per 100,000 residents, while the highest rate of property crime occurred in the San Francisco Bay Area, which had 3,049 property incidents per 100,000 residents. The crime category that varies most widely across regions is robbery: in 2017, the robbery rate in Los Angeles County and the Inland Empire (177 per 100,000 residents) was more than five times higher than the rate in the Sierras (34), which comprises Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, and Tuolumne Counties. By contrast, larceny theft rates vary the least: the highest rate in 2017 was 2,133 incidents per 100,000 residents in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the lowest rate, again in the Sierras, was 1,185. The San Joaquin Valley had the highest auto theft rate (517), while the Sierras had the lowest rate (203).

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

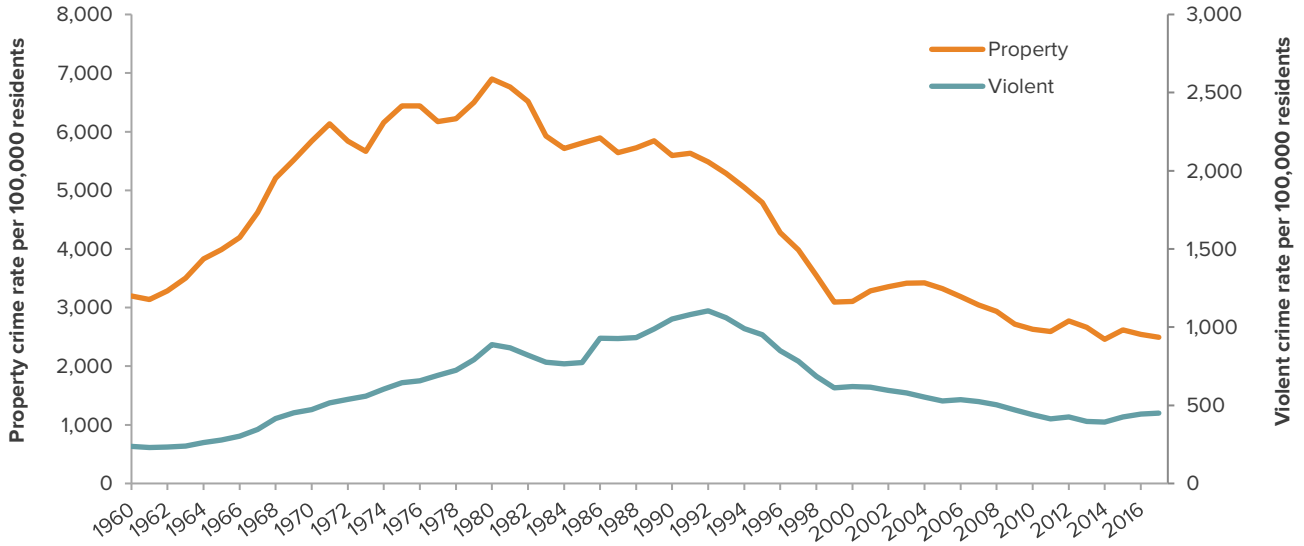
A total of 33 of the state's 58 counties saw increases in their violent crime rates in 2017. In 19 counties, the violent crime rate increased by more than 10%. Most of these large increases occurred in small counties, which are susceptible to substantial swings in crime rates due to small populations and rare instances of violent crime. Among the counties experiencing decreases in violent crime, seven saw declines of more than 10% (El Dorado, Madera, Mendocino, San Luis Obispo, Sierra, Tehama, and Yolo). Of the state's 15 largest counties, 7 saw increases and 8 saw decreases in violent crime.

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

A total of 36 of the state's 58 counties—including 10 of the 15 largest—saw decreases in property crime rates in 2017. In many counties there were significant decreases. In nine counties—including three larger counties (Kern, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara)—the property crime rate decreased by more than 10%. Seven counties, most of them less populous, saw their property crime rates increase by more than 10%. Only 5 of the 15 largest counties (Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara) 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, 2003–2017.

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, Santa Clara, San Francisco, and San Mateo saw increases in both violent and property crime rates in 2017



Source: Author calculation based on the California Department of Justice’s Criminal Justice Statistics Center, California Crimes and Clearances Files, 2016–2017.

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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