

Crime Trends in California

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Given the limitations of the available data for 2020, this fact sheet provides preliminary 2020 trends and focuses on data from 2019, prior to the pandemic.

➤ **Crime rates have shifted amid the pandemic, but the full impact is unclear.**

Preliminary data from four major cities (Los Angeles, Oakland, San Diego, and San Francisco) indicate some types of crime rose during the pandemic, though overall crime rates remain historically low as of fall 2020. While violent and property crimes dropped notably at the onset of the pandemic, the overall violent crime rate returned to early 2020 levels and the overall property crime rate plateaued. These data suggest notable decreases in reports of robberies and rapes, a slight increase in assaults, and a troubling increase of about 30% in homicides. Among property crimes, larcenies and residential burglaries declined, but both motor vehicle theft and commercial burglaries increased markedly, by roughly 20%. The need to continue monitoring crime trends, investigating underlying causes, and identifying effective solutions remains high.

➤ **Prior to the pandemic, California's violent crime rate decreased in 2019.**

California's violent crime rate decreased by 2.9% to 430 per 100,000 residents between 2018 and 2019. Despite upticks in 2012 and from 2015 to 2017, the statewide rate was slightly below what it was in 2010, before California embarked on significant criminal justice reforms, and comparable to levels in the late 1960s. California's violent crime rate ranked 12th nationwide and was higher than the national rate of 379 per 100,000 residents. In 2019, 60% of reported violent crimes in California were aggravated assaults, 30% were robberies, 9% were rapes, and 1% were homicides.

➤ **The statewide property crime rate decreased in 2019.**

The 2019 property crime rate of 2,272 per 100,000 residents was down 3.6% from 2018 and was the lowest observed since 1960. California's property crime rate was above the national rate (2,110 per 100,000 residents) and ranked 19th among all states. Of all reported property crimes in California in 2019, 68% were larceny thefts, 17% were burglaries, and 15% were auto thefts.

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

The lowest rates of both violent and property crime in 2019 were on the southern coast and border (Imperial, Orange, San Diego, and Ventura Counties), with rates of 273 and 1,725 per 100,000 residents, respectively. The state's highest rate of violent crime was in the San Joaquin Valley, which had 556 violent incidents per 100,000 residents, while the highest rate of property crime occurred in the San Francisco Bay Area, which had 3,045 property incidents per 100,000 residents.

➤ **In 2019, a majority of counties saw decreases in violent crime . . .**

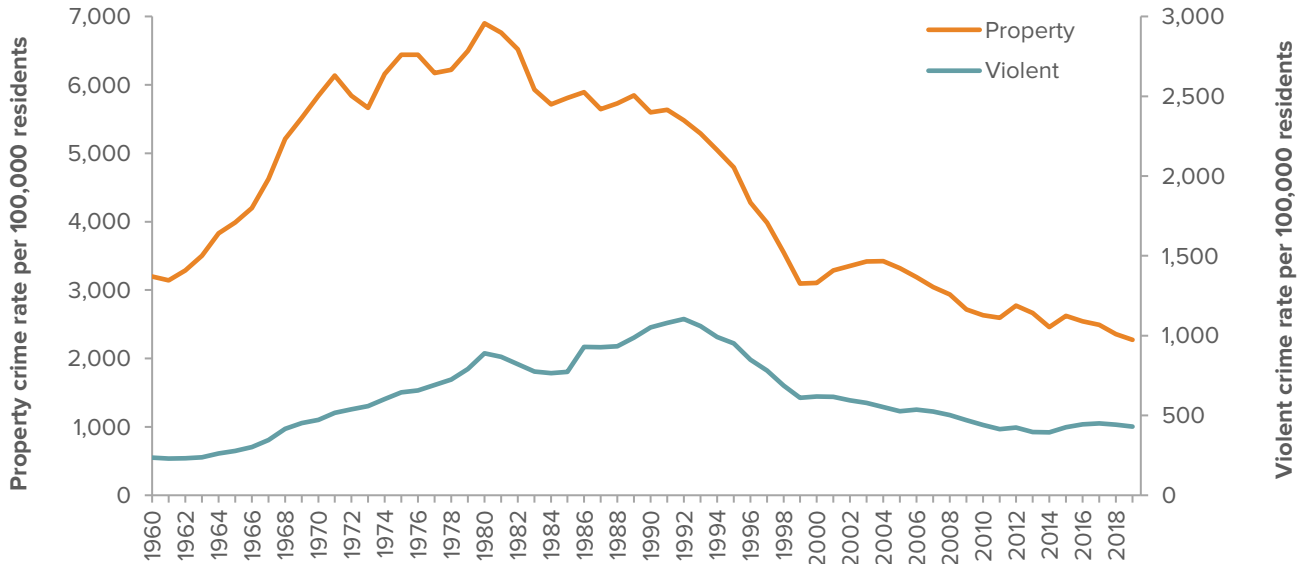
A total of 38 of the state's 58 counties saw violent crime decline in 2019. In 14 counties, the violent crime rate dropped by more than 10%. Among the counties experiencing increases in violent crime, seven—including several small counties, which are especially susceptible to substantial swings in crime rates due to small populations and rare instances of violent crime—saw gains of more than 10% (Glenn, Humboldt, Mariposa, Mono, Napa, San Bernardino, and Santa Cruz). Of the state's 15 largest counties, six saw increases and nine saw decreases in violent crime.

➤ **. . . and property crime.**

A total of 39 counties—including 10 of the 15 largest—saw decreases in property crime rates in 2019. In many counties there were significant reductions. In 11 counties—including two larger counties (Fresno and Ventura)—the property crime rate decreased by more than 10%. Ten counties saw their property crime rates increase by more than 10%. Of the 15 largest counties, two experienced increases of more than 10% (Alameda and San Mateo) while three (Contra Costa, Sacramento, and Santa Clara) saw more modest increases.



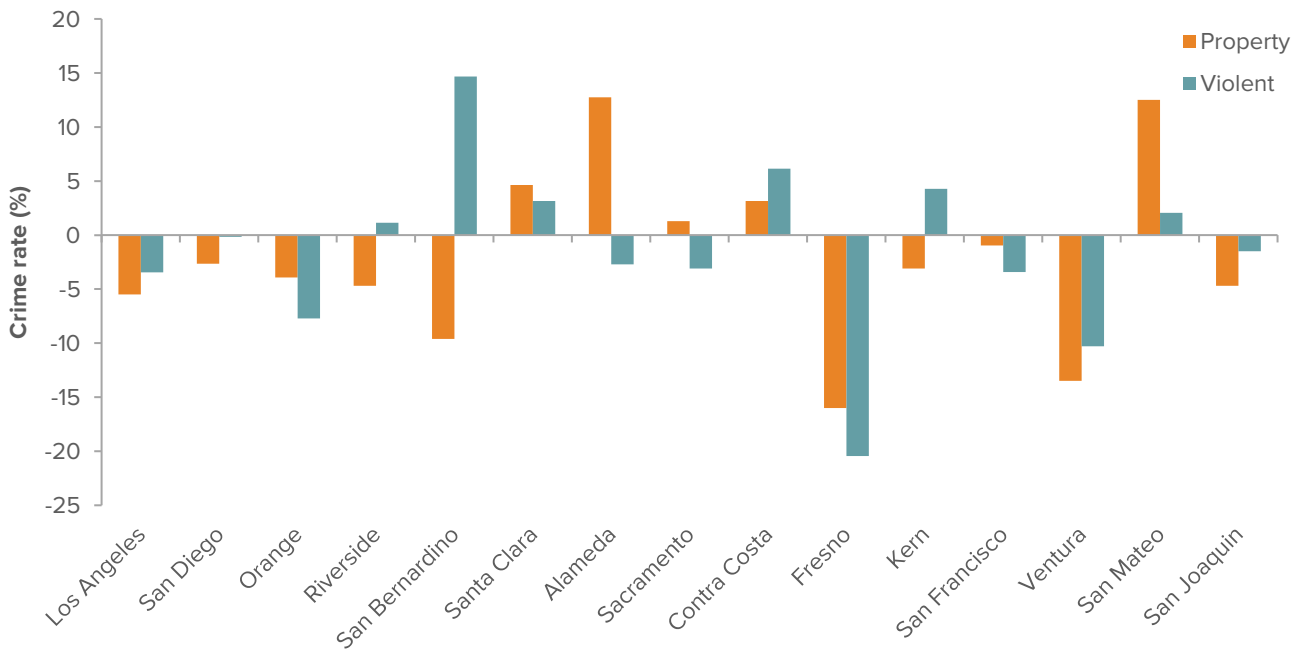
California’s violent and property crime rates were at historic lows in 2019



Sources: Authors’ 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, 2003–2019.

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, Contra Costa, San Mateo, and Santa Clara saw both violent and property crime rates increase in 2019



Source: Authors’ calculation based on the California Department of Justice’s Criminal Justice Statistics Center, California Crimes and Clearances Files, 2018–2019.

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.

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