Crime Trends in California: 10-year Analysis

Prepared by:
The Crime Strategies Unit
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Executive Summary
The Crime Strategies Unit seeks to explore the ever-changing rate of crime in California, to better inform the public of trends, the latest analyses, and to seek effective preventative strategies. This report compiles data from the eight most populous cities in California to examine what trends emerged during the last 9-11 years. The data has been formatted in two ways. In the first section, it is formatted with graphs looking at the raw change across crime types within a single city, or a single category of criminal activity throughout all cities. The second section looks at crime per capita as compared to other major counties.

Throughout the past decade, there have been many distinctive macro- and micro-trends within the major categories of crime within our community. What do they mean for policy-making, crime prevention, and every day decision making for the citizens of Santa Clara County? San Jose stands out. With more than a million residents, the city remains one of the safest big cities in the country and the statistical driver of the county’s overall crime trends. While the city has maintained its historically and comparatively low crimes rates, San Jose has experienced some unique microtrends in recent years. Perhaps the most troubling is a notable increase in gun-related crime. Reported cases of aggravated assault with a firearm have doubled in the last ten years, with a consistent upward trendline. Similarly, reported robberies with a firearm have increased in the last ten years. Both trends outpace the statewide trendlines and suggest that there are locally-specific factors driving this phenomenon. Robberies overall have continued a steady increase over the last ten years, while every other major California city has seen a decrease in robberies in the last decade. Stolen vehicle reports remain high after a significant jump in 2012, while the rest of the state has mostly experienced declining vehicle thefts. However, drops in several prominent crime categories – from shoplifting to homicides - belie an easy narrative. Residential burglaries in San Jose, and statewide, have steadily declined in recent years to its lowest levels in more than a decade.

Santa Clara County remains statistically, comparatively and historically safe. Its property crime rates per capita are well below many other major California counties over the past decade. Its violent crime rates per capita are well below the rest of the major counties during that period, and indeed lower than the state. In 2017, for example, there were 32 homicides in San Jose. Even its high of 47 in 2016 is dwarfed by comparative cities. San Francisco’s high was 100 (in 2007.) Oakland’s was 145 (in 2006.) Just two years ago, Chicago (albeit with a much larger population) had 762 murders, 404 more than San Jose has suffered over the last 11 years. St. Louis, with a population of 314,000 had 188. It is just as a statistically valid question to ask why homicides are so comparatively low here as it is to query why car thefts have risen.

Despite mirroring the low crime rates of the 1960s, some have sought to align the handful of troubling rising trends with a series of statewide criminal justice of reforms which began with California Assembly Bill 109, or Realignment, that went into effect in late 2011. This was followed three years later by Proposition 47. There is no clear or convincing evidence that Realignment or Prop. 47 caused a statewide, uniform crime increase. The Public Policy Institute of California, for example, concluded that increases in violent crime after 2014 seem to have begun before the Proposition 47 was passed.

However, the Institute identified a potential relationship between the Proposition and statewide increases in larceny¹. The statistical jury remains out.

There may be a clearer local catalyst for some of the rising trends. As the statistics show, San Jose has – by far - the smallest ratio of officers to residents in the county and of the major cities in the US, with about 9 officers per 10,000 residents. As a comparison, San Francisco’s ratio is close to 26 and Oakland has close to 18. We note that some of San

Jose’s crime trends which rose while falling in other parts of the state (car thefts being a prime example) began just as the police department dramatically bled staff. The Rand Corporation studied this phenomenon on a national level in 2010, concluding that the crime prevention benefit of hiring more officers is well worth the cost.

There may be few simple conclusions to be drawn from these statistics. However, there is a clear path forward. We will continue to keep our close and careful attention upon our local crime trends. We will work with our law enforcement agencies, governments, NGOs, and neighborhoods to keep this county safe to live, visit, and work. In the last year, for example, we and our law enforcement partners have launched a county-wide Gun Initiative – looking at a variety of ways to quickly get weapons out of the hands of dangerous criminals. Preliminary results are positive. Analytics are increasingly key tools in fighting crime. However, the people of Santa Clara County are not statistics. One life saved is a worthy goal. One murder solved is success. We will continue to seek a safer, smarter, fairer justice for all.
Methodology
In Part One of the Report, the eight most populous cities in California are compared across multiple crime types. These charts show ten-year crime trendlines for each city, allowing the reader to see what is going on individually in those jurisdictions. The numbers reflect reported incidents as maintained by the California Department of Justice, regardless of whether the case resulted in an arrest/citation.

Terminology/Definitions
Definitions taken from State of California Department of Justice OpenJustice website

**Aggravated Assault** – an unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or great bodily harm.

**Burglary** – the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or a theft. Attempted burglary is included.

**Homicide** – the willful (non-negligent) killing of one human being by another. Murder and non-negligent manslaughter are included.

**Larceny-Theft** – the unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another. Attempted larcenies are included. Embezzlement, confidence games, forgery, check fraud, etc., are excluded.

**Motor Vehicle Theft** – the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle. A motor vehicle is self-propelled and runs on land surface and not on rails. Motorboats, construction equipment, airplanes, and farming equipment are specifically excluded from this category.

**Robbery** – the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.

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Vehicle Theft

San Jose
Vehicle Theft 2006-2017

Fresno
Vehicle Theft 2006-2017

Oakland
Vehicle Theft 2006-2017

Sacramento
Vehicle Theft 2006-2017

Los Angeles
Vehicle Theft 2006-2017

San Diego
Vehicle Theft 2006-2017

Long Beach
Vehicle Theft 2006-2017

San Francisco
Vehicle Theft 2006-2017

Robberies (Firearm)

San Jose
Robberies (Firearm) 2006-2017


San Francisco
Robberies (Firearm) 2006-2017


Fresno
Robberies (Firearm) 2006-2017


Oakland
Robberies (Firearm) 2006-2017


Sacramento
Robberies (Firearm) 2006-2017


Los Angeles
Robberies (Firearm) 2006-2017


San Diego
Robberies (Firearm) 2006-2017


Long Beach
Robberies (Firearm) 2006-2017

Larceny (Shoplifting)

San Jose
Larceny (Shoplifting) 2006-2017

Oakland
Larceny (Shoplifting) 2006-2017

Los Angeles
Larceny (Shoplifting) 2006-2017

Sacramento
Larceny (Shoplifting) 2006-2017

Fresno
Larceny (Shoplifting) 2006-2017

San Diego
Larceny (Shoplifting) 2006-2017

Long Beach
Larceny (Shoplifting) 2006-2017

San Francisco
Larceny (Shoplifting) 2006-2017
Larceny (Felony)

San Jose
Larceny (Felony) 2006-2017


Fresno
Larceny (Felony) 2006-2017


Oakland
Larceny (Felony) 2006-2017


Sacramento
Larceny (Felony) 2006-2017


Los Angeles
Larceny (Felony) 2006-2017


San Diego
Larceny (Felony) 2006-2017


Long Beach
Larceny (Felony) 2006-2017


San Francisco
Larceny (Felony) 2006-2017

*The 2017 total appears to be due to a definition and reporting change at SFPD

PART TWO: Crime Rates Adjusted for Population

San Jose vs Rest of Santa Clara County
All statistics represent the number of cases per 100,000 residents.

Violent crimes

Homicide

Robbery

Robbery with Firearm
Crime Rates in 15 largest California counties

In this section we compare rates of different crimes in the 15 largest counties in California (Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Santa Clara, Alameda, Sacramento, Contra Costa, Fresno, Kern, San Francisco, Ventura, San Mateo, and San Joaquin Counties). All crime rates are normalized by the population of that county in that year, giving the number of crimes per 100,000 residents in that year.

Focusing on the largest counties is essential to reduce “noise” in the data, while the geographic and socioeconomic diversity among these 15 counties ensures that our comparisons are not unrepresentative. Santa Clara County is highlighted in each chart, as are the nearby San Francisco County and Alameda County for comparison. San Diego County is similar in many ways to Santa Clara County, and is also highlighted as a comparison. Certain other counties are also highlighted in individual charts. Interactive versions of all charts in this section can be found at [INSERT URL]; this allows close examination of individual datapoints and trendlines for individual counties. Journalists can modify these interactive charts in order to render the same data in different formats or styles.

Violent Crime Per 100,000 Residents

The category of Violent Crimes includes homicide, rape and attempted rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Data for each of these categories is presented individually below.
**Homicides Per 100,000 Residents**

It is important to note that the absolute numbers of homicides in each county are extremely low (for example, San Joaquin County had between 35 and 89 homicides each year). This means the random variation in this chart due to “noise” is larger than in others, so one should be especially cautious about interpreting any apparent trends in this data.
At first glance, this chart might suggest that the incidence of rape has increased dramatically across all counties starting in 2014. It is certainly true that the number of reported cases has increased (see charts on following page). But two factors suggest that this impression is misleading, and cast doubt on the prospect that rates of sexual assault have increased recently.

1. In 2013, the FBI revised the definition of “rape” for purposes of these statistics. The revised definition now includes cases where the victim is male; cases of oral or anal penetration; and non-consensual cases where force was not used. In some counties, such as San Francisco County, the new definition was used for the 2014 statistics; in others the new definition was used beginning in 2015. Therefore even without any change in occurrence of crime, we would expect these statistics to increase in these statistics starting in 2014/2015.

2. Firsthand reports from law enforcement suggest that the reporting rate for sexual assaults has increased in recent years, perhaps due to changes in societal attitudes, or increased attention to the problem of sexual assault. Sexual assault is among the most under-reported crimes (that is, victims of sexual assault are less likely to report than victims of other violent crimes such as robbery), so changes in reporting rates would affect its statistics more sharply.

Together, these factors suggest that the rate of sexual assault may not have increased at all. They suggest that the reality all along has been closer to the current elevated numbers, but that the earlier portion of the graph was artificially depressed by lower reporting rates and by the restrictive earlier definition. It’s impossible (without extensive further study) to determine how much of the apparent increase is due to these factors, so we can’t rule out the possibility that

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3 The previous classification was “forcible rape,” defined as “the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will.” The current classification is “rape,” defined as “penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.”
rates of sexual assault are in fact increasing somewhat. But we can put this in perspective by comparing with other violent crimes. Below we compare the statistics across all of California over the longer period 1986-2017 for the most common violent crimes (robbery and aggravated assault).

**Reported violent crimes per 100k residents, all of California**

There was a slight increase of 14% in the incidence of these violent crimes since 2013, and essentially none since 2010.

**Reported rape cases (incl. attempted) / 100k residents, all of California**

However, the statistics for rape and attempted rape show a much sharper increase of 92%, to levels not seen since 1993 (a time when overall violent crime rates were at 238% their current levels). Common sense suggests it is unlikely that rates of sexual assault have spiked so dramatically while other violent crimes remain roughly constant, and this is borne out by the experience of law enforcement on the ground.
Aggravated Assault with Firearm Per 100,000 Residents

Aggravated Assault with Knife Per 100,000 Residents

Graphs showing the number of aggravated assaults per 100,000 residents for Alameda County, California, San Diego County, San Francisco County, and Santa Clara County from 2008 to 2017.
Property Crime

The category of Property Crimes includes motor vehicle theft, burglary (both residential and non-residential), and larceny (including thefts from motor vehicles and from buildings).

Data for each of these categories is presented individually below.

**Total property crimes per 100k residents**

![Graph showing total property crimes per 100k residents for San Francisco County, Alameda County, California, Santa Clara County, and San Diego County from 2008 to 2017.](image-url)
Motor Vehicle Thefts per 100,000 Residents

Total Burglaries per 100,000 Residents
Larceny from Building Cases per 100,000 Residents
Crime Rates in 10 largest California cities

In this section we compare rates of different crimes in the 10 largest cities in California (Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, Fresno, Sacramento, Long Beach, Oakland, Bakersfield, and Anaheim). All crime rates are normalized by the population of that city in that year, giving the number of crimes per 100,000 residents in that year.

San Jose is highlighted in each chart, as are San Francisco and Oakland as nearby comparisons. San Diego, which is similar in many ways to San Jose, is also highlighted as a comparison. Interactive versions of all charts in this section can be found at [INSERT URL], or by clicking on the graphs themselves; this allows close examination of individual datapoints and trendlines for individual cities. Journalists can modify these interactive charts to present the same data in different formats or styles.

**Violent Crime**

The category of Violent Crimes includes homicide, rape and attempted rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Data for each of these categories is presented individually below.

![Violent Crimes per 100k residents](chart)

*Chart: Santa Clara County DA, Crime Strategies Unit • Source: CA DOJ • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper*
Robbery cases per 100,000 Residents

Aggravated Assault per 100,000 Residents
Aggravated Assault with Firearm per 100,000 Residents

Total Property Crimes per 100,000 Residents
Residential Burglary per 100,000 Residents

Non-Residential Burglary per 100,000 Residents
Larceny cases per 100,000 Residents

San Francisco

Oakland

San Diego

San Jose

Larceny from Motor Vehicle per 100,000 Residents

San Francisco

Oakland

San Diego

San Jose
Police Staffing:
San Jose Police Department experienced a dramatic decrease in the number of sworn personnel in recent years, resulting in a declared state of emergency in 2016. Beginning in June of 2011, a series of layoffs and then a high rate of police officer retirements and acceptance of jobs at other police agencies dramatically reduced the police force in San Jose. In 2017 the department started to increase staffing, but remains one of the leanest police forces in the Country.

When compared to other large metropolitan areas in the United States the staffing levels for San Jose police and the police agencies in Santa Clara County are remarkably low. For example, San Francisco with a smaller population than San Jose employs 2,236 police officers – 25.9 officers per 10,000 residents. San Antonio, Texas, which is often compared to San Jose as a city with a similar population, crime rate and demographics employs 2,191 police officers – 15 per 10,000 residents. The national average for cities with over 500,000 residents is 23.7 officers per 10,000 residents.\(^4\)

In its annual report on Police Staffing, the city of San Jose reported that “the number of sworn, authorized positions per 100,000 residents decreased from 139 in 2007-08 to 106 in 2016-17. SJPD has faced high vacancies and decreasing numbers of street-ready officers. Of the 1,109 authorized sworn positions, only 798 were actual full duty, street-ready (this excludes vacancies, officers in training, or those on modified duty or disability/other leave) as of June 2017.”

Conclusion
In the wake of recent increasing crime in Santa Clara County, the Crime Strategies Unit is committed to identifying solutions to regional crime problems. In this and future reports, the Unit will keep the public informed about what is happening in our community. More importantly, the District Attorney’s Office is constantly seeking innovative approaches to combat crime and remains dedicated to swift and fair justice for offenders and victims in Santa Clara County.

5 City of San José – Annual Report on City Services 2016-17, available at: https://www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/73917
6 Ibid.