

# CRIME IN CALIFORNIA

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## Introduction

In recent years, the Legislature and Governor have enacted numerous laws to respond to the public's concerns with crime in California, including measures to stiffen penalties for existing criminal offenses, define new criminal offenses, construct new correctional facilities, and provide financial assistance to law enforcement. Despite these responses, however, recent polls indicate that fear of crime remains a top concern of Californians.

In an effort to put the current discussion of crime in California in perspective, we have prepared this report to answer several key questions, including:

- How much crime is there in California?
- What are the short-term and long-term trends in crime?
- How does crime vary within California, and among the states?
- Who are the victims and perpetrators of crime?
- How does California's criminal justice system deal with crime?
- What are the costs of crime?
- What are the policy implications for decision-makers?

Although this report is not designed to present comprehensive answers to all of these questions, it does provide basic information on these issues. It does this through a "quick reference" document that relies heavily on charts to present the information.

***The State of Crime in California.*** The message in this report about the state of crime in California is mixed. Crime has increased substantially over the last several decades. And although the violent crime rate has increased steadily over the years, overall

crime reached its peak in California in 1980. National surveys in which persons are asked whether they have been the victim of a crime (whether reported to the police or not) confirm this trend nationwide. Much of the increase in the violent crime rate is due to reporting changes in assault that occurred in 1986. However, preliminary crime data for the first six months of 1993 compared with the same period in 1992 indicate that all categories of violent crime (with the exception of homicide) are down. And although the homicide rate has increased, it still accounts for a tiny fraction of overall violent crime.

## What Is Crime?

In its simplest definition, “crime” is any specific act prohibited by law for which society has provided a formally sanctioned punishment. This also can include the failure of a person to perform an act specifically required by law.

**Types of Offenses.** Crimes are classified by the seriousness of the offenses as follows:

- A **felony** is the most serious offense, for which the offender may be sentenced to state prison. Felonies generally include violent crimes, sex offenses, and many types of drug and property violations.
- A **misdemeanor** is a less serious offense for which the offender may be sentenced to probation, county jail, a fine, or some combination of the three. Misdemeanors generally include crimes such as assault and battery, petty theft, and public drunkenness.
- An **infraction** is the least serious offense and generally is punishable by a fine. Many motor vehicle violations are considered infractions.

California law permits law enforcement and prosecutors to charge many types of crimes as either a felony or misdemeanor (known as a “wobbler”), or as either a misdemeanor or an infraction. Most of the resources of the criminal justice system are devoted to dealing with felonies.

**Categories of Crimes.** In general, felonies, misdemeanors, and infractions are classified in one of three broad categories: violent, property, and drug-related. Violent crime refers to events such as homicide, rape, and assault that result in an injury to a person. Robbery is also considered a violent crime because it involves the use or threat of force against a person.

Property crimes are offenses with the intent of gaining property through the use or threat of force against a person. Burglary and motor vehicle theft are examples. Such offenses are often referred to as “household crimes.”

Drug-related crimes, such as possession or sale of illegal narcotics, are generally in a separate category altogether. This is because such offenses do not fall under the definition of either violent or property offenses.

***Society's Definition of Crime Can Change.*** Although many offenses, such as homicide, robbery, and burglary, have been considered crimes for centuries, changes in the values and moral attitudes of society result in some conduct being criminalized while other conduct is decriminalized. For example, in recent years California has chosen to criminalize more severely drunken driving, while lessening criminal penalties for possession of small amounts of marijuana.

Also, society's attitudes toward the amount of punishment that should be dealt out for particular crimes changes over time. For instance, the state has enacted many laws that increase the punishment for felonies and limit the discretion of state and local criminal justice officials in dealing with offenders.

## How Much Crime Is There in California?

Although this is a simple question, the answer to it is often confusing because of the bewildering volume of crime statistics. For this reason, it is important to first understand how crimes are counted. Crime is counted in two different ways. One is based on official reports to law enforcement agencies, and is reflected in the national Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) data and the California Crime Index (CCI) data. Crime is also counted based on surveys of individuals to determine if they have been victims of crime, even though the crime may not have been reported to the police. These data are obtained from national victimization surveys.

**Crimes as Counted by Law Enforcement Reports.** For more than 60 years, the FBI has collected criminal statistics from throughout the nation under the UCR Program. Under this program, law enforcement agencies in California report information on crimes to the state Department of Justice (DOJ), which forwards the data to the FBI. In order to eliminate differences among various states' statutory definitions of crimes, the UCR reports data only on selected crimes, which are chosen because of their seriousness, frequency, and the likelihood of being reported to law enforcement. The UCR crimes are homicide, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

The DOJ annually reports on California crime using the CCI. The state's data are similar, but not identical, to the national data. The state's data exclude larceny-theft and arson in order to maintain the long-term consistency in the CCI trend.

**Crime as Counted by Victimization Surveys.** The U.S. Department of Justice annually surveys households and organizations regarding whether they have been victims of crimes. These studies, known as victimization surveys, are conducted nationally, not on a state-by-state basis, using scientific survey techniques.

**Crime "Rates."** Crime data are often presented in terms of "rates." A rate is defined as the number of occurrences of a criminal event within a given population. For example, the overall crime rate in California (according to the CCI) for 1992 was 3,491.5, which means that there were about 3,492 reported crimes per 100,000 Californians in 1992.

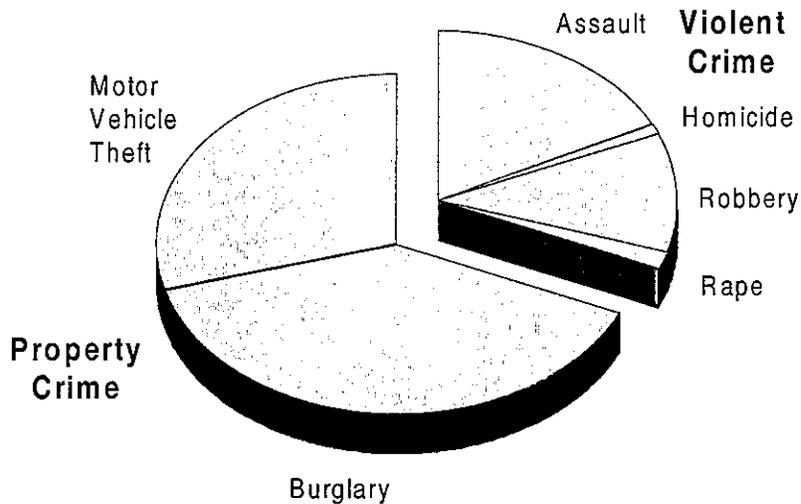
**Crime Is Underreported.** Crime statistics from law enforcement agencies don't tell the entire story for two reasons. Victimization surveys generally show that there is a significant amount of crime committed each year that is not counted in official statistics because it is not reported to law enforcement authorities. However, the proportion of crimes reported to law enforcement agencies has increased steadily since the victimization surveys began in the early 1970s.

Some crimes are more likely to be reported than others. For example, crimes involving personal injury or large economic loss are more apt to be reported. Violent crimes that are attempted, but not completed, and property crimes involving small amounts of money are much less likely to be reported. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, in 1992 about two-thirds of all crimes went unreported to the police. Specifically, about 50 percent of all violent victimizations, 59 percent of all household crimes, and 70 percent of all personal thefts went unreported.

Another reason for underreporting of crime is that sometimes several crimes are committed by an offender at the same time, but only one (usually the most severe) is counted in the data. For example, if an offender robbed a store, assaulted a clerk, and killed the owner, only the homicide would be reported.

## Most Crime Is Property Crime

1992



- There were 3,492 reported crimes per 100,000 Californians in 1992.
- Property crime (burglary and motor vehicle theft) account for about 70 percent of crimes reported in California in 1992 and violent crime (homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) accounted for about 30 percent.
- Although the proportion of violent crimes increased slightly in 1992 from 1991, the general relationship of violent to property crimes (roughly 30 percent to 70 percent) has remained stable in recent years.

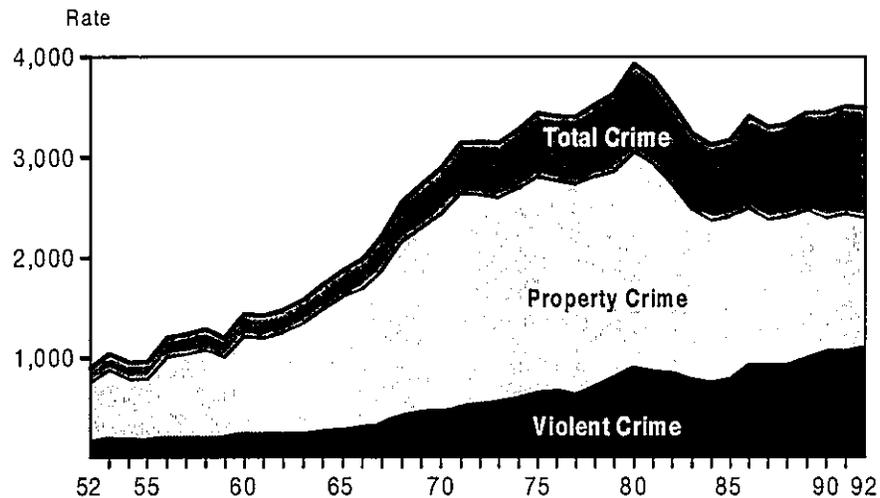


## What Are the Trends in Crime in California?

When considering the trends in crime, it is important to consider both the long-term and the short-term directions of crime in the state. Changes that occur over the years in demographics, economic conditions, social conditions and values, lifestyles, and residential patterns have a significant impact on crime trends. In several of the charts that follow, we present California crime data starting with 1952—the first year in which the DOJ began publishing the statistics.

In addition to the reported crime data, it is also important to consider trends in victimization rates to obtain a truer picture of overall trends in crime. As mentioned earlier, the national victimization survey, which began in 1973, provides valuable data in this area. These data are national in scope, however, and are not broken down specifically for California.

## Crime Rate Peaked in California in 1980<sup>a</sup> 1952 Through 1992

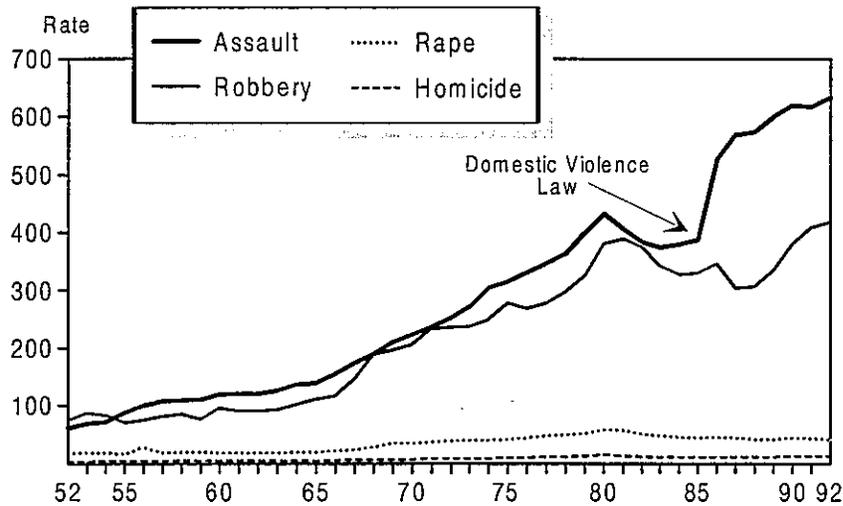


<sup>a</sup> Rate per 100,000 population.

- California's crime rate, as measured by the California Crime Index (CCI), has increased about 290 percent since 1952. The state's population increased about 169 percent over the same period.
- The crime rate reached its peak in 1980, declined for four years, and began to increase in 1985, with much of the decline due to a significant drop in property crime. Although there are probably many reasons for the decline after 1980, many researchers consider the aging of the population (particularly the aging of "baby-boomers") as the principal reason.
- Property crime—which accounts for the bulk of crime in California—grew at a slower rate (221 percent) than violent crime (621 percent) since 1952. Since 1982, the property crime rate has decreased by 12 percent, while violent crime increased by 34 percent.

## Assault and Robbery Are Most Prevalent Violent Crimes<sup>a</sup>

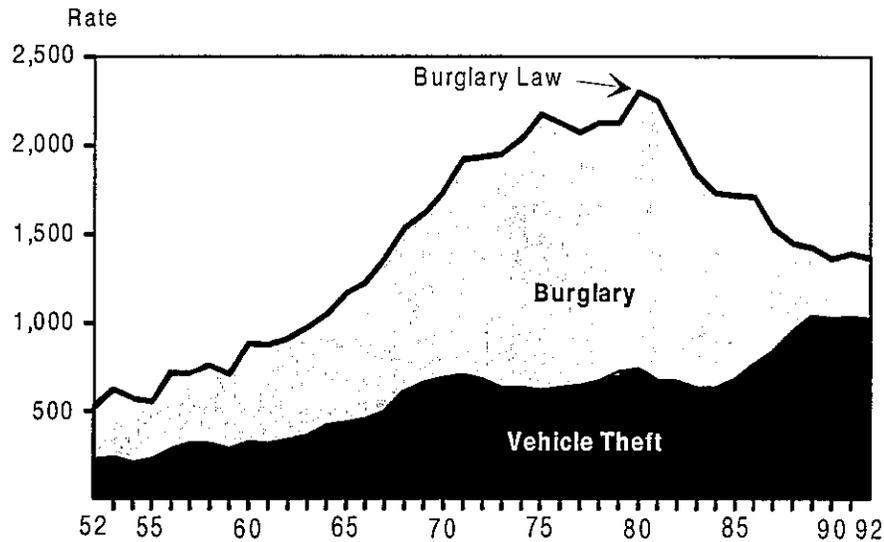
1952 Through 1992



<sup>a</sup> Rate per 100,000 population.

- Assault and robbery account for more than 95 percent of all violent crimes reported. Both offenses increased slightly in 1992 (2.6 percent for assault and 2.4 percent for robbery).
- The substantial increase in reported assaults that occurred in 1986 was due in large measure to enactment of legislation that reclassified domestic violence from a misdemeanor to a felony. Thus, the spike in the assault rate, and the corresponding increase in the overall violent crime rate, was not due primarily to an increase in the number of crimes committed, but rather a change in the way the crimes were reported.
- The homicide rate has increased substantially over the years (from 2.4 in 1952 to 12.5 in 1992), but it decreased slightly between 1991 and 1992, and remains about 1 percent of overall violent crime.

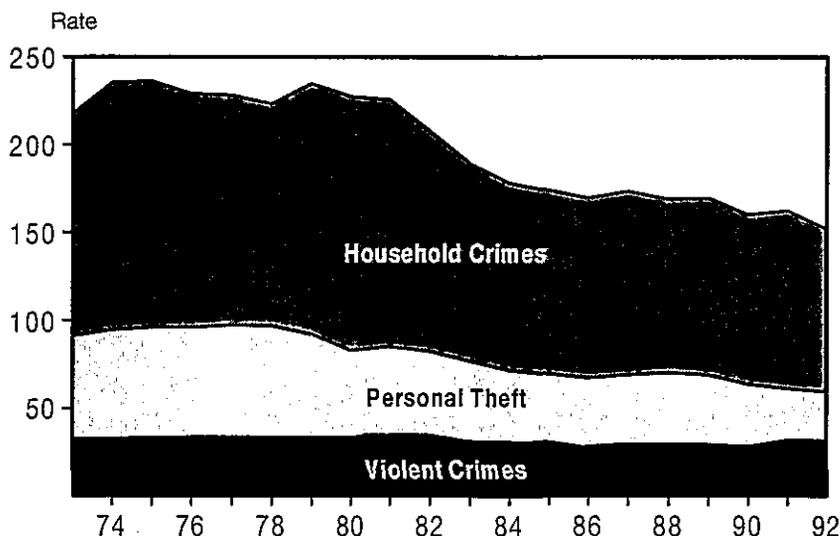
## Property Crime Down Due to Drop in Burglary Rate<sup>a</sup> 1952 Through 1992



<sup>a</sup> Rate per 100,000 population.

- Burglaries declined substantially from a high in 1980, including a 1.8 percent drop from 1991 to 1992.
- Motor vehicle theft rates increased steadily until 1989 (with a sharp increase between 1984 and 1989). Rates have declined slightly since 1989.
- The decline in the burglary rate and the sharp increase in the motor vehicle theft rate was probably due to two factors: (1) enactment of legislation in 1980 that denied probation to offenders convicted of residential burglary, thus making motor vehicle theft more attractive, and (2) demographic changes (particularly the aging of the population).

**National Victimization Studies  
Show Decline in Overall U.S. Crime<sup>a</sup>  
1973 Through 1992**



<sup>a</sup> Victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older, or per 1,000 households.

- Like the California crime rate, national surveys in which persons are asked whether they have been the victim of a crime show that crime has declined since its peak in the early 1980s. However, while California's crime rate began to increase after 1984, the national victimization surveys have shown a continuing downward trend.
- Since the surveys began in 1973, the data show a decline of 6 percent in victimizations for all crimes, a 3 percent drop for household crimes (burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft), and 18 percent for personal theft. Violent victimizations, however, showed a 24 percent increase, but remained a small portion of the total.
- The national victimization surveys are an important measure of the actual amount of crime because the official crime rate data do not include crimes that go unreported to the police.

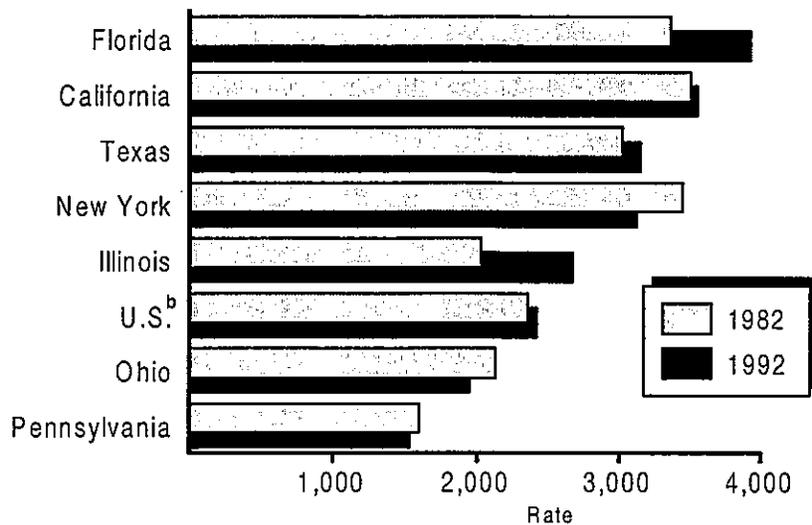


## How Does Crime Vary Among States and Within California?

Although there is value in comparing crime data among different jurisdictions, one should be cautious with such comparisons. Numerous factors can influence crime rates, such as the composition of the populations of different jurisdictions (particularly the age of the residents), the density and size of the jurisdictions, the mobility of the residents, economic and family conditions, strength and effectiveness of the law enforcement agencies, crime reporting practices, and—most importantly—the laws and criminal justice policies of the jurisdictions. It is especially important not to oversimplify or draw quick conclusions from comparisons without first understanding the differences among the jurisdictions being compared.

The most complete information comparing state crime rates is from the FBI. The most complete information for comparing crime among jurisdictions within California is from the California DOJ and is available on a county-by-county basis. In general, we believe that only large industrial states with diverse populations and economies should be compared. Comparison of counties should be limited to comparing similar counties—for example, large counties (with populations of 1 million or more), medium-sized counties, and small and rural counties.

## California's Crime Rate Higher Than Many Large States<sup>a</sup>

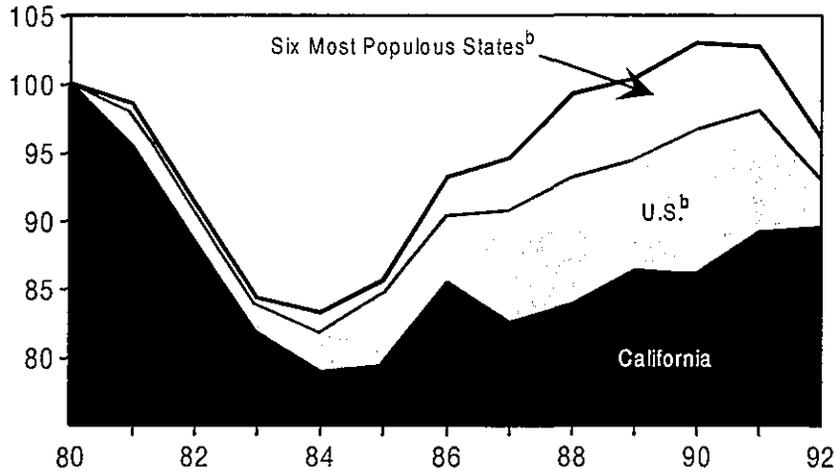


<sup>a</sup> Rate per 100,000 population in states with populations of 10 million or more.

<sup>b</sup> Excludes California.

- California's 1992 crime rate is higher than the nation's rate and is the second highest among the large states.
- Florida's 1992 rate was the highest among the large states and was about 11 percent higher than California's rate. The highest rate in the nation is in the District of Columbia, with a rate that is almost twice as high as California's.
- Although California's crime rate has increased since 1982, the increase has been slower than the increase for the nation as a whole, as well as Texas, Florida, and Illinois.
- California ranks third (behind Florida and New York) in overall violent crime and second (behind Florida) in overall property crime. California ranks first in one individual crime—motor vehicle theft.

**Crime Rate in Other States  
Increased Faster Than in California<sup>a</sup>  
1980 Through 1992**



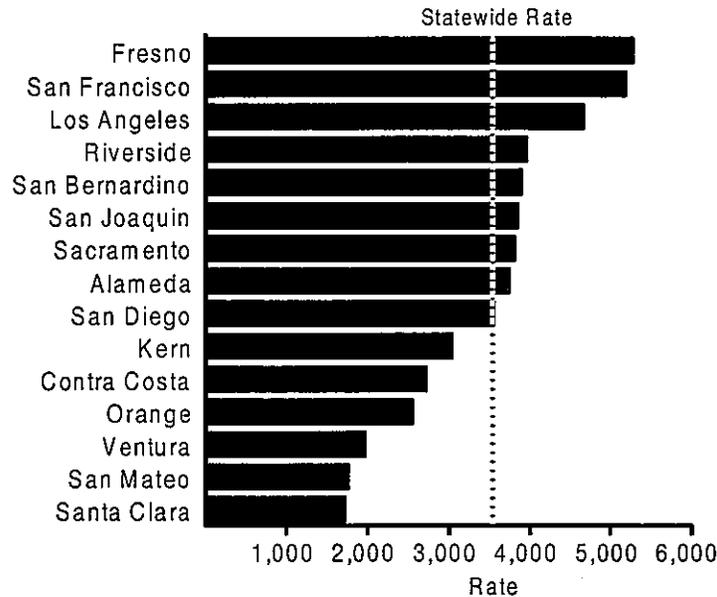
<sup>a</sup> Change in rate, indexed to 1980.

<sup>b</sup> Excludes California.

- Since 1980, California's crime rate has followed a path similar to that of the nation and the other six most populous states (states with populations of 10 million or more); however, California's rate fell further (from 1980 to 1984) and increased slower (from 1985 to 1991).
- From 1991 to 1992, California's crime rate remained about the same while the rates for the rest of the nation and other large states fell.

### Crime Rates Vary Among Counties<sup>a</sup>

1992



<sup>a</sup> Crime rates in counties with populations of 500,000 or more.

- Among those counties with populations of 500,000 or more, Fresno had the highest crime rate in 1992—about 50 percent higher than the statewide rate. Santa Clara County’s rate was the lowest and was less than half the statewide rate.
- Comparing crime rates in 1982 and 1992, Santa Clara had the largest drop and Fresno had the largest increase. Some of this change may reflect the changing populations in the crime-prone age groups (in the 1980s Fresno’s juvenile population increased by 37 percent while Santa Clara’s juvenile population increased by only 1 percent).

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## Who Are the Victims of Crime?

National victimization surveys provide a good deal of reliable data about the victims of crime. These surveys reveal that:

- **Groups at the highest risk of becoming victims—young men**—are not the ones who generally express the greatest fear of crime—women and the elderly. In fact, men are almost twice as likely as women to be victims of violence, and persons under the age of 20 are almost ten times more likely to be victims than persons over the age of 65.
- **Teenagers are most often the victims** of both violence and personal theft. Teenage black males have the highest victimization rates for violent crime (about 20 percent higher than teenage black females, the next highest group). Teenage white and black males have the highest victimization rates for personal theft (their rates are virtually identical).
- **Blacks are most often the victims of violence**—the violent victimization rate for blacks is about 50 percent higher than for whites. There is little difference in victimization rates between Hispanics and non-Hispanics in violent offenses, but Hispanics are more likely to be victims of a property crime.
- **Victims and offenders are of the same race** in 80 percent of all violent crimes.
- **Urban dwellers are much more likely to be victims** of all types of crime than are persons who live in suburban and rural areas.
- **A person is more likely to be the victim of a violent crime** than to be injured in a motor vehicle accident.

## How Do Crime Rates in the U.S. Compare With the Rates of Other Life Events?

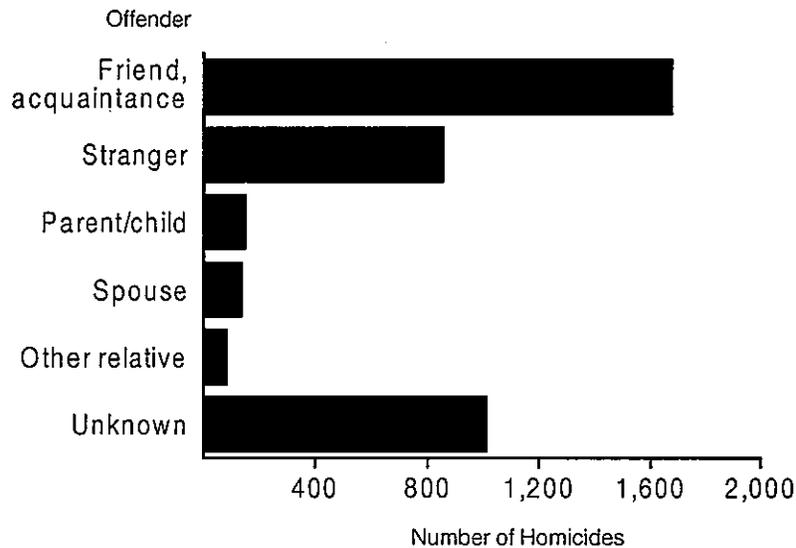
1992

Events	Rate per 1,000 Adults per year
Accidental injury, all circumstances	220
Accidental injury at home	66
<b>Personal theft</b>	61
Accidental injury at work	47
<b>Violent victimization</b>	31
<b>Assault (aggravated and simple)</b>	25
Injury in motor vehicle accident	22
Death, all causes	11
<b>Victimization with injury</b>	11
<b>Serious (aggravated) assault</b>	8
<b>Robbery</b>	6
Heart disease death	5
Cancer death	3
<b>Rape (women only)</b>	1
Accidental death, all circumstances	0.4
Pneumonia/influenza death	0.4
Motor vehicle accident death	0.2
Suicide	0.2
HIV infection death	0.1
<b>Homicide</b>	0.1

Source: U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

## Homicide Most Often Committed By Acquaintance

1992



- California's 1992 homicide data indicate that the victim and offender are most likely to know each other.
- Of the 3,920 homicides reported in 1992, 1,677 were committed by a friend or acquaintance, which includes an ex-husband or ex-wife, employer, employee, gang member, etc. This represents about 60 percent of all known victim-offender relationships.
- Homicides committed by a stranger accounted for about 30 percent of all known relationships.

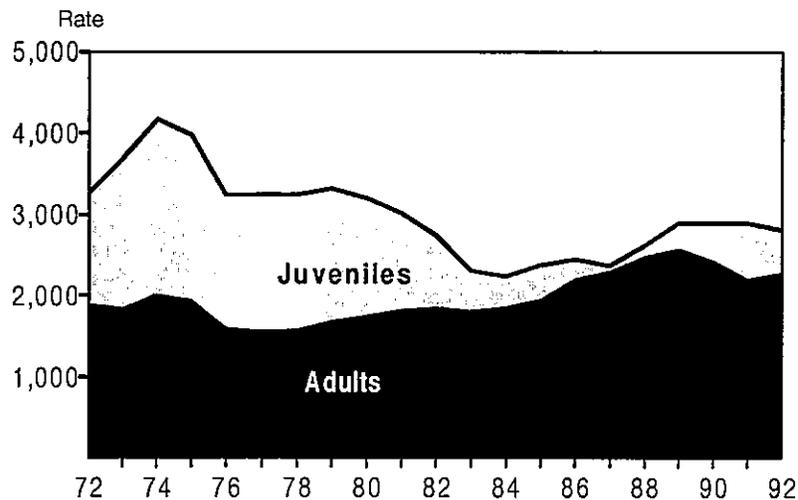


## Who Commits Crime?

Official records of police and correctional officials provide information about criminal offenders, as do the national victim surveys. These reports show that:

- ***The vast majority of offenders are teenagers and young men*** (in their twenties). Criminal activity declines significantly as individuals mature into their thirties. A 1987 study in California found that by the time men reached age 29, 35 percent had been arrested once (66 percent for young black men), although these figures may actually be *low* because they do not include of all juvenile records or driving-under-the-influence offenses.
- ***More than half of all violent offenders are under the influence of alcohol or drugs*** at the time of their crime (most often alcohol).
- ***Some studies have shown that some offenders have “low self-control”***—that is, they often commit their crimes as an impulsive response to an immediate stressful situation, rather than a rational choice.
- ***Males are much more likely to be the victims of a stranger*** in assault and robbery offenses. Females, however, are equally likely to be victimized by a husband or boyfriend as they are by an acquaintance or a stranger.
- ***Offenders often commit many more crimes than they are arrested for***, and a very small portion of offenders commit a very large portion of total criminal offenses. A study by the RAND Corporation found, for example, that 50 percent of robbers committed, on average, less than five robberies per year, but 10 percent of robbers committed more than 85 robberies per year.

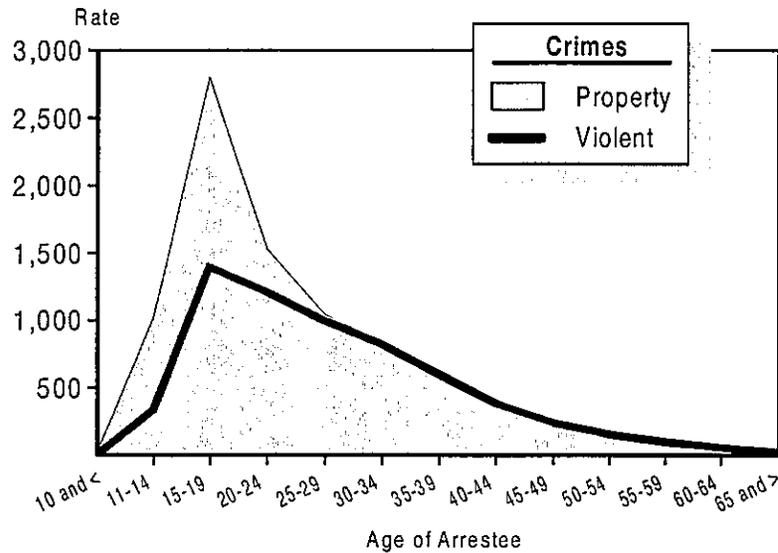
## Juvenile Arrests Higher Than Adult Arrests<sup>a</sup> 1972 Through 1992



<sup>a</sup> Rate per 100,000 population within each group.

- Although the arrest rates for juveniles (ages 10 to 17) have consistently been higher than the arrest rates for adults over the past 20 years, they have become much closer in the past five years.
- There is evidence that a major reason that arrest rates for juveniles are higher than for adults is that young men tend to be arrested in *large groups* on suspicion of committing a crime or at the scene of a crime, although charges may not ever be filed.
- Juvenile arrest rates peaked in 1974. This was probably due to demographics, that is, the at-risk juvenile population was a larger proportion of the overall state population.

### Felony Arrests Highest Among The Young<sup>a</sup> 1992

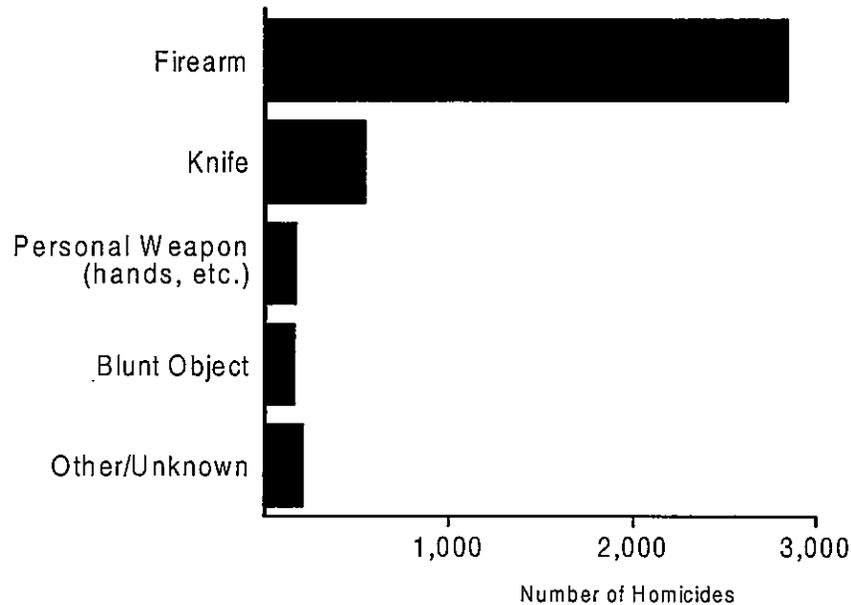


<sup>a</sup> Rate per 100,000 age-eligible population.

- Felony crime arrest rates peak in the 15- to 19-year-old age group.
- About half of all persons arrested in California in 1992 were between the ages of 11 and 24. This group, however, makes up only about 20 percent of the state's total population.

## Firearms Used in Most Homicides

1992



- Firearms are the weapons used in 73 percent of reported homicides in 1992, or about five times more often than knives.
- Firearms account for more homicides than all other weapons combined.
- Teenagers, 18 to 19 years old, are more likely to be killed by firearms than other age groups.

## How Does California's Criminal Justice System Work?

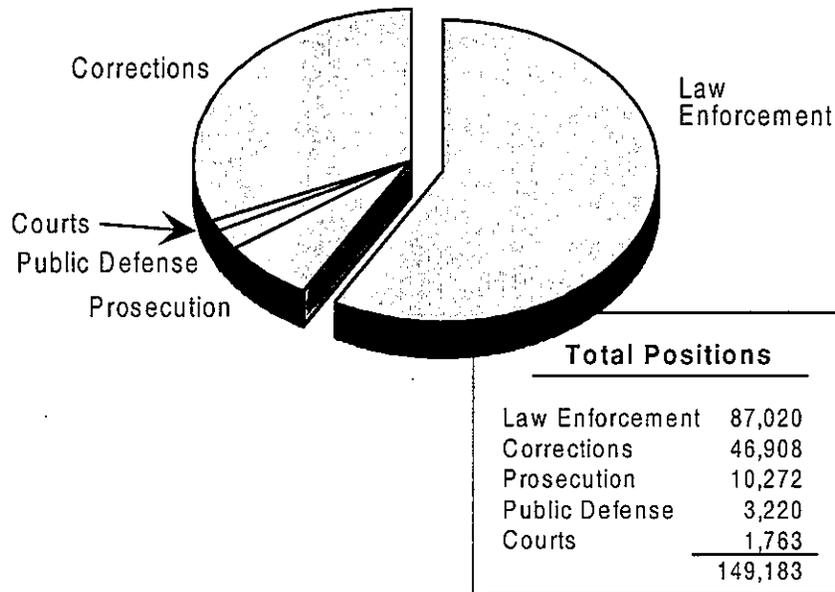
In general, the criminal justice system does not respond to *most* crime because about two-thirds of all crimes are not discovered or reported to law enforcement authorities. And of those crimes reported to law enforcement officials, only about one-quarter are solved. In 1992, for example, only about 22 percent of all reported crimes were solved or "cleared" (that is, a person was charged with a crime). This figure has remained relatively stable for a number of years.

Following an arrest, a law enforcement agency may file a complaint against the individual and he or she may be prosecuted. Prosecution may result in the person being convicted. Persons who are convicted are given a fine or are sentenced to county probation, county jail, county probation with a jail term, state prison, or Youth Authority. The vast majority of convicted offenders end up on county probation and/or in jail.

Although the Legislature and Governor enact laws that define crimes and set penalties, criminal justice officials exercise a great deal of *discretion* in enforcing these laws. The greatest discretion is at the local level, when police decide whether to arrest someone for a crime, prosecutors decide whether or how to charge a person with a crime, and courts adjudicate suspected offenders.

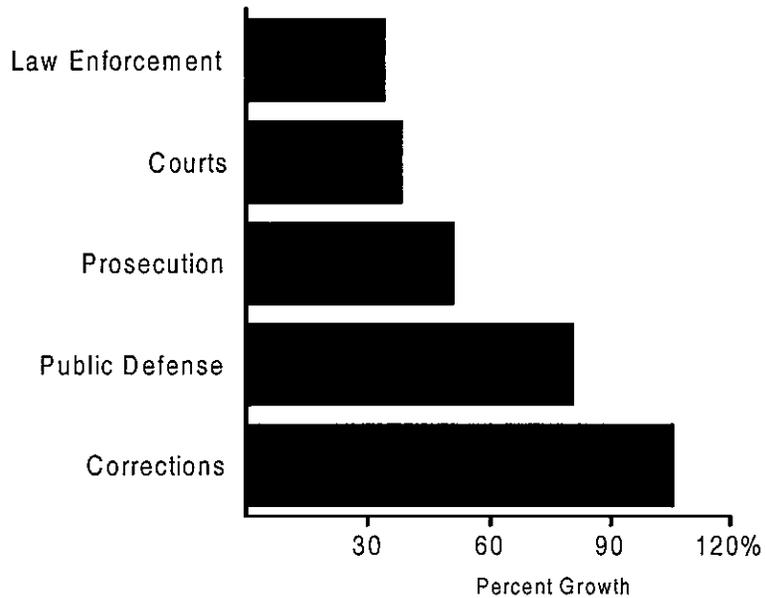
## Most Criminal Justice Personnel In Law Enforcement

1992



- Law enforcement personnel (police, sheriffs, CHP) make up about 58 percent of total criminal justice personnel. This proportion has declined from about 66 percent in 1978, although the total number of law enforcement personnel has increased by 34 percent since 1978.
- Corrections personnel (probation, prisons, Youth Authority) make up about 31 percent of the total.

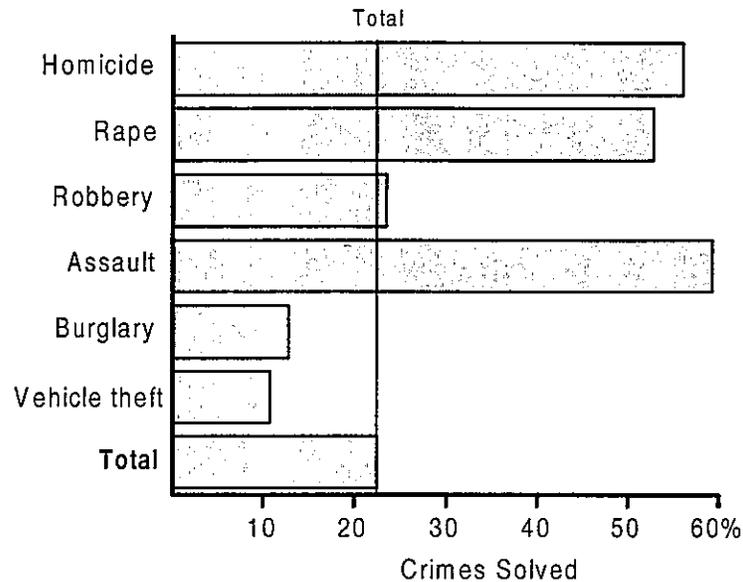
### Corrections Personnel Has Grown Most 1978 Through 1992



- The number of corrections personnel (probation, prisons, Youth Authority) has more than doubled since 1978.
- Law enforcement (police, sheriffs, CHP), which is the largest portion of total criminal justice personnel, grew the least (34 percent).
- The state's total population increased about 37 percent between 1978 and 1992.

## Most Reported Crimes Not Solved

1992

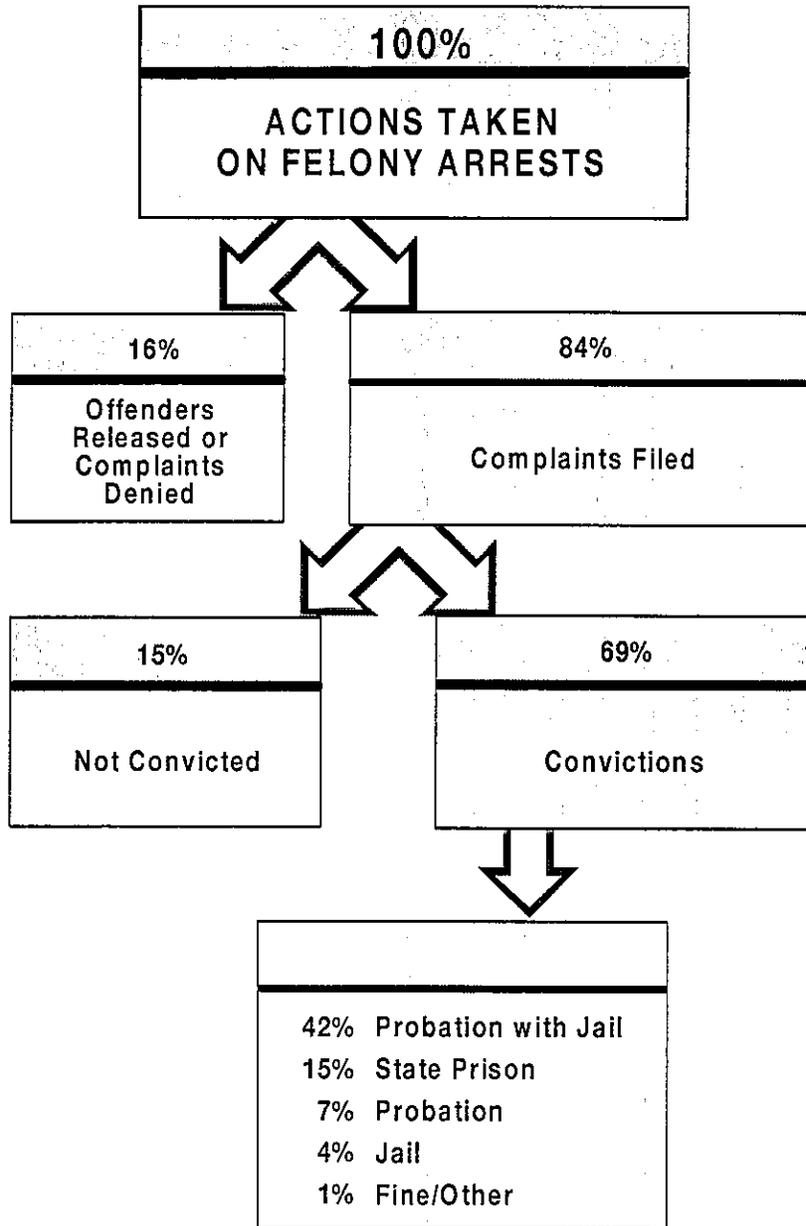


- Only about 22 percent of all reported crimes were solved in 1992. Violent crimes are solved more often than property crimes. In 1992, 59 percent of assaults and 56 percent of homicides were solved; 13 percent of burglaries and 11 percent of motor vehicle thefts were solved.
- Although the rate of crimes solved in recent years has declined slightly, the rate has remained relatively stable since 1972.
- Generally, a crime is considered solved or “cleared” when at least one person is arrested, charged with the crime, and turned over to the court for prosecution or referred to juvenile authorities. In addition, a crime may be considered solved if authorities have ample evidence for arrest, know the location of the offender, but for some reason cannot take the offender into custody.

## Who Exercises Discretion in California's Criminal Justice System?

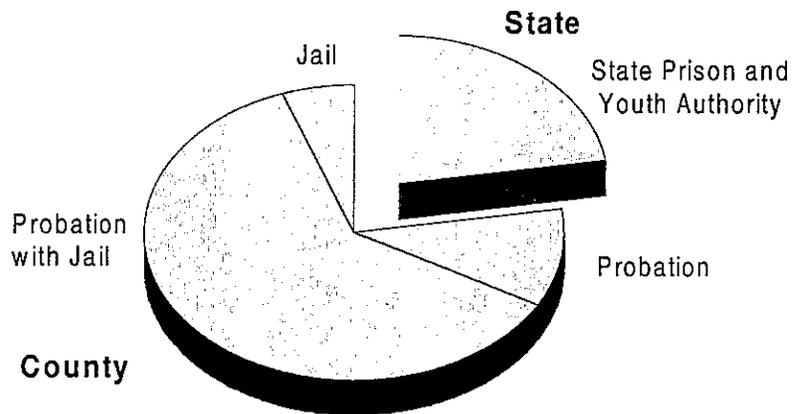
These Criminal Justice Officials . . .	Who Are Subject to the Control of . . .	Must Often Decide Whether or not or how to . . .
Police/Sheriffs	Cities/Counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforce laws</li> <li>• Investigate crimes</li> <li>• Search people, premises</li> <li>• Arrest or detain people</li> <li>• Supervise offenders in local correctional facilities (primarily county sheriffs)</li> </ul>
District Attorneys (prosecutors)	Counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• File charges</li> <li>• Reduce, modify, or drop charges</li> </ul>
Judges	State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set bail or conditions for release</li> <li>• Accept pleas</li> <li>• Determine delinquency for juveniles</li> <li>• Dismiss charges</li> <li>• Impose sentences</li> <li>• Revoke probation</li> </ul>
Probation Officials	Counties or Judges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend sentences to judges</li> <li>• Supervise offenders released to probation in the community</li> <li>• Supervise offenders (especially juveniles) in probation camps and ranches</li> <li>• Recommend probation revocation to judges</li> </ul>
Correctional Officials	State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign offenders to type of correctional facility</li> <li>• Supervise prisoners</li> <li>• Award privileges, punish for disciplinary infractions</li> </ul>
Parole Officials	State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine conditions of parole</li> <li>• Supervise parolees released to the community</li> <li>• Revoke parole and return offenders to prison</li> </ul>

### What Happened to Adult Felony Arrests In 1992?



### Vast Majority of Felons Supervised by Counties<sup>a</sup>

1992

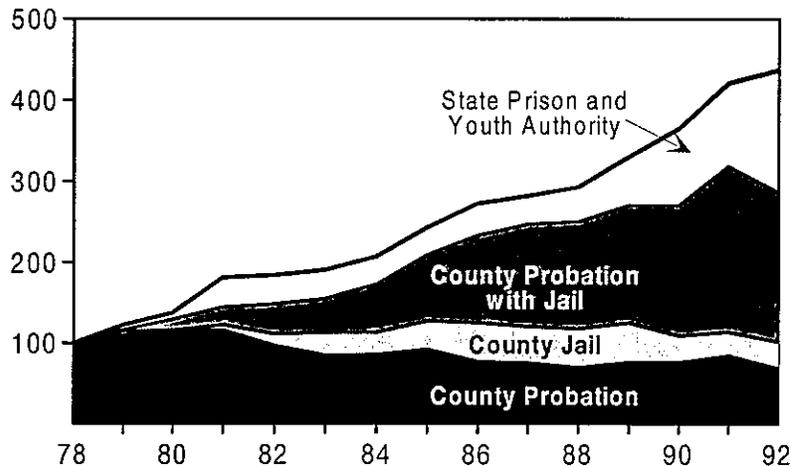


<sup>a</sup> 1992 felony convictions.

- About 78 percent of convicted felons are housed and/or supervised by counties.
- Only 22 percent of all convicted felons are sentenced to the Department of Corrections or the Department of the Youth Authority.

## More Felons Being Sentenced to State Correctional Institutions<sup>a</sup>

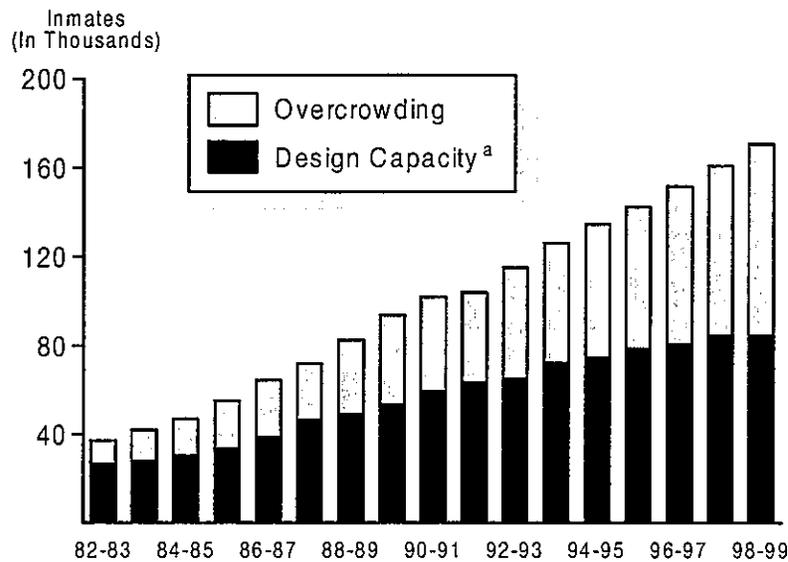
1978 Through 1992



<sup>a</sup> Change in felony sentences, indexed to 1978.

- Although most convicted felons are sentenced to local custody (county probation and/or jail), the proportion being sentenced to state custody has more than doubled since 1978.
- Reasons for the increase in felons sentenced to state prison (and the corresponding sharp decline in felons sentenced to county jail and probation) include changes in law requiring state prison (instead of local punishment) when convicted for certain crimes, court-ordered caps on county jail populations, and a generally tougher approach to punishment by local prosecution officials.

## Prison Population Exceeds Design Capacity 1982-83 Through 1998-99



<sup>a</sup> Includes funded prison, camp, and community-based beds.

- Despite the state's massive prison construction program, prison overcrowding will be worse at the end of the decade than it is now.
- The prison population has more than doubled over the past ten years and is expected to reach 171,000 inmates by 1999. At that time, prison overcrowding will reach about 202 percent.
- A small change in the sentence length of inmates can result in a significant need for additional prison beds. For example, the average sentence for male felons recently increased by about nine days, which resulted in the need for about 500 additional prison beds and increased overcrowding by about 1 percent.

## A Profile of Criminal Offenders Supervised by Counties

Type of Offender	General Characteristics
County Juvenile Probationer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male, about 16 years old, equally likely to be white (non-Hispanic), black, or Hispanic</li> <li>• From urban area</li> <li>• At least one year behind in schooling</li> <li>• Committed for property or drug-related offense</li> <li>• Likely to have had two or three other contacts (questioning or arrest) with law enforcement prior to most recent arrest</li> <li>• Likely supervised at home on probation, after short stay in juvenile hall</li> <li>• After completing probation, stands a good chance of not committing a new offense as a juvenile or an adult</li> </ul>
County Adult Probationer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male, about 26 years old, more likely to be black or Hispanic</li> <li>• Committed nonviolent offense, usually property or drug-related offense</li> <li>• Served a few months in jail before beginning probation, although many are placed in drug or DUI diversion programs (instead of jail) and then are placed on probation</li> <li>• Generally not supervised during probation period, except to inform probation officer of whereabouts</li> </ul>
County Jail Inmate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male, 18 to 55 years old (usually 25 to 30), more likely to be black or Hispanic</li> <li>• About half awaiting trial on misdemeanor charge, such as DUI, average stay 19 days</li> <li>• Other half sentenced to jail or jail and probation for less than one year for a misdemeanor or low-level felony</li> </ul>

Source: Federal and state reports and interviews with selected counties.

## A Profile of Criminal Offenders Supervised by the State

Type of Offender	General Characteristics
State Youth Authority Ward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male, 19 years old, from Los Angeles or Bay Area, more likely to be Hispanic or black</li> <li>• 64 percent were committed for violent crime</li> <li>• Has abused alcohol and/or drugs, but not incarcerated for drug-related crime</li> <li>• Sixth-grade education level</li> <li>• Likely to be committed only once to the Youth Authority, but has been arrested between 8 and 33 times—although not charged with a crime in many cases</li> <li>• Has been previously incarcerated in county juvenile hall and/or probation camp</li> <li>• Average stay will be 21 months, followed by parole in community</li> <li>• 45 percent chance of completing parole without committing a new offense as a juvenile or adult</li> </ul>
State Prison Inmate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male, between ages of 25 and 29 years old, from southern California, more likely to be black or Hispanic</li> <li>• Two-thirds were committed for a nonviolent offense, usually a property crime</li> <li>• Has a history of drug abuse, most likely cocaine</li> <li>• Eighth-grade education level</li> <li>• In prison for 18 months for nonviolent offense; 34 months for violent offense</li> <li>• Will be supervised in community on parole for one year after discharge from prison</li> <li>• About 38 percent will return to prison for less than one year for a technical violation of parole (a violation that did not result in criminal prosecution)</li> <li>• About 20 percent will return to prison for committing a new felony offense, most likely a property offense</li> </ul>

## Who Is in State Prison?

Offenses	Prison Population June 30, 1993		1992 Admissions to Prison	
	Inmates	Percent of Total	Inmates	Average Term (Years)
<b>Violent Offenses</b>				
Murder, First Degree <sup>a</sup>	5,362	4.6%	452	—
Murder, Second Degree <sup>a</sup>	5,790	5.0	657	—
Manslaughter	2,969	2.6	743	8.6
Vehicle Manslaughter	179	0.2	95	2.8
Robbery	15,593	13.5	4,226	4.9
Assault with Deadly Weapon	6,035	5.2	2,080	4.2
Other Assault/Battery	2,946	2.5	1,038	3.2
Rape	2,231	1.9	429	9.0
Lewd Act with Child	4,563	3.9	1,305	8.5
Oral Copulation	700	0.6	112	10.6
Sodomy	195	0.2	15	12.2
Penetration with Object	251	0.2	59	13.8
Other Sex Offenses	232	0.2	96	4.0
Kidnap <sup>b</sup>	1,733	1.5	266	9.3
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>(48,779)</b>	<b>(42.2%)</b>	<b>(11,573)</b>	<b>(—)</b>
<b>Property Offenses</b>				
Burglary, First Degree	9,723	8.4%	2,527	4.0
Burglary, Second Degree	5,600	4.8	2,443	1.9
Grand Theft	2,066	1.8	1,045	2.1
Petty Theft with Prior	4,516	3.9	1,667	1.9
Receiving Stolen Property	2,211	1.9	1,085	1.9
Vehicle Theft	4,655	4.0	1,685	2.6
Forgery/Fraud	1,096	0.9	604	2.1
Other Property	324	0.3	170	2.4
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>(30,191)</b>	<b>(26.1%)</b>	<b>(11,226)</b>	<b>(—)</b>

**Who Is in State Prison?** CONTINUED

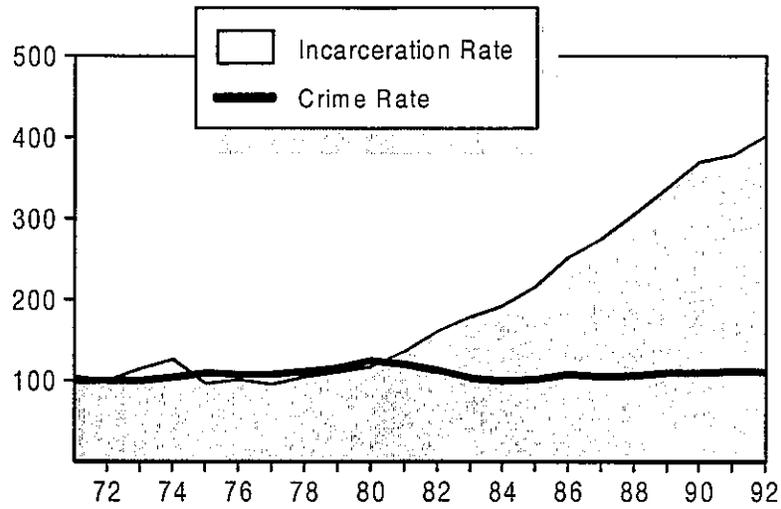
Offenses	Prison Population June 30, 1993		1992 Admissions to Prison	
	Inmates	Percent of Total	Inmates	Average Term (Years)
<b>Drug Offenses</b>				
Possession	7,681	6.6%	4,126	1.8
Possession for Sale	9,083	7.9	4,208	3.1
Sale	8,741	7.6	3,130	4.0
Manufacturing	694	0.6	212	5.4
Other drug	522	0.5	220	2.8
Marijuana Possession	15	—	12	1.9
Marijuana Possession for Sale	564	0.5	403	1.8
Marijuana Sale	767	0.7	411	2.4
Other marijuana	78	0.1	49	2.3
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>(28,145)</b>	<b>(24.4%)</b>	<b>(12,771)</b>	<b>(—)</b>
<b>Other Offenses</b>				
Escape	223	0.2%	86	1.3
Driving Under the Influence	3,081	2.7	2,398	1.8
Arson	347	0.3	162.0	3.6
Possession of Weapon	2,290	2.0	797	2.0
Other Offenses	1,219	1.1	1,135	2.3
Unknown (data unavailable)	1,259	1.1	—	—
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>(8,419)</b>	<b>(7.3%)</b>	<b>(4,578)</b>	<b>(—)</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>115,534</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>40,148</b>	<b>—</b>

<sup>a</sup> Life sentences with and without the possibility of parole.

<sup>b</sup> Some kidnap cases may result in life sentences, these were excluded from average term calculation.

## Crime Rate Remains Stable Despite Sharp Increase in Imprisonment<sup>a</sup>

1971 Through 1992



<sup>a</sup> Change in rates per 100,000 population, indexed to 1972.

- California's incarceration rate has increased almost 300 percent since 1971 while the crime rate remained relatively flat (it increased about 11 percent).
- Some researchers argue that this situation should be expected because they believe that incarcerating more people for a longer period of time has no impact on the crime rate. Others disagree and argue that the crime rate would have increased significantly if the rate of imprisonment had not increased so significantly.

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## How Much Does Crime Cost?

There is no simple answer to this difficult question. Although many studies over the years have attempted to quantify the total direct and indirect costs of crime to government and society, the results have varied widely, but all conclude that the nationwide costs are in the tens to hundreds of billions annually.

Some components of the cost of crime (such as the government's cost of fighting crime) can be readily estimated. For example, in 1991-92, California spent about \$13.7 billion to fight crime, which included costs for police, prosecution, courts, probation, and incarceration.

Other costs cannot be easily measured. For example, many crimes go undetected or unreported—such as fraud, embezzlement, or arson—and thus their costs to society are not captured. Also, some costs are difficult to estimate because the costs are “transferred,” such as the costs for goods and services that are transferred to consumers by manufacturers and retailers to cover their costs for crime prevention activities or losses from crime.

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## What Is Considered a “Cost” of Crime?

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- ▲ **Costs to government** to operate the criminal justice system (police, prosecution, courts, probation, incarceration, parole).
- ▲ **Medical costs to individuals and government** because of injuries suffered due to crime.
- ▲ **Property stolen or damaged** resulting from crime.
- ▲ **Loss of productivity to society** because of death, medical and mental disabilities resulting from crime.
- ▲ **Loss of work time** by victims of crime and their families.
- ▲ **Loss of property values** in neighborhoods with high rates of crime.
- ▲ **Pain and suffering of crime victims**, their families, and friends, as well as communities plagued by crime.

## Corrections Per Capita Cost Highest

1993-94

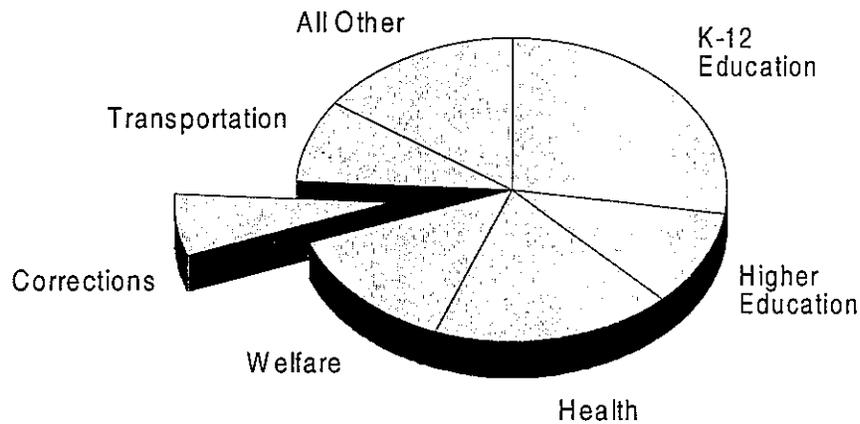
	Number of Participants (In Millions)	Average Cost per Participant	
		General Fund	Total Government
<b>Corrections—inmates and wards</b>			
Prison	0.1	\$20,900	\$20,900
Youth Authority	0.01	32,000	32,000
<b>Education—students<sup>a</sup></b>			
K-12	5.2	\$2,530	\$4,200
UC	0.2	11,800	11,800
CSU	0.2	6,038	6,038
Community Colleges	0.9	1,054	2,811
<b>Health and Welfare—beneficiaries</b>			
Medi-Cal	5.4	\$1,500	\$2,300
AFDC	2.6	1,100	2,200
SSI/SSP	1.0	2,100	5,300

<sup>a</sup> Does not include federal funds or lottery funds.

■ Youth Authority wards and prison inmates have the highest cost but are the least numerous. For example, it costs \$32,000 to house a Youth Authority ward in 1993-94, but \$4,200 to educate a student in K-12 school.

■ The costs shown are averages. The range of individual costs is especially large in the Medi-Cal Program. Nursing home patients in the Medi-Cal Program, for example, cost about \$25,000 annually to support.

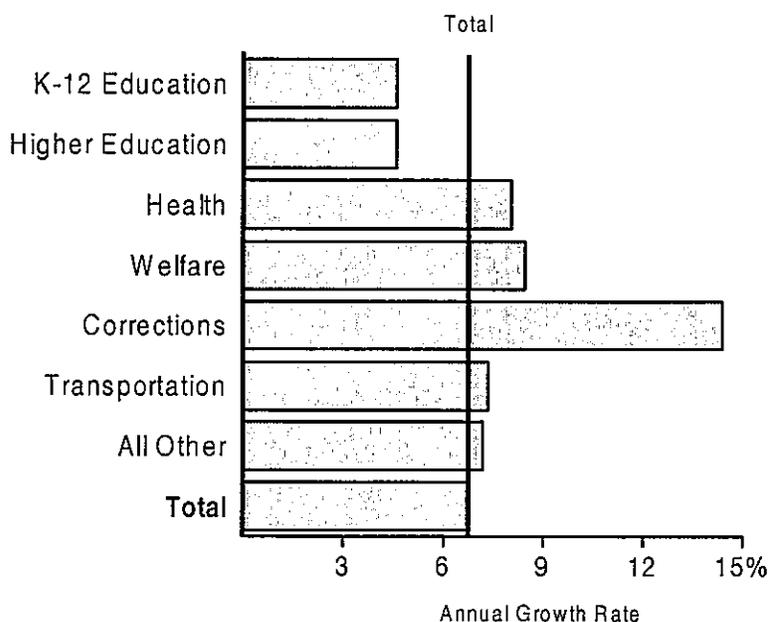
## Corrections Is Small Portion of Total 1993-94 State Spending



- Spending for corrections is about 7 percent of total state spending in 1993-94.
- Ten years ago in 1983-84, spending for corrections was about 3 percent of total state spending.

### Corrections Spending Has Grown Much Faster Than Other State Spending

1983-84 Through 1993-94



- Spending for corrections increased, on average, about 14 percent annually since 1983-84 while total state spending increased about 7 percent per year.
- The principal reason that corrections expenditures have grown the most is that the prison inmate population has increased much faster than the caseloads of most other programs, such as K-12 and higher education and welfare.



## What Are the Policy Implications?

The major policy implications of the data presented in this report are summarized briefly below.

***Recognize Divergence of Crime Data and Public Perceptions of Crime.*** Contrary to public perception, total crime is down rather than up in California. Californians are more likely to be victimized by an accident in their own homes than they are by crime. Nonetheless, certain types of crime—such as violent crimes and vehicle thefts—are on the rise. Both public perceptions and crime data should be taken into account by decision-makers when shaping public policy affecting the state's criminal justice system.

***Recognize That Criminal Justice System Deals With Small Portion of Total Crime.*** As we indicated earlier, the criminal justice system deals with only a small portion of all criminal activity in society, principally because about two-thirds of all crimes go unreported to or undiscovered by police. If policy-makers wish to affect a larger share of crime, it will require a significantly larger investment of funds than is currently being spent by government. Given scarce government resources, such an increased investment will require that policy-makers select new, cost-effective approaches (and new strategies) to crime fighting, not using scarce resources for activities that may result in only marginal changes in the crime rate.

***Recognize Importance of Demographics in Crime.*** As we indicated, a large amount of crime is committed by young people, and the decline in crime rates in California in the 1980s was due, at least in part, to the aging of the population. For these reasons, it is important for policy-makers to recognize that the changing demographics

of California—particularly the boom in juvenile population that is projected to occur in the early part of the next century—could result in a return to the high crime rates of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In our view, the Legislature should keep this potential increase in mind as it develops programs to prevent and respond to crime.

***Recognize the Interrelationships Among the Parts of the Criminal Justice System and the Need for Flexibility.*** The component parts of the state's criminal justice system are, by necessity, closely interrelated (persons arrested by *police* are prosecuted by *district attorneys*, decisions as to their fate are made by *courts*, and punishment/treatment is applied by *probation and corrections* officials). It is important for policy-makers to understand and appreciate these interrelationships. For example, federal legislation proposed by the President could result in California receiving substantial funds for local jurisdictions to put more police officers on the streets. Such a move could have positive crime deterrence effects in communities and result in additional arrests. It would, however, not only increase the responsibilities of police agencies, but also increase the workload of prosecutors, public defenders, courts, and correctional officials.

As we showed in the chart "Who Exercises Discretion in California's Criminal Justice System" (see page 31), the system includes significant *flexibility* at various levels. The greatest flexibility is generally at the "front-end" of the process—police and prosecutors. The system functions as a result of this flexibility and efforts to reduce flexibility could significantly affect the system as a whole. For example, eliminating the ability of prosecutors to reduce the charges against a nonviolent offender could result in greater costs for prosecution, courts, and corrections, thereby limiting resources available to deal with violent offenders or other high-priority matters.

***Recognize That the Greater Use of Imprisonment May Have Limited Affect on Crime.*** There is no question that incarceration has

an important role to play in the criminal justice system. Offenders who are “career criminals” and persons who commit particularly violent acts should be incarcerated for long periods. However, the ability of increased imprisonment to significantly reduce crime is unclear. California’s imprisonment rate has increased three-fold since 1972 but the crime rate has remained relatively stable (see page 40). Some experts argue that this indicates that greater use of imprisonment has little affect on crime. Others argue that the crime problem would have gotten worse had imprisonment not been increased. Although there is little argument that taking offenders off the street will mean that they will not be able to commit crimes while incarcerated, it does not necessarily follow that incarcerating significantly more offenders or incarcerating them for much longer periods will necessarily result in a commensurate reduction in crime in California.

Several studies have concluded that prison—and criminal justice agencies more generally—have a limited impact on the overall amount of crime experienced by society. This is true for a number of reasons mentioned earlier, including (1) the fact that the criminal justice system deals with only a relatively small amount of total crime and, therefore, the certainty of punishment is diminished, (2) research shows that some crime is frequently an impulsive response to stressful situations (prison is unlikely to deter such behavior), and (3) much violent crime is perpetrated by young offenders who are unlikely to be incarcerated in prison early in their lives.

In addition, several studies have pointed out other reasons that prison has little impact on the overall amount of crime experienced by society. For example, some research indicates that prison does not reduce crime because a criminal “labor market” exists in some communities where new recruits replace offenders who are incarcerated (this is particularly true for drug-related crime). Also, some studies found that different levels of violence and crime result from “social

stress” factors in communities, which include such factors as business failures, bankruptcies, foreclosures, unemployment, divorces, illegitimate births, and high school dropouts.

**Target Violent Crime.** Violent crime has risen in California in recent years as property crime has declined. Given this trend, and the significantly greater negative consequences of violence, crime reduction efforts should be targeted at reducing *violent crime*.

**Target Offenders Who Are Most At-Risk of Committing Crime.** There is substantial evidence that a small number of offenders commit a large number of total offenses. Thus, in order to have the greatest impact on crime, efforts should be targeted at imprisoning (sometimes referred to as “selective incapacitation”) or treating those offenders. However, proactively identifying individuals who are most at risk is difficult and raises ethical and legal questions as well.

**Target Rehabilitation Programs.** Available studies conclude that some rehabilitation programs have been shown to work with certain offender populations and to have little or no impact on other populations. For this reason, it is important to target rehabilitation programs to offenders most likely to benefit, which usually means first-time offenders. Substance abuse programs are probably the most important, given that so many offenders commit violent offenses while under the influence. In addition, because of the limited information available, policy-makers should require that rigorous evaluations be completed on rehabilitation programs to identify “what works and what doesn’t.”

**Place Priority on Prevention and Early Intervention.** Given the high costs of crime to society and research that indicates that efforts to rehabilitate chronic offenders have limited success, the best course of action may be to place emphasis on intervening with potential offenders early in order to prevent future criminal activity. Given the large numbers of juveniles who commit crimes, prevention and

early intervention efforts (including mental health and drug treatment, family services, and education) need to start at a young age and be closely linked.

Research in Orange County has found that a relatively small number of juvenile offenders commit the bulk of offenses and that these offenders generally have multiple problems. These include school behavior and performance problems, significant family problems (alcoholism, abuse or neglect, or criminal family members), and substance abuse problems. In response to these findings, the county is developing a project to provide integrated services to young offenders using criminal justice, education, social services, and mental health resources.

We believe that providing integrated services has the potential to reduce criminal behavior. Thus, we conclude that incentives need to be designed to encourage state and local communities to develop closely linked prevention and intervention programs in order to reduce the costs and effects of crime in the future.

This Report was prepared by Craig Cornett. For information about this report call Mr. Cornett at 445-4660. For additional copies contact the Legislative Analyst's Office, State of California, 925 L Street, Suite 1000, Sacramento, CA 95814, (916) 445-2375.

