

California Youth Crime Declines: The Untold Story

Introduction

Public perceptions about youth crime tend to imagine high incidents of violent crime and property offenses. These perceptions are often fostered by tough responses to crime, whether through the implementation of sentencing increases, statements by public officials, or stories in the media. To determine the basis of these assertions, CJCJ analyzed official youth crime statistics in California's eight largest cities—Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno, Long Beach, and Oakland—over a 30-year period, a 10-year period and between the years of 2002 and 2005. CJCJ also compared crime rates reported for the listed urban areas with their surrounding counties. Finally, CJCJ examined economic and demographic changes that are widely believed to impact youth crime.

An examination of California's youth population reveals significant economic and demographic changes in the past three decades. Census and Department of Finance population statistics reveal high rates of youth poverty, ranging from 12% in San Jose to 34% in Fresno. The most dramatic demographic change in California's major cities, and their surrounding suburban and rural areas, is racial and ethnic diversification. In 1970, a majority of California urban youth was white. Today, white youth are a minority in every major city, comprising 33% of San Diego's total youth population; 25% of Fresno's, San Jose's, and Sacramento's; 20% of San Francisco's; 17% of Los Angeles's and Long Beach's; and 10% of Oakland's.

Conventional wisdom assumes that higher rates of youth poverty results in increased youth crime. To determine the validity of this assumption, this report examines California's major population centers, as follows:

- ❖ **The eight largest cities** are those with populations of 400,000 or more. These include Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, Long Beach, Fresno, Sacramento, and Oakland. Together, these cities reported 951,000 youth ages 10-17 in 2005, accounting for 21% of California's total youth population. These cities' youth populations averaged 80% of color (Hispanic, Asian, Black, Native, other Nonwhite), and 25% of the youth live in households with incomes below poverty level.
- ❖ **The outer areas of the seven counties surrounding these eight cities** (Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Fresno, Sacramento, Alameda). These seven counties, all of which have total populations exceeding 800,000, contained 2,306,000 youth ages 10-17 in 2005, 52% of all youth in the state. Subtracting the populations of the eight major cities, the outer areas of these counties house 1,355,000 youths. Youth living in urban counties outside the major city average much lower rates of poverty (15%) than urban youth and are less likely to be of color (65%).

Juvenile Crime & Population Data Sources

Juvenile arrests by offense are collected by local law enforcement agencies under the Uniform Crime Reporting System and reported annually by the California Department of Justice's Criminal Justice Statistics Center (CJSC) in *Criminal Justice Profiles* for each county and city.¹ Juvenile populations by age, year, race, poverty level, county, and city are provided by the Demographic Research Unit, California Department of Finance, and by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Juvenile arrests by offense are divided by populations ages 10-17 (the age group defined as "youth" by the CJSC) for each year, city, and county to produce arrest rates. Arrests are tabulated for homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, all violent offenses (the sum of the previous four violent crimes), property felonies, drug felonies, all felonies, all misdemeanors, and all criminal offenses (misdemeanors plus felonies).

Juvenile arrest rates for each city and county are shown for the years 1976, 1995, and 2000 through 2005 to show, respectively, crime trends over the last three decades, the last decade, and the most recent six years.² The year 1995 is 10 years before the most recent year available at this writing, 2005. Each year from 2000 through 2005 is provided to delineate the most recent crime trends.

Trends in Urban & Suburban Juvenile Crime

There is no evidence of increasing violence or crime by urban or suburban youth. Table 1 shows juvenile arrest trends in and around California's eight largest cities. Table 1a shows juvenile arrest trends in the 7 counties surrounding California's largest cities.

The effect of small numbers on trends

As a preliminary consideration, it is essential to consider the effect of small increases during periods of overall dramatic declines to low rates. When juvenile crime rates fall to record low levels, as is currently the case, a small increase in a particular year will appear more significant than it may be. If not placed in the proper context, the minimal increase can lead to misperceived trends. Persistently low rates, while difficult to analyze, are evidence of lower incidents of crime per capita.

Offense trends show significant decreases for most juvenile crime

Juvenile crime rates in California are at 30-year lows. In 2004 and 2005, juvenile arrests for felonies, misdemeanors, property and drug offenses, and all types of violent crime in the state's eight major cities reached their lowest levels in at least 30 years. Whether compared to three decades ago, a decade ago, or the early 2000s, youth crime and violence have declined to unprecedented low rates, with property offenses and rape showing especially dramatic decreases.

¹ Criminal Justice Profiles are available online at <http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc>.

² The year 1976 is chosen it is the earliest one after the state's drug laws changed in 1975. At that time, California law made certain drug offenses misdemeanors rather than felonies, thus numbers for 1975 and prior show larger felony arrest totals for drug offenses and are incomparable with later years.

The two offenses showing the least decrease, robbery and assault, have remained fairly static, possibly due to broader definitions of the crimes that produce arrests for street, domestic and school offenses that would have resulted in informal discipline in past decades. In addition, stricter policing for these offenses may also contribute to their consistent rates.

Other offenses, such as murder, rape, and property offenses, show dramatic declines despite expanded definitions and police attention that should be producing more arrests. Although status offenses (arrests of youths for curfew violations, running away, truancy, and other behaviors that would not be crimes if they were adults) are not included in this report, they, too, have plummeted; in 2005, status crime arrest rates were 32% lower than in 1995 and 82% below 1976 levels.

Urban trends show reduced juvenile offending

Though media reports frequently worry over rising juvenile crime, the information presented in Table 1 shows felonies by urban juveniles declined 30% from 1976 to 1995, dropped another 13% by 2000, and fell again by 19% through 2005. Property felonies show a sharp, steady decline of 78% over the last three decades. Rape has plummeted to a 2005 level that is less than one-fifth of its 1976 prevalence. Homicide rates were higher in 1995 than in 1976 but then fell by 78% over the next decade to reach levels lower than any time in at least half a century. The other violent crimes, robbery and aggravated assault, also show considerably lower rates today than in the mid-1970s or mid-1990s, though there was an increase in the early 1990s. Overall, violent crime rates among urban youth today are 28% lower than in the mid-1970s and 42% lower than the mid-1990s.

On average, juvenile offending rates in the most populous California cities have plunged by half over the last three decades, including a 30% drop in the last decade and general declines in the most recent years. From 2002 to 2005, all offenses except robbery declined. From 2004 to 2005, murder, rape, and drug offenses fell slightly while robbery, assault, and property offenses rose slightly.

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Suburban trends show reduced juvenile offending

Data on suburban juvenile crime gathered and presented in Table 1a invalidates the popular claim that juvenile crime and violence has spread from big cities to nearby suburban and rural areas in recent decades. In fact, official data shows an opposite pattern.

While small numbers can yield volatility in any given offense, the overall trend is downward, with the 2005 violent crime rate 46% lower than in 1976, and 45% lower than in 1995.

Sharp declines in juvenile arrests for all offenses occurred in the county areas outside California's largest cities. Property and drug offending fell steadily over the last generation. While homicide and robbery rates were higher in 1995 than in 1976, assault and rape fell, so that--in contrast with cities--suburban violence levels among youth were slightly lower in the 1990s than the 1970s. Over the last decade, all forms of juvenile offending dropped to their lowest levels in decades (and perhaps ever) by 2005. While small numbers can yield volatility in any given offense, the overall trend is downward, with the 2005 violent crime rate 46% lower than in 1976, and 45% lower than in 1995.

Table 1. Eight largest cities,* juvenile arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17

Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd.
1976	8,526.0	3,688.9	669.8	14.4	24.6	298.8	332.1	2,347.1	383.6	4,837.1
1995	5,933.2	2,666.7	825.4	25.8	16.7	399.9	382.9	1,147.1	363.8	3,266.5
2000	5,144.4	1,811.2	563.5	4.9	9.6	222.0	326.9	699.0	249.0	3,333.2
2001	4,739.9	1,719.8	554.7	6.8	9.0	214.7	324.2	651.1	189.6	3,020.0
2002	4,432.2	1,652.2	491.2	7.6	8.5	185.6	289.5	627.4	200.6	2,779.9
2003	4,363.1	1,608.5	490.0	6.9	5.9	192.8	284.4	568.5	187.1	2,754.6
2004	4,066.1	1,523.6	474.5	6.4	4.8	208.4	255.0	506.8	188.8	2,542.5
2005	4,190.3	1,590.7	481.9	5.6	4.5	209.7	262.0	510.5	187.5	2,599.6
2005 v 1976	-50.9%	-56.9%	-28.1%	-61.3%	-81.6%	-29.8%	-21.1%	-78.3%	-51.1%	-46.3%
2005 v 1995	-29.4%	-40.3%	-41.6%	-78.4%	-73.0%	-47.6%	-31.6%	-55.5%	-48.4%	-20.4%
2005 v 2002	-5.5%	-3.7%	-1.9%	-26.2%	-47.1%	13.0%	-9.5%	-18.6%	-6.5%	-6.5%

Table 1a. Surrounding counties, juvenile arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17**

Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd.
1976	8,667.2	3,493.3	597.7	10.0	20.0	249.7	318.1	2,270.7	387.1	5,173.9
1995	5,395.3	2,277.8	585.2	11.7	6.7	276.0	290.9	1,209.4	194.2	3,117.5
2000	4,217.9	1,436.4	369.2	4.6	7.8	121.4	235.4	750.5	124.4	2,781.5
2001	4,046.3	1,461.3	375.5	5.3	6.5	106.6	257.1	746.4	132.5	2,585.0
2002	3,790.6	1,324.6	328.0	4.2	7.9	105.3	210.6	651.8	116.1	2,466.0
2003	3,658.7	1,284.0	325.9	2.7	7.8	105.3	210.0	596.0	120.0	2,374.7
2004	3,652.0	1,306.5	319.1	3.4	6.3	112.8	196.6	590.1	121.0	2,345.6
2005	3,578.8	1,265.4	323.8	4.6	5.6	119.1	194.5	519.0	122.6	2,313.4
2005 v 1976	-58.7%	-63.8%	-45.8%	-54.1%	-72.0%	-52.3%	-38.9%	-77.1%	-68.3%	-55.3%
2005 v 1995	-33.7%	-44.4%	-44.7%	-60.9%	-15.7%	-56.8%	-33.1%	-57.1%	-36.9%	-25.8%
2005 v 2002	-5.6%	-4.5%	-1.3%	7.7%	-28.8%	13.1%	-7.6%	-20.4%	5.6%	-6.2%

***Cities:** Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno, Long Beach, and Oakland.

****Surrounding counties:** Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno, and Alameda.

Source: Criminal Justice Statistics Center, California Department of Justice (arrests); Demographic Research Unit, California Department of Finance (populations).

Trends by city show overall reduction in juvenile crime

Data presented in Tables 2-9 summarize juvenile crime trends by city. The trends show an overall reduction in juvenile crime and violence over the last decade. Rates from every city except Long Beach indicate declining youth crime and violence trends over the last 30 years—many to record lows. Trends are mixed over the last three years, depending on the offense, city, and time period chosen, but the trend generally proceeds downward.

Here, the small rates observed in certain cities render a decisive statement regarding the appearance of trends difficult. Overall, however, no consistent evidence of increasing juvenile violence or crime can be discerned.

Los Angeles: Lowest Felony Arrest Rate in California

The city of Los Angeles shows the biggest youth crime drop of all California cities.

The city of Los Angeles shows the biggest youth crime drop of all California cities. Compared to rates observed in the mid-1970s, in 2005, overall felony rates in Los Angeles were 61% lower. This decrease is also demonstrated by reduced rates for unique offense categories. In 2005, its violence rates were 37% lower, its murder rates were 55% lower, its property crime rates 83% lower, its drug offending rates were 52% lower, and its misdemeanor offenses were 60% lower than rates in the mid-1970s. Crime declines over the last decade averaged 44% for violence, 80% for murder, and 55% for property crimes. Murder and robbery rates leveled off in the 2000s, while assault and rape generally fell.

By the 2000s, Los Angeles had the lowest juvenile felony arrest rate of any major city in California.

Table 2. LOS ANGELES, juvenile arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17

Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd
1976	7,219.6	3,687.8	711.5	18.0	32.7	274.4	386.4	2,271.7	388.6	3,531.8
1995	3,938.5	2,272.0	792.4	40.7	15.3	433.0	303.4	857.7	412.5	1,666.5
2000	3,186.1	1,394.7	484.4	5.5	7.1	188.2	283.6	530.5	176.3	1,791.4
2001	3,122.2	1,363.6	524.7	10.1	7.4	195.6	311.6	482.7	141.7	1,758.6
2002	2,962.1	1,300.1	432.7	9.8	5.5	165.0	252.5	455.6	156.7	1,661.9
2003	2,634.5	1,303.1	447.9	8.6	7.0	176.8	255.5	406.4	159.0	1,331.4
2004	2,590.2	1,311.5	443.6	8.5	3.9	208.9	222.3	374.5	190.6	1,278.8
2005	2,783.3	1,381.6	444.7	8.1	6.1	215.8	214.7	388.0	187.2	1,401.7
2005 v 1976	-61.4%	-62.5%	-37.5%	-54.9%	-81.4%	-21.3%	-44.4%	-82.9%	-51.8%	-60.3%
2005 v 1995	-29.3%	-39.2%	-43.9%	-80.1%	-60.3%	-50.2%	-29.2%	-54.8%	-54.6%	-15.9%
2005 v 2002	-6.0%	6.3%	2.8%	-17.0%	10.9%	30.8%	-15.0%	-14.8%	19.5%	-15.7%

San Diego: Lowest Violent Crime Rate in California

San Diego shows large juvenile crime rate declines over the last 30 years, averaging 50% for all offenses, 58% for felonies, and 74% for property offending. From 1995 to the early 2000s, arrest rates rose due to a rise in misdemeanor arrests. Over the period from 2002 to 2005, San Diego reports declines in all forms of crime except for a slightly higher rate of murder (five arrests in 2005, compared to four in 2002). San Diego now has the lowest violent crime rate of any large city in California.

San Diego's juvenile crime rate has declined significantly over the last 30 years.

Table 3. SAN DIEGO, juvenile arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17

Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd
1976	10,717.3	3,610.7	692.9	4.1	18.3	309.9	360.7	2,351.9	258.1	7,106.6
1995	4,851.7	1,892.1	548.3	2.5	5.8	256.3	283.7	849.4	177.5	2,959.6
2000	6,427.2	1,762.5	562.6	4.1	4.9	184.0	369.7	698.8	182.4	4,664.7
2001	6,004.6	1,869.1	570.6	3.1	5.5	172.3	389.5	675.2	173.9	4,135.5
2002	5,855.6	1,797.0	487.8	3.1	6.2	126.6	352.0	683.9	161.3	4,058.6
2003	5,676.5	1,774.8	413.9	4.6	3.8	143.6	261.9	650.7	146.6	3,901.7
2004	5,416.2	1,566.6	400.1	6.1	4.6	124.4	264.9	616.7	121.3	3,849.7
2005	5,198.4	1,516.6	372.9	3.9	1.6	109.5	257.9	602.9	110.3	3,681.9
2005 v 1976	-51.5%	-58.0%	-46.2%	-4.4%	-91.5%	-64.6%	-28.5%	-74.4%	-57.2%	-48.2%
2005 v 1995	7.1%	-19.8%	-32.0%	56.1%	-73.2%	-57.3%	-9.1%	-29.0%	-37.8%	24.4%
2005 v 2002	-11.2%	-15.6%	-23.6%	25.8%	-74.8%	-13.5%	-26.7%	-11.8%	-31.6%	-9.3%

San Jose: Higher Violent Crime, Lower Property Crime

San Jose shows a declining pattern of arrests for most offenses but shows a higher arrest rate for violent crime today than in 1976.

Overall, felony rates are much lower today than 30 years ago, largely due to a 78% drop in property offending. Unlike other cities, rates of assault are higher but robbery rates are lower than in the past. The city's inconsistent crime trends and the low drug arrest rates in 1995 may be due to sporadic police crackdowns on targeted offenses that produce higher arrest rates in a given year.

In 2005, zero murder arrests and very low rates of robbery accompanied increases in misdemeanors, assaults, property crimes, and drug offenses, compared to 2004. However, 2004 represented a major decline in nearly all crimes from 2003. It appears that San Jose's erratic trends are due to changes in policing and reporting rather than changes in juvenile crime.

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Table 4. SAN JOSE, arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17

Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd
1976	11,089.9	3,669.6	331.1	10.4	6.2	167.7	146.8	2,183.6	841.4	7,420.3
1995	8,266.3	2,706.7	694.8	0.0	32.4	240.2	422.3	1,345.0	45.8	5,559.7
2000	6,149.6	1,915.6	493.7	2.0	13.3	151.0	327.4	730.3	213.2	4,234.0
2001	5,355.3	1,531.1	369.5	0.0	17.1	92.4	260.0	581.3	184.7	3,824.2
2002	5,060.5	1,358.5	385.4	4.0	12.0	91.6	277.9	411.3	179.3	3,702.0
2003	5,381.4	1,441.0	353.4	0.0	6.8	76.9	269.7	435.2	185.0	3,940.4
2004	4,144.3	1,126.3	328.3	0.0	3.8	98.3	226.2	330.2	112.6	3,018.1
2005	5,953.9	1,562.2	408.1	0.0	6.6	93.6	307.9	479.2	166.6	4,391.7
2005 v 1976	-46.3%	-57.4%	23.2%	-	4.9%	-44.2%	109.7%	-78.1%	-80.2%	-40.8%
2005 v 1995	-28.0%	-42.3%	-41.3%	-	-79.8%	-61.0%	-27.1%	-64.4%	263.8%	-21.0%
2005 v 2002	17.7%	15.0%	5.9%	-	-45.2%	2.2%	10.8%	16.5%	-7.1%	18.6%

San Francisco: All youth crime down over ten years

San Francisco shows major declines in youth offending over the last 30 years and (especially) the last decade, when every form of youth crime fell.

San Francisco shows major declines in youth offending over the last 30 years and 10 years.

Violent crime rose from the 1970s to the 1990s, and fell abruptly in 2004. In 2005, the violent crime rate rose due to an increase in robbery arrests. The apparently large decreases of rape and homicide are due to the erratic nature of small numbers; the erratic pattern for drug arrests appears due to changes in policing. San Francisco, more than other cities, shows dramatic declines in juvenile misdemeanors over the last decade, which may reflect a combination of shifts toward redefining certain offenses as felonies and in decreased arrests for trivial offenses. As in San Jose, a large decline in juvenile arrests from 2003 to 2004 was followed by an increase from 2004 to 2005. Overall, youth crime trends in San Francisco, both in the near and longer term, have been downward.

Table 5. SAN FRANCISCO, arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17

Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd
1976	7,067.6	3,391.5	875.0	4.2	21.1	496.0	353.7	2,337.5	67.6	3,676.1
1995	7,616.7	4,273.5	1,612.2	14.6	25.6	996.2	575.8	1,407.4	1,012.6	3,343.1
2000	6,248.3	3,071.9	1,181.7	4.1	6.1	708.6	462.8	698.4	729.1	3,176.4
2001	5,873.6	2,752.1	1,064.7	4.2	10.4	672.5	377.7	703.6	448.3	3,121.5
2002	5,221.1	2,718.7	1,048.4	16.6	8.3	570.0	453.5	657.3	530.4	2,502.4
2003	4,675.9	2,474.2	1,084.3	6.2	4.1	561.8	512.2	598.9	400.7	2,201.6
2004	3,864.4	2,135.9	893.0	2.1	0.0	532.9	358.0	463.0	327.2	1,728.5
2005	4,183.8	2,581.0	955.5	2.1	2.1	589.8	361.7	571.3	322.6	1,602.8
2005 v 1976	-40.8%	-23.9%	9.2%	-51.4%	-90.3%	18.9%	2.3%	-75.6%	377.0%	-56.4%
2005 v 1995	-45.1%	-39.6%	-40.7%	-85.9%	-92.0%	-40.8%	-37.2%	-59.4%	-68.1%	-52.1%
2005 v 2002	-19.9%	-5.1%	-8.9%	-87.7%	-75.3%	3.5%	-20.2%	-13.1%	-39.2%	-35.9%

Sacramento: Increases and decreases, but better than mid-90s

Sacramento shows yet another pattern: drops in overall juvenile arrest, felony, property crime, and misdemeanor rates over the last 30 years and the last decade, but recent increases in several offenses.

The long-term trend for Sacramento is downward, but in recent years, the rates have been more volatile.

Violent crime arrest rates bottomed out in 2002 at historically low levels but have since risen by 39% to levels in 2005 that remain well below those of 1995 or 2000 and only slightly higher than 30 years ago. While the long-term trend in major crime generally is downward, whether Sacramento shows declining or rising juvenile crime in recent years depends on which offenses and years are chosen for analysis.

Table 6. SACRAMENTO, arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17

Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd
1976	9,020.9	4,272.3	714.6	12.7	25.3	354.8	321.8	2,997.7	106.4	4,748.6
1995	8,534.3	3,431.7	833.1	27.7	16.2	341.6	447.7	1,830.1	281.6	5,102.6
2000	7,491.4	2,725.4	796.0	8.2	12.3	271.5	503.9	1,199.2	290.0	4,765.9
2001	5,760.8	2,133.8	494.4	5.9	15.8	178.0	294.7	1,087.7	185.9	3,626.9
2002	4,619.7	1,934.9	528.6	9.5	21.0	230.9	267.1	927.4	190.8	2,684.8
2003	5,492.5	1,987.6	558.2	9.4	1.9	181.7	365.3	953.5	200.4	3,504.9
2004	5,512.6	2,358.8	631.1	9.2	9.2	217.1	395.6	1,021.2	241.0	3,153.7
2005	5,567.1	2,366.6	732.9	14.4	5.4	294.2	418.8	880.9	278.0	3,200.6
2005 v 1976	-38.3%	-44.6%	2.6%	14.0%	-78.6%	-17.1%	30.1%	-70.6%	161.2%	-32.6%
2005 v 1995	-34.8%	-31.0%	-12.0%	-47.9%	-66.5%	-13.9%	-6.5%	-51.9%	-1.3%	-37.3%
2005 v 2002	20.5%	22.3%	38.7%	51.4%	-74.2%	27.4%	56.8%	-5.0%	45.7%	19.2%

Oakland: Consistent drop in youth crime

Oakland's trends are unequivocal: large, consistent declines in every form of juvenile crime no matter what offense or era is assessed. In 1976, Oakland was the city with the highest juvenile arrest rate. Now, Oakland's low felony arrest rates rival only Los Angeles.

In 1976, Oakland was the city with the highest juvenile arrest rate. Now, Oakland's low felony arrest rates rival only Los Angeles.

Though plummeting crime trends are demonstrated, incomplete police reports prevent a thorough assessment of its significance. This report adjusts the Oakland Police Department's 2005 arrest figures upward by approximately 25% (using the proportion of Oakland's 2004 arrest numbers compared to those of Alameda County as a whole to project Oakland arrests from 2005 Alameda County totals). This may mitigate apparent underreporting. Thus, the figures shown here do not reflect the low numbers that Oakland Police Department actually reported to the California Department of Justice.

Even under conservative assumptions, the massive, consistent drop in offending by Oakland youth over the last 30 years, the last 10 years, and in the most recent years holds the record among all California

cities. Since 1976, rates of overall juvenile arrests are down 83%; felonies are down 66%; violent offenses are down 48%; homicide is down 64%; rape is down 96%; property offenses are down 81%; and misdemeanors are down 93%. The sole exception is a sharp, upward trend in juvenile drug arrests from 1976 to 2000, followed by a large decline from 2000 through 2005.

Table 7. OAKLAND, arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17

Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd
1976	11,173.1	4,026.4	780.6	14.9	29.8	357.3	378.6	2,739.6	206.3	7,146.7
1995	6,320.6	2,981.6	796.1	15.2	12.7	370.2	398.1	1,031.9	387.9	3,339.1
2000	3,543.5	2,490.8	424.4	0.0	21.8	206.2	196.5	1,033.2	895.0	1,052.6
2001	3,173.3	2,268.7	529.3	12.0	2.4	320.0	194.9	988.8	613.5	904.6
2002	3,231.3	2,341.8	491.3	4.8	11.9	331.5	143.1	1,113.7	584.3	889.5
2003	2,981.7	2,086.7	473.4	11.8	7.1	299.1	155.4	1,041.0	449.8	895.0
2004	2,179.0	1,541.8	469.7	9.3	2.3	339.5	118.6	602.3	358.1	637.2
2005 (estimated)	1,924.9	1,386.7	408.1	5.3	1.2	304.4	97.2	524.8	317.5	538.2
2005 v 1976	-82.8%	-65.6%	-47.7%	-64.3%	-96.1%	-14.8%	-74.3%	-80.8%	53.9%	-92.5%
2005 v 1995	-69.5%	-53.5%	-48.7%	-65.0%	-90.8%	-17.8%	-75.6%	-49.1%	-18.1%	-83.9%
2005 v 2002	-40.4%	-40.8%	-16.9%	11.6%	-90.2%	-8.2%	-32.1%	-52.9%	-45.7%	-39.5%

Fresno: All crimes reduced over 10 years

Fresno has the fastest-growing urban youth population in California. It shows large drops in nearly all juvenile offenses since the 1970s and, especially, since 1995. All juvenile arrest rates are down over the last decade, most impressively those for the most serious offenses. Since 1995, Fresno's youth crime has dropped for all offenses, ranging from a 33% decline in misdemeanors to an 88% decline in murder. Between 2002 and 2005, only rates for murder and robbery increased; the first due to very small numbers (2 arrests in 2005, versus 1 in 2002); the latter seems to result from an erratic pattern (large declines from 1995 through 2002, then somewhat higher rates).

Fresno has the fastest-growing urban youth population in California and shows large drops in nearly all juvenile offenses since the 70s.

Table 8. FRESNO, arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17

Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd
1976	10,377.9	3,268.0	499.7	13.5	30.4	212.7	243.1	2,407.1	162.0	7,109.9
1995	12,329.0	4,242.0	933.5	25.0	21.5	357.7	529.4	2,451.8	366.6	8,087.0
2000	10,555.6	2,341.5	621.9	1.6	23.0	205.1	392.2	1,056.7	136.2	8,214.1
2001	9,504.4	2,386.9	589.5	4.8	11.2	165.7	407.9	1,077.1	135.4	7,117.5
2002	8,850.9	2,270.6	433.6	1.6	9.3	102.6	320.2	1,150.1	169.4	6,580.3
2003	8,642.6	2,000.3	449.4	6.1	0.0	155.4	287.9	932.4	149.3	6,642.3
2004	8,053.5	1,840.8	417.5	1.5	9.2	124.8	281.9	807.2	160.2	6,212.7
2005	7,216.8	1,805.0	430.9	3.1	3.1	157.7	267.0	757.3	153.0	5,411.8
2005 v 1976	-30.5%	-44.8%	-13.8%	-76.9%	-89.7%	-25.9%	9.8%	-68.5%	-5.6%	-23.9%
2005 v 1995	-41.5%	-57.4%	-53.8%	-87.5%	-85.4%	-55.9%	-49.6%	-69.1%	-58.3%	-33.1%
2005 v 2002	-18.5%	-20.5%	-0.6%	100.9%	-66.5%	53.7%	-16.6%	-34.2%	-9.7%	-17.8%

Long Beach: More violent crime and misdemeanors offset reductions

Data from Long Beach reveal yet another pattern. The city saw no decline in overall juvenile crime in either the last 30 years or the last decade due to a drop in felonies, property offenses, and drug offenses offset by increased violent crime and misdemeanor arrests.

Long Beach trends are inconsistent. Murder and rape declined to historic lows in 2005, but robbery and assault arrests have increased in the last decade. The extent to which Long Beach's peculiar patterns reflect changes in juvenile crime versus changes in policing is not clear.

Long Beach saw no decline in overall juvenile crime in the last 30 years or the last decade due to increased violent crime arrests and misdemeanor arrests.

Table 9. LONG BEACH, arrest rates/100,000 pop age 10-17										
Year	All offenses	Felonies	Violence	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Property	Drug	Misd
1976	7,139.0	3,781.3	634.5	31.8	8.0	381.9	212.8	2,309.4	678.3	3,357.6
1995	5,956.0	2,479.1	553.2	24.6	12.3	131.1	385.2	1,397.3	245.9	3,476.9
2000	6,800.5	1,715.0	545.6	13.0	9.3	232.8	290.5	772.8	163.9	5,085.5
2001	6,513.6	1,897.6	664.6	5.4	9.1	285.1	365.0	780.8	109.0	4,616.0
2002	5,990.7	2,073.0	678.0	7.1	15.9	258.5	396.5	899.3	134.5	3,917.7
2003	7,300.2	1,933.5	714.5	6.9	12.1	294.4	401.2	685.3	151.5	5,366.7
2004	7,714.9	2,071.1	705.1	6.8	10.2	306.8	381.3	720.3	205.1	5,643.8
2005	6,897.7	2,085.0	776.4	1.7	1.7	311.2	461.9	704.5	179.1	4,812.7
2005 v 1976	-3.4%	-44.9%	22.4%	-94.7%	-79.0%	-18.5%	117.0%	-69.5%	-73.6%	43.3%
2005 v 1995	15.8%	-15.9%	40.4%	-93.2%	-86.4%	137.4%	19.9%	-49.6%	-27.2%	38.4%
2005 v 2002	15.1%	0.6%	14.5%	-76.4%	-89.5%	20.4%	16.5%	-21.7%	33.1%	22.8%

Preliminary Data for 2006

Fresno's Police Department is the only agency to post juvenile arrest statistics for the current year. From January through July 2006, police have arrested no youths for homicide, 3 for rape, 30 for robbery, and 73 for assault. This would project totals for the year well below those of 2005. Efforts to obtain updated juvenile arrest statistics from other city police departments were not successful as of this writing.

Conclusion

Perceptions of rising youth crime and violence in California cities are unwarranted based on official data from the California Department of Justice. Rates for violent offenses, property crimes, and drug offenses are lower among urban youth today than they were 30 years ago and 10 years ago. Rates of all major offenses except robbery have also dropped in the last three years.

Further, claims of youth violence spreading to the suburbs are not supported as suburban youth crime rates have declined even faster than urban youth crime rates. Temporary trends and year-to-year changes notwithstanding, an examination of the official data show that young people in nearly every city, and their surrounding counties, are less delinquent than any generation in many decades.

California's unprecedented decline in youth crime defies conventional assumptions and has been largely unnoticed by policymakers and the media. Further analysis should be pursued to determine the foundation for these changes and responsive measures to encourage a continuation of the downward trend. Local practices employed by California cities and counties that may be responsible for lower youth crime rates should be shared with and considered by the state for application on a wider scale, if appropriate.

CJCJ presents this information to place the current discussions about youth crime in proper context and to promote a balanced and rational approach to criminal justice policy.

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Queries

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