

# CALIFORNIA'S ARREST RATE FALLS TO RECORD LOW IN JUSTICE REFORM ERA (2011-2018)

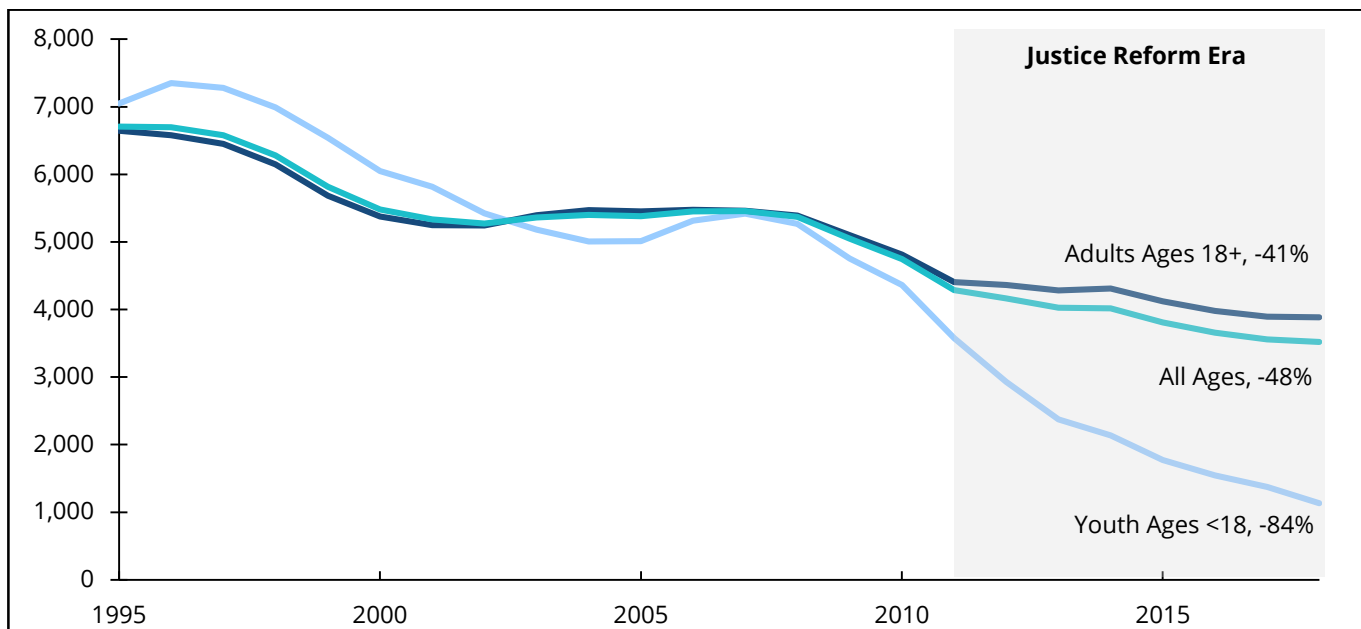


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Fact Sheet

**Figure 1. California arrests per 100,000 population by age group, 1995-2018**



Sources: DOF (2019); DOJ (2019; 2019a). The populations used to calculate rates are ages 10-17 for ages under 18, and 18-69 for ages 18 and older.

The latest statistics released by the California Department of Justice show the state's 2018 arrest rate for felony, misdemeanor, and juvenile status offenses (3,520 per 100,000 population ages 10-69) stood at its lowest level since rates were first recorded in 1957 (7,740), and well below the state's peak arrest rates in 1974 (8,984) and 1989 (8,742) (DOJ, 2019; 2019a). Since 1995, arrest rates have fallen substantially for both youth and adults, with an average decline of 48 percent (Figure 1).

- **Overall arrest rate has fallen 26 percent since before the start of the justice reform era in 2010.**

Downward trends in the arrest rate have continued through California's justice reform era (2011-present), a period that includes 2011's Public Safety Realignment, which transferred responsibility for some incarcerated populations from the state to the counties; 2014's Proposition 47, which reclassified a number of drug possession and property offenses from felonies to misdemeanors; and 2016's Proposition 57, which abolished prosecutors' power to file juvenile offenses directly into adult court and allowed individuals in prison to earn credits towards earlier parole consideration (AB 109, 2011; Prop 47, 2014; Prop 57, 2016). From 2010 through 2018, overall arrests per 100,000 population ages 10-69 declined by 26 percent. Of the decline, more than one-fifth (approximately 66,000 out of 303,000) is due to the decriminalization (SB 1449, 2011) and legalization (Prop 64, 2016) of marijuana. Marijuana reform accounted for 11 percent of the decline in juvenile arrests and 31 percent of the decline in adult arrests (DOF, 2019; DOJ, 2019a).

- **Youth arrest rates show the steepest decline.**

From 1995 through 2018, the arrest rate declined most rapidly among youth and young adults, falling by 87 percent for ages 10-14, 83 percent for ages 15-17, and 79 percent for ages 18-19 (DOF, 2019; DOJ, 2019). These trends continued during the justice reform era when arrests declined by 75 percent among youth ages

17 or younger. In 2010, the adult and youth arrest rates were nearly comparable (4,807 adults per 100,000 population ages 18-69 vs. 4,445 youth per 100,000 population ages 10-17). However, by 2018, the youth arrest rate had fallen to just over one-quarter of adult levels (3,894 adults per 100,000 population ages 18-69 vs. 1,113 youth per 100,000 population ages 10-17) (DOF, 2019; DOJ, 2019). During the era of criminal justice reforms, adults ages 20-29 and 40 and older showed more modest arrest rate declines (-25% and -15%, respectively), while adults ages 30-39 showed a slight increase in arrests (+11%) (Table 1).

**Table 1. Arrests per 100,000 population during justice reform era, by age group**

	Under 15	15-17	18-19	20-29	30-39	40 and older
2010	1,880.4	8,613.6	9,075.2	8,406.6	5,160.5	2,780.8
2011	1,505.6	6,959.9	7,130.5	7,681.0	4,877.5	2,622.3
2012	1,238.4	5,607.9	6,328.4	7,676.3	4,999.1	2,590.8
2013	986.2	4,537.8	5,640.7	7,540.0	5,113.7	2,544.9
2014	876.0	4,130.1	5,281.3	7,538.0	5,298.8	2,567.7
2015	723.2	3,444.8	4,569.6	7,201.3	5,302.1	2,443.6
2016	644.6	2,974.8	4,050.3	6,910.2	5,370.1	2,331.2
2017	593.1	2,638.5	3,562.4	6,575.8	5,461.4	2,309.1
2018	487.9	2,178.8	3,062.4	6,285.2	5,714.0	2,362.5
<b>Change</b>	<b>-74%</b>	<b>-75%</b>	<b>-66%</b>	<b>-25%</b>	<b>+11%</b>	<b>-15%</b>

Sources: DOF (2019); DOJ (2019; 2019a). The populations used to calculate rates are ages 10-14 for ages under 15, and 40-69 for ages 40 and older.

- **Most counties show declines in arrest rates during the justice reform era.**

Arrest rates vary considerably across California’s counties. However, during the nine-year period from 2010 to 2018 arrest rates trended downward in 45 of the state’s 58 counties, with just 22 percent reporting increases (DOF, 2019; DOJ, 2019). Counties show even greater uniformity in their youth arrests rates, which have declined in all but tiny Alpine County since 2010 (DOF, 2019; DOJ, 2019). The consistency of positive public safety trends throughout the justice reform era suggests that new statewide policies have not interrupted a decades-long pattern of declining arrests.

- **Arrest declines are greatest in regions with lower rates of incarceration.**

Most areas of the state show decreased arrest and incarceration rates during the reform era. However, one criticism of recent justice reforms is that reduced criminal penalties and increased jail and prison releases have produced more crime (Keep California Safe, 2020). If reforms themselves were promoting crime, we would expect higher levels of arrest and increasing arrest rates in counties that have seen the greatest effects of reform, notably a reduction in incarceration. As Table 2 shows, the opposite is true; urban counties, which had larger reductions in incarceration than rural counties, also reported lower rates of and larger declines in arrests than rural counties during the justice reform era. That both arrest and incarceration rates fell in urban counties relative to rural counties suggests that lower incarceration rates did not promote more crime. Further, coastal counties maintained lower arrest and incarceration rates than did inland counties, though their trends in both measures were similar.

**Table 2. Adult arrest and incarceration rates per 100,000 population by county type.**

	Total adult arrest rate				Total adult incarceration rate			
	2010	2014	2018	Change	2010	2014	2018	Change
All areas	4,806.5	4,300.9	3,893.7	<b>-19%</b>	928.1	788.3	755.6	<b>-19%</b>
Urban	4,685.0	4,152.4	3,729.2	<b>-20%</b>	928.1	785.6	746.1	<b>-20%</b>
Rural	5,864.4	5,630.4	5,394.7	<b>-8%</b>	927.9	813.0	842.1	<b>-9%</b>
Coast	4,540.5	3,863.9	3,579.3	<b>-21%</b>	829.6	694.6	668.2	<b>-19%</b>
Inland	5,416.5	5,297.8	4,597.1	<b>-15%</b>	1,154.0	1,002.2	951.0	<b>-18%</b>

Source: BSCC (2019); CDCR (2019); DOF (2019); DOJ (2019). Incarceration rate includes jail and prison populations. For classifications of counties, see Appendix.

California's justice reform era has accompanied several major successes for public health and safety, including reductions in arrests and incarceration. However, California's uptick in arrests among 30-39-year-olds warrants greater attention. This trend has accompanied increases in drug overdose deaths among adults and homicide deaths among those over 30, suggesting a need for services among Californians in middle adulthood (CDC, 2018). Though reforms are associated with overall declines in arrests, 2018 figures offer a window into the age groups most in need of future study and investment.

Younger age groups, especially those under age 20, show large declines in arrests, as do regions with less reliance on incarceration. In its ninth year of implementing major criminal and juvenile justice reforms, California continues to maintain record low levels of arrest and incarceration, a consistent pattern that could bring corresponding cost savings to the state and counties.

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**Appendix. Adult and youth arrest rates per 100,000 population by age and county, 2010, 2014, and 2018**

County	Type/location	Adults ages 18+				Youths ages <18			
		2010	2014	2018	Change	2010	2014	2018	Change
Alameda	Urban/coastal	4,444.9	3,729.6	3,254.5	-27%	3,714.5	1,530.2	964.4	-74%
Alpine	Rural/inland	9,024.4	5,074.3	6,151.8	-32%	1,886.8	1,626.0	3,759.4	+99%
Amador	Rural/inland	4,692.1	4,649.6	3,970.7	-15%	2,795.0	906.3	521.6	-81%
Butte	Rural/inland	6,435.9	6,583.9	6,999.6	+9%	5,848.1	2,585.8	1,854.7	-68%
Calaveras	Rural/inland	4,446.7	5,003.4	3,935.2	-12%	4,951.6	3,384.8	2,616.0	-47%
Colusa	Rural/inland	8,269.9	7,415.6	6,696.3	-19%	3,304.9	1,518.4	811.1	-75%
Contra Costa	Urban/coastal	3,725.8	3,374.4	3,107.0	-17%	2,572.8	1,398.4	661.5	-74%
Del Norte	Rural/inland	7,828.3	9,312.7	10,213.9	+30%	4,514.8	1,693.0	1,966.1	-56%
El Dorado	Rural/inland	4,350.1	4,513.8	3,706.4	-15%	3,625.9	1,942.5	1,204.8	-67%
Fresno	Urban/inland	6,329.8	7,104.0	5,685.3	-10%	4,672.8	2,738.5	1,620.2	-65%
Glenn	Rural/inland	8,077.6	5,560.4	6,817.2	-16%	6,408.1	4,426.9	1,208.3	-81%
Humboldt	Rural/coastal	9,407.1	8,522.9	7,476.6	-21%	7,713.9	3,473.7	981.3	-87%
Imperial	Rural/inland	7,169.8	5,827.4	4,560.9	-36%	4,442.8	1,429.5	902.3	-80%
Inyo	Rural/inland	7,412.9	6,135.5	7,210.9	-3%	3,608.5	1,274.3	2,853.7	-21%
Kern	Urban/inland	7,610.1	7,791.2	5,814.2	-24%	4,413.1	2,686.5	1,205.5	-73%
Kings	Rural/inland	6,540.8	7,476.6	7,245.5	+11%	9,886.2	6,456.2	2,529.7	-74%
Lake	Rural/inland	8,174.1	8,743.1	10,014.7	+23%	5,642.6	3,951.8	1,091.8	-81%
Lassen	Rural/inland	4,008.4	4,446.3	3,822.3	-5%	6,736.6	3,110.0	2,945.2	-56%
Los Angeles	Urban/coastal	4,781.0	3,963.1	3,365.1	-30%	3,946.2	1,658.0	794.5	-80%
Madera	Rural/inland	4,166.9	4,097.2	5,437.4	+30%	2,642.4	2,477.7	1,309.9	-50%
Marin	Rural/coastal	3,677.2	3,523.1	3,526.5	-4%	6,171.7	2,128.9	1,715.5	-72%
Mariposa	Rural/inland	6,400.7	4,575.3	4,207.3	-34%	5,440.1	0.0	78.3	-99%
Mendocino	Rural/coastal	8,069.7	7,744.3	7,064.1	-12%	5,167.1	2,593.6	2,439.0	-53%
Merced	Rural/inland	6,650.1	5,123.5	5,272.3	-21%	7,276.4	3,910.9	2,789.6	-62%
Modoc	Rural/inland	7,162.1	8,783.8	7,891.6	+10%	10,220.4	1,436.5	1,603.7	-84%
Mono	Rural/inland	4,651.8	3,279.3	3,339.0	-28%	1,465.8	707.0	217.9	-85%
Monterey	Urban/coastal	4,861.8	4,090.3	4,117.2	-15%	5,276.9	2,780.9	1,548.2	-71%
Napa	Rural/coastal	5,044.2	5,248.7	4,460.8	-12%	3,970.5	2,089.1	1,196.1	-70%
Nevada	Rural/inland	4,195.6	4,438.8	4,217.1	+1%	3,928.3	3,770.3	3,504.3	-11%
Orange	Urban/coastal	3,930.1	3,254.7	3,809.9	-3%	3,965.8	1,951.7	814.6	-79%
Placer	Rural/inland	3,841.9	3,774.1	3,478.6	-9%	3,890.8	1,558.6	750.2	-81%
Plumas	Rural/inland	7,153.3	6,011.4	6,961.4	-3%	5,872.1	4,158.7	2,840.2	-52%
Riverside	Urban/inland	3,581.7	3,808.6	2,789.1	-22%	2,912.9	1,441.0	536.2	-82%
Sacramento	Urban/inland	4,451.0	4,153.8	3,480.3	-22%	3,324.9	1,513.9	791.1	-76%
San Benito	Rural/inland	4,163.3	4,199.0	4,101.8	-1%	5,271.4	2,360.7	1,121.0	-79%
San Bernardino	Urban/inland	5,566.6	5,176.6	4,832.5	-13%	5,014.8	2,322.8	1,435.5	-71%
San Diego	Urban/coastal	4,591.9	3,839.1	3,647.6	-21%	5,206.0	2,404.4	1,014.5	-81%
San Francisco	Urban/coastal	3,281.9	2,683.5	2,225.4	-32%	3,955.7	2,158.4	1,796.5	-55%
San Joaquin	Urban/inland	5,783.7	4,212.2	3,989.1	-31%	5,288.2	2,963.4	1,415.9	-73%
San Luis Obispo	Rural/coastal	5,583.6	6,018.1	5,553.7	-1%	4,233.0	1,613.0	1,183.9	-72%
San Mateo	Urban/coastal	3,307.9	3,069.3	3,082.8	-7%	3,644.0	2,137.3	1,024.3	-72%

County	Type/location	Adults ages 18+				Youths ages <18			
		2010	2014	2018	Change	2010	2014	2018	Change
Santa Barbara	Urban/coastal	8,354.9	7,623.5	5,578.7	-33%	6,728.4	2,982.8	2,856.4	-58%
Santa Clara	Urban/coastal	3,452.6	2,974.5	2,666.0	-23%	6,491.9	2,335.8	1,218.6	-81%
Santa Cruz	Rural/coastal	6,342.4	5,565.7	5,427.3	-14%	5,350.2	2,631.4	1,599.0	-70%
Shasta	Rural/inland	7,099.9	6,850.9	8,187.6	+15%	8,334.7	3,961.7	1,421.5	-83%
Sierra	Rural/inland	6,090.5	5,334.0	5,541.7	-9%	727.3	0.0	454.5	-38%
Siskiyou	Rural/inland	7,548.2	7,865.4	7,844.0	+4%	6,053.7	2,011.3	917.2	-85%
Solano	Urban/coastal	3,935.8	4,541.8	4,726.7	+20%	6,201.5	2,662.4	1,704.7	-73%
Sonoma	Urban/coastal	5,582.7	4,400.3	4,634.6	-17%	5,022.7	2,743.9	1,508.8	-70%
Stanislaus	Urban/inland	5,745.9	6,046.9	5,415.5	-6%	4,147.9	1,976.9	1,264.1	-70%
Sutter	Rural/inland	6,016.5	5,435.2	6,615.4	+10%	5,462.3	3,325.0	1,213.7	-78%
Tehama	Rural/inland	8,514.9	8,806.7	5,913.4	-31%	4,480.7	3,405.3	2,185.3	-51%
Trinity	Rural/inland	8,639.8	8,809.1	7,047.2	-18%	1,529.8	279.9	469.5	-69%
Tulare	Urban/inland	7,441.4	7,744.1	6,988.4	-6%	6,005.7	3,524.6	2,145.9	-64%
Tuolumne	Rural/inland	6,927.0	6,334.6	7,636.8	+10%	4,420.9	2,235.5	1,638.9	-63%
Ventura	Urban/coastal	5,355.7	4,657.8	5,531.0	+3%	6,168.6	3,269.0	2,375.1	-61%
Yolo	Rural/inland	5,076.6	5,124.8	3,885.6	-23%	6,205.4	3,237.4	821.0	-87%
Yuba	Rural/inland	8,150.1	7,766.9	5,675.1	-30%	3,351.2	2,749.4	1,328.7	-60%
<b>All counties</b>	<b>All areas</b>	<b>4,806.5</b>	<b>4,300.9</b>	<b>3,893.7</b>	<b>-19%</b>	<b>4,444.9</b>	<b>2,112.4</b>	<b>1,113.2</b>	<b>-75%</b>

Sources: DOF (2019); DOJ (2019; 2019a). The populations used to calculate rates are ages 10-17 for ages under 18, and 18-69 for ages 18 and older. "Urban" refers to counties with at least one city of 100,000 or more population. "Coastal" refers to counties that are adjacent to the Pacific Ocean or located in the San Francisco Bay metropolitan area.

Please note: Jurisdictions submit their data to the official statewide or national databases maintained by appointed governmental bodies. While every effort is made to review data for accuracy and to correct information upon revision, CJCJ cannot be responsible for data reporting errors made at the county, state, or national level.

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