

VIOLENCE BY CALIFORNIA YOUTH IS NOT “SURGING”



California is not suffering a “crisis” in violence by juveniles, as the Chief Probation Officers of California alleges in its self-interested campaign to alarm lawmakers.

Mike Males, Ph.D., Senior Research Fellow
Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice

October 14, 2026

Policy Brief

KEY FINDINGS

- California’s juvenile violent felony (homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault) arrest rate in 2025 was the fourth **lowest** since statistics were first compiled in 1957.
- Department of Justice statistics show the only years with lower rates of violence by youth were 2020, 2021, and 2022, when the state was largely shut down during the COVID pandemic.
- The 2025 violence arrest rate among California youth was 49% below 2010’s rate, 72% below 1990’s rate, and 17% below even 1957’s rate.

Claims of “crisis” are a hoax

The [California Department of Justice](#) has been reporting violent crime statistics for youth since 1957. The latest rate, for 2025, was the fourth lowest ever recorded in 68 years of reporting. The only years with lower rates of violent crime by youths were 2022, 2020, and 2021 – years during which the COVID pandemic largely shut California down.

That is, today’s violent crime level by California youth is even lower than in the 1950s, as well as every decade since. The unprecedented plummet in youth crime has saved state taxpayers \$10 billion in incarceration costs alone since the 1990s.

However, less youth crime threatens major interests. [The Chief Probation Officers of California](#) (CPOC), invoking numbers so misleading they should shame the organization, just declared a “crisis” because “violent juvenile crime is surging in California.”

The CPOC cherry-picks wildly inconsistent time periods, variously comparing recent years to ones when the state was largely shut down during the COVID pandemic. “Violent felony arrests among youth” are “up nearly 60 percent since the state closed the Division of Juvenile Justice,” CPOC declares, comparing 2025 to 2021. Switching to another set of years, CPOC then declares: “Youth adjudicated for serious offenses, including

murder and rape” are “up 120 percent in two years.” Switching yet again to a third set of years, CPOC then declares, “juvenile homicide arrests” are “up more than 80 percent.”

CPOC’s self-interested lobbying for more funding, staffing, and hardline policy by issuing selective, cherry-picked numbers illustrates how criminal justice policies get misdirected and [taxpayer dollars wasted by the billions](#) to no good effect.

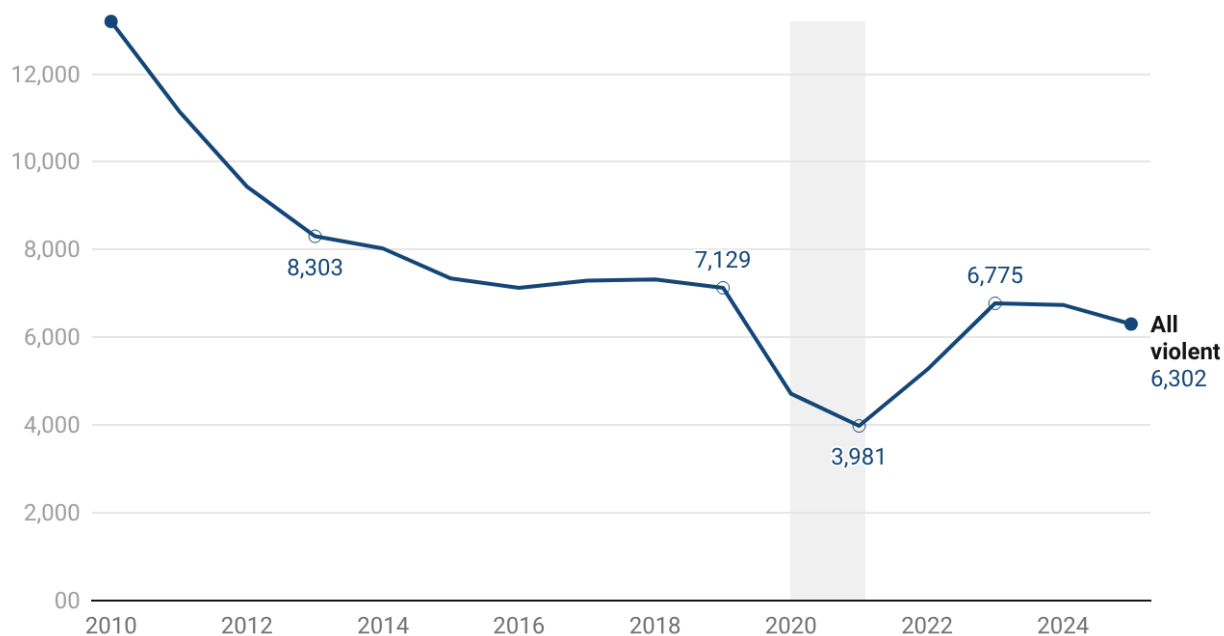
Strange that CPOC hypes the numbers for homicide (a very rare crime) from 2025 versus 2019, but doesn’t mention the large declines in juvenile robberies, rape/sex offenses, aggravated assaults, simple assaults, and total violent crimes over that period. Of course certain crimes would temporarily increase as the state opened back up after COVID restrictions, but levels today remain lower than before the pandemic.

Institutional interests distort public policy

CPOC represents the leadership of county probation departments, which supervise youth, operate juvenile facilities, and influence local spending. The question is whether policy and budgets reflect demonstrated needs rather than selective statistics.

In fact, the real trends powerfully validate California leaders’ decisions to reform the criminal justice system, including [closing the state Division of Juvenile Justice](#) in 2023 and 30 local juvenile detention facilities due to plunging youth crime.

Figure 1. California youth violent felony arrests, 2010-2025



Shaded band marks the pandemic period

Chart: Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice • Source: California Department of Justice (DOJ), Crime in California, 1975-2025. • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 1 and Table 1 show full – not cherry-picked – tabulations of juvenile violent offenses taken from the California Department of Justice’s annual [Crime in California](#) annual report, yearly since 2010 and for the prior years of 1975, 1990, and 2010 for perspective. Using regression analysis which incorporates all years of data into an overall trend – not just selective years picked to show a partisan result – California juvenile violent crimes have fallen by 53% since 2010 and by 81% since 1990 to levels now 17% lower than in the first year numbers were compiled, 1957. During the 2010-2025 period, juvenile homicide fell by 22%, rape/sex offenses (despite a large expansion in their definition) fell by 28%, aggravated assault fell by 53%, robbery fell by 56%, and simple assault fell by 69%.

There are no grounds for stating, as CPOC does, that youth offenses are surging and becoming more serious. Just the opposite is occurring. Reforms, including cuts to budgets and staffing of juvenile probation and related justice systems, should continue.

Table 1. California youth violent felony and simple (misdemeanor) assault arrests, 1975, 1990, 2000, 2010-2025

Year	All violent	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Aggravated assault	Simple assault
1975	17,747	223	na	7,981	8,749	13,099
1990	20,658	658	2,327	7,786	11,379	19,299
2000	16,610	156	2,106	4,965	11,138	22,701
2010	13,200	181	1,375	5,333	7,445	17,425
2011	11,158	134	1,253	4,174	6,595	15,536
2012	9,437	96	1,121	3,483	5,618	13,169
2013	8,303	105	985	3,106	4,906	11,209
2014	8,024	95	1,001	2,737	4,850	10,343
2015	7,341	88	916	2,597	4,329	9,753
2016	7,128	91	760	2,604	4,077	8,990
2017	7,291	98	776	2,963	3,858	8,555
2018	7,320	84	615	2,950	3,973	8,049
2019	7,129	68	668	2,946	3,840	7,786
2020	4,715	79	448	1,966	2,487	3,938
2021	3,981	101	387	1,405	2,310	3,398
2022	5,262	94	441	1,846	3,131	5,399
2023	6,775	123	393	2,412	4,050	6,841
2024	6,739	124	355	2,365	4,069	7,274
2025	6,302	102	295	2,225	3,812	6,875

Table: Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice • Source: California Department of Justice, Crime in California, 1975-2025. • Created with Datawrapper

Methods

This brief reports juvenile arrest counts for persons younger than 18, not the number of violent incidents or unique individuals who committed offenses. Enforcement practices, agency reporting completeness, offense classifications, and changes in reporting systems all affect arrest counts.

References

California Department of Justice (2026). *Crime in California*, annual publications, 1975-2025. [data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov](https://data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov/openjustice.doj.ca.gov/resources/publications).
[openjustice.doj.ca.gov/resources/publications](https://data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov/openjustice.doj.ca.gov/resources/publications)

Chief Probation Officers of California (2026). “Violent Juvenile Crime Is Surging in California, and Bills Governor Newsom Signed This Session Will Make It Worse.” October 1, 2026. cpoc.org