

IS PROPOSITION 47 TO BLAME FOR CALIFORNIA'S 2015 INCREASE IN URBAN CRIME?



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Research Report

Introduction

In November 2014, nearly 60 percent of California’s electorate voted to pass Proposition 47. This proposition made substantial sentencing reforms by reducing certain nonviolent, non-serious offenses, such as minor drug possession and shoplifting, from felonies to misdemeanors (CJCJ, 2014). Because the changes made by the new law applied retroactively, incarcerated people serving felony sentences for offenses affected by Proposition 47 were eligible to apply for resentencing to shorten their sentences or to be released outright. Those who already completed felony sentences for Proposition 47 offenses could also apply to change their criminal records to reflect the reforms.

Critics of Proposition 47 contended it would increase crime by releasing those convicted of dangerous or violent felonies early (see “Arguments Against Proposition 47,” 2014). Opponents also suggested that reducing the severity of sentences for certain felonies would fail to deter people from committing crimes or completing court-ordered probation requirements.

In the initial months following the passage of Proposition 47, California’s jail population dropped by about 9,000 between October 2014 (pre-Prop. 47) and March 2015 (the most recent date for which county jail figures are available at this time) (BSCC, 2016).¹ State prisons reported over 4,500 releases attributed to Proposition 47 (CDCR, 2016), for a total incarcerated population decline of more than 6 percent — a substantial decrease. Similar to the initial year after Public Safety Realignment took effect, January-June 2015 saw general increases in both violent and property crime in California’s cities with populations of 100,000 or more (Table 1). During this period, homicide and burglary showed slight declines, while other Part I violent and property offenses experienced increases.

Is Proposition 47 to blame for the increases in reported urban crimes? This report tests this question by comparing changes in crime rates, from January–June 2014 and January –June 2015, in California’s 68 largest cities to changes in: (a) county jail populations and (b) Proposition 47-related discharges and releases from prison to resentencing counties.

Table 1. Offenses reported to police in California’s 68 largest cities, January-June 2010-2015

Rates	Total	Violent	Murder	Robbery	Assault	Property	Burglary	Larceny	MV theft
2010	1,615.6	241.3	2.8	99.4	128.1	1,374.3	288.1	854.0	232.2
2011	1,570.1	231.9	2.9	93.9	124.7	1,338.2	285.1	832.2	220.8
2012	1,686.5	239.3	3.1	97.8	127.2	1,447.2	312.0	888.0	247.2
2013	1,652.8	225.2	2.8	95.8	117.1	1,427.6	304.3	874.3	249.0
2014	1,550.4	217.5	2.6	81.6	121.3	1,333.0	281.8	819.9	230.2
2015	1,669.5	241.0	2.5	89.9	132.6	1,428.6	280.7	903.2	243.6
2015 v. 2010	3%	0%	-12%	-10%	4%	4%	-3%	6%	5%
2015 v. 2014	8%	11%	-3%	10%	9%	7%	0%	10%	6%

Source: FBI (2016); FPD (2016); OPD (2016). Note: Rates are calculated per 100,000 population. 2010 is used as a comparison because it is the year prior to Public Safety Realignment. Data for all measures are the most recent as of this publication.

¹ An earlier version of this report stated that California’s jail population dropped by about 9,000 between November 2014 and March 2015. The correct time period for this decrease was between October 2014 and March 2015.

Method

This report analyzes several data sources for three separate time periods.

1. Uniform Crime Reports provide urban crime information for January-June of 2014 and 2015, which is provided to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for 66 of California's cities with populations of 100,000 or more (FBI, 2016). Crime reports for two additional cities (Fresno and Oakland) for the same period are obtained from city police reports (FPD, OPD, 2016). The reported crime totals for these 68 cities are divided by the population of each city provided by the Department of Finance (DOF) to produce crime rates per 100,000 population for January-June of 2014 and 2015.
2. The total 68 cities are located in 22 counties. The Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC, 2016) provides figures for Average Daily Population (ADP) in local jails for the 22 relevant counties by offense type and month through March 2015.
3. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR, 2016) provides prison discharges and releases as a result of Proposition 47 by resentencing county for the November 5, 2014²-December 31, 2015 period.

Results

If the reduction in local jail populations after Proposition 47 passed in November 2014 is responsible for the urban crime increase in early 2015, as some sources are arguing, then cities in counties with the largest reductions in jail populations in 2015 would show the biggest increases in crime. However, the data suggest this is not the case (Table 2).

In fact, the cities in 11 counties with the largest decreases in both total jail populations and felony jail populations showed equivalent changes in violent crime, and smaller increases in property and total crime, than the cities in 10 counties with the smallest decreases in jail populations. In these 11 counties (total urban population 7.4 million) with larger jail population decreases (total average jail ADPs decreased 15 percent, average felony ADPs dropped 18 percent), the overall crime rate increased by only 1 percent. In the 10 counties (urban population 5.3 million) with smaller jail population decreases (total average jail ADP decreased 7 percent, average felony ADPs dropped 11 percent), overall crime increased by 6 percent. Both sets of counties experienced violent crime increases of 9 percent, while the 11 large jail population decrease counties saw no increase in property crime. Significantly, the 10 smaller jail population decrease counties experienced a six percent increase in property crime. Los Angeles County (shown separately due to the unreliability of its 2014 crime statistics) had a lesser decrease in total jail ADP and an average decrease in felony jail ADP, while the city of Los Angeles saw more unfavorable crime trends than the state as a whole.

² Proposition 47 took effect on November 4, 2014.

Table 2. Counties ranked by change in jail average daily population (ADP), March 2015 v. March 2014, and changes in urban crime rates, January-June 2015 v. January-June 2014

Change in Jail ADP March 2015 v. March 2014			Change in Urban Crime Rates Jan-June 2015 v. Jan-June 2014		
County	Total	Felony	Total	Violent	Property
Overall average jail population decrease (21 counties, 54 cities)	-11%	-14%	4%	9%	3%
<i>Smaller than overall average jail population decrease (10 counties)</i>					
Riverside (5 cities)	0%	-5%	6%	7%	6%
Sonoma (1 city)	-6%	-11%	8%	2%	8%
Sacramento (2 cities)	-7%	-7%	7%	23%	4%
Fresno (1 city)	-7%	-9%	0%	12%	-1%
Solano (2 cities)	-8%	-12%	-3%	-7%	-2%
Placer (1 city)	-8%	-5%	7%	21%	6%
Ventura (4 cities)	-8%	-22%	7%	14%	6%
San Bernardino (6 cities)	-8%	-8%	6%	12%	5%
Kern (1 city)	-9%	-19%	1%	1%	1%
San Francisco (1 city)	-10%	-10%	22%	4%	25%
Average (10 counties)	-7%	-11%	6%	9%	6%
<i>Larger than overall average jail population decrease (11 counties)</i>					
Monterey (1 city)	-12%	n.a.	-8%	25%	-14%
Santa Clara (3 cities)	-12%	-20%	5%	3%	5%
Contra Costa (2 cities)	-13%	-11%	-7%	-2%	-8%
Stanislaus (1 city)	-13%	-17%	5%	12%	4%
Santa Barbara (1 city)	-13%	n.a.	-11%	-6%	-11%
San Joaquin (1 city)	-15%	-17%	-5%	0%	-7%
Tulare (1 city)	-16%	-18%	1%	21%	-1%
San Diego (6 cities)	-16%	-18%	0%	5%	0%
San Mateo (2 cities)	-18%	-18%	8%	20%	6%
Orange (8 cities)	-19%	-25%	24%	19%	25%
Alameda (4 cities)	-21%	-18%	1%	3%	1%
Average (11 counties)	-15%	-18%	1%	9%	0%
Los Angeles (14 cities)	-8%	-14%	11%	18%	10%

Sources: FBI (2016); BSCC (2016); FPD (2016); OPD (2016). Note: Rates are calculated per populations of 100,000. Los Angeles County is listed separately due to potential unreliability of 2014 crime statistics. Data for all measures are the most recent as of this publication.

Table 3 compares the rates of discharges and releases from state prisons caused by Proposition 47 by resentencing county, to changes in urban crime rates in the first half of 2015 for each of the 22 counties. In total, 4,533 people (over 3 percent of the entire prison population) were either discharged from their sentences (1,120) or released to parole (3,413) through December 31, 2015, as a result of the proposition, with widely varying numbers of people returning to each resentencing county. While the resentencing county (which is the same as the original sentencing county) may not be the county to which a discharged or released person may ultimately go, the assumption is that most individuals sentenced by a county would return to that county.

The results shown in Table 3 suggest, much like in Table 2, that, at this time, available data does not show a correlation between Proposition 47 and the total 2015 crime increase. The 10 resentencing counties with the most per capita discharges/releases as a result of Proposition 47 (averaging 17 prison discharges/releases per 100,000 population) showed much lower increases in their cities' total Part I crime rates than did those counties less impacted by Proposition 47 (4.2 discharges/releases). While violent crime did increase in counties with larger than average Proposition 47-related discharges/releases, overall the experiences of individual cities and counties were too variable to draw conclusions regarding patterns or causality.

Table 3. Proposition 47 related discharges/releases from state prisons v. change in per-capita urban crime rates, January-June 2015 v. January-June 2014

Resentencing County (Ranked by Prop. 47 Discharges/Releases)	Rate of County's Prop. 47 Discharges/Releases Nov. 2014 - Dec. 2015	Absolute Change in County's Urban Crime Rates Jan-June 2015 v. Jan-June 2014		
		Total	Violent	Property
Overall Average Prop. 47- related discharges/releases (21 counties, 54 cities)	10.3	52.5	17.7	34.8
<i>Smaller than average Prop. 47-related discharges/releases (11 counties)</i>				
San Francisco (1 city)	0.7	653.9	15.6	638.3
Contra Costa (2 cities)	1.4	-157	-6.6	-150.4
Alameda (4 cities)	1.5	25.4	11.6	13.8
San Mateo (2 cities)	2.8	74.8	19.8	55.0
Sonoma (1 city)	3.2	107.7	3.6	104.1
Santa Clara (3 cities)	3.7	63.5	4.0	59.5
Orange (8 cities)	4.7	266	22.0	244.0
Solano (2 cities)	5.6	-62.9	-23.2	-39.8
San Diego (6 cities)	6.8	5.9	8.9	-3.0
Ventura (4 cities)	7.6	87.9	17.2	70.7
Monterey (1 city)	7.8	-169.4	76.5	-245.8
Average (11 counties)	4.2	81.5	13.6	67.9
<i>Larger than average Prop. 47-related discharges/releases (10 counties)</i>				
Placer (1)	8.6	92.3	16.4	75.9
Santa Barbara (1)	10.3	-195.9	-12.3	-183.6
Sacramento (2)	10.5	119.7	63.3	56.4
San Joaquin (1)	10.7	-158.2	0.1	-158.2
Fresno (1)	15.7	0.5	25.8	-25.3
San Bernardino (6)	15.7	103.1	27.7	75.4
Tulare (1)	18.5	16.3	38.0	-21.7
Riverside (5)	21.8	80.5	8.4	72.2
Stanislaus (1)	29.4	130.6	51.9	78.7
Kern (1 cities)	29.7	17.4	2.3	15.1
Average (10 counties)	17.0	31.9	23.6	8.3
Los Angeles (14)	16.0	144.3	38.1	106.2

Source: CDCR (2016); FBI (2016); FPD (2016); OPD (2016). Note: Per-capita rates are calculated per 100,000 population in cities and in counties. Los Angeles County is listed separately due to potential unreliability of 2014 crime statistics. Data for all measures are the most recent as of this publication.

Conclusion

There are no obvious effects associated with Proposition 47 that would be expected if the reform had a significant and consistent impact on crime. In fact, many cities in counties that experienced larger declines in local and state incarcerated populations after Proposition 47 took effect had more favorable crime trends.

It is too early to conclusively measure the effects of Proposition 47 on crime rates just one year after the law took effect. The urban crime increase in the first half of 2015 could be a normal fluctuation, such as those that occurred from 1999 to 2001 or from 2005 to 2006 (CJSC, 2016). Initial trends are often reversed later. In the case of Realignment, implemented in 2011, crime initially increased in 2012, but later declined sharply in 2013 and 2014.

Finally, the counties that show the largest jail and prison population decreases as well as more favorable municipal crime trends (such as in Contra Costa, San Joaquin, and Santa Barbara) can be further examined for potential model practices. While more data are necessary to determine the impacts of Proposition 47, close analysis of the variability in local experiences over a longer time period will yield valuable information as to what works in reducing both incarcerated populations and crime.

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Appendix

Of the 68 reporting cities, 48 showed increases, three showed no change, and 17 showed decreases in reported crime rates.

Appendix 1. Changes in reported crime rates in California's 68 largest cities, January-June 2015 v. January-June 2014

City	County	Change			Jan-June 2015			Jan-June 2014		
		Total	Violent	Property	Total	Violent	Property	Total	Violent	Property
All Cities	--	8%	11%	7%	1,669.5	241.0	1,428.6	1,550.4	217.5	1,333.0
Berkeley	Alameda	22%	49%	20%	2,675.5	226.5	2,449.1	2,189.4	152.5	2,036.9
Fremont	Alameda	4%	24%	3%	1,022.3	63.6	958.7	985.2	51.3	933.9
Hayward	Alameda	-2%	1%	-3%	1,721.5	192.3	1,529.2	1,761.7	191.3	1,570.4
Oakland**	Alameda	-2%	0%	-3%	3,771.5	761.8	3,009.7	3,862.4	764.8	3,097.6
Antioch	Contra Costa	-10%	-9%	-11%	2,140.4	357.3	1,783.0	2,390.1	392.7	1,997.4
Concord	Contra Costa	-4%	10%	-5%	2,068.7	191.2	1,877.5	2,146.8	173.6	1,973.2
Fresno**	Fresno	0%	12%	-1%	2,284.1	249.3	2,034.8	2,283.6	223.6	2,060.1
Bakersfield	Kern	1%	1%	1%	2,334.7	237.9	2,096.9	2,317.3	235.6	2,081.8
Burbank	Los Angeles	1%	-2%	1%	1,273.5	65.0	1,208.5	1,263.3	66.3	1,197.0
Downey*	Los Angeles	-6%	2%	-6%	1,322.2	131.7	1,190.5	1,401.9	128.7	1,273.2
El Monte*	Los Angeles	1%	11%	-1%	1,081.4	168.4	913.0	1,074.5	151.1	923.4
Glendale*	Los Angeles	6%	9%	6%	897.7	47.7	850.0	845.8	43.9	801.9
Inglewood*	Los Angeles	-5%	-3%	-6%	1,450.2	308.9	1,141.2	1,531.6	319.2	1,212.4
Lancaster	Los Angeles	3%	4%	2%	1,360.8	299.2	1,061.7	1,324.1	287.0	1,037.2
Long Beach	Los Angeles	12%	19%	11%	1,718.6	277.5	1,441.1	1,534.0	232.9	1,301.1
Los Angeles	Los Angeles	15%	23%	13%	1,419.7	273.3	1,146.4	1,236.5	222.3	1,014.3
Norwalk	Los Angeles	-3%	13%	-6%	1,060.0	181.0	879.0	1,093.9	160.3	933.6
Palmdale	Los Angeles	2%	-2%	3%	1,271.3	258.6	1,012.7	1,241.9	262.6	979.2
Pasadena*	Los Angeles	11%	17%	10%	1,522.9	144.2	1,378.7	1,377.1	123.4	1,253.6
Pomona*	Los Angeles	4%	0%	5%	1,785.2	262.4	1,522.8	1,712.3	263.5	1,448.8
Torrance*	Los Angeles	18%	62%	16%	1,025.4	70.1	955.4	867.5	43.3	824.2
West Covina	Los Angeles	5%	14%	5%	1,458.5	111.6	1,346.9	1,386.7	98.3	1,288.5
Salinas	Monterey	-8%	25%	-14%	1,906.7	380.7	1,526.0	2,076.0	304.2	1,771.8
Anaheim*	Orange	18%	16%	18%	1,606.6	178.7	1,427.9	1,361.5	154.1	1,207.3
Costa Mesa	Orange	39%	45%	38%	2,231.7	164.8	2,066.9	1,611.3	113.6	1,497.7
Fullerton*	Orange	17%	18%	17%	1,501.0	136.8	1,364.1	1,285.3	116.3	1,169.0
Garden Grove*	Orange	40%	26%	42%	1,410.4	152.8	1,257.6	1,006.7	121.3	885.4
Huntington Beach	Orange	10%	-8%	11%	1,293.4	89.7	1,203.7	1,179.0	97.4	1,081.6
Irvine*	Orange	25%	1%	26%	800.8	22.4	778.4	638.3	22.3	616.0
Orange*	Orange	33%	24%	34%	1,140.7	68.5	1,072.1	856.6	55.3	801.3
Santa Ana*	Orange	28%	24%	28%	1,309.7	230.6	1,079.1	1,026.5	186.2	840.3
Roseville	Placer	7%	21%	6%	1,358.4	95.8	1,262.6	1,266.2	79.4	1,186.8
Corona	Riverside	3%	3%	3%	1,177.3	58.0	1,119.2	1,145.1	56.6	1,088.6
Moreno Valley	Riverside	0%	13%	-1%	1,687.8	140.5	1,547.3	1,692.3	124.5	1,567.8
Murrieta	Riverside	34%	98%	32%	953.6	39.2	914.4	710.6	19.7	690.8
Riverside	Riverside	5%	2%	5%	1,773.7	214.0	1,559.7	1,691.5	209.4	1,482.1

City	County	Change			Jan-June 2015			Jan-June 2014		
		Total	Violent	Property	Total	Violent	Property	Total	Violent	Property
Temecula	Riverside	11%	13%	11%	1,426.7	46.8	1,379.9	1,281.8	41.4	1,240.4
Elk Grove	Sacramento	4%	-7%	6%	1,126.5	181.7	944.8	1,083.9	196.0	887.9
Sacramento	Sacramento	8%	24%	4%	2,059.1	381.2	1,678.0	1,912.7	306.8	1,605.9
Fontana	San Bernardino	15%	4%	17%	1,243.7	187.9	1,055.7	1,083.6	181.2	902.4
Ontario	San Bernardino	14%	13%	14%	1,662.0	155.8	1,506.1	1,457.8	138.1	1,319.7
Rancho Cucamonga	San Bernardino	-1%	-26%	1%	1,150.7	55.7	1,095.0	1,159.3	75.5	1,083.8
Rialto	San Bernardino	-7%	27%	-12%	1,201.9	202.8	999.1	1,293.8	159.9	1,133.9
San Bernardino	San Bernardino	11%	15%	10%	2,932.2	571.7	2,360.6	2,642.2	497.7	2,144.6
Victorville	San Bernardino	-7%	20%	-10%	1,867.7	307.0	1,560.6	1,997.8	254.8	1,743.0
Carlsbad	San Diego	11%	-13%	14%	1,008.6	79.5	929.0	905.4	91.9	813.5
Chula Vista	San Diego	-5%	8%	-7%	979.9	123.3	856.6	1,033.7	114.2	919.5
El Cajon	San Diego	-7%	-16%	-5%	1,257.8	155.8	1,102.1	1,351.4	186.1	1,165.3
Escondido	San Diego	1%	10%	0%	1,294.0	183.3	1,110.7	1,276.4	167.0	1,109.4
Oceanside	San Diego	9%	-8%	11%	1,438.1	182.3	1,255.8	1,324.4	197.9	1,126.5
San Diego	San Diego	0%	8%	-1%	1,214.9	208.0	1,007.0	1,212.9	192.2	1,020.7
San Francisco	San Francisco	22%	4%	25%	3,601.5	408.3	3,193.1	2,947.5	392.7	2,554.8
Stockton	San Joaquin	-5%	0%	-7%	2,742.0	657.7	2,084.4	2,900.2	657.6	2,242.6
Daly City	San Mateo	19%	31%	17%	1,036.8	124.8	912.0	872.2	95.1	777.1
San Mateo	San Mateo	-2%	9%	-3%	1,079.6	116.3	963.2	1,099.1	106.8	992.3
Santa Maria	Santa Barbara	-11%	-6%	-11%	1,645.7	209.6	1,436.0	1,841.5	221.9	1,619.6
San Jose	Santa Clara	4%	3%	4%	1,418.3	167.2	1,251.1	1,365.1	162.5	1,202.6
Santa Clara	Santa Clara	11%	3%	12%	1,592.9	65.3	1,527.6	1,430.4	63.7	1,366.8
Sunnyvale	Santa Clara	6%	-1%	7%	884.3	52.7	831.6	832.2	53.2	779.0
Fairfield	Solano	-8%	-12%	-8%	1,774.9	220.8	1,554.2	1,931.4	250.3	1,681.1
Vallejo	Solano	1%	-4%	2%	2,465.7	419.4	2,046.2	2,439.5	436.0	2,003.4
Santa Rosa*	Sonoma	8%	2%	8%	1,516.7	180.3	1,336.4	1,409.0	176.6	1,232.4
Modesto	Stanislaus	5%	12%	4%	2,791.8	469.9	2,321.9	2,661.2	418.0	2,243.1
Visalia	Tulare	1%	21%	-1%	1,718.5	218.0	1,500.5	1,702.2	179.9	1,522.2
Oxnard	Ventura	9%	-2%	10%	1,823.0	216.3	1,606.6	1,678.3	219.7	1,458.7
Simi Valley*	Ventura	7%	66%	3%	698.9	65.6	633.3	656.0	39.6	616.4
Thousand Oaks	Ventura	3%	-6%	4%	691.9	50.3	641.7	669.3	53.5	615.8
Ventura	Ventura	5%	61%	2%	1,958.1	179.3	1,778.9	1,857.1	111.1	1,745.9

Source: FBI (2016); FPD (2016) OPD (2016). Note: Rape is not included. Due to expanded definition of rape in 2014, the California Department of Justice has recommended that rape comparisons should not be drawn at this time. Cities marked with a "*" did not report rape in both old and new definitions, preventing year-to-year comparison. Cities marked with "***" were not included in the FBI Unified Crime Reports; information above was obtained through city police reports. Rates are calculated per 100,000 populations. Data for all measures are the most recent as of this publication.

Appendix 2. Counties listed alphabetically including data over all three time periods

County	Change in Jail ADP March 2015 v. March 2014		Rate of County's Prop. 47 Discharges/Releases Nov. 2014 - Dec. 2015	Change in Urban Crime Rates January-June, 2015 v.2014		
	Total	Felony		Total	Violent	Property
Alameda (4 cities)	-21%	-18%	1.5	1%	3%	1%
Contra Costa (2 cities)	-13%	-11%	1.4	-7%	-2%	-8%
Fresno (1 city)	-7%	-9%	15.7	0%	12%	-1%
Kern (1 city)	-9%	-19%	29.7	1%	1%	1%
Los Angeles (14 cities)	-8%	-14%	16	11%	18%	10%
Monterey (1 city)	-12%	n.a.	7.8	-8%	25%	-14%
Orange (8 cities)	-19%	-25%	4.7	24%	19%	25%
Placer (1 city)	-8%	-5%	8.6	7%	21%	6%
Riverside (5 cities)	0%	-5%	21.8	6%	7%	6%
Sacramento (2 cities)	-7%	-7%	10.5	7%	23%	4%
San Bernardino (6 cities)	-8%	-8%	15.7	6%	12%	5%
San Diego (6 cities)	-16%	-18%	6.8	0%	5%	0%
San Francisco (1 city)	-10%	-10%	0.7	22%	4%	25%
San Joaquin (1 city)	-15%	-17%	10.7	-5%	0%	-7%
San Mateo (2 cities)	-18%	-18%	2.8	8%	20%	6%
Santa Barbara (1 city)	-13%	n.a.	10.3	-11%	-6%	-11%
Santa Clara (3 cities)	-12%	-20%	3.7	5%	3%	5%
Solano (2 cities)	-8%	-12%	5.6	-3%	-7%	-2%
Sonoma (1 city)	-6%	-11%	3.2	8%	2%	8%
Stanislaus (1 city)	-13%	-17%	29.4	5%	12%	4%
Tulare (1 city)	-16%	-18%	18.5	1%	21%	-1%
Ventura (4 cities)	-8%	-22%	7.6	7%	14%	6%

Source: BSCC (2016); CDCR (2016); FBI (2016); FPD (2016) OPD (2016). Note: Rates are calculated per 100,000 population. Data for all measures are the most recent as of this publication.