

Briefing Paper

San Francisco Youth, 2012: Our Least Violent Generation?

By

Mike Males, Ph.D., Senior Research Fellow

This briefing paper examines the most recent youth crime trends in San Francisco violent youth crime. The data were compiled from the California Department of Justice's Bureau of Criminal Statistics and the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department. CJCJ has examined San Francisco crime trends for the past twenty years and this report reflects the agency's most recent update.

The decline in violent crime by youth

Persistent commentary in the press and other forums continues to depict young people as ever-more violent and requiring additional control measures. Researchers have repeatedly failed to find evidence supporting these claims. In fact, both San Francisco law enforcement and state crime reports show the city's numbers and rates of violent crimes by youths have fallen to historic lows. There is no evidence to demonstrate a youth crime wave that demands stronger laws or tougher law enforcement. The data suggest the city's juvenile and criminal justice policies emphasizing decriminalization, deincarceration, targeted use of programs, and lighter policing strategies (especially toward status and other lesser offenses) have been successful with justice involved youth.

San Francisco's peak years for murders by youth were 1993 (34 arrests), 1981 (27), and 1977 (20) (CJSC, 2012). In contrast, there were 7 youths arrested for murder in 2009 and 3 in 2010; as of late 2012, just 2 city youths were being held for murder. Statewide, youth arrests for homicide fell by 26%, and all violent crimes dropped by 15%, from 2010 to 2011, reaching the lowest levels since reliable statistics were first kept in the mid-1960s (CJSC, 2012). San Francisco's statistics show a continued decline in youths' violent offenses through October 2012 (SFJPD, 2012).

Violent crime trends are less consistent due to the law changes that greatly expanded the definitions of assault and rape to include domestic abuse and other offenses not previously policed as much. However, even with expanded definitions, youths' rates of violence arrests are no higher today than 50 years ago, and well below 1990s' levels (see table on next page).

San Francisco's rates of juvenile homicide and violence stand at near-record lows

<u>Decade</u>	<u>Rate per 100,000 pop.</u>		<u>Average annual juvenile:</u>		<u>Population age 10-17</u>
	<u>Homicide</u>	<u>All violent crimes</u>	<u>Homicides</u>	<u>All Violent crimes</u>	
1960s	18.3	906.3	11	554	61,129
1970s	12.1	1,002.1	9	718	71,682
1980s	15.5	819.0	9	476	58,145
1990s	21.6	1,248.9	12	690	55,217
2000s	8.9	1,002.7	5	504	50,307
2010	6.9	902.4	3	392	43,442

Source: Criminal Justice Statistics Center (2012).

Figures from the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department (2012), though not directly comparable to those released by Criminal Justice Statistics Center, show a continued, steep drop in crime and violence by youths into late 2012. Overall, the number of youth held in local detention facilities on October 31, 2012 stands at a record low: 68 in 2012, compared to 84 in 2011, 80 in 2010, and 99 in 2009.

From 2010 to 2011, referrals to the city's juvenile justice system for violent offenses fell from 441 to 381, a decline of 14%, with all major offenses (murder, rape, robbery, and assault) showing declines. On October 31, 2012, the most recent date as of this writing, 20 youth were held in local detention facilities for violent offenses compared to 42 on the same date in 2011, 39 in 2010, and 51 in 2009.

Conclusion

As has always been the case, neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and high levels of violence remain. Further, there will continue to be isolated incidents involving youths (as for all ages) that generate selective outrage in the press and demand for harsher law enforcement measures. However, San Francisco's young people as a whole appear to be among the least delinquent, especially for violent offenses than any generation for which reliable statistics are available. Although it is not clear what caused these positive trends, they coincide with the city's more relaxed criminal justice approaches toward youth that appear to be effective and consistent with public safety (CJCJ, 2012).

References

CJCJ (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice) (2012). San Francisco Youth Crime at Record Low. At: http://www.cjcj.org/files/SF_Youth_Police_Commission_Factsheet.pdf

CJSC (Criminal Justice Statistics Center) (2012). Criminal Justice Profiles – 2010. Juvenile Justice in California, 2011. Sacramento: California Department of Justice. At: <http://oag.ca.gov/crime>

SFJPD (San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department) (2012). Monthly Report for October 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009. 2011 Statistical Report, and previous years. City and County of San Francisco. At: <http://sfgov3.org/index.aspx?page=549>

***Please note:** Each year, every county submits their data to the official statewide 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.*

For more information, please contact:

Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice
40 Boardman Place
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 621-5661
cjcjmedia@cjcj.org
www.cjcj.org

www.cjcj.org/blog
facebook.com/CJCJmedia
twitter.com/CJCJmedia

The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that offers policy analysis, program development, and technical assistance in the criminal justice field.