

# PROPERTY CRIME REACHED RECORD LOWS IN 2024 — BEFORE PROP 36 EVEN TOOK EFFECT



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Report

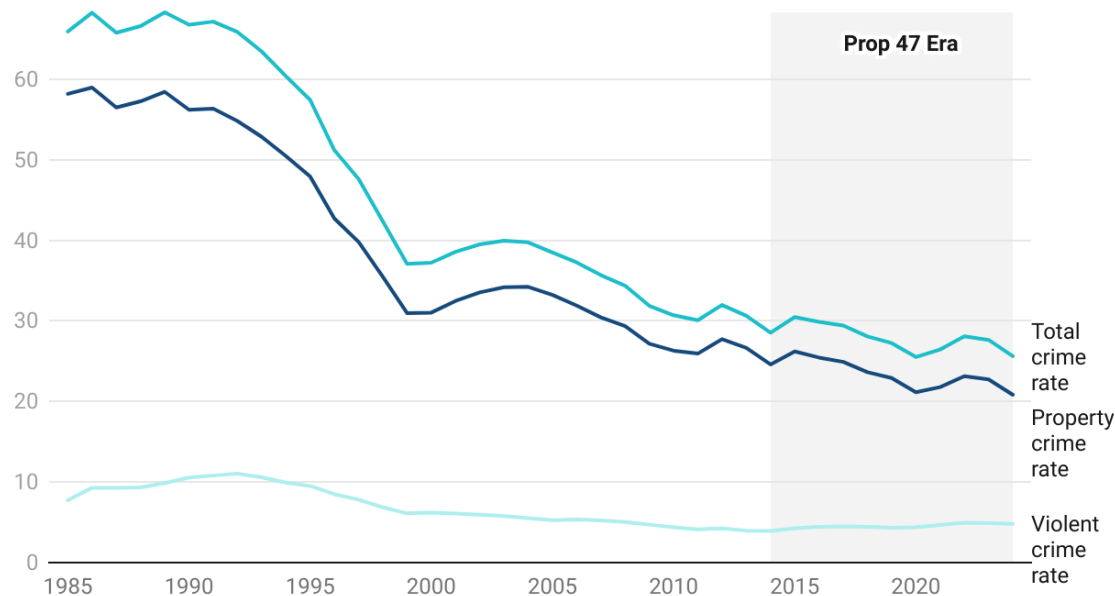
## Introduction

Just-released statistics from the California Department of Justice show property crime rates reached their lowest levels ever reliably recorded in 2024—before the anti-reform Proposition 36 ever took effect (DOF, 2025; DOJ, 2025).

A decade of crime trends through 2024 refute the widespread alarm driven by viral videos, sensational news reports, anecdotes, and quips that 2014's Proposition 47 reform increased property crimes. Property crime rates declined during much of the criminal justice reform era<sup>1</sup> to reach record-low levels last year. While these rates fluctuated during the COVID-19 shutdowns and reopenings, they improved in 2023 and 2024. California's larger public safety trends over the last half-century are even more encouraging and underscore the distortions present in today's crime debate. Both violent and property crime rates were much higher in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s when arrest and incarceration rates were at their peaks (see Figure 1).

In defiance of these facts, anti-reform advocates exploited the pandemic-related uptick in crime to advance punitive policies. Proposition 36, which increases penalties on certain low-level drug and property offenses, promised to lower crime. Yet, while supporters of the initiative campaigned on a purported crime surge, Californians were experiencing a year of record-low crime.

**Figure 1. Offenses per 1,000 population, California, 1985-2024**



*Violent crime rates were adjusted to account for an error in the Oakland Police Department's 2023 crime statistics.*

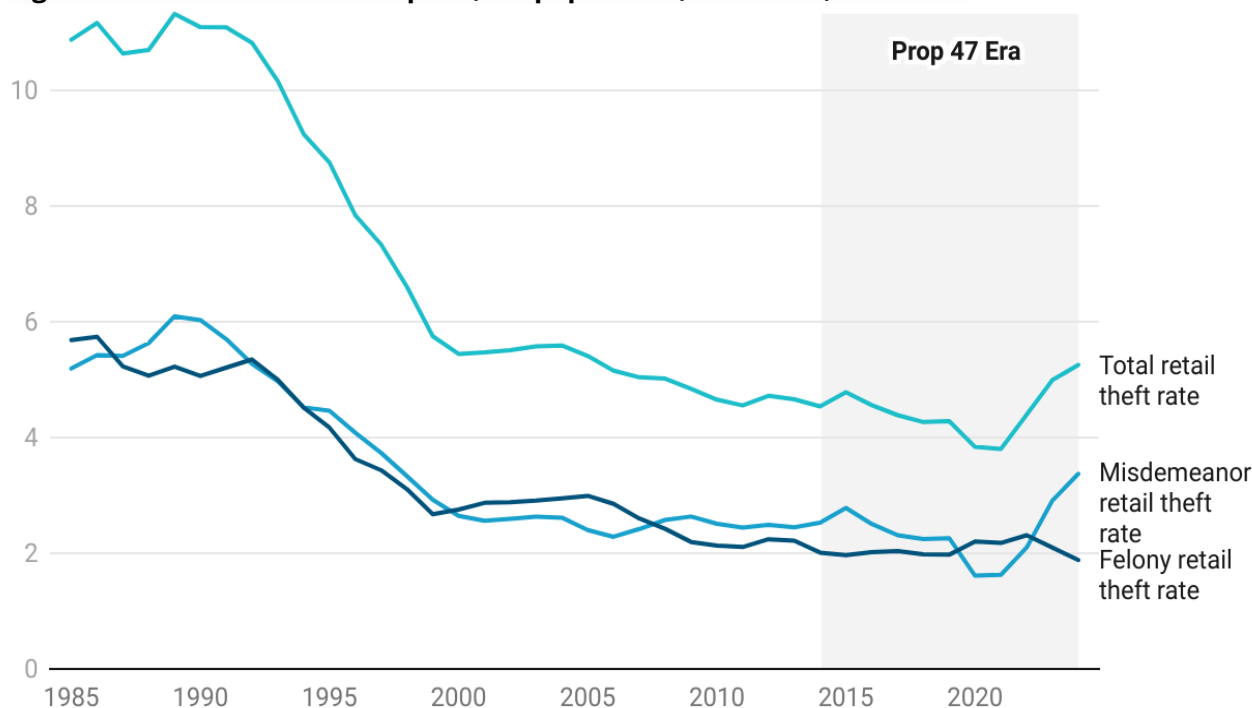
Source: DOF, 2025; DOJ 2025. • Created with Datawrapper

<sup>1</sup> California has adopted transformative criminal justice policies reforms to reduce prison overcrowding, reform sentencing, and expand community-based programs. These include Public Safety Realignment (2011), Proposition 47 (2014), and Proposition 57 (2016).

## Findings

- **Crime fell sharply in 2024, the last year before Prop 36 took effect.** Compared to 2023, 2024 showed declines for all reported Part I crimes (-7%), property crime (-8%), larceny/theft (-6%), and violent crime (-2%) (Figure 1).
- **Property crime rates are at their lowest levels ever recorded** in six decades of statewide crime reporting.
- **Today, even after COVID disruptions, California crimes of all types remain at or near record lows.** Violent crime and shoplifting increased during the COVID-19 pandemic after falling during the early part of the criminal justice reform period.
- **Retail theft rates increased in recent years after declining for much of California's criminal justice reform era.** As with other offenses, shoplifting and non-residential burglary peaked during California's high-incarceration period (1975-1990). These crime rates declined in the 1990s, 2000s, and during much of the criminal justice reform era (2010-2021), before increasing in the post-COVID years (2022-2024).<sup>2</sup> This recent increase may reflect an expansion in theft reporting rather than a genuine rise in crime. Felony retail theft (non-residential burglary), a consistently reliable measure of retail theft, fell in both 2023 and 2024. Moreover, a growing political spotlight on these offenses, bolstered by the Proposition 36 campaign, led public officials and independent groups to call for increased retail theft reporting and the creation of easy-to-use online reporting systems (Howland, 2024; LHC, 2024; OAG, 2025).

**Figure 2. Retail theft offenses per 1,000 population, California, 1985-2024**



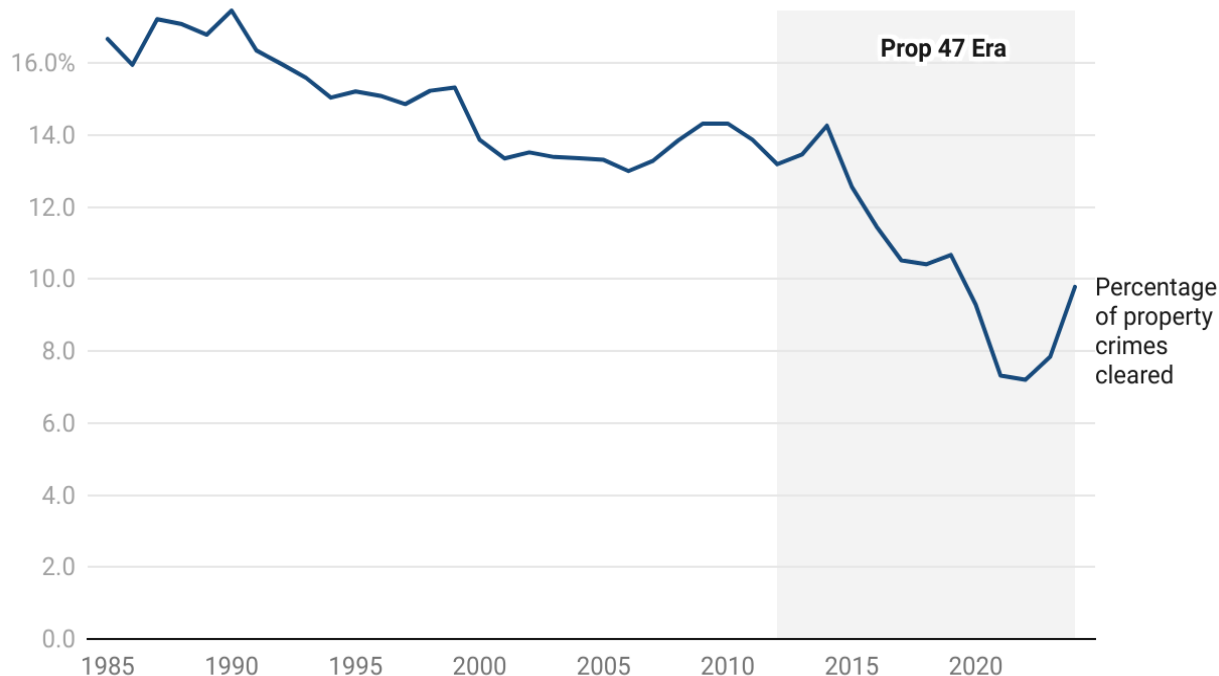
*Felony retail theft includes non-residential burglaries. Misdemeanor retail theft includes shoplifting offenses.*

Source: DOF, 2025; DOJ 2025. • Created with Datawrapper

<sup>2</sup> Shoplifting peaked in 1990 at 178,188 reported offenses before falling to 93,532 offenses in 2013 and 89,378 offenses in 2018. It rose again to 113,116 reported offenses in 2023 and 132,076 in 2024. Shoplifting is the only property crime to show an increase in 2024, with rates rising in most large counties, but falling in others. Non-residential burglary fell to its lowest level in at least half a century in 2024 (74,704), down from 84,669 in 2013 and a peak of 178,188 in 1990.

- **Property crime clearance rates plunged for much of the decade-long Prop 47 era**, with improvements in 2023 and 2024. Law enforcement solved (cleared) just 16% of all reported crimes in 2024, including less than 10% of property crimes.

**Figure 3. Property crimes solved (cleared) as a percentage of reported property offenses, California, 1985-2024**



Source: DOF, 2025; DOJ 2025. • Created with Datawrapper

## Conclusion

The Proposition 36 campaign attributed a temporary, pandemic-driven shift in crime to a 10-year-old law. Now we can see that crime rates have consistently fallen since the height of the pandemic, all before Proposition 36 took effect. Moreover, the investments in drug treatment promised by Proposition 36 have not materialized. After more than six months of Proposition 36 implementation, there has been no funding allocated to treatment services for those with repeat drug offenses.

With crime already on the decline and reaching historic lows, Proposition 36 has done little more than throw courts into chaos, cost the state and counties millions, and undermine the effective crime prevention programs being funded through Proposition 47 (CJCJ, 2024).

## References

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