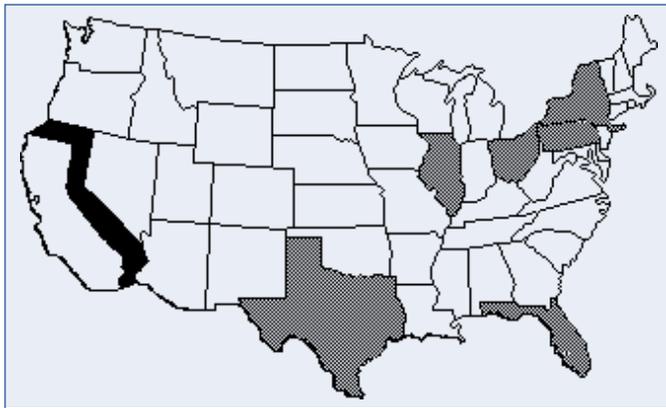


# CRIME IN CALIFORNIA AND THE UNITED STATES, 1988-1998



*A COMPARISON OF CRIME IN CALIFORNIA TO  
CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES LESS CALIFORNIA,  
AND CRIME IN THE SIX OTHER STATES WITH  
POPULATIONS OVER 10 MILLION*



Bill Lockyer, Attorney General  
California Department of Justice  
Division of Criminal Justice Information Services  
Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATISTICS CENTER, June 2000

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Men have been barbarians much longer than they have been civilized.  
They are only precariously civilized, and within us there is the  
propensity, persistent as the force of gravity, to revert  
under stress and strain, under neglect or  
temptation, to our worst natures.

Walter Lippmann  
(1889-1974)

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The role of the **CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATISTICS CENTER** is to:

- Collect, analyze, and report statistical data which provide valid measures of crime and the criminal justice process.
- Examine these data on an ongoing basis to better describe crime and the criminal justice system.
- Promote the responsible presentation and use of crime statistics.

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## PREFACE

Intended to be both informative and readable for the general audience, this report presents crime data for California from 1988 to 1998 and compares these data against crime data for the United States less California, and crime data for the six other states with populations over 10 million.

Why these comparisons? Trend data provide a more accurate picture of change. For example, reported crime may have increased from a prior year. Does this mean that crime is “up”? Possibly, however, a ten-year data comparison may reveal that California has experienced a *decrease* in reported crime. Longer trends may portray a different story yet.

A further comparison of California’s crime data with data for the United States (minus California’s crime counts) allows us to place California’s experience in a more informative context. Are California’s data unique? Or, do California’s data follow the same trends as the rest of the nation? If unique, what factors separate California from the rest of the nation?

This report also compares California’s crime data against data for other states with large populations. In 1988 (this report’s base year), California’s population exceeded New York’s (the next largest state in population) by 58.7 percent. In 1998 (the most current year for which national data are available), California’s population exceeded Texas’ (the next largest state in population) by 65.3 percent. Because population size alone does not determine crime amount, the reader is cautioned against making direct correlations.

Finally, only continued quantitative crime trend analysis and detailed scientific research will allow us to accurately assess the success of policymakers’ efforts to reduce crime in a state whose population continues to grow at an unprecedented rate.

Adele Spears  
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## SUMMARY

### HOW WE FARED

- As measured by the California Crime Index (CCI), California's crime rate decreased 35.3 percent from 1988 to 1998. The rest of the nation experienced a 24.1 percent decrease in the CCI rate; the six most populous states\* category experienced a 33.3 percent decrease in the CCI rate.
- While California experienced the largest decrease in the CCI rate (down 35.3 percent) from 1988 to 1998, the state experienced the largest increase in population when compared to the rest of the nation and the six most populous states\* category (up 14.8 percent vs. 10.0 percent and 8.8 percent, respectively).
- California's violent crime rate decreased 23.5 percent from 1988 to 1998. The rest of the nation experienced a 9.3 percent decrease in rate for violent crime; the six most populous states\* category experienced a 19.0 percent decrease in rate for violent crime.
- As measured by the CCI, California's property crime rate decreased 39.9 percent from 1988 to 1998. The rest of the nation experienced a 29.0 percent decrease in rate for property crime; the six most populous states\* category experienced a 38.4 percent decrease in rate for property crime.
- When compared to the rest of the nation and to the six most populous states\* category, California exhibited greater decreases in rates per 100,000 population from 1988 to 1998 for forcible rape, aggravated assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft.
- Of the six CCI offenses, burglary exhibited the largest decline in rate per 100,000 population from 1988 to 1998 (down 42.5 percent for California, 33.3 percent for the rest of the nation, and 41.6 percent for the six most populous states\* category).
- Throughout the 1988 to 1998 period, California's homicide, aggravated assault, and motor vehicle theft crime rates exceeded the rates for both the rest of the nation and the six most populous states\* category.
- In 1998, California's forcible rape and burglary crime rates were below both the rates for the rest of the nation and the rates for the six most populous states\* category.

### HOW CALIFORNIA RANKED

- In 1998, California ranked 20th in homicide rate, 34th in forcible rape rate, seventh in robbery rate, 11th in aggravated assault rate, 25th in burglary rate, and seventh in motor vehicle theft rate when compared to the rest of the nation.
- In 1998, California ranked third in homicide rate, fifth in forcible rape rate, fourth in robbery rate, third in aggravated assault rate, fourth in burglary rate, and second in motor vehicle theft rate when compared to the six other states with populations over 10 million.

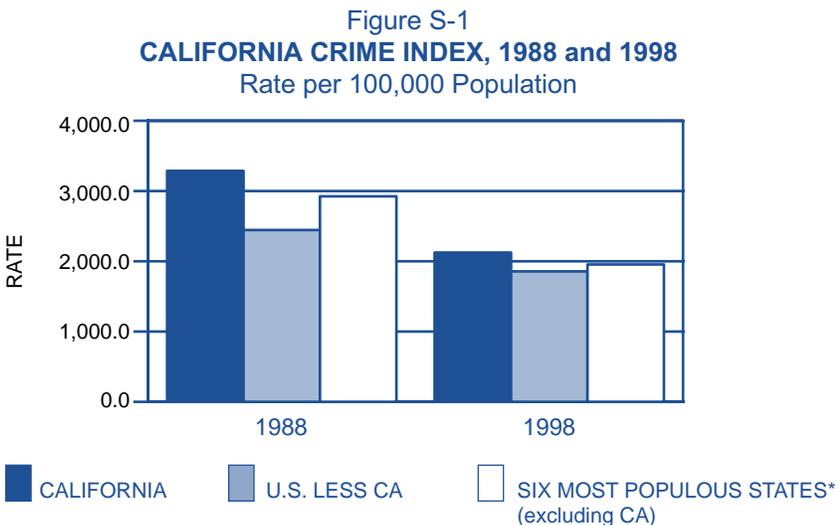
- Nationwide, California's crime rate rankings fell from 1988 to 1998 for all six CCI offenses. California's forcible rape ranking exhibited the largest drop (from rank 12 in 1988 to rank 34 in 1998).
- California's crime rate rankings among the six other states with populations over 10 million fell from 1988 to 1998 for forcible rape, aggravated assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft; rose for homicide; and experienced no change for robbery.

### HOW OTHER STATES RANKED

- In 1998, the District of Columbia ranked first in homicide, robbery, aggravated assault, and motor vehicle theft. Forcible rape and burglary were the only two crimes for which other states' rates exceeded the District of Columbia's. Alaska ranked first in forcible rape; New Mexico ranked first in burglary.
- In 1998, among the six most populous states,\* Florida ranked first in forcible rape, aggravated assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft; Illinois ranked first in homicide; New York ranked first in robbery.

### CONCLUSION

- Figure S-1 shows that California's 1988 CCI rate was above the CCI rates for the other two categories shown. By 1998, however, the differences between California's CCI rate and the rates for the other two categories had narrowed considerably. Additional figures and tables within the text show individual offense rates for California often decreasing faster than rates for the rest of the nation. And, interestingly, when California was ranked amongst the nation, it often emerged well below other states.



Sources: [Tables 32 and 42.](#)

\*States with populations over 10 million (excluding California). These states are: Florida, Illinois, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

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