

Policy Brief

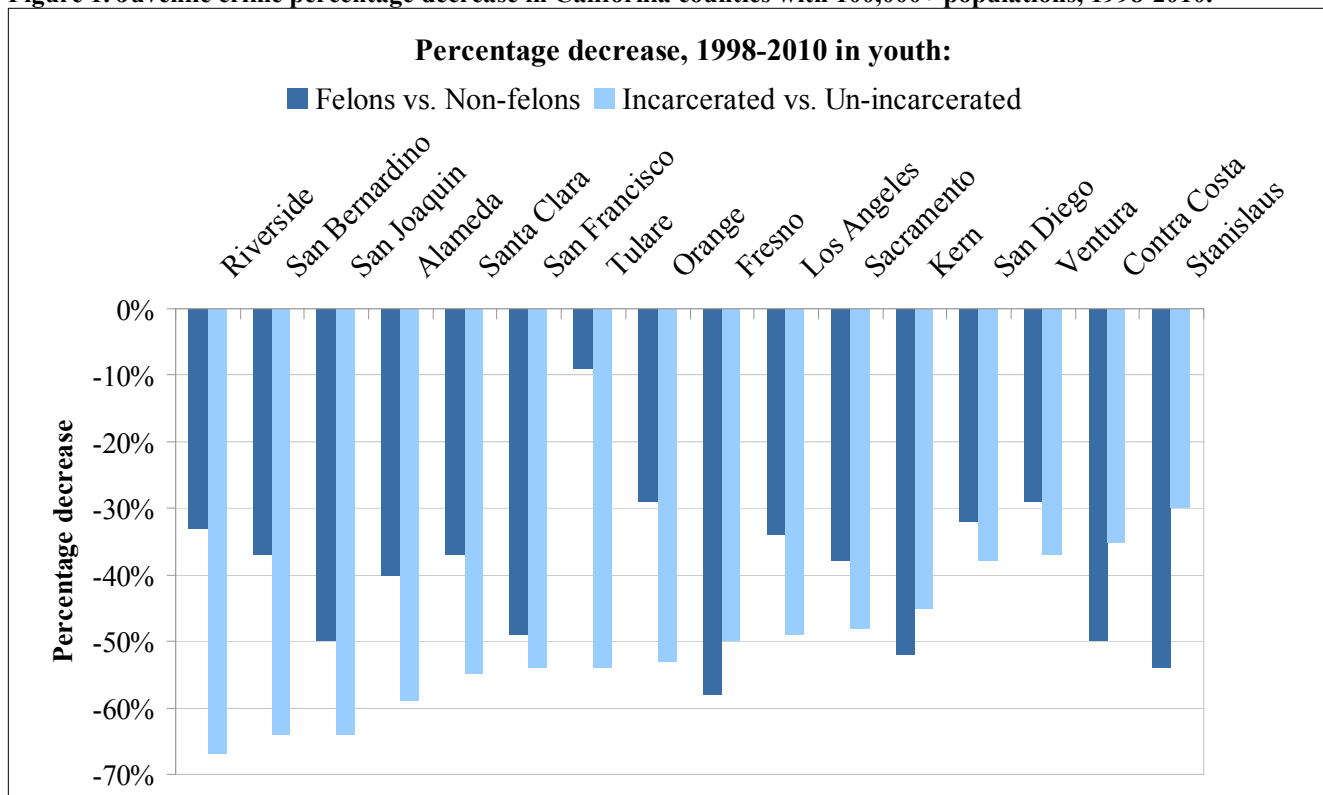
**California’s startling trends:
Does more “youth on the streets” mean more crime?**

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In 1998, California had 19,000 youths confined to youth correctional facilities or county managed juvenile halls, ranches, and camps; in 2010, just 10,500. During that same period, California’s adolescent youth population age 10-17 grew by 380,000. By every crime theory, the presence of nearly 400,000 more youths on the streets, including 8,000 adolescent felons who would have been confined a decade prior, should have led to a mammoth juvenile crime wave.

Instead, California’s juvenile crime rate plunged as never before, from 76,100 felony arrests in 1998 to 52,000 in 2010; the lowest rate of serious crime among youths since statewide statistics were first collected in 1954. The figure below demonstrates juvenile crime plunged in every major county in California between 1998 and 2010.

Figure 1. Juvenile crime percentage decrease in California counties with 100,000+ populations, 1998-2010.



Source: Census Bureau (2011); CSA (2011); CJSC (2011); DJF (2011).

For example, in 2010, the proportion of Los Angeles County youths who were incarcerated versus the proportion who were not incarcerated was nearly 50% lower than it was in 1998 (see Figure 1). Likewise, in 2010, the proportion of Los Angeles County youths who were arrested for felonies compared to the proportion who were not arrested for felonies was 34% lower than in 1998. In raw numbers, Los Angeles had nearly 40,000 more youth in the public domain, including 2,900 youth felons who historically would have been confined, than in 1998. Yet, the city's juvenile felony totals dropped by 6,400 arrests over the period. Alameda County had 2,400 more youths on the streets, including nearly 500 more youth felons, in 2010 than in 1998, yet felony totals dropped by 1,300 arrests.

Less youth incarceration and more youth in the public domain can accompany lower crime rates (Macallair & Males, 2010). Why? One clue we found in our study of curfews is that, contrary to urban myths, more youths in public places contributes to lower crime rates (Males, 2000). In future reports, we will continue to explore the many misapprehensions about young people and the small fraction who commit serious crimes.

These startling youth trends have implications for continued dismantling of the state Division of Juvenile Facilities as well as the current transfer of California adult inmates to local jails under Assembly Bill 109. Some predict another crime wave, but if adults follow youth patterns, the opposite could be the case. While a certain level of imprisonment is necessary to incapacitate criminals who pose serious public safety threats, imprisonment of lower-level offenders can reinforce criminal associations and tendencies, producing high rates of offending after release (Latessa, Lovins, & Smith, 2010; PEW, 2011, p.3). Managing low level offenders as probationers in local, community-based programs where they can maintain associations with family and non-criminal influences, and connect with treatment and employment services, reduces the risk of future offending. Understanding exactly what factors led to California's surprising plunge in youth offending accompanying massive youth de-incarceration is essential to encouraging a similar decline in adult crime in conjunction with realignment.

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Appendix

Table 1. California juvenile crime statistics for counties with 100,000+ population, 1998-2010.

County, ranked by change in <u>de-incarceration</u>	Change, 1998-2010 in youth:		Juvenile felons per 1,000 age 10-17		Incarcerated youth per 1,000 age 10-17	
	Felons vs. <u>Non-felons</u>	Incarcerated vs. <u>Un-incarcerated</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>1998</u>
Riverside	-33%	-67%	9.6	14.3	1.4	4.3
San Bernardino	-37%	-64%	12.3	19.2	1.3	3.8
San Joaquin	-50%	-64%	15.4	30.6	2.1	5.6
Alameda	-40%	-59%	14.2	23.3	2.3	5.5
Santa Clara	-37%	-55%	13.1	20.8	2.2	4.9
San Francisco	-49%	-54%	18.4	35.8	2.2	4.8
Tulare	-9%	-54%	14.9	16.3	3.0	6.6
Orange	-29%	-53%	10.6	14.8	1.9	3.9
Fresno	-58%	-50%	11.0	26.1	3.8	7.6
Los Angeles	-34%	-49%	12.5	18.7	2.8	5.5
Sacramento	-38%	-48%	11.9	19.2	2.3	4.4
Kern	-52%	-45%	13.2	27.2	3.9	7.0
San Diego	-32%	-38%	12.9	18.8	2.6	4.2
Ventura	-29%	-37%	10.0	13.9	2.0	3.1
42 others	-37%	-36%	12.5	19.5	2.8	4.3
Contra Costa	-50%	-35%	9.8	19.4	2.6	4.1
<u>Stanislaus</u>	<u>-54%</u>	<u>-30%</u>	<u>13.2</u>	<u>28.5</u>	<u>2.5</u>	<u>3.6</u>
Statewide	-38%	-49%	12.2	19.5	2.5	4.8

Source: Census Bureau (2011); CSA (2011); CJSC (2011); DJF (2011).

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, CJCJ cannot be responsible for data reporting errors made at the county level.

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