CALIFORNIA'S 58 CRIME RATES: REALIGNMENT AND CRIME IN 2012

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Introduction

California must reduce its prison population to 137.5 percent of rated capacity (approximately 110,000 individuals), due to a court-ordered mandate. One measure to achieve an institutional population reduction was the adoption of Public Safety Realignment, under Assembly Bill (AB) 109, in October 2011, whereby counties assumed responsibility for individuals convicted of low-level, nonviolent, non-sexual offenses who might have previously been sent to state prison. Counties also are responsible for managing said individuals who are released from prison on Post Release Community Supervision (PRCS).

California's crime rate increased slightly in 2012. Previous CJCJ analysis found no correlation between the crime rate increase and Realignment (CJCJ, 2013a), and the purpose of this publication is to analyze newly available data for 2012. This report further addresses recent research by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC, 2013) that concluded Realignment was associated with an increase in property offenses, particularly motor vehicle theft, but not violent offenses in the first year of the policy.

The present analysis finds California's 58 counties vary dramatically in their implementation of Realignment and in their respective crime rates. There are no conclusive trends demonstrating a causal relationship between Realignment and crime, even among counties in close geographic proximity. Additionally, there may be non-Realignment factors that inform an increase in certain crimes. Given this varied implementation, some counties continue as models for innovative policies worthy of recognition and replication.

Method

Evaluating Realignment in California requires assessing five felony populations:

For state-supervised individuals, this includes those managed through

(1) Imprisonment in a state facility ("Prison"), and
(2) State parole after imprisonment ("Parole").

For locally managed or realigned individuals, this includes those supervised through

(3) Release from state prison to local probation departments under Realignment's Post Release Community Supervision mandates ("PRCS"),
(4) Detention at the local level due to Realignment mandates instead of being sentenced to state prison ("Realigned Population"), and
(5) Supervision at the local level under ongoing practices ("Residual Population").

2012 data for (1) new admissions to state prisons and (2) parolees supervised by state parole officers are available from annual reports by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR, 2013, 2013a). The Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC) makes available 2012 data on (3) those state parolees released to PRCS (CPOC, 2013). However, the authors must estimate (4) the number of realigned individuals who would have been previously sent to state prison, and (5) the residual individuals who would have been handled locally regardless of Realignment.

The methodology for (4) projects 2012 prison admissions in the absence of Realignment based on 2010 county practices.[1] The method then compares the projected 2012 baseline to actual prison admissions in 2012 to calculate the Realigned Population. The formula used to calculate the "Realigned Population" by county is thus:

$$2012\,Adult\,Felony\,Arrests * \left(\frac{2010\,\mathrm{Pr}ison\,Admissions}{2010\,Felony\,Arrests} \right) - 2012\,Actual\,\mathrm{Pr}ison\,Admissions$$

Finally, to estimate (5) the Residual Population, (1) the numbers sent to state prison and (4) the Realigned Population were subtracted from each county's adult felony arrest totals for 2012.

A total criminal justice population for each county was estimated as the sum of (2) those on state parole, (3) those paroled by the state to county probation (PRCS), and the total adult felony arrests in 2012. It should be noted that, while the numbers are bounded by the calendar years, the categories do not contain exactly the same individuals. Some imprisoned or paroled in 2010 and 2012 would have been arrested in earlier years, offset by those who were arrested or rearrested in prior and sentenced in later years. Percentages of state-supervised versus locally managed individuals were calculated using the total criminal justice population and categories (1) through (5), and these percentages were then compared to changes in crime rates.

County crime rates were calculated as reported Part I violent and property crimes, for 2010 and 2012, per 100,000 county population. Specifically, this consists of reported Part I violent (aggravated assault, murder, rape, and robbery) and property offenses (arson, burglary, larceny/theft, and motor vehicle theft) reported to the Criminal Justice Statistics Center (CJSC, 2013)[2]. Population figures for these two years were provided by the Demographic Research Unit (DRU, 2013).

Results

The data and subsequent analysis offer a complicated picture of Realignment. If Realignment caused more crime, we would first expect to see counties with the highest proportions of realigned individuals (high realignment counties) experiencing the largest increases in crime from 2010 to 2012. However, this issue involves several major complications.

1. *Nearly all counties had substantial decreases in prison admissions but crime trends varied erratically.*

While all California counties were subject to the same Realignment mandates, and all but three (Del Norte, Sierra, and Trinity, all smaller counties) experienced large declines in state imprisonments, their crime trends were extremely erratic—even for larger, presumably stable counties. Trends in overall Part I

[1] The year 2011 is excluded as a transitional year containing months both before and after Realignment implementation.
[2] This report uses the Federal Bureau of Investigation's definition of Part I crimes, which includes arson within the property crime category.

crime rates in counties with 100,000 or more population ranged from a 24% increase in Madera County to a 14% decrease in Placer County. Violent crime trends were even more variable, ranging from a 46% increase in Kings County to 26% declines in Humboldt and Napa counties. Overall, there does not appear to be a causal connection between Realignment and crime trends generally.

2. *Los Angeles County bucks the trend and skews state averages.*

Populous Los Angeles County's singularly striking improvements in reduced crime rates from 2010 to 2012 strongly affected statewide trends. The county, population 9.9 million in 2012 (DRU, 2013), has a higher than average proportion of realigned individuals and experienced substantial decreases in nearly all forms of crime. It now has a crime rate substantially below the state average. If Los Angeles were properly grouped with the high-realignment counties, it would make trends for high-realignment counties appear exceptionally favorable. Only four other counties (Placer, Sacramento, San Mateo, and Tulare) experienced similar, across-the-board crime reductions, and their relatively smaller populations render them far less likely to affect larger trends. Thus, results for Los Angeles County and for statewide results both with and without Los Angeles are presented separately.

3. *High realignment and low realignment counties showed no difference in violent crime and motor vehicle theft trends, but did show differences in other property crime and homicide trends.*

Of the state's 58 counties, 24 counties with an aggregate population of 11.8 million in 2012 had higher than average proportions of realigned individuals (15.3%) than the state average (11.6%, without Los Angeles), while 33 counties with an aggregate population of 16.1 million had lower than average proportions (8.7%) (See Appendix for full list of counties).

Table 1. Counties ranked by realigned offenders as a proportion of total offenders, changes in crime rates

	Locally managed		State	Change in crime rates, 2012 vs. 2010				
County category	Realigned	Residual	managed	Total	Violent	Property	Homicide	MV theft
High realignment	15.3%	72.1%	12.7%	10%	2%	11%	-7%	18%
Low realignment	8.7%	81.3%	10.0%	7%	2%	7%	17%	17%
Los Angeles	13.4%	73.1%	13.5%	-2%	-11%	0%	-3%	-7%
Statewide minus LA	11.6%	77.1%	11.3%	8%	2%	9%	7%	17%
Statewide	12.1%	76.1%	11.9%	6%	-2%	7%	4%	11%

Sources: CJSC (2013), CDCR (2013, 2013a), CPOC (2013).

High realignment counties experienced an average increase in crime rates of 10% from 2010 to 2012, compared to 7% for counties with lower rates of realignment. There was no difference in violent crime trends, but a substantial difference in property crime trends (up 11% in high realignment counties, versus 7% in low realignment counties). There was also an unusual increase in homicides among low realignment counties, which will be separately analyzed in another CJCJ report.[3]

The PPIC 2013 report analyzing crime trends in California assumes a causal connection between the statewide increase in motor vehicle theft during the first nine months of 2012 and implementation of Realignment during the same period. This association initially may appear plausible, since motor vehicle thefts had not risen previously in California since the early 1990s and did not rise to a similar extent in most other Western states, but it remains simply an association, not a proven cause. Our analysis shows the difference in motor vehicle theft trends was small between high and low realignment counties, suggesting there is not a causal relationship between realignment and motor vehicle theft.

[3] It should be noted that homicide trends involve low incident events and thus are more likely to show erratic patterns.

As an alternative, counties were also ranked by changes in crime rates. The results were similar to those shown in Table 1 and are not shown separately here. Counties with larger increases in crime tended to have slightly higher proportions of both realigned and state-managed individuals and correspondingly lower rates of locally managed residual persons than did counties with lesser increases in crime. Again, Los Angeles proved an exception to this pattern, as did the offense of homicide.

4. *Counties that are still using state prison more are also serving a larger realigned population.*

While there were few discernible trends regarding the realigned population and crime, there was a pattern between current use of state prison and experience under Realignment. High realignment counties also had higher than average proportions of state-managed individuals; in fact, the biggest difference between the two categories is in their proportions of locally managed residual persons whose statuses were not affected by Realignment.

Table 2 rearranges the county categories into 37 "self reliant counties" (those that have lower proportions of individuals in state prisons or under state parole supervision than the state average) versus 20 "state-dependent" counties (those having higher than average dependence on state prison and parole). Los Angeles, a state-dependent county, again is separated from the statewide average; its results are shown in Table 1.

Table 2. Counties ranked by state-managed offenders as a proportion of total offenders, changes in crime rates

	Locally managed		State	Change in crime rates, 2012 vs. 2010				
County category	Realigned	Residual	managed	Total	Violent	Property	Homicide	MV theft
Self reliant	10.2%	81.0%	8.9%	5%	-1%	6%	9%	7%
State-dependent	13.1%	73.4%	13.5%	11%	4%	12%	6%	26%
Statewide minus LA	11.4%	77.4%	11.3%	8%	2%	9%	7%	17%
Statewide	11.9%	76.2%	11.9%	4%	-3%	5%	2%	9%

Sources: CJSC (2013), CDCR (2013, 2013a), CPOC (2013).

The self-reliant counties utilized state prisons and parole to manage just 8.9% of their population, compared to 13.5% for the state-dependent counties. Self-reliant counties had generally better experiences in terms of smaller increases in overall crime (up 5% from 2010 to 2012, compared to up 11% in the state-dependent counties, as well as a decrease in violent crime and a smaller increase in property crimes compared to state dependent counties. Only for homicide did self-reliant counties show a worse trend, and the difference was small.

However, there is considerable overlap between county use of state prison and realignment experience; 13 of the 20 state-dependent counties are also high-realignment counties, reflecting the fact that these counties had higher numbers of state prisoners available to realign.

5. *Cross-referencing state prison use and Realignment experience by county does not reveal significant differences in crime trends.*

Data was analyzed to examine the correlation between use of state prison and the Realignment impact on crime trends. Table 3 divides counties into four categories: high versus low proportions of realigned individuals crossed with high versus low levels of state-dependence.

Table 3. Counties ranked by state-dependence crossed with realigned offenders as a proportion of total offenders, changes in crime rates

Realigned/	Locally managed		State	Change in crime rates, 2012 vs. 2010				
State-dependent	Realigned	Residual	managed	Total	Violent	Property	Homicide	MV theft
High/high	15.6%	70.9%	13.5%	11%	1%	12%	-9%	21%
Low/High	8.5%	78.9%	12.7%	10%	8%	11%	21%	31%
High/Low	13.0%	78.0%	9.0%	3%	2%	3%	3%	6%
Low/low	8.6%	82.9%	8.5%	4%	-2%	5%	16%	6%

Sources: CJSC (2013), CDCR (2013, 2013a), CPOC (2013).

Here something of a pattern emerges. The self-reliant counties—those with low levels of state management—experienced more favorable overall and property crime trends compared to state-dependent counties. However, the pattern for violent crime trends was mixed. Homicide trends were more favorable in the counties with higher proportions of realigned individuals regardless of level of self-reliance, while motor vehicle theft trends were more favorable in the self-reliant counties regardless of level of realignment. That even neighboring counties show large variances in crime trends, particularly for motor vehicle theft, indicates factors other than Realignment are at work. The erratic county-specific trends make it difficult to draw strong conclusions regarding a causal relationship between Realignment and crime.

That non-Realignment factors may be responsible for the increase in certain crimes in many areas of California, from 2010 to 2012, is previously noted by PPIC (PPIC, 2013). Their report finds that some non-Realignment factors that could influence this process including demographic shifts, economic conditions, and law enforcement personnel. The impact of these factors should be the subject of further analysis.

Ultimately, the data show 58 unique county experiences with varying crime trends that cannot be linked definitively to Realignment, but can provide models for future study of criminal justice management approaches. For example, Tulare, San Benito, and Siskiyou counties represent diverse jurisdictions that are self-reliant and had higher than average proportions of realigned individuals—and decreases in most types of crime from 2010 to 2012. In addition, Amador, Solano, and Stanislaus counties are also self-reliant and have larger than average realigned populations along with generally lower than average increases in crime in 2012. These stand in sharp contrast to counties like Merced, Alameda, and Santa Clara counties, which have lower than average proportions of realigned individuals and higher than average state dependency, and generally experienced larger than average crime increases in 2012. As a special case, Los Angeles County's continuing decline in crime is worthy of further examination to determine if model practices exist for statewide replication.

Conclusion

Recent analysis by PPIC concludes that Realignment is responsible for an increase in California's property crime rates, yet unrelated to increases in very serious violent crime (e.g. murder and rape). However, the PPIC report acknowledges some complications that challenge these findings. Their analysis finds that violent crime declined in Los Angeles County, while Fresno County experienced drops in both violent and property offenses. Moreover, property crimes substantially increased in Alameda County despite a small drop in the prison population and a low realigned population. Here they recognize the impact of non-realignment crime-related factors (PPIC, 2013).

The lack of a clear pattern —in fact, it is hard to imagine a pattern that is more ambivalent and complicated—indicates the perils of drawing hard conclusions about a single, albeit important, public policy change such as Realignment based on short-term crime trends. If Realignment brought more crime, counties with higher proportions of realigned individuals would have experienced larger increases in crime in 2012, after Realignment's implementation. Moreover, this hypothesis would mean that systems with greater local management, as opposed to reliance on the state system, would have greater increases in crime. The data do not support either conclusion; in fact, self-reliant counties seemed to have somewhat more favorable crime trends. In addition, violent crime trends do not seem to be affected by level of Realignment or by degree of local versus state management.

At this time, there does not appear to be one particular county management strategy that is better suited for mitigating crime rates. Rather than attempting to draw conclusions from mass trends, the most useful information is that a myriad of different county responses to systems management and Realignment are associated with distinctly different results, though whether these management systems or some other factors produced these differing results is another question. Still, the sharp diversity among counties, including major counties, in crime trends under relatively similar Realignment circumstances suggests that the several successful counties—ones that manage increasing numbers and higher proportions of individuals locally without sharply increasing crime rates—are models for ones having more difficulties.

Meanwhile, full 2012 data reveal a stable violent crime rate and a slight increase in property crime—trends that merit ongoing analysis as additional data becomes available. The large variations in crime trends, prison use, and Realignment by county indicate more nuanced local reforms to criminal justice practices will be necessary to promote further public safety improvements. In the interim, policymakers should be cautious of adopting statewide policies that modify elements of Realignment based on narrow and anecdotal evidence from just one or a handful of counties. For example, Assemblymember V. Manuel Pérez introduced Assembly Bill 1449, on January 7, 2014, which seeks to return individuals to state prison who under Realignment would be managed locally. AB 1449 would fundamentally change Realignment despite the lack of a clear pattern on how, if at all, it has impacted county crime rates.

Given this analysis, policymakers should develop state resources to expand research capacity and leadership on tracking the impact of Realignment. The Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) is the appropriate state agency for this purpose. It has recently hired a research team to assess local criminal justice programs and their implementation of Realignment (BSCC, 2014). This is a positive step that allows counties to understand the unique nature of their criminal justice system and how they can establish policies to effectively serve their populations.

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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.

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Appendix. Counties ranked by proportion of realigned offenders and crime changes

Ranked by realignment	Percentage of total felon population			Change in crime rates, 2012 vs. 2010:				
	Locally managed		State					
	Realigned	Residual	managed	Total	Violent	Property	Homicide	MV theft
Kings	33.4%	46.2%	20.4%	21.8%	45.8%	17.7%	35.1%	-5.5%
Alpine	28.6%	67.2%	4.2%	-38.4%	-15.9%	-41.3%	n.a	31.4%
Shasta	23.2%	63.9%	12.9%	20.8%	-11.4%	30.6%	131.9%	111.2%
Butte	21.9%	63.5%	14.5%	-6.4%	-10.7%	-5.7%	56.4%	2.4%
Sutter	17.0%	71.5%	11.5%	8.6%	-13.3%	12.0%	-2.1%	24.2%
San Bernardino	16.8%	69.7%	13.5%	10.6%	-1.1%	12.7%	-3.1%	31.8%
Santa Barbara	16.4%	71.7%	11.9%	11.4%	-11.2%	16.2%	-45.7%	33.5%
Kern	15.8%	72.9%	11.3%	9.9%	0.2%	11.7%	-13.7%	17.7%
Lassen	15.6%	75.8%	8.6%	12.3%	17.8%	11.3%	5.3%	-6.7%
Riverside	15.0%	69.8%	15.2%	11.3%	3.1%	12.4%	-14.9%	8.8%
Solano	14.9%	76.9%	8.2%	3.6%	-3.3%	4.9%	-16.4%	12.3%
Humboldt	14.7%	77.7%	7.6%	7.6%	-26.5%	11.9%	-66.7%	17.9%
Tehama	14.4%	73.4%	12.2%	-5.3%	-3.8%	-5.6%	200.7%	14.6%
San Benito	13.9%	75.3%	10.7%	-17.6%	-0.8%	-20.4%	-2.6%	-23.3%
Yolo	13.8%	72.3%	13.9%	-0.1%	6.6%	-0.6%	-100.0%	-3.3%
Amador	13.5%	75.9%	10.6%	1.1%	22.7%	-1.6%	-100.0%	-12.2%
Yuba	13.3%	72.1%	14.7%	16.9%	12.7%	17.7%	196.6%	-6.7%
Madera	12.6%	74.2%	13.2%	24.4%	42.8%	21.2%	-80.0%	9.8%
Orange	12.5%	75.1%	12.4%	7.7%	-3.5%	9.1%	-25.3%	14.9%
Mariposa	12.4%	81.7%	5.9%	15.2%	90.2%	6.4%	n.a	28.2%
Tulare	12.3%	77.6%	10.1%	-4.2%	-0.9%	-4.5%	-7.7%	-17.3%
Siskiyou	12.2%	79.0%	8.7%	-8.3%	-25.4%	-5.4%	394.7%	1.7%
Stanislaus	12.1%	79.1%	8.7%	3.9%	6.0%	3.8%	29.0%	11.9%
San Luis Obispo	11.7%	71.5%	16.8%	3.7%	25.8%	1.3%	-0.4%	30.9%
High realignment	15.3%	72.1%	12.7%	10%	2%	11%	-7%	18%
Statewide	12.1%	76.1%	11.9%	6%	-2%	7%	4%	11%
Statewide-LA	11.6%	77.1%	11.3%	8%	2%	9%	7%	17%
Lake	11.4%	78.3%	10.3%	7.7%	29.2%	4.6%	-24.8%	9.6%
Fresno	11.3%	79.8%	8.9%	3.7%	0.8%	4.2%	18.5%	-3.3%
San Diego	11.0%	77.8%	11.2%	0.7%	0.1%	0.9%	57.1%	-4.9%
Santa Clara	10.7%	77.7%	11.7%	14.3%	3.3%	15.7%	115.1%	50.9%
Monterey	10.5%	74.4%	15.1%	-3.8%	-9.5%	-2.3%	1.0%	27.1%
Placer	10.4%	83.3%	6.3%	-14.2%	-15.8%	-14.0%	-2.8%	-5.0%
Plumas	10.1%	83.0%	6.9%	17.0%	0.8%	21.8%	n.a	-13.3%
Colusa	10.0%	82.2%	7.8%	8.9%	-4.1%	10.1%	n.a	2.0%
Napa	9.7%	82.7%	7.6%	-4.6%	-26.2%	0.4%	-0.9%	41.6%
Inyo	9.6%	86.1%	4.3%	24.6%	17.9%	26.4%	n.a	-46.1%
San Mateo	9.6%	81.1%	9.4%	-6.9%	-3.9%	-7.1%	-51.1%	-18.9%
Sacramento	9.4%	76.9%	13.7%	-5.9%	-7.2%	-5.6%	-4.7%	-1.0%
Glenn	8.5%	81.8%	9.7%	19.0%	6.9%	20.6%	-100.0%	15.9%
Ventura	8.1%	83.6%	8.2%	-2.0%	-5.8%	-1.5%	15.5%	23.4%
San Joaquin	7.9%	77.5%	14.6%	3.1%	11.3%	1.8%	38.9%	30.0%
El Dorado	7.5%	83.3%	9.3%	2.8%	-9.4%	5.0%	-1.0%	18.9%
Imperial	7.3%	87.3%	5.3%	4.7%	-20.4%	7.4%	-1.6%	-8.0%

Sonoma	7.2%	85.3%	7.4%	-4.6%	-5.3%	-4.3%	-33.9%	7.1%
Merced	6.8%	81.8%	11.4%	20.4%	24.1%	20.1%	-13.3%	39.7%
Calaveras	6.6%	84.9%	8.5%	35.3%	8.1%	38.5%	-100.0%	-5.4%
Nevada	6.6%	87.6%	5.9%	19.4%	-21.3%	28.1%	0.7%	73.5%
Alameda	6.2%	82.4%	11.4%	19.2%	11.7%	21.1%	13.2%	35.7%
San Francisco[4]	4.6%	90.4%	5.0%	15.3%	-0.8%	18.3%	41.0%	34.0%
Santa Cruz	4.6%	89.5%	5.9%	-0.7%	-22.4%	2.9%	-30.1%	45.1%
Mendocino	4.4%	86.0%	9.7%	3.9%	-27.2%	14.0%	48.9%	8.4%
Marin	4.3%	89.1%	6.6%	-2.6%	-6.2%	-2.2%	-100.0%	5.6%
Mono	4.0%	92.8%	3.1%	-17.6%	-26.1%	-15.9%	n.a	-75.2%
Tuolumne	3.8%	88.6%	7.6%	-0.1%	-11.5%	1.1%	-100.0%	0.7%
Contra Costa	3.6%	90.8%	5.6%	4.1%	-0.3%	5.0%	-15.3%	10.5%
Trinity	3.1%	92.1%	4.8%	26.3%	-37.0%	42.4%	n.a	-25.8%
Modoc	3.0%	93.2%	3.8%	57.3%	315.2%	23.5%	n.a	-54.5%
Sierra	0.8%	88.3%	10.9%	16.5%	-7.2%	26.2%	n.a	n.a
Del Norte	0.4%	86.4%	13.2%	-1.8%	40.0%	-7.6%	-66.6%	22.4%
Low realignment	8.7%	81.3%	10.0%	7%	2%	7%	17%	17%
Los Angeles	13.4%	73.1%	13.5%	-2%	-11%	0%	-3%	-7%

Sources: CJSC (2013), CDCR (2013), CPOC (2013).

[4] San Francisco felony arrest figures were adjusted using reported-offense arrest change, due to known underreporting by county.