

## Shattering "Broken Windows": An Analysis of San Francisco's Alternative Crime Policies

### *Introduction*

In March of 1982, conservative theorists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling published an article in the Atlantic Monthly introducing a new crime fighting theory known as "broken windows." The theory states:

*if the first broken window in a building is not repaired, then people who like breaking windows will assume that no one cares about the building and more windows will be broken. Soon the building will have no windows....*

The theory endorsed the belief that crime was the result of lax police efforts and that stricter law enforcement policy is the primary ingredient to promoting safer communities. Wilson and Kelling theorized that if rude remarks by loitering youth were left unchallenged, they will be under the impression that no one cares and their behavior will likely escalate to more serious crimes. As crime became a major political issue during the 1980's and 90's, many politicians quickly echoed the commonsense nature of the "broken windows" theory.

Nowhere has "broken windows" become more prominent than in New York City. Upon his election in 1994, Mayor Rudolph Guiliani instituted sweeping changes in his police department adopting a zero tolerance approach stressed by "broken windows." Guiliani ordered his police to enforce even the lowest level offenses including jaywalking, vagrancy and public intoxication. Coinciding with these policies was a dramatic drop in overall crime, particularly serious crime. These declining crime rates catapulted Mayor Guiliani into the national spotlight as his policies seemed to confirm the assumptions of conservative commentators and law enforcement advocates.

During the time that New York City was being heralded as a national model, similar crime rate declines were occurring in other cities around the country. These equally dramatic crime rate decreases occurred despite the absence of "broken windows" policies. The most notable antithesis to New York City is San Francisco. In recent years, San Francisco adopted less strident law enforcement policies that reduced arrests, prosecutions and incarceration rates. Long derided by conservatives for its alternative crime policies, San Francisco registered reductions in crime that exceed or equal comparable cities and jurisdictions - including New York.

The study is the first analysis of San Francisco's crime rates in relation to more traditional or conservative jurisdictions that are typically cited as national models. San Francisco is also compared to other comparable California jurisdictions.

## *Methodology*

This analysis is based on data gathered from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Census Bureau, California Criminal Justice Statistics Center, California Youth Authority and California Department of Corrections Data Analysis Unit. To measure changes in crime by city and county, Part I serious offenses reported to police are analyzed. Ten national comparison cities were chosen based on their designation by the United States Department of Justice as models of effective crime policy. These cities are Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Jacksonville, New Orleans, New York City, Phoenix, and Washington, DC. In addition, San Francisco was also compared to the three largest California cities - Los Angeles, San Diego and San Jose and to the eight largest California counties.

## *The National Comparison*

Crime has been a problem for politicians at the national, state, and local levels. Politicians who have made the most use out of the crime issue have been "law and order" politicians who embrace a conservative approach (Conklin, 1992). Conservative approaches (i.e. "broken windows") emphasize deterrence through arrests, incapacitation through imprisonment, and just desserts through harsh sentencing, and rely on the criminal justice system to mete out certain, severe, prompt, and just penalties (Conklin, 1992). The "broken windows" approach stresses increasing the number of officers on the streets and arresting and prosecuting all crimes. Between 1990 and 1996, New York City increased its number of police officers by 7,000 and police have been directed to crack down on public drinking, graffiti, vandalism, and other public disorders (Council on Crime in America, 1996). While there is no evidence supporting the claims that the number of officers and arrests per capita affects the crime rate, public perception seems to accept this premise. San Francisco on the other hand utilized an alternative approach to crime that stresses alternative sentences and community involvement. Conservative critics like Guiliani have labeled this approach as "soft on crime" and continuously claim that they do not work.

Despite popular assumptions, San Francisco experienced a larger decline in reported crime than most comparable national cities while enforcing these alternative policies. As Table I illustrates, San Francisco's decline in Part I offenses exceeded the average of the 10 comparison cities in almost all categories and time periods. Violent crime rates exceeded the average of the ten national comparison cities chosen over the three time periods. In fact, San Francisco's decreases far surpassed the average of the national comparison cities in all categories except for burglary in two time periods.

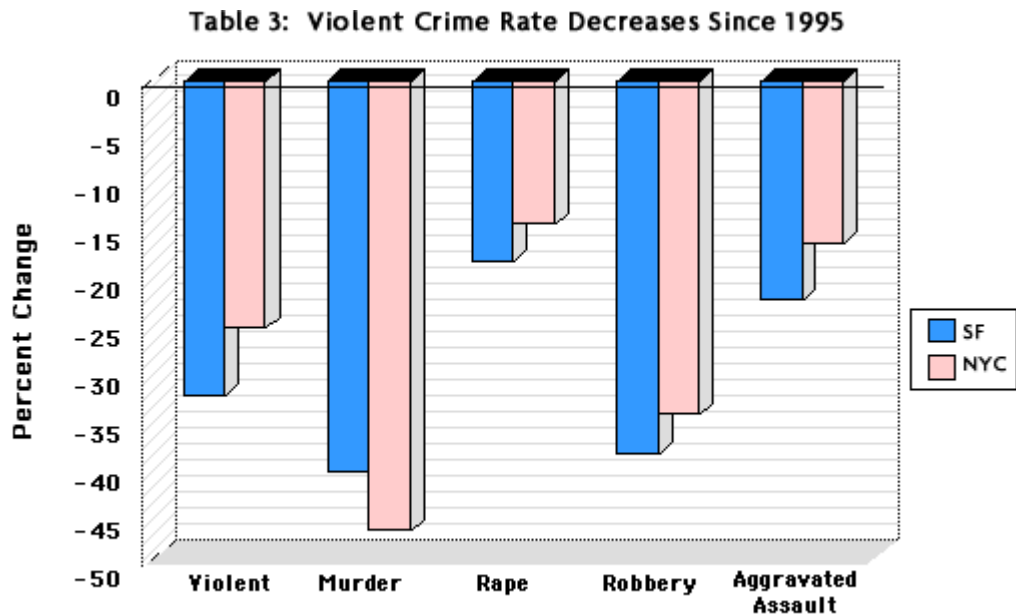
	Total	Violent	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Agg Assault	Property	Burglary	Theft	MV Theft
<b>San Francisco</b>										
1998 v 1990	-38%	-43%	-44%	-44%	-46%	-38%	-37%	-39%	-33%	-43%
1998 v 1992	-42	-47	-50	-39	-53	-38	-40	-44	-36	-47
1998 v 1995	-26	-33	-41	-19	-39	-23	-24	-6	-28	-19
<b>Avg., Other 10 cities</b>										
1998 v 1990	-30	-34	-39	-32	-42	-26	-29	-43	-22	-27
1998 v 1992	-24	-33	-35	-23	-39	-26	-22	-35	-14	-23
1998 v 1995	-16	-21	-29	-17	-26	-17	-15	-19	-14	-16

*Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1990-1998, Offenses Known to Police. Uniform Crime Reports*

Since 1992, San Francisco has outperformed New York City in violent crime rate declines and has received virtually no media attention. For example, in reported violent crime between 1992 and 1998 San Francisco's rates decreased 47% while New York's rate declined 46% (see Table 2 below). Since 1995, one year after Guiliani was elected, San Francisco recorded a 33% decrease in reported violent crime compared to only 26% in New York City (see Table 3 below). These declines were occurring at a time when New York City was vigorously pursuing "broken windows" policy and being cited by commentators as a national model.

	Total	Violent	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Agg Assault	Property	Burglary	Theft	MV Theft
<b>San Francisco</b>										
1998 v 1990	-38%	-43%	-44%	-44%	-46%	-38%	-37%	-39%	-33%	-43%
1998 v 1992	-42	-47	-50	-39	-53	-38	-40	-44	-36	-47
1998 v 1995	-26	-33	-41	-19	-39	-23	-24	-6	-28	-19
<b>New York</b>										
1998 v 1990	-55	-51	-72	-36	-61	-37	-56	-62	-46	-70
1998 v 1992	-49	-46	-69	-28	-57	-31	-49	-56	-38	-66
1998 v 1995	-28	-26	-47	-15	-35	-17	-29	-38	-21	-40

*Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1990-1998, Offenses Known to Police. Uniform Crime Reports.*



San Francisco's violent crime decreases exceeded most of the nations in the 1990's. For the better part of the decade, San Francisco had greater declines in all Part I offenses and reported violent crime than most of the comparison cities. Between 1992 and 1998, San Francisco's violent crime decreases were unmatched by the ten national comparison cities (see Table 4). San Francisco's declines coincided with declining misdemeanor and felony arrest rates. New York City, on the other hand, increased its felony and misdemeanor arrest rates and yet only equaled San Francisco's violent crime rate declines.

**Table 4: SF Versus All National Comparison Cities in Total Part I and Violent Offenses**

	<b>All Part I Offenses</b>			<b>Total Violent Crime</b>		
	<b>98 v 90</b>	<b>98 v 92</b>	<b>98 v 95</b>	<b>98 v 90</b>	<b>98 v 92</b>	<b>98 v 95</b>
<b>San Francisco</b>	<b>-38%</b>	<b>-42%</b>	<b>-26%</b>	<b>-43%</b>	<b>-47%</b>	<b>-33%</b>
Boston	-47%	-36%	-34%	-44%	-34%	-23%
Charlotte	-17%	-17%	-9%	-26%	-26%	1%
Chicago	-20%	-14%	-9%	-25%	-25%	-16%
Dallas	-40%	-25%	-1%	-39%	-29%	-3%
Denver	-30%	-34%	-21%	-35%	-46%	-32%
Jacksonville	-25%	-25%	-12%	-36%	-33%	-17%
New Orleans	-30%	-12%	-20%	-35%	-25%	-34%
New York City	-55%	-49%	-28%	-51%	-46%	-26%
Phoenix	-19%	-5%	-20%	-2%	-22%	-20%
Washington, D.C.	-18%	-23%	-27%	-30%	-39%	-35%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1990-1998, Offenses Known to Police Uniform Crime Reports

## *The California Analysis*

### **County-by-County Comparison**

Among large California counties, San Francisco is unique because it is the only combined city and county. Comparing San Francisco to other counties is difficult in this context since it is the only combined city and county and it is solely a large urban area and population. Historically, crime rates in San Francisco have always been higher than the mixed urban suburban counties. However, in recent years San Francisco's crime rate reductions exceeded those of California's largest counties.

Between 1994 and 1998, San Francisco witnessed a 35% reduction in reported violent crime rates, second only to Orange County (see Tables 5 and 7). In the last decade, reported crime rates in San Francisco fell 33% exceeding or equaling every other county except for Los Angeles where crime rates fell 40% (see Tables 6 and 8)

**Table 5: Change in Reported Violent Crime  
(1994 v 1998)**

	<b>1994</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>% Change</b>	<b>Rate Change</b>
<b>Alameda</b>	17,647	11,894	-33%	-31%
<b>Fresno</b>	8,130	6,894	-15%	-29%
<b>Los Angeles</b>	153,876	94,164	-39%	-35%
<b>Orange</b>	13,456	9,497	-29%	-36%
<b>Sacramento</b>	10,628	7,813	-26%	-28%
<b>San Diego</b>	23,371	16,594	-29%	-32%
<b>San Francisco</b>	10,937	7,409	-32%	-35%
<b>San Mateo</b>	3,370	2,361	-30%	-33%
<b>Santa Clara</b>	9,036	8,078	-11%	-16%

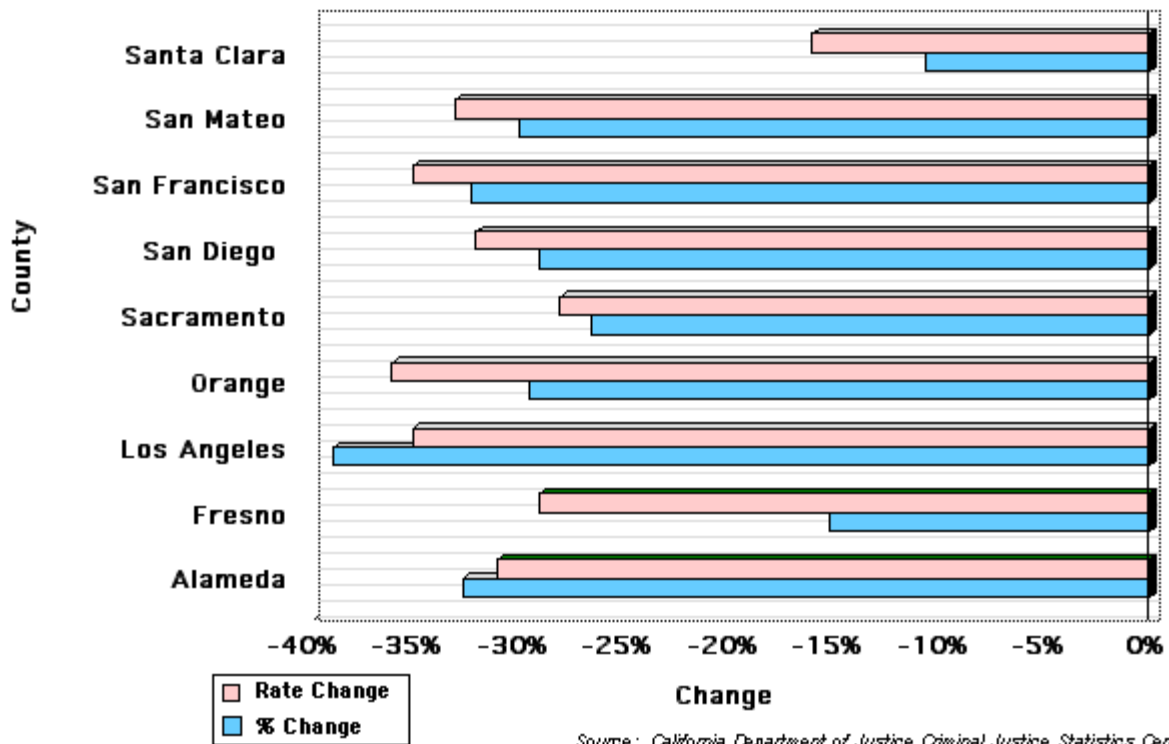
*Source: California Department of Justice  
Criminal Justice Statistics Center*

**Table 6: Change in Reported Violent Crime  
(1989 v 1998)**

	<b>1989</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>% Change</b>	<b>Rate Change</b>
<b>Alameda</b>	10,563	11,894	13%	-1%
<b>Fresno</b>	6,622	6,894	4%	-15%
<b>Los Angeles</b>	141,137	94,164	-33%	-40%
<b>Orange</b>	11,197	9,497	-15%	-28%
<b>Sacramento</b>	7,558	7,813	3%	-12%
<b>San Diego</b>	18,400	16,594	-10%	-24%
<b>San Francisco</b>	10,190	7,409	-27%	-33%
<b>San Mateo</b>	3,116	2,361	-24%	-33%
<b>Santa Clara</b>	7,066	8,078	14%	-1%

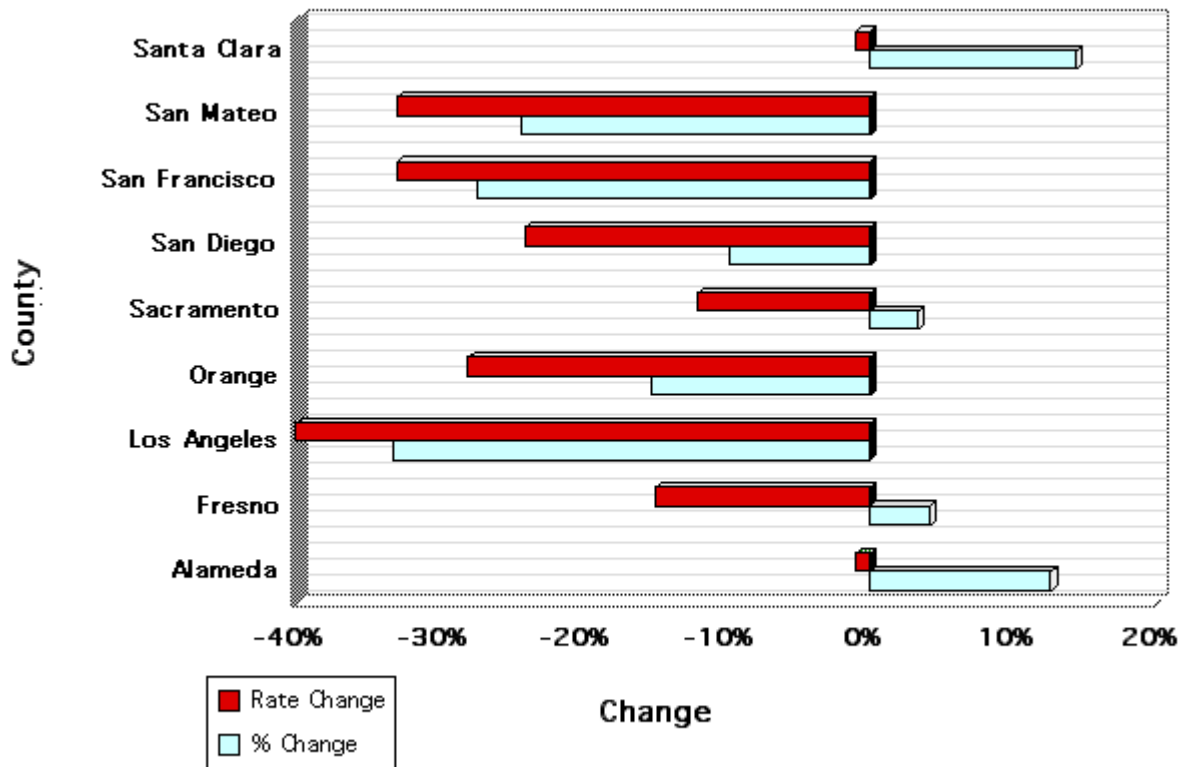
*Source: California Department of Justice  
Criminal Justice Statistics Center*

Table 7: Change in Reported Violent Crime (1994 v. 1995)



Source: California Department of Justice Criminal Justice Statistics Center

Table 8: Change in Reported Violent Crime (1989 v 1995)



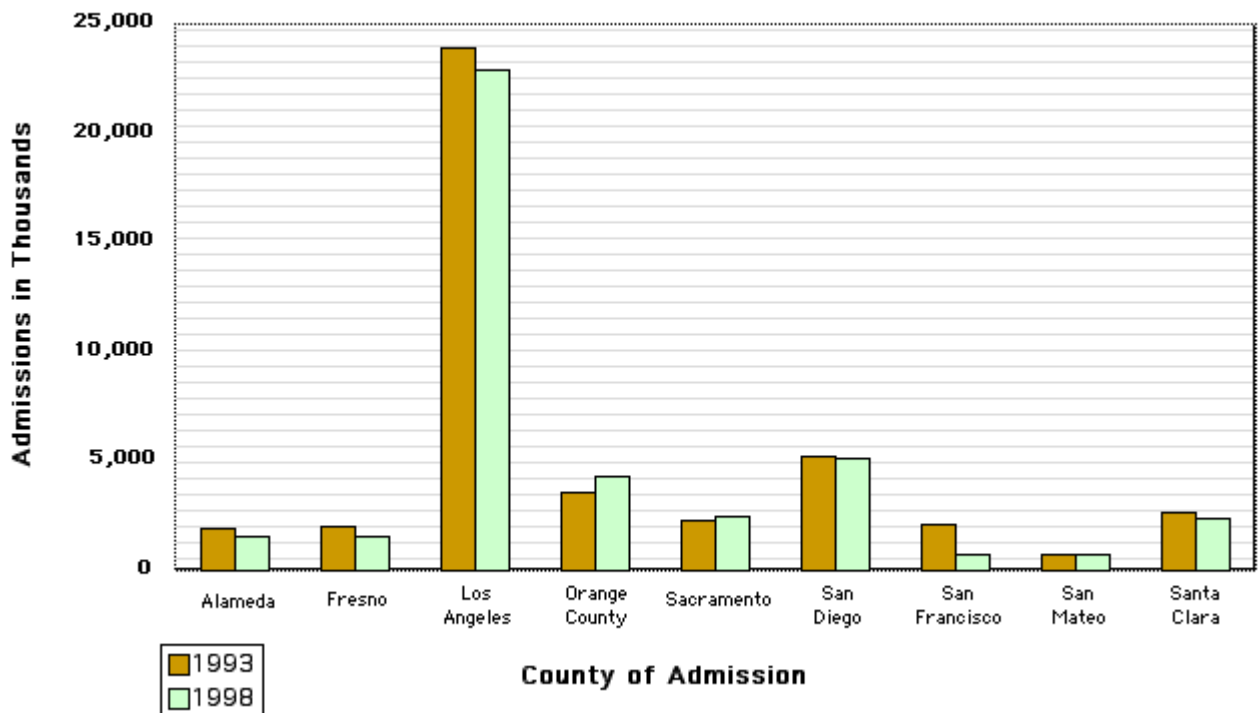
Source: California Department of Justice Criminal Justice Statistics Center

## *Prison as Crime Control*

While crime throughout the United States continues to decline, the prison population also continues to rise. Jurisdictions that utilize the conservative approach attribute their declining crime rates partly to the use of incarceration as a mechanism of its crime fighting policy. The conservative approach stresses that imprisonment offers at least four types of social benefits which are retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation and incapacitation (Council on Crime in America, 1996). Former Attorney General William Barr stated that California should serve as a model and that the country had a choice of either building more prisons or tolerating higher violent crime rates (Irwin, 1994).

Commensurate with its declining crime and arrest rates, San Francisco also reduced its state commitments. For example, in 1993 San Francisco sent 2136 individuals to prison while in 1998 only 703 were committed. In contrast other counties increased or maintained their prison commitments during the same period (see Table 9).

**Table 9: Felon Admissions to CDC by County of Commitment**



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1992-1998, Offenses Known to Police

As seen above, San Francisco's crime rate declined as arrest rates and prison commitments decreased. Declining prison commitments coinciding with falling crime rates is counter to conservative tenets about crime control. In 1995, following the election of liberal San Francisco District Attorney Terrence Hallinan, neighboring conservative Santa Clara County District Attorney George Kennedy stated, "We're trying to decide if some of the benefit here wouldn't be that some of our problem persons would be drawn up there." However, contrary to this assumption, San Francisco outperformed Santa Clara County in almost all aspects of crime reduction since 1993. Table 10, 11 and 12 illustrate

Part I crime comparisons between San Francisco and Santa Clara for the three years before and after Hallinan took office.

<b>Table 10: Absolute Change in Reported Violent Crime Between 1993-1995 and 1996-1998 in San Francisco</b>									
	<b>1993</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2-year Total</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2-year Total</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Violent Crimes</b>	<b>13,536</b>	<b>10,937</b>	<b>10,998</b>	<b>35,471</b>	<b>9,946</b>	<b>8,608</b>	<b>7,409</b>	<b>25,963</b>	<b>-27%</b>
Homicide	129	92	99	320	82	59	58	199	-38%
Forcible Rape	364	295	305	964	299	236	246	781	-19%
Robbery	8,544	6,677	6,522	21,743	5,565	4,618	3,957	14,140	-35%
Aggravated Assaults	4,499	3,873	4,072	12,444	4,000	3,695	3,148	10,843	-13%
<b>Property Crimes</b>	<b>22,559</b>	<b>17,452</b>	<b>15,550</b>	<b>55,561</b>	<b>15,791</b>	<b>14,706</b>	<b>13,581</b>	<b>44,078</b>	<b>-21%</b>
Burglary	11,324	8,113	7,196	26,633	7,168	7,237	6,792	21,197	-20%
Motor Vehicle Theft	11,235	9,339	8,354	28,928	8,623	7,469	6,789	22,881	-21%

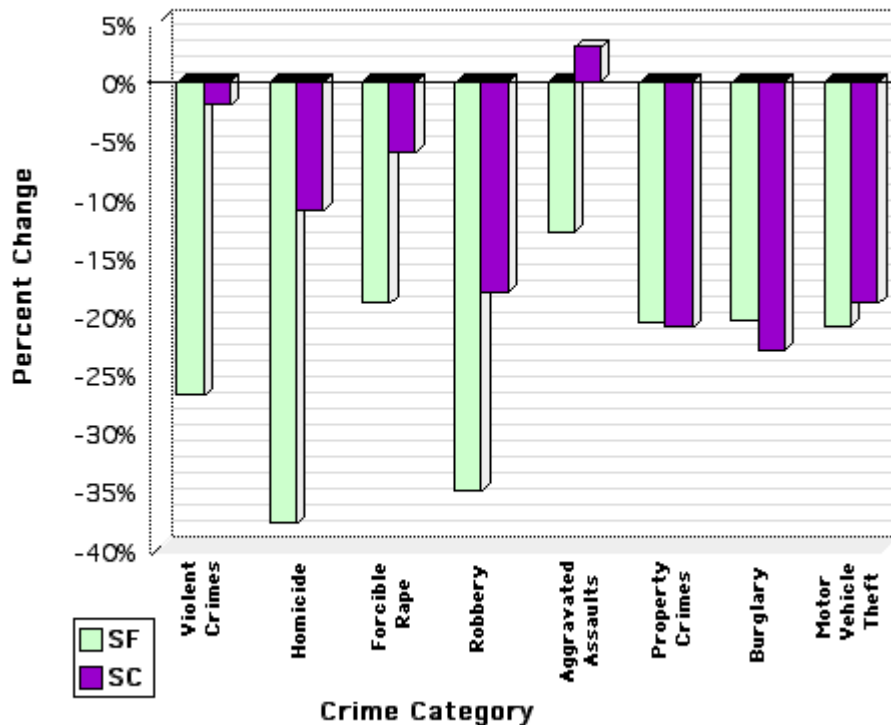
*Source: California Department of Justice Criminal Justice Statistics Center*

<b>Table 11: Absolute Change in Reported Violent Crime Between 1993-1995 and 1996-1998 in Santa Clara</b>									
	<b>1993</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2-year Total</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2-year Total</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Violent Crimes</b>	<b>8,180</b>	<b>9,036</b>	<b>9,716</b>	<b>26,932</b>	<b>8,965</b>	<b>9,307</b>	<b>8,078</b>	<b>26,350</b>	<b>-2%</b>
Homicide	61	56	56	173	48	62	44	154	-11%
Forcible Rape	593	562	569	1,724	544	539	538	1,621	-6%
Robbery	1,820	1,868	2,000	5,688	1,774	1,438	1,426	4,638	-18%
Aggravated Assaults	5,706	6,550	7,091	19,347	6,599	7,268	6,070	19,937	3%
<b>Property Crimes</b>	<b>18,498</b>	<b>17,948</b>	<b>16,761</b>	<b>53,207</b>	<b>14,636</b>	<b>14,641</b>	<b>12,701</b>	<b>41,978</b>	<b>-21%</b>
Burglary	11,808	10,902	10,224	32,934	8,925	8,763	7,822	25,510	-23%
Motor Vehicle Theft	6,690	7,046	6,537	20,273	5,711	5,878	4,879	16,468	-19%

*Source: California Department of Justice Criminal Justice Statistics Center*



**Table 12: Absolute Change in Reported Crime Between 1993-1995 and 1996-1998 in San Francisco and Santa Clara County**



Source: California Department of Correction Data Analysis Unit

Conservative critics such as George Kennedy assume that straying away from the normal approaches to "law and order" will result in crime increases. But as the data above illustrates, since Hallinan took office, San Francisco declines in violent crime rates are unmatched by his predecessor. More poignantly, San Francisco declines under Hallinan in Part I crime offenses far surpassed those of Santa Clara County. The views expressed by Kennedy are typical of conservative critics' disbelief in the effects of liberal crime policies on crime rates. The comparison of crime in Santa Clara County and San Francisco under Hallinan are important to illustrate these effects compared to those of a more conservative approach.

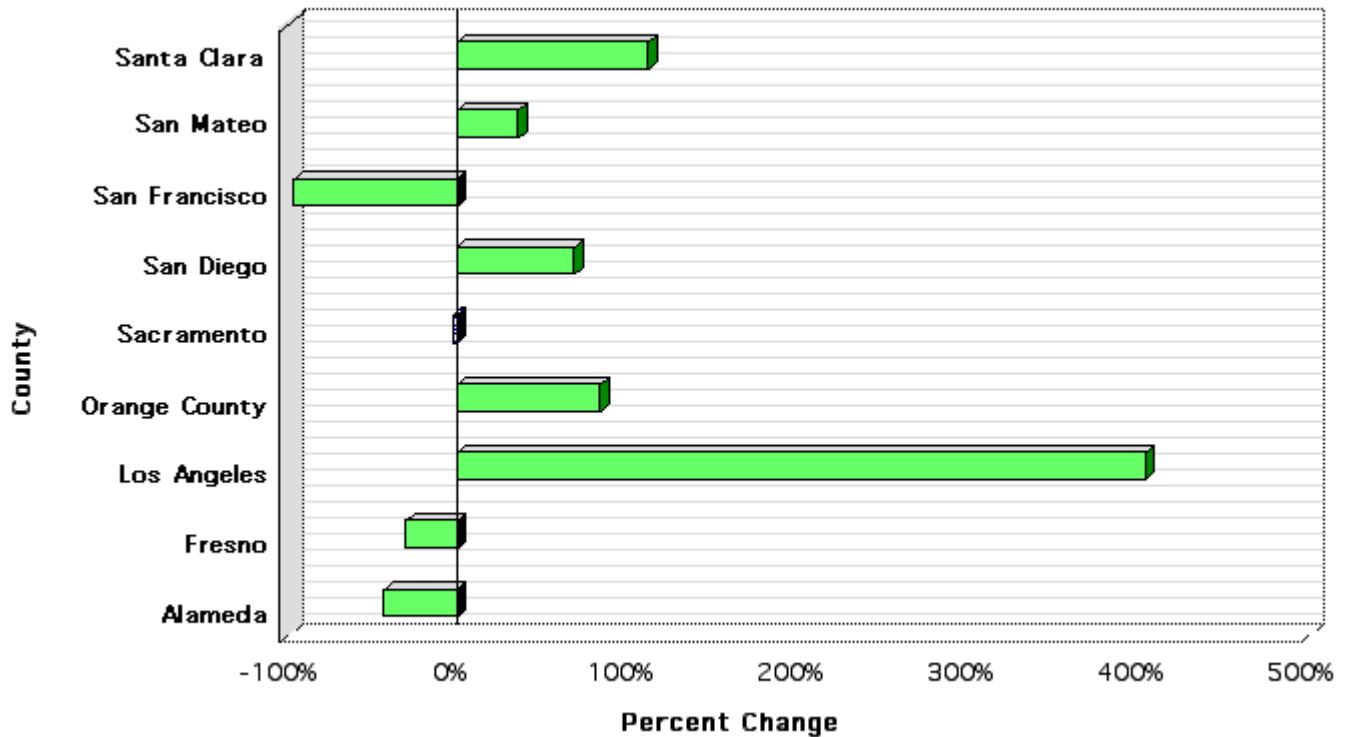
### *Juvenile Crime Declines*

"Broken window" approaches to crime control have a great impact on how youth are handled by the police and the criminal justice system. While many legislative efforts aimed at trying youth as adults have been introduced in the last decade, juvenile crime has continued to decline sometimes at a greater rate than those of adults. Recent studies have shown that juvenile crime declines are driving the national crime rate declines contrary to popular sentiments that youth crime is on a rise. Conservative jurisdictions such as Santa Clara County rigorously enforce status offense arrests (i.e. curfew violations) under the impression that they prevent more serious crimes from occurring.

By abandoning a curfew law nearly ten years ago when other counties were increasing enforcement, San Francisco Juvenile crime was expected to rise relative to California's

other large counties. According to the "broken windows" theory, youth in San Francisco should have had a message sent to them that no one cares and crime should have risen accordingly. However, as the following graph illustrates below, by almost abandoning the enforcement of status offenses all together, San Francisco has witnessed similar if not greater drops in juvenile felony arrests. Homicides decreased by 57% (7 -1989, 3 -1998) over a ten year period and 79% (14 -1994, 3 -1998) over five years.

**Table 13: Percent Change in Status Arrests From 1989**



*Source: California Department of Justice Criminal Justice Statistics Center*

San Francisco has also lowered its number of commitments to the California Youth Authority from both juvenile and adult court more so than most of the comparison counties. San Francisco District Attorneys have opted to rely on more diversionary programs that stress prevention and not detention. While these policies were being adopted, juvenile crime declined in San Francisco.

County	1994		1998		% Change	% Change
	CYA Juvenile	CYA Criminal	CYA Juvenile	CYA Criminal	CYA Juvenile	CYA Criminal
<b>Alameda</b>	137	4	82	0	-40%	-100%
<b>Fresno</b>	165	24	118	2	-28%	-92%
<b>Los Angeles</b>	620	57	472	23	-24%	-60%
<b>Orange County</b>	58	34	141	11	143%	-68%
<b>Sacramento</b>	97	1	32	4	-67%	300%
<b>San Diego</b>	269	15	113	8	-58%	-47%
<b>San Francisco</b>	27	5	13	0	-52%	-100%
<b>San Mateo</b>	39	1	32	0	-18%	-100%
<b>Santa Clara</b>	101	12	86	2	-15%	-83%

### *City-by-City Analysis*

While San Francisco crime rate declines equaled or exceeded those of California's eight largest counties, a comparison between SF and Los Angeles, San Diego and San Jose revealed more striking results. In the comparison, San Francisco's violent crime reductions matched or exceeded all three jurisdictions. All three cities are noted for their stringent enforcement policies and high number of state prison commitments. In the last decade, San Francisco crime rate declines were unequaled by most of California's large cities. The declines in San Francisco far exceeded those of San Jose, Santa Clara County's largest city in all three time periods examined. Since 1992, San Francisco violent crime declines were unmatched by all three California comparison cities.

	Violent	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Agg Ast
<b>San Francisco</b>					
1998 v 1990	-43%	-44%	-44%	-46%	-38%
1998 v 1992	-47%	-50%	-39%	-53%	-38%
1998 v 1995	-33%	-41%	-19%	-39%	-23%
<b>Los Angeles</b>					
1998 v 1990	-45%	-61%	-36%	-59%	-34%
1998 v 1992	-46%	-63%	-29%	-62%	-35%
1998 v 1995	-33%	-52%	-16%	-47%	-22%
<b>San Diego</b>					
1998 v 1990	-34%	-72%	-24%	-56%	-21%
1998 v 1992	-45%	-73%	-29%	-63%	-35%
1998 v 1995	-24%	-55%	4%	-37%	-19%
<b>San Jose</b>					
1998 v 1990	-5%	-29%	-26%	-25%	4%
1998 v 1992	-16%	-40%	-29%	-35%	-8%
1998 v 1995	-27%	-29%	-14%	-30%	-28%

*Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1990-1998, Offenses Known to Police. LCA*

## *Conclusion*

San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown recently sent his Director on Homelessness to New York to observe how the city handled its homeless problem. Shortly thereafter, a new policy arose in San Francisco to confiscate shopping carts from the homeless. Later, when subjected to intense criticism, Mayor Brown backed off from the policy saying, "I am not trying to gain the Guiliani vote."

Importing a "broken windows" approach to San Francisco is unnecessary as the evidence above illustrates. Utilizing alternative crime policy, San Francisco crime declines matched and exceeded those of comparable national cities. These results suggest a new evaluation of popular assumptions and crime policy.

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