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Secretary of State
State of California

Three Strikes and You're Out

Five Years Later

On June 29, 1992, 18-year old Kimber Reynolds was murdered by a repeat felon outside a popular restaurant in Fresno, California. In response to the tragedy, her father, Mike Reynolds, convened a panel of law enforcement officials and legal experts to find a way to close the revolving door of California's prisons in an effort to save lives.

The result was California's Three Strikes and You're Out law, which was introduced in the State Legislature as Assembly Bill 971 by then-Assemblyman Bill Jones and then-Assemblyman Jim Costa.

On March 7, 1994, Three Strikes was signed into law by Governor Pete Wilson. An identical measure was also placed on the November, 1994 ballot by the voters in the form of an initiative that eventually received the support of 72 percent of the state's voters.

The theory was simple, if we could incarcerate the small percentage of criminals who commit the vast majority of crimes in our state, we could effectively lower the crime rate and save thousands of lives. Five years later, we have witnessed a reduction in crime that is greater than even the most optimistic Three Strikes supporters predicted.

After five years, we now have strong statistical data to show the law is working exactly as intended. California's murder and robbery rates are down by 50%, the overall crime rate in California has declined 38% and the early predictions of rapid prison overpopulation have proven to be unfounded. Most importantly, more than one million Californians who would have been victimized by crime if the 1993 crime rate continued, are still safe today.

Crimes Prevented During Three Strikes Era (1994-1998)

Homicide	5,694	-51.5%
Forcible Rape	6,923	-18.7%
Robbery	172,045	-48.6%
Aggravated Assault	111,223	-25.9%
Burglary	454,654	-38.3%
Motor Vehicle Theft	339,082	-40.2%

Early predictions that the implementation of Three Strikes would rapidly overload the California prison system have proven untrue. In the Fall of 1994, the prison population in California was approximately 125,000. The California Department of Corrections estimated that with the new law, the prison population would expand to 190,000 by 1998 — a 52 percent projected increase. The actual population in 1998 was 158,207 — only a 27 percent increase and nearly 3,000 fewer inmates than were predicted even before Three Strikes was passed into law.

Deterrence

Prior to 1994, career criminals took advantage of the prisons system's revolving door. Three Strikes proponents argued that if punishment for crimes was swift and sure, we would be able to use the threat of a double or triple sentence as a deterrent to prevent repeat offenders from continuing their life of crime.

As Secretary of State Bill Jones has said, “With Three Strikes, we gave career criminals three choices: straighten up, leave the state or go to prison.”

Five years later, we now have evidence that fewer crimes are being committed, fewer inmates than expected are going to prison, and more career criminals on parole have left the state for more crime-tolerant locales.

As has been reported by the Department of Justice and the California Department of Corrections, California has seen a net exodus of parolees to other states since the implementation of the Three Strikes law. In 1994, the year Three Strikes was put in place, more parolees left California than entered for the first time since 1976. The trend continues to this day.

That statistic is even more startling when you consider that California passed a law in 1995 that denied parolees the right to leave the state until all of the parolee’s restitution and restitution fines have been paid.

Economic Benefits from Reduced Crime

During the initial debate on Three Strikes, much discussion was focussed on the cost of implementing Three Strikes, but little attention was paid to the vast economic benefits a society realizes from reduced crime.

‘While it is impossible to place a dollar value on the loss of a life or the physical and emotional damage caused by rape and other violent crimes, the National Institute of Justice, in 1996, attempted to measure the tangible and intangible costs of crime. The tangible costs include productivity lost, medical care, public safety services, victim services, and property damage losses. The other figures include intangible costs such as quality of life.

Tangible cost per crime	Overall cost per crime	
Murder	\$1,030,000	\$2,940,000
Rape	5,100	87,000
Robbery	2,300	8,000
Assault	1,550	9,400
Burglary	1,100	1,400
Motor Vehicle Theft	3,500	3,700

When the costs are multiplied by the number of crimes that were not committed during the crime drop experienced since 1994, a range of economic savings to the community can be estimated.

	Crimes not committed	Tangible costs	Overall costs
Murder	5,694	\$5,864,820,000	\$16,740,360,000
Rape	6,923	35,307,300	602,301,000
Robbery	172,045	395,703,500	1,376,360,000
Assault	111,223	172,395,650	1,045,496,200
Burglary	454,654	500,119,400	636,515,600
Motor Vehicle Theft	339,082	1,186,787,000	1,254,603,400
Total	1,089,621	\$8,155,132,850	\$21,655,636,200

The economic savings to the people of California from the reduction in crime during the Three Strikes era is between \$8.2 billion and \$21.7 billion.

In 1994, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research estimated that over the first five years, Three Strikes would save \$23 billion. That is one estimate about Three Strikes that appears to have hit the mark fairly accurately.

Conclusion

While a variety of factors influence the crime rate in California and across the nation, it is clear that the implementation of the Three Strikes and You're Out law has made a considerable positive impact on the incidence of crime in California.

While still more needs to be done to get dangerous assault weapons off our streets and improve our education system to help prevent at-risk youth from turning to a life of crime, one thing we must not do is soften the nation's toughest and most effective crime law.

Opponents that hold up rare examples of low level felonies that trigger double or triple sentences for career criminals must remember that before anyone is even eligible for Three Strikes sentencing, they must have already been caught and convicted of multiple serious and violent felonies. We must make sure that dangerous and violent criminals are removed from our streets, if possible, for a lower level felony — before they rape, murder or molest a third victim.

Violent Crime Rate Since Implementation of Three Strikes*

Homicide Rate	-51.5%
Forcible Rape	-18.7%
Robbery	-48.6%
Aggravated Assault	-25.9%

Property Crime Rate Since Implementation of Three

Burglary	-38.3%
Motor Vehicle Theft	-40.4%

* Statistics provided by California Department of Justice Crime Reports. 1998 totals are estimates based on the Preliminary Crime Report released by the Office of the Attorney General on February 23, 1999.

California Crime Rates Since 1993*

California Crime Home	-37.7%
Violent Crime	-34.5%
Property Crime	-39.2%

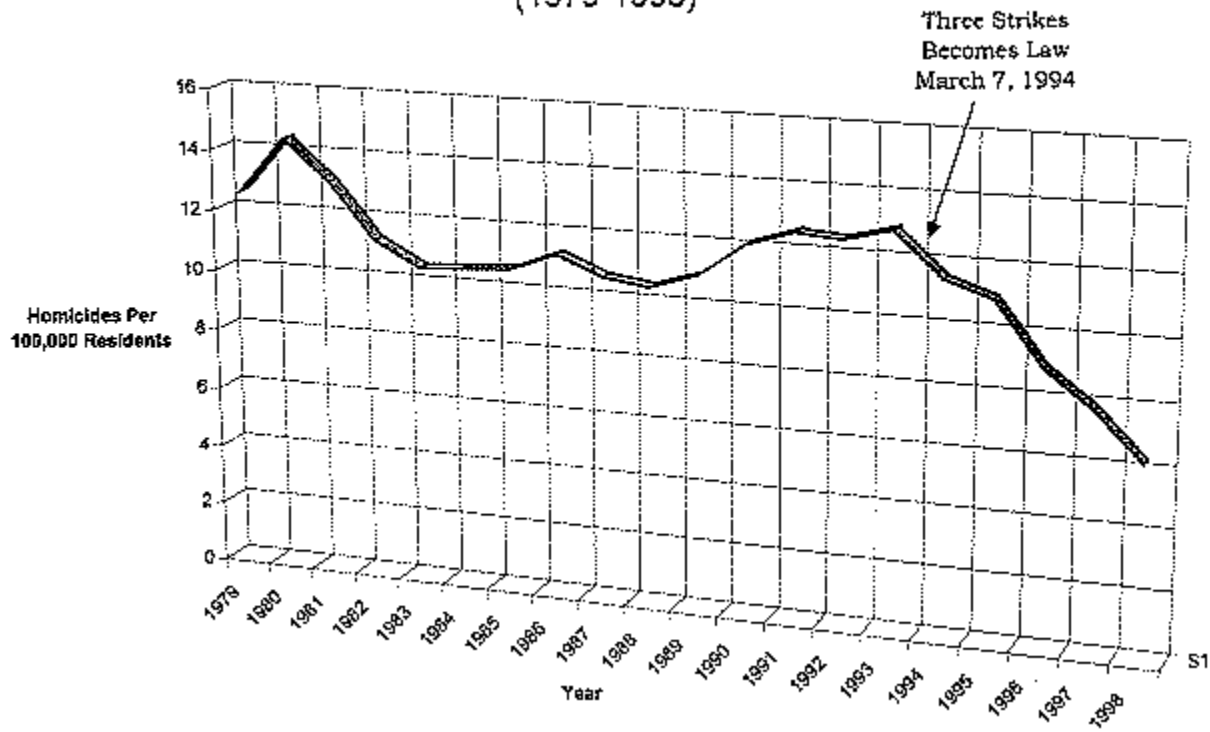
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Crimes Prevented During Three Strikes Era*

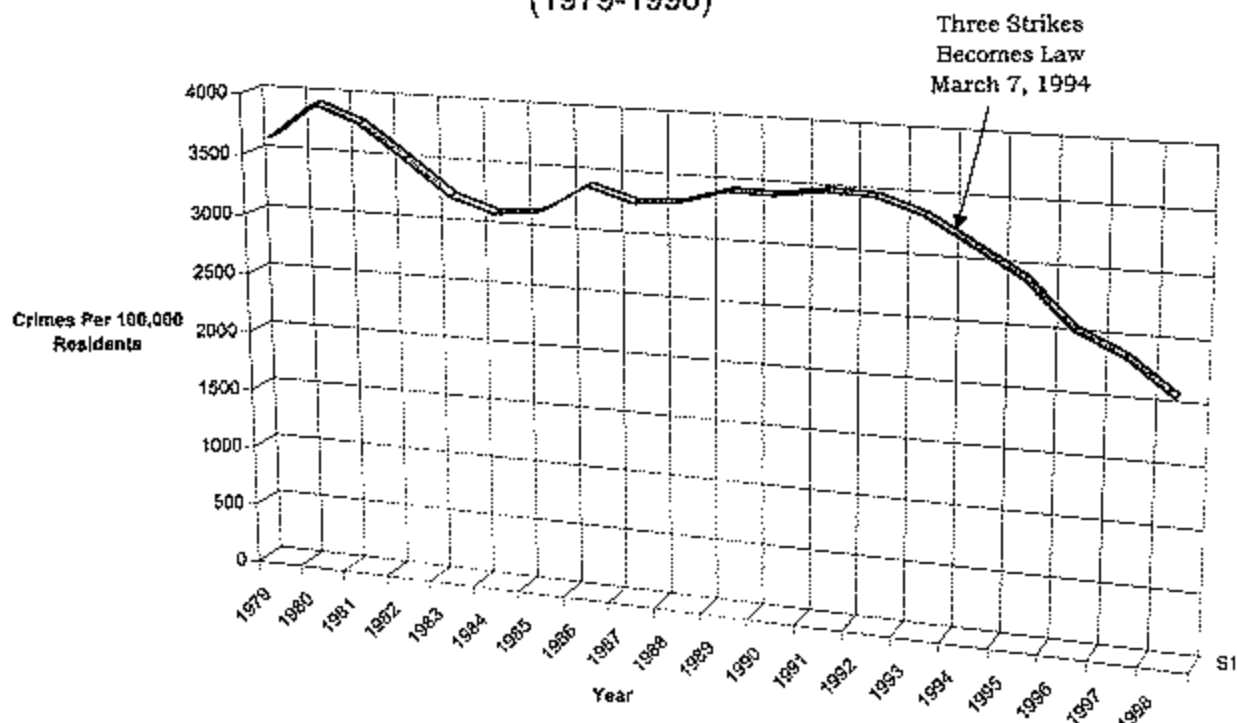
Homicide	5,694
Forcible Rape	6,923
Robbery	172,045
Aggravated Assault	111,223
Burglary	454,654
Motor Vehicle Theft	339,082
Total	1,089,621

* Statistics provided by California Department of Justice Crime Reports. 1998 totals are estimates based on the Preliminary Crime Report released by the Office of the Attorney General on February 23, 1999.

California Homicide Rate (1979-1998)



California Crime Rate (1979-1998)



California Crime Statistics During The Three Strikes Era

	Population	CA Crime Home Total	Violent Crime Total	Willful Homicide	Forcible Rape	Robbery	Aggravated Assault	Property Crime Total	Burglary	Motor Vehicle Theft
1993 rate per 100,000	31,741,671	1,068,996 3,367.8	336,100 1,058.9	4,095 12.9	11,754 37.0	126,347 398.0	193,904 610.9	732,896 2,308.9	413,671 1303.2	319,225 1,005.7
1994 rate per 100,000 1 Yr. Crime Drop Crimes Not Committed	32,139,753	1,011,663 3,147.7 6.5% 57,333	318,946 992.4 6.3% 17,154	3,669 11.5 10.8% 396	10,960 34.1 7.9% 794	112,149 348.9 12.3% 14,198	192,138 597.8 2.1% 1,766	692,717 2,155.3 6.7% 40,179	384,414 1196.1 8.2% 29,257	308,303 959.3 4.6% 10,922
1995 rate per 100,000 2 Yr. Crime Drop	32,063,229	939,132 2,929.0 13.0% 129,864	304,998 951.2 10.2% 31,102	3,530 11.0 14.7% 565	10,550 32.9 11.1% 1,204	104,581 326.2 18.1% 21,766	186,337 581.2 4.9% 7,567	634,134 1,977.8 14.3% 98,762	353,817 1103.5 15.3% 59,854	280,317 874.3 13.1% 38,908

Crimes Not Committed										
1996 rate per 100,000 3 Yr. Crime Drop Crimes Not Committed	32,383,016	828,649 2,558.9 24.0% 240,347	274,675 848.2 19.9% 61,425	2,910 9.0 30.3% 1,185	10,238 31.6 14.6% 1,516	94,137 290.7 27.0% 32,210	167,390 516.9 15.4% 26,514	553,974 1,710.7 25.9% 178,922	311,778 962.8 26.1% 101,893	242,196 747.9 25.6% 77,029
1997 rate per 100,000 4 Yr. Crime Drop Crimes Not Committed	32,956,706	784,831 2,381.4 29.3% 284,165	257,409 781.1 26.2% 78,691	2,579 7.8 39.3% 1,516	10,182 30.9 16.6% 1,572	81,413 247.0 37.9% 44,934	163,225 495.6 18.9% 30,669	527,422 1600.3 30.7% 205,474	298,882 906.9 30.4% 114,789	228,540 693.5 31.0% 90,685
1998* rate per 100,000 5 Yr. Crime Drop Crimes Not Committed	32,956,706	691,084 2,096.9 37.7% 377,912	228,587 693.6 34.5% 107,513	2,063 6.3 51.5% 2,032	9,917 30.1 18.7% 1,837	67,410 204.5 48.6% 58,937	149,197 452.7 25.9% 44,707	462,497 1,403.3 39.2% 270,399	264,810 803.5 38.3% 148,861	197,687 599.8 40.4% 121,538
5 Yr. Crime Total of Crimes Not Committed		1,089,621	295,885	5,694	6,923	172,045	111,223	793,736	454,654	339,082