

# Crime Trends in the City of East Palo Alto

## Executive Summary

By Sarah Lawrence and Gregory Shapiro

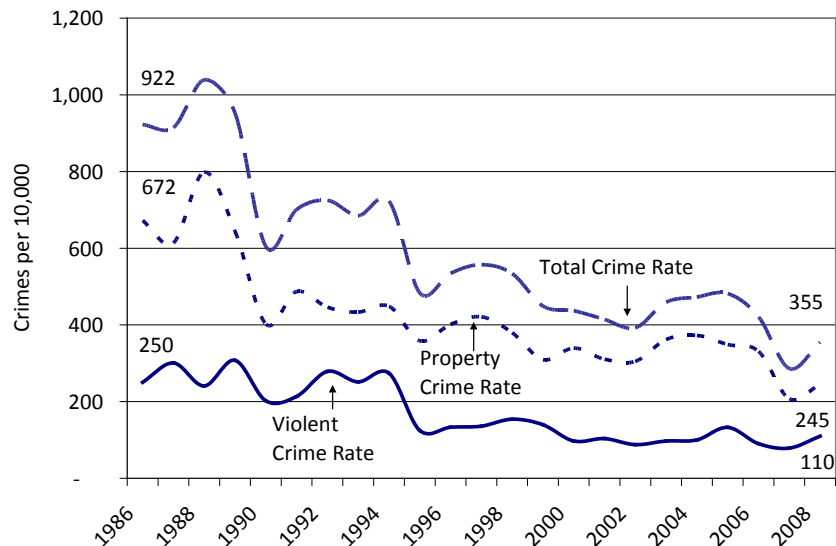
Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice, University of California, Berkeley School of Law

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This report presents a comprehensive analysis of crime in East Palo Alto (EPA) to increase knowledge about the scope and nature of crime in the City.<sup>1</sup> The intent is to help City leaders, community groups, and the residents of East Palo Alto make more informed and empirically-based decisions about how to improve public safety. Included in this report are an examination of crime in the City over the last few decades and comparisons between East Palo Alto and California to understand what has happened in the City in the context of what has happened in the rest of the State.<sup>2</sup>

East Palo Alto has seen significant population growth over the last few decades, increasing 75% between the years 1986 and 2008. East Palo Alto has also seen significant improvements in public safety. The total crime rate in East Palo Alto has generally been on the decline since 1986, when there were 922 crimes per 10,000 people compared to 355 crimes per 10,000 people in 2008.

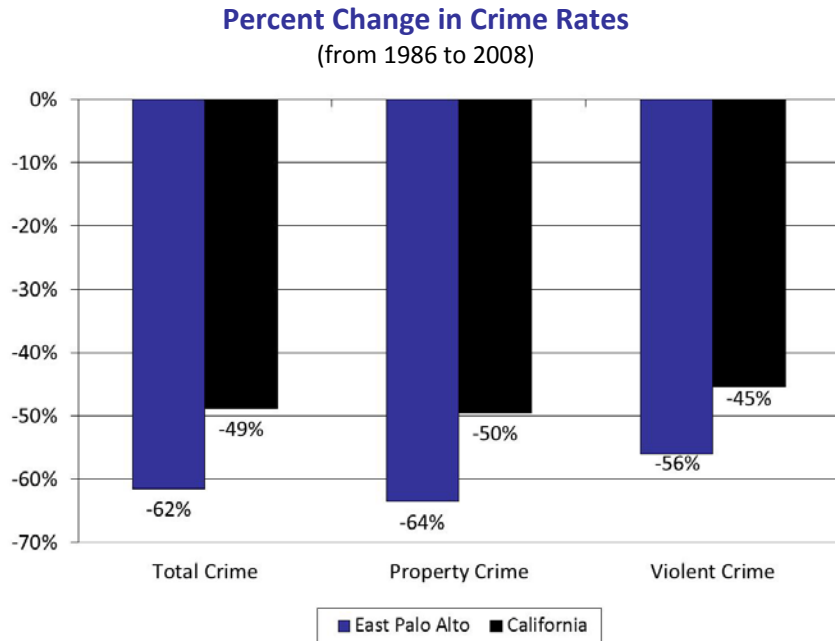
**Total, Violent, and Property Crime Rates in East Palo Alto (1986 – 2008)**



<sup>1</sup> The full report to this Executive Summary is available on BCCJ's website: [www.bccj.berkeley.edu](http://www.bccj.berkeley.edu).

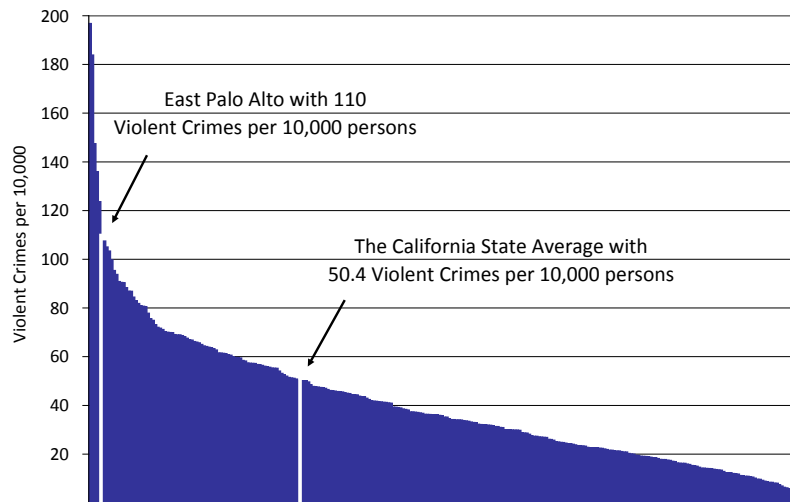
<sup>2</sup> The analyses presented in this report are based on data from several different sources including data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS), the East Palo Alto Police Department, and the San Mateo Public Safety Communications Division. The City of East Palo Alto was incorporated in 1983 and consistent crime data collection began in 1986.

The crime rate decreased in all major crime types since the mid 1980's. The property crime rate decreased by 64% and the violent crime rate decreased by 56%.<sup>3</sup> While crime declined across the State, East Palo Alto's crime decline was larger than the State overall. As shown in the figure below, the State's total crime rate decreased by 49% compared to 62% for the City.



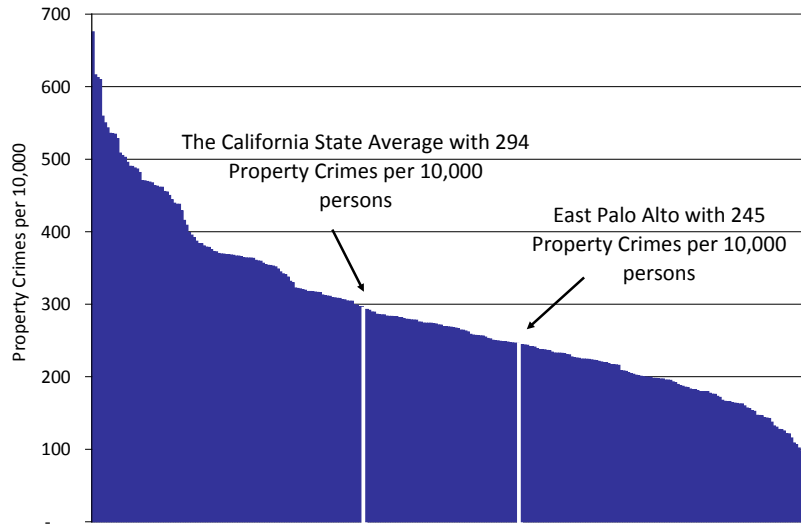
Although the reduction in violent crime has been considerable, the level of violence in East Palo Alto remains very high. In 2008 the violent crime rate in EPA was 110 crimes per 10,000 people compared to the State average of 50 crimes per 10,000. Despite improvements, East Palo Alto still ranks in the top ten among California cities in three of the four categories of violent crime (aggravated assault, homicide, and rape). At the same time, however, East Palo Alto's property crime rate is lower than the State average, with 245 property crimes per 10,000 people for the City compared to 294 property crimes per 10,000 people for the State overall.

### City-Level Violent Crime Rate Ranked from Highest to Lowest (2008)



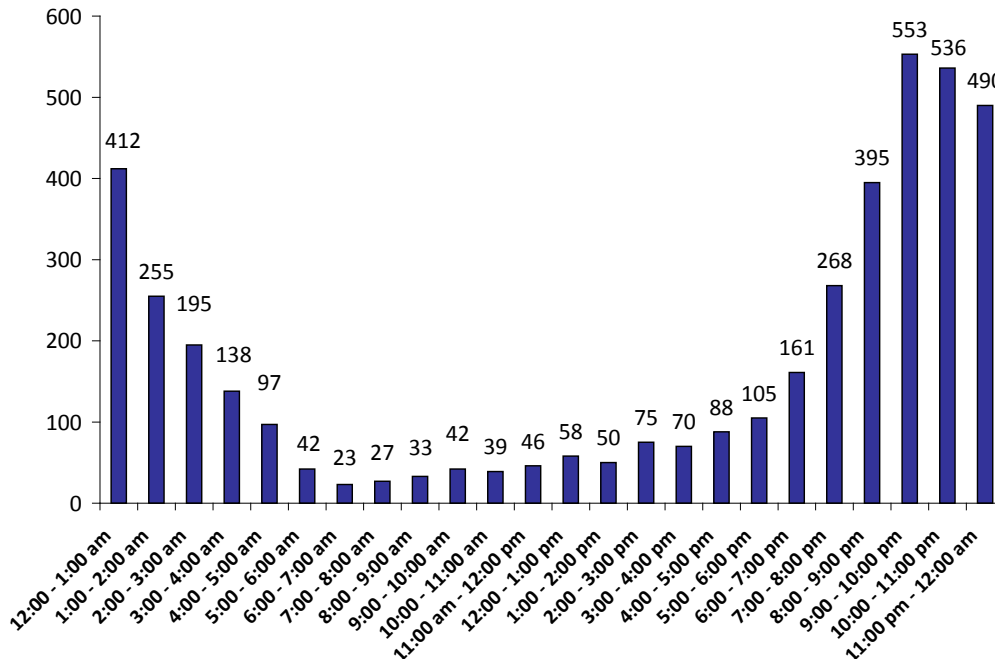
<sup>3</sup> For the seven major crime types in East Palo Alto between 1986 and 2008 burglary decreased by 69%, auto-theft by 12%, larceny-theft by 8%, aggravated assault by 58%, robbery by 54%, rape by 45%, and homicide by 58%.

### City-Level Property Crime Rate Ranked from Highest to Lowest (2008)



Shifting from a fairly high-level perspective (a state level and city level) the next section provides a more in-depth look at shootings and homicides in the City. East Palo Alto has a serious gun violence problem and shootings are a fairly common occurrence with more than one shooting incident per day on average. Between 1999 and 2007, the average number of dispatched calls for service involving a firearm was 466 per year. The dispatched calls for service by time of day are presented in the figure below. Calls for service involving a firearm are concentrated during a few hours of the day. The two-hour period with the highest number of calls for service for gunshots is between 9:00 pm and 11:00 pm. After 1:00 am the number of calls drops significantly. Fifty-seven percent of dispatched calls happen during the six-hour period of 6:00 pm and midnight, while only 16% of calls are received during the 12-hour period 6:00 am to 6:00 pm.

### Number of Dispatched Calls For Service Involving a Firearm by Hour (1999 - 2007)



To better understand the nature and context of homicide in East Palo Alto an analysis of the demographics and criminal histories of homicide victims and known homicide offenders was conducted. The analysis is based on a review of case files from the East Palo Alto Police Department and files from the California Law Enforcement Telecommunication System (CLETS). On average, homicide victims are 10 years older than known homicide offenders (30 years old compared to 21 years old). The large majority of homicide victims are men of color (87% male, 52% Black, 37% Hispanic). Homicide victims and homicide offenders are well-known to the criminal justice system. Both groups had considerable arrest records, as 81% of homicide victims and 100% of homicide offenders had at least one prior arrest. Victims with an arrest record had an average of 8.5 arrests and known offenders had an average of 7.0 arrests. Both groups had arrests for a wide range of offense types (see table below).

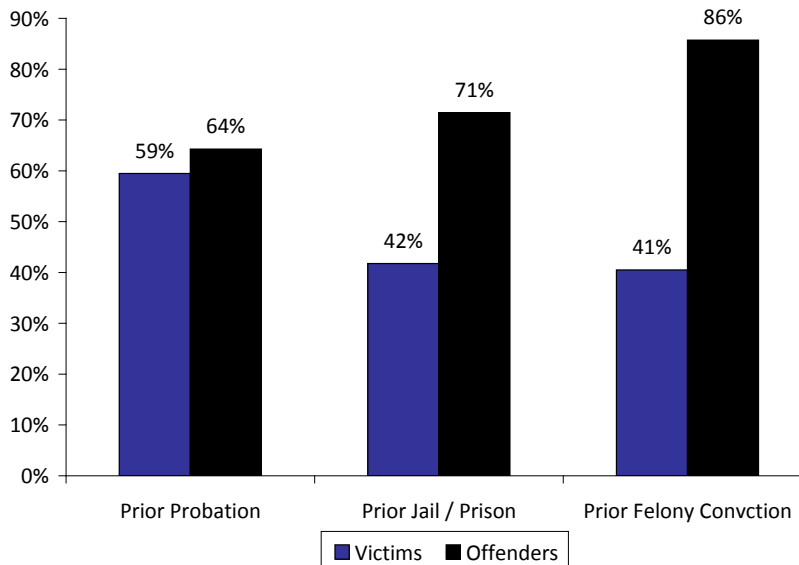
### Criminal Histories of Homicide Victims and Known Offenders

(Victim data: January 1998 – June 2010, Offender data: January 2006 – June 2010)

Victims	Known Offenders
Average age = 30.3 years	Average age = 20.6 years
81% of victims had at least one prior arrest	100% of known offenders had at least one prior arrest
Average number of arrests	Known offenders average 7.0 prior arrests
- 6.9 arrests for all victims	
- 8.5 arrests for victims with at least one prior arrest	
Of 64 victims with at least one prior arrest	Of 14 known offenders
- 70% at least one violent arrest	- 100% at least one violent arrest
- 73% at least one drug arrest	- 43% at least one drug arrest
- 53% at least one property arrest	- 64% at least one property arrest
- 53% at least one disorderly arrest	- 50% at least one disorderly arrest
- 28% at least one "other" arrest	- 36% at least one "other" arrest

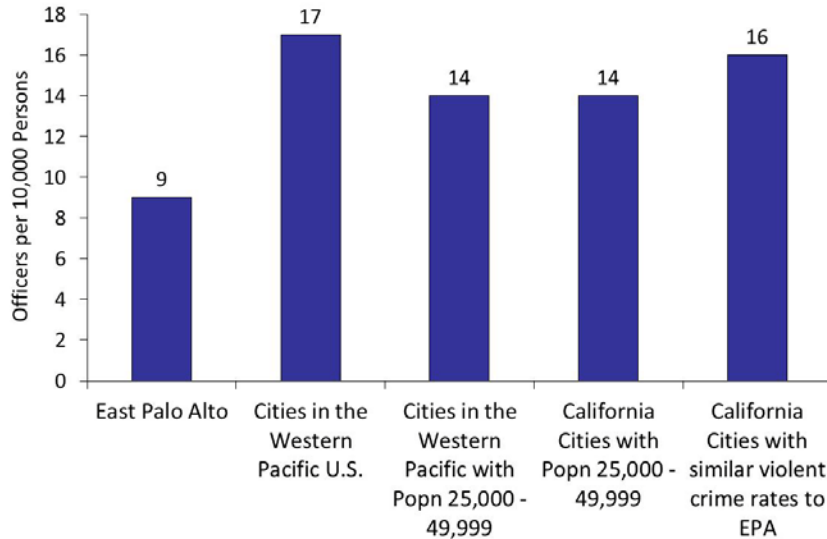
Both homicide victims and known offenders had high rates of prior convictions and periods of incarceration, although offenders have notably higher rates than victims. Over 70% of known homicide offenders served time in jail or prison compared to 42% of victims and 86% of offenders had been convicted of a felony compared to 41% of victims.

### Percent of Homicide Victims and Offenders with Prior Criminal Justice Involvement



Despite high levels of violence, resources for the East Palo Alto Police Department appear to be lower than other police departments. A look at sworn police officers per capita shows that EPA PD is significantly lower in officers per capita compared to other cities in California with similar violent crime rates and other similarly sized cities in California.

### Police Officer Rates (per 10,000 people in 2008)



The data presented in this report were compiled to inform and educate City leaders, community groups, and the residents of East Palo Alto about crime in the City using a comprehensive approach. While much has been accomplished over the last few decades, serious problems and challenges remain. The hope is that the findings presented here and in the full report will help the City of East Palo Alto make more-informed decisions, more effectively target resources, and become a safer and more secure community going forward.

This Executive Summary and the full report are available on the BCCJ website: [www.bccj.berkeley.edu](http://www.bccj.berkeley.edu).

#### **Acknowledgements**

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#### **About the Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice**

Based at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, the Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice (BCCJ) works to enhance public safety and foster a fair and accountable justice system through research, analysis, and collaboration. BCCJ works to increase stakeholder access to timely and relevant information on criminal justice issues, enhance the understanding of those issues among policy-makers, practitioners, scholars, and students, and improve outcomes for individuals involved in the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

*Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice  
University of California, Berkeley School of Law  
2850 Telegraph Avenue, Suite 500  
Berkeley, CA 94705  
(510) 643-7025*