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Sacramento violent crime rises nearly 25 percent in 2015

Law enforcement says early rise not indication of crime spike

Robbery increase most troubling, experts say

Former Sacramento County sheriff blames Prop. 47 and realignment

Crime trending up

Violent crime in the city of Sacramento increased by almost 25 percent during the first five months of the year as compared to the same period of 2014.

Violent crime	Jan. to May		Change
	2014	2015	
Homicide	15	19	27%
Rape	29	46	59%
Robbery	391	482	23%
Aggravated assault	781	958	23%
Property crime			
Burglary	1,315	1,460	11%
Larceny	4,087	4,050	-1%
Motor vehicle theft	923	1,156	25%

Source: Sacramento Police Department

The Sacramento Bee

By Richard Chang and Phillip Reese

A spike in assaults and robberies caused violent crime in Sacramento to increase nearly 25 percent during the first five months of the year.

But the increase – which follows a historic low number of homicides in 2014 – doesn't necessarily point to a yearlong trend for the city, law enforcement officials and experts say.

Crime data from the Sacramento Police Department shows aggravated assaults rose by 177 to 958, an increase of 23 percent in the first five months of 2015 compared with the same period in 2014. Robberies rose to 482 from 391 during the same period last year,

an increase of 23 percent. Reported rapes increased to 46, up from 29, a 59 percent increase over the same period last year. There were 19 homicides in the city, compared to 15 in 2014, a 27 percent increase.

Sgt. Doug Morse, a Sacramento police spokesman, cautioned that the small sample provides only a snapshot of crime in the city. Violent crime in the city has fallen during six of the last seven years and, at the end of 2014, stood at the lowest level in decades.

He joins others in law enforcement advising against alarm at the early increase.

“It’s not statistically significant to zoom in on that first few months,” Morse said. “If we get along throughout the year, we’re going to see the percentage drop.”

Because the numbers are small, the percentage gains can be misleading, Morse said, noting that the four additional homicides this year represent an outsized percentage when accounting for the 15 total homicides during the same period in 2014.

William Vizzard, professor emeritus of criminal justice at Sacramento State, agrees that any increase, at this point, can be considered negligible.

“Don’t draw any great conclusions from five months,” he said. “You may be chasing ghosts. Crime rates are indicative over the long run.”

Vizzard said the rise in robberies is probably most significant, even in the small data set. Robberies involving commercial business owners are seen as a reliable indicator of crime, given the high reporting rates.

Morse said the crimes are not limited to particular neighborhoods. He said the department is using social media websites like Nextdoor.com to spread the word about crime and prevention techniques. The agency also allows residents to use the William J. Kinney police station for Craigslist transactions in a bid to prevent robberies.

“They’ve subsided a lot due to our community engagement,” Morse said of robberies involving sellers and buyers who use the sales website.

Crime data collected by the Sacramento County Sheriff’s Department for the first four months of 2015 present a similar picture. While rapes and murders are down, robberies and aggravated assaults edged up slightly.

Robberies in areas policed by the Sheriff’s Department increased to 338 from 276, while assaults hit 718, up from 634. Data for the month of May were not yet available.

Former Sacramento County Sheriff John McGinness attributed the growth in crime to Proposition 47 and the policy of realignment. Passed by voters in 2014, Proposition 47 changed certain offenses from felonies to misdemeanors, including shoplifting and grand theft. Realignment has resulted in the release of inmates because of overcrowding in county jails.

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