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One: What is Law?

Movement of Violent Crime in the Bay Area

Crime statistics gathered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation over the years paints a very interesting picture of the trends of crime in various counties of the Bay Area. This paper focuses on the data publicly available in the Uniform Crime Reports from the year 2005 until the most recent complete year, 2103. Specifically, we will examine the information gathered on four distinct counties: Marin, Alameda, San Mateo, and Santa Clara. One important note that the Federal Bureau of Investigation makes is in regards to the accuracy of the data. On nearly every page with statistical information, clearly visible at the top of the tables, is the following disclaimer: *“The data shown in this table do not reflect county totals but are the number of offenses reported by the sheriff’s office or county police department.”* This seems as though it may be a minor distinction, however it is important to note, as this excludes any unreported crimes from the data set.

Specific categorizations of violent crime, to my own surprise, showed widely differing developments through the examined eight years. Generically violent crime into account, there is a clear upward trend in both Alameda County and San Mateo County since 2005. Both the counties of Santa Clara and Marin, on the other hand, saw an overall decrease in violent crime. Alameda County has consistently held the highest rate of violent crime since 2005, while Marin Country has consistently held the lowest. San Mateo County had a lower rate of general violent crime until 2011, when Santa Clara County’s numbers experienced a marked downward spike.

The most severe fluctuations in reported incidents of violent crime can be seen in data from Alameda County. Alameda County statistics show an overall rise in violent crime. In 2005, the county reached an all-time low since then, with a total of 505 reported incidents. Of those incidents, and since that same year, incidents categorized as “Murder and non-negligent manslaughter” have been consistently lower throughout the years. Reported incidents of rape have stayed between twenty and thirty since 2005, with no clear trend in data upwards or downwards. Aggravated assault has consistently trended towards higher frequencies since 2005, though many crime statisticians note the significant decrease of reported incidents since a spike in 2011. Since that upward spike, the incidents of aggravated assault have declined approximately 10.5%.

A very interesting trend in the data shows at least two distinct downward ripples in each county’s statistics. These trends don’t always perfectly line up, though the proportions of the data is probably related to the total population count of the county. The significant downward bounces in violent crime can be seen in 2009, and again in 2011. Though there are certainly many aspects which contribute to the occurrence of violent crime, significant nation-wide events very well may have an effect. In 2008 for example, America elected its first African American President, an event which marks what many consider to be a significant step towards true equality in the country. Then again, a more localized and less-significant event may have had an equally strong impact on the data, such as an increase in minimum wage, or a general decrease on the cost of living.