ANALYSIS OF VIOLENT CRIMES IN THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES
FROM 1990 TO 1997

A Staff Report
Prepared by
Management Services Division

February 24, 1998

BACKGROUND

For the past several years, violent crimes have been decreasing nationwide and are substantially less frequent than they were in the beginning of the 1990's. Although this decline has been highly publicized, polls have shown that crime and the fear of crime rank among the most important concerns of the public. Accordingly, while the drop in violent crime in the City of Los Angeles has outpaced that of most of the nation, there is growing widespread concern with public safety in the City. In response to this concern, the City's leadership and the public have demanded stricter and more punitive policies. Furthermore, local, state and federal governments have allocated additional funds to crime control.

The purpose of this report is to provide a more accurate view of violent crime in the City so that the effects of those strategies may be assessed. This includes an analysis of violent crime statistics for the period between 1990 and 1997. Frequencies and percent change of reported homicides, aggravated assaults, robberies, and forcible rapes are examined.

In addition, this report considers whether the reductions in violent crime were significantly different after homicide and non-domestic violence related aggravated assault were classified as Repressible Violent Crimes in 1994. A previous Department study found that in 1986, 70 percent of the City's murders and 65 percent of our felony assaults (other than those involving domestic violence) occurred in public places. By 1992, those figures grew to 82 and 74 percent respectively. On January 1, 1994, in response to these findings, the LAPD=s category of Repressible Violent Crime was redefined to include homicide, aggravated assault (except those involving domestic violence) and robbery. Because violent crime causes a disproportionate increase in the community's perception and fear of crime, identifying these violent crimes as repressible was intended to direct Department focus to these crimes which are both destructive to the community and highly affected by enforcement efforts. This expansion also held officers and their command staff accountable for reducing the incidence of those crimes.

VIOLENT CRIME IN THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

Addendum 1 shows that homicides and aggravated assaults have dropped for six consecutive years in the City of Los Angeles. In 1997, homicides and aggravated assaults were down 4.7 percent from the 1996 totals. The declines in 1993, 1994 and 1996 were even more
significant at 8.5 percent, 7.1 percent and 9.2 percent respectively. The 1997 total of 34,634 homicides and aggravated assaults is nearly one-quarter below the 1990 figures, a 24.7 percent decrease over the seven year period. This trend appears to be even more notable when domestic violence related aggravated assaults are omitted and all repressible violent crimes are considered (Addendum 2). During just the last three years, 1995 to 1997, the frequency of repressible violent crimes dropped almost 29 percent relative to the 1994 total. This compares to a 15 percent reduction for homicides and all aggravated assaults during the same three-year period (Addendum 1).

Addenda 3 through 6 present crime data separately for homicide, robbery, aggravated assault and forcible rape. The most striking declines are found in homicide and robbery, which both fell over 45 percent from the end of 1993 through 1997 (Addenda 3 and 4). The frequencies of aggravated assault and forcible rape also dropped significantly, by about one-fifth, in that same time period (Addenda 5 and 6). When repressible aggravated assaults (that is, those not involving domestic violence) are reviewed separately, as in Addendum 5, the decline is over 22 percent from 1994 to 1997. This compares to a decrease of about 15 percent for all aggravated assaults over the same period.

FACTORS WHICH MAY ACCOUNT FOR THE DECREASE IN VIOLENT CRIME

Another purpose of this report is to examine the possibility that classifying homicides and aggravated assaults as Repressible Crimes, which began in 1994, may partially account for the decrease in violent crimes in Los Angeles. For years criminologists, police officials and politicians have attempted to determine the reasons for the recent decline in crime, and particularly violent crime. The one thing all the experts agree on is that not one, but a number of variables affect crime rates. Although there are many reasons, some factors which may partially account for the decrease in violent crime in the City of Los Angeles are as follows:

* **Stronger economy** - When other determinants are held constant, generally, the economy is negatively correlated with crime rates. That is to say, as the economy improves or goes up, the crime rate goes down. Addendum 7 shows the Los Angeles County adjusted unemployment rate, an indicator of the state of the economy, has been decreasing slightly since 1994. The 1997 unemployment rate was 2.5 percent below the 1994 rate. However, this is not unique to the City of Los Angeles. The economy and unemployment rates have been improving throughout the nation.

* **Demographics** - Many researchers consider the aging of the population, particularly the aging of the Ababy boomers, as a principal reason for the reductions in crime. The aging of the population results in decreasing numbers of people in the age groups most likely to commit crimes.
Stricter sentencing laws - On November 8, 1994, California voters approved the AThree Strikes Law which became effective the same day. Although laws that impose more rigorous sentencing do not likely have an immediate effect on crime, over time criminals become increasingly aware of the impact of the legislation. By seeing others go to prison, some they know personally and some through the media, criminals may start to believe the law will be taken seriously and alter their own criminal behaviors. Equally important, the core group of hardened criminals, that small portion of the community responsible for a large percentage of crime, is removed from the community through these types of laws. The AThree Strikes Law and similar sentencing laws should have an increasing impact on crime for several years after implementation. We must continue to track this variable.

The January 1994 Northridge earthquake - The major earthquake that occurred in Los Angeles in January 1994, may have contributed to the considerable drop in crime which occurred in 1994. In addition to large numbers of community members being displaced and overwhelmed with Asurvival issues such as food, shelter and water, the Department mobilized thereby increasing the deployment of personnel in the field.

Increased numbers of police officers - The collective attention on crime and the perceived lack of public safety has prompted increased hiring of police officers locally and throughout the United States. Addendum 8 shows that the number of sworn officers has increased by over 1,200 officers, a 15 percent rise, since 1990. Although the number of officers has not grown substantially relative to the City=s population, the increased number of officers represents a substantial increase in this community=s police presence.

Increased efforts in community-police problem solving - It is believed that partnerships between the community and the police to reduce crime and solve quality of life problems are partially responsible for decreased crime in the City. ANeighborhood Watch type programs, Community OutReach Centers and Community-Police Advisory Boards have helped community members take an active role in reducing crime in their neighborhoods.

Expanded definition of Repressible Crime - Because the goal of expanding the Repressible Crime category to include violent crimes was to encourage and strengthen the Department=s enforcement efforts in those areas, it is quite possible that this change accounts for at least some of the City=s reduction in violent crimes. The fact that the most significant reductions in violent crime occurred in the same year the change in the Repressible Crime category became effective (1994), could hardly be classified as Aunrelated. However, the frequency of most crimes has decreased, not just Repressible Crimes. Likewise, the Repressible Crimes category is unique to the City of Los Angeles, though violent crimes have gone down across the nation, not just in Los Angeles.
CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, 1994 was a year marked with changes that, in combination, may have stimulated significant reductions in violent crime. As indicated above, in January 1994, the definition of Repressible Crime was redefined to include homicide, most aggravated assaults, and robbery. The Northridge earthquake occurred almost simultaneously. In March 1994, the AThree Strikes Law was passed by the legislature and then voted into law in November of that year. It is likely that these factors contributed, at least in part, to the decline in violent crime.

Numerous interrelated social, psychological, demographic, economic and political factors contribute to the degree and severity of crime in the City. Conditions and events can combine in certain ways that have a noteworthy effect on the frequency of crime, even in large metropolitan cities. Perhaps some of the factors indicated above, such as natural disaster, legislation, demographics and policing strategies have combined in just the right way to have a positive effect on crime.

Contrary to public perception, violent crime is down rather than up. One purpose of this report was to present a more realistic view of the prevalence of crime in the City. Studies have shown that persons are more likely to be accidentally injured at home than they are to be victimized by crime. Yet the level of public concern with crime seems to be rising. If this concern is not based on statistics or experience, it may be a result of both the volume and type of media coverage crime receives. Television and print media, the most widely used sources of information on crime, bombard us with disproportionate amounts of violent and sensational crimes. Unfortunately, a sprawling metropolis such as Los Angeles can make one feel as though he or she is being surrounded by very violent crimes when in fact, the crimes may be occurring over fifty miles away, and in no discernable pattern.
ADDENDA

1. Homicides and Aggravated Assaults Combined
2. Repressible Violent Crimes
3. Homicide
4. Robbery
5. Aggravated Assault
6. Forcible Rape
7. Adjusted Unemployment Rate and Los Angeles Police Department Sworn Personnel
ADDENDA

1. Homicides and Aggravated Assaults Combined
2. Violent Repressible Crimes
3. Homicide
4. Robbery
5. Aggravated Assault
6. Forcible Rape
7. Adjusted Unemployment Rate and Los Angeles Police Department Sworn Personnel
Addendum 1
Homicides and Aggravated Assaults Combined
(Includes Domestic Violence Related Assaults)
1990 to 1997

Percent Change
From Previous Year

- \(+5.2\)  
- \(-1.2\)  
- \(-8.5\)  
- \(-7.1\)  
- \(-2.1\)  
- \(-9.2\)  
- \(-4.7\)  

Frequency
Addendum 2
Violent Repressible Crimes
(Includes Homicides and Non-Domestic Violence Related Aggravated Assaults)
1994 to 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>25,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>23,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>21,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>19,678</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Change From Previous Year:
- 1994 to 1995: -5.9%
- 1995 to 1996: -10.5%
- 1996 to 1997: -8.4%
Addendum 3
Homicide
1990 to 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Change From Previous Year:
- 1990 to 1991: +4.3%
- 1991 to 1992: +6.5%
- 1992 to 1993: -1.4%
- 1993 to 1994: -21.1%
- 1994 to 1995: -1.4%
- 1995 to 1996: -15.6%
- 1996 to 1997: -16.4%
Addendum 4
Robbery
1990 to 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>35,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>39,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>39,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>38,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>30,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>28,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>25,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>20,506</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Change
From Previous Year
+10.3  -5.8  -2.6  -19.8  -5.6  -13.8  -18.0

Frequency
Adjusted Unemployment Rate
County of Los Angeles
1990 to 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Los Angeles Police Department Sworn Personnel
1990 to 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Officers</td>
<td>8458</td>
<td>8192</td>
<td>7757</td>
<td>7667</td>
<td>7917</td>
<td>8976</td>
<td>9204</td>
<td>9720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers per 1000 City Residents</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>