

# Watsonville crime rate lowest in 30 years

Police attribute drop to community relations, gang prevention work

*Crime & Criminals - 2000*  
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WATSONVILLE — Police credit more officers on the street and greater cooperation from the community for hitting the lowest crime rate per capita in nearly 30 years in Watsonville last year.

The rate, per 1,000 people, is based on the FBI crime rate, which includes violent crimes such as homicide and rape as well as burglaries and vehicle thefts.

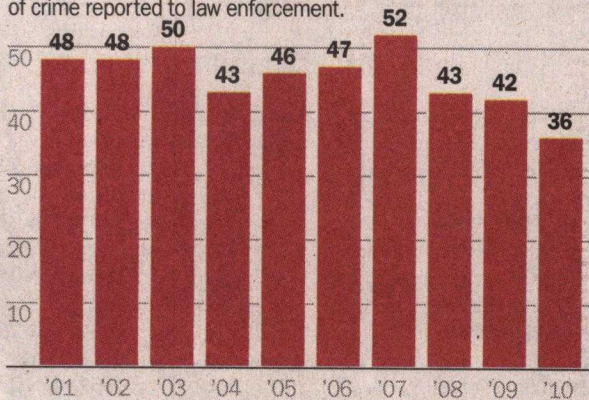
While Police Chief Manny Solano acknowledged there have been violent crimes in the city in recent months, he credited police partnerships with the public and focused efforts on gang crime that have helped reduce the crime rate in the past few decades.

"While this is very good news, we also realize that we have a lot of work ahead of us," Solano said. "I believe we're on the right track, and it just tells us we need to keep doing what we're doing."

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## WATSONVILLE CRIME RATE

Crimes per 1,000 residents over the past 10 years based on FBI crime index. The FBI crime index is composed of selected offenses — including murder, rape, robbery, assault and property crimes — used to gauge fluctuations in overall volume and rate of crime reported to law enforcement.



SOURCE: Watsonville Police

ANTHONY L. SOLIS/SENTINEL

## CRIME

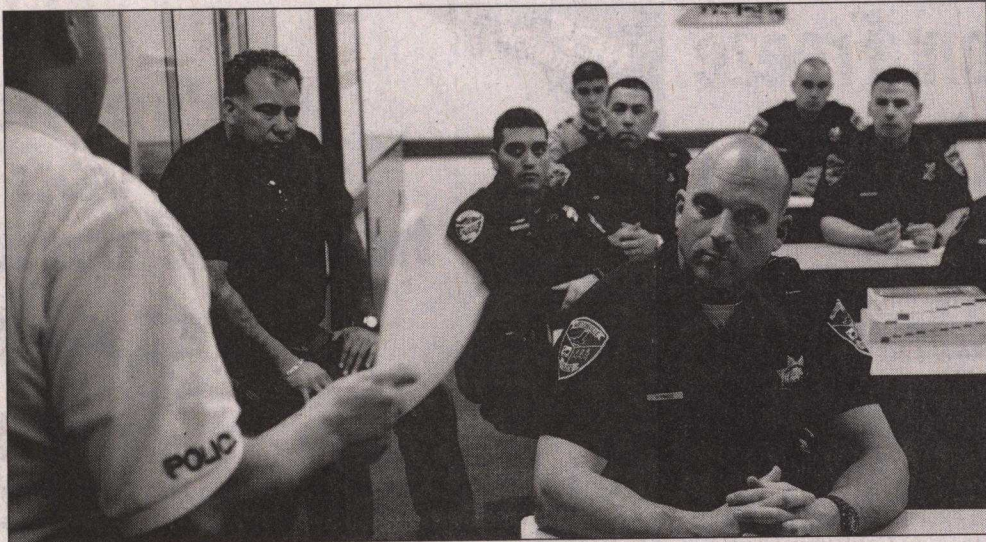
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Last year there were 36 crimes per 1,000 people reported, compared with 42 per 1,000 people in 2009 and 43 in 2008.

Watsonville annually reports its crime statistics, and the data also was broken down for violent crime, property crime, arrests and other matters.

The city saw just one homicide in 2010, when 32-year-old shopkeeper Yahya Ahmed was shot point-blank during a robbery. Christian Speaker, a 17-year-old, was arrested in connection with the killing a few days later. The city also reported this year's first and only homicide in the county though that is not included in these statistics. No one has been arrested in the Jan. 2 stabbing death of 32-year-old Jose Alfredo Coronel.

There were four homicides in Watsonville in 2009, three in 2008 and one in 2007, police said. Reported homicides since 1982 peaked at six in both 2006 and 1996, according to records. Meanwhile the city's popula-



LARISSA MUELLER/SENTINEL

Watsonville police officer Skip Prigge, foreground, and other officers listen in a meeting on Thursday as Chief Manny Solano shares the news: The city's crime rate fell in 2010 to the lowest it's been in nearly 30 years.

tion has grown from about 25,500 in 1980 to 58,000 in 2010, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Linda Peters, the administrative services manager for the police department, said crime analysts look at reported crimes weekly. Violent crime had increased in the first half of 2010 but dropped for the year as a whole.

"I was happy to see that the violent crime rate was reduced and gang-motivated crime was reduced. We have a number of initiatives we've been working on," Peters said.

Robberies and domestic violence increased last year, police said.

There were 31 reported robberies with a firearm in 2010 compared with six in 2009,

said Peters. Reported robberies with a knife rose by two to 20 in 2010.

Gang-motivated violent crime fell from 203 in 2009 to 182 in 2010.

Peters and Solano said a \$147,000 federal grant received in 2009 that paid for police overtime of a robbery suppression team netted several arrests, taking criminals off

the street.

An increase in the number of officers has helped as well, Solano said. The department had 69 officers in 2010, up two from 2009.

The rates per capita of burglary and thefts dropped in 2010 compared to the previous year, and vehicle thefts dropped 38 percent compared with the previous year, police said.

Solano said with positive progress, he hoped the police department would maintain its staff size as the City Council considers budget cuts.

Solano credited citizen cooperation with police recent strides in fighting crime. He said he wants to build on that momentum and maintain his programs. After violent crimes the department reaches out to neighborhoods with its Post Incident Team made up of officers as well as city officials who walk the streets in an effort to help calm fears and gather information.

"Thirty years is a long spread of time, and what we're starting to see is the byproduct of all that work," Solano said. "I just don't want them to think that we're going to let up."