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Cities across Southern California report drops in violent crime in 2009

Garden Grove reported an 11% drop, Anaheim had a 10% decrease and L.A. saw a 10% drop over the year before, FBI data show. But in Fullerton, violent crime increased.

By Robert J. Lopez

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Mirroring a national trend, the number of violent crimes reported in cities across Southern California dropped in 2009 from the previous year, according to preliminary figures released Monday by the FBI.

The statistics show that violent crime nationwide fell 5.5% last year, compared with figures reported the previous year. But the decrease was even bigger in areas of Orange County and the Inland Empire, where some cities reported double-digit drops in the number of murders, robberies, forcible rapes and aggravated assaults.

The crime drops came as the nation was reeling from rising unemployment and a bad economy, factors that are commonly believed to help fuel violence.

"I just think it shows how little sociologists know about crime," said Malcolm Klein, a USC professor emeritus who has researched gang violence and crime trends. "Whatever drives crime is crime itself rather than how we respond to it."

In Orange County, Garden Grove reported 541 violent crimes last year, compared to 609 in 2008. That was an 11% drop, according to FBI figures.

Anaheim, meanwhile, logged 1,184 violent crimes in 2009 — 128 fewer than the year before. That was about a 10% decrease.

The Los Angeles Police Department had already reported this year that the city had seen a 10% drop in violent crimes in 2009 compared to the previous year.

However, not all jurisdictions recorded decreases in violent crimes, the FBI statistics show.

In Fullerton, the number of violent crimes rose 28% — from 410 in 2008 to 526 last year. The increase was driven, in part, by a rise in the reported number of aggravated assaults — 227 in 2008 compared to 291 last year, according to the data.

"We do have a lot of assaults in town because we have a lot of bars," said Sgt. Andrew Goodrich, a Fullerton Police Department spokesman.

During the last several years, Goodrich said, the city's violent crime rate has been relatively stable, which indicates that the 2009 figures may be an anomaly. "It definitely appears to be a blip," he said.

Ventura recorded a 7% drop in violent crimes last year compared to the year before. During the same period, Riverside showed a 20% decrease and Ontario reported a 17% drop, according to the data.