

Prop. 47 lowers county inmate counts

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

A November 2014 ballot measure that reduced punishment for drug possession and low-level theft crimes lowered county jail populations by 9 percent in its first year, an effect that could increase public safety by allowing more serious criminals to be kept behind bars longer, according to a study released Wednesday.

The report by the Public Policy Institute of California gives supporters of Proposition 47 a counterargument against police and prosecutors who blamed the ballot measure for a statewide increase in crime last year. Another study earlier this month found an 8 percent increase in crimes reported in the state's largest cities during the first six months of 2015, compared with the same period in 2014, but also found that crime rates had risen more rapidly in counties that released fewer inmates from jail under Proposition 47.

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