

Crime in the United States

1998

Uniform Crime Reports



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FOREWORD

For nearly seven decades, local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies have reported crime statistics to the national Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. As the twenty-first century approaches, the Program continues working diligently to maintain the accuracy and credibility of the statistics received from participating agencies across the Nation. Detailed and timely submissions of data from monthly reports or individual crime incident records enable the UCR Program to compile a reliable set of statistics that can be used to help understand and combat crime.

The UCR Program continues its commitment and support towards the full implementation of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). Through its progressive, automated collection methods, NIBRS offers a wealth of crime information which has never before been available, taking crime reporting into the next century. As NIBRS becomes the standard of UCR, it will provide a more comprehensive national perspective of the characteristics, elements, volume, diversity, and complexity of reported crime.

The significant challenge of reducing crime requires commitment from all law enforcement agencies. The evolution of the UCR Program continues to bring about improvements that will provide additional information to the criminal justice community, government agencies, researchers, students, and others. Helping to prepare law enforcement agencies to meet daily challenges, this publication exists as one weapon in the fight against crime.

CRIME FACTORS

Each year when *Crime in the United States* is published, many entities—news media, tourism agencies, and other groups with an interest in crime in our Nation—use reported Crime Index figures to compile rankings of cities and counties. These rankings lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses which often create misleading perceptions adversely affecting cities and counties, along with their residents. Assessing criminality and law enforcement’s response from jurisdiction to jurisdiction must encompass many elements, some of which, while having significant impact, are not readily measurable nor applicable pervasively among all locales. Geographic and demographic factors specific to each jurisdiction must be considered and applied if crime assessment is to approach completeness and accuracy. There are several sources of information which may assist the responsible researcher. The U.S. Bureau of the Census data, for example, can be utilized to better understand the makeup of a locale’s population. The transience of the population, its racial and ethnic makeup, its composition by age and gender, education levels, and prevalent family structures are all key factors in assessing and comprehending the crime issue.

Local chambers of commerce, planning offices, or similar entities provide information regarding the economic and cultural makeup of cities and counties. Understanding a jurisdiction’s industrial/economic base, its dependence upon neighboring jurisdictions, its transportation system, its economic dependence on nonresidents (such as tourists and convention attendees), its proximity to military installations, etc., all contribute to accurately gauging and interpreting the crime known to and reported by law enforcement.

The strength (personnel and other resources) and the aggressiveness of a jurisdiction’s law enforcement agency are also key factors. While information pertaining to the number of sworn and civilian law enforcement employees can be found in this publication, assessment of the law enforcement emphases is, of course, much more difficult. For example, one city may report more crime than a comparable one, not because there is more crime, but rather because its law enforcement agency through proactive efforts identifies more offenses. Attitudes of the citizens toward crime and their crime reporting practices, especially concerning more minor offenses, have an impact on the volume of crimes known to police.

It is incumbent upon all data users to become as well educated as possible about how to categorize and quantify the nature and extent of crime in the United States and in any of the approximately 17,000 jurisdictions represented by law enforcement contributors to this Program. Valid assessments are possible only with careful study and analysis of the various unique conditions affecting each local law enforcement jurisdiction.

Historically, the causes and origins of crime have been the subjects of investigation by varied disciplines. Some factors which are known to affect the volume and type of crime occurring from place to place are:

- Population density and degree of urbanization.
- Variations in composition of the population, particularly youth concentration.
- Stability of population with respect to residents’ mobility, commuting patterns, and transient factors.
- Modes of transportation and highway system.
- Economic conditions, including median income, poverty level, and job availability.
- Cultural factors and educational, recreational, and religious characteristics.
- Family conditions with respect to divorce and family cohesiveness.
- Climate.
- Effective strength of law enforcement agencies.

Administrative and investigative emphases of law enforcement.

Policies of other components of the criminal justice system (i.e., prosecutorial, judicial, correctional, and probational).

Citizens' attitudes toward crime.

Crime reporting practices of the citizenry.

The Uniform Crime Reports give a nationwide view of crime based on statistics contributed by state and local law enforcement agencies. Population size is the only correlate of crime utilized in this publication. While the other factors listed above are of equal concern, no attempt is made to relate them to the data presented. *The reader is, therefore, cautioned against comparing statistical data of individual reporting units from cities, counties, metropolitan areas, states, or colleges and universities solely on the basis of their population coverage or student enrollment.*

Data users are cautioned against comparisons of crime trends presented in this report and those estimated by the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Because of differences in methodology and crime coverage, the two programs examine the Nation's crime problem from somewhat different perspectives, and their results are not strictly comparable. The definitional and procedural differences can account for many of the apparent discrepancies in results from the two programs.

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