Crime in the United States 1999

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FOREWORD

Uniform is defined by Webster as that which is “marked by complete conformity to a rule or pattern or by similarity in salient detail or practice.” For the better part of the twentieth century, the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program has collected, tabulated, and presented crime statistics from city, county, and state law enforcement agencies in the United States in this standardized manner. Despite the Program’s growth and expansion, witnessed by the evolution of its main product from a thin booklet of limited statistics to the comprehensive report that this foreword introduces, the goal of UCR has never wavered. The objective is to compile and maintain useful, reliable, multilevel crime statistics for law enforcement as well as researchers, academicians, the media, and the general public.

Just as the narrow scope of data first collected and published in 1930 has given way to the broader view provided by the modern Summary system, that system is now steadily giving way to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). Entering the new century, this venerable Program is being revitalized by the possibilities that NIBRS presents. Not only are the number of crimes tallied, but the nature, diversity, and characteristics of crime are recorded and studied. This information and its implications may well become as important a weapon in the crime-fighting arsenal as any that an agency possesses.

The foreword of the first Uniform Crime Reports publication, Uniform Crime Reporting: A Complete Manual for Police, published in 1929 states, “The urgent need for national crime statistics in the United States is so well recognized as to require no debate.” The need continues today. The national staff of UCR rededicates itself in this seventy-first year of the Program to meeting the goal set forth at that time: providing meaningful and dependable national crime data.
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 comparing 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.

The national Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program would like to hear from you.

The staff at the national UCR Program are continually striving to improve their publications. We would appreciate it if the primary user of this publication would complete the evaluation form at the end of this book and either mail it to us at the indicated address or fax it: 304-625-5394.
## CONTENTS

**Section I—Summary of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program**

**Section II—Crime Index Offenses Reported**

Narrative comments:

- Crime Index Total: 5
- Violent Crime:
  - Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter: 13
  - Forcible rape: 24
  - Robbery: 27
  - Aggravated assault: 32
- Property Crime:
  - Burglary: 39
  - Larceny-theft: 44
  - Motor vehicle theft: 50
  - Arson: 54
- Hate Crime: 58
- Crime Index Tabulations: 63

### Figures:

- (2.1) Crime clock, 1999: 4
- (2.2) Crime Index total, 1995-1999: 7
- (2.3) Crime Index offenses, percent distribution, 1999: 8
- (2.4) Regional violent and property crime rates, 1999: 9
- (2.5) Violent crime, 1995-1999: 12
- (2.6) Murder, 1995-1999: 15
- (2.7) Murder by relationship, 1999: 20
- (2.8) Forcible rape, 1995-1999: 26
- (2.9) Robbery, 1995-1999: 30
- (2.10) Robbery analysis, 1995-1999: 31
- (2.11) Aggravated assault, 1995-1999: 34
- (2.12) Property crime, 1995-1999: 38
- (2.13) Burglary, 1995-1999: 41
- (2.14) Burglary analysis, 1995-1999: 42
- (2.15) Larceny-theft, 1995-1999: 46
- (2.16) Larceny analysis, 1995-1999: 47
- (2.17) Larceny analysis, 1999: 48
- (2.18) Motor vehicle theft, 1995-1999: 52
- (2.19) Bias-motivated offenses, 1999: 61

### Tables:

- (2.1) Crime Index total by month, percent distribution, 1995-1999: 6
- (2.2) Violent crime total by month, percent distribution, 1995-1999: 11
- Murder:
  - (2.3) Month, percent distribution, 1995-1999: 14
  - (2.4) Victims, by race and sex, 1999: 14
  - (2.5) Victims, by age, sex, and race, 1999: 16
  - (2.6) Offenders, by age, sex, and race, 1999: 16
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables—Continued</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Victim/offender relationship, by age, 1999</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Victim/offender relationship, by race and sex, 1999</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Types of weapons used, by region, percent distribution, 1999</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 Victims, types of weapons used, 1995-1999</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11 Victims, by age, types of weapons used, 1999</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12 Circumstances, by relationship, 1999</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13 Circumstances, by weapon, 1999</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14 Circumstances, 1995-1999</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15 Circumstances, by victim sex, 1999</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justifiable homicide by weapon, 1995-1999:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.16 Law enforcement</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.17 Private citizen</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcible rape:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.18 Month, percent distribution, 1995-1999</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.19 Month, percent distribution, 1995-1999</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.20 Region, percent distribution, 1999</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.21 Population group, percent distribution, 1999</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.22 Types of weapons used, by region, percent distribution, 1999</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated assault:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.23 Month, percent distribution, 1995-1999</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.24 Types of weapons used, by region, percent distribution, 1999</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.25 Property crime total by month, percent distribution, 1995-1999</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.26 Month, percent distribution, 1995-1999</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny-theft:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.27 Month, percent distribution, 1995-1999</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.28 Larceny analysis, by region, percent distribution, 1999</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor vehicle theft:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.29 Month, percent distribution, 1995-1999</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.30 Region, percent distribution, 1999</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.31 Rate, population group, 1999</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.32 Type of property, 1999</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.33 Structures not in use, 1999</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.34 Monetary value of property damaged, 1999</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.35 Offenses cleared by arrest, 1999</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.36 Offenses cleared by arrest of persons under 18 years of age, 1999</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate Crime:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.37 Number of incidents, offenses, victims, and known offenders</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by bias motivation, 1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.38 Number of offenses, victims, and known offenders, by offense, 1999</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.39 Number of known offenders, by race, 1999</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.40 Agency hate crime reporting, by state, 1999</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of crime:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) United States, 1980-1999</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) United States, 1999</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Regional offense and population distribution, 1999</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Region, geographic division, and state, 1998-1999</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) State, 1999</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables—Continued

(6) Metropolitan Statistical Area, 1999 83
(7) Offense analysis, United States, 1995-1999 110

Offenses known to the police:
(8) Cities and towns 10,000 and over in population, 1999 111
(9) Universities and colleges, 1999 152
(10) Suburban counties, 1999 162
(11) Rural counties 25,000 and over in population, 1999 176

Crime trends:
(12) Population group, 1998-1999 183
(13) Population group, suburban and nonsuburban cities, 1998-1999 185
(14) Population group, suburban and nonsuburban counties, 1998-1999 186
(15) Population group, breakdown of offenses known, 1998-1999 187

Rate, number of crimes per 100,000 inhabitants:
(16) Population group, 1999 190
(17) Population group, suburban and nonsuburban cities, 1999 192
(18) Population group, suburban and nonsuburban counties, 1999 193
(19) Population group, breakdown of offenses known, 1999 194
(20) Murder, by state, 1999, type of weapon 196
(21) Robbery, by state, 1999, type of weapon 197
(22) Aggravated assault, by state, 1999, type of weapon 198
(23) Offense analysis, number and percent change, 1998-1999 199
(24) Property stolen and recovered, by type and value, 1999 199

Section III—Crime Index Offenses Cleared 201
Narrative comments 201

Figure:
(3.1) Crimes cleared by arrest, 1999 202

Tables:
Offenses known and percent cleared by arrest:
(25) Population group, 1999 203
(26) Geographic region and division, 1999 205
(27) Population group, breakdown of offenses known, 1999 207
(28) Number of offenses, by population group cleared by arrest, of persons under 18 years of age, 1999 209

Section IV—Persons Arrested 211
Narrative comments 211
(4.1) Arrest for drug abuse violations, by region, 1999 211

Tables:
(29) Estimated arrests, United States, 1999 212
Number and rate of arrests:
(30) Geographic region, 1999 213
(31) Population group, 1999 214
Ten-year arrest trends:
(32) Totals, 1990-1999 216
(33) Sex, 1990-1999 217
Tables—Continued

Five-year arrest trends:
(34) Totals, 1995-1999 218
(35) Sex, 1995-1999 219

Current year over previous year arrest trends:
(36) Totals, 1998-1999 220
(37) Sex, 1998-1999 221

Arrests:
(38) By age, 1999 222
(39) Males, by age, 1999 224
(40) Females, by age, 1999 226
(41) Persons under 15, 18, 21, and 25 years of age, 1999 228
(42) By sex, 1999 229
(43) By race, 1999 230

City arrest trends:
(44) 1998-1999 233
(45) Sex, 1998-1999 234

City arrests:
(46) Distribution by age, 1999 235
(47) Persons under 15, 18, 21, and 25 years of age, 1999 237
(48) Distribution by sex, 1999 238
(49) Distribution by race, 1999 239

Suburban county arrest trends:
(50) 1998-1999 242
(51) Sex, 1998-1999 243

Suburban county arrests:
(52) Distribution by age, 1999 244
(53) Persons under 15, 18, 21, and 25 years of age, 1999 246
(54) Distribution by sex, 1999 247
(55) Distribution by race, 1999 248

Rural county arrest trends:
(56) 1998-1999 251
(57) Sex, 1998-1999 252

Rural county arrests:
(58) Distribution by age, 1999 253
(59) Persons under 15, 18, 21, and 25 years of age, 1999 255
(60) Distribution by sex, 1999 256
(61) Distribution by race, 1999 257

Suburban area arrest trends:
(62) 1998-1999 260
(63) Sex, 1998-1999 261

Suburban area arrests:
(64) Distribution by age, 1999 262
(65) Persons under 15, 18, 21, and 25 years of age, 1999 264
(66) Distribution by sex, 1999 265
(67) Distribution by race, 1999 266
(68) Police disposition of juvenile offenders taken into custody, 1999 269
(69) Arrests, by state, 1999 270
Section V—The Chances of Lifetime Murder Victimization, 1997

Narrative comments

Figures
(5.1) Age specific murder rates, by sex
(5.2) Age specific murder rates, by race
(5.3) Murder victimization, by sex
(5.4) Murder victimization, by race
(5.5) Male murder victimization, by race
(5.6) Female murder victimization, by race

Tables:
(5.1) Total U.S. population, murder rate, and number of murders by year
(5.2) Lifetime victimization rate of murder (5 year)
(5.3) 1978 Lifetime victimization rate by murder (10 year)
(5.4a) Expected number of lifetime murder victims, 1997
(5.4b) Expected number of lifetime murder victims, 1978
(5.5) Percent decrease in lifetime murder victimization (1997 vs. 1978)
(Appendix A) Age-specific murder rates, 1997
(Appendix B) Age-specific murder rates, 1978

Section VI—Law Enforcement Personnel

Narrative comments

Tables:
Full-time law enforcement employees, October 31, 1999:
(70) Employees, number and rate per 1,000 inhabitants, geographic region and division by population group
(71) Officers, number and rate per 1,000 inhabitants, geographic region and division by population group
(72) Employees, range in rate per 1,000 inhabitants
(73) Officers, range in rate per 1,000 inhabitants
(74) Employees, percent male and female
(75) Civilian employees, percent of total, population group
(76) State law enforcement agencies
(77) State
(78) Cities
(79) Universities and colleges
(80) Suburban counties
(81) Rural counties

Section VII—Appendices

Appendix I—Methodology
Appendix II—Offenses in Uniform Crime Reporting
Appendix III—Uniform Crime Reporting Area Definitions
Appendix IV—The Nation’s Two Crime Measures
Appendix V—Directory of State Uniform Crime Reporting Programs
Appendix VI—National Uniform Crime Reporting Program Directory
Appendix VII—Uniform Crime Reporting Publications List