

Crime in the United States

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Uniform Crime Reports



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Foreword

The concept of collecting national crime statistics and using them to explore the complexion and scope of the country's crimes originated with discussions among law enforcement officials in the late 1800s. The topic continued to be of interest at national meetings of law enforcement, and the idea gained momentum as the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) took a leading role in promoting it. Finally, in January 1930, 400 cities from 43 of the 48 United States and the territories of Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico submitted their data to the IACP. The association compiled the information into the first national database of crime statistics and subsequently published them in a nine-page report. The IACP published the statistics that they collected thereafter in a monthly pamphlet titled *Uniform Crime Reports for the United States and Its Possessions* and distributed it to participating agencies and other interested parties.

Later in 1930, the years of planning further culminated in the IACP's successful implementation of a data collection program that we now know as the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. By August 1930, the Bureau of Investigation (renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI] in 1935) had assumed oversight of the UCR Program. At the time the IACP transferred the responsibilities of collecting and publishing crime statistics to the FBI, participation in the Program had grown to include 786 cities. In September, the fledgling UCR Program compiled the data into the first monthly report under the auspice of the FBI.

Although the Program experienced many changes throughout the decades that followed, its primary objective has never changed—to provide reliable criminal statistics for use by law enforcement, criminologists, sociologists, legislators, municipal planners, the media, and the general public. As the UCR Program developed through the years, crime categories were added and additional information pertaining to particular crimes were included. Consequently, the resulting reports grew in magnitude and scope. Today, the original pamphlet-sized publication, now titled *Crime in the United States*, has evolved into the current document that exceeds 450 pages and provides crime information from over 17,000 local and state law enforcement agencies.

Despite its long, rich history, the UCR Program is in many ways still in its infancy, and more changes lie ahead as it continues its development. FBI executives are exploring additional ways that the Program's data can be used to support the Nation's law enforcement and other governmental agencies as they struggle to combat crime in a new global environment. Moreover, as the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division joins the current movement to more efficiently use and share data, officials are focusing on the UCR Program's potential to enhance the Nation's criminal justice information network.



Robert S. Mueller, III
Director

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.

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, however, are merely a quick choice made by the data user; they provide no insight into the many variables that mold the crime in a particular town, city, county, state, or region. Consequently, these rankings lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses that often create misleading perceptions adversely affecting cities and counties, along with their residents. To assess criminality and law enforcement's response from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, one must consider many variables, some of which, while having significant impact on crime, are not readily measurable nor applicable pervasively among all locales. Geographic and demographic factors specific to each jurisdiction must be considered and applied if one is going to make an accurate and complete assessment of crime in that jurisdiction. Several sources of information are available that may assist the responsible researcher in exploring the many variables that affect crime in a particular locale. The U.S. Bureau of the Census data, for example, can be used 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, correctional facilities, 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. Although information pertaining to the number of sworn and civilian law enforcement employees can be found in this publication, it cannot alone be used as an assessment of the emphasis that a community places on enforcing the law. 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 understand and quantify the nature and extent of crime in the United States and in any of the more than 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 many disciplines. Some factors that 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.

Crime in the United States provides a nationwide view of crime based on statistics contributed by state and local law enforcement agencies. Population size is the only correlate of crime presented in this publication. Although many of the listed factors equally affect the crime of a particular area, the UCR Program makes no attempt 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. Until data users examine all the variables that affect crime in a town, city, county, state, region, or college or university, they can make no meaningful comparisons.

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