

Crime in the United States

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FOREWORD

The incidence of serious crime in the United States, which has been following a downward spiral since 1992, may be reaching a plateau. Compared to the marked drops noted in recent years, the current slight decline in the Index crime estimate is certain to be viewed by many as no change at all from the previous year's. Only after publication of the next few issues of *Crime in the United States* will we know whether the figures for 2000 signaled an end to the current downward trend or were merely a bump in the road. What can be stated with certainty is that the opportunity to compare national crime totals and speculate upon their significance would not be available without the Uniform Crime Reporting Program, which has been compiling and publishing the Nation's crime statistics since 1930.

In the beginning, the Program was conceived, developed, and originally managed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). The first *Uniform Crime Reports* monthly bulletin for January 1930 contained reports of offenses committed in 400 cities located in 43 states. It provided data from half of all cities over 30,000 in population and covered more than 20 million U.S. inhabitants. This initial response far exceeded the highest hopes of the IACP's Committee on Uniform Crime Records, which had been working for several years to develop the Program.

Throughout the developmental period, the goal of the police chiefs' association had been to transfer the management of the new UCR Program to the FBI (then called the Bureau of Investigation). To achieve this end, the IACP actively sought to amend the legislation that established the identification work of the FBI to include authorization to collect, compile, and distribute "other crime records." The bill was passed by Congress and then approved by President Herbert Hoover on June 11, 1930. The July issue of the *Uniform Crime Reports* announced that the Bureau of Investigation would assume responsibility for crime reporting the following fall. On August 24, 1930, a local Washington, D.C. newspaper, the *Sunday Star*, reported that "Uncle Sam beginning September 1 is going to put his finger on the pulse of crime in America. . . ." Uncle Sam has kept his finger firmly planted on the Nation's crime pulse ever since.

About the cover: The history of the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program is closely linked with the evolution of the FBI's fingerprint identification services. When the Bureau of Investigation assumed responsibility for the UCR Program in 1930, the Program was housed in the Southern Railway Building (top photo) along with approximately 2 million fingerprint cards. The crime reporting program and the fingerprint cards were moved into the new United States Department of Justice Building (top right) in 1934. Over the next 60 years, the UCR Program was located in several different buildings in the Nation's capitol, including the J. Edgar Hoover Building (center photo). In 1992, the Program was included in the reorganization of the FBI's identification services into the new Criminal Justice Information Services Division and was part of the Division's 1995 relocation from Washington, D.C. to the newly constructed, state-of-the art facility at Clarksburg, West Virginia (bottom photo).

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, correctional facilities, state penitentiaries, prisons, jails, 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 nearly 17,000 jurisdictions represented by law enforcement contributors to the Uniform Crime Reporting 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.

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