



Crime

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.

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