



Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

Criminal Victimization 1983

June 1984

Preliminary results from the National Crime Survey indicate that the victimization rate for violent crime in the United States dropped 10% in 1983 to 30.9 per 1,000 persons age 12 and older, the lowest in 6 years. The rate for personal crimes of theft dropped 8% to the lowest level in the 11-year history of the National Crime Survey, which measures crimes not reported to the police as well as those reported.

Behind the drop in victimization rates lay a decline in the number of criminal victimizations—sharper and more widespread than the one that occurred during 1982. National Crime Survey (NCS) findings indicate that Americans sustained about 2.9 million fewer victimizations in 1983 than a year earlier.¹ There were record low rates for several property crimes, and the rate of personal robbery decreased dramatically.²

Considering all offenses measured by the NCS, roughly 36.9 million victimizations were estimated to have occurred in 1983. This figure represents about 7% fewer victimizations than the total of 39.8 million that took place in 1982.³ Between the 2 years, the number of persons age 12 and over (the focus of the NCS) increased by an estimated 1.1%. The latest data also indicate that the rates of reporting offenses to the police remained basically unchanged between 1982 and 1983.

¹ Summary results for 1982 and trends over the first 10 years of the NCS were reported in *Criminal Victimization in the United States: 1973-83 Trends*. BJS Special Report NCJ-80541, September 1983. A comprehensive report for 1982, tenth in an annual series, is now in preparation.

² For definitions of crimes measured by the National Crime Survey and a description of NCS operations see *Measuring Crime*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, NCJ-75710, February 1981.

³ Comparisons made in this report passed a hypothesis test at either the 0.05 level of statistical significance (i.e., the 95% confidence level) or the 0.10 level (the 90% confidence level). In the first

With the release of the 1983 victimization data, the Bureau of Justice Statistics introduces techniques that allow the publication of preliminary data from the National Crime Survey several months prior to the availability of final figures. Although the final figures will differ somewhat from those presented here, the differences are expected to be too small to affect data interpretation.

Considerable statistical re-

search has gone into the development of the preliminary 1983 data. This research continues and is expected to improve and refine our estimation methodology even further in the years ahead. The publication of preliminary statistics on victimization is part of an ongoing Bureau program to improve the quality and timeliness of criminal justice statistics.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

Violent crimes decline

Approximately 568,000 fewer violent victimizations—rapes, personal robberies, and assaults—occurred in 1983 than in 1982, according to the latest NCS estimates (see table 1). In contrast, there were no statistically significant changes between 1981 and 1982 in either the numbers or rates of victimization for violent offenses.

Reductions of 18% in the number of personal robberies and of 7% in assaults contributed to the overall drop in violent crime.⁴ With respect to rape, one of the three NCS-measured violent crimes, neither the number nor the rate changed significantly between 1982 and

instance, the estimated difference between the values examined was greater than twice the standard error of the difference. In the second, the estimated difference between the values examined was within the range of 1.8 and 2.0 standard errors—statistically significant at the 0.10 level but not at the 0.05 level. In the text, such comparisons have been footnoted. The statistical testing procedure included a "prediction error" term developed from a time-series study of the feasibility of using collection-year data to project the final (calendar-year) results. Post-1973 NCS data were used in developing projection error terms for each category of crime and each type of statistic (numbers, rates of victimization, or percents of victimizations

1983. The rate for rape, based on women only, was 1.4 victimizations per 1,000 in 1983 (see figure 1).

The decline in personal robbery centered upon the less serious form—robberies not resulting in victim

Trends in victimization rates for violent crimes, 1973-83

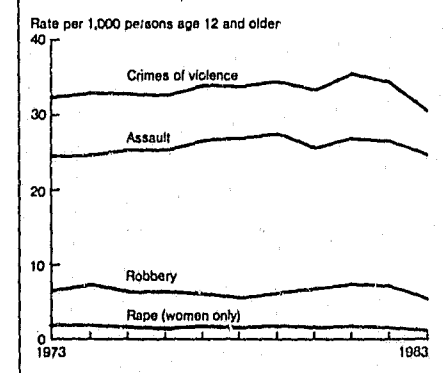


Figure 1

reported to the police.) The presence and level of statistically significant differences are noted on tables 1, 3, and 5.

⁴ The differences between the 1982 and 1983 (preliminary) levels for both robbery and assault are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

Table 1. Preliminary changes in victimization levels and rates for personal and household crimes, 1982-83

Sector and type of crime	Victimization levels (1,000s)			Victimization rates		
	1982	Preliminary 1983	Percent change	1982	Preliminary 1983	Percent change
Personal sector						
Crimes of violence	6,459	5,891	*-8.8	34.3	30.9	*-9.8
Rape	153	162	5.9	0.8	0.9	4.9
Completed rape	46	68	47.8	0.3	0.4	48.0
Attempted rape	106	97	-8.5	0.6	0.5	-8.9
Robbery	1,334	1,092	** -18.1	7.1	5.7	*-19.1
Robbery with injury	414	395	-4.6	2.2	2.1	-5.9
From serious assault	213	193	-9.4	1.1	1.0	-10.6
From minor assault	202	203	0.5	1.1	1.1	-0.9
Robbery without injury	919	701	** -23.7	4.9	3.7	** -24.4
Assault	4,973	4,648	** -6.5	26.4	24.4	*-7.6
Aggravated assault	1,754	1,577	-10.1	9.3	8.3	** -11.1
With injury	587	575	-2.0	3.1	3.0	-3.2
Attempted with weapon	1,167	1,003	-14.1	6.2	5.3	** -15.0
Simple assault	3,219	3,070	-4.6	17.1	16.1	-5.7
With injury	859	805	-6.3	4.6	4.2	-7.2
Attempted without weapon	2,360	2,265	-4.0	12.5	11.9	-5.0
Crimes of theft	15,553	14,450	*-7.1	82.5	75.8	*-8.1
Personal larceny with contact	577	515	-10.7	3.1	2.7	-11.8
Purse snatching	177	143	-19.2	1.0	0.8	-20.0
Completed purse snatching	131	93	-29.0	0.7	0.5	-30.0
Attempted purse snatching	46	53	15.2	0.3	0.3	12.0
Pocket picking	399	372	-6.8	2.1	2.0	-8.0
Personal larceny without contact	14,976	13,937	** -6.9	79.5	73.1	*-8.0
Total population age 12 and over	188,497	190,586	1.1			
Household sector						
Household burglary	6,663	6,137	*-7.9	78.2	71.2	*-8.9
Forcible entry	2,104	1,892	-10.1	24.7	22.0	** -11.1
Unlawful entry without force	2,932	2,667	-9.0	34.4	31.0	** -10.1
Attempted forcible entry	1,627	1,580	-2.9	19.1	18.3	-4.0
Household larceny	9,705	9,187	** -5.3	113.9	106.6	*-6.4
Less than \$50	4,614	4,442	-3.7	54.1	51.5	-4.8
\$50 or more	3,964	3,714	-6.3	46.5	43.1	-7.4
Amount not available	444	399	-10.1	5.2	4.6	-11.1
Attempted larceny	683	632	-7.5	8.0	7.3	-8.5
Motor vehicle theft	1,377	1,215	-11.8	16.2	14.1	-12.8
Completed theft	947	819	-13.5	11.1	9.5	-14.4
Attempted theft	430	394	-8.4	5.1	4.6	-9.5
Total number of households	85,211	86,179	1.1			

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Percent change based on unrounded figures. Victimization rates are calculated on the basis of the number of victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 and over (personal sector) or per 1,000 households

(household sector).
* The difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.
** The difference is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

injury. The rate for this offense declined by roughly a fourth between 1982 and 1983.⁵ The reduction in the rate for robbery with injury was not statistically significant.

The overall rate for robbery—5.7 victimizations per 1,000 persons—was clearly lower than in 1981 or 1982. It was not, however, significantly different from the rates for most of the pre-1981 period (see tables 2 and 3).

The assault rate—24.4 victimizations per 1,000—was lower than the corresponding rates for the preceding 2 years and for 1977-79. The 1983 aggravated assault rate was also a near-record low—below the figures for 9 of the 10 preceding years, but not significantly different from the rate for 1980.

⁵ The difference between the 1982 rate and 1983 (preliminary) rate for robbery without injury is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

Personal thefts down 8%

The victimization rate for personal larceny without victim-offender contact continued a general downturn that began in 1978. The rate for 1983—73.1 victimizations per 1,000 persons—was the lowest in NCS history (see figure 2).

Personal larcenies involving victim-offender contact—purse snatchings and pocket pickings—occur far less frequently than the noncontact larcenies and have had few statistically significant fluctuations in annual rates. Although matching the previously observed low (for 1977), the 1983 rate for larceny with contact was not significantly different from the figures for 1982 or most of the preceding years.

Because of the appreciable decline in personal larceny without contact, the 1983 overall rate for personal crimes of theft was lower than the 1982 figure by about 8%. The resulting rate—75.8

Trends in victimization rates for selected crimes, 1973-83

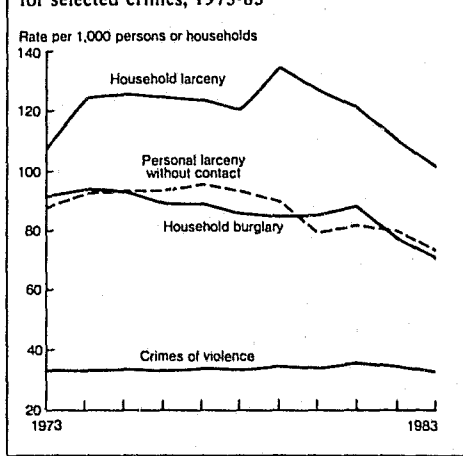


Figure 2

victimizations per 1,000 individuals—is the lowest to date for this grouping of crimes.

Residential crimes also drop

The NCS measures three kinds of offenses against residential property—burglary, household larceny, and motor vehicle theft. For all of these combined, some 1.2 million fewer incidents occurred in 1983 than in 1982. This decline represents roughly 7% fewer crimes. Two of the household offenses were affected by reductions in the rate of victimization for 1983.

Following a 10-year low that was set in 1982, the rate of residential burglary declined by about 9% in 1983. Therefore, the 1983 figure—71.2 burglaries per 1,000 households—is a second consecutive record low. Both forms of completed burglary—forcible entries (break-ins) and unforced entries—shared in the reduction.⁶

Household larceny, which had decreased gradually since 1979, continued this trend. In fact, the preliminary rate—106.6 larcenies per 1,000 households—was significantly lower than in any previous year, except 1973.

Few statistically significant year-to-year fluctuations have been recorded for motor vehicle theft, and the apparent drop in the 1983 rate for this crime was not statistically significant.

No change in police reporting

The overall proportion of crimes reported to the police remained essentially unchanged for the first 3 years of the 1980s. This trend appears to have continued through 1983 (see figure 3).

⁶ The differences between the 1982 rates and 1983 (preliminary) rates for forcible entry and unlawful entry without force are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

Table 2. Victimization rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-82 and 1983 preliminary

Sector and type of crime	(Rate per 1,000)										
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	Preliminary 1983
Personal sector											
Crimes of violence	32.6	33.0	32.8	32.6	33.9	33.7	34.5	33.3	35.3	34.3	30.9
Rape	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.9
Robbery	6.7	7.2	6.8	6.5	6.2	5.9	6.3	6.6	7.4	7.1	5.7
Assault	24.9	24.8	25.2	25.3	26.8	26.9	27.2	25.8	27.0	26.4	24.4
Aggravated assault	10.1	10.4	9.6	9.9	10.0	9.7	9.9	9.3	9.6	9.3	8.3
Simple assault	14.8	14.4	15.6	15.4	16.8	17.2	17.3	16.5	17.3	17.1	16.1
Crimes of theft	91.1	95.1	96.0	96.1	97.3	96.8	91.9	83.0	85.1	82.5	75.8
Personal larceny with contact	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.1	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.1	2.7
Personal larceny without contact	88.0	92.0	92.9	93.2	94.6	93.6	89.0	80.0	81.9	79.5	73.1
Household sector											
Household burglary	91.7	93.1	91.7	88.9	88.5	86.0	84.1	84.3	87.9	78.2	71.2
Household larceny	107.0	123.8	125.4	124.1	123.3	119.9	133.7	126.5	121.0	113.9	106.6
Motor vehicle theft	19.1	18.8	15.5	16.5	17.0	17.5	17.5	16.7	17.1	16.2	14.1

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Statistically significant differences between the rates for 1983 and each preceding year are identified on table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of changes in victimization rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-83, based on 1983 preliminary data

Sector and type of crime	Percent change in victimization rate									
	1973-83	1974-83	1975-83	1976-83	1977-83	1978-83	1979-83	1980-83	1981-83	1982-83
Personal sector										
Crimes of violence	-5.0	-6.2	-5.8	-5.1	*-8.8	*-8.3	*-10.5	** -7.0	*-12.5	*-9.8
Rape	-10.5	-13.3	-6.6	1.2	-4.5	-12.4	-21.3	-9.6	-10.5	4.9
Robbery	-15.0	*-20.2	-15.2	-11.3	-7.9	-2.7	-8.5	-12.7	*-22.7	*-19.1
Assault	-2.0	-1.8	-3.2	-3.5	*-9.0	*-9.2	*-10.4	-5.3	*-9.6	*-7.6
Aggravated assault	*-17.8	*-20.3	*-13.8	*-16.0	*-17.0	*-14.6	*-16.5	-10.6	*-14.1	** -11.1
Simple assault	** 8.9	*11.6	3.5	4.5	-4.2	-6.1	-6.8	-2.3	** -7.0	-5.7
Crimes of theft	*-16.8	*-20.3	*-21.0	*-21.1	*-22.0	*-21.6	*-17.5	*-8.7	*-10.9	*-8.1
Personal larceny with contact	-12.1	-13.2	-12.6	-6.6	1.9	-13.5	-5.9	-10.9	** -16.9	-11.8
Personal larceny without contact	*-16.9	*-20.5	*-21.3	*-21.5	*-22.7	*-21.9	*-17.8	*-8.6	*-10.7	*-8.0
Household sector										
Household burglary	*-22.3	*-23.5	*-22.3	*-19.9	*-19.6	*-17.2	*-15.3	*-15.5	*-19.0	*-8.9
Household larceny	-0.4	*-13.9	*-15.0	*-14.1	*-13.5	*-11.1	*-20.3	*-15.7	*-11.9	*-6.4
Motor vehicle theft	*-26.2	*-25.1	*-27.7	** -14.5	*-17.0	*-19.5	*-19.6	*-15.6	*-17.7	-12.8

NOTE: Percent change calculated using rates that were rounded to the nearest hundredth.

* The difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

** The difference is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

According to the latest data, victims reported 34.7% of all victimizations to

Trends in police reporting rates for selected crimes, 1973-83

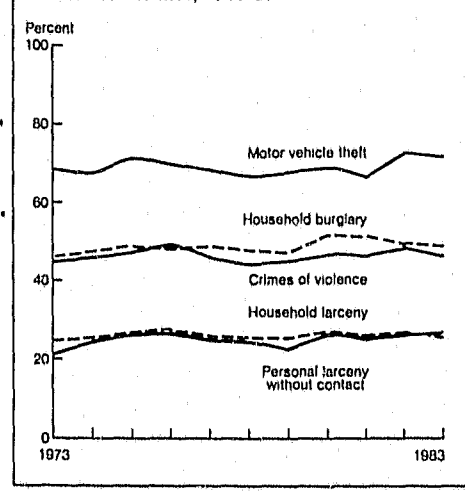


Figure 3

the police, not significantly different from the figure (35.7%) for 1982.⁷

An apparent decline between 1982 and 1983 in the police reporting rate for violent crimes as a whole was not statistically significant (see tables 4 and 5). There is some indication that the police reporting rate for rape declined substantially in 1983.⁸ In general, however, no distinct pattern or trend emerged from the projected police reporting rates.

As in past years, motor vehicle theft, with roughly 7 in every 10 incidents reported to the police, had a relatively high rate of reporting. With approximately 3 in every 4 cases unreported, personal larceny without

⁷ The aggregate rates of police reporting are averages calculated for all of the categories shown in table 4.

⁸ The difference between the 1982 and 1983 (preliminary) police reporting rates for rape is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

contact and household larceny again had comparatively low police reporting rates.

A note about the preliminary estimates

This is the first release of preliminary NCS victimization levels and rates, as well as police reporting data. The procedure used in calculating these results is believed to have yielded a reliable indication of the direction and magnitude of change in criminal victimization during 1983. For reasons discussed below, the final 1983 estimates—to be released in the fall—will differ somewhat from the figures in this report. For the vast majority of estimates, however, those differences will not be statistically significant.

Collection year vs. reference year.

The NCS measures selected personal and household offenses, including crimes not reported to the police,

Table 4. Police reporting rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-82 and 1983 preliminary

Sector and type of crime	Percent of victimizations reported to the police										
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	Preliminary 1983
Personal sector											
Crimes of violence	45.5	46.9	47.2	48.8	46.1	44.2	45.1	47.1	46.6	48.2	46.2
Rape	48.9	51.8	56.2	52.7	58.4	48.8	50.5	41.4	55.7	52.8	34.9
Robbery	52.5	53.6	53.3	53.3	55.5	50.5	55.5	56.8	55.8	56.2	54.2
Assault	43.5	44.7	45.2	47.5	43.5	42.7	42.4	44.9	43.7	45.9	44.8
Aggravated assault	51.6	53.1	55.2	58.4	51.5	52.7	51.3	54.0	52.2	57.6	60.4
Simple assault	38.0	38.7	39.0	40.6	38.8	37.0	37.4	39.8	39.0	39.6	36.9
Crimes of theft	22.1	24.6	26.3	26.6	24.8	24.6	24.0	26.9	26.7	26.9	26.5
Personal larceny with contact	32.8	33.8	34.5	36.2	37.2	33.7	35.6	35.7	40.4	32.7	34.7
Personal larceny without contact	21.8	24.2	26.0	26.3	24.5	24.3	23.6	26.5	26.2	26.7	26.2
Household sector											
Household burglary	46.6	47.7	48.6	48.1	48.8	47.1	47.6	51.3	51.1	49.3	49.6
Household larceny	24.8	25.2	27.1	27.0	25.4	24.5	25.1	27.5	26.2	26.8	25.4
Motor vehicle theft	68.3	67.3	71.1	69.5	68.4	66.1	68.2	69.3	66.6	72.4	71.8

NOTE: Statistically significant differences between the rates for 1983 and each preceding year are identified on table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of changes in police reporting rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-83, based on 1983 preliminary data

Sector and type of crime	Percent change in police reporting rate									
	1973-83	1974-83	1975-83	1976-83	1977-83	1978-83	1979-83	1980-83	1981-83	1982-83
Personal sector										
Crimes of violence	1.6	-1.3	-2.0	-5.2	0.3	4.6	2.7	-1.9	-0.7	-4.0
Rape	-28.6	** -32.6	* -37.9	** -33.8	* -40.3	-28.5	-30.9	-15.7	* -37.3	** -33.9
Robbery	3.4	1.2	1.8	1.7	-2.3	7.3	-2.3	-4.6	-2.8	-3.5
Assault	3.0	0.2	-1.0	-5.8	2.9	5.0	5.6	-0.2	2.4	-2.5
Aggravated assault	*17.0	**13.6	9.3	3.4	*17.2	**14.4	*17.7	11.7	*15.6	4.7
Simple assault	-2.8	-4.5	-5.4	-9.0	-4.9	-0.1	-1.2	-7.1	-5.3	-6.6
Crimes of theft	*19.8	7.9	0.9	-0.2	6.8	7.6	*10.4	-1.3	-0.9	-1.4
Personal larceny with contact	5.9	2.6	0.5	-4.2	-6.6	3.1	-2.4	-2.9	-14.1	6.2
Personal larceny without contact	*20.5	8.1	0.8	-0.3	7.0	7.7	*10.9	-1.2	0.0	-1.7
Household sector										
Household burglary	6.4	4.0	2.1	3.0	1.6	5.3	4.3	-3.3	-2.9	0.6
Household larceny	2.4	0.6	-6.3	-6.2	-0.3	3.6	0.9	** -7.8	-3.3	-5.3
Motor vehicle theft	5.1	6.7	1.0	3.4	5.0	8.8	*5.3	3.6	7.8	-0.8

NOTE: Percent change calculated using rates that were rounded to the nearest hundredth.

* The difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

** The difference is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

through interviews at 6-month intervals with the occupants of housing units that make up a representative national sample. (During 1983, some 128,000 persons—occupants of about 60,000 housing units—participated in the survey). Field interviews are administered monthly to one-sixth of the sample, according to a rotation schedule. Information pertaining to the previous 6 months is gathered at each interview.

The use of the 6-month reference period causes the collection year to lag 6 months behind the reference year. By the end of 1983, about 71% of the data for that year had been gathered. The balance of the data for 1983 will be collected between January and June 1984.⁹ Interviews conducted in June 1984—referencing the period from December 1983 to May 1984—will provide the final portion of 1983 data.

⁹ The 71% data-collection rate for 1983 and the 29% figure cited later in the text are estimates.

Given the chronological disparity between a collection year (the period during which the interviews are conducted) and a reference year (the period during which the crimes are reported to have occurred), roughly 29% of the data for the 1983 reference year had not been gathered by the end of the year. The missing information pertains to the latter half of 1983 and is concentrated toward the later months of that period (i.e., more is missing for December than November, more for November than October, etc.).

Early estimation. The 1983 estimates in this report were derived from a detailed comparison of nationwide data gathered during 1982 and 1983 (i.e., during the 2 most recent, complete data-collection years). The method of estimation had two steps: (1) Percent changes were calculated, on a crime-by-crime basis, between the 1982 and 1983 collection-year data. And, (2) those percentages were applied to the final, or reference-year, data for 1982. In other words, the 1982 final

results were statistically adjusted, chiefly on the strength of the 71% of data already collected for the 1983 reference year.

As part of a continuing program of methodological refinement in the measurement of crime, other early estimation techniques have been under study. Knowledge gained during the course of this research was applied in

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analyzing the data in this release. The analytical testing procedure (summarized in footnote 3) incorporated an estimate of the "prediction error" that was anticipated to occur from the use of collection-year data for generating the preliminary 1983 results.

Prediction intervals. As mentioned, the final 1983 NCS results will differ from the preliminary figures in this release. As a byproduct of the research into early estimation techniques, it was possible to develop "prediction intervals," using the preliminary estimates, that will be associated with the final estimates for 1983. Such intervals are shown for selected victimization rates in table 6.

To interpret those intervals, refer to table 1, which shows that the preliminary 1983 rate for crimes of violence is 30.9 per 1,000. By associating this figure with the corresponding prediction interval in table 6, one can be

Table 6. Prediction intervals for 1983 final victimization rates, based on 1983 preliminary victimization rates

Type of crime and sector	Prediction interval*	
	95% confidence	90% confidence
Personal sector		
Crimes of violence	28.78 to 33.05	29.19 to 32.64
Rape	0.65 to 1.05	0.69 to 1.01
Robbery	4.64 to 6.83	4.85 to 6.62
Assault	23.16 to 25.61	23.40 to 25.37
Aggravated assault	7.43 to 9.12	7.59 to 8.96
Simple assault	15.31 to 16.91	15.47 to 16.75
Crimes of theft	70.49 to 81.15	71.52 to 80.12
Personal larceny with contact	2.39 to 3.02	2.45 to 2.95
Personal larceny without contact	67.94 to 78.32	68.94 to 77.32
Household sector		
Household burglary	66.99 to 75.44	67.81 to 74.62
Household larceny	101.28 to 111.92	102.31 to 110.89
Motor vehicle theft	12.13 to 16.06	12.51 to 15.68

* There is statistical confidence, at the 95% (or 90%) level, that the final point estimate for any given victimization rate will fall within the prediction interval, most likely near the center. Conversely, there is a 5% (or 10%) chance that the final estimate will fall outside of the prediction interval.

confident, at a 95% level, that the final 1983 estimate will be within the interval of about 28.8 to 33.1; likewise, the 90% prediction interval is defined as about 29.2 to 32.6. Conversely, there is a 5% (or 10%) likelihood that the final estimate will be outside of the respective interval.

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