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## Chapter I

# The criminal event

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Michael R. Rand  
Patsy A. Klaus  
Bruce M. Taylor

This chapter gives an overview of crime as it exists in our Nation with data that answer such questions as—

How are crimes defined? What are the most common serious crimes? How much is known about white-collar crime?

How do people rank the seriousness of different crimes? How much agreement is there among the public about the seriousness of various crimes?

What are the two main sources of national crime statistics? What do they measure? How and why do they differ?

How much crime is there? Have crime rates gone up or down? What do different kinds of statistics tell us about crime trends?

When do crimes occur?

Where do crimes occur?

What kinds of weapons are used in various types of crimes? How often are handguns used in crime?

To what extent are crimes committed by strangers and by relatives, and by people known or related to the victim?

Chapter I was written by Michael R. Rand, Patsy A. Klaus, and Bruce M. Taylor of the BJS staff. Invaluable contributions were also made by Siretta L. Kelly and other members of the Center for Demographic Studies, U.S. Bureau of the Census; by Robert Figlio and other members of the Center for Studies in Criminology and Criminal Law, University of Pennsylvania; and by Christopher A. Innes and other staff members of the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan.

# What is crime?

## Crimes are defined by law

In this report, we define crime as all behaviors and acts for which a society provides formally sanctioned punishment.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, what is criminal is specified in the written law, primarily State statutes. What is included in the definition of crime varies among Federal, State, and local jurisdictions.

Criminologists devote a great deal of attention to defining crime in both general and specific terms. This definitional process is the first step toward the goal of obtaining accurate crime statistics.

## How do violent crimes differ from property crimes?

Violent crime refers to events such as homicide, rape, and assault that may result in injury to a person. Robbery is also considered a violent crime because it involves the use or threat of force against a person.

Property crimes are unlawful acts with the intent of gaining property but which do not involve the use or threat of force against an individual. Larceny, burglary, and motor vehicle theft are examples of property crimes.

## How do felonies differ from misdemeanors?

Criminal offenses are also classified according to how they are handled by the criminal justice system. Most jurisdictions recognize two classes of offenses: felonies and misdemeanors.

Felonies are not distinguished from misdemeanors in the same way in all jurisdictions, but most States define felonies as offenses punishable by a year or more in a State prison. While the same act may be classified as a felony in one jurisdiction and as a misdemeanor in another, the most serious crimes are never "misdemeanors" and the most minor offenses are never "felonies."

## What are the characteristics of the most common serious crimes?

Crime	Definition	Facts
<b>Homicide</b>	Causing the death of another person without legal justification or excuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Homicide is the least frequent violent crime.</li><li>• 93% of the victims were slain in single-victim situations.</li><li>• At least 55% of the murderers were relatives or acquaintances of the victim.</li><li>• 24% of all murders occurred or were suspected to have occurred as the result of some felonious activity.</li></ul>
<b>Rape</b>	Unlawful sexual intercourse with a female, by force or without legal or factual consent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most rapes involved a lone offender and a lone victim.</li><li>• About 36% of the rapes were committed in the victim's home.</li><li>• 58% of the rapes occurred at night, between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.</li></ul>
<b>Robbery</b>	Unlawful taking or attempted taking of property that is in the immediate possession of another, by force or threat of force.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Robbery is the violent crime that typically involves more than one offender (in about half of all cases).</li><li>• Slightly less than half of all robberies involved the use of a weapon.</li><li>• Less than 2% of the robberies reported to the police were bank robberies.</li></ul>
<b>Assault</b>	Unlawful intentional inflicting, or attempted inflicting, of injury upon the person of another. <i>Aggravated assault</i> is the unlawful intentional inflicting of serious bodily injury or unlawful threat or attempt to inflict bodily injury or death by means of a deadly or dangerous weapon with or without actual infliction of injury. <i>Simple assault</i> is the unlawful intentional inflicting of less than serious bodily injury without a deadly or dangerous weapon or an attempt or threat to inflict bodily injury without a deadly or dangerous weapon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simple assault occurs more frequently than aggravated assault.</li><li>• Assault is the most common type of violent crime.</li></ul>

Sources: BJS *Dictionary of criminal justice data terminology*, 1981. FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1981, BJS National Crime Survey, 1981.

## What are some other common crimes in the United States?

**Drug abuse violations**—Offenses relating to growing, manufacturing, making, possessing, using, selling, or distributing narcotic and dangerous nonnarcotic drugs. A distinction is made between possession and sale or manufacturing.

**Sex offenses**—In current statistical usage, the name of a broad category of varying content, usually consisting of all offenses having a sexual element except for forcible rape and commercial sex offenses.

**Fraud offenses**—The crime type comprising offenses sharing the elements of practice of deceit or intentional misrepresentation of fact, with the intent of unlawfully depriving a person of his property or legal rights.

**Drunkenness**—Intoxication, but does not include "driving under the influence."

**Disturbing the peace**—Unlawful interruption of the peace, quiet, or order of a community, including offenses called "disorderly conduct," "vagrancy," "loitering," "unlawful assembly," and "riot."

Crime	Definition	Facts
<b>Burglary</b>	Unlawful entry of any fixed structure, vehicle, or vessel used for regular residence, industry, or business, with or without force, with the intent to commit a felony or larceny.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 42% of all household burglaries occurred without <i>forced</i> entry.</li> <li>• In the burglary of more than 3 million American households, the offenders entered through an unlocked window or door or used a key (for example, a key "hidden" under a doormat).</li> <li>• About 34% of the no-force household burglaries were known to have occurred between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.</li> <li>• Residential property was targeted in 67% of reported burglaries; non-residential property accounted for the remaining 33%.</li> <li>• Three-quarters of the nonresidential burglaries for which the time of occurrence was known took place at night.</li> </ul>
<b>Larceny (theft)</b>	Unlawful taking or attempted taking of property other than a motor vehicle from the possession of another, by stealth, without force and without deceit, with intent to permanently deprive the owner of the property.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pocket picking and purse snatching most frequently occur inside nonresidential buildings or on street locations.</li> <li>• Unlike most other crimes, pocket picking and purse snatching affect the elderly as much as other age groups.</li> <li>• Most personal larcenies with contact occur during the daytime, but most household larcenies occur at night.</li> </ul>
<b>Motor vehicle theft</b>	Unlawful taking or attempted taking of a self-propelled road vehicle owned by another, with the intent of depriving the owner of it permanently or temporarily.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motor vehicle theft is relatively well reported to the police because reporting is required for insurance claims and vehicles are more likely than other stolen property to be recovered.</li> <li>• About three-fifths of all motor vehicle thefts occurred at night.</li> </ul>
<b>Arson</b>	Intentional damaging or destruction or attempted damaging or destruction by means of fire or explosion of the property without the consent of the owner, or of one's own property or that of another by fire or explosives with or without the intent to defraud.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-family residences were the most frequent targets of arson.</li> <li>• More than 17% of all structures where arson occurred were not in use.</li> </ul>

New forms of white-collar crime involving political and corporate institutions have emerged in the past decade. For example, the dramatic growth in high technology has brought with it sensational accounts of computerized "heists" by sophisticated felons seated safely behind computer terminals. The specter of electronic penetration of the Nation's financial assets has spurred widespread interest in computer security by business and government alike.

In the area of political crime, exposés of illegal campaign contributions and the ability of powerful financial elements to influence government have gravely disturbed the public.

#### Some organized crime is white-collar crime

"Organized crime" refers to those self-perpetuating, structured, and disciplined associations of individuals, or groups, combined together for the purpose of obtaining monetary or commercial gains or profits, wholly or in part by illegal means, while protecting their activities through a pattern of graft and corruption.

Organized crime groups possess certain characteristics that include but are not limited to the following:

- Their illegal activities are conspiratorial.
- In at least part of their activities, they commit or threaten to commit acts of violence or other acts that are likely to intimidate.
- They conduct their activities in a methodical, systematic, or highly disciplined and secret fashion.
- They insulate their leadership from direct involvement in illegal activities by their intricate organizational structure.
- They attempt to gain influence in government, politics, and commerce through corruption, graft, and legitimate means.
- They have economic gain as their primary goal, not only from patently illegal enterprises such as drugs, gambling, and loansharking, but also from such activities as laundering illegal money through and investment in legitimate business.

**Driving under the influence**—Driving or operating any vehicle or common carrier while drunk or under the influence of liquor or narcotics.

**Liquor law offenses**—State or local liquor law violations, except drunkenness and driving under the influence. Federal violations are excluded.

**Gambling**—Unlawful staking or wagering of money or other thing of value on a game of chance or on an uncertain event.

**Status offenses**—Acts that are illegal only if committed by a juvenile, for example, truancy.

#### What are white-collar crimes?

There is much debate over the proper definition of "white-collar" crime. Reiss and Biderman define it as violations of law "that involve the use of a violator's position of significant power, influence or trust . . . for the purpose of illegal gain, or to commit an illegal act for personal or organizational gain."<sup>2</sup>

White-collar crimes include such traditional illegalities as embezzlement, bribery, fraud, theft of services, theft of trade secrets, forgery, smuggling, tax evasion, obstruction of justice, and others, where the violator's position of fiduciary trust, power, or influence has provided the opportunity to abuse lawful institutions for unlawful purposes. White-collar offenses frequently involve deception.

# How serious are various types of crimes?

## The public's ranking of the severity of crimes was measured through a national survey

The National Survey of Crime Severity (NSCS) was conducted in 1977. It described 204 illegal events—from playing hooky from school to planting a bomb that killed 20 people in a public building. This survey of a nationwide sample of people is the largest measure ever made of how the public ranks the seriousness of specific kinds of offenses.

Severity scores were developed by asking a national sample of people to assign scores of any value they felt was appropriate to specific questionnaire items. Because of the large number of items in the severity scale, no one was asked to respond to all

the items. One innovation of the survey was that people were allowed to assign any value they felt appropriate to an item—the scale had no upper limits. Mathematical techniques were used to take everyone's answers and convert them to ratio scores that reflect the feelings of everyone in the sample. These scores were derived from geometric means that were calculated from the various scores assigned by the people who responded to the questionnaire.

## The National Survey of Crime Severity found that many diverse groups of people generally agree about the relative severity of specific crimes

However, the severity scores assigned by crime victims are generally higher

than those assigned by nonvictims. For most people, the severity of a crime of theft depends on the dollar value of the loss rather than on the background of the person making the judgment.

There are some differences, however, among different groups of people.

- The severity scores assigned by blacks and members of other racial groups are generally lower than those assigned by whites.
- Older people found thefts with large losses to be slightly more severe than did people of other age groups.

## How do people rank the severity of crime?

### Severity score and offense

72.1—Planting a bomb in a public building. The bomb explodes and 20 people are killed.

52.8—A man forcibly rapes a woman. As a result of physical injuries, she dies.

43.2—Robbing a victim at gunpoint. The victim struggles and is shot to death.

39.2—A man stabs his wife. As a result, she dies.

35.7—Stabbing a victim to death.

35.6—Intentionally injuring a victim. As a result, the victim dies.

33.8—Running a narcotics ring.

27.9—A woman stabs her husband. As a result, he dies.

26.3—An armed person skyjacks an airplane and demands to be flown to another country.

25.9—A man forcibly rapes a woman. No other physical injury occurs.

24.9—Intentionally setting fire to a building causing \$100,000 worth of damage.

22.9—A parent beats his young child with his fists. The child requires hospitalization.

21.2—Kidnaping a victim.

20.7—Selling heroin to others for resale.

19.5—Smuggling heroin into the country.

19.5—Killing a victim by recklessly driving an automobile.

17.9—Robbing a victim of \$10 at gunpoint. The victim is wounded and requires hospitalization.

16.9—A man drags a woman into an alley, tears her clothes, but flees before she is physically harmed or sexually attacked.

16.4—Attempting to kill a victim with a gun. The gun misfires and the victim escapes unharmed.

15.9—A teenage boy beats his mother with his fists. The mother requires hospitalization.

15.5—Breaking into a bank at night and stealing \$100,000.

14.1—A doctor cheats on claims he makes to a Federal health insurance plan for patient services.

13.9—A legislator takes a bribe from a company to vote for a law favoring the company.

13.0—A factory knowingly gets rid of its waste in a way that pollutes the water supply of a city.

12.2—Paying a witness to give false testimony in a criminal trial.

12.0—A police officer takes a bribe not to interfere with an illegal gambling operation.

12.0—Intentionally injuring a victim. The victim is treated by a doctor and hospitalized.

11.8—A man beats a stranger with his fists. He requires hospitalization.

11.4—Knowingly lying under oath during a trial.

11.2—A company pays a bribe to a legislator to vote for a law favoring the company.

10.9—Stealing property worth \$10,000 from outside a building.

10.5—Smuggling marijuana into the country for resale.

10.4—Intentionally hitting a victim with a lead pipe. The victim requires hospitalization.

10.3—Illegally selling barbiturates, such as prescription sleeping pills, to others for resale.

10.3—Operating a store that knowingly sells stolen property.

10.0—A government official intentionally hinders the investigation of a criminal offense.

9.7—Breaking into a school and stealing equipment worth \$1,000.

9.7—Walking into a public museum and stealing a painting worth \$1,000.

9.6—Breaking into a home and stealing \$1,000.

9.6—A police officer knowingly makes a false arrest.

9.5—A public official takes \$1,000 of public money for his own use.

9.4—Robbing a victim of \$10 at gunpoint. No physical harm occurs.

9.3—Threatening to seriously injure a victim.

9.2—Several large companies illegally fix the retail prices of their products.

8.6—Performing an illegal abortion.

8.5—Selling marijuana to others for resale.

8.5—Intentionally injuring a victim. The victim is treated by a doctor but is not hospitalized.

8.2—Knowing that a shipment of cooking oil is bad, a store owner decides to sell it anyway. Only one bottle is sold and the purchaser is treated by a doctor but not hospitalized.

7.9—A teenage boy beats his father with his fists. The father requires hospitalization.

7.7—Knowing that a shipment of cooking oil is bad, a store owner decides to sell it anyway.

7.5—A person, armed with a lead pipe, robs a victim of \$10. No physical harm occurs.

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**Almost everyone agrees that violent crime is more serious than property crime**

However, people make distinctions about seriousness depending on the circumstances of the crime. For example, an assault is viewed as more serious if a parent assaults a child than if a man assaults his wife, even though both victims require hospitalization. These differences are greater for assaults that result in death.

In deciding severity, people seem to take into account such factors as—

- The ability of the victim to protect him/herself
- Extent of injury and loss
- For property crimes, the type of business or organization from which the property is stolen

- The relationship of the offender to the victim.

“White-collar” crimes, such as fraud against consumers, cheating on income taxes, pollution by factories, pricefixing, and accepting of bribes, are viewed as seriously as (or more seriously than) many of the conventional property and violent crimes.

Within particular categories of crime, severity assessments are affected by factors such as whether or not injury occurred and the extent of property loss. For example, all burglaries or all robberies are not scored at the same severity level because of the differing characteristics of each event (even though all of the events fit into the same general crime category).

7.4—Illegally getting monthly welfare checks.

7.3—Threatening a victim with a weapon unless the victim gives money. The victim gives \$10 and is not harmed.

7.3—Breaking into a department store and stealing merchandise worth \$1,000.

7.2—Signing someone else's name to a check and cashing it.

6.9—Stealing property worth \$1,000 from outside a building.

6.5—Using heroin.

6.5—An employer refuses to hire a qualified person because of that person's race.

6.4—Getting customers for a prostitute.

6.3—A person, free on bail for committing a serious crime, purposefully fails to appear in court on the day of his trial.

6.2—An employee embezzles \$1,000 from his employer.

5.4—Possessing some heroin for personal use.

5.4—A real estate agent refuses to sell a house to a person because of that person's race.

5.4—Threatening to harm a victim unless the victim gives money. The victim gives \$10 and is not harmed.

5.3—Loaning money at an illegally high interest rate.

5.1—A man runs his hands over the body of a female victim, then runs away.

5.1—A person, using force, robs a victim of \$10. No physical harm occurs.

4.9—Snatching a handbag containing \$10 from a victim on the street.

4.8—A man exposes himself in public.

4.6—Carrying a gun illegally.

4.5—Cheating on Federal income tax return.

4.4—Picking a victim's pocket of \$100.

4.2—Attempting to break into a home but running away when a police car approaches.

3.8—Turning in a false fire alarm.

3.7—A labor union official illegally threatens to organize a strike if an employer hires nonunion workers.

3.6—Knowingly passing a bad check.

3.6—Stealing property worth \$100 from outside a building.

3.5—Running a place that permits gambling to occur illegally.

3.2—An employer illegally threatens to fire employees if they join a labor union.

2.4—Knowingly carrying an illegal knife.

2.2—Stealing \$10 worth of merchandise from the counter of a department store.

2.1—A person is found firing a rifle for which he knows he has no permit.

2.1—A woman engages in prostitution.

1.9—Making an obscene phone call.

1.9—A store owner knowingly puts “large” eggs into containers marked “extra-large.”

1.8—A youngster under 16 years old is drunk in public.

1.8—Knowingly being a customer in a place where gambling occurs illegally.

1.7—Stealing property worth \$10 from outside a building.

1.6—Being a customer in a house of prostitution.

1.6—A male, over 16 years of age, has sexual relations with a willing female under 16.

1.5—Taking barbiturates, such as sleeping pills, without a legal prescription.

1.5—Intentionally shoving or pushing a victim. No medical treatment is required.

1.4—Smoking marijuana.

1.3—Two persons willingly engage in a homosexual act.

1.1—Disturbing the neighborhood with loud, noisy behavior.

1.1—Taking bets on the numbers.

1.1—A group continues to hang around a corner after being told to break up by a police officer.

0.9—A youngster under 16 years old runs away from home.

0.8—Being drunk in public.

0.7—A youngster under 16 years old breaks a curfew law by being out on the street after the hour permitted by law.

0.6—Trespassing in the backyard of a private home.

0.3—A person is a vagrant. That is, he has no home and no visible means of support.

0.2—A youngster under 16 years old plays hooky from school.

Source: *The seriousness of crime: Results of a national survey* (forthcoming). Center for Studies in Criminology and Criminal Law, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. The entire questionnaire will be published verbatim in a forthcoming technical report of the Bureau of Justice Statistics. (The entries here have been slightly edited.)

# Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and the National Crime Survey (NCS) are the main sources of national crime statistics

## National crime statistics focus on selected crimes

The two sources, UCR and NCS, concentrate on measuring a limited number of well-defined crimes. They do not cover all possible criminal events. Both sources use commonly understood definitions rather than legal definitions of crime.

"Crime" covers a wide range of events. It isn't always possible to tell whether an event is a crime. For example, if your personal property is missing, you may not know for certain whether it was stolen or simply misplaced.

## The UCR Index shows trends in eight major crimes

In 1927, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) formed a committee to create a uniform system for gathering police statistics. The goal was to develop a national system of statistics that would overcome variations in the way crimes were defined in different parts of the country.

Because of their seriousness, frequency of occurrence, and likelihood of being reported to the police, seven crimes were selected as the basis for the UCR Index for evaluating changes in the volume of crime. Arson was added as the eighth UCR Index offense in 1978.

## The NCS adds information about victims and crimes not reported to police

In 1973, to learn more about crimes and the victims of crime, the National Crime Survey began to measure crimes not reported to police as well as those that are reported. Except for homicide (which is well reported in police statistics) and arson (which is difficult to measure using survey techniques), the NCS measures the same crimes as the UCR. Both the UCR and NCS count attempted as well as completed crimes.

## How do UCR and NCS compare?

	Uniform Crime Reports	National Crime Survey
<i>Offenses measured:</i>	Homicide Rape Robbery (personal and commercial) Assault (aggravated) Burglary (commercial and household) Larceny (commercial and household) Motor vehicle theft Arson	Rape Robbery (personal) Assault (aggravated and simple) Household burglary Larceny (personal and household) Motor vehicle theft
<i>Scope:</i>	Crimes reported to the police in most jurisdictions; considerable flexibility in developing small-area data	Crimes both reported and not reported to police; all data are for the Nation as a whole; some data are available for a few large geographic areas
<i>Collection method:</i>	Police department reports to FBI	Survey interviews; periodically measures the total number of crimes committed by asking a national sample of 60,000 households representing 135,000 persons over the age of 12 about their experiences as victims of crime during a specified period
<i>Kinds of information:</i>	In addition to offense counts, provides information on crime clearances, persons arrested, persons charged, law enforcement officers killed and assaulted, and characteristics of homicide victims	Provides details about victims (such as age, race, sex, education, income, and whether the victim and offender were related to each other) and about crimes (such as time and place of occurrence, whether or not reported to police, use of weapons, occurrence of injury, and economic consequences)
<i>Sponsor:</i>	Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation	Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics

## The portraits of crime from NCS and UCR differ because they serve different purposes and are based on different sources

These are some of the more important differences in the programs, thought to account for a good deal of the differences in resulting statistics:

- The UCR counts only crimes coming to the attention of the police. The NCS obtains information on both reported and unreported crime.
- The UCR counts crimes committed against all people and all businesses, organizations, government agencies, and other victims. NCS counts only crimes against persons age 12 or older and against their households.

- The two programs, because they serve different purposes, count crimes differently, in some instances. For example, a criminal robs a victim and steals someone else's car to escape. UCR only counts the robbery, the more serious crime. NCS could count both; one as a personal crime and one as a household crime.

- Each program is subject to the kinds of errors and problems typical of its method of data collection that may serve to widen or narrow the differences in the counts produced by the two programs. For example, it is widely believed by analysts that the rise in the number of rapes reported to police stems largely from the special programs established by many police departments to treat victims of rape more sympathetically.

# How much crime is there?

## In 1981 almost a third of all households were victimized by violence or theft

Nearly 25 million households were victimized by at least one crime of violence or theft.

- Almost 18 million households, or 21% of those in the Nation, were victimized by at least one theft during the year.
- 6 million, or 7%, were burglarized at least once.
- Less than 2% were victimized by the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.
- 6% of all households had members who were victims of at least one violent crime of rape, robbery, or aggravated or simple assault.

## A violent crime by strangers and/or a burglary struck 10% of all households in 1981

Public opinion polls show that burglaries and violent crime by strangers are high on the list of the greatest public concerns and fears. Nearly 9 million U.S. households were touched by one or more of these crimes in 1981—the household was burglarized and/or one or more of its members was raped, robbed, or assaulted by a stranger. Of these 9 million households, most—about 5.5 million—were victimized by burglaries alone, but more than half a million suffered both burglaries and violent crime by strangers.

## 41 million victimizations occurred in 1981

### Personal crimes

Crimes of violence	
Rape	178,000
Robbery	1,381,000
Aggravated assault	1,796,000
Simple assault	3,228,000

Crimes of theft	
Larceny with contact	605,000
Larceny without contact	15,258,000

### Household crimes

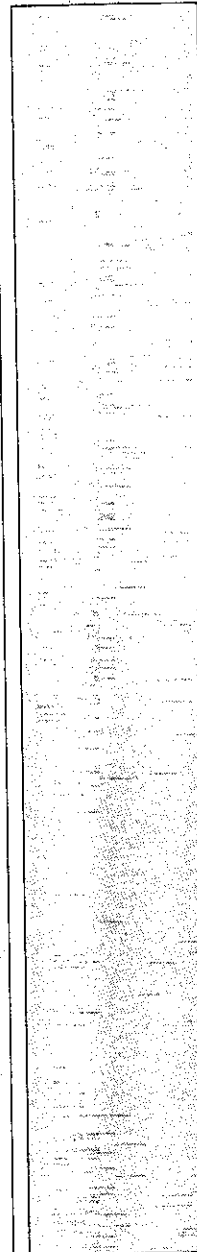
Burglary	7,394,000
Larceny	10,176,000
Motor vehicle theft	1,439,000

Total 41,455,000

Source: BJS National Crime Survey, 1981.

## Property crime outnumbered violent crimes by 9 to 1

Property crimes  
5,223 per 100,000  
U.S. population



Property crimes  
Larceny-theft 53.8%  
Burglary 28.1%  
Motor vehicle theft 8.1%

Violent crimes  
Aggravated assault 4.8%  
Robbery 4.3%  
Forcible rape 0.6%  
Murder 0.2%  
100.0%\*

Violent crimes  
577 per 100,000  
U.S. population



\*Percents do not add to 100% because of rounding

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1981.

## 13 million UCR Index Crimes were reported to police in 1981

Violent crimes	1,321,900
Murder	22,520
Forcible rape	81,540
Robbery	574,130
Aggravated assault	643,720

Property crimes	11,968,400
Burglary	3,739,800
Larceny-theft	7,154,500
Motor vehicle theft	1,074,000

Total 13,290,300

Note: Offenses may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1981.

## Businesses are prime targets of robbers and burglars

- In 1980, businesses were robbed at a rate 10 times higher than the rate for private persons.
- In the same year, businesses were burglarized at a rate more than 5 times higher than the rate for households.

## Businesses reported more than 1 million burglaries and more than 100,000 robberies in 1981

More than half of the 1.1 million non-residential burglaries reported to the police in 1981 occurred at night. Only 17% were known to have taken place during the day. (In 29%, the time of day was not known.)

In 1981, more than 140,000 completed or attempted robberies were reported to the police by stores, gas stations, banks, and other commercial establishments. Convenience stores were hit by 35,000 robberies—about 1.5 times the number of gas station robberies and 5 times the number of bank robberies.

# What are the trends in crime?

To understand the magnitude of crime in our society, it is important to compare current levels of crime with those of the past

To gain the best perspective, crime trends should be examined over the longest possible period. Additionally, it is essential to standardize for population growth over time by using crime rates. The analysis of crime trends here uses crime rates from several different sources: the National Crime Survey, which has been conducted since 1973; the Uniform Crime Reports, which are analyzed for 11 years (1971-81); and homicide statistics from coroners' reports to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) which are available from 1900. As previously discussed, all of these sources measure only specific types of crime.

Short-term trends point toward varied conclusions:

- Some crimes have increased in frequency while others have declined.
- The rates for crimes reported to police generally show short-term increases.
- The percentage of households victimized by at least one crime has changed very little in recent years.

However, these short-term trends portray only a part of the trend picture. For example, the homicide trend displayed by the NCHS data has risen sharply since 1960, but the homicide rate has only recently surpassed the previous high point reached in 1933.

## The percentage of households touched by crime changed little during the past 7 years

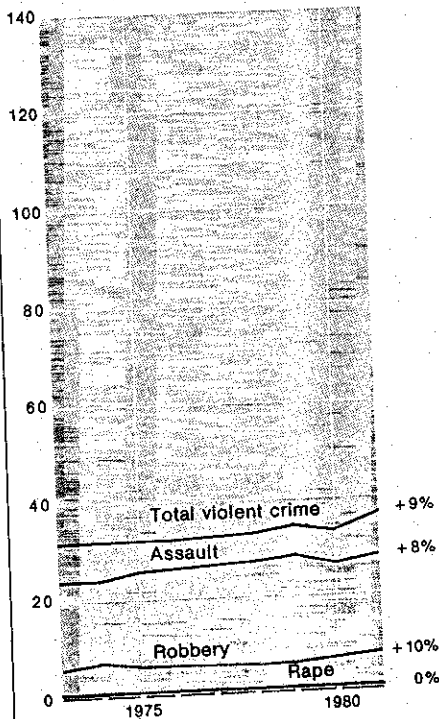
In 1981, 30% of all U.S. households were touched by crime. Each of these households was victimized by at least one burglary, larceny, or motor vehicle theft, or one or more of its members were victims of a rape, robbery, or assault by strangers.

This was only slightly lower than the 32% touched by crime in 1975. This small overall drop resulted from a decrease (from 16% to 13%) in the proportion of households touched by personal larceny without contact. Taken together, the percentage of households touched by all other NCS-measured crimes—violence, burglaries, household larcenies, and motor vehicle thefts—remained virtually unchanged from 1975 to 1981.

### The National Crime Survey shows relatively little change in victimization rates between 1973 and 1981

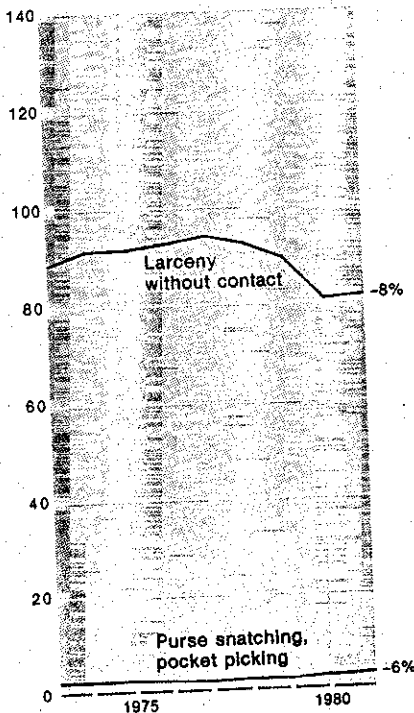
**Violent crimes against persons**  
per 1,000 persons  
age 12 and older

% change  
(1973-81)



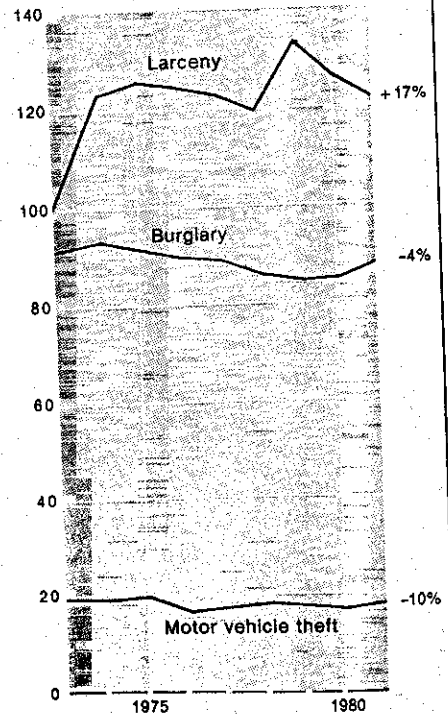
**Crimes of theft against persons**  
per 1,000 persons  
age 12 and older

% change  
(1973-81)



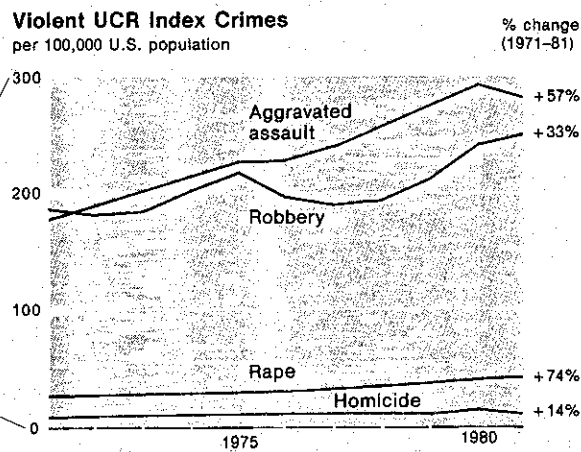
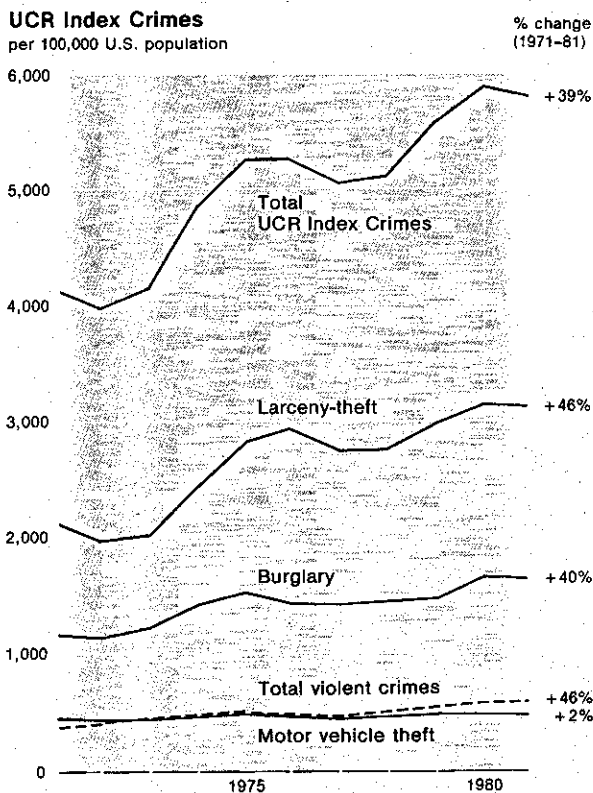
**Crimes against households**  
per 1,000 households

% change  
(1973-81)



Source: BJS National Crime Survey, 1973-81.

**UCR shows increases in all Index Crimes reported by police during the 1970's**



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1971-81.

**NCS and UCR examine different aspects of crime and crime trends**

The two statistical series are complementary measures of crime in much the same way that the Consumer Price Index and the Producer Price Index are complementary measures of the economy.

As previously discussed, NCS and UCR serve different purposes and use different methodologies. These differences are thought to account for a large part of the apparent divergence between NCS and UCR trends:

- The UCR counts only crimes coming to the attention of the police. NCS obtains information on both reported and unreported crime.
- The UCR counts crimes committed against all people and all businesses, organizations, government agencies, etc. NCS counts only crimes against persons age 12 or older and their households.

- The two programs, because they serve different purposes, count crimes differently, in some instances.
- The two series compute rates using different population bases.

Additionally, differences in these trends are suspected to result, in part, from increases in citizen reporting related to various efforts, including introduction of 911 numbers, increased police presence and neighborhood watch programs, and improvements in UCR reporting by police agencies.

**Much of the difference between the NCS and UCR burglary trends can be explained**

Between 1973 and 1981, the NCS burglary rate decreased by 4% but the UCR rate increased by 34%. A large portion of this difference appears to be caused by—

- Differences in the bases used to calculate the rates. The NCS base is households while the UCR base is

population. The number of U.S. households grew at a much faster rate than the general population during the 1970's so the NCS rate for the later 1970's was lower relative to the UCR rate.

- Differences in the coverage of each series. NCS includes burglaries not reported to police, but UCR measures burglaries to nonresidential buildings. When NCS rates for reported burglaries are based on total U.S. population and are compared with UCR residential burglary rates, both series show increases.

- Removal from UCR consideration of incidents that are not found to be crimes by the police. When such incidents are removed from UCR, the two series rates become closer. The trend lines for the two series track more closely for forcible entry, the burglary event least likely to be removed from UCR consideration.

### Homicide data provide added perspective to crime trends

The National Center for Health Statistics derives homicide data from death certificates filed throughout the United States, based on the judgments of appropriate authorities as to the causes or probable causes of death.

Homicide data have been compiled from death certificates for the entire 20th century to date. This makes it possible to view rises and drops in the homicide rate against a backdrop of events and developments of national magnitude in order to explore the possibility that any of these events or developments have had any influence on the homicide rate.

Three major long-term trends in homicide are evident. From 1903 to 1933, the rate rose from 1.1 to 9.7 homicides per 100,000 people. Between 1934 and 1958, it fell to 4.5. From 1961 through 1980, it rose again to 11.0. Many minor, short-term trends

are also evident, such as the 1945-47 rise within a long-term falling trend.

While it is safe to say that many national events combine to contribute to affect the crime rate, some occurrences seem of such magnitude that their influence seems to be a major factor:

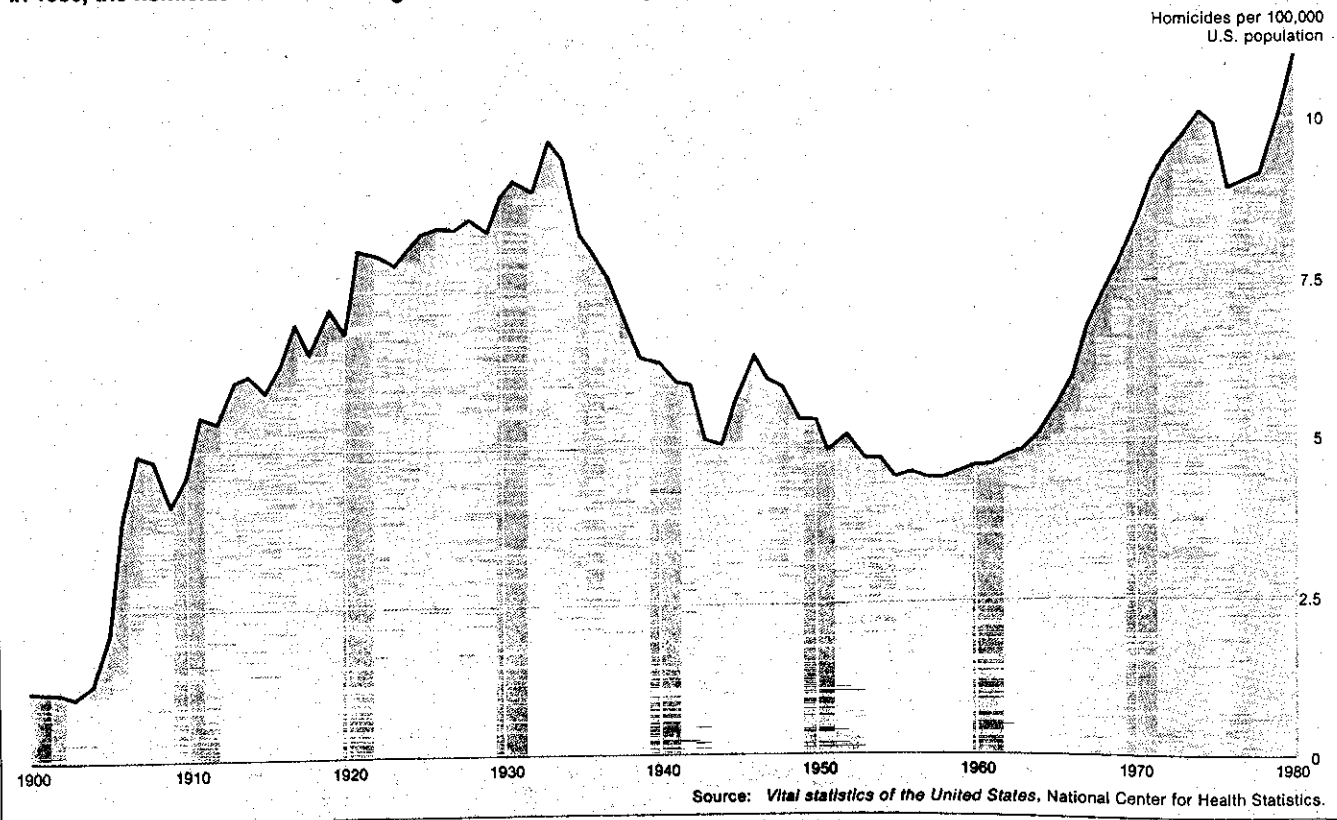
- World War II clearly affected the homicide rate, by a sharp decline during the war years, and a short-term rise immediately after the war's end, when most of the soldiers returned home.
- The postwar baby boom generation began to reach age 16 in the early 1960's, at the same time the homicide rate began to rise sharply. As discussed in Chapter II, violent victimization is most prevalent among people under age 30. Therefore, when the baby boom representing a large proportion of the population reached the victimization-prone ages, the homicide rate would be expected to increase.

### UCR and Public Health statistics both show that the homicide rate has been rising since 1961

Despite differences between the two series, historically, they have tracked very closely. Homicide statistics are generally regarded as the most reliable and valid of all crime statistics.

Because the two series serve different purposes, they consider homicide from somewhat different perspectives and therefore do differ slightly.

**In 1980, the homicide rate was the highest level in this century**



# When does crime occur?

## The warmer months are the peak season for many types of crime

The impact of seasonality on crime rates can range from essentially no effect for robbery to fluctuations of roughly 65% for household larceny of \$50 or more. NCS data indicate that almost all types of personal and household crimes are more likely to occur during the warmer months of the year. UCR data show that the number of rapes reported to the police also peaks during the summer months.

Among the possible explanations for this warm weather trend, the most probable ones are—

- People spend more time outdoors during these months, making them more vulnerable to some crimes.
- Individuals leave their homes more frequently during this time of year, or leave doors and windows open, making their residences more vulnerable to property crimes.

A notable exception to this trend is personal larceny of less than \$50, which shows a drop during the summer months. Most likely this results from a decline in school-related thefts during the summer.

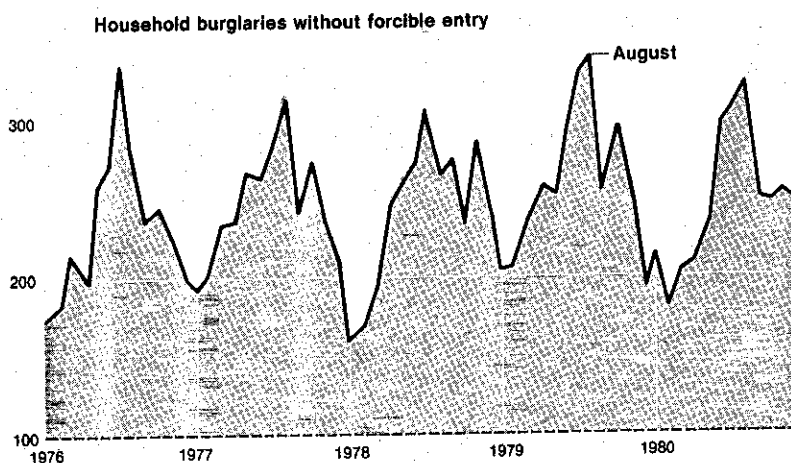
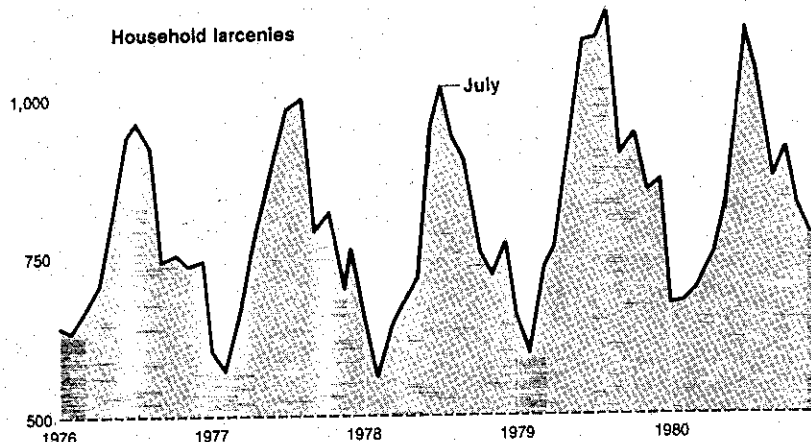
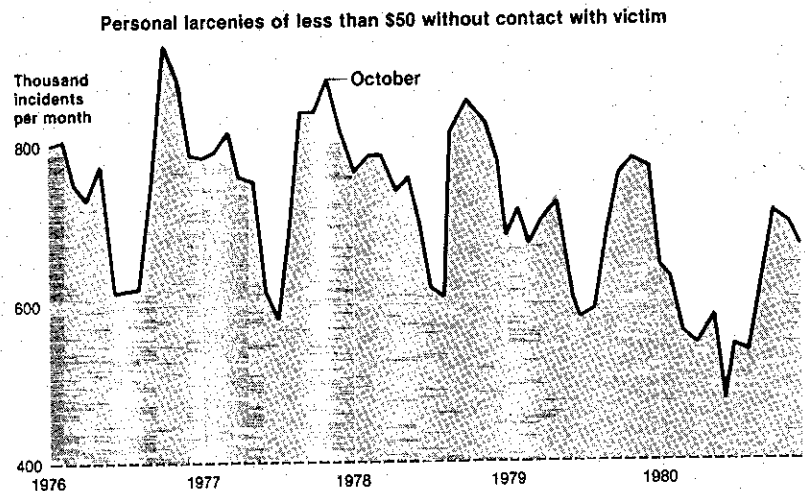
## Crime incidence varies with time of day

In 1980, among the crimes most likely to occur during evening or nighttime hours were motor vehicle theft (68%) and serious violent offenses such as personal robbery (58%) and aggravated assault (56%).

Among the crimes least likely to happen at night were simple assault (48%), purse snatching and pocket picking (38%), and personal larceny without contact (45%).

Many people do not know when some crimes took place. However, among victims who did know, burglaries (53%) occur more often during the day, and household larcenies (70%)—which do not involve either illegal entries or break-ins—happen more often at night.

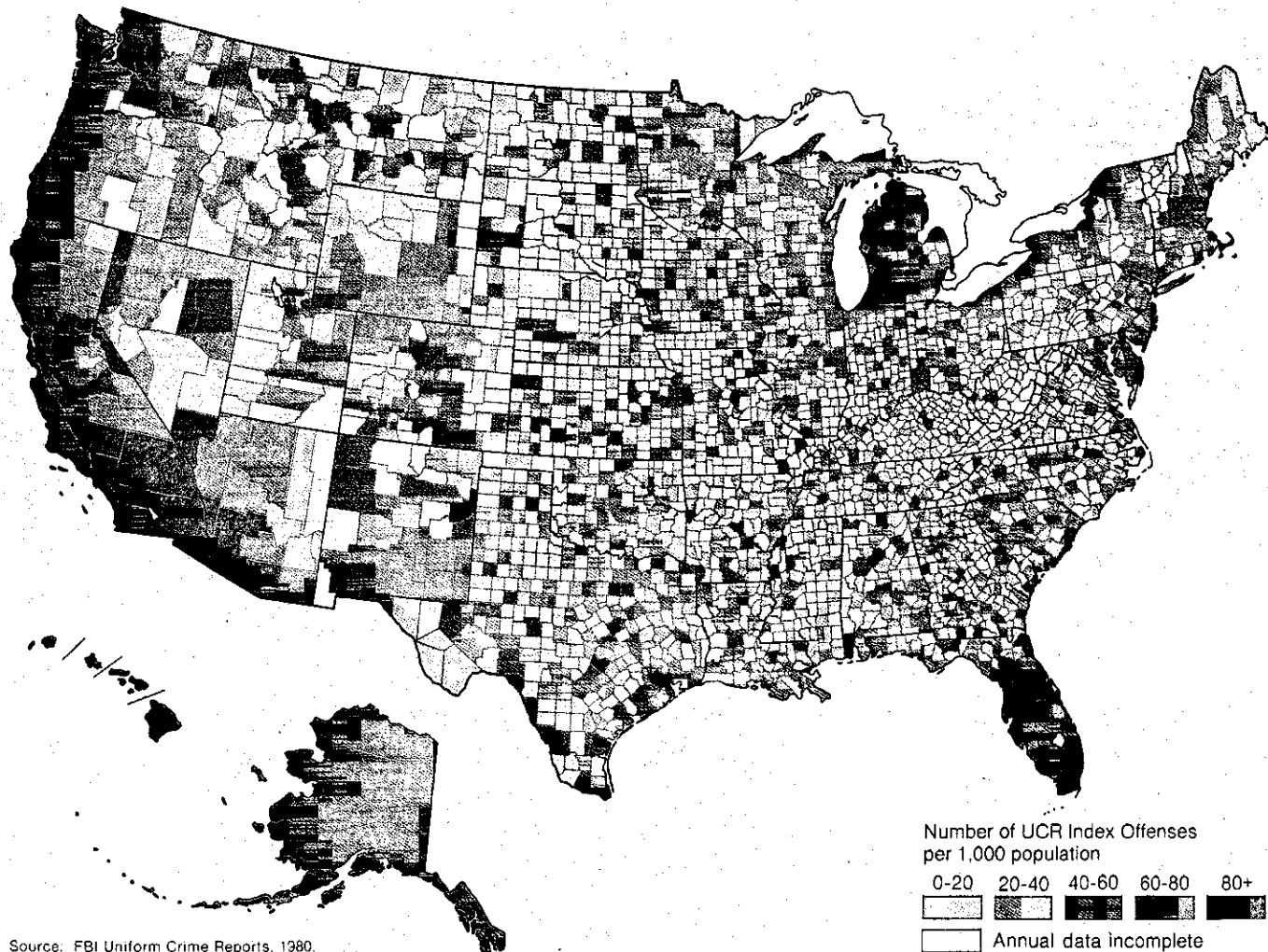
## Some types of larceny and burglary show strong seasonal trends



Source: BJS National Crime Survey, 1976-1980.

# Where does most crime occur?

UCR Index Crime rates are highest in the West, lowest in Central and Appalachian regions



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1980.

**Counties with the highest crime rates tend to be very urban or resort areas; those with the lowest rates tend to be very rural**

Many factors can account for particularly high or low county crime, but generally—

- Counties with very low per capita crime rates tend to be rural. Such areas may genuinely experience less crime, but it is also true that these areas often have small police or sheriff departments, many of them with part-time staffs. Coupled with an absence of the sophisticated resources often available to larger

departments, these staffing patterns may partially depress the number of crimes detected.

- Counties with extremely high crime rates are usually urbanized, independent cities, such as Baltimore and St. Louis, that report separately from their suburbs, or resort areas that have a high number of transients relative to their resident population. Among the latter are Atlantic County, New Jersey; Nantucket, Massachusetts; and Summit County, Colorado. Because crime rates are computed on the resident population, these findings for resort areas are not surprising.

## Rates of reported crimes vary by region

In eight of nine regions of the country, rates of reported property crime were lower in 1981 than in 1980. The 1981 rates were highest in the Pacific and Mountain regions largely because all States in the two regions (except Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming) had rates higher than average for the United States.

In six of the nine regions, rates of reported violent crime were also lower in 1981 than in 1980. The regions where the 1981 rates were higher than in 1980 were New England and the Middle and South Atlantic. The high rates in the Middle Atlantic and Pacific regions were due largely to very high rates in New York (1,070), Nevada (896), California (863), and New Mexico (672).

**The proportion of crime occurring in urban, suburban, and rural areas has shown little change**

Over the 9 years ending in 1981—

- Most UCR Index Crimes in all areas were property crimes, but the share of violent crimes was larger in Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA's) (more than 10%) than in other types of places (less than 7%).
- Violent and property crime rates were consistently higher for SMSA's, roughly comparable for suburbs and non-SMSA cities, and consistently lower for rural areas.
- Increases in violent crime were greatest for non-SMSA cities and for rural areas.
- Disproportionate increases were noted in rates for violent crime in suburban and rural areas.

**NCS data confirm UCR findings about where crime occurs**

NCS data show that violent crime rates per 1,000 resident population were consistently highest for central cities and consistently lowest for rural areas. The rate for suburban areas consistently fell between that for central cities and that for rural areas. The differences for robbery are particularly strong: rates per 1,000 were 15 for central city residents; 6 for suburbanites, and 3 for rural residents. It should be noted that survey respondents are classified by their place of residence, not the place in which an incident occurred. While it is reasonable to expect that most incidents took place in the type of place where the victim resided, it is possible, for example, that some suburban residents were victimized in central cities.

Patterns of property crime were similar: households in central cities were the most likely to be victimized and those in rural areas were the least likely to be victimized. There is no clear trend in burglary and household larceny for central cities of different sizes, but the likelihood of motor vehicle theft increases for households in larger central cities.

**87% of violent crimes occurred away from victim's home**

National Crime Survey data for 1980 indicate that—

- Only 13% of the total number of violent crimes occurred in and around its victim's home, but 20% of all rapes occurred there.
- 39% of violent crimes committed by persons known to the victim took place in or near the victim's home, while only 15% of those committed by strangers occurred there.
- 86% of all household larcenies took place near the victim's home rather than inside the dwelling—partly because thefts inside the home often involve illegal entries or break-ins and thus would be classified as burglaries.
- Personal larcenies without contact were also more likely to be committed outside, but most personal larcenies with contact (such as pocket picking) occurred inside a nonresidential setting rather than outdoors.

Place of occurrence	% crimes of violence (rape, robbery, assault)	% larceny without contact
On street, park, playground, school ground, or parking lot	41%	44%
Inside nonresidential building	15	21
Inside own home	13	•
Near own home	11	•
Inside school	5	16
Elsewhere	15	19
Total	100%	100%

\*By definition, personal larceny without contact cannot occur in these locations.

Source: BJS National Crime Survey, 1980.

**Metropolitan areas have the highest rates of reported crime**

	UCR Index crime rates per 100,000 population			
	Violent crimes	% change* 1973-81	Property crimes	% change* 1973-81
<b>Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA's)</b> Urbanized areas that generally include at least one central city of 50,000 or more inhabitants, the county in which it is located, and contiguous counties that satisfy certain criteria of population and integration with the central city.	691	+ 37%	5,913	+ 37%
<b>Non-SMSA cities</b> Cities that do not qualify as SMSA central cities and are not included in other SMSA's.	330	+ 49%	4,834	+ 55%
<b>Suburban areas</b> Suburban cities other than central cities and counties within metropolitan areas.	373	+ 50%	4,503	+ 36%
<b>Rural areas</b>	173	+ 17%	2,004	+ 51%

\*This period was chosen for comparison, as 1973 was the first year for which the current crime classification was used in FBI tabulations of UCR Index crimes.

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1981.

# What is the involvement of weapons in crime?

## Except for homicide, most violent crimes do not involve the use of weapons

Weapon use	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Assault**
Firearm	62%	7%	18%	9%
Knife	19	15	21	9
Other	13	1*	9	14
Type unknown	0	2*	2	1
None used	6	77	54	68
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: Because some victimizations involve more than one type of weapon, detail may add to more than 100%.  
 \* Estimate is based on 10 or fewer samples and is therefore statistically unreliable.  
 \*\* Includes simple assaults, which by definition do not involve the use of a weapon.

Source: National Crime Survey, 1981.  
 Uniform Crime Reports, 1981.

## Victims used or brandished a gun or knife to protect themselves in only 2% of all violent crimes

In about a fourth of all violent crimes, victims protected themselves using physical force or with some object used as a weapon.

Because the circumstances of every victimization differ (time, place, nearness of people who might help, characteristics of victim, etc.), it is not possible to make inferences about the relationship between protective measures taken and the outcome of the victimization.

## Armed offenders seldom had more than one type of weapon

In about 95% of all victimizations between 1973 and 1979 in which offenders possessed weapons, the offenders had only one type of weapon (that is, only guns or only knives or only other objects used as weapons).

## Weapons are more often used than assaults in killings of law enforcement officers

Of the 91 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in 1981, three-quarters (69) were killed by handguns. Twelve officers were killed by rifles and five by shotguns. Only five officers died from other than firearm wounds; one was stabbed, two were struck by vehicles, one was killed by a blunt instrument, and one drowned.

Officers assaulted by gunbearing offenders sustained the lowest percentage of injuries.

Means of assault	% of all assaults	% resulting in personal injury
Firearm	6%	18%
Knife	3	34
Other weapon	8	41
Hands, fists, feet, etc.	83	36
Total	100%	

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1981.

## Bombing incidents declined by 45% between 1975 and 1981

The number of actual and attempted bombings in the United States fell from 2,074 in 1975 to 1,142 in 1981.

- Personal injuries from bombings dropped from 326 to 133 and deaths from 69 to 30.
- In 1975, three major bombings resulted in a very high number of deaths and injuries.
- In 1980, actual bombings made up 83% of the total number of bombing incidents.

Targets of bombing incidents	% of all incidents (actual and attempted)
Residence	33%
Commercial establishments	21
Vehicles	15
Schools	7
Government property (including military and postal)	4
Persons	3
Police/fire department buildings/property	1
Miscellaneous	15
Total	100%

Note: Percents do not add to 100% because of rounding.

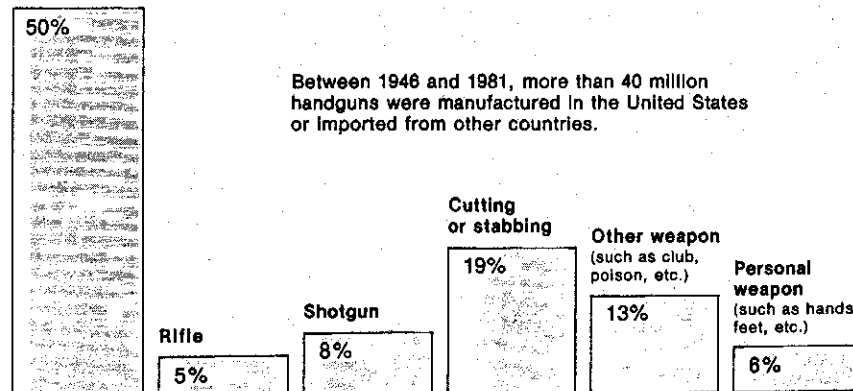
Source: FBI Bomb Summary, 1981.

## Terrorist groups claimed responsibility for only 20 of the 1,249 bombing incidents in 1980

Fifteen of these 20 were actual explosions. The three most common motives attributed to nonterrorist bombings in 1980 were animosity, mischief, and revenge. Half of all bombings were done for unknown motives.

## Half of all homicides are committed with handguns

### Handgun



Between 1946 and 1981, more than 40 million handguns were manufactured in the United States or imported from other countries.

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1981.

# People are particularly fearful of being victimized by strangers

## When people worry about crime, they worry most about being injured by strangers

The fear of crime, in general, is the fear of a random unprovoked attack or robbery by a stranger. In 1967, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice concluded that "... the fear of crimes of violence is not a simple fear of injury or death or even of all crimes of violence, but, at bottom, a fear of strangers."<sup>3</sup>

As measured by the National Crime Survey, an offense by a stranger includes those committed by persons identified by the victim as strangers and by those identified as "known by sight." They do not include crimes committed by acquaintances, friends, family members, or other relatives.

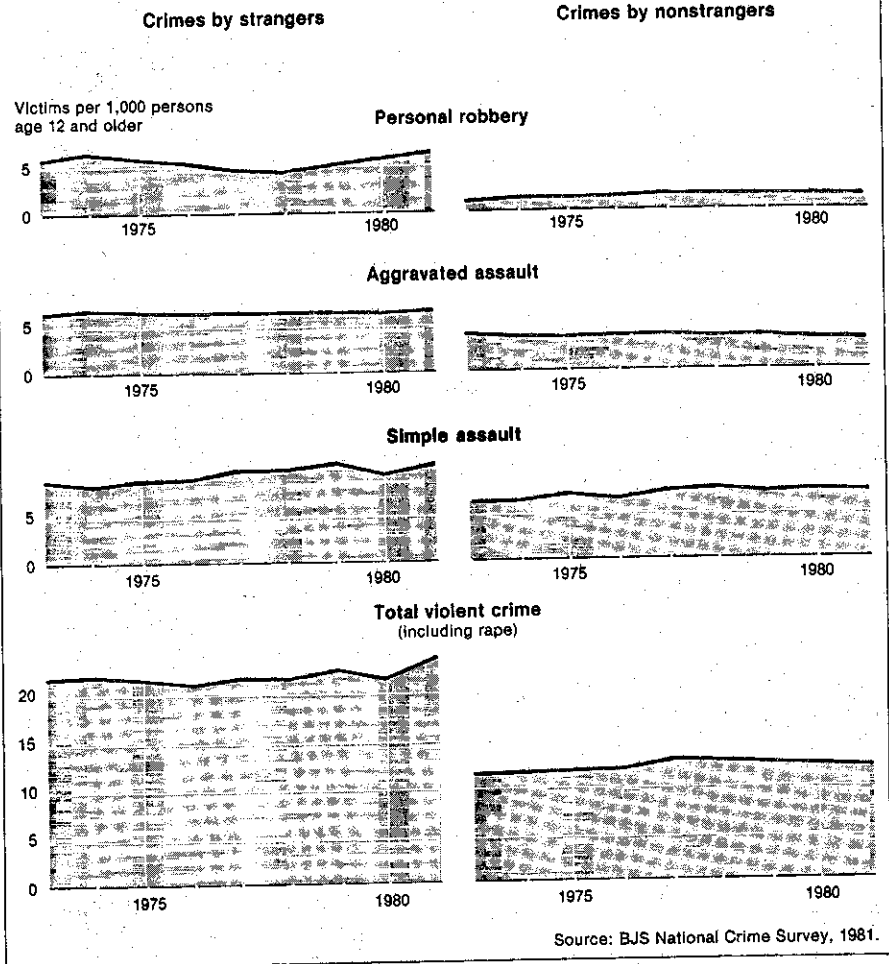
## Most violent crimes except murder are committed by strangers

More than half of all homicides are committed by someone known to the victim. Three of every five of all other violent crimes are committed by strangers.

- Acquaintances commit more than 38% of all homicides and a fourth of all other violent crimes.
- Relatives commit 17% of all homicides but only 7% of other violent crimes.
- Robbery is the violent crime most often committed by strangers (76%) and homicide is the least often committed by strangers (16%).
- Almost half of all assaults are by acquaintances or relatives.
- In 30% of homicides, the relationship between the victim and offender cannot be determined.

It is widely believed that a very large proportion of crimes committed by relatives are not reported to the police and are not revealed to crime survey interviewers.

## Strangers commit most violent crimes, especially robbery



Source: BJS National Crime Survey, 1981.

## Robbery victims run a high risk of injury from unarmed strangers

The likelihood that a victim will lose property in a robbery attempt by a stranger is—

- 80% if the robber wields a gun
- 60% if the robber wields a knife
- 54% if the robber is unarmed or threatens the victim with a stick, bottle, club, or other such weapon.

However, the likelihood that a robbery victim will be injured by a stranger is—

- 53% if the robber displays a stick, bottle, or other such weapon
- 34% if the robber is unarmed
- 25% if the robber is armed with a knife
- 17% if the robber is armed with a gun.

One possible explanation for this is that victims may be more willing to resist offenders armed with sticks, bats, etc. than they are those armed with knives or guns.

## Basic sources

*Dictionary of criminal justice data terminology*, second edition, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, NCJ-76939 (Washington: USGPO, 1981).

### *National Crime Survey:*

*Crime and seasonality*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ-64818 (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, May 1980).

*Criminal victimization in the U.S., 1980-81 changes based on new estimates*, BJS technical report, NCJ-87577 (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, March 1983).

*Criminal victimization in the United States, 1980*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ-84015 (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, June 1983).

*Households touched by crime*, BJS bulletin, NCJ-84406 (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, September 1982).

*Measuring crime*, BJS bulletin, NCJ-75710 (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, February 1981).

### *Uniform Crime Reports:*

*Crime in the United States* (annual), Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice (Washington: USGPO), 1970-1980.

*Vital statistics of the United States* (annual), National Center for Health Statistics, Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>*Dictionary of criminal justice data terminology*, second edition, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, NCJ-76939 (Washington: USGPO, 1981), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>Albert J. Reiss, Jr. and Albert D. Biderman, *Data sources on white-collar lawbreaking*, National Institute of Justice (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, September 1980), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>*The challenge of crime in a free society*, a report by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (Washington: USGPO, 1967), p. 52.