

# Crime and Victimization in the United States

When considering crime and victimization facts and statistics, we can only analyze or report on crimes that are measured or counted in some way. The United States has long-standing national data collections for serious violent crimes, such as homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, as well as property crimes such as burglary. While we know that the statistics do not cover all crime or all victims, we do know from these reports that crime in the United States has declined measurably for decades. Although the decrease in crime has been steady and remarkably consistent, criminologists have reached no widely held conclusions about the reasons why. There are however some general patterns.

Males disproportionately commit criminal offenses, particularly violent crime (see "Homicide"), and certain crimes are predominately committed by men against women (see "Stalking," "Intimate Partner Violence," and "Sexual Violence"). Young people (age 16–24) experience the most crime both in terms of victimization and offending as compared to other age groups (see "Child, Youth, and Teen Victimization").

Our national crime statistics provide an important resource for our understanding about crime and victimization, but these statistics do not cover all crimes or all victims. While the scope of crimes included in national collection efforts continues to grow, gaps in our knowledge still exist, particularly for emerging crimes, including elder victimization, human trafficking, financial crimes (especially Internet-based frauds), stalking, and mass casualty crimes. An additional issue concerns our understanding of the broader effects of crime, especially measuring the direct and indirect harm to victims caused by crime and identifying the impact of exposure to violence, particularly for children. The limitations in our knowledge of these areas should not be interpreted as diminishing the importance of these crimes or the harm experienced by these victims but rather should signal the need for continued work by researchers.

## Uniform Crime Report

The Uniform Crime Report (UCR), launched in 1929, collects information reported to law enforcement agencies on the following crimes: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, arson, and human trafficking. Law enforcement agencies also report arrest data for 22 additional crime categories (e.g., forgery and counterfeiting, drug abuse violations, disorderly conduct,

vagrancy). Each year, the FBI issues a report on the main UCR findings, titled *Crime in the United States*, as well as several other reports (e.g., *Hate Crimes 2014* and *Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted, 2014*).<sup>A</sup> The UCR presents crime counts for the entire nation, as well as for regions, states, counties, cities, towns, tribal law enforcement, and colleges and universities. Its primary purpose is to provide reliable criminal justice statistics for law enforcement administration and management.<sup>B</sup>

## National Crime Victimization Survey

The methodology for the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which began in 1973, differs from that of the UCR. The NCVS is based on a nationally representative sample of U.S. households. Household members age 12 and older are interviewed by the U.S. Census Bureau every six months for a three-year period. The NCVS collects information on the frequency and nature of the crimes of rape, sexual assault, personal robbery, aggravated and simple assault, household burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft; it does not, however, measure homicide or commercial crimes. It gathers information on crimes both reported and not reported to the police, estimates the proportion of each crime reported to law enforcement, and describes the reasons victims gave for reporting or not reporting. The NCVS also includes questions about victims' experiences with the criminal justice system, possible substance abuse by offenders, and how victims sought to protect themselves.

The NCVS collects demographic information about both victims and offenders (e.g., age, sex, race, ethnicity, marital status, income, educational level, relationship between victim and offender), as well as information about the crimes (including time and place of occurrence, use of weapons, nature of injury, and economic impact).<sup>C</sup> The

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NCVS also publishes supplements on specific crime issues such as stalking or school crime.

### Differences between the UCR and NCVS

Although the categories of crime covered by the UCR and NCVS overlap, their methodologies differ, and the studies serve different purposes. The UCR covers all victims of crimes that were reported to law enforcement (regardless of the victim's age, and including non-person victims such as businesses), but the NCVS gathers data on crimes against people age 12 and older. The UCR covers homicide, arson, and commercial crimes, which the NCVS does not measure. The studies use somewhat different definitions of some crimes, and they report property crime using different bases, e.g., per capita—crimes per 100,000 persons (UCR) versus crimes per 1,000 households (NCVS). The UCR measures crimes actually reported to law enforcement nationwide, and the NCVS addresses crimes not reported to law enforcement.

### Important Notes about the Data

The information presented in the following newly envisioned Crime and Victimization Fact Sheets reflects the findings in the reports and other sources cited for each topic. The data are based on the best available information as of January 2016. Since then, updated data may have become available. The latest Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) study, *Criminal Victimization, 2014*, is available online at [www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov). The latest FBI statistics, *Crime in the United States, 2014*, and additional statistical tables are available online at [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov).

The information included in the Resource Guide relies primarily on reports published by BJS and the FBI, as well as statistics calculated using online data tools available from both BJS and the FBI. These data tools are freely available and can be accessed online at

[www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=nvat](http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=nvat) (for the NCVS data tool) and [www.bjs.gov/ucrdata](http://www.bjs.gov/ucrdata) (for the UCR data tool). These tools are user-friendly resources that permit interested readers to generate additional statistical tables that suit their particular interests.

Each Fact Sheet includes both text and graphics. Infographics are included in this year's Resource Guide to provide a visual representation of the data. These new facts are interactive, allowing users to easily delve further into the information by clicking on the data point to visit the source. The information compiled on the Fact Sheets is also great to share via social media during National Crime Victims' Rights Week and throughout the year. Please note that percentages on charts and graphs do not always add up to 100 because the numbers have been rounded.

### SOURCES

- A Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Uniform Crime Reports," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2014), <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr>
- B --- "A Word About UCR Data," *Uniform Crime Reports*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2014), <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/word>
- C Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Data Collection: National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2014), <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=245#Methodology>