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## Violent Crime: An Overview

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## VIOLENT CRIME: AN OVERVIEW

### SUMMARY

Violent crime in the United States is a matter of national concern. A February 1994 survey by the *Los Angeles Times* found that 25 percent of those polled nationwide believe crime is the most important problem facing the Nation, making this issue "the country's top social problem."

Policymakers at the Federal and State levels have urged various initiatives to address this problem. On July 28, conferees reached agreement on the House and Senate versions of an omnibus anti-crime bill, H.R. 3355. A recent National Criminal Justice Association review of State-of-the-State addresses by the Nation's Governors found that crime control, especially that concerning violent, repeat offenders, was among Governors' top 1994 State legislative priorities.

Crime statistics may provide useful insights about the nature and incidence of violent crime, although they provide few definitive answers. The two official measures of all crime nationwide, including violent crime, are the FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)* and the Bureau of Justice Statistics' *National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)*. According to *UCR* data, the rate of violent crime increased from an estimated 199 crimes committed per 100,000 persons in 1965 to a high of 758 crimes per 100,000 in 1991, then declined slightly in 1992 and again in 1993. The highest homicide rate occurred in 1980. The *NCVS* reports the annual results of a household survey of those victimized by violent crime. Violent crimes, including rape, robbery and assault, rose 24 percent from 1973 to 1992. The *NCVS* data show a decline in the violent crime rate since the peak in 1981.

Criminal justice researchers use statistics on crime-related factors, including recidivism, alcohol, drugs, and guns, to understand how violent crime may be reduced or prevented. Statistics on violent adult offenders suggest that recidivism is a significant factor in the Nation's violent crime problem. The National Institute of Justice reported 1992 data from its Drug Use Forecasting Program (DUF), showing that the percentage of males arrested for any reason that tested positive for drug use in its sample at any one site ranged from 47 to 78 percent. In addition, cocaine and marijuana use showed an increase among arrestees at many testing sites. During a recent study concerning firearms and violent crime, the National Academy of Sciences Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior found that greater firearm availability is positively associated with higher rates of murder and felony gun use, but does not show a significant statistical effect on general violence levels.

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## VIOLENT CRIME: AN OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

Violent crime in the United States is clearly a matter of national concern. A recent national survey by the *Los Angeles Times* found that 25 percent of those polled believe crime is the most important problem facing the Nation, making this issue, in the pollsters' view, "the country's top social problem."<sup>1</sup> Although preliminary statistics released by the FBI found a 1 percent decrease in the number of reported violent crimes from 1992 to 1993 (from approximately 1.93 million to around 1.9 million), the number of reported homicides increased by 3 percent (an estimated 24,500 in 1993 up from about 23,760 in 1992).<sup>2</sup> Not only is there widespread consensus that the rate of violent crime is too high, many suggest that the problem is getting worse. For example, Jack Levin, professor of sociology and criminology at Boston's Northeastern University, remarked: "This may be the last good report [from the FBI] that we see in a long time. This is the lull before the crime storm that we're going to have in this country the next decade."<sup>3</sup>

Press accounts suggest that Americans' fear of violent criminal activity is growing. James Marquart, a criminal justice professor at Sam Houston State University, argues that increasing public fear of crime is due in part to the fact that "there is no pattern to the crime . . . it is random, spontaneous and episodic."<sup>4</sup> Also, there are prominent examples of crime occurring in places, both public and private, that were formerly believed to be safe:

- Twelve-year old Polly Klaas was kidnapped from her own bedroom in Petaluma, California, and killed by her abductor.
- Recent multiple killings of innocent bystanders have occurred on the Long Island Rail Road, at postal facilities, during drive-by shootings in various cities, in courtrooms, in restaurants, in office buildings, and in an Air Force hospital.

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan, John. Public Focus on Violent Felons Pushes Health Care Issues Off Screen. *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1994. p. A7.

<sup>2</sup> Murder Up 3% in 1993; Violent Crime Down Slightly. *Washington Post*, May 2, 1994. p. A6; U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Press Release. May 1, 1994. 2 p.

<sup>3</sup> Murder Up 3% in 1993, p. A6.

<sup>4</sup> Smolowe Jill. Danger in the Safety Zone. *Time*. August 23, 1993. p. 29.

- Murders of foreign tourists have made domestic and international headlines.<sup>5</sup>

Reported data suggest a growing connection between violent crime and drugs and firearms:

- The Partnership for Drug-Free America recently released a report concluding that almost half of all murders and other violent crimes nationwide are tied to drug abuse.<sup>6</sup>
- A National Institute of Justice report noted that about 60 percent (approximately 12,000 victims) of all homicides were committed with firearms in 1989 and another 70,000 persons received injuries caused by attackers with firearms.<sup>7</sup>

Increasingly, law enforcement officers have been victims of this violence. For example, during 1991, felonious killings of 68 police officers and assaults on 3,532 officers involved the use of a firearm.<sup>8</sup>

Policymakers at the Federal and State levels have crafted various initiatives to address the crime problem.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, President Clinton called for adoption of the proposed Federal assault weapons ban.<sup>10</sup> A recent National Criminal Justice Association review of State-of-the-State addresses by the Nation's Governors found that crime control, especially that concerning violent, repeat offenders, was among Governors' top 1994 State legislative priorities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on these and other incidents, see *Violence in America. U.S. News and World Report*, v. 116, Jan. 17, 1994, pp. 22-24, 26-27, 30, 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> The Partnership for a Drug-Free America noted that 48 percent of all male offenders charged with murder and assault test positive for drugs at the time of their arrest. See: *Half of All Homicides Tied to Drug Use, Report Says. Narcotics Control Digest*, v. 24, March 2, 1994. p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Roth, Jeffrey A. *Firearms and Violence. National Institute of Justice: Research in Brief*. February 1994. p. 1. According to the author, "among firearms, handguns are the murder weapon of choice. While handguns make up only about one-third of all firearms owned in the United States, they account for 80 percent of all murders committed with firearms."

<sup>8</sup> Of the 68 officers feloniously killed, assailants with handguns murdered the officers in 50 cases, rifles in 14, and shotguns in 4. U.S. Department of Justice. *Federal Bureau of Investigation. Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted, 1991*. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1992. pp. 12, 62.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the Federal response to crime, see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Crime Control: The Federal Response*. Issue Brief No IB90078, by Suzanne Cavanagh, April 22, 1994 (continually updated). Washington, 1990. 16 p.

<sup>10</sup> Cooper, Ken. *Brandishing a Loaded Symbol. Washington Post*. May 5, 1994. p. A5.

<sup>11</sup> *Crime Control is Among Governors' Top 1994 State Legislative Priorities. Governors Bulletin*. Mar. 7, 1994. p. 1.

On July 28, conferees reached agreement on two versions of an omnibus anti-crime bill, H.R. 3355; it passed as S. 1607 in the Senate in November 1993, and as H.R. 4092 in the House in April 1994. In addition, in May 1994, the House passed H.R. 4296, a bill containing semi-automatic assault weapons ban provisions similar to Title 45 of the Senate crime bill. These measures contain a wide variety of provisions designed to address the problem of violent crime.

This report presents statistics on violent crime and discusses various factors related to the problem. It provides an analysis of policy issues, including pros and cons of proposals emphasizing prevention, punishment, and rehabilitation. Proposed legislative initiatives designed to prevent and reduce violent crime are summarized.

## STATISTICS AND TRENDS

Crime statistics may provide useful insights about the nature and incidence of violent crime. For example, statisticians compile and interpret data on: the demographics of offenders and crime victims; recidivism; the incidence of crime-related activities involving alcohol, drugs, and guns; international crime comparisons; and the costs associated with criminal activity. In addition to providing snapshots of criminal activity at any one time, statisticians also use series of crime data sets to suggest trends.

### *Uniform Crime Reports and National Crime Victimization Survey*

The two official measures of all crime nationwide, including violent crime, are the FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)* and the Bureau of Justice Statistics' *National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)*.<sup>12</sup> According to Department of Justice statisticians, the measures use different methodologies to collect data and together they provide a comprehensive view of the nature and extent of crime in the United States:

- The *UCR* provides data on four major violent crimes: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. The *NCVS* includes the violent crimes of rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault, but it does not include homicide (because this crime cannot be counted in a survey that interviews victims).

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<sup>12</sup> The most recent editions of these two measures are: U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Uniform Crime Reports for the United States 1992*. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1993. Hereafter referred to as *UCR*. U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1991*. Washington, December 1992. Hereafter referred to as *NCVS, 1991*. Although these measures provide information about property crimes, as well as violent crimes, this report confines itself to an analysis of the latter.

- The *UCR* reports arrests at the State and local levels. The *NCVS* uses a methodology providing more extensive information than the *UCR* about victims and the characteristics of their victimization.
- The *UCR* provides data on all crimes reported to the police, while the *NCVS* surveys reported and unreported crimes affecting the national population age 12 or older.<sup>13</sup>

Critics of the usefulness and validity of these two measures suggest that neither adjusts their reported crime or victimization rate for the U.S. population as a whole to show "the impact of age-structure fluctuations on U.S. crime. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Some argue that budgetary pressures (affecting the number of police officers who report the data, or local anti-crime initiatives) may change over time, leading to possible variations in the number of those arrested or otherwise involved in the criminal justice system.<sup>15</sup>

Others question the meaning of variations over time in crime reported to the *UCR*, suggesting, for example, that citizens in certain cities may be more likely to report criminal activity to the police, that crime prevention efforts by law enforcement officials may result in a *drop* in crimes reported, or that police may establish a new unit to handle certain crimes, resulting in an increase in public reports of those crimes.<sup>16</sup>

Critics of the *NCVS* methodology question the validity of data the survey provides on violent crime. For example, in the case of rape, each respondent decides for themselves whether or not a rape had actually occurred, and some respondents may be reluctant to provide details if family members or relatives are present or if the interviewer is a male.<sup>17</sup>

### Statistics and the Violent Offender

According to *UCR* data, the rate of violent crime increased from an estimated 199 crimes committed per 100,000 people in 1965 to a high of 758.1

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<sup>13</sup> The *NCVS* noted that 39 percent of all crimes revealed to its surveyors were also reported to the police, but almost half of all crimes of violence were reported to the authorities. U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Highlights From 20 Years of Surveying Crime Victims: The National Crime Victimization Survey, 1973-92*. Washington, October 1993. pp. 4, 32. Hereafter referred to as *NCVS, 1973-92*.

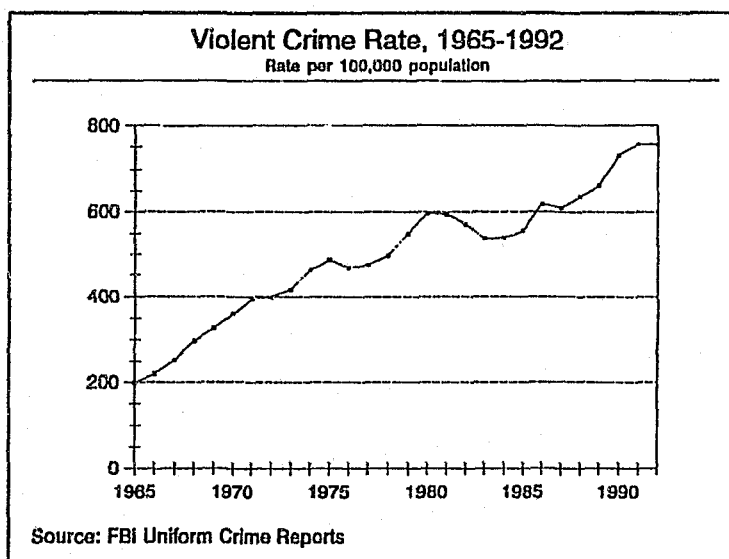
<sup>14</sup> Steffensmeier, Darrell, and Miles D. Harer. Did Crime Rise or Fall During the Reagan Presidency? The Effects on An "Aging" U.S. Population on the Nation's Crime Rate. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, v. 28, Aug. 1991. p. 335.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, James. New York Crime Statistics vs. Reality. *New York Times*, August 16, 1993. p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> Testimony of Mary P. Koss, on behalf of the American Psychological Association, in U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. *Women and Violence*. Hearings on Legislation to Reduce the Growing Problem of Violent Crime Against Women, 101st Congress, 2d Sess. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1991. pp. 38-42.

crimes per 100,000 in 1991, then declined slightly in 1992 to 757.5.<sup>18</sup> Increases in the crime rate are not necessarily parallel to increases in the actual number of crimes committed. The crime *rate* for previous years may be higher than that for more recent years, although the actual *number* of crimes committed for the latter often set new records. For example, the homicide *rate* in 1980 (10.2 murders per 100,000) is higher than that for 1991 (9.8 per 100,000), but the *number* of murders committed in 1991, estimated at 24,700, surpasses the 23,040 murders in 1980. This difference is largely explained by the fact that U.S. population from 1980 to 1991 increased from 225,349,264 to 252,177,000.<sup>19</sup>



The demographic categories of crime data are usually broken down according to age, sex, race and ethnicity, and location. The crime rate may be affected by growth in the size of the population, the number of people in crime-prone age groups, and the recidivism of certain high-rate, violent offenders within those groups.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The *UCR* computes the violent crime rate by adding subtotals for murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault to obtain a violent crime total, then uses census data to produce the rate per 100,000 inhabitants within various jurisdictions ranging from the Nation at large to cities and counties. Some critics warn that the results may be misleading. For example, cities with a low murder rate and relatively higher rates in other violent crimes may have a greater violent crime rate than those with a higher murder rate and relatively lower rates for other violent crimes. See Bennet, *New York Crime Statistics*, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> *UCR*, 1992, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of efforts to prevent and control crime by juveniles, see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: Background and Current Issues*. Report Number 92-633 GOV, by Suzanne Cavanagh and David Teasley. Washington, 1992. 18 p.; and U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Youth Gangs: An Overview*. Report Number 92-491 GOV, by Suzanne Cavanagh and David Teasley. Washington, 1992. 17 p.



### Age

Law enforcement professionals and statisticians generally agree that criminal activity tends to crest during adolescence and young adulthood and then declines with age. According to sociologists Steffensmeier and Harer, "age-specific arrest rates peak in the 16 to 18 year old range for all index crimes [violent or person crimes and property crimes], then drop quickly to half the peak by age 21 for the property crimes and slowly to age 35 for person crimes."<sup>21</sup> The rates of violent crimes committed by those over age 35 are much lower than those for younger offenders. Arrests in 1992 of offenders 35 years and older comprised about one-fifth of all arrests for violent crime.<sup>22</sup>

Crime data may be affected by the number of people in certain age groups during any given year. Statistically, males enter their most crime-prone years between the ages of 16 and 24.<sup>23</sup> This age cohort has grown proportionally smaller since the early 1980s. Projected population data for juveniles show slight proportional increases, with those aged 5 to 13 comprising an estimated 12.8 percent of the total population in 1990 and increasing to 13.2 percent in projections for 2000, and with those aged 14 to 17 increasing from an estimated 5.3 percent in 1990 to a projected 5.7 percent in 2000.

U.S. Population, 1960-2000 (Projected)  
Ages 0-24, Proportion of Total Population<sup>24</sup>

	Under 5 Yrs	5-13 Yrs	14-17 Yrs	18-24 Yrs
1960	11.3	18.2	6.2	8.9
1970	8.4	17.9	7.8	12
1980	7.2	13.7	7.2	13.3
1990	7.6	12.8	5.3	10.8
2000 (projected)	7	13.2	5.7	9.4

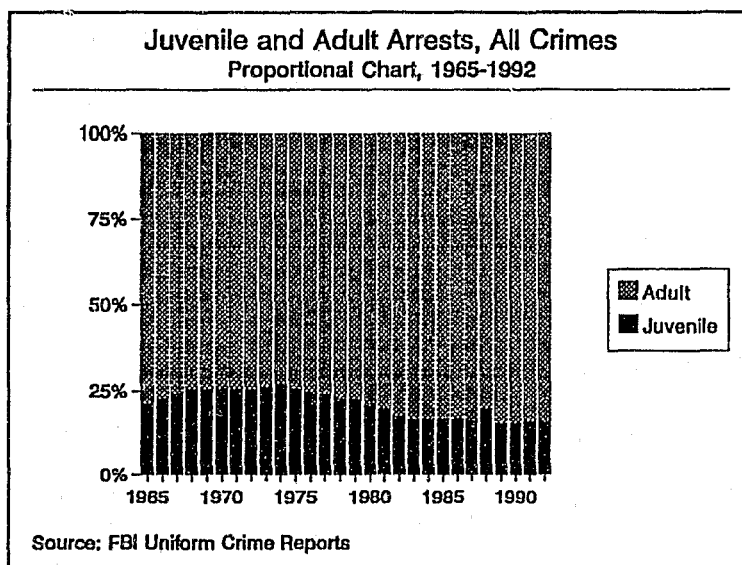
<sup>21</sup> Steffensmeier and Harer, *Did Crime Rise or Fall?* p. 331. See also the statement of criminal justice professor Dr. Carl Klockars: "The major criminal element in our society is males in their late teens to early 20's." Rosen, Marie Simonetti. A *LEN* Interview With Prof. Carl Klockars of the University of Delaware. *Law Enforcement News*, April 15, 1994. p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> *UCR*, 1992, pp. 227-28.

<sup>23</sup> According to Ted Chiricos, a Florida State University criminology professor, national crime trends are statistically linked to the number of young males, aged 16 to 24, in the U.S. population. He argues that the greatest increases in the overall U.S. crime rate occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Professor Chiricos, "This can be explained almost entirely by age distribution . . . . It is directly correlated to the large number of births, including males, in the baby boom years." *FSU Geography Study Offers Insight On Crime Patterns, Allocating Officers. Crime Control Digest*, Apr. 18, 1994. pp. 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. *Population Projections of the United States, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1993 to 2050*. P25-1104, p. xvii; *Preliminary Estimates of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race: 1970 to 1981*. P25-917, p. 1; and *Estimates of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race: April 1, 1960 to July 1, 1973*. P25-519, p. 1.

UCR data show the proportion of arrests for *all* crimes committed by adults and juveniles respectively has ranged from 27.2 percent for juveniles and 72.8 percent for adults in 1974, to 15.5 percent for juveniles and 84.5 percent for adults in 1989, with juveniles arrested for about 1 in 4 or 1 in 5 of all crimes reported to police.<sup>25</sup>

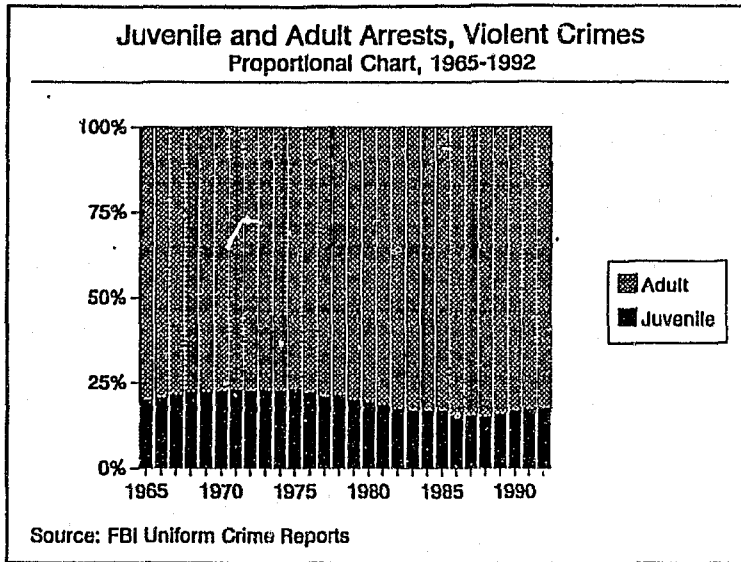


Juveniles are those under 18, with 98 percent of that group aged 10-17 years.

What has been particularly worrisome to criminologists, however, is that beginning in 1989, the proportion of *violent* crimes committed by juveniles, as compared to those committed by adults, surpassed the proportion of *all* crimes committed by juveniles relative to those committed by adults. In a special 1992 report by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), it was argued that "between the mid-1970's and the latter part of the 1980's, Violent Crime Index arrest rates for young people remained relatively constant, but increased substantially in 1989 and in 1990."<sup>26</sup> Though the Department of Justice characterized this increase as "substantial," some argue that the data reveal only a modest rise in the proportion of violent juvenile crimes as compared to those for adult offenders. For example, juvenile arrests in 1989 were 15.5 percent of all crimes and 15.8 percent of all violent crimes, in 1990 —15.6 percent of all crimes and 16.8 percent of all violent crimes, in 1991 —16.3 percent of all crimes and 17.2 percent of all violent crimes, and in 1992 —16.3 percent of all crimes and 17.5 percent of all violent crimes.

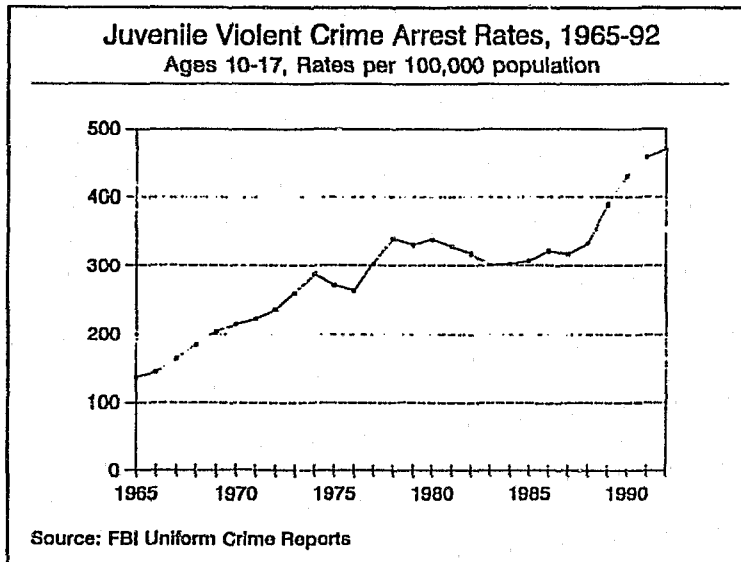
<sup>25</sup> UCR, 1965-1992, Table 38.

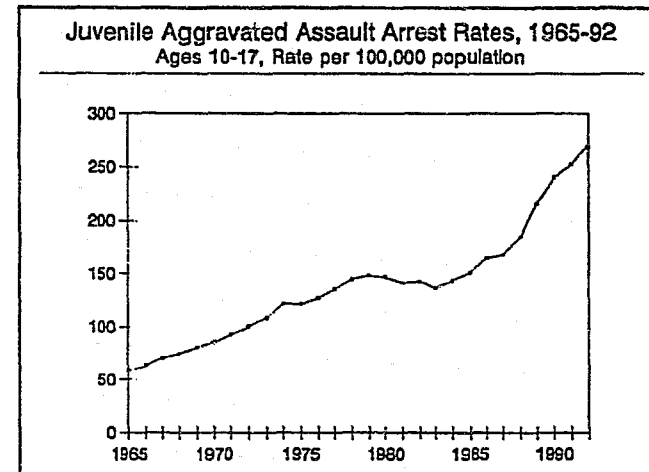
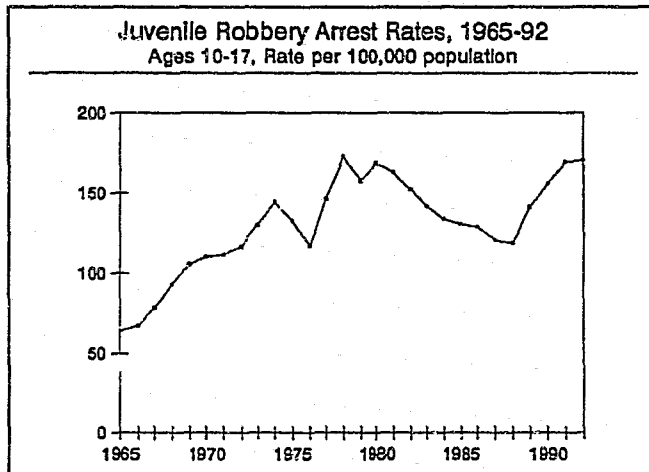
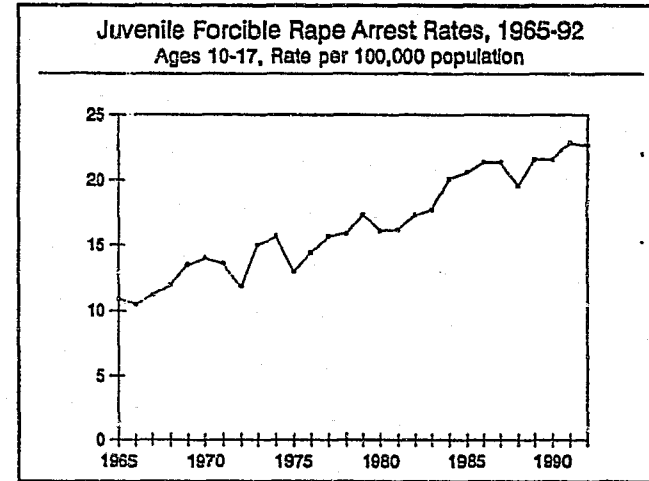
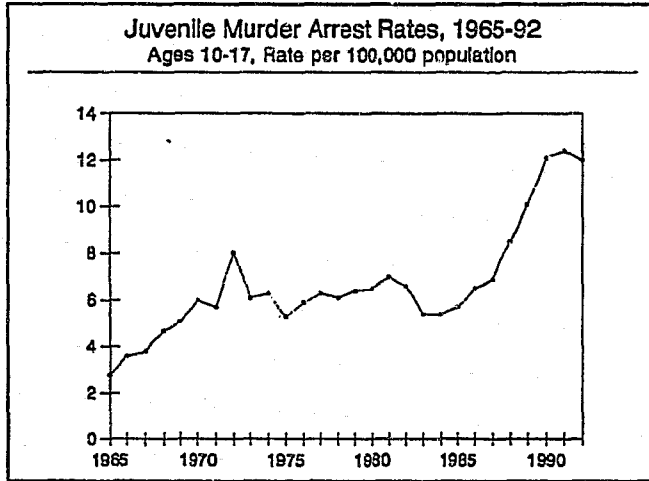
<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. *Arrests of Youth 1990*. Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Jan. 1992. p. 2.



Juveniles are those under 18, with 98 percent of that group aged 10-17 years.

Also, data show that the proportion of violent crimes committed by juveniles within the larger category of all juvenile crimes is on the increase. In 1992, the FBI reported that during the 1980s, crimes of violence made up a growing proportion of all juvenile crimes. In addition, violent crime arrest rates for juveniles, mainly young males, substantially increased from 1965 to 1992, with the most recent upward trend beginning in 1988.





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Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports. Juveniles are those under 18, with 98 percent of that group aged 10-17 years.

Demographic data suggest that fewer juveniles were committing more violent crimes during the 1980s than in earlier generations. For example, the U.S. population aged 13 to 17 declined from about 19.8 million in 1980 to 16.7 million in 1990. The *UCR* reports that police made 72,554 arrests of teenage offenders for violent crime in 1980, at a rate of 492.4 per 100,000 population, as compared with 84,393 arrests in that group in 1990, at a rate of 651.6 per 100,000 population.<sup>27</sup> Worse, crime data suggest that violent criminal activity is increasing among younger age groups, especially those aged 13 to 16.<sup>28</sup>

Most arrests nationwide involve adult offenders, who commit almost 4 out of every 5 violent crimes where an arrest is made. Although violent crime arrests for adults have continued to rise, the ratio for adults has not kept pace with that for juveniles. For example, in the decade from 1983 to 1992, adult violent crime arrests rose from 324,718 to 485,636, a 49.6 percent increase; juvenile violent crime arrests rose from 66,296 to 104,137, a 57.1 percent increase. This disparity has widened when statistics for the last 5 years are highlighted: adult arrests rose 18.8 percent from 1988 to 1992, while juvenile arrests increased 47.4 percent in that period.<sup>29</sup>

### Sex

Nationwide males are arrested for more than 4 out of every 5 violent crimes. Although violent crime arrests for males have continued to rise, the ratio for females is growing. For example, in the decade from 1983 to 1992, annual male violent crime arrests rose from 348,813 to 516,810, a 48.2 percent increase; female violent crime arrests rose from 42,201 to 72,963, a 72.9 percent increase. During that decade, violent crime arrests of male juveniles increased by 54 percent, while those for female juveniles increased by 82.9 percent.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: Background and Current Issues*. Report Number 92-633 GOV, by Suzanne Cavanagh and David Teasley. Washington, 1992. p. 13. Some argue that if violent crime data is adjusted for demographic changes among this crime-prone group, certain interpretations that the overall crime rate declined during most of the 1980s may be incorrect. Sociologists Steffensmeier and Harer find that when the crime rate for the *UCR* is adjusted for the period from 1980 to 1988 to show demographic changes in the number of adolescents and young adults, the rate did not decline 4 percent as reported, but actually increased about 7 percent. Steffensmeier and Harer, *Did Crime Rise or Fall?* p. 343. Also, they argue that from 1940 to 1980, there has been "the progressive concentration of offending among the young." Steffensmeier, Darrell J., Emilie Andersen Allan, Miles D. Harer, and Cathy Streifel. *Age and the Distribution of Crime*. *American Journal of Sociology*, v. 94, Jan. 1989. p. 803.

<sup>28</sup> Juvenile Crime Statistics Rise as Young Adult Population Shrinks. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, v. 20, October 21, 1992. p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *UCR*, 1992, pp. 221, 223.

<sup>30</sup> *UCR*, 1992, pp. 222.

### *Race and Ethnicity*

At present, *UCR* statistics provide race-related data, but the FBI requirement that police maintain data on ethnicity of arrestees is optional. Consequently, Hispanic arrestees are counted in the racial category to which they say they belong.<sup>31</sup>

Caucasians comprise over 83 percent of the total population, and they accounted for 67.6 percent of all arrests and 53.6 percent of all violent crime arrests in 1992. African-Americans comprise approximately 12 percent of the total U.S. population; arrestees within this group during 1992 accounted for 30.3 percent of all criminal arrests and 44.8 percent of all violent crime arrests. The *UCR* provides data on two additional groups: American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Asian or Pacific Islander. These two groups comprise 0.8 percent and 3.2 percent of the total population, respectively, and together they accounted for about 2 percent of all criminal arrests.<sup>32</sup>

For juveniles, the distribution of violent crime arrests by race in 1992 was 49.1 percent Caucasian, 49.1 percent African-American, 0.6 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1.2 percent Asian or Pacific Islander.

Recently, the *UCR*'s compilation of crime statistics by race has come under some criticism. Then-Minneapolis Mayor Donald Fraser and his successor, Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton, required that a disclaimer be appended to that city's crime statistics "warning users against linking the prevalence of crime to race without considering other factors such as socio-economic conditions."<sup>33</sup> In addition, former Mayor Fraser sent a letter to the Attorney General in October 1993, co-signed by mayors of several other major cities, urging the Justice Department not to maintain race-based statistics unless a relevance could be demonstrated for their use.<sup>34</sup>

### *Location*

The *UCR* reports violent crime data by region, State, metropolitan statistical area (MSA), and locales divided according to population, including major cities, towns, and suburban and rural counties.

- In 1992, the violent crime rate was highest in the West, with 864 crimes committed per 100,000 inhabitants, followed

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<sup>31</sup> The FBI is now in the process of expanding and improving the *UCR* program under the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). When completed, NIBRS crime data will include ethnicity.

<sup>32</sup> *UCR*, 1992, p. 235.

<sup>33</sup> The Race is Run. *Law Enforcement News*, v. 20, April 15, 1994. p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

by the South with a rate of 809.6, the Northeast with a rate of 731.5, and the Midwest with a rate of 607.2.<sup>35</sup>

- States with 1992 violent crime rates of more than 1,000 per 100,000 inhabitants were Florida (1,207.2), New York (1,122.1), California (1,119.7), and Maryland (1,000.1). States with rates lower than 200 per 100,000 were North Dakota (83.3), Vermont (109.5), New Hampshire (125.7), Maine (130.9), and Montana (169.9), and South Dakota (194.5).
- MSAs for which a reported violent crime rate of more than 1,500 were reported were Miami, Florida (2,037), Los Angeles-Long Beach, California (1,778.6), Alexandria, Louisiana (1,618.5), Tallahassee, Florida (1,609.7), and Baton Rouge, Louisiana (1,596.4).
- In a comparison of offenses known to the police from 1991 to 1992, the *UCR* reports that violent crime dropped 5.6 percent in the 7 cities with populations of one million or more, rose 3.8 percent in the 18 cities with a population of 500,000 to 999,999, dropped 0.2 percent in 38 cities with a population of 250,000 to 499,999, and rose 1.7 percent in 127 cities with populations of 100,000 to 249,999.
- In a comparison of offenses known to the police from 1991 to 1992, the *UCR* provides statistics reporting a 2 percent rise in suburban counties' violent crime offenses and a 5.8 percent rise in the number of offenses for rural counties.<sup>36</sup>

### Statistics on Victims of Violent Crime

The *NCVS* reports the annual results of a national household survey of those victimized by violent crime. The number of households surveyed increased from over 63 million in 1970 to almost 96 million in 1992. Violent crimes reported, including rape, robbery and assault, rose 24 percent from 1973 to 1992. The rate of victimization for crimes of violence in 1992 was 32.1 per 1,000

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<sup>35</sup> Western States are: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming. Southern States are: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The District of Columbia is also included in this category. Northeastern States are: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Midwestern States are: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

<sup>36</sup> Rural county totals include offenses reported by State police agencies with no county breakdown.

persons aged 12 or older (or per 1,000 households), declining from a peak of 35.3 in 1981.

- From 1973 to 1991, over 36 million people over the age of 12 were injured as a result of violent crime.
- Teenage black males report the highest violent crime victimization rates at 113 per 1,000 persons, followed by teenage black females at 94, teenage white males at 90, and young adult black males at 80. The lowest violent crime victimization rates range from elderly white females at 3 per 1,000 persons, followed by elderly white males at 6, elderly black females at 10, and elderly black males at 12.<sup>37</sup>
- Blacks have significantly higher victimization rates than whites or those of other races, while Hispanics have slightly higher rates than non-Hispanics.
- Eighty percent of all reported single offender violent crimes involve victims and offenders of the same race; 15 percent involve white victims and black offenders, 3 percent involve white victims and other-race offenders, and 2 percent involve black victims and white offenders.
- Those residing in the central city are more likely to be victimized at a rate of 44 per 1,000 persons than those in suburbs at 26, or rural areas at 25.
- About half of all violent crime victimizations recorded by *NCVS* are reported to police, with the number increasing if the victim is injured.<sup>38</sup>

The *NCVS* does not provide data on victims of homicide but the *UCR* provides supplemental information on murder victims, suggesting an increase in their overall numbers and a proportional rise in those under 18, in comparison with adults. Using annual data for those homicide victims whose age was known, juveniles comprised 9.9 percent of the total in 1990, 10.6 percent in 1991, and 10.9 percent in 1992. Also, the *UCR* reports that in 1992, almost half of all murder victims were either related to (12 percent) or acquainted with (35 percent) their assailants.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The *NCVS* defines teenage as ages 12 through 19, young adult as ages 20 through 34, adult as ages 35 through 64, and elderly as age 65 and over.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Highlights from 20 Years of Surveying Crime Victims. The National Crime Victimization Survey, 1973-92*. October 1993; and *Crime Victimization in the United States, 1992*. March 1994.

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Crime in the United States, 1990, 1991, and 1992*.



In 1993 the National Center for Health Statistics released mortality data involving firearms from 1985 to 1990.<sup>40</sup> For homicides specifically, NCHS provides estimates showing that firearms-related homicides for all youths aged 15 to 19 rose from a rate of 5.8 deaths per 100,000 population in 1985 to 14 deaths in 1990. Similarly, data for all youths aged 20 to 24 rose from a rate of 9.9 deaths per 100,000 population in 1985 to 17.1 deaths in 1990.<sup>41</sup>

Among black males, NCHS data show an even larger increase in firearms-related homicides. Statistics for youths aged 15 to 19 rose from a rate of 37.4 deaths per 100,000 population in 1985 to 105.3 deaths in 1990. Similarly, data for youths aged 20 to 24 rose from a rate of 63.1 deaths per 100,000 population in 1985 to 140.7 deaths in 1990.<sup>42</sup>

Scott Decker, chairman of the Criminal Justice Department at the University of Missouri at St. Louis, concludes that the pattern for homicide in the United States has shifted: "The decreasing age of both offenders and victims is the most profound change in homicide rates since World War II."<sup>43</sup>

#### Factors Related to Violent Criminal Activities

Criminal justice analysts use statistics on crime-related factors, including recidivism, alcohol, drugs, and guns, in part to understand how violent crime may be reduced or prevented. In 1989, the National Academy of Sciences Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior was established in response to the request of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the National Science Foundation (NSF). The Panel's mission was to review research on interpersonal violence, and its conclusions are found in an NIJ report entitled "Understanding and Preventing Violence."

Though the Panel urged initiatives aimed at what it believed are the sources of violence, including childhood development, firearms, alcohol, and drugs, it recognized that no single factor by itself is responsible for violent criminal activity; nor were the precise linkages of these factors with crime conclusively documented.<sup>44</sup> For example, the U.S. Department of Justice

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<sup>40</sup> Gun-related mortality statistics are broken down by manner of death, including homicide, suicide, and unintentional injury.

<sup>41</sup> A firearms-related homicide is a killing in which gunshot was the cause of death. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. *Firearm Mortality Among Children, Youth, and Young Adults 1-34 Years of Age, Trends and Current Status: United States, 1985-90*. By Lois Fingerhut. Advance Data No. 231. March 23, 1993. pp. 8-9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> As Cities each Record Numbers of Killings, Youths Play Grim Role. *New York Times*. January 1, 1994. p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

reports extensive evidence of the strong relationship between drug and alcohol use and crime but notes that the linkage is complex.<sup>46</sup> In another case, the Panel found that greater firearm availability increases the rates of murder and felony gun use, but does not seem to have a significant effect on general violence levels. Also, it is unclear how often guns may be used by victims to *reduce* violent criminal activity by offenders.<sup>46</sup> According to the Panel's report: "More research and better measurement are needed to identify the causes of violence and opportunities for preventing it . . . ."<sup>47</sup>

### *Recidivism*

Increasingly, policymakers and criminologists debate issues concerning the proportion of violent crime committed by recidivist offenders. Statistics on violent adult offenders suggest that recidivism is a significant factor in violent criminal activity. A Bureau of Justice Statistics survey of State prison inmates released last year found that violent offenders made up 46.6 percent of all offenders in 1991, as compared with 55 percent in 1986. Despite the drop in percentage, the actual number of violent offenders in State prisons increased from 245,600 in 1986 to 328,000 in 1991. Among all violent offenders, 35 percent were recidivists, with 55 percent of *these* having prior violent offenses. In addition, 22 percent of the recidivists imprisoned for property offenses, 16 percent of the recidivists among drug offenders, and 7 percent of the recidivists among public-order offenders had served time in the past for a violent offense.<sup>48</sup>

Recently, a number of proponents favoring stiff penalties for violent chronic offenders as a means of reducing the crime rate have cited a University of Pennsylvania study reporting that more than two-thirds of all violent crimes were committed by 7 percent of young males in each of two birth cohorts (born respectively in 1945 and in 1958).<sup>49</sup> Critics argue that this study has been used incorrectly to support statements that 6 percent of offenders commit 70 percent of the violent crime. Though these data may be suspect, studies have

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<sup>45</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *A National Report. Drugs, Crime and the Justice System*. December 1992. p. 2; Roth, Jeffrey. *Psychoactive Substances and Violence*. National Institute of Justice. February 1994. p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Roth, *Firearms and Violence*, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Roth, Jeffrey. *Understanding and Preventing Violence*. National Institute of Justice. February 1994. p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Survey of State Prison Inmates, 1991*. Washington, 1993. p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, U.S. Department of Justice. Office of the Attorney General. *Combating Violent Crime: 24 Recommendations to Strengthen Criminal Justice*. July 1992. p. 7. For a summary of the University of Pennsylvania study, see: U.S. Department of Justice. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. *Delinquency in Two Birth Cohorts*. September 1985. 26 p. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines "cohort" as "a group of individuals having a statistical factor (as age or class membership) in common in a demographic study."

confirmed that a relatively small segment of the population commits a disproportionate amount of criminal violence.<sup>50</sup>

### *Drugs and Alcohol*<sup>51</sup>

According to the Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior:

- Alcohol consumption and violence are linked through pharmacological effects on behavior, through expectations that heavy drinking and violence go together in certain settings, and through patterns of binge drinking and fighting that sometimes develop in adolescence [and]
- Illegal drugs and violence are linked primarily through drug marketing: disputes among rival distributors, arguments and robberies involving buyers and sellers, property crimes committed to raise drug money and, more speculatively, social and economic interactions between the illegal markets and the surrounding communities.<sup>52</sup>

According to the 1991 Survey of State Prison Inmates, 49 percent of violent offenders were under the influence of either alcohol or drugs, or both, when they committed their offense; 21 percent under the influence of alcohol only, 12 percent drugs only, and 16 percent both alcohol and drugs.<sup>53</sup> The National Institute of Justice reported 1992 data from its Drug Use Forecasting Program (DUF) showing that the percentage of males arrested (for any offense) testing positive for drug use (excluding alcohol) in its sample at any one site ranged from 47 to 78 percent. In addition, cocaine and marijuana use showed an increase among arrestees at many testing sites.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Raspberry, William. Crime and the 6 Percent Solution. *Washington Post*, March 14, 1994. p. A19. For examples of studies supporting the thesis that repeat offenders commit a disproportionate number of crimes in the United States, see: U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1983*. April 1989, pp. 1-13; and, Chaiken, Jan M. and Marcia R. Chaiken. *Varieties of Criminal Behavior*. Santa Monica, Rand. August 1982. 321 p.

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of Federal efforts to control illegal drugs, see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Drug Supply Control: 103d Congress*. Issue Brief No. IB94033, by David Teasley, May 27, 1994 (continually updated). Washington, 1994. 15 p.

<sup>52</sup> Roth, *Psychoactive Substances and Violence*, p. 1; For more information on the complex linkages between illicit drug use and crime, see, BJS, *Drugs, Crime, and the Justice System*, pp. 2-6.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Survey of State Prison Inmates, 1991*. March 1993, p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. National Institute of Justice. *Drug Use Forecasting: 1992 Annual Report*. October 1993. pp. 3-4.

Thomas Constantine, the new Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), reaffirmed a strong connection between illicit drug use and violent crime:

Drugs were once regarded as a singular issue. Now, drugs are inextricably linked with the violence that is terrorizing our country. We know that drug users commit a disproportionately high percentage of violent crimes. Our most recent national surveys show that over one third of all violent acts committed and almost half of all homicides are drug-related.<sup>55</sup>

The DEA Administrator further illustrated the link between crime and drugs in his comments on the success of cooperative task forces:

In several American cities, cooperative task forces have been so successful that their investigations have been responsible for dramatic decreases in drug-related violence. For example, when a task force made up of Federal, state, and local law enforcement, targeted crack dealers in Schenectady, New York, violent crime in that city fell by 37 percent. . . . And, in New Haven, Connecticut, as a result of task force enforcement actions against drug gangs, the murder rate in that city dropped by almost 50 percent, while the rates continued to climb in neighboring cities.<sup>56</sup>

### *Firearms*<sup>57</sup>

During a recent study of research concerning firearms and violent crime, the National Academy of Sciences Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior found that greater firearm availability increases the rates of murder and felony gun use, but does not seem to have a significant effect on general violence levels. Also, it is unclear how often guns may be used by victims to *reduce* violent criminal activity by offenders.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Remarks of Thomas A. Constantine. Contained in statement of the Hon. Charles E. Schumer. *Congressional Record*, Daily Edition, v. 140, June 9, 1994. p. E1147.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. E1147-48.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of Federal policy regarding gun control see, U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Gun Control. Issue Brief No. IB94007, by Keith Bea, May 23, 1994 (continuously updated). Washington, 1994. 15 p.

<sup>58</sup> Roth, *Firearms and Violence*, p. 1. See also, U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Guns and Crime. April 1994. p. 2. In the latter publication, NCVS surveyors report that:

A fifth of the victims defending themselves with a firearm suffered an injury, compared to almost half of those who defended themselves with weapons other than a firearm or who had no weapon. Care should be

*NCVS* data on violent crime in 1992 show 931,000 violent crimes committed by armed offenders. Handgun crimes accounted for about 13 percent of all violent crimes in 1992. Bureau of Justice Statistics data reveal that the most likely victims of handgun crimes are young black males: those aged 16 to 19 were 4 four times more likely to be victimized than white males of the same age group (the black rate is 40 per 1,000 persons compared to 10 whites per 1,000); and those aged 20 to 24 were 3 four times more likely to be victimized than white males of the same age group (the black rate is 29 per 1,000 persons compared to 9 whites per 1,000).<sup>59</sup> Between 1987 and 1992, approximately three-fourths of the victims who used firearms for self-defense did so during a crime of violence.<sup>60</sup>

*UCR* statistics on firearms-related homicides, not found in *NCVS* data, show a continuing increase in these crimes. For example, of the 17,971 murder cases for which there is supplemental data in 1988, 10,865 victims were killed by offenders using firearms, including handguns, rifles, shotguns, and other guns. Of the 22,540 victims in 1992, 15,377 died from firearms injuries.<sup>61</sup> In addition, firearms were used in 40.3 percent of all robberies and 25 percent of all aggravated assaults.<sup>62</sup>

### International Crime Comparisons

Criminologists generally agree that the United States has significantly higher rates for most violent crimes than most of other developed countries. For example, one study based upon data from the World Health Organization found that the United States had a homicide mortality rate of 8.3 per 100,000 population in 1984, nearly twice the rate for all European countries.<sup>63</sup> Another study found that the homicide mortality rate in 1986 and 1987 for male victims aged 15 to 24 was at least four times higher for the United States (21.9 per 100,000) than that for each of 21 other developed countries, including Scotland (5 per 100,000), Israel (3.7 per 100,000), Canada (2.9 per 100,000),

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used in interpreting these data because many aspects of crimes--including victim and offender characteristics, crime circumstances, and offender intent--contribute to the victims' injury outcomes.

<sup>59</sup> *UCR*, 1992, pp. 16-17; *BJS, Guns and Crime*, pp. 1-2. According to the *UCR*, approximately 7 of every 10 murders were committed with weapons, and 55 percent of all murders for which the use of a weapon is reported involved handguns.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *UCR*, 1992, p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 32.

<sup>63</sup> Reiss, Jr., and Roth, eds., *Understanding and Preventing Violence*, pp. 52-53.

England and Wales (1.2 per 100,000), and Japan (0.5 per 100,000).<sup>64</sup> For the same age group, the study found that three-fourths of U.S. homicides were firearms-related as compared with fewer than one-fourth of homicides in comparison countries.<sup>65</sup>

On the other hand, various studies suggest that the rates in the United States for sexual assault and assaults with force, though ranking among the highest internationally, do not so markedly surpass those of other developed nations. For example, in random surveys of approximately 2,000 people in 20 countries performed in 1989 by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, respondents were asked to report whether they had been victims of crime during the past 12 months. The U.S. percentage of the total sample who were victims of sexual assault and assaults with force during the previous 12 months were 1.5 and 2.2 respectively. The percentages of the total sample for Canada were 1.8 and 2.3, for Australia—1.9 and 2.8, England and Wales—0.3 and 1.1, and West Germany—1.7 and 1.9.<sup>66</sup>

### Costs Related to Crime

Violent crime is costly in many respects, including physical injury or death of victims, psychological trauma, economic loss, criminal justice expenditures, and a probable decline in public confidence in law enforcement. These costs to society cannot be estimated easily. For example, though the *UCR* provides an estimated 24,500 reported homicides nationwide in 1993 and the *NCVS* estimates that about 2 million people are injured each year as a result of violent crime, there are no national data for crime-related injuries linked to psychological trauma.<sup>67</sup> Also, *BJS* reports that Federal, State and local governments spent approximately \$74 billion for civil and criminal justice in 1990, but no subtotal is available for the costs of violent crime alone.<sup>68</sup>

Estimated costs of violent crime nationwide are incomplete but range in the billions of dollars. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that, in 1992, the total estimated cost of violent crime (excluding homicide) to victims was about \$1.36 billion, which included losses from medical expenses, lost pay, property

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<sup>64</sup> Fingerhut, Lois A, and Joel C. Kleinman. International and Interstate Comparisons of Homicide Among Young Males. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, v. 263, June 27, 1990. p. 3293.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3292.

<sup>66</sup> Marsh, David, Eur. Ed. English-Speakers Lead in Crime. *Financial Times*, January 25, 1993. p. 2. The Netherlands Justice Ministry (coordinator). *Criminal Victimization in the Industrial World*. 1993.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. FBI. Press Release, May 1, 1994. 2p.; *BJS*. *Highlights from 20 Years*, p. 15; Reiss, Albert J, Jr., and Jeffrey A. Roth, Eds. *Understanding and Preventing Violence*. Washington, National Academy Press, 1993. p. 59.

<sup>68</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Justice Expenditure and Employment, 1990*. September 1992. p. 1.

theft and damage, cash losses, and other crime-related costs.<sup>69</sup> Another source estimates that medical and mental health costs due to violent crime total about \$11 billion each year.<sup>70</sup>

## POLICY ISSUES RELATED TO VIOLENT CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Policymakers continue to debate the question of how to reduce and prevent violent crime. The primary purpose of the criminal justice system has been to control criminal activity through the use of sentencing and incarceration, though many argue that such crime reduction efforts also aid in the prevention of criminal activity. Traditionally, criminal punishment has served four purposes:

- Retribution—the need to reflect society's view of the seriousness of the offense, to promote respect for law, and to provide just punishment;
- Deterrence—the need to prevent the occurrence of criminal activity;
- Incapacitation—the need to protect the public from further crimes of the offender; and
- Rehabilitation—the need to provide the offender with educational or vocational training, medical treatment, or other treatment while within the correctional facility.<sup>71</sup>

Those who favor "getting tough" on crime contend that violent crime should be controlled by enacting strict, punitive measures. They believe that criminal activity may best be controlled or prevented when criminal acts are punished severely and swiftly.

Increasingly, policymakers have also sought to enact crime prevention measures to reduce criminal activity. This approach may range from establishing prevention programs in conjunction with punitive measures, to reliance on a multi-faceted plan to address crime-related issues within the context of other community problems or needs, to support of initiatives to

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<sup>69</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *The Costs of Crime to Victims*. February 1994. p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Cost of Crime: \$674 Billion. *U.S. News & World Report*, v. 116, January 17, 1994, p. 40. *U.S. News and World Report* consulted economists and criminal justice professionals nationwide to arrive at this estimate for the annual cost of U.S. crime.

<sup>71</sup> These purposes were noted by the Senate Committee on the Judiciary in its consideration of sentencing reform legislation incorporated in the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984. See: U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. *Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1983*. Report to Accompany S. 1762. Senate Report No. 98-225, 98th Cong., 1st Sess. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1983. p. 50.

reduce violent crime by eliminating what some consider are its roots. Recent research aimed at preventing criminal activity has investigated a wide range of factors, including:

- family characteristics and background;
- association with others engaged in criminal activity or the use of certain substances, such as illegal drugs or alcohol, or the use of weapons;
- employability and economic dislocation; and
- social conditions, such as poverty and illiteracy.

Although the current policy debate tends to divide anti-crime initiatives into two categories—punishment versus prevention, some argue that the most effective approach to controlling crime involves selective combinations of measures. For example, some argue that prevention programs work best in concert with punishment, when the programs are directly targeted at reducing crime. Rather than looking for the root causes of crime, these individuals favor conflict resolution programs, community mediation by lawyers, and other violence reduction mechanisms.<sup>72</sup>

## RECENT LEGISLATION

During the 103d Congress the Senate and the House have each passed a version of the Violent Crime Control and Enforcement Act (H.R. 3355). Conferees reached agreement on the two versions on July 28.

Under the agreement, the total authorization for H.R. 3355 is \$33 billion, including:

- \$8.8 billion for "Cops on the Beat" grants to hire or rehire approximately 100,000 police officers nationwide,
- \$10.5 billion in State construction grants for prisons and boot camps, and in funds reimbursing States for the costs of incarcerating illegal aliens who commit crimes,
- \$7.6 billion for crime prevention programs,
- \$2.6 billion for Federal law enforcement, and
- \$1.3 billion for drug courts, designed to rehabilitate first-time or non-violent drug offenders.

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<sup>72</sup> Baird, Zoe. Rule of Law. *The Wall Street Journal*, April 27, 1994. p. A13.



In addition, the agreement authorizes the death penalty for dozens of Federal crimes; calls for mandatory life imprisonment for a third violent felony under the "three strikes" provision; bans selected semi-automatic assault weapons and higher capacity ammunition feeding devices; and allows juveniles aged 13 and over to be tried as adults for selected violent crimes. Conferees dropped provisions in the Senate version that would have made it a Federal crime to use firearms during a violent criminal offense and that would have made certain criminal gang activities punishable under Federal law.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Idelson, Holly. \$33 Billion Crime Measure Heads to Last Hurdles. *Congressional Quarterly*. July 30, 1994. pp. 2137-41.