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# 5 facts about crime in the U.S.

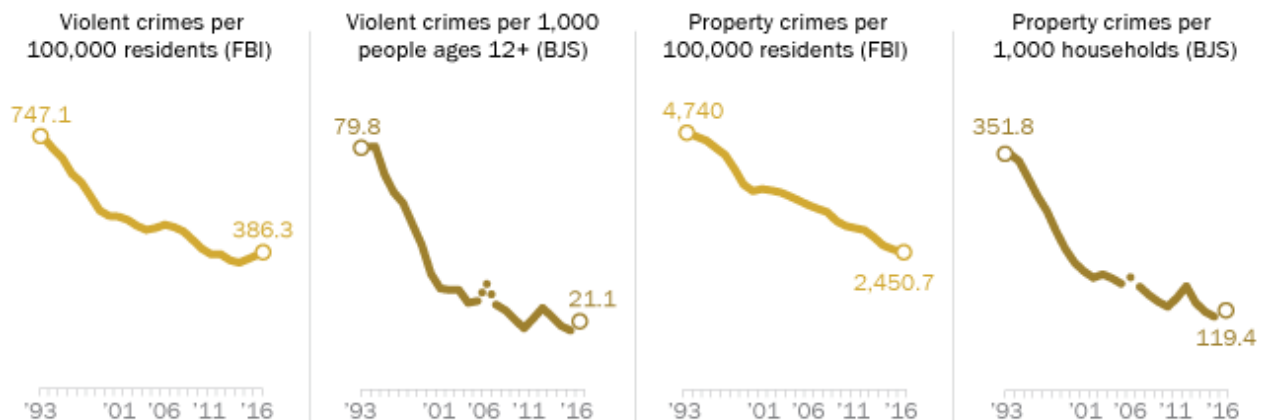
BY JOHN GRAMLICH ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/AUTHOR/JGRAMLICH/](http://www.pewresearch.org/author/jgramlich/))

Donald Trump made crime fighting an important focus of his campaign for president, and he cited it again during his January 2017 inaugural address (<http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/20/politics/trump-inaugural-address/>). As the administration takes steps (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/12/us/politics/attorney-general-jeff-sessions-drug-offenses-penalties.html>) to address violence in American communities, here are five facts about crime in the United States.

**1 Violent crime in the U.S. has fallen sharply over the past quarter century.** The two most commonly cited sources ([https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ntcm\\_2014.pdf](https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ntcm_2014.pdf)) of crime statistics in the U.S. both show a substantial decline in the violent crime rate since it peaked in the early 1990s. One is an annual report by the FBI (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/ucr-publications>) of serious crimes reported to police in approximately 18,000 jurisdictions around the country. The other is an annual survey of more than 90,000 households (<https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=245>) conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which asks Americans ages 12 and older whether they were victims of crime, regardless of whether they reported those crimes to the police.

## Crime rates have fallen since the early 1990s

*Trends in violent crime and property crime, 1993-2016*



Note: FBI figures include reported crimes only. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) figures include unreported and reported crimes. 2006 and 2016 BJS estimates are not comparable to those in other years due to methodological changes.

Source: FBI, Bureau of Justice Statistics

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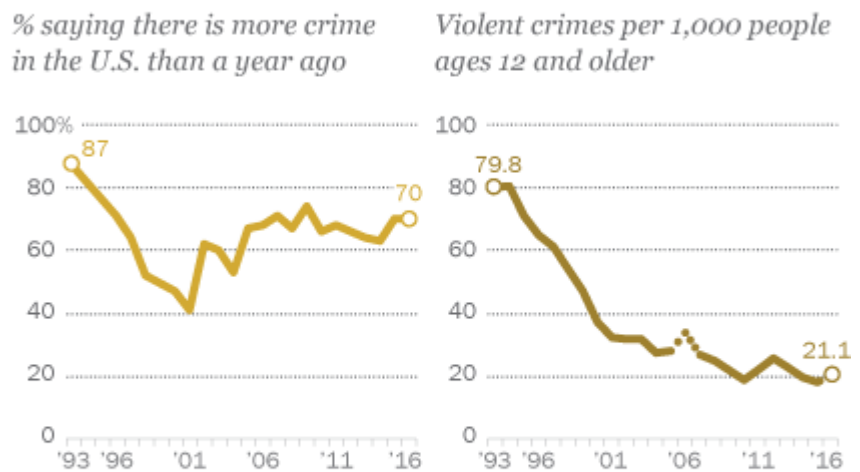


the FBI numbers, the violent crime rate fell 48% between 1993 and 2016. Using the BJS data, the rate fell 74% during that span. (For both studies, 2016 is the most recent full year of data.) It's important to note that the FBI reported a 7% *increase* in the violent crime rate between 2014 and 2016, including a 20% rise in the murder rate —from 4.4 to 5.3 murders per 100,000 residents. The BJS figures do not show an increase in the violent crime rate between 2014 and 2016, but they do not count murders. The BJS figures for 2016 also reflect a survey redesign, making it difficult to compare directly to prior years.

**2** **Property crime has declined significantly over the long term.** Like the violent crime rate, the U.S. property crime rate today is far below its peak level. FBI data show that the rate fell 48% between 1993 and 2016, while BJS reports a decline of 66% during that span. Property crime includes offenses such as burglary, theft and motor vehicle theft, and it is generally far more common than violent crime. There was no documented increase in the property crime rate between 2014 and 2016.

**3** (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/30/5-facts-about-crime-in-the->

### Public perception of crime rate at odds with data



Note: 2006 and 2016 Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) estimates are not comparable to those in other years due to methodological changes.  
Source: Gallup, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

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[u-s/ft\\_18-01-26\\_crimetrends\\_perception/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/30/5-facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/ft_18-01-26_crimetrends_perception/)) **Public perceptions about crime in the U.S. often don't align with the data.** Opinion surveys regularly find that Americans believe crime is up nationally, even when the data show it is down. In 17 Gallup surveys conducted since 1993, at least six-in-ten Americans said there was more crime in the U.S. (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/1603/crime.aspx>) compared with the year before, despite the generally downward trend in national violent and property crime rates during much of that period.

Pew Research Center surveys have found a similar pattern. In a survey in late 2016, 57% of registered voters said crime in the U.S. had gotten worse (<http://www.people-press.org/2016/11/10/a-divided-and-pessimistic-electorate/3-11/>) since 2008, even though BJS and FBI data show that violent and property crime rates declined by double-digit percentages (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/16/voters-perceptions-of-crime-continue-to-conflict-with-reality/>) during that span.

While perceptions of rising crime at the *national* level are common, fewer Americans tend to say crime is up when asked about the *local* level. In 20 Gallup surveys conducted since 1996, about half of Americans or fewer (<http://news.gallup.com/poll/1603/crime.aspx>) said crime is up *in their area* compared with the year before.

**4** **There are large geographic variations in crime rates.** The FBI's data show big differences from state to state and city to city. In 2016, there were more than 600 violent crimes per 100,000 residents

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Nevada, New Mexico and Tennessee. By contrast, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont had rates below 200 violent crimes per 100,000 residents. And while Chicago has drawn widespread attention for its soaring murder *total* in recent years (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-two-shot-to-death-in-uptown-marks-first-homicide-of-2017-20170101-story.html>) , its murder *rate* in 2016 – 28 murders and non-negligent manslaughters per 100,000 residents – was less than half of the rate (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/topic-pages/tables/table-4>) in St. Louis (60 per 100,000) and far below the rate of Baltimore (51 per 100,000). The FBI notes that various factors might influence a particular area’s crime rate, including its population density and economic conditions.

**5** **Most crimes are not reported to police, and most reported crimes are not solved.** In its annual survey, BJS asks victims of crime whether they reported that crime to police. In 2016, only 42% of the violent crime tracked by BJS was reported to police. And in the much more common category of property crime, only about a third (36%) was reported. There are a variety of reasons crime might not be reported, including a feeling that police “would not or could not do anything to help” or that the crime is “a personal issue or too trivial to report,” according to BJS.

Most of the crimes that *are* reported to police, meanwhile, are not solved (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/01/most-violent-and-property-crimes-in-the-u-s-go-unsolved/>) , at least using an FBI measure known as the “clearance rate.” That’s the share of cases each year that are closed, or “cleared,” through the arrest, charging and referral of a suspect for prosecution. In 2016, police nationwide cleared 46% of violent crimes that were reported to them. For property crimes, the national clearance rate was 18%.

*Note: This is an update of a post originally published Feb. 21, 2017.*



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