

2016 National Crime Trends Fact Sheet

Pew's Public Safety Performance Project compiled the data contained in this fact sheet.

Crime in America, including violent crime, remains near all-time lows. According to the FBI's uniform crime report:

- **Serious crime is at half-century lows.** In 2016, the combined crime rate, factoring in both violent and property crimes, was at its lowest level since 1966.
- **Property crime is at its lowest level in the last fifty years.** In 2016, property crime fell 2% over 2015 totals, and is down 25% from 2007. Burglaries in particular are down over 35% from a decade ago.
- **Geographic concentrations.** Homicide increases mostly are concentrated in a small number of neighborhoods in a handful of cities across the country. According to the [Vera Institute](#), "A few jurisdictions – representing 2.8% of the total U.S. population – have recently experienced large increases in homicide rates that were clearly unusual in the context of historical trends and normal fluctuations." Even within these jurisdictions, while the increases are troubling, it is important to understand that due to natural fluctuations, it typically takes 3-5 years to establish a trend.
- **Perspective: 6th lowest violent crime totals since 1971.** In 2016, the violent crime rate rose 3.4% from 2015, but is still 18% lower than violent crime a decade ago. The murder rate remains at about half of what it was at its peak years in 1980 and 1991. In 2016, the murder rate rose 7.9% last year relative to 2015, but it still is 6% lower than a decade ago. And according to [a recent report](#) from the Brennan Center for Justice, data from America's 30 largest cities suggests that both violent crime and homicides specifically **are on track to decline in 2017.**
- **Trends may not be trends.** According to data compiled by [Major Cities Chiefs Association through June 2017](#), there is not a clear trend of homicides increasing in the largest U.S. cities. *In fact, in close to two dozen large cities there was a decrease in total homicides during the first half of 2017 even though they had experienced a brief increase in homicides in the first half of 2016, demonstrating just that short-term fluctuations are not unusual.*

While it is important to reflect on 2016 increases in violent crime and homicides in isolated pockets of the country, **the bottom line is that most Americans remain safer today—much safer in fact—than at almost any other point in the last half-century.**

You can listen to today's call with criminal justice experts and law enforcement leaders here: <https://fccdl.in/xhTskvijg>

Quotes from Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Leaders:

Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of Fair and Just Prosecution

“For the first time in decades we’re seeing bipartisan momentum for criminal justice reform at the local, state, and national levels.

“This data cannot and should not push us back to failed tough on crime policies of past decades that left too many people locked up for too long; too many families and communities fractured; too many lives lost on our street and in our jails; and too much money spent in prisons rather than investing in prevention.”

“We know what doesn’t work -- just as we know what works. And the good news is that in some of the states that are leading the way in reducing rates of incarceration, we are seeing bigger decreases in crime than in states that have yet to embrace these smarter approaches.”

Adam Gelb, Director of the Public Safety Performance Project at The Pew Charitable Trusts

“Crime statistics have been used as a political football since they were tracked, and this year is no different.”

“America remains near record lows in overall crime, especially in violent crime and in homicides. Minor fluctuations from year to year don’t change this fact.”

“On the whole, it doesn’t make a lot of sense to focus on year-to-year fluctuations. The key point is that both cities, like America generally, are much safer today than they were a decade or two decades ago.”

John Pfaff, Professor of Law at Fordham University Law School

“It is important to keep in mind that long-term trends are more reliable than year-over-year data.”

“The fact is the number of homicides in 2014 was half what it was in 1991. It is important to remember that an increase in the crime rate in some of our cities amounts to very small numbers. It is not that increase isn’t important, but that these small numbers can move the rate dramatically because the crime rate is so low.”

“The Uniform Crime Report is one particular take on crime but is by no means an objective measure. It tracks reported crime. It does not tell you underlying trends in crime. Last year, for example, the DOJ's National Crime Victimization Survey showed no statistically significant change in the rate of overall violent crime rate with violent crime rates down nearly 76 percent since 1991.”

“Much of our focus on crime and punishment tends to focus on urban areas. There has been an increase in violent crimes in rural areas. We don’t have a good explanation for that increase and we don’t spend enough time trying to figure it out.”

Eric Gonzalez, Kings County District Attorney in Brooklyn, New York

“One of things we know in New York City, and in Brooklyn where I am the District Attorney, is that we cannot arrest and jail our way out of violence. We need to invest in communities, invest in services, and hold people accountable while also ensuring that we have the respect and trust of the people we serve.”

“So far, in 2017, though, NYC is on pace to have the safest year--the lowest level of violent crime--in modern history.”

“The bottom line is that violent crime in the U.S. is near historic lows and the country is far safer than it was 25 years ago, when 40% more people were murdered annually.”

Scott Thomson, Police Chief for Camden County, New Jersey

“The relationship between the police and the communities they serve is a key element in promoting safer communities.”

“In Camden, we are seeing steep reductions in crime, including in murders. We achieved that not by putting more cops on the beat or militarizing our neighborhoods, but rather by working with our communities, helping to promote prevention and youth-focused strategies.”

“Since being on the front lines in the 1990s, it has turned out that being smart on crime, and using data-driven solutions, has been so much more effective than being tough on crime. A return to 90s style tough-on-crime approaches might lead us back to 90s level of crime and worse yet, further polarize our most challenging communities. We cannot arrest ourselves out of violence.”