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U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Bureau of Justice Statistics



Violent Crime in the United States

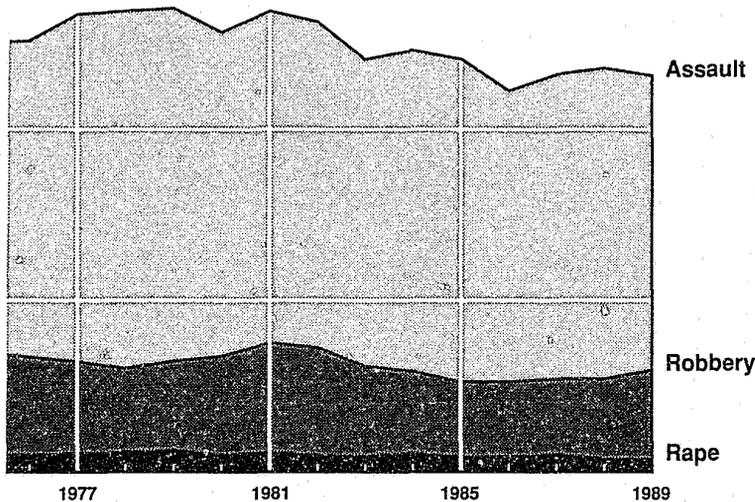
Drug trafficking and its inevitable handmaiden of violence are the greatest threats to what I have always called the first civil right of every American — the right to be free from fear in our homes, on our streets, and in our communities.

— Dick Thornburgh
Attorney General
The 1991 Crime Summit

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ent victimization, 1973-89

sons age 12 and older



artin, *Criminal Victimization 1989*, October 1990.

Bureau of Justice Statistics reports

(Revised January 1991)

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Violent crime

**U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Bureau of Justice Statistics**

**Steven D. Dillingham, Ph.D.
Director**

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NCJ-127855, March 1991

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

Violent crime

Foreword

In this special report for the **Attorney General's Summit on Law Enforcement Responses to Violent Crime: Public Safety in the Nineties**, the Bureau of Justice Statistics presents a summary profile of violent crime in the United States.

Based on findings selected from recent studies conducted by the Bureau and from other sources, this report summarizes national data on violent crime, its victims, and its perpetrators. It addresses many important questions related to violent crime:

How much violent crime is there in the United States?

What are the trends?

Who are the victims?

How does violent crime affect its victims?

Who commits violent crime?

How many people are arrested and convicted for violent crime?

What kinds of sentences do convicted violent felons receive?

What is the relationship between drugs and violent crime?

The Bureau of Justice Statistics through this special report as well as its other reports and bulletins seeks to assist both policymakers and those on the front lines combating violent crime in the 1990's. Only after gaining a firm understanding of the extent and the complexity of violent crime can our Nation fashion an effective response and take appropriate action to enhance the safety of our citizens.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics, in conjunction with the Office of Policy Development and the Office of Liaison Services, is coordinating the Attorney General's Summit. We are proud to be part of this summit with participants from the Department of Justice and with representatives of State and local criminal justice agencies and communities across the Nation.

Steven D. Dillingham, Ph.D.
Director

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Violent crime

How much violent crime is there in the United States?

■ Figures from the National Crime Survey (NCS) show that in 1989 there were an estimated 5,861,050 violent victimizations in the United States including 135,410 rapes, 1,091,830 robberies, and 4,633,800 assaults.* NCS data are based on interviews with victims and include offenses whether or not the victim reported the crime to the police. In 1989, 45% of the violent victimizations were reported to the police.

*The National Crime Survey (NCS) is the second largest ongoing household survey that the Federal Government administers. Every 6 months for 3 years, 101,000 persons age 12 or older in 50,000 households are interviewed regarding their experiences as crime victims, if any. Data provided by the victim to the NCS include whether or not the crime was reported to law enforcement agencies, characteristics of both the victim and offender, time and place of occurrence of the crime, and information about the outcome of the victimization, such as time lost from work and medical care the victim may have received.

■ In 1989 there were 21,500 murders according to the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR).

■ In 1989 an estimated 4.6 million households, or about 5% of all households nationwide, had a member who experienced one or more violent crimes.

■ The chance of being a violent crime victim (with or without injury) is greater than that of being hurt in a traffic accident.

Sources: *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1989*, BJS, forthcoming. *Crime in the United States 1989*, FBI, August 1990. *Crime and the Nation's Households, 1989*, BJS Bulletin, September 1990. *Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice: Second Edition*, BJS, 1988.

Violent crime

What are the trends in violent crime?

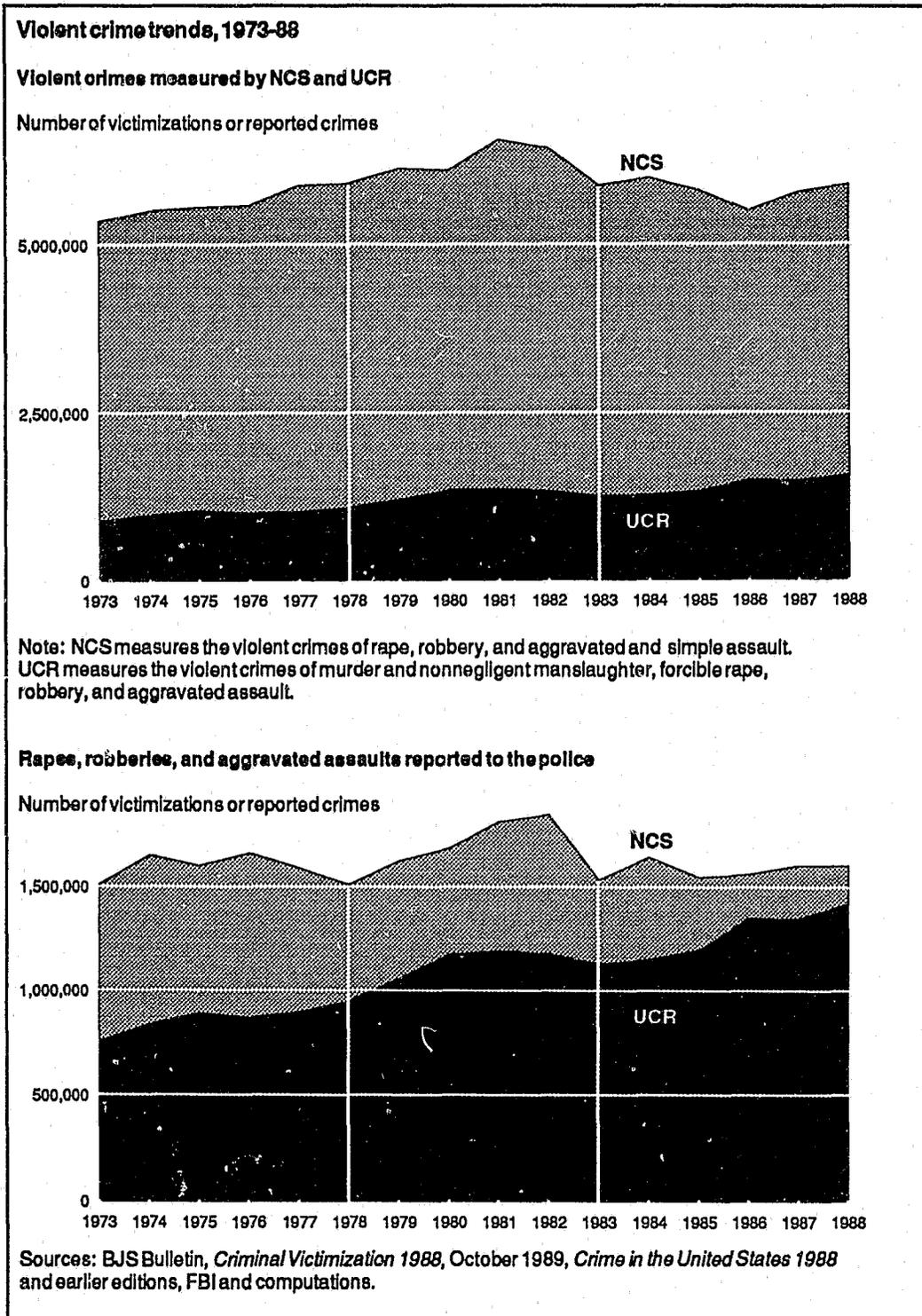
■ NCS data on rape, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault show that these crimes increased from 1973 to 1981, dropped between 1981 and 1986, and have increased slightly since then. Nevertheless, 1989 levels were 11% below the peak year of 1981.

■ The UCR Index of criminal incidents reported to law enforcement agencies has evidenced increases in all crime categories since 1985. When violent incidents reported in 1985 and 1989 are compared, law enforcement authorities registered a 24% increase in the number of offenses reported to them — from about 1.3 million to 1.6 million nationwide. Aggravated assaults (up by 32%) reflected the largest percentage gain among the Index categories of violence, followed by —

- robbery (up 16%)
- murder and nonnegligent manslaughter (up 13%)
- forcible rape (up about 7%).

In 1985 violent offenses accounted for 11% of the total UCR Index offenses (both violent and property offenses) reported by law enforcement agencies and 12% of those reported in 1989.

Violent crime



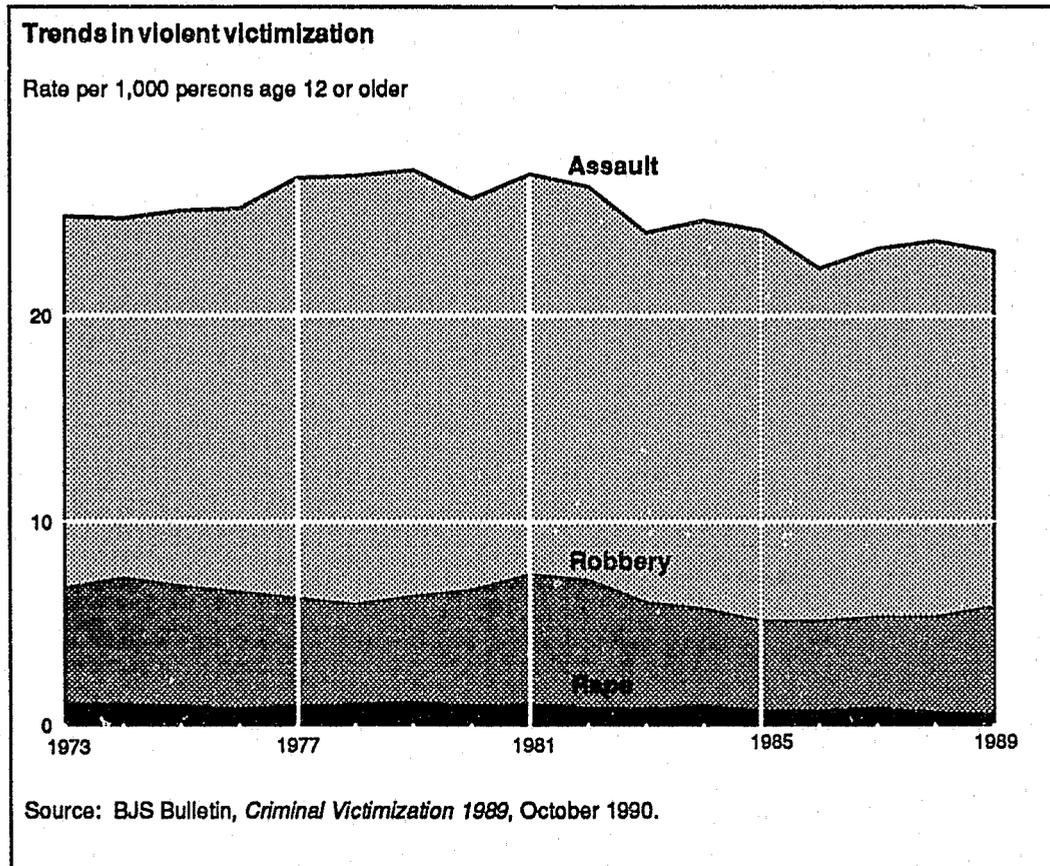
Violent crime

■ Per capita measures of crime victimization, referred to as victimization rates, take into account population growth over time and allow for comparisons among subgroups in the population. The NCS victimization rate is the number of victimizations per 1,000 resident population age 12 or older. In 1989 about 1 in 34 persons age 12 or older was the victim of a violent crime. NCS data, based upon the self-reports of crime victims, indicate that —

— from 1973 through 1987, rates of violent victimization for males declined from 48.2 per 1,000 males aged 12 or older to 38.7, while female rates of violent victimization changed little (23.9 in 1973 and 24.0 in 1987)

— the assault rate reached an all-time low in 1986 of 22.3 per 1,000 persons age 12 or older, with a level of 23.0 recorded in 1989

— the robbery rate reached an all-time low in 1985 of 5.1, with a level of 5.4 in 1989. Even though the robbery rate has been increasing in recent years, it has not yet reached the rates measured in the 10 years prior to 1983.



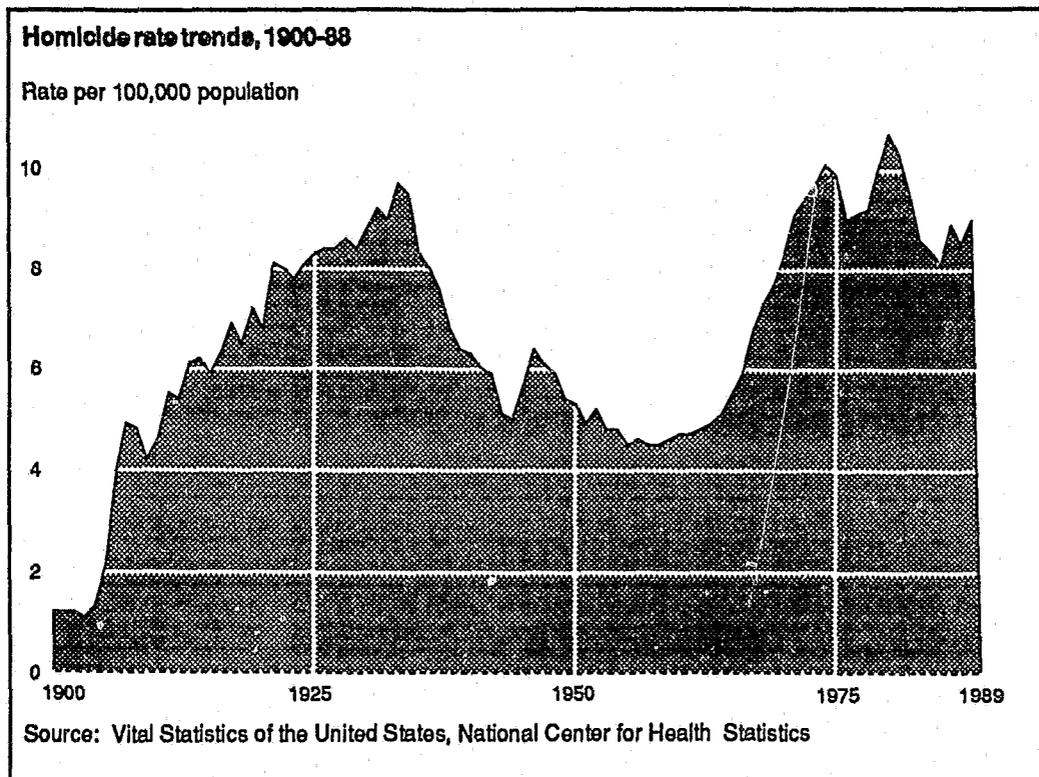
Violent crime

■ The percentage of U.S. households with at least one family member who was a victim of violent crime has declined from 5.8% in 1975 to 4.9% in 1989, staying at levels less than 5.0% since 1984.

■ UCR found that the murder rate peaked in 1980 at 10.2 murders per 100,000 population and then dropped to 7.9 in 1984, climbing again to 8.6 in 1986. In 1989 the rate was 8.7. Coroners' reports confirm the UCR trends and also show that homicide rates have varied substantially since

1900. After dropping from 1933 to 1958, the homicide rate climbed to an all-time high in 1980. In 1988 the homicide rate was 16% less than in 1980.

Sources: *Criminal victimization 1989*, BJS Bulletin, October 1990. *Female victims of violent crime*, BJS, January 1991. *Crime and the Nation's Households, 1989*, BJS Bulletin, September 1990. *Crime in the United States 1989*, FBI, August 1990. *Vital statistics of the United States*, National Center for Health Statistics.



Violent crime

Where does violent crime occur?

- Persons who live in central cities are more likely to be violent crime victims than persons who live in suburban or rural areas. Persons who live in cities of 250,000 to 499,999 population have the highest violent victimization rates.
- In 1989, 14% of violent crime incidents occurred at the victim's home; 8% near home; 4% on the street near home; and 7% at or near a friend's, relative's, or neighbor's home. Twenty-three percent of violent crimes occurred on the street but not near the victim's or a friend's home; 11% took place in school or on school property.
- In 1989 the West had the highest rate of violent crime, 36.4 crimes per 1,000 persons 12 or older, followed by the South and the Midwest. The Northeast recorded the lowest rate of violent crime, 23.1 per 1,000 persons.

Sources: *Criminal Victimization in the United States 1989*, BJS, forthcoming. *Criminal Victimization 1989*, BJS Bulletin, October 1990.

Who are the victims of violent crime?

- Although persons of all ages, races, and income levels are victims of violent crime, some individuals — specifically males, blacks, teenagers and young adults, persons in low income families, and persons living in central cities — are at higher risk of experiencing a violent crime than others.

Race and ethnicity

- Blacks are more likely than whites to be victims of a violent crime. In recent years blacks had a rate of 44.3 and whites had a rate of 34.5. Blacks experience higher rates of rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, but whites have a higher victimization rate for simple assault.
- The murder victimization rate for blacks is about 6 times the rate for whites. In 1989, 50 of every 100 murder victims were black, 49 were white and the remainder were persons of other races.
- From 1979 to 1986, Hispanics had higher rates of violent crime than non-Hispanics. In recent years, Hispanics had a rate of 39.6 and non-Hispanics had a rate of 35.3.

Violent crime

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Violent crime

Age

- Violent crime is more likely to strike the young than the elderly.
- Young persons age 12 to 24 have the highest victimization rates for violent crime. Beginning at age 25, rates of violent crime decrease as age increases. Elderly persons (age 65 or older) have the lowest violent crime victimization rate:

Age	Violent crime victimization rate per 1,000 persons, 1989
12-15	63
16-19	74
20-24	58
25-34	35
35-49	21
50-64	8
65 and older	4

- Homicide was the second leading cause of death for persons age 15 to 34 years old in 1988, trailing only accidents.

Sex

- Except for rape, violent crime is more likely to strike men than women. In 1989 the differences in rates between men and women were especially pronounced for aggravated assault: 11.9 assaults per 1,000 men versus 4.9 per 1,000 women.

- About 25% of the incidents reported by female victims of violence were committed by family members or intimates, and an additional 27% were committed by other people whom the victims knew. Offenders who were strangers to the victims accounted for about 44% of the violent incidents described by women. By contrast, male victims of violence report that about 4% of the incidents they experienced were committed by family members or intimates, 27% by other friends or acquaintances, and 65% were committed by strangers.

Income

- Persons with low family incomes are more likely to be violent crime victims than more affluent individuals. Persons with a family income below \$7,500 have a violent crime rate that is about 2 1/2 times as high as the rate for persons with a family income of \$50,000 or more.

Sources: *Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice, Second Edition*, BJS, 1988. *Black Victims*, BJS Bulletin, April 1990. *BJS Data Report, 1988*, BJS, May 1989. *Hispanic Victims*, BJS Bulletin, January 1990. *Criminal Victimization in the United States 1989*, BJS, forthcoming. Update of *Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice* from the "Annual Summary of Births, Marriages, Divorces, and Deaths: United States, 1988," *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, National Center for Health Statistics, July 1989. *Female Victims of Violent Crime*, BJS, January 1991.

Violent crime

How does violent crime affect its victims?

- An estimated 28% of violent crime victims are injured during the crime; 0.3% are killed; 13% require medical attention. For 7% of all violent crime victims, the injury is serious enough to require hospital care; and for 1% an overnight hospital stay is necessary.
 - On average, 2.2 million victims are injured from violent crime each year; 1 million receive medical care; half a million are treated in an emergency room or hospital.
 - Among those victims injured in rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults in recent years, an estimated 22,870 received gunshot wounds each year, 76,930 received knife wounds, and 141,460 suffered broken bones or teeth knocked out.
 - Rates of injury from violent crime are highest for males, blacks, persons age 19 to 24, persons who are separated or divorced, those earning less than \$10,000 annually, and residents of central cities.
- More than 50% of the women who were victims of violence committed by family members or intimates said they were injured, 23% said they received medical treatment, and 10% said their injuries were serious enough to require medical care in a hospital.
 - In 1989 the estimated cost of violent crime (excluding homicide) to victims was about \$1.5 billion, which included losses from medical expenses, lost pay, property theft and damage, cash losses, and other crime-related costs.*
 - About 10% of victims of violent crime lost time from work in 1989. Of those who lost time from work, 18% were absent from work for less than one day, and 50% lost 1 to 5 days of work. Eleven percent lost 6 to 10 days of work, and 15% lost 11 or more days from work as a result of their injury.

*These losses do not include such costs as criminal justice system costs or increased insurance premiums.

Sources: *Injuries from Crime*, BJS Bulletin, May 1989 and *Crime in the United States 1988*, FBI, August 1989. *Female Victims of Violent Crime*, BJS, January 1991. *Criminal Victimization in the United States 1989*, BJS, forthcoming.

Violent crime

Who commits violent crime?

- Of all violent crimes, 55% are committed by strangers, 32% by acquaintances, and 8% by relatives. In 1989 persons not known to the victim committed 3.2 million violent crimes.
- Nearly 25% of all violent crime incidents are committed by two or more offenders; 13% are committed by three or more offenders. Crimes committed by strangers are more likely to involve multiple offenders than are crimes by known persons.
- Of murder victims in 1989, 15% were killed by relatives, 39% by acquaintances, 13% by strangers, and 33% in circumstances where the relationship was not known.
- Among all female murder victims in 1989, 28% were killed by husbands or boyfriends. Five percent of male victims were killed by wives or girlfriends.
- In about 31% of rapes, robberies, and assaults, the offender was younger than 21, according to the victims of violent crime in 1989.

Sources: *Criminal Victimization in the United States 1989*, BJS, forthcoming. *Crime in the United States 1989*, FBI, August 1990.

How often are firearms used in committing violent crime?

- Offenders brandished or used firearms in 11% of all violent crimes committed during 1989. Firearms were used to commit —
 - 62% of all homicides
 - 20% of all robberies
 - 10% of all assaults
 - 6% of all rapes.
- According to UCR data, nearly 12,000 people were murdered with firearms in 1989.
- Handguns were present in 27% of all violent crime incidents involving offenders armed with weapons in 1989. Offenders had a handgun in 4 out of 5 of those incidents where a firearm was present.
- Twenty-one percent of female victims of violence who were attacked by a family member or intimate said the offender used a weapon — about a third of these victims said the weapon was a gun.

Sources: *Criminal Victimization in the United States 1989*, BJS, forthcoming. *Crime in the United States, 1989*, FBI, August 1990. *Female Victims of Violent Crime*, BJS, January 1991.

Violent crime

How many people are arrested for violent crime?

- The FBI estimates that in 1989 1,664,370 people were arrested for serious violent offenses — including
 - 22,300 for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter
 - 39,110 for forcible rape
 - 165,060 for robbery
 - 459,000 for aggravated assault
 - 978,900 for other assaults.
- Between 1980 and 1989 the number of arrests for serious violent offenses increased by nearly 73%.
- Violent crimes are more likely to be cleared by arrest than other crimes. In 1989 the clearance rate was —
 - 68% for murder
 - 52% for forcible rape
 - 26% for robbery
 - 57% for aggravated assault.

Sources: *Crime in the United States 1989*, FBI, August 1990. *Crime in the United States 1980*, FBI, September 1981.

How likely are persons arrested for violent crime to be released and be rearrested for another crime while awaiting trial?

- In 1988 in the Nation's 75 largest counties, an estimated 59% of all felons arrested for a violent crime were released into the community pending the disposition of their cases.
- Of the violent felony defendants who were released, 20% failed to appear in court and 16% were rearrested for another felony while awaiting trial.

Sources: *Pretrial Release of Felony Defendants, 1988*, BJS Bulletin, February 1991.

Violent crime

How many people are convicted for violent crime?

- In 1988 an estimated 99,900 of the 667,000 felony convictions in State courts were for violent crimes and included 9,340 convictions for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, 15,562 for rape, 37,432 for robbery, and 37,566 for aggravated assault.
- Violent offenses are most likely to be handled by the States and localities. In 1988 there were an estimated 99,900 violent convictions in State courts, as compared to 2,241 in U.S. district courts. In State courts, violent offenses represented a larger proportion of all convictions (15%) than they did in U.S. district courts (5%).

Sources: *Felony Sentences in State Courts, 1988*, BJS Bulletin, 1988, December 1990. *Federal Criminal Case Processing, 1980-87*, BJS, forthcoming.

What kinds of sentences do convicted violent felons receive?

- Convicted violent felons are more likely to receive sentences to incarceration than are other convicted felons. In 1988 State courts imposed sentences to incarceration in local jails or State prison in 95% of the murder and nonnegligent manslaughter convictions, 87% of the rape convictions, 89% of the robbery convictions, and 72% of the convictions for aggravated assault.
- For convicted violent felons receiving a sentence to State prison, the average sentence received and the expected time to be served were —

<u>Offense</u>	<u>Average sentence</u>	<u>Expected time to be served</u>
Murder or nonnegligent manslaughter	19 yrs. 11 mos.	6 yrs. 7 mos.
Rape	15 yrs. 3 mos.	5 yrs. 11 mos.
Robbery	9 yrs. 6 mos.	3 yrs. 2 mos.
Aggravated assault	7 yrs. 6 mos.	2 yrs. 8 mos.

- On December 31, 1989, there were 2,250 offenders under sentence of death in 34 States. All had been convicted of murder except for one Mississippi prisoner who had been convicted of the capital rape of a minor.
- Between January 1, 1977, and December 31, 1989, 120 executions altogether were carried out by 13 States.

Sources: *Felony Sentences in State Courts, 1988*, BJS Bulletin, December 1990. *Capital Punishment 1989*, BJS Bulletin, September 1990.

Violent crime

What portion of the prison population is made up of violent offenders?

■ An estimated 55% of offenders confined in State prisons in 1986 had been convicted of a violent offense:

- 11%, of murder
- 3%, of manslaughter
- 2%, of kidnapping
- 4%, of rape
- 5%, of sexual assault
- 21%, of robbery
- 8%, of assault
- 1%, of other violent offenses.

■ When prior conviction offenses are taken into account, an estimated 66% of State prison inmates in 1986 were found to have had a current or past conviction for a violent crime.

■ An estimated 76% of State prisoners serving time in 1986 for a violent offense had prior sentences to probation, jail, youth confinement facilities, or prison — nearly half of these recidivists had previously been convicted of violence.

■ Among violent offenders incarcerated in State prisons in 1986 —

— 59% reported that their victim had been a stranger to them

— 24% said that their victim was an acquaintance or friend

— 10% reported that their victim was a relative

— 7% said that their victim was an intimate, such as a spouse, ex-spouse, girlfriend, or boyfriend.

■ About a third of the men serving time in State prison in 1986 for a violent crime had been convicted of the robbery of a stranger. More than a quarter of violent female State prisoners had been convicted of the homicide of a relative or intimate.

■ About 1 in 8 violent offenders in State prisons in 1986 were serving a sentence for victimizing a child or youth age 17 or younger. Violent prisoners in 1986 reported more than 40,000 young victims, 71% of whom had been raped or sexually assaulted.

Sources: *Profile of State Prison Inmates, 1986*, BJS Special Report, January 1988. *Violent State Prisoners and Their Victims*, BJS Special Report, July 1990.

Violent crime

What portion of the juvenile correctional population is made up of violent offenders?

- An estimated 39% of juvenile offenders confined in long-term State-operated juvenile correctional facilities in 1987 were incarcerated for having committed a violent crime. Overall, 58% had a current or prior history of violent offenses.

- Among juvenile offenders with current or past histories of violence and confined in long-term State-operated facilities, 48% reported at least six prior arrests, and 24% reported at least three prior admissions to juvenile correctional facilities.

- Among juveniles confined in 1987 in a long-term State-operated institution for a violent crime, 20% reported using a gun in the commission of the crime, and 45% reported that they had been under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or both at the time of the violent offense.

Sources: *Survey of Youth in Custody, 1987*, BJS Special Report, September 1988.

Violent crime

What are the rates of recidivism for violent offenders?

■ A 3-year followup of 108,850 State prisoners released in 1983 from institutions in 11 States found that within 3 years 60% of violent offenders were rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor, 42% were reconvicted, and 37% were reincarcerated. Of the violent offenders, 30% were rearrested for a new violent crime. Among nonviolent prisoners released, 19% were rearrested within 3 years for a new violent crime.

■ The 108,850 prisoners who were released from prisons of 11 States in 1983 accounted for over 1.6 million arrest charges for the time before they had entered prison and for the 3 years afterwards. These arrest charges

Included nearly 215,000 arrests for violent crimes before going to prison and 50,000 violent crimes within 3 years after release. Altogether they were arrested for —

- 14,467 homicides
- 7,073 kidnappings
- 23,174 rapes or sexual assaults
- 101,226 robberies
- 107,130 assaults.

■ Many violent offenders entering prison would still have been in prison for a previous offense if they had completely served their prior sentence. For example, for those entering State prison in 1979, 20% of those entering for a violent offense — including 22% of those convicted of robbery and 23% of those convicted of assault — fell into this category.

Sources: *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1983*, BJS Special Report, April 1989. *Examining Recidivism*, BJS Special Report, February 1985.

Violent crime

How much of the Nation's crime is committed by repeat offenders?

- A few criminals commit many crimes. Studies in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Racine, Wisconsin; and Columbus, Ohio, show that 23% to 34% of the juveniles involved with crime were responsible for 61% to 68% of all the crimes committed by juveniles in the cohort. A California study of males born in 1956 showed that a small percentage were responsible for a disproportionate share of all arrests for ages 18 to 29. Specifically, 6.6% of the juveniles studied were responsible for 72% of all the arrests for index crimes from this group.
- High-rate offenders seldom specialize in one type of crime. Instead, they tend to commit a variety of misdemeanors and felonies, including both violent and property offenses.
- Long-term studies show that the more often a person is arrested, the greater the chance of being arrested again. For example, a study of Philadelphia males born in 1945 found that 35% were arrested at least once, 54% of those with one arrest had a second arrest, 65% of those with two arrests had three arrests, and 72% of those with three arrests had four arrests.

Sources: *Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice: Second Edition*, BJS, 1988. *The Prevalence and Incidence of Arrests Among Young Males in California*, Robert Tillman, BCS Forum, California Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Violent crime

What is the relationship between drugs and violent crime?

■ Researchers have identified three ways in which drugs are related to crime:

psychopharmacological, in which a drug user commits crime because of drug-induced changes in physiological functions, cognitive ability, and mood
economic compulsive, in which a drug user commits crime in order to obtain money to buy drugs
systemic, in which violent crime occurs as a part of the drug business or culture.

■ The actual number of drug-related acts of violence is difficult to measure. Three cities, however, have studied the amount of drug-related homicide in their jurisdictions:

— Of 1,263 homicides reported in New York City in 1984, 24% were identified as drug-related.

— Of 1,850 homicides recorded in Miami from 1978 to 1982, 24% were classified as drug-related.

— In 1985, 21% of the homicides reported in the District of Columbia were identified as drug-related, increasing steadily to 34% in 1986, 51% in 1987, and to as much as 80% in 1988.

■ Victims across the country reported that they believe their assailants were under the influence of drugs in about 12% of violent crime incidents in 1986-87. An additional 2% of the victims said their assailants were under the influence of drugs or alcohol, but they were not sure which. In 22% of the cases, the victims reported that the offenders were under the influence of alcohol alone.

■ Incarcerated adults and youth report high levels of drug use. Among those incarcerated for violent crimes, a third of State prisoners and more than a third of the incarcerated youth said they had been under the influence of an illegal drug at the time of their offense. In the month before the violent offense for which they were incarcerated, 39% of State prison inmates reported daily drug use, and 16% reported daily use of a major drug (cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone).

Among the violent offenders in State prison, those incarcerated for robbery were the most likely to have used a major drug daily, (23%); those incarcerated for rape and other sexual offenses were the least likely to report such use, 9% and 6%, respectively.

Violent crime

Additional data from the surveys shed light on the relationship between drugs and crime, although not available separately for violent offenders:

- Overall, more than half of the State prisoners who had ever used a major drug (cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, or methadone) reported that they began their major drug use after their first arrest.
- Major drug use (cocaine, heroin, PCP, LSD, and methadone) is related to the number of prior convictions for State prisoners: the greater the use of major drugs, the more prior convictions the inmate was likely to report.

Sources: *Drug Related Crime Analysis—Homicide*, Paul J. Goldstein and Henry H. Brownstein, a Report to the National Institute of Justice Drugs, Alcohol, and Crime Program, July 1987. "Drugs and Homicide," Duane C. McBride, Cindy Burgman-Habermehl, Jeff Alpert, and Dale D. Chitwood, *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, June 1986, pp. 497-508. *Homicide in the District of Columbia*, Office of Criminal Justice Plans and Analysis, December 1988, p.23. *The Redesigned National Crime Survey: Selected New Data*, BJS Special Report, January 1989. *Drug Use and Crime*, BJS Special Report, July 1988. *Survey of Youth in Custody, 1987*, BJS Special Report, September 1988.

Violent crime

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Violent crime

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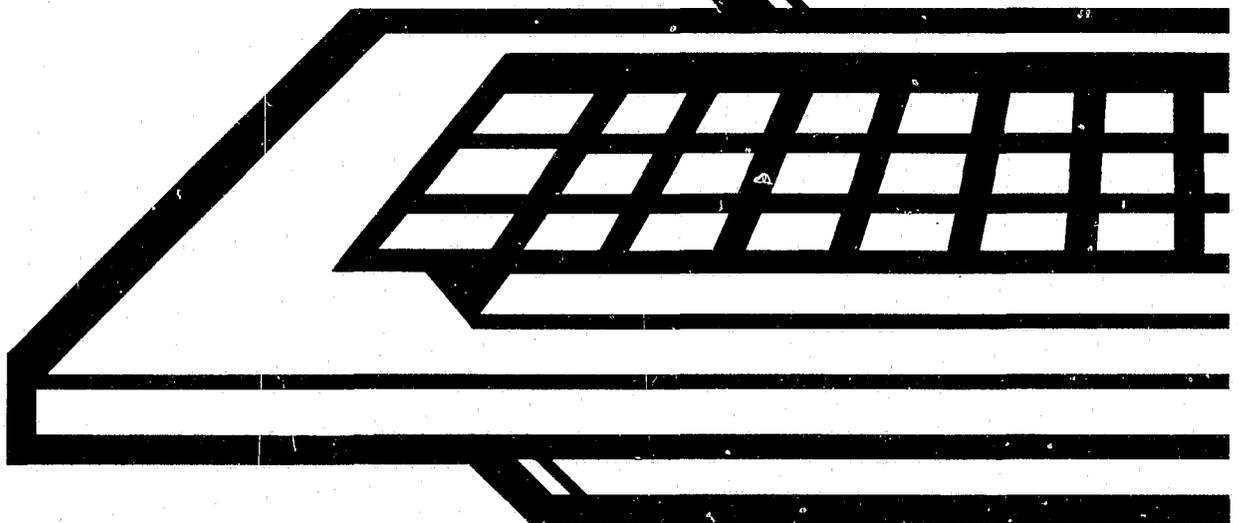
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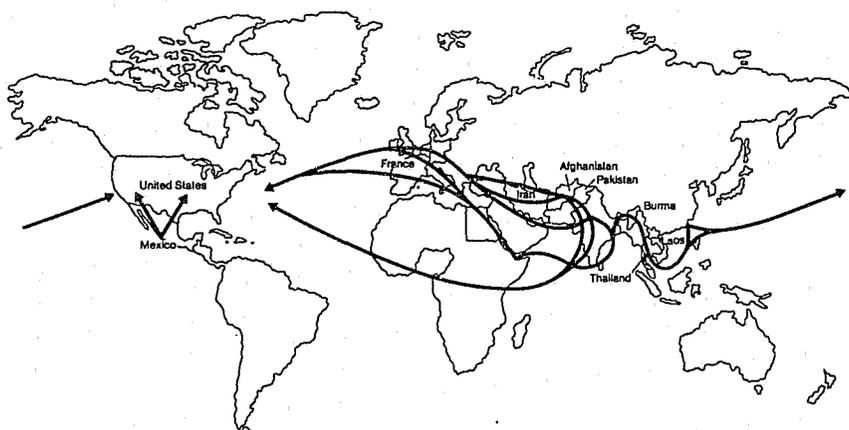
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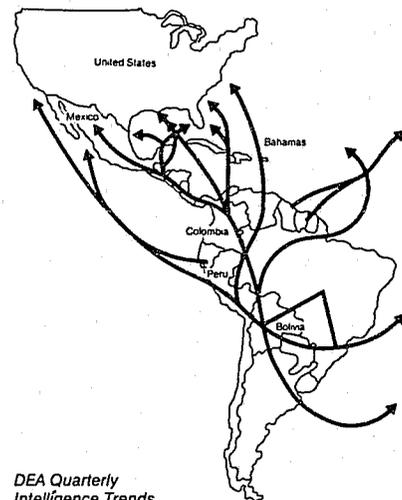
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