

### Long-Term Crime Trends in the United States

As of 2022, the United States boasted an average rate of 1954.4 cases of property crime and 380.7 cases of violent crime per 100,000 people, where 58% of adults held that reducing crime should be a top priority of the government. (Gramlich, 2024) In 2024, John Gramlich reported on U.S. trends in crime for the Pew Research Center, identifying that the historical record shows a distinct spike in crime between 1985 and the early 1990s, followed by a steady fall from 1993 onward. Crime rates fell 49% between 1993 and 2022, and here Gramlich touched on an interesting detail. (Gramlich, 2024) Despite the numbers, which should signal increased domestic safety, Americans tend to perceive the national crime situation as far worse than the figures indicate. Importantly, there is often a discrepancy between the lived experiences of citizens and nationwide statistics read off of a sheet, for the average American's experience with crime can vary greatly. Through visual storytelling, the narrative surrounding the history of crime in the United States can be distilled, revealing crime's relationships to geography, weapons, and other influencing factors. Hans Rosling's debut data visualization of 2006, which concisely correlated health and wealth for 200 countries, across 200 years, provides a powerful template for a chronological study of American crime. (*BBC — 200 Countries, 200 Years, 4 Minutes*, 2018)

The Federal Bureau of Investigation publishes databases highlighting state-level crimes, which, once compiled, allow for an analysis of nation-wide crime trends by geography and year. Here, the regional classification of states was derived from the U.S. Census Bureau, classifying all as Western, Midwestern, Northeastern, or Southern. (U.S. Census Bureau, 1984) First, drawing from the Rosling model, the property and violent crime rates for all 50 states were plotted alongside the measures of geographic region and population size. Each state was color

coded by region, with bubble size representing the civilian population, and a sliding tool allowing users to control the year displayed. Upon interacting with the visual, the clearest takeaway is that overall crime peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, with violent crime especially high from 1991-1995. At these points, many states exceeded violent offense rates of 1000 per 100,000 people. Of the states represented, Florida, New York, and California were the highest performers. Florida presents a particularly interesting case as its crime rates consistently surpass most counterparts. The second visualization applied a critical eye to murder and manslaughter rates by region. The year and violent crime rate measures were plotted on each axis, with lines representing the regions of the U.S. Of these, the South showed the highest rates of murder and manslaughter, coming in at a maximum rate of 12.48 cases in 1974. Further, between the years of 1972 - 1976, the Supreme Court instituted a federal moratorium on capital punishment - also recognized as the death penalty - represented by gray banding. (Bomboy, 2023) During the moratorium, murder rates increased through 1974, but fell again by 1976, revealing the contested nature of the death penalty's impacts. Speaking on this briefly, evidence supports that capital punishment gives rise to the Brutalization Effect, for when the death penalty is introduced, there are actually additional lives lost. An adamant defender of the death penalty would have anticipated to see a linear increase in murder, given the dissolve of the deterrent effect. To ensure interactivity, the first two visualizations contain actions to highlight data by region, joined by a highlight tool and a map housing all 50 states with their regional association indicated by color and tooltip display. Lastly, a third visualization parses New York's total property crime by type, specifically accounting for larceny, burglary, and motor vehicle theft. For reference, in 1980 – the peak of property crime – the rate per 100,000 individuals was 5,882 compared to 2022's report of 1,721 cases. Echoing the first two visualisations, rates saw a spike between the 1980s and 1990s, though this time horizon for property crime was staggered slightly earlier than that of

surges in murder and manslaughter. Throughout, New York consistently emerged as a leading contributor to national crime levels, particularly in the realm of violent crime, until roughly 1992, from which point it entered a prolonged decline.

Such a presentation on U.S. crime trends invites reflection on why certain timeframes and geographic locations displayed escalating patterns of crime. To speak to the nearly decade-long surge of crime that began in the 1980s, many popular theorists credited that a spike in the American crack market led directly to rising homicide rates in this period. Key evidence lay in the fact that this wave involved increased numbers of males, ages 14-24, shooting one another. (Miller, 2022) According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report, the number of non-gun homicides between 1980 and 1995 remained constant while gun homicides saw striking increases from approximately 1,000 to 3,750 peak cases. (Fox, 2000) The theory suggested that with stimulation in the drug market, violent encounters increased in tandem with ecosystems of gang activity. Later explanations for why crime began to fall emphasized factors as diverse as abortion, reduced lethality of murder, increased incarceration, and more aggressive crime-control policies. Additionally, the regional variances between the Southern region of the United States against the other three geographies stand in stark contrast. Attempts to explain high murder rates in the South have been attributed to looser gun laws, given that 79% of homicides are committed with a firearm, higher levels of poverty and inequality, and even historical linkages to slavery that normalized forms of violence. (Walters, 2022) While the singular causes of homicide or burglary trends may not be identified overnight, the dashboard helps shape a clearer image of how geography, time, and social forces have interacted to mold the trajectory of crime in the United States.

## Appendix

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