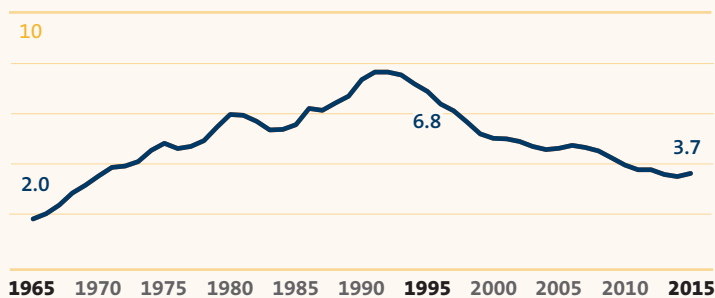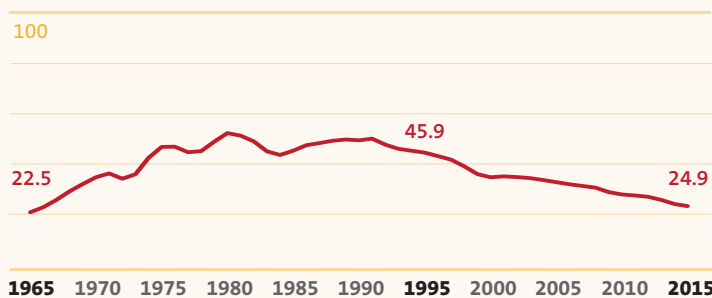# Crime Trends

Criminal victimization trends provide useful insights by positioning annual data within a broader context. To estimate these trends, researchers rely on two national sources of crime data: the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR) and the Bureau of Justice Statistics's National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Both the UCR and the NCVS have been collected for decades. While their methodologies and findings differ slightly, each resource provides critical information necessary to understand crime and victimization in the United States. *For more information, see the Crime and Victimization in the United States fact sheet in this series.*

While **the rate of criminal victimization has decreased dramatically over the past 50 years**, many in the general public believe crime rates have increased. According to Gallup polls conducted since the mid-to-late 1990s, more than half of Americans have consistently reported that they believe there is more crime in the United States today than there was a year ago.[A] This misconception among the general public can be attributed to a variety of factors, but importantly, it demonstrates the necessity of tracking trends. Trends on crime and victimization provide researchers, victim service providers, policymakers, and the public with the information they need to accurately interpret, understand, and act on criminal victimization.
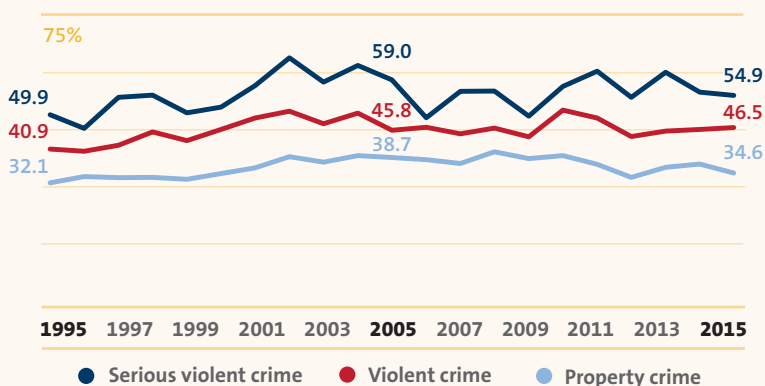
Violent Crime[B]
rate per 1,000 people

Property Crime[B]
rate per 1,000 people

Without a longer trajectory, year-to-year changes in data seem like emerging trends. For example, violent crime is **86% higher** today than in 1965; however, it is **also 50% lower** than in 1991.[B] The rate of property crime follows a similar trend: today's rate is 11% higher compared to the rate in 1965, but has fallen by more than 50% when compared to 1991.[B] Changes in criminal victimization are always evaluated within the context of time, and changing that context—selecting a different subset of years—influences whether criminal victimization appears to be increasing or decreasing.

Victimization Reported to Law Enforcement[C]

- ● **Serious violent crime**
- ● **Violent crime**
- ● **Property crime**

Did You Know?

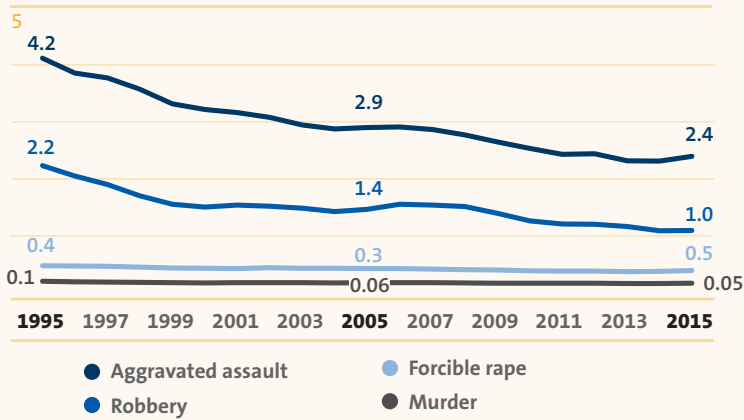The NCVS asks participants if they reported crime incidents to police:

In 2015, an estimated 55% of serious violent victimizations were reported to the authorities, compared to 47% of all violent victimizations and 35% of all property victimizations. **Since 1993, there has been no real change in crimes reported to law enforcement.[B]**
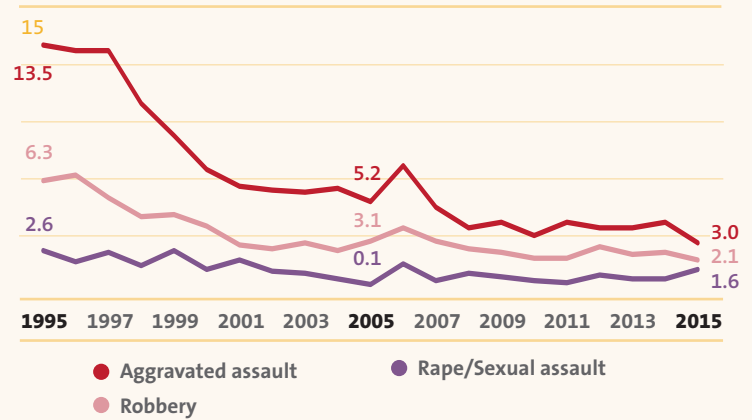
UCR vs. NCVS Crime Victimization Trends

The Uniform Crime Reports for 2015 show an increase in serious violent crimes compared to 2014. Aggravated assault, murder, and forcible rape rose by 5%, 11%, and 6%, respectively. Robbery increased by less than 1%.[B]

Compared to the UCR, the NCVS did not report a similar increase in serious violent victimization between 2014 and 2015. Aggravated assault and robbery declined by an estimated 25% and 13%, respectively. Rape/sexual assault, though, increased by an estimated 52%.[C]

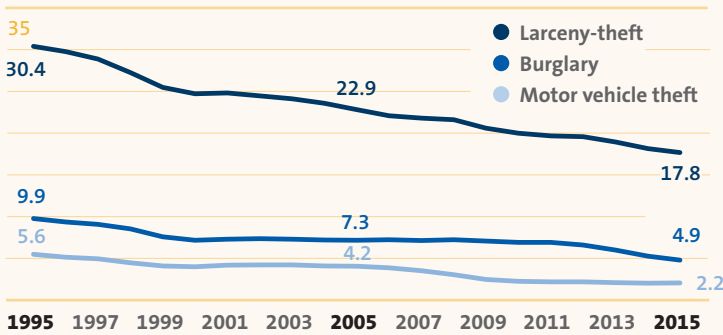## UCR Violent Crime[B]
rate per 1,000 people

● Aggravated assault	● Forcible rape
● Robbery	● Murder

NCVS Violent Crime[C]
rate per 1,000 people

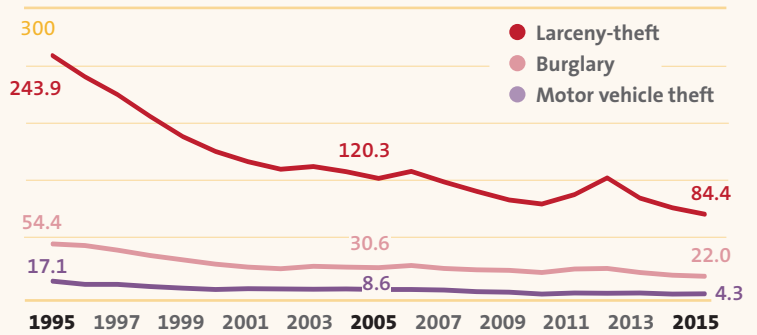|	
● Aggravated assault	● Rape/Sexual assault
● Robbery	

The UCR and the NCVS both report a downward trend in property crime. However, the NCVS consistently reports higher levels of larceny-theft, burglary, and motor vehicle theft—which highlights an important distinction between the UCR and the NCVS: the UCR aggregates property victimizations reported by individuals, while the NCVS collects information on property from a representative sample of U.S. households. As a result, the two figures cannot be compared directly. Furthermore, because the UCR is measured by the number of incidents reported to law enforcement, it also includes property victimizations occurring at commercial businesses.

UCR Property Crime[B]
rate per 1,000 people

● Larceny-theft
● Burglary
● Motor vehicle theft

NCVS Property Crime[C]
rate per 1,000 households

● Larceny-theft
● Burglary
● Motor vehicle theft

SOURCES

A Justin McCarthy, "More Americans Say Crime Is Rising in U.S.," (Gallup Poll, 2014), http://www.gallup.com/poll/186308/americans-say-crime-rising.aspx

B FBI, *Crime in the United States, 1995 - 2015*, (U.S. Department of Justice), https://www.ucrdatatool.gov/Search/Crime/State/RunCrimeStatebyState.cfm; Table 1, https://ucr.fbi.gov/ucr-publications

C Bureau of Justice Statistics, *National Crime Victimization Survey, Concatenated File, 1992-2014,* (U.S. Department of Justice)

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