Urban and Rural Crime

National aggregate crime statistics may mask important differences among subnational geographic areas throughout the country. Statistics show that crime rates in metropolitan areas, as well as the criminal justice response, differ significantly from those in suburban areas, cities outside metropolitan areas, and non-metropolitan counties. The uneven distribution of crime has implications for responding to crime, supporting victims, and allocating criminal justice system resources. As Americans become more mobile, it becomes increasingly important to understand the impact of geographic differences on crime rates and the ability of local criminal justice systems to enforce the law and protect citizens.

- The rate of violent crime known to law enforcement within metropolitan areas is 428.3 per 100,000 persons. The rate of violent crime per 100,000 persons in cities outside metropolitan areas is 399.7, and for non-metropolitan counties, it is 195.1.1,2

- Metropolitan cities had a murder and nonnegligent manslaughter rate known to law enforcement of 5.0 per 100,000 persons. Cities outside metropolitan areas had a murder and nonnegligent manslaughter rate of 3.6 per 100,000 persons while non-metropolitan counties had a rate of 3.2 per 100,000 persons.3

- In 2010, the rate of arrests for forcible rape was 6.5 per 100,000 inhabitants. In cities under 10,000 the rate was 19.3 per 100,000; in suburban areas, the rate was 24.2 per 100,000; and in large cities (populations 250,000 and over), the rate was 9.1 per 100,000.5

- Within metropolitan areas, the rate of forcible rape known to law enforcement was 27 per 100,000 persons. The rate of forcible rape in cities outside metropolitan areas was 41.6 per 100,000. Non-metropolitan counties had a rate of 22 per 100,000 persons.4

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2 As defined by the FBI, metropolitan areas are cities or urbanized areas of 50,000 or more inhabitants; cities outside metropolitan areas are incorporated areas; and non-metropolitan counties are unincorporated areas. Ibid., “Area Definitions,” accessed October 10, 2012, http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2010/crime-in-the-u.s. 2010/areadefinitions.

3 Ibid., Table 2.

4 Ibid.

Within metropolitan areas, the aggravated assault rate known to law enforcement was 260.3 per 100,000 persons. The rate of aggravated assault in cities outside metropolitan areas is higher at 297.3 per 100,000 persons.6

Metropolitan areas have a robbery rate known to law enforcement of 136.0 per 100,000 persons, compared to a rate of 15.9 per 100,000 persons in non-metropolitan counties.7

In 2011, a total of 5,086 bank robberies occurred as reported to law enforcement. Of these, 46 percent occurred in metropolitan areas, 34 percent occurred in small cities/towns, 18 percent occurred in suburban areas, and 2 percent occurred in rural areas.8

In 2010, the property crime rate known to law enforcement in the United States was 2,941.9 per 100,000 persons.9

Cities outside metropolitan areas had the highest property crime rate known to law enforcement—3,602.3 per 100,000 persons. Metropolitan areas had a property crime rate of 3,046.5 per 100,000 persons, and non-metropolitan counties had a property crime rate of 1,605.8 per 100,000.10

The rate of burglaries known to law enforcement is highest in cities outside of metropolitan areas, at 819.9 per 100,000 persons. Burglaries in metropolitan areas occurred at a rate of 706.5 per 100,000 persons, and in non-metropolitan areas, they occurred at 559.7 per 100,000 persons.11

In 2010, the rate of larceny-theft per 100,000 persons known to law enforcement was highest in cities outside metropolitan areas at a rate of 2,643.5. Metropolitan areas had the second highest rate at 2,077.5, followed by non-metropolitan counties at a rate of 944.4 per 100,000 inhabitants.12

In 2010, motor vehicle thefts known to law enforcement occurred at a rate of 101.7 per 100,000 inhabitants in non-metropolitan counties, 138.9 per 100,000 inhabitants in cities outside metropolitan areas, and 262.5 in metropolitan areas.13

In 2010, cities with more than 250,000 inhabitants had 2.7 law enforcement officers per 1,000 inhabitants, cities under 10,000 had 3.5 law enforcement officers per 1,000 inhabitants, and suburban areas had 2.5.14

In 2010—in cities larger than 250,000—83 percent of law enforcement officers were male and 17 percent were female. Cities under 10,000 people had 92 percent male officers and 9 percent female officers. The percentage of male and female officers in suburban areas was 89 percent and 11 percent, respectively.15

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6 Ibid., Table 2.
7 Ibid.
9 Federal Bureau of Investigation, Crime in the United States, 2010, Table 2.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.