



Crime in the United States

BEFORE YOU READ

The Main Idea

When a person breaks a law, it is called a crime. There are several types of crimes and a variety of reasons why people commit crimes.

Reading Focus

1. What are five different types of crime?
2. What are four possible causes of crime?
3. How do we fight crime in the United States?

Key Terms

crime, p. 382
 criminal, p. 382
 felonies, p. 382
 misdemeanors, p. 382
 victimless crimes, p. 384
 white-collar crimes, p. 384



Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on the types of crime, the causes of crime, and how we fight crime in the United States.



According to the FBI Uniform Crime Report, crime rates for all kinds of crime dropped from 2006 to 2009. But the cost is huge: according to one economist's 1999 estimate, crime costs \$1.7 trillion per year. That is more than \$7,100 per person in today's dollars. Crimes can range from shoplifting or disturbing the peace to murder, assault, or arson. And crime is a problem in small towns as well as cities. So what can you do about crime in your community? You might think you can do very little. But you might be surprised to learn that teenagers all across the country are taking action to fight crime and make their neighborhoods safer. There are many opportunities to protect yourself, your family, your friends, and your neighbors from crime.

FOCUS ON

In 2009, law enforcement officers in Florida made over 1 million arrests. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 49,859 of those arrests were for violent crimes and 145,011 were for property crimes.

Types of Crime

What is a crime? A **crime** is any act that breaks the law and for which there is a punishment. A **criminal** is a person who commits any type of crime. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collects information on crime in the United States. The FBI identifies 29 types of crime. Serious crimes, such as murder and kidnapping, are called **felonies**. Less serious offenses, such as traffic viola-

tions and disturbing the peace, are charged as **misdemeanors**.

The 29 types of crime can be categorized in other ways as well. Five main categories of crime are crimes against persons, crimes against property, victimless crimes, white-collar crimes, and organized crimes.

Crimes against Persons

Crimes against persons that include force or the threat of force are violent crimes. They include acts that harm a person, end a person's life, or threaten to end a life. From 2001 to 2007, more than 1.3 million violent crimes were reported each year. The most serious violent crime is homicide, or the killing of one person by another. From 2001 to 2008, more than 16,000 homicides were committed in the United States each year.

The most common type of violent crime is aggravated assault. Aggravated assault is any kind of physical injury that is done intentionally to another person. Some aggravated assaults happen when a person robs someone else. More than 800,000 cases of aggravated assault occur each year.

Some crimes against persons are also hate crimes. Hate crimes are often violent crimes

committed against people because of prejudice. Hate crimes include those committed against someone because of his or her race, religion, or other characteristics.

Another type of violent crime is the sexual violation of a person by force and against the person's will. The FBI calls this type of crime forcible rape. Between 2000 and 2008, more than 90,000 forcible rapes took place in the United States each year.

Crimes against Property

Most crimes committed in the United States are crimes against property. This type of crime involves stealing or destroying someone else's property. For example, burglary is the forcible or illegal entry into someone's home or other property with the intention to steal. In recent years, about 2 million burglaries were reported annually. Larceny is the theft of property without the use of force or violence against another person. Stealing from a cash register and shoplifting are examples of larceny.

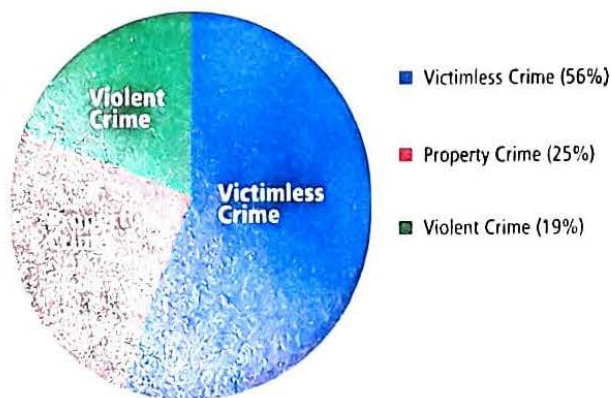
Motor vehicle theft is a common crime against property and a serious national problem. Nearly 800,000 cars were stolen in 2008. Organized gangs often steal cars to resell them or to strip them and sell the parts. Sometimes people steal cars to use them in other crimes, like burglaries. In other cases, people steal the cars, drive them for awhile, and then abandon them.

Types of Crime

QUICK FACTS

The FBI identifies 29 types of crime, such as murder, robbery, arson, drug abuse violations, fraud, vandalism, and so on. Crimes can also be categorized as crimes against persons, crimes against property, white-collar crimes, and organized crimes. So-called victimless crimes, which result in the majority of arrests, include offenses whereby another person is not directly harmed by the person charged with a crime.

Arrests in the United States, 2009



Source: United States Census Bureau

Violent

Crimes like murder, manslaughter, robbery, forcible rape, and aggravated assault are considered violent crimes.

Victimless

Gambling, drug abuse, breaking curfew, and running away are categorized as victimless crimes.

Property

Crimes against property include burglary, motor vehicle theft, shoplifting, and some white-collar crimes.

ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING VISUALS

What is the total percentage of arrests made for property crimes and victimless crimes?

Bicycle theft is a property crime. Many of these bikes were stolen and then abandoned.

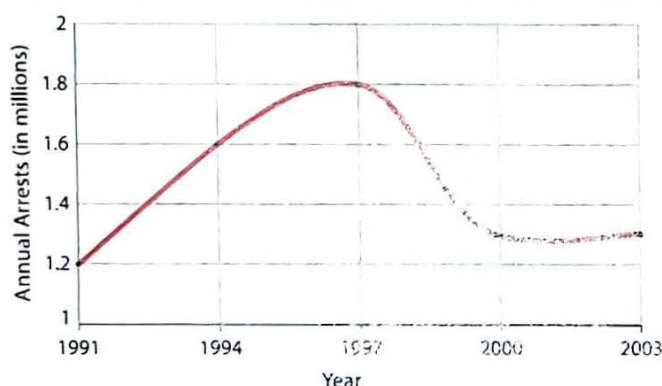
MATH 101

Measuring Juvenile Crime

Law enforcement agencies carefully track crime statistics each year. Lately these statistics have shown that the juvenile arrest rate is decreasing, especially arrests for violent crimes. This drop in arrests is partially due to community curfews, mentoring programs, and changes in sentencing guidelines. However, minors are still arrested regularly for such crimes as burglary, vandalism, assault, and even murder.

$$\text{percent change} = \frac{\text{new value} - \text{original value}}{\text{original value}} \times 100$$

Number of Juveniles Arrested, 1991-2003



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation

ANALYSIS SKILL

INTERPRETING GRAPHS

Use the formula for finding the percent change, shown above, to answer the following questions. What is the percent change in the arrest rate from 1997 to 2000? From 1994 to 1997?

Robbery is a crime that involves both property and people when committed. Many robberies involve taking something by threatening to hurt a person. In a mugging, for example, the robber may demand the person's property and back the threat with a weapon.

Other kinds of crime against property include vandalism and arson. Vandalism is the willful destruction of property. Spray-painting the walls of a school is an example. Arson is the destruction of property by setting fire to it.

Victimless Crimes

Some crimes, such as illegal gambling and the use of illegal drugs, are sometimes called **victimless crimes**. These crimes are considered victimless because the criminal does not violate another person's rights. Rather, the criminal mainly harms himself or herself.

Nevertheless, victimless crimes are a problem for society. For example, the sale and possession of illegal drugs increases the death rate. Drug abuse often leads to other types of crime, like robbery. People who use drugs may hurt their family members or others if they become violent.

White-Collar Crimes

Some nonviolent crimes are called **white-collar crimes**. These crimes range from copyright violations to embezzlement and fraud. Embezzlement is the theft of money that has been entrusted to an individual's care. Fraud means cheating someone out of money or property. Embezzlement and fraud cost Americans millions of dollars each year.

White-collar crimes may involve computers in which vital and sensitive information is stored. This is called cybercrime. Some criminals, called hackers, break into computer systems to commit electronic theft, fraud, and embezzlement. Some hackers use computers to spread viruses that can damage computer systems worldwide.

Identity theft is a growing concern. Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personal information, such as a Social Security number, date of birth, or address information, to commit fraud or other crimes. Criminals use this information to get credit cards in another person's name or to take money from bank accounts.

Experts estimate that the total cost to society of white-collar crimes may be billions of dollars. These costs are then passed along to consumers in the form of higher prices. Everyone in society ends up paying for white-collar crimes.

Organized Crime

Organized crime groups specialize in providing illegal goods and services. They operate in gambling, drug trafficking, prostitution, and lending money at extremely high interest rates. Crime syndicates often run legal businesses that serve as fronts, or covers, for illegal activities. Many times they use the threat of violence to keep people from going to the police.



Summarizing What are the main categories of crime?

Causes of Crime

Although no one really knows why people commit crimes, experts have a lot of theories.

Poverty, illegal drug use, and other aspects of society are thought to contribute to crime.

- **Poverty** Poverty and unemployment are related to crime. When people cannot earn enough money to support themselves or their family, they may turn to crime to obtain things they don't have.
- **Illegal Drug Use** Many of the crimes committed each year are drug-related. People who commit these crimes may be stealing to support their drug habit. Or they may be selling drugs or acting under their influence.
- **Permissive Society** Some people believe that our permissive society contributes to crime. The idea is that many parents permit their children to do anything they want. Some children have not learned to act responsibly on their own or with others. So they commit crimes. Other people believe that judges often are too easy when sentencing criminals.
- **Urbanization** Some experts suggest that urbanization plays a role in crime. They offer a couple of reasons for this. More people live in cities, which means there are more potential victims for criminals. In addition, there are more young people in cities. People under the age of 25

account for about two out of every five arrests in the United States.

- **Other Causes of Crime** Some people suggest that technological and social change may lead to crime as people fall behind the times. Without a good education, some people are unable to find jobs and may turn to crime. Others suggest that society's attitudes toward right and wrong have changed, or that violence in the media and in computer games inspire violent crimes. Still other people say that society does not spend enough money on law enforcement. This results in an increase in crime.
- **No Single Cause** As you can see, a variety of aspects of today's society have been offered as causes of crime. Perhaps the one thing that experts do agree on is that today's crime problem probably cannot be blamed on any single cause.



Finding the Main Idea What are some of the main causes of crime?

**ACADEMIC
VOCABULARY**
aspects: parts



FOCUS ON Eric Holder

(1951—)

When Eric Holder joined President Barack Obama's cabinet on February 2, 2009, he became the first African

American attorney general of the United States. The attorney general is the "top cop" for the federal government. That person also heads up the Department of Justice.

Holder was born and raised in New York City. He attended schools for gifted children. His early education prepared him for Columbia University, where he received his law degree in 1976. That same year, Holder joined the Department of Justice. He worked his way through the ranks. In 1988 he was nominated by President Reagan as an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Under President Clinton, Holder served as U.S. district attorney for the District of Columbia and then as deputy attorney general.

Making Inferences How might Holder's experience as a deputy attorney general help him perform his duties as attorney general?

Neighborhood Watch

Many communities have formed Neighborhood Watch programs in which residents watch for criminal activity.



Fighting Crime

Whatever its causes, crime hurts everyone. Partly in response to the growing public outcry about crime, Congress passed a national crime bill in 1994. This bill illustrates some of the country's main strategies for reducing crime. One approach is to increase the number of police officers and expand the prison system. Another is to

provide tougher legal penalties for criminals. For example, the 1994 crime bill increased the number of crimes eligible for the death penalty. It also introduced the so-called three-strikes rule. This federal law, which has been adopted by some states, gives life sentences to three-time violent offenders.

Other strategies focus on crime prevention. These include creating community-policing programs in neighborhoods to improve relationships between police and citizens. Schools can also provide crime prevention education.

These strategies have helped reduce crime rates, but there is no simple solution. Fighting crime effectively requires citizens to get involved. There are many things you can do to help your community. Obey the law. Report any crimes that you see. Take common-sense precautions to ensure your safety and that of others. Even small steps such as cleaning up graffiti in your neighborhood can help fight crime. Finally, try to support the police officers who work to protect your community.

READING CHECK

Analyzing Information What can government and citizens do to fight crime?

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

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ONLINE QUIZ

Reviewing Ideas and Terms

- Define** Write a brief definition for the terms **crime**, **criminal**, **felonies**, **misdemeanors**, **victimless crimes**, and **white-collar crimes**.
 - Defend a Point of View** Some people argue that there is no such thing as a victimless crime. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Recall** Describe at least four potential causes of crime.
 - Evaluate** How might permissive courts contribute to crime?
- Summarize** What are two of the strategies for fighting crime that were included in the 1994 national crime bill?
 - Make Inferences** Why do you think some citizens do not report crime?

Critical Thinking

- Categorizing** Use your notes and a chart like this one to fill in the boxes with different types of crime on the left and examples of each type of crime on the right.

Type of Crime	Examples

FOCUS ON WRITING

- Problem Solving** Imagine that you are a police commissioner for a city. Write a speech discussing how government and citizens can work to reduce crime.