

PLACES THAT SERVE DRINKS,
BITES AND GAMES GALORE

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Sunday

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2022

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FINAL

POST-GAZETTE SPECIAL REPORT

Pittsburgh and Pa.'s unreported FBI
crime stats paint an incomplete
picture and raise serious police
transparency concerns

% OF POLICE AGENCIES REPORTING CRIME DATA TO FBI

TOP 10 STATES

Conn.	100.0%
Del.	100.0
N.D.	100.0
Vt.	100.0
Okla.	99.3
Minn.	97.9
Maine	97.7
Va.	97.6
Idaho	96.5
R.I.	95.9

Data as of Oct. 5

BOTTOM 10 STATES

Miss.	52.5%
Hawaii	50.0
Ill.	35.1
N.M.	32.8
N.J.	30.6
N.Y.	20.9
Md.	11.7
Pa.	2.7
Calif.	2.0
Fla.	0.3

U.S. average 63.0%

Source: The Marshall Project, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Post-Gazette

IN THE DARK

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Police officers take cover behind an armored vehicle after several shots were fired on Manilla Street near its intersection with Bedford Avenue in the Hill District on Oct. 1, 2021. That year, the FBI moved to a new data-collection system, and 40% of law enforcement agencies nationwide did not report their 2021 crime data to the agency. Pennsylvania was among the states with the lowest reporting rate.

By Michael Korsh
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Just past midnight on a January morning last year, three boys in a home in Wilksburg were playing with a handgun when it accidentally fired a bullet into 15-year-old Marcus Gibson, killing him.

Later that month, two men in masks strode up to a school van in Marshall-Shadeland and opened fire, leaving 15-year-old Marquis Campbell dead as he waited to return home from the special education center he attended.

Four months later, the crumpled body of 17-year-old Daymeir Boyd was found inside a vehicle in Homewood North, shot to death.

The surge in gun violence in 2021 that left more than a dozen teenagers dead in Allegheny County would normally have been reported to an FBI database that has been helping police battle crime for nearly a century.

Known as the Uniform Crime Reporting system, the program — created to gather statistics about crimes such



"Two percent in a state like Pennsylvania ... is just not acceptable. The public has a right to know more about the level of crime in our local communities."

— Carol Tracy, former director of Pittsburgh-based Women's Law Project

as robbery and assault from the vast majority of police agencies — has become a critical tool in targeting violence nationwide.

But Pittsburgh is among more than 40% of all police agencies nationally that did not turn over their crime numbers to the FBI, leading to gaps that

have frustrated criminologists and making it virtually impossible to know the real picture of crime in America from the FBI.

One of the states with the lowest rates is Pennsylvania — where just 2% of police agencies have sent their figures to the FBI, a Pittsburgh Post-Gazette analysis shows, compared to states like Delaware and Vermont, where every department shared its data.

The lack of participation by such a populous state can obscure crime numbers nationally while also raising questions about police transparency at a time such an issue is vital to the public, experts say.

"Two percent in a state like Pennsylvania — a state with the population we have — is just not acceptable," said Carol Tracy, the former director of the Pittsburgh-based Women's Law Project. "The public has a right to know more about the level of crime in our local communities and in our entire community."

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INSIDE: A closer look at Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh data. Page A-4

Shapiro successor no stranger to big stage

She helped convict a former AG. Now, she will be running that powerful office

By Mike Wereschagin
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The most powerful woman in Pennsylvania, the state's top law enforcement official, was facing judgment in a string of corruption charges that had rocked the state's political and legal communities, shaken public faith in a pillar of society and captured attention around the country.

The case was filled with sordid tales of a politician — Kathleen Kane, the first Democrat

ever elected attorney general — misusing her office to exact revenge on her political enemies. But there was another, more tragic side to the story.

In her effort to embarrass a former deputy, Kane had leaked to the press explosive documents of a long-dead investigation into Philadelphia civil rights leader J. Wyatt Mondesire — an investigation that ended with no charges filed. But the story thrust Mondesire onto

SEE **AG**, PAGE A-5



Bucks County Courier Times

Michelle Henry played a key role in prosecuting former Attorney General Kathleen Kane. Now she's in line to become acting attorney general.

Russia grinds on in Ukraine; Bakhmut 'destroyed'

The Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces have turned the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut into ruins, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, while Ukraine's military on Saturday reported missile, rocket and air strikes in multiple parts of the country that Moscow is trying to conquer after months of resistance.

The latest battles of Russia's 9½-month war in Ukraine have centered on four provinces that Russian President Vladimir Putin triumphantly — and illegally — claimed to have annexed in late September. The fighting indicates Russia's struggle to establish control of those regions and Ukraine's persistence to reclaim them.

Mr. Zelenskyy said the situation "remains very difficult" in several front-line cities in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk provinces. Together, the provinces make up the Donbas, an expansive industrial region bordering Russia that Mr. Putin identified as a focus from the war's outset and where Moscow-backed separatists have fought since 2014.

"Bakhmut, Soledar, Maryinka, Kreminna. For a long time, there is no living place left on the land of these areas that have not been damaged by shells and fire,"

SEE **UKRAINE**, PAGE A-6

Equitrans storage well leak sparks overhaul

Monitoring efforts ramp up to limit possibility of mishap

By Anya Litvak
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

For years, Pennsylvania regulators have been concerned that if something like the massive gas leak that raged in Cambria County last month occurred in a more urban area, the consequences would be devastating.

The Keystone State is second only to Michigan in the number of gas storage fields it hosts — large, underground reservoirs that hold and dispense gas used to heat homes and cook food.

Within the 49 active storage fields are more than 1,770 wells used to inject and withdraw gas from storage, and monitor conditions underground. They dot large chunks of land in Allegheny, Westmoreland, Washington and Greene counties, and many carry an elevated risk from failure because of their age, construction and location.

The George L. Reade 1 well in the Rager Mountain storage field in Cambria County, operated by Canonsburg-based Equitrans Midstream Corp., was one of those high-risk wells.

In the coming years, its name might become a kind of shorthand for how the state overhauls its oversight of the natural gas

SEE **WELLS**, PAGE A-5



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Gaps in reporting crime figures leaves Pa. and nation in dark

FBI, FROM A-1

Gaps hide crimes

One of the few cities in the state to comply with the voluntary program is Philadelphia, which disclosed nine months worth of crimes from a year when it saw more homicides than any other time in the city's history.

But Pittsburgh, which continues to undergo an upswing in homicides this year, was among the hundreds of law enforcement agencies in Pennsylvania that didn't adapt to a new reporting system that's now the standard under the FBI, making the city's statistics all but unusable.

Known as the National Incident-Based Reporting System (or NIBRS), the program, which includes intricate details about victims, requires law enforcement agencies to spend money on new software, training and to certify people to run the process.

As far back as 2015, the FBI began alerting police agencies to the changes offering some agencies millions in federal dollars to help pay for the upgrades.

Within a year, Philadelphia took in nearly \$4 million to overhaul its technology to meet the demands of the new reporting system, which became the national standard last year.

For Pittsburgh, it was a different story.

Local officials said they turned over the city's crime statistics to Pennsylvania State Police last year — the same routine followed for years.

"All I can say is, I can confirm on our end that we've done our submissions in a timely manner for that process," said Heath Johnson, the head of the police department's crime analysis unit. "So, again, if there's any disruption there, it's really not from our level."

But the disruption began with the city when it didn't improve its technology to meet the FBI's deadline nor did the city try to get federal dollars to pick up the cost, even though it was among 800 police agencies that qualified for the money, records and interviews show.

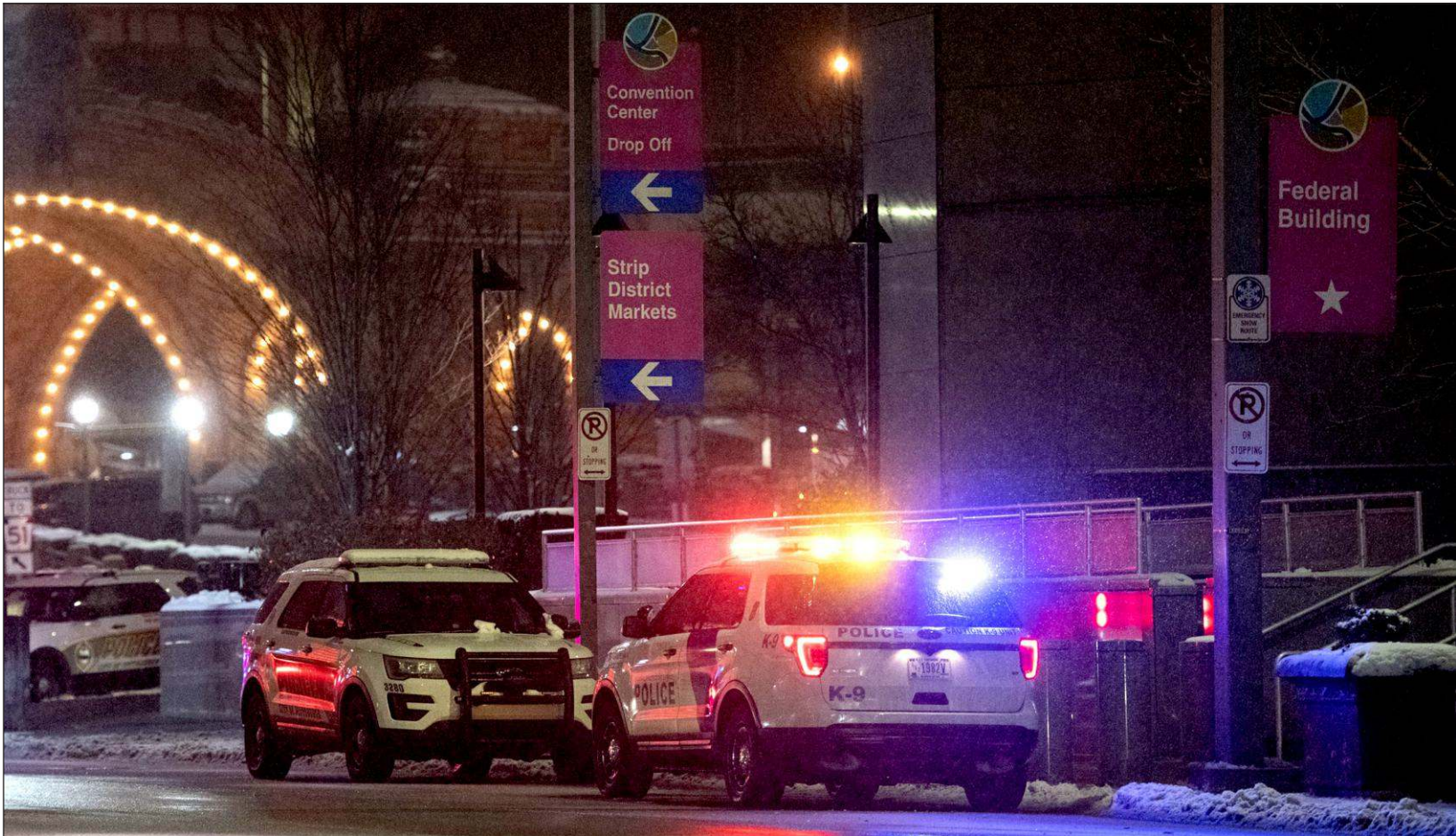
Coincidentally, even the existing crime stats that Pittsburgh sent to the state never made it to the FBI.

The state, it turns out, was using a different set of key codes for each police agency that did not mesh with those used by the FBI, according to Myles Snyder, a state police spokesman.

Not only would the city have been able to share its data with the FBI to be analyzed with other municipalities of its size — looking for common ways to battle crime — but it would have contributed to more accurate statewide numbers.

Mr. Johnson of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police's crime analysis unit said the department more than likely will provide the old data, which is not compatible with the FBI standard, for this year's crimes. While the city expects the changeover to take place by next year, he said the launch date has continued to be pushed back.

For decades, serious crime in Pittsburgh was reported to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program that was created to help analyze, track, and fight crime like murders and robberies. But the city's police department was among hundreds of state agencies that did not report its numbers to the FBI's upgraded system last year, creating gaps that mask the true picture of crime. The city said it will start to report its crime to the FBI next year.



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

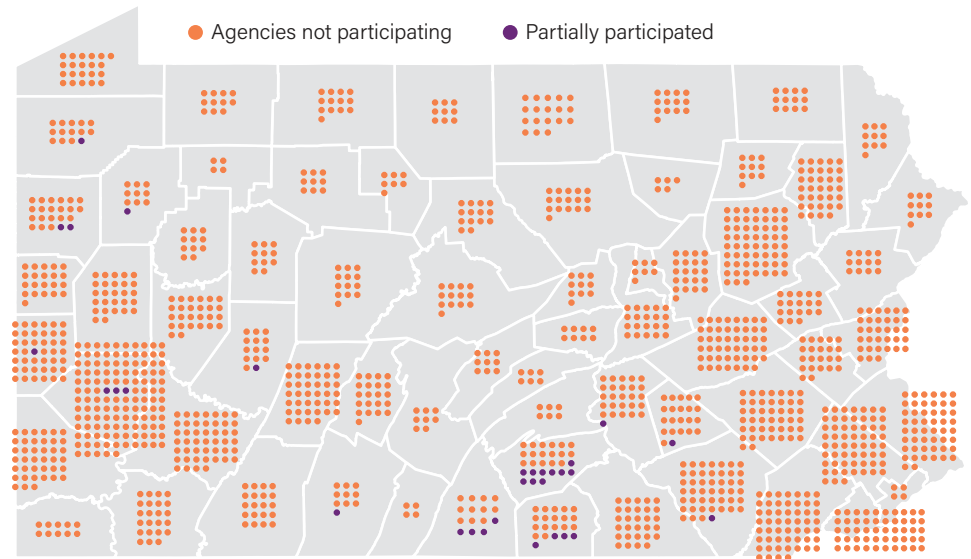


Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Police carry weapons out of a Mt. Lebanon home where a 25-year-old man killed his parents, fled from police in a vehicle, crashed and died on July 29, 2021.

Pennsylvania law enforcement agencies slow to adopt new national crime data reporting system

Pennsylvania was one of the lowest states in terms of agency participation in the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), with only 40 agencies of 1,504 (2.7%) submitting data as of Oct. 5.* Here's a county-by-county breakdown:



*Map shows Feb. 7 data. As of Oct. 5, nine additional agencies have reported data to NIBRS, but were not included on this map.

Source: The Marshall Project, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Post-Gazette

professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and expert on police behavior, said low participation in the FBI program can mask just how badly crime may be unfolding in their communities.

"It affects how people feel about where they live and making basic decisions about whether or not you go downtown tonight. When our data is so incomplete, it makes all of those discussions less accurate and more open to manipulation by those who have an interest in arguing a certain point of view, without the benefit of actual facts," Mr. Harris said.

So far, just 40 police departments out of 1,504 agencies statewide have sent the latest numbers to the FBI, comprising an area that represents just 17% of the state's residents in total, according to the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics.

One such agency is the

Ross Township police, which switched over to the new system in December 2014, even before the FBI said it would become the national standard. Officer Robert Zegar, who oversees the agency's NIBRS system, said the transition "wasn't a big deal at all," taking a mere six months to complete.

The new system has allowed the township to compare its rates against other jurisdictions its size, Officer Zegar said.

Since it was forged in 1929, the Uniform Crime Reporting program has consistently helped police agencies lobby for public dollars and influence their budgets, even though critics say it had its own flaws.

The former technology, known as the Summary Reporting System, only accounted for a handful of major crimes, including murder, rape and robbery, and less serious offenses like

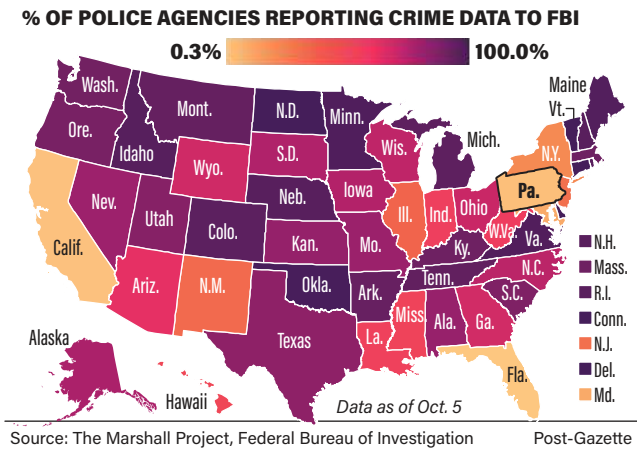
vandalism and disorderly conduct. When the FBI announced the move to NIBRS, the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics wrote that the older format was now an "outdated, 90-year-old system of counting crime that does not meet the needs of 21st-century policing."

By adopting the new system, police agencies like Pittsburgh are positioned to monitor entirely new types of activity — 52 in total — including animal cruelty, destruction of property, intimidation and identity theft.

With dozens of unique data points that give context about the crime, victim and offender, NIBRS also allows police to track people who have carried out multiple crimes and creates detailed profiles of victims and offenders, experts said.

"You'll be able to see some things that we couldn't before. For instance, what per-

Gaps in national crime reporting



Source: The Marshall Project, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Post-Gazette

centage of our homicides are gun-related. And that's terribly important to the problems we have now with gun violence," said Mr. Harris of the University of Pittsburgh. "But right now, in this transitional phase, we are groping around in the dark in a lot of places. And certainly, nationally, we have no coherent picture of where we are."

Crime statistics empower cops

Antonio Sanchez, a former Florida police commander and an adjunct professor of criminal justice at St. Thomas University in Miami, said the system gives police "an opportunity to inventory their crimes — and that, in turn, can be used in crime mapping."

He said that can mean giving police critical information on which neighborhoods are rife with shootings: "It gives you a true picture of crime in the jurisdiction and a breakdown of who is committing crimes."

When he was a deputy chief in the South Florida city of Opa-locka, Mr. Sanchez said the rate of serious crimes — including murders and aggravated assaults — was among the highest in Miami-Dade County.

"We were in trouble for real," he said.

Armed with those numbers in 2011, he persuaded the city commission to hire three additional officers and managed to get state and federal dollars to pay for five more.

And then by expanding the reserve force, he was able to double his staff and cut the crime rate by more than half the next year, records show. "It's all linked to the information that we were able to get from the UCR," he said.

While the FBI gave police agencies across the country six years to install the new system, only 55% of departments had made the switch to NIBRS by 2020 — a far greater percentage than Pennsylvania, but still much lower than what the rate used to be nationally.

Because the FBI requires about 60% of police departments to be on board before it releases nationwide stats, the agency did not report quarterly crime rates for 2021.

While the Bureau of Justice Statistics and FBI typically use statistical estimates to compensate for gaps in the data, they had to develop a completely new set of statistical procedures to make up for the lack of information coming in. The FBI released last year's annual crime figures in October of this year.

When full participation finally kicks in, the nation will have "an honest picture of crime," said Mr. Sanchez.

According to the state's crime dashboard, which still taps into the old reporting system, Allegheny County saw a more than 50% uptick in murder and non-negligent manslaughter from 2020 to 2021, to 136 cases from 89.

Ames Grawert, a senior counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice, said the last reliable national crime data estimates — which showed a "deeply alarming" 30% increase in the murder rate — came from data that was received two years ago.

"I worry that we're stranded in this 'long 2020,' almost, when the real problems facing us might be different today," Mr. Grawert said.

Officer Zegar of Ross said moving the agency's crime tracking to NIBRS allowed his agency to apply for federal grants that required the new system to be in place.

But to police accountability advocates like Beth Pittinger, executive director of Pittsburgh's Citizen Police Review Board, more needs to be done at the state or federal level to push agencies to contribute their crime figures.

"I'd love to see the state legislature require it by statute, that this is something that all law enforcement agencies receiving state money must do — end of discussion. And if you don't do it, you're gonna lose your state money and you're gonna lose your federal money. If there's not some threat of harm to something — and here we're talking public agencies, so it's money — then they don't do it."

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