

The Prison Index



Get the real facts about crime and punishment in the US today!

The Prison Index: Taking the Pulse of the Crime Control Industry is the first index of statistics about our nation's criminal justice system ever published. Containing 611 facts and 17 graphs and charts, this 48-page volume presents, in black-and-white, the state of crime control in America. Below is just a sample of some of the insightful and useful information, in easy to read index form.

Why does prison building continue as crime drops?

Incarceration grew rapidly in the 1990s, approaching almost 2 million adults in prison or jail by 2000

- Growth in the number of prisoners and jail inmates, 1994 to 2000¹: **+439,121**

While prison populations soared, crime was actually falling.

As measured by arrests for "Index crimes" (crimes considered serious and tracked statistically by the FBI) crime has been falling every year since 1994. ² The murder rate has been falling since 1993.³

- Number of arrests for index crimes per 100,000 population, 1994⁴: **1,148.4**
- Number of arrests for index crimes per 100,000 population, 2000⁵: **821.8**
- Number of murders per 100,000 population, 1994⁶: **9.0**
- Number of murders per 100,000 population, 2000⁷: **5.5**

Public perceptions contradict the fact that crime is falling.

Crime has been declining for 6 years in a row, but for 5 of those years *most* Americans thought crime was on the increase. In 2000, almost half of the public thought that crime was increasing.

- Percentage of people believing that crime in the U.S. was rising, 1996⁸: **71**
- Actual change in arrest rate for index crimes, 1995 to 1996⁹: **-5.1%**
- Percentage of people believing that crime in the U.S. is rising, 2000¹⁰: **47**
- Actual change in arrest rate for index crimes, 1999 to 2000¹¹: **-6.6%**

If asked about crime in their local area, the public's perception are less likely to be wrong.

- Percentage of people believing that crime in their local area was rising, 1996¹²: **46**
- Percentage of people believing that crime in their local area was rising, 2000¹³: **34**

The cost of the criminal justice system is growing.

- Public expenditures on criminal justice, 1994¹⁴: **\$103 billion**
- Public expenditures on criminal justice, 2000¹⁵: **\$153 billion**

If crime is declining, why might people believe it is growing?

- Percent of public that forms opinions about crime based on what they see or read in the news¹⁶: **82%**

(Endnotes)

¹ Calculation, Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 2000, Table 6.20 and Table 6.27

² Sourcebook 2001, Table 4.2.

³ Sourcebook 2000, Table 3.146.

⁴ Sourcebook 2000, Table 4.2.

⁵ Sourcebook 2001, Table 4.2.

⁶ Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS),

Homicide Trends website, *Homicide victimization, 1950-2000*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Sourcebook 2000, Table 2.36.

⁹ Calculation, Sourcebook 2000, Table 4.2.

¹⁰ Sourcebook 2000, Table 2.36.

¹¹ Calculation, Sourcebook 2001, Table 4.2.

¹² Sourcebook 2000, Table 2.36.

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ BJS Justice Expenditures and Employment in the United States, spreadsheet table 1

¹⁵ Projected from *Ibid*

¹⁶ ABC News, June 2000, republished at

http://www.publicagenda.com/issues/angles_pcc_detail2.cfm?issue_type=crime&graph1=pcc5new.gif

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