



Crime Rate Falls Despite Recession

The FBI's preliminary crime statistics for the first half of 2009 show the crime rate falling all across the nation despite high unemployment and a deep recession. Even murder and manslaughter dropped 10 percent during this time.

This defies the standard logic that tougher economic times drive more people to a life of crime. Experts are at a loss to explain why crime hasn't gone up with the rate of joblessness. Some guess that since those without jobs are home more often, thieves have fewer opportunities, or that the American population is aging and older people commit fewer crimes. The 10-percent drop in violent crimes like murder and manslaughter just doesn't fit past patterns.



"That's a remarkable decline, given the economic conditions," declared Richard Rosenfeld, a University of Missouri-St. Louis sociologist who has researched trends in crime. AP noted on December 21 that Rosenfeld did not think the 10-percent drop in deadly crime would carry through the entire year. He stated such declines are exceptional and previous recessions as far back as the 1950s have all seen crime rates rise.

Bill Bratton, a former chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, noted that law enforcement officials are better able to track patterns of crime and to adjust accordingly. "Police have gotten much better at analyzing numbers and responding quickly," said Bratton, who is now chairman of a private security firm called Altegrity Security Consulting. "Los Angeles has been in an economic downturn almost two years ahead of the country and is now in its eighth straight year of crime decline."

The FBI drew its data from over 11,700 police and law enforcement agencies across the country. The bureau then compared reported crimes for the first half of 2009 to those reported for the first six months of 2008.

The 2009 figures show that the drop in crime beginning in 2008 is not only continuing but also accelerating. In 2008, the FBI numbers showed a drop of nearly 4 percent in murder and manslaughter, and an overall 1.9-percent drop in violent crime from 2007 to 2008.

Overall, in early 2009 violent crimes fell by 4.4 percent and property crimes by 6.1 percent. Nationwide, rape was down by 3.3 percent, robbery by 6.5 percent, and arson by more than 8 percent. As AP noted, "Crime rates haven't been this low since the 1960s, and are nowhere near the peak reached in the early 1990s."

When the data is broken down by city size, towns with a population of 10,000 to 25,000 actually saw violent crime rise by 1.7 percent. However, cities with a population of one million or more experienced a 7-percent decline in violent crime. Of course, every city had its own individual trends, but taken



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together the figures show less crime in all major categories.

For example, the statistics for New York show 204 reported murders in 2009 compared to 252 in the same half of last year. Oklahoma City's reported killings went the opposite direction, rising from 26 to 32. Phoenix had 10 fewer murders during the first six months of this year, dropping from 86 in 2008 to 76 in 2009.

While there may be no definitive explanation of the drop in reported crime, and the data is still not in for the last half of the year, any downward trend is welcome. James Alan Fox, a criminal justice professor at Northeastern University, said the overall downward trends were not really that surprising. "The popular wisdom is wrong," said Fox. "If a law-abiding citizen loses their job, they don't typically go on a crime spree."

Perhaps the crime figures indicate this simple fact: The average American is indeed a law-abiding citizen and has more ability to handle tough economic times than the experts give him credit for.

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