

## Backgrounder

Contact: Jason Ziedenberg/Jasmine Tyler

202-558-7974, ext. 312/313

### 2005 Crime Rise in Context

#### One-Year Crime Change Masks

#### Regional, Racial, Geographical Impact of Crime

Violent crime rose most in areas where unemployment is higher

Violent crime fell in largest cities with employment growth

WASHINGTON, D.C., -- New statistics show that U.S. crime trends are mixed. According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program, the number of violent crime arrests rose 2.5 percent, but the number of property crime offenses decreased 1.6 percent when compared with data from 2004. While reported arrests increased for three of the four violent crime categories from the previous year's data, the rise in crime differed by region, and size of metropolitan areas.

A breakdown of the 2005 data by population group revealed that all city population groups but the nation's largest experienced increases in violent crime when compared with those data reported for the previous year. On the other hand, the nation's largest cities, which constitute 1 million and over in population, saw violent crimes fall by 0.4 percent. While the nation's four regions all saw increases in violent crime in 2005, the Midwest experienced the steepest increase at 5.7 percent.

The Justice Policy Institute (JPI), a Washington, D.C. based policy group that promotes fair and rational justice policies, cautions that a one-year change in arrests cannot be interpreted as a "trend," and that no single factor can explain changes in arrests across the nation, or within a jurisdiction. JPI offers the following findings based on a longer timeline<sup>1</sup> as context for policy choices that may impact crime and public safety.

#### **Large, coastal cities represented a disproportionate share of the crime drop.**

Between 1995 and 2004, cities that constitute about 5 percent of the nation's population (New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, San Francisco, and Los Angeles) accounted for 23 percent of the overall drop in violent crime. In the 2005 survey, only Boston and San Francisco<sup>2</sup> experienced an increase in violent crime, and those cities only accounted for a small portion of the national increase.

#### **Of these large, coastal cities, the places that saw a decline in crime also saw a decline in the unemployment rates.**

Besides Boston and San Francisco, where the unemployment rate rose or stayed the same, all of these cities have seen drops in the unemployment rate since 1997. The unemployment rate dropped 36 percent in New York, 27 percent in Washington, D.C., 31 percent in Baltimore and 23 percent in Los Angeles. These cities have seen growth in "new

<sup>1</sup>Data reported here was compiled and compared from the 1995 and 2004 FBI Uniform Crime Reports, and National Crime Victimization Survey (2004).

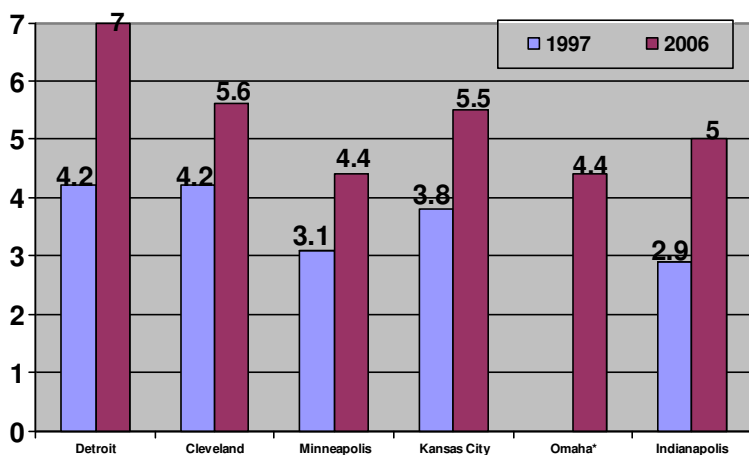
<sup>2</sup>Between 2004-5, San Francisco experienced 4 percent increase—composed mainly of an increase in aggravated assaults. Boston experienced an 8 percent increase in violent crime, mainly driven by an increase in aggravated assaults and robberies.

economy jobs,” particularly in the computer technology-related fields, where these six cities account for 17 percent of the people employed in these fields in the country.<sup>3</sup>

**The Midwest, which has experienced the biggest increase in violent crime, also saw unemployment rise across the region and in select cities.** In the Midwestern region, unemployment is 13 percent higher than the national average. In contrast to the big coastal cities responsible for a quarter of the violent crime drop, select mid-sized cities in the Midwest and Great Lakes states (Detroit, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Omaha, and Indianapolis) saw unemployment rise since 1997. With the exception of Omaha, all these cities reported a rise in violent crime in 2005, and these cities only accounted for 3.6 percent of the violent crime drop during the previous decade. These cities account for 7 percent of the employment in computer-related fields in the country.

### **In the Midwest cities where crime rose, unemployment rose.**

**UNEMPLOYMENT RATES IN CITIES WITH RISING CRIME, 1997 AND 2006**



**The crime drop, and the one-year rise in crime were not borne equally by income groups.** According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)<sup>4</sup>—another Justice Department survey of crime and victimization trends—the rate of reported violent crime for households for an income beneath \$14,000 is 50 percent higher than that of higher income groups. From 2001-04, the \$14,000 income group did not experience a decrease in crime and was the only group not to do so.

**The crime drop was not experienced equally by races, ethnicities and neighborhoods.** Research has shown that the impact of crime and victimization varies by race and ethnicity. The NCVS has shown that African Americans are victims of violent crime at a rate 30 percent higher than whites. In Los Angeles—where there was a 10 percent decline in homicides—an area that contains 13 percent of the population was responsible for 43 percent of the homicides; African Americans and Latino’s accounted for 85 percent of the homicide victims, and 97 percent of the gang-related homicide victims in that jurisdiction.<sup>5</sup>

**There is no clear relationship between the crime change and reported gang activity.** While some have attributed the rise in crime to increased gang activity, and the image of juvenile crime and gang crime have been merged and melded by the media, the true picture of crime trends and their relation to gangs is more complicated. Law enforcement estimates of nationwide juvenile gang membership suggest that no more than 1 percent of youth aged 10-17 are gang members.<sup>6</sup> Cities known to have high levels of gang activity—Los

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics: *Fastest growing occupations, 2004-14* (2005). Retrieved from:

<http://www.bls.gov/emp/emptab21.htm>

<sup>4</sup> *National Crime Victimization Survey, 2004*. (2005) U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>5</sup> Khalil, Ashaf, “Killings Drop 11% as Crime Totals Decline,” *The Los Angeles Times*, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Snyder, Howard N., and Sickmund, Melissa. (2006). *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Angeles and Chicago<sup>7</sup>—experienced a drop and virtually no change in crime in 2005, respectively. More than 80 percent of the agencies with gang problems in both smaller and rural counties reported *zero* gang homicides in 2004. NCVS data shows that urban Hispanic students reported the *highest* existence of street gangs in their schools (43 percent), but Hispanic youth reported the *lowest* rates of crime in their schools.<sup>8</sup> Just as most young people “age out”, or desist from delinquency and crime when they reach adulthood, research on gangs published by the Justice Department found that, “*gang-membership tends to be short-lived, even among high-risk youth...with very few youth remaining gang members throughout their adolescent years.*”<sup>9</sup>

### **Cuts Occurring to delinquency prevention and youth employment programs that promote public safety and reduce crime**

A one-year change in crime may not indicate a national trend. The rise in crime experienced in 2001 was followed by three more years of declining crime. And, even during the historic crime drop that defined the 1990s and most of this current decade, the benefit of the crime drop was not experienced equally by race, ethnicity or regions. But the “benefits” of creating jobs and opportunities for young people left out of the labor market holds some promise. As evidenced by the near decade-long trend in Washington, D.C., where youth unemployment closely tracked youth referrals to the juvenile justice system (see graph below), investing in ways to support young people’s entry into the labor market may help reduce crime.

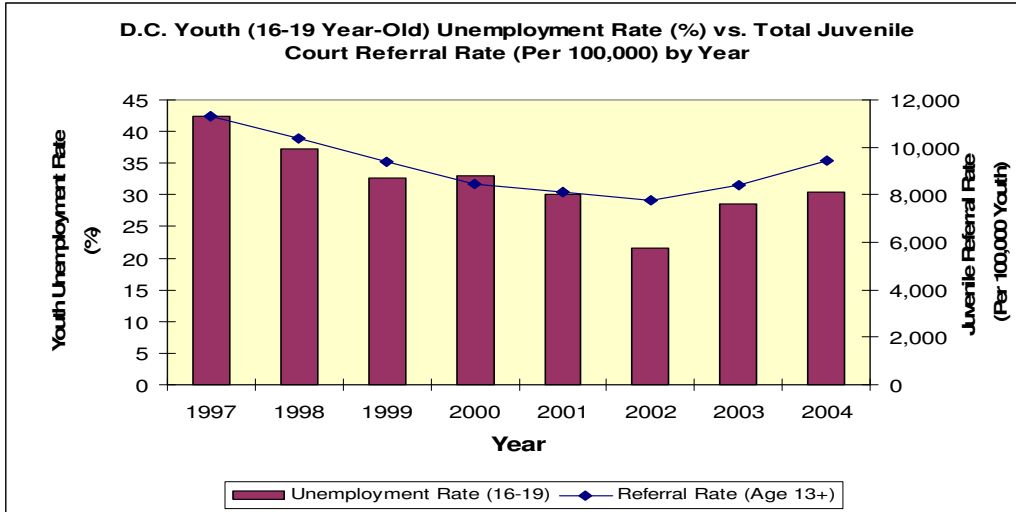
---

<sup>7</sup> Egley, Arlen Jr. and Ritz, Christina E. Highlights of the 2004 National Youth Gang Survey. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. With the exception of robberies—which rose by less than 1 percent—the number of violent crimes in Chicago declined.

<sup>8</sup> *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2004*. (2005) Washington, DC. Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>9</sup> Snyder, Howard N., and Sickmund, Melissa. (2006). *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

## Unemployment Tracked Juvenile Court Referrals in Washington, DC.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics and D.C. Superior Court.

While the nation continues to funnel upwards of \$60 billion a year in ways to incarcerate people in youth and adult prisons and jails, there is a declining federal commitment to investing in effective youth employment strategies, many of which are designed as delinquency prevention programs. Policymakers concerned about rising crime should protect opportunities for youth development and crime prevention at the front end.

The Bush Administration's budget proposal calls for a 43 percent cut to juvenile justice funding, including a 50 percent cut to the Title V Incentive Grants for Local Delinquency Prevention Programs, and zeroing out the Juvenile Accountability Block Grants Program (JABG)—two youth service funding streams that support employment and vocational services for court-involved youth. While the House recent restored some of these funds, the cuts may still be sustained by the Senate.

*The Justice Policy Institute is a Washington, D.C.-based think tank dedicated to ending society's reliance on incarceration and promoting effective and just solutions to social problems.  
For more information, visit our website at [www.justicepolicy.org](http://www.justicepolicy.org)*