



Crime fell in 2009; States are safely reducing prison populations and saving money

The FBI released its Preliminary Annual Uniform Crime Report on Monday, May 24th with the news that the United States experienced a 5.5 percent drop in the number of reported violent offenses and a 4.9 percent decline in the number of reported property offenses in 2009. **This drop in crime came at a time when prison growth rates fell from previous years¹ and when state corrections spending grew at a much lower rate than the previous year.²** As with many state-funded programs and services during the current, challenging economic times, corrections budgets are not growing at the same rates as previous years; and many states are looking for innovative ways to reduce the amount of money they spend on corrections while implementing more effective public safety strategies.

The Justice Policy Institute, a national research and communications organization focused on reducing use of the criminal justice system, has assembled key findings from these new crime and prison surveys to put the new figures in their appropriate context. For a more in-depth analysis of crime trends, and information on effective public safety practices, please visit our website at www.justicepolicy.org.

The number of violent offenses reported to law enforcement fell 5.5 percent in 2009.³ While crime has been dropping nationally since 2007, this year's drop was the biggest yet, and the decline was spread over all regions of the United States.

	Percent Change (2007-2008)	Percent Change (2008-2009)
Violent Crime Total	-1.9%	-5.5%
Murder	-3.9%	-7.2%
Forcible Rape	-1.6%	-3.1%
Robbery	-0.7%	-8.1%
Aggravated Assault	-2.5%	-4.2%
Property Crime Total	-0.8%	-4.9%

Source: FBI *Preliminary Annual Uniform Crime Report 2009*, Table 3,
www.fbi.gov/ucr/prelimsem2009/table_1.html

Crime is going down as states are putting fewer people in prison. The number of people in prison is still growing, but at a slower rate than the last few decades.⁴ The 0.8 percent growth during 2008 was the second year of decline in the rate of growth and the slowest growth in eight years. From 2000 to 2008 the growth of the prison population (1.8 percent per year on average) was less than a third of the rate observed during the 1990s (6.5 percent per year on average). Much of this change can be attributed to a drop in the number of people admitted to prison since 2006 and an increase in the number of people released.

States are curbing their spending on corrections. State spending for corrections totaled \$52 billion in FY2008, a 6.5 percent increase compared to the previous year; but it is estimated to grow only 1.8 percent in FY2009 to \$53 billion.⁵ In times of budget crises states have to cut funding for almost all services, including corrections, and are seeking alternative strategies that are both effective at improving public safety and promote better life outcomes for all individuals.

¹ William J. Sabol and others, *Prisoners in 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009)
<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/p08.pdf>

² National Association of State Budget Officers, *State Expenditure Report 2008* (Washington, D.C.: 2009) www.nasbo.org

³ FBI *Preliminary Semiannual Uniform Crime Report 2009*, Table 1, www.fbi.gov/ucr/prelimsem2009/table_1.html

⁴ William J. Sabol and others, 2009

⁵ National Association of State Budget Officers, 2009