Contents

1. Overview

2. The Issue

3. Launching Arrest Trends

4. Emerging Findings
   - Drivers of arrests
   - Disparities in arrests
   - Effectiveness of arrests
   - Gaps in arrest data

5. What’s next

6. Acknowledgments
Overview

More than 10 million arrests are made each year in the United States. Although arrest is an important tool in some situations, its overuse can have many detrimental effects. These include, but are not limited to, mass incarceration, diminished public health and economic prosperity, racial inequities, and unwieldy levels of bureaucratic work for officers. The widespread use of arrests also damages already fractured trust between police and many of the communities they serve. Given these impacts, arrests should be monitored carefully and applied sparingly. Alternatives to arrest need to be explored and implemented. However, this space has seen little innovation to date, largely because the data needed to drive and inform change is inaccessible.

To help unlock this important knowledge, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) developed Arrest Trends. This tool provides answers to fundamental questions about American policing by organizing publicly available datasets into one easy-to-use data platform where users can access, customize, and analyze decades of policing data that previously had been disparately located and difficult to interpret. Users can explore trends in arrests, arrest demographics, clearance rates, victimizations, and data reported at both the local and national levels to understand how these vary by time, location, and offense type. Arrest Trends aims to empower diverse stakeholders such as community advocates, police practitioners, and policymakers to explore and better understand police enforcement.

The most important aspects of Arrest Trends are the actionable findings that can be quickly generated and visualized. These findings will create an understanding of, and drive needed improvements to, police enforcement in America. Initial analyses of Arrest Trends’ data paint a striking picture, showing that despite recent reductions, the use of arrest is still staggeringly high. The tool reveals that, although arrest volumes have dropped by more than 25 percent since 2006, an arrest is made every three seconds. Fewer than 5 percent of these are for serious violent crimes. Instead, the bulk of police work is in response to incidents that are not criminal in nature and the majority of arrests involve non-serious offenses like “drug abuse violations”—arrests for which increased more than 170 percent between 1980 and 2016—disorderly conduct, and a nondescript low-level offense category known as “all other non-traffic offenses.” Collectively, these offenses make up more than 80 percent of all arrests. Further, these heavily arrested non-serious offenses disproportionately impact people of color. The data shows that arrests are applied with geographic disparity as well, concentrating most prominently in metropolitan—and particularly suburban—areas.

The enforcement of overwhelmingly low-level offenses may challenge police-community relationships—which are often already frayed—impairing police effectiveness and public safety as a whole. When people do not trust the police, they may be less likely to report crimes or assist in investigations. Indeed, Arrest Trends shows us that fewer than 40 percent of victims report their experiences to the police, and fewer than 25 percent of offenses known to the police are then cleared (meaning that they are solved by arrest).

Collectively, the data presented in Arrest Trends, and the findings in this report, challenge the notion that America's reliance on enforcement is a necessary component to achieving oft-stated public safety goals—or indeed, a means of achieving justice or equity. The launch of Arrest Trends marks Vera’s most recent effort to reduce the criminal justice system's footprint—by unlocking key policing data and, in doing so, elevating the narrative of overreliance on arrests and the need for viable alternatives. In this report, readers will find information about the need for greater access to policing data, an overview of the Arrest Trends tool as well as several initial findings gleaned from it, and future directions for this work.

1
The Issue

The use of arrests can have a multitude of detrimental individual, community, and agency level effects. (See Table 1.) These disproportionately impact racial and ethnic minorities in ways that exacerbate existing structural disadvantages, lack of economic opportunity, and material insecurity. Although arrests are a necessary part of the justice system, police officers have discretion to take alternative, less invasive courses of action (such as applying de-escalation techniques or referring people to supportive services), which in many circumstances may be more appropriate for or beneficial to the individual person, community, officer, and agency. Yet few formal alternatives to arrest currently exist.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual level</th>
<th>Community level</th>
<th>Police agency/officer level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial challenges associated with underemployment, reduced wage growth, and</td>
<td>Fractured police-community relations</td>
<td>Traditional policing practices are expensive</td>
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<td>legal and incarceration expenses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty obtaining and retaining housing</td>
<td>Perceptions of unsafety and police distrust</td>
<td>Limited resources available for community and</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>proactive policing purposes</td>
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<td>Diminished physical and mental well-being</td>
<td>Minimal collaboration on public safety</td>
<td>Risks of physical harm to officers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>goals with police departments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal risks, such as detainment, loss of child custody, and deportation</td>
<td>Civil unrest in response to perceived</td>
<td>Poor officer morale, which can result in aversion of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>unfairness of arrest practices</td>
<td>sick days and recruitment challenges</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risk of harm to innocent bystanders</td>
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Researchers, practitioners, and advocates alike need information on the dynamics of policing to better understand how the overreliance on arrests drives mass incarceration and deepens other social inequities. But unless one knows how to navigate the multitude of public datasets available, there is no easy way to find and interpret data on the basic components of American policing—such as how often people are arrested, who police are arresting and why, or whether community members collaborate with and report crimes to the police.

Although police agencies and the federal government invest significant time and resources into collecting policing data, the data is not easily accessible, centrally located, or available in a user-friendly format. Files are often large and require a great deal of cleaning, restructuring, merging, statistical knowledge, and computing power to analyze. In addition, there is no simple way to compare data across locations, see information from agencies that only share partial data, or calculate arrest rates among
specific demographic groups. For data-savvy researchers, this is technically possible, but time intensive.

For other stakeholders, such as police chiefs, advocates, the media, and community members—who may want to learn about how arrests affect their communities or how the implementation of a particular policy changed arrest trends over time—this is a much harder task. As a result, it can be difficult to lift the veil off policing practices for both community members and police practitioners alike. The result is that those who do not have the time or technical expertise to go through reams of data often only have access to high-level information—such as overall crime rates—to make decisions.

At a time when confidence in the police is low—particularly within communities of color—and in the wake of high profile incidents of police violence, increased transparency and access to information about police practices is more important than ever. Moreover, access to good data is necessary in order to build an evidence-base for practices that are intended to make communities safer—including those that serve as an off-ramp from the justice system (and thus incarceration), as well as those that strengthen and improve trust between police and the communities they serve.

Launching Arrest Trends

Vera developed *Arrest Trends* to unlock important policing data. This tool helps to answer fundamental questions about American policing by organizing publicly available datasets into one easy-to-use platform. Users can explore multiple related and customizable visualizations that allow for a deeper understanding of police enforcement in local jurisdictions and across the country. *Arrest Trends* focuses on the following critical areas.

- **Arrests**: How many arrests are made annually, and for what?
- **Demographics**: How do arrest trends vary across demographic groups?
- **Clearance rates**: How successful are the police at solving reported crimes?
- **Victimizations**: How common are victimizations and how often are they reported to the police?
- **Data reported**: What gaps exist in policing data?

Through *Arrest Trends*, users can easily access and analyze decades of policing data that previously has been disparately located and difficult to interpret. This tool builds on the development and successes of Vera's *Incarceration Trends* tool, which collates and visualizes publicly-available jail and prison incarceration data to explore and compare county and state incarceration by location and time. *Arrest Trends* will allow a broad group of stakeholders to access data related to policing at both a national and localized level, allowing users to better understand how police currently operate and helping to set the roadmap for reform.

**What Arrest Trends does and who it helps**

*Arrest Trends* allows users to:
• explore multiple up-to-date indicators of enforcement in one comprehensive tool;
• profile the use of arrests in individual agencies, counties, states, regions, and the United States as a whole;
• understand how arrest trends vary over time, place, offense type, and arrestee demographics;
• learn about gaps in policing data, when and where they exist, and how they affect information accuracy and transparency; and
• identify situations (such as locations or non-serious offense types) in which enforcement is particularly heavy with limited public safety need.

By making data accessible to all, Vera hopes Arrest Trends will generate dialogue about the role of policing. Importantly, the tool can be used to highlight the extent to which local decisions about arrests create disparity and may act as a primary driver of mass incarceration. For example:

• police chiefs can use Arrest Trends to understand how various policing strategies and new approaches (such as decriminalizing select low-level offenses, implementing de-escalation strategies) might impact their communities;
• policymakers can access information that is critical to decisions about the potential impact of decriminalizing certain behaviors (such as vagrancy);
• criminologists and researchers working in related social policy disciplines can incorporate measures of enforcement into their analyses more easily; and
• media outlets, educators, and advocates can use the tool to inform the public about the extent and disparate impacts of arrests locally and across the country and how this has changed over time.

**What data is featured in Arrest Trends?**

*Arrest Trends* collates information from eight major data series, so that users can easily explore police enforcement trends in one comprehensive location:

• Uniform Crime Report (UCR) Arrests by Age, Sex, and Race;
• UCR: County-Level Detailed Arrest and Offense Data;
• Arrests Data Analysis Tool National Estimates;
• U.S. Census Populations with Bridged Race Categories;
• UCR Offenses Known and Clearances by Arrest;
• National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) Victimization Analysis Tool;
• Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Offenses Known to Law Enforcement; and
• Law Enforcement Agency Identifiers Crosswalk.

Vera has produced a separate technical report, *Arrest Trends: Data Sources and Methodology*, which readers can access for more information about these data sources and how they were analyzed and integrated into this tool. In general, however, *Arrest Trends* uses these data series to populate interactive visualizations of the following five policing indicators: (1) arrests; (2) arrest demographics; (3) clearance rates; (4) victimizations; and (5) reported data (in other words, gaps in data reported by police agencies to the FBI). Users can explore these indicators to better understand the extent, disparity, effectiveness, and
Emerging Findings

Early use of Arrest Trends has already uncovered important trends regarding:

- drivers of arrests;
- disparities in arrests;
- effectiveness of arrests; and
- gaps in arrest data.

These emerging trends are described below and can be explored further online through Arrest Trends.

Drivers of arrests

Arrest Trends can be used to examine the number of, and reasons for, arrests made. The results are stark. Initial analysis shows that, across the United States, an arrest occurs every three seconds. Although this figure may sound strikingly high, today’s estimated total arrest volume—approximately 10.5 million arrests annually—has dropped to historic lows not otherwise seen since the early 1980s.
This recent decline in arrests occurred primarily over the past 10 years, with arrest volumes dropping by more than 25 percent between 2006 and 2016. The timing of this decline in arrest trends parallels widespread changes in policing policies, such as the decriminalization of certain offenses (such as “runaways” and “vagrancy”), changing practices around pedestrian and vehicle stops, and the growing recognition that America incarcerates too many people.

Despite this decline, arrests are clearly still a massive enterprise, affecting many. To better understand their purpose, we can begin by investigating the types of offenses that most prominently drive arrest volumes. The data shows that non-serious, low-level offenses such as “drug abuse violations” and “disorderly conduct” make up over 80 percent of arrests, while serious (Part I) violent offenses account for fewer than five percent of arrests.

Especially notable are drug arrests, which increased by 171 percent between 1980 and 2016, and—despite recent, smaller declines—now account for more than 1.5 million arrests annually—the vast majority of which are made for drug possession.
generally, and marijuana possession most often.

This stark increase in drug arrests suggests that despite evidence that public health-based solutions are more effective, policing practices in response to drugs remain largely punitive in nature. In light of the rising opioid epidemic—and the abundance of research suggesting that justice system involvement exacerbates rather than solves substance use disorders—it is imperative that the nation begins to question the reliance on arrests as a response to this public health problem, among others.

Unfortunately, Vera’s analysis reveals that by far the most common arrest category includes a group of low-level offenses labeled by the FBI as “other non-traffic offenses,” which accounts for more than 30 percent of all arrests.

![Figure 3. 1980–2016 estimated drug arrest volume](image)

![Figure 4. Proportion of estimated arrests made for “other non-traffic offenses” in 2016](image)
“Other non-traffic offenses” are classified by the FBI as non-serious, low-level offenses, but little else is known about these arrests, making it impossible to understand their utility and effect in maintaining public safety. So, although we know that arrests overall are widespread and frequent, we don’t know the specific nature of the largest category of arrests. Going forward, nationally we must interrogate and further understand frequently occurring arrest practices in much greater detail.

What is clear, however, is that approximately 10.5 million arrests per year is a staggeringly high number, given the detrimental effects arrests have on individuals, communities, police officers, and police agencies. Because the vast majority of arrests are made in response to low-level, non-violent offenses, it is imperative to examine the purpose and necessity of arrests—as well as viable alternatives—in order to scale back these and other forms of punitive enforcement.

Disparities in arrests

_Arrest Trends_ can also be used to identify agencies and locales that have been particularly successful in reducing their reliance on arrests—or, conversely, those in particular need of alternative strategies to reduce their reliance on arrests. Vera hopes that future phases of this work will highlight lessons from agencies that have reduced their reliance on arrests and build partnerships with agencies that are eager to implement alternatives.

One important insight from _Arrest Trends_’ data is that metropolitan areas account for the vast majority of arrests. More specifically, metropolitan areas account for **78 percent of all arrests**, while nonmetropolitan areas account for only 21 percent, and another 1 percent occur in areas without a specified municipality type. Arrest rates mimic these same patterns: **metropolitan areas have higher average arrest rates—4,229 arrests per 100,000 residents**—than nonmetropolitan areas—3,552 arrests per 100,000 residents.

Further analysis shows that **suburban cities have the highest average arrest rates (4,604 per 100,000)**, followed by cities outside of metropolitan areas (4,090 per 100,000), principal metropolitan cities (3,332 per 100,000), metropolitan counties (3,027 per 100,000), and nonmetropolitan counties (2,322 per 100,000). To date, there has been limited criminological research on suburban arrest trends, making this finding particularly worthy of further exploration. This is especially true given that a number of high-profile police enforcement-related events in recent years that resulted in deaths—of black people in particular—have occurred in suburbs such as Ferguson, Missouri; Falcon Heights, Minnesota; and Balch Springs, Texas.
Publicly available data—made more accessible through *Arrest Trends*—further suggests that arrests are disproportionately applied across racial, age, and gender groups, and that these trends are particularly prominent for non-serious offenses. The estimated volume of arrests of black people across the country rose by 23 percent between 1980 and 2014, and black people now make up 12 percent of the U.S. population, but an estimated 28 percent of all arrests.

Unpacking this further, *Arrest Trends* shows that in 2014, black people were an estimated 2.39 times more likely to be arrested for "drug abuse violations" than white people—even though research suggests that black people and white people use drugs at similar rates. This trend may have been spurred by a combination of concentrated policing efforts in disadvantaged communities, racially targeted pedestrian and vehicle stop practices, and racial trends in using drugs outside in public view rather than indoors and in private spaces.

Arrests of women similarly increased between 1980 and 2014—here by 83 percent—while arrests of men decreased 7 percent over the same timeframe. In 1980, women accounted for an estimated 16 percent of all arrests, but in 2014 they accounted for 27 percent.
Arrests of juveniles age 17 and younger decreased by more than 50 percent from 1980 to 2014. In 1980, juveniles accounted for an estimated 20 percent of all arrests, but by 2014 this proportion dropped to 9 percent.

This decrease in arrests of young people paralleled several political and cultural shifts in how young people are viewed and treated in the U.S. criminal justice system. Several juvenile-specific offenses were largely decriminalized (such as running away and curfew violations), local non-punitive programs were implemented in response to low-level offenses, developing neurological research showed that young people are evolving decision makers and very capable of change, and the Supreme Court overturned life without parole sentences for juveniles. These types of advances may have helped propel the decrease in arrests of young people. An important opportunity now exists to explore the application of alternatives to arrest that have been effective with young people to adults as well.

Effectiveness of arrests

The data presented in Arrest Trends shows that, although the estimated volume of victimizations based on reports to national surveyors has dropped by more than 50 percent in the past 20 years, nearly 18 million serious victimizations still occur annually across the country, and the majority of these (more than 60 percent) are not reported to the police.
Of those offenses known to law enforcement, just 25 percent are cleared by arrests (meaning that they are solved by the police).

This data signals a persistent problem affecting police and communities alike: when crime is not reported to the police—as it often is not—it limits the police’s ability to solve and prevent crime and affects the overall safety of communities. While people have various reasons for not reporting a crime to the police, they may be discouraged from doing so by fractured police-community relationships and feelings of mistrust—issues that can be exacerbated by an over-emphasis on the enforcement of low-level offenses.
Gaps in arrest data

Not all police agencies report their data to the FBI’s UCR program, though they may opt to publish their data elsewhere. Data goes unreported by agencies for a variety of reasons—including lack of technology or resources, incompatible offense definitions, and concerns around open policing data. Further, some agencies report only partial data. As Arrest Trends shows, of the 22,645 police agencies on record in 2016, 32 percent reported none of their arrest data to the FBI, 9 percent reported some of their data, and 59 percent reported all of their data.

![Figure 10. Proportion of agencies to report full, partial, and no UCR arrest data in 2016](image)

Unlike most existing tools, Arrest Trends allows users to explore all relevant arrest data reported through the UCR regardless of whether that data is complete. In other words, community members can still find their agency’s arrest and clearance rate data in Arrest Trends—along with an indicator of where data gaps exist (instances where agencies did not report data to the FBI)—even if the agency only reported partial data. (If an agency reported no data—rather than partial data—however, users will not be able to view these trends.) To account for missing or partial data, the FBI produces estimates at the county, state, regional, and national level; users can explore this data through Arrest Trends, in addition to the reported data.

Underreporting clearly impacts the accuracy and availability of policing data across the country, inhibiting the public’s ability to paint a complete picture of enforcement. Arrest Trends allows community members to understand how transparent their agencies are about their practices. Further research is needed to understand why agencies are not reporting data to the FBI, and whether that data is available elsewhere. Still, by making data available to a wide range of audiences, including policymakers, researchers, and members of the general public, Arrest Trends provides a new tool for understanding how policing operates across the country and a mechanism for constituents to better understand local and national policing practices.

What's next
The nation’s current approach to public safety overly applies arrests without a full accounting of the social and financial costs associated with this widespread practice. The launch of Arrest Trends marks Vera’s most recent effort to reduce the criminal justice system’s footprint, this time by unlocking key policing data and thus elevating the narrative of overreliance on arrests and the need for viable alternatives. Vera anticipates that the outcomes of Arrest Trends’ launch will include:

- surfacing national arrest trends that were previously not well known;
- highlighting communities that are making positive changes to their enforcement practices;
- enabling peer learning across communities and various stakeholders; and
- increasing access to and transparency of policing data.

In future phases of Arrest Trend’s development, Vera intends to expand upon the tool by:

- developing a “create your own report” function, whereby users can explore specific research questions and access comprehensive arrest information on an agency or location of their choice;
- enabling Arrest Trends visuals to be embedded into other mediums, including social media platforms;
- expanding map functionality to also show data at a local agency level and other important geographic areas (such as congressional districts);
- incorporating census data at the agency level to present arrest disparities across demographic and socioeconomic groups at a more localized level;
- including crime data to explore and better understand the relationship between, and impacts of, crime and arrests;
- integrating Law Enforcement Management and Statistics (LEMAS) data to inform how agency size, priorities, training, infrastructure, management, and other characteristics impact arrests;
- building out the capacity to compare agencies based on additional factors such as proximity, population demographics, and more; and
- allowing users to develop and save tailored queries and personal profiles.

Vera will prioritize the development of these features based on user experiences and the field’s most pressing needs.

Vera also plans to publish subsequent reports that dive into additional significant and nuanced findings from Arrest Trends, such as which agencies most contribute to high arrest volumes, which have shown marked improvements and why, and where the greatest demographic disparities exist. Perhaps most importantly, this tool will help identify agencies with which to collaborate in developing and testing alternative-to-arrest policies and practices. To transform the nation’s policing practices, we must first understand them. Arrest Trends seeks to unlock this important information and make it accessible for all people who are involved with and care about the American criminal justice system.
Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge Nicholas Turner, Susan Shah, Mary Crowley, and Jim Parsons for their invaluable support and guidance throughout the development of *Arrest Trends*. We are also grateful for the assistance given by colleagues at the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera): Jackson Beck, Alex Boldin, Léon Digard, Chris Henrichson, Oliver Hinds, Jacob Kang-Brown, Mawia Khogali, Chris Mai, Michael Mehler, Cindy Reed, Karina Schroeder, Kinsen Siu, Ram Subramanian, and Hayne Yoon. In addition, we are grateful for the assistance given by Vera’s Policing Fellows and interns: Kristyn Jones, Matthew Stock, Vanessa D’Erasmo, and Darren Agboh. Special thanks to our external advisor, Ross Dakin, for his expertise and valuable advice. We would like to thank Teal Media, Gramener, Inc., Civic Hall Labs, and Delta.NYC for their contributions in developing *Arrest Trends*. Finally, this project would not have been possible without the support of Vera’s Capital Campaign; Elizabeth Grossman, Kevin Miller, and all of the Microsoft Cities Team; and Brianna Walden, Jordan Richardson, and everyone at the Charles Koch Foundation.
Arrest Trends

Data Sources and Methodology

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# Table of Contents

4 Introduction  
4 Background  
5 Data Sources and Methodology  
  6 Arrests  
  7 Demographics  
  7 Clearance Rates  
  8 Victimization  
  9 Data Reported  
  10 Comparisons  

11 Conclusion  
13 Appendix A: FBI-Recognized Offense Types and Definitions  
18 Appendix B: BJS-Recognized Offense Types and Definitions  
20 Appendix C: FBI and BJS Offense Type Comparisons  
21 Endnotes
Introduction

Information is needed to understand and advance policing policies and practices—especially those that promote alternatives to arrests. While evidence on policing practices is lacking in many areas, data exist that can begin to answer a number of important questions, such as:

- How many arrests are made annually across the United States, and for what?
- How do arrest trends vary across demographic groups?
- How successful are the police at solving crimes?
- How common are victimizations, and to whom are they reported?
- What gaps exist in policing data and why?

The government invests considerable resources to capture information surrounding many policing practice indicators, including civilian-police interactions, arrests and clearance rates, crime and victimization, and more. However, due to data complexities and the fact that datasets are scattered over many different locations, these key indicators are often inaccessible to those who could benefit from them most: practitioners, policymakers, advocates, researchers, journalists, and philanthropists.

In response to this need, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) has developed Arrest Trends, which unlocks this important knowledge. Arrest Trends helps answer some of the most fundamental questions about American policing, by organizing publicly available datasets into one easy-to-use data platform, where users can explore multiple related and customizable visualizations to deepen their understanding of arrests. Arrest Trends seeks to lift the narrative around American policing’s overreliance on enforcement and inspire dialogue around creative alternatives at both the local and national levels. This report provides an overview of the data sources and methodological approach that Vera employed to develop Arrest Trends.

Background

Several resources exist to aid in the analysis of policing data, including the Bureau of Justice Statistic’s (BJS) Arrests and National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) calculators; the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) Persons Arrested, Clearances, and Offenses Known to Law Enforcement Tables; and the FBI’s Crime Data Explorer, among others. These tools are beneficial in that they are efficient, relatively easy to use, and often customizable. They remain limited, though, in the following ways:
• tools are held in different locations, so users looking for comprehensive information on arrests must consult multiple resources;
• few tools offer drill-down features that allow for analysis at the national, regional, state, county, and agency levels;
• outputs are numbers-heavy and are often presented without written explanations or clear visualizations, making it difficult for users to interpret the findings;
• tools currently offer no means for comparing arrest trends across agencies or locations;
• agencies that report partial data are excluded from the majority of tools, affecting the data’s utility, accuracy, and completeness; and
• rate calculations (such as clearance rates, arrest rates, arrest rates for specific demographic groups) based on resident populations are largely absent from available tools.

One centralized and highly interactive tool—through which users can explore and understand comprehensive arrest trends at both the national and local levels—can work to address these limitations. Vera created Arrest Trends to meet this need.

Data Sources and Methodology

To construct Arrest Trends, Vera researchers located, cleaned, restructured, merged, and aggregated the following eight major data series:

• Uniform Crime Report (UCR) Arrests by Age, Sex, and Race;\textsuperscript{iii}
• UCR County-Level Detailed Arrest and Offense Data;\textsuperscript{iv}
• Arrest Data Analysis Tool National Estimates;\textsuperscript{v}
• U.S. Census Populations with Bridged Race Categories;\textsuperscript{vi}
• UCR Offenses Known and Clearances by Arrest;\textsuperscript{vii}
• National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) Victimization Analysis Tool;\textsuperscript{viii}
• Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Offenses Known to Law Enforcement; and\textsuperscript{ix}
• Law Enforcement Agency Identifiers Crosswalk.\textsuperscript{x}

These data series were used to populate interactive visualizations of the following five policing practice indicators: (1) arrests, (2) arrest demographics, (3) clearance rates, (4) victimizations, and (5) reported data. These indicators were selected for inclusion in Phase I of Arrest Trends because they help explain the extent, disparity, effectiveness, and transparency of U.S. policing arrest practices. The following sections describe how data for each of these indicators were prepared, and what information users can expect to find available within the tool itself.
Arrests

Police enforcement takes many forms including citations, summonses, warrants, and arrests. While national-level data do not yet exist for the majority of these indicators, detailed arrest data are collected and made publicly available through the FBI’s UCR program. The UCR is most widely known for providing a national picture of crime; however, it is a large and complex data series that also contains all of the arrest data voluntarily reported by each of the country’s 18,000-plus police agencies. By exploring visualizations related to this policing indicator in Arrest Trends, users can learn more about how arrest trends vary by offense type, time, and place.xi

Arrest Trends’ reported arrest data come from the “UCR Arrests by Age, Sex, and Race” data series, which covers years 1980 to 2016.xii Each individual police agency across the United States may submit their arrest data to the FBI to be included in this series. Agencies that report these data must specify the arrestee’s gender, age range, and offense type. (For a complete list and definitions of FBI-recognized offense types, see Appendix A.) Vera researchers restructured the data to:

- standardize formatting across years;
- identify true zeros (i.e., instances when zero arrests were made) versus missing values (i.e., when relevant data was not reported for inclusion in the data series);
- determine how much (i.e., how many months out of the year) of an agency’s data was reported;
- aggregate into larger crime categories (i.e., total, violent, property, Part I, Part II arrests; see Appendix A for definitions);
- redefine age ranges, to increase their usability and to comport with criminological literature;xiii
- compute arrest rate variables;xiv and
- aggregate datasets up to larger geographic levels (i.e., county, state, region, nation).

Because participation in the UCR program is optional, the FBI also generates and releases a data series that provides estimated arrest volumes, known as the “UCR County-Level Detailed Arrest and Offense Data” series.xv While these estimates are imperfect, they help users to avoid undercounting indicators—and thus underestimating the extent of—police enforcement.xvi This data series exists at the county level, covers years 1977 to 2014, and specifies arrestees’ offense types but not demographic information.xvii Vera researchers restructured the data to:

- standardize formatting across years;
- create and add aggregated crime categories;
- add arrest rate variables;xviii and
- aggregate datasets up to larger geographic levels (i.e., state and region).xix

National estimated arrest volumes were drawn from another data series—“Arrests Data Analysis Tool National Estimates”—because this series includes breakouts by arrestee offense types and
Beyond understanding the extent of police enforcement, it is also vital to consider the demographic differences—and at times, disparities—in how arrests are applied. By exploring the demographics indicator in Arrest Trends, users can learn more about the demographic groups that are most affected by arrests, and how these trends vary by offense type, time, and place.

The “UCR Arrests by Age, Sex, and Race data” series—which features information on reported arrest volumes—also includes information on arrestee demographics from 1980 to 2016. As referenced above, by default all agencies participating in the UCR program must report the gender and age range of arrestees. However, agencies can also choose to report arrestees’ race (and in some years, ethnicity). The race and ethnicity categories available in the UCR are broken down to distinguish between juveniles and adults. As the UCR program does not mandate the reporting of race and ethnicity—and, furthermore, these demographic data are not always collected during an arrest—the numbers may undercount arrest volumes, and/or not be representative of all policing practices. These data have all of the same elements as the reported arrest data series (i.e., same years, geographic levels, and crime types). However, the data does not include reported arrest rates by demographic group, as the UCR reported population data are not parsed out by demographic groups.

Again, due to issues of under- and non-reporting, it is important to consider estimated trends in arrestee demographics as well. To date, only national-level estimates of this sort exist, spanning from 1980 to 2014 as part of the “Arrests Data Analysis Tool National Estimates” series. Preparation of these datasets and the types of information available within them is described above in the “Arrests” section of this report, with the only difference being on the calculation of arrest rates. Estimated national arrest rates for individual demographic groups were calculated by Vera using “U.S. Census Populations with Bridged Race Categories data” to inform the corresponding population sizes.

Clearance Rates

According to the FBI, crimes are considered cleared by arrest (i.e., “solved”) when: “at least one person is: (a) arrested; (b) charged with the commission of the offense; and (c) turned over to the court for prosecution (whether following arrest, court summons, or police notice). Although no physical arrest is made, a clearance by arrest may also be reported when the individual is a person under 18 years of age and is cited to appear in juvenile court or before other juvenile authorities.” Clearance rates, then, reflect the volume of crime solved by arrests compared to the total volume of offenses known to the police.
Clearance rates are an important indicator to consider. While enforcement is often intended to solve, prevent, and respond to crimes, the data shows that it may not always be particularly effective in doing so. Solving crimes requires a high degree of police-community collaboration—through reporting crimes and tips, witness participation in investigations, and the like—so clearance rates are also indicative of police-community trust and collaboration. By exploring this indicator in Arrest Trends, users can learn more about both the effectiveness of American policing practices and the extent of trust and collaboration. They can also learn how clearance rates vary by offense type, time, and place.

Reported clearance rate data are provided through the “UCR Offenses Known and Clearances by Arrest data” series, which covers years 1964 to 2016. Each individual police agency across the United States may submit to the FBI data on the volume of offenses known to the agency and the volume then cleared by arrest for inclusion in this series—meaning that in some cases, agencies may also opt to submit partial or no data.

Data are broken down by offense type, and all Part I offenses (except arson) are included in this series (see Appendix A). Vera researchers restructured the data to:

- standardize formatting across years;
- identify true zeros versus missing values;
- generate an annual volume of clearances and offenses known and then convert into clearance rates;
- determine how much (i.e., how many months out of the year) of an agency’s data were reported;
- aggregate crime categories (i.e., Part I, violent, property arrests; see Appendix A); and
- aggregate datasets up to larger geographic levels (i.e., county, state, region, nation).

No publicly available data series currently exist providing estimated clearance rates. As such, only reported clearance rates are available in Arrest Trends at this time.

Victimizations

Victimizations represent another indicator through which users can explore and understand the effectiveness of police enforcement practices. As referenced above, a primary purpose of the police is to prevent, solve, and respond to crimes. However, police can only address the crimes they are made aware of and, for a variety of reasons—including poor community-police trust and cooperation—many victims choose not to report their experiences to the police. In an effort to understand the full extent of victimization in America, BJS invests significant resources in the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)—a program that surveys nationally representative samples about people’s victimization experiences, including whether they reported any victimization experiences to the police. Data from the “NCVS Victimization Analysis Tool” are incorporated into Arrest Trends so that users can observe trends in victimization reporting—and non-reporting—and how these vary by offense type, time, and place.
Data exist at both the regional and national levels for years 1993 to 2016, parsed out according to BJS-defined offense types. (For a complete list and definitions of BJS-recognized offenses, see Appendix B.)

Also included within the Arrest Trends’ victimization indicator are the FBI’s official estimates of offenses known to the police, which are made available through the “FBI Offenses Known to Law Enforcement” data series. This data series covers the same years and geographic levels as the NCVS data, and contains information on the estimated volume of crime in the United States, based on what is reported to the FBI through the UCR program. While these numbers may not exactly match the NCVS estimates of victimizations reported to the police—due largely to differences in methodological approach, crime classifications, and the UCR’s voluntary nature—trends tend to follow roughly similar patterns. Drastic differences, however, may highlight disconnect between police and community perceptions of crime and public safety priorities, which can fuel fractured relationships and ineffective policing practices.

In preparing these datasets for tool inclusion, Vera researchers reconciled differences in crime classifications across the two data series, primarily by excluding records of homicides and arson offenses from the “FBI Offenses Known to Law Enforcement” series, as NCVS does not collect comparable data. (For complete details on how Vera combined and compared crime types across data series, see Appendix C.) Again, due to methodological differences, direct comparisons across these datasets is not advisable (i.e., users should not attempt to calculate the proportion of all occurring victimizations that are ultimately known to law enforcement, as these figures come from different data sources). Rather, users are encouraged to make note of instances where drastically different trends surface (e.g., NCVS total rape victimizations appear to increase, but FBI rape offenses known to law enforcement appear to decrease), in light of what these differences in community and police perceptions of crime may mean for policing practices and priorities.

Data Reported

The need for accessible and reliable policing data is clear: it informs strategy, policy development, oversight, evidence-based practices, and more. For these reasons, the government invests significant resources into the collection of policing metrics, primarily through the FBI’s UCR program. But while these data series can provide a great deal of insight into police arrest trends, the voluntary nature of this program means that these data inherently suffer from non- and under-reporting.

For a variety of reasons—including lack of technology or resources, incompatible offense definitions, and/or fundamental issues with policing data—not all agencies report all of their data to the UCR program, though they may opt to publish their data elsewhere. This has severe consequences for the accuracy and transparency of policing data across the country, sometimes obscuring the complete picture of enforcement trends. By exploring the “data reported” indicator, Arrest Trends users can learn more about the gaps in available policing data, and how these gaps vary by time, place, and data type. The UCR program instructs agencies to report offense and arrest counts based on the month in which they occurred.
and the specific offense type. Missing and incomplete data can therefore be detected on the basis of how many months are non-existent within the series. In other words, agencies with 12 months of data reported complete data, agencies with one to 11 months of data reported partial data, and agencies with zero months of data reported no data.\textsuperscript{xxxvi} Further, throughout the tool, data are labeled as “not applicable” when relevant information was not collected by UCR at all in a given year, and “missing” when relevant information was collected by UCR but an agency did not report it.

**Arrest data:** To determine how many months of arrest data were reported by a given agency in the “UCR Arrests by Age, Sex, and Race” data series, Vera researchers summed the number of unique months present in each annual dataset associated with that agency’s identifier. This approach was complicated by the fact that, on occasion, the datasets include a line of data for a specific month and agency where the offense is categorized as ‘not applicable’—indicating that no counts were actually submitted by the agency for that month. The researchers identified and tallied these instances and then subtracted them from each agency’s total.\textsuperscript{xxxvii} When aggregating data to larger geographic units, Vera researchers calculated the average number of months reported.

**Demographics:** The same methodology was used to assess completeness of arrest demographics, which are reported through the same data series. Unlike age and gender, however, agencies can report arrest data without specifying an arrestee’s race or ethnicity. This means that, at times, only a portion of these data are made available. As such, Vera researchers created proportion variables, by dividing the volume of arrests for which race (and separately, ethnicity) data were reported by the total volume of arrests reported, as indicators of race and ethnicity data completeness. This process was repeated at each geographic level.

**Clearance rates:** To determine how many months of clearance-rate data were reported by a given agency in the “UCR Offenses Known and Clearances by Arrest” data series, Vera researchers assessed: (1) whether any data were submitted for a given month, and (2), if not, whether they were included in another months’ records. Again, for the purposes of aggregating to larger geographic levels, Vera researchers calculated the average clearance rate.

Lastly, Vera researchers verified the accuracy of their data completeness calculations by: (1) reviewing codebooks and publications; (2) communicating with representatives from the FBI, BJS, and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR); and (3) cross-validating results against other publicly available tools.\textsuperscript{xxxviii}

**Comparisons**

Another feature available within *Arrest Trends* is the ability to compare trends across various locations, times, offense types, demographic groups, and cohorts. Data for these features are drawn primarily from the “Law Enforcement Agency Identifiers Crosswalk” data series. In general, users can opt to add
additional trend lines to visuals, to compare and contrast practices. For example, an agency may be interested in learning how their clearance rates over the past 40 years compare to a similar neighboring agency’s, or a state might want to understand the rate at which police are arresting black people compared to white people. Through Arrest Trend’s “Compare” function, users can further build out visuals to answer these types of questions.

In particular, the “Compare by Cohort” function is intended to help users explore trends across nearby agencies based on user-selected characteristics, such as population size, agency type, or community type.

Based on UCR-available variables and codebooks,

- population size cohort options include:
  - <10,000,
  - 10,000-24,999,
  - 25,000-99,999, and
  - 100,000+;
- community type cohort options include:
  - metropolitan, and
  - nonmetropolitan; and
- agency type cohort options include:
  - local police department,
  - sheriff’s office,
  - state law enforcement agency,
  - special jurisdictions,
  - constable/marshal, and
  - federal.xxxix

Once users select a variable, Arrest Trends provides a list of all nearby agencies (i.e., those within the same state as the originally specified agency) which match that characteristic. Users can then select the agency or agencies that they would like to compare trends against from that list. So, if someone is using Arrest Trends to explore the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) arrest rate from 1980 to 2016, and wants to understand how it compares to other agencies serving similar population sizes, they can use the tool’s “Compare by Cohort” feature to generate a list of other agencies within California that serve populations of 100,000 or more residents. From this list, they might then choose to compare LAPD’s trends to those of the San Diego and San Jose Police Departments.

Conclusion

Arrest Trends helps to answer some of the most fundamental questions about American policing by organizing publicly available datasets into one easy-to-use data platform, through which users can access
and analyze several decades of policing data that were previously disparately located and difficult to interpret. *Arrest Trends* is a dynamic tool that, in future phases, will continue to expand in scope and recency. Foremost, at its launch, Vera hopes that this tool will further the conversation around police overreliance on arrests and inspire dialogue around creative alternatives.

Data and features will be continually updated and revised. Users are encouraged to contact ArrestTrends@vera.org with any questions, errors, or feedback.
Appendix A: FBI-Recognized Offense Types and Definitions

**Part I offenses:** These offenses are serious crimes, they occur with regularity in all areas of the country, and they are likely to be reported to police (i.e., aggravated assault, arson, burglary, criminal homicide, larceny, motor vehicle theft, rape, and robbery).

**Violent offenses:** Part I offenses which involve force or threat of force (i.e., aggravated assault, homicide, rape, and robbery).

**Aggravated assault:** An unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or great bodily harm. Simple assaults (i.e., assaults where no weapon was used or no serious injury resulted) are excluded.

**Homicide:** Includes:

1. Murder and non-negligent manslaughter—the willful (non-negligent) killing of one human being by another. Deaths caused by negligence, attempts to kill, assaults to kill, suicides, and accidental deaths are excluded. UCR classifies justifiable homicides separately and limits the definition to a) the killing of an individual—during the commission of a felony—by a law enforcement officer in the line of duty, or b) the killing of an individual—during the commission of a felony—by a private citizen.

2. Manslaughter by negligence—the killing of another person through gross negligence. Deaths of persons due to their own negligence, accidental deaths not resulting from gross negligence, and traffic fatalities are not included.

**Rape:** The FBI’s definition of rape was revised in 2013.

*Revised definition (2013-present):* Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim. Attempts or assaults to commit rape are also included; however, statutory rape and incest are excluded.

*Legacy definition (pre-2013):* Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim. Attempts or assaults to commit rape
are also included; however, statutory rape and incest are excluded. The carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will. Rapes by force and attempts or assaults to rape, regardless of the age of the victim, are included. Statutory offenses (no force used—victim under age of consent) are excluded.\textsuperscript{xlv}

**Robbery:** The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.\textsuperscript{xlvi}

**Property offenses:** Part I offenses that involve theft or property destruction (i.e., burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson).\textsuperscript{xlvii}

**Arson:** Any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another, etc.\textsuperscript{xlviii}

**Burglary:** Breaking or entering. The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or a theft. Attempted forcible entry is included.\textsuperscript{xlix}

**Larceny:** Theft (except motor vehicle theft). The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another. Examples are thefts of bicycles, motor vehicle parts and accessories, shoplifting, pocket-picking, or the stealing of any property or article that is not taken by force and violence or by fraud. Attempted larcenies are included. Embezzlement, confidence games, forgery, check fraud, etc., are excluded.\textsuperscript{l}

**Motor vehicle theft:** The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle. A motor vehicle is self-propelled and runs on land surface and not on rails. Motorboats, construction equipment, airplanes, and farming equipment are specifically excluded from this category.\textsuperscript{li}

**Part II offenses:** Offenses classified by the FBI as being less serious, for which only arrest data are collected (e.g., drug abuse violations, disorderly conduct, gambling, etc.).\textsuperscript{lii}

**Curfew and loitering:** Violations by juveniles (persons under age 18) of local curfew or loitering ordinances.\textsuperscript{liii}
**Disorderly conduct:** Any behavior that tends to disturb the public peace or decorum, scandalize the community, or shock the public sense of morality.\textsuperscript{lv}

**Driving under the influence:** Driving or operating a motor vehicle or common carrier while mentally or physically impaired as the result of consuming an alcoholic beverage or using a drug or narcotic.\textsuperscript{lv}

**Drug abuse:** The violation of laws prohibiting the production, distribution, and/or use of certain controlled substances. The unlawful cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, use, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic substance. Arrests for violations of state and local laws, specifically those relating to the unlawful possession, sale, use, growing, manufacturing, and making of narcotic drugs.\textsuperscript{vi}

**Drunkenness:** To drink alcoholic beverages to the extent that one’s mental faculties and physical coordination are substantially impaired. Driving under the influence is excluded.\textsuperscript{lvii}

**Embezzlement:** The unlawful misappropriation or misapplication by an individual to his/her own use or purpose of money, property, or some other thing of value entrusted to his/her care, custody, or control.\textsuperscript{viii}

**Forgery and counterfeiting:** The altering, copying, or imitating of something, without authority or right, with the intent to deceive or defraud by passing the copy or thing altered or imitated as that which is original or genuine; or the selling, buying, or possession of an altered, copied, or imitated thing with the intent to deceive or defraud. This category includes both attempted and completed crimes.\textsuperscript{lix}

**Fraud:** The intentional perversion of the truth for the purpose of inducing another person or other entity in reliance upon it to part with something of value or to surrender a legal right. Fraudulent conversion and obtaining of money or property by false pretenses. Confidence games and bad checks, except forgeries and counterfeiting, are included.\textsuperscript{lx}

**Gambling:** To unlawfully bet or wager money or something else of value; assist, promote, or operate a game of chance for money or some other stake; possess or transmit wagering information; manufacture, sell, purchase, possess, or transport gambling
equipment, devices, or goods; or tamper with the outcome of a sporting event or contest to gain a gambling advantage.\textsuperscript{ix}

**Liquor laws:** The violation of state or local laws or ordinances prohibiting the manufacture, sale, purchase, transportation, possession, or use of alcoholic beverages, not including driving under the influence and drunkenness. Federal violations are excluded.\textsuperscript{ixi}

**Offenses against the family and children:** Unlawful nonviolent acts by a family member (or legal guardian) that threaten the physical, mental, or economic well-being or morals of another family member and that are not classifiable as other offenses, such as assault or sex offenses. This category includes both attempted and completed crimes.\textsuperscript{xiii}

**Other non-traffic offenses:** All violations of state or local laws not specifically identified as Part I or Part II offenses, except traffic violations.\textsuperscript{xiv}

**Prostitution:** The unlawful promotion of or participation in sexual activities for profit, including attempts to solicit customers or transport persons for prostitution purposes; to own, manage, or operate a dwelling or other establishment for the purpose of providing a place where prostitution is performed; or to otherwise assist or promote prostitution. Commercialized vice included.\textsuperscript{ xv}

**Runaway:** Limited to juveniles taken into protective custody under the provisions of local statutes.\textsuperscript{xvi}

**Simple assault:** Assaults and attempted assaults where no weapon was used or no serious or aggravated injury resulted to the victim. Stalking, intimidation, coercion, and hazing are included.\textsuperscript{xvii}

**Sex offense:** Offenses against chastity, common decency, morals, and the like. Incest, indecent exposure, and statutory rape are included. This category includes both attempted and completed crimes. Forcible rape, prostitution, and commercialized vice are excluded.\textsuperscript{xviii}

**Stolen property:** Buying, receiving, possessing, selling, concealing, or transporting any property with the knowledge that it has been unlawfully taken, as by burglary,
embezzlement, fraud, larceny, robbery, etc. This category includes both attempted and completed crimes.\textsuperscript{lxix}

**Suspicion:** Arrested for no specific offense and released without formal charges being placed.\textsuperscript{lxx}

**Vagrancy:** The violation of a court order, regulation, ordinance, or law requiring the withdrawal of persons from the streets or other specified areas; prohibiting persons from remaining in an area or place in an idle or aimless manner; or prohibiting persons from going from place to place without visible means of support.\textsuperscript{lxxi}

**Vandalism:** To willfully or maliciously destroy, injure, disfigure, or deface any public or private property, real or personal, without the consent of the owner or person having custody or control by cutting, tearing, breaking, marking, painting, drawing, covering with filth, or any other such means as may be specified by local law. This category includes both attempted and completed crimes.\textsuperscript{lxxii}

**Weapons:** The violation of laws or ordinances prohibiting the manufacture, sale, purchase, transportation, possession, concealment, or use of firearms, cutting instruments, explosives, incendiary devices, or other deadly weapons. This category includes both attempted and completed crimes.\textsuperscript{lxxiii}
Appendix B: BJS-Recognized Offense Types and Definitions

**Personal victimizations:** Rape, sexual assault, personal robbery, assault, purse snatching, and pocket picking. This category includes both attempted and completed crimes.\(^{lxxiv}\)

**Serious violent victimizations:** Rape, sexual assault, personal robbery, or aggravated assault. This category includes both attempted and completed crimes. It does not include purse snatching and pocket picking. Murder is not measured by the National Crime Victimization Survey because of an inability to question the victim.\(^{lxxv}\)

**Rape / sexual assault:**

- **Rape:** Forced sexual intercourse including both psychological coercion and physical force. Forced sexual intercourse means vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by the offender(s). This category also includes incidents where the penetration is from a foreign object, such as a bottle. Includes attempted rape, male and female victims, and both heterosexual and same sex rape. Attempted rape includes verbal threats of rape.\(^{lxxvi}\)

- **Sexual Assault:** A wide range of victimizations, separate from rape or attempted rape. These crimes include attacks or attempted attacks generally involving unwanted sexual contact between victim and offender. Sexual assaults may or may not involve force and include such things as grabbing or fondling. Sexual assault also includes verbal threats.\(^{lxxvi}\)

**Robbery:** Completed or attempted theft, directly from a person, of property or cash by force or threat of force, with or without a weapon, and with or without injury.\(^{lxxvii}\)

**Aggravated assault:** An attack or attempted attack with a weapon, regardless of whether an injury occurred, and an attack without a weapon when serious injury results.\(^{lxxviii}\)

**Personal theft / larceny:** Purse snatching/pocket picking. Theft or attempted theft of property or cash directly from the victim by stealth, without force or threat of force.\(^{lxxix}\)
Household victimizations: Household victimization includes all property victimization (i.e., burglary, motor vehicle theft, and theft; both attempted and completed crimes).

Household burglary: Unlawful or forcible entry or attempted entry of a residence. This crime usually, but not always, involves theft. The illegal entry may be by force (e.g., breaking a window or slashing a screen) or may be without force (e.g., entering through an unlocked door or an open window). As long as the person entering has no legal right to be present in the structure, a burglary has occurred. Furthermore, the structure need not be the house itself for a burglary to take place; illegal entry of a garage, shed, or any other structure on the premises also constitutes household burglary. If breaking and entering occurs in a hotel or vacation residence, it is classified as a burglary for the household whose member or members were staying there at the time the entry occurred.

Motor vehicle theft: Stealing or unauthorized taking of a motor vehicle, including attempted thefts.

Theft: Completed or attempted theft of property or cash without personal contact. Incidents involving theft of property from within the sample household are classified as theft if the offender has a legal right to be in the house (e.g., a maid, delivery person, or guest). If the offender has no legal right to be in the house, the incident is classified as a burglary.
## Appendix C: FBI and BJS Offense Type Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrest Trends Offense Type</th>
<th>FBI-Recognized Offense Type</th>
<th>BJS-Recognized Offense Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Part I crimes** (excluding homicide and arson) | • Aggravated assault  
• Burglary  
• Larceny  
• Motor vehicle theft  
• Rape  
• Robbery | • Serious violent victimizations  
• Personal theft/ larceny  
• Household victimizations |
| **Violent crimes** (excluding homicide) | • Aggravated assault  
• Rape  
• Robbery | • Serious violent victimizations  
• Aggravated assault |
| Aggravated assault | • Aggravated assault  
• Rape  
• Robbery | • Aggravated assault |
| Rape | • Rape | • Rape/ sexual assault |
| Robbery | • Robbery | • Robbery |
| **Property Crimes** (excluding arson) | • Burglary  
• Larceny  
• Motor vehicle theft | • Personal theft/ larceny  
• Household victimizations |
| Burglary | • Burglary | • Household burglary |
| Larceny | • Larceny | • Personal theft/ larceny  
• Household theft |
| Motor vehicle theft | • Motor vehicle theft | • Motor vehicle theft |
Endnotes


9 Criminal Justice Information Services Division, Estimated Number of Arrests, Table 18, Crime in the United States 2015-2016, https://perma.cc/X3U3-NTZ8; and Criminal Justice Information Services Division, Estimated Number of Arrests, Table 19, Number and Rate of Arrests by Region, (Washington, DC: FBI, 2015-2016). https://perma.cc/GH5N-DKHJ.

x UCR data are difficult to merge and combine across years, as minor grammatical and spelling changes in variables from one year to the next can hinder successful matchings. This crosswalk dataset was used to circumvent some of these challenges. Unique agency identifiers (known as ORIs) exist in all UCR tables; the crosswalk is a consistent source from which detailed information (e.g., agency name, location, type, etc.) was pulled for the purpose of merging data. Separately, rarely occurring errors present in these publicly available datasets (for example, an agency mistyping “1,000 arrests” in their UCR report when “100” were actually made, or a true instance of missing data being misclassified as “0 arrests”) may also be present in this tool. See United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Law Enforcement Agency Identifiers Crosswalk United States [United States], (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2012). https://perma.cc/TP6Q-RH2P.
For all data featured in Arrest Trends, users should avoid drawing conclusions based on changes observed over one year (or generally short timeframes), as these may be indicative of naturally occurring fluctuations and/or methodological changes. Rather, users should draw inferences from changes that occur over longer timespans. For more information, see Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Data Collection: National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS): Methodology,” https://perma.cc/724R-5NZK; Bruce Fredrick, Measuring Public Safety: Responsibly Interpreting Statistics on Violent Crime (New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice, 2017); and Snyder et al., Arrests Data Analysis Tool Methodology, 2018.

United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program Data [United States]: Arrests by Age, Sex, and Race, https://perma.cc/ZZ92-HLYJ.

Age ranges were set to: 0-9 years old, 10-12, 13-15, 16-17, 18-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65+.

All Arrest Trends arrest rates are calculated as number of arrests per 100,000 residents. Reported arrest rates were calculated using UCR-reported populations, which incorporates only the populations of those agencies that reported at least partial data. These figures are helpful in comparing relative trends across geographic units, and over time in instances where population sizes have changed. However, arrest rates should be interpreted with caution, as not all people are residents of the place where they were arrested and virtually no arrests are made of youth under age 13, which may skew rates in places with particularly young populations.

United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program Data: County-Level Detailed Arrest and Offense Data [United States], https://perma.cc/KCM5-LUX9.


Note that arrest estimates are missing for 1993, as this year’s data was not publicly available through ICPSR.

County, state, and region-level estimated arrest rates were calculated using UCR-specified populations, for all agencies in that geographic unit, regardless of whether or not they reported any arrest data.

Some law enforcement agencies that report to UCR have jurisdiction over entire states. As such, the FBI inflates their county estimates to include those agencies, for aggregation purposes. To interpret county level estimates accurately, then, Vera researchers subtracted these inflation values (provided in an FBI sub-data series) from the data presented at just that geographic level.


National-level estimated arrest rates were also calculated using UCR-specified populations, for all agencies in that geographic unit, regardless of whether or not they reported any arrest data.

Races featured within this data series include white, black, Asian, and Native American, and these are available every year for which there is data (1980 to 2016). Ethnicities featured in this tool include Hispanic and Non-Hispanic, and these are available only from 1980 to 1991. Race and ethnicity data cannot be parsed by gender.

As such, clearance rates of 0 percent or 100 percent should be interpreted with caution, as these may indicate data-entry errors, missing data, or the presence of arrest clearances that pertain to offenses known from previous years. Further, the arrest of one person may clear multiple crimes, or multiple arrests may clear one offense known to law enforcement. See Federal Bureau of Investigations, Uniform Crime Reporting, *Crime in the United States*, (Washington, DC: FBI, 2016), https://perma.cc/S4EZ-D6TE.

In 2016, for example, only 22 percent of Part I offenses known to law enforcement in the United States were cleared by arrests. This trend has remained largely consistent since at least the 1960s (i.e., as far back as this data series extends).


Vera researchers applied the methodologies specified in the UCR codebook to distinguish true zeroes from missing values. However, research suggests that misclassifications (and/or data typos and incorrect submissions) that occur at the time of agency submission may still affect these data. Likewise, clearance rates of 0 percent or 100 percent should be interpreted with caution, as these may indicate data entry errors, missing data, or the presence of arrest clearances that pertain to offenses known from previous years. See Cynthia Lum, Charles Welford, Thomas Scott, and Heather Vovak, *Identifying Effective Investigative Practices: A National Study Using Trajectory Analysis*, (Fairfax, VA: Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, George Mason University, 2016).

Clearance rates are aggregated up to larger geographic units, through a population size weighted averaging process.

According to UCR codebooks, agencies can opt not to report clearance rate data to the UCR for any given month. However, for those months that they do report, they must provide complete information on all offenses, both known and cleared. Clearance rates should therefore be relatively unaffected by missing data. See United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reporting Program Data [United States]: Offenses Known and Clearances by Arrest*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1980-2016), https://perma.cc/E6FS-DHTQ.


Users should note some inconsistencies in the data. Per BJS: “In 2006 and 2016, the NCVS sample was redesigned to reflect changes in the population based on the most recent Decennial Census. The redesign impacted the comparability of 2006 and 2016 estimates to prior years of data. Use caution when comparing 2006 and 2016 estimates to other years.” See: Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Data Collection: National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS): Methodology,” https://perma.cc/KB3M-AITJ.

Division, *Estimated Number of Arrests, Table 19, Number and Rate of Arrests by Region*, https://perma.cc/598N-LUDL.


xxv Some agencies make their data publicly available through individual departmental websites or via other means but not through UCR, meaning that their data are transparent, but not included in national records or *Arrest Trends*.

xxvi Note that “months reported” was calculated and validated using publicly available data, which may not reliably a) indicate when multiple agencies report their data together, or b) specify months in accordance with UCR reporting instructions.

xxvii For the 2016 data, the step of subtracting months with missing offense codes was skipped to resolve a coding discrepancy that arose from a redesign of the data series.


xxix Population size classifications are determined using the UCR’s “U_POPGRP” variable; community types are determined using the “U_POP_GRP” and “FMSA” variables; and agency type is determined using the “AGENCYTYPE” variable. Metropolitan is defined by the FBI as “locales that include a principal city or urbanized area with a population of 50,000+ (i.e., metropolitan statistical areas, MSAs).” and nonmetropolitan is defined as “Locales that consist mostly of unincorporated areas and do not include a principal city or urbanized area with a population of 50,000+ (i.e., nonmetropolitan statistical areas, non-MSAs).” See U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Area Definitions,” https://perma.cc/BX9Z-NNMN.

xx Agency-to-agency comparisons are not restricted by state boundaries, as users can manually add more comparison agencies by name using the “Compare by Location” feature, instead of “Compare by Cohort,” if desired.


xlv Ibid.


Ibid.

II Ibid.


Ibid. UCR stopped collecting data on runaway offenses in 2010.