

Violent Crime Continues to Drop

Slight Decline in First Half of Year Extends Nine-Year Trend

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Violent crime dropped 1.3 percent in the first six months of this year and the volume of crime overall declined slightly, the FBI reported yesterday.

The drop in violent crime continued a nine-year trend of fewer serious crimes, but the decline was less dramatic than in recent years.

Murders were reported up 0.3 percent in the first half of this year, after dropping 1.1 percent in 2000. Robberies rose 0.8 percent, but rapes declined 1.7 percent and aggravated assaults fell 2.4 percent between January and June of this year, when compared to the same period in 2000.

Overall, crime was down 0.3 percent. Property crimes, including burglary and car theft, fell 0.2 percent.

Crime in the District of Columbia dropped 6.7 percent, including a sharp decrease in the number of homicides -- from 126 in the first half of 2000 to 85 for the same period this year, according to the report. However, the murder rate has jumped since Sept. 11, local officials say. The FBI report also shows that the number of reported rapes in the District increased from 118 to 129, and the number of robberies was up substantially, the statistics show.

Crime varied by region. It fell by 4 percent in the Northeast and 2 percent in the Midwest, while it rose by 1.6 percent in the West and 0.8 percent in the South.

The semiannual report by the FBI is a preliminary snapshot of crime in the United States during the first half of the year. Last year crime fell slightly, and many criminologists forecast that crime rates would begin to rise this year after dropping during the 1990s, a period of vibrant economic growth.

With the economic downturn that was exacerbated by the attacks of Sept. 11, crime will likely begin to increase, they say.

"We have already begun seeing crime go up in Los Angeles, Boston and other cities," said James Alan Fox, a criminal justice professor at Northeastern University in Boston. "This signals we shouldn't count on crime dropping much more."

In its 2000 crime report, the FBI said law enforcement agencies reported 11.6 million serious crimes, a 0.2 percent drop from 1999. The number of violent crimes reported was 1.4 million, a 0.1 percent drop from 1999.

The FBI crime report is based on data reported voluntarily from 17,000 local and state law enforcement agencies, which represent 94 percent of the U.S. population.

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