

TELEMASP BULLETIN

TEXAS LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM

February 1999

Vol. 5, No. 11

Why the Drop In Crime?

Part II

Recent Trends

This Bulletin is the second in a series explaining the recent drop in crime and the role played by police agencies.

UCR Trends

By 1991, crime as measured by the UCR was at all-time highs. Overall, the UCR crime rate nearly tripled from 1960 to 1975. If we are now in an unprecedented period of a drop in the crime rate, from 1960 to 1975 we were in an unprecedented period of increase in the crime rate. An analysis of the phenomenal increase from 1960 to 1975 is beyond the scope of this Bulletin. It should be noted that part of the increase may be attributed to better police reporting of offenses. At the same time, the homicide rate paralleled increases in other offense categories, a statistic not subject to much variation in reporting. Hence, it is assumed that nearly all of the increase was real. The UCR rate was relatively stable from 1975 to 1985, then increased again (by 13%) between 1985 and 1991. See Figures 1 through 3.

NCVS Trends

In contrast to the Uniform Crime Reports, the National Crime Victimization Survey shows a gradual decrease in property crime, except auto theft, from 1973 to 1992. There was a slight increase in violent crime during the same period. Between 1993 and 1994, the NCVS recorded a 4.5 percent decrease in property crime, and a slight decrease in violent crime. From 1994 to 1995, the NCVS recorded a 9 percent decrease in property crime, and a phenomenal 12 percent decrease in violent crime. See Figures 4 through 11.

Discrepancies between the UCR and NCVS

By and large, the UCR and NCVS have tracked one another reasonably well. They do not, however, correlate perfectly. The National Crime Victimization Survey has shown a fairly steady decrease in burglary and theft since 1973, a trend not reflected in the UCR until 1991. The UCR showed a fairly substantial increase in violent crimes during the late 1980s, while the National Crime Victimization Survey showed only a slight rise. Both, however, show substantial decreases in the 1990s.

The most obvious explanation for the 13 percent rise in the UCR in the late 1980s, as compared to a relatively flat NCVS, is police recording. It is possible that reporting increased, particularly in sexual assault, but that does not likely account for all differences. It is also possible, but very unlikely, that the differences in crime targets measured by the two programs account for some differences. Obviously, the National Crime Victimization Survey does not measure crime against businesses, and that category of crime could have been increasing in the late 1980s while personal crime remained relatively flat. Both show increases in motor vehicle theft in the 1980s. Both have shown increases in

**Special Bulletin
Co-Sponsored by the
Texas Regional Community
Policing Institute**

*Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas
Texas Regional Community Policing Institute*

Preliminary 1998 Crime Data

At the date of publication of this Bulletin, only UCR preliminary figures for 1998 were available. The F.B.I. indicates that, nationwide, Part I crimes in 1998 decreased 7 percent from 1997. By category, preliminary data represent decreases of:

Murder	-8%
Sexual Assault	-5%
Aggravated Assault	-5%
Robbery	-11%
Burglary	-7%
Motor Vehicle Theft	-10%
Larceny	-6%

DPS estimates that crime declined statewide in Texas by 5.2% in 1998. Among Texas' major cities for which data were available, decreases were the norm.

City	Crime Index Total	
	1997	1998
Dallas	100,624	100,594
El Paso	42,649	35,787
Fort Worth	34,972	35,491
Houston	130,844	127,817

Note that the city data are crime index total offenses, not offense rates. Continuing population growth will mean rates will fall more than the percent change in the raw index number.

violent crime in the late 1980s, and both showed decreases in both violent and property crime in the 1990s. It is likely that the differences in sexual assault rates are due to increased reporting of these offenses to the police, such that the UCR was showing some increase while the NCVS remained flat or actually decreased. Differences in burglary and theft rates are, more than likely, due to variation in reporting and recording in UCR. The bottom line, however, is that the decrease in crime in the 1990s, most frequently cited from UCR statistics, is verified by the National Crime Victimization Survey. That is to say, the decrease is real, not an artifact of reporting or recording. The real incidence of crime is down.

Recent Crime Trends in Texas

Figure 12 charts the statewide UCR rate in Texas from 1990 through 1997 (most recent data available). Note the dramatic decrease between 1991 and 1994. Examination of Figure 12 would seem to indicate that crime has leveled off within the state. However, because the figure depicts the overall rate, it is somewhat misleading. Earlier, the fact was mentioned that theft by its sheer numbers (58% of the UCR Part I total) overwhelms the overall UCR Part I statistic. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the changes in the UCR rate between 1995 and 1997 by category. Note that in the last two year period, violent crime has dropped 9 percent. Burglary is down 3 percent. Motor vehicle theft is down nearly 5 percent. Murder is down a phenomenal 24.4 percent. Robbery has dropped nearly 13 percent. While the UCR total has only dropped 3.6 percent over the last two years, crimes of greatest concern have dropped much more. It is the relative leveling in the theft statistics which has leveled the overall UCR Part I rate. Stated simply, crimes of greatest import continue to drop substantially in the state.

Overall, the drop has been a statewide phenomenon. Figure 13 depicts the statewide percent decrease followed the relative percent drop in the Metropolitan Statistical Areas of Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio. Note that the drop in major metropolitan areas has been larger than the statewide drop; crime is going down faster in the major cities in Texas than in smaller towns and rural areas. Figure 14 depicts the crime rate trends by year for the same Metropolitan Statistical Areas. Note that whatever is happening is happening by and large consistently across the state. That is, we do not have a precipitous drop in one metropolitan area in one year while crime was going up in another.

Once again, however, one must be careful about over-generalizing. If one examines individual cities, rather than our major metropolitan areas in aggregate, a different picture emerges. Table 2 contains data regarding the change from 1996 to 1997 in UCR Part I rates among selected pairs of Texas cities. In the Panhandle, while the crime dropped by

nearly 8 percent in Amarillo, it only went down by 1.4 percent in Lubbock. In the Valley, crime dropped twice as much in McAllen as in Brownsville. In the Metroplex, Fort Worth continued to experience substantial drops (10%), while the rate in Dallas actually crept up slightly. More dramatically, in Garland, crime went down 9 percent while it went up 8 percent down LBJ Loop in Grand Prairie. Similarly, like-size cities in Central Texas—Killeen and San Angelo—saw crime moving in different directions. Longview and Tyler, often compared with one another, also saw crime moving in opposite directions. Thus, one must be a bit cautious before asserting that whatever is happening with regard to crime rates is happening with absolute uniformity across the state, and, by extrapolation, certainly across the nation.

Summary

The phenomenon we have experienced since 1991 is unprecedented in the professional lives of everyone reading this Bulletin. If in the late 1980s someone would have predicted that crime in the 1990s was going to fall by a third, one has to doubt that the prediction would have been greeted with much credibility. In upcoming Bulletins, the potential explanations of this phenomenal change will be examined in greater detail. However, the *TELEMASP Bulletin Series* is not a mystery novel, and we don't want to be coy about the outcome. Hence, it needs to be restated at the outset that the drop in crime is likely a combination of a good economy, increased prison capacity, and proactive police efforts. Social demographic trends and the prevalence of drug use appear to be largely irrelevant. Of prime importance to the readership of the *TELEMASP Bulletin Series*, all indications are that the police do make a difference. Police efforts have accounted for at least part of the drop in crime. We will return to this issue in the epilogue contained in the final bulletin in this series.

References

- Bureau of Justice Statistics. (January 1999). *Additional Crime Facts at a Glance*. On-line: <http://www.ojp.usoj.gov/bjs/gvc.htm#violence>.
- Caeti, T. and Hoover, L. (December 1994). "Crime Specific Policing in Houston." *Texas Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics Program Bulletin*, 1:9.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. (Annual). *Crime in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Uniform Crime Reports 1998 Preliminary Annual Release*. On-line: <http://www.fbi.gov>.

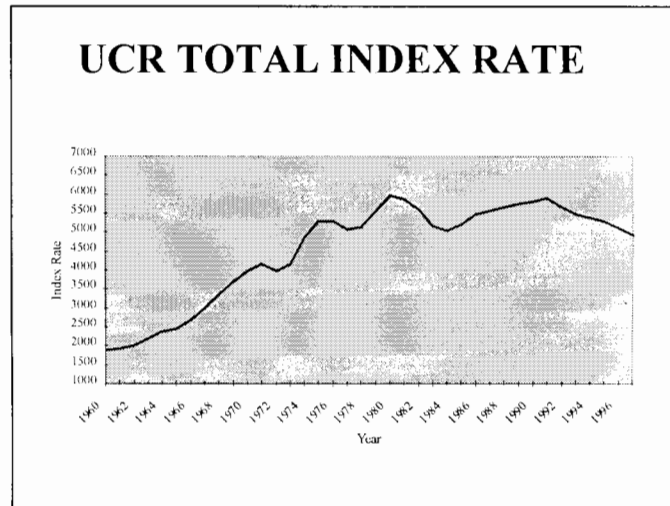


Figure 1

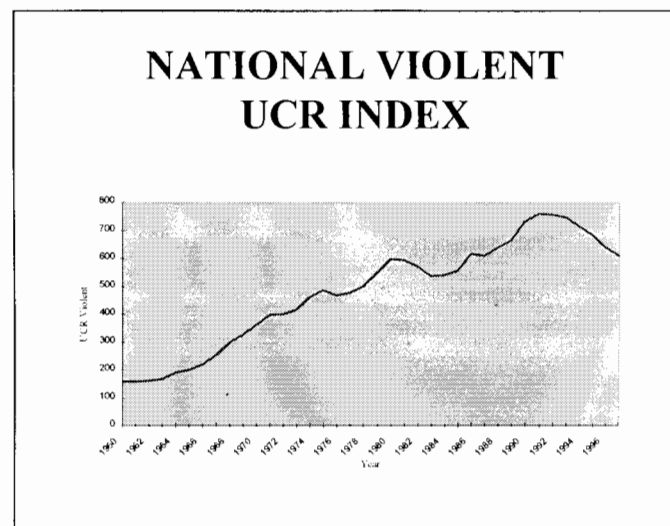


Figure 2

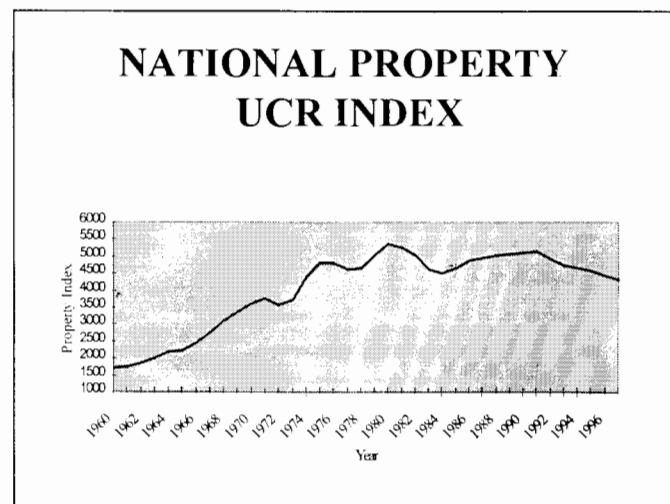


Figure 3

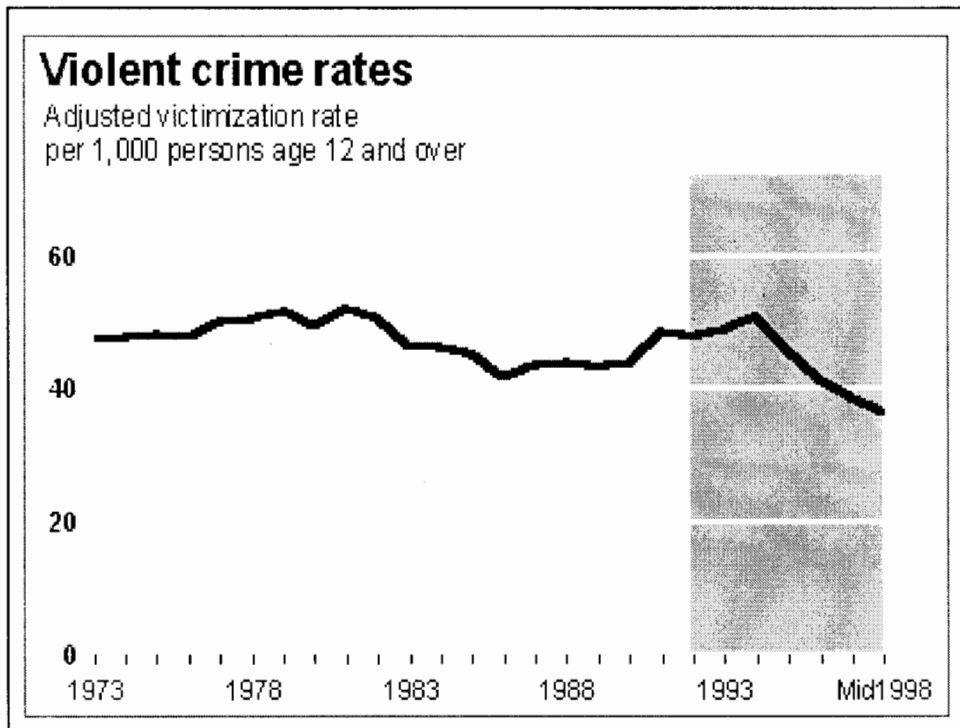


Figure 4

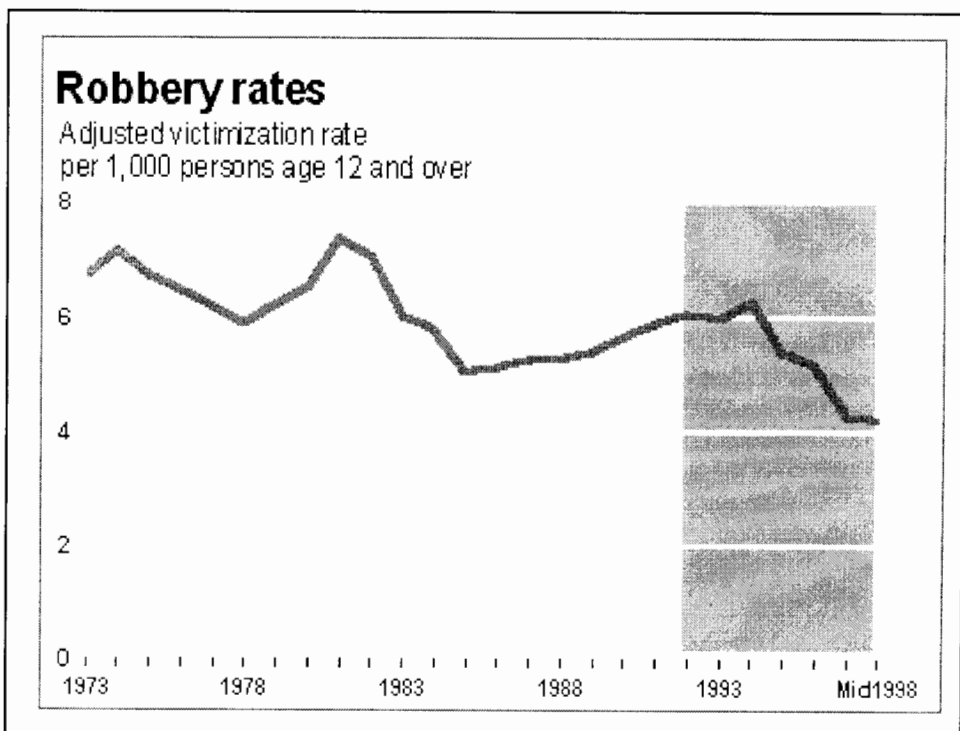


Figure 5

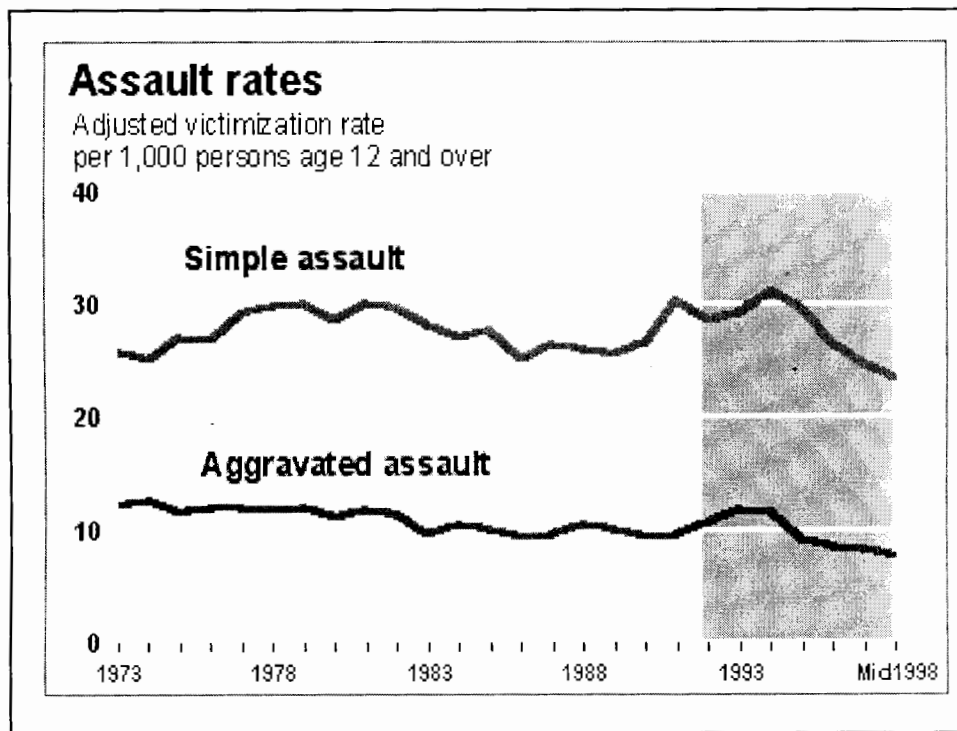


Figure 6

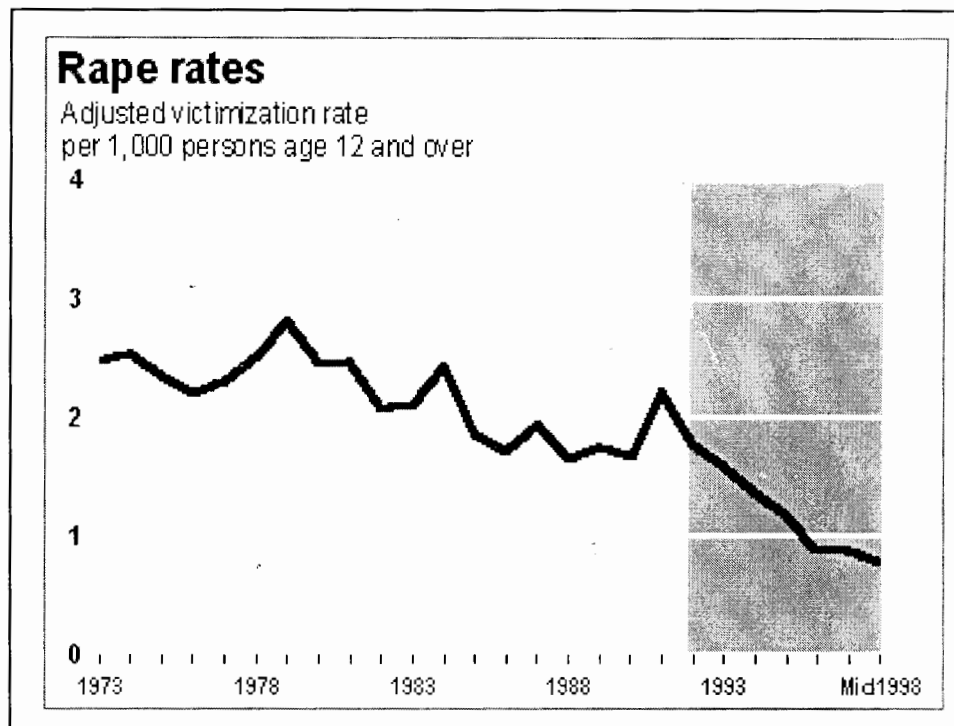


Figure 7

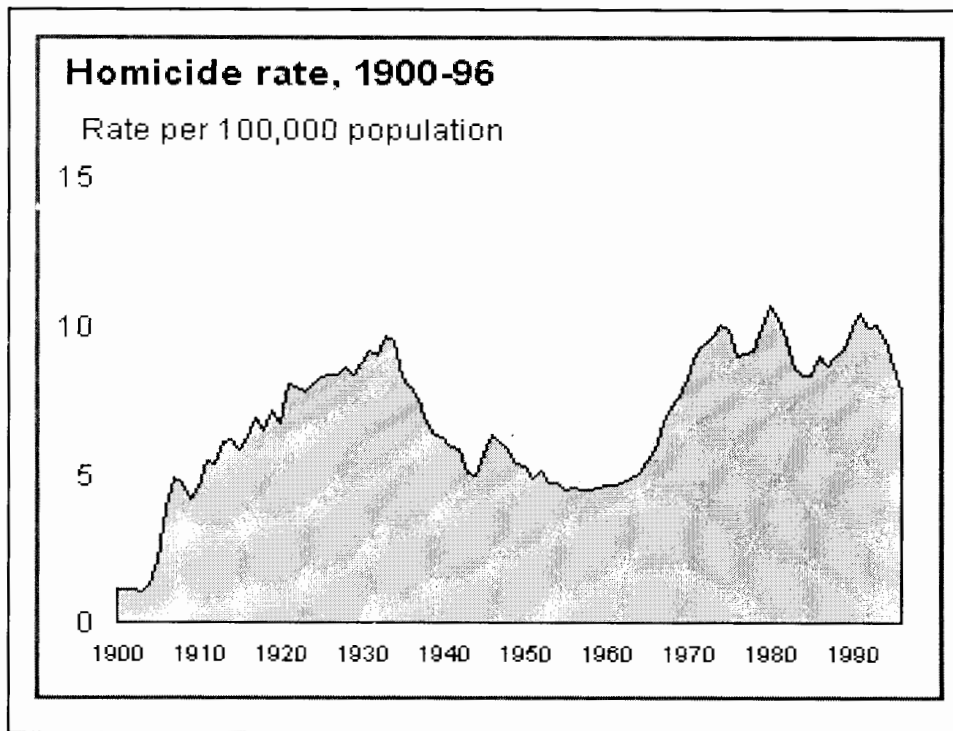


Figure 8

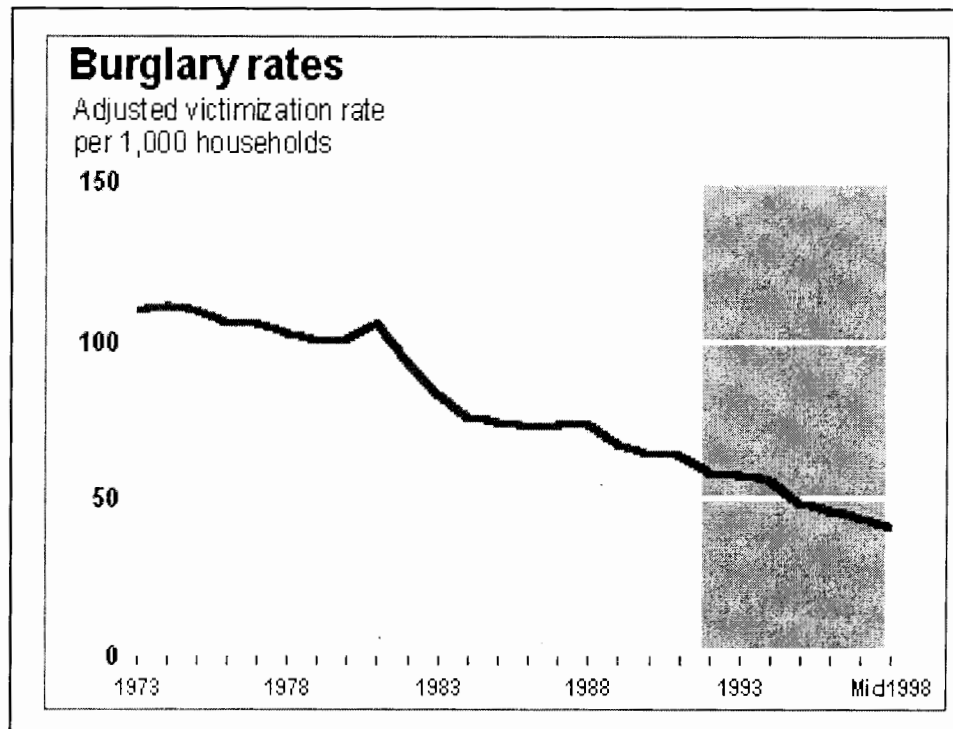


Figure 9

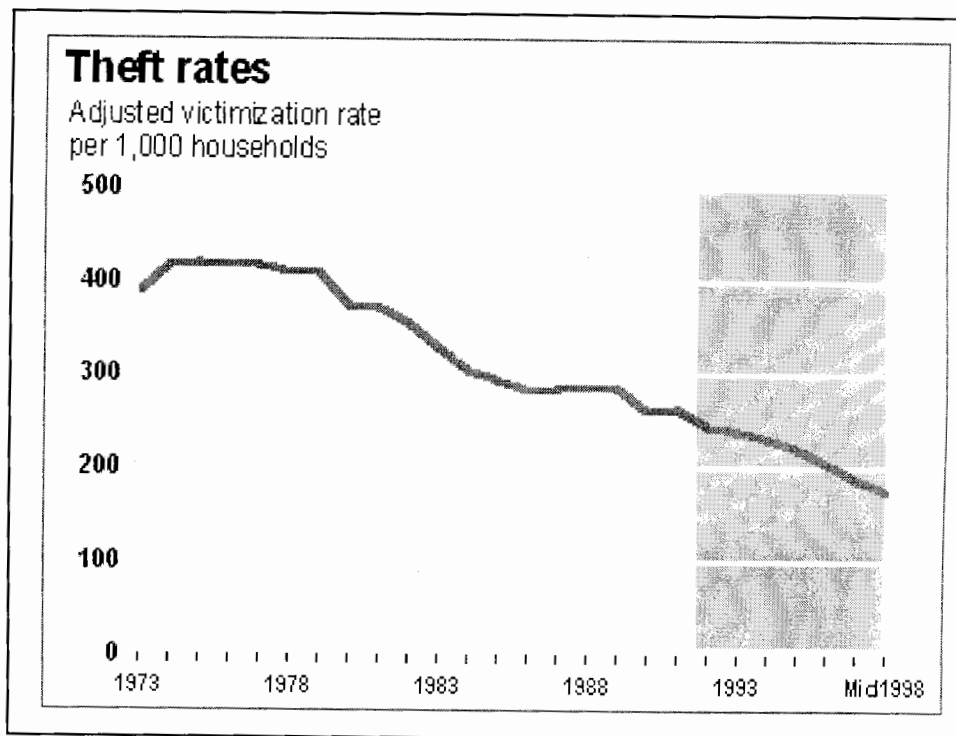


Figure 10

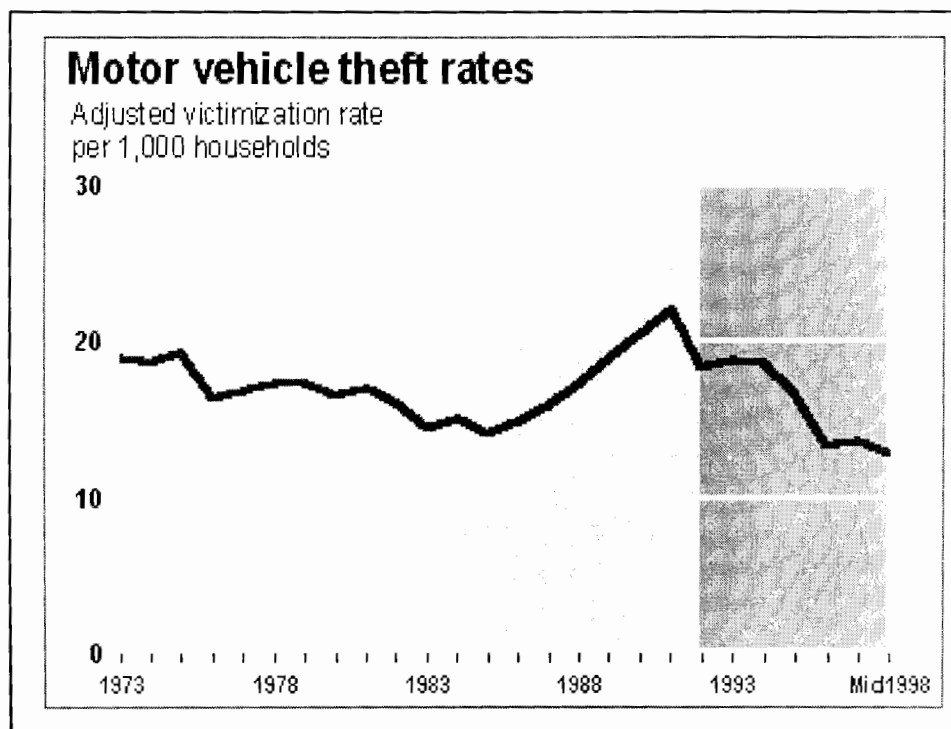


Figure 11

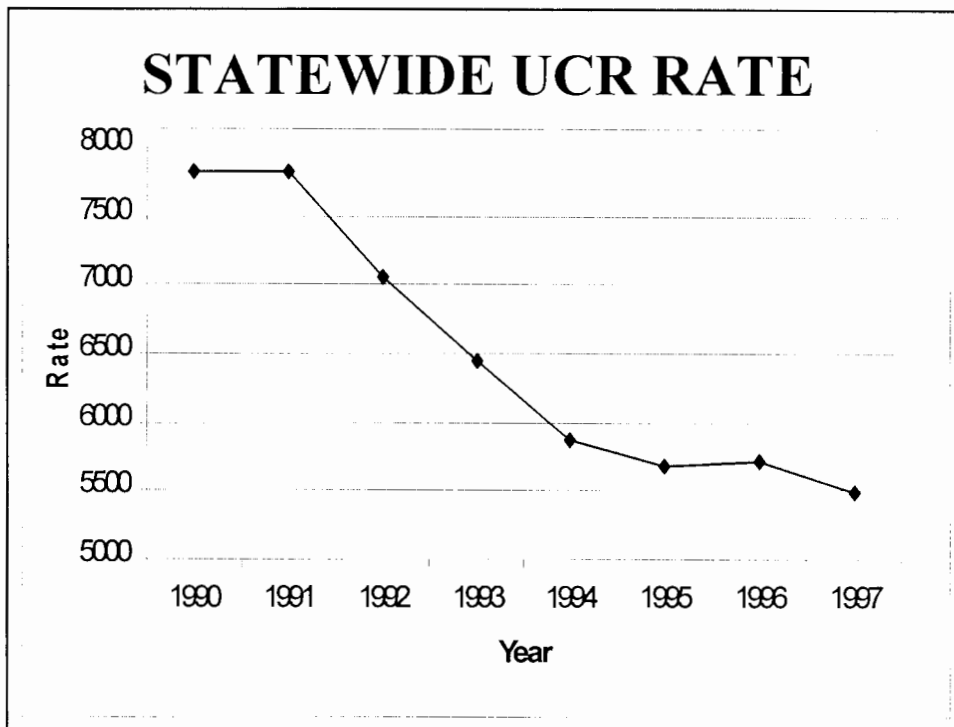


Figure 12

Table 1

Texas Crime Rate by Offense

Offense	1997	1995	1995-97
Murder	6.8	9.0	-24.4%
Rape	41.2	45.5	-9.5%
Robbery	157.0	179.8	-12.7%
Aggravated	397.5	429.3	-7.4%
Violent Total	602.5	663.7	-9.2%
Burglary	1,034.3	1,068.3	-3.2%
Theft	3,320.4	3,447.3	-3.7%
Motor Vehicle	523.3	548.6	-4.6%
Property Total	4,878.0	5,064.1	-3.7%
TOTAL	5,480.5	5,684.5	-3.6%

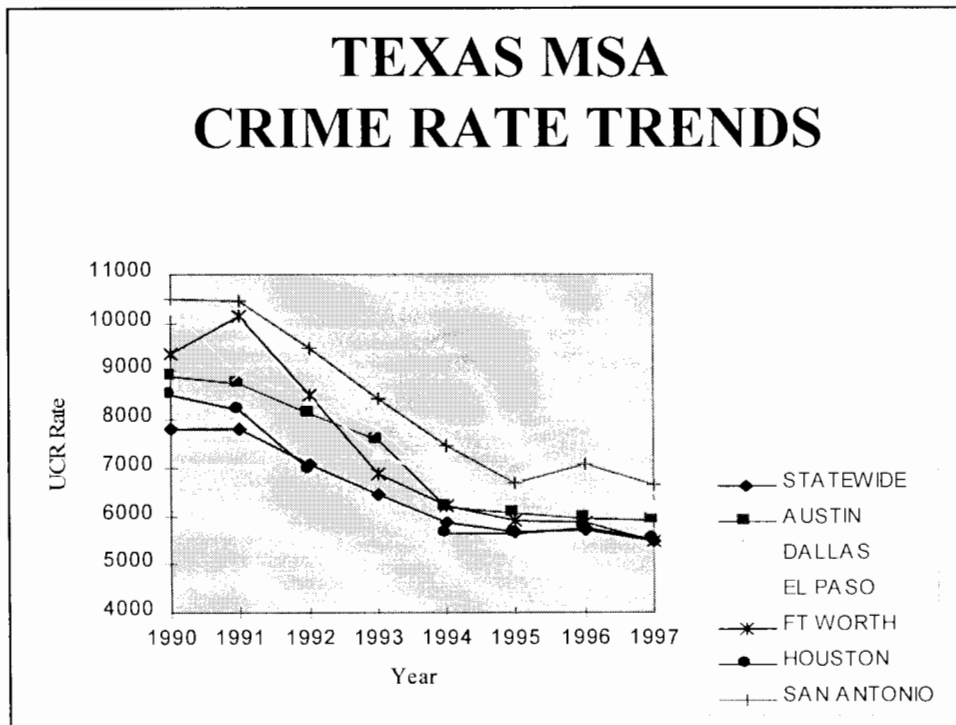


Figure 13

Table 2

Change From 1996 to 1997 Selected Texas Cities

Amarillo	-7.8%	Garland	-8.9%
Lubbock	-1.4%	Grand Prairie	+8.2%
Brownsville	-6.3%	Killeen	+2.4%
McAllen	-13.3%	San Angelo	-6.3%
Dallas	+0.2%	Longview	-9.0%
Fort Worth	-10.1%	Tyler	+4.1%

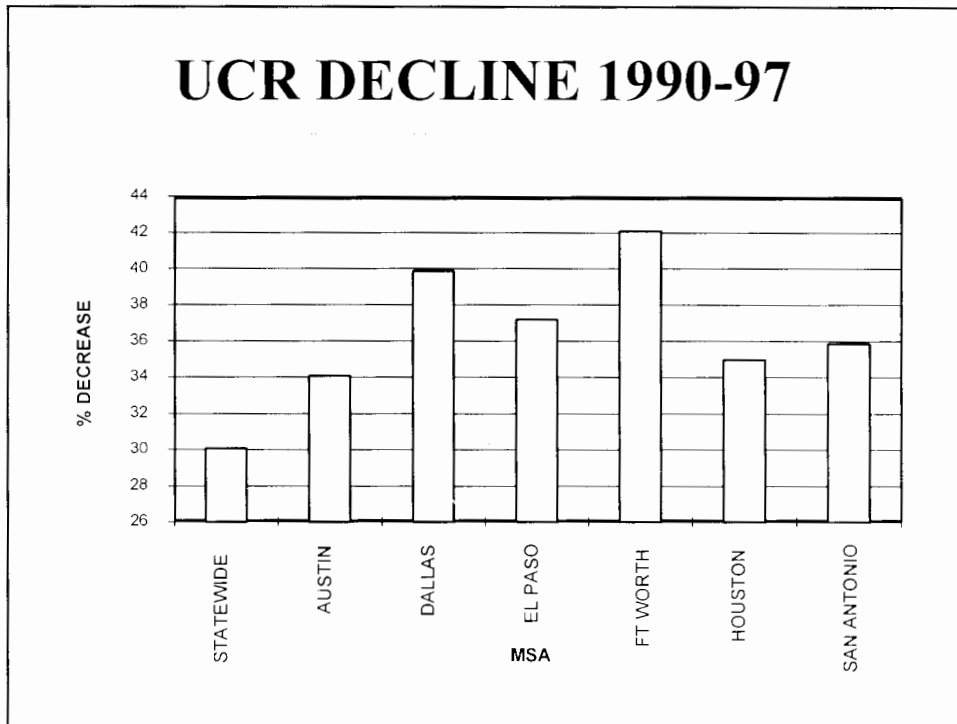
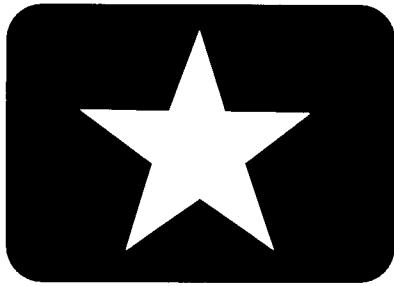


Figure 14

This project was co-sponsored by cooperative agreement #97-CK-WX-0020 awarded by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice



BILL BLACKWOOD

Law
Enforcement
Management
Institute of
Texas

Randy Garner, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Kay Billingsley
Publications Manager

For information about LEMIT
programs, call (800) 477-9248

TELEMASP Monthly Bulletins,
ISSN 1075-3702, are produced
under an agreement with the

Police Research Center

Sam Houston State University
Larry T. Hoover, Ph.D., Director
Jamie L. Tillerson, Program Manager

For information about TELEMASP
Bulletins, call (409) 294-1704

This bulletin was authored by Dr. Larry Hoover,
Director of the Police Research Center at Sam
Houston State University, Editor of the
TELEMASP Bulletin Series.



A Member of The Texas State University System

**Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement
Management Institute of Texas**

Criminal Justice Center
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, TX 77341-2296

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 26
Huntsville
Texas