



# Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

# Households Touched by Crime, 1986

One-fourth of the Nation's households were touched by a crime of violence or theft in 1986, the same proportion as in 1985 and well below the third of all households touched by crime in 1975, the first year for which the measure is available. There were no measurable differences in 1986 from 1985 in the percentages of households touched by any of the crimes measured: rape, robbery, assault, personal theft, household burglary, household theft, and motor vehicle theft (table 1).

The term "household" as used in this report refers to a dwelling unit (usually a house or apartment) and the people who occupy it. A household is considered "touched by crime" if during the year it experienced a burglary, auto theft, or household theft or if a household member was raped, robbed, or assaulted, or was a victim of personal theft, no matter where the crime occurred. These offenses, which include attempted as well as completed crimes, are measured by the National Crime Survey (NCS), the source of this report.

Five percent of the households in the Nation had a member who was the victim of a violent crime in 1986. Five percent of all households were burglarized at least once during the year. Seventeen percent of all households had a completed or attempted theft during the year.

In 1986, households with high incomes, households in urban areas, and black households were more vulnerable to crime than others. During 1986, 27% of black households, 28% of households with incomes of \$25,000 or more, and

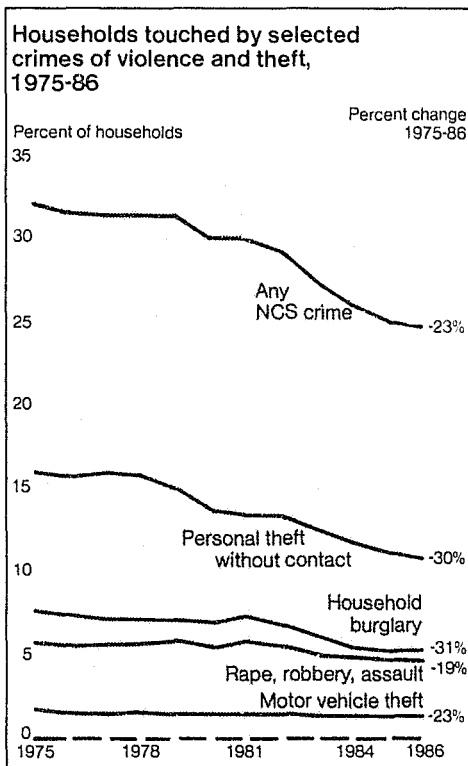


Figure 1

29% of urban households were touched by crime.

For the first time, the survey can examine the regional differences among households touched by crime. Households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crime in 1986 (19%), while those in the West were the most vulnerable (30%). About 25% of the households in the Midwest and South were touched by crime in 1986.

June 1987

"Households Touched by Crime, 1986," marks the seventh year that BJS has published this bulletin. As in 1985, last year 1 in 4 American households experienced a rape, robbery, assault, burglary, or theft. Although this finding reflects the high level of crime in the United States, it is well below the almost 1 in 3 households touched by crime a decade ago.

This year, for the first time, we are able to present victimization data by the ethnicity and region of the household. Our continuing efforts to improve the National Crime Survey's data on criminal victimization will be, we hope, a useful tool in our common effort to achieve additional reductions in crime in the next decade.

Steven R. Schlesinger  
Director

### Trends

1986 was the first year since 1981 in which the percentage of households touched by crime did not decrease significantly from the previous year (figure 1). Since its inception in 1975, the proportion of households touched by crime has never shown a year-to-year increase. More than a million fewer households were touched by crime in 1986 than were touched by crime 12 years earlier, despite an increase of about 17 million households in the Nation (table 2).

**Table 1. Households touched by crime, 1986 and relative percent change since 1985**

Households	1985		1986		Relative percent change 1985-86*
	Number of households	Percent	Number of households	Percent	
Total	88,852,000	100.0%	90,014,000	100.0%	
Touched by					
Any NCS crime	22,191,000	25.0	22,201,000	24.7	-1.4%
Violent crime	4,302,000	4.8	4,225,000	4.7	-3.1
Rape	125,000	.1	121,000	.1	-7.0
Robbery	832,000	.9	843,000	.9	0.0
Assault	3,567,000	4.0	3,464,000	3.8	-4.2
Aggravated	1,309,000	1.5	1,253,000	1.4	-5.4
Simple	2,492,000	2.8	2,408,000	2.7	-5.0
Total theft	15,699,000	17.7	15,582,000	17.3	-2.0
Personal	10,232,000	11.5	10,098,000	11.2	-1.7
with contact	439,000	.5	474,000	.5	+8.2
without contact	9,910,000	11.2	9,717,000	10.8	-3.0
Household	7,240,000	8.1	7,238,000	8.0	-1.3
Burglary	4,713,000	5.3	4,778,000	5.3	+2
Motor vehicle theft	1,201,000	1.4	1,216,000	1.4	0.0
Crimes of high concern (a rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger, or a burglary)	6,876,000	7.8	6,914,000	7.7	-1.5

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes. Relative percent change is based on unrounded figures. Estimates for robbery and assault for 1985 differ slightly from those published in *Households Touched by Crime, 1985* due to changes in classification of crimes committed during commercial robberies (see Methodology). \*No changes were statistically significant at the 90% level.

There is some evidence that since 1975 white households have enjoyed a larger decline in the percentage of households touched by crime than black households (figure 2). During that time the proportion of white households touched by crime fell by 24%, compared to a 16% decline for black households.

This overall difference in the trends for white and black households is caused primarily by differences in the trends for household theft and motor vehicle theft. White and black households had similar trends between 1975 and 1986 for violent crime, personal theft, and burglary. However, while the proportions of white households victimized by household theft and motor vehicle theft decreased between 1975 and 1986, the proportions of black households victimized by these crimes did not change significantly during this period.

#### 1985-86 comparisons

White households, black households, and households with incomes under \$15,000 were touched by crime to the same extent in 1986 as in 1985. The percentage of households with incomes of \$25,000 or more touched by crime was somewhat lower in 1986 than in the previous year, the result of a decrease in the percentage of such households touched by personal theft without contact. There are also indications that a smaller percentage of households with

incomes between \$7,500 and \$15,000 were victimized by personal theft without contact in 1986, although the decrease was not great enough to result in an overall decrease in the percentage of these households being touched by crime.

#### Race and ethnicity of household

A higher percentage of black households than white or other minority race households (Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans) were touched by crime in 1986 (table 3).<sup>1</sup> Black households were more vulnerable than white households to household theft and burglary, and somewhat more vulnerable to violent crime. White households were more vulnerable than black households to personal theft. When personal and household thefts were combined, there was no measurable difference in the proportions of black and white households victimized. Other minority race households were less vulnerable than black households to the crime of burglary.

Hispanic households were more vulnerable to crime than non-Hispanic households in 1986, primarily because of their greater susceptibility to robbery, burglary, household theft, and motor vehicle theft. There were no differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic households in the percentages victimized by assault or personal theft.

<sup>1</sup>For this analysis, the race of the household is considered to be that of the household head.

**Households touched by selected crimes, by race of household head, 1975-86**

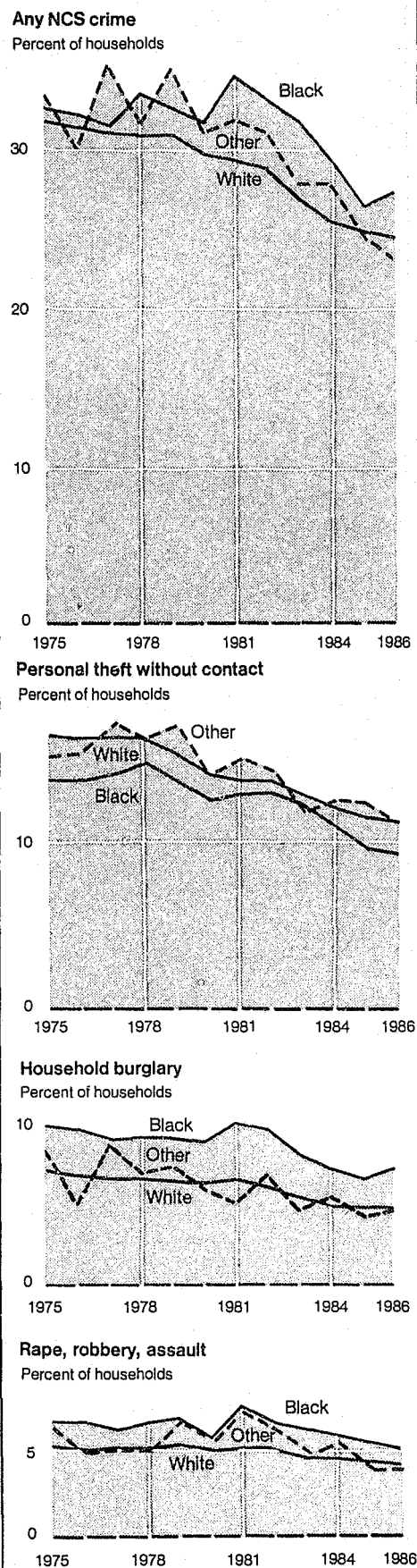


Figure 2

**Table 2. Number and percent distribution of households touched by crime, by type of crime, 1975-86**

Percent of households touched by:	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Any NCS crime	32.0%	31.5%	31.3%	31.3%	31.3%	30.0%	30.0%	29.3%	27.4%	26.0%	25.0%	24.7%
Violent crime	5.8	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.5	5.9	5.6	5.1	5.0	4.8	4.7
Rape	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.1	.2	.1	.1
Robbery	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.0	.9	.9
Assault	4.5	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.4	4.7	4.5	4.2	4.1	4.0	3.8
Personal theft	16.4	16.2	16.3	16.2	15.4	14.2	13.9	13.9	13.0	12.3	11.5	11.2
Household theft	10.2	10.3	10.2	9.9	10.8	10.4	10.2	9.6	8.9	8.5	8.1	8.0
Burglary	7.7	7.4	7.2	7.2	7.1	7.0	7.4	6.9	6.1	5.5	5.3	5.3
Motor vehicle theft	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4
Households touched by crime (in millions)	23.377	23.504	23.741	24.277	24.730	24.222	24.863	24.989	23.621	22.806	22.191	22.201
Households in U.S. (in millions)	73.123	74.528	75.904	77.578	78.964	80.622	82.797	85.178	86.146	87.791	88.852	90.014

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes. The estimate for assault for 1985 was revised from last year's report (see Methodology).

**Family income**

Households with higher incomes had greater vulnerability to crime victimization than those with lower incomes, almost entirely because of their greater vulnerability to crimes of personal theft. The percentage of households with incomes of \$25,000 and over touched by personal theft was almost twice that of households with incomes under \$7,500 (table 4). Despite differing risks for personal theft, households at all income levels appeared equally susceptible to household theft.

Households with incomes below \$7,500 experienced violent crimes and burglaries to a greater degree than did households in higher income categories.

**Table 3. Percent of households touched by crime by race and ethnicity of household head, 1986**

Percent of households touched by:	Race of household head			Ethnicity of household head	
	White	Black	Other	Non-Hispanic	Hispanic
Any NCS crime	24.4%	27.4%	23.2%	24.5%	28.1%
Violent crime	4.6	5.4	4.1	4.7	5.5
Rape	.1	.3	.1	.1	.3
Robbery	.9	1.5	1.1	.9	1.8
Assault	3.9	4.0	3.1	3.9	3.7
Aggravated	1.3	1.8	1.1	1.4	1.6
Simple	2.7	2.4	2.2	2.7	2.3
Total theft	17.4	16.8	16.8	17.3	18.3
Personal theft	11.4	10.0	11.3	11.3	10.8
Household theft	7.9	9.1	8.1	7.9	10.0
Burglary	5.0	7.6	5.0	5.2	7.3
Motor vehicle theft	1.2	2.2	1.4	1.3	2.1
Serious violent crime <sup>a</sup>	2.2	3.4	2.3	2.3	3.6
Crimes of high concern <sup>b</sup>	7.4	10.3	7.4	7.5	10.6

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes.  
<sup>a</sup>Rape, robbery, aggravated assault.  
<sup>b</sup>A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger or a burglary.

**Table 4. Percent of households touched by crime by selected characteristics, 1986**

Percent of households touched by:	Annual family income				Place of residence*			Region			
	Low Under \$7,500	Medium \$7,500- \$14,999	High \$15,000- \$24,999	High \$25,000 or more	Urban	Suburban	Rural	North- east	Mid- west	South	West
Any NCS crime	22.5%	23.1%	25.0%	27.9%	28.5%	24.2%	20.0%	18.9%	24.8%	25.1%	29.8%
Violent crime	5.6	4.8	4.6	4.6	5.5	4.5	3.9	3.7	4.9	4.6	5.6
Rape	.3	.2	.1	.1	.2	.1	.1	.1	.2	.1	.2
Robbery	1.3	1.1	.8	.8	1.4	.8	.5	.9	.9	.8	1.1
Assault	4.4	4.0	3.8	3.9	4.2	3.7	3.5	2.8	4.0	3.9	4.6
Aggravated	1.8	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.8	1.2	1.2	1.0	1.4	1.5	1.6
Simple	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.0	2.9	2.6	3.2
Total theft	14.0	15.4	18.1	20.6	19.6	17.4	13.9	12.4	17.3	17.7	21.7
Personal theft	7.9	9.1	11.7	14.4	12.3	11.7	8.7	8.4	11.6	11.4	13.3
Household theft	8.0	7.9	8.3	8.5	9.9	7.4	6.6	5.3	7.7	8.1	11.1
Burglary	6.7	5.5	5.1	5.0	6.2	4.8	4.9	3.3	5.3	5.8	6.5
Motor vehicle theft	.9	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.9	1.3	.6	1.4	1.4	1.1	1.5
Serious violent crime <sup>a</sup>	3.2	2.5	2.2	2.1	3.2	2.1	1.7	1.9	2.3	2.4	2.8
Crimes of high concern <sup>b</sup>	8.9	7.8	7.4	7.6	9.2	7.2	6.3	5.4	7.5	8.1	9.5

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes.  
<sup>a</sup>Rape, robbery, aggravated assault.  
<sup>b</sup>A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger or a burglary.  
\*These estimates are not comparable to previous years' estimates for place of residence due to changes in geographic classification (see footnote 2).

## Place of residence

As in previous years, in 1986 households in urban areas were the most susceptible to criminal victimization, while households in rural areas were the least susceptible. For most types of crime, suburban households were less vulnerable than urban households but more vulnerable than rural households. There was, however, no measurable difference between the percentage of urban and suburban households touched by personal theft; nor were there measurable differences in the percentages of suburban and rural households victimized by assault or burglary.

In 1986, 1 in 71 urban households had a member who was the victim of a robbery, compared with 1 in 125 suburban households and 1 in 200 rural households.<sup>2</sup>

## Region

Households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crime in 1986 (19%), while those in the West were the most vulnerable (30%). About 25% of the households in the Midwest and South were touched by crime in 1986.

Households in all regions were about as likely to have a member suffer a robbery or to have a motor vehicle stolen. Northeastern households were less likely than households in other regions to be victimized by theft or burglary or to have a member victimized by assault.

Western households were more vulnerable than Midwestern households to crimes of theft (22% vs. 17%) and burglary (6% vs. 5%) and were more vulnerable than Southern households to crimes of theft (22% vs. 18%) and simple assault (3.2% vs. 2.6%).

## Size of household

In general, the more people in a household, the greater is its vulnerability to crime (table 5). This tendency is more pronounced for personal crimes than for household crimes because larger households have more members at risk for personal crimes; but each household, regardless of size, is at risk for household crimes.

Vulnerability to personal crime victimization generally does not increase

<sup>2</sup>Estimates for 1986 of households in urban, suburban, and rural areas are not comparable to those of previous years. Geographic codes for 1986 estimates are based on 1980 Census definitions, while previous years are based on 1970 Census definitions. Some areas that were considered rural in 1970 were coded suburban in 1980, and some 1970 suburban areas became urban in 1980.

at a rate proportional to increases in household size. For example, in 1986, the percentage of six-or-more-person households touched by personal theft was only about three times that of one-person households.

One reason why personal crime victimization is not simply proportional to household size is that many households with 2 or more members include children under 12 years of age. Crimes against such young children are not included in the measurement of households touched by crime.<sup>3</sup> In addition, differences in demographic characteristics and lifestyles among different size households will affect the degree to which they are touched by crime because both are related to crime vulnerability.

The relationship between household size and vulnerability to crime shown in past years also held for 1986:

o Fewer than 1 in 5 single-person households were touched by crime in 1986, compared to almost 2 in 5 households with 6 or more people.

o Households with six or more members were about three times more likely than single-person households to be touched by violent crime (9% vs. 3%) and 2½ times as likely to be touched by personal or household theft (29% vs. 11%).

As in previous years, the percentages of households of different sizes touched by crime varied least for burglary. In 1986, 5% of single-person households were burglarized one or more times, compared to 7% of households with six or more members.

## Crimes of high concern

In 1986, 1 in 13 households in the Nation was burglarized or had a mem-

<sup>3</sup>Crimes against children under age 12 are excluded from the National Crime Survey because asking sensitive questions about victimization might be stressful to the child or the parents, possibly discouraging the adults' participation in the survey.

**Table 5. Percent of households touched by selected crimes, by size of household, 1986**

Percent of households touched by:	Number of persons in household			
	1	2-3	4-5	6+
Any NCS crime	17.1%	24.0%	32.7%	37.3%
Violent crime	2.9	4.4	6.6	9.1
Total theft	10.6	16.8	24.1	28.7
Personal theft	6.7	10.9	16.0	18.4
Household theft	5.0	7.8	10.8	14.9
Burglary	4.9	5.0	6.2	6.9
Motor vehicle theft	.9	1.3	1.7	2.3

ber who was the victim of a violent crime (rape, robbery, or assault) committed by a stranger. These crimes, which many people consider the most threatening, have been designated "crimes of high concern" in this report.

In 1986, as in previous years, black, low-income, and urban households were the most likely to be victims of crimes of high concern. Households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crimes of high concern, while households in the West were the most vulnerable. Similar percentages of Southern and Midwestern households were touched by crimes of high concern.

From 1981, when 10.5% of all households were touched by a crime of high concern, to 1984, the percentage of households touched by such crimes decreased steadily. It was unchanged between 1984 and 1986. There is some evidence that the decrease between 1981 and 1986 was relatively greater for black households than for white households (figure 3).

## Factors affecting trends

As discussed in previous reports, changes in American society can have an effect on the percentage of households touched by crime. How Americans live affects these estimates because this influences how crime is distributed across society.

American society is extremely mobile. People are constantly moving into and out of different households, creating new households, and merging existing households. For some time the population has been moving away from urban areas into suburban and rural areas. Between 1975 and 1985 the percentage of households located in urban areas fell from 32% to 29% of all households, while suburban and rural households increased from 68% to 71% of all American households.

During the 1975-86 period the average American household has decreased in size. One-person households represented 21% of all households in 1975, but 24% in 1986. The percentage of households containing six or more people fell from 7% to 4% during this period. These movements shift population from households more vulnerable to crime--larger ones and those in urban areas--to those less vulnerable--smaller ones and those in suburban or rural areas.

The percentage of households touched by crime is probably lower than it would have been had these population

**Households touched by crimes of high concern, by race of household head, 1981-86**

(A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger or a household burglary)

Percent of households

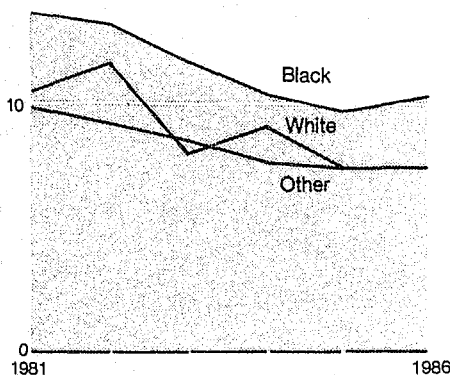


Figure 3

shifts not occurred. For example, if the size distribution of American households had been the same in 1986 as in 1975, then the estimate of households touched by crime would have been 25.5% rather than 25.0%.<sup>4</sup> This adjusted estimate, however, is still significantly below the 1975 estimate of 32.0% of households touched by crime.

**Methodology**

The households-touched-by-crime indicator was developed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1981 to improve our understanding of the impact of crime on our society.<sup>5</sup> The household was chosen as the unit of analysis because crimes such as burglary are crimes against an entire household and crimes against persons affect not only the victim but also members of the victim's household.

Households-touched-by-crime estimates are derived from National Crime Survey (NCS) statistics on rape, personal robbery, assault, household burglary, personal and household theft, and motor vehicle theft.<sup>6</sup> Because the NCS counts only crimes for which the victim can be interviewed, homicide is not counted. Its exclusion does not

noticeably affect the estimates. If each of the homicides during 1986 had touched a different household and if these households had been touched by no other crime (the largest possible effect), then the inclusion of homicides in these findings would not have raised the overall percentage of households touched by crime (24.7%) by as much as 0.05%.

Other crimes against persons or their households such as fraud, confidence games, kidnaping, and arson are not included in this analysis because they are not measured by the NCS.

Traditional measures of crime are in the form of volumes or rates. Data on the volume of crime have limited usefulness because the size of the population is not taken into account. Rates—expressed in the NCS as crimes per 1,000 households or per 1,000 persons—automatically correct for different population sizes, but they do not show whether a given amount of crime is widely spread or highly concentrated within a limited population.

For each type of crime examined, a household is counted only once regardless of how many times that household was victimized. For example, if a household was burglarized twice and one of its members robbed once during the year, it is counted once for households touched by burglary even though it was victimized twice by burglary. It is also counted once for households touched by robbery. Finally, it is counted once in the overall measure, households touched by crime.

Consequently, the households-touched-by-crime estimate for 1986 (24.7%) is less than the sum of the estimates for households touched by personal crimes (14.6%) and those touched by household crimes (13.5%) because 3.4% of U.S. households were victims of both personal and household crimes. Similarly, because about 1.3% of the U.S. households were touched by both personal theft and violence, the sum of households touched by personal theft (11.2%) and those touched by violence (4.7%) exceeds the estimate of those touched by personal crime (14.6%).

<sup>7</sup>Preliminary estimates for 1986 indicate that homicides increased by 9% from the 18,976 that occurred in 1985 (*Uniform Crime Reports*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1986).

All data in this bulletin are from the National Crime Survey except those specifically attributed to other sources. The NCS is an ongoing survey conducted for the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Interviews are conducted at 6-month intervals with all occupants age 12 and over in about 49,000 housing units (101,000 persons). Because the NCS does not obtain information about crimes against persons under age 12, households experiencing only these crimes are not included in the estimate of households touched by crime.

For 1986 the NCS crime classification protocol was changed to improve classification of crimes occurring during commercial robberies. Prior to 1986, persons injured during a commercial robbery but who lost no property themselves were considered to have been victimized by robbery. Such incidents are now counted as assaults. Additionally, persons threatened in commercial robberies are also now counted as victims of attempted assault. Previously these incidents were excluded. Estimates for 1985 in this report have been adjusted to be equivalent to the 1986 estimates. The net effect of these changes on the estimates in 1985 was -1% for robbery and +2% for assault.

The estimates in this bulletin are derived from sample survey data, and they are subject to sampling variation.<sup>8</sup> Because the procedure used to produce estimates of households touched by crime differs from that for victimization rates, the households-touched data have standard errors about 8% higher than those for victimization rates with the same population bases even though they are derived from the same sample survey.

<sup>8</sup>Details of the NCS sample design, the standard error computation, and the customary estimation procedure for victimization rates and counts may be found in appendix III of the BJS report *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1985*, NCJ-104273, May 1987.

<sup>4</sup>This analysis assumes that in each category of household size, the percent of households touched by crime in 1986 would be unchanged, given the size distribution for all households that existed in 1975.

<sup>5</sup>*The Prevalence of Crime*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, NCJ-75905, March 1981.

<sup>6</sup>These crimes are defined in *Measuring Crime*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-75710, February 1981. As used in this report the term "theft" is synonymous with the term "larceny" used in previous reports.

Comparisons presented in this report were determined to be statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, meaning that the estimated difference is greater than twice the standard error. Statements of comparison qualified by language such as "somewhat," "some evidence," or "some indication" indicate statistical significance at the 90% level (1.6 standard errors).

The estimates are also subject to response errors, including crimes that are forgotten or withheld from the interviewer. Such response errors tend to cause understated counts of households touched by crime.

<sup>9</sup>A more detailed description of the procedures used to estimate households touched by crime appears in an unpublished memorandum prepared by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The memorandum is available from the author, Michael Rand, c/o Bureau of Justice Statistics, 633 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20531, telephone (202) 724-7774.

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The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the criminal and juvenile justice activities of the following program Offices and Bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office of Victims of Crime.

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Crime and Justice Facts, 1985 summarizes much of what BJS has learned about crime and justice in the United States through December 31, 1985. It is intended to bridge the gap between the first and second editions of the Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice, a comprehensive statistical portrait of crime and justice in the United States, first published in October 1983.

Crime and Justice Facts, 1985 may be ordered (NCJ-100757) from the Justice Statistics Clearinghouse, NCJRS, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850, toll-free 800-732-3277 (local number 301-251-5500). Postage and handling are charged for bulk orders.



## Bureau of Justice Statistics reports

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