

Bureau of Justice Statistics  
Special Report

# Locating City, Suburban, and Rural Crime

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The vast majority of crimes committed against city, suburban, and rural residents in 1983 occurred in the general area where the victims lived. However, suburban dwellers were more likely to be victims of crimes of violence within the city limits of the central cities of their metropolitan areas (12%) than were city dwellers to become victims in the suburban areas surrounding their cities (5%). The comparable figures for crimes of theft were 13% and 6%, respectively. Resi-

dents of the very largest cities—those with one million or more population—were least likely to be victimized by violent crimes outside of their own cities (5%), whereas suburban residents of these same metropolitan areas were more likely than other suburban dwellers to become crime victims outside their home areas (32%). Robbery and personal larceny with contact (purse snatching and pocket picking) were especially likely to occur in cities (94% and 95%, respectively). Not only were city residents who were victims of robbery and personal larceny with contact almost always victimized in

their own areas, but a substantial proportion of suburban victims experienced these crimes in city settings (31% and 35%, respectively). Moreover, persons living in small towns and rural areas reported that a higher proportion of robberies and personal larcenies occurred in metropolitan areas (26% and 28%, respectively) than was the case for other personal crimes.

### Residential victimization rates

Victimization rates by place of residence of the victim reveal differences by size of jurisdiction (table 1). This variation in crime location is shown when 1983 victimization rates for crimes of violence (rape, robbery, assault) and crimes of theft (personal larceny with and without contact) are examined for the three basic geographic areas—central cities, suburban areas, and nonmetropolitan

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Victimization surveys—those surveys in which American citizens are asked in their homes what their experience has been with crime over the past 6 months—originated in this country in the early 1970's. With the numbers reported by police departments to the Federal Bureau of Investigation—called uniform crime reports—this country has two measures of the extent of crime in the society, the equivalent for weather reporting of a thermometer and barometer, with both measures essential for understanding the phenomenon.

An intriguing issue with relation to crime is the extent to which victims of crimes of violence and theft experience these crimes in close proximity to their homes or in places geographically removed from their immediate neighborhoods. Again, both official police records and citizen victimization surveys offer insights: police report crimes where they occur in the communities

for which they have responsibility; victimization figures, on the other hand, are derived from a national sample based on where people live, from urban highrises to rural farms and communities.

This report uses our ongoing victimization survey—which is called the National Crime Survey—to examine such matters as: the proportion of suburban residents victimized in the central cities of their own metropolitan areas and the reverse; the proportion of the nonmetropolitan population victimized outside of their home counties; the effect of the size of the central city of the metropolitan area on victimization patterns; and the differences among crimes in the extent to which residents are victimized in other areas. Such information further expands our understanding of crime.

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Director

Table 1. Victimization rates for persons age 12 and over, 1983

Place of residence and population	Crimes of violence	Crimes of theft
<b>Total all areas</b>	<b>31.0</b>	<b>76.9</b>
All central cities	13.3	92.0
50,000-249,999	34.1	89.5
250,000-499,999	39.1	85.4
500,000-999,999	22.1	104.5
1,000,000 or more	46.2	90.4
All suburban areas	29.1	82.0
50,000-249,999	25.2	71.5
250,000-499,999	30.3	78.6
500,000-999,999	30.2	82.8
1,000,000 or more	32.8	92.7
Non metropolitan areas	22.4	57.7

Note: Rates are per 1,000 population age 12 and over. The population range categories shown under the "all central cities" and "all suburban areas" headings are based only on the size of the central city and do not reflect the population of the entire metropolitan area.

**Table 2. Violent victimization of central city residents, 1983**

Place of occurrence	Central city residents		
	Crimes of violence	Robbery	Assault
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
In own central city	87.5	89.6	86.7
In suburb of own central city	4.9	2.8	5.8
In another central city	3.2	4.2	2.8
In suburb of another central city	1.7	—	1.6
In a central city	90.7	93.8	89.5
In a suburban area	6.5	4.4	7.4
In own metropolitan area	92.4	92.4	92.6
In another metropolitan area	4.9	5.7	4.3
In a nonmetropolitan area	1.5	—	1.7
Not known	1.3	—	1.4

Note: Figures may not add to total because of rounding.  
—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

areas (cities up to 50,000, small towns, and rural areas)—and for four size classes of central cities for city residents and residents of suburban areas.

Residents of central cities experienced the highest rates for crimes of violence, followed by suburban area dwellers, with nonmetropolitan area residents having the lowest rates. Residents of the two largest categories of central cities (500,000 to 999,999 and 1,000,000 and above) had higher rates than their counterparts in the smaller cities; the pattern for suburban residents was less varied, although persons living in the suburbs of the smallest metropolitan areas had the lowest rates of violent crime victimization.

The pattern of victimization rates for personal crimes of theft was generally similar to that for crimes of violence, except that the rates for crimes of theft were uniformly higher. Central city residents had the highest rates for this crime, followed by suburbanites, with persons living outside metropolitan areas a distant third. Residents of cities in the one-half to one million population category had the highest rates, but there were no significant differences in victimization rates for persons living in the other three categories of cities. For suburban residents, on the other hand, there was somewhat of a trend of rising victimization rates with increased size of the central city.

**Table 3. Violent victimization of suburban residents, 1983**

Place of occurrence	Suburban residents		
	Crimes of violence	Robbery	Assault
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
In own suburban area	72.7	59.7	75.0
In central city of own metropolitan area	11.7	19.3	10.4
In another suburban area	4.7	—	4.9
In central city of another metropolitan area	5.3	11.4	4.1
In a suburban area	77.4	62.9	80.0
In a central city	16.9	30.7	14.5
In own metropolitan area	84.4	79.0	85.5
In another metropolitan area	10.0	14.6	8.0
In a nonmetropolitan area	3.5	—	3.5
Not known	2.1	—	2.1

Note: Figures may not add to total because of rounding.  
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**Place of occurrence of crime vs. place of residence of victim**

All victims tended to be victimized in the general areas where they lived: city residents were victimized mainly in the same city; suburban residents were usually victims in some part of the same suburban area; and those persons living in small towns and rural areas were more likely to be victimized in the same county as their residence.

**Crimes of violence: City, suburban, and nonmetropolitan patterns**

Data on victimizations of metropolitan area and nonmetropolitan area residents for all crimes of violence and for the specific violent crimes of

**Table 5. Crimes of violence victimizations of central city residents by size of central city, 1983**

Place of occurrence	Residents of central city with population of			
	50,000-249,999	250,000-499,999	500,000-999,999	1,000,000 or more
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
In own central city	89.3	87.6	85.5	94.6
In suburb of own central city	7.7	—	5.8	3.2
In another central city	5.0	—	4.1	—
In suburb of another central city	2.9	3.3	—	—
In a central city	85.3	90.2	89.6	96.1
In a suburban area	10.6	6.2	6.6	3.1
In own metropolitan area	88.0	90.4	91.3	97.8
In another metropolitan area	7.9	5.9	5.0	—
In a nonmetropolitan area	—	—	—	—
Not known	—	—	—	—

Note: Figures may not add to total because of rounding.  
—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

**Table 4. Violent victimization of nonmetropolitan area residents, 1983**

Place of occurrence	Nonmetropolitan area residents		
	Crimes of violence	Robbery	Assault
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Same county as residence	76.8	53.6	80.2
Different county	10.6	13.7	10.1
In a metropolitan area	9.1	25.9	6.8
Not known	3.5	—	2.9

—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

robbery and assault show that central city residents were more likely to be victimized in their own area than were suburbanites or nonmetropolitan area residents (tables 2, 3, and 4). The contrast was especially sharp for robbery. About 90% of central city robbery victimizations occurred in the same city as the victim's residence, but only 60% of suburban robbery victimizations took place in the local area (tables 2 and 3). The proportion of nonmetropolitan robbery victimizations that happened in the same county was only 54% (table 4).

To further underline the urban character of robbery victimizations, 31% of suburban residents who reported such crimes were victimized in a central city, either in their own metropolitan area or another (table 3), and as many as 26% of robbery victimizations of nonmetropolitan residents occurred in metropolitan areas, although it is not known what proportion of these took place in central cities (table 4). Lines between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas, however, usually were not crossed when all violent crime victimizations were examined. Nonmetropolitan residents were more commonly victimized in metropolitan areas (9%), than the other way around. Only 3.5% of violent victimizations against

**Table 6. Crimes of violence victimizations of suburban residents by size of central city, 1983**

Place of occurrence	Residents of suburbs of central city with population of			
	50,000-249,999	250,000-499,999	500,000-999,999	1,000,000 or more
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
In own suburban area	75.0	75.6	74.6	66.2
In central city of own metropolitan area	8.1	8.5	15.2	14.6
In another suburban area	3.0	3.7	—	10.2
In central city of another metropolitan area	6.0	5.4	4.1	5.6
In a suburban area	77.9	79.2	76.0	76.5
In a central city	14.1	13.9	19.3	20.2
In own metropolitan area	83.1	84.1	89.8	80.9
In another metropolitan area	9.0	9.0	5.6	15.8
In a nonmetropolitan area	5.6	4.4	2.9	—
Not known	2.4	2.5	—	—

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suburban residents occurred in nonmetropolitan areas; the comparable figure for city dwellers was 1.5%.

**Crimes of violence: Effect of size of central city**

Examination of the victimization pattern for the four size classes of metropolitan area residents revealed some differences within central cities and suburbs (tables 5 and 6). Victimizations occurring to residents of central cities of one million or more inhabitants were more likely to take place in these same cities (95%) than was true for residents of any of the other groups of central cities; the

**Table 7. Theft victimization of central city residents, 1983**

Place of occurrence	Central city residents		
	Crimes of theft	With contact	Without contact
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
In own central city	82.6	92.8	81.8
In suburb of own central city	6.1	—	6.4
In another central city	4.4	—	4.6
In suburb of another central city	1.6	—	1.7
In a central city	87.0	94.9	86.4
In a suburban area	7.7	—	8.1
In own metropolitan area	88.7	95.5	88.2
In another metropolitan area	6.0	—	6.5
In a nonmetropolitan area	2.8	—	2.9
Not known	2.5	—	2.0

Note: Figures may not add to total because of rounding.  
—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

figure ranged down to 80% for the smallest cities (table 5). At the same time, residents of the suburbs of the largest cities displayed the lowest proportion of violent victimizations taking place in their own geographic areas (66%) and the highest proportion of crimes of violence occurring in other metropolitan areas (16%) (table 6).

**Crimes of theft: City, suburban and nonmetropolitan patterns**

Personal crimes of theft and its components, personal larceny with

**Table 8. Theft victimization of suburban residents, 1983**

Place of occurrence	Suburban residents		
	Crimes of theft	With contact	Without contact
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
In own suburban area	67.1	50.7	67.4
In central city of own metropolitan area	13.1	16.8	13.0
In another suburban area	3.3	—	5.3
In central city of another metropolitan area	6.6	18.1	6.3
In a suburban area	72.3	57.0	72.7
In a central city	19.6	35.0	19.3
In own metropolitan area	80.1	67.6	80.4
In another metropolitan area	11.8	24.4	11.5
In a nonmetropolitan area	4.6	—	4.6
Not known	3.5	—	3.5

Note: Figures may not add to total because of rounding.  
—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

contact and personal larceny without contact, exhibited similar patterns to those observed for crimes of violence (tables 7, 8, and 9). Central city residents experienced higher proportions of victimizations in their own areas than did suburban residents: 83% vs. 67% in the case of crimes of theft (tables 7 and 8). The proportion of residents experiencing crime in their own areas, however, was lower for crimes of theft than for crimes of violence in all three jurisdictions (tables 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9).

Personal larceny with contact—although a crime of low incidence, is particularly a crime of cities. Ninety-three percent of these crimes that befell city residents took place in their own cities, whereas the comparable figure for suburbanites was 51% occurring in those parts of metropolitan areas outside central cities. About 35% of personal larceny with contact victimizations reported by suburban residents occurred in central cities, approximately equally divided between the central city of their own metropolitan area and other central cities (table 8). About 60% of personal larceny with contact victimizations suffered by nonmetropolitan residents took place in the counties where they lived, but 28% occurred in metropolitan areas (table 9).

**Crimes of theft: Effect of size of central city**

There were fewer differences by size of metropolitan central cities for crimes of theft than there were for crimes of violence (tables 10 and 11). In each of the four size categories, central city residents were more likely to be victimized in their home cities than were suburban residents to become victims of crimes of theft where they lived. Residents of the largest

**Table 9. Theft victimization of nonmetropolitan area residents, 1983.**

Place of occurrence	Nonmetropolitan area residents		
	Crimes of theft	With contact	Without contact
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Same county as residence	69.1	60.4	69.5
Different county	10.9	—	11.9
In a metropolitan area	15.3	27.6	15.1
Not known	4.4	—	4.4

Note: Figures may not add to total because of rounding.  
—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

cities experienced a higher proportion of victimizations in their own areas than was true for residents in the smallest city category. Differences among suburban residents were not as pronounced as was previously noted for crimes of violence. Residents of the suburban portion of the largest metropolitan areas were somewhat less likely to be victimized by crimes of theft in their own areas (64%) than persons living in the next largest size category (69%). Although residents of metropolitan areas were seldom victimized in nonmetropolitan areas by crimes of theft (about 4%), proportionally more of these victimizations occurred to residents of the smallest cities and their surrounding suburbs.

#### Demographic patterns

The proportion of victimizations occurring outside one's general area of residence varied for some demographic characteristics.

- White residents of central cities and nonmetropolitan areas were somewhat more likely to be victimized outside these areas than were black residents for both crimes of violence and crimes of theft. There were no differences for either crime for suburban residents.

- Whether the victim was male or female made no difference regarding the likelihood of encountering a personal crime outside one's area of residence.

- Persons aged 16-34 were victimized outside their areas of residence to a greater extent than the very young and the middle-aged and elderly combined, presumably because of their greater mobility. The only exception to this finding was victims of crimes of theft living in cities.

- Crimes of violence committed by strangers occurred more often away from the victim's home area than did such crimes when committed by offenders who were relatives, friends, or acquaintances. This was the case for suburban and nonmetropolitan residents, but did not hold true for city dwellers.

#### The impact of mobility

Since the National Crime Survey (NCS) asks about crime episodes that happened in the 6 months prior to the interview, it is possible that some of the reported incidents may have occurred when the victim lived in a different jurisdiction. To the extent that this was the case, the conclusions based on place of residence vs. place of oc-

Place of occurrence	Residents of central city with population of			
	50,000-249,999	250,000-499,999	500,000-999,999	1,000,000 or more
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
In own central city	78.5	82.2	84.0	86.0
In suburb of own central city	4.6	6.9	6.2	7.1
In another central city	5.7	4.2	3.8	3.7
In suburb of another central city	3.0	—	1.3	—
In a central city	84.2	86.4	87.8	89.7
In a suburban area	7.5	8.2	7.5	7.7
In own metropolitan area	83.1	89.1	90.2	93.1
In another metropolitan area	8.7	5.5	5.2	4.2
In a nonmetropolitan area	4.6	2.6	2.2	1.4
Not known	3.6	2.8	2.5	1.2

Note: Figures may not add to total because of rounding.  
—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

Place of occurrence	Residents of suburbs of central city with population of			
	50,000-249,999	250,000-499,999	500,000-999,999	1,000,000 or more
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
In own suburban area	67.4	67.3	69.3	64.4
In central city of own metropolitan area	10.6	12.3	16.4	13.0
In another suburban area	4.6	4.9	1.8	9.6
In central city of another metropolitan area	6.5	9.7	4.3	6.0
In a suburban area	71.9	72.2	71.1	74.0
In a central city	17.1	22.1	20.7	19.0
In own metropolitan area	77.9	79.7	85.6	77.3
In another metropolitan area	11.1	14.6	6.1	15.6
In a nonmetropolitan area	7.7	3.7	4.8	2.2
Not known	3.3	2.1	3.5	4.8

Note: Figures may not add to total because of rounding.

currence would be affected. However, analysis of data from other sources indicates that the impact of mobility on these findings is slight. (See discussion under Methodology.)

#### Conclusions

Although the majority of personal crimes occurred to people in the general area where they lived, there were substantial differences between areas and also for certain crimes. Residents of central cities were more likely to be victimized in those same areas, especially by robbery and personal larceny with contact. Suburban residents of these metropolitan areas had the highest probability of experiencing crime in other jurisdictions, although the majority of crimes of violence and crimes of theft still occurred in their own areas. Experiencing crime in other jurisdictions was the exception rather than the rule, but when this situation did occur, there was a greater likelihood that rural and small-town residents would be victimized in metropolitan areas and that suburban

residents would be victimized in central cities than the other way around.

A partial explanation for some of these differences may be suggested by 1980 Census data comparing the geographic areas where people work with where people live. These figures show that the majority of workers live and work in the same general area. For example, about 80% of city residents who reported where they worked were employed in the same city; the comparable figure for suburban residents was 61%. A higher proportion of suburban dwellers worked in the central city of their metropolitan areas (31%) than did city residents in the suburbs surrounding their cities (16%). Insofar as the work site or getting to and from work increases the risk of victimization, the differential flow of workers between cities and suburbs may contribute to the higher victimization rates in the Nation's central cities.

Implicit in these figures are the differences in where people spend their time. A revised NCS questionnaire,

which is expected to be introduced later in the decade, will contain more detailed questions on what people were doing when they were victimized, for example, going to or from work, attending school, or on a shopping trip. There will also be questions on general activity patterns. This additional information, when combined with the geographical detail examined in this report, will permit the identification of factors that contribute to victimization risk, which will, in turn, assist in developing strategies to avoid crime victimization.

#### Methodology

Police statistics on crime are based on where crimes occur. Each jurisdiction reports the number of criminal events taking place within its area of responsibility that have come to its attention and have been entered into its reporting system. Crime statistics derived from victimization surveys, on the other hand, are compiled from samples of the population selected on the basis of where people live and are reported on this basis.

The National Crime Survey, because it also obtains geographical detail on where crimes occur, makes it possible to compare the general location of the crime with where the victim lived.

In this report, the principal geographical divisions used to compare crime location with victim residence were central cities of metropolitan areas, their suburban areas, and non-metropolitan areas (cities up to 50,000, small towns, and rural areas). Four size classes of central cities were analyzed, both for the central cities and their suburban areas: 50,000-249,999; 250,000-499,999; 500,000-999,999; and 1,000,000 and over. Within each size category, for both central city and suburban area, whether or not the crime incident occurred in the same metropolitan area as the victim's residence, and whether it occurred in the central city or in the remainder of the metropolitan area was determined. For residents of nonmetropolitan areas, one can distinguish between victimizations that took place in the county of residence, in another nonmetropolitan county, or in a metropolitan area.

This analysis is restricted to personal crimes of violence and theft. Of the three household crimes measured by the NCS, motor vehicle theft is well reported in official police statistics, and burglary and larceny generally occur at one's current dwelling. The only exceptions for burglary and lar-

ceny involve recent movers who were victimized at their previous residences, crimes occurring at second or vacation homes, and those happening to guests at hotels and motels. With the 6-month reference period employed in the NCS, there were a number of victims of burglary and household larceny who were victimized at previous residences which may have been located in different geographical areas, as defined by this study.

Independent estimates of mobility and a question in the survey itself that asks recent movers if the incident occurred before or after their move make it possible to estimate the impact of mobility on the personal crimes under study. According to the Bureau of the Census, about 16% of the U.S. population moved to a different address between March 1982 and March 1983.<sup>1</sup>

However, the majority of these moves occurred within the same area, whether city, suburban area, or non-metropolitan county. If one assumes that mobility rates for the 6-month reference period in NCS were one-half those reported for 1 year by the Census Bureau (or about 8%), then the proportion of 1983 residents who lived in a different area (following the definition used in this report) was between 3% and 4% for central cities, suburbs, and nonmetropolitan areas combined. In addition, approximately half of these recent movers reported in the interview that the crime incident occurred at their current address or after their move.<sup>2</sup>

Data collected in the National Crime Survey are obtained from a sample and not from a complete enumeration. Consequently, a sampling error (standard error) is associated with each number in this report. In general, if the difference between two numbers is greater than twice the standard error for that difference, one can be 95% confident that the two numbers are in fact different—that is, the apparent

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 393, Geographical Mobility: March 1982 to March 1983, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1984.

<sup>2</sup>Mobility as a factor in vulnerability to victimization is another matter. Although not within the scope of this report, it is clear that movers are victimized to a much greater degree than those who remain at the same address, even when the comparison is restricted to the 6-month NCS reference period. For example, the 8% of households that are estimated to have moved in the 6 months prior to the NCS interview experienced about 34% of the violent crime victimizations reported to have occurred during that period. The comparable figure for theft victimizations is 23%.

difference is not simply the result of surveying a sample rather than the entire population. If the difference is greater than 1.6 standard errors, the confidence level is 90%. All comparisons and relationships in the text are at or above the 95% confidence level, except where the findings are qualified by language such as "somewhat," indicating significance at the 90% confidence level.

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