

A WORD ABOUT CRIME RANKINGS FROM CQ PRESS

CQ Press's annual rankings of crime in states, metro areas, and cities are considered by some in the law enforcement community as controversial.

The FBI, police and many criminologists caution against rankings according to crime rates. They correctly point out that crime levels are affected by many different factors, such as population density, composition of the population (particularly the concentration of youth), climate, economic conditions, strength of local law enforcement agencies, citizens' attitudes toward crime, cultural factors, education levels, crime-reporting practices of citizens, and family cohesiveness. Accordingly, crime rankings often are deemed "simplistic" or "incomplete." However, this criticism is largely based on the fact that there are reasons for the differences in crime rates, not that the rates are incompatible. This would be somewhat akin to deciding not to compare athletes on their speed in the 100-yard dash because of physical or training differences. Such differences help explain the different speeds but do not invalidate the comparisons.

To be sure, crime-ranking information must be considered carefully. However, the rankings tell not only an interesting but also very important story regarding the incidence of crime in the United States. Annual rankings not only allow for comparisons among different states and cities, but also enable leaders to track their communities' crime trends from one year to the next.

We certainly do not want to be irresponsible in our presentation of state and city crime data. Our publications help concerned Americans learn how their communities fare in the fight against crime. The first step in making our cities and states safer is to understand the true magnitude of their crime problems. This will only be achieved through straightforward data that all of us can use and understand.