

City Crime Rankings 2011- 2012

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of *City Crime Rankings* is to serve as a resource for researchers, city and law enforcement officials, and the community. The book provides the means by which individuals can compare local communities to other similar communities through contrast with the national level of reported crime—more specifically, crime rates per 100,000 for individual types of reported crime, for violent and property crime categories, and for overall crime.

In editions prior to the 2009 to 2010 edition, the terms *safest* and *dangerous* were used to describe the cities and metropolitan areas with the lowest and highest rankings in the comparative analysis, respectively. Even though the rankings are still provided, these terms are no longer used because perceptions of safety and danger are just that—perceptions. The data analyzed here are *reported crime* and *population*, which together constitute only two factors considered when determining safety or risk of crime victimization. Thus, the analyses in this book are purely descriptive. At no time do we attempt to explain why reported crime rates are higher or lower from one community to the next. These explanations—currently sought by criminologists and other social science researchers—are beyond the scope of this book.

Consequently, to enhance the usefulness of *City Crime Rankings*, a new section was introduced in the 2009 to 2010 edition and is continued in this edition. The “Distribution Analysis” section (see page xii) provides histograms of the comparison score and reported crime rate distributions as well as such measures of central tendency as median, mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum values for each distribution. Because the rank ordering

of scores and crime rates does not illustrate the relative difference between metro areas' and cities' values, this analysis is provided so the reader can better understand how the values are distributed and where a particular metro area's or city's ranking falls in comparison to others.

These statistics are used in a variety of ways, by a range of audiences, including the following:

- Law enforcement agencies use them to help identify crime problems for further study (Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, 2011).
- City governments compare their cities' crime levels to those of other jurisdictions to determine how their rates appear in comparison.
- The federal government uses this type of analysis to allocate grant funding (Bauer, 2004).
- The media report these results to report and compare crime rates across cities and years.

In addition, it is important to examine the statistics of a city along with its metro area when using *City Crime Rankings*. Although a city's scores and rates are useful for understanding the crime levels within the boundaries of that city and for making comparisons to other law enforcement jurisdictions, criminals and opportunities for crime do not adhere to city boundaries, but rather spill over to adjacent (i.e., metro) areas. In fact, crime rates and comparison scores tend to be lower in metro areas than in individual cities because many of the more populous cities are geographically small and include central business, retail, and industrial areas where residential population is low. These nonresidential areas contain more victims and targets (e.g., commuters, merchandise, vehicles) than do residential areas, so their crime rates appear higher when population is used as the denominator in the calculation of the crime rate. Researchers who

study low-population areas within cities often use other denominators to determine rates, such as number of vehicles parked in lots for auto theft, number of businesses for commercial burglary, or square footage of retail establishments for shoplifting and theft (Boba, 2008).

However, these variables are not easily obtained for all U.S. cities. By expanding the geographic unit from city to metro area to include business, retail, industrial, and residential areas, using population of the entire area as a basis for determining rate is more practical. Thus, combining a major city with its suburbs provides an overall view of how crime is present in interrelated communities. For example, the city of West Palm Beach, FL, has a relatively low population, but it contains a large number of retail, commercial, and tourist locations and is the principal city in a much larger, more diverse metropolitan area. The table below presents the 2010 population, comparison scores, and rates for the city of West Palm Beach, FL, and the metro area of West Palm Beach, FL, Metropolitan Division (MD). As shown, there is a large difference between the city and its metro area for each variable. Thus, city statistics and metro-area statistics both serve useful purposes and should be considered together when examining a city situated within a metro area.

	Population	Comparison Score	Overall Crime Rate	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate
West Palm Beach, FL	101,267	117.18	5,767.9	779.1	4,988.8
West Palm Beach, FL, MD	1,294,282	19.82	4,107.7	540.2	3,567.5