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 based on comparison to the national level of reported crime as well as crime rates per 100,000 of individual types of reported crime, violent and property crime categories, and overall.

In previous editions, the terms "safest" and "dangerous" were used to describe the cities and metropolitan areas with lowest and highest rankings in the comparative analysis. These terms will no longer be used because perceptions of safety and danger are just that—perceptions of the individuals who live in these communities. The data analyzed here are "reported crime" and population, which together constitute only one factor that is 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.

To enhance the usefulness of *City Crime Rankings*, this edition includes a new Distribution Analysis section that provides histograms of the comparison score and reported crime rate distributions as well as measures of central tendency, such as median, mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum values. 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 can be used in a variety of ways, by a variety of audiences, including the following examples:

- Law enforcement can use them to help identify crime problems for further study (POP Center, 2008).
- City governments can compare themselves to other jurisdictions to determine if their crime levels are relatively average.
- The federal government can and does use this type of analysis to allocate grant funding (Bauer, 2004).
- The media can report these results to report and compare crime rates across cities and years to the public.

It is important to examine the statistics of a city along with its metro area when using *City Crime Rankings*. A city's scores and rates are useful for understanding the crime levels within the boundaries of that city. Often, law enforcement agencies serve an individual city, especially in the case of larger cities with a population of more than 75,000; these statistics help these agencies understand trends and make comparisons to other law enforcement jurisdictions.

Criminals and opportunities for crime, however, do not adhere to city boundaries but spill over to adjacent areas. 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 very low. These non-residential areas represent more victims and targets (e.g., commuters, products, vehicles) than residential areas, so their crime rates appear higher when population serves as the denominator in the calculation of crime rate. Researchers who study these areas within cities often use other denominators in this calculation, 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 as a basis for determining rate is more reasonable. Combining a major city with its suburbs provides an overall view of the interrelated communities. For example, the city of St. Louis is very small and densely populated (as compared to the metropolitan area St. Louis, which is less densely populated). The table below presents population, comparison scores, and rates for the city of St. Louis and the metro area of St. Louis, Missouri-Illinois. As shown, there is a large difference between the city and its metro area for each variable.

	Population	Comparison Score	Overall Crime Rate	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate
St. Louis, MO	348,197	355.0	11,934.3	2,198.2	9,736.2
St. Louis, MO-IL	2,810,914	6.8	4,037.7	536.7	3,501.0

In summary, city statistics and metro area statistics both serve useful purposes and should be considered when examining a city that is situated within a metro area.