

Crime Rate

## Crime Fell 7 Percent in '98, Continuing a 7-Year Trend

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

Crime in the United States dropped sharply last year, the seventh consecutive year it has fallen, according to preliminary figures released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation yesterday.

The number of violent crimes and property crimes each fell 7 percent in 1998, creating the largest annual decline since crime began to decrease in 1992.

The biggest decrease occurred in robbery, which fell 11 percent, followed by a 10 percent decline in motor vehicle theft and an 8 percent decline in murder, the bureau said in its annual Uniform Crime Report.

The decline in robbery, by far its largest single-year decrease in the 1990's, is particularly significant, said Alfred Blumstein, a criminologist at Carnegie Mellon University, because it reflects a diminished demand for crack cocaine, which had driven violent crime rates up in the 1980's. "For people who are heavy drug users, robbery is a favorite way to get drugs," Professor Blumstein said.

In addition, he said, the drop in robbery may be attributed to the vitality of the economy. The economy has become so strong that it is reaching into the inner cities and providing jobs, even if low-paying jobs, to unskilled young people who had previously turned to selling drugs because they were shut out of the job market.

Criminologists pointed to several other factors that appear to be behind the drop in crime, though they acknowledged that it was impossible to measure them precisely. These include a huge increase in the number of people behind bars, more imaginative police strategies, tighter gun-control laws and widespread community programs to work with troubled young people.

Beyond these factors, said James Alan Fox, dean of the college of criminal justice at Northeastern University, there appears to be a kind of contagion effect. "The more crime drops, the more lawfulness becomes the norm, as opposed to lawlessness," he said.

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*An economic expansion is helping to keep robbery rates down.*

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Professor Fox said the seven-year drop in crime, the longest uninterrupted decline since the 1950's, underscored an important point: that school shootings like the recent attack in Littleton, Colo., "are a statistical aberration."

"For most of our kids, school is the safest place to be," Professor Fox said. Violence in school is far lower than violence in the home, in many children's neighborhoods or in areas around schools, he said.

For criminologists, Professor Fox said, the biggest question now is how long the decline in crime can last.

The F.B.I. report measures serious crimes including the violent crimes of murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault and the property crimes of burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft and arson. The report is based on arrest data supplied by local police forces.

The report said rape and aggravated assault had both dropped 5 percent, while burglary and arson each had fallen 7 percent. Only larceny, which includes petty theft like shoplifting and pickpocketing, showed no decrease.

The declines in crime were generally highest in the nation's largest cities, apparently a reflection of more intense police efforts. Murder, for example, fell 11 percent in cities with a population over one million, but only 6 percent in cities of 50,000 to 100,000 and not at all in cities of 10,000 to 25,000. Only the suburbs had an increase, of 2 percent, in homicides.

Homicides in New York fell to 633 in 1998, from 770 in 1997, the report said, with New York dropping to second place in reported homicides for the first time in memory. Chicago surpassed New York with 694 homicides.

The New York Times

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## Companies Lag on Year 2000 Repairs, Study Says

By BARNABY J. FEDER

The largest companies in the nation continue to fall behind their schedules for Year 2000 repairs, and most suspect that their budget estimates for the remaining work are too low, according to a survey in April that was the latest in a closely watched series that began in 1994.

About 22 percent say they do not expect to have all of their critical systems tested and ready to adjust when the clock ticks over to Jan. 1, 2000. That is up from 16 percent in

November and 12 percent last August.

The number of companies that have actually encountered a computer failure stemming from Year 2000 date miscalculations jumped to 72 percent in April from 55 percent in the previous survey, which was completed in November. Eight percent of the 152 Fortune 500 companies and 14 Government agencies responding said they had severed relations with a supplier, customer or partner because of Year 2000 problems. This is the first time that such moves have been reported.

The surveys, which are sponsored by CAP Gemini America, a New York consulting firm, are carried out by Howard A. Rubin, an information technology researcher based in Pound Ridge, N.Y. The respondents are typically chief information officers or project managers.

"Everyone agrees there will be some sort of disruptions," Mr. Rubin said. "The real issue is going to be how you maintain business continuity."

The fear is that computers will break down because they read the year 2000 as 1900.

### Rubin Sees Growth Continuing in U.S.

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Reuters) — The outgoing Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin said today that he expected the economy to experience low inflation and solid growth in the coming months, but he warned that it was risky for the world to rely on the United States as the only engine of economic growth.

Mr. Rubin, in an interview with ABC, was questioned about whether the unexpectedly high jump in the Consumer Price Index for April meant the robust economy was threatened by higher inflation.

"As you look forward, the most likely scenario remains one of solid growth and low inflation," said Mr. Rubin, who announced his resignation last week.

Financial markets tumbled Friday after the Labor Department said its index, the main inflation gauge of the economy, had increased by seven-tenths of a percent last month, the biggest monthly rise since October 1990 just before the Persian Gulf war.

About 85 percent of those polled said that spending would have to rise beyond current estimates, mostly to support more testing and the creation of emergency command centers and other contingency plans aimed at keeping business running despite any Year 2000 glitches. Projects are slipping past their expected deadlines at 92 percent of the companies.

"It's typical information technology," said Prof. Leon A. Kappelman, a software management expert at the University of North Texas. "You don't get any recognition until the last 30 days that your project is going to be late."

More than a third now report that their companies are cutting back on

new information technology projects to pay for Year 2000 work. In part because of the attention to contingency planning, which involves business managers in addition to technology specialists, the percentage of work done internally has jumped to 82 percent from 60 percent in November.

For all the problems, the respondents seem confident in their ability to manage their way through Year 2000 disruptions. Three out of four said that their Year 2000 programs will give them a competitive advantage, the survey found.

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