



## FBI says crime statistics steady

By Jacqueline Koch  
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Online: Hear Sgt. Phil Headden talk about property crimes in Chattanooga. [Comment.](#)

Crime in Chattanooga remained steady from 2006 to 2007, according to the FBI's preliminary annual uniform crime report released this week, but law enforcement officials urged caution when evaluating or comparing the data.

The number of aggravated assaults reported in the city rose by about 100 reported offenses, driving up total violent crime by about 3 percent, to 2,006 offenses reported. Murders, forcible rapes and robberies all decreased slightly, the data showed. Property crimes rose by about 1 percent in 2007, attributed mostly to small increases in thefts and burglaries, according to the FBI data.

By comparison, violent crime — classified by the FBI as murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault — rose 10.3 percent in Chattanooga in 2006, according to Times Free Press archives.

The steady rates in 2007 were a trend across the state and country, said Stacie Bohanan, a community outreach specialist with the FBI in Knoxville.

"There wasn't just a sweeping increase or decrease in any category," she said.

Statistics are self-reported from law enforcement agencies to the FBI, which cautions against making city-to-city comparisons because agencies may have different methods for recording and reporting numbers, Ms. Bohanan said. However, the statistics do give a snapshot of where cities stand compared to national averages, she said. "They can use that data to see how they need to adjust their resources or see how they need to address crime in their particular area," Ms. Bohanan said.

Law enforcement officials must look at the data in conjunction with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and local agency records to make in-depth analysis, Hamilton County District Attorney Bill Cox said. Population increases or decreases, more people reporting crimes and better crime detection from police officers play a role in the statistics, he said.

"There are so many factors and it's such a small increase that (we can't) make any general conclusions other than that we'd like crime to go down rather than up," Mr. Cox said.

Reducing violent crime — especially aggravated assault — includes educating people about appropriate responses to anger and working with schools, faith-based organizations and law enforcement personnel, he said.

"The problem remains in our state that violent crime is just too high," he said. "If it's going up or going down, it's from a point that's way too high to begin with."

Violent crime declined in every region of the country except the South, which saw an increase of less than 1 percent, data show.

But comparing different segments of the country hides important trends about violent crime, as does comparing a year only to the previous year, said Dr. James Alan Fox, a leading criminologist at Northeastern University in Boston. During the last two years, murders committed by and against young black males increased 52 percent nationwide, he said, a statistic not included in the report. Statistics for overall crime remain steady because the increasing number of crimes committed by young black males is offset by crime decreases in other population segments.

"(Murders) declined for black females and white males," Dr. Fox said. "Overall things have seemed level... making it seem like everything is just fine. But it's not."

The growing homicide rate in the black male population has occurred because some police departments across the United States have scaled back crime and gang-suppression efforts, Dr. Fox said. Those factors, combined with an increased high school dropout rate and somewhat relaxed gun control legislation, have created a group of young people with a greater potential to commit crimes, he said.

"We find an increasing number of young black males with guns in their hands and gangs in their plans," he said.

Gauging an increase or decrease in property crimes — classified by the FBI as burglaries, thefts, motor vehicle thefts and arson — from a patrol officer's perspective is difficult because they see so many of them on a day-to-day basis, said Chattanooga police Sgt. Phil Headden, supervisor over the Brainerd area.

But the prevalence of property crimes can be attributed to youths who run around unsupervised or who skip school and break into cars and houses, he added.

"It's always been a big problem," Sgt. Headden said. "This is just kids — high school kids, middle school kids — that are doing that."

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