

Public Safety, Crime Prevention & Victimization



This document provides an update to information in the *Community Action Network Public Safety, Crime Prevention, & Victimization: A Community Assessment* report released in May of 2000.

Highlights

Austin Crime Rate Increased by 12% in 2001

In contrast to the consistent decreases in Austin's crime rate over the past several years, Austin's indexed crime rate—which includes violent crimes and serious property crimes—increased 12% in 2001. According to figures released by the Austin Police Department (APD), the crime rate spiked sharply in the weeks immediately after the September 11 terrorist attack, in contrast to a falling rate during the same period in 2000.

Furthermore, the *Austin American-Statesman* reported that crime reports in December 2001 were up 23% over December 2000. Whether there were actually more crimes or simply more reported by a citizenry in a higher state of alert is unknown. Despite the increases, crime rates remain lower than they were in the late 1980's and early 1990's (Texas Department of Public Safety).

Resources Reallocated for Emergency Preparedness Following 9-11

The future outlook for public safety in Austin/Travis County is mixed. The immediate aftermath of the September 11 attack has seen a reallocation of resources and funds for emergency preparedness. The APD is restructuring in response to the events, including forming a Homeland Defense Division, expanding Search and Rescue and Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD, or Bomb Squad) units, and considering changes to the role of Street Response. Austin Energy, the City's electric department, and the Water/Wastewater Department are funding 32 APD positions, 17 of which are new, to provide round-the-clock security at power and water treatment plants. Austin Energy's portion of the cost of the positions is \$2.24 million.

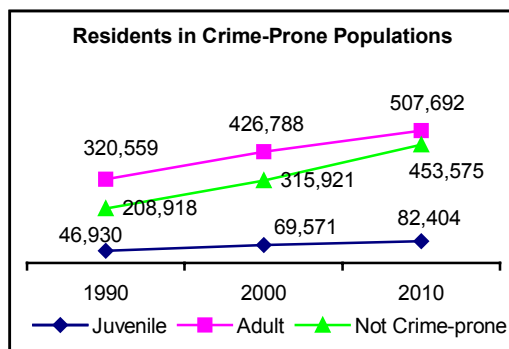
Impact of Economic Downturn

This reallocation of resources comes at a time when Austin is experiencing an economic downturn. Many citizens, as well as social service agencies, are experiencing the economic impact (e.g., the battered women's shelter is cutting its budget by \$1 million and laying off staff, despite persons waiting for services). Research shows that economic deprivation can increase the incidence of crime. If current economic trends continue, it is possible that Travis County will see additional impacts on crime indicators in the future.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How many residents are in the "crime-prone" age groups?

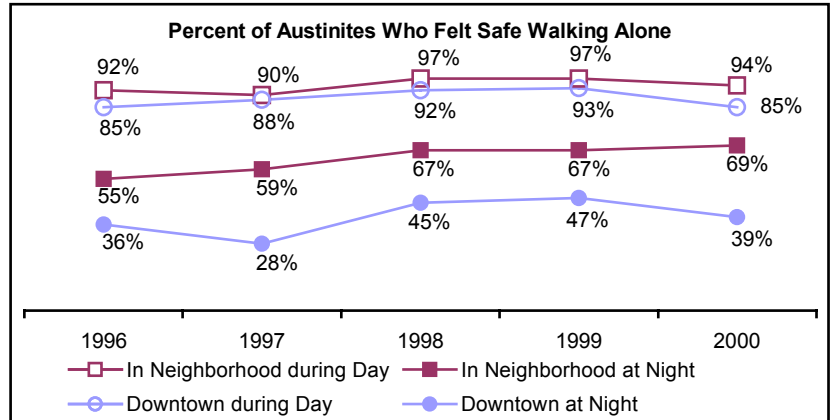
Individuals in some age groups commit more offenses (are more "crime-prone") than others. Increases in crime are often tied, in part, to increases in the crime-prone populations. The Texas A&M State Data Center estimates that together the Travis County adult (ages 17 to 44) and juvenile (ages 10 to 16) crime-prone populations will increase 19% between 2000 and 2010. The number of individuals that are not in the crime-prone populations, however, is expected to increase at a much greater rate (44%). So, while the number of crimes committed might be expected to increase, the crime rate may not.



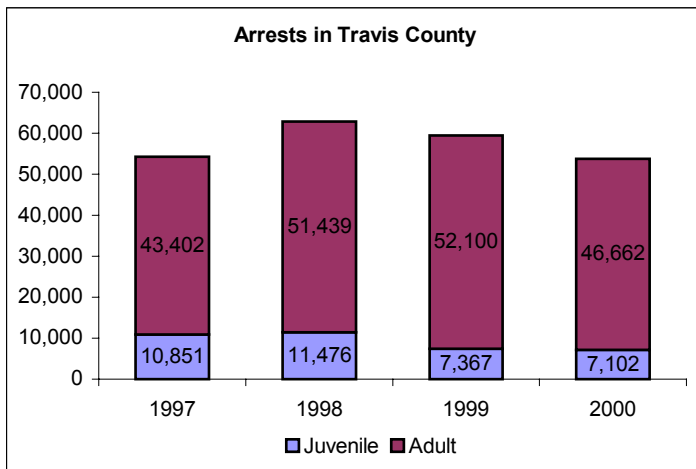
Frequently Asked Questions about Public Safety

Q: Do Austin residents feel safe?

The annual citizen survey conducted by the City of Austin showed a **slight decrease in feelings of safety** across the community from 1999 to 2000, despite a decrease in crime rates. In general, however, feelings of safety remained higher in 2000 than they had been in 1997. Austinites also continued to feel safer during the day than at night and safer in their neighborhoods than downtown. It is unclear whether the events of 9-11-2001 will further impact perceptions of safety.



Q: Has crime increased?

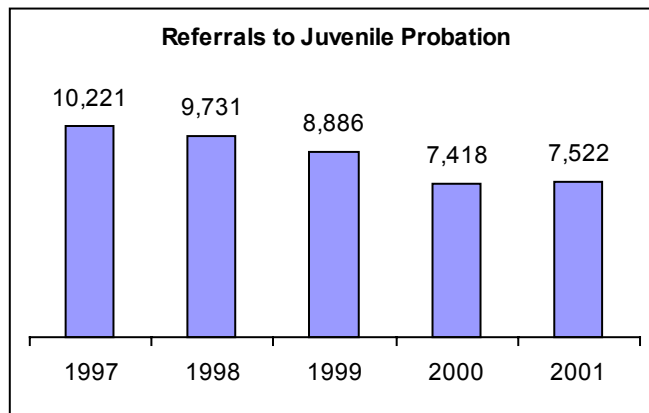


The total number of Travis County arrests decreased by 15% from 1998 to 2000 (Texas Department of Public Safety). Arrests of juveniles (under the age of 17) decreased by 38%, and adult arrests decreased by 9%. In 2000, adult arrests comprised 87% of the total arrests in Travis County. Females comprised 35% of the juvenile arrests and 19% of adult arrests.

Despite the decrease, data from the Austin Police Department indicated that **crime in Austin increased in 2001** (See *Highlights*). Department of Public Safety data on all of Travis County was not available at the time of this report.

Q: How many youth were referred to Travis County Juvenile Probation?

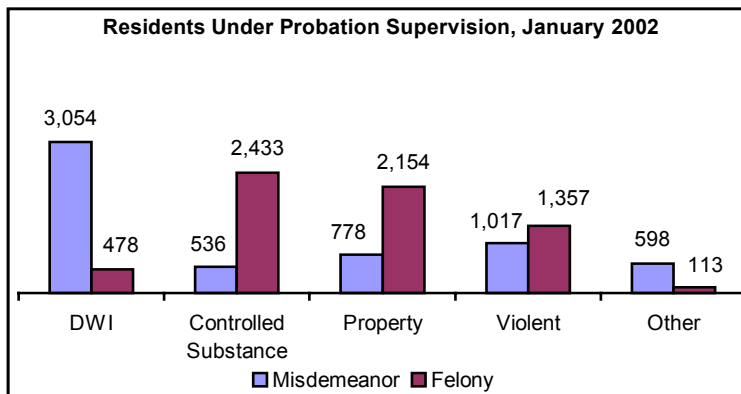
Total juvenile referrals decreased by 27% from CY 1997 to 2000, and **remained relatively stable from 2000 to 2001** (Travis County Juvenile Probation). In CY 2001, felonies accounted for 10% of all referrals, class A and B misdemeanors accounted for 28% of referrals, status offenses accounted for 6% of referrals, class C misdemeanors accounted for 29% of referrals, and other referrals accounted for 26% of all referrals.



Frequently Asked Questions about Public Safety

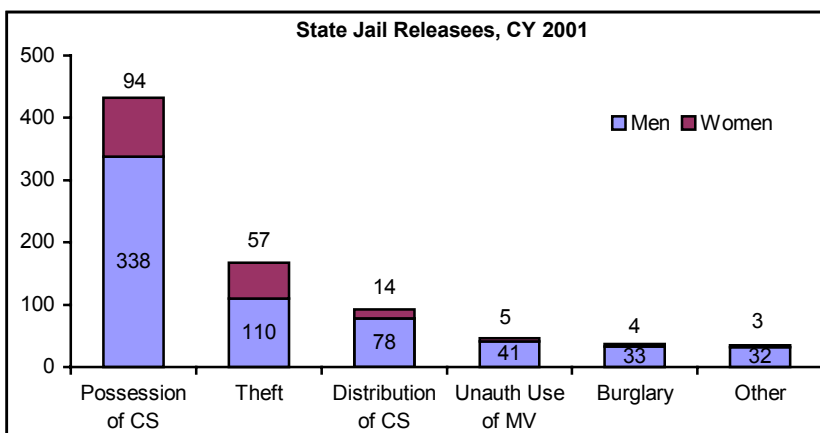
Q: How many adults are currently under criminal justice supervision in our community, and what were their offenses?

In January 2002, there were 5,983 misdemeanants and 6,535 felons on adult probation supervision in Travis County (Travis County Community Supervision & Corrections Department). Nearly one-half of the misdemeanor probationers were under supervision for **driving under the influence**, while the majority of felons on probation were under supervision for **property or controlled substance offenses**.



In addition, in February 2002, there were 3,852 men and 428 women on parole in Travis County. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice reports that **40% of these persons were convicted of a drug offense**, 33% were convicted of a property crime, and 21% were convicted of a violent crime. Others were convicted primarily of unlawful carrying of a weapon and driving while intoxicated.

Q: How many state jail confinees were released into Travis County?



In calendar year 2001, 632 men and 177 women, respectively, were released from the Travis County Community Justice Center (male state jail unit) and the Woodman State Jail (female unit) located in Gatesville (Texas Department of Criminal Justice). The majority of the releasees (53%)

served time for Possession of a Controlled Substance, followed by Theft (21%), and Distribution of a Controlled Substance (11%). The remainder of the offenses included Unauthorized Use of a Motor Vehicle (6%), Burglary (5%), Failure to Register (2%), Assault (1%), Escape (1%), and other offenses (1%). The large majority of the state jail releasees were released with **no community supervision**.

Q: How many children were victims of child abuse or neglect in Travis County?

The confirmed child abuse/neglect rate in Travis County increased by 29% between 1999 and 2000 (Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services). In addition, in comparison with other large counties in Texas, Travis County had the **highest rate of child abuse/ neglect** in 2000. According to the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, Travis County has a higher level of awareness of abuse, and therefore has tended to have an increased level of reported abuse.

Year	Child Population	Alleged Victims	Confirmed Victims	Confirmed Victims Per 1,000
1996	165,911	4,593	1,487	9.0
1997	169,530	4,357	1,295	7.6
1998	171,792	7,081	1,633	9.5
1999	173,987	6,385	1,270	7.3
2000	176,335	8,633	1,653	9.4

Frequently Asked Questions about Public Safety

Q: How many victims of crime have received assistance?

In 2001, the Austin Police Department's (APD) Victim Services Division served 15,933 victims, a **17% increase** from 1998 (Austin Police Department).

The Travis County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) Victims Services Unit provided services to 3,885 victims of crime, a **33% increase** from 2000 - a ratio of 706 to 1, considering the 5.5 TCSO staff that provided direct services to victims. During 2001, staff and volunteers traveled 16,674 miles. The staff to victim ratio and the distance traveled demonstrate some of the challenges of providing assistance to victims countywide.

Q: How much compensation has been received by victims of crime?

In 2001, Travis County crime victims applied for victims compensation funds 1,186 times, and 802 of those applications were approved (a 68% approval rate). Of the \$2,991,608 that Travis County contributed to the fund, \$1,999,025 was paid to victims, meaning that **only 67% of funds contributed were accessed**.

Q: What can I do to help?

Contact the United Way Capital Area's Volunteer Center at 512-323-1898 or search for volunteer opportunities on United Way Capital Area's Website at www.uway-austin.org.

Please see the CAN Urgent Issues Action Plan at www.caction.org for additional information about specific and community-wide approaches to addressing Public Safety in our community.

Additional Information

To access the 2000 Community Action Network's (CAN) Community Public Safety Assessment refer to <http://www.caction.org>. To obtain a copy of these or any other CAN report, please visit the CAN offices, email Brenda Ahrens at bahrns@austin.isd.tenet.edu, call (512) 414-8203, or write to The Community Action Network, 1111 W. 6th Street, Suite B220, Austin, Texas 78703.

For regularly updated current statistics across all issue areas please see The CAN Community Overview document which can also be found at www.caction.org.

Additional public safety data can be found in the Sustainability Indicators Project's Central Texas Indicators Reports - <http://www.centex-indicators.org/report.html>

For information on available crime prevention, offender, or victim services, refer to United Way Capital Area's First Call for Help at 324-1899 or their online database at <http://www.uway-austin.org/gethelp>.

For additional information about this document, please contact Sheila Dhir Hughes at the Travis County Health and Human Services Department's Research & Planning Division, (512) 854-4271 or sheila.hughes@co.travis.tx.us

This FAQ was created by the following individuals with input from the Community JusticeCouncil and the Community Action Network:

Susie Duarte, Capital Area Planning Council (CAPCO)
Kirsha Haverlah, Travis County Constable Precinct 5 Office
Sheila Dhir Hughes, Travis County Health & Human Services, Research & Planning Division
Lila Oshatz, Travis County Community Supervision & Corrections Department
Kimberly Pierce, Travis County Justice and Public Safety, Research & Planning Division
David Wilkinson, Travis County Justice and Public Safety, Research & Planning Division

CAN Partners: Austin Area Research Organization ~Austin Independent School District ~Austin Area Human Services Association ~ Austin Area Interreligious Ministries ~ Austin Travis County MHMR Center ~ Capital Metro ~ City of Austin ~ Community Justice Council ~ Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce ~ Health Partnerships 2010 ~ Higher Education Coalition ~ Travis County ~ United Way Capital Area ~ WorkSource- Greater Austin Area Workforce Board