

Crime Is Still a Major Problem in Cleveland

By James M. Trutko

It's time to face reality: the City of Cleveland still has an extremely high crime rate and needs a much stronger effort to strengthen local police and reduce local crime.

In 2024, FBI crime statistics showed Cleveland reported 21,700 crimes, including 5,700 violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault) and 16,100 property crimes. Overall, Cleveland's crime rate is 599 per 10,000 population, and it ranks eleventh among the top 100 US cities. The crime rate is much higher than the average crime rate of 369 for the Top 100 cities and the national rate of about 215. Cleveland's crime rate is equivalent to having a 6% chance each year of being a victim of crime.

Cleveland's crime rate of 599 per 10,000 population is clearly one reason why many city residents leave the city for the suburbs. In Cuyahoga County, there are 27 very safe suburban cities with crime rates under 100 per 10,000 and 19 suburban cities with rates under 200 per 10,000. In other words, the safest suburbs are five times safer and the next safest are three times safer than Cleveland proper.

2024 Total Crime & Crime Rates in Top 100 US Cities						
City	State	2024 Total Crime Rate Rank	2024 Crime Rate	2024 Total Crime	Violent crime	Property crime
Memphis	TN	1	940	57,600	15,300	42,300
Oakland	CA	2	916	39,800	8,400	31,500
St. Louis	MO	3	707	19,600	3,800	15,800
Little Rock	AK	4	689	14,100	3,400	10,700
Tacoma	WA	5	667	14,900	2,400	12,600
Minneapolis	MN	6	630	26,700	4,900	21,800
Portland	OR	7	625	38,900	4,500	34,400
Kansas City	MO	8	622	31,800	7,900	23,900
Detroit	MI	9	609	39,600	11,600	28,000
Salt Lake City	UT	10	606	12,900	1,800	11,100
CLEVELAND	OH	11	599	21,700	5,700	16,100
Albuquerque	NM	12	581	32,500	6,600	25,900
Seattle	WA	13	578	44,000	5,900	38,100
Baltimore	MD	14	576	32,700	9,100	23,600
Denver	CO	15	575	41,600	7,200	34,400
Nashville	TN	16	563	39,400	7,900	31,500
Spokane	WA	17	552	12,700	1,500	11,100
Philadelphia	PA	18	546	84,500	14,100	70,500
Houston	TX	19	544	126,200	26,600	99,600
San Antonio	TX	20	522	79,000	9,000	70,000

Source: FBI, Crime in the US - 2024, Table 6. Crimes rounded.

When comparing crime totals over time, annual local variations of 5% or more are not uncommon and do not necessarily indicate a local trend. A recent drop of 9% in Cleveland crime occurred in a national environment where violent crime was down 7.4% and property crime was down 11.5% over the past year. Despite the slight improvement, Cleveland's current annual total crime rate is still about 600, an unacceptable level.

Crime Is Still a Major Problem in Cleveland

By James M. Trutko

Although city officials claim public safety is a priority, police operating statistics do not show that the city has implemented policies to reduce the number of criminals on the streets. Compared to five years ago, large reductions in police personnel have resulted in a significant reduction in criminal arrests (-55%), prisoners held (-50%), and other enforcement activities, according to operating data from the 2024 City of Cleveland audit.

Summary of City of Cleveland Police Operating Indicators

	2015-19 Avg	2020-24 Avg	Chg	Chg %
Police Personnel (FTE)	1,907	1,662	(245)	-13%
Criminal arrests	18,265	8,280	(9,985)	-55%
Prisoners	13,872	6,910	(6,962)	-50%
OVI arrests	435	103	(332)	-76%
Traffic citations issued	48,445	29,505	(18,940)	-39%
Parking citations issued	30,866	23,719	(7,147)	-23%
Motor vehicle accidents	17,822	15,745	(2,077)	-12%
Accident reports completed	17,822	15,745	(2,077)	-12%
Comm diversion program youths	111	75	(36)	-32%

Source: 2024 City of Cleveland Audit, Tables S-22 & S-23

The audit data, a long-term average crime rate around 600 per 10,000 population and a consistent average well over 20,000 crimes annually simply do not support a conclusion that public safety is an important priority of the City of Cleveland government. The goal should be to cut the Cleveland crime rate in half -- to a level below 300 per 10,000 population. The rate is below the average of the top 100 cities but still much higher than most suburbs.

The primary solutions to crime deterrence and reduction are proven police-oriented actions and judicial reforms that increase the likelihood of criminals being caught and incarcerated. The key is to reduce the number of active criminals on the streets. The number of police should be increased by 300 to 500, a total that is little higher than the average level from 2015 to 2019. The new recruits and current police officers should be well trained and supported by advanced technologies to enable effective strategies like “hot spot”, “precision” and “broken windows” policing. The police strategy should be supplemented with third-party activity by property owners, proactive outreach to community and church groups, and supportive social programs, but these efforts do not take the place of increased police personnel and training.

Reducing violent crime would benefit individuals, property owners, and taxpayers by reducing the direct costs associated with crime, and the intangible costs of crimes -- pain and suffering of victims, reduced quality of life, and declining property values. The goal of substantial crime reduction and improved safety for Cleveland residents and businesses is not an impossible pipedream but it will require city officials to make bold policy changes that strengthen police presence and effectiveness.

James M. Trutko is an economist, market research professional and public policy analyst. His email is jmtrutko@gmail.com and his website is cuyahogascorboard.com.