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**U.S. METROS BECOME SAFER
AS THEY BECOME MORE DIVERSE**

Brookings study of 100 metro areas shows former associations between crime and race, poverty, and immigration have weakened considerably

WASHINGTON, D.C.—America’s metropolitan areas have become increasingly safer in the past 20 years as crime rates have fallen, but a new Brookings Institution report on crime in metropolitan areas also finds some surprising trends at work behind the numbers.

The new report, *City and Suburban Crime Trends in Metropolitan America*, finds that factors like immigration, ethnicity, and poverty, when combined, do not play the roles in encouraging crime many might believe they do.

“Many people know the rates of violent and property crimes have declined significantly in recent years,” said Steven Raphael, Professor of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley and one of the report authors. “What may come as a surprise is that some of the social characteristics we have associated with crime in the past are not associated with criminal behavior as they were once upon a time.

“Crime rates have dropped everywhere, but they have declined the most in the nation’s inner cities that are often poorer, more urbanized, and more minority than their suburban counterparts,” Raphael said.

Elizabeth Kneebone, a Senior Research Associate with the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, added that demographic changes in suburban areas across the country, including greater diversity and poverty, have not created a spike in crime rates.

“Our suburbs became significantly more diverse, economically and demographically, over the period we studied,” Kneebone said, “yet, as the share of poor, minority, and foreign-born suburbanites grew, suburban crime rates fell, particularly in the older, higher-density suburbs closest to cities.”

Kneebone and Raphael studied data from the FBI and the Census Bureau between 1990 and 2008 for 5,400 communities in the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas.

Among the report's key findings:

- **Rates of violent crime and property crime declined significantly between 1990 and 2008 in the country's 100 largest metropolitan areas, with the largest decreases occurring in cities.** Violent crime rates dropped by almost 30 percent in cities, while property crime fell by 46 percent. Though city crime rates remain considerably above those in suburbs, smaller decreases in suburban violent and property crime rates over this time period (7 percent and 37 percent, respectively) narrowed the gap.
- **The gap between city and suburban violent crime rates declined in nearly two-thirds of metro areas.** In 90 of the 100 largest metro areas, the gap between city and suburban property crime rates narrowed from 1990 to 2008. In most metro areas, city and suburban crime rates rose or fell together.
- **Among suburban communities, older high-density suburbs registered the largest declines in crime rates.** All types of suburban communities saw property crime rates fall over this time period. Cities and high-density suburbs also saw violent crime rates decline, but low-density exurban communities experienced slight increases that are not explained by their changing demographics.
- **As crime rates fell and communities diversified, relationships between crime and community demographic characteristics weakened significantly.** The association between crime and community characteristics—like the proportion of the population that is black, Hispanic, poor, or foreign-born—diminished considerably.

The report concludes that these trends have significant implications for metropolitan areas and for public policy.

For example, falling crime rates in cities makes them more attractive choices for residency and leisure activities, with the economic benefits that flow from there.

Second, it is clear that crime should no longer be considered an urban concern, but a metro-wide issue, meaning policymakers and public safety officials should think in broader terms about what future crime-reduction policies would be most effective.

The Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings *provides decision-makers with cutting-edge research and policy ideas for improving the health and prosperity of metropolitan areas, including their component cities, suburbs, and rural areas. To learn more, please visit: www.brookings.edu/metro.*

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