



# Crime

October 22, 2024

Crime is a concern for many Utahns. It should come as little surprise that the issue ranked of some importance among voters responding to the 2024 Utah Priorities Project survey.

## National View

According to a 2023 Gallup Poll, an increasing number of Americans (63%) see the U.S. crime problem as a serious one.<sup>1</sup> Further, most say that local crime is higher than the previous year. Nonetheless, 2023 saw a 3% reduction in violent crime and a 2% decrease in property crime nationally from the previous year.<sup>2</sup> In fact, U.S. crime rates have been steadily declining for decades.<sup>3</sup> (See Figure 1.)

## The Crime Disconnect

The disconnect between the perceptions of Americans and the criminal realities surrounding them could be a function of increased media coverage of crime – particularly from certain outlets.<sup>4</sup> This could perhaps explain why conservatives were also more likely to rank crime highly when compared to liberals – at least as seen by respondents to the Utah Priorities Project survey.

Further, an increase in population and, therefore, an increase in the raw number of crimes, particularly high-profile ones, could affect perceptions.<sup>5</sup> The disconnect could also be a function of recency bias as people give more weight to recent, though often slight, increases in crime relative to the longer-term trends.<sup>6</sup>

There are demographic variations in perceptions of crime, possibly due to varied experiences with crime across populations. About 28% of Americans say that their household has been victimized by crime, which may be more likely to happen in certain areas.<sup>7</sup>

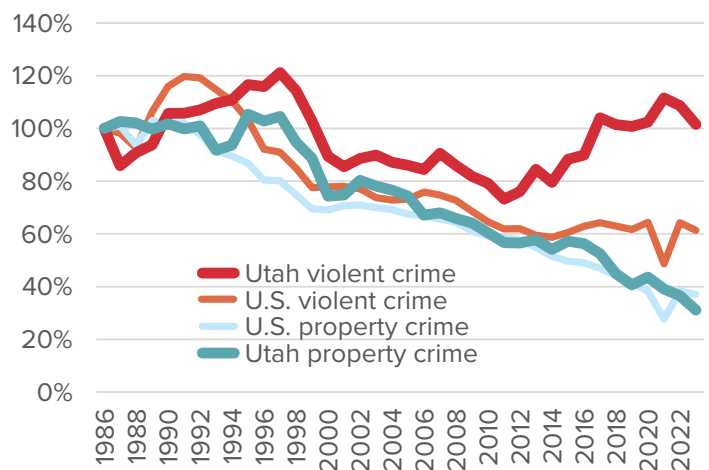
For example, according to the Utah Priorities Project survey, lower-income Utahns were more likely to rank crime as a priority than those with higher incomes. Renters ranked it higher than homeowners.<sup>8</sup> Crime may be happening more often in areas in which these groups live.

## Utah Crime Rates

Utah has relatively low crime rates and, like the U.S., has seen a long-term decline since the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> (See Figure 1.) However, certain crimes have become notably more common in the state. For example, in 2019, Utah saw 14,597 cases of simple assault. That number increased steadily to 18,523 in 2023, and

## Utah and U.S. crime rates have declined – though violent crime in Utah holds steady.

Figure 1: Violent and Property Crime Rates, Utah and U.S.



Note: The U.S. data for 2021 are likely undercounted.  
Source: FBI and MacroTrends.

the year-to-date numbers for 2024 seem poised to eclipse that number. Intimidation and aggravated assault seem to be trending up as well.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, Utah's violent crime rate remains below that of the U.S.<sup>11</sup> (See Figure 2.)

The number of arrests in the state has increased since before the pandemic. In 2019, a total of 27,276 people were arrested in Utah. That figure increased in each subsequent year, totaling 38,664 in 2023.<sup>12</sup> Hate crimes against lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans Utahns have also increased steadily and dramatically since 2019.<sup>13</sup> That said, as of 2022, only ten states exhibited a violent crime rate lower than that of Utah.<sup>14</sup>

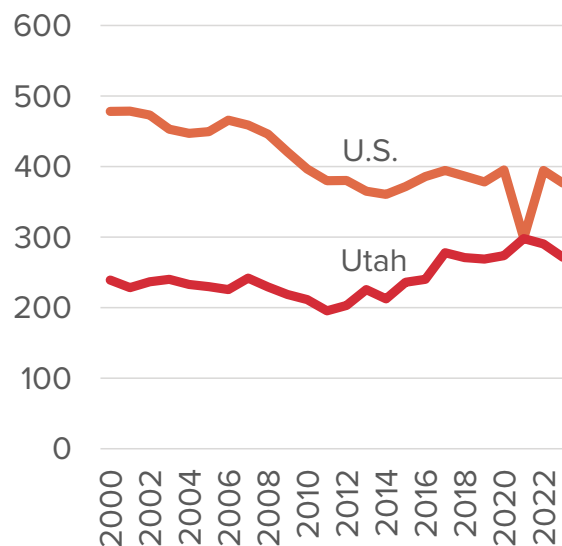
## Salt Lake City Crime Rates

Crime is more often seen in larger cities. Salt Lake City, in particular, enjoyed a crime rate that reached a 15-year low in 2023.<sup>15</sup> This good news has continued since October 2024 – violent and property crime in Salt Lake City have collectively declined by 9% relative to 2023. Similarly, the three-year average of year-to-date crime has decreased by 20%.<sup>16</sup> When comparing year-to-date figures since 2018, the current number of property and violent crimes in 2024 is lower than any of the previous six years.<sup>17</sup>

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### While U.S. violent crime has declined, Utah remains lower per 100,000 people.

Figure 2: Violent Crime Rates per 100,000 People, Utah and U.S.



Note: The U.S. data for 2021 are likely undercounted.

Source: FBI and MacroTrends.

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This research brief was written by Utah Foundation staff.

## Endnotes

1. Gallup, "More Americans See U.S. Crime Problem as Serious," 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/544442/americans-crime-problem-serious.aspx>.
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3. FBI, Crime Data Explorer, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/query>; And MacroTrends, Population 1900-2023, <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/states/utah/population>.
4. The Dispatch, "Why the Perception That Crime Is Rising Persists," 2024, <https://thedispatch.com/article/why-the-perception-that-crime-is-rising-persists/>.
5. Ibid.
6. NJ Spotlight, "As Trump Fuels Tales of Rising Crime, Official Data Tells a Different Story," 2024, <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2024/09/official-data-contradicts-trump-crime-increasing-claims/>.
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8. Note that men and more religious populations were more likely to see crime as a highly ranked issue relative to women and the spiritual or non-religious.
9. FBI, "Crime Data Explorer," 2023, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/crime-trend>.
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15. The Deseret News, "Overall crime reaches 15-year low in Salt Lake City, according to city's top law enforce," 2024, <https://www.deseret.com/utah/2024/2/5/24063029/crime-in-salt-lake-city/>; Salt Lake City Police, "SLCPD Chief Mike Brown and Mayor Erin Mendenhall Announce 2023 Crime Reduction Efforts," 2023, <https://slcpd.com/2024/02/05/slcpd-chief-mike-brown-and-mayor-erin-mendenhall-announce>; And UTSA Criminology and Criminal Justice, "Salt Lake City Violent Crime Reduction Plan: Year 1 Evaluation," 2023, <https://hcap.utsa.edu/documents/criminal-justice/final-slc-y1-report-11.20.23.pdf>.
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