

RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Clearance Rates in Nevada, 1998-2009

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Clearance rates provide one indication of law enforcement's ability to apprehend criminal suspects. When clearance rates decline, it raises concerns about police performance. Nationally, in 2009, about 22% of all Part I crimes that were known to the police were cleared (FBI, 2010). Part I crimes include murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larcenytheft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

There are two distinct ways that crimes are cleared. First, a crime can be cleared when "a law enforcement agency has identified the offender, there is enough evidence to charge him, and he is actually taken into custody" (DPS, 2009; p. 63).

In addition to offenses cleared by arrest, a crime can be cleared through exceptional means. An offense may be exceptionally cleared when some elements beyond law enforcement control precludes formal charges against an offender due to the death of the offender (e.g., suicide, double murder, justifiably killed by police or citizen); the victim's refusal to cooperate with the prosecution after the offender has been identified; or the denial of extradition because the offender committed a crime in another jurisdiction and is being prosecuted for that offense.

Unless otherwise noted, clearance rates discussed in this report include crimes cleared by both arrest and exceptional means.

This state data brief describes patterns of clearance rates in Nevada and compares them to national trends. It examines questions about the trend in clearance rates, differences in clearance rates for particular types of offenses, as well as jurisdictional differences in clearance rates across Nevada's counties. The limitations of the data and this study are also addressed.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Nationally, about 22% of all Part I crimes that are known to police are cleared by arrest or exceptional means, compared to about 25% in Nevada.
- Since 1998, the national clearance rate for Part I crimes increased about 3%, while the clearing rate for these offenses in Nevada increased nearly 14%.
- In 2009, the national clearance rate for murder was far less than Nevada's (67% versus 80%); however, the clearance rate for rape offenses nationally was noticeably higher than Nevada's (41% versus 24%).
- In Nevada, clearance rates are higher for violent crimes (43%) than for property crimes (21%). The highest clearance rate in the state is for murder (80%) and the lowest is for motor vehicle theft (7%).
- Within Nevada, the highest clearance rates in 2009 were observed in Esmeralda County (83%) and Mineral County (71%), while the lowest clearance rates were observed in Elko County (20%) and Storey County (11%).

Trends in Clearance Rates

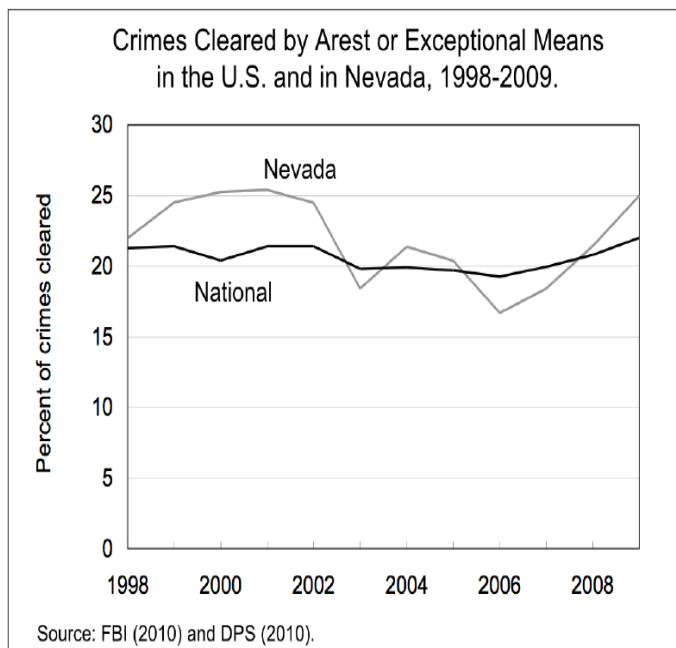
According to data collected by the FBI, in 2009 there were nearly 10 million Part I crimes known to police nation wide (FBI, 2010). Of these, about 22% were cleared by an arrest or exceptional means.

Nationally, clearance rates have remained fairly constant over the past decade (Figure 1). Since 2006, the trend in the national clearance rate is upward and in 2009 it reached its highest level in over a decade.

Based on information collected by the Nevada Department of Public Safety (DPS), in 2009, there were about 100,000 Part I crimes known to Nevada law enforcement agencies (DPS, 2010). Of these, one-in-four were cleared by an arrest.

The trend in Nevada's overall clearance rate is less stable than the national trend. From 1998 to 2003, Nevada's clearance rate for Part I crimes fell from 22% to less than 19%, only to rise back over 21% the next year.

Since 2006, as with the national rate, Nevada's clearance rate for Part I crimes has steadily risen from about 17% to 25%.



Clearance Rates by Offense Type

Clearance rates vary dramatically by crime type. As shown in Table 1, in 2009, the national clearance rate for violent crime (e.g., murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) is greater than for property crime (e.g., burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson).

Among particular types of violence, national clearance rates are highest for murder (67%) and aggravated assault (57%). Rates are lowest for rape (41%) and robbery (28%) (FBI, 2010).

For property crimes, national clearance rates are highest for larceny-theft (22%) and arson (19%). About one of every eight burglaries and motor vehicle thefts known to the police are cleared by an arrest or by exceptional means (FBI, 2010).

The pattern of clearance rates in Nevada is similar to the national trends, with a few notable exceptions. Nevada's clearance rate for violent crime in 2009 was slightly less than the national rate (43% versus 47%), but Nevada's property crimes clearance rate was slightly more than the national rate (21% versus 19%).

Among violent offenses, Nevada's clearance rate was higher than the national average for murder (80% versus 67%), but lower than the national rate for rape (24% versus 41%) and aggravated assault (51% versus 57%).

Among property offenses, Nevada's clearance rate is generally below the national averages for burglary (11% versus 13%), motor vehicle theft (7% versus 12%), and arson (13% versus 19%), but higher than the national rate for larceny (29% versus 22%).

Clearance Rates Across Nevada Counties

As with crime rates, clearance rates vary across Nevada's counties. For example, in 2009, Clark County had a relatively high crime rate for Part I crimes (39 per 1,000 residents), but a relatively low clearance rate (24%). In contrast, Esmeralda County had a relatively low crime rate in 2009 (5 per 1,000 residents), but a relatively high clearance rate (83%). (Table 2).

Table 1. Total number of crimes and percentage of crimes cleared by arrest or exceptional means in the U.S. and in Nevada, by crime type, 2009.

Crime type	Crimes in the U.S.		Crimes in Nevada	
	Total	Cleared	Total	Cleared
All Part I crimes	9,425,490	22%	99,755	25%
Violent crimes	1,142,120	47%	18,594	43%
Murder	13,240	67%	170	80%
Rape	76,280	41%	1,014	24%
Robbery	352,130	28%	6,045	28%
Aggravated assault	700,470	57%	11,365	51%
Property crimes	8,283,370	19%	81,161	21%
Burglary	1,957,830	13%	22,029	11%
Larceny	5,557,560	22%	46,236	29%
Motor vehicle theft	714,130	12%	12,367	7%
Arson	53,850	19%	529	13%

Source: FBI (2010) and DPS (2010).

For most counties in the state, clearance rates for Part I crimes has dramatically increased over the past decade (Table 3). For example, since 1998, Eureka County increased its Part I crimes clearance rate over 180%, while the crime rate in the county decreased by nearly a third. Similarly, Pershing County's clearance rate more than doubled from 1998 to 2009, while its crime rate declined more than 17%.

In general, from 1998 to 2009, the Part I crime rate declined, while the clearance rate increased. In Lander County and Lincoln County, the clearance rates increased during this period; but so did the crime rate. In Douglass County, Lyon County, Nye County, and Storey County the opposite occurred: between 1998 and 2009 crime was down, but so were the clearance rates in these areas.

While these rather dramatic changes over time may reflect changes in police arrest practices, this volatility of clearance rates in less populated counties in the state is most likely due to either changes in the distribution of criminal offenses (e.g., a rise in property crimes in those jurisdictions showing a decrease in clearance rates over time) or changes in how local agencies record and count clearances.

Table 2. Part I crime rate and clearance rate by Nevada counties, 1998 and 2009.

County	1998		2009	
	Clearance rate	Crime rate	Clearance rate	Crime rate
Average	22%	50.1	25%	36.7
Carson	19%	35.3	38%	23.3
Churchill	31%	31.8	35%	21.1
Clark	20%	54.7	24%	39.3
Douglass	25%	21.3	24%	15.7
Elko	18%	38.8	20%	25.2
Esmeralda	80%	14.1	83%	4.75
Eureka	13%	34.2	35%	23.3
Humboldt	33%	31.7	51%	15.9
Lander	24%	11.9	52%	32.2
Lincoln	30%	14.6	39%	17.8
Lyon	38%	22.8	36%	15.2
Mineral	36%	24.8	71%	14.3
Nye	67%	35.5	29%	24.8
Pershing	24%	21.5	53%	17.8
Storey	24%	20.4	11%	17.3
Washoe	25%	50.2	27%	37.9
White Pine	17%	25.9	23%	13.9

Source: DPS (2010).

Note: Crime rates are per 1,000 residents.

Data Sources and Limitation

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and Nevada Department of Public Safety (DPS) are the two primary data sources for this brief.

UCR data represent crimes that are known to law enforcement agencies and do not contain crimes that are unknown to the police or not reported by law enforcement agencies to the FBI. Jurisdictions may also differ in terms of how they apply the UCR rules and guidelines for recording crime offenses and clearance statistics. Due to these issues, the data reported in this study should be viewed with some caution.

Table 3. Changes in Part I crime rates and clearance rates by Nevada counties, 1998 and 2009.

County	Pct. change from 1998-2009 in --	
	Clearance rate	Crime rate
Average	13.5%	-26.7%
Carson	99.1%	-34.0%
Churchill	12.0%	-33.6%
Clark	17.9%	-28.2%
Douglass	-2.9%	-26.3%
Elko	12.7%	-35.1%
Esmeralda	4.2%	-66.3%
Eureka	182.3%	-31.9%
Humboldt	54.2%	-49.8%
Lander	119.3%	170.6%
Lincoln	33.7%	21.9%
Lyon	-3.9%	-33.3%
Mineral	98.4%	-42.3%
Nye	-55.8%	-30.1%
Pershing	118.2%	-17.2%
Storey	-53.0%	-15.2%
Washoe	7.6%	-24.5%
White Pine	34.7%	-46.3%

Source: DPS (2010).

References

Nevada Department of Public Safety (DPS). Crime and Justice in Nevada, 1998-2009. Retrieved (October 1, 2010), from <http://www.nvrepository.state.nv.us/crimiejustice.shtml>

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Crime in the United States, 1998-2009. Retrieved (October 1, 2010) from <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/>

CENTER FOR CRIME AND JUSTICE POLICY

STATE DATA BRIEF SERIES

This report is part of the “Research in Brief” series produced by the Center for Crime and Justice Policy at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The Center is housed in the Department of Criminal Justice, which is located in the Greenspun College of Urban Affairs. Research in Briefs are modeled after the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ Special Reports and Bulletins.

The Briefs provide summaries of various criminal justice system practices in Nevada over time, and highlight differences between Nevada and other states. These reports cover all aspects of the criminal justice system, including trends in crime and arrests, police practices, prosecution, pretrial activities, adjudication, sentencing, and corrections. Although Research in Briefs typically focus on criminal justice issues within Nevada, these reports may focus on national issues as well.

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