

---

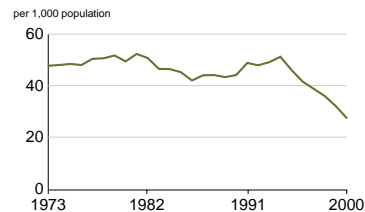
# PART II

## Examining Serious Crime

## Examining Serious Crime

The incidence of violent crime is down. Following a decade of decline, crime rates for some of the most serious criminal offenses are at the lowest levels in a generation. Still, serious crime remains a critical concern to the public and policymakers—and understandably so. High-profile offenses such as murder and kidnapping garner considerable media attention and help shape our general feelings of safety. However, because of the publicity given to notorious criminal cases, it is difficult to gain perspective on larger crime trends and reconcile the news about the drop in crime. The search for a broader context is facilitated by pulling together multiple national-level data sources and viewing them side-by-side. The result is a revealing and often surprising glimpse into the prevalence, circumstances, and criminal justice response to violent crime.

### Violent Crime Victimization Rate



In this year's *Part II*, we draw from multiple sources to profile select and timely segments of serious crime in the United States. Our focus covers violent crime rates, circumstances surrounding homicide and abductions, and the historical trend in felony convictions and the death penalty. The specific issues are:

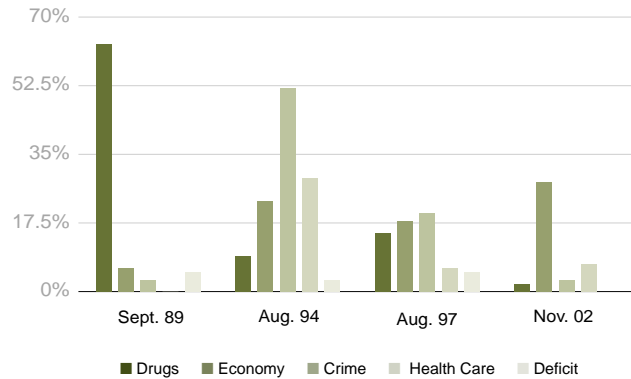
- Public opinion and fear of crime
- Violent crime and arrest trends
- Personal victimization
- Homicide circumstances
- Abduction profiles
- Felony arrests and convictions
- Death sentences and executions

The purpose is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of the incidence and outcomes of serious crime. Rather, we simply display a range of issues related to important aspects of violent crime and let readers draw their own conclusions about the data's significance and implications.

### What issues are of most concern to Americans?

- Public opinion on the most pressing problems confronting our country tends to vary from year to year. This variation is displayed for four illustrative points in time.
- In three of the four years shown, a single issue dominated, although the problem deemed most important differed each year. For example, U.S. citizens were most concerned about drugs in September 1989, crime in August 1994, and the economy in November 2002.
- Drugs and crime are no longer center stage as they were in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the drop in public concern matching the drop in crime rates that have occurred over the last 10 years.
- Looking at polling data for the last three months of 2002 confirms the intuition of many that the economy, terrorism, and fear of war are now of primary public concern.
- The data also show how individual events can affect month-to-month perceptions. For example, the 2002 bombing of a club in Bali, Indonesia, may have contributed to the October spike in fear of terrorism.

Public Perception of Problems Facing the United States, 1989 - 2002



Public Perception of Most Important Problems Facing the United States September, October, November 2002

	Nov.	Oct.	Sep.
Economy	28%	29%	24%
Terrorism	19	32	19
Fear of war	14	15	10
Unemployment	7	6	8
National security	7	4	5
Healthcare	7	4	5
Ethics/religious	7	4	10
Int'l problems	6	9	8
Education	6	6	6
Politics	4	4	7
Crime/violence	3	10	3
Poverty	3	3	4
Drugs	2	1	1

Source: The Gallup Polls, November 18, 2002; [www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr021118.asp](http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr021118.asp).

## What are public perceptions about crime and public safety?

- The trend charts show the results from two polling questions used to gauge public perception about crime and safety:

- *Is there more or less crime in the United States than there was a year ago?*

- *Is there any area near where you live – that is, within a mile – where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?*

- Public perception appears to be tracking the recent fall in crime rates. In 1989, 84 percent of people felt that crime had increased from the previous year. By 2001, this number had fallen to 41 percent.

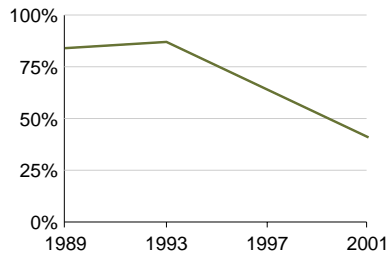
- Likewise, corresponding to the drop in crime rates and a perception that crime is lessening, fewer people indicate they are afraid to be out at night. In fact, the percent of respondents having “fear of walking alone at night” dropped from 43 to 30 percent from 1989 to 2001.

- By disaggregating the survey results, we gain a clearer picture of how different groups feel about the incidence of crime.

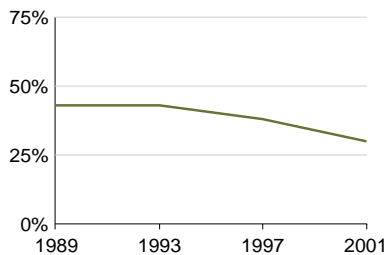
- More females than males answered “yes” when asked if there was more crime than a year ago, supporting the notion that females feel more vulnerable to crime. There was no clear pattern when looking at age, however blacks and other non-whites were most likely to feel that crime had recently risen.

- Those with more education and higher incomes felt crime had fallen. A large share of these respondents reside in the suburbs, where violent crime rates tend to be much lower as compared to more urbanized areas.

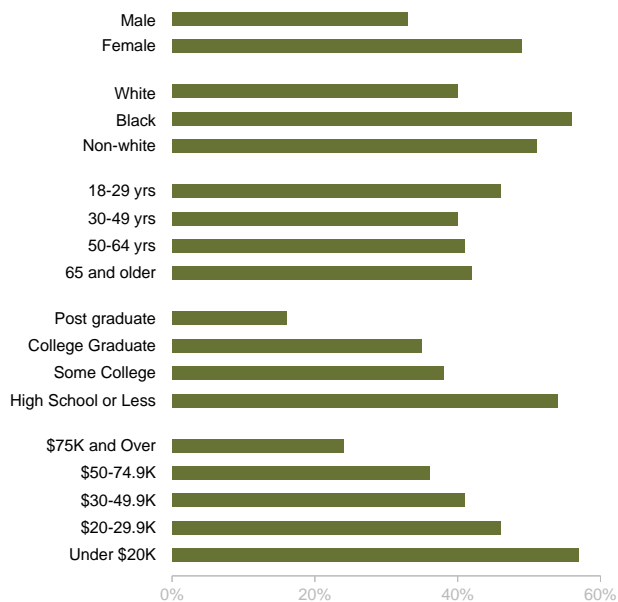
**Percent of citizens saying there is more crime than a year ago**



**Percent of citizens saying they are afraid to walk alone at night**



**Profiles of those who feel there is more crime than a year ago, 2001**

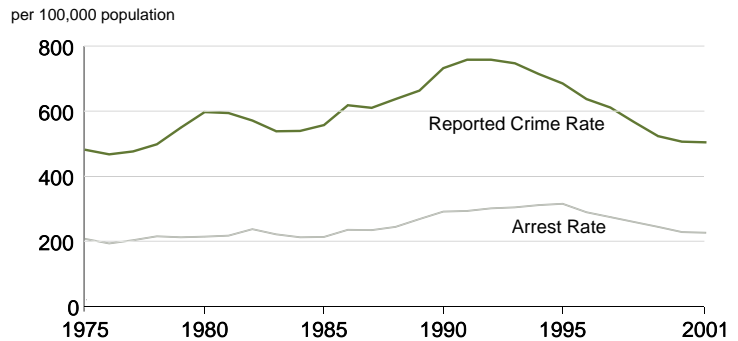


Source: Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 1989, 1996, 2001, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

### What are the trends in reported violent crime and arrests over the past three decades?

- The public is most concerned about crime that carries the potential for harm. The FBI collects data, Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), on reported violent crime that includes murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.
- After climbing for about 15 years, violent crime peaked in 1992 at 758 crimes per 100,000 population. From 1992 to 2001, the rate dropped 34 percent.
- The FBI also collects data on the number of persons arrested for a violent crime. Although at lower levels, arrest rates for violent crimes tend to track reported crimes.
- Over the past 28 years, there has been an average of 247 arrests per 100,000 population annually.

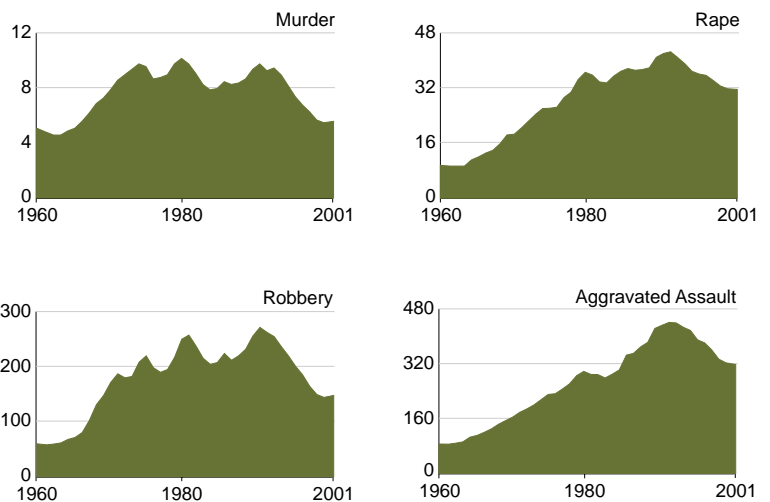
#### Violent Crime: Reported Crime Rates vs. Arrest Rates



Source: Uniform Crime Reports, 1975-2001, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

- The four offense types that comprise the violent crime rate have all declined over the last decade.
- The murder rate in 2001 was at a level last seen during the 1960s. In fact, comparing the 2001 murder rate with the 1960 murder rate shows only a nominal increase (from 5.1 murders per 100,000 population in 1960 to 5.6 murders per 100,000 population in 2001).
- The rape rate declined by 26 percent in the last 10 years, from a record high of 43 rapes per 100,000 in 1992 to 32 in 2001. The robbery rate in 2001 was 149 robberies per 100,000 population, equivalent to rates during the late 1960s.
- The aggravated assault rate increased steadily from 1960 through 1992. Following these steep increases, assault rates were cut by almost one-third between 1993 and 2001.

#### Reported violent crime rates at lowest level in 20 years for three of four offenses (per 100,000 population)

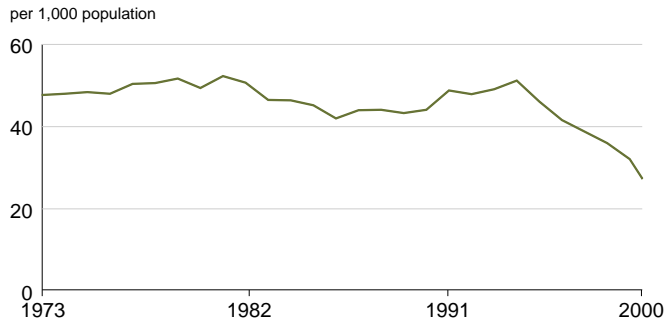


Source: Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 2001, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Uniform Crime Reports, 1960-2001, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

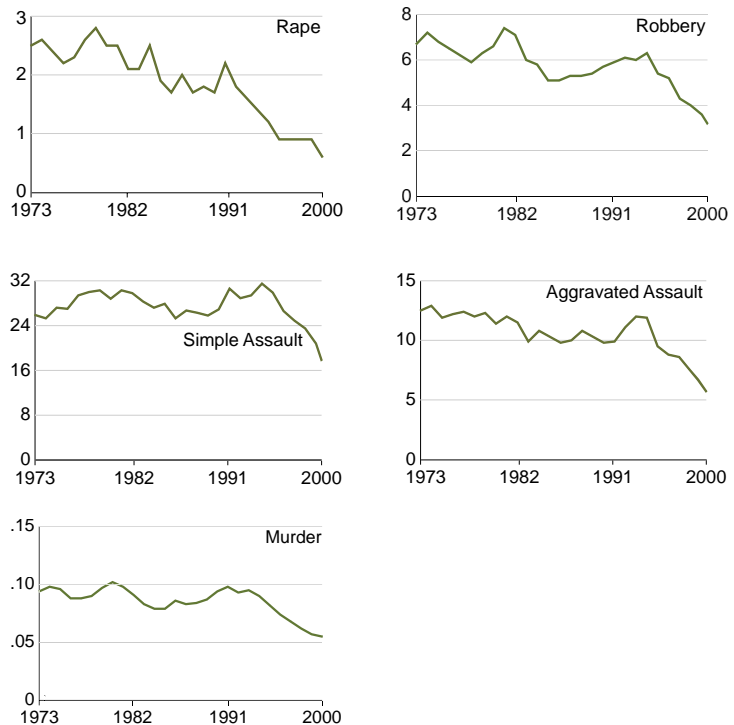
*How have violent crime victimization rates varied over the past 25 years?*

- The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is another means by which to measure crime suffered by individuals or households. Unlike FBI crime rates (which measure offenses reported to the police), the NCVS seeks to calculate the level of crime based on victimization—regardless of whether the crime was reported to police. The NCVS uses survey data derived from a national representative sample of the U.S. population.
- Overall, violent crime victimization was relatively steady between 1973 and 1994, followed by a 47 percent drop between 1994 and 2000.
- Victimization rates for all major crime categories are at all-time lows. The declines since the early 1990s also match declines in crimes reported to police.
- Rape, robbery, and assault rates all trended downward from 1973 through 2000. The murder trend was fairly even from 1973 through 1991 before dropping steadily through 2000.
- Using both victimization and reported crime rates enhances our knowledge about the extent of crime. In addition, one measure can help confirm the other, especially when crime or victimization rates begin to change.

**Total Violent Crime**



**Victimization rate per 1,000 persons age 12 and older**



Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, Bureau of Justice Statistics, and Uniform Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

## What circumstances surround homicide, and what weapons are used?

- The top four circumstances involving a homicide (excluding other and unknown)
  - 50 percent result from an argument
  - 15 percent occurred during a robbery
  - 12 percent are juvenile gang related
  - 8 percent are related to narcotic drug laws
- The FBI reports that homicides related to arguments have declined, but remain the most frequently cited circumstance. Not included above, many homicide circumstances are unknown (roughly 4,500 in 2001).

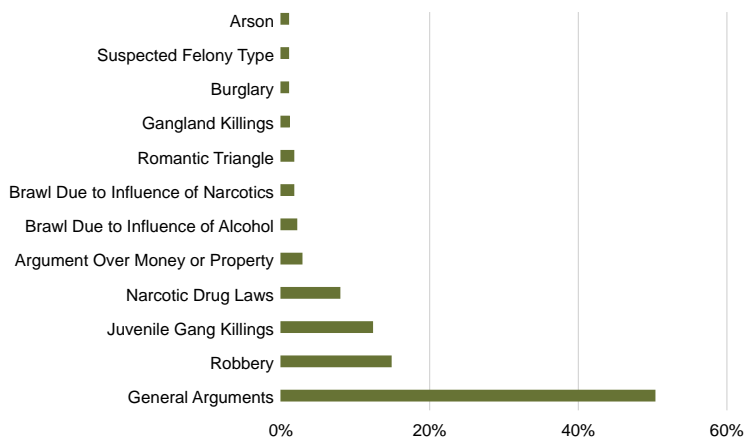
### Less Frequent Homicide Circumstances, 2001

	Total Reported	Percent
Rape	59	.8%
Child Killed By Babysitter	37	.5
Auto Theft	20	.3
Larceny/theft	16	.2
Institutional Gang Killings	8	.1
Sniper Attack	7	.1
Other Sex Offenses	7	.1
Prostitution and Vice	5	.1
Gambling	3	<.1

Note: The above data is for cases where the circumstances were known; in roughly 45 percent of the homicide cases, the circumstances were either other, not known, or not reported.

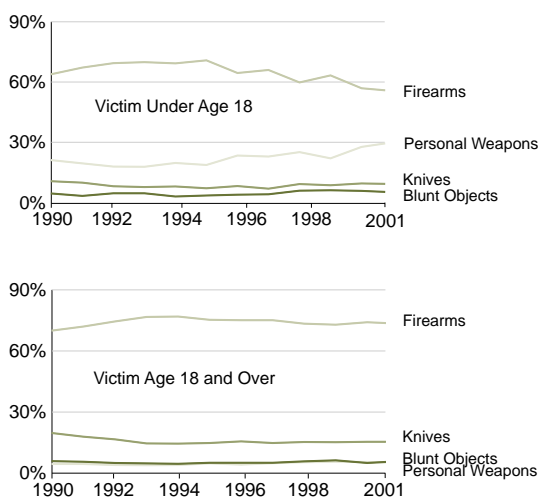
- Violent situations are more likely to result in a fatality when a firearm is involved. The latest available data show use of firearms involved in homicide has decreased in the past decade.
- Type of weapon used in homicide varies somewhat by whether the victim was over or under age 18. In homicides involving juveniles, there has been a reduction in firearm use, while the rate of homicides committed with personal weapons has gone up. This includes hands, fist, and feet.
- For adult victims, weapon use trends over the past 10 years have been relatively steady; about three-fourths of homicides involve firearms, and about 15 percent involve knives.

### Murder Circumstances, 2001



Source: Uniform Crime Reports, 2001, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

### Type of Weapon Used in Murders

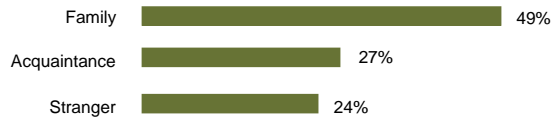


Source: Uniform Crime Reports, 1990-2001, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

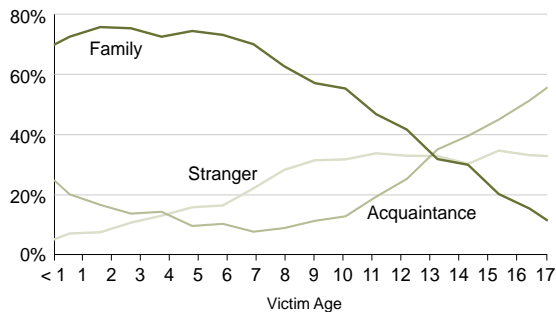
### What are some key characteristics of abductions and kidnappings?

- Data from the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) is available from 12 states to develop a profile of kidnapping offenses.
- The data cover kidnappings of youth age 17 and younger.
- Nearly 50 percent of kidnappings are committed by a family member and about 25 percent by strangers.
- Over three-quarters of kidnappers know their victims (acquaintance or family).
- Infant kidnappings by strangers rarely occur (5.3 percent).
- Children under the age of seven are most often abducted by family or someone who knows them (>80 percent family or acquaintance).
- Generally, if an abduction involves a stranger, the victim is most likely a teenager or pre-teen.
- Kidnappings by an acquaintance or family usually occurs in the victim's residence.
- Kidnappings by a stranger are most likely to occur outdoors (58 percent of the time).
- Regardless of victim/offender relationship, school is the least likely place where kidnappings occur.

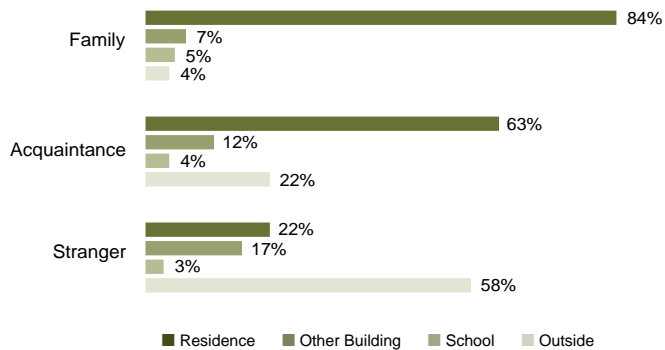
**Kidnapping: Victim-Offender Relationship, 1997**



**Offender Relationship and Victim Age, 1997**



**Locations of Abductions by Offender Relationship, 1997**

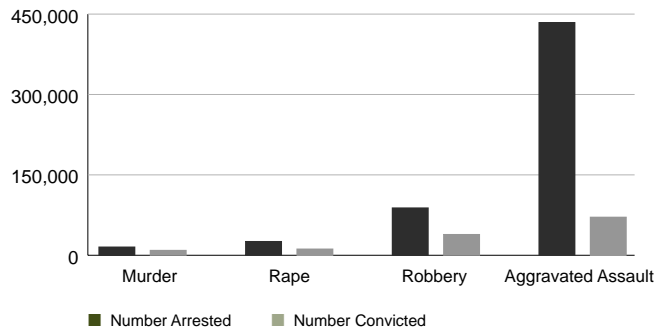


Source: Kidnapping of Juveniles: Patterns from NIBRS, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, June 2000, David Finkelhoe and Richard Ormrod.

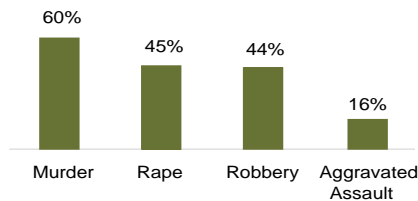
### How do arrest rates compare to conviction rates for serious crime?

- The data shown represent the number of people arrested for a felony who were also convicted of a felony.
- Just over half a million people were arrested for a felony violent crime including homicide, rape, robbery, or aggravated assault.
- The vast majority of these arrests (roughly 430,000) were for aggravated assault. However, those arrested for aggravated assault are most likely convicted of a lesser offense such as misdemeanor assault and battery.
- 60 percent of all arrested homicide suspects are convicted, and 94 percent of those convicted go to prison.
- 45 percent of all arrested rape suspects are convicted, and 70 percent of those convicted go to prison.
- 44 percent of all arrested robbery suspects are convicted, and 76 percent of those convicted go to prison.
- 16 percent of aggravated assault suspects are convicted, and 46 percent of those convicted go to prison.

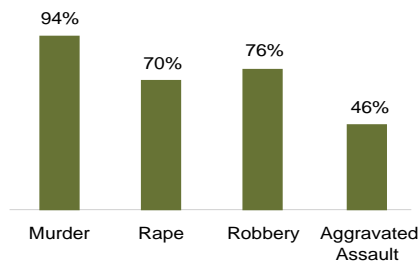
Number of Felony Arrests vs. Felony Convictions, 1998



Percent of Adults Convicted, 1998



Percent of Convicted Adults Receiving Prison Sentences, 1998

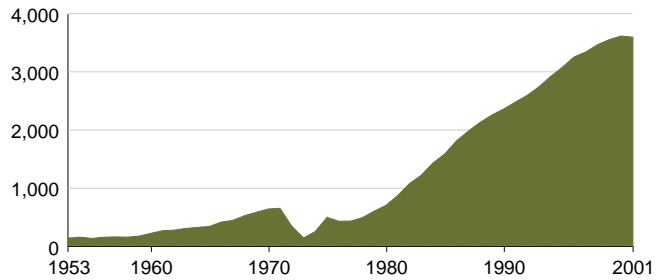


Source: Felony Sentences in State Courts, 1998, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

*What are the trends in death penalty convictions and executions?*

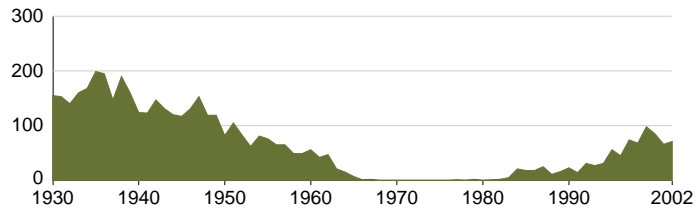
- A moratorium on the death penalty existed between 1973 and 1976. In the years following reinstatement, there has been considerable growth in the number of prisoners on death row.
- In 1973, there were 134 prisoners on death row compared to 3,581 prisoners in 2001.

**Number of Prisoners Under Sentence of Death in the United States 1953-2001**



- A total of 2,951 prisoners were executed between 1930 and 1949, an average of 148 prisoners per year. In contrast, a total of 21 prisoners were executed during the 19-year period of 1965 to 1983.
- Executions have been on the rise in recent years—a total of 798 offenders were put to death during the nineteen-year period from 1984-2002. After a peak of 98 in 1999, the number of executions declined to 66 persons in 2001 and 71 persons in 2002.

**Number of Prisoners Executed in the United States, 1930-2002**



Source: Capital Punishment, 2001, Bureau of Justice Statistics, and [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/exe.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/exe.htm)