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## **Property and Violent Crimes Increase in 2006, But 30-Year Trend is Downward**

Becky Noreus

*University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service*

John A. Gale MS

*University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service, Maine Rural Health Research Center*

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# Research & Policy Brief

February 2008

## Property and Violent Crimes Increase in 2006, But 30-Year Trend is Downward

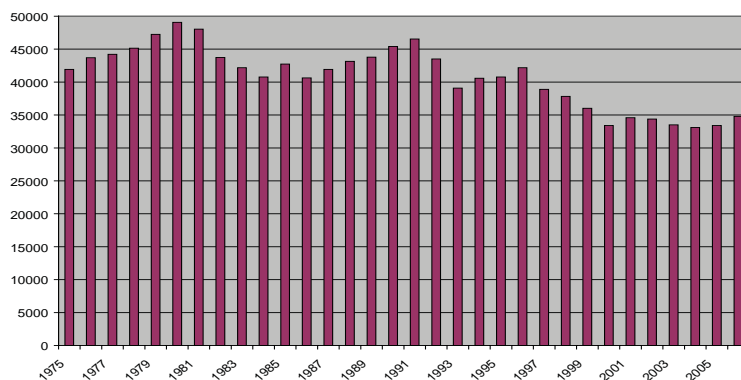
### Overview

This brief provides an overview of index crime trends in Maine between 1975 and 2006. The violent crimes of murder (including non-negligent manslaughter), forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault as well as property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson are considered the most serious crimes occurring in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Each state reports these crimes (referred to as index crimes) on an annual basis to the Federal Bureau of Investigation as part of the Uniform Crime Reports.

### In the last thirty years, index crimes have decreased nearly 17 percent in Maine

Overall, index crimes have decreased 17 percent between 1975 and 2006. Index crimes rose and fell in three small cycles, peaking in 1980, 1991, and 1996. In 2006, the number of index crimes increased slightly (3%), which may indicate that a new cycle has begun. It is important to note that index crimes are lower today than at any point in the 1980s and 1990s. While index crimes have generally decreased since 1980, they have increased five percent since 2004.

### Maine Index Crimes



### Maine's property crime increase in 2006 was one of the highest in the country, but remains lower than 1975

During 2006, property crimes increased four percent in Maine. This increase was the third highest in the country behind Delaware (11%) and Wisconsin (6%). Despite the

### Fast Facts

- In the last thirty years, index crimes have decreased nearly 17 percent in Maine.
- Maine's percent rise in property crime increase in 2006 was one of the highest in the country, but remains lower than 1975.
- The number of violent crimes has increased nearly 12 percent since 2004, but remains well below the rate in 1975.
- Maine's violent crime rate is lower than any other New England state and four times lower than the national rate.

### Authors

Becky Noréus  
Research Analyst  
(207) 780-5835  
rnoreus@usm.maine.edu

Mark Rubin  
Research Associate  
(207) 780-5843  
mrubin@usm.maine.edu

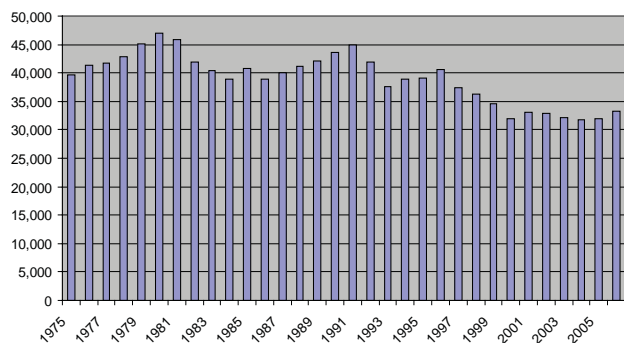
### Maine Crime & Justice Brief Series

Produced by the Maine Justice Policy Center (MJPC), the series charts changes in crime, arrests and incarceration to present a portrait of crime and justice indicators in the state. The briefs include the most recent comprehensive data sets available for Maine.



recent increase, the number of property crimes in 2006 is below the ten-year average (1997-2006) and lower than 30 years earlier. Mirroring the most recent index crime trends, property crimes peaked in the mid-1990s, before falling. Since 2004, property crimes have increased nearly five percent, and are at the highest level since 1999.

### Maine Property Crimes

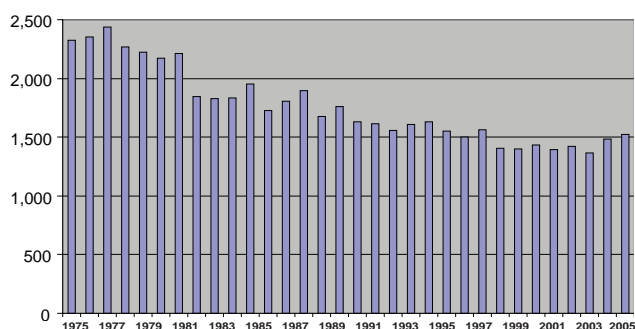


### The number of violent crimes has increased nearly 12 percent since 2004, but remains well below the rate in 1975

Violent crimes have decreased 34 percent from 2,324 in 1975 to 1,524 in 2006. The number of violent crimes peaked in 1977 at 2,438 and remained above 2,000 per year until 1982. Violent crimes reached a low of 1,364 in 2004, but have increased in the past two years.

The two violent crimes that have been driving the increase since 2004 have been rape, which increased eight percent, and robbery, which increased 33 percent in the last two years. Looking back on the last thirty years, rape has increased 131 percent and the number of robberies in 2006 (383) is at its highest level since 1977 (420). Conversely, aggravated assault decreased 58 percent from a high of 1,845 in 1977 to 780 in 2006, and murder decreased 23 percent between 1977 and 2006.

### Maine Violent Crimes



### Maine's violent crime rate is lower than any other New England state and four times lower than the national rate

Despite the recent increase in violent crime, Maine's violent crime rate is lower than rates in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. Maine's violent crime rate was 116 violent crimes per 100,000 population, four times lower than the national average. Compared to New Hampshire and Vermont, Maine's one year increase in violent crime between 2005 and 2006 was also lower.

### Violent crime rates per 100,000: New England and United States 2005-2006 Change

	2006 Violent Index Crime Rate Per 100,000 Population	2006 - 2005 Change
Maine	116	2.6 %
Vermont	137	8.7 %
New Hampshire	139	2.9 %
New England	317	-1.6 %
United States	474	1.0 %

### Implications

While Maine's index crime rates remain lower than at any point in the 1980s and 1990s, the number of index crimes has edged up in recent years. Crime in Maine has risen and fallen in two cycles since 1980, and the present increase may be indicative of the beginning of a new cycle.

The number of violent crimes in Maine is at the highest since 1998. Reported rape is at an all time high, while robbery crimes are at the highest point since 1977. Despite the recent increase, the violent crime trends show Maine as one of the safest states in the nation.

Property crimes remain the overwhelming share of index crimes. Reducing these kinds of crimes may require less police activity and more behavioral changes by the general public. Property crimes are often crimes of opportunity that could be reduced by either locking doors, or putting up notices that attract potential offenders' attention that the crime will not go unnoticed.

Economic considerations also play a role in property crime rates. While the quality of the state's economy helps determine whether property crimes rise or fall, the decision by

state government on social policy issues, especially as they relate to ex-offenders, may help determine whether rates stay low. Maintaining and offering job-training programs, education, community mental health services, and unemployment insurance benefits should be considered carefully. Because studies have shown that nearly two-thirds of ex-offenders recidivate in three years, efforts at bridging their transition from prison and postponing or eliminating their recidivism are likely to have immediate benefits by lowering the crime rate.<sup>ii</sup>

Aside from economic considerations, drug and alcohol abuse remain at the root of many violent and property crimes. In the *2007 Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing Public Policy for Safer Communities*, nearly two-thirds (63%) of victims threatened with or victimized by violence believed the offender was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time the victimization occurred.<sup>iii</sup> The state will have to ensure proper attention is paid to drug and alcohol rehabilitation resources, if policy makers hope to reduce index crimes across the state over the next five years.

### Maine Justice Policy Center

The Maine Justice Policy Center (MJPC) informs policy development and improvement of practice in Maine's criminal and juvenile justice systems. A partnership between the USM Muskie School of Public Service and the Maine Department of Corrections, MJPC collaborates with numerous community-based and governmental agencies. MJPC conducts applied research, evaluates programs and new initiatives, and provides technical assistance, consultation and organizational development services. MJPC programs include the state statistical analysis center, funded by the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics and guided by a statewide advisory group.

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### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup>It should be noted that index crimes do not capture all crimes considered serious (e.g. domestic violence).

<sup>ii</sup>Langan, P.A., & Levin, D.J. (2002, June). Recidivism of prisoners released in 1994. (NCJ 193427). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>iii</sup>Rubin, M., Dorsey, C., & Shaler, G. (2007). *Maine crime victimization report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service, Maine Statistical Analysis Center.

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