

The Safest Cities in America – Murrieta at #2

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More than 1.1 million violent crimes were reported in the United States in 2014, or 366 incidents per 100,000 Americans. Compared with 2013, the U.S. violent crime rate fell by 1%. The 2014 violent crime rate was also 9.6% lower compared to 2010, and 22.1% lower compared to 2005. However, violent crime rates, as well as any improvements, are by no means uniform across the country. Some of the nation's cities are far safer than others.

24/7 Wall St. reviewed violent crime rates in major U.S. cities from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) most recent Uniform Crime Report. Violent crime includes murder, no negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. This year, Irvine, California, ranked as the safest city in the country, with a violent crime rate of 49 incidents per 100,000 people.

While it is difficult to identify the root causes of violent behavior, violence is often conducted in similar contexts, and cities with especially low violent crime rates frequently share social and economic characteristics. In an interview with 24/7 Wall St., John Roman, senior fellow at the Urban Institute, a social policy research think tank, explained, "Places that are experiencing consistent economic growth tend to be the safest places in America."

These areas are economically prosperous — and so are the residents. The median annual household income in all but two of the 25 safest cities exceeds the national income level of \$53,657. Similarly, the poverty rate in all but two of the 25 cities is lower than the national rate of 15.5%.

How these factors contribute to violent crime is still unclear, however. Roman noted that poverty, for example, may not be the cause of crime but rather the consequence. "The effect is young men who don't have jobs, who dropped out of school, who aren't trying to learn new skills." People in these circumstances, often turn to illegal activity to make up for the economic hardship. Unfortunately, as Roman explained, "The reality is that being a drug dealer, or an arms dealer, actually doesn't pay very well. So that accelerates the cycle of poverty."

The safest cities tend to have relatively low unemployment rates. While individuals considered as unemployed are necessarily looking for work, a weak job market is also home to relatively high numbers of people who are not looking for a job and are generally unengaged. As Roman explained, "The number one predictor of crime is dense areas of disconnected young men."

Education levels, which are general predictors of income levels, also tend to be tied to violent crime. Adults in 20 of the 25 safest cities are more likely to have completed at least high school than their peers nationwide. While again it is difficult to determine which comes first, "places with high educational

attainment and relatively higher incomes have more opportunities for citizens, so the choice to commit crime becomes less appealing,” said Roman.

24/7 Wall St. considered only the nation’s largest cities, but the ones with the lowest crime rates tended to have relatively small populations. All of the 25 safest cities have populations between 100,000 and 250,000 people. By contrast, some of the nation’s largest urban centers, such as New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, are each home to several millions of people. These three U.S. cities each reported 597, 884, and 491 violent crimes per 100,000 residents, respectively.

Many of the safest cities are frequently highly desirable places to live because of their proximity to major urban centers. These larger metropolitan centers tend to offer cultural and economic amenities and benefits, including high-paying jobs. However, they also tend to have higher crime rates. In this sense, residents of smaller cities outside these areas benefit from the best of both worlds.

To identify the 25 safest cities in the country, 24/7 Wall St. reviewed violent crime rates in U.S. cities with at least 100,000 people from the FBI’s 2014 Uniform Crime Report. The numbers and rates of murders, non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, which are included in the violent crime rate, as well as burglaries, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson — all classified as property crime — also came from the FBI’s report. We also considered data for each year from 2010 through 2014. Annual unemployment rates for 2014 came from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Median household income, poverty rates, the percentage of adults with at least a bachelor’s degree, and the percentage of adults with at least a high school diploma came from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS).