



# The United States Conference of Mayors

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## **U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS DENOUNCES CRIME RANKINGS AS BOGUS, DAMAGING TO CITIES**

**Washington, D.C.** – The U.S. Conference of Mayors today denounced the expected release of city-by-city crime rankings by CQ Press as “a premeditated statistical mugging of America’s cities.” The book containing the rankings is scheduled for publication on Monday, November 22.

“These rankings represent a gross misuse of FBI data,” said Houston Mayor Annise D. Parker, Chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Criminal and Social Justice Committee. “Everyone with the slightest knowledge of this issue knows the rankings are not credible, but the publication persists with them, presumably because rankings are popular and sell books. Unfortunately, they also do real harm to the reputation and economy of the cities that come out on the losing end, often through no fault of their own.”

“For many years,” Mayor Parker continued, “the media gave these rankings broad and uncritical coverage. More recently, however, we have been pleased to see the media take a more skeptical approach. In the last couple of years, most journalistic outlets have either ignored the rankings altogether or noted that the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the American Society of Criminology all considered them bogus and damaging.”

Mayor Parker was referring to an annual ranking of U.S. cities by “highest crime rate” and “lowest crime rate,” compiled by CQ Press, which is owned by SAGE Publications, an independent international publisher. The rankings were initially compiled by Morgan Quitno Press, whose editor, Scott Morgan, once acknowledged he would be “stunned if there is a criminologist out there who will support this.”

The rankings have received strong criticism for years. The FBI, American Society of Criminology, and Criminal Justice Journalists, among others, have joined the Conference of Mayors in pointing to a variety of flaws. Among them:

- Cities differ in ways that have nothing to do with their crime risk, but that can greatly affect their ranking. Pure geographic happenstance — the location of the boundary line separating “city” and “suburb” — is one. Cities that are geographically small and that therefore do not include as many middle-class areas as larger cities get penalized, arbitrarily.
- Cities differ in the degree to which their citizens report crimes and in how crime is reported. How much of the difference between any two cities’ crime ranks is real and how much reflects differences in measurement and reporting systems is not known.
- Knowing the city in which a person lives reveals next-to-nothing about his or her crime risk, especially when compared with genuine risk factors such as age, lifestyle, and the neighborhood within a given city where that person lives.

The annual rankings are derived from the FBI's annual Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) statistics. The UCR program, which dates from the 1930s, gathers crime statistics from thousands of U.S. communities for the purpose of helping individual communities track their own crime trends and detect national patterns.

Four years ago, the FBI began posting a disclaimer about the rankings on its website where it posts the UCR figures: [http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/about/variables\\_affecting\\_crime.html](http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/about/variables_affecting_crime.html). The disclaimer reads:

Each year when *Crime in the United States* is published, many entities—news media, tourism agencies, and other groups with an interest in crime in our Nation—use reported figures to compile rankings of cities and counties. These rankings, however, are merely a quick choice made by the data user; they provide no insight into the many variables that mold the crime in a particular town, city, county, state, region, or other jurisdiction. Consequently, these rankings lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses that often create misleading perceptions adversely affecting cities and counties, along with their residents.

In 2007 the Conference of Mayors passed a resolution in opposition to the rankings. It is available at [http://usmayors.org/resolutions/75th\\_conference/csj\\_05.asp](http://usmayors.org/resolutions/75th_conference/csj_05.asp). The resolution states that the Conference is committed to working with the FBI and the U.S. Department of Justice to, “educate reporters, elected officials, and citizens on what the data means and doesn’t mean.”

“We’re disappointed that CQ Press and SAGE would persist in publishing these rankings,” Mayor Parker concluded. “They simply are not valid, and they lead to false comparisons that are damaging to our nation’s cities.”

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