
Fact Sheet

Recent Trends in Murder Clearance Rates

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Although the United States has been enjoying a period of relatively low crime rates in recent years, an alternative measure of how well the police are doing is the crime clearance rate. Crimes can be cleared either through an arrest or by exceptional means, including having an offender who is known but dead, or one who is not available for arrest (i.e. out of the country). Although national clearance rates for all Index crimes are relatively low (46.5% of violent crimes and 16.4% of property crime in 2003), they are typically much higher for violent crimes. Violent crimes such as murder have higher rates of reporting to the police, and as the FBI notes in their Uniform Crime Reports release, Crime in the United States, "Violent crimes often undergo a more vigorous investigative effort than crimes against property, and they more often involve victims and/or witnesses who are able to identify the perpetrators" (FBI 2003: 255).

Our analysis of the murder clearance rates for 2001 to 2004 compared the City of Baton Rouge to New Orleans, a group of cities that are similar in size to Baton Rouge (what the FBI calls Group II cities, which have a population of 100,000 to 249,999), and to the National clearance rate. Data for 2004 are only available for the cities of Baton Rouge and New Orleans at the time of this

writing. Figure 1 below illustrates that the performance of the Baton Rouge police in clearing murders is consistently better than New Orleans, and they steadily remain above the trend for cities of similar size. While in 2002 the Baton Rouge murder clearance rate slipped slightly below the National average, Table 1 below illustrates that when considering the average clearance rate for the three year period (2001-2003) over which data is available for all groups, the Baton Rouge police maintain the highest average murder clearance rate.

The 2004 figures for Baton Rouge and New Orleans are particularly notable. While both cities show improvements in their murder clearance rates for this year, the Baton Rouge police have been exceptionally successful, with an extremely high murder clearance rate of 72.34%.

While clearance rates do change from year to year, these data indicate that in recent years the Baton Rouge police have exceeded both the National average and the average of similarly sized cities in the clearance of murders.

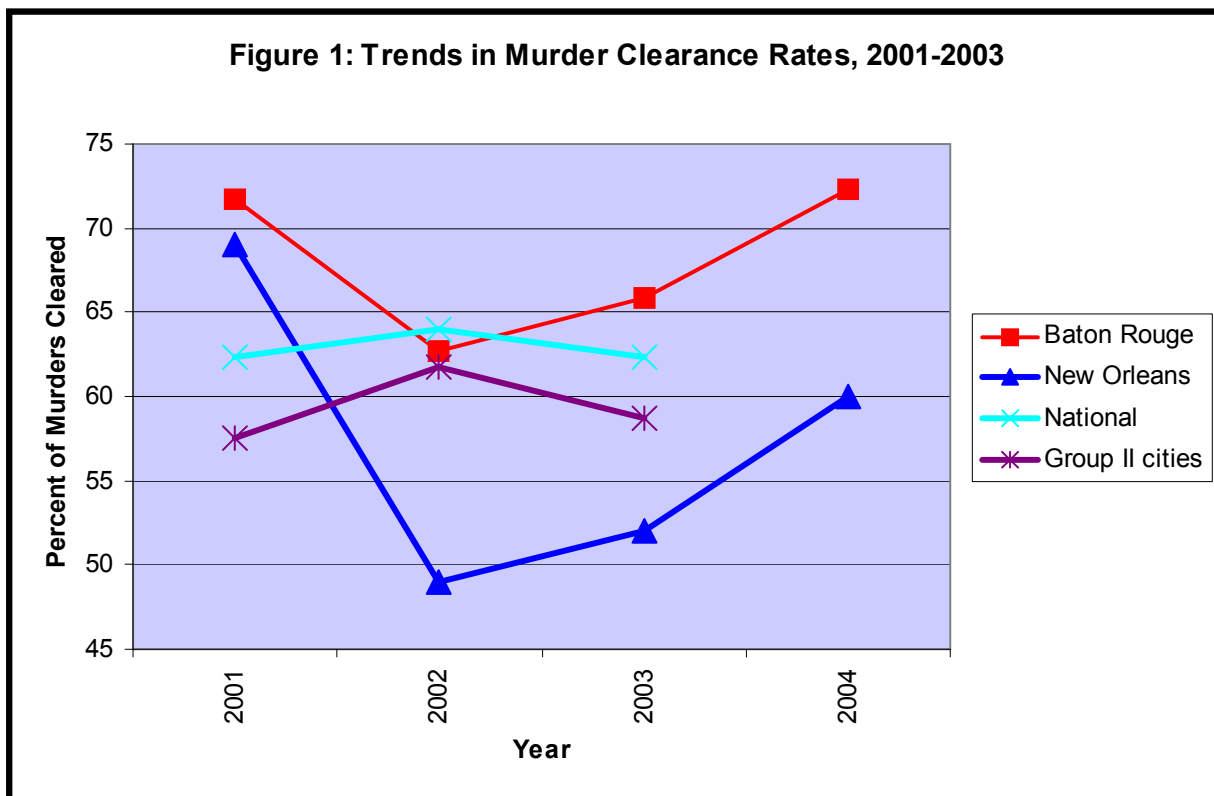


Table 1: Average Murder Clearance Rates, 2001- 2003

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Percentage of Murders Cleared</u>
1. Baton Rouge	66.77
2. National Average	62.93
3. Group II Cities	59.3
4. New Orleans	56.67

References:

2003: FBI Uniform Crime Reports: Crime in the United States. Available at <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm#cius>

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