Perceptions of Crime in the US

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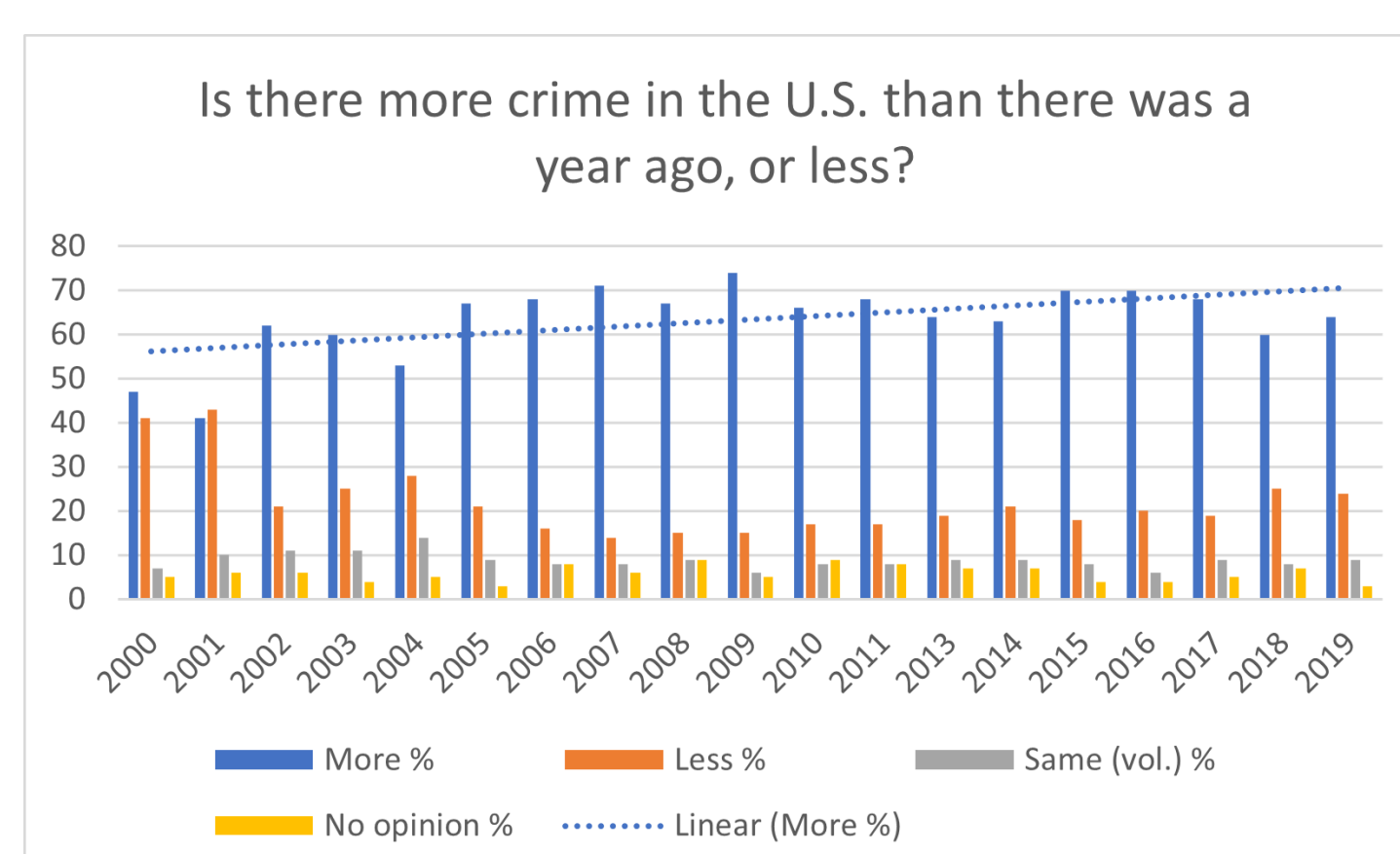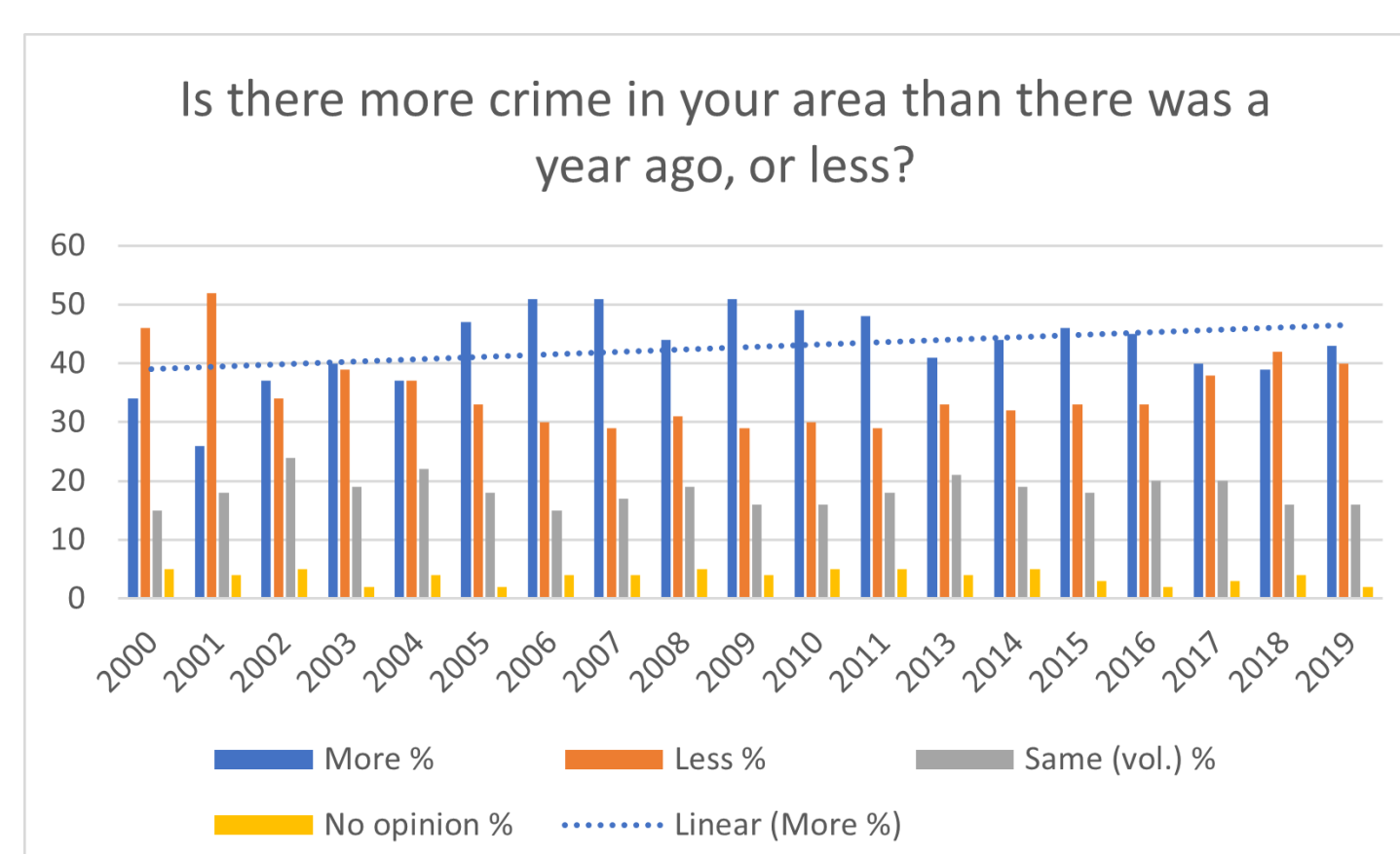### TWC 514: Data Visualization (2020 FALL - B)

Introduction

The number of violent crimes in the United States has decreased by almost 16% from 2000 to 2019. Yet many people think that crime has actually increased.

Perceptions of Crime

In a yearly Gallup poll[2] people were asked the following questions:
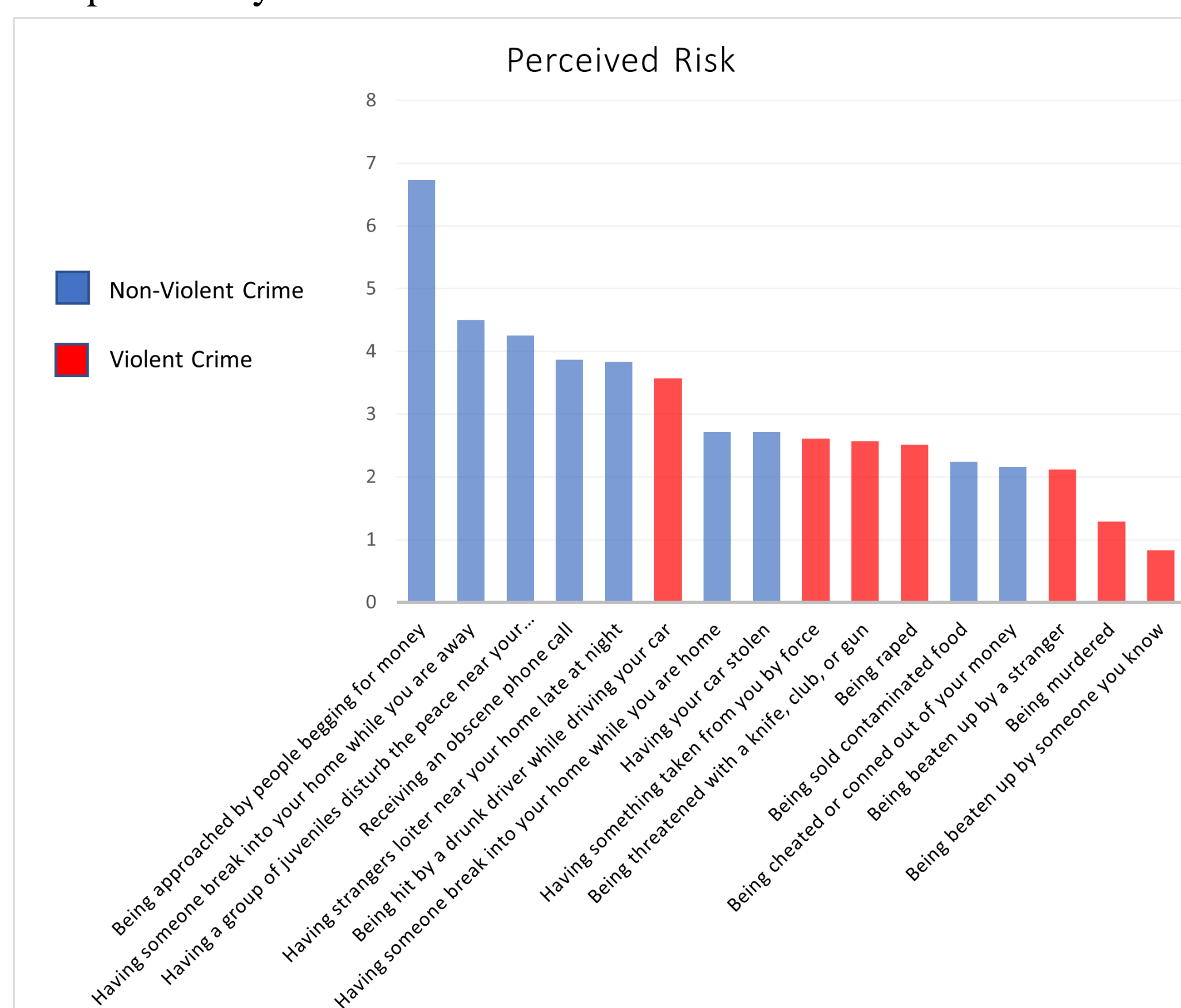1. Is there more crime in your area than there was a year ago, or less?
2. Is there more crime in the US than there was a year ago, or less?

While people were less likely to think there was more crime in their area than in the US year-to-year, the overall trend indicates people think crime is on the rise.
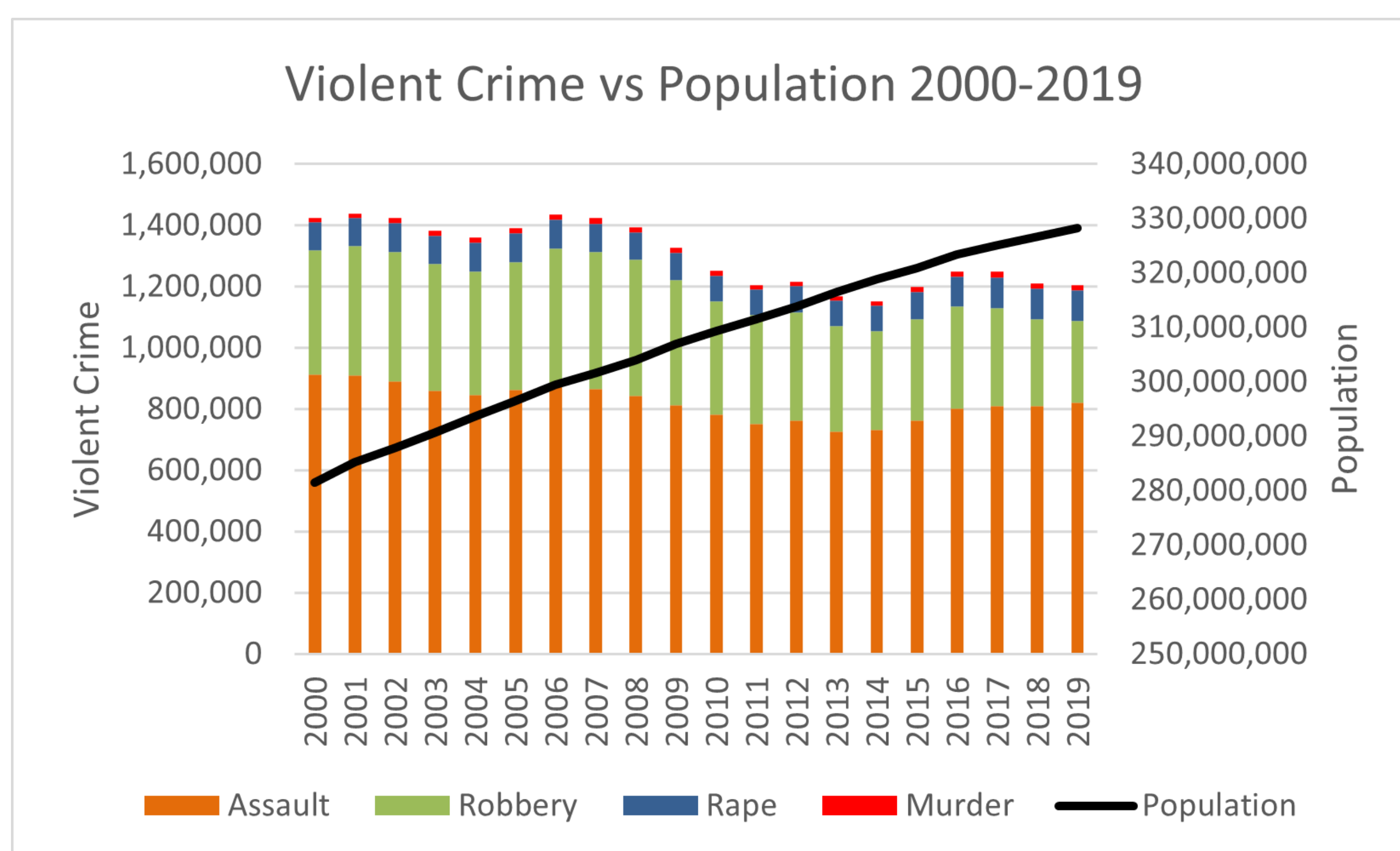

Is there more crime in your area than there was a year ago, or less?
SOURCE: Gallup

Is there more crime in the U.S. than there was a year ago, or less?
SOURCE: Gallup

Perceived Risk

In a survey conducted in the Seattle area[6], people were asked to rate their perceived risk of 16 types of crime on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest amount of risk. The top 5 crimes were all non-violent and murder was number 15 of the 16. The survey respondents appear to be less worried about violent crime, but a serious crime will not be highly feared if it is viewed as unlikely[6]. This explains why murder is so far down the list.
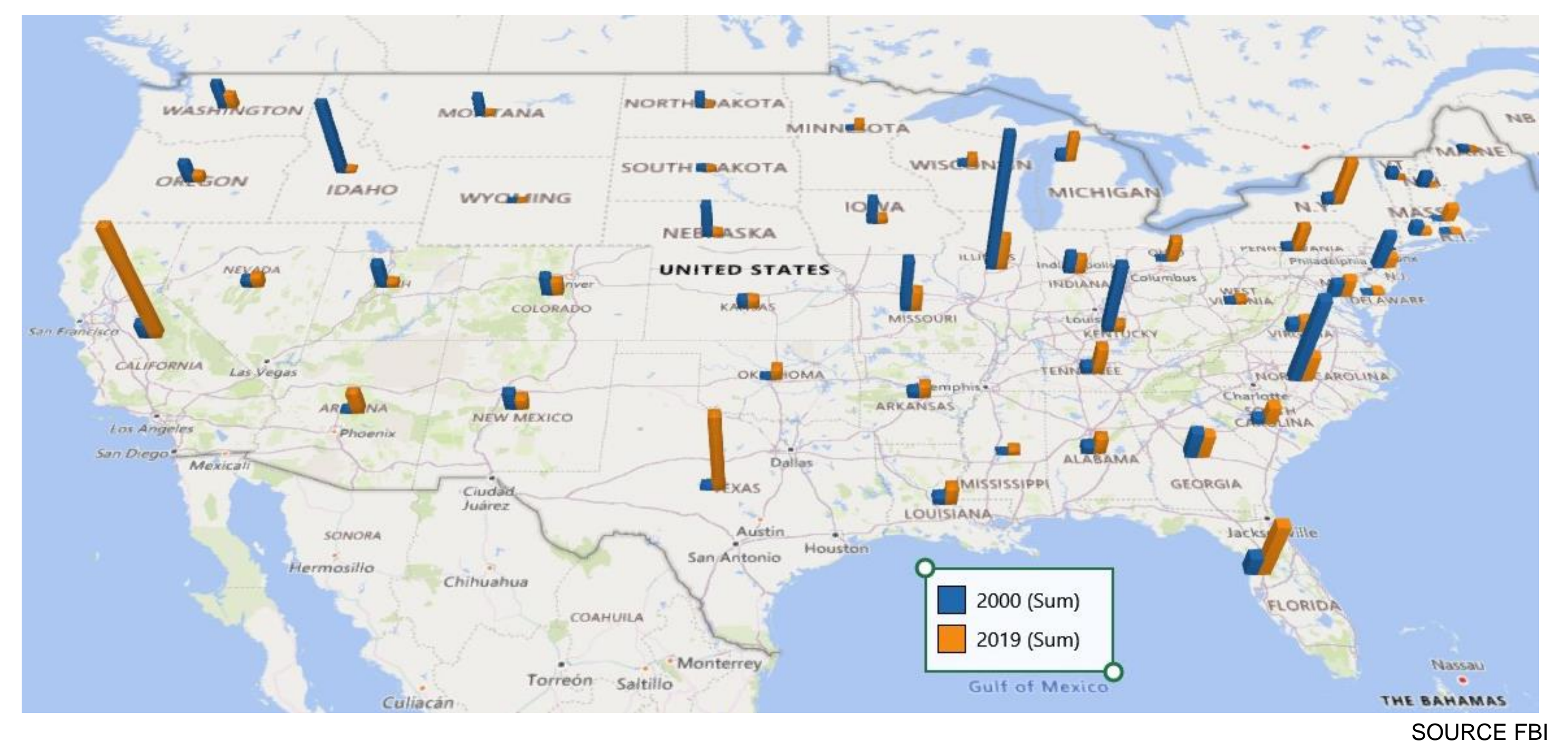

Perceived Risk
SOURCE: Warr

Violent Crime vs Population

According statistics from the FBI[1], as the US population has increased, the number of violent crimes committed has decreased.
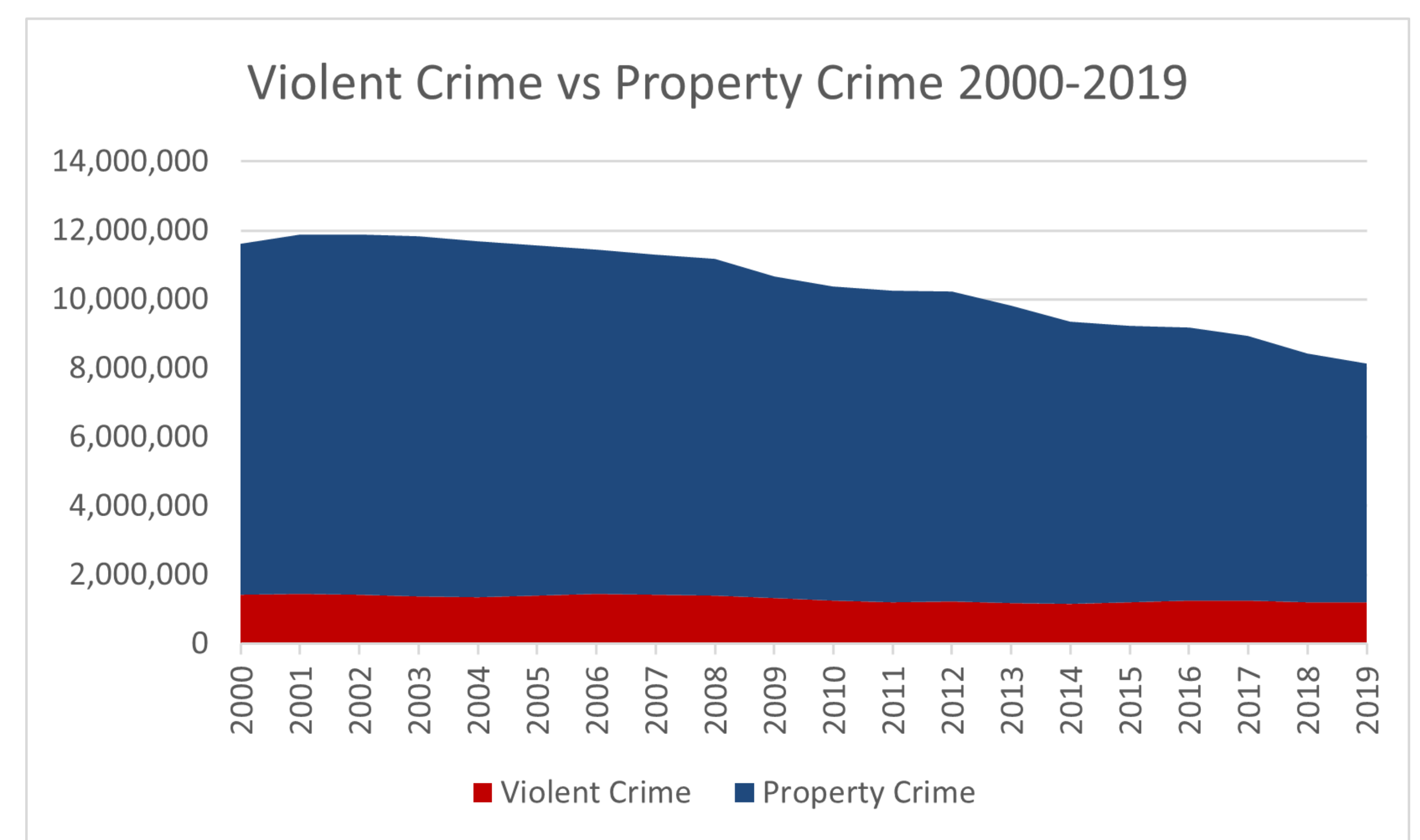

Violent Crime vs Population 2000-2019
SOURCE FBI

Violent Crime by State

While crime trends for the country have been steeply down since the 1990s and while this decline has included large as well as small cities, there is a good deal of variation[5]. In most states violent crime has decreased. However, a few (California, Texas, and Florida) have seen dramatic increases.

SOURCE FBI

Violent Crime vs Property Crime

"Using the FBI data, the violent crime rate fell 49% between 1993 and 2019, with large decreases in the rates of robbery (-68%), murder/non-negligent manslaughter (-47%) and aggravated assault (-43%). (It's not possible to calculate the change in the rape rate during this period because the FBI revised its definition of the offense in 2013.) Meanwhile, the property crime rate fell 55%, with big declines in the rates of burglary (-69%), motor vehicle theft (-64%) and larceny/theft (-49%)[3]."

Violent Crime vs Property Crime 2000-2019
SOURCE FBI

Conclusion

So, if the data says that violent crime, all crime for that matter, is decreasing why do people think that it is increasing?

The local news may be responsible for convincing Americans that violent crime is more common than it really is[4]. "If it bleeds, it leads" has been the mantra of newspapers and TV news since their inception. They are looking to grab readers/viewers attention and the way to do that is through sensationalizing the news. This has led to a perception of higher, more serious crime than actually exists in the US.

Bibliography

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