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Why CQ Press Publishes City Crime Rankings: A Response to the Critics

Washington, D.C., November 19, 2007 — Every year, the publication of *City Crime Rankings* attracts criticism and controversy, and this year is no exception. The critics largely fault the survey's ranking of the country's safest and -- most dangerous -- cities. In particular, the critics argue that ranking the most dangerous cities unfairly paints an entire city with a negative brush, when, in fact, only parts of the city, or segments of its population, may have serious crime problems. Moreover, they say, negative rankings are economically unfair because they hit designated cities in the pocketbook, scaring away tourists and convention business.

In the face of this annual torrent of criticism, why does CQ Press -- the nation's No. 1 publisher of books on government and the recipient of countless awards for excellence -- continue to publish *City Crime Rankings*? The reason is simple, and gets to the very heart of what CQ Press, and our parent, Congressional Quarterly, are all about: We are journalistic enterprises, and our goal, and passion, is to provide readers with useful, accurate and balanced information.

As journalists, we gather information -- in this case the annual data on crime collected and released to the public by the FBI -- and then we try to make sense of it. We do that by performing some very basic analysis to try to bring meaning to the numbers, to make them useful to the average citizen. But the rankings hardly stand alone: This year's 408-page 14th edition of *City Crime Rankings* includes 90 tables of data and 12 graphs. The book also ranks Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), which encompass cities and their surrounding suburbs. Such a huge mass of statistics would be meaningless for the average reader unless some effort were made to summarize and analyze it.

The FBI, the Conference of Mayors, American Society of Criminology and various police chiefs -- notably of cities that received "dangerous" rankings -- say such rankings are "simplistic." They argue that crime levels are affected by many different factors, including population density, economic conditions and education and drop-out levels.

We agree, of course, that crime-ranking information contains many variables and that all must be considered carefully. But as journalists, we take very seriously our responsibility to keep Americans informed -- even if the news is not good. So we publish such data, even if it causes cities and officials to feel aggrieved.

While crime has many causes, its results are simple to understand. Reporting on cities' crime rates, and presenting the results in understandable formats, is an elementary journalistic exercise.

The incidence of crime – is it growing, or dropping? -- is of real concern to millions of Americans, and the rankings help them better understand what is happening in their communities. They not only allow for comparisons among different cities and metro areas but also enable local leaders and concerned citizens to track their own progress in addressing crime problems from year to year.

Knowing whether crime is rising or falling is a first step toward addressing its causes. *City Crime Rankings* will aid in that effort, not least by helping citizens to hold the appropriate officials accountable.

John A. Jenkins
Publisher
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ABOUT CQ PRESS

CQ Press (www.cqpress.com) publishes reference works, textbooks, directories, and online resources on government, politics, and world affairs that educate and inform readers about government and democracy. It is a division of Congressional Quarterly Inc. (CQ), a private, independent news-gathering and publishing firm based in Washington, D.C. CQ produces content renowned for its objectivity, breadth, depth of coverage, and high standards of journalistic and editorial excellence. Founded in 1945, CQ is owned by the Florida-based Times Publishing Company, a leading independent media organization and publisher of the *St. Petersburg Times*.

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