# Mitchell and Hoover:

# Focus Differs on Crime Data

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 7—For the last year, the office of Attorney General John N. Mitchell has been rewriting the Federal Bureau of Investigation's interpretations of the nation's crime statistics, which for four decades had been within the sole control of J. Edgar Hoover.

As a result of the interpretations placed on the crime situation by Mr. Mitchell's public relations staff, it has been made to appear that the F.B.I. believes the crime rise that began under a Democratic administration almost a decade ago is tapering off.

The figures, however, show that reported crime is rising at about the same velocity as before.

Mr. Mitchell's efforts with the crime figures are in line with the Nixon Administration's law-and-order political strategy. President Nixon won office in 1968 on a campaign of criticism of the high crime rates under the Democrats, coupled with promises to do better.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has often been accused of presenting crime figures in a way that emphasizes the crime increases, supposedly because this will justify larger F.B.I. budgets. Attorneys General before Mr. Mitchell have tended to stress what good news could be found in the figures, as if to say that Justice Department programs were succeeding.

### Uniform Crime Reports

Documents have come to light illustrating how the Attorney General began last June to change the interpretation placed on the crime figures without altering the figures themselves or omitting crucial statistics.

The F.B.I. Uniform Crime Reports are compilations of local police departments' statistics on crimes reported to them. Each year, the bureau issues the figures in four quarterly reports and an annual report.

The reports are presented in virtually impenetrable form, consisting of tables of figures plus some explanatory passages. So the public's impression of what the figures show is largely influenced by at press statement that is always issued on F.B.I. stationery with the reports.

Ever since the bureau began releasing crime figures in 1933, Mr. Hoover, the director, has drafted the statements to explain the figures. This changed last June 22, when Mr. Hoover's office prepared a statement, under his letterhead, that characterized the statistics to be released that day as follows:

"For release Monday P.M. June 22, 1970—according to figures made available through the F.B.I.'s Uniform Crime Reports and released by Attorney General John N. Mitchell, serious crime in the United States continued its upward trend, recording a 13 per cent rise nationally for the first three months in 1970 when compared to the same period in 1969."

### Another Version

The Statement, rewritten in Mr. Mitchell's office, and as it was actually issued under Mr. Hoover's letterhead, began as follows:

"For release Monday P.M., June 22, 1970—Attorney General John N. Mitchell announced today that the F.B.I.'s Uniform Crime Reports show that the rate of increase of violent crimes in the first three months of 1970 slowed by 7 per cent in the major cities of the nation —and by 3 per cent in the nation as a whole."

It was not until the third paragraph of Mr. Mitchell's release that it was disclosed crime had risen by 13 per cent.

Since then, each release of F.B.I. figures has revealed a difference in tone between the explanatory material written by the bureau and printed in the crime reports themselves, and the statement authorized by Mr. Mitchell and published under the F.B.I. letterhead.

The bureau's explanation invariably stated how much reported crime had risen. Mr. Mitchell's accompanying statement began with a passage that explained how the crime rise had slowed in certain respects.

The difference between Mr. Hoover's view and Mr. Mitchell's view of the crime figures came into sharp focus last week when the annual figures for 1970 were released. They showed that, in the two years since the Republicans took office, reports of major crimes have risen from 4.4 million in 1968 to 5.5 million last year—a rise of 25 per cent. The crime rate has also risen, but not as rapidly—from 2,235 reported major crimes per 100,000 United States residents in 1968 to 2,741 per 100,000 in 1970.

### Explanatory Material

The explanatory material written by the F.B.I. in the report said that reported crime increased by 11 per cent in 1970 over 1969, and that it rose by 144 per cent since 1960. "The risk of becoming a victim of crime in this country is increasing," it concluded, and "population growth cannot alone account for the crime increases."

When the figures were released on Tuesday, some news reports said that crime was rising, others said that it was "tapering off," and others quoted Mr. Hoover as having said that the risk of being a crime victim was rising, and then quoted Mr. Mitchell's statement that the crime rise was slowing down.

Commenting in response to questions about the revisions of the release, Jack W. Hushen, a Justice Department spokesman said:

"Press releases come up to us from various divisions and we are continually changing things, putting emphasis on more newsworthy items and significant points that we find have been overlooked.

"What they send us is a proposed press release. We review them to see that they are set in the proper context. I can show you a lot that have been rewritten a lot more than that. After all, these are reports put out under the Attorney General's name."

Spokesmen for the F.B.I. and Mr. Mitchell's office said that the releases were being handled as always, with the Attorney General's office giving inal approval to the press statements. Comparisons between the F.B.I.'s explanatory material and the press statements of past years make it clear that only in Mr. Mitchell's tenure has Mr. Hoover's copy been edited.

### A Matter of Stress

In no case has Mr. Mitchell's statements changed the figures or omitted crucial statistics. But he has stressed certain figures that tend to show that the crime picture has improved under the Nixon Administration, and the pattern seems clear enough by now to establish that the Republican candidates will probably stress certain points in discussing crime.

One is the "rate-of-increase" argument. It points out that, while the volume of reported crime was 11 per cent higher in 1970 than 1969, and 12 per cent higher in 1969 than 1968, this is a slower rate of increase than in 1968, when it rose 17 per cent over 1967, and 1967, when it rose 16 per cent over 1966.

Statisticians say that there is some validity to this argument, but that it also contains a built-in distortion because, as the volume grows, the rate of increase usually shrinks. They cite the following example:

If there were one million crimes in 1968, two million crimes in 1970, crime would have increased by 100 per cent in 1969, but by only 50 per cent in 1970. It could thus be said that the rate of crime increase had been cut in half in 1970.

SFChronicle version, same date, includes two paragraphs (marked) not given here.

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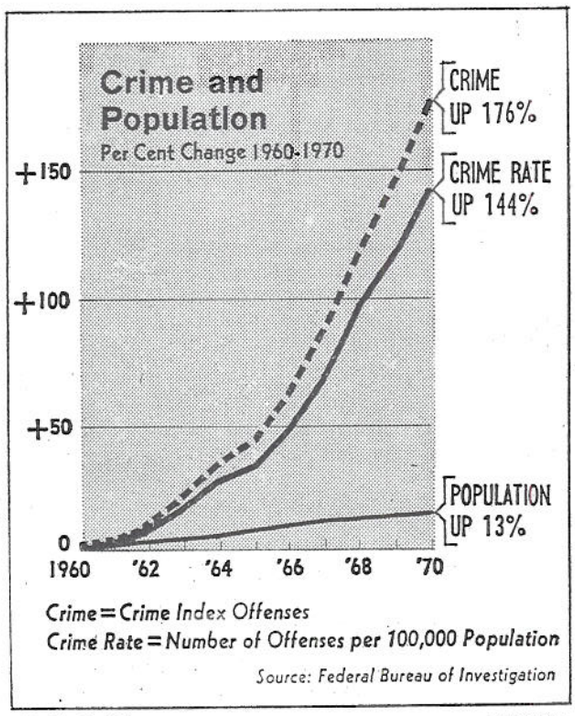


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**This chart on the rise in crime was issued by the F.B.I.**