BR crime down, while U.S. rate up

By RYAN GOUDELOCKE
Advocate staff writer

Baton Rouge was among three of four large cities in Louisiana where crime rates bucked a national trend of slight increases in 2001, according to preliminary numbers from the FBI.

Crime dropped significantly in Lafayette and Shreveport, but it was up 6 percent in New Orleans.

Nationwide, the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program showed an overall increase of 2 percent in major crimes in 2001. Murders were up 3.1 percent, accompanied by jumps in burglaries, robberies and car thefts.

More than 17,000 law enforcement agencies in the country report murders, rapes, robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries and felony thefts to the FBI. Most also report arsons.

Only cities with populations more than 100,000 are broken down in the UCR numbers. City police released their totals locally in February, but FBI tallies, which allow nationwide and statewide comparison among cities, were released Monday. Final numbers should be available by autumn.

Violent crime in Baton Rouge dropped about 8 percent in 2001, including a decrease in murders from 58 in 2000 to 46 last year.

"That was really a big drop in the murder rate," police spokesman Cpl. Don Kelly said of

Major crime in La. metropolitan areas, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent change 2000-2001</th>
<th>Violent crime</th>
<th>Property crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
<td>20,318</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>2,547</td>
<td>17,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
<td>8,208</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1,045</td>
<td>7,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans*</td>
<td>36,056</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5,876</td>
<td>30,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shreveport</td>
<td>15,746</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>1,929</td>
<td>13,817</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excludes arsons

Note: Violent crime includes murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault.

Property crime includes burglary, theft, auto theft and arson.

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

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Major crimes in Lafayette fell 1 percent from 8,277 in 2000 to 8,208 in 2001. Rape, thefts and motor vehicle thefts fell, while all other categories were up. The city had three murders in 2000 and five in 2001.

Lafayette Police Cpl. Mark Francis said his department is pleased by the slight decrease in reported crime, especially considering the department is short about 26 officers.

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Lafayette Parish has had just two murders so far this year, he said.

New Orleans reported 36,056 major crimes in 2001, up from 34,001 in 2000. All categories except for rape were up. Murders increased from 204 to 212, and rapes decreased from 227 to 209.

But Sgt. Paul Accardo, a New Orleans Police Department spokesman, said Monday that the first three months of 2002 were encouraging when compared to the first three months of 2001. He said armed robberies were down more than 11 percent and murders were up just 2 percent.

"We're doing everything we can to control it (major crimes) and keep it down," Accardo said. "We're still not satisfied."

New Orleans has had a "spike" in the number of murders in recent weeks, he acknowledged, saying drugs or arguments or a combination of both have played a part in more than 90 percent of them.

"There are a lot of social problems underlying these murders," Accardo said.

Drugs are fueling violent crime in the Big Easy, he said, noting that the department's top brass is focusing on the city's illegal drug trade.

Unlike the numbers for Baton Rouge and Lafayette, the figures for New Orleans do not include arson.

In the South, major crimes rose 1.9 percent.

The South was the only region with a reported increase in overall crime, despite a decrease in murders. The murder rate dropped 2.1 percent from 2000 to 2001.

Editor's note: Advocate staff writers Joe Gyan and Kevin Blanchard and The Associated Press contributed to this report.