

Tick Em Up

There's been an uptick in the use of the word "uptick". Have you noticed? It's a decent enough word, sure, but what ticks me off is how, well, stupidly people use it, especially when talking about "crime". What's an uptick, anyway? Seems to me it's, um... a tick. Upward. Nothing much, just a tick, like the seconds on a digital watch, ticking away, tick tick tick. It's a word to use when the change it refers to doesn't even merit the word "increase", really. When anything stronger feels like exaggeration, then you say "uptick".

But... no. For some reason, it's become popular to talk about "upticks" in "crime", then segueing into an anxiety-ridden hyperventilation about a "crimewave". The obvious problem is that upticks make waves the same way raindrops make oceans (and, of course, there's the total disregard for the fact that very few types of crime are even seeing upticks, and those that are are still sitting near historic lows anyway). And so, people, folks, my ninjas... please, RELAX. There is no "crime wave"; society has not gotten more dangerous. The only way to fool yourself — or to be fooled — into thinking that "crime" is rising in any meaningful way is to compare today with, well, yesterday, essentially. No comparison with the early 2000's, or the 90's, or 80's, will reveal anything of the sort. In fact, quite the opposite. In the context of the past 5 decades, crime is simply LOW. Across the board.

A final, related thought... sometimes statistics are used to make upticks look like explosions. With "crime", almost invariably, when we see 50%, 60% jumps, they usually come from hyperlocal reports, or categories that comprise extremely rare events. If burglaries in Dinkville are up a whopping 50%, it's worth looking to see whether they simply went from, say, 8 last year to 12 this year. 50%, but just 4 more incidents. Or did national terrorism occurrences leap up 33%? Like, say, from 3 total to 4 — one incident? ^{Percentage} ~~explosions~~ explosions, but in real life, tiny upticks. Statistically normal fluctuations, nothing more. Just... beware the fallacy of small numbers, my friends. Don't allow panic-mongering naked emperors to commandeer your amygdalae.