



Tribal Law Enforcement

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Tribally operated law enforcement agencies provide a broad range of public safety services. They respond to calls for service, investigate crimes, enforce traffic laws, execute arrest warrants, serve process, provide court security, and conduct search and rescue operations.

Tribal law enforcement comprises 258 agencies that have at least one full-time sworn officer with arrest authority or authority to issue citations in Indian country, consisting of:

- 234 tribally operated law enforcement agencies
- 23 police agencies operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and
- the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program, which provides services to Alaska Native villages that are under the jurisdiction of the Alaska State Police, the entity that administers the VPSO.

The Census of Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies (CTLEA) helps fulfill BJS's legislative mandate

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under the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010 (TLOA; P.L. 111-211, 124 Stat. 2258 § 251(b)) to establish and implement a tribal crime data collection system. The CTLEA collects information from tribal law enforcement agencies, VPSOs in Alaska, and law enforcement agencies operated by the BIA. The survey is designed to capture unique attributes of tribal criminal justice agencies, including information on staffing and recruitment, budgets and sources of funding, equipment, services and support provided, and interactions with federal, state, regional, and local agencies.

Tribal Law Enforcement Authority



Data Collections

Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (CSLLEA)

Census of Tribal Justice Agencies in American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Jurisdictions (CTJA02)

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Recent Publications

Tribal Crime Data Collection Activities, 2024

Tribal Law Enforcement in the United States, 2018

Tribal Crime Data Collection Activities, 2023

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Terms & Definitions

Criminal jurisdiction in tribal areas

Jurisdiction over offenses in Indian country may lie with federal, state, or tribal agencies, depending on the particular offense, offender, victim, and offense location.

For more information on tribal jurisdiction, see [State Prosecutors' Offices with Jurisdiction in Indian Country, 2007](#), [Tribal Law Enforcement, 2008](#), [Census of Tribal Justice Agencies in Indian Country, 2002](#), and the [Jails in Indian Country](#) series.

Cross deputization agreements

Allow law enforcement personnel from state and tribal entities to cross jurisdictions in criminal cases. Cross deputization agreements have been used to enhance law enforcement capabilities in areas where state and tribal lands were contiguous and intermingled. Under some agreements, federal, state, county/local, and/or tribal law enforcement officers have the power to arrest Indian and non-Indian wrongdoers wherever the violation of law occurs.

Public Law 83-280 (commonly referred to as Public Law 280 or P.L. 280)

Establishes criminal justice responsibilities among American Indian tribes with tribal land, the states in which tribes are located, and the federal government. Public Law 280 is mandatory or optional for 204 tribes, about two-thirds of the total in the lower 48 states. In states where P.L. 280 does not apply, the federal government retains criminal jurisdiction for major crimes committed under the Indian Country Crimes Act (18 U.S.C. § 1152), the Indian Country Major Crimes Act (18 U.S.C. § 1153), and the Assimilative Crimes Act (18 U.S.C. § 13).

Public Law 93-638

The Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 affords tribes the opportunity to provide for their own police departments and other institutional services through federal grants and contracts.

Tribal police powers

Authority to exercise criminal jurisdiction over all tribal members and the authority to arrest and detain non-Indians for delivery to state or federal authorities for prosecution. These tribal police powers are generally limited to tribal lands.



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