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By: Administrator

In the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) most recent annual complaint report, [Consumer Sentinel Network for January-December 2014](#), identity theft topped the list for the 15<sup>th</sup>

consecutive year. Government documents/benefits fraud was the most common form of identity theft that consumers complained about, (accounting for 38 percent of all identity theft-related complaints), followed by credit card fraud (17 percent), phone or utilities fraud (12 percent), and bank fraud (8 percent).

After identity theft and debt collection, imposter scams were the third most frequent category of complaints. "While identity theft remains a huge issue, consumers should also keep a close eye out for imposter scams," [said](#) Jessica Rich, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. "Whether it's pretending to be the IRS during tax season or making false promises of a lottery win, scammers are increasingly sophisticated in their efforts to deceive consumers, but the FTC will continue working to shut these scammers down."

The Consumer Sentinel Network (CSN) database contains complaints that consumers have made directly to the FTC as well as complaints that are funneled into it from other agencies and non-governmental programs such as the Better Business Bureaus. Local, state and federal law enforcement agencies can access the complaints to track trends and assist in their investigations.

But as the nonprofit [Identity Theft Resource Center](#) (ITRC) pointed out, statistics based on self-reported complaints may provide a somewhat skewed picture of the problem. In a new [whitepaper](#)

based on analyzing the FTC's latest statistics, the ITRC noted that dramatic increases in identity theft complaints in some states could be due to more concerted efforts to educate the public and encourage victims to report the crime, rather than to higher numbers of identity theft incidents. The ITRC also noted that it is difficult to draw conclusions from the statistics about how people's identities are being compromised, since many victims have no idea how the

identity theft occurred. Another issue that the ITRC highlighted is that the identity theft complaints that the CSN captures are not reflected in the statistics for property crimes in the [Uniform Crime Report](#) that is published by the U.S. Department of Justice.

One thing is clear: identity theft remains a significant problem and much more needs to be done to prevent it and help victims.