

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

Tracking Offenders, 1988

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Fourteen States provided data describing the processing and disposition during 1988 of felony arrests that arose from 648,463 incidents. Eight States reported on the entire criminal justice process beginning at arrest. Of the more than 584,450 persons arrested in these 8 States, 81% were prosecuted, 59% were convicted of a felony or misdemeanor, and 39% received a sentence to a State prison or a local jail. These findings are from data voluntarily submitted to the Offender-Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) program of the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

OBTS collects data from States on the criminal justice processing of persons arrested for a felony. In 1988 the participating States — which accounted for more than 36% of the resident population of the United States — were Alabama, Alaska, California, Delaware, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia.

Other findings from an analysis of these felony arrests include the following:

- Of the 536,708 prosecutions reported by OBTS States in 1988, almost 1 in 4 resulted in a court dismissal, and slightly less than 3 in 4 ended with a conviction. One percent of the prosecutions resulted in acquittal, and 5% resulted in other non-convictional dispositions.

Fourteen States participating in the Offender-Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) program voluntarily submitted criminal justice processing data for this report. The data cover those felony arrests that had a final disposition in 1988.

OBTS provides a valuable vantage point on the criminal justice process. It is based on the individual arrested for a felony. Only this type of information at this level of detail permits a comprehensive examination of the outcomes of arrest, prosecution, and conviction.

- More than 6 in 10 of those convicted received a sentence to a State prison or local jail. Among those convicted of homicide, 88% were sentenced to incarceration; among those convicted of rape or robbery, 79%; and among those convicted of burglary, 78%.

- Most persons arrested for all types of felonies were male (86%), white (61%), and under age 30 (61%). Whites and blacks comprised nearly equal percentages of accused violent offenders.

Introduction to OBTS

This report is based on OBTS data received from 14 States and covers felony arrest cases that terminated in calendar year 1988. State criminal records repositories sent reports for persons arrested for one or more felonies with a final disposition in 1988. Each report had a readable finger-

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As many who are knowledgeable about criminal justice issues have observed, an appropriate response to crime and criminals requires an understanding of each stage of the criminal justice process,

We appreciate the ongoing support that the State criminal records repositories afford OBTS. Only through their cooperation and assistance have we been able to develop and expand this program over the past 10 years.

Steven D. Dillingham, Ph.D.
Director

print identification. The offenses may actually have occurred in earlier years; 67% of the 648,463 incidents disposed of in 1988 occurred in that year, 27% occurred in 1987, and 5% occurred prior to 1987.

An OBTS record distinguishes among arrestees, incidents, and charges. The arrestee is identified through fingerprints and is assigned an identification number which can be linked to earlier records. The incident number identifies each incident so that records in multiple-charge cases can be condensed. In the latter situation, the program collects the most serious arrest charge as well as the most serious disposition by the police, prosecutor, grand jury, or court, depending on the circumstances of the particular case. (Each State uses its statutes or other rankings to determine the relative seriousness of offenses.) Sentencing information is also collected for the conviction on the most serious charge.

Dispositions of felony arrests

Data from Alaska, California, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania indicate that for every 100 persons arrested for a felony, 81 were prosecuted, 59 were convicted, 39 received sentences to incarceration, and 10 were committed to a State prison, usually for more than a year (table 1). Alabama, Delaware, Nebraska, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia provide data that begin after the decision has been made to prosecute.

Compared to persons arrested for violent, property, or drug felonies in the eight States, those arrested for public-order offenses had the highest subsequent prosecution and conviction rates. (Public-order offenses include such crimes as driving while intoxicated and obstruction of justice. See Appendix for further information.) Eighty-four percent of persons arrested for public-order offenses were prosecuted; 66% were convicted of some offense, though not necessarily a felony or a public-order offense. Compared to persons arrested for other types of felonies, a smaller percentage of those arrested

for public-order felonies received a prison sentence (5%) or a sentence to either jail or prison (30%).

For individuals arrested for property felonies, prosecution rates (82%) and conviction rates (62%) were higher than among violent or drug felony arrestees. However, sentences to prison (9%) were less likely among property arrestees than among drug arrestees (12%) or those arrested for violent crimes (12%). Those charged with drug felonies at arrest were the most likely of all persons arrested for felonies to receive a sentence to incarceration in jail or prison (47%). About a fifth of the arrests for violent crimes such as rape or robbery were likely to result in confinement in a State prison, but the likelihood of prison in the case of homicide was 1 in every 2 arrests.

For the 18 specific types of crimes examined, persons charged with homicide were the most likely to be prosecuted (90%) (table 2). Other persons arrested for a felony with a high likelihood of prosecution included those charged with other sexual assault and larceny (88%), burglary (87%), and arson (86%).

Adjudication

The OBTS program captures information on the most serious charge and the most serious consequence for the arrestee at each decision point in the criminal justice

Table 2. Likelihood of being prosecuted after a felony arrest in 8 States, 1988

Most serious arrest offense	Percent of arrested persons who were prosecuted
Homicide	90%
Larceny/theft	88
Sexual assault, other	88
Burglary	87
Arson	86
Public-order, other	85
Fraud	84
Robbery	82
Drugs	80
Weapons	80
Sexual assault, type unspecified	79
Rape	77
Assault	77
Property, other	76
Stolen property	76
Kidnaping	75
Violent, other	72
Motor vehicle theft	64

Note: Prosecutions were not necessarily pursued for the offense at arrest or for a felony.

Table 1. Disposition of felony arrests in 8 States, 1988

Most serious arrest offense	Number of persons arrested*	Percent of persons arrested			
		Prosecuted	Convicted	Incarcerated Total	Prison
All offenses	584,450	81%	59%	39%	10%
Violent offenses	144,916	79%	50%	32%	12%
Homicide	6,089	90	68	60	49
Kidnaping	3,469	75	49	36	19
Sexual assault	11,192	80	54	40	20
Rape	5,060	77	48	38	21
Other	2,099	88	65	47	18
Type unspecified	4,033	79	56	40	20
Robbery	40,432	82	53	42	21
Assault	69,867	77	46	24	4
Other violent	13,867	72	47	27	2
Property offenses	202,572	82%	62%	42%	9%
Burglary	65,991	87	70	54	15
Larceny/theft	53,698	88	65	38	7
Motor vehicle theft	23,831	64	47	36	7
Arson	2,208	86	61	39	14
Fraud	25,481	84	61	33	6
Stolen property	23,043	76	56	38	5
Other property	8,320	76	51	23	5
Drug offenses	145,971	80%	58%	47%	12%
Public-order offenses	90,991	84%	66%	30%	5%
Weapons	20,354	80	54	28	7
Other public-order	70,637	85	70	30	4

Note: The 8 States are Alaska, California, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. The other 6 States provide OBTS data only from the point after the decision has been made to prosecute.

*Includes only arrest reports containing readable fingerprints and excludes 129 incidents for which National Crime Information Center (NCIC) codes are not known.

Table 3. Disposition of cases prosecuted in 14 States, 1988

Most serious arrest offense	Number of persons prosecuted	Percent of cases prosecuted, according to disposition type				
		Total	Dismissal	Acquittal	Other non-conviction*	Conviction
All offenses	535,708	100%	22%	1%	5%	72%
Violent offenses	125,536	100%	32%	2%	3%	63%
Homicide	6,481	100	17	5	3	76
Kidnaping	3,244	100	27	4	6	63
Sexual assault	11,103	100	24	4	5	67
Rape	3,900	100	32	4	1	62
Other	2,135	100	21	2	4	73
Type unspecified	5,068	100	19	4	9	68
Robbery	35,507	100	32	2	2	64
Assault	58,807	100	36	2	3	59
Other violent	10,394	100	30	1	5	64
Property offenses	197,020	100%	20%	1%	5%	75%
Burglary	63,835	100	17	1	3	79
Larceny/theft	58,462	100	21	1	5	74
Motor vehicle theft	17,137	100	22	1	6	71
Arson	2,215	100	23	2	5	70
Fraud	29,823	100	19	1	9	71
Stolen property	18,711	100	23	--	3	74
Other property	6,837	100	28	1	4	67
Drug offenses	127,892	100%	19%	1%	7%	73%
Public-order offenses	86,260	100%	16%	1%	5%	78%
Weapons	17,600	100	26	1	5	68
Other public-order	68,660	100	13	1	5	81

Note: Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

*Includes 10,574 cases of *nolle prosequi*.

--Less than 0.5%.

process. A basic program requirement is that the arrestee must have been originally charged with a felony, an offense that may be punishable by imprisonment for more than 1 year. However, OBTS data reveal that more than a quarter of the felony charges at arrest were downgraded by prosecutors or the courts to misdemeanors or mere violations of local ordinances:

Disposition offense type	Among persons arrested for a felony, percent of court dispositions
Total	100.0%
Felony	70.2
Misdemeanor	23.3
Local ordinance	6.6

This charge-reduction may have occurred from plea bargaining or because the evidence or testimony supported only a lesser charge.

Of the 648,463 felony arrests, 386,974, or 60%, resulted in conviction. In the eight States reporting pre-adjudication dispositions, the police released 5% of the persons arrested for felonies, grand juries or prosecutors failed to indict 14%, and prosecutors filed *nolle prosequi* on 1.6%. (*Nolle prosequi* is notice to the court that the prosecutor will not pursue the case — in some jurisdictions following approval by the court.) Of the total number of persons prosecuted, the

courts dismissed 22% of the cases, acquitted the defendant in 1%, and rendered a judgment other than acquittal or conviction in 5% (table 3).

The percentage of cases resulting in conviction varied by type of offense. For example, convictions accounted for 78% of those prosecuted after an arrest for a public-order felony and 63% of those prosecuted following arrest for a violent felony. For court dismissals, however, the difference was in

Table 4. Likelihood of being convicted if prosecuted after arrest for a felony in 14 States, 1988

Most serious arrest offense	Percent of prosecuted persons who were convicted
Public-order, other	81%
Burglary	79
Homicide	76
Larceny/theft	74
Stolen property	74
Drugs	73
Sexual assault, other	73
Motor vehicle theft	71
Fraud	71
Arson	70
Weapons	68
Sexual assault, type unspecified	68
Property, other	67
Robbery	64
Violent, other	64
Kidnaping	63
Rape	62
Assault	59

the opposite direction: courts dismissed cases of 32% of persons arrested for a violent felony and 16% of those arrested for a public-order felony.

Conviction in OBTS refers to any conviction following a decision to prosecute. Persons prosecuted after being arrested for public-order crimes that exclude weapons offenses had the highest conviction rates, 81% of those prosecuted (table 4). Among those prosecuted, those charged at arrest with burglary or homicide also had relatively high percentages of conviction (79% and 76%, respectively).

Dismissals, acquittals, and other nonconvictions among those prosecuted were highest for those charged with violent offenses; 37% of those prosecuted following arrest for a violent crime had their cases terminated by other than a conviction. Assault, with 41% of the cases ending by other than a conviction, rape (38% nonconviction), and kidnaping (37%) were the offenses with the highest percentages of prosecutions that resulted in no conviction.

Sentencing

Sentencing reflects the specific conviction offense, which may have been less serious than the arrest charge. For the OBTS data obtained from the 14 States in 1988, 66% of those convicted were sentenced to prison or jail, and 34% received probation or some other type of sentence without incarceration (table 5). Among persons arrested for a violent or property felony and convicted, there were two sentences to incarceration for every sentence to probation, fine, restitution, or community service.

Convicted persons arrested for the most serious violent crimes had the highest percentage of convicted offenders receiving a sentence to confinement. Of those arrested for homicide and then convicted of homicide or another offense, 88% received a sentence to incarceration. Among those arrested for rape, robbery, or drug offenses and subsequently convicted, 79% received a confinement sentence.

Fifty-six percent of convicted offenders who had been arrested for a public-order felony received a sentence that did not include confinement in prison or jail. When all sentences are considered together for offenders convicted in the 14 States in 1988, at least half of the persons arrested for motor vehicle theft, stolen property, a drug offense, other violent offenses, or

Table 5. Sentences received in 14 States, by arrest offenses, 1988

Most serious arrest offense	Number of persons convicted	Percent of convicted offenders, according to sentence type					
		Nonincarceration			Incarceration		
		Total	Probation*	Other	Total	Prison	Jail
All offenses	386,670	34%	19%	15%	66%	20%	47%
Violent offenses	78,771	33%	17%	17%	67%	27%	40%
Homicide	4,896	12	7	4	88	72	16
Kidnaping	2,036	24	15	8	76	43	33
Sexual assault	7,421	23	15	7	77	41	36
Rape	2,436	21	15	6	79	44	35
Other	1,550	26	19	7	74	29	44
Type unspecified	3,435	23	14	9	77	44	33
Robbery	22,832	21	11	9	79	43	37
Assault	34,932	46	21	25	54	11	43
Other violent	6,654	42	24	18	58	4	53
Property offenses	147,102	32%	17%	15%	68%	19%	49%
Burglary	50,451	22	13	9	78	25	53
Larceny/theft	43,194	39	18	21	61	16	45
Motor vehicle theft	12,221	24	14	9	76	17	59
Arson	1,543	32	22	10	68	26	42
Fraud	21,302	39	23	16	61	20	42
Stolen property	13,803	32	20	12	68	11	57
Other property	4,588	52	18	34	48	11	37
Drug offenses	93,305	21%	12%	9%	79%	23%	56%
Public-order offenses	67,492	56%	35%	22%	44%	8%	36%
Weapons	11,917	48	34	15	52	14	38
Other public-order	55,575	58	35	23	42	7	35

Note: Detail may not add to total because of rounding. Sentences given were not necessarily for the offense at arrest or for a felony.

*Includes 17,970 dispositions of "probation without verdict" meted out in Minnesota (287), Pennsylvania (17,661), and Utah (22).

burglary were sentenced to local jails (table 6). Following conviction, more than 7 of 10 persons arrested for homicide were sentenced to State prisons (table 7).

A reduction in offense seriousness from arrest to conviction, as cases passed through the criminal justice process, can be observed in the decreasing percentages in

all offense categories except public-order. As shown to the right, among those arrested for a felony and convicted of some offense, public-order offenses such as driving while intoxicated, gambling, and obstruction of justice accounted for about 17% of those convicted based on the arrest charge, but nearly 26% of those convicted based on the court-disposed offense.

Type of offense	Arrest offense	Conviction offense*
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Violent	20.5	15.7
Property	38.3	35.6
Drugs	24.4	22.8
Public-order	16.8	25.8

*The arrest offense was a felony; the offense at the time of disposition may have been a felony or misdemeanor.

Sentencing patterns observed for convicted offenders based on the court-disposed conviction offense were similar to those based on the arrest offense (tables 8 and 5). The more serious violent crimes, such as homicide and rape, reflected the highest percentages of prison commitments, while less serious public-order offenses resulted in higher percentages of convicted offenders receiving a nonincarceration sentence.

The three major sentencing options of probation, jail, and prison reveal substantial differences in the composition of those sentenced (table 9). For example, while robbers accounted for 4% of those convicted and about 2% of those sentenced to either probation or a local jail, they comprised 12% of offenders sentenced to prison. Violent offenders made up 26% of convicted defendants sentenced to prison but 13% of those sentenced to jail and 15% of those sentenced to probation.

Table 6. Likelihood of being sentenced to jail if convicted after a felony arrest in 14 States, 1988

Most serious arrest offense	Percent of convicted offenders who were sentenced to jail
Motor vehicle theft	59%
Stolen property	57
Drugs	56
Burglary	53
Violent, other	53
Larceny/theft	45
Sexual assault, other	44
Assault	43
Fraud	42
Arson	42
Weapons	38
Robbery	37
Property, other	37
Rape	35
Public-order, other	35
Sexual assault, type unspecified	33
Kidnaping	33
Homicide	16

Note: Sentences given were not necessarily for the offense at arrest or for a felony.

Table 7. Likelihood of being sentenced to prison if convicted after a felony arrest in 14 States, 1988

Most serious arrest offense	Percent of convicted offenders who were sentenced to prison
Homicide	72%
Rape	44
Sexual assault, type unspecified	44
Robbery	43
Kidnaping	43
Sexual assault, other	29
Arson	26
Burglary	25
Drugs	23
Fraud	20
Motor vehicle theft	17
Larceny/theft	16
Weapons	14
Stolen property	11
Assault	11
Property, other	11
Public-order, other	7
Violent, other	4

Note: Sentences given were not necessarily for the offense at arrest.

Table 8. Sentences received in 14 States, by conviction offense, 1988

Most serious conviction offense	Number of persons convicted ^a	Percent of convicted offenders, according to sentence type					
		Nonincarceration			Incarceration		
		Total	Probation ^b	Other	Total	Prison	Jail
All offenses	382,610	33%	19%	14%	67%	20%	47%
Violent offenses	60,233	29%	18%	11%	71%	32%	38%
Homicide	3,789	8	5	3	92	81	11
Kidnaping	861	20	13	7	80	60	20
Sexual assault	5,756	18	13	4	82	48	34
Rape	971	8	7	1	92	75	17
Other	1,885	27	23	4	73	26	47
Type unspecified	2,900	15	9	6	85	54	31
Robbery	14,216	13	11	2	87	63	24
Assault	26,214	34	25	9	66	15	52
Other violent	9,397	58	18	40	42	3	39
Property offenses	136,207	28%	18%	10%	72%	21%	51%
Burglary	30,057	15	11	4	85	40	45
Larceny/theft	48,806	31	18	13	69	15	54
Motor vehicle theft	11,961	22	14	8	78	17	61
Arson	1,207	26	18	7	74	33	42
Fraud	20,388	37	25	12	63	21	42
Stolen property	16,153	31	23	7	69	14	55
Other property	7,635	43	22	22	57	7	50
Drug offenses	87,369	19%	12%	7%	81%	25%	57%
Public-order offenses	98,801	55%	27%	28%	45%	7%	38%
Weapons	13,420	41	32	9	59	16	43
Other public-order	85,381	57	27	31	43	5	38

Note: Detail may not add to total because of rounding.
^aSentencing data were available for 99% of convictions.

^bIncludes 17,970 dispositions of "probation without verdict" meted out in Minnesota (287), Pennsylvania (17,661), and Utah (22).

Table 9. Conviction offense, by type of sentence received in 14 States, 1988

Most serious conviction offense	Percent of convicted offenders			
	Total ^a	Probation	Jail	Prison
All offenses	100%	100%	100%	100%
Violent offenses	16%	15%	13%	26%
Homicide	1	--	--	4
Kidnaping	--	--	--	1
Sexual assault ^b	2	1	1	4
Robbery	4	2	2	12
Assault	7	9	8	5
Other violent	2	2	2	--
Property offenses	37%	34%	38%	38%
Burglary	9	4	8	16
Larceny/theft	13	12	15	9
Motor vehicle theft	3	2	4	3
Arson	--	--	--	1
Fraud	5	7	5	5
Stolen property	5	5	5	3
Other property	2	2	2	1
Drug offenses	25%	14%	28%	28%
Public-order offenses	22%	37%	21%	8%
Weapons	4	6	3	3
Other public-order	18	31	18	6

Note: The numbers of convicted offenders follow: total, 328,328; probation, 72,428; jail, 179,705; and prison, 76,195. Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

--Less than 0.5%.

^aExcludes convicted offenders sentenced to other than probation, jail, or prison.

^bIncludes rape, other sexual assaults, and type unspecified.

Demographic characteristics

The majority of persons arrested for a felony in the 14 participating States were male, white, and under age 30 (table 10).

Although men predominated among persons arrested for all the categories of felonies, their percentages were especially high among persons arrested for violent (90%) and public-order offenses (89%). Higher percentages of women were found among arrests for larceny (24%) and fraud (36%).

Sixty-one percent of persons arrested for a felony were white, 38% were black, and about 1% were Native Americans, Asians, or Pacific Islanders. This overall pattern also existed for drug and property offenders, but blacks were more highly represented among those arrested for violent offenses (48% of arrestees), while whites accounted for a larger percentage of public-order arrestees (76%).

Persons in their twenties accounted for 47% of those arrested for violent offenses, 47% of property arrestees, 52% of those arrested for drug violations, and 44% of those arrested for public-order felonies. These young adults were most overrepresented

among those arrested and charged with robbery, kidnaping, and motor vehicle theft. By contrast, arrestees of at least age 40 were overrepresented among those arrested for assault, arson, fraud, sexual assault other than rape, and public-order offenses other than weapons violations. The OBTS program is designed to account for adult felons and only those juveniles who are involved in very serious felonies and tried as adults in criminal courts. The data show that persons under age 20 are overrepresented among those arrested for robbery (23%), burglary (21%), motor vehicle theft (24%), other property (23%), stolen property (20%), and weapons violations (18%). Across the major offense categories, an overall decline in arrests was associated with increases in age, and regardless of category, persons in their twenties accounted for the largest percentage of arrests (figure 1).

Appendix

Felons and felonies

All 14 States under study provided ID numbers for both arrestees and arrest events. There were 616,149 final dispositions (excluding 32,314 unknown ID's) attributable to 501,299 arrestees, or 1.23 felony arrest events per offender.

Public-order offenses

The most frequently charged categories of public-order felonies at arrest included:

Driving-related felonies	40%
Weapons	21
Family-related felonies	9
Flight or escape	9
Sex offenses, excluding assault and commercialized sex	5
Obstruction of justice	5

Arrests, by offense and age of arrestee, 1988

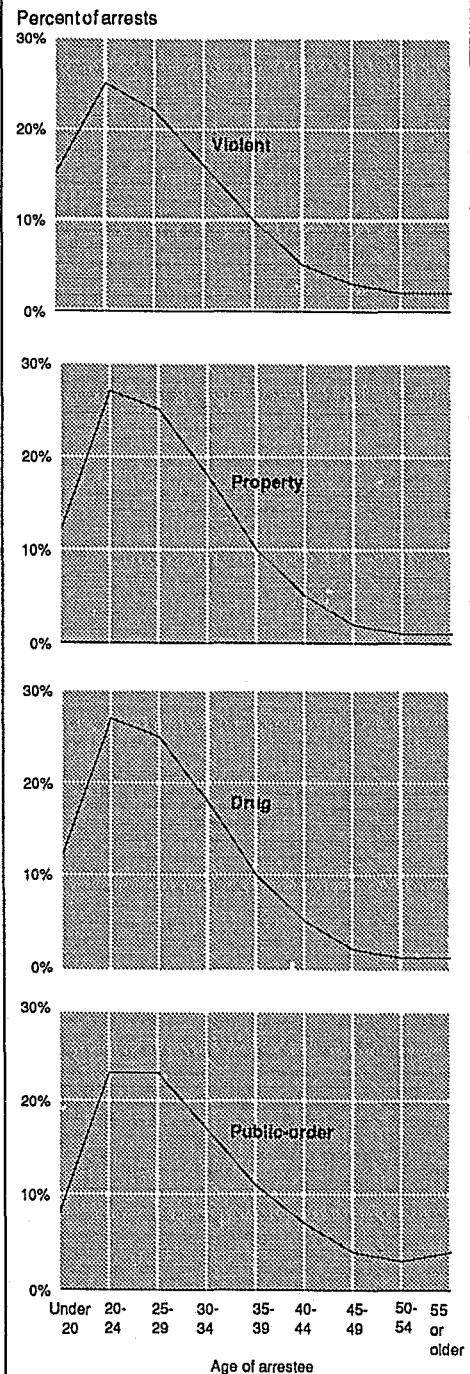


Figure 1

Table 10. Sex, race, and age of persons arrested for a felony in 14 States, by arrest offense, 1988

Most serious arrest offense	Total	Percent of persons arrested for a felony					Age				
		Sex		Race			Under 20	20-24	25-29	30-39	40 or older
		Male	Female	White	Black	Other					
All offenses	100%	86%	14%	61%	38%	1%	14%	25%	22%	25%	13%
Violent offenses	100%	90%	10%	51%	48%	1%	14%	25%	22%	25%	15%
Homicide	100	91	9	53	47	1	16	26	20	22	15
Kidnaping	100	92	8	55	44	1	9	26	26	27	13
Sexual assault	100	99	1	65	35	1	10	20	20	28	21
Rape	100	99	1	53	46	1	11	25	22	27	15
Other	100	98	2	77	22	1	11	17	17	28	26
Type unspecified	100	98	2	69	30	1	9	18	19	29	24
Robbery	100	92	8	35	65	--	23	30	22	20	5
Assault	100	87	13	54	46	1	11	23	21	26	18
Other violent	100	88	12	73	26	1	6	19	23	32	20
Property offenses	100%	82%	18%	63%	36%	1%	18%	26%	21%	23%	11%
Burglary	100	90	10	65	34	1	21	29	21	22	7
Larceny/theft	100	76	24	58	42	1	16	23	21	25	14
Motor vehicle theft	100	90	10	59	40	1	24	31	20	19	6
Arson	100	84	16	65	34	1	15	22	19	26	18
Fraud	100	64	36	67	32	1	9	23	21	27	19
Stolen property	100	88	12	68	31	1	20	28	20	22	10
Other property	100	92	8	68	31	1	23	26	22	21	9
Drug offenses	100%	84%	16%	59%	41%	--	12%	27%	25%	27%	9%
Public-order offenses	100%	89%	11%	76%	23%	1%	8%	22%	22%	27%	21%
Weapons	100	94	6	56	44	1	18	27	21	22	12
Other public-order	100	87	13	82	17	1	5	20	22	28	24

Note: The sex, race, and age of persons arrested for felonies were reported in 99%, 97%, and 98% of the cases, respectively. Detail may not add to total because of rounding.
--Less than 0.5%.

Access to data

OBTS data are publicly available for the disposition years 1980 through 1988. Data for 1989 are being processed and should be available in late 1991. Researchers interested in analyzing the OBTS data may access them through the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD) at the University of Michigan. Information can be obtained from NACJD/ICPSR, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI 48106; telephone (800) 999-0960.

Methodology

Local criminal justice agencies record arrest data and other information on fingerprint cards and disposition documents. The agencies forward the data to a State's criminal information repository that updates appropriate master records. OBTS receives data from the repositories. OBTS coverage may remain incomplete within the reporting States for several reasons. Not all law enforcement agencies fingerprint all persons arrested, and some do not submit all their fingerprint cards. Offenders sometimes surrender directly to a court and are not fingerprinted. Even when a fingerprint card is filed, the prosecutor or court may not report the final disposition.

BJS sponsored a survey of 50 States and the District of Columbia to assess the quality of data in the criminal record repositories at the end of 1989. As noted above, jurisdictions varied in the completeness of reporting. Interested readers can refer to the report, *Survey of Criminal History Information Systems* (NCJ-125620, March 1991), to gain estimates of the amount and type of missing data.

BJS annually solicits State repositories to extract and submit data from their master records, following OBTS guidelines. Some States are in the process of automating their criminal-history files and cannot participate. Other States do not participate because of insufficient reporting by local agencies, criminal-history files not designed for statistical extraction, or lack of resources.

In 1990 BJS and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) initiated a joint program to make systematic improvements in the quality and timeliness of State criminal-history records information throughout the country. The program has a duration of 3 years and an annual budget of \$9 million. Additional resources will be made available

by BJA beginning in fiscal year 1992. It is anticipated that one by-product of this effort will be increased State participation in OBTS and general improvement in the quality and completeness of the data submitted.

To ensure comparability among States, the OBTS standards use the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) offense codes. To preserve privacy, an OBTS record uses as personal identifiers only an encrypted identification number (to permit study of repeat offenders), sex, race, and age.

OBTS data are based on the year of final disposition, not on the year of arrest. Thus, an OBTS year includes arrests that occurred in an earlier year. A final disposition refers to either a decision not to prosecute or a trial court finding, not to an appeal.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are written principally by BJS staff. This report was written by Jacob Perez. Tom Hester edited the report, and Brian Reaves provided statistical review. Priscilla Middleton assisted with graphics. Marilyn Marbrook administered production, assisted by Priscilla Middleton, Jayne Pugh and Yvonne Boston.

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The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Office for Victims of Crime.

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(Revised July 1991)

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