

Chapter Three

Official Crime Data

The statistics of crime and criminals are known as the most unreliable and difficult of all statistics. First, the laws which define crimes change. Second, the number of crimes actually committed cannot possibly be enumerated. This is true of many of the major crimes and even more true of the minor crimes. Third, any record of crimes, such as arrests, convictions, or commitments to prison, can be used as an index of crimes committed only on the assumption that this index maintains a constant ratio to the crimes committed. This assumption is a large one, for the recorded crimes are affected by police policies, court policies, and public opinion.

Sutherland (1947:29)

Official crime data are those that derive from the normal functions of the criminal justice system. These official counts of crime include police reports of offenses and arrests, charges filed by prosecutors, criminal complaints and indictments, imprisonment data, and prison releases.

Although official data come from a number of different sources, both the volume and nature of recorded crime incidents change dramatically through successive stages of criminal justice processing. A funnel analogy is often used to describe how both the number of offenders and the number of criminal offenses decrease significantly as one moves from police statistics

to imprisonment data. Of all offenders and offenses known to the police, only a proportion are subject to arrest. Only some of those subject to arrest will be prosecuted in courts, and of these, only some will be convicted. A smaller proportion still will be incarcerated. The most inclusive official measure of crime thus involves police reports of criminal incidents.

This chapter examines the nature and scope of police statistics on crime. We begin with a description of the crime reporting procedures in the United States. We then summarize historical trends in crime rates and the characteristics of offenders that derive from police reports. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the various problems associated with using police data as a measure of crime.

Uniform Crime Reports in the United States

As discussed in Chapter 2, prior to 1930, police reports of crime in the United States were not collected or compiled in any systematic way across jurisdictions. Some large cities kept yearly counts of reported crime incidents and persons arrested, whereas other cities did not formally record such information. The classification of crime also varied widely across jurisdictions, with different community standards and legal definitions affecting how crimes were defined and whether particular activities would be recorded as crimes in official data. Public tolerance and law enforcement activities toward lynchings, abortion, spouse abuse, drug and alcohol use, dueling, and other forms of mutual combat varied widely both within and between southern and northern states. Both comparisons across jurisdictions and estimates of historical trends in crime are extremely hazardous prior to 1930 because of the lack of uniformity in definitions of crime and in the collection of police data on crime incidents.

In developing the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program in the late 1920s, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) recognized that not all crimes are equally important. They therefore focused on seven types of crime that were prevalent, generally serious in their nature, widely identified by victims and witnesses as criminal incidents, and most likely to be reported to the police. The original seven major index crimes, or what are also referred to as Part I offenses, include murder and manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. The reporting of other offenses (referred to as Part II or nonindex offenses) is not mandatory for police departments that participate

Exhibit 3.1. Part I and Part II Offenses in the UCR Classification

Index Crimes

Part I Offenses

Violent Crime

Murder and Nonnegligent
Manslaughter
Forcible Rape
Robbery
Aggravated Assault

Property Crime:

Burglary
Larceny-Theft
Motor Vehicle
Arson

Part II Offenses

Other Assaults
Forgery and Counterfeiting
Fraud
Embezzlement
Stolen Property, Buying, Receiving, Possessing
Vandalism
Weapons, Carrying, Possessing, etc.
Prostitution and Commercialized Vice
Sex Offenders (except forcible rape and prostitution)
Drug Abuse Violations
Gambling
Offenses Against the Family and Children
Driving Under the Influence
Liquor Laws
Drunkenness
Disorderly Conduct
Vagrancy
All Other Offenses (except Traffic)
Suspicion
Curfew and Loitering Law Violations
Runaway

SOURCE: Uniform Crime Reports.

in the UCR program. A list of Part I and Part II offenses is presented in Exhibit 3.1.

Although the number of police departments participating in the UCR program has increased over time, the program remained essentially unchanged in its content and structure from its inception in 1930 until 1958. During this period, the FBI published crime data according to the size of the jurisdiction and did not provide reports of a national rate of crime because there was insufficient coverage of the entire country. Changes in 1958 included (1) the use of a composite crime index of all Part I offenses in the UCR, (2) the elimination of negligent manslaughter and larceny under \$50 as Part I crimes, (3) the removal of statutory rape from UCR counts, and (4) the estimation and publication of crime rates for the entire United States.

Further changes to the UCR program, involving the development of state-level officials to serve as intermediaries between local police departments and the FBI, were implemented in the 1970s. There are currently 44 states with special UCR programs that provide technical assistance within their state and submit data to the federal UCR program. The number of law

enforcement agencies reporting to the UCR has almost doubled since the introduction of these state programs.

In 1979, arson was added to the UCR crime index as a Part I offense. This was in response to an apparently growing problem with this crime. In the United States in 1977, arson was reported to account for approximately one quarter of all fires and “perhaps about 750 deaths and possibly many more” (Simpson 1978). Senator John Glenn (1978) was instrumental in having arson classified in the UCR, noting, “A criminal could steal a car in New York and drive it to New Jersey and his crime would be noted in the FBI charts. But let that same criminal torch a house or business—causing untold property damage and ruined lives—and his crime of arson will never make the charts. That’s a ridiculous situation” (p. 15). Despite protestations of FBI officials who believed it would be difficult to properly classify arson incidents in the UCR (Renshaw 1990), Glenn’s argument that including arson as a Part I crime would focus national attention on a solution to the problem ultimately held sway.

The most fundamental change in the UCR program in the last three decades involves the movement toward what is known as a national incident-based reporting system (NIBRS), the special features of which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Although participation in the UCR program is voluntary, the proportion of law enforcement agencies participating is remarkably high. A total of 16,788 state, county, and city law enforcement agencies, covering more than 272 million inhabitants, submitted crime reports under the UCR system in 1999. A total of 97 percent of the U.S. population is covered by this data source, with participation rates slightly lower in cities outside metropolitan areas (90 percent) and in rural areas (87 percent).

Data Collection Procedures Under the Uniform Crime Reports Program

Crime data under the UCR program are collected on a monthly basis from participating local law enforcement agencies or the state UCR programs. The FBI provides report forms, tally sheets, and self-addressed envelopes to local agencies. These agencies complete the forms and return them directly to the FBI.

A national reporting system such as the UCR that relies on the cooperation of local and state agencies requires the development and establishment

of standard operating procedures and uniform practices. Accordingly, the FBI has gone to considerable lengths to standardize these reporting procedures through the provision of training services and data collection manuals to local agencies.

According to the *UCR Reporting Handbook* (1984), basic minimum standards in several areas are required for agencies providing data for the UCR program. First, a written record is made of each crime upon receipt of a complaint or a call for service. A follow-up system is used to examine whether reports are promptly submitted in all cases. Second, crime reports are checked to see that all offenses submitted in the UCR program conform to the UCR classification of offenses. Third, all records and statistical reports are closely supervised by the agency administrator. Periodic inspections are made to ensure strict compliance with the standard rules and procedures.

Classifying and Scoring Criminal Offenses in the UCR Program

Two essential components of the UCR data system involve the classifying and scoring of criminal offenses. Classifying crime offenses in the context of the UCR refers to the process of translating offense titles used in particular local and state laws into the standard UCR definitions for Part I and Part II offenses. Depending on the particular classifications used in individual jurisdictions, this conversion process may be more or less ambiguous for certain offenses. Scoring of criminal offenses, in contrast, refers to counting the number of offenses after they have been classified under the UCR typology and entering the total count on the appropriate form. Uniformity in both classifying and scoring criminal offenses across jurisdictions is essential for maintaining the integrity of the UCR.

The *UCR Reporting Handbook* provides reporting agencies with detailed definitions and general rules for the classification and scoring of criminal offenses. The classification of offenses into particular UCR categories is based on the facts that underlie an agency’s investigation of the crime. The UCR program distinguishes between crimes against persons (i.e., criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) and crimes against property (i.e., burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson). Under the UCR scoring rules, one offense is counted for each offense in crimes against persons, and one offense is counted for each “distinct operation” in crimes against property. Motor vehicle thefts are an exception to the property-counting rule in that one offense is counted for each stolen vehicle.

Given that UCR definitions of criminal offenses are a crucial element in the standardization of reporting practices, it is important to look more closely at how major criminal offenses are defined and counted under the UCR scheme. As described in the methodological appendix to the 1999 UCR Report and the 1984 *UCR Reporting Handbook*, crimes against persons are defined as follows:

1. *Criminal homicide* involves two subtypes of offenses. Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter are defined as "willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human being by another." The second type of criminal homicide involves manslaughter by negligence, which is defined as "the killing of another person through gross negligence." Although manslaughter by negligence is a Part I crime, it is not included in the calculation of the crime index.

2. *Forcible rape* is defined as "the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will." It involves two categories: (a) rape by force and (b) attempts to commit forcible rape. These offenses are restricted to female victims, and they are classified as forcible regardless of the age of the victim. Statutory offenses (no force used, victim under the age of consent) are excluded.

3. *Robbery* is defined as "the taking or attempt to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear."

4. *Aggravated assault* is defined as an "unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury." This type of assault is usually accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or great bodily harm. Simple assaults are excluded.

The crimes against property included in the UCR are as follows:

1. *Burglary* is the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft. Attempted forcible entry is included in this category.

2. *Larceny-Theft* involves the "unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another." Larceny-theft is subclassified into the following categories: (a) pocket picking (i.e., theft from a person by stealth), (b) purse snatching that involves no more force than necessary to snatch the purse from the

person's custody, (c) shoplifting, (d) thefts of articles from motor vehicles, (e) thefts of motor vehicle parts and accessories, (f) thefts of bicycles, (g) thefts from buildings, (h) thefts from coin-operated devices or machines, and (i) all other larceny-theft not specifically classified. Attempted larcenies are included in this category.

3. *Motor vehicle theft* is the theft or attempted theft of a self-propelled vehicle that runs on land surface and not on rails. Motorboats, construction equipment, airplanes, and farming equipment are specifically excluded from this category.

4. *Arson* involves "any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another, etc." Fires of suspicious or unknown origin are excluded from the UCR.

Sources of Ambiguity

Coding crimes into these categories can be a complex process. The FBI provides training to local reporting agencies and presents numerous examples in the *UCR Reporting Handbook* (FBI 1984) to illustrate the rules for classifying and scoring criminal offenses. However, there are several sources of ambiguity in the definition and coding of even the UCR Part I offenses that call into question the uniformity of reporting practices across jurisdictions. In fact, it is not unreasonable to assume that all the index crimes are subject to considerable variability in counting and scoring across individual reporting units. The primary sources of variability include differences across local jurisdictions in their interpretation of crime incidents, the "hierarchy rule," the diligence of record keeping, and the adequacy of follow-up procedures.

In the specific case of homicide, the main obstacle to uniform reporting and counting involves the follow-up procedures, the timing of police investigations and UCR filing, and definitional ambiguity in the classification of accidental killings and justifiable homicides. For example, the recording of situations of aggravated assaults that become murders because the victim dies as a result of the assault assumes equal diligence and detailed record keeping across reporting agencies in conducting follow-up investigations and correctly adjusting multiple monthly returns. Some less reliable agencies may simply count the aggravated assault and fail to record the subsequent death of the victim as a murder. Depending upon when in the investigative process the UCR incident is filed, a deadly shooting involving two juveniles

playing with a gun may be classified as accidental (i.e., manslaughter by negligence) or willful killing (i.e., murder and nonnegligent manslaughter). Similarly, the killing of an individual by a law enforcement officer or private citizen in the course of the commission of a felony by that individual is a justifiable homicide under the UCR, but some local agencies violate UCR procedures and count such incidents as criminal homicides. Such differences in classification are not likely to be identified in the record-checking procedures used by the FBI.

The major source of ambiguity in the definition and classification of forcible rape involves what constitutes "carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will." Specifically, some jurisdictions may apply the strict definition of carnal knowledge as "sexual intercourse" (i.e., penile-vaginal intercourse), whereas others may consider a fuller range of sexual acts and offensive touches. Also, when there is no apparent resistance on the part of the victim, some jurisdictions may count the act as "consensual" and, thereby, not against the woman's will. Contrary to the instructions provided in the UCR forms, local reporting agencies may also vary in their inclusion of male victims and female offenders in their counts of forcible rape. There is also likely to be considerable variation across local jurisdictions in the inclusion and counting of forcible rapes that occur within the context of marital partners and intimates.

Sources of diversity in the classification of robberies are related to the distinction between "strong-arm" robberies and types of larceny from the person (e.g., purse snatchings). Under the UCR classifications, a purse snatching is classified as a strong-arm robbery when force or threat of force is used to overcome the active resistance of the victim. This force is also considered more than is necessary to snatch a purse from the grasp of the person. However, is it reasonable to assume that all local law enforcement agencies and, for that matter, individual police officers share the same interpretation of "more than necessary" force? Likewise, if the victim falls to the ground when a bag or purse is yanked from her shoulder, would this offense be classified uniformly as robbery or as larceny-theft? Does the classification change if the victim was "pushed" rather than fell or stumbled to the ground? In addition, jurisdictional differences are likely in the counting of robberies with multiple victims in the same behavioral incident. The UCR rule is to ignore the number of victims and count "one offense for each distinct operation," but can we be certain that this rule is uniformly applied? How is this rule actually applied across jurisdictions in cases of "spree robberies" that may be interpreted as a continuation of the original incident?

Definitional and classification problems with aggravated assault concern the interpretation of the provision that it is not necessary that physical injury results from an aggravated assault. Threats and assaults in the context of domestic violence are also subject to various interpretations. When assault situations occur in private places with no witnesses besides the victim, the absence of physical injuries makes it especially difficult to ascertain on a consistent basis whether an "aggravated" threat or attempt with a dangerous weapon actually occurred. The mere brandishing of a dangerous weapon may also be interpreted by some, but not by other local agencies, as an aggravated assault. Domestic assault situations are especially problematic in their classification across jurisdictions. Physical injuries to victims of domestic violence are often treated under state codes as gross or simple misdemeanors rather than felonies such as "aggravated assault." Whether a threat with a dangerous weapon was involved (or a weapon was merely brandished) is also difficult to uncover in this particular context. Even under the best conditions of training and definitional clarity, local agencies will vacillate widely in their UCR classification of offenses with threats or no physical injury as aggravated or simple assault.

The major obstacles to uniformity in classifying and scoring the crime of burglary are the demonstration of intent beyond unlawful entry, the inclusion of attempts, the types of persons who qualify as being involved in an unlawful entry, and more general definitional misunderstandings. For example, burglary is a trespass with intent to commit a felony or theft, but how is this intent consistently determined when the alleged burglary is only attempted and not completed? Could the incomplete act be just a trespass, the destruction of property, or a type of vandalism? Does the apprehension of a suspect after breaking a window count as an attempted burglary or simply vandalism? Concerning the difference between lawful and unlawful entry, are acts of theft without forcible entry by previous intimates (e.g., ex-spouses, separated but not divorced parties, ex-roommates) counted as burglaries or larcenies? This determination will vary depending on the interpretation of particular parties as having the necessary legal status to define their behavior as lawful entry.

McCleary, Nienstedt, and Erven (1982) examined some additional problems in the classification of burglary. In an interview with a UCR coding clerk in a particular police department, they were informed that "a burglary has the element of breaking and entering a *building*. In a lot of cases, the thief breaks through a fence and steals something. That's not a burglary, but a lot of officers don't know that" (p. 362) and would still classify such an incident as a burglary.

Another issue with respect to the classification of burglary stems from what is known as the hotel rule. Under this rule, "If a number of units under a single manager are burglarized and the offenses are most likely to be reported to the police by the manager rather than the individual tenants/renters, the burglary should be reported as a single incident" (FBI 1999:6). Examples would include burglaries of a number of hotel rooms or storage units in commercial self-storage buildings.¹ Note that under this rule, even though a number of separate burglaries may have occurred, only one would be recorded in official data.

The major problem with the classification of larceny-theft stems more from the differential likelihood across jurisdictions of reporting particular types of thefts than from definitional ambiguity. Specifically, police underreporting and undercounting of particular thefts, such as shoplifting and stolen motor vehicle parts or accessories, is especially likely when these offenses involve minor financial losses and occur in large metropolitan areas. These frequently occurring offenses, however, may be more accurately reported to the FBI in smaller local areas.

Another perhaps more obvious problem with the larceny-theft category is related to the estimate of the dollar value of the item(s) stolen. The dividing line for UCR reporting was \$50, and larceny more than \$50 was the index offense that increased the most over the early history of the UCR—an increase of more than 550 percent between 1933 and 1967. However, because the purchasing power of the dollar in 1967 was only 40 percent of what it was in 1933, many thefts that would have been under \$50 in 1933 were more than \$50 in 1967 (President's Commission on Law Enforcement, 1968).

Differences across local areas in the UCR counting and scoring of motor vehicle theft may derive from the lack of internal consistency in the coding of motor vehicle thefts and thefts of accessories and parts. Although the UCR manuals clearly specify the different categories, it is possible that some agencies may assume that the theft of motor vehicle accessories and parts falls into the category of motor vehicle theft rather than larceny-theft. The theft of boats and bicycles may also be improperly classified as motor vehicle theft by some local jurisdictions.

The differential interpretation of "willful" or "malicious" burnings and how suspicious fires are classified are the major problems associated with the UCR category of arson. The UCR handbook clearly notes that suspicious fires of unknown causes should not be counted as arson. However, local areas are likely to vary widely in their investigative expertise in these crimes and their subsequent reporting of fires as arson.

The FBI has gone to considerable lengths in an attempt to improve the accuracy of classifying and scoring crimes in the UCR. Starting in 1997, the FBI developed a voluntary Quality Assurance Review (QAR) for the UCR program that assesses the validity of crime statistics through an on-site review of local case reports. The review program also extends to the collection and compilation of crime statistics by the state repositories. Upon completion of the review, the QAR assessment team sends the agency a written evaluation of its performance in reporting methods, submission requirements, and overreporting or underreporting of incidents. The FBI (1998) has conducted quality assurance reviews at 74 agencies.

The Hierarchy Rule and Counting Multiple-Offense Incidents

The UCR's hierarchy rule applies to the classification and scoring of crimes when multiple offenses are committed at the same time by a person or group of persons. When the hierarchy rule is applied in a multiple-offense situation, only the most serious offense in the series is reported, and all others are ignored.² For example, if an individual breaks into a house, steals items from the house, kills the owner of the house, and makes a getaway in a stolen car, only the murder would be recorded in official statistics. Similarly, if, during the commission of a robbery, the offender strikes the teller with the butt of a handgun, runs from the bank, and steals an automobile at curbside, it would appear that three Part I offenses (robbery, aggravated assault, and motor vehicle theft) have occurred. However, because robbery is the most serious of the three offenses, only it would be counted, with the other two offenses ignored (FBI 2000). The hierarchy rule, in theory, involves the application of a rather simple two-step process. First, the reporting agency classifies each of the separate offenses and determines which of them are Part I crimes. Second, the ranking of Part I crimes under the UCR system is used to identify the most serious offense, and that offense is recorded in the data. The decision to apply the hierarchy rule becomes more complicated when it is unclear whether there was a separation of time and place between the commission of several crimes.

The major methodological concern regarding the hierarchy rule is how to determine compliance with it and what adjustments, if any, should be used to correct for potential classification errors. Greater oversight by the state or federal UCR program is an obvious way of determining compliance, but such coding decisions are usually of low visibility and detectability because the summary counts provided in monthly UCR data do not include

the information necessary to make independent judgments of coder reliability. Perhaps ironically, the most direct solution to the problem of selective application of the hierarchy rule is its elimination through the greater utilization of the National Incident-Based Reporting System,³ as discussed below.

National Incident-Based Reporting System

A recent enhancement to the UCR program is the development of an incident-based reporting system for reporting offenses and arrests, known as the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). It has been described as "a new approach to measuring crime, one that is simultaneously ambitious, revolutionary, cumbersome, little known, and disappointingly slow to be adopted" (Maxfield 1999:120).

Implementation of the NIBRS program requires (a) a revision of the definitions of certain index offenses, (b) the identification of additional significant offenses to be reported, and (c) the development of incident details for all UCR offenses (see UCR 1998; FBI 1997). It is believed that, when fully implemented, NIBRS data will be better able to measure the true volume of crime than standard UCR data, because the former does not rely on the hierarchy rule and other practices that restrict the counting of crime incidents.

In contrast to the traditional UCR, which uses a summary or aggregate reporting approach, NIBRS categorizes each incident and arrest in one of 22 basic crime categories (see Exhibit 3.2) that span 46 separate offenses. A total of 53 data elements about the victim, property, and offender are collected under NIBRS.

The NIBRS was intended to be implemented as a phase-in program, and it has largely developed at that pace. The FBI has been able to accept NIBRS data from local agencies as of January 1989, and over the first 10 years a total of 19 state-level programs have been certified by the FBI for participation in NIBRS. An additional 14 state programs, several local law enforcement agencies, and five federal agencies have submitted test data to the FBI on their incident-based systems. Several other agencies remain in various stages of planning and development.

Although NIBRS data have been used in federally published reports on crime, it is too early to determine the overall effectiveness of this redesigned UCR program. As of 1999, approximately 6 percent of the U.S. population was represented by NIBRS contributing agencies. Participation in

Exhibit 3.2. Offense Categories and Data Elements Under the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

The NIBRS Group A Offenses

Arson	Negligent Manslaughter
Assault Offenses	Justifiable Homicide
Aggravated Assault	Kidnapping/Abduction
Simple Assault	Larceny/Theft Offenses
Intimidation	Pocket Picking
Bribery	Purse Snatching
Burglary/Breaking and Entering	Shoplifting
Counterfeiting/Forgery	Theft from Building
Destruction/Damage/Vandalism of Property	Theft from Coin-Operated Machines
Drug/Narcotic Offenses	Theft from Motor Vehicle
Drug/Narcotic Violations	Theft of Motor Vehicle Parts/Accessories
Embezzlement	All Other Larceny
Fraud Offenses	Motor Vehicle Theft
False Pretenses/Swindle/Confidence	Pornography/Obscene Material
Game	Prostitution Offenses
Credit Card/ATM Fraud	Prostitution
Impersonation	Assisting or Promoting Prostitution
Welfare Fraud	Robbery
Wire Fraud	Sex Offenses, Forcible
Gambling Offenses	Forcible Rape
Betting/Wagering	Forcible Sodomy
Operating/Promoting/Assisting Gambling	Sexual Assault with an Object
Gambling Equipment Violations	Forcible Fondling
Sports Tampering	Sex Offenses, Nonforcible
Homicide Offenses	Stolen Property Offenses
Murder/Nonnegligent Manslaughter	Weapon Law Violations

The NIBRS Group B Offenses

Bad Checks	Drunkness	Runaway
Curfew/Loitering/Vagrancy	Liquor Law Violations	Trespassing
Disorderly Conduct	Nonviolent Family Offenses	All Other Offenses
Driving under the Influence	Peeping Tom	

Administrative Segment:

1 ORI Number	17 Property Value
2 Incident Number	18 Recovery Date
3 Incident Date/Hour	19 Number of Stolen Motor Vehicles
4 Exceptional Clearance Indicator	20 Number of Recovered Motor Vehicles
5 Exceptional Clearance Date	21 Suspected Drug Type
<u>Offense Segment:</u>	22 Estimated Drug Quantity
6 UCR Offense Code	23 Drug Measurement Unit
7 Attempted/Completed Code	<u>Victim Segment:</u>
8 Alcohol/Drug Use by Offender	24 Victim Number
9 Type of Location	25 Victim UCR Offense Code
10 Number of Premises Entered	26 Type of Victim
11 Method of Entry	27 Age of Victim
12 Type of Criminal Activity	28 Sex of Victim
13 Type of Weapon/Force Used	29 Race of Victim
14 Bias Crime Code	30 Ethnicity of Victim
<u>Property Segment:</u>	31 Resident Status of Victim
15 Type of Property Loss	
16 Property Description	

(continued)

Exhibit 3.2. (continued)

32 Homicide/Assault Circumstances	<i>Arrestee Segment:</i>
33 Justifiable Homicide Circumstances	41 Arrestee Number
34 Type of Injury	42 Transaction Number
35 Related Offender Number	43 Arrest Date
36 Relationship of Victim to Offender	44 Type of Arrest
	45 Multiple Clearance Indicator
<i>Offender Segment:</i>	46 UCR Arrest Offense Code
37 Offender Number	47 Arrestee Armed Indicator
38 Age of Offender	48 Age of Arrestee
39 Sex of Offender	49 Sex of Arrestee
40 Race of Offender	50 Race of Arrestee
	51 Ethnicity of Arrestee
	52 Resident Status of Arrestee
	53 Disposition of Arrestee under 18

SOURCE: National Incident-Based Reporting System.

the program has been greatest in small- and medium-sized law enforcement agencies. Austin, Texas, is the only law enforcement jurisdiction covering a population of more than one half million that has reported NIBRS data to the FBI.

Despite its promise in terms of improving the accuracy of crime measurement, several potential problems exist with NIBRS data. Most obvious is the incredible complexity of the coding schemes: the coding specifications are documented in four volumes published by the FBI. As Maxfield (1999) suggests, few police officials are researchers, and diligence in paperwork is not among the skills most valued by police officers. As a result, missing data may become an even greater problem under the NIBRS because of the larger number of categories for which data are collected and the complexity of definitions within each of these categories. Furthermore, as Roberts (1997) notes, the incentives for law enforcement agencies to participate in NIBRS data collection are few. These agencies may feel that NIBRS data are of far more value to researchers than to themselves, and there is concern that the detailed, incident-level reporting required for NIBRS will require police officers to spend additional time filling out reports instead of responding to the needs of the public. A widespread perception also exists that NIBRS participation will result in an increase in reported crime because the UCR's hierarchy rule will be eliminated. This presents a potential public relations disaster for agencies who are, to at least some extent, evaluated on the basis of crime rates in their jurisdiction.

Official Crime Trends and Patterns Based on Uniform Crime Reports⁴

One of the primary purposes for the establishment of uniform crime reporting practices across jurisdictions was to provide a national barometer of crime and its distribution. The methods of classifying and counting offenses have remained relatively stable over time, allowing for estimation of national crime trends. Aggregate characteristics of particular types of offenses and some demographic characteristics of arrested persons are also presented in these national statistics.

Based on UCR data, the crime rate in the United States has vacillated over time and exhibits some variation by type of crime. Participation in the UCR program was sufficient to estimate national crime trends beginning in the 1960s. Starting then, the total index crime rate per 100,000 inhabitants increased steadily until the mid-1970s, decreased somewhat, and then peaked again in the early 1980s. It generally rose steadily from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s and has dropped since that time (see Exhibit 3.3).

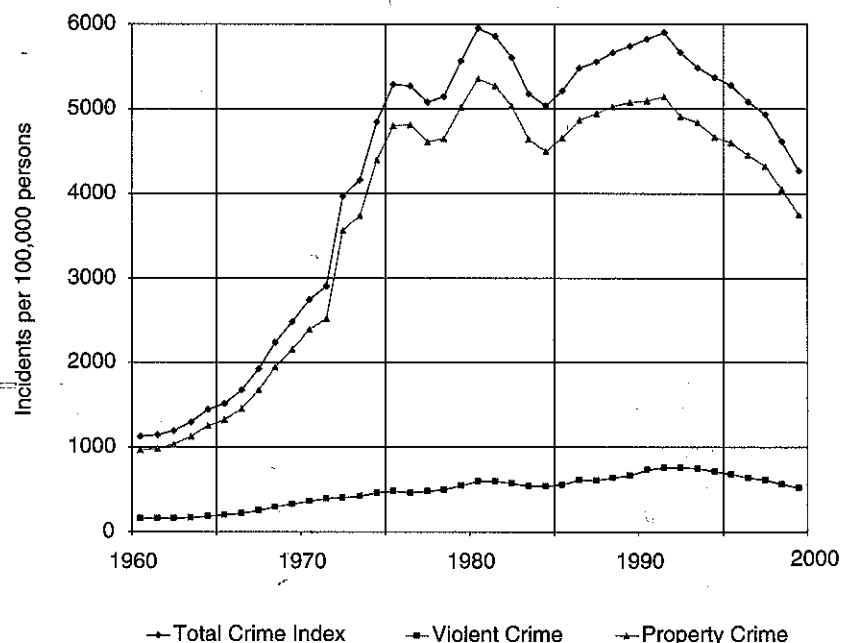
Although the number of reported index crimes exceeded 11.5 million in 1999, the crime rate of 4,267 per 100,000 is at the lowest point since 1973; the index crime rate has declined by more than 20 percent over the last 10 years (1990 to 1999). Declining crime rates are found in each region of the country. Southern and western states have continued to experience the highest rates of reported crime, and lower rates are found in the Northeast and Midwest.

The FBI's report of *Crime in the United States, 1999* indicates that violent crime (i.e., murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) accounts for about 12 percent of the total offenses in the crime index reported to law enforcement, whereas the remaining 88 percent were property crimes. This ratio of violent to property crimes in national data has been quite stable over time. Throughout the history of UCR reporting, larceny-theft represents, by far, the most common offense in these national data, whereas murders are the least common offense. Aggravated assaults account for nearly two thirds of all violent crimes.

Homicide

Among the violent index crimes, the most comprehensive police data are collected on murders and manslaughters. This is the case because (a) as the most serious UCR offense, this crime is never undercounted by the hierar-

Exhibit 3.3. Crime Rates, UCR 1960-1999



chy rule, (b) murder has the highest clearance rate of all index crimes (i.e., 69 percent of murders known to the police in 1999 were cleared or “solved” by an arrest), and (c) additional police data are collected on each homicide through the Supplemental Homicide Reports (SHR).

Both the number of homicides and rates per 100,000 population have followed a similar pattern to the trend for all index crimes combined. Homicide rates increased throughout the 1960s until the mid-1970s, dropped somewhat in the late 1970s before the peak appeared in 1980, stayed relatively high until the early 1990s, and have decreased steadily since that time. In 1999, 15,533 homicides were known to the police, representing a 39 percent decline from 1990 figures. The homicide rate of 5.7 per 100,000 population in 1999 was the lowest recorded in the United States since 1966.

Homicide rates based on UCR data vary across geographical areas. The homicide rate in southern states is higher than in any other region of the country, at more than double the rate for states in the Northeast. However, each region has experienced a declining homicide rate over the last five

years. Metropolitan areas had a 1999 murder rate of 6 per 100,000, compared to rates of 4 per 100,000 in rural counties and suburban areas. Homicide rates in particular U.S. cities over time, however, exhibit fairly unique patterns. Some cities have homicide rates that have fluctuated considerably over the last 30 years (e.g., Houston), some cities have stable rates over this period (e.g., Baltimore, Phoenix, Seattle), and others have experienced general increases with dramatic upward swings in a particular decade (e.g., Detroit, New Orleans, Washington, D.C.).

Analysis of SHR data for 1999, based on 12,658 of the total 15,533 murders, indicates several dominant patterns in the characteristics of homicide victims and offenders (see Exhibit 3.4). More than three fourths of homicide victims are males, and nearly 9 out of every 10 victims are aged 18 years or older. Almost half of all homicide victims are black. Black males have the greatest risk of being homicide victims of all sex-race combinations. Concerning offender characteristics, approximately 90 percent of homicides for which complete information was available are comprised of male offenders, and the vast majority of homicide offenders are persons aged 18 years or older. In 1999, 50 percent of homicide offenders were black, and the vast majority of homicides are intraracial killings for both white and black offenders. Males are most often murdered by male offenders, and about 90 percent of female victims are killed by males.

Although these data are useful in terms of examining the characteristics of homicide offenders and victims, there are problems with the SHR data as well. Maltz (1999) points out that Washington, D.C., rarely records drug involvement in homicide incidents, whereas in Detroit, virtually every homicide is recorded in these reports as drug involved. The truth is likely somewhere between these two extremes.

Based on police reports of known offenses, homicides also exhibit wide variation in their offense characteristics and situational contexts (see Exhibit 3.5). The majority of victims know their assailants, and most of these incidents involve killings by acquaintances or friends. The killer is a stranger in approximately one in five murders in which information about the victim-offender relationship is known. Arguments and disputes are the most prevalent circumstances under which homicides take place, and a sizable minority of killings occur in the course of the commission of another felony offense (especially robberies). A firearm was the most common lethal weapon used in homicide incidents; 65 percent of homicides in the SHR data involved the use of a firearm, whereas approximately 13 percent involved knives or other cutting instruments. The proportion of homicides involving the use of firearms has changed very little over the last 30 years.

Exhibit 3.4. Characteristics of Homicide Victims and Offenders Based on UCR Supplemental Homicide Reports, 1999^a

Attribute	Victim Characteristics	Offender Characteristics
Sex:		
Female	24%	10%
Male	76%	90%
Age:		
< 18	12%	10%
≥ 18	88%	90%
Race:		
White	50%	47%
Black	47%	50%
Other	3%	3%

SOURCE: Uniform Crime Reports.

a. Includes only cases in which victim and offender characteristics are known.

Forcible Rape

Based on UCR data, rape rates in the United States increased steadily and more than tripled between the early 1960s and the early 1980s, remained high and fairly stable across the 1980s, and have decreased throughout the 1990s. An estimated 89,107 rapes were known to the police in 1999, representing a rate of about 32.7 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Rape rates also vary by location. States in the South have slightly higher rape rates than other regions of the country. Western states have experienced the largest decrease in rape rates in the years 1990-99. Forcible rape rates in metropolitan and suburban areas are more than 20 percent higher than those in rural areas. Metropolitan areas have experienced a decline in rape rates over the years 1990-99, whereas these rates have increased over the same time period in cities outside metropolitan areas and in rural counties (see FBI 1999).

Several other factors are associated with rape in the UCR data. Most rapes known to the police involve completed offenses by force (89 percent), whereas the remaining cases involve attempts. The highest proportion of rapes occur in the late spring and summer months rather than other times of the year. According to UCR arrest data, almost half of those arrested for forcible rape in 1999 were under the age of 25, and compared to their distribution in the population, black males are overrepresented as persons arrested for forcible rape.

Exhibit 3.5. Offenses and Situational Characteristics of Homicides Based on UCR Supplemental Homicide Reports, 1999^a

Victim-Offender Relationship	
Family Member/Relative	23%
Acquaintance/Friend/Neighbor	57%
Stranger	20%
Motive of Circumstance	
Arguments/Brawls	52%
Felonious Activity	25%
Other Reasons	23%
Weapon Use	
Firearm	65%
Knives or Cutting Instruments	13%
Blunt Objects (Clubs, Hammers)	5%
Personal Weapons (Hands, Fists, Feet)	7%
Other Weapon or Weapon Not Stated	10%

SOURCE: Uniform Crime Reports.

a. Includes only cases in which information on the offense is known.

Robbery

Robbery rates in the United States have vacillated widely over the last 40 years. These rates more than quadrupled from 1960 to 1980, then dropped in the early 1980s, rose dramatically in the late 1980s until 1991, and have decreased appreciably throughout the 1990s. More than 400,000 robberies were known to the police in 1999, representing a rate of 150 per 100,000 inhabitants. Compared to 1990 figures, 1999 UCR data indicate that the estimated number of robberies in the United States has decreased by approximately 36 percent.

Similar to other violent crimes, robbery incidents vary by geographical location (see Exhibit 3.6). Northeastern states have the highest robbery rates of all regions, and the Midwest has the lowest rate. Although nearly half of all robberies in the United States are street muggings, a far higher proportion than the national average for muggings is found in the Northeast. Convenience store robberies account for the highest proportion of robberies in the South. Although when the general public thinks about robberies they most likely envision bank robberies, these are rare in all geographical areas. Robbery rates are highest in the largest metropolitan areas, and street muggings account for a large proportion of robberies in such jurisdictions compared to other areas.

Several other characteristics of robbery are revealed in UCR data. For example, the average monetary loss from a robbery is approximately \$1,100, which ranges from \$620 taken in robberies of gas or service stations

Exhibit 3.6. Characteristics of Robbery Based on UCR Data, 1999

<u>Region</u>	
Northeast	170 per 100,000
Midwest	129 per 100,000
South	156 per 100,000
West	146 per 100,000
<u>Location</u>	
Metropolitan Area	180 per 100,000
City outside Metropolitan Area	59 per 100,000
Rural Counties	17 per 100,000
<u>Type of Robbery Target</u>	
Street/Highway Mugging	48%
Commercial House	14%
Gas or Service Station	2%
Convenience Store	6%
Residence	12%
Bank	2%
Miscellaneous	16%
<u>Weapon Used</u>	
Firearm	40%
Strong-Arm Tactics	42%
Knife/Cutting Instrument	8%
Other Dangerous Weapons	10%
<u>Offender's Sex</u>	
Male	90%
Female	10%
<u>Offender's Age</u>	
<25	62%
≥25	38%
<u>Offender's Race</u>	
White	44%
Black	54%
Other	1%

SOURCE: Uniform Crime Reports.

to \$4,552 per bank robbery. With respect to the type of weapon used in robberies, strong-arm tactics are the most common, followed closely by firearms. Males accounted for about 9 out of every 10 robbery arrestees, and nearly two thirds of persons arrested for this crime were under 25 years of age. More than half of arrested robbers are black.

Compared to the UCR data from 1972, there has been both change and stability in the factors associated with robbery over time. Robbery rates across this time frame have remained higher in major metropolitan areas and northeastern states, and similar proportions of robberies are found to

involve strong-arm tactics over time. Based on arrest data, a similar proportion of robberies across time periods involve males, but the prevalence of robbery arrests among both persons under 25 years old and blacks has decreased somewhat over time.

Aggravated Assault

Aggravated assault rates increased in almost every year from 1960 to the early 1990s, before decreasing over successive years in the 1990s. More than 900,000 aggravated assaults were recorded in UCR data for 1999. The estimated rate of 336 aggravated assaults per 100,000 population is the lowest recorded since 1988. Southern and western states have the highest rates for this offense, and rates of aggravated assault are more than twice as high in large metropolitan areas as in rural counties.

Concerning offense and offender characteristics, the most common weapons used in aggravated assaults are blunt objects (35 percent) and personal weapons such as hands, fists, and feet (29 percent). Knives or cutting instruments and firearms each accounted for 18 percent of weapons used in aggravated assaults. Males account for about 80 percent of those arrested for aggravated assaults, and approximately 40 percent of these offenders were under the age of 25; the proportion of these arrests involving both males and adults has exhibited little change over time. Although 63 percent of aggravated assault arrestees are white, black offenders represented a higher proportion of persons arrested for aggravated assault in the early 1970s.

Property Crime

Property crimes account for about 88 percent of the known offenses in the UCR crime index, so overall crime rates in the United States primarily represent trends in property crime. As a group, property crime rates have exhibited a steady decline over the 1990s. More than 10 million of these offenses were known to the police in 1999, and the property crime rate of 3,742 per 100,000 in 1999 represented the lowest rate since 1973. Both property crime rates and incidents are highest in southern states and lowest in the Northeast (see Exhibit 3.7).⁵ Urban areas have rates of property crime that are about two and one half times higher than rates in rural areas.

Burglary rates in the United States more than doubled between 1960 and 1980 and have generally declined over successive years since the early 1980s. More than 2 million burglaries were known to the police in 1999. The burglary rate in southern states is almost double the rate in the north-