

Exhibit 3.7. Characteristics of Property Crimes Based on UCR Data, 1998

	% of All Property Crimes	% of All Burglaries	% of All Larcenies	% of All Motor Vehicle Thefts
Region				
Northeast	14	13	14	16
Midwest	22	21	23	20
South	41	43	40	36
West	23	23	23	28
Location				
Metropolitan Area	86	83	85	93
City outside Metropolitan Area	9	8	10	4
Rural Counties	5	9	5	3
Offender's Sex				
Male	71	88	65	84
Female	29	12	35	16
Offender's Age				
≤ 18	33	35	32	36
18 or over	67	65	68	64
Offender's Race				
White	65	68	65	58
Black	32	29	32	39
Other	3	3	3	3

SOURCE: Uniform Crime Reports.

eastern states. The data also indicate that urban areas have far higher rates than rural counties. The vast majority of burglaries involve forcible entry, and residential break-ins account for about two thirds of all burglaries. The majority of burglaries occur during the daytime hours, whereas almost two thirds of nonresidential burglaries happen at night. Males, persons under 18 years of age, and blacks are overrepresented among burglary arrestees.

Larceny-thefts are the most common crime in the UCR data, involving an estimated 6,957,412 offenses in 1999. Rates of larceny have remained more stable since the early 1970s than other UCR Part I offenses. Southern and northeastern states have the highest and lowest larceny rates, respectively. Larceny-theft rates are about three times higher in urban areas than rural counties.

The average value of property loss due to larceny in 1999 was \$678. The average take from pocket picking was \$451, and losses from purse snatching were approximately \$392, compared to \$165 for shoplifting and \$1,015 for thefts from buildings. Thefts from motor vehicles are the most common type of larceny-theft, accounting for about 36 percent of these crimes. Only about 1 percent of larceny-thefts involve either pocket picking or purse

snatching. Nearly half of the arrestees for this offense are under 21 years old, and 31 percent are black. Females were arrested for this offense more often than for any other Part I offense, comprising 36 percent of larceny-theft arrestees.

Motor vehicle theft rates based on UCR data increased throughout the 1960s, hovered between 400 and 500 per 100,000 in the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, and similar to the trend with other crimes, decreased over the 1990s. An estimated 1,147,305 auto thefts were known to the police in 1999, and the rates were substantially higher in western states compared to other regions. Large urban areas have offense rates that are far higher than smaller cities and rural areas. The average value of the stolen vehicle was approximately \$6,104. Seventy-five percent of stolen vehicles were automobiles, 19 percent were trucks or buses, and the remainder were other types of vehicles. Arrestees for motor vehicle theft are disproportionately male (84 percent), under 18 years old (19 percent), and black (42 percent).

Although only about two thirds of the U.S. population is covered in UCR estimates for arson for 1999, several patterns are revealed in these data: (1) estimated arson rates are highest in the western states and lowest in the Northeast, (2) cities with a population of more than 1 million have arson rates nearly twice the national arson rate of 37 per 100,000 inhabitants, (3) nearly half of all reported arsons are directed at structures, with single occupancy residential units being the most common target in this category, (4) the monetary value of property damaged in reported arson cases averaged nearly \$11,000, and (5) arrested arsonists are disproportionately male (86 percent), juveniles under 18 years old (54 percent), and black (24 percent).

Hate Crimes

Hate crimes were added to the UCR in 1990 with the passage of the Hate Crime Statistics Act. Hate crimes, also known as bias crimes, are defined as offenses committed against a person, property, or society that is motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin (FBI 1999). There is considerable doubt regarding the reliability of hate crime statistics (Center for Criminal Justice Policy Research 2000). In fact, nearly 83 percent of the agencies that participate in the UCR hate crime reporting program reported no such crimes in 1998. State comparisons of hate crime statistics are also instructive. For example, in 1998, 5 percent of law enforcement agencies participating in hate crime reporting were located in New Jersey; these agencies were responsible for recording nearly 10 percent of the total

hate crimes in the United States. On the other hand, Pennsylvania comprised 10.5 percent of the participating agencies but recorded only 2 percent of all hate crime incidents. "Clearly, it would be negligent to assume from this information that New Jersey has five times more hate crime than Pennsylvania" (Center for Criminal Justice Policy Research 2000:11). There is also skepticism in the fact that although 29 percent of the nation's index crimes were reported in the South in 1997, only 6 percent of the hate crime incidents were reported there.

Clearance Rates

One measure of the effectiveness of local law enforcement agencies in apprehending criminals is the clearance rate. Crimes are "cleared" by either an arrest of a suspect or by exceptional means when some element beyond the control of law enforcement (e.g., the death of a suspect, international flight) precludes them from making formal charges against the offender (FBI 1999). As is often illustrated by the arrest of serial killers, the arrest of one person may clear several crimes. Alternatively, several people may be arrested in the clearance of one crime. Clearance rates represent the proportion of crimes known to the police that lead to arrest.

Clearance rates as reported in UCR data have varied over time, region of the country, and across the various types of Part I offenses (see Exhibit 3.8). According to the most recent UCR data, only 21 percent of crime index offenses were cleared in 1999. Clearance rates were higher for crimes against persons (50 percent) than for property crimes (18 percent). Murders had the highest clearance rate and robbery the lowest, among the violent offenses. Larceny-theft had the highest clearance rate among property crimes (19 percent) and the lowest rates were for burglary (14 percent). The Northeast had the highest clearance rates for all regions of the country for both violent and property offenses.

When examined over time, clearance rates for some crimes have decreased more rapidly than others. There has been more than a 20-percentage-point decline in clearance rates between 1960 and 1999 for murder and forcible rape in the United States. Wellford and Cronin (2000) note that a number of factors affect clearance rates for homicide. For example, the probability of clearance increases significantly when the first police officer on the scene quickly notifies the homicide unit, medical examiners, and the crime laboratory and attempts to immediately locate witnesses and secure the area.

Smaller decreases over time are found in clearance rates for aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and robbery. The clearance rate for larceny-theft has remained at about 20 percent across this period.

Exhibit 3.8. Clearance Rates for Each Index Crime over Time (Percentage)

	1960	1999	Differences
Total Index Crimes	31 ^a	21	-10
Violent Crimes	62 ^a	50	-11
Murder	92	69	-23
Forcible Rape	72	50	-22
Robbery	38	29	-9
Aggregated Assaults	76	59	-17
Property Crime	26 ^a	18	-9
Burglary	30	14	-16
Larceny/Theft	20	19	-1
Motor Vehicle Theft	26	15	-11

a. Estimated rate from hand calculations.

A careful consideration of clearance rates also serves to clarify distortions associated with the contribution of juveniles to crime rates. As Snyder (1999) notes, after the FBI released the 1997 *Crime in the United States* report, newspapers across the country reported that 30 percent of all persons arrested for robbery were juveniles, and many concluded that juveniles were responsible for 30 percent of all robberies committed in the United States. However, a substantial discrepancy exists between juvenile arrest proportions and juvenile clearance proportions. For example, although it is true that in 1997 juveniles constituted 30 percent of those arrested for robbery, they were responsible for only 17 percent of robberies that were cleared by arrest. This discrepancy is largely explained by the fact that, compared to adults, juveniles are more likely to commit crimes in groups. In short, simply accepting arrest statistics at face value can lead to dubious conclusions regarding trends in crime and the correlates of crime.

Problems with Police Data on Crime

Police reports are often considered to be the best official measure of the nature and extent of crime. Compared to prosecutorial, judicial, and correctional data, police reports are more comprehensive in their coverage of types of criminal offenses and include information on criminal incidents even when the offender has not been identified. However, as a measure of the true extent of crime in a jurisdiction, police statistics are inade-

quate for several fundamental reasons. The major problems with police data involve variation in citizen reporting and police recording practices, possible race and social class biases in the structure of policing, limited coverage of crime types under UCR data, conceptual and methodological factors that affect the classification of crime incidents and estimates of national crime rates, and political manipulation and fabrication of these data by police departments and other reporting agencies.

Variation in Citizen Reporting and Police Recording Practices

As discussed earlier, the term *dark figures* has been widely used by criminologists to represent the gap between the true extent of crime and the amount of crime known to the police. The major sources of this gap are the inability of police to observe all criminal activity, the reluctance of crime victims and witnesses to report crime to the police, and variation in the recording of "known" crime incidents due to police discretion.

Contrary to the image portrayed in crime dramas and media depictions of police work, the vast majority of crime becomes known to the police through citizen complaints or calls for service. In other words, police mobilization toward crime and its detection is largely because of a citizen complaint. If a member of the public fails to contact the police about a criminal incident they have experienced or witnessed, it will remain undetected in most cases. The magnitude of unreported crime vastly exceeds crime reported to the police.

The reasons victims and other citizens do not report most crimes to the police are wide and varied. Some victims lack trust in the police or have severe reservations about the ability of law enforcement officials to solve crimes. Some fear retaliation and reprisals from offenders for reporting crimes; others think it is not worth their while to report offenses because, for example, the property is uninsured and probably will not be recovered. The victims in some crime situations may also be involved in criminal activities themselves (e.g., drug sellers or prostitutes who are victims of robbery), which decreases their likelihood of reporting. Others may believe the incident was a "private matter," "nothing could be done," or was "not important enough." Public apathy and the desire to "not get involved" may underlie some witnesses' reluctance to report offenses they observe. Regardless of the particular reasons for underreporting of crime by citizens, this reporting gap raises serious questions about the accuracy of police data as a valid measure of the prevalence of crime.

Even if a crime incident is reported by citizens or directly observed by the police, there is no guarantee that such an offense will be recorded in police data. In fact, police discretion both across and within jurisdictions in recording an incident as crime is a major source of inconsistency in official counts of crime. In this context, the role of the police dispatcher can be crucial. Pepinsky (1976) found that the decision of patrol officers' about whether to report offenses was determined by the nature of the calls they received from the dispatcher. Apparently, if the dispatcher named no offense in the call or dispatched the officer to check a victimless or attempted offense, the chances were practically zero that the officer would report an offense.

In his classic study of police-citizen encounters, Donald Black (1970) identified the following factors that determine whether an incident reported by citizens is formally recorded as a crime by the police:

Legal Seriousness of the Crime. Police are more likely to write up a crime report when the crime is more serious. Approximately 72 percent of the felonies but only 53 percent of the misdemeanors in Black's study were written up as reports. This means that the police officially disregarded about one fourth of the felonies they handled.

The Complainant's Preferences. When called to a crime scene, police often follow the wishes of the complainant. They almost always agree with the complainant's preference for informal action (as opposed to arrest) in minor cases. When the complainant requested official police action, the police complied in the majority of both felony (84 percent) and misdemeanor (64 percent) situations.

The Relational Distance. Police are more likely to file an official report in cases involving strangers than friends or family members. Black (1970) asserts that the victim-offender relationship is more important than the legal seriousness of the crime in terms of whether an incident is officially recorded.

The Complainant's Deference. The more deference or respect shown to the police by the complainant, the more likely it is that the police will file an official crime report. This pattern was found for both felony and misdemeanor situations.

The Complainant's Status. Police are more likely to file an official report when the complainant is of higher social status. The effect of the race of the complainant on recording practices in Black's study was unclear.

Differences in citizen reporting and police recording practices are also likely to vary by region of the country and by rural and urban jurisdictions. Under these conditions, statistics on crime incidents are highly suspect for comparisons across jurisdictions.

Race and Social Class Biases in Policing

There is considerable evidence of racial and social class biases in street-level policing, which dates back to the earliest studies of police in the United States (see, e.g., Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922; Myrdal 1944; Sellin 1928). Irwin (1985) argues that a tendency on the part of police to characterize lower-class persons and blacks as disreputable and dangerous may lead them to watch and arrest such individuals more frequently than is warranted on the basis of their actual criminal involvement. Although focusing more explicitly on socioeconomic status as opposed to race, Sampson (1986) provides further evidence of police bias in arrest decisions. In a study examining the police processing of juveniles in the Seattle, Washington, area, Sampson found that for the bulk of offenses committed by juveniles, official police records, and referrals to court were structured not simply by the act itself but by the socioeconomic and situational contexts of such acts. In addition, law enforcement officials apparently perceive lower-class neighborhoods as being characterized by a disproportionate amount of criminal behavior and accordingly concentrate their patrol resources in those "offensible space" (Hagan 1994) areas. As Smith (1986) suggests:

Based on a set of internalized expectations derived from past experience, police divide the population and physical territory they must patrol into readily understandable categories. The result is a process of ecological contamination in which all persons encountered in bad neighborhoods are viewed as possessing the moral liability of the area itself. (P. 316)

Under these conditions, it is possible that at least some of the difference between minority and white crime rates is the product of a differential police focus on minority groups (Mosher 2001).

Limited Coverage of Different Crime Types

Police statistics on crime such as those developed under the UCR system are restricted to only a small class of criminal offenses. Most of these crimes

involve street-level offenses that occur among individuals. UCR data do not measure federal crimes or political crimes, and severely undercount organizational and occupational crime. Corporate crimes such as price-fixing and environmental pollution are simply not covered by these data, and occupational crimes such as thefts and frauds by employees are underrepresented in UCR data. Beirne and Messerschmidt (2000:38) contend that there are at least three reasons why the FBI focuses on crimes committed by the powerless: (1) the FBI recognizes the fact that crimes typically or exclusively committed by the powerful are difficult to detect, often covered up, and seldom reported to the police, (2) the FBI is insensitive to the plight of the powerless, and (3) the FBI is politically biased in favor of the powerful.

Conceptual and Methodological Problems

Police data on crime in the United States are also problematic as valid and reliable measures of crime prevalence because of several conceptual and methodological problems. As described in detail earlier in this chapter, the major conceptual problems involve the definition of certain crimes under the UCR and the classification of a particular offense under one of the included crime categories. Even with extensive coding and classification rules, counting and scoring decisions in practice are subject to multiple interpretations and potentially large inconsistencies both within and across jurisdictions. Basic methodological problems involve estimating population figures in order to calculate crime rates in noncensus years, sampling error, imputation and estimation procedures, and the application of the hierarchy rule and other conventions in cases of multiple crime incidents.

Estimating Population Figures to Calculate Crime Rates

The UCR calculates crime rates per 100,000 population; however, the most accurate counts of population are only available for census years. In noncensus years, estimates of the population are used to calculate crime rates, and if these estimates are inaccurate, then calculated crime rates will be similarly inaccurate. Bell (1967) noted that 1949 crime rates for California, which were based on 1940 population figures, were grossly inflated because the state's population increased by more than 3 million people over the decade. When the crime rate "automatically dropped . . . [in 1950] it was not due to sunspots or some other cyclical theory, but to a simple statistical pitfall" (p. 153). More recently, crime statistics for Illinois were questioned

because the Illinois State Police used faulty population estimates in their calculations. The state police 1999 report underestimated the population of Chicago by tens of thousands of residents, which produced an inflated crime rate for the city. An Illinois sheriff whose county's crime rate was overstated claimed, "Hell, they never could add. You get those fellows off of chipped roads and they get confused" (as quoted in Berens and Lighty 2001).

Sampling Error and Participation Rates

Participation in the UCR is voluntary, and police departments are not under any legal obligation to report their crime data to the FBI. The reporting area covered by the UCR program has remained high since the late 1950s. For example, the national coverage rate was 93 percent in 1972, 97 percent in 1981, and 95 percent in 1999. Active participation in the UCR program is highest among law enforcement agencies representing large metropolitan areas (with more than 250,000 population) and lowest for rural areas.

Sampling error is a problem in any research when sample data are used to estimate and represent population values. Two general sources of sampling error and possible sampling bias are found in the UCR system. First, not all police agencies in the United States report crime data to the UCR program. If there are differences in the crime experiences of reporting and nonreporting agencies (as is suggested by the differences in crime rates and participation rates by urban and rural areas), this sampling error is actually sampling bias that may distort population estimates. Second, agencies that are defined as "participating" may not be providing complete crime data to the FBI. In fact, data from six states were excluded in the 1997 UCR because of erratic or nonreporting behavior. A study of reporting behavior covering the years 1992 to 1994 revealed that only 64 percent of law enforcement agencies reported crime for the entire 36 months; 17 percent were classified as partial reporting (i.e., 1 to 35 months of data) and 19 percent provided no reports (Maltz 1999). Under these conditions of incomplete reporting on the part of law enforcement agencies, claims that UCR data represent more than 90 percent of the U.S. population are misleading.

Incomplete reporting under the UCR program is due to a wide variety of reasons. Some of these include (a) natural disasters that prevent state agencies from submitting their data on time, or at all, (b) budgetary restrictions on police and the cutback on services, (c) changes in the personnel who prepare local UCR data and their replacement with persons with less training,

experience, or commitment to the program, (d) new reporting systems or computerization of old systems that may cause delays or gaps in the crime reporting process, (e) small agencies with little crime that may feel it is unnecessary to file monthly reports, and (f) incompatibility in state and UCR definitions, resulting in data being submitted by states but not accepted by the FBI (Maltz 1999). Whatever the reason, incomplete reporting and nonreporting have obvious implications for the estimation of national trends in crime.

Problems with Imputation and Estimation

Problems related to sampling error and potential sampling bias are compounded when estimating arrest trends and the profile of persons arrested for crimes. As noted earlier, clearance rates vary widely according to the type of crime, hovering around 50 percent for violent crimes and only 17 percent for property crimes in 1999. Given that the majority of offenders are not counted in arrest data, inferences about the typical profile of particular types of offenders from UCR arrest data also represent a type of sampling bias, because some offenders (e.g., nonstrangers) are more easily identified by victims, and subsequently arrested, than others. Another problem with developing offender profiles from UCR arrest data is that arrests are a reflection of differential police priorities and enforcement practices, further contributing to the likelihood of qualitative differences between those arrested and not arrested for even the same type of offense.

Since 1958, the FBI has used two different methods of imputing crime data for police agencies that have incomplete data or that do not provide reports at all. If a particular agency reports for three or more months in a given year, the total annual crime for the jurisdiction is estimated by multiplying the reported number of crimes by 12, divided by the number of months reporting (Maltz 1999). This procedure implicitly assumes that the crime rate for nonreporting months is the same as for reporting months, which is a rather dubious assumption. If, on the other hand, an agency reports for less than three months, the number of crimes in that jurisdiction is essentially estimated from scratch. Such agencies are considered to be nonreporting agencies, and the FBI estimates data for these jurisdictions based on crime rates for the same year for similar agencies. These "similar agencies" are defined as those in the same population size category in the same state but that provide 12 months of data. If there are no comparable agencies in the state, the estimate is based on rates of crime in the jurisdiction's region.

Unfortunately, if the nonreporting agency is different from the "comparable" reporting agencies on crime-related correlates other than geographical location and size (e.g., income distribution, unemployment rates, population density, racial composition), the assignment of equal proportions of crime in each jurisdiction will distort the accuracy of these estimates. The fact that no two cities are alike in their economic opportunity, physical structure, history, and culture raises questions about this estimation approach. And although it is possible that inaccuracies in crime data that result from such estimation procedures may not be significant, the real problem is that there is currently no way of determining whether the estimation procedures produce major or minor discrepancies in crime data. As Maltz (1999) points out, such imputation can be especially problematic for crimes that vary according to season.

Alternative imputational methods have also been used with UCR data. For example, the process of conversion to the NIBRS program required the estimation of totals for some entire states. Unique estimation procedures are also required when yearly data for a particular jurisdiction are incomplete and in other situations (e.g., the inability of some state UCR programs to provide forcible rape figures in accordance with UCR guidelines). For these problems, the UCR program has used "known" data from other geographical areas in the same time period, regional data from the United States for that year (e.g., mountain states, west north-central division), or state totals from previous years to derive population estimates. Such extrapolations, however, are accurate only if trends in other jurisdictions or the same jurisdiction in previous years are representative of crime experiences in the nonreporting areas.

Although it is often overlooked by users of UCR data, the UCR program has relied extensively on extrapolations from other jurisdictions or other time frames for estimating national crime trends. The most recent UCR report (FBI 1999) provides the following examples of major nonreporting and estimation practices over the last 15 years.

1985 through 1994. State UCR programs were unable to provide forcible rape figures in accordance with UCR guidelines in Illinois (1985-94), Michigan (1993), and Minnesota (1993). Forcible rape totals were estimated for these states using national rates within eight population groups (e.g., cities with more than 250,000 population, cities with 100,000 to 249,999 population, suburban counties, rural counties) and then assigning counts of forcible rape proportional to each state's distribution in these population groups.

1988 and 1991. Reporting problems at the state level resulted in no usable data for Florida and Kentucky in 1988. NIBRS conversion required the estimation of state totals for Iowa in 1991.

1993 and 1994. NIBRS conversion efforts resulted in the estimation of state totals for Kansas and Illinois.

1994. Montana state totals were estimated by updating previous valid annual totals for individual jurisdictions in the state and subdividing them by population groups.

1996. Annual crime totals for the state of Kansas were extrapolated from state-level data for only the first six months. Valid state totals in 1994 and percent changes between 1995 and 1996 in their respective geographic regions were used to generate 1996 state totals for Kentucky and Montana. Aggregate state totals in Florida were derived from 94 individual agencies.

1998. State totals for Kentucky, Montana, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin were estimated using 1997 state figures and applying percentage changes from 1997 to 1998 in the geographic division in which each state is located. Total counts for Kansas in 1998 were estimated from 1997 state data and 1998 crime trends for the west north-central division. Forcible rape data in Delaware did not conform to UCR guidelines, so totals were estimated.

From these examples of imputation of UCR data, it is clear that cross-jurisdictional and over time comparisons must be made with considerable caution.

Political Manipulation and Fabrication

An additional limitation of official crime statistics involves their manipulation and fabrication for political purposes. For better or worse, police departments are evaluated to some extent on the basis of the volume of crime in their jurisdiction. The mass media, city and county commissions, local chambers of commerce that promote tourism in their "safe" city, elections for incumbent police chiefs and sheriffs, and the general public are sources of considerable pressure on police departments to provide a positive spin on the effectiveness of their crime fighting activities. Although Chambliss (1984) suggests that "other things being equal, it is in the interests of the police to prove an increase in crime [because] higher crime rates . . . mean increased budgets" (p. 176) in general, the image of a rising crime rate is not good news for local businesses and police departments who are

held accountable for these crime trends. Favorable crime statistics apparently make everyone happy. In the early 1970s, for example, several large police departments in the United States downgraded their crime rates "to create the illusion that the country is a safer place to walk at night because President Nixon's anti-crime measures are working" (*Justice Magazine* 1972:1).

In another example of this manipulation, Seidman and Couzens (1974) identified a significant decrease in the number of larceny-thefts of \$50 or more in one jurisdiction as a result of the installation of a new police chief, who threatened to replace police commanders who were unable to reduce the amount of crime in their precincts. The importance of the \$50 criterion was that larcenies of less than \$50 were not reported to the FBI. Thus, simply by estimating the value of stolen goods to be slightly less than \$50, it was possible for the police to reduce the official crime rate. Similarly, McCleary et al. (1982) note that a significant decline in the number of burglaries in one jurisdiction was related to a change in police procedure whereby burglary complaints were investigated by detectives as opposed to uniformed police officers. When this experiment of using detectives was terminated 21 months later, the burglary rate in the jurisdiction increased again. In another example, a 72 percent increase in the number of major crimes in New York City from 1965 to 1966 was primarily due to a change in crime reporting; the actual increase was only 6.5 percent (Weinraub 1967). In a perhaps even more disturbing example, in 1973, Orange City, California, based the pay of its police officers on decreases in crime. At least partially as a result of this change, the reported crime rates for rape, robbery, auto theft, and burglary dropped by 19 percent in this jurisdiction over a one-year period (Holsendoph 1974).

Given that the police have exclusive control over the dissemination of crime data and there is little monitoring of the accuracy of their crime counts, one obvious way to demonstrate effective law enforcement is to distort, manipulate, and fabricate the number and nature of crime reports. The claim of "cooking the data" has long been alleged against law enforcement agencies, and numerous incidents of police misconduct over the last few decades have increasingly challenged the integrity of law enforcement and have led to growing suspicion about the pervasiveness of cooking data across the country.

When submitting crime data to the UCR program, there are various ways for local agencies to distort and undercount crime incidents. The most basic methods for "creative accounting" through falsifying crime reports include the following:

- Not reporting all crime incidents on monthly UCR submissions
- Combining separate events as if they occurred in multiple-offense incidents and falsely using the hierarchy rule to undercount the total number of crime reports
- Declaring large numbers of reported crimes as "unfounded" so they are not counted in UCR annual summaries
- "Downgrading" major Part I offenses to minor offenses so they are not tallied nationally in the UCR summaries

The particular reasons or motives for the police manipulation of crime statistics are wide and varied. Economic interests and political posturing are sometimes the underlying cause of the artificial inflation of crime statistics by law enforcement agencies, whereas these and other reasons may be the basis for the undercounting of crime. The following examples illustrate both the diversity of motives and the magnitude of distortion and manipulation of crime statistics by law enforcement officials.

Crime Reporting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Some of the most serious allegations of fabrication of crime statistics involve practices in the Philadelphia Police Department. The distortion and manipulation of crime statistics in this jurisdiction has grown out of a "culture of statistical manipulation" that goes back for decades. In 1953, for example, Philadelphia reported 28,560 index crimes plus negligent manslaughter and larceny under \$50, which represented an increase of more than 70 percent compared to 1951 figures. This tremendous increase in crime, however, was not due to an "invasion by criminals" (Bell 1967:152) but to the discovery by the new administration that earlier crime records had minimized the amount of crime in Philadelphia for a number of years. In fact, one district in the city had actually handled 5,000 more complaints than it had recorded (President's Commission 1968). This distortion of crime statistics apparently continued; in 1970, Philadelphia, which was the fourth largest city in the United States, reported fewer index crimes than any other city among the 10 largest. In fact, Baltimore, which had less than one half the population of Philadelphia, reported more than 60 percent more index crimes in 1970 (Seidman and Couzens 1974).

The two major forms of distortion that have been employed by the Philadelphia police in recent years are the excessive use of "unfounded" and "downgrading." It is estimated that literally thousands of sexual assault

cases that occurred over the last two decades in Philadelphia have been buried by the sex-crime unit either by rejecting many of them as unfounded or by placing nearly one third of its caseload into noncriminal categories such as "investigation of person" and other "throwaway categories" (Faziollah, Matza, and McCoy 1999). When the high rates of unfounded sexual assault were scrutinized, the sex-crime unit reported low rates for the next year simply by shifting these cases to "investigation of persons," which are excluded in police summary data reported to the FBI.

A number of different types of downgrading have been used in Philadelphia to circumvent the counting of Part I index offenses. The city has consistently had one of the lowest rates of aggravated assault of any large city because many of these attacks are classified as "hospital cases" or downgraded to simple assaults, thereby being excluded from UCR data on serious crimes. Similarly, the index crime of burglary is often downgraded to "lost property," car thefts and break-ins are redefined as "vandalism," and street muggings without injury (categorized as robbery in the UCR) are downgraded to the minor offenses of "threats."

The manipulation of crime statistics in Philadelphia has been so notorious that dramatic actions have been taken to explore its source and curtail the practice. These procedures have included the auditing of police crime figures by the city controller's office, the assignment of 45 detectives to reinvestigate more than 2,000 sex offenses that were downgraded over a five-year period, the appointment of an academic panel to develop yearly auditing procedures, and a formal inquiry by former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno. The new Philadelphia police commissioner has taken several measures to increase the accuracy of police data, including the dismissal of district captains who were in charge of crime data and the use of undercover investigators posing as crime victims to determine whether police are recording the incidents accurately.

Although these corrective actions should improve the accuracy of police statistics in this jurisdiction, the impact of these presumed improvements in reporting practices on actual crime rates in Philadelphia is debatable. In 1998, the Philadelphia police department failed to report an estimated 37,000 index crimes, but when these crimes were included, Philadelphia moved from the fifth to the second most dangerous city in the United States (*Time* 2000). Not surprisingly, police officials in Philadelphia attributed this major increase in crime rates to more accurate reporting rather than a surge in violent behavior. However, by blaming rising crime trends on better reporting procedures, officials in this jurisdiction may be engaging in other forms of manipulation and "creative writing" to deflect attention

away from ineffective law enforcement practices. It is within that both accurate and inaccurate reporting of crime may be found in local police departments.

Crime Reporting in Other U.S. Cities

In addition to the situation with the Philadelphia police force, there is also evidence that police officials in the city of Atlanta manipulated crime statistics through the use of the unfounded option. Slightly more than one rape report per week was written off by the Atlanta police as never having happened in 1996 (Martz 1999). These rape reports and nearly 500 robberies were quickly classified as unfounded and not counted in official crime reports.

By eliminating these serious crimes from official records, the Atlanta police department was able to make their city appear less violent than it actually was that year. City officials claimed that rapes had declined by 11 percent from 1995 (when including the unfounded rapes would have revealed a 2 percent increase), and that robbery rates had declined by 9 percent (instead of increasing by 1 percent when the unfounded robberies were included). The timing of this downgrading of violent crime was crucial because the Olympic games were held in Atlanta in late August of 1996 and a mayoral election was also held that year (Martz 1999).

As a result of a major public dispute between the Atlanta police chief and her deputy chief who managed the crime statistics section of the department, a joint state-federal FBI audit was conducted to assess the accuracy of crime reports in the city. The audit revealed that approximately 16 percent of the cases examined in the mid-1990s were improperly classified as unfounded, providing support for the deputy chief's allegation that the department was "manipulating crime reporting" (Martz 1999). Based on UCR policies, the reporting error rate for the most serious violent crimes was 26 percent in 1996.

As might be expected, the Atlanta police chief blamed the high error rate on confusion in the UCR classification rules for unfounded cases, rather than to the department's deliberate manipulation of the crime data. However, a former robbery detective was quoted as saying that detectives were encouraged in subtle ways by supervisors to record particular types of cases as unfounded (e.g., homeless people, both suspects and victims who were drug users). This detective noted that "the system was set up to cheat a little bit, not to cheat in big numbers" (as quoted in Martz 1999).

Substantial reductions in official crime rates in New York City from 1995 to 2000 have been attributed to aggressive and effective law enforce-

ment practices by police officials, whereas critics have alleged that the reduction is due to distortion and manipulation through downgrading and unfounding cases. Downgrading in Boca Raton, Florida, resulted in an 11 percent decline in the felony crime rate in 1997. In that jurisdiction, a police captain downgraded crimes reported by investigating officers as burglaries and car thefts to vandalism and "suspicious incidents." In one particular case, the captain changed a burglary charge to vandalism when \$5,000 worth of jewels were taken and \$25,000 in damage was done (Rozsa 1998).

The use of categories such as "vandalism, trespassing or missing property" to downgrade residential burglaries has also occurred in smaller cities such as South Bend, Indiana (Sulok 1998). Alternative strategies include delaying the submission of crime data until after elections, as has occurred in some cities. Political opponents allege that these delays are used to conceal potentially damaging crime trends, whereas the incumbents claim the delays are due to such factors as computer problems that delay the timely release of the data.

Official data can also be distorted through the peculiar practices of individual police departments with respect to some crimes. For example, between 1996 and 2000, Detroit had arrested far more people in homicide cases than any other big-city police department, reporting an average of nearly three arrests per homicide. Most cities average roughly one arrest per homicide. As a result of these practices, Detroit, with less than 2 percent of the population of the United States, accounted for 1 in 13 homicide arrests in the United States in 1998 and 1999. When questioned about these statistics, officials in Detroit claimed that they were the result of computer glitches or the arrests of people at homicide scenes on unrelated charges (Belluck 2001).

The pattern of manipulation, distortion, and fabrication of official crime data is a serious problem that may be self-perpetuating. For example, the considerable media attention devoted to the declining crime rate in New York City has placed great pressure on other cities to report similar reductions in crime. If these data are generated through selective reporting practices, however, this may persuade other jurisdictions to use creative counting methods. Under these conditions, the continuing decrease in the number of UCR index crimes over the 1990-99 period may be more reflective of changes in police reporting and recording activities than changes in criminal activity in the larger society.

The Serial Killer Epidemic

During the early and mid-1980s, considerable media attention was focused on the apparent serial killer epidemic in the United States. Riveting

television interviews with serial killers such as Ted Bundy and Henry Lee Lucas helped arouse public hysteria about these types of offenders. U.S. Justice Department officials, extrapolating from data in the UCR's Supplemental Homicide Reports, claimed that as many as 4,000 persons were murdered by serial killers in the United States each year.

Taking issue with these claims, Jenkins (1994) argued that Justice Department officials grossly inflated their estimates of the annual number of serial murders. This major counting error was the result of the dubious assumption that all or most of the Supplemental Homicide Report murders classified as "motiveless/offender unknown" were the work of serial killers. Jenkins concluded from his extensive analysis of serial killers that such offenders are responsible for no more than 350 to 400 murders in the United States each year.

The manipulation of official crime data to create the image of a serial killer "epidemic" served several organizational goals for the Justice Department. Specifically, this apparent epidemic provided an immediate justification for a new Violent Criminal Apprehension Program at a new center for the study of violent crime at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. The dramatic rise in the popularity of crime profiling was also initially based on this alleged serial killer epidemic.

Official Data on Juvenile Gang Crime

Official estimates of the number of youthful gang members and gang crime have skyrocketed in the United States over the last three decades. Agencies such as the National Youth Gang Center estimate from surveys of police departments that there are nearly 31,000 gangs and about 850,000 gang members currently in the United States (see Bilchik 1999). However, because there is no uniform procedure for removing files of inactive gang members, law enforcement agencies' estimates of the number and age range of gang members in their jurisdictions are very likely to be artificially inflated. In addition, political pressures to deny or minimize local gang problems, as well as the countervailing tendency to exaggerate them in order to secure monetary incentives to fight gangs, play a role in distorting the statistics on gang membership (Snyder and Sickmund 1999).

In a study of whether the law enforcement response to gangs in Nevada was commensurate with the magnitude of the gang problem, McCorkle and Miethe (2001) found that police statistics on gangs are seriously distorted. For example, contrary to the image of dangerous youthful offenders portrayed in the media and other sources, these researchers discovered that a large percentage of gang members included on police gang rosters were

adults, and a large percentage were individuals who had not been charged with any criminal offense. Instead, they were persons who had been "field identified" as gang members because of their associates, style of dress, race, and geographical location.

The official image of gangs as violent hordes with guns and selling drugs is also inconsistent with the substantiated prosecutorial data collected in Nevada. Specifically, McCorkle and Miethe (2001) found that less than 10 percent of violent crimes and drug offenses filed in Las Vegas courts involved gang members as suspects. Although official police statistics in Las Vegas indicated a dramatic rise in gangs and gang members in the 1980s, this presumed rise in gang activity over time was not validated by a rise in gang prosecutions.

The results of this study of youth gangs are interpreted as representing a "moral panic." From this perspective, police used selective crime statistics and counting procedures to convey the notion of gang crime as a "clear and present danger" to the community. This presumed threat from youth gangs was more imaginary than real, but the police used their official statistics on gangs as part of a justification for additional financial resources to increase the size of the gang unit and to pass a special bond issue that provided for more police officers.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter examined police statistics on the nature and prevalence of crime. We discussed the definitions of criminal conduct underlying the UCR classification system, the problems associated with classifying and scoring crimes under this system, the nature and prevalence of crime based on official measures, and the major limitations of police data as an accurate measure of crime.

Throughout the process of reporting and recording official instances of crime, criminal definitions are socially constructed. In other words, each official "count" of crime requires some amount of interpretation and negotiation. Under the widely regarded UCR system in the United States, a crime report becomes part of the official data only after surviving the following five decision points: (1) someone must perceive an event or behavior as a crime, (2) the crime must come to the attention of the police, (3) the police must agree that a crime has occurred, (4) the police must code the crime on the proper UCR form and submit it to the FBI, and (5) the FBI must include the crime in the UCR (Beirne and Messerschmidt 2000:39).

Of the many problems associated with police statistics on crime, charges of political manipulation and fabrication of these statistics are particularly

insidious because they challenge the basic integrity of these data. Although more extensive auditing and monitoring may improve data quality, the processing of police crime data remains largely unavailable for public scrutiny and thus continues to be susceptible to creative accounting methods that may serve political ends. Under conditions of growing distrust of statistical data and numerous allegations about downgrading of offenses, UCR claims regarding declining national crime rates and the characteristics of offenders derived from these data may best be viewed as tentative estimates that are rooted on rather shaky grounds.

Notes

1. The hotel rule only applies to the offense of burglary, however. Thus, robbery of three individuals in three separate motel rooms would be scored as three separate offenses of robbery (UCR 1984).
2. The hierarchy rule does not apply to arson, which is always reported, even in multiple offense situations (FBI 2000).
3. It is not clear, however, that the implementation of NIBRS will eliminate the practice of using the hierarchy rule on the part of individual police departments. Roberts (1997) reports that only one third of law enforcement agencies using NIBRS collected information on all crimes involved in an incident, whereas the remainder continued to follow the hierarchy rule.
4. UCR data can be accessed through the following website: www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm
5. The data presented in Exhibit 3.7 are based on information from the 1998 UCR.