



Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

Tracking Offenders, 1984

In 1984, 84% of adults who had been arrested for a felony in 11 States were prosecuted; 62% were convicted; 36% were sentenced to incarceration; and 13% were imprisoned for more than 1 year. These and other findings are based on almost 532,000 felony arrest dispositions in the following States reporting Offender-Based Transactions Statistics (OBTS): Alaska, California, Delaware, Georgia, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. These States account for approximately 38% of the Nation's population and 37% of reported crime. However, they are not necessarily representative of the entire Nation.

Other findings include:

- Those arrested for public-order felony offenses (such as weapons violations, commercialized vice, and violations of probation and parole) were prosecuted most often (90%); those arrested for felony drug offenses, least often (78%).
- About 18% of those arrested for a violent felony were convicted and sentenced to prison for more than a year, compared to 13% of felony property arrests, 10% of felony drug arrests, and 9% of felony public-order arrests.
- Those arrested for homicide had the greatest chance of being sentenced to more than a year in prison (49%), followed by rape (29%) and robbery (28%).
- Of those prosecuted, almost one-fourth had their cases dismissed; nearly three-fourths of prosecutions resulted in convictions.
- About 4 in 10 of those convicted after a felony arrest received a nonincarceration sentence (such as probation, fines, or community service).
- Of those who were convicted after arrest for a violent felony offense, about 36% received a nonincarceration

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Offender-Based Transactions Statistics (OBTS) are increasingly providing us with an overall portrait of criminal justice processes in the United States. This rich data series allows us to trace a criminal defendant's contact with criminal justice agencies, from the point of arrest to final disposition by police, prosecutors, and courts. It shows us the proportion of adults arrested for a variety of felony offenses who are ultimately convicted and sentenced to prison.

For 1984, 11 States, representing about 38% of the Nation's population, provided data to the OBTS program. As the number of participating States expands, the data on criminal justice processes will become more representative of the United States as a whole. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of those States currently participating in the program.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

sentence, 31% received a year or less of incarceration, and 34% were sentenced to more than 1 year of incarceration.

- Of all those arrested for felonies, 86% were male, and 63% were white. Those arrested for violent felonies were almost equally divided between whites (51%) and blacks (48%).

Introduction to OBTS

The data for this report were obtained from the Offender-Based Transactions Statistics (OBTS) program. OBTS gathers information from participating States on felony dispositions of adults for a given year. An OBTS record consists of selected facts about

those arrested for felonies. The most serious felony charge at arrest is tracked and subsequent actions taken by the police, prosecutors, and courts are reported. The program is designed to collect information by tracking adult offenders from the point of entry into a State's criminal justice system through final disposition. Such a final disposition may be a dismissal of charges by police or prosecution or a court disposition such as a dismissal, acquittal, or conviction and sentencing.

Felony dispositions in 1984

For every 100 persons arrested for a felony in the 11 OBTS States, 84 were prosecuted, 62 were convicted, 36 received sentences to incarceration, and 13 were imprisoned for more than 1 year (table 1). Arrests for property and public-order offenses were prosecuted and convicted most often; drug offenses, least often. Those arrested for violent crimes were less likely than those arrested for property or public-order offenses to be prosecuted or convicted, but they had the greatest likelihood of being sentenced to prison for more than 1 year (18 in 100). (Note that all data on prosecutions, convictions, and sentences refer to the original arrest offense. Defendants may have been prosecuted for or convicted of a crime other than the arrest offense.)

For some specific violent crimes the number of arrested individuals who were convicted and imprisoned for more than a year was much higher than this. Among those arrested for homicide, 49 in 100 were eventually convicted and sent to prison for more than a year; for rape, 29 received such sentences; for robbery, 28; and for kidnapping, 25.

Almost three-fourths of all arrested persons who were prosecuted were convicted (table 2). Convictions were obtained for public-order and property offenses more often than for violent or drug offenses.

About 1 in 4 cases that were prosecuted were dismissed. This proportion was slightly higher for drug and violent offenses. Court acquittals made up a small proportion of all dispositions in 1984. About 1 in 50 cases resulted in a court acquittal. Among violent offenders, however, a higher proportion had their cases formally acquitted. Homicide, kidnaping, and rape had the highest percentages of acquitted cases.

Among convicted individuals, violent, property, and drug offenders were all more likely to be incarcerated than to receive a sentence to probation or some other nonincarceration sentence such as a fine (table 3). More than 6 in 10 of these types of offenders were sentenced to incarceration. The reverse, however, was true of public-order offenders. More than 6 in 10 of these received nonincarceration sentences.

Public-order offenders also received sentences to probation more often than other types of offenders (40%).

Violent offenders were the only group in which a majority of those sentenced to incarceration received a prison term of more than 1 year. Among the other three groups of incarcerated offenders, about 2 in 3 received sentences of 1 year or less.

Comparing the 18 specific types of crimes examined, prosecution was most likely for public-order crimes other than weapons violations (92%) and least likely for motor vehicle theft (66%, table 4). Homicide and larceny were the two other felonies for which the likelihood of prosecution after arrest was at least 90%.

Those prosecuted after arrest for public-order crimes other than weapons offenses were also the most likely to be convicted (table 5). Those arrested for burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft were also highly likely to be convicted if prosecuted. Those arrested for rape, assault, and kidnaping were the least likely to be convicted, although about two-thirds of these were convicted.

Those convicted after arrest for homicide and rape were the most likely to receive sentences to incarceration (table 6). The arrest offenses least likely to result in eventual incarceration were other public-order, violent, and property offenses as well as weapons violations. All other specific crimes had incarceration rates after conviction of at least 50%.

Those convicted after arrest for homicide had the highest proportion, about three-fourths, of sentences to prison for more than 1 year (table 7). Over half of those convicted after arrest for rape also received prison sentences of more than a year. Among all other convicted offenders, less than half received prison terms of this length, ranging from 49% for kidnaping and robbery to 9% for other violent offenses.

Arrest offense	Number of persons arrested	Percent of persons arrested who were:			
		Prosecuted	Convicted	Total	Sentenced to incarceration For more than 1 year
All offenses	531,896	84%	62%	36%	13%
Violent offenses	131,454	82%	55%	35%	18%
Homicide	7,217	91	68	58	49
Kidnaping	3,574	78	50	39	25
Sexual assault					
Rape	5,410	76	50	42	29
Other	2,556	87	64	47	21
Type unspecified	3,994	84	55	42	26
Robbery	40,573	84	59	45	28
Assault	61,535	79	51	26	8
Other violent	5,695	81	57	22	5
Property offenses	230,478	86%	66%	40%	13%
Burglary	76,805	88	71	52	20
Larceny/theft	62,351	90	69	37	10
Motor vehicle theft	15,506	66	51	38	10
Arson	2,467	88	64	41	18
Fraud	37,981	88	63	32	9
Stolen property	26,111	79	58	31	7
Other property	9,257	80	52	23	5
Drug offenses	84,608	78%	54%	35%	10%
Public-order offenses	84,556	90%	73%	29%	9%
Weapons	20,404	83	58	27	7
Other public-order	64,152	92	78	29	10

Note: Total number of persons arrested includes 882 cases for which the arrest offense could not be classified.

Arrest offense	Total	Percent of persons prosecuted whose cases resulted in:			
		Dismissal	Acquittal	Other non-conviction	Conviction
All offenses	100%	23%	2%	1%	74%
Violent offenses	100%	29%	3%	1%	67%
Homicide	100	19	6	1	75
Kidnaping	100	31	4	1	64
Sexual assault					
Rape	100	29	5	1	65
Other	100	22	2	2	73
Type unspecified	100	29	4	1	66
Robbery	100	26	3	1	70
Assault	100	33	3	1	64
Other violent	100	27	2	0	70
Property offenses	100%	21%	1%	1%	77%
Burglary	100	16	1	1	81
Larceny/theft	100	21	1	2	77
Motor vehicle theft	100	20	2	1	78
Arson	100	22	3	3	72
Fraud	100	25	1	2	72
Stolen property	100	25	2	1	73
Other property	100	32	1	2	66
Drug offenses	100%	30%	1%	1%	69%
Public-order offenses	100%	16%	1%	1%	82%
Weapons	100	27	2	1	70
Other public-order	100	13	1	1	85

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding.

Table 3. Sentences received by those arrested for felonies in 11 States, 1984

Arrest offense	Percent of those convicted in felony cases who were sentenced to:					
	Nonincarceration			Incarceration		
	Total	Probation	Other	Total	1 year or less	More than 1 year
All offenses	42%	25%	17%	58%	37%	21%
Violent offenses	36%	20%	16%	64%	31%	34%
Homicide	14	9	5	86	13	73
Kidnaping	21	15	6	79	29	49
Sexual assault						
Rape	16	13	4	84	26	56
Other	27	21	6	73	40	33
Type unspecified	23	17	6	77	30	47
Robbery	23	16	8	77	28	49
Assault	49	25	24	51	35	15
Other violent	61	31	31	39	30	9
Property offenses	39%	23%	16%	61%	42%	19%
Burglary	26	17	9	74	45	28
Larceny/theft	46	24	22	54	40	14
Motor vehicle theft	25	20	5	75	55	20
Arson	37	26	11	63	35	28
Fraud	58	26	24	42	35	15
Stolen property	47	33	14	53	40	13
Other property	55	24	31	45	33	12
Drug offenses	35%	20%	15%	65%	46%	19%
Public-order offenses	61%	48%	21%	39%	27%	12%
Weapons	53	36	17	47	34	13
Other public-order	63	41	22	37	25	12

Note: Detail may not add to total due to rounding.

Table 4. Likelihood of being prosecuted if arrested for a felony in 11 States, 1984

Arrest offense, in rank order	Percent of arrested persons who were prosecuted
Public-order, other	92%
Homicide	91
Larceny/theft	90
Burglary	88
Arson	88
Fraud	88
Sexual assault, other	87
Robbery	84
Sexual assault, type unspecified	84
Weapons	83
Violent, other	81
Property, other	80
Assault	79
Stolen property	79
Drug	78
Kidnaping	78
Rape	76
Motor vehicle theft	66

Table 5. Likelihood of being convicted if prosecuted after arrest for a felony in 11 States, 1984

Arrest offense, in rank order	Percent of persons prosecuted who were convicted
Public-order, other	85%
Burglary	81
Motor vehicle theft	78
Larceny/theft	77
Homicide	75
Sexual assault, other	73
Stolen property	73
Arson	72
Fraud	72
Robbery	70
Weapons	70
Violent, other	70
Drug	69
Sexual assault, type unspecified	66
Property, other	68
Rape	65
Assault	64
Kidnaping	64

Table 6. Likelihood of being sentenced to incarceration if convicted after arrest for a felony in 11 States, 1984

Arrest offense, in rank order	Percent of convicted persons who were sentenced to incarceration
Homicide	86%
Rape	84
Kidnaping	79
Robbery	77
Sexual assault, type unspecified	77
Motor vehicle theft	75
Burglary	74
Sexual assault, other	73
Drug	65
Arson	63
Larceny/theft	54
Stolen property	53
Assault	51
Fraud	50
Weapons	47
Property, other	45
Violent, other	39
Public-order, other	37

Table 7. Likelihood of being sentenced to incarceration for more than 1 year if convicted after arrest for a felony in 11 States, 1984

Arrest offense, in rank order	Percent of convicted persons who were sentenced to incarceration for more than 1 year
Homicide	73%
Rape	56
Kidnaping	49
Robbery	49
Sexual assault, type unspecified	47
Sexual assault, other	33
Burglary	28
Arson	28
Motor vehicle theft	20
Drug	19
Assault	15
Fraud	15
Larceny/theft	14
Stolen property	13
Weapons	13
Property, other	12
Public-order, other	12
Violent, other	9

Demographic characteristics

Among those who had a felony arrest disposed of in 1984, about two-thirds were white, and one-third were black (table 8). For violent offenses about half were of each race; for public-order offenses about three-fourths were white.

For all crimes the majority of those arrested were men. Men were about nine-tenths of those arrested for violent and public-order offenses; they were slightly smaller proportions of those arrested for property and drug offenses. The crime that had the highest proportion of women arrested was fraud (35%).

Those between the ages of 20 and 29 were about half of the adults arrested for all felonies and almost three-fifths of those arrested for drug offenses (table 9). Adults arrested for property crimes were the youngest--nearly 70% were under 30 years old. Those arrested for public-order crimes were the oldest--nearly half were over 30.

Table 8. Race and sex distribution of felony arrests in 11 States, 1984

Arrest offense	Total	Percent of those arrested			Sex	
		White	Black	Other	Male	Female
All offenses	100%	63%	37%	1%	86%	14%
Violent offenses	100%	51%	48%	1%	91%	9%
Homicide	100	52	47	—	90	10
Kidnaping	100	60	39	1	93	7
Sexual assault						
Rape	100	52	47	1	99	1
Other	100	81	18	2	98	2
Type unspecified	100	66	33	1	98	2
Robbery	100	36	63	—	93	7
Assault	100	57	43	1	88	12
Other violent	100	74	25	1	84	16
Property offenses	100%	64%	36%	1%	83%	17%
Burglary	100	65	34	1	91	9
Larceny/theft	100	58	41	—	77	23
Motor vehicle theft	100	62	37	1	92	8
Arson	100	69	30	1	86	14
Fraud	100	68	31	1	65	35
Stolen property	100	65	35	—	89	11
Other property	100	73	27	1	93	7
Drug offenses	100%	64%	35%	—	84%	16%
Public-order offenses	100%	76%	23%	—	88%	12%
Weapons	100	58	42	—	95	5
Other public-order	100	83	17	—	66	34

Note: Data cover all felony arrests disposed of in 1984, even if the arrest occurred in an earlier year. Detail may not add to total due to rounding. —Less than 1%.

Table 9. Age distribution of felony arrests in 11 States, 1984

Arrest offense	Total	Percent of those arrested by age				
		Less than 20	20-24	25-29	30-39	40 or older
All offenses	100%	14%	29%	22%	23%	12%
Violent offenses	100%	16%	29%	21%	22%	12%
Homicide	100	15	27	20	24	15
Kidnaping	100	10	31	23	26	10
Sexual assault						
Rape	100	12	29	23	24	12
Other	100	9	19	16	29	27
Type unspecified	100	10	23	20	27	20
Robbery	100	28	33	19	16	4
Assault	100	11	28	22	25	15
Other violent	100	10	26	22	27	15
Property offenses	100%	17%	31%	21%	22%	9%
Burglary	100	23	34	20	17	5
Larceny/theft	100	16	27	21	24	13
Motor vehicle theft	100	18	39	21	17	6
Arson	100	15	24	21	24	16
Fraud	100	7	25	24	30	14
Stolen property	100	17	33	21	20	9
Other property	100	19	31	22	21	7
Drug offenses	100%	9%	32%	26%	25%	8%
Public-order offenses	100%	7%	25%	21%	25%	21%
Weapons	100	14	31	21	22	12
Other public-order	100	6	23	21	26	24

Note: Data cover all felony arrests disposed of in 1984, even if the arrest occurred in an earlier year. Detail may not add to total due to rounding. —Less than 1%.

Methodology

OBTS data are gathered when an adult arrested for a felony is fingerprinted and the disposition of the case is reported as the arrestee passes through the criminal justice process. For several reasons, however, the OBTS coverage is not complete within the reporting States. For example, not all law enforcement agencies fingerprint all arrestees, and some fingerprint cards are not readable. Also, offenders sometimes surrender directly to the court and, consequently, are not fingerprinted by police agencies. Moreover, even when a fingerprint is filed, the final disposition may not be reported by prosecutors or courts.

As a measure of the reliability of OBTS data, the demographic characteristics of persons arrested for a felony whose cases were disposed in 1984 were compared with 1984 arrest data from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) for comparable offenses. Some differences exist between these two data sets (UCR tracks arrests for a given year, OBTS tracks dispositions; UCR includes arrests of juveniles, OBTS does not). Nevertheless, for the offenses that are most similar in the two statistical series, there is a high degree of similarity between their demographic profiles (appendix tables).

OBTS data are based on the year of final disposition, not on the year of arrest. Thus, data for 1984 represent arrests that may have occurred in previous years. A final disposition refers to either a decision not to prosecute or a trial court finding, not to any subsequent judicial appeal that may have occurred. Also, OBTS data show the sentence imposed, not the actual time served in prison or jail.

OBTS standards allow the States to submit data on the offender (including age, race, sex, and ethnic origin), the arrest (including arresting agency, date of arrest, the most serious felony arrest offense, and date and type of police disposition), prosecutor or grand jury action, court activities (court dates, disposition offense if different from charge offense, type of court, type of trial, type of counsel, and final plea), the judicial decision, and the sentence imposed if convicted.

These standards, however, are flexible, permitting the States to submit minimal data (age of offender, arrest date and charge, court-disposed offense and date, judicial decision, and sentencing data). Thus, the research potential of OBTS data depends upon the comprehensiveness of State submissions and the number of States reporting. No assumption is made here that the data presented in this report accurately reflect national trends or patterns.

Data are submitted in accordance with the nearly 400 crime classifications established by the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC). The States submitting data determine the appropriate classifications for their reported dispositions. Subsequently, these data are merged into the NCIC's 47 offense categories, and these categories are then aggregated into standard BJS crime classification codes.

Access to data

Researchers interested in using the OBTS data files for their own analyses may access the data through the Criminal Justice Archive and Information Network (CJAIN) at the University of Michigan. Additional information can be obtained from CJAIN, ICPSR, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106; telephone (313) 763-5010.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared principally by BJS staff. This bulletin was written by Edward Lisefski and Donald A. Manson. Susan Kline provided statistical review. Frank D. Balog edited the bulletin. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administered production, assisted by Jeanne Harris and Yvonne Shields.

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

Appendix table 1. Comparison of race and sex data for Offender-Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) and Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), 1984

Arrest offense	Percent of arrested persons									
	Race				Sex					
	White		Black		Other		Male		Female	
	OBTS	UCR	OBTS	UCR	OBTS	UCR	OBTS	UCR	OBTS	UCR
Homicide	52%	54%	47%	45%	—	1%	90%	87%	10%	13%
Rape	52	53	47	46	1%	1	99	99	1	1
Robbery	36	37	63	61	—	1	93	93	7	7
Assault	57	61	43	39	1	1	88	87	12	13
Burglary	65	70	34	29	1	1	91	93	9	7

Note: OBTS data cover adult felony arrests disposed of in 1984. UCR data cover arrests of adults and juveniles that occurred in 1984. Detail may not add to 100% due to rounding.

—Less than 1%.
Source (UCR): Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 1984* (Washington, D.C.), table 36 (p. 179) and table 37 (p. 180).

Appendix table 2. Comparison of age data for Offender-Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) and Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), 1984

Arrest offense	Percent of arrested persons by age							
	20-24		25-29		30-39		40 and older	
	OBTS	UCR	OBTS	UCR	OBTS	UCR	OBTS	UCR
Homicide	31%	30%	23%	23%	28%	27%	17%	20%
Rape	33	30	26	25	27	29	14	16
Robbery	46	45	27	27	22	22	5	6
Assault	31	29	25	24	28	28	17	18
Burglary	44	46	26	26	23	21	7	7

Note: Since UCR data normally include data on juvenile apprehensions, but OBTS do not, only those 20 and older are compared. Detail may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source (UCR): *Crime in the United States 1984*, table 32 (pp. 172-73).

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National Crime Survey

Criminal victimization in the U.S.:

- 1985 (final report), NCJ-104273, 5/87
- 1984 (final report), NCJ-100435, 5/86
- 1983 (final report), NCJ-96459, 10/85

BJS special reports:

- Elderly victims, NCJ-107676, 11/87
- Violent crime trends, NCJ-107217, 11/87
- Robbery victims, NCJ-104638, 4/87
- Violent crime by strangers and nonstrangers, NCJ-103702, 1/87
- Preventing domestic violence against women, NCJ-102037, 8/86
- Crime prevention measures, NCJ-100438, 3/86
- The use of weapons in committing crimes, NCJ-99643, 1/86
- Reporting crimes to the police, NCJ-99432, 12/85
- Locating city, suburban, and rural crime, NCJ-99535, 12/85
- The risk of violent crime, NCJ-97119, 5/85
- The economic cost of crime to victims, NCJ-93450, 4/84
- Family violence, NCJ-93449, 4/84

BJS bulletins

- Criminal victimization 1986, NCJ-106388, 10/87
- Households touched by crime, 1986, NCJ-105289, 6/87
- The crime of rape, NCJ-96777, 3/85
- Household burglary, NCJ-96021, 1/85
- Violent crime by strangers, NCJ-80829, 4/82
- Crime and the elderly, NCJ-79614, 1/82
- Measuring crime, NCJ-75710, 2/81

Series crimes: Report of a field test (BJS technical report), NCJ-104615, 4/87

Crime and older Americans information package, NCJ-104569, \$10, 5/87

Lifetime likelihood of victimization, (BJS technical report), NCJ-104274, 3/87

Teenage victims, NCJ-103198, 12/86

Response to screening questions in the National Crime Survey (BJS technical report), NCJ-97824, 7/85

Victimization and fear of crime: World perspectives, NCJ-93872, 1/85

The National Crime Survey: Working papers, vol. I. Current and historical perspectives, NCJ-75374, 8/82

vol. II. Methodological studies, NCJ-90307, 12/84

Issues in the measurement of victimization, NCJ-74652, 10/81

The cost of negligence: Losses from preventable household burglaries, NCJ-53527, 12/79

Rape victimization in 26 American cities, NCJ-55878, 5/79

Criminal victimization in urban schools, NCJ-58396, 8/79

An introduction to the National Crime Survey, NCJ-43732, 4/78

Local victim surveys: A review of the issues, NCJ-39973, 8/77

Corrections

BJS bulletins and special reports:

- Profile of State prison inmates, 1986, NCJ-109926, 1/85
- Capital punishment 1986, NCJ-106483, 9/87
- Prisoners in 1986, NCJ-104864, 5/87
- Imprisonment in four countries, NCJ-103967, 2/87
- Population density in State prisons, NCJ-105204, 12/86
- State and Federal prisoners, 1925-85, 102494, 11/86
- Prison admissions and releases, 1983, NCJ-100582, 3/88
- Examining recidivism, NCJ-96501, 2/85
- Returning to prison, NCJ-95700, 11/84
- Time served in prison, NCJ-93924, 5/84

Correctional populations in the U.S.

- 1985, NCJ-103957, 2/88
- 1984 census of State adult correctional facilities, NCJ-105585, 7/87
- Historical corrections statistics in the U.S., 1950-1984, NCJ-102529, 4/87

1979 survey of inmates of State correctional facilities and 1979 census of State correctional facilities:

BJS special reports:

- The prevalence of imprisonment, NCJ-93557, 7/85
 - Career patterns in crime, NCJ-88672, 5/83
- ### BJS bulletins:
- Prisoners and drugs, NCJ-87575, 3/83
 - Prisoners and alcohol, NCJ-86223, 1/83
 - Prisons and prisoners, NCJ-80697, 2/82
 - Veterans in prison, NCJ-79232, 11/81

Census of jails and survey of jail inmates

- Drunk driving, NCJ-109845, 2/85
- Jail inmates, 1986, NCJ-107123, 10/87
- Jail inmates 1985, NCJ-105586, 7/87
- The 1983 jail census (BJS bulletin), NCJ-95536, 11/84
- Census of jails, 1978: Data for individual jails, vols. IV, Northeast, North Central, South, West, NCJ-72279-72282, 12/81
- Profile of jail inmates, 1978, NCJ-65412, 2/81

Parole and probation

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