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Bureau of Justice Statistics Executive Summary

July 1995, NCJ-155180

NCJRS

National Pretrial Reporting Program

AUG 4 1995

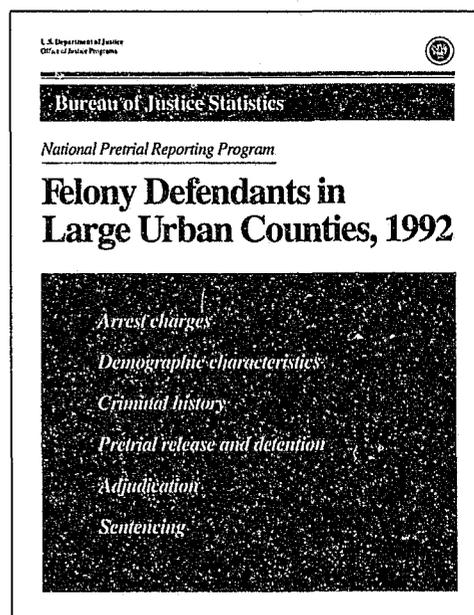
Felony Defendants in Large Urban Counties, 1992

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Arrest charges — arrest data on the 55,513 felony cases filed in the State courts of the 75 largest counties during May 1992.

Demographic characteristics — age, sex, and race of persons charged with murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, theft, drug trafficking, weapons offenses, or other felonies.

Criminal history — criminal justice status (on parole, probation, or pretrial release) at time of alleged offense; number of prior arrests and convictions, and most serious prior conviction.

Pretrial release and detention — whether defendants were released or detained before case disposition — bail amount, type of release, time from arrest to release, and record of court appearance and re-arrest.

Adjudication — time from arrest to adjudication; adjudication out-come; method of adjudication (guilty plea, dismissal, trial, diversion or deferred adjudication); conviction offense.

Sentencing — time from conviction to sentencing; type of sentence (prison, jail, probation, fine), length of sentence, probation conditions.

Highlights

Arrest charges

An estimated 55,513 felony cases were filed in the State courts of the Nation's 75 largest counties during May 1992. About a fourth of these felony defendants were charged with a violent offense, usually assault (12.7%) or robbery (8.5%). Murder (1.1%) and rape (1.4%) defendants accounted for a small percentage of defendants.

About three-fourths of defendants were charged with a nonviolent felony. The most frequently charged nonviolent offenses were drug trafficking (16.4%), other drug offenses (13.7%), theft (12.7%), and burglary (12.0%).

The percentage of felony defendants who were charged with a violent offense in 1992 (26.5%) was slightly higher than in 1988 (21.3%). The percentage of drug defendants decreased from 34.9% in 1988 to 30.0% in 1992. The 1992 percentages of property defendants (34.9%) and public-order defendants (8.5%) were similar to 1988.

Demographic characteristics

A majority (60%) of felony defendants charged as adults in the 75 largest counties were under age 30. A fifth were under age 21, including about a third of murder (35%) and robbery (31%) defendants. Defendants whose most serious arrest charge was a driving-related offense (21%) were the most likely to be age 40 or older.

A large majority (85%) of felony defendants were male. About half were black males, including 57% of those ages 18 to 20, and 65% of those under age 18. Black males accounted for a majority of the defendants whose most serious arrest charge was robbery (71%), murder (66%), or a weapons offense (64%). White males (71%) comprised a majority among the defendants facing driving-related charges.

Criminal history

About 3 in 8 defendants had an active criminal justice status at the time of the current charged offense, including 17% who were on probation, 12% on pretrial release, and 8% on parole. Nearly half of robbery defendants had an active criminal justice status at the time of the current offense. About a third were either on probation (19%) or parole (13%) at the time of the current charged offense.

Two-thirds of all defendants had been arrested previously, with 36% having at least five prior arrest charges. A majority (55%) had a felony arrest record, and 38% had been previously convicted of at least one felony. Nearly half of burglary (47%) and robbery (43%) defendants had a felony conviction record. Twenty-two percent of robbery defendants had one or more prior convictions for a violent felony, compared to 13% of defendants overall.

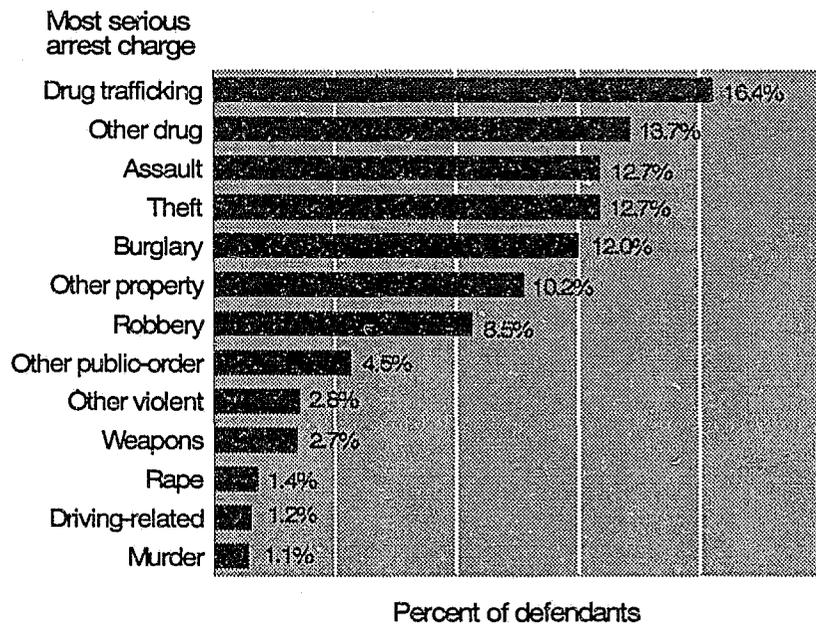
Pretrial release and detention

Just over a third of all felony defendants were detained until their case reached final disposition. About two-thirds of defendants already on parole (68%) were detained during the current case. A majority of defendants on probation (56%), or with five or more prior convictions (57%) were also detained.

About three-fourths of the defendants charged with murder were held until disposition, as were about half of defendants charged with rape, robbery, or burglary. Except for those charged with murder, a large majority of pretrial detainees had a bail amount set but failed to post the amount required to secure release. Among detained murder defendants, about the same percentage were held without bail as were held on bail.

Among those defendants who were released prior to case disposition, a

The most serious arrest charge of felony defendants in the 75 largest counties, 1992



fourth failed to appear in court as scheduled. A third of those who failed to appear, representing 8% of all released defendants, were still fugitives at the end of the 1-year study period. About 1 in 7 released defendants were rearrested for a new offense allegedly committed while on pretrial release. Most of these new charges were for a felony. Overall, a third of released defendants committed one or more types of pretrial misconduct that involved a missed court appearance, a rearrest for a new offense, or some other violation that resulted in the revocation of their pretrial release.

Adjudication

Ninety percent of defendants had their cases adjudicated within 1 year of arrest. Two-thirds of the cases adjudicated during this period ended with a conviction. The highest conviction rates were for defendants charged with a driving-related offense (90%), drug trafficking (78%), burglary (75%), or murder (72%). Defendants charged with assault were the least likely to be convicted (51%).

Fifty-four percent of all defendants were convicted of a felony, and 14% were convicted of a misdemeanor. The highest felony conviction rates were for defendants charged with a driving-related felony (76%), murder (70%), burglary (64%), or drug trafficking (63%). The lowest felony conviction rate was found among assault defendants (36%).

Ninety-two percent of convictions occurring within 1 year of arrest were obtained through a guilty plea. About 4 in 5 guilty pleas were to a felony. Murder defendants (27%) were the most likely to have their case adjudicated by trial. About 4 in 5 trials resulted in a guilty verdict, including three-fourths of murder trials.

Sentencing

Overall, 71% of the defendants whose most serious conviction charge was a felony were sentenced to incarceration. Nearly all of the remaining convicted defendants received a probation sentence. About a third of felony convictions resulted in a prison term, including a majority of convictions for murder (92%), robbery (67%), and

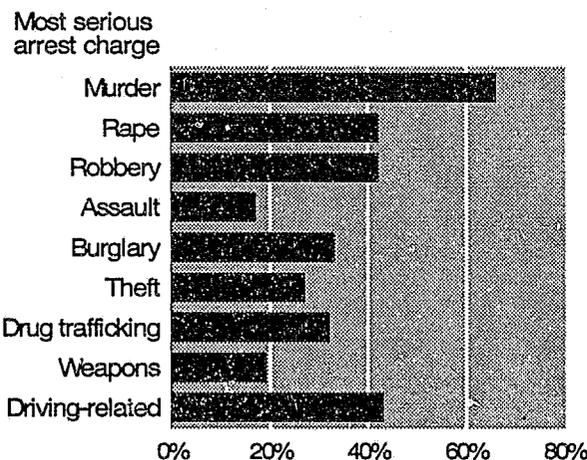
rape (66%). Given prosecution, the chances of eventually being convicted and sentenced to prison were highest for murder defendants (66%), followed by those charged with a driving-related offense (43%), rape (42%), or robbery (42%).

Nearly two-thirds of those with multiple prior felony convictions were sentenced to prison following a felony conviction in the current case. About half of those with a single prior felony conviction and about a fourth of those without prior felony convictions received such a sentence.

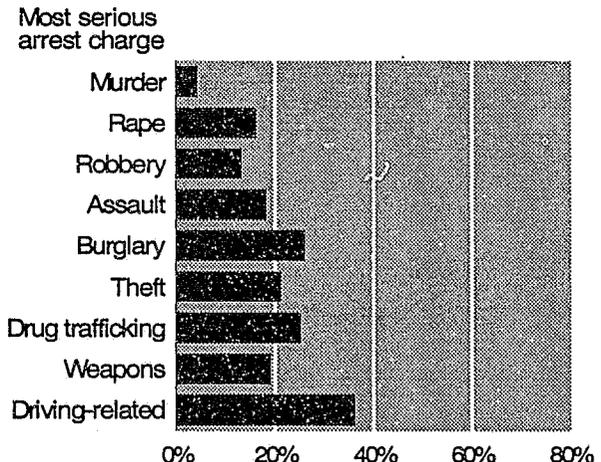
Prison sentences were longest for those convicted of a violent felony, a median of 6 years and a mean of about 9 years. Within the violent offense category, median prison sentences ranged from 16 years for those convicted of murder to 6 years for rape and 5 years for robbery or assault. The median prison sentence for defendants convicted of a nonviolent felony was 3 years, ranging from 4 years for a drug trafficking conviction to about 2 years for a public-order conviction that did not involve a weapons offense.

Probability of being convicted and sentenced to incarceration for felony defendants in the 75 largest counties, 1992

Percent of defendants convicted and sentenced to prison



Percent of defendants convicted and sentenced to jail



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