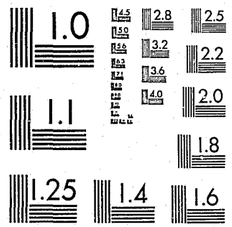

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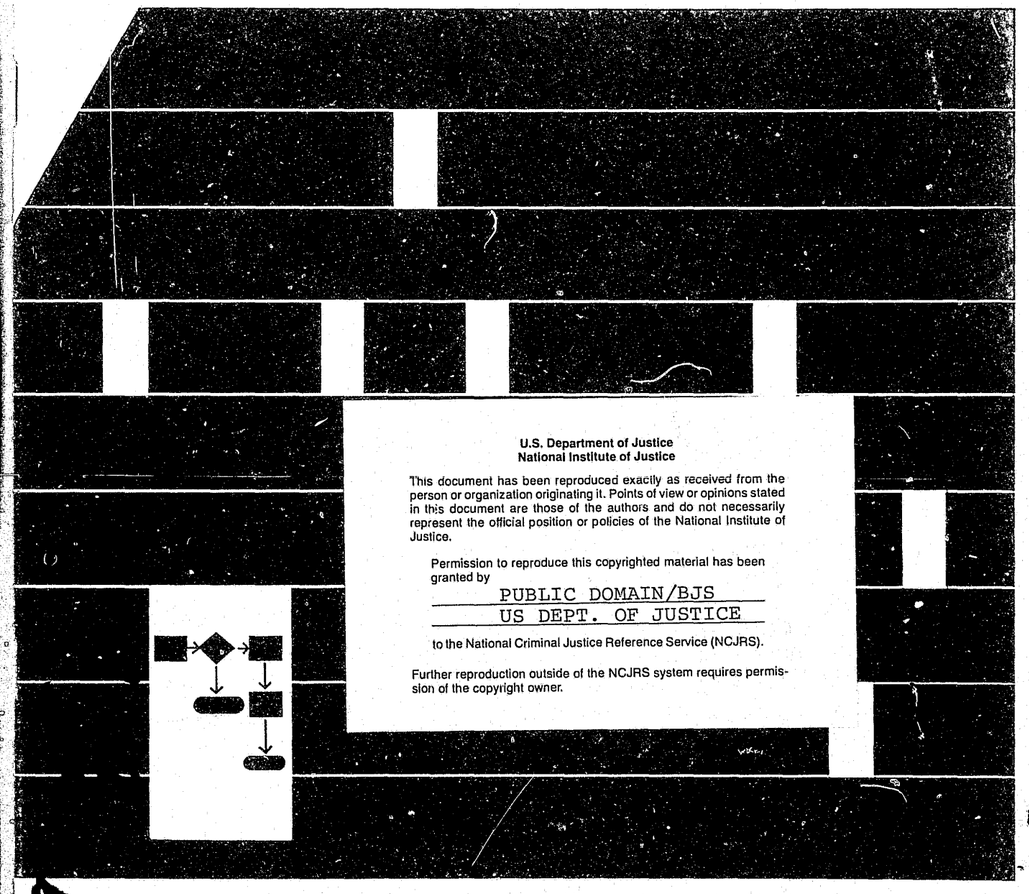
Offender-Based Transaction Statistics: New Directions in Data Collection and Reporting



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE Law Enforcement Assistance Administration
National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service
UTILIZATION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATISTICS **ANALYTIC REPORT 5**

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Utilization of Criminal Justice Statistics Project
ANALYTIC REPORT 5

Offender-Based Transaction Statistics: New Directions in Data Collection and Reporting

by **Carl E. Pope**
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This project was supported by Grant No. 72-SS-99-6006, awarded to the Criminal Justice Research Center, Albany, New York, by the Statistics Division, National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U.S. Department of Justice, under the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, as amended; the project, entitled "Utilization of Criminal Justice Statistics," is being directed by Michael J. Hindelang and monitored for LEAA by Sue A. Lindgren. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

SD-AR-5 1975

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Law Enforcement Assistance Administration

National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Pope, Carl E
Offender-based transaction statistics.

(Analytic report - Utilization of Criminal Justice Statistics Project; SD-AR-5)
Bibliography: p. 31
Supt. of Docs. no.: J 1.42/3:SD-AR-5
1. Criminal statistics—California. I. Title. II. Series: Criminal Justice Research Center. Utilization of Criminal Justice Statistics Project. Analytic report - Utilization of Criminal Justice Statistics Project; SD-AR-5.
KFC70.P663 345'.794'00723 75-619297

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THE UTILIZATION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATISTICS Project was funded initially in 1972 by the National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. One primary aim of the project is the production of annual editions of the Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, a compilation of available nationwide criminal justice statistical data. A second aim has been and continues to be an examination of the utility that a variety of criminal justice statistical data bases have for addressing questions of practical and theoretical interest in the field.

One product of that examination is a series of analytic reports, of which this volume is one. These reports, written by research staff members of the Utilization of Criminal Justice Statistics Project, all have a common theme: the discussion of a central criminal justice topic using an exemplary or innovative criminal justice data base. Each report in the series not only discusses substantive findings in regard to particular issues, but also considers the qualities and limitations of the data, as well as techniques and problems of analysis, in relation to the substantive findings.

At a time when criminal justice statistics development is extensive, and often expensive, these analytic reports focus attention on one often overlooked function of criminal justice statistics—the analysis of current issues and questions based on available data. In fact, the utilization issue is perhaps as important as any in the area of criminal justice statistics. It often happens that data are collected—usually at great expense—without subsequent efforts to utilize such data to address the pressing problems that confront criminal justice. This series of Analytic Reports explores the problems and prospects inherent in the application of various sources of criminal justice statistical data to issues of interest and concern to agency personnel, planners, researchers, and the public alike.

MICHAEL J. HINDELANG
Project Director

PREFACE

THIS IS THE FIRST of three monographs focusing on judicial processing of California Felony offenders in 12 separate counties. The overall objectives of the series (listed inside the front cover) are basically twofold: 1) to describe and analyze a transactional data base in which offenders are tracked through various stages of the criminal justice system, and 2) to demonstrate empirically some of the possible uses of these data in providing information of the type heretofore not readily available. This report describes the underlying nature of transaction data, highlighting many of its possible uses. The flow of California felony arrestees through the judicial system is presented and discussed. The second report focuses on the disposition of felony offenders at both lower and superior court levels, and the third considers judicial processing of arrestees for specific offenses—assault and burglary.

This project could not have been undertaken without access to the Transactional Data Base generously supplied by the California Bureau of Criminal Statistics. I would like to express appreciation to Bureau Chief Willard Hutchins and Crime Studies Analyst Stan Wilkins, extending personal acknowledgement to their continuing efforts in contributing to the success of present and future research endeavors.

CONTENTS

TABLES AND FIGURES

Offender-Based Transaction Statistics: New Directions in Data Collection and Reporting

Introduction

WITHIN THE LAST DECADE there has been increasing agitation throughout the Nation about the problem of crime and its control. This concern has been evidenced, in part, by the accentuated growth of literature related to these issues, the increase in the appointment of investigatory commissions and recommendations of learned societies and professional groups, the results of national opinion polls tallying public attitudes, and the response of government officials in proposing and enacting legislation aimed at supposed solutions to the crime problem. Coupled with this general awareness, however, has been the absence of accurate and reliable data with which to systematically assess the nature of crime and the effectiveness of those resources developed to combat it. As a result, the advancement of knowledge relating to crime and corrections has been seriously impeded. Many official statistics currently compiled by various government agencies frequently prove to be unreliable, fragmentary, and often misleading. For example, police jurisdictions serving only 74 percent of the population in the United States forward arrest data to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for inclusion in the **Uniform Crime Reports** (Kelley, 1974:121). Similarly, data regarding felons institutionalized under State authority are based on incomplete and inconsistent reporting. Thus, the Bureau of Prisons in the reporting of national prisoner statistics includes the following caveat:

> Whereas NPS is a voluntary program, many reporting jurisdictions have been unable to provide program data due to exigencies related to each's particular budget, personnel or program situation. *As a result, the statistics in this Bulletin are not complete and do not represent composite nationwide figures.* [Emphasis in the original.][1]

[1] National Prisoner Statistics, Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions for Adult Felons (Bureau of Prisons, 1972), p. 1.

As informed decisionmaking requires an adequate information base, and no such base now exists, it seems reasonable to suggest that many proposed solutions to crime and recommendations altering the nature of criminal processing may prove erroneous in their application and thus counterproductive. As the Wickersham Committee observed more than four decades ago:

> Accurate data are the beginning of wisdom in [crime control], and no such data can be had for the country as a whole, nor have they ever been available hitherto with respect to many of the activities of the Federal Government in the enforcement of Federal laws. A proper system of gathering, compiling, and reporting of statistics of crime, of criminal justice, and of penal treatment is one of the first steps in the direction of improvement. (Wickersham, 1968:3)

The Data Problem

Unfortunately, until recently these early admonitions went virtually unheeded. Existing attempts to collect and report crime statistics suffer from many of the same inadequacies noted in the original Wickersham document. A major recommendation of the committee provided for the creation within each State of a centralized repository for all crime data, which would then be forwarded to a single statistics center (to be located in the Census Bureau) for national dissemination (Wickersham, 1968:17). It was argued that such a system, in addition to being economical, would provide a foundation for improvement in the collection and interpretation of data and also insure continuity of information through the various agencies of the criminal justice system (Wickersham, 1968:14-16). Centralized data collection and reporting, however, remains the exception rather than the rule. In 1967 the President's Crime Commission, in its series of Task Force Reports,

again decried the lack of adequate crime data, specifically citing the need for criminal justice statistics related to the processing of offenders through the system.[2] More recently, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals observed that lack of information about the current operation of the criminal justice system forestalls needed improvement.[3]

Often, that data collection that does occur is segmental and discontinuous, in that it is limited to a particular agency or stage of criminal processing. Each criminal justice agency, be it police, court or corrections (at all levels of government) generally collects and reports its own summary tabulations. The unit of count (the main focus of interest) changes with each organizational structure. Thus, the police record arrests, the courts record cases, and the correctional institutions tabulate inmates with little regard to the interrelationships among agencies or the individual offender being processed. Summary tabulations, the foundation of most official reports, severely handicap the growth of knowledge regarding crime and its control.[4] We may have a reasonable estimate of how many crimes are known to the police and less accurate knowledge of arrest trends, but we know little about the disposition of offenders at later stages, especially those involving court and correctional decisions. With the national data currently available, it is virtually impossible to relate initial police decisions to outcomes at later stages, for example, the proportion accorded alternative sentences. Existing data sources give little indication of various alternate routes which offenders follow in criminal processing nor which demographic characteristics are associated with dispositions at various stages.

The **Uniform Crime Reports** (UCR),[5] at present our best national estimate of offense and arrest trends, provides little information beyond police processing. Table 1, reproduced from the 1972 UCR, provides information about dispositions of those persons formally charged by the police in that year. This table shows that

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[2] The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, **Task Force Report: Crime and Its Impact—An Assessment** (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 127. Other publications have stressed a similar need. Hill, for example, underscores the necessity for criminal justice information systems, which he defines as,

> ...an integrated organization of procedures, personnel, facilities, and equipment which systematically gathers, transmits, processes, stores, retrieves, and displays information at the time and place necessary to permit organizational efficiency and/or effectiveness.

See: H. L. Hill, "Information Systems for Decision-Making and Program Evaluation in the Prevention and Control of Crimes," **International Review of Criminal Policy**, 28:55-63, 1970.

[3] National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, **Criminal Justice System** (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 37. Recently, the National Institute of Mental Health's Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency listed six fundamental requirements that all criminal justice statistics should meet. Such data should:

(1) Provide information about the kinds of crimes committed.
(2) Indicate something of the circumstances surrounding the crime.
(3) Provide some information about the kinds of persons involved.
(4) Indicate the forms of disposal decided on by the courts or other authorities.
(5) Separate first offenders (or first convictions) from others and similarly distinguish them according to age, sex, and other social and psychological data.
(6) Provide data on the cost of maintaining the services connected with the detection and prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders, and relate these to some measure of effectiveness.

Eugene Doleschal and Leslie T. Wilkins, **Criminal Statistics** (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), p. 1. The authors of this report point out that official publications of crime data are deficient in their failure to meet the above minimum requirements.

[4] It is perhaps noteworthy that within recent years, computer technology has led to the development of system models of criminal justice processing, but adequate data to support such models are nonexistent. Blumstein and Larson, for example, after developing a sophisticated model of a total criminal justice system, were forced to input aggregate data from divergent jurisdictions and estimate various parameters because needed data were either unreliable or lacking altogether (1969). Whereas the technique of system analysis offers new promise in understanding and altering criminal justice processes, haphazard data collection methods prevent its effective implementation.

[5] The UCR has been subject to much valid criticism since its inception (Doleschal and Wilkins, 1972; Sellin and Wolfgang, 1964; Zeisel, 1971). In a recent article, Hindelang enumerates no less than 14 separate shortcomings of the UCR, each reflecting varying degrees of seriousness (Hindelang, 1974). At the same time, however, Hindelang's analysis suggests that statistics reported in the UCR may be valuable for certain undertakings. As he states:

> ...it is decidedly not being suggested that the UCR are without shortcomings—there is, in fact, agreement here that the shortcomings are numerous, severe, and varied, and are in drastic need of alteration—but rather that in spite of these problems, the UCR seem to have at least some applicability as crude approximations which are of utility for some purposes. (19)

Comparing UCR figures with those for the Center for Health Statistics (on the cause of death) and victim surveys, for example, Hindelang concludes that the UCR may accurately reflect the selective geographic distribution of offenses and the nature of criminal activity (1974).

TABLE 1 Disposition of Persons Formally Charged by the Police, 1972[a]

[2,832 cities; 1972 population 53,069,000]

OFFENSE	Number of persons charged (held for prosecution)	PERCENT OF CHARGED[1]			
		Guilty		Acquitted or dismissed	Referred to juvenile court
		Offense charged	Lesser offense		
Total	1,896,936	60.8	4.4	17.1	17.7
Criminal homicide:					
(a) Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	2,853	37.4	20.8	31.2	10.6
(b) Manslaughter by negligence	714	36.4	12.0	42.3	9.2
Forcible rape	3,957	25.1	14.6	37.5	22.8
Robbery	17,181	14.8	13.7	31.2	40.4
Aggravated assault	32,075	34.6	14.7	32.3	18.4
Burglary—breaking or entering	77,485	24.5	8.6	14.2	52.7
Larceny—theft	166,528	50.5	4.6	16.6	28.3
Auto theft	29,468	19.0	6.1	15.6	59.2
Violent crime[2]	56,066	28.0	14.7	32.3	25.0
Property crime[3]	273,481	39.7	5.9	15.8	38.5
Subtotal for above offenses	330,261	37.7	7.4	18.7	36.2
Other assaults	98,855	44.8	3.8	38.1	13.3
Arson	2,576	18.6	6.9	17.0	57.5
Forgery and counterfeiting	10,286	52.8	12.1	22.5	12.6
Fraud	24,626	62.1	4.1	30.7	3.1
Embezzlement	1,754	73.0	7.0	14.0	6.0
Stolen property; buying, receiving, possessing	19,155	33.0	6.3	25.4	35.2
Vandalism	28,682	25.6	1.6	21.4	51.4
Weapons; carrying, possessing, etc	33,410	53.1	9.3	24.9	12.7
Prostitution and commercialized vice	9,331	56.1	5.7	36.4	1.8
Sex offenses (except forcible rape and prostitution)	12,005	46.7	9.1	23.2	21.1
Narcotic drug laws	94,223	44.0	4.3	26.8	24.9
Gambling	16,026	59.2	3.0	36.5	1.3
Offenses against family and children	12,075	50.2	3.8	28.2	17.8
Driving under the influence	183,041	73.0	17.6	8.6	.8
Liquor laws	75,800	61.6	1.3	13.5	23.6
Drunkenness	528,886	91.5	.3	6.5	1.7
Disorderly conduct	124,949	48.5	1.4	31.6	18.5
Vagrancy	12,464	67.7	.8	20.6	10.8
All other offenses	278,531	46.8	1.6	18.7	32.9

[a] Source: Clarence M. Kelley. **Crime in the United States** (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973) p. 113.

[1] Due to rounding, percentages may not add to total.
[2] Violent crime is offenses of murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.
[3] Property crime is offenses of burglary, larceny $50 and over, and auto theft.

of those formally charged, 65.2 percent were found guilty (either of the original offense or a lesser one), 17.1 percent were acquitted or dismissed, and 17.7 percent were referred to juvenile court. These overall figures, however, tend to be misleading when we observe the high proportion of those convicted of the original charge resulting from drunkenness, vagrancy, and similar arrests for less serious offenses. As arrests of this nature account for the largest percentage of offenders coming into contact with the criminal justice system, they tend to inflate the overall percentage figures reported above. Of those formally charged with murder and non-negligent manslaughter, for example, only 37.4 percent were found guilty of the original offense, and 20.8 percent were convicted of lesser offenses. It is perhaps surprising to note that 31.2 percent of those arrested for murder and non-negligent manslaughter have their cases either acquitted or dismissed, considering the serious nature of the offense, and that the clearance rate generally runs over 80 percent.

Within aggregate offense groups of violent and property index crimes, distinct variations are evident. Although 42.7 percent of those charged with a violent index offense are found guilty, compared to 45.6 percent of those charged with a property index offense, distinctions are noted in the offense for which these offenders were convicted. Twenty-eight percent of all violent offenders were convicted of the offense with which they were originally charged, compared to 39.7 percent of property offenders. Only 16 percent of those arrested for property crimes were acquitted or had the charges against them dismissed, but 32 percent of those arrested for violent crimes were acquitted or had the charges against them dismissed.

Although information of the type noted above is useful, the extent of its utility is severely limited. Many defendants are convicted of charges other than those for which they were originally arrested, but we have no information as to which factors are likely to differentiate between these two outcomes. For example, are there certain legally relevant variables (e.g., number of prior convictions) or demographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex) that may distinguish between those convicted on original charges as opposed to those convicted of lesser offenses? Further, what effect does charge reduction have on sentence outcome? Do those offenders who gain sentencing concession in the form of reduced charges receive less severe sentences and serve less time than those convicted on the original charge?[6] Similarly, we may inquire as to what characteristics distinguish among those acquitted or dismissed and those eventually found guilty. We are informed that 17.7 percent of those offenders formally charged by the police are referred to juvenile court, but we know little about the nature of dispositions accorded there.

Other questions can be posed concerning the information presented here and in other areas of criminal processing as well, but the fact remains that data collection techniques now used are inadequate to answer such questions. Tabulation of summary data are of limited value and fail to address many issues currently being raised in the criminal justice field. That current data sources are inadequate to meet today's criminal justice needs is not surprising. Most of these collection methods were developed decades ago to provide direction to an emerging criminal justice system endowed with much simpler goals and objectives. However, even in relation to the less complex criminal justice system of the past, such data sources were much less than ideal; in relation to the complexity of today's criminal justice system, these antiquated data sources are totally inadequate. With the advent of new philosophies of crime control, there exists a corresponding need to re-evaluate present data collection methods in light of today's information needs. If we propose, for example, to view criminal justice as an integrated system, then data must be obtained that reflect this premise.

Transactional Data

It is only within the last few years that a new method of improved data collection and reporting has emerged as a supplement to traditional summary tabulations. This new system, appropriately titled offender-based transaction statistics (OBTS), provides statistical information based on those offenders being processed. These data are "transactional"; the individual offender is the unit of count as he proceeds through the various processing stages of the criminal justice system, and thus

[6] Shin, in an empirical study of charge reduction, found that the long-term advantage of the negotiated plea may be minimal in that parole authorities are likely to readjust original sentences. "It further appears... that the readjustments of sentences in the parole process are so far-reaching as to completely nullify the advantages of a lesser plea." (Shin, 1972:86)

provides the means of linking various segments to one another. In the late sixties, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration sponsored the development of Project SEARCH, a program designed, in part, to implement the collection of transaction statistics.[7] The advantages of this system were well-stated by the Project SEARCH Committee in a series of technical reports.[8] In addition to providing information of the type then being recorded, such a system, it was hoped, would permit the examination of previously unexplored areas as well. In summarizing the advantages of transaction data, the SEARCH Committee identified three major areas where sufficient knowledge was lacking and to which these data could be applied, including time variation in the processing of offenders, the recirculation of offenders through the system, and the relationship between inputs at one stage and outputs at a later point.

1. Processing Time

Traditionally, crime control agencies have recorded and reported their statistics based on the calendar or fiscal year. Such a method may reflect agency workload and underpin requests for budget allocations, but it provides no useful information regarding the amount of time required to process various offenders from one stage to the next and the effects of time variation on dispositional outcome. The necessity of such information is underscored by publications documenting the backlog of cases in courts across the country and the effects of such backlogs on the administration of justice. It had often been observed that defendants are frequently incarcerated in local jails for long periods of time before their cases are ultimately settled.[9] In view of the fact that our Constitution guarantees the right to a speedy trial, it is certainly a travesty of justice for those detained prior to trial who are eventually found to be innocent. On the other hand, the interests of justice are defeated by those who simply wait the system out by originally pleading not guilty and then later changing their plea, at a more opportune time, to guilty, thus gaining sentencing concessions. Available data tend to show that such individuals are more likely to avoid imprisonment (and longer sentences if imprisoned) than those originally pleading guilty (Newman, 1966; Shin, 1973). Generally, the longer one remains in the system, the more likely he is to receive sentencing concessions (leniency or reduced charges) from either the prosecutor or judge, as long as he successfully avoids actually going to trial (Newman, 1966; Remington, 1969). Paradoxically, defendants who exercise their constitutional right to trial are those most likely to be convicted of serious offenses, and, further, to serve the longest sentences if incarcerated.[10]

Clearly, the length of time from charge to disposition (including intervening time lags from stage to stage) is quite an important indicator of the performance of criminal justice processing. Up to the present, however, it has been under-researched, since adequate data facilitating investigation of the effects of time passage have been virtually nonexistent. Unlike prior data collection techniques, in which processing dates are lost in summary tabulations, OBTS records the various dates on which decisions regarding the offender are made. It is

[7] Project Search Technical Report No. 3, **Designing Statewide Criminal Justice Statistics Systems—The Demonstration of a Prototype**, November, 1970, p. V.

[8] A prototype of the model was developed in 1970 in an attempt to explore the utility of offender-based transaction statistics. In this example, data from 1968 arrests for a sample of 250 offenders from 10 States were recreated and tracked through the various processing stages of each criminal justice system. Examples were presented depicting the type of information and tables which could be compiled from transaction data. Several tables were presented showing the multiple combinations of variables along with flow charts depicting the alternate routes followed through the system. The interested reader is referred to the following SEARCH reports for a more detailed discussion of the project. See: Project SEARCH Technical Report No. 3, **Designing Statewide Criminal Justice Statistics Systems—The Demonstration of a Prototype**, November, 1970. Also, Technical Report No. 4, **Implementing Statewide Criminal Justice Statistics Systems—The Model and Implementation Environment**, January, 1972. Technical Report No. 5, **Designing Statewide Criminal Justice Statistics Systems—An Examination of the Five State Implementation**, December, 1972.

[9] The President's Commission of Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. **Task Force Report: The Courts.** (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 38.

[10] The Society of Friends, for example, presents figures on Federal offenders showing the average sentences in years by different methods of conviction. Those offenders who elect a trial serve longer sentences than those who plead guilty (either at arraignment or later in the process).

> A bench trial is rather cheap—it costs only an extra year. The constitutional right to a trial by jury is far more costly. For the day or two of the court's time needed to select a jury, the defendant found guilty pays 5 years!

American Friends Service Committee. **Struggle for Justice.** (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971), p. 139.

thus possible to identify the specific stages at which backlogs occur and assess the effects of these backlogs on dispositions at later stages. Similarly, informed decisions, based on more adequate information, can be made regarding a strategy or program to relieve congestion at these points and improve the delivery of criminal justice services.

2. Recirculation of Offenders

Under present conditions it is difficult, if not impossible, to adequately account for the recirculation of offenders through the system. We have little information regarding those repeaters who had prior exposure to the system, much less the various alternative routes which they may have followed. Without such information it is difficult to judge the effect of our crime control system on various types and categories of offenders.

Our view of crime is surely incomplete and possibly distorted when we fail to take into account those with prior records who again find themselves to be clients of the system. Under OBTS, criminal histories of these individuals can be gathered allowing a comparison of their social and demographic characteristics with those of first offenders. Transactional data allow us to chart the movement through the system of both first offenders and repeaters. Comparisons can then be made at any given point. For example, are first offenders or repeaters more likely to be convicted of the charge for which they were originally arrested? Are there observable differences between first offenders and recidivists in terms of average processing time from arrest to disposition? Similarly, what differences may exist between these two groups in terms of sentence disposition or length of time under State control? These and related questions can be explored when relevant information is recorded on each individual offender. It is thus possible to determine the status of any given person at any particular processing stage for any particular point in time.

3. Input and Output

In like manner, an OBTS system allows for the examination of the effects of decisions made at one stage on those made at a later point. As we noted previously, most criminal justice data are discontinuous in that they are compiled by divergent agencies at separate processing stages of the criminal justice system. Under these conditions, outputs at one point cannot be related to inputs at other points. We cannot compute, for example, the percentage of those held in pre-trial detention who subsequently received a prison commitment, nor can we assess the effects of type of counsel on bail decisions or sentence outcome. As each offender proceeds through the system, numerous decisions are made altering his status: whether to release or hold him prior to trial; what type of counsel, if any, will assist him in his defense; if convicted, whether he will remain under supervision in the community or be sent to a penal institution, and so on. Each of these decisions may impinge on those made at a later point.[11] As Howlett and Hurst have observed in speaking of a systems approach to criminal justice planning, ". . . outcomes of decision-making along a given point in the process not only provide input to other points, but also define and constrain decision-making at these other points, thereby affecting this outcome positively or negatively." (1971:352)

Overall, transaction data would seem to provide a viable supplement to the UCR and other summary publications of criminal justice data. At the very least, they allow us to determine who the clients of the criminal justice system are and what happens to them as they proceed through various processing stages.

[11] The effects of prior decisions on sentence outcome have been noted by several researchers. In March of 1973, the Rand Corporation released a report of its findings focusing on the prosecution of felony defendants in Los Angeles County (Greenwood, 1973). Among other things, the study demonstrated that the type of attorney a defendant had at his disposal (whether public defender, court-appointed or private) was related to variation in outcomes at various processing stages. *Over one-half of those represented by either public defenders or court-appointed attorneys remained in custody prior to trial compared to 19 percent of those defended by private counsel* (Greenwood, 1973:52). Further, court-appointed attorneys evidenced higher acquittal rates for those clients going to trial followed by private attorneys and public defenders respectively (Greenwood, 1973:53).

In the administration of juvenile justice, Duffee and Siegel report that those juveniles who retain counsel at their delinquency hearing are significantly more likely to receive a severe disposition than those who are not represented by an attorney. The authors found that the relationship between severity of disposition and representation by counsel remained even when seriousness of offense was introduced as a control variable. They conclude that juveniles with attorneys are more likely to be detained than those without counsel (Duffee and Siegel, 1971). Whereas studies such as these tend to demonstrate the effect of prior decisions or status on subsequent outcome, data have not been available to research such issues in detail or on a large scale.

Availability and Implementation of Transaction Data

At the time that this study was undertaken, national transaction data were not available. This deficiency is not surprising considering many of the problems involved in implementing such a massive data collection system in various states. Most law enforcement agencies, for example, are concentrated in city and county jurisdictions. Probation services are most often organized on the county level, with felony penal institutions generally being administered by the State. Understandably, there may be some reluctance on the part of these agencies to relinquish what they believe to be part of their autonomous and independent operation. Perhaps the best method of transactional data collection is through a central agency located within each State with responsibility for compiling and recording criminal justice processing data. Whereas slightly more than half the States have such an agency for criminal justice statistics, only a few States have operational or nearly operational OBTS programs. Conventionally, most criminal justice agencies have recorded and reported their own statistics, determing for themselves which types of data are important. Typically, as noted above, such statistics reflect agency workload and are of little value to the wider criminal justice community.

In certain instances local agencies may be hesitant to forward their data to some central agency for compilation. Several reasons can be cited for this hesitancy. Oftentimes these agencies believe that such data will be used as a check on their performance, and, as a result, they may be held accountable. Similarly, many may believe that the new system offers little improvement over present methods. From the point of view of the local criminal justice agency, the time and procedural changes needed to implement such a system may not outweigh the advantages to be gained. As the SEARCH Committee noted, such resistance is to be expected and must be taken into account during the early phases of the project. Failure to convince participating agencies of the importance and advantages of the new system may jeopardize the entire project. Thus, the active participation of user agencies must be sought and nurtured from the beginning.

The coordination of various operational parts in such a mammoth data collection program also present imposing obstacles. It is no simple task to monitor hundreds of local agencies in the use of standard reporting forms, to check on the reliability of data and to see that information is submitted on time. Such duties may place a severe strain on the allocation of personnel resources. For example, additional manpower may not be readily available for field checks on the reliability of that data being received. This may, in turn, delay the processing of available information, and thus a backlog may quickly develop.

Further, criminal justice processing is a dynamic rather than a static system. Changes in policy and procedure are constantly occurring in response to legal decisions or local needs. The entire reporting system must be flexible enough to adapt to these continual changes. Information must be deleted, recoded, and updated as the need arises. Such reorganization may have an impact on budget allocations and priorities. These are only some of the considerations that must be anticipated and dealt with in designing an OBTS data collection system. Each State, of course, will experience unique problems in implementing its own system.

Administrative and organizational problems, such as those noted above, have hindered the development of offender-based transaction statistics, for each State is, in a real sense, tied to its traditional procedures and organizational capabilities. Retooling existing operations to meet OBTS requirements may require major revisions. As a result of these conditions, transactional data were limited, thus placing severe restrictions on this project with respect to obtaining data for analysis.

California, however, has long had a centralized agency, the Bureau of Criminal Statistics (BCS), responsible for compiling crime statistics on a statewide basis. Because agencies were accustomed to submitting data to BCS, many of those problems encountered in converting to a transaction system would be lessened. BCS, for example, has long maintained an active arrest and superior court register containing much of the data that would be required to support a functioning OBTS system. These data were retabulated along an OBTS format for 12 California counties for a 3-year period, from 1969 through 1971. In 1972 an additional 10 counties were included. At the time of this report, an initial 3-year data block encompassing the original 12 counties was available on magnetic tape for analysis. These data can be considered transactional in nature, as the individual offender was tracked through various decision-making stages, from the point of arrest to

sentence outcome at both lower and superior court levels. Unfortunately, these data are not as inclusive as those ultimately envisioned for an OBTS system. Correctional data, for example, are not generally appended to the superior court record. Similarly, complete OBTS data, because of their longitudinal perspective including various components of the criminal justice system, would be unavailable for from 5 to 6 years after implementation. It is only after this period of time that many offenders would have completed their sentences, and information on probation, incarceration, and parole outcome recorded.

The Sentencing Decision

Although there are numerous stages in the processing of criminal offenders—through police, court and correctional channels--this and subsequent reports are primarily concerned with sentencing at both lower and superior court levels. Information on police decision-making is lacking except for that related to charge at arrest and a preliminary post-arrest determination, made by the police and the prosecutor's office regarding whether or not to hold the suspect for further processing. In the latter case, it may be that insufficient evidence exists to warrant prosecution or new evidence may confirm the innocence of the suspect. The suspect may also be transferred to another agency with original jurisdiction or, if younger than 18, he may be turned over to the juvenile authorities. Data on correctional outcome are missing altogether. As we noted above, such data are not routinely collected by BCS at present, and, therefore, no information relating to correctional decisions (e.g., parole determinations) was available. Similarly, much useful information on the judicial processing of offenders—which would be included in a comprehensive OBTS system—are omitted from our data set. We have no data, for example, on bail determinations, type of counsel, or type of trial (e.g., whether by judge or jury). Such data are obviously useful, and we would hope that they will, in fact, be included in future offender-based transaction systems.[12]

[12] Unfortunately, missing information such as pre-trial status, type of attorney, and method of disposition precludes as complete an analysis as we would have liked to undertake. We have no way, for example, of ascertaining the effects of these prior decisions on sentence outcome, although we believe that their impact may be significant. Our interpretation of sentence outcome in these data must, of course, be tempered by such knowledge.

Of all criminal justice decisions, those made at sentencing probably exert the greatest impact upon the offender, affecting both his present and future status. The original charge, for example, may be reduced to a misdemeanor, and the offender may be required to serve a specified period at time under probation supervision, assessed a fine, or sentenced to a jail term. He may eventually be acquitted of the charges against him, or the case may be dismissed because evidence upon which the charge is based was illegally seized. On the other hand, a felony conviction may result in imprisonment for 1 or more years in a State penal institution. The various possibilities are numerous, but not infinite, being bounded by appropriate statutory law. Our major emphasis, then, is on sentencing dispositions, those officially recorded judicial decisions that bear directly upon a defendant's future.[13]

[13] It should be noted that decision-making in the criminal justice system is discretionary and non-reviewable and therefore is not measurable. An example of such decision-making in the judicial area is seen in the process of plea negotiation, where a defendant agrees to plead guilty in return for certain sentencing concessions granted by the prosecutor (Newman, 1966). The prosecutor and the defendant (or his counsel) meet in secret and strike a bargain, the mechanics of which are never officially recorded.

In the enforcement area as well, such decisions are frequent. The police have not been delegated discretion to selectively enforce the law. Clearly their mandate is to enforce all statutory law in a fair and consistent manner. In practice, however, operational demands frequently place the police in a position of deciding which laws to enforce under which circumstances. Certain less serious offenses, for example, may be ignored because of manpower limitations or public pressure. Further, police administrators rarely delineate arrest criteria, but rather rely on the individual officer's judgment. Felony arrests are based on probable cause (a reasonable belief that a crime was committed by the accused), but such a concept is nebulous at best. Pre-arrest decisions such as initiating an investigation or invoking "stop and frisk" powers, because they are based on less clearly definable criteria, are often more discretionary than decisions to arrest.

In the corrections field, there is much administrative discretion. The decision to apply sanctions such as loss of "good time" credits or segregated confinement is often based on undefined criteria and are nonreviewable. Because decisions of this type are discretionary, records are rarely kept, and the basis upon which the decision is reached is never specified.

In the judicial area the sentencing decision is based on a multitude of factors, the determinants of which are often unclear. Magistrates are thought to exercise little delegated discretion at trial (guilt or innocence being based on the facts of the case), but the sentencing decision is often enclosed by discretionary leeway. The legislature typically allocates much discretion to the judicial branch in making sentencing determinations. In California this discretion is curbed somewhat for those felons sentenced to State prisons. In such cases the California Adult Authority sets the limits of incarceration. The initial sentencing decision as to fine, probation, jail, or prison, however, still resides with the trial judge, as does the length of time the defendant will spend on probation or in county jail.

The Present Study

With these data limitations in mind, we focused our analysis on those defendants originally arrested for a felony offense who were processed in 12 California counties from 1969 to 1971. Appendix A contains a copy of the original California OBTS Codebook, with an inclusive list of data elements. Unfortunately, much of the information listed in the codebook was not collected, as it is not routinely provided in the arrest or superior court register. (Those data elements for which information was collected are noted in the codebook by an asterisk.) As we noted above, certain information such as that pertaining to an offender's eventual exit from the system would be unavailable for a reasonable period of time. Similarly, some criminal justice data are more difficult than others to collect. Bail determinations, for example, are made and readjusted at a number of different points in the system, thus making the recording and checking of this information difficult. Since the data contained in this report represent an initial attempt at an OBTS system, reporting by BCS focused on those types of information readily attainable through existing collection systems. As a result, these data are almost exclusively concerned with lower and superior court sentence dispositions, including the length of probation and jail terms. We are thus precluded from undertaking as complete an analysis as an ideal OBTS system could support and, therefore, will concentrate on those transactions occurring at the sentencing stage. Even at this single stage of criminal processing, however, these data provide more information than has hitherto been available under existing collection techniques and effectively demonstrate the advantages of transaction data.

The 3-year time span constitutes the most complete data block available, with a sufficient number of cases having been adjudicated at both lower and superior court levels. Further, by utilizing the entire 3-year period, we are also more likely to avoid any unique events occurring in a given year that may produce an anomalous effect upon the data.

Preliminary analysis for each separate year revealed little variation in patterns over the years. There was, however, one noteworthy exception. A significant decrease was observed for both 1970 and 1971 in the number of felony defendants convicted at the superior court level. This trend was consistent with a revision in the penal law occurring in 1969. In that year, section 17 of the California Penal Code was amended to allow certain felony offenses to be processed as misdemeanors under the following circumstances:

> When the prosecuting attorney files in a court having jurisdiction over misdemeanor offenses a complaint specifying that the offense is a misdemeanor, unless the defendant at the time of his arraignment or plea objects to the offense being made a misdemeanor, in which event the complaint shall be amended to charge the felony and the case shall proceed on the felony complaint.
>
> When, at or before the preliminary examination and with the consent of the prosecuting attorney and the defendant, the magistrate determines that the offense is a misdemeanor, in which event the case shall proceed as if the defendant had been arraigned on a misdemeanor complaint.[14]

If an offense is punishable by imprisonment in the State prison, or by fine or imprisonment in the county jail, the case may be disposed of by the municipal court as a misdemeanor under those conditions cited above.

Table 2 is illustrative of those changes occurring since the adoption of section 17. Superior court convictions decreased from a high of 68 percent in 1969 to 50 percent and 45 percent for 1970 and 1971 respectively. A greater proportion of cases in 1970 and 1971 were handled at the lower court level, thus substantially reducing the workload of the superior court. It is also evident from Table 2 that the total number of convictions increased for each consecutive year from 1969 through 1971; in fact, from 1969 to 1971 there was more than a 50 percent increase in such cases. This increase was entirely absorbed by the lower court.

While a number of cases were later reduced to misdemeanors, all cases included in this report originated from a felony arrest in which the offender was fingerprinted. It would certainly be advantageous to include data on misdemeanor offenders, but the sheer volume of such cases would preclude their incorporation into an OBTS system at the present time. Further, because crimes of a felonious nature are considered more serious and therefore pose a greater threat to society, it would seem reasonable to give priority to efforts in this area.

[14] **West's Annotated California Codes:** Penal Code Sections 1-210 (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Company, 1970).

TABLE 2 Lower and Superior Court Convictions: 1969-71

Conviction level	YEAR OF DISPOSITION 1969	1970	1971
Lower court	32% (1679)	50% (3356)	55% (4282)
Superior court	68% (3502)	50% (3341)	45% (3503)
	100% (5181)	100% (6697)	100% (7785)

Level of Analysis

The total data set used herein consists of 32,694 felony arrestees from 12 counties covering a 3-year period. Based on various demographic characteristics such as population size, land usage, city size, and the like, these counties were divided into urban and rural areas. Since differences in urban and rural crime patterns and criminal justice processing have long been noted, we felt it advisable to add a new dimension to the analysis if the data were amenable to such a breakdown.

Generally, the rate of crime in urban areas has far surpassed that in rural regions, and variation in types of offenses committed across areas have been evident (Wilks, 1967). For example, in 1974, on a national average, the crime rate per 100,000 inhabitants was *substantially* higher in standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSA's)[15] compared to rural areas for all index offenses, with the exception of murder and non-negligent manslaughter. In the latter case, the SMSA rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 10.8, while that for rural regions was 7.6. Burglary evidenced the widest disparity: the rates per 100,000 inhabitants were 1,652.6 and 693.2 for SMSA's and rural areas respectively (Kelley, 1975:55). The crime rate for urban and rural areas within California generally follows a similar pattern to that noted for the United States (Kelley, 1975:62).

[15] A Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area consists of a cluster of urban counties that meet specific criteria. "Generally conceived, a metropolitan area is an integrated economic and social unit with a large population nucleus." U.S. Bureau of the Census, **Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1973**, 94th edition (Washington, D.C., 1973), p. 849.

The performance of criminal justice services may also vary across urban and rural geographic regions. The impersonality of city life may buttress the official handling of law violations, compared to the informal structure of rural areas. In those instances where people interact daily with one another and members of the community are well known, there exists support for informality in the processing of criminal cases. Under such circumstances, offenders may be offered alternative dispositions to criminal processing. For these and other reasons, it would seem worthwhile to subdivide the 12 counties along an urban/rural dimension.

On the basis of available census data from 1970, we classified 10 counties as predominately rural (with an offender population of 13,063) and two counties as urban in composition (with an offender population of 19,635). The two urban counties each contain a major city of over 100,000 population, whereas in only one rural county was there a city with over 50,000 inhabitants. The total combined population for the two urban counties is 921,706, compared to 691,706 for 10 rural counties. Further, the population density (number of inhabitants per square mile) is substantially greater in urban (386.1) than rural counties (24.8). In addition, 89.4 percent of the population in both urban counties live in urbanized areas, compared to 54.9 percent of the population in the 10 rural counties.[16] With respect to social characteristics, 5.6 percent of the population in the two urban counties is black, whereas the black population is significantly less (0.6 percent) in the 10 rural counties. Few differences were noted between urban and rural counties with regard to other census characteristics, such as median family income, median school years completed, and percent males 16 or older in the labor force.

Any classification scheme is, to some extent, arbitrary, but the indicators listed above seem to justify dichotomizing the data into separate county regions. It should be emphasized, however, that these "urban" counties have rural parts and vice versa. Further, none of the California counties containing the most urbanized sections of the State are among the 12 counties available for analysis. It is necessary, therefore, to bear in mind throughout this and subsequent analysis, that although these two urban counties are the most urbanized of the 12 counties, there are many counties in the State of California that are more urbanized.

[16] According to the 1970 census definition, the urban population includes all persons in (a) places of 2,500 inhabitants or more incorporated as cities, villages, boroughs (except Alaska), and towns (except New England, New York, and Wisconsin), but excluding persons living in the rural portions of extended cities; (b) unincorporated places of 2,500 inhabitants or more; and (c) other territory, incorporated or unincorporated, included in urbanized areas. Some urbanized areas contain one or more incorporated places designated as "extended cities" because they have one or more large portions (normally at the city boundary) with relatively low population density. These portions are classified as rural. U.S. Bureau of the Census, **Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1973**, 94th edition (Washington, D.C., 1973), p. 2.

The Flow of Defendants

This section is concerned with the various types of alternative outcomes and how offenders are distributed with respect to these outcomes. Two flow charts (Figures 1 and 2) are presented, depicting the movement of offenders through lower and superior court processing stages for both urban and rural jurisdictions. Those cases decided at the lower court level resulted in misdemeanor convictions, whereas those at the superior court level most often resulted in felony convictions, with a small percentage of misdemeanor convictions included. These convictions were arrived at either through guilty pleas or trial (judge or jury).

Each figure begins with pre-trial screening, which represents a post-arrest decision of whether or not to hold the suspect for further processing or otherwise dispose of him. At this point 10 percent of all urban and rural arrestees in our sample were transferred either to another agency or to juvenile authorities for further action, thus excluding them from the data set. Further, 24 percent of all urban offenders and 20 percent of all rural offenders had their cases dismissed. Thus over one-fifth of all felony arrestees in each jurisdiction were released prior to trial, thereby avoiding prosecution. The high proportion of releasees is indicative of a so-called "funnel" effect, which is operative throughout the criminal justice system, and reflects the tendency of those charged with criminal offenses to drop out of the system at various points. The number of those eventually convicted and sentenced to prison, for example, represents only a fraction of those originally charged with a criminal offense. Of the total number of felony offenders contained herein, only 6 percent were eventually sentenced to serve a prison term. (See Section 3.)

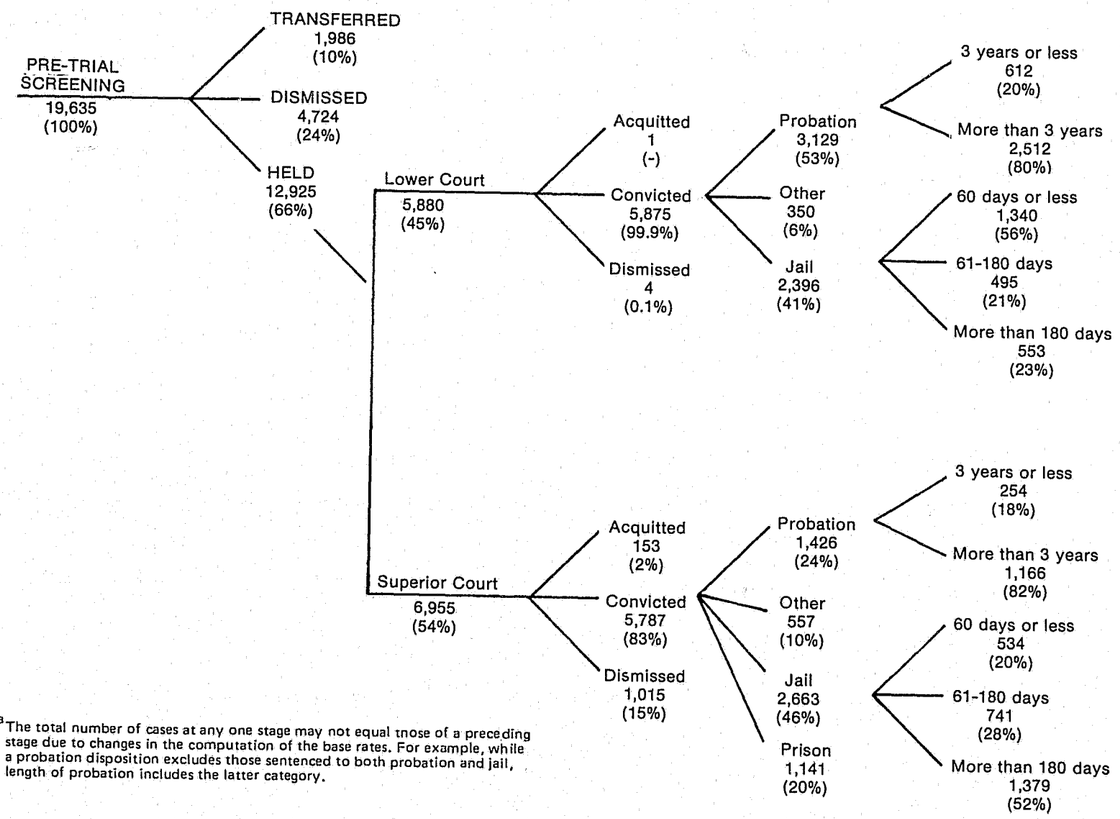
1. Lower Court Processing

Of those defendants held for trial, 38 percent of all rural defendants were disposed of by the lower court, compared to 45 percent for all urban defendants. As both figures indicate, dismissals at this point are quite rare, being less than 1 percent of all cases handled by the lower court. This may reflect a tendency for defendants to plead guilty (or consent to be tried on transcript) to a misdemeanor offense rather than face the possibility of a felony conviction at the superior court and the consequent probability of a relatively severe sentence (recall that all defendants in the data set were felony arrestees). Also, prior police and prosecutor screening have eliminated a substantial number of cases before reaching this stage.

For purposes of analysis, the possible sentence options for those convicted were collapsed into the three categories of probation, jail and "other." Various combinations of dispositions are available. One may be sentenced to a jail term followed by a period of probation supervision or fined and also required to serve a jail sentence. For these cases, we simply selected the most severe disposition and coded the data under that category. The category "jail," therefore, includes those receiving a straight jail term plus a combination of jail and a fine or probation term. "Other" serves as our residual category, and includes both fine and suspended sentence. Only about 1 percent of all cases adjudicated by the lower court received unsupervised probation, under which there is no requirement to periodically report to a probation officer.

The data for both Figures 1 and 2 reveal that, at the lower court level, *probation* is resorted to a greater proportion of the time in urban than rural areas. Approximately 53 percent of those cases decided by lower courts in urban areas received a probation disposition, compared to 37 percent for rural areas. Only a 4 percent difference is noted between areas with respect to jail terms. Rural courts, however, are more likely to resort to a disposition encompassing a fine or other types of alternatives (19 percent versus 6 percent). It is interesting to note that although offenders are more likely to receive a probation disposition in urban lower courts, they were sentenced to a substantially longer period of time under supervision. Eighty percent of urban probationers were sentenced to a term of more than 3 years under supervision, compared to 15 percent of rural probationers. For those who were sentenced to

Figure 1 Flow of California Felony Offenders: Urban Areas[a]



[a]The total number of cases at any one stage may not equal those of a preceding stage due to changes in the computation of the base rates. For example, while a probation disposition excludes those sentenced to both probation and jail, length of probation includes the latter category.

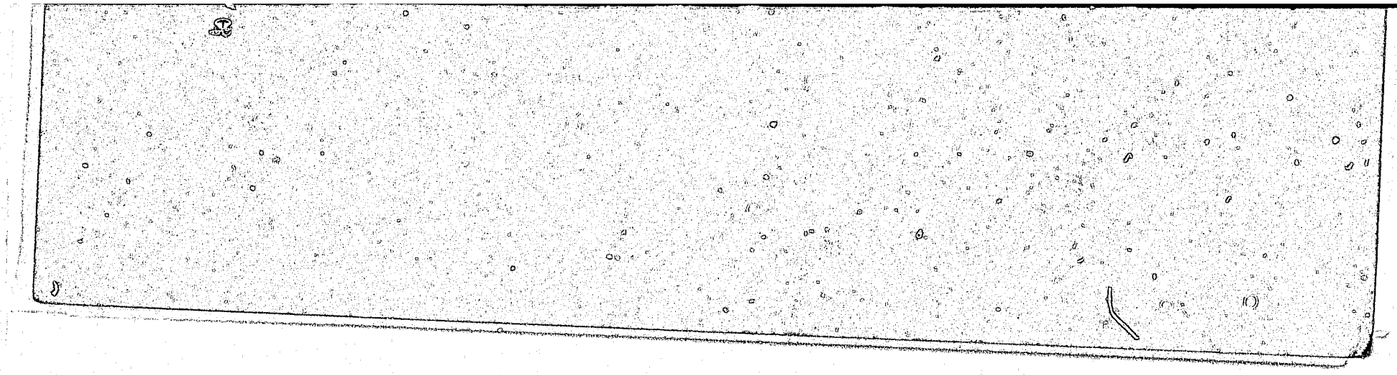
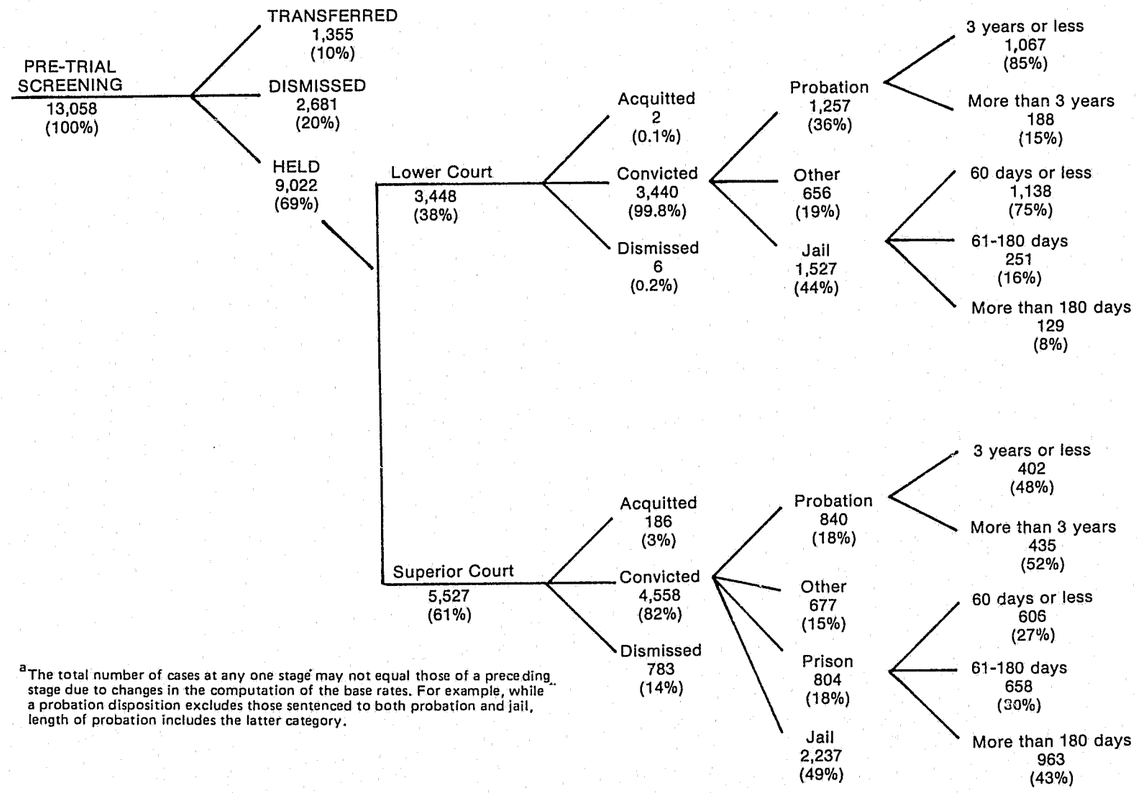


Figure 2 Flow of California Felony Offenders: Rural Areas[a]



[a]The total number of cases at any one stage may not equal those of a preceding stage due to changes in the computation of the base rates. For example, while a probation disposition excludes those sentenced to both probation and jail, length of probation includes the latter category.

jail, we also note that length of sentence tends to be longer in urban than rural areas. Whereas 56 percent of urban offenders sentenced to jail received sentences of less than 60 days, 75 percent of confined rural offenders received the same sentence. At the other extreme, 23 percent were sentenced to a jail term of more than 6 months in urban areas, compared to only about one-third of that proportion (9 percent) in rural areas. It should be noted, however, that length of incarceration refers to time imposed at sentencing, not the actual time an offender serves. It is often the case, for example, that actual time served is shortened by the application of "good time" credits or parole decisions. However, this is more likely to be the case for those serving time in State penal institutions rather than municipal or county jails.

2. Superior Court Processing

Of those held for trial, 54 percent eventually reached the superior court in urban areas, whereas 61 percent proceeded to the superior court in rural areas. Slightly more cases in urban areas were initially dismissed prior to trial and also handled at the lower court level, which may account for the approximately 7 percent difference between jurisdictions in those reaching the superior court. Sentencing variables are collapsed in a manner similar to that for lower court processing. For example, jail includes a straight jail term plus any combination of jail and probation or fine. Probation, and "other" dispositions are coded the same as those sentences occurring at lower court, with the addition of a category including *prison commitments.*

Dispositions at the superior court level are similar across urban and rural areas in that more than 80 percent of all cases handled at the superior court level resulted in convictions. Across urban and rural areas, then, the superior court conviction rate seems to have remained relatively stable. Further, it is interesting to note that a substantially larger proportion of cases was dismissed in superior court than at the lower court in both urban and rural areas. Approximately 14 percent of all offenders proceeding to the superior court for both regions (as compared to less than one percent at the lower court) had their cases dismissed. It would seem then, that those defendants proceeding to the superior court, although more likely to receive severe dispositions if convicted, are also more likely to have their cases dismissed. The acquittal rate, however, is extremely low. Only 2 percent of urban offenders and 3 percent of rural offenders were acquitted of the charges against them at superior court.

Of those adjudicated by the superior court for both geographic regions, approximately 97 percent were convicted of a *felony* offense. Whereas data are not available to determine the method of conviction, by trial or plea of guilty, supplementary evidence indicates that the majority were convicted by a plea of guilty. For example, of the 86 percent superior court convictions recorded across the State for 1971, nearly four times as many resulted from guilty pleas as from trial convictions.[17]

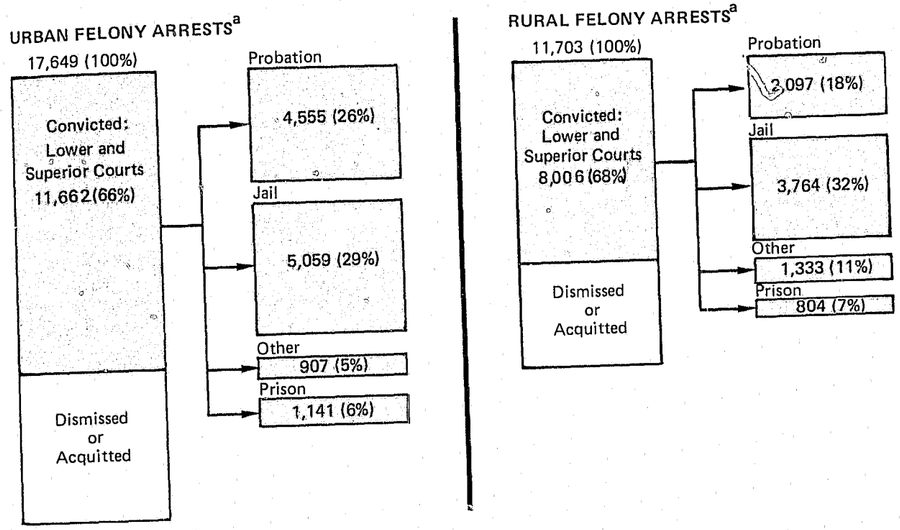
As to type of sentence, the data reveal that superior court dispositions were relatively severe compared to those at the lower court, regardless of other urban/rural differences. Of the total number of defendants sentenced by the superior court, 66 percent were sentenced to jail or prison by urban courts, compared to 67 percent in rural areas. This incarceration rate is considerably higher than that found at the lower court level. Although the percentage sentenced to probation by superior courts declines for both county areas, the probation option is still resorted to more often in urban (24 percent) than rural (18 percent) areas, whereas the percent given an alternative disposition ("other") is again higher for rural regions. Offenders in urban courts were sentenced to considerably longer periods on probation than offenders in rural courts; 82 percent of urban and 52 percent of rural offenders were sentenced to more than 3 years on probation. This trend was also observed at the lower court level. Urban/rural variation in length of jail sentence, however, was substantially less than that for the lower court. Whereas 52 percent of urban offenders were sentenced by the superior court to more than 180 days in county jails, 43 percent of the rural offenders received the same sentence.

3. Attrition

Figure 3 depicts the amount and type of case attenuation for both urban and rural regions. The computation base excludes those cases transferred to other agencies or handled by juvenile authorities. Dispositions combine those occurring at both lower and

[17] Crimes and Arrests, California Department of Justice, Division of Law Enforcement, Bureau of Criminal Statistics, 1972, p. 17.

FIGURE 3. Case Attrition: Urban and Rural Areas



[a] Excludes those cases transferred to other agencies or juvenile authorities for further disposition.

superior court levels. Sixty-six percent of the cases in urban areas resulted in a conviction (either misdemeanor or felony) compared to 68 percent in rural areas. The percentage receiving a prison commitment, however, is relatively low for both urban (6 percent) and rural areas (7 percent), especially when we consider that all original offenses provided for a prison term of some kind.

Disposition of Offenders Originally Arrested for Index Offenses

Included within the data set are the general offense categories for which offenders were initially arrested.[18] In order to further investigate dispositions accorded offenders across urban and rural areas, seven offenses were selected that are essentially similar to index offenses reported in the **Uniform Crime Reports**. Index offenses are recorded by the UCR as reflective of the most serious local crime problem, and are therefore significant because of their very nature (e.g., homicide) or by virtue of their volume (e.g., auto theft). An examination of these index offenses should serve as a supplement to those flow charts presented above.

Murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft accounted for 44 percent of all arrest offenses in the data set for urban areas and 39 percent for rural areas. As Table 3 indicates, of all arrests occurring in both urban and rural areas, approximately 1 percent was for homicide. Overall, the distribution of index offenses for urban and rural areas revealed little variation. Only for robbery was there a notable difference; 6.2 percent of all urban arrestees were charged with robbery, compared to 3 percent of all rural offenders. This difference may reflect differential opportunity in the commission of robbery offenses, as the greater population density of cities may increase the availability of potential robbery victims. Similarly, the less homogeneous nature of urban life probably reduces the risk of apprehension, compared to the close interpersonal relationships often associated with rural life styles, where residents are more likely to know one another at least casually.

TABLE 3 Distribution[a] of UCR Index Offenses in Urban and Rural Jurisdictions

Index offenses	Urban	Rural
Murder	1.0% (193)	.7% (85)
Forcible rape	1.3% (263)	1.1% (149)
Robbery	6.2% (1205)	3.0% (393)
Aggravated assault	9.7% (1890)	9.8% (1265)
Burglary	15.6% (3056)	16.4% (2128)
Larceny	4.9% (952)	3.7% (487)
Auto theft	5.7% (1114)	4.3% (753)
Other	55.6% (10885)	60.0% (7735)
	100% (19558)	99% (12995)

[a] Column percents refer to the proportion of total arrests in urban and rural areas respectively.

In Table 4 dispositions of those originally arrested for an index offense are examined. Here, the seven index offenses were divided into violent and property crimes by using the same classification scheme reported in the UCR.[19] Included under the category of violent offenses are murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Under property offenses are included burglary, larceny, and auto theft. Dispositions include those occurring at both lower and superior court levels. Because all offenses involve felony charges at arrest, those cases handled by the lower court were either reduced to misdemeanors or certified on transcript, a process resulting in a misdemeanor conviction.

As the column totals demonstrate, 41 percent of all violent index offenses were disposed of at the lower court level in urban areas compared to 46 percent in rural areas. For property index offenses, the order is reversed, with 51 percent handled by the lower court in urban areas compared to 38 percent for rural areas.

It is further evident from the data contained in Table 4 that probation is relied on more in urban than rural areas at the lower court stage. Whereas 48 percent of those urban offenders arrested for violent crimes were sentenced to probation by the lower court, only 31 percent received a similar disposition in rural areas. Further, these differences remain constant regardless of whether the offense is one against the person or one against property. Similarly, within both urban and rural areas no differences in the percent accorded probation by type of offense are noted. That is, very similar proportions of offenders receive probation for violent and property offenses. Whereas 31 percent of rural violent offenders received probation, 30 percent of rural property offenders received a similar disposition.

The probation/jail option (time in confinement followed by a probation term), unsupervised probation, and "other" dispositions are rarely used in either area by the lower courts. A straight jail sentence, however, is more common in rural than urban areas. Similarly, fines alone are more frequently imposed by rural courts than urban courts.

At the superior court level, probation was a less frequent disposition than at the lower court, regardless of whether the offense was violent or property, and whether the court was urban or rural. A straight incarceration sentence was resorted to more frequently by the superior court, where 46 percent of urban violent offenders were so sentenced (including both jail and prison sentences) by the superior court, compared to 20 percent at the lower court stage. This trend holds for both violent and property offenses across urban and rural jurisdictions. While fewer defendants received probation sentences by the superior court, a considerable increase is observed in the percentage accorded a combination probation and jail disposition. In both

TABLE 4 Disposition of UCR Violent and Property Offenses in Urban and Rural Areas, by Sentence Outcome

LOWER COURT

	Violent		Property	
Disposition	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Jail	20.0% (161)	32.4% (166)	26.0% (425)	36.7% (284)
Probation/jail	.1% (1)	-----	.1% (1)	.3% (2)
Jail/fine	24.6% (198)	13.5% (69)	21.8% (356)	19.8% (153)
Probation	48.0% (387)	30.6% (157)	47.6% (777)	29.5% (228)
Unsupervised probation	.4% (4)	.4% (2)	.2% (3)	.8% (6)
Fine	6.2% (50)	22.8% (117)	3.2% (53)	12.1% (94)
Other	.7% (6)	.4% (2)	1.0% (17)	.9% (7)
Column total (lower court)	807 (41%)[a]	513 (46%)[a]	1632 (51%)[a]	774 (38%)[a]

SUPERIOR COURT

	Violent		Property	
Disposition	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Prison	33.0% (378)	31.6% (190)	17.0% (266)	17.3% (223)
Jail	13.2% (151)	16.1% (97)	18.3% (286)	21.0% (270)
Probation/jail	27.4% (314)	21.9% (132)	33.8% (528)	34.1% (439)
Jail/fine	----	----	.1% (1)	.2% (3)
Probation	12.6% (144)	17.9% (108)	16.8% (262)	13.8% (177)
Unsupervised probation	3.6% (41)	.2% (1)	3.5% (54)	.4% (5)
Fine	.7% (8)	5.3% (32)	.4% (7)	2.6% (34)
Suspended	.3% (3)	.5% (3)	----	----
Other	9.3% (106)	6.5% (39)	10.1% (157)	10.5% (135)
Column total (superior court)	1145 (59%)[a]	602 (54%)[a]	1561 (49%)[a]	1286 (62%)[a]

[a] Percent of column total: includes those cases disposed of in both lower and superior courts.

[18] The California transaction data included more than 50 arrest offenses ranging from murder through cashing a check with insufficient funds. The classification of offenses used by BCS in compiling the original data set reflect generic categories rather than specific types. Under this NCIC coding system, we can identify robbery offenses, but we cannot specify whether the offense included first degree, second degree, or attempted robbery. Similarly, burglary includes burglary first through attempted burglary second. If all possible charge variations were reported, the data could very well become unmanageable. It stands to reason, then, that charge categories must be grouped in some manner to permit meaningful analysis. Unfortunately, in the process we do sacrifice some information. Along with using generic offense codes, the Bureau of Criminal Statistics associated one offense with each offender. The most serious offense was recorded, thus eliminating multiple charges.

[19] The UCR classifies murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault as violent offenses. A special category of crimes against the person are also included that excludes robbery offenses (Kelley, 1973).

jurisdictions, violent offenders are more likely than property offenders to be sentenced to prison (the most severe disposition available).

While the recorded distribution of persons arrested for index offenses in roughly similar (except for robbery) in urban and rural areas, dispositions accorded offenders charged with index crimes are not. For example, rural offenders arrested for property index crimes are substantially more likely to be handled at the superior court level, whereas property index crimes committed by urban offenders are about equally likely to be disposed of by either court. For lower court dispositions generally, greater use of probation is noted in urban areas, but rural areas are more likely to resort to fines. It is interesting to note that superior court prison dispositions differ little across urban and rural regions—33 percent of all urban violent index offenders are sentenced to prison compared to 32 percent for rural areas. These findings are made more interesting when we consider that approximately one-half of all index offenses are processed by the lower court as misdemeanor offenses.

Summary and Conclusions

In an attempt to empirically demonstrate the utility of the OBTS model, an initial subset of transaction statistics was obtained from the California Bureau of Criminal Statistics. These data, recreated from current arrest and superior court registers, provide information on 32,694 felony offenders in 12 California counties from the point of arrest through court disposition. The original 12 counties were further subdivided into urban and rural areas in order to assess the extent of differential processing which might be in evidence.

Preliminary analysis did, in fact, reveal differences in the criminal processing of felony offenders across urban and rural areas and according to the level of the court where the disposition occurred. For example, it was found that urban offenders generally fared worse than their rural counterparts with respect to severity of disposition when sentence length was considered. Those urban offenders sentenced by the lower court received substantially longer probation and jail terms than rural offenders. These differences in sentence lengths were still evident at the superior court, although the percentage differences were considerably less than at the lower court. Further, whereas urban offenders were more likely than rural offenders to receive a probation disposition, rural offenders were sentenced to substantially less time under supervision. Overall, more than one-third of both urban and rural offenders held for trial were handled at the lower court level, thus obtaining a sentencing break in the form of a misdemeanor conviction.

Whereas the distribution of those arrested for index offenses was found to be quite similar across urban and rural areas, differences were evident with respect to sentence outcome. After having dichotomized these index offenses into violent and property crimes, sentencing differentials were noted by area and court level. For example, rural offenders disposed of by the municipal courts were substantially more likely than their urban counterparts to receive a jail term regardless of whether their initial arrest was for a property offense or one against the person. Violent offenders in both urban and rural areas were most likely to be handled at the superior court level. A similar relationship maintained for rural property offenders, whereas urban property offenders were about equally likely to be handled at either the municipal or superior court level.

Overall, these findings illustrate the complexity of the sentencing process and underscore the need for a more refined analysis than has generally been undertaken heretofore. Preliminary results reported here support the proposition that actual differences do occur in the processing of criminal offenders in urban and rural areas. Further, these data portray the movement of cases through the judicial system, reflecting the proportion of offenders handled at various stages. Of those originally arrested for felony offenses, for example, only 6 percent are eventually sentenced to a State penitentiary.

In subsequent monographs, these data will be utilized to explore in greater detail those dispositions occurring in both lower and superior courts for urban and rural areas. Both type and length of sentence will be considered with respect to the demographic variables of age, race, sex, and the criminal histories of those offenders processed. In this first report, we have outlined the data problem, presented an innovative new model for data collection, noted some preliminary trends, and specified various parameters that will underscore our future work. In the following report, the ability of transaction data to shed some light on the critical issue of sentence differentials is assessed.

APPENDIX—OBTS Data Elements [a]

Development of the data element set for the OBTS system has considered other existing or evolving criminal justice information/statistics systems. In particular, the codes for the various data elements are everywhere compatible with the coding structure of NCIC.

Prepared by **Public Systems Incorporated**
October 1972

Ident. Elements

State Record Number[b]
*Sex
- M Male
- F Female

*Race
- W White
- N Negro
- I Indian
- C Chinese
- J Japanese
- O All Other
- X Unknown

*Date Of Birth

Police/Prosecutor Elements

*Arresting Agency (NCIC Codes)
Sequence Letter
*Date of Arrest
*Charged Offense—Most Serious (NCIC Codes)
*Police Disposition (NCIC Codes)
- 201 Admin Discharge
- 202 Deceased
- 203 Deportation
- 204 Depart U.S.
- 205 Held
- 206 Released—Bail, or
- 207 Released—No Charge
- 208 Transfer Other Agency
- 209 Wanted
- 210 Bail Forfeit
- 211 No Bill Returned
- 207 Dismissed
- 212 Refer Juvenile Court
- 213 Consolidate With Another Arrest

Prosecutor Disposition
- 1 Felony Charge
- 2 Misdemeanor Charge
- 3 Decline To Prosecute
- 4 Other

Police/Prosecutor Disposition Date

Lower Criminal Court Elements

Court I.D. # (NCIC Codes)
Initial Appearance Date
*Charged Offense—Most Serious (NCIC Codes)
Release Action (Initial)
- 1 Own Recognizance
- 2 Bail
- 3 Committed In Default
- 4 Committed Without Bail
- 5 Other

Release Action Date
Final Charge—Most Serious (NCIC Codes)
Type Of Charge
- 1 Felony
- 2 Misdemeanor
- 3 Other

Plea (At Trial)
- 1 Not Guilty
- 2 Guilty
- 3 Nolo
- 4 Other
- 5 Unknown

Type Of Trial
- 1 Non-jury
- 2 Jury
- 3 Transcript
- 4 Other

*Lower Court Disposition (NCIC Codes)
- 301 Acquitted
- 302 Acquitted—Insanity
- 303 Acquitted—Incompetent
- 304 Continued—No Finding
- 305 Dismissed
- 306 Dismissed—Insanity
- 307 Dismissed—Incompetence
- 308 Pending—Insanity
- 309 Pending—Incompetence
- 310 Convicted
- 311 Deceased
- 312 Deferred Disposition
- 313 Dismissed—Civil Action
- 314 Extradited
- 322 Insane
- 323 Mentally Incompetent
- 315 Pardoned
- 316 Probation Before Conviction
- 317 Sentence Commuted
- 318 Adjudication Withheld
- 320 Mistrial
- 321 Executive Clemency

[a] Those data elements marked by an asterisk (*) in the left-hand margin were recorded and thus available for analysis. Also included were prior record, criminal status and time lapse from charge to disposition.

[b] Converted from state I.D. # (NCIC Codes)

*Disposition Date
Date Of Sentence
*Type Of Sentence
1 Prison
2 Probation (Supervised)
3 Probation And Jail
4 Probation (Unsupervised)
5 Jail And Fine
6 Jail
7 Fine
8 Suspended/Imposition/Execution
9 Other
0 Time—Served And Released
*Confinement Term (Days)
*Probation Term (Months)
Type Of Counsel
1 Private
2 Private—Appointed
3 Public Defender
4 Self
5 Other

County Prosecution/Grand Jury Elements

Date Of Filing
Type Of Filing
1 Information
2 Grand Jury
3 Other
Filing Procedure
1 Indictment/Accusation
2 No Bill
3 Refer To Lower Court/Reduced Charge
4 Dismissed
5 Information
Date Of Arraignment
Charged Offense—Most Serious (NCIC Codes)
Initial Plea
1 Not Guilty
2 Guilty
3 Nolo
4 Other
5 Unknown
Release Action
1 Own Recognizance
2 Bail
3 Committed In Default
4 Committed Without Bail
5 Other
Date Of Release Action

NOTE: If the *Prosecution/Grand Jury* filing procedure is "Refer To Lower Court/Reduced Charge," indicate the results of that referral in the *Felony Trial* data elements below.

Felony Trial Elements

Trial Date
Trial Type
1 Non-jury
2 Jury
3 Transcript
4 Other
Final Plea
1 Not Guilty
2 Guilty
3 Nolo
4 Other
5 Unknown
*Trial Ending/Disposition Date
*Final Charge—Most Serious (NCIC Codes)
*Type Of Charge
1 Felony
2 Misdemeanor
3 Other
*Court Disposition (NCIC Codes)
(See Lower Criminal Court)
Sentence Date
*Sentence Type
1 Prison
2 Probation (Supervised)
3 Probation And Jail
4 Probation (Unsupervised)
5 Jail And Fine
6 Jail
7 Fine
8 Suspended/Imposition/Execution
9 Other
0 Time—Served And Released
Confinement—Prison (Years)
(Place "—" between minimum and maximum; Indeterminate Sentence = Ind Right Justified)
*Confinement—Jail (Days)
*Probation (Months)
Type Of Counsel
1 Private
2 Private—Appointed
3 Public Defender
4 Self
5 Other

Corrections Elements

Receiving Agency
1 State Institution
2 Local Prison
3 Jail/Local Institution
4 Probation
5 Parole
6 Other

Date Received
Status
1 Custody
2 Part-Time Release
3 Full-Time Release
4 Abscond
5 Other
(The preceding corrections elements may be repeated four times to reflect movement within the corrections system. Entries should reflect major status changes.)

Date Of Exit
Exit
1 Discharge/Pardon
2 Court Order Discharge
3 Return To Court—Revocation
4 Return To Court—New Offense
5 Other

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