

# Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report

## *Offender-Based Transaction Statistics*

# Patterns of Robbery and Burglary in 9 States, 1984-88

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In number and in seriousness, robbery and burglary account for a large part of the crimes committed in the United States. From 1984 through 1988, the 205,630 arrests for robbery reported by 9 States accounted for over 29% of the almost 700,000 reported arrests for crimes of violence in those States. The 362,352 arrests for burglary were over a third of all reported arrests for property crimes. During 1984, the 9 States charged 126,501 arrestees with violent crimes, including robbery. They also charged 208,629 arrestees with a crime against property, including burglary. Four years later, in 1988, these totals were 146,091 and 210,118, respectively.

The nine States — Alaska, California, Delaware, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia — voluntarily submitted data under the Offender-Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) program.

Among the findings about robbery and burglary from OBTS were the following:

- The median time between arrest and sentencing for a robbery was 4 months and for a burglary, 3 months. About 89% of the robberies and 93% of the burglaries were processed by the criminal justice system within 1 year.
- Of nearly 1.5 million prosecutions reported in this study, more than 1 in 4 resulted in a court dismissal or acquittal, and almost 3 in 4, with a conviction.

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Robbers and burglars exact heavy losses and suffering from their victims. The most numerous of the offenses that the public considers to be the most serious, many robberies and burglaries also fund illegal drug purchases. A cogent argument can be made that controlling the incidence of these two crimes would strike at the heart of criminal behavior in the United States.

This report analyzes the Offender Based Transaction Statistics program data to provide some basic statistics from nine States of varying sizes and regions. In addition to presenting outcomes of felony arrests, average time to disposition, and offenders' demographic characteristics, the report draws on multiple charges and case changes to examine the dynamics of the process and the nature of the arrest offenses.

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- About 1 in 5 conviction offenses (19%) resulted in probation. Additionally, 13% resulted in a monetary sanction, a deferred sentence, or a completely suspended sentence as the most severe penalty.
- A majority of persons arrested for robbery or burglary were males under age 30. Most arrested for robbery were black (63%), and most arrested for burglary, white (64%).

• As the cases moved through the criminal justice process toward a final disposition, 98% of the arrests for violent offenses, and 97% of property arrests remained in the property category. Both robbery and burglary arrests were disposed of as the same offense 71% of the time. While about 8% of the initial robbery charges were changed during the process to another violent crime category, about 20% were changed to a property crime.

### Introduction to OBTS

The data for this report were obtained from nine States under the Offender-Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) program. The OBTS data contain arrest reports for which readable fingerprints of arrested felons were submitted to the State criminal history repository. OBTS captures data on the final dispositions of adult offenders who had been arrested for one or more felony offenses. A case is not included until the final disposition, which may occur a year or more after the arrest, according to the workload, decisions, and priorities of the courts and prosecutors. Overall, about 66% of the processed cases began during the same calendar year and 28% of the arrests took place in the preceding year, while the remaining 5% were at least 2 years old.

The case record structure distinguishes among offenders, incidents, and charges. The offender can be uniquely identified using an encrypted identification number, which can also be used to link incidents from previous years. The system is also

incident-based and each incident is identified with an incident number which is used to condense records in multiple-charge cases. In the latter situation, the program collects the most serious arrest charge as well as the most serious action by the police, prosecutor, or grand jury, and court disposition, and the sentence associated with the most serious conviction.

### Definitions of robbery and burglary

The number of offenders convicted of robbery and burglary and the seriousness of the offenses make them important crimes for study. Together, the two offenses comprised about a third of all felony arrests reported for violent and property crimes in the nine States between 1984 and 1988. The two offenses also accounted for a large percentage of all sentences to prison, an indicator of their seriousness. Although the number of offenders convicted of assault, larceny, or drug offenses may be several times that of persons convicted of robbery or burglary, the percentage of robbers and burglars sentenced to prison is greater. In 1988, for example, compared to robbery, only convictions for homicide or rape had a higher percentage of offenders sentenced to prison.

Law enforcement agencies, businesses, and homeowners expend a large amount of resources to safeguard life and property from robbers and burglars. Moreover, these two crimes are often used to finance drug habits of the offenders.<sup>1</sup>

In a formal definition, robbery is the unlawful taking or attempted taking of property that is in the immediate possession of another, by force or the threat of force. As the 1990 Uniform Crime Report of the FBI stated, "... the impact of this violent crime on its victims cannot be measured in terms of monetary loss alone. While the object of robbery is to obtain money or property, the crime always involves force or threat of force, and many victims suffer serious personal injury."<sup>2</sup> Because robbery cases involve both a threat of force and loss of property, a high percentage of robbery incidents may

<sup>1</sup>See *Drug Use and Crime*, BJS Special Report, NCJ-111940, July 1988, p. 7 and *Drugs and Jail Inmates, 1989*, BJS Special Report, NCJ-130836, August 1991, p. 9. Of the convicted jail inmates in the 1989 survey, 32% of the robbers and 31% of the burglars reported committing their offense to get money to buy drugs. Overall, 13% of the inmates said that they had committed their crime for money to buy drugs.

<sup>2</sup>FBI *Crime in the United States*, 1990, p. 19.

include multiple charges such as assault with a dangerous weapon, assault with intent to rob, or a weapon offense.

An estimated 8% to 10% of robbery incidents also contain charges that fit the definition of burglary.<sup>3</sup> The OBTS procedure for condensing incidents with multiple charges requires that the one most serious charge be carried on the record, so that in these cases the condensed record would indicate a robbery.

Burglary can be defined as the unlawful entry of a structure, with or without force, with intent to commit a felony or theft. When a burglar breaks into a person's dwelling, that invasion may violate the victim's sense of security and increase the feeling of vulnerability. These costs to the victim, though not quantifiable, may be as important as the property losses.

### Felony arrest dispositions

From 1984 to 1988, of the more than 1.7 million persons with dispositions of felony arrests in the 9 States, approximately 362,000 were charged with burglary and 697,000 were charged with other property crimes (table 1). Over 489,000 were

<sup>3</sup>*Robbery Victims*, BJS Special Report, NCJ-104638, April 1987.

arrested for violent offenses, excluding about 206,000 arrests for robbery.

The percentage of robbery defendants sentenced to serve time in prison (23%) is more than twice the percentage (11%) convicted of other violent offenses such as assault, murder, manslaughter, rape, and other sexual assault. Burglars, too, were more likely than other property offenders to receive a prison term, 17% versus 8%. Other property offenses include theft or larceny, motor vehicle theft, fraud, arson, and possessing or selling stolen property.

Overall, for the reporting States, the prosecutions and sentences to imprisonment were quite stable during the period 1984 to 1988. While convictions for violent crime including robbery decreased by 5 percentage points, incarcerations showed a modest increase for property crime including burglary (3%).

More than four-fifths of all property and violent crime arrests in the nine States were prosecuted; three-fifths of the defendants were convicted; and two-fifths received a sentence to jail or prison. The specific offenses of robbery and burglary had higher percentages of prosecution, conviction, and incarceration than other violent and property offenses, respectively.

Table 1. Disposition of felony arrests in 9 States, 1984-88

Arrest offense	Number of persons arrested	Percent of persons arrested			
		Prosecuted	Convicted	Sentenced to incarceration	
				Total	Prison
All violent and property offenses	1,754,469 <sup>a</sup>	83%	60%	41%	12%
1984	335,130	84	62	40	12
1988	356,209	83	58	41	12
Robbery	205,630	83%	55%	44%	23%
1984	39,633	84	59	45	25
1988	40,822	83	53	42	22
Other violent offenses <sup>b</sup>	489,052	79%	51%	31%	11%
1984	86,868	81	54	32	11
1988	105,269	79	49	31	10
Burglary	362,352	88%	71%	55%	17%
1984	74,303	88	72	53	16
1988	67,757	88	71	56	17
Other property offenses <sup>c</sup>	697,435	84%	62%	39%	8%
1984	134,326	85	63	37	7
1988	142,361	83	61	40	9

<sup>a</sup>Represents the total of all arrests from 1984 through 1988 but excludes 42,551 court-disposed offenses. Delaware, Nebraska, and Virginia failed to report police dispositions.

<sup>b</sup>Includes murder, manslaughter, rape or other sexual assault, and assault.

<sup>c</sup>Includes theft or larceny, fraud, motor vehicle theft, arson, and stolen property offenses.

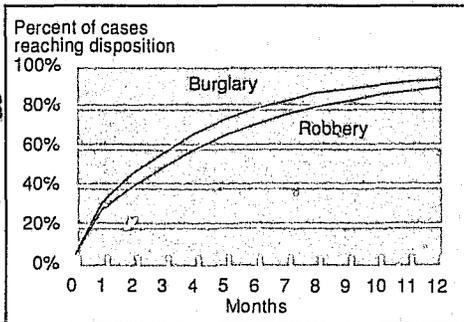


Figure 1

### Robbery and burglary, 1984 and 1988

The nine States that contributed data for this study — Alaska, California, Delaware, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia — account for over 31% of the U.S. resident population and about 30% of the total number of offenses reported to the FBI Index of Crime. These States display a broad spectrum of economic and demographic diversity. The arrest data that they submitted, however, may not represent all the arrests made in the States. (See *Methodology* for a discussion of coverage.)

During 1984 the 9 States reported 126,501 arrests for robbery or some other violent crime and 208,629 arrests for a burglary or some other property felonies.

#### Arrests

	Total	Percent robbery or burglary
Violent		
1984	126,501	31.3%
1988	146,091	27.9
Property		
1984	208,629	35.6%
1988	210,118	32.2

Four years later in 1988 the number of arrests for violent crimes was 146,091 and for property crimes, 210,118. Based on the total number of violent or property crimes, the percentage of arrests for robbery and burglary changed little during the period. Robbery, as a percentage of violent crime, fell from 31% to 28%, and burglary, as a percentage of property crime, declined about the same amount, from 36% to 32%.

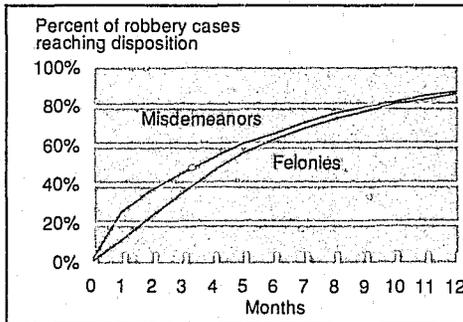


Figure 2

The pattern for convictions differed somewhat from that for arrests —

#### Convictions

	Total	Percent robbery or burglary
Violent		
1984	82,325	27.6%
1988	103,525	21.1
Property		
1984	168,682	24.6%
1988	158,332	23.0

The percentage of burglaries among convictions for property crimes scarcely changed from 1984 to 1988 (25% to 23%). The percentage of robbery convictions among all convictions for violent crimes decreased from 28% in 1984 to 21% in 1988.

#### Case processing time

For all cases in OBTS, the criminal justice process begins when law enforcement authorities arrest suspected offenders, inform them of the charges, and make fingerprints. Final disposition removes the case from the system; in some jurisdictions the arresting agency may nullify the arrest charges, but in other jurisdictions, a decision by a prosecutor or a court is required. A final disposition may be dismissal, acquittal, conviction and sentencing, or special court rulings. On average, the more serious the offense, the longer the time used for completion of the criminal justice process. This pattern occurs when the time required for processing burglary is compared to that for robbery and when the average times of cases disposed as felonies and as misdemeanors are compared.

For data from 1984 to 1987, about 78% of the robbery offenses and 80% of the burglaries had a case processing time recorded.<sup>4</sup> The average amount of time required to process a robbery case was 6 months, as opposed to 4 months and 21 days required for burglary. The median

<sup>4</sup>The time to disposition is not available for 1988.

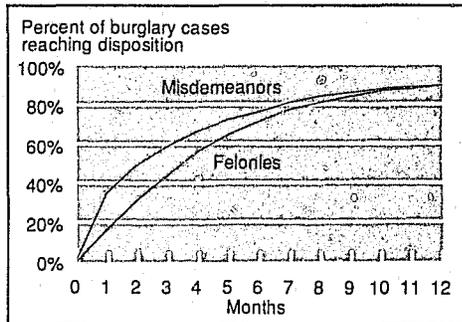


Figure 3

amount of time, or the time required to process half the cases, was 4 months for robbery and 3 months for burglary. Seventy-eight percent of the burglaries, compared to 70% of the robberies, were processed within the first 6 months following arrest (figure 1).

The difference between the percentages of robbery and burglary cases reaching disposition uniformly increased during the first 5 months and uniformly decreased afterwards. Yet the cumulative distribution of cases processed indicates that in each month up to a year after arrest, a higher percentage of burglary cases than of robbery cases reached final disposition.

In the relationship between the gravity of offenses and the amount of time required to process cases from arrest to conviction, a similar finding existed. The cumulative distribution of cases processed indicates that in each month up to a year after arrest, courts had processed a higher percentage of misdemeanor cases than felony cases.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Tracking Offenders, 1987, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-125315, October 1990.

Table 2. Case processing time in 9 States, 1984-87

Months from arrest to disposition	Cumulative percent of disposed cases			
	Robbery		Burglary	
	Felony	Misdemeanor	Felony	Misdemeanor
	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	11	26	17	36
2	24	37	32	50
3	36	46	45	60
4	47	54	57	68
5	56	61	66	74
6	63	66	73	78
7	69	72	79	83
8	74	77	83	86
9	78	80	86	88
10	82	83	89	90
11	84	86	90	91
12	87	88	92	92

<sup>4</sup>Case processing time was recorded for both felonies and misdemeanors in 83% of the robbery cases and 87% of the burglaries.

Examining the interactions among the three factors — arrest offense, whether the disposed offense was a felony or misdemeanor, and time to disposition — clarifies the relationship between seriousness and length of processing time. The more serious crimes were processed more slowly, but only at first; the difference between the distributions for felonies and misdemeanors is negligible after the first few months (table 2 and figures 2 and 3).

Robbery arrest cases that required a month from arrest to disposition accounted for 11% of the felonies and 26% of the misdemeanors, a difference of 15 percentage points; for burglary arrests, the difference between felonies and misdemeanors was 19 percentage points. At the 6-month mark, the differences between felony and misdemeanor dispositions had decreased to 3 percentage points for robbery (63% and 66%) and to 5 points for burglary (73% and 78%).

#### Adjudication

Of the approximately 1.5 million persons prosecuted in the 9 States from 1984 to 1988, courts convicted 72% and dismissed the cases of 27%, including acquittals and nolle prosequi (table 3). Other forms of nonconviction such as civil or unspecified dispositions accounted for the remaining 1% of all prosecutions. Prosecutions for property crime, and especially for burglary, were more likely to result in convictions (74% and 81%, respectively) than were prosecutions for robbery (66%) or other violent crime (65%).

#### Sentencing

Of the more than 1.7 million persons arrested for a violent or property felony in the 9 States, more than 1 million were convicted (table 4). Over two-thirds of the sentences imposed on offenders were to prison or jail, and the remaining third of the sentences were to some form of nonincarceration such as probation or monetary sanctions.

The specific offenses of robbery or burglary had higher percentages of sentences to local jail or State prison than did the general categories of other violent and property offenses. Of offenders arrested for robbery and convicted of some crime, 79% were sentenced to incarceration; of burglary arrestees who were convicted,

78%. Just over 60% of the offenders arrested for and convicted of a violent or property crime other than robbery or burglary were sentenced to incarceration. For every convicted offender arrested for a violent offense other than robbery and sentenced to prison, 2 offenders arrested for robbery were sentenced to prison. For every offender arrested for a property crime other than burglary and sentenced to prison, slightly fewer than 2 offenders

arrested for burglary were sentenced to prison.

Based on offense at conviction, the overall pattern of types of sentences was essentially the same as the one for offense at arrest except that the differences were more pronounced (table 5). The percentages of offenders sentenced to jail or prison for the specific offenses of robbery (88%) and burglary (86%) were even

**Table 3. Disposition of felony cases prosecuted in 9 States, 1984-88**

Arrest offense	Number of persons prosecuted	Percent of persons prosecuted whose cases resulted in:			
		Total	Conviction	Dismissal <sup>a</sup>	Other
All violent and property offenses	1,462,033	100%	72%	27%	1%
Robbery	171,284	100	66	33	1
Other violent offenses	388,001	100	65	35	1
Burglary	320,014	100	81	18	1
Other property offenses	582,734	100	74	24	2

Note: Detail may not add to total because of rounding.  
<sup>a</sup>includes 23,039 acquittals and 27,251 cases of nolle prosequi.

**Table 4. Sentence type, by arrest offense in 9 States, 1984-88**

Arrest offense	Number of convictions	Nonincarceration sentences			Sentences to incarceration		
		Total	Probation <sup>a</sup>	Other <sup>b</sup>	Total	Jail	Prison
All violent and property offenses	1,048,828	32%	19%	13%	68%	48%	21%
Robbery	113,434	21	13	8	79	37	42
Other violent offenses	247,656	38	21	18	62	41	21
Burglary	257,126	22	15	7	78	54	23
Other property offenses	430,612	37	22	15	63	50	13

Note: Detail may not add to total because of rounding. Sentences given were not necessarily for the offense at arrest or for a felony.  
<sup>a</sup>Includes probation without verdict.  
<sup>b</sup>Includes 63,185 monetary sanctions. It also includes sentencing deferred or entire sentence suspended.

**Table 5. Sentence type, by conviction offense in 9 States, 1984-88**

Conviction offense	Number of convictions	Nonincarceration sentences			Sentences to incarceration		
		Total	Probation <sup>a</sup>	Other <sup>b</sup>	Total	Jail	Prison
All violent and property offenses	911,488	28%	20%	8%	72%	49%	23%
Robbery	71,809	12	12	1	88	25	63
Other violent offenses	200,341	34	22	12	66	43	23
Burglary	152,962	14	12	2	86	49	37
Other property offenses	486,376	32	23	10	68	55	13

Note: The OBTS program lists 18 possible sentencing categories, which were reduced to 4 categories based on sanction severity. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.  
<sup>a</sup>Sentences of "probation without verdict" are imposed at the court-disposition level, not at the sentencing level. These dispositions are included in both probation and conviction counts.  
<sup>b</sup>Includes monetary sanctions, restitution, suspended sentences, and unspecified sentences.

higher than for offenders identified by the arrest offense. Among convicted offenders identified by conviction offense, 63% of those convicted of robbery and 37% of those convicted of burglary were sentenced to prison. The ratios of robbers to offenders convicted of other violent crimes and of burglars to offenders convicted of other property crimes were both about 1 to 3.

### Demographic characteristics

The majority of persons arrested for violent or property offenses and reported in the nine States were male (86%), white (58%), and under age 30 (67%) (tables 6 and 7). Except for age, the characteristics of the arrestees did not change appreciably during the 5-year period. Men predominated among persons arrested for any felony, but especially for robbery (92%) and burglary (90%). The larger percentage of women was among those arrested for property offenses (21%). Fifty-eight percent of the felons in this study were white, 40% were black, and 1% were Native Americans, Asians, or Pacific Islanders; however, persons arrested for robbery or burglary differed sharply in their racial composition. For robbery arrests, there were 2 blacks to 1 white; for burglary arrests, 2 whites to 1 black.

The age distributions for robbery and burglary arrestees were similar. Fifty-eight percent of those arrested for robbery were under age 25, followed closely by burglary arrestees with 54%. These percentages were substantially higher than those for other violent offenses (36%) or even other property offenses (43%). For felons age 40 or older, persons arrested for robbery and burglary accounted for 4% and 5%, respectively, as opposed to other violent and other property crimes with 15% and 10%, respectively.

Age was the only demographic characteristic that changed appreciably from 1984 to 1988. Overall, the arrestees in 1988 were somewhat older than those of 4 years earlier. In 1988, 46% of robbery arrestees and 51% of burglary arrestees were over age 24; in 1984, 39% and 43%. The percentages within the 25-and-over group increased 3 points (62% to 65%) for violent offenses excluding robbery and stayed the same for property offenses excluding burglary (56% in 1984 and 1988).

### Seriousness and multiple charges

Although the OBTS system is limited to felonies cleared by arrest, it does allow for some variation in the seriousness of crime starting with the prosecution segment. The

categorization of felony/misdemeanor/local ordinance violation, a rudimentary measure of crime seriousness, is recorded for court-disposed offenses.

A group of 30,792 robbery defendants (or 18.3% of those with a known court-disposed offense of robbery) had charges reduced from felony to misdemeanor, and another 7,415 accused robbers (or 4.4%) were prosecuted under city or county ordinances out of the total number of cases where the level of court disposed offense was known (tables 8 and 9). The felonies of 86,164 arrested burglars (27.8%) were reduced to misdemeanors, and another 12,278 (or 4%) were prosecuted under city or county ordinances. Thus, less than a fourth of the felony arrests for robbery but almost a third of the arrests for burglary were disposed of as lower-level offenses.

**Table 6. Sex and race of persons arrested for a felony in 9 States, by arrest offense, 1984-88**

Arrest offense	Percent of persons arrested for a felony					
	Total	Sex		Race		
		Male	Female	White	Black	Other
All violent and property offenses	100%	86%	14%	58%	40%	1%
Robbery	100	92	8	36	63	0
Other violent offenses	100	89	11	56	40	1
Burglary	100	90	9	64	33	1
Other property offenses	100	79	21	61	56	1

Note: The sex, race, and age of persons arrested for felonies were reported in 99.1%, 97%, and 97.7% of the cases, respectively. Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

**Table 8. Level of court-disposed offense for robbery and burglary in 9 States, 1984-88**

Level of court-disposed offense	Prosecution	Conviction	Incarceration	
			Total	Prison
<b>Robbery</b>				
Felony	129,964	66.1%	57.1%	36.6%
Misdemeanor	30,792	65.5	43.0	.4
Other	7,415	92.4	18.1	.1
<b>Burglary</b>				
Felony	211,769	80.9%	68.3%	27.8%
Misdemeanor	86,164	83.5	56.7	.5
Other	12,278	93.3	22.8	.0

**Table 7. Age of persons arrested for a felony in 9 States, by offense, 1984-88**

Arrest offense	Total	Percent of arrestees, by age				
		Under 20	20-24	25-29	30-39	40 or over
<b>Violent and property offenses</b>	100%	18%	28%	21%	23%	10%
1984	100	17	30	21	21	10
1985	100	19	28	20	21	9
1986	100	18	28	21	22	9
1987	100	17	27	22	24	10
1988	100	17	26	22	25	10
<b>Robbery</b>	100%	26%	32%	21%	17%	4%
1984	100	28	33	19	16	4
1985	100	29	32	19	16	4
1986	100	25	32	21	18	4
1987	100	23	32	22	19	4
1988	100	24	30	22	20	4
<b>Other violent offenses</b>	100%	11%	25%	22%	26%	15%
1984	100	11	28	22	25	15
1985	100	13	27	22	24	14
1986	100	11	26	22	26	15
1987	100	11	25	22	27	15
1988	100	11	23	22	28	15
<b>Burglary</b>	100%	23%	31%	21%	20%	5%
1984	100	23	34	20	18	5
1985	100	26	32	20	18	5
1986	100	24	31	21	19	5
1987	100	22	30	22	21	6
1988	100	21	28	22	23	6
<b>Other property offenses</b>	100%	16%	27%	21%	24%	10%
1984	100	15	29	22	24	11
1985	100	18	28	21	23	10
1986	100	17	28	22	24	10
1987	100	17	27	21	25	10
1988	100	18	26	22	25	10

**Table 9. Level of court-disposed offense in 9 States, by offense type, 1984-88**

Level of court disposed offense <sup>a</sup>	All violent and property offenses	Robbery		Burglary	
		Robbery	Burglary	Robbery	Burglary
Felony	65.4%	77.3%	68.3%		
Misdemeanor	27.9	18.3	27.8		
Other <sup>b</sup>	6.7	4.4	4.0		
<b>Total dispositions</b>	<b>1,046,770</b>	<b>90,067</b>	<b>220,336</b>		

<sup>a</sup>Data for level of court-disposed offense were available for 96.1% of the prosecutions.

<sup>b</sup>Consists mostly of cases prosecuted under city or county ordinances.

At every level of seriousness, the likelihood of conviction was higher for burglary than robbery. The likelihood of conviction was higher for local ordinances than for misdemeanors and felonies. This may reflect the effects of plea bargaining.

Within the offense categories of burglary and robbery, the higher the likelihood of conviction, the lower the likelihood of a more severe sentence. For example, 92% of robbery arrestees whose cases were disposed of as a local ordinance were convicted, compared to 66% of those with a misdemeanor disposition. The likelihood of going to prison, the most serious of punishments, existed for felonies alone. Among felons, about 37% of those convicted of robbery were sentenced to State prison and 20% were sentenced to local jail; of convicted burglars, 28% were sentenced to prison and 40%, to jail. Among offenders convicted of misdemeanors, burglars were more likely than robbers to be sentenced to jail, 57% versus 43%.

Another possible indication of seriousness is the number of charges against a defendant. About 73% of the burglary prosecutions involved a single arrest charge, 10% involved two, and about 18%, three or more charges (table 10). This distribution parallels that for all violent and property offenses. Compared to burglary, the

**Table 10. Number of arrest charges in 9 States, by offense type, 1984-88**

Number of arrest charges <sup>a</sup>	All violent and property offenses	Robbery		Burglary	
		Robbery	Burglary	Robbery	Burglary
One	72.0%	68.0%	72.8%		
Two	9.9	6.3	9.7		
Three or more	18.0	25.7	17.5		

<sup>a</sup>Data for the 'number of arrest charges' were available for 58% of all arrests.

percentage of arrests for robbery with two or more charges was slightly higher — 32%.

### Consistency in single-charge offense designations

The offense designation of cases may change as the cases move from arrest, to prosecution, to a court decision. The level of consensus is the extent to which the major categories — robbery, other violent crime, burglary, or other property crime — were consistent throughout the criminal justice process.

From 1984 to 1988, 503,624 single-charge offenses were classified as one of the four categories at both arrest and at the court disposition; this study did not track drug offenses or public-order felonies.<sup>8</sup> The level of consensus for a category is the number of cases that were in that category at both arrest and conviction, divided by the total number of cases in the category at either arrest or conviction. The general categories of other violent or other property crime had high levels of consensus, 98% and 97%, respectively (table 11).

The specific categories of robbery or burglary had the same level of consensus, 71%. While 28% of the burglary charges changed during the process of justice administration into some other offense against property, only 8% of the robbery charges changed into charges for some other crime of violence. In most robbery cases the prosecutor must establish two elements: actual or potential property loss and use of force or intimidation. The 8% of the robbery charges ending as another violent crime presumably reflects the greater likelihood to bargain for a plea to the less serious property crime (20%) or

<sup>8</sup>During 1988, 1.1% of violent and property offenses were disposed of by the courts as drug offenses. Likewise, 1.5% of those crimes were disposed of as public-order violations.

the greater ability to prove property loss rather than intimidation.

### Methodology

#### Data sources and completeness

Local criminal justice agencies record arrest data and other information on fingerprint cards and disposition documents. The agencies forward the data to a State criminal information repository that updates appropriate master records. OBTS receives data from the repositories. OBTS coverage may remain incomplete within the reporting States for several reasons. Not all law enforcement agencies fingerprint all persons arrested, and some do not submit all of their fingerprint cards. Offenders sometimes surrender directly to a court and are not fingerprinted. Even when a fingerprint card is filed, the prosecutor or court may not report the final disposition.

As noted above, jurisdictions varied in the completeness of reporting. A survey of 50 States and the District of Columbia collected information to assess the quality of data in criminal record repositories at the end of 1989. Interested readers can refer to the report *Survey of Criminal History Information Systems* (NCJ-125620, March 1991) to gain estimates of the amount and type of missing data.

BJS annually solicits State repositories to extract and submit data from their master records, following OBTS guidelines. Some States are in the process of automating their criminal-history files and cannot participate. Other States do not participate because local agencies have insufficient reporting, their criminal history files are not designed for statistical extraction, or other reasons.

In 1990 BJS, with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), implemented

**Table 11. Consistency in single-charge offenses between stages in the criminal justice process in 9 States, 1984-88**

Arrest offense	Total	Court disposition offense <sup>a</sup>			
		Robbery	Other violent offenses	Burglary	Other property offenses
Robbery	100%	71.0%	7.6%	1.8%	19.7%
Other violent offenses	100	.5	97.9	.2	1.3
Burglary	100	.2	1.0	70.7	28.2
Other property offenses	100	.1	1.6	1.1	97.1

Note: Data are based on the number of violations classified as one of the four crime categories under study throughout the criminal justice process (503,624). Data are limited to single-charge offenses.

the Attorney General's Criminal History Record Improvement program to make systemic improvements in the quality and timeliness of State criminal history information throughout the country. It is anticipated that one byproduct of this effort will be increased State participation in OBTS and general improvement in the quality and completeness of the data submitted.

To ensure comparability among States, the OBTS standards use the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) offense codes. To preserve privacy, an OBTS record uses as personal identifiers only an encrypted identification number (to permit study of repeat offenders), sex, race, and age.

OBTS data are based on the year of final disposition, not on the year of arrest. Thus, an OBTS year includes arrests that occurred in an earlier year. A final disposition refers to either a decision not to prosecute or a trial court finding, not to an appeal.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Reports are prepared principally by the staff of BJS. This Special Report was written by Jacob Perez. Pheny Z. Smith provided statistical review. Tom Hester edited the report. Marilyn Marbrook and Jayne Pugh produced the report.

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