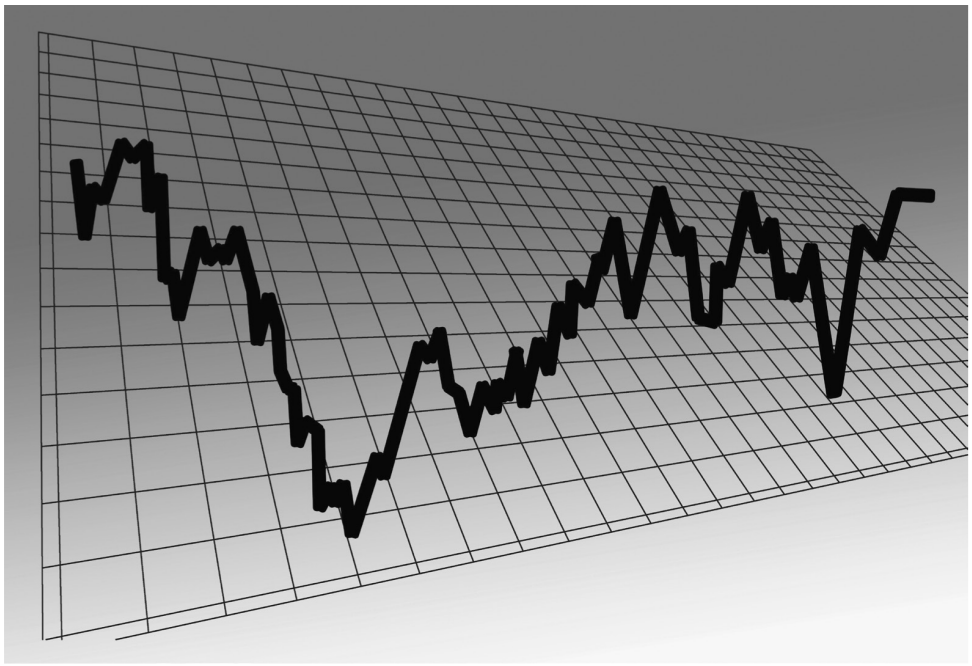

3 How Much Delinquency Is There, and Is Delinquency Increasing?

This chapter focuses on the two simple questions asked in the title: How much delinquency is there in the United States? Is delinquency increasing? Simple questions, however, often have complex answers. This complexity can be frustrating at times, but you will have a much fuller understanding of the extent of and trends in delinquency after reading this chapter. We first focus on the extent of delinquency in the United States, presenting estimates from arrest, self-report, and victimization data. We then focus on trends in delinquency, again presenting estimates from arrest, self-report, and victimization data. These data sources do not always agree with one another, but we think there are some conclusions that can be safely drawn about the extent of and trends in delinquency. One such conclusion is that there has been a dramatic decrease in serious delinquency in recent years, and we end this chapter by discussing some possible reasons for this decrease.

We should warn you that any discussion in this area is going to contain a lot of numbers. We try to keep the numbers to a minimum, and we encourage you to focus on the central points that are being made and to avoid getting caught up in the specific numbers. Much of the information that follows comes from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Statistical Briefing Book* (http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb). It is a good place to look if you ever want to know anything about the extent of delinquency, trends in delinquency, the characteristics of delinquents, or a range of other topics.

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the extent of delinquency using arrest data and self-report data.
- Identify the characteristics of those most likely to be victims of crime.
- Describe trends in delinquency using arrest data, self-report data, and victimization data.
- Explain why there are no simple answers to questions of how much delinquency there is or how much it is changing over time.
- Offer explanations for the dramatic decline in serious crime since the mid-1990s.

HOW MUCH DELINQUENCY IS THERE?

How Many Juveniles Are Arrested, and What Are They Arrested For?

As you know, arrest data vastly underestimate the extent of delinquency. Most delinquent acts do not come to the attention of the police, and acts that do come to the attention of the police usually do not result in arrest. This is especially true for minor crimes. Nevertheless, many juveniles are arrested each year.

Table 3.1 shows the estimated number of juvenile arrests in 2014 broken down by type of crime. The top part of the table focuses on Part I, or index, crimes, while the bottom part focuses on Part II crimes. Overall, there were about 1 million juvenile arrests. That number does not mean that 1 million different juveniles were arrested. Many juveniles were arrested more than once.

About 288,000 of these arrests were for Part I crimes. Note that arrests for property crimes are much more common than arrests for violent crimes. In fact, well over half of all Part I arrests are for larceny-theft. Larceny-theft, in fact, is the crime with the highest number of arrests. About 736,000 arrests were for Part II offenses, with the most arrests being for "other assaults," disorderly conduct, drug abuse violations, liquor law violations, curfew violations, and vandalism.

Overall, note that the number of arrests tends to be higher for minor crimes than for serious crimes. For example, 800 juvenile arrests were for homicide and 3,300 were for rape. About 178,000 juvenile arrests were for larceny-theft, however.

TABLE 3.1 Estimated Number of Juvenile Arrests, 2014

Total	**1,024,000**
Part I (Index) Offenses	
Criminal homicide (murder and nonnegligent manslaughter)	800
Rape	3,300
Robbery	19,400
Aggravated assault	30,100
Burglary	40,300
Larceny-theft	178,000
Motor vehicle theft	12,700
Arson	3,200
Part II Offenses	
Other assaults	139,100
Forgery and counterfeiting	1,200
Fraud	4,300
Embezzlement	500
Stolen property (buying, receiving, possessing)	10,400
Vandalism	45,200
Weapons (carrying, possessing, etc.)	20,700
Prostitution and commercialized vice	700
Sex offenses (except rape and prostitution)	9,400
Drug abuse violations	112,600
Gambling	600
Offenses against the family and children	3,400
Driving under the influence	7,000
Liquor law violations	53,300
Drunkenness	6,500
Disorderly conduct	80,800
Vagrancy	900
All other offenses (except traffic)	186,000
Curfew and loitering	53,700

SOURCE: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Statistical Briefing Book* (http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb).

These data, while useful, may be a little difficult to interpret. One way to help interpret them is to look at ***arrest rates***. Arrest rates show the number of juvenile arrests per 100,000 juveniles ages 10 to 17 in the population (very few juveniles under age 10 are arrested). Arrest rates are useful because they give us an idea of the probability that a juvenile will be arrested. The overall juvenile arrest rate was about 3,000 per 100,000 juveniles. In other words, there were about 3,000 juvenile arrests for every 100,000 juveniles ages 10 to 17 in the population (or about 3 arrests per 100 juveniles). The arrest rate for Part I violent crimes was about 158 per 100,000 juveniles (or about 0.2 arrest per 100 juveniles). The arrest rate for Part I property crimes was about 693 per 100,000 juveniles (or about 0.7 arrest per 100 juveniles).

We want to add a note of caution: The fact that there were nearly 1 million juvenile arrests does not mean that juveniles committed 1 million crimes. We earlier stated that juveniles usually commit their crimes in groups. As a consequence, several juveniles are often arrested for a single crime. For example, several juveniles might be arrested for a single act of vandalism. To estimate the number of crimes committed by juveniles, it is best to look at the number of crimes cleared by the arrest of juveniles. ***Clearance data*** allow us to estimate the number of Part I crimes committed by juveniles (clearance data are not reported for Part II crimes). While about 288,000 juveniles were arrested in 2014 for Part I crimes, only about 183,000 Part I crimes were cleared by the arrest of juveniles.

You know that arrest data vastly underestimate the extent of delinquency. Self-report data, discussed in the following section, provide a more accurate estimate of the extent of delinquency.

How Much Self-Reported Delinquency Is There?

We have the students in our juvenile delinquency courses fill out a short survey on the first day of class. Among other things, the survey asks whether they ever committed any of 14 different delinquent acts as juveniles. Some of these acts are status offenses, like running away and truancy. Some are minor crimes, like petty larceny and trespassing. And some are more serious crimes, like burglary and robbery. The students are always shocked by the results. We typically find that anywhere from 90 to 100 percent of the students have committed at least one of the delinquent acts. And it is often the case that about half the class has committed at least 7 of the 14 delinquent acts. Keep in mind that most of our students have done quite well in school and are pursuing a college degree. A certain percentage of them will go on to become doctors, lawyers, business managers, and leaders in their communities. (Look at the self-report survey in Table 2.2 again. How many of the delinquent acts have you committed?) Self-report surveys typically find that 90 percent or more of all juveniles have engaged in at least some forms of delinquency—usually minor delinquency but often a few instances of more serious delinquency as well.

We do not, however, want you to think that we are picking on juveniles. Two criminologists conducted a self-report survey of crime among criminologists (M. Robinson and Zaitzow, 1999). They describe their motivation for doing such a survey by stating, "We were in an airplane on our way back from a recent American Society of Criminology meeting [and] we overheard from the seats directly in front of us two criminologists discussing what they had taken (i.e., stolen) from the conference hotel." They began to wonder just how common crime was among criminologists. So they surveyed 522 criminologists from throughout the United States, most of whom had doctoral degrees and half of whom were faculty members at colleges and universities. The large majority of these criminologists had engaged in one or more crimes at some point in their lives. For example, 55 percent had committed theft, 22 percent had committed burglary, 60 percent had used illicit drugs, and 25 percent had physically attacked another person. Self-report data, then, indicate that delinquency (and crime) is common, even among students like yourselves and the faculty who teach you. Keep this in mind when we are examining topics like the causes of delinquency. To some extent, we are examining your (and our) behavior.

As indicated earlier, not many self-report surveys have been administered to juveniles throughout the United States. But a few such surveys exist. The most recent is the 2014 Monitoring the Future survey. **The Monitoring the Future survey is administered to a sample of about 2,500 high school seniors throughout the United States each year.** While the survey provides national data on the extent of self-reported delinquency, it does have certain problems. It focuses on high school seniors, thereby missing dropouts and students who were suspended or truant when the survey was administered. As indicated

earlier, such juveniles are more likely to be serious offenders. It does not examine many delinquent offenses, especially serious offenses like homicide and rape. And it employs vague response categories. In particular, it uses the response category "five or more times," so that researchers cannot distinguish someone who committed an act 5 times from someone who committed the same act 100 times. Nevertheless, the data in Table 3.2 provide an idea of the extent of delinquency in this group.

Note that certain forms of delinquency are quite common, particularly status offenses and minor forms of delinquency. For example, the large majority of high school seniors have drunk alcohol and have argued or fought with their parents in the past year (the status offense of "incorrigibility"). And a substantial percentage of students have engaged in petty theft and fighting. More serious forms of delinquency are less frequent but not uncommon. For example, about 8 percent of high school seniors reported that they "hurt someone badly enough to need bandages or a doctor" in 2014.

The best self-report survey conducted on a national level is the National Youth Survey (see Elliott et al., 1985). This survey was administered to a sample of 1,725 adolescents ages 11 through 17 throughout the United States in 1977. These adolescents were asked about the extent of their delinquency in 1976. The same group of adolescents was surveyed several additional times through the 1990s, but they, of course, turned from adolescents into adults as the surveys progressed. Elliott and his associates looked at a total of 47 delinquent acts, including status offenses, minor crimes, and serious crimes (see Table 2.2 for a list of these acts). They took care to precisely measure the number of times each act was committed, avoiding the use of vague response categories. They found that the average number of delinquent acts committed by a juvenile in 1976 was 52 (there is reason to believe this number is similar today, as indicated by the trend data presented in the next section). So while FBI data indicate that there are 3 arrests per 100 juveniles, self-report data indicate that there are at least 5,200 self-reports of delinquency per 100 juveniles (52×100). And while arrest data indicate that there were about 1 million juvenile arrests in 2014, self-report data suggest that the 33 million juveniles between ages 10 and 17 in the United States engaged in hundreds of millions of delinquent acts in 2014.

Again, self-report data indicate that most of these delinquent acts are status offenses and minor crimes. More serious crimes are less frequent, although they are not uncommon, particularly in certain subgroups. For example, Elliott (1994) found that 36 percent of 17-year-old African American males and 25 percent of 17-year-old white males committed at least one serious act of violence over the course of a year. Serious acts of violence include aggravated assaults, robberies, and rapes; all involve some injury or the use of a weapon.

The large discrepancy between arrest data and self-report data highlights the fact that **most delinquent acts do not come to the attention of the police or result in arrest.** Dunford and Elliott (1984) used the National Youth Survey to explore the relationship between self-reported delinquency and arrest data. They classified youth according to the number of delinquent acts they self-reported in a two-year period and then examined the percentage of youth in each group who had been arrested at least once during the same two-year period. They found that the probability of arrest was quite low, even among youths who had committed a large number of offenses. For example, only 7 percent of the youths who self-reported between 101 and 200 delinquent acts were arrested. Only 19 percent of the youths who self-reported over 200 delinquent acts were arrested. Overall, the probability that a youth will be arrested for a given delinquent act is well under 1 percent. The probability of arrest is low even for those who commit serious offenses. For example, Elliott (1995) estimated that the probability of arrest for a serious violent offense (aggravated assault, rape, robbery) is about 2 in 100 (also see Farrington et al., 2007).

TABLE 3.2 The Extent of Self-Reported Delinquency Among High School Seniors, 2014.

During the Last 12 Months How Often Have You	Not at All (%)	Once (%)	Twice (%)	3 or 4 Times (%)	5 or More Times (%)	Rate (# Acts per 100 Juveniles)
1. Argued or had a fight with either of your parents?	15.1	12.0	15.3	24.0	33.6	282.6
2. Hit an instructor or supervisor?	97.3	1.5	.7	.3	.3	5.3
3. Gotten into a serious fight in school or at work?	90.4	5.6	2.1	1.1	.8	17.1
4. Taken part in a fight where a group of your friends were against another group?	86.7	7.6	2.9	2.0	.8	23.4
5. Hurt someone badly enough to need bandages or a doctor?	91.8	4.3	2.1	1.0	.8	15.5
6. Used a knife or gun or some other thing (like a club) to get something from a person?	97.6	1.1	.8	.2	.4	5.3
7. Taken something not belonging to you worth under $50?	79.3	9.3	5.2	3.3	3.0	44.6
8. Taken something not belonging to you worth over $50?	93.0	3.4	1.5	1.2	.9	14.5
9. Taken something from a store without paying for it?	78.9	9.0	4.5	3.7	3.9	48.6
10. Taken a car that didn't belong to someone in your family without permission of the owner?	96.1	1.9	1.0	.3	.7	8.3
11. Taken part of a car without permission of the owner?	97.4	1.3	.6	.1	.6	5.8
12. Gone into some house or building when you weren't supposed to be there?	77.8	9.3	6.3	3.5	3.1	47.9
13. Set fire to someone's property on purpose?	98.2	1.0	.3	.1	.4	3.9
14. Damaged school property on purpose?	93.8	2.9	1.7	.5	1.1	13.3
15. Damaged property at work on purpose?	98.0	1.0	.4	.2	.3	3.9
16. Used alcohol at least once in 2014?		60.2				
17. Used marijuana at least once in 2014?		35.1				

SOURCE: Monitoring the Future survey (http://www.monitoringthefuture.org).

What can we **conclude** about the extent of delinquency according to self-report data? Delinquency is far more common than arrest data suggest. Most juveniles engage in delinquency. They generally commit status offenses and minor crimes, but serious crimes are not uncommon.

We have focused on self-reported delinquency in the United States, but a large international survey allows us to place these self-report data in cross-national context. Between 2005 and 2007, self-report data were collected from young people (ages 12–15) in the United States and 30 other nations, mostly in Europe. The findings indicate that the percentage of youth involved in serious violent delinquency is highest in the United States, Ireland, Germany, and the Netherlands, Young people in the United States and other prosperous nations also have some of highest levels of participation in serious property offenses (for a discussion of factors that may help to explain the high rate of serious delinquency in the United States, see Chapters 17 and 24). Further, the findings suggest that cross-national differences in relatively minor delinquencies, such as shoplifting, partly reflect differences in opportunity. Participation in shoplifting tends to be most common in prosperous nations such as the United States. The lowest rate of shoplifting "can be found in Armenia where consumer goods are rare" (Enzmann et al., 2010:165).

How Many Juveniles Are Victimized, and How Many Victimizations Are Committed by Juveniles?

Victimization data provide another alternative to arrest data. As indicated earlier, victimization data tell us a lot about crime victims. Such data have somewhat less to say about the number of victimizations committed by juveniles, largely because crime victims usually do not see the person who victimized them. Nevertheless, victimization data do provide some information about the number of violent crimes committed by juveniles.

Table 3.3 shows the number of victimizations experienced by U.S. residents age 12 or older in 2014, as estimated by the National Crime Victimization Survey. About 21 million victimizations were reported in 2014, including 5.4 million violent victimizations and 15.3 million property victimizations. That amounts to about 2 violent victimizations for every 100 people age 12 or older and 12 property victimizations for every 100 households. As you can see, people are most often the victims of larceny-theft. Victimization data, like arrest and self-report data, indicate that property crimes are more common than violent crimes, and minor crimes are more common than serious crimes.

TABLE 3.3 Number and Rate of Victimizations, 2014

	Number	Rate
All crimes	20,648,040	
Rape/sexual assault	284,350	1.1
Robbery	664,210	2.5
Aggravated assault	1,092,090	4.1
Simple assault	3,318,920	12.4
Household burglary	2,993,480	23.1
Motor vehicle theft	534,370	4.1
Theft	11,760,620	90.8

SOURCE: Truman and Langton, 2015.

Note: Rate of victimization is per 1,000 persons age 12 or older, or per 1,000 households.

Who is most likely to be victimized? Who do you think is most likely to be victimized by crime: young or old, male or female, white or African American, Hispanic or non-Hispanic, poor or rich?

Young people have higher rates of victimization than older people for violent crimes (data for property crimes are reported for households rather than for individuals). Rates of violent victimization are highest for those between 12 and 17 years old. Rates of victimization generally decline with age and are lowest among those 65 or older. To illustrate, about 3 out of every 100 people ages 12 to 17 were the victims of violence in 2014, a rate about 10 times higher than those ages 65 and over. As dramatic as this difference is, there are data suggesting that the National Crime Victimization Survey substantially underestimates the extent of victimization against young people. Data from other surveys suggest that at least 50 of every 100 adolescents are the victims of violence each year and that more than 25 of every 100 are the victims of theft (Finkelhor et al., 2005, 2009).

Males have higher rates of victimization than females for violent crimes, with the exception of serious intimate partner violence (which includes rape/sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated assault committed by the victim's spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend). About 2.1 of every 100 males were the victims of violence in 2014, versus about 1.9 of every 100 females. Data from previous years, however, indicates that females are about 4 times more likely than males to be the victims of serious intimate partner violence. About 1.6 acts of serious intimate partner violence per 1,000 females were reported in 2011 (S. Catalano, 2013). These estimates, however, should be viewed with much caution. Data suggest that the National Crime Victimization Survey substantially underestimates the amount of rape and other violence against women. In particular, other data suggest that 15 to 20 percent of all females will be the victims of a completed or attempted rape at some point in their lives, with at least half of these rapes occurring before the age of 18 (Black et al., 2011; Tjaden and Thoennes, 1999, 2006; also see Fisher and Cullen, 2000). Based on data from the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, an estimated 1.3 million women were raped in the 12 months prior to the survey (too few males in the survey reported rape to provide a reliable 12-month estimate). Nearly 1 in 5 women (18.5%) have been raped at some point in their lives, compared to 1 in 71 men (1.4%). For females, more than half (51.1%) of these rapes were committed by intimate partners (current and former spouses, cohabiting partners, and dates or boyfriends). As indicated by Gove et al. (1985), intimate partner violence is much less likely to be reported in the National Crime Victimization Survey than is violence committed by strangers (for more on intimate partner violence, see Box 7.2 in Chapter 7).

African Americans are somewhat more likely than whites to be victims of violence. About 2.3 of every 100 African Americans were victims of violence in 2014, versus about 2 of every 100 whites. The rate of violent victimization among Hispanics (1.6 per 100) was lower than that of white non-Hispanics (2.0) and African American non-Hispanics (2.3). ("Hispanics" are defined as persons of Spanish-speaking origin; they may identify themselves as white, African American, or members of other racial groups.)

Data from previous years indicate that **people with lower incomes** are generally more likely to be victims of violence. In 2005, for example, about 4.1 of every 100 people in households with incomes of less than $7,500 were victims of violence, versus about 1.7 of every 100 people in households with incomes of $75,000 or more. **The relationship between household income and property crime is somewhat mixed.** In 2008, about 5.7 of every 100 households with incomes lower than $7,500 were burglarized, versus 1.6 of every 100 households with incomes of at least $75,000. The differences

in property crime between lower- and higher-income households are much smaller for theft, however.

In sum, the victims of violence tend to be young, male (except for rape/sexual assault), African American, and poor. The relationship between household income and property crime is somewhat mixed, but lower-income households are more likely to be burglarized.

How many victimizations are committed by juveniles? What do victimization data tell us about the number of crimes committed by juveniles? As indicated, crime victims are asked whether they saw the person(s) who victimized them. They rarely see the offender(s) in property crimes like larceny and burglary, but they almost always see the offender in violent crimes like assault, rape, and robbery. Victims who saw the offender(s) are asked to estimate the offender's age. The information that victimization data provide about the extent of juvenile delinquency, therefore, is largely limited to violent crimes (although see Hindelang, 1981, regarding property crime). Data from 2014 indicate that juveniles ages 12 to 17 committed about 174,000 serious violent crimes (rape/sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault), or about 6.9 serious violent crimes per 1,000 juveniles ages 12 to 17 (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2016). These estimates exceed by several times those provided by FBI arrest and clearance data (e.g., about 53,000 juveniles under age 18 were **arrested** for these crimes in 2014). So victimization data show that violent crime among juveniles is far more extensive than arrest data indicate, although not as extensive as indicated by self-report data.

Summary

You have been presented with a lot of numbers and may be feeling a little overwhelmed right now. Again, try not to get too caught up in all the numbers. Focus on the basic points being made by these numbers. These points include the following:

1. Arrest, self-report, and victimization data provide different estimates of the extent of delinquency in the United States. Arrest data provide the lowest estimates, and self-report data provide the highest. You should be able to explain why this is the case, drawing on the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each type of data (see Chapter 2).
2. Self-report data probably provide the most accurate estimate of the extent of delinquency. At least 90 percent of all adolescents engage in delinquency at some point, and, on average, each juvenile commits about 52 delinquent acts per year.
3. All three data sources indicate that minor offenses are more common than serious offenses and that property crime is more common than violent crime, although minor or simple assault is common.

IS JUVENILE DELINQUENCY INCREASING?

As Bernard (1992) points out, most people think that juvenile delinquency is worse now than in the past. In fact, they often think of the past as the "good old days," a time when it was safe to walk the streets and juveniles almost never committed serious crimes like murder and rape. It is easy to understand why people feel this way. The media regularly report on the horrible crimes committed by juveniles (see Box 3.1). But what do the data show? Is delinquency increasing, decreasing, or staying the same? Once more, we must examine arrest, self-report, and victimization data. As you will see, they sometimes disagree with one another regarding trends in delinquency. Nevertheless, an examination of these data sources will allow us to draw some tentative conclusions about trends in delinquency. Our focus is on **trends in delinquency since the early 1980s**.

Box 3.1 Are Today's Youth More Violent than Previous Generations? Sorting Fact from Fiction

> [In earlier times] it was a rare day when you saw a man under 25 up for a felony. Today it's the rule. And today when one of these kids robs a bank he doesn't rush for a businesslike getaway. He stays around and shoots up a couple of clerks. Not long ago I asked such a boy why, and he said: "I get a kick out of it when I see blood running."
>
> [In earlier times] juvenile delinquency, in general, meant such things as truancy, minor vandalism and petty theft. Today, the term includes armed robbery, assault and even murder.

Do these quotations reflect your own sentiments about young offenders today, and perhaps that of your friends and family members? Would you be surprised to learn that these quotations are over 50 years old? The first quotation is from a New York City judge in 1954—a time period that many people associate with social order and stability. The second quotation is from the head of the FBI in 1964 (quoted in Bernard, 1992:33). Similar concerns about a rising tide of out-of-control, violent youth can be traced back to the 1940s, 1930s, and 1920s. Further, historians have uncovered complaints about "rotten" and inconsiderate youth dating back hundreds and even thousands of years. As summarized by author Frank Donovan, it seems that "every generation since the dawn of time has denounced the rising generation as being inferior in terms of manners and morals, ethics and honesty" (quoted in Bernard, 1992:31).

It is not difficult to see how adults would form a negative impression of the younger generation. As mentioned earlier, the media regularly report on the horrible crimes committed by young people. In such reports, we often hear claims that a certain type of delinquency is increasing. "Expert" commentators may even offer explanations for the alleged increase, and viewers are left with the impression that serious juvenile offending was less common in earlier times. If you pay close attention to such reports, however—and we encourage you to do so in the future—you may find that claims about juvenile crime are frequently exaggerated and lack supporting data (or are inconsistent with the major data sources described in this book).

A dramatic example involves the "superpredator" myth. During the mid-1990s, following a real increase in the rate of serious juvenile crime, some expert commentators jumped to conclusions. Not only did they predict that the problem would grow worse, but they attributed the rise in youth crime to a new and remorseless breed of young offenders: that is, to a new group of "superpredators." As the authors of a 1996 book titled *Body Count* described:

> America is now home to thickening ranks of superpredators—radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters, including ever more preteenage boys, who murder, assault, rape, rob, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, join gun toting gangs, and create serious communal disorders. . . . [H]ere come the superpredators. (quoted in Brownstein, 2000:120)

Although other experts dismissed the superpredator story as "hogwash," it was picked up by the national press with such headlines as "Teenage Time Bombs: Violent Juvenile Crime Is Soaring and It's Going to Get Worse" (Brownstein, 2000:121). There was one major problem with the superpredator story, however. The predicted juvenile crime wave failed to materialize. In fact, as we describe later in this chapter, the rate

(*Continued*)

(*Continued*)

of serious juvenile offending has *declined dramatically* since the publication of *Body Count*. Although the juvenile crime rate has fluctuated in recent years, it remains far below the level of the early to mid-1990s (when some of your professors may have come of age). Today's youth, then, are **not** more violent than the previous generation.

Nevertheless, alarmist reports of a rising juvenile crime wave tend to be repeated every decade (Bernard, 1992). In fact, the same experts who promoted the superpredator story in the 1990s did not hesitate to warn of another possible juvenile crime wave in the following decade. In a book published in 2001 titled *The Will to Kill,* the authors write: "Over the next 6 years, the number of teens, ages 14 to 17, will swell by about 15 percent, which may indeed bring increased problems of . . . drug abuse, joblessness, and, of course, violence" (J. Fox and Levin, 2001:87).

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think media reports of a juvenile crime wave are repeated every decade, regardless of the facts?
2. After reading this chapter, try to answer the following question: Did the 2001 prediction of a possible juvenile crime wave come to pass?

Are Juvenile Arrests Increasing?

When examining trends in juvenile arrests, it is best to look at **arrest rates** rather than the number of arrests. Arrest rates are usually presented as the number of arrests per 100,000 juveniles ages 10 to 17 in the population. Arrest rates have the advantage of controlling for changes in the size of the juvenile population. If there is an increase in the number of juveniles, then the number of juvenile arrests will likely increase because there are more juveniles to be arrested. This will occur even if the typical juvenile is no more or less delinquent than before. For example, there was a dramatic increase in the number of juvenile arrests during the 1960s and early 1970s. But part of this increase was because there were more juveniles to be arrested. As a result of the post–World War II baby boom, the number of juveniles between 10 and 17 years of age increased from about 25 million in 1960 to over 33 million in 1975. The arrest rate is not influenced by changes in the size of the juvenile population, since it shows the number of arrests per 100,000 juveniles. Changes in the arrest rate, then, provide a better indication of whether juveniles are becoming more or less delinquent.

The two graphs in Figure 3.1 show changes in the juvenile arrest rate for Part I violent crimes (homicide, aggravated assault, robbery, rape) and Part I property crimes (burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, arson). Take a moment to look at these graphs; some of their ramifications are suggested in the paragraphs that follow.

Property crime. The rate of property crime was reasonably stable from the early 1980s to 1994, with perhaps a modest increase in rates during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The rate has been declining since the mid-1990s, dropping from over 2,500 arrests per 100,000 juveniles in 1994 to less than 1,300 arrests per 100,000 juveniles in 2006. By 2006, the rate of juvenile property crime dropped to its lowest level since the 1960s. This downward trend was interrupted between 2006 and 2008, when the overall rate of juvenile property crime began to increase again by a modest amount (though it remained far below the rates recorded in the early to mid-1990s). Beginning in 2010, the downward trend continued, reaching a historic low by 2014 (about 693 arrests per 100,000 juveniles). **In fact, the 2014 juvenile arrest rate for property crime was lower than at any point in the past 30 years.**

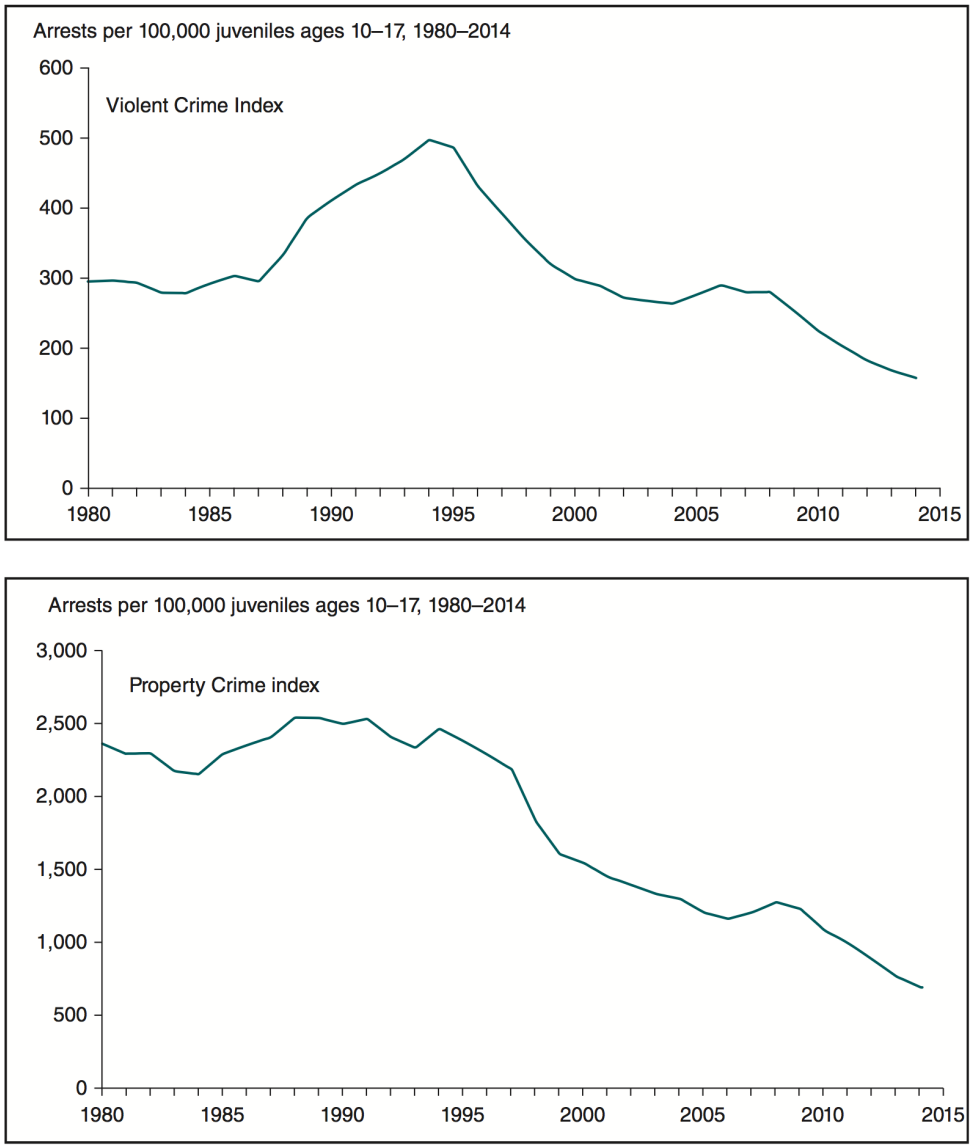

FIGURE 3.1 Trends in the Juvenile Arrest Rate for Part 1 Violent and Property Crimes

SOURCE: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Statistical Briefing Book, 2017.

It should be noted that trends for particular types of property crime sometimes differ from the overall trend shown in Figure 3.1. For example, the modest increase in the property crime rate in recent years (2006–2008) was due mainly to an increase in juvenile arrests for larceny-theft. In contrast, the rate of juvenile arrests for arson and motor vehicle theft continued a steady downward trend.

Violent crime. The rate of violent crime arrests was reasonably stable from 1980 to 1988. It then increased by more than 60 percent between 1988 and 1994. This increase did much to draw attention to the juvenile crime problem, with the media running numerous stories about juvenile violence during this time. Violent crime arrests then declined from 1994

through the early 2000s. Between 2004 and 2006, violent crime rates increased again but remained well below their levels in the early to mid-1990s. This increase led to some discussion over whether the dramatic drop in violence since the mid-1990s had come to an end (see Butts and Snyder, 2006; Zimring, 2007). But then the juvenile violent crime rate decreased once again between 2006 and 2014. **In fact, by 2014, the juvenile arrest rate for violent crime was at its lowest level in more than three decades**. As with property crime, trends for particular types of violent crime sometimes differ from the overall trend. Much of the latest decrease in violent crime is due to a lower rate of juvenile arrest for aggravated assault. The juvenile arrest rate for robbery, however, increased slightly between 2006 and 2008.

Trends in murder rates. We want to draw special attention to the crime of murder, since trends in the arrest rate for murder have been the subject of much discussion in the media and in the criminology literature.[1] The juvenile arrest rate for murder more than doubled between 1987 and 1993. This increase was especially dramatic because the arrest rate for murder among those over 25 declined during this period. Further, the increase in the juvenile arrest rate for murder was entirely due to an increase in gun-related murders. The juvenile arrest rate for nongun murders was stable (see Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 1998; Snyder, 2003).

There has been much discussion about **why the juvenile arrest rate for gun-related murders increased so dramatically during the late 1980s and early 1990s.** Among other things, some evidence suggests that the increase was due to the spread of crack cocaine during the mid- to late 1980s. Juveniles became heavily involved in the crack trade, and they often armed themselves for protection (you are unlikely to call the police for protection if you are a crack dealer). So guns became more common among certain juveniles. This led other juveniles to feel that they had to carry guns for protection. The end result was that guns spread throughout the juvenile population, and disputes that used to be settled with fists or knives came to be settled with bullets (Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 1998; Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Cork, 1999).

The increase in juvenile homicides (and serious violence more generally) has also been linked to certain social changes that led to an increase in gangs (see Braga, 2003; Greenwood, 2002). These changes include a decline in manufacturing jobs, especially in inner-city neighborhoods; an increase in single-parent families; and tensions involving recent immigrants to the United States (see Chapter 16 for further discussion). Such changes likely contributed to the dramatic growth in gangs during the 1980s and early to mid-1990s (W. Miller, 2001). As discussed in Chapter 16, gang members are more likely than nonmembers to possess and use guns.

The juvenile arrest rate for murder declined sharply from 1994 to 2004, with the decline more than erasing the previous increase in arrest rates for murder. There has also been much discussion about the reasons for this decline and the more general decline in violent and property crimes—a topic that we address shortly. Beginning in 2005, the arrest rate for juvenile murder increased again by a modest amount, but this increase was interrupted by another drop from 2008 to 2014. Despite some fluctuation in recent years, the arrest rate for juvenile murder remains well below its levels in the early to mid-1990s. To illustrate, the rate peaked in 1993, with 12.8 juveniles per 100,000 being arrested for murder. The arrest rate for juvenile murder in 2014 was 2.2 per 100,000, about one-sixth of the 1993 rate.

Overall, arrest data suggest the following about trends in delinquency since the early 1980s: (1) rates of property crime were fairly stable from the early 1980s to 1994, with perhaps a modest increase in the late 1980s and early 1990s, then rates declined sharply after 1994, and have since continued a general downward trend, despite some year-to-year

fluctuations; (2) rates of violent crime were stable through the late 1980s, increased sharply from 1988 to 1994, then declined sharply until 2004, and have since continued a general downward trend despite some year-to-year fluctuations in the mid-2000s. We have focused on Part I crimes. We should note that trends in Part II crimes are somewhat varied, although arrests for most such crimes have declined in recent years. Perhaps the most striking trends in arrests for Part II crimes involve drug abuse and curfew/loitering violations. There was a dramatic increase in the arrest rates for drug abuse and curfew/loitering violations in the mid-1990s—followed by decreases in the arrest rates for these crimes in the later 1990s and 2000s. (There is good reason to believe that much of the increase in curfew/loitering arrests reflects changes in the law and police practices. Many cities, for example, responded to the increase in juvenile violence by instituting curfews for juveniles or more strictly enforcing existing curfew laws.)

Is Self-Reported Delinquency Increasing?

The Monitoring the Future survey described earlier provides information on trends in self-reported delinquency. Again, these data focus on high school seniors. They do not contain information on certain serious crimes, like murder and rape. Rather, they tend to focus on minor offenses or minor instances of more serious offenses (for reasons indicated in Chapter 2). Also, their use of the response category "5 or more times" means that they underestimate the extent of delinquency. Nevertheless, these data provide some indication of trends in delinquency—especially minor delinquency—among high school seniors throughout the United States.[2]

The graph in Figure 3.2 shows trends in the rate of self-reported property crime and violent crime from 1980 to 2014. In particular, it shows the number of property and violent crimes reported each year per 100 high school seniors. We focus on four property crimes: larceny under $50, larceny over $50, shoplifting, and auto theft (there is no good

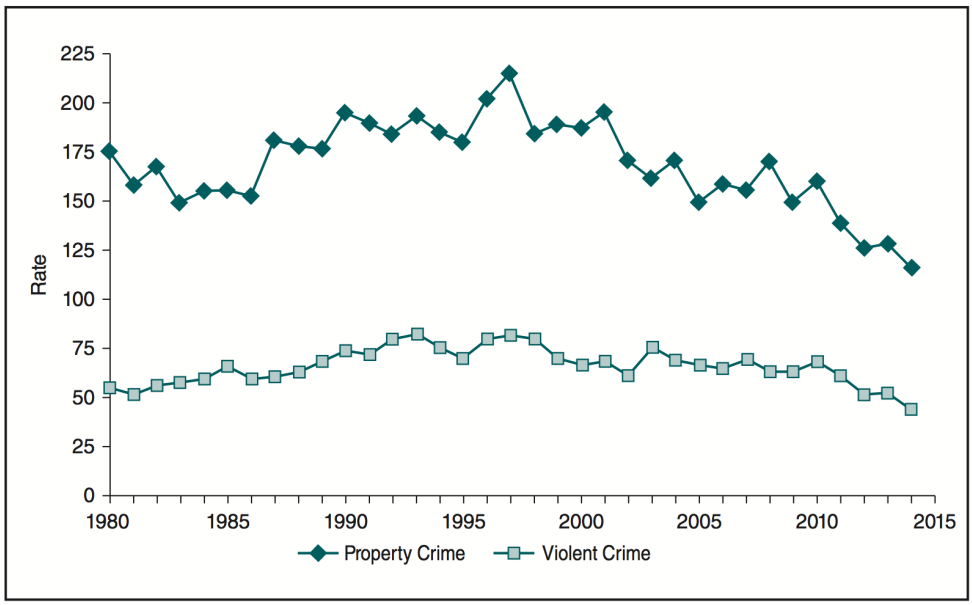

FIGURE 3.2 Trends in the Rate of Self-Reported Delinquency of High School Seniors (Rate = Number of Acts per 100 Seniors)

SOURCE: Monitoring the Future survey (http://www.monitoringthefuture.org)

measure of burglary in the survey). And we focus on three violent crimes: serious assault, group fights, and robbery. Take a moment to examine the graph in Figure 3.2. Focus on long-term trends, rather than short-term or year-to-year fluctuations in the delinquency rate. These short-term fluctuations may be due to chance, but substantial changes in the crime rate that last for several years likely reflect real changes.[3]

Property crime. The rate of property crime was generally stable during the early to mid-1980s, increased by a modest amount during the late 1980s and 1990s, then declined by a modest amount during the 2000s. To illustrate, the average rate of property crime each year from 1980 to 1986 was 159.6 property crimes per 100 high school seniors. The average rate of property crime per year from 1987 to 2002 was 188.2 property crimes per 100 seniors. The average rate from 2003 to 2014 was 148.9 per 100 seniors. These data are somewhat at odds with arrest data. While arrest data also show a modest increase in rates of property crime during the late 1980s, arrest data show a more dramatic decline in rates of property crime since the mid-1990s.

Violent crime. It is more difficult to discern clear patterns in the rate of self-reported violence. Rates of violence were fairly stable during much of the 1980s but then increased somewhat during the late 1980s and 1990s. To illustrate, the average rate of violence each year from 1980 to 1988 was 59.6 violent acts per 100 high school seniors. The average rate of violence each year from 1989 to 1998 was 76.3 violent acts per 100 seniors. There has been a slight decrease in the rate of violence since 1998, with the average rate of violence from 1999 to 2014 being 63.7 acts per 100 seniors. These data are also somewhat at odds with arrest data. Arrest data show a larger increase in violence in the late 1980s. Also, arrest data show a larger decline in violence beginning in the mid-1990s.

Drug use. Figure 3.3 shows trends in drug use, using data from the Monitoring the Future study of high school seniors. In particular, Figure 3.3 shows the percentage of high school seniors who used an illicit drug in the last 30 days. Illicit drugs include marijuana, LSD and other hallucinogens, crack and other forms of cocaine, heroin and other narcotics, amphetamines, barbiturates, and tranquilizers (not under a doctor's orders). As can be seen, there was a dramatic decrease in illicit drug use from the early 1980s to 1992. Illicit drug use then increased a good deal during the 1990s, with the percentage of high school seniors reporting illicit drug use almost doubling. This increase attracted much attention in the media and was a major issue in the 1996 presidential campaign. A major antidrug initiative was launched by the federal government in response to this increase (see Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1999, 2007). And illicit drug use did in fact decrease beginning in the early 2000s. Since 2006, however, data indicate that the proportion of illicit drug users began to creep up again, although it remains far below that observed during the early 1980s. (Note: Other data on illicit drug use, including data on younger juveniles, largely confirm these trends; see Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2016. We should note, however, that trends in the use of particular drugs sometimes differ from the general trends in illicit drug use just described.)

In sum, self-report data suggest the following about trends in delinquency: (1) The rate of property crime was generally stable during the early to mid-1980s, increased by a modest amount during the late 1980s and 1990s, then declined by a modest amount during the 2000s; (2) the rate of violent crime was stable during much of the 1980s, increased during the late 1980s and generally remained high during much of the 1990s, then decreased slightly since 1998; and (3) the rate of illicit drug use decreased during the 1980s and early 1990s, increased during the 1990s, decreased during the early 2000s, and increased again by a modest amount in recent years.

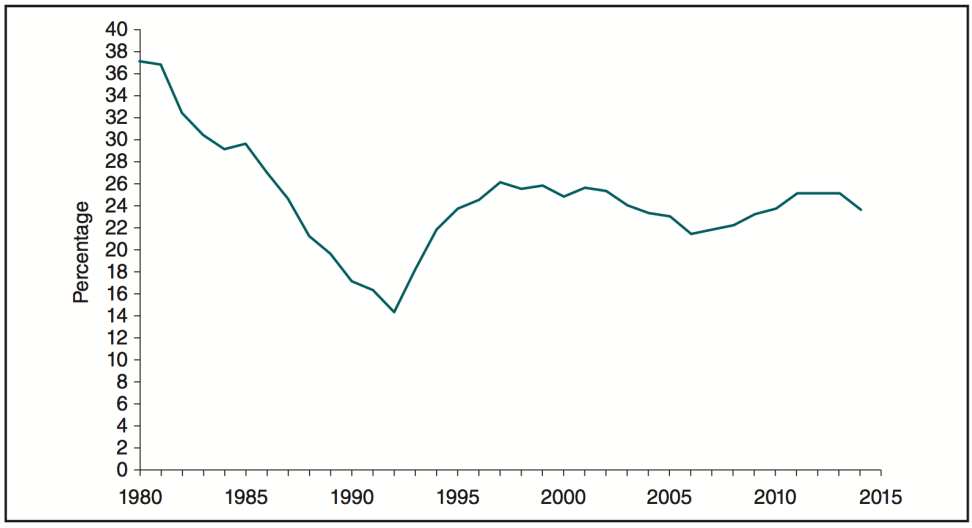

FIGURE 3.3 Percentage of High School Seniors Using Illicit Drugs in the Last 30 Days

SOURCE: Monitoring the Future survey, as reported by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2016.

Are Victimizations Committed by Juveniles Increasing?

We can use the National Crime Victimization Survey to estimate the rate of violent crime victimizations committed by juveniles ages 12 through 17. Data indicate that this rate was moderately stable during much of the 1980s, increased during the late 1980s and early 1990s, declined dramatically from 1993 to 2002, and has continued a general downward trend since 2002 despite some year-to-year fluctuations. These trends are illustrated in Figure 3.4, which focuses on aggravated assaults, robberies, rapes, and homicides committed by juveniles ages 12 to 17 (the homicide data are from police reports).

So victimization data, like arrest data, indicate that the violent crime rate for juveniles was reasonably stable during the early to mid-1980s, increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s, declined sharply through the early 2000s, and has continued a general downward trend. Unfortunately, victimization data on trends in property crime by juveniles are largely lacking.

Summary

We began with a simple question: Is juvenile delinquency increasing? But, as you can see, the answer is anything but simple. The answer varies somewhat by type of crime and by data source. Nevertheless, we can draw some general conclusions.

Property crime. Arrest and self-report data disagree somewhat regarding trends in property crime. Both arrest and self-report data suggest that rates of property crime were fairly stable during much of the 1980s, with a modest increase during the late 1980s. But arrest data show that rates of property crime have declined sharply since the mid-1990s, while self-report data show a relatively modest decline. One possible explanation for this difference is that arrest data are biased toward serious crimes and the more serious instances of less serious crimes, while self-report data are biased toward minor crimes. In particular, the Monitoring the Future survey does not measure the crime of burglary; in addition, it likely picks up large numbers of trivial property crimes, and it undersamples those juveniles most likely to engage in serious property crime. So we might **tentatively**

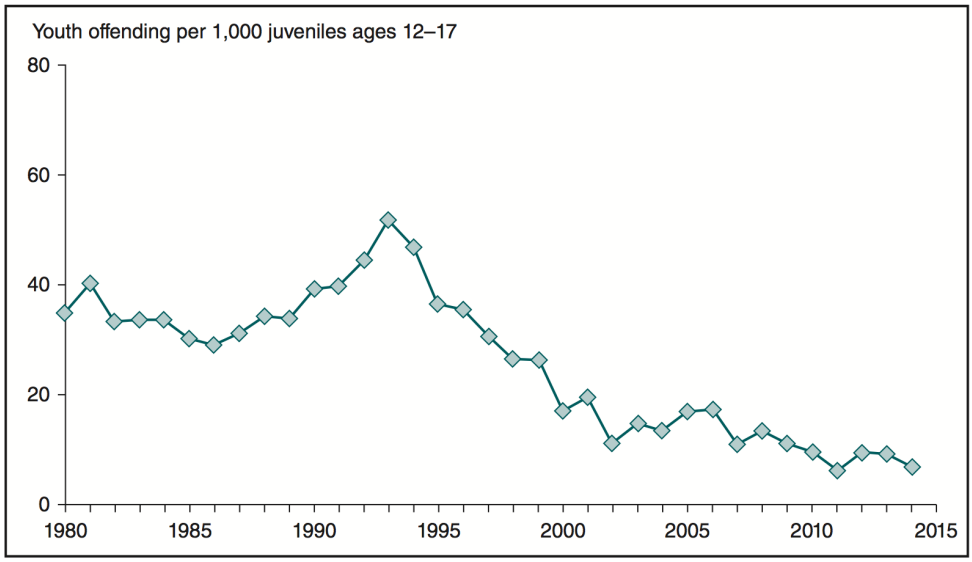

FIGURE 3.4 Trends in the Rate of Violent Victimizations Committed by Juveniles Ages 12–17

SOURCE: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2016.

conclude that there was **an overall sharp decline in serious property crime from the mid- to late 1990s to 2014, and a relatively modest decline in minor property crime.**

Violent crime. Arrest and victimization data indicate that rates of juvenile violence were generally stable in the early to mid-1980s, increased substantially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, decreased substantially from the mid-1990s to early 2000s, and continued on a modest downward trend, despite some year-to-year fluctuations. Self-report data, however, show a more modest increase in violence during the late 1980s and a more modest decrease since 1998. We lean toward the arrest and victimization data when it comes to trends in serious violence. For reasons indicated earlier, arrest and victimization data probably do a better job of measuring serious violence. So we would conclude that **rates of serious violence increased dramatically in the late 1980s and early 1990s, declined sharply through the early 2000s, and continued on a general downward trend.** We lean toward the self-report data for trends in less serious violence. So **rates of less serious violence increased by a modest amount during the late 1980s and early 1990s and decreased by a modest amount since the late 1990s.**

Drug crime. It seems safe to conclude that **overall rates of illicit drug use declined substantially during the 1980s and early 1990s.** All major self-report data indicate such a decline. Arrest rates for drug abuse during this period are relatively stable, but arrest rates for drug abuse are heavily influenced by police practices as well as by true levels of drug abuse. It also seems safe to conclude that **rates of drug use increased substantially from about 1992 to the early 2000s.** Both self-report and arrest data are in agreement here. **Rates of illicit drug use declined once again throughout the early to mid-2000s,** with this decline evident in both self-report and arrest data. According to multiple self-report surveys, however, **the rate of illicit drug use began creeping up again after 2006.** (Arrest data show a decline, but for reasons stated previously, we tend to rely on self-reports when interpreting drugs use trends.)

HOW CAN WE EXPLAIN THE DRAMATIC DECLINE IN SERIOUS CRIME SINCE THE MID-1990S?

As indicated, there is good reason to believe that there has been a dramatic decline in the rates of serious violent and property crimes since the mid-1990s. In fact, these rates are now at historic lows. Crime and delinquency remain serious problems, of course, but the general downward trend we observe is encouraging. And it is important to determine why this decline has occurred. Doing so may help us better predict future trends in crime and may even help us influence those trends. For example, if we determine that certain police practices contributed to the decline, we might make an effort to continue or increase the use of such practices.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to determine whether particular factors contributed to the decline. Researchers need to demonstrate that a particular factor changed around the time that crime rates declined and that there is good reason to believe that this change affected crime rates. But this is not always possible. Nevertheless, there is some reason to believe that **several factors may have contributed to the decline in juvenile crime rates.**[4]

Two such factors are the **decline in crack use** and in the **turf disputes among crack dealers.** As indicated earlier, the increase in crack use in the 1980s likely contributed to the increase in serious juvenile violence during this time. Juveniles became heavily involved in the crack trade; they armed themselves for protection, given the dangers involved; other juveniles responded by arming themselves; and, as a consequence, disputes that used to be settled with fists came to be settled with guns. Crack use, however, began to decline in the 1990s, partly because attitudes toward crack became more negative as people became aware of the devastating effects of this drug. Also, competition among crack dealers decreased as dealers established their territories. As a consequence, juvenile involvement in the crack trade declined, and the trade itself became less violent. This, in turn, contributed to a decrease in the carrying and use of guns by juveniles.

The decline in crime rates was also probably influenced by **improvements in the economy** during the 1990s. Among other things, the percentage of children living in poverty fell sharply from 1993 through the early 2000s, especially for African American children (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2007). Reductions in poverty contribute to **better parenting practices and improved school performance,** which in turn contribute to lower delinquency (see Bellair and Roscigno, 2000; Chapters 14 and 15 in this text). Also, unemployment declined to the point that **teenagers with few skills and a limited education were able to get jobs.** Data suggest that employment reduces crime, especially when illegal opportunities to make money—like selling crack—are on the decline (see Allan and Steffensmeier, 1989; Grogger, 2006; Zimring, 2007). Further, improvements in the economy likely contributed to the **decline in gangs** that began in the mid-1990s, with this decline also contributing to the reduction in crime rates (see Chapter 16). Economic factors alone, however, cannot explain why serious juvenile crime remained relatively low into the late 2000s, despite a major economic recession (2007–2009) and an increase, once again, in poverty (see Chapter 12).

Improvements in police practices may have also contributed to the decline in crime rates, although the data here are less clear-cut. Many cities adopted new methods of policing. Evidence suggests that certain of these methods are effective at reducing crime. These include efforts to crack down on particular types of crime, such as drug selling and gun carrying, to crack down on gangs, and to crack down on locations with high rates of crime. These methods also include certain types of "community policing," such as problem-oriented policing ,where the police attempt to address the underlying problems that contribute to crime. (These methods and the evidence on their effectiveness are described in Chapter 20.) However, we lack good data on the extent to which these methods were adopted by police

departments across the country. Also, many cities experienced substantial reductions in crime even though they did not adopt such methods to any significant degree (see Conklin, 2003; Eck and Maguire, 2006; Zimring, 2007, 2011). Even so, some criminologists feel that new methods of policing helped contribute to the reduction in crime rates.

Further, **the increased use of prevention and rehabilitation programs** during the 1990s may have contributed to the decline in crime rates. These programs include efforts to help troubled families, to help children do better in school, to provide mentors for at-risk and delinquent children, to mediate gang disputes, and to provide teenagers with organized recreational activities (see Chapter 24 for a discussion of rehabilitation and prevention programs). However, we lack good data on the extent to which effective rehabilitation and prevention programs were employed during the 1990s.

Another factor that may have contributed to the decline is **the higher rate at which juvenile offenders were incarcerated** in the 1990s. Confining more juvenile offenders may prevent crime in two ways: the confined juveniles are unable to commit crimes on the street, and their confinement may deter others from crime. It is estimated that increased rates of confinement accounted for about one-fourth of the reduction in **adult** crime during the 1990s (see Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Conklin, 2003; Zimring, 2007). But the rate at which juveniles were confined increased at a much slower pace than the rate at which adults were confined, so **increased rates of confinement probably account for only a small portion of the decrease in juvenile crime rates** (see Chapter 23).

Scholars are now exploring **the role of immigration** in the crime decline. Although past studies have linked immigration-related tensions to gang problems (see Chapter 16), research indicates that, on average, immigrants are less violent than third-generation Americans (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). Moreover, since 1990, America has experienced a large wave of immigration, with the foreign-born population increasing by 56 percent—representing an additional 11 million individuals. This wave of immigration was followed by a dramatic *decrease* in violent crime, as we have seen. This fact may seem counterintuitive, as many people assume that immigration leads to more crime (and people often assume that crime is rising, regardless of the facts). But at least two studies now show that the increase in the immigrant population contributed to the *decline* in violent crime (Stowell et al., 2009; Tim Wadsworth, 2010). (Reading this chapter, you may have noticed a theme emerging: namely, that common sense and conventional wisdom are often poor guides to understanding social problems like crime and delinquency. You will encounter other examples in the chapters ahead.) The role of additional factors, including technological developments (e.g., new security devices, availability of smartphones) and improvements in health and safety (e.g., reduced exposure to lead and lower levels of alcohol consumption), are being explored as well.

In sum, many factors likely contributed to the decline in rates of serious offending that began in the mid-1990s. There is now some concern that the downward trend in serious violent crime may be coming to an end. At the time of this writing, the latest official crime data indicate that, while the property crime rate continued to drop, the rate of violent crime in 2015 was 3 percent higher than that recorded in 2014 (FBI, 2016). This uptick in serious violent crime was not the result of a nationwide crime surge; rather, it was largely the result of a dramatic spike in homicide in a small number of cities, such as Chicago, Baltimore, and Washington, DC. The reasons for this spike are not yet clear, but criminologists and law enforcement officials point to the possible influence of gangs, drug markets, and policing issues in these cities. There is now a lively debate over the actions of the police, and whether the spike in violence was the result of police adopting a less aggressive stance toward crime. Some claim that, given recent protests over police shooting deaths, the police are now more reluctant to confront potential offenders—the so-called

"Ferguson effect" (for an overview of this debate and a discussion of relevant evidence, see Beckett, 2016; for more on policing, see Chapter 20).

Yet, despite this tragic spike in violence, it is important to emphasize that the national crime rate remains at historic lows—far below that of the early 1990s. Whether it will be possible to keep the crime rate down in the future will likely depend on such things as trends in the economy and the extent to which the United States makes use of effective crime control strategies, including new methods of policing (see Chapter 20), better methods of sanctioning juvenile offenders (see Chapter 23), and effective methods of rehabilitating offenders and preventing delinquency (see Chapter 24). All these things are important because they impact the causes of delinquency, described in Chapters 6 through 18.

TEACHING AIDS

Exercise: The Extent of and Trends in Campus Crime

Colleges and universities are required to collect data on the extent of crime on campus and to make that data available to the public. We would like you to obtain data on the extent of crime on your campus during the previous two years (you can probably obtain such data by visiting the office or website of your campus police or security force). Then do the following.

1. Figure out what data are being reported. In particular, what crimes are listed and what types of data are available on each crime (e.g., number of crimes known to the police, number of arrests).
2. Look at the number of crimes listed for each type of crime. Do you think these numbers provide an accurate indication of the extent of crime on your campus (e.g., the extent of liquor law violations, drug offenses, sexual assaults)? If not, list all your reasons for believing that such data may underestimate the extent of campus crime.
3. Determine whether the number of crimes increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the previous two years. In particular, calculate the percentage change in the number of crimes. Do this for each type of crime. (For example, you might find that the number of liquor law violations increased 50 percent from 2015 to 2016.) Do you think these data provide a good indication of the true amount of change in the extent of crime? If not, list all the reasons why not.
4. How might you go about better determining the extent of crime on campus and trends in crime? (Note: See Fisher et al., 1998, for an example of a victimization survey conducted on 12 college campuses. The researchers found that more than 33 percent of the students they surveyed had been the victims of crime during the academic year. Furthermore, "the main predictor of violent victimization was a lifestyle that included high levels of partying on campus and the recreational use of drugs" [Fisher et al., 1998:671; also see Hart, 2003].)

Web-Based Exercise: Finding the Latest Information on the Extent of and Trends in Crime and Delinquency

FBI data collected from the police. Each year the FBI releases data on the extent of and trends in crime in the prior year, including data on "offenses known to law enforcement" and "persons arrested." You should:

1. Visit the **FBI's homepage** (www.fbi.gov).
2. Click on the "Resources" tab at the top of the page.
3. Click on "**Crime Statistics.**"
4. Under "Publications," click on "Crime in the United States," and then click on the year of the latest complete ***Uniform Crime Reports/Crime in the United States*** volume.
5. Click on "**Offenses Known to Law Enforcement**." Examine the number and rate of index, or Part I, crimes committed in the most recent year. What are the most

common and least common crimes? Describe trends in the rate of crime over the last several years. (Note: These data are usually provided in Table 1 of each volume of *Uniform Crime Reports*).

6. The "Offenses Known to Law Enforcement" data focus on crimes committed by both adults and juveniles. We have to examine arrest data to estimate the extent of delinquency. But only some of the offenses known to law enforcement are "cleared" by arrest. Click on "**Clearances**" and indicate the percentage of crimes cleared by arrest or "exceptional means."
7. Click on "**Persons Arrested**." Examine the number of juveniles arrested for Part I and Part II offenses (these data are usually provided in Table 41). What crimes are juveniles most often arrested for?
8. Explore the FBI data on your own. For example, examine trends in juvenile arrests over time (usually in Table 32). Examine sex and race differences in delinquency.

Victimization data. You might also examine the latest victimization data reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

1. Visit the **Bureau of Justice Statistics homepage** (www.bjs.gov).
2. Click on "**Victims**."
3. Click on "**Crime characteristics and trends**."
4. Scroll down to "**Publications and Products**."
5. Find the publication titled "**Criminal Victimization**" (look for the latest year available). Open the PDF. What do these data say about the extent of and trends in crime? How do they compare to the FBI "Offenses Known to Law Enforcement" data? Why might there be differences between these two sources of data (see the discussion near the end of Chapter 2)?

Self-report data. We report self-report data from the annual Monitoring the Future survey and certain other sources. Another major source of self-report data on delinquency, particularly violence and drug use, is the **Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)** of the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). The YRBSS in based on a national, school-based survey of 9th–12th grade students conducted every two years by the CDC and on state, local, and tribal surveys conducted by health agencies and governments (see the YRBSS website for further information). You should note that these data provide information on the **prevalence** of violence and drug use (that is, the percentage of youth who committed the act in question at least once during the prior 12 months). They do **not** indicate how many times each youth committed the act.

1. Visit the website for the **Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System** at http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/index.htm.
2. Click on the box "**Youth Online Data Analysis Tool**."
3. Following the instructions provided, explore the data. You can examine the extent of selected types of violence and drug use in the United States as a whole, in particular states, in particular cities and counties, by males and females, by race/ethnic groups, and by grade. You can also examine trends in self-reported violence and drug use since 1991 (click "**View all years**" to examine trends).
4. Drawing on these data, how would you respond if asked the following questions: How much juvenile violence and drug use are there in the United States? Is juvenile violence and drug use increasing?
5. How do these self-report data differ from the victimization and FBI data above? For example, do they examine the same or somewhat different types of crime? Do they examine the same or somewhat different populations or samples?

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THIS CHAPTER

1. What general conclusions can we draw about the extent and nature of delinquency from arrest data (e.g., how widespread is delinquency, what types of crime are most common)?
2. What is the "arrest rate"?
3. What do clearance data show?
4. Why is the number of juveniles arrested greater than the number of crimes cleared by the arrest of juveniles?
5. What general conclusions can we draw about the extent and nature of delinquency from self-report data?
6. Why are estimates of the extent of delinquency based on self-report data so much larger than those based on arrest data?
7. Who is most likely to be victimized?
8. Why is it that victimization data provide so little information about the characteristics of people who commit property crimes?
9. Why do we argue that arrest rates should be examined when investigating trends in delinquency?
10. Drawing on arrest data, describe the major trends in property and violent crimes since the early 1980s.
11. Describe the major trends in arrest rates for murder. How have criminologists explained the sharp increase in arrest rates for murder in the late 1980s and early 1990s?
12. Drawing on self-report data, describe trends in violent crime, property crime, and illicit drug use since the early 1980s.
13. Drawing on victimization data, describe trends in violent crime since the early 1980s.
14. Drawing on all data sources, we reach general conclusions about trends in property crime, violent crime, and illicit drug use since the early 1980s. What are they?
15. Describe those factors that may have contributed to the large decline in serious crime rates in the 1990s. Briefly note any problems in the evidence linking these factors to the decline in crime rates (e.g., indicate that we lack good data on the extent to which effective rehabilitation and prevention programs were employed in the 1990s).

THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Self-report data suggest that 90 percent or more of all adolescents engage in delinquency at some point. Why do you think delinquency is so common among adolescents? How might we explain the fact that a small portion of adolescents—10 percent or less—manage to refrain from delinquency? (See Chapter 10; Agnew, 2003a; and Moffitt, 1993, for discussions of these issues.)
2. Despite the decline in serious crime since the late 1990s, many people believe that delinquency has increased. How might we explain this?
3. Give an example of a situation where the juvenile arrest rate remains the same but the number of crimes committed by juveniles increases. (Hint: The number of persons under age 18 will increase by 4 million in the next 20 years.)
4. Data suggest that while rates of serious delinquency declined sharply during the 1990s, rates of minor delinquency declined at a more modest pace. How might we explain this difference in trends?

5. Do you think rates of serious delinquency will remain at historic lows? Justify your response.
6. Why do you think rates of illicit drug use have started to creep up again since 2006?

KEY TERMS

- Arrest rates
- Clearance data

ENDNOTES

1. For examples, see Blumstein, 1995; Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 1998; Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Braga, 2003; Cook and Laub, 1998; Cork, 1999; J. Fox and Zawitz, 1999; National Institute of Justice, 1998a; Messner et al., 2005; Ousey and Lee, 2004; Zimring, 1998, 2007.
2. See Browning and Huizinga, 1999; Huizinga et al., 2003; McCord et al., 2001; Steffensmeier et al., 2005; and Snyder, 2012 for additional self-report data on trends in delinquency.
3. Jensen and Rojek (1998), McCord et al. (2001), and Osgood et al. (1989) have conducted similar analyses using earlier data from the Monitoring the Future survey.
4. See the discussions in Blumstein, 2002; Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 1998; Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Conklin, 2003; LaFree, 1999; Ousey and Augustine, 2001; Ousey and Lee, 2004, 2007; Messner et al., 2005; Steffensmeier and Harer, 1999; Stowell et al., 2009; Wadsworth, 2010; Zimring, 2007, 2011.