

CONFIDENTIAL

Crime and the
Criminal Justice System



Department of Criminal Justice Services

104063

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the reader with an overview, based on recent data, of crime and the criminal justice system in Virginia. We will discuss four topics germane to Virginia's criminal justice system: crime rates, arrests, felony convictions, and criminal justice expenditures. First, we will present data showing the state's major crime rates and violent crime rates for 1985. Second, we will present data on arrests made during 1985. Third, we will examine statewide data on recent felony convictions. Fourth, we will present data showing per capita expenses for law enforcement and corrections for the fiscal year ending June 1984.

Our primary data sources are the *Crime in Virginia* report from the Department of State Police for reported crime and arrest data, the Department of Corrections' Presentencing Investigations data file for felony conviction data, and the Auditor of Public Accounts' *Comparative Report of Local Government Revenues and Expenditures: Year Ending June 30, 1984*.

Since a substantial portion of this report concerns crime rates in Virginia, we will explain the method used to calculate these rates. Because a jurisdiction's population size can be an important influence on the number of crimes occurring within its boundaries, we must calculate crime rates for all jurisdictions so that the rates in different jurisdictions can be logically compared. A crime rate is calculated by dividing the number of crimes reported for a city (or county) by its population. The result is then multiplied by a factor of 100,000 to give a figure which, for purposes of comparison, applies to an assumed population size. For example, a county with 2,000 reported major crimes and a population of 50,000 has a major crime rate of 4,000 per 100,000 residents (i.e., $2,000/50,000 \times 100,000 = 4,000$). This figure can now be compared with the figure for any other jurisdiction which also has had a major crime rate calculated for an assumed population size of 100,000.

The section on methodology at the end of this report discusses some of the data's technicalities as well as the analytical techniques used in preparing the report.

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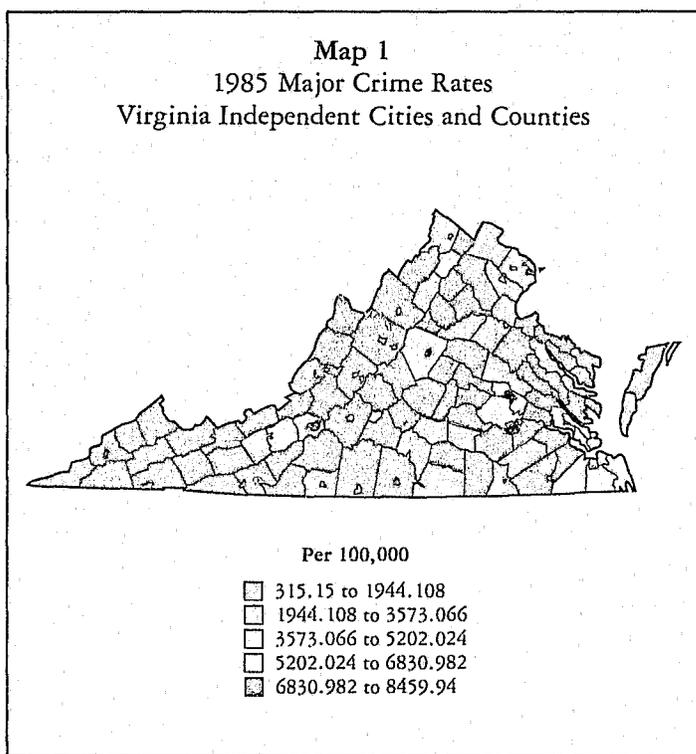
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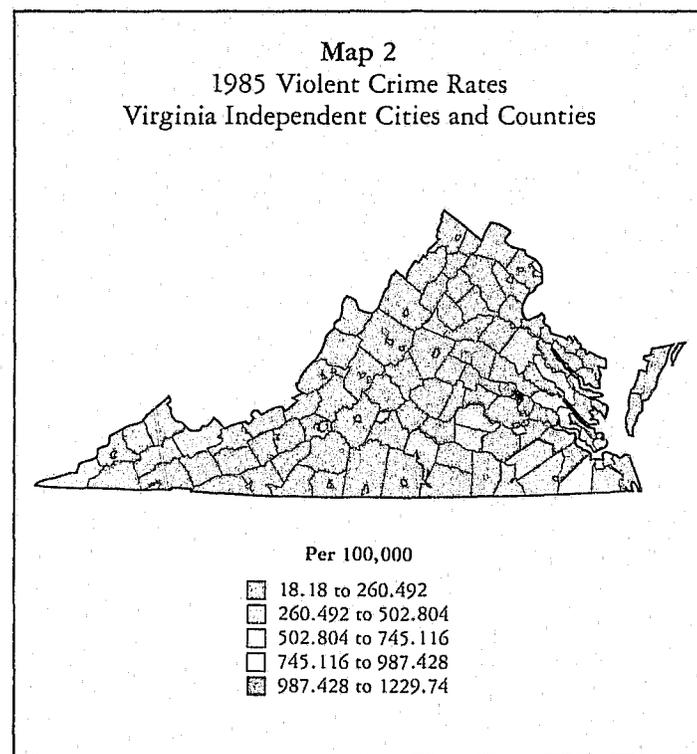
How did major crime rates vary across Virginia in 1985?



- Most of the state's counties and cities enjoyed low to moderate major crime rates, with high major crime rates occurring mainly in the large metropolitan areas.
- The range of major crime rates was very wide, with the lowest at 12% of the statewide average rate of 2641.52 and the highest at 320%.

Note: The term "major crimes" includes murder/nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft.

How did violent crime rates vary across Virginia in 1985?

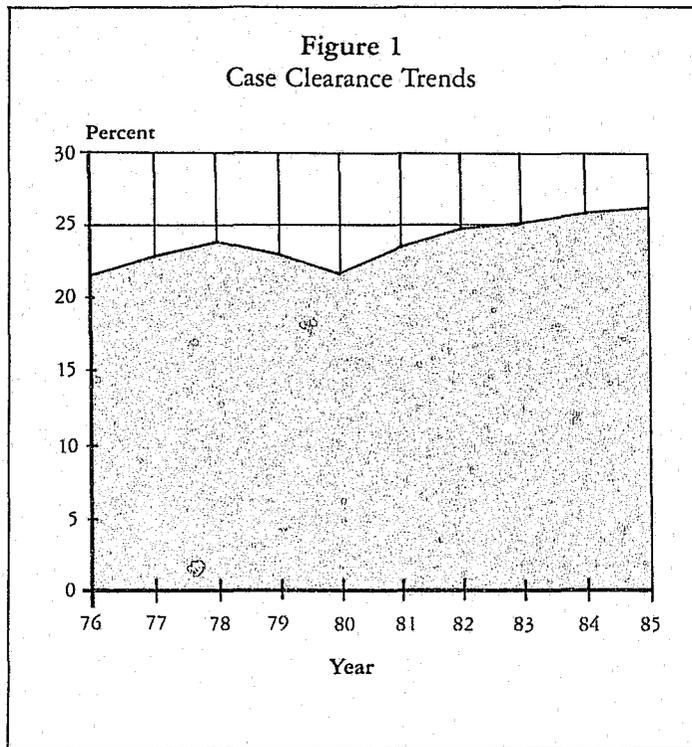


- Violent crime was rare throughout most of the state, even in some urban areas where the major crime rate was above average or high.
- The violent crime rates had an even greater range than the overall major crime rates, with the lowest at 9% of the statewide average of 212.94 and the highest at 578%.

Note: The term "violent crimes" includes murder/nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

INCURRED
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ACQUISITIONS

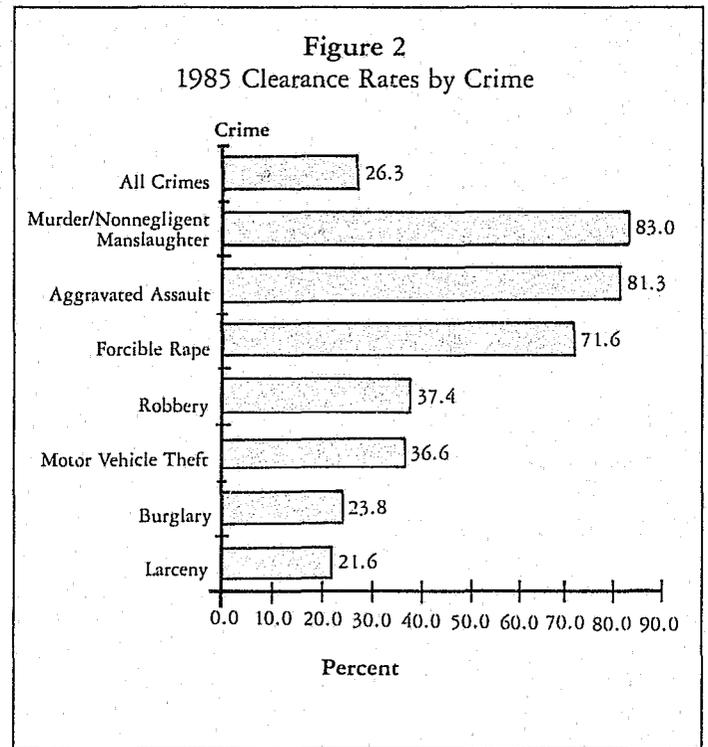
How many reported crimes were solved?



- Over the last ten years the percentage of cleared cases has generally increased.
- The statewide average of one-fourth of all cases cleared is higher than the national average of about one-fifth of all cases cleared.¹

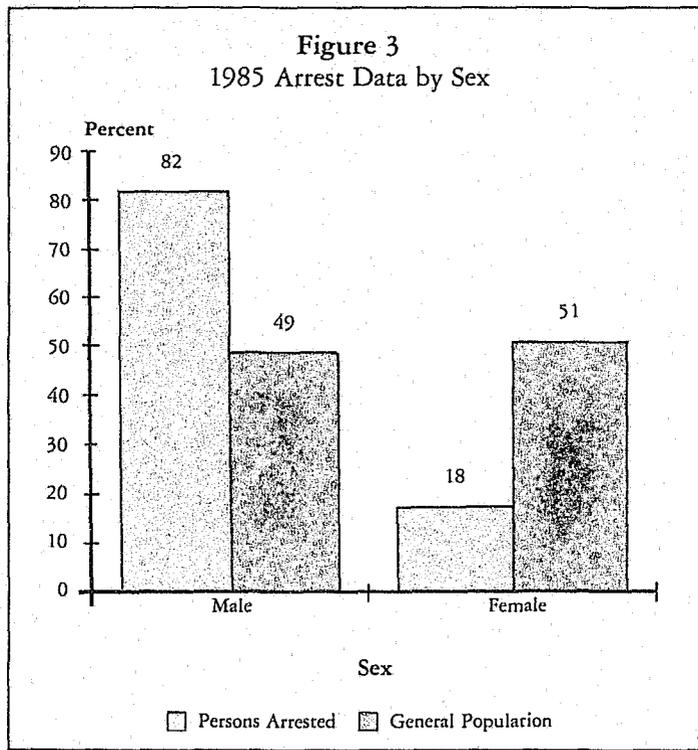
Note: The term "percent cleared" refers to the percentage of reported crimes in which either an arrest was made or another resolution was reached.

Has the clearance rate been the same for all crimes?

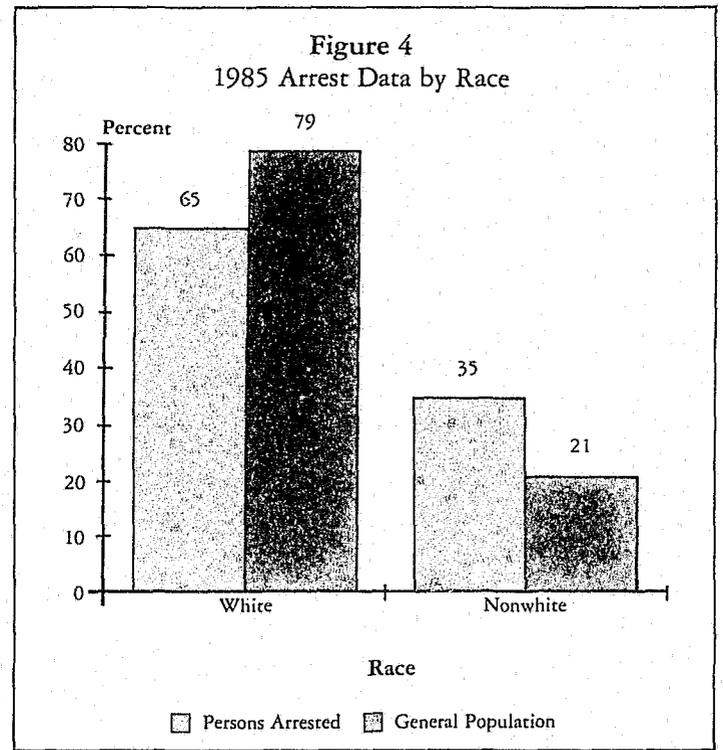


- Murder/nonnegligent manslaughter, aggravated assault, and forcible rape had substantially higher clearance rates than other crimes, probably because of greater victim/perpetrator contact, witness availability, and intensive investigations for these crimes than for others.

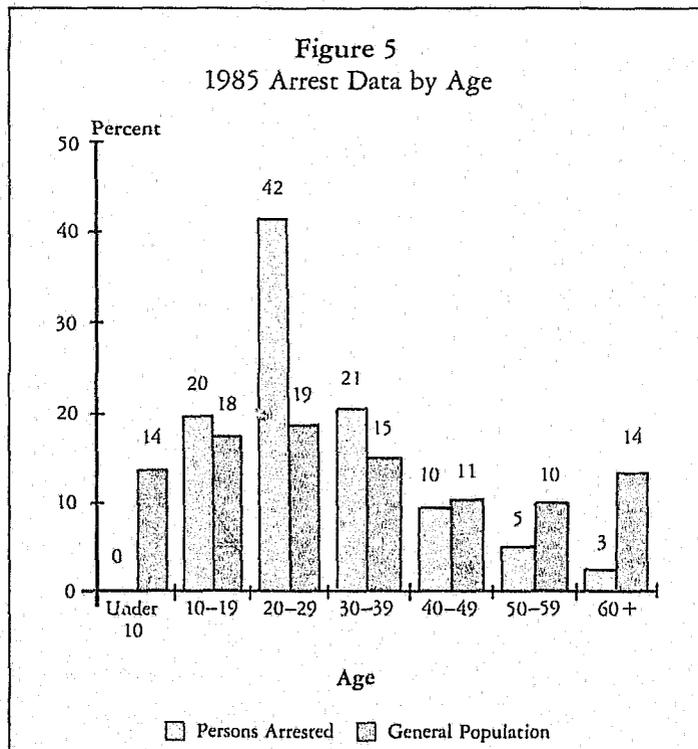
What were the demographic characteristics of those arrested and how did they compare to the general population?



- Males constituted the vast majority of those arrested in 1985.
- The proportion of males among those arrested was nearly twice the percentage of males in Virginia's general population.

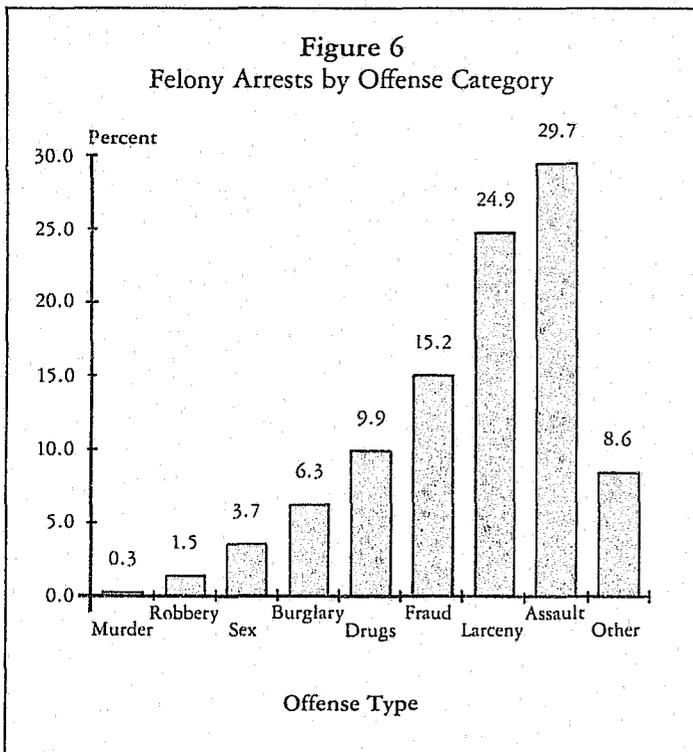


- Nearly two-thirds of those arrested were whites.
- Although only a third of those arrested were nonwhite, this percentage was substantially more than the nonwhite proportion of Virginia's general population.



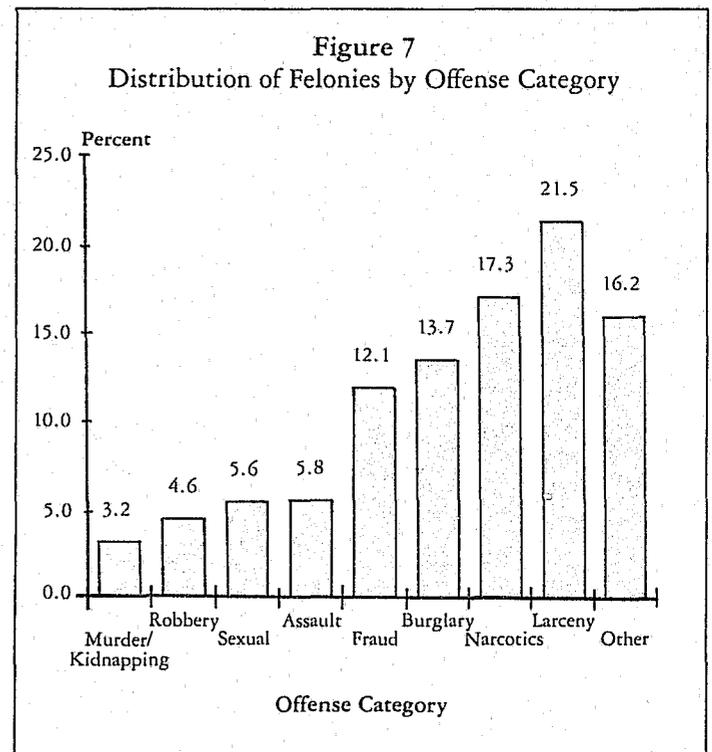
- Arrests in the 10 to 39 age group were higher than their proportion in Virginia's general population, and arrests in the 40 and over age group were lower.
- A majority of those arrested were under 39 years or age.
- The 20 to 29 age group accounted for the largest percentage of arrests, more than double that for the next largest age group.

What were most felony arrests for?



- Arrests for assault and larceny constituted most of the felonies in 1985.
- Arrests for murder, robbery, and sexual offenses made up the smallest share of all arrests.
- The overall frequency of felony arrests depended upon a number of factors, such as the frequency of reported crimes in each offense category, the availability of evidence or witnesses, and the amount of time between the crime's occurrence and its report to the police.

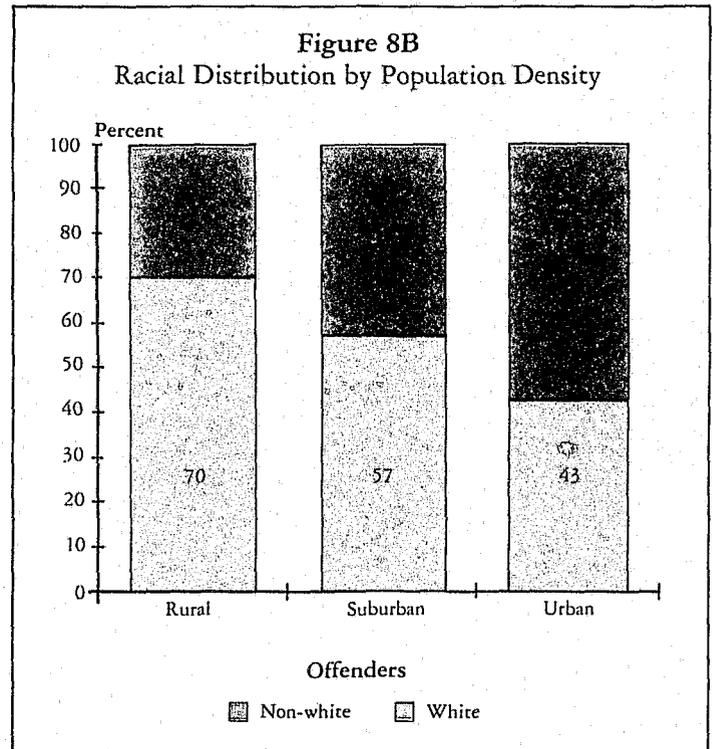
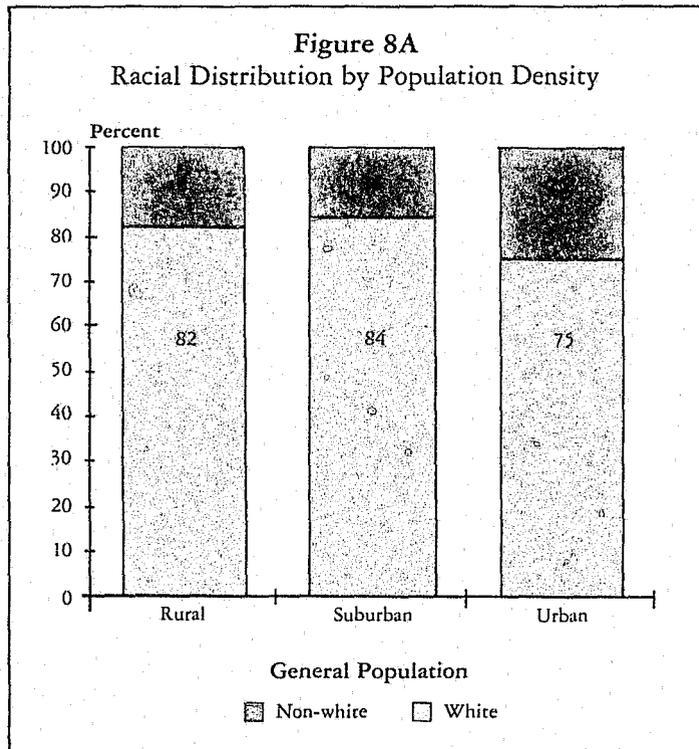
Which offenses were most felony convictions for?



- Convictions for larceny and narcotics constituted the largest number of felonies; burglary and fraud also accounted for a significant proportion.

Note: The arrests in Figure 6 include both misdemeanors and felonies.

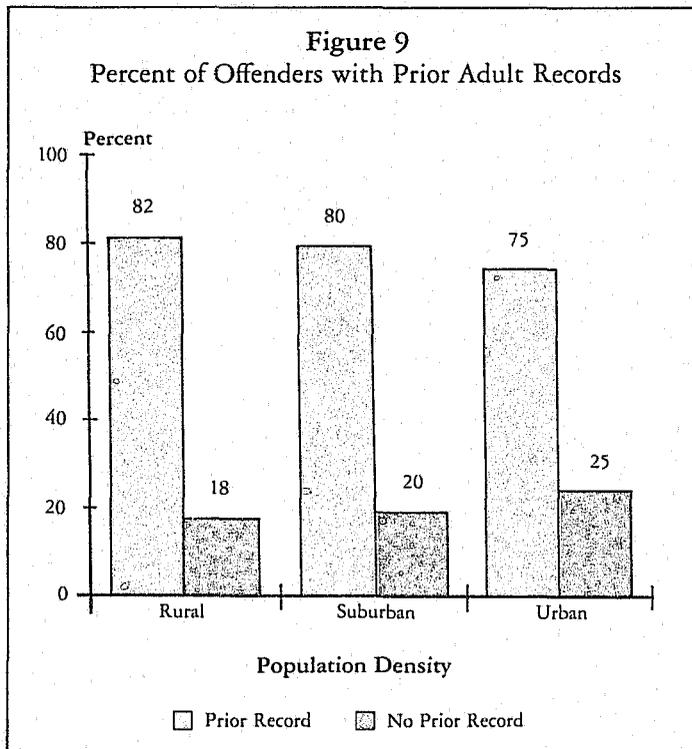
Was the racial distribution of convicted felons similar to that for the general population?



- The proportion of white to nonwhite convicted felons varied dramatically depending upon the population density of the area in question. In general, the percentage of white felons appeared to be inversely related to population density.
- Despite the variation in the white/nonwhite distribution at different population densities, the percentage of nonwhite convicted felons was consistently two to three times greater than their percentage in the general population.

Note: For this report, an urban area was defined as having at least 500 people per square mile and a total population of at least 10,000; a suburban area as having 100-500 people per square mile and a total population of 20,000-100,000; and a rural area as having less than 100 people per square mile and a total population of less than 20,000.

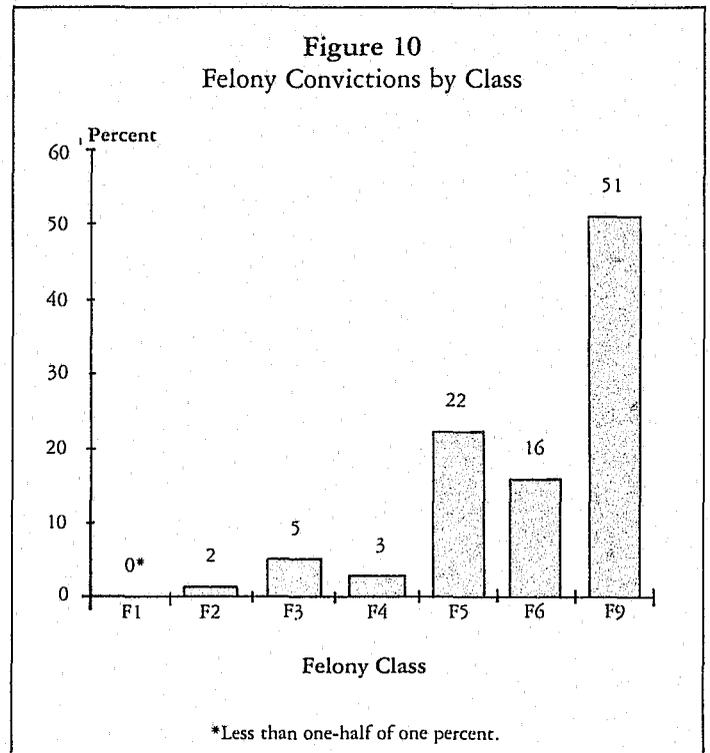
Was a convicted felon likely to have a prior record?



Most felons did have prior records at the time of conviction.

- In urban areas, three-fourths (75%) of all convicted felons had prior records.
- In suburban and rural areas, slightly more than three-fourths (80% and 82% respectively) of all convicted felons had prior records.

What sentence did most felons receive?

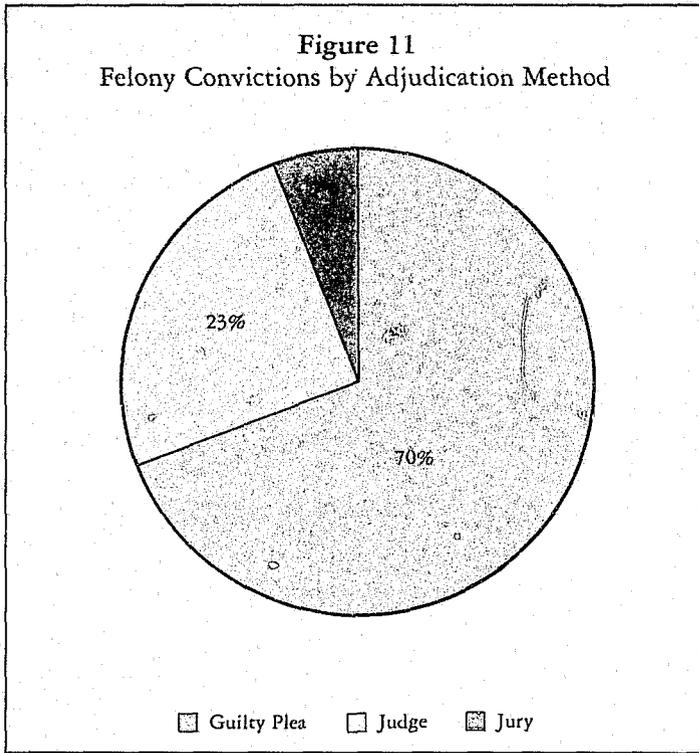


- Most felons were sentenced for unclassified felonies (F9), which carry a very wide range of authorized penalties.
- Of those offenders sentenced for classified felonies, the largest number were convicted of Class 5 or Class 6 felonies.

Note: The authorized punishments for the six felony classes are as follows:

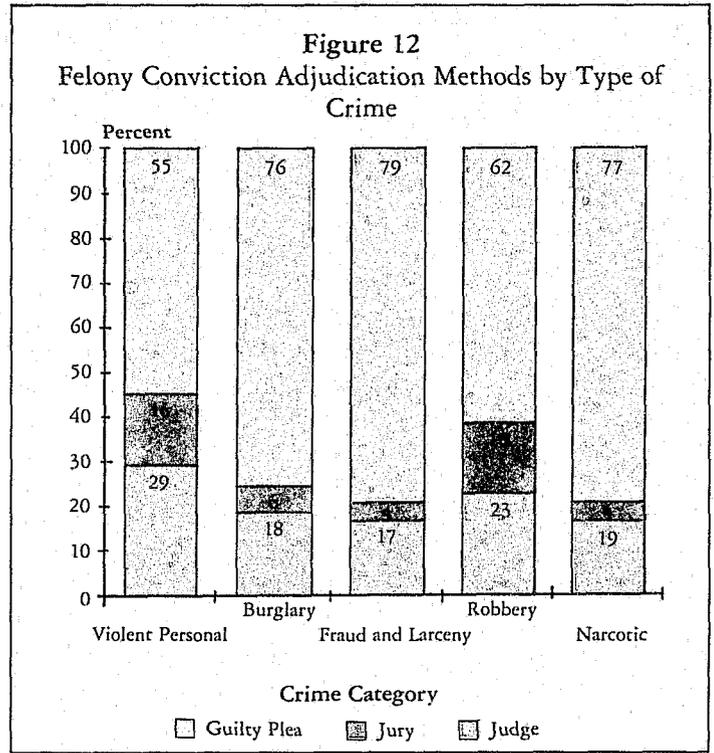
- Class 1—death or life imprisonment*
- Class 2—20 years to life imprisonment*
- Class 3—5 to 20 years imprisonment*
- Class 4—2 to 5 years imprisonment*
- Class 5—1 to 10 years imprisonment or a maximum of 12 months jail confinement and/or a \$1,000 fine*
- Class 6—1 to 5 years imprisonment or a maximum of 12 months jail confinement and/or a \$1,000 fine.*

By what means of adjudication were most felons sentenced?



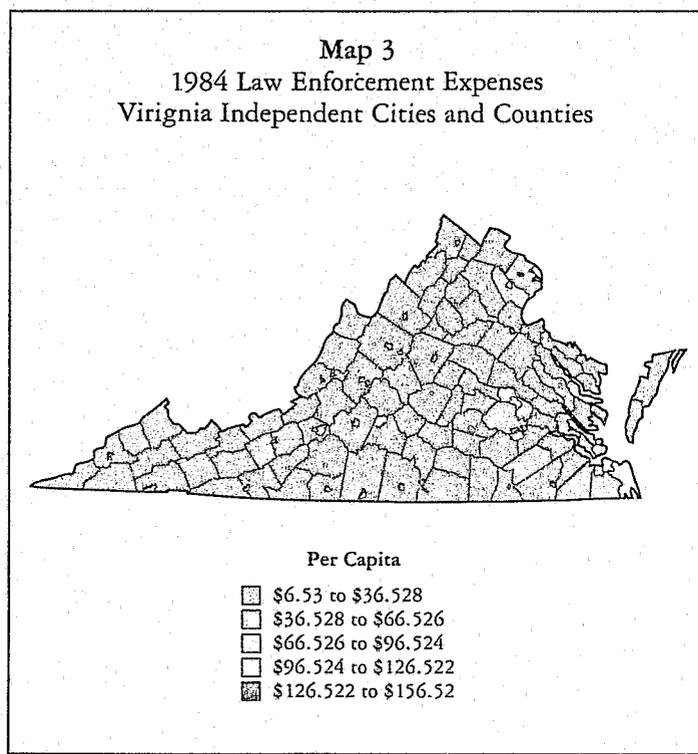
- A large majority of felons pled guilty rather than refer their cases to a judge or jury trial for adjudication.

Were felony guilty pleas a result of the type of offense charged?



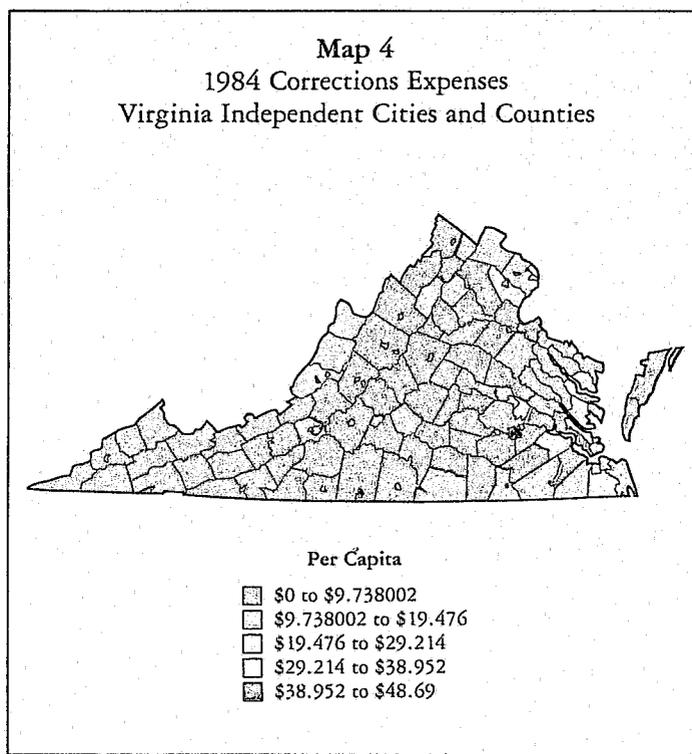
- Although substantially higher proportions of jury trials occurred for violent personal crimes and robberies than for other offenses, guilty pleas were still the most frequent method of adjudication for all crime categories.

How did expenditures for law enforcement vary across Virginia?



- Large urban areas spent more per capita for law enforcement than suburban and rural areas.
- The range of per capita expenditures was very wide. Factors such as the relative cost of living in some areas may explain part of this variance.

How did expenditures for corrections vary across Virginia?



- Unlike those for law enforcement, per capita expenditures for corrections did not generally correspond to population size or crime rates.
- Local variations in corrections expenditures arise from differences in the maintenance costs of city jail farms, the construction of new correctional facilities, the lack of local facilities in some areas, the operation of some facilities at under capacity, or other reasons unrelated to population size or crime rates.

Data Sources and Methodology

Maps 1 and 2—The number of crimes reported for each Virginia county and independent city in 1985 was obtained from the most recent *Crime in Virginia* report issued by the Department of State Police. Because this report focuses on Virginia's independent cities and counties as its unit of analysis, crime data reported by institutions like colleges and by agencies like port authorities have been added to the figures for the jurisdictions in which the institutions and agencies are located.

The major limitation of these data is that they include only crimes reported to or by law enforcement agencies. Consequently, these figures may understate the actual number of crimes committed in a community. Some studies have indicated that nearly two-thirds of all crimes committed are not reported to police. However, these statistics should still be adequate for comparison purposes, since no substantial difference should exist in the degree of underreporting across communities.

The 1985 population figures were taken from *Estimates of the Population of Virginia Counties and Cities*, published by the Tayloe Murphy Institute in June 1986. Even though these are only provisional estimates of the population, they were used in our calculations because they provide a more accurate reflection of the actual population levels at this time than do other available population figures.

Using the formula explained earlier in this report, we calculated the total major crime rates and the violent crime rates for all of Virginia's 95 counties and 41 independent cities. The counties and independent cities were placed in rank order by their crime rates. Next, the counties and cities were divided into five groups, based on their crime rates. This division was constructed by first finding the range between the lowest and highest crime rates. The result was then divided by five to determine the breakpoints for each group. Finally, the counties and cities were separated into the five groups.

Figures 1 through 6—The arrest data were also taken from the State Police's *Crime in Virginia* reports. The data on the general population were obtained from the 1980 U.S. Census reports.

Figures 7 through 12—The convicted felon data were obtained from the Presentencing Investigations (PSI) data file maintained by the Virginia Department of Corrections. This file contains information collected from Feb. 1, 1985 to June 1986 and represents about 95% of all felony convictions during this period.

Maps 3 and 4—The per capita expenditure data are from the Auditor of Public Accounts' *Comparative Report of Local Government Revenues and Expenditures: Year Ended June 30, 1984*. The financial items included in the expenditure categories are defined in the *Uniform Financial Reporting Manual for Virginia Counties and Municipalities*.

Note

"Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice," Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Dept. of Justice, NCJ-87068, Oct. 1983, pages 52-53.

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