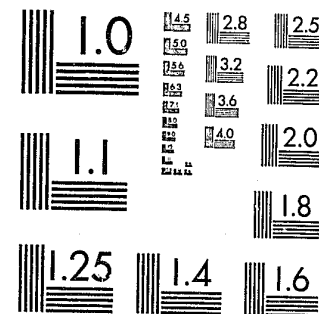


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All phases of preventive and correctional activities in delinquency and crime come within the fields of interest of FEDERAL PROBATION. The Quarterly wishes to share with its readers all constructively worthwhile points of view and welcomes the contributions of those engaged in the study of juvenile and adult offenders. Federal, state, and local organizations, institutions, and agencies—both public and private—are invited to submit any significant experience and findings related to the prevention and control of delinquency and crime.

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A JOURNAL OF CORRECTIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

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This Issue in Brief

Can Corrections Be Rehabilitated?—During the last 30 years much progress has been made toward dissolving the barriers of hostility that generated violence and distrust between correctional staffs and prisoners. Because of forthcoming budgetary stringencies, rapidly increasing populations, and a vast increase in the level and frequency of violence, much of that progress is in danger of reversal. Author John Conrad feels it is urgently necessary to reduce prison intake by making maximum use of community-based corrections. He proposes a new model of sanctions that will be more severe than the present community corrections without resort to incarceration.

"It Only Gets Worse When It's Better."—This article by W. Clifford of the Australian Institute of Criminology, and the following article by Professor López-Rey of Cambridge, England, present two differing perspectives on world corrections. Mr. Clifford states that in the past 10 years regimes have changed or been overthrown, ideologies have been transformed, but corrections throughout the world has not changed all that much. Some of the older and outdated systems are yet 10 years more behind the times. In fact, he adds, corrections in its old form has a remarkable facility for surviving all kinds of revolutions and looking much the same afterwards.

Crime, Criminal Justice, and Criminology: An Inventory.—This article by Professor Manuel López-Rey attempts to demonstrate that crime is not an ensemble of behavioral problems but a sociopolitical phenomenon, that criminology should overcome excessive professional aims, and that criminal justice is increasingly unable everywhere to cope with the problem of crime, even within the limits of common crime.

Adopting National Standards for Correctional Reform.—The concept of correctional accreditation, according to Dale Sechrest and Ernest Reimer, is built on the foundation of humanitarian

reform of prison conditions through the application of standards of performance. A Commission on Accreditation for Corrections was formed in 1974. The Commission, using trained professionals, has accredited over 250 correctional agencies including 80 prisons, having a total involvement of over 500 correctional facilities and programs of all types.

Volunteers in Criminal Justice: How Effective?—The acceptance or rejection of the use of volunteers in justice settings has been based primarily on personal belief rather than on sound empirical evidence, assert authors Sigler and

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Leenhouts. While many volunteer programs have been evaluated, the results are questionable because of methodological errors. Two methodologically correct professional evaluations have indicated that volunteers are successful in working with justice system clients.

Volunteers in Corrections: Do They Make a Meaningful Contribution?—This article by Peter C. Kratoski examines the roles of volunteers in corrections in the past, the advantages and problems associated with using volunteers in a correctional setting, correctional agency administrators' and staff members' attitudes toward them, and the motivations and satisfactions of the volunteers. The findings of a study of the characteristics and motivations of a national sample of volunteers in probation are reported.

A Delphi Assessment of the Effects of a Declining Economy on Crime and the Criminal Justice System.—The research discussed in Professor Kevin Wright's article utilized the Delphi method of forecasting in order to obtain an initial and expedient answer to the question of what effect economic adversity will have on the incidence of crime and on the criminal justice system. Certain types of crime are expected to increase; however, an uncontrolled outbreak of crime is not predicted. Specific economic factors are identified as the primary producers of fluctuations in the incidence of crime. Some elements of the criminal justice system are expected to be burdened by economic decline.

Presumptive Parole Dates: The Federal Approach.—The procedure adopted by the United States Parole Commission to avoid unnecessary indeterminacy in making its determinations relative to prison confinement, while at the same time allowing for consideration of significant

changes in circumstances, is the focus of this article by Drs. Barbara Stone-Meierhoefer and Peter Hoffman. The presumptive parole date procedure implemented by the Parole Commission is described, and its relationship to the Commission's system of explicit guidelines for parole decision-making is discussed.

Court—Prosecutor—Probation Officer: When Is Discretion Disparity in the Criminal Justice System?—There is not yet in America any clear, consistent, rational policy regarding whether to pursue a correctional philosophy of rehabilitation or one of retribution. Former emphasis on treatment is being replaced by emphasis on punishment and uniformity of sentence. Supervising Probation Officer Robert L. Thomas believes traditional definitions of discretion and disparity are being prostituted to cover up the belated realization that after-the-fact solutions to crime do not work. What is really needed, he insists, is more realistic alternatives to traditional dispositions and a clearer understanding of who should or should not go to prison.

Rekindling the Flame.—The syndrome of burnout is a symptom of the crisis presently affecting the social service professions, asserts James O. Smith of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole. As such, the phenomenon presents both the danger of poorer quality services and, paradoxically, the opportunity for enhancement of services. Using as a general framework Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, this article maintains that through the medium of a comprehensive, in-service training program an organization can positively affect the "esteem needs" of its staff. The outcome of this relationship, as it is suggested, is higher quality service with less staff burnout.

All the articles appearing in this magazine are regarded as appropriate expressions of ideas worthy of thought but their publication is not to be taken as an endorsement by the editors or the Federal probation office of the views set forth. The editors may or may not agree with the articles appearing in the magazine, but believe them in any case to be deserving of consideration.

A Delphi Assessment of the Effects of a Declining Economy on Crime and the Criminal Justice System

BY KEVIN N. WRIGHT, PH. D.

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FEW AMERICANS would claim that the economic situation is not a major concern. In recent years, the public has been lambasted by double digit inflation, a fact of life that steadily eats away at the individual's or family's buying power. In fact, a recent study conducted by Tax Foundation, Inc., a Washington-based research group, indicated that despite the fact that American workers earn twice as much today as in 1970, their real income—adjusted for inflation and taxes—has decreased by 5 percent.¹ Furthermore, there is no sign on the horizon of a quick resolution to the inflation problem. We can expect some fluctuations in the rate during upcoming years, but any hope of the end of inflation would undoubtedly be false hope.

The effects of inflation alone are serious enough; however, the economic woes of the Nation are not limited to inflation. A second nagging, and possibly more serious, problem is that of stagnation—failure of the economy to grow. The American economy is known to fluctuate—periods of upswing, i.e., growth, are followed by periods of downturn, stagnation and recession; however, general and widespread pessimism seems to have set in concerning the status of the economic situation. Richard Levine, a writer for *The Wall Street Journal*, observed that "the once mighty U.S. economy, following years of neglect and overuse, is aging and tired."² Felix Kaufman has been even more specific in his description of the future status of the economy:

The 1980s will arrive in the United States accompanied by such burdensome economic baggage as rapid price increases and escalating interest rates, slow growth and slackening innovation, capital shortages, and a further erosion of already low productivity. These conditions will be exacerbated by

severe labor shortages in certain areas that will push inflation upward while holding growth down.³

The direct effects of stagnation are fairly clear: increasing unemployment and inflation. The solution to the problem most probably lies in significant capital investment for the purpose of reindustrialization.⁴

For most Americans, the economic situation is having and will continue to have a significant impact on their lives. We have been told that we are going to have to tighten our belts, earn less, buy less, and stay a little colder in the winter and warmer in the summer. Those, however, are the direct effects of economic adversity. What about the secondary effects? Will the number of people receiving public assistance increase? Will the number of suicides increase? Will intensified stress brought on by economic adversity influence the incidence of mental illness and heart disease? Will economic decline produce an actual increase in crime? It is the last question which is of interest in this article.

Concern about the possible effects economic adversity might have on the problem of crime raises a number of interrelated issues. The first, and most obvious question which comes to mind is whether the incidence of crime will increase during an economic decline. If there is a relationship between economic factors and crime, then is it a linear relationship, is there a threshold effect, and is there a lag period before crime rates will respond to economic change? It would also seem to be important to consider whether certain types of crime—property versus personal, for example—will be more likely to be affected by economic decline. Furthermore, an additional concern is whether the criminal justice system could respond to any change brought on by an economic downturn.

The Research Problem

The basic question to be addressed in this article involves the effects which future economic adver-

sity will have on the problem of crime. Obviously, the situation in which we are interested in examining lies in the future. This fact clearly precludes the direct study of the problem. We cannot examine a phenomenon which has not occurred; however, we can infer or predict what might happen based on the knowledge which we presently have concerning the situation. This activity is known as forecasting and has been carried out by utilizing various techniques.

Several researchers interested in the effects which the economy might have on crime in the future have turned to one of the most obvious, strongest, and most widely used methods to study this sort of problem. The technique known as predictive forecasting utilizes information concerning the relationship of the two factors in the past to predict what will happen in the future. In other words, the strength and nature of the relationship between economic factors and crime is examined and the observed covariance is used to predict what might happen in the future. In a most extensive review of this research, Long and Witte found "only weak support for simple economic models of crime which see high unemployment, low incomes, and high returns to illegal activity as a major factor is causing crime."⁵ The literature suggested that the production function between the two variables was much more complex in that the type of crime and type of individual are important in understanding the relationship.

There are two basic but extremely important problems with this form of research and forecasting. The first problem involves the nature of the data which has been used to examine the relationship between the factors in the past. Aggregate data which has been used in some studies is somewhat suspect in that its accuracy is questionable. Whether FBI crime statistics accurately indicate levels of criminal behavior has been an unresolved topic of controversy for many years. Beyond the question of accuracy is a question of meaning. What aggregate data actually measures is often fuzzy. For example, do FBI crime rates indicate criminal activity, enforcement activity or some combination of both? Aggregate data can also be faulted for its lack of sensitivity to change. Individual data concerning criminality and economic status which has been used in selected studies has also been criticized. The results from particular studies may lack generalizability to the general population. Furthermore, most studies

which utilize individual data tend to be terribly specific and are consequently somewhat limited in what they can infer.

The second problem with predictive forecasting lies in a basic assumption of the technique. That assumption is that the trends established and observed in the past will continue into the future. In other words, if as unemployment has increased in the past, a precipitant and corresponding increase in crime has occurred, then we should expect the same in the future. It seems plausible, and certainly possible, that the economic future which we face might be unique enough or severe enough, that new, and unanticipated, effects on crime might precipitate. Furthermore, there may be a threshold effect in the relationship between economic factors and crime such that the economic situation must be extremely bad before a significant change in criminality will be produced.

These faults with predictive forecasting seem to indicate the need for exploring other forecasting techniques. In moving away from forecasting techniques which utilize predictive modeling, one must turn to techniques which tend to be less objective and more subjective. Two of the most widely used techniques of this sort are the development of scenarios and the analysis of the predictions of experts. However, simply because these techniques are more subjective certainly does not discredit the methods. Humans are wonderful processors of information and are capable of considering factors which are difficult to build into a predictive model. A forecast of a predictive model is only as good as the model; a scenario or a forecast of experts is only as good as the ability of the participants to analyze and predict based on their knowledge of the situation.

Method

As stated above the research problem of this study concerns the effects which the future economic situation will have on the problem of crime. It was the author's hypothesis that the economy will substantially decline during the next decade and that factor may produce changes in the incidence of criminality as well as affect the ability of the criminal justice system to respond to those changes. In order to study this problem, the author selected a subjective forecasting technique which analyzes expert opinions and is known as the Delphi approach. The technique has been succinctly described as follows:

The Delphi method, developed during the late 1940s by the Rand Corporation, attempts to overcome these difficulties (encountered in systematically assessing expert opinions) by

¹As reported by Louis Cook, "Real Income Deadline in 10 Years," Associated Press story in *The Saturday Press*, Binghamton, N.Y. (October 18, 1980), p. 1.

²Richard Levine, "The Outlook: Review of Current Trends in Business and Finance," *Wall Street Journal* (June 25, 1979), p. 1.

³Felix Kaufman, "The Jobs that Nobody Wants: Economic Challenges of the 1980s," *The Futurist* (August 1979), pp. 269-74.

⁴For a discussion of this idea, see Amitai Etzioni, "Work in the American Future: Reindustrialization or Quality of Life," in Clark Kerr and Jerome M. Rosow (eds.), *Work in America*. New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1978, pp. 27-34.

⁵Sharon K. Long and Ann D. Witte, "Current Economic Trends: Implications for Crime and Criminal Justice," in Kevin N. Wright (ed.), *Crime and Criminal Justice in a Declining Economy*. Cambridge: Oelgeschlager, Gunn, and Hain, Publishers, 1981.

forcing experts involved in the forecasting exercise to voice their opinions anonymously and through an intermediary. The intermediary acts as a control center in analyzing responses to each round of opinion gathering and in feeding back opinions to participants in subsequent rounds. Thus, the Delphi technique is a systematic procedure for soliciting and organizing "expert" forecasts about the future through the use of anonymous, iterative responses to a series of questionnaires, and controlled feedback of group opinions. By following such a procedure, it is hoped that the responses will converge on a consensus forecast that turns out to be a good estimation of the true outcome.⁶

The first step in the implementation of the Delphi assessment of the project consisted of the selection of a panel of experts.⁷ A pool of potential participants was generated by identifying a group of people (20 in number) who fell into at least one of the following categories: (1) individuals who are by profession economists, and who have conducted analyses of crime trends; (2) individuals whose profession is criminal justice and who have conducted analyses of crime trends; or (3) individuals who are criminologists and who have used economic variables in their explanation of criminality. After the pool of potential participants was identified, they were contacted by letter in order to ascertain whether they were willing to participate. The nature of the project as well as the technique was carefully explained in the letter and a card to indicate one's willingness and unwillingness to participate was provided for their return. A final panel of eight experts was obtained, one of which subsequently dropped out, leaving a final panel of seven individuals.⁸

The medium used to obtain the experts' opinions was a mailed questionnaire. The instrument was designed to seek information about six basic questions:

- (1) whether or not economic fluctuations will affect the crime rate;
- (2) whether the crime rate will increase or decrease during economic downturn;
- (3) what economic conditions or factors will influence the crime rate;

⁶William G. Sullivan and Wayne Claycombe, *Fundamentals of Forecasting*. Reston, Virginia: Reston Publishing Co., 1977, p. 140.

⁷Large n-sizes similar to those used in empirical research are not required in a Delphi assessment. The goal is not to represent the opinions of some larger group but is to obtain the best conjecture based on the opinions of experts.

⁸All seven experts had conducted research on and written about the relationship of crime and economic factors. Five of the panel were academics who represented a broad cross section of the social science disciplines. One panel member whose background was criminology taught in a sociology department, a second was trained as a political economist and was associated with a community development and criminal justice program, another also taught in a criminal justice program and had economic training. The remaining two academics taught in criminal justice departments; one's specialty was penology; the other's law enforcement. The remaining two panel members were economists who had recently conducted research concerned with crime causation and the economy. One was associated with a major criminal justice foundation, the other with a national criminal justice public interest organization.

⁹H. Sackman, *Delphi Assessment: Expert Opinion, Forecasting and Group Process*. Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, R-128-3-PR, 1974.

¹⁰Sullivan and Claycombe, op. cit., p. 143.

¹¹Ibid.

- (4) at what threshold point will economic changes begin to influence the incidence of crime;
- (5) the incidence of what specific crimes might be influenced during an economic downturn;
- (6) what reaction of social and crime control institutions to a changing rate of crime in a declining economy might be expected.

Once the questionnaire was mailed to the participants and returned, the next stage of the Delphi procedure involved a second iteration of questioning. The researcher, acting as the intermediary analyzed the responses to the first questionnaire. The mean and standard deviation or frequency distributions were computed for each item of the questionnaire. These results were then incorporated into a second instrument which was presented to the experts. The participants were then asked to reconsider their responses from the first round in relation to the statistics which were provided. The members of the panel were thus given an opportunity to revise their responses according to the group estimate. If any participants' response to any question deviated appreciably from the group norm, then they were asked to provide an explanation of their position. A third iteration was planned; however, it became unnecessary as the responses began to converge after the second round of questioning.

It should be noted that utility of the Delphi method as a forecasting technique is a matter of controversy. Both its methodology and its application have been criticized.⁹ It is important, however, to realize that the method is intended to be used "as a vehicle to help discover and explore vague and unknown future issues that would be otherwise difficult to address."¹⁰ If the results of the Delphi are interpreted and used in context of its purpose, then its utility seems to be justified. Sullivan and Claycombe have succinctly summarized its use noting that it "should be used with the realization that the results would be more in the nature of a structured brainstorming session as opposed to a highly scientific exercise in prediction."¹¹ Since there is a relative dearth of information about the relationship between economic fluctuation and changes in the incidence of crime, and since, from a policy standpoint there is an urgent need for information concerning that relationship, the use of the Delphi method for the task at hand seems quite appropriate.

Results

The members of the expert panel were first asked a series of questions about the extent and nature of

economic adversity which they expected during the 1980s. This information serves as a basis for subsequent considerations of relationship between economic decline and crime. When asked if they thought the economy would significantly improve, slightly improve, remain unchanged, slightly worsen or significantly worsen, the opinion was consistently pessimistic. None of the respondents indicated they expected the economic situation to improve. Three experts thought that the economy would slightly worsen, and three thought it would significantly worsen. The one individual who predicted that the economy would remain unchanged did so because he expected that the economy would fluctuate in such a way that the net result would be little change.

When asked about specific forms of adversity, the experts were once again fairly consistent in their expectations. All of the panel thought that significant unemployment (greater than 8%), a significant loss of individual buying power, and low economic growth were quite likely. The panel as a whole, with one exception, thought that continued high inflation (double digit) and recession were also probable during the 1980s. The panel as a group, however, did not expect a depression. Having stated that they felt that the economy would worsen, the panel then indicated that unemployment, loss of buying power, and inflation would be the primary contributors to fluctuation in the incidence of crime. Drops in stock prices, low economic growth, and depression were considered to be much less important, and recession somewhat less important.

Based on their predictions of economic adversity, the panel of experts were asked whether or not they expected various categories of crime to increase as a result of that adversity. The panel foresaw little increase as a result in the personal crimes of murder, average of a 3 percent gain, and assault, average of a 4 percent gain, as well as drug offenses, with an average predicted gain of 6 percent. Significant increases in the incidence of tax evasion and violations of OSHA standards, offenses generally considered to be crimes of the middle and upper classes, were predicted. The panel's estimates of the percentage increase of tax evasion ranged from 15 to 50 percent with an average of 30 percent, and their estimates of OSHA violations ranged from 25 to 30 percent increases with an average of 28 percent. Moderately high increases in burglary, robbery, petty larceny, arson, forgery, embezzlement and employee theft, and price fixing were also expected.

The respondents were next asked a series of questions concerning (1) what percentage of

unemployment would be necessary, (2) what length of time would double digit inflation have to be experienced, (3) what percentage drop in individual buying power would be necessary, and (4) what length of time would a no growth economy have to be experienced before a 10 percent rise in various categories of crime would occur. In the case of person crimes including murder and assault, the majority of the panel members indicated that they did not believe any of the four economic factors would have any appreciable effect no matter how bad they became. When a panel member did indicate that the economic factor would influence person crime, it was only after a lengthy period of double digit inflation or no growth economy or after the occurrence of a high percentage of unemployment or high percentage drop in individual buying power. The panel predicted that approximately a 10 percent drop in unemployment, a year of double digit inflation, a 15 percent drop in individual buying power, or almost 2 years of no growth in the economy would produce a 10 percent rise in property crime such as burglary, robbery, and so forth. Lengthy periods, from 1½ to 2 years, of double digit inflation or no growth in the economy were predicted to be necessary to produce at least a 10 percent gain in either white collar or corporate crime. A decrease of approximately 15 percent in individual buying power was also expected to create a 10 percent increase in white collar and corporate crime.

The experts, with one exception, did not expect a 10 percent rise in person crimes if a general recession occurred during the 1980s. They did expect, however, that property theft, white collar crime, and corporate crime would increase by at least 10 percent under the conditions of recession. These predictions for changes were approximately the same if a depression were to occur during the 1980s; however, the proportion believing person crimes would go up did increase.

Three factors were clearly identified by the experts as being important in producing fluctuations in the incidence of crime during an economic decline. They were relative deprivation, demands for high profits, and the limits placed on alternative options. Additionally, it was indicated that four factors—the breakdown of norms and decay of values, the loss of deterrent effectiveness, reduced mobility and greed—would not play a role in the production of fluctuation in the incidence of crime. There were mixed opinions about a number of other factors.

The expected lag-time between the onset of economic adversity and the effect on the incidence of crime varied according to category of crime. The

experts thought it would take almost 2 years before adversity would have any effect on person crimes but would take only 10 months before it affected property theft. A period of 1 year was expected to lapse before the effects of economic decline began to take effect on white collar and corporate crime.

The opinions of the experts were split on whether or not the ability of the criminal justice system to provide crime control services would be diminished during the 1980s due to a lack of fiscal resources. Four respondents thought services would be diminished; three did not. Those who did not expect a reduction based their conclusion on the belief that the system does not have much effect on crime control presently; thus, there is little that can be affected.

The experts who believed that the ability of the system would be diminished thought that actual budget cuts due to Proposition 13-type action and the effect of inflation would be responsible for reduction in fiscal resources. It was predicted that a moderate to significant reduction in resources would hit the public defenders, probation, and parole officers. The attitudes toward the effects of adversity on the police and agencies were mixed. In considering the effects of economic adversity on the processing of criminal offenders, the panel as a whole generally predicted a decrease in the use of probation and an increase in the use of prison. Other expectations were for the most part mixed.

Conclusions

Expectations concerning the economy and its effects on crime and criminal justice as discussed in the preceding sections can be summarized by six points:

(1) The economic situation should worsen during the 1980s with significant unemployment, losses in individual buying power, low economic growth, high inflation and recession. Severe economic adversity such as depression is unlikely.

(2) Crimes against persons should not significantly increase since this category of of-

fense is not influenced to any extent by economic fluctuations.

(3) Extremely high increases in white collar and corporate crimes such as tax evasion and violations of OSHA regulations should be expected during the 1980s.

(4) Moderately high increases in various property crimes including burglary, robbery, petty larceny, arson, forgery, embezzlement and employee theft, and price fixing should be expected in the 1980s.

(5) Unemployment, the loss of buying power, and inflation will be the primary direct causes of the increases. Important factors in the production of criminality will include relative deprivation, demands for high profits, and limited alternatives.

(6) The criminal justice system may be presently quite limited in its ability to affect crime control; however, economic adversity may further reduce service delivery. The public defenders, probation, and parole offices are most likely to bear the brunt of any significant resource cuts.

The conjecture of the future as described by these six points is basically a conservative one. The economic situation will worsen, but the economy will not collapse. Specific categories of crime will increase but others will not. An uncontrolled outbreak of crime is certainly not foreseen. The least powerful criminal justice agencies are expected to suffer most from budgetary cutbacks.

The predictions seem to be consistent with current trends. While the economic situation is thought to be tenuous, most analysts are foreseeing decline as a result of the need for reindustrialization but no longer see depression as highly likely. Studies of the economy and crime have pointed out that increased tax evasion is quite likely during an economic decline, that property crime does seem to be related to the economy in a complex to changes in the economy. Exchange theory and research has shown that the least powerful agencies within a given network are the least likely to fair well in the competition for scarce resources.

END