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Alaska Crime Trends – 1963 to 1987

-David L. Parry

Using computerized crime reporting data provided by the FBI and additional data compiled by the Alaska State Troopers, the Justice Center recently completed an analysis of statewide trends in crimes reported to the police during the twenty-five year period from 1963 to 1987.

Since 1930, the FBI has collected monthly crime statistics from law enforcement agencies nationwide. These statistics are then compiled by the FBI and published in its annual Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) under the title *Crime in the United States*. The UCR contains statistics about crimes reported to the police, crimes cleared by arrest, persons arrested and law enforcement personnel. Much of the information included in the UCR focuses on eight offenses which form the crime index used by the FBI and other government agencies in their efforts to determine the extent of crime and in making decisions related to its control. These offenses include murder and non-

negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft and arson.

Although crime statistics published in *Crime in the United States* have been aggregated by year, size and type of community, etc., and include estimates for crimes committed in jurisdictions which fail to submit reports to the FBI, the Justice Center data tapes contain the raw data submitted monthly by each agency from 1963 to 1983. These tapes make it possible to analyze statistics for the state as a whole or for individual agencies or groups of agencies in ways that are not possible using either *Crime in the United States* or statistics published by the State of Alaska based on the UCR. Use of computerized data also facilitates efforts to identify errors and inconsistencies in the data and it allows us to trace the history of Alaska's participation in the Uniform Crime Reporting Program.

The analysis reported here represents the first effort by the Justice Center to use the computerized UCR data to improve our understanding of crime in Alaska. Summary statistics showing frequencies and rates of index crimes reported to the police during each of the twenty-five years are used both to provide an indication of long-term trends and patterns in offense behavior in the state and to demonstrate the extent to which statistics such as these may be affected by variations in the

record-keeping and data submission practices of law enforcement agencies rather than in the actual incidence of reported crime.

Figure 1 shows the total number of index crimes (excluding arson, which became an index crime in 1979 and which is still reported separately and in a somewhat different form than the other index offenses) reported to the FBI by Alaska law enforcement agencies each year. The frequencies shown for all years from 1963 through 1983 have been drawn from the UCR data tapes. However, because the Justice Center has not yet received complete computerized data for index crimes committed since 1983, the frequencies shown for 1984 through 1987 were drawn from *Crime in Alaska*, an annual report published by the Alaska Department of Public Safety. Offense frequencies drawn from this source are not entirely comparable to those contained in the data tapes, however, because the Department of Public Safety routinely continues to compile statistics after FBI deadlines for submission, resulting in somewhat higher annual frequencies than those reported to the FBI.

The bottom portion of Figure 1 shows the combined population of communities served by law enforcement agencies submitting data to the FBI each year. The number of agencies reporting each year is indicated in Table 1. (Note that the population figures, which are provided to the FBI annually by the U.S. Census Bureau, fluctuate

HIGHLIGHTS INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Redesigned National Crime Survey reflects data in new areas (p. 2).
- Review of 1984 Alaska OBTS data illustrates patterns of case attrition and charge disparity (p. 3).

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A BJS Report

New Data from National Crime Survey

Data obtained through the redesigned National Crime Survey (NCS) reveal information in three new areas: victims' perception of drug and alcohol use by violent offenders; protective actions taken by victims and bystanders; and the response of police and other criminal justice authorities to reported crimes. Since 1972 the National Crime Survey has collected national data on personal and household criminal victimization. The original survey questions remained essentially unchanged until July 1986, when BJS added and expanded questions on crime incident characteristics and outcomes.

A report released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, presents an overview of the responses given by crime victims from a nationally representative sample of households, surveyed by the NCS from July 1986 through June 1987 using the newly revised questionnaire.

Among the key findings revealed by the new questions are the following:

- Victims reported that they believed their assailants were under the influence of drugs or alcohol in about 36 per cent of violent crime incidents (rapes, robberies, and assaults) including 46 per cent of rapes. In 43 per cent of violent crimes the victims reported that they did not know whether the offender was under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Seventy three per cent of violent crime victims reported taking some self-protective measure. The most common measures were resisting or trying to capture the offender (32% of cases where at least one self-protective measure was taken), running away or hiding (26%), and persuading or appeasing the offender (26%).
- About three-fifths of the victims who took self-protective measures stated that their actions had a positive effect on the outcome of the crime. About 7 per cent of the

victims taking self-protection reported that their actions hurt the situation, and 6 per cent reported both positive and negative effects.

- When notified of a crime, the police came to see the victim in 76 per cent of violent crimes, in 71 per cent of household crimes (burglary, household theft, and motor vehicle theft), and in 54 per cent of personal thefts.
- According to the crime victims, in about 56 per cent of the violent crimes, 38 per cent of personal thefts, and 35 per cent of household crimes where the police came to see the victim, the police arrived within 10 minutes after being notified. Police arrived within an hour in 95 per cent of violent crimes, 84 per cent of personal thefts, and 85 per cent of household crimes.
- Police had later contact with victims in 37 per cent of the violent crimes

reported to the police (including 62% - of rapes), 35 percent of reported household crimes (including 58% of motor vehicle thefts), and 25 per cent of reported personal thefts.

- In those cases where the crime was reported to the police, victims were aware that an arrest was made in 25 per cent of violent crimes (including 34% of aggravated assaults and 15% of robberies), 7 per cent of household crimes, and 4 per cent of personal thefts.
- In about 1 in 9 of violent crimes reported to the police, the victim received help or advice from a victim assistance office or agency other than the police.

Additional new data, not presented here, are also now being obtained on the type of location where the crime occurred and the victim's activity at the time of the incident. Finally, new response categories have been added to several existing ques-

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| Characteristics of violent offenders under the influence of drugs or alcohol as reported by victims | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------|-------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Offender characteristics** | | Total | Not under the influence | Under the influence | | | | Not sure which substance | Not known if under the influence |
| | | | | Total | Alcohol only | Drugs only | Both | | |
| Sex | Male | 100% | 19% | 38% | 23% | 6% | 6% | 2% | 43% |
| | Female | 100 | 34 | 27 | 17 | 6 | 3 | 1* | 39 |
| | Both sexes | 100 | 17 | 47 | 23 | 13 | 11 | -* | 37 |
| Race | White | 100% | 23% | 42% | 28% | 5% | 7% | 2% | 35% |
| | Black | 100 | 18 | 27 | 12 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 55 |
| | Other | 100 | 18 | 39 | 20 | 8* | 6* | 4* | 43 |
| Age | 20 or less | 100% | 29% | 23% | 14% | 5% | 3% | 1%* | 48% |
| | 21 or older | 100 | 18 | 45 | 28 | 8 | 8 | 2 | 37 |
| | Mixed ages | 100 | 11 | 44 | 27 | 4* | 12 | 2* | 44 |
| Relationship to victim | Nonstranger | 100% | 31% | 40% | 24% | 6% | 8% | 1% | 28% |
| | Stranger | 100 | 13 | 35 | 22 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 52 |

Note: Per cents may not total to 100% because of rounding. For incidents with more than one offender, data show incidents in which at least one offender was under the influence. Crimes committed by mixed racial groups are not presented.
 - Less than .05%.
 * Estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases; see Methodology.
 ** Describe single and multiple offenders.

Recent BJS Reports

In addition to the report summarized in the preceding article, the following recent studies and reports from the Bureau of Justice Statistics are available from the Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Unit:

"Jail Inmates 1987," an estimate of the country's jail inmate population, NCJ-114319.

"Probation and Parole 1987," statistics on probation and parole populations in the states, NCJ-113948.

"Felony Sentences in State Courts, 1986," an examination of national data on state court activity, NCJ-115210.

Jail Monitoring Undertaken

David Parry, an Instructor in the Justice Center, is currently working with the Division of Family and Youth Services (DFYS) to design and implement a system for monitoring detention of juveniles in jails, lockups and detention/correctional facilities throughout Alaska. This monitoring is required by the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act as part of an effort by the U.S. government to deinstitutionalize status offenders and prevent the placement of any juvenile in a facility which also houses adults. Parry's design was recently approved by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in Washington, D.C. He is now compiling information to be included in the monitoring reports for 1987 and 1988. These reports and a monitoring policies and procedures manual will be completed in April.

Felonies Prosecuted in 1984

— Allan Barnes

A recent study conducted by the Statistical Analysis Unit of the Justice Center illuminates on a statewide basis the process of case attrition and charge change between the time of arrest and the time of initial prosecution. The study utilized 1984 Alaska Offender Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) data. The 1984 data encompassed 2,249 cases. (Alaska OBTS data begins with 1984; that is, only cases opened on or after January 1, 1984 are included in the data set. Hence, the 1984 cases studied present a somewhat non-typical set. A more typical set would include all cases closed in a given year regardless of date of arrest. See accompanying box for a further discussion of OBTS.)

The analysis revealed that approximately 56 per cent of the 1984 OBTS felony cases were rejected by the prosecutor while

only 1 per cent of the cases presented to the grand jury were rejected. On a national basis the rejection by prosecutor rate is lower, but more cases are rejected by grand juries. The total percentage of cases not prosecuted in Alaska is close to the national average.

Slightly less than 80 per cent of those cases not prosecuted were disposed within one day after reaching the prosecutor. After one month 90 per cent of those not prosecuted had been dropped. The remaining cases were dropped within 268 days. The average time from arrest to closure for cases not prosecuted was 14 days. The average elapsed time from arrest to closure was shorter for cases in the Third Judicial District than for those in other districts..

Of the 2,249 cases examined, 955 were prosecuted. In seventy-three per cent of these cases the
(Turn to *FELONIES*, Page 4)

OBTS

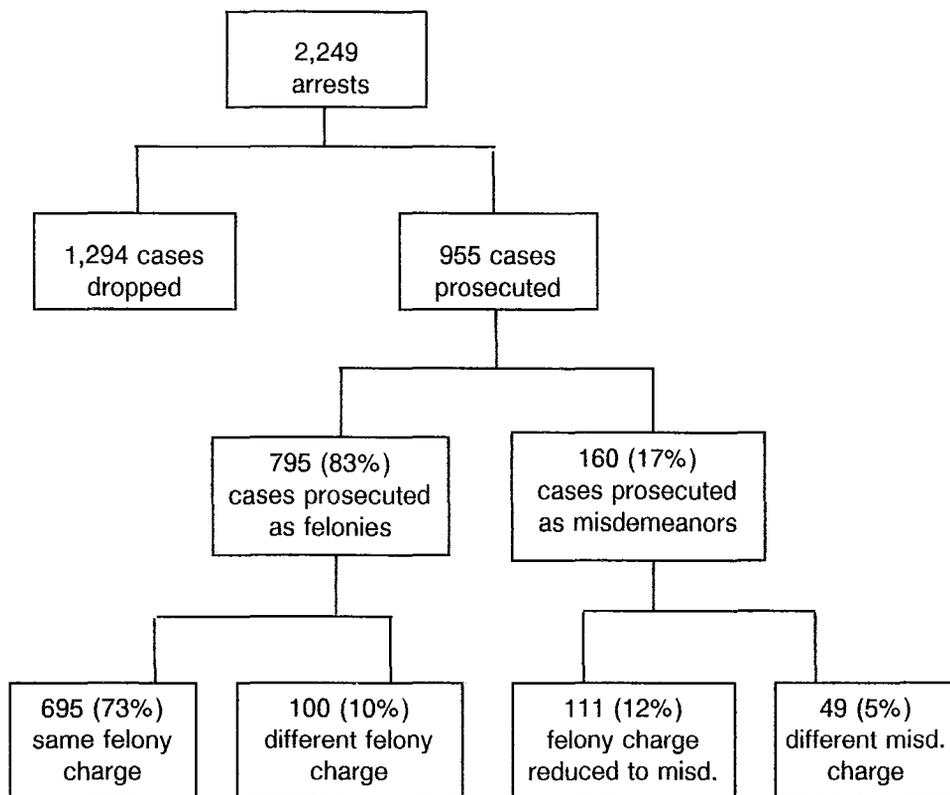
The Offender Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) program is designed to collect information tracking adult offenders from the point of entry into the criminal justice system through final disposition. It is a national program conducted under the auspices of the Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice.

OBTS data permit researchers to examine how the criminal justice system processes offenders, to measure the number of offenders moving through different parts of the system, to calculate processing time intervals between major points of decision and to assess the composition of the offender population.

An OBTS record contains information pertaining to the offender, the arrest charge and disposition, the prosecutor/grand jury charge and disposition, the court disposition and sentencing. The information is compiled utilizing National Crime Information Center (NCIC) codes. The identity of the offender is protected through the use of an encryption code.

The Statistical Analysis Unit of the Justice Center began compiling Alaska Offender Based Transaction Statistics tapes in 1986. The Alaska tapes utilize data from the PROMIS system of the Department of Law. At present data tapes have been compiled for 1984 through 1986.

Prosecution of 1984 OBTS felony cases



(Percentages are based on 955 cases prosecuted.)

Statistical Analysis Unit

The Alaska Statistical Analysis Unit has only been in existence a relatively short time but the small group of dedicated faculty and staff have made some significant contributions to the field of justice in our state: the *Alaska Justice Forum*, which you are now reading; the *Alaska Justice Data Base Directory*; statistics and related information which few other states have; the annual survey of justice needs in our state; and numerous reports, projects and videos.

The basic function of the unit is that of a clearinghouse for justice-related statistics. We have a small but growing collection of data bases, and we invite you to give us a call if you would like to contribute information or need help in locating information.

— Allan R. Barnes
Director

FELONIES

(continued from page 3)

offense charged by the prosecutor was in the same category as the arrest charge. A different felony charge was selected in 10 per cent of the cases. (The conversion of the Alaska criminal code statutes to the NCIC codes required by OBTS does not allow us to see differences in the degree of offense charged. Thus, the analysis was limited to examination of changes to a different felony charge or to a misdemeanor.) Only 17 per cent of the felony arrest charges were prosecuted as misdemeanors. In slightly more than two-thirds of the cases prosecuted as misdemeanors (12 per cent of 2,249 total), the prosecuted charge represented a simple reduction of the original charge to a mis-

demeanor. Only 5 per cent of the cases prosecuted were reduced to a misdemeanor charge not similar to the main arrest charge. This relatively small percentage of charge reductions from felonies to misdemeanors suggests that the disparities observed are in line with the normal process of adjustment prosecutors undertake to bring the prosecution charge closer to the legally relevant circumstances of the crime.

(The preceding article was based on the study, "Disparities between Felony Charges at Time of Arrest and Those at Time of Prosecution: 1984 Alaska OBTS Analysis." Copies of the complete study are available at nominal cost from the Justice Center.)

DATA

(continued from page 2)

tions, such as the place of occurrence, type of weapons present, items taken in thefts, and reasons for reporting or not reporting crimes to the police.

BJS is currently testing additional changes to the NCS questionnaire. These changes include a substantially revised screening procedure and new questions on factors that may increase or decrease an individual's likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. These revisions are scheduled to be phased in during 1989; all changes to the questionnaire will be completed in 1991.

TRENDS

(continued from page 1)

are provided to the FBI annually by the U.S. Census Bureau, fluctuate considerably from year to year as population estimates are revised. These figures, and crime rates which are based on them, must be viewed with extreme caution to avoid attributing apparent changes in the population or the crime rate to actual increases or decreases, when the change may merely reflect revision of the population estimate. Note also that population figures for the years 1984-1987 are based upon population data published in *Crime in the United States* and, due to the incorporation in the published statistics of crime and population estimates for agencies which fail to report crime data, these figures may not be precisely comparable to the population figures for previous years).

The statistics in Figure 1 (overleaf) and Table 1 show, perhaps more than anything else, the extent to which an

| Year | Anchorage | Fairbanks | Juneau | Troopers | Other |
|------|-----------|-----------|--------|----------|--------|
| 63 | 3,328 | 4,575 | 2,648 | 1,176 | 4,147 |
| 64 | 2,041 | 5,029 | 2,474 | 1,561 | 3,345 |
| 65 | 5,311 | 4,446 | — | 1,156 | 4,739 |
| 66 | 6,030 | 5,218 | — | 1,344 | 5,235 |
| 67 | 5,534 | 6,058 | — | 1,464 | 4,974 |
| 68 | 6,557 | 6,760 | — | 1,972 | 3,680 |
| 69 | 7,987 | 6,911 | — | 2,199 | 5,002 |
| 70 | 8,699 | 10,026 | — | 1,989 | 6,938 |
| 71 | 8,283 | 9,582 | 4,711 | 1,763 | 6,719 |
| 72 | 8,072 | 11,093 | 6,201 | 2,012 | 6,990 |
| 73 | 9,052 | 9,703 | 7,565 | 2,390 | 7,538 |
| 74 | 9,046 | 11,122 | 2,844 | 2,694 | 8,604 |
| 75 | 10,318 | 9,616 | 4,371 | 3,424 | 7,503 |
| 76 | 8,425 | 8,586 | 3,991 | 4,205 | 6,547 |
| 77 | 8,195 | 6,058 | 3,409 | 4,219 | 7,012 |
| 78 | 7,024 | 6,177 | 2,968 | 4,686 | 7,756 |
| 79 | 6,676 | 6,929 | 3,299 | 3,985 | 9,998 |
| 80 | 6,738 | 10,612 | 3,193 | 3,194 | 10,478 |
| 81 | 7,665 | 11,204 | 3,704 | 2,760 | 9,438 |
| 82 | 7,073 | 8,782 | 3,118 | 3,163 | 8,960 |
| 83 | 6,833 | 8,238 | 2,568 | 3,724 | 8,464 |
| 84 | 6,678 | 8,394 | 2,535 | 4,163 | 7,987 |
| 85 | 6,369 | 9,416 | 2,572 | 3,865 | 8,274 |
| 86 | 6,917 | 9,831 | 3,465 | 3,955 | 11,298 |
| 87 | 5,950 | 3,716 | 4,479 | 4,163 | 8,093 |

| Year | Agencies | Year | Agencies |
|------|----------|------|----------|
| 1963 | 6 | 1976 | 19 |
| 1964 | 6 | 1977 | 18 |
| 1965 | 7 | 1978 | 23 |
| 1966 | 7 | 1979 | 21 |
| 1967 | 7 | 1980 | 23 |
| 1968 | 7 | 1981 | 24 |
| 1969 | 8 | 1982 | 24 |
| 1970 | 9 | 1983 | 24 |
| 1971 | 16 | 1984 | 22 |
| 1972 | 18 | 1985 | 25 |
| 1973 | 18 | 1986 | 25 |
| 1974 | 19 | 1987 | 27 |
| 1975 | 19 | | |

Sources for Table 1 and Figure 1:
Frequencies and reporting agencies for 1984 through 1987 are based on data reported in *Crime in Alaska*. Population estimates for these years are based on data reported in *Crime in the United States*. All other data are based exclusively on computerized UCR data.

apparently skyrocketing incidence of crime in Alaska can be attributed to the growth and development of participation in the Uniform Crime Reporting Program. In 1963, with only six law enforcement agencies reporting index crime statistics for a population of 244,077, the crime index for Alaska was 4,973. But by 1987, with 27 agencies submitting reports for a population of 503,757, the crime index had multiplied by more than five times, to 27,093 reported offenses.

It is also clear, however, that the increase in reported crime from 1963 to 1987 is not entirely an arti-

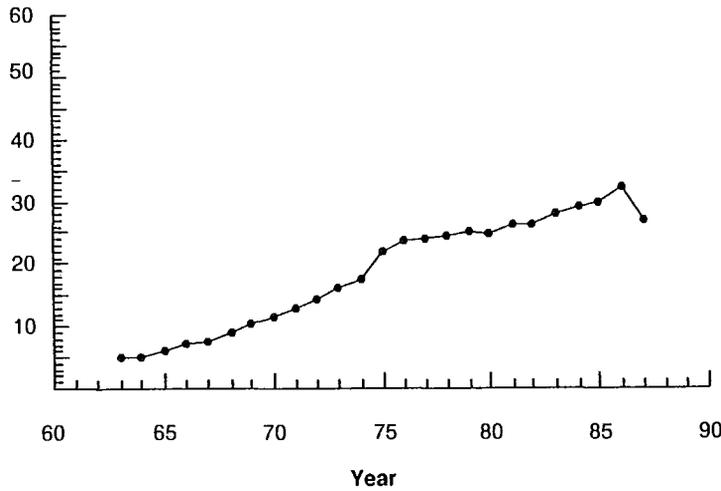
fact of expanding participation in the UCR program. As shown in Figure 2 (page 7), the index crime rate, which effectively controls for the effects of population changes and growing participation in the program, increased steadily through the early 1970s, from 2,037 offenses per 100,000 people in 1963 to 5,182 per 100,000 in 1974. Then, in 1975, the crime rate jumped precipitously to 6,193 and, with the exception of a high of 6,410 in 1981 and a low of 5,378 in 1987, it has hovered near 6,000 offenses per 100,000 people ever since.

Please turn to *TRENDS*, page 6

Figure 1

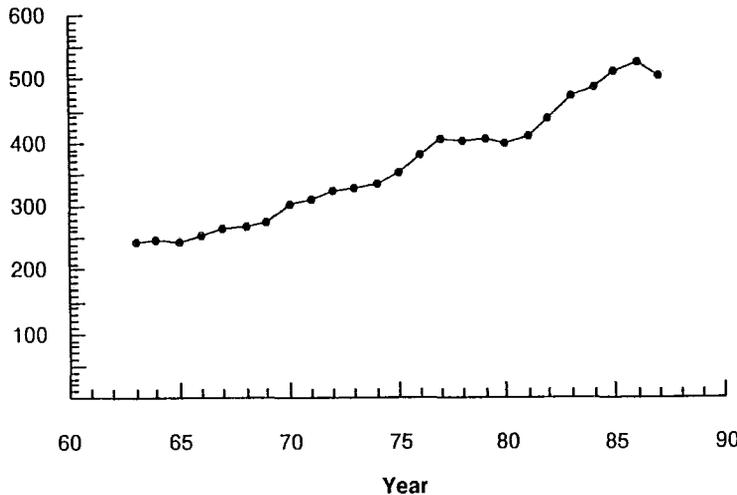
Statewide Index Crime Frequencies - 1963 to 1987

Frequency (in thousands)



Population Base - 1963 to 1987

Population (in thousands)



was increasing more rapidly than was, in fact, the case.

By comparing trends in reported index crimes among law enforcement agencies in Alaska we can gain greater insight into the distribution of crime among Alaska communities and the varying levels of criminal activity experienced by different communities over the years, and we can also highlight some of the difficulties encountered in attempts to interpret statistics which are based upon official records of reported crimes. Table 2 shows annual rates of index crime as reported to the FBI by the Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau police departments, the Alaska State Troopers, and other Alaska law enforcement agencies, which are grouped into a single composite category for purposes of this analysis. This table reveals the extent to which the relative linearity of the statewide trend has masked considerable fluctuation in rates of crime reported to specific law enforcement agencies. The Fairbanks rate, for example, jumps from 6,911 in 1969 to 10,026 in 1970, then drops radically in 1975 and again in 1977, only to jump above the 10,000 mark again in 1980. Similarly, the rate for Juneau rises steadily through 1973, but then drops by more than half in 1974 and fluctuates for a couple of years before settling near 3,000 offenses per 100,000 people for several years.

Crime rates may reasonably be expected to fluctuate far more from year to year in a small community than in a larger city or the state as a whole. Due to the relatively small number of offenses committed each year in Juneau, for example, the arrests of a small number of especially active criminals may cause the crime rate to drop sharply, while the arrest of a similar number of active criminals would hardly affect the Anchorage crime rate - or the statewide crime rate - at all.

Please turn to TRENDS, page 7

TRENDS

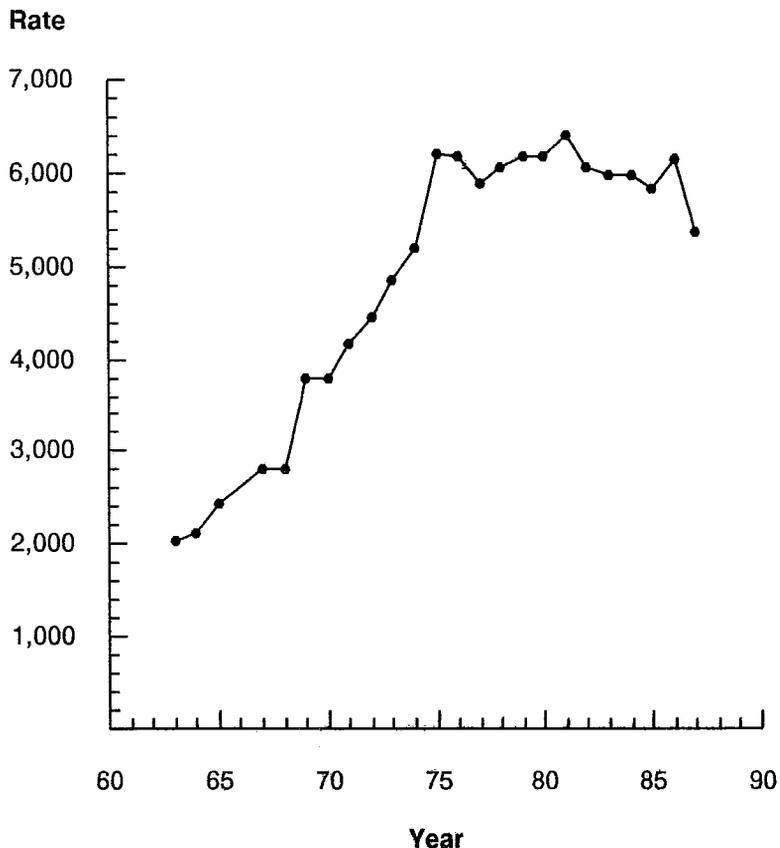
(continued from page 5)

To some extent, the rapid escalation in the crime rate during the 1960s and early 1970s parallels a similar nationwide trend. It is also reasonable to infer that social dislocations associated with the population explosion and industrial development in Alaska during the 1970s may have contributed to a

growing rate of crime. It must be remembered, though, that law enforcement agencies in Alaska were undergoing a general process of professionalization during the same period and that greater responsiveness to complaints of crime and improvements in record-keeping practices may have independently generated an appearance that criminal activity

Figure 2

Statewide Index Crime Rates - 1963 to 1987



Sources for Figure 2 and Table 2: Rates for 1984 through 1987 are based on index crime frequencies reported in *Crime in Alaska* and population estimates reported in *Crime in the United States*. Rates for all other years are based exclusively on computerized UCR data.

for at least part of the period examined in this analysis, only 12 have submitted reports for each month since entering the program. Some, like Juneau (as shown in Table 2), have dropped out of the program, then reentered after failing to participate for one or more years. Others have reported sporadically, or submitted reports for some, but not all, months in a year. In *Crime in the United States* the FBI incorporates estimates for crime occurring in jurisdictions for which it does not receive reports. These estimates, however, are based on an assumption that monthly variations in criminal activity are similar for communities in all parts of Alaska, so the resulting crime statistics may mask significant variations among communities.

Discussion of other factors which complicate the interpretation of these statistics is beyond the scope of this article. But the brief discussion above should provide some indication of the difficulties inherent in interpretation of crime statistics such as these. This is not to say that the statistics are meaningless. They provide at least a rough basis for gauging trends in criminal activity and for comparing the extent of crime in various communities, and they certainly provide a firmer foundation for determination of criminal justice policy than guesswork and speculation.

TRENDS

(continued from page 6)

However, the noticeable instability of the crime rates shown in Table 2 is due not only to the ebb and flow of criminal activity in small communities but also to such factors as annual revision of population estimates, failure of some agencies to submit reports for a full twelve months each year, changes in jurisdictional boundaries and in FBI definitions of certain index crimes, and confusion on the part of law enforcement agencies about how to incorporate such changes into their monthly reports.

For example, revision of the Juneau population estimate from 6,517 in 1973 to 17,513 in 1974 clearly contributed to the appearance of a radical drop in the crime rate for that city, and major revisions of population estimates for Anchorage in 1976 and for Fairbanks in 1970, 1975 and 1980 had comparable effects on their reported crime rates in these years.

Inconsistent reporting of crime data to the FBI is another source of instability in crime rate computations. Of 33 different Alaska law enforcement agencies participating in the UCR program

(This is the first of two articles on crime issues in Alaska)

Alaska Department of Corrections Profile of Population

As of January 1989, Department of Corrections had jurisdiction over 5,686 persons. This number includes:

- 2,389 persons in Alaska institutions
- 88 persons in the Federal Bureau of Prisons
- 5 persons in Minnesota state institutions
- 178 persons in community residential centers (furloughees)
- 33 persons in community residential centers (prob-parolees)
- 483 persons on parole
- 2,510 persons on probation

Since July 1984, the following increases have occurred:

| | | | |
|--|------|------|---------------|
| Persons in Alaska's institutions | up | 33% | (1,794-2,389) |
| Persons in federal and Minnesota prisons | down | 49% | (182-93) |
| Persons in community residential centers | up | 118% | (97-211) |
| Persons on parole | up | 81% | (267-483) |
| Persons on probation | up | 33% | (1,886-2,510) |

The makeup of the population incarcerated in Alaska's institutions, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and Minnesota state prisons has changed during these four years.

| | 01/85 | 01/88 | 01/89 | 85-89 Change | 88-89 Change |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Felons-sentenced | 1,238 | 1,679 | 1,761 | + 42% | + 5% |
| Misdemeanants-sentenced | 242 | 133 | 119 | - 50% | - 11% |
| Felons-unsentenced | 394 | 437 | 484 | + 23% | + 11% |
| Misdemeanants-unsentenced | 102 | 128 | 119 | + 17% | - 7% |
| Totals | 1,976 | 2,377 | 2,483 | + 26% | + 4% |



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