

Typology of Inter-Jurisdictional Offenders in Florida

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the spatial arrest patterns of repeat offenders in Florida to investigate the concept of “inter-jurisdictional offending”. For the purposes of this study the Florida Statistical Analysis Center defined inter-jurisdictional as having arrests in two or more law enforcement jurisdictions or counties. The study found differences in the two groups examined. Inter-jurisdictional offenders tend to have longer criminal careers with more property arrests than intra-jurisdictional offenders. The study offers further evidence of the value of inter-agency cooperation and data sharing in the fight against crime.

Typology of Inter-Jurisdictional Offenders

Introduction

The theme of the 1997 National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Conference on Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation, *Crime and Place*, reflects an emerging trend among criminal justice researchers and practitioners to shift the focus of crime prevention and suppression efforts from people (potential offenders) to places. This spatial orientation toward crime control has informed the development of “Weed and Seed” programs and “hot spot” policing, both of which seek to identify small areas of intense criminal activity and target those areas for increased prevention efforts and/or increased surveillance and visible police presence. While interventions like “hot spot” policing have been found to be moderately successful in reducing crime and disorder in targeted areas (Taylor, 1998), critics suggest that what appears to be crime reduction is actually crime displacement, or the movement of offenders and offenses from “hot spots” to proximal locations not targeted by law enforcement. While the movement of offenses can be observed by changes in crime rates, the movement of offenders is less well understood and more difficult to measure. To address this gap in our knowledge, the Florida Statistical Analysis Center (FSAC) undertook a study of criminal mobility in Florida, examining inter-agency and inter-county offending among repeat offenders arrested in 1980 and 1997.

Four questions about offender mobility guided the research process, the answers to which are presented in this report:

- ❑ How prevalent is inter-jurisdictional offending in Florida?
- ❑ What is the impact of inter-jurisdictional offending on the level of crime in Florida?
- ❑ Are there differences in offender mobility in 1997 and 1980?
- ❑ Are there differences between inter- and intra-jurisdictional offenders?

Criminal Mobility: A review of the literature

The early literature on criminal mobility focused primarily on distance traveled from the Central Business District or the offender’s place of residence to the crime site and generally reports finding that most offenders commit a large number of their offenses “close” to home (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1981). Bullock (1955) showed that 40% of all Houston homicides between 1945-1949 occurred within one city block of the offender’s residence and 74% within two miles. Pokorny (1965) found similar patterns for 1958-1961. Further support for the “close to home” thesis has also been found for robberies (Capone and Nicholas, 1976), rape (Amir, 1971), and property offenses (Baldwin and Bottoms, 1976).

The theoretical models with which these findings are best understood assume that criminals are rational actors who combine processes of effort minimization and opportunity maximization (Harris, 1980; Pettiway, 1982). More specifically, they suggest that an offender’s “journey to crime” is based on availability, potential payoff, and risk of apprehension. The assumption of rational choice, then, implies the potential for a law enforcement effect on criminal mobility in that the “risk of apprehension” is, at least in part, a function of law enforcement resources and

patterns of deployment. Evidence of this effect has been found in studies of inter-jurisdictional “crime spillover” (Mehay, 1977; Hakim et. al., 1979; and Fabrikant, 1979), where police expenditures in one jurisdiction affect the level of crime in one or more adjacent jurisdictions.

From the literature on “crime spillover” comes the concept of inter-jurisdictional offending, defined as *crossing a political boundary in the journey from the origin of the criminal to the crime site* (Hakim and Rengert, 1981). Scholars in this area of research caution us to beware of the methods used in traditional criminal mobility studies, proposing that such studies are probably biased against the inter-jurisdictional criminal. Most of the studies that focus on distance traveled to the crime site use data gathered by interviewing adjudicated criminals. If we assume the inter-jurisdictional offender is more professional, he or she is less likely to be caught and, consequently, less likely to be interviewed. Hakim and Rengert (1981) go on to suggest that more mobile criminals are likely the most effective (dangerous) and most evasive. Therefore, the empirical evidence on criminal mobility may be biased toward the more “insignificant, hometown hoodlum.”

Given the caution put forth by Hakim and Rengert, the FSAC determined to focus on inter-jurisdictional offenders, those who “cross a political boundary,” in its effort to better understand criminal mobility. Rather than looking at distance traveled to the crime site, this study examines the spatial arrest patterns of repeat offenders in Florida, defining inter-jurisdictional offending as having arrests in two or more law enforcement jurisdictions or counties. In addition to assessing the prevalence of inter-jurisdictional offending, we also explore variation in mobility across types of offending and between past (1980) and more recent (1997) offenders.

Data and Variables

Criminal history files were created for offenders arrested in 1980 and 1997 with data from Florida’s Computerized Criminal History (CCH) database. Included in these files are the primary offense¹, date, and location (jurisdiction and county) of each arrest in a given offender’s criminal career. Offenders with only one arrest were dropped from the analysis, leaving a total of 35,552 and 105,866 repeat offenders in 1980 and 1997, respectively.

Repeat offenders were coded *inter-jurisdictional* if they had ever been arrested in two or more law enforcement jurisdictions or counties. Further distinctions among this group were then made according to the particular political boundary they had crossed (law enforcement jurisdiction or county), the temporal proximity of their inter-jurisdictional arrests (within the same year or ever in their criminal careers), and the type of offense for which they had most recently been arrested. The first two distinctions are categorized as multi-agency vs. multi-county mobility and single-year vs. career mobility. Offense-specific mobility is based on the primary offense for which the

¹ CCH does not designate primary offense. For purposes of this study the primary offense was designated by using the offense with the lowest numerical FCIC code. Therefore a homicide would be kept and an aggravated assault would not be for the same arrest event.

offender was arrested and is categorized, first, as property vs. violent crime then according to the specific crime type committed. Only Part I Index crimes² are included.

Repeat offenders were coded *intra-jurisdictional* if their current and prior arrests occurred in the same law enforcement jurisdiction or county. Again, the multi-agency vs. multi-county distinction was made, allowing an individual offender to be coded *inter-jurisdictional* when looking at mobility across law enforcement jurisdictions but *intra-jurisdictional* when looking at mobility across county lines.

Finally, career length was calculated for both inter- and intra-jurisdictional offenders by subtracting the year of first arrest from the year of most recent arrest (in this case, either 1980 or 1997, depending on the year in question). The number of career years ranges from zero (all arrests in the same, one, year) to more than twenty and was collapsed into seven career length categories: 0, 1, 2, 3-5, 6-9, 10-19, and 20+.

Results

How prevalent is inter-jurisdictional offending in Florida?

In 1997, over one-half of all arrest events (63%) involved an offender who had previously been arrested by more than one law enforcement agency, and over one-third (36%) involved an offender who had been arrested in more than one county. These figures, up significantly from those for 1980 (28% and 16%, respectively), suggest that, in any given year, law enforcement can expect a substantial proportion of their arrests to involve an offender who has had previous contact with another law enforcement agency in the state. Table 1 shows the extent of repeat and inter-jurisdictional offending in Florida for 1980 and 1997.

Crucial to the question of differences in offender mobility between these two years, however, is the difference in the proportion of arrest events that involved a repeat offender, a difference of 35 percentage points.

The distribution of these inter-jurisdictional offenders within the pool of total and repeat offenders and the extent and type of their offending is the subject of the remainder of this paper.

Table 1. Prevalence of Inter-Jurisdictional Offending, 1980 & 1997

	1980	1997
Total arrest events	240,703	596,758
Percent involving a repeat offender	40	80
Percent involving a multi-agency offender	28	63
Percent involving a multi-county offender	16	36

² Part I index crimes, as defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, include murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Arson arrests are not included in this analysis. In addition, we included other violent crimes, not only those listed as felonies

Single-year mobility

Table 2 presents single-year arrest and mobility figures for 1980 and 1997. Of the 416,841 offenders arrested in 1997, 105,866 (25.4%) had more than one arrest in that year and accounted for almost half (47.4%) of the total arrests. Of these single-year repeat offenders, over one-half (53.4%) were arrested by more than one law enforcement agency and almost one-quarter (22.4%) in more than one county. These figures indicate that not only do repeat offenders account for a substantial proportion of the total crime in the state but also that they tend to be fairly mobile, particularly in terms of crossing agency jurisdictional boundaries. Compared to 1980, this single-year mobility appears to be somewhat stable over time, with inter-agency mobility up by less than 3% and inter-county mobility by less than 1%.

Table 2. Single-Year Mobility, 1980 and 1997

	1980	1997
Total number of offenders	184,576	416,841
Number repeat offenders (%)	35,552 (19.3)	105,866 (25.4)
Percent arrest events involving repeat offenders	37.9	47.4
Number multi-agency offenders (% of repeat offenders)	17,969 (50.5)	56,532 (53.4)
Number multi-county offenders (% of repeat offenders)	7,880 (22.2)	23,725 (22.4)

Career mobility

Table 3 presents career mobility figures for 1980 and 1997. As described above, *career mobility* is measured in terms of an offender's prior arrest record, with more than one arrest (ever) indicating a repeat offender and arrests by more than one law enforcement agency or in more than one county (ever) indicating an inter-jurisdictional offender.

Table 3. Career Mobility, 1980 and 1997

	1980	1997
Total number of offenders	184,576	416,841
Number repeat offenders (%)	96,545 (52.3)	288,255 (69.2)
% arrest events involving repeat offenders	84.8	93.4
Number multi-agency offenders (% of repeat offenders)	67,124 (69.5)	221,202 (76.7)
Number multi-county offenders (% of repeat offenders)	38,003 (39.4)	123,785 (42.9)

Unlike the results for single-year mobility, career mobility is somewhat greater in 1997 than in 1980, with the percentage of repeat offenders with prior arrests by more than one agency up to 76.7 (+7.2) and the percentage with prior arrests in more than one county up to 42.9 (+3.5). While small, these differences are actually more consequential than they seem in light of the large increase in the percentage of offenders who are repeat offenders (+16.9). As a percentage

of the total number of offenders, inter-agency mobility in 1997 is up by 16.7 percentage points from 1980; inter-county mobility, by 9.1.

Are there differences between inter- and intra-jurisdictional offenders?

To examine differences in inter- and intra-jurisdictional offenders, the analysis was limited to repeat offenders arrested in 1997 for a Part I index offense (N=40,201³), divided into those who had been arrested by more than one law enforcement agency in that year and those whose multiple arrests were within the jurisdiction of only one law enforcement agency. In other words, we are looking at single-year, multi-agency mobility for 1997.

Figure 1.

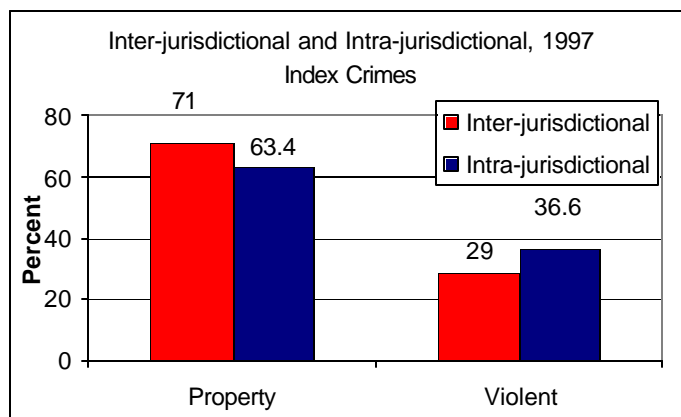
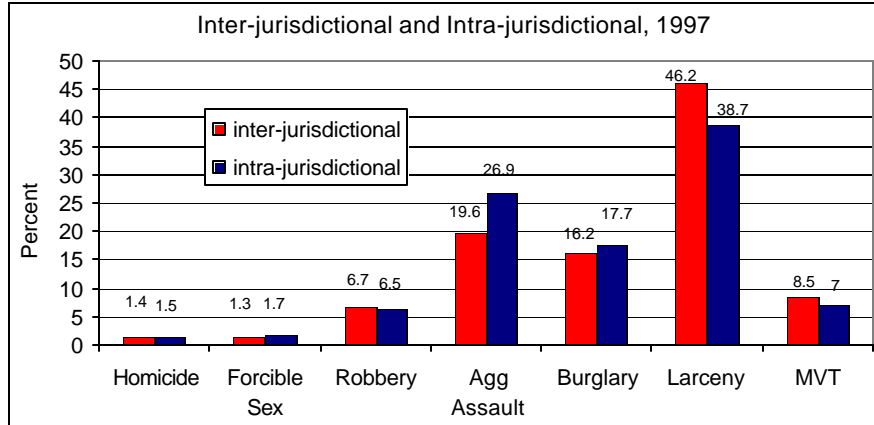


Figure 1 shows the distribution of inter- and intra-jurisdictional offenders across the index crime categories of property and violent crime for 1997. As expected, the difference is more pronounced for inter-jurisdictional offenders, indicating that they are somewhat more likely than intra-jurisdictional offenders to be property, rather than violent, offenders. However, when index crimes are examined separately (Figure 2), it appears that this distinction is limited, primarily, to the two most frequently occurring index crimes – aggravated assault and larceny. The distributions across the other five crime types are almost identical. This suggests that previous findings about property crime “spillover” may have over-estimated the extent of offender mobility with regards to the more serious crimes of burglary and motor vehicle theft and that findings about violent crime committed “closer to home” may be limited to aggravated assault, rather than robbery or murder.

³ Includes all charges from these arrest events.

Figure 2.



Length of Criminal Career

To further examine differences between inter- and intra-jurisdictional offenders, length of criminal career was calculated and compared for each group. Again, we are only looking at repeat offenders. Table 4 shows the distribution of offenders across career length categories from zero (all arrests occurred in 1997) to twenty or more years. These figures indicate that inter-jurisdictional offenders tend to have longer careers than intra-jurisdictional offenders. In fact, almost 80% (79.3%) of the inter-jurisdictional offenders arrested in 1997 had criminal histories that spanned six or more years, while just slightly over half (51.3%) of the intra-jurisdictional offenders fall into these “lengthier” categories.

Table 4. Criminal Career Length, Inter- and Intra-Jurisdictional Offenders, 1997

Career Length (in years)	Inter-jurisdictional Offenders		Intra-jurisdictional Offenders	
	Percent	Cumulative Percent ^a	Percent	Cumulative Percent
20+	21.3	21.3	9.5	9.5
10-19	40.2	61.5	24.6	34.1
6-9	17.8	79.3	17.2	51.3
3-5	12.3	91.6	20.0	71.3
2	4.5	96.1	10.6	81.9
1	3.0	99.1	11.0	92.9
0	1.1	100.2	7.1	100

^aNumbers add to more than 100 due to rounding.

Data Limitations and Issues

A major limitation to this analysis is that we can’t distinguish between offenders who travel across a political boundary to commit their crimes and those who simply change residences.

Therefore, our findings should not be interpreted as an indication of “crime spillover” or the effect of law enforcement activity on neighboring jurisdictions. On the other hand, looking at mobility in the sense that this analysis does is of help to lawmakers and law enforcement agencies in showing how frequently the same offender is arrested by different agencies.

An additional limitation has to do with our research design. The years 1980 and 1997 were purposely, rather than randomly, selected. While we have no reason to think they are, there is always the possibility that one or both of these years was an anomalous year with regards to the proportion of mobile offenders. For our results to be generalizable to other years requires an assumption that 1980 and 1997 are representative of “earlier” and “more recent” time periods in arrest patterns in Florida.

In addition it must be noted that different data collection and recording methods have been used throughout the history of Florida’s CCH. This could in some way influence the results we have found. Fortunately as these methods are becoming more precise and therefore it is likely that the data from 1997 is more accurate than the data from 1980.

Conclusions

The results presented here indicate that inter-jurisdictional offending in Florida is a phenomenon worth closer scrutiny and law enforcement attention. Looking at the results from 1997 we see that almost 28% of arrests included offenders who had offended in multiple counties and 63 % who had offended in multiple jurisdictions. In addition, enhanced technology and training make criminal mobility and the spatial distribution of crime issues that can be more successfully addressed today than in the past.

Among repeat offenders, both single-year and career mobility are prevalent, with multi-agency offenders accounting for 53.4% and 76.7%, respectively, and multi-county for 22.4% and 42.9% in 1997. Perhaps more important than its prevalence is the description of inter-jurisdictional offending and offenders provided by this research. From it, we know that they are somewhat more likely than intra-jurisdictional offenders to be arrested for property, rather than violent, crimes but that this tendency only holds for the two most frequently-occurring index crimes of aggravated assault and larceny. For the other five crime types, the inter/intra-jurisdictional distinction disappears. We also know that inter-jurisdictional offenders tend to have longer criminal careers than do intra-jurisdictional offenders, suggesting they may be older and are certainly more experienced.

Collectively, our findings indicate strong support for the value of inter-agency cooperation and the importance of sharing offender information across jurisdictional boundaries. The fact that recidivism was substantially more prevalent in 1997 than in 1980 means that offender mobility had even greater consequences for law enforcement. If we assume this two-year comparison is indicative of a trend, then law enforcement officers can expect to encounter an increasing proportion of offenders that has had prior contact with another agency, possibly in another county.

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