

SECTION V

Drugs in America: 1980-1995

The Nation experienced its highest level of illicit drug activity in 1995 when measured by the total number of reported drug arrests since 1980. This study examines the national drug arrest trend for 1980-1995 using reported drug abuse violations arrest figures from local, county, and state law enforcement agencies participating in the Uniform Crime Reporting Program. Additionally, the study looks at the change in the profile of drug arrestees that has occurred during this same period.

The illegal drug trade confronting the Nation has steadily increased during the period under consideration. The total impact of drug abuse on society is immeasurable, and the cost to law enforcement alone is astronomical. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, federal law enforcement agencies expend \$16 billion annually to combat this problem. Trends for overall drug arrests indicate that this social ill shows no signs of abating.

In 1995, the Nation recorded its highest drug arrest total; an estimated 1.5 million people were arrested for either the sale and/or manufacture or possession of illegal narcotics. Furthermore, Table 5.1 shows that since 1980, the number of arrests for all drug types rose substantially, with those of heroin/cocaine showing the highest increase, 741 percent. In comparing arrests for specific drug types from 1990 to 1995, marijuana arrests have increased 80 percent and heroin/cocaine arrests 6 percent. These two drug categories account for more than eight out of every 10 drug arrests.

Table 5.1

Percent Changes in the Estimated Number of Drug Arrests by Type, United States, 1995 over 1980, 1985, and 1990

Drug Type	1995/1980	1995/1985	1995/1990
Total	154.1	81.9	35.5
Heroin/Cocaine	741.5	163.1	5.7
Marijuana	48.8	30.6	79.8
Synthetic	50.6	69.3	39.3
Other	153.6	120.8	57.4

Charts 5.1 to 5.5 show 1980-1995 national drug arrest trends by drug type. An analysis of these charts indicates that marijuana arrests dominated the first part of the decade, but toward the end of the decade, these arrests were outstripped by heroin/cocaine arrests. However, in the 1990s the pendulum is swinging the other way as the number of marijuana arrests is again increasing.

Regionally, when examining the year 1995 over 1990, the South, the most populous region, registered a 55-percent increase in total drug arrests. This region accounts for 34 percent of the Nation's total drug arrests in 1995. During this same time period, the other three regions also registered increases in drug arrests: 37 percent in the Midwest, 36 percent in the Northeast, and 18 percent in the West. (See Table 5.2.)

Table 5.2

Percent Changes in Estimated Number of Drug Arrests by Region, United States, 1995 over 1990

Year	Total	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
1990	1,089,500	252,250	131,901	323,756	381,593
1995	1,476,100	342,544	181,216	501,351	450,979
Percent Change	35.5	35.8	37.4	54.9	18.2

The majority of arrests for the offense of drug abuse violations by type are for possession. Table 5.3 shows that while the percent of sale/manufacture drug arrests peaked in 1990, arrests for possession constituted three out of every four drug arrests in 1995. This pattern is consistent with the historical trend.

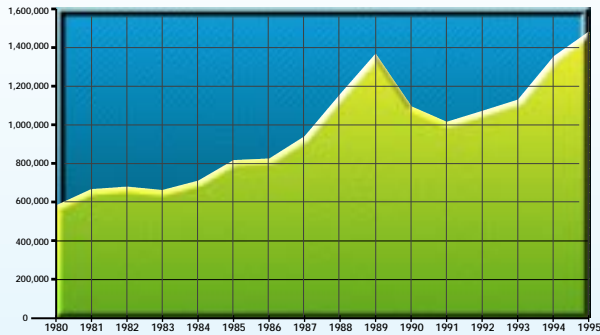
Table 5.3

Percent Distribution of Total Drug Arrests by Sale/Manufacture and Possession, United States, 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1995

Year	Total	Sale/ Manufacture	Possession
1980	100.0	22.6	77.4
1985	100.0	23.7	76.3
1990	100.0	31.9	68.1
1995	100.0	24.9	75.1

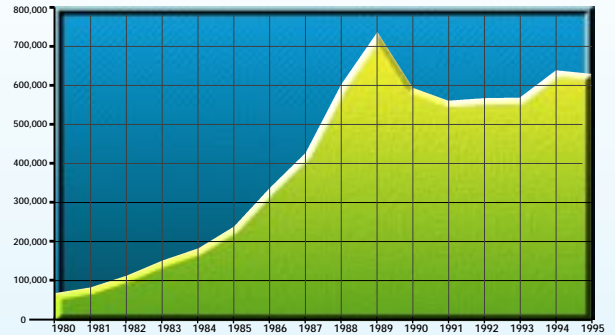
ESTIMATED DRUG ARRESTS UNITED STATES FROM 1980 - 1995

CHART 5.1



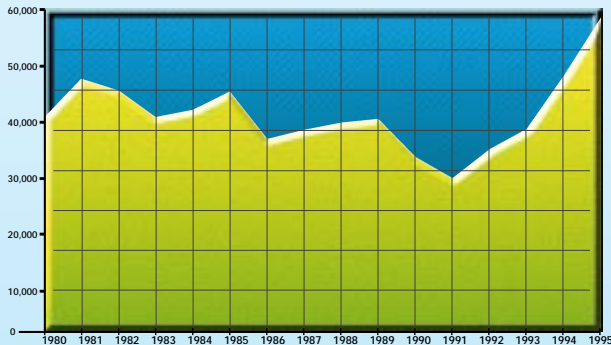
ESTIMATED HEROIN/COCAINE ARRESTS UNITED STATES FROM 1980 - 1995

CHART 5.2



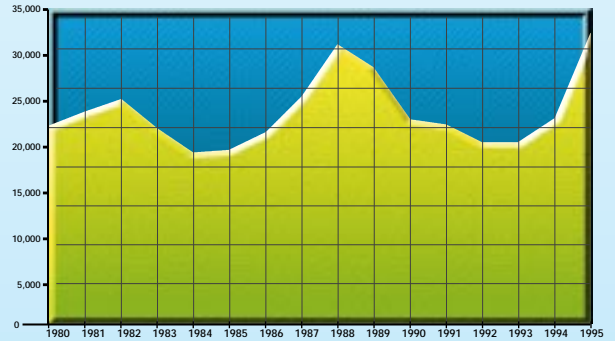
ESTIMATED MARIJUANA ARRESTS UNITED STATES FROM 1980 - 1995

CHART 5.3



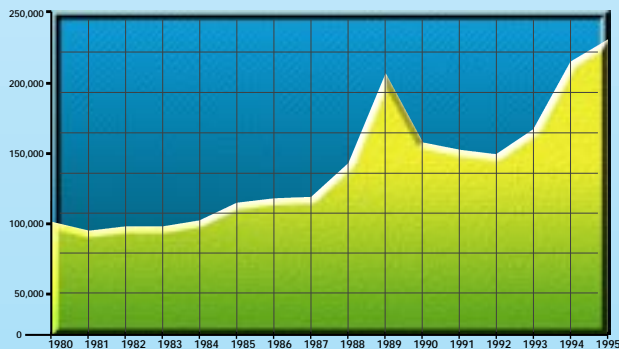
ESTIMATED SYNTHETIC DRUG ARRESTS UNITED STATES FROM 1980 - 1995

CHART 5.4



ESTIMATED OTHER DRUG ARRESTS UNITED STATES FROM 1980 - 1995

CHART 5.5



Between the years 1980 and 1995, the profile of drug arrestees in the United States has changed somewhat. Arrests of juveniles and adults for drug abuse violations have increased significantly during this same time period (see Chart 5.6 and Chart 5.7); however, the percent involving juveniles has fallen. In 1980, arrests of persons under 18 accounted for 19 percent of total drug arrestees; in 1995 the total declined to 13 percent. When considering the percent change in the number of juvenile and adult drug arrests from 1980 to 1995, adult arrests jumped 173 percent and juvenile arrests rose 73 percent. It should be noted, however, that when examining 1995 versus 1990, the number of juvenile arrests for drug violations has increased at a faster rate than that of adults. During this period, juvenile drug arrests increased 132 percent, versus a 28-percent increase for adults. This overall increase in juvenile drug arrests was influenced by a 278-percent rise in marijuana arrests.

Considering race distribution figures of drug arrestees in 1995, blacks constituted 39 percent of the total, up from 24

percent in 1980 (see Table 5.4). In 1995 whites made up 60 percent of all drug arrestees, down from the 75 percent in 1980. The percent distribution of persons arrested in other racial groups has remained relatively stable.

Further examination of drug arrests by race and individual drug type reveals that from 1990 to 1995 all racial groups experienced a substantial increase in the number of marijuana arrests. Increases were 98 percent for blacks, 69 percent for whites, and 96 percent for other races. Arrests for involvement with heroin/cocaine have also risen when comparing 1995 numbers with 1990 numbers, though less markedly. The number of white arrestees increased 4 percent and, that for blacks, 1 percent. The number of arrests for heroin/cocaine for all other races has increased 34 percent for those same years. (See Table 5.5.)

Although the age and racial composition of drug arrestees have changed, the gender distribution of arrestees has remained constant with males accounting for 84 percent of persons arrested.

Table 5.4
Percent Distribution of Total Drug Arrests by Race,
United States, 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1995

Year	Total	White	Black	Indian	Asian
1980	100.0	74.7	24.5	.4	.4
1985	100.0	67.8	31.2	.4	.6
1990	100.0	58.0	41.2	.3	.4
1995	100.0	59.9	39.1	.4	.6

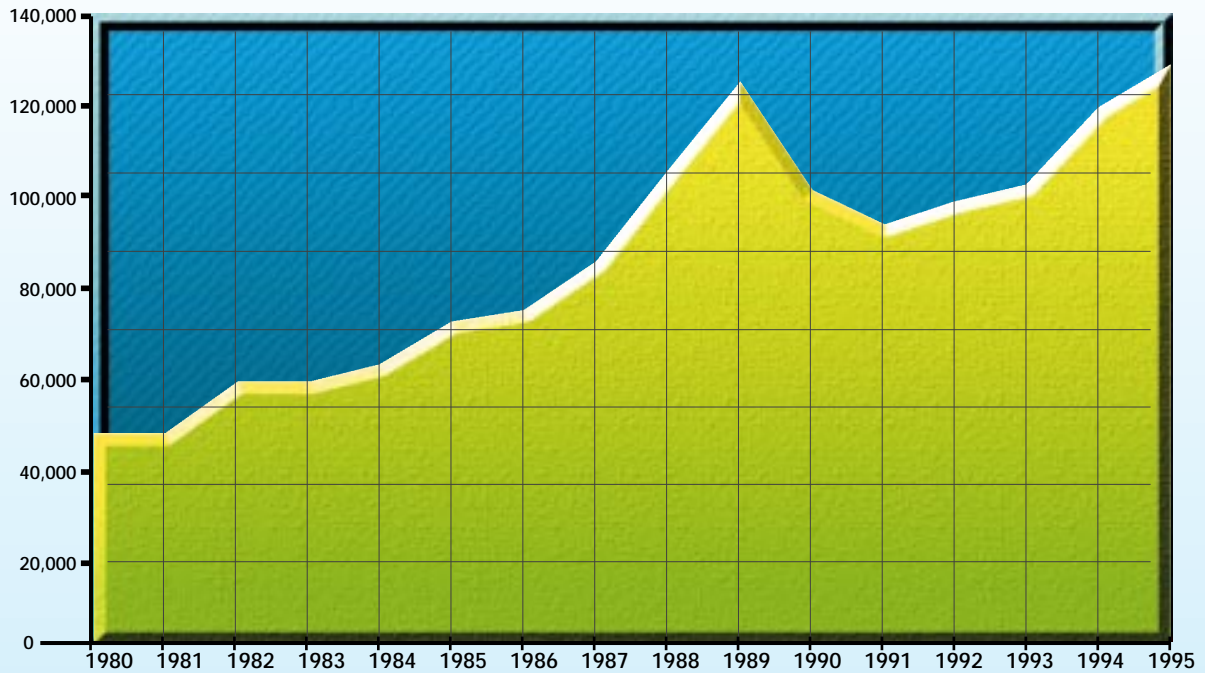
Table 5.5
Percent Changes in the Estimated Number
of Heroin/Cocaine and Marijuana Arrests
by Race, United States, 1995 over 1990

Race	Heroin/ Cocaine	Marijuana
White	3.6	69.1
Black	1.3	97.7
Other	34.4	95.6

ESTIMATED ADULT DRUG ARRESTS

UNITED STATES FROM 1980 - 1995

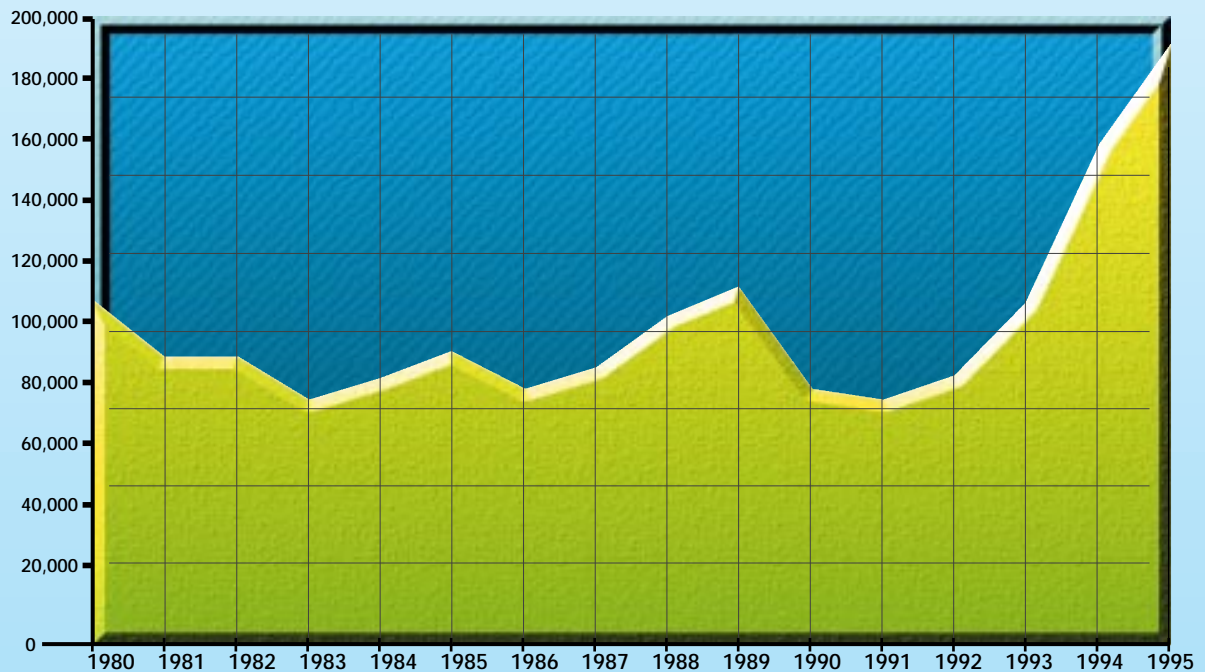
CHART 5.6



ESTIMATED JUVENILE DRUG ARRESTS

UNITED STATES FROM 1980 - 1995

CHART 5.7



Summary

The majority of arrests for drug abuse violations during the 1980s were for marijuana. However, when comparing the number of drug abuse violation arrests in 1990 to that in 1980, the number of marijuana arrests decreased 17 percent while the number of heroin/cocaine arrests increased 696 percent. During the 1990s, marijuana appears to be the fastest growing drug category with arrests increasing 80 percent between 1990 and 1995, while heroin/cocaine arrests have increased 6 percent.

On a regional basis, the more populous South has replaced the West as the region in the country during the 1990s with the highest number of drug violation arrests.

During the past decade and a half, the age and racial composition of drug arrestees has also shown a change. Adults are more frequently arrested than are juveniles; the number of adult arrests is up 173 percent, while the number of juvenile

arrests increased 73 percent. Current 1995 figures show juveniles constituted only 13 percent of total drug arrests; a decline of 32 percent from the 1980 level. However, a year-to-year analysis of juveniles arrested for drug abuse violations during the 1990s shows a rise in the number of persons under 18 being arrested in this category. The racial distribution of drug arrestees has also changed. In 1995, nonwhites accounted for 40 percent of drug arrests compared to 25 percent in 1980. Finally, the age and racial makeup of the marijuana arrestee has also undergone a change. From 1990 to 1995, the number of persons under the age of 18 arrested for marijuana increased 278 percent. Additionally, during the 1990s the number of nonwhite persons arrested for marijuana violations also increased. Specifically, arrests for blacks were up 98 percent and other races, up 96 percent. The number of marijuana arrests for whites increased 96 percent.