

On Good Authority

AN EXECUTIVE BRIEFING ON TRENDS AND ISSUES IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

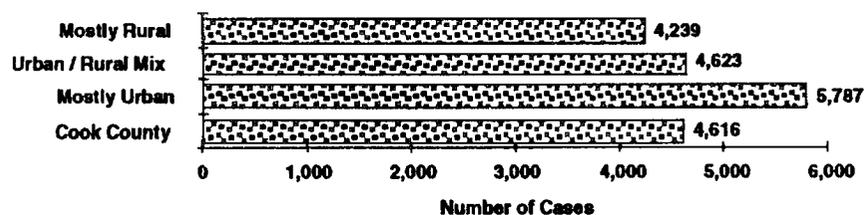
JUNE 1995

Drug law enforcement

What impact have Metropolitan Enforcement Groups (MEGs) and drug task forces had on drug trafficking in Illinois? That was the question researchers asked in a study recently conducted by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

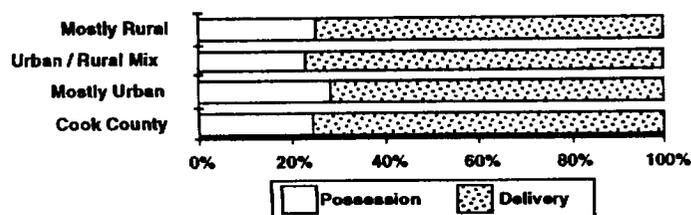
The study revealed that nearly 20,000 cases were opened and investigated by Illinois drug enforcement units between January 1988 and June 1994 (Figure 1). Those investigations resulted in more than 17,300 arrests, 75 percent of which were for illicit drug manufacturing and delivery. Almost 14,000 criminal prosecutions were initiated as a result, and the statewide conviction rate through June 1994 was 96 percent. In addition, officers seized 334,000 pounds of cannabis; 6,700 pounds of cocaine; more than 1,000 weapons; \$7.8 million in cash; and \$2.8 million in non-cash property.

Figure 1
New cases filed, 1988–1994, by region



By a 3-to-1 margin, the vast majority of all MEG and drug task force unit arrests were for manufacturing and delivery (Figure 2). Statewide, drug enforcement units made 4,336 arrests for illicit drug possession during the period and 13,010 arrests for manufacturing and delivery — a total of 17,346 arrests. Regionally, 4,401 of those arrests were made by the mostly rural units; 4,321 were made by the urban/rural units; 5,090 were made by the mostly urban units; and 3,534 were made by the Cook County unit.

Figure 2
Drug arrest proportions, 1988–1994, by offense type and region



About the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact Metropolitan Enforcement Groups and drug task forces have had on drug crime in Illinois. The state currently has a total of 23 such units. All but five date to 1988.

Metropolitan Enforcement Groups (MEGs) were statutorily created in the late 1970s and have two primary objectives. The first is to eliminate overlapping jurisdictional boundaries (local, county and state) that often complicate or impede drug investigations. The second is to develop and maintain a core of enforcement experts to investigate people running drug distribution networks — networks that are often complex and sophisticated. Illinois currently has 10 MEG units.

Drug task forces are similar to MEGs in purpose but are broader in scope; they are not statutorily limited to the investigation of drug crime. Nevertheless, drug crime remains their principal focus. The state currently has 13 drug task forces.

The study period encompassed by this report starts in January 1988 — the date MEGs initially received federal funding through the Authority — and continues through June 1994. For study purposes, the units were collapsed into four major regional groups, as follows:

Mostly Rural includes: Blackhawk, ECITF, Henry/Mercer, SCIDTF, SEIDTF, SIDTF, SIEG, WCITF and Task Force 17;

Urban/Rural Mix includes: CIEG, Kankakee, Multi-County, Quad Cities, SLANT, Task Force X, Vermilion and Task Force 6;

Mostly Urban includes: DuPage, Lake, Joliet MANS, NCNTF and MEGSI; and

Cook County is MEG of Cook County (formerly NEMEG). The city of Chicago is not a member of the Cook County MEG.

Figure 3
Drug arrest proportions, 1988–1994, by drug type and region

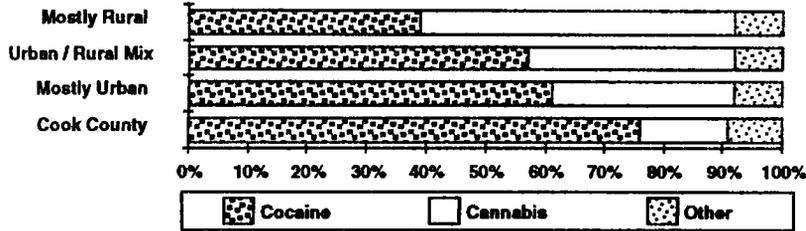


Figure 4
Drug arrest prosecutions, 1988–1994, by drug type and region

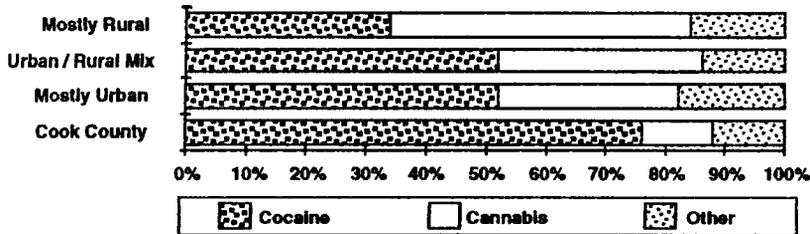


Figure 5
Drug conviction rate, 1988–1994, by region

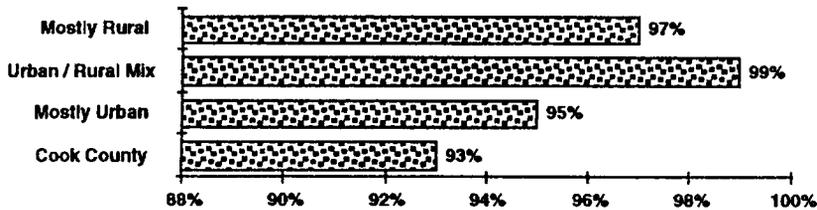
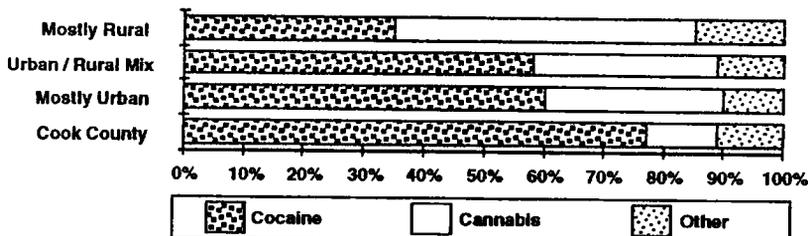


Figure 6
Drug arrest convictions, 1988–1994, by drug type and region



Statewide, 58 percent of all drug enforcement unit arrests were for cocaine possession and/or delivery. Cannabis possession and/or delivery accounted for 34 percent of the arrests, while the remaining 8 percent involved possession and/or delivery of opiates, hallucinogens or other dangerous drugs. Thirty-nine percent of all drug enforcement unit arrests were for cocaine in the mostly rural counties (Figure 3), while 76 percent were for cocaine in Cook County. Regional differences in arrest patterns reflect, in part, regional differences in drug use and drug prevalence. Cannabis production, for example, is particularly problematic in rural Illinois.

There were 13,625 criminal felony drug prosecutions in Illinois during the period as a result of drug enforcement unit efforts. Statewide, the majority of those prosecutions (53 percent) were for cocaine possession and/or delivery. Combined, cocaine and cannabis offenses accounted for 85 percent of all prosecutions. Regionally, 3,387 prosecutions were initiated as a result of efforts by the mostly rural units; 3,128 as a result of efforts by the urban/rural units; 4,067 as a result of efforts by mostly urban units; and 3,043 as a result of efforts by the Cook County unit. As Figure 4 illustrates, most criminal felony drug prosecutions were for cocaine in urban Illinois, while half of all such prosecutions were for cannabis in predominantly rural areas.

Statewide, 9,511 criminal felony drug convictions were obtained during the period as a direct result of drug enforcement unit efforts (Figure 5). An additional 411 criminal felony drug cases ended in acquittal. The statewide conviction rate during the period for drug enforcement unit cases was 96 percent. Slightly higher conviction rates were obtained in the more rural regions of the state, those in which cannabis production is particularly problematic. Regionally, 66 prosecutions resulted in acquittal in the mostly rural counties, 32 in the urban/rural counties, 154 in the mostly urban counties, and 159 in Cook County.

Cocaine and cannabis convictions accounted for 88 percent of all drug enforcement unit-related felony drug convictions during the period. Conviction patterns somewhat mirrored arrest patterns. Regionally, there were 2,451 drug crime convictions in the mostly rural counties; 2,196 convictions in the urban/rural counties; 2,751 convictions in the mostly urban counties; and 2,113 in Cook County. Cocaine convictions accounted for 57 percent of the total; these ranged from 77 percent in Cook County to 35 percent in the mostly rural counties (Figure 6).

More than one-third (37 percent) of all defendants arrested and convicted as a result of drug enforcement unit efforts were sentenced to state prison. Combining prison and jail sentences, more than half (52 percent) of all defendants were incarcerated. While Cook County had the lowest regional conviction rate during the period (by 6 percentage points), it had the second-highest overall incarceration rate (Figure 7). The highest incarceration rate, 59 percent, was in the urban/rural region. That region also had the highest overall conviction rate. Regionally, there were 2,443 sentences to prison, jail or probation in the mostly rural areas; 2,115 in the urban/rural areas; 2,761 in the mostly urban areas; and 2,013 in Cook County.

Statewide, 43 percent of all drug seizures netted cocaine. Another 41 percent netted cannabis, and 16 percent netted other types of drugs. While drug seizures were split between cocaine and cannabis, there were substantial regional differences (Figure 8). Nearly three-fourths of all seizures in Cook County involved cocaine, while only 21 percent of the seizures involved cocaine in the mostly rural counties. Of the 29,901 drug seizures made by drug enforcement units, 5,232 were made by the mostly rural units; 5,235 were made by the urban/rural units; 12,931 were made by the mostly urban units; and 6,502 were made by the Cook County unit.

A total of 6,653 pounds of cocaine was seized by drug enforcement units during the period. More than one-third of that cocaine (38 percent) was seized by units in rural Illinois (Figure 9). A significant, but unknown, portion of rural seizures involved the interdiction of cocaine en route to Chicago and other large metropolitan areas inside and outside of the continental United States.

Sixty-three percent of all cannabis seizures during the period were made by drug enforcement units operating in areas with both urban and rural characteristics (Figure 10). Statewide, more than 166 tons of cannabis (334,000 pounds) were seized by drug enforcement units. Even in Cook County, where opportunities for cannabis production are more limited than in other parts of the state, drug enforcement units seized more than 3.5 tons of the illicit substance during the period.

Figure 7
Drug conviction sentences imposed, 1988-1994, by sentence type and region

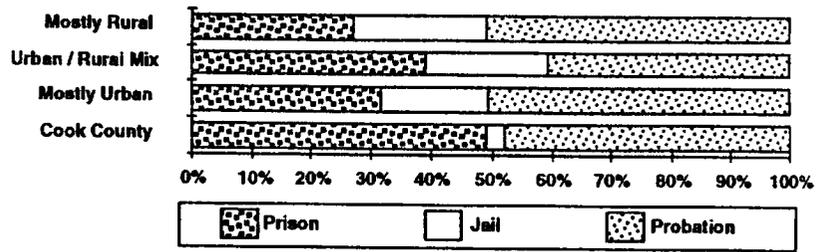


Figure 8
Drugs seized (number of incidents), 1988-1994, by drug type and region

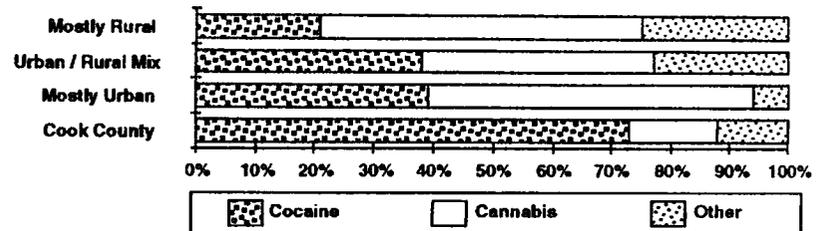


Figure 9
Cocaine seizure quantities (in pounds), 1988-1994, by region

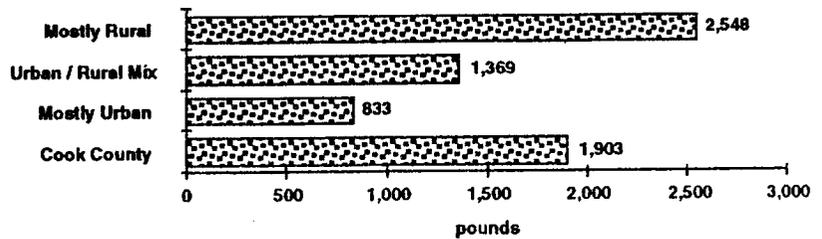
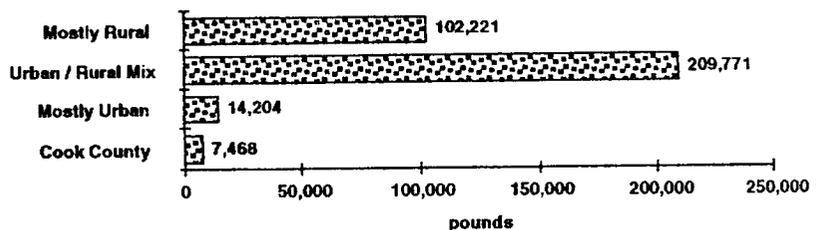


Figure 10
Cannabis seizure quantities (in pounds), 1988-1994, by region



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Figure 11
Cash and tangible property seizure value (in thousands),
1988-1994, by type and region

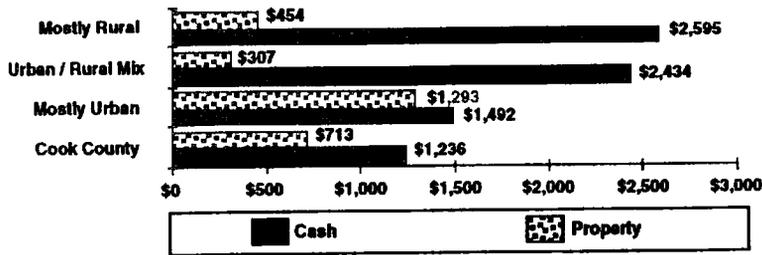
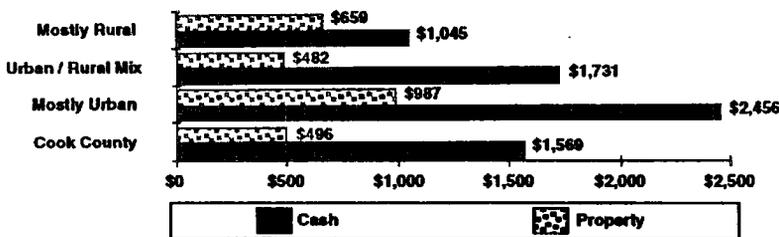


Figure 12
Cash and tangible property forfeiture value (in thousands),
1988-1994, by type and region



Statewide, 1,640 drug enforcement unit seizures netted \$7.8 million in cash and \$2.8 million in tangible assets, such as vehicles and real property during the period — a total of \$10.6 million. Cash seizures ranged from \$1.2 million in Cook County to \$2.5 million in the predominantly rural areas (Figure 11). Tangible property seizures ranged in value from \$307,000 in the urban/rural areas to \$1.3 million in the predominantly urban areas. Nearly three-fourths (74 percent) of the seizures were in cash. Regionally, the mostly rural units seized cash and tangible property valued at \$3.1 million, the urban/rural units seized assets valued at \$2.7 million; the mostly urban units seized assets valued at \$2.8 million; and the Cook County unit seized assets valued at \$1.9 million.

A total of 1,162 forfeiture judgments were filed statewide during the period. As a result, \$6.8 million in cash and \$2.6 million in tangible property were forfeited. Cash forfeitures ranged from \$1 million in predominantly rural areas to \$2.5 million in predominantly urban areas (Figure 12). Tangible property forfeitures ranged from \$482,000 in the urban/rural areas, to \$987,000 in the predominantly urban areas. ■

This report was written by Dr. Edwin Kennedy.



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