Research Assignment 2: Deviance, Crime and Employment

Data Mining Exercises – complete all three parts of the assignment

EXPLORING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND PRISONS

In this project, you will use the U.S. Census's *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.* to look for different types of crime statistics. The *Statistical Abstract* contains a collection of statistics on social and economic conditions in the United States. We will use this source to gather information on criminal activity, levels of unemployment, and rates of incarceration in order to better understand patterns of crime in American society.

To obtain the information for this exercise, follow these steps:

1. Start at the Web page for the U.S. Census Bureau's [Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 2012](#) (you can also find this book in the reference section of your library). You can use this webpage or download a PDF (30MB) for offline use to complete the assignment.

2. On the Web page or PDF "Contents" area for the *Statistical Abstract* you should see a list of "Sections." First select "Section 5: Law Enforcement, Courts, and Prisons," and (if you're using the webpage), you can either click on the image on the right side that says "Download Law Enforcement, Courts, and Prisons Section [PDF - 1.5 MB]" or download the individual tables as Microsoft Excel files.

Part I
In the first part of this data exercise you will be using data on crime rates by state. To begin, scroll down the list of tables until you find the one labeled, "Crime Rates by State, 2008 and 2009, and by Type, 2009," and click on that table (Table No. 308).

Notice that the table distinguishes between violent crimes (murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault) and property crimes (burglary, larceny/theft, motor vehicle theft). Find the five states with the highest and lowest rates for each of these broad categories (violent versus property) and record your findings in Table 1, below. (*Note*: Do not include the District of Columbia.) Did the same states show up in both categories of crime? Next, look up the state you're from and record those rates too (if you are from outside of the US, select your state of current residence, New York).

Discussion Questions
Were you surprised by what you found? Using your sociological imagination, explain the findings of your investigation. What social factors might contribute to the patterns of high and low rates of crimes?

Write a summary of your response to the activities undertaken and questions answered in Part I. Include your figures from Table 1.

Table 1. Rates of Crime for Selected States (2009)

Violent crime rate	Property crime rate
Five highest states	*Five highest states*
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
Five lowest states	*Five lowest states*
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
Your state	

Part II

Statistics show a decline in crime rates in recent years. According to the *Statistical Abstract*, between 1990 and 2009 (the most recent year for which information is available), the violent crime rate declined from 730 per 100,000 population in 1990 to 429/100,000 in 2009, and the property crime rate dropped from 5,073/100,000 population in 1990 to 3,036/100,000 in 2009. In this portion of the data exercise, you will explore one possible explanation for this decline by applying sociological "strain theory." Strain theory would suggest that the declining crime rate is related to better economic conditions of society. If the economy is doing well and the unemployment rate is low, then there is less pressure on people to commit crime.

To test this hypothesis, we need to look at both the crime rates and the unemployment rate for the period from 1990 to the present. To obtain the annual crime rates for violent crimes and property crimes, scroll through the list of tables again, only this time you want to look for "Crimes and Crime Rates by Type of Offense" (Table 306). Record information for the violent crime rate and the property crime rate in Table 2.

Once you have completed this, return to the *Statistical Abstract* Web page and look again at the list of sections. This time select "Section 12: Labor Force, Employment and Earnings," and, again, on the following page, click the image on the right side that says "Download Labor Force, Employment and Earnings Section [PDF - 1.5 MB]" (or download the Microsoft Excel table separately). Open the page and review the tables that provide all the data you will need to get started.

Scroll down until you see "Table 586: Civilian Population—Employment Status," and click on that. Record the information on the unemployment rate in Table 2.

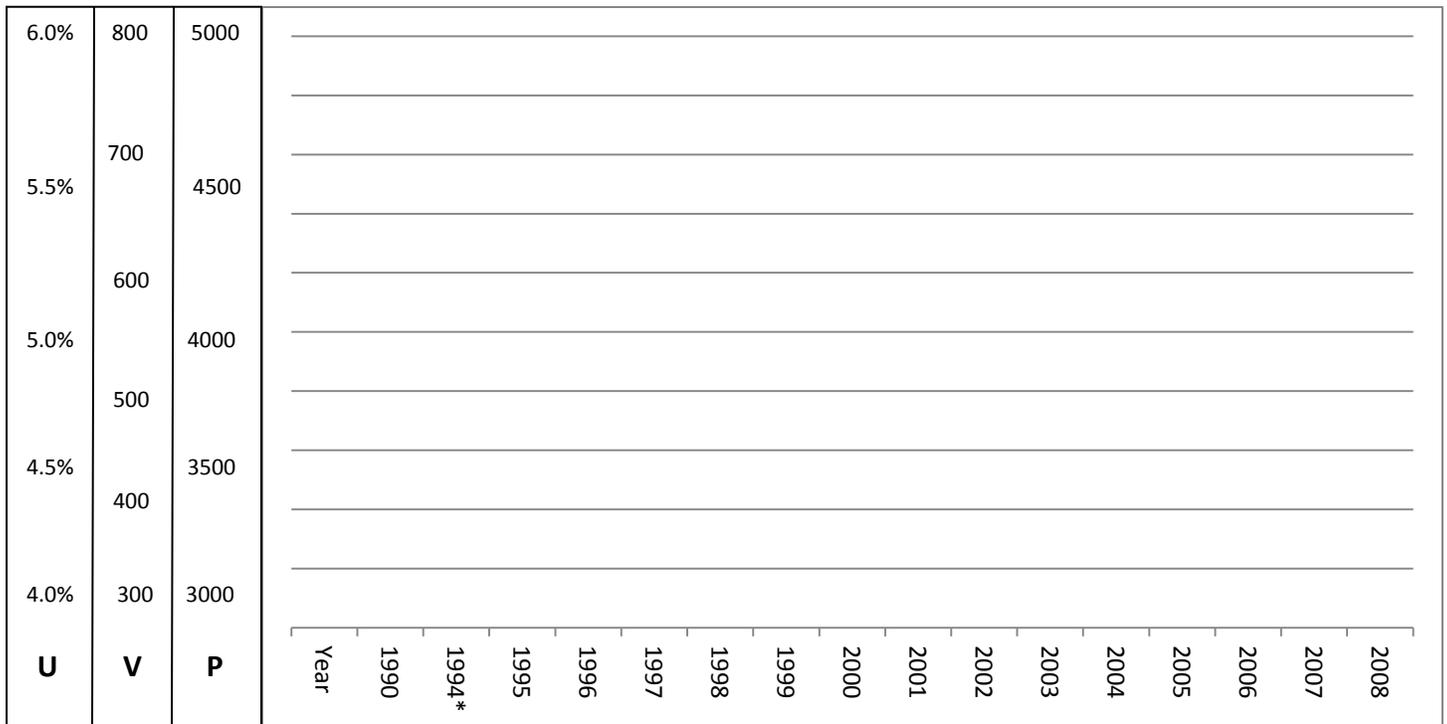**Table 2. Crime Rates and Unemployment Rates for the United States, 1990–present**

| Year | Crime rate, per 100,000 population | | Unemployment rate (% of labor force) |
	Violent	Property	
1990			
1994*			
1995			
1996			
1997			
1998			
1999			
2000			

2001			
2002			
2003			
2004			
2005			
2006			
2007			
2008			

* Crime rate or Unemployment rate data is not available for the years 1991-1993.

Chart of Table 2

Next, plot each number above on a chart that shows the data in Table 2 visually:

U	V	P
6.0%	800	5000
	700	
5.5%		4500
	600	
5.0%		4000
	500	
4.5%		3500
	400	
4.0%	300	3000

Year: 1990, 1994*, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008

U = Unemployment %
V = Violent Crime rate (x/100,000)
P = Property Crime rate (x/100,000)

Plot each number, then connect the dots – be sure to label each line U, V, or P.
(you may want to use different colored pens for each line)

Discussion Questions

What is the trend of the unemployment rate (in percent) since 1990? Can you see a relationship between the unemployment rate and criminal activity?

Write a summary of your response to the activities undertaken and questions answered in Part II. Include your figures from Table 2 (but you do NOT need to copy Chart 2).

Part III

In their discussion of strategies for reducing crime, we can pose the question, "Are prisons the answer?" This last part of the data exercise provides you with an opportunity to consider how to answer this question. As noted in your textbook, the United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. Does the strategy of locking people away result in less crime? If this were true, we should expect to find that states with the highest rates of incarceration would have the lowest rates of crime, while those with the lowest rates of incarceration would have the highest rates of crime.

In order to test this, let's look at rates of incarceration across the United States (see Table 3 below). According to the Bureau of Justice, the national incarceration rate (as of June 30, 2009) was 748 persons in custody per 100,000 population ("Prison Inmates at Midyear 2009—Statistical Tables," *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*). Table 3 provides information on the highest and lowest rates of incarcerations for different state jurisdictions as of June 30, 2009. Next, compare the states listed in this table to those you listed in Table 1 to see whether there is a relationship between rates of incarceration and crime.

Table 3. States with the Highest and Lowest Incarceration Rates of Prisoners under Jurisdiction of State and Federal Correctional Authorities, June 30, 2009

States with highest incarceration rates		States with lowest incarceration rates	
State	**Incarceration rate**	**State**	**Incarceration rate**
1. Louisiana	866	1. Maine	151
2. Mississippi	718	2. Minnesota	191
3. Oklahoma	655	3. New Hampshire	205
4. Texas	649	4. Massachusetts	215
5. Alabama	637	5. North Dakota	222

Discussion Questions

What is the relationship between incarceration and crime? The authors of your sociology textbook suggest that incarceration is not very effective in deterring crime. What do you think, based on the information you have uncovered? In this society we tend to look at incarceration as a deterrent to crime. Is that belief borne out by the data? We can also argue that having ample opportunities to find employment is a deterrent. In your answer to these questions, consider which strategy—employment or imprisonment—is *more* effective in reducing criminal behavior.

Write a summary of your response to the activities undertaken and questions answered in Part III.