

introduction to **criminology**

THIRD
EDITION

pamela j. schram • stephen g. tibbetts



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Introduction to Criminology

Third Edition

I dedicate this book to my brothers Douglas Monroe and Jeffrey Alan Schram.

—Pam Schram

I dedicate this book to my loving wife and best friend, Kim Tibbetts. My true soulmate, for the last 20 years and forever.

—Steve Tibbetts

In Memoriam

After many years in academia, we are grateful for having the colleague whom we also consider a dear friend, someone special in our lives. Steve was one of those exceptional colleagues, a dear friend, to me. I will miss our conversations. Those who knew Steve appreciate that those conversations could range from how much snow he was shoveling, to his thoughts on why SEC is so wonderful (I'm Big 10), to his favorite episodes of Law and Order. Steve always expressed such joy and pride when talking about the special loves in his life—his wife, Kim; his daughter, Rian; and his mom and dad, Jane and Steve.

Steve was one of those colleagues I could go to when I needed to discuss a possible project, advice on how to handle a situation, or just to “vent.” He always had a way of making things seem better. He was known by many of us in the department to share odd or strange crime stories. For me, he would enjoy sharing some crazy cat news story. By the way, Steve did not really like cats, so you can imagine the type of stories he would share.

Steve has made a significant, and lasting, impact in the field of criminology in so many ways. But he has impacted so many people, not just as a criminologist, but as Stephen Tibbetts. He

was a wonderful husband, father, son, and dear friend. I will miss him.

—Pam Schram

Introduction to Criminology

Why Do They Do It?

Third Edition

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Preface

If you are considering a career in any aspect of criminal justice, and you want to know more about the motivations and socio-psychological makeup of serious offenders, then this book is for you! *Introduction to Criminology: Why Do They Do It?* applies the dominant theories in the existing criminological literature as to why people commit crimes. In addition, we examine many recent (as well as many hypothetical) examples of serious crimes, and we demonstrate applications of theory as to why the offenders did what they did. While other textbooks do a decent job in discussing the basic theories, as well as exploring the various types of crime, our book integrates various street crimes within each chapter and applies theories that are appropriate in explaining such criminal activity. This is extremely important, because most instructors never get to the latter typology chapters in a given semester or term. So our approach is to incorporate them into the theoretical chapters in which they apply directly to the theories presented.

Our specific examples and true stories, such as notable serial killings and other recent crimes, in each chapter, as well as our use of established theoretical models to explain the offenses, is another primary distinction of this book. Obviously, this book is meant to be central to an introductory course in criminology, but due to the emphasis on applied theoretical explanations, it is also appropriate for higher-level undergraduate and graduate courses in criminological theory or as a reference for anyone in the field of criminal justice. In it, we have integrated true crimes (and some hypothetical examples) both on a general level, such as in the Applying Crime to Theory sections, and more specifically—in the Why Do They Do It? sections, which often involve serial killings, mass murderers, or other notorious examples of offenders/offending.

The subtitle of our book, “Why Do They Do It?” relates to our theme. Our goal in writing this book was to apply established theories of crime, which are often seen as abstract and hypothetical, to real crimes that have occurred, as well as to hypothetical ones that are quite likely to occur. To this end, we explore the various reasons for offending or the “why they do

it” in various cases, from the first documented serial killers in the United States—the Harpe Brothers in the late 18th century—to California cop-killer/spree-killer Christopher Dorner in 2013 and John T. Earnest, who massacred worshippers in a Poway, California, synagogue in 2019. Importantly, throughout these discussions of actual crimes we will apply theories. As you will see, some of the theories that applied to the earliest crimes seem to apply to the most modern crimes as well.

Unlike other authors in this field, we chose not to include separate chapters on violent or property crimes, because we have worked those into and applied them to the theories explored in each chapter. We strongly believe that by integrating discussions of such serious crimes—all of the FBI Index offenses of murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor-vehicle theft, larceny, and arson, as well as non-Index crimes, such as simple assault and driving under the influence—into the theoretical chapters provides the best exploration of why people commit such offenses. And the flip side is good as well; by discussing offenses together with theories, we show you how to apply theories toward explaining other instances of criminal behavior. Again, this goes back to our theme of “why do they do it?” It demonstrates our goal: apply the appropriate theories for the specific crime.

Additionally, our book is different from other textbooks in that we don’t have an overwhelming amount of sidebars and special sections that diverge from the topic at hand. We limited the special sections to a few basic categories, largely based on the goal of this text and mostly dedicated to applying criminological theory to actual offenses or true cases.

We feature a separate chapter on feminist criminology. Given that over half of Americans are female, and there has been a recent increase in certain crimes (e.g., simple assault) by women, this is an important addition to the study of crime. Furthermore, while men are still responsible for the vast majority of violent acts—murder, robbery, aggravated assault—in all societies, the pursuit of understanding why women commit so much less violence may have significant implications for reducing violence by men.

Another distinctive aspect of this book is that we devoted separate chapters to the developmental/life-course perspective, as well as modern biosocial

approaches regarding propensities to commit crime. These two frameworks/perspectives have become some of the most accepted and valid frameworks for explaining criminal behavior. A recent survey of key criminologists in the field showed that the developmental/life-course perspective ranked as the second most accepted perspective in explaining chronic offending (and the biosocial perspective ranked number 6, out of dozens of theories), yet most other textbooks do not cover this perspective as widely or in depth as we do. The developmental/life-course perspective, as well as the biosocial perspective, is “cutting edge” right now, and so we highlight the importance of these theoretical models, as well as the recent empirical studies in those areas.

Our text does follow a somewhat traditional format in that it presents theories chronologically from the Classical School to the Positive School of criminology, discussing all the established theories in the areas of social structure, social process, and conflict theories as they became popular over time. However, we look deeply into why certain theories became popular at certain times, which is often due more to politics and societal trends than the empirical validity of a given theory. Students of criminology should understand how historical crime and theories about crime were products of certain periods and certain ways of thinking.

Finally, our special typology chapters, the last three chapters of the book, are dedicated to contemporary topics—such as cybercrime, hate crimes, terrorism, white-collar/corporate crimes, and drug-related offenses—as well as several others that do not fit into the FBI Index crimes. We have done our best to provide the most current research on these topics. Gaining insight into these modern forms of offending is vital if you wish to understand the current state of crime in our society.

Our book also provides an ancillary package, with numerous resources to support instructors and students.

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New to This Edition

As we mentioned previously, a constant theme of this book is “why do they do it?” We explore different reasons by presenting various cases, both hypothetical and actual, both current and historical. For this edition, we have updated some of these materials, including recent crime data as well as more current news stories. Other significant changes in this edition include the following:

- [Chapter 1](#) features a more extensive discussion on victimization, focusing on victims of crime and key concepts in victimology.
- An entire chapter ([Chapter 2](#)) is dedicated to measuring crime. This provides a strong, and essential, foundation to understanding and appreciating how crime data enhance our understanding of criminal activity, with updated statistics from national databases.
- Most chapters have new case studies, which are introduced at the beginning of the chapter and often revisited at the end in order to explain the offenses and apply the theories discussed in the chapter.
- A new section on multicide examines the motivations behind mass murders, including school shootings, as well as issues of race and religious ideology linked to these types of crimes.
- Coverage of contemporary issues—such as gun control, mental health, disparity in the criminal justice system, cybercrime and internet fraud, hate crimes, and terrorism—has been updated.
- Critical-thinking questions and other textual features help readers make connections between the real-world examples and theory.

- The revised learning objectives follow Bloom's taxonomy and provide a clearer pedagogical framework.

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Acknowledgments

We would first like to thank former publisher Jerry Westby. It was Jerry's idea for us to write this book, and he had "gone to bat" for us numerous times regarding various unique aspects of this text, such as integrating discussion of violent and property street crimes into the theoretical chapters, rather than having separate chapters on these topics at the end of the book, as well as including separate chapters on feminist and developmental/life-course perspectives. This is a rather unorthodox approach, compared to other introductory criminology textbooks, but Jerry was fully supportive, even at the outset. So, for his support of our rather deviant way of approaching this material, he has our highest respect.

We would also like to thank the staff at SAGE Publishing for doing such a great job of putting the book together, which includes fixing all the mistakes we made in drafts of the chapters, as well as so many other things that go into producing a book such as this. We specifically want to thank acquisitions editor Jessica Miller, content development editor Adeline Grout, and production editor Laureen Gleason for all of their help in getting the drafts of the third edition ready to send to the copy editor and for advising us on how to make the book far more polished than it was. We also want to thank our copy editor, Will DeRooy. He did a fantastic job, and it was a pleasure working with him. Also, we offer special thanks to Laura Kearns for pulling together the original filming. Overall, we give the greatest thanks to everyone at SAGE who worked on this book!

Pamela Schram would like to acknowledge some very special people who had an influence on her life prior to her college years. First and foremost, she would like to thank her ninth-grade English teacher, Joe Devlin, who, on the first day of class, announced to his students, "I can't 'learn' you. First, that is poor English, and second, that is not how it works. I can teach you, but the learning part is on you." Obviously, those words have stuck with Pam; it has been more than 30 years and she still remembers Mr. Devlin's opening lecture. Later, Mr. Devlin was Pam's Latin teacher; Pam continued to take Latin, and she was the only student for Latin III. Mr.

Devlin would stay after school to conduct this class, and it taught Pam the lengths to which a truly dedicated teacher will go for his or her students.

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As Pam has gotten older, she has realized the many special ways in which numerous people have touched her life. One of those special people was her co-author Steve Tibbetts. Steve was an extremely intelligent and well-respected criminologist. He was also a wonderful friend who delivered vital encouragement, usually with a sense of humor. He was very patient and understanding with her not just when writing this book but during his years at CSUSB. Through his friendship, he helped her be a better person.

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Pamela J. Schram

has published articles on such topics as violent female offenders, female juvenile gang members, and issues pertaining to women in prison, such as stereotypes about mothers in prison and vocational programming. She has co-authored three books: one on women in prison, one on theory and practice in feminist criminology, and a juvenile delinquency text. She is currently interested in issues pertaining to elderly prisoners. Dr. Schram has been involved in various research projects that have primarily focused on evaluating the effectiveness of measures such as juvenile diversion options and programs for at-risk youths as well as programs for women in prison. Dr. Schram received her Ph.D. from Michigan State University. She is a professor in the Department of Criminal Justice. She is currently the Associate Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at California State University, San Bernardino.



Stephen G. Tibbetts

was a Professor and Chair in the Department of Criminal Justice at Radford University. He earned his undergraduate degree in

criminology and law (with high honors) from the University of Florida and his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Maryland. For more than a decade, he worked as a sworn officer of the court (juvenile), first in Washington County, Tennessee, and then in San Bernardino County, California, providing recommendations for disposing numerous juvenile court cases. He published more than 50 scholarly articles in scientific journals (including *Criminology*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, and *Criminal Justice and Behavior*), as well as nine books, all examining various topics regarding criminal offending and policies to reduce such behavior. One of these books, *American Youth Gangs at the Millennium*, received a Choice award for Outstanding Academic Title from the American Library Association. In 2010, Tibbetts received a Golden Apple award from the mayor of San Bernardino for being chosen as the Outstanding Professor at the CSUSB campus. One of his books, *Criminals in the Making: Criminality Across the Life Course* (SAGE, 2008), was lauded by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* as a key scholarly publication in advancing the study of biosocial criminology.

Chapter 1 Introduction to Criminology



Often, crimes such as the mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2017, lead people to ask, “Why do they do it?”

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Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- 1.1 Identify key concepts in understanding criminology.
- 1.2 Summarize the general structure and organization of the criminal justice system.
- 1.3 Identify and characterize a good theory.
- 1.4 Identify key concepts and issues associated with victimology.

Case Study

The “Confidence Man”

On July 8, 1849, *The New York Herald*, in its “Police Intelligence” section, reported the arrest of William Thompson. The *Herald* wrote that Thompson had been scamming men he met on the streets of New York City. He had a “genteel appearance” and was very personable. After a brief conversation with the target of his scam (i.e., the “mark”), Thompson would ask, “Have you confidence in me to trust me with your watch until tomorrow?” The target, possibly thinking that Thompson was a forgotten acquaintance, would give him his watch.¹

The *Herald* thus disdainfully labeled Thompson a “confidence man,” and the term soon became part of the American vernacular. It is unclear as to why the “Confidence Man” article drew so much attention. However, it gave birth to varying phrases such as “confidence game” and “con man.”²

In November 2018, it was reported that numerous grandparents in Kentucky were victims of what Kentucky’s attorney general, Andy Beshear, called the “grandparent scam.”³ Essentially, the victims reported that they had received a call from someone claiming to be their grandchild. The “grandchild” had said that he or she was in jail in another state following his or her arrest for driving under the influence and causing an automobile accident. Then, a second person had gotten in on the conversation, claiming to be an attorney or a law enforcement officer. This person had confirmed the scammer’s story. Afterward, the grandparent had been asked to wire money or send cash to pay for the “grandchild’s” bail. The scammer also had asked the grandparent not to tell anyone of this situation, including his or her parents.

Generally, the “grandparent scam” follows this type of pattern:

- A grandparent gets a call from someone posing as his or her grandchild.
- The caller explains that he or she is in trouble, with a story such as “There’s been an accident and I’m _____ (in jail, in the hospital, stuck in a foreign country). I need your help.”
- The caller provides just enough detail to make the story seem believable.
- Next, the caller informs the grandparent that a third person, such as a lawyer, doctor, or police officer, will explain all of this if the grandparent will call that person.
- The caller asks the grandparent to send or wire money but “Don’t tell Mom and Dad.”⁴

According to the Federal Trade Commission, in 2018 one in four people 70 years or older sent money to an imposter whom they believed to be a family member or friend. The median individual loss for these victims of fraud was \$9,000.⁵

The “Confidence Man” and the “grandparent scam” are separated by more than 170 years; the technological expertise needed to carry out these crimes significantly changed during this time. However, what links these two cases is motive—monetary gain. This is one of the most fascinating questions in the study of crime—although technology has changed how certain

crimes are committed (e.g., internet fraud), have the explanations (i.e., “why they do it”) changed?

Introduction

When introducing students to criminology, it is essential to stress how various concepts and principles of theoretical development are woven into our understanding of, as well as our policy on, crime. This chapter begins with a brief discussion of such concepts as *crime*, *criminal*, *deviant*, *criminology*, *criminal justice*, and *consensus and conflict perspectives of crime*. The following section presents a general summary of the different stages of the adult criminal justice system, as well as the juvenile justice system. Next, this chapter illustrates how criminology informs policies and programs. Unfortunately, there are instances when policies are not founded on criminological theory and rigorous research but are more of a “knee-jerk” reaction to perceived problems. The concluding section provides an overview of victimology and various issues related to victims of crime.

What Is a Crime?

There are various definitions of [crime](#). Many scholars have disagreed as to what should be considered a crime. For instance, if one takes a legalistic approach, then crime is that which violates the law. But should one consider, also, whether certain actions cause serious harm? If governments violate the basic human rights of their citizens, for example, are they engaging in criminal behavior?⁶

crime: there are various definitions of crime. From a legalistic approach, crime is that which violates the law.

As illustrated by these questions, the issue with defining crime from a legalistic approach is that one jurisdiction may designate an action as a crime while another does not. Some acts, such as murder, are against the law in most countries as well as in all jurisdictions of the United States. These are referred to as acts of [mala in se](#) (Latin, “evil in itself”), meaning the act is “inherently and essentially evil, that is immoral in its nature and injurious

in its consequence, without any regard to the fact of its being noticed or punished by the law of the state.”⁷

mala in se: acts that are considered inherently evil.

Other crimes are known as acts of ***mala prohibita***, which means “a wrong prohibited; an act which is not inherently immoral, but becomes so because its commission is expressly forbidden by positive law.”⁸ For instance, in the last few years there has been considerable decriminalization of marijuana. Some states have legalized medical marijuana, while others have legalized *both* recreational and medical marijuana.

mala prohibita: acts that are considered crimes primarily because they have been outlawed by the legal codes in that jurisdiction.

This text focuses on both *mala in se* and *mala prohibita* offenses, as well as other acts of ***deviance***. Deviant acts are not necessarily against the law but are considered atypical and may be deemed immoral. For example, in Nevada in the 1990s, a young man watched his friend (who was later criminally prosecuted) kill a young girl in a casino bathroom. He never told anyone of the murder. While most people would consider this highly immoral, at that time, Nevada state law did not require people who witnessed a killing to report it to authorities. This act was deviant, because most would consider it immoral; yet it was not criminal, because it was not against the laws of that jurisdiction. It is essential to note that as a result of this event, Nevada changed its laws to make withholding such information a criminal act.

deviance: behaviors that are not normal; includes many illegal acts, as well as activities that are not necessarily criminal but are unusual and often violate social norms.

Other acts of deviance are not necessarily seen as immoral but are considered strange and violate social norms. One example of such acts is purposely belching at a formal dinner. These types of deviant acts are relevant even if not considered criminal under the legal definition, because individuals engaging in these types of activities reveal a disposition toward antisocial behavior often linked to criminal behavior. Further, acts that are

frowned upon by most people (e.g., using a cell phone while driving or smoking cigarettes in public) are subject to being declared illegal. Many jurisdictions are attempting to have these behaviors made illegal and have been quite successful, especially in New York and California.

While most *mala in se* activities are also considered highly deviant, this is not necessarily the case for *mala prohibita* acts. For instance, speeding on a highway (a *mala prohibita* act)—although it is illegal—is not technically deviant, because many people do it.

This book presents theories for all these types of activities, even those that do not violate the law.⁹

What Are Criminology and Criminal Justice?

The term [criminology](#) was coined by Italian law professor Raffaele Garofalo in 1885 (in Italian, *criminologia*). In 1887, anthropologist Paul Topinard invented its French cognate (*criminologie*).¹⁰ In 1934, American criminologist Edwin Sutherland defined criminology as

the body of knowledge regarding crime as a social phenomenon. It includes within its scope the process of making laws, of breaking laws, and of reacting toward the breaking of laws. . . . The objective of criminology is the development of a body of general and verified principles and of other types of knowledge regarding this process of law, crime, and treatment or prevention.¹¹

criminology: the scientific study of crime and the reasons why people engage (or don't engage) in criminal behavior.

Criminology is the scientific study of crime, especially the reasons for engaging in criminal behavior. While other textbooks may provide a more complex definition of crime, the word “scientific” distinguishes our definition from other perspectives and examinations of crime.¹²

Philosophical and legal examinations of crime are based on logic and deductive reasoning—for example, by developing what makes logical sense. Journalists play a key role in examining crime by exploring what is happening in criminal justice and revealing injustices as well as new forms of crime. However, the philosophical, legal, and journalistic perspectives of crime are not scientific, because they do not involve the use of the scientific method.

Criminal justice often refers to the various criminal justice agencies and institutions (e.g., police, courts, and corrections) that are interrelated and work together toward common goals. Interestingly, many scholars who have referred to criminal justice as a “system” have done so only as a way to collectively refer to those agencies and organizations, rather than to imply that they are interrelated.¹³ Some individuals argue that *criminal justice system* is an oxymoron. For instance, Joanne Belknap noted that she preferred to use the terms *crime processing*, *criminal processing*, and *criminal legal system*, given that “the processing of victims and offenders [is] anything but ‘just.’”¹⁴

criminal justice: often refers to the various criminal justice agencies and institutions (e.g., police, courts, and corrections) that are interrelated.

The Consensus and Conflict Perspectives of Crime

A **consensus perspective** of crime views the formal system of laws, as well as the enforcement of those laws, as incorporating societal norms for which there is a broad normative consensus.¹⁵ The consensus perspective developed from the writings of late-19th- and early-20th-century sociologists such as Durkheim, Weber, Ross, and Sumner.¹⁶ This perspective assumes that individuals, for the most part, agree on what is right and wrong, as well as on how those norms have been implemented in laws and the ways in which those laws are enforced. Thus, people obey laws not for fear of punishment but rather because they have internalized societal norms and values and perceive these laws as appropriate.¹⁷ The consensus perspective was dominant during the early part of the 20th century. Since the 1950s, however, no major theorist has considered this to be the best

perspective of law. Further, “to the extent that assumptions or hypotheses about consensus theory are still given credence in current theories of law, they are most apt to be found in ‘mutualist’ models.”¹⁸

consensus perspective: theories that assume that virtually everyone is in agreement on the laws and therefore assume no conflict in attitudes regarding the laws and rules of society.

Around the 1950s, the **conflict perspective** began challenging the consensus approach.¹⁹ The conflict perspective maintains that there is conflict between various societal groups with different interests. This conflict is often resolved when the group in power achieves control.

conflict perspective: theories of criminal behavior that assume that most people disagree on what the law should be and that law is a means by which those in power maintain their advantage.

Several criminologists, such as Richard Quinney, William Chambliss, and Austin Turk, maintained that criminological theory has placed too much emphasis on explaining criminal behavior, and it needs to shift its focus toward explaining criminal law. That is, the emphasis should not be on understanding the causes of criminal behavior; rather, it should be on understanding the process by which certain behaviors and individuals are formally designated as criminal. From this perspective, instead of asking, “Why do some people commit crimes while others do not?” one would ask, “Why are some behaviors defined as criminal while others are not?” Asking these types of questions raises the issue of whether the formulation and the enforcement of laws equally serve the good of all, not just the interests of those with the power to influence such matters.²⁰

Learning Check 1.1

1. Crime that is evil in itself is referred to as *mala* _____.
2. Acts that are not necessarily against the law but are considered atypical and may be considered more immoral than illegal are _____ acts.
3. Criminology is distinguished from other perspectives of crime, such as journalistic, philosophical, or legal perspectives, because it involves the use of the _____.

Answers at www.edge.sagepub.com/schram3e

The Criminal Justice System

According to the 1967 President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice:

any criminal justice system is an apparatus society uses to enforce the standards of conduct necessary to protect individuals and the community. It operates by apprehending, prosecuting, convicting, and sentencing those members of the community who violate the basic rules of group existence.^{[21](#)}

This general purpose of the criminal justice system can be further simplified into three goals: to control crime, to prevent crime, and to provide and maintain justice. The structure and organization of the criminal justice system has evolved in an effort to meet these goals. There are three typically recognized components: law enforcement, courts, and corrections.^{[22](#)}

Law Enforcement

Law enforcement includes various organizational levels (i.e., federal, state, and local). One of the key features distinguishing federal law enforcement agencies from state or local agencies is that they have often been established to enforce specific statutes. Thus, their units are highly specialized and often associated with specialized training and resources.^{[23](#)} Federal law enforcement agencies include the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Secret Service, the Marshals Service, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). Further, almost all federal agencies, including the Postal Service and the Forest Service, have some police power. In 2002, President George W. Bush restructured the federal agencies, resulting in the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2003. The DHS was created in an effort to protect and defend the United States from terrorist threats following the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington, DC.^{[24](#)}

The earliest form of state police agency to emerge in the present-day United States was the Texas Rangers, founded by Stephen Austin in 1823. By 1925, formal state police departments existed throughout most of the country. While some organizational variations exist among the different states, two models generally characterize the structure of these state police departments.

The first model can be designated as [state police](#). Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Vermont, and Arkansas are states that have a state police structure. These agencies have general police powers and enforce state laws as well as perform routine patrols and traffic regulation. They have specialized units to investigate major crimes, intelligence units, drug-trafficking units, juvenile units, and crime laboratories.

state police: agencies with general police powers to enforce state laws as well as to investigate major crimes; they may have intelligence units, drug-trafficking units, juvenile units, and crime laboratories.

The second model can be designated as [highway patrol](#). California, Ohio, Georgia, Florida, and the Carolinas are states that have a highway patrol model. For these agencies, the primary focus is to enforce the laws that govern the operation of motor vehicles on public roads and highways. In some instances, this includes not just enforcing traffic laws but investigating crimes that occur in specific locations or under certain circumstances, such as on state highways or state property.²⁵

highway patrol: one type of model characterizing statewide police departments. The primary focus is to enforce the laws that govern the operation of motor vehicles on public roads and highways.

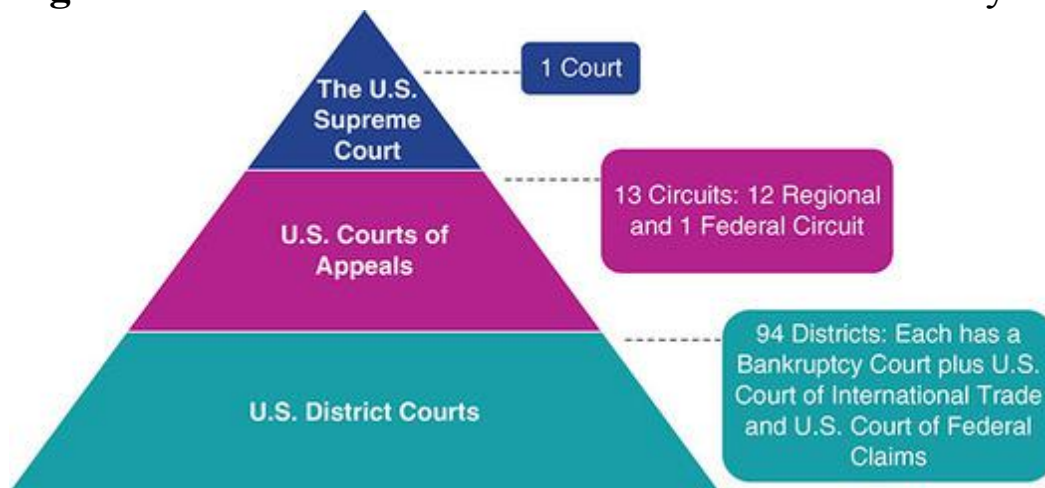
Agencies on the local level are divided into counties and municipalities. The primary law enforcement office for most counties is that of county sheriff. In most instances, the sheriff is an elected position. The majority of local police officers are employed by municipalities. Most of these agencies comprise fewer than 10 officers. Local police agencies are responsible for the “nuts and bolts” of law-enforcement responsibilities. For instance, they engage in crime prevention activities such as patrol their districts and investigate most crimes. Further, these officers are often responsible for

providing social services, such as responding to incidents of domestic violence and child abuse.²⁶

Courts

The United States does not have just one judicial system. Rather, the judicial system is quite complex. There are 52 different systems: one for each state, one for the District of Columbia, and one for the federal government. Given this complexity, however, one can characterize the United States as having a *dual court system*. This dual court system consists of separate yet interrelated systems: the federal courts and the state courts. While there are variations among the states in terms of judicial structure, usually a state court system consists of different levels or tiers, such as lower courts, trial courts, appellate courts, and the state's highest court. The federal court system is a three-tiered model: district courts (i.e., trial courts) and other specialized courts, courts of appeals, and the Supreme Court (see [Figure 1.1](#)).²⁷

Figure 1.1 Three-Tiered Model of the Federal Court System



Source: Adapted from <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/levels-of-the-federal-courts>.

Before any case can be brought to a court, that court must have *jurisdiction* over those individuals involved in the case. Jurisdiction is the authority of a court to hear and decide cases within an area of the law (i.e., subject matter such as serious felonies, civil cases, or misdemeanors) or a geographic territory.²⁸ Essentially, jurisdiction is categorized as *limited*, *general*, or *appellate*:

Courts of **limited jurisdiction**. These are also designated as “lower courts.” They do not have power that extends to the overall administration of justice; thus, they do not try felony cases and do not have appellate authority.

Courts of general jurisdiction. These are also designated as “major trial courts.” They have the power and authority to try and decide any case, including appeals from a lower court.

Courts of appellate jurisdiction. These are also designated as “appeals courts.” They are limited in their jurisdiction decisions on matters of appeal from lower courts and trial courts.²⁹

limited jurisdiction: the authority of a court to hear and decide cases within an area of the law or a geographic territory.

Every court, including the U.S. Supreme Court, is limited in terms of jurisdiction.



The U.S. Supreme Court in 2019. *Front, left to right:* Associate Justice Stephen Breyer, Associate Justice Clarence Thomas, Chief Justice John Roberts, Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice Samuel Alito, Jr. *Back, left to right:* Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch, Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Associate Justice Elena Kagan, and Associate Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images North America/Getty Images

Corrections

After an offender is convicted and sentenced, he or she is processed in the corrections system. An offender can be placed on probation, incarcerated, or transferred to some type of community-based corrections facility. [Probation](#) is essentially an *arrangement* between the sentencing authorities and the offender. While under supervision, the offender must comply with certain terms for a specified amount of time to return to the community. These terms are often referred to as *conditions of probation*.³⁰ *General conditions*