




# JUVENILE JUSTICE STATISTICS

## NATIONAL REPORT SERIES FACT SHEET

Eileen M. Garry, Acting Administrator

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## Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Court, 2014

Nina Hyland

### Counts and trends

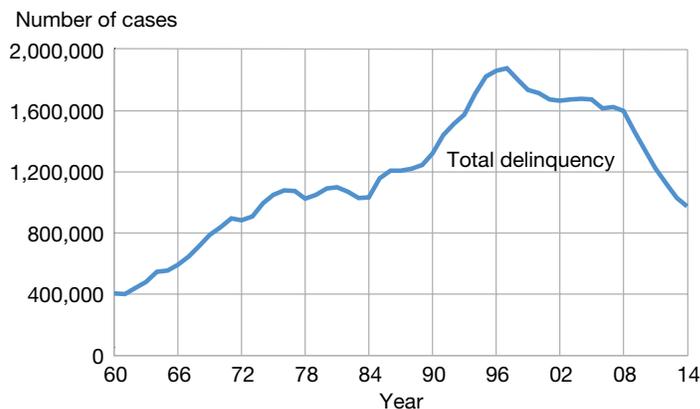
In 2014, juvenile courts in the United States handled nearly 975,000 delinquency cases that involved juveniles charged with criminal law violations. The delinquency caseload fell to fewer than 1 million cases for the first time since the mid-1970s. From 2005 through 2014, the number of delinquency cases declined 42% across all four offense categories: property offense cases (down 46%), public order offense cases (down 44%), person offense cases (down 40%), and drug law violation cases (down 30%).

### Gender

More than a quarter of the overall delinquency caseload involved females. In 2014, juvenile courts handled 269,800 cases involving females, compared with 705,100 cases involving males. Between 2005 and 2014, the relative decline in delinquency cases was the same for males and females (down 42%). In fact, across offenses, the relative decline in the female caseload mirrored the decline for males.

Most serious offense	Percent change 2005–2014	
	Female	Male
Total delinquency	-42%	-42%
Person	-37	-41
Property	-46	-45
Drugs	-26	-31
Public order	-44	-43

The decline in juvenile court caseloads since the mid-1990s is the most substantial decline since 1960



### Delinquency Estimates

The estimates are based on data from more than 2,400 courts with jurisdiction over 84% of the nation's juvenile population (youth age 10 through the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each state) in 2014. The unit of count is a case disposed. Each case represents the most serious offense of one youth that a court with juvenile jurisdiction processed on a new referral, regardless of the number of offenses contained in that referral. A youth may be involved in more than one case during the calendar year.



Most serious offense	Number of cases	Percent change		
		10-year 2005–2014	5-year 2010–2014	1-year 2013–2014
<b>Total delinquency</b>	974,900	-42%	-27%	-5%
<b>Person offenses</b>	262,800	-40	-23	-3
Criminal homicide	900	-31	-7	14
Forcible rape	8,600	-23	-4	-1
Robbery	20,900	-22	-21	-2
Aggravated assault	26,700	-46	-27	2
Simple assault	173,400	-39	-23	-4
Other violent sex offenses	7,700	-34	-13	-5
Other person offenses	24,600	-51	-31	-3
<b>Property offenses</b>	333,500	-46	-33	-6
Burglary	59,500	-42	-31	-6
Larceny-theft	166,800	-40	-31	-6
Motor vehicle theft	12,000	-63	-23	5
Arson	4,000	-51	-25	-7
Vandalism	48,400	-53	-38	-8
Trespassing	26,500	-50	-38	-8
Stolen property offenses	9,700	-51	-30	-3
Other property offenses	6,700	-62	-29	-6
<b>Drug law violations</b>	128,900	-30	-20	-6
<b>Public order offenses</b>	249,700	-44	-27	-7
Obstruction of justice	128,200	-36	-21	-2
Disorderly conduct	65,000	-51	-35	-11
Weapons offenses	20,200	-52	-29	-13
Liquor law violations	5,900	-62	-58	-16
Nonviolent sex offenses	10,800	-22	-6	3
Other public order offenses	19,700	-51	-28	-12

**Notes:** Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

The female proportion of the delinquency caseload changed little between 2005 and 2014.

Most serious offense	Female proportion	
	2005	2014
Total delinquency	28%	28%
Person	30	31
Property	28	27
Drugs	20	21
Public order	28	28

## Estimates of Cases Involving Hispanic Youth

With the release of the 2014 data, detailed race estimates were expanded to include estimates for cases involving Hispanic youth for data years 2005–2014. In previous years, race estimates were reported for four race groups—white, black, American Indian, and Asian—without consideration of ethnicity; that is, prior to 2005, persons of Hispanic ethnicity could be of any race and were included in each of the four race groups listed above. Beginning with the 2005 data year, persons of Hispanic ethnicity are treated as a distinct race group and are excluded from the other race groups. Many case records from state and local jurisdictions do not include Hispanic ethnicity as a variable separate from race, limiting the ability to generate estimates by both race and ethnicity.

## Race

Forty-three percent of delinquency cases handled in 2014 involved white youth, 36% black youth, 18% Hispanic youth, 2% American Indian youth (including Alaska Natives), and 1% Asian youth (including Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders). In 2014, white youth accounted for 56% of the U.S. juvenile population, black youth 15%, Hispanic youth 23%, American Indian youth 1%, and Asian youth 5%.

Race	Race profile of cases, 2014				
	Most serious offense				
	Total delinquency	Person	Property	Drugs	Public order
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
White	43	40	44	55	40
Black	36	42	36	20	37
Hispanic	18	15	17	22	21
Amer. Indian	2	1	2	2	1
Asian	1	1	1	1	1

**Note:** Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

The racial disparity in delinquency cases varied across offense categories. White youth accounted for a larger proportion of drug offense cases (55%) than any of the other general offense categories. In contrast, black youth were involved in only 20% of drug offense cases, accounting for a larger proportion of person offense cases (42%) than any other general offense category. Hispanic youth represented about one-fifth of cases in each offense category. Asian and American Indian youth accounted for a small proportion of cases across all offense categories.

A comparison of the rates at which cases involving different groups of youth proceed from one decision point to the next as they go through the court system demonstrates the contribution that each decision point makes to the overall disparity in the system. The rate at which black youth were referred to juvenile court for a delinquency offense was more than three times the rates for white and Hispanic youth. The rate at which referred cases were petitioned for formal processing was 19% greater for black youth than for white youth and 15% greater than the rate for Hispanic youth. The rate at which petitioned cases were adjudicated was 8% less for black youth than for white youth, and 8% greater for Hispanic youth than for white youth. The rate at which petitioned cases were waived to criminal court was 60% greater for black youth than for white youth, and 13% less for Hispanic youth than for white youth. Once adjudicated, cases involving black or Hispanic youth were more likely to result in residential placement than cases involving white youth (28% and 43%, respectively). Conversely, adjudicated cases involving white youth were more likely to result in probation than cases involving black or Hispanic youth (5% and 4%, respectively).

## Age

In 2014, juveniles younger than age 16 at the time of referral to court accounted for 53% of all delinquency cases handled. This age group accounted for 61% of person offense cases, 53% of property offense cases, 50% of public order offense cases, and 40% of drug law violation

cases. Person offense cases had the largest proportion (12%) of very young juveniles (younger than age 13 at referral), followed by property offense cases (8%) and public order offense cases (7%). For drug offense cases, a smaller proportion (3%) involved juveniles younger than age 13.

## Detention

A juvenile may be placed in secure detention at various times during case processing. Detention is primarily used for temporary holding while youth await adjudication, disposition, or placement elsewhere. Many states detain youth if there is reason to believe they are a threat to the community, will be at risk if returned to the community, or may fail to appear at an upcoming hearing. Intake staff may also detain juveniles for diagnostic evaluation purposes. All states require that a detention hearing be held within a few days of placement in detention (usually within 24 hours). At the detention hearing, the judge reviews the initial detention decision, considers what is in the best interests of the community and/or the youth, and decides whether to continue the youth's detention. Most states also use detention for sanctioning purposes—juveniles may be committed to a detention facility as part of a disposition order or as a sanction for a probation violation. Actual detention practices vary substantially across jurisdictions. These court data count the number of cases that involve detention of the juvenile at some point between referral to court and case disposition. A youth may be detained and released more than once between referral to court and case disposition. In most delinquency cases, the juvenile is not detained (78% in 2014).

The likelihood of detention varies by general offense category. In 2014, person offense cases were the most likely to involve detention (27%), followed by public order offense cases (25%). In comparison, juveniles were less likely to be detained in property offense cases (18%) and drug offense cases (15%). Similar to the overall delinquency caseload trend, between 2005 and 2014, the number of delinquency cases in which the juvenile was detained decreased 41%.

## Intake decision

The juvenile court intake function is typically the responsibility of the juvenile probation department or the prosecutor's office. At intake, authorities decide whether to dismiss the case, handle it informally (without filing a petition), or file a petition to formally request an adjudicatory hearing or waiver hearing. In 2014, 18% of all delinquency cases (171,000 cases) were dismissed at intake, generally for lack of legal sufficiency. An additional 27% (261,500 cases) were handled informally, with the juvenile agreeing to some sort of voluntary sanction (e.g., restitution). In more than half of all delinquency cases (56% or 542,500 cases), authorities filed a petition and handled the case formally. The proportion of delinquency cases petitioned for formal handling changed little between 2005 and 2014.

## Waiver to criminal court

In most states, juvenile court judges may waive juvenile court jurisdiction in certain cases and transfer jurisdiction to criminal court so the juvenile

can be tried as an adult. The court decision in these matters follows a review of the case and a determination that probable cause exists to believe the juvenile committed the criminal act. The judge's decision generally centers on the issue of whether the juvenile is amenable to treatment in the juvenile justice system. The prosecutor may argue that the juvenile has been adjudicated several times previously and that interventions the juvenile court ordered have not prevented the youth from committing subsequent criminal acts. The prosecutor may also argue that the crime is so serious that the juvenile court cannot intervene for the time period necessary to rehabilitate the youth. (For more information, see *Delinquency Cases Waived to Criminal Court, 2011*, available online from [ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/publications/statbb.asp](http://ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/publications/statbb.asp).)

In 2014, juvenile court judges waived jurisdiction over an estimated 4,200 delinquency cases, sending them to criminal court. This represents about 1% of all formally handled delinquency cases. The number of cases waived was relatively flat from 2005 to 2009 and then declined 30% through 2014.

For each year between 2005 and 2014, person offenses accounted for the largest proportion of waived cases. In 2014, more than half of all waived cases involved person offenses.

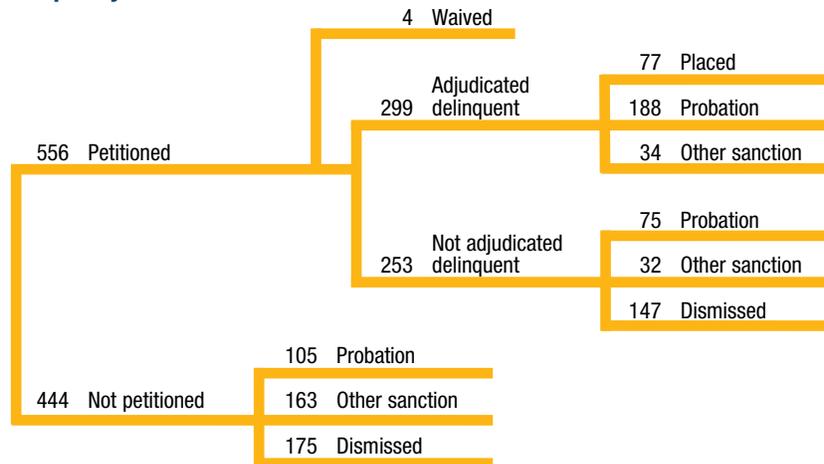
Most serious offense	Offense profile of cases waived to criminal court			
	Number		Percentage	
	2005	2014	2005	2014
Total delinquency	6,800	4,200	100%	100%
Person	3,000	2,100	44	51
Property	2,200	1,300	32	31
Drugs	1,000	400	14	10
Public order	600	400	9	8

**Note:** Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

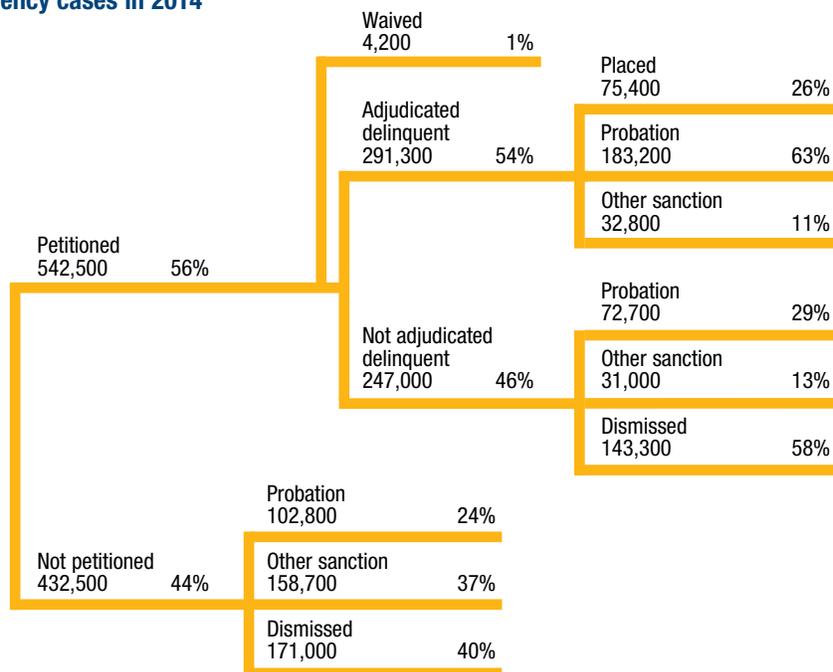
## Adjudication and disposition

Adjudicatory hearings establish responsibility for an alleged delinquent act. When a juvenile is adjudicated (judged delinquent), it is analogous to conviction in criminal court. In 2014, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in 54% (291,300) of petitioned cases. The court holds disposition hearings to decide what sanctions it should impose on a juvenile who has been adjudicated delinquent and whether it should place the juvenile under court supervision. Many cases result in multifaceted dispositions, and most involve some type of supervision. A probation order often includes additional requirements, such as drug counseling, restitution to the victim, or community service. In 2014, formal probation was the most severe disposition ordered in 63% of cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent, and in 26% of cases, residential placement was the most severe disposition. A smaller proportion of cases received some other sanction as their most severe disposition. The proportion of adjudicated cases ordered to residential placement has remained steady in recent years, from 27% in 2005 to 26% in 2014, while the proportion ordered to probation has increased slightly, from 60% in 2005 to 63% in 2014. The proportion receiving other sanctions has fluctuated between 11% and 13% over the time period.

## Case flow for a typical 1,000 delinquency cases in 2014



## Case flow for 974,900 delinquency cases in 2014



**Notes:** Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Annual case processing flow diagrams for 2005 through 2014 are available at [ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/court/faqs.asp](http://ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/court/faqs.asp).

## For more information

This fact sheet is based on the report, *Juvenile Court Statistics 2014*, which is available through OJJDP's website ([ojjdp.gov](http://ojjdp.gov)). To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP's online Statistical Briefing Book ([ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb](http://ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb)) and click on "Juveniles in Court."

OJJDP also supports *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics*, a web-based application that lets users analyze the data from the *Juvenile Court Statistics* report. This application is available from the "Data Analysis Tools" section of the Statistical Briefing Book.

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