



Juvenile Offenders and Victims

National
Report Series

Fact Sheet

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Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Court, 2013

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Counts and trends

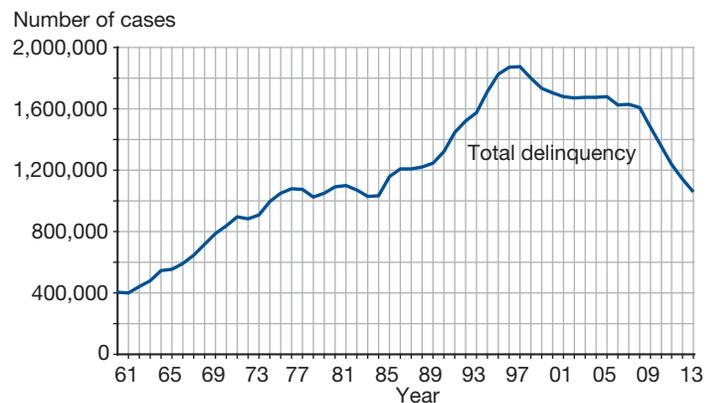
In 2013, juvenile courts in the United States handled nearly 1.1 million delinquency cases that involved juveniles charged with criminal law violations. From 1985 through 1997, the number of delinquency cases climbed steadily (62%) and then fell 44% from 1997 through 2013. Juvenile courts handled 9% fewer cases in 2013 than in 1985.

This overall pattern of increase followed by decline is the result of the trends of various offense categories combined. Public order offense cases increased steadily from 1985 through 2005 (128%) and then declined 39% by 2013. Person offense cases increased through 1997 (131%), leveled off through the mid-2000s, and then fell 36% between 2005 and 2013. Drug law violation cases more than doubled between 1985 and 1997 and then gradually declined (26%) through 2013. Although these patterns differed, each increased through the 2000s, followed by a decline. In contrast, property offenses showed quite a different trend. Between 1985 and 1995, the number of property offense cases increased 31%. Since 1995, the number of property offense cases declined steadily (down 60% from 1995 through 2013). Thus, property offenses were the one general offense category that declined overall from 1985 through 2013 (down 48%).

Gender

More than a quarter of the overall delinquency caseload involved females. Juvenile courts handled 293,700 cases involving females in 2013, compared with 764,800 cases involving males. Between 2004

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



Delinquency data estimates

The 1985–2013 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). 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.



Delinquency cases disposed by most serious offense, 2013

Most serious offense	Number of cases	Percent change		
		10 year 2004–2013	5 year 2009–2013	1 year 2012–2013
Total delinquency	1,058,500	-37%	-29%	-7%
Person offenses	278,300	-34	-24	-6
Criminal homicide	900	-30	-33	-1
Forcible rape	7,500	-16	-5	-1
Robbery	22,000	2	-25	4
Aggravated assault	26,900	-42	-32	-7
Simple assault	186,400	-37	-25	-6
Other violent sex offenses	9,700	-18	-6	-3
Other person offenses	25,000	-28	-12	-11
Property offenses	366,600	-42	-35	-10
Burglary	65,300	-38	-32	-11
Larceny-theft	183,400	-38	-34	-10
Motor vehicle theft	11,600	-65	-38	0
Arson	5,000	-42	-29	-10
Vandalism	54,200	-46	-40	-13
Trespassing	29,900	-44	-38	-11
Stolen property offenses	10,200	-48	-34	-7
Other property offenses	7,100	-59	-38	-6
Drug law violations	141,700	-23	-14	-4
Public order offenses	271,800	-38	-30	-7
Obstruction of justice	132,000	-33	-28	-5
Disorderly conduct	74,500	-43	-32	-9
Weapons offenses	21,700	-44	-33	-7
Liquor law violations	9,000	-47	-47	-23
Nonviolent sex offenses	10,600	-25	-8	-2
Other public order offenses	24,000	-38	-28	-3

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

and 2013, the relative decline in delinquency cases was about the same for males (down 37%) and females (down 36%). In fact, across offenses, the relative decline in the female caseload mirrored the decline for males.

Most serious offense	Percent change 2004–2013	
	Female	Male
Total delinquency	-36%	-37%
Person	-29	-35
Property	-42	-42
Drugs	-23	-23
Public order	-38	-37

As a result, the female proportion of the delinquency caseload changed little between 2004 and 2013.

Most serious offense	Female proportion	
	2004	2013
Total delinquency	27%	28%
Person	30	31
Property	27	28
Drugs	19	20
Public order	28	28

Race

In 2013, white youth accounted for 76% of the U.S. juvenile population, black youth 16%, American Indian youth (including Alaska Native) 2%, and Asian youth (including Native Hawaiian and Other

Pacific Islander) 6%. Sixty-two percent of delinquency cases handled in 2013 involved white youth, 35% black youth, 2% American Indian youth, and 1% Asian youth.

Race profile of cases, 2013

Most serious offense	Total	White	Black	American Indian	
				Indian	Asian
Total delinquency	100%	62%	35%	2%	1%
Person	100	55	42	1	1
Property	100	61	36	2	2
Drugs	100	76	21	2	1
Public order	100	62	36	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 (76%) than for any of the other general offense categories. In contrast, white youth were involved in only 55% of person offense cases. Black youth accounted for a larger proportion of person offense cases (42%) than for any other general offense category. Asian and American Indian youth accounted for a small proportion of cases across all offense categories.

A comparison of the rate at which cases involving different groups of youth proceed from one decision point to the next as they go through the court system shows the unique contributions 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 twice the rate for white youth. The rate at which referred cases were petitioned for formal processing was 20% greater for black youth than for white youth. The rate at which petitioned cases were adjudicated was 10% less for black youth than for white youth. The rate at which petitioned cases were waived to criminal court was 30% greater for black youth than for white youth. The rate at which youth in adjudicated cases were ordered to residential placement was 20% greater for black youth than for white youth, but the rate at which they were ordered to probation was 10% less for black youth than for white youth.

Age

In 2013, 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, 54% of property offense cases, 51% of public order offense cases, and 42% of drug law violation cases. Person offense cases had the largest proportion (11%) 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 (4%) 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 (79% in 2013).

The likelihood of detention varies by general offense category. In 2013, person offense cases were the most likely to involve detention (26%), followed by public order offense cases (24%). In comparison, juveniles were less likely to be detained in property offense cases (17%) and drug offense cases (14%).

Similar to the overall delinquency caseload trend, between 1997 and 2013, the number of delinquency cases in which the juvenile was detained decreased 39%. As a result, the number of cases involving detention in 2013 was 2% less than in 1985.

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 2013, 191,800 cases (18% of all delinquency cases) were dismissed at intake, generally for lack of legal sufficiency. An additional 27% (283,900) were handled informally, with the juvenile agreeing to some sort of voluntary sanction (e.g., restitution). In more than half of all delinquency cases (55% or 582,800), authorities filed a petition and handled the case formally. The proportion of delinquency cases petitioned for formal handling rose from 46% in 1985 to 57% in the late 1990s and then declined slightly to 55% in 2013.

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.)

In 2013, juvenile court judges waived jurisdiction over an estimated 4,000 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 1985 to 1988, rose sharply from 1988 to 1994 (112%), and then fell to the levels of the mid-1980s and remained there through 2009 before declining 36% through 2013.

For many years, property offense cases accounted for the largest proportion of waived cases. However, since the mid-1990s, person offenses have outnumbered property offenses among waived cases. In 2013, almost half of all waived cases involved person offenses.

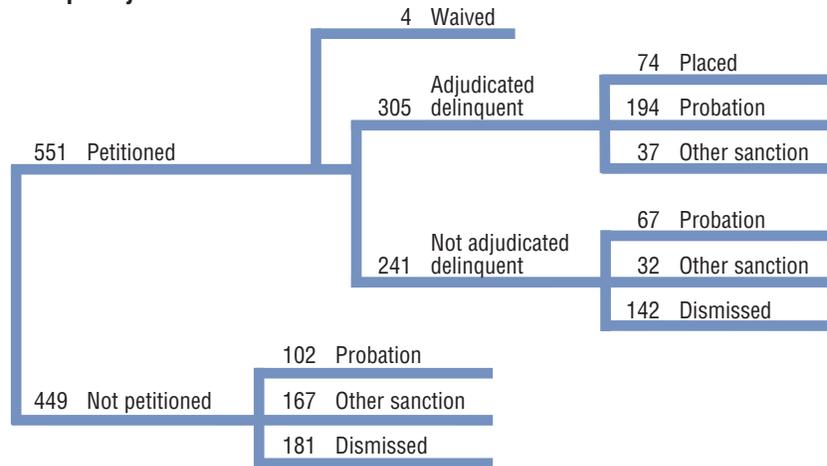
Offense profile of cases waived to criminal court

Most serious offense	Number		Percentage	
	2004	2013	2004	2013
Total delinquency	6,500	4,000	100%	100%
Person	2,600	2,000	40	50
Property	2,300	1,200	35	31
Drugs	1,000	500	15	12
Public order	600	300	10	8

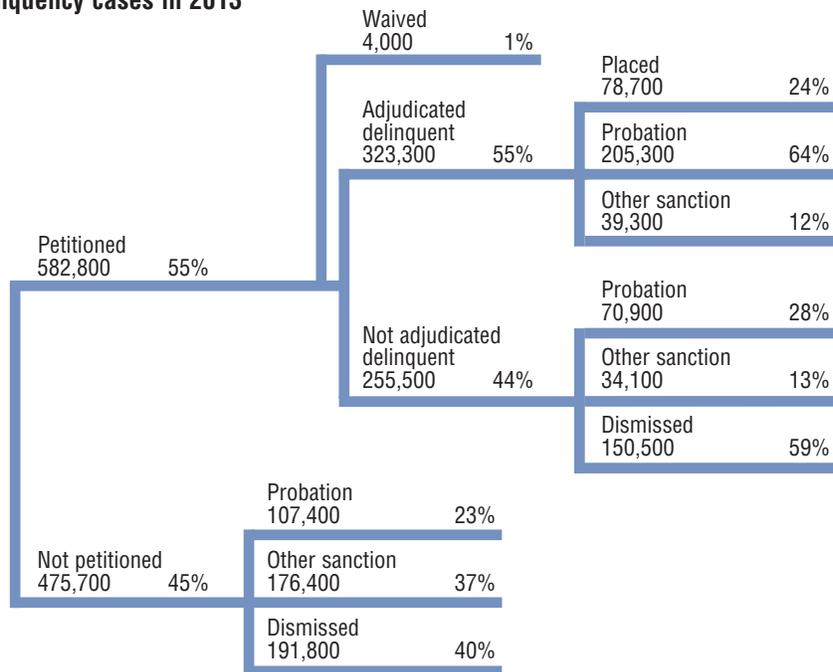
Adjudication and disposition

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 2013, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in 55% (323,300) 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 multi-faceted 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 2013, formal probation was the most severe disposition ordered in 64% of cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent, and 24% of cases were ordered to residential placement as 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 decreased gradually over the years (from 31% in 1985 to 24% in 2013), while the proportion ordered to probation has increased (from 57% in 1985 to 64% in 2013). The proportion receiving other sanctions has fluctuated between 10% and 15% over the time period.

Case flow for a typical 1,000 delinquency cases in 2013



Case flow for 1,058,500 delinquency cases in 2013



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 1985 through 2013 are available at ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/court/faqs.asp.

For more information

This fact sheet is based on the forthcoming report, *Juvenile Court Statistics 2013*, which will be available through OJJDP's website (ojjdp.gov). To learn more about juvenile court cases, visit OJJDP's online Statistical Briefing Book (ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb) and click on "Juveniles in Court." OJJDP also supports *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics*, a Web-based application that analyzes the data files used for the *Juvenile Court Statistics* report. This application is available from the "Data Analysis Tools" section of the Statistical Briefing Book.

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