



JUVENILE JUSTICE STATISTICS

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Trends in Youth Arrests for Violent Crimes

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Violent crime arrests involving youth have been on the decline

The estimated number of youth arrests for violent crime, which includes murder, robbery, and aggravated assault, has declined since the mid-2000s. By 2020, the number of violent crime arrests involving youth reached a new low, 78% below the 1994 peak, and half the number 10 years earlier.

Males accounted for 80% of all youth arrests for violent crimes in 2020, but their share of murder (92%) and robbery (88%) arrests was much greater. Youth ages 16–17 accounted for more than half (55%) of all youth arrests for violent crime, but accounted for 76% of all youth arrests for murder. White youth accounted for nearly half (49%) of all youth arrests for violent crime and 57% of youth arrests for aggravated assault.

Overall, 8% of youth arrests involved a violent crime

In 2020, there were an estimated 424,300 arrests involving persons younger than 18—38% fewer than the number of arrests in 2019, and half the number of arrests 5 years earlier. Less than 1 in 10 (8%) of these arrests were for a violent crime. Aggravated assault accounted for 5% of all arrests involving youth in 2020, robbery accounted for 3%, and murder accounted for one-fourth of 1%.

The number of youth arrests for violent crimes declined 67% since 2006

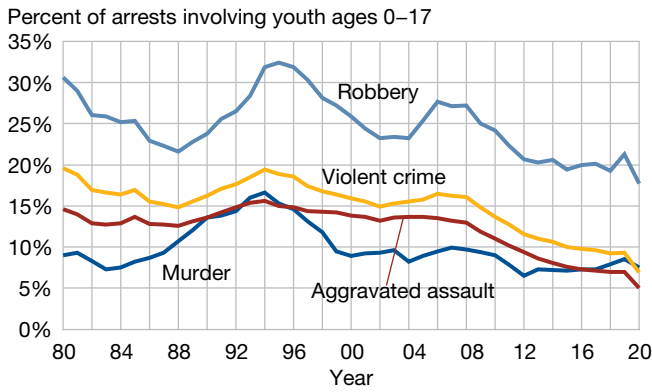


Youth accounted for 1 in 14 arrests for violent crimes in 2020

Overall, youth younger than age 18 accounted for 7% of all arrests for violent crimes, but the proportion varied by offense. Among arrests for violent crimes in 2020, youth accounted for a larger proportion of arrests for robbery (18%), which includes carjacking, than for murder (7%) or aggravated assault (5%).

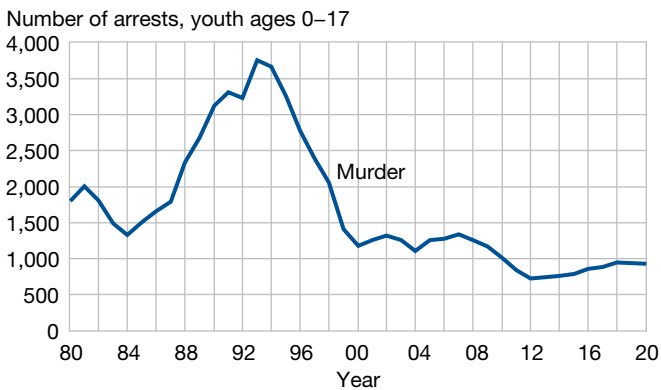
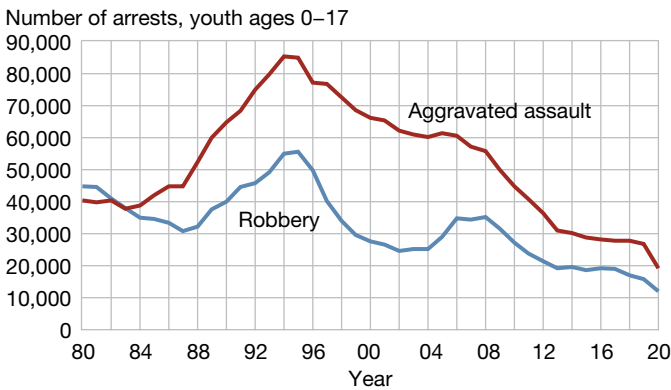
The proportion of violent crime arrests involving youth has declined in recent years in each offense category. Youth accounted for a smaller proportion of arrests for murder, robbery, and aggravated assault in 2020 than in 2010. Overall, the youth proportion of violent crime arrests fell from 14% in 2010 to 7% in 2020.

The youth proportion of violent crime arrests has declined



- Each year since 2000, youth accounted for 10% or less of all murder arrests.
- Youth account for a larger proportion of arrests for robbery than other violent crimes, but their share in 2020 was at its lowest level since at least 1980.
- The proportion of aggravated assault arrests involving youth has declined since 2008.

Although youth arrests for robbery and aggravated assault have been on the decline, youth arrests for murder have increased since reaching a low point in 2012



Violent crime arrests involving youth declined more than arrests involving adults

The number of violent crime arrests involving youth decreased 56% between 2010 and 2020, compared with a 6% decrease for adults. Likewise, from 2019 to 2020, for each of the violent crimes, the relative decline in arrests of youth outpaced the decline for adults. For example, robbery arrests involving youth fell 24%, while adult arrests declined 5%. Similarly, youth arrests for aggravated assault fell 29%, while adult arrests increased about 1%. Arrests for murder involving adults increased 14%, while the number of murder arrests involving youth were about the same in 2019 and 2020.

Most serious offense	2020 arrests	Percent change	
		2010–2020	2019–2020
Youth (0–17) arrests			
All offenses	424,300	–74%	–38%
Violent crimes	32,070	–56	–26
Murder	930	–8	0
Robbery	12,000	–56	–24
Aggravated assault	19,140	–57	–29
Adult (age 18 and older) arrests			
All offenses	7,208,180	–37%	–23%
Violent crimes	429,470	–6	1
Murder	11,510	13	14
Robbery	55,900	–34	–5
Aggravated assault	362,050	0	1

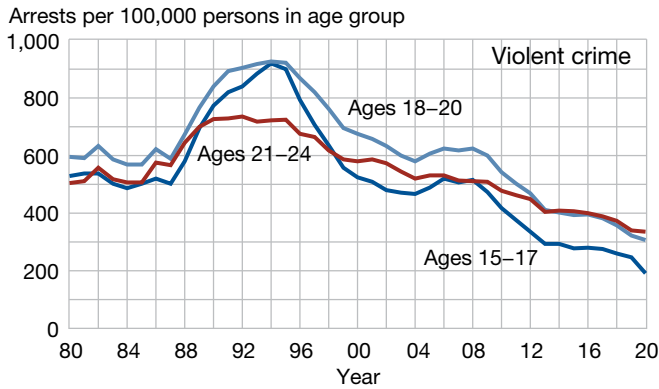
Young adults ages 18–24 accounted for a larger share of arrests for violent crime than did youth

In 2020, young adults ages 18–24 accounted for 19% of all arrests and 21% of arrests for violent crimes. Compared with youth, arrests of young adults accounted for a larger share (21% vs. 7%) of violent crime arrests, and the proportion of murder arrests involving young adults was more than 4 times the proportion involving youth (32% vs. 7%).

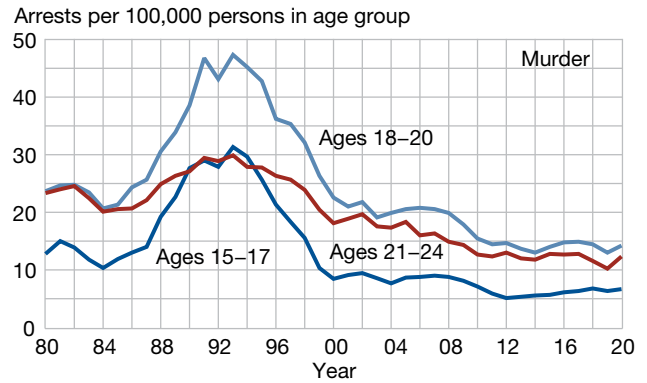
- The trend in robbery arrests involving youth is marked by periods of growth and decline, while aggravated assault arrests increased through the mid-1990s and then declined. By 2020, youth arrests for robbery and aggravated assault were at their lowest level since 1980, and half the level 10 years earlier.

- Unlike robbery and aggravated assault, the number of murder arrests involving youth reached a low point in 2012, increased 31% through 2018, and then declined about 2% through 2020. The number of murder arrests involving youth in 2020 was 29% above the 2012 low point but 75% below the 1993 peak.

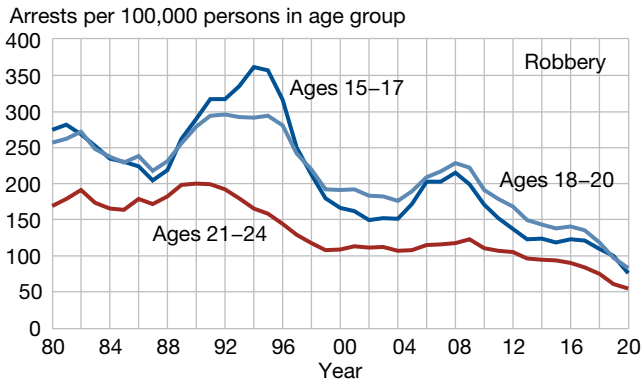
Since 2010, the violent crime arrest rate for youth ages 15–17 was well below the rates for young adults ages 18–20 and 21–24, but trends vary by offense



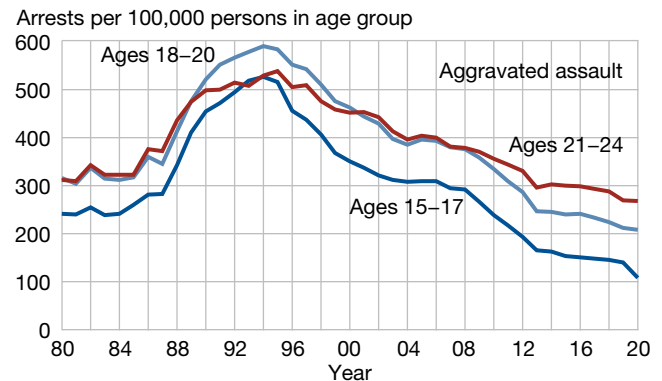
■ Violent crime arrest rates for youth ages 15–17 and young adults ages 18–20 followed a similar pattern between 1980 and 2020. Rates peaked for both age groups in 1994, then fell considerably (79% and 67%, respectively) through 2020. Comparatively, the violent crime arrest rate for adults ages 21–24 peaked in 1992, then declined 54% through 2020.



■ Since 2000, the murder arrest rate for youth ages 15–17 has been well below the rates for young adults ages 18–20 and 21–24. In 2020, the murder arrest rate for young adults ages 18–20 was twice the rate for youth ages 15–17, while the rate for young adults ages 21–24 was 85% above the rate for 15- to 17-year-olds.



■ Unlike the pattern for murder and aggravated assault, the robbery arrest rate for youth ages 15–17 exceeded the rate for young adults ages 21–24 each year since 1980. For each age group, the arrest rates decreased by half in the last 10 years, so that the rates in 2020 were at their lowest levels since at least 1980.



■ Aggravated assault arrest rates followed a similar pattern for each age group between 1980 and 2020. The rates peaked in the mid-1990s for each group and then declined considerably through 2020; the relative decline in the arrest rate for youth ages 15–17 (79%) outpaced that of young adults ages 18–20 (65%) and those ages 21–24 (49%).

What arrest data tell us

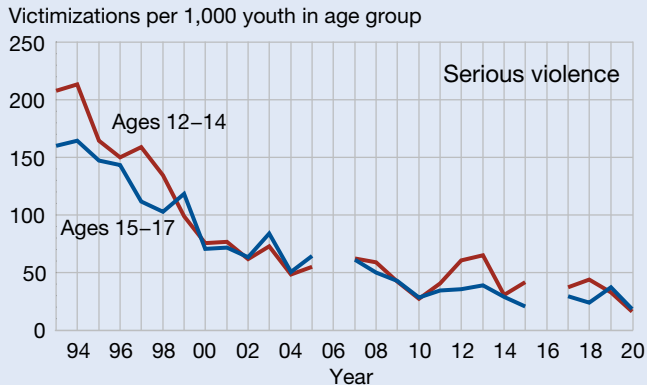
Arrest statistics document the number of arrests made by law enforcement agencies—not the number of individuals arrested nor the number of crimes committed. The number of arrests is not the same as the number of people arrested because an unknown number of individuals are arrested more than once during the year. Similarly, arrest statistics do not represent the number of crimes that arrested individuals commit because a series of crimes that one person commits may result in a single arrest, and a single crime may result in the arrest of more than one person. This latter situation, where many arrests result from one crime, is relatively common in youth law-violating behavior because youth are more likely than adults to commit crimes in groups. For these reasons, one should not use arrest statistics to indicate the relative proportions of crime that youth and adults commit. Arrest statistics are most appropriately a measure of entry into the justice system.

Arrest statistics also are limited in measuring the volume of arrests for a particular offense. Under the Uniform Crime Reporting Program’s Summary Reporting System, the FBI requires law enforcement agencies to report the most serious offense charged in an arrest. The arrest of a youth charged with robbery and aggravated assault would be reported to the FBI as an arrest for robbery.

It is important to note that 2020 was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have impacted policies, procedures, and data collection activities. Additionally, stay-at-home orders and school closures likely impacted the volume and type of law-violating behavior by youth that came to the attention of law enforcement in 2020.

What are trends in violence against youth?

Serious violent victimizations reported by youth ages 12–17 have declined

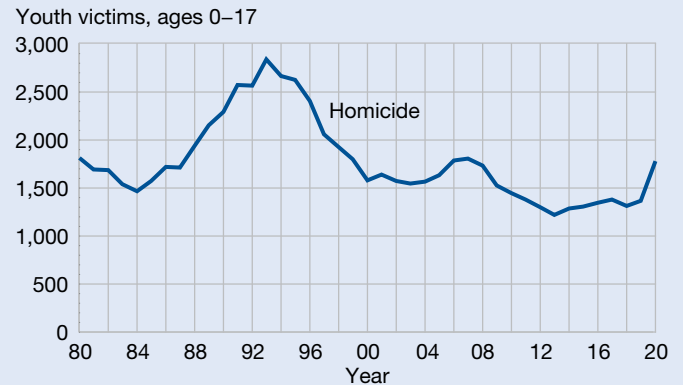


- The rate at which youth ages 12–14 reported serious violent crime victimization declined 73% since 2017 to reach a level in 2020 that was the lowest since at least 1993.
- The serious violent crime victimization rate for youth ages 15–17 reached a low point in 2015, increased through 2019, then was decreased by half in 2020.

Notes: Serious violence includes robbery, rape/sexual assault, and aggravated assault. Data for 2006 and 2016 are not presented because they are not comparable with estimates for other years.

Data source: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Rate of Violent Victimization, 1993–2020. NCVS Dashboard (N-DASH) available at <https://ncvs.bjs.ojp.gov/Home> [retrieved March 2022].

The number of youth homicide victims increased 30% from 2019 to 2020—the largest 1-year increase since at least 1980



- There were an estimated 1,780 youth victims of homicide in 2020—30% more than in 2019 and 46% more than 2013, the year with the fewest youth victims.
- Males accounted for 74% of youth homicide victims in 2020. Youth ages 15–17 accounted for 52% of youth homicide victims and 27% were children younger than age 6. White youth accounted for 40% of victims and Black youth accounted for 55%.
- A firearm was involved in two-thirds of all youth homicides in 2020.

Data source: Puzzanchera, C., Chamberlin, G., and Kang, W. 2021. Easy Access to the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports: 1980–2020. Available at www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezashr.

Data sources

Throughout this fact sheet, arrest estimates are based on counts of arrests detailed by age of arrestee and offense from all law enforcement agencies that reported complete data for the calendar year. The proportion of the U.S. population covered by these reporting agencies ranged from 70% to 86% between 1980 and 2020, with 2020 coverage of 71%.

Arrest estimates for 1980–2014 were developed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and disseminated through the Arrest Data Analysis Tool, available at www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=datool&surl=/arrests/index.cfm. Arrest estimates for 2015–2020 were developed by the National Center for Juvenile Justice based on the FBI's annual Arrest Master Files of 12-month reporting departments from the Crime Data Explorer, available at crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov/pages/downloads [retrieved June 14, 2022].

Arrest rates (page 3) use population data for 1980–1989 from the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Population Estimates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1980 to 1999 [machine-readable data files available online, released April 11, 2000]; and population data for 1990–2020 from

Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, A., and Kang, W. 2022. Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990–2021, available at www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop.

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