




JUVENILE JUSTICE STATISTICS

NATIONAL REPORT SERIES FACT SHEET

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Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Court, 2015

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Counts and trends

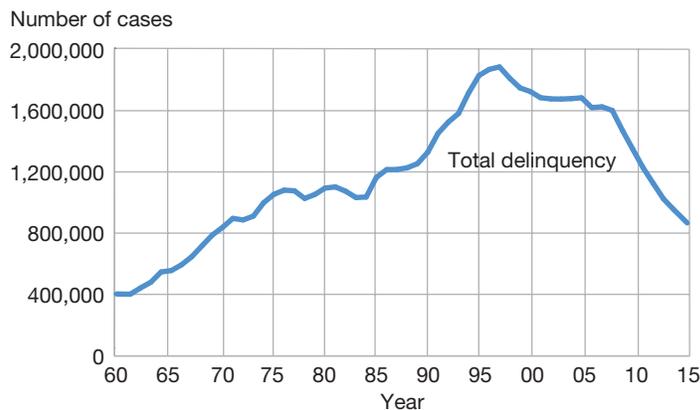
In 2015, juvenile courts in the United States handled 884,900 delinquency cases that involved juveniles charged with criminal law violations. From 2005 through 2015, the number of delinquency cases declined 47%, with decreases experienced in all four offense categories: property offense cases (down 51%), public order offense cases (down 49%), person offense cases (down 43%), and drug law violation cases (down 39%). In 2015, property offense cases accounted for the largest proportion (34%) of the delinquency caseload, followed by person offense cases (28%), public order offense cases (25%), and drug offense cases (13%).

Gender

More than a quarter of the overall delinquency caseload involved females. In 2015, juvenile courts handled 244,000 cases involving females, compared with 640,900 cases involving males. Between 2005 and 2015, the relative decline in delinquency cases was the same for males and females (down 47%). In fact, across offenses, the relative decline in the female caseload mirrored the decline for males.

Most serious offense	Percent change 2005–2015	
	Female	Male
Total delinquency	-47%	-47%
Person	-42	-44
Property	-52	-51
Drugs	-32	-41
Public order	-50	-49

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



Delinquency Estimates

This fact sheet presents national estimates of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts in 2015 and analyzes caseload trends since 2005. The estimates are based on data from more than 2,400 courts with jurisdiction over 86% of the nation's juvenile population (youth age 10 through the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each state) in 2015. 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.



Delinquency cases disposed, by most serious offense, 2015				
Most serious offense	Number of cases	Percent change		
		2005–2015	5-year 2011–2015	1-year 2014–2015
Total delinquency	884,900	-47%	-28%	-7%
Person offenses	246,800	-43	-22	-3
Criminal homicide	800	-30	2	-5
Rape	7,700	-33	-10	-5
Robbery	19,600	-27	-16	-3
Aggravated assault	25,700	-47	-18	4
Simple assault	161,800	-42	-23	-3
Other violent sex offenses	7,700	-44	-23	-13
Other person offenses	23,400	-56	-27	-5
Property offenses	301,500	-51	-32	-8
Burglary	54,400	-47	-32	-6
Larceny-theft	144,500	-48	-33	-11
Motor vehicle theft	13,200	-58	2	14
Arson	2,900	-61	-39	-19
Vandalism	44,300	-57	-36	-6
Trespassing	26,500	-51	-32	-2
Stolen property offenses	8,900	-60	-31	-14
Other property offenses	6,800	-63	-25	0
Drug law violations	111,500	-39	-27	-11
Public order offenses	225,100	-49	-28	-7
Obstruction of justice	114,500	-44	-25	-7
Disorderly conduct	58,300	-56	-34	-10
Weapons offenses	18,900	-55	-28	-5
Liquor law violations	6,100	-60	-39	1
Nonviolent sex offenses	11,200	-16	2	3
Other public order offenses	16,000	-57	-31	-14

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 2015.

Most serious offense	Female proportion	
	2005	2015
Total delinquency	27%	28%
Person	30	31
Property	28	27
Drugs	20	22
Public order	28	28

Race

Forty-three percent of delinquency cases handled in 2015 involved white youth, 35% black youth, 18% Hispanic youth, 2% American Indian youth (including Alaska Natives), and 1% Asian youth (including Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders). In 2015, white youth accounted for 56% of the U.S. juvenile population, black youth 15%, Hispanic youth 23%, American Indian youth 2%, and Asian youth 6%.

Race	Race profile of cases, 2015				
	Most serious offense				
	Total delinquency	Person	Property	Drugs	Public order
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
White	43	40	43	55	40
Black	35	40	37	19	37
Hispanic	18	17	17	23	20
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 disproportionality 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 19% of drug offense cases, accounting for a larger proportion of person offense cases (40%) than any other general offense category. Hispanic youth were involved in 23% of drug offense cases, accounting for their largest share across offense categories. Asian and American Indian youth accounted for a small proportion of cases across all offense categories.

Variations in case processing by race can be examined by looking at the rate at which cases involving different groups of youth proceed from one decision point to the next as they move through the court system. The referral rate (per 1,000 youth at risk of juvenile court involvement) for delinquency cases involving black youth (67.5) was three times the rates for white (22.0) and Hispanic (22.9) youth. Cases were more likely to be petitioned for formal processing for black youth (62%) than white (51%) or Hispanic (53%) youth. Once petitioned, cases involving black youth were less likely to be adjudicated (50%) than cases involving white (54%) and Hispanic (58%) youth, and slightly more likely to be waived to criminal court (0.8%) than white (0.6%) and Hispanic (0.5%) youth. Once adjudicated, cases involving black or Hispanic youth were more likely to result in residential placement (29% and 31%, respectively) than cases involving white youth (21%). Conversely, adjudicated cases involving white youth were more likely to result in probation (65%) than cases involving black (61%) or Hispanic (63%) youth.

Age

In 2015, juveniles younger than age 16 at the time of referral to court accounted for 52% of all delinquency cases handled. This age group accounted for 60% of person offense cases, 53% of property offense cases, 49% of public order offense cases, and 39% 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 (6%). 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 (76% in 2015).

The likelihood of detention varies by general offense category. In 2015, person offense cases were the most likely to involve detention (30%), followed by public order offense cases (28%). In comparison, juveniles were less likely to be detained in property offense cases (20%) and drug offense cases (17%). Similar to the overall delinquency caseload trend, between 2005 and 2015, the number of delinquency cases in which the juvenile was detained decreased 44%.

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 2015, 18% of all delinquency cases (156,400 cases) were dismissed at intake, generally for lack of legal sufficiency. An additional 27% (238,400 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 (55% or 490,000 cases), authorities filed a petition and handled the case formally. The proportion of delinquency cases petitioned for formal handling changed little between 2005 and 2015.

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/pubs/248410.pdf.)

In 2015, juvenile court judges waived jurisdiction over an estimated 3,200 delinquency cases, sending them to criminal court. This represents 1% of all formally handled delinquency cases. The number of cases waived was relatively flat from 2005 to 2008 and then declined 50% through 2015.

For each year between 2005 and 2015, person offenses accounted for the largest proportion of waived cases. In 2015, half of all waived cases involved person offenses.

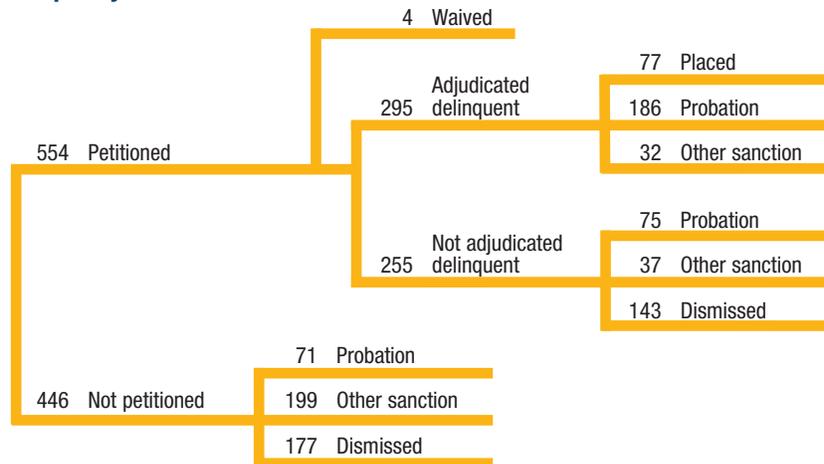
Most serious offense	Offense profile of cases waived to criminal court			
	Number		Percentage	
	2005	2015	2005	2015
Total delinquency	6,500	3,200	100%	100%
Person	3,000	1,600	46	50
Property	2,200	1,000	31	31
Drugs	900	300	14	10
Public order	600	300	9	9

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

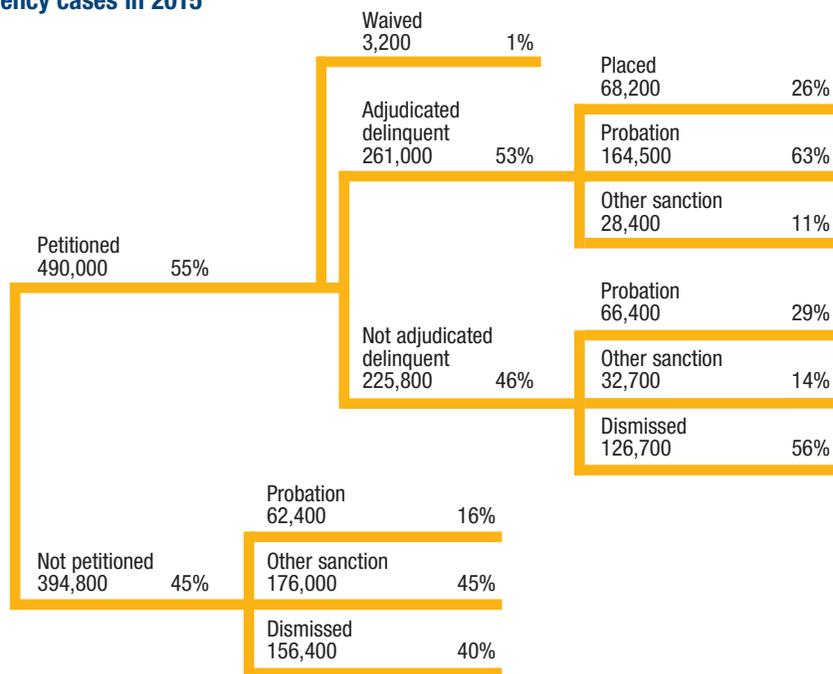
Adjudication and disposition

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 2015, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in 53% (261,000) 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 2015, 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, 26% in both 2005 and 2015, while the proportion ordered to probation has increased slightly, from 60% in 2005 to 63% in 2015. The proportion receiving other sanctions has fluctuated between 11% and 14% over the same time period.

Case flow for a typical 1,000 delinquency cases in 2015



Case flow for 884,900 delinquency cases in 2015



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 2015 are available at ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/court/faqs.asp.

For more information

This fact sheet is based on the report, *Juvenile Court Statistics 2015*, which is available at ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/njcda/pdf/jcs2015.pdf. 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 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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