

What Story Does the Data Tell? A Look at Trends in Juvenile Justice

Hunter Hurst, Director

National Center for Juvenile Justice

Judicial Conference on Juvenile Justice
August 17, 2026

National Center For Juvenile Justice

NCJFCJ's Specialized Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Research Group (est. in 1973 in Pittsburgh PA)

Curates the **National Juvenile Court Data Archive**, a repository of millions of **delinquency and petitioned status offense case records** dating back to the 1970s

Supports the **OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book (SBB)**, which attracts more than 300,000 visitors a year

Provides jurisdiction-specific dependency and delinquency **data capacity improvement** assessments, assisting jurisdictions in over half of the states since 2018.

Conducts **statutes analysis and policy research** on topics such as transfer to criminal court

Supports Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act data compliance through **technical assistance to the states/territories**

Provides editorial support for the **NCJFCJ Juvenile and Family Court Journal** (est.1949)

Hunter's 5 Key Take Aways

Youth justice challenges are complex. Simple solutions are unlikely to solve them and could create poor outcomes and waste resources. Resist unitary solutions or absolutes.

Youth violence is decreasing nationally. We continue to enjoy a steep decline in overall offending, including violent offenses with some important caveats:

- Juvenile arrests for homicides have steadily increased since 2016
- Gun offenses are increasing
- Regional variations can produce exceptions

While some kids act out outwardly, there is evidence that they are hurting inwardly.

Examine child well-being alongside offense trends.

Court referrals are down, and so are detentions and state commitments. However, the easy cases are increasingly and successfully being diverted, leaving a concentrated docket of complex young people.

Watch out for misleading dips in the road (the whoop-de-do effect). Not the right time to hit the pedal unless you want to launch into the air. Hands on the wheel and steady.

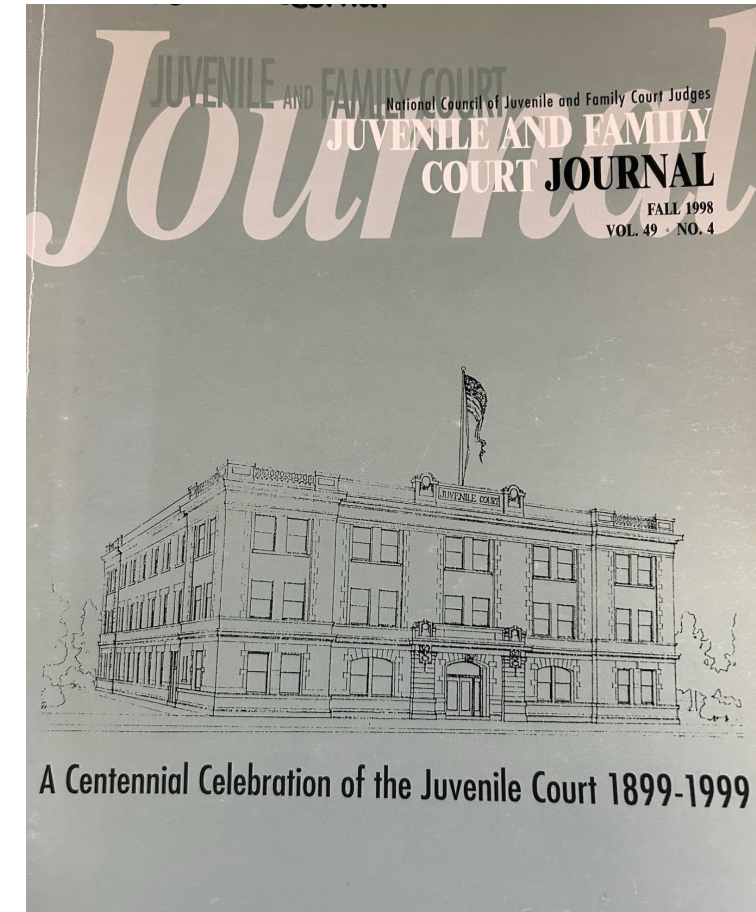
Historical Context



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

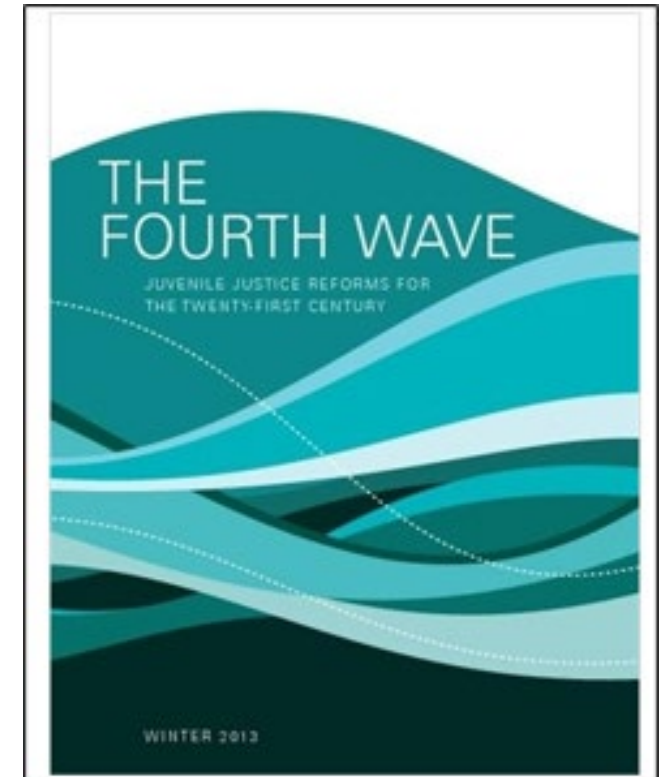
Hunter's Lens: A quick retrospective

- The Juvenile Court at 100 Years of Age: The Death of Optimism (Hurst, 1998 NCJFCJ Journal)
- The Juvenile Court at 100 Years: Celebration or Wake? (Merlo et al. 1999, NCJFCJ Journal)
- Juvenile Justice: A Birthday Cake or a Funeral Pyre (Shepherd, NCJFCJ Journal)



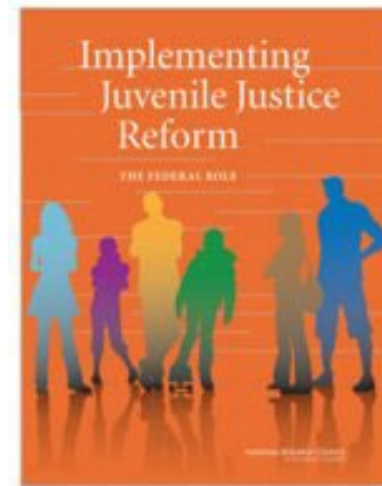
The Fourth Wave of Juvenile Justice Reform

- Historic declines in juvenile arrests
- Shrinking custody populations
- Facilities closing/realignment of resources
- Successful national policy reform initiatives
- Advances in risk/need measurement and adoption by states
- Increasing application of evidence-based interventions and state support or requirements

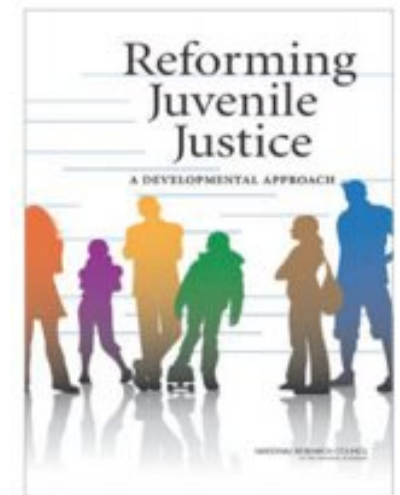


Formal Recognition at Federal Policy Levels

- Foundation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) juvenile justice reform efforts
- Laws, policies, and practices at every stage within the system should align with the evolving knowledge of adolescent development



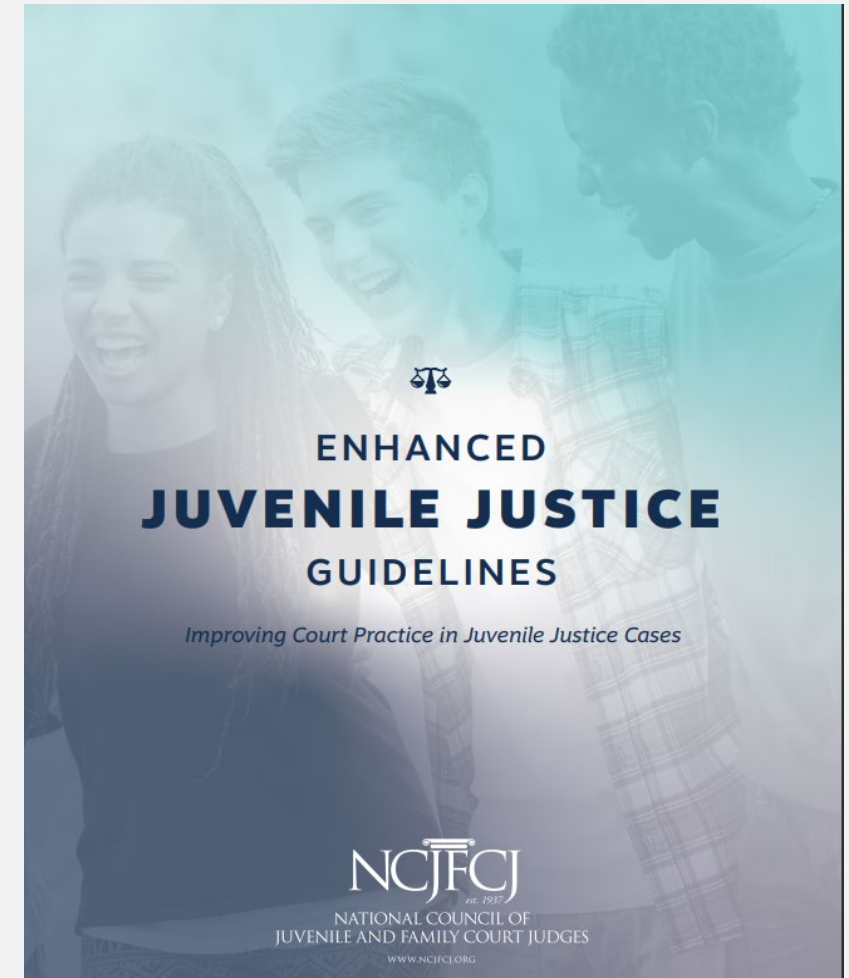
National Academy
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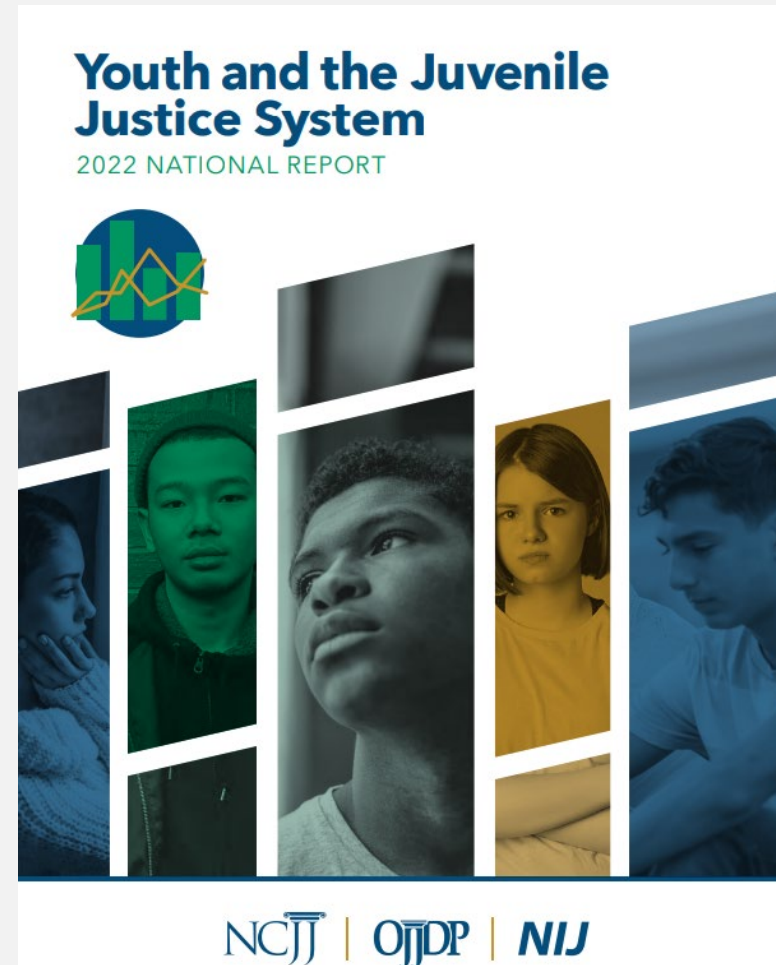
Practice Guides & Supporting Resolutions

- Enhanced Juvenile Justice Guidelines (ed. Pearce 2018)
 - NCJFCJ Resolution in Support of Best Practices and Principles of the Enhanced Juvenile Justice Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Juvenile Justice Cases
 - NCJFCJ Resolution Regarding Juvenile Probation and Adolescent Development

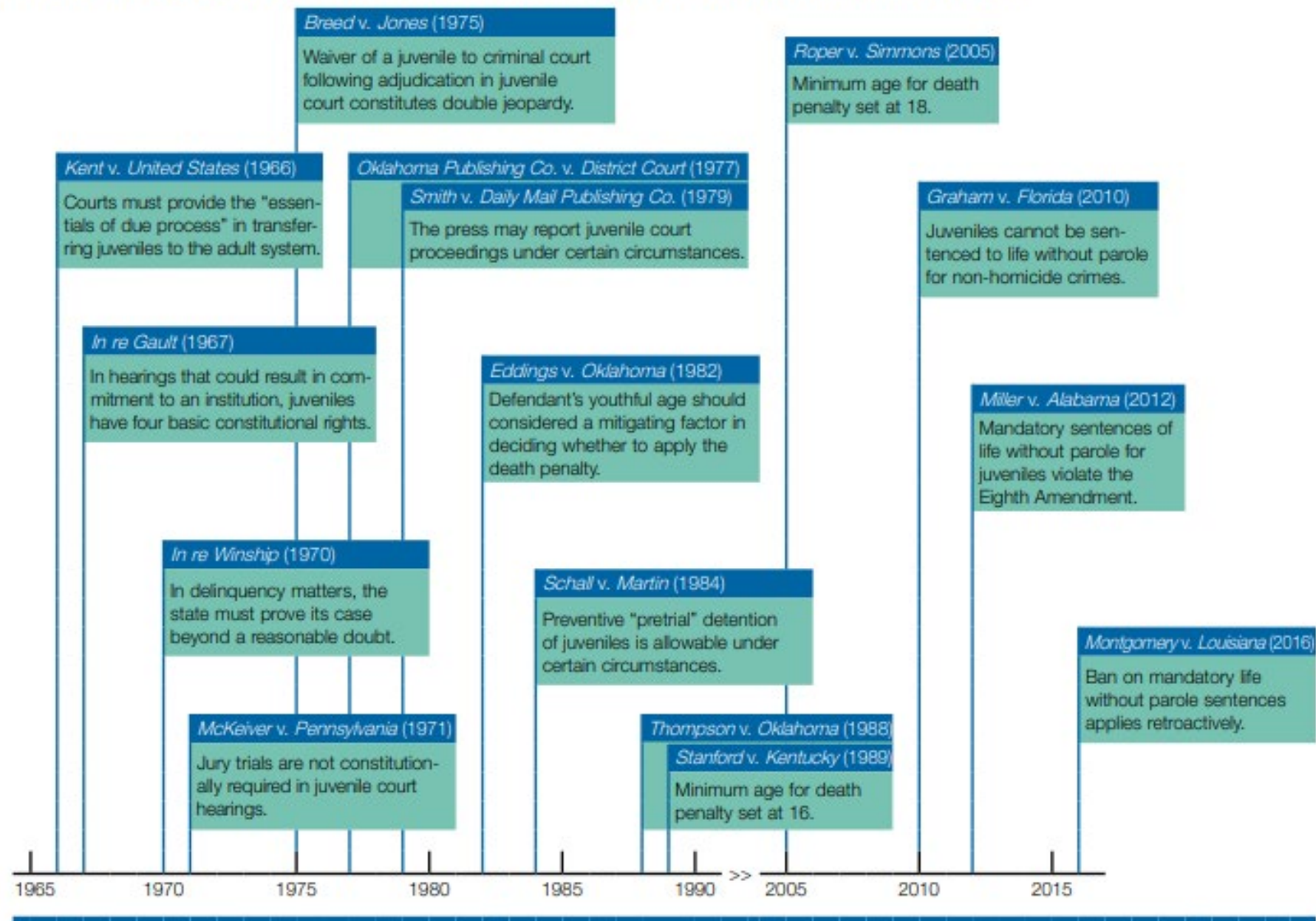


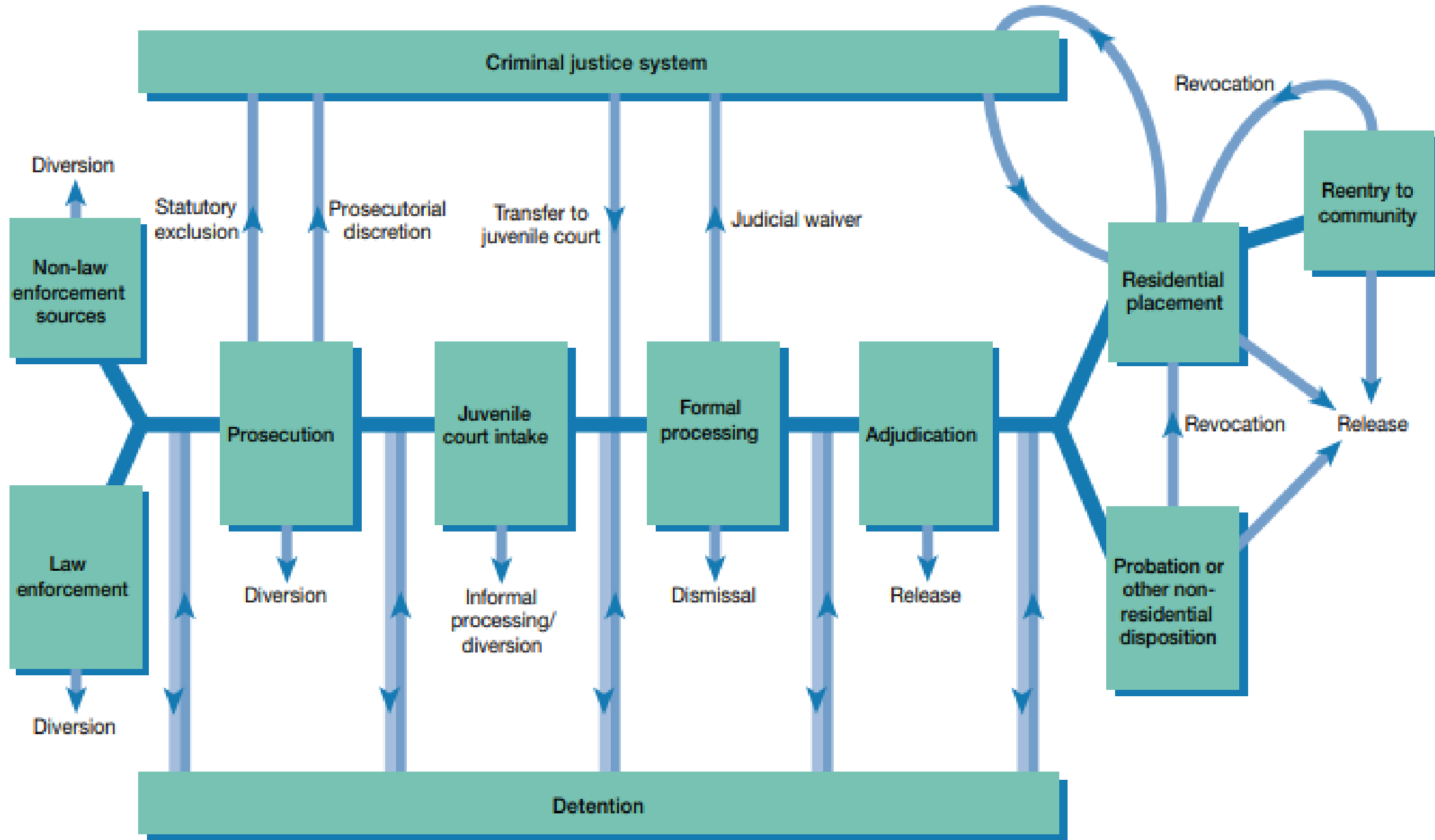
NCJJ's National Report: *A cornucopia of data on youth and the juvenile justice system*

(Puzzanchera et al. 2023)



A series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions have shaped juvenile justice over the decades





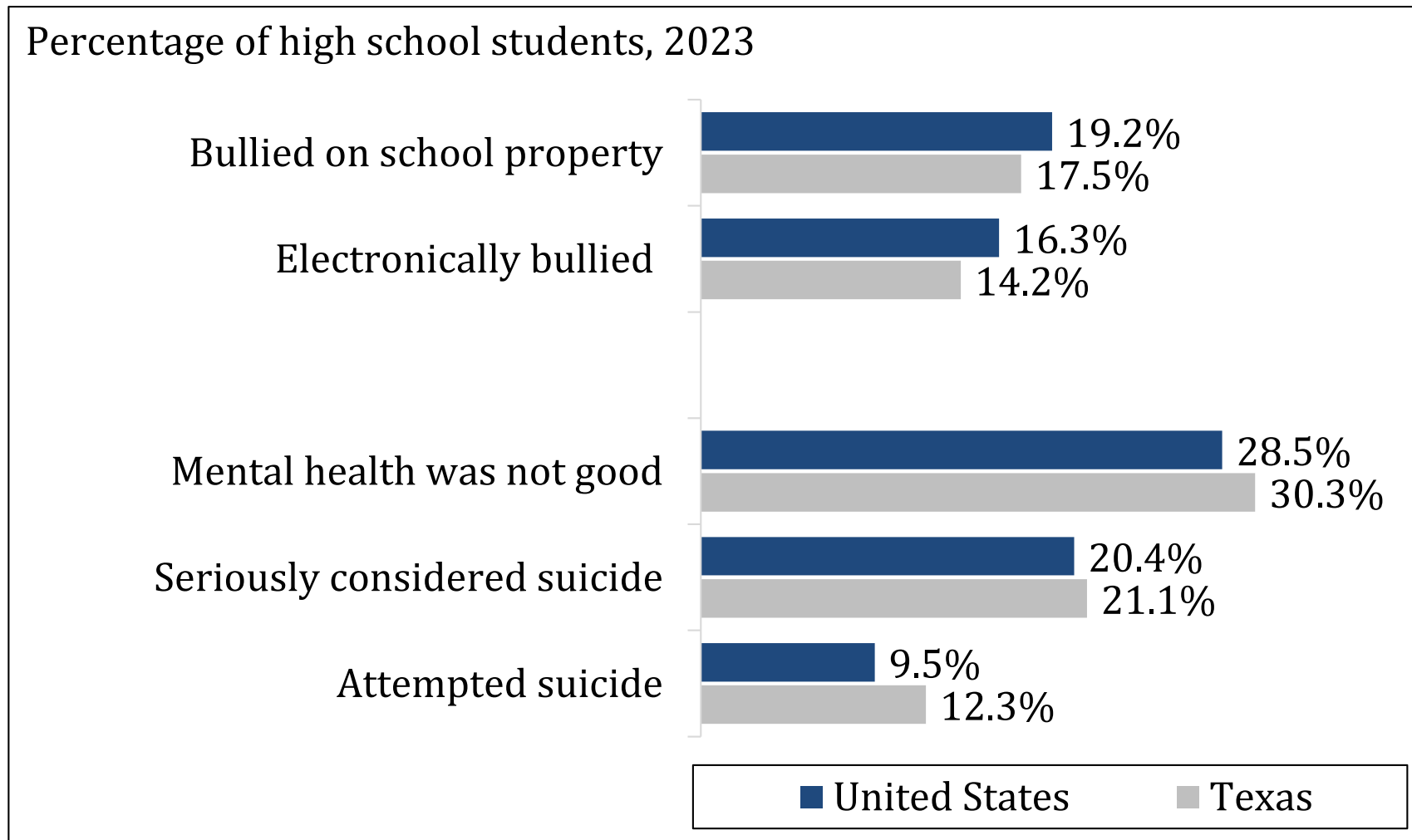
Note: This chart gives a simplified view of caseload through the juvenile justice system. Procedures may vary among jurisdictions.

What youth tell us about: their mental health



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

The prevalence of bullying in TX was below the national average



Data source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

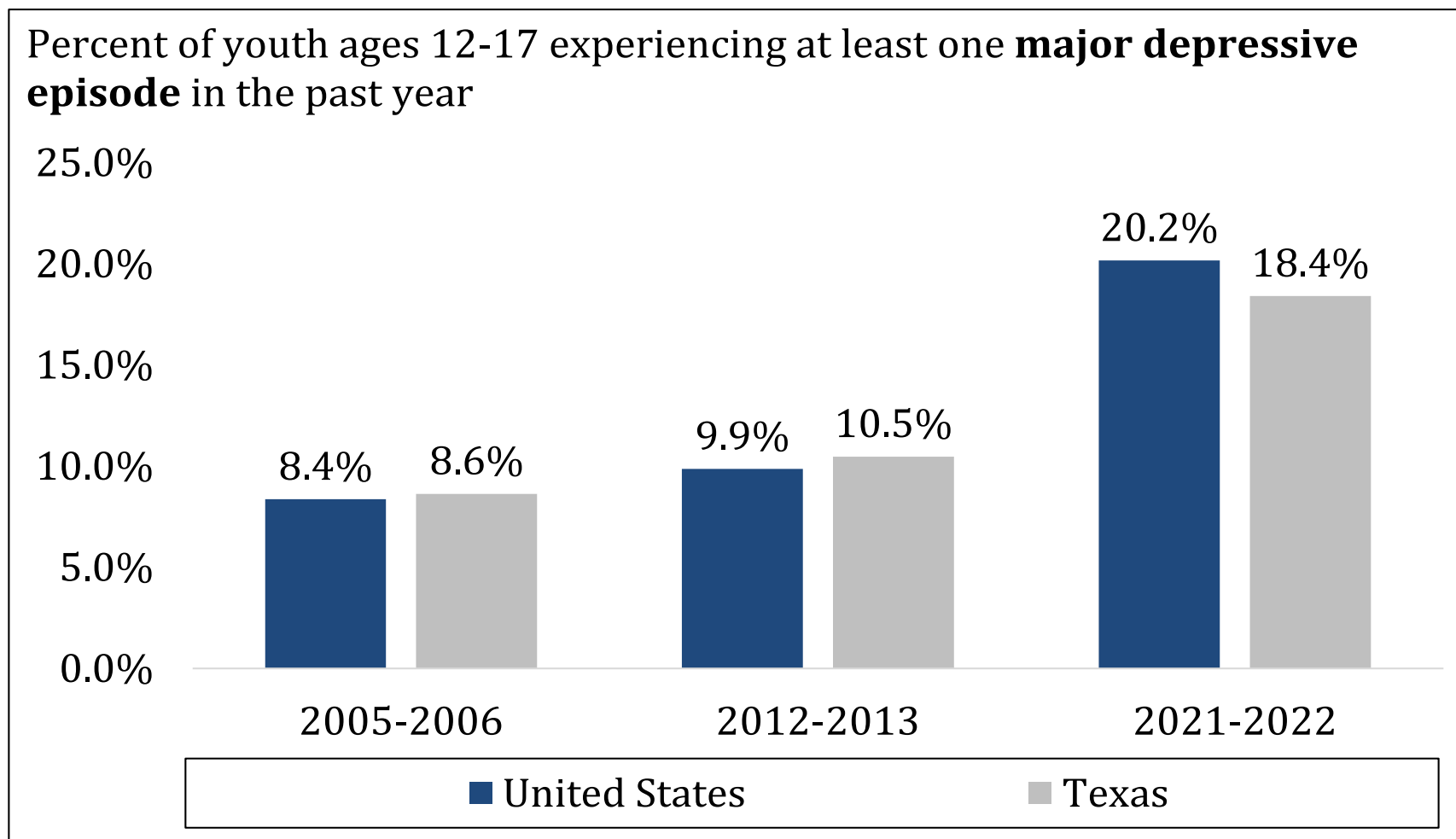
How the National Survey on Drug Use and Health defines **Major Depressive Episode (MDE)**

Major depressive episode (MDE): respondents were classified as having had an MDE in the past 12 months if:

- (1) they had at least one period of **2 weeks or longer** in the past year when, for **most of the day nearly every day, they felt depressed or lost interest or pleasure in daily activities**; and
- (2) they also had **problems with sleeping, eating, energy, concentration, self-worth, or having recurrent thoughts of death or recurrent suicidal ideation.**

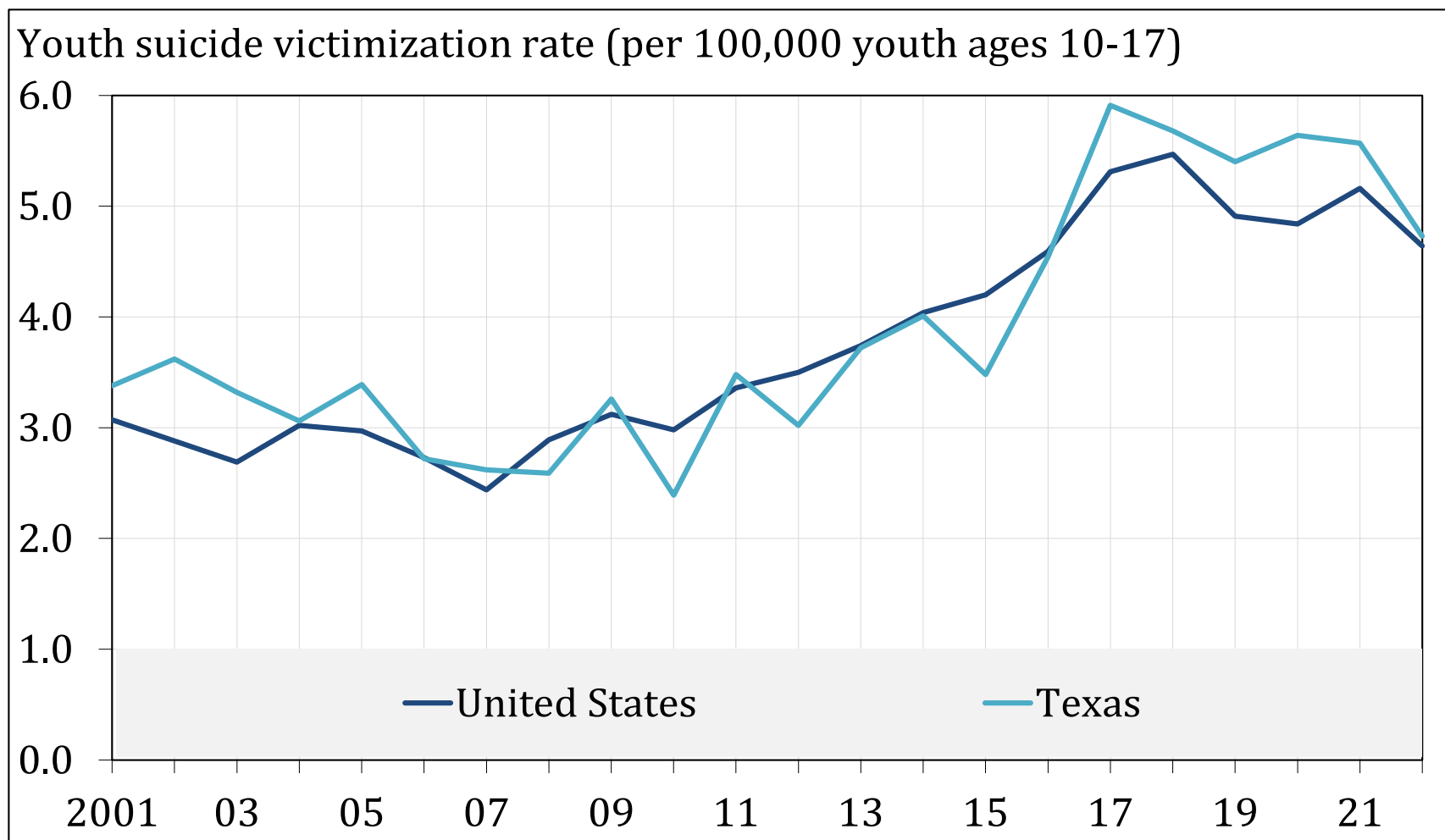
Adapted from: Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health

Nationally, about 1 in 5 youth ages 12-17 experienced a major depressive episode



Data source: National Survey on Drug Use and Health-Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA)

The rate of suicide for TX youth followed the national pattern



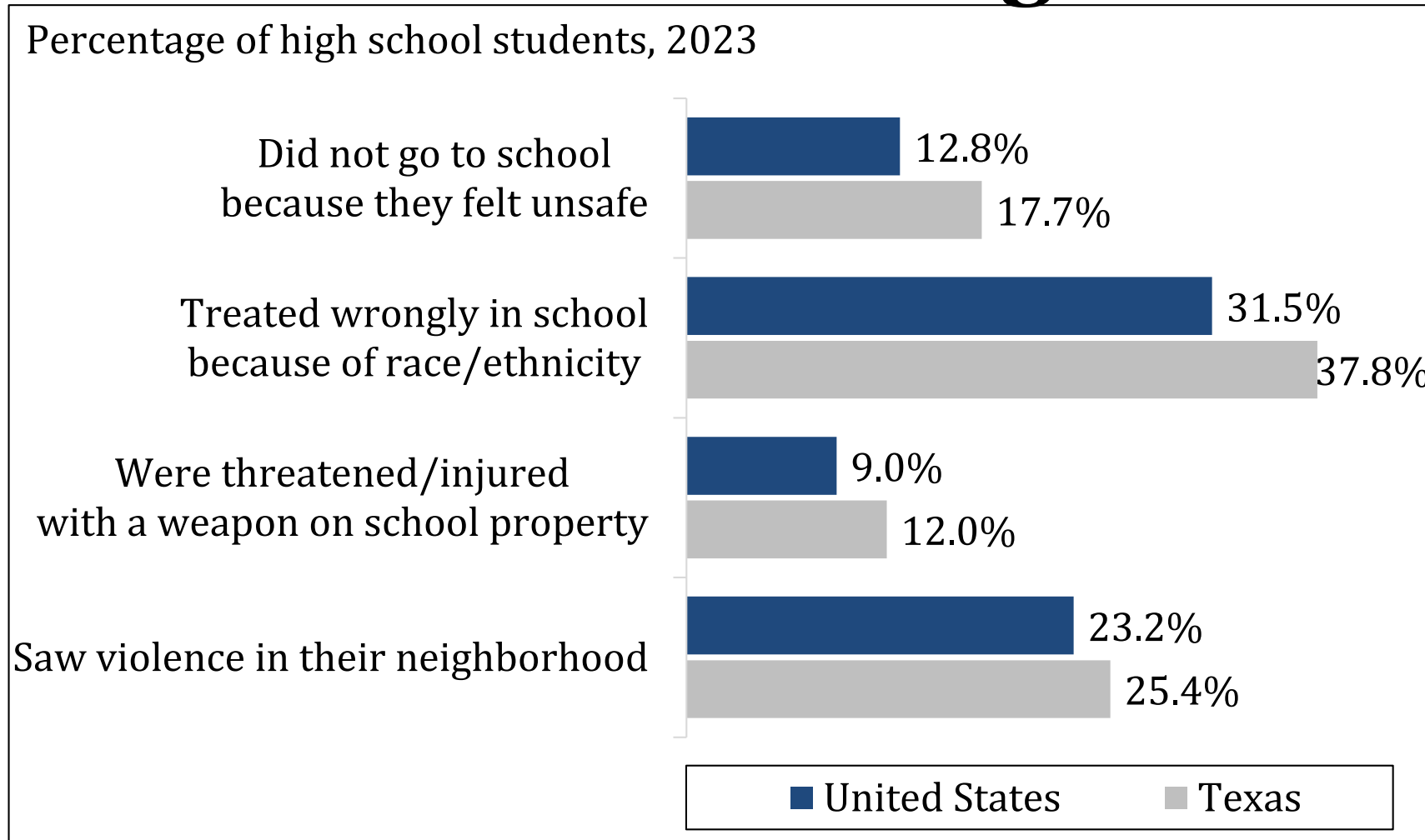
Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports

What youth tell us about: exposure to violence



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The prevalence of exposure to violence among TX HS students exceeded the national average



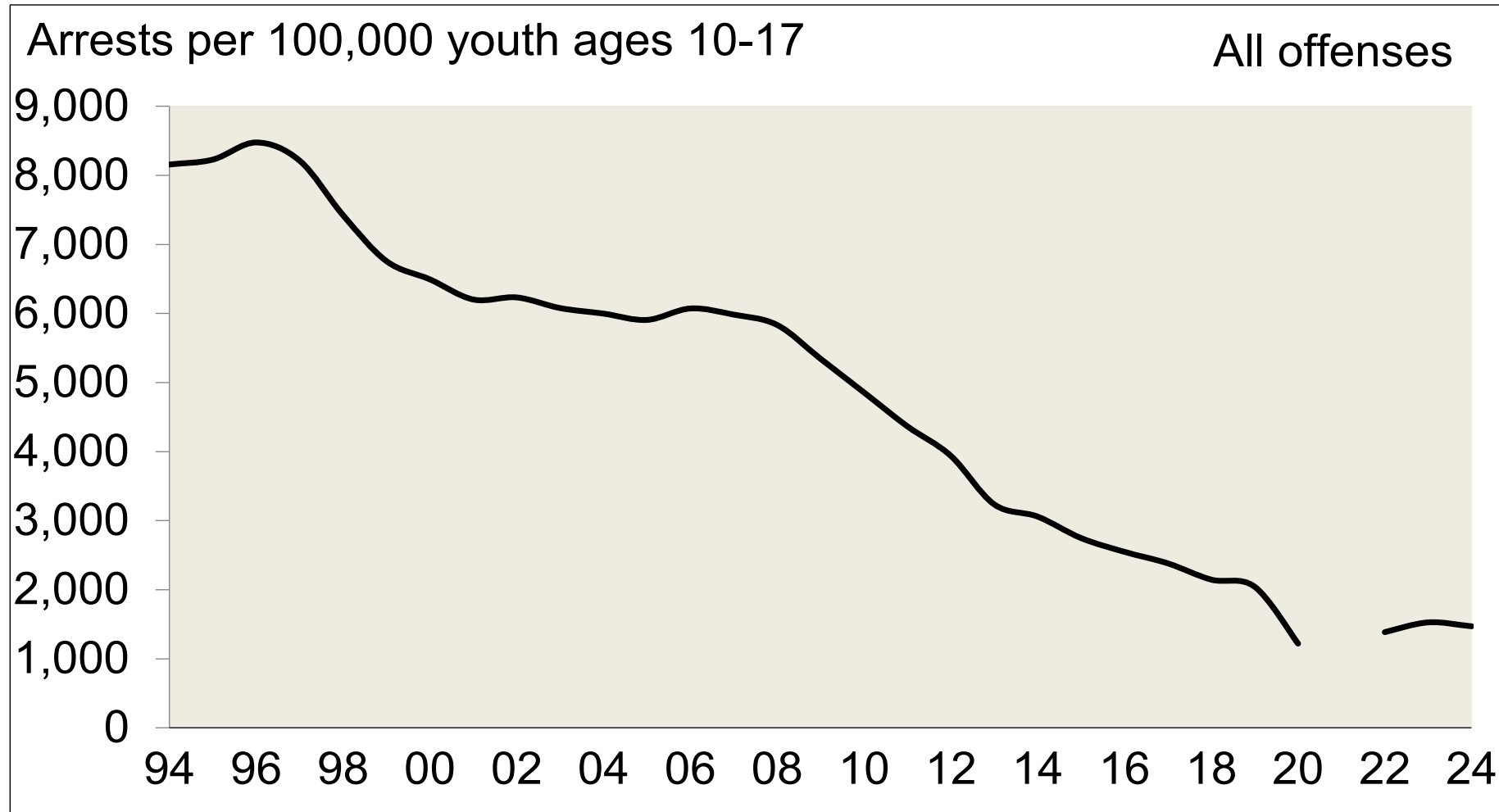
Data source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

Violence **by** youth is
below pre-pandemic
levels



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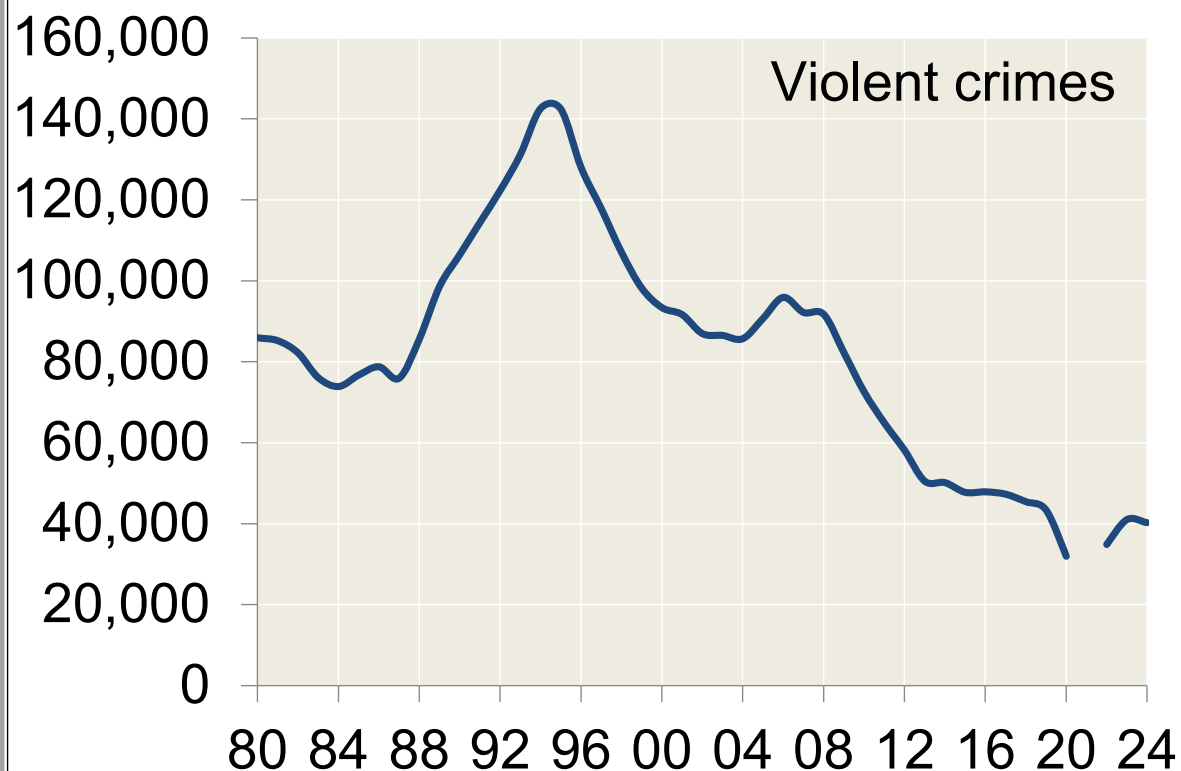
The overall arrest rate for youth in 2024 was 83% below the 1996 peak



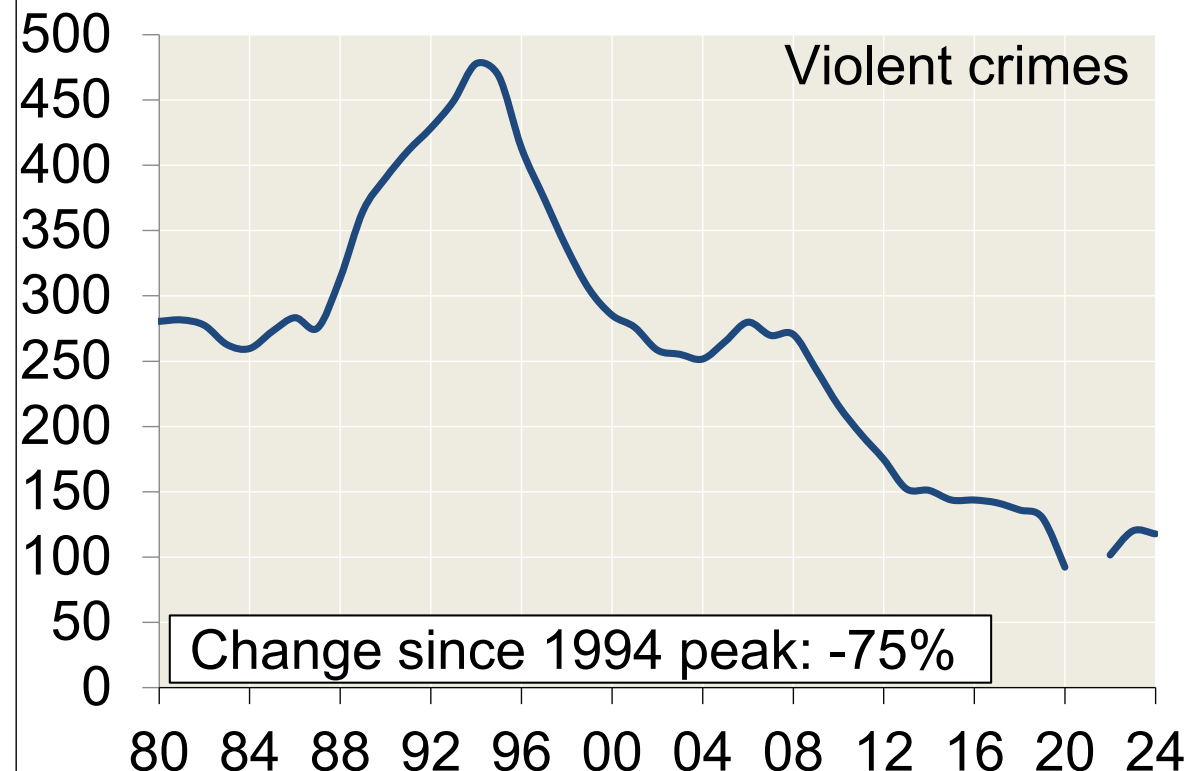
Data source: OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book (1980-2020); Crime in the United States Tables 38-40 (2022-2024)

Youth arrests for violence are down

Arrests of youth ages 0-17



Arrests per 100,000 youth ages 10-17



Data source: OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book (1980-2020); Crime in the United States Tables 38-40 (2022-2024)

Decrease is likely to continue in 25 and 26 and may accelerate

- Based on projections using non-official
 - A real time crime index (400 law enforcement agencies)—parallel to official FBI releases.
 - Mainly focuses on overall crime/ not age breakouts
- Three years of historic decreases—too early to predict magnitude
- Also, unclear what proportion of the decrease will be driven by juveniles
- Estimates 6-8k fewer homicides annually 2023-26 compared to 2020-22

Source: A Top Analyst Explains Why America's 'Second Great Crime Deline' Could Already be Here. 5/12/2026. Online. [The U.S. May Be Experiencing a Second 'Great Crime Decline'](#)

Why does it feel like violence is out of control?



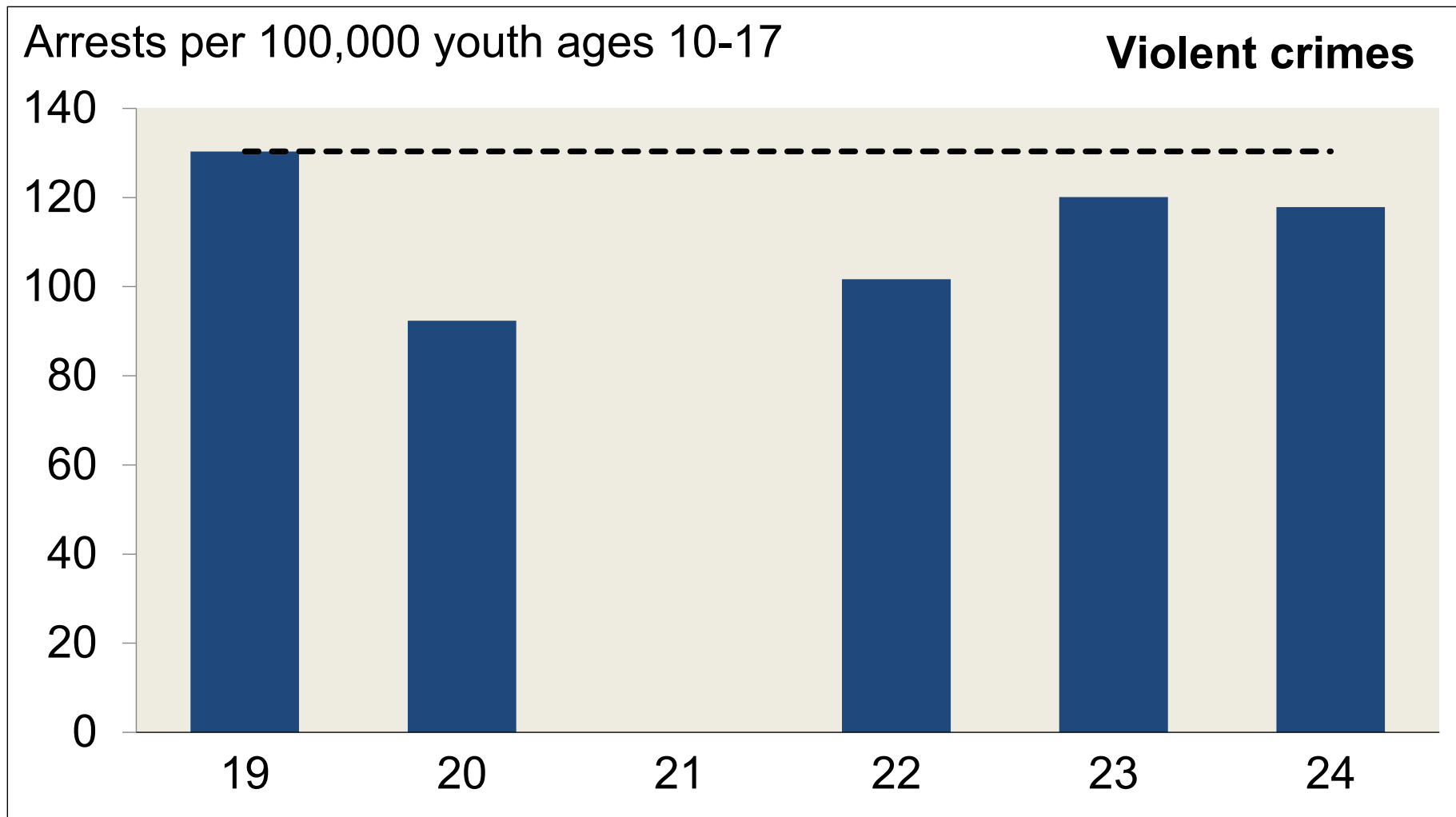
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The whoop-de-doo effect

The violent crime arrest rate for youth in 2024 was about 10% below the 2019 rate

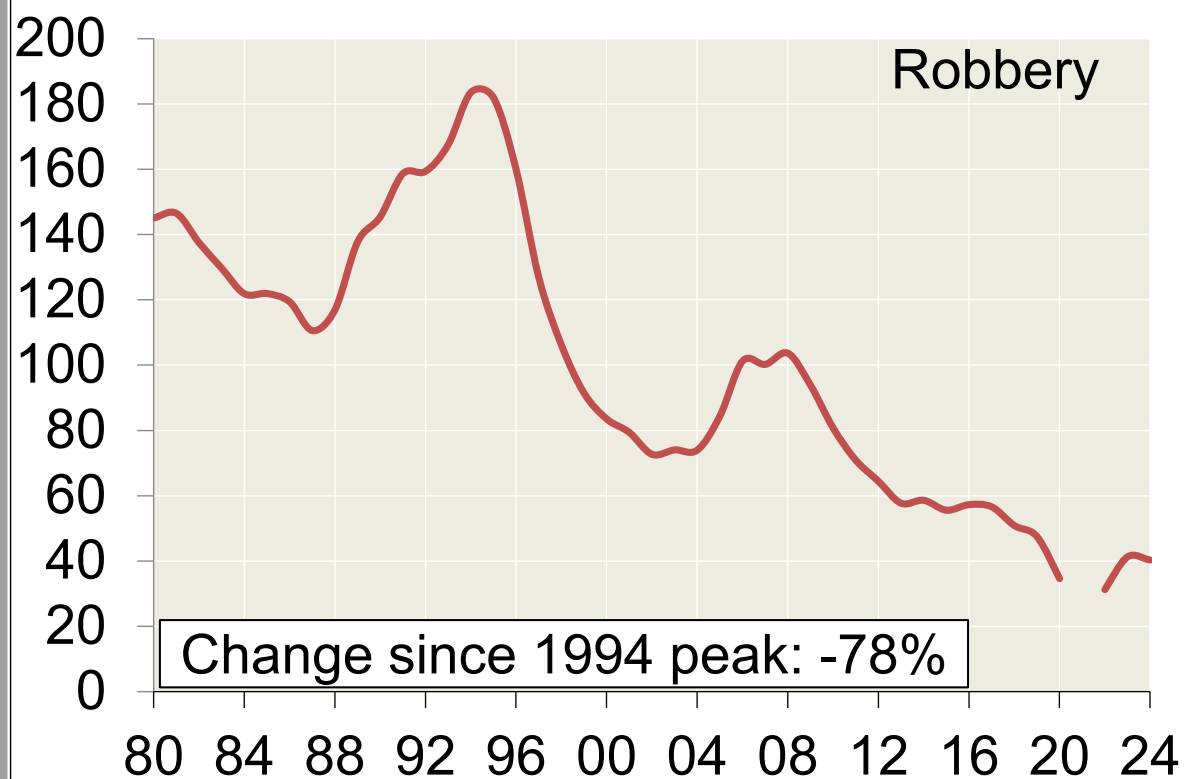
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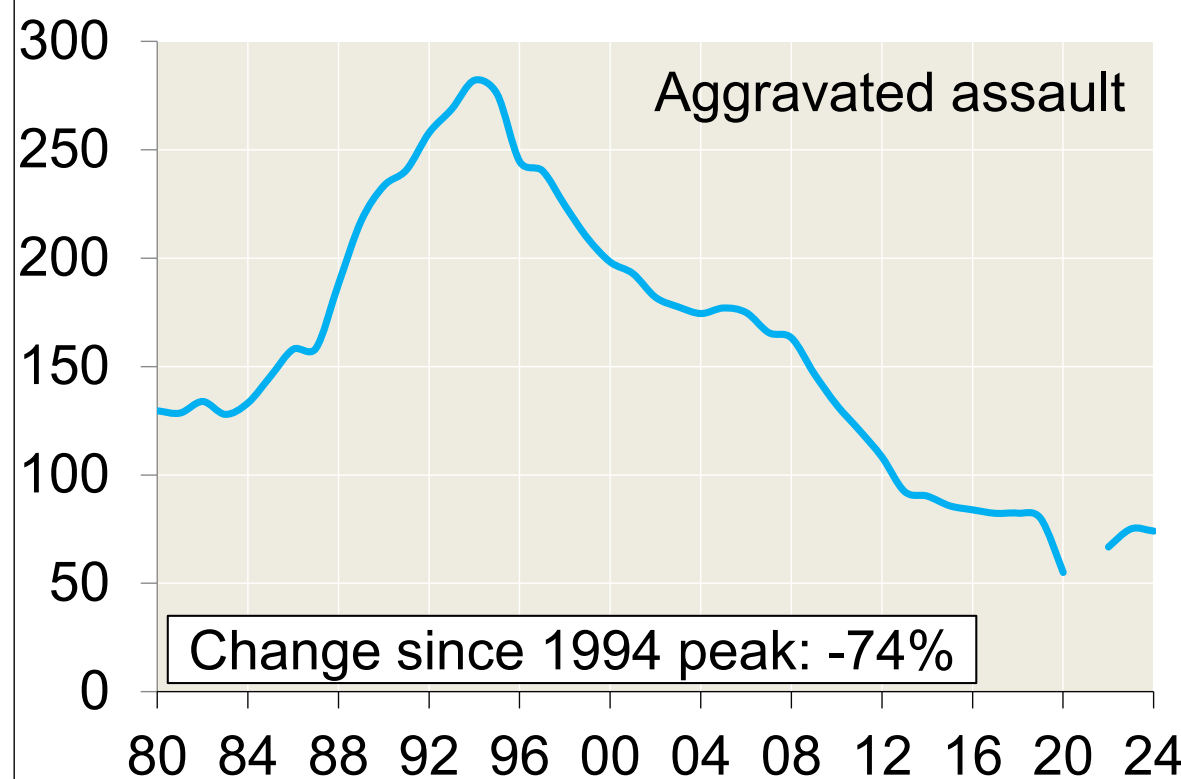
Data source: OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book (1980-2020); NIBRS Indicator Tables (2021 & 2022), FBI Crime Data Explorer, 2023

Arrests for robbery and aggravated assault are near their historic lows

Arrests per 100,000 youth ages 10-17

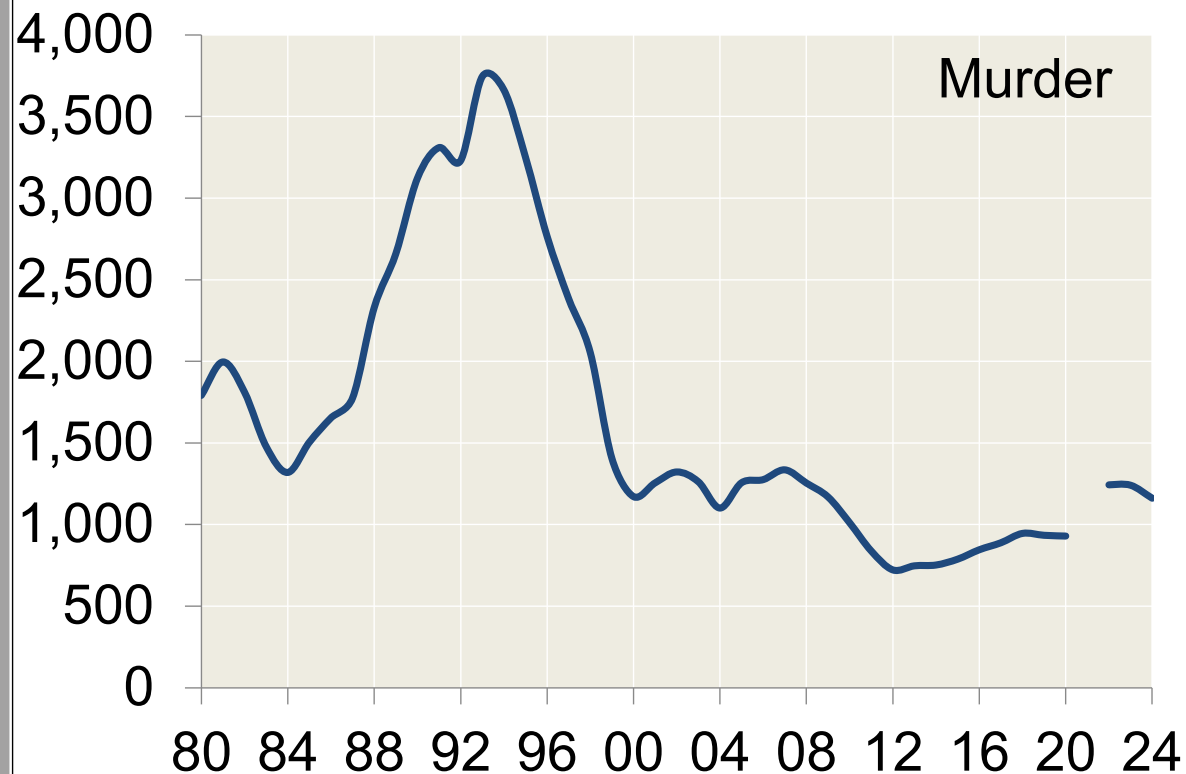


Arrests per 100,000 youth ages 10-17

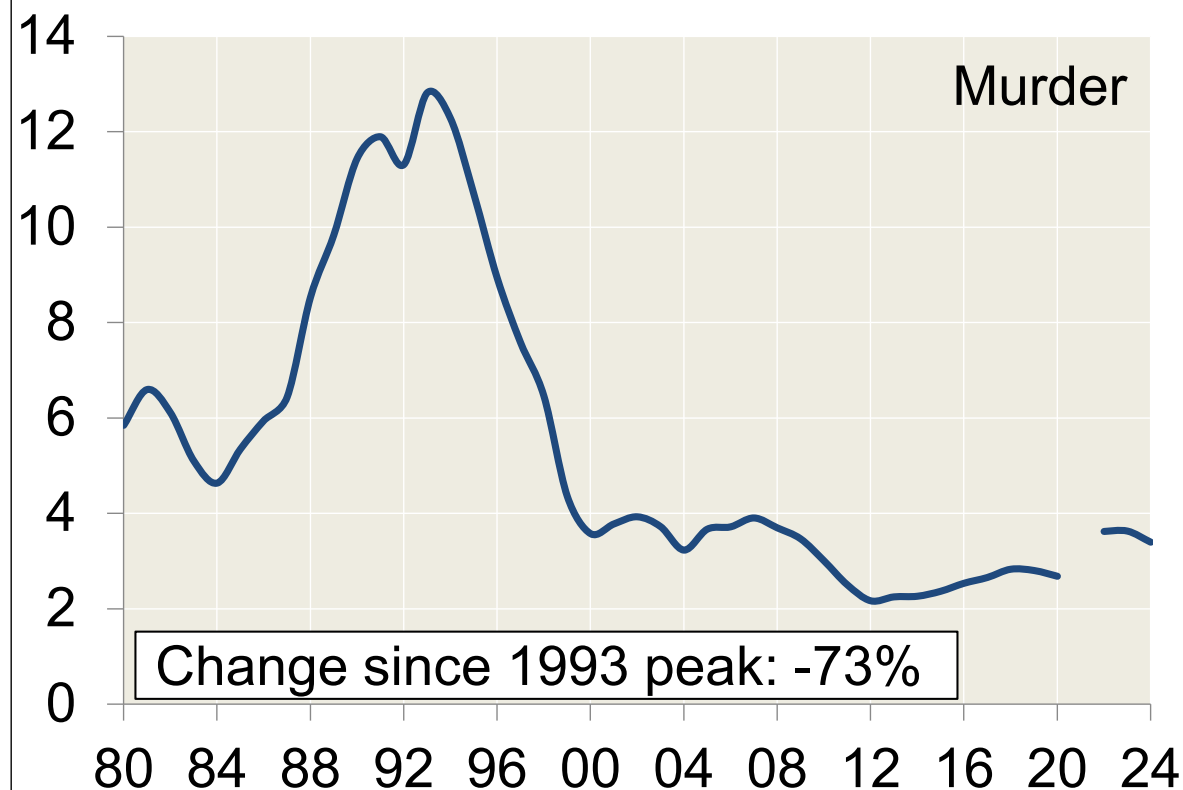


Youth arrests for murder have been on the rise since 2012

Arrests of youth ages 0-17

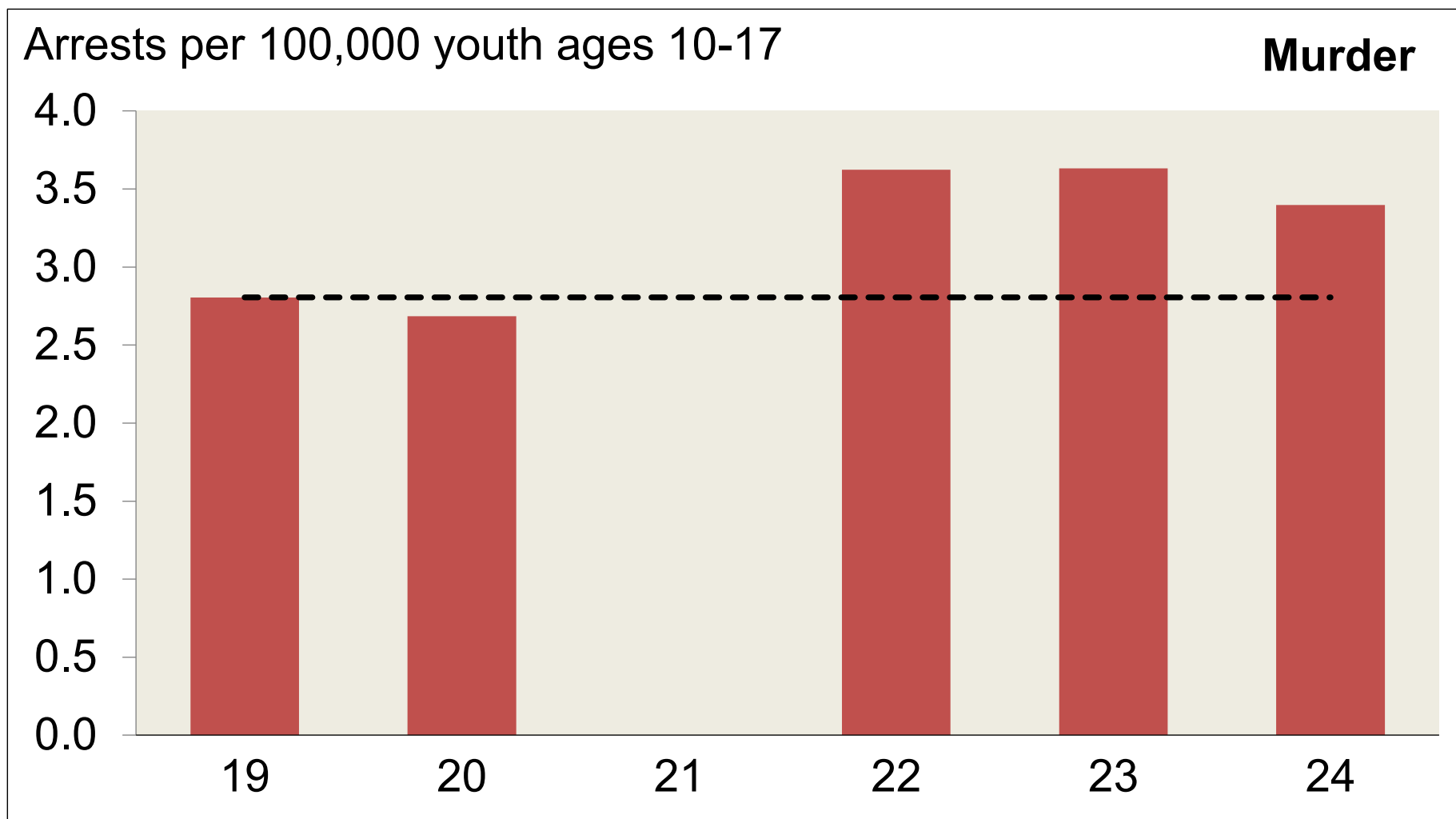


Arrests per 100,000 youth ages 10-17



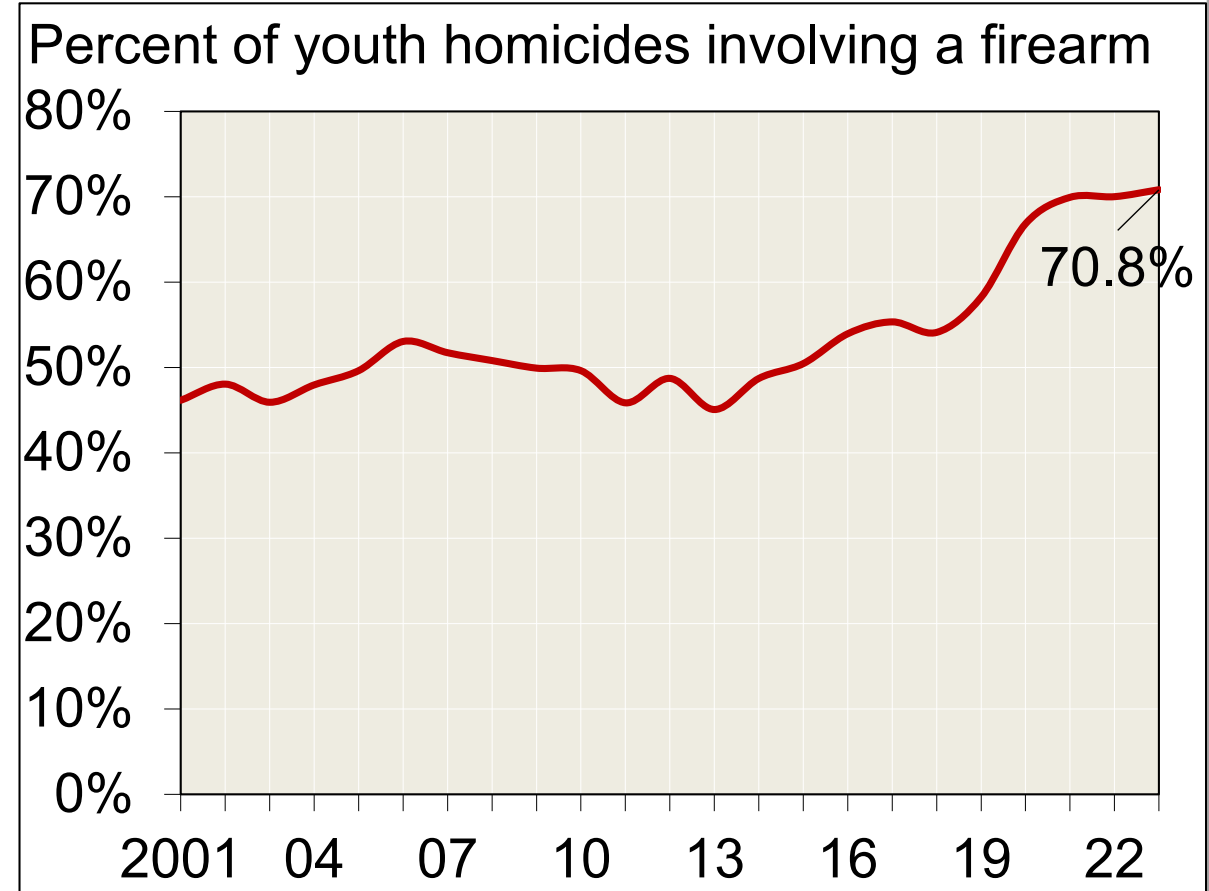
Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports

The 2024 murder arrest rate for youth was about 20% above the 2019 rate



Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports

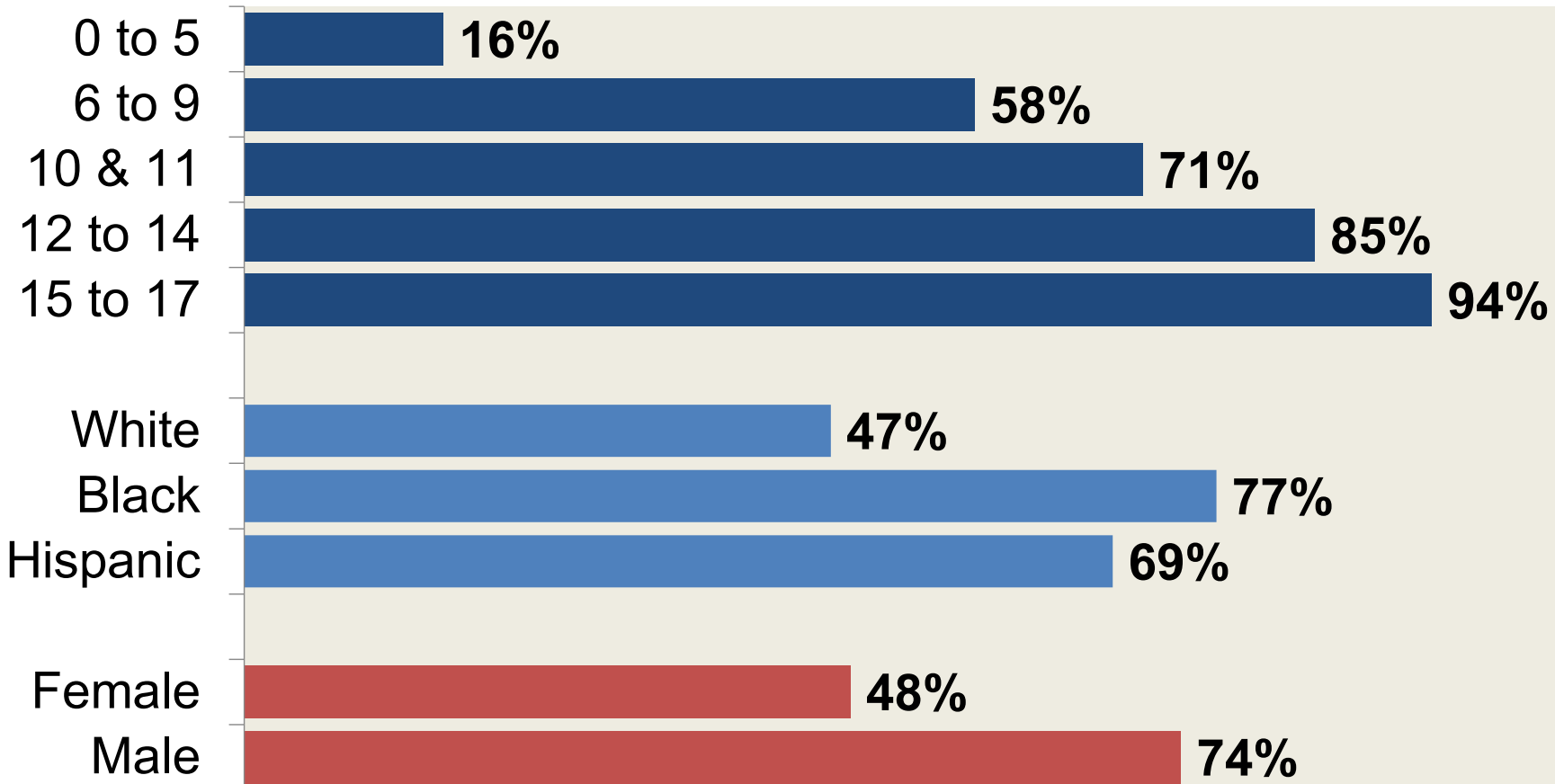
The proportion of youth homicides involving a firearm has been on the rise



Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports

Firearm involvement varies by youth demographics

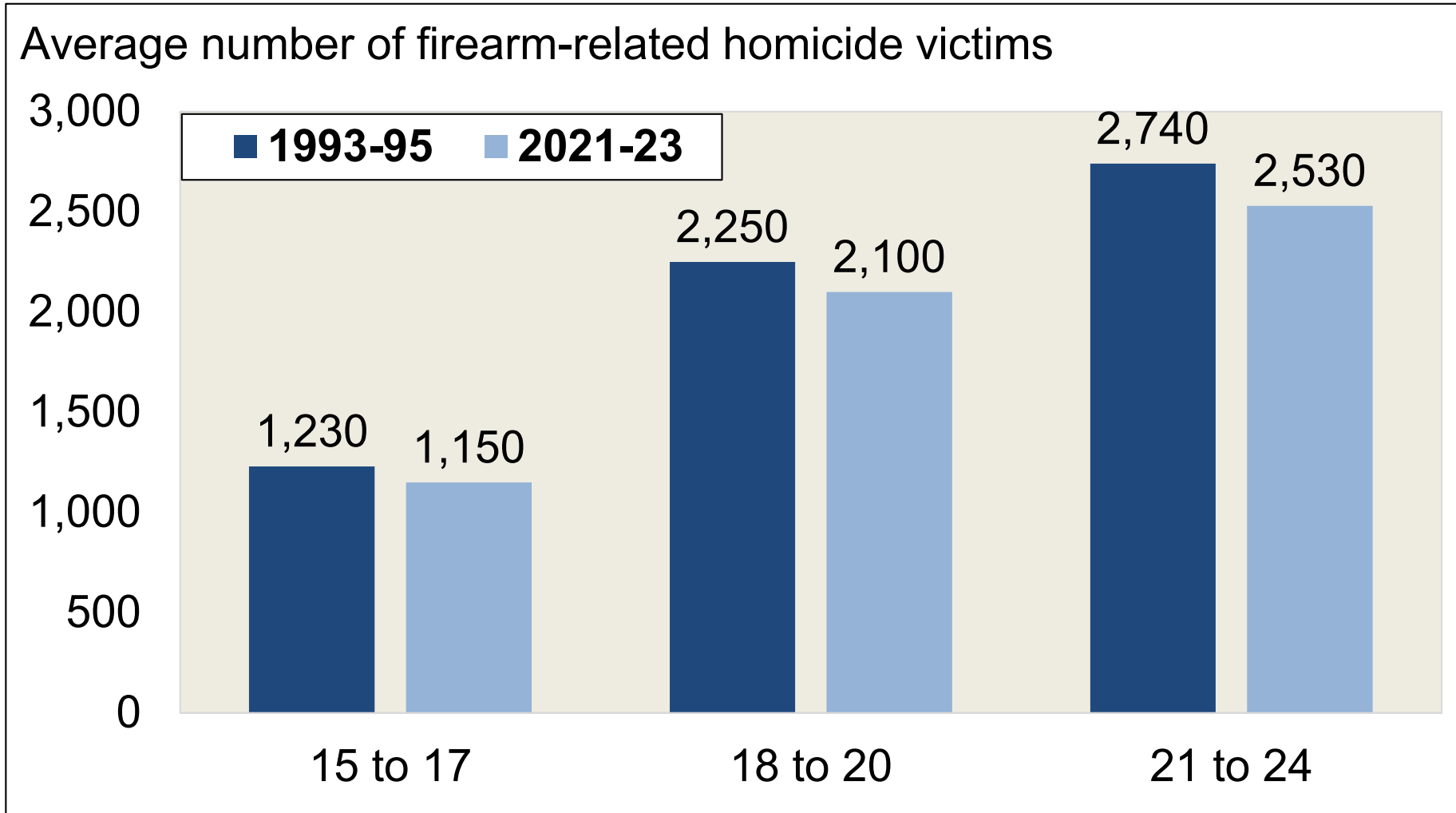
Percent of youth homicides involving a firearm, 2019-2023



Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports

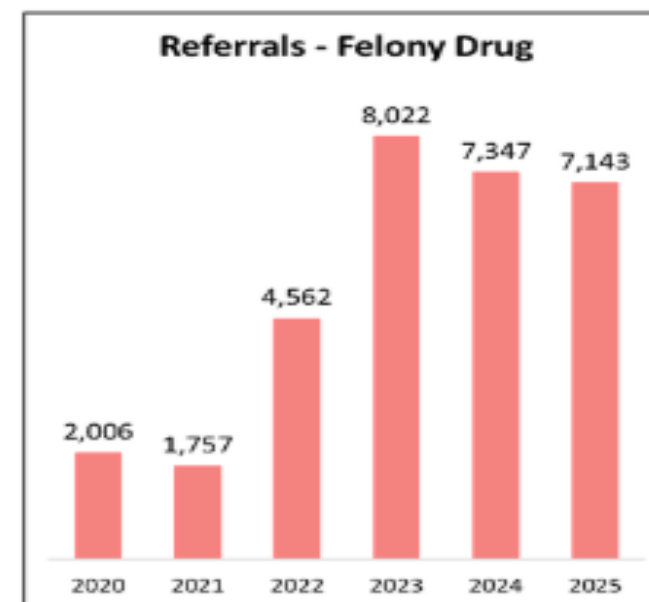
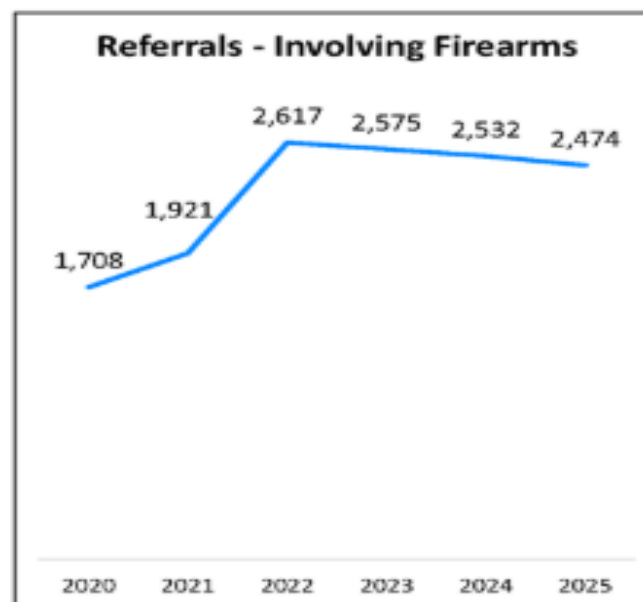
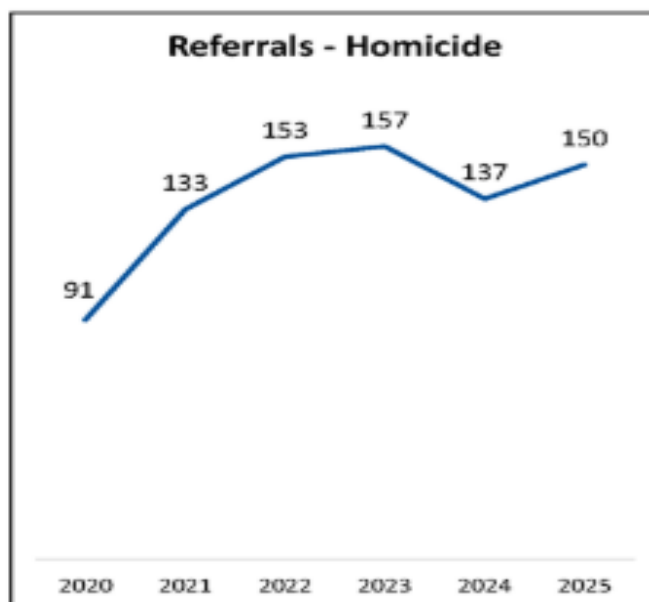
Firearm-related homicides are near the historic highs of the 1990s

31



Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports, Easy Access to the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports

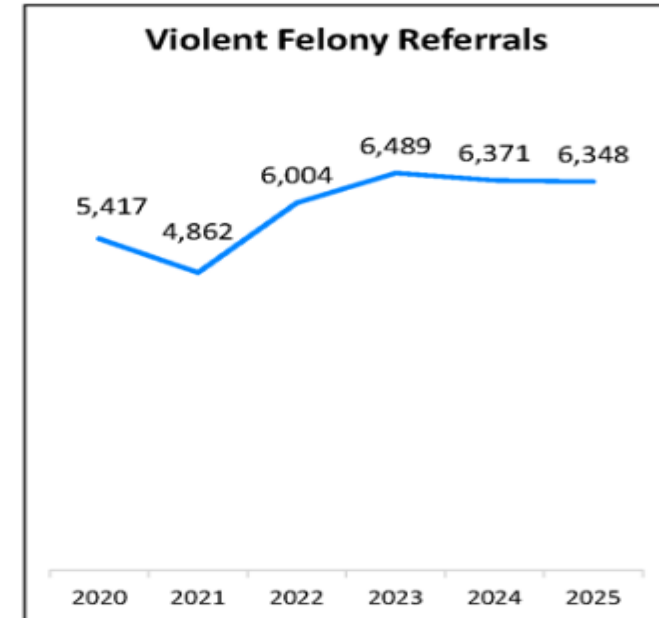
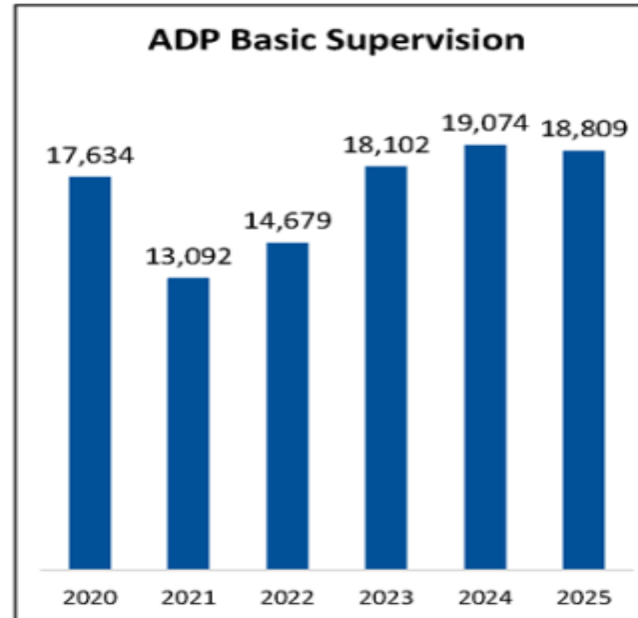
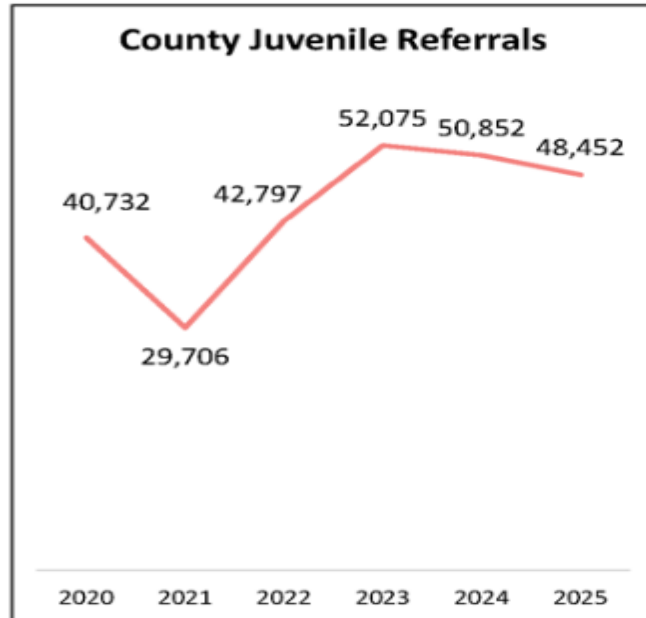
Homicide, Crimes Involving Firearms and Drug Offenses Rose



In this timeframe, homicide referrals increased by 65%, firearms offenses increased by 45%, and felony drug referrals sharply increased due to changes in the law.

Excerpt: Texas Juvenile Justice Department, TJJD Data and Statistics, online. [TJJD Data and Statistics - Texas Juvenile Justice Department](#) accessed 7/23/26

Juvenile Justice Population Rebounded After Pandemic



Formal referrals, basic supervision ADP, and violent felony referrals decreased during the pandemic but have since returned to near pre-pandemic levels.

Excerpt: Texas Juvenile Justice Department, TJJD Data and Statistics, online. [TJJD Data and Statistics - Texas Juvenile Justice Department](#) accessed 7/23/26

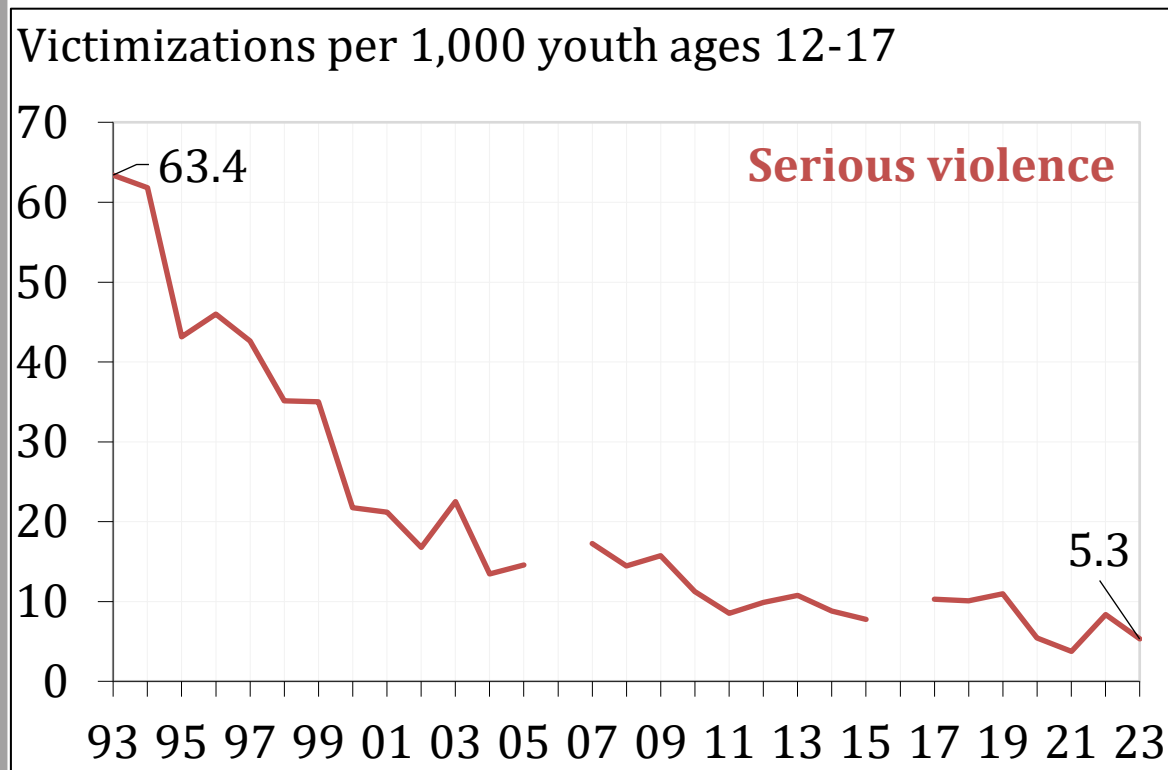
Non-fatal and fatal violence **against** youth have different patterns



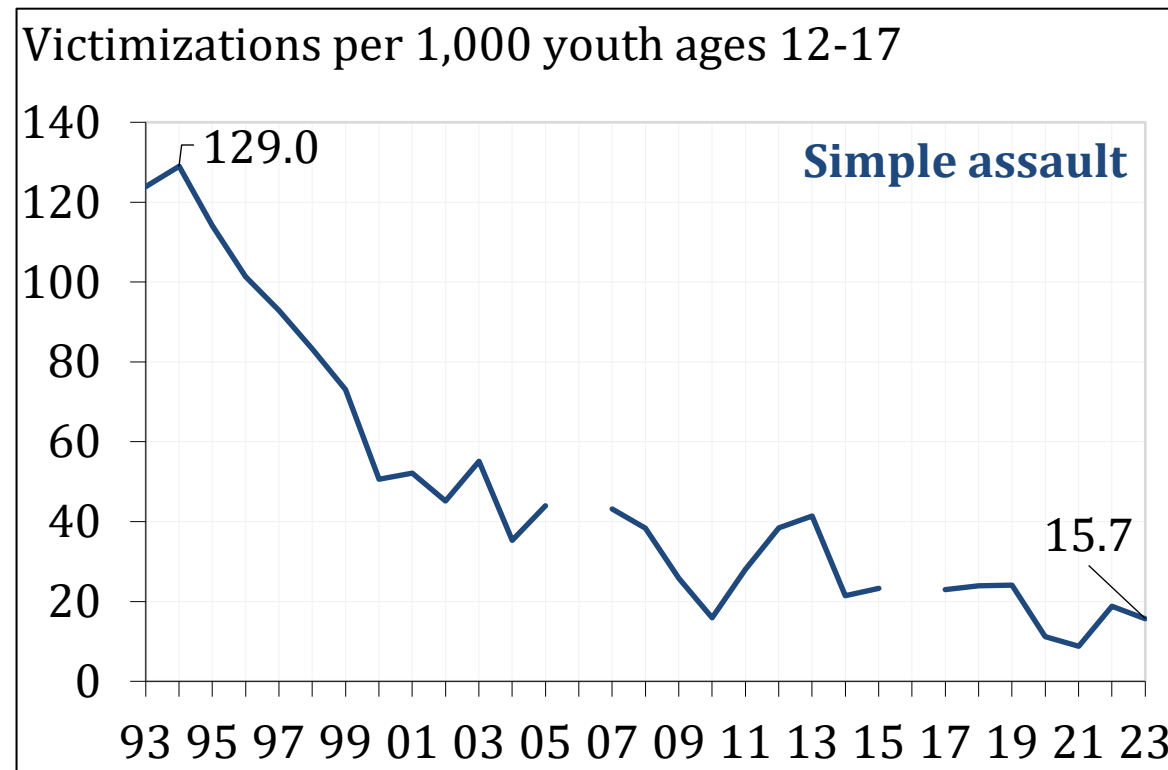
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Non-fatal victimization of youth remains near historic lows

Serious violence*

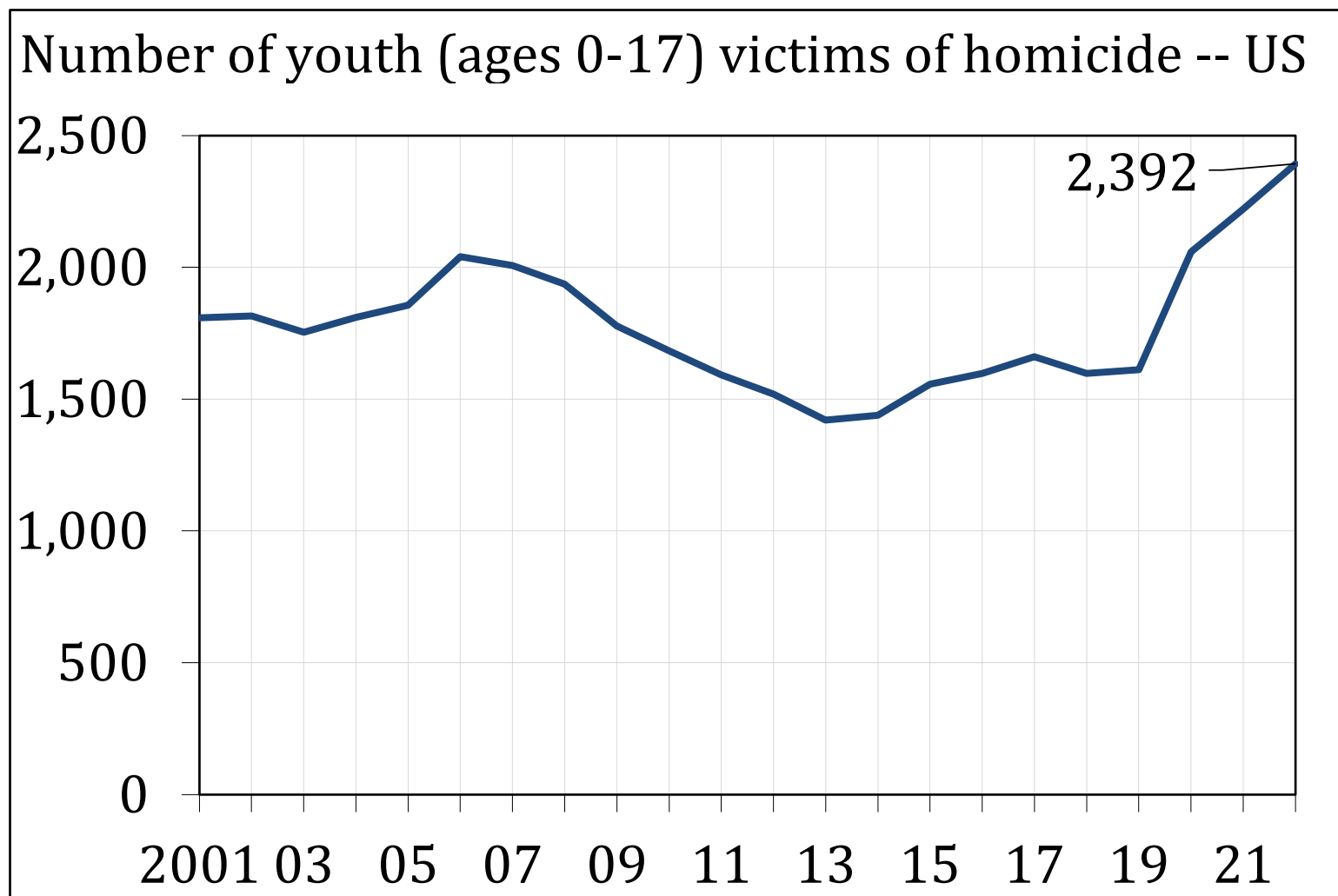


Simple assault



*Robbery, violent sexual assault, & aggravated assault

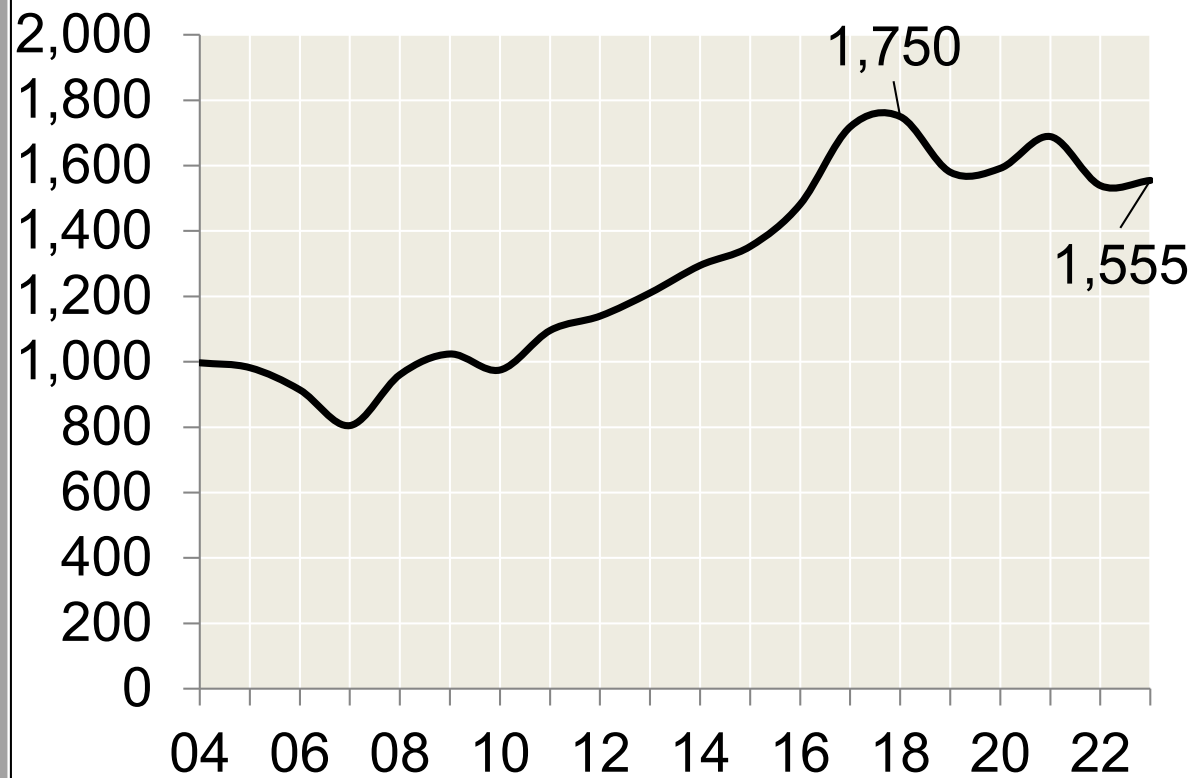
While fatal violence has increased in recent years



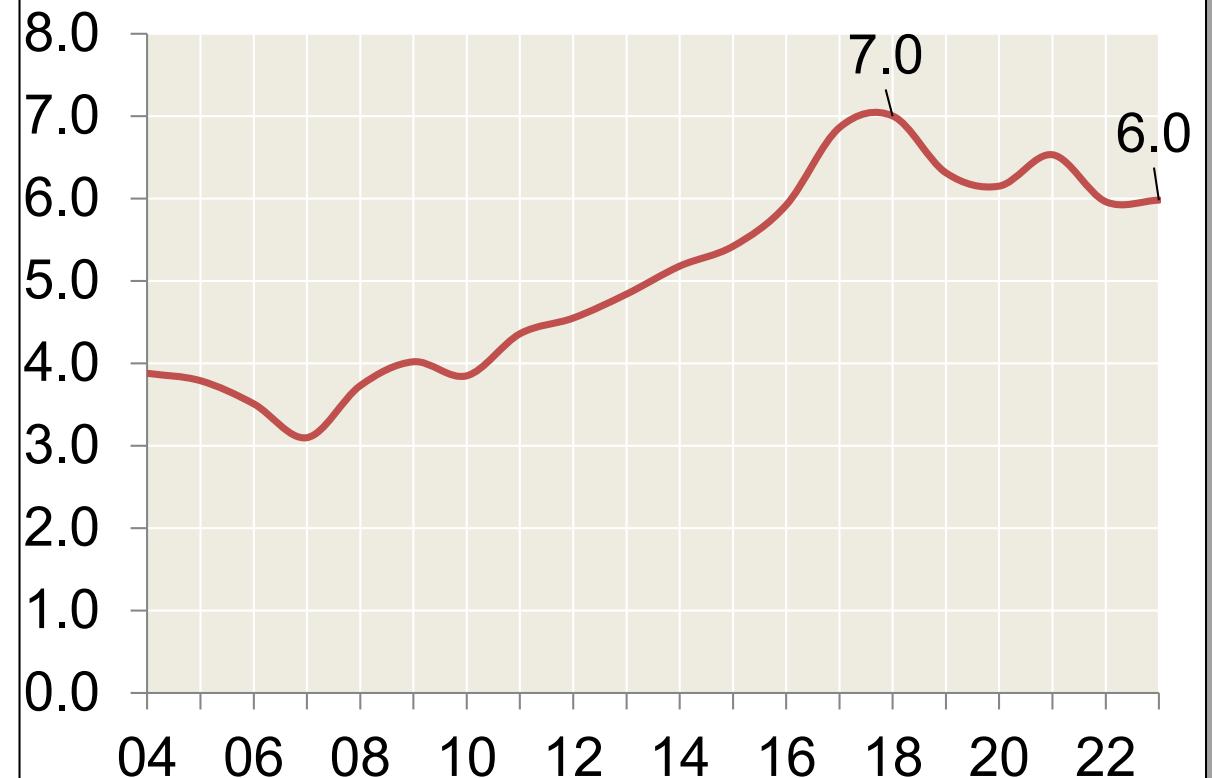
Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports

The number of youth victims of suicide has been on the rise

Suicide victims ages 12 to 17



Suicide victims per 100,000 youth ages 12-17

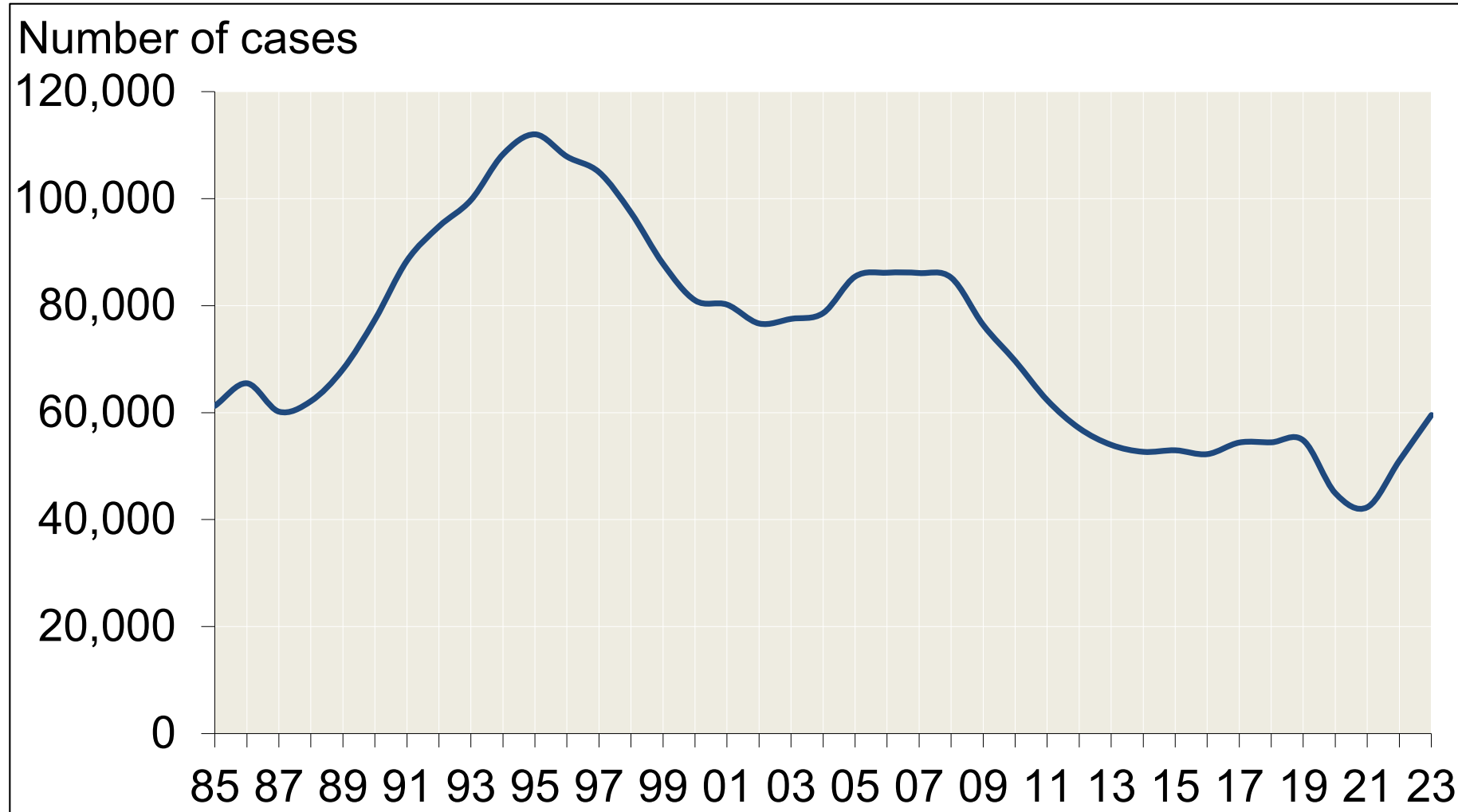


The juvenile court response to violent crimes



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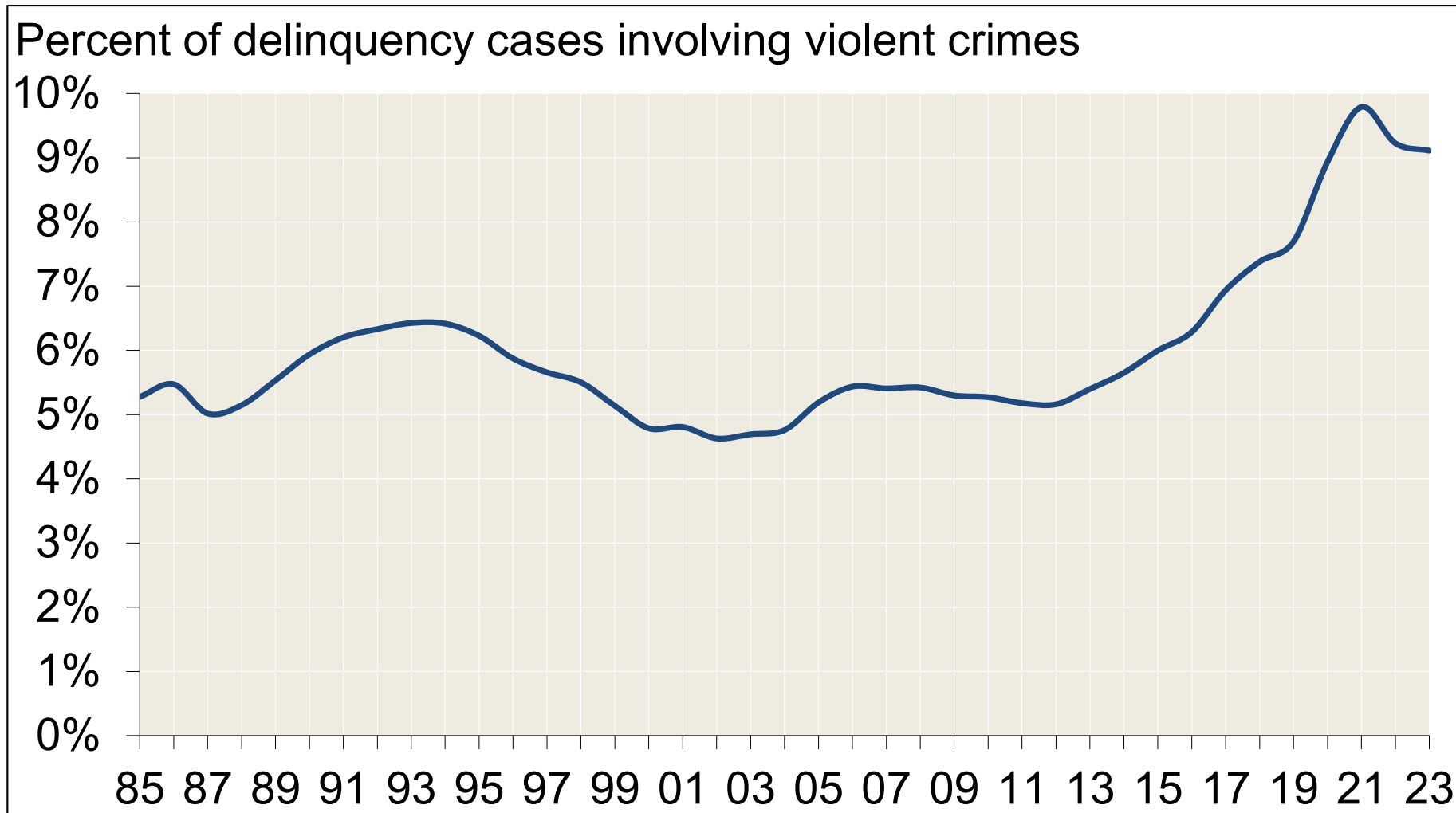
The number of violent crime cases disposed in 2023 was 43% below the 1995 peak



Data source: Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics

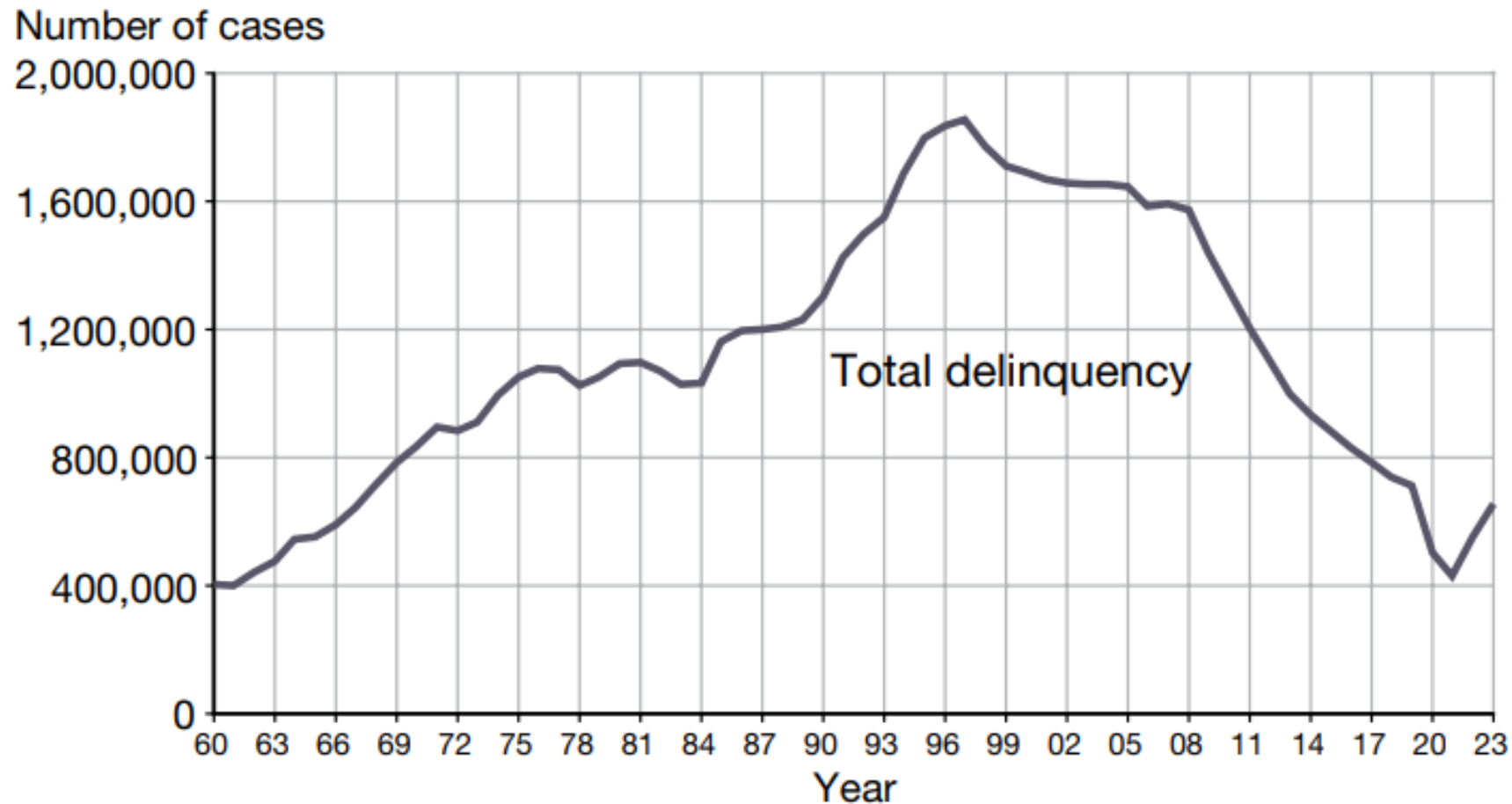
Nearly 1 in 10 cases disposed in 2023 involved a violent crime, up from 1 in 20 in 2000

40



Data source: Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics

Delinquency referrals have increased in recent years but remain 67% below 1997 peak



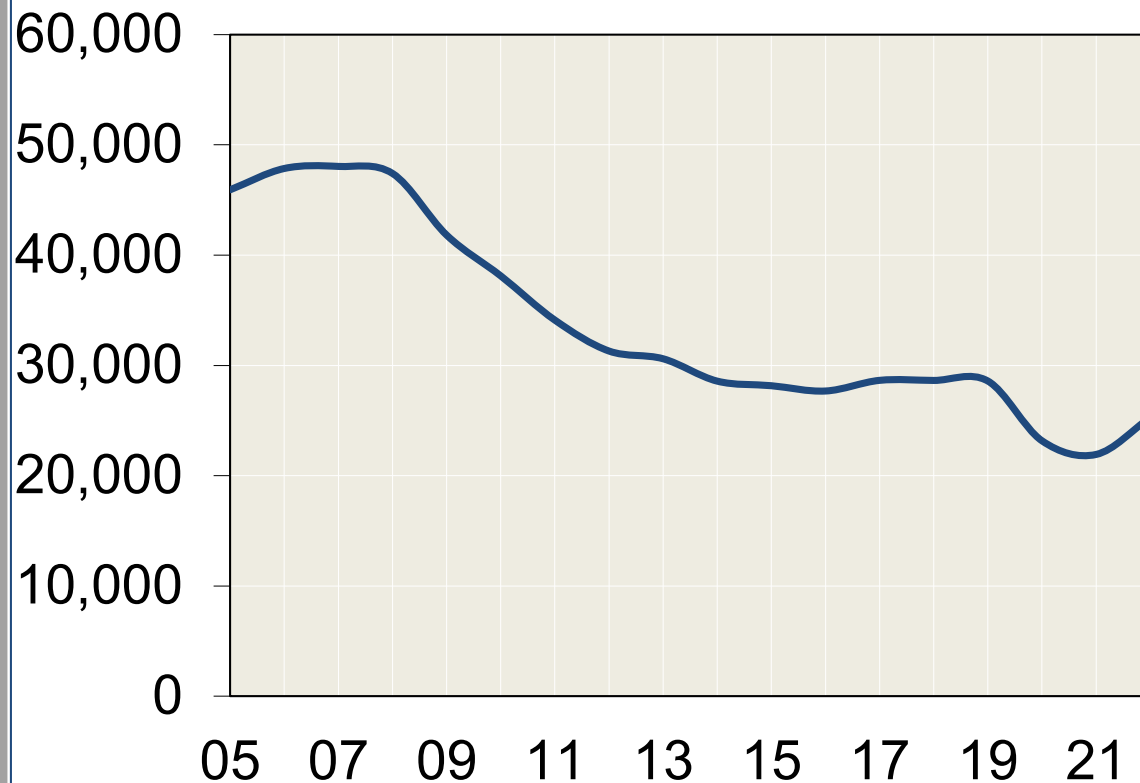
Comparatively a greater proportion of person offense referrals

Offense profile of delinquency cases:

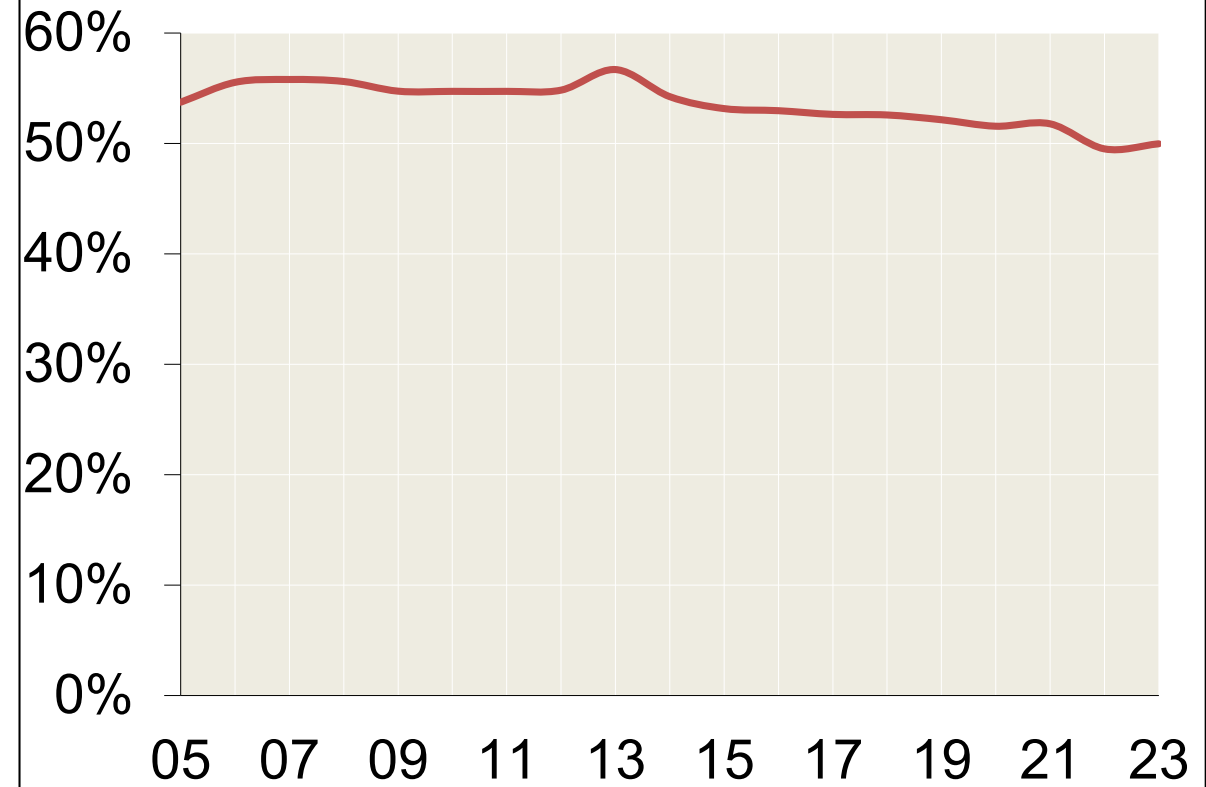
Most serious offense	2005	2023
Person	26%	39%
Property	37	27
Drugs	11	11
Public order	26	23
Total	100	100

The number of violent crime cases detained has declined; the percent detained has not

Cases detained prior to disposition



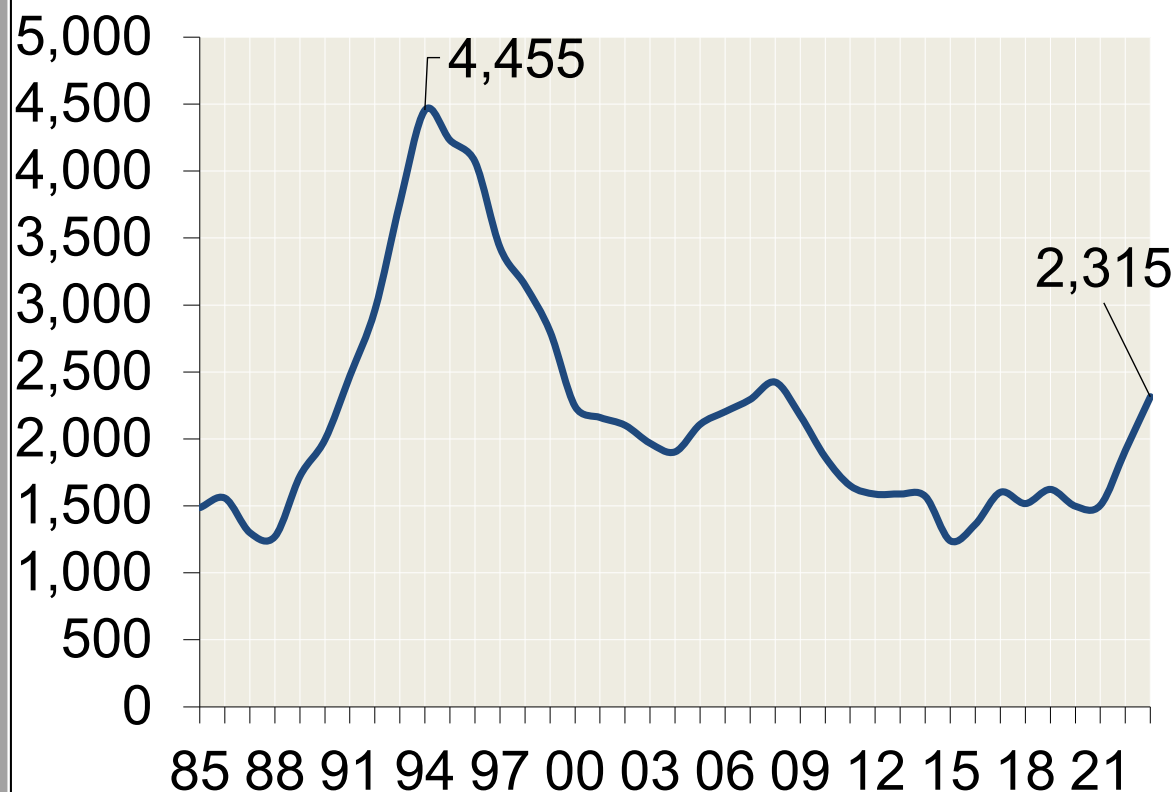
Percent of cases detained prior to disposition



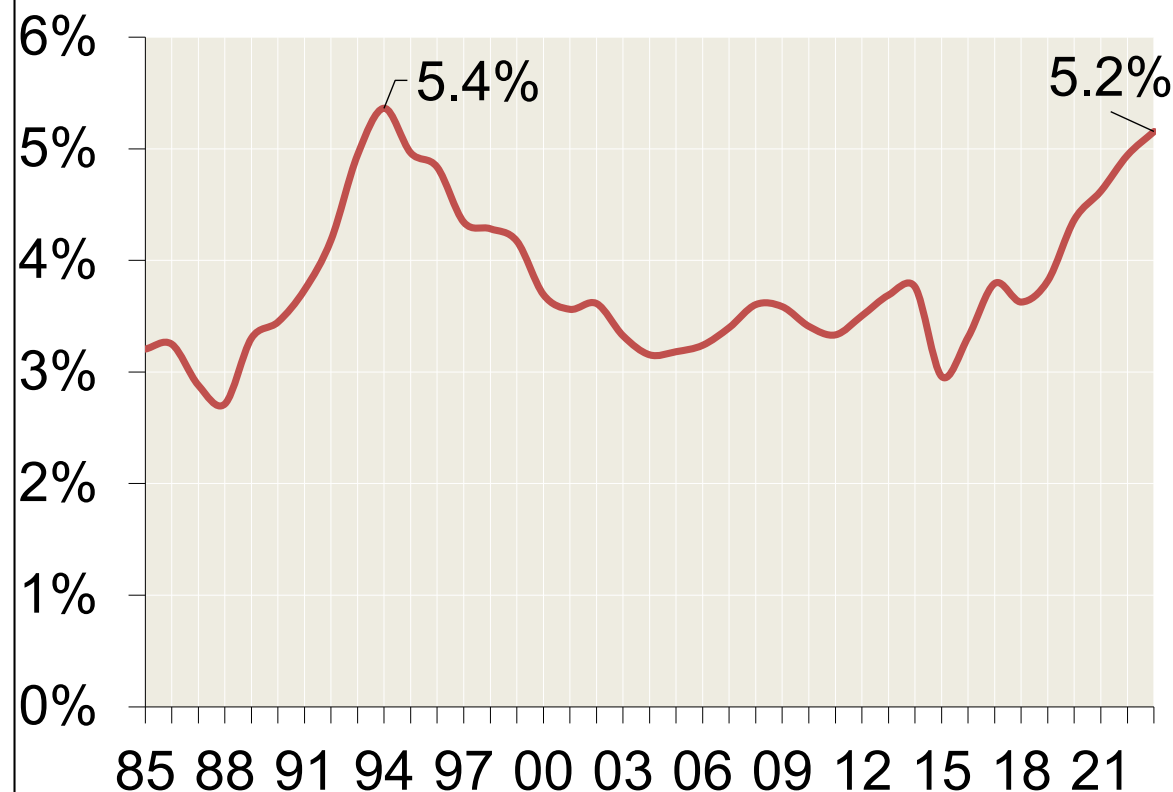
Data source: Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics

The number of violent crime cases judicially waived to criminal court declined 48% since 1994

Cases judicially waived to criminal court



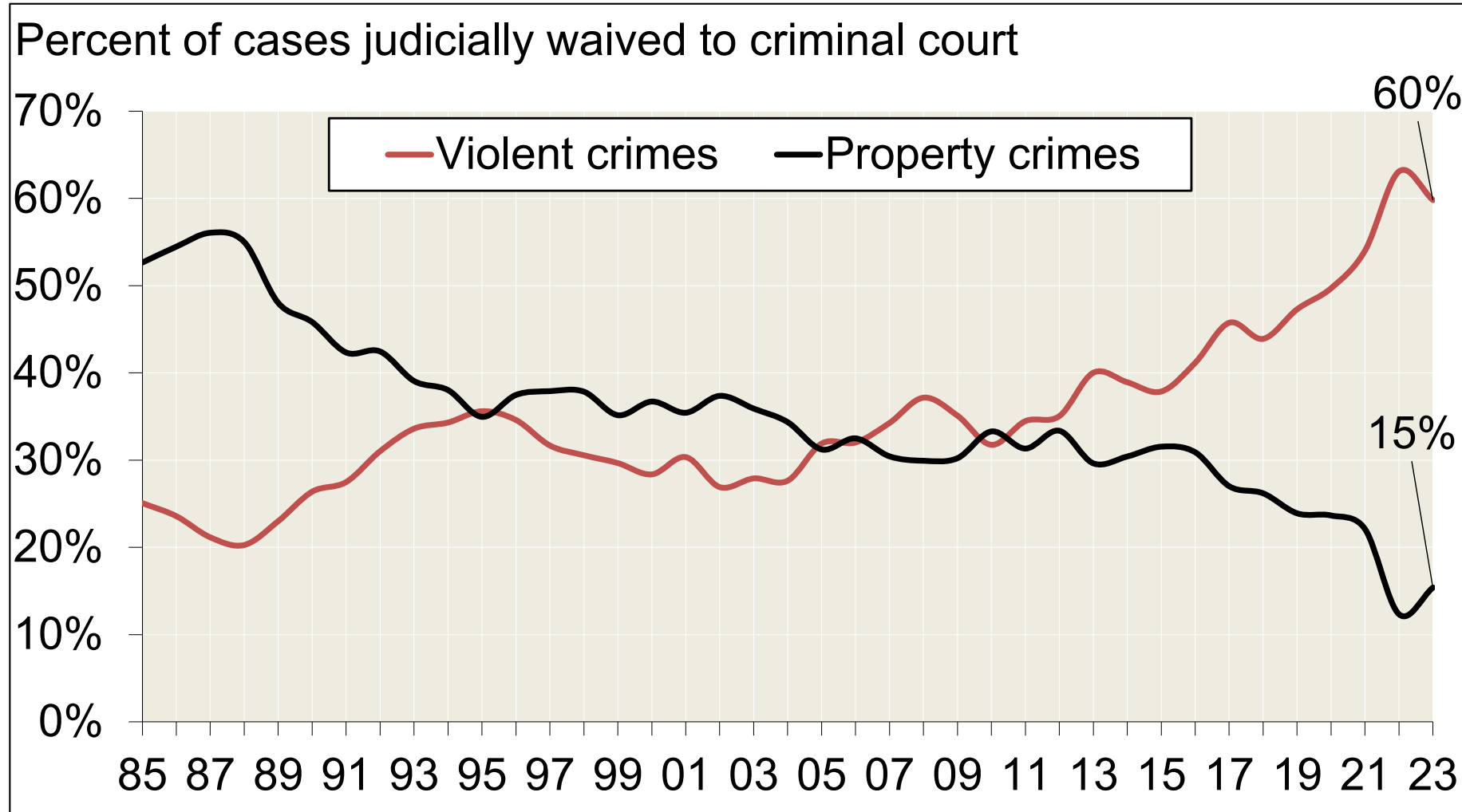
Percent of petitioned cases judicially waived



Data source: Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics

Cases involving violent crimes account for the largest share of the judicially waived caseload

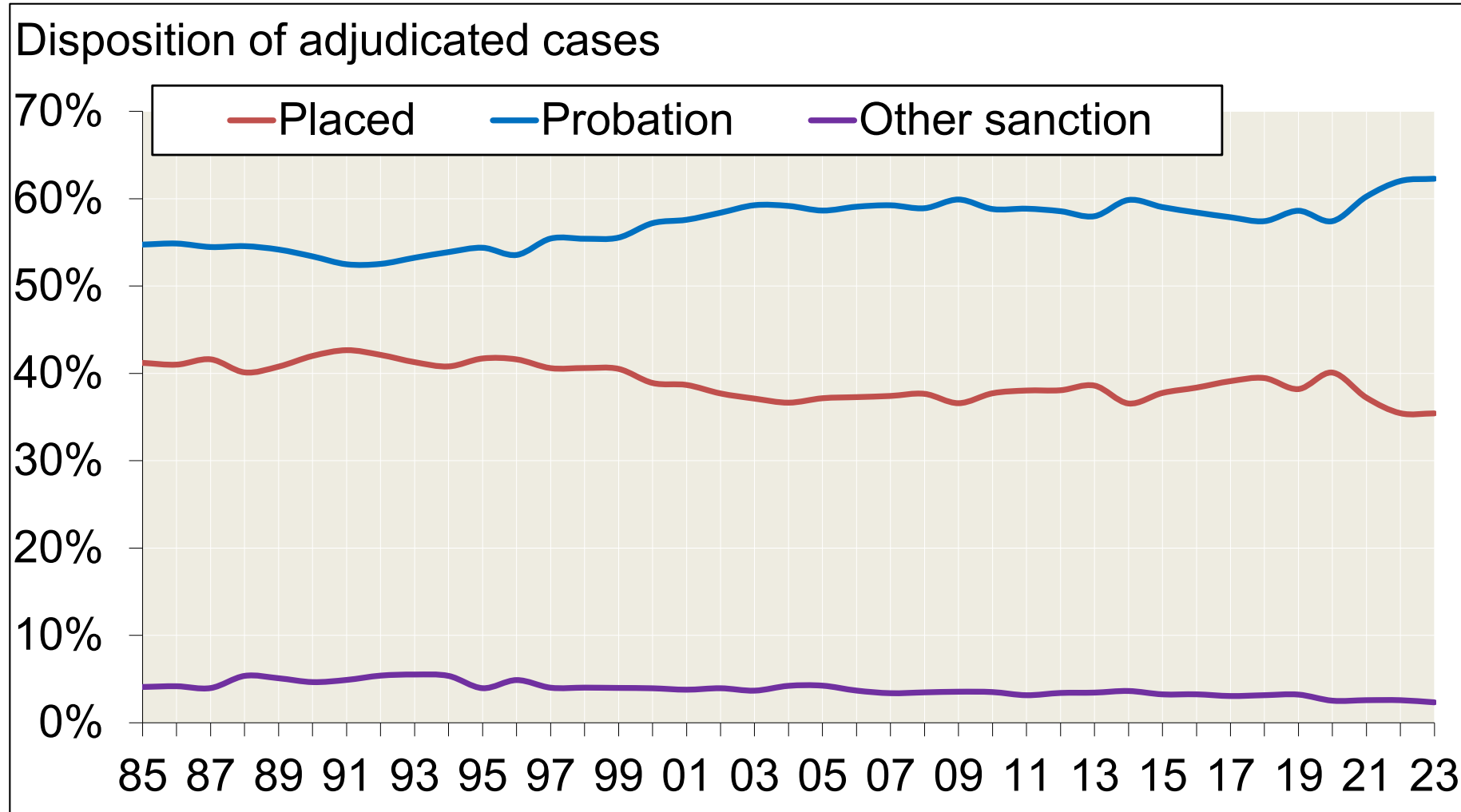
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Data source: Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics

Once adjudicated, the majority of violent crime cases receive probation

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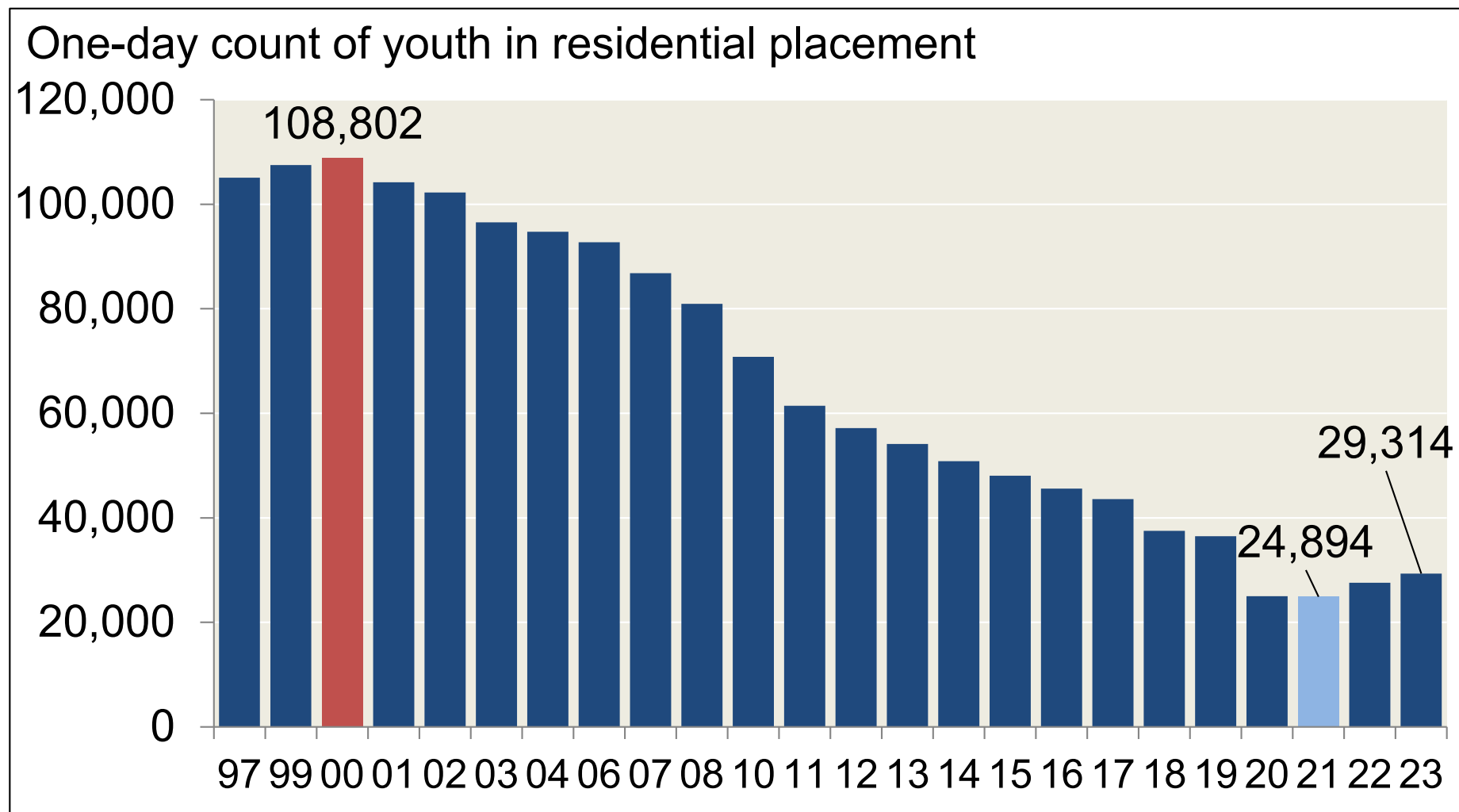
Data source: Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics

**The number of youth in
placement remains near
its historic low**



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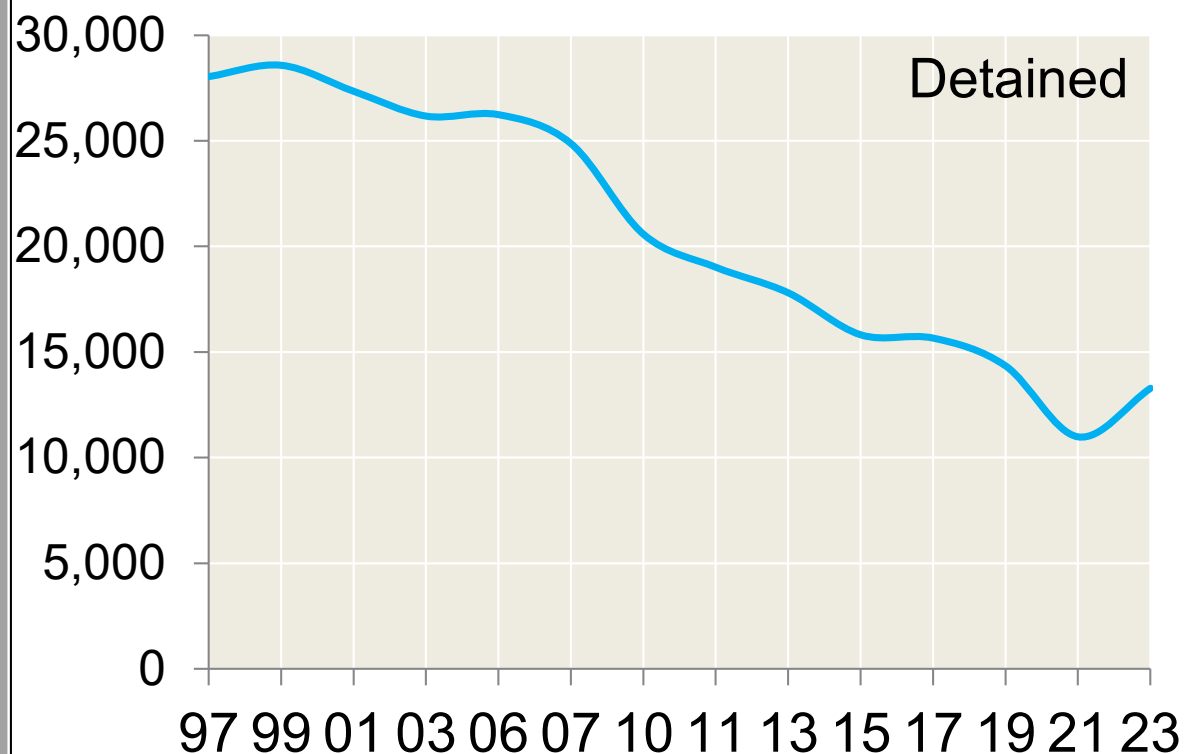
The number of youth in placement is nearly three-fourths below the 2000 peak



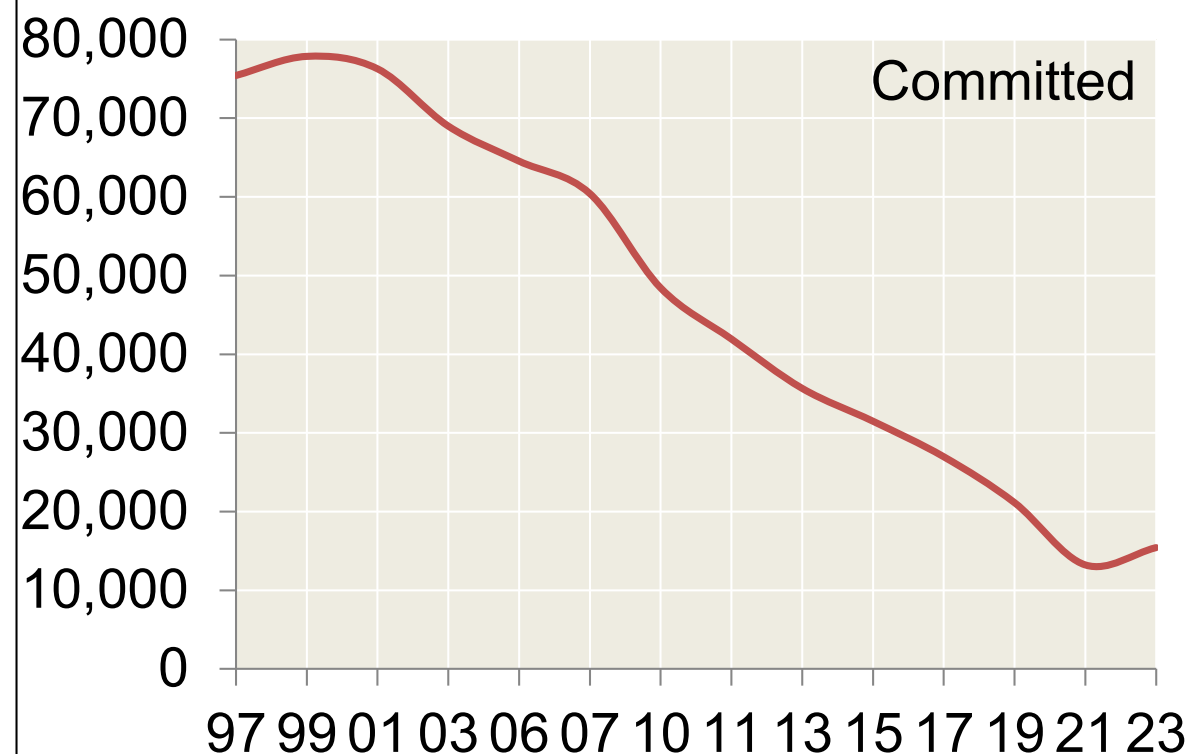
Data source: Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement; Juvenile Residential Facility Census Databook

Similar declines were found among the detained and committed populations

Number of youth in placement



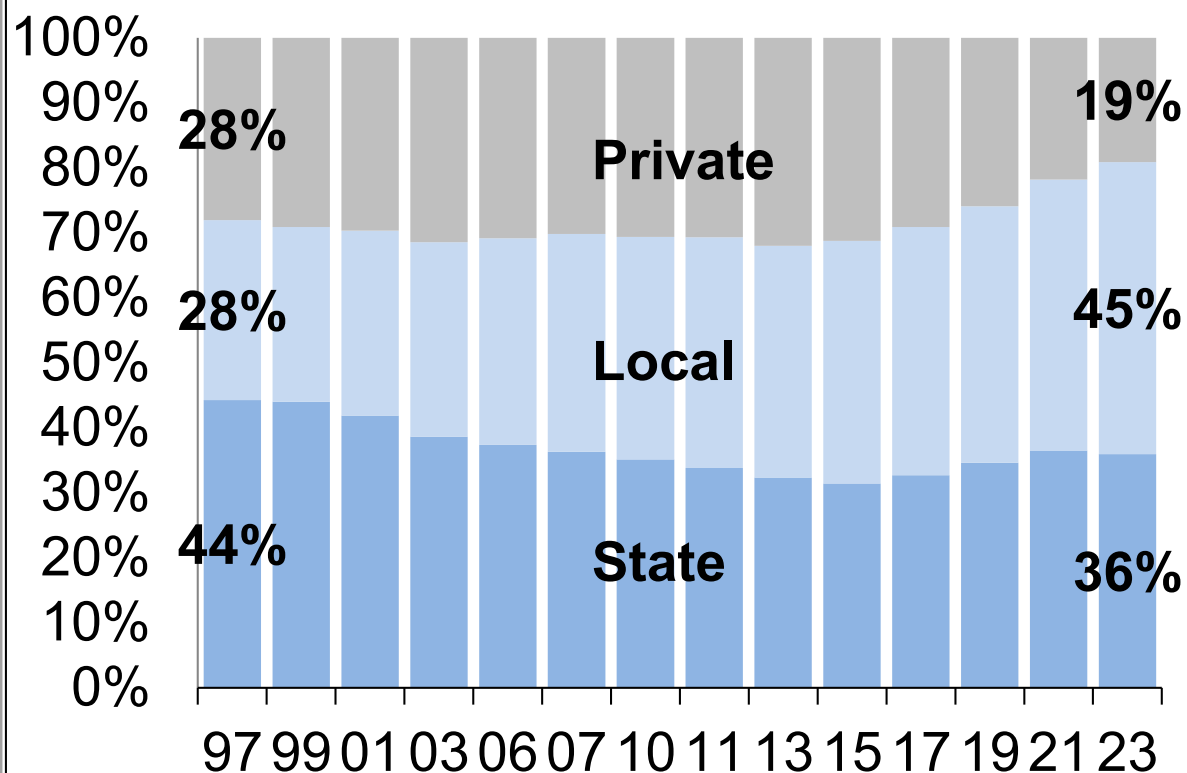
Number of youth in placement



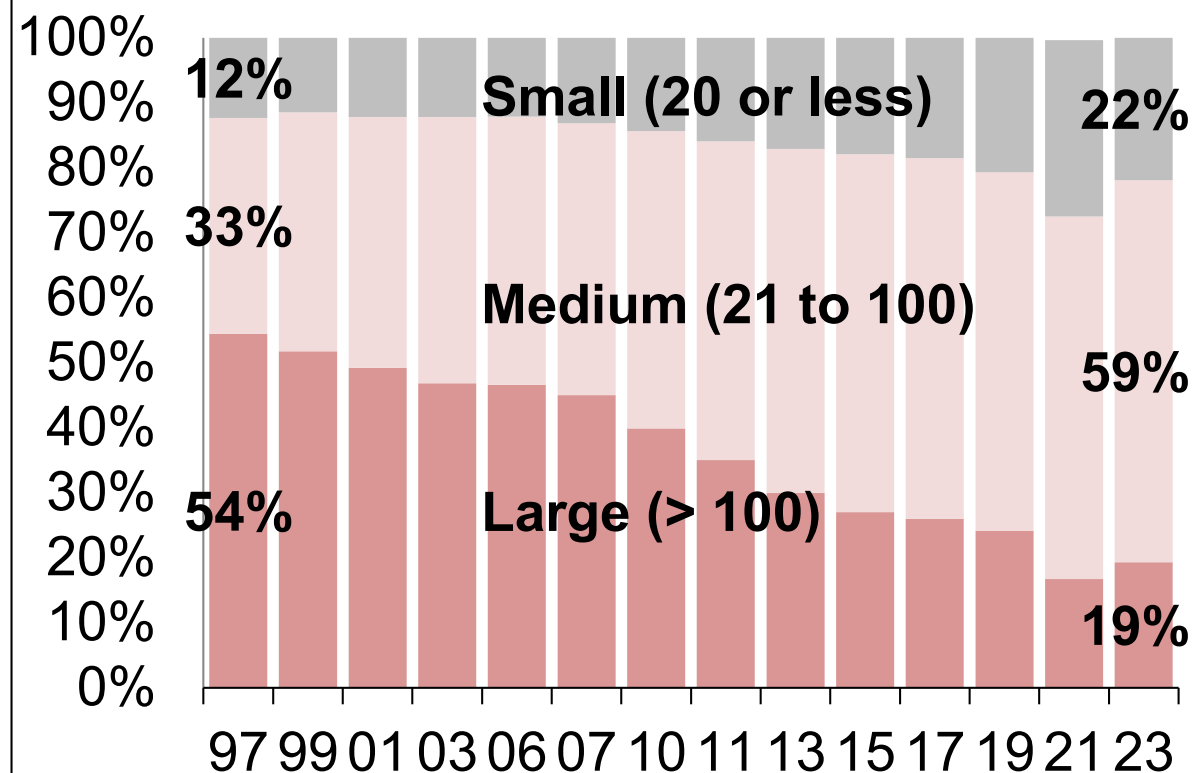
Data source: Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement

Where youth are placed has changed

Youth placement profile by facility operation

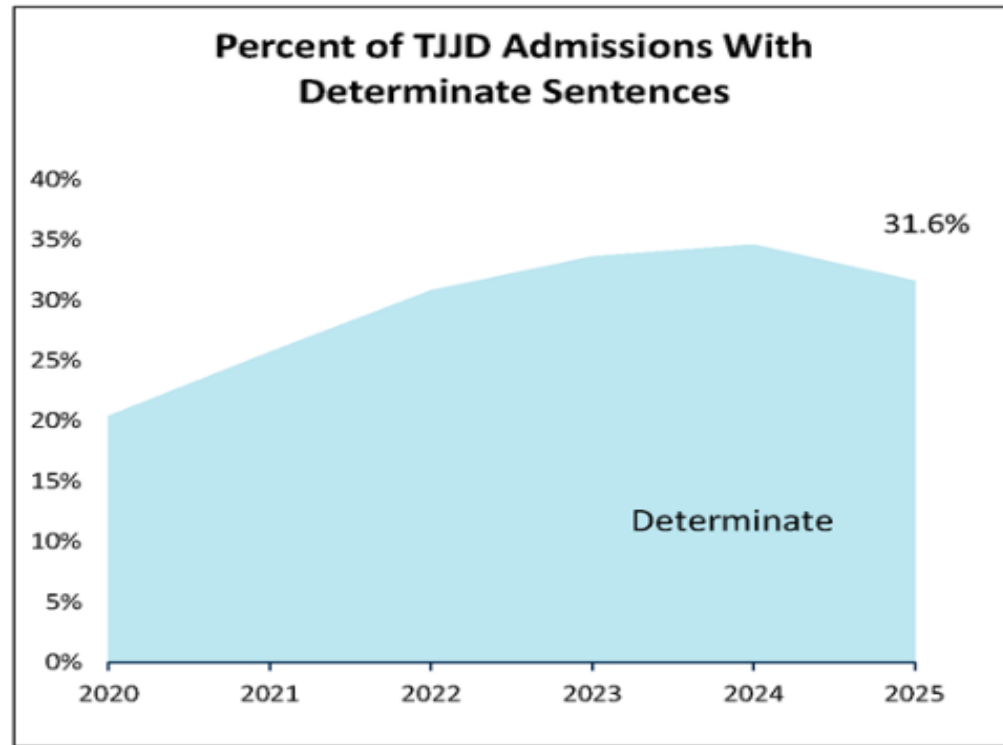
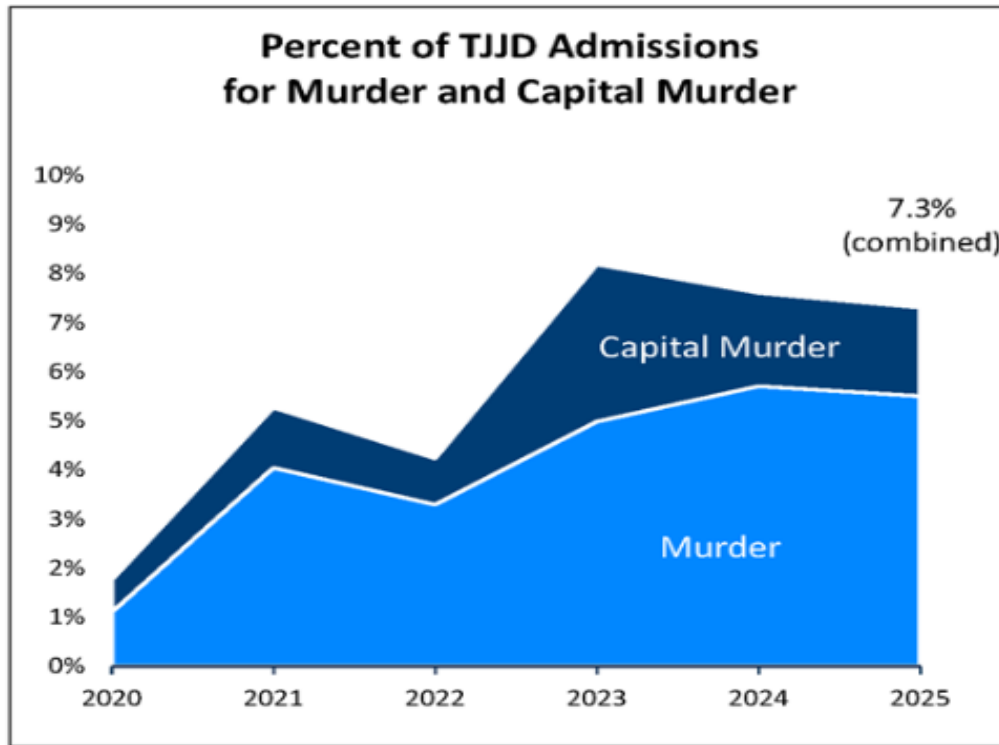


Youth placement profile by facility size



TJJD Admission Trends

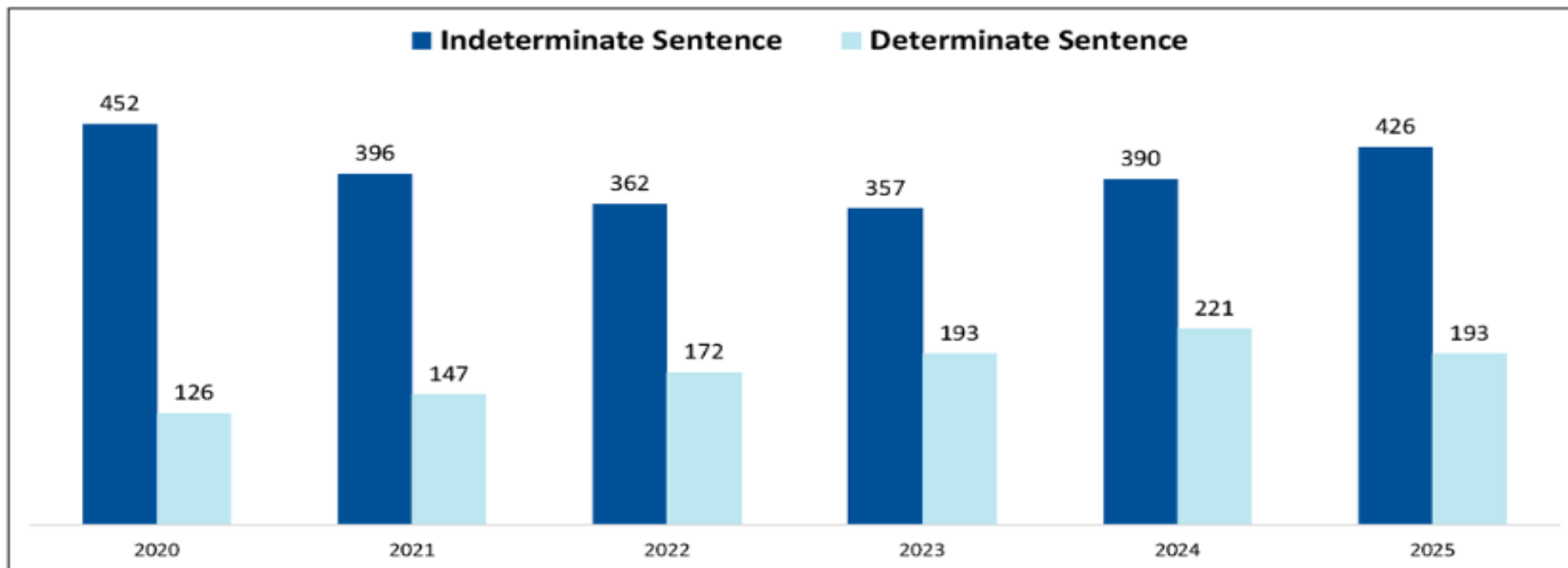
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A major shift in the profile of youth committed and admitted to TJJD occurred during this time period, reflecting referral trends. Of youth admitted to TJJD in FY 2025, 7.3% (1 in 13) committed murder and 31.6% (1 in 3) had a determinate sentence.

Excerpt: Texas Juvenile Justice Department, TJJD Data and Statistics, online. [TJJD Data and Statistics - Texas Juvenile Justice Department](#) accessed 7/23/26

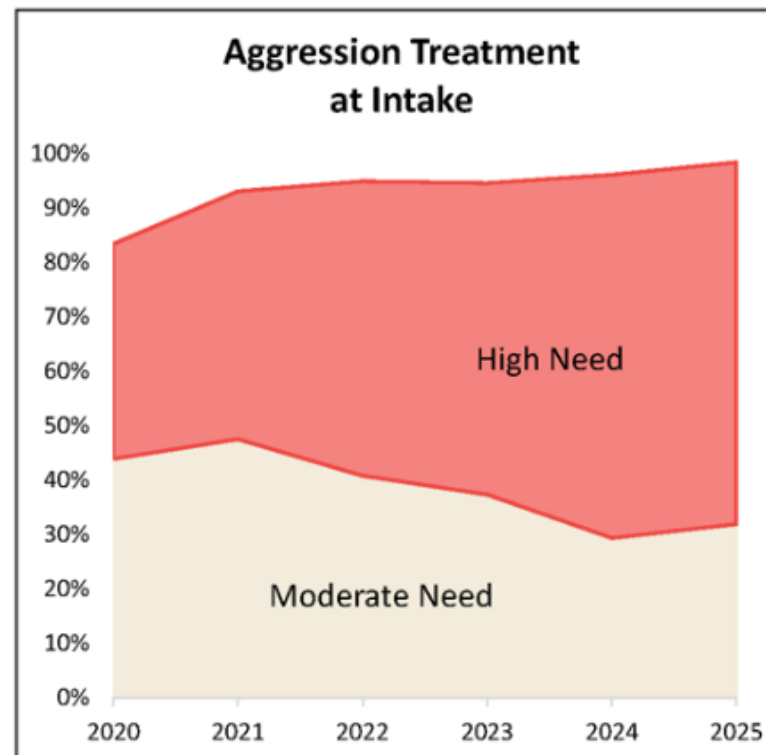
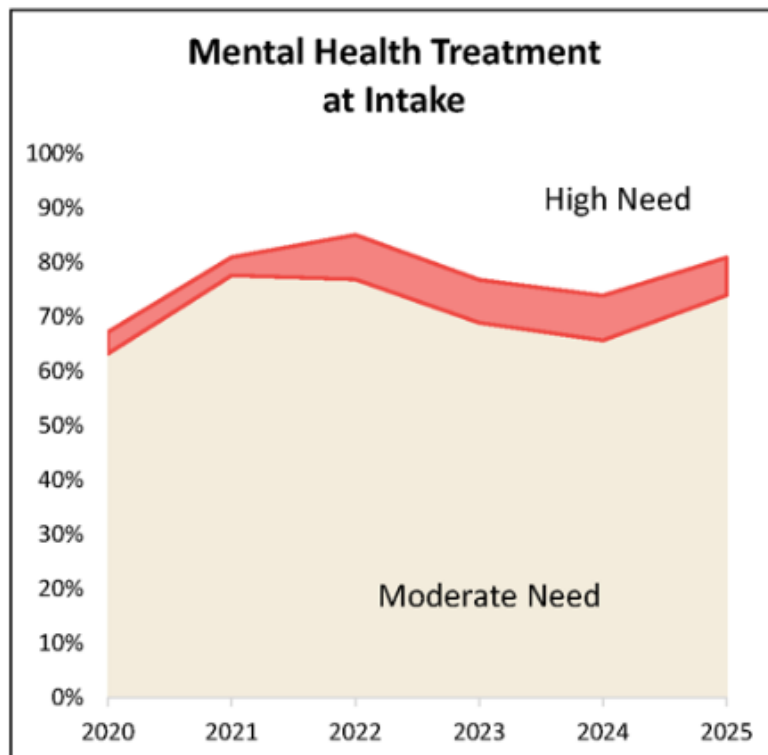
The Number of Youths Committed to TJJD Has Declined



Counties have committed fewer youth to TJJD with indeterminate sentence commitments driving the decline. Determinate sentence commitments, through, increased over this same period.

Excerpt: Texas Juvenile Justice Department, TJJD Data and Statistics, online. [TJJD Data and Statistics - Texas Juvenile Justice Department](#) accessed 7/23/26

TJJD Youth Have Increasing Treatment Needs



At the same time, TJJD saw more higher-risk youth with higher needs. Aggression and mental health treatment needs as a percent of population are at all-time agency highs.

Excerpt: Texas Juvenile Justice Department, TJJD Data and Statistics, online. [TJJD Data and Statistics - Texas Juvenile Justice Department](#) accessed 7/23/26

Handle with Caution: recidivism tracking is challenging

- No single, universally accepted way to define, track, and interpret reoffending among youth.
- Different definitions of recidivism
- Variation in follow-up periods
- Differences across jurisdictions
- Developmental changes in youth
- Incomplete or inaccurate data
- Influence of system practices
- Different risk levels among youth

Texas Resources

- Defines recidivism
- Recidivism Rates for Youth who Received Disposition of Supervision
- Recidivism Rates for Youth who Ended Residential Placement
- Recidivism Rates for Youth Served in a Commitment Diversion Funded Program or Placement



Excerpts

Three-Year Recidivism Rates for Youth who Received Disposition of Supervision in FY 2022

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Total
Probation Supervision	30%	16%	8%	55%
Deferred Prosecution Supervision	22%	12%	6%	41%
Total Re-offense	26%	14%	7%	46%
Subsequent Secure Placement	4%	2%	1%	7%
Subsequent Incarceration	1%	2%	2%	6%

Percentages may not sum to total due to rounding.

Online. <https://www.tjtd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-TJJD-Rider-Report-to-Governor-and-LBB.pdf>

Excerpts

Three-Year Recidivism Rates for Youth who Ended Residential Placement in FY 2022

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Total
Ended Secure Placement	50%	17%	6%	72%
Ended Non-secure Placement	41%	15%	6%	62%
Total Re-offense	46%	16%	6%	68%
Subsequent Incarceration	7%	9%	6%	22%

Percentages may not sum to total due to rounding.

Online. <https://www.tjtd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-TJJD-Rider-Report-to-Governor-and-LBB.pdf>

Excerpts

Three-Year Recidivism Rates for Youth Served in Commitment Diversion Funded Program or Placement in FY 2022⁵

		Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Total
Started Commitment Diversion Program	Total Re-offense	41%	12%	6%	59%
	Subsequent Incarceration	2%	6%	5%	14%
Ended Commitment Diversion Placement	Total Re-offense	43%	16%	6%	65%
	Subsequent Incarceration	6%	9%	5%	21%

Percentages may not sum to total due to rounding.

Online. <https://www.tjtd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-TJJD-Rider-Report-to-Governor-and-LBB.pdf>

Excerpts

Three-Year Recidivism Rates for Youth Served in Commitment Diversion Funded Program or Placement in FY 2022⁵

		Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Total
Started Commitment Diversion Program	Total Re-offense	41%	12%	6%	59%
	Subsequent Incarceration	2%	6%	5%	14%
Ended Commitment Diversion Placement	Total Re-offense	43%	16%	6%	65%
	Subsequent Incarceration	6%	9%	5%	21%

Percentages may not sum to total due to rounding.

Online. <https://www.tjtd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-TJJD-Rider-Report-to-Governor-and-LBB.pdf>

Excerpts

Three-Year Recidivism Rates for Youth Released from a Regional Diversion Funded Placement, a Commitment Diversion Funded Placement, or a State Juvenile Correctional Facility in FY 2022

		Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Total
Ended Regional Diversion Placement	Total Re-offense	35%	17%	5%	57%
	Subsequent Incarceration	10%	6%	3%	19%
Ended Commitment Diversion Placement	Total Re-offense	43%	16%	6%	65%
	Subsequent Incarceration	6%	9%	5%	21%
Ended State Juvenile Correctional Facility	Total Re-offense	49%	20%	7%	76%
	Subsequent Incarceration	24%	10%	8%	42%

Percentages may not sum to total due to rounding.

Online. <https://www.tjtd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-TJJD-Rider-Report-to-Governor-and-LBB.pdf>

Thinking Beyond Recidivism to Tell a More Complete Story

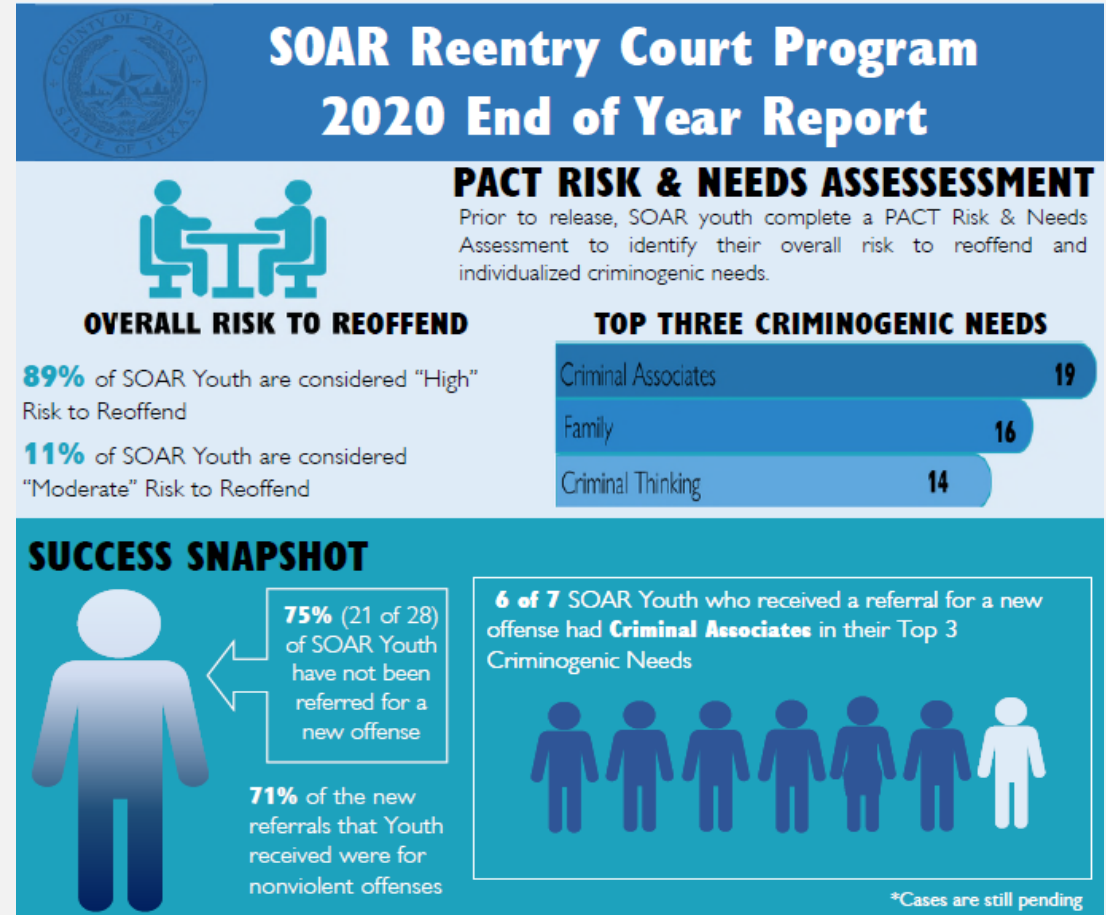
Time to re-offense

Flipping to success rates

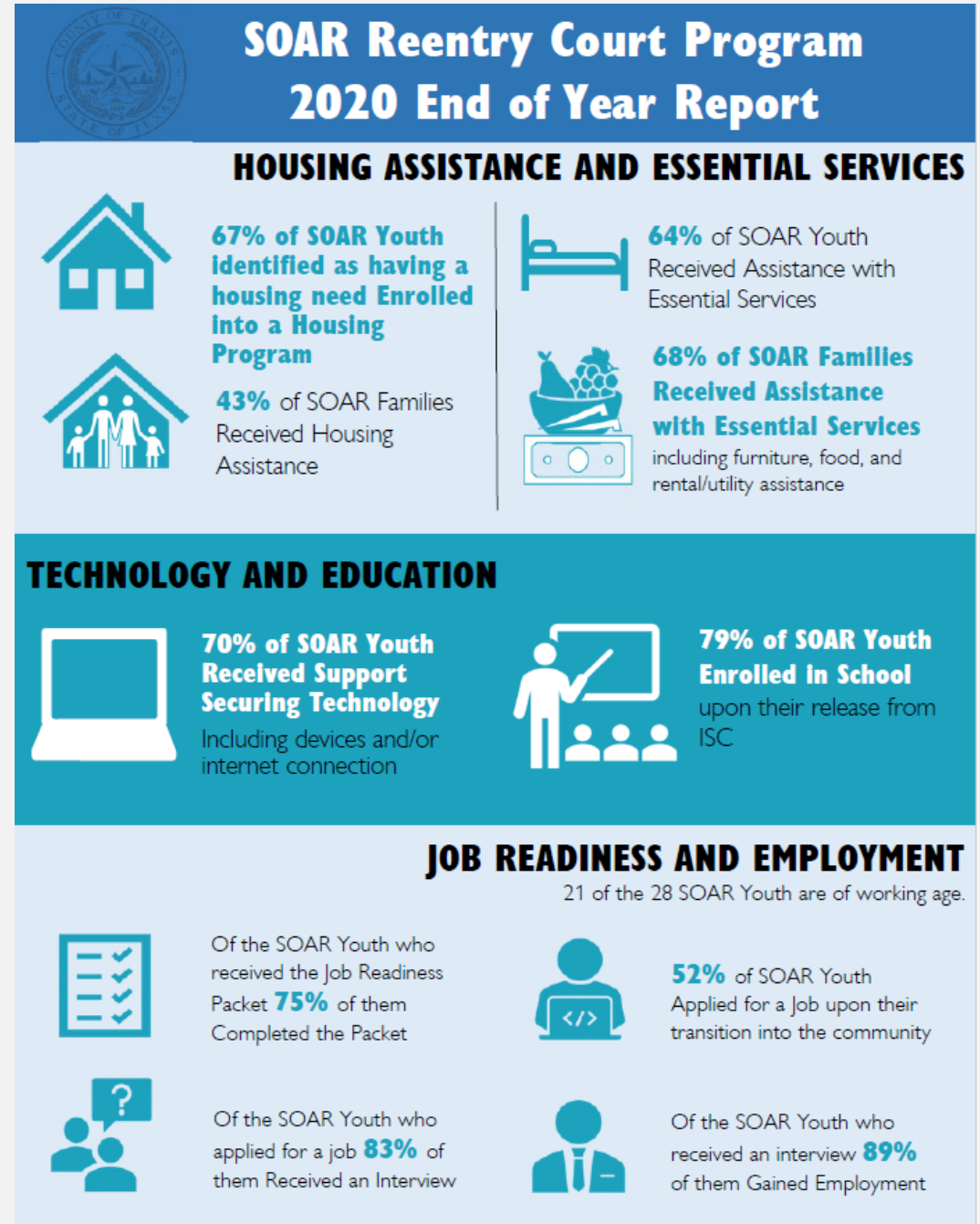
Re-offense type (is the offense seriousness decreasing)

Work skill obtainment

Educational progress



Continued



Resources: Important Texas-Based Overlays/Reports

- The State of Juvenile Probation Activity in Texas Report
 - <https://www.tjjd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/The-State-of-Juvenile-Probation-Activity-in-Texas-CY-2024.pdf>
- Annual TJJD Rider Report to the Governor and LBB
 - <https://www.tjjd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-TJJD-Rider-Report-to-Governor-and-LBB.pdf>
- TJJD data and statistics trends
 - <https://www.tjjd.texas.gov/about-the-tjjd/data-and-statistics/>

Some states are restoring or reversing direction on some policies

- Colorado: prosecutor-driven discussions of expanding detention capacity by 50% (after reducing capacity in 2021)
- Louisiana: Reversed “raise the age” legislation, now automatically trying all 17-year-olds as adults.
- Maryland: Legislature reversed minimum age of court jurisdiction legislation that was passed only 2 years prior.
- North Carolina: After raising the age, reversed by expanding automatic transfer for 16- and 17-year-olds to any felony offense
- Tennessee: Under SB 2569, children 15 and older can be tried in adult court for two nonviolent offenses: shoplifting or stealing a firearm or attempting to do so.
- Washington: Proposal to repurpose an adult facility used for isolation to expand juvenile corrections capacity

Sustaining the 4th Wave of Youth Justice

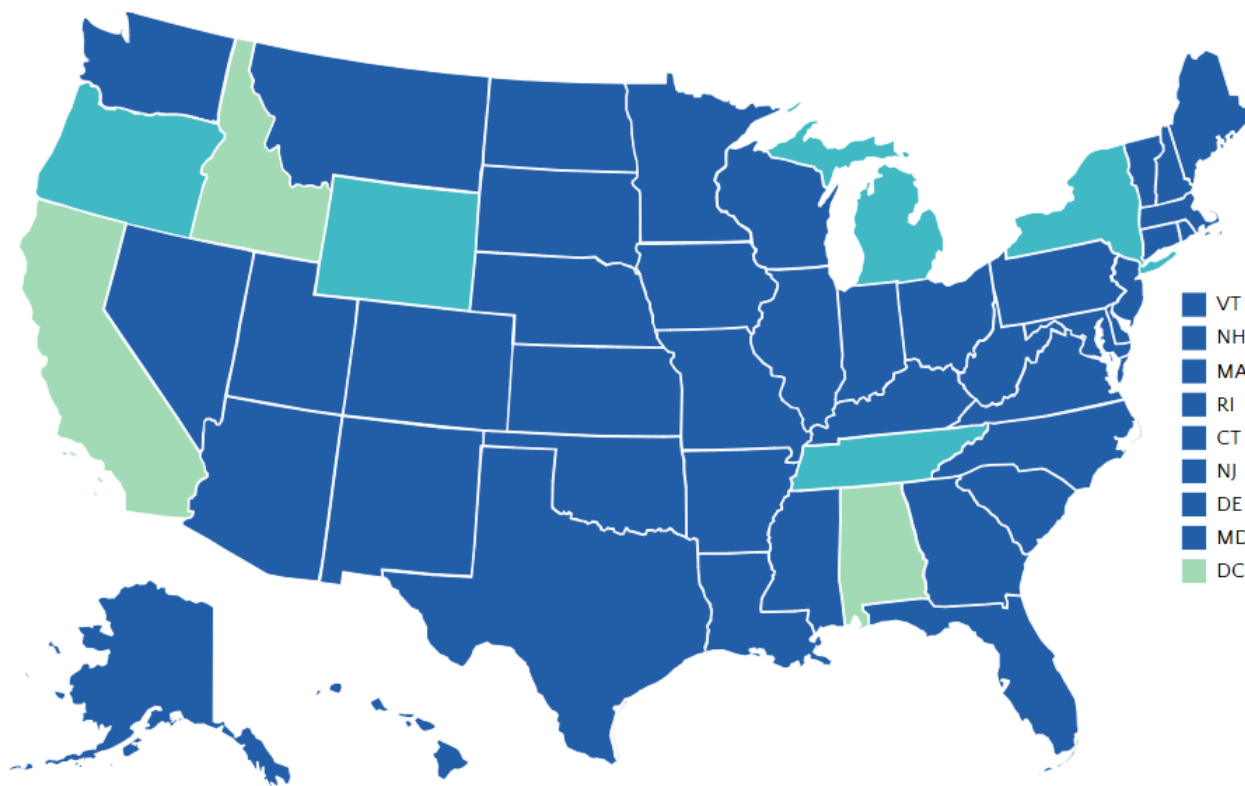
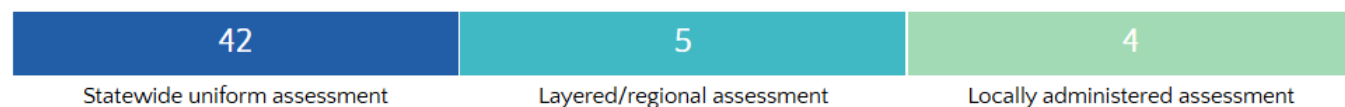


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4th Wave Innovations/Scientific Advancements

1. The science of adolescent development supported by advances in brain neuroscience
2. Right-sizing of the delinquency boundaries (both the lower and upper age boundaries)
3. Recognition that transfer to criminal court is ineffective
4. **The expansion and adoption of case classification science to measure risk to reoffend**
5. The movement away from boilerplate conditions of probation and towards case plans that target dynamic risk factors
6. Recognition that system penetration causes harm and diversion is effective and creating off ramps at each step is cost-effective
7. The adoption by states of evidence-based support centers
8. Recognition that for those in high end placements that reentry planning should begin at admission
9. Increased information about the costs of high-end, secure placements and judicial involvement in facility oversight
10. Greater data capacity and examples of using data effectively to continuously improve

Most states (42) have statewide uniform risk/need assessment in juvenile probation



Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI)

Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT)

Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI)

Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY)

Ohio Youth Assessment System (OYAS) and derivatives AZYAS, etc.)

Locally developed

Hunter's 5 Key Take Aways

Youth justice challenges are complex. Simple solutions are unlikely to solve them and could create poor outcomes and waste resources. Resist unitary solutions or absolutes.

Youth violence is decreasing nationally. We continue to enjoy a steep decline in overall offending, including violent offenses with some important caveats:

- Juvenile arrests for homicides have steadily increased since 2016
- Gun offenses are increasing
- Regional variations can produce exceptions

Watch out for misleading dips in the road (the whoop-de-do effect). Not the right time to hit the pedal unless you want to launch into the air. Hands on the wheel and steady.

While some kids act out outwardly, there is evidence that they are hurting inwardly. Examine child well-being alongside offense trends.

Court referrals are down, and so are detentions and state commitments. However, the easy cases are increasingly and successfully being diverted, leaving a concentrated docket of complex young people.



Questions

Contact: hhurst@ncjfcj.org

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SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL
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Thank you!