



Juvenile Offenders and Victims

National  
Report Series

Fact Sheet

Robert L. Listenbee, Administrator

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# Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Court, 2010

Charles Puzzanchera and Crystal Robson

## Counts and trends

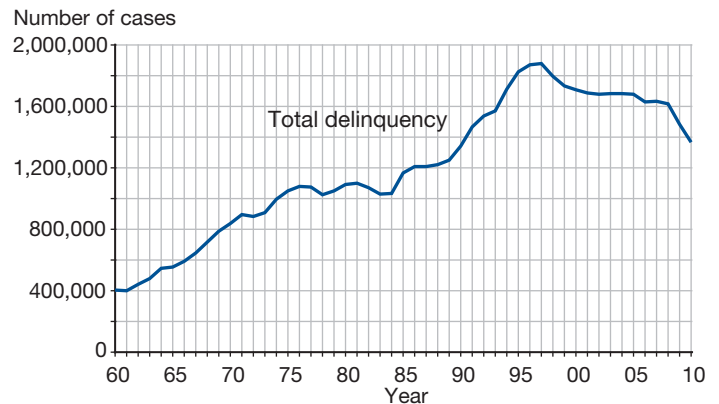
In 2010, juvenile courts in the United States handled nearly 1.4 million delinquency cases that involved juveniles charged with criminal law violations. From 1985 through 1997, the number of delinquency cases climbed steadily (61%) then fell 27% from 1997 through 2010. Juvenile courts handled 17% more cases in 2010 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 (127%) and then declined 21% by 2010. Person offense cases increased through 1997 (128%), leveled off through the mid-2000s, and then fell 20% between 2005 and 2010. Drug law violation cases more than doubled between 1985 and 1997 and then gradually declined (14%) through 2010. 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 30%. Since 1995, the number of property offense cases declined steadily (down 45% from 1995 through 2010). Thus, property offenses were the one general offense category that declined overall from 1985 through 2010 (down 29%).

## Gender

Females represent a relatively small proportion of the overall delinquency caseload. Juvenile courts handled 381,500 cases involving females in 2010, compared with 986,700 cases involving males.

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



### Delinquency data estimates

The 1985–2010 estimates are based on data from more than 2,300 courts with jurisdiction over 83% 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, 2010

Most serious offense	Number of cases	10 year 2001– 2010	5 year 2006– 2010	1 year 2009– 2010
<b>Total delinquency</b>	1,368,200	-19%	-16%	-8%
<b>Person offenses</b>	346,800	-15	-17	-5
Criminal homicide	1,000	-23	-27	-20
Forcible rape	3,900	-15	-12	-3
Robbery	26,300	22	-12	-10
Aggravated assault	39,900	-21	-20	-6
Simple assault	237,100	-17	-16	-4
Other violent sex offenses	12,700	-2	-12	-1
Other person offenses	26,000	-19	-23	-7
<b>Property offenses</b>	502,400	-24	-15	-11
Burglary	90,100	-21	-14	-8
Larceny-theft	243,800	-19	-2	-11
Motor vehicle theft	16,100	-58	-45	-16
Arson	5,500	-41	-35	-18
Vandalism	79,400	-19	-26	-14
Trespassing	42,500	-21	-20	-10
Stolen property offenses	14,000	-42	-28	-10
Other property offenses	11,100	-55	-40	-15
<b>Drug law violations</b>	164,100	-15	-10	-1
<b>Public order offenses</b>	354,800	-16	-20	-9
Obstruction of justice	166,200	-20	-15	-9
Disorderly conduct	101,200	-6	-22	-8
Weapons offenses	29,700	-12	-33	-9
Liquor law violations	16,400	3	-18	-5
Nonviolent sex offenses	11,200	-21	-9	0
Other public order offenses	30,000	-26	-29	-12

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

However, between 2001 and 2010, the number of cases decreased more for males (-21%) than for females (-13%). As a result of these trends, the female proportion of the delinquency caseload increased from 26% in 2001 to 28% in 2010.

### Female proportion

Most serious offense	2001	2010
Total delinquency	26%	28%
Person	28	31
Property	26	29
Drugs	17	18
Public order	27	28

Females accounted for a slightly larger proportion of cases in 2010 than in 2001 for each of the four general offense categories. From 2001 through 2010, female caseloads decreased less than male caseloads for each of the four general offense categories.

### Percent change 2001–2010

Most serious offense	Female	Male
Total delinquency	-13%	-21%
Person	-8	-18
Property	-15	-28
Drugs	-11	-15
Public order	-14	-16

## Race

In 2010, 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) 5%. Sixty-four percent of delinquency cases handled in 2010 involved white youth, 33% black youth, 2% American Indian youth, and 1% Asian youth.

### Race profile of cases, 2010

Most serious offense	Total	White	Black	American Indian	Asian
Total delinquency	100%	64%	33%	2%	1%
Person	100	57	40	1	1
Property	100	66	31	2	2
Drugs	100	76	21	2	1
Public order	100	63	34	2	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 they did for any of the other general offense categories. In contrast, white youth were involved in just 57% of person offense cases. Black youth accounted for a larger proportion of person offense cases (40%) than for any other general offense category. Asian and American Indian youth accounted for a small proportion of cases across 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 18% greater for black youth than for white youth. The rate at which petitioned cases were adjudicated was 9% less for black youth than for white youth. The rate at which petitioned cases were waived to criminal court was 40% greater for black youth than for white youth. The rate at which youth in adjudicated cases were ordered to residential placement was 21% greater for black youth than for white youth, but the rate at which they were ordered to probation was 9% less for black youth than for white youth.

## Age

In 2010, 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 59% of person offense cases, 53% of property offense cases, 49% of public order offense cases, and 41% 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%). There was a smaller proportion of cases involving juveniles younger than age 13 for drug offense cases (3%).

## 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 interest 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 2010).

The likelihood of detention varies by general offense category. In 2010, 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 (16%).

Similar to the overall delinquency caseload trend, between 1997 and 2010, the number of delinquency cases in which the juvenile was detained decreased 23%. The 1985–2010 growth in detained cases was the same as the growth in the overall delinquency caseload (17% for each during the period).

## 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 2010, 267,600 cases (20% of all delinquency cases) were dismissed at intake, generally for lack of legal sufficiency. An additional 36% (485,900) were handled informally, with the juvenile agreeing to some sort of voluntary sanction (e.g., restitution). In more than half of all delinquency cases (54% or 733,200), authorities filed a petition and handled the case formally. The proportion of delinquency cases petitioned for formal handling rose from 45% in 1985 to 57% in the late 1990s and then declined slightly to 54% in 2010.

## 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, 2010*, available online from [ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/publications/statbb.asp](http://ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/publications/statbb.asp).)

In 2010, juvenile court judges waived jurisdiction over an estimated 6,000 delinquency cases, sending them to criminal court. This represents less than 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 (119%), and then fell to the levels of the mid-1980s and remained there through 2010.

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 2010, half of all judicially waived cases involved person offenses.

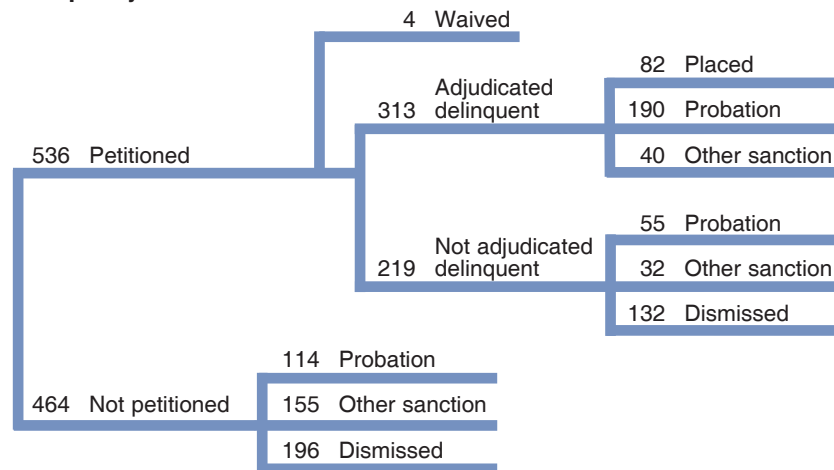
### Offense profile of cases waived to criminal court

Most serious offense	Number		Percent	
	2001	2010	2001	2010
Total delinquency	7,600	6,000	100%	100%
Person	3,300	3,000	43	50
Property	2,500	1,800	33	30
Drugs	1,100	700	14	12
Public order	700	500	10	8

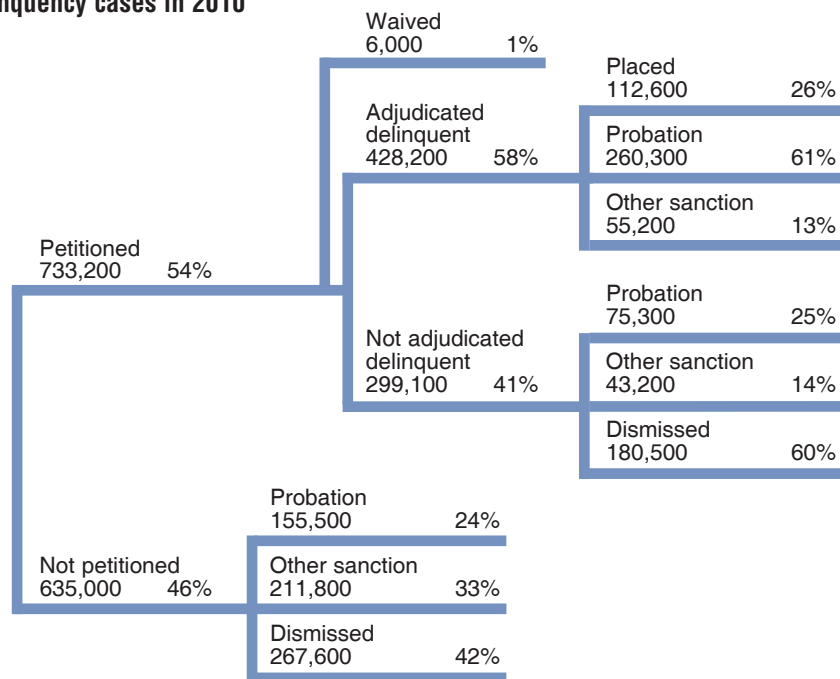
## Adjudication and disposition

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 2010, juveniles were adjudicated delinquent in 58% (428,200) 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 2010, formal probation was the most severe disposition ordered in 61% of cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent, and 26% 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 probation has fluctuated within a relatively narrow range over the years (56%–61% during the 1985–2010 time period), as has the proportion of cases resulting in residential placement (26%–32%) and the proportion receiving other sanctions (11%–15%) during that time.

## Case flow for a typical 1,000 delinquency cases in 2010



## Case flow for 1,368,200 delinquency cases in 2010



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 2010 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 2010*, which is available through OJJDP's Web site ([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 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.

Charles Puzzanchera, M.A., Senior Research Associate, and Crystal Robson, M.A., Research Associate, with the National Center for Juvenile Justice, prepared this document as a product of the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by OJJDP grant 2012-JR-FX-0002.

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