



# OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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## The Juvenile Delinquency Probation Caseload, 1985–1994

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### Probation is the most common disposition ordered by juvenile courts

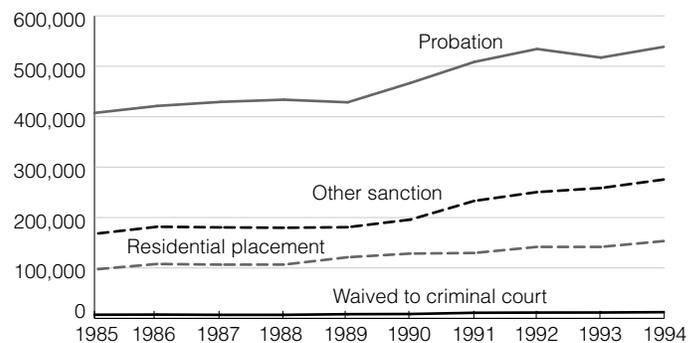
In 1994 courts with juvenile jurisdiction handled 1.6 million delinquency cases. Probation supervision was the most severe disposition in nearly 539,000 of these cases (about one-third of all delinquency cases). The number of cases placed on probation grew 32% between 1985 and 1994. In the same time period, the overall delinquency caseload increased 41%. Compared with other juvenile court dispositions, the relative growth in cases placed on probation was low. For example, the number of cases waived to criminal court rose 71%, and the number placed out of the home increased 58%. However, because probation is the most common disposition ordered by juvenile courts, the absolute growth in the number of cases placed on probation is much greater than the growth for other dispositions.

### Most cases placed on probation involve white youth, but the proportion of black youth has increased

The probation caseload essentially mirrors the overall delinquency caseload in terms of its demographic profile and trends. In 1994 the proportion of cases placed on probation involving white youth was 68% (down from 73% in 1985), the black proportion was 29% (up from 25%), and the proportion of youth of other races was 3% (virtually unchanged). As with the delinquency caseload overall, the majority of cases placed on probation involve males (about 80%). The female proportion of the probation caseload has not changed much over the 10-year period from 18% in 1985 to 21% in 1994. Youth ages 14–16 make up about 60% of juveniles on probation. The age distribution of probation cases did not change much from 1985 to 1994. This Fact Sheet presents national data on delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts from 1985 through 1994. National estimates were generated using information from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. The analysis is based on data from more than 1,800 jurisdictions (covering 67% of the U.S. juvenile population) that were able to provide data in the detail required for these national estimates.

Probation was ordered in 55% of the 1 million cases that received some sort of juvenile court sanction

#### Number of delinquency cases disposed



Probation cases accounted for 44% of the increase in delinquency cases that received a juvenile court sanction (those that were not dismissed or otherwise released).

### Probation can be either voluntary or court ordered

Some youth are ordered to probation after an adjudication of delinquency (analogous to conviction). In contrast to these court-ordered probation placements, some youth who are not adjudicated delinquent voluntarily agree to abide by certain probation conditions, often with the understanding that if they successfully complete their probationary period their case will be terminated without any formal processing. In 1994 adjudicated delinquents ordered to probation accounted for nearly half of all delinquency cases placed on probation (nearly 265,000 cases). In the remaining half of delinquency cases, the youth agreed to some form of voluntary, or informal, probation. The number of cases resulting in a formal order of probation rose 41% from 1985 through 1994. In comparison, informal probations increased 25%, reflecting the general trend over the period toward more formal processing of delinquency cases.

**Probation was the most likely disposition for cases in which the youth was adjudicated delinquent**

Most Severe Disposition	Percent of all cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent		
	1985	1990	1994
Total	100%	100%	100%
Probation	57	57	54
Residential placement	28	31	29
Other sanction	11	9	15
Released without additional sanction	4	3	4

The likelihood of probation for cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent dropped slightly from 1985 to 1994. Drug offenses were the only category showing a substantial reduction in the likelihood of probation (10 percentage points).

**The probability of probation for cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent**

Most Serious Offense	1985	1990	1994
Total	57%	57%	54%
Person	55	56	54
Property	58	60	55
Drugs	62	55	52
Public order	51	52	49

**A majority of cases placed on probation involve property offenders**

The offense profile of the probation caseload has changed somewhat since 1985. Cases involving property offenses as the most serious offense continue to account for the majority of cases placed on formal or informal probation. However, the proportions of person offense cases have grown some.

**For further information**

This Fact Sheet is based on the report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1994*. Copies are available from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 800-638-8736. OJJDP also supports distribution of a PC-compatible software version of the data analyzed in *Juvenile Court Statistics*. For a free copy of the software, *Easy*

**Offense profile of cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent and placed on probation**

Most Serious Offense	1985	1990	1994
Total	100%	100%	100%
Person	15	18	22
Property	60	58	51
Drugs	7	7	9
Public order	17	17	19

**Probation is the most severe penalty imposed for a substantial proportion of adults convicted of felonies in criminal court but is used less than in juvenile court**

According to 1994 data reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), 55% of adults under some form of correctional supervision were on probation. In 1992 probation accounted for 30% of the felony sentences imposed by State criminal courts. In comparison, probation accounted for 56% of 1992 juvenile court (felony or misdemeanor) cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent. Among adult felony convictions, probation was more likely for property (34%), public order (35%), and drug offenses (30%) than for person offenses (19%). Among adjudicated delinquency cases, probation was more likely for property offenses (59%) than for person (54%), drug (52%), and public order offenses (52%). Of adult felony convictions sentenced to probation in 1992, 38% were convictions for property offenses, 31% were drug offenses, 18% were public order offenses, and the remaining 12% were person offenses. In comparison, among adjudicated delinquency cases ordered to probation that year, 57% were adjudications for property offenses, 20% for person offenses, 17% for public order offenses, and 6% for drug offenses.

P. Langan and R. Cohen. 1996. *State Court Sentencing of Convicted Felons, 1992*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Bureau of Justice Statistics. 1996. *Correctional Populations in the United States, 1994* (Executive Summary). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

*Access to Juvenile Court Statistics*, call the National Juvenile Court Data Archive at the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 412-227-6950. This software can also be downloaded from OJJDP's home page: <http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm>.

Melissa Sickmund is a Senior Research Analyst with the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

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