



OJJDP

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1996

Anne L. Stahl

Juvenile courts in the United States processed nearly 1.8 million delinquency cases in 1996. This number represented a 3% increase over the 1995 caseload and a 49% increase over the number of cases handled in 1987. More than half (56%) of the delinquency cases processed by U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction in 1996 were handled formally (that is, a petition was filed requesting an adjudicatory or waiver hearing). Of the cases that were petitioned, 58% were adjudicated delinquent and 1% were judicially waived to criminal (adult) court. Waivers to criminal court were most common in cases involving person offenses (1.9%) and drug offenses (1.2%). Of all delinquency cases adjudicated in juvenile court in 1996, 28% resulted in residential placement and 54% were placed on the probation caseload.

These statistics are among the findings to be published in *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996*, the latest in a series of annual reports on cases handled by U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction. Although courts with juvenile jurisdiction handle a variety of cases, including abuse, neglect, adoption, and traffic violations, *Juvenile Court Statistics Reports* focus on the disposition of delinquency cases and formally processed status offense cases. Each report includes national estimates of the number of cases handled by juvenile courts and an appendix that lists

caseload statistics for individual States and jurisdictions within each State.

Findings from *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996* include the following:

- ◆ The number of criminal homicide cases processed by courts with juvenile jurisdiction dropped 12% between 1995 and 1996.
- ◆ In 22% of delinquency cases processed in 1996, the most serious charge was a person offense. Person offenses accounted for 16% of all cases in 1987.
- ◆ The number of cases involving drug offenses handled in 1996 was 144% greater than the number of these cases processed in 1987.
- ◆ Although property offense cases still accounted for the greatest proportion of delinquency cases in 1996 (50%), the proportion was smaller than in 1987 (60%).
- ◆ The number of delinquency cases involving female juveniles increased 76% between 1987 and 1996, while cases involving males increased 42%.
- ◆ Juveniles were held in secure detention facilities at some point between referral and disposition in 18% of all delinquency cases disposed in 1996, compared with 20% in 1987.

From the Administrator

From 1987 to 1996, the number of delinquency cases handled by the Nation's juvenile courts rose 49 percent, with juvenile courts processing nearly 1.8 million delinquency cases in 1996 alone. Person offenses accounted for more than 381,000 of these cases—the largest number of person offense cases to come before America's juvenile courts in a decade.

Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1996 presents these and other findings from *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996*, the latest in a series of OJJDP Reports that provide data from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. The Archive, which is maintained for OJJDP by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, is the only comprehensive source of data about youth referred to U.S. juvenile courts for delinquency and status offenses.

The estimates reported in these pages are derived from data from nearly 1,800 courts with jurisdiction over 67 percent of the U.S. juvenile population. This Bulletin, like the larger Report on which it is based, serves as a barometer of trends in juvenile crime. It is my hope that the Bulletin will provide a useful guidepost for juvenile justice professionals, public officials, policymakers, and other citizens concerned about juvenile violence and delinquency.

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

- ◆ Delinquency cases were more likely to be processed formally with the filing of a petition in 1996 than in 1987—56% compared with 47%.
- ◆ There were 47% more delinquency cases judicially waived to criminal court in 1996 than in 1987, but 3% fewer than in 1992.

These national estimates of juvenile court cases are based on data from nearly 1,800 courts that had jurisdiction over 67% of the U.S. juvenile population in 1996.¹ The unit of count in each *Juvenile Court Statistics* Report is a case disposed during the calendar year by a court with juvenile jurisdiction. It is possible for an individual youth to have been involved in more than one case during the calendar year. Each case represents a youth processed by a juvenile court on a new referral, regardless of the number of individual offenses contained in that referral. Cases involving multiple offenses are categorized according to the most serious offense. For example, a case involving both a charge of vandalism and a charge of robbery would be characterized as a robbery case. Similarly, cases involving multiple dispositions are categorized according to the most restrictive disposition. A case that resulted in both probation and placement in a residential facility would be coded as residential placement.

Delinquency Cases

Delinquency offenses are acts committed by a juvenile that, if committed by an adult, would be a criminal act. Juvenile courts handled an estimated 1,757,600 delinquency cases in 1996 (table 1). The most serious charge was a property offense (such as burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, or vandalism) in 50% of these cases, a person offense (such as simple or aggravated assault, robbery, violent sex offenses, or homicide) in 22%, a public order offense (such as disorderly conduct, weapons offenses, or obstruction of justice) in 19%, and a drug offense (including trafficking or possession of controlled substances or paraphernalia) in 10%.

Case Trends

Between 1987 and 1996, the total number of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts in the United States increased 49%. The percent change was greater for person and drug offense cases than for property and public order offense cases. The growth in person offense cases was relatively steady over the time period. In

Table 1: Delinquency Cases, by Most Serious Offense, 1996

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases	Percent Change		
		1987-96	1992-96	1995-96
Total	1,757,600	49%	18%	3%
Person offense	381,500	100%	24%	2%
Criminal homicide	2,400	74	11	-12
Forcible rape	6,900	60	8	2
Robbery	37,300	67	13	-5
Aggravated assault	89,900	135	14	-3
Simple assault	216,600	106	39	6
Other violent sex offense	8,900	39	-6	-4
Other person offense	19,400	51	-15	-3
Property offense	874,400	23%	2%	1%
Burglary	141,100	6	-11	2
Larceny-theft	421,600	27	11	1
Motor vehicle theft	51,600	7	-27	-2
Arson	8,900	49	13	-21
Vandalism	119,800	39	1	0
Trespassing	65,000	18	9	1
Stolen property offense	32,900	6	1	0
Other property offense	33,400	57	1	12
Drug law violation	176,300	144%	143%	11%
Public order offense	325,400	58%	34%	7%
Obstruction of justice	125,800	70	58	15
Disorderly conduct	90,200	95	40	7
Weapons offense	41,200	109	-3	-12
Liquor law violation	10,300	-44	-10	-16
Nonviolent sex offense	10,600	-17	-20	1
Other public order	47,300	40	52	15
Violent Crime Index*	136,600	106%	13%	-3%
Property Crime Index**	623,300	20%	1%	1%

*Includes criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

**Includes burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

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

Figure 1: Delinquency Cases Processed in Juvenile Court, 1987-1996

Number of Cases Disposed

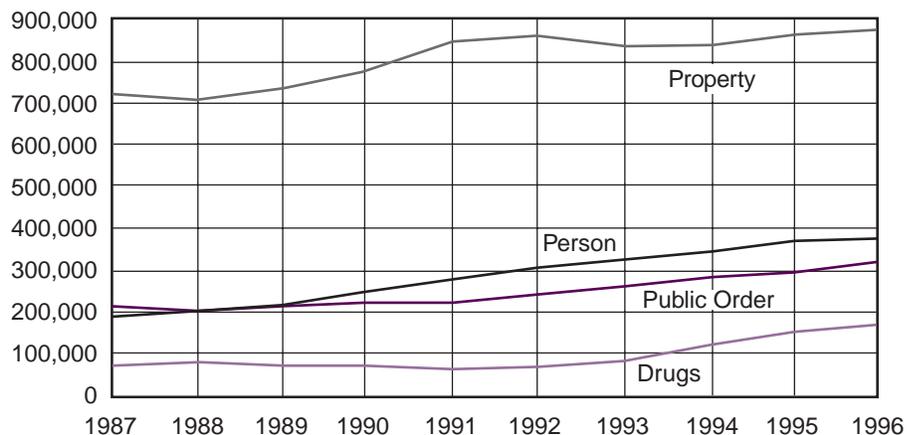


Table 2: Percent Change in Delinquency Case Rates, 1987–1996

Most Serious Offense	Cases per 1,000 Youth at Risk			Percent Change	
	1987	1992	1996	1987–96	1992–96
Delinquency	46.2	55.8	61.8	34%	11%
Person	7.5	11.6	13.4	80	16
Property	27.8	32.4	30.7	10	-5
Drugs	2.8	2.7	6.2	120	127
Public order	8.0	9.1	11.4	42	25

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

Table 3: Offense Profile of Delinquency Cases, by Age at Referral, 1996

Most Serious Offense	Age 15 or Younger	Age 16 or Older
Person	23%	19%
Property	53	46
Drugs	7	14
Public order	17	21
Total	100	100

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

comparison, the growth in the number of drug offense cases occurred after 1991 (figure 1).

Case Rates

To examine changes in juvenile court caseloads while controlling for changes in the size of the juvenile population, researchers calculate a case rate that represents the number of delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts for every 1,000 juveniles in the population.² Between 1987 and 1996, the total delinquency case rate increased 34%, from 46.2 to 61.8 cases disposed per 1,000 juveniles (table 2). During the same time period, the case rate for juveniles charged with drug offenses increased 120%, the case rate for person offenses increased 80%, the case rate for public order offenses increased 42%, and the case rate for property offenses increased 10%.

Age of Youth

Of all delinquency cases processed by the Nation's juvenile courts in 1996, 59% involved a juvenile younger than 16. These younger juveniles were involved in 64% of person offense cases, 62% of property offense cases, 54% of public order offense cases, and 42% of drug law violations. Compared with those of older juveniles (16 and older), the caseloads of younger juveniles involved a smaller proportion of drug law violations and public order offenses, but somewhat larger proportions of person offenses and property offenses (table 3).³

Delinquency case rates generally increase with the age of the juvenile (figure 2). For example, the delinquency case rate for 15-year-olds in 1996 was 36% higher than the rate for 14-year-olds. Similarly, the case rate for 16-year-olds was 18% greater than that for 15-year-olds. The case rate for 17-year-olds was an

exception to this pattern, as it was 1% lower than the rate for 16-year-olds.

Sex of Youth

In 1996, juvenile courts disposed 1,359,000 delinquency cases involving males, compared with 398,600 cases involving females (table 4). The number of delinquency cases involving females increased 76% between 1987 and 1996, while cases involving males increased 42%. The relatively greater increase in cases involving females reflected changes in the number of person offense cases processed (up 152% for females versus 87% for males) and the number of property offense cases processed (up 52% among females compared with 16% among males). Drug violation cases increased more among males than among females between 1987 and 1996, but between 1992 and 1996, the growth in cases

involving females outpaced the growth in cases involving males.

Between 1987 and 1996, the delinquency case rate for males increased 28%, to 92.9 cases per 1,000 male youth. Among female juveniles, the delinquency case rate grew 58%, to 28.8 cases per 1,000 female youth. The person offense case rate for females was 127% higher in 1996 than in 1987, while the person offense case rate for males grew 68%. Still, the 1996 person offense case rate was almost three times greater for males than for females (19.5 versus 6.9 cases per 1,000).

Race of Youth

Between 1987 and 1996, the number of delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts involving white youth increased

Figure 2: Delinquency Case Rates, by Age at Referral, 1996

Cases per 1,000 Youth in Age Group

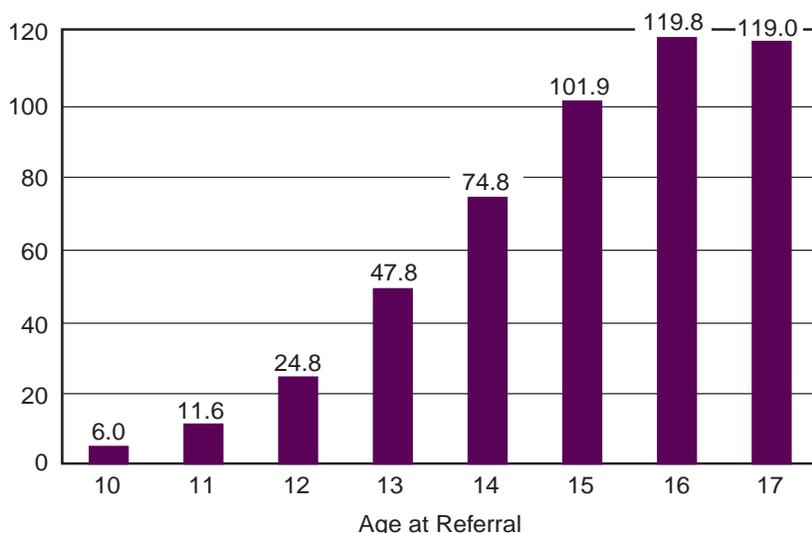


Table 4: Percent Change in Delinquency Cases and Case Rates, by Sex, 1987–1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996	Percent Change	
				1987–96	1992–96
Number of cases					
Male	954,100	1,197,100	1,359,000	42%	14%
Person	152,900	243,500	285,800	87	17
Property	578,400	693,500	671,100	16	-3
Drugs	60,800	63,900	151,100	149	136
Public order	162,000	196,200	251,000	55	28
Female	226,700	286,700	398,600	76%	39%
Person	38,000	64,700	95,700	152	48
Property	134,000	167,100	203,300	52	22
Drugs	11,300	8,700	25,200	123	189
Public order	43,400	46,100	74,400	72	61
Cases per 1,000 youth at risk					
Male	72.7	87.7	92.9	28%	6%
Person	11.7	17.8	19.5	68	10
Property	44.1	50.8	45.9	4	-10
Drugs	4.6	4.7	10.3	123	121
Public order	12.3	14.4	17.2	39	19
Female	18.2	22.2	28.8	58%	30%
Person	3.0	5.0	6.9	127	38
Property	10.7	12.9	14.7	37	14
Drugs	0.9	0.7	1.8	100	170
Public order	3.5	3.6	5.4	54	51

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

39%, the number of cases involving black youth increased 68%, and the number involving youth of other races rose 103% (table 5).⁴ In 1996, the number of delinquency cases involving white youth exceeded the number involving black youth by a margin of 2.2 to 1, compared with a ratio of 2.6 to 1 in 1987.

The delinquency case rate for black youth was nearly 2.5 times the rate for white youth in 1996 (124.1 compared with 51.0 per 1,000). The person offense case rate for black youth was more than three times greater than the corresponding rate for white youth. Similarly, the drug offense and public order case rates for black youth were nearly three times the rates for white youth. The property offense case rate for blacks was nearly double the rate for whites. In all offense categories, the case rate for juveniles of other races was lower than the corresponding rates for either black or white juveniles.

Property offense cases accounted for 53% of all 1996 delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts involving white youth, 42% of those involving black youth,

and 57% of those involving youth of other races. The caseload of black youth involved a higher proportion of person offense cases (27%) than either the caseload of white youth (19%) or the caseload for other races (20%). Drug law violations accounted for approximately equal proportions of delinquency cases involving black youth (11%) and white youth (10%) and a smaller proportion of cases involving youth of other races (6%).

Source of Referral

A number of sources—law enforcement agencies, social services, schools, parents, probation officers, and victims—referred delinquency cases to juvenile courts. Although there were variations across offense categories, 86% of all 1996 delinquency cases were referred to juvenile courts by a law enforcement agency (table 6). Law enforcement agencies referred 93% of drug law violation cases, 91% of property offense cases, 86% of person offense cases, and 69% of public order offense cases.

Use of Detention

In some cases, juveniles are held in secure detention facilities before adjudication and disposition. This serves to protect the community and the juvenile, ensure his or her appearance at scheduled hearings, and allow for evaluation if needed. The number of delinquency cases involving detention increased 38% between 1987 and 1996, rising from 231,900 to 320,900 (table 7). During the same 10-year period, the number of person offense cases involving detention increased 97%, the number of drug offense cases involving detention increased 89%, and the number of public order cases involving detention increased 35%. The number of property offense cases involving detention in 1996 was 8% greater than in 1987, although the number of property offense cases involving detention fell 13% between 1992 and 1996.

The proportion of delinquency cases involving detention changed little between 1987 and 1996 (table 8). Overall, the use of detention gradually rose and then fell between 1987 and 1996, ranging from 18% to 23% of delinquency cases, with the peak year being 1990. The same pattern was seen in each of the four major offense categories. For drug offense cases, however, the probability of detention was greater and the range in the use of detention was broader (from 23% to 38%).

In 1996, the likelihood of detention for property offense cases (14%) was lower than for other types of offenses (21% to 23%). However, because of the large number of property offense cases, they accounted for 39% of the cases in which the juvenile was detained. In general, the use of detention was greater for males than for females (20% versus 14%) in 1996. This was true for all offenses except public order offenses, where females were almost as likely to be detained as their male counterparts.

In 1996, the likelihood of detention in delinquency cases involving white juveniles was 14%, while it was 27% for those involving black juveniles and 18% for juveniles of other races (table 9). Compared with 1987, the use of detention in 1996 remained the same for cases involving black youth and was lower for white youth and youth of other races. For all racial categories, the use of detention in drug offense cases was considerably lower in 1996 than in 1987.

Case Processing

When a delinquency case is referred to juvenile court, an intake officer, prosecutor, or judge determines whether to handle

the case formally or informally. Formal handling involves the filing of a petition requesting that the court hold an adjudicatory or waiver hearing. Informal case handling is conducted entirely at the juvenile court intake level, without a petition and without an adjudicatory or waiver hearing.

In 1996, more than half of all delinquency cases were handled formally (figure 3). The proportion of delinquency cases that were formally processed increased from 47% to 56% between 1987 and 1996. The increased number of cases referred to juvenile court intake and the greater likelihood of formal handling of these cases resulted in a 78% increase in the number of petitioned delinquency cases disposed by juvenile courts in the United States between 1987 and 1996 (table 10). The largest percentage increase was in the number of petitioned drug offense cases, which increased 183% from 1987 to 1996. The number of petitioned person offense cases increased 121%, petitioned public order offense cases increased 104%, and petitioned property offense cases increased 44%.

Waiver to criminal court. One of the first actions taken during the juvenile court intake process is determining whether a case should be processed in the criminal justice system rather than in juvenile court. Most States have more than one mechanism for transferring cases to criminal court. In an increasing number of States, cases that meet certain age and offense criteria are excluded by statute from juvenile court jurisdiction and are thus filed directly in criminal court. In some States, statutes give prosecutors discretion to file certain juvenile cases directly in criminal court. In most States, cases referred to juvenile court that meet certain criteria may be transferred to criminal court upon the authorization of the juvenile court judge. In such cases, the judge may waive the juvenile court's

Table 5: Percent Change in Delinquency Cases and Case Rates, by Race, 1987–1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996	Percent Change	
				1987–96	1992–96
Number of cases					
White	831,800	975,800	1,158,600	39%	19%
Person	110,200	177,000	224,600	104	27
Property	522,100	604,500	611,500	17	1
Drugs	48,200	37,500	114,100	136	204
Public order	151,300	156,700	208,400	38	33
Black	315,000	453,800	530,100	68%	17%
Person	76,000	121,300	143,100	88	18
Property	168,000	221,300	223,700	33	1
Drugs	22,300	33,500	57,800	159	72
Public order	48,700	77,700	105,500	117	36
Other races	34,000	54,300	69,000	103%	27%
Person	4,700	9,900	13,800	192	39
Property	22,400	34,900	39,200	76	13
Drugs	1,600	1,600	4,400	182	170
Public order	5,400	7,900	11,500	114	46
Cases per 1,000 youth at risk					
White	40.2	45.8	51.0	27%	11%
Person	5.3	8.3	9.9	86	19
Property	25.2	28.4	26.9	7	-5
Drugs	2.3	1.8	5.0	116	186
Public order	7.3	7.4	9.2	26	25
Black	82.4	113.7	124.1	51%	9%
Person	19.9	30.4	33.5	69	10
Property	43.9	55.4	52.3	19	-6
Drugs	5.8	8.4	13.5	132	61
Public order	12.7	19.5	24.7	94	27
Other races	32.5	42.6	46.7	44%	10%
Person	4.5	7.8	9.3	107	20
Property	21.4	27.3	26.6	24	-3
Drugs	1.5	1.3	3.0	100	133
Public order	5.1	6.2	7.8	52	26

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

Table 6: Percentage of Delinquency Cases Referred by Law Enforcement, 1987, 1992, and 1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996
Delinquency	84%	86%	86%
Person	82	85	86
Property	90	90	91
Drugs	92	93	93
Public order	64	71	69

Table 7: Percent Change in Detained Delinquency Cases, 1987–1996

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1987	1992	1996	1987–96	1992–96
Delinquency	231,900	299,700	320,900	38%	7%
Person	44,300	73,900	87,200	97	18
Property	115,900	144,100	125,700	8	-13
Drugs	21,000	25,100	39,700	89	58
Public order	50,600	56,700	68,300	35	20

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

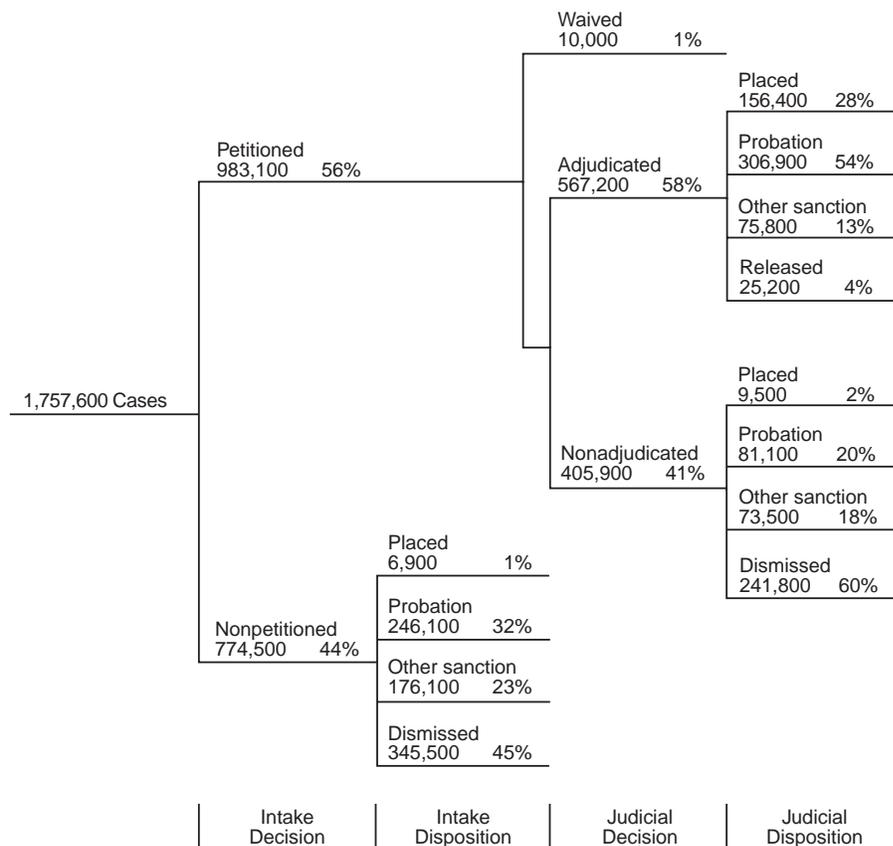
Table 8: Percentage of Delinquency Cases Detained, by Sex, 1987, 1992, and 1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996
Delinquency	20%	20%	18%
Person	23	24	23
Property	16	17	14
Drugs	29	35	23
Public order	25	23	21
Male	21%	21%	20%
Person	25	26	24
Property	17	18	16
Drugs	30	36	24
Public order	25	24	21
Female	16%	15%	14%
Person	17	17	19
Property	11	12	9
Drugs	23	27	15
Public order	25	22	19

Table 9: Percentage of Delinquency Cases Detained, by Race, 1987, 1992, and 1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996
White	17%	18%	14%
Person	19	21	19
Property	14	15	11
Drugs	20	25	14
Public order	23	23	17
Black	27%	25%	27%
Person	29	27	28
Property	22	21	22
Drugs	48	45	40
Public order	30	24	29
Other races	24%	23%	18%
Person	31	28	26
Property	21	21	15
Drugs	29	22	19
Public order	30	22	17

Figure 3: Juvenile Court Processing of Delinquency Cases, 1996



Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding

Table 10: Percent Change in Petitioned Delinquency Cases, 1987-1996

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1987	1992	1996	1987-96	1992-96
Delinquency	552,600	739,900	983,100	78%	33%
Person	101,300	166,200	223,600	121	35
Property	317,300	402,900	455,800	44	13
Drugs	38,800	47,400	109,500	183	131
Public order	95,200	123,400	194,200	104	57

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

jurisdiction over the case, thus referring it to criminal court for prosecution. This Bulletin analyzes only those cases transferred from juvenile court to criminal court by judicial waiver.

The number of delinquency cases judicially waived to criminal court grew 73% between 1987 and 1994, then decreased 15% by 1996. Compared with the number in 1987, there were substantially more

person and drug offense cases waived to criminal court in 1996 and slightly fewer property offense cases (table 11).

The estimated 10,000 delinquency cases waived to criminal court in 1996 represented 1.0% of all petitioned delinquency cases (table 12). In 1987, the proportion was 1.2%, and it reached 1.5% in 1991 before dropping to the 1996 level. In general, the cases most likely to be

waived were those involving person offenses. However, from 1989 through 1992, drug offense cases were the most likely cases to be waived. In fact, the proportion of petitioned drug offense cases waived reached 4.1% in 1991.

The offense profile of cases waived to criminal court changed considerably between 1987 and 1996 (figure 4). Prior to 1992, property offense cases accounted for

Table 11: Percent Change in Petitioned Delinquency Cases Waived to Criminal Court, 1987–1996

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1987	1992	1996	1987–96	1992–96
Delinquency	6,800	10,300	10,000	47%	-3%
Person	1,900	4,000	4,300	125	7
Property	3,800	4,200	3,700	-2	-13
Drugs	600	1,200	1,400	124	15
Public order	500	900	600	22	-30

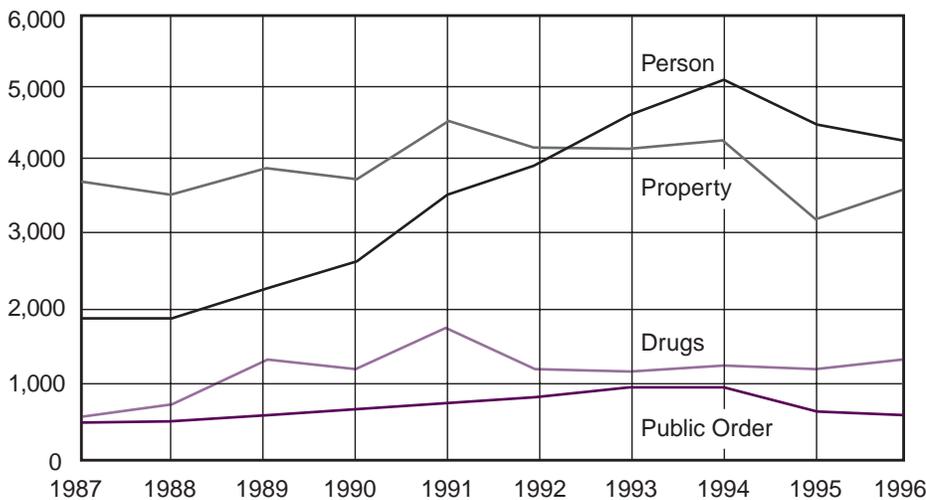
Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Table 12: Percentage of Petitioned Delinquency Cases Waived to Criminal Court, 1987, 1992, and 1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996
Delinquency	1.2%	1.4%	1.0%
Person	1.9	2.4	1.9
Property	1.2	1.0	0.8
Drugs	1.6	2.5	1.2
Public order	0.5	0.7	0.3

Figure 4: Delinquency Cases Waived to Criminal Court, 1987–1996

Number of Cases Judicially Waived to Criminal Court



the largest share of waived cases. For example, in 1987, property offense cases made up 55% of waived cases and person offense cases made up the next largest share (28%). In 1992, the tide began to turn, with person and property offense cases waived in nearly equal numbers. Since 1992, person offense cases have been the largest group of cases waived. By 1995, person offense cases accounted for 47% of all waived delinquency cases and property offense cases accounted for 34%. Because of the increase in property offense cases waived in 1996 and the corresponding decline in waived person offense cases, person offenses represented 43% of all delinquency cases waived to criminal court in 1996 and property offense cases accounted for 37%. If this trend continues among cases judicially waived to criminal court, property offense cases will once again outnumber person offense cases.

Adjudication and disposition. An adjudicatory hearing is available in all formally petitioned delinquency cases not judicially waived to criminal court.⁵ During the hearing, the judge (or a jury) determines whether a youth committed the delinquent act(s) charged. If so, the court then makes a dispositional decision that may include a fine, restitution, probation, commitment to a residential facility (secure or nonsecure), referral to a treatment program, and/or community service.

In 1996, 58% of all formally processed delinquency cases resulted in an adjudication of delinquency (table 13). In 28% of these cases, the youth was placed out of the home in a residential facility (table 14). More than half (54%) of all formally adjudicated delinquency cases resulted in formal probation for the juvenile (table 15). In 13% of formally adjudicated delinquency

Table 13: Percentage of Petitioned Delinquency Cases Adjudicated, 1987, 1992, and 1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996
Delinquency	63%	58%	58%
Person	57	54	54
Property	64	59	59
Drugs	63	58	58
Public order	65	60	58

Table 14: Percentage of Adjudicated Delinquency Cases Placed Out of Home, 1987, 1992, and 1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996
Delinquency	31%	30%	28%
Person	33	33	31
Property	28	27	26
Drugs	32	34	24
Public order	37	35	32

Table 15: Percentage of Adjudicated Delinquency Cases Placed on Formal Probation, 1987, 1992, and 1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996
Delinquency	56%	56%	54%
Person	55	54	53
Property	58	58	56
Drugs	59	52	54
Public order	49	52	49

cases, the court ordered some other sanction, such as requiring the juvenile to pay restitution or a fine, participate in some form of community service, or enter a treatment or counseling program. In a small number of cases (4%), the juvenile was adjudicated but was released with no further sanction ordered.

In 41% of formally handled delinquency cases in 1996, the juvenile was not subsequently adjudicated delinquent. Most (60%) of these cases were dismissed by the court, but in 20% of the cases, the juvenile voluntarily agreed to some form of probation. Approximately 2% of nonadjudicated delinquency cases resulted in voluntary out-of-home placement. In 18% of nonadjudicated cases, the juvenile agreed to another voluntary disposition such as restitution, community service, or referral to an agency for services.

Petitioned Status Offense Cases

Status offenses are acts that are law violations only for individuals of juvenile status. The four major status offense categories analyzed here are running away, truancy, ungovernability (sometimes known as incorrigibility or being beyond the control of one's parents), and liquor law violations (e.g., minor in possession of alcohol, underage drinking).

Number of Cases

In 1996, U.S. juvenile courts petitioned and formally disposed an estimated 162,000 status offense cases (table 16).⁶ In 44,800 of these cases, the most serious charge was liquor law violation. Truancy was the most serious charge in another 39,300 cases, running away in 25,800 cases, and ungovernability in 20,100 cases. Other miscellaneous status offenses (such as curfew violations, tobacco offenses, violations of court orders in status offense cases, and any status offenses coded as "other" in a jurisdiction's original data) accounted for the remaining 32,000 cases.⁷

Between 1987 and 1996, the number of petitioned status offense cases seen in U.S. juvenile courts increased 101%. The number of status cases involving truancy climbed 92%, cases involving charges of running away grew 83%, and liquor law violation cases increased 77%. The largest proportionate increase in formally processed status offense cases during that 10-year period was in the miscellaneous category, possibly reflecting an increase in referrals for curfew violations.

Table 16: Percent Change in Petitioned Status Offense Cases and Case Rates, 1987–1996

Most Serious Offense	1987	1992	1996	Percent Change	
				1987–96	1992–96
Number of cases					
Status offense	80,600	94,200	162,000	101%	72%
Running away	14,100	16,700	25,800	83	54
Truancy	20,400	25,700	39,300	92	53
Ungovernability	14,100	10,700	20,100	42	88
Liquor law violation	25,300	29,600	44,800	77	51
Miscellaneous	6,700	11,500	32,000	376	178
Cases per 1,000 youth at risk					
Status offense	3.2	3.5	5.7	81%	60%
Running away	0.6	0.6	0.9	65	44
Truancy	0.8	1.0	1.4	73	43
Ungovernability	0.6	0.4	0.7	28	75
Liquor law violation	1.0	1.1	1.6	59	41
Miscellaneous	0.3	0.4	1.1	328	159

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

Case Rates

The Nation's juvenile courts processed 5.7 petitioned status offense cases for every 1,000 youth at risk of referral in 1996 (table 16). The total status offense case rate was 81% higher in 1996 than in 1987. Between 1987 and 1996, the truancy case rate increased 73%, the rate for cases of running away increased 65%, and the rate of status liquor law violation cases increased 59%. The rate for cases involving ungovernability increased 28%.

Age of Youth

Juveniles younger than 16 accounted for a somewhat smaller proportion of status offense cases in 1996 than in 1987. In 1996, 55% of the petitioned status offense cases disposed by juvenile courts involved a youth under age 16, compared with 57% of the 1987 caseload. For truancy cases, the proportion of juveniles younger than 16 dropped from 86% to 77%, and among cases of running away, the proportion decreased from 65% to 63%. However, among ungovernability cases, the proportion of younger juveniles increased slightly (from 69% to 70%) and, among petitioned status liquor offense cases, juveniles younger than 16 made up a larger proportion of cases in 1996 (25%) than in 1987 (20%).

In 1996, the most common status offense for youth younger than 16 was truancy (34%) (table 17). Among older youth, the most common status offense was a liquor

Table 17: Offense Profile of Petitioned Status Offense Cases, by Age at Referral, 1996

Most Serious Offense	Age 15 or Younger	Age 16 or Older
Running away	18%	13%
Truancy	34	13
Ungovernability	16	8
Liquor law violation	13	46
Miscellaneous	20	20

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

law violation, which accounted for 46% of all cases involving a youth age 16 or older.

Sex of Youth

Male juveniles were involved in 59% of the petitioned status offense cases handled by juvenile courts during 1996. Nearly 7 in 10 liquor law violation cases involved males. On the other hand, about 6 in 10 cases of running away involved females. In 1996, 53% of truancy cases and 57% of ungovernability cases involved male juveniles. These patterns in status offense cases did not change much between 1987 and 1996.

Race of Youth

White youth were involved in 78% of the petitioned status offense cases

disposed by juvenile courts during 1996. White youth were involved in 90% of status liquor law violation cases, 75% of cases of running away, 74% of ungovernability cases, and 72% of truancy cases. Truancy was the most common status offense for black youth (34%), while a liquor law violation was the most common status offense for white youth (32%) and youth of other races (39%).

Source of Referral

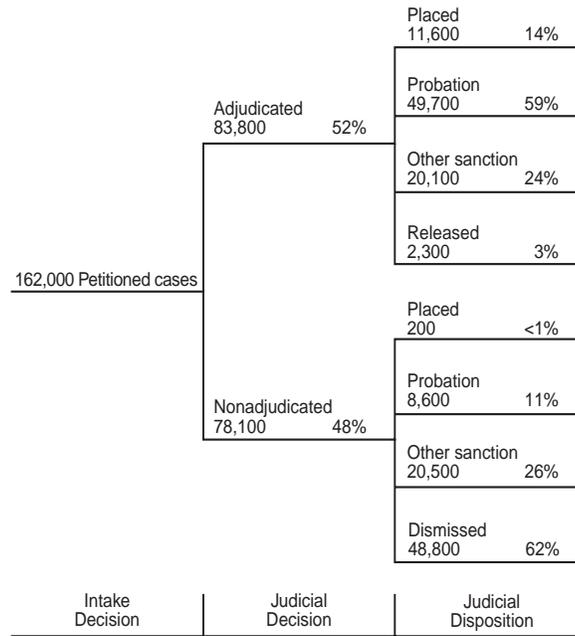
Law enforcement agencies referred 48% of the petitioned status offense cases handled by juvenile courts in 1996. However, the source of referral varied according to the offense involved. Law enforcement agencies referred 93% of status liquor law violation cases, 37% of cases of running away, 12% of ungovernability cases, and 10% of truancy cases.

Use of Detention

Detention was used in 9,600 petitioned status offense cases in 1996 (table 18). There were 14% fewer status offense cases involving detention in 1996 than in 1987, but 25% more than in 1992. Even larger declines in the number of cases involving detention were seen in cases of truancy (53%), running away (45%), and ungovernability (44%). In contrast, the number of cases involving detention was greater in 1996 than in 1987 for cases involving liquor (79%).

Cases of running away were the most likely status offense matters to involve detention in 1996. Detention was used in 10% of these cases, 7% of ungovernability cases, 6% of status liquor law violations, and 2% of truancy cases. Of the estimated 9,600 petitioned status offense cases that involved detention in 1996, 29% involved liquor law violations, 27% were cases of running away, 15% involved ungovern-

Figure 5: Juvenile Court Processing of Petitioned Status Offense Cases, 1996



Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding

ability charges, 6% were truancy cases, and the remaining 22% involved miscellaneous status offenses.

Case Processing

During 1996, more than half of petitioned status offense cases (52%) resulted in an adjudication (i.e., a formal finding that the juvenile committed the offense) (figure 5). Adjudication was more likely in cases involving truancy (57%), ungovernability (56%), and liquor law violations (55%) than in cases of running away (35%). Probation was the most common disposition for adjudicated status offenders. Among adjudicated status offense cases, 59% resulted in

probation; 24% resulted in other sanctions, such as restitution or community service; 14% resulted in out-of-home placement; and 3% were dismissed (i.e., no sanction was entered as a disposition).

Endnotes

1. For information on the estimation procedure, see the "Methods" section in this Bulletin or in *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996*. The national estimates for 1987 through 1996 described in this Bulletin include revisions made after publication of previous *Juvenile Court Statistics Reports*.
2. Rate calculations control for State variations in the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction. The population used in the denominator of the case rate calculations includes youth age 10 or older who were at, or under, the upper age of original jurisdiction of the juvenile court according to the laws of their State. In most States, the upper age of original jurisdiction is 17, but the upper age ranged from 15 to 17 in 1996. (See *juvenile population* in the glossary.)
3. Care should be exercised when interpreting age, sex, or racial differences in the analysis of juvenile delinquency cases; reported statistics do not control for the seriousness of the behavior leading to each charge or the extent of a youth's court history.

Table 18: Percent Change in Detained Petitioned Status Offense Cases, 1987–1996

Most Serious Offense	Number of Cases			Percent Change	
	1987	1992	1996	1987–96	1992–96
Status offense	11,100	7,600	9,600	-14%	25%
Running away	4,700	2,500	2,600	-45	5
Truancy	1,300	500	600	-53	21
Ungovernability	2,600	1,000	1,400	-44	47
Liquor law violation	1,600	1,800	2,800	79	59
Miscellaneous	1,000	1,900	2,100	109	11

Note: Total includes case types not detailed above. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Percent change calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Acknowledgments

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Related Readings

State Legislative Responses to Violent Juvenile Crime: 1996–97 Update, November 1998, NCJ 172835. Also available electronically.

The Youngest Offenders, 1996, November 1998, FS–9887. Also available electronically.

Juvenile Vandalism, 1996, October 1998, FS–9885. Also available electronically.

Drug Offense Cases in Juvenile Court, 1986–1995, June 1998, FS–9881. Also available electronically.

Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Courts, 1995, May 1998, FS–9879. Also available electronically.

Person Offenses in Juvenile Court, 1986–1995, April 1998, FS–9877. Also available electronically.

The Youngest Delinquents: Offenders Under Age 15, September 1997, NCJ 165256. Also available electronically.

Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1997 Update on Violence, August 1997, NCJ 165703. Also available electronically.

The National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Collecting Data Since 1927, August 1997, FS–9766. Also available electronically.

Juvenile Offenders and Victims: A National Report, August 1995, NCJ 153569.

To obtain *Juvenile Court Statistics*, other publications using Archive data, or OJJDP publications that focus on juvenile justice statistics, visit OJJDP's Web site, www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org, or contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse by telephone at 800–638–8736; by mail at P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849–6000; or by e-mail at puborder@ncjrs.org.

4. Nearly all youth of Hispanic ethnicity are included in the white racial category.

5. In a number of cases, the petition is withdrawn before an adjudicatory hearing is held.

6. In many communities, social service agencies, rather than the juvenile courts, have assumed responsibility for screening and diverting alleged status offenders. Because of great differences in intake and screening procedures for informally handled status offense cases, national estimates are not calculated. The national estimates presented here and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* focus on formally handled, or petitioned, status offense cases.

7. Due to the homogeneity of offenses contained in the miscellaneous category, these cases are not always discussed independently. All totals in the tables and figures, however, include miscellaneous status offenses.

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Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.

About the National Juvenile Court Data Archive

This Bulletin presents information from the latest report in OJJDP's *Juvenile Court Statistics* series. The *Juvenile Court Statistics* Report series was first published in 1929 and continues to be the Nation's primary source of information on the activities of juvenile courts. The data for the reports are collected, analyzed, and stored by the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is operated by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) in Pittsburgh, PA. The Archive collects demographic, legal, and dispositional data on more than 1 million delinquency and status offense cases annually. In addition to producing *Juvenile Court Statistics* and other topical publications, the Archive can provide data files and special analyses for research and policy purposes.

The Archive's national delinquency estimates are available to researchers in an easy-to-use software package, *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1987–1996*. With the support of OJJDP, NCJJ distributes the software to facilitate independent analysis of Archive data while eliminating the need for statistical analysis software. All necessary data files and the NCJJ software can be downloaded from OJJDP's Web site, www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org, or a complimentary copy of *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1987–1996* on diskette can be ordered from NCJJ.

For further information about the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, contact:

National Center for Juvenile Justice
710 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219–3000
412–227–6950

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

Glossary

Adjudication: Judicial determination (judgment) that a juvenile is responsible for the delinquent or status offense that is charged in a petition.

Age: Juvenile's age at the time the case was referred to juvenile court.

Case rate: Number of cases disposed per 1,000 juveniles in the population. The population base used to calculate the case rate varies. For example, the population base for the male case rate is the total number of male youth age 10 or older who are under the jurisdiction of the juvenile courts. (See *juvenile population*.)

Delinquent act: An act committed by a juvenile which, if committed by an adult, would be a criminal act. The juvenile court has jurisdiction over delinquent acts. Delinquent acts include crimes against persons, crimes against property, drug offenses, and crimes against public order when such acts are committed by juveniles.

Detention: The placement of a youth in a secure facility under court authority at some point between the time of referral to court intake and disposition. This Bulletin does not include detention decisions made by law enforcement officials prior to court referral or those occurring after the disposition of the case.

Disposition: Sanction ordered or treatment plan decided upon or initiated in a particular case. Case dispositions are coded into the following categories:

- ◆ **Waiver to criminal court:** Cases that were transferred to a criminal court as the result of a judicial waiver hearing in the juvenile court.
- ◆ **Placement:** Cases in which youth were placed out of the home in a residential facility for delinquents or status offenders, or cases in which youth were removed from their homes and placed elsewhere.
- ◆ **Probation:** Cases in which youth were placed on informal/voluntary or formal/court-ordered probation or supervision.
- ◆ **Dismissed/released:** Cases dismissed or otherwise released, including those warned and counseled, with no further sanction or consequence anticipated. Among cases handled informally, some may be dismissed by the juvenile court because the matter is being handled in another court or agency. (See *manner of handling*.)

◆ **Other sanction:** Miscellaneous dispositions not included above, which may include fines, restitution, community service, referrals outside the court for services with minimal or no further court involvement anticipated, and dispositions coded as "other" in a jurisdiction's original data.

Juvenile: Youth at or below the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction. (See *juvenile population* and *upper age of jurisdiction*.)

Juvenile court: Any court that has jurisdiction over matters involving juveniles.

Juvenile population: For the purpose of calculating case rates for delinquency and status offense matters, this term refers to the number of children from age 10 through the upper age of jurisdiction. In all States, the upper age of jurisdiction is defined by statute. Because most States consider individuals to be adults on their 18th birthday, the juvenile population in these States equals the number of children ages 10 through 17 living within the geographical area serviced by the court. (See *upper age of jurisdiction*.)

Manner of handling: A general classification of case processing within the court system.

- ◆ **Petitioned:** Formally handled cases that appear on the official court calendar in response to the filing of a petition or other legal instrument requesting the court to adjudicate the youth a delinquent, status offender, or dependent child or to waive jurisdiction and transfer the youth to criminal court for processing as a criminal offender.
- ◆ **Nonpetitioned:** Informally handled cases in which duly authorized court personnel, having screened the case, decide not to file a formal petition. Such personnel include judges, referees, probation officers, other officers of the court, and/or staff of an agency statutorily designated to conduct petition screening for the juvenile court.

Petition: A document filed in juvenile court alleging that a juvenile is a delinquent or a status offender and asking that the court assume jurisdiction over the juvenile or that an alleged delinquent be transferred to criminal court for prosecution as an adult.

Race: The race of the youth referred, as determined by the youth or by court personnel.

◆ **White:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North

Africa, or the Middle East. (In both the population and court data, nearly all youth of Hispanic ethnicity were included in the white racial category.)

- ◆ **Black:** A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
- ◆ **Other:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America, the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands.

Unit of count: The unit of count is a case disposed by a court with juvenile jurisdiction during the calendar year. Each case represents a youth referred to the juvenile court for a new referral for one or more offenses. The term "disposed" means that during the year, some action was taken or some treatment plan was decided upon or initiated. Within this definition, it is possible for a youth to be involved in more than one case during a calendar year.

Upper age of jurisdiction: The oldest age at which a juvenile court has original jurisdiction over an individual for law-violating behavior. For the time period covered by *Juvenile Court Statistics 1996*, the upper age of jurisdiction was 15 in three States (Connecticut, New York, and North Carolina) and 16 in 10 States (Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin). In the remaining 37 States and the District of Columbia, the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction was 17. It must be noted that within most States, there are exceptions in which youth at or below the State's upper age of jurisdiction can be placed under the original jurisdiction of the adult criminal court. For example, in most States, if a youth of a certain age is charged with an offense from a defined list of "excluded offenses," the case must originate in the adult criminal court. In addition, in a number of States, the district attorney is given the discretion of filing certain cases either in the juvenile or in the criminal court. Therefore, although the upper age of jurisdiction is commonly recognized in all States, there are numerous exceptions to this age criterion.

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Methods

Data are provided to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive by State and local agencies responsible for the collection and/or dissemination of juvenile justice data. The information contributed by these agencies is not derived from a probability sampling procedure, nor is it the result of a uniform data collection effort. The national estimates described in this Bulletin and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* are developed using information from all courts able to provide compatible data to the Archive. While juvenile courts with jurisdiction over 96% of the U.S. juvenile population contributed at least some 1996 data to the Archive, not all information could be used to generate the national estimates because of incompatibilities in the structure or content of the data files.

Data are provided to the Archive in two forms—automated *case-level* data and *court-level aggregate* data. Automated case-level data for 1996, which describe

each case's demographic and processing characteristics, were provided by 1,317 jurisdictions in 26 States (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia). Together, the contributing jurisdictions from these States contained 52% of the Nation's juvenile population (i.e., youth ages 10 through the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each State). Compatible court-level aggregate data for 1996, which usually indicate the number of delinquency cases disposed in a calendar year, were provided by an additional 516 jurisdictions in 8 States (California, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, New York, Texas, and Vermont) and the District of

Columbia. In all, compatible 1996 data were provided to the Archive by 1,775 jurisdictions, containing 67% of the Nation's juvenile population.

The national estimates of juvenile court cases reported in this Bulletin and in *Juvenile Court Statistics* were developed using the Archive's case-level and court-level data files combined with county-level juvenile population estimates (controlling for the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each State). The basic assumption underlying the estimation procedure is that the volume and characteristics of juvenile court cases are shaped by the same set of factors in reporting and nonreporting jurisdictions of similar size. For interested readers, a complete description of the estimation procedure appears in the "Methods" section of each *Juvenile Court Statistics* Report.