



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Juvenile Court Processing of Delinquency Cases, 1986–1995

by Anne L. Stahl

More than half of the delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts in 1995 were formally processed

In 1995, U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction handled an estimated 1.7 million cases involving delinquency charges. More than half (55%) of these cases were processed formally, either by filing a delinquency petition in the juvenile court or by waiving the case to criminal court. This Fact Sheet presents national data on delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts from 1986 through 1995. National estimates were generated using information from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive. Nearly 1,800 jurisdictions containing 67% of the U.S. juvenile population contributed data for these estimates.

The number of formally processed delinquency cases increased 69% between 1986 and 1995

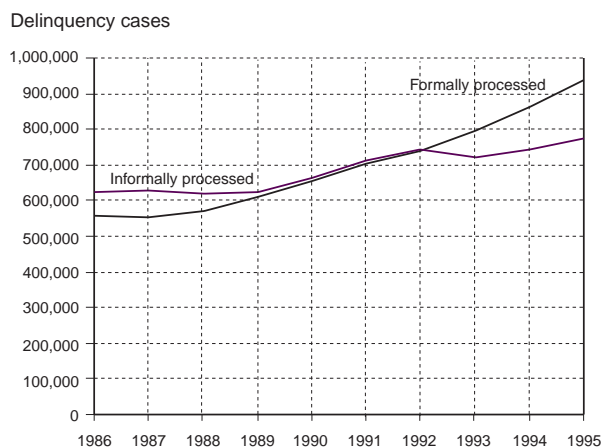
Between 1986 and 1995, the delinquency caseload of U.S. juvenile courts increased 45%. The number of cases formally processed by juvenile courts rose from 554,000 to 938,400 during this time period, while the number of cases handled informally (without a petition or court hearing) increased 24%.

Between 1986 and 1992, juvenile courts handled a greater number of delinquency cases informally, although the proportion remained fairly steady from 1989 to 1992. Beginning in 1993, formally processed delinquency cases outnumbered those handled informally. By 1995, the formal delinquency caseload exceeded the informal caseload by 21%.

Between 1986 and 1995, the likelihood of formal handling increased for virtually every offense

Most Serious Offense	Percent of Delinquency Cases Handled Formally		
	1986	1991	1995
Total Delinquency	47%	50%	55%
Person Offenses	55%	55%	58%
Criminal homicide	82	89	92
Forcible rape	79	78	79
Robbery	80	85	87
Aggravated assault	64	61	60
Simple assault	43	42	50
Other violent sex offenses	72	70	73
Other person offenses	49	56	59
Property Offenses	45%	47%	51%
Burglary	68	69	75
Larceny-theft	36	35	40
Motor vehicle theft	62	67	71
Arson	53	51	54
Vandalism	37	40	48
Trespassing	30	33	40
Stolen property offenses	54	62	67
Other property offenses	57	63	66
Drug Law Violations	49%	67%	61%
Public Order Offenses	45%	49%	58%
Obstruction of justice	68	68	76
Disorderly conduct	29	34	37
Weapons offenses	46	52	64
Liquor law violations	28	35	54
Nonviolent sex offenses	52	50	52
Other public order offenses	26	37	52

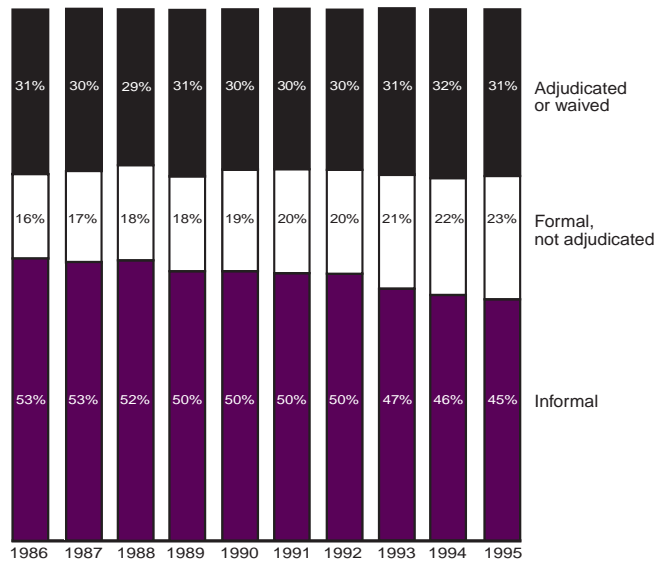
The number of formally processed delinquency cases increased substantially between 1986 and 1995



The likelihood of formal processing for delinquency cases in general increased from 47% to 55% between 1986 and 1995. The largest relative changes were in formal processing of liquor law violation cases (from 28% to 54%) and weapons offense cases (from 46% to 64%). The proportion of cases formally processed did not change substantially for cases involving charges of forcible rape and arson, and for aggravated assault cases the proportion actually dropped from 64% to 60%.

cases were waived to criminal court in 1995. Despite increases in the use of formal processing, the proportion of delinquency cases that were either adjudicated or waived to criminal court did not change substantially. Adjudications and waivers represented 29% to 32% of the delinquency cases each year from 1986 to 1995. In 1995, drug cases were the most likely to result in adjudication or waiver (36%) and property cases were the least likely (30%).

Despite increases in the use of formal processing, the total proportion of delinquency cases that result in adjudication or waiver has not changed



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

The proportion of cases that were either adjudicated or waived to criminal court did not change substantially for most offenses between 1986 and 1995

Most Serious Offense	Percent Adjudicated or Waived to Criminal Court		
	1986	1991	1995
Person	33%	31%	32%
Property	30	29	30
Drugs	34	42	36
Public order	30	30	34

For further information

This Fact Sheet is based on the report *Juvenile Court Statistics 1995*. 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 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: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org.

Anne L. Stahl is the Manager of Data Collection for the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

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In nearly one-third of the delinquency cases referred to juvenile courts, the youth was adjudicated delinquent or waived to criminal court

A youth may be adjudicated delinquent because he or she admits to the charges or because the court finds sufficient evidence to judge the youth delinquent. Adjudication in juvenile court and waiver to criminal court are considered the most serious court actions in delinquency cases. Only 1% of formally processed

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