

High-Impact Court Decisions for High-Risk Youth

June 15, 2026

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Public concern, media coverage, and political divisiveness have created a challenging environment around youth crime/violence.

2 BALTIMORE
WHAR

HOMEPAGE SHOWCASE

'You can't keep letting them get away with it': Addressing juvenile crime



MOCO 360

Opinion

Opinion: To fix our juvenile justice system, we need accountability for offenders

Montgomery County has an obligation to fill the gaps and prevent recurring incidents

by **Dawn Luedtke**
November 18, 2023 11:00 am

At our Oct. 30 County Council Public Safety Committee briefing on juvenile justice and crime, I discussed

Some say - it all starts at home. Change. Either way, everyone who carjackings shouldn't be considered Adrian Inniss. "You can't keep letting changes and they're hurting innocent down. It's bad," said Linda Reed.


By: Elizabeth Worth

READER

NEWS & POLITICS


Politics of fear: Are youth really to blame for the car-jacking spike?

Cops say masked teens with a thirst for violence and joyrides are terrorizing the city. A recent arrests reveals anecdotal evidence



by **Maya Dukmas**
April 28, 2021

Lawmakers looking to hold parents accountable for their children's crimes



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Juvenile Crime Surges, Reversing Long Decline. 'It's Just Kids Killing Kids.'


Violence among children has soared across the country since 2020. One consequence: a mounting toll of young victims.

By [Dan Frosch](#) and [Zusha Elinson](#) | Photographs by José A. Alvarado Jr. for *The Wall Street Journal*
Jan. 23, 2023 10:06 am ET

2 BALTIMORE
WHAR

IN FOCUS

Governor wants juvenile justice bills to focus on accountability



A 13-year-old boy ran through the year, chased by two teenagers frantically trying to open a scooter peeled onto the riding on the back point

Nearby, 11-year-old Kyah was eating chicken wings and another pierced her stomach at Lincoln Hospital 2 miles

Violence among children is the reversal of a decadeslong trend

In the U.S., homicides of children from a year earlier, while up 66%. The number of killings is the highest in two decades,

In March 2026, the CSG Justice Center and NCJFCJ released bench cards and a research guide for jurisdictions on handling high-risk youth cases.

BENCH CARD

Judicial Decision-Making for High-Risk Youth

Judges play a key role in improving public safety by making research-based decisions about supervision and services for high-risk youth. This bench card provides research-based guidance and quick reference points along a delinquency case continuum to reduce recidivism and promote positive outcomes for young people at high risk for reoffending or committing serious offenses.

- **Determination of High Risk**
- **Detention Decisions for High-Risk Youth**
- **Dispositional Decisions for High-Risk Youth**
- **Promoting Effective Supervision and Services for High-Risk Youth**

Determination of High Risk

<p>DO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use validated risk assessment tools administered by trained professionals, including a separate sex offender risk assessment for youth charged with sex offenses. ✓ Focus on dynamic (changeable) rather than static (unchangeable) risk factors and prioritize those that are most predictive of risk. ✓ Consider protective factors as having potential to mitigate risk (especially self-control and self-efficacy). 	<p>DON'T</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Don't rely on offense type or severity, demographics, or subjective factors. ✗ Don't confuse mental health needs with risk, as youth's mental health is not predictive of their risk to reoffend.
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Detention Decisions for High-Risk Youth

<p>DO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use validated detention screening tools to measure public safety and flight risk. ✓ Solely consider public safety and flight risk as reasons (but not a requirement) to detain. ✓ Eliminate or severely limit screening overrides and allow only with clear public safety criteria and judicial discretion with safeguards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage and support the establishment of a continuum of detention alternatives (e.g., shelters, mentoring, reporting centers) that are equipped to work with high-risk youth. <p>DON'T</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Don't detain solely based on offense seriousness. ✗ Don't use detention for family, service, self-protection, or "accountability" reasons or "to teach the youth a lesson." ✗ Don't presume youth identified as high risk must automatically be detained.
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BENCH CARDS // JUDICIAL DECISION-MAKING FOR HIGH-RISK YOUTH // 1

Research and Resource Companion for High-Risk Youth and Challenging Cases Bench Cards

Overview and How to Use this Guide

Judges, policymakers, and communities are increasingly concerned about youth crime and violence. In response, some decision-makers are adopting sanctions-heavy approaches that are not shown to improve public safety. Judges play a critical role in identifying truly high-risk youth and applying timely, research-based dispositional decisions and interventions to reduce reoffending. They also need evidence-based strategies for cases when youth are struggling to comply with their probation conditions and/or make consistent treatment progress.

This research summary complements the "Judicial Decision-Making for High-Risk Youth" and "How Courts Can Best Support Post-Disposition Success for Challenging Delinquency Cases" bench cards, offering a research "cheat sheet," brief summaries with references, and additional resources to help judges and other court stakeholders apply proven practices, supported by training and implementation tools.

What Research Shows

Identifying Youth's Risk to Public Safety and Assessing Case Progress

- Risk predicts likelihood of reoffending, not the seriousness of the offense.**
 - The severity of a youth's offense is not a strong indicator of the future likelihood of offending.¹
 - "High risk" means a youth is at high risk of committing another delinquent offense. Risk levels predict the *likelihood* of future offenses, not their *severity*. Youth may have a high risk to reoffend without a high risk to commit violent or serious offenses.²

<p>LOW</p> <p>Youth assessed as low risk are unlikely to reoffend even with no intervention. The justice system should divert or handle these young people informally and minimize supervision and services.³</p>	<p>MODERATE</p> <p>Youth assessed as moderate risk have some likelihood of reoffending. Risk factors should be matched to targeted services, with some monitoring.⁴</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>Youth assessed as high risk are likely to reoffend if there are no interventions. These youth should receive high-intensity services and case management.⁴</p>
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**This does not mean these youth must be confined to protect public safety; consider whether well-matched resources exist in the community.⁵*

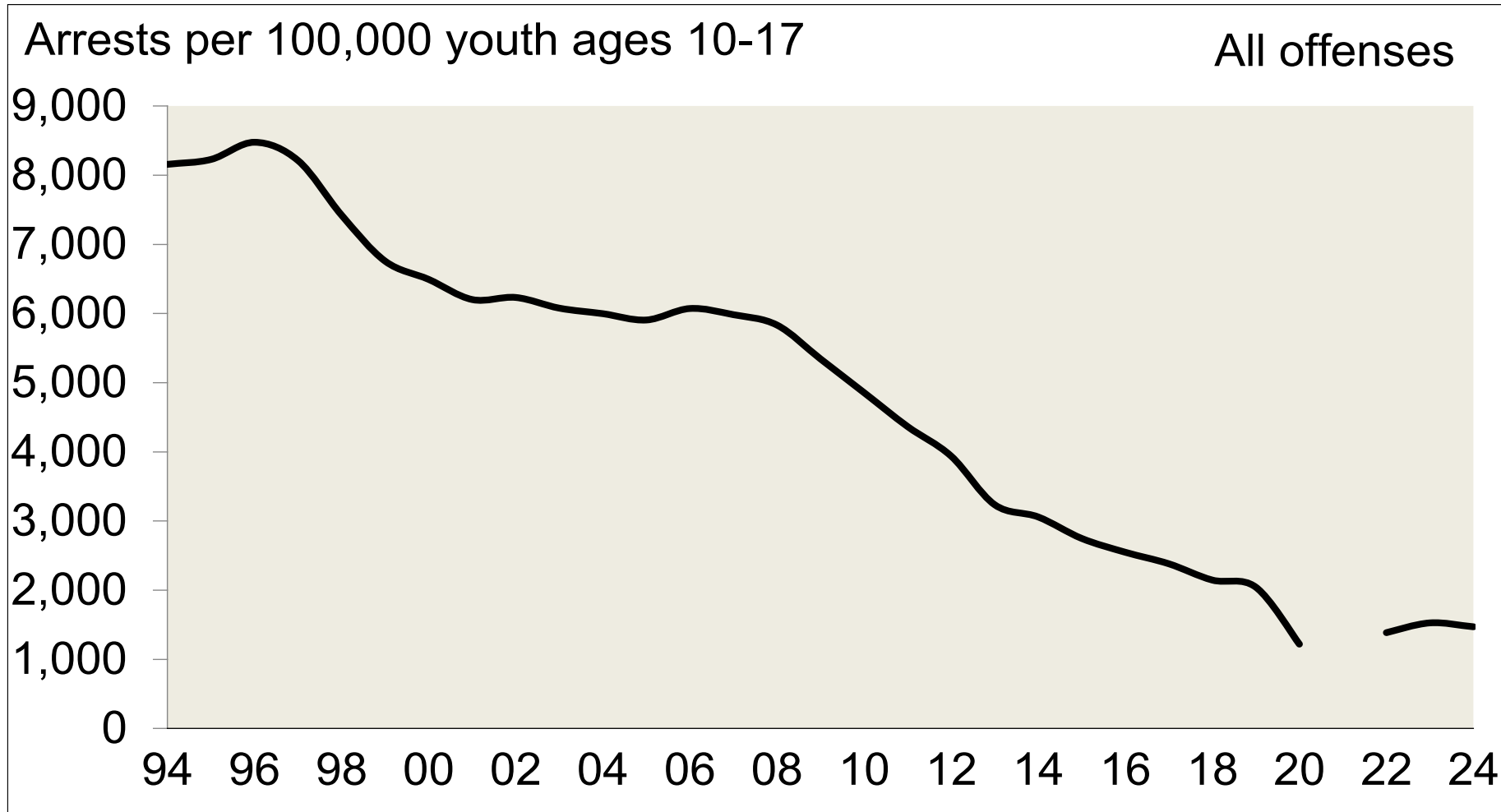
RESEARCH AND RESOURCE COMPANION FOR HIGH-RISK YOUTH AND CHALLENGING CASES BENCH CARDS // 1



Data Trends on Youth Arrests and Violence

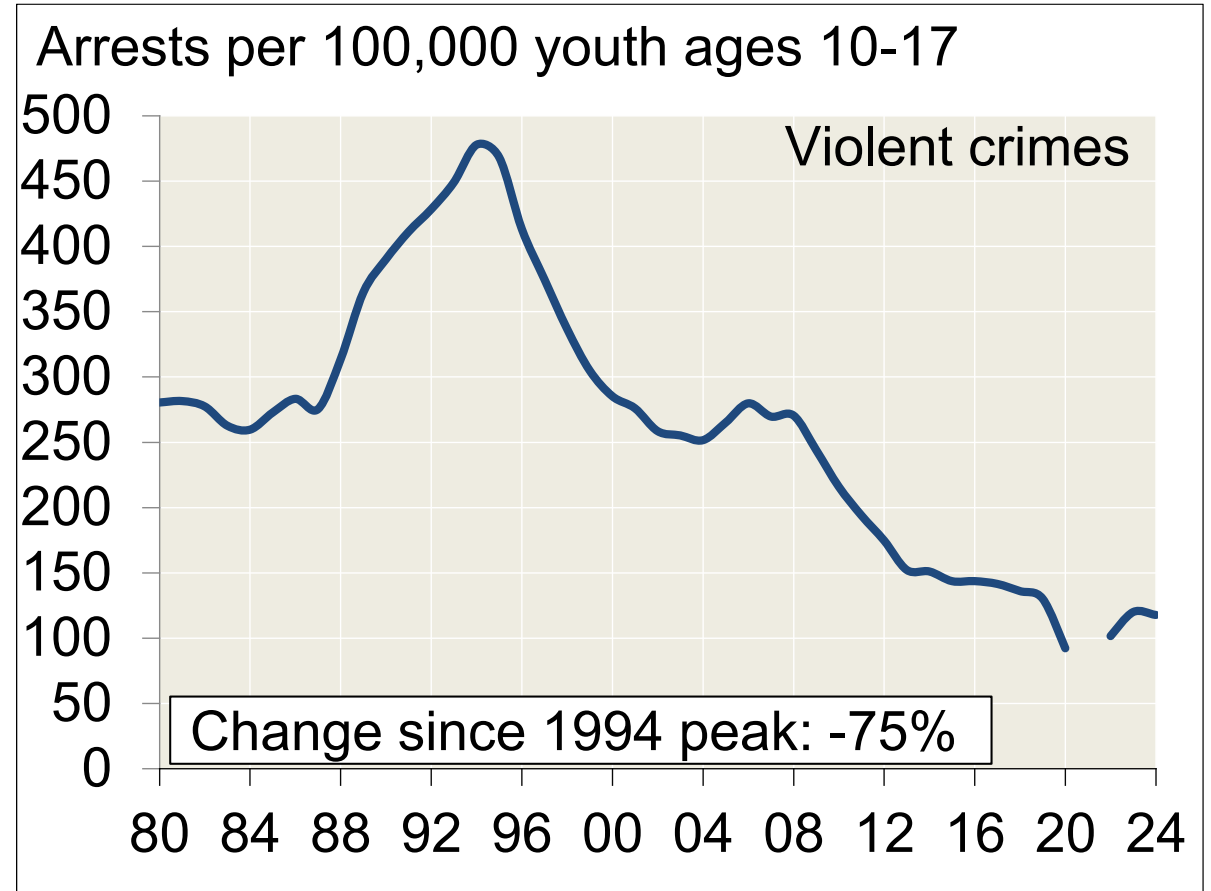
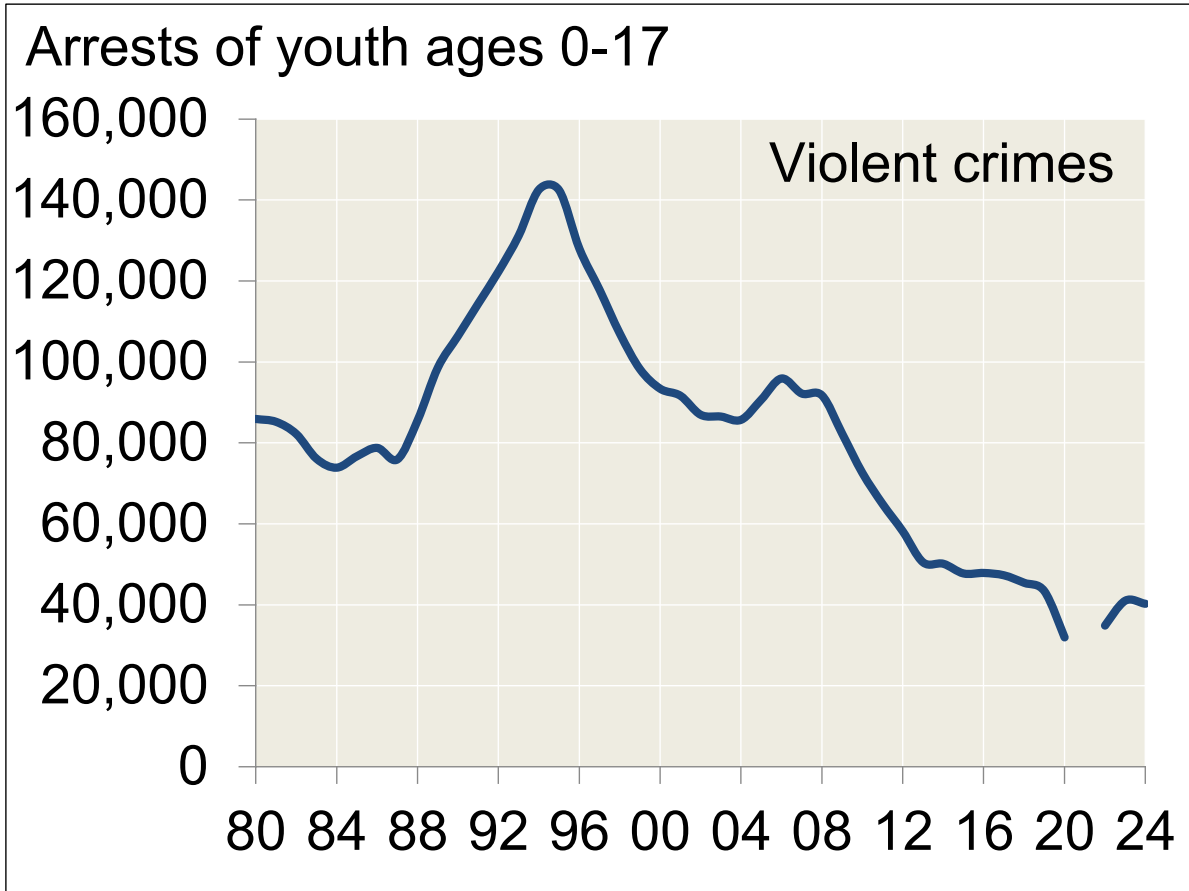
Youth arrests have reached historic lows.

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



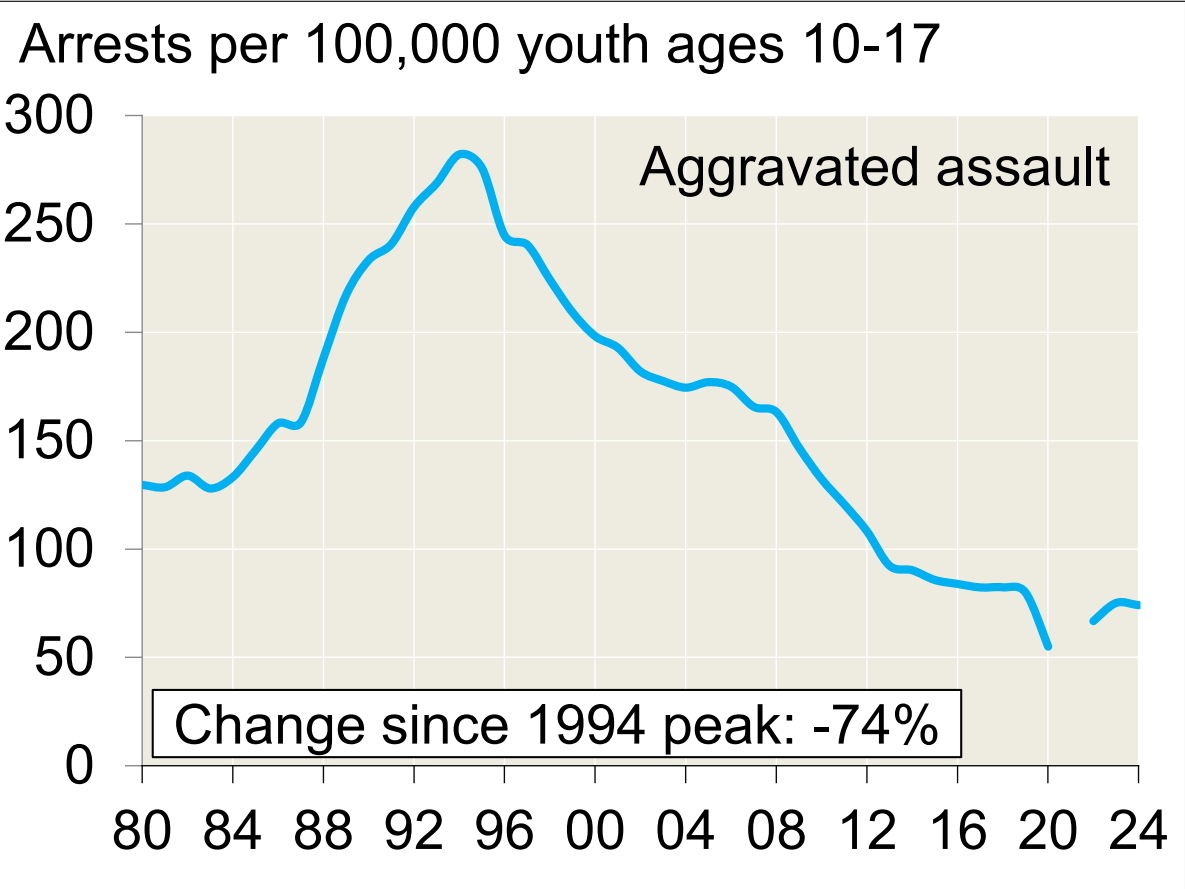
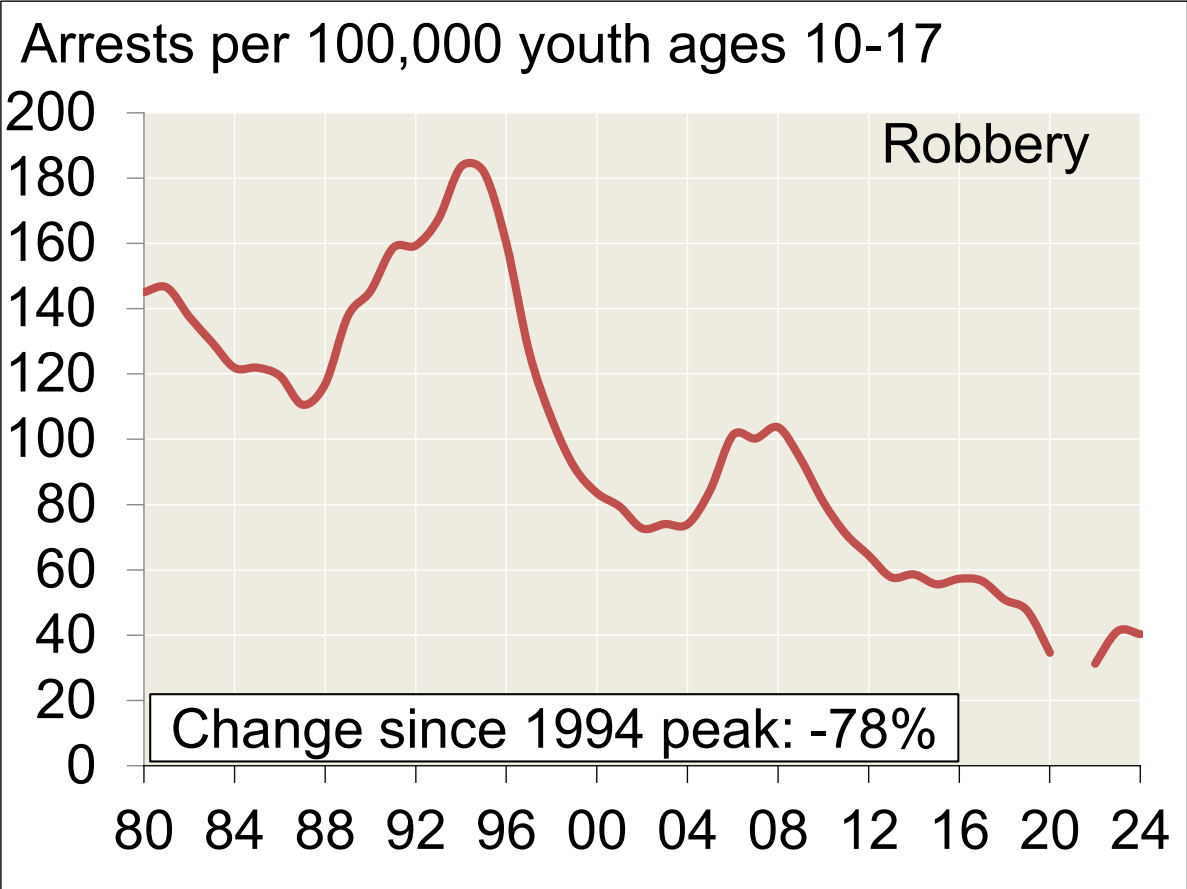
Data source: OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book (1980–2020); Crime in the United States Tables 38–40 (2022–2024).

Youth arrests for violence are down.



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

Arrests for robbery and aggravated assault are near their historic lows.



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

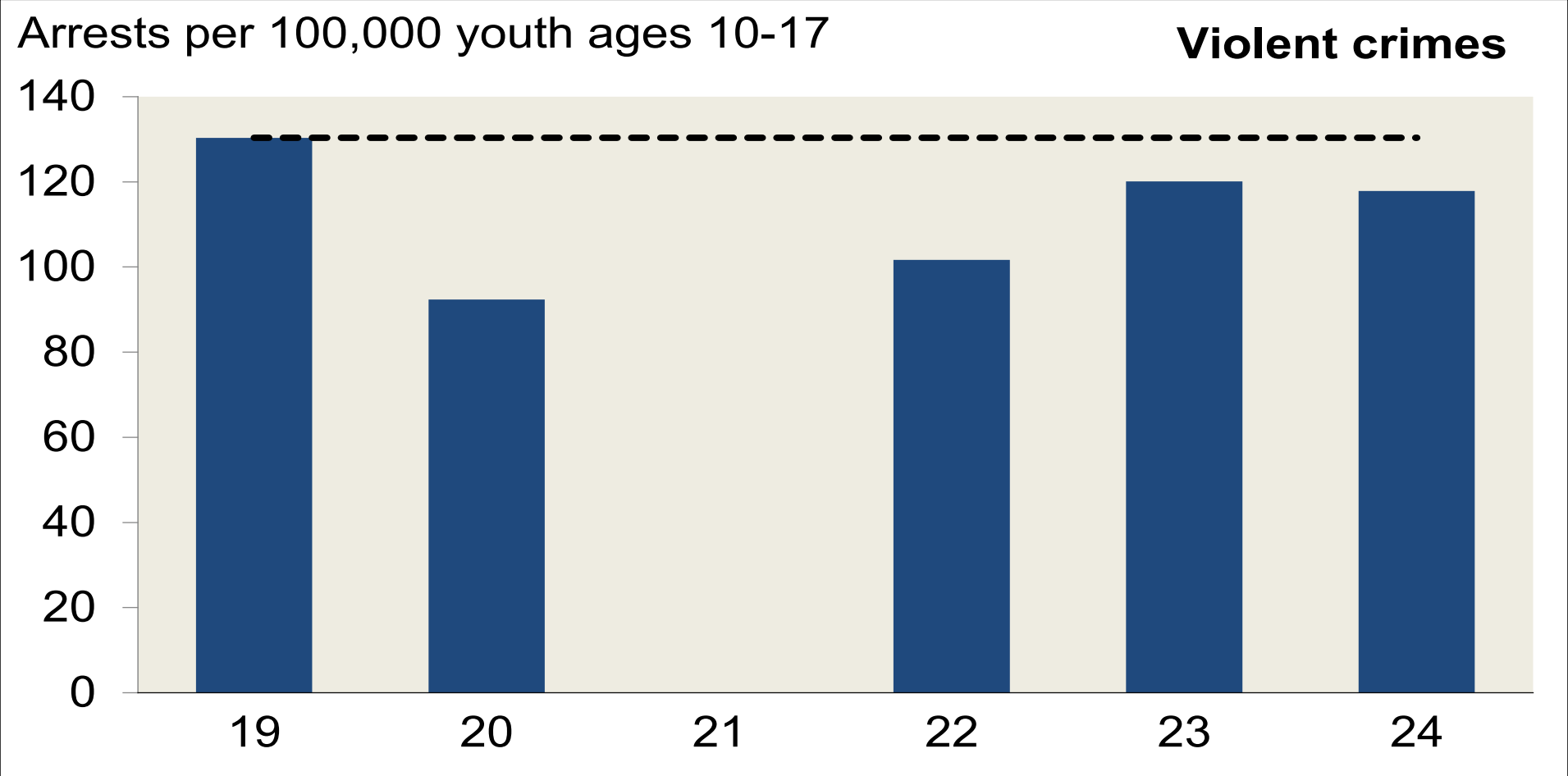
This decrease is likely to continue in 2025 and 2026 and may accelerate.

- Based on projections:
 - 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 youth
- Estimates 6–8k fewer homicides annually from 2023–26 compared to 2020–22

Source: Chip Brownlee, “A Top Analyst Explains Why America’s ‘Second Great Crime Deline’ Could Already be Here,” *The Trace*, May 12, 2026, accessed June 9, 2026, <https://www.thetrace.org/2026/05/us-murder-rate-historic-low-jeff-asher/>.

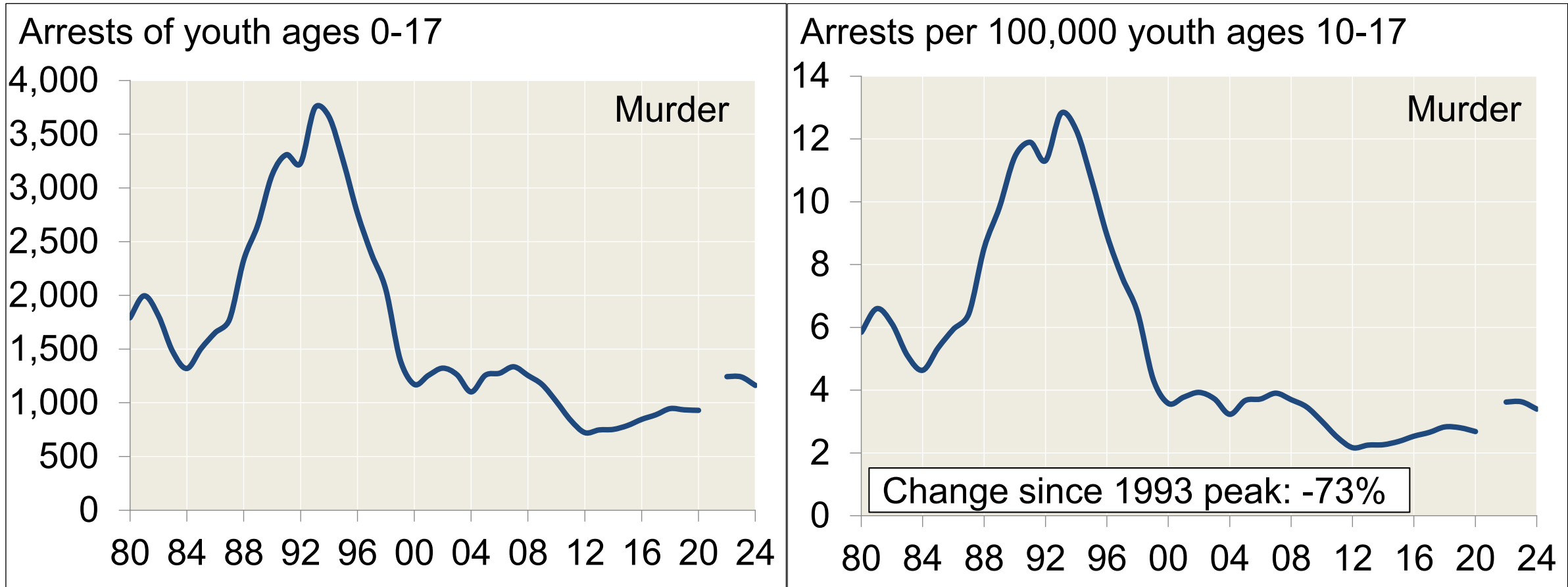
Why does it feel like violence is spiking?

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



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

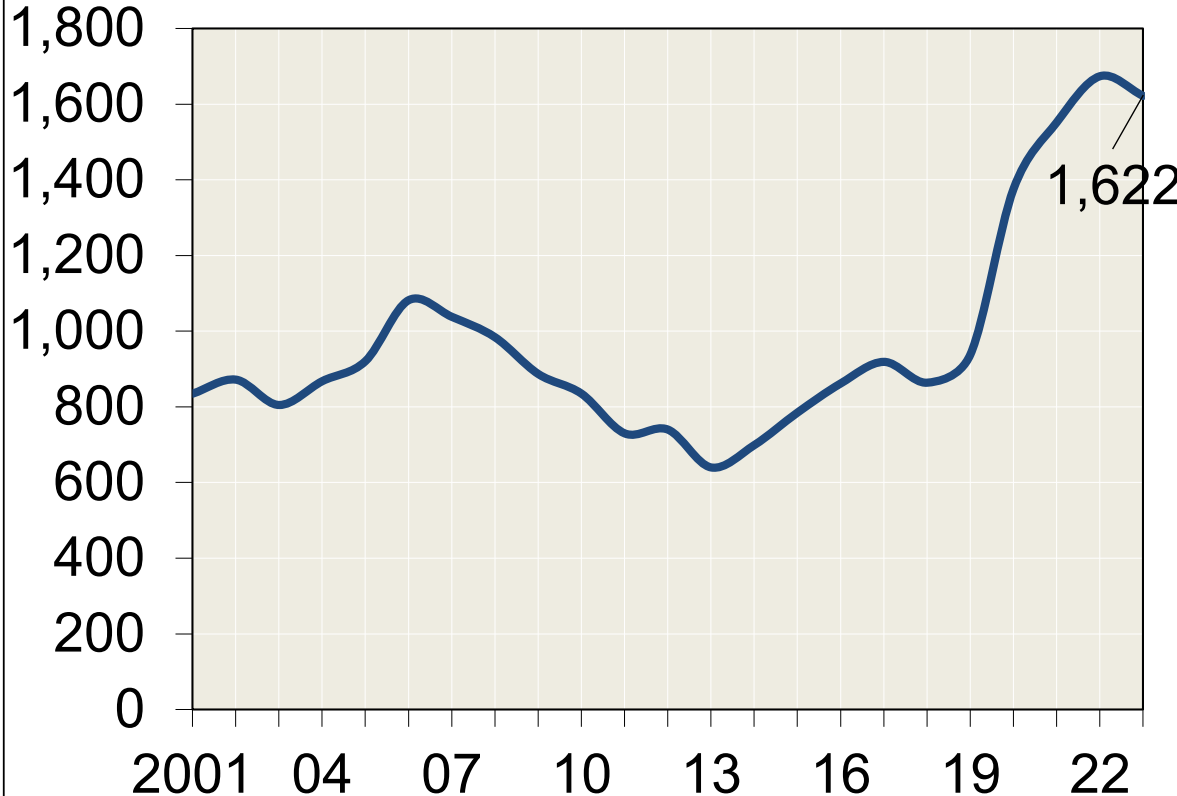
Youth arrests for murder have been on the rise since 2012.



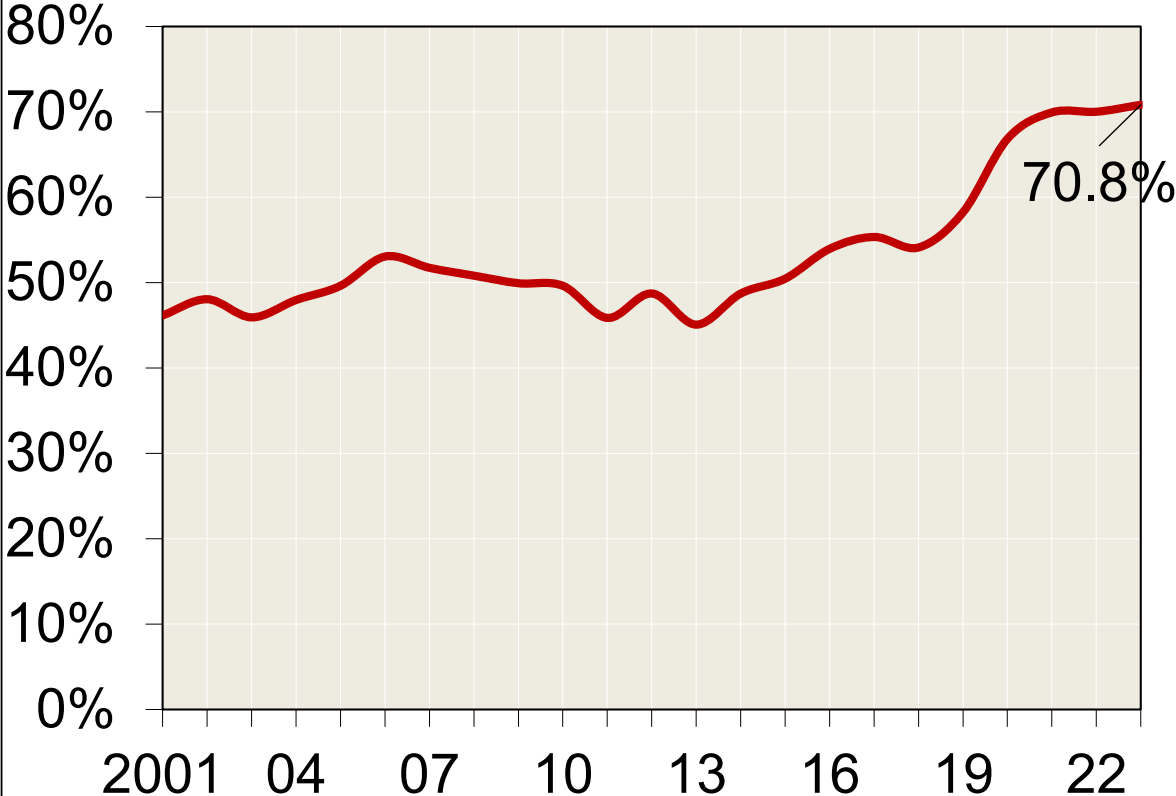
Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports.

The proportion of youth homicides involving a firearm has been rising.

Youth (ages 0-17) homicides involving a firearm

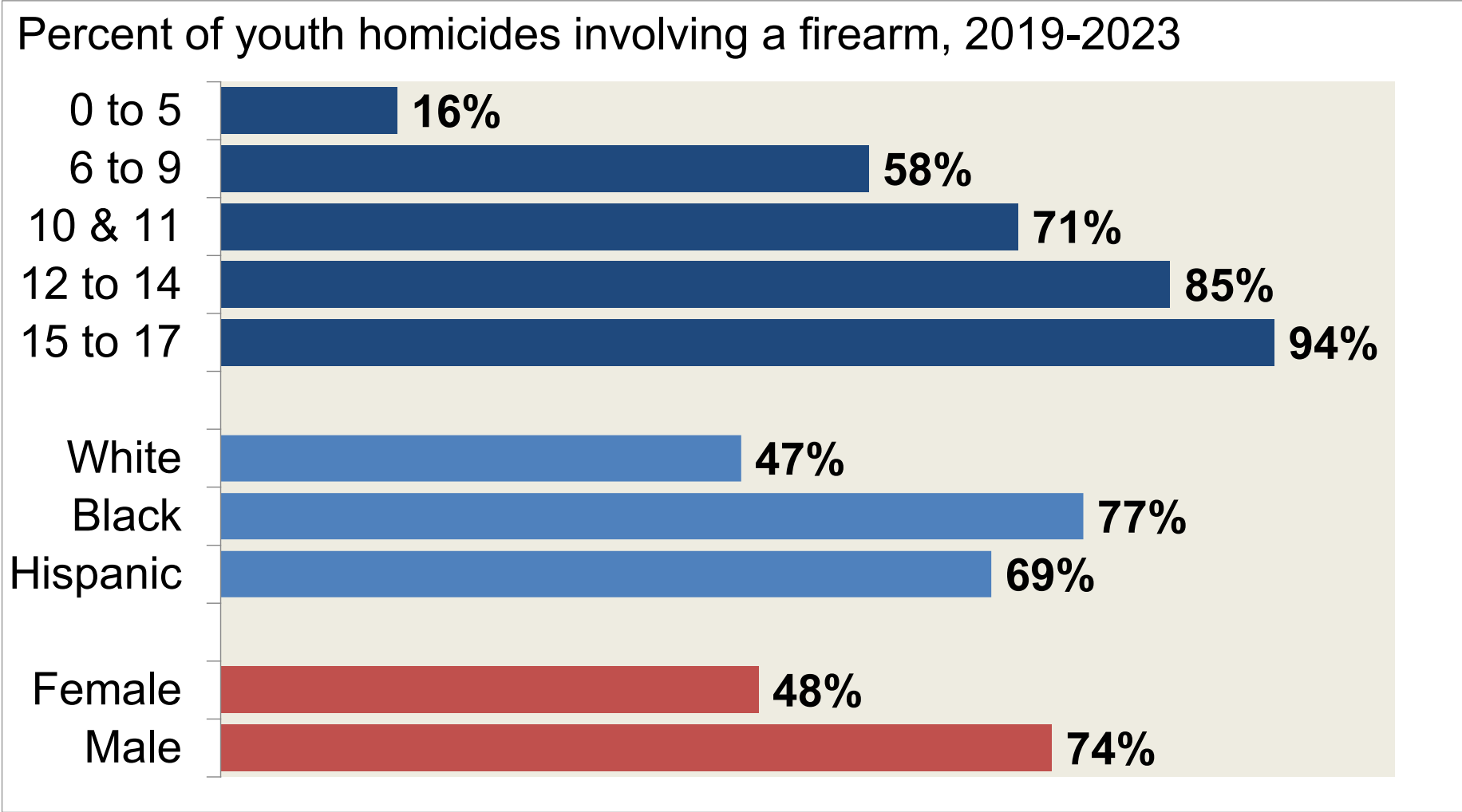


Percent of youth homicides involving a firearm



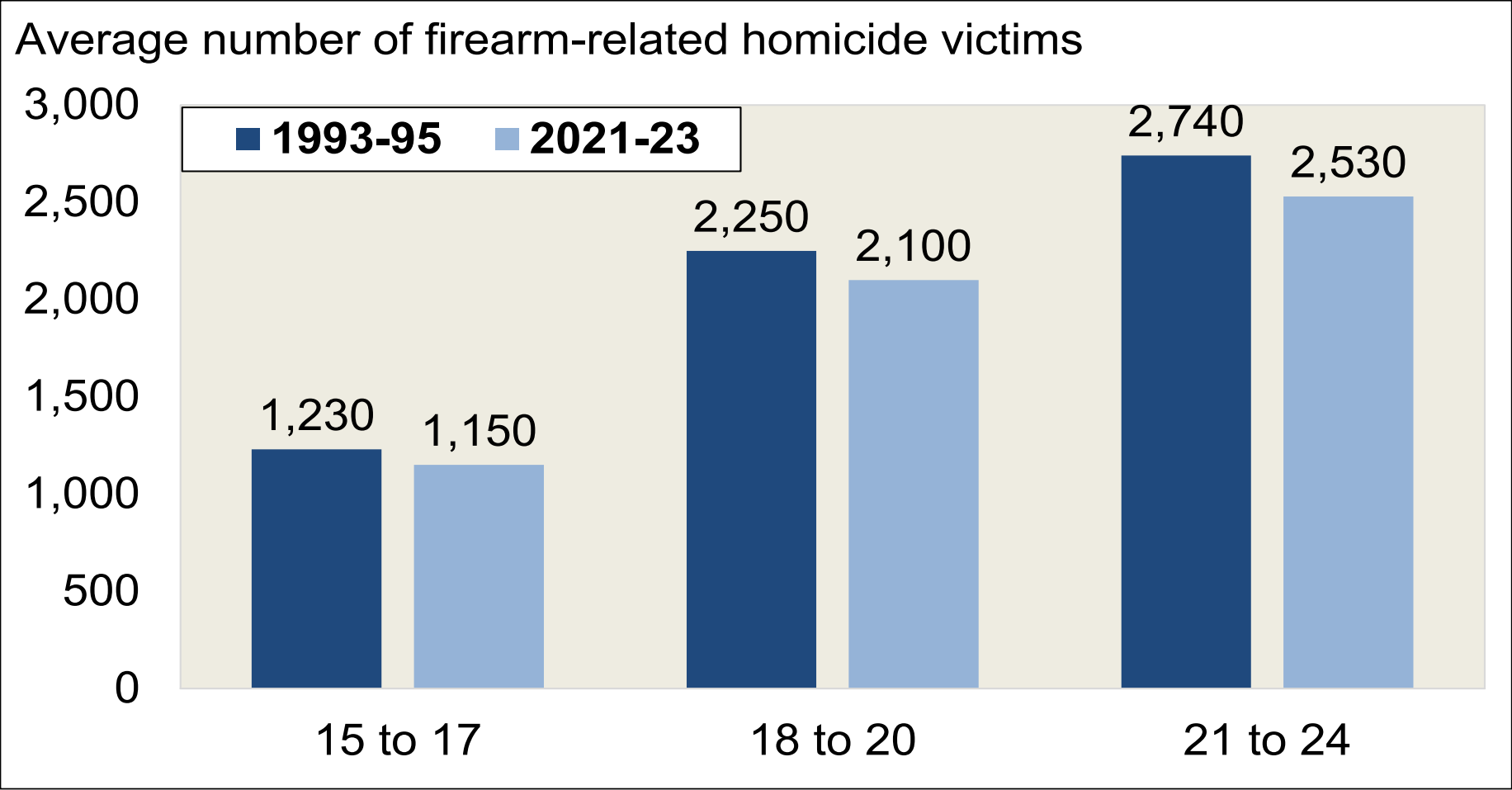
Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports

Firearm involvement varies by youth demographics.



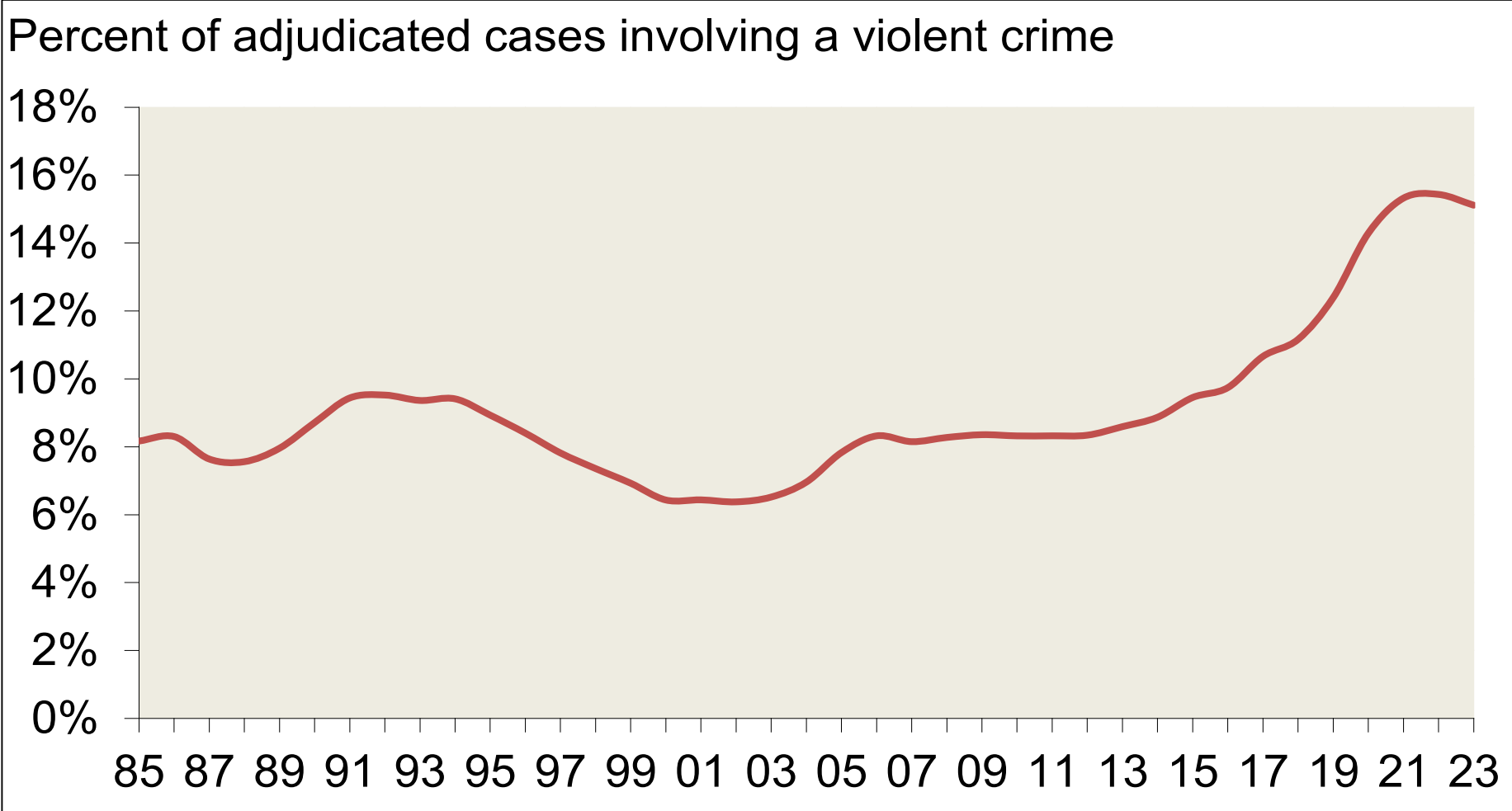
Data source: CDC Fatal Injury Reports.

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



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

The proportion of adjudicated cases involving a violent crime has grown in the past 20 years.



Data source: Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics.

Short-term increases or selective categories are highlighted, giving the impression of a system-wide crisis.

Newsweek

News Article ©

America Sees Rise in Minors Accused of Crimes

PUBLISHED SEP 23, 2024 AT 04:45 PM EDT UPDATED SEP 23, 2024 AT 05:00 PM EDT



An FBI Police vehicle is parked near bureau headquarters on September 15 in Washington, D.C.

BLUE CITY CRIME

Inside the teen takeovers threatening to explode this summer as Memorial Day weekend kicks off: 'Very worried'

Experts say social media and lack of consequences for juvenile offenders are fueling the growing phenomenon



By Kiera McDonald, Andrew Mark Miller · Fox News

Published May 16, 2026 9:00am EDT | Updated May 23, 2026 9:05am EDT

NATION

Juvenile Crime

Add Topic +

How a 'horrible perfect storm' fueled a 65% increase in homicides committed by kids



N'dea Yancey-Bragg
USA TODAY

Updated Oct. 18, 2024, 11:51 a.m. ET

Key Best Practices for Reducing Reoffending for High-Risk Youth

Determination of High Risk

- The seriousness of a youth's offense does not predict their risk of reoffending.
- Validated risk assessments, used by a trained professional, can help jurisdictions accurately identify youth's likelihood of reoffending.
- It's important to screen, assess, and address youth's mental health, if needed, but a youth's mental health is not predictive of their risk of reoffending.

Detention Decisions

- Use validated detention screening tools to measure public safety and flight risk rather than relying on the nature of youth's offenses.
- Don't use detention for family, service, or self-protection reasons or "to teach the youth a lesson." Detention can often cause more harm than good for youth and public safety.
- Establish a continuum of detention alternatives (e.g., shelters, mentoring, reporting centers) that are equipped to work with high-risk youth.

Dispositional Decisions

- Use pre-disposition risk assessments to guide supervision and service decisions, ensuring that any specific services directly address priority risk factors identified in the assessment.
- Prioritize community-based interventions over placement if youth are not an imminent risk to themselves or the community.
- Don't expect sanctions, longer or more intensive monitoring, or stricter probation conditions to change behavior without appropriate and effective risk-reduction services.

Supervision and Service Decisions

- Hold probation, providers, and facilities accountable for case plans that match high-risk youth to the right level and type of services.
- Ensure youth receive evidence-based risk-reduction services such as cognitive behavioral and family therapy.
- Ensure high-risk youth are prioritized for services, and that youth are engaged in treatment and receive an appropriate “dosage” of services.

Strongest Predictors of Serious Recidivism—Most Important for Matching

Dynamic Risk Factor Domains

1. Disruptive Behavior Problems
2. Substance Misuse
3. Family/Lack of Parental Monitoring
4. Negative Peer Influences
5. Attitude Supports Crime
6. Employment/Education
7. Use of Leisure Time/Community

Protective Factors Matter: Those Most Important for Reducing Recidivism

- Self-control
- Self-efficacy
- Prosocial engagements (sense of purpose, school connectedness for younger youth)
- Social support from caregivers



The Youth Protective Factors Study: Effective Supervision and Services Based on Risks, Strengths, and Development

The Youth Protective Factors Study is an unprecedented, multistate, multiyear examination of which risk and protective factors matter most when it comes to reoffending—particularly for more serious offenses that involve physical harm to another person (person offenses)—for youth ages 10 to 23 in the juvenile justice system. This brief is the first in a series that shares key findings to guide jurisdictions on research-based juvenile justice supervision, case planning, and service strategies to improve public safety and youth outcomes. These findings are especially pertinent during a time of rising concerns about youth crime, violence, and victimization.

This brief is based on analysis of over 22,000 youth who had a new delinquency or status offense complaint over 3 years (2015-2017) in 2 states and received a risk assessment from the probation department. Most of the youth ended up on some form of supervision. Supervision could have included involvement in a diversion program, informal supervision, probation, a secure placement, or any combination of the above, and incorporates the time from their risk assessment until their case was closed (including any supervision extensions). Researchers obtained the records of all new juvenile court petitions and adult charges for these youth during supervision and for an average 2.5-year post-supervision follow-up period. The study analyzed recidivism during and after supervision, including for person offenses (offenses ranging from simple assault to robbery and homicide), and identified which risk factors were most associated with reoffending for youth overall and of different ages (see Appendix for details).

The Youth Protective Factors Study: Effective Supervision and Services Based on Risks, Strengths, and Development

The Youth Protective Factors Study is an unprecedented, multistate, multiyear examination of which risk and protective factors are most significant when it comes to reoffending—especially for more serious offenses—among youth ages 10 to 23 in the juvenile justice system. This brief is the second in a series that shares key findings from the study to inform juvenile justice supervision, case planning, and service strategies aimed at improving public safety and youth outcomes.

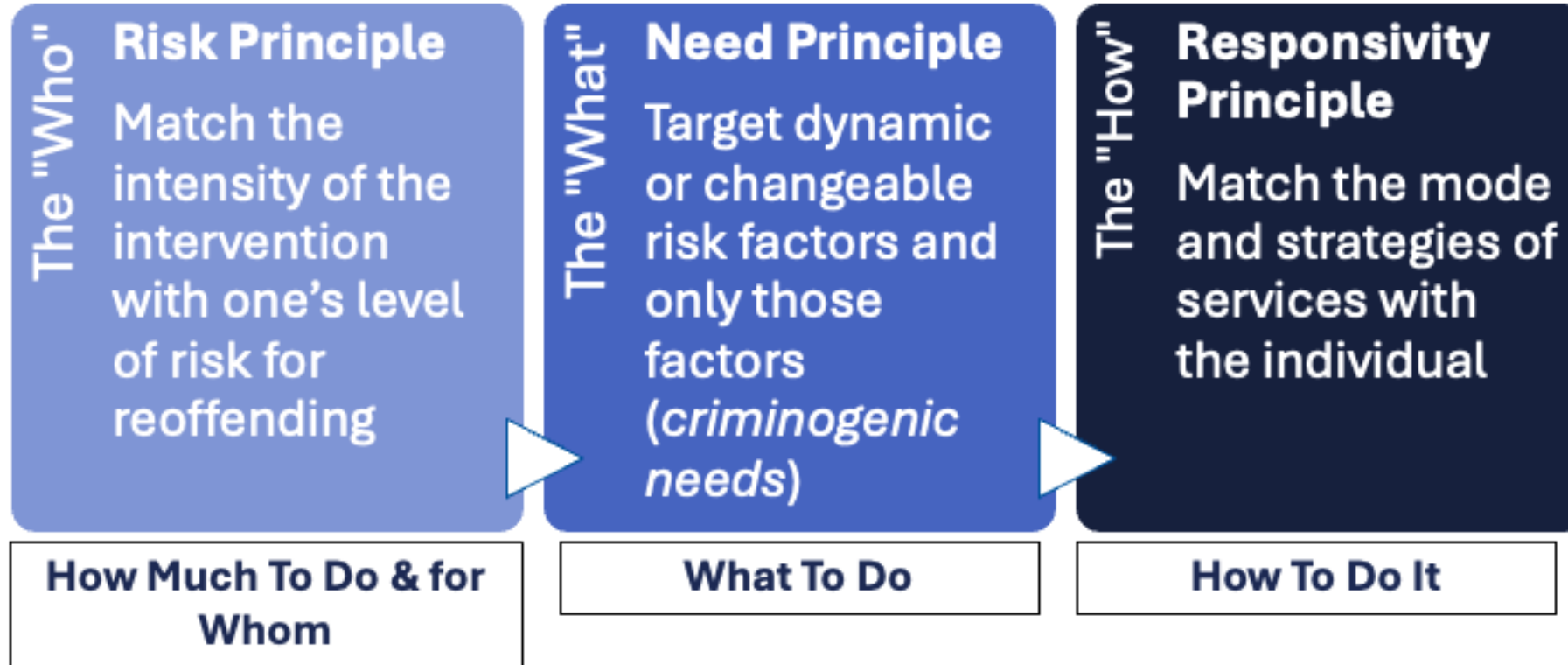
Background

Decades of research have shown that addressing the dynamic risk factors underlying youth delinquency, such as negative peer influences, attitudes that support crime, and inadequate supervision at home, is crucial for reducing recidivism. Over the last decade, some practitioners have expressed concerns about the potential limitations of such “deficit”-based approaches and have become interested in whether focusing on youths’ strengths could yield equal, if not greater, benefits for improving their outcomes. Despite this interest, little

research has been conducted to determine whether jurisdictions in each state to administer a protective factor survey at intake for all youth referred to or adjudicated in the youth justice system. Based on existing research, the survey assessed four promising areas, with nine specific measures, aimed at reducing youth recidivism:

- **Prosocial Identity:** Assesses the extent to which youth view and value their future possible selves as prosocial or moral (e.g., kind, honest, respectful).

Risk/needs assessment should be paired with the Risk-Need-Responsivity Approach



Case Study: Applying Best Practices to Real World Cases

Case Scenario: Violation of Probation Hearing

Ryan, age 16, was adjudicated delinquent for **felony assault with a weapon** and placed on 12 months of probation, including:

- Anger management programming
- School attendance
- Victim-related conditions

Three months into supervision, Ryan is before the court on a **violation petition for failure to attend anger management classes**.

Alleged Violation:

- Missed 4 anger management sessions
- Missed 2 probation appointments

Ryan reports unreliable transportation and scheduling conflicts with school. Probation notes that Ryan did not proactively communicate these barriers.

Case Scenario: Violation of Probation Hearing

- During a confrontation, **Ryan used a razor blade**, causing a deep facial laceration. The **victim required multiple stitches** and faces likely permanent scarring, with potential future plastic surgery. Ryan initially minimized the conduct but has since **expressed remorse**, while continuing to characterize the incident as self-defense.
- Ryan lives with their father and 17-year-old sister. The father works overnight shifts, resulting in **limited supervision** during evenings. Ryan has not had contact with their mother for several years. The family has experienced housing instability in the past but is currently housed. Ryan reports past **exposure to neighborhood violence** and prior peer altercations.
- School records show **chronic truancy and failing grades** beginning in middle school. In 9th grade, Ryan's academic performance improved, and attendance issues decreased, though unexcused absences remain. Ryan has **no prior adjudications but has had multiple school discipline referrals for fighting**.

How The CSG Justice Center Partners with Jurisdictions to Improve Public Safety and Youth Outcomes

The CSG Justice Center partners with states and local jurisdictions around the country to improve outcomes for youth and families.



Courting Judicial Excellence

The CSG Justice Center partners with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to **improve how juvenile courts are structured and supported.**



Collaborating for Youth and Public Safety Initiative

We partner with states to **strengthen and scale research-based services and supports for youth** and their families.



IOYouth

Improving Outcomes for Youth (IOYouth) works with state and local jurisdictions to **align their policies, practices, and resource allocation with what research shows works** to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for youth while enhancing public safety.



The CSG Justice Center partners with states and local jurisdictions around the country to improve outcomes for youth and families.

STEPPING UP FOR YOUTH

Helps state or county leaders identify, implement, and expand policies and best practices to **reduce detention and increase connections to care for youth with behavioral health needs** who are impacted by the juvenile justice system.



REENTRY 2030

Reentry 2030 unites **government and community leaders across justice, housing, health, and workforce sectors** around one bold goal: Reduce recidivism 30% by 2030.



Thank You!

For more information, please contact Josh Weber at jweber@csg.org

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