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Youth Still Leading Violent Crime Drop: 1988-2018

by Jeffrey A. Butts

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Arrest rates for violent offenses reached 30-year lows in 2018, but the scale of the decline varied by the age of arrestees. Between 1988 and 2018 (the most recent national crime data available), violent crime arrests of youth under age 18 declined far more than arrests of adults ages 18 and older.

Based on statistics compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the national violent crime arrest rate declined 38 percent overall, but the steepest declines were observed among youth ages 10 to 14 (-53%) and 15 to 17 (-54%). The arrest rate for 18-20 year-olds dropped 47 percent while the arrest rates for adults ages 21-24 and 25-49 declined 42 percent and 23 percent, respectively.

In 1988, the violent crime arrest rate for youth ages 10-14 was 347 per 100,000. By 2018, the 10-14 rate had declined to 163 per 100,000. Similarly, the violent crime arrest rate for youth ages 15 through 17 was 615 per 100,000 in 1988, but fell to 282 per 100,000 in 2018.

Violent crime arrest rates for juveniles under age 18 as well as young adults ages 18-20 increased sharply during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Arrests of 18-20 year-olds reached a peak of 968 per 100,000 in 1994 while the arrest rate for 15-17 year-olds peaked at 931 per 100,000 in 1995 and violent crime arrests for 10-14 year-olds topped out at 551 per 100,000 in 1994.

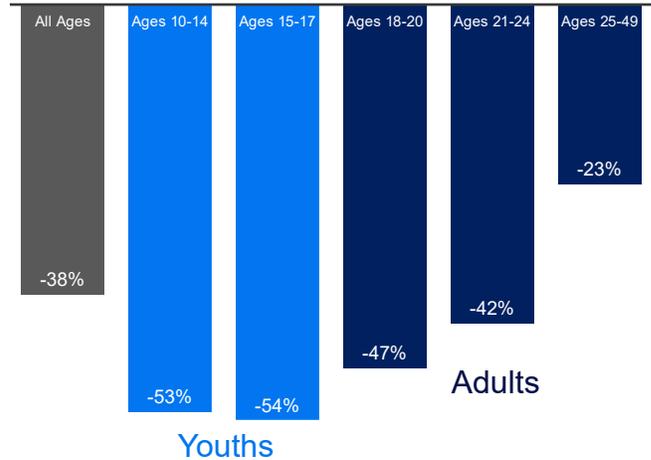
Arrest rates then plummeted among all age groups, but juvenile rates fell more relative to adult rates. In 1995, the arrest rate for 15-17 year-olds was nearly the same (97 percent) of the rate for 18-20 year-olds. By 2018, the 15-17 year-old rate had fallen to just 75 percent of the rate for 18-20 year-olds. In 1994, the arrest rate for youth ages 10-14 was twice as high as the rate for adults ages 25 to 49. From 2009 through 2018, the 10-14 year-old arrest rate dipped below the rate for adults age 25 and older.

All age groups experienced falling arrest rates in another important category: weapon offenses. Again, however, juvenile arrest rates declined more than arrest rates for adults. The weapon arrest rate for 10-14 year-olds dropped 59 percent between 1988 and 2018, while the arrest rate for youth ages 15 to 17 declined 61 percent.

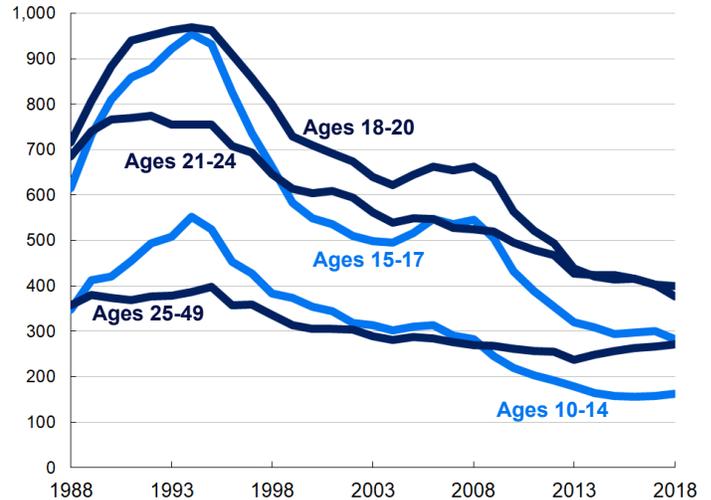
DATA SOURCE:

National arrest estimates for 1988-2014 are from by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). Estimates for 2015-2018 were calculated by John Jay College using BJS methods. Violent crimes include forcible rape, which was redefined by the FBI in 2013. Data for years prior to 2013 are adjusted to approximate the revised definition.

Changes in Violent Crime Arrest Rates: 1988-2018



Violent Crime Arrests per 100,000: 1988-2018



Weapon Offense Arrests

	2018 Arrests per 100,000	Pct. Change: 1988-2018
Youth: Ages 10-14	51	-59%
Youth: Ages 15-17	98	-61%
Adults: Ages 18-20	150	-51%
Adults: Ages 21-24	172	-29%
Adults: Ages 25 and Older	56	-25%