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As Serious Juvenile Crime Declined, Police Made More Arrests for Less Serious Offenses

by Jeffrey A. Butts

In the United States, the number of arrests made by law enforcement and involving juveniles (or, youth under age 18) generally declined since the mid-1990s, reaching a 30-year low in 2010.

Between 1995 and 2010, juvenile arrests overall dropped nearly 40 percent. The level of violent crime arrests in 2010 was half the level of 1995. Murder arrests declined more than 60 percent, while robbery arrests and serious (aggravated) assaults were down almost 50 percent.

Property offenses fell between 1995 and 2010 as well. Burglary arrests dipped more than 50 percent since 1995, and compared with 1980 juvenile burglary arrests were down nearly 70 percent. Larceny-theft arrests dropped more than 40 percent, while motor vehicle thefts plummeted nearly 80 percent, continuing a long-term trend that began in the late 1980s.

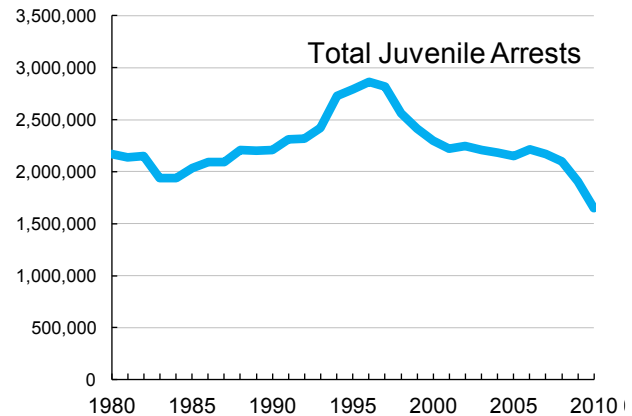
Taken together, arrests for the eight serious offenses included in the FBI Crime Index decreased nearly 50 percent between 1995 and 2010.

Arrests for some of the most common, less serious offenses, however, increased substantially from 1985 through 2005, and they remained at higher levels in 2010 when compared with the early 1980s. As a result, offenses such as minor (non-aggravated) assaults, drug law violations, and disorderly conduct accounted for a much larger proportion of all juvenile arrests in 2010 than was true in 1980.

As serious and violent juvenile crime declined after the 1990s, arrests by law enforcement appear to have shifted toward less serious offenses.

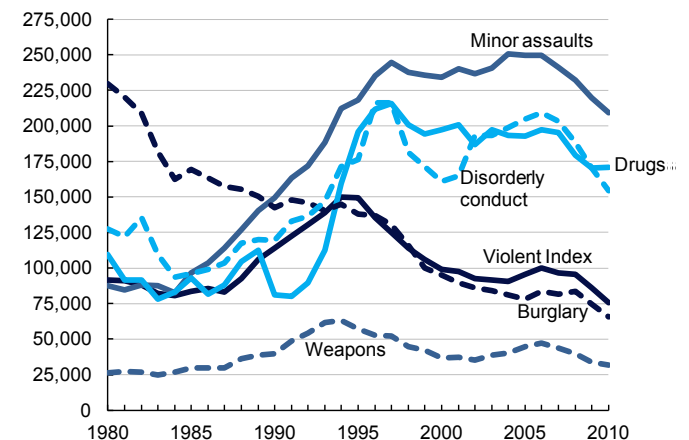
Juvenile arrests increased through the mid-1990s and then dropped nearly 40 percent by 2010

National Estimate of Arrests



Juvenile arrests for less serious offenses grew during the 1990s but did not decline substantially afterwards

National Estimate of Arrests



Data source: Snyder, Howard and Mulako-Wangota, J., Arrest Data Analysis Tool at www.bjs.gov. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice (1980-2009). Estimates for 2010 calculated directly using data from *Crime in the United States 2010*, Federal Bureau of Investigation.