

CALIFORNIA'S YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT ARREST RATES CONTINUE A HISTORIC DECLINE



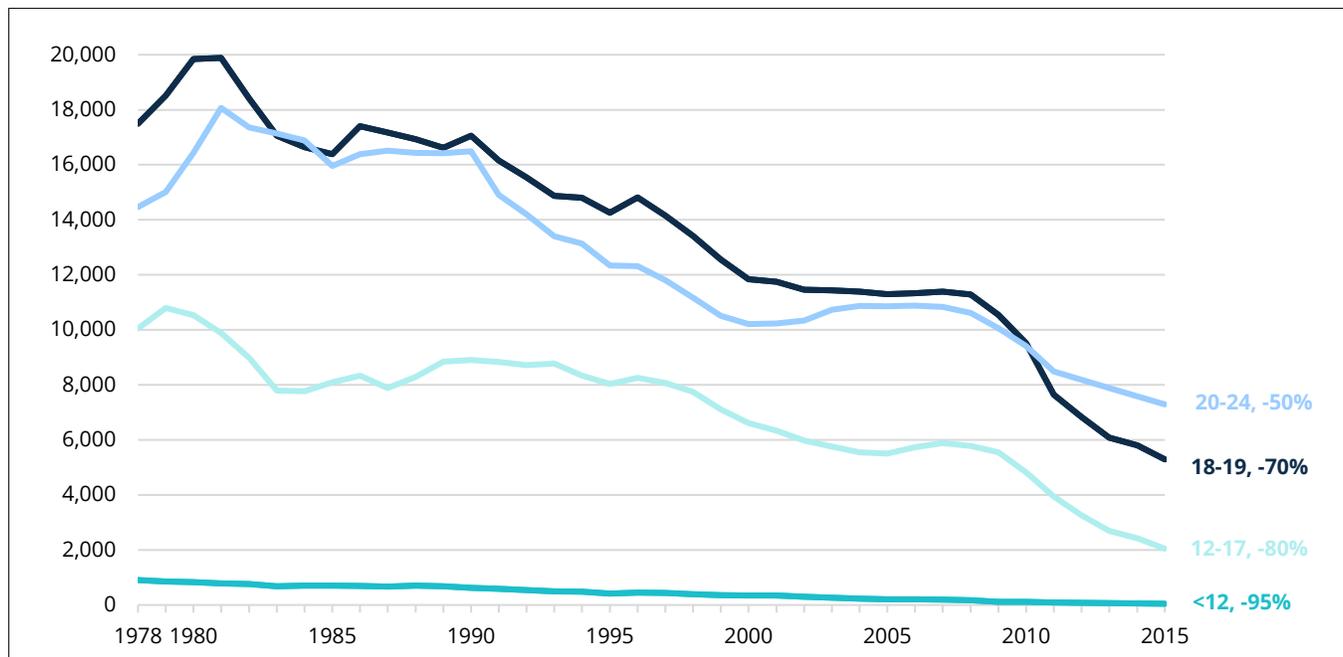
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Fact Sheet

In 2015, jurisdictions across California reported another year of marked decline in youth and young adult¹ arrests, with rates falling below 2014 levels and continuing a decades-long pattern of decline.

Figure 1. Trends in the arrest rates of Californians under age 25, 1978-2015



Sources: DOJ (2011, 2015, 2016, 2016a). Notes: Population for youth ages 10-11 are used to calculate rates for the under age 12 category.

- **Youth and young adult arrests fell by 31,500 from 2014 to 2015.**

The total arrest rate of young people under age 25² fell by 8 percent between 2014 and 2015, to 66 percent below the level reported in 1978, the first year for which statistics are available (DOJ, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2016a). This 8 percent decline represents a decrease of 31,500 arrests from 2014 to 2015, contributing to a drop of nearly 415,000 in the number of youth and young adult arrests reported since 1978 (DOJ, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2016a).

- **Felony arrest rates for youth and young adults fell by 42 percent from 2010 to 2015.**

Recent reforms have facilitated ongoing declines in arrests, particularly felony arrests. In 2011, California decriminalized marijuana possession and, in 2014, the state enacted Proposition 47, which reclassified some drug and property offenses from felonies to misdemeanors. These reforms may have contributed to sharp declines in felony drug and property arrests of Californians under 20 years old. However, arrests for offenses not specifically addressed by the reforms, including violent felony arrests, also declined between 2010 and 2015 (DOJ, 2016).

¹ “Youth” refers to people under age 18. “Young adult” refers to those ages 18-24.

² At the time of publication, arrests for ages 20-24 were not yet available for 2015. These arrest statistics were estimated using the percentage of arrests for ages 20-29 comprised of 20-24 year olds in 2014.

- **Arrest rates for the youngest Californians are declining most rapidly.**

Arrest rates for youth under 12 and ages 12 to 14 have declined most rapidly since 1978, falling by 95 percent and 82 percent, respectively (DOJ, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2016a). Because childhood arrest is a strong indicator of future justice system involvement, the steep drops in arrests reported for these age groups suggest that positive arrest trends will continue as California youth reach adulthood (CJCJ, 2015). Arrest rates for older youth and young adults also exhibited declines, but fell less rapidly (See Figure 1).

- **Decreases in youth and young adult arrests contribute to reduced detention and incarceration.**

Falling youth and young adult arrest rates are enabling decreases in state correctional institution populations. The population of the state's youth correctional facilities, the Division of Juvenile Justice, has declined by more than 90 percent since 1996, while the average daily populations at county juvenile facilities have fallen 52 percent, from over 13,000 in 2005 to approximately 6,300 in 2015 (BSCC, 2016; CDCR, 2007, 2016). These trends are impacting young adult incarceration as well, with new prison admissions for 18-24 year olds falling by half since the late 1990s (CDCR, 2014).

The causes of these declines in arrest remain unknown, but trends suggests that high rates of incarceration are not required to protect public safety. California sends far fewer young people to locked facilities today than it did in the 1990s, yet youth arrests continue to fall and now stand at the lowest level ever reliably recorded.

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