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Youth criminal justice in Canada: A compendium of statistics

Introduction
This compendium presents an overview of statistical information on Canada’s youth criminal justice system, including information on youth contact with the police, youth courts, and the youth correctional system from 1999 (a few years before implementation of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act, YCJA, 2003*) to the most recent year with available data.¹ Youth includes persons aged 12 to 17 years, consistent with the *YCJA*.

Many factors can influence statistics on police-reported youth crime, youth courts, and youth corrections, including police enforcement (related to factors such as resources, priorities, policies, and procedures), police and Crown charging practices, the structure and operation of courts and corrections, along with social and economic factors and public reporting to police.² Most incidents of victimization do not come to the attention of the police. Just under one-third (31%) of criminal incidents were reported to the police in 2014.³

This compendium follows the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS) (Statistics Canada) reporting of the police-reported youth crime rate (which includes *Criminal Code* offences, excluding traffic and federal statute violations such as drug offences and offences related to the *YCJA*), as well as the police-reported Youth Crime Severity Index (YCSI) and youth court statistics (both of which include *Criminal Code* offences, including traffic offences, as well as federal statute violations).

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¹ Most information was publicly available in Statistics Canada’s [CANSIM](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/) database. The most recent information for police-reported youth crime was 2014. The most recent information for youth courts and youth corrections was 2013/2014.
² For more information on factors influencing police-reported crime, see Boyce, Jillian. 2015. *Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2014*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.
Youth population
In 2014, there were approximately 2.3 million youth in Canada aged 12 to 17.

Aboriginal youth represented approximately 7% of youth in Canada in 2014. The territories, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan had the highest proportion of Aboriginal youth (Chart 1).

Visible minority youth represented approximately 26% of youth in Canada in 2014. Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta had the highest proportion of visible minority youth (Chart 2).
According to population projections, Canada’s youth population will increase overall and in most jurisdictions over the next decade or so (Chart 3). Estimates suggest that by 2031, visible minority youth will make up 38% of youth in Canada and the Aboriginal youth population will remain relatively stable.

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 052-0005 - Projected population, by projection scenario, age and sex, as of July 1, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (persons). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.

Chart 3. Percent of projected change in Canada’s youth population, 2015-2031

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percent Change (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>+17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEI</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NB</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QC</td>
<td>+22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON</td>
<td>+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>+20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>+28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>+46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>+17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YT</td>
<td>+25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>+20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NU</td>
<td>+30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 052-0005 - Projected population, by projection scenario, age and sex, as of July 1, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (persons). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.

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4 Population projections were based on the medium-growth and 1991/1992 to 2010/2011 interprovincial migrations trends scenario defined by certain assumptions about fertility, life expectancy, interprovincial migration, immigration, number of non-permanent residents, and emigration.
Police-reported youth crime

Police-reported youth crime can be measured by the youth crime rate and the Youth Crime Severity Index (YCSI).\(^5\) The youth crime rate measures the volume of police-reported *Criminal Code* offences, excluding traffic and federal statute violations such as drug offences and offences related to the *YCJA*.\(^6\) The YCSI measures both the volume and seriousness of police-reported *Criminal Code* offences, including traffic and federal statute violations.\(^7\) Each offence in the YCSI is assigned a weight based on its average court sentence, with more serious offences having a greater impact on the index.

Youth crime rate

According to police records, about 94,100 youth (aged 12-17) were accused of a criminal offence in 2014, a rate of 4,016 per 100,000 youth in Canada (excluding traffic and federal statute offences). The majority (68%) of youth crime involved non-violent offences.\(^8\) Youth crime rates were lowest in British Columbia (3,007 per 100,000 youth) and Quebec (3,031), and highest in the territories (e.g., 28,175 in Northwest Territories), Saskatchewan (11,816), and Manitoba (7,424) (Chart 4).

\(^5\) Information comes from the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR2), publicly available in Statistics Canada’s CANSIM database, and differs slightly from that published in Statistics Canada’s report *Youth crime in Canada, 2014*, which draws from a different survey (the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey) and different method for counting accused. Information reflects nearly 100% of police services. For more information on the methodology behind police-reported crime statistics, see Boyce, Jillian. 2015. *Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2014*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

Trends in youth crime are not directly comparable to trends in overall crime. The youth crime rate and Youth Crime Severity Index (YCSI) are based on the number of youth accused rather than the number of criminal incidents. For more information, see Boyce, Jillian. 2015. *Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2014*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

\(^6\) The youth crime rate is calculated by summing the number of youth accused of *Criminal Code* offences (excluding traffic and federal statute violations such as drug offences), then dividing by the population, and expressed as a rate based on 100,000 youth in the population.

\(^7\) The YCSI is calculated by summing the weighted offences and dividing by the population. To enable comparison, the YCSI is standardized to a base year of 100. For more information on the YCSI, see Wallace, Marnie et al. 2009. *Measuring crime in Canada: Introducing the Crime Severity Index and improvements to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-004-X.; Babyak, Colin et al. 2009. *The methodology of the police-reported Crime Severity Index*, SSC Annual Meeting. June 2009 Proceedings of the Survey Methods Section.

\(^8\) Non-violent offences do not involve the use or threat of violence against the person.
Between 1999 and 2014, Canada’s youth crime rate decreased overall (-38%) and among all offence categories: property crime (-49%), violent crime (-26%), and ‘other’ Criminal Code offences (-12%) (Chart 5). Rates declined in all provinces, while those in the territories have fluctuated over time, due partly to their small populations (Charts 6-9).

---

9 Property crimes involve unlawful acts to gain property, such as break and enter and theft. Violent crimes involve the use or threatened use of violence against a person, such as homicide, assault, sexual assault, and robbery. ‘Other’ Criminal Code offences include offences not classified as violent or property, such as mischief and bail violations.
Source: Statistics Canada. Table 252-0051 - Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, annual (number unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Youth Crime Severity Index (YCSI)

In 2014, Canada’s YCSI was 60.3. Like the youth crime rates, the YCSI was lowest in British Columbia (38.6) and highest in the territories (e.g., 333.8 in Northwest Territories) and Saskatchewan (165.8) (Chart 10).
Between 1999 and 2014, both the violent (-23%) and non-violent YCSI (-49%) decreased (-39% overall) (Chart 11).
Police charging
In 2014, 45% of youth accused of a criminal offence were charged (excluding traffic and federal statute offences), and 55% were dealt with by some other means, such as a warning, caution, or referral to a community program. Since the implementation of the *YCJA* (2003), the rate of youth who are not charged continues to be higher than the rate of youth who are charged, although this difference has narrowed since 2009 (Chart 12).

Source: Statistics Canada. *Table 252-0051 - Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, annual (number unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.*
Youth courts

Caseload
There were just under 40,000 youth court cases of Criminal Code and federal statute offences in 2013/2014 (including offences related to traffic, drugs, and the YCJA). The number of youth court cases has declined over time, most notably with the implementation of the YCJA (2003) (Chart 13). The 2013/2014 youth court caseload was the lowest number in 20 years (since data were first collected in 1991/1992). The number of cases declined among all offence categories (i.e., violent, property, ‘other’ Criminal Code offences, traffic, drug-related offences, YCJA offences).

Decisions
More than half (56%) of youth court cases in 2013/2014 resulted in a finding of guilt, and a further 41% were stayed or withdrawn (about 2% resulted in an acquittal). Findings of guilt have declined over time, while stays/withdrawals have increased (Chart 14).

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10 A case represents one or more charges against an accused person or company that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final disposition. Cases include violent, property, and ‘other’ Criminal Code offences, as well as Criminal Code traffic offences, drug-related offences, and Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) offences. Information on youth courts comes from the Integrated Criminal Court Survey. For more information on the methodology behind youth court statistics, see Alam, Sarah. 2015. Youth court statistics in Canada, 2013/2014. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.
In 2013/2014, the proportion of guilty findings ranged from 45% in Ontario to 77% in New Brunswick (Chart 15).

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 252-0064 - Youth courts, number of cases and charges by type of decision, annual (number), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Sentences

Probation, the most common type of youth court sentence, was imposed in 58% of youth court cases in Canada in 2013/2014. Probation is a community-based sentence which requires youth to abide by certain conditions, such as reporting to a probation officer and keeping the peace.

Custody sentences were imposed in 15% of cases, down from 28% in 1999/2000 (Chart 16). The decrease in custody has been offset somewhat by sentences to deferred custody and supervision, imposed in about 4% to 5% of cases since being introduced in 2003 as an alternative to custody.

A deferred custody and supervision order allows youth who would otherwise be sentenced to custody to serve their sentence in the community under a number of conditions. Violations of conditions may result in the youth being sent to custody.

The proportion of youth court cases resulting in custody in 2013/2014 was highest in Yukon (25%) and lowest in Quebec (9%) (Chart 17).

1 Probation is a community-based sentence which requires youth to abide by certain conditions, such as reporting to a probation officer and keeping the peace.

12 A deferred custody and supervision order allows youth who would otherwise be sentenced to custody to serve their sentence in the community under a number of conditions. Violations of conditions may result in the youth being sent to custody.
The proportion of cases resulting in custody has decreased in all jurisdictions (Charts 18-21).

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 252-0067- Youth courts, guilty cases by type of sentence, annual (number), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Case processing time

The median length of time from first to last appearance in youth court was 120 days in 2013/2014 (about 4 months), up from 75 days in 1999/2000 (Chart 22).13

---

13 The median elapsed time is the mid-point of the number of days taken to complete a case, from the first to last court appearance.
Yukon recorded the longest youth court case processing time in 2013/2014, three times longer than the shortest time in Prince Edward Island (155 days and 50 days, respectively) (Chart 23).

Since 1999/2000, case processing time has increased in all jurisdictions except Saskatchewan (-13 days) (Charts 24-27).
### Table 252-0066 - Youth courts, cases by median elapsed time in days, annual (number unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Newfoundland and Labrador</td>
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<td>85</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>141</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
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<td>New Brunswick</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Statistics Canada. Table 252-0066 - Youth courts, cases by median elapsed time in days, annual (number unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
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Source: Statistics Canada. Table 252-0066 - Youth courts, cases by median elapsed time in days, annual (number unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Youth corrections

Community corrections

On an average day in 2013/2014, there were approximately 9,500 youth in the correctional system in Canada.\(^{14}\) Approximately 90% of these youth were in community corrections (Chart 28).\(^{15}\) This was true across time and jurisdictions.\(^{16}\)

Most youth in community corrections were on probation (90%). A smaller proportion of youth were serving a community portion of a custody sentence (4%), an intensive support and supervision order (4%), or a deferred custody and supervision order (2%). Between 2003/2004 and 2013/2014, the proportion of youth in an intensive support and supervision program increased from 1% to 4%, and the proportion of youth serving a deferred custody and supervision order increased from 1% to 2%.

\(^{14}\) Information on youth corrections comes from the Youth Corrections Key Indicator Report, the Youth Custody and Community Services survey, and the Integrated Correctional Services Survey. For more information on the methodology behind youth correctional statistics, see Correctional Services Program. 2015. Youth correctional statistics in Canada, 2013/2014. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X.

\(^{15}\) Community corrections includes probation (the most common type of community supervision), the community portion of a custody and supervision order, deferred custody and supervision, and intensive support and supervision programs. Intensive support and supervision is a sentence served in the community under conditions with closer monitoring and support than probation.

Custody

On any given day in Canada in 2013/2014, there were approximately 1,019 youth in custody, resulting in a youth incarceration rate of 6 per 10,000 youth population. The incarceration rate includes sentenced custody, pre-trial detention, and Provincial Director remand. Youth incarceration rates were highest in Manitoba (29 per 10,000 youth population) and Nunavut (22), and lowest in British Columbia (2) and Ontario (4) (Chart 29).

Between 1999/2000 and 2013/2014, Canada’s youth incarceration rate declined from 18 to 6 per 10,000 youth (Chart 30). Youth incarceration rates declined in all jurisdictions during this time. The largest drop coincided with the implementation of the YCJA (2003).

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17 The incarceration rate represents the average daily number of youth in custody for every 10,000 youth in the population. It includes youth in sentenced custody (secure and open custody), pre-trial detention, and Provincial Director remand. Pre-trial detention is the temporary detention of a young person in custody while awaiting trial or sentencing.

18 Quebec data was not available starting in 2011/2012. Ontario data was not available prior to 2003/2004. Alberta data were not available as of 2012/2013. Nunavut data were not available prior to 2001/2002.
Over time, youth sentenced custody rates have declined and pre-trial detention rates have remained relatively stable (Charts 31). In 2013/2014, youth sentenced custody and pre-trial detention rates were virtually the same (3 per 10,000 youth).

Youth sentenced custody and pre-trial detention rates declined in all jurisdictions between 1999/2000 and 2013/2014, with the exception of Manitoba’s rate of pre-trial detention, which increased from 10 to 17 per 10,000 youth (Charts 32-44).
Table 251-0008 - Youth correctional services, average counts of young persons in provincial and territorial correctional services, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.

Chart 32. Rate of youth in sentenced custody and pre-trial detention, Newfoundland and Labrador, 1999/2000-2013/2014


Chart 34. Rate of youth in sentenced custody and pre-trial detention, Nova Scotia, 1999/2000-2013/2014

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 251-0008 - Youth correctional services, average counts of young persons in provincial and territorial correctional services, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Source: Statistics Canada. Table 251-0008 - Youth correctional services, average counts of young persons in provincial and territorial correctional services, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Source: Statistics Canada. Table 251-0008 - Youth correctional services, average counts of young persons in provincial and territorial correctional services, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.

Chart 38. Rate of youth in sentenced custody and pre-trial detention, Manitoba, 1999/2000-2013/2014

Chart 39. Rate of youth in sentenced custody and pre-trial detention, Saskatchewan, 1999/2000-2013/2014

Chart 40. Rate of youth in sentenced custody and pre-trial detention, Alberta, 1999/2000-2012/2013

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 251-0008 - Youth correctional services, average counts of young persons in provincial and territorial correctional services, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
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Source: Statistics Canada. Table 251-0008 - Youth correctional services, average counts of young persons in provincial and territorial correctional services, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Most serious offence
In half (49%) of cases in which youth were admitted to sentenced custody in Canada in 2013/2014, the most serious offence was violent. In a smaller proportion (42%) of cases in which youth were admitted to pre-trial detention, the most serious offence was violent (Chart 45).\(^{19}\)

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\(^{19}\) Admissions describe the movements of youth from the time they enter correctional services until they leave. An admission is counted each time an individual begins or moves to any type of custody or community program. The same person can be included several times in the admissions counts whenever the individual moves from one type of legal status to another (e.g., from pre-trial detention to probation).
Aboriginal youth in corrections

One-third (33%) of youth admitted to the youth correctional system in 2013/2014 were Aboriginal.\(^\text{20}\) An even higher proportion of Aboriginal youth were admitted to sentenced custody (39%) and pre-trial detention (37%). Relative to their representation in the Canadian youth population (7% in 2014), Aboriginal youth are overrepresented in the correctional system in Canada and in most jurisdictions (Charts 46-48).

The disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth in correctional services is more pronounced among female youth than male youth. In 2013/2014, Aboriginal female youth accounted for 43% of female youth admitted to the correctional system (30% male youth), 45% of female youth admitted to sentenced custody (38% male youth), and 49% of female youth admitted to pre-trial detention (33% male youth).

\(^{20}\) Excludes Nova Scotia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Alberta as data was not available. Excludes cases where sex was unknown. Includes cases where Aboriginal identity was unknown.
Note: Data for Canada excludes Nova Scotia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Alberta as data was not available. Unless otherwise indicated, corrections data is from 2013/2014 and population data is from 2014 (for Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, corrections data is from 2008/2009 and population data is from 2009; for Alberta, corrections data is from 2011/2012 and population data is from 2012). Population data for Aboriginal youth was not available for Prince Edward Island. Excludes cases where sex was unknown. Includes cases where Aboriginal identity was unknown. For all jurisdictions in 2013/2014, Aboriginal identity was unknown for 21% of admissions to correctional services. The unknown proportion was highest (40% or more) in Ontario and Prince Edward Island.

Source: Statistics Canada.

Table 251-0012 - Youth custody and community services (YCCS), admissions to correctional services, by sex and aboriginal identity, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database); Statistics Canada. Table 051-0001 - Estimates of population, by age group and sex for July 1, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Note: Data for Canada excludes Nova Scotia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Alberta as data was not available. Unless otherwise indicated, corrections data is from 2013/2014 and population data is from 2014 (for Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, corrections data is from 2008/2009 and population data is from 2009; for Alberta, corrections data is from 2011/2012 and population data is from 2012). Population data for Aboriginal youth was not available for Prince Edward Island. Excludes cases where sex was unknown. Includes cases where Aboriginal identity was unknown. For all jurisdictions in 2013/2014, Aboriginal identity was unknown for 21% of admissions to correctional services. The unknown proportion was highest (40% or more) in Ontario and Prince Edward Island.

Source: Statistics Canada.

Table 251-0012 - Youth custody and community services (YCCS), admissions to correctional services, by sex and aboriginal identity, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database); Statistics Canada.

Table 051-0001 - Estimates of population, by age group and sex for July 1, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Note: Data for Canada excludes Nova Scotia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Alberta as data was not available. Unless otherwise indicated, corrections data is from 2013/2014 and population data is from 2014 (for Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, corrections data is from 2008/2009 and population data is from 2009; for Alberta, corrections data is from 2011/2012 and population data is from 2012). Population data for Aboriginal youth was not available for Prince Edward Island. Excludes cases where sex was unknown. Includes cases where Aboriginal identity was unknown. For all jurisdictions in 2013/2014, Aboriginal identity was unknown for 21% of admissions to correctional services. The unknown proportion was highest (40% or more) in Ontario and Prince Edward Island.

Source: Statistics Canada.

Table 251-0012 - Youth custody and community services (YCCS), admissions to correctional services, by sex and Aboriginal identity, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database); Statistics Canada.

Table 051-0001 - Estimates of population, by age group and sex for July 1, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Custom tabulation prepared by the Department of Justice Canada.
Conclusion
Overall, police-reported youth crime has decreased in both volume and severity. Youth accused of a criminal offence are more likely to be diverted from the formal criminal justice system than charged by police. The youth incarceration rate has decreased across Canada. Aboriginal youth are overrepresented in the correctional system, especially female Aboriginal youth.