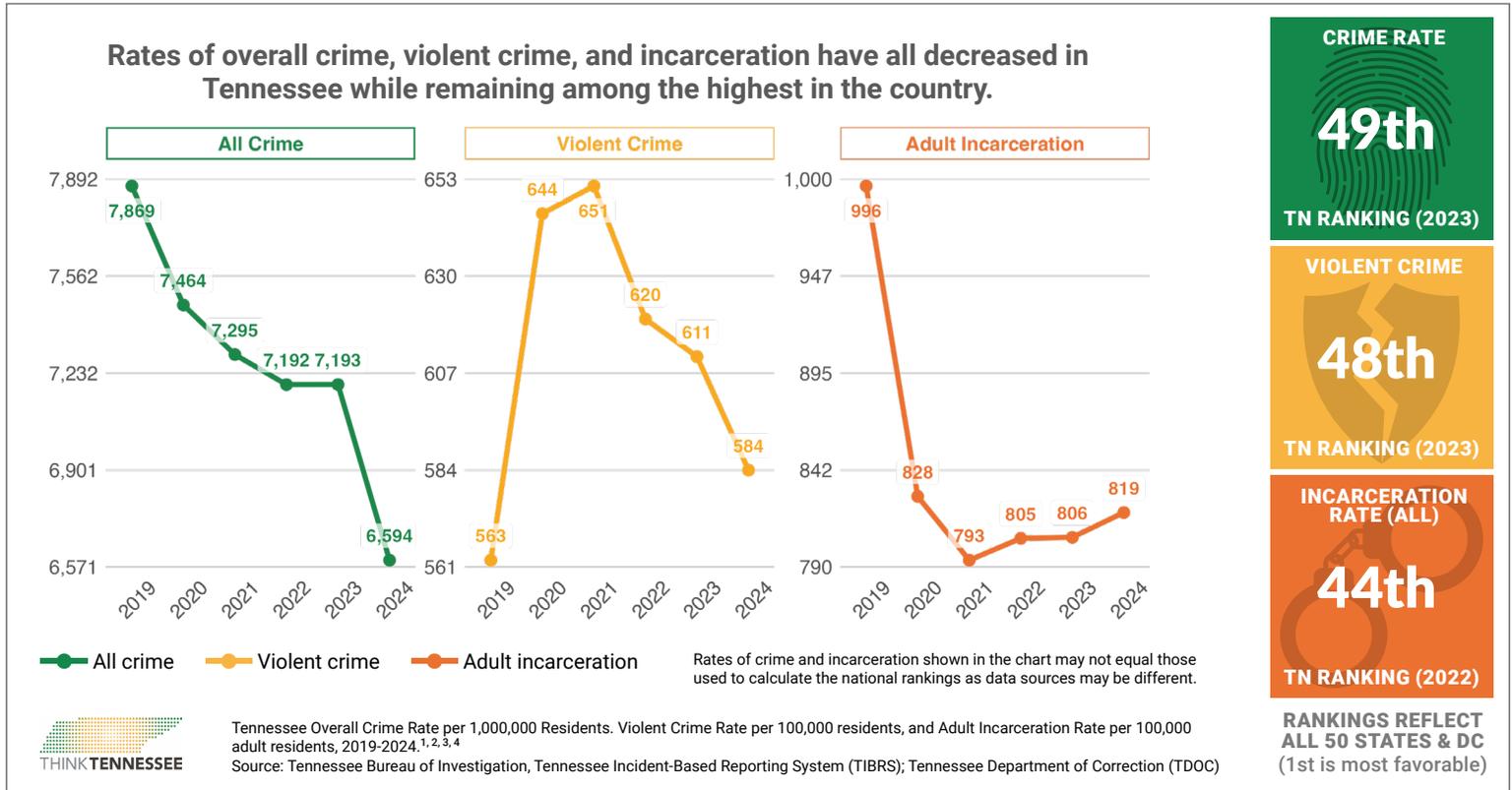


Criminal Justice in Tennessee:

Trends, Notable Progress, and Persistent Gaps

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In recent years, multiple indicators of crime—overall, youth, and violent crime rates, and rates of incarceration and recidivism—have all decreased. While this is undoubtedly a positive trend for our state, comparatively, Tennessee continues to have some of the lowest rankings of public safety and criminal justice system effectiveness in the country.



In ThinkTennessee’s comprehensive *State of Our State: Public Safety and Criminal Justice* report, we share data on crime rates, law enforcement, courts, and corrections, and find that despite positive trends in the data in recent years, Tennessee still has significant room for improvement in its criminal justice outcomes.

This brief highlights the report’s key takeaways and findings. To dive deeper into the findings, see the [full report here](#).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- High crime rates occur in both urban and rural Tennessee counties.
- More than half of crimes in the state are property crimes.
- White Tennesseans’ per capita crime rate is highest but declining.
- Crime and incarceration rates are trending downward statewide.
- Over a third of Tennessee’s prison population is housed in privately managed prisons.
- Justice system processes and outcomes are inconsistent across the state.

Recent Downward Trends in Crime

- Overall crime rates decreased statewide and in all but eight counties.
- Most youth crime types and arrest rates have decreased.
- Incarceration rates for both adults and youth have decreased.
- Overall recidivism rates decreased 9.1% from 2019 to 2024.
- Overall decreases in crime are mostly driven by decreases in crimes against property.
- Tennessee’s two largest counties have the highest crime rates, though they have both seen decreases in recent years.

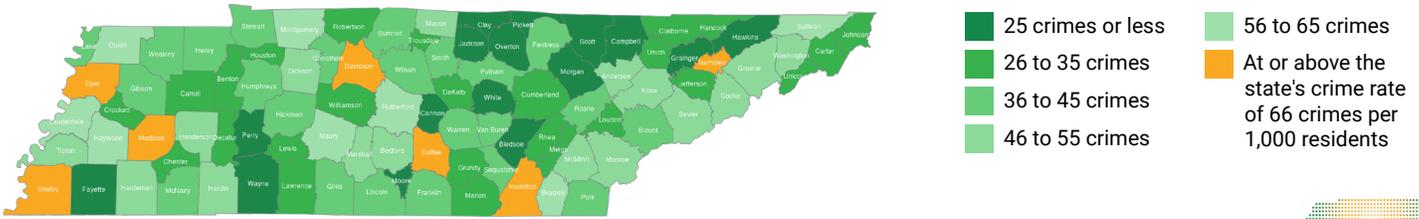
KEY TAKEAWAYS

The key takeaways highlight meaningful declines in several major crime and incarceration indicators in Tennessee, even as structural gaps continue to shape justice system experiences across the state.

High crime rates occur in both urban and rural Tennessee counties.

In 2024, Tennessee's overall crime rate was 6,594 crimes per 100,000 residents. Crime rates among counties varied significantly, and while the state's largest counties (Shelby and Davidson) saw the highest rates, several smaller counties also saw rates higher than the state average: Coffee, Dyer, Hamblen, Hamilton, and Madison.⁵

Seven counties, both urban and rural, exceed the state's average crime rate.



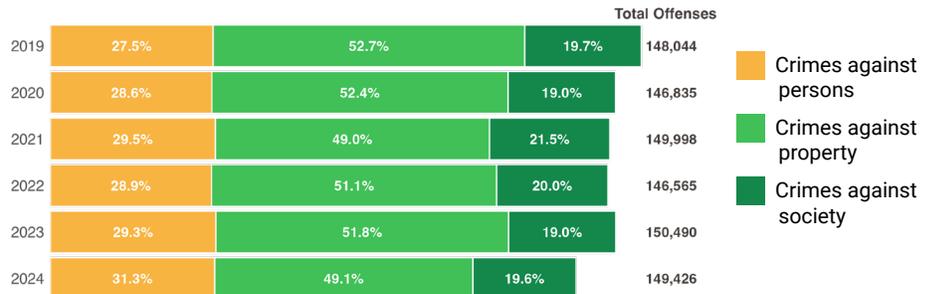
Overall Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) by County, 2024. Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)



More than half of crimes in the state are property crimes.

Crimes are generally classified as one of three major types. **Crimes against persons** are those whose victims are individuals, **crimes against property** are those whose purpose is to obtain money or property, and **crimes against society** are generally victimless crimes dealing with socially prohibited acts such as drugs and gambling offenses. From 2019 to 2024, crimes against property accounted for 49.0% to 52.7% of all crimes in Tennessee.⁶

Property crimes averaged 51% of all crimes from 2019 to 2024.



Tennessee Crimes by Type, 2019-2024. Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)



White Tennesseans' per capita crime rate is highest but declining.

White Tennesseans account for the highest crime rate per capita and the largest share of total crimes, but both rates have declined. While at the same time, the crime rate per capita of Black Tennesseans has decreased and the share of total crimes has increased.⁷

White Tennesseans have the highest crime rate per capita.



Crime Rate per 100,000 Residents by Race and Ethnicity, 2019-2024. Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)



White Tennesseans' share of total crimes declined from 38.7% to 32.7% between 2019 and 2024.



Percent of Total Crimes Committed by Race and Ethnicity, 2019-2024. Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

Note: Totals do not sum to 100% because TIBRS has unknown or missing data on race or ethnicity.

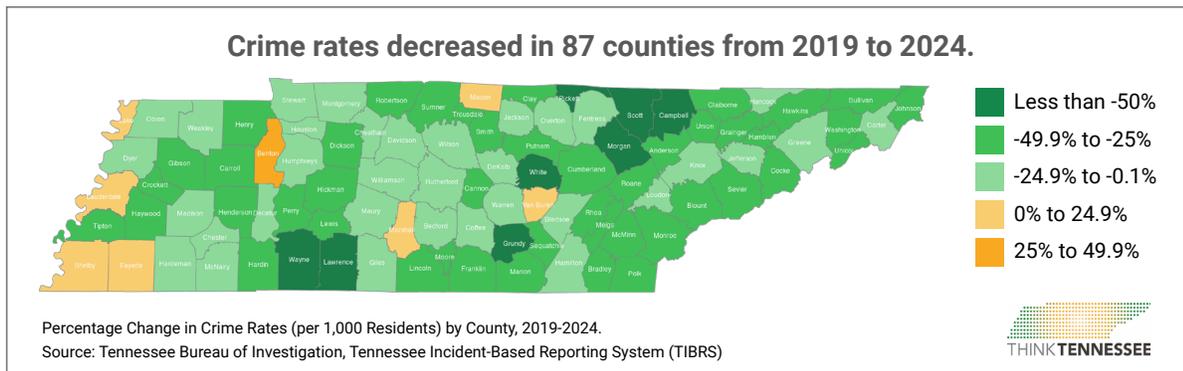


Crime and incarceration rates are trending downward statewide.

Overall crime, youth crime, incarceration, and recidivism rates have all decreased over time. Those decreases are being driven by decreases in crimes against property statewide and decreases in crime rates in the two largest counties.

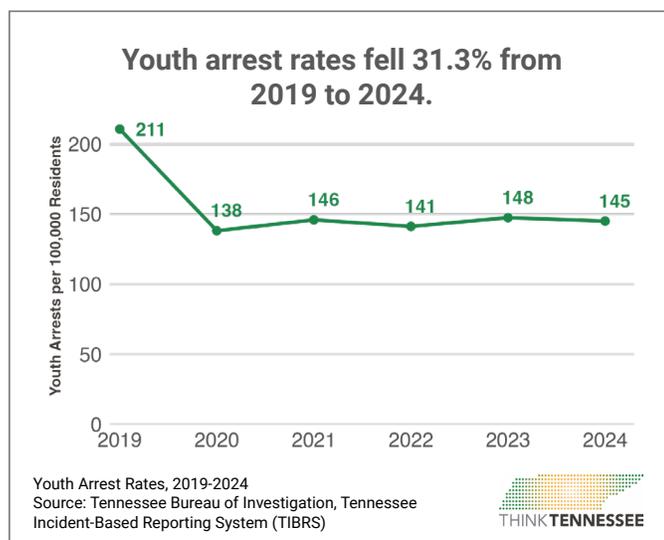
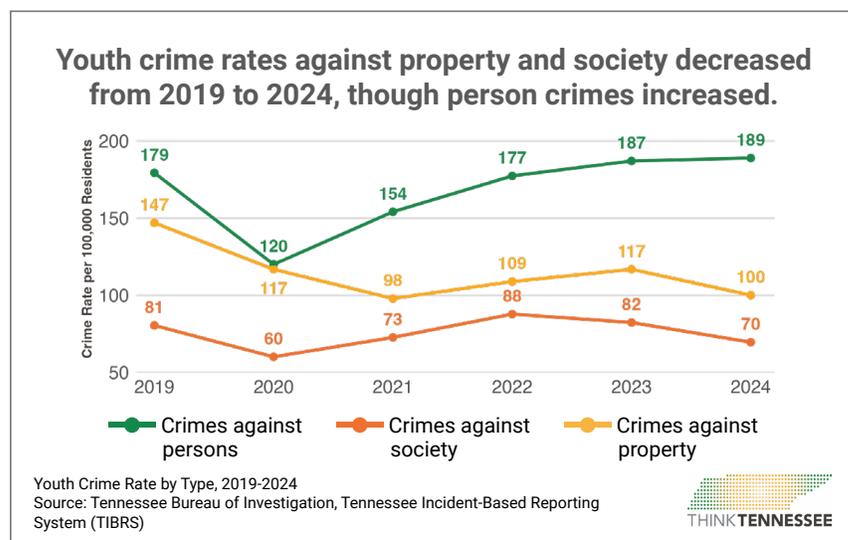
Overall crime rates decreased statewide and in all but eight counties.

Tennessee's overall crime rate decreased 16.2% from 2019 (7,869 per 100,000 residents) to 2024 (6,594). This decrease in crime rates was similarly seen in most counties; just eight counties saw crime rates increase.⁸



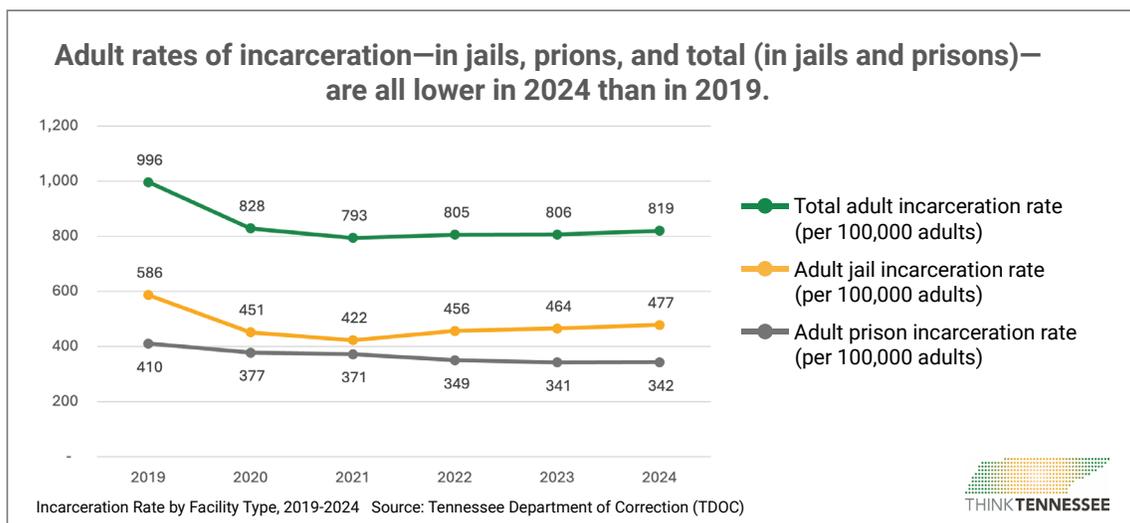
Most youth crime types and arrest rates have decreased.

Youth crime rates against property and society decreased from 2019 to 2024, though crimes against persons increased above 2019 levels. Youth arrest rates decreased 34.6% from 2019 to 2020 and have remained relatively stable since, staying well below 2019 levels.⁹

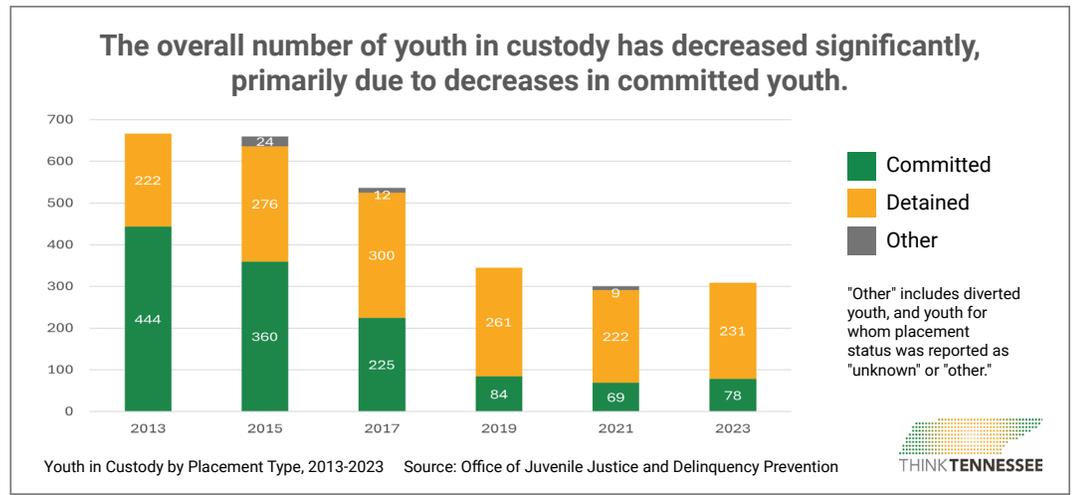


Incarceration rates for both adults and youth have decreased.

Adult incarceration rates—for jails, prisons, and in both (total)—are all lower in 2024 than in 2019. The prison incarceration rate has seen a consistent decline while rates for jail and total incarceration have been increasing slightly since 2022. Generally, incarceration in prisons reflects felony convictions and jails reflects misdemeanors.¹⁰



Driven by a decrease in “committed” youth (those held as part of a court-ordered disposition), the **overall number of youth in custody decreased by 53.6%** from 2013 to 2023. While the number “detained” (those held before adjudication or disposition or awaiting a hearing or transfer to adult court) increased 4.1%. Of the youth in custody, 62.8% are held for non-violent crimes and 15.0% for technical violations.¹¹

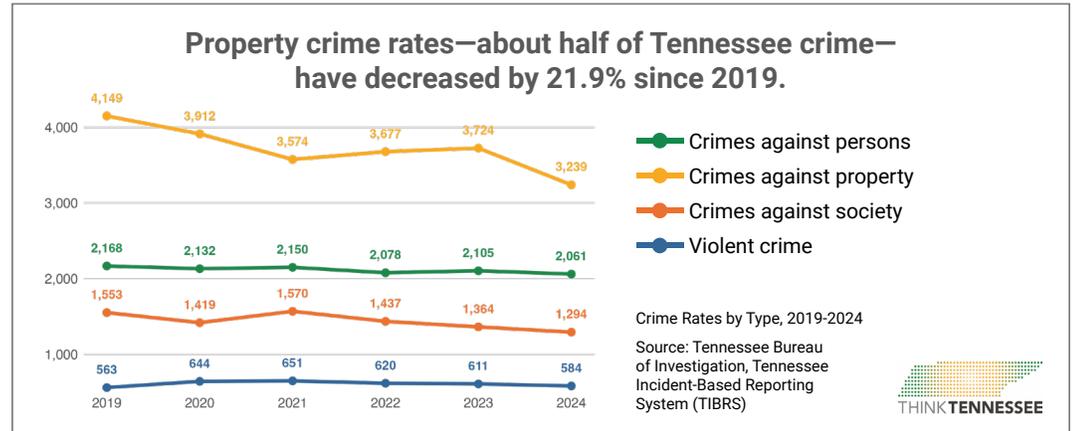


Overall recidivism rates decreased 9.1% from 2019 to 2024.

Overall recidivism decreased from 46.3% in 2019 to 42.1% in 2024. In 2024, recidivism was higher for local jails (48.7%) than for state prisons (35.0%) and for males leaving prisons (36.2%) than women (30.1%).¹²

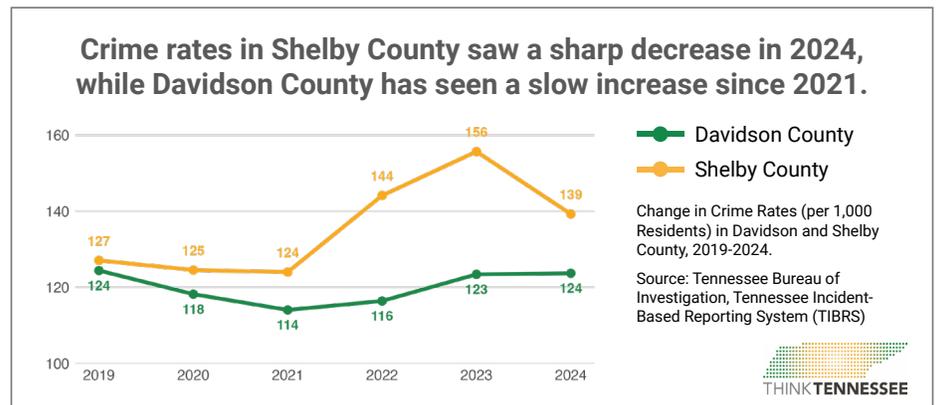
Overall decreases in crime are mostly driven by decreases in crimes against property.

Property crimes, which account for over half of crimes in the state, decreased 21.9% while crimes against persons and against society decreased at slower rates, 4.9% and 16.7% respectively, and violent crime rates increased 3.8%. More counties saw a decrease in property crimes (91) than in crimes against society (63) or persons (66).¹³



Tennessee’s two largest counties have the highest crime rates, though they have both seen decreases in recent years.

Davidson County’s crime rate generally decreased through 2021 and then gradually increased, ending 2024 at the same level as in 2019. While in Shelby County, the crime rate stayed in the mid-120 per 1,000 residents through 2021, rose sharply to a peak in 2023, and then declined in 2024.¹⁴ Yet, more recent data from both counties show decreases in overall, property, and violent crime rates from 2024 to 2025.^{15,16}



Crime significantly decreased in Memphis and Nashville from 2024 to 2025.*



*This data reflects Part I offenses, the highest, most serious crimes. Source: Metro Nashville Police Data Dashboard, Uniform Crime Reporting Incidents Map; City of Memphis, Safer Communities Dashboard

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