

THINKTENNESSEE



State of Our State: Public Safety and Criminal Justice

FEBRUARY 2026



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACES	Adverse Childhood Experiences
AOC	Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts
BJS	U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics
BOP	Board of Parole
CDC	Center for Disease Control
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
DC	District of Columbia
DCS	Department of Children’s Services
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GDP	Global Domestic Product
IDOB	Inmate Disciplinary Oversight Board
LEOKA	Law Enforcement Officers Killed or Assaulted
NIBRS	National Incident-Based Reporting System
SRS	Summary Reporting System
TBI	Tennessee Bureau of Investigation
TCI	Tennessee Corrections Institute
TDOC	Tennessee Department of Correction
TDSHS	Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security
TIBRS	Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System
TRICOR	Tennessee Rehabilitative Initiative in Correction
UCR	Unified Crime Reporting
WONDER	Wide-ranging ONLINE Data for Epidemiologic Research

Tennessee is a vibrant and growing state—from 2019 to 2024, Tennessee’s population increased by 5.8%, the number of jobs increased 8.1%, and real GDP increased 14.0%.¹ Despite this growth, Tennessee struggles with some of the highest rates of crime, incarceration, and recidivism in the nation. The following report presents a comprehensive view of the criminal justice system in Tennessee to help inform residents, justice system-impacted Tennesseans, and decision makers to improve the effectiveness and fairness of Tennessee’s criminal justice system.

This data is intended to help address some of the current challenges and opportunities facing the state’s criminal justice system, including:

- **Understanding Trends in Public Safety**—Concerns about public safety and crime have been driving recent changes to state policy, including increased sentences, higher fines and fees, and a proposed constitutional amendment to limit judicial discretion in granting bail.^{2,3,4} This report aims to look at recent trends in crime and public safety to better understand changes in crime rates in order to inform policy choices.
- **Improving Data in the Tennessee Court System**—Tennessee does not currently have a unified court system. Most court functions are overseen at the local or district level, making data collection, analysis, and distribution difficult. In 2024, the state allocated \$75 million to develop a centralized case-management system for collecting and documenting uniform court cases.^{5,6} This represents an important opportunity to identify and implement improvements in how data is collected and shared between courts and the public.
- **Tracking Impacts from the Truth in Sentencing Act**—In 2022, the Tennessee state legislature passed the Truth in Sentencing Act which reduced the ability for incarcerated people to earn sentence-reduction credits and increased the number of offenses for which someone will serve almost the entire sentence.⁷ The bill was enacted without the signature of the governor, who noted that similar legislation had been passed in Tennessee previously and resulted in increased costs, prison overcrowding, and violence.⁸ This report can serve as a benchmark for sentencing and incarceration data to better understand the outcomes of this Act.

Data Note

The goal of this report is to provide an understanding of the Tennessee criminal justice system through an inventory and analysis of publicly available data. The report presents the most recent five years of data available, which is typically from 2018 to 2024, though we have provided more recent data when available. Where possible, it highlights how Tennessee performs compared to the region and the nation, as well as a more detailed analysis specific to Tennessee, including trends and geographic differences within Tennessee. Unfortunately, this often requires using different data sets for national comparison and a detailed view of the criminal justice system in Tennessee. We have highlighted this throughout the report, and more information can be found in the methodology section.

The following report provides background and publicly available data on the major components of Tennessee's criminal justice system including:

- Crime in Tennessee
- Law Enforcement
- The Court System
- Correction and Incarceration
- The Youth Justice System

Key Findings

The following report identifies several key findings:

- **State spending on criminal justice has increased, while local spending has decreased when adjusted for inflation.** In Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (FY24-25), Tennessee spent a total of \$2.8 billion on its policing, courts, and correctional systems. From FY19-20 to FY24-25, state spending on the criminal justice system increased 25.0% in real terms.⁹ Local government spending on criminal justice has increased nominally, but decreased 1.7%, from \$3.5 billion in FY17-18 to \$3.4 billion in FY21-22 when adjusted for inflation.¹⁰
- **Despite recent decreases, Tennessee has one of the highest crime rates in the nation.** The state's overall crime rate decreased from 7,869 crimes per 100,000 residents in 2019 to 6,594 in 2024—a 16.2% decline.¹¹ However, Tennessee's overall crime rate is one of the highest in the nation, ranking 49th among the 50 states and DC.¹²
- **Tennessee performs poorly on community characteristics that are associated with higher crime.** While the causes of crime are complex and debated, there are several economic and community characteristics that are associated with increases in crime, such as high rates of poverty and low median income, where Tennessee performs poorly compared to many other states. For example, Tennessee ranks 42nd nationally for poverty, 36th for food insecurity, and 49th in bankruptcy rate.¹³
- **Tennessee incarcerates more people than most other states.** In Tennessee, an estimated 57,625 people are incarcerated, including in state prisons, local jails, youth facilities, or other confinement facilities. The incarceration rate, 817 people per 100,000 residents, is higher than 43 other states and DC.¹⁴
- **Tennessee has high rates of recidivism, though rates are declining.** Recidivism in Tennessee was 42.1% in 2024, a decrease from 46.3% in 2019.¹⁵ According to the Council of State Governments, Tennessee ranks 38th nationally for recidivism.¹⁶

Overview of the Criminal Justice System in Tennessee

Tennessee’s criminal justice system is a complex interweaving of multiple state departments with local government services in three primary areas: Law enforcement (Policing), Judicial (Courts), and Corrections (Incarceration and Supervision).

Law enforcement—the enforcement of laws and investigation of alleged crimes—primarily occurs at the local level with limited support from the state through the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Safety. The court system, which serves to prosecute, defend, and adjudicate criminal and youth cases, is primarily administered through the state, with support of locally elected judges and county clerks. Corrections occurs at the state and local level; in general, individuals convicted of felonies are sentenced to state custody while individuals convicted of misdemeanors are sentenced to local custody.

Tennessee’s criminal justice system involves multiple actors across state and local governments.

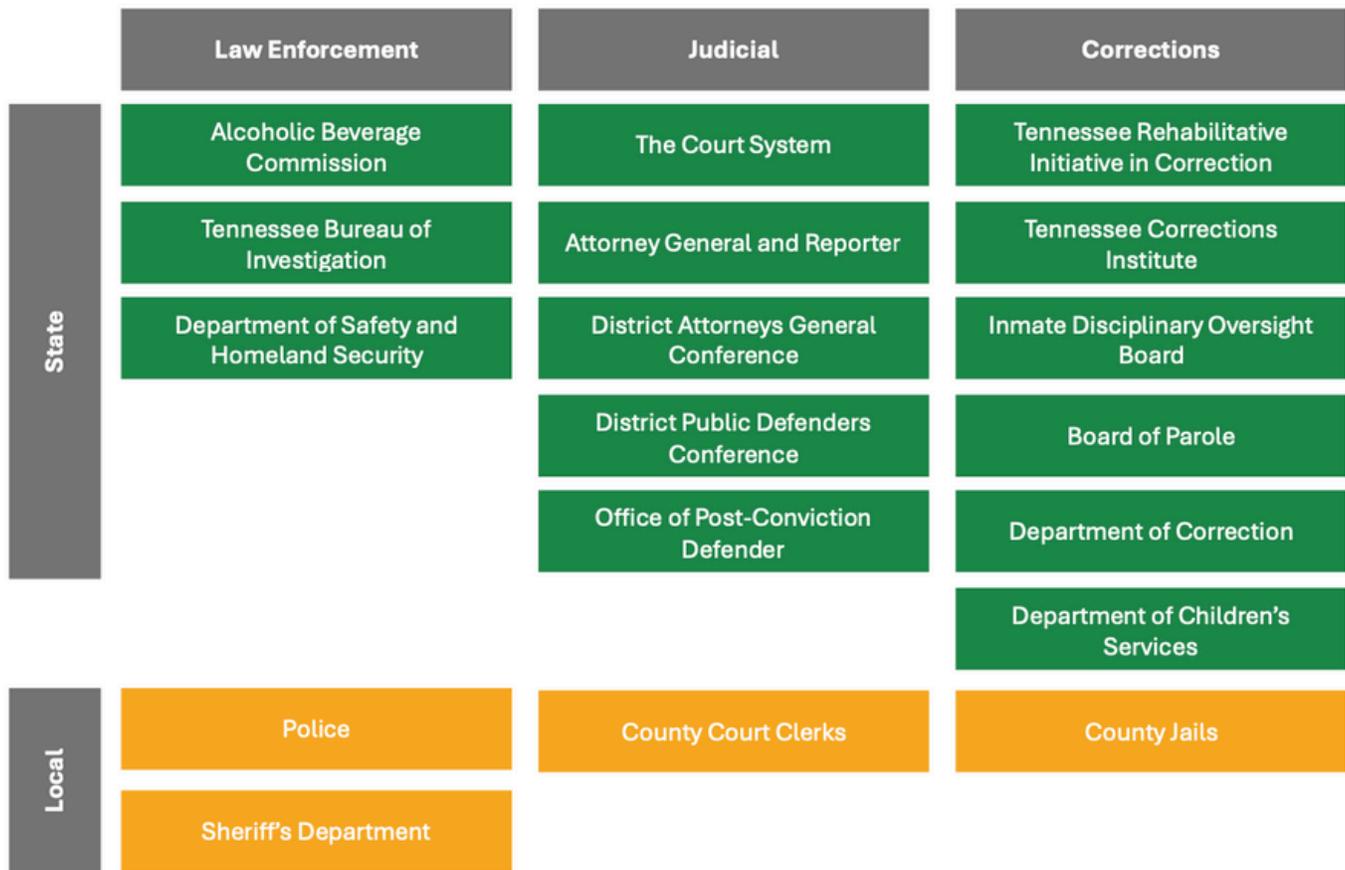


Figure 1: Tennessee Criminal Justice System Overview
Sources: Tennessee Department of Finance & Administration; ThinkTennessee

State spending on criminal justice has increased, while local spending decreased when adjusted for inflation.

In Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (FY24-25), Tennessee spent an estimated \$2.8 billion on its policing, courts, and correctional systems—approximately 4.6% of the entire state budget of \$60.6 billion. From FY19-20 to FY24-25, spending on the criminal justice system increased 25.0% in real terms, compared to a 54.4% nominal increase. Most of this real increase occurred from FY22-23 to FY23-24, when criminal justice spending increased 19.5% in real terms.^{17,18}

From FY22-23 to FY23-24, state spending on criminal justice increased by one-fifth.

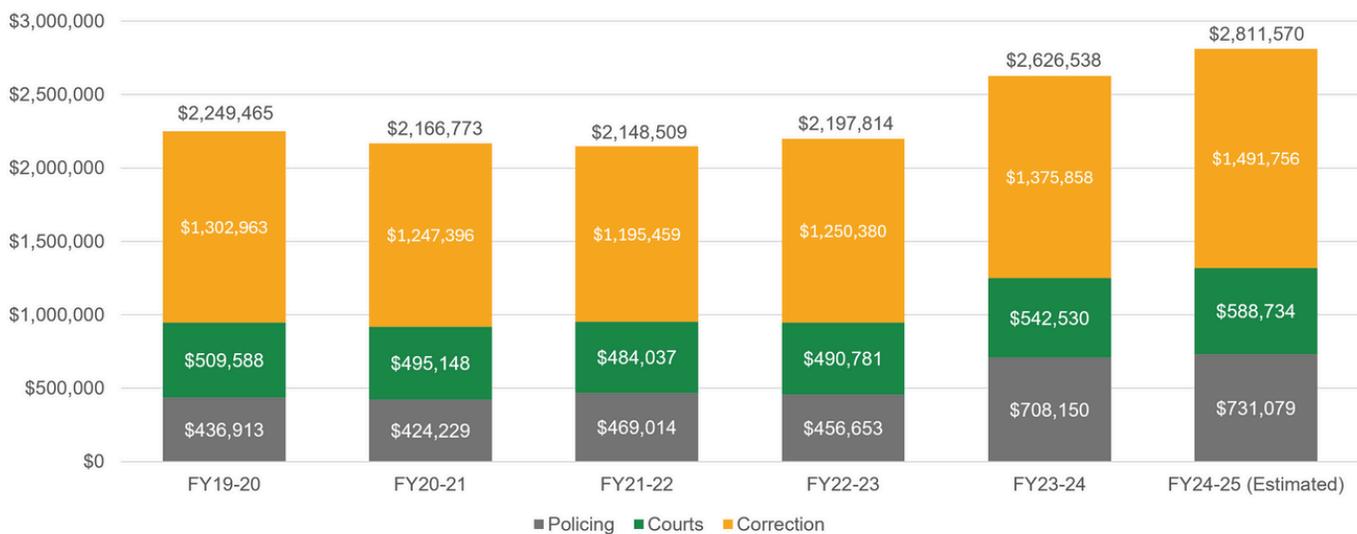


Figure 2: State Spending by Category, FY19-20 to FY24-25 (inflation-adjusted to FY25 dollars, in thousands)
Source: Tennessee Department of Finance & Administration

The vast majority of Tennessee’s spending on criminal justice (89.7%) comes from state revenue sources with just 2.2% coming from the federal government and 8.1% coming from other sources, such as fees for service. Policing is most reliant on federal funding, with 6.6% of its budget coming from federal sources, while both policing and the courts rely on other sources of funds, like fees, for 11.8% and 12.9% of their budgets, respectively.¹⁹

Almost 90% of the state’s criminal justice system spending is from state dollars.

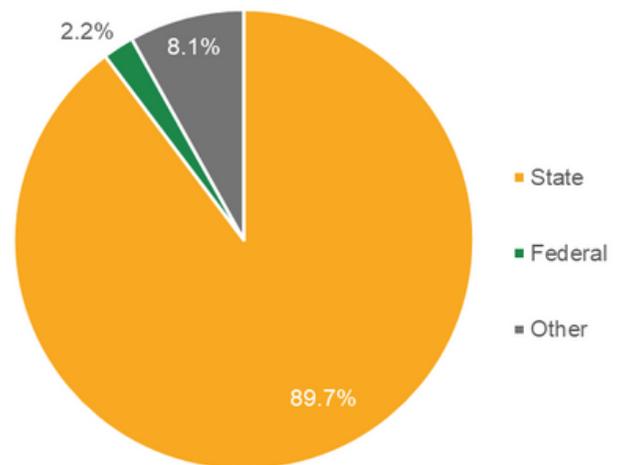


Figure 3: Estimated State Spending on Criminal Justice, FY24-25
Source: Tennessee Department of Finance & Administration

In FY21-22, local governments in Tennessee spent \$3.4 billion (in FY2025 dollars) on policing, courts, and corrections, a decrease of 1.7% from \$3.5 billion in FY17-18. Despite an 11.7% nominal increase, the 13.7% cumulative inflation during this period resulted in a decline in real spending.

Policing spending increased modestly by 0.9% in real terms, from \$2.318 billion in FY17-18 to \$2.339 billion in FY21-22. Corrections spending declined 9.3% from \$618.2 million to \$560.4 million (FY2025), while spending on courts decreased 4.2% from \$543.4 million in FY17-18 to \$520.7 million in FY21-22.

About Spending Data

Spending for the state is found in Tennessee budget documents, while local spending is from the U.S. Census' Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finance data which is only available through 2022. Because methodology differs between the two data sources and because data availability differs by year, these two data sets should not be combined.

The majority of local spending on criminal justice (68.4%) is for policing.²⁰

From FY17-18 to FY21-22, local criminal justice spending grew nominally but declined 1.7% when adjusted for inflation.

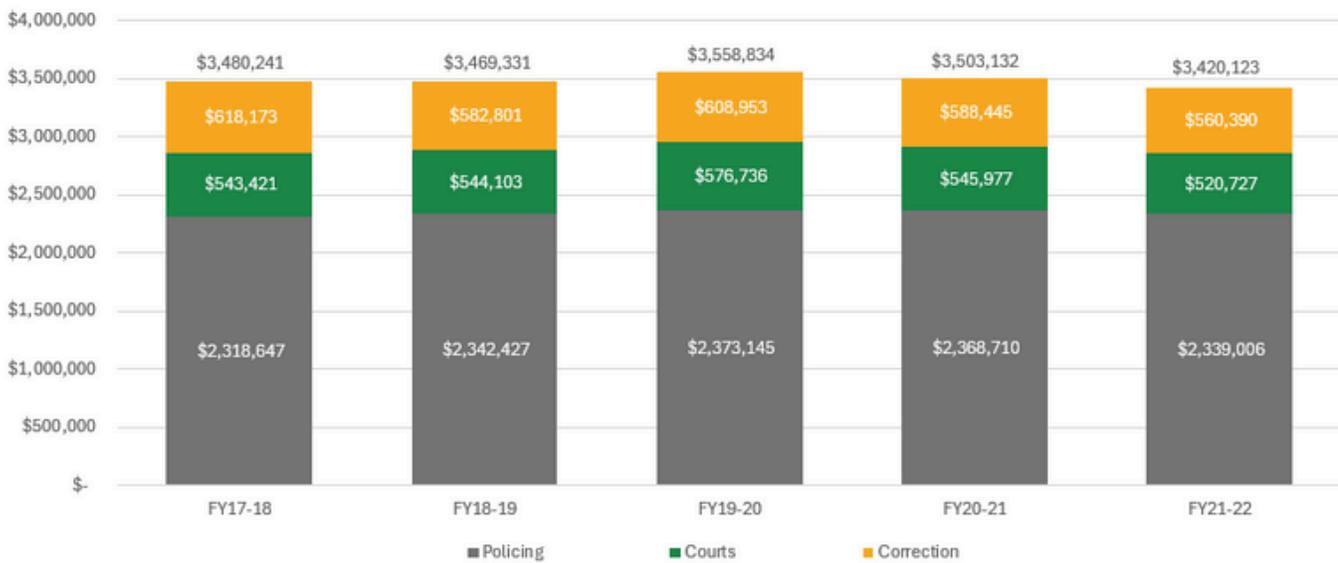


Figure 4: Local Spending by Category, FY17-18 to FY21-22 (inflation-adjusted to FY25 dollars, in thousands)
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances (ALFIN)

Crime in Tennessee

The criminal justice system begins with an alleged crime—an unlawful act that is punished by the state. In Tennessee, challenging economic conditions and other factors associated with crime are prevalent. Overall crime rates in Tennessee are decreasing, led by significant decreases in property crimes throughout the state. Violent crimes remain above pre-pandemic rates despite more recent decreases, and deaths by firearm are increasing. Although overall crime is decreasing, Tennessee’s crime rates continue to be much higher than in most other states.

Crime in Tennessee is decreasing.

According to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), 478,084 crimes were recorded in calendar year 2024, an 11.0% decrease from 537,391 crimes committed in 2019. This reduction in crimes occurred during a period of significant population growth, resulting in a larger decrease in Tennessee’s crime rate. The state had an overall crime rate of 6,594 cases per 100,000 residents in 2024, a decrease of 16.2% from 7,869 in 2019. Crime rates in the state have continuously decreased since 2019, with the largest drop (8.3%) from 2023 to 2024.²¹

The overall crime rate has decreased by 16.2%.

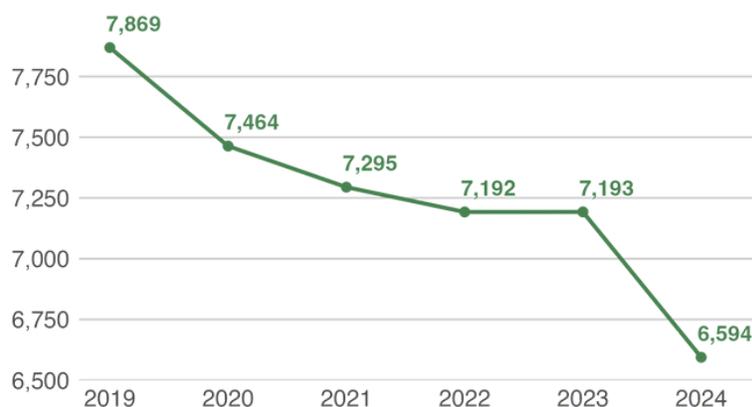


Figure 5: Tennessee Overall Crime Rates (per 100,000 Residents), 2019 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

Data Note

State crime rates are calculated per 100,000 residents and county crime rates are calculated per 1,000 residents due to smaller total population size.

Crime is decreasing in most of Tennessee’s counties, but crime rates vary significantly.

From 2019 to 2024, crime rates decreased in most Tennessee counties; on average, counties saw a 26.7% decrease in crime rates. Over this period, crime rates decreased the most in the counties of Cambell (-65.1%), Grundy (-63.3%), and Pickett (-62.1%). Crime rates increased in only eight counties: Fayette (1.7%), Van Buren (2.8%), Lauderdale (7.7%), Shelby (9.6%), Macon (19.9%), Lake (23.0%), Marshall (23.9%), and Benton (32.0%).²²

Only eight counties had an increase in overall crime rates from 2019 to 2024.

County	2019	2024	% Change
Fayette	24.1	24.5	1.7%
Van Buren	39.9	41.0	2.8%
Lauderdale	55.0	59.3	7.7%
Shelby	127.1	139.3	9.6%
Macon	43.3	51.9	19.9%
Lake	30.8	37.9	23.0%
Marshall	41.5	51.4	23.9%
Benton	24.8	32.8	32.0%

Table 1. Percentage Change in Overall Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) in Select Counties, 2019 and 2024

Source: TIBRS

Note: Percent change is calculated using unrounded values. Small differences in the displayed percent change are due to rounding of the base data.

From 2019 to 2024, crime rates decreased in 87 counties.

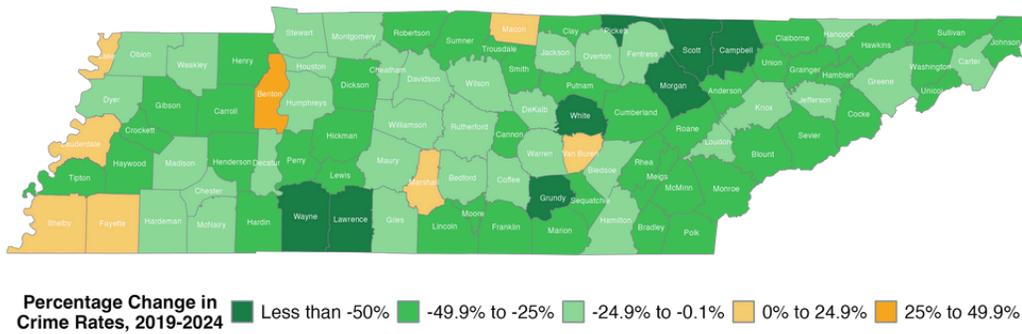


Figure 6. Percentage Change in Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) by County, 2019 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

In 2024, the overall crime rate per 1,000 people varied by county significantly—from a low of 10.6 in Pickett County to a high of 123.7 in Davidson County and 139.3 in Shelby County, with the state average being 66. Crime is higher in the state’s largest counties (Shelby and Davidson); however, several smaller counties (including Madison, Dyer, and Hamblen) are also struggling with high crime rates.²³

There are seven counties with crime rates higher than the state average of 66.

County	Crime Rate per 1,000 people
Coffee	66.9
Hamilton	68.6
Hamblen	73.4
Dyer	74.9
Madison	84.3
Davidson	123.7
Shelby	139.3

Table 2. Counties with Overall Crime Rates above the State Average, 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

The seven counties with crime rates higher than the state’s average include both rural and urban communities, and are located in all three grand divisions across the state.

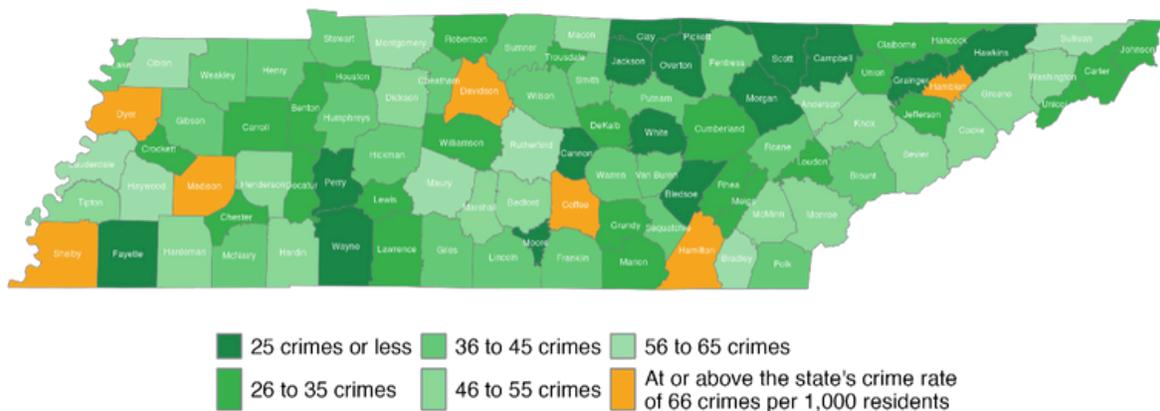


Figure 7. Overall Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) by County, 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

All types of crimes are decreasing in Tennessee, with property crimes decreasing the most.

Most crimes committed in Tennessee are property crimes. Since 2019, property crimes have been approximately half of all crimes committed in the state, and the property crime rate has decreased 21.9%, from 4,149 in 2019 to 3,239 in 2024. Crimes against persons represent less than one-third of crimes in the state, and the rate of crimes against persons has decreased 4.9%, from 2,168 in 2019 to 2,061 in 2024. Crimes against society represent approximately one in five crimes in the state, and the rate of crimes against society has decreased 16.7% from 1,553 in 2019 to 1,294 in 2024.²⁴

About half of crime in Tennessee are property crimes, which have decreased by 21.9% since 2019.



Figure 8. Change in Crime Rates (per 100,000 Residents) by Crime Type, 2019 to 2024

Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

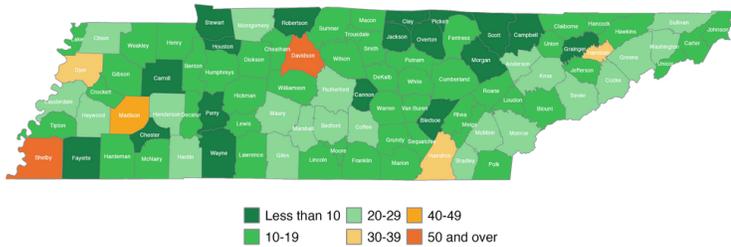
Crimes Against Persons are considered those whose victims are individuals. These include murder and non-negligent manslaughter, negligent manslaughter, justifiable homicide, kidnapping/abduction, rape, sodomy, sexual assault with an object, fondling, incest, statutory rape, aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation, commercial sex acts (human trafficking), and involuntary servitude (human trafficking).

Crimes Against Property are those in which the purpose of committing the crime is to obtain money, property, or some other benefit. These include arson, bribery, burglary/breaking & entering, counterfeiting/forgery, destruction/damage/vandalism of property, credit card/automatic teller machine fraud, impersonation, welfare fraud, wire fraud, identity theft, hacking/computer invasion, robbery, pocket-picking, purse-snatching, shoplifting, theft from a building, theft from a motor vehicle, theft of motor vehicle parts or accessories, motor vehicle theft, and all other larcenies.

Crimes Against Society are determined by society's prohibition of engaging in these types of activity and are generally considered victimless crimes. These include drug/narcotic violations, drug equipment violations, betting/wagering, operating/promoting/assisting gambling, gambling equipment violations, sports tampering, pornography/obscene material, prostitution, assisting or promoting prostitution, purchasing prostitution, weapons law violation, and animal cruelty.

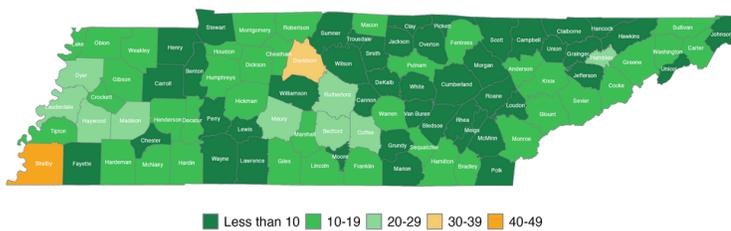
Throughout Tennessee, crime rates vary significantly by type of crime.

Crime Rates: Crimes Against Property, 2024



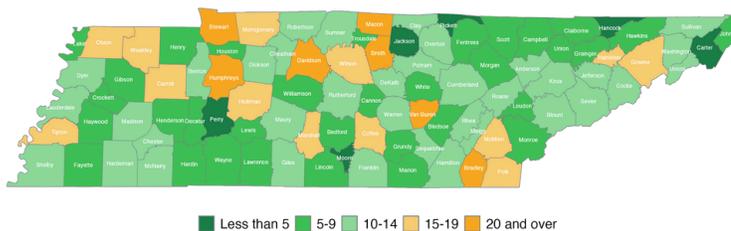
In 2024, the rate of **crimes against property** was lowest in Cannon (3.9 per 1,000 residents), Wayne (4.3) and Pickett (4.6) counties, and was highest in Shelby (79.6), Davidson (67.6) and Madison (45.5) counties.²⁵

Crime Rates: Crimes Against Persons, 2024



In 2024, the rate of **crimes against persons** was lowest in Cannon (2.7 per 1,000 residents), Bledsoe (2.7), and Wayne (3.5) counties, and the rate of crimes against persons was highest in Shelby (47.4), Davidson (35.6), and Dyer (27.1) counties.²⁶

Crime Rates: Crimes Against Society, 2024



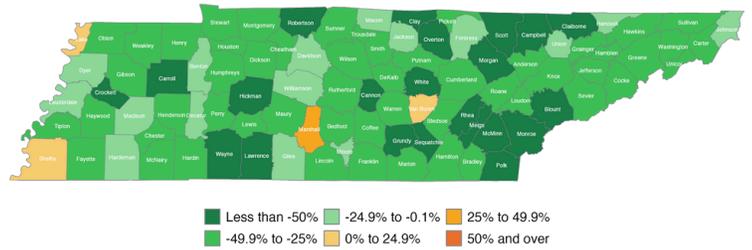
In 2024, the rate of **crimes against society** was lowest in Perry (1.8 per 1,000 residents), Pickett (1.9), and Carter (3.3) counties, and was highest in Van Buren (24.1), Stewart (22.3), and Humphreys (22.0) counties.²⁷

Figure 9. Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) by Type and by County, 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

The average Tennessee county saw a decrease in overall crime of 26.7% from 2019 to 2024; however, the rate of change varied significantly by types of crime and by county.

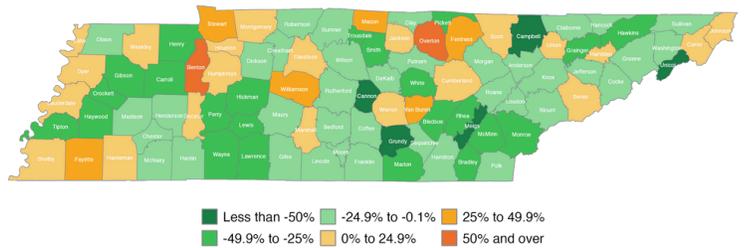
The average Tennessee county saw the rate of **crimes against property** decrease 37.9% from 2019 to 2024. The rate of crimes against property decreased in 91 counties, with the rate decreasing the most in Polk (-50.6%), Crockett (-50.2%), and Franklin (-49.6%) counties. Four counties saw an increase in the rate of crimes against property, with rates increasing the most in Shelby (7.5%), Van Buren (14.5%), and Marshall (37.0%) counties.²⁸

Percentage Change in Crimes Against Property, 2019-2024



The average Tennessee county saw the rate of **crimes against persons** decrease 11.4% from 2019 to 2024. The rate of crimes against persons decreased in 66 counties, with the rate decreasing the most in Grundy (-66.9%), Meigs (-56.2%), and Campbell (-52.9%) counties. Twenty-nine counties saw an increase in the rate of crimes against persons, with rates increasing the most in Benton (90.8%), Overton (55.6%), and Van Buren (49.6%) counties.²⁹

Percentage Change in Crimes Against Persons, 2019-2024



The average Tennessee county saw the rate of **crimes against society** decrease 8.8% from 2019 to 2024. The rate of crimes against society decreased in 63 counties, with the rate decreasing the most in Pickett (-86.2%), Scott (-70.8%), and Lawrence (-69.5%) counties. Thirty-two counties saw an increase in the rate of crimes against society, with rates increasing the most in Shelby (7.5%), Van Buren (14.5%), and Marshall (37.0%) counties.³⁰

Percentage Change in Crimes Against Society, 2019-2024

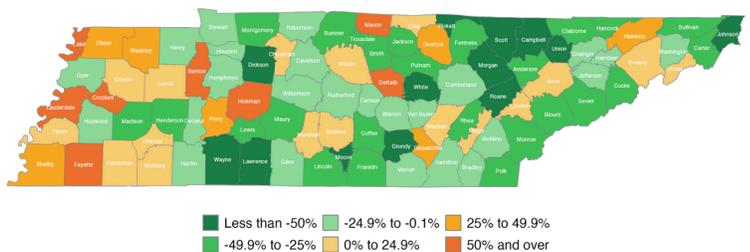


Figure 10. Percent Change in Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) by Type and by County, 2019 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

Violent crimes increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, but have decreased since 2021.

The violent crime rate in Tennessee has increased from 563 in 2019 to 584 in 2024, an increase of 3.7%. These offenses increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, from 563 in 2019 to a high of 651 in 2021. From 2019 to 2020, Tennessee’s violent crime rate increased by 14.5%, a higher rate than the national 5.2% increase in violent crime rate.³³ Since 2021, the rate for violent crimes has decreased from 651 to 584, a reduction of 10.3%, though it remains slightly higher than the pre-pandemic rate.³⁴

Violent crimes, as defined by the Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System, include murder, non-consensual sex offenses, and aggravated assault. In the national Unified Crime Reporting Program, violent crimes include those offenses that involve force or a threat of force and are composed of four main offenses: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.^{31,32}

The violent crime rate has increased by 3.7%, but has decreased 10.3% since the COVID-19 pandemic.

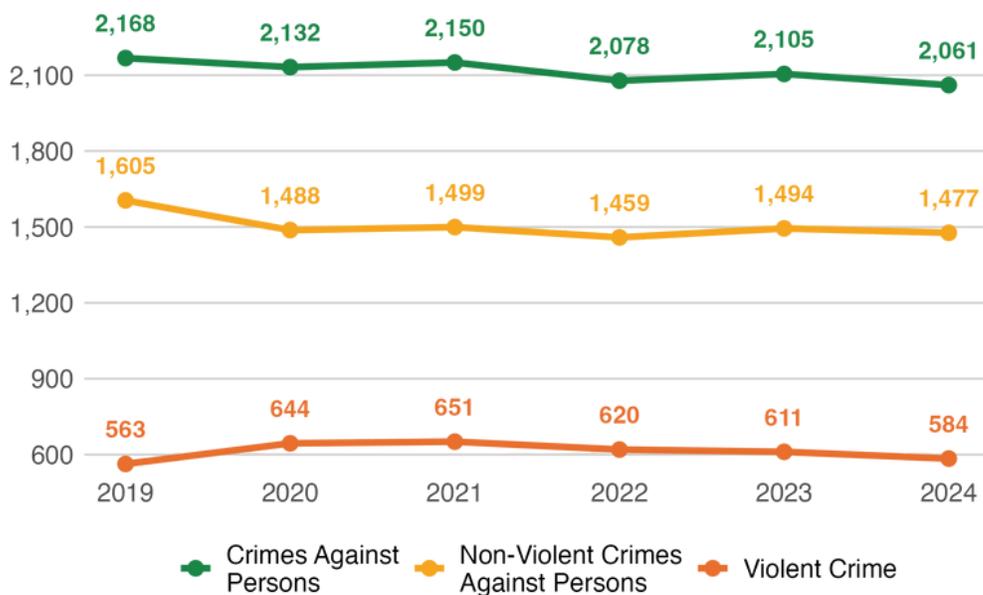


Figure 11. Change in Crime Rates (per 100,000 Residents) by Crime Type, 2019 to 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

Six counties have rates of violent crime above the state average: Hamblen (6.0), Haywood (7.1), Madison (7.2), Lauderdale (9.6), Davidson (10.9), and Shelby (16.5).³⁵

Higher rates of violent crime occur in both urban and rural counties, with four of the highest six counties in West Tennessee.

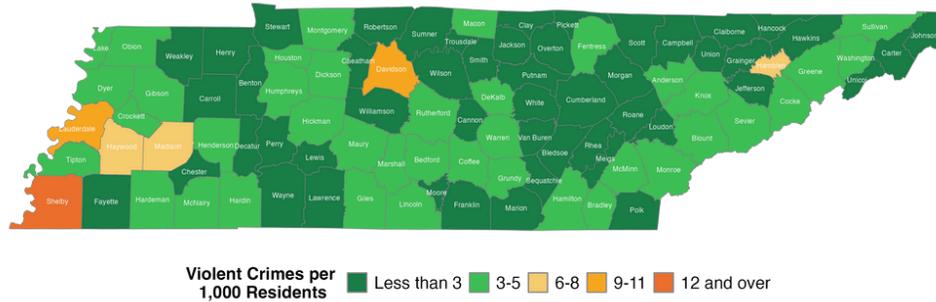


Figure 12. Violent Crime Rate (per 1,000 Residents) by County, 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

From 2019 to 2024, the rate of violent crimes decreased 10.7% on average in Tennessee counties. During the period, the violent crime rate decreased in 68 counties, with the largest decreases in Cannon (-86.4%), Bledsoe (-77.1%), and Clay (-69.1%) counties. The violent crime rate increased in 27 counties, with the largest increases in Fentress (65.8%), Polk (74.2%), and Overton (109.7%) counties.³⁶

From 2019 to 2024, violent crime rates increased the most in rural counties.

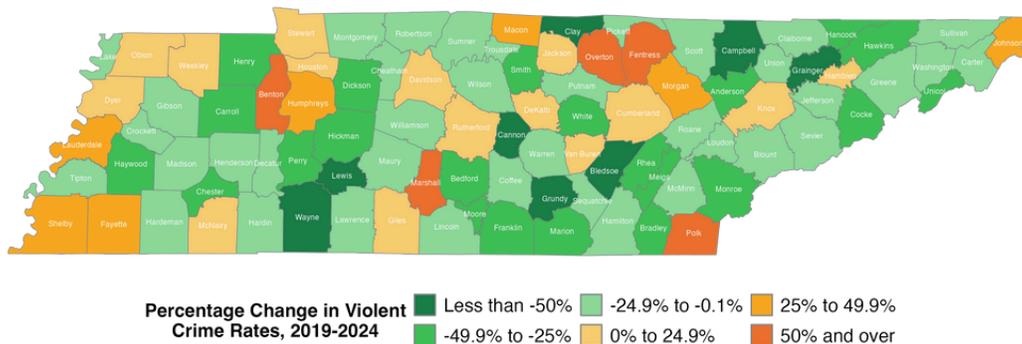


Figure 13. Percentage Change in Violent Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) by County, 2019 to 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

Firearm deaths of all types are increasing significantly in Tennessee.

In 2023, there were 1,587 firearm deaths in Tennessee, a 29.2% increase from 2018. Over half (55.3%) of the deaths caused by firearms in Tennessee were suicides, and suicide deaths by firearm increased 27.2% from 690 in 2018 to 878 in 2023. Homicides, which represent 42.0% of all firearm deaths, increased 32.3% from 504 in 2018 to 667 in 2023. Other firearm deaths, which include firearm deaths inflicted by police or other law enforcement agents, unintentional, or undetermined injury intent, represent 2.1% of firearm deaths in Tennessee, and increased 32.0%, from 25 in 2018 to 33 in 2023.³⁷

Firearm deaths have increased 29.2% since 2018 and the majority (55.3%) of firearm deaths in Tennessee 2023 were suicides.

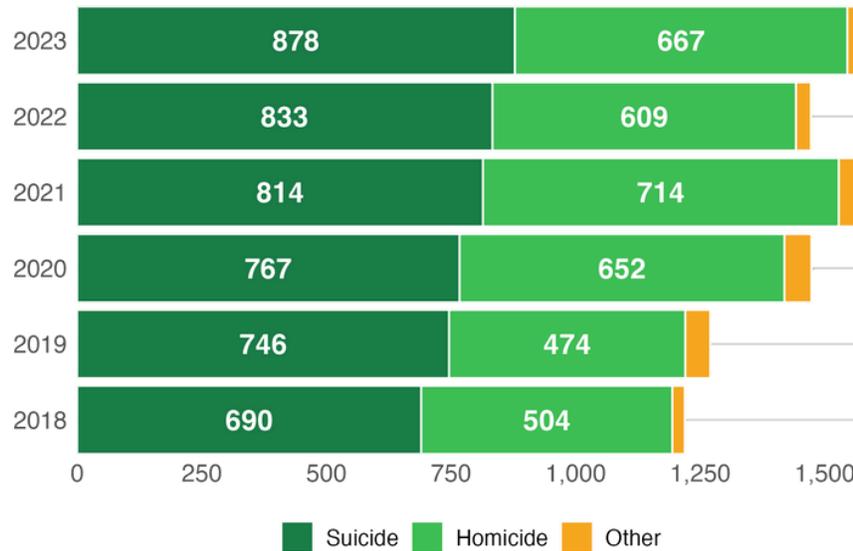


Figure 14. Firearm Deaths in Tennessee by Type, 2018 to 2023
 Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics
 Note: The "Other" category includes firearm deaths inflicted by police or law enforcement acting in the line of duty ("legal intervention"), unintentional, or undetermined injury intent.

Data Note

Crude mortality rates are calculated as the number of deaths divided by the population, expressed per 100,000. "Crude" indicates that the rates are not adjusted for differences in age composition across populations or over time; they reflect the actual observed deaths in each population. For multi-year periods (2018-2023), total deaths across all years were divided by the summed population across those years (person-years of observation), following CDC WONDER's standard methodology for multi-year rate calculations. This approach accounts for population changes over time and yields an average annual rate for the period.

Person-years represent the total amount of time a population is observed or "at risk" for an outcome. For example, if a county has 100,000 residents in each year from 2018 through 2023, this represents 600,000 person-years of observation (100,000 people × 6 years). Using person-years as the denominator ensures that rates properly account for both the size of the population and the length of time studied.

From 2018 to 2023, the highest rates of firearm deaths were in Shelby (38.4 per 100,000 person-year), McNairy (32.9), and Haywood (29.7) counties. With the exception of Shelby County, all other counties with the highest rates of firearm deaths were rural.³⁸

Ten counties have a firearm death rate above 25 (per 100,000 person-year), with half located in West Tennessee, four located in Middle Tennessee, and one located in East Tennessee.

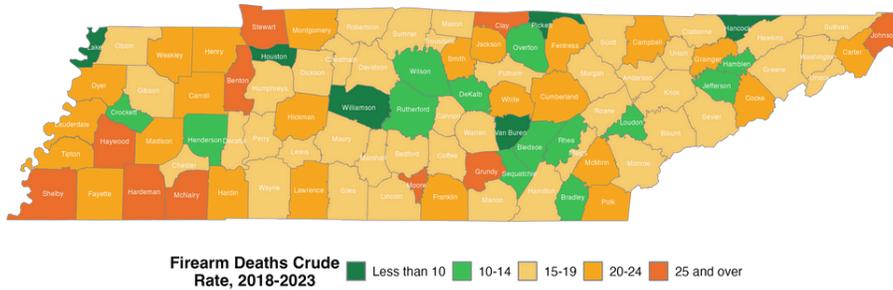


Figure 15. Firearm Deaths Crude Rate (per 100,000 person-year) by County and Selected Types, 2018 to 2023
 Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics
 Note: Data for counties with fewer than 10 deaths have been suppressed. See methodology.

From 2018 to 2023, the highest rates of firearm deaths by suicide were in Moore (27.9 per 100,000 person-year), Johnson (25.9), and McNairy (25.8) counties.³⁹

Firearm deaths by suicide are more prevalent in rural counties.

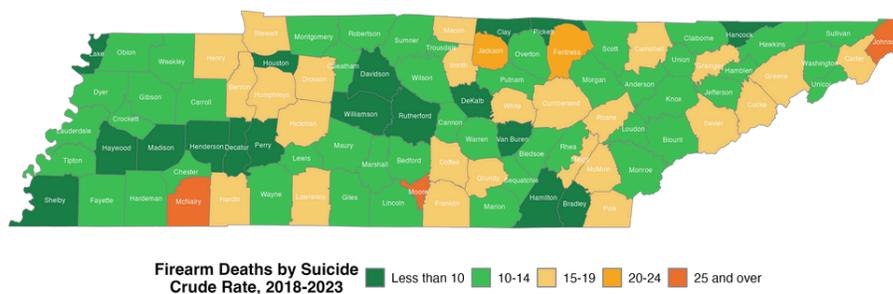


Figure 16. Firearm Deaths by Suicide Crude Rate (per 100,000 person-year) by County and Selected Types, 2018 to 2023
 Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics
 Note: Data for counties with fewer than 10 deaths have been suppressed. See methodology.

From 2018 to 2023, the highest rates of firearm deaths by homicide were in Shelby (29.6 per 100,000 person-year), Haywood (20.2), and Hardeman (13.2) counties. With the exception of Shelby County, all other counties with the highest rates of firearm deaths by homicide were rural.⁴⁰

The rates of firearm deaths by homicide are highest in Shelby and Haywood counties.

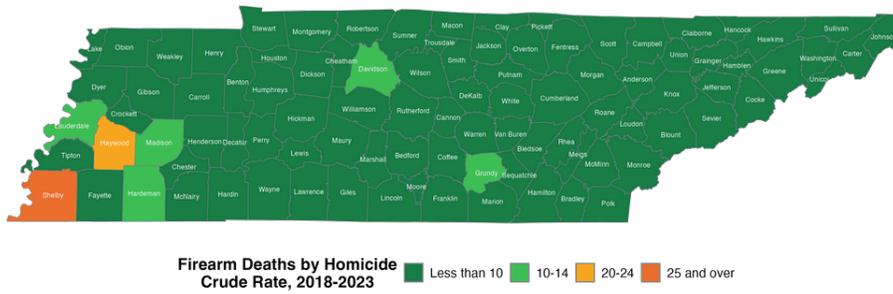


Figure 17. Firearm Deaths Crude Rate (per 100,000 person-year) by County and Selected Types, 2018 to 2023
 Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics
 Note: Data for counties with fewer than 10 deaths have been suppressed.

Crime rates in Davidson and Shelby counties were nearly identical in 2019, with rates remaining flat in Davidson since then and rates decreasing 10.9% since a peak in 2023 in Shelby County.

As the largest counties in Tennessee, both Shelby and Davidson counties have higher rates of crime than many other Tennessee counties, which is consistent with national trends and the association of population density and urbanization with crime.⁴¹ In 2019, crime rates in both counties were nearly identical. Shelby County’s crime rate was relatively flat from 2019 to 2021 (-2.4%), then increased 25.8% from 2021 to 2023. Most recently, the crime rate decreased 10.9% to 139 in 2024. In Davidson County, the crime rate decreased from 124 in 2019 to 114 in 2021, an 8.1% decrease, before increasing 8.8% to 124 in 2024.⁴²

After an increase in crime rate, Shelby County saw a sharp decrease in 2024, while Davidson County has seen a slow increase since 2021.

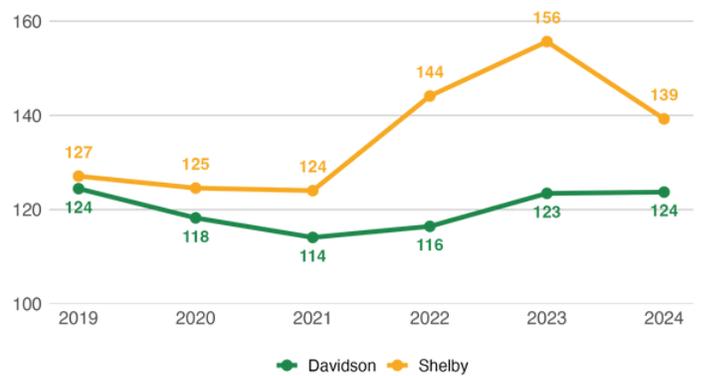


Figure 18. Change in Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) in Davidson and Shelby Counties, 2019 to 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

Crime continues to decrease in Shelby and Davidson counties.

More recent data provided by the Shelby County Crime Commission and the Nashville Public Safety Data Dashboard shows continued decreases in crime in both counties.^{43,44}

- The overall crime rate in Shelby County is down 15.8% from 2024 to 2025, and down 24.6% since its peak in 2023. The overall crime rate in the City of Memphis is down 9.8% from 2024 to 2025, and down 24.8% since the peak in 2023. In Davidson County, the overall number of crimes is down 11.2% since its peak in 2024.
- The rate of major violent crime in Shelby County is down 21.1% from 2024 to 2025, and down 22.5% since its peak in 2023. The rate of major violent crimes in Memphis is down 23.4% from 2024, and down 38.6% since its peak in 2023. In Davidson County, the number of violent crimes has decreased 14.5% from 2024 to 2025 and decreased 18.2% since its peak in 2022.
- The rate for property crime in Shelby County is down 22.6% from 2024 to 2025, and down 37.9% since its peak in 2023. The rate of property crimes in Memphis is down 23.4% since 2024, and down 38.6% since its peak in 2023. In Davidson County, the number of property crimes have decreased 10.3% since its peak in 2024.

In both Shelby and Davidson counties, crime rates for property crimes are higher than other types of crime, which is similar to the rest of the state. In Davidson County, the rate for property crime (68 per 1,000 residents) is higher than all other types of crime, followed by crimes against persons (36), crimes against society (21), and violent crimes (11). (Violent crimes are primarily a subset of crimes against persons; they are not mutually exclusive.) Similarly, in Shelby County, the rate of crime for property crimes (80 per 1,000 residents) is highest, followed by crimes against persons (47), violent crimes (16), and crimes against society (12).⁴⁵

The increase in Shelby County crime rates between 2021 and 2023 was driven primarily by crimes against property.

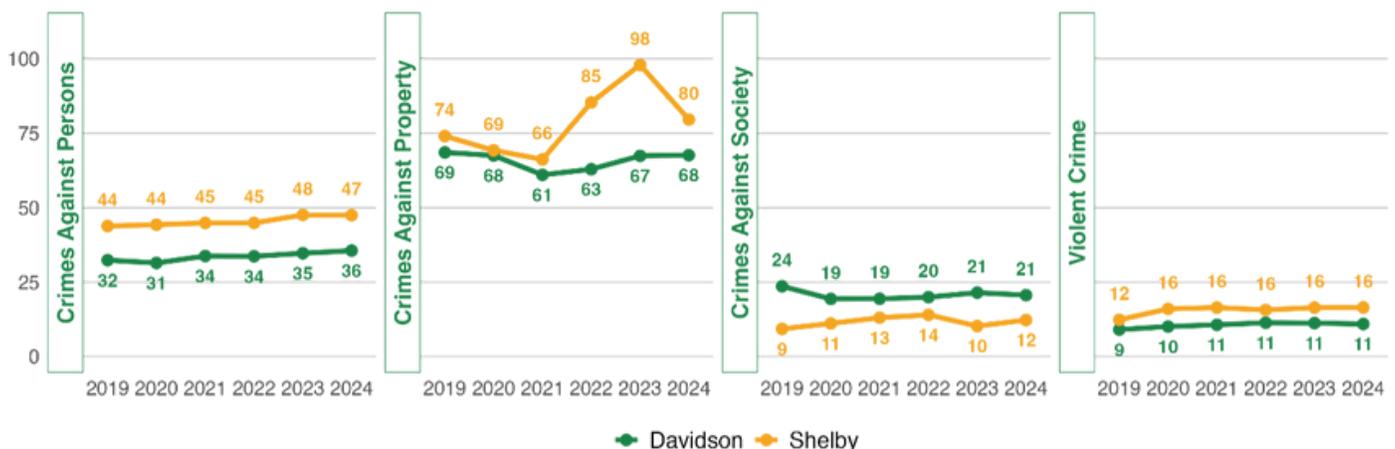


Figure 19. Change in Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) by Crime Type in Davidson and Shelby Counties, 2019 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

The rate of crimes against persons has increased slightly for both counties; from 2019 to 2024, the crime rate for crimes against persons increased 12.5% in Davidson County and 6.8% in Shelby County. The rate of crimes against property decreased 1.4% in Davidson County and increased 8.1% in Shelby County, though the property crime rate in Shelby County decreased 18.4% from 2023 to 2024. The rate of crimes against society has increased 33.3% in both Davidson and Shelby counties. The rate of violent crimes increased 33.3% in Shelby County and 22.2% in Davidson County; however, the majority of that increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and the violent crime rate has remained relatively steady since 2021.⁴⁶

The rate of violent crimes in both Shelby and Davidson counties is driven primarily by aggravated assaults. In Davidson County, the rate of aggravated assault (9 per 1,000 residents), is significantly higher than the rate for murder (0.1) and non-consensual sex offenses (1.5). In Shelby County, the rate of aggravated assault (15 per 1,000 residents), is also significantly higher than the rate of murder (0.3) and non-consensual sex offenses (1.0).⁴⁷

In both Shelby and Davidson counties, crime rates for aggravated assault are significantly higher than rates for other violent crimes.

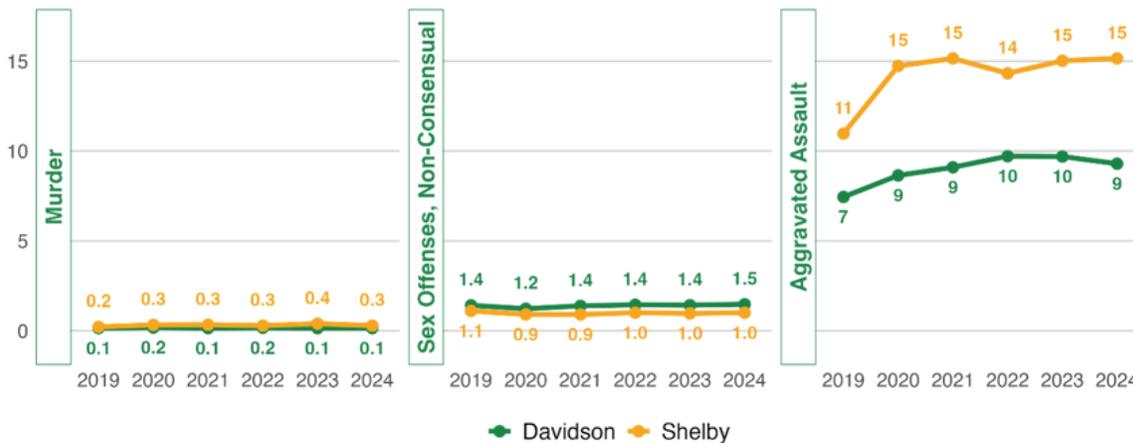


Figure 20. Change in Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) for Selected Violent Crimes in Davidson and Shelby Counties, 2019 to 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

The rate of motor vehicle theft in Shelby County increased 209.6% from 6.12 per 1,000 residents in 2021 to 18.95 in 2023, however the rate decreased 35.6% in 2024. In Davidson County, the rate of motor vehicle theft increased 70.3% from 4.38 per 1,000 residents in 2019 to 7.46 in 2024. In Shelby County, all other larceny theft has decreased from 5.62 per 1,000 residents in 2019 to 5.6 in 2024 and burglary has decreased from 8.87 per 1,000 residents in 2019 to 6.55 in 2024. In Davidson County, all other larceny theft increased from 4.85 per 1,000 residents in 2019 to 5.41 in 2024, and the rate of burglary has decreased from 5.24 per 1,000 residents in 2019 to 4.22 per 1,000 residents in 2024.⁴⁸

In both Shelby and Davidson counties, crime rates for motor vehicle theft are higher than rates for other property crimes, and rates are down 35.6% and 7.6% respectively since a peak in 2023.

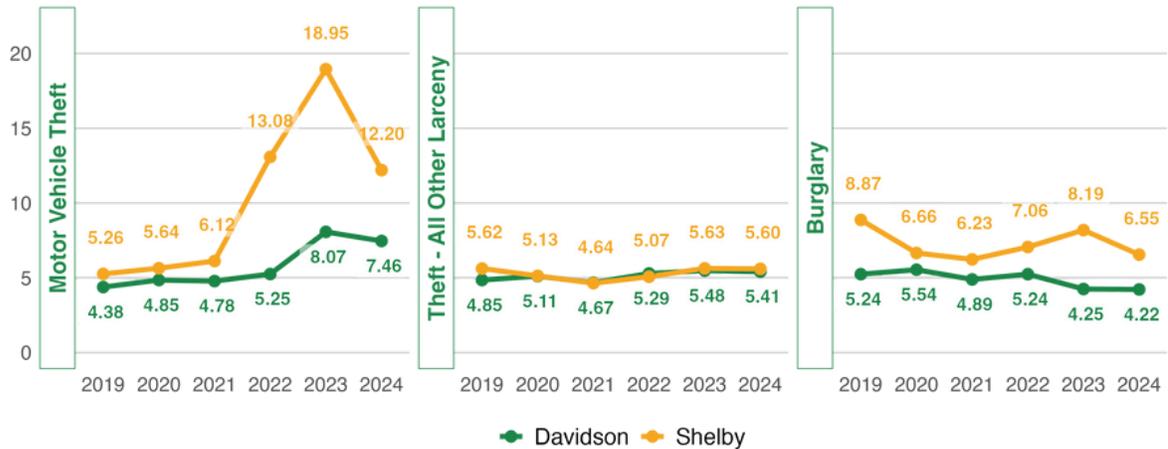


Figure 21. Change in Crime Rates (per 1,000 Residents) for Selected Crimes against Property in Davidson and Shelby Counties, 2019 to 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

In Tennessee, crime rates are highest for adults and White males.

Similar to crime rates overall, crime rates for both men and women are decreasing. The crime rate for men has decreased from 3,983 in 2019 to 3,214 in 2024 (-19.3%), while the crime rate for women decreased from 1,820 in 2019 to 1,435 in 2024 (-21.1%). In 2024, the crime rate for men was almost 2.2 times higher than the crime rate for women.⁴⁹

From 2019 to 2024, nearly two-thirds (65.0%) of people involved in offenses were identified as adults or youth, with the remaining individuals of unknown age. In the Tennessee Juvenile Justice System, a youth is defined as “any individual who is under the chronological age of eighteen (18) years and who has not been previously transferred to adult court.” Therefore, adults and arrestees are those 18 years and older, while youth are those under 18.^{50,51}

Crime rates for both adults and youth declined from 2019 to 2024. The adult crime rate dropped by 21.5%, from 4,621 to 3,626 offenses per 100,000 residents, and the youth crime rate decreased by 11.8%, from 407 in 2019 to 359 in 2024. However, the youth crime rate has increased in recent years; it has risen 20.8% since 2020, although it remains below pre-pandemic levels. In 2024, the crime rate for adults was 10.1 times higher than that for youth.⁵²

Close to one in four adult crimes are committed by individuals within the ages of 18 to 25 (24.8%)

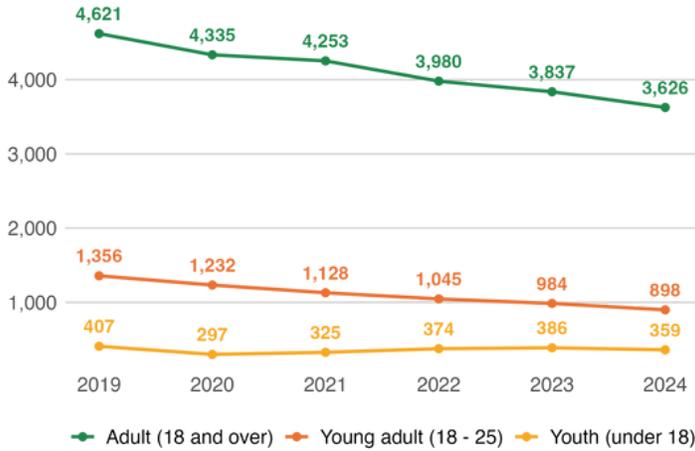


Figure 22. Crime Rate by Age Groups (per 100,000 Residents), 2019 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

The crime rate for men is 2.2 times higher than the crime rate for women.

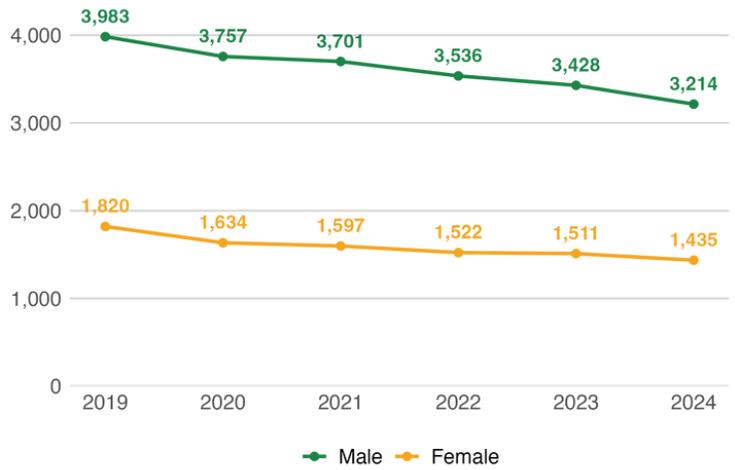


Figure 23. Crime Rate by Sex (per 100,000 Residents), 2019 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

Only youth crime against persons rates have increased from pre-pandemic levels

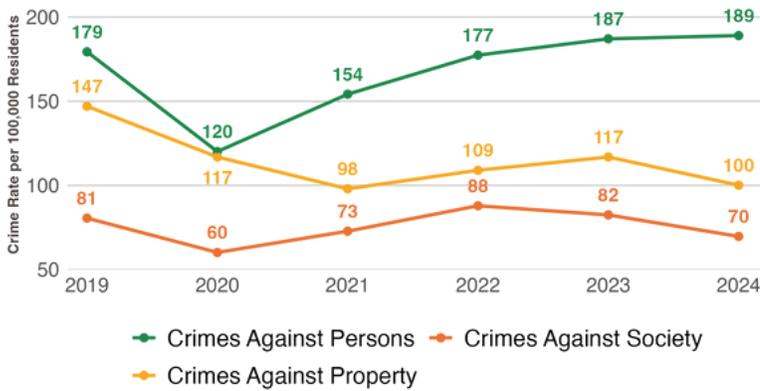


Figure 24. Youth Crime Rate by Type (per 100,000 Residents), 2019 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

For offenses in which demographic data of the person who committed the crime is known, the majority are committed by adult males. For all crimes, 59% of offenses were committed by adults, 52.7% by males, and 33% by White persons, 31.4% by Black persons, and 30.9% by other races and ethnicities. For violent crimes, 66.9% are committed by adults, 67.8% by males, and 31.4% by White persons, 41.1% by Black or African American persons, and 20.8% by other races and ethnicities.⁵³

Compared to all crimes, violent crimes are more likely to be committed by adult males.

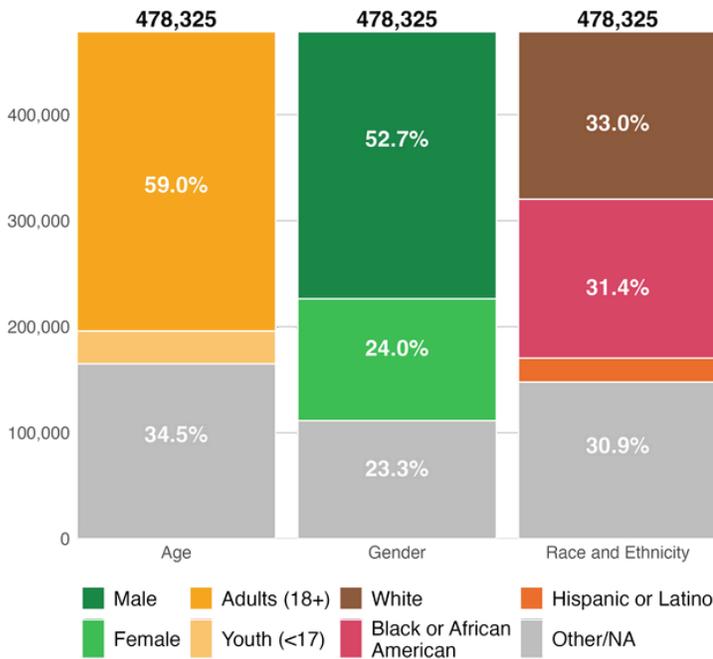


Figure 25. All Crimes by Gender, Age, and Race and Ethnicity, 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

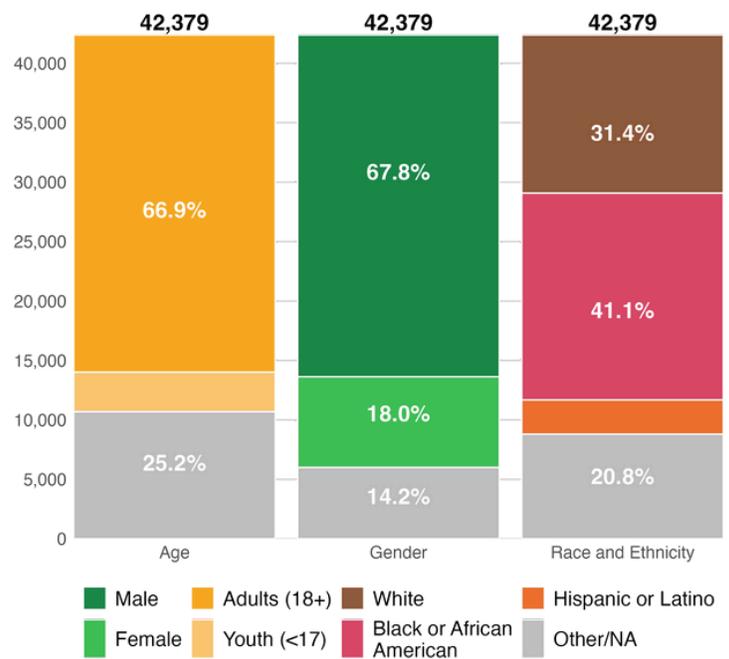


Figure 26. Violent Crimes by Gender, Age, and Race and Ethnicity, 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): Offense Data

Simple assault is the leading youth offense.

In 2022, crimes against persons accounted for over half (54.8%) of youth offenses and have remained the largest offense type committed by youth since 2018. Simultaneously, crimes against persons had the largest decline in 2020 from the previous year at 31.2%, followed by crimes against society at 25.9% and crimes against property at 20.3%.⁵⁴

From 2018 to 2022, simple assault was the most frequent offense among youth, accounting for one-third of all offenses in almost all years. In 2022, simple assault accounted for 35% of all offenses committed by people under 18, followed by drug/narcotic violations with 10% of all youth offenses, intimidation and aggravated assault with 7.6% each, and weapon law violations at 5.1%. The remaining 27.7% of youth offenses included motor vehicle theft (4%), drug/narcotic equipment violations (3.8%), and shoplifting (2.9%).⁵⁵

Simple assault is the most frequent offense among youth.

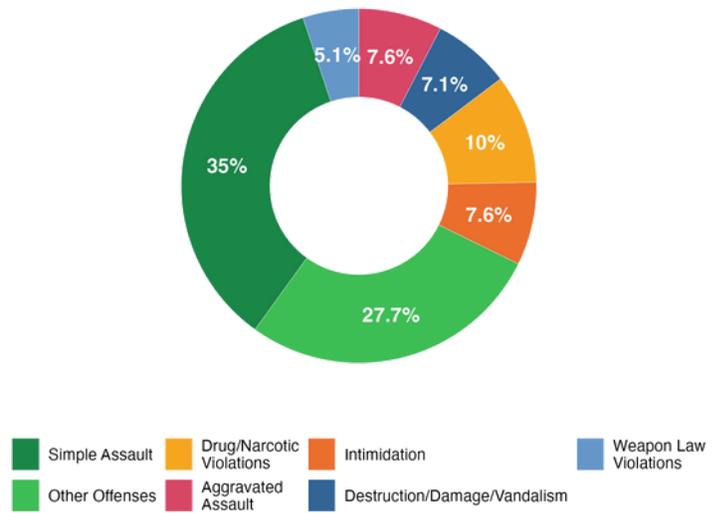


Figure 27: Youth Crime by Offense, 2022

Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

About Crime Rate Demographic Data

TIBRS collects data on “offenders” whether or not an individual has been identified, arrested, or convicted of a crime. There are some incidents in which there is no information on the person who committed a crime, in which case demographic data is listed as “unknown.”

As of 2022, data was classified for five different races: White, Black or African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. For this report, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander have been combined into an “Other Race” category.

Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that racial and ethnic identification and categorization is often performed based on an officer’s perception rather than verbal inquiry which could lead to misclassification of demographic identity, as has been evidenced in the case of Hispanic or Latinos being identified as White.⁵⁶

Crime rates for White Tennesseans have decreased from 2,894 per 100,000 residents in 2019 to 2,027 in 2024, or 30.0%, while the crime rate for Black Tennesseans has decreased 10.2%, from 2,114 per 100,000 residents in 2019 to 1,898 in 2024. Crime rates for Hispanic or Latino Tennesseans have increased from 191 per 100,000 residents to 280 per 100,000 residents, an increase of 47.1%, while the crime rate for other races remained steady at or below 33 per 100,000 residents.⁵⁷

Crime rates are highest for White residents.

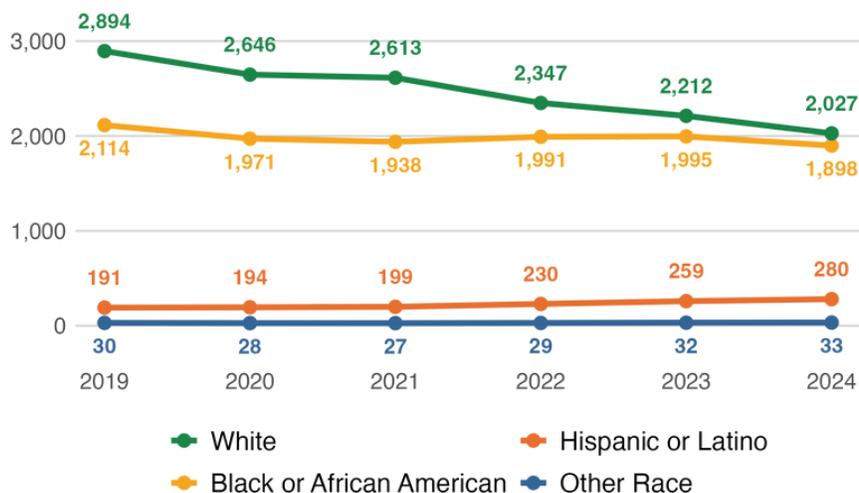


Figure 28. Crime Rate (per 100,000 Residents) by Race and Ethnicity, 2019 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

Crime victims are racially diverse, with the highest proportion aged 25-34.

In 2023, there were 424,398 reported crime victims in Tennessee, a 5.7% decrease from 450,119 in 2018. Of these individuals, 42.5% were female and 38.7% were male. The racial breakdown showed that 47.4% of victims were White, 31.8% Black, and 1.3% other races. Additionally, 6.2% of victims were of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. (Note: Demographic data does not total 100% because it was not available for all individuals. See methodology for more on crime victim data.)⁵⁸

Crime impacts all age groups, but the highest proportion of victims of crime are aged 25-34.

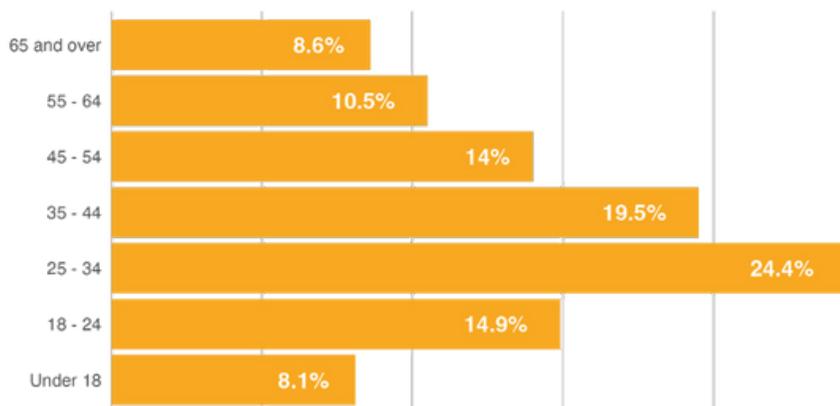


Figure 29. Age of Crime Victims, 2023
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)
Note: Percentages exclude those victims whose ages are unknown or missing.

The victims of firearm deaths are primarily males, adults, and White.

In 2023, there were 1,587 firearm deaths in Tennessee; 83.4% of these deaths were males, 94% were adults, and 58.9% were White. In 2023, there were 878 firearm deaths by suicide; 83.4% of these deaths were male, 96.9% were adults, and 87.4% were White. In 2024, there were 667 firearm deaths by homicide; 82.8% of deaths were male, 90.9% were adults, and 68.7% were Black.

More than eight in ten firearm deaths in Tennessee are males.

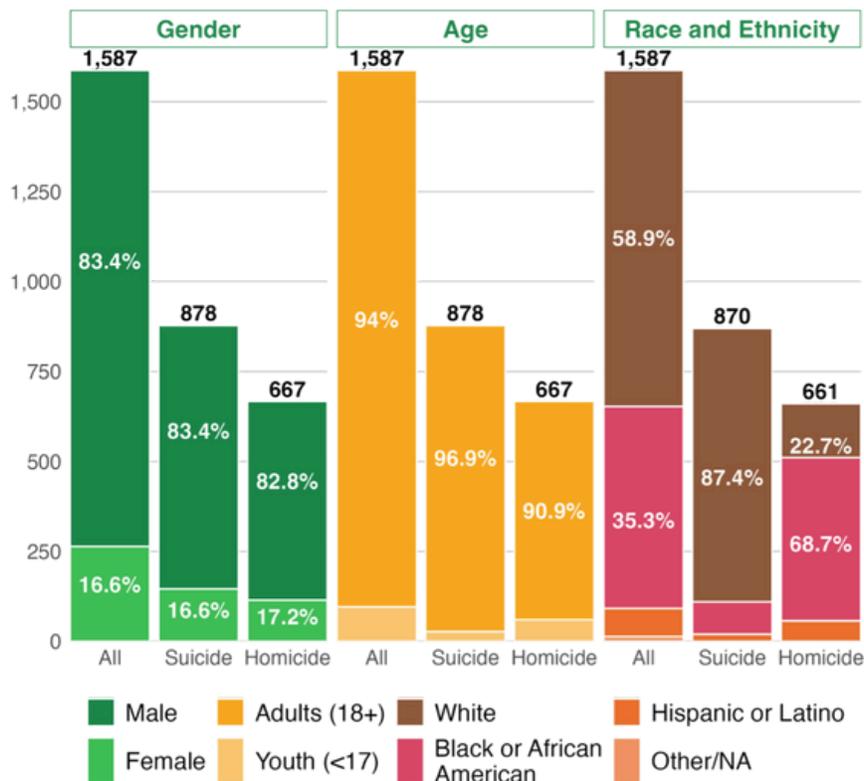


Figure 30. Firearm Deaths by Type and by Gender, Age, and Race and Ethnicity, 2023
 Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics
 Note: Firearm deaths by "Other" injury intents are excluded as groups with less than 10 cases are suppressed.

Tennessee's crime rates are higher than most other states.

While Tennessee's overall crime rate is decreasing, it remains higher than almost every other state in the nation—it ranks 49th among 50 states and DC. According to the NIBRS, Tennessee's overall crime rate in 2023 was 5,773 incidents per 100,000 residents, a 9.9% decrease from 6,404 in 2019, 45.4% higher than the national average of 3,970.⁶⁰

Only DC and New Mexico have a higher crime rate than Tennessee.

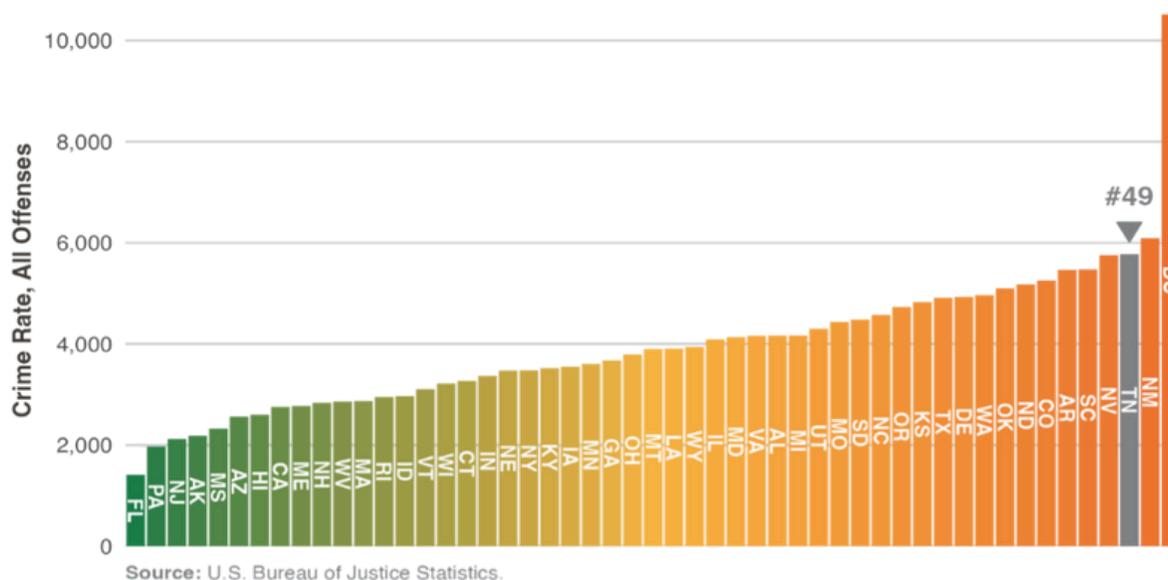


Figure 31. Crime Rates by State, 2023
Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

2023 Violent Crime
48th

2023 Property Crime
45th

2023 Crimes Against Society
47th

Data Note

Since 1929, local and state data on crime has been collected nationally through the Unified Crime Reporting (UCR) Program through the Summary Reporting System (SRS). In 2016, the FBI began to transition the UCR from SRS to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), which captures more detail on occurrences of crime.⁶¹ Tennessee began transitioning to NIBRS in the 1990s and has been fully reporting to NIBRS since 2011; however, many states have not completed the transition and some state-to-state comparisons are based on limited data from other states.

Tennessee struggles with several community conditions linked to high crime rates.

The causes of crime are complex and varied, and include factors at the individual, family, peer, school, and neighborhood levels; however, Tennessee has poor outcomes for several conditions that have been shown to affect crime rates.^{62,63} In particular, Tennessee performs lower than other states in community and economic conditions associated with crime.

Neighborhood poverty and economic distress have been connected to exposure to violence, risk of victimization, adolescent crime rate, arrests, and recidivism.⁶⁴ Tennessee demonstrates economic distress in a number of ways:

- In Tennessee, 14.0% of people live in poverty, including 19.7% of people under the age of 18, ranking 42nd nationally for people living in poverty.⁶⁵ Poverty rates vary significantly by race and ethnicity—ranging from a low of 7.7% for Asian residents to a high of 24.9% for residents who identify as some other race, including American Indian or Alaska Native.
- Over 10% of Tennessee families experience food insecurity, ranking 36th nationally.
- Only 24.3% of workers in Tennessee earn a living wage that allows them to comfortably afford their household expenses—almost 75% of Tennesseans do not earn a living wage.⁶⁶
- In Tennessee, 11.5% of people are experiencing food insecurity, over half of renters are cost-burdened, and Tennessee ranks 49th in bankruptcy filings per capita.⁶⁷
- Tennessee has nine economically distressed counties as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission: Bledsoe, Cocke, Grundy, Hancock, Hardeman, Haywood, Lake, Perry, and Scott.⁶⁸

There are significant racial and ethnic disparities in Tennessee poverty rates.

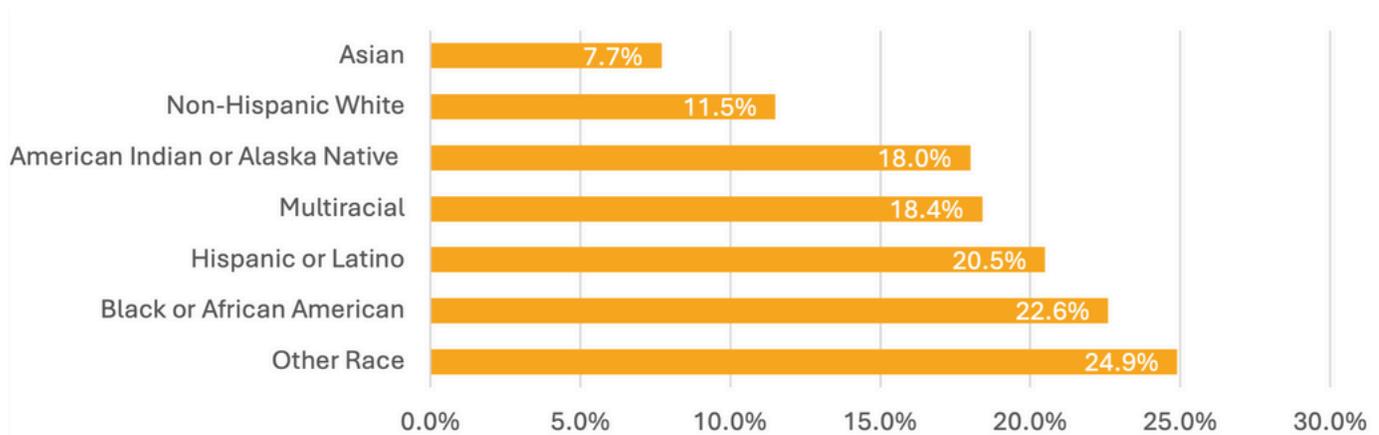


Figure 32. Poverty Rates by Race and Ethnicity, 2023
Source: ThinkTennessee, State of our State Dashboard

Education is a critical tool for increasing economic opportunity and preventing criminal activity. Both educational attainment and public-school funding are associated with lower adult crime rates.^{69,70} In Tennessee, 9% of adults do not have a high school diploma, ranking 38th nationally, and only 46.5% have post-secondary educational attainment, ranking 41st nationally.⁷¹ Tennessee also has lower levels of educational funding. In 2021, Tennessee spent \$2,120 per capita on education compared to \$2,571 in the Southeast U.S. and \$3,215 nationally.⁷²

Financial problems and debt have been shown to increase the risk of criminal behavior and be worsened by justice involvement for both youth and adults. For example, debt (particularly criminal debt) may be associated with higher rates of recidivism.^{73,74,75} Tennessee has very high distressed-debt rates, despite overall debt levels in the state being lower than the national average.⁷⁶ Tennessee ranks 38th nationally in debt collections; 32% of Tennesseans with credit reports have debt in collections, higher than the national rate of 26%.⁷⁷

Across most types of debt, Tennessee has higher rates of delinquent debt, debt in default, or in collections.

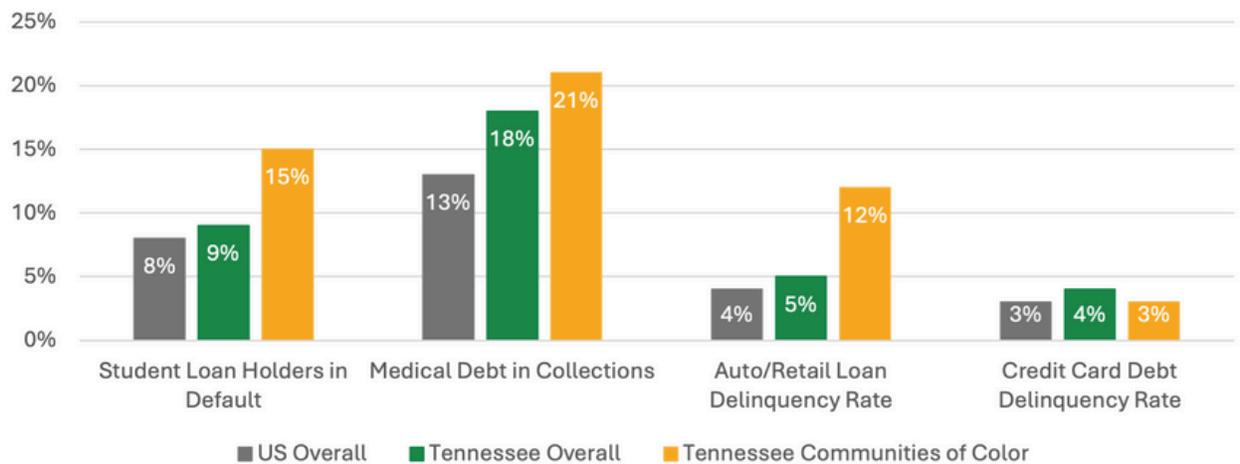


Figure 33: Distressed Debt, 2023
Source: Urban Institute, Urban Data Catalog

In addition, a number of other factors associated with a child’s family structure and experiences have been shown to impact crime.

- Unstable or dysfunctional family environments with neglect, abuse, or parental criminality make it more likely that a child will grow up to engage in criminal behavior.⁷⁸ In Tennessee, one in five children has had two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES); the state ranks 41st nationally.⁷⁹
- Opportunity youth (i.e., those not enrolled in school, in the labor force, or employed) are more likely to be involved in crime.⁸⁰ In Tennessee, 6.4% of youth aged 16 to 19 are considered opportunity youth, ranking 25th nationally.⁸¹

Opportunity youth are more prevalent in rural counties.

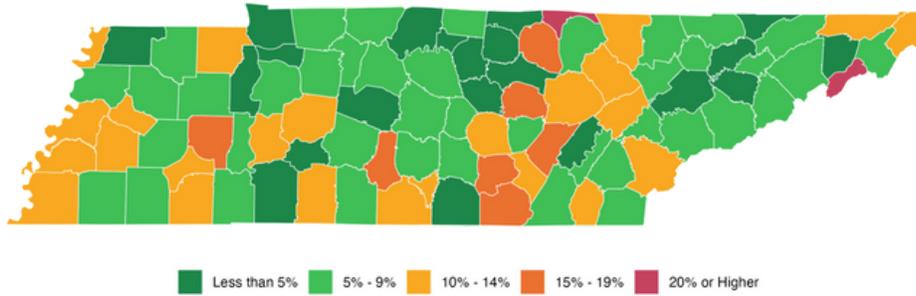


Figure 34. Percent of Youth who are not Enrolled in School, in the Labor Force, or Employed, 2023
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Variables Affecting Crime⁸²

- Population density and degree of urbanization
- Variations in composition of the population, particularly youth concentration
- Stability of the population with respect to residents' mobility, commuting patterns, and transient factors
- Modes of transportation and highway system
- Economic conditions, including median income, poverty level, and job availability
- Cultural factors and educational, recreational, and religious characteristics
- Family conditions with respect to divorce and family cohesiveness
- Climate
- Effective strength of law enforcement agencies
- Administrative and investigative emphases of law enforcement
- Policies of other components of the criminal justice system (i.e., prosecutorial, judicial, correctional, and probational)
- Citizens' attitudes toward crime
- Crime reporting practices of the citizenry

Source: FBI

Tennessee leads in crime data collection and reporting.

In 1995, TBI enhanced its data management and reporting capabilities with several initiatives, including establishing a data repository, aligning state statuses with TIBRS definitions, creating specialized reporting software, developing training and auditing programs, and beginning statewide training. As a result, Tennessee was NIBRS-certified in 1998.

As of 2024, Tennessee stands out in the southeast region for its comprehensive crime reporting, with 100% of its population covered by NIBRS-reporting law enforcement agencies, compared to 82% nationwide. Other southeastern states like Florida (42%), Mississippi (64%), and Louisiana (78%) lag in agency coverage.⁸³

Law Enforcement

Tennessee law enforcement is conducted by a myriad of agencies, primarily the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security (TDSHS) and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), as well as by local law enforcement through police departments and Sheriff's offices. In addition, many state agencies and other institutions have their own law enforcement arms, such as universities, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. In total, there are an estimated 363 law enforcement agencies operating in Tennessee.⁸⁴ The following section provides data on law enforcement staffing, performance, and funding, though the focus is on state-level law enforcement due to the lack of consolidated data sources for local law enforcement.

Data Note

Data on law enforcement that can be used for state-to-state comparisons comes from the Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies; however, the most recent data available from this source is 2018. Therefore, it has been used for state comparisons. Where possible, more recent information available from the State of Tennessee is provided.

There are over 360 law enforcement agencies in Tennessee—most work locally.

In 2018, there were 26,746 state and local law enforcement staff working in 363 agencies throughout Tennessee—a rate of 395 employees per 100,000 residents. This rate was slightly higher than the national average of 372, and Tennessee ranked 15th for the number of enforcement employees per resident. The majority of these employees work at the local level—45% for Sheriff's offices and 44% for local police—while 11% work for state or other agencies. Approximately 66% of law enforcement staff in Tennessee were sworn officers.⁸⁵

Almost nine in ten law enforcement staff are local.

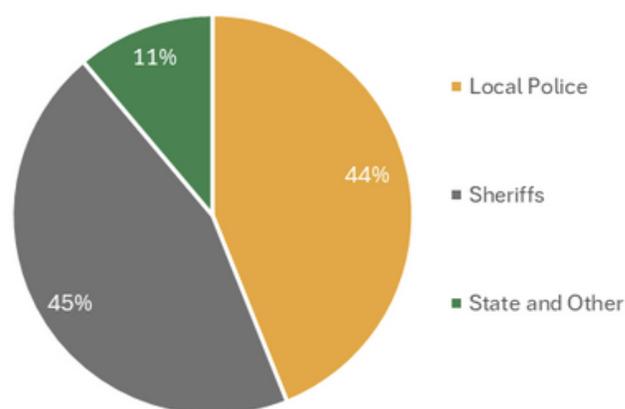


Figure 35. TN Law Enforcement Agency Employees, 2018
Source: U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics

Tennessee arrest rates are declining, while clearance rates climbed in 2024.

After declines in 2022 and 2023, Tennessee's clearance rates (the percentage of reported crimes that result in an arrest, charge, or other resolution) have increased to 38.0% in 2024, but still remain lower than 2020 rates. Arrest rates have decreased from 2,050 per 100,000 residents in 2020 to 1,622 in 2024, a 20.9% decline.⁸⁶ In Tennessee, clearance rates for homicides of a White victim are 85.3%, compared to 82.5% for homicides with a Black victim.⁸⁷

Clearance rates are 4.8% lower than in 2020, while arrest rates are 20.9% lower.

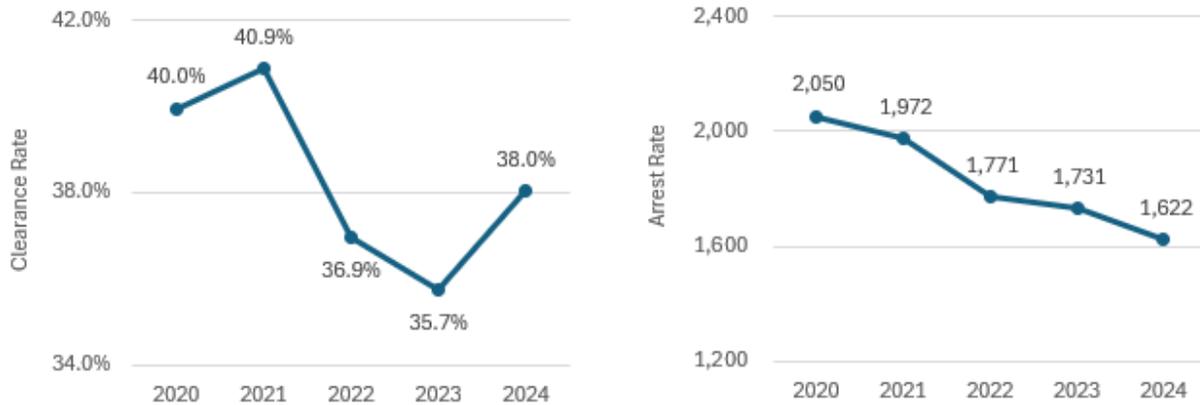


Figure 36: Clearance and Arrest Rates (per 100,000 Residents), 2020 to 2024
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

Incidents of law enforcement officers killed or assaulted have increased in recent years.

Reports of LEOKA (Law Enforcement Officers Killed or Assaulted) increased from 2,453 in 2019 to 2,824 in 2023, an increase of 15.1%.⁸⁸ In 2023, the majority of these incidents, 57.5%, involved simple assault with an additional 37.1% involving aggravated assault. In addition, 5.2% of incidents were intimidation, and both stalking and murder represented .04% of incidents.⁸⁹ LEOKA incidents are most prevalent when responding to a disturbance call (29.1%) or attempting other arrests (18.1%). In 2023, the clearance rate for LEOKA was 80.0%, with an additional 2.9% of incidents considered “exceptional clearance,” meaning that the offender is known but the incident is unable to be cleared by an arrest.⁹⁰

Almost half of LEOKA occur during a response to a disturbance call or attempting arrest.

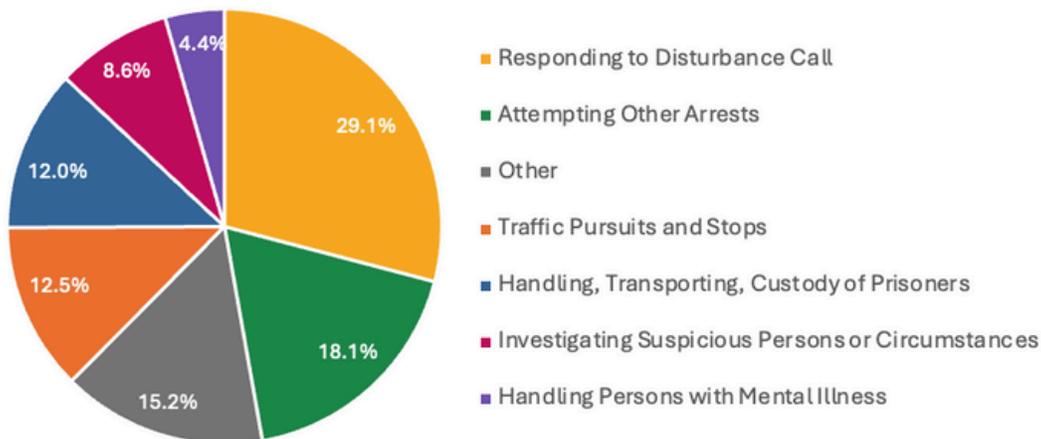


Figure 37: Law Enforcement Officers Killed or Assaulted (LEOKA) by Activity Type, 2023
 Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation

Use of force results in the death of an average of 32 Tennesseans each year.

From 2020 to 2024, there were a total of 153 incidents of deadly use of force from law enforcement, resulting in the death of 159 Tennesseans. Over the five years, the number of incidents was typically around 30 per year; however, in 2023 there was a peak of 36 deadly-use-of-force incidents.⁹¹ Deadly use of force usually occurs in residences (41%) or on highways, roads, or streets (36%) and occurs during a response to unlawful or suspicious activity (39.7%) or a traffic stop (18.5%).⁹²

The majority of deadly-use-of-force incidents occur after reported unlawful or suspicious activity or traffic stops.

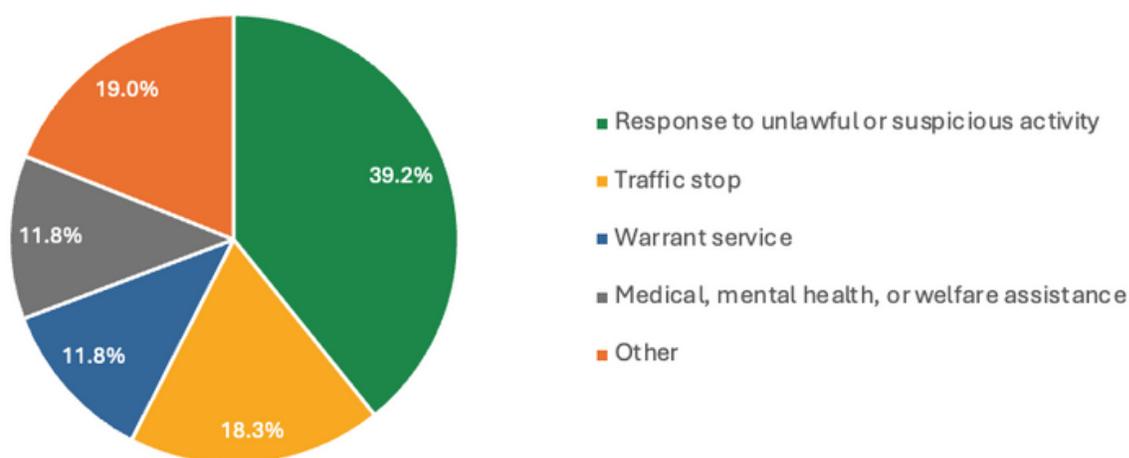


Figure 38: Law Enforcement-Related Deaths by Initial Contact, 2020 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation

Victims of deadly use of force are most likely to be male (99.7%), White (66.0%), and between the ages of 25 and 44 (57.9%). From 2020 to 2024, Black Tennesseans represented 28.3% of people killed by deadly use of force despite being 15.3% of the population.^{93,94}

Judicial System

The Tennessee judicial system includes the courts, district attorneys, public defenders, and the Office of Attorney General and Reporter. The Tennessee court system is made up of three levels: the state Supreme Court, the appellate courts, and the trial courts, which include courts with limited jurisdiction (general sessions courts, juvenile and family courts, and municipal courts).

The Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) provides statewide support to the court system, preparing annual budgets, providing judicial education, and compiling data. Due to the diffused nature of the courts and judicial discretion, a person's experience in court and their outcomes can vary significantly across the state.

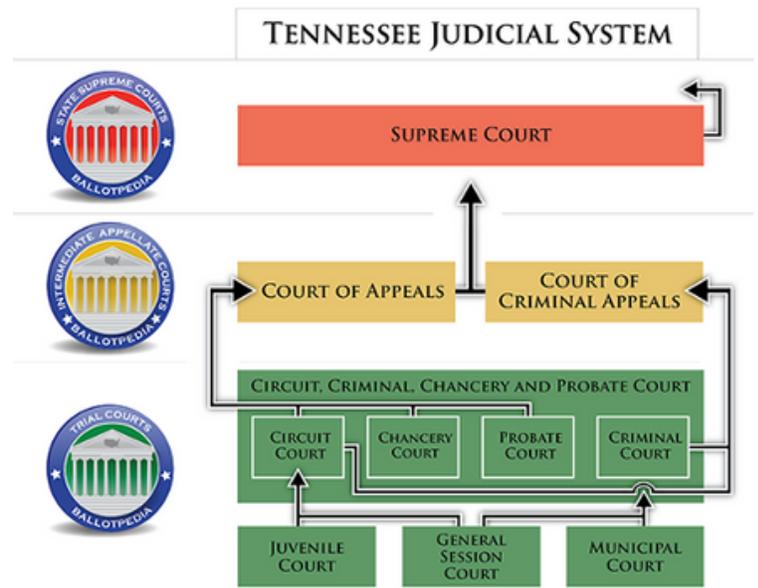


Figure 39: Tennessee Judicial System
Source: Ballotpedia

Not all Tennessee judicial districts have criminal or juvenile courts.

Criminal cases occur in either criminal or circuit courts.⁹⁵ Circuit courts have general jurisdiction in Tennessee and hear civil and criminal cases, as well as appeals from decisions of juvenile, municipal, and general sessions courts. The legislature created criminal courts in certain counties to relieve circuit courts in areas with heavy caseloads. Currently, 13 of Tennessee's 32 judicial districts have criminal courts, including Davidson, Shelby, Knox, and Hamilton counties.

Since 2022, there are 32 Tennessee judicial districts; 13 of which have a criminal court.

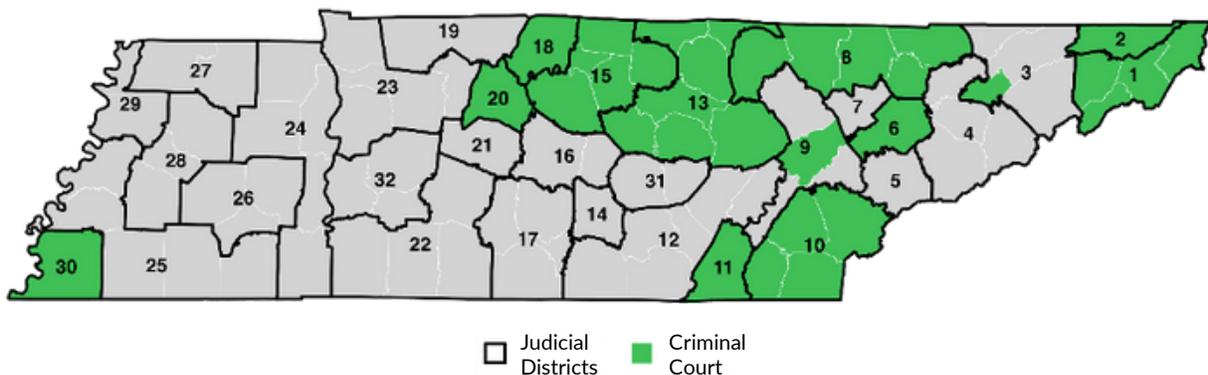


Figure 40: Map of Tennessee Judicial Districts
Source: Ballotpedia

Tennessee is developing a uniform court system to address case management and data accessibility challenges.

The Tennessee General Assembly recently directed the AOC to develop a unified court system that integrates case management, electronic case filing, payment processing, and data reporting across state and local courts with \$75 million appropriated for the effort.⁹⁶ The goal is to make court system data more accessible and uniform across the state. Currently, probation officers and prosecutors must request records from other court jurisdictions because systems are not connected. Also, individuals with offenses may face difficulty in determining what fines and fees they owe or obtaining documents needed for voting rights restoration.

The AOC is currently working with a consulting firm to develop a new unified court system. According to the AOC's communications director, the multi-year project is in its final planning stages, and the AOC is required to provide updates to the General Assembly every six months. While the new system offers the opportunity for statewide uniformity, implementation may be challenging as some counties have already invested in their own court systems.⁹⁷

The number of Tennessee court filings of criminal cases has decreased slightly.

In FY23-24, there were 149,175 criminal court filings, a 6.0% decrease from 158,721 in FY19-20, though filings have not shown a consistent upward or downward trend.^{98,99} Similarly, dispositions (filings resolved) have decreased by 1.5% over the five-year period.¹⁰⁰

Criminal court filings and dispositions are slightly down on the previous two years.

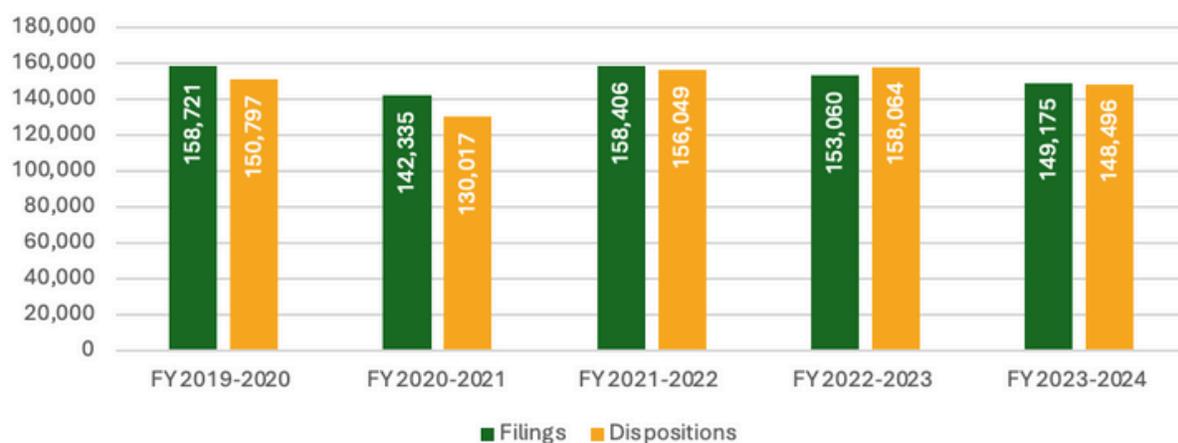


Figure 41: Criminal Court Filings and Dispositions, FY19-20 to FY23-24
Source: Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

Almost one in five criminal court filings is for drug offenses.

Almost one in five (18.6%) court filings are for drug offenses, while the second largest number of filings are for probation violations (16.5%), followed by burglary/theft (12.7%).¹⁰¹ Homicides account for 1.5% of court filings. The number of filings for most offenses decreased from FY19-20 to FY23-24, with a few notable exceptions of types of filings that increased: Sexual Offenses (15.9%), Offenses Against the Family/Person (10.5%), Post-Conviction (8.8%), Other (8.2%), Offenses Against Government (3.4%), and Assaults (0.8%).

Drug offenses are 18.6% of court filings in Tennessee.

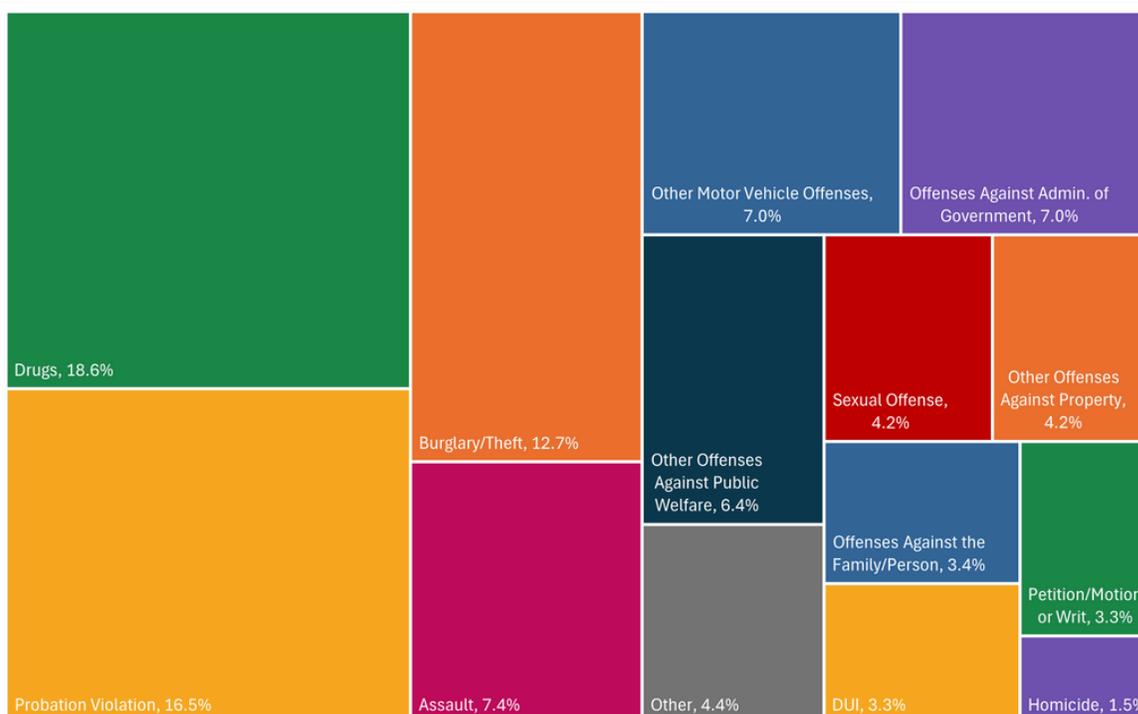


Figure 42: Court Filings by Offense, 2023
 Source: Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

All Tennesseans are entitled to counsel regardless of ability to pay.

Tennesseans have a right to counsel in criminal cases; those who cannot afford to hire an attorney (referred to as “indigent” defendants) are assigned a lawyer by the court. Judges determine whether a person qualifies for appointed counsel, and the required filings and proof vary from county to county in the state.¹⁰²

In Tennessee, indigent defendants are typically represented by district public defenders—unless a conflict of interest or other good cause (like excessive workload) prevents effective counsel.¹⁰³ When a public defender cannot serve (in about 25% of criminal cases) due to an ethical conflict or the case is not within the defender’s jurisdiction (e.g., child welfare cases), judges appoint private attorneys from a court-maintained list to provide legal counsel, paid hourly at the state’s expense.

Judges determine whether a defendant should have appointed counsel and whether the defendant can pay all or some of the appointed-counsel fees.¹⁰⁴ From 2020 to 2024, the number of adult defendants appointed counsel increased from 172,642 to 190,698. And of defendants appointed counsel in 2024, 56% were ordered to pay those fees.¹⁰⁵

The number of defendants who are appointed counsel is going up; and a larger portion is ordered to pay.



Figure 43. Number of Defendants who are Appointed Counsel, with Fee Waived or Ordered to Pay, 2020 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

However, the proportion of defendants whose fees are waived versus those ordered to pay varies widely from county to county. In some counties, 0% of defendants were ordered to pay, while in many others, 100% were ordered to pay.¹⁰⁶ In total, \$1.5 million in appointed-counsel fees were collected in 2024.

The percentage of defendants who must pay for court-appointed counsel varies significantly by county.

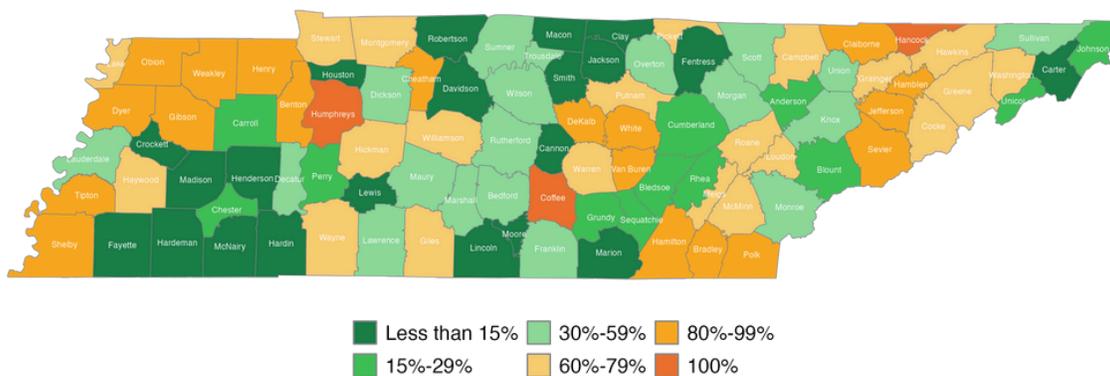


Figure 44: Percent of Defendants who are Appointed Counsel who are Ordered to Pay, 2024
Source: Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

New funding and policy changes aim to address problems in Tennessee's indigent defense system.

Unlike some states, Tennessee has no central entity that oversees indigent defense.¹⁰⁷ Instead, trial court judges determine when a defendant is appointed counsel, the District Public Defenders Conference oversees elected public defenders, and the AOC administers compensation for private appointed counsel.

- **Public Defenders & Assistant Public Defenders:** Public defenders are salaried employees primarily funded by the state of Tennessee.¹⁰⁸ According to a 2023 study based on National Public Defense Workload Standards, Tennessee public defenders work 5.5 times more cases than the national standards recommend—the most “overworked” of the 27 states featured in the study.¹⁰⁹
- **Indigent Representation:** Currently, the AOC receives a recurring \$64.4 million from the state budget for indigent representation (\$53.4 million for indigent defense and \$11 million for Guardian Ad Litem services). According to the AOC, 99% of all appropriated funds are paid to attorneys, experts, and investigators, and low rates of pay for appointed counsel have caused a shortage of attorneys willing to take appointments.¹¹⁰

However, the Tennessee General Assembly recently approved much-needed funding for the indigent defense system.

- **Funding Increases:** In 2024, the Tennessee General Assembly approved the first funding increase for appointed counsel since 1997, raising the maximum hourly rate by \$10 (from \$50 to \$60) and proportionately increasing the total cap an attorney can earn per case.¹¹¹ Before this change, Tennessee's court appointed attorneys were among the lowest paid in the nation.¹¹²
- **Indigent Representation Plan:** In April 2025, the state's approved budget included an additional \$13 million in recurring funding and \$4 million in startup funds for the AOC's new Indigent Representation Plan.¹¹³ The plan includes establishing an “Indigent Representation Commission” that provides operational oversight and a new “Office of Indigent Conflicts and Civil Counsel” to make indigent defense and counsel appointments—relieving judges of the responsibility to appoint private counsel when the district public defender cannot serve. Based on FY22-23 indigent claims data, the new Office would manage an estimated 76,000 cases each year.

Most court filings are resolved through a dismissal or guilty plea.

In FY23-24, 43.6% of filed criminal counts were dismissed, meaning they were disposed of without trial. A further 42.8% were resolved through a guilty plea—38.2% of defendants pleaded guilty as charged, and 4.6% pleaded guilty to a lesser charge. Only 2.9% of charges were resolved via trial—2.5% leading to conviction and 0.4% leading to acquittal. Court data shows that 3.0% of charges led to pre-trial or judicial diversion, though diversion can also lead to other resolutions.¹¹⁴

The largest portion of charges (43.6%) are dismissed.

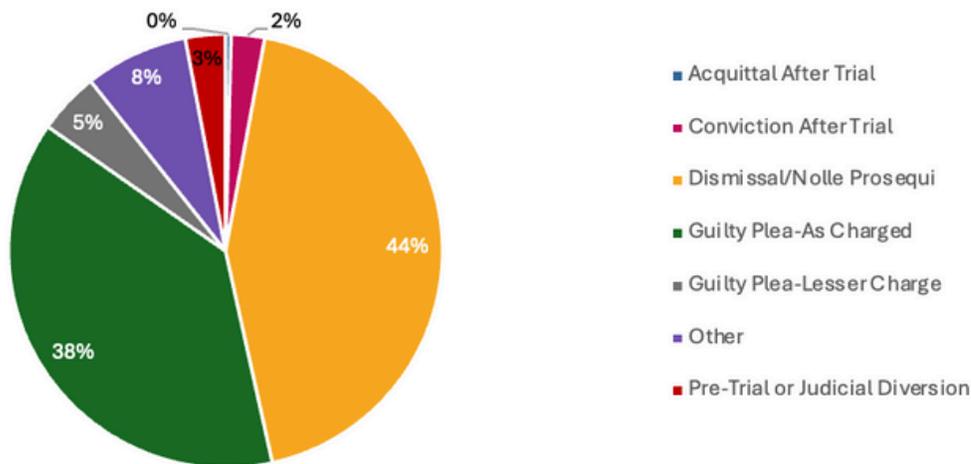
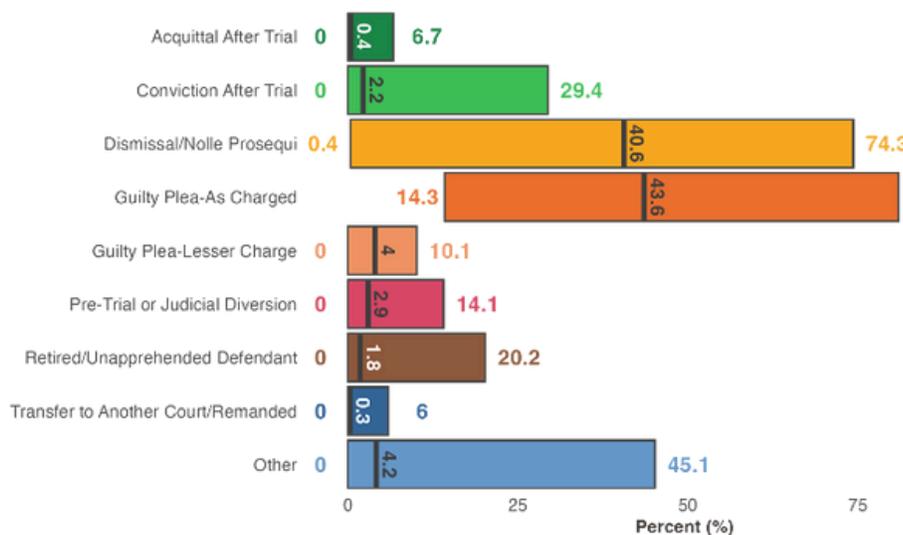


Figure 45. Dispositions by Manner, FY23-24
Source: Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

Disposition of filings varies significantly by county.

How a person’s case is disposed varies depending on the county of filing. For example, dismissal only accounted for 0.4% of cases in Bledsoe County, while in Pickett County, 74.3% of counts were dismissed. Pleading guilty (as charged) accounted for between 14.3% to a high of 81.0% of all charges.¹¹⁵

How a defendant’s case is disposed depends on the county in which they are tried.



For each manner of disposal, the bar indicates the minimum and maximum percent of cases in any county that are disposed of in that manner, with the middle bar indicating the average. For example, 0.4% of filings result in acquittal after trial; however, it ranges from 0% in some counties to a high of 6.7% in one county.

Figure 46. Variance of Dispositions by Manner, FY23-24
Source: Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

For individuals sentenced to incarceration, average sentence lengths are increasing. For example, the average sentence length for people convicted of a Class A felony increased from 272 months in FY18-19 to 291 months in FY22-23, a 7.0% increase. Incarceration sentencing for all felony classes has increased –from 119 months to 126 months (5.9%) for Class B felonies, 61 months to 67 months (9.8%) for Class C felonies, from 42 months to 47 (11.9%) months for Class D felonies, and from 26 months to 27 (3.8%) months for Class E felonies.¹¹⁹

In FY22-23, the average sentence length for every felony class was longer than FY18-19.

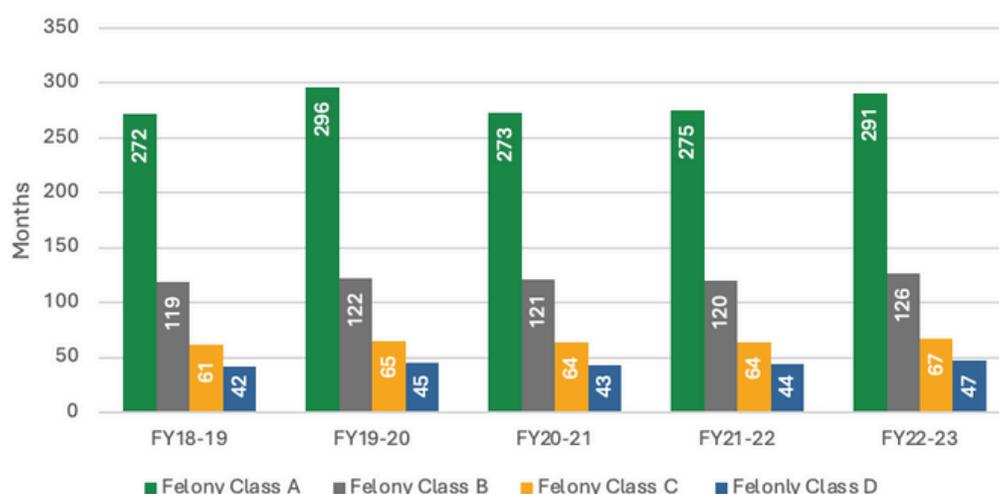


Figure 49. Average Incarceration Sentence Length by Felony Class (Class E not shown), FY18-19 to FY22-23
Source: Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

Felony Classes

Crimes are assigned a felony class based on the severity of the offense, so one type of offense (e.g., theft) could be classified differently based on the details of the incident. For example, theft can range from a less severe Class A misdemeanor to a severe Class A felony based on the value of the stolen property.

- **Class A felony** carries a sentence of 15 to 60 years in state prison and fines up to \$50,000.
- **Class B felony** carries a sentence of 8 to 30 years and fines up to \$25,000.
- **Class C felony** carries a sentence of 3 to 15 years and fines up to \$10,000.
- **Class D felony** carries a sentence of 2 to 12 years and fines up to \$5,000.
- **Class E felony** carries a sentence of 1 to 6 years and fines up to \$3,000.

Source: Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-35-111(b)

Almost 3.5% of court fines and fees revenue come from the bail system.

Under the Tennessee Constitution Art. I §15—last amended in 2014—all prisoners are bailable, with the exception of capital offenses where the proof is evident or the presumption of guilt is great.¹²⁰

According to the TN Code § 40-11-115, magistrates must carry out a tiered analysis when setting bail in the following order: (1) release pending trial on the defendant's own recognizance (ROR) without conditions, (2) release on the person's own recognizance with conditions, and then (3) monetary bail.^{121,122} If flight risk or public safety concerns are not satisfied under unconditional ROR, conditions are set to ensure the defendant's appearance in court, including, but not limited to, monetary bail.¹²³ Despite this, the setting magistrate will often default to monetary bail.¹²⁴

Factors to set monetary bail are similar to those when setting ROR. When monetary bail is required, Tennessee recognizes four types—including (1) cash bail, (2) real estate security or property bond, (3) agreement of two sufficient sureties, and (4) professional bondsman or bail bond.¹²⁵

Cash bonds require the full bail amount to be paid in cash, which is refunded at the end of the trial when the defendant has made all required court appearances, minus any administrative fees. Bail bonds involve a bond seller who guarantees payment of the full bail amount if the defendant fails to appear. In Tennessee, the defendant or a co-signer pays a non-refundable fee, in most cases, equal to 10% of the total bail amount.¹²⁶ Property bonds involve real estate in Tennessee valued at 1.5 times the bail amount, which the court can seize if the defendant fails to appear. Monetary bail amounts are forfeited to the court if the defendant fails to comply with the conditions of the bail bond.¹²⁷

Financial data from July 2022 to June 2025 reveals significant revenue streams from Tennessee's bail system. Across 86 counties, courts received \$19,196,134 in cash bonds, \$7,420,756 in bond forfeitures, and \$308,573 in bond fees.¹²⁸ Bond forfeiture and bond fees represented 3.5% of criminal fines and fees that courts received from July 2022 to June 2025, though ten counties saw more than 5%, with Tipton County reaching 18.6%.

Ten counties collect 5% or more of their criminal court fees from bail fees and forfeiture.¹²⁹

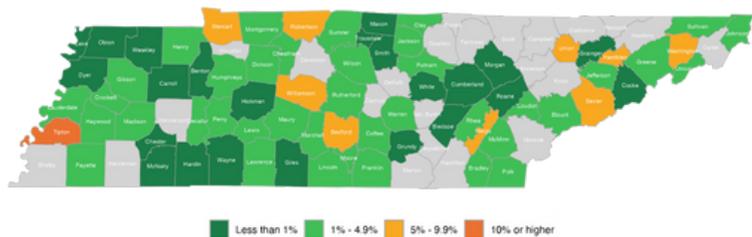


Figure 50. Cash Bonds Forfeiture and Bond Fees as Share of All Criminal Fees Received by County Courts, FY21-22 to FY24-25
Source: Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts

Tennessee voters are set to vote on the November 3rd, 2026 ballot on the *Tennessee Remove Right to Bail for Certain Criminal Offenses Amendment*. The constitutional amendment would allow judges to deny bail in cases where the presumption of guilt is great and the defendant is accused of acts of terrorism, second-degree murder, aggravated rape of a child, grave torture, or any other offense requiring 85% of the sentence to be served before eligibility for release.¹³⁰

Tennessee’s *Truth in Sentencing Law* requires convicted individuals of certain offenses to serve at least 85% of their sentence before eligibility for parole or release. Some of those offenses include aggravated assault, voluntary manslaughter, vehicular homicide, reckless homicide, aggravated kidnapping, aggravated robbery, burglary, or arson. For other offenses, convicted individuals must serve 100% of their sentence without eligibility for parole or release, including negligent homicide, attempted first degree murder, especially aggravated kidnapping, robbery, and burglary, and carjacking.¹³¹

Tennessee relies on court fines and fees for funding the court system.

Tennessee levies procedural fees and taxes that help fund the criminal justice system as well as punitive costs (including fines, restitution, and forfeitures).¹³² Typically, fines go to state or local general funds, restitution is used to compensate or benefit victims of crime, while funds from forfeitures go to state or local governments.¹³³ There are over 360 fines and fees that Tennessee courts can impose, with more than 250 of those used to fund the courts.¹³⁴ These funds raise, on average, about three cents for every dollar of local tax revenue.¹³⁵

On average, Tennessee city and town governments raised \$5.7 per capita in 2022 from fines, fees, and forfeitures; however, this varies significantly by local government, while 160 local jurisdictions raise less than \$5 for each resident, nine raise at least \$25, and Calhoun (\$69.9), Townsend (\$65.8), and Englewood (\$55.0) raise over \$50 per capita. All three localities having a population of less than 2,000 residents.¹³⁶

Three local governments’—Calhoun, Townsend, and Englewood—fines, fees, and forfeitures revenues exceed \$50 per capita.



Figure 51. Per Capita Local Revenue from Fines, Fees, and Forfeitures, in inflation-adjusted (2025) USD, 2022

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Governments (CoG) and Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Incorporated Places in Tennessee*

For individuals who cannot afford their court fines and fees, the consequences of nonpayment can exacerbate their economic challenges. In Tennessee, unpaid court debt can lead to the revocation of a driver’s license; however, evidence shows that this can impede an individual’s ability to earn wages needed to pay fines and fees, thereby making it more difficult for an individual to pay off their court debt.¹³⁷

According to the National Center for Access to Justice, Tennessee ranks 33rd in its Fines and Fees Justice Index—Tennessee scored only 26 out of 100 points for policies related to fines and fees. The positive policies noted in their research included the determination of ability to pay for fines, requirements to prove willful failure to pay before imposing sanctions, judicial discretion to waive some fines and fees, payment plan options, and the right to counsel for people facing incarceration for failure to pay their fines and fees.¹³⁸

The application of court fines, fees, and payment plans varies significantly by county.

In 2019, in response to multiple lawsuits, the Tennessee legislature passed a law requiring counties to offer income-based repayment plans and allowing courts to suspend court debt for indigent individuals. However, the use and administration of payment plans vary significantly between counties, for example:

- Some counties enroll defendants onto payment plans automatically, while others require a judge's approval.
- Some counties charge additional fees or require a down payment to establish a payment plan.
- Some counties will immediately revoke a defendant's license after one missed payment, while others have a two- or three-strike policy, and others will shift some court costs to community service.¹³⁹

In 2023, the Tennessee legislature passed a law which allows individuals on a payment or installation plan to request a 180 day deferment of payment of outstanding fines, fees, or other costs after their release from imprisonment.¹⁴⁰

Correction of persons convicted of a crime in Tennessee occurs at both the state and local levels and can include incarceration and non-incarceration activities such as probation and community corrections. At the state level, correction primarily occurs by the Tennessee Department of Correction, which manages community correction, probation, and incarceration at 14 state prisons. In addition, state correction activities are supported by the Tennessee Rehabilitative Initiative in Correction (TRICOR), the Tennessee Corrections Institute, the Inmate Disciplinary Oversight Board, and the Board of Parole. There are over 100 county-operated facilities that are used to house people in state custody as well as those sentenced to local incarceration, typically referred to as TDOC backup.¹⁴¹ This report focuses on data on the incarceration population at the state and local level and operational information for the Department of Corrections.

Most incarcerated Tennesseans are housed in local jails (46%) and state prisons (41%).

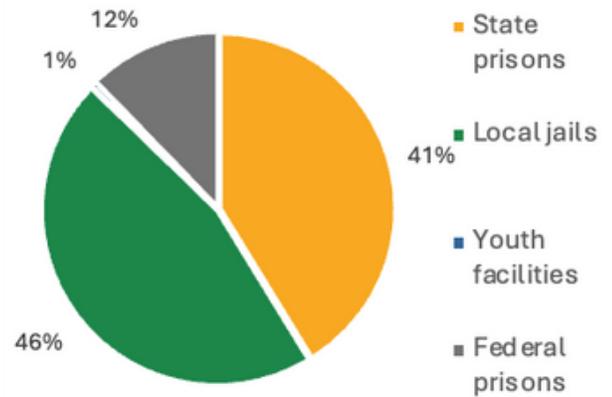


Figure 52. Incarcerated Population by Facility, FY21-22
Source: Prison Policy Initiative

Tennessee Departments Involved in Correction Activities	
Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC)	TDOC is responsible for the incarceration of people convicted of a state felony through secured prison settings, supervision of probationers and parolees, and management of community corrections grant programs.
Tennessee Corrections Institute (TCI)	TCI trains local correctional staff, as well as inspects and certifies local adult correction facilities. ¹⁴²
Inmate Disciplinary Oversight Board (IDOB)	The IDOB reviews the awarding, denial, and removal of sentence credits which help determine how much of a sentence is served and who is eligible to serve a reduced sentence.
Board of Parole (BOP)	BOP determines if a person, after serving a portion of their sentence, can be granted parole and serve the remainder of their sentence through community supervision. The BOP also can revoke parole and make recommendations regarding executive clemency to the governor. ¹⁴³
Tennessee Rehabilitative Initiative in Correction (TRICOR)	TRICOR is a work program which employs incarcerated persons in manufacturing, business, and agricultural jobs during incarceration, provides occupational skills training, as well as administers a post-release placement program. ¹⁴⁴

Ranked 44th, Tennessee has one of the highest incarceration rates in the nation.

In Tennessee, an estimated 57,625 people are incarcerated; this number reflects a rate of 817 people per 100,000 residents, an incarceration rate higher than 43 other states and DC.¹⁴⁵ This includes individuals incarcerated in federal, state, or local prisons, jails, youth facilities, or other confinement facilities.

Only people convicted of a state felony are sentenced to a TDOC facility—TDOC does not imprison people convicted of federal crimes or misdemeanors. However, a person convicted of a state felony can be sentenced to either a TDOC or a county facility. Typically, state facilities are referred to as “prisons,” and county facilities are referred to as “jails.”

Some people sentenced to a TDOC facility are then incarcerated in a county facility under an agreement between TDOC and the county. This can occur when an individual is waiting for transfer to a TDOC facility, those serving a “split confinement” sentence, those awaiting court appearances, and those serving short terms (typically under one year), though a “short term” can be up to six years in the largest counties.¹⁴⁶ This confinement of TDOC-assigned individuals in local facilities is typically referred to as “backup.”¹⁴⁷

About TDOC Data

Due to the fluid nature of incarceration status, data on prison populations sometimes is calculated using an annual average or may reflect a point-in-time count. There is typically a lag between when an individual enters a TDOC facility and when records are updated with more detailed data on their conviction, sentence, or other information. This is reflected in the “unknown” category throughout this section.

The number of people incarcerated in TDOC facilities is decreasing.

In 2024, the average number of people convicted of a felony in TDOC custody was 25,160.¹⁴⁸ On average, 76.0% were in TDOC facilities, 15.5% were in local facilities as backup, and 8.4% were sentenced to local facilities. There was a 13.6% reduction in incarceration from 29,447 in FY19-20 to 25,460 in FY20-21, with the number of incarcerated people remaining relatively steady since. The largest decrease in average population was in locally sentenced people (-31.3%), followed by TDOC backup (-21.4%) and in TDOC facilities (-10.5%).

The number of people with felony convictions in TDOC or local facilities has decreased.

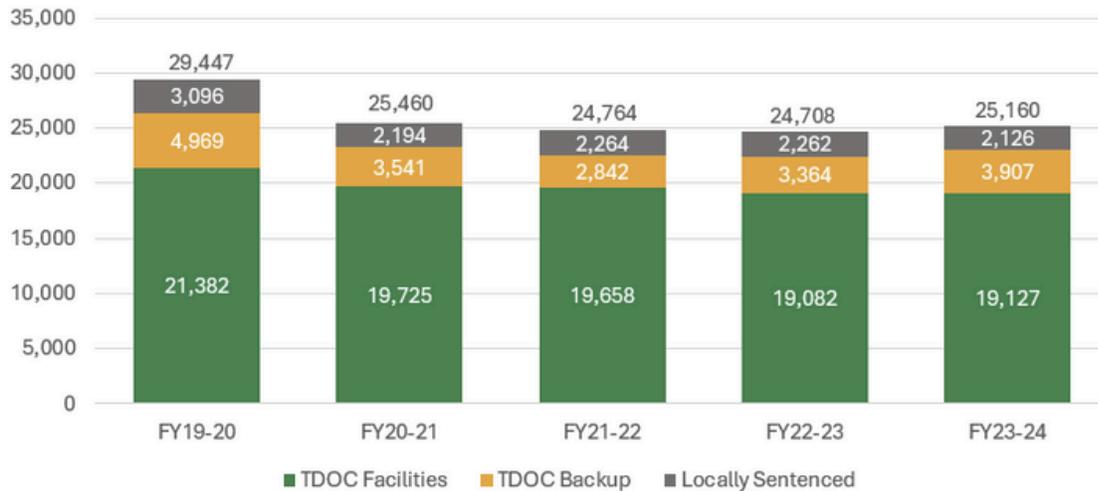


Figure 53. Average Annual TDOC Population, FY19-20 to FY23-24
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction

After a decrease in 2020, the number of people incarcerated in local jails is increasing.

Tennessee's local jail population decreased 27.0% from mid-year 2019 to mid-year 2020, an intentional decrease to reduce crowding and potential transmission during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, jail populations have increased 12.6% since 2020. The largest increase (39.8%) is the detention of people awaiting trial for a misdemeanor.¹⁴⁹

In 2024, 40.6% of people in local jails were awaiting trial on a felony charge. An additional 25.5% were already convicted of a felony and were either in jail because of local sentencing, TDOC backup, or other conditions. While 17.2% of the jail population was awaiting trial for a misdemeanor, and 12.0% were convicted of a misdemeanor.¹⁵⁰

Since 2020, the number of people incarcerated in local jails has increased 12.6%.

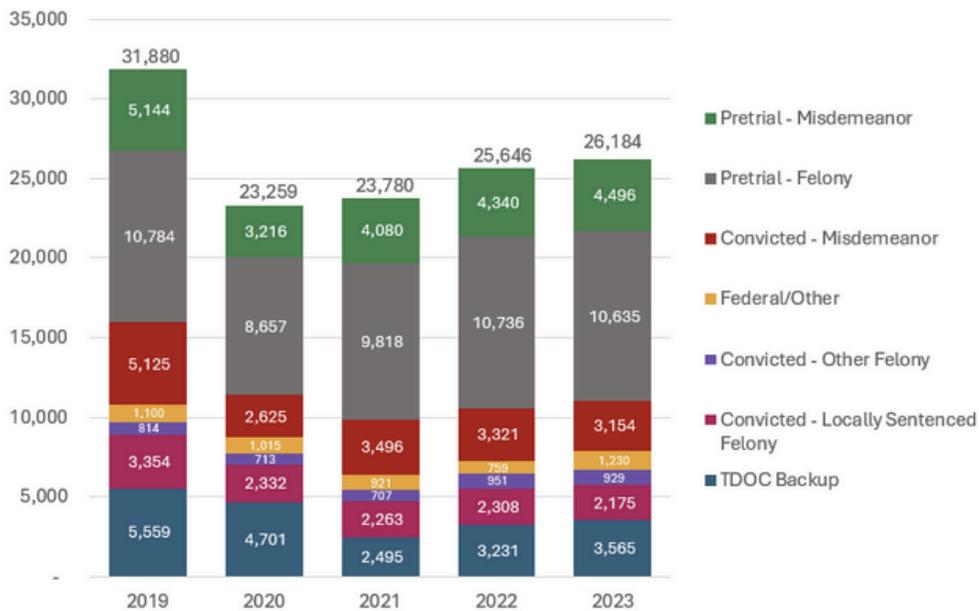


Figure 54. Average Midyear Jail Population, 2019 to 2023
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction

People convicted of a felony and sentenced to TDOC prisons come from all counties in the state.

Most incarcerated persons at TDOC were convicted in Tennessee’s largest counties, including Shelby (4,962), Davidson (3,668), and Knox (2,555). However, when looking at the TDOC incarceration rate per 100,000 county residents, some of Tennessee’s smallest counties had the highest rates, including Wayne (1,290), Lake (1,246), and Henderson (1,121).¹⁵¹

Some of Tennessee’s smaller counties have the highest rates of convictions leading to TDOC incarceration.

County	Total	Rate per Capita (per 100,000)	County	Total	Rate per Capita (per 100,000)
Shelby	4,962	545	Wayne	206	1,290
Davidson	3,668	503	Lake	80	1,246
Knox	2,555	504	Henderson	316	1,121
Rutherford	1,571	417	Lauderdale	273	1,108
Sullivan	1,124	691	Hardin	302	1,094

Table 3. Total and Per Capita TDOC Population by County of Conviction, Top Five Counties, FY23-24
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction; U.S. Census Bureau

Many of Tennessee’s rural counties have high rates of convictions leading to incarceration by TDOC.

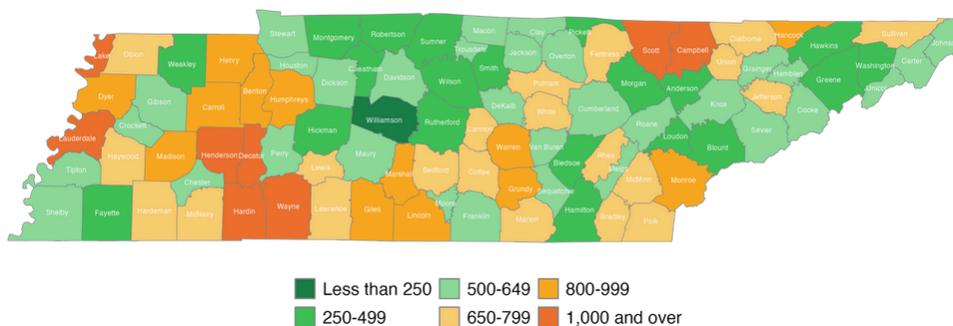


Figure 55. Per Capita TDOC Population by County of Conviction, FY23-24
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction; U.S. Census Bureau

Tennessee relies more heavily on privately managed prisons than most other states.

The Tennessee Department of Correction oversees 14 state prisons in Tennessee.¹⁵² Ten of these prisons are managed directly by TDOC, and four prisons—South Central Correctional Facility (since 1992), Hardeman County Correctional Facility (since 1997), Whiteville Correctional Facility (since 1998), and Trousdale Turner Correctional Facility (since 2015)—are managed by CoreCivic, a private prison management company.¹⁵³

Minimum – Close	Minimum – Medium	Minimum – Maximum
Bledsoe County Correctional Complex (BCCX)	Hardeman County Correctional Facility (HCCF)*	DeBerry Special Needs Facility (DSNF)
Northeast Correctional Complex (NECX)	Mark Luttrell Transition Center (MLTC)	Morgan County Correctional Complex (MCCX)
Northwest Correctional Complex (NWCX)	South Central Correctional Facility (SCCF)*	Riverbend Maximum Security Institution (RMSI)
Turney Center Industrial Complex (TCIX)	Trousdale Turner Correctional Complex (TTCC)*	Debra K. Johnson Rehabilitation Center (DJRC)
	Whiteville Correctional Facility (WCFA)*	West Tennessee State Penitentiary (WTSP)

Table 4. Tennessee Prisons by Security Classification

*Managed by CoreCivic

In 2024, TDOC incarcerated an average of 23,339 people each day, with 65.1% in TDOC-managed prisons, while 34.9% were held in privately managed prisons.¹⁵⁴ Compared to other states, Tennessee relies more on managed prisons than 46 other states—almost half of the states do not use privately managed prisons at all.¹⁵⁵

TDOC’s budget has increased in the past five years.

The Tennessee Department of Correction is funded through appropriations from the Tennessee General Assembly's general fund. The TDOC budget increased from \$1.12 billion in FY2020 to \$1.41 billion in FY2024, an increase of \$290.7 million or 25.9% over five years.¹⁵⁶ The largest contributors to the increased budget were payroll (\$128.0 million), professional services (\$79.6 million), and privately operated facilities (\$42.2 million), which together accounted for 92.3% of the overall increase.

TDOC's budget has increased 26% since FY2020.

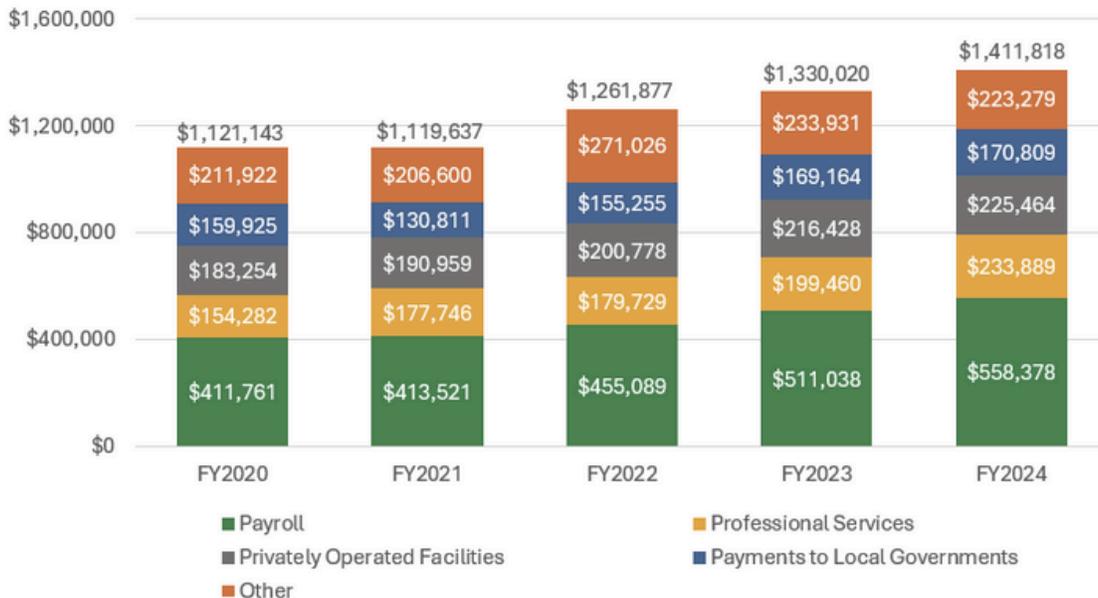


Figure 56. TDOC Budget (in thousands), FY20 to FY24 (inflation-adjusted to FY25 dollars, in thousands)
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction

In 2024, the largest portion of the budget was spent on payroll (39.6%), followed by professional services (16.6%) and privately operated facilities (16.0%). Of the top five largest expenditures, three (professional services, privately operated facilities, and payments to local government) flow outside TDOC—these expenses account for 44.6% of TDOC’s budget.¹⁵⁷

TDOC’s budget is dominated by payroll, professional services, and funding for privately operated facilities.

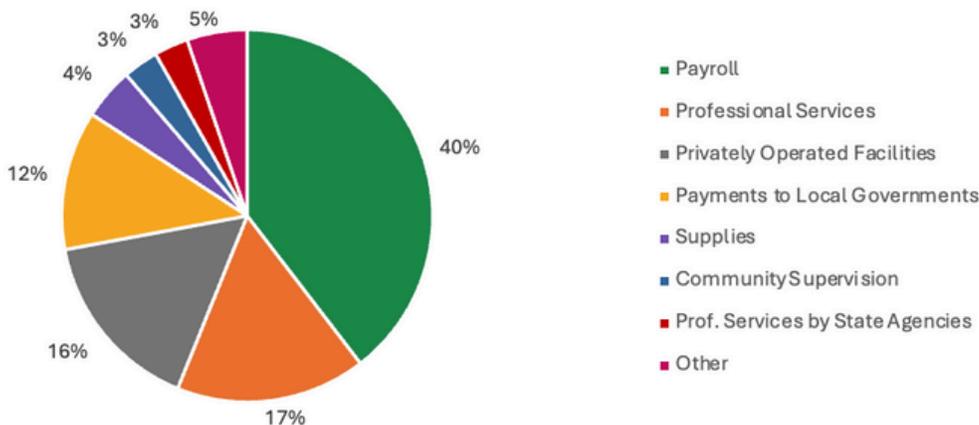


Figure 57. TDOC Budget by Use, FY24-25
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction

Staffing vacancies have decreased since 2021, but remain elevated.

In 2024, TDOC had 6,344 employees, with most (66.0%) working in correctional facilities, 18.6% in community supervision, and 4.4% in the central office. The remaining staff (704 employees, or 11.1%) were considered “other,” which includes the Tennessee Correction Academy, the Office of Investigations and Conduct, and statewide maintenance workers.¹⁵⁸

TDOC has struggled with staff vacancies, which increased from 20.8% in 2020 to 22.8% in 2024, after spiking to 30.8% in 2021.¹⁵⁹ While this appears to be a return to pre-pandemic normal, a longer view of staffing vacancies shows that vacancies remain almost three times as high as the rate of 7.2% in 2014, and that this steep increase in vacancies began before the pandemic.¹⁶⁰ The majority of vacancies occur in the correctional officer position—of 2,428 correctional officer positions, 690 are unfilled, a vacancy rate of 28.4%, compared to a 10.0% vacancy rate for majors and a 9.6% vacancy rate for corporals. While correctional officers represent 72.4% of staff positions, they represent 90.2% of vacancies.

Staffing vacancies are three times higher than in 2014.

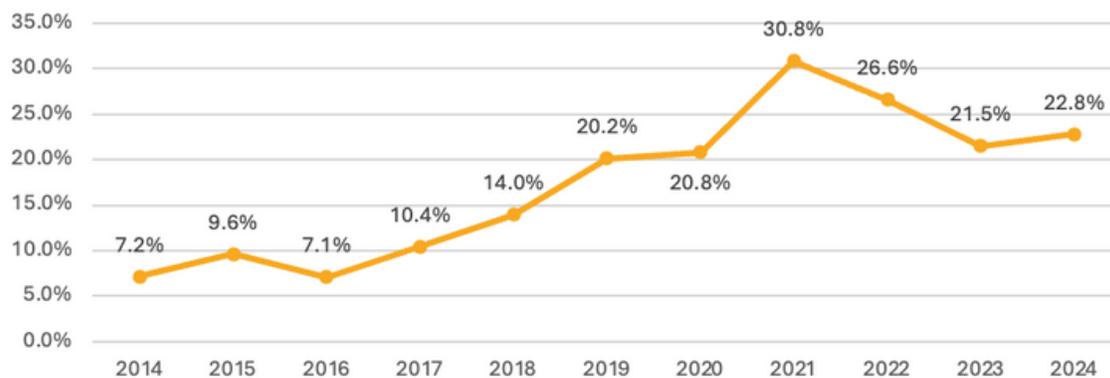


Figure 58. TDOC Staffing Vacancy Rate, 2014 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction

Turnover in TDOC facilities has decreased—from an annual average of 32.7% in 2019 to 22.0% in 2024; however, turnover ranges significantly from a low of 14.7% at Morgan County Correctional Complex to a high of 35.6% at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution.¹⁶¹

The cost to incarcerate people is increasing and is significantly higher at TDOC-managed prisons.

In 2025 \$USD, the average cost of incarceration for TDOC was \$131.89 per day in 2024, a 29.7% increase from \$101.67 in 2019. Costs to incarcerate an individual in a TDOC-managed prison increased 40.7% over the period—from \$131.24 to \$184.60. Costs increased 18.9% at privately managed prisons, increasing from \$73.75 to \$87.70. The costs of incarceration in a TDOC-managed prison are now over twice the rate of a privately managed prison.¹⁶²

The daily cost of incarceration has increased 29.7% over five years.

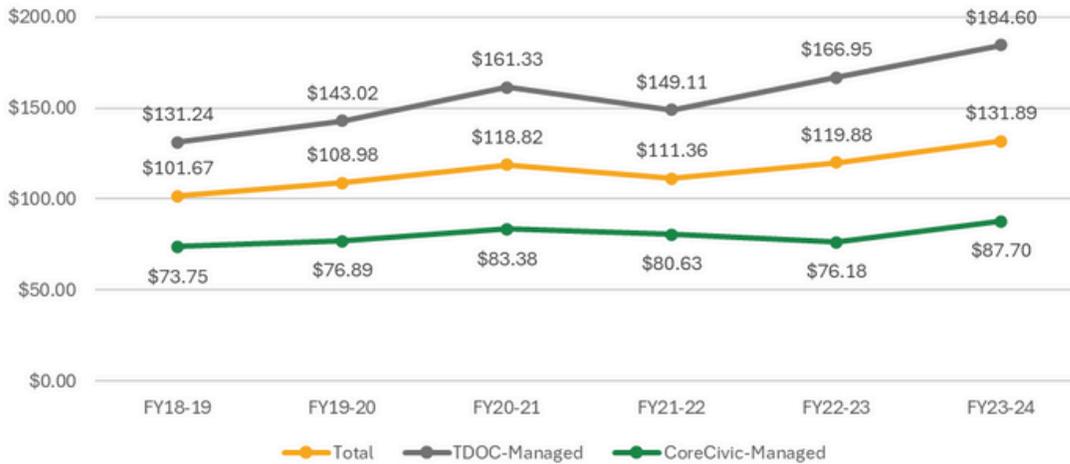


Figure 59. Tennessee Average Cost per Occupancy Day, FY18-19 to FY23-24 (inflation-adjusted to FY25 dollars, in thousands)
 Source: Tennessee Department of Finance

The rate of incidents occurring in state prisons is increasing.

Prison incidents increased by approximately 14%, from 13,731 in FY19-20 to 15,595 in FY22-23. Because the average prison population decreased over the same period, the rate of incidents per 100 prisoners increased 32%, from 62.7 to 82.5. In FY22-23, the most frequently reported incidents were related to weapons (21%), cellular phones or contraband (18%), drugs or intoxicants (16%), illness or injury (14%), and assault (8%). From FY19-20 to FY22-23, most of these incident types increased; however, cell or contraband incidents decreased by 17%.¹⁶³

About Incidents Data

Each year, TDOC reports on prison incidents, events recorded in the Tennessee Offender Management Information System. Incidents can either include multiple participants or a single participant. Reported incidents include infractions such as arrest, arson, assault, death, drugs, escape, injury, rape, riot, suicide, use of force, and weapons; however, the reported data does not include all incident types. In FY22-23, the DOC included four incident categories not previously documented: drug screens either refused or positive, indecent exposure, and “violation of state law.” To ensure an appropriate year-over-year comparison, these incidents were not included in the analysis.

There are documented ongoing problems with conditions of confinement in Tennessee prisons.

A 2023 audit of the Tennessee Department of Correction found significant operating challenges impacting safety in prison facilities in both TDOC and CoreCivic-managed prisons. The audit focused on critical staffing shortages resulting from attrition, which are leading to operational risks and safety concerns. The audit also noted that there was insufficient capacity for behavioral health and educational programs designed to increase the likelihood of successful re-entry, and that individuals were released without the necessary documents and referrals. The audit noted that several facilities were not conducting required annual Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) screenings or following PREA-required regulations.¹⁶⁴

Following a 2021 NAACP call for a federal investigation, in 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice announced an investigation into Trousdale Turner Correctional Center. The announcement called violence at the facility “endemic” and noted that the prison has the highest homicide rate of any prison in the country.¹⁶⁵

Recidivism is decreasing, but is high compared to many other states.

People leave corrections under several circumstances. Parole is release before the expiration of a person’s original sentence, which may be subject to conditions and continued supervision by the Department of Correction. Probation is when a person found guilty of a crime is not sentenced to imprisonment but is instead placed under other conditions, enforced by the Department of Correction. Community corrections allows people convicted of non-violent felony offenses to use community-based alternatives to incarceration. Discharge occurs when a person has served their entire sentence and no additional supervision is required.

About Recidivism Data

Comparative data on Tennessee’s recidivism rate comes from The Council of State Governments report, “50 States, 1 Goal: Examining State-Level Recidivism Trends in the Second Chance Act Era.” While breakdown of recidivism by demographics, facility, and other factors comes from TDOC’s 2024 Annual Statistical Abstract.

According to the Council of State Governments (CSG), Tennessee’s felony recidivism rate—the percentage of people leaving jail or prison after a felony conviction and returning to incarceration within three years—was 40% in 2019, ranking 38th nationally.¹⁶⁶ Overall, recidivism decreased from 49% in 2008 to 40% in 2019 in Tennessee, a 9 percentage-point decline. According to CSG, the number of people who reoffended in 2022 would result in a total cost of \$233 million for their reincarceration.¹⁶⁷

According to the TDOC recidivism methodology, overall recidivism was 46.3% in 2019 and decreased to 42.1% in 2024. Recidivism rates vary significantly by a number of factors. In 2024, recidivism was higher for local jails (48.7%) than for state prisons (35.0%). In 2024, the recidivism rate for males leaving prisons was 36.2% while it was 30.1% for women, while the recidivism rate for males leaving local jails was 49.5% compared to 46.6% for women. In 2024, the recidivism rate was highest for people released to community correction (67.4%), followed by probation (58.1%), parole (41.8%), and lowest for discharge (23.4%).¹⁶⁸

Recidivism rates are highest for those released to community correction and lowest for those released via discharge.

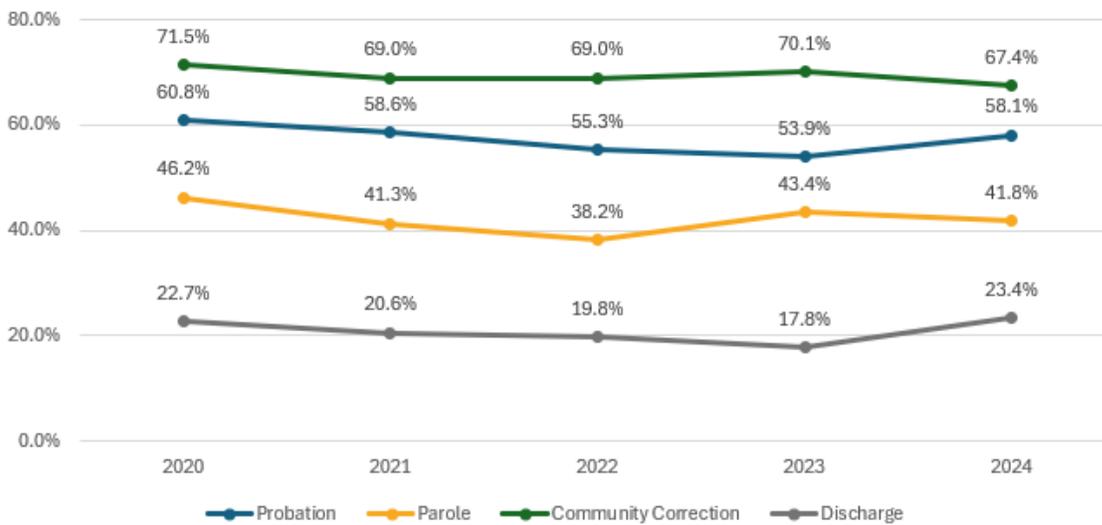


Figure 60. Recidivism by Release Type, 2020 to 2024
 Source: Tennessee Department of Correction

In Tennessee, youth are classified as “juveniles” and include anyone under the age of 18 who has not previously been transferred to an adult court. Though in Tennessee, youth as young as 15 can be transferred to the adult system. The youth justice system in Tennessee relies on many of the same institutions as the adult system. Youth suspected of committing a crime are investigated by law enforcement and are adjudicated by the court system, though some judicial districts have special juvenile courts. When youth are found delinquent, they are placed under the supervision of the Department of Children’s Services. This supervision can include probation, state custody in community-based facilities, or detention in secure facilities.

A Note on Youth Justice Terminology

Terminology used in the youth justice system differs from the adult system. Youth are not “criminal defendants”—they are “juvenile delinquents.” Judgments are not “convictions”—they are “determinations”, and youth facilities are not “jails” or “prisons,” but “detention centers” or “development centers.”

Adult System	Youth System
Warrants	→ Petition or summons
Criminal defendants	→ Juvenile delinquents
Convictions	→ Determinations
Jails	→ Detention centers
Prisons	→ Development centers

Like adult arrest rates, youth arrest rates are decreasing.

Arrest rates for youth decreased significantly from 211 in 2019 to 145 in 2024, a decrease of 31.2%. Since 2020, rates have increased slightly from 138 to 145 in 2024 (34.4%), but remain significantly lower than in 2019.¹⁶⁹

Youth arrest rates decreased by one-third from 2019 to 2020 and remain lower than pre-pandemic years.

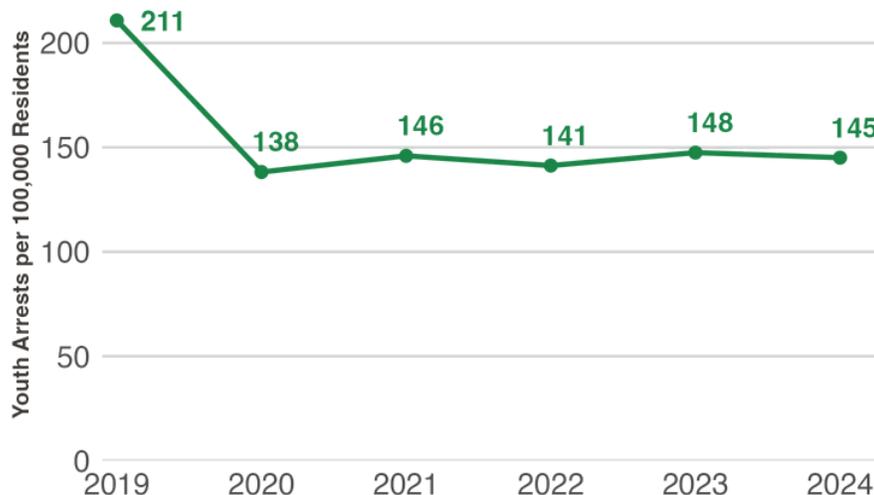


Figure 61. Youth Arrest Rates, 2019 to 2024
Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS)

While Tennessee has a specialized juvenile justice system, it is not standardized across the state.

Tennessee's juvenile courts handle cases involving children under the age of 18 who have not been transferred to adult court. There are 98 juvenile courts with 109 judges and 45 magistrates.¹⁷⁰ Tennessee is one of only 19 states that have judges who specialize in juvenile justice.¹⁷¹

While juvenile courts across the state often implement Tennessee Rules of Juvenile Practice and Procedure, the size of the court, case management procedures, and administrative practices vary widely from one community to another. Juvenile courts adjudicate delinquency cases, custody issues and parental rights, commitment to DCS custody, abuse and neglect proceedings, need for medical and/or mental health treatment for children, and truancy. A judge may transfer serious cases to criminal court for trial as adults.

Youth justice practices can vary from one Tennessee county to another due to judicial discretion and differences in county funding. First, judges determine whether cases are referred to court, diverted, or resolved, and the availability of diversion programs depends on local resources.

A Blue Ribbon Task Force on Juvenile Justice in 2017 further described some of these discrepancies. First, probation decisions (including length and conditions) differ across counties, with averages ranging from five to 11 months for similar cases.¹⁷² Additionally, fines and fees are inconsistently applied, with smaller counties imposing them more frequently than larger, more populated areas.¹⁷³

Tennessee does not have qualification requirements specifically for juvenile judges, nor does the state require annual training. It is one of 20 states that does not have a juvenile justice bench book to help support decisions on delinquency cases.¹⁷⁴

Tennessee is enacting harsher laws for youth and their parents.

Tennessee has enacted several laws recently that increase youth sentences, make it more likely that a youth will be tried as an adult, and institute new fines and fees in the juvenile system.

“Blended sentencing,” took effect at the start of 2025. It allows prosecutors to try some youth as “serious youth offenders” who can be given both juvenile and adult sentences. In blended sentencing cases, the juvenile sentence must last until the person turns 19 when the judge considers whether to impose an adult sentence. The adult sentence may vary in length but must end by the time the youth turns 24; it is determined by whether the youth meets three or more of the following:

- the youth committed another delinquent act;
- the youth engaged in other conduct that creates a substantial safety risk;
- the youth failed to meet conditions of their supervision;
- the youth didn’t attend school regularly with passing grades, graduate from high school or earn a high school equivalency, or attend a Tennessee college of applied technology with passing grades; or
- the youth failed to obtain “regular employment” or enroll in higher education.

The law also requires that 16- and 17- years olds accused of violent crimes (first and second degree murder or attempted murder) be tried as adults.¹⁷⁵ A child classified as a “serious youth offender” is tried under blended sentencing. To qualify as a “serious youth offender,” the child must be 14 or older and charged with a Class A or Class B felony. A child must be considered a serious youth offender and receive a blended sentence if:

- it is the second Class A or Class B felony offense;
- the local district attorney requests it; or
- the youth is under 16 and charged with murder or attempted murder.¹⁷⁶

Youth tried as adults are not eligible for rehabilitative support services available to other youth.¹⁷⁷

The number of youth in TDOC adult custody is small, but increasing.

In July of 2024, there were 10 youth in TDOC adult custody, having been transferred to the adult court system and convicted of a felony, representing a 66.6% increase from six youth in TDOC custody in 2020. Half of youth were held at the Northwest Correctional Complex, though youth were also held in local adult jails. From 2020 to 2021, most youth held in TDOC custody were 17 years of age; however, in 2024, a youth aged 14 was being held in adult facilities. In 2024, Black youth represented 80% of youth housed by TDOC, and all were male.¹⁷⁸

Youth in TDOC custody were convicted in nine counties throughout the state.*

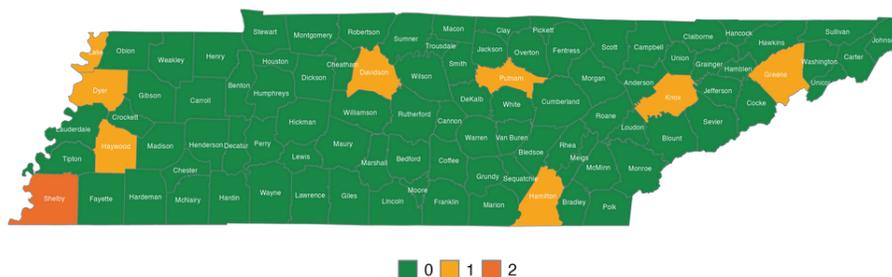


Figure 62. County of Conviction, Youth in TDOC Custody, 2024
 Source: Tennessee Department of Correction
 *County of Conviction was unavailable for two youth in TDOC custody

Youth detention rates are decreasing.

The number of youth in custody in the juvenile system decreased by over half, from 666 in 2013 to 309 in 2023 (-53.6%). This decline has mainly come from reductions in committed youth—those youth held in a facility as part of a court-ordered disposition—which decreased from 444 in 2013 to 78 in 2023 (-82.4%). The number of youth detained—those held before adjudication or disposition, or awaiting a hearing or transfer to adult court—increased from 222 in 2013 to a high of 300 in 2017, but decreased to 231 in 2023. A small number of youth in placement have a reported status of “other,” which includes diverted youth, or those with an “unknown” placement status. The percentage of youth in privately run facilities decreased from 18.0% to 8.7% in 2023; however, Tennessee ranks 22nd for youth in private facilities.¹⁷⁹

The overall number of youth in custody has decreased significantly, primarily due to decreases in committed youth.



Figure 63. Youth in Custody by Placement Type, 2013 to 2023

Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Other includes diverted youth and youth for whom placement status was reported as “unknown” or “other”.

About Juvenile Residential Placement Data

Due to the limited data produced on juvenile justice in Tennessee, this report relies primarily on data from the federal Office of Youth Justice and Delinquency Prevention, specifically the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement. The data source notes that some years, particularly 2015 and 2017, had higher rates of non-responsiveness from facilities in Tennessee and therefore some data on demographics, offenses, and other characteristics are imputed; in some years more than 30% are imputed.¹⁸⁰

Youth in detention are more likely to be male and Black than the overall population.

Youth in custody are overwhelmingly male. In 2023, 91.2% of youth in custody were male and 7.8% were female, though the percentage of males has ranged from a high of 92.8% in 2013 to a low of 87.0% in 2021. In 2023, 58.3% of youth in custody were Black and 31.1% were White. A smaller proportion identified as Multiracial (5.8%) or Hispanic (4.9%).¹⁸¹

On average, nine in ten youth in custody are male and the majority are Black.

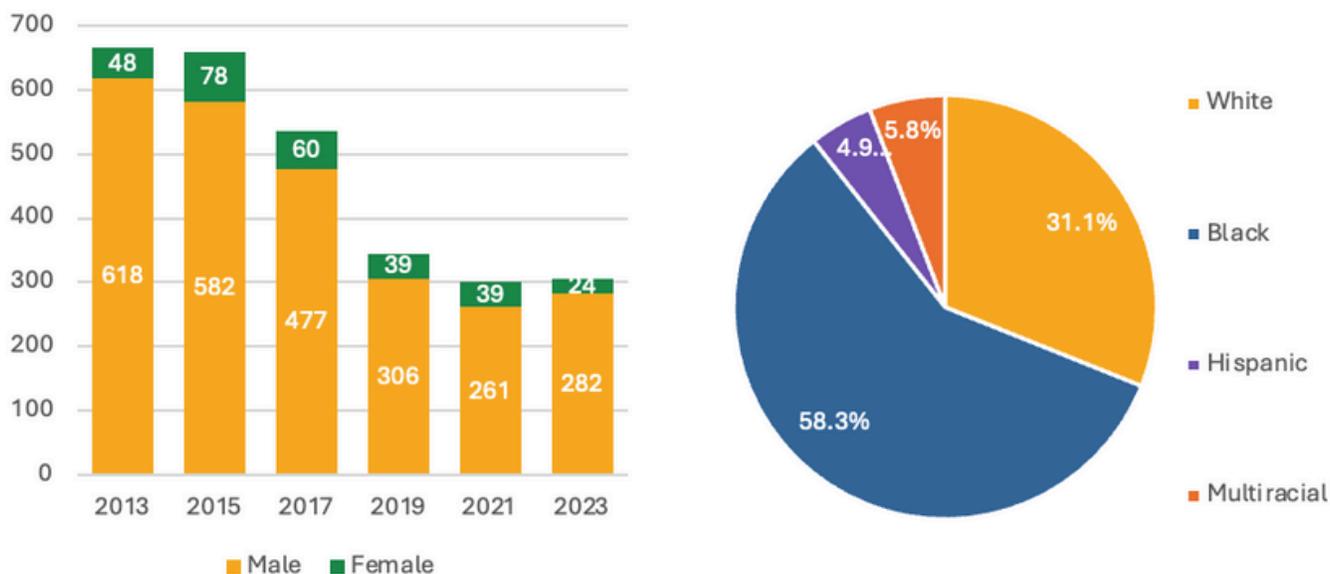


Figure 64: Youth in Custody by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

*There were no Asian or American Indian youth in custody in 2023.

**Hispanic is presented as a racial (not ethnic) category and is mutually exclusive of other categories.

The majority of youth in custody are ages 15 to 17, representing 80.6% of youth in custody in 2023. The number of children younger than 14 in placement has ranged from a low of 51 in 2013 and 2023 to a high of 93 in 2015, but overall has decreased over the decade. The number of 18- to 20-year-olds in custody has decreased from 102 to 9 (-91.2%), most likely a result of youth being tried in the adult justice system.¹⁸²

The majority of youth in placement are aged 15 to 17.

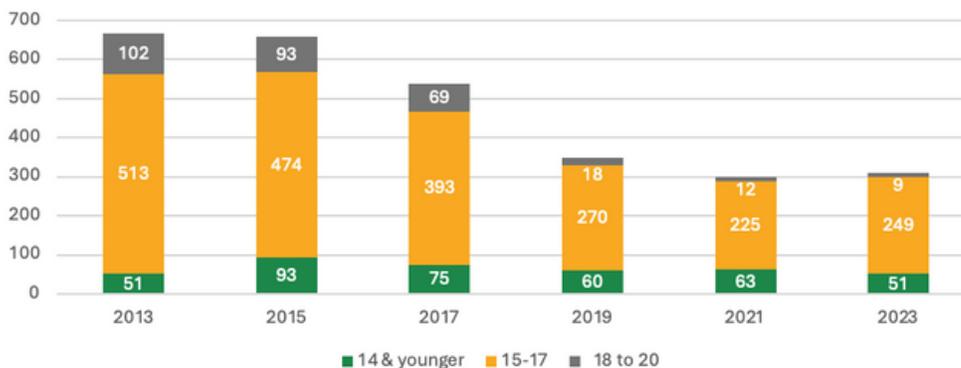


Figure 65: Youth in Custody by Age, 2013 to 2023

Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

A majority of youth in custody are not accused of or disposed of violent crime.

In 2023, almost half of youth in placement were accused or adjudicated for a crime against persons as their most serious offense; 37.2% of youths' most serious offense was considered a violent crime. Crimes against property represented an additional 17.6% of crimes while 13.7% of youth were in placement for public order violations (e.g., weapons, alcohol), 9.8% for a technical violation (e.g., missing a court date, refusing a drug test) and 5.9% for a status offense (e.g., running away, underage drinking, truancy, etc.), and 4.9% for drug offenses.¹⁸³

Over 15% of youth in custody are accused of a status offense or technical violation.

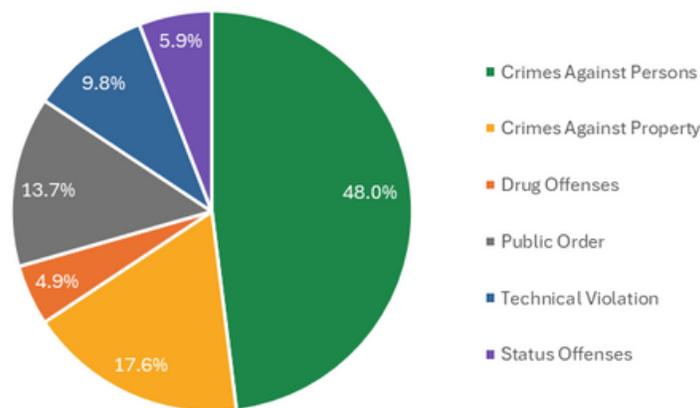


Figure 66: Youth in Custody by Most Serious Offense, 2023
Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

The decrease in detained youth is occurring for all types of crimes, including a 59.1% decrease in placements for violent crimes from 2013 to 2023, a 67.3% decrease in placements for property crimes, and a 40.0% decrease in placements for other types of crimes.¹⁸⁴

Youth in custody have decreased across all types of crimes.

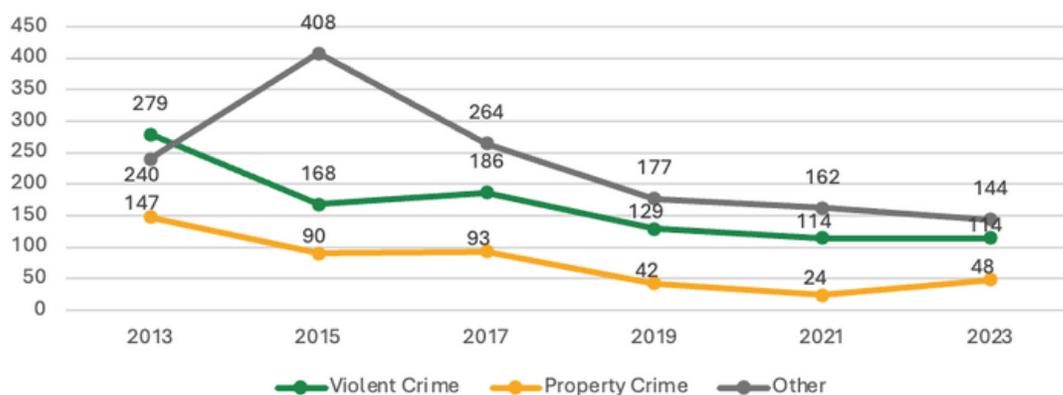


Figure 67: Youth in Custody by Type of Crime, 2013 to 2023
Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

The state of Tennessee provides data on the operational cost of Wilder Youth Development Center, its only hardware-secure facility for youth; however, it does not include the cost of youth in other types of facilities. For Wilder Youth Development Center, the cost of youth in custody has increased slightly, from \$15.4 million in 2019 to \$17.0 million in 2024, an increase of 10.4%. Combined with declining detention rates, the cost per occupancy day has increased significantly—from \$364 in 2019 to \$1,363 in 2024, an increase of 274%.¹⁸⁵ (Budget data is presented as nominal dollars and have not been adjusted for inflation.)

The number of youth in private facilities has decreased.

Like the adult system, Tennessee utilizes private providers for some youth in custody. For example, Mountain View Academy is operated by Wayne Halfway House, Inc. and the Clover Bottom Development Center is managed by G4S. The number of youth in private facilities has decreased from a high of 225 in 2015 to a low of 27 in 2023. In 2023, only 8.7% of youth were held in private facilities, lower than the national average of 19.1%.¹⁸⁶

The number of Tennessee youth held in private facilities has decreased 77% since 2013.

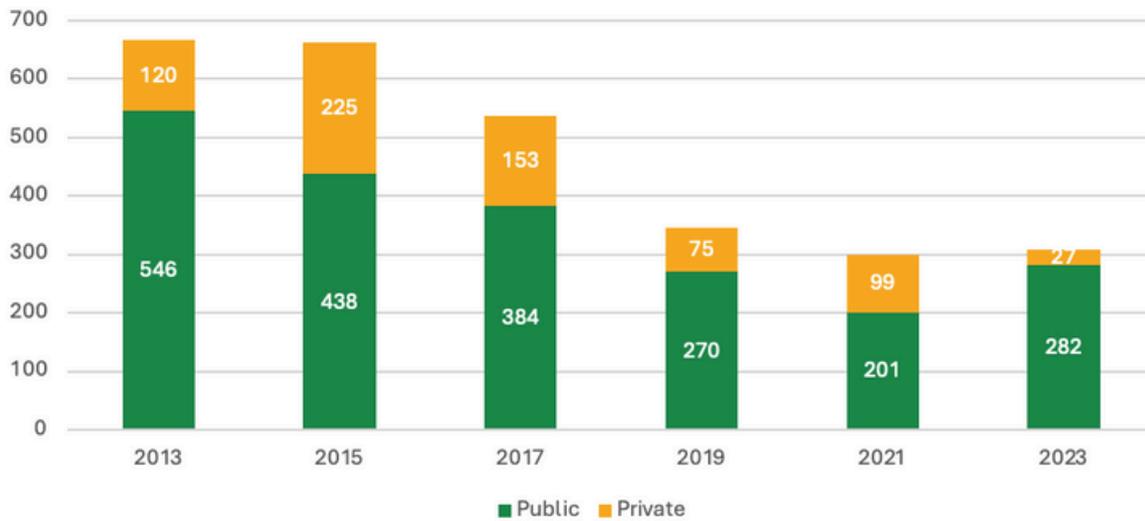


Figure 68: Youth in Custody by Private or Public Facility, 2013 to 2023
 Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Tennessee has significant room for improvement in its criminal justice outcomes. Developing a baseline understanding of the challenges Tennessee faces in crime, case clearances, incarceration rates, and recidivism is the first step in informing policy choices that can help make Tennessee safer and the state's criminal justice system fairer and more effective.

Additional research is needed to develop policy recommendations and next steps, including:

- Determining what investments can reduce community conditions associated with crime.
- Reviewing national best practices in crime reduction approaches.
- Establishing a shared understanding of criminal justice data needs and the implementation of a centralized court data system.
- Developing a deeper understanding of the trade-offs of TDOC-managed and privately-managed prisons.
- A review of research related to the efficacy of a harsher criminal justice system on public safety.

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Acquittal: A finding of not guilty after a court has rendered a judgment, based on the verdict of a jury or a judicial officer.¹⁸⁷

Clearance Rate: The number of clearances reported as a percentage of the total number of crimes reported. The clearance rate is calculated by dividing the number of crimes cleared by the number of crimes reported and multiplying by 100.¹⁸⁸

Conviction After Trial: A criminal trial that ends in a judgment or sentence, and the accused is found guilty.¹⁸⁹

Community Corrections: Community corrections allows people convicted of non-violent felony offenses to receive community-based alternatives to incarceration.

Crimes Against Persons: Crimes Against Persons are considered those whose victims are individuals. These include murder and non-negligent manslaughter, negligent manslaughter, justifiable homicide, kidnapping/abduction, rape, sodomy, sexual assault with an object, fondling, incest, statutory rape, aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation, commercial sex acts (human trafficking), and involuntary servitude (human trafficking).¹⁹⁰

Crimes Against Property: Crimes Against Property are considered those in which the purpose of committing the crime is to obtain money, property, or some other benefit. These include arson, bribery, burglary/breaking & entering, counterfeiting/forgery, destruction/damage/vandalism of property, embezzlement, extortion/blackmail, false pretenses/swindle/confidence game, credit card/automatic teller machine fraud, impersonation, welfare fraud, wire fraud, identity theft, hacking/computer invasion, robbery, pocket-picking, purse-snatching, shoplifting, theft from a building, theft from a coin-operated machine or device, theft from a motor vehicle, theft of motor vehicle parts or accessories, all other larcenies, and motor vehicle theft.¹⁹¹

Crimes Against Society: Crimes Against Society are determined by society's prohibition of engaging in these types of activity and are generally considered victimless crimes. These include drug/narcotic violations, drug equipment violations, betting/wagering, operating/promoting/assisting gambling, gambling equipment violations, sports tampering, pornography/obscene material, prostitution, assisting or promoting prostitution, purchasing prostitution, weapons law violation, and animal cruelty.¹⁹²

Crime Rate: Crime rates are the number of offenses per 100,000 residents at the state level or per 1,000 residents at the county level. Crime rates are calculated by dividing the total number of crimes reported by the total population estimate and multiplying by 100,000 (or 1,000 if appropriate).¹⁹³

Discharge: Discharge occurs when a person has served their entire sentence and no additional supervision is required.¹⁹⁴

Dismissal/Nolle Prosequi: A formal entry upon the record disposing of an action, suit, or motion, etc., without trial of the issues involved. It is a final action.¹⁹⁵

Exceptional Clearance: Cases in which the offender is known but, due to a mitigating circumstance (such as the offender's death or the victim's refusal to cooperate), the incident cannot be cleared by an arrest.¹⁹⁶

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI): The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is the primary national security and law enforcement agency responsible for enforcing federal law and investigating criminal activities, including but not limited to terrorism, cybercrime, white-collar crime, public corruption, and civil rights violations.¹⁹⁷

Fiscal Year (FY): Tennessee's fiscal year is from July 1st to June 30th. Several state data sources organize their data by fiscal year rather than by calendar year (January to December).

Group A Offenses: Group A Offenses include 52 offense types divided into three categories: Crimes Against Persons, Crimes Against Property, and Crimes Against Society.

Group B Offenses: Group B offenses include all other offenses (excluding traffic violations), for example bad checks, curfew/loitering/vagrancy violations, disorderly conduct, driving under the influence (DUI), drunkenness, nonviolent family offenses, liquor law violations, peeping tom, and trespass of real property.¹⁹⁸

Guilty Plea-As Charged: The defendant admits guilt to the offense with which he/she is charged.¹⁹⁹

Guilty Plea-Lesser Charge: The defendant admits guilt to a lesser offense than that for which he/she is charged.²⁰⁰

Incident: One or more offenses committed by the same offender or a group of offenders acting in concert at the same time and place. Acting in concert means that all offenders must commit or assist (even non-consensually) in committing the crimes. If an offender did not engage in one or more of the offenses committed, then it's considered a separate incident.²⁰¹

Incident Clearance: Group A incidents are cleared in the TIBRS by arrest or exceptional clearance. Incidents involving more than one offense are cleared when at least one of the offenses in said incident is cleared by arrest or exceptional clearance. An incident is cleared by exceptional means when it meets all the following conditions: (1) the investigation has established the identity of at least one offender, (2) sufficient probable cause has been developed to support the arrest, charge, and prosecution of the offender, (3) the offender's exact location is known, allowing an arrest, and (4) there is a reason outside of law enforcement control preventing the arrest. Exceptional clearance is never applicable when an incident has been cleared by arrest. Group B incidents, for TIBRS purposes, are a form of arrest report that includes the offense type, arrestee information, and a narrative.²⁰²

Law Enforcement: Local police departments, sheriffs' offices, and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) enforce laws, prevent and investigate crimes, apprehend suspects, and maintain public order. They are often the first point of contact in the criminal justice process.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): The system for crime data collection by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It has replaced the Unified Crime Reporting Program.

Offense: Offense data identifies the types of offenses or crimes occurring within the same incident. Both in NIBRS and TIBRS, each incident reports up to 10 of the most serious Group A offenses.²¹¹ For NIBRS purposes, one offense is counted per victim in a Crime Against Persons; one offense is counted per a Crime Against Property, except for the case of Motor Vehicle Theft, where one offense is counted per each stolen vehicle; and one offense is counted per each Crime Against Society.²⁰³

Parole: Release before the expiration of a person's original sentence, which may be subject to conditions and continued supervision by the Department of Correction.

Part I Offenses: Part I Offenses (also known as Index Crimes), which include murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.^{204, 205}

Part II Offenses: Part II Offenses are less serious than Part I Offenses. They include other/simple assault, forgery and counterfeiting, fraud, embezzlement, stolen property, vandalism, weapons, prostitution and commercialized vice, sex offenses (except Part I sex offenses), drug abuse violations, gambling, offenses against the family and children, driving under the influence, liquor laws, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, vagrancy, etc.

Percent Change: Percent change illustrates the year-to-year change in a number or rate. Percent change is calculated by subtracting the current-year data from the base-year data, dividing by the base-year data, and multiplying by 100.²⁰⁶

Pre-Trial or Judicial Diversion: A system whereby certain defendants in criminal cases are referred to community agencies prior to trial while their criminal complaints or indictments are held in abeyance. The defendant may be given job training, counseling, and/or education. If he/she responds successfully within a specified period (e.g., 90 days, more or less), the charges against him/her are commonly dismissed.²⁰⁷

Probation: Probation is when a person found guilty of a crime is not sentenced to imprisonment but is instead placed under other conditions, enforced by the Department of Correction.

Retired / Unapprehended Defendant: The case is retired or dismissed by the court because the defendant cannot be found or there is no affirmative action by the district attorney. It is left up to the discretion of the judge as to when to eliminate such cases from the system. If the defendant is located later, a case may be reinstated.²⁰⁸

Southeast Region: For the purposes of this report, the Southeast Region includes 12 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Split Sentence: A split sentence includes both time in confinement and probation.

Summary Reporting System (SRS): The Summary Reporting System (SRS) is part of the UCR program.

Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC): The AOC provides administrative support to the Tennessee court system. This includes managing court operations, preparing the court system's annual budget, providing training and resources to judges and court staff, supporting judicial oversight boards and commissions, and overseeing data collection related to court cases.²⁰⁹

Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI): TBI is the state of Tennessee's lead law enforcement agency that conducts criminal investigations statewide. Divisions within TBI include: Criminal Investigation, Drug Investigation, Forensic Services, Training, and Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS).

Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC): TDOC oversees the state's correctional facilities, including prisons, probation, and probation services. They are responsible for the incarceration and rehabilitation of adult offenders, ensuring that sentenced individuals serve their time and receive any necessary treatment or education programs to reduce recidivism. TDOC is responsible for 14 adult prisons across the state (10 operated by TDOC and 4 managed by a private contractor). In addition to the prisons, TDOC oversees 46 probation parole offices across 13 judicial districts.

Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS): DCS is home to the Office of Juvenile Justice, which supervises youth who have been found delinquent in Tennessee. They manage youth detention centers, provide services and programs for youth, and work with the courts to ensure that impacted youth receive appropriate interventions. DCS aims to rehabilitate and reintegrate justice-impacted youth back into society.

Tennessee Board of Parole (BOP): The BOP is a state commission with seven members appointed by the governor. The commission is responsible for determining whether justice-impacted people can be released from incarceration to community supervision. They review cases, conduct parole hearings, and monitor parolees to ensure they comply with the conditions of their release. The Board's decisions can significantly affect the time individuals spend in the correctional system. In 2012, management of probation was transferred away from this Board to TDOC.

Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS): This department works with the criminal justice system to provide mental health and substance abuse services to justice-impacted people and plays a role in diversion programs.

The Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS): The Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS) collects data on every crime occurrence or incident and each offense within that incident. TIBRS collects information on 24 crime categories across 54 Group A Offenses and 10 Group B offense categories. TIBRS reports on up to 10 offenses that occurred in a single incident.²¹⁰

Transfer to Another Court / Remanded: A decision by a court that transfers or sends part or all of a case back to the original court or administrative agency from which it came, for the purpose of entry of a proper judgment or decision, further proceedings, or a new trial.²¹¹

Unified Crime Reporting Program (UCR): The Unified Crime Reporting Program (UCR) is a federal program that collects and publishes statistics on eight major classifications of crime, known as the crime index, from 18,000 city, university and college, county, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies.²¹² The UCR Program includes the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), the Summary Reporting System (SRS), the Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) Program, and the Hate Crime Statistics Program.²¹³

Violent Crimes: In the UCR program, violent crimes are those offenses that involve force or a threat of force and are composed of four main offenses: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.²¹⁴ In the TIBRS, the violent crime category is comprised of the following offenses: murder, forcible rape, forcible sodomy, sexual assault with an object, forcible fondling, and aggravated assault.²¹⁵

Appendix 2 : Methodology

Crime Data

We collect crime data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) to draw between-state comparisons. NIBRS collects data on the number of incidents and arrests across the different Group A Offenses. The number of offenses included in the NIBRS system varies over time. In its first year of published data (2011), NIBRS included 46 crimes across 22 crime categories.²¹⁶ By 2019, the system included 52 offenses across 23 categories.²¹⁷ NIBRS territorial coverage also varies by year. In 2012, only 32 states were certified to report data via NIBRS, totaling 6,115 law enforcement agencies.^{218,219} By 2022, all 50 states had been certified to submit data via NIBRS, collecting data from 13,293 agencies nationwide.²²⁰

Alternatively, UCR's Summary Reporting System (SRS) data collects the number of crimes or arrests in a month voluntarily reported by law enforcement agencies across states.²²¹ The FBI's SRS collects crime data on Part I Offenses (also known as Index Crimes) and follows the hierarchy rule, meaning that only the most serious offense will be recorded per incident.^{222,223}

Crime rates are calculated from the raw number of offenses and population size. Here, we present crime rates based on the number of offenses reported per 100,000 population. U.S. Census Bureau intercensal population estimates are used to calculate crime rates by state and year.

When measuring within-state comparisons, crime rate statistics are derived from the Tennessee Incident-Based Reporting System (TIBRS), published by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI).²²⁴ TBI data includes Group A offenses mandatorily reported by law enforcement agencies, colleges, and universities. Offenders are individuals of all ages. Additionally, yearly population data from Tennessee's Department of Health Population projections is used when calculating within-state crime rates.

Despite TIBRS being modeled after the NIBRS methodology, there are differences in the definitions for some offenses. For instance, the definition of "rape" before 2013 was more limited than that of TIBRS, which causes discrepancies in the rape figures presented in each database.²²⁵ Differences are greater when comparing SRS and TIBRS data.

Unless otherwise noted, percent changes are calculated using relative change, expressed as: $\text{Change} = (x_t - x_{t-1}) / x_{t-1} \times 100$ where x_t represent the value in the current period, and x_{t-1} represents the value in the previous or base period.

Crime Victim Data

Between 2018 and 2023, there were 1.2 crimes per victim, on average. However, victim reporting varies by crime category. Crimes Against Persons and Crimes Against Property offenses each average one victim per offense, while Crimes Against Society offenses do not record individual victims.²²⁶

TIBRS requires victim data for each person affected by Group A incidents. Although the system includes a "Society/Public" victim type option, this category does not produce victim data in standard reports. For counting purposes, Crimes Against Persons record one offense per victim, while Crimes Against Property and Crimes Against Society record one offense per incident, regardless of the number of victims involved.²²⁷

Firearm Death Data Suppression

Data values are suppressed when counts fall below CDC WONDER's privacy threshold to protect individual identities. When suppression occurs, totals and subtotals may also be unavailable if they would allow suppressed values to be calculated through subtraction.

Mortality Rate Calculations

Crude mortality rates are calculated as the number of deaths divided by the population, expressed per 100,000. "Crude" indicates that the rates are not adjusted for differences in age composition across populations or over time; they reflect the actual observed deaths in each population. For multi-year periods (2018-2023), total deaths across all years were divided by the summed population across those years (person-years of observation), following CDC WONDER's standard methodology for multi-year rate calculations. This approach accounts for population changes over time and yields an average annual rate for the period.

Person-years represent the total amount of time a population is observed or "at risk" for an outcome. For example, if a county has 100,000 residents in each year from 2018 through 2023, this represents 600,000 person-years of observation (100,000 people \times 6 years). Using person-years as the denominator ensures that rates properly account for both the size of the population and the length of time studied.

Appendix 3: Timeline of Recent Criminal Justice Legislation

- **1985** - Following prison riots and unrest throughout the system, the Tennessee General Assembly held the First Extraordinary Session on Corrections, resulting in significant changes through the Comprehensive Corrections Improvement Act of 1985. The Act established the Oversight Committee on Corrections (to monitor the Department of Correction), Tennessee Sentencing Commission (to draft a new criminal code and revise the sentencing statutes), and Community Corrections Program (allowing sentencing of non-violent felony offenders to community-based alternatives).
- **1989** - The Sentencing Reform Act (drafted by the Tennessee Sentencing Commission and passed by the General Assembly) based sentencing on the seriousness of the crime committed and the number of prior convictions the defendant had, attempting to make sentencing more ascertainable. The new process sorted individuals into classes of felonies or misdemeanors, each with different sentencing ranges. The trial court would then consider enhancement or mitigating factors to determine the sentence.²²⁸
- **1998** - Legislation passed to transfer the duties and responsibilities relating to probation services and community grant programs from TDOC to the Board of Paroles. The Act also changed the name of the Board of Paroles to the Board of Probation and Parole (BOPP).
- **2005** - Revisions to the Criminal Sentencing Reform Act of 1989. Following a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions on constitutional issues around sentencing, Governor Bredesen created a Task Force to draft legislation to address Tennessee's sentencing laws. In 2005, amendments were passed by the legislature, directing trial courts to use a combination of sentencing alternatives and giving trial judges more discretion in sentencing (e.g., judges could sentence anywhere within the appropriate range, but statutory sentencing ranges remained mandatory).²²⁹
- **2012** - Legislation passed calling for all supervision of individuals with convictions, from incarceration through community supervision, to be placed under the TN Department of Correction (TDOC). BOPP was renamed the TN Board of Parole (BOP) and remained an independent agency overseeing parole decisions and processes only.
- **2021** - Governor Bill Lee signed into law two criminal justice reform bills. The Alternatives to Incarceration Act created a process for local governments and organizations to develop alternatives to incarceration, limited parole revocation upon one instance of a technical violation, and opened drug court treatment programs to individuals who were previously ineligible. The Reentry Success Act of 2021 expanded release to supervision, limited liability for employers who hire individuals with convictions, and encouraged community colleges and technical schools to provide training and programs to facilitate workforce development among those previously incarcerated. The Act also eliminates certain fees for restricted driver's licenses and offers stipends to counties for implementing reentry programs. The Tennessee Office of Reentry was also formed in 2021 and housed in the Department of Labor & Workforce Development.
- **2022** - The Truth in Sentencing Act passed, which included a rollback of sentence reduction credits and an increase in the number of offenses for which someone will serve almost the entire sentence. The legislation was enacted without the signature of the Governor.

Appendix 4: Timeline of Recent Youth Justice Legislation

- **1988** - The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (TCCY) was created and authorized to implement provisions of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) of 1974. The JJDPA prohibited detention of status offenders (runaways, truants, or curfew violators), contact between juvenile and adult offenders, and placement of youth in adult facilities except under specific circumstances.
- **1996** - The Department of Children's Services (DCS) was created by Public Chapter 1079, placing both child welfare services and juvenile justice programs under the umbrella of one state agency. All juvenile justice programs formerly administered by the Department of Youth Development were transferred to DCS.
- **2006** - The Division of Juvenile Justice was created by Public Chapter 818 within the Department of Children's Services to serve children who are adjudicated delinquent.
- **2017** - The Office of Juvenile Justice began providing supervision over all youth in custody adjudicated delinquent and non-custodial probation and diversion cases, as well as supervision of juvenile justice case managers and transportation officers.
- **2018** - The Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018 emphasizes diversion and community-based alternatives over detention for low-risk youth, standardizes probation practices, uses risk assessments to guide decisions, bans detention for status offenses, and reallocates resources to support effective community programs. The Act also enhances data collection and sets clear sentencing guidelines to replace indeterminate sentencing.
- **2024** - The Organized Retail Crime law (effective July 1, 2024) and Blended Sentence for Serious Youthful Offenders (effective Jan. 1, 2025), which impact when a juvenile may be tried in adult court, were passed in 2024. Children 15 and older can now be tried in adult court for two nonviolent offenses: shoplifting or stealing a firearm, or attempting to do so, with the juvenile court deciding whether confinement should occur in a juvenile facility or compliant adult facility. Previously, they could only be tried in adult court for violent or otherwise extreme offenses. The other law made changes to when a juvenile as young as 14 may be classified as a "serious youth offender," implementing blended sentences (a combination of juvenile and adult sentences) through review of their record at age 19 (after leaving DCS custody) to determine if additional sentencing should be enforced.^{230,231}

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