

A snapshot of youth facing felonies

Most of the teens charged with felonies in Cook County were black and from poor neighborhoods. In most cases, those teens pleaded guilty to the crimes, regardless of whether they had a private lawyer or public defender. In many cases, the teens were sentenced to adult prison on their charges, many of which were nonviolent offenses.

What has happened to minors charged with a felony in Illinois since 2006

2,798 were 17 years old and were automatically sent to adult court

553 were 16 or younger and were transferred up to adult court for one of the following reasons:

Automatic Transfer

- Murder
- Aggravated criminal sexual assault
- Armed robbery with a firearm
- Aggravated vehicular hijacking
- Unlawful use of a weapon on school grounds
- Aggravated battery with firearm

Mandatory Transfer

- Forcible felony with prior felony conviction and gang activity
- Felony with prior forcible felony conviction and gang activity
- Presumptive transfer crime and prior forcible felony
- Aggravated discharge of a firearm within 1,000 feet of a school

Presumptive Transfer

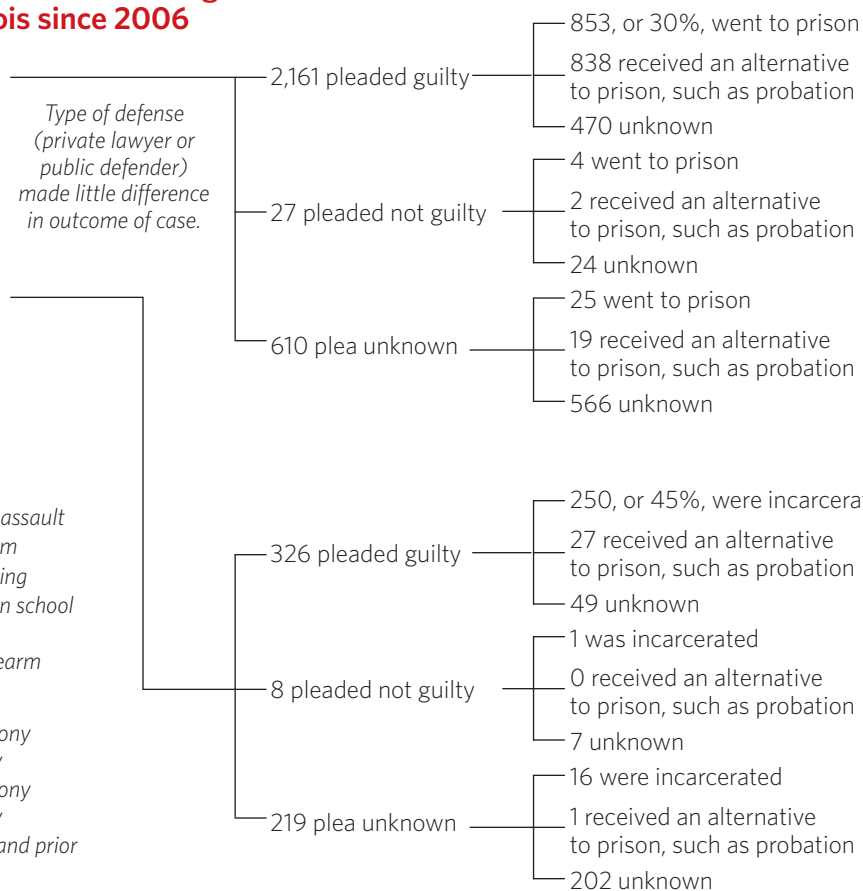
- Class X felonies other than armed violence
- Aggravated discharge of firearm
- Armed violence with firearm when predicated offense is Class 1 or 2 felony and gang activity
- Armed violence with firearm when predicated on drug offense
- Armed violence with a machine gun, rifle or explosive
- Delivery of a Class X amount of controlled substance on school grounds, on public housing property or any amount within 1,000 feet of a school or public housing when delivery is to a person under 17

Discretionary Transfer

- Any crime

Extended Jurisdiction Juvenile

- Any felony



17-year-olds were sentenced to a total of 3,103 years in prison. The median sentence was three years. The maximum sentence was 33 years. The minimum sentence was two days.

Minors 16 and younger were sentenced to a total of 2,168 years in detention. The median sentence was six years. The maximum sentence was 50 years. The minimum sentence was seven days.

Top charges

Though their crimes tend to be more violent, minors 16 and younger begin serving their adult sentences in youth facilities.

Top crimes for 14-, 15- and 16-year olds

Crime	Convictions	Percent
Guns	166	56%
Robbery	54	18%
Murder	32	11%
Sexual assault	24	8%
Battery	6	2%
Theft	6	2%
Drugs	5	2%
Other	2	1%

17 and convicted

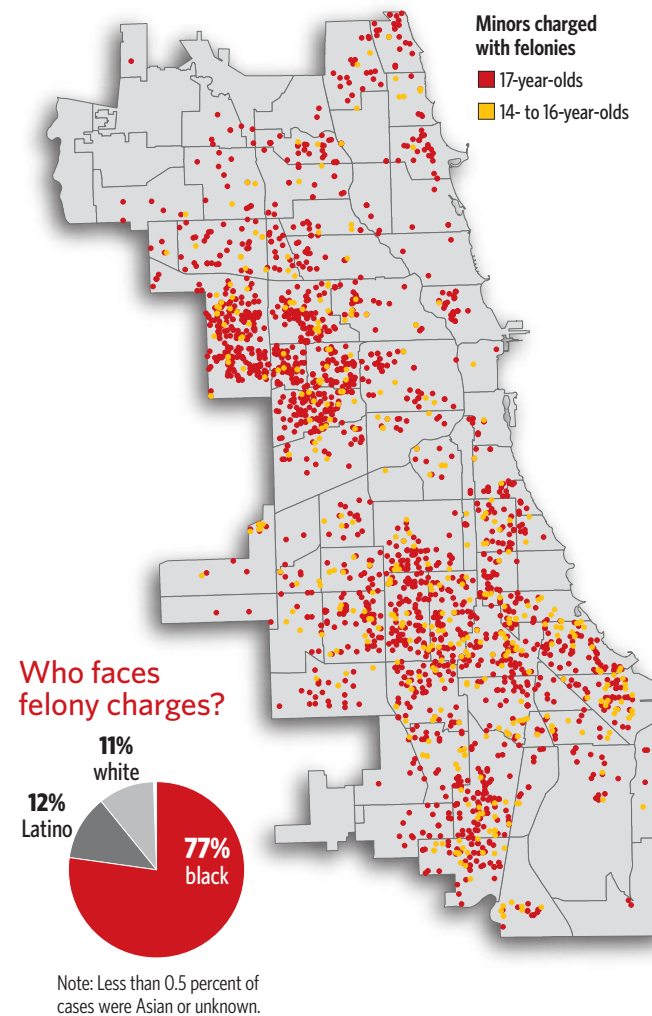
Most 17-year-olds are not heading to adult prison for violent crimes like murder but for drug-dealing and petty theft.

Top crimes for 17-year olds

Crime	Convictions	Percent
Drugs	570	31%
Theft	418	23%
Guns	404	22%
Robbery	236	13%
Battery	92	5%
DUI	35	2%
Sexual assault	17	1%
Other	62	3%

For more groundbreaking data analysis, go to www.chicagoreporter.com

Most of the minors charged with a felony in Cook County are black, hailing from communities below the city's median income and with the highest unemployment, such as Austin, North Lawndale, West Englewood, Humboldt Park and Roseland.



Methodology

The Chicago Reporter obtained records for all 14-, 15-, 16- and 17-year-old defendants facing felony charges in the Cook County courts system between Jan. 1, 2006, and March 2010. The Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court returned records for 3,386 cases. Those records included case numbers, charges by statute, date of the first court filing, whether defendants were represented by a public defender or private lawyer, a plea, verdict, sentence and the location of the courthouse where the case was conducted. Personal information about those defendants included names, date of birth, address, ZIP code and race. A plea was recorded in 80 percent of the cases. A verdict was recorded in 60 percent of the cases. The Reporter considered cases to be "violent" if they included crimes like murder, sexual assault, kidnapping, battery, robbery or those involving a gun. Cases were considered "nonviolent" if they involved drugs, theft, driving under the influence, property damage or trespassing.

A century of youth justice

During the height of the nation's War on Drugs in the early 1980s, the Illinois General Assembly passed a series of laws to crack down on youth crime. These were some of the numerous measures that moved more youth into the adult penal system. Now the state is figuring out whether it should put more minors back into the juvenile justice system.

- 1899:** Illinois passes Juvenile Court Act, setting up first independent youth court to rehabilitate youth.
- 1906:** Illinois law puts 17-year-old boys, but not girls, into adult court systems, regardless of the crime.
- 1925:** By this time, 46 states, three territories and the District of Columbia are operating juvenile court systems.
- 1973:** Illinois law pushes 17-year-old girls into adult court systems, regardless of the crime.
- 1973:** 13- through 16-year-olds are transferred to adult court at prosecutors' discretion.
- 1980:** Then-Illinois state Sen. Richard M. Daley runs for state's attorney and wins with a tough-on-crime platform.
- 1982:** 15- and 16-year-olds are moved to adult court if charged with murder, aggravated criminal sexual assault or armed robbery with a firearm.
- 1985:** 15- and 16-year-olds are moved to adult court for unlawful use of a weapon on school grounds or delivery of a controlled substance within 1,000 feet of a school or public housing unit.
- 1986:** Daley and the state legislature push law to increase penalties for people convicted of possessing or selling cocaine, crack cocaine or marijuana.
- 1990:** 15- and 16-year-olds are moved to adult court if charged with forcible felony with prior felony conviction and gang activity, a felony with prior forcible felony conviction and gang activity, or presumptive transfer crimes and prior forcible felonies.
- 1991:** Any minor in violation of a bail bond or escape is moved to adult court.
- 1995:** 15- and 16-year-olds are moved to adult court when charged with any class X felony other than armed violence.
- 1995:** 13- and 14-year-olds are moved to adult court if charged with murder in the course of aggravated criminal sexual assault.
- 1996:** 15- and 16-year-olds are moved to adult court if charged with armed violence with a firearm when predicated on a drug offense or armed violence with a machine gun, rifle or explosive.
- 1999:** Once any minor is convicted in adult court, that youth is always transferred to adult court.
- 2000:** 15- and 16-year-olds charged with aggravated battery with a firearm are moved to adult court.
- 2005:** 15- and 16-year-olds charged with delivering a Class X amount of a controlled substance within 1,000 feet of a school or public housing unit when delivering to a person under 17 are moved to adult court.
- 2005:** 15 and 16-year-olds delivering controlled substances within 1,000 feet of a school or public housing unit are sent back to juvenile court.
- 2009:** Illinois legislature sends 17-year-olds charged with misdemeanors to juvenile court.