

## Minor Role IV: Violent Crime More of an Adult Problem Today

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Public officials may point to “juvenile” crime when responding to public concerns about community safety. Recent [statements](#) by federal officials echo the political rhetoric of the 1990s when politicians across the country blamed young people for what were actually generalized increases in crime.

Despite [decades of research](#) showing that such statements are mistaken at best, and intentionally misleading at worst, crime politics today resemble the 1990s. When violence increases overall, some lawmakers blame the juvenile justice system.

Analyses of the FBI’s national crime data show these claims to be incorrect. Arrests for serious and violent crimes generally declined nationwide since the 1990s, and rates dropped sharply when the social and economic disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in 2020. Arrests then surged in 2021 and 2022 before beginning to fall once again in 2023 and 2024. All age groups display these fluctuations to some degree, but youth under age 18 actually lead the crime decline (Figure 1).

Between 1995 and 2024, the crime decline was steeper for youth under age 18 in total arrests as well as arrests for offenses in the FBI’s Violent Crime Index and Property Crime Index. For example, arrests of under-18 youth for violent crimes fell 67 percent between 1995 and 2024, while arrests were down 58 percent for young adults aged 18-24 and 21 percent for adults ages 25 and older.

Over the past three decades, the responsibility of youth under 18 for the nation’s overall crime problem has [fallen](#) dramatically. Juveniles accounted for 18 percent of total arrests in 1995, but just 7 percent in 2024 (Table 1).

Among offenses in the FBI’s Violent Crime Index (i.e., aggravated assault, robbery, rape, and murder or nonnegligent manslaughter), youth aged 17 and younger were involved in 19 percent of arrests in 1995, but only 10 percent in 2024. The under-18 proportion of arrests for offenses in the property index (i.e., burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson) fell from 35 percent to 9 percent between 1995 and 2024.

These trends from the FBI’s compilation of national crime data suggest that public officials could reasonably celebrate the nation’s successful efforts over the past 30 years to improve community safety by reducing criminal and violent behavior among youth. Instead, nearly any time public attention focuses on crime and violence, many political officials across the United States choose to bring out youth-blaming rhetoric from the 1990s.

Figure 1: Number of Arrests Nationwide in 2024 Relative to 1995

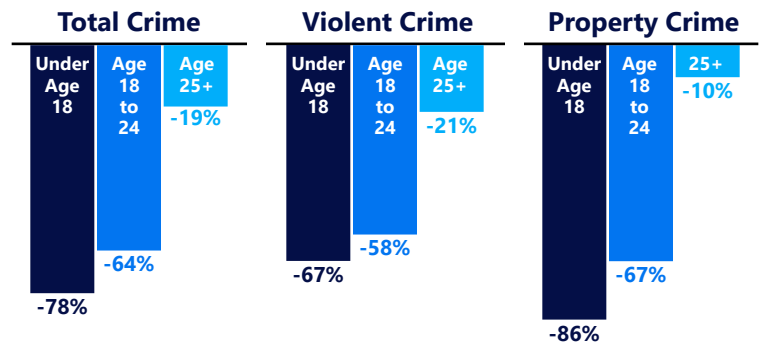


Table 1: Since 1995, Arrests for Serious Crime Fluctuated Nationally While the Proportion Involving Juveniles Declined

### Total Arrests

Age Group	Number			Percent		
	1995	2010	2024	1995	2010	2024
17 & Younger	2,084,428	1,288,615	448,524	18%	13%	7%
18 to 24	2,978,044	3,014,350	1,060,714	26%	29%	16%
25 & Older	6,353,874	5,920,593	5,115,079	56%	58%	77%
Total	11,416,346	10,223,558	6,624,317	100%	100%	100%

### Arrests for FBI Violent Index Crimes

Age Group	Number			Percent		
	1995	2010	2024	1995	2010	2024
17 & Younger	115,592	59,093	38,274	19%	14%	10%
18 to 24	167,223	126,270	70,084	27%	29%	19%
25 & Older	336,415	245,001	266,064	54%	57%	71%
Total	619,230	430,364	374,422	100%	100%	100%

### Arrests for FBI Property Index Crimes

Age Group	Number			Percent		
	1995	2010	2024	1995	2010	2024
17 & Younger	561,634	290,351	76,803	35%	22%	9%
18 to 24	383,619	404,245	127,564	24%	31%	16%
25 & Older	675,451	598,427	606,749	42%	46%	75%
Total	1,620,704	1,293,023	811,116	100%	100%	100%

Data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Crime in the United States, Table 38, provided through the agency’s [Crime Data Explorer](#) and analyzed by the Research and Evaluation Center. Total arrests are those reported by the police agencies fully participating in the FBI program, typically greater than 90 percent of the country.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

As violent crime in the U.S. generally declined after the 1990s, many states began to reverse the legal mechanisms used to **transfer** youth out of juvenile court for prosecution in adult criminal court. New York's **Raise the Age** law, for example, was implemented in 2018, bringing many youth back to family-court jurisdiction. Adult-court processing remained possible for a smaller number of youth charged with the most serious crimes and those with extensive criminal histories. By 2019, the new law had eliminated the automatic policies that previously sent young people into criminal court by default. Some elected officials still oppose the policy change.

Retaining nearly all youth in family court is consistent with the **science** of adolescent development and public safety. Many studies have **found** that moving juveniles into adult court does not improve public safety. It may even lead to higher rates of post-conviction recidivism. Yet, some **public officials** continue to claim Raise the Age laws produce increases in crime and violence.

Isolated acts of violence, of course, continue to occur. Crimes by the very young are inherently disturbing, especially when victims are very young. It is also possible to identify particular types of crime that recently increased between two points in time, even as overall crime was on the decline. These facts are not evidence of a negative effect from Raise the Age.

The decline in weapon arrests between 2006 and 2025 may be slightly greater among 18-24 year-olds than under-18 youth. Robbery arrests declined for all age groups, but the post-COVID drop for the larger group of older adults was sharp enough that under-18 arrests accounted for a larger share of the total after 2022. Juvenile robbery arrests, however, were still down considerably. Under-18 youth account for just 23 percent of the estimated 2025 total, compared with 30 percent in 2015 and 43 percent in 2006 (Table 2).

Examining arrests for three violent offenses by age reveals that crime trends during the past 20 years were more favorable for youth under age 18 than for adults (Figure 2). If Raise the Age were responsible for increased violence, the analysis would show a different pattern with consistently increasing crime for youth under age 18. Thus, it does not appear to be accurate to attribute recent increases in crime and violence to New York's Raise the Age law.

Finally, using the same data provided by the New York City Police Department, researchers examined detailed trends in the number of people arrested for the three key offenses before and after the passage of Raise the Age (Figure 3). Arrests in New York City surged with the rest of the nation due to the COVID-19 pandemic and then began to drop. The three age groups show the trend to varying degrees, and the extent to which they differ is not consistent with the type of youth-specific increase that would be expected if Raise the Age were causing violent crime increases.

### The Key Question

Are recent crime trends for under-18 youth different from those of adults in ways that point to a failure of youth justice systems? Is it accurate to say our crime problems are increasingly due to the behavior of youth under age 18? Recent data from New York City and the nation suggest the answer to these questions would be "no." Politicians blaming youth justice policies and practices for much of the nation's violent crime problem may be simply mistaken, or they may be drawing on rhetoric from the 1990s.

**Table 2: Youth Under Age 18 Are Responsible for Less of the Violence in New York City Today Than in 2006**

#### Arrests for Felony Dangerous Weapon Charges

Age Group	Number			Percent		
	2006	2015	2025*	2006	2015	2025*
17 & Younger	652	463	381	11%	8%	7%
18 to 24	2,509	2,160	1,262	41%	35%	25%
25 & Older	2,922	3,493	3,444	48%	57%	68%
Total	6,083	6,116	5,087	100%	100%	100%

#### Arrests for Felony Assault Charges

Age Group	Number			Percent		
	2006	2015	2025*	2006	2015	2025*
17 & Younger	1,921	1,166	960	15%	8%	6%
18 to 24	3,600	3,523	2,499	28%	24%	14%
25 & Older	7,144	9,846	13,794	56%	68%	80%
Total	12,665	14,535	17,253	100%	100%	100%

#### Arrests for Felony Robbery Charges

Age Group	Number			Percent		
	2006	2015	2025*	2006	2015	2025*
17 & Younger	5,316	3,192	1,952	43%	30%	23%
18 to 24	3,600	3,437	1,815	29%	32%	22%
25 & Older	3,329	4,148	4,576	27%	38%	55%
Total	12,245	10,777	83,010	100%	100%	100%

#### Source:

New York City Police Department, [Open Data](#) portal.

\* 2025 figures estimated using data from the first two calendar quarters, adjusted by the mean contribution of the same quarters in 2023 & 2024.

**Figure 2: New York City Arrests in 2025\* Relative to 2006**

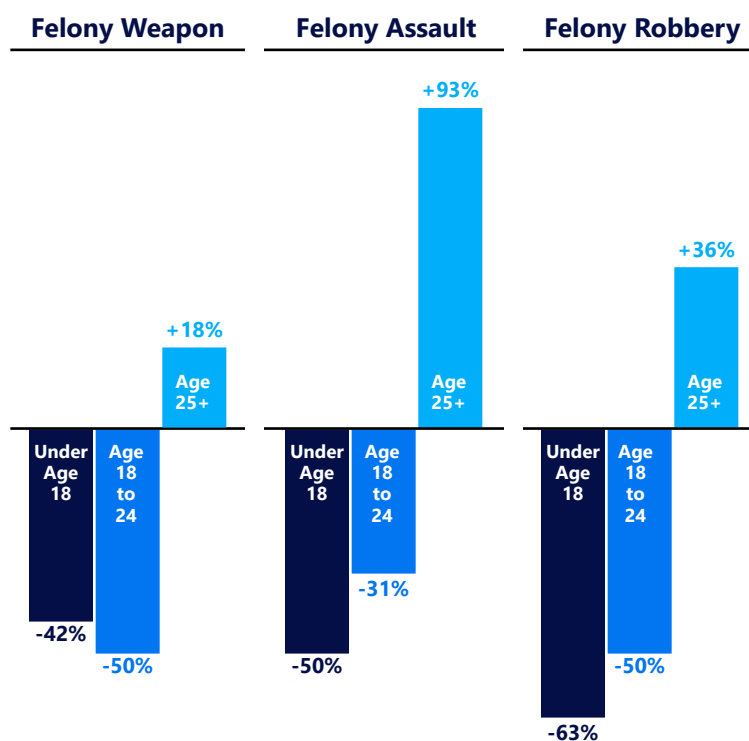
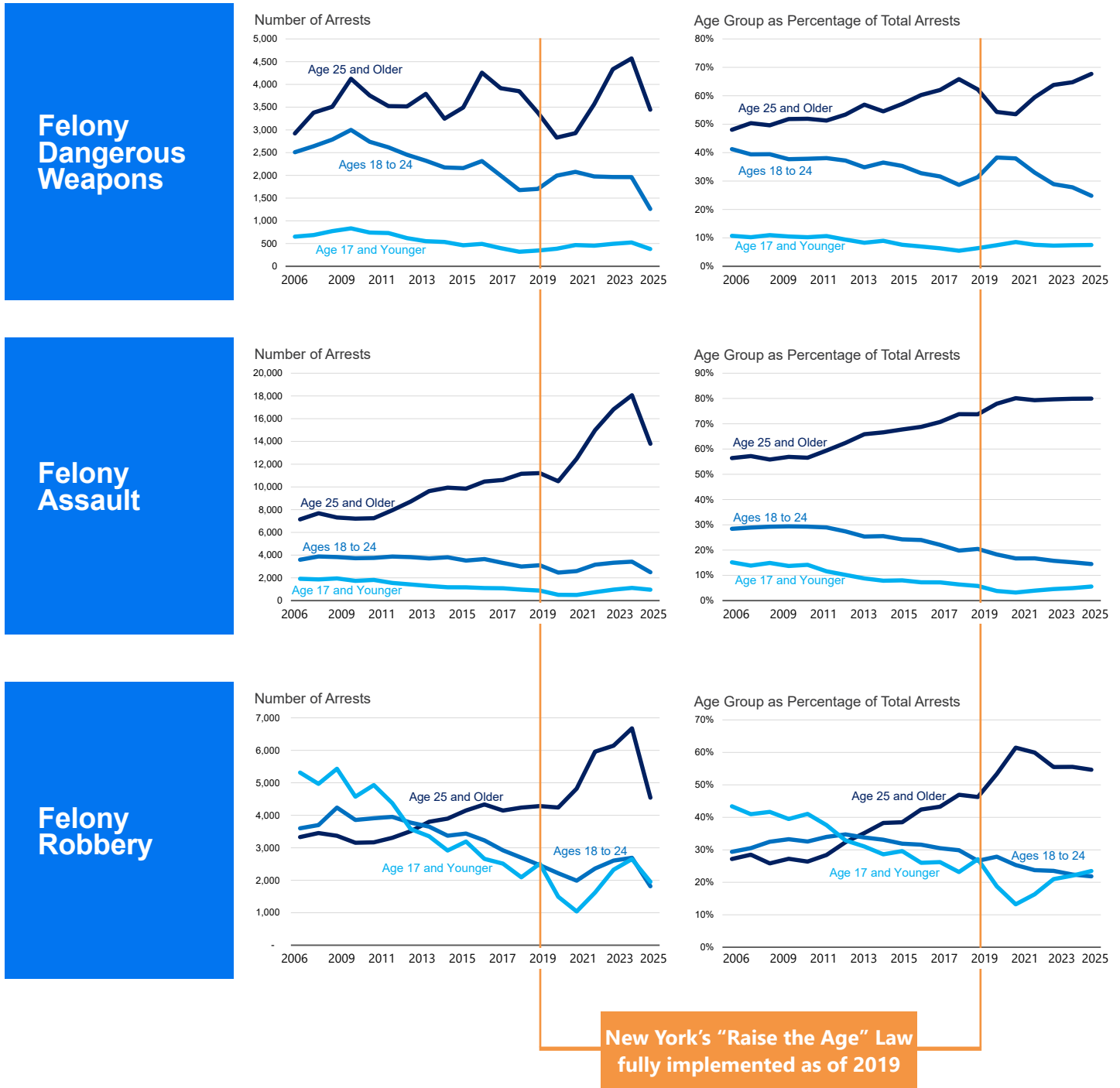


Figure 3: Violent Offense Arrests in New York City by Age Group



#### New York City Data:

Data provided by the New York City Police Department on the [Open Data](#) portal, then inspected and analyzed by the Research and Evaluation Center. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Annual figures for 2025 are estimated using data from the first two quarters of the year and weighting them to represent the expected yearly total based on the average proportions in the first two quarters of 2023 and 2024.

The analysis focuses on three high-volume violent crimes:

- **Felony assault** involves charges of assault in the first and second degree as well as strangulation in the first degree (see NY Penal Law [Article 120](#) & [Article 121](#)).
- **Felony dangerous weapon** includes charges for firearms or other weapons (see NY Penal Law [Article 265](#)).
- **Felony robbery** includes charges for forcible theft of property that involves the use of physical force (see NY Penal Law [Article 160](#)).