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# Department of Justice

## Office of Justice Programs



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**Bureau of Justice Statistics  
[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs)**

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### **STUDY FINDS MORE THAN HALF OF ALL CONVICTED VIOLENT FELONS HAD A PRIOR RECORD**

Thirty Percent of Those Who Murdered Were Younger Than 21

WASHINGTON -- Fifty-six percent of the violent felons convicted in the nation's 75 most populous counties from 1990 through 2002 had a prior conviction record, 38 percent had a prior felony conviction and 15 percent had been previously convicted for a violent felony, according to a new study released today by the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).

Thirty-six percent of the violent felons had at least one active criminal justice status at the time of their arrest. This included 18 percent on probation, 12 percent on release pending disposition of a prior case and 7 percent on parole.

Six percent of the convicted violent felons were under the age of 18, and 25 percent were younger than 21, 10 percent of the convicted murderers were under the age of 18, and 30 percent were under 21.

The data was gathered from a report that analyzed a sample of 9,000 convicted violent felons representing 33,000 cases from state courts in the most populous counties. These cases were selected during seven separate studies conducted in even-numbered years from 1990 through 2002. A sample of felony cases filed during the month of May was selected in each of these years. They were included in the analyses if the defendants were convicted of a violent felony.

During the 1990 to 2002 period, 18 percent of the felony convictions studied were for violent offenses, including 7 percent for assault and 6 percent for robbery.

Fifty percent of those convicted of a violent felony received a prison sentence and an additional 31 percent received a jail sentence. Nearly all (96 percent) murderers were sentenced to prison. A majority of those convicted of robbery (69 percent) or rape (62 percent) were also sentenced to prison. About one-fifth of the rape and robbery offenders were sentenced to jail.

For those convicted of felony assault, equal percentages (38 percent) were sentenced to prison and jail. Nearly all violent felons not sentenced to incarceration were sentenced to serve a term of probation. The median prison sentence length was 20 years for murder, 10 years for rape, five years for robbery, and four years for assault.

The report, "Violent Felons in Large Urban Counties" (NCJ-205289) was written by BJS statistician Brian A. Reaves. Following publication, the report can be found at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/vfluc.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/vfluc.htm)

Additional information about BJS statistical reports and programs is available from the BJS website at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs).

The Office of Justice Programs provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP is headed by an Assistant Attorney General and comprises five component bureaus and two offices: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; and the Office for Victims of Crime, as well as the Office of the Police Corps and Law Enforcement Education and the Community Capacity Development Office, which incorporates the Weed and Seed strategy and OJP's American Indian and Alaska Native Affairs Desk. More information can be found at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov).

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