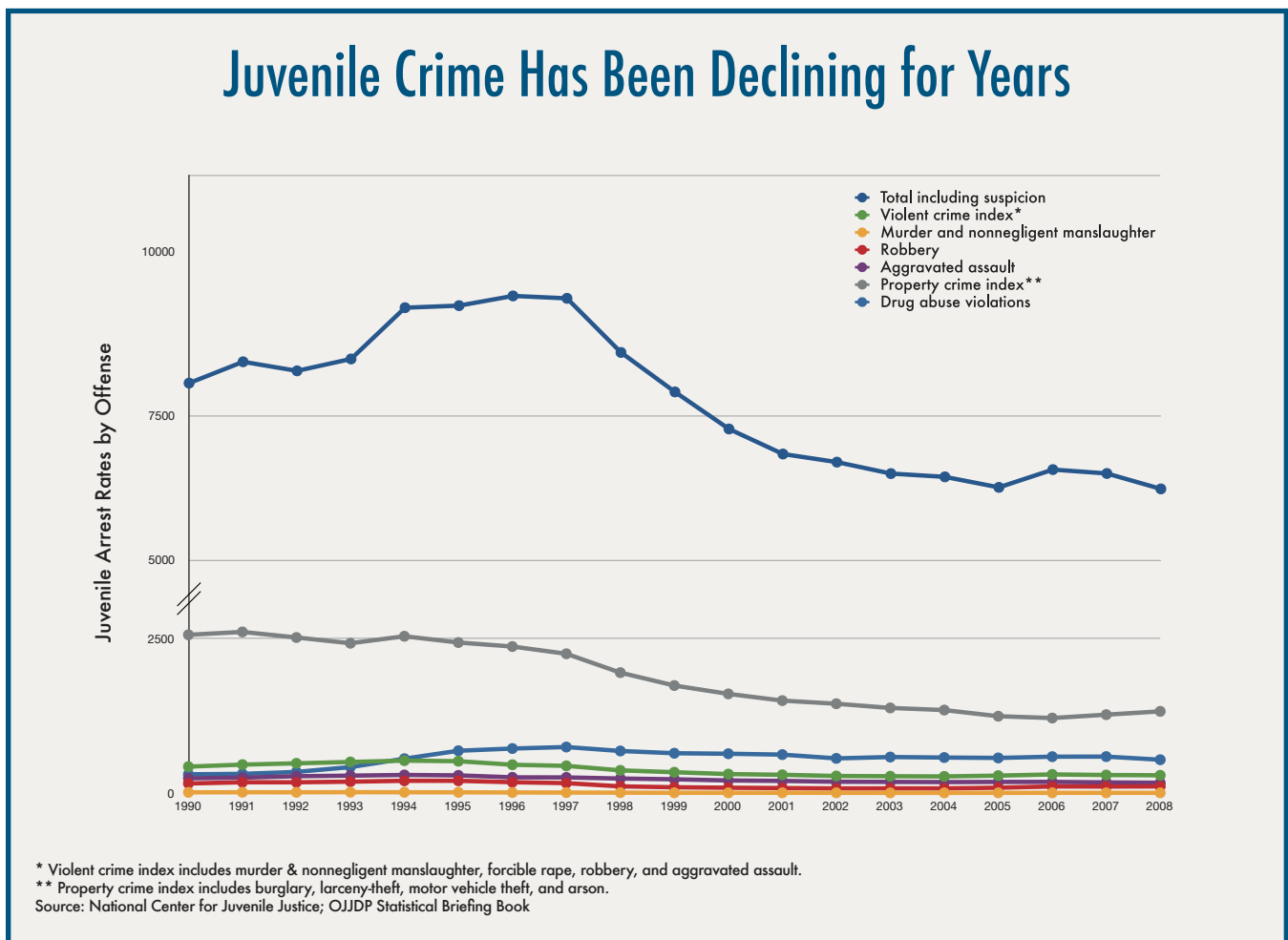


Most Youth in the Adult System Are Convicted of Minor Crimes

Any mention of juvenile crime tends to evoke images that perpetuate three specific myths about youth. First, newspaper and television coverage of youth crime tends to involve stories focused on gangs or murder leading to a distorted view of the nature of juvenile crime. Youth who have been arrested for violent crimes are rare and only account for about 5% of all juveniles arrested each year.¹ Drugs, burglary, theft, and other property crimes are among the more common reasons teens are prosecuted in adult courts.

Second, there is a perception that juvenile crime is on the rise. In reality, youth crime has been going down for many years and is now at historic lows. The number of adults arrested between 1999 and 2008 increased 3.4%, whereas the number of juveniles arrested dropped a staggering 15.7% during that same time frame.²

Third, there is a perception that youth commit the majority of crime in the nation. The truth is that adults commit the majority of crime in America. In 2008,

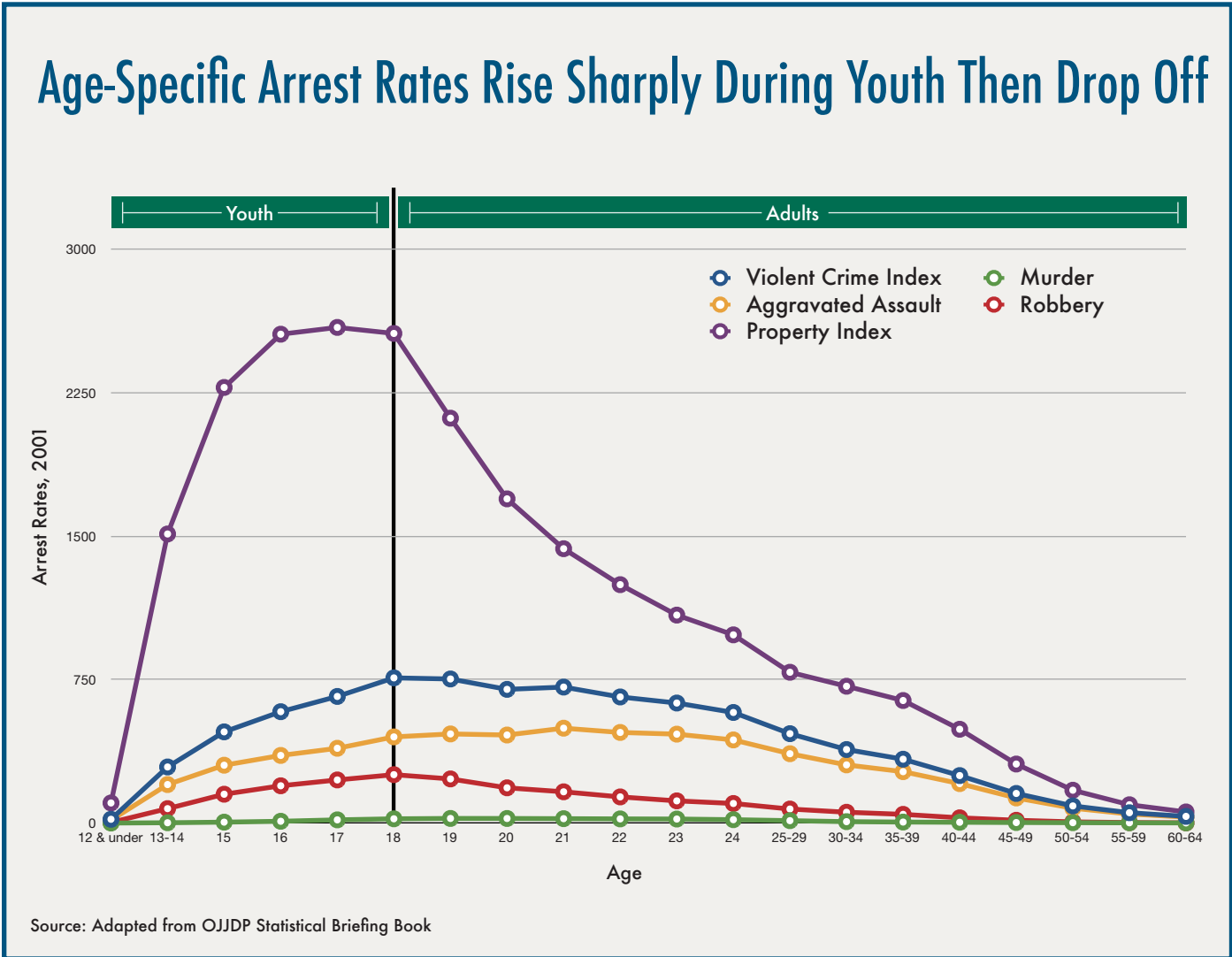


1 Federal Bureau of Investigation. Crime in the United States 2008. Washington, D.C.
 2 Federal Bureau of Investigation. Crime in the United States 2008. Washington, D.C.

only 12% of violent crime and 18% of property crime nationwide were attributed to youth.³ According to the FBI, youth under age 18 accounted for 15% of all arrests.⁴

These three misperceptions apply equally to youth in the adult justice system. The overwhelming majority of youth who enter the adult court are not there for serious, violent crimes. Despite the fact that many of the state laws were intended to prosecute the most serious offenders, most youth who are tried in adult courts are there for nonviolent offenses.⁵ A significant proportion of youth, in some states the majority, only receive a sentence of pro-

bation. However, even youth who receive the most serious sanction – a sentence of imprisonment in an adult prison – are not the serious offenders that one may imagine. The majority of youth held in adult prisons are not given extreme sentences such as life without parole, and 95% of youth will be released back to their communities before their 25th birthday.⁶ Unfortunately, by virtue of being prosecuted in the adult system these youth are less likely to get an education or skills training, and their adult conviction will make it harder for them to get jobs.



3 Federal Bureau of Investigation. Crime in the United States 2008. Washington, D.C.

4 Federal Bureau of Investigation. Crime in the United States 2008. Washington, D.C.

5 *The Consequences Aren't Minor: the Impact of Trying Youth as Adults and Strategies for Reform* (2007, March). Washington, DC: Campaign for Youth Justice.

6 Richard E. Redding, *Juvenile transfer laws: An effective deterrent to delinquency?* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention) (June 2010).