

Youth Violence

DEFINITION

Youth violence is the number of arrests of youth under age 18 in Rhode Island for assault/violent and weapons offenses and the percentage of middle and high school students who worry about violence at school. These two measures of youth violence are used to account for violence that leads to arrest as well as some of the violence experienced by youth that may not come to the attention of the police.

SIGNIFICANCE

Youth violence refers to a variety of harmful behaviors that youth can experience as victims, witnesses, and/or offenders, which can cause emotional harm, physical injury, or death. Violence impacts the well-being of individuals, families, schools, and communities and can generate high social and economic costs.^{1,2}

Effective youth violence prevention efforts require an understanding of the factors that influence violence. Efforts to prevent youth violence should begin in early childhood and address a wide range of individual, family, and community factors. Effective violence prevention strategies include promoting nurturing family environments that support healthy development, providing high-quality early education, improving school connectedness, strengthening youth's interpersonal, emotional, and behavioral skills, connecting youth to

caring adults in the community, and creating protective environments to reduce youth exposure to violence.^{2,3}

The interaction of individual, family, and community factors can put youth at risk for involvement in youth violence. Living in high-poverty neighborhoods with less economic opportunity is a risk factor for becoming involved in youth violence, as is having a history of substance use, association with lawbreaking peers, poor academic performance, and being a victim of child maltreatment.^{1,2,4} Youth who are victims of violence are at increased risk for physical and mental health problems, academic difficulties, smoking, high-risk sexual behavior, and suicide.⁵

Nationally, 19% of high school students reported being bullied on school property during the previous year, 13% did not go to school due to safety concerns, and 9% reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property during the previous year.⁶

In 2024, less than one in 10 (8.5%) youth arrests in the U.S. were for a violent crime, a 75% decrease since the peak in 1995. In 2024 in Rhode Island, there were 558 juvenile arrests for assault/violent offenses and 84 juvenile arrests for weapons offenses.⁸ In 2025, violent crimes made up 4% (134) of the 3,581 juvenile offenses referred to Rhode Island Family Court.⁹



Bully Status, by Gender and Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2023

	MIDDLE SCHOOL		HIGH SCHOOL	
	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE
Bullied on School Property	43%	28%	17%	15%
Bullied Electronically	37%	19%	15%	12%
Been in a Physical Fight	10%	19%	7%	12%

Source: 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis.

- ◆ Violence in schools affects individual victims and disrupts the functioning of entire schools and communities.¹⁰ In Rhode Island in 2023, 12% of high school students reported not going to school due to safety concerns.¹¹
- ◆ Bullying adversely affects all children involved, including victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of bullying behaviors. Victims of bullying are at risk of emotional, behavioral, and mental health problems. Victims of chronic bullying are at an increased risk of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts compared to their peers who are not victims of bullying.¹²
- ◆ In 2022, nearly half (46%) of U.S. teens reported being the victim of cyberbullying (bullied or harassed online, on their cellphone, on social media, etc.).¹³ In 2023 in Rhode Island, 28% of middle school students (37% of females and 19% of males) and 14% of high school students (15% of females and 12% of males) reported being electronically bullied.¹¹



Youth Witnessing Violence and Youth Gun Violence

- ◆ Witnessing violence (like domestic violence) can cause emotional and physical harm, even for children who are not the direct victims, and early, chronic exposure to violence can damage a child's brain development.¹⁴
- ◆ In 2018, for the first time in history, gun violence surpassed motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death for U.S. children and teens ages one to 19 and has remained the leading cause of death among this age group.^{15,16} In Rhode Island between 2020 and 2024, there were 105 emergency department visits, 28 hospitalizations, and more than 14 deaths of children and youth ages one to 19 attributed to firearms.¹⁷

Table 24.

Youth Violence, Rhode Island

CITY/TOWN	COMMUNITY CONTEXT		VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS, 2025		JUVENILE ARRESTS FOR VIOLENCE, 2024		
	TOTAL VIOLENT CRIME OFFENSES (ALL AGES)	TOTAL POPULATION AGES 11-17	% OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WORRY ABOUT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL	% OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WORRY ABOUT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL	# TOTAL VIOLENT CRIME OFFENSES	# FOR WEAPONS OFFENSES	TOTAL # FOR VIOLENT CRIME AND WEAPONS OFFENSES
	2024	2020					
Barrington	37	2,191	8%	5%	8	1	9
Bristol	43	1,290	12%	19%	0	0	0
Burrillville	44	1,467	9%	19%	8	0	8
Central Falls	182	2,662	23%	15%	15	4	19
Charlestown	21	566	9%	13%	2	0	2
Coventry	161	2,944	18%	12%	36	2	38
Cranston	293	6,786	13%	15%	35	7	42
Cumberland	84	3,185	12%	12%	5	1	6
East Greenwich	19	1,661	5%	9%	0	0	0
East Providence	219	3,229	16%	22%	18	1	19
Exeter	NA	518	8%	7%	NA	NA	NA
Foster	13	382	7%	14%	0	0	0
Glocester	27	857	7%	14%	2	0	2
Hopkinton	19	696	9%	13%	0	0	0
Jamestown	10	420	NA	4%	1	0	1
Johnston	129	2,173	15%	17%	14	6	20
Lincoln	99	1,987	8%	13%	16	2	18
Little Compton	4	283	NA	3%	1	0	1
Middletown	51	1,426	9%	13%	9	1	10
Narragansett	52	876	6%	9%	4	0	4
New Shoreham	0	82	0%	*	0	0	0
Newport	210	1,410	20%	26%	25	3	28
North Kingstown	87	2,506	6%	14%	16	2	18
North Providence	213	2,422	13%	14%	12	1	13
North Smithfield	41	1,018	5%	10%	4	0	4
Pawtucket	646	6,682	25%	23%	84	8	92
Portsmouth	51	1,605	9%	8%	8	4	12
Providence	762	17,093	18%	26%	48	10	58
Richmond	17	703	9%	13%	0	0	0
Scituate	26	869	11%	14%	5	0	5
Smithfield	86	1,544	8%	12%	21	1	22
South Kingstown	99	2,055	7%	10%	10	0	10
Tiverton	65	1,199	14%	13%	6	1	7
Warren	67	796	12%	19%	8	0	8
Warwick	352	5,721	13%	22%	34	6	40
West Greenwich	16	550	8%	7%	6	0	6
West Warwick	251	2,220	16%	30%	23	1	24
Westerly	122	1,762	14%	15%	9	1	10
Woonsocket	457	3,716	32%	21%	49	14	63
State Police/Other	307	NA	NA	NA	16	7	23
Five Core Cities	2,257	31,563	20%	24%	221	39	260
Remainder of State	2,818	57,989	11%	15%	321	38	359
Rhode Island	5,382	89,552	14%	17%	558	84	642

Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Total violent crime offense data are from Rhode Island Department of Public Safety, Unified Crime Reporting/National Incident Based Reporting, 2024. NA indicates that the data are not available. Brown University, Exeter, T.F Green International Airport, and University of Rhode Island arrest numbers are included in the State Police/Other totals. See Methodology section for all offenses included as violent crime offenses.

Total population ages 11 to 17 data are from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020, PCT12.

Data on high school and middle school students worrying about violence at school are from the 2024-2025 administration of SurveyWorks, Rhode Island Department of Education. Percentages reflect students answering frequently or almost always to the question of "how often do you worry about violence at your school." SurveyWorks data for communities that belong to regional districts reflect the district's overall survey results. Students from Little Compton attend high school in Portsmouth, and students from Jamestown can choose to attend high school in North Kingstown or Narragansett. *Represents districts who had fewer than 10 students respond to the survey. Rhode Island total and remainder of state include charter schools, state operated schools, and collaboratives.

Juvenile arrests for violent crime and weapons offenses data are from Rhode Island Department of Public Safety, Unified Crime Reporting/National Incident Based Reporting, 2024. NA indicates that the data are not available. Exeter arrest numbers are included in the State Police/Other totals. See Methodology section for all offenses included as violent crime offenses.

Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

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