

# Criminal Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions

*In 2021, about 23,400 on-campus criminal incidents were reported by degree-granting postsecondary institutions. The overall number of on-campus criminal incidents reported per 10,000 full-time-equivalent students was lower in 2021 than in 2011 (16.9 vs. 20.0) but showed no consistent trend for this period.*

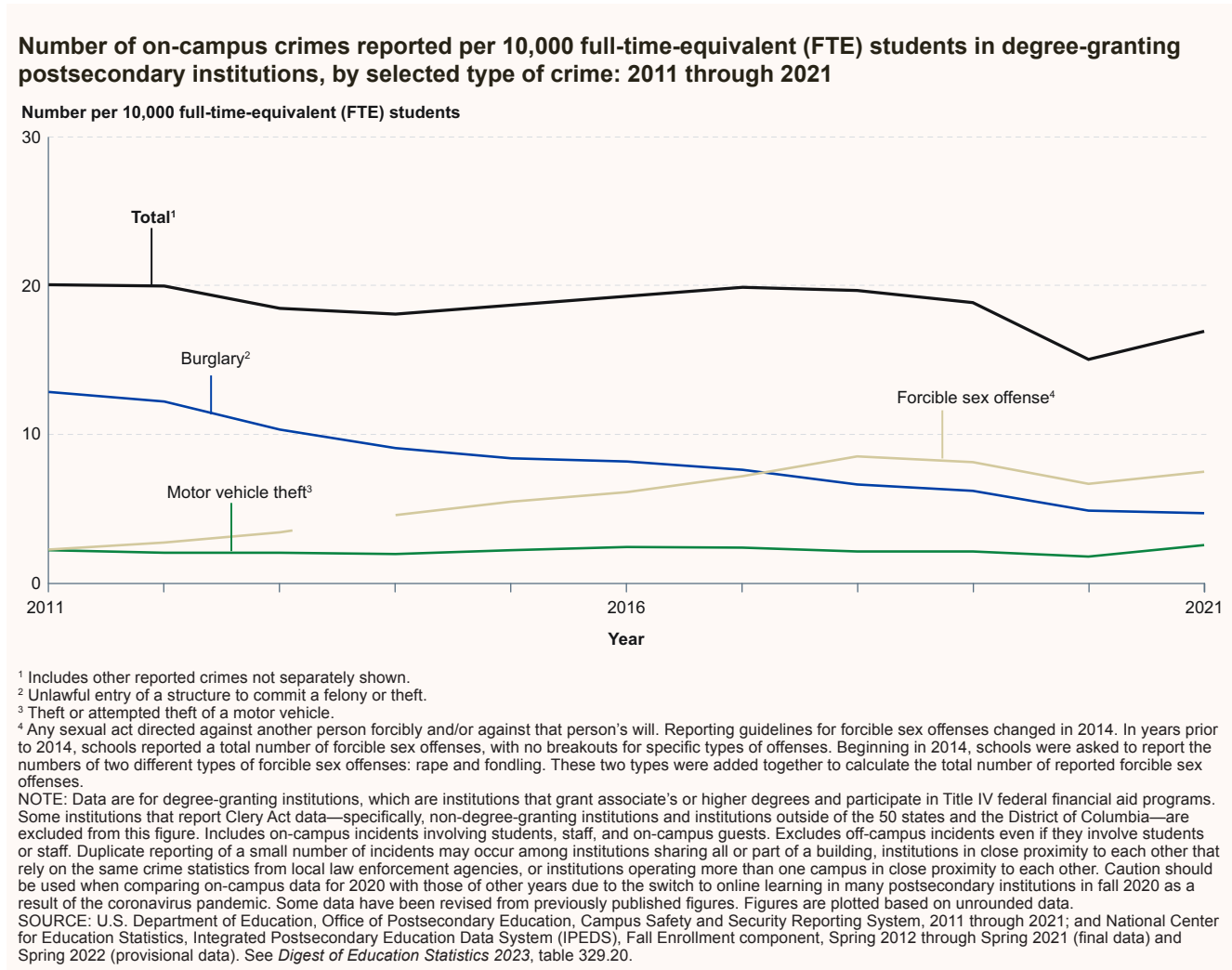
Since 1990, degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal student financial aid programs have been required to comply with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, known as the Clery Act. The Clery Act requires institutions to distribute timely warnings about crime incidents to students and staff; to publicly report campus crime and safety policies; and to collect, report, and disseminate campus crime data. Since 1999, data on campus safety and security have been reported by institutions through the Campus Safety and Security Survey, sponsored by the Office of Postsecondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education. These data are reported for each calendar year and include on-campus criminal offenses and arrests involving students, faculty, staff, and the general public, as well as referrals for disciplinary action primarily dealing with persons associated formally with the institution (i.e., students, faculty, and other staff).<sup>1</sup> Due to underreporting, figures for reported offenses, arrests, and disciplinary referrals likely do not capture all incidents that occurred. For example, according to reports in a student survey administered at several dozen large universities, officially reported sexual assaults represented only a minority of sexual assaults that occurred.<sup>2</sup>

## On-Campus Crimes

The Clery Act requires postsecondary degree-granting institutions to report data for several types of crimes,<sup>3</sup> including the following seven against persons and property on their campuses: murder, sex offenses (forcible and nonforcible), robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson.<sup>4</sup> In calendar year 2021, a total of 23,400 criminal incidents (hereafter referred to as “crimes”) of these types were reported.<sup>5,6</sup> This translates to 16.9 on-campus crimes reported per 10,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students enrolled. Among the various types of on-campus crimes reported in 2021, there were

- 10,400 forcible sex offenses<sup>7</sup> (44 percent of reported on-campus crimes);
- 6,500 burglaries<sup>8</sup> (28 percent of reported on-campus crimes);
- 3,500 motor vehicle thefts<sup>9</sup> (15 percent of reported on-campus crimes);
- 2,100 aggravated assaults<sup>10</sup> (9 percent of reported on-campus crimes);
- 500 robberies<sup>11</sup> (2 percent of reported on-campus crimes); and
- 400 arson<sup>12</sup> incidents (2 percent of reported on-campus crimes).

These estimates translate to 7.5 forcible sex offenses, 4.7 burglaries, 2.5 motor vehicle thefts, 1.5 aggravated assaults, 0.4 robberies, and 0.3 arson incidents per 10,000 FTE students.

**FIGURE 1.**

The overall number of on-campus crimes reported per 10,000 FTE students was lower in 2021 than in 2011 (16.9 vs. 20.0) but showed no consistent trend for this period. Specifically, the overall rate of on-campus crimes

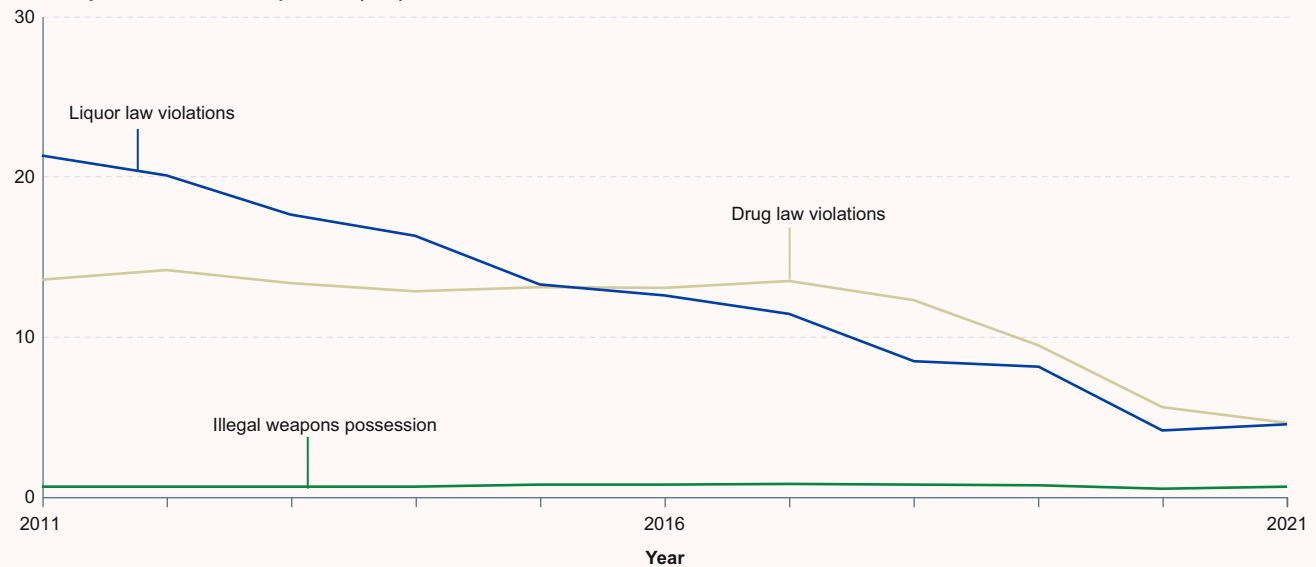
- was 6 percent lower in 2019 than in 2011 (18.8 vs. 20.0 per 10,000 FTE students);
- decreased by 20 percent between 2019 and 2020, during the first year of the coronavirus pandemic<sup>13</sup> (from 18.8 to 15.0 per 10,000 FTE students); and
- increased by 12 percent between 2020 and 2021.

Considering specific types of reported on-campus crimes, the rate per 10,000 FTE students was lower in 2021 than in 2011 for five categories: murder, robbery, burglary, arson, and nonforcible sex offenses. In contrast, the rate was higher in 2021 than in 2011 for forcible sex offenses, motor vehicle theft, and aggravated assault.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, the rate for forcible sex offenses increased between 2011 and 2021 (from 2.2 to 7.5 per 10,000 FTE students), surpassing burglary as the most reported crime and peaking in 2018.

In 2021, the number of on-campus crimes reported per 10,000 FTE students differed by level and control of the reporting institution (ranging from 5.3 at private for-profit 4-year institutions to 23.7 at private nonprofit 4-year institutions). To some extent, this range reflects the presence of student residence halls. Crimes involving students while they are on campus, including those that occur after normal class hours or in residence halls, are included in campus crime reports, while crimes involving students while they are off campus are not. In 2021, institutions with residence halls reported higher rates of on-campus crime than did institutions without residence halls (21.0 vs. 5.5 per 10,000 FTE students). The rate for each individual type of crime was also higher for institutions with residence halls. For example, the rate of reported forcible sex offenses was higher at institutions with residence halls than at institutions without them (9.9 vs. 0.7 per 10,000 FTE students), and the rate of reported burglaries was higher at institutions with residence halls than at institutions without them (5.6 vs. 2.1 per 10,000 FTE students).

**On-Campus Arrests****FIGURE 2.****Number of on-campus arrests per 10,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by type of arrest: 2011 through 2021**

Number per 10,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students

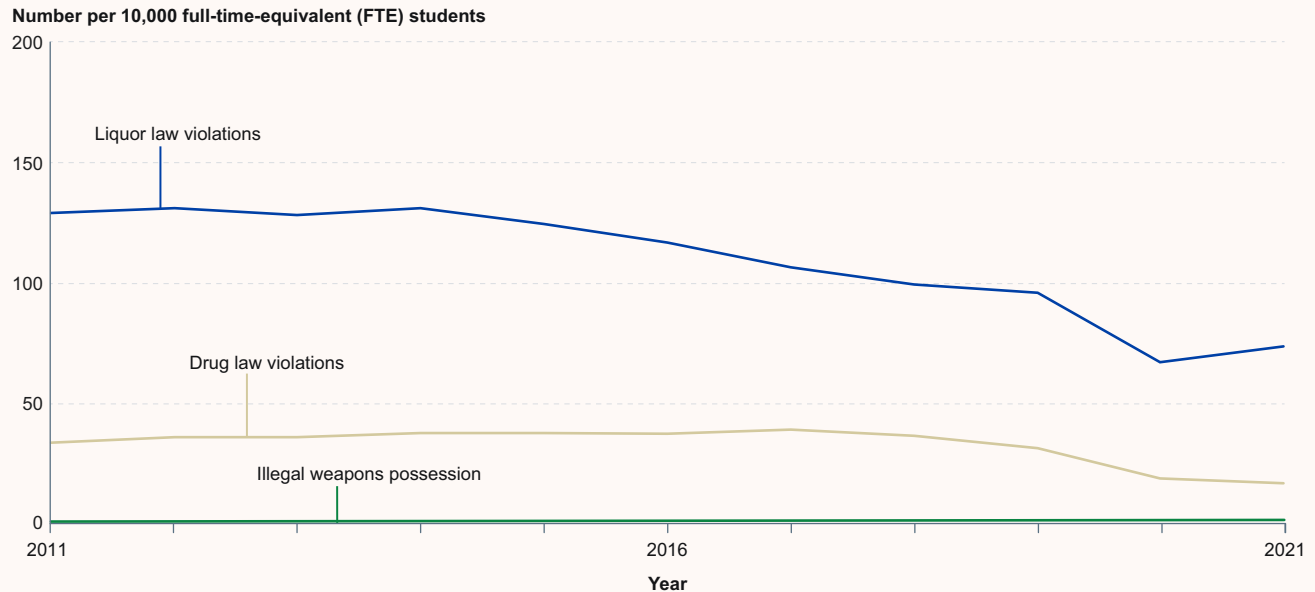


NOTE: Data are for degree-granting institutions, which are institutions that grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Some institutions that report Clery Act data—specifically, non-degree-granting institutions and institutions outside of the 50 states and the District of Columbia—are excluded from this figure. Includes on-campus incidents involving students, staff, and on-campus guests. Excludes off-campus incidents even if they involve students or staff. Duplicate reporting of a small number of incidents may occur among institutions sharing all or part of a building, institutions in close proximity to each other that rely on the same crime statistics from local law enforcement agencies, or institutions operating more than one campus in close proximity to each other. Caution should be used when comparing on-campus data for 2020 with those of other years due to the switch to online learning in many postsecondary institutions in fall 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Some data have been revised from previously published figures. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security Reporting System, 2011 through 2021; and National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment component, Spring 2012 through Spring 2021 (final data) and Spring 2022 (provisional data). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 329.20.

As part of the Clery Act, degree-granting postsecondary institutions are also required to report the number of arrests made on campus for illegal weapons possession, drug law violations, and liquor law violations. In 2021, the total number of these arrests was 13,800. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of these arrests per 10,000 FTE students decreased overall (from 35.8 to 10.0). More specifically, the number of arrests per 10,000 FTE

- decreased for liquor law violations (from 21.4 to 4.6);
- decreased for drug law violations (from 13.7 to 4.7); and
- ranged between 0.6 (2020) and 0.8 (2017) for illegal weapons possession but showed no consistent trend between 2011 and 2021.

While the rate of arrests had been falling for both drug and liquor law violations prior to the pandemic (between 2011 and 2019), the largest year-over-year decrease occurred from 2019 to 2020. The rate for these two types of violations remained lower in 2021 than in 2019, despite an increase in the rate for liquor law violations from 2020 to 2021 (4.2 to 4.6 per 10,000 FTE students, respectively).

**Referrals for Disciplinary Actions****FIGURE 3.****Number of referrals for disciplinary action resulting from on-campus violations per 10,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by type of referral: 2011 through 2021**

NOTE: Data are for degree-granting institutions, which are institutions that grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Some institutions that report Clery Act data—specifically, non-degree-granting institutions and institutions outside of the 50 states and the District of Columbia—are excluded from this figure. Referrals include incidents involving students, staff, and on-campus guests. Excludes cases in which an individual is both arrested and referred to college officials for disciplinary action for a single offense. Duplicate reporting of a small number of incidents may occur among institutions sharing all or part of a building, institutions in close proximity to each other that rely on the same crime statistics from local law enforcement agencies, or institutions operating more than one campus in close proximity to each other. Caution should be used when comparing on-campus data for 2020 with those of other years due to the switch to online learning in many postsecondary institutions in fall 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Some data have been revised from previously published figures. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security Reporting System, 2011 through 2021; and National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment component, Spring 2012 through Spring 2021 (final data) and Spring 2022 (provisional data). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 329.20.

In addition to reporting on-campus arrests for cases involving illegal weapons possession, drug law violations, and liquor law violations, degree-granting postsecondary institutions also report referrals for disciplinary action for these types of cases. Counts of disciplinary actions only include incidents for which there was a referral for institutional disciplinary action but no arrest. In 2021, there were a total of 127,300 referrals for disciplinary action for cases involving illegal weapons possession, drug law violations, and liquor law violations. The largest number of disciplinary referrals (102,700 referrals, or 81 percent of referrals) involved liquor law violations. Most of the referrals (92 percent) involved violations in residence halls.

Between 2011 and 2021, the total number of referrals per 10,000 FTE students peaked in 2014 (170.7) before decreasing to 91.8 in 2021. Changes over time in the number of disciplinary referrals per 10,000 FTE students also varied by type of violation. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of referrals per 10,000 FTE students decreased for

- liquor law violations (from 129.7 to 74.1);
- drug law violations (from 34.0 to 17.1); and
- illegal weapons possession (from 0.8 to 0.6).

While the rate of disciplinary referrals showed year-over-year decreases for at least the 3 years preceding the coronavirus pandemic for each of these types of violations, the largest decrease occurred from 2019 to 2020. The rate for each type of violation remained lower in 2021 than in 2019, despite increases from 2020 to 2021 in the rates for liquor law violations (from 67.4 to 74.1 per 10,000 FTE students) and illegal weapons possession (from 0.4 to 0.6 per 10,000 FTE students).

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> As of October 9, 2020, the Department of Education has rescinded and archived the [Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting](#), which in previous years was provided to assist institutions, in a step-by-step manner, in understanding and meeting the various Clery Act requirements. The Department now provides a [Clery-related Appendix to the Federal Student Aid Handbook](#). For more information about the rescission and replacement of the previous Handbook, see: <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/electronic-announcements/2020-10-09/rescission-and-replacement-2016-handbook-campus-safety-and-security-reporting-updated-jan-19-2021>. Due to this change, readers should exercise caution when comparing data for 2020 and later to those from previous years.

<sup>2</sup> Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Harps, S., Townsend, R., Thomas, G., Lee, H., Kranz, V., Herbison, R., and Madden, K. (2020). *Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct*. Rockville, MD: Westat. Retrieved November 7, 2022, from [https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/Key-Issues/Campus-Safety/Revised%20Aggregate%20report%20%20and%20appendices%201-7\\_\(01-16-2020\\_FINAL\).pdf](https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/Key-Issues/Campus-Safety/Revised%20Aggregate%20report%20%20and%20appendices%201-7_(01-16-2020_FINAL).pdf).

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the seven crimes against persons and property reported in this indicator's main findings, degree-granting institutions are also required to report data on negligent manslaughter. An average of 2 manslaughter incidents have been reported annually across all institutions since 2010. A ninth category of crime is arrests or persons referred for campus disciplinary action for liquor law violations, drug-related violations, and weapons possession. The Clery Act requires additional reporting for hate crimes (for more information, see [Hate Crime Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions](#)).

<sup>4</sup> Data reported throughout this section are based on these seven types of crimes.

<sup>5</sup> For general technical notes related to data analysis, data interpretation, rounding, and other considerations, please refer to the [Reader's Guide](#).

<sup>6</sup> Duplicate reporting of a small number of incidents may occur among institutions sharing all or part of a building, institutions in close proximity to each other that rely on the same crime statistics from local law enforcement agencies, or institutions operating more than one campus in close proximity to each other.

<sup>7</sup> Refers to any sexual act directed against another person forcibly and/or against that person's will. Reporting guidelines for forcible sex offenses changed in 2014. In years prior to 2014, schools reported a total number of forcible sex offenses, with no breakouts for specific types of offenses. Beginning in 2014, schools were asked to report the numbers of two different types of forcible sex offenses: rape and fondling. These two types were added together to calculate the total number of reported forcible sex offenses.

<sup>8</sup> Refers to unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft.

<sup>9</sup> Refers to theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.

<sup>10</sup> Refers to an attack upon a person for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury.

<sup>11</sup> Refers to taking or attempting to take anything of value using actual or threatened force or violence.

<sup>12</sup> Refers to willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle, or personal property of another.

<sup>13</sup> In calendar year 2020, many postsecondary institutions shifted instruction from in-person classes to online-only or hybrid education during the coronavirus pandemic, which meant fewer students on college campuses. According to the 2019-20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20), 84 percent of undergraduate students reported having some or all classes moved to online-only instruction in spring 2020 due to the pandemic. For more information, see the [2019-20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study \(NPSAS:20\): First Look at the Impact of the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic on Undergraduate Student Enrollment, Housing, and Finances \(Preliminary Data\)](#) (NPSAS:20).

<sup>14</sup> The rate for negligent manslaughter per 10,000 FTE students was also higher in 2021 (0.004) than in 2011 (0.001).

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, tables [329.10](#) and [329.20](#); *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table [307.10](#)

**Related indicator and resource:** [Hate Crime Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions](#)

**Glossary:** [Aggravated assault](#); [Arson](#); [Burglary](#); [Forcible sex offense](#); [Full-time equivalent \(FTE\) enrollment](#); [Incident](#); [Motor vehicle theft](#); [Nonforcible sex offense](#); [Postsecondary institutions \(basic classification by level\)](#); [Private institution](#); [Public school or institution](#); [Robbery \(Campus Safety and Security Reporting System\)](#)