

Are Younger Generations Committing Less Crime?

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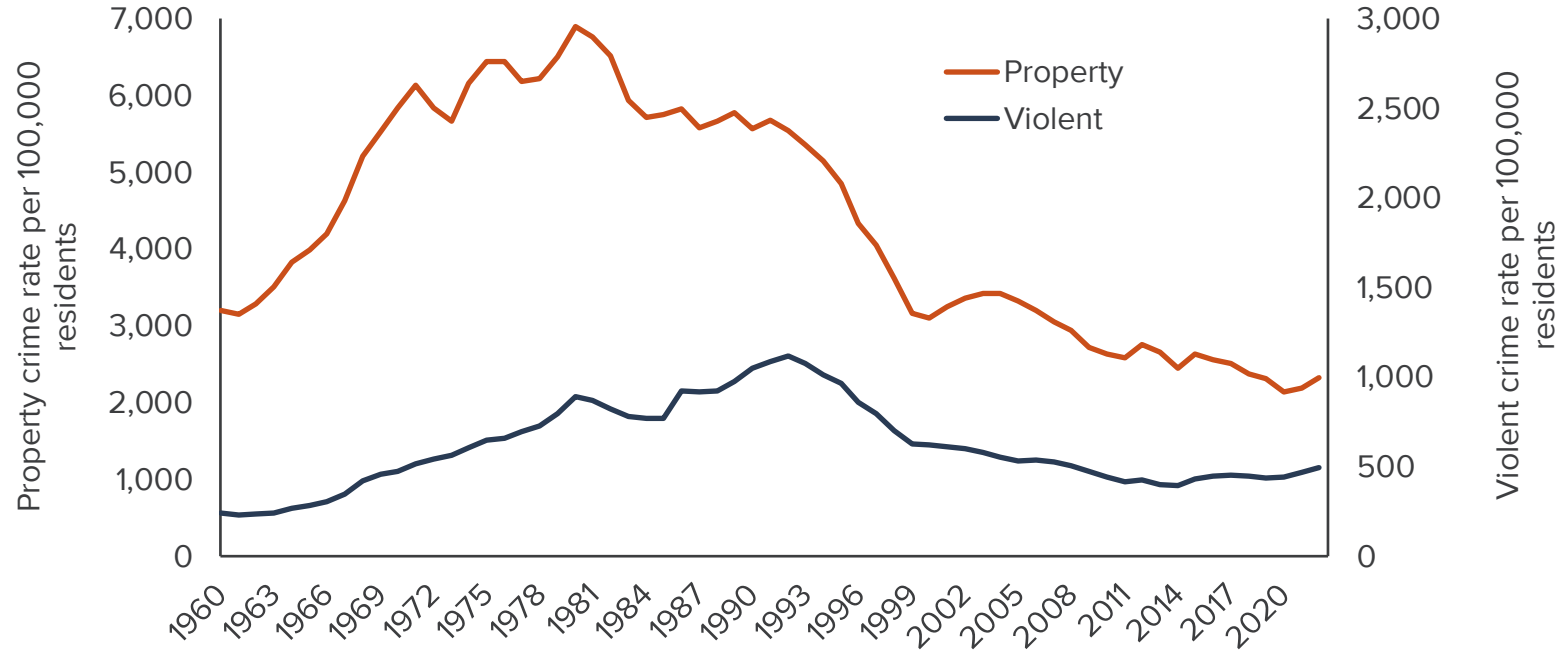
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While some crime has ticked up recently, rates are relatively low from a historical perspective



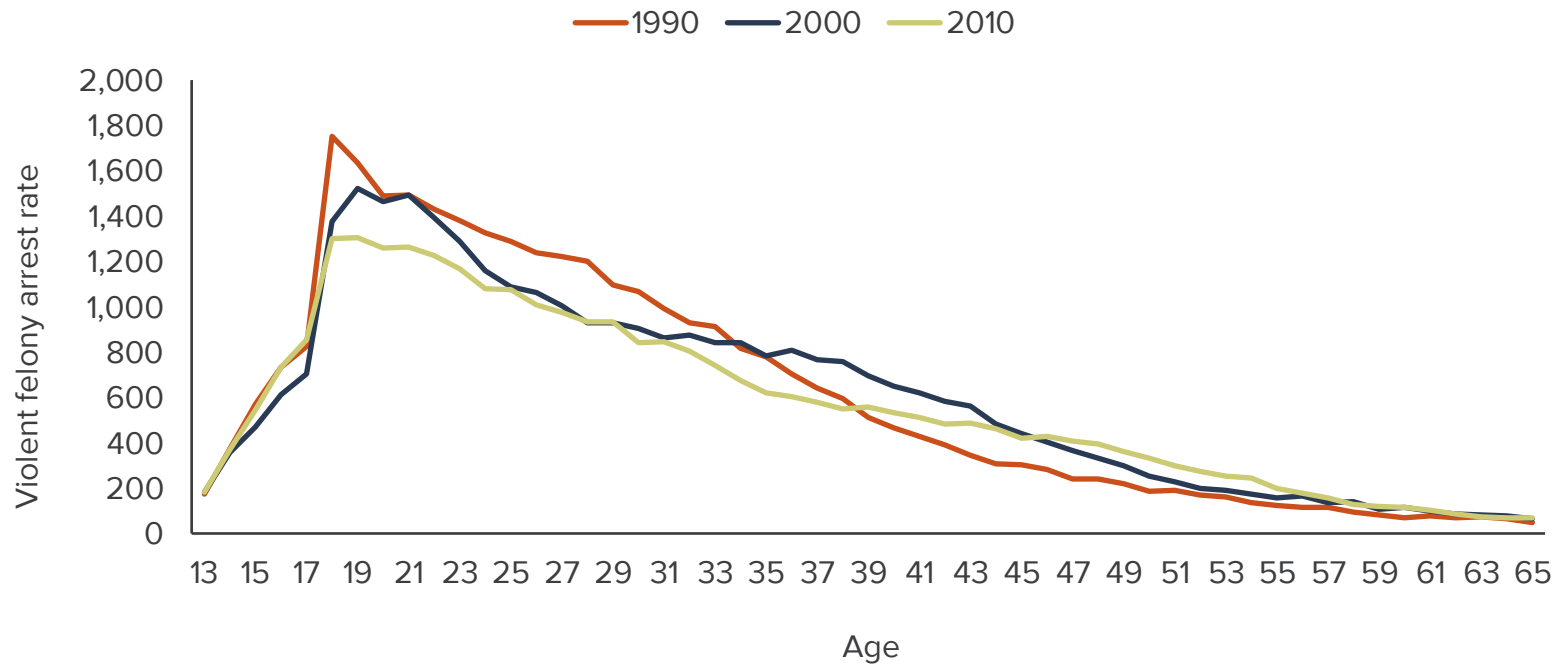
Research suggests recent decreases in crime and arrests are driven by juveniles and young adults

- We examine whether younger generations are less likely to be criminally active than past generations
 - Using unique data on all arrests between 1980 and 2020 in the California DOJ's Automated Criminal History System
- Our measure of criminal offending is ***violent felony arrests***
 - Not directly affected by state reforms over the past decades
 - Subject to less law enforcement discretion
 - Our findings and conclusions may not apply to other types of offenses

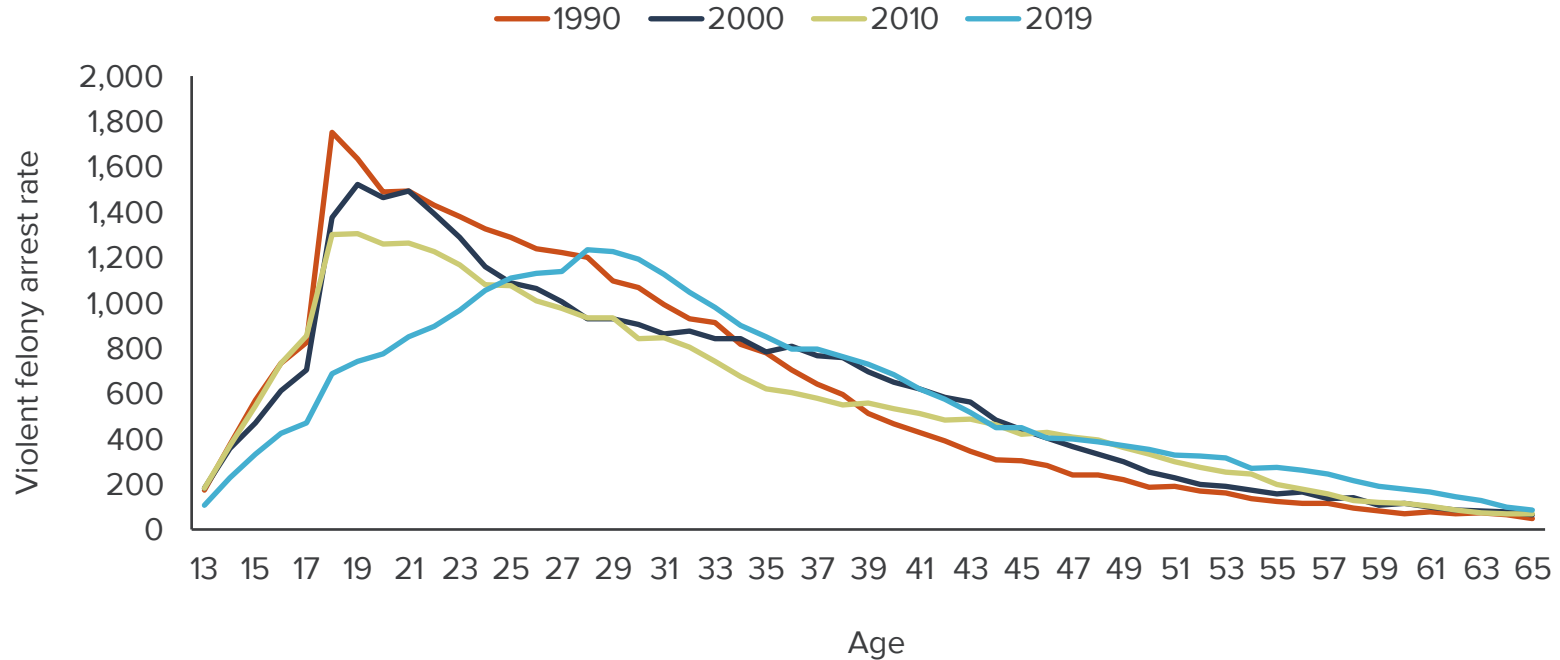
Examining generational shifts through the age-crime relationship

- Age is one of the strongest predictors of criminal behavior
 - Crime increases in adolescence, peaks in the late teens or early 20s, and then continually decreases
- Underlying factors could be influencing trends, alone or in combination:
 - Generational changes (birth-cohort effects)
 - Broader societal changes (period effects)
 - Age-crime relationship (age effects)

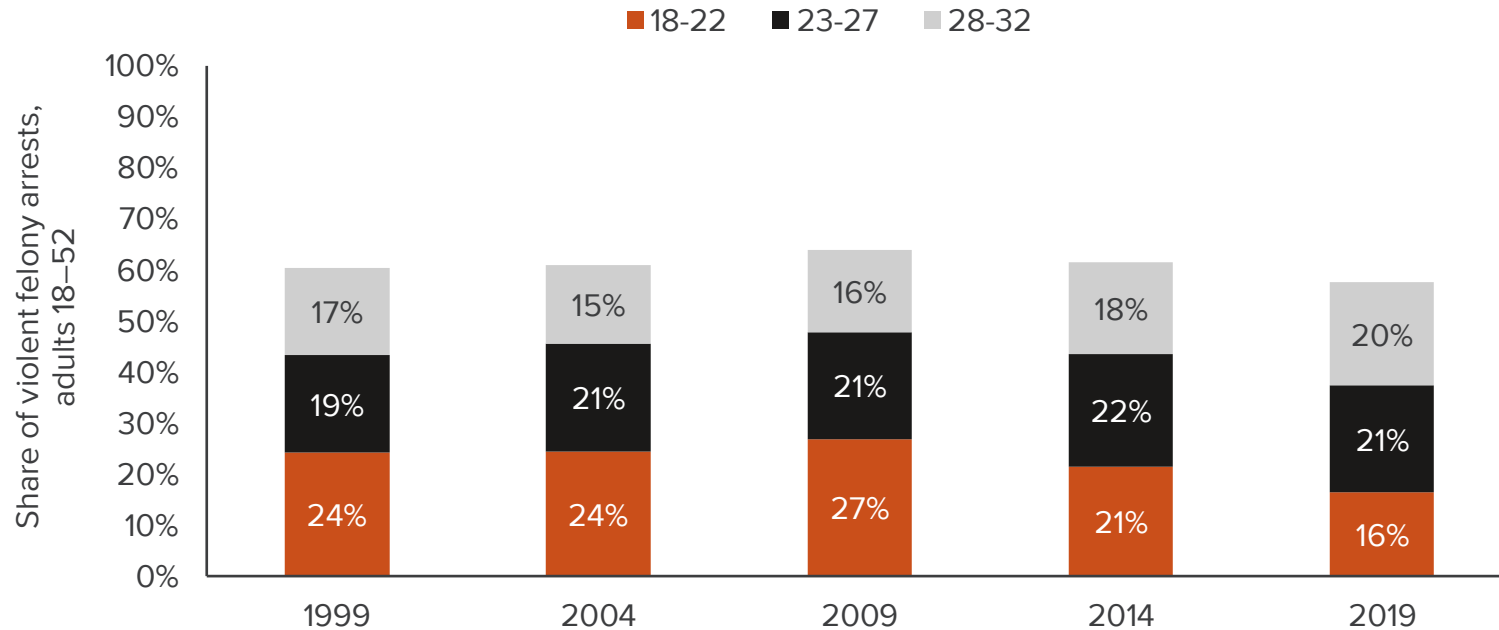
Age-crime curves in California followed traditional patterns for decades



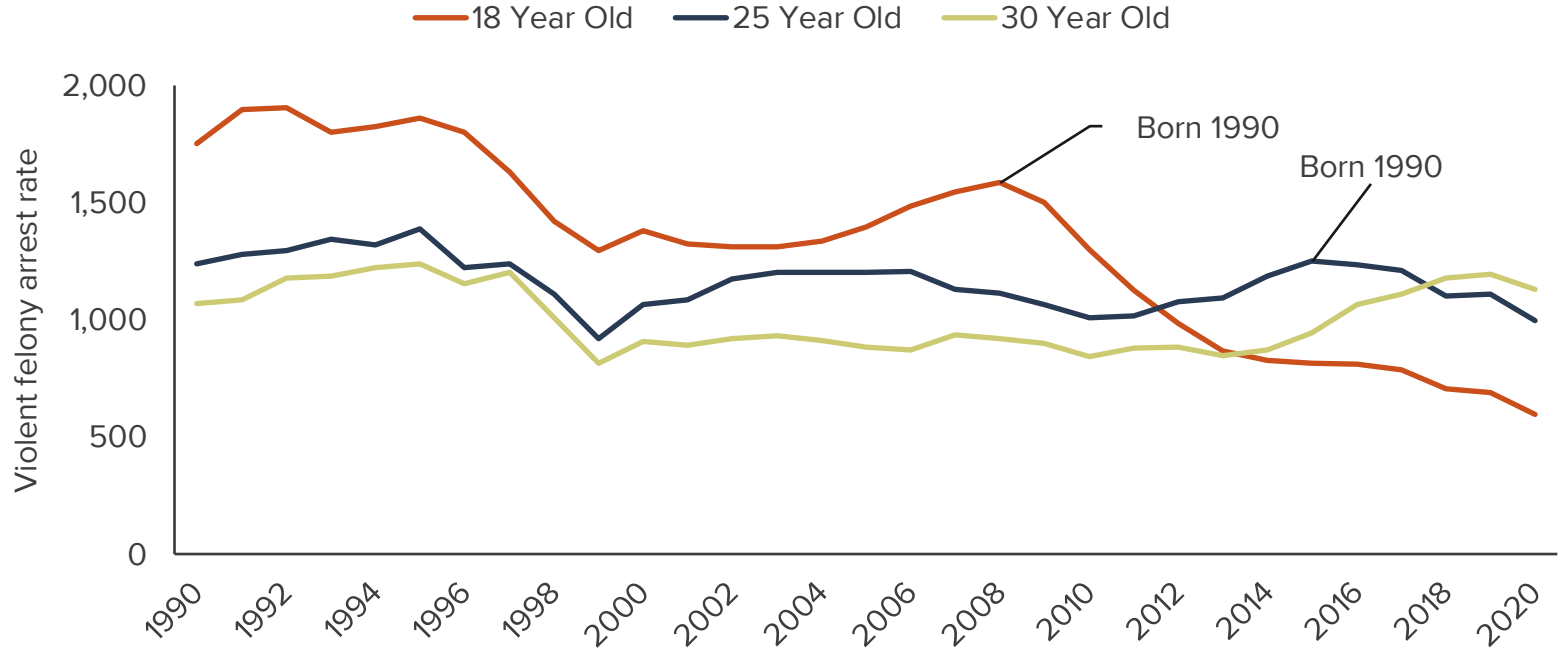
More recent age-crime curve differs, driven by notable drops among young offenders



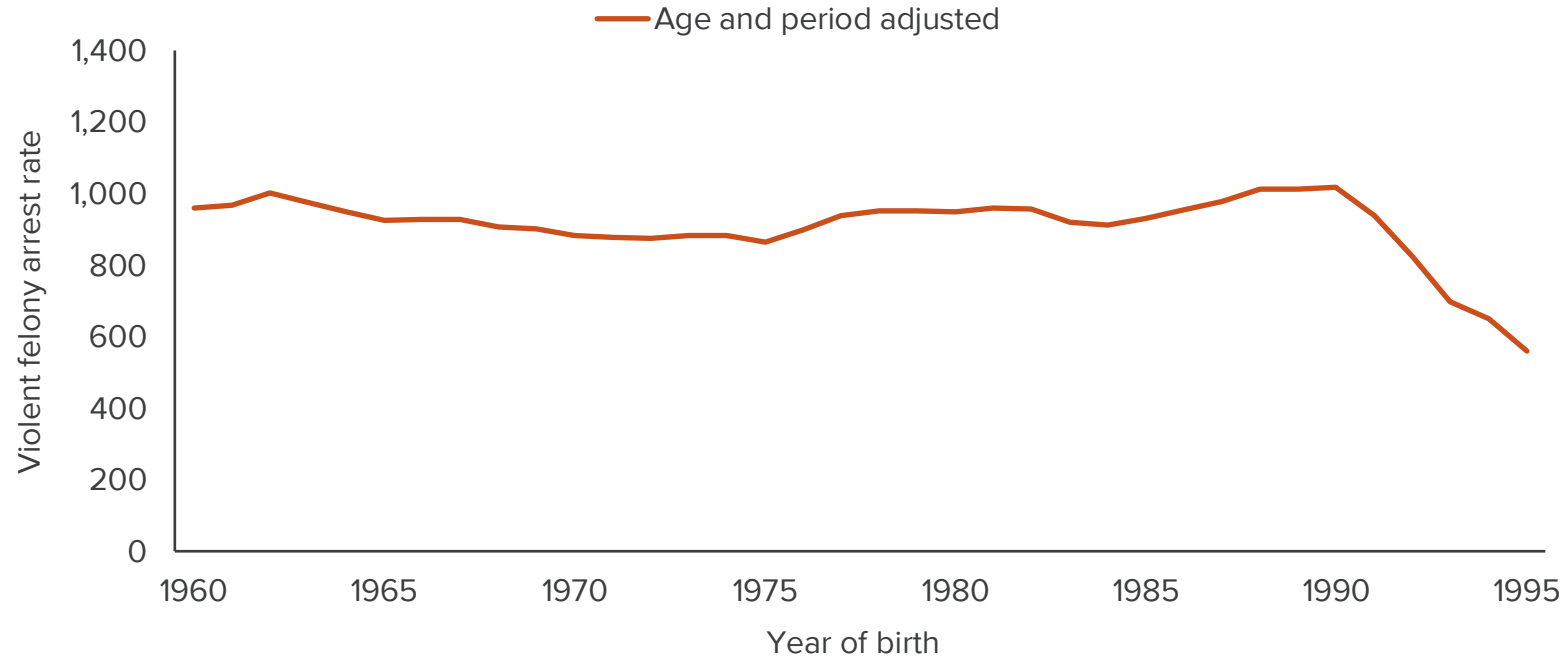
The share of violent felony arrests for young adults dropped markedly over the last decade



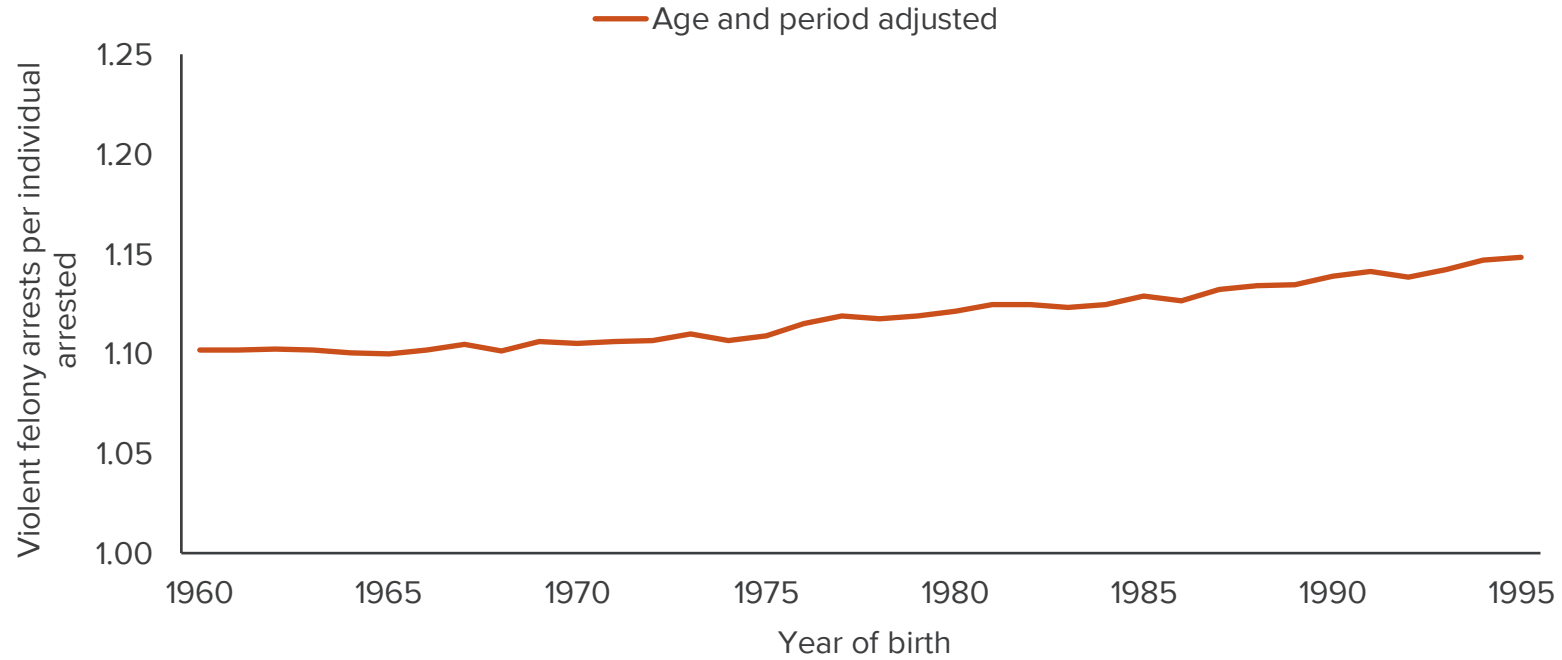
Criminal offending rates among 18-year-olds are now below that of individuals in their 30s



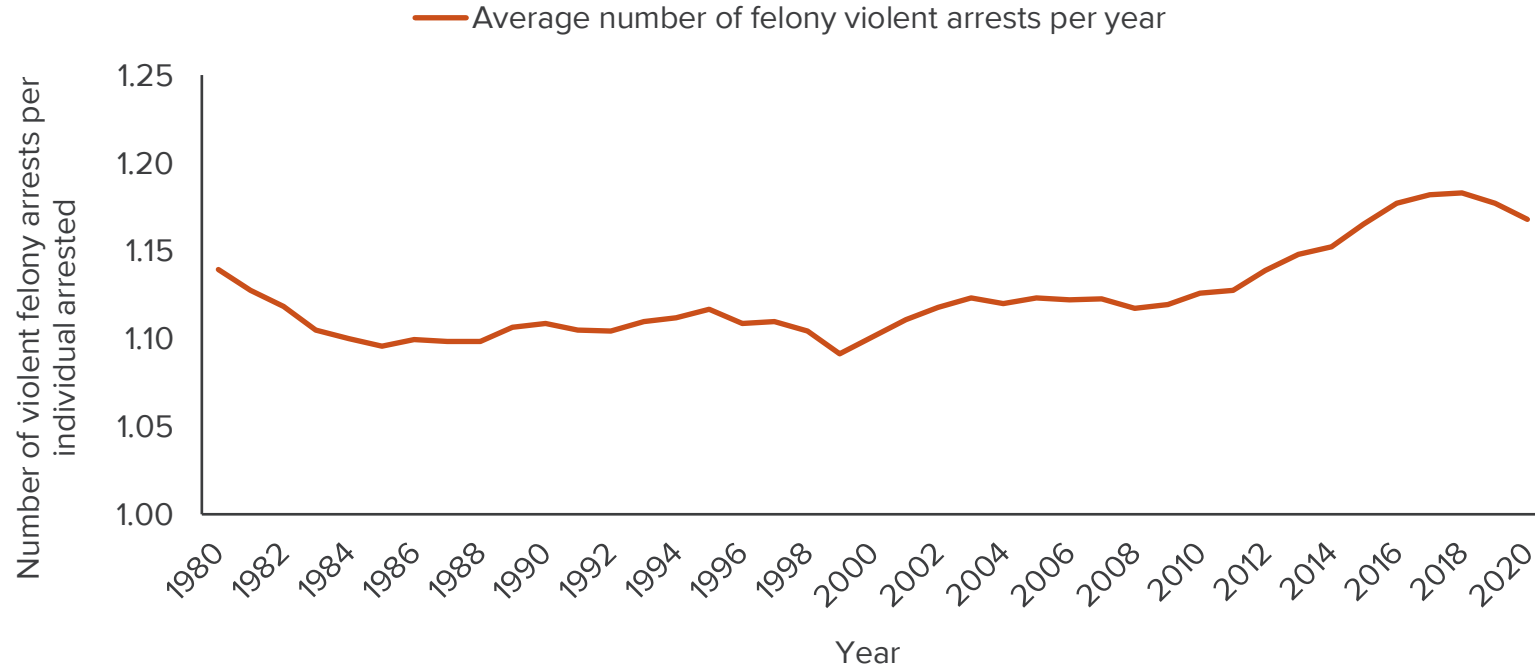
Criminal offending started to drop with individuals born in the early 1990s



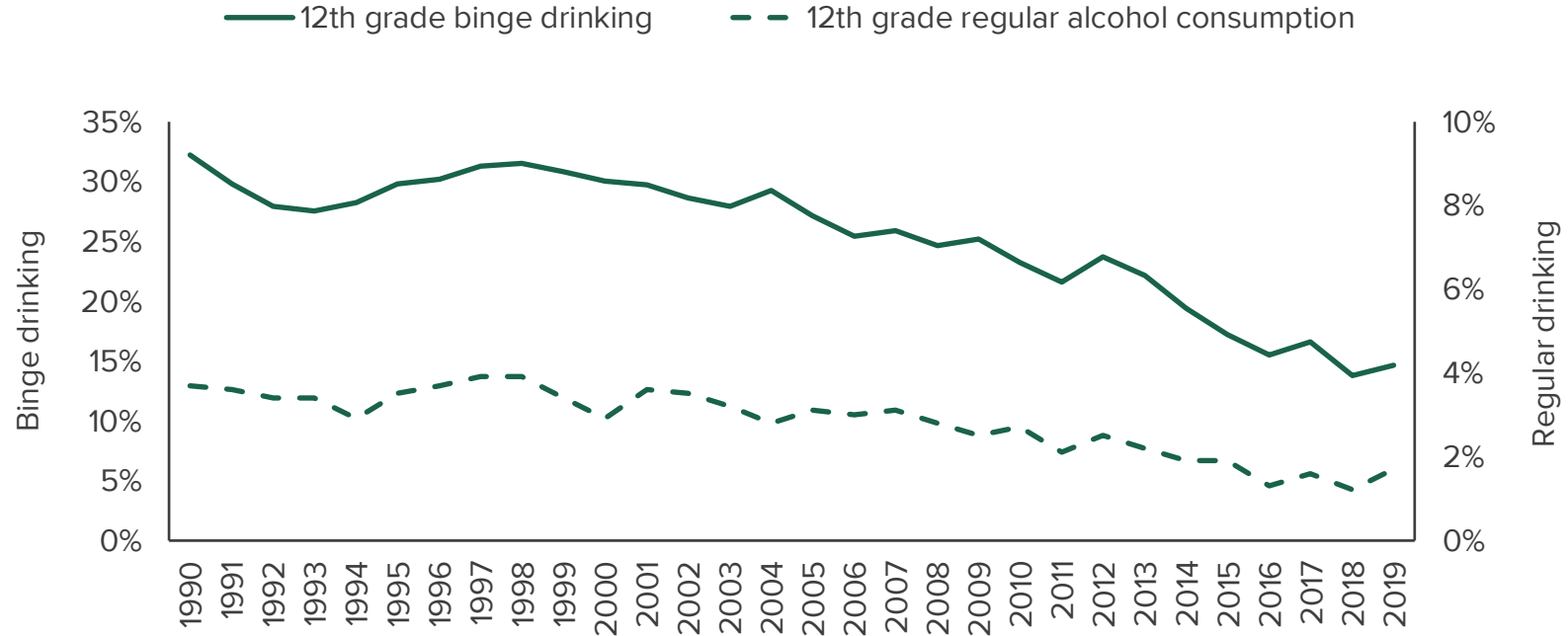
The number of violent felonies per individual arrested is slowly rising by birth year



The number of violent felonies per individual arrested steadily increased over the last decade



Teens' risky behaviors have decreased, while screen time has gone up



Key findings

- Violent felony arrest rate for young adults (ages 18–22) has dropped by more than 50% over the last 25 years
- Analysis shows a shift in criminal offending, starting with the generation born in the early 1990s
 - Drop in offenses of 20%–25% compared to earlier generations
 - Driven by fewer individuals arrested for violent felonies
- Number of offenses each individual is arrested for in a year has increased by about 5%, not limited to the most recent generation

Policy implications

- Generational shift in crime suggests the possibility of lower future capacity needs for the criminal justice system
- But importantly, the frequency of offending is up somewhat
 - Different approaches to reduce crime among a plausibly more challenging-to-rehabilitate offender population may be needed
- Risk assessment tools should be adjusted to account for declines in offending among younger generations

Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.