Report 2025:22

Percentage of population found guilty of offences

Birth cohort statistics for persons born 1958–2007, reported in decade cohorts

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) - centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures

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Percentage of population found guilty of offences

This focus report is based on the same material as the main report *Födelsekohortstatistik*. Registered residents of Sweden found guilty of offences between 1958 and 2007, published on Brå's website. The population studied consists of persons born between 1958 and 2007, who were registered residents of Sweden at the age of 15 and were found guilty of offences between 1973 and 2023. The person must also have been a registered resident of the population at the time they were found guilty of the offence.

The main report examines the extent to which the population studied, divided into groups by year of birth (known as birth cohorts), was found guilty for offences 1973–2023 as they aged. Cohort statistics allow the population under study to be followed up over a long period of time. It thus complements the statistics on persons found guilty of offences, which report the number of persons found guilty of offences in a specific year by different variables.

This focus report complements the main report, but here the birth cohorts are instead grouped by decade, so-called decade cohorts. Thus, persons born in 1970–1979 are included in the 1970s group, and so on. he focus report also answers more direct questions. These include the proportion of the population ever found guilty of any offence and the corresponding proportion for specific types of offences, the proportion of the population sentenced to imprisonment, how the number of persons found guilty of an offence increased with age, and the importance of background at birth in cohort statistics.

Summary

Across the entire population studied[1], 20.2 per cent were found guilty at some point of offences (10.3% of women and 29.7% of men) and 2.3 per cent were sentenced to prison at some point. However, the proportion of those in the population who had been found guilty of offences was significantly higher among those born in the 1950s and '60s than among those born in the 1990s and 2000s.

Regardless of the decade in which offenders were born, theft offences were the most common type of offence of which women were found guilty, up to the age of 25. For men, offences against the Road Traffic Offences Act were the most common type of offence for people born in the 1980s and earlier. For men born in the 1990s, minor drug offences were the most common.

On average, each man in the population was found guilty once and each woman 0.2 times. The number of guilty findings per person was higher among those born in the 1950s and '60s than among those born in the 1990s and 2000s.

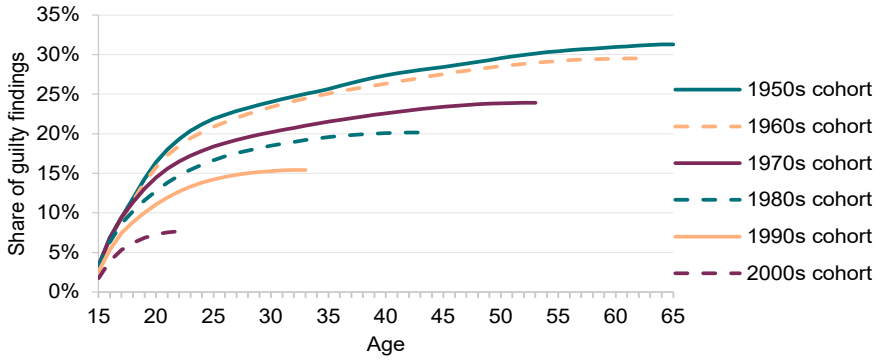
Both the proportion found guilty of offences and the proportion sentenced to imprisonment differed between groups according to background at birth. The highest shares are found among foreign-born individuals. Regardless of background at birth, the proportions were highest among those born in the 1980s and lowest among those born in the 2000s.

[1] All persons found guilty of offences together, not broken down by decade cohort, sex or background at birth. This includes people reaching an age of 16 to 65.

Those born in the 2000s were guilty of offences at the lowest rates

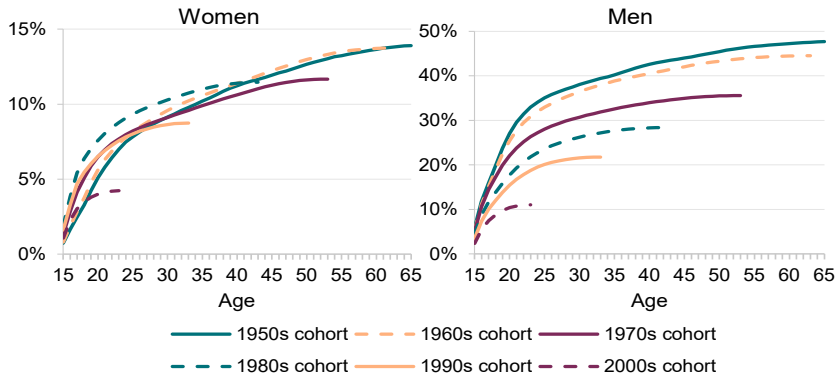
Of the total population studied, 20.2 per cent were found guilty of offences at some point. Men were significantly more likely than women to be found guilty of offences (29.7%, compared with 10.3%). The proportion of persons who had ever been found guilty of an offence also differed within the population. Figures 1a-b below show the proportion of persons found guilty of offence up to a certain age by the decade of birth, known as decade cohorts.

Figure 1a. Proportion found guilty of any offence, by decade cohort and age at first conviction. Cumulative shares in per cent. All persons.



By the time persons born in the 1950s were 15 years old, 3.4 per cent had been found guilty of offences. By the age of 25, this share was 21.9 per cent, and by the age of 60, the share had risen to 30.9 per cent. The share of persons who were ever found guilty of offences was lowest for those born in the 2000s. By the age of 15, 1.7 per cent had been found guilty of offences, and by the age of 23[2], this share was 7.7 per cent.

Figure 1b. Proportion found guilty of any offence, by decade cohort and age at first conviction. Cumulative shares in per cent. Women (left) and men (right). Note that the figures have different scales.



[2] People born in the 2000s were followed up to a maximum age of 23 years.

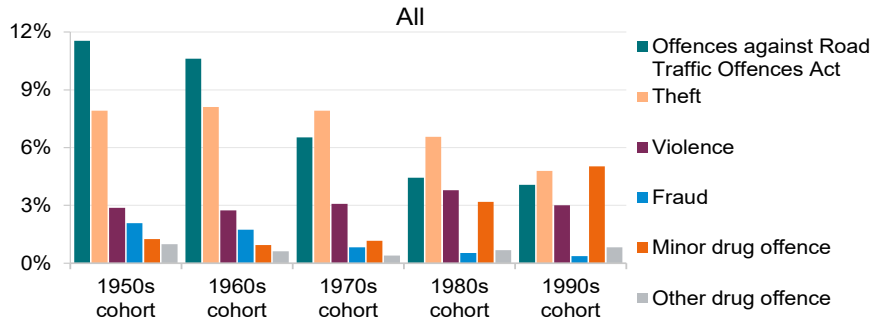
Particularly for men, being found guilty for offences was less common among those born in the 2000s. For women, the share of those found guilty of offences was less unequal among the decade cohorts. The age at which a person was first found guilty of an offence shifted slightly instead. For example, among those born in the 1980s, the share of women found guilty of offences increased most up to the age of 20, but for those born in the 1950s the share increased more evenly across the ages.

From traffic offences to minor drug offences

During the period studied (1973–2023), theft offences and traffic offences were the most common types of offences for which people were found guilty.

The bar charts below show the proportion of people who, by age of 25[3], had been found guilty of traffic offences, theft offences, violent offences, fraud, minor drug offences and drug offences that are not minor (other drug offences)[4]. Legislation and police priorities determine to a large extent the share of persons found guilty for a given type of offence[5]. The results are presented by decade cohort, first for all persons, then broken down by sex.

Figure 2a. Proportion of those found guilty by age 25 of traffic offences, theft offences, violent offences, fraud, minor drug offences and other drug offences, by decade cohort. All persons.



The proportion of those found guilty of traffic offences and fraud by age 25 was higher among early decade cohorts than among later ones. Beginning with the cohort born in the 1980s, the share of people found guilty of theft also decreased. The share of people found guilty for violent offences was

[3] Many of those who are found guilty of offences at some point in life are found guilty for the first time before age 25. Most of the population also reached that age by the end of the study period, although none of those born in the 2000s.

[4] A single person may appear in the accounts of several different offence types. The types of offences reported here are the same as in the main report. The main report lists the offences included in each type of offence.

[5] The criminalisation of personal drug use is one example of how legislative changes can result in increasing numbers of those found guilty of offences. More important changes are addressed in the main report.

roughly the same for all groups, but slightly higher for those born in the 1980s. In contrast, the share of people found guilty of minor drug offences has increased, from around 1 per cent for those born in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, to 3.1 per cent for those born in the 1980s and 5.0 per cent for those born in the 1990s. The share of people found guilty of any other drug offence decreased up to, and including, the cohort of those born in the 1970s. For those born in the 1980s and 1990s, the share of those found guilty of offences was higher.

Figure 2b. Proportion of those found guilty by age 25 of traffic offences, theft offences, violent offences, fraud, minor drug offences and other drug offences, by decade cohort. Women.

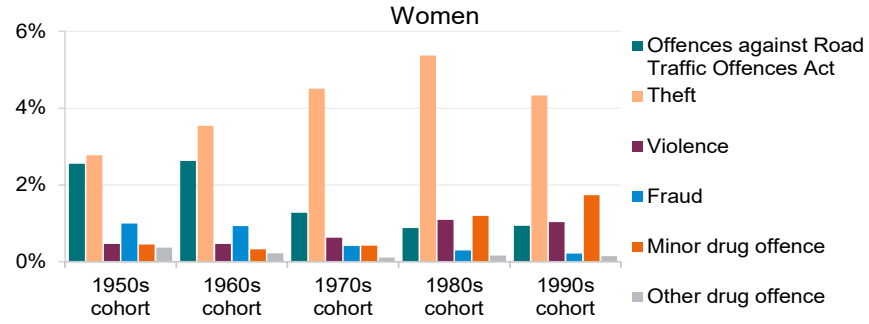
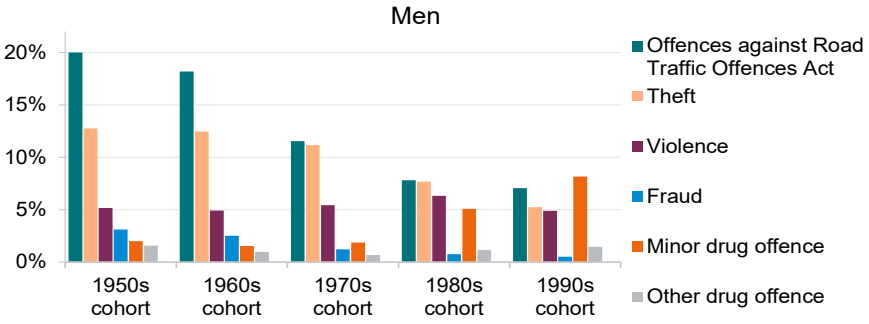


Figure 2c. Proportion of those found guilty by age 25 of traffic offences, theft offences, violent offences, fraud, minor drug offences and other drug offences, by decade cohort. Men.



The share of men found guilty of any offence by age 25 was higher than the share of women, and Figure 2b-c shows that this was the case for all reported offence types. Women and men also differed in the types of offences of which they were most likely to be found guilty.

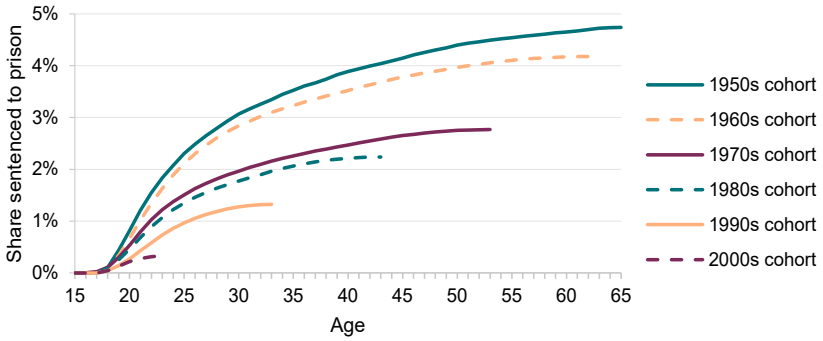
For females in all decade cohorts, theft offences were the most common type of offence. The share of those found guilty of offences was highest among those born in the 1980s. For men, offences against the Road Traffic Offences Act were the most common type of offence in all groups, except for those born in the 1990s. However, the share of men found guilty of offences peaked with the

1950s cohort, declining with each decade cohort thereafter. It became more common for both men and women to be found guilty of minor drug offences, and for men born in the 1990s this was the most common type of offence.

2000s cohort had the lowest share of prison sentences

This includes all prison sentences imposed by district courts[6], from 14 days to life. Of the entire population studied, 2.3 per cent were sentenced to prison at some point. Men were significantly more likely than women to be found guilty of offences (4.2%, compared with 0.4%). The share also differed greatly between the decade cohorts, especially for men.

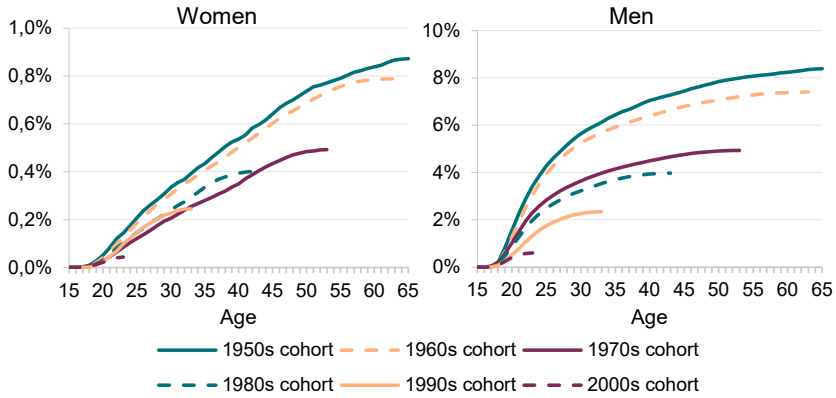
Figure 3a. Proportion sentenced to imprisonment, by decade cohort and age at first prison sentence. Cumulative shares in per cent. All persons.



Sentencing of persons under 17 to prison has occurred in only a few cases. By the time the 1950s cohort reached age 25, 2.3 per cent had been sentenced to prison, and by age 60 this had risen to 4.7 per cent. The proportion of people who had ever been sentenced to prison then decreased with each decade cohort.

[6] A person sentenced to imprisonment by a district court is included even if the person is subsequently acquitted in a higher court. Persons acquitted in district courts but convicted in higher courts are not included.

Figure 3b. Proportion sentenced to imprisonment, by decade cohort and age at first imprisonment. Cumulative shares in per cent. Women (left) and men (right). Note that the figures have different scales.



It was true for both women and men that the share of people who had ever been sentenced to prison decreased with each decade cohort. The first time that women were sentenced to prison tended to be spread across the ages. For men, many were sentenced to prison before age 25.

Those born in the 1950s and '60s continued being found guilty of offences into adulthood

In Figures 1–3, each person is allowed to appear only once. By instead including all instances in which a person was found guilty of an offence, the numbers of guilty findings per person can be totalled. This is done both to examine how the number of persons found guilty of an offence increased with age and to examine when it tended to increase at a slower rate. During the period studied, persons in the whole population were found guilty of offences 0.6 times per person (0.2 times for women and 1.0 times for men).

Figure 4a. Number of guilty findings per person, by decade cohort and age when found guilty of an offence. Cumulative numbers. All persons.

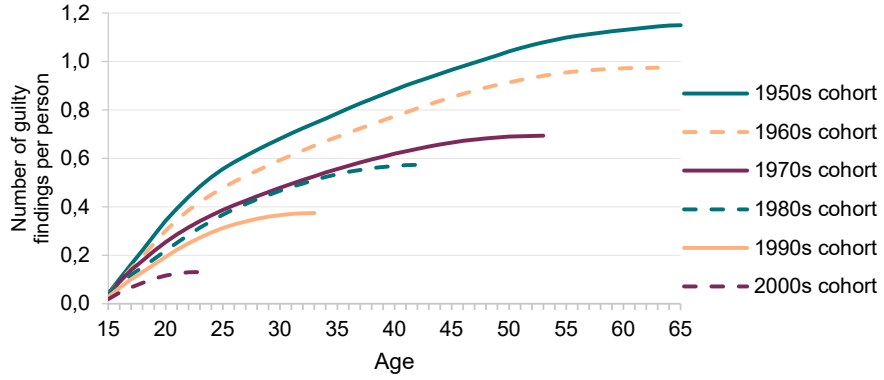
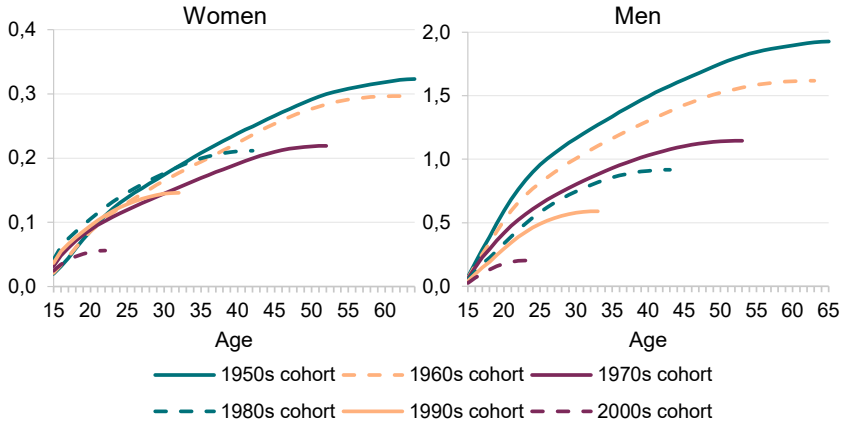


Figure 4a shows that the number of guilty findings per person decreased for each decade cohort. Those born in the 1950s had been found guilty of an offence 0.6 times per person by age 25, and 1.1 times per person by age 60. However, this does not mean that all persons born in the 1950s were found guilty of an offence, but that the almost 30 per cent (see Figure 1, page 4) who were found guilty were, on average, found guilty several times per person. For people born later, the number of guilty findings per person was lower.

After about age 25, the number of guilty findings did not increase at the same rate as before. The later the year of someone's birth, the more the rate of offending fell. The number of offences of which persons born in the 2000s were found guilty was low throughout the period.

Figure 4b. Number of guilty findings per person, by decade cohort and age when found guilty of an offence. Cumulative numbers. Women (left) and men (right). Note that the figures have different scales.



Both women and men were found guilty of offences at higher rates among those born further in the past compared with those born more recently. The ages at which women were found guilty of offences were more dispersed, and, additionally, there was little variation among decade cohorts. Men were found guilty of offences at increasing rates at younger ages, compared with later in life, and it was much more common for those born in the 1950s to be found guilty of offences than those born in the 2000s, for example.

Trends hold steady, regardless of background at birth

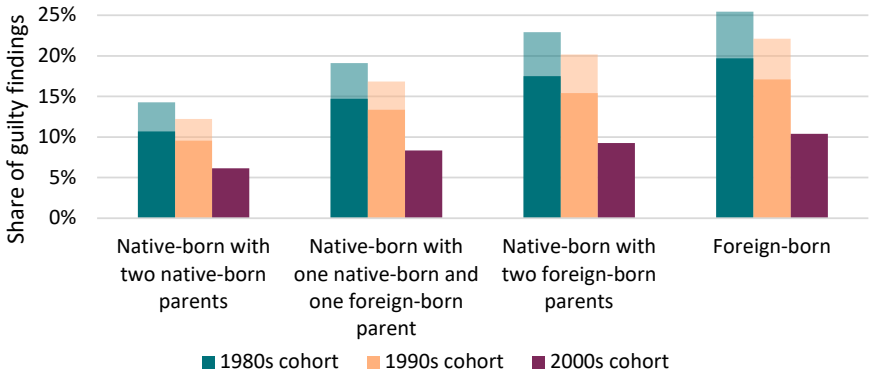
The population can be divided into four groups according to background at birth[7]. Most of the population belongs to the native-born group, with two native-born parents. This group accounted for the majority of all persons

[7] This classification follows that of Statistics Sweden. Read the main report for more information.

found guilty of offences (72%) examined in this study. Native-born persons with one native-born and one foreign-born parent; native-born persons with two-foreign born parents; and foreign-born individuals, together make up a smaller share, both of the population and of all persons found guilty of offence.

In order to examine whether the results varied by background at birth, the share of those found guilty of offences and the share sentenced to imprisonment are shown here (Figures 5-6 below). The proportions are presented in bar charts, where the solid area is the proportion at age 20 and the shaded area is the proportion at age 25[8]. As data on population by background at birth are only available for people born from 1984 onwards, only the results for those born in the 1980s, '90s and 2000s are presented here.

Figure 5. Proportion found guilty of any offence by age 20 (solid area of bars) and 25 (shaded area of bars), by decade cohort and background at birth. Cumulative shares in per cent.



The figure shows that, for most of those found guilty of offences by age 25, this had already occurred by age 20. Foreign-born persons were most likely to be found guilty of offences, both by age 20 and by age 25, and least likely were native-born persons with two native-born parents. The figure also shows that the proportion of those found guilty of an offence was highest among people born in the 1980s and lowest among those born in the 2000s, and this was true for all background groups.

[8] Those born in the 2000s did not reach age 25 during the period studied. Therefore, only the shares at age 20 are reported.

Figure 6. Proportion sentenced to imprisonment up to age 20 (solid area of bars) and 25 (shaded area of bars), by decade cohort and background at birth. Cumulative shares in per cent.

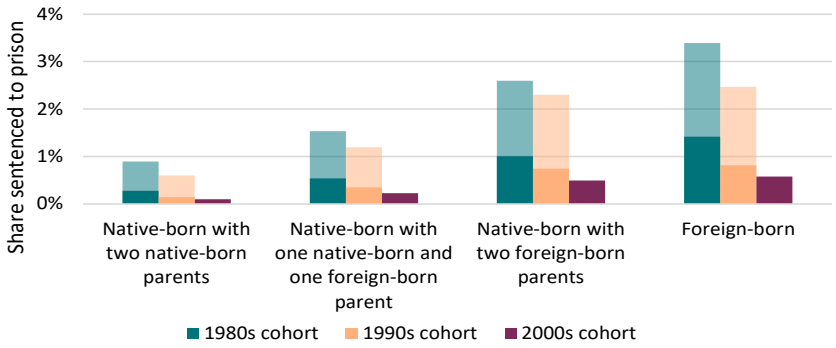


Figure 6 shows that the share sentenced to imprisonment by age 25 was significantly higher than the share sentenced to imprisonment by age 20. This means that many people were sentenced to prison for the first time between the ages of 20 and 25, which is also evident in Figure 3.

At both age 20 and age 25, the share sentenced to imprisonment was highest among foreign-born persons and lowest among native-born persons with two native-born parents. Figure 3 also shows that these shares were highest among those born in the 1980s and lowest among people born in the 2000s, and this was true for all background groups.

Thus, the share found guilty of offences and the share sentenced to prison differed between the background groups, but the trends for the decade cohorts were the same. The proportion of people found guilty of an offence and sentenced to prison thus decreased with the decade cohorts, irrespective of background at birth.

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