

Crime Statistics for the Year 1895: Juveniles (1898)

Abstract

In the modern period, national governments everywhere turned to collected and managed knowledge to address social problems and exercise power. Data collection involved reducing populations to statistics, for in “mathematizing” populations, bureaucrats trained in modern analytical methods could chart tendencies and trends that showed just how far the state had come in its quest for ameliorative “progress.” Here, we see such efforts at work in the area of juvenile crime. The following statistics were compiled by functionaries in Germany’s Imperial Statistics Office, which was founded in June 1872, one year after the founding of the Empire. The office was tasked with providing usable knowledge to state authorities, with the goal being the improvement of Germany. This is an example of scientific ambition as applied to governance.

Source

[...]

Fourth Section.

Juveniles.

(On this subject, see Summaries 11 to 15)

I. In the same manner as Summary 21 for the previous year, Summary 11 shows convictions for juveniles, that is, persons who, at the time of the perpetration of the criminal act, had completed their twelfth year but not yet their eighteenth. However, calculations concerning the ratio of convictions to the number of juveniles in the civilian population of the Reich, and in the individual Higher Regional Court districts [*Oberlandesgerichtsbezirken*], had to be omitted.

Overall, 44,384 juveniles were convicted in the present reporting year. That is 2,112 fewer than in 1892, the year with the highest number of convictions to date, and 1,170 fewer than in 1894. If, as shown in the first section, the total number of convicted persons in this reporting year is higher than in the previous year, then this is solely due to an increase in adult convictions.

According to the new figures for the juvenile population of the Reich in the years between the last two censuses, it can be assumed with some certainty that this group has declined in size since 1893. For the present reporting year, however, the decline does not appear significant. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the drop in the absolute number of juvenile convictions does in fact correlate with an actual reduction in juvenile crime. At the same time, one must consider that the crime figures calculated for 1894 were probably too low.

Of the individual types of crimes and misdemeanors for which an absolute increase in convictions over the previous year was registered in the first section, only three were associated with a rise in juvenile convictions: bodily injury, criminal self-enrichment [mainly poaching], and violations of oath [i.e. perjury].

Juvenile convictions for bodily injury increased most markedly, by 288, that is, 3.5 percent. Juvenile convictions for criminal self-enrichment and for offenses involving the disclosure of privately-held information rose to 162, or by 26.8 percent. The main reason for this is that 161 more juveniles were convicted than in the previous year, because

hunting and fishing violations [i.e. poaching] fall under this category. The same phenomenon can be seen among adults; 1,354 more individuals were convicted for these violations than in 1894. However, when it comes to hunting and fishing violations, pronounced fluctuations have already been observed many times,^[1] so the increase in the present reporting year may not be of immediate significance. For offenses involving the violation of other persons' rights of use and retention, which falls under the same category, the Prussian law of June 12, 1894, on the rights of landlords to retain items brought into rented premises has had an effect on juveniles, too. Convictions for this offense, which had risen continually in recent years and numbered 42 just last year, dropped to 28. For the present reporting year, 23 people, or 49 percent more than in the previous year, were convicted for violations of oath [i.e. perjury]. However, this relatively sizeable increase should not be taken as an alarming indicator, since the limited size of the data sample cannot rule out coincidence. Besides the three types of offenses listed above, juvenile convictions for crimes and misdemeanors relating to religion and to resisting state authority have increased, even though they have decreased among the general population. Still, the increase in juvenile convictions is insignificant; it amounts to 3, or 4.9 percent, for the former offense and 5, or 1.1 percent, for the latter.

For the remaining types of crimes and misdemeanors there was either no change or a drop in absolute numbers.

The most significant decrease was reported for theft and embezzlement. Nine hundred and seventy-two (or 3.9 percent) fewer juveniles were convicted of these crimes than in 1894. However, this overall decrease is solely attributable to the decline in theft convictions by 1,050, or 4.5 percent. Seventy-eight more juveniles were convicted of embezzlement than in the previous year.

In contrast to the previous trend, offenses involving property damage have dropped for the present reporting year by 294, or 10.2 percent. Convictions for morality offenses, whose steady and considerable climb was previously interrupted only once, in 1888, likewise fell by 125, or 8.8 percent, for the reporting year. Of less importance is the drop in convictions for offenses against the sovereign, crimes and misdemeanors against the public order, defamation, offenses against life, violations of personal freedom, robberies, and malfeasance; the slight reduction in absolute numbers should not be interpreted as a decrease in crime figures because the size of the juvenile population also decreased.

II. Summaries 12 to 14 build on Summaries 22 to 24 of the previous year and continue to document the number of juvenile acquittals made on the basis of §56 of the Criminal Code. Because of the importance of this documentation, reference is made to the information on page I.53 of the previous volume. The organization of the summaries has remained the same. The first summary covers the acquittal figures for individual crimes and misdemeanors; the second calculates the ratio of acquittals to convictions; the third highlights discrepancies between the individual Regional Court Districts in the application of the statutory provisions cited.

In the present reporting year, the total number of acquittals granted on the basis of §56 is 1,578, compared to 1,615 in the previous year. This slight reduction generally corresponds to the aforementioned drop in convictions. The reduction represents 2.3 percent of the acquittals in 1894, whereas the reduction in convictions amounts to 2.5 percent. The ratio to convictions has thus remained virtually the same. For every 100 convictions, there were 3.5 acquittals of the kind in question in 1894, and 3.6 in the reporting year.

Just how these acquittals are distributed across the various types of crimes and misdemeanors was shown in detail in the previous year. Only slight divergences can be observed for the reporting year, and they do not change the overall picture.

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NOTES

[1] The number of juvenile convictions for hunting and fishing violations are as follows: for 1890: 464; for 1891: 664; for 1892: 494; for 1893: 658; for 1894: 511.

Source: "Kriminalstatistik für das Jahr 1895: Die Jugendlichen," *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches*, edited by the Imperial Statistical Office, New Series, Volume 89. Berlin: Puttkammer & Mühlbrecht, 1898, pp. 34–35.

Translation: Kathleen Dell'Orto

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