



Domestic Violence in California

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Domestic violence is one of the most common forms of victimization. Nationally, over one million people reported being victims of domestic violence in 2024.¹ This report focuses on domestic violence in California during the past decade, showing trends in calls for assistance, arrests, and convictions for domestic violence offenses. It shows the characteristics of people who are convicted of domestic violence and the sentences they receive for these offenses. It also shows how rates of domestic violence vary across counties.

The report draws on two data sources provided by the California Department of Justice (DOJ). The Domestic Violence Related Calls for Assistance (DVRCA) data are reported to the DOJ by law enforcement agencies throughout the state. DVRCA data includes counts of the number of domestic violence related calls and the number of cases involving weapons, strangulation, or suffocation. The second source is the Automated Criminal History System (ACHS), which includes individual-level records of arrests and convictions in the state. Data are analyzed for the period from 2015 through 2024 to establish a baseline understanding of domestic violence offending in California. It is important to note that official reports of the prevalence of domestic violence that are based on police or court data will likely undercount the true prevalence of victimization.

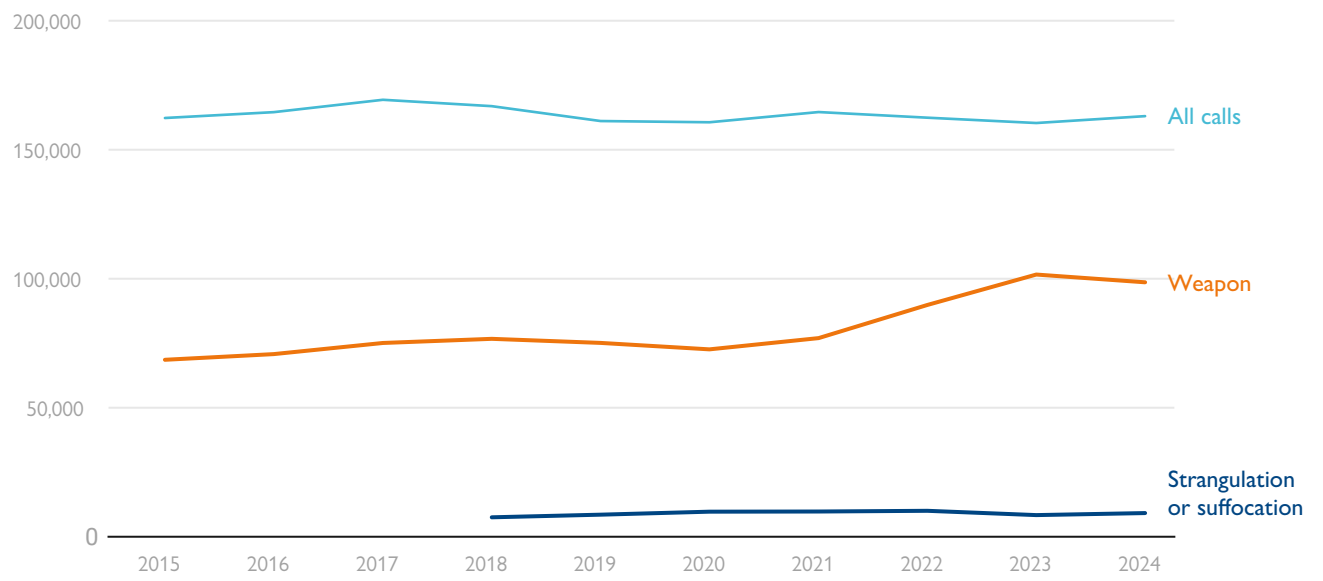
Key Findings

Domestic violence calls for assistance are increasingly likely to report the use of a weapon.

There were about 163,000 calls for assistance for domestic violence in 2024 (Figure 1). Nearly 100,000 of these calls (61%) reported the use of a weapon, which represents a 44% increase over the past decade. The state began collecting data

on calls reporting strangulation or suffocation in 2018. Rates of this type of violence have remained level over the period of data collection. In 2024, 6% of calls reported this type of violence.

FIGURE 1. Domestic violent calls for assistance, 2015-24



Source: California Domestic Violence-Related Calls for Assistance (DVRCA) data

Rates of domestic violence calls for assistance vary widely across California counties

Over the past decade, annual call rates ranged from fewer than 250 calls per 100,000 people in Marin, Nevada, Placer, and San Luis Obispo counties to 750 or more calls per

100,000 people in Fresno, Kern, and Ventura counties ([Table 1](#)). Sonoma and Yolo counties represent the county median with 394 calls for assistance per 100,000 people.

TABLE 1: Domestic violence calls for assistance per 100,000 people, 2015-24

COUNTY	TOTAL CALLS	AVERAGE ANNUAL CALLS	POPULATION	AVERAGE ANNUAL CALLS/100,000
Placer	8,062	806	423,561	190
Marin	5,457	546	254,407	214
Nevada	2,396	240	102,037	235
San Luis Obispo	6,795	680	281,639	241
Contra Costa	31,206	3,121	1,155,025	270
Riverside	70,524	7,052	2,492,442	283
San Mateo	20,687	2,069	726,353	285
Orange	95,378	9,538	3,135,755	304
Imperial	5,533	553	179,057	309
Shasta	5,671	567	180,366	314
Santa Clara	61,737	6,174	1,877,592	329
Napa	4,480	448	133,216	336
Santa Cruz	8,896	890	261,547	340
Alameda	56,162	5,616	1,622,188	346
Sacramento	58,291	5,829	1,584,288	368
Santa Barbara	16,435	1,644	441,257	372
Yolo	8,694	869	220,544	394
Sonoma	18,998	1,900	481,812	394
Monterey	17,037	1,704	430,723	396
Los Angeles	385,876	38,588	9,663,345	399
San Bernardino	88,037	8,804	2,195,611	401
Madera	6,546	655	162,858	402

Table 1 continues

TABLE 1: Domestic violence calls for assistance per 100,000 people, 2015-24 (continued)

COUNTY	TOTAL CALLS	AVERAGE ANNUAL CALLS	POPULATION	AVERAGE ANNUAL CALLS/100,000
San Francisco	32,813	3,281	808,988	406
Kings	6,262	626	152,682	410
Solano	20,366	2,037	449,218	453
El Dorado	9,088	909	192,215	473
San Diego	172,842	17,284	3,269,973	529
Humboldt	7,206	721	133,985	538
Tulare	26,110	2,611	479,468	545
Merced	16,165	1,617	291,920	554
San Joaquin	44,640	4,464	800,965	557
Stanislaus	30,976	3,098	551,430	562
Butte	11,890	1,189	207,172	574
Ventura	62,247	6,225	829,590	750
Kern	69,253	6,925	913,820	758
Fresno	87,308	8,731	1,017,162	858

Note: This table includes counties with populations of 100,000 or more people. The call rate is calculated as the ratio of the average annual number of calls for domestic violence assistance per year per 100,000 people in the county. Population size is based on 2023 Census estimates.

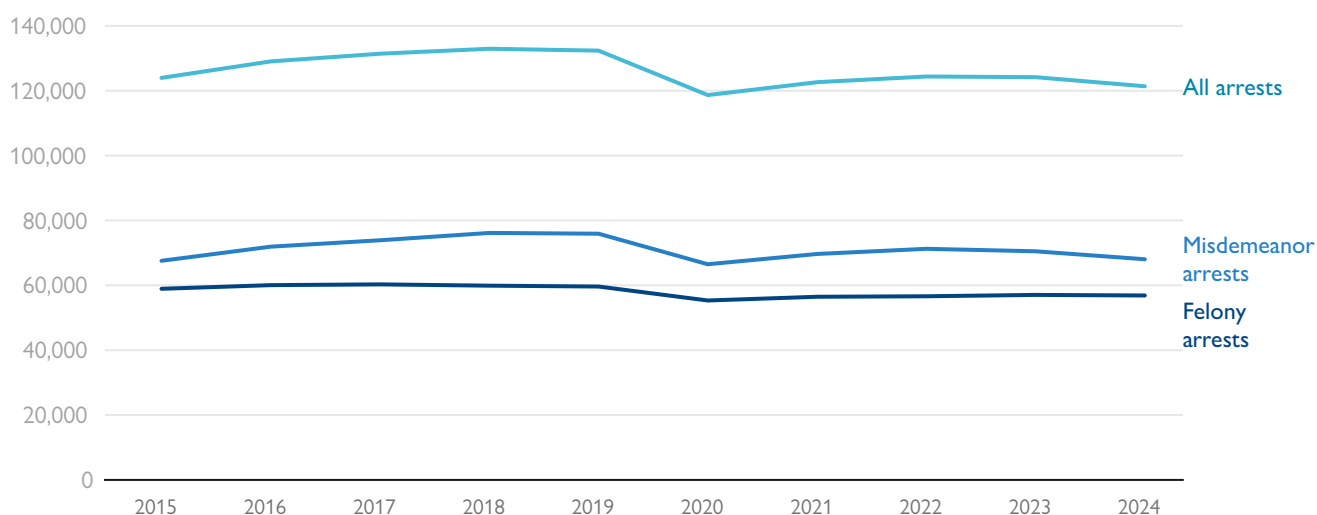
Source: California Domestic Violence Related Calls for Assistance (DVRCA) data

Domestic violence arrests declined by about 2% over the past decade.

There were approximately 1.3 million arrests for domestic violence in California between 2015 and 2024 (Figure 2).² Arrests increased between 2015 and 2019 by 8,400 (7%) but then declined sharply with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. While the number of arrests did increase after reaching a pandemic low point, the arrest count has not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels. In 2024, there

were about 2,600 (2%) fewer domestic violence arrests than in 2015. This decline was driven by a drop in felony arrests, which typically involve serious injury to the victim. Misdemeanor arrests, which typically do not involve sustained injury, remain more common than felony arrests, representing 56% of all domestic violence arrests.

FIGURE 2: Arrests for domestic violence offenses, 2015-24



Note: Felony and misdemeanor arrests are not mutually exclusive. Some arrests may include both felony and misdemeanor domestic violence charges. In these cases, the arrest is represented in both categories.

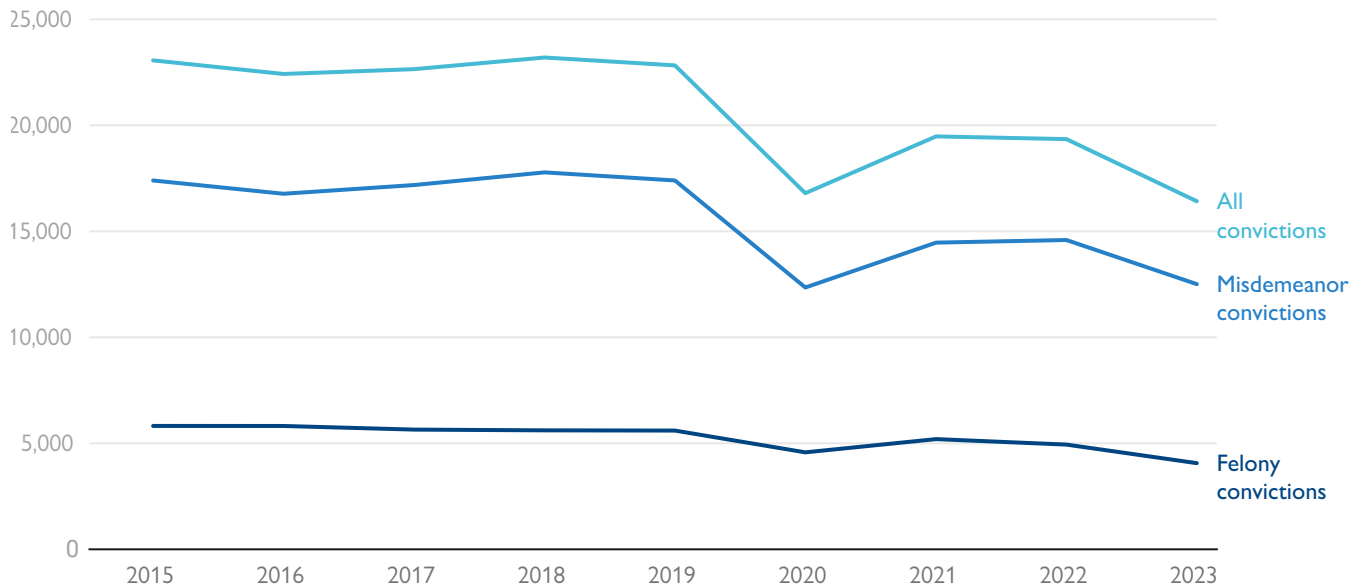
Source: California Department of Justice Automated Criminal History System (ACHS).

Convictions for domestic violence also declined over the past decade.

Annual domestic violence conviction counts were stable at about 23,000 per year between 2015 and 2019 (Figure 3).³ As is the case for arrests, convictions for domestic violence offenses dropped off sharply in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although convictions increased during the years that followed, they remain substantially

lower than pre-pandemic levels, with about 6,600 fewer convictions in 2023 than in 2015. This change represents a 29% decline, driven by declines in both felony and misdemeanor convictions. Misdemeanors represent 75% of the approximately 186,000 convictions for domestic violence between 2015 and 2023.

FIGURE 3: Convictions for domestic violence, 2015-23



Note: The analysis of conviction data is limited to the period 2015 through 2023 due to possible delays in the reporting of conviction data to the Department of Justice. Felony and misdemeanor convictions are not mutually exclusive. Some convictions may include both felony and misdemeanor domestic violence charges. In these cases, the conviction is represented in both categories.

Source: California Department of Justice Automated Criminal History System (ACHS)

About nine in ten people convicted of domestic violence are male.

The share male is highest for felony domestic violence convictions relative to misdemeanors (94% v. 87%; [Table 2](#)). About half of people convicted of domestic violence in California over the past decade were Hispanic, more than one-in-four (27%) were White, and less than one-in-five (17%) were Black. Less than 2% of people convicted of

domestic violence were Asian or Pacific Islander, and about 3% were identified as another race or ethnicity. Black people were more likely to receive felony convictions, while other groups were more likely to receive misdemeanor convictions. The average age of people convicted of domestic violence during this period was 35 years.

TABLE 2: [Demographic characteristics of people convicted of domestic violence, 2015-23](#)

	ALL CONVICTIONS	FELONY CONVICTIONS	MISDEMEANOR CONVICTIONS
Male	88.7%	93.5%	87.1%
Mean age at conviction	34.9	34.4	35.1
Asian or Pacific Islander	2.4%	2.0%	2.6%
Black	17.2%	21.8%	15.6%
Hispanic	50.3%	47.8%	51.1%
White	27.4%	26.1%	27.8%
Other race or ethnicity	2.8%	2.3%	2.9%

Note: This table represents the characteristics of people convicted of domestic violence between 2015 and 2023. Information on race/ethnicity may not be self-reported and can reflect classifications made by arresting agencies or court officials.

Source: California Department of Justice Automated Criminal History System (ACHS)

People convicted of domestic violence have an average of two prior arrests for domestic violence.

People convicted of domestic violence over the past decade had 1.9 prior arrests and 0.5 prior convictions for domestic violence on average, and a total of 3.6 prior convictions for any offense (Table 3). Among those convicted of domestic violence, 41% of people had a prior felony conviction, 13% had a prior serious conviction, and 4% had a prior violent conviction. Those with felony convictions had more substantial criminal histories compared with those convicted of misdemeanors.

TABLE 3. Criminal history characteristics of people convicted of domestic violence, 2015-23

	ALL CONVICTIONS	FELONY CONVICTIONS	MISDEMEANOR CONVICTIONS
# Prior DV arrests	1.9	2.2	1.8
# Prior DV convictions	0.5	0.6	0.5
# Prior total convictions	3.6	3.9	3.5
Prior felony conviction	41.19%	52.03%	37.6%
Prior serious conviction	13.17%	17.73%	11.7%
Prior violent conviction	4.06%	5.43%	3.6%

Note: This table represents the criminal histories of people convicted of domestic violence between 2015 and 2023.

Source: California Department of Justice Automated Criminal History System (ACHS)

The domestic violence conviction rate varies substantially by county.

The annual average number of convictions was fewer than 25 per 100,000 people in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo, and San Francisco counties over the past decade (Table 4). In contrast, the conviction rate was four times greater — with over 100 convictions for domestic violence annually per 100,000 people — in seven counties, including Butte, Fresno,

Kern, Kings, Madera, Shasta, and Tulare counties. There are many possible drivers of these differences in conviction rates, including differences in the prevalence of domestic violence, differences in the likelihood of reporting or prosecuting domestic violence, or differences in the availability or quality of intervention programs.

TABLE 4: Domestic violence conviction rate per 100,000 people, 2015-23

	POPULATION	TOTAL CONVICTIONS	AVERAGE ANNUAL CONVICTIONS	AVERAGE ANNUAL CONVICTIONS/100,000
San Francisco	808,988	411	46	6
Alameda	1,622,188	1,869	208	13
Contra Costa	1,155,025	2,043	227	20
San Mateo	726,353	1,365	152	21
Marin	254,407	578	64	25
Nevada	102,037	234	26	25
Solano	449,218	1,074	119	27
San Diego	3,269,973	8,670	963	29
Sonoma	481,812	1,346	150	31
Placer	423,561	1,379	153	36
Santa Clara	1,877,592	6,382	709	38
Orange	3,135,755	12,131	1,348	43
Los Angeles	9,663,345	39,019	4,335	45
Ventura	829,590	3,516	391	47
Yolo	220,544	958	106	48
Santa Cruz	261,547	1,157	129	49
San Bernardino	2,195,611	10,496	1,166	53
Sacramento	1,584,288	7,865	874	55
Merced	291,920	1,584	176	60
San Luis Obispo	281,639	1,584	176	62

Table 4 continues

TABLE 4: Domestic violence conviction rate per 100,000 people, 2015-23 (continued)

	POPULATION	TOTAL CONVICTIONS	AVERAGE ANNUAL CONVICTIONS	AVERAGE ANNUAL CONVICTIONS/100,000
El Dorado	192,215	1,131	126	65
Napa	133,216	852	95	71
Humboldt	133,985	943	105	78
Imperial	179,057	1,343	149	83
Santa Barbara	441,257	3,335	371	84
Stanislaus	551,430	4,567	507	92
Riverside	2,492,442	20,678	2,298	92
San Joaquin	800,965	6904	767	96
Monterey	430,723	3,773	419	97
Fresno	1,017,162	9,244	1,027	101
Kern	913,820	8,801	978	107
Madera	162,858	1,635	182	112
Tulare	479,468	5,039	560	117
Shasta	180,366	1,948	216	120
Kings	152,682	1,694	188	123
Butte	207,172	2,467	274	132

Note: This table includes counties with populations of 100,000 or more people. The conviction rate is calculated as the ratio of the average annual number of convictions for domestic violence offenses per 100,000 people in the county. Population size is based on 2023 Census estimates.

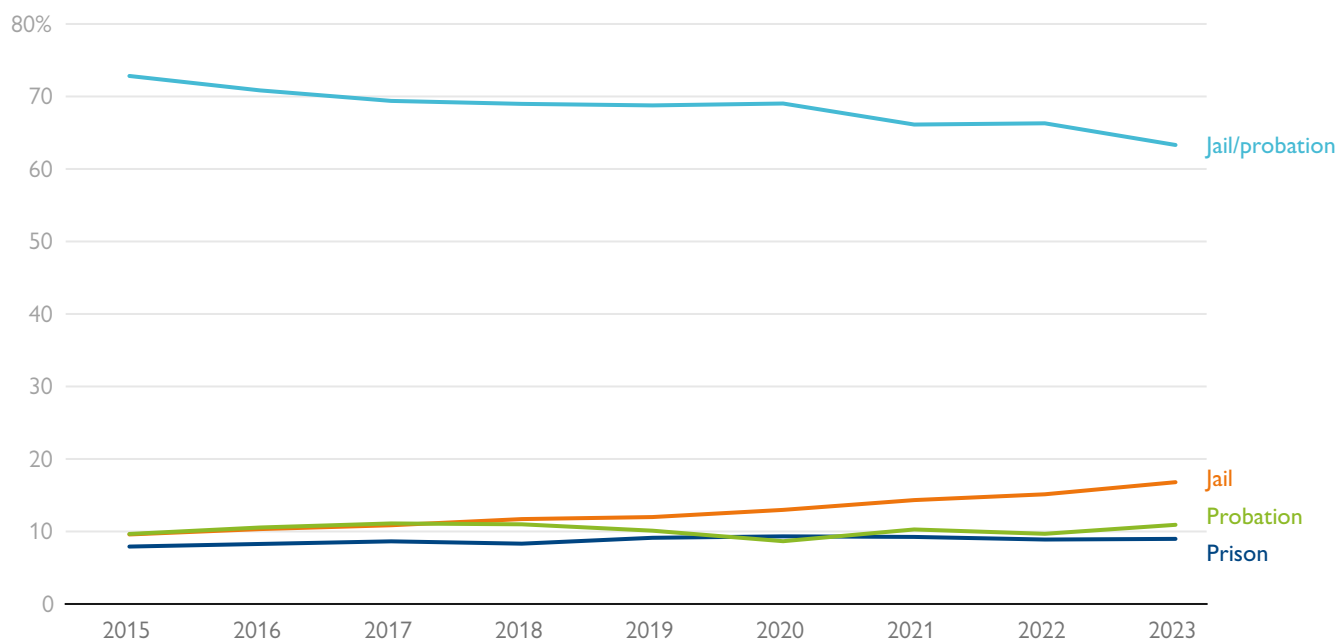
Source: California Department of Justice Automated Criminal History System (ACHS)

Most people convicted of domestic violence are sentenced to a combination of jail and probation time.

Sentences to probation often include jail terms of up to 12 months referred to as a “jail condition.” Between 2015 and 2023, the share of sentences that included both jail and probation time decreased from 73% to 63% (Figure 4). In contrast, the share of convictions with sentences to jail only

increased from 10% to 17% over this period. The share of convictions with a probation only sentence increased slightly from 10% in 2015 to 11% in 2023. Similarly, the share sentenced to prison increased from 8% to 9% over this timeframe.

FIGURE 4. Domestic violence sentences, 2015-23



Note: This figure is based on 180,162 convictions for domestic violence between 2015 and 2023. For a small share, the ACHS data does not include a sentence to prison, jail, jail and probation, or probation only. In these cases, sentence location information may be missing or the conviction may have resulted in an alternative sentence.

Source: California Department of Justice Automated Criminal History System (ACHS)

Conclusion

Over the past decade, the number of domestic violence calls for assistance has held steady, but calls involving the use of a weapon have increased. Following a period of increasing arrests for domestic violence, arrests declined substantially in 2020 and have yet to return to pre-pandemic levels. Convictions for domestic violence also dropped off markedly during the pandemic. Although conviction rates increased from that low point, they remain substantially below pre-pandemic levels in California.

The vast majority of those convicted of domestic violence are male, and the average age of someone convicted is 35 years old. About half of people convicted of domestic violence are Hispanic, over one-quarter are identified as White, and less than one-fifth are identified as Black. People convicted of domestic violence have an average of two prior arrests for domestic violence.

Counties vary widely in the rates of domestic violence calls for assistance. At the low end, some counties have fewer than 250 annual calls for assistance per 100,000 people, while those at the high end have about three times that rate (or more than 750 calls per 100,000). Conviction rates also vary widely across counties, ranging from fewer than 25 convictions per 100,000 people to more than four times this rate (more than 100 convictions per 100,000). This wide variation across counties may be driven by several factors, including differences in the prevalence of domestic violence or differences in the likelihood of reporting or prosecuting these offenses. Differences may also be driven by variation across counties in the availability and quality of intervention programs. These county-level differences could be studied to better understand the causes of domestic violence, as well as to support counties with low rates of domestic violence in sharing information and resources on effective interventions.

About this research

This research was made possible through a [partnership](#) between the California Policy Lab at the University of California and the Committee on Revision of the Penal Code,

a state agency that studies and makes recommendations to improve California's criminal justice system.

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Endnotes

- 1 Tapp, S. N., and E. J. Coen. 2025. "Criminal Victimization, 2024." U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- 2 The arrest and conviction counts presented in this analysis are a lower bound on domestic violence offending. We include offenses that explicitly reference domestic violence, such as PC 273.5 and PC 243(E)(1), but we exclude offenses, such as PC 240, that may be charged in domestic violence cases but are indistinguishable from assault and battery more generally.
- 3 Although we present calls for assistance and arrest data through 2024, we restrict our analysis of changes in convictions over time to the period 2015 and 2023 due to possible delays in updates to conviction. These delays may result in artificially low conviction levels.