

David Lammy's Youth Justice White Paper

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cutting-youth-crime-changing-young-lives>

David Lammy intro

As a young boy growing up in Tottenham in the 1980s, I saw too many young people – often Black boys like me – take their first steps towards trouble. Many were pulled towards violence and criminality without anyone stepping in to change their path. By the time the State noticed them, it was already too late. When we fail to intervene early enough, the consequences can be devastating – not only for children, but for victims and entire communities. Around eighty per cent of prolific adult offenders first entered the justice system as children. If we want fewer adult offenders, and fewer victims, we must intervene earlier and more effectively – support children before risks escalate, or signs of harm or offending first emerge.

Lammy is inferring that its putting them in custody as children, that is to blame for them ending up in custody as adults, not that they were correctly identified as criminal types needing incarceration as children

The lessons emerging from the Southport Inquiry – following the tragic murders of three young children by a violent 17-year-old known to agencies – are a sobering reminder of what can happen when systems are not sufficiently coordinated or decisive in the face of escalating

concerns. We must learn those lessons – and this government is determined to act.

No mention of fear of being called ‘racist’

Our approach is rooted in what works. Evidence shows that relying too heavily on custody once behaviour has escalated creates more adult offenders, more crime and more victims. More than two-thirds of children released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months go on to reoffend within a year.

Putting them in prison makes them commit crime?

That is why we are setting an ambition to reduce the number of children remanded to custody by 25 per cent, backed by £5 million for community placements and enhanced bail support. We are also considering wider reform to move away from ineffective short custodial sentences for children, by raising the minimum term for Detention and Training Orders, while ensuring custody remains available for the most dangerous offenders. Alongside this, we will strengthen parenting orders, so there are real consequences for parents and carers who wilfully fail to support efforts to address their children’s behaviour.

25% more child criminals will not be locked up

And we will carefully consider whether the age of criminal responsibility – currently set at just 10-years old – still

reflects modern understanding of childhood, vulnerability and development in today's society.

Jamie Bulger killers were 10 yrs old

We will also pursue the removal of serious violent and sexual foreign national youth offenders *where it is safe to do so*, whatever their age, and the Home Office have introduced legislation to bring in a new Youth Diversion Order to tackle the increasing number of young people being brought into the criminal justice system for terrorism offences, allowing agencies to intervene before risks escalate.

Not safe to do so to Moslem countries if sexual crime committed

This White Paper also addresses the inequalities that continue to shape outcomes across youth justice. Children with care experience remain dramatically overrepresented. So too do Black boys – both in custody but also as victims of serious violence themselves. We cannot build a fair or effective youth justice system while ignoring the persistent racial disproportionality within it, including the continued ‘adultification’ of Black children compared with their white peers. Taken together, our reforms represent a meaningful step towards addressing this disproportionality by making the system fairer, more consistent, and preventing escalation into offending.

Blacks are 12% of the American population and make up 50% of the prison population. In the U.S., one out of every three Black men is either in jail, on probation, or awaiting trial. That is much more than the number who graduate from college. Chapter 2 shows how this racial pattern in crime is found worldwide. INTERPOL Yearbooks show the rate of violent crime (murder, rape, and serious assault) is four times lower in Asian and Pacific Rim countries than in African and Caribbean countries #

‘Adultification’

The faster pace of growth among Blacks goes on through childhood. Black babies have greater muscular strength and can reach for objects better. Their neck muscles are often so developed that they can lift their heads up when they are only nine hours old. In a matter of days they can turn themselves over. Black children sit, crawl, walk, and put on their own clothes earlier than Whites or Orientals. The findings are measured by such tests as Bayley’s Scales of Mental and Motor Development and the Cambridge Neonatal Scales

...

Blacks reach sexual maturity sooner than Whites, who in turn mature sooner than Orientals. This is true for things like age at first menstruation, first sexual experience, and first pregnancy. One study of over 17,000 American girls in the 1997 issue of Pediatrics found that puberty begins a year earlier for Black girls than for White girls. By age

eight, 48% of the Black girls (but only 15% of the White girls) had some breast development, pubic hair, or both. For Whites this did not happen until ten years. The age when girls began to menstruate was between 11 and 12 for Black girls. White girls began a year later. Sexual maturity in boys also differs by race. By age 11, 60% of Black boys have reached the stage of puberty marked by fast penis growth. Two percent have already had sex. White boys tend not to reach this stage for another 1.5 years. Orientals lag one to two years behind Whites in both sexual development and the start of sexual Interest.

Quote – JP Rushton – Race, Evolution and Behaviour

‘The number of children in custody has fallen dramatically over the past two decades, from more than 3,000 to fewer than 400 at any one time ‘

This either means in the past 2 decades 2,600 were jailed when they were innocent, or that 2,600 are now not jailed for the same serious crimes

1.32. Children from ethnic minority backgrounds – and Black boys in particular – continue to be disproportionately represented at almost every stage of the system. Black children, who make up just 6% of the 10-17 population, 12 represent 9% of arrests, 12% of sentences and cautions, 26% of custodial remands and 22% of the youth custody population.

Blacks are just 4% of the population in the UK

‘In the U.S., Blacks are less than 13% of the population but have 50% of all arrests for assault and murder and 67% of all arrests for robbery. Fifty percent of all crime victims also report their assailants are Black, so the arrest statistics cannot be due to police bias.’

‘The same pattern is found in other countries. In London, England, Blacks make up 13% of the population, but account for 50% of the crime rate. A 1996 government commission in Ontario, Canada, reported that Blacks were five times more likely go to jail than Whites, and 10 times more likely than Orientals. In Brazil, there are 1.5 million Orientals, mostly Japanese whose ancestors went there as laborers in the 19th century, and who are the least represented in crime. ‘

JP Rushton

13 Children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds are also overrepresented across the system, and we are seeing a rise in the overrepresentation of Mixed-heritage children. Biases, including adultification bias (where Black children in particular are perceived as older, less vulnerable and more culpable than their peers) at key decision-making points is likely to contribute to this overrepresentation as children move through the system.

1.33. Racial disproportionality is not only an issue of system contact, but an issue of safety. Black young people are around six times more likely to be victims of homicide

than their peers.¹⁴ Some young people face a far greater risk of the most serious harm, and that is not acceptable.

2.62. This government is committed to driving this step-change in all areas. Going forward, child knife possession offences should only be met with a charge, a youth conditional caution or, in select cases, a deferred prosecution, which will be available in all police forces to ensure a non-criminal outcome where appropriate.

No more jail for Black youth caught with knives

2.79. The tragic events in Southport demonstrated the devastating consequences when risk is not taken seriously, information is not shared, or action is delayed. A system that allows responsibility to dissipate as concerns escalate is a system that fails in its most basic duty

3.7. The lottery is not only geographic, but also demographic. Evidence indicates a pattern consistent with structural biases, including adultification, contributing to Black children being disproportionately less likely to be offered diversionary interventions or receive the same level of support as White children, for the same offences.³⁶

The counter point to that is, that they may already have demonstrated that intervention would be no use – such as multiple previous offences

Further, we know that individuals from an ethnic minority background, and Black people in particular, are less likely

to make an admission of guilt, often due to lower levels of trust in the police and wider justice system. This can limit their access to OOCRs that require a formal admission of guilt, creating disparities in who benefits from diversion, and increasing the likelihood of children from ethnic minority backgrounds being escalated into formal criminal proceedings.

It could also just be that they don't properly understand the western justice system for a number of other reasons

3.54. The average number of children on remand in custody has decreased over the last five years, 44 however we are still seeing some custodial remands for relatively minor offences (such as minor drug offences and theft)⁴⁵ and it is disproportionately Black and Mixed Heritage children who are remanded to custody (28% and 18% of the remand population respectively).⁴⁶ In an HM Inspectorate of Probation thematic inspection of youth remand to custody, it was judged that 46% of the children assessed could have been safely accommodated in the community instead.⁴⁷ This indicates that some children are being locked up unnecessarily at one of the most formative points in their lives.

This does not reflect the fact that it is previous offences that can result in custody for a later offence, it does not mention the number of previous offences these Black children already had, before they were jailed

3.66. Remand is an area where we see significant racial disparities, with Black and Mixed-heritage children more likely to be remanded to custody than their peers, even after controlling for demographic and offence-related factors. 49 The London Accommodation Pathfinder provides supported accommodation and wrap-around support to predominantly ethnic minority children. Insights from the pilot point to locally tailored, community-informed, robust alternatives to custody effectively diverting ethnic minority children from custody.

See earlier response

3.79. Statute and longstanding youth justice principles are clear that custody should be reserved for only the most serious offences, where no other sanction is appropriate. However, this is not always reflected in practice. In 2024/25 the average custodial sentence length was just 18.8 months,⁵² and in the three years from 2023 to 2025 custodial sentences were sometimes imposed for offences such as possession of cannabis (7 children); offences relating to theft of a motor vehicle (34 children); and driving whilst disqualified from holding or obtaining a licence, (7 children) all offences which (without reference to individual cases) you could reasonably expect to be managed in the community with effective supervision

See earlier response

3.80. Custodial sentencing is also applied disproportionately to some ethnic groups. Analysis by the

Youth Justice Board found that, even after controlling for demographic and offence-related factors, Black children were between 2 and 8 percentage points more likely than White children to receive a custodial sentence rather than the alternative community sentence, a youth rehabilitation order

See earlier response

3.81. We know that short custodial sentences are not effective – for children or for public protection. More than two-thirds of children released from custodial sentences of twelve months or less in 2023/24 went on to reoffend within a year. Just over one third of children sentenced to community sentences during the same period were proven to reoffend. 55 Yet around half of all custodial sentences imposed on children in 2025 were under 12 months

This shows the state were correct to jail them, if they then went on to commit further crime and got jailed again

6.9. And, for children from ethnic minority backgrounds, this package of reforms is intended to make the youth justice system fairer and more consistent. Nearly 10 years have passed since the Lammy Review, yet persistent racial disparities undermine trust in the system and risk entrenching disadvantage rather than supporting children to move away from harm. Addressing racial disproportionality is central to this government's vision of a modern youth

justice system that commands public confidence and delivers better outcomes.

By 'fairer and more consistent' they mean 5 times less Black youth than now, should be jailed