

# Equity in Law Enforcement Actions Following a School Threat Assessment

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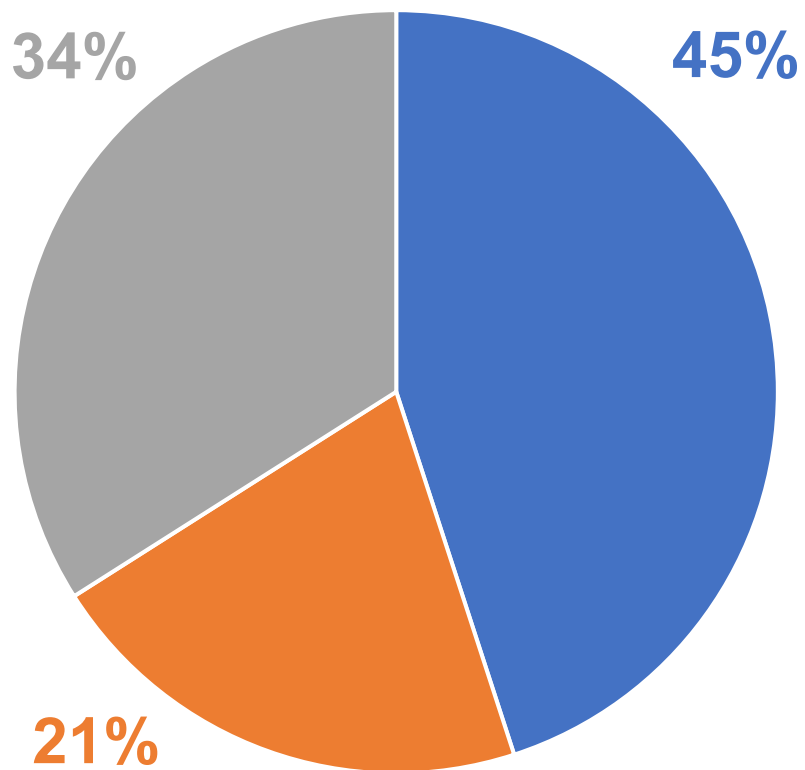
# School-Based Law Enforcement

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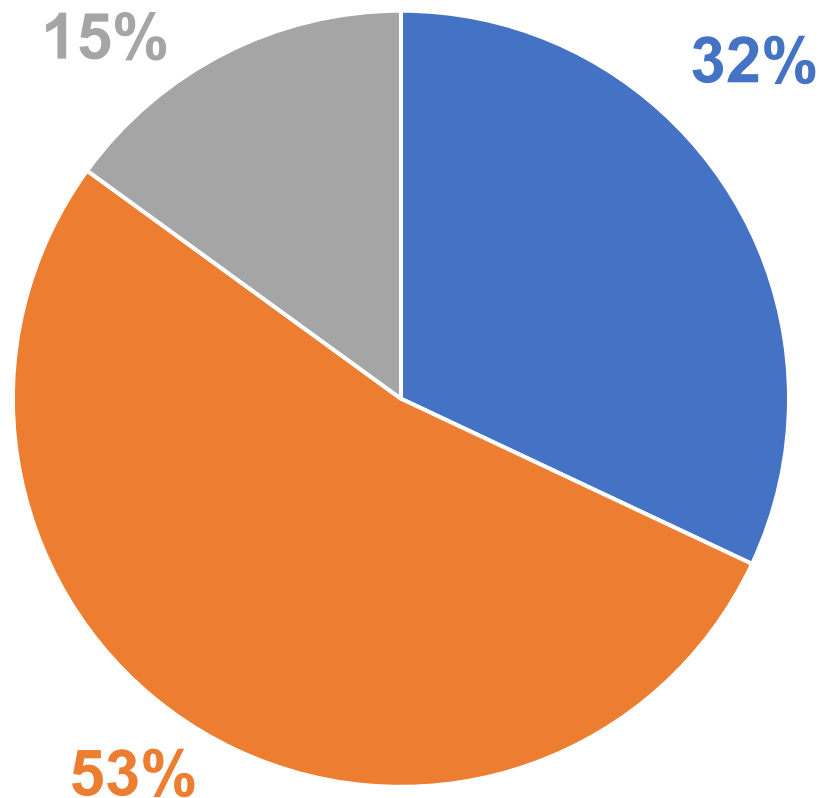
- Concerns about 1) criminalization of student behavior and 2) disparities between groups of students
- Disparities in community-based arrest data  
(Claus et al., 2018; Schleiden et al., 2020)



## Juvenile Population in Florida



## Juvenile Arrests in Florida



■ White Youth ■ Black Youth ■ Hispanic Youth



# Threat Assessment as Diversion

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- Proposed as an evidence-based approach that reduces disparities in suspension and expulsion data (Cornell et al., 2018; Cornell & Maeng, 2024; Maeng et al., 2023)
- Possibly also as diversion from law enforcement action

# What is Threat Assessment?

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A problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves identification, assessment, and intervention with individuals who have threatened violence toward others



# How Prevalent is Threat Assessment?

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- Used in 64% of US public schools (Wang et al., 2022)
- Required in 18 states and encouraged/recommended in 21 more (NASBE, n.d.)



**Not just searching for a needle in a haystack**



# Fairness and Equity Goals

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- Avoid unfair excessive punishment or criminalization for minor misbehaviors
- Equitable treatment of students from diverse racial/ ethnic backgrounds





# Who is on a Threat Assessment Team?

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- Administrator
- Mental health staff (e.g., school psychologist, counselor, social worker)
- School resource officer
- Other staff (e.g., teacher, nurse)



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# SROs and Threat Assessment

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Concern that SRO involvement leads to greater criminalization of non-criminal behaviors, higher arrest rates and disparities for students of color



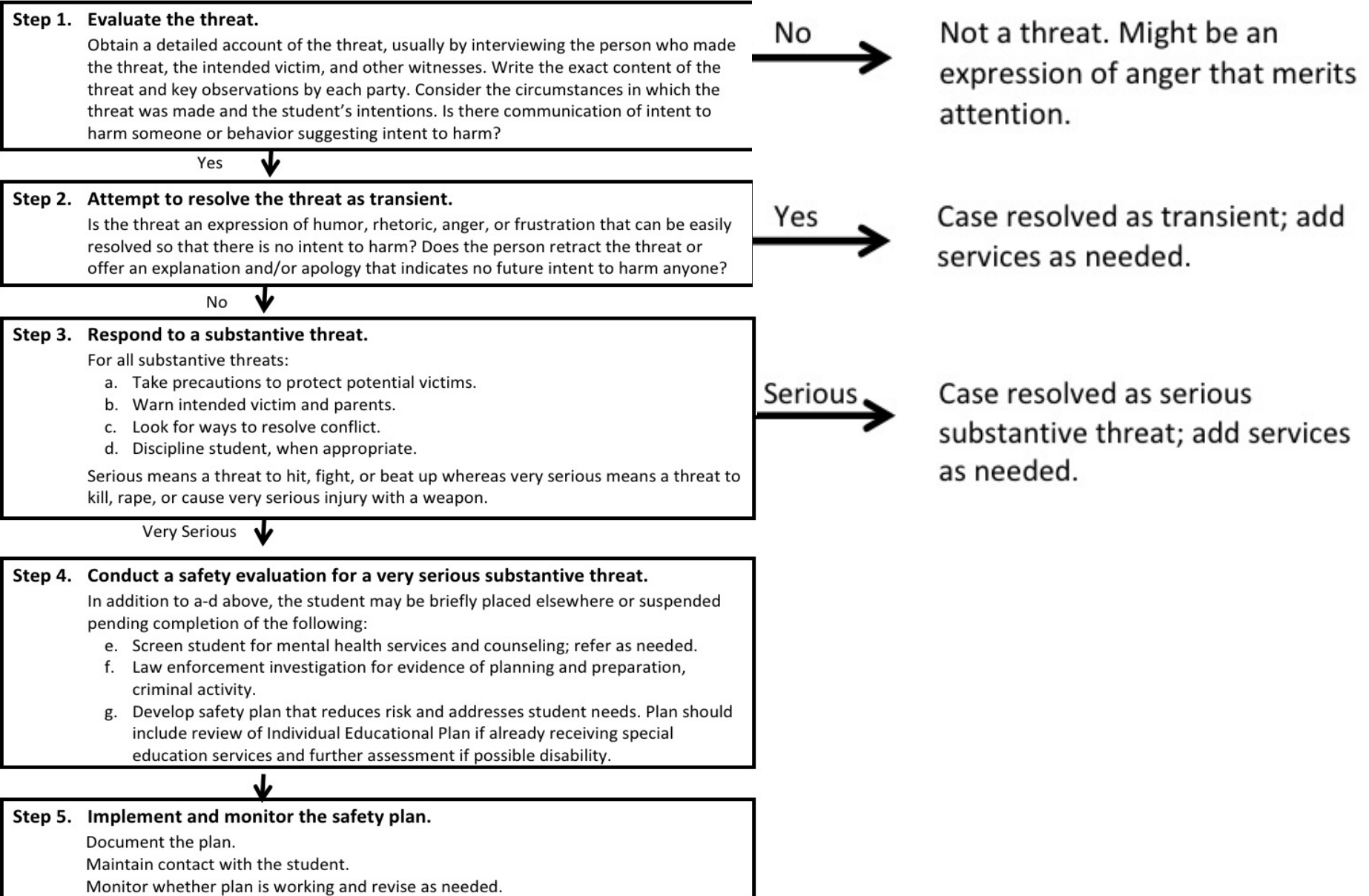
# Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG)

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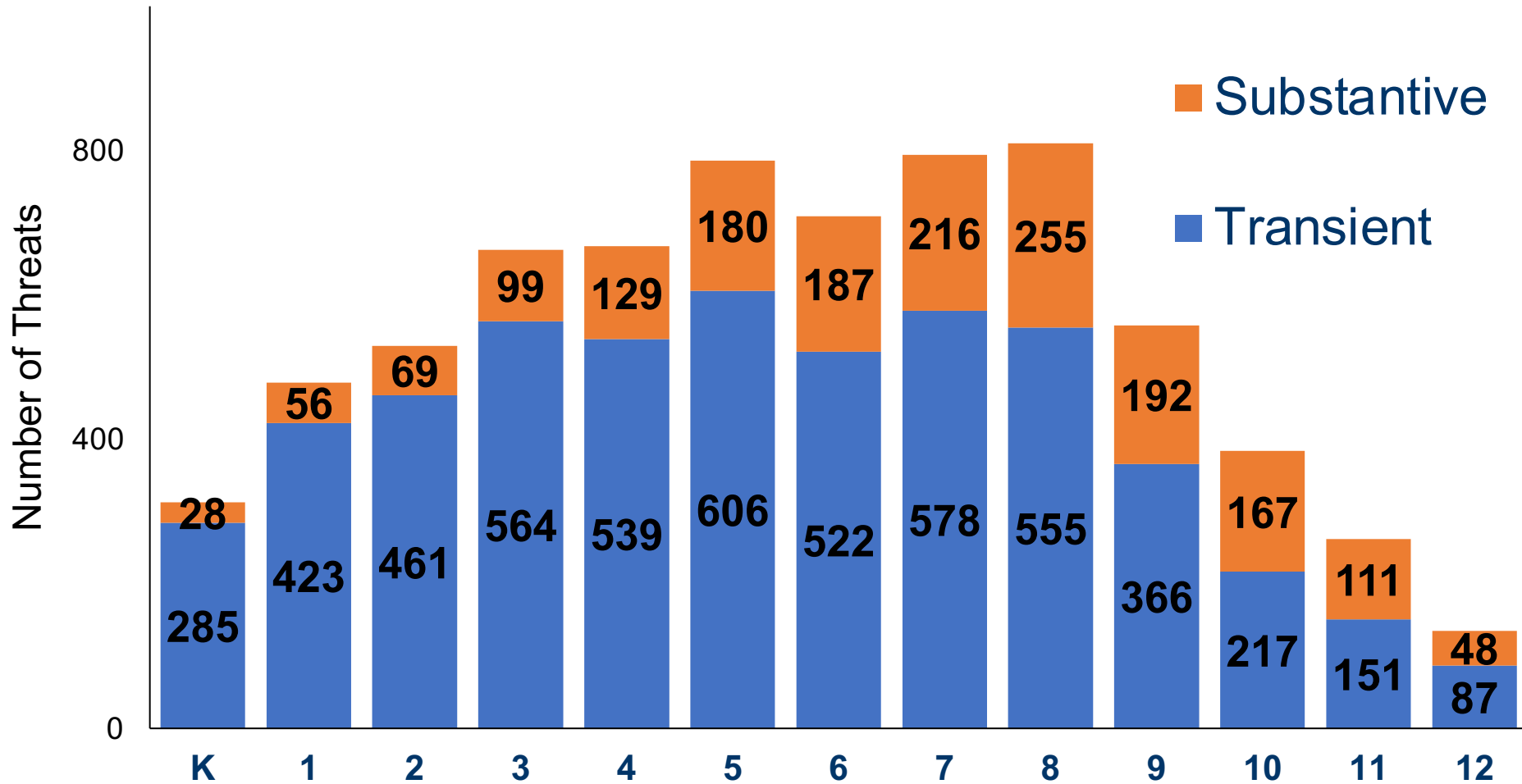
- Developed at UVA in 2001
- Distinguish serious (substantive) threats from non-serious (transient) threats
- Focus on support services to prevent violence



# CSTAG Decision Tree



# Threat Classification by Grade



# SROs and Threat Assessment

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- Trained in CSTAG model
- Respond to criminal law breaking
- Interviews, searches, and take protective action when necessary



# Project Overview

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- In 2018, Florida mandated TA in public schools
- FLDOE adopted CSTAG and initiated statewide training
- UVA project funded by US DOJ to examine CSTAG training and implementation





# Research Questions

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1. How frequent are law enforcement actions following a threat assessment in schools?
2. How do these actions differ by student race/ ethnicity?



# Participants

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- 21,847 student threat cases
- 2,334 schools in 60 of 67 districts in Florida



# Measures

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## Independent Variables

- Student demographics  
Gender, race, SPED, FRPM,  
grade
- Classification  
No threat, transient,  
substantive

## Outcome Variables

- Arrest
- Court charge
- Incarceration

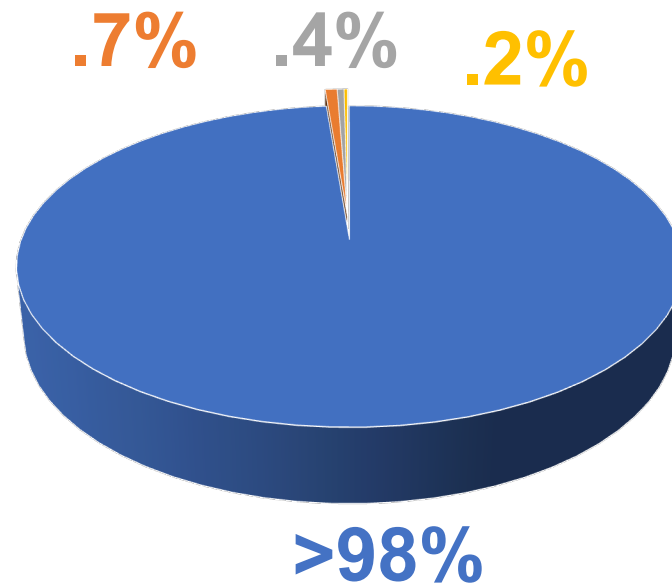


**How frequent are law enforcement actions following a threat assessment?**

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# Frequency of Law Enforcement Action



- No legal action (n = 21,587)
- Arrest (n = 150)
- Court charge (n = 77)
- Incarceration (n = 33)

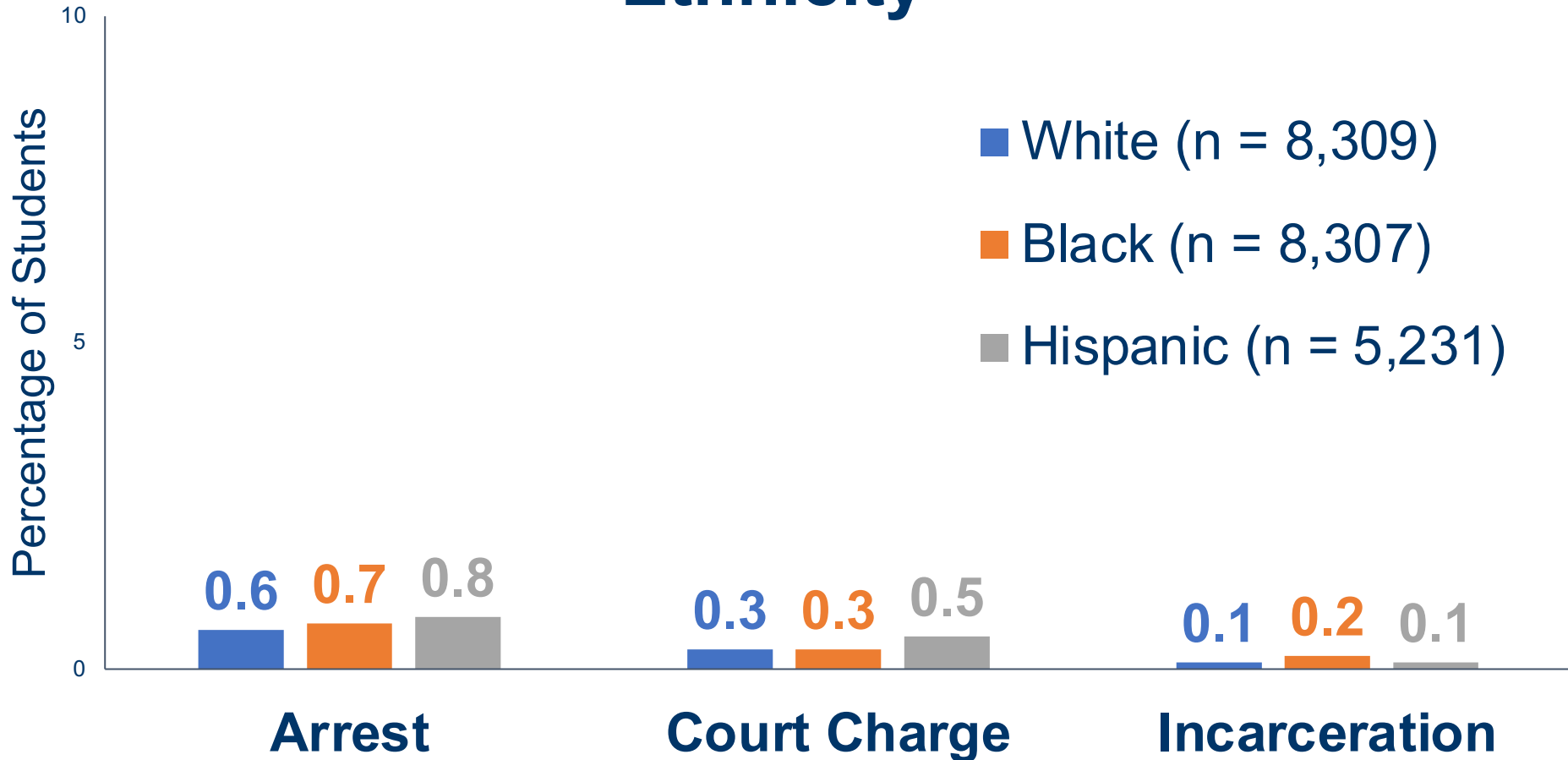


# How do law enforcement actions differ by student race/ethnicity?

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# Law Enforcement Action by Race/Ethnicity



*Logistic regression model of law enforcement actions*

	Arrest	Court charge	Incarceration
Female gender	0.99	0.92	1.02
Black race/ ethnicity	1.00	0.97	1.14
Hispanic race/ ethnicity	1.19	1.41	0.71
Elementary grade	0.10***	0.32**	0.44
High grade	1.84***	2.33***	3.92**
FRPM	0.75	1.00	1.20
IEP	0.83	0.88	1.02
504 Plan	0.72	0.48	0.99
Transient classification	1.36	2.61	2.59
Serious substantive classification	6.58***	7.97***	15.96**
Very serious substantive classification	44.81***	20.50***	75.16***
	$R^2 = .30$	$R^2 = .15$	$R^2 = .26$

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Reference groups: Male gender, White race/ ethnicity, Middle grade, Not a threat classification.





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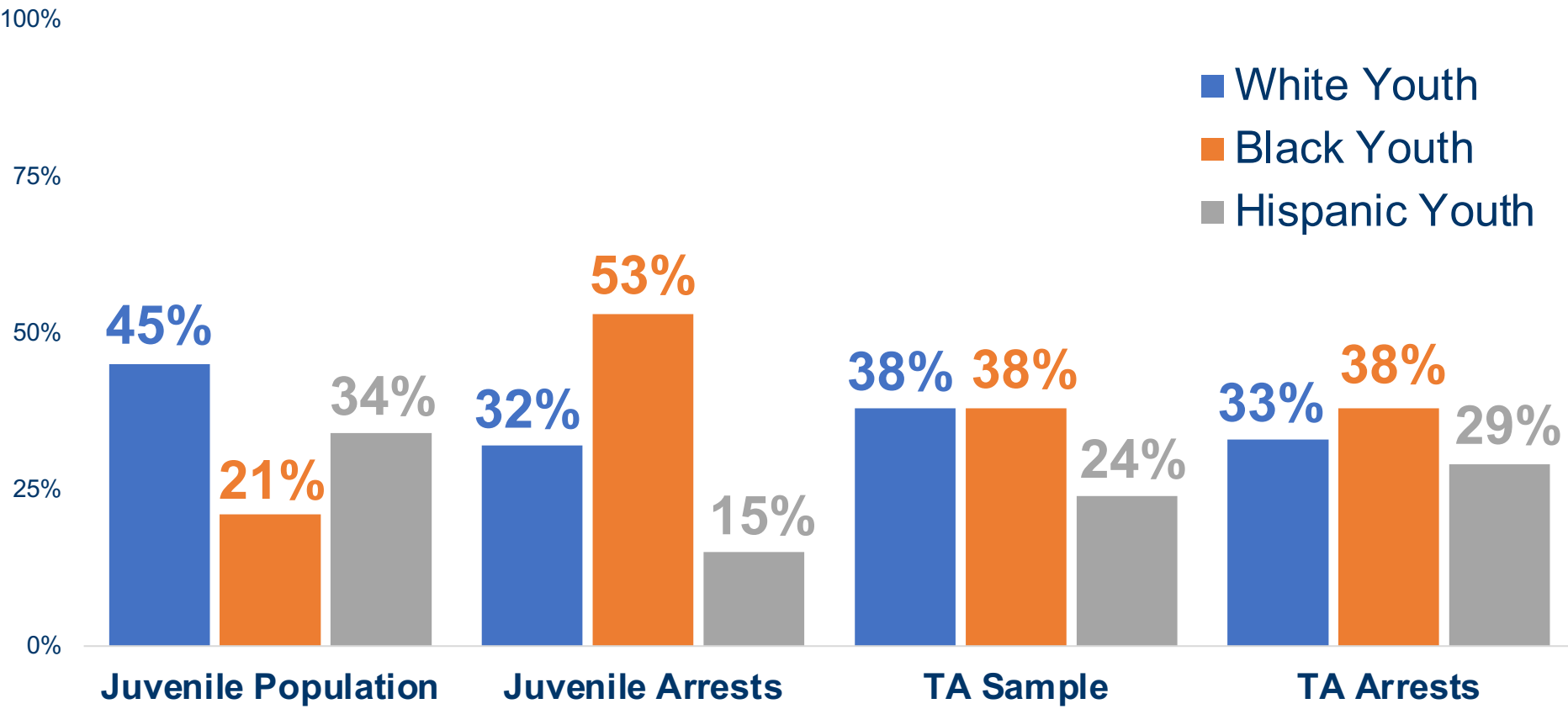
# Summary

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- >98% of cases resolved without law enforcement action
- No significant differences in law enforcement action between White, Black, and Hispanic students receiving a threat assessment



# Law Enforcement Action by Race/Ethnicity in Community vs Threat Assessment Contexts



# Limitations

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- No control group of schools not using threat assessment
- Correlational analyses, cannot make causal inferences



# Future Study

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- Qualitative research on law enforcement actions
- Examine services, academic, and behavioral outcomes for students 2-3 years after a threat assessment

# Implications: Threat Assessment as Diversion

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- Evidence-based process that may help correct a previously existing racial disparity in law enforcement actions
- Support for the appropriate use of law enforcement in schools



# Thank you!

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<http://tiny.cc/YouthViolenceProject>

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Dr. Dewey Cornell discloses that he has a financial interest as the primary developer of the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines.

