



# Research Bulletin

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## Assessing disproportionate minority contact with the Illinois juvenile justice system

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**M**inority youth are very much in the majority when it comes to being arrested and incarcerated, according to an assessment of minority overrepresentation in Illinois' juvenile justice system.

Findings of a study conducted by the Authority indicated that in many Illinois counties where there is a measurable percentage of minority youth, those

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youth are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. The problem of minority overrepresentation is especially acute for African-American youth in Illinois.

### Introduction

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 provides for the allocation of federal funds to address juvenile

delinquency and improve juvenile justice systems at both state and local levels. To receive these funds, states are required to submit three-year juvenile justice and delinquency prevention plans to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, the state advisory group, is charged with developing, approving, and submitting the juvenile justice plan for the state.

Addressing disproportionate minority confinement became a key component of the state plan as mandated by OJJDP in 1992. Other components included sight and sound separation of juveniles from adults in secure facilities; de-institutionalization of status offenders; and elimination of the practice of confining or detaining juveniles in adult jails and lockups.

In 2002, the disproportionate minority confinement core component was modified to address disproportionate minority contact. This broadened the focus of the effort, from studying youth in detention centers

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and correctional facilities to studying all youth who come in contact with the juvenile justice system, from law enforcement through corrections.

One of the greatest challenges facing the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission as they work to meet the OJJDP mandate is obtaining data needed to assess the degree of racial and ethnic disparity at each stage and at each outcome of the juvenile justice process.

In 2003, the Authority published a report titled, “A Study of Disproportionate Minority Representation in the Cook County Juvenile Justice System,” which assessed racial and ethnic representation at several decision points in the Cook County juvenile justice process. The analysis included the use of a disproportionate representation index, a measure assessing the contribution that several decision points make to increase, decrease, or not impact racial or ethnic disparity in the juvenile justice system. This analysis can lead to a more targeted investigation, one that disentangles the various causes of racial disparity and offers strategies to reduce disparity at the most problematic stages of the juvenile justice process.

In Cook County, as in many jurisdictions, it was determined that much of the racial disparity evident in the juvenile justice system is a result of who law enforcement agencies arrest. It also was discovered that racial disparity increases as the juvenile justice process moves forward. Although African-American youth 10 to 16 years of age comprised approximately one-third of all youth in that age group in Cook County, they made up approximately 63 percent of youth arrested in 1999, and nearly 80 percent of youth sentenced to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) from 1996 to 1999.

Illinois juvenile justice system data is limited, placing significant barriers on the ability to replicate the type of study conducted in Cook County. Most statewide

data on the juvenile justice system is collected in the aggregate by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts. While it was known that the number of delinquency adjudications dropped nearly 50 percent from 1998 to 2003—from 13,137 in 1998 to 6,619 in 2003—the characteristics of juveniles who were adjudicated delinquent or their offenses were unknown. This greatly limits the type of analysis that can be conducted with these data, and renders some questions

unanswerable, such as whether racial disparity increased, decreased, or stayed the same from 1998 to 2003 among adjudicated delinquents.

Two sources of statewide data that allow researchers to assess racial disparity include the Computerized Criminal History Information System (CHRI), from which arrest information can be extracted, and admissions records on juveniles

committed to Illinois Department of Corrections Youth Centers.

Findings in this *Research Bulletin* support the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission as it attempts to report to OJJDP the status of its disproportionate minority contact efforts by assessing racial disparity at the point of arrest and among commitments to IDOC for the entire state and for each of Illinois’ 102 counties.

#### Measures

The methods used to assess disproportionate minority contact have evolved. Initially, a statistic called a representation index (RI) was used to assess racial and ethnic disparity. At any stage of the juvenile justice process, the representation index compares the percentage of all youth who are of a particular race and/or ethnicity with their percentage in the general juvenile population. For example, if 50 percent of youth found delinquent are African American, and 25 percent of youth in the general juvenile population of that jurisdiction are African American, then the RI=2. The representation index provides a basic understand-

*Although African-American youth 10 to 16 years of age make up approximately one-third of all youth in that age group in Cook County, they comprised approximately 63 percent of youth arrested in 1999, and almost 80 percent of youth sentenced to the Illinois Department of Corrections from 1996 to 1999.*

ing of minority overrepresentation, but shows little about how the juvenile justice process contributed to the overrepresentation. In this report, the RI was calculated at the point of arrest and among commitments to IDOC by county and for Illinois as a whole.

In an attempt to measure how the juvenile justice process impacts disproportionate minority contact, another statistic was developed called the disproportionate representation index (DRI). DRI was the primary statistic used in the Cook County research. It compares the percentage of all youth at each stage of the juvenile justice process who are of a particular race and/or ethnicity to the same racial or ethnic group percentage of all youth at the previous stage.

For example, if 50 percent of youth found delinquent are African American, but 40 percent of youth for whom delinquency petitions were filed were African American, the  $DRI=1.25$ . The power of the disproportionate representation index is its ability to identify specific stages of the juvenile justice process where disproportionate minority contact is the most problematic. To calculate the disproportionate representation index for the entire juvenile justice system process, quality race and ethnicity data for each step of the process must be available.

Illinois does not have the juvenile justice data needed to conduct a disproportionate representation index assessment on the system as a whole, and although local jurisdictions may have the data for this assessment in some form, the data are unlikely to be in a format that lends itself to this type of analysis. To address concerns over the limitations of the representation index and disproportionate representation index, the OJJDP convened a working group to create a new measure of disproportionate minority contact. A relative rate index (RRI) was developed to compare the rate at which a racial and/or ethnic group appears at each stage of the juvenile justice process with the rate at which youth of a reference group (such as Caucasian) appear at the same stage.

For example, if African-American youth are arrested at a rate of 10,000 per 100,000 African-American youth, and Caucasian youth are arrested at a rate of 2,500 per 100,000 Caucasian youth, the  $RRI=4$ . This is the disproportionate minority contact measure that OJJDP asks state advisory groups to report on an annual basis. In this *Research Bulletin*, the relative rate index is calculated at the point of arrest and admission to IDOC for Illinois and each county.

In jurisdictions with small minority populations, the measures described are sensitive to dramatic changes in levels with relatively small changes in the number of minority youth at the stages being assessed. As a result, OJJDP recommends that these disparity measures are not used in jurisdictions where a specific minority group does not constitute at least 1 percent of the jurisdiction's total population. That recommendation was followed in this study.

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#### Data

The data used for the assessment of disproportionate minority contact in Illinois come from the U.S. Census Bureau, CHRI, and IDOC.

#### Census data

State and county level juvenile population data for the year 1999 were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau. For the disproportionate minority contact assessment at the arrest stage, the age range of 10 to 16 years old was used as the eligible juvenile arrest population. Although youth under the age of 10 can be arrested in Illinois, it is exceedingly rare. Of the more than 52,000 arrest charges reported to the Illinois State Police in 2003, only 152 were of youth nine years of age or younger.

For the disproportionate minority contact assessment at the IDOC admissions stage, the juvenile population 13 to 16 years old was used. In Illinois, youth 12 years of age or younger cannot be committed to IDOC, and youth 17 years and older are considered adults by the justice system. The 1999 population data were the

Table 1  
Arrest representation index by race

	Representation index	Percent of population ages 10 to 16	Percent arrested
African American	3.14	18.16%	57.03%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.12	3.4%	0.39%
Caucasian	0.65	64.81%	41.97%

most recent available containing the necessary age ranges at the time of assessment. Use of 1999 data should have had only a marginal effect on the representation index and the relative rate index, as the percentage of the population by race changes little from year to year. In fact, the percentage of Illinoisans who are African American and Hispanic changed by about two-tenths of 1 percent and about 2 percent respectively in the 10 years between the 1990 and 2000 censuses.

CHRI data

The 2003 juvenile arrest data used for the assessment of disproportionate minority contact were pulled from the Illinois State Police Computerized Criminal History system. The Criminal Identification Act mandates that an arrest fingerprint card be submitted for all minors ages 10 years and older who have been arrested for an offense that would be a felony if committed by an adult or any motor vehicle offense, including theft, driving under the influence, and aggravated fleeing and eluding police.

Fingerprint-based arrest cards may be submitted to the state police but are not required for minors age 10 years and older who have committed an offense that would be a class A or B misdemeanor if committed by an adult. Further, the Juvenile Justice Reform Provi-

*IDOC provides data files to the Authority that contain information on every admission to an Illinois Youth Center for each calendar year.*

sions of 1998 mandate that the state police maintain a record of all station adjustments, both formal and informal, for offenses that would be a felony if committed by an adult. The reporting of station adjustments for misdemeanor offenses is optional.

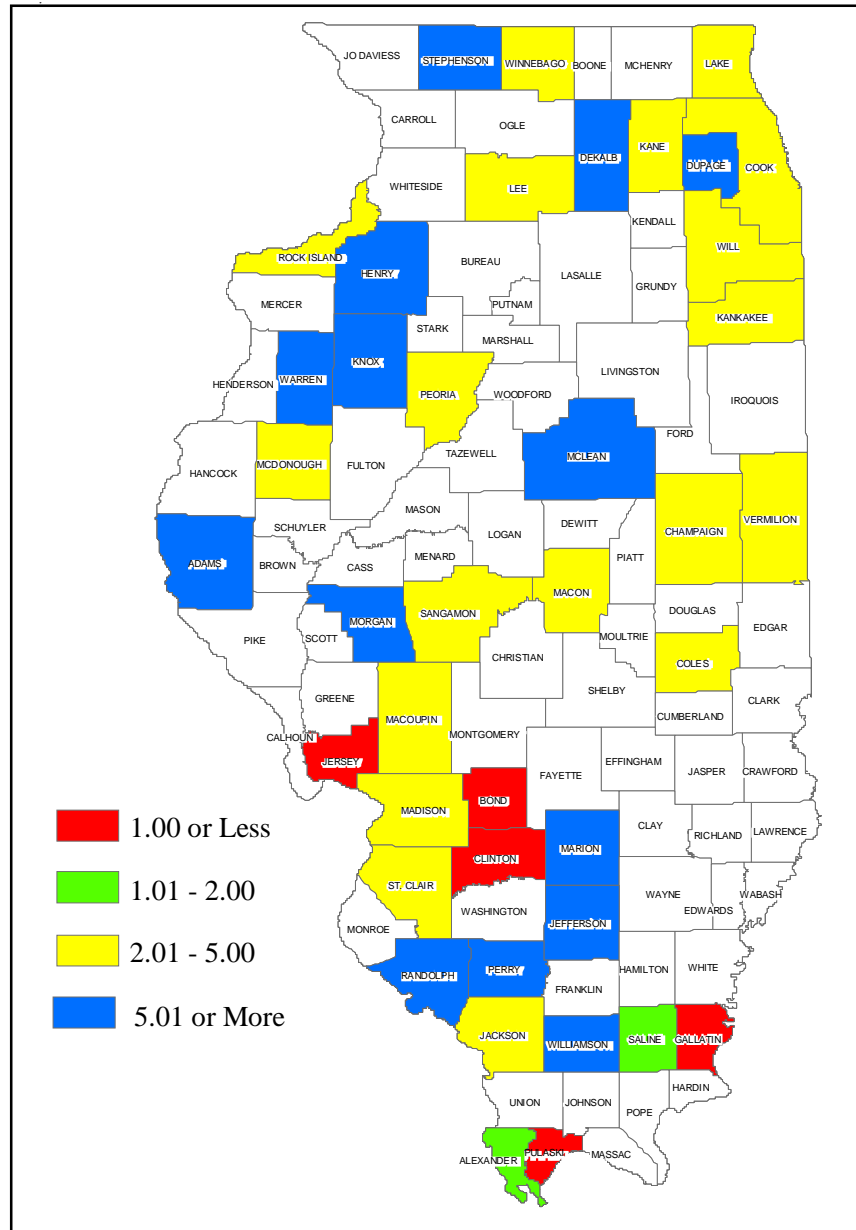
The most significant limitation these data impose on this assessment is the absence of information on the number of Hispanic youth arrested in Illinois. CHRI supports Illinois' participation in the Uniform Crime Reporting program, administered by the FBI. Since the program does not require submission of data on the ethnicity of those arrested, such as Hispanic or non-Hispanic, state police do not collect this information.

IDOC data

For the assessment of disproportionate minority contact at the IDOC admissions stage, admissions data for the year 2003 were used. IDOC provides data files to the Authority that contain information on every admission to an Illinois Youth Center (IYC) in each calendar year. Included in the files are race, committing county, and admission type of each youth admitted.

These data are used to assess both the representation index and the relative rate index by committing county and race of youth who are court-committed to an IYC.

Figure 1  
African-American arrest representation indices  
by county and disproportionate minority contact level



For the purposes of the disproportionate minority contact assessment, court-committed youth are defined as those admitted to an IYC for an initial commitment or a court evaluation. Parole violators were excluded from this analysis. Finally, unlike the arrest data, IDOC admissions data included information on Hispanics committed, albeit as a race and not an ethnicity.

**Results**

For the arrest stage, representation indices and relative rate indices were calculated for African-American, Asian/Pacific-Islander, and Caucasian youth. At the IDOC commitment stage, representation indexes and relative rate indexes were calculated for African-American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific-Islander youth. Although the arrest and IDOC data does contain a field that allows for the identification of Native-American youth, according to the U.S. Census Bureau,

Table 2  
2003 arrest relative rate indices by race

	African American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Caucasian
Relative rate index	4.85	0.18	--
Arrest rate per 100,000	11,647.71	438.59	2,401.61

Table 3  
2003 IDOC representation indices by race

	Representation index	Percent of population ages 13 to 16	Percent of population at IDOC
African American	2.92	17.75%	51.79%
Hispanic	0.82	13.39%	10.96%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.06	3.51%	0.21%
Caucasian	0.57	65.18%	36.89%

no Illinois county had the minimum 1 percent needed to reliably calculate either a representation index or a relative rate index.

Arrest representation index

In Illinois, the arrest representation index was 3.14 for African-American youth, 0.12 for Asian/Pacific Islander youth, and 0.65 for Caucasian youth (Table 1). The data revealed that African-American youth in Illinois were arrested at a level that was just more than three times their representation in the general juvenile population. Asian/Pacific Islander youth in Illinois were arrested at a level just more than one-tenth of their representation in the general juvenile population. Caucasian youth in Illinois were arrested at a level that was about two-thirds their representation in the general juvenile population.

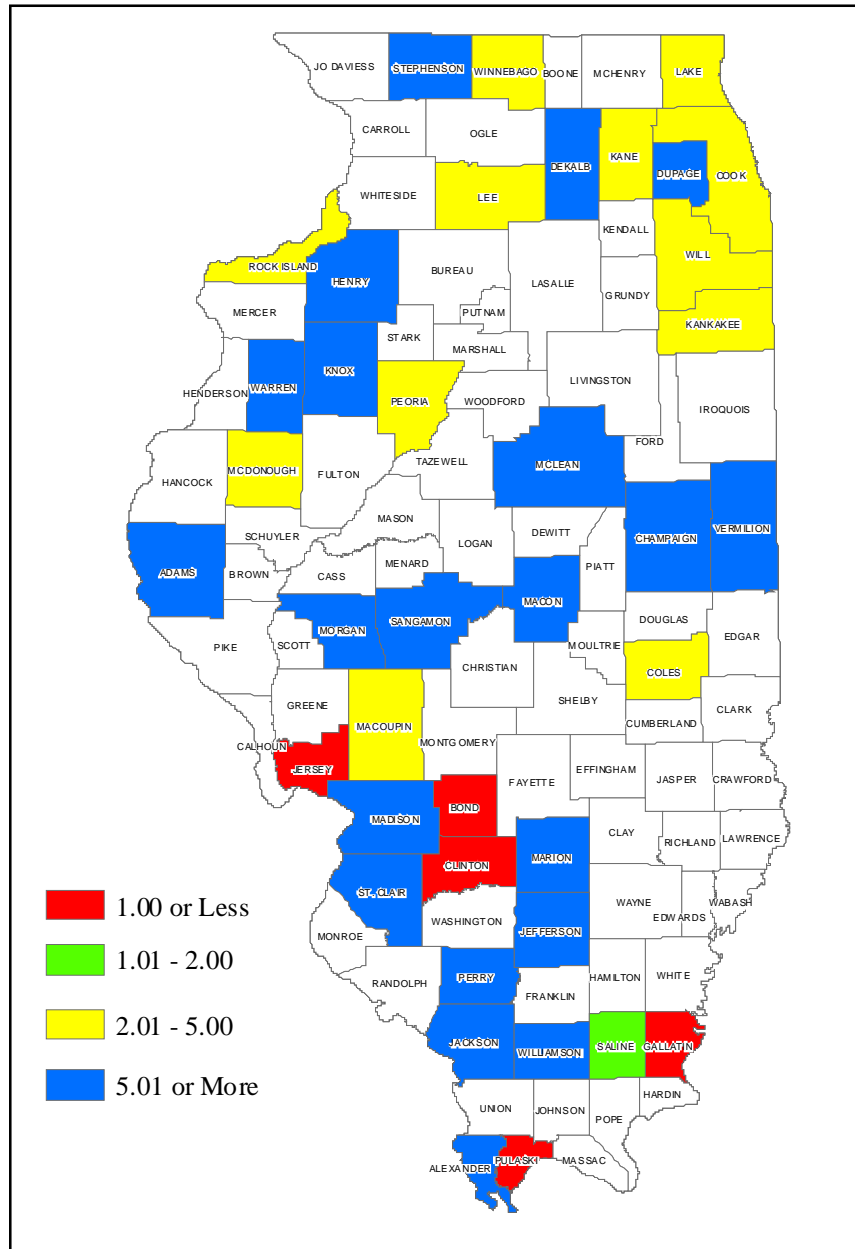
At the county level, 42 counties had African-American juvenile populations ages 10 to 16 years old that were

equal to or greater than 1 percent of the total county juvenile population in that age group. Twenty-eight counties had Asian/Pacific Islander juvenile populations 10 to 16 years old that were equal to or greater than the 1 percent of the total county juvenile population 10 to 16 years old.

Of the 42 counties with a sufficient percentage of African-American youth to utilize the disproportionate minority contact measures, 35 had an over-representation of African-Americans among youth arrested in 2003. In contrast, Asian/Pacific Islander youth were not overrepresented in any Illinois county at the point of arrest, as measured by the representation index.

Figure 1 highlights the counties where African Americans make up at least 1 percent of the juvenile population 10 to 16 years of age and their representation indices. Counties without shading are those where

Figure 2  
African-American arrest relative rate indices  
by county and disproportionate minority contact level



representation indexes were not calculated due to their low percentage of African-American youth.

Arrest relative rate index

Statewide, the relative rate index for African Americans was 4.85 and 0.18 for Asian/Pacific Islanders (Table 2). This meant African-American youth in Illinois were arrested at a rate that was nearly five times the rate at which Caucasian youth were arrested.

In contrast, Asian/Pacific Islander youth were arrested at just less than one-fifth the rate of Caucasian youth.

Of the 42 counties that had a sufficient percentage of African-American youth 10 to 16 years, five counties had an under-representation of African-American youth as measured by the relative rate index. African-American youth were arrested at more than twice the rate of Caucasian youth in 33 of 34 counties where there was an over-representation of African-American youth.

Table 4  
2003 IDOC relative rate indices by race

	African American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Caucasian
Relative rate index	5.15	0.11	1.45	--
Commitment rate per 100,000	605.24	12.45	169.82	117.44

In contrast, consistent with the results of using the representation index as a measure of disproportionate minority contact, Asian/Pacific Islander youth were not over-represented at the point of arrest as measured by the relative rate index in any Illinois county. Figure 2 highlights the relative rate indexes for African-American youth at the arrest stage.

Commitment to IDOC representation index

In Illinois, the IDOC representation index for African-American youth was 2.92, 0.82 for Hispanic youth, 0.06 for Asian/Pacific Islander youth, and 0.57 for Caucasian youth (Table 3). African-American youth were committed to IDOC at a level that was nearly three times their representation in the general juvenile population; Hispanic youth at a level just more than three-fourths their representation; Asian/Pacific Islander youth at a level less than one-tenth their representation; and Caucasian youth at a level that was just more than one-half their representation.

African-American youth were over-represented among youth committed to IDOC as measured by the representation index in 30 of 42 counties that had African-American juvenile populations 13 to 16 years old. In contrast, Hispanic youth were over-represented in 14 of 57 counties where they made up more than one percent of the juvenile population 13 to 16 years old.

Finally, in only 2 of the 31 counties where Asian/Pacific-Islander youth 13 to 16 years old exceed 1 percent of the county's total juvenile population 13 to 16 were they over-represented as measured by the representation index. Figures 3 and 4 highlight those counties where African-American and Hispanic youth, respectively, made up at least 1 percent of the juvenile

*African-American youth were committed to IDOC at a level just less than three times their representation in the general juvenile population.*

population 13 to 16 years old and their IDOC representation indices.

Commitment to IDOC relative rate index

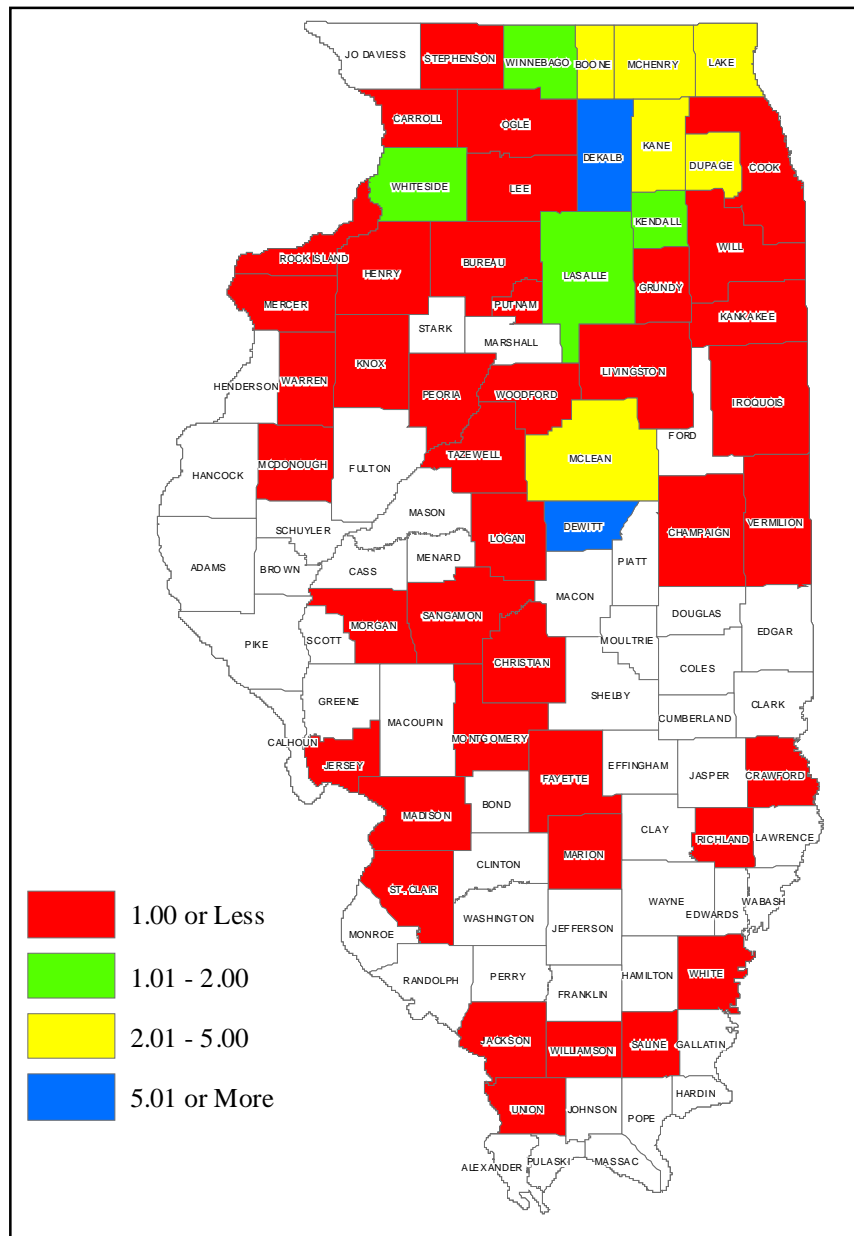
In Illinois, the IDOC relative rate index for African-Americans was 5.15, the Hispanic IDOC relative rate index was 1.45, and for Asian/Pacific Islanders the IDOC relative rate index was 0.11 (Table 4). This indicated that African-American youth in Illinois were committed to IDOC at a rate that was more than five times that at which Caucasian youth were committed, while Hispanic youth were committed to IDOC at a rate that was 45 percent greater than the rate at which Caucasian youth were committed. In contrast, Asian/Pacific-Islander youth were committed to IDOC at just more than one-tenth the rate of Caucasian youth.

In 12 of the 42 counties where African-American youth made up more than one percent of the general juvenile population 13 to 16 years old, African-American youth were under-represented among youth committed to IDOC as measured by the relative rate index. African-American youth were committed to IDOC at more than twice the rate of Caucasian youth in 28 of the remaining counties where there was an over-representation of African-American youth. Hispanic youth were committed to IDOC at a rate that was less than the rate at which Caucasian youth were committed in 75 percent of the 57 counties where Hispanics made up more than





Figure 4  
Hispanic IDOC representation index  
by county and disproportionate minority contact level



and committed to IDOC. Additionally, in most of the counties where African-American youth constituted more than one percent of the general juvenile population, they were disproportionately arrested and committed to IDOC. This assessment of disproportionate minority contact offers a more precise evaluation of the depth and breadth of African-American over-representation among arrested and incarcerated youth in Illinois.

Evidence also exists that shows Hispanic youth over-representation among IDOC commitments. In most Illinois counties where Hispanic youth constitute more than 1 percent of the juvenile population 13 to 16 years old, they were under-represented among youth committed to IDOC as measured by either index. When looking at the state as a whole, however, Hispanic youth were over-represented as measured by the relative rate index.



