

# Juries in England and Wales convict defendants for rape more often than they acquit, finds large-scale analysis

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Once a rape case reaches court, juries in England and Wales are more likely to convict than acquit a defendant, and this has been the case for at

least 15 years, according to a large-scale analysis of all jury verdicts by UCL's Professor Cheryl Thomas.

The paper also found that the [jury](#) conviction rate for [rape](#) is increasing alongside an increase in jury verdicts in rape cases.

Despite rape being one of the most high-profile issues in the U.K. justice system today, until this study, there has not been reliable information for over a decade on how often juries convict defendants charged with rape in England and Wales.

The research, published in the *Criminal Law Review*, examined all charges, pleas and jury verdicts for all defendants in the Crown Court in England and Wales over a 15-year period from 2007–2021. The study analyzed almost six million charges against defendants and includes every single verdict reached by a jury on rape charges in this period (68,863 jury verdicts by deliberation).

In 2021, the most recent year with full data, the jury conviction rate for all rape charges was 75%, up from 55% in 2007. The finding that juries convict more often than they acquit defendants in rape cases was also true regardless of the age or sex of the rape complainant.

The research was commissioned by the senior judiciary following a [petition](#) to Parliament arguing that jurors were biased in rape cases and that jury conviction rates for rape were very low.

Other key findings/analysis from Professor Thomas' research:

- The jury conviction rate for all sexual offenses has also increased over the last 15 years, steadily rising from 58% in 2007 to 75% in 2021.
- The precipitous fall in rape charging from 2016 to 2020 was part

- of a systemic fall in charging for all offenses in this period.
- Rape offenses have the highest not guilty plea rate of any offense (85%) and this has been the case consistently for 15 years, providing important context to the government's ambition to increase the number of early guilty pleas in such cases.
  - Over the 15 years, the average jury conviction rate for rape was 58%—higher than for other [serious crimes](#) such as threatening to kill (33%), attempted murder (47%), GBH (48%), and manslaughter (48%) where juries acquit defendants more often than convict.
  - Juries do not consistently acquit young men for rape more than older men. This is in contrast to a perception that juries are particularly reluctant to convict young men for rape.

Professor Thomas (UCL Laws), Director of the UCL Jury Project, said, "These findings have important implications not just for the Government's Rape Action Plan and the Law Commission's current review of sexual offense prosecutions. They are important for all rape complainants. Knowing the truth about jury decision-making in rape cases is important for anyone who may be reluctant to continue with a case through to trial because they incorrectly believe that juries are unwilling to convict the accused in rape cases.

"It's clear that there are serious problems with how rape complaints are handled by police and how long cases take to reach court. But juries are not responsible for this. They can only decide the cases put to them, and this research shows that if rape complainants can put their evidence to a jury, they have a good likelihood of securing a conviction."

Ash Patel, Program Head (Justice), Nuffield Foundation, said, "There is undoubtedly a crisis in how serious sexual assault and rape cases are dealt with by the criminal justice system. However, this ground-breaking study clearly shows that those problems neither start nor end with juries.

Contrary to many people's views, this study suggests that over time juries have not been overly lenient in their decisions in rape cases, convicting more often than acquitting and returning notably high rates of guilty verdicts in recent years."

Earlier research by Professor Thomas examined jury rape conviction rates in 2006–2008. Professor Thomas has also conducted research with real jurors at court that indicated jurors in England and Wales do not routinely believe false assumptions about rape and rape complainants.

**More information:** Juries, Rape and Sexual Offences in the Crown Court 2007–21: [www.ucl.ac.uk/judicial-institu ... ript fro clr.doc.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/judicial-institu...ript_fro_clr.doc.pdf)

Provided by University College London

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