



The Faces Behind the Data: Missing Children Trends (2023-2025)

By: Lindsay Goff

Project Overview

The purpose of this project is to examine demographic patterns among missing children in the United States between 2023 and 2025. I chose this topic because of growing concerns surrounding disparities in both the frequency of missing-child cases and the level of public awareness they receive. In particular, Native American and African American children are disproportionately represented among missing cases, yet often receive significantly less media attention and public visibility compared to White/Caucasian children. These disparities raise important questions about equity, response systems, and community protection.

This project analyzes missing-children trends using demographic variables including age, gender, ethnicity, and state, with the goal of identifying patterns that may help illuminate which groups are most vulnerable. Data was collected from national missing-person sources and aggregated to understand year-to-year trends, demographic shifts, and geographic differences.



Objectives

- Identify demographic patterns among missing children from 2023–2025 across age, gender, ethnicity, and state.
- Examine disparities in missing-child cases, with specific attention to Native American and African American children who may be disproportionately affected.
- Analyze geographic variation to determine which states and regions report higher numbers of missing children and potential demographic clusters.
- Evaluate visibility and representation, highlighting potential gaps in attention or coverage across different demographic groups.

Data Sources

- Annie E. Casey Foundation Data Center. Child Population by Race and Ethnicity. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/103-child-population-by-race-and-ethnicity#detailed/1/any/false/1096,2545,1095,2048,574,1729,37,871,870,573/72,66,67,8367,69,70,71,12/423,424>
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2024 NCIC Missing and Unidentified Person Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/cjis/2024-ncic-missing-and-unidentified-person-statistics.pdf/view>
- National Missing and Unidentified Persons System. NAMUS Dashboard. Retrieved from <https://www.namus.gov/Dashboard#/>
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. 2023 Our Impact Report. Retrieved from <https://www.missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/2023-ncmec-our-impact.pdf> NCMEC+1
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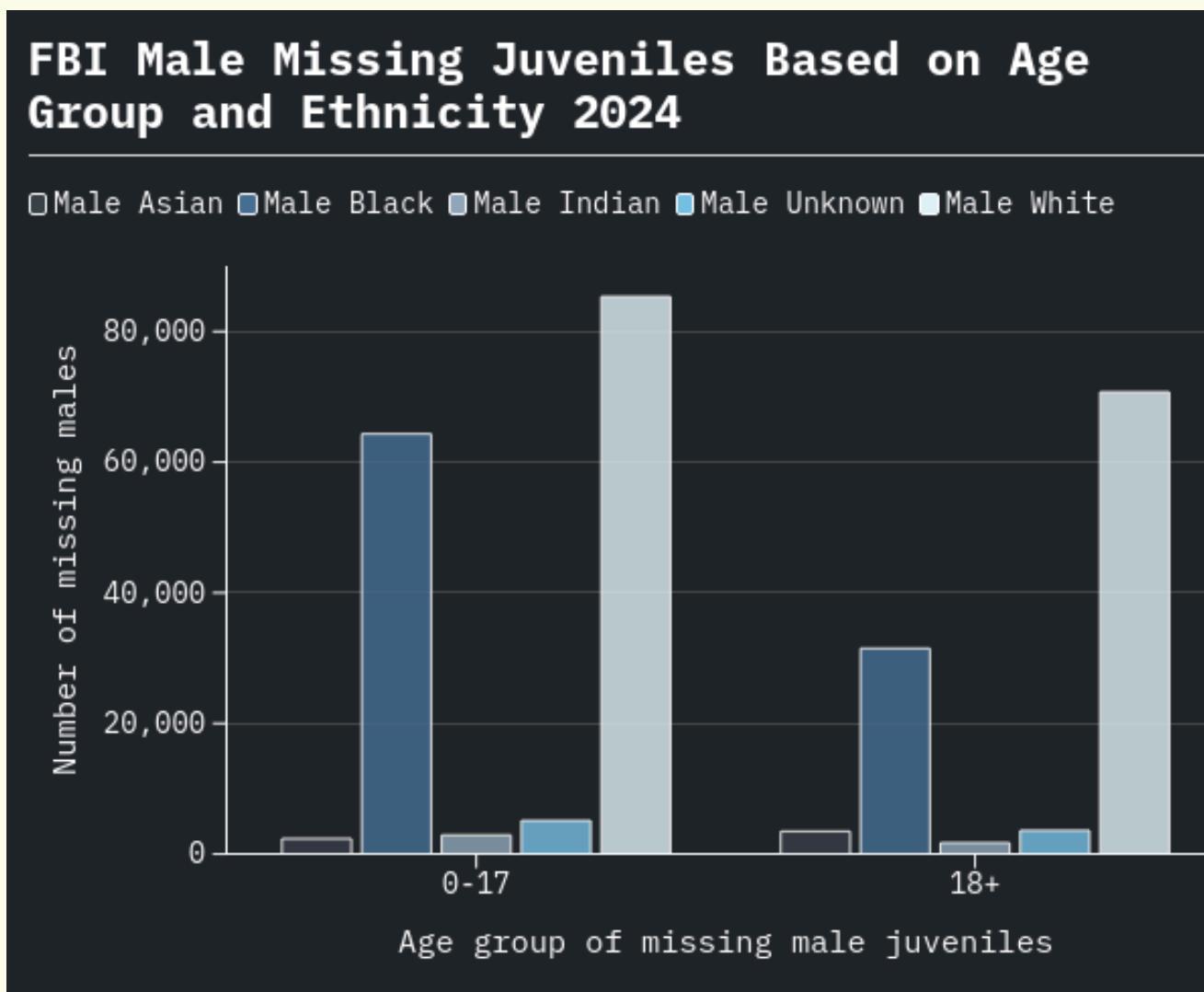


Questions

- Which age groups have the highest rates of missing children between 2023-2025?
- Which ethnic groups have seen the largest increases or disparities in missing-child cases?
- How do missing-child numbers for Native American and African American children compare to White/Caucasian children?
- Which states report the highest counts or consistent patterns in missing children?
- Do specific states report higher missing-child rates among certain ethnic or age groups?
- Did any demographic group show a significant increase or decline over time?

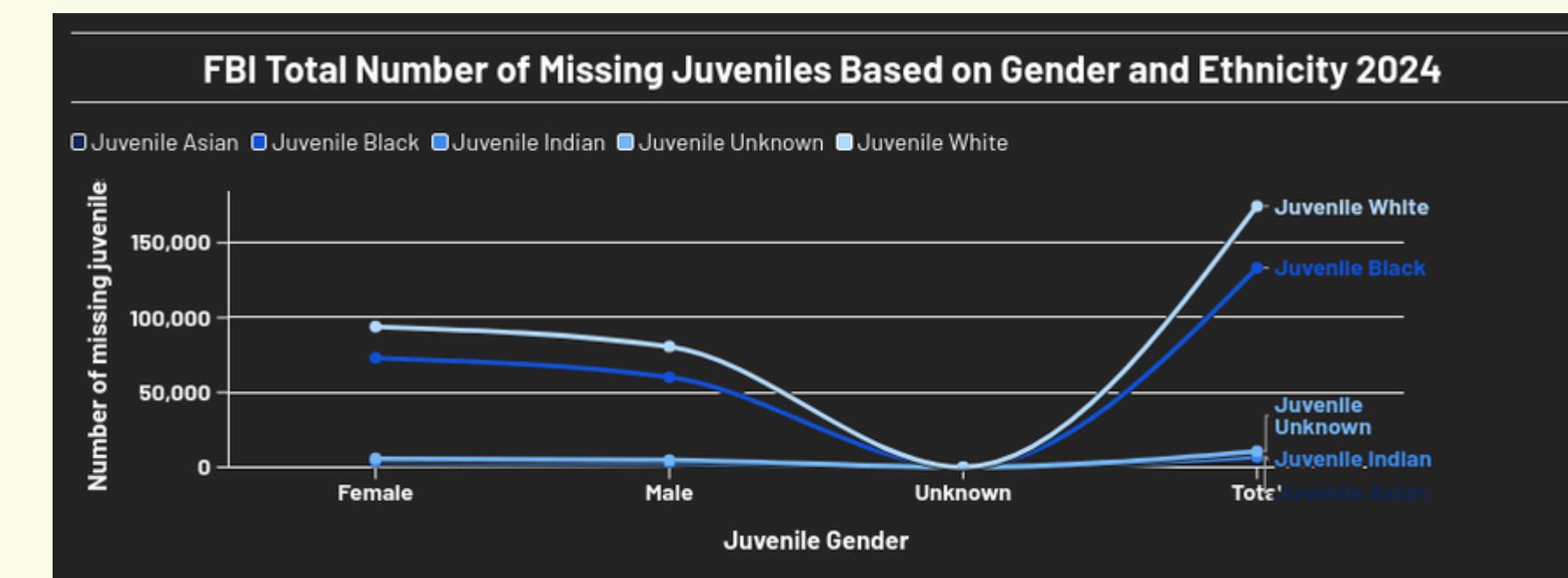
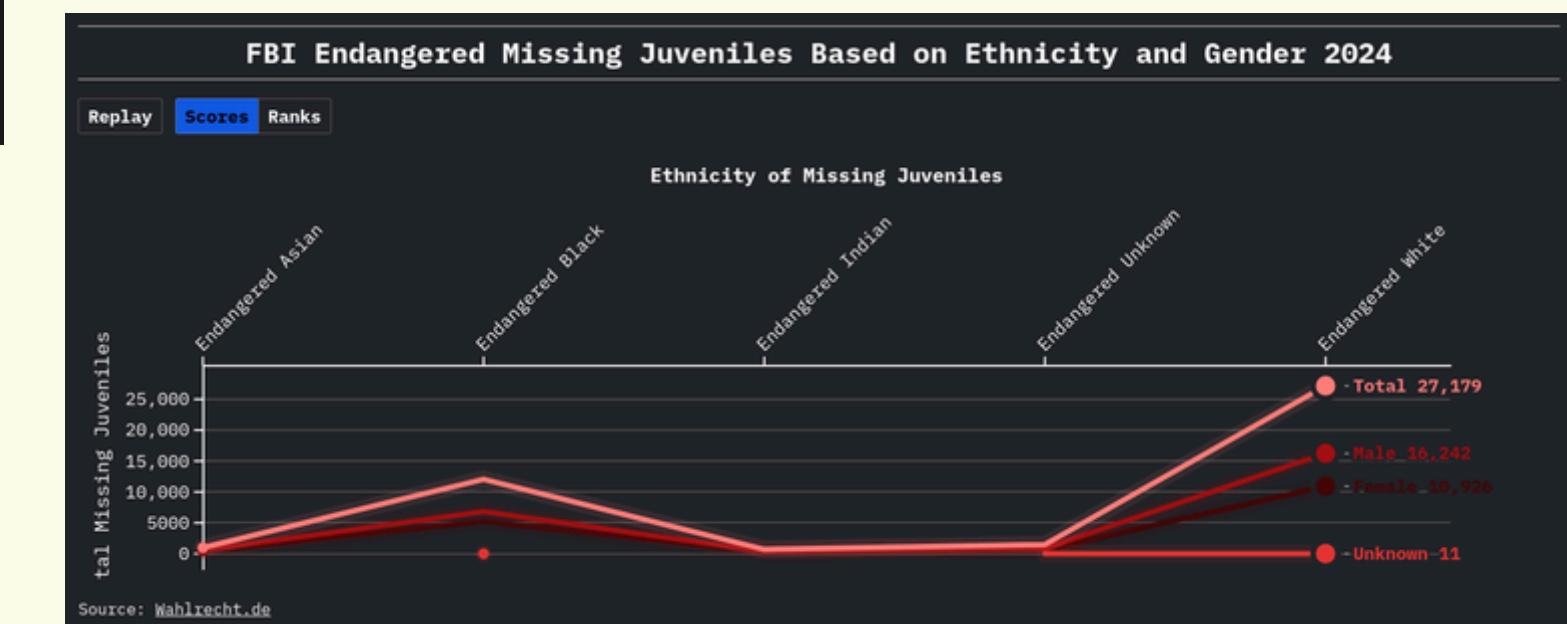


Federal Bureau of Investigation's Database



I began my project by analyzing data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's 2024 NCIC Missing and Unidentified Person Statistics. However, I quickly discovered a major limitation: Hispanic/Latino individuals were not included as a separate demographic category. When I looked back at earlier datasets, I found that this exclusion extended as far back as 2018.

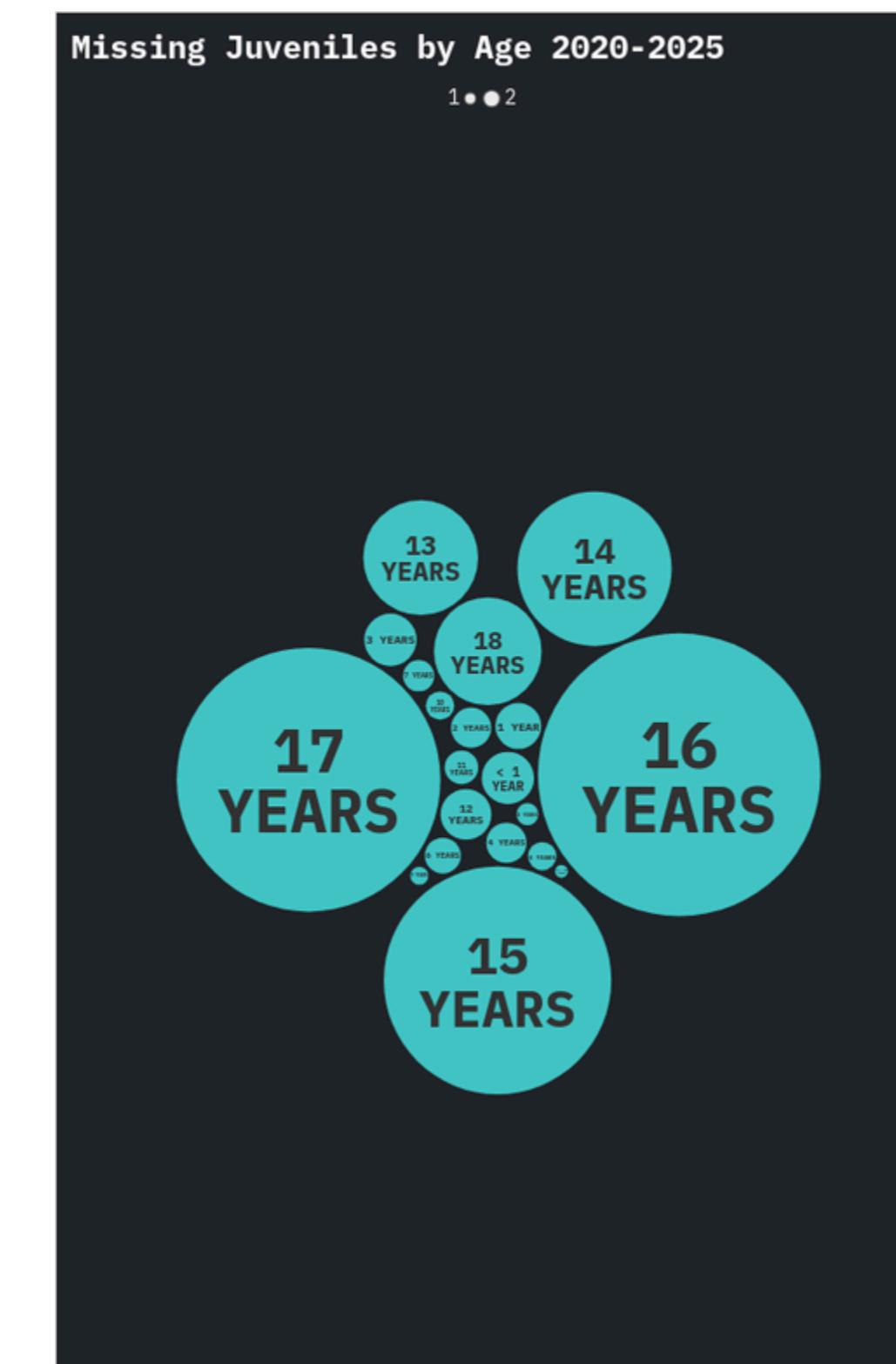
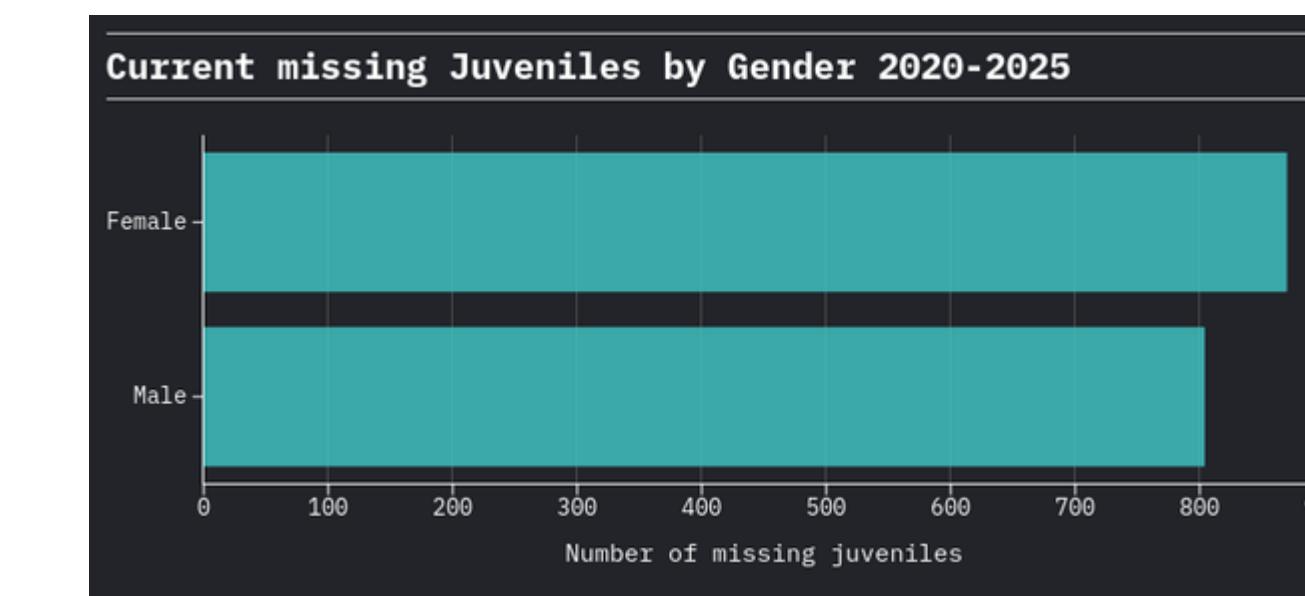
Because Hispanic/Latino children make up a significant portion of the U.S. population, their absence in the dataset presents a substantial gap and limits the fairness and completeness of any ethnicity-based analysis. Despite this, I continued exploring the available FBI data in order to understand the trends it could still reliably show, while also acknowledging the demographic groups that were missing from the record.



“Name Us” Database

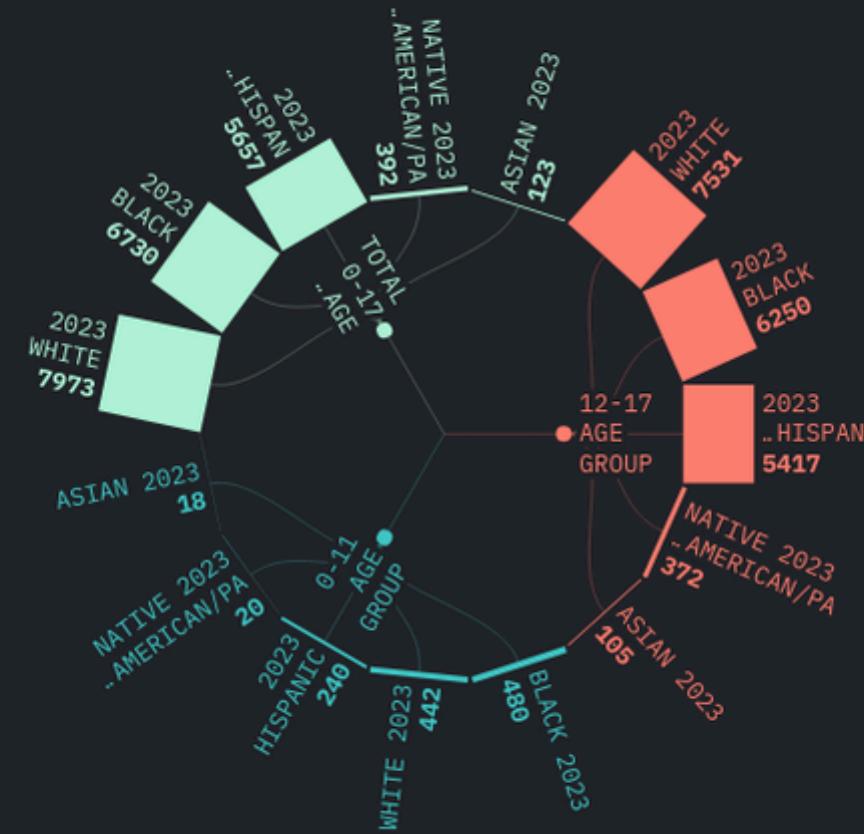


I used the NamUs (National Missing and Unidentified Persons System) database because it offered a broader and more flexible set of filters than the initial FBI source. Through NamUs, I was able to filter cases by state, age, ethnicity, gender, and date last seen, which allowed for a more detailed breakdown of missing juveniles across different demographic groups. However, one limitation of the NamUs database is that it only provides information on currently missing juveniles. Because of this, I focused my analysis on cases listed as missing from 2020 through 2025, using all available active records for those years to identify patterns and trends.



“Missing Kids’ Database

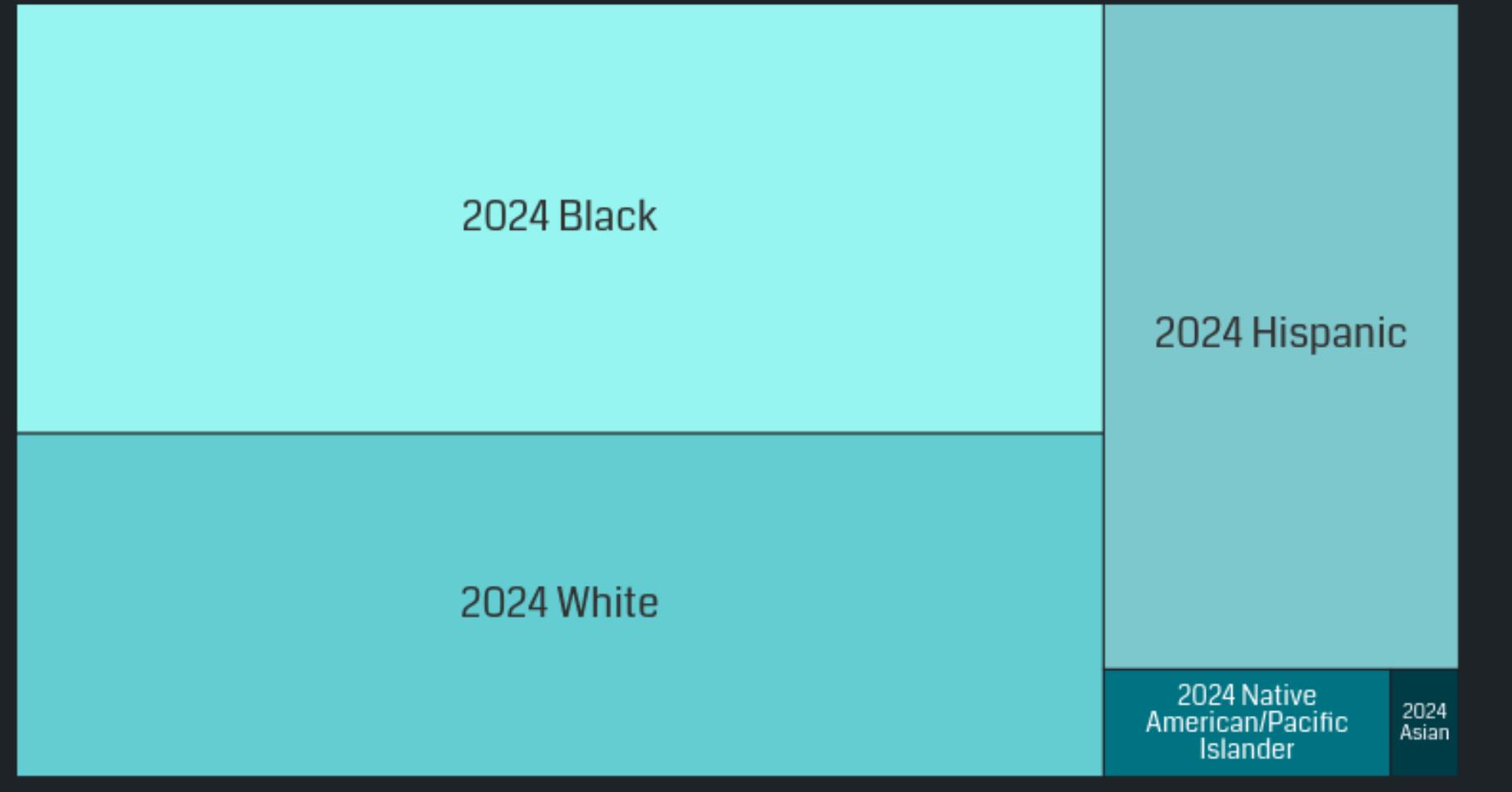
Missing Juveniles Based on Age Group and Ethnicity 2023



This analysis focuses on missing children reported between 2023 and 2024, examining cases by age, ethnicity, and overall totals. The dataset offered a clearer look at reported missing juveniles and allowed for a more detailed breakdown of ethnicity—including Hispanic/Latino children, who are often missing from federal datasets such as the FBI NCIC reports.

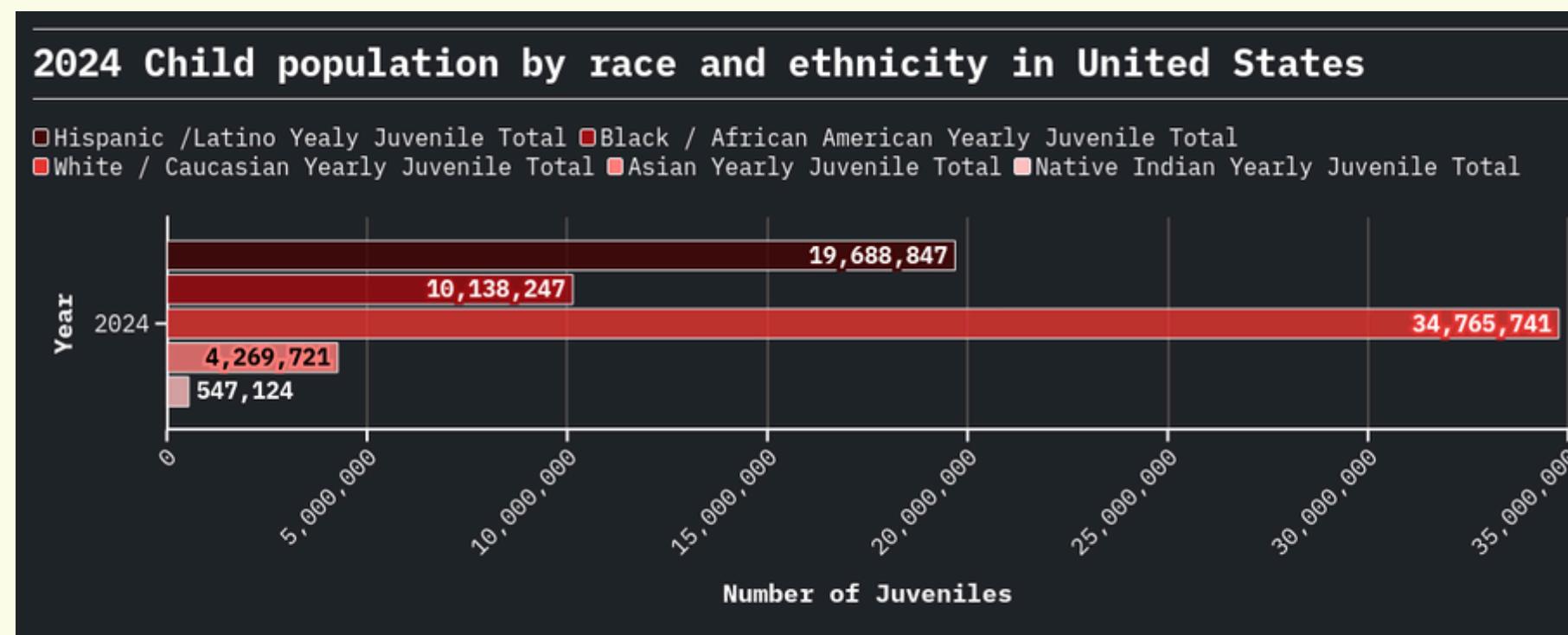
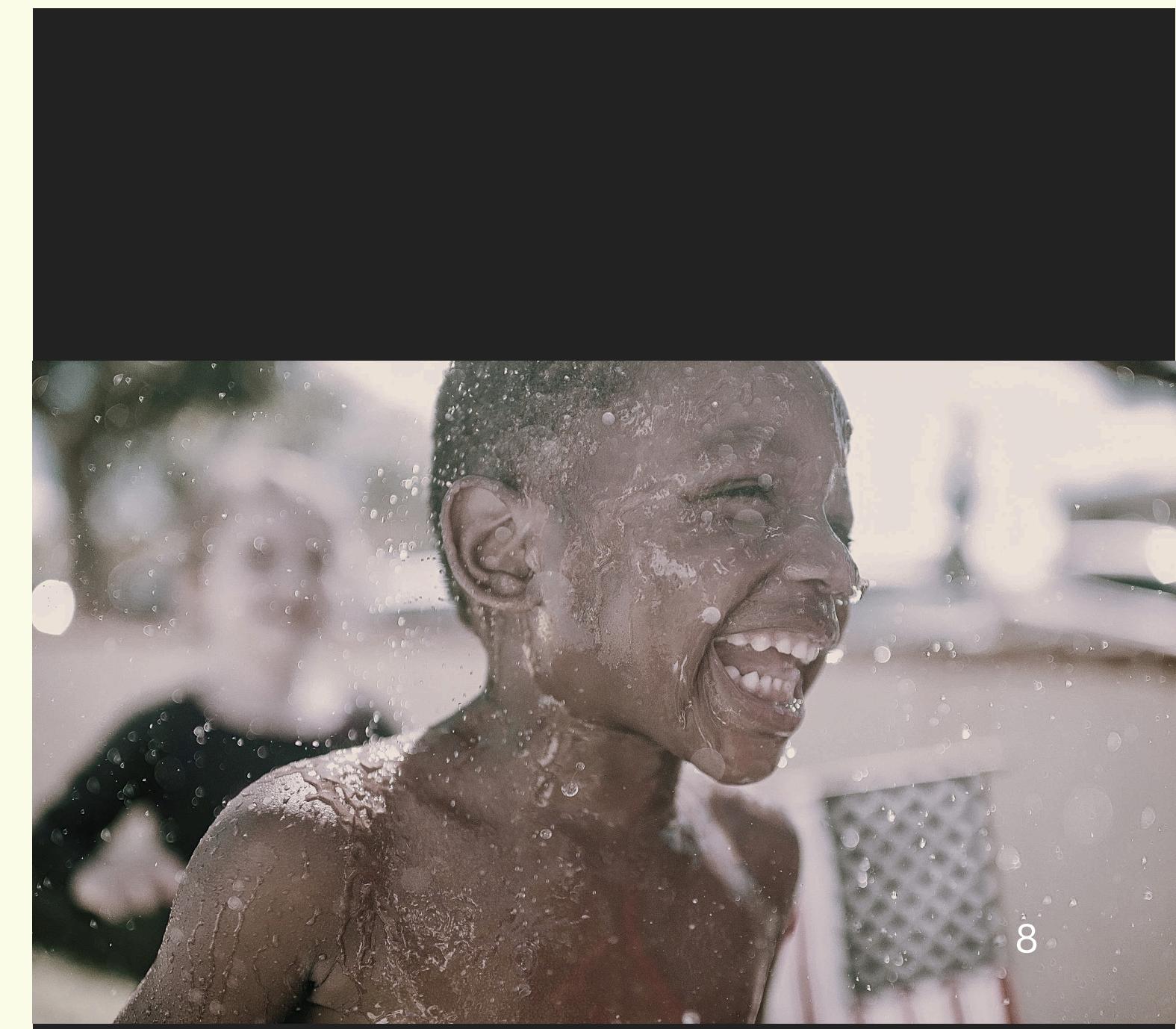
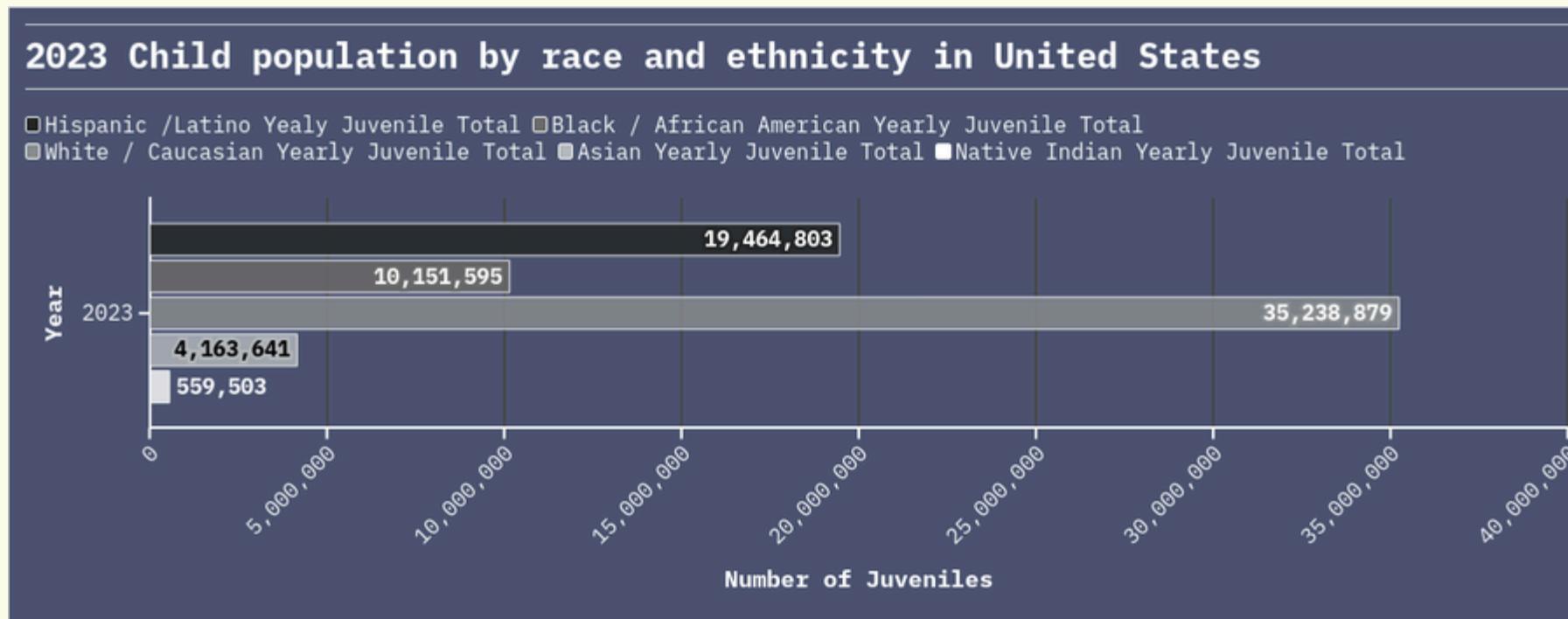
Missing Juvenile Based on Age Group and Ethnicity 2024

□ 2024 Asian □ 2024 Native American/Pacific Islander □ 2024 Hispanic □ 2024 White □ 2024 Black



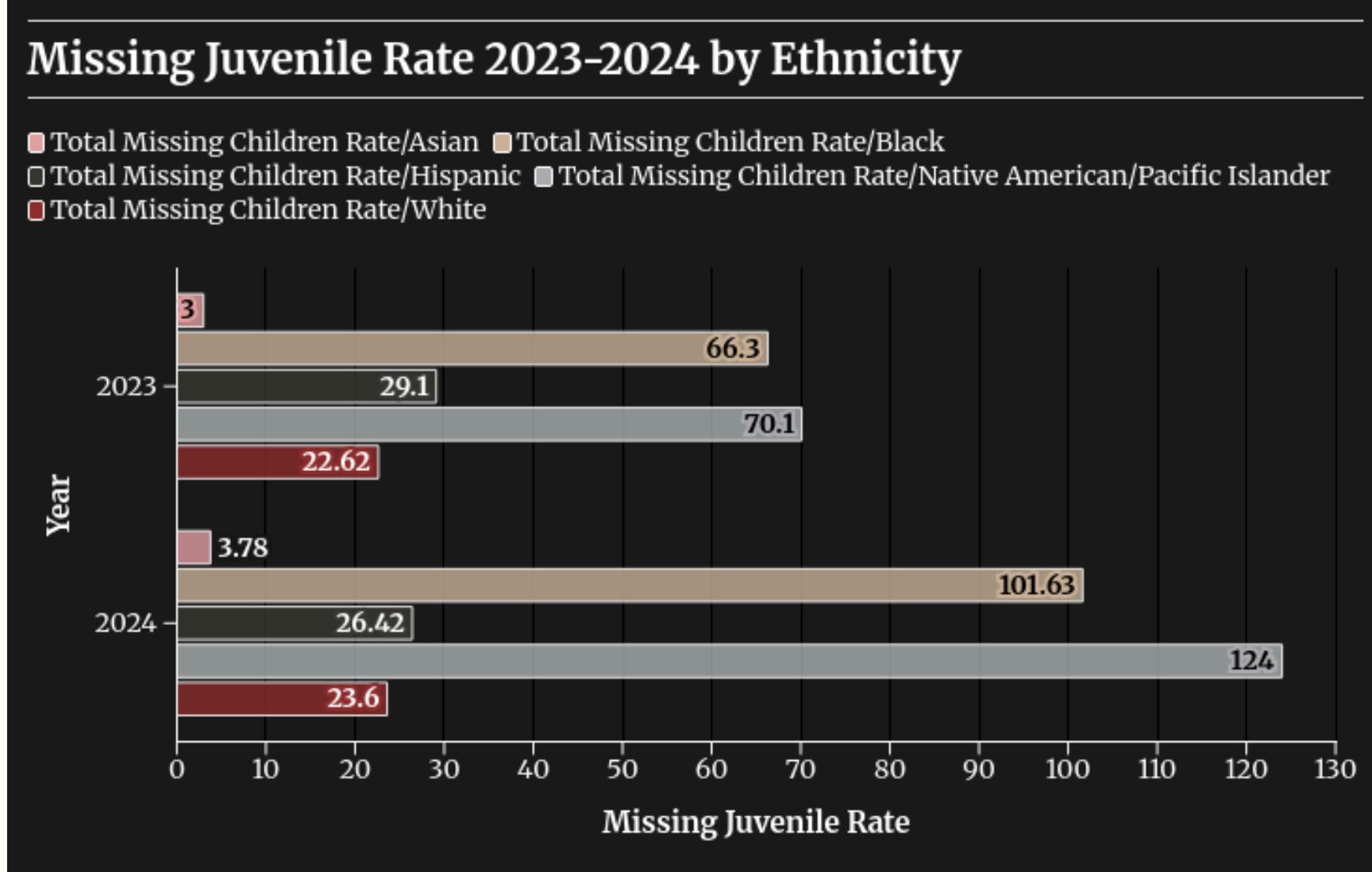
‘Kids Count Data Center’ Dataset

To strengthen the context and accuracy of my analysis, I expanded my research to include the total child population by ethnicity for the years 2023–2024. Incorporating population data allowed me to calculate missing-child rates rather than relying solely on raw counts. This provided a clearer, more meaningful understanding of disparities across ethnic groups and improved the overall insight and validity of my findings.



Missing Juvenile Rate

To deepen my analysis, I incorporated child population data from the Kids Count Data Center and combined it with missing-child counts from the Missing Kids Database. Using the formula $(\text{Missing Children} : \text{Total Children in that Ethnic Group}) \times 100,000$, I calculated the missing juvenile rate for each ethnicity. This approach allowed me to move beyond raw totals and identify which groups are disproportionately affected. The rate-based analysis provided clearer insight into underlying disparities and highlighted the ethnicities experiencing the highest impact.



Conclusion

Analysis of missing children from 2023-2025 revealed clear and concerning disparities across age, gender, and ethnicity. Adolescents aged 12-17 consistently accounted for the majority of missing juvenile cases across all demographic categories. Gender patterns showed higher missing rates among females, particularly in older age groups.

When adjusted for population, the ethnic disparities became even more pronounced. Using the rate formula $\text{Missing Children} / \text{Total Children in Group} \times 100,000$, the data showed:

- Native American/Pacific Islander children had the highest missing rate, increasing from 70.1 per 100,000 in 2023 to 124 per 100,000 in 2024, making them the most disproportionately affected population.
- Black children also showed consistently elevated rates, rising from 66.3 to 101.63 per 100,000, reflecting a significant and growing burden.
- Hispanic/Latino children, once properly included through external dataset sources, showed moderate rates (29.1 → 26.42 per 100,000) that are underrepresented in federal databases like NCIC.
- White and Asian children had the lowest rates, with Asian youth consistently at the bottom (3.0 → 3.78 per 100,000).

These findings highlight not only the severity of missing child cases among Native American and Black communities, but also the gaps and inconsistencies in data reporting—particularly the absence of Hispanic ethnicity in federal systems. Overall, population-adjusted rates made it clear which groups are disproportionately affected and helped reveal underlying disparities that raw totals alone concealed.

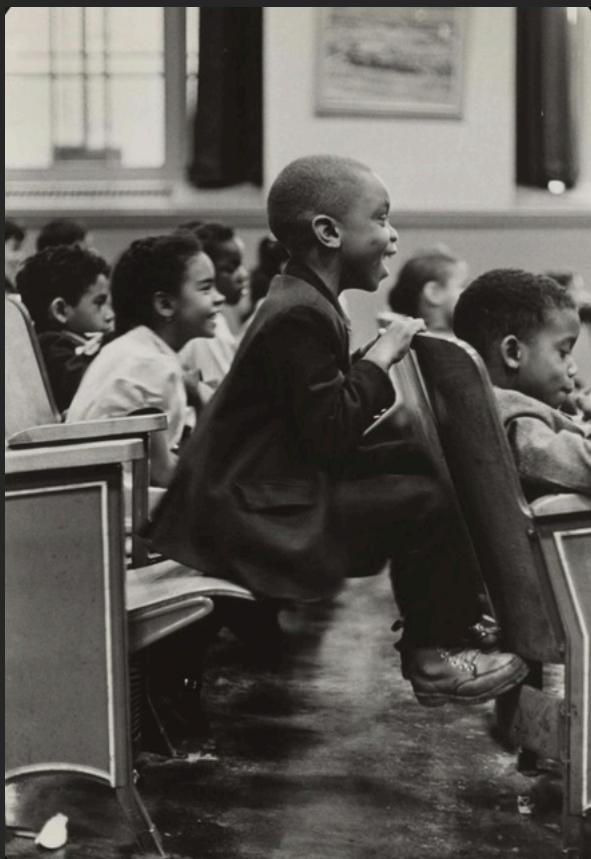




Proposed solutions

Improve National Data Reporting Standards

- Federal systems like NCIC must require ethnicity categories that include Hispanic/Latino children, along with more specific Indigenous classifications.
- Standardized demographic reporting would allow for more accurate tracking, resource allocation, and identification of trends. Increase Targeted Prevention Resources



Strengthen Media Coverage and Awareness

- Media outlets should adopt equitable reporting standards for missing children, ensuring all cases—especially those involving Native American, Black, and Hispanic youth—receive appropriate visibility.
- Public awareness campaigns should highlight populations with the highest risk.



Expand State and Tribal Collaboration

- Encourage partnerships between state law enforcement, Tribal agencies, and national organizations to ensure cases are reported, uploaded, and updated consistently.
- Support Tribal AMBER Alert systems and cross-jurisdictional communication.

