

55 facts about mass incarceration

The Prison Policy Initiative is a research and activist organization focused on issues related to mass incarceration. Below we list some of the most important statistics about the U.S. criminal legal system, for use in your reporting. (All data below are the most recent statistics available as of March 2026. Statistics before 2018 are noted.) You can see all of these statistics and more on our website at www.prisonpolicy.org. You can also write to us with questions at PO Box 127, Northampton, MA 01061.

The big picture

- Number of people locked up in the U.S. on any given day: **2 million**
- Number of women locked up in the U.S. on any given day: 190,600
- Number of people in state and federal prisons: 1.3 million
- Number of people in local jails (under local jurisdiction): 546,000
- Incarcerated people held in a private prison or jail: 8%
- U.S. incarceration rate: 614 per 100,000 people (the highest of any country in the world)
 - State with the highest incarceration rate: Louisiana (1,067 per 100,000 people)
 - State with the lowest incarceration rate: Massachusetts (241 per 100,000 people)

Facts about prisons (state and federal)

- Over the last 50 years the state + federal prison population has grown by about 540%
- Prison incarceration rate for:
 - Black people: 1,096 per 100,000 people
 - White people: 214 per 100,000 people
- Of people in state prisons (2016):
 - The average person has been arrested 9 times
 - 68% were 18 or younger at the time of their first arrest
 - 33% had a parent incarcerated while they were kids
 - 12% were homeless before age 18
 - 22% were homeless or housing insecure shortly before incarceration
 - 42% received public assistance before age 18
 - 19% lived in public housing before age 18
 - 40% have a physical or intellectual disability
- Percent of people in state prisons at the end of 2021 who had already served over 10 years: 23%
- Percent of people in state and federal prison who have been diagnosed with a mental illness: 37% (2017)
 - With a substance use disorder: 49% (2016)
- Other chronic illnesses more common in prison than in the general U.S. population: diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, hep C, heart disease, asthma (2016)
- Unemployment rate of formerly inc. people: 27% (2009)
- Formerly incarcerated people are 10 times more likely to be homeless than the average person in the U.S. (2009)

Mortality and aging in prisons

- Percent that state prison deaths rose 2001-2018: 44%
 - Percent by which deaths from illness rose: 27%
 - Suicide: 85% Homicide: 208% Drug/alcohol intoxication: 611%
- Percent by which the national state prison population rose in that same time period: 1%
- Time that each year of incarceration takes off the average person's life expectancy: 2 years (2016)
- Percent of people in prison over the age of 55 in 1991: 3% In 2021: 15%

Facts about local jails

- Between 1983 and 2023, local jail populations grew by approximately 250% (i.e. nearly tripled)
 - Main reason for jail population growth: Increased use of pretrial detention
- Approximate number of people who go to jail every year: 5.6 million
- 80% of local jail detainees are being held pretrial
- Median bail bond for a felony: \$10,000 (2009)
- Average income of a person in jail: \$15,109 (2015)
- Yearly nat'l cost of pretrial detention: \$13.6bn (2017)
- Jail incarceration rate for:
 - Black people: 600 per 100,000 people
 - White people: 184 per 100,000 people
- Of people booked in jail once in a typical year: (2017)
 - 12% were unemployed before arrest
 - 36% had annual incomes under \$10,000
 - 22% had a serious/moderate mental illness
 - 36% had a substance use disorder
 - 23% had no health insurance

Facts about immigration detention

- Increase in the number of people held for immigration reasons (by ICE, the U.S. Marshals, the Bureau of Prisons, or the Office of Refugee Resettlement) between 2025-26: 32%
- Share of federal government spending on the criminal legal system now going exclusively to immigration/ border policing and detention: 13%

Following the money of mass incarceration

- Annual cost of the criminal legal system: \$445 billion
 - Cost of prisons, jails, probation & parole: \$116bn
 - Cost of court systems: \$44bn
 - Cost of policing (civil and criminal): \$203bn
 - Cost of immigration policing/detention: \$54.3bn
 - Costs paid by incarcerated people/loved ones for telecommunication and commissary: \$5.3bn
 - Cost of fines, court fees, and bail forfeitures: \$15.1bn