



Prisoners in 2019

SUMMARY | NCJ 255115

OCTOBER 2020

The combined state and federal imprisonment rate of 419 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents in 2019 was the lowest imprisonment rate since 1995. The imprisonment rate in 2019 marked a 17% decrease from 2009, a 3% decrease from 2018, and the 11th consecutive annual decrease. The imprisonment rate—the portion of U.S. residents who are in prison—is based on prisoners sentenced to more than one year.

Changes in the rate over time

The imprisonment rate rose 23% from 1995 to its peak in 2007 and 2008 (506 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 residents in both years). It then fell back below the 1996 level (which was 427 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 residents) in 2019.

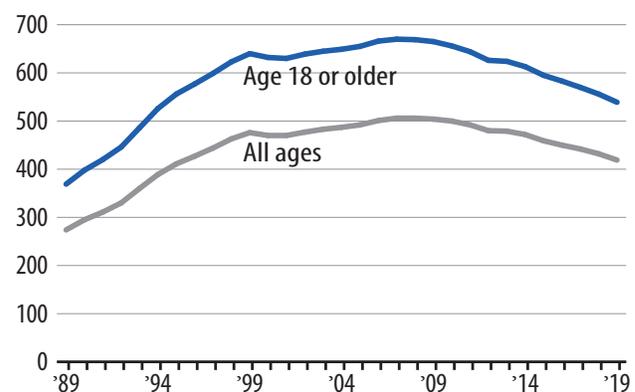
The total prison population in the U.S. declined from 1,464,400 at year-end 2018 to 1,430,800 at year-end 2019, a 2% decrease. This marked the fifth consecutive annual decrease of at least 1% in the prison population. At year-end 2019, the prison population had declined 11% from its peak of 1,615,500 prisoners in 2009.

Imprisonment rate by race/ethnic group

Across the decade from 2009 to 2019, the imprisonment rate fell 29% among black residents, 24% among Hispanic residents, and 12% among white residents. In 2019, the imprisonment rate of black residents was the lowest it has been in 30 years, since 1989.

At year-end 2019, there were 1,096 sentenced black prisoners per 100,000 black residents, 525 sentenced Hispanic prisoners per 100,000 Hispanic residents, and 214 sentenced white prisoners per 100,000 white residents in the U.S. Among sentenced state prisoners at year-end 2018 (the most recent data available), a larger percentage of black (62%) and Hispanic (62%) prisoners than white prisoners (48%) were serving time for a violent offense.

Combined state and federal imprisonment rates per 100,000 U.S. residents, 1989-2019



Note: Rates are based on prisoners sentenced to serve more than one year in state or federal prison.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Statistics, 1989-2019; and U.S. Census Bureau, post-censal resident population estimates for January 1 of the following calendar year.

Imprisonment rate by type of crime

An estimated 14% of sentenced state prisoners were serving time for murder or non-negligent manslaughter at year-end 2018, and 13% were serving time for rape or sexual assault. At the end of fiscal-year 2019, 46% of sentenced federal prisoners were serving time for a drug offense (99% for drug trafficking), and 8% were serving time for a violent offense.

Private facilities and juveniles

In 2019, privately operated facilities held 7% of state prisoners and 16% of federal prisoners. Public and private adult prisons held 653 prisoners age 17 or younger at year-end 2019, down 11% from the 730 held at year-end 2018.

The full report (*Prisoners in 2019*, NCJ 255115), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics are available on the BJS website at www.bjs.gov.