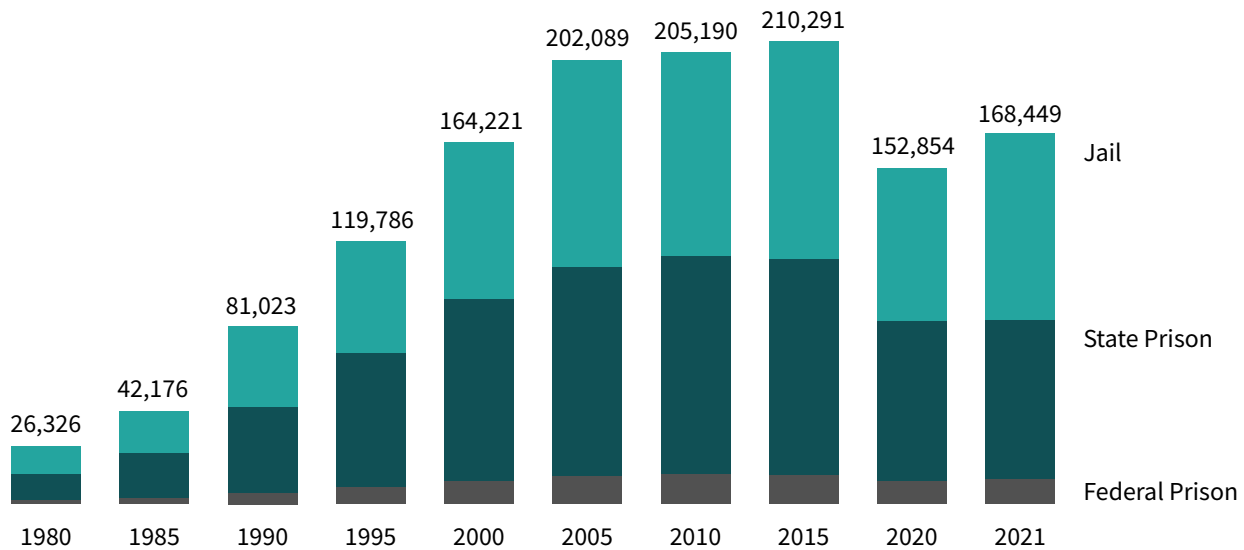


# Incarcerated Women and Girls

Over the past quarter century, there has been a profound change in the involvement of women within the criminal justice system. This is the result of more expansive law enforcement efforts, stiffer drug sentencing laws, and post-conviction barriers to reentry that uniquely affect women. The female incarcerated population stands over six times higher than in 1980. Over half (58%) of imprisoned women in state prisons have a child under the age of 18.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1980 and 2021, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 525%, rising from a total of 26,326 in 1980 to 168,449 in 2021. While 2020 saw a substantial downsizing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this trend reversed with a 10% increase in 2021.

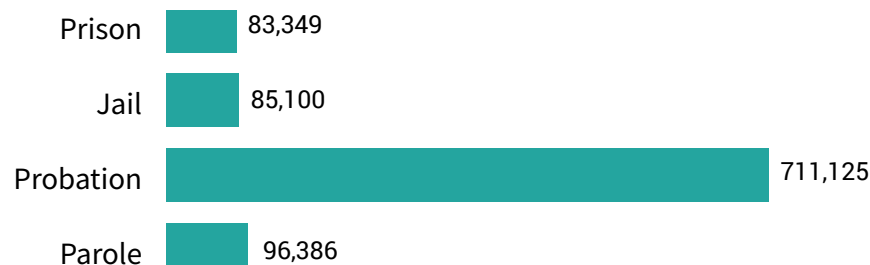
## Rise in Women’s Incarceration, 1980-2021



Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics: *Historical Corrections Statistics in the United States 1850-1984* (1986); *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear Series (1997-2021)*, *Prisoners Series (1980-2021)*. Washington, DC.

Though many more men are in prison than women, the rate of growth for female imprisonment has been twice as high as that of men since 1980. There are approximately 976,000 women under the supervision of the criminal justice system.

## Women Under Control of the U.S. Corrections System, 2021

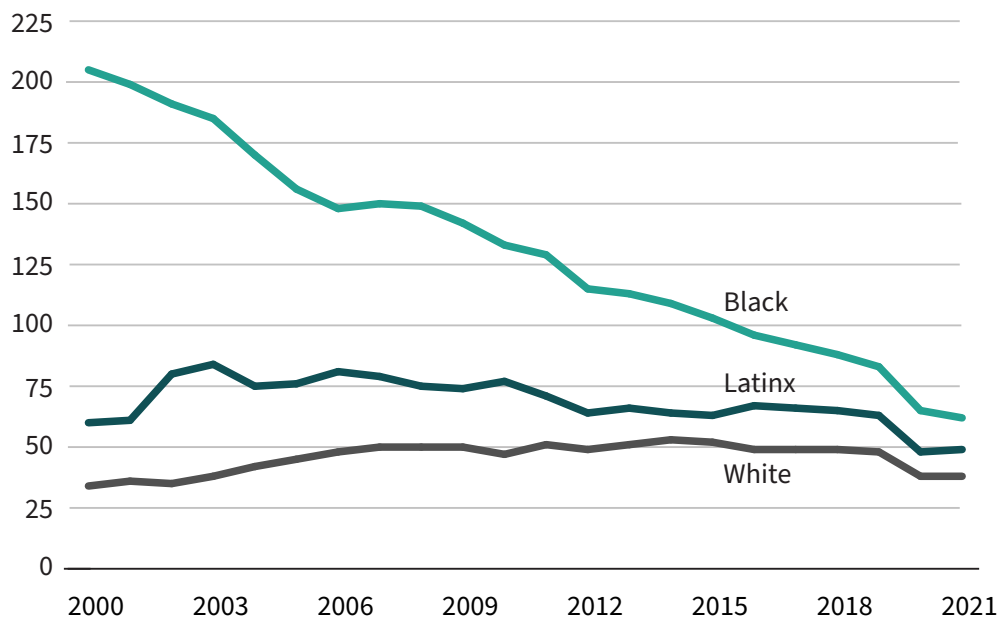


Sources: Carson, E.A. (2022). *Prisoners in 2021 – Statistical Tables*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Zeng, Z. (2022) *Jail Inmates in 2021 – Statistical Tables*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Kaeble, D. (2023). *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2021*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

## RACE AND ETHNICITY IN PRISONS

- In 2021, the imprisonment rate for Black women (62 per 100,000) was 1.6 times the rate of imprisonment for white women (38 per 100,000).
- Latinx women were imprisoned at 1.3 times the rate of white women (49 vs. 38 per 100,000).
- The rate of imprisonment for Black and Latinx women has declined since 2000, while the rate of imprisonment for white women has increased.
- Between 2000 and 2021, the rate of imprisonment in state and federal prisons declined by 70% for Black women, while the rate of imprisonment for white women rose by 12%.

### Female Imprisonment Rate per 100,000, by Race and Ethnicity, 2000-2021



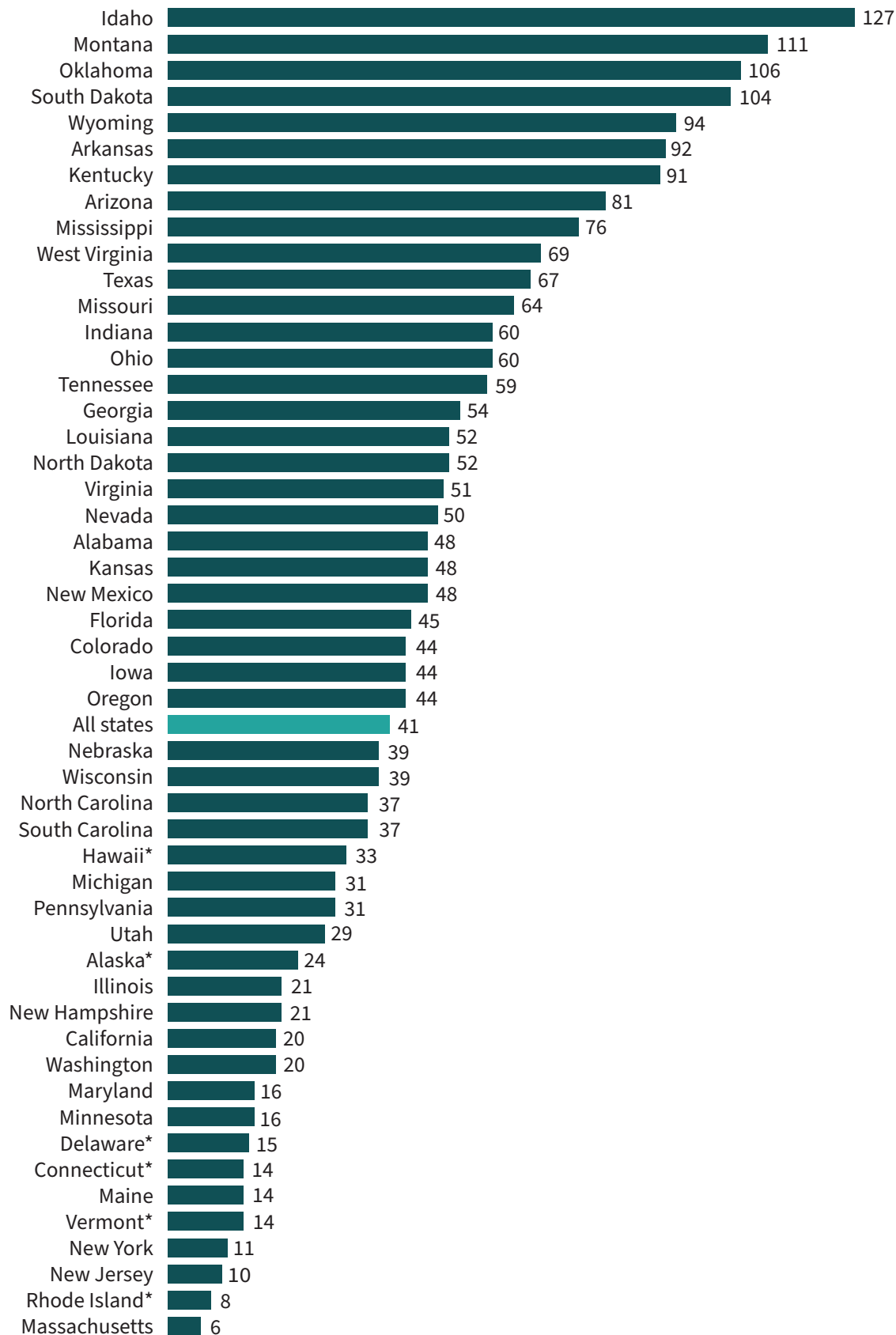
Source: *Prisoners Series*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics

### Imprisonment Rates by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity per 100,000: 2000 vs. 2021

		2000	2021	% Change
White	Women	34	38	<b>12% increase</b>
	Men	449	327	27% decrease
Black	Women	205	62	70% decrease
	Men	3,457	1,807	48% decrease
Latinx	Women	60	49	18% decrease
	Men	1,220	810	34% decrease

Source: *Prisoners Series*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics

**Highest and Lowest Female State Imprisonment Rates (per 100,000 U.S. Female Residents), 2021**



\*In these states with integrated jail and prison systems, data include both jail and prison populations.  
Source: Carson, E.A. (2022). *Prisoners in 2021 – Statistical Tables*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics

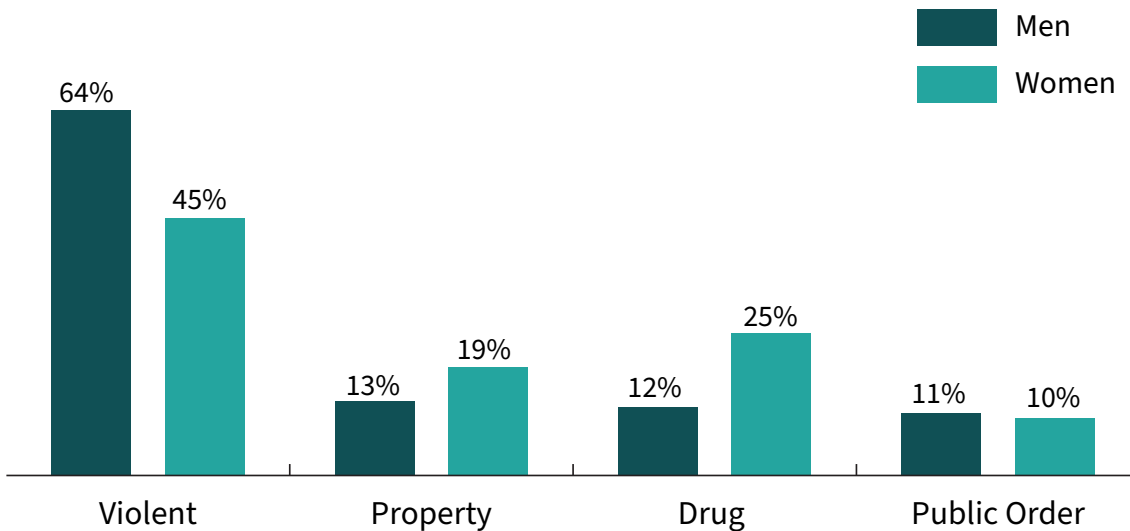
## STATE VARIATION

The rate at which women are incarcerated varies greatly from state to state. At the national level, including both state and federal imprisonment, 47 out of every 100,000 women were in prison in 2021. The state with the highest rate of female imprisonment is Idaho (127) and the state with the lowest incarceration rate of women is Massachusetts (6).

## OFFENSE TYPES FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN STATE PRISONS

- Women in state prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug or property offense. Twenty-five percent of women in prison have been convicted of a drug offense, compared to 12% of men in prison; 19% of incarcerated women have been convicted of a property crime, compared to 13% among incarcerated men.
- The proportion of imprisoned women convicted of a drug offense has increased from 12% in 1986 to 25% in 2020.

**Offense Type by Gender in State Prisons, 2020**



Source: Carson, E.A. (2022). *Prisoners in 2021 – Statistical Tables*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics

## INCARCERATED GIRLS

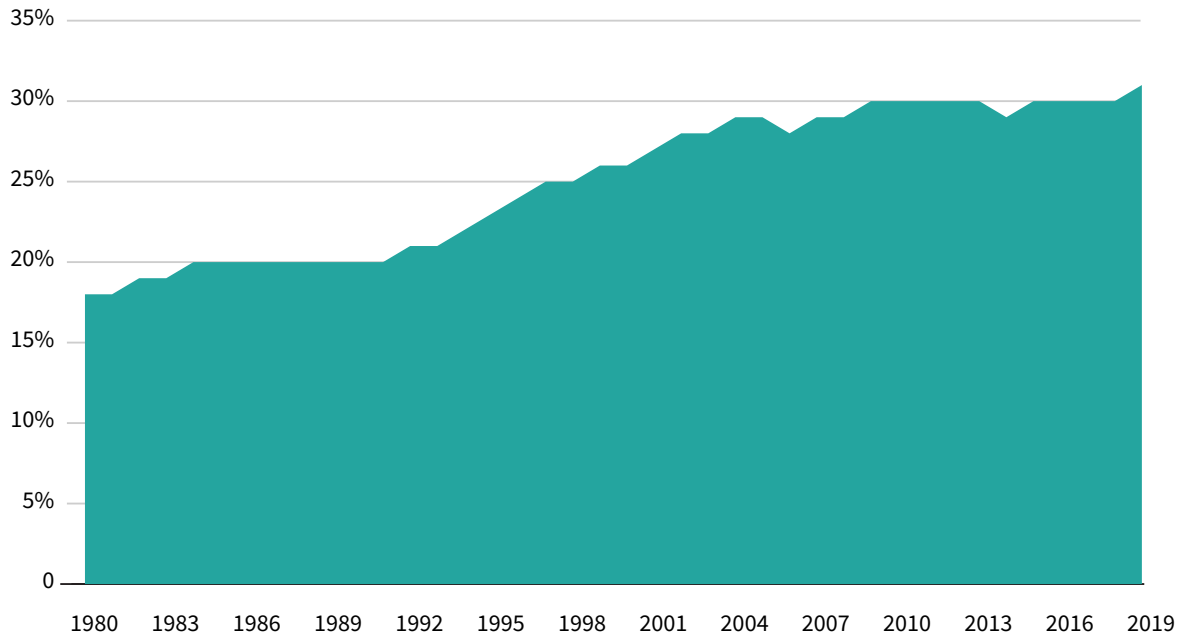
- Of the 36,479 youth in residential placement on a typical day, 15% (6,598) are girls.<sup>2</sup>
- As with boys, girls are confined considerably less frequently than at the start of the century. In 2001, 15,104 girls were confined in residential placement settings on a typical day. By 2019, this figure had been cut by two-thirds.<sup>3</sup>
- African American and Native American girls are much more likely to be incarcerated than Asian, white, and Latinx girls. The placement rate for all girls is 35 per 100,000 girls (those between ages 10 and 17),<sup>4</sup> but the placement rate for Asian girls is 4 per 100,000; for white girls is 24 per 100,000; and Latinx girls is 27 per 100,000. African American girls are more than three times as likely as their white peers to be incarcerated (77 per 100,000), and Native American girls are more than four times as likely (112 per 100,000).<sup>5</sup>
- Though just 15% of youth incarcerated on a typical day are girls, they make up a much higher proportion of those incarcerated for the lowest level offenses. Thirty-four percent of youth in placement for status offenses (such as truancy and curfew violations) are girls. More than half of youth incarcerated for running away are girls. Overall, one-third of incarcerated girls are held for status offenses or for violating the terms of their probation.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2019, girls in the youth justice system were detained after their arrest 41,016 times and committed to out-of-home placement after their adjudication 9,061 times.<sup>7</sup>

### Highest and Lowest State Rates of Confinement for Girls (per 100,000), 2019

Highest Incarceration Rates		Lowest Incarceration Rates	
State	Rate	State	Rate
Alaska	136	Vermont	0
Wyoming	111	New Hampshire	5
West Virginia	104	Rhode Island	6
Idaho	71	New Jersey	8
Michigan	71	Utah	9
South Dakota	71	Kansas	10

Source: Sickmund, M., Sladky, T.J., Puzanchera, C., & Kang, W. (2021). [“Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement.”](#)

## Girls Comprise a Growing Proportion of All Teen Arrests, 1980-2019



Source: [OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book](#). Trends in the number of arrests by age group for All offenses.

In 1990, girls comprised 18% of all youth arrests, a proportion that grew to 31% in 2019.<sup>8</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 Maruschak, L. M., Bronson, J., & Alper, M. (2021). Parents in prison and their minor children: Survey of prison inmates, 2016. Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/parents-prison-and-their-minor-children-survey-prison-inmates-2016>
- 2 Sickmund, M., Sladky, T.J., Puzanchera, C., & Kang, W. (2021). Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/>
- 3 Sickmund, M., et al. (2021).
- 4 Sickmund, M., et al. (2021).
- 5 Author's calculations of girls' placement rate by race and ethnicity based on total US population for all girls aged 10 to 17, found at Puzanchera, C., Sladky, A. & Kang, W. (2021). Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2020. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>. Other rate calculations among youth in this report are based on youth aged 10 through the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction. This age is typically 17 years old, but not in every state.
- 6 Sickmund, M., et al. (2021).
- 7 Sickmund, M., Sladky, A., & Kang, W. (2021). Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1985-2019. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezajcs/>
- 8 OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book. Trends in the number of arrests by age group for All offenses. [https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/ucr\\_trend.asp?table\\_in=1](https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/ucr_trend.asp?table_in=1)