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Correctional Populations in the United States, 1997

By

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BJS Statisticians

An estimated 5.7 million adult residents of the United States were under some form of correctional supervision in 1997. Seven in 10 were supervised in the community, through probation or parole.

About 2.8% of all adult residents of the United States were under correctional supervision in 1997, up from 1.7% in 1985. About 9.0% of black adults, 2.0% of white adults, and 1.3% of adults of other races were under correctional supervision in 1997.

Jails

On June 30, 1997, local jails held an estimated 557,974 adults. Men comprised 89% of adult jail inmates. White non-Hispanic inmates accounted for 41% of the total jail population; black non-Hispanics, 42%; and Hispanics, 16%.

The total number of adults in local jails increased by approximately 47,600 during the year ending June 30, 1997, or 9.3%. The growth rate during 1997 was nearly twice that of the average annual increase between 1990 and 1997.

Probation

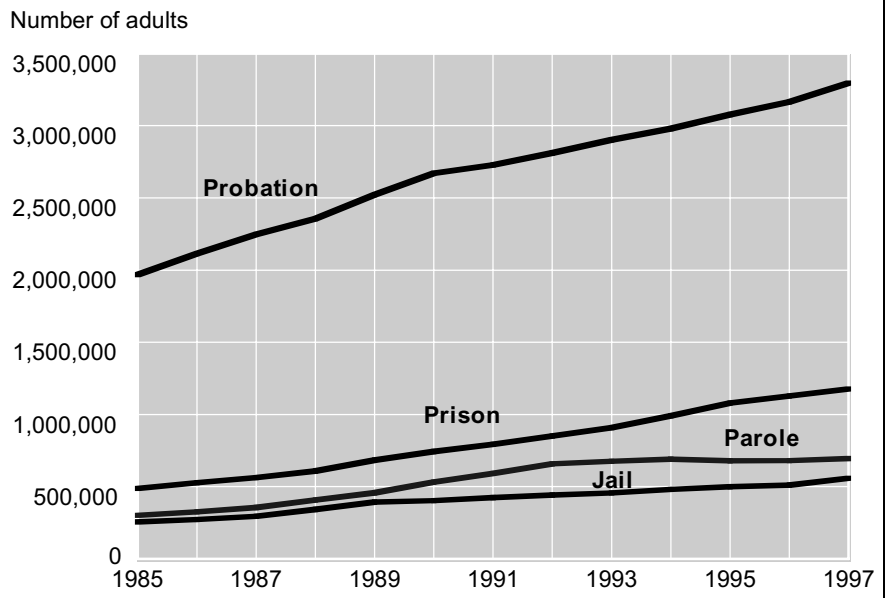
Nearly 3.3 million adults were on probation on December 31, 1997. Probationers made up 57% of all adults under correctional supervision in 1997.

Twenty-one percent of the probationers were women, a larger proportion than for any other correctional population. About 64% were white and 34% black.

Between yearend 1996 and 1997, the number of adults on probation increased by 101,841 (3.2%). From 1990 to 1997 the probation population grew by nearly 600,000 people, an average of 2.9% annually.

About 62% of all adults discharged from probation in 1997 had successfully completed their sentences. Nearly 20% were incarcerated, 5% under a new sentence and 14% with the same sentence.

Adults on probation, in jail or prison, or on parole, 1985-97



Prisons

Nearly 1.2 million men and women were in the custody of State and Federal prisons at yearend 1997. Approximately 94% were men. About 48% of the inmates were white, 49% black, and 3% American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, or Pacific Islander.

The number of inmates in State or Federal custody rose by 49,158 (4.4%) during 1997. Between 1990 and 1997 the prison population increased by nearly 434,000 inmates, or an average annual growth of 6.8%.

The number of sentenced prisoners under State or Federal jurisdiction per 100,000 U.S. residents increased from 292 in 1990 to 444 in 1997. Between 1990 and 1997 the imprisonment rate of white inmates rose 36% from 139 to 189 per 100,000; the rate for blacks increased 63% from 1,067 to 1,743; and the rate for Hispanics grew 35% from 548 to 738.

Among whites, prisoners age 30-34 had the highest incarceration rate in 1997: 476 per 100,000 white residents. Among blacks, prisoners age 25-29 had the highest rate: 4,564 per 100,000.

Approximately 62% of sentenced inmates entering prison in 1997 were new court commitments. Just over a third were parole or other conditional release violators, up from 29% in 1990.

Around 334,500 sentenced offenders were admitted as new court commitments to State prisons during 1997. Between 1990 and 1997, the number of persons entering State prison for a violent offense increased by 16% from 86,600 in 1990 to 100,200 in 1997. Admissions for public-order offenses were up by 37%, from 26,000 in 1990 to 35,700 in 1997. Property offenses decreased by 9%, from 104,400 in 1990 to 94,700 in 1997.

For the fourth consecutive year, the largest number of admissions to State prison were for drug offenses, 102,600 drug offenders were admitted in 1997, up from 102,400 in 1990.

There were 39,431 sentenced offenders admitted to Federal prison in 1997. Forty-six percent were drug offenders, 27% were public-order offenders, 20% property offenders, and 7% violent offenders.

Parole and post-release supervision

An estimated 690,750 adults were on parole at yearend 1997, a 1.6% increase from 1996. The average annual rate of growth between 1990 to 1997

was 3.8%. Among persons released from prison in 1997, around 83% were placed on probation, parole, or some other type of conditional release.

The number of persons leaving State prisons based on parole board decisions declined from 39% in 1990 to 28% in 1997. During the same period, the number exiting by mandatory release grew from 29% to 40% of all releases, and the number whose sentence expired increased from 13% to 17%.

Slightly fewer than 9 in 10 parolees were male. An estimated 54% of persons on parole were white; 44%, black; and 2%, other races.

Around 6% of the parole population was under intensive supervision. Nearly half (45%) of all exits from parole were successful completions, 41% were returned to incarceration. One in every 8 parolees were returned to prison with a new sentence.

The proportion of adults being actively supervised (80%), those being supervised out of State (5%), and the number of absconders (7%) remained relatively unchanged between 1996 and 1997. The number of parolees classified under inactive supervision (7%) decreased slightly.

Capital punishment

During 1997, 256 inmates were received under sentence of death by State and Federal prisons. As of December 31, 1997, the Nation's prisons held a total of 3,335 inmates under sentence of death. An estimated 56% were white and 42% were black. Half had been under sentence of death for at least 6 years and 7 months.

Seventeen States executed 74 male prisoners during 1996, including 45 whites, 27 blacks, 1 American Indian, and 1 Asian person. Between 1977 and 1997 a total of 432 prisoners were executed under civil authority in the United States.

Military confinement

On December 31, 1997, the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy held a total of 2,772 prisoners in 64 facilities. The Coast Guard operated no confinement facilities.

Approximately 98% of the prisoners held by the Army, 87% of those held by the Air Force, 79% of those held by the Navy, and 75% of those held by the

Marine Corps at yearend 1997 were convicted inmates; the remainder were unconvicted persons whose cases had not yet been tried.

Half of convicted military prisoners had committed a violent offense. About a third were confined for rape (16%) or sexual assault (15%). A fifth were serving sentences for drugs. Eleven percent were sentenced for larceny/theft, and 11% for murder. Approximately 8% were confined for military infractions, such as AWOL or insubordination.

Ninety-eight percent of all prisoners held in military confinement facilities in 1997 were men, and 2% were women. About 52% were non-Hispanic whites; 35%, non-Hispanic blacks; 9%, Hispanics; and 4%, other races. Around 98% were enlisted personnel, and 2% officers.

Characteristics of State and Federal prison inmates

The 1997 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities conducted face-to-face interviews with prison inmates from June through October 1997.

The Surveys obtained detailed information about State and Federal prison inmates' current offenses and sentences, their criminal histories, personal and family characteristics, drug and alcohol use, treatment, health care, and prison conditions. State prison inmate surveys were also conducted in 1974, 1979, 1986, and 1991. Federal inmates were surveyed for the first time in 1991.

During the period that interviews were conducted, 1,409 State prisons held 1,059,607 inmates, and 127 Federal prisons held 89,072 inmates. Since 1991, when the previous survey was conducted, the State and Federal prison population grew by 51%.

The percentage of white, black, and Hispanic State prison inmates remained relatively unchanged between 1991 and 1997. Thirty-three percent of State inmates were white non-Hispanic, 47% black non-Hispanic, and 17% Hispanic. The percentage of black inmates in Federal prison increased from 30% in 1991 to 38% in 1997.

The State prison population grew increasingly middle-aged between 1991 and 1997. In 1991 inmates between age 35 to 44 comprised 23% of the population, the same group accounted for 29% in 1997. The median age increased from 30 years in 1991 to 32 years in 1997. The median age of Federal prisoners remained unchanged at 36 years.

Just under half of inmates in State prison were incarcerated for a violent offense in both 1991 and 1997. The percentage of property offenders dropped from 25% in 1991 to 22% in 1997, while public-order offenses increased from 7% to 10% during the same period. In both years about 2 in 10 State inmates were incarcerated for a drug offense.

The percentage of inmates held for a drug offense in Federal prison continued to rise, from 58% in 1991 to 63% in 1997. Nearly half were drug trafficking offenders.

Just under half of all inmates in State prison and a quarter of those in Federal prison were on probation or parole at the time of their current arrest. The percentage of recidivists among State prisoners, those with a prior sentence to probation or incarceration, declined from 81% in 1991 to 76% in 1997. Nearly 43% of State inmates said they had three or more prior sentences.

At the time of the offense, just over half of State inmates in 1997, and a third of Federal inmates were under the influence of either alcohol or drugs. Among State inmates, 37% were under the influence of alcohol, and 33% were under the influence of drugs. Among Federal inmates, 20% were drinking and 22% were using drugs.

Reported drug use by State and Federal prison inmates increased between 1991 and 1997. Nearly 57% of State inmates were using drugs in the month before the offense, up from 50% in 1991. Drug use among Federal inmates increased from 32% in 1991 to 45% in 1997.

Overall, the percentage of inmates who reported receiving drug treatment and programs since admission to State prison declined from 30% in 1991 to 24% in 1997. Among federal prisoners, 25% reported participation in drug treatment or programs in 1997, up from 20% in 1991.

Among those who used drugs regularly in the month before the offense, 35% of State prisoners and 40% of Federal inmates in 1997 had participated in a drug treatment or drug abuse program since admission.

Prior to admission to prison, 57% of female State prison inmates and 16% of males said they had been physically or sexually abused. Lower rates of abuse were reported by Federal inmates, 7% of males and 40% of females reported prior abuse.