

Over the past two decades, the number of state prisoners age 55 or older sentenced to more than 1 year increased from 26,300 to 131,500 prisoners. This represented an increase from 3% of the state prison population in 1993 to 10% in 2013. Between 1993 and 2013, the median age of prisoners increased from 30 to 36 years. The prison population's changing age structure has implications for the management and care of inmates.

Two main factors contributed to the aging of state prisoners between 1993 and 2013: a greater proportion of older prisoners were serving longer sentences, predominantly for violent offenses, and the number of admissions of older persons increased. Both the admission rate and year-end imprisonment rate for state prisoners age 55 or older increased from 1993 to 2013, which indicates that the aging U.S. resident population was not solely responsible for the growth in older offenders in prison.

Increased imprisonment rate of older offenders

The imprisonment rate for prisoners age 55 or older sentenced to more than 1 year in state prison increased from 49 per 100,000 U.S. residents of the same age in 1993 to 154 per 100,000 in 2013. Forty percent of state prisoners who were age 55 or older on December 31, 2013, had been admitted to prison when they were at least age 55, and 60% turned age 55 while serving time in prison. Additionally, 40% of state prisoners age 55 or older on December 31, 2013, had been imprisoned for at least 10 years, compared to 9% in 1993.

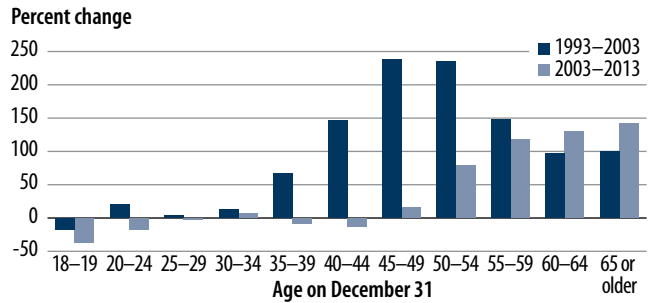
Increased admissions of older offenders

The growth in state prison admissions from 1993 to 2013 was driven by people ages 40 to 54 (up 162%) and those age 55 or older (up 124%). Admission to prison of people age 55 or older increased 82% between 2003 and 2013. During the same period, state prison admissions declined 12% for those age 39 or younger and 11% for those ages 40 to 54. People age 55 or older accounted for 1% of state prison admissions in 1993, 2% in 2003, and 4% in 2013. The mean age at admission also increased, from 30 years in 1993 to nearly 34 years in 2013.

Longer sentences and time served

Prisoners age 55 or older had consistently higher mean sentence lengths, increasing from 76 months in 1993 to 82 months in 2013 across all offenses. In comparison, prisoners

Percent change in sentenced state prisoners, by age at yearend, 1993–2003 and 2003–2013



Note: Percent changes based on prisoners sentenced to more than 1 year under the jurisdiction of state correctional authorities.

Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Statistics program, 1993, 2003, and 2013; Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, 1991; and National Corrections Reporting Program, 2003 and 2013.

ages 18 to 39 were sentenced to a mean of 64 months in 1993 and 69 months in 2013. The mean sentence length for new inmates ages 40 to 54 increased from 65 months in 1993 to 71 months in 2013.

Across all age groups and offense types, the mean time prisoners expected to serve on a new court commitment when entering state prison increased from 29 months in 1993 to 39 months in 2013. Prisoners age 55 or older convicted of new violent crimes received longer sentences and could be expected to serve a higher proportion of their sentences than younger offenders. Prisoners admitted in 2013 when they were age 55 or older could expect to serve an average of more than 182 months (15 years) for new violent offenses, compared to 116 months (10 years) for those admitted at ages 40 to 54 and 55 months (almost in 5 years) for those ages 18 to 39.

Serving time for violent offenses

Many older prisoners in the past two decades were serving long sentences for violent crimes. More than 65% of state prisoners age 55 or older were serving time for violent offenses between 1993 and 2013, compared to a maximum of 58% of other age groups. In 2013, 48% of state prisoners age 55 or older were serving sentences for murder or nonnegligent manslaughter or sexual assault, compared to 31% of those ages 45 to 54 and 27% of those ages 35 to 44.

The full report (*Aging of the State Prison Population, 1993–2013*, NCJ 248766), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics can be found at www.bjs.gov.

