

# Incarceration Trends in CALIFORNIA

## Incarceration in Local Jails and State Prisons



REGIONAL RANK  
**3** of 5 in total incarceration

Total people...

...locked up in California

152%

INCREASE

81,095 people

204,287 people

1983

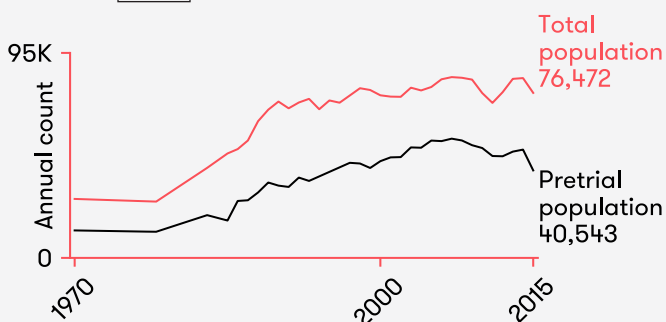
2015

Since 1970, the rate of incarceration in America has expanded more than fourfold, and the United States leads the world in locking people up. Many places in America have begun to reduce their use of prisons and jails, but progress has been uneven. Although the number of people sent to state prisons and county jails from urban areas has decreased, that number has continued to rise in many rural places. Racial disparities in incarceration remain strikingly wide. Women constitute a rising number of those behind bars.

This fact sheet provides at-a-glance information about how many people are locked up in both state prisons and county jails and shows where the state stands on a variety of metrics, so that policymakers and the public can better determine where to target reforms.

### STATE TOTALS

#### JAILS



% change in jail population

SINCE 1970

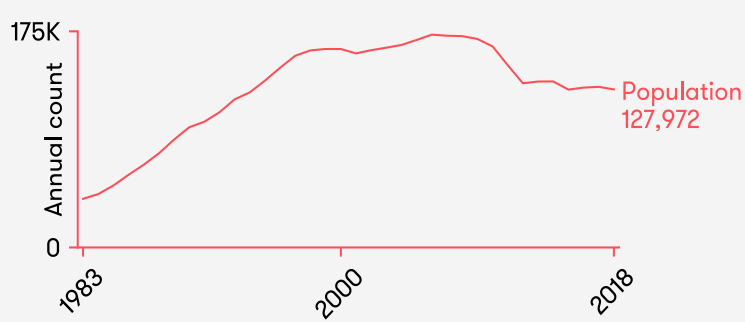
SINCE 2000

180% ↑

1% ↑

Since 1970, the total jail population has increased 180%. In 2015, pretrial detainees constituted 53% of the total jail population in California.

#### PRISONS



% change in prison population

SINCE 1983

SINCE 2000

225% ↑

-20% ↓

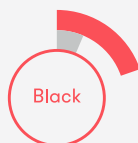
Since 1983, the prison custody population has increased 225%. In 2018, there were 127,972 people in the California prison system.

#### RACE

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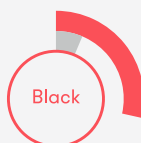
##### JAILS 2015

6% of state pop. | 20% of jail pop.



##### PRISONS 2017

6% of state pop. | 28% of prison pop.



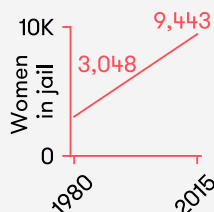
In California, Black people constituted 6% of state residents, but 20% of people in jail and 28% of people in prison.

#### GENDER

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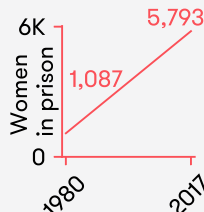
##### JAILS

210% ↑



##### PRISONS

433% ↑



Since 1980, the number of women in jail has increased 210%, and the number of women in prison has increased 433%.

#### GEOGRAPHY

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##### Top admission rates, 2015 (rate per 100K)

COUNTY	JAILS	COUNTY	PRISONS
Mendocino	12,628	Tehama	361
Del Norte	12,591	Kings	335
Siskiyou	11,333	Shasta	324
Humboldt	10,796	Lake	308
Plumas	10,755	Yuba	299

Incarceration is not only an urban phenomenon. In fact, on a per capita basis, the most rural places in the state often lock up the most people in jail and send the most people to prison.

## RACE AND ETHNICITY

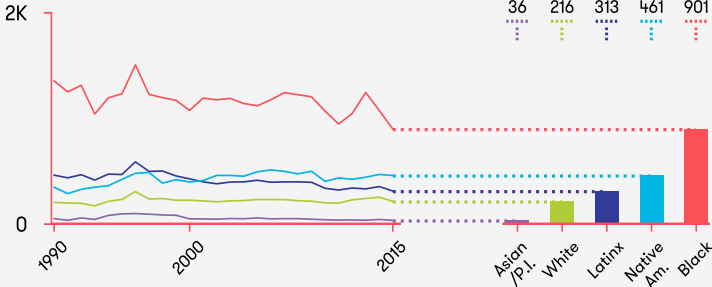


### JAILS 2015

15% of state pop. | 2% of jail pop. | 39% of state pop. | 29% of jail pop. | 38% of state pop. | 41% of jail pop. | 1% of state pop. | 1% of jail pop. | 6% of state pop. | 20% of jail pop.



#### Rate per 100,000 ages 15-64



Since 1990, the Black incarceration rate has decreased 34 percent. In 2015, Black people were incarcerated at 4.2 times the rate of white people, and Native American people were incarcerated at 2.1 times the rate of white people.

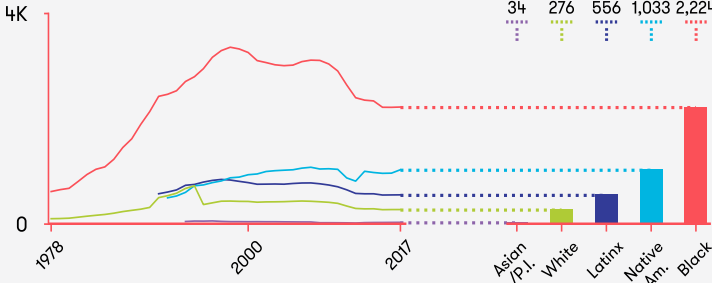


### PRISONS 2017

15% of state pop. | 1% of prison pop. | 39% of state pop. | 21% of prison pop. | 38% of state pop. | 44% of prison pop. | 1% of state pop. | 1% of prison pop. | 6% of state pop. | 28% of prison pop.



#### Rate per 100,000 ages 15-64



Since 1978, the Black incarceration rate has increased 260 percent. In 2017, Black people were incarcerated at 8.0 times the rate of white people, and Native American people were incarcerated at 3.7 times the rate of white people.

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

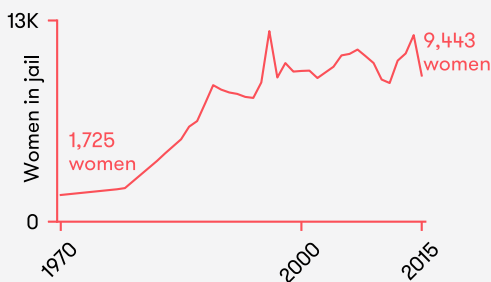
The overrepresentation of Black Americans in the justice system is well documented. Black men constitute about 13 percent of the male population, but about 35 percent of those incarcerated. One in five Black people born in their lifetime, compared to one in 10 Latinx people and one in 29 white people.

Discriminatory criminal justice policies and practices at all stages of the justice process have unjustifiably disadvantaged Black people, including through disparity in the enforcement of seemingly race-neutral laws. Studies have found that Black people are more likely to be stopped by the police, detained pretrial, charged with more serious crimes, and sentenced more harshly than white people—even when controlling for things like offense severity.

Nationally, Latinx people are also overrepresented in prisons and jails, yet common data misclassification leads to distorted, lower estimates of Latinx incarceration rates and distorted, higher estimates of white incarceration rates. Smaller and inconsistent data reporting make it difficult to measure the effects of racism for incarcerated people of other racial groups.

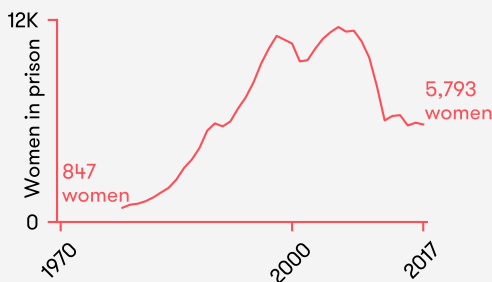
## GENDER

### JAILS



The number of women in California's jails has increased more than fivefold, from 1,725 in 1970 to 9,443 in 2015.

### PRISONS



The number of women in California's prisons has increased more than sixfold, from 847 in 1970 to 5,793 in 2017.

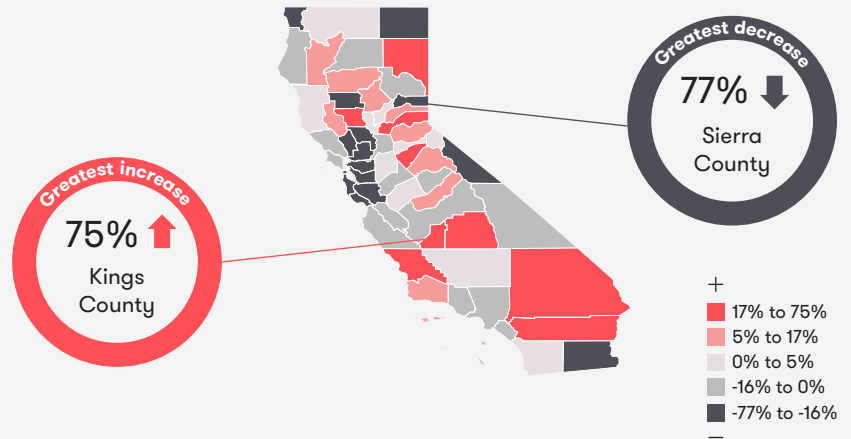
## NATIONAL CONTEXT

Although men's jail admissions have declined by 26 percent since 2008, women's admissions have increased both as a total number and as a proportion of all jail admissions. Women now make up almost one out of every four jail admissions, up from fewer than one in 10 in 1983. Since 1970, the number of women in U.S. jails has increased 14-fold—from fewer than 8,000 to nearly 110,000 in 2013—and women in jail now account for approximately half of all women behind bars in the country.

# GEOGRAPHY

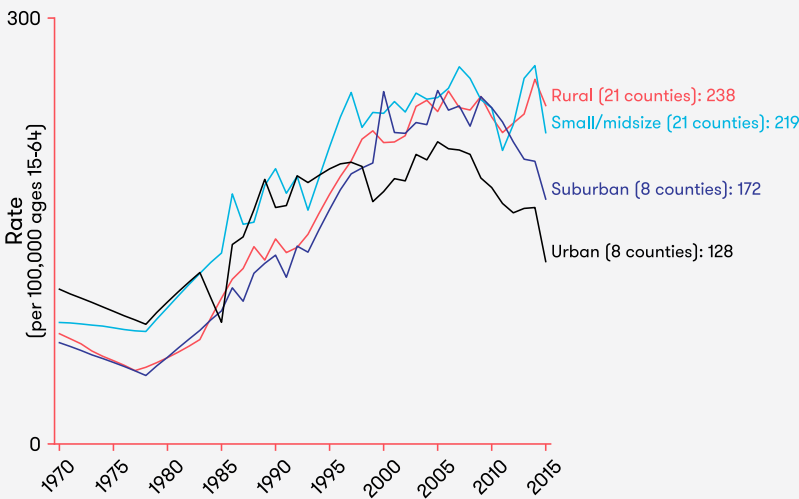
Statewide trends alone do not tell the whole story of incarceration: there is wide variation in the use of incarceration across the state. Today, the highest rates of prison admissions are in rural counties, and pretrial detention continues to increase in smaller counties even as it is on the decline in larger counties. It is critical to examine incarceration trends in every corner of the state, because although the largest counties may have the most people in jails—the highest rates of incarceration are in smaller cities and rural counties.

## % change in jail population from 2005 to 2015



Comparing the jail populations for 2005 and 2015, counties shaded dark gray had fewer people in jail and those shaded dark red had more people in jail.

## JAILS Pretrial population



Since 2000, the state's use of pretrial detention has taken different trajectories in different types of counties. The pretrial incarceration rate has increased 12% in the state's 21 rural counties. It has decreased 6% in the state's 21 small/medium counties, 31% in the state's eight suburban counties, and 28% in the state's eight urban counties.

Vera's analysis of the urban-rural continuum changes the six categories defined by the National Center for Health Statistics Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties to four. A county is labeled "urban" if it is one of the core counties of a metropolitan area with 1 million or more people and is labeled "suburban" if it is within the surrounding metropolitan area. Vera turns the remaining four categories into two by combining small and medium metropolitan areas ("small and midsize metro") and micropolitan and noncore areas ("rural").

## JAIL ADMISSIONS (TOP 10 OF 58 COUNTIES)

COUNTY	Rate (per 100K)	COUNTY	Annual count
Mendocino	12,628	Los Angeles	156,433
Del Norte	12,591	San Diego	86,116
Siskiyou	11,333	San Bernardino	74,199
Humboldt	10,796	Orange	59,381
Plumas	10,755	Sacramento	56,362
Shasta	9,965	Riverside	49,953
Tuolumne	9,771	Alameda	49,378
Colusa	9,684	Kern	35,093
Lake	9,666	Santa Clara	30,328
Yuba	9,578	Fresno	29,965

## PRISON ADMISSIONS (TOP 10 OF 58 COUNTIES)

COUNTY	Rate (per 100K)	COUNTY	Annual count
Tehama	361	Los Angeles	9,701
Kings	335	San Bernardino	2,891
Shasta	324	Riverside	2,505
Lake	308	San Diego	2,275
Yuba	299	Orange	1,729
Mendocino	270	Sacramento	1,616
Siskiyou	258	Fresno	1,400
Kern	243	Kern	1,383
Mariposa	228	Santa Clara	912
Fresno	225	San Joaquin	864

## JAILS

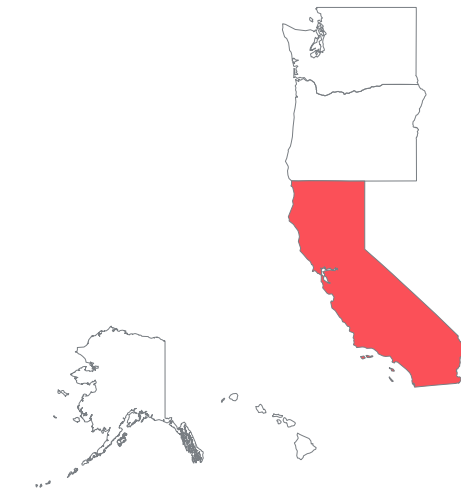


## Jail admissions

Rank	State	Rate (2015)	Rate change ('05-'15)
1	Oregon	6,568	-7%
2	Washington	4,422	-27%
3	<b>California</b>	3,830	-26%
4	Alaska	838	38%
5	Hawaii	169	-12%

## Jail pretrial population

Rank	State	Rate (2015)	Rate change ('05-'15)
1	Alaska	373	10%
2	<b>California</b>	155	-30%
3	Oregon	137	-10%
4	Washington	127	-12%
5	Hawaii	115	-6%



## Jail sentenced population

Rank	State	Rate (2015)	Rate change ('05-'15)
1	Alaska	231	1%
2	<b>California</b>	138	0.3%
3	Hawaii	113	0.5%
4	Oregon	80	-0.3%
5	Washington	78	-0.5%

## PRISONS



## Prison admissions

Rank	State	Rate (2016)	Rate change ('06-'16)
1	Oregon	190	-14%
2	Washington	154	-16%
3	<b>California</b>	136	-76%

## Prison population

Rank	State	Rate (2018)	Rate change ('08-'18)
1	Oregon	569	2%
2	<b>California</b>	489	-29%
3	Alaska	416	-31%
4	Washington	393	-1%
5	Hawaii	382	-20%

## Data

This fact sheet uses data from four U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) data series and is supplemented with data obtained directly from state governments for the more recent years for which BJS data is not yet available, when available. The Annual Survey of Jails, Census of Jails, and National Corrections Reporting Program provides data through 2016; the National Prisoner Statistics program provides data through 2017, and 2018 data is sourced from state agencies. Rates are per 100,000 residents aged 15 to 64. See *Data and Methods for Vera's State Fact Sheets*: [www.vera.org/incarceration-trends-fact-sheets-data-and-methods.pdf](http://www.vera.org/incarceration-trends-fact-sheets-data-and-methods.pdf) for complete details. County-level data is available at [trends.vera.org](http://trends.vera.org).

## Acknowledgments

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## For more information

For more information, visit [www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org). For more information about this fact sheet, contact Jacob Kang-Brown, senior research associate, at [jkangbrown@vera.org](mailto:jkangbrown@vera.org).