

**The New York Times** | <http://nyti.ms/1H8sijn>

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**The Upshot**  
RACE IN AMERICA

# The Methodology: 1.5 Million Missing Black Men

APRIL 20, 2015

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Our analysis of the number of missing African-American men relies on the 2010 census, the government's most recent attempt to count all residents. The census also contains counts of people in prison and in other institutions such as homeless shelters, hospitals, nursing homes and domestic military barracks.

According to the Census Bureau, there were 7.046 million black men 25 to 54 who were not incarcerated in 2010 and 8.503 million black women in this category. The difference between these two figures leads to our headline of 1.5 million missing black men.

Demographers refer to the 25-to-54 age group as prime age, a term this post will use frequently.

Using census data, we estimated that about 625,000 prime-age black men were imprisoned, compared with 45,000 black women. This gap — of 580,000 — accounts for more than one-third of the overall gap.

It is the result of sharply different incarceration rates for black men and any other group. The rate for prime-age black men is 8.2 percent, compared with 1.6 percent for nonblack men, 0.5 percent for black women and 0.2 percent for nonblack women.

The remaining roughly 900,000 missing men are the result of several factors, the largest of which is likely to be differing mortality rates, demographers say. Our analysis did not attempt to estimate precisely how much of the gap stems from mortality; doing so would involve collecting mortality data over each of the last 54 years. But different homicide rates alone appear to account for at least 200,000 missing black men. And many other causes of death — accidents, heart disease and respiratory disease, for example — are also more common among black boys and men than black girls and women or white girls and women.

As a rough estimate, it seems likely that mortality accounts for roughly half of the remaining 900,000 missing men, but we would not be surprised if the true answer fell anywhere between one-third (300,000) and three-quarters (almost 700,000).

After mortality and incarceration, other factors play smaller roles. There are more black men than women deployed in the military overseas, for example, but the difference is not large in terms of raw numbers. There are also more female black immigrants living in this country.

One factor that may play a larger role than many people realize is the so-called sex ratio at birth. As in other demographic groups, more black boys than girls are born. But the difference is smaller than for other groups. For every 1,000 black babies, slightly more are female than among 1,000 white or Asian babies. Over the entire population, the difference is enough to leave tens of thousands — and perhaps into six figures — of fewer black prime-age men than there would be if the sex ratio at birth were the same as for other groups.

It's worth noting, as our main article does, that there is also a gap between prime-age white men and women. This gap is also caused mostly by higher mortality and incarceration rates among men. But the gap among whites is of an entirely different magnitude than the gap among blacks. There are 1 percent more prime-age white women living outside of jail, compared with 21 percent more prime-age black women than men.

The regional data in the article is analyzed in several further ways. In order to ensure that gender ratios for a particular community are not distorted

by the presence of a men's jail, a women's college or military barracks, our regional analysis focuses on the population living in households rather than group quarters.

Our definition of black is based on individuals describing that as their only race, but an analysis of people who identify themselves as both black and as another race shows the same patterns. An analysis of data from 2013 — based on the American Community Survey, which is more recent but less comprehensive than a decennial census — also shows similar conclusions. The Upshot provides news, analysis and graphics about politics, policy and everyday life. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Sign up for our weekly newsletter.

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