

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/02/01/how-many-prisoners-are-in-solitary-confinement-in-the-united-states/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | February 1, 2012

The number of inmates held in solitary confinement in the United States has been notoriously difficult to determine. Most states do not publish the relevant data, and many do not even collect it. Attempts to come up with a figure have been [denounced as imperfect](#), based on state-by-state variances and shortcomings in data-gathering and in conceptions of what constitutes solitary confinement.

A widely accepted [2005 study](#) found that some **25,000** prisoners were being held in supermax prisons around the country. And in the last year, that figure seems to dominate in the mainstream press. The *Washington Post*, in a recent [front-page article](#) on solitary confinement in Virginia, noted that 44 states use solitary confinement, and cited an estimated 25,000 people in solitary in the nation's state and federal prisons. The problem here is that the 25,000 figure (as well as the 44) applies to *supermax prisons only*. It does not claim to account for the tens of thousands of additional prisoners held in the Secure Housing Units, Restricted Housing Units, Special Management Units and other isolation cells in prisons and jails around the country. Yet it is being cited as a total for the nation's overall use of solitary confinement.

An alternative figure does, however, exist and while it may not be perfect, we believe it more accurately reflects the total number of prisoners held in isolated confinement on any given day. A census of state and federal prisoners is conducted every five years by the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics. The most recent census for which data are available is 2005. It found **81,622** inmates were being held in restricted housing. This number was recently cited by the [Vera Institute of Justice's](#) Segregation Reduction Project. The 80,000 figure has also been used by [National Geographic](#) and [The New Yorker](#), among others.

An earlier version of this number, from the Bureau of Justice Statistics 2000 census, was cited by the widely respected [Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons](#), convened by Vera. The Commission further broke the figure down to show types of restricted housing. In 2000, the BJS found **80,870** inmates in some form of segregation, including 36,499 in administrative segregation, 33,586 in disciplinary segregation, and 10,765 in protective custody. The Commission noted that the 2000 figures represented a 40 percent increase over 1995, when 57,591 inmates were in segregation. During the same period of time, the overall prison population grew by 28 percent. (See page 56 of the Commission's 2006 report, [Confronting Confinement](#)).

The census uses the term restricted housing, which clearly includes segregation units outside of supermax prisons. Since it captures where prisoners are housed on a given day (June 30, 2005), it is meant to include both long-term or indefinite isolation (years or decades) as well as shorter stints in solitary (weeks or months). It may include a small number of prisoners who are held in 23-hour lockdown in double cells, a practice popular in some states. (For this reason, some advocates prefer the term isolated confinement to solitary confinement). The number is based on self-reporting by wardens and state corrections departments, so it may reflect some errors and inconsistencies. But prison officials are not, as a rule, known for their tendency to overreport the number of inmates they hold in solitary.

It is also worth noting that the census figures *do not* include prisoners in solitary confinement in juvenile facilities, immigrant detention centers, or local jails; if they did they would certainly be higher. We know that New York's jails alone contain 990 isolation cells, according to the [New York City Department of Corrections](#).

A survey of available data from a handful of states also suggests that the 80,000 figure is likely low, rather than high. Just eight states and the federal government hold some **44,000** prisoners in isolated confinement.

In our opinion, the most accurate possible description of how many prisoners are in solitary confinement in the United States would go something like this: Based on available data, there are at least 80,000 prisoners in isolated confinement on any given day in America's prisons and jails, including some 25,000 in long-term solitary in supermax prisons.

Research for this article was provided by Sal Rodriguez.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He

was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, *Blood in the Face*. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, and *Mother Jones*, and is co-editor of the book *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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A person was in jail since October 14th 2015. for probation violation, (non violent offense) Went to court on the 6th of November (Probation Officer did not show)

The Judge gave 90 days and 2 for 1, no more probation or fines and file closed

The release date should have been November 27th and not December 27 2015..

When that person finally got the court papers they were incomplete with a different Judges name. I tried and could not get a straight answer out of anyone involved. Probation Officer is never available as well as the Public Defender.

Found out that they are not the only ones having the same problem. A parent went to the court to find out about the same error for a family member and said the court clerk told her that 2 for 1 is not for probation violation charges.

They are still only allowed out for 2 hours while the violent inmates roam free.

Rockdale County Jail

911 Chambers Drive

Conyers, Georgia. 30012

Non violent offenders in lock down and let out only 2 hours a day while a lot of violent offenders are allowed to roam free.

80,000 humans being caged in an environment worse than free-range chickens! Many of these prisoners have been validated as gang members are sent into solitary for the safety of the prison? What an incredible joke because everyone knows 75% of prisoners are so-called gang members. So a guard doesn't like you and then you get validated and sent into isolation for YEARS even though you had little or know trouble in prison up till then.

Our country will bear the horrible karma of this silent cruelty for years to come. Those who knowingly profit from this cruelty cannot be considered Christians.

Is this why all those young men have died for? LAND OF THE FREE! Whose running our country? It doesn't take an Einstein to see what the problem with The System is. Let's reform and give our people skills so they can raise a household. Clinics for addicts. What happens when you put a dog on a chain or lock him up in a cage? You create a monster. Did you know it's illegal in some states to do this to a dog? Prison should be a place for Evil People. Those who get a kick of murdering and raping our children and women and men. Our country has 2.3 million humans in prison more than any other country. What does that show for our country. We now raise children with one or no natural parent. Children have to see their parents behind bars so besides the 2.3 million people locked up let's not forget the children who have to enter a PRISON TO SEE THEIR PARENTS. We just can't keep locking our U.S. people up. The prisons also lock up people in cells for 23 hours a day in a cage. That to me is very inhuman. If you don't agree with me go lock yourself in your bathroom for 23 hours and see what goes through your mind. Let's stop the cycle because if you really think about it were teaching our generation it's alright to go to prison mommy and daddy has been there. I sometimes think it's about our country making money I think opening clinics and rehabs and training schools could bring money into our system too. Let's fix our system. Stop hurting our children and mothers and fathers. These are my thoughts on our system. God Bless America and Justice hopefully for all. Let's not forget all are men who have gone to war for our FREEDOM.

PLEASE, PLEASE help to stop this horrible treatment. Solitary Confinement for years on end??? Are we animals? Have we no souls?? Are we so lazy we care not about rehabilitation or treatment any more; we just want to lock them up and forget about them? It could be your son, daughter, mother, father, brother, sister anyone and everyone!! How can this continue? Because WE DON'T STAND UP AND COMPLAIN!! MORE of us have to keep screaming, yelling, writing, emailing, facebooking, twittering, communicating in whatever way we can to every legislator, every Judge, every court. don't stop keep the pressure on until they see that we will not allow our families to be treated this way!!!! I am so frustrated can u tell?

More than Princeton.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/11/chart-one-year-of-prison-costs-more-than-one-year-at-princeton/247629/>

Democracy in cages:

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21134540/vp/46264122#46264117>

Dont forget the Juveniles. Photos:

<http://www.juvenile-in-justice.com/>

Excerpts from

http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/02/03/10309751-for-mentally-ill-inmates-health-care-behind-bars-is-often-out-of-reach

which relate to the cost of jailing the mentally ill:

Richard Bonnie, director of the University of Virginias Institute of Law, Psychiatry, and Public Policy.

There are many factors at work here, but many us involved in this field are convinced that diversion from the criminal justice system into mental health services can alleviate the problem without compromising public safety, he told msnbc.com via email.

Jail diversion options include drug courts, where a substance abuse program is worked out instead of a jail sentencing; mental health courts, where a behavioral contract including drug tests and treatment appointments is drawn up; and sometimes, assignment to a mental health probation officer who is trained to handle mental issues and knows how to direct someone to health services.

Lots of people have recognized theres this population with severe mental disorders that just isnt going to do well in a prison population, said Hafemeister, from the University of Virginia Law School.

Care doesnt have to cost more

According to Fred Osher, director of health systems and services policy at the Council of State Governments Justice Center, people with mental disorders are overrepresented and it doesnt always have to be expensive to divert those with mental issues.

What many systems are coming to realize is if you provide alternatives, then you can reduce length of stay. You can actually have this be a resource-neutral event. It doesnt necessarily require an infusion of dollars, he said. Were spending tons of money warehousing, having people in a revolving door without producing good outcomes.

Were not giving people a pass because they have mental illness, Osher said. Were not being soft on crime. For those individuals that dont pose a public safety risk, there are these alternatives. There are treatments that can be provided.

Also on Up With Chris Hayes a MSNBC morning news program, M. Alexander author of the book The New Jim Crow appeared on todays program which is worth watching for its focus on these issues.

I was going to send the link but it is too soon it should be released tomorrow.

The following The Atlantic Magazine articles title reads:

If Dickens Came Back to America He Would Note Todays WSJ

<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/02/if-dickens-came-back-to-america-he-would-note-todays-wsj/252421/>

Maybe, but I think he would find this information on solitary the most disturbing.

So you have now posted cost estimates per inmate, building costs and have estimated the total number held in isolation under different names. I think its time to get an intern to combine the two stories and come up with a total cost estimate for our nation. Of course this would only be a \$ figure and would not include the social costs and international PR costs. The social costs to communities runs exponentially higher in both \$s and its lingering societal costs not to mention the human suffering of these inmates and their families.

Although the 83 year old Jesuit pries Father Bill Bichse actions were troublesome is he really one of the worst of the worst that warrant such housing? Are we really protecting the main line population or just seeking to break his resistance and spirit? Then there are the mentally ill to whom I would ask is it the right thing to do?

i think that they should stop itthey treated as animals and their not,their humans,,it is a snake pit situation and lots that goes into it are normal but..when they come out their not..we the taxpayer are paying for the way their treated..., and that stinks look at the whole picture,not part they want to get ride of the death penalty, maybe thay need to get rid of the HOLE

sick is it not welcome to the united plane of just the tribunals age cant be fare off if we do nothing bout this may thare be light in the darknes of justice

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