## Data Source

This dataset was sourced from the [Vera Instituite of Justice’s Github Account - Incarceration Trends Dataset.](https://github.com/vera-institute/incarceration-trends)[[1]](#footnote-1) It includes County and jurisdiction level jail data (1970-2018) and prison data (1983-2016).

the total number held in the custody of the state correctional authority (including private prisons) at yearend. Vera collected this data through the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Prisoner Statistics (NPS) Program.

The county and state descriptive data for resident population is from the U.S. Census Bureau decennial census and American Community Survey (ACS). Data for county median income is from the 2013 U.S. Census American Community Survey five year estimates.

This dataset was chosen because of its longevity and recency. In addition, Vera is a well-known organization in area of prison research and the sources for Vera’s data are trusted agencies.

More information can be found in Appendix Exhibit I.

## Limitations

* Since youth under age 15 and adults over 64 are at very low risk of jail incarceration, these age groups were removed, Vera removed these groups from the dataset.
* I deleted 1970-1989 & 2017-2018 because too many nulls would disrupt trends trying uncover (so worked with the years 1990-2016).
* Averaged counties when grouping by state, it's hard to know how using state averages to fill in counties that didn't report affected the numbers. Also, the facilities reported most of the numbers, which might allow for bias.

## Changes made to dataset

* Deleted all columns but ‘year’, ‘state, ‘county’, 'total\_jail\_pop\_rate', 'black\_jail\_pop\_rate', 'white\_jail\_pop\_rate': total\_prison\_pop\_rate', 'black\_prison\_pop\_rate', and 'white\_prison\_pop\_rate'.
* Grouped by ‘year’ & ‘state’, averaging the populations and deleting the counties.
* Deleted 1970-1989 & 2017-2018 because too many nulls would disrupt trends trying uncover (so worked with the years 1990-2016).
* Replaced remaining nulls with 0s.
* Created new variables ‘tot\_imprisoned’, ‘tot\_black\_imprisoned’ and ‘tot\_white\_imprisoned’ by summing jail and prison rates and deleted previous population columns.
* Deleted observations that were only 0s.
* Deleted 5 outliers in ‘tot\_black\_imprisoned’ and replaced with median

**Appendix**

**Exhibit I – Data Sources from** [**trends.ver.org/about**](http://trends.vera.org/about)

Data sources

The Incarceration Trends dataset was assembled using information collected by the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), supplemented with data from state departments of correction when federal data is not available. The dataset, and complete documentation, is available on Vera’s GitHub account.

Prison

Prison Population

Prison population is defined as those individuals sentenced to the state prison authority,

aggregated by the county of commitment. Total prison population count is based on the number

of people held in prison on December 31 of a given year. We disaggregate prison population

count by race and gender. We include six race categories: Asian or Pacific Islander (including

Native Hawaiian) (AAPI), Black, Latinx, Native American, White, and Other or unknown racial

categories.

1983-1999

Only data on admissions and releases are available for the years 1983 to 1999, therefore

population counts for these years are estimates. For each release in a given year from 1983 to

1999, population estimates are accumulated incrementally by adding one to the population

count for all years between the admission year and release year of an individual release record.

Release data from 2000 to 2016 is used to find those admitted before 2000.

County jail population: These data were obtained through the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Annual Survey of Jails (ASJ) and Census of Jails (COJ). The ASJ has been fielded 26 times between 1985 and 2015 and captures data for a sample of a few hundred jails; in 2015, the sample was approximately 800 counties, which included the 250 largest jails. The COJ has been fielded 10 times since 1970—in 1970, 1972, 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1999, 2005, 2006, and 2013—but captures data for all counties. Data for years that counties do not supply data (through the ASJ or COJ) are interpolated assuming a constant rate of change between the years when data are provided. Six states (Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont) do not participate in the U.S. jail survey or census because they run unified state systems that combine prisons and jails.

Total jail population is the average daily population and excludes federal jails and inmates in local jails held for federal authorities, such as U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Marshals Service. Federal inmates are, however, included in pretrial, race, gender, and admissions data because the BJS surveys do not disaggregate inmate jurisdiction for these data. The Pretrial jail population are those individuals categorized as “unconvicted” in the BJS data. See Kang, Brown 2015 for more information.

The pretrial jail population is a June 30th snapshot and are those individuals categorized as “unconvicted” in the BJS data. The total jail population and pretrial population numbers are not directly comparable because the total jail population is based on the average daily jail population in that year rather than a single day (June 30) count. Single day counts tend to fluctuate more than the average daily population.

County prison population: These data were obtained through the National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP) and data collected directly from state departments of correction, when NCRP data is not available or is unreliable. See the Incarceration Trends Codebook for further detail.

State prison population: These data—the total number held in the custody of the state correctional authority (including private prisons) at yearend—were obtained through the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Prisoner Statistics (NPS) Program.

State jail population: These data were obtained through the Bureau of Justice Statistics Annual Survey of Jails (ASJ) and Census of Jails (COJ), which collects facility-level data. The state total was calculated by summing the jail populations for every county in the state.

State jail + prison population: These data were calculated by summing the state jail population and the total number held in the custody of the state correctional authority (including private prisons), which was obtained though the NPS.

County and State Descriptive Data: Data for resident population is from the U.S. Census Bureau decennial census and American Community Survey (ACS). Data for county median income is from the 2013 U.S. Census American Community Survey five year estimates. Data for county arrests is the 2012 Uniform Crime Report (Part I and Part II crimes); this data has limited coverage in some states, notably Illinois and Florida.

Notes

Incarceration and admission rates: To get a more accurate picture of incarceration, youth under age 15 and adults over 64 were removed from the general population to calculate rates, since these age groups are at very low risk of jail incarceration. Because the proportion of these groups varies greatly by county, keeping their data in this tool would skew rates and make comparisons between counties difficult. This calculation method differs from most other sources of national and incarceration rates, which use either the total resident population or the population aged 18 and older to calculate rates.

Comparing jail data: Cross-state comparisons of jail incarceration data should be made with caution because each state’s use of jail to hold sentenced people varies. Pretrial jail incarceration and jail admissions data are not affected in the same way by differences in sentencing practices, and may be used for cross state comparisons. Please note, however, that cross-county comparisons of pretrial and admission data should be done with caution if one county holds a large number of individual for other authorities, such as other county jails, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, or the U.S. Marshals Service.

1. https://github.com/vera-institute/incarceration-trends [↑](#footnote-ref-1)