

## Prison Ministry Facts and Stats

For Use in 2024-2025

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### The Big Picture<sup>1</sup>

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- Estimated 1.9 million people are incarcerated in the United States.
- 565 per 100,000 residents per capita are incarcerated, more than any other nation in the world.
  - State Prisons
    - 1,047,000 inmates
  - Federal Prisons & Jails
    - 209,000 inmates
  - Local Jails
    - 514,000 inmates
  - When accounting for probation and parole, the U.S. Justice System controls almost 5.5 million people.
    - Probation: 2.9 million people
    - Parole: 770,000 people

### The Long Term Effects of Mass Incarceration

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- 1.9 million people are currently incarcerated in the United States
- 19 million people have ever been convicted of a felony
- 79 million or more people have a criminal record
- 113 million adults have an immediate family member who has ever been to a prison or jail<sup>2</sup>

### Demographics

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- **Age and Sex**
  - Males account for 92% of the total prison population.<sup>3</sup>
  - An estimated 32.1% of sentenced prisoners are aged 25 - 34
  - An estimated 26.3% of sentenced prisoners are aged 35-44
    - More than 1 in 8 people in state prisons nationwide (13%) are over the age of 55, and the average age has grown from 35 to 39 years old since 2004.
    - Another 1 in 10 people in state prison (10%) are on the other end of the age range — they're between 18 and 24 years old.

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1 <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2023.html#slideshows/slideshow1/1>

2 Carson, Ann E., U.S. "Prisoners in 2019" United States Department of Justice, pg. 3, [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf).

3 Carson, Ann E., U.S. "Prisoners in 2019" United States Department of Justice, pg. 3, [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf).

- **Socioeconomic Background<sup>4</sup>**
  - Four in 10 (39%) people in state prison did not have a job (i.e., were “jobless”) in the month before their arrest.
  - Of those who weren’t working before their arrest, 4 in 10 (38%) were looking for work, a requirement for being counted as “unemployed.”
  - Among those who did work before their arrest, 1 in 5 (20%) were actually working two or more jobs, compared to [just 1 in 20 \(5%\)](#) of the U.S. population who held more than one job in 2016.
  - 6.5% of people in state prisons were living in a hotel, motel, or rooming house; altogether, more than one-fifth (22%) were experiencing housing instability or homelessness shortly before they were incarcerated.
  - From those incarcerated in state prisons:
    - 33% had a parent incarcerated
    - 18% were in foster care before turning 18
    - 12% were homeless before turning 18
    - 19% were in subsidized or public housing before turning 18
    - 62% did not complete high school
    - 68% were arrested before turning 18
      - 38% were arrested before turning 16

## Religion in Prison

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- Do prisons and jails offer religious services?
  - In order to protect the right to exercise one’s religion for institutionalized people, chaplains and trained volunteers are contracted through each facility to provide ministerial aid to the incarcerated. People who are incarcerated may also be reached through the mail.
  - Whether in-person or through the mail, there are stringent rules, unique to each facility, that must be followed in order to gain and maintain access to those who are incarcerated.
  - There is no standardized system across the penitentiary system.
- “Little is known about the religious make-up of the state prison population. Government agencies routinely report on the gender, racial and ethnic composition of inmates in state and federal prisons but not on their religious affiliation.”
- A 2012 Pew Forum survey among prison chaplains in all U.S. states estimates .4% of inmates identify as Orthodox Christian.
- About two-thirds of the inmate population are affiliated with a Christian group.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics' Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016 data analyzed by the Prison Policy Initiative, Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report

<sup>5</sup> “Chaplains' Perspectives on the Religious Lives of Inmates.” Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 22 Mar. 2012, [www.pewforum.org/2012/03/22/prison-chaplains-perspectives/](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/22/prison-chaplains-perspectives/).

- A 2013 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Federal Bureau of Prisons estimates the number of people who identify as Eastern Orthodox in federal prisons were .2%.<sup>6</sup>

## General Knowledge

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- What's the difference between prison and jails?
  - Generally, jails house pretrial detainees and those sentenced to less than one year of incarceration. These short-term facilities are operated by local government municipalities, cities, and counties.
  - Prisons are used to house inmates with long-term sentences. They are operated by state and federal governments. State and federal governments also contract incarceration to privately operated prisons.
- Private facilities only house 7% of inmates.
- Over the 10-year period from 2011 to 2021, the adult imprisonment rate declined 30%.

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<sup>6</sup> Chalabi, Mona. "Are Prisoners Less Likely To Be Atheists?" FiveThirtyEight, 12 Mar. 2015, [fivethirtyeight.com/features/are-prisoners-less-likely-to-be-atheists/](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/are-prisoners-less-likely-to-be-atheists/).