

Drugs – Probation, Parole and Prison

Persons under control of the U.S. corrections system by year							
Component of system	1980	1990	2000	2007	2008	2009	% Chg 1990-2009
TOTAL persons under system control	1,840,421	4,346,193	6,502,541	7,417,301	7,403,178	7,315,187	+168.3%
<i>Probation</i>	1,118,097	2,670,234	3,839,532	4,293,163	4,270,917	4,203,967	+157.4%
<i>Parole</i>	220,438	531,407	725,527	826,097	828,169	819,308	+154.2%
<i>Federal Prison</i>	23,779	56,989	140,064	197,285	198,414	205,087	+359.9%
<i>State Prison</i>	295,819	684,544	1,176,269	1,320,582	1,320,145	1,319,391	+192.7%
<i>Local Jails</i>	182,288	403,019	621,149	780,174	785,533	767,434	+190.4%
Minorities % of TOTAL	--	54.1%	51.5%	49.4%	49.3%	49.9%	--

All of the above numbers represent computed estimates, not exact counts. The source reports from the Bureau of Justice Statistics for various years have been periodically revised. The methodologies used to collect these data may also be modified over time, rendering the percent change values approximations. A conviction of "drugs" means that possession or sales of an illegal drug was the person's most serious offense, even if he or she were convicted of multiple offenses.

In 1996, former Drug Czar General Barry McCaffrey foretold the growing prison industrial complex and its relationship to drugs when he lamented, "I believe that we have created an American gulag. We have 1.6 million people behind bars, and probably two-thirds of those in the Federal system are there for drug-related crimes."¹ By 2009, the American gulag numbered **2.3 million federal, state and local prisoners**. The addition of probationers and parolees expanded the total of **those under the control of the U.S. corrections system to 7.3 million, an increase of +168.3% since 1990**.

According to the Pew Center on the States,² "This change was fueled by stiffer sentencing and release laws and decisions by courts and parole boards, which sent more offenders to prison and kept them there for longer terms." Passed in the 1980s

and 1990s, many of these laws were a reaction to drug war induced hysteria, which in turn fueled prison growth. In 1980, only 4,900 federal prisoners held a drug conviction as their most serious offense. That number rose to 30,470 in 1990 and 95,205 in 2009. Overall, **the most serious offense for over one quarter of all probationers, parolees, and federal and state prisoners is a drug conviction**.

Via drug convictions, the expanding American gulag captured a disproportionate number of minorities. Of those who were sentenced to state prison for drug offenses in 2009, 69% were black and Hispanic/Latino, even though these two groups together represent only 30% of the U.S. population. **Half of all persons under the control of the U.S. corrections system in 2009 – 3.6 million people or 49.9% – were minorities**.

Persons under control of the U.S. corrections system by year for "drugs"							
Component of system	1980	1990	2000	2007	2008	2009	% Chg 1990-2009
TOTAL persons under system control for "Drugs"	--	964,469	--	1,833,856	1,891,467	1,725,387	+78.9%
<i>Probation</i>	--	640,856	918,290	1,159,154	1,238,566	1,093,031	+70.6%
<i>Parole</i>	--	144,543	--	305,656	306,423	294,951	+104.1%
<i>Federal Prison</i>	4,900	30,470	74,276	95,446	95,079	95,205	+212.5%
<i>State prison</i>	19,000	148,600	251,100	273,600	251,400	242,200	+63.0%
"Drug" prisoners % of all probation, parole, federal & state prisoners	--	24.5%	--	35.8%	28.6%	26.4%	--

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, State and Federal Prisoners, 1925-2001: <http://www.census.gov/statab/hist/HS-24.pdf>

Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, "Persons under correctional supervision": http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/tost_6.html

Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Total Correctional Population": <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=11>

¹ National Conference on Drug Abuse Prevention Research, September 19, 1996. <http://archives.drugabuse.gov/meetings/CODA/Keynote2.html>

² Pew Center on the States, "Prison Count 2010," http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/Prison_Count_2010.pdf