

U.S. Prison Population Trends 1999-2013:

Broad Variation Among States in Recent Years

While the number of people in prison in the United States has stabilized in recent years, incarceration trends among the states have varied significantly. Two-thirds of states (34) have experienced at least a modest decline since 1999, while one-third (16) have had continued rises in their prison populations.

Nine states have produced double-digit declines during this period, led by New Jersey (29% since 1999), New York (27% since 1999), and California (22% since 2006, though partly offset by increasing jail use). These prison population reductions have come about through a mix of changes in policy and practice designed to reduce admissions to prison and lengths of stay. **Recent analyses** have shown that these substantial reductions have had no adverse effect on public safety.

The overall pace of change, though, is quite modest given the scale of incarceration. The total U.S. prison population declined by 2.4% since 2009. Five of the states with rising prison populations have experienced double-digit increases, led by Arkansas, with a 17% rise since 2008. While sharing in the national crime drop, these states have resisted the trend toward decarceration. And of those states with declining prison populations, 16 have had less than a 5% decline since their peak years. The decline in the federal prison population has been of this magnitude: 1% since 2011.

Just as mass incarceration has developed primarily as a result of changes in policy, not crime rates, so too have declines reflected **changes in both policy and practice**. These have included such measures as drug policy sentencing reforms, reduced admissions of technical parole violators to prison, and diversion options for persons convicted of lower-level property and drug crimes.

Change in State and Federal Prison Populations

Jurisdiction	Peak Year to 2013	Peak Year
New Jersey	-28.7%	1999
New York	-26.7%	1999
California	-21.8%	2006
Rhode Island	-19.2%	2008
Hawaii	-17.3%	2006
Connecticut	-15.5%	2007
Michigan	-15.3%	2006
Alaska	-13.9%	2006
Colorado	-12.5%	2008
South Carolina	-8.7%	2009
Vermont	-8.6%	2009
Maryland	-7.9%	2007
Iowa	-7.8%	2010
Kentucky	-6.8%	2007
Massachusetts	-6.5%	2011
Wisconsin	-5.9%	2006
Maine	-5.8%	2007
Idaho	-5.5%	2012
Mississippi	-4.4%	2008
Georgia	-3.7%	2009
Virginia	-3.2%	2008
West Virginia	-3.1%	2012
New Hampshire	-2.8%	2007
Texas	-2.6%	2010
Pennsylvania	-2.5%	2011
Nevada	-2.5%	2007
New Mexico	-2.5%	2011
U.S. Total	-2.4%	2009
Louisiana	-2.2%	2012
Delaware	-2.1%	2007
Montana	-2.0%	2010
Washington	-1.5%	2010
Illinois	-1.4%	2012
Florida	-1.2%	2010
Federal	-1.0%	2011
North Carolina	-0.7%	2010
Jurisdiction	2008 to 2013	Peak Year
Ohio	0.1%	2013
Minnesota	3.8%	2013
North Dakota	4.2%	2013
Missouri	4.5%	2013
Tennessee	4.7%	2013
Arizona	5.0%	2013
Oklahoma	5.3%	2013
Alabama	5.6%	2013
Indiana	5.7%	2013
Oregon	7.4%	2013
South Dakota	9.2%	2013
Utah	10.0%	2013
Wyoming	10.8%	2013
Kansas	11.3%	2013
Nebraska	11.4%	2013
Arkansas	17.0%	2013

Source: *Prisoners Series* (1999-2013), Bureau of Justice Statistics.

U.S. prison population trends through 2013: decreases from peak year, increases from 2008

