

Deep dives into deportations, healthcare, prison discipline, and more.

Prison Policy Initiative updates for December 11, 2025 Exposing how mass incarceration harms communities and our national welfare

PRISON
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[Our most important research and advocacy work in 2025](#)

[by Danielle Squillante](#)

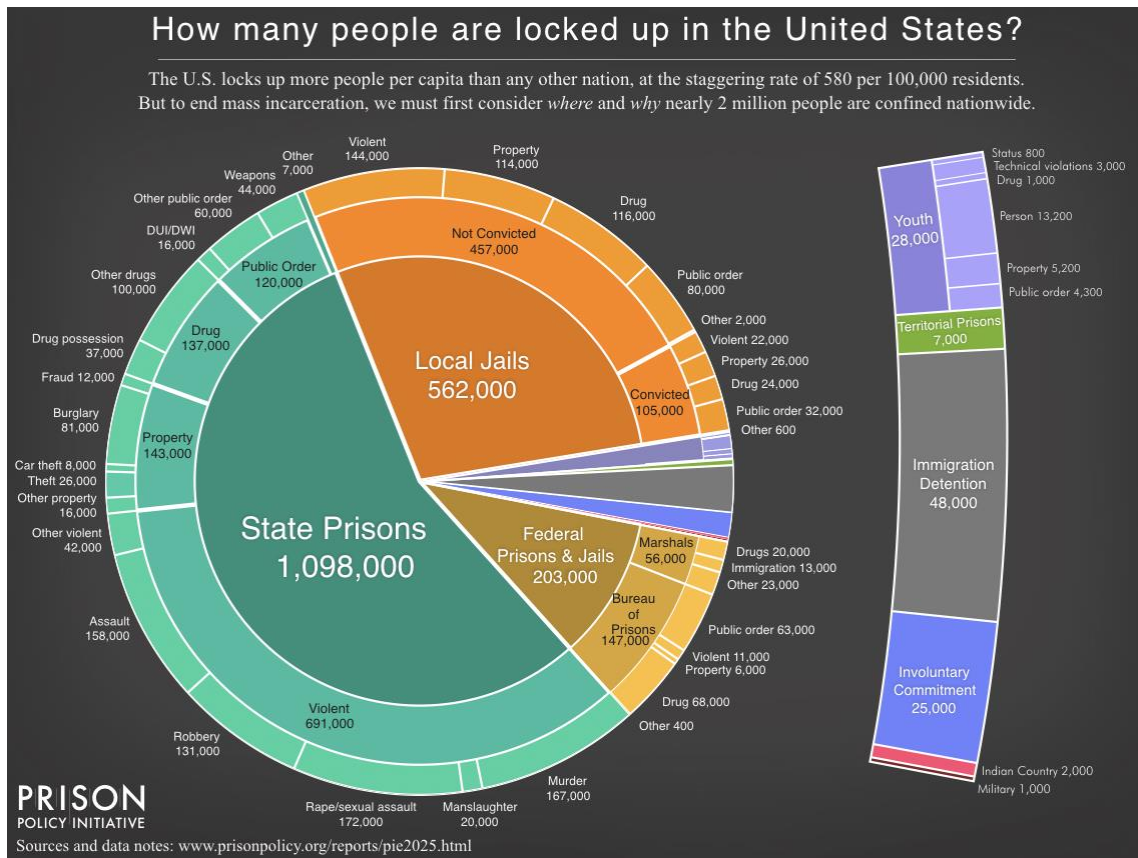
Highlights of our work include exposing the role jails are playing in Trump's mass deportation agenda, a new report detailing the current state of youth confinement, and a deep dive into discretionary parole systems.

2025 was a challenging year. Not only were many states returning to the failed policies that created the nation's mass incarceration crisis, but a new administration came to D.C., threatening to use the power of the federal government to make the criminal legal system even worse. The Prison Policy Initiative rose to these challenges, pushing back on and exposing these misguided policies, and continuing to produce cutting-edge research that shines a light on the dark corners of the criminal legal system in America.

Here's just a taste of some of our most important work this year:

Updates to our bedrock *Whole Pie* reports

We released the 2025 edition of our flagship report, [*Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie*](#). The report offers the most comprehensive view of the nearly 2 million people incarcerated in the U.S., showing what types of facilities they are in and why. It also included, for the first time, a section that breaks down which states are driving the growth in incarceration. We also released an update to our [*Youth Confinement: The Whole Pie*](#) report, which provides the most up-to-date picture of how many youth are detained and committed in the U.S., highlighting the persistent overincarceration of Black and Indigenous youth in a system that, in recent decades, has made great strides in reducing youth confinement overall.



New resources highlighting how the federal government is impacting the criminal legal system

Since taking office, the Trump administration has issued numerous executive orders and used its bully pulpit and control over federal spending to coerce state and local governments into expanding the size and brutality of their criminal legal systems. To help people make sense of these rapid-fire actions, we [released a new tool](#) that tracks the administration's efforts and connects the dots on its strategy to make the criminal legal system harsher, less effective, and even more unfair. We also [released a primer](#) on the traditional role of the federal government in shaping the criminal legal system, to help advocates know where state and local lawmakers can push back on the administration's actions.

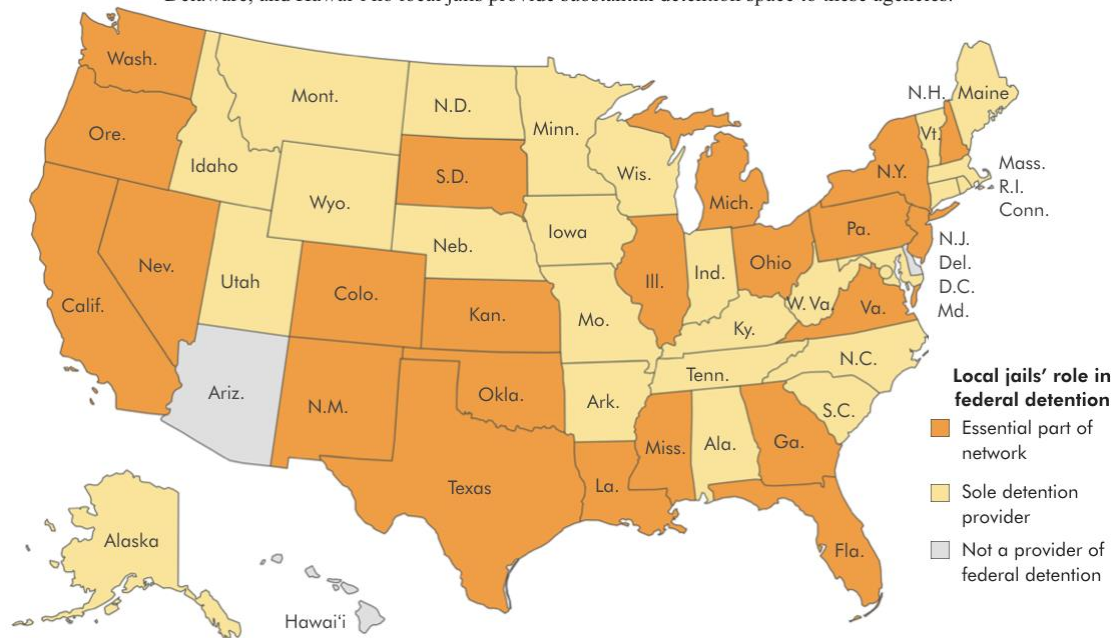
[Hiding in Plain Sight: How local jails obscure and facilitate mass deportation under Trump](#)

Local jails, even in some sanctuary cities and states, are playing an essential role in President Trump's mass detention and deportation plan. [This report](#) breaks down the

complicated overlap between local criminal and immigration systems, and reveals that the Trump administration is circumventing sanctuary policies by referring immigrants to the shadowy U.S. Marshals Service, whose contracts with jails to hold pretrial detainees have often gone overlooked.

Local jails enable federal agencies to detain people for immigration reasons

In 25 states and D.C., federal agencies like ICE and the U.S. Marshals only detain people using local jails. In other states, jails play a part in the detention network alongside federal or private facilities. In Arizona, Delaware, and Hawai'i no local jails provide substantial detention space to these agencies.



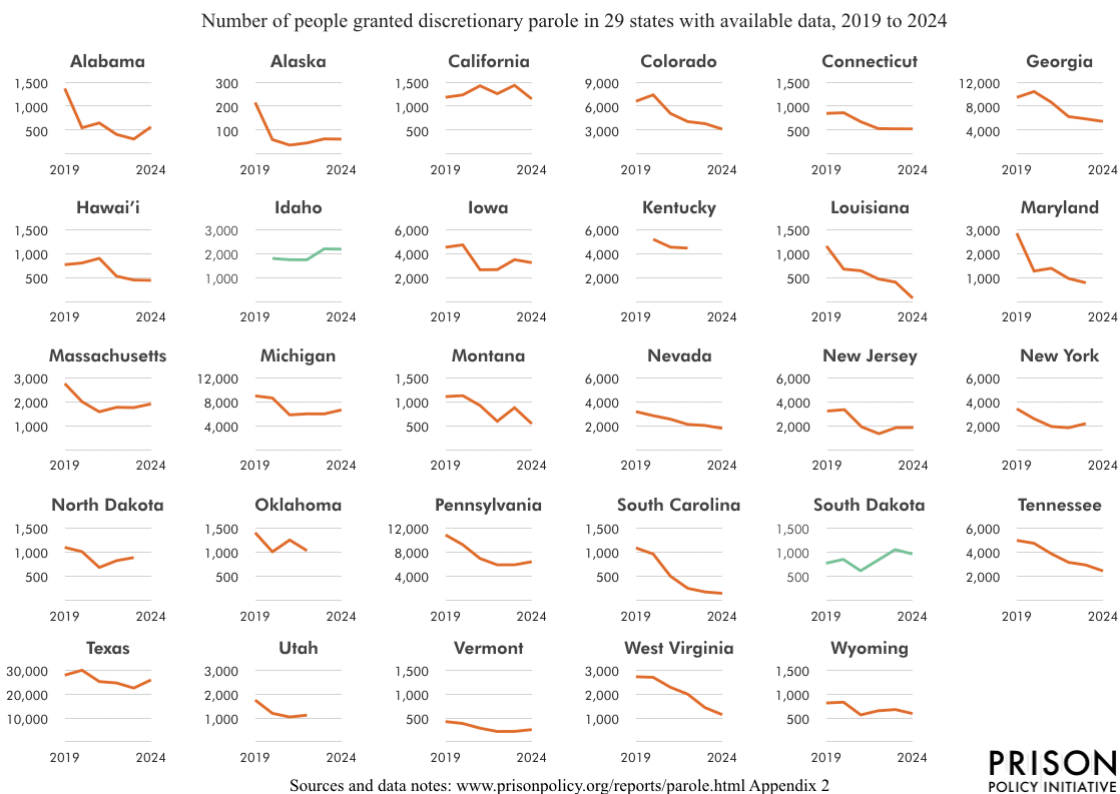
Highlights from our advocacy work

While we're best known for our research and reports, that's not all we do. In 2025, our [advocacy department](#) partnered with dozens of organizations in over 25 states to provide custom research and strategy support to on-the-ground efforts that are transforming our criminal legal system. This year, we testified in legislatures in Massachusetts and [Colorado](#) on the importance of protecting in-person visitation in prisons and jails and presented to the [Hawai'i](#) Correctional Oversight Commission about the pitfalls of new jail construction. We also presented two webinars, each with hundreds of attendees, that covered how best to [interpret recidivism data](#) and [how to fight unnecessary local jail construction](#).

[Parole in Perspective: A deep dive into discretionary parole systems](#)

[This two-part report](#) pulls back the curtain on parole release systems, providing the most accessible and comprehensive source to date for comparing how these essential — and often dysfunctional — release mechanisms are set up in 35 states. The [first part](#) explores the makeup of boards and how they conduct hearings. The [second](#) dives into new data on hearings and grants, and the factors that boards consider — including their discretion — in determining whether someone will be released.

Almost every parole board is releasing fewer people now than in 2019



[Bad Behavior: How prison disciplinary policies manufacture misconduct](#)

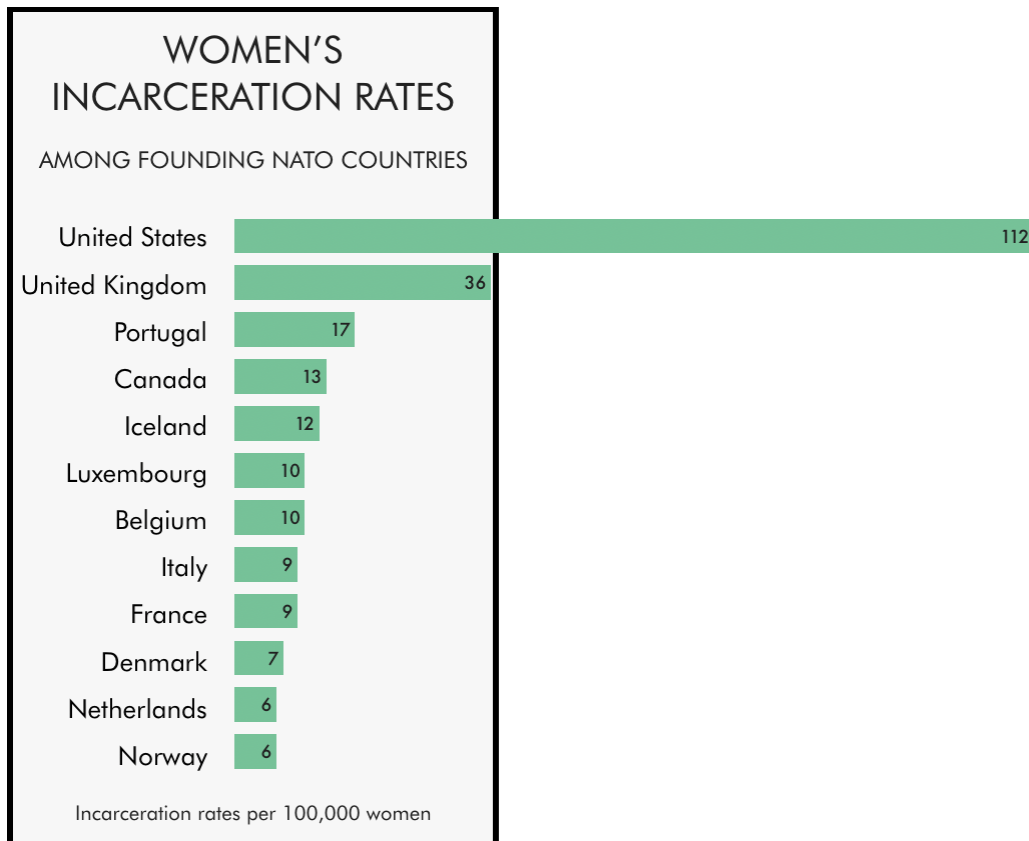
Every prison system has a lengthy disciplinary policy laying out the rules incarcerated people must follow, as well as the procedures and punishments they'll face if they don't. These policies are supposed to ensure safety, security, and order by deterring and punishing misconduct. In practice, however, prison discipline is a system of petty tyranny with devastating, long-term consequences. Our report, [Bad Behavior](#) is the broadest review of disciplinary policies to date, and draws on original research as well as testimony from 47 currently incarcerated people, providing an essential look at how prisons are run in the age of mass incarceration.

[Cut-rate care: The systemic problems shaping 'healthcare' behind bars](#)

In correctional healthcare systems, care is secondary to controlling costs and avoiding lawsuits. For [this report](#), we pored over research, news investigations, government reports, and contractor documents to better understand the “big picture” relationship between healthcare providers, government agencies, and incarcerated people, and to identify system-level targets for improving care outcomes. Importantly, we combined testimonies from incarcerated people in state and federal prisons with this in-depth research and analysis to tell a fuller story of how deeply flawed health care systems are.

[States of Women's Incarceration: The Global Context 2025](#)

[This report](#) offers a crucial lens through which to view the criminalization of women, who are a small minority of all incarcerated people in the U.S., but whose incarceration rates today are at near-historic highs. It provides a comprehensive women's incarceration rate for every U.S. state — including prisons and jails, youth confinement facilities, tribal jails, immigrant detention centers, and other types of incarceration — comparing states to each other and to countries of the world.



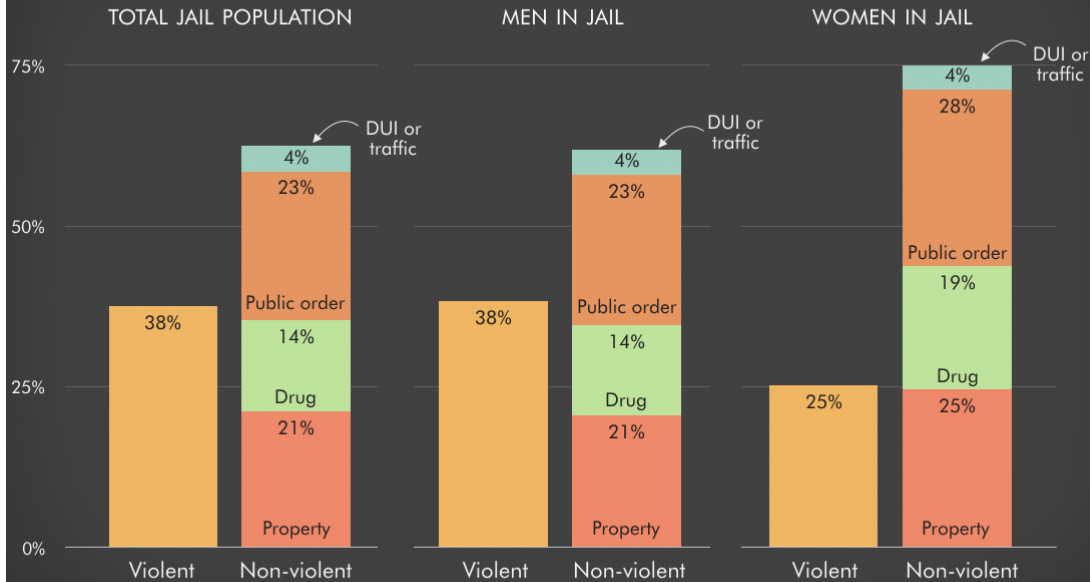
Source: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/women/2025.html>

[New national data help fill 20-year data gap: Offense data for people in local jails](#)

Millions of people are arrested and booked into jail every year, but existing national data offer very little information about the actual criminal charges for which they are detained. In [this briefing](#), we worked with the [Jail Data Initiative](#) to fill that gap and provide a new “snapshot” of people in jail by offense type using the most up-to-date nationally representative sample available.

Most people in jail are charged with only non-violent offenses

Top charge category among people in a sample of jails on February 1, 2024, by sex

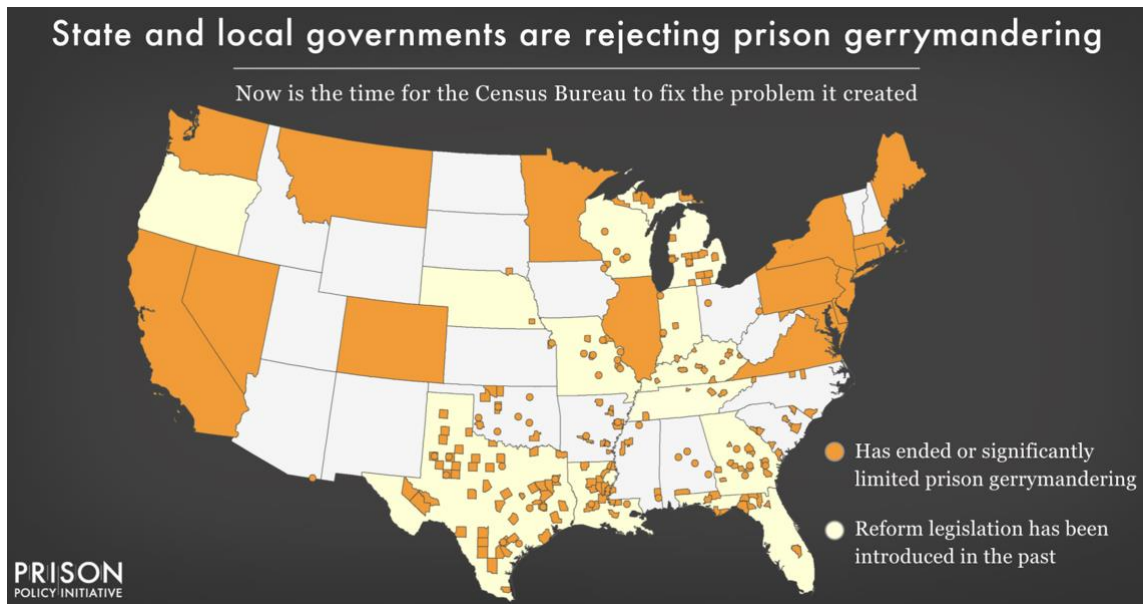


Source: Jail Data Initiative. See: www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2025/04/17/JDI_jail_offenses
Note: The total jail population appears identical to the male jail population because the majority of people in jails nationwide are male; 84% of the population in this sample of jails was male.

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[Fourteen states ripe for prison gerrymandering reform](#)

Everyone is supposed to have an equal voice in their government's decisions, but an outdated and misguided Census Bureau policy that counts incarcerated people in the wrong place gives a few residents of each state a megaphone. It is a problem known as prison gerrymandering, and state lawmakers can fix it. We recently released a series of reports focused on states ripe for ending prison gerrymandering — [Alaska](#), [Florida](#), [Georgia](#), [Kansas](#), [Kentucky](#), [Louisiana](#), [Michigan](#), [North Carolina](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Oregon](#), [Texas](#), [Vermont](#), [West Virginia](#), and [Wyoming](#). Not only do these states have significantly prison-gerrymandered districts, but this problem has a significant impact on their Black, Native American, or Latino residents.



This is only a small piece of the important and impactful work we published in 2025, and our work is far from over. We've got big things planned in 2026, when we'll continue to expose the broader harms of mass criminalization and highlight solutions that keep our communities safe without expanding the footprint of the carceral system.

What do you think? Was there a Prison Policy Initiative [report](#) or [briefing](#) that you thought was particularly powerful that didn't make the list? Is there a topic you want us to cover in 2026? Reply to this email to let us know about it.

[Help us continue this work in 2026](#)

If you find our work valuable, we hope you'll consider [making a contribution](#) as part of your end-of-year giving. Our work is only possible thanks to the contributions from people like you, who are committed to ending mass incarceration in America.

We can accept tax-deductible [gifts online](#) or via paper checks sent to PO Box 127 Northampton MA 01061. Thank you!

[What Trump gets right and wrong about pardons](#)

Donald Trump has garnered lots of headlines for the pardons that he's granted.

In [this new piece](#), we take a closer look at these pardons to understand what Trump gets right, what he gets wrong, and what others can learn from his actions.

[Can you support our work?](#)

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