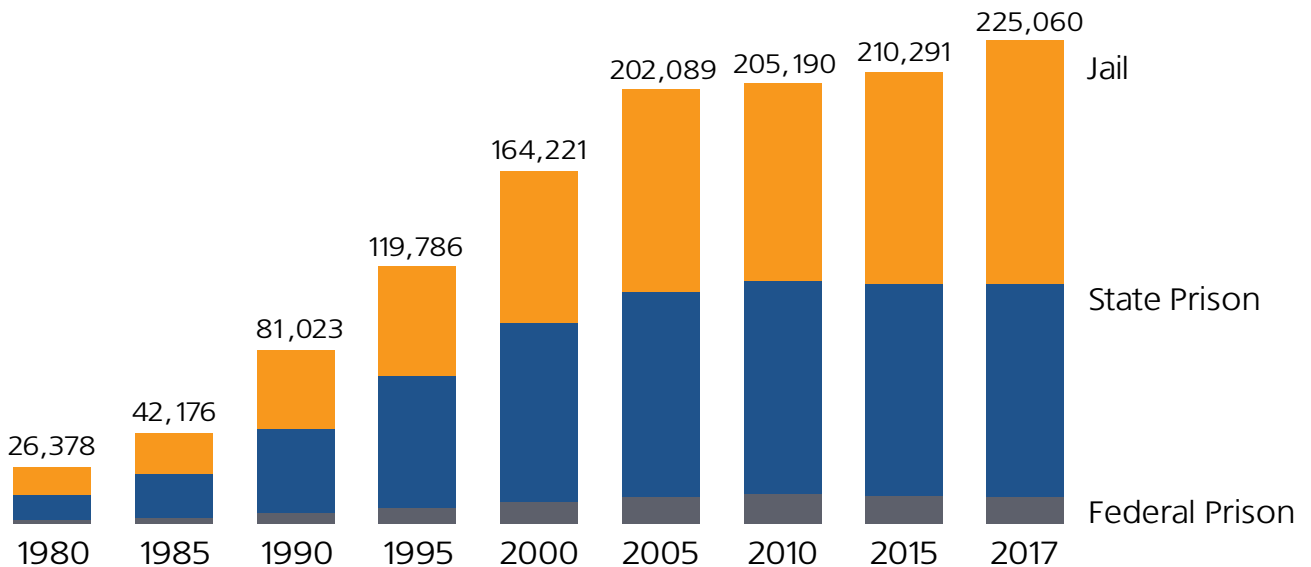


# Incarcerated Women and Girls

Over the past quarter century, there has been a profound change in the involvement of women within the criminal justice system. This is the result of more expansive law enforcement efforts, stiffer drug sentencing laws, and post-conviction barriers to reentry that uniquely affect women. The female incarcerated population stands nearly eight times higher than in 1980. More than 60% of women in state prisons have a child under the age of 18.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1980 and 2017, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 750%, rising from a total of 26,378 in 1980 to 225,060 in 2017.

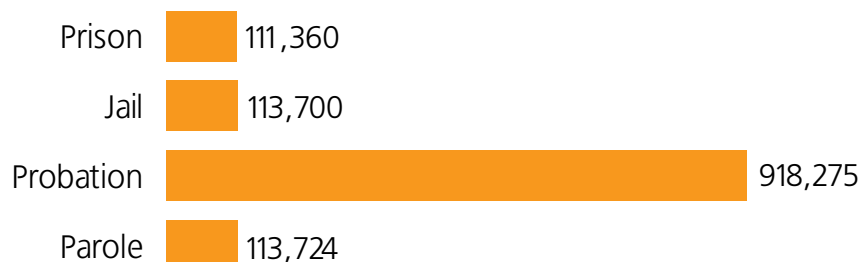
## Rise in Women's Incarceration, 1980-2017



Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics: *Historical Corrections Statistics in the United States, 1850-1984*; *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear Series (1997-2017)*, *Prisoners Series (1986-2018)*. Washington, DC.

Though many more men are in prison than women, the rate of growth for female imprisonment has been twice as high as that of men since 1980. There are 1.3 million women under the supervision of the criminal justice system.

## Women Under Control of the U.S. Corrections System, 2016-2017

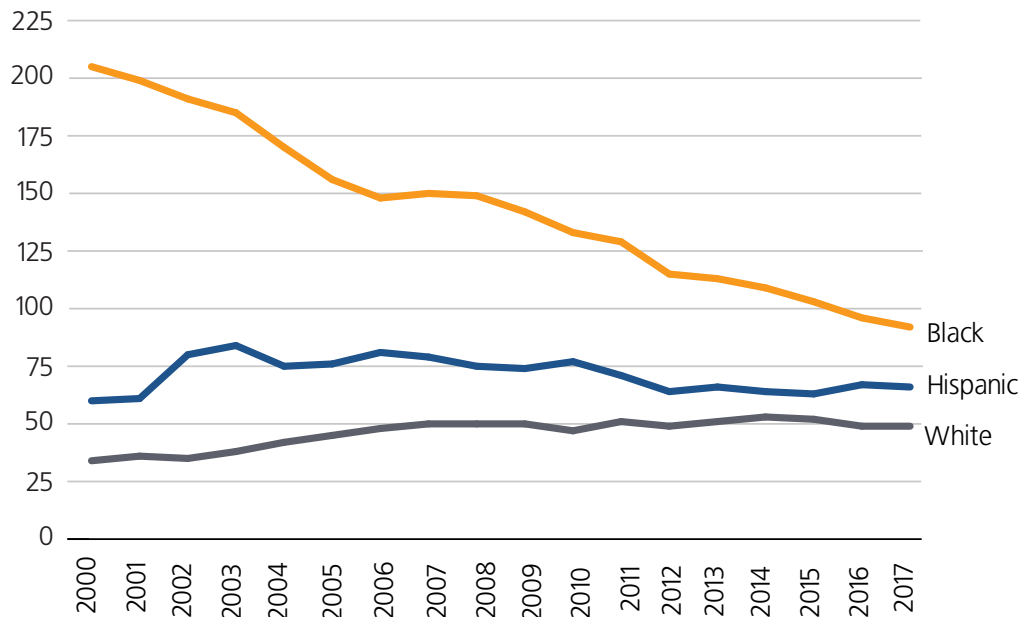


Source: Bronson, J., and Carson E.A. (2019). *Prisoners in 2017*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Zeng, Z. (2019). *Jail Inmates in 2017*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Kaeble, D. (2018). *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2016*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

## RACE AND ETHNICITY IN PRISONS

- In 2017, the imprisonment rate for African American women (92 per 100,000) was nearly twice the rate of imprisonment for white women (49 per 100,000).
- Hispanic women were imprisoned at 1.3 times the rate of white women (66 vs. 49 per 100,000).
- The rate of imprisonment for African American women has been declining since 2000, while the rate of imprisonment for white and Hispanic women has increased.
- Between 2000 and 2017, the rate of imprisonment in state and federal prisons declined by 55% for black women, while the rate of imprisonment for white women rose by 44%.

### Female Imprisonment Rate per 100,000, by Race and Ethnicity, 2000-2017



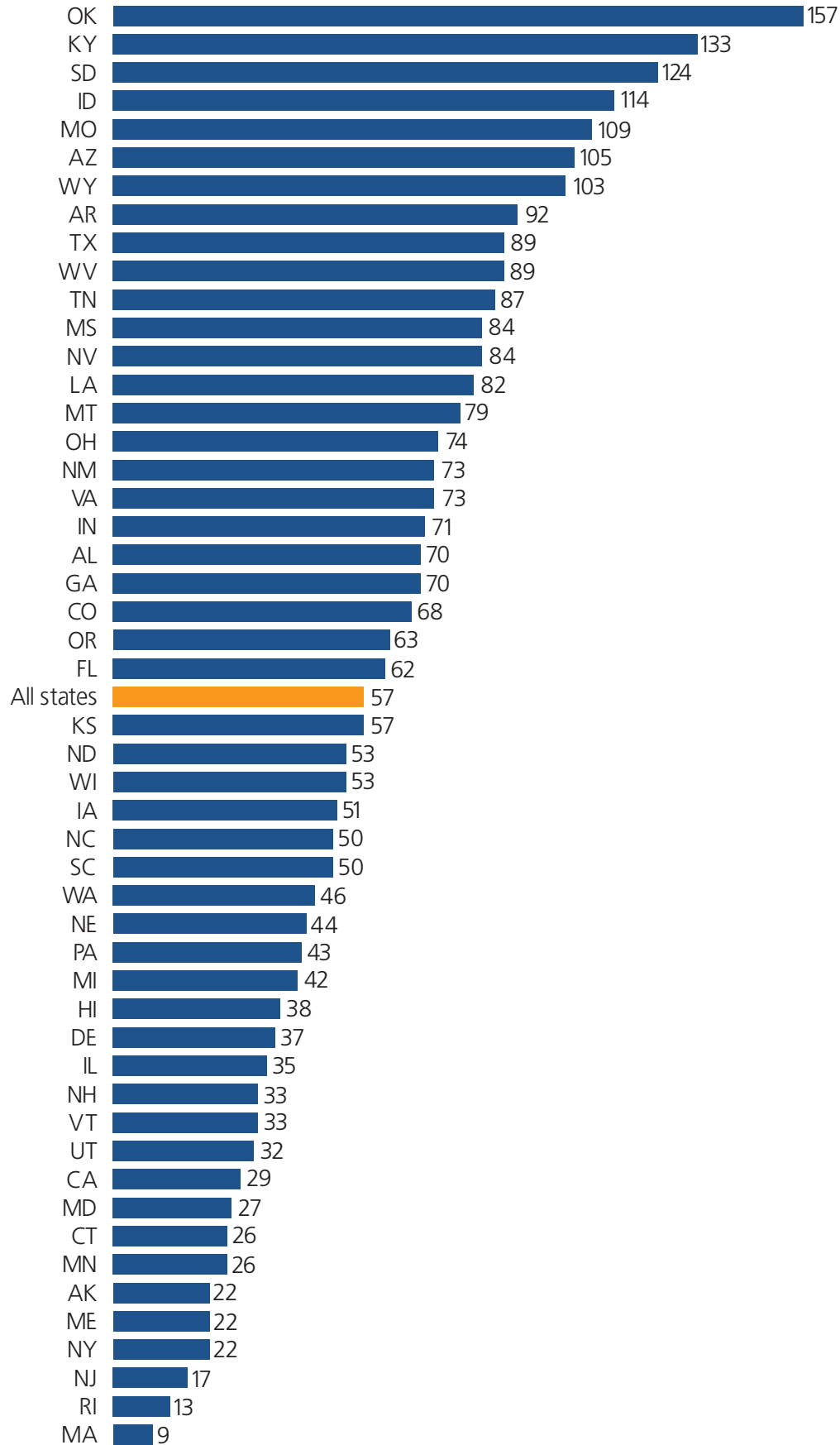
Source: *Prisoners Series*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

### Imprisonment Rates by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity per 100,000: 2000 vs. 2017

		2000	2017	% Change
White	Women	34	49	<b>44% increase</b>
	Men	449	397	12% decrease
African American	Women	205	92	55% decrease
	Men	3,457	2,336	32% decrease
Hispanic	Women	60	66	<b>10% increase</b>
	Men	1,220	1,054	14% decrease

Source: *Prisoners Series*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

### Highest and Lowest Female State Imprisonment Rates (per 100,000), 2017



Source: Bronson, J., and Carson, E.A. (2019). *Prisoners in 2017*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

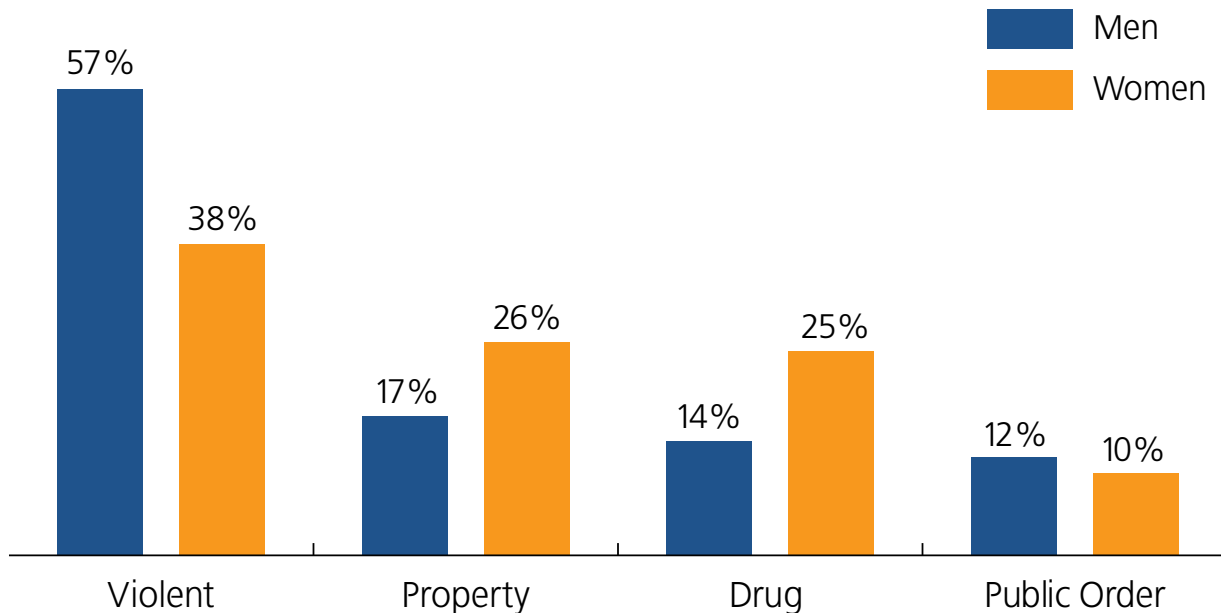
## STATE VARIATION

The rate at which women are incarcerated varies greatly from state to state. At the national level, 63 out of every 100,000 women were in prison in 2017.<sup>2</sup> The state with the highest rate of female imprisonment is Oklahoma (157) and the state with the lowest incarceration rates of females is Massachusetts (9).

## OFFENSE TYPES FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN STATE PRISONS

- Women in state prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug or property offense. Twenty-five percent of women in prison have been convicted of a drug offense, compared to 14% of men in prison; 26% of incarcerated women have been convicted of a property crime, compared to 17% among incarcerated men.
- The proportion of imprisoned women convicted of a drug offense has increased from 12% in 1986 to 25% in 2017.

Offense Type by Gender in State Prisons, 2016



Source: Bronson, J., and Carson, E.A. (2019). Prisoners in 2017. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

## INCARCERATED GIRLS

- Of the 48,043 youth in residential placement, 15% (7,293) are girls.
- As with boys, girls are confined considerably less frequently than at the start of the century. In 2001, 15,104 girls were confined in residential placement settings. By 2015, this figure had been cut in half.

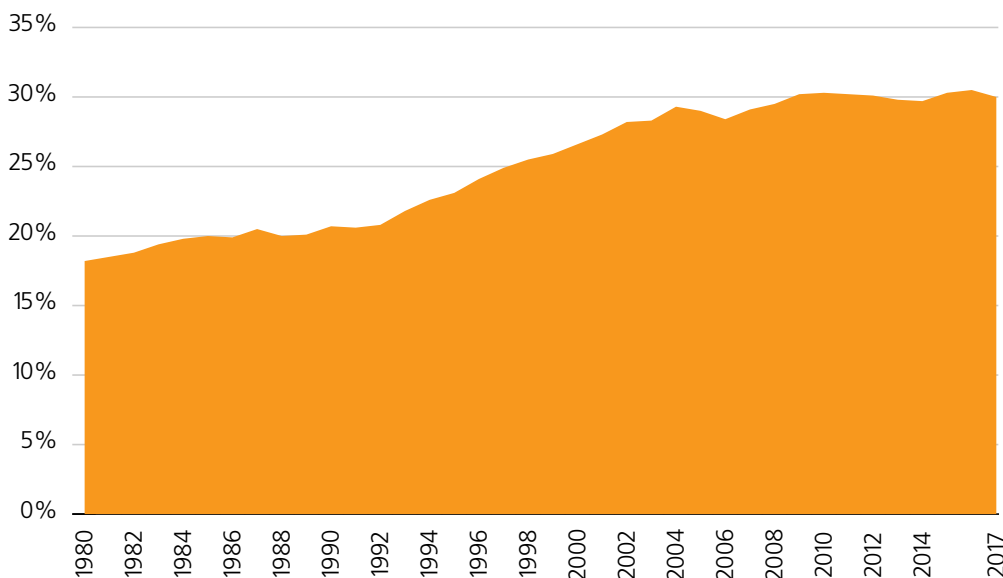
- Girls of color are much more likely to be incarcerated than white girls. The placement rate for all girls is 47 per 100,000 girls (those between ages 12 and 17). For white girls, the rate is 32 per 100,000. Native girls (134 per 100,000) are more than four times as likely as white girls to be incarcerated; African American girls (110 per 100,000) are three-and-a-half times as likely; and Latina girls (44 per 100,000) are 38% more likely.
- Though 85% of incarcerated youth are boys, girls make up a much higher proportion of those incarcerated for the lowest level offenses. Thirty-eight percent of youth incarcerated for status offenses (such as truancy and curfew violations) are girls. More than half of youth incarcerated for running away are girls.

### Highest and Lowest State Rates of Confinement for Girls (per 100,000), 2015

Highest Incarceration Rates		Lowest Incarceration Rates	
State	Rate	State	Rate
<b>National</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>47</b>
Wyoming	197	New Jersey	7
West Virginia	175	Connecticut	10
South Dakota	138	Vermont	11
Nebraska	137	Maine	15

Source: Sickmund, M., Sladky, T.J., Kang, W., and Puzzanchera, C. (2017) "Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement." Online. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/>.

### Girls Comprise a Growing Proportion of All Teen Arrests, 1980-2017



Source: OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book. Online. Available: [http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/JAR\\_Display.asp?ID=qa05230&selOffenses=1](http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/JAR_Display.asp?ID=qa05230&selOffenses=1). October 22, 2018.

## Endnotes

- 1 Glaze, L. E., and Maruschak, L. M. (2009). *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- 2 Bronson, J., and Carson, E.A. (2019). *Prisoners in 2017*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

This fact sheet was updated June 2019.

The Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration.