

Women's Justice:

By the Numbers

JULY 2024

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ABOUT THE WOMEN'S JUSTICE COMMISSION ABOUT THE COUNCIL on criminal justice

The [Women's Justice Commission](#) is a multi-year research, policy, and communications initiative that documents and raises awareness of the unique challenges facing women in the justice system and builds consensus for evidence-based reforms that enhance safety, health, and justice. The project spans the full scope of the adult justice system—from arrest and diversion through prosecution, incarceration, release, and community supervision—with a particular focus on trauma-informed and gender-responsive prevention and intervention strategies.

Chaired by former U.S. Attorney General [Loretta Lynch](#), the Commission includes 15 other high-profile, ideologically diverse leaders representing law enforcement, courts, corrections, medicine, research, and advocacy. Oklahoma First Lady Sarah Stitt is Senior Adviser, and the Commission also consults with a team of experts with decades of experience in women's justice issues. This report is a preliminary assessment to inform the Commission's work, which will further examine the challenges facing justice-involved women and develop proposed solutions for policy and practice.

[Press Release](#)

The Council on Criminal Justice is an invitational membership organization and think tank. Independent and nonpartisan, the Council advances understanding of the criminal justice policy choices facing the nation and builds consensus for solutions that enhance safety and justice for all.

The Council does not take policy positions. As part of its array of activities, the Council conducts research and convenes task forces composed of Council members who produce reports with findings and policy recommendations on matters of concern. The findings and conclusions in this report were not subject to the approval of the Council's Board of Directors, its Board of Trustees, or funders. For more information about the Council, visit counciloncj.org.

This series of charts presents a statistical portrait of women in the justice system, establishing a common understanding of key trends as the Commission begins its work.

This series of charts does not attempt to explain the trends. Discussions often focus on trends through 2019, the last year before COVID-19 interrupted criminal justice trends, and time periods vary due to data availability. This series focuses on adult women, discussing men and juveniles only when it helps to illustrate women's unique experiences. However, in instances where data used for this report included juveniles, we refer to females and males instead of women and men. Please see the [source document](#) for citations and additional data notes.

Key Takeaways

- Women's contact with the criminal justice system has trended upward over the last several decades, while comparable figures for men have trended downward.
 - This includes higher arrest rates for women (41% higher in 2019 than in 1980) and higher rates of jail incarceration for females (12% higher in 2019 than in 2010).
 - Females also make up a larger share of violent crime victims in the community—51% of all victimizations in 2022 compared to 41% of all victimizations in 1993.
- The share of female arrests is up in part due to trends in arrest rates for violent and drug crimes. In 2019, the women's arrest rate was 63% higher for violent crimes and

317% higher for drug crimes than in 1980.

- In 2022, three fourths of women (74%) under correctional control were serving a probation sentence (compared to half of men, 49%).
- The women's prison population is aging; 2022 imprisonment rates were 83% higher than in 2007 for older women (ages 60 to 64) and 62% lower for younger women (ages 20 to 24).
- In 2016, 58% of the women in state and federal prisons were parents to minor children, compared to less than half of the men (47%).
- Racial disparities in female imprisonment rates narrowed from 2000 to 2022. In 2022, the imprisonment rate was 69% lower for Black females, 18% lower for Hispanic females, and 18% higher for White females than in 2000.
- Females released from state prison systems were less likely to recidivate than their male counterparts. By 2017, 63% of females released from 34 state prison systems in 2012 had been rearrested, compared to 72% of males.

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Arrests

Women

The arrest rate for women was 41% higher in 2019 than in 1980, while men's arrest rate was 40% lower (Figure 1A). From 2019 to 2020, female and male rates decreased at a similar pace in response to the COVID-19 pandemic—26% and 23%, respectively. Women made up 14% of all arrests in 1980 and 26% in 2020 (Figure 1B).

Figure 1. Adult Arrests, 1980-2020

1A. Rate by Sex

1B. Share of Women

Note: The rate is calculated per 100,000 adults. For example, a women's arrest rate of 1,500 means 1,500 women arrested out of every 100,000 adult residents.

Girls

Unlike the trend for women, girls (females aged 10-17) were arrested at lower rates in 2019 than in 1980 (Figure 2A). The arrest rate for girls was 45% lower in 2019 than in 1980, while the arrest rate for boys was 73% lower. From 2019 to 2020, the arrest rate for girls and boys decreased at similar rates—41% and 37%. Girls made up 18% of all juvenile arrests in 1980 and 29% in 2020 (Figure 2B).

Figure 2. Juvenile Arrests, 1980-2020

2A. Rate by Sex

2B. Share of Girls

Note: Rates are calculated per 100,000 girls or boys aged 10 to 17. For example, a girls arrest rate of 2,000 means 2,000 girls 10 to 17 years old arrested out of every 100,000 girls in the same age group.

Offenses by Sex

Compared to figures for 1980, women's arrest rates in 2019 were 64% higher for violent

offenses, 317% higher for drug crimes, and 5% lower for property offenses (Figure 3). Unlike the trend for women, men's violent crime arrest rate was 35% lower over the same period. Similar to the trends for women, the drug crime arrest rate for men was higher (68%), and the property offense arrest rate for men was lower (57%). From 2019 to 2020, arrest rates decreased for women and men for nearly all offenses; the men's violent offense rate increased less than 1%.

For each major offense category, women made up a larger share of all arrests in 2022 compared to 1986 (Figure 3); their share changed from 11% to 21% for violent offenses, 25% to 34% for property crimes, and 14% to 26% for drug offenses.

Figure 3. Adult Arrests by Sex and Offense

Notes: The time periods presented for rates and shares differ because the data sources are different. Arrest shares for 2016 are missing because the data used to calculate shares were not reported for 2016. The rate is calculated per 100,000 adults. For example, a women's violent offense arrest rate of 1,500 means 1,500 women arrested out of every 100,000 adult residents.

Correctional Control

While most adults under correctional control in 2022 were supervised in the community, community supervision was more common for women than men (Figure 4). A majority (82%) of women under correctional control were under community supervision (probation or parole), while 18% were incarcerated in prisons or jails. In contrast, 64% of men under correctional control were under community supervision, while 36% were incarcerated. People on probation accounted for the largest share of the correctional control population for both women (about 74%) and men (about 49%).

Figure 4. All Correctional Control by Sex, 2022

Notes: The populations include adults under state and federal jurisdictions. Details do not sum to exact totals because of source methods and rounding.

Incarceration

Incarceration Rates by Sex

Imprisonment rates peaked for both females and males in 2007, at 69 per 100,000 for females and 955 for males (Figure 5A). Compared to the 2007 peak, in 2019 state and federal imprisonment rates were lower for both females (down 12%) and males (down 17%). From 2019 to 2020, imprisonment rates for both sexes dropped sharply due to responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, although the rate reduction was greater for females than for males. From 2019 to 2020, the female state and federal imprisonment rate decreased 23%, while the male rate fell 14%. Since that time, female imprisonment rates have risen, increasing 4% from 2020 to 2022, while male imprisonment rates were 2% lower in 2022 than in 2020.

Compared to levels seen in 2010, female jail incarceration rates in 2019 were 12% higher, while male rates declined each year over the same period, resulting in a 10% decrease overall (Figure 5B). From 2019 to 2020, the decline in jail incarceration rates for both sexes occurred due to responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, although the rate reduction was greater for females than for males. The female jail incarceration rate dropped by 36%, while the male rate fell by 24%. From 2020 to 2022, jail rates for both sexes increased. The rise in female jail incarceration rates outpaced that for males, with 31% growth, compared to 18%.

Figure 5. Imprisonment and Jail Incarceration Rates by Sex

5A. Prisons

5B. Jails

Notes: The imprisonment rate includes people at year-end serving state and federal prison sentences of more than one year. The jail incarceration rate includes all people in custody at mid-year, whether they are being held before trial or serving a sentence. Rates are calculated per 100,000 females or per 100,000 males. For example, a female imprisonment rate of 50 females means 50 females imprisoned out of every 100,000 female residents.

Incarceration Rates by Population

The number of females incarcerated in state and federal prisons and local jails was 617% higher in 2018, when it reached a recent peak, than in 1982, without adjusting for U.S. population growth (Figure 6). The number of incarcerated females was 20% lower in 2022 compared to the 2018 peak. The number dropped 3% from 2018 to 2019 and then fell by 30% from 2019 to 2020 due to responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 and 2022, the number of incarcerated females rebounded, increasing 18% from 2020 to 2022. In 2022, there were about 88,000 females in state and federal prisons and about 93,000 in local jails.

Figure 6. Number of Incarcerated Females, 1982-2022

Note: The number includes females based on jail counts at mid-year and state and federal counts at year-end.

Race and Ethnicity

From 2000 to 2022, racial disparity in female imprisonment rates narrowed between White, Black, and Hispanic females (Figure 7A). In 2022, the imprisonment rate was 69% lower for Black females, 18% lower for Hispanic females, and 18% higher for White females than in 2000. For example, 205 Black females were imprisoned per 100,000 in 2000, compared to 64 in 2022; and 34 White females per 100,000 were imprisoned in 2000, compared to 40 in 2022. The Black female imprisonment rate was higher throughout the period compared to the rates for White and Hispanic females.

Data before 2020 were only available for White, Black, and Hispanic females, preventing pre-2020 comparisons with any additional racial or ethnic groups. Between 2020 and 2022, American Indian/Alaska Native and Other/Multiracial females had much higher imprisonment rates than their White and Hispanic counterparts (Figure 7B). In 2022, American Indian/Alaska Native females were imprisoned at a rate 4.3 times higher than the rate for White females, and Other/Multiracial females were imprisoned at a rate 6.7 times higher than White females. Asian females were imprisoned at the lowest rate of all racial and ethnic groups for whom data were available.

Figure 7. State and Federal Imprisonment Rates by Race and Ethnicity

7A. Long Trend, 2000-2022

7B. Short Trend, 2020-2022

Notes: Rates are calculated per 100,000 females in each racial or ethnic group. For example, a Black female imprisonment rate of 200 means 200 out of every 100,000 Black females. The state and federal imprisonment rate includes females of all ages at year-end serving prison sentences of more than one year. Rates before 2000 are not comparable. Rates for American Indian/Alaska Native and Asian females were not reported before 2020. Rates for Other/Multiracial females before 2020 are excluded because they are not comparable to 2020-2022.

Age

Since 2007, imprisonment rates for older women have trended upward while rates for younger women have trended downward (Figure 8).¹ The age groups with the largest changes from 2007 to 2022 were women ages 18 and 19 (79% lower), women ages 20 to 24 (62% lower), women 55 to 59 (86% higher), women 60 to 64 (83% higher), and women 65 and older (100% higher).

Figure 8. Imprisonment Rates by Age, 2007-2022

Notes: The population includes women at year-end serving prison sentences of more than one year. Rates are calculated per 100,000 women in each age group. For example, an arrest rate of 30 for women aged 18 and 19 means 30 women aged 18 and 19 imprisoned out of every 100,000 female residents aged 18 and 19. Rates before 2007 are excluded because they cover different age groups.

Offenses

From 2006 to 2021, the share of the female population in state prisons went up for violent (35% to 46%) and public order (6% to 10%) offenses, and down for drug (28% to 25%) and property (30% to 19%) offenses. (See Figure 9.) Male populations displayed a similar trend; the share of the male population in state prisons also went up for violent (53% to 64%) and public order (88% to 11%) crimes and down for drug (19% to 12%) and property (30% to 19%) offenses.

Figure 9. Share of Offenses in State Prisons, 2006-2021

Notes: People are counted once, based on their most serious offense. State prison means the legal jurisdiction of states, not physical custody, and includes people at year-end serving prison sentences of more than one year. Data for the period before 2006 were not readily available.

From 2014 to 2022, the share of the female population in federal prisons went up for drug (59% to 65%) and public order (18% to 22%) offenses, down for property offenses (18% to 9%), and remained the same for violent crimes (4%). (See Figure 10.) As seen with women, the share of men in federal prisons went up for public order offenses (37% to 44%), down for property offenses (5.2% to 3.4%), and remained about the same for violent offenses (8%). In contrast to women, the share of men held in federal prison for drug offenses was lower 2022 (50% to 45%).

Figure 10. Share of Offenses in Federal Prisons, 2014-2022

Note: The population includes people who were convicted, sentenced to one year or more, and in federal or contract custody. Data before 2014 were not readily available.

States

In 2022, female imprisonment rates ranged by state from a low of 7 per 100,000 females

(Massachusetts) to a high of 132 per 100,000 (Idaho).² (See Figure 11.) Overall, female imprisonment rates changed little within and across states from 2018 to 2022. Massachusetts had the lowest rate in every year during the period; Oklahoma had the highest rate in 2018, and Idaho had the highest rate between 2019 and 2022.

Figure 11. Female Imprisonment by State, 2018-2022

Notes: Rates are calculated per 100,000 female state residents. For example, an imprisonment rate of 50 in Alabama means 50 females imprisoned out of every 100,000 Alabama female residents. Rates are calculated based on legal jurisdiction, not physical custody, and include females at year-end serving prison sentences of more than one year.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) advises using caution when comparing rates between states or across different years, due to counting variations between states and across time. For example, Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont counts include females incarcerated in jails. In another example, Illinois and Massachusetts include a small number of people in prison in 2021-2022 who were sentenced to one year or less. See the [source document](#) for more data notes.

Long Sentences

Defining a “long sentence” as a state prison sentence of 10 years or more, the number of women who received long sentences in 2019 was 27% higher than in 2005, while the number of men who received long sentences was 4% higher (Figure 12). Due to responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of women and men admitted with a long sentence fell 43% and 46%, respectively, from 2019 to 2020.

In 2019, the share of women receiving a long state prison sentence was 55% higher than in 2005. For men, the share receiving a long sentence was 37% higher in 2019 than in 2005. From 2019 to 2020, the share of women receiving a long sentence remained stable, while the men's share dropped 4%.

Figure 12. State Long Sentence Prison Admissions by Sex

12A. Number

12B. Share

Note: This population excludes people in federal prisons and local jails.

Recidivism

Females released from state prisons in 2012 were less likely than their male counterparts to be rearrested, reconvicted, or reimprisoned within five years (Figure 13). While 63% of females released from 34 state prison systems in 2012 were rearrested within five years, the figure was 72% for males.

Additional data show that females released from federal prisons in 2010 were less likely than their male counterparts to be rearrested by 2018 (35% and 52%, respectively).

Figure 13. Recidivism After Release from State and Federal Prison

Note: State recidivism counts instances of rearrest, reconviction, or reimprisonment regardless of the specific state across the sample in which the person recidivated. Federal recidivism counts instances of the type of recidivism across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and federal agencies. Newer analyses from BJS and the U.S. Sentencing Commission are not available.

Females released from state prisons in 2012 who were initially convicted of violent offenses were less likely to be rearrested, reconvicted, and reimprisoned than those who were initially convicted of property, drug, and public order crimes (Figure 14). With respect to rearrests, for example, 55% of females convicted of a violent crime were rearrested, while 68% of females convicted of a property crime were rearrested, 63% of females convicted of a drug crime were rearrested, and 61% of females convicted of a public order crime were rearrested.

Females were also less likely than males convicted of the same offenses to be rearrested, reconvicted, or reimprisoned. For those convicted of violent crimes, for example, rearrests were lower for females (55%) than males (66%).

Figure 14. Recidivism for People Released from State Prisons by Offense, 2012-2017

Note: State recidivism counts instances of rearrest, reconviction, or reimprisonment regardless of the specific state in which the person recidivated.

Of all people released from federal prison in 2005, females aged 60 and older were least likely to recidivate by 2013 (Figure 15). While 12% of women over 60 were rearrested within eight years of release, for example, 48% of females under 30 were rearrested during the time period. Women over 60 released from federal prison were also less likely to be arrested by 2013 (12%) than men over 60 (17%).

Figure 15. Recidivism for People Released from Federal Prisons by Age, 2005-2013

Note: Federal recidivism counts instances of rearrest, reconviction, or reincarceration across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and federal agencies.

Community Supervision

Comparing community supervision rates by sex reveals similar trends for women and men over time (Figure 16). From 2011 to 2019, for example, the women's and men's rates both dropped 16% percent. From 2011 to 2022, the women's rate decreased 34%, dropping from 900 to 590 per 100,000, and the men's rate fell 30%, dropping from 3,200 to 2,240.

Figure 16. Parole and Probation Rates by Sex, 2011-2021

Note: The data include adults under state and federal jurisdictions. Rates are calculated per 100,000 U.S. adult residents (women and men). For example, a women's rate of 800 means 800 women out of every 100,000 adults.

Women's Unique Experiences

Adverse Experiences

Women surveyed in state and federal prisons in 2016 were more likely than men to self-report having experienced certain adverse life and health experiences, from substance use to a mental health disorder, disability, or chronic condition (Figure 17). For example, women reported having an incarcerated family member and reported using substances more frequently than men.

Figure 17. Adverse Life and Health Experiences of People in State and Federal Prisons, 2016

Notes: Substance use percentages do not add to 100% because some incarcerated people reported using both alcohol and any drug at the time of the offense. Disabilities range from difficulties related to hearing and vision to cognitive ability, ambulatory ability, self-care, and independent living.

Motherhood

In 2016, the most recent year for which data are available, nearly six in ten women (58%) in state and federal prisons were parents of minor children, compared to less than half (47%) of men (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Parents in State and Federal Prisons, 2016

Note: Original data are from the Survey of Prison Inmates and was last conducted in 2016.

Pregnancy

The Federal Bureau of Prisons began to collect information on pregnancy among its female population in 2018, following a mandate created through the First Step Act. Over the first five years of data collection, the number of pregnant females in the system peaked in 2019 at 180 (Figure 19), fell 49% by 2020, and fell again by 19% in 2021 amid population declines related to responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2021 to 2022, the number increased by 30% to 96.

Figure 19. Pregnant Females in Federal Prisons, 2018-2022

State prisons and local jails do not routinely report data on pregnant women. The Pregnancy in Prison Statistics project, examining data from 22 states, estimated that 4% of females admitted to state prisons in December 2016 were pregnant.³ Based on a sample of six jails, including five of the nation's largest, the project estimated that 3% of women admitted to local jails over 12 months from 2016 to 2017 were pregnant.⁴

Sexual Victimization During Incarceration

In 2011-2012, 7% of women in state and federal prisons reported being sexually victimized by another imprisoned person, compared to 2% of men (Figure 20A). Likewise, more women (4%) than men (1%) in local jails reported sexual victimization by another incarcerated person (Figure 20B). A similar percentage of women and men held in local jails reported being sexually victimized by staff—1% of women and 2% of men.

Figure 20. Reported Sexual Victimizations, 2011-2012

20A. Prisons

20B. Jails

Note: The data include adult victimizations over a 12-month period.

Violent Victimization

This section examines data covering all people in the community—not just justice-involved women—to provide additional context about women's experiences with violent crime.

Victimization Rate

The female violent victimization rate in 2022 was 66% lower than its 1994 peak, while the male rate was 75% lower in 2022 than in 1994 (Figure 21). Between 1994 and 2008, the disparity between female and male violent victimization rates narrowed; in 2009, female and male violent victimization rates were similar and have remained so since that year. In 2022, the rates for females and males were nearly identical (23.4 and 23.5 per 100,000, respectively).

The number of female violent crime victimizations in 2022 was 55% lower than its 1994 peak, while the male number was 66% lower in 2022 than in 1994. In 2022, there were 3.4 million female and 3.3 million male violent crime victimizations.

Figure 21. Violent Crime Victimization, 1993-2022

Notes: The data include self-reported survey responses of people age 12 and older in correctional facilities, and exclude unhoused people. The victimizations include attempted and completed rape/sexual assault, personal robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Rates are calculated per 100,000 people 12 years or older. For example, a female victimization rate of 20 means there were 20 female victimizations out of every 100,000 people 12 years or older.

Both sexes have experienced downward trends in both the number and rate of violent crime victimization since the early 1990s. But the female share of all violent crime victimization has trended upward (Figure 22). In 1993, 41% of violent crime victims were female. From 2009 to 2022, shares of female and male violent victimization were about 50% annually, with some annual variability. In 2022, females made up 51% of all violent victimizations—24% higher than the female share in 1993. The male share was 16% lower in 2022 than in 1993.

Figure 22. Share of the Number of Violent Crime Victimization, 1993-2022

Notes: The data include people age 12 and older who are not unhoused or in correctional facilities. Victimization reports include attempted and completed rape/sexual assault, personal robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault.

Relationship to Offender

In 2022, a quarter of female violent crime victims identified an intimate partner as their offender, compared to 3% of male victims (Figure 23). More than a third (34%) of female victims identified a stranger as their offender; for male victims, more than half (57%) identified a stranger as the offender.

Figure 23. Violent Victimization by Relationship to Offender, 2022

Note: The data include attempted and completed rape/sexual assault, personal robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault.

Location of Offense

Women who were victims of a violent crime in 2022 were most likely to have experienced the incident at or near their homes (50%); men were most likely to have been victimized in a public area (43%). (See Figure 24.)

Figure 24. Violent Victimizations by Location, 2022

Note: The data include attempted and completed rape/sexual assault, personal robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault.

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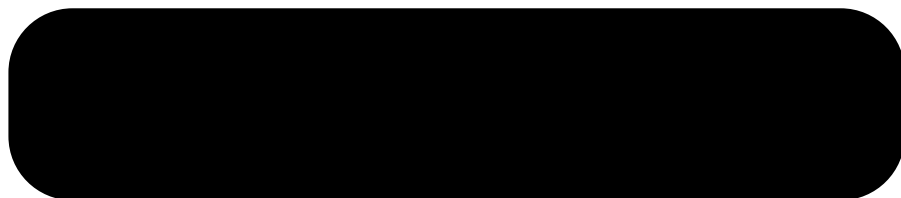
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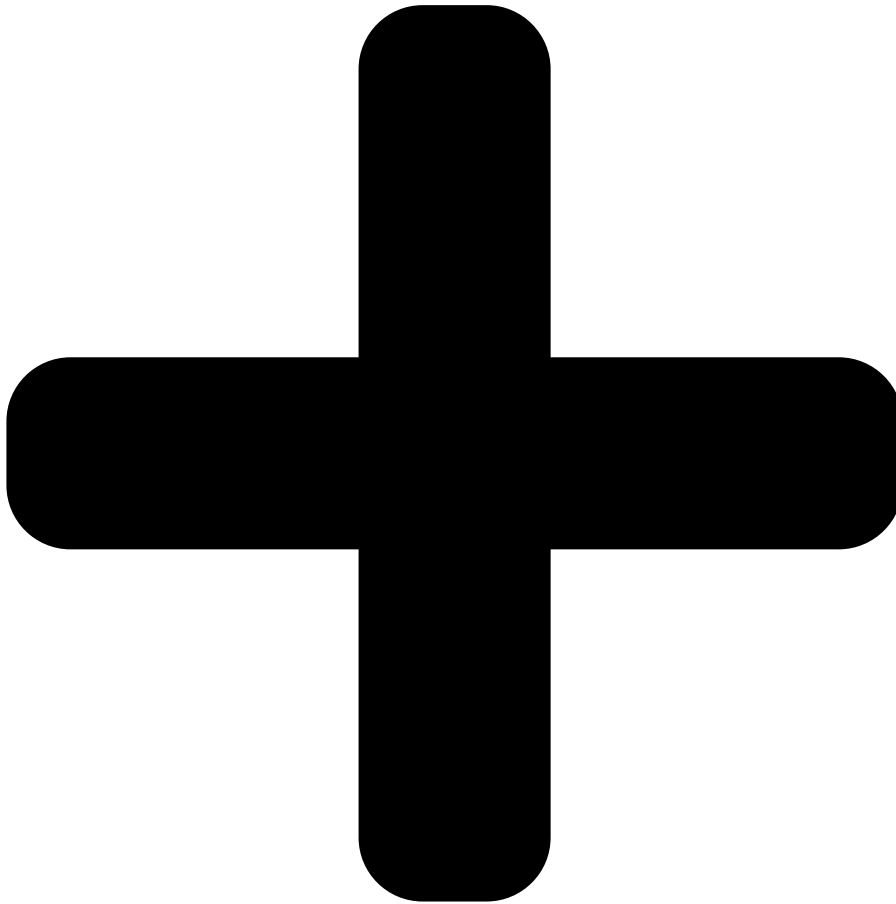
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ENDNOTES





¹ For both men and women in prison, the aging trend reflects two phenomena—older people entering prison and younger people aging in prison due to serving long sentences. See: Carson, E. A. & Sabol, W. (2016). *Aging of the State Prison Population, 1993–2013* (NCJ 248766). Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/aspp9313.pdf>

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