

Invisible Warriors: Veterans in State Prisons

Methodology

[Invisible Warriors: Veterans in State Prisons](#) examined how states identify veterans in their prison populations, whether through self-reporting, administrative records, or external verification systems. We also assembled a count of the total number of veterans in state prison, and, using that count, generated the percentage of the state's total prison population who identified as veterans and a ratio to indicate whether veterans were over- or underrepresented in prison compared to their prevalence in the community.

Data Collection

We collected data on state prison populations and incarcerated veterans using publicly available sources and public records requests. The total number of people in state prison was identified for 48 states from state department of corrections websites. This method was also used to identify the number of veterans in state prison in six states. Two states confirmed that they do not track veteran status, leaving six states with complete data and 44 with partial information.

To fill in the gaps, we followed each state's contact protocols. For 21 states that provided direct email contacts, we contacted research or records staff and received responses from 20. For the remaining 23 states, we submitted formal public records requests and received 22 responses.

Our goal was to capture a consistent snapshot from June 2023, marking the end of the fiscal year just prior to data collection. However, due to varying response times and data availability, the final dataset includes counts from snapshots collected between June 2022 and May 2024, with most data points falling within 2023.

Information Verification Process

To ensure accuracy and transparency, we contacted all 50 states to verify or correct the data we collected on how they identify veterans in prison and their most current count of veterans in state prisons. Although our data came from official sources—state reports, public records, or direct communication—we pursued this extra verification step to strengthen the reliability of our findings and foster collaboration with state agencies.

We gathered contact information for each state's corrections department leader and sent those officials a summary table of their state's data, asking them to confirm or correct it and share it with the appropriate staff. Within 28 days, we received responses from 19 states. A follow-up email to the remaining states yielded six more replies, bringing the total to 25.

Of these 25 states, 19 fully confirmed or corrected their data. Two provided partial confirmation, with outstanding questions that typically related to budget details. The remaining four contacts either acknowledged our request and referred us to another staff member, who had not responded by our publication deadline, or advised us to file a public records request. As of this writing, we have not received responses to any of those outstanding requests.

We were able to identify and verify the veteran identification method for 43 states and the count of veterans for 46 states. Table S2 provides state-level details.

Veteran identification methods:

- Twenty states used individual self-report of veteran status, typically collected during prison admission.
- Sixteen states used Veterans Re-Entry Search Service (VRSS).
- Seven states used both self-report and VRSS.
- A veteran identification method was not identified for three states.
- Two states do not record veteran status.
- Two states did not respond to the public records requests.

Veteran counts:

- Forty-six states provided a count of veterans directly or in published materials.
- Two states do not record veteran status.
- Two states did not respond to the public records requests.

Share of Veterans in State Prison

To determine the share of veterans as a portion of the total state prison population in the 46 states with data, we divided the number of veterans identified in each state's prison system by the total prison population in that state. We used count data from a range of sources to match the time the veteran count was taken as closely as possible to the number of people in each state's prison system (Table S1). Table S2 below provides state-level details on the share of veterans in state prison.

Table S1. Data Source, Date, and Count of People in State Prison

State	Date Source for Count	Date of Count	Count of People in State Prison
Alabama	Monthly Statistical Report	April 2024	20,445
Alaska	Public records request	January 2024	4,446
Arizona	Public report, July 2022	July 2022	33,326
Arkansas	Director's Board Report, Oct 2023	October 2023	18,380
California	Weekly Total Report	May 2023	96,318
Colorado	Provided by state	March 2024	15,982
Connecticut	Monthly Population Report	November 2023	10,445
Delaware	Public Data (filtered to Nov 2023 prisons)	November 2023	4,214
Florida	Monthly Population Report	October 2023	85,712
Georgia	Monthly Population Report	November 2023	50,616
Hawaii	Public records request	June 2023	2,422
Idaho	FY 2023 Population Report	June 2023	9,332
Illinois	June 30, 2023 Population Snapshot	June 2023	29,930
Indiana	Provided by state	January 2024	23,136
Iowa	July 2, 2024 Daily Population	July 2024	8,947
Kansas	Current Population (on 01/25/24)	January 2024	8,980
Kentucky	Daily Count Sheet	November 2023	19,468
Louisiana	Demographic Dashboard (06/30/2023 snapshot)	June 2023	27,899
Maine	Monthly Report	October 2023	1,824
Maryland	DOC Dashboard	June 2023	15,425

Massachusetts	Weekly Population Report	January 2024	6,171
Michigan	FY 23-24 Corrections Summary Report	April 2023	32,616
Minnesota	Provided by state	May 2024	8,147
Mississippi	2022 Inmate Population	June 2022	17,422
Missouri	Offender Profile FY 22	June 2022	23,496
Montana	Daily Population Report (11/30/2023)	November 2023	2,759
Nebraska	Quarterly Data Sheet 2023 Quarter 3	September 2023	5,516
Nevada	Monthly Population Report	June 2022	10,332
New Hampshire	FY 2021 Annual Report	June 2021	1,937
New Jersey	Provided by state	March 2024	13,139
New Mexico	PERFORMANCE REPORT CARD	April 2022	5,651
New York	Public records request	December 2023	32,766
North Carolina	Cost of Corrections 2022	June 2022	28,692
North Dakota	2022 Fact Sheet	December 2022	1,817
Ohio	December 2023 Fact Sheet	December 2023	44,892
Oklahoma	Weekly Population Count	November 2023	17,296
Oregon	Jan 2024 Inmate Profile	January 2024	12,027
Pennsylvania	Monthly Population Report	September 2023	37,676
Rhode Island	Open records request (11/27/2023)	November 2023	2,322
South Carolina	Inmate Count Report	January 2024	16,173
South Dakota	2022 Annual Report	June 2022	3,375
Tennessee	May 2023 Felon Population Report	May 2023	24,764

Texas	FY 2022 Statistical Report	August 2022	116,684
Utah	Operations Dashboard (excluding county jail counts)	January 2024	4,508
Vermont	December 2023 Population Report	December 2023	1,324
Virginia	FY 22 Annual Financial Report	June 2023	23,288
Washington	Provided by state	September 2023	13,972
West Virginia	FY 2022 Annual Report	June 2022	4,016
Wisconsin	Public record, June 2023	June 2023	21,597
Wyoming	FY 2023 Annual Report (avg daily population)	June 2023	2,208

Representation Ratios

To assess whether veterans were proportionally represented in state prisons, we used population data from the 2020 Census and the VA's 2020 state veteran report to calculate a representation ratio for each state.¹ Table S2 below provides state-level details.

We calculated the national representation ratio for the 46 states with available information using this formula:

$$\frac{(\text{Total veterans in prison across 46 states} / \text{Total prison population of those states})}{(\text{Total veterans in the general population across those states} / \text{Total population of those states})}$$

This national ratio shows whether veterans are over- or underrepresented in state prisons overall. A ratio above 1 indicates overrepresentation; a ratio below 1 indicates underrepresentation.

¹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (n.d.). *National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics* https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp; U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau *Table 2. Resident Population for the 50 States, The District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico; 2020 Census* <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/data/apportionment/apportionment-2020-table02.pdf>

Table S2. State Prison Veteran Identification Methods and Incarceration Metrics, 2023

State	Veteran Identification Method	Count of Veterans in State Prisons (2023)	Veterans as a Share of the State Prison Population	Ratio of Veterans in Prison to Veterans in the State
Alabama	VRSS	730	3.57%	0.5
Alaska	VRSS	420	9.45%	0.97
Arizona	Unknown	1,703	5.11%	0.72
Arkansas	Self-Report	1,189	6.47%	0.92
California	Self-Report and VRSS	3,027	3.14%	0.76
Colorado	Self-Report	1,112	6.96%	1.04
Connecticut	Self-Report and VRSS	398	3.81%	0.8
Delaware	Self-Report	165	3.92%	0.55
Florida	Self-Report and VRSS	3,983	4.65%	0.67
Georgia	VRSS	2,024	4.00%	0.62
Hawaii	VRSS	181	7.47%	0.97
Idaho	Self-Report	325	3.48%	0.5
Illinois	Self-Report	778	2.60%	0.55
Indiana	VRSS	1,288	5.57%	0.93
Iowa	Unknown	330	3.69%	0.61
Kansas	Self-Report	437	4.87%	0.73
Kentucky	Unknown	636	3.27%	0.52
Louisiana	VRSS	789	2.83%	0.47
Maine	VRSS	171	9.38%	1.13
Maryland	Self-Report and VRSS	668	4.33%	0.72
Massachusetts	Self-Report	301	4.88%	1.11
Michigan	VRSS	1,489	4.57%	0.82
Minnesota	VRSS	404	4.96%	0.9
Mississippi	VRSS	1,037	5.95%	0.94
Missouri	Not Recorded			
Montana	Self-Report	79	2.86%	0.35
Nebraska	Self-Report	242	4.39%	0.68
Nevada	VRSS	739	7.15%	1.01

New Hampshire	Missing			
New Jersey	Self-Report and VRSS	291	2.21%	0.61
New Mexico	Self-Report	281	4.97%	0.7
New York	Self-Report and VRSS	1,119	3.42%	0.92
North Carolina	Self-Report	1,781	6.21%	0.92
North Dakota	Self-Report	111	6.11%	0.89
Ohio	VRSS	2,547	5.67%	0.92
Oklahoma	Self-Report	864	5.00%	0.68
Oregon	Self-Report	1,843	15.32%	2.29
Pennsylvania	Self-Report	2,462	6.53%	1.1
Rhode Island	Self-Report and VRSS	97	4.18%	0.74
South Carolina	VRSS	935	5.78%	0.75
South Dakota	Not Recorded			
Tennessee	Self-Report	1,014	4.09%	0.62
Texas	VRSS	8,134	6.97%	1.3
Utah	Self-Report	211	4.68%	1.15
Vermont	Self-Report	30	2.27%	0.35
Virginia	Missing			
Washington	VRSS	805	5.76%	0.8
West Virginia	Self-Report	326	8.12%	1.08
Wisconsin	Self-Report	1296	6.00%	1.01
Wyoming	VRSS	192	8.70%	1.07

Notes: Arizona, Iowa, and Kentucky provided a count of veterans but not the identification method. Missouri and South Dakota do not record veteran status for people in state prison. New Hampshire and Virginia did not respond to the records request. A ratio above 1 indicates overrepresentation; a ratio below 1 indicates underrepresentation.