

Arizona's Imprisonment Crisis:

PART 2

THE COST TO COMMUNITIES *Summary Brief*

After decades of sustained prison growth, Arizona is in the midst of an imprisonment crisis. The state has the fourth highest imprisonment rate in the country and the prison system costs taxpayers over \$1 billion each year. This prison growth cannot be explained by more crime or a larger resident population — instead it was driven by policy choices to send more people to prison for first-time and non-violent offenses, and to keep people in prison far beyond the national average.

This imprisonment crisis is not felt equally across the state. Rural communities commit more of their residents to prison than urban counties. Maricopa County, the most populous county in the state, hands out the longest sentences, driven by the use of powerful sentencing enhancements. Communities of color are disproportionately sent to prison, and — in certain circumstances — stay behind bars for far longer than white people.

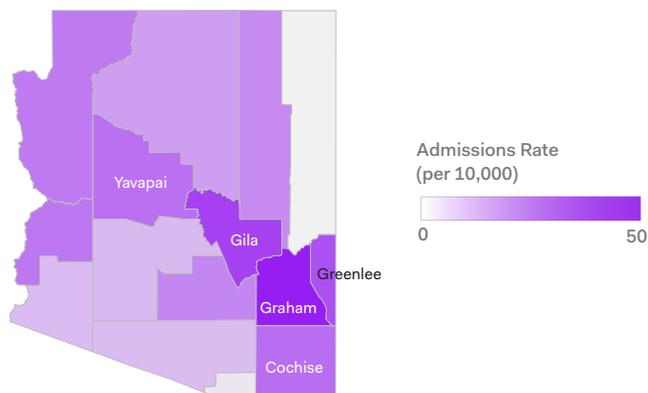
County Disparities

Arizona's criminal laws are set at the state level. However, each county in Arizona has local practitioners — police, sheriffs, county attorneys, defense attorneys, judges, and others — who collectively make decisions about how those laws are implemented. These county-level decisions lead to tremendous variation in the use of prison across counties in Arizona.

The biggest counties in Arizona, Maricopa, Pinal, and Pima, send the most people to prison each year. However, when looking at admissions on a per-capita basis — or how many people are admitted to prison for every 10,000 county residents — rural counties rise to the top. Graham County, a small county with less than 40,000 residents, has the state's highest admissions rate, followed by Gila, Greenlee, Cochise, and Yavapai counties.

Rural counties admit people to prison at a higher rate than urban counties in Arizona.

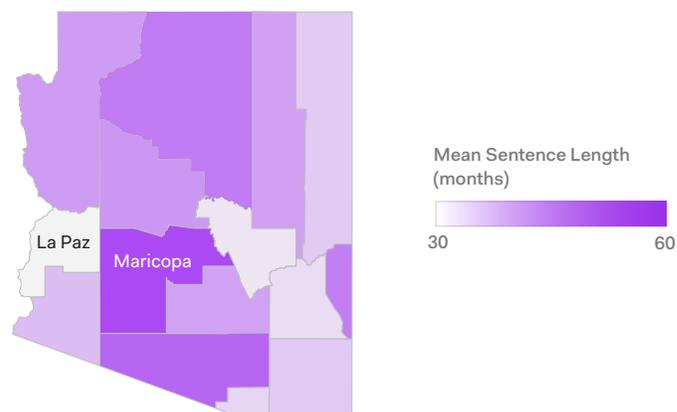
Admissions Rate by County, FY2017 (per 10,000)



How long people spend in prison also differs from county to county. Maricopa County sends people to prison with the longest sentences — an average of 57.4 months. La Paz County, on the other hand, sends people to prison with an average sentence of only 32.9 months.

Sentence lengths also vary widely, with some counties in Arizona sending people to prison for much longer terms.

Mean Sentence Length, Arizona New Prison Sentences, FY2017



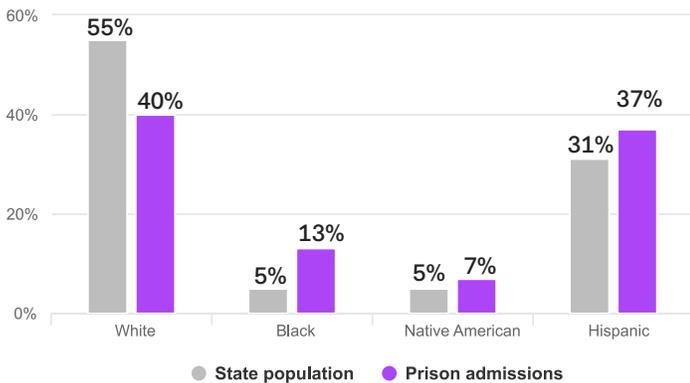
These longer sentences are driven in part by use of sentencing enhancements, including the powerful “repetitive offender” enhancement. Maricopa accounted for nearly 76 percent of all the people sent to prison in Arizona with the enhancement, but only 62 percent of all people sent to prison.

Racial and ethnic disparities

Communities of color experience imprisonment at higher rates than white people in Arizona. In 2017, Hispanic people comprised 31 percent of Arizona's state population but 37 percent of people admitted to prison. Black people were over-represented at an even higher rate, comprising five percent of the state population but 13 percent of prison admissions.

Hispanic and black people are disproportionately represented in Arizona's prison admissions.

Arizona Prison Admissions vs. Arizona State Population, by Race and Ethnicity, FY2017

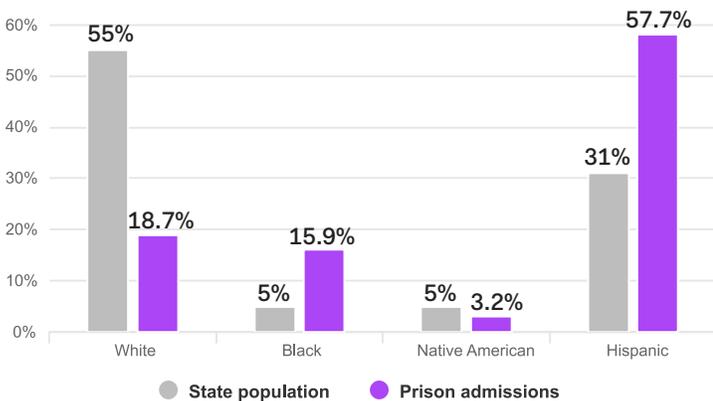


Source: Census Bureau, Population Estimates July 1, 2017

For drug crimes, these disparities are even greater. For example, for possession of marijuana, Hispanic people comprise 31 percent of Arizona's population and 32 percent of arrests for marijuana possession, but almost 60 percent of the people admitted to prison for that crime.

Hispanic people significantly overrepresented for marijuana possession in Arizona.

Prison Admissions for Marijuana Possession vs. Arizona State Population, by Race and Ethnicity, FY2017

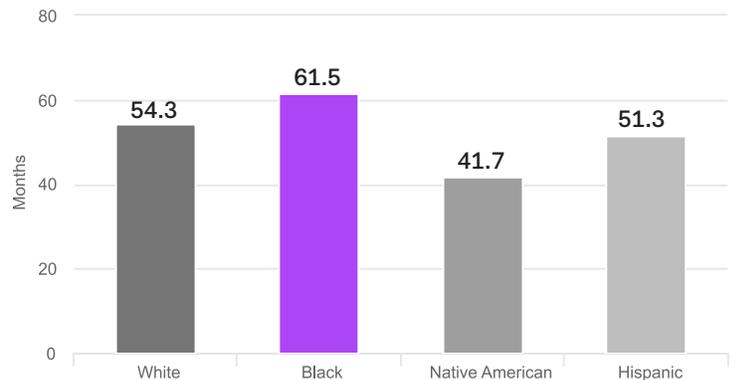


Source: Census Bureau, Population Estimates July 1, 2017

In addition to stark disparities in terms of who is sent to prison, there are also differences in how long people spend in prison by race and ethnicity. On average, black people sentenced to prison in Arizona receive the longest sentences (62 months compared to 54 months for white people and 51 months for Hispanics).

Black people receive the longest average prison sentences in Arizona.

Mean Sentence Length by Race and Ethnicity, Arizona New Prison Sentences, FY2017



These disparities are particularly acute for some offenses. For example, the average prison sentence for drug possession was 36 months in 2017. For black people, the average sentence was 56 months, or more than a year and a half longer.

Arizona's Imprisonment Crisis: The Cost to Communities is the second in a three-part research series documenting the cost of the state's growing prison population. To see the full report, please visit <https://www.fwd.us/AtWhatCost>

Unless otherwise noted, all prison figures cited in this report use data from the Arizona Department of Corrections analysed by FWD.us. See the full report for a description of the methodology and data definitions.