

97995



U.S. Department of Justice  
Bureau of Justice Statistics

## Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report

# Prison Admissions and Releases, 1982

by Stephanie Minor-Harper  
and  
Lawrence A. Greenfeld  
BJS Statisticians

July 1985

During 1982, 201,000 persons were admitted to State prisons to begin serving newly imposed court sentences or because they had violated the terms of an earlier conditional release. During the same year, 157,000 persons were released from State prisons by parole board decision, mandatory release, or by expiration of term.<sup>1</sup> The data for this report on the characteristics of persons admitted to or released from prison in 1982 were obtained from 29 States and the District of Columbia and cover approximately three-fifths of the Nation's total State prison admissions and releases.

● The overwhelming majority of those admitted to and those released from prison in 1982 were male and almost half of both groups were black.

● The median age of those admitted to prison was 25 years; the median age at release was 27 years.

● Violent offenders accounted for 37.5% of those admitted to prison and 35.9% of those released.

● Burglary and robbery were the most prevalent offenses for which persons were admitted to prison. While the percentage of blacks admitted for

This is the second Bureau of Justice Statistics special report devoted to statistics on persons admitted to and released from State prisons. This series continues to enlighten us regarding such basic questions as: Who goes to prison and for what crimes? How much time do offenders spend in prison? Are offenders serving more or less time than in the past?

As increasing numbers of offenders are convicted and sentenced under new laws requiring mandatory prison terms and fixed sentences without possibility of parole, statistics on admissions and releases will provide an early indication of the effect of these

laws on prison populations and on time served by offenders. This information will be essential to an examination of the effectiveness of these new statutes.

Twenty-nine States and the District of Columbia contributed the offender-specific data that made this report possible. We gratefully acknowledge their generous contribution. Because of the uniqueness of this series and its value to everyone concerned with correctional policy, we hope that all 50 States will recognize the value of participating in this program.

Steven R. Schlesinger  
Director

burglary (25.5%) was less than the percentage of whites (29.6%), the percentage of blacks admitted for robbery (24.0%) was almost twice as large as the percentage of whites (13.6%).

● The median sentence for those admitted to prison was 51 months, and the median time served of those released was 16 months.

● About 3% of those entering prison had received a life sentence. Two of every three life sentences were imposed for murder. Murderers, drug offenders, robbers, and rapists, as a group, accounted for more than 9 of every 10

Offense	Median sentence for 1982 admissions	Median time served for 1982 releases
All offenses	51 months	16 months
Murder	Life*	69
Manlaughter	105	28
Rape	120	36
Robbery	78	25
Assault	48	15
Burglary	42	14
Larceny	32	10
Auto theft	36	13
Forgery/fraud/ embezzlement	33	11
Drugs	43	11

\* Sentences greater than 50 years were assumed to be life.

<sup>1</sup>See *Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions on December 31, 1982*, NCJ-93311, August 1984, for a detailed description for each reporting jurisdiction.



offense varied widely among the reporting States, from a high of 71% in Massachusetts to a low of 17% in South Dakota (table 5). A total of four States—Massachusetts, Hawaii, New York, and Rhode Island—reported that more than 50% of their admissions were for violent offenses. Seven States—South Dakota, Iowa, North Carolina, Tennessee, Nebraska, Texas, and Georgia—reported that less than 30% of their admissions were for violent offenses. In all but three reporting States—Delaware, Montana, and South Dakota—the percentage of violent offenders among blacks admitted to prison exceeded the percentage of violent offenders among whites admitted. (Montana and South Dakota each admitted only one black for a violent offense.)

#### Age and offense

About five-sixths of all those admitted to prison for all offenses in 1982 were under 35 years of age; nearly half were under 25 years of age (table 6). The oldest were those convicted of public order offenses (median age of 30), manslaughter (29), murder (28), forgery/fraud/embezzlement (28) and drug offenses (28). The youngest were those convicted of robbery, burglary, and auto theft (all with a median age of 23).

The relationship between age and offense can also be analyzed by examining the most prevalent conviction offenses among different age groups of those admitted to prison (table 7). Robbery and burglary were the most common offenses among the younger age groups, while murder, manslaughter and public order offenses were most common among the oldest age groups. Consider, for example,

Table 5. State prison admissions and releases, 1982: sentence length, time served, and percent convicted of violent crimes

State	Admissions		First release <sup>a</sup>	
	Median sentence	Percent convicted of violent crimes <sup>b</sup>	Median time served	Percent convicted of violent crimes <sup>b</sup>
Total	51 months	36%	16 months	36%
Alabama	54	30	12	28
Delaware	36	35	37	---
District of Columbia	73	49	37	54
Georgia	53	29	13	27
Hawaii	110	57	29	42
Illinois	39	40	14	41
Iowa	110	25	17	---
Kentucky	55	38	7	31
Louisiana	---	---	23	38
Massachusetts	111	71	16	80
Mississippi	49	32	11	26
Missouri	41	32	14	28
Montana	79	31	11	26
Nebraska	34	28	15	25
Nevada	52	39	15	25
New Hampshire	55	37	13	32
New Mexico	40	44	22	46
New York	49	56	21	55
North Carolina	29	27	13	26
North Dakota	33	32	11	31
Ohio	58	---	---	---
Pennsylvania	56	49	18	47
Rhode Island	31	51	17	47
South Carolina	57	33	---	31
South Dakota	31	17	11	17
Tennessee	50	27	18	24
Texas	---	28	13 <sup>c</sup>	23 <sup>c</sup>
Utah	60	37	14	32
West Virginia	111	31	14	27
Wisconsin	34	39	18	37

--- Data not available or could not be utilized.  
<sup>a</sup> First release is the release of an offender from prison for the first time since his commitment for his present offense.

<sup>b</sup> Violent offenses: murder, manslaughter, rape, other sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and miscellaneous violent offenses.  
<sup>c</sup> Includes all releases.

how the prevalence of admissions for burglary drops off with age. For those admitted to prison under the age of 25, more than 1 in 3 was sentenced for burglary; for those 25-34 it was 1 in 4; for those 35-44, 1 in 6; for those 45-54, 1 in 9; for those 55-64, 1 in 14; and for those 65 and older only 1 in 25 was

admitted for burglary. A similar pattern exists for robbery: about 1 in every 5 offenders under 25 was convicted of robbery, but only 1 in every 38 of those 65 or older.

For murder, manslaughter, and public order offenses the pattern is

Table 6. Age distribution of State prison admissions, by offense, 1982

Offense	Number of admissions	Total	Age at admission							Median age
			Less than 18 years	18-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	65 years and over	
All offenses <sup>a</sup>	106,814	100%	2.6%	44.0%	36.9%	11.4%	3.6%	1.1%	0.1%	25 years
Murder	4,327	100	2.7	32.4	36.7	16.8	7.5	2.8	0.8	28
Manslaughter	2,598	100	1.7	28.4	37.7	18.3	7.3	4.1	1.2	29
Rape	2,664	100	3.8	48.8	37.1	12.9	4.9	1.9	---	25
Robbery	17,782	100	4.2	58.6	36.9	7.1	1.6	0.2	---	23
Assault	6,852	100	1.9	39.3	39.7	14.9	5.8	1.5	0.2	29
Burglary	27,431	100	3.5	56.5	31.4	6.5	1.5	0.3	---	23
Larceny	19,534	100	2.1	44.6	36.3	12.1	3.7	0.9	---	25
Auto theft	1,782	100	3.5	54.9	29.7	8.5	3.1	0.6	---	23
Forgery, fraud, embezzlement	6,216	100	0.6	31.1	45.9	18.0	5.8	1.3	0.1	29
Drugs	8,895	100	0.2	28.2	48.4	17.1	4.5	1.9	0.2	28
Public order	5,369	100	1.1	26.4	39.8	19.2	6.4	2.9	0.6	30
Other offenses <sup>b</sup>	7,444	100	1.6	38.3	38.6	14.6	4.7	1.6	0.6	27

--- Less than 0.1%.  
<sup>a</sup> Age and offense data were provided for 88% of the 114,391 admissions.

<sup>b</sup> "Other offenses" includes other sexual offenses, other violent offenses, other property offenses, and miscellaneous offenses.

Table 7. Offense distribution within age groups for State prison admissions, 1982

Offense	Total	Age at admission						
		Less than 18 years	18-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	65 years and over
All offenses <sup>a</sup>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Murder	4.3	4.5	3.1	4.2	6.3	8.8	11.0	18.4
Manslaughter	2.6	1.7	1.6	2.6	4.3	5.1	9.8	16.8
Rape	2.6	3.8	2.4	2.6	2.9	2.9	2.5	1.0
Robbery	17.6	28.4	20.1	17.1	10.9	7.6	4.6	2.6
Assault	6.6	4.8	5.7	6.9	8.1	9.1	9.1	8.7
Burglary	27.2	36.2	31.9	23.2	15.6	11.3	7.3	4.1
Larceny	10.4	8.6	10.5	10.2	11.1	10.7	7.8	3.6
Auto theft	1.8	2.3	2.1	1.4	1.3	1.5	0.9	2.0
Forgery, fraud, embezzlement	6.2	1.4	4.3	7.5	8.6	9.4	7.5	4.1
Drugs	8.0	0.8	5.1	10.5	12.0	9.8	8.0	9.7
Public order	5.3	2.3	3.1	5.6	8.9	13.7	19.8	17.3
Other offenses <sup>b</sup>	7.4	4.6	6.4	7.7	9.4	9.4	11.0	11.7
Number of admissions	100,814	2,674	44,423	37,209	11,507	3,696	1,109	196

<sup>a</sup> Age and offense data were provided for 88% of the 114,391 admissions.

<sup>b</sup> "Other offenses" includes other sexual assault, other violent offenses, other property offenses, and miscellaneous offenses.

reversed. The proportion of each age group confined for these offenses generally increases with age. For example, while 1 in every 32 persons admitted to prison between the ages of 18 and 24 was a convicted murderer, nearly 1 in every 5.5 persons 65 years old and above was admitted for murder. (For every crime, however, at least 85% of those admitted were under 45 years old.)

Unlike these other crimes, drug offenses were most prevalent in the middle years of 35-44 (1 in 8 of those admitted in this age group).

#### Sentences

The sentencing of a convicted offender is one of the most difficult components of the criminal justice system to compare across jurisdictions. Every State has unique sentencing laws and practices governing both the chance of receiving imprisonment given a conviction for a particular crime and the expected duration of confinement for that crime. In recent years reform efforts have led many States to enact laws that have as one of their major goals the reduction of disparities in sentences and actual time served for offenders convicted of similar crimes with similar criminal backgrounds. This is achieved, in part, by reducing, eliminating, or making explicit the amount of discretion available to judges in sentencing convicted offenders and to parole authorities in releasing inmates from prison. Examples of such laws are determinate and mandatory sentencing statutes and statutes (or administrative procedures)

creating sentencing and parole release guidelines.

By yearend 1982, fully determinate sentencing, in which the court sets a fixed term of years to be served in full (less time off for good behavior), was in effect in nine States. A majority of the States had also enacted a wide variety of mandatory sentences that required imprisonment for certain types of offenses or offenders such as repeat or habitual offenders, certain classes of violent or drug crimes, and specific offenses involving the use of a firearm. In addition, a number of States enacted sentencing provisions requiring minimum prison stays for certain offenses or offenders.

In 1982, State courts committed approximately 10 in every 10,000 adults to prison (table 8). Rates per 10,000 varied considerably across jurisdictions, ranging from just over 28 in the District of Columbia (a wholly urban jurisdiction) to less than 3 in Hawaii. Between 1978 and 1982 court commitment rates for the Nation increased from 7.2 per 10,000 adults to 9.8.

The median sentence for persons admitted to State prisons in 1982 was 51 months, ranging from highs of life for murder and 120 months for rape to lows of 32 months for larceny and 29 months for public order offenses (table 3). Median sentences for each of the violent crimes examined were longer than for the nonviolent crimes. The nonviolent crimes with the longest median sentences were drug offenses (43 months) and burglary (42 months).

Table 8. Court commitment rates for State prison admissions, 1982

States	Number	Commitments per 10,000 adults in population <sup>a</sup>
U.S. total	164,648	9.8
Alabama	4,283	15.2
Alaska	477	16.1
Arizona	2,575	12.5
Arkansas	1,821	11.1
California	15,932	8.7
Colorado	1,587	7.2
Connecticut	1,849	7.8
Delaware	613	13.8
District of Columbia	1,403	28.4
Florida	11,888	14.9
Georgia	8,719	21.7
Hawaii	197	2.8
Idaho	651	9.9
Illinois	6,764	8.1
Indiana	4,104	10.5
Iowa	1,220	5.8
Kansas	1,604	9.1
Kentucky	2,197	8.4
Louisiana	3,626	12.0
Maine	471	5.7
Maryland	4,170	13.2
Massachusetts	1,729	4.0
Michigan	4,376	6.7
Minnesota	1,037	3.5
Mississippi	2,384	13.6
Missouri	2,922	8.1
Montana	405	7.1
Nebraska	588	5.1
Nevada	1,161	17.8
New Hampshire	213	3.1
New Jersey	3,667	6.6
New Mexico	771	8.2
New York	9,116	6.9
North Carolina	7,743	17.6
North Dakota	222	4.7
Ohio	8,872	11.5
Oklahoma	3,377	14.7
Oregon	1,848	9.5
Pennsylvania	3,736	4.2
Rhode Island	312	4.3
South Carolina	3,323	14.6
South Dakota	407	8.3
Tennessee	3,238	9.6
Texas	16,692	15.5
Utah	480	4.9
Vermont	178	4.7
Virginia	4,965	12.3
Washington	1,741	5.6
West Virginia	738	5.3
Wisconsin	1,903	5.5
Wyoming	353	10.2

<sup>a</sup> Defined as the number of persons in the civilian resident population aged 18 and older.

Source: Prisoners in 1982, NCJ-87933, BJS bulletin, April 1983.

White offenders had a median sentence of 50 months and black offenders had a median sentence of 52 months. Mean sentences (excluding those sentenced to life or death) for whites were 75.1 months compared to 80.3 months for black admissions. These differences reflect the fact that a higher proportion of blacks were admitted for the crimes with the longest median sentences: 43.7% of blacks and 32.1% of whites were admitted for the violent offenses of murder, manslaughter, rape,

robbery, assault, other sexual assault, and other crimes involving violence.

The impact on the overall average sentence of these differential offense distributions can be systematically examined by computing what the average sentence would have been for blacks if, crime-for-crime, they had received the same sentences as whites (table 9). This calculation, which removes the effects of differences in offense distribution between the races, indicates that if blacks had received the same sentences as whites for the same crime categories, the overall average (mean) sentence for blacks admitted to prison in 1982 would have been 81.4 months. This is 2 months longer than the actual average sentence of 79.4 months for blacks. (Note that the difference between 79.4 months and 80.3 months, noted in the preceding paragraph, is due to rounding and the exclusion of cases that did not specify an offense.)

Among reporting States, aggregate median sentence lengths ranged from 29 months in North Carolina to 111 months in Massachusetts and West Virginia (table 5). Such differences among States reflect variations in sentencing statutes, in the kinds of offenses that result in imprisonment, and in assumptions about time to be served (based on different good-time rules and parole eligibility provisions). Such differences limit meaningful discussion or generalization across jurisdictions.

North Carolina, for example,

Offense	(A) Number of black admissions	(B) Actual mean sentence length for black admissions	(C) Total actual months sentenced for black admissions (AxB)	(D) Mean sentence length for white admissions	(E) Total projected months sentenced for black admissions (AxD)
Murder	1,286	250.2 mos.	321,757	241.7 mos.	310,826
Manslaughter	1,311	125.2	164,137	116.3	152,469
Rape	1,342	164.4	220,625	152.0	203,984
Other sexual assault	403	103.0	41,509	94.1	37,922
Robbery	10,366	103.4	1,071,844	109.3	1,133,004
Assault	3,011	68.7	206,856	69.2	208,361
Other violent offenses	448	105.9	47,443	106.0	47,488
Burglary	11,121	58.1	646,130	61.0	678,381
Auto theft	577	52.2	30,119	50.4	29,081
Forgery/fraud/embezzlement	2,332	47.8	111,470	52.8	123,130
Larceny	4,437	46.9	208,095	50.5	224,069
Other property offenses	1,359	49.5	67,271	54.3	73,794
Drugs	2,723	58.3	158,751	57.4	156,300
Public order	1,622	43.8	71,044	44.3	71,855
Other offenses	312	62.2	19,406	68.1	21,247
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,650</b>		<b>3,386,457</b>		<b>3,471,911</b>
Total months divided by number of admissions			<b>79.4 months</b>		<b>81.4 months</b>

Note: Those with life or death sentences are excluded.

following the lead of States like California and Maine, adopted a determinate sentencing system in 1979. Under this system a convicted person must serve the imposed sentence less good time before release. Massachusetts, on the other hand, has indeterminate sentencing, which provides statutory limits on each offense within which the court sets minimum and maximum limits for each sentence. In indeterminate sentencing States most inmates are released on parole before serving the maximum sentence. Previous studies have found that sentence lengths in determinate sentencing States (like North Carolina) are generally only a fraction of those in indeterminate sentencing States (like Massachusetts).<sup>2</sup>

## RELEASES

### Demography

**Sex.** Most persons released from State prisons in 1982 were males (94.3%) (table 1). This percentage has been stable since data first became available in 1926. Among reporting States, Massachusetts had the highest percentage of females among releases (21.7%), and Missouri had the smallest (1.6%).

**Race.** The racial distribution pattern for releases was nearly identical to that for admissions: 53.3% white, 45.8% black, and 0.9% other races. As with admissions, the percentage of blacks among those released from prison fluctuated sharply. More than 97% of the releases in the District of Columbia and 68% of those in Louisiana were black. More than 50% of the releases were black in seven other States: (in decreasing order) Illinois, Mississippi, Delaware, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and New York. North Dakota and New Hampshire reported the lowest percentage of black releases (0.5%).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, *Felony Sentencing in 18 Local Jurisdictions*, BJS Special Report, June 1985, NCJ-97681, and *Characteristics of State Prisoners, 1960*, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Washington, D.C., pp. 13-16.

As with admissions, Hawaii reported the largest percentage of releases classified as "other" races (60.6%), and again they were primarily Asian and Pacific Islanders. Similarly, in South Dakota (23.5%), Montana (20.5%), and North Dakota (15.1%) a large percentage of the releases were "other" races, primarily Native Americans.

**Age.** The median age of persons released from prison in 1982 was 27 years, a year younger than in 1981 and 2 years older than those admitted to prison in 1982. The median age of releases was highest (29 years) in the District of Columbia, Nevada and New Mexico, and lowest (25 years) in 8 States: Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, West Virginia and Wisconsin. While 46.7% of those admitted to prison were under 25 and 5.0% were 45 or older, 38.6% of those released were under 25 and 8.0% were 45 or older (table 2).

### Offenses

Of the 89,573 releases reported by participating States, 58% were first releases from prison for whom offense and time-served data were provided. A first release is the release of an offender from prison for the first time since his commitment for his present offense, thus excluding persons exiting prison who had earlier been conditionally released from prison but were subsequently returned for violating the conditions of that release. The discussion of offenses and time served is limited to first releases.

Overall, 35.9% of the inmates released from prison in 1982 had committed a violent crime; for whites it was 29.4%, for blacks 43.0% (table 10).

As with admissions, the proportion of released inmates who had been sentenced for a violent crime varied markedly across the States. In Massachusetts, for example, where 71% of the admissions were for violent

Table 10. State prison releases, 1982: distribution and time served for offense and race

Offense	All races			White			Black			Other		
	Per cent	Time served in months Median	Mean	Per cent	Time served in months Median	Mean	Per cent	Time served in months Median	Mean	Per cent	Time served in months Median	Mean
All offenses	100.0%	16	24.1	100.0%	15	21.9	100.0%	18	26.7	100.0%	15	22.0
Violent, total	35.9	24	35.1	29.4	23	32.7	43.0	26	37.1	36.5	21	31.8
Murder	2.5	69	81.3	2.1	65	78.5	2.9	74	84.1	1.7	*	79.0
Manslaughter	3.7	28	35.7	3.1	25	32.9	4.3	31	38.5	4.5	22	31.4
Rape	2.0	36	48.5	1.7	33	42.6	2.3	38	53.4	2.0	*	61.7
Other sexual assault	1.7	23	28.6	2.3	22	27.8	1.0	24	30.7	2.0	*	28.8
Robbery	17.2	25	33.4	12.1	24	30.5	23.0	26	35.1	12.0	25	35.3
Assault	7.5	15	21.7	6.7	14	21.1	8.3	16	22.4	12.3	13	18.7
Other violent offenses	1.3	20	30.3	1.3	20	30.7	1.1	20	30.3	1.9	*	24.3
Property, total	49.4	12	17.2	53.3	12	16.8	45.2	12	17.7	50.1	13	17.4
Burglary	27.5	14	18.6	29.9	14	18.1	25.0	14	19.2	26.8	16	19.5
Larceny	10.0	10	14.9	10.0	10	14.5	9.8	10	15.1	10.9	10	15.0
Auto theft	1.2	13	16.7	1.4	12	16.7	0.9	13	16.9	2.2	*	14.6
Forgery/fraud/embezzlement	6.2	11	16.0	6.9	11	15.5	5.6	12	16.5	5.1	12	17.4
Other property offenses	4.5	11	15.9	5.1	11	15.7	4.0	11	16.3	5.0	9	12.3
Drugs	8.1	11	16.7	10.1	11	15.6	6.0	13	19.1	5.1	9	11.5
Public order	5.1	9	14.5	5.6	9	14.4	4.6	9	14.8	7.8	7	10.0
Other offenses	1.4	10	13.8	1.6	10	12.7	1.3	11	15.5	0.5	*	9.3
Number of releases	52,008			26,845			24,042			641		

Note: All data refer to first releases from prison (see definition in table 5). Offense data were reported for 52,632 (95.2%) of the

55,308 first releases. Offense and time served data were provided for 52,008 of these cases, 94% of all reported first releases.

\* Median not computed on fewer than 20 cases.

offenses, 80% of the releases were convicted of violent offenses (table 5). The District of Columbia and New York also reported more than 50% of their releases were violent offenders. South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas reported that fewer than 25% of their releases had been serving time for violent crimes.

### Time served

**Overview.** Excluding any prior jail time credited against their sentences, inmates released from prison for the first time served a median of 16 months in prison and a mean of 24.1 months. Median time served was longest for murder (69 months), followed by the violent crimes of rape (36 months) and manslaughter (28 months). Among the nonviolent crimes, median time served was longest for burglary (14 months) and auto theft (13 months).

**State differences.** There was considerable variation in median time served among the reporting jurisdictions, from a high of 37 months in the District of Columbia to a low of 7 months in Kentucky (table 5). Hawaii was the only other jurisdiction where the median time served exceeded 2 years. It was less than 1 year (11 months) in four other States: Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Some of the difference in time served among the States may be attributable to the different mix of offenses

among releases of the reporting jurisdictions. For example, in the District of Columbia, which had the longest time served, 54% of releases had been convicted of violent crimes. In Ken-

tucky, which had the shortest overall time served, 31% of releases had been convicted of violent crimes. Nonetheless, an examination of time served within each State for each

Table 11. Sentence length and time served for selected crimes for State prison admissions and releases, 1982

State	Admission/ Median sentence			First releases <sup>a</sup> Median time served		
	Robbery	Burglary	Larceny	Robbery	Burglary	Larceny
U.S. estimate	78 mos.	42 m/s.	32 mos.	25 mos.	14 mos.	10 mos.
Alabama	137	43	36	29	11	9
Delaware	59	36	28	...	...	...
District of Columbia	84	78	63	52	36	41
Georgia	80	56	35	30	13	8
Hawaii	117	59	54	36	38	24
Illinois	65	37	23	22	14	9
Iowa	119	11	51	...	...	...
Kentucky	114	51	24	20	6	5
Louisiana	...	...	...	44	18	10
Massachusetts	113	110	35	14	14	5
Mississippi	103	41	34	22	11	10
Missouri	110	32	30	32	11	10
Montana	119	59	54	20	13	9
Nebraska	54	33	30	34	18	10
Nevada	107	43	33	25	11	14
New Hampshire	54	52	-	12	15	-
New Mexico	90	32	22	29	20	22
New York	65	41	33	23	19	18
North Carolina	113	29	21	29	13	10
North Dakota	55	32	28	-	10	9
Pennsylvania	78	51	29	24	17	11
Rhode Island	56	23	20	28	13	11
South Carolina	97	51	56	...	...	...
South Dakota	*	35	32	*	14	15
Tennessee	114	35	32	28	15	12
Texas	...	...	...	30 <sup>b</sup>	12 <sup>b</sup>	10 <sup>b</sup>
Utah	167	58	58	23	12	11
West Virginia	120	112	111	38	11	12
Wisconsin	55	31	23	25	17	12

... Data not available or could not be utilized.  
\* Median not computed on fewer than 20 cases.

<sup>a</sup> See table 5 for definition of "first release."  
<sup>b</sup> Includes all releases.

of the three most prevalent offenses among releasees—burglary, robbery, and larceny—shows that even for the same crimes there is considerable difference in how time served distributes among the States (table 11).

For robbery the range in time served among the reporting jurisdictions was 12 to 52 months; for burglary it was 6 to 38 months; and for larceny it was 5 to 41 months. If, however, we eliminate the two States at each extreme for each crime, the ranges are much narrower: robbery, 22-38 months; burglary, 11-20 months; and larceny, 8-22 months.

These differences among the States may be due to a variety of factors: 1) different standards of punishment, of how long offenders ought to serve in prison, perhaps reflected in mandatory minimum sentences; 2) differences in the overall severity of similar crimes in different States (robbers in one State, for example, may more often carry weapons or harm victims than robbers in another State); 3) whether some States reserve prison for the most serious offenders within each crime type, resulting in longer overall time served than in a State which imprisons a higher proportion of offenders; 4) the relative proportions of recidivists, who may receive longer sentences than first-timers who commit identical crimes; 5) the varying use of consecutive vs. concurrent sentences for multiple offenders; 6) differences in parole practices in indeterminate sentencing States; and 7) the use of early release to reduce overcrowding.

**Race.** There were also differences in time served by race. Whites as a group had a median time served of 15 months and a mean of 21.9 months; for blacks the median was 18 months and the mean was 26.7 months (table 10). For some crimes there was no difference between the races in median time served. This was true, for example, for burglary and larceny, two of the three most prevalent offenses among both white and black releasees, and for public order offenses. Together, these three offenses accounted for 45.5% of all white releasees and 39.4% of all black releasees. Median time served was 1 month longer for blacks than whites for the crimes of auto theft and forgery/fraud/embezzlement; and it was 2 months longer for drug offenses, assault, and robbery. Greater differences existed for rape, manslaughter, and murder.

Some of the overall difference of 3 months in median time served between the races for those released in 1982 is attributable to the fact that higher

Table 12. Comparison of time served for black and white releasees from State prison, 1982, adjusted for offense distribution

Offense	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)
	Number of black releasees	Observed mean time served for black releasees	Total observed months served for black releasees (AxB)	Mean time served for white releasees	Total projected months served for black releasees (AxD)
Murder	708	84.1 mos.	59,543	78.5 mos.	55,578
Manslaughter	1,040	38.5	40,040	32.9	34,216
Rape	545	53.4	29,103	42.6	23,217
Other sexual assault	248	30.7	7,614	27.8	6,894
Robbery	5,538	35.1	194,384	30.1	166,694
Assault	1,991	22.4	44,598	21.1	42,010
Other violent offenses	274	30.3	8,302	30.7	8,412
Burglary	6,000	19.2	115,200	18.1	108,600
Auto theft	216	16.9	3,650	16.7	3,607
Forgery/fraud/embezzlement	1,343	16.5	22,160	15.5	20,817
Larceny	2,358	15.1	35,606	14.5	34,191
Other property offenses	973	16.3	15,860	15.7	15,276
Drugs	1,435	19.1	27,409	15.6	22,386
Public order	1,094	14.8	16,191	14.4	15,754
Other offenses	312	15.5	4,836	12.7	3,962
Total	24,075		624,496		561,614
Total months divided by number of releasees			25.9 mos.		23.3 mos.

Table 13. Time served for selected years and offenses

Year	Percent released by parole board decision	Median time served to first release <sup>a</sup>					
		All offenses	Robbery	Rape	Aggravated assault	Burglary	Larceny
1926	55%	19 mos.	31 mos.	24 mos.	17 mos.	20 mos.	17 mos.
1927	56	19	34	26	17	21	18
1928	57	18	...	...	...	...	...
1929	56	19	38	26	18	20	18
1930	55	19	35	27	17	21	18
1931	59	18	34	30	17	20	17
1932	57	18	32	30	19	19	16
1933	57	17	32	32	17	17	16
1934	57	17	35	28	16	18	14
1935	55	17	39	30	17	19	14
1936	55	17	40	27	19	20	14
1937	50	20	43	27	19	21	15
1938	49	21	45	28	18	22	15
1939	47	21	49	28	19	22	18
1940	42	21	47	31	19	21	15
1944	55	30	52	37	26	30	21
1945	55	30	55	38	25	30	21
1946	56	25	47	36	20	26	18
1951	56	21	...	...	...	...	...
1954	55	21	...	...	...	...	...
1957	55	21	...	...	...	...	...
1960	59	21	34	30	20	20	17
1967	62	19	31	34	15	17	13
1968	...	18	31	32	15	16	13
1969	...	18	31	33	15	16	13
1970	...	18	30	35	18	16	13
1974	68	18	27	32	16	16	14
1975	68	...	...	...	...	...	...
1976	69	...	...	...	...	...	...
1977	72	18	25	32	19	15	13
1978	70	18	25	34	20	15	13
1979	60	19	...	...	...	...	...
1980	57	19	...	...	...	...	...
1981	55	17	25	33	17	13	11
1982	52	16	25	36	15	14	10

Notes: Data for 1967-74 are from unpublished Uniform Parole Reports statistics obtained from between 31 and 35 jurisdictions. Data for 1975-80 are from unpublished BJS admissions and release statistics. The number of States reporting during 1975-80 varied by

year between 25 and 32. Data for all other years are from published National Prisoner statistics reports. Data not available or could not be utilized. See table 5 for definition of first release.

proportions of blacks than whites had been imprisoned for the most serious offenses, carrying the longest sentences. For example, whereas 6.9% of the white releasees had been convicted of murder, manslaughter, or rape, 9.5% of the black releasees had been convicted of these same crimes. Moreover, adding robbery increases the proportion to 32.5% for blacks and 19% for whites.

The impact on overall time served of the differential offense distributions of white and black releasees can be examined more systematically by computing the overall average time that blacks released in 1982 would have served in prison if, crime-for-crime, they served exactly what whites served. (This is similar to the procedure used to compare black and white sentences above.) This calculation, which removes the effects of differences in offense distribution between the races, shows that there is a difference of 2.6 months, or about 10%, between the average amount of time that blacks actually served in prison (25.9 months) and how long they would have served if there was no difference in time served between the races for the various offenses (23.3 months) (table 12).

Whether this 10% difference can be accounted for by nonracial factors cannot be determined from the release data. A comprehensive analysis of this issue would have to examine possible differences between white and black prison releasees on factors likely to influence either sentencing or prison release decisions. Such factors would include: 1) prior criminal record, especially the number and type of convictions, prior violent record, and behavior on probation, parole, or pre-trial release; 2) degrees of severity within crime categories, especially the use of a weapon and the degree of harm to the victim; 3) the difference between the actual crime and the conviction offense (a distinction sometimes used by parole boards); and 4) behavior within prison, including the prevalence of rule violations and the degree of good time forfeiture. (For a discussion of some of these factors, see the appendix.)

**Historical trends.** The median time served to first release in 1982, 16 months, was lower than any other year since 1926 for which data are available (table 13). With the exception of the years during World War II (when prison was reserved for very serious offenders), median time served for all first releasees has been in the range of 17-21 months. In 1979 and 1980 it was 19 months, and then declined to 17 months

Table 14. Median time served for selected years and States

State	1951	1954	1957	1960	1981	1982
U.S. estimate	21 mos.	21 mos.	21 mos.	21 mos.	17 mos.	13 mos.
Alabama	19	18	18	17	10	12
District of Columbia	25	27	31	34	40	37
Georgia	22	20	19	22	12	13
Hawaii	...	...	...	32	33	29
Iowa	24	24	24	24	18	17
Kentucky	18	18	18	19	10	7
Louisiana	17	20	18	19	21	23
Massachusetts	30	29	18	17	22	16
Mississippi	22	30	24	23	12	11
Missouri	16	16	16	17	15	14
Montana	12	15	10	11	11	11
Nebraska	18	17	18	17	15	15
Nevada	16	17	18	17	15	15
New Hampshire	16	16	16	12	11	13
New Mexico	12	11	18	23	24	22
New York	31	27	30	29	22	21
North Carolina	28	25	17	17	14	13
North Dakota	12	13	16	15	10	11
Pennsylvania	31	36	30	31	18	18
Rhode Island	19	21	23	22	18	17
South Dakota	12	10	10	11	14	11
Tennessee	24	24	24	20	18	18
Texas	16	16	20	20	17	13
Utah	21	29	27	24	18	14
West Virginia	34	36	28	27	16	14
Wisconsin	16	15	14	15	20	18

Notes: Data for 1951 to 1960 obtained from Characteristics of State Prisoners, 1960, published by the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Data for 1981 is from Prison Admissions and Releases, 1981, Bureau of Justice Statistics. ... Data not available or could not be utilized.

in 1981 and 16 months in 1982. Specific crimes also showed a drop over the past half century. For larceny the decrease was 7 months; for robbery and burglary it was 6 months; and for aggravated assault it was 2 months less. Rape, on the other hand, showed an increase in time served of 12 months, from 24 to 36.

More recent trends in time served can be examined by State (table 14). In 16 of 26 reporting jurisdictions, median time served declined from 1981 to 1982. In 21 of 25 jurisdictions with available data, median time served decreased from 1951 to 1982.

In six reporting jurisdictions—District of Columbia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Utah, and West Virginia—median time served has varied by at least 15 months during the 1951-82 period, suggesting major changes in these jurisdictions in sentencing or release practices, or both, at some point during this time. Such changes may or may not have been the result of legislative revisions.

One indication of changes in prison release practices in recent years is the variation in the proportion of all releasees that were due to parole board decisions (table 13). In the decade after World War II this proportion remained at a stable 55-56%. In 1960 it began a gradual climb until it peaked at 72% in 1977. In the 5 years since, the use of parole release dropped sharply, reaching 52% in 1982.

**Life sentences and actual time served**

Aside from sentences to death, a sentence to life in prison is the most severe penalty the justice system can impose on a convicted offender. However, a life sentence rarely means that the offender will spend the rest of his life in prison. Most State statutes allow for the possibility of parole, but the amount of time that must be served before becoming eligible for parole varies across the States.

During 1982, among reporting jurisdictions, there were 2,223 persons with a life sentence admitted to prison and 980 released. Of those released, 612 were first releasees for whom time served data were available. Overall, 3.0% of those entering prison in 1982 had received a life sentence (table 15). Nearly 1 in every 2 persons convicted of murder in 1982 received a life sentence and nearly 2 in every 3 life sentences imposed were for murder convictions. White inmates convicted of murder and robbery were more likely than black murderers to have received a life sentence while the converse was true for rape. While about 1 in 20 drug offenders received a life sentence, they accounted for 13% of all the life sentences imposed. Little difference was found among white and black drug offenders in the proportion who received a life sentence (4.9% vs. 4.8%). Murderers, drug offenders, robbers and



**Table A-2. Criminal histories of State prison inmates, by race, 1979**

Inmates with a history of prior:	Current offense					
	Total		Nonviolent		Violent	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
Violence	23.6%	31.7%	16.8%	23.5%	30.0%	36.2%
Convictions	81.1	79.5	86.2	87.3	76.2	75.3
Incarceration	54.5	54.9	58.1	60.6	51.1	51.8

Source: Survey of State Prison Inmates, 1979.

Percentages are based on an estimated 136,192 white inmates and 131,236 black inmates.

**Table A-3. Frequency and median number of rules violations by prison inmates, by race, 1979**

Number of times rules violated during current incarceration	White		Black	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
	<b>Total</b>	<b>136,192</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>131,236</b>
0	66,831	49.1	57,355	43.7
1	24,683	18.1	21,572	16.4
2	12,873	9.5	11,916	9.1
3	7,685	5.6	9,452	7.2
4	5,193	3.8	5,459	4.2
5	2,936	2.1	3,983	3.0
6-10	8,423	6.2	9,861	7.5
11-20	4,009	2.9	6,342	4.8
21+	3,659	2.7	5,296	4.0

Median number per offender with rules violations

1.8

2.4

Source: Survey of State Prison Inmates, 1979

If the name and address on the mailing label attached are correct, check here and send a copy of the label. If your name and address differ from the label, please fill them in:

Name:

Title:

Organization:

Street or box:

City, State, Zip:

Telephone:

Interest in criminal justice:

U.S. Department of Justice  
Bureau of Justice Statistics

Official Business  
Penalty for Private Use \$300

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Reports are prepared principally by BJS staff under the direction of Joseph M. Bessette, deputy director for data analysis. This report was edited by Mr. Bessette and Carol B. Kalish. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administered the production, assisted by Millie Baldea, Joyce M. Stanford, and Betty J. Sherman.

July 1985, NCJ-97995

To be added to any BJS mailing list, copy or cut out this page, fill in and mail to: National Criminal Justice Reference Service, User Services Dept. 2, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850.

Please put me on the mailing list for:

- Justice expenditure and employment reports—annual spending and staffing by Federal/State/local governments and by function (police, courts, etc.)
- Computer crime reports—electronic fund transfer system crimes
- Privacy and security of criminal history information and information policy—new legislation; maintaining and releasing intelligence and investigative records; data quality issues
- BJS bulletins and special reports—timely reports of the most current justice data
- Courts reports—State court caseload surveys, model annual State reports, State court organization surveys
- Corrections reports—results of sample surveys and censuses of jails, prisons, parole, probation, and other corrections data
- National Crime Survey reports—the Nation's only regular national survey of crime victims
- Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics (annual)—broad-based data from 150+ sources (400+ tables, 100+ figures, index)

BULK RATE  
POSTAGE & FEES PAID  
DOJ/BJS  
Permit No. G-91

Washington, D.C. 20531

Special Report

**END**