



2024 Survey of Inmates in Local Jails

MARCH 2024

For the seventh time since 1972, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is planning to conduct the Survey of Inmates in Local Jails (SILJ) in November 2024. The survey is administered by the U.S. Census Bureau for BJS. The SILJ is the only national source of detailed information on the characteristics of jail inmates, including special populations such as drug and alcohol users, mentally ill inmates, and inmates at different stages of the criminal justice process.

What information will the SILJ collect?

The SILJ consists of in-person interviews of inmates in the custody of local (county and city) jails. BJS uses the self-report data collected through the SILJ to examine jail populations over a variety of domains, including information on the inmates’:

- education, work experience, military service, family background, and citizenship status
- current charges and prior criminal history
- physical and mental health conditions and treatment received
- drug and alcohol use before admission to jail
- experiences in jail and use of jail programs.

Who participates and when will the 2024 SILJ begin?

BJS will randomly select 600 jails varying in size and demographic makeup to participate in the study. Over several days in each facility, the 70-minute survey will be administered to a nationally representative sample of 10,000 inmates across the 600 jails, using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). The CAPI



instrument was pretested successfully in 2023 with a sample of 169 inmates in five local jails. Pending approval from the Office of Management and Budget (Number 1121-0098), data collection will likely occur in selected jails between November 2024 and February 2025. BJS and the U.S. Census Bureau will work with each jail to schedule a timeframe that works best for their facility.

Why should jails participate?

The SILJ collects data that cannot be obtained in any other way, and the success and accuracy of the survey depend on facility participation. No other source of data provides detailed national information on who is held in local jails—their offenses, their sentences, their prior criminal involvement, and their prior use of drugs and alcohol. The survey allows practitioners to compare their facilities, their inmates, and their special circumstances with those from jails across the United States. It provides representative data to federal, state, and local policymakers. Data from past surveys have been used by Congress to monitor trends, develop legislation, and assess the legislative impact of law enforcement initiatives.

How will the data be used?

BJS may only use the data for statistical and research purposes [34 U.S.C. § 10134]. BJS will use these data to publish national-level information in a series of special reports, statistical briefs, statistical tables, and other products on issues relevant to jail inmates, such as:

- substance use and treatment
- mental health problems and treatment
- co-occurring mental health and substance use issues
- medical problems
- firearms use during crime
- veterans in jail
- access to legal representation
- inmate misconduct
- monetary sanctions (court costs, fees, fines, restitution, and other financial liabilities related to contact with the justice system)
- characteristics of inmates' victims.

Consistent with its statistical mission, BJS will make SILJ microdata available to researchers, professionals, and other users for secondary analysis purposes, subject to strong confidentiality protections and applicable federal law. BJS archives its published data at its official criminal justice data archive, currently the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, to facilitate and encourage criminal justice research. Prior SILJ studies are widely cited in external publications. (See <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/ICPSR/series/69>.)

All data submitted for archiving undergo a comprehensive disclosure risk assessment to determine the appropriate level of access and protection needed to protect confidentiality. BJS and its archive operate strict controls and apply robust safeguards to mitigate potential privacy risks. BJS adheres to the Standard Application Process to accept and review applications for its restricted data [OMB Memorandum M-23-04, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/M-23-04.pdf>]. More information about NACJD and its archiving practices can be found at <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/pages/NACJD/index.html>.

How will the data be protected?

BJS will protect the privacy and confidentiality of inmate data to the fullest extent under federal law [34 U.S.C. § 10231]. Any person who violates these provisions may be punished by a fine of up to \$10,000, plus other penalties. Per the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, data are further protected from cybersecurity risks through screening of the systems that transmit BJS data. More information about the various authorities that govern BJS data is available in the BJS Data Protection Guidelines at https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/bjs_data_protection_guidelines.pdf.

How can I find out more about the SILJ?

See <https://bjs.ojp.gov/survey-inmates-local-jail-s-silj-2024-2025> for more information.

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(Include “SILJ2024” in the email subject line.)