

## The U.S. Prison Population and Punitive Policies: Racial Disparities Among State Prisoners



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### Abstract

The U.S incarceration rate is the highest in the world. Many of the U.S state prison systems are overcrowded at levels over 140% the intended capacity. This massive overcrowding is correlated with punitive policies that lead to longer prison sentence terms and disproportionately affect poor and minority populations-- especially African Americans, who are incarcerated at a rate of over 3,000 per 100,000 in the population. This paper reports on a state level analysis using data on the prison populations and state policies on sentencing and felon discrimination. Data came from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics. I analyzed how racial disparities and overcrowded prison systems are affected by crime and punishment policies like three-strikes-laws, truth-in-sentencing, abolished parole, felon employment discrimination, and felon disenfranchisement within the U.S. I determined that states with the same levels of overcrowding but differing levels of racial disparity differ in their use of punitive policies and are thus more punitive because of their greater racial disparity. This research focused on inequality, criminal justice institutions, and punitive policies within the U.S criminal justice system.