



Time Served in State Prison, 2018

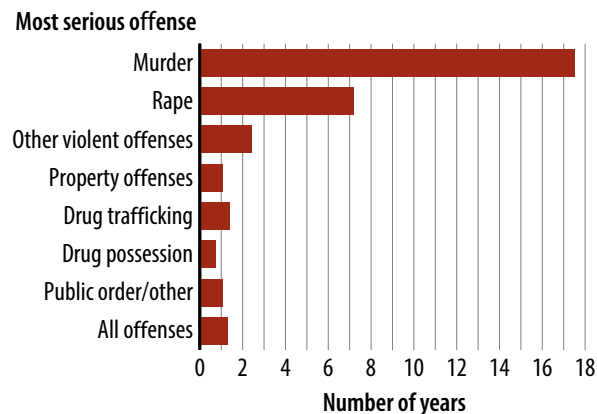
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Two-thirds of offenders released from state prison in 2018 served less than 2 years in prison before their initial release. While 1 in 23 violent offenders (4%) served 20 years or more before their initial release, over half of violent offenders (57%) were released in less than 3 years.

The average time served by state prisoners released in 2018, from their date of initial admission to their date of initial release, was 2.7 years. The median amount of time served (the middle value in the range of time served, with 50% of offenders serving more and 50% serving less) was 1.3 years (figure 1). By offense type, the median time served was 17.5 years for murder, 7.2 years for rape, 17 months for drug trafficking, and 9 months for drug possession.

These findings are based on prisoner records from the National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP), which collects records on prison admissions and releases. All statistics in this report are based on state prisoners' first release after serving time for a given offense.

FIGURE 1
Median time served in state prison before initial release, by most serious offense, 2018



Note: Initial release does not refer to first-time offenders but to offenders' first release from a given sentence (whether they are first-time offenders or not), as opposed to a re-release after a subsequent parole violation. Statistics are based on 44 states, and data exclude state prisoners with sentences of one year or less; those with missing values for most serious offense or calculated time served; those released by transfer, appeal, or detainer; and those who escaped. Data include 3,266 deaths in 2018. See table 1 for details and descriptions of offenses.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Corrections Reporting Program, 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The average time served by state prisoners released in 2018, from initial admission to initial release, was 2.7 years, and the median time served was 1.3 years.
- Persons released from state prison in 2018 served an average of 44% of their maximum sentence length before their initial release.
- State prisoners serving time for rape and initially released in 2018 served an average of 68% of their sentence, and those serving time for murder served an average of 58% of their sentence.
- Persons serving less than one year in state prison represented 42% of first releases in 2018.
- Among persons released from state prison in 2018 after serving 20 years or more, 70% had been imprisoned for murder or rape.
- Violent offenders released from state prison made up less than a third (30%) of all initial releases in 2018.
- About 1 in 5 state prisoners released in 2018 had served less than 6 months before their initial release.
- Offenders released from state prison in 2018 after serving time for drug possession or drug trafficking had served less than 40% of their sentence, on average.

They exclude persons who were released after serving time for an offense, returned to prison for violating community supervision, and then were released again.

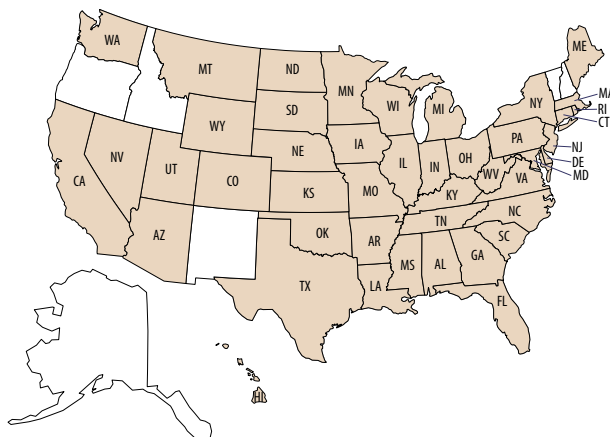
This report is based on NCRP data from 44 states (map 1). In 2018, these states were responsible for 97% of all persons released from state prisons nationwide. Annually administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the NCRP obtains individual-level records from state departments of corrections on prisoners entering and leaving prison custody or community supervision.

Violent offenders served more than twice as long in state prison on average as other offenders

State prisoners released in 2018 after serving time for a violent offense spent an average of 4.8 years in prison before their initial release (table 1). Violent offenders made up 30% of all initial releases that year. Among non-violent offenders, those released from state prison in 2018 after serving time for drug trafficking (26 months) served more than a year longer on average than those released after serving time for drug possession (13 months). Persons sentenced for weapons offenses spent an average of 23 months in state prison before initial release, which was 3 months longer than the average time served for other public-order offenses (20 months).

Persons sentenced to state prison for rape or other sexual assault made up 5% of initial releases in 2018. On average, offenders sentenced for rape spent almost twice as long in state prison (9.6 years) as those sentenced for other sexual assault (5 years).

MAP 1
States included in analysis of time served, 2018



Note: Analysis includes data from 44 states and excludes the District of Columbia. See *Methodology* for details.
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Corrections Reporting Program, 2018.

TABLE 1
Time served in state prison before initial release, by most serious offense, 2018

Most serious offense	Percent of total releases	Time served in prison ^a	
		Median ^b	Mean
All offenses	100%	1.3 yrs.	2.7 yrs.
Violent	29.8%	2.4 yrs.	4.8 yrs.
Murder	1.7	17.5	17.8
Non-negligent manslaughter ^c	0.4	7.0	8.2
Negligent manslaughter	0.8	3.7	5.3
Rape	1.5	7.2	9.6
Other sexual assault	3.4	3.6	5.0
Robbery	7.4	3.2	4.8
Assault	11.6	1.4	2.5
Other violent ^d	2.3	1.5	3.5
Property	25.7%	13 mos.	21 mos.
Burglary	10.6	17	27
Larceny-theft	6.8	11	17
Motor-vehicle theft	1.5	11	15
Fraud ^e	3.8	11	17
Other property ^f	3.0	12	20
Drug	24.6%	12 mos.	21 mos.
Possession	8.6	9	13
Trafficking	9.4	17	26
Other drug ^g	6.6	14	23
Public order	19.2%	13 mos.	21 mos.
Weapons	5.9	15	23
Other public order ^h	13.3	12	20
Other/unspecified	0.7%	16 mos.	31 mos.
Number of releases	376,993	~	~

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. Initial release does not refer to first-time offenders but to offenders' first release from a given sentence (whether they are first-time offenders or not), as opposed to a re-release after a subsequent parole violation. Statistics are based on 44 states, and data exclude state prisoners with sentences of one year or less; those with missing values for most serious offense or calculated time served; those released by transfer, appeal, or detainer; and those who escaped. Data include 3,266 deaths in 2018.

~Not applicable.

^aExcludes time served in jail.

^bThe statistical median represents the value at which 50% of the values are larger and 50% are smaller in a sequence of numbers.

^cIncludes unspecified and other homicides.

^dIncludes kidnapping, blackmail, extortion, hit and run with injury, and other unknown violent offenses.

^eIncludes forgery and embezzlement.

^fIncludes arson, receiving and trafficking of stolen property, destruction of property, trespassing, and other unknown property offenses.

^gIncludes forging prescriptions, possession of drug paraphernalia, and other unspecified offenses.

^hIncludes DUIs/DWLs; court offenses; commercialized vice, morals, and decency offenses; liquor law violations; and other public-order offenses.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Corrections Reporting Program, 2018.

More than 75% of offenders released in 2018 served less than 3 years in state prison

A fifth (20%) of all persons released in 2018 served less than 6 months in state prison before initial release, while two-fifths (42%) served less than one year (table 2). Ninety-nine percent of all offenders released in 2018 served less than 20 years before initial release.

More than 7 in 10 violent offenders (71%) served less than 5 years in state prison before their initial release, and nearly 9 in 10 violent offenders (87%) served less

than 10 years. More than a quarter (26%) of offenders released after being sentenced for rape served between 5 and 10 years before initial release, and close to another quarter (23%) served between 10 and 20 years.

Less than 10% of offenders released in 2018 after serving time for property, drug, or public-order offenses served 5 years or longer in state prison before their initial release. Over 20% of persons released after serving time for property, drug, or public-order offenses served less than 6 months in state prison before their initial release.

TABLE 2
Cumulative percent of prisoners who served a given length of time before initial release, by most serious offense, 2018

Most serious offense	<6 months ^a	<1 year ^b	<2 years	<3 years	<5 years	<10 years	<20 years	20 years or longer
All offenses	19.9%	41.9%	66.1%	77.1%	87.7%	95.8%	99.0%	1.0%
Violent	11.1%	24.7%	44.8%	56.7%	71.2%	86.8%	95.8%	4.2%
Murder	2.0	3.1	5.7	8.9	14.7	29.5	58.0	42.0
Non-negligent manslaughter ^c	2.2	4.1	9.4	14.7	28.3	62.3	97.7	2.3
Negligent manslaughter	6.0	15.6	30.9	43.3	60.9	85.2	98.9	1.1
Rape	4.3	8.6	17.3	23.9	38.2	63.9	87.1	12.9
Other sexual assault	6.5	14.7	31.0	43.5	64.2	87.0	98.8	1.2
Robbery	6.6	15.5	34.1	47.7	66.4	88.5	98.2	1.8
Assault	16.3	37.1	63.3	75.9	87.9	96.4	99.4	0.6
Other violent ^d	17.9	36.3	60.2	71.9	83.2	93.0	97.9	2.1
Property	21.8%	46.9%	73.5%	84.6%	93.7%	98.8%	99.8%	0.2%
Burglary	16.4	36.7	63.4	77.0	89.8	97.8	99.7	0.3
Larceny-theft	26.1	54.8	80.9	90.3	96.7	99.5	100	0.0
Motor-vehicle theft	21.4	54.0	84.3	94.0	98.5	99.8	100	0.1
Fraud ^e	26.2	54.5	81.0	90.3	96.7	99.5	100	0.0
Other property ^f	24.3	51.0	77.5	86.6	94.4	98.8	99.9	0.1
Drug	23.6%	48.7%	74.5%	85.3%	94.0%	98.8%	99.9%	0.1%
Possession	33.7	65.2	87.9	94.2	98.2	99.7	100	0.0
Trafficking	16.4	36.7	64.4	78.8	91.2	98.3	99.9	0.1
Other drug ^g	20.6	44.4	71.4	83.1	92.5	98.3	99.9	0.1
Public order	21.2%	46.9%	74.5%	85.6%	94.3%	98.9%	99.9%	0.2%
Weapons	16.4	39.8	69.8	83.2	93.6	98.7	99.7	0.3
Other public order ^h	23.3	49.7	75.9	86.0	94.1	98.9	99.9	0.1
Other/unspecified	21.8%	42.1%	63.0%	73.2%	85.4%	95.6%	99.5%	0.5%

Note: Categories cumulative through <20 years (e.g., <1 year includes <6 months). First release does not refer to first-time offenders but to offenders' first release from a given sentence (whether they are first-time offenders or not), as opposed to a re-release after a subsequent parole violation. Statistics are based on 44 states, and data exclude state prisoners with sentences of one year or less; those with missing values for most serious offense or calculated time served; those released by transfer, appeal, or detainer; and those who escaped. Data include 3,266 deaths in 2018.

^aFor initial release with average time served of less than 6 months, deaths accounted for 6.0% of murder "releases," 1.4% of manslaughter "releases," 2.4% of rape "releases," and 2.1% of other sexual assault "releases" in 2018. Deaths made up less than 0.5% of all other offense categories.

^bFor initial release with average time served of less than one year, deaths accounted for 9.0% of murder "releases," 1.5% of manslaughter "releases," 3.3% of rape "releases," and 7.4% of other sexual assault "releases" in 2018. Deaths made up less than 0.4% of all other offense categories.

^cIncludes unspecified and other homicides.

^dIncludes kidnapping, blackmail, extortion, hit and run with injury, and other unknown violent offenses.

^eIncludes forgery and embezzlement.

^fIncludes arson, receiving and trafficking of stolen property, destruction of property, trespassing, and other unknown property offenses.

^gIncludes forging prescriptions, possession of drug paraphernalia, and other unspecified offenses.

^hIncludes DUIs/DWIs; court offenses; commercialized vice, morals, and decency offenses; liquor law violations; and other public-order offenses.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Corrections Reporting Program, 2018.

Offenders released after serving time for rape served the highest percentage of their sentence

Persons released from state prisons in 2018 served an average of 44% of their sentence before their first release (table 3). The average sentence length for persons released after serving time for violent offenses (10.8 years) in 2018 was more than twice the average sentence length for those released after serving time for property (4.9 years), drug (5.2 years), or public-order (4.4 years) offenses. Only offenders serving time for murder, manslaughter, rape, or other sexual assault had average sentences of more than 10 years. Offenders released for the first time after being imprisoned for rape served the highest percentage of their maximum sentence length (68%), while those released after serving time for drug possession served the lowest percentage (35%).

The average sentence length for drug offenders was 3.7 years for possession and 7 years for trafficking, and the average percentage of sentence served before first release was less than 40% for all drug offenders. On average, offenders sentenced for murder, non-negligent manslaughter, other sexual assault, or robbery served approximately 60% of their maximum sentence length before being released.

TABLE 3
Average sentence length and percent of sentence served before initial release, by most serious offense, 2018

Most serious offense	Average sentence length ^a	Percent of sentence served ^b
All offenses	6.7 yrs.	44.4%
Violent	10.8 yrs.	52.5%
Murder	48.8	57.6
Non-negligent manslaughter ^c	14.3	63.2
Negligent manslaughter	10.2	54.3
Rape	18.2	67.8
Other sexual assault	10.4	58.1
Robbery	9.4	56.6
Assault	5.8	47.2
Other violent ^d	7.6	44.7
Property	4.9 yrs.	40.7%
Burglary	6.0	42.1
Larceny-theft	3.8	41.3
Motor-vehicle theft	3.8	37.1
Fraud ^e	4.4	37.9
Other property ^f	4.6	39.9
Drug	5.2 yrs.	39.2%
Possession	3.7	34.9
Trafficking	7.0	38.2
Other drug ^g	4.6	46.0
Public order	4.4 yrs.	43.4%
Weapons	4.8	44.8
Other public order ^h	4.4	43.1
Other/unspecified	9.3 yrs.	37.4%
Number of releases	375,234	~

Note: First release does not refer to first-time offenders but to offenders' first release from a given sentence (whether they are first-time offenders or not), as opposed to a re-release after a subsequent parole violation. Statistics are based on 44 states, and data exclude state prisoners with sentences of one year or less; those with missing values for most serious offense or calculated time served; those released by transfer, appeal, or detainer; and those who escaped. Data include 3,266 deaths in 2018. ~Not applicable.

^aAverage sentence length reflects the total maximum sentence that prisoners received. Sentences of more than 100 years, including life sentences and death sentences, are set to a maximum sentence of 100 years.

^bAverage percentage of sentence served is the percentage of the maximum sentence served before the first release and excludes time served in jail. In cases of death, percentage of sentence served equals 100%. Including life sentences, death sentences, and deaths has little effect on offenses apart from murder. If they were excluded, then the average sentence for murder would be 20.2 years and the percentage of time served for murder would be 53.6%.

^cIncludes unspecified and other homicides.

^dIncludes kidnapping, blackmail, extortion, hit and run with injury, and other unknown violent offenses.

^eIncludes forgery and embezzlement.

^fIncludes arson, receiving and trafficking of stolen property, destruction of property, trespassing, and other unknown property offenses.

^gIncludes forging prescriptions, possession of drug paraphernalia, and other unspecified offenses.

^hIncludes DUIs/DWIs; court offenses; commercialized vice, morals, and decency offenses; liquor law violations; and other public-order offenses.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Corrections Reporting Program, 2018.

Violent offenders made up more than 70% of all deaths in state prisons in 2018

In 2018, a total of 3,266 prisoners died while awaiting their initial release, and they were counted among “initial releases” (table 4). This statistic is based on data from 42 states where data on the type of release was available

TABLE 4
Deaths among state prisoners awaiting their initial release, by most serious offense, 2018

Most serious offense	Percent	Number
All offenses	100%	3,266
Violent	70.8%	2,311
Murder	25.5	834
Non-negligent manslaughter ^a	1.0	33
Negligent manslaughter	1.4	45
Rape	10.9	356
Other sexual assault	12.7	414
Robbery	7.2	234
Assault	8.5	277
Other violent ^b	3.6	118
Property	9.8%	320
Burglary	5.2	170
Larceny-theft	1.9	63
Motor-vehicle theft	0.1	3
Fraud ^c	1.3	43
Other property ^d	1.3	41
Drug	8.9%	291
Possession	1.6	53
Trafficking	4.3	140
Other drug ^e	3.0	98
Public order	9.6%	315
Weapons	2.5	82
Other public order ^f	7.1	233
Other/unspecified	0.3%	9

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. Counts may differ from those published elsewhere due to non-reporting states. First release does not refer to first-time offenders but to offenders’ first release after a given sentence (whether they are first-time offenders or not), as opposed to a re-release after a subsequent parole violation. Statistics are based on state prisoners who were released for the first time from their sentence in 42 states, and data exclude state prisoners with sentences of one year or less.

^aIncludes unspecified and other homicides.

^bIncludes kidnapping, blackmail, extortion, hit and run with injury, and other unknown violent offenses.

^cIncludes forgery and embezzlement.

^dIncludes arson, receiving and trafficking of stolen property, destruction of property, trespassing, and other unknown property offenses.

^eIncludes forging prescriptions, possession of drug paraphernalia, and other unspecified offenses.

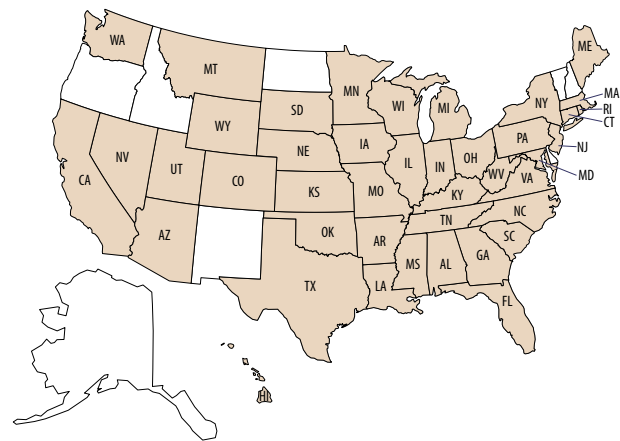
^fIncludes DUIs/DWIs; court offenses; commercialized vice, morals, and decency offenses; liquor law violations; and other public-order offenses.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Corrections Reporting Program, 2018.

for 2018 (map 2). Causes of death included natural causes, suicide, homicide, legally imposed execution, and injury resulting in death.

Among prisoners who died before their first release, those serving time in state prison for murder, manslaughter, rape, or other sexual assault made up more than half (51.5%) of the total deaths in 2018. Persons sentenced for non-violent offenses made up 29% of all deaths in state prisons in 2018 among those who died before their first release. An eighth (12.7%) of persons serving time in state prison for murder in 2018 died before their first release (not shown in tables).

MAP 2
States with prisoner deaths included in analysis, 2018



Note: Analysis includes data from 42 states and excludes the District of Columbia. The number of states included differs from other tables in this report due to the availability of data on type of prison release in release records. See *Methodology* for details.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Corrections Reporting Program, 2018.

Methodology

The National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP), administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), is an annual voluntary data-collection of administrative records on individual prisoners that is submitted by state departments of corrections. BJS sponsors the survey, and Abt Associates, Inc. currently serves as the data-collection agent. Since its inception in 1983, the NCRP has collected records for each prison admission, prison release, and exit from post-custody community supervision programs. Starting in 1999, BJS requested that states submit an additional file that included the administrative records of all prisoners under the custody of state prisons on December 31 of each year. In 2013, BJS began requesting that states provide entries to post-custody community supervision in addition to exits.

The findings in this report are based on data from the NCRP prison-release records, which include one record for each release of a sentenced offender from a state's prison system. Data elements collected include offenders' demographic, offense, and sentencing characteristics, and the dates and types of admission to and release from state prison. Data are for prisoners under the immediate control of state authorities, regardless of the jurisdiction in which they were originally sentenced.

Initial release

Initial release of an offender is defined by the type of admission to prison for that period of imprisonment. If the admission was coded by the state as a court commitment—either through a new sentence, imposition of a suspended sentence, or revocation of probation—the release of that offender was considered the initial or first release. Admissions to prison due to parole or mandatory release violations were considered subsequent releases and were excluded from this report.

States reporting

For calendar year 2018, a total of 48 states submitted at least one type of record: prison admissions (46 states), prison releases (48), year-end population (47), entries to post-custody community supervision (35), and exits from post-custody community supervision (34).

Data in this report were based on NCRP release records for 2018 from 44 states. New Mexico and New Hampshire did not submit any NCRP data for 2018. Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Vermont reported to the NCRP in 2018 but could not distinguish between admission types and were therefore excluded from this

report. In addition, admission types were not reported in Virginia's 2018 NCRP release file. Table 3 includes data from 42 states who reported a non-zero or not-missing value for "death" as a type of release from prison. Based on data reported to the 2018 National Prisoners Statistics (NPS) program, BJS estimated that all of Virginia's offenders entered on new court commitments.

Offenses reported to the NCRP vary by state. Maine and Minnesota did not report rape separately from other sexual assault. Non-negligent manslaughter was not reported in 21 states; three-quarters of non-negligent manslaughter offenders in this report are from California, Florida, Georgia, or New York.

Time served, sentence length, and percentage of sentenced served

All analyses in this report were limited to prisoners sentenced to more than one year who were admitted to state prison on new court commitments, resulting in a total of 422,650 new court commitments. All analyses excluded (1) records that indicated the offender was previously released from the current sentence and (2) release records where the type of admission was a transfer within the state prison system or was the return of a prisoner who escaped or was absent without leave. Tables 1 and 2 present data from 376,993 releases from state prison in 2018. This number excludes reported releases with missing values for most serious offense or calculated time served. Table 3 presents data from 375,234 releases from state prison in 2018. In addition to excluding releases with missing values for most serious offense or time served, this number excludes releases with a missing value for maximum sentence.

Maximum sentence length refers to the greatest amount of time a person can spend in prison based on the sentence imposed by a court. It includes consecutive sentences imposed by a court for multiple offenses but does not measure the time actually served in prison. The analyses in this report include prisoners who were released in 2018 after being sentenced to life, life without parole, life plus additional years, or death. For purposes of calculating percentage of time served, BJS assigned a 100-year maximum value to sentences of more than 100 years, life, or death.

Average percentage of sentence served is the percentage of the maximum sentence served before first release. In cases of death in prison, percentage of sentence served equals 100%. In statistical tables previously published by BJS, offenders with life or death sentences, and "releases" due to death, were excluded. Including life sentences,

death sentences, and deaths—as in this report—has little effect on offenses apart from murder. If they were excluded, then the average time served for murder would be 15.6 years (17.8 years in this report) and the

percentage of time served for murder would be 53.6% (57.6% in this report). Across all offenses, the average time served would be 2.6 years (2.7 years in this report) and the percentage of time served would remain at 44%.



The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for measuring crime, criminal victimization, criminal offenders, victims of crime, correlates of crime, and the operation of criminal and civil justice systems at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels. BJS collects, analyzes, and disseminates reliable statistics on crime and justice systems in the United States, supports improvements to state and local criminal justice information systems, and participates with national and international organizations to develop and recommend national standards for justice statistics. Doris J. James is the acting director.

This report was written by Danielle Kaeble. Lauren G. Beatty verified the report.

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