

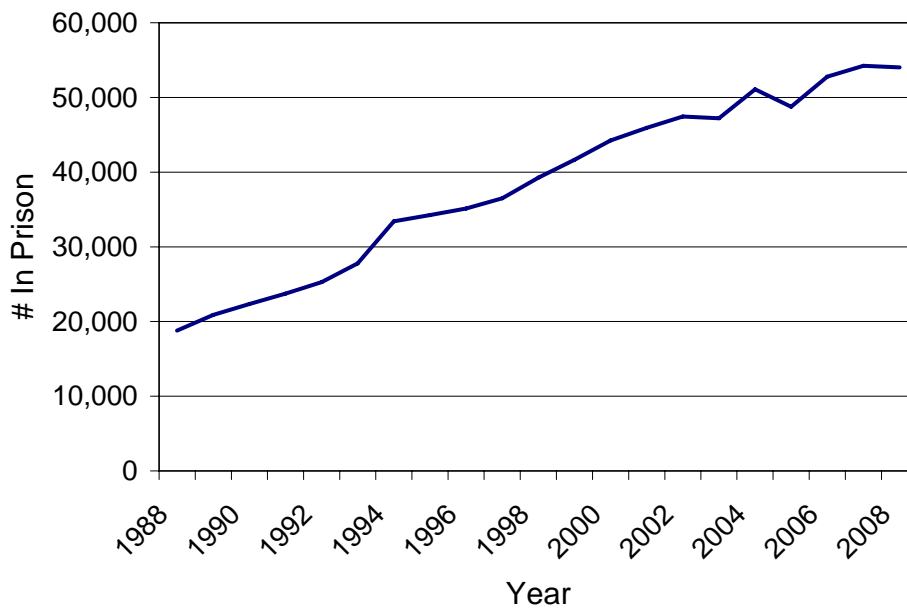
Incarceration Trends in Georgia, 1988 - 2008

As of 2008, there were 54,016 people held in Georgia state prisons, placing the state fifth in the nation in its incarcerated population. Georgia trails only California, Texas, Florida, and New York in terms of the number of people in prison. In addition to a high *number* of people incarcerated, Georgia also incarcerates its citizens at a high *rate*. The state's rate of incarceration of 542 people per 100,000 population is 20% higher than the national average for states of 450 per 100,000. By these measures, Georgia is at the forefront nationally in the use of imprisonment.

These rates of incarceration do not simply reflect higher rates of criminal offending in Georgia. For example, in 2007, Georgia had the 18th highest violent crime rate in the United States, but the 8th highest rate of imprisonment.

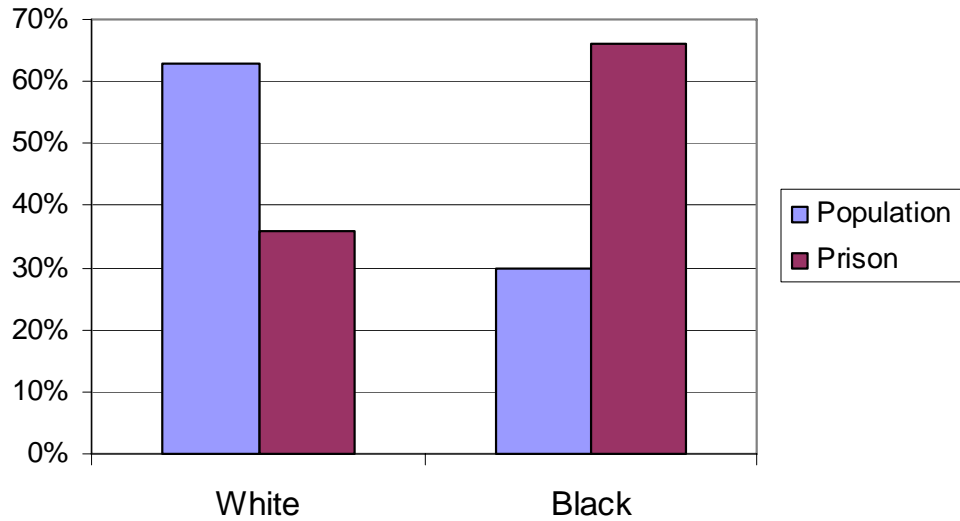
Georgia has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of persons in prison over the last two decades. Since 1988, the total number of persons in prison in Georgia has nearly tripled, increasing by 188% (see Figure 1). This exceeds the national rate of growth of 133% during the same period. During this period the rate of imprisonment (taking into account population growth) in Georgia has nearly doubled, increasing by 93% from 281 per 100,000 residents to 542 per 100,000 residents.

Figure 1: Georgia Prison Population



The use of imprisonment in Georgia has been felt disproportionately in communities of color. African Americans comprise 30% of the state's population, but 63% of persons in prison. Conversely, whites, who comprise 66% of the state's population, represent 36% of the state prison population (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Racial Composition of Prison Population



As states across the nation grapple with the fiscal crisis, policymakers have come to recognize that the rising cost of corrections is competing with funding for higher education and other vital state services. This situation has contributed to a renewed interest in developing public safety measures that use corrections resources more effectively and rely less on expanded incarceration. Such measures have included diversion of lower-level drug and property offenders, expansion of graduated sanctions for probation and parole violators, and community-based sentencing alternatives.