

State Comparison Report - Incarceration Rates and Prison Populations in MT, ND, SD, and WY



Comparison States

For the purposes of comparison to South Dakota, Montana, North Dakota, and Wyoming were the states selected for several reasons. All four states exist in the same geographic area: the border between the Upper Midwest and Mountain West. Considering population, all four states fall within the lowest ten states. Of the other six states, five are in the Northeast and the remaining state is Alaska, as shown in Figure 1.

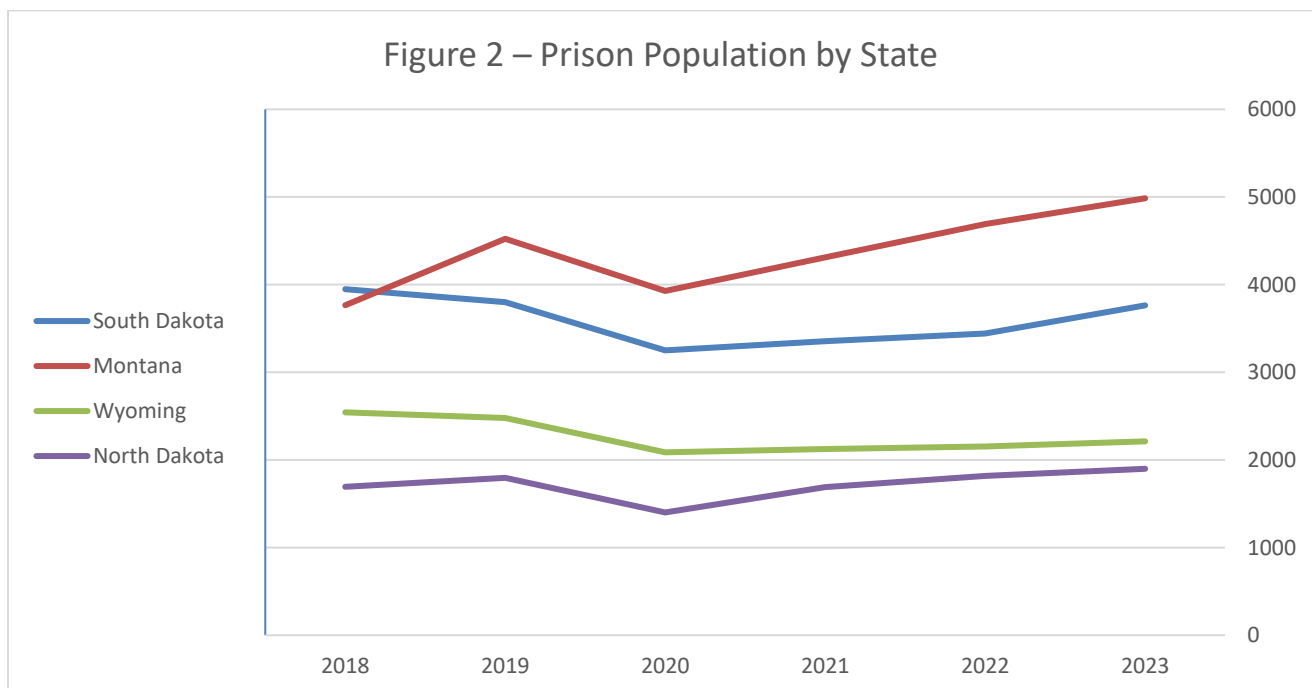
Further, in all four states, Native Americans make up the largest minority group. In terms of nominal GDP, all states rank in the bottom six states (with the other two being Alaska and Vermont). All states also rank within the bottom six states for total state expenditures per year (with the other two being Vermont and New Hampshire).

Figure 1 – Population by State

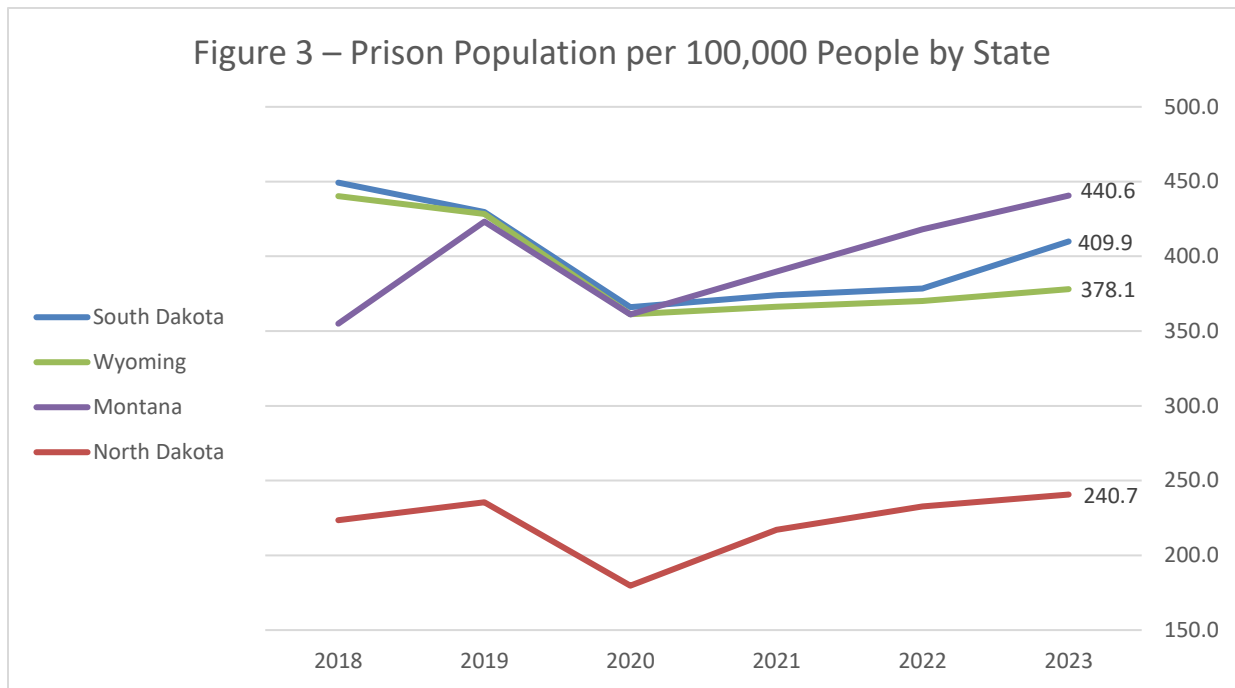
State	Population (2024 est.)
New Hampshire	1,409,032
Maine	1,405,012
Montana	1,137,233
Rhode Island	1,112,308
Delaware	1,051,917
South Dakota	924,669
North Dakota	796,568
Alaska	740,133
Vermont	648,493
Wyoming	587,618

Total Prison Population

Based on data collected by the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), Figure 2 shows the prison populations for Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming as of December 31 of each year. The bureau has yet to publish data on prison populations for calendar year 2024.



Considering the total population of these states using prison population per 100,000 people, the prison populations of Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota have closely aligned with each other since 2019, as shown in Figure 3. Only North Dakota's incarceration rate has been historically lower than the country's average incarceration rate (350 per 100,000 in 2022).



These prison populations do not always allow for apples-to-apples comparisons. For example, of Montana's prison population on June 11, 2025, 3,404 inmates were held in secure facilities, but another 1,625 inmates were held in alt-secure facilities, including contracted treatment centers and pre-release centers at unfenced locations. Of South Dakota's inmate population on May 31, 2025, only 116 were held in community locations, with a majority being held at the Hughes County Jail.

Further data on these states' prison populations can be found at the following links for [Montana](#) (plus reports), [North Dakota](#) (plus reports), [South Dakota](#), and [Wyoming](#).



Prison Population by Age

In South Dakota, 64% of the state's prison population is between the ages of 25 and 44, as shown in Figure 4. The average age of South Dakota inmates has steadily increased from 37 to 39 since 2018.

Figure 4 – South Dakota Prison Population by Age Group (June 30, 2024)

	Male	Female	Total
Under 20	20 (1%)	1 (0%)	21 (1%)
20 - 24	270 (9%)	64 (10%)	334 (9%)
25 - 34	1010 (32%)	282 (45%)	1292 (34%)
35 - 44	927 (29%)	201 (32%)	1128 (30%)
45 - 54	490 (15%)	66 (11%)	556 (15%)
55 - 64	314 (10%)	10 (2%)	324 (9%)
65 - 74	102 (3%)	2 (0%)	104 (3%)
75 and Over	33 (1%)	0 (0%)	33 (1%)

Comparing the ages of inmates across the four states in question presents difficulties. Montana tracks the ages of its inmates across four ranges of 18–25, 26–35, 36–50, and 51 and over. Wyoming tracks the ages of its inmates across six ranges. North Dakota uses seven ranges, starting with those under 25 and ending at those 70 and over. Between 78% and 86% of prisoners are below the age of 50 across North Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana, similar to the 87.8% of South Dakota prisoners under the age of 55.

Prison Population by Gender

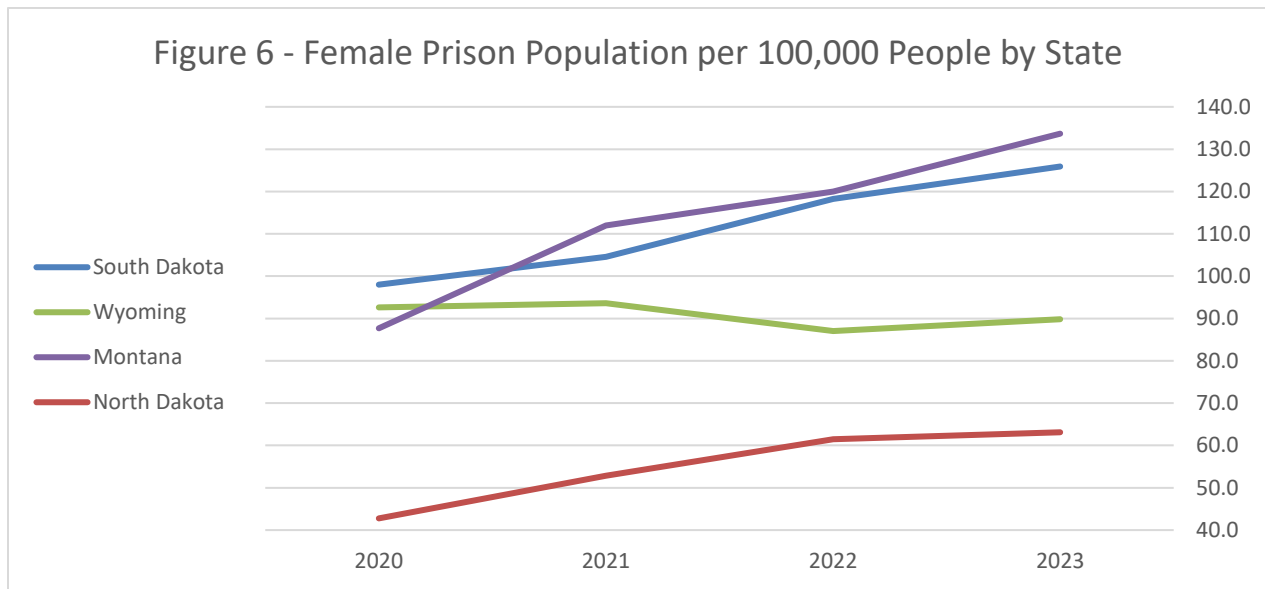
Of South Dakota's prison population, around 16.5% are women, as shown in Figure 5. This percentage has increased in recent years, with women making up 14.6% of the prison population in 2022 and 15.8% in 2023.

Figure 5 – South Dakota Prison Population by Gender (June 30, 2024)

Male	3166 (83%)
Female	626 (17%)

Again using Bureau of Justice Statistics, across the four states in question, South Dakota has the second highest incarceration rate of women, holding just below Montana, as shown in Figure 6. In the country, only Idaho has a higher incarceration rate of women than that of Montana and South Dakota. Indeed, all four states reviewed in this report incarcerate more women than the national average (43 per 100,000 in 2022).





Prison Population by Ethnicity/Race

Considering ethnicity and race, 45.9% of South Dakota's prison population are White, 39.7% are Native American, and the remaining 14.4% are Black, Hispanic/Latino, or other, as shown in Figure 7. The percentage of the female prison population that is Native American is higher at 62.9%.

Figure 7 – South Dakota Prison Population by Ethnicity/Race (June 30, 2024)

	Male	Female	Total
White	1542 (49%)	199 (32%)	1741 (46%)
Native American	1113 (35%)	394 (63%)	1507 (40%)
Black	311 (10%)	15 (2%)	326 (9%)
Hispanic or Latino	147 (5%)	15 (2%)	162 (4%)
Other	53 (2%)	3 (0%)	56 (1%)

All four of these states incarcerate Whites at a lower rate than the total population would suggest and incarcerate Native Americans at a higher rate. Wyoming's prison population is about 14% Native American, North Dakota's is about 19%, and Montana's is about 26% based on 2024 data. Figures 8 and 9 show how many Whites and Native Americans are in prison compared to how many are in the state's total population, respectively. In Wyoming, there are 4.82 times more Native Americans in prison than in total, higher than any other comparison states. In South Dakota, that number is 4.67.



Figure 8 – White Prison Population Compared to Total Population

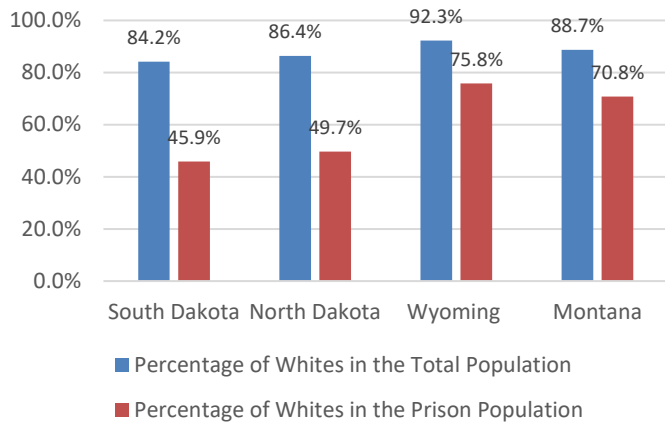
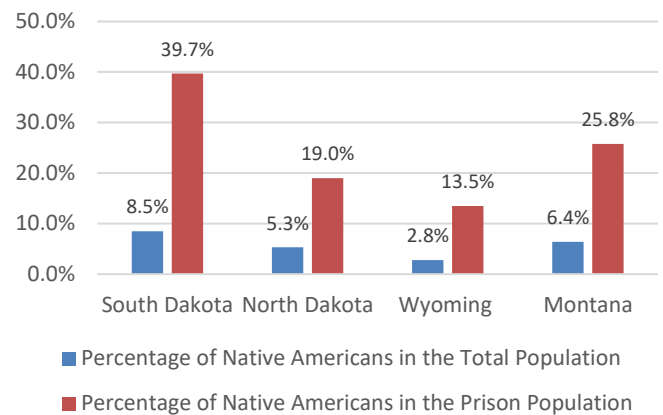


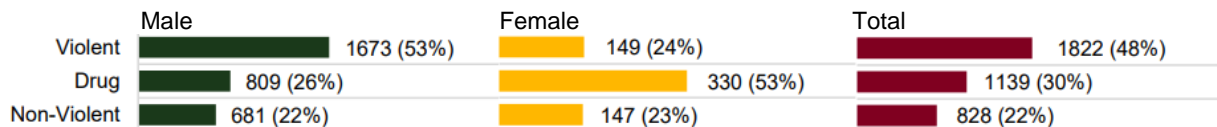
Figure 9 – Native American Prison Population Compared to Total Population



Prison Population by Offense

Almost half of all inmates (48%) in the state are incarcerated due to a violent offense conviction (as their most serious offense), as shown in Figure 10. Inmates convicted of nonviolent offenses make up 22% of the prison population, and inmates convicted of drug offenses make up an even higher 30%. Looking at women, more than half are in prison due to a drug offense. While 30% of those in prison are there for a drug offense as their most serious offense, between 89% and 94% of inmates assessed at intake were found to have a substance use disorder since 2020.

Figure 10 – South Dakota Prison Population by Offense (June 30, 2024)



Montana tracks offenses for everyone under the care of the Department of Corrections, which includes probation, so there is no equivalent data source to compare against South Dakota. In Wyoming, around 61% of those in prison were there for a violent or sex offense in 2024. Only 23% of inmates were in prison for a drug offense, including 46% of women, and 16% were in for a nonviolent offense. Similar to Wyoming, in North Dakota, 62% of inmates were in prison for a violent or sex offense at the end of 2023, 22% were in for a drug offense, and 16% were in for a nonviolent offense.



Prison Population by Location

In South Dakota, almost half of all individuals coming into the care of the Department of Corrections in 2024 are from either Minnehaha or Pennington County, as shown in Figure 11. Most counties have court commitments consistent with their populations apart from Roberts County, which despite only having 1.1% of the state's population in 2024 had 6% of court commitments. Commitments from Pennington and Minnehaha County made up 48% of total commitments in 2024.

Figure 11 – Court Commitments by County of Conviction (2024)

