There are a staggering 1.8 million people behind bars in the United States, a number so big it can make mass incarceration seem abstract. But mass incarceration is a local problem, driven by more than 3,000 county-run jails and local justice systems and nearly 18,000 police departments.

Jails are primarily funded by county-level taxpayer dollars and used to lock up people who are awaiting trial but have not been convicted of the charges they are facing. The vast majority of people in jail are simply too poor to pay bail. Some jails also hold people serving shorter prison sentences, and many jails rent beds to the state prison system or federal authorities—like U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Most jails are run by elected sheriffs or jailers.

Prisons are primarily funded by state and federal tax dollars and hold people serving sentences of more than a year. Prisons are run by state departments of corrections and are managed by wardens. Fewer than 9 percent of incarcerated people are held in private prisons.

Just a few days behind bars is enough to:
- lose housing
- cause strain on a family
- lose employment

This fact sheet will help you understand who is locked up in your county jail and how this impacts your community.

Use it to:
- Explore trends
- Talk about their impact
- Change the system

Amite County
MISSISSIPPI

23 people were in the Amite County jail on a typical day in 2020.

79 people from Amite County were in state prison at the end of 2016.
Public health

Jails have revolving doors, often churning the same people in and out. Even before COVID-19, jail stays led to worse physical and mental health outcomes.³

Cost

Jail costs make up a sizable portion of the county budget, and every dollar spent is one that could have gone to critical community needs. As counties face increasing budget constraints, reducing jail spending has a big impact.

Rising incarceration

On an average day in 2020, 23 people were being held in the county jail, 51 percent of the total capacity. The 113 percent increase in incarceration since 1990 does not necessarily reflect an increase in serious crime.³

Admissions to state prison

The number of people sent to state prison from Amite County has risen 108 percent since 1990.

Note: Prison admissions reflect current sentencing practices more clearly than does the prison population. This is because the prison population, which includes people serving long sentences, changes more slowly in response to reforms.
Different agencies using the county jail (2020)

- 17% People held for Amite County
- 2 People held for the state prison system
- 2 People held for other counties

Cashing in on incarceration
On a typical day, 17 percent of people being held in the county jail fill beds “rented” to other agencies. The county gets paid a per diem to incarcerate or detain them.

Most counties charge fines and fees for court costs and jail stays. This further traps people in cycles of poverty.

Racial disparities in criminalization (2020)

- Latinx people are 1% of the county population...
- ...but 4% of the county jail population.

Latinx 1%

Black people are treated more harshly at every stage of the criminal legal system.

Latinx 4%

Understanding disparities
Racial disparities begin with who gets stopped by the police and multiply throughout the legal system. When charged with similar offenses as white people, Black people are more likely to be detained pretrial, convicted, and given harsher sentences. Seemingly “color-blind” policies may still disproportionately impact communities of color.

People of every race and ethnicity are incarcerated at higher rates than they were in 1970. The county’s white incarceration rate has grown 800 percent since 1990. Latinx people are also overrepresented in the nation’s jails, yet common misclassification of ethnicity leads to distorted, lower estimates of Latinx incarceration.

Locking up loved ones

- 2 in 3 Two-thirds of women in jail across the country are mothers of young children.
- 1 in 2 More than half of all people who are in jail because they couldn’t make bail are parents to young children.
- 1 in 2 Nearly half of adults in the United States have had an immediate family member in jail or prison.
Each of these officials makes decisions that lead to
criminalization and incarceration in your community:

Police and the sheriff — decide who gets stopped, who gets arrested, what
they’re charged with, and whether or not they’re
booked into jail.

Prosecutors — decide who gets diverted and who gets prosecuted and
on which charges. They also make bail recommendations, control most of the evidence
in a case, offer plea bargains, and make sentencing recommendations.

Probation and parole officers — decide supervision rules and requirements, what costs
people under supervision must shoulder, and whether
to reincarcerate someone for inability to meet those
requirements.

Judges — decide who gets released or detained pretrial and who
must pay a money bond to secure freedom. A judge or
jury determines whether someone is found guilty and
selects the terms of a sentence.

City, county, and state legislators — decide spending priorities for the community, control
the purse strings that fund each of these systems, and
enact local policies. State legislators write the criminal
code, determining what constitutes an offense.

As a community member, **YOU** have influence over decision-making in
Amite County. You can get involved with or start local efforts to shift
time into the community and end mass incarceration in Amite County.

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Data
This fact sheet uses data from four U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) data
series and is supplemented, when available, with data obtained directly from the
Amite County Sheriff’s Office for the more recent years for which BJS data is not yet
available. The Census of Jails provides data through 2013; the Annual Survey of Jails
provides data through 2018; the National Corrections Reporting Program provides data
through 2016; and the National Prisoner Statistics program provides data through 2017.
A complete dataset and documentation are available on Vera’s GitHub at
Version: Data current as of March 09, 2021.

Acknowledgments
This fact sheet would not be possible without the excellent work of researchers at the
Bureau of Justice Statistics—E. Ann Carson, Todd Minton, and Zhen Zeng—who maintain
the Annual Survey of Jails, Census of Jails, National Corrections Reporting Program, and
National Prisoner Statistics program. This report was designed by Paragini Amin at Design
for Progress and created by Eital Schattner-Elmaleh, Sarah Minion, and James
Wallace-Lee. Thanks to Jessica Zhang, Maurice Smith, Bea Hallbach-Singh, and Jacob
Kang-Brown for research support.

Credits
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