



[Current](#) [Premium](#) [Archives](#) [About CVBT](#) [Policies](#) [Advertising](#)

[Podcasts](#) [Letters to the Editor](#) [Lighter Side](#) [Headlines by Email](#) [Free Classifieds](#)

Study: California prison population exploding, changing

SAN FRANCISCO

August 10, 2006 10:07am

- **Could lead to gigantic health care costs**
- **System impact 'thousands' of children**

California's prisoners aren't who they used to be, according to a study by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC). Its demographic analysis reveals a prison population that is not only larger but also changing dramatically.

Some of the major changes have unsettling implications, including potentially prohibitive health care costs for an aging inmate population and the social welfare consequences of incarcerated women with minor

Specializing in
Agricultural
Financing &
Farm Loans

agricap.com

children, the report says.

Since 1990, the number of prisoners in California has risen three times faster than the overall adult population, standing at almost 168,000 in 2005.

The San Joaquin portion of the Central Valley and the Inland Empire in Southern California contribute disproportionately to the state's prison population, the PPIC report says.

Between 1990 and 2002, their share of admissions has risen from 11 percent to 14 percent and from 8 percent to 15 percent, respectively.

((Download a copy of the report by clicking on the link below.))

Adults younger than 25 years old account for a declining segment of the prison population (declining from 20 percent in 1990 to 14 percent in 2005), while the share of adults age 50 and older has nearly tripled (rising from 4 percent to 11 percent).

What accounts for this shift? Surprisingly – given that criminological research tells us young people are the most likely group to commit crimes – older adults are increasingly being admitted to prison. Additionally, more inmates are aging in prison because tougher sentencing laws lead to more time served.

The graying of the state's inmate population raises the prospect of soaring health care costs – a prospect that is even more ominous in light of a recent federal court-appointed receiver's report that says California's prison health

**Premier
Guide**

Local Search,
Made Easy



care system is in a state of almost complete disrepair, the report says.

Prior research estimates that the expense of housing, transporting, and caring for elderly inmates is two-to-three times higher than for other prisoners.

“Whether or not federal actions will bring relief remains to be seen, but providing medical and health care to California’s prisoners is on its way to being an acute financial challenge,” says PPIC research associate Amanda Bailey, who co-authored the study with PPIC research associate Joseph Hayes.

The PPIC says its analysis also raises “disquieting questions” about the families and communities that prisoners leave behind – and may someday rejoin.

For example, 64 percent of female inmates have children under the age of 18 – and over half of these mothers were living with their children at the time of their arrest.

“The effects of incarceration certainly extend beyond prison walls to touch thousands of children and other family members,” says Mr. Hayes. “Some communities experience a revolving door of prisoners coming and going.”

The study finds that 58 percent of women in California prisons have an immediate family member who has been in prison, compared to 42 percent of men.

• [Lighter Side](#)

• [Letters from Laskin](#)

• [Dunklee’s Weather](#)

Daily Toon

Click to enlarge



Business Cartoons by Andertoons



The prison population is also marked by large racial and ethnic disparities, according to the PPIC study.

At 38 percent, Latino men now constitute the largest share of the state's male prisoners (roughly comparable to their share of the adult population).

At 27 percent, white men are underrepresented in prison; but at 29 percent, African American men are vastly overrepresented, the report says.

African American men are seven times as likely as white men and 4.5 times as likely as Latino men to be incarcerated, it says. One out of every 12 African American men in California between the age of 25 and 29 is currently in state prison. There are also disparities by offense type, with African American and Latino prisoners (52 percent each) more likely than whites (44 percent) to be imprisoned for violent offenses.

Prisoners in general are more likely to be serving sentences for violent offenses than in the past. Violent offenders now constitute a majority (just over 50 percent) of prisoners, and their share is growing.

In contrast, the share of drug offenders is declining – 28 percent to 21 percent in the past six years. Part of this decline results from Proposition 36, which passed in 2000 and diverts non-violent drug offenders from prison to treatment centers.

California's "Three Strikes" law and the state's enactment of the federal "Truth in Sentencing" program have produced longer sentences and more time served, the analysis says. Together with Prop 36, they have helped

transform the prison population to one increasingly composed of violent offenders.

Drilldown

[Click here to download a copy of the report \(CC_806ABCC.pdf, 342 KB\)](#)



**Premier
Guide**

Local Search, Made Easy

[Top](#) [Current](#) [Search](#) [Premium](#) [Policies](#) [Advertising](#) [Laskin](#) [Weather](#)
[Subscribe](#) [Account](#) [About CVBT](#) [Contact](#) [Home](#)

Copyright Central Valley Business Times © 2006
Central Valley Business Times is an online unit of BizGnus, Inc.
All rights reserved. No content may be reused without written permission.