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As New York's prison population drops, so does crime
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by Natasha Haverty [\[/news/reporters/48/natasha-haverty\]](#)



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From the Pew Charitable Trusts' study, "Prison and Crime: A Complex Link"

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prison-population-drops-so-does-crime]

Sep 29, 2014 – A study from the Pew Charitable Trusts says crime is still dropping in New York state, even as people are spending less time behind bars. This bucks the trend of many other states, where incarceration rates are on the rise even as the crime rate falls.

The prison population in New York is down by 24 percent—that's down from the state's peak in the late Nineties. And that drop comes almost entirely from reforms to the Rockefeller Drug Laws—a set of policies that sent thousands of men and women away for prison sentences, often for low-level drug crimes.

Today New York sends far fewer nonviolent drug offenders to prison—70 percent less. So while in 1996, almost 24 thousand drug offenders were in New York prisons, today, there are less than 7 thousand. All together, the state of New York holds 54,200 people in its prisons.

These sweeping changes to inmate populations and crime policies have meant the downsizing of New York's prison system. In the past four years, the state's cut 5500 prison beds. Just this summer, four prisons closed across the state, and nearly half of the correctional officers and staff working at those facilities were transitioned out of the system. Acting Commissioner of the Department of Corrections Anthony Annuci has said this downsizing will save taxpayers \$30 million dollars.

Crime is also down in New York—by more than half. But while New York reduces mass incarceration and has less crime, other states, and the country as a whole, are putting more people behind bars, even as the crime rate goes down. Those numbers, in part, are the results of the Violent Crime and Control Act—passed under Bill Clinton in 1994—that locks up offenders for longer periods of time.

So as New York demonstrates that crime, and incarceration, can go down at the same time, other states show completely different trends. Vermont's incarceration rate is up by 44 percent. Its crime rate is down by half that rate. And West Virginia has almost tripled the number of people it puts behind bars, while its crime rate is up by 6 percent.

The Pew Charitable Trusts' statistics don't include people being held in jail, or juvenile facilities. Meanwhile, New York is the only state other than North Carolina that that incarcerates all 16 and 17 year olds as adults.

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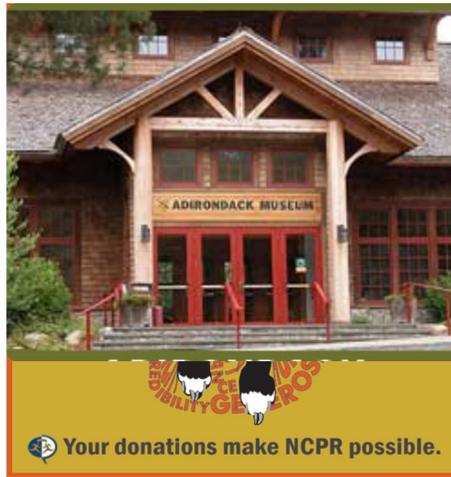
Prison and Crime: A Complex Link [From the Pew Charitable Trusts] (<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/multimedia/data-visualizations/2014/prison-and-crime>)

Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie [From the Prison Policy Initiative] (<http://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie.html>)

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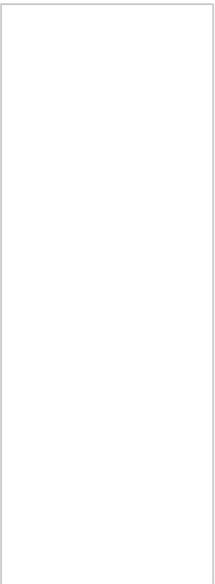
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