Drivers of Incarceration

Report highlights **November 2026**

Idaho's prison population growth closely tracks statewide growth, but there have been changes to the makeup of the custody population.

Idaho had the **7th** highest incarceration rates in the country in 2023, and the highest rate in the mountain west.

43% more felony offenders were incarcerated in 2025 than two decades prior, but the state population grew by 42% over the same period.

2x more women were incarcerated in 2025 than 2005. Idaho has the highest incarceration rate for women in the nation.

33% of offenders in custody were under the age of 35 in 2025. This is a significant decline. In 2005, half of offenders in custody were under 35.

87% of custody growth over the past four decades came from just four large counties: Ada, Canyon, Kootenai, and Twin Falls.

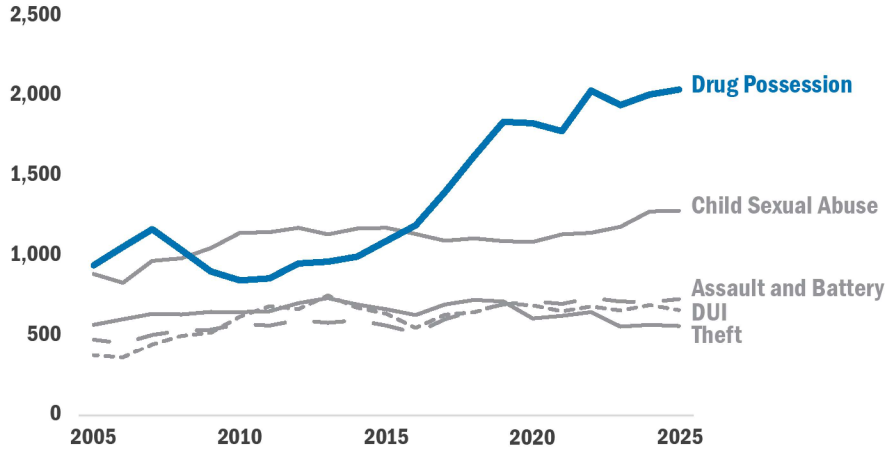
50% fewer offenders per capita were incarcerated for property crimes like burglary and theft.

View the report:
www.legislature.idaho.gov/ope

Declines in younger offenders and property crimes were offset by custody growth in other groups and crimes.

Idaho's stable incarceration rate hides significant changes to the custody population. Fewer offenders are incarcerated under the age of 35, and the custody rate for property crimes has decreased by half. But prison space freed up by these changes is now occupied by more older offenders, more women in custody, and more offenders with assault and drug crimes.

Incarceration for drug possession charges increased more than any other offense.



Note: OPE analysis of annual July 1st custody counts from Department of Correction.

Offenders convicted of first-time drug possession rarely begin their sentence committed to a prison term. But many offenders violate the terms of their probation and are taken into custody. The growth of drug possession convictions in custody has had an especially large impact on Idaho's women's prisons. While women are less likely than men to be incarcerated for drug possession, they are much less likely to be incarcerated for other crimes. More than half of the growth of women in custody over the past two decades comes from women convicted of a single drug possession charge.