

Analysis of Australian Indigenous imprisonment and demographic information
Kathleen Daly, April 2009.

These sources were used in creating Charts 1 and 2:

Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Population distribution, Indigenous Australians, 2001."

Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Prisoners in Australia 2005."

Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Prisoners in Australia 2008," ABS publication 4517.0.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Updated information on Indigenous population: Population characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians," ABS publication 4713.0 (2006).

Charts 1 and 2 show population data for 2001. However, imprisonment data are for 2008 (Chart 1) and 2005 (Chart 2).

The charts show the following:

1. Between 2005 and 2008, increases in the rate of Indigenous incarceration, from 1,561 to 1,769 per 100,000 adult population (age-adjusted).* If the crude rates are used, the differences are much greater.
2. The state with both the highest incarceration rate of Indigenous people and the highest disproportionality is WA, with (in 2008) an Indigenous imprisonment rate of 2828, and disproportionality of 19.8 times.
3. The NT has the overall highest incarceration rate of all states and territories (in 2008, 610 per 100,000 adult pop), and the reason is not because Indigenous rates of incarceration are higher in the NT but because Indigenous people form a large share of the population (nearly 30%), which raises the overall average.
4. The state with the highest non-Indigenous rate of incarceration is NSW.
5. From 2005 to 2008, rates of Indigenous incarceration have increased in some states more than others. The rate of increase is very high for SA (42%), followed by NSW (21%) and the NT (17%). Smaller rates of increase are evident in Qld (7%), WA (5%), and Vic (3%). There was a rate of decrease of 12% in Tasmania and no change in the ACT.

Drawing from 2006 population data, Indigenous people (Aboriginal and TSI) were 2.5% of the total population (Table 2.1, ABS 4713). With respect to place (p. 13):

32% live in major cities

21% live in inner regional areas

22% live in outer regional areas

10% live in remote areas

16% live in very remote areas

) Thus, 26% live in remote or very remote areas.

Drawing from 2008 Imprisonment data, Indigenous people were 24.3% of the prison population (sentenced and unsentenced) (Table 3, ABS 4517, 2008, Prisoners in Australia).

Table 17 of the above document shows that the age adjusted disproportionality in Indigenous imprisonment has risen from 9.9 times (2000) to 13.3 times (2008).

*The age adjusted imprisonment rates adjust for the fact that the Indigenous population is younger.

Note 1: I would like to have gathered more recent population data, but the release by the ABS is a bit late for 2009 data. The 2008 population figures show a total of 21,542,000 people, but I can't easily find estimated ATSI population.

Note 2: By comparison rates of incarceration for American Indians and Native Alaskans are much lower than for Indigenous Australians. In 2000, the rate was 709 per 100,000 in state prisons. They were about 1% of the state prison population, a share that has not changed in two decades (Toward Freedom 2009 story 31 March 2009, citing Mother Jones Foundation for National Progress Review, "Native incarceration rates are increasing" by Greg Guma). Rates of incarceration have increased in particular areas, but not all areas. For federal data, 2.4% of those entering Federal prison were American Indians; their share in 1994 was 2.2%, so there has been no change in the past 15 years (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004, "American Indians and Crime 1992-2002"). The American Indian and Native Alaskan share of the population is about 1.5% (Amnesty International 2007: 5), drawing from 2000 census data.

The highly "captured" group in the US CJS is Black Americans, whose rate of incarceration per the "resident population" (which would be larger than the adult population figures used in Australia) is staggering. In 2006, it was 5,147 per 100,000 residents (Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Prison and jail inmates at midyear 2006," p. 9, adding the black/African American male and female rates in Table 14, 4,789 and 358 = 5,147 per 100,000 residents). If this were calculated as a rate per 100,000 of the adult population, it would be higher.

Chart 1

2001 population data;
2008 imprisonment (age-adjusted)

State/Territory	N of Indigenous people	Total N in the population	Indigenous population share	overall imprisonment rate per 100,000 adult population	Indigenous imprisonment rate	non-Indigenous imprisonment rate	ratio
New South Wales	135,319	6,609,304	2.0	195	2005	161	12.5
Victoria	27,928	4,822,663	0.6	104	1016	100	10.1
Queensland	126,035	3,635,121	3.5	169	1397	131	10.7
South Australia	25,620	1,514,854	1.7	156	1840	137	13.4
Western Australia	66,069	1,906,114	3.5	230	2828	143	19.8
Tasmania	17,442	472,931	3.7	136	491	139	3.5
Northern Territory	57,550	200,019	28.7	610	1679	128	13.2
Australian Capital Territory	3,941	321,680	1.2	94	816	82	10
Australia	460,140	19,485,278	2.4	169	1769	133	13.3

Chart 2

2001 population data;
2005 imprisonment (age-adjusted)

State/Territory	N of Indigenous people	Total N in the population	Indigenous population share	overall imprisonment rate per 100,000 adult population	Indigenous imprisonment rate	non-Indigenous imprisonment rate	ratio
New South Wales	135,319	6,609,304	2.0	188	1652	158	10.5
Victoria	27,928	4,822,663	0.6	94	983	91	10.8
Queensland	126,035	3,635,121	3.5	177	1304	138	9.5
South Australia	25,620	1,514,854	1.7	123	1297	99	13
Western Australia	66,069	1,906,114	3.5	229	2697	144	18.7
Tasmania	17,442	472,931	3.7	150	559	149	3.7
Northern Territory	57,550	200,019	28.7	576	1441	135	10.7
Australian Capital Territory	3,941	321,680	1.2	110	821	93	8.8
Australia	460,140	19,485,278	2.4	163	1561	129	12