



# Orleans Parish Jail Population: By the Numbers

## Glossary of terms and technical notes

### Criminal legal system definitions

#### Where do these definitions come from?

We draw on these key sources for these definitions: 1) existing data documentation for OPSO tables; 2) the Bureau of Justice Statistics; 3) commonly accepted statistical calculations; and 4) common usage of terms among local stakeholders. Accordingly, this is a living document, and we will make changes as constructs evolve in meaning and use.

#### Questions? Contact us!

At OCJC, we are interested in your observations and data questions.

Please reach out to [adrienne.tobler@nola.gov](mailto:adrienne.tobler@nola.gov) to further discuss the possibility of exploring your questions.

For technical questions, please contact [theresa.mckinney@nola.gov](mailto:theresa.mckinney@nola.gov)

This document is also available online.

**AVERAGE MONTHLY JAIL POPULATION.** The sum of all the daily detainee counts divided by the number of days in the month. We use an average, rather than a population snapshot (i.e. the daily count on a single day of the month) so that we can report one figure that takes into consideration all the daily counts and day-to-day fluctuations in jail population during the month. In monthly reports, we contextualize the average monthly jail population by reporting the minimum and maximum daily populations and the standard deviation for all daily jail counts in the month.

**JAIL ADMISSIONS.** We acknowledge that the term, *jail admission*, may be defined differently in correctional, pretrial, and other spaces. Here, we define jail admissions as the transfer of custody from an arresting agency to the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office following custodial arrests that occurred outside of the jail. Certainly, people can be and are booked on new charges after admission to the jail (for example, for offenses that can only take place within a jail, such as battery of a correctional officer). Our tabulations and analyses only count the initial booking that brought a person from the community into the jail, consistent with the central aims of the report.

**JAIL RELEASES.** A person's exit from jail custody. Note that the term, *releases*, can refer to releases back into the community (for example, when someone is released on their own recognizance or posts bond); releases to another jurisdiction's law enforcement agency (for example, in the case of someone admitted to the jail on an out-of-state warrant); or releases to the Department of Corrections after sentencing.

**LENGTH OF JAIL STAY.** The difference, in days, between the date of jail admission and the date of jail release. Note that the length of stay is only calculated for people who have been released from jail to ensure a final, static figure.

**AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY.** The mean of all jail stays for people released during the month, calculated as the sum of all lengths of stay for people released during the month divided by the number of people released during the same month. To contextualize our reporting of the average length of stay, we also report the shortest lengths of stay (i.e. the minimum; usually less than 1 day); the longest length of stay (i.e. the maximum); and the standard deviation for all lengths of stay for people released during the month.

**MEDIAN LENGTH OF STAY.** When a released person has been released from jail custody after a very long jail stay, that person's length of stay can skew the average length of stay upward. We report the median length of stay, the midway point between all observed lengths of jail stays for people released during the month, to provide additional context for interpreting average length of stay. For a given median length of stay, 50% of those released had a length of stay longer than the median.

## Criminal legal system definitions, continued

**MOST SERIOUS CHARGE AT BOOKING.** People detained in jail can have more than one charge at more than one level of seriousness. For example, a detained person may have been booked with a felony property charge, state misdemeanor drug charge, while also having an outstanding local warrant. We created “most serious charge at booking” so that we can name the highest-level charge for which a person is being detained. We use a hierarchy of charge categories to determine the most serious charge at booking. In the hierarchy, all charges are categorized into four types: 1) felonies; 2) state misdemeanors; 3) municipal and traffic offenses; 4) warrants, attachments, and Louisiana parole and probation detainers. All felonies are more serious than state misdemeanors, and within the felony and state misdemeanor categories is a sub-hierarchy of offense types, listed here in order of seriousness: a) violent offenses; b) sex offenses; c) weapons offenses; d) property offenses; e) drug offenses; and f) ‘other’ offenses.

**AVERAGE 7-DAY JAIL TURNOVER RATE.** A measure “borrowed” from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the average 7-day jail turnover rate aims to capture in broad terms the movement of people into and out of the jail. We calculate the jail turnover rate by dividing the average daily population for the month by the sum of jail admissions and jail releases, multiplying by 7, and dividing by the number of days in the month.

## Definitions based on OPSO variables

**“LEGAL STATUS”, “OPEN”, AND “CLOSED” MATTERS.** “Legal status” is a designation used by the Sheriff to categorize people detained in the jail. There are two types of legal-status designations. People with “open” matters had, at the time of reporting, had cases that had not yet reached a final disposition. People with open matters may also have had active warrants and/or detainers at the time of reporting. Inversely, people with “closed” matters have cases that have reached a final disposition, and any warrants and/or detainers they may have had have been resolved. People with closed matters have been sentenced to a Department of Corrections institution or to the Eastern Louisiana Mental Health System and were, at the time of reporting, awaiting transport to those facilities.

Note that these are designations originate from the Sheriff, for the purpose of categorizing people detained in the jail. *Any reporting of frequencies or percentages involving these categories should not be interpreted as measures related to Court activities.*

**ARRESTING AGENCY.** We report monthly jail admissions by arresting agency in response to inquiries about possible effects of increased Louisiana State Police patrols beyond the French Quarter. The Sheriff collects “arresting agency” data for every person admitted to the jail, and we tabulate this variable to generate a data graphic that appears in the monthly report. *As this variable specifically relates to jail admissions, our reporting on arresting agency should not be interpreted as a measure of law enforcement activities.*

## How we operationalize measures of inequality

**DISPROPORTIONALITY AND OVER- AND UNDERREPRESENTATION.** We use these terms to compare the demographic characteristics of a group (like people detained in the jail) to the demographic characteristics of the larger community from which most of that group came (like Orleans Parish). When both groups share similar proportions of people by demographic characteristics, we observe proportionality. We observe disproportionality when one demographic group -- for example, Black people or white people detained in the jail--is overrepresented (in the case of Black people in the jail) or is underrepresented, in comparison with the demographic characteristics of Orleans Parish.

**DISPARITY.** We use the term, disparity, to refer to differences in the rates at which something occurs among 2 or more groups. To explore the possibility of disparity in our jail population reports, we first calculate the rate of jail detention per 100,000 New Orleans residents by race/ethnicity. The jail detention rate is the average jail population for a group (say, Black people detained in the jail during the month) divided by the estimated number of Black people in New Orleans, then multiplied by 100,000. Generating a rate per 100,000 is useful when comparing rates between groups of differing sizes (for example, the population of New Orleans, a majority [58%] African American city), we can “control” for the differences in size by comparing rates per 100,000 residents.

Further, we can “relate” the jail detention rate for Black people with that of white people to generate a relative rate index (RRI). To do this, we divide the Black jail detention rate per 100,000 Black people in New Orleans by the jail detention rate for white people per 100,000 residents. By using the white rate as the denominator in the calculation, we effectively index the white rate to 1 and defensibly make the statement that, in December 2023 (for example), Black people were jailed at a rate 4.8 times that of white people. We observe parity – a measure of equality – when the RRI = 1.

### *Notes about race / ethnicity categories*

Our reporting on racial and ethnic demographics of people detained in the jail is based on data collected by Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office (OPSO) deputies during the jail admission process. OPSO uses the following mutually exclusive categories for race: Black; White; Hispanic; Asian; American Indian; and Unknown. The race and ethnicity categories currently in use by OPSO do not quite align with those used by the US Census Bureau, which defines race and ethnicity as separate constructs.

Our reporting is rooted in an understanding that the inequalities that we observe are reflections and symptoms of systemically racist systems. We view mass incarceration in the US as the cumulative effects of systemic racism that impact everyone's lives before any one person is ever booked into jail. Accordingly, our reporting about racial disproportionalities should not be interpreted as critiques of Black people or Black culture; nor should it be interpreted as evidence to support detention of more white people to reduce inequalities.

One thing to keep in mind: we use these measures and categories as a kind of shorthand to describe inequalities, but they certainly don't tell the whole story. Race – like other categories like gender – is a broad social construct that is shaped by history and contains other constructs, like socio-economic status and access to essentials such as education and health care. Accordingly, the purpose of the sections is to highlight some observed areas of inequality, in the hope that it sparks continued conversation about how to make our community more just and equitable.