

Comments on the Growth in Number of Prison Inmates by Gender

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this brief report is to provide historical data about the growth in the number of female and male inmates in state prisons with respect to a historical norm.

Data Sources

1. *State & Federal Prisoners 1925-85* Stephanie Minor-Harper NCJ-102494
2. Bureau of Justice Statistics: *State Prison Populations 1978-2016*
3. Iowa Department of Corrections: Historical Data File

Mass Imprisonment or Mass Incarceration

The term “Mass Imprisonment” was first used in a meeting at New York University in 2000 to mean excessive use of imprisonment with respect to historic norms. Since then the term was been changed to mass incarceration to include confinement in jails and other institutions authorized to detain individuals. However, in most discussions the historic norm was not specified.

Determination of Historic Norms

The 1925 to 1985 data set included federal and combined state prison inmates for both genders and the BJS 1978 to 2016 data set only included combined state prison inmates also for both genders. The data sets overlapped between 1978 and 1985 and that made it possible to determine the federal contribution to the male and female subsets. Correction factors based on the overlap where used to correct the female and male subsets of the 1925 to 1985 data set for the presence of federal inmates.

There were dips in the incarceration rate during the Civil War, WW I, WW II and the Vietnam War and in specifying the historic norm for incarceration rate it is necessary to avoid the dips caused by WW II and the Vietnam War. In this discussion I determined the historic norms by averaging the female and male populations for each set of prisons for the years 1950 to 1965.

Table 1: Historic Norms

Prison System	Gender	Historic Norm
Combined States	Female	6,987
	Male	179,370
Iowa Prisons	Female	68
	Male	2,173

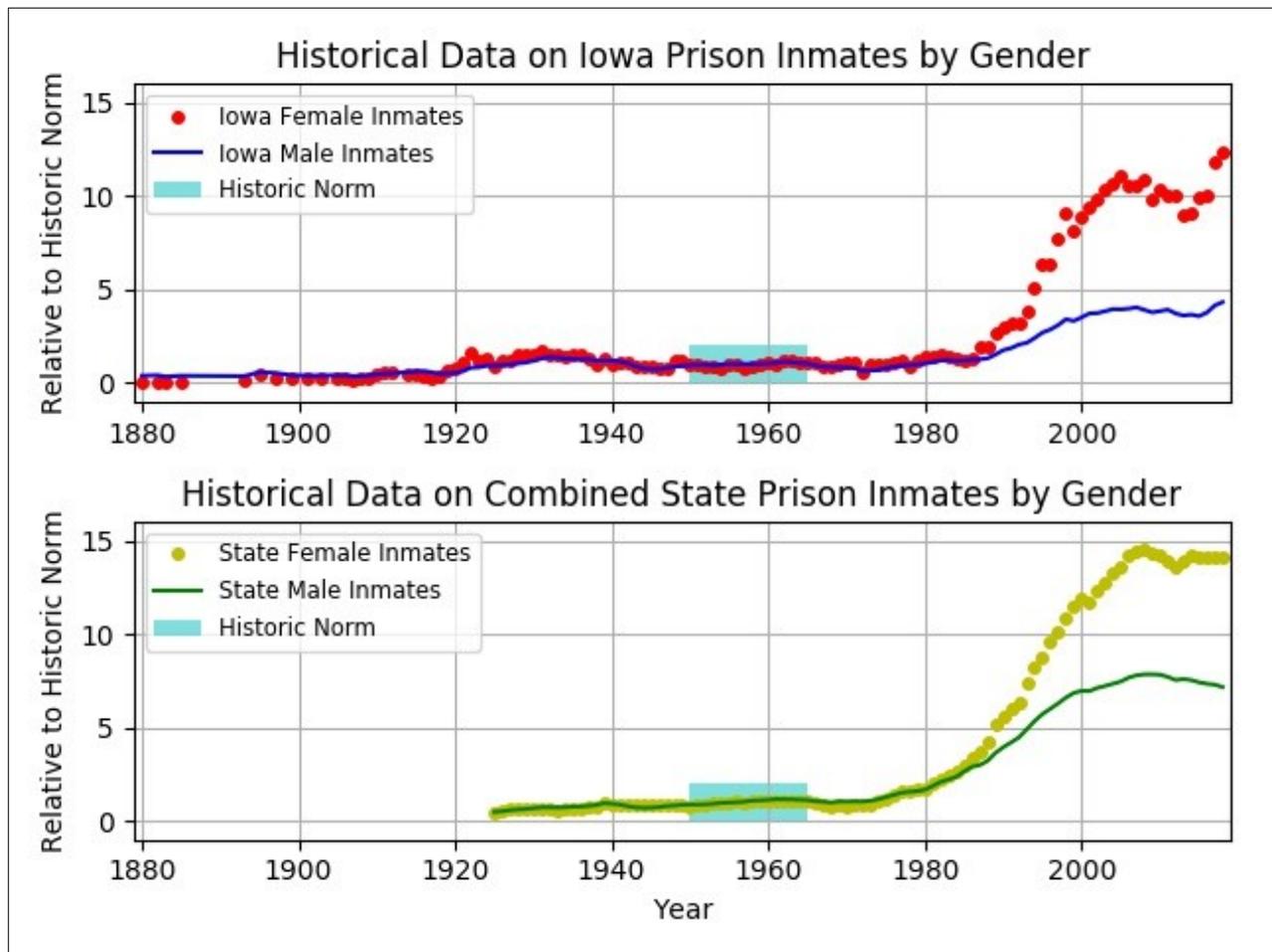


Figure 1: The upper panel shows the Iowa female and male prison populations relative to their historic norms and the lower panel gives the results for the combined state prisons.

Discussion of Figure 1

1. The increase that started after the end of the Vietnam War was delayed for Iowa prisons because of an attempt to cap the prison population between 1983 and 1988. The procedures were able to slow but not stop the growth. They were terminated because they caused serious problems with the prisons and community supervision.
2. The average ratio for Iowa female inmates between 2007 and 2018 was 12.3.
3. The average ratio for Iowa male inmates between 2007 and 2018 was 3.9.
4. The average ratio for female inmates in combined state prisons for the same interval was 14.1.
5. The average ratio for male inmates in combined state prisons for the same interval was 7.8.

There is very little data that is presented as relative to historic norms. There is more data available about the percentage of female prison inmates. Figure 2 shows the historical data on the percentage of female inmates for Iowa and combined state prisons. The Iowa percentage tended to increase whenever the capacity of the prison for women increased.

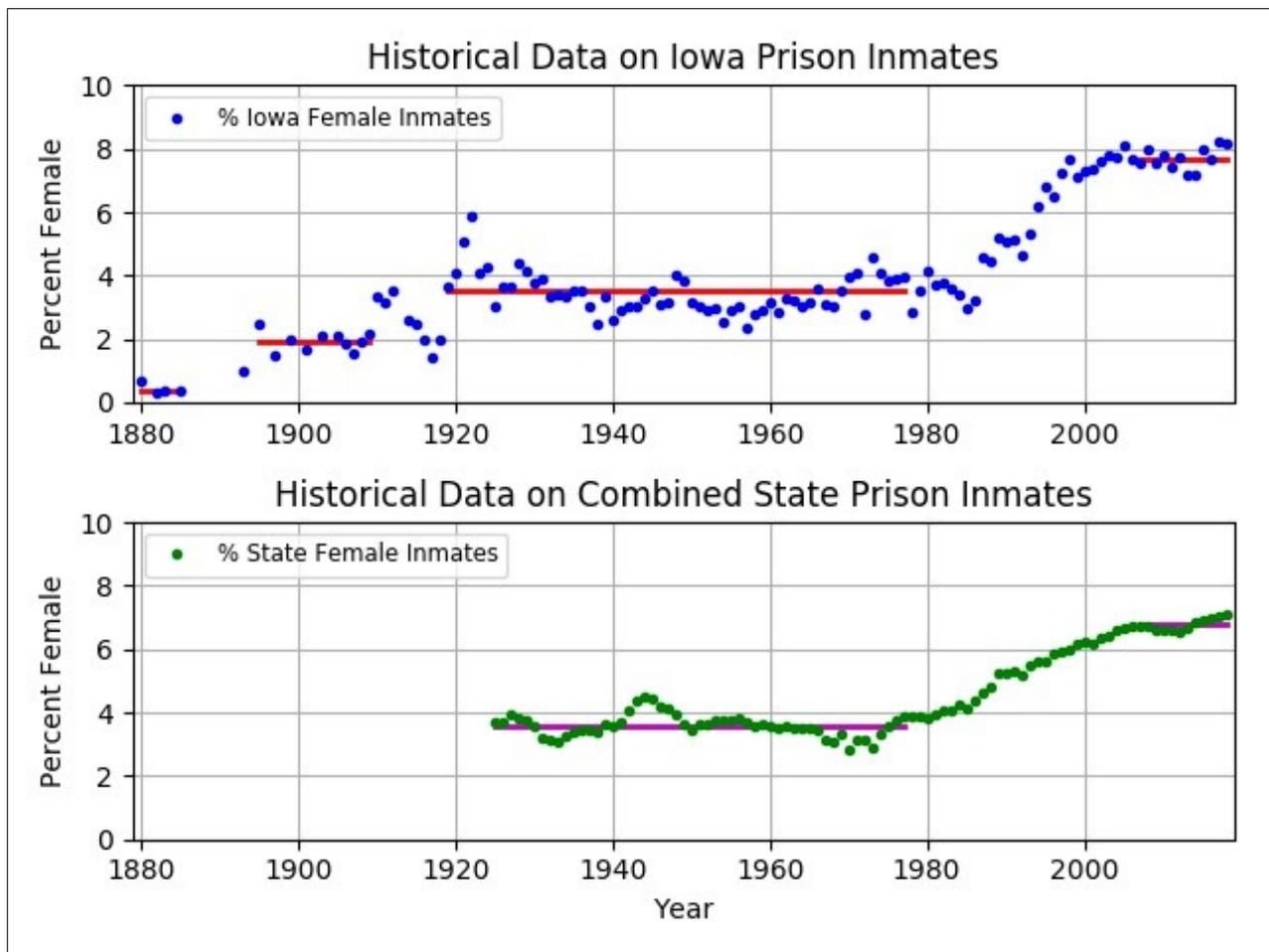


Figure 2: The upper panel shows the growth in the percentage of female inmates in Iowa prisons during the past 138 years. The lower panel shows the growth for the past 93 years for combined state prisons.

Discussion of Figure 2

1. The red horizontal lines in the upper panel denote intervals when the percentage of Iowa female inmates showed little trend. The percentages increased in four steps from 0.4% to 1.9% to 3.4% and 7.7%.
2. The magenta lines in the lower panel denote the intervals when the percentage of combined state female inmates showed little trend. The percentages increased from 3.6% to 6.8%.
3. Roy Walmsley who established and directs the World Prison Brief has reported on the worldwide incarceration of women. He reported that between 2000 and probably 2015 the worldwide percentage of incarcerated women increased from 5.4% to 6.8%. Note that Walmsley used the European term imprisonment that has the same definition as the American term incarceration.