PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE

For more information about prison-based gerrymandering, see our website and newsletter at http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org

Prison gerrymandering disproportionately harms Wyoming's Black residents

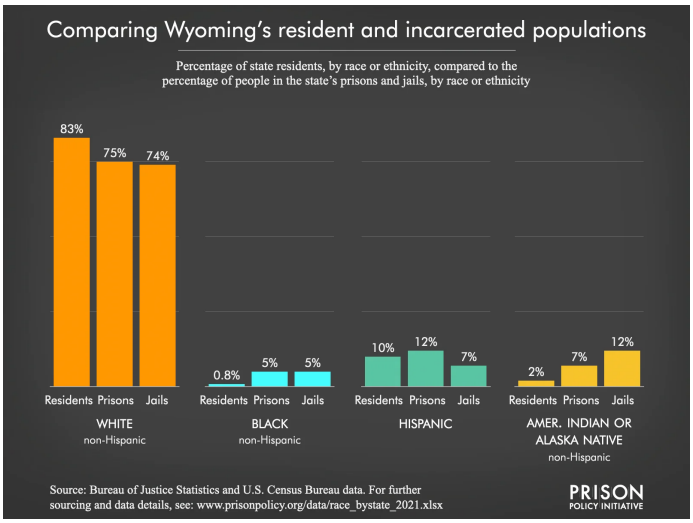
Prison gerrymandering reduces the political power of nearly all Wyoming residents by allowing a few districts with large correctional facilities to claim residents from all over the state. And while it does that, it also enshrines the racial inequities of mass incarceration into the state's democratic institutions.

What is prison gerrymandering?

Everyone in Wyoming is supposed to have an equal voice in their government's decisions, but an outdated and misguided Census Bureau policy that counts incarcerated people in the wrong place gives a few residents of the state a megaphone.

Every ten years, when the Census Bureau conducts its official tally of the nation's population, it incorrectly counts incarcerated people as residents of prison cells rather than in their home communities. When state officials then use that Census data in the legislative redistricting process, they inadvertently inflate the populations of those areas — in violation of constitutional principles of equal representation. This gives residents of state legislative districts that contain correctional facilities a particularly loud voice in government, at the expense of nearly every other person in the state.

In two Wyoming House of Representatives districts — districts 2 and 15 — correctional facilities account for a significant portion of the population. In District 83, for example, correctional facilities make up about 14% of the population. That means that just 86 residents of that district have as much political clout as 100 residents in other districts.



Disproportionate impact for Black residents

In Wyoming, like across the country, mass incarceration has a disproportionate impact along racial lines. Black, Native American, and Latino residents are incarcerated at disproportionate rates and therefore counted in the wrong place more often than Wyoming's white residents:

- Black residents make up less than 1% of the state population, but 5% of people in prisons and jails.
- The racial impact of prison gerrymandering is so strong that, for example, most Black people counted in State House District 2 were actually behind bars, rather than living in the community.

Wyoming needs to end prison gerrymandering now

Nearly half of the US population now lives in a place that corrects redistricting data they receive from the Census to avoid prison gerrymandering. States that have ended prison gerrymandering include deep "blue" states like California, "purple" states like Maine and Pennsylvania, and deep "red" states like Montana — where prison gerrymandering-reform legislation received wide bipartisan support.

It's now time for Wyoming to pass legislation ending prison gerrymandering and count incarcerated people at home when drawing districts.

Our full report on prison gerrymandering in Wyoming is available at https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/news/2025/07/09/wyoming_prison_gerrymandering/

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