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## Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report

# Population Density in Local Jails, 1988

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The 1988 Census of Local Jails found that the Nation's 3,316 jails contained 136,828 units where inmates could spend the night, providing an average of 50.9 square feet of space per inmate and housing an average of 2.5 inmates per unit. From 1983 — the year of the last previous census of jails — to 1988, the average amount of space per inmate had decreased 6% (or 3.4 square feet), and the average number of inmates in a housing unit had remained almost the same (2.4 in 1983).

The census, which asked every U.S. jail about its facility, staff, and characteristics of the inmate population, also revealed the following:

- The number of jail inmates had increased from 223,551 in 1983 to 343,569 in 1988. To accommodate this 54% growth in the number of inmates, local jails added 5.3 million square feet of housing (a 44% increase) and almost 29,000 correctional officers (a 65% increase).
- In 1988 there were 177 fewer local jails in operation than there had been 5 years earlier, but jails on average were larger than before. The average daily population of a local jail in 1988 was 101; in 1983 it was 68.
- Two out of three jails in 1988 housed an average daily population of fewer than 50 inmates, but these smaller jails confined

This Special Report addresses the important issue of population density within the Nation's 3,316 locally operated jails. Based on the 1988 Census of Local Jails, BJS collected data on nearly 137,000 individual housing units, including dimensions, number of occupants, and amount of time each day that inmates were confined in the units.

Special thanks are due to the thousands of jail personnel nationwide who devoted substantial time and effort to completing the census forms. This report would not have been possible without their generous participation.

All data from the 1988 Census of Local Jails are available for public use through the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data at the University of Michigan. We hope that policymakers, practitioners, and researchers will derive substantial benefit from the census data.

Joseph M. Bessette  
Acting Director

less than 12% of the Nation's jail inmates. In 1983, 3 out of 4 jails had an average daily population of under 50 inmates.

- The number of large jails, those with an average daily population of 250 inmates or more, increased from 190 in 1983 to 299 in 1988. These larger facilities housed 63% of all jail inmates nationwide in 1988.
- The average square footage of housing unit floorspace per inmate was lower in large jails. Local jails housing fewer than 50 inmates on an average day provided 60.6 square feet per inmate, while those jails housing over 1,000 inmates had about 46 square feet per inmate.
- Large jails had more multiple-occupancy housing than small jails. Jails with at least 1,000 inmates housed an average of 3.4 persons per unit, while the smallest jails, confining an average of fewer than 50 inmates per day, housed an average of less than 2 persons per housing unit.
- Standards on spatial density established by the American Correctional Association suggest that each inmate have 60 square feet of floorspace and spend 10 hours or less per day in a confinement unit. In 1988, 28% of the Nation's jails, housing 38% of all jail inmates, had more than 40% of their inmates housed in conditions less than the recommended standard. In 1983, 23% of jails, with 37% of the jail inmates, were found to be operating at this level.
- Local jails reported confining their inmates in housing units the same average amount of time per day in 1983 and 1988: 13.5 hours.

- In 1983, 24% of jails had an average of five or more people per housing unit. By 1988, 28% of local jails housed an average of five or more persons in a housing unit. Sixty-one percent of jail inmates resided in these jails with the highest social density.

- Jails reported that 284 inmates had committed suicide during the 12 months before the 1988 Census of Local Jails. This total represented a slight decrease from 297 suicides before the 1978 census and 294 before the 1983 census. By comparison, from 1978 to 1988 the jail population had increased 117%.

- Suicide rates were higher in small jails and highest in small jails with lower population densities.

### The 1988 Census of Local Jails

The 1988 Census of Local Jails was the fifth census of local correctional facilities that the Bureau of the Census has conducted since 1970 under the direction of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). (See *Methodology* for further details.) *Census of local jails 1988* (BJS Bulletin, NCJ-121101, February 1990) summarizes the data collected, including facility and staff characteristics, population changes, and expenditures.

The census gathered data from all locally administered facilities that held persons beyond arraignment. Excluded were temporary holding facilities, such as drunk tanks or police lockups, and facilities administered by State or Federal authorities. Among the latter were facilities in Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Alaska (except for five jails) because these States were operating combined jail-prison systems.

Each local jail reported on each of its housing units — any quarters where inmates slept at night and which were in use on June 30, 1988. Areas not normally used for confinement, such as dayrooms and corridors, were included if they housed inmates. Excluded were other areas of the jail used only for recreation, programs, services, or administrative operations.

**Table 1. Total inmate population and amount of housing space in local jails, by region, 1983 and 1988**

	Total inmates		Percent change	Total square feet		Percent change
	1983	1988		1983	1988	
U.S. total	223,272	341,636	5.9%	12,107,838	17,394,457	43.7%
Northeast	36,652	57,550	57.0	2,038,035	3,118,036	53.0
Midwest	39,386	50,872	29.2	2,278,528	2,969,676	30.3
South	89,215	142,781	60.0	4,763,944	6,897,508	44.8
West	58,019	90,433	55.9	3,027,331	4,409,237	45.6

Note: The number of inmates is that number for which housing information was available. Floor-space includes all areas where inmates slept at

night and in use on June 30. Excluded from housing space were areas used only for recreation, services, or administration.

For each of the 136,828 housing units, jail authorities reported —

- the unit's rated capacity
- the unit's exact floorspace
- the average number of hours per day inmates were confined to the unit
- the exact number of inmates housed in the unit on the reporting date
- the unit's use — general housing, protective custody, administrative or disciplinary segregation, infirmary, or work release.

The housing unit data were used to create two objective measures that describe population density within individual jails: spatial density, the average amount of floorspace per inmate, and social density, the average number of inmates per housing unit. Both the amount of space per person and the degree of privacy represent important components of an analysis of housing conditions in local jails.<sup>1</sup> Housing standards suggested by correctional organizations as well as court decisions about the adequacy of housing space have incorporated the number of hours that inmates must spend in their quarters as the third element of assessing housing conditions.

<sup>1</sup>In addition to objective measures of how closely together jail occupants are housed, there are the more subjective and psychological issues of crowding. For example, the emotional response to being alone in a small room (high spatial density) may be different from the response to being in a large crowd (high social density). For further reading on population density, see G.G. Gaes, "The effects of overcrowding in prisons," in *Crime and justice: An annual review*, vol. 6, M. Tonry and N. Norris, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and P. Paulus, *Prison crowding: A psychological perspective* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988).

### Inmates, housing, and staff in local jails

On June 30, 1988, 3,316 local jails maintained 341,636 inmates in 136,828 housing units with a total floorspace of nearly 17.4 million square feet (table 1).<sup>2</sup> Compared to 1983, local jurisdictions had increased the total housing stock by 5.3 million square feet, an expansion of about 44%. Over the same period, the inmate population had grown by nearly 53%.

Jails in the Northeast, with a 53% increase in housing space, reported the largest percentage gain in housing space since 1983, and Midwestern jails, the smallest (a 30% increase in housing space). The two regions had increases in space that almost matched in size the population increases during the same period. In the South and West, inmate population growth outpaced increases in housing space. In 1988 the Northeast accounted for 16.9% of the Nation's inmates and 17.9% of the Nation's jail housing space. Midwestern States had 14.9% of all inmates and 17.1% of local jail housing space. Southern jails accounted for 41.8% of the inmates and 39.7% of housing space, and the Western States, 26.5% of inmates and 25.3% of space.

<sup>2</sup>Of the 343,569 persons in local jails on June 30, 1988, housing data were available for 341,636. Of the 223,551 persons in local jails on June 30, 1983, housing data were available for 223,272. Data for one jail in 1983 were unavailable.

While both population and housing space increased from 1983 to 1988, the number of local jails declined. In response to the increased number of inmates, the jails operating in 1988 were larger on average than those in 1983. The average daily population of the individual jails increased by 49%, from 68.2 inmates to 101.3 (table 2).

A quarter of all jails in 1983 and a third of all jails in 1988 held a daily average of more than 50 inmates. It is important to note that 91% of the Nation's jails reported a daily average of fewer than 250 inmates. Although the largest jails (250 or more inmates on an average day) comprised less than a tenth of the jails, these 299 jails on an average day housed a majority of the Nation's inmates.

Average jail size and increases in inmate population varied widely by region. The average daily population of jails in the West had increased by 60% between 1983 and 1988, compared to a 21% increase in Midwestern jails. In 1988 the average daily population of Midwestern jails was about a fifth that of jails in the Northeast, three-fifths that of jails in the South, and nearly a third that of Western jails. Eight out of ten jails in the Midwest held a daily average of fewer than 50 inmates. By contrast, 3 of every 10 Northeastern jails held a daily average of fewer than 50 inmates.

The number of staff supervising inmates also increased from 1983 to 1988. During the 5-year period the number of correctional officers in local jails increased 65%, compared to the 53% increase in inmates and the 44% increase in space (table 3). The number of inmates per correctional officer declined from 5.0 in 1983 to 4.6 in 1988.

**Table 2. Number of local jails and size of facility, by region, 1983 and 1988**

Region and year	Number of jails	Average daily population	Percent of jails in categories of daily population				
			Fewer than 50	50-249	250-499	500-999	1,000 or more
U.S. total							
1983	3,337	68.2	74.0%	20.2%	3.5%	1.6%	.6%
1988	3,316	101.3	66.9	24.1	4.8	2.7	1.5
Northeast							
1983	223	168.2	42.6	39.0	11.2	4.5	2.7
1988	223	255.0	30.0	40.4	13.9	11.2	4.5
Midwest							
1983	972	42.5	84.3	12.8	1.6	1.0	.1
1988	964	51.6	80.4	16.3	2.1	.8	.4
South							
1983	1,606	57.2	75.2	20.7	2.6	1.2	.4
1988	1,599	87.2	66.9	25.8	4.4	1.9	1.1
West							
1983	536	105.9	65.1	24.4	6.5	2.8	1.1
1988	530	169.6	58.1	26.2	7.0	4.9	3.8

**Table 3. Number of correctional officers for local jails and number of inmates per officer, by region, 1983 and 1988**

	Correctional officers		Percent change	Inmate/staff ratio	
	1983	1988		1983	1988
U.S. total	44,454	73,280	64.8%	5.0	4.6
Northeast	9,019	18,262	102.5%	4.1	3.2
Midwest	9,022	12,546	39.1	4.4	4.0
South	18,309	28,790	57.2	4.9	5.0
West	8,104	13,682	68.8	7.2	6.6

In the Northeast the number of correctional officers increased nearly twice as fast between 1983 and 1988 (103%) as did the number of jail inmates (57%). In both census years Northeastern jails had the lowest number of inmates per correctional officer (4.1 in 1983 and 3.2 in 1988).

## Population density in local jails

As defined above, population density encompasses three elements: space per inmate, number of persons sharing a housing unit, and amount of time spent in the housing unit. Between 1983 and 1988 the average number of square feet per inmate declined from 54.3 to 50.9 square feet (table 4). The average number of inmates per unit, the measure of social density, changed only negligibly from 2.4 inmates in 1983 to 2.5 in 1988. In both years jails reported confining inmates to housing units an average 13.5 hours a day.

Nationally, local jails held about a quarter of all inmates alone in a cell; these cells had an average floorspace of 68 square feet. The remaining three-quarters of the jail population were in multiple-occupancy housing. Inmates held in two-person units had the smallest average space per person, 39.2 square feet. Comparing 1983 and 1988, the average amount of space per person in 1988 had increased slightly for single-occupancy cells and had declined for every size category of multiple-occupancy housing.

In both 1983 and 1988, spatial density varied inversely with the size of the jail:

Size of facility	Average square feet per jail inmate	
	1983	1988
Fewer than 50	64.4	60.6
50-249	54.8	53.5
250-499	57.2	52.3
500-999	50.2	47.8
1,000 or more	45.1	45.7

The smallest jails, those with an average daily population of fewer than 50 inmates, provided the most space per person — 60.6 square feet in 1988. The largest jails, which confined an average daily population of 1,000 or more inmates, provided the least space — 45.7 square feet per person. During the 5 years before the 1988 census and for all size categories of jails, facilities housing 250 to 499 inmates lost the greatest amount of average confinement space per person — about 5 square feet.

The slight increase from 1983 to 1988 in the average number of persons sharing a cell or dormitory did not occur across all individual regions. Jails in Western States reported an average of 3.3 persons per

housing unit in 1988, a decline from the 3.7 persons per unit reported in 1983. The other regions showed little change over the 5-year period.

Social density varied directly with jail size:

Size of facility	In 1988, the average number of:	
	Inmates per unit	Hours per day in unit
Fewer than 50	1.9	14.3
50-249	2.4	13.6
250-499	2.5	13.6
500-999	2.3	13.3
1,000 or more	3.4	13.3

The smallest jails had the lowest average number of persons per housing unit (1.9), and the largest jails, the highest number (3.4 persons). However, inmates confined in the largest facilities were also reported to spend an average 1 hour less in their housing unit per day than those inmates in the smallest jails.

Jails, when considered by State, varied in both spatial density and social density. North Dakota jails reported the largest

**Table 4. Percent of local jail inmates, average square feet, number of inmates per housing unit, and hours in housing unit per day, by region, size of unit, housing type, and size of facility, 1983 and 1988**

	Percent of inmates		Average square feet per inmate		Average number of inmates per unit		Average number of hours inmates confined in unit	
	1983	1988	1983	1988	1983	1988	1983	1988
All jails	100.0%	100.0%	54.3 sq. ft.	50.9 sq. ft.	2.4	2.5	13.5 hours	13.5 hours
Region								
Northeast	16.4%	16.8%	55.6 sq. ft.	54.2 sq. ft.	1.6	1.8	11.8 hours	11.8 hours
Midwest	17.6	14.9	57.9	58.4	2.0	2.0	12.5	13.0
South	40.0	41.8	53.4	48.3	2.6	2.7	14.4	14.3
West	26.0	26.5	52.3	48.8	3.7	3.3	13.9	13.8
Persons per unit								
1 person	27.1%	25.4%	66.8 sq. ft.	68.2 sq. ft.	1.0	1.0	12.4 hours	12.6 hours
2 persons	14.3	17.7	48.4	39.2	2.0	2.0	12.2	12.2
3-5	15.0	11.8	45.9	40.7	3.6	3.6	13.6	13.6
6-49	33.3	31.1	52.0	48.9	12.7	13.4	15.4	15.1
50 or more	10.3	14.0	49.1	47.5	71.6	78.5	12.0	13.3
Housing unit use								
General	89.2%	88.5%	52.8 sq. ft.	49.8 sq. ft.	2.5	2.6	13.4 hours	13.4 hours
Special	4.0	4.0	57.8	55.0	1.4	1.6	18.3	17.7
Other	6.9	7.5	71.9	61.9	2.6	2.6	12.8	12.5
Size of facility								
Fewer than 50	16.4%	11.6%	64.4 sq. ft.	60.6 sq. ft.	1.8	1.9	13.2 hours	14.3 hours
50-249	31.2	25.7	54.8	53.5	2.4	2.4	13.1	13.6
250-499	17.4	17.2	57.2	52.3	2.5	2.5	14.1	13.6
500-999	17.2	18.5	50.2	47.8	2.5	2.3	13.8	13.3
1,000 or more	17.9	27.0	45.1	45.7	3.2	3.4	14.0	13.3

Note: Averages for square footage, number per unit, and hours confined are all computed by using the number of inmates reported to be in each unit and comparing this to its physical dimensions, average

across units, or duration of confinement as appropriate. See *Methodology* for an example. Special housing units are reserved for disciplinary, protective custody, or administrative segregation, while other

housing is any other nongeneral housing such as an infirmary or diagnostic unit.

amount of space per inmate, 88.8 square feet, while New Jersey jails reported the least space per inmate, 39.6 square feet (figure 1).

Nine States, six of them in the South, had less than the 50.9 average square feet per inmate reported by jails across the Nation: New Jersey (39.6 square feet), Virginia (40.4), Tennessee (42.3), California (43.0), Louisiana (43.1), Georgia (43.9), Texas (44.0), Massachusetts (49.0), and South Carolina (49.6).

Four Western States, four Midwestern States, and one Northeastern State had local jails with an average of at least 65 square feet per inmate: Maine (65.5 square feet), Minnesota (66.8), Kansas (67.7), Idaho (69.9), Nevada (70.5), Iowa (75.6), Wyoming (76.1), Montana (76.7), and North Dakota (88.8). No Midwestern State fell below the national average, and only California among the Western States had less than the national average amount of floorspace per inmate.

Thirty-three States altogether had an average number of inmates per unit below the national figure of 2.5 inmates per unit. Social density ranged from a low of 1.2 persons per housing unit in the District of Columbia, Nevada, and New Hampshire to a high of 5.2 persons per housing unit in California jails (figure 2). Of the 15 Southern States, 8 had a higher average number of persons per unit than the national average of 2.5. California largely accounted for the higher average social density in Western jails.

When the 44 States with locally operated jails (excluding Alaska) are compared on the density measures, jails in 5 States (California, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas) had much less average space per inmate and more persons per unit than the average for the Nation. Conversely, jails in 30 States had both more space per inmate and fewer persons per unit than the national norms.

**Average square feet of floorspace per inmate in local jails, by region and State, 1988**

Average square feet per inmate	Northeast (54.2)	Midwest (58.4)	South (48.3)	West (48.8)
80-89		North Dakota (88.8)		
70-79		Iowa (75.6)		Montana (76.7) Wyoming (76.1) Nevada (70.5)
60-69	Maine (65.5)	Kansas (67.7) Minnesota (66.8) South Dakota (63.7) Wisconsin (63.6) Missouri (63.5) Nebraska (62.0)	Arkansas (63.6) West Virginia (61.8)	Idaho (69.9) Washington (63.9) Colorado (62.7) Oregon (61.0) New Mexico (60.8)
50-59	New York (59.2) Pennsylvania (58.7) New Hampshire (57.9)	Ohio (56.5) Michigan (56.3) Illinois (53.2) Indiana (52.2)	Dist. of Columbia (57.2) Oklahoma (57.2) Kentucky (56.9) Alabama (54.3) Florida (54.3) Maryland (52.4) Mississippi (52.3) North Carolina (50.9)	Arizona (57.8) Utah (51.4)
40-49	Massachusetts (49.0)		South Carolina (49.6) Texas (44.0) Georgia (43.9) Louisiana (43.1) Tennessee (42.3) Virginia (40.4)	California (43.0)
30-39	New Jersey (39.6)			

Figure 1

**Average number of inmates per housing unit in local jails, by region and State, 1988**

Average number of inmates per housing unit	Northeast (1.8)	Midwest (2.0)	South (2.7)	West (3.3)
1.0-1.4	New Hampshire (1.2) Maine (1.4)	North Dakota (1.3) Iowa (1.4)	Dist. of Columbia (1.2)	Nevada (1.2)
1.5-1.9	Pennsylvania (1.5) Massachusetts (1.8) New York (1.8) Maryland (1.9)	Minnesota (1.5) Kansas (1.8) Nebraska (1.8) Ohio (1.9) South Dakota (1.9)	West Virginia (1.6) Arkansas (1.7)	Arizona (1.5) Montana (1.5) Colorado (1.6) Wyoming (1.7) Oregon (1.9)
2.0-2.4		Indiana (2.0) Michigan (2.0) Illinois (2.1) Wisconsin (2.2)	Virginia (2.0) Alabama (2.1) North Carolina (2.2) Mississippi (2.3)	New Mexico (2.2) Washington (2.3) Utah (2.4)
2.5-2.9	New Jersey (2.7)	Missouri (2.7)	Louisiana (2.8)	Idaho (2.9)
3.0-3.4			Texas (3.0) Oklahoma (3.0) Kentucky (3.1) Tennessee (3.2) Florida (3.3)	
3.5+			South Carolina (3.5) Georgia (3.7)	California (5.2)

Figure 2

About 40% of the inmates in multiple-occupancy units slept in quarters that housed more than the rated capacity (table 5). Nearly 41% of inmates in cells with two persons were in space rated to hold one person. Almost 55% of the inmates in cells with three persons were confined in a space rated to hold fewer persons. The units designed for more than five inmates would have to be enlarged or increased about 23% to accommodate the inmates at rated capacity (table 6). The greatest difference between the number of inmates and the capacity of their quarters occurred for the 14,805 inmates in dormitories housing at least 100 inmates but rated to hold 9,472; the units were 56% above their rated capacities.

### Spatial and social density in local jails

The management of jail facilities becomes more difficult when more inmates are living in high-density situations. Maintaining high population densities in large segments of a jail can affect routine activities such as food service, visitation, recreation, medical care and sick call, inmate property management, and inmates' movements to and from court or consultations with attorneys.

### Spatial-density categories

A previous BJS report discussed similar research on spatial density in State prisons (*Population density in State prisons*, NCJ-103204, December 1986). High-spatial-density facilities are identified in the report as those in which over 40% of the inmates have less than the American Correctional Association standard of 60 square feet per person in housing where they are confined for 10 hours or more.<sup>3</sup> In 1984, 18% of State prisons were found to be operating at the highest spatial-density levels.

Among jails in 1988, 28.1% operated with a population in the highest spatial-density category (table 7). High-density jails housed 37.9% of the inmates nationwide. By comparison, in 1983, 23.3% of the jails, housing 36.8% of all inmates, were in the highest spatial-density category. In both years and in all regions, a majority of jails housed inmates in conditions that met the spatial-density standard established by the American Correctional Association.

<sup>3</sup>See *Manual of standards for adult correctional institutions*, American Correctional Association, August 1977, and *Federal standards for corrections*, U.S. Department of Justice, 1980

**Table 5. Occupancy by five or fewer inmates in housing units, by rated capacity of the units, 1988**

Number of inmates in unit	Number	Rated capacity of housing unit						Unrated
		One	Two	Three	Four	Five	More than five	
One	86,913	89.3%	8.4%	.3%	.8%	0	.3%	.9%
Two	60,422	40.5	53.4	1.2	3.5	.1	.8	.5
Three	17,781	21.5	33.2	15.1	23.0	1.0	5.1	1.1
Four	14,256	1.4	8.6	1.7	74.0	2.3	10.7	1.3
Five	8,355	0	2.5	1.6	50.1	12.3	31.7	1.8

**Table 6. Percent of rated capacity occupied for housing units holding more than five persons, 1988**

Number of inmates per housing unit	Rated capacity of units	Total inmates held	Percent of rated capacity occupied
6-15	39,872	47,248	118.5%
16-25	22,823	26,361	115.5
26-49	23,275	28,629	123.0
50-99	25,820	31,759	123.0
100 or more	9,472	14,805	156.3
Total	121,262	148,801	122.7

**Table 7. Spatial density by percent of local jails and inmates, 1983 and 1988**

		Percent of inmates in the spatial density categories of:			
	Number	Lowest	Low	Moderate	High
<b>Jails</b>					
1983	3,337	67.3%	3.2%	6.2%	23.3%
Northeast	223	70.9	5.8	7.2	16.1
Midwest	972	72.6	3.6	5.7	18.0
South	1,606	65.1	2.9	5.8	26.2
West	536	62.5	2.4	8.0	27.1
1988	3,316	58.4%	5.5%	7.9%	28.1%
Northeast	223	55.2	12.6	10.3	22.0
Midwest	964	64.7	4.8	7.5	23.0
South	1,599	53.3	5.4	7.5	33.8
West	530	64.0	4.2	9.1	22.8
<b>Inmates</b>					
1983	223,273	45.2%	8.7%	9.2%	36.8%
Northeast	36,652	61.6	5.5	10.0	22.9
Midwest	39,387	55.9	13.6	8.0	22.3
South	89,215	39.7	9.8	6.9	43.6
West	58,019	36.2	5.6	13.2	45.0
1988	341,639	43.5%	9.9%	8.7%	37.9%
Northeast	57,550	54.1	9.1	6.3	30.6
Midwest	50,872	50.4	12.8	9.2	27.6
South	142,784	41.4	9.6	8.4	40.5
West	90,433	36.1	9.2	10.4	44.3

Note: Spatial density categories are based on the percent of inmates in each facility housed in less than 60 square feet and confined in that area for more than 10 hours each day. The categories of percent

of inmates in a jail are as follows: lowest spatial density, none; low, 1%-10%; moderate, 11%-40%; and high, over 40%.

Nationally in 1988, 43.5% of jail inmates were housed in facilities with no inmates below the standard, and another 9.9% were in jails with 1%-10% of their population below the standard. In every region

except the West, the majority of inmates were housed in jails in the two lowest spatial-density categories.

### Social-density categories

For the other measure of population density, social density, an average of five or more persons per housing unit was chosen as the highest social-density category, based on an examination of the distribution of social densities reported by jails. By that criterion, 27.6% of all jails, housing 61.1% of jail inmates nationwide, were high-social-density facilities (table 8).

In 1983, 23.6% of jails were in the highest social-density category with an average of five or more inmates per housing unit. However, in both years about 60% of the total inmate population were incarcerated in a jail with an average of five or more persons per unit. Also, in both years jails in the West had the largest percentage of inmates residing in the highest social density (79.5% in 1983 and 75.0% in 1988).

### Jail size and density measures

Higher population densities in 1988 were more common in larger jails. Jails with an average daily population between 500 and 999 inmates had the highest percentage of institutions with high spatial density; 43.8% had at least 40% of their inmates residing in less than 60 square feet for more than 10 hours per day (table 9).

More than three-quarters of the 51 largest jails, holding 1,000 or more inmates daily, had an average social density of at least 5 persons per housing unit.

The smallest jails, housing fewer than 50 inmates daily, were less likely to report high-density conditions. About 1 in 4 of the small facilities were classified as having high spatial density, and 1 in 7, as having high social density. The percentages of small jails in the lowest spatial and social-density categories were substantially greater than for jails of other sizes.

**Table 8. Social density, by percent of local jails and inmates, 1983 and 1988**

	Number	Percent of inmates in the social density categories of:			
		Lowest	Low	Moderate	High
<b>Jails</b>					
1983	3,337	37.1%	18.0%	21.3%	23.6%
Northeast	223	50.7	20.2	12.1	17.0
Midwest	972	47.1	19.5	20.8	12.6
South	1,606	30.9	17.6	23.8	27.6
West	536	31.9	15.5	18.5	34.1
1988	3,316	31.6%	18.0%	22.9%	27.6%
Northeast	223	36.8	22.0	15.2	26.0
Midwest	964	40.0	21.1	23.5	15.4
South	1,569	25.8	16.9	24.1	33.1
West	530	31.7	13.8	20.9	33.6
<b>Inmates</b>					
1983	223,273	15.2%	12.4%	12.8%	59.6%
Northeast	36,652	32.9	18.9	6.8	41.4
Midwest	39,387	18.1	15.3	16.8	49.8
South	89,215	12.2	11.4	17.8	58.5
West	58,019	6.5	7.7	6.3	79.5
1988	341,639	13.9%	13.3%	11.7%	61.1%
Northeast	57,550	23.3	16.1	10.5	50.2
Midwest	50,872	19.0	16.4	19.6	45.0
South	142,784	10.0	14.5	13.1	62.4
West	90,433	11.0	8.0	6.0	75.0

Note: Social-density categories are based on the average number of inmates per housing unit within a facility on June 30. The categories of percent of in-

mates in a jail are as follows: lowest, 1.5 inmates or less per unit; low, 1.6-2.5; moderate, 2.6-4.9; and high, 5.0 or more inmates per unit.

**Table 9. Spatial and social density in local jails, by size of facility, 1983 and 1988**

	Number	Percent of inmates in the density categories of:			
		Lowest	Low	Moderate	High
<b>Spatial density</b>					
Jails, 1983	3,337	67.3%	3.2%	6.2%	23.3%
Fewer than 50	2,471	73.5	1.4	4.9	20.2
50-249	674	52.8	7.6	10.4	29.1
250-499	117	39.3	9.4	9.4	41.9
500-999	54	31.5	16.7	7.4	44.4
1,000 or more	19	36.8	5.3	10.5	47.4
Jails, 1988	3,316	58.4%	5.5%	7.9%	28.1%
Fewer than 50	2,219	64.7	2.7	7.1	25.6
50-249	798	47.7	11.0	9.8	31.5
250-499	159	42.8	11.3	8.8	37.1
500-999	89	32.6	13.5	10.1	43.8
1,000 or more	51	49.0	9.8	7.8	33.3
<b>Social density</b>					
Jails, 1983	3,337	37.1%	18.0%	21.3%	23.6%
Fewer than 50	2,471	44.0	20.6	22.9	12.5
50-249	674	18.1	11.6	18.5	51.8
250-499	117	17.9	4.3	13.7	64.1
500-999	54	11.1	11.1	7.4	70.4
1,000 or more	19	5.3	15.8	0	78.9
Jails, 1988	3,316	31.6%	18.0%	22.9%	27.6%
Fewer than 50	2,219	38.8	20.4	26.3	14.4
50-249	798	18.0	12.8	18.9	50.3
250-499	159	15.1	12.6	8.2	64.2
500-999	89	14.6	19.1	9.0	57.3
1,000 or more	51	9.8	7.8	3.9	78.4

Note: For the definitions of the categories of densities, see notes on tables 7 and 8.



### *Spatial density and occupancy*

The effect of different density levels can also be estimated for the individual inmate. Relative to the standards noted earlier, the 1988 Census of Local Jails revealed that nationwide 32.8% of inmates reside in housing units providing less than 60 square feet per person for more than 10 hours per day (table 10). Nearly 86% of inmates receiving less than 60 square feet were held in multiple-occupancy units. Overall, 28.5% of jail inmates were housed in less than 60 square feet, shared their housing unit with other inmates, and spent more than 10 hours per day in that housing unit.

### **Methodology**

The 1988 Census of Local Jails was the fifth enumeration of local confinement facilities since 1970. As in previous censuses, the U.S. Bureau of the Census, under the direction of BJS, conducted the mail canvass of every local jail in the United States.

The census included all locally administered jails that held inmates beyond arraignment and that were staffed by municipal or county employees. Eight jails under contract to local governments but operated privately were also included.

Excluded from the census were physically separate drunk tanks, lockups, and other holding facilities that did not hold persons after they had been formally charged. Facilities administered by State or Federal authorities were also excluded, but inmates being held for these authorities in a local jail were counted.

Six States operate adult correctional facilities in combined jail-prison systems; the census did not include these facilities in Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Five locally administered jails in Alaska were included.

The data were collected through an initial mailing to every jail, followed by a number of direct contacts to achieve a 100% response rate. During the week of August 1, 1988, jail census questionnaires were mailed to 3,448 facilities. Following the initial mailing, 44 new facilities were identified and 176 were eliminated, to produce the final count of 3,316 jails in operation.

**Table 10. Percent of jail inmates, by average number of square feet per inmate and type of occupancy, 1988**

	Percent of inmates in:		Total population
	Less than 60 sq. ft.	More than 60 sq. ft.	
All jails	68.7%	31.3%	100.0%
Single occupancy	9.8	15.6	25.4
Less than 10 hours	5.5	9.3	14.8
More than 10 hours	4.3	6.3	10.6
Multiple occupancy	58.9	15.6	74.5
Less than 10 hours	30.4	8.0	38.4
More than 10 hours	28.5	7.6	36.1

The census results are not subject to sampling error. Other sources of error, such as misreporting by respondents or mistakes in processing, have been kept to a minimum through repeated manual and computer editing procedures. Facilities were contacted to correct or verify their reports.

Each of the 3,316 jails reported in detail on each of the housing units in its facility. In 1988 there were 136,828 units being used to house inmates, and the measures of population density were computed from the information provided about each unit. For example, a facility might have reported having 30 cells, each 65 square feet, housing 24 inmates. In this case, six of the cells are assumed to be empty, and each inmate has 65 square feet. The average number of inmates per unit would be one. If the facility reported that 36 inmates were housed in the units, the occupancy of the cells was distributed on the assumption of minimum density. Thus, 22 of the cells were assumed to have one inmate with 65 square feet, and 7 of the cells were assumed to have two inmates ("double bunked") with each of these inmates having 32.5 square feet. The social density in this case would be 1.2 inmates per unit.

## Jail suicides and population density

Of the 667 deaths reported by jails for the 12-month period ending June 30, 1988, there were 284 suicides. This compares to 297 suicides during the year before the 1978 census and 294 suicides in the annual period before the 1983 census. The number of jail suicides recorded in the quinquennial censuses has thus changed little during a time when the number of inmates has grown substantially.

Suicides were far more common in smaller jails; 70% of jail suicides occurred in facilities with average daily populations of fewer than 250 inmates. These facilities account for 37.1% of jail inmates and 51.8% of jail admissions nationwide (see table on number of inmates, admissions, and suicides).

### Spatial density and jail size

Suicide rates based on both the average daily population and the number of admissions annually were calculated for facilities of different sizes and in different categories of spatial density. Smaller jails reported higher rates of suicide, based on either daily population or admissions. Small, low-spatial-density jails had rates of suicide based on the average daily population nearly 4 times higher than larger, high-spatial-density jails. Suicide rates based on admissions were twice as large in small, low-spatial-density jails than in larger, high-spatial-density jails. The small, low-spatial-density jails accounted for 18.3% of all inmates, 22.7% of jail admissions, and 34.9% of jail suicides.

### Social density and jail size

As with spatial density, suicide rates by category of social density were calculated based upon both the average daily population and the annual number of jail admissions. Suicide rates per 100,000 inmates were 9 times higher in small, low-social-density jails than in larger, high-social-density jails. Rates based upon the annual number of admissions were nearly 5 times higher in small, low-social-density jails compared to larger, high-density jails. Large jails, averaging at least five inmates per housing unit, accounted for 44.2% of jail inmates, 34.5% of the annual admissions to jails, and 14.1% of jail suicides nationwide.

## Number of inmates, admissions, and suicides, by size of facility and spatial and social density in local jails, 1988

	Percent of:			Suicide rate per 100,000	
	Inmates	Admissions	Suicides	Inmates	Admissions
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	84.52	2.93
<b>Spatial density</b>					
ADP of fewer than 250 inmates	37.1%	51.8%	69.7%	158.98	3.95
Lowest	18.3	22.7	34.9	161.14	4.51
Medium	7.0	8.5	10.6	127.85	3.64
High	11.8	20.6	24.3	174.06	3.46
ADP of 250 inmates or more	62.9%	48.2%	30.3%	40.66	1.85
Lowest	26.2	19.4	12.3	39.73	1.87
Medium	11.2	9.1	4.9	37.17	1.59
High	25.5	19.7	13.0	43.16	1.94
<b>Social density</b>					
ADP of fewer than 250 inmates	37.1%	51.8%	69.7%	158.98	3.95
Lowest	7.4	11.3	21.5	243.70	5.58
Medium	13.5	18.8	24.6	154.05	3.84
High	16.1	21.7	23.6	123.91	3.20
ADP of 250 inmates or more	62.9%	48.2%	30.3%	40.66	1.85
Lowest	7.8	4.9	7.4	79.99	4.46
Medium	10.9	8.8	8.8	67.96	2.93
High	44.2	34.5	14.1	26.95	1.20
Number	336,017	9,669,954	284		

Note: The medium category combines the low and moderate spatial- and social-density categories used in tables 7, 8, and 9. ADP refers to the average daily population.

## Total releases, time spent in jail, and ratio of inmates to correctional officers, by spatial density and size of facility, 1988

	Releases	Time spent in jail before release			Average number of inmates per correctional officer
		1 day	2-4 days	More than 4 days	
All jails	108,427	39.4%	23.0%	37.6%	4.6
Fewer than 250	65,374	44.3	25.5	30.2	4.0
Lowest	29,671	43.2	26.6	30.3	3.8
Medium	12,349	43.7	21.0	35.3	3.8
High	23,354	46.0	26.6	27.4	4.5
250 or more	43,053	32.0	19.2	48.9	5.1
Lowest	18,046	32.9	18.6	48.5	4.4
Medium	12,054	29.8	23.0	47.2	4.9
High	12,953	32.9	16.7	50.4	6.1

These data suggest that the size of jail, spatial density, and the number of persons occupying a housing unit are all inversely related to suicide, whether based on the average daily population or the number of persons passing through a jail facility.

Small, low-density jails average 3.8 inmates per correctional officer, compared to 6.1 inmates per correctional officer in

large, high-density jails (see table on total releases). In addition, small, low-density jails have shorter lengths of stay than the large, high-density jails.

## New from BJS

**Justice variable passthrough data, 1988: Anti-drug abuse formula grants** (BJS Technical Report), NCJ-120070, 2/90

**Felony case processing in State courts, 1988** (BJS Special Report), NCJ-121753, 2/90

**Census of local jails, 1988** (BJS Bulletin), NCJ-121101, 2/90

**Hispanic victims** (BJS Special Report), NCJ-120507, 1/90

**Profile of felons convicted in State courts, 1986**, NCJ-120021, 1/90

**Juvenile and adult records: One system, one record? Proceedings of a BJS/SEARCH conference**, NCJ-11494 1/90

**Drugs and crime facts, 1989**, NCJ-121022, 1/90

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**Prison rule violators** (BJS Special Report), NCJ-120344, 12/89

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**Criminal victimization 1988**, (BJS Bulletin), NCJ-119845, 10/89

**Criminal cases in five States, 1983-86** (BJS Special Report), NCJ-118798, 9/89

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**Children in custody, 1975-85: Census of public and private juvenile detention, correctional, and shelter facilities**, NCJ-114065, 5/89

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Reports are written principally by BJS staff. This report was written by Christopher Innes. Jim Stephan provided statistical assistance. Thomas Hester edited the report. Marilyn Marbrook administered production, assisted by Yvonne Boston and Jayne Pugh. Marianne Zawitz provided assistance in data presentation.

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(Revised May 1990)

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