# Codebook: The Prison Bust Dataset

**Data Overview:**
Scholars and policy analysts alike have long been concerned with the social and economic consequences of the prison boom. However, as state corrections departments have been forced to make cutbacks and state incarceration rates have declined, we are currently in a prison bust. The Prison Bust Dataset is the first comprehensive record of U.S. prison closures from after the end of the prison boom to the present. It provides novel opportunities for understanding the causes and consequences of the prison boom. The dataset contains details of 188 verified state and federal adult correctional facility closures from 2000-2022.[1]

**Access Prison Bust Dataset:**
Link to Data

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**Last updated:**
October 28, 2023

[1]Some portions of this codebook are taken verbatim from *The Prison Bust: Declining Carceral Capacity in an Era of Mass Incarceration*, the paper that reports the findings from this dataset.

# 1 Data coverage and sources

Our data contains the universe of prison closures during this period for all secure-confinement state and federal prison facilities. We built this dataset using several approaches. We began by submitting public information requests to each state's department of corrections and the federal Bureau of Prisons. This was our primary method of data collection and resulted in a complete list of closures for over 40 states. We validated this data and collected data for the remaining states from a variety of different sources. First, we searched each state's department of corrections website as a few states maintain updated lists of closed facilities online. Second, we scanned news articles for information about closures. Third, we used data from the Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities (conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics every 5-7 years from 1979-2019) which contains cross-sectional data on the universe of prison facilities in the U.S. By comparing across versions of the survey, we were able to identify facilities that no longer appeared in the data and were therefore coded as closures. For a simple test of data quality, we compared a subset of our list of closures with data obtained by the Sentencing Project on prison closures from 2011-2016 (Porter 2016). This comparison showed that our search did not exclude any closures identified by the Sentencing Project but did improve on their list by identifying a few additional closures. Finally, we took care to avoid including spurious closures in our dataset and verified each closure through at least two independent data sources in addition to at least one news article. This resulted in a comprehensive and accurate list of prison closures throughout the course of the prison bust.

# 2 Measuring prison closures

Our next task was to narrow down this list to those that meet our criteria for a closure. Much of the data we received and collected included small community corrections facilities that could not be verified, individual units that closed despite the larger facility remaining open, prisons that closed but were immediately replaced by a new prison in the same town, and more. These unique circumstances required individual scrutiny of each closure. To guide our analysis, we defined prison facilities as:

> *Correctional facilities operated by the state or federal government (or contracted out to a private corrections company) that primarily house incarcerated adults. This excludes non-traditional facilities such as community corrections centers, road camps, and facilities operated by local governments (e.g., county jails).*

We also defined prison closures as:

> *The permanent ceasing of operations of a prison facility that leads to a substantive reduction in the carceral capacity of the host community*

With these operational definitions in mind, we excluded closures that fell under the following unique circumstances:

1. *The closure was of a non-traditional prison facility such as a community corrections center, road camp, or boot camp.*

   Ideally, we would include all types of prison facilities in our data. However, information is often not available for small, non-standard facilities after they close. Thus, curating a comprehensive list of closures would be impossible, and the inclusion of identified closures of this category would be subject to substantial measurement error.

2. *The closure was designated as temporary and/or the prison reopened*

   One complication with identifying prison closures is that they are not always permanent. In fact, it is fairly common for a state to close a facility for a few months, or even years, with the intention of bringing it back into operation into the future. Thus, we restrict our list of prison closures to those that were not explicitly classified as temporary or had not reopened since being closed.

3. *The closed prison was immediately replaced by a new prison in the same community*

   In a small number of cases, a prison was shut down due to its poor condition only to be replaced by a new prison nearby. We do not count these as closures as shutting these facilities did not create a "substantive reduction in the carceral capacity of the host community."

4. *Only a portion of the prison was shut down but not the entire facility*

   Some states have preferred to close individual units across several facilities as opposed to closing entire facilities. Unfortunately, it is not possible to systematically measure this across states, so our data only include closures of entire facilities.

5. *We were unable to verify any supporting information about the closure from a second source*

   There were a limited number of cases (nine in total) where we were unable to verify closures reported in our information requests through any other sources. We chose to exclude these cases from our list of closures. Had we been able to obtain confirmatory information, many of these would likely have been excluded anyway on the basis of being non-standard facility types.[2]

6. *The prison was taken over by a different law enforcement agency*

   In some cases, the Bureau of Prisons or Immigrations and Customs Enforcement has taken over closed state facilities or vice versa. We exclude these cases because they simply shift the operating authority/incarcerated population of the facility as opposed to changing the carceral capacity of the host community.

[2]These facilities include: Goose Bay Correctional Center (Alaska), Osawatomie Correctional Facility (Kansas), Ryan Correctional Facility (Michigan), Atterbury Correctional Facility (Indiana), Medaryville Correctional Facility (Indiana), El Paso FPC (Federal), California Correctional Facility (Federal), Women's Detention Center (Maryland).

# 3 Adding geographic and contextual variables

For the finalized list of verified closures, we then added geographic and contextual information for each prison closure. For each closed facility, our data include the state, closure year, facility name, physical address, security level, inmate sex, design capacity, federal status, private status, an indicator for whether another prison remained open in the county after the closure, latitude and longitude, Rural-Urban Continuum Codes, and several geographic identifiers. We obtained as many of these details as possible from our original public information requests. We also used the same prison census data discussed above and data on prison openings from the Prison Proliferation Project (PPP) to obtain these variables and used news articles and official department of corrections reports to fill any gaps. All variables were confirmed from at least two independent sources. Latitude and longitude were obtained using Google Maps and verified with PPP data. Geo-identifiers were obtained using the U.S. Census Public Geocoder tool (U.S. Census 2022) and spot-checked to ensure accuracy. The data were then merged with PPP data on prison openings and data from American Community Survey (ACS) and the 2000 Decennial Census.

# 4 Variable names, definitions, and values

- State: State the closure occurred in.
- YearClosure: The year the facility was closed.
- MonthClosure: The month the facility was closed.
- FacilityName: The name of the facility.
- Address: The physical street address of the facility.
- City: The city of the facility.
- Zip: The zip code of the facility.
- County: The county of the facility.
- CountyFIPS: The FIPS identifier for the county.
- TractFIPS: The FIPS identifier for the census tract.
- BlockFIPS: The FIPS identifier for the census block.
- Rural: 0 if metro county, 1 if non-metro county (based on Rural-Urban Classification Codes, see below for additional details).
- StandardSecurityLevel: A standard security designation harmonized for all 50 states. The categories are minimum, medium, and maximum (see below for additional details).

- InmateSex: Indicates whether the prison holds only male, only female, or both male and female inmates.
- Capacity: The design capacity of the prison (see below for additional details).
- Federal: Federal prison = 1, non-federal prison = 0.
- Private: Private prison = 1, non-private prison = 0.
- StateFIPS: The FIPS identifier for the state.
- StateAbb: Two-letter state abbreviation.
- lat: Latitude.
- long: Longitude.
- PriorPrisCounty: 1 if another prison facility remained open in the county after the closure, 0 otherwise (see below for additional details).

# 5 Identifying Closures Without Successful Public Records Requests

Four states — Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Maine — were unwilling or unable to provide data on correctional facility closures after repeated contacts. For these states, we used the Bureau of Justice Statistics Census of State and Federal Correctional Institutions to identity closures. To do this, we looked at all the correctional facilities in these states prior to 2000 and then examined the subsequent years of the survey (2005 and 2012) to find facilities that were no longer listed. We then hand verified each individual closure. For closures that occurred after 2012, we searched online for news articles or press releases from corrections departments about all the facilities listed in the 2000, 2005, and 2012 releases of the dataset.

## 5.1 Coding Protocols for Select Variables

### 5.1.1 Rural

Counties are coded as metro or non-metro (rural) using Rural Urban Continuum Codes (RUCC) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The RUCC measure uses an ordinal scale that factors in population and proximity to metro areas to determine how metropolitan (rural) a county is. RUCC codes have been calculated for 1974, 1983, 1993, 2003, and 2013. Because all closures are 2000 or later, we only use RUCC codes from 2003 and 2013. Counties with closures in 2008 or sooner we paired with the 2003 RUCC codes. Counties with closures after 2008 were paired with the 2013 RUCC codes.

### 5.1.2 Capacity

When possible, we used the design capacity as the metric for measuring prison capacity. Prison capacities are complicated so there is no one perfect approach to capturing this variable, but design capacity is the most consistent and available metric at our disposal. Rated and operational capacity can change significantly over time and the available data is not good enough to account for these variations, but design capacity gives a more stable albeit blunt measure of capacity. For some facilities, we were forced to use rate or design capacity as that was the only available data or some capacity figures did not specify which kind of the capacity they were measuring. The different types of prison capacities are[3]:

- Design capacity: Number of inmates who can be held based on facility's architect or planner.
- Operational capacity: Number of inmates who can be held based on staffing and services.
- Rated capacity: Refers to inmates or beds a facility can accommodate, set by a rating official.

### 5.1.3 Standardizing Security Levels

All corrections departments employ different practices for categorizing offenders and prison facilities. While the general idea of keeping similar types of offenders in similar facilities holds across all corrections departments that actual way departments do this varies widely. Because of these disparate facility classification practices, qualitative comparisons are necessary for accurately assigning security levels that are comparable across states. Fortunately, the Census State and Federal Correctional Facilities conducted by the Bureau of Justice statistics conducted every 5-7 years from 1974-2012 provides a simple solution for this issue. Administrations of the census include the following question:

> What is the physical security of this facility? Mark (X) the ONE box that best describes the physical security of the facility (CITE).

While prison officials may vary in their notions of what these different security levels entail, this approach provides the most reliable approach for standardizing prison security levels across states since comparing the state-defined security levels across states lacks the insider knowledge the prison officials taking the survey have.

We also double or triple verified the BJS data with data from state FOIA requests, the American Corrections Association, and the Prison Proliferation Project. When discrepancies remained, we used the security levels reported in the BJS prison censuses.

[3]See `https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-public-affairs-and-community-service/governing/stories/state-prison-overcrowding-and-capacity-data.php` for a more comprehensive overview.