Racial Patterns in State Trends in Prison Admissions 1983-2003:
Drug and Non-Drug Sentences and Revocations
Introduction and National Graphs

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The full report includes three files, all available at
http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/%7Eoliver/RACIAL/StateTrends/StateTrends2007.htm
(1) This file: **RacialPatterns_Intro_National.pdf**   Includes introduction and national graphs.
(2) **StateGraphs.pdf**   Includes all state graphs (fifteen graphs for each of 32 states). Useful for seeing the trends within one state at a time. (Separate files for each state are also available. If you are interested in only one or two states, you may prefer to download the state-specific files.)
(3) **AllStateGraphs.pdf**   Color graphs comparing time trends of all states. Each graph shows all states for one race and one admission type. Useful for seeing how states compare to each other.

Overview

These graphs use data from the National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP) to show the trends in prison admission by race. They make it possible to visualize the relative importance of new sentences and revocations and drug and non-drug offenses in the prison admissions for different races. Drug offenses are distinguished from other offenses and new prison sentences are distinguished for prison admissions from a probation or parole revocation. These proportion of the national population as of 2000 who resided in the 32 states included in these graphs is: 86% White, 94% Black, 89% Hispanic, 84% other races.

Nationally, prison admissions rose especially steeply for Blacks and Hispanics in the 1980s and then leveled off or declined in the 1990s. White prison admissions rose less steeply in the 1980s, declined through the mid-1990s and then rose again through 2003. The "drug war" played a major role in driving prison admissions for Blacks and Hispanics. While the Black/White disparity for non-drug sentences varied between 5 and 7, the Black/White disparity in prison admissions for drug sentences rose steeply in the late 1980s, peaking at about 18 in 1992 and then declining to 10 by 2003; the Black/White disparity in revocation prison admissions for drug offenders showed a similar trajectory, peaking at 23 in 1993 and declining to 12 by 2003. Similarly, while the Hispanic/White disparity for non-drug sentences held steady at about 2 throughout the two decades, the Hispanic/White disparity for drug offenses rose earlier in the 1980s and peaked at 9 for drug sentences in 1992 and at nearly 10 for drug revocations in 1986, then declined steeply to

about 3 in 2003 for both drug sentences and drug revocations.

In these tables, all other races are grouped together. "Other" races are primarily Asian and nationally their disparity ratios are less than 1, meaning that Whites have higher prison admission rates than those of "other" races. However, American Indians typically have higher prison admission rates than Whites, and in states where American Indians are a large fraction of the "other race" population, the disparities are greater than 1.

National graphs show the summary trends for all states for which there are complete data for all years in the NCRP. Individual state graphs give the same information for each state. These state graphs show that the specific trends within states varied greatly. Virtually all states showed a steep rise in Black drug sentences in the 1980s, but the states are much more variable in their trajectories in the 1990s, with some states showing rising prison admissions and disparities, while others showed declining admissions or disparities. The final section shows the plots for all states together, providing a visual way to see how states compare to each other.

A Guide to the Graphs

There are too many graphs in this packet to absorb at once. The key is to focus on the ones that interest you.

(1) **National.** These show the trends over time 1983-2003 for all the NCRP states added together. Different presentations of the same information are provided to offer different points of comparison. These graphs are in black and white and will photocopy well.
    (A) The first set of graphs compares the races for each type of prison admission. For each type of admission, one graph shows the rates for the four racial groups and the other the disparity ratios across time. You can see how Black prison sentences and revocations for drug crimes skyrocketed, compared with other races and non-drug crimes.
    (B) The second set of graphs compares the different types of admission for each race. For each race, one graph shows the rates and the other the disparity ratios across time for the four admission types. The rate graphs give a visual impression of the relative importance of the four types of prison admissions to the total: the sizes of the gaps between drug and non-drug admissions show the importance of the drug war for each race. The gaps between sentence and revocation rates show the growing importance of revocations in prison admissions. The disparity graphs show how, for Blacks and Hispanics, drug offenses are much more disparate than other types of crime.

(2) **State Graphs.** The same set of graphs is prepared for each state separately as for the national summary. Some data points or graphs are missing for some states where the information is partial. The explanatory materials for the national graphs apply to the state graphs as well. However, the patterns within states are often quite different from the national patterns. States vary greatly in their trends in the 1990s and in the relative importance of revocations vs. sentences and drug versus other crimes.

(3) State Comparison Graphs. These color graphs use symbols (standard two-letter abbreviations) for each state to permit you to compare states to each other in their time trends. They can be are hard to read for non-extreme cases, but it is possible to see how any given state changed in comparison with all other states over time. There is a comparison graph for each combination of race and admission type, for both rate and disparity. Because there are extreme cases that make it hard to see some of the lines when they are all plotted together, an alternate graph permits a "close up" view of the non-extreme cases. These are easiest to read in color and high-definition print, but they are legible when printed in black-only monochrome. Some of the colors are light enough that they may not show up well if printed in low resolution grayscale.

Data Sources and Methodology

Prison admission counts are calculated from the National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP) files available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. The underlying data are voluntarily provided by state departments of corrections. Not all states participate in the NCRP. The data can contain coding errors, and states differ in how they interpret some of the categories. The data presented in these graphs have been cleaned, corrected, and interpolated as much as possible, but may still contain errors. Stark year-to-year changes ("spikes") in the graphs are especially likely to reflect errors in data reporting by states.

Population figures for the state population of a given race age 14 and over from the US Census Bureau's official estimates for each year. Virtually everyone sentenced to prison falls in this age range.

Four types of prison admissions are tracked: Drug sentences, non-drug sentences, drug revocations, non-drug revocations. Offenders are classified into the drug or non-drug category by their "governing offense," which is usually the most serious offense. Prison admissions are categorized as "new sentence" if they are classified as "new sentence only" (no revocation) in the NCRP data; any revocation from any of a multitude of types of statuses (probation, parole or other correctional supervision outside prison), with or without a new prison sentence, is counted as a revocation. (Note: Maryland reports new sentences only, not revocations.)

Rates are calculated by dividing the number of prison admissions of a given type for a given race by the population over age 14 for that race and then multiplying by 100,000. A rate of 1000 per 100,000 is the equivalent of 1%. The rate automatically controls for the size of the population. If group A has 500,000 members and group B has 5,000,000 members, and both A and B have a prison admission rate of 100 per 100,000, this would mean that 500 members of group A and 5000 members of group B were admitted to prison. Or, if 5000 members of A and 5000 members of B were admitted to prison, the rate would be 1000 for group A and 100 for group B, or 10 times higher.

The **disparity ratio** (also called the relative rate index by some) is the ratio of the minority rate to the majority (White) rate. In our above example, the A/B disparity ratio would be 1000/100=10.

In this example, members of group A are 10 times more likely (relatively to their population) to be admitted to prison than members of group B.

Interpreting Rates and Disparity Ratios
The rates let you see what fraction of the population is going to prison and how this differs across time, between states, between races, or by type of offense or admission. The disparity ratios specifically compare minorities to Whites. The disparity ratio will be high when the minority rate is high and the White rate is low, and the states with the highest disparity ratios tend to be the ones in which Whites have very low imprisonment rates. Some states with unusually high Black imprisonment rates also have unusually high disparity ratios, but other states with very high Black rates have lower disparities because their White rates are also high. The Black/White disparity in prison admissions declined steeply in the late 1990s because White imprisonment went up, even though Black imprisonment stayed high. If you are concerned with social policies to reduce minority imprisonment rates, you need to consider both the disparities (which point to possible areas of differential treatment) and the overall rates (which point to the general reliance on imprisonment in the criminal justice system).

Caveats about the data
Because many people are of mixed ancestry and there are no fixed boundaries between racial/ethnic groups, there is always some ambiguity in any classification of people by race. The Black vs. White distinction is relatively sharp and ambiguity about classification is not likely to make a big difference in Black-White comparisons. However, there is much more ambiguity and variability between states in their classifications of Hispanics and other races in their prison records, and thus comparisons between states are more uncertain for these groups. Hispanic ethnicity is recorded separately in the NCRP data from race. Following standard practice, we group all Hispanics together, regardless of race. In the US Census, which relies on self-reports of race and ethnicity, about half of all Hispanics are racially White, and about half identify as "other" race (i.e. not Black, not Asian, not American Indian). White Hispanics may sometimes be classified as White without record of their ethnicity, thus lowering the apparent Hispanic prison admission rate and increasing the apparent White prison admission rate.

NCRP data contain information about the type of admission. Our "new sentences" have been coded as a new prison sentence with no revocation. Revocations should include probation and parole revocations (with or without a new sentence) as well as revocations for other statuses (i.e. extended supervision, mandatory release). States vary in their adherence to this protocol when they submit NCRP data. Some states record probation revocations as new sentences, and some submit their data with no distinction between new sentences and revocations or submit data only for new sentences. Thus differences between states in revocation and sentence rates may be due to coding decisions, and apparent changes in the mix over time may be due to changes in coding. The distinction between drug and non-drug offenses is relatively sharp, but in some years so states submit a high proportion of their data with the offense listed as unknown; in these cases, we have treated all the offenses as non-drug.

Thus, these graphs should be seen as opening discussion, as providing a window into the particular patterns of imprisonment in each state, not as a definitive report.

National tables are calculated by summarizing across states. However, different numbers of states participated in different years and apparent year-to-year fluctuations can be affected by the changing mix of participating states. States who participated in the NCRP always recorded whether prisoners were Black or White, but the recording of other races and Hispanic ethnicity may have been more sporadic in states where these groups are a small proportion of the total population. When no prison admissions for a racial group is recorded, it is hard to know whether there truly were no prison admissions for that group, or the data were missing. Additionally, rates fluctuate wildly if zeroes are treated as data rather than missing. For this reason, if a state recorded zero prison admissions for a given racial group in a given year, the value was treated as missing. If a state reported to the NCRP before and after a year for which it is missing data, the missing information can be estimated through a procedure called interpolation. However, this procedure cannot be used when information is missing at the beginning or the end of the series.

The table below shows the proportion of the total population represented in the 32 states in the NCRP data who are represented in a given year in the national totals. This table indicates that the mix of states in the data is constant for all racial groups between 1992 and 2002, so trends in this period are not due to shifts in the mix of states. For 1983 and 1984, in particular, and for 1985-1987 to a lesser extent, it is possible that the mix of states reporting made the rates of prison admission look lower in those years than they actually were, thus making the increases in the 1980s look greater than they actually were. This problem does not arise when considering each state one at a time.

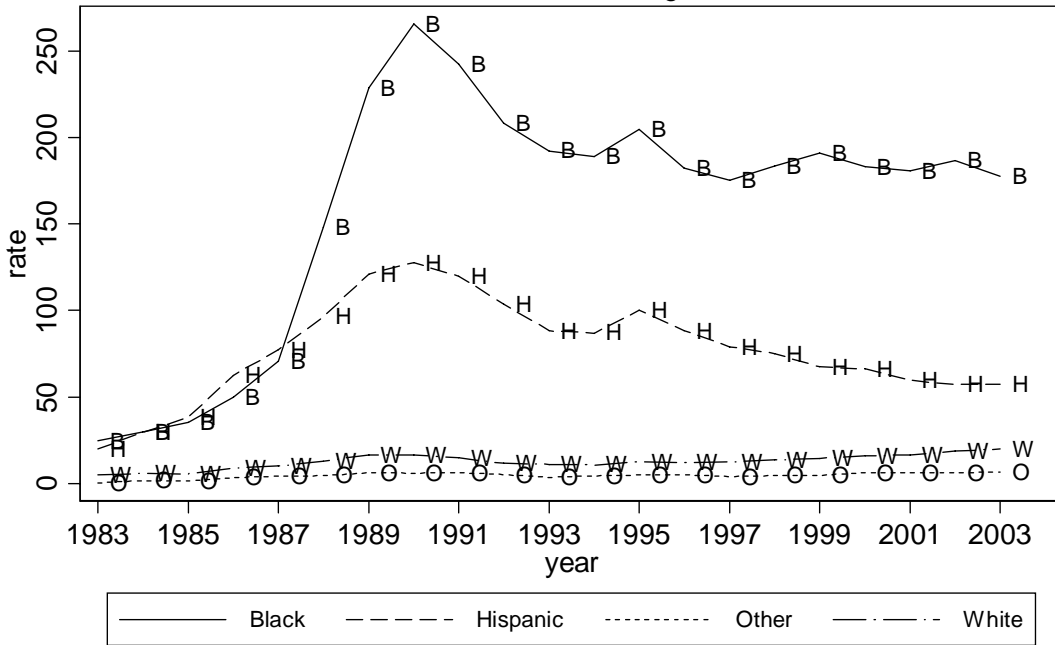| year	White, NH	Black, NH	Other, NH	Hispanic	All Races
1983	0.54	0.50	0.59	0.47	0.55
1984	0.84	0.82	0.79	0.65	0.84
1985	0.89	0.88	0.92	0.89	0.89
1986	0.90	0.88	0.93	0.91	0.90
1987	0.91	0.88	0.96	0.91	0.91
1988	0.97	0.94	0.99	1.00	0.97
1989	0.98	0.95	0.99	1.00	0.98
1990	0.98	0.95	0.99	1.00	0.98
1991	0.98	0.95	0.99	1.00	0.98
1992	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1993	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1994	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1995	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1996	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1997	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1998	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1999	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00
2000	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00
2001	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00
2002	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00
2003	0.94	0.96	0.98	0.98	0.95

States in the NCRP Graphs

Population charactistics in 2000 of states in the NCRP graphs

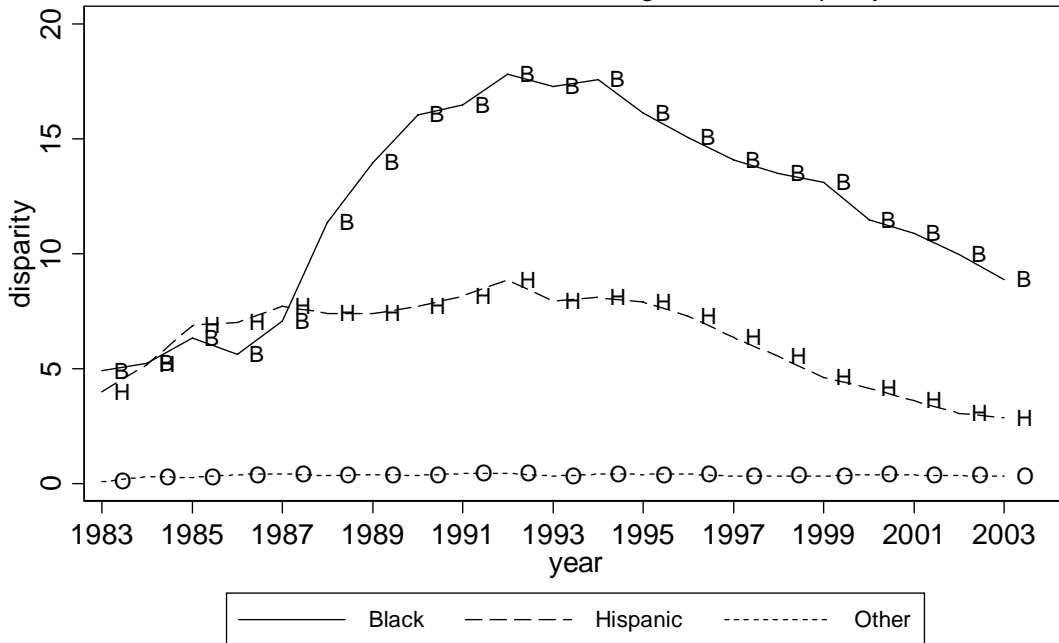| State	stateinit	Total Population	Percents			
			White, NH	Black, NH	Other, NH	Hispanic
Alabama	AL	3,523,068	73%	24%	1%	2%
Arkansas*	AR	2,116,289	81%	14%	2%	3%
California	CA	26,283,837	52%	7%	13%	29%
Colorado	CO	3,415,493	78%	4%	3%	15%
Florida	FL	13,025,323	68%	13%	2%	16%
Georgia	GA	6,426,641	65%	27%	3%	5%
Illinois	IL	9,742,160	71%	14%	4%	11%
Iowa	IA	2,316,335	94%	2%	2%	2%
Kentucky	KY	3,224,098	91%	7%	1%	1%
Louisiana*	LA	3,466,502	65%	30%	2%	2%
Maryland*	MD	4,185,440	64%	27%	5%	4%
Michigan	MI	7,791,433	81%	13%	3%	3%
Minnesota	MN	3,873,802	90%	3%	4%	2%
Mississippi	MS	2,208,224	64%	34%	1%	1%
Missouri	MO	4,423,351	86%	11%	2%	2%
Nebraska	NE	1,340,208	89%	4%	2%	5%
Nevada	NV	1,586,586	70%	6%	7%	17%
New Jersey	NJ	6,697,468	69%	13%	6%	13%
New York	NY	15,113,013	65%	15%	6%	14%
North Carolina	NC	6,435,270	73%	20%	3%	4%
Ohio	OH	8,967,055	86%	11%	2%	2%
Oklahoma	OK	2,720,883	79%	7%	10%	4%
Oregon	OR	2,730,678	87%	2%	5%	7%
Pennsylvania	PA	9,862,934	86%	9%	2%	3%
South Carolina	SC	3,186,138	69%	28%	1%	2%
Tennessee	TN	4,545,730	81%	15%	1%	2%
Texas	TX	16,043,312	56%	11%	3%	29%
Utah	UT	1,619,773	87%	1%	4%	8%
Virginia	VA	5,661,480	72%	19%	4%	4%
Washington	WA	4,665,082	82%	3%	8%	6%
West Virginia	WV	1,476,166	95%	3%	1%	1%
Wisconsin	WI	4,241,461	90%	5%	2%	3%

* States with incomplete NRCP data: Arkansas, no data for 2003. Louisiana does not report Hispanic ethnicity. Maryland does not report revocations.

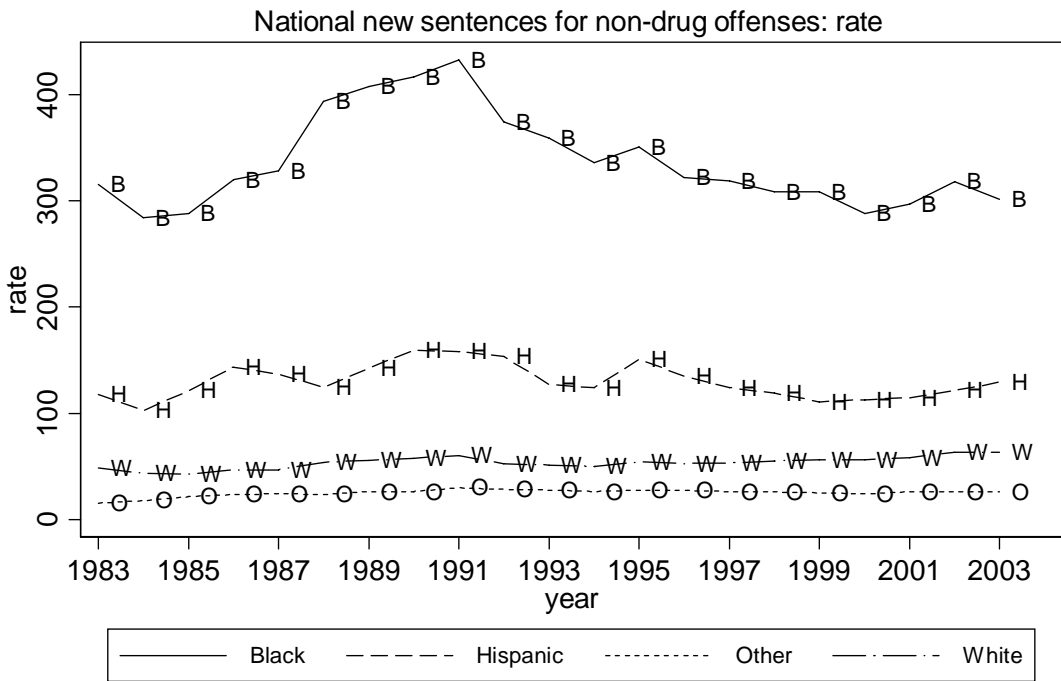## National new sentences for drug offenses: rate

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data

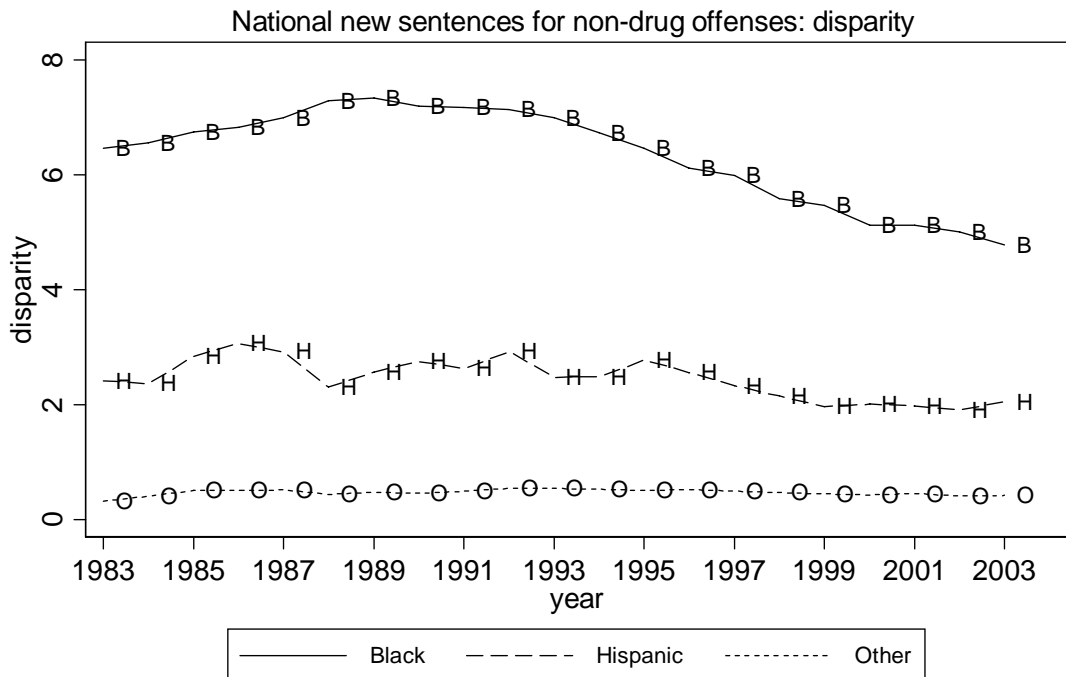Prison Admissions per 100,000 population over age 14

National new sentences for drug offenses: disparity

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data

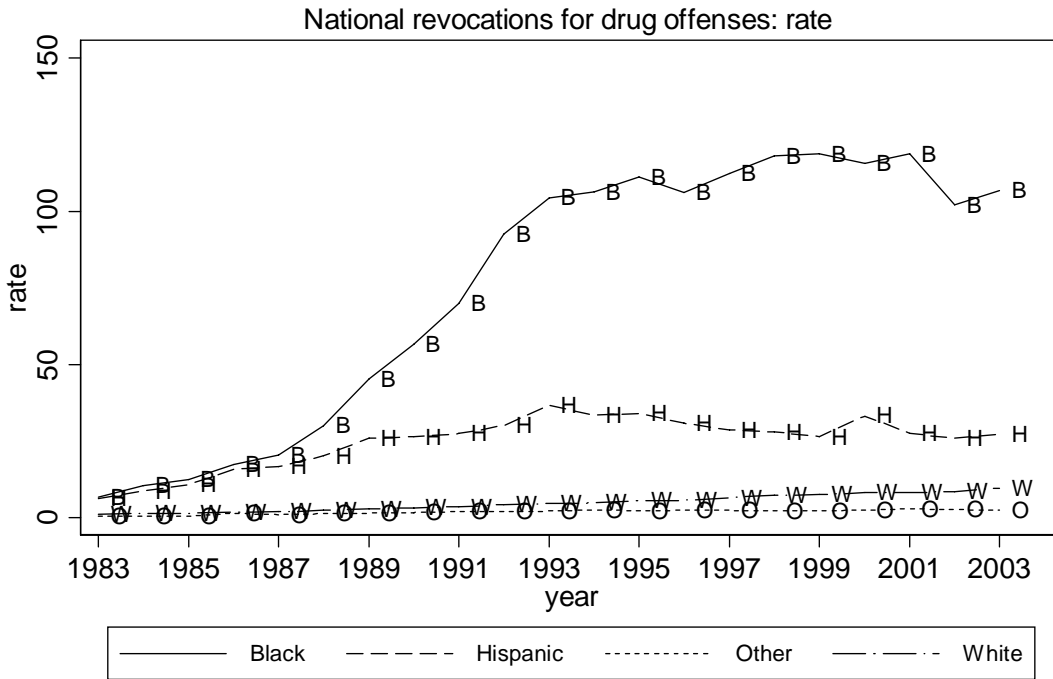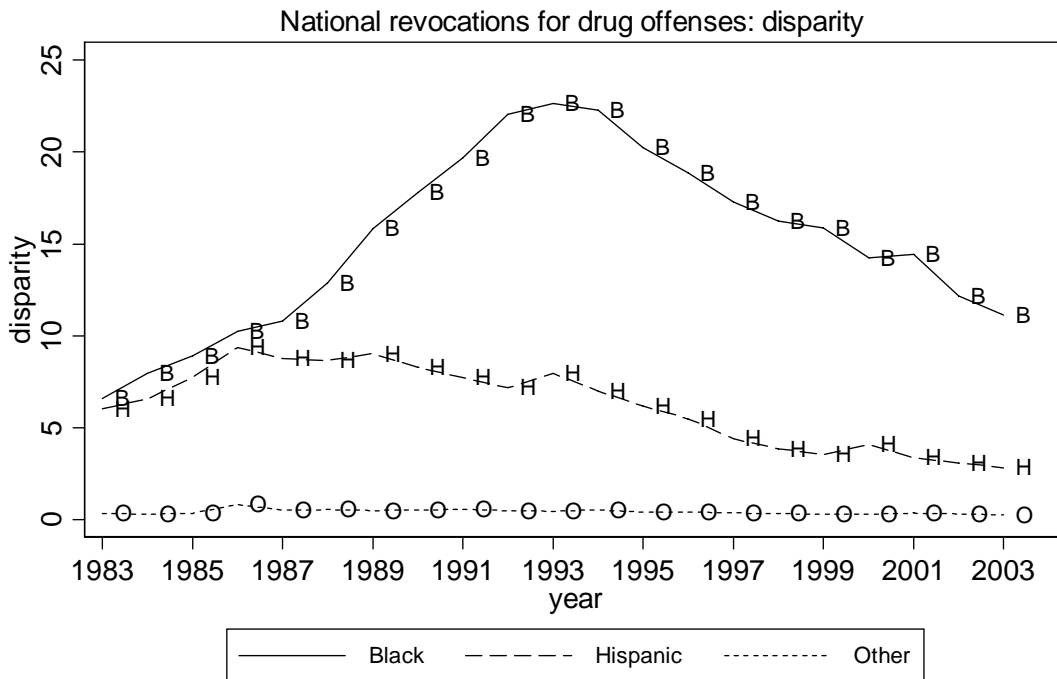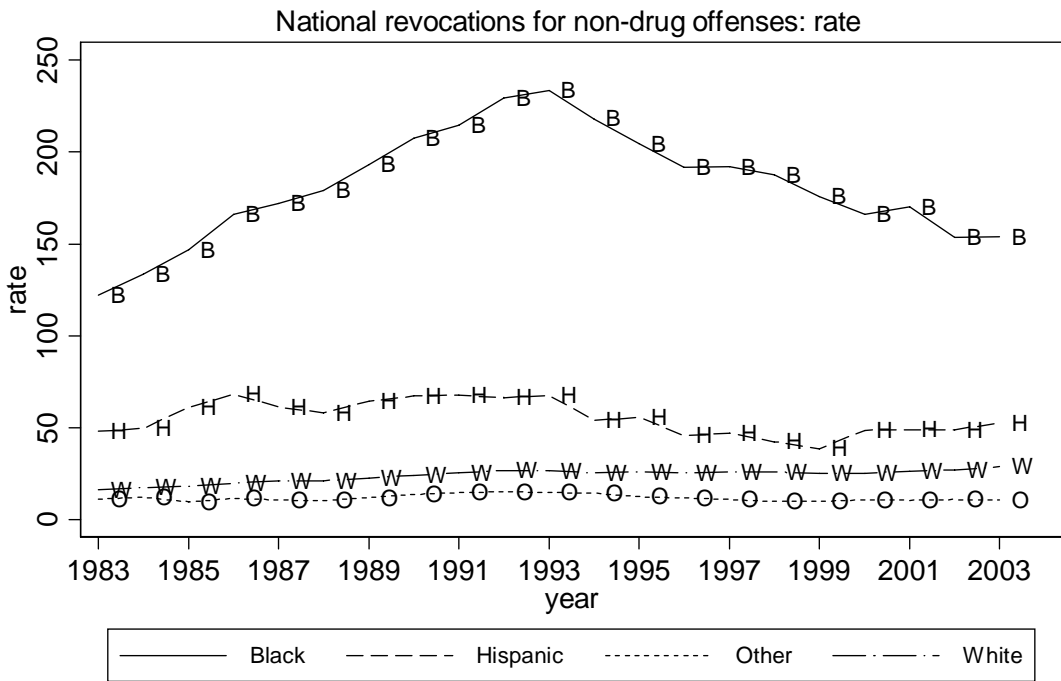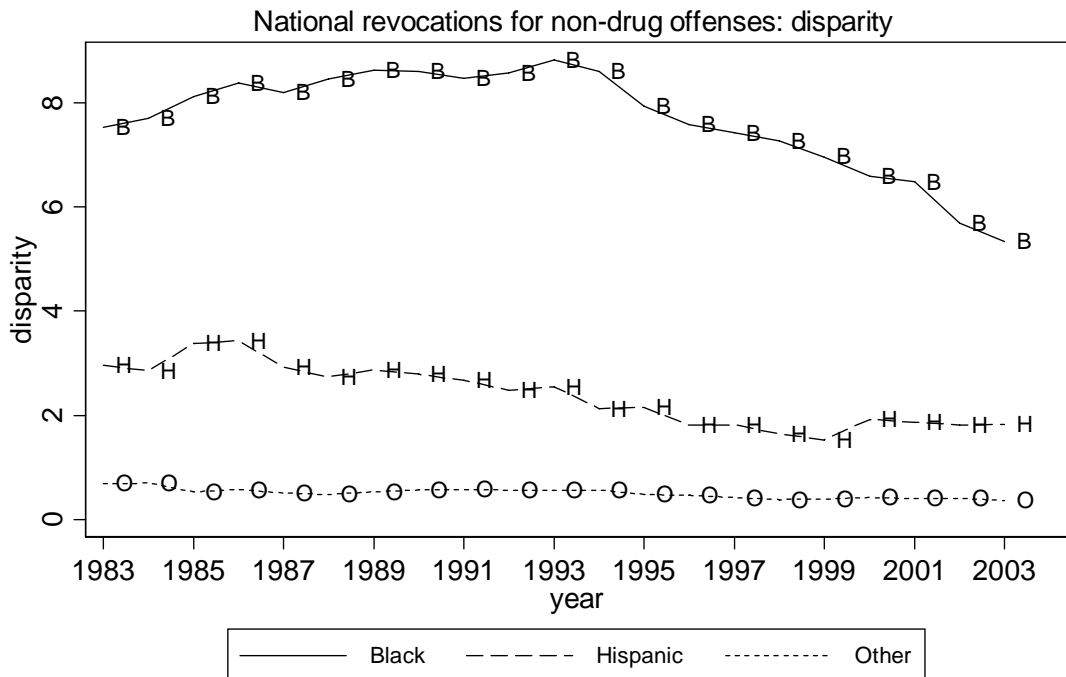Ratio of Minority Rate to White Rate (Disparity Ratio)

National new sentences for non-drug offenses: rate

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data

Prison Admissions per 100,000 population over age 14

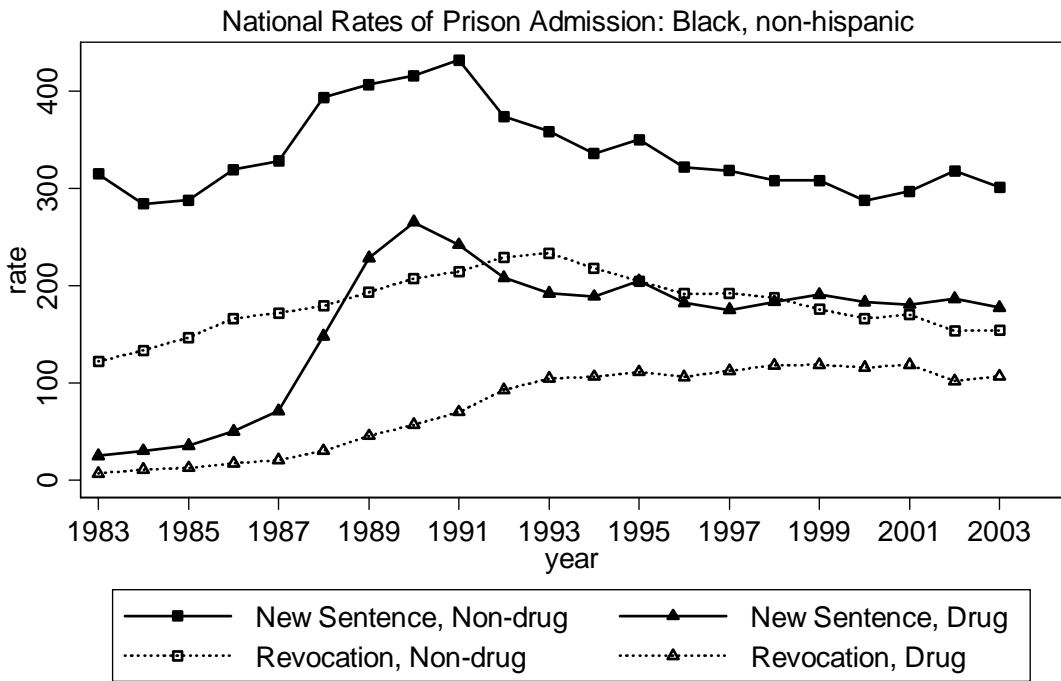## National new sentences for non-drug offenses: disparity

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data

Ratio of Minority Rate to White Rate (Disparity Ratio)

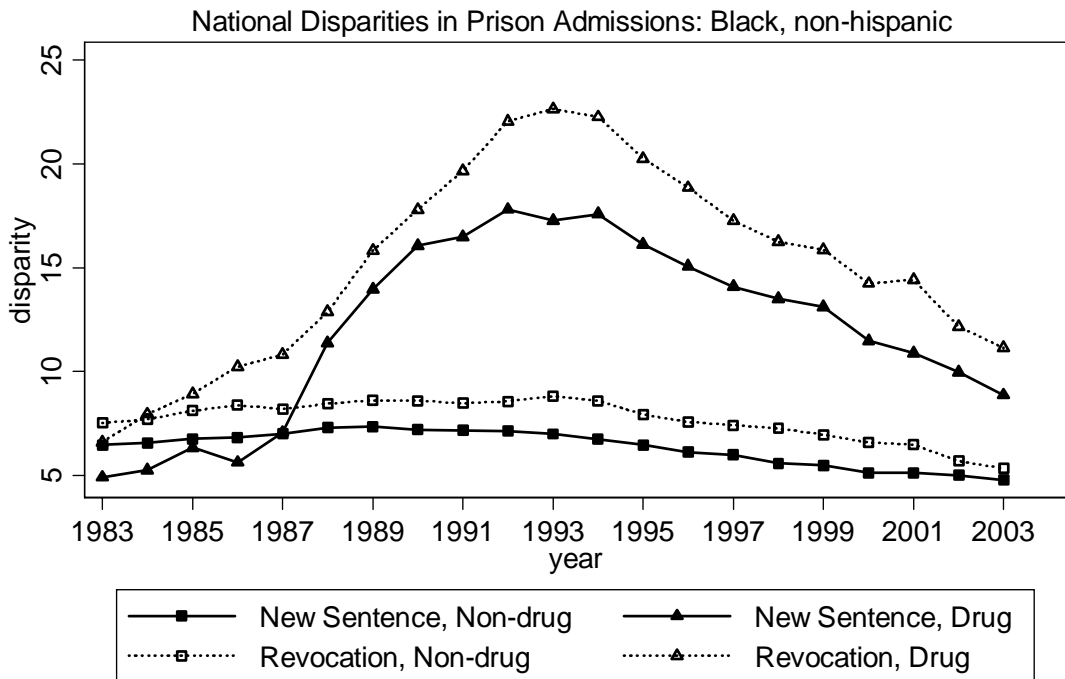## National revocations for drug offenses: rate

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data

Prison Admissions per 100,000 population over age 14

National revocations for drug offenses: disparity

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data
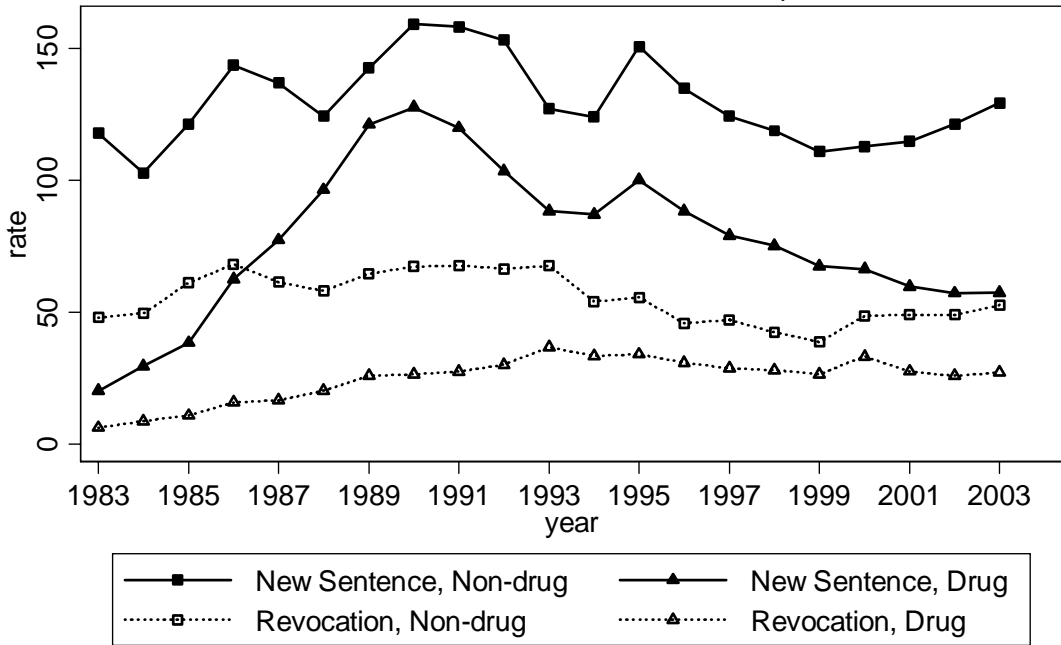
Ratio of Minority Rate to White Rate (Disparity Ratio)

National revocations for non-drug offenses: rate

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data
Prison Admissions per 100,000 population over age 14

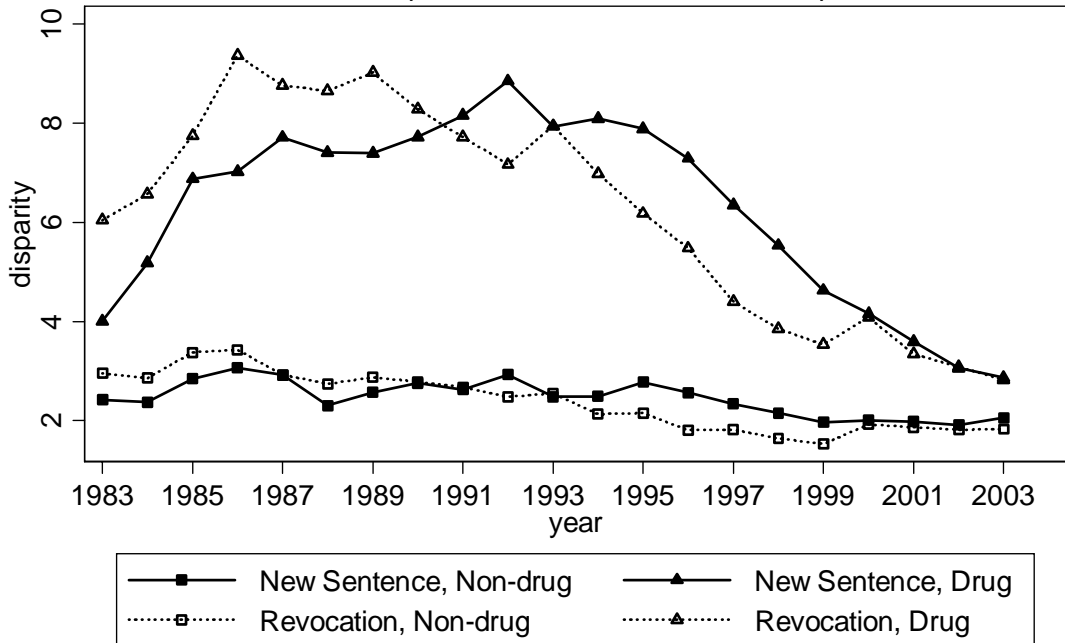## National revocations for non-drug offenses: disparity

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data
Ratio of Minority Rate to White Rate (Disparity Ratio)

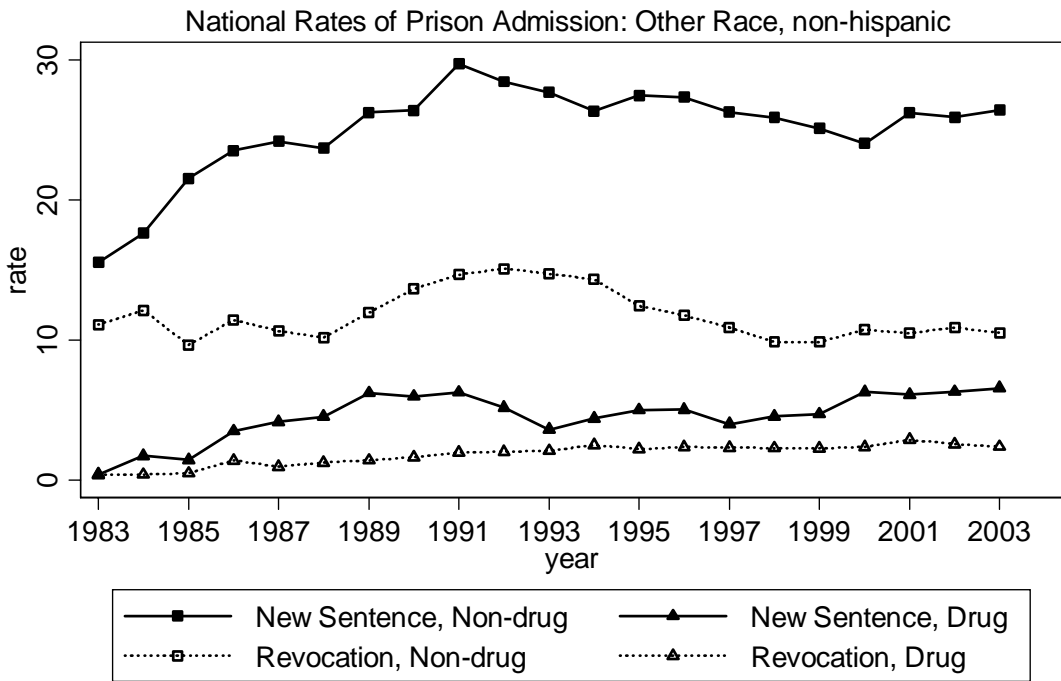## National Rates of Prison Admission: Black, non-hispanic

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data

Prison Admissions per 100,000 population over age 14

National Disparities in Prison Admissions: Black, non-hispanic

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data

Ratio Minority Rate to White Rate (Disparity Ratio)

National Rates of Prison Admission: Hispanic

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data
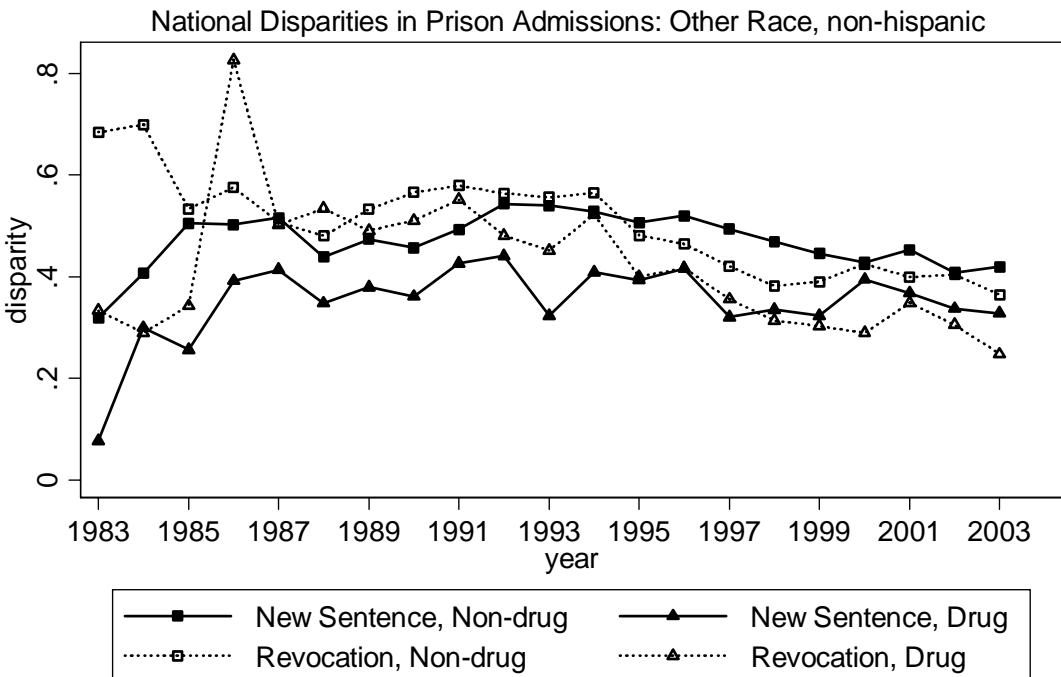Prison Admissions per 100,000 population over age 14

National Disparities in Prison Admissions: Hispanic

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data
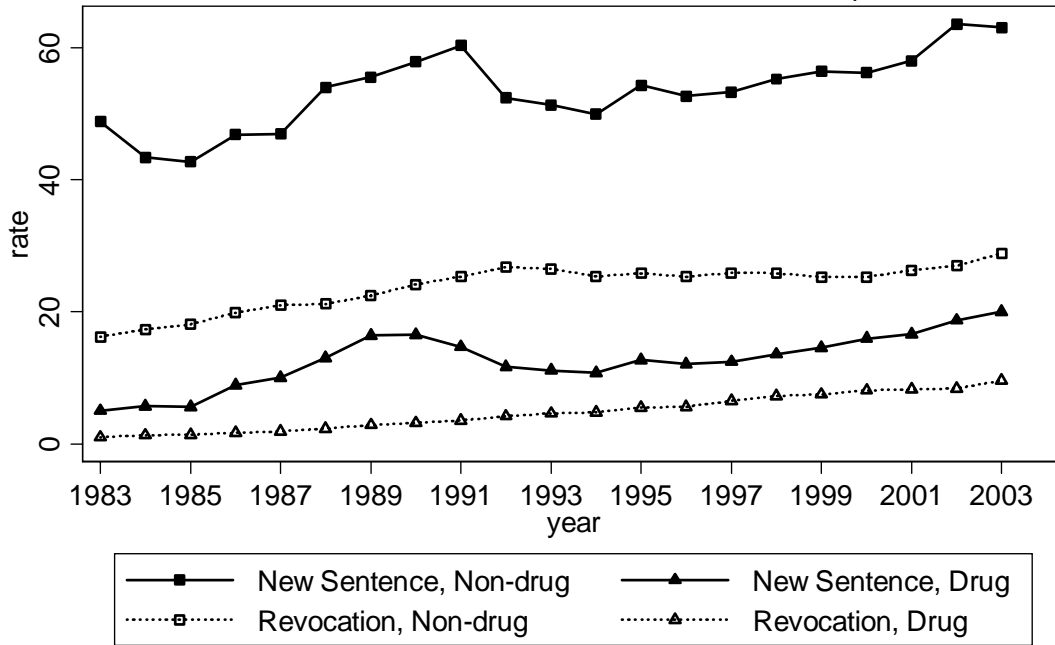Ratio Minority Rate to White Rate (Disparity Ratio)

National Rates of Prison Admission: Other Race, non-hispanic

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data
Prison Admissions per 100,000 population over age 14

National Disparities in Prison Admissions: Other Race, non-hispanic

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data
Ratio Minority Rate to White Rate (Disparity Ratio)

National Rates of Prison Admission: White, non-hispanic

Calculated from National Corrections Reporting Program and Census Population Data

Prison Admissions per 100,000 population over age 14