

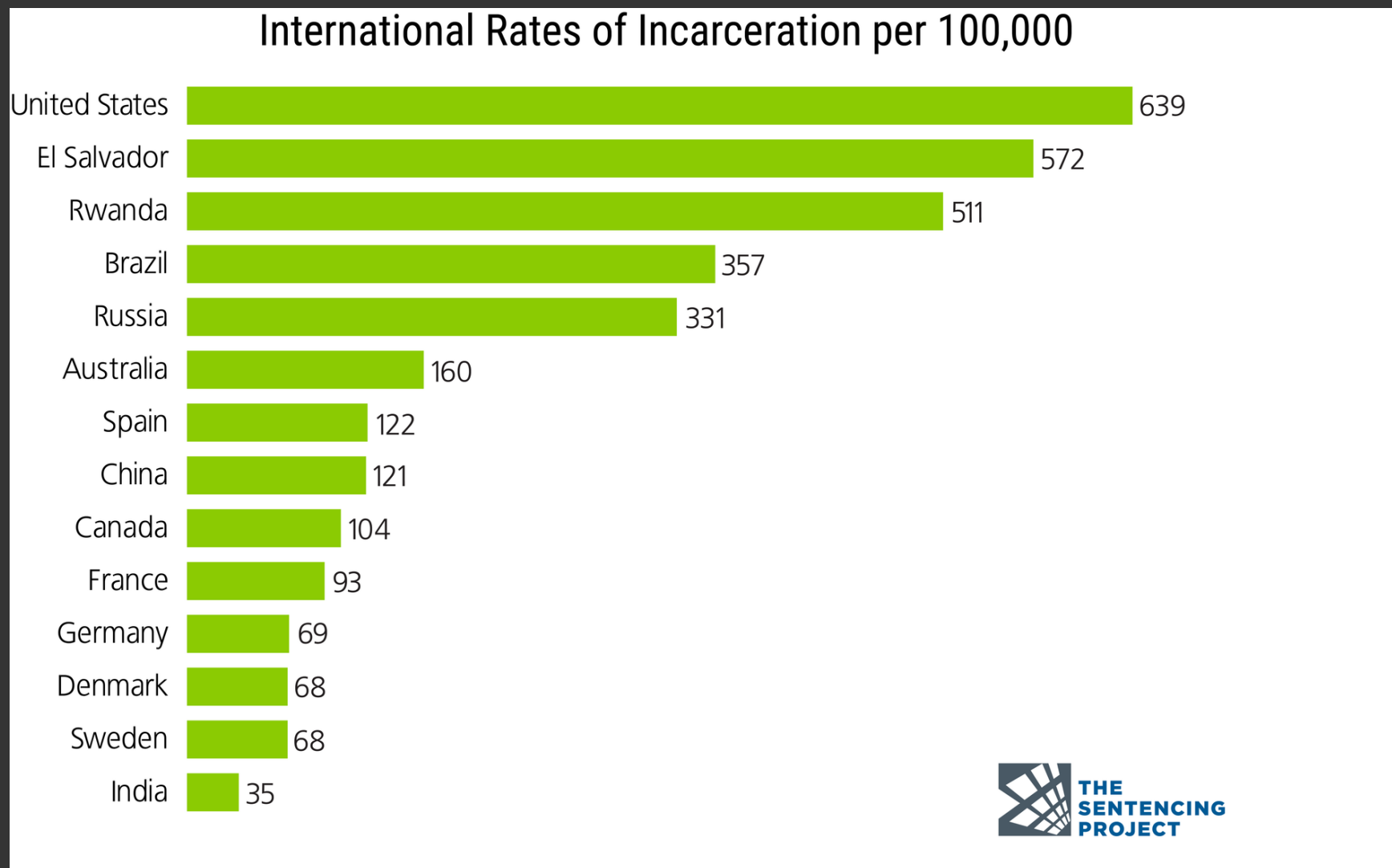
Autism Behind Bars

Introduction to the US Prison System and
the Obstacles Faced by Incarcerated
Peoples with Autism Spectrum Disorder



Mass Incarceration

In recent years the term "mass incarceration" and the discussion surrounding the idea has become increasingly common and an area of concern on both governmental agendas and amongst the general population. While there is no single definition, mass incarceration is best defined by the fact that the United States incarcerates more of its people than any other country in the world. This phenomenon has the largest impact on communities of colour.



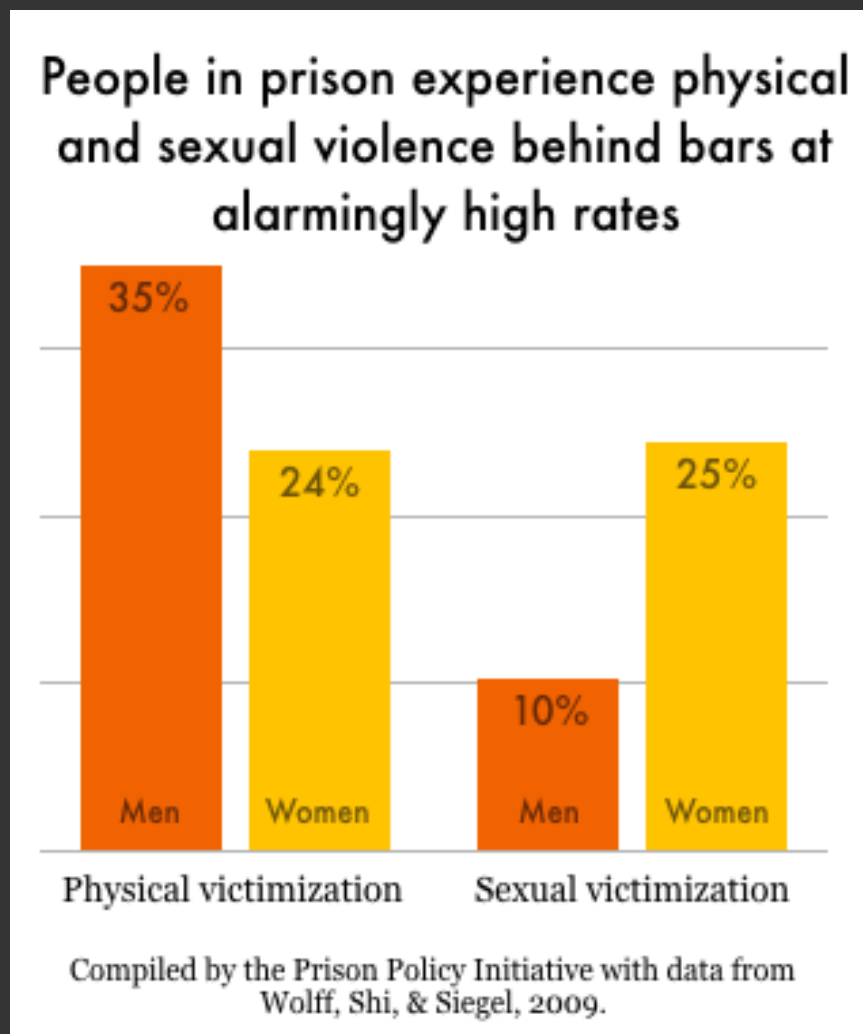
Brief Introduction Re: The US Prison System

- 8.3% of prisons in the United States are private institutions.
- The most basic division of prisons is on a state vs federal level; there are far more state prisons than there are federal.
- Federal prisons are generally safer and house less dangerous inmates compared to state prisons.
- State jails and state prisons function differently, with jails being locally operated and housing inmates for no more than a year.
- There are roughly 2 million people in the nation's prisons and jails.
- Texas has the highest prison population in the country.



Inside Prisons

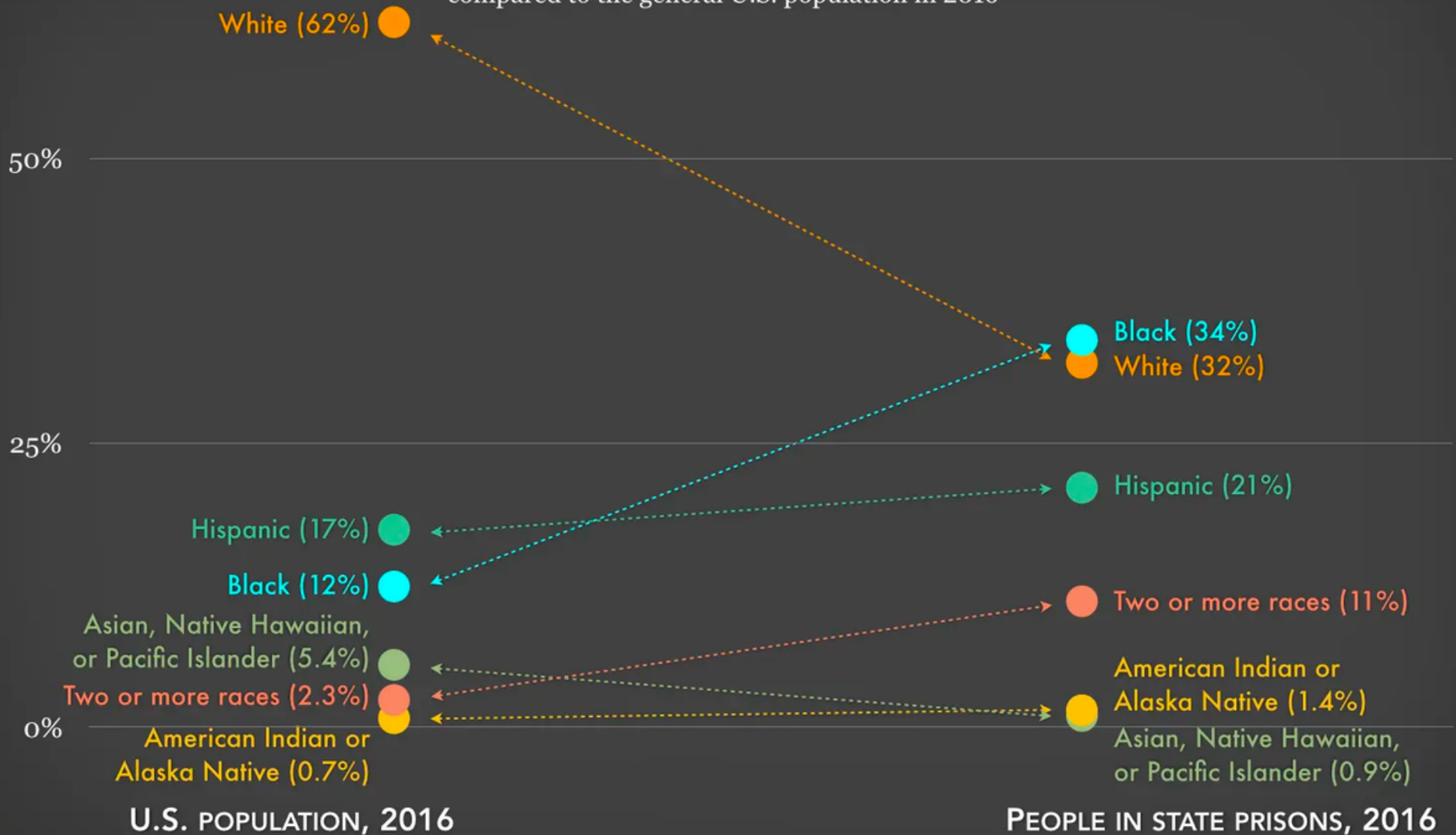
- The social experience in prisons varies depending upon the place and time, but in general, there is the formation of hierarchies. These hierarchies can be based on factors such as strength, time served, the crime itself, etc. This low-trust, high-stress environment can lead to intense physical altercations.
- Due to overpopulation in prisons and a lack of staff and overall poor management, 35% of male prison inmates are physically assaulted over 6 months; 10% are sexually assaulted.



Prison Demographics

White people are very underrepresented in state prisons while almost every other racial and ethnic group is overrepresented

Percentage of people in state prisons nationwide in 2016, by self-identified race or ethnicity, compared to the general U.S. population in 2016



Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics' *Survey of Prison Inmates*, 2016 data analyzed by the Prison Policy Initiative, and U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2016, Table DP05. All categories other than Hispanic include only those identifying as non-Hispanic. The Census Bureau collects data on Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander people separately; the U.S. population was 5.2% Asian and 0.2% Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander.

Prison Demographics

According to the US Department of Justice:

- About 2 in 10 prisoners and 3 in 10 jail inmates reported having a cognitive disability.
- Prisoners with a disability were approx. 4 times more likely and jail inmates with a disability were nearly 2.5 times more likely to report past 30-day serious psychological distress.
- 33% of prisoners and 47% of jail inmates with a cognitive disability reported past 30-day serious psychological distress, compared to 11% of prisoners and 24% of jail inmates with a disability other than cognitive.

Roughly 4.4% of inmates are on the Autism Spectrum

This is 4x more prevalent than the general population

Prison Experiences Re: Those Who Possess Autism

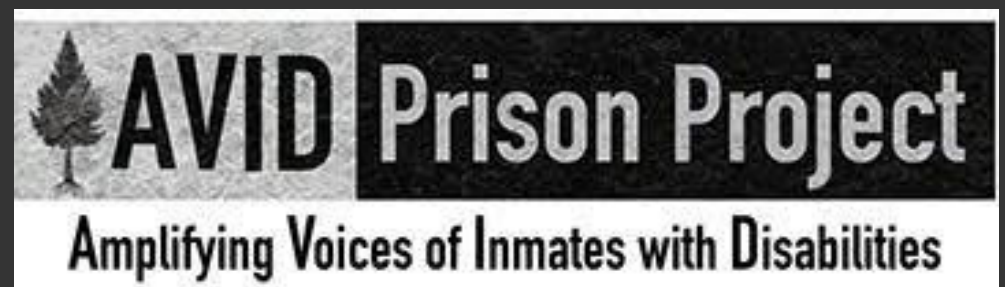
- Characteristics of autism include sensory sensitivity and difficulty picking up social cues. In a prison it is key that you are aware of the existing social dynamics; If not your life could be at stake.
- In the case of sensory sensitivity, punishments, such as keeping the lights on at night for extended periods as a result of unruly behaviour can be extremely unpleasant or anxiety-provoking experiences for those with autism.
- These characteristics, along with many others, and a lack of adequate support, makes prison for those with autism unbearable and can lead to long-term trauma.

Moving Forward

If you are interested in learning more or supporting organisations dedicated to bettering prison conditions for those with Autism, please consider looking into the following groups:

United States

- AVID Prison Project
- Autism Society
- The Marshall Project



United Kingdom

- National Autism Society
- Parc Prison and Young Offender Institute

