

Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy finds Idaho has one of higher incarceration rates in the country

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Idaho has the 13th-highest incarceration rate in the nation, outpacing all six of its neighboring states in that respect, a new study finds.

The study, conducted by the Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy, found 490 of every 100,000 Idahoans are in prison — a rate five times what it was in 1978. In 2017, spending on corrections accounted for about 7.8 percent of the state's budget, up from 4.9 percent in 1992.

The state's incarceration rate is higher than neighboring states including Nevada, which, historically, has incarcerated more people than other states in the region.

The increased incarceration rate comes as violent crime in the state shows an overall downward trend in since 1996, while property crime plummeted during the same timeframe, according to the study. That downward trend, however, is not attributable to the state's higher incarceration rate, according to the study.

"Placing more people in prison, however, has had diminishing benefits as a crime deterrent," the report's authors write.

They also note Idaho's crime decrease is part of a national trend, which has played out over the past 25 years, and they estimate only a 2 percent decrease in the state's crime is due to placing more people in prison.

What's more, the center's report hints at the possibility that prison time might actually contribute to crime in the community.

"The effects of prison itself can produce more crime among those exiting," its authors write.

"Exposure to prisoners who have committed more serious offenses can increase the criminal behavior of lower level offenders."

Officials from the Idaho Department of Corrections declined to comment on the study Tuesday.