



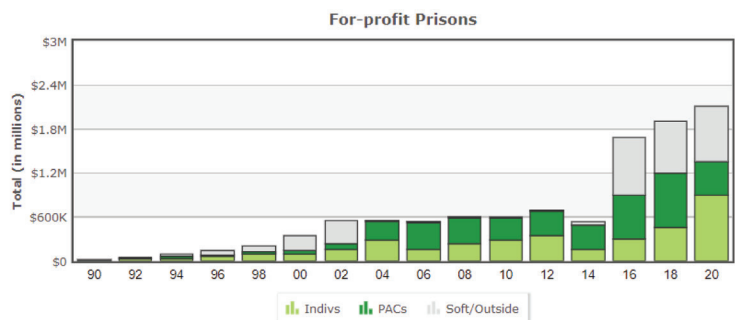
The Corrosive Impact of Money in Politics: Incarceration and Private Prisons

Background: Despite comprising less than 5% of the global population, the U.S. has nearly 25% of the world’s prison population. More than 2 million people are imprisoned in the nation’s prisons and jails—a 500% increase over the last 40 years. Changes in law and policy, not changes in crime rates, explain most of this increase.

Prison System Political Spending:

- According to Open Secrets, private prisons, dominated by GEO Group and its nearest competitor, CoreCivic, in 2020 have contributed over \$2 million to candidates, parties and outside spending group, with the majority of the growth since 2014 in outside contributions.
- Private prison companies have also benefited from the expansion of immigrant detention; this is revealed by the growth in lobbying expenses, which nearly doubled between 2016 and 2019, reaching \$4.3 million in 2019.
- In Virginia, Ed Gillespie was the top individual to be championed by the industry, receiving almost \$100,000 when he was the Republican gubernatorial candidate in 2017.

Contribution Trends, 1990-2020



How This Affects You:

- Our prison system costs taxpayers \$80 billion per year. Of that, tens of billions are then funneled into the private sector through vendor contracts with healthcare providers, food suppliers, commissary merchants, prison contractors, and countless others.
- The U.S. has the largest private prison population in the world housed in 51 private prisons in operation in 16 states. Of the over 2 million prisoners, about 128,063 are detained in federal or state facilities operated by private prison facilities, a 47 percent increase from 2000.
- Virginia has an incarceration rate of 779 per 100,000 people, meaning it locks up a higher percentage of its people than many wealthy democracies do. There is one privately operated prison in Virginia, operated by the GEO Group, the Lawrenceville Correctional Center, which held 1,555 prisoners in 2018. 4.2% of Virginia’s prison population is held in this prison.
- GEO’s contract in Virginia has what’s known as an “occupancy requirement.” The Commonwealth agreed to make sure GEO’s privately operated prison is kept at least 95 percent full at all times—regardless of current crime rates. That means the state is obligated to keep using a third-party provider even when it has less need to do so (and paying for the privilege), and the state is pressured to maximize incarceration rates.