

## MEDILL REPORTS CHICAGO

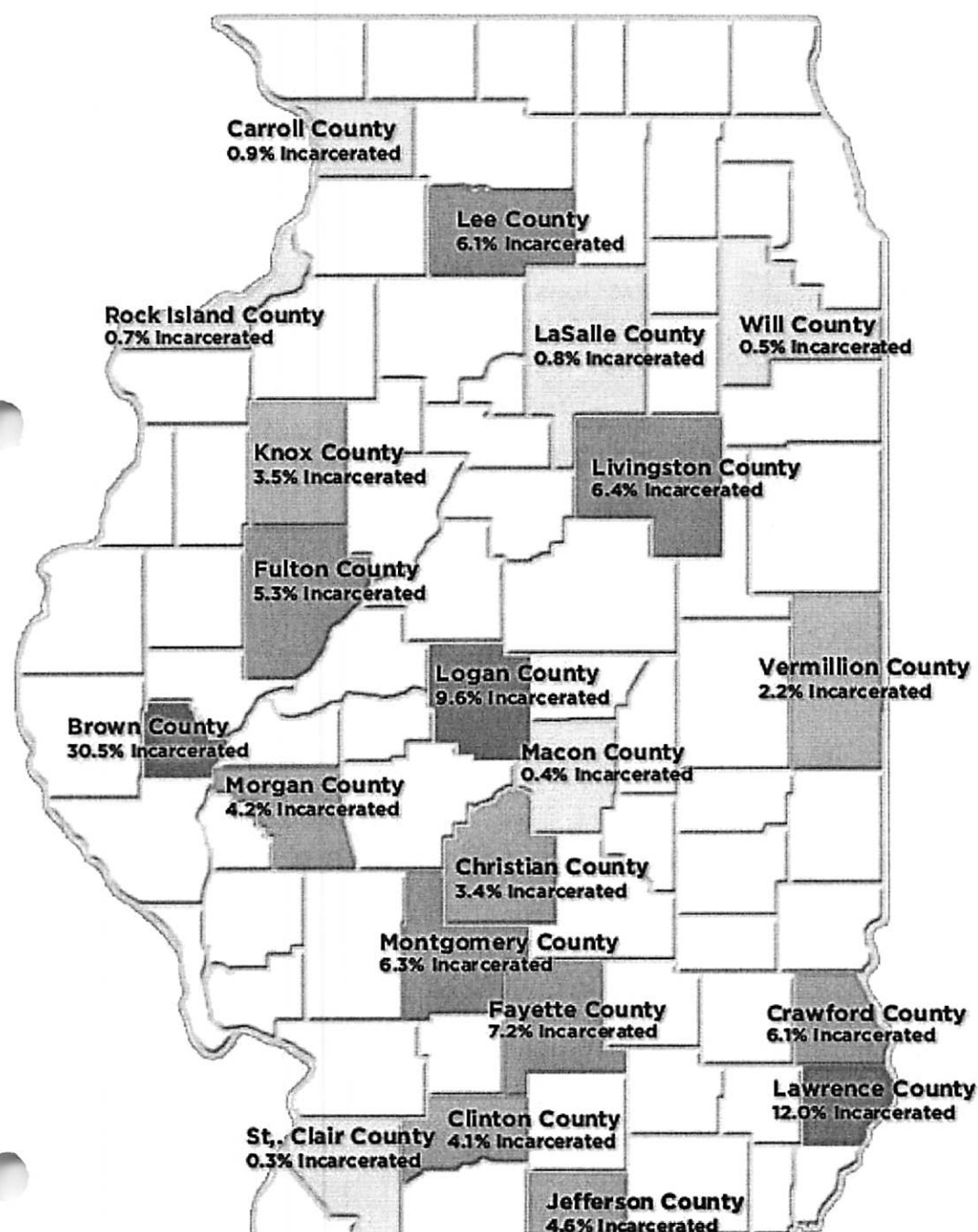
N3-785

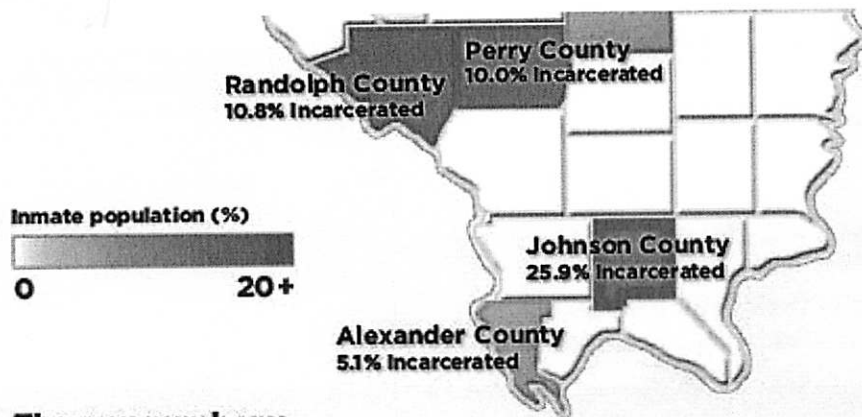
URL: <http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=155730>  
Story Retrieval Date: 2/8/2010 12:18:09 PM CST

## Inmates live where they're locked

The U.S. Census counts prisoners as residents of their cells, despite Illinois law. No big deal, right? It is for the districts in which prisons are located, because census numbers are used to determine district sizes.

Here's a preview of how state prisons might pad population numbers in 2010.\*





### The raw numbers:

Facility	Pop.	County	Pop.
Big Muddy River	1847	Jefferson	40083
Centralla	1539	Clinton	36711
Danville	1825	Vermillion	80680
Decatur	497	Macon	108328
Dixon	2144	Lee	35129
Dwight	1114	Livingston	37681
East Moline	1118	Rock Island	146886
Graham	1894	Montgomery	29773
Hill	1829	Knox	51857
Illinois River	1967	Fulton	36719
Jacksonville	1513	Morgan	35251
Lawrence	2005	Lawrence	16681
Lincoln	973	Logan	29787
Logan	1899	Logan	29787
Menard	3547	Randolph	32641
Pinckneyville	2256	Perry	22484
Pontiac	1300	Livingston	37681
Robinson	1202	Crawford	19555
Shawnee	1990	Johnson	13731
Sheridan	946	LaSalle	112474
Southwestern Ill.	674	St. Clair	262291
Stateville	3404	Will	681097
Tamms	415	Alexander	8152
Taylorville	1177	Christian	34501
Thomson	138	Carroll	15841
Vandalia	1520	Fayette	20981
Vienna	1573	Johnson	13731
Western Illinois	2004	Brown	6573

\*Data based on U.S. Census population projections for 2008 and Illinois Department of Corrections inmate headcount averages for 2009

Note: Does not include federal prisons

Sources:  
Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties of Illinois, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau

Illinois Department of Corrections Web site

Prison Policy Initiative's Importing Constituents: Prisoners and Political Clout in Illinois Report

## Census engaged in 'prison-based gerrymandering,' report says

by **ANDREW PALEY**  
Feb 04, 2010


The U.S. Census is set to skew political power in Illinois, again.

Reformers call the problem "prison-based gerrymandering." It's the census practice of counting inmates where they're incarcerated, not where they legally reside (that's their homes prior to arrest, according to Illinois case law dating back to the 1800s).

"If a prisoner is in jail on the day of the census, but released the next day, they would be counted there for the next 10 years," Illinois Rep. La Shawn K. Ford (D-Chicago) said.

The main result? Constituents in districts with large prisons find themselves with more political power

thanks to redistricting – antithetical to the supposed purpose of redistricting, which is to ensure that each American has equal voice in government.

 Ford has a fix, and his bill is now before the House after passing out of committee on Wednesday night in a vote split starkly along party lines.


Ford's bill would require state and federal prison authorities to report inmate data to the Illinois Secretary of State. This would be used for "an adjusted population distribution count" – placing each inmate at his or her legal address rather than at the prison for redistricting purposes.

It's a hot topic elsewhere this week as well. A report released Tuesday by the Prison Policy Initiative, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit, outlined the case for that exact reform in Illinois. In the report, the organization cites county-by-county data from the 2000 Census.

One highlight in the report is Brown County, home of the Western Illinois Correctional Center. In the 2000 Census, the population of Brown County was recorded as 6,950. But 1,912 of those counted in Brown County were inmates – they couldn't vote, and they didn't legally reside there.

That population padding means that the 5,038 actual legal residents of Brown County have a disproportionate influence in government.

How? According to the report, each Illinois State Assembly district is built around census data to have 105,248 constituents. Brown County is part of the 93rd District, where roughly 2 percent of the recorded population is incarcerated.

Meaning: Every 98 voters in the 93rd District are as politically powerful as every 100 voters of other districts  don't benefit from a prison. And that's not the worst case outlined in the report.

Beyond the scope of Ford's bill, the miscount of prisoners also wreaks havoc on the quality of the census data itself. And it's not just in the population counts.

Let's go back to Brown County. In the last census, the county's black population stood at 1,265. That's one in five – relatively diverse on paper. According to the Prison Policy Initiative's report, however, 1,260 of them were in the correctional facility.

In other words, 99.6 percent of the black population of Brown County counted in 2000 were transplanted inmates. But you wouldn't know it from the census.

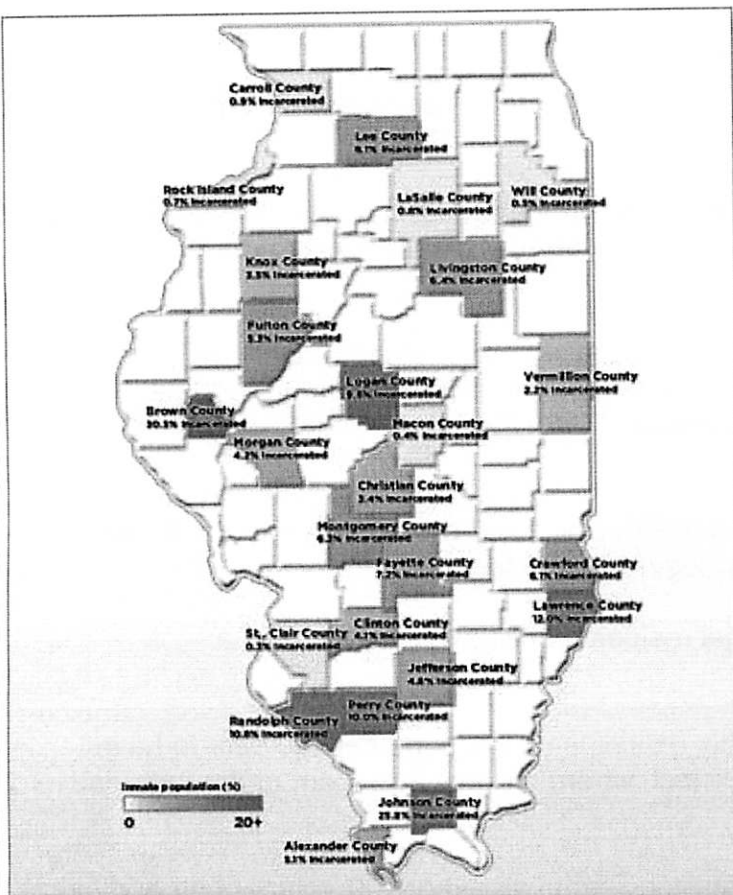
And despite the push for reform, Peter Wagner, executive director of the Prison Policy Initiative, contends that the Census Bureau is slow to adopt his suggestions. They couldn't even put a number on the inmate issue until his first report in 2002.

As such, there's no hope at this point for 2010.

"The bureau is off the hook for this year," Wagner said. "But this needs to be the last census that counts 2 million people in the wrong place."

---





## Related Links

[The Prisoners of the Census Report](#)[Bill HB4650: Status and Full Text](#)

©2001 - 2009 Medill Reports - Chicago, Northwestern University. A publication of the [Medill School](#).