



Are All Drug Offenders Really Violent?: A Snapshot of Federal Drug Offenders & Their Sentences

A common misperception is that all federal drug offenders are violent kingpins. Almost all federal drug offenders are sentenced for drug trafficking (less than one percent are sentenced for simple possession). Nonetheless, data show that while most federal drug traffickers are not violent or major dealers and kingpins, they still receive lengthy, expensive prison terms and mandatory minimum sentences. Also, in the federal system, there are virtually no programs that can divert addicted or mentally ill drug offenders to treatment courts or other effective intensive probation programs. If a person commits a violent offense (murder, assault, etc.), he will be tried and convicted in state courts and sent to state prisons – unsurprisingly, half of all state prisoners were convicted of violent offenses.

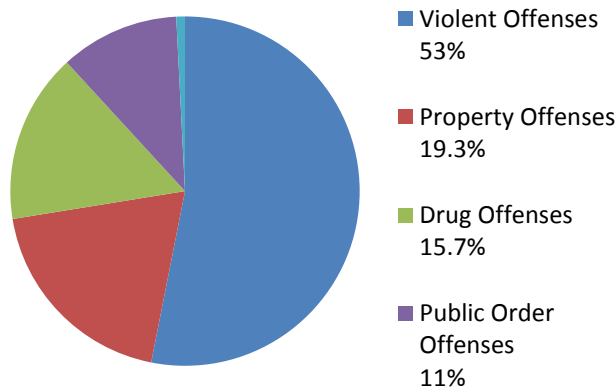
Of the approximately 19,400 federal drug offenders sentenced in FY 2016:

- 50% had little or no prior criminal record
- 92% did not play any leadership role in the offense
- 82% had no weapon involved in the crime
- **Only 14 cases (0.1%) involved a death caused by use of the drug**
- **Only 86 cases (0.4%) resulted in serious bodily injury or death to another person**
- **Only 163 cases (0.9%) involved violence or threats of violence.**

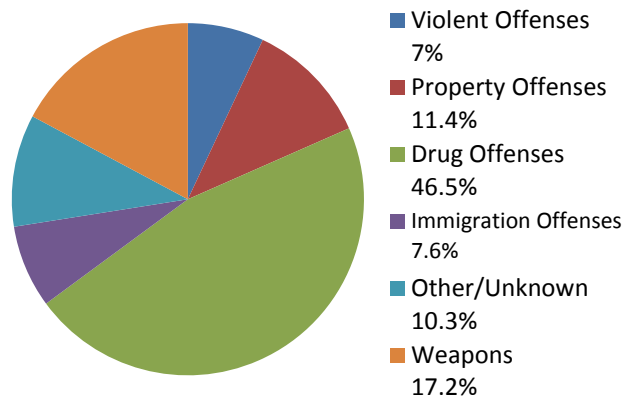
Yet virtually all federal drug offenders go to prison, and almost half face lengthy mandatory minimum prison terms. In FY 2016:

- 45% faced mandatory minimum sentences of 5, 10, 20 years, or life without parole
- Only 4% of drug traffickers got sentences of probation.

State Prisoners & Their Crimes



Federal Prisoners & Their Crimes



Sources: U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, 2016 SOURCEBOOK OF FEDERAL SENTENCING STATISTICS, <https://www.ussc.gov/research/sourcebook-2016>; U.S. Sentencing Comm’n, FY16 Use of Guidelines & Specific Offender Characteristics (Offender-based Analysis) (2017), https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/federal-sentencing-statistics/guideline-application-frequencies/2016/Use_of_SOC_Offender_Based.pdf; BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, PRISONERS IN 2014 Tbl. 11 (Sept. 2015), <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p14.pdf>; BUREAU OF PRISONS, INMATE STATISTICS: OFFENSES (Sept. 23, 2017), http://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_offenses.jsp.