

Rural Washington Jails Analysis 2015-2021

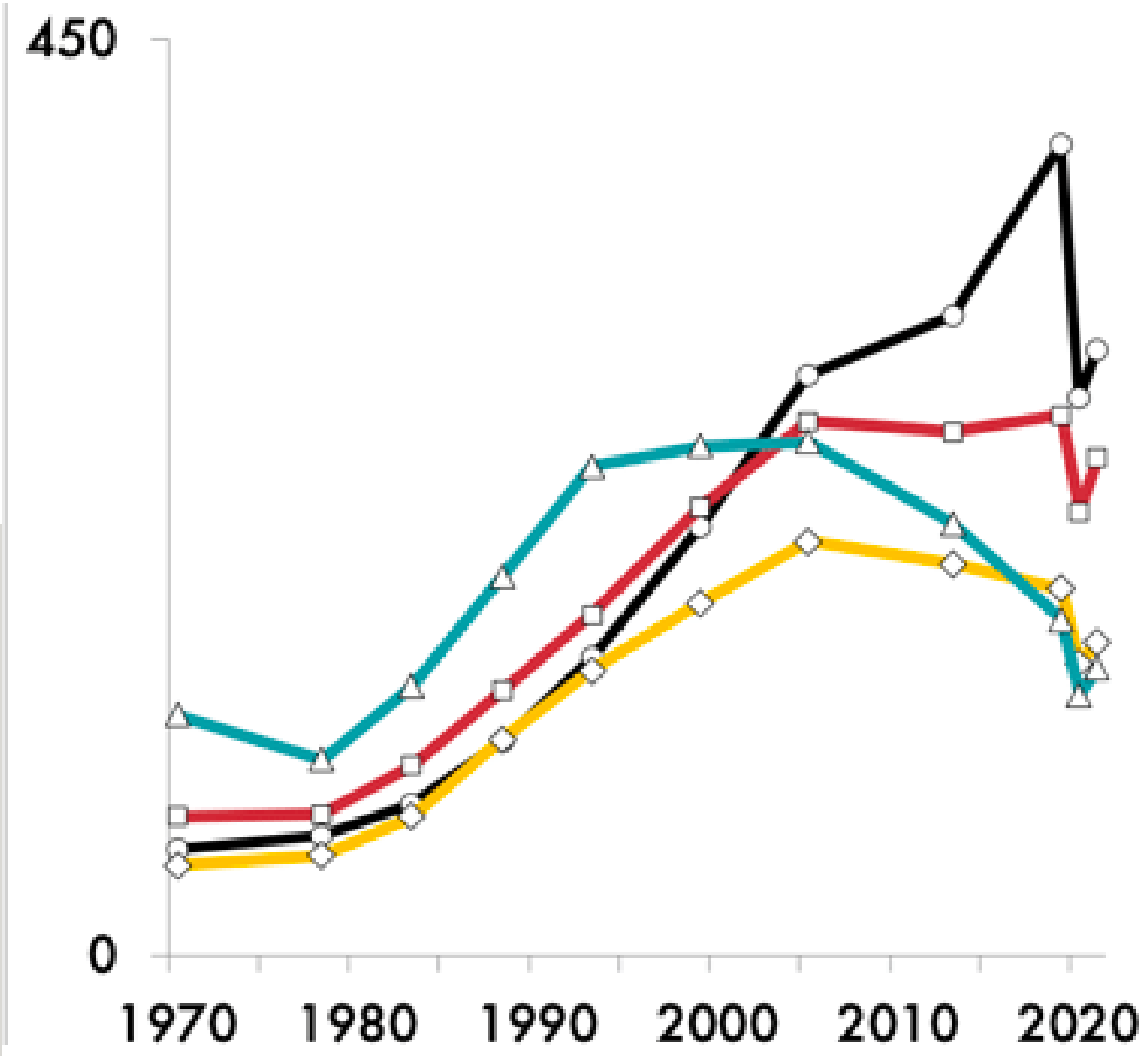
Research Findings and Policy
Recommendations

Vera Institute of Justice



The continued rise of jail incarceration in small town America is eroding national progress toward ending mass incarceration.

Smaller cities and rural counties have the highest incarceration rates.



Local Jail Rate Per 100k Residents From 1970-Late 2020 By Urbanicity

- Rural Counties
- Small / Mid Metro Areas
- ◇ Suburban Counties
- △ Urban Counties

Broad Lessons Learned

Rural jails in Washington are being used primarily to hold people for **minor charges**, including for charges directly related to **poverty, substance use** and **domestic violence**.

Punitive state-level policies such as mandatory arrest for domestic violence and penalties arising from drivers license suspension have broad impact on jail incarceration in rural Washington counties.

Findings from Washington

Project structure and research methods

- Vera partners with local public university: Washington State University
- WSU team set up DUAs, cleaned & analyzed jail administrative data, court-watching data. WSU also did significant qualitative research.
- Universities lead on analysis; Vera leads on policy framing + connections
- WSU project site: <https://labs.wsu.edu/wrjn/> (county fact sheets soon!)



County Fact
Sheets



State Policy
Briefs



Dissemination &
Briefing Events

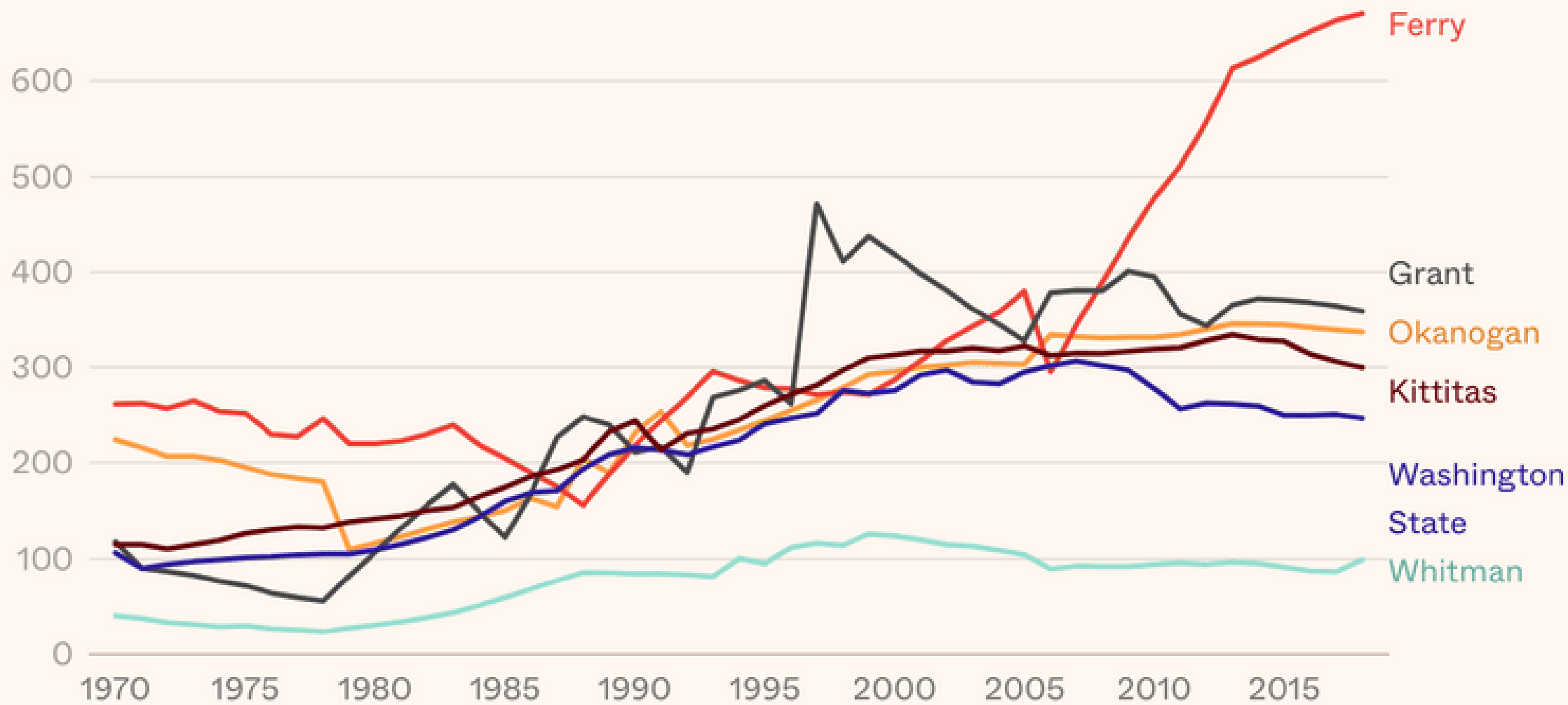


Toolkits for
Decarceration

While total jail incarceration rates in Washington State are below the national average, the rates in rural counties are mostly **higher** than the state's average.

In the six counties examined in this study, rural jail populations have **continued to rise in 5 of the 6** and have higher rates than the state.

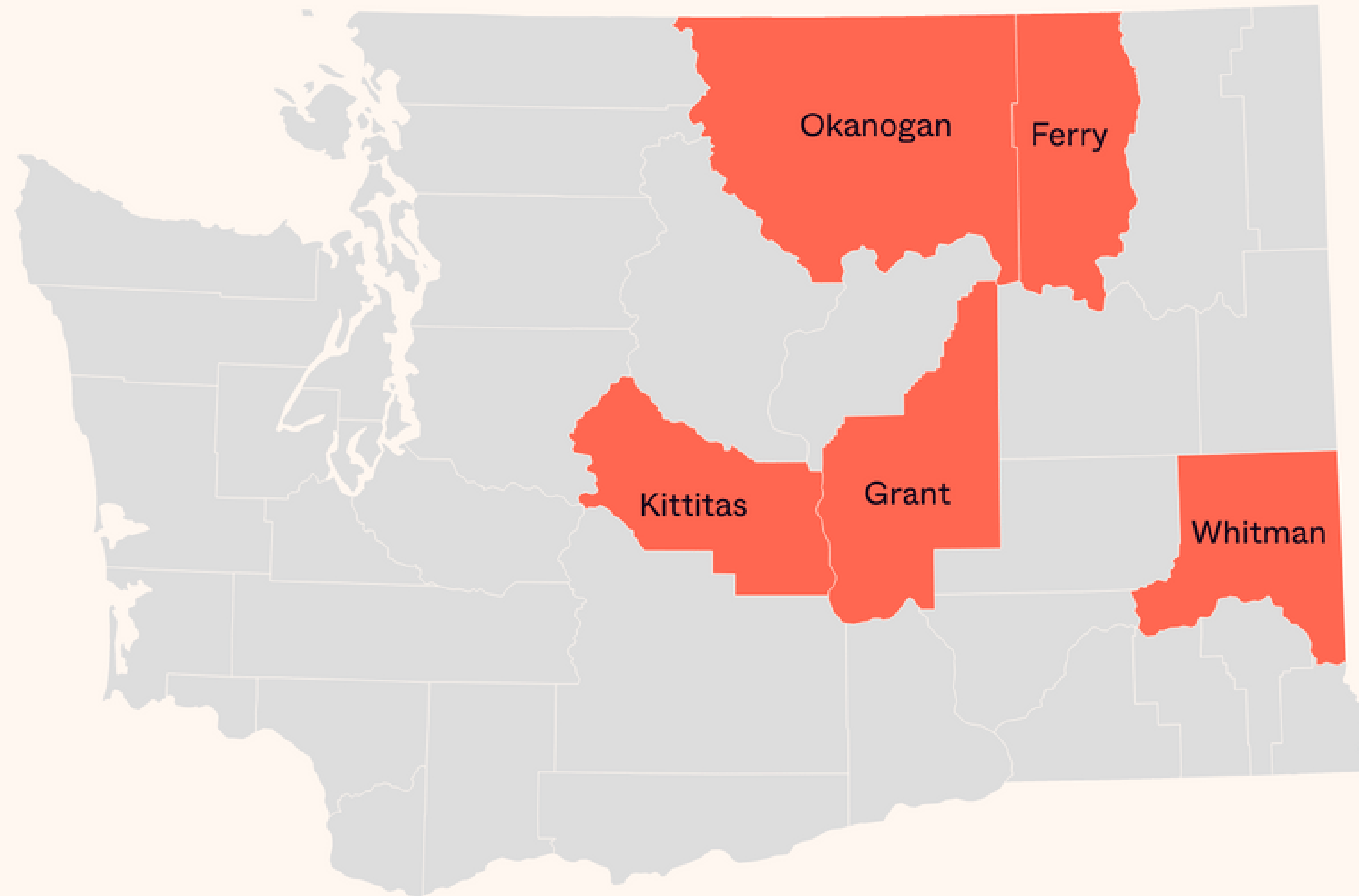
Jail population rate per 100,000 residents in five Washington counties, 1970-2018



Source: Vera Incarceration Trends



Washington Counties Included in Study

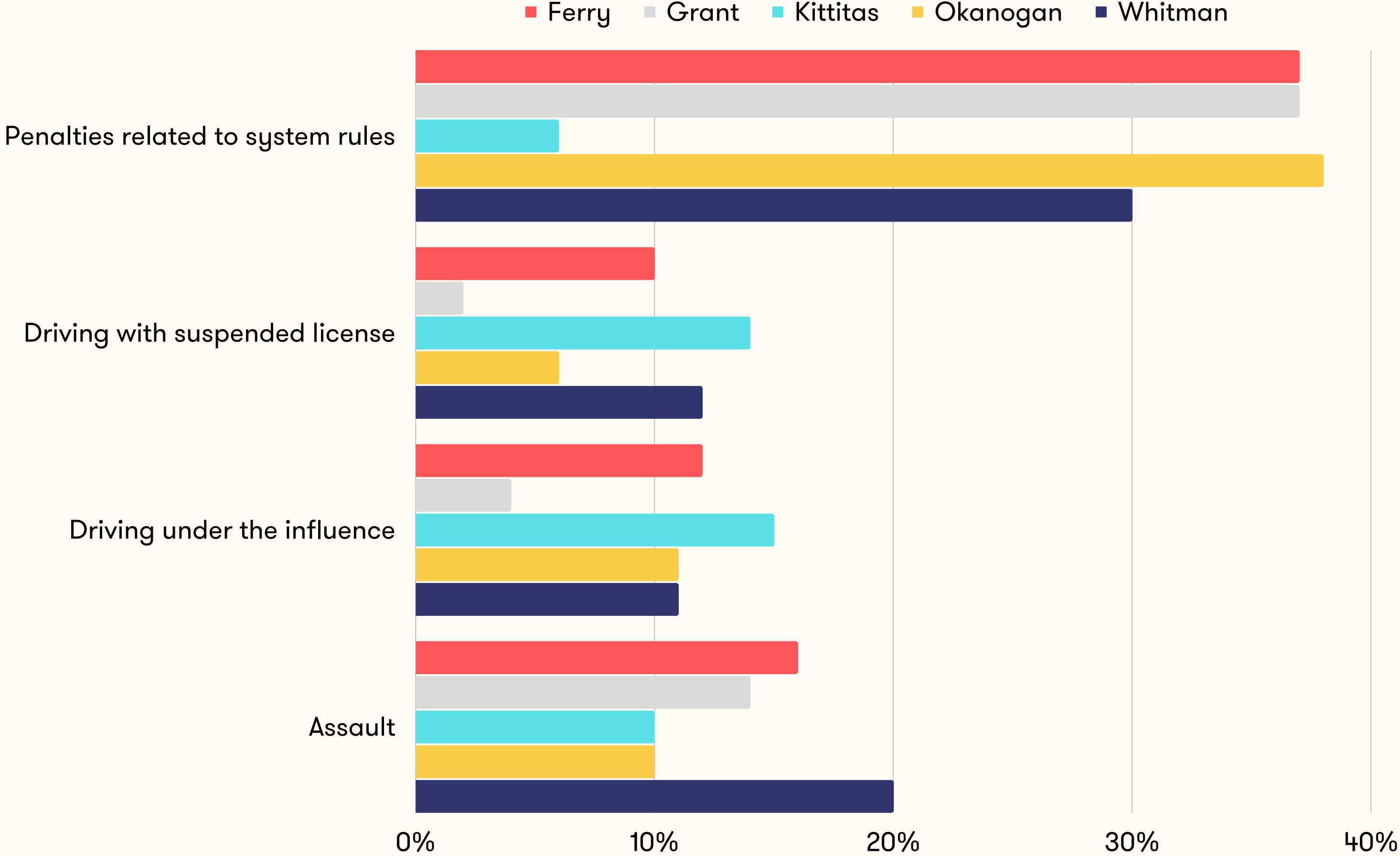


Analysis of jail bookings data covers roughly five-year periods

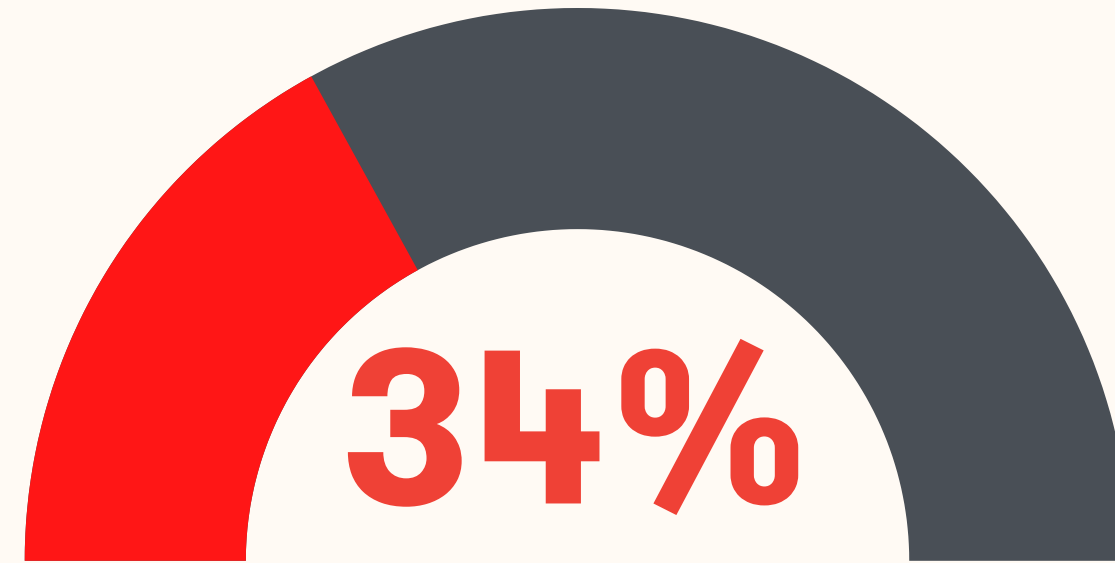
(from 2015-2016 to 2019-2021, depending on the county)

This study is based on jail data provided by the sheriff's offices in five counties, covering approximately five years in Ferry County, Grant County, Kittitas County, Okanogan County, and Whitman County.

Key drivers of jail incarceration in participating counties



Penalties Related to Navigating the Criminal Legal System



In 4 of 5 counties, **30% to 38%** of all people booked into jail were as a penalty related to navigating criminal legal system requirements.

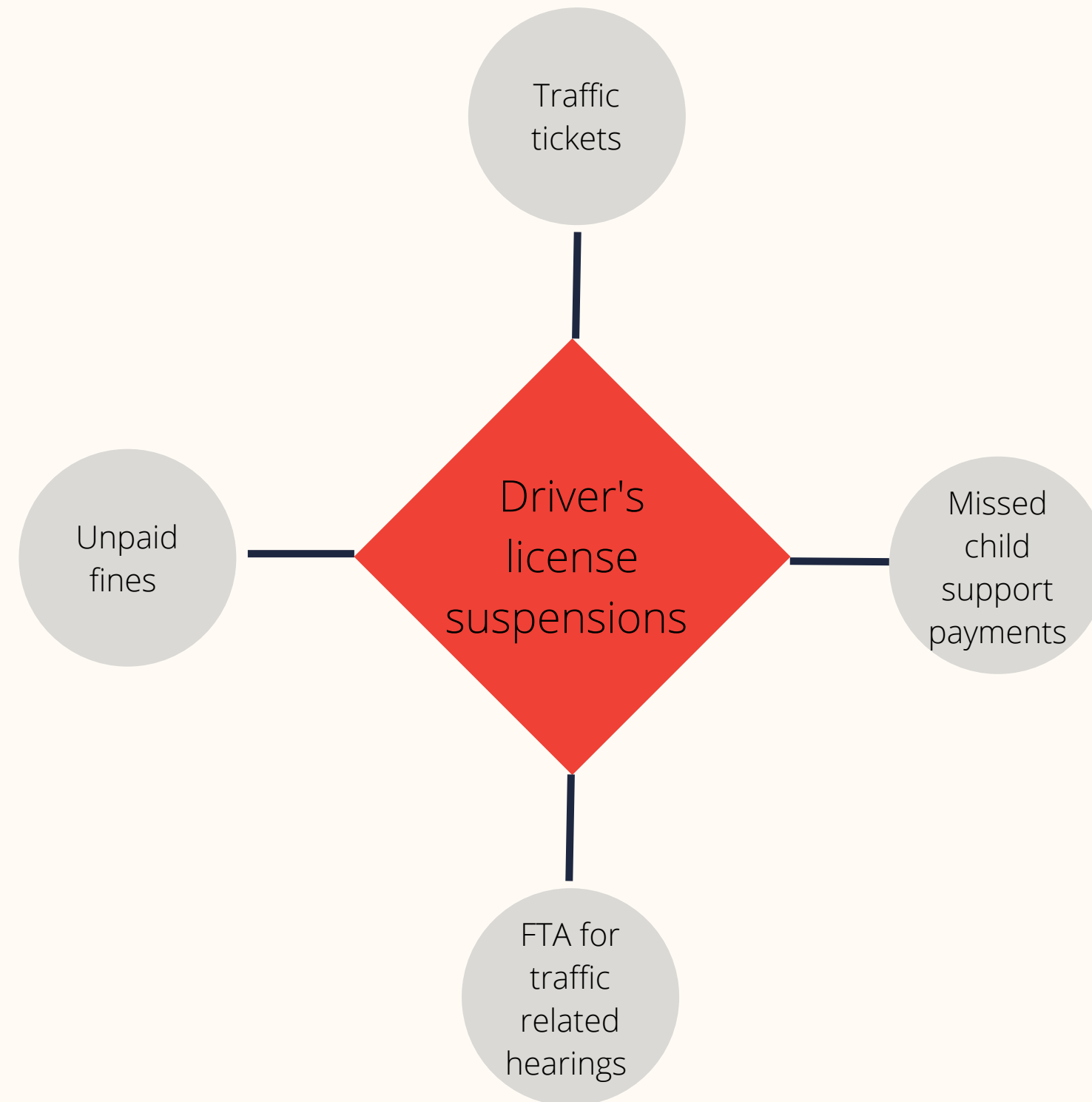
Failure to appear

is the most common charge within this group:
from **23% to 30%** of jail bookings

Driving With a Suspended License

10 to 14%

of admissions in three of five counties for driving with a suspended license



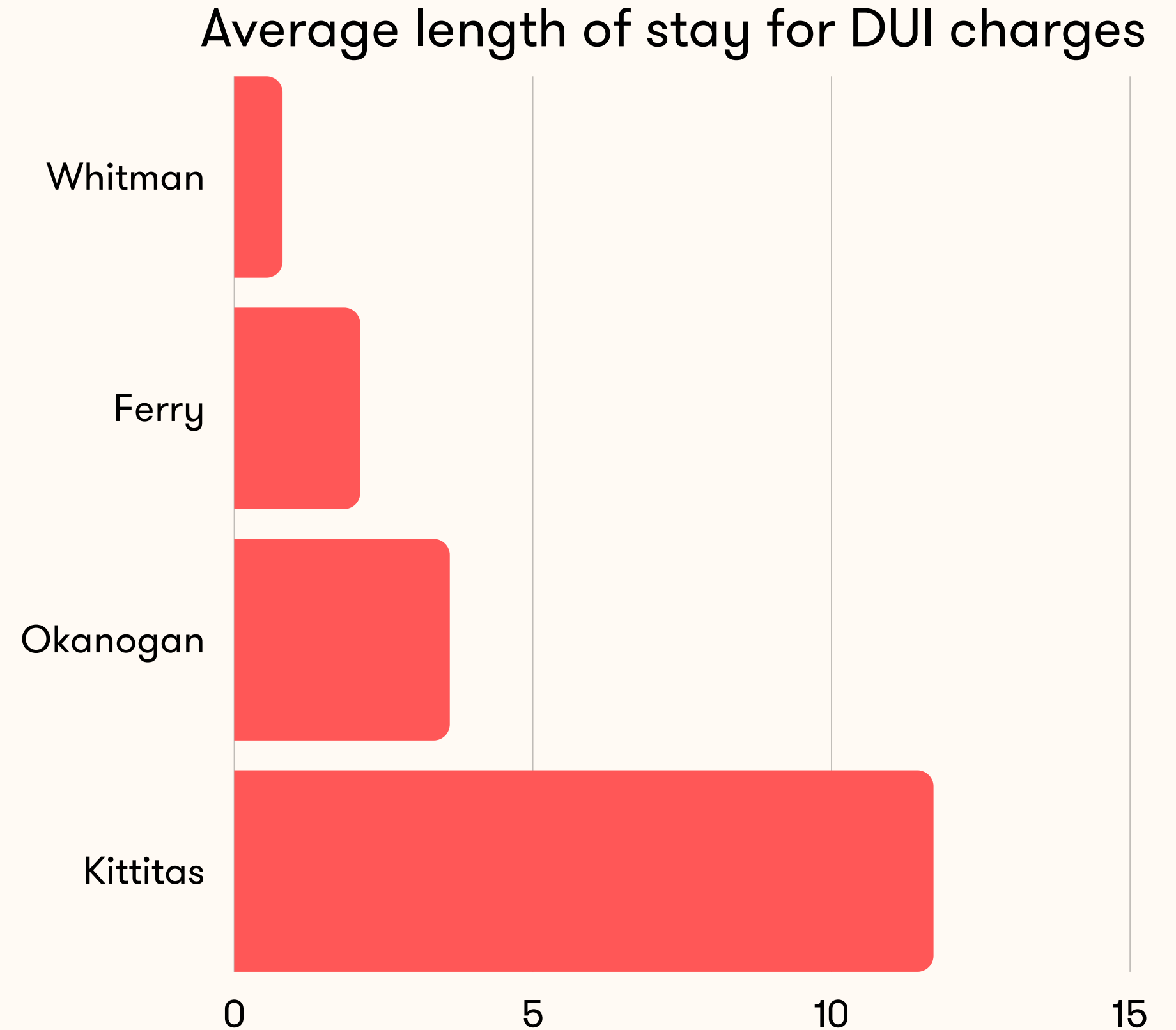
"People that go to jail . . . want to have a better life. But when you get in their system deep enough, you can't. You can't get a decent job. If you can't get a decent job, how do you pay to get your license back? If you can't get a license back, you can't get a decent job. It is this downward spiral effect that is really hard to hit the brakes and it is really hard to stop."

- 32 year-old white man, Grant County

Driving Under the Influence

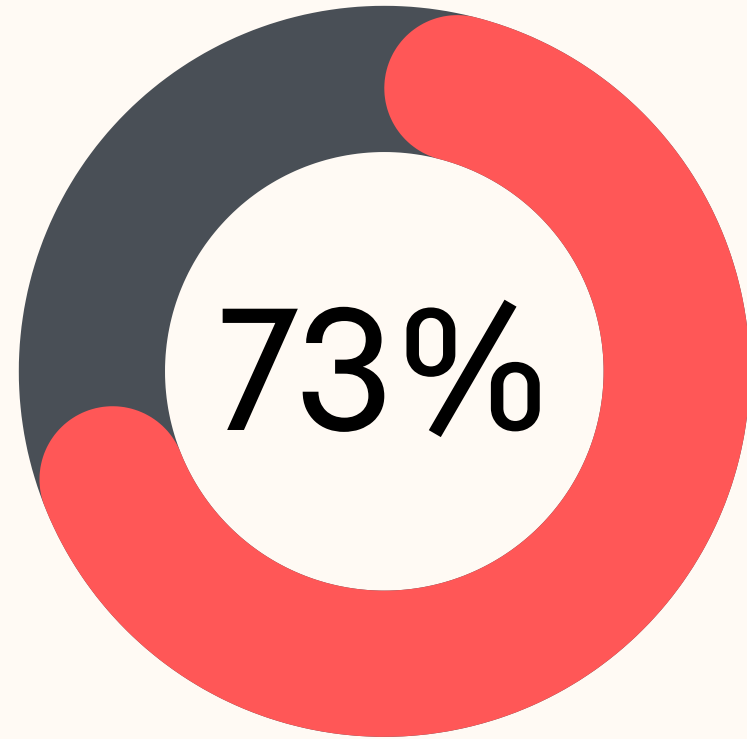
Driving Under the Influence

- DUI charges range from **4 to 15 percent** of admissions
- Usually people booked on DUI have much **shorter stays** than other charge types
- State DUI laws require jail stay or home electronic monitoring

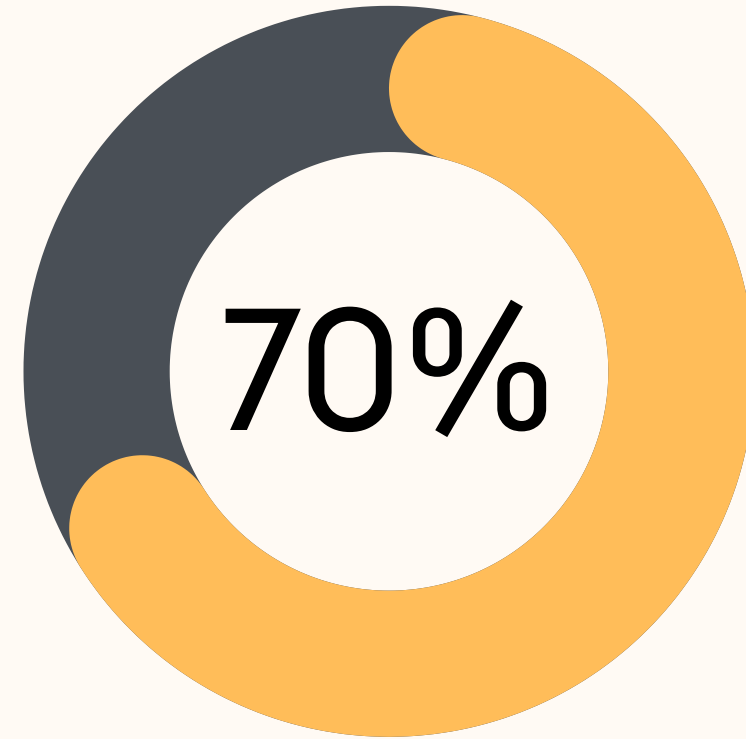


Mandatory Arrest for Domestic Violence

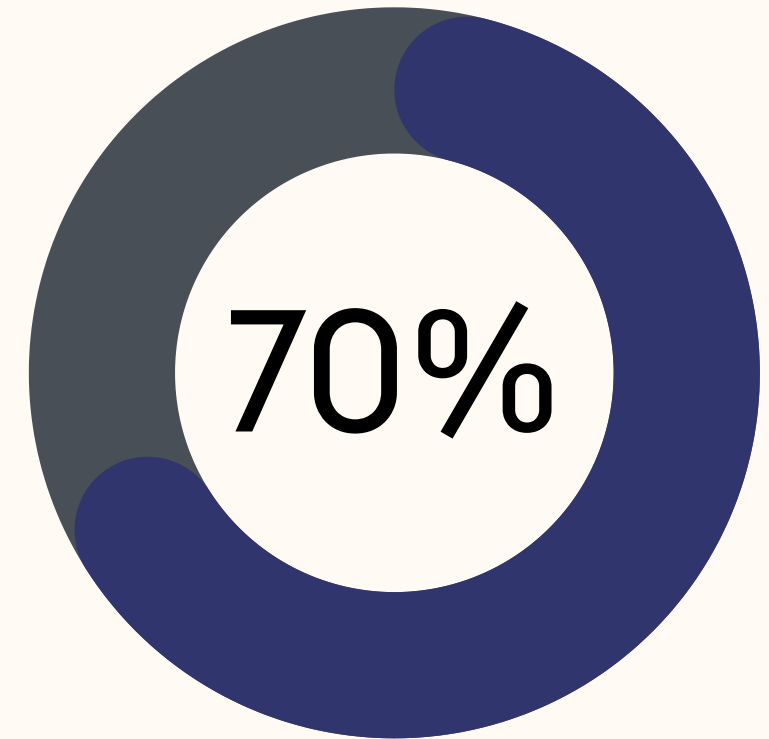
Most jail bookings for assault are related to domestic violence



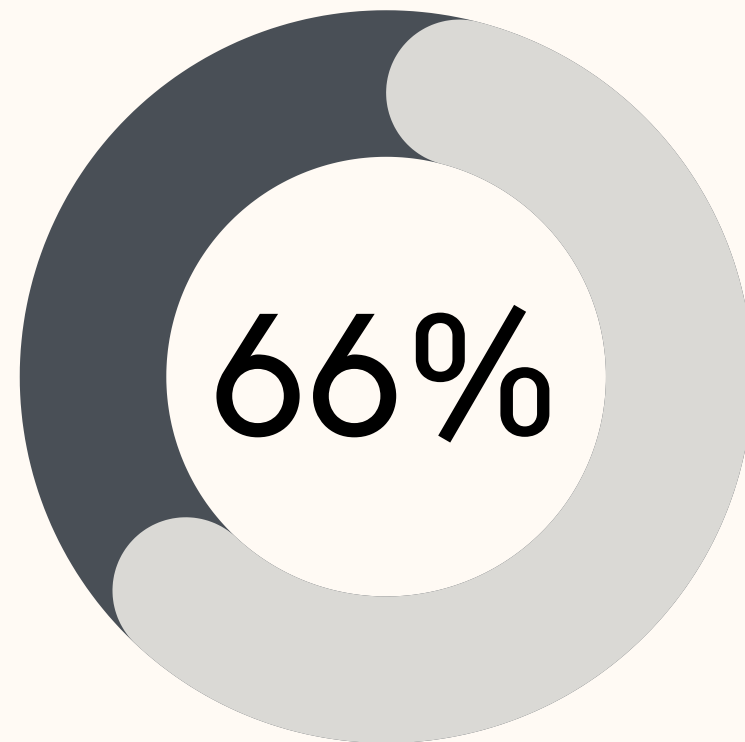
Okanogan



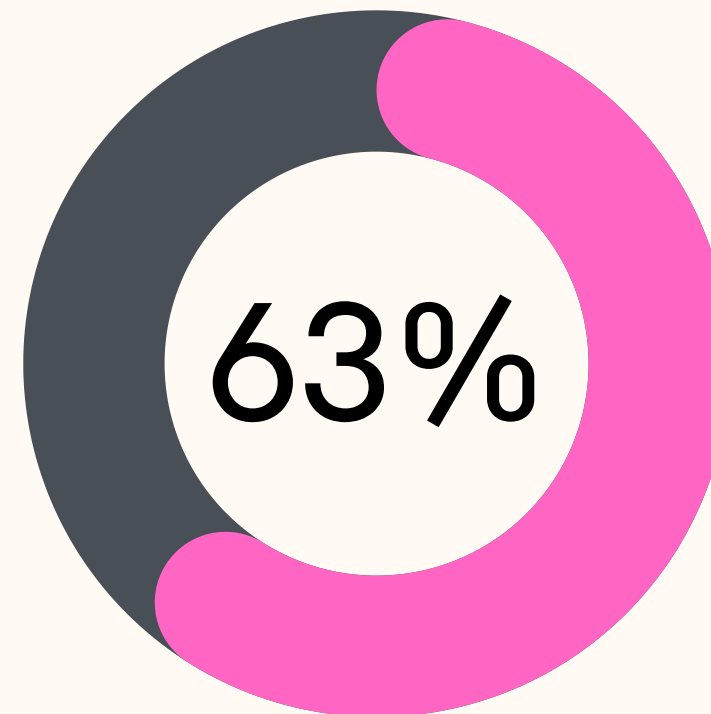
Whitman



Kittitas



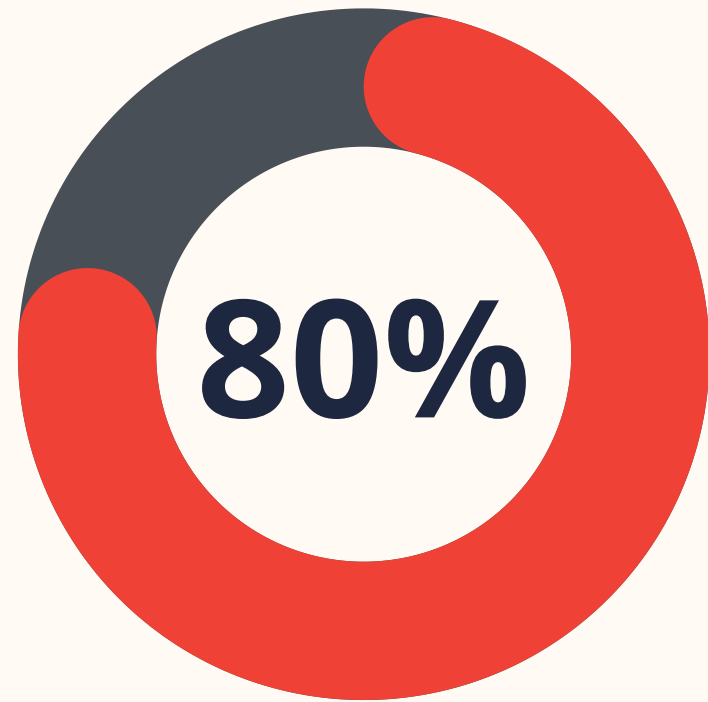
Ferry



Grant

#2


Domestic violence charges are the **second most** common type of top charge for **women** booked into jail pretrial.



In four of the five counties, **over 80 percent** of domestic assault charges were misdemeanors.

- 95% in Okanogan
- 90% in Grant and Whitman
- 82% in Ferry.

Impacts of Mandatory Arrest Laws



Myriad of unintended
consequences for mandatory
arrest laws

- Higher arrest rates of women
- Arrests of survivors
- Arrest of the person suspected of causing the harm regardless of a survivor's wishes
- Unwanted involvement of child protective services
- Increased danger of retaliation from an abusive partner

"I was already in a fight with [my mom] a while ago and I was like, okay, I'm going to give her another chance. And we started arguing really bad, a scream fight. And... my boyfriend walked out. And then I went to walk out and I nudged my mom, and she turned around and ripped my hair, and then we got into a fist fight. And then we ran down the highway to his house. And then I got arrested. The cops found me there."

- 18 year old Native American and White woman,
Okanogan County

Drug-Related Charges

Drug-related charges comprise **10% or less** of admissions



6-10% of jail admissions across participating counties are for drug-related charges

Methamphetamine
was the most common
drug-related charge,
when substance was identified

Why are people **staying** in jail in Rural Washington?



2x

Across all counties, the charges corresponding with the **longest jail stays** were **drug-related** and **theft**. These charges resulted in about double the overall average length of stay.

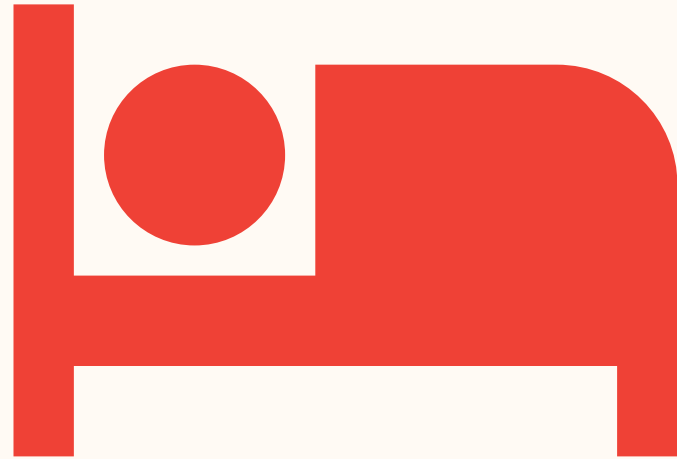
In Ferry County, FTA admissions averaged almost **9 days**.

In contrast, in three counties, the **shortest lengths of stays** were for driving under the influence (DUI) charges.



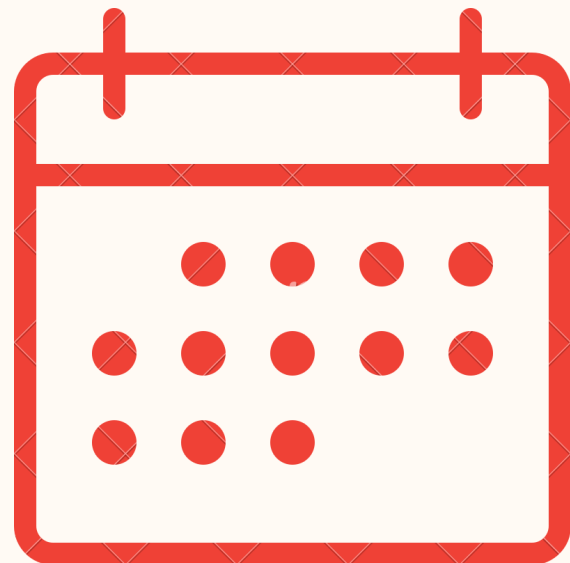
Shortest length
of stay

Holds for other criminal legal system agencies



Washington DOC contracts for county jail beds:

- **26 percent** of admissions in Ferry County are for DOC community custody violations
- **14 days average length of stay** in Grant County
- (11% of admissions, 9.9 days overall)



In Whitman county, people on U.S. Marshals holds stayed on average of **two and a half months in jail.**

This group brings up the average length of stay from **3.7 to 6.6 days** overall.

Disparities in the Jail Population

Racial disparities in rural Washington jails

2x

Across all counties, Black counties were represented in jail populations at **twice or more** their proportion of the county population

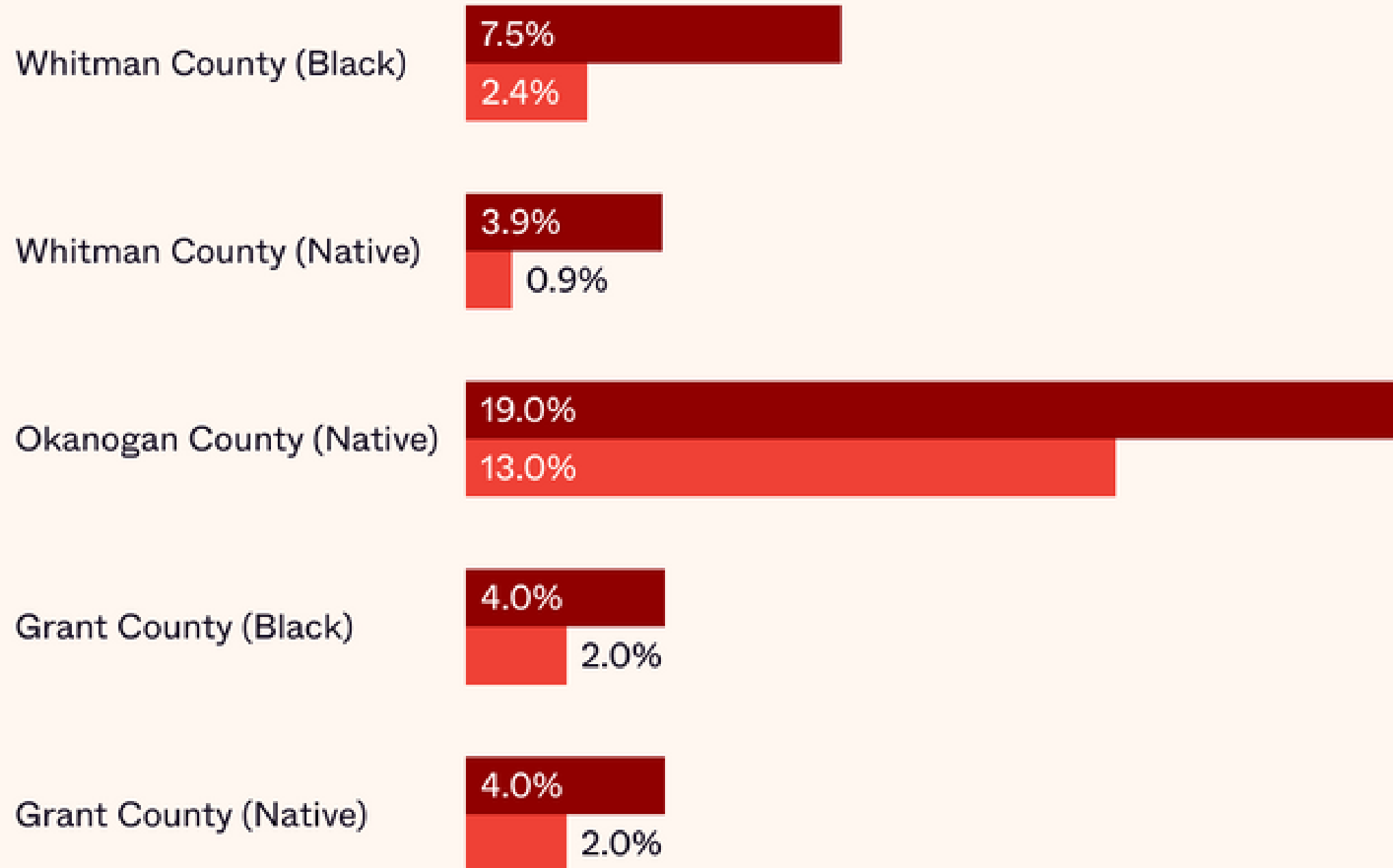
1.5 to 4x

Indigenous people were over represented in jail populations from **1.5 to 4 times** their proportion in the county population

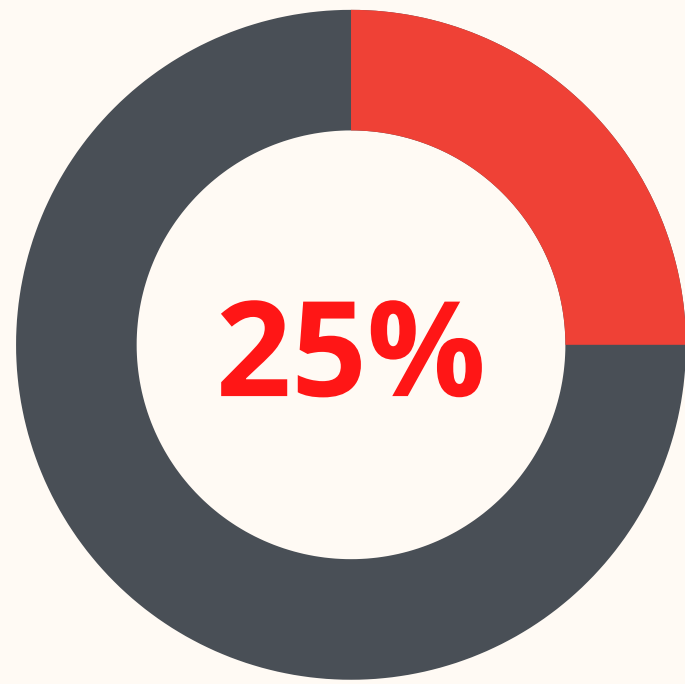
Racial Disparities in Rural Washington Jails

Jail populations are racially disproportionate for Black and Native populations

■ Percentage of jail population ■ Percentage of county population



Increasing Women's Population



Over a quarter of people in jail in participating counties are women - a proportion that has increased since 2000 in four of the five counties.



The rate of women in jail in Washington has increased over 5 fold from 1980 to 2019.

Most common charges driving women's admission

Penalties related to system rules, assault charges (mostly domestic violence-related), drug-related charges, DUI, and DWLS.

Policy Recommendations

Local policy recommendations



Require text reminders and provide support to help people get to required court hearings; use local authority to stop using jail as a penalty for failure to appear.



Use local authority to stop enforcement of DWLS 3.



Increase coordination with existing community organizations to support people affected by domestic violence.



Resist proposals for jail expansion or new jail construction

State-level policy recommendations



End the practice of driver license suspension for nonpayment of fines or for failing to appear in court.



Provide resources to rural counties to establish supportive pretrial services, ideally community-based.



End mandatory arrest for domestic violence law enforcement calls; direct support towards non-carceral responses to domestic violence.

Q & A

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Extra Information

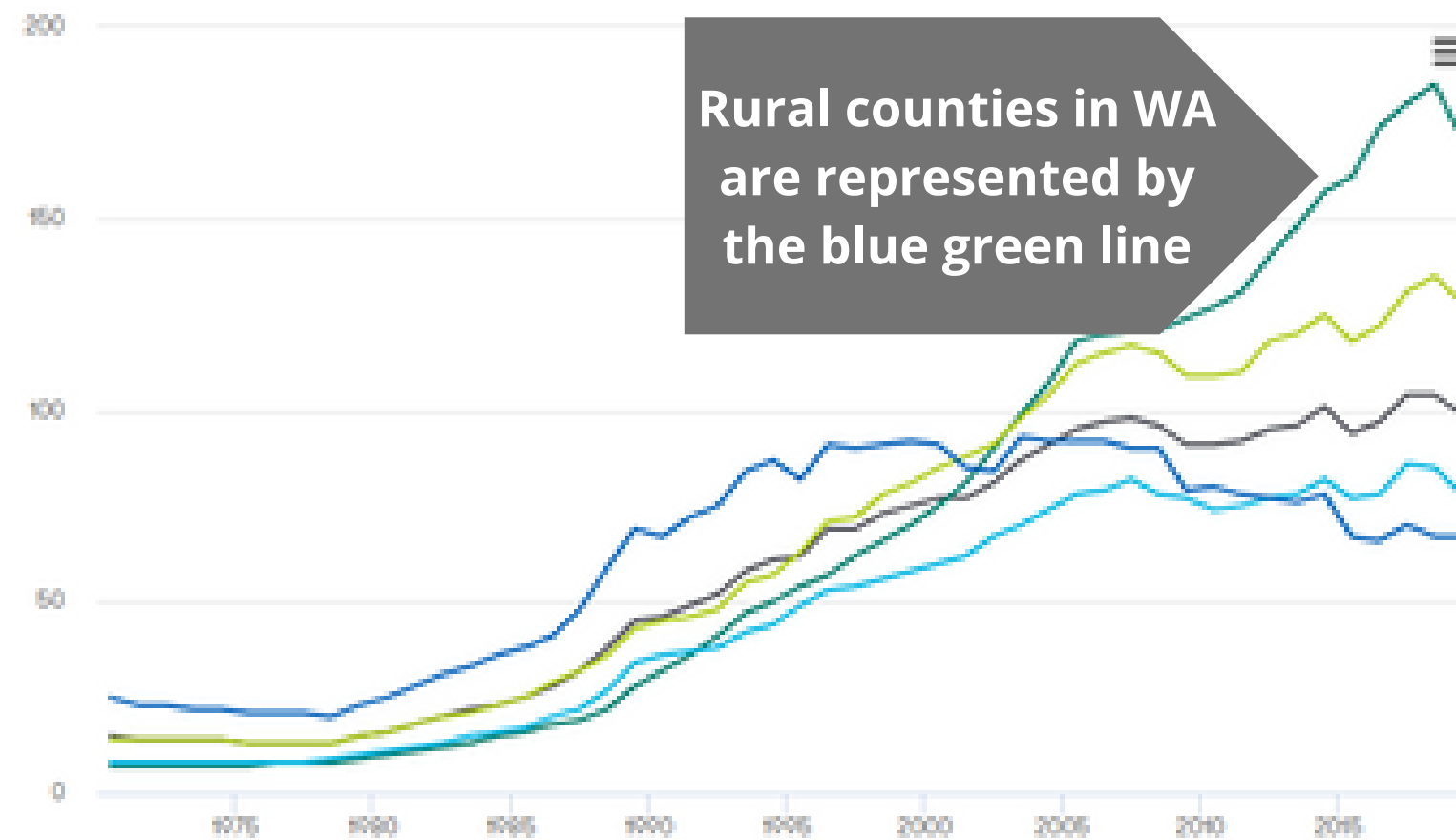
Women's Incarceration

The number of women held in local jails and prisons has grown exponentially in the last several decades, outpacing rates of growth for men. Today, women in the U.S. are incarcerated at over 10 times the level in 1970, and this increase has been primarily driven by rural counties. Women are particularly vulnerable to the harms of incarceration for several reasons: the majority of women in custody have experienced trauma, have unmet mental and physical health needs, are single mothers, and come from low-income communities of color. Use the charts below to compare women's incarceration rates in your state to the national average across the rural-urban spectrum.

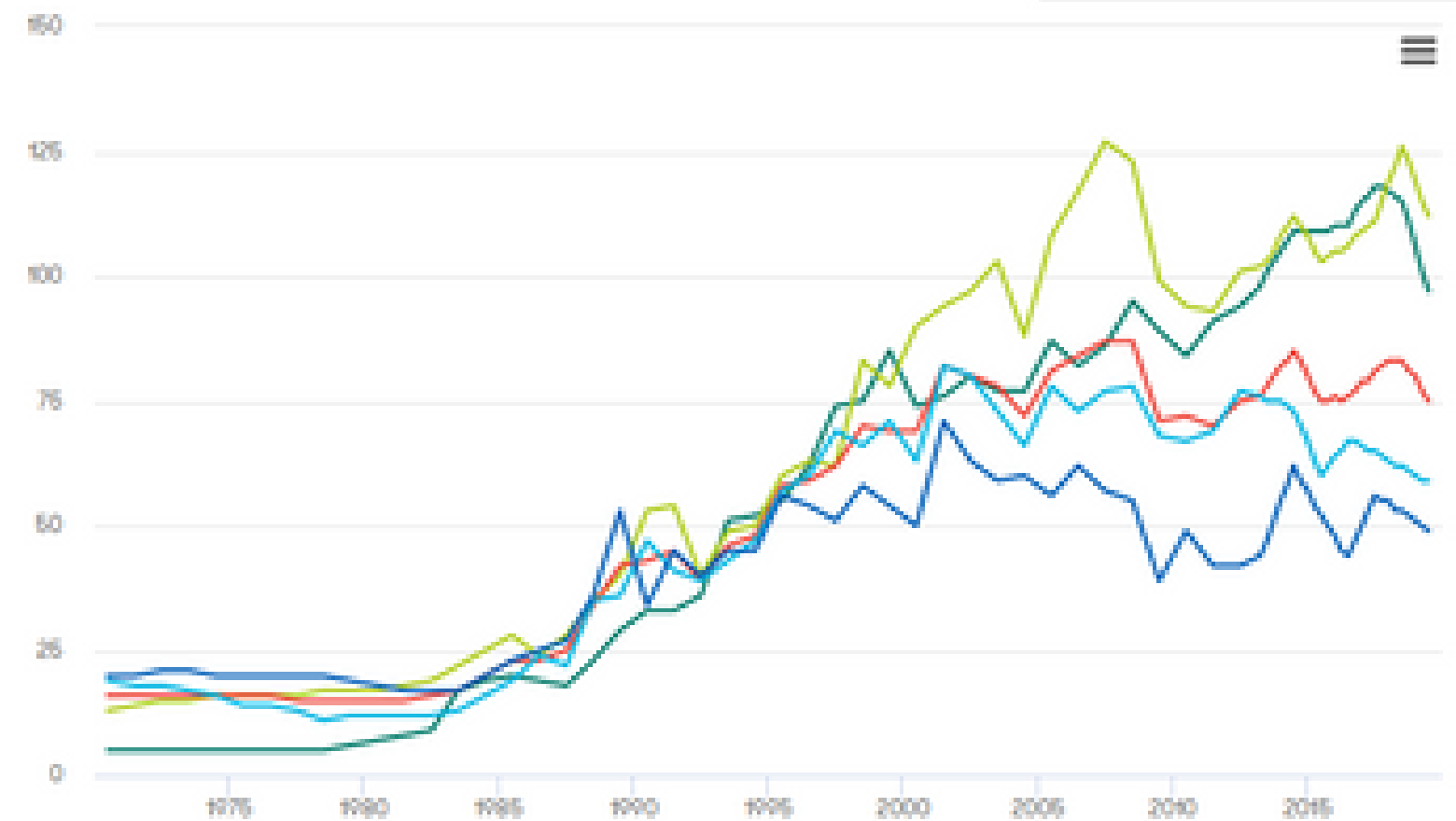
Number of women in jail per 100,000 residents ages 15 to 64

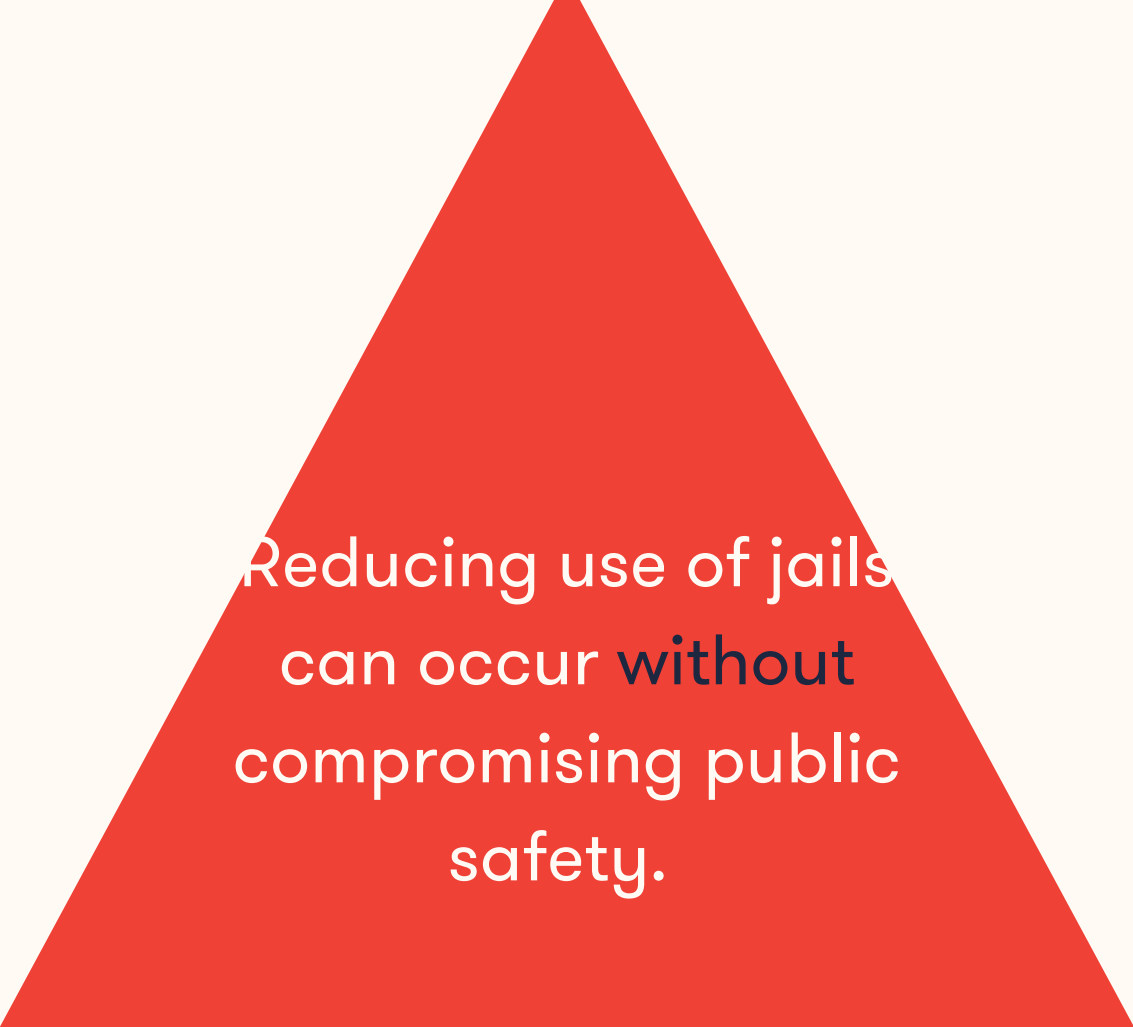
■ U.S. total ■ Rural counties ■ Small/midsize metro areas ■ Suburban counties ■ Urban counties ■ State total

National trend




State trend





Reducing use of jails
can occur without
compromising public
safety.

Rural jails in Washington are being used mostly to detain people for **minor charges**, including situations related to **poverty**, **substance use** and **domestic violence**.



Rural communities
should not be forced to
use limited resources and
infrastructure to
incarcerate people



Remind people of court dates and make documents more legible



Provide free, accessible transportation to court



Provide childcare options at court



Allow defense attorneys a reasonable window to produce their client before issuing a warrant



End the use of court-related fines and fees

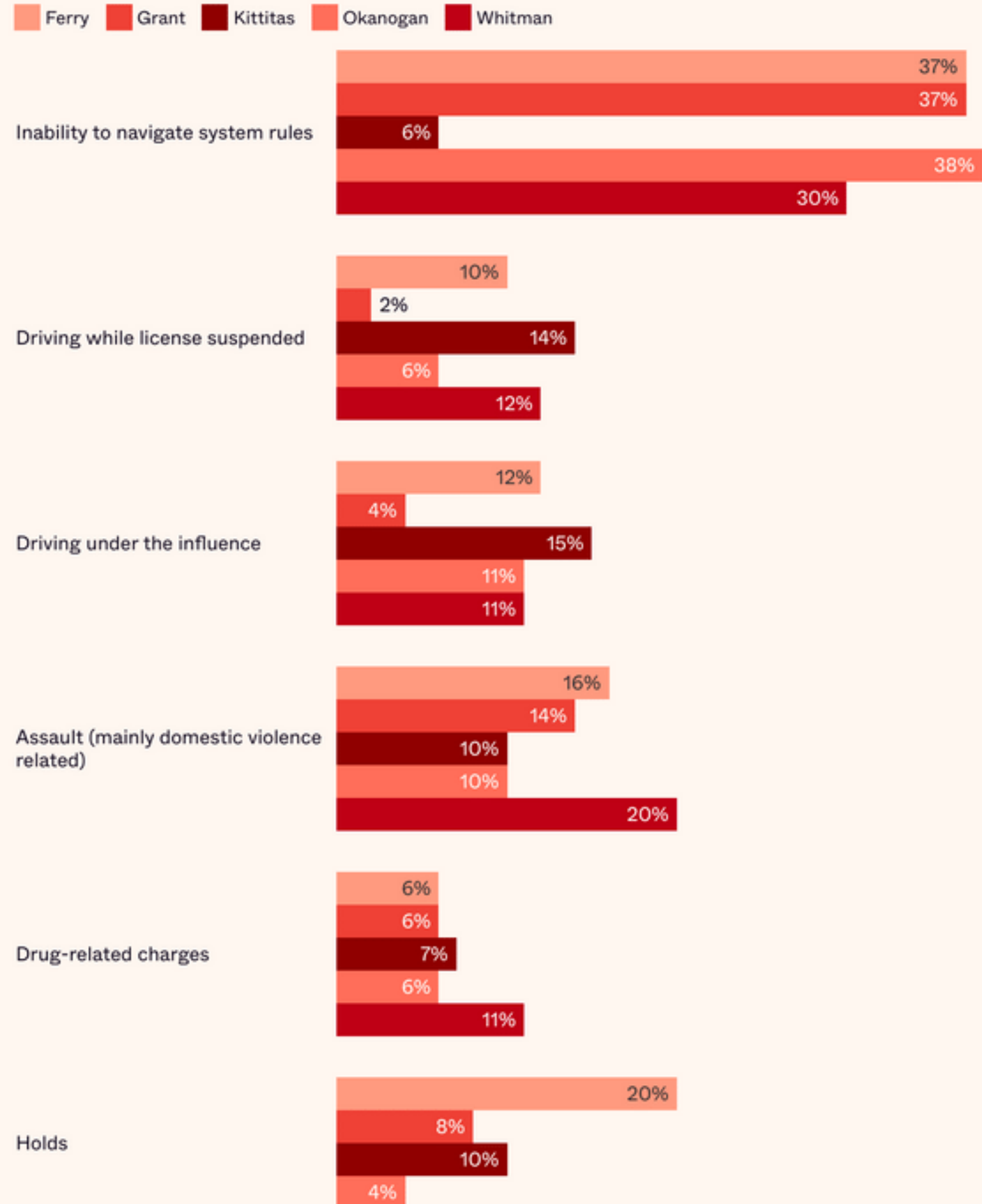
Key drivers for pretrial jail incarceration in participating counties:



Between 2015 to 2021

1. Penalties for problems navigating the criminal legal system
 - Top charge type in 4 of 5 counties
2. Driving with a suspended license
 - Top category in two counties: 14% in Kittitas and 12% in Whitman
3. Statewide mandatory arrest policies for domestic violence charges
 - Average 13-16% of bookings

Top charge type, percentage of pretrial bookings per county



Source: Washington Rural Jails Network analysis of county jail roster data