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U.S. | LAW

What Sam Bankman-Fried's Long Stretch in Prison Might Look Like

FTX founder could finish serving his sentence by age 50

By [Corinne Ramey](#) [Follow](#) and [James Fanelli](#) [Follow](#)

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Inmates can make ceramics or crochet at a federal prison in Lompoc, Calif. At a federal prison in Mendota, a few hours away, inmates can have a harmonica or play basketball on one of five facility courts.

Those prisons represent possible landing places for FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried, who will in coming months report to begin serving his 25-year sentence, imposed Thursday by U.S. District Judge Lewis Kaplan in Manhattan.

Kaplan recommended that the onetime entrepreneur be assigned to either a low- or medium-security prison near where his parents live in the San Francisco Bay Area.

In making the recommendation, the judge cited Bankman-Fried's low risk for violence and noted that his autism and association with wealth make him a target for other prisoners.



Sam Bankman-Fried has been in a Brooklyn federal jail since August and will likely remain there until he is assigned a prison. PHOTO: ED JONES/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

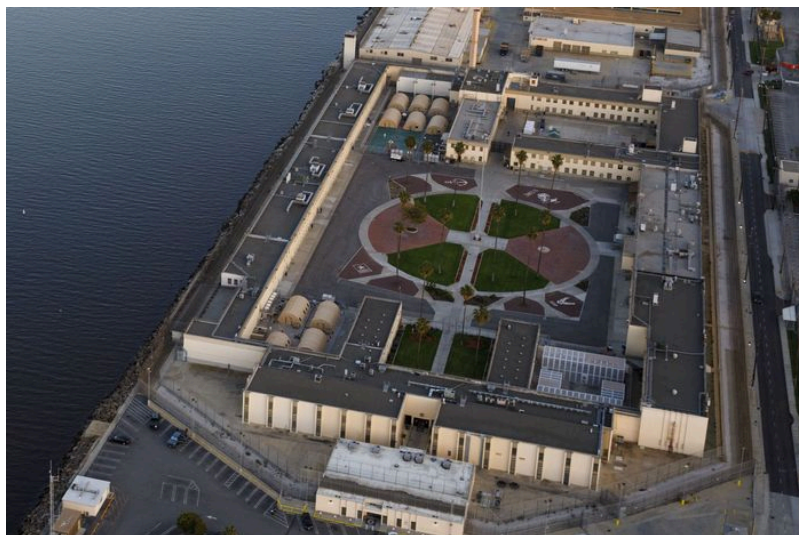
The prison's security level will play a significant role in how his experience unfolds. In a low-security facility, Bankman-Fried would likely sleep in dormitory-style housing and have more freedom to move around the prison. His bunkmates would more likely be fellow white-collar criminals.

In a medium-security prison, Bankman-Fried could be serving time with inmates with long sentences for violent crimes, including sex offenses. In some medium-security facilities, inmates sleep in cells.

“Medium-security prisons are going to be much more volatile,” said Justin Paperny, a prison consultant who works with white-collar criminals.

Ultimately, the decision on where Bankman-Fried is sent is up to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, which oversees 122 detention facilities around the country. The bureau may follow Kaplan's guidance and send Bankman-Fried to the West Coast. But it doesn't have to.

A spokesman for the bureau declined to discuss how it would determine Bankman-Fried's security designation, but said that in general the agency considers an inmate's required level of supervision, medical and programming needs, and other factors.



A prison consultant for Sam Bankman-Fried recommended he be sent to a low-security prison, such as Terminal Island in Los Angeles. PHOTO: PATRICK T. FALLON/BLOOMBERG NEWS

Bankman-Fried has already gotten a taste of life behind bars. He has been in a Brooklyn federal jail since August, when a federal judge revoked his bail after finding probable cause that he attempted to intimidate witnesses, a claim Bankman-Fried denied. Bankman-Fried's lawyer called the Metropolitan Detention Center "probably" the worst federal jail in the country.

In the jail, Bankman-Fried shared a dorm with a former Honduran president who was recently convicted of conspiring to traffic drugs. He also used packets of mackerel—an informal jailhouse currency—to get a haircut. The fish replaced cigarettes as a favored federal jailhouse currency after officials banned smoking.

Bankman-Fried will likely remain in the Brooklyn jail until he is assigned a prison.

Prison consultants estimated that Bankman-Fried was likely to serve from about 17 to 20 years total, due to credits for classes and good behavior that can shave time off one's sentence. This means Bankman-Fried, 32, will likely be close to 50 when he re-enters society.

In a court filing, a prison consultant hired by Bankman-Fried's lawyers recommended he be sent to a low-security facility. The consultant provided a list of prisons near the FTX founder's parents, who live within walking distance to Stanford University in California.

Possible low-security prisons included Terminal Island, in Los Angeles, and Lompoc, about an hour northwest of Santa Barbara, Calif.

The resources and activities available to inmates vary from prison to prison.

At Lompoc, for instance, inmates have access to various arts and crafts, according to the prison handbook. Inmates are assigned jobs, ranging from food service to factory work, which pay from 12 to 40 cents per hour, according to the Bureau of Prisons.

Mendota, a medium-security prison located southeast of San Francisco, is another possible option for Bankman-Fried, according to his consultant.

Mendota has an outdoor recreation yard that includes six handball courts, two softball fields, five basketball courts, one soccer field and one quarter-mile track, according to its handbook. Inmates also have access to treadmills and stair climbers. They are permitted one harmonica, but can play them only in recreation areas or in the music room, if selected as a band member.

In different security levels, “the atmospherics, the tension, the type of inmate are different,” said Joel Sickler, a federal prison consultant who previously worked in corrections. Bankman-Fried, he said, “will be OK at the low, but whether they can keep him safe at a medium is questionable.”

The first prison Bankman-Fried is assigned to might not be his last. Inmates in the federal system typically transfer to lower-security facilities as they serve out their sentences, said Bill Baroni, a lawyer and prison consultant.

“He will work his way to a low then to a camp,” said Baroni, referring to minimum-security facilities sometimes informally called Club Fed.

During his Thursday sentencing hearing, Bankman-Fried lamented his lack of usefulness. “At the end of the day, my useful life is probably over,” he told the judge. “I’ve long since given everything that I had to give.”

However, prison consultants said Bankman-Fried will likely make himself useful, by teaching classes or dispensing financial advice.

Paperny recommends to his clients that when they first arrive at prison, they lie low, observe their environment and let friendships happen organically.

“If you complain and condemn all day, your sentence will truly feel like a life sentence,” he said.

In any facility, Bankman-Fried, a vegan, will likely face dietary challenges.

Baroni, who was convicted of his role in the New Jersey Bridgegate scandal, said when he was incarcerated that the only vegetables served came from cans.

Bankman-Fried might be forced to rely on the commissary. Vegan options on the commissary list at Mendota include raw almonds, white rice and Skittles drink mix.

“He’s not going to a Just Salad,” said Baroni, whose conviction was subsequently tossed by the U.S. Supreme Court. “He’ll probably have to do a lot of peanut butter.”

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