



Jails in Indian Country, 2019–2020 and the Impact of COVID-19 on the Tribal Jail Population

SUMMARY | NCJ 300801

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A total of 2,020 inmates were held in 82 jails in Indian country at midyear 2020, a 30% decrease from the 2,890 inmates held in 83 facilities at midyear 2019. The midyear 2020 inmate population was the lowest since 2004, when 1,745 persons were confined in Indian country jails.

Impact of COVID-19

The decline in the Indian country jail population can be attributed mainly to the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact began in March 2020, with a 30% decline in the inmate population between the end of February and the end of March.

From March to June 2020, about 2,130 COVID-19 tests were conducted on persons held in Indian country jails, and about 9% of the tests were positive. During the same period, about 5% (85) of the 1,710 staff tested positive for COVID-19. One employee death was reported due to COVID-19 during this period. No inmate deaths due to COVID-19 were reported.

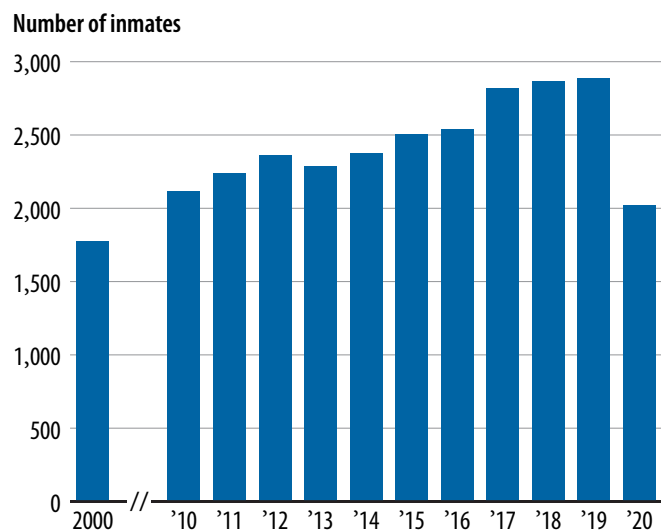
Inmate deaths in custody

One death was reported in Indian country jails during the 12 months ending June 30, 2020, based on valid data from 76 Indian country jails. Also, 75 jails reported 23 attempted suicides. Over the past 10-year period from 2010 to 2020, Indian country jails reported 20 deaths in custody.

Admissions and expedited releases

Since midyear 2019, the decline in the inmate population resulted from both a reduction in admissions to Indian country jails and expedited releases from March to June of 2020. Admissions decreased 45% from June 2019 to June 2020, from 9,620 persons to 5,330. Of the 21,190 persons admitted to Indian country jails from March to June of 2020, about 11% (2,300) received expedited release in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Number of inmates held in Indian country jails, midyears 2000 and 2010–2020



Note: Counts are as of the last weekday in June. For 2013 to 2020, data were imputed for nonresponse and rounded to the nearest 10. Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Annual Survey of Jails in Indian Country, 2000 and 2010–2020.

Indian country jails also became less crowded between midyear 2019 and midyear 2020. Less than half of bed space was occupied, dropping from 67% to 48%. Four facilities were operating above their rated capacity at midyear 2020, down from 10 at midyear 2019.

Inmate offenses

From midyear 2019 to midyear 2020, the number of inmates held for a violent offense increased 8% and the number held for a nonviolent offense dropped 44%. The number held for aggravated assault increased 29%, while the number held for domestic violence declined 6%. There was no change in the number of persons held for rape or sexual assault and other violent offenses.

The full report (*Jails in Indian Country, 2019–2020 and the Impact of COVID-19 on the Tribal Jail Population*, NCJ 300801), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics are available on the BJS website at bjs.ojp.gov.