



# Department of Justice



## Office of Justice Programs

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### **INDIAN COUNTRY JAILS SEE 30% DECREASE IN INMATE POPULATION ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

WASHINGTON — 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 Bureau of Justice Statistics announced today. The midyear 2020 inmate population was the lowest since 2004, when 1,745 persons were confined in Indian country jails.

The decline in the Indian country jail population can be attributed mainly to the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 on Indian country jails 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 county jails, and about 9% of the tests were positive. During the same period, about 5% (85) of the 1,710 staff in Indian country jails tested positive for COVID-19. Indian country jails reported the death of one staff member due to COVID-19 during this period. No inmate deaths due to COVID-19 were reported.

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 jail facilities reported 23 attempted suicides. Over the past 10-year period from 2010 to 2020, Indian country jails reported 20 deaths in custody.

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 to Indian country jails 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. Two-thirds of the decline in admissions occurred in facilities rated to hold 50 or more inmates.

Indian country jails 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.

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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%. At midyear 2020, the number of persons held for violent offenses accounted for 42% of all inmates held in Indian country jails. 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 report, *Jails in Indian Country, 2019–2020 and the Impact of COVID-19 on the Tribal Jail Population* (NCJ 300801), was written by BJS statistician Todd D. Minton. The report, related documents and additional information about BJS’s statistical publications and programs are available on the BJS website at [bjs.ojp.gov](https://bjs.ojp.gov).

The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for collecting, analyzing and disseminating reliable statistics on crime and criminal justice in the United States. Doris J. James is the acting director.

The Office of Justice Programs provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance and other resources to improve the nation’s capacity to prevent and reduce crime, advance racial equity in the administration of justice, assist victims and enhance the rule of law. More information about OJP and its components can be found at [www.ojp.gov](https://www.ojp.gov).

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