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U.S. JAIL POPULATION INCREASED WHILE PRISON POPULATION DECREASED IN 2021

The Bureau of Justice Statistics is announcing the release of statistical tables on *Jail Inmates in 2021* and *Prisoners in 2021*. Of note, the two incarcerated populations diverged in 2021, with the number of persons held in local jails increasing by 16% from 2020, while the number of persons in prison decreased 1%. Both populations decreased from 2019 to 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding the jail population, local jails held 636,300 persons on the last weekday in June 2021, up from 549,100 at midyear 2020. The number of males confined in local jails increased 15% from 2020 to 2021, while females increased 22%.

The racial and ethnic composition of people held in local jails remained stable from 2020 to 2021. At midyear 2021, about 49% of people in local jails were white, 35% were black, and 14% were Hispanic. American Indians or Alaska Natives; Asians, Native Hawaiians, or Other Pacific Islanders; and persons of two or more races together accounted for 2% of the total jail population.

At midyear 2021, 29% of persons held in jail (185,000) were convicted, either serving a sentence or awaiting sentencing on a conviction, while 71% (451,400) were unconvicted, awaiting court action on a current charge or held in jail for other reasons. Unconvicted people in jail accounted for 81% of the increase in the jail population from midyear 2020 to midyear 2021. Three-quarters (76%) of all persons incarcerated in local jails at midyear 2021 were held for felony offenses (485,700 persons) compared to 18% (114,000) for misdemeanors and 6% (36,600) for other types of offenses.

Based on the occupancy rate, jails are still less crowded than about a decade ago. At midyear 2021, about 70% of jail beds were occupied, which is higher than the occupancy rate of 60% at midyear 2020 but lower than the rates from 2011 to 2019, which ranged from 81% to 85%.

The number of persons supervised by local jails outside of a jail facility increased by 12,100 (31%) from midyear 2020 to midyear 2021. At midyear 2021, local jails supervised 50,800 persons in various programs, such as electronic monitoring, home detention, day reporting, community service, alcohol or drug treatment programs, and other pretrial supervision and work programs outside of a jail facility.

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Regarding the U.S. prison population, for the eighth consecutive year, the number of persons held in U.S. prisons declined, dropping from 1,221,200 at yearend 2020 to 1,204,300 at yearend 2021. The overall decline reflected a decrease in prison populations in 32 states that was offset by an increase in 17 states and the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). This one-year change is vastly different from 2019 to 2020, when 49 states (data for Idaho are not comparable) and the BOP had a decrease in the number of persons in prison, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The imprisonment rate for adult U.S. residents in state or federal prison serving a sentence of more than one year also declined (down 2%) from yearend 2020 to 2021, from 460 to 449 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 adult U.S. residents. Over the 10-year period from 2011 to 2021, the adult imprisonment rate declined 30%.

Among racial and ethnic groups, black persons had the highest imprisonment rate in 2021 (1,186 per 100,000 adult black residents), followed by American Indian/Alaska Natives (1,004 per 100,000), Hispanics (619 per 100,000), whites (222 per 100,000) and Asians (90 per 100,000). Compared to 2011, adult imprisonment rates declined for all racial and ethnic groups in 2021, including a 40% decrease for black persons, 37% for Hispanics, 34% for Asians, 27% for whites, and 26% for American Indian/Alaska Natives.

Regarding the offense for which people were imprisoned, more than 651,800 persons (62% of all state prisoners) were serving sentences in state prison for a violent offense at yearend 2020, the most recent year for which offense data were available. Forty-seven percent (66,500) of all persons in federal prison were serving time for a drug offense on September 30, 2021 (the most recent date for which federal prison offense data were available), and an additional 20% (28,500) of persons sentenced to federal prison were serving a sentence for a weapons offense.

At yearend 2021, private facilities contracted to state departments of corrections or the BOP held 96,700 persons, a 3% decrease from yearend 2020. Local jail facilities held an additional 65,400 state or federal prisoners, down 11% from yearend 2020. Together, private and local facilities housed more than 13% of the total U.S. prison population in 2021.

The findings in the *Jail Inmates in 2021 – Statistical Tables* report are based on data from BJS’s Annual Survey of Jails, which BJS has conducted annually since 1982, and Census of Jails, which BJS has conducted periodically since 1970. It is the 35th report in a series that began in 1982. Findings in the *Prisoners in 2021 – Statistical Tables* report, the 96th report in the series, are based on data from BJS’s National Prisoner Statistics program, which has collected data on the U.S. prison population annually since 1926.

[*Jail Inmates in 2021 – Statistical Tables*](#) (NCJ 304888) was written by BJS Statistician Zhen Zeng, PhD. [*Prisoners in 2021 – Statistical Tables*](#) (NCJ 305125) was written by BJS Statistician E. Ann Carson, PhD. The reports, related documents and additional information about BJS’s statistical publications and programs are available on the BJS website at 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. Alexis R. Piquero, PhD, is the director. More information about BJS and criminal justice statistics can be found at bjs.ojp.gov.

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