



Prisoners in 2020 – Statistical Tables

SUMMARY | NCJ 302776

DECEMBER 2021

In 2020, the number of persons held in state or federal prisons in the United States declined 15%, from 1,430,200 at yearend 2019 to 1,215,800 at yearend 2020. Only Alaska showed an increase (2%) in its prison population, while other jurisdictions showed declines of 7% to 31%. The number of persons sentenced to more than 1 year in state or federal prison decreased from 1,379,800 in 2019 to 1,182,200 in 2020. The combined state and federal imprisonment rate (the number of persons sentenced to more than one year in state or federal prison, per 100,000 U.S. residents) for 2020 (358 prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents) represented a decrease of 15% from 2019 (419 per 100,000 U.S. residents) and a decrease of 28% from 2010 (500 per 100,000 U.S. residents).

Effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on U.S. prisons

The COVID-19 pandemic was largely responsible for the decline in prisoners under state and federal correctional authority. Courts significantly altered operations for part or all of 2020, leading to delays in trials and/or sentencing of persons, and this was reflected in the 40% decrease in admissions to state and federal prison from 2019.

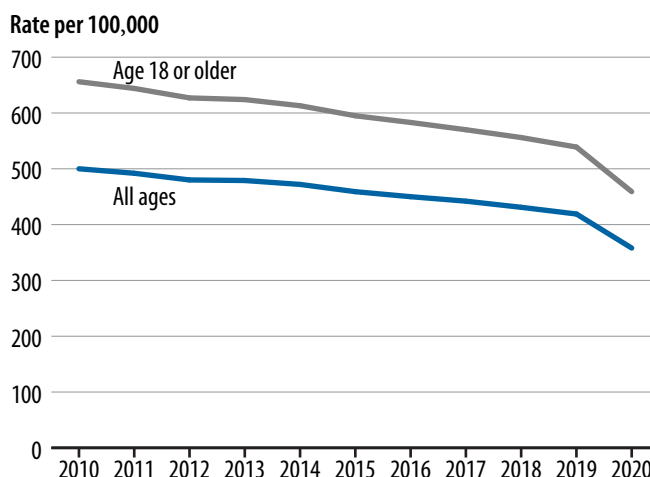
State and federal prison population

At yearend 2020, the number of prisoners under state or federal jurisdiction had decreased by 214,300 (down 15%) from 2019 and by 399,700 (down 25%) from 2009, the year the number of prisoners in the United States peaked. Nine states showed decreases in the number of persons in prison of at least 20% from 2019 to 2020. The prison populations of California, Texas, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons each declined by more than 22,500 from 2019 to 2020, accounting for 33% of the total prison population decrease.

Imprisonment rates

In 2020, the imprisonment rate was 358 prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents, the lowest since 1992. From

Imprisonment rate per 100,000 U.S. residents, by age, 2010–2020



Note: Imprisonment rate is the number of sentenced prisoners under state or federal jurisdiction per 100,000 U.S. residents. Rates are presented for all ages and age 18 or older as of December 31 of each year and are based on prisoners with a sentence of more than 1 year.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Statistics, 2010–2020; and U.S. Census Bureau, postcensal resident population estimates for January 1 of the following calendar year.

2010 to 2020, the imprisonment rate fell 37% among blacks; 32% among Hispanics; 32% among Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Other Pacific Islanders; 26% among whites; and 25% among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Admissions and releases

The number of admissions to federal prison (down 19,000) and to state prison (down 211,800) both declined by 40% from 2019 to 2020. Releases from federal and state prisons also decreased during 2020 (down 58,400 or almost 10% from 2019), but at a lower rate than the decrease in admissions. More than 6,100 persons died in state or federal prison during 2020, an increase of more than 1,900 (up 46%) deaths from 2019.

The full report (*Prisoners in 2020 – Statistical Tables*, NCJ 302776), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics are available on the BJS website at bjs.ojp.gov.