Census of Jails (COJ)

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About This Data

"The 2019 Census of Jails (COJ) is part of a series of data collections that studies the nation's local jails and the 12 Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) detention facilities that function as jails. The 2019 COJ collected data necessary for producing estimates on local jail populations, including one-day custody counts by sex, race and Hispanic origin, conviction status, and severity of offense (felony and misdemeanor); counts of non-U.S. citizens by conviction status; juvenile counts; holds for state and federal authorities; admissions and releases; and average daily population by sex. It also collected data on facility information, including rated and design capacity, staffing, and opioid testing and treatment programs. The COJ is the only collection that enumerates local jails and the 12 BOP facilities that function as jails in the United States and provides inmate counts at the jail facility level. It provides the sampling frame for the Survey of Inmates in Local Jails (SILJ) and the Annual Survey of Jails (ASJ)."[1]

[1] Zeng & Minton, 2009, para. 1

Methodology

"The Census of Jails (COJ) collects data on jail facilities and the inmate populations they supervise. Administered to nearly 3,200 local jails (city, county, regional, and private) nationwide and the 12 Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) detention facilities that function as jails, the COJ provides state and national estimates on the number of inmates confined in jails, characteristics of the jail population, counts of admissions and releases, and jail facility characteristics. The COJ includes all locally operated jails in 45 states and the District of Columbia, and 15 locally operated jails in Alaska. It excludes temporary holding facilities and state-operated facilities in Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The 2019 COJ collected data on facility characteristics and programs, including rated and design capacity, staffing, and opioid testing and treatment protocols. It also collected data necessary for producing estimates on local jail populations, including one-day custody counts by sex, conviction status, severity of offense (felony and misdemeanor), counts of U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens, juvenile counts, and holds for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other state and federal authorities, average daily population, admissions, releases, and turnover rates."[2]

[2] Zeng & Minton, 2009, sect. "Methodology"

Questionnaires

- The following image includes a sample of questions on form "CJ-3" (page 6 of 15)
  - CJ-3 is sent to "single-facility jails"
- Other forms include, but not limited to:
  - Jurisdiction Data (CJ-3A) - jail jurisdictions with multiple jail facilities having separate staff and budgets
  - Multi-Jurisdiction Facility (CJ-3B) - All confinement facilities including detention centers, jails, and other correctional facilities administered by two or more governments (or a board composed of representatives from two or more governments), intended for adults but sometimes holding juveniles.

[3] Zeng & Minton, 2009, sect. "Questionnaires: Census of Jails (CJ-3)"

Jail Incarceration Rates, By State

"At midyear 2019, there were 224 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents in the custody of local jails (figure 1, table 4). The jail incarceration rate ranged from a low of 103 inmates per 100,000 state residents in New Hampshire to a high of 700 per 100,000 in Louisiana. Eight of the 10 states with the highest jail incarceration rates were in the South—Louisiana (700), Kentucky (586), Mississippi (482), Tennessee (457), Georgia (422), Alabama (335), Virginia (332), and Arkansas (311).

From 2005 to 2019, the jail incarceration rate in the United States declined more than 11%, from 253 to 224 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents. The largest decline in the jail incarceration rate occurred in the District of Columbia, where the rate fell 58%, from 610 to 258 inmates per 100,000 district residents. Kentucky saw the largest increase in the incarceration rate, from 401 to 586 inmates per 100,000 state residents, a 46% increase."[4]
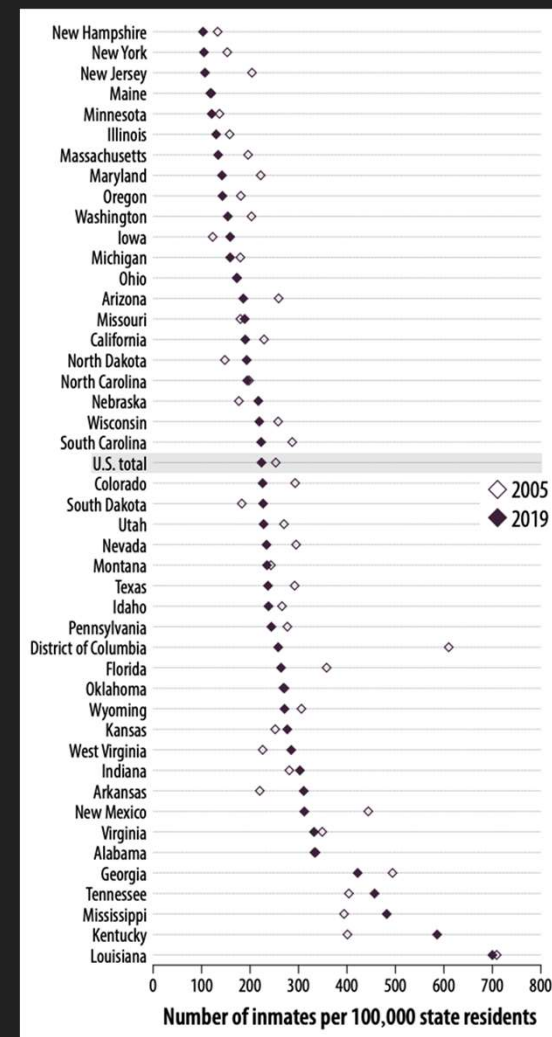
[4] Zeng & Minton, 2021a, para. 1-2

Other Highlights

- "At midyear 2019, a total of 734,470 persons were confined in local jails, and another 38,660 persons were supervised in programs outside of jail.
- From 2005 to 2019, the jail incarceration rate increased 10% for whites, 24% for American Indians and Alaska Natives, and 7% for Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders. The rate decreased 25% for blacks, 33% for Hispanics, and 38% for Asians.
- At midyear 2019, about a third of jail inmates (253,730) were sentenced or awaiting sentencing on a conviction, while about two-thirds (480,740) were unconvicted, awaiting court action on a current charge or held for other reasons.
- At midyear 2019, 97,540 inmates (13% of the total inmate population) were jailed for violating probation, and 28,950 (4% of the total inmate population) were jailed for violating parole."[5]

[5] Zeng & Minton, 2021b, sect. "Highlights"

New Insights

Based on the same data used in Zeng & Minton (2021a, "Figure 1: Jail incarceration rates, by state, 2005 and 2019"), the following represents the percent changes in incarceration rate from 2005 and 2019 broken out by region (Figure 1) and by state (Figure 2).

The states with the highest **decrease** in incarceration rates were District of Columbia (57.7%), New Jersey (47.5%), and Maryland (36.0%).

The states with the highest **increase** in incarceration rates were Kentucky (46.1%), Arkansas (41.4%), and North Dakota (30.4%).

Figure 1
Percent Change by Region in jail incarceration between 2005 and 2019
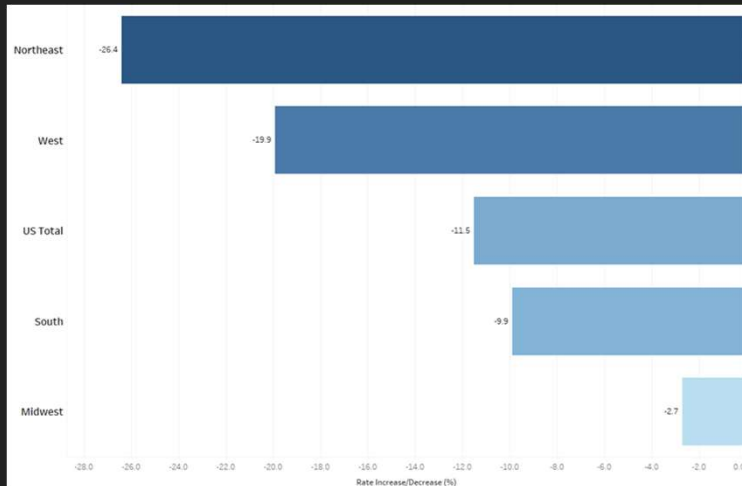
Figure 2
Percent Change by State in jail incarceration between 2005 and 2019
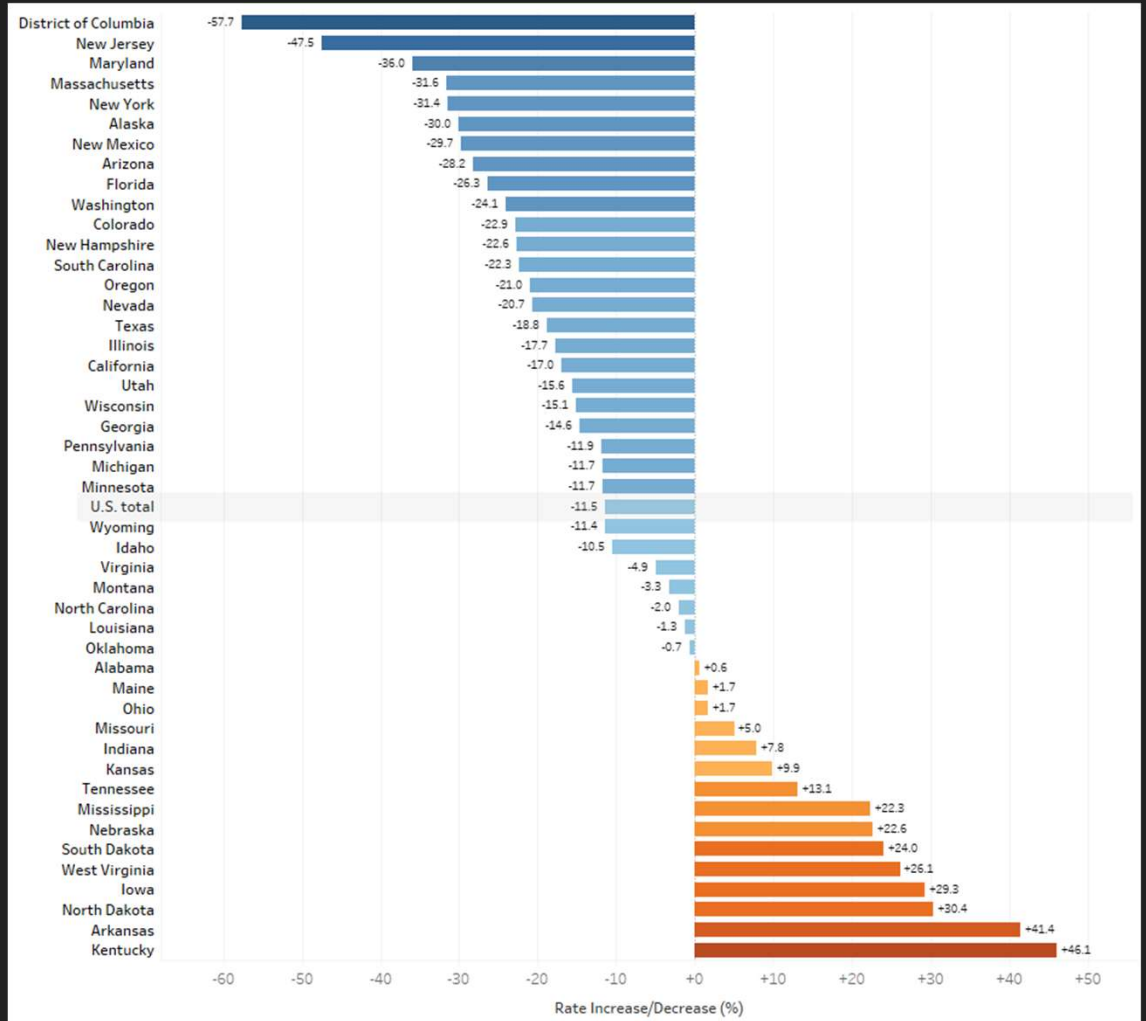
Ongoing Data Collection

"The 2019 Census of Jails (COJ) is part of [an ongoing] series of data collections that studies the nation's local jails."[6]

- Data Collection Status: **Active** [6]
- Frequency: **1970, 1972, 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1999, 2005/2006, 2013, 2019** [6]
- Years Produced: **Every 5 years** [7]

[6] Zeng & Minton, 2009, sect. "Introduction"
[7] The Regents of the University of Michigan, n.d., para. 2

Concerns?

- Pre-Aggregation
  - As seen in the sample questionnaire, data collected from individual facilities has been pre-aggregated which helps keep individual records secure
  - The issue with pre-aggregation is the data set doesn't allow to derive metrics by combining separate categorical data points (i.e. race/ethnicity and gender)
- Data integrity
  - Data is collected at a singular point in time and not collected throughout the year
    - Data changes based on seasonality cannot be tracked
  - Data is collected only every five (5) years
  - "the questionnaire is modified with each iteration to capture information on evolving issues in criminal justice and topics of greatest interest to users."[8] - while this might be good to accommodate evolving issues, this can make data comparison inconsistent between different years of collection

[8] Zeng & Minton, 2009, sect. "Changes Over Time"

Overall Impressions

- Topic
  - The concept of a "Census of Jails" is helpful to gather statistics around jail populations
  - These analyses can provide insights into unequal populations being impacted by incarceration and maybe outline ways to be more equitable
- Data set
  - The concept could improve if institutions were required to include an automated, anonymized file of individual inmates
  - The usability of the data could improve if data points/files were combined into one file with a "year collected" column included
- BJS Overall
  - My favorite feature are the "highlights" sections provided in each publication; this gives the reader some straightforward statistics about the analysis rather than combing through 50+ pages of documentation
  - I had an extremely hard time getting the raw data sets from each of the years collected (some years are not included in the download)

References

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