



Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

Prisoners at Midyear 1981

The prison population of the United States swelled by more than 20,000 during the first half of 1981 adding more persons to the rolls of the Nation's correctional institutions in 6 months than were added during the previous 12 months. On June 30, 1981, State and Federal correctional institutions held nearly 350,000 prisoners, compared with less than 330,000 yearend 1980 and 300,000 yearend 1977. The 6.2 percent increase during the first half of 1981 was equivalent to an annual growth rate of nearly 13 percent compared with increases of 4.5 percent in 1980 and just above 2 percent in 1979 and 1978. If this trend continues until yearend, prison population growth in 1981 will surpass the record set in 1975.

The number of Federal prisoners rose by 1,370 in the first half of 1981, reversing a trend that has cut the Federal prison population by one-fourth over

the previous three years. Federal authorities attributed this change to more aggressive law enforcement at the Federal level and to a more conservative Federal parole policy.

This issue of the Bulletin inaugurates the publication of midyear statistics on the Nation's prisoner population. These statistics, like the comparable annual data, are available only because of the high level of support and cooperation provided to the Bureau by State correctional officials throughout the country.

We have asked them to bear the extra burden of supplying population data each quarter because of the need to follow closely the mounting pressures on the Nation's correctional systems. To minimize the

additional reporting burden placed on the States, we have not sought to collect each quarter the full range of detailed statistics reported by the States at yearend.

These data are collected by the U.S. Census Bureau from the departments of corrections in the 50 States and the District of Columbia through the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Prisoner Statistics program.

Benjamin H. Renshaw III
Acting Director

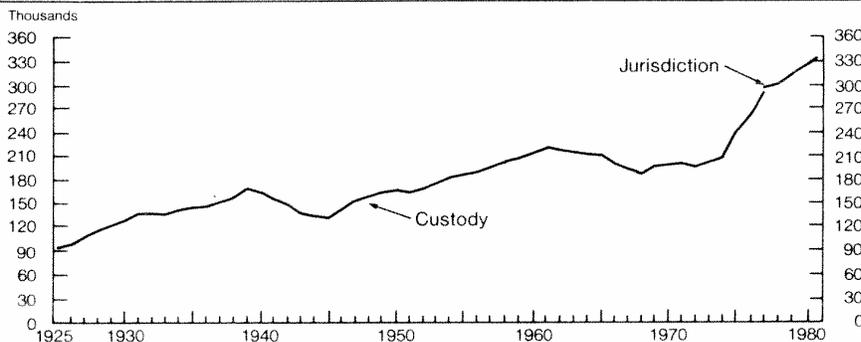
September 1981

The overwhelming part of the total increase, nearly 19,000, occurred in State institutions. To cope with expanding populations, State correctional authorities employed a wide range of measures including tents, prefabricated buildings, double bunking, and early release. Facilities in some States housed almost twice their rated capacities and other States were relying heavily on space in local jails.¹ These increases were felt in almost every State. Only five States, most in the West, reported population decreases during the first half of 1981.

The largest correctional system in the United States, the Texas system, surpassed 30,000 during the first half of the year, adding over 1,000 inmates. Compared with many other States the rate of increase (less than 4 percent)

¹The Bureau of Justice Statistics collects data on State prisoners housed in local jails on an annual basis at the end of each calendar year; it does not collect these data each quarter.

Number of sentenced State and Federal prisoners, yearend 1925 - midyear 1981



Note: Prior to 1979, NPS reports were based on the custody population. Beginning in 1978, focus is on the jurisdiction population. Both figures are shown for 1977 to facilitate year-to-year comparison.

Figure 1

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Table 1. Prisoners under jurisdiction of State and Federal correctional authorities, by region and State, yearend 1980 and first and second quarter 1981

Region and State	Total prison population			Percent change from 12/31/80 to:		Number of sentenced prisoners per 100,000 population 6/30/81 ^a
	12/31/80	3/31/81	6/30/81	3/31/81	6/30/81	
United States	328,695	338,087	349,118	+2.9	+6.2	147
Male	315,437	324,221	334,462	+2.8	+6.0	290
Female	13,258	13,866	14,656	+4.6	+10.6	12
Federal institutions	24,363	24,949	25,733	+2.4	+5.6	9
State institutions	304,332	313,138	323,385	+2.9	+6.3	137
Northeast	45,920	47,603	49,675	+3.7	+8.2	96
Maine	829	830	845	+0.1	+1.9	62
New Hampshire	326	346	360	+6.1	+10.4	39
Vermont ^b	480	523	512	+9.0	+6.7	77
Massachusetts	3,268	3,369 ^c	3,436 ^c	+3.1	+5.1	60
Rhode Island ^{b,d}	814	875	894	+7.5	+9.8	69
Connecticut ^b	4,308	4,421	4,366	+2.6	+1.3	89
New York	21,829	22,804	24,167	+4.5	+10.7	137
New Jersey	5,884 ^e	6,070	6,598	+3.2	+12.1	86
Pennsylvania	8,182	8,365	8,497	+2.2	+3.8	71
North Central	66,041	67,326	68,984	+1.9	+4.5	111
Ohio	13,489	15,058	14,454	+11.6	+7.2	134
Indiana	6,683	7,182	7,614	+7.5	+13.9	131
Illinois	11,899	12,228	12,532	+2.8	+5.3	97
Michigan	15,124	13,787 ^{c,f}	15,137	-8.8	+0.1	150
Wisconsin	3,980	4,037 ^g	4,099 ^g	+1.4	+3.0	87
Minnesota	2,001	2,013	2,063	+0.6	+3.1	51
Iowa	2,513	2,579	2,578	+2.6	+2.6	88
Missouri	5,524	5,700	5,598	+3.2	+1.3	114
North Dakota	253	309	295	+22.1	+16.6	45
South Dakota	635	639	648	+0.6	+2.0	91
Nebraska	1,446	1,219	1,255	-15.7	-10.4	69
Kansas	2,494	2,575	2,671	+3.2	+7.1	113
South	144,958	149,424	153,855	+3.1	+6.1	198
Delaware ^b	1,474 ^d	1,572	1,558	+6.6	+5.7	201
Maryland	7,731	7,945	8,377	+2.8	+8.4	199
District of Columbia ^{b,d}	3,145	3,271	3,412	+4.0	+8.5	439
Virginia	8,920	8,701	9,155	-2.5	+2.6	164
West Virginia	1,257	1,299	1,313	+3.3	+4.5	67
North Carolina ^d	15,382	16,141	16,095	+4.9	+4.6	256
South Carolina	7,862	8,033	8,257	+2.2	+5.0	247
Georgia	12,210	12,481	13,396	+2.2	+9.7	238
Florida	20,735	21,097	21,579	+1.7	+4.1	217
Kentucky	3,608	3,672	3,776	+1.8	+4.7	103
Tennessee	7,022	7,293	7,693	+3.9	+9.6	168
Alabama	5,961	6,442	6,932	+8.1	+16.3	173
Mississippi	3,374	3,874	3,855	+14.8	+14.3	150
Arkansas	2,925	3,013	3,156	+3.0	+7.9	138
Louisiana	8,889	8,988	9,269	+1.1	+4.3	220
Oklahoma	4,571	4,921 ^h	5,078	+7.7	+11.1	168
Texas ^c	29,892	30,681	30,954	+2.6	+3.6	218
West	47,413	48,785	50,871	+2.9	+7.3	113
Montana	738	790	829	+7.0	+12.3	105
Idaho	817	865	907	+5.9	+11.0	96
Wyoming	534	506	504	-5.2	-5.6	107
Colorado	2,792	2,747	2,630	-1.6	-5.8	91
New Mexico	1,461 ⁱ	1,461	1,404	0	-3.9	100
Arizona	4,372	4,521	4,777	+3.4	+9.3	175
Utah	932	1,019	1,083	+9.3	+16.2	73
Nevada	1,839	1,914	1,925	+4.1	+4.7	241
Washington	4,382 ^j	4,496	4,881	+2.6	+11.4	118
Oregon	3,170	3,063	3,082	-3.4	-2.8	117
California ^k	24,569	25,412	26,792	+3.4	+9.0	107
Alaska ^b	822	891	950	+8.4	+15.6	155
Hawaii ^b	985	1,100	1,107	+11.7	+12.4	72

NOTE: Yearend 1980 prisoner counts may differ from those in Prisoners in 1980 because reporting officials are given the opportunity to revise their submissions.

^a 1980 decennial census (April 1980) figures for resident population were used to calculate sentenced prisoners per 100,000 persons for both the States and the Nation as a whole. Sentenced prisoners in this case are prisoners with sentences longer than a year.

^b Figures include both jail and prison inmates; jails and prisons are combined into one system.

^c Figures for inmates under State jurisdiction but not State custody are not available.

^d Figure excludes persons with a split sentence of more than a year, part in prison and part on probation, unless prison portion exceeds one year.

^e Figure excludes 200 prisoners housed in local jails.

^f Figure is for March 1, 1981.

^g Figure excludes an unknown number of prisoners under jurisdiction of correction authorities but housed in mental institutions.

^h Figure includes approximately 120 escapees.

ⁱ Figure may be understated because of record-keeping backlog.

^j Figure excludes 85 State prisoners held in local jails.

^k Figures exclude adult inmates under the jurisdiction of the California Youth Authority.

was small, but the Texas inmate population had grown by nearly 13 percent in 1980. During the 18-month period the system absorbed 4,400 inmates and resorted to housing inmates in tents and having inmates sleep on floors.

The three other State prison systems that have populations of more than 20,000—California, Florida, and New York—also registered large gains. California's and New York's both topped 2,000 and Florida added 850. Both California and New York have relatively recent laws requiring mandatory imprisonment for conviction of certain violent offenses and drug offenses. California also has a habitual offender statute as well that requires imprisonment for repeat offenders. In both States these laws were cited as contributors to growth.

Other States with large increases during the six-month period were Georgia (1,200), Alabama (1,000), Ohio (1,000), and Indiana (900). Alabama's prison population increased by 27 percent in 1980 and 1981. State officials attribute the increase to a sharp rise in the crime rate in the State and less frequent use of probation. Alabama is one of many States under court order to reduce its prison population. Indiana, one of the States to abolish parole completely, has an inmate population that grew by 34 percent during the 1980-81 period and now faces what State officials call a crisis. Indiana State prison officials are admitting 100 more inmates each month than they release, and most State institutions are now at double their rated capacity. The increase is attributed to the combined effects of rising crime and the absence of parole.

	Number	Percent increase over previous period
Midyear 1981	348,695	6.2
Yearend 1980	328,695	4.5
1979	314,457	2.3
1978	307,276	2.4
1977	300,024	—

The largest numbers of inmates have been admitted to the prisons of the larger States, but smaller States have not been exempt from prison population pressures. For example, North Dakota, Utah, and Alaska, even though their combined prison population is less than 2,400, each experienced a rise in prison population of more than 15 percent during the first six months of 1981. If they each continue at the same rate until yearend they will experience annual growth rates of 36 percent (North Dakota), 35 percent (Utah), and 34 percent (Alaska).

All in all, 14 States posted gains of more than 10 percent during the first half of 1981, and another five States had gains of close to 10 percent. As unprecedented as these increases were, for several States they occurred on top of especially large increases during 1980, compounding the effect for the period as a whole. For example, prison populations increased by 25 percent or more during the 18-month period in six States: North Dakota (59 percent), Indiana (34 percent), Hawaii (29 percent), Alabama and Arizona (27 percent), and Alaska (25 percent). Both

State	12/31/79	6/30/81	Percent change
North Dakota	186	295	58.6
Indiana	5,667	7,614	34.4
Hawaii	856	1,107	29.3
Arizona	3,749	4,777	27.4
Alabama	5,464	6,932	26.8
Alaska	760	950	25.0
Colorado	2,668	2,630	-1.4
Minnesota	2,094	2,063	-1.5
Oregon	3,179	3,082	-3.1
New Mexico	1,556	1,404	-9.8

Alaska and Hawaii operate combined jail-prison systems, and part of their increase was in their jail population. Officials in Hawaii cited tightening up of bail and of release on own recognizance procedures as increasing their pretrial detainees and stricter parole procedures as increasing their sentenced population. North Dakota, which is not experiencing space problems, attributes its 59 percent increase to the boom atmosphere created by energy exploration.

Four States—Colorado, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Oregon—managed to decrease their prison populations during 1980 and 1981, but the combined decrease was only 320 inmates. In 1978 Colorado passed a presumptive sentencing law that reduced the average length of sentence served in that State. However, this effect has been largely offset by an increase in new court commitments. A Minnesota official attributes that State's lack of growth to sentencing guidelines that take into account prison capacity and to increased use of parole. New Mexico's decrease is part of the aftermath of the prison riot that occurred early in 1980. The use of probation in New Mexico has increased by 30 percent, resulting in a decrease of 17 percent in the number of inmates under a minimum-security classification. Oregon, under court order a year ago, has revised its parole guidelines and increased reliance on probation to hold down its inmate count.

Record increases in the prison population were accompanied by record incarceration rates.² The United States now imprisons 147 persons for every 100,000 in the general population. Incarceration rates vary

²Incarceration rates are based only on those prisoners sentenced to more than a year to minimize differences between States with combined jail-prison systems and those without.

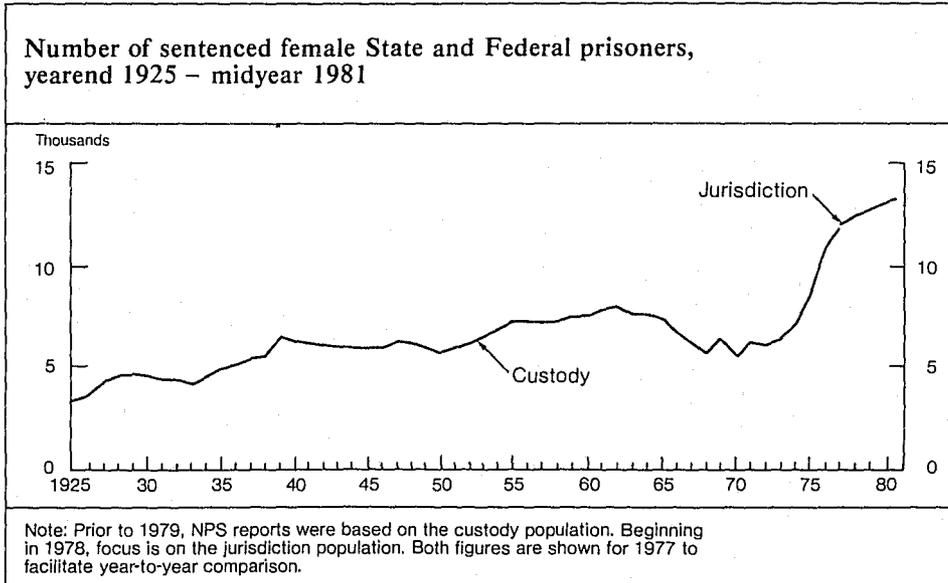


Figure 2

markedly among the States reflecting a wide range of factors from degree of urbanization to the age-sex composition of the population to social, economic, and cultural influences. On June 30, 1981, Vermont's incarceration rate was 39; North Carolina's was 256. Both States form part of a larger pattern. New England States tend to have the lowest incarceration rates and Southern States the highest. The District of Columbia, a wholly urban area, had a rate of 439 per 100,000 population.

The rate of growth for the female prison population during the first half of 1981 exceeded that for prisoners as a whole. During the first six months of 1981 the number of women in prison grew at a rate equivalent to 22 percent a year. At midyear the number of female inmates was 14,656, a gain of

1,400 in six months. This was by far the most substantial gain recorded in the female offender population since the series began in 1925. Nevertheless, women still constitute only 4.2 percent of the total prison population.

Further reading

The Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin Prisoners in 1980 reports prison population developments during 1980. A final report containing additional detail will be published later in 1981 under the title Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions on December 31, 1980. Annual reports under the same title are available for the years 1971 through 1979.

Other Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins include Measuring Crime,

February 1981, The Prevalence of Crime, March 1981, and Capital Punishment 1980, July 1981.

To obtain copies of any of these publications or to be added to the Bulletin mailing list, write to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Washington, D.C. 20531.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared principally by the staff of the Bureau. Carol B. Kalish, chief of policy analysis, edits the Bulletins; Marilyn Marbrook, head of the Bureau publications unit, administers their publication, assisted by Julie A. Ferguson. The principal author of this edition is Ms. Kalish.

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