

U.S. Department of Justice
Bureau of Justice Statistics



Prisoners 1979

in State and Federal Institutions on December 31

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Advance Report

The latest national prisoner count produced a record high of 314,000 imprisoned persons. More States than ever housed inmates in local jails to alleviate overcrowding in State prison systems. These developments marked a year in which the annual growth rate in the number of prisoners under the jurisdiction of State and Federal correctional authorities appeared to have leveled off just above 2 percent. A few jurisdictions with more substantial increases in inmates reported diminished use of probation and parole.

Although the number of prisoners under the jurisdiction of State and Federal correctional authorities on December 31, 1979, was a record for the fifth year in a row, the 2.3-percent increase over the 1978 yearend count was virtually unchanged from that recorded in the preceding year.¹ Inmates in State institutions increased by 3.8 percent, slightly higher than the 3.5 figure for 1978. For the second year in a row, Federal institutions experienced a net reduction in the number of prisoners, reflecting the continued high priority accorded to efforts to relieve overcrowding and to the prosecution of individuals implicated in white collar and organized crime. Such cases require longer processing time and result in relatively fewer commitments.

The exceptionally high rate of growth in the prison population sustained in 1975 and 1976 was moderated in 1977 and 1978 and appears to have leveled off in 1979. Nonetheless, over the past 5 years the prison population has increased by about a third, adding some 76,000 inmates to the Nation's prisons.

The slowdown in the growth of the overall prison population did not occur uniformly in all States. Of the 40 jurisdictions that registered increases in 1979, 31 did so at a pace higher than the average for State institutions. In all, 13 States had increases of 10 percent or more. Of these, those with the largest prisoner populations (Indiana, Mississippi, Oregon, and Tennessee) attributed their increases to large numbers of new court commitments, often stemming from the reluctance of judges to impose probation as an alternative to incarceration.² In addition, some States were granting fewer releases on parole.

Texas continued to hold the largest number of prisoners (26,522), followed by California (22,628) and New York (21,158). Together, these three States accounted for two-fifths of the total increase in the State prison population.

¹Yearend 1978 prisoner counts shown in the accompanying table may differ from those found in *Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions on December 31, 1978*, because reporting officials are given the opportunity to update NPS records. All data in this report are preliminary and subject to revision.

²The observation excludes States with a combined jail/prison system. Connecticut actually had a larger overall

Florida, the fourth-ranking State with 20,133 prisoners, had a 6-percent decline, largely because the retroactive application of new parole guidelines resulted in a large number of releases.

On a regional basis, the West, as in 1978, had the highest relative increase in prisoners (5 percent) and the North Central area had the lowest (2 percent). Both had lower increases than in 1978, while the Northeast and the South, each with a 4-percent rise, experienced higher growth than a year earlier.

For the second consecutive year, the relative increase for women prisoners was about half that of the previous year, and for the first time in almost a decade it was lower than that for men--1.5 vs. 2.3 percent. Triggered by a 27-percent drop in the number of imprisoned women with short sentences or no sentences, the relatively low overall rise contrasted sharply with the extremely high increases registered from 1974 through 1976.³ However, the number of women serving sentences of more than a year rose appreciably (4.2 percent). As a proportion of all State and Federal prisoners, the number of women inmates remained at 4 percent.

Correctional authorities in 15 States, the largest number on record, housed some prisoners in local jails because of overcrowding in State-operated facilities. The total number of such prisoners (6,421) accounted for 2 percent of the entire State prisoner population, almost the same as in the previous year.

Prisoners with sentences of more than 1 year, who accounted for 96 percent of all inmates, increased by 3 percent. Those with shorter or no sentences dropped 5 percent, continuing the steady decline registered by this group over the past several years. All of this decline occurred at the State level, with the 11-percent State decrease partially offset by an 11-percent Federal increase. State prisoners with sentences of over 1 year, the single largest segment of the Nation's prison population, increased by exactly the same proportion as in 1978--4.3 percent.

Additional details from the 1979 inmate count will be contained in a final report to be published this year. Data in this report were collected through the National Prisoner Statistics program for the Bureau of Justice Statistics by the Bureau of the Census.

inmate population than Mississippi or Oregon, but its increase centered on inmates with sentences of a year or less, whose number rose by 45 percent.

³Examples of unsentenced inmates are those held for safekeeping, those undergoing presentencing evaluation, narcotics addicts under civil (i.e., non-criminal) commitment, and, in the seven jurisdictions operating a combined jail/prison system, those held awaiting trial or sentencing.

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**Prisoners under jurisdiction of State and Federal correctional authorities
on December 31, 1978, and December 31, 1979, by region and State.**

Region and State	Total			Maximum length of sentence					
	1979	1978	Percent change	More than a year			Year or less (and unsentenced)		
				1979	1978	Percent change	1979	1978	Percent change
United States	314,083	307,159	2.3	301,849	294,299	2.6	12,234	12,860	-4.9
Male	301,156	294,418	2.3	289,762	282,701	2.5	11,394	11,717	-2.8
Female	12,927	12,741	1.5	12,087	11,598	4.2	840	1,143	-26.5
Federal institutions	26,233	29,803	-12.0	22,450	26,391	-14.9	3,783	3,412	10.9
State institutions	287,850	277,356	3.8	279,399	267,908	4.3	8,451	9,448	-10.6
Northeast	44,184	42,316	4.4	41,379	40,066	3.3	2,805	2,250	24.7
Maine ¹	789	711	11.0	641	577	11.1	148	134	10.4
New Hampshire	316	283	11.7	316	283	11.7	0	0	...
Vermont ²	411	464	-11.4	286	374	-23.5	125	90	38.9
Massachusetts ¹	2,949	2,833	4.1	2,920	2,812	3.8	29	21	38.1
Rhode Island ²	746	664	12.3	565	524	7.8	181	140	29.3
Connecticut ²	4,061	3,489	16.4	2,139	2,163	-1.1	1,922	1,326	44.9
New York ¹	21,158	20,189	4.8	21,158	20,189	4.8	0	0	...
New Jersey ³	5,875	5,869	0.1	5,562	5,422	2.6	313	447	-30.0
Pennsylvania	7,879	7,814	0.8	7,792	7,722	0.9	87	92	-5.4
North Central	63,124	61,702	2.3	62,500	60,465	3.4	624	1,237	-49.6
Ohio	13,353	13,107	1.9	13,353	13,107	1.9	0	0	...
Indiana	5,667	4,923	15.1	5,270	4,396	19.9	397	527	-24.7
Illinois	11,211	11,258	-0.4	11,165	10,765	3.7	46	493	-90.7
Michigan ¹	15,054	14,944	0.7	15,054	14,944	0.7	0	0	...
Wisconsin	3,650	3,433	6.3	3,650	3,433	6.3	0	0	...
Minnesota	2,094	1,965	6.6	2,094	1,965	6.6	0	0	...
Iowa	2,214	2,065	7.2	2,204	2,044	7.8	10	21	-52.4
Missouri	5,555	5,637	-1.5	5,555	5,637	-1.5	0	0	...
North Dakota	220	200	10.0	170	138	23.2	50	62	-19.4
South Dakota	562	532	5.6	539	505	6.7	23	27	-14.8
Nebraska	1,254	1,347	-6.9	1,156	1,242	-6.9	98	105	-6.7
Kansas	2,290	2,291	(Z)	2,290	2,289	(Z)	0	2	-100.0
South	136,456	131,401	3.8	133,441	127,803	4.4	3,015	3,598	-16.2
Delaware ²	1,427	1,325	7.7	1,096	1,005	9.1	331	320	3.4
Maryland ¹	7,860	7,966	-1.3	7,860	7,966	-1.3	0	0	...
District of Columbia ²	2,973	2,844	4.5	2,599	2,530	2.7	374	314	19.1
Virginia ³	8,449	8,344	1.3	8,200	7,882	4.0	249	462	-46.1
West Virginia	1,251	1,185	5.6	1,251	1,185	5.6	0	0	...
North Carolina ¹	14,271	13,252	7.7	13,602	12,268	10.9	669	984	-32.0
South Carolina ¹	7,643	7,396	3.3	7,115	6,990	1.8	528	406	30.0

Georgia	12,098	11,403	6.1	11,658	10,919	6.8	440	484	-9.1
Florida ¹	20,133	21,436	-6.1	19,792	21,243	-6.8	341	193	76.7
Kentucky	3,691	3,390	8.9	3,691	3,390	8.9	0	0	...
Tennessee ¹	6,626	5,835	13.6	6,626	5,835	13.6	0	0	...
Alabama ¹	5,343	5,472	-2.4	5,343	5,376	-0.6	0	96	-100.0
Mississippi ¹	3,458	2,896	19.4	3,375	2,633	28.2	83	263	-68.4
Arkansas	2,937	2,605	12.7	2,937	2,529	16.1	0	76	-100.0
Louisiana ¹	7,693	7,291	5.5	7,693	7,291	5.5	0	0	...
Oklahoma ¹	4,081	4,186	-2.5	4,081	4,186	-2.5	0	0	...
Texas	26,522	24,575	7.9	26,522	24,575	7.9	0	0	...
West	44,086	41,937	5.1	42,079	39,574	6.3	2,007	2,363	-15.1
Montana ¹	722	690	4.6	718	680	5.6	4	10	-60.0
Idaho	830	802	3.5	830	802	3.5	0	0	...
Wyoming	498	433	15.0	498	433	15.0	0	0	...
Colorado	2,493	2,486	0.3	2,483	2,474	0.4	10	12	-16.7
New Mexico	1,547	1,593	-2.9	1,457	1,505	-3.2	90	88	2.3
Arizona	3,496	3,456	1.2	3,496	3,450	1.3	0	6	-100.0
Utah	960	911	5.4	957	908	5.4	3	3	0.0
Nevada	1,566	1,350	16.0	1,566	1,350	16.0	0	0	...
Washington ³	4,507	4,563	-1.2	4,507	4,563	-1.2	0	0	...
Oregon	3,218	2,891	11.3	3,215	2,885	11.4	3	6	-50.0
California	22,628	21,325	6.1	21,258	19,550	8.7	1,370	1,775	-22.8
Alaska ²	760	712	6.7	532	490	8.6	228	222	2.7
Hawaii ²	861	725	18.8	562	484	16.1	299	241	24.1

NOTE: For Maine and Vermont, 1979 figures that distinguish between prisoners sentenced to more than 1 year and those with shorter or no sentences are estimates. Maryland figures for inmates sentenced to more than 1 year include approximately 6 percent with shorter or no sentences. For Tennessee, the figure for inmates sentenced to more than 1 year includes those with sentences of exactly 1 year. The Arkansas figure for inmates sentenced to 1 year or less will be available in the final report. All data for Texas are custody figures, as jurisdiction counts are not provided.

Z Insignificant change.

... Not applicable.

¹Figures for 1979 include the following number of inmates held in local jails because of overcrowding in State institutions: Alabama

(1,317), Florida (229), Louisiana (872), Maine (39), Maryland (392), Massachusetts (77), Michigan (52), Mississippi (1,362), Montana (2), New York (263), South Carolina (630), and Tennessee (214). All of those States except Maine and Montana also held such inmates in 1978.

²Both 1978 and 1979 figures include jail and prison inmates, as jails and prisons form a combined system within the jurisdiction. In both years, figures for all District of Columbia facilities except two--the D.C. Jail and the D.C. Detention Center--include inmates with a maximum sentence of a year or less or with no sentence.

³Figures for 1979 exclude the following number of inmates held in local jails because of overcrowding in State institutions: New Jersey (31), Virginia (811), and Washington (130). New Jersey and Virginia also held such inmates in 1978.

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