

Changes in North Carolina Jail Populations During COVID-19

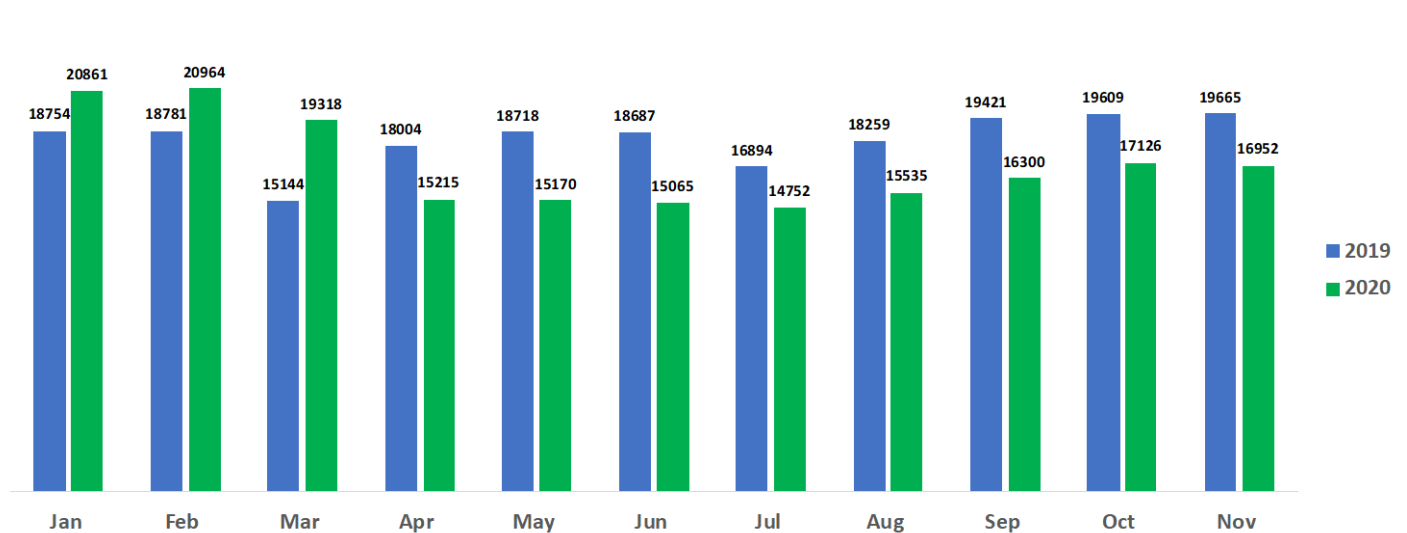
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We have issued a series of reports on North Carolina state and county-level jail occupancy rates, including one in October 2020 focusing on changes in total county and statewide jail occupants during the COVID-19 pandemic (our earlier reports are [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). This report provides updated jail population numbers through November 2020. Please refer to our prior reports for information on data sources and calculations.

State Level Data

In February 2020, before COVID-19 began impacting North Carolina, the statewide jail population was 20,964, a figure above the 2019 rate for that month. Starting in March 2020—the onset of the pandemic—the statewide population started dropping, hitting a low of 14,752 in July 2020. While all 2020 monthly populations from April onward were below 2019 numbers, since July 2020 the statewide rate has been increasing. The statewide jail population grew in August, September, and October of 2020, hitting 17,126 in October before declining slightly in November to 16,952. (Figure 1)

Figure 1. Number of individuals detained in jail statewide—January through November, 2019 & 2020



Monthly Net Change in Jail Occupants - 2019 to 2020										
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
2107	2183	4174	-2789	-3548	-3622	-2142	-2724	-3121	-2483	-2713

Note: Figure 1 shows a significant decline in the statewide jail population in March 2019. However, in March 2019 a large number of facilities—40 of 114—did not report jail data. As a result, the March 2019 figure is artificially low.

County Level Data

Because statewide data can hide variation at the local level, we also looked at county level jail population changes. At the local level, the vast majority of jails reporting data had lower populations in November 2020 as compared to February 2020. Specifically, of the 90 counties accepting occupants in those months that reported data¹, 82 (91.1%) had November populations that were below pre-pandemic levels. Population declines ranged from 1 to 324 persons; in terms of percentage change, declines ranged from .6% to 65.1%. One county experienced no population change between February and November. Ten counties experienced increased populations. In terms of persons, increases ranged from 2 to 18 occupants; in terms of percentage change, increases ranged from 1.4% to 50.0%. Table 1 presents these changes.

Table 1. County level changes in jail occupants—February to November, 2020

County	Change in Occupants: Feb - Nov	Percentage Change in Occupants: Feb - Nov	County	Change in Occupants: Feb - Nov	Percentage Change in Occupants: Feb - Nov	County	Change in Occupants: Feb - Nov	Percentage Change in Occupants: Feb - Nov
Guilford	-324	-31.1%	Pitt	-42	-9.6%	Yancey	-12	-33.3%
Forsyth	-222	-26.2%	Caswell	-41	-65.1%	New Hanover	-11	-2.0%
Cumberland	-212	-29.4%	Surry	-38	-20.3%	Union	-11	-4.3%
Alamance	-163	-34.7%	Columbus	-37	-21.0%	Halifax	-11	-13.4%
Rowan	-149	-38.9%	Vance	-37	-23.9%	Chowan	-11	-33.3%
Cabarrus	-149	-42.7%	Alexander	-37	-35.9%	Polk	-10	-19.6%
Onslow	-146	-35.3%	Dare	-36	-43.9%	Lee	-9	-6.8%
Buncombe	-132	-25.0%	Bertie	-35	-38.0%	Yadkin	-9	8.9%
Wilson	-112	-45.2%	Chatham	-33	-33.7%	Watauga	-9	-10.8%
Wake	-91	-7.2%	Transylvania	-32	-40.5%	Henderson	8	-4.1%
Wayne	-86	-20.7%	Montgomery	-31	-31.3%	Franklin	-8	-4.3%
Nash	-82	-41.0%	Greene	-29	-40.8%	Swain	-8	-7.8%
Caldwell	-79	-40.9%	Hertford	-27	-37.5%	Richmond	-7	-6.4%
Hoke	-75	-42.6%	Carteret	-26	-16.8%	Currituck	-7	-20.6%
Lenoir	-73	-28.7%	Haywood	-26	-19.1%	Jones	-7	-36.8%
Davidson	-72	-21.9%	Bladen	-23	-14.2%	Alleghany	-6	-24.0%
Cleveland	-66	-20.4%	Rutherford	-22	-11.2%	Craven	-2	-0.6%
Johnston	-64	-20.7%	Stanly	-22	-14.9%	Clay	-2	-5.4%
Wilkes	-64	-27.2%	Davie	-22	-35.5%	Beaufort	-1	-2.4%
Gaston	-60	-9.6%	Moore	-21	-12.9%	Washington	0	0.0%
Robeson	-60	-16.3%	Scotland	-21	-15.9%	Macon	2	2.2%
Sampson	-59	-21.0%	Duplin	-21	-18.4%	Pasquotank	3	1.4%
Mecklenburg	-57	-3.8%	Catawba	-20	-7.2%	Avery	5	11.6%
Orange	-54	-46.2%	Iredell	-19	-6.6%	Graham	6	50.0%
Person	-49	-45.8%	Rockingham	-18	-8.6%	Harnett	9	3.5%
Randolph	-48	-17.1%	Northampton	-17	-23.6%	Burke	10	7.6%
Durham	-47	-12.1%	Cherokee	-16	-11.9%	Madison	11	18.3%
Ashe	-46	-33.6%	Stokes	-16	-12.0%	Pender	14	26.9%
Edgecombe	-45	-22.3%	Jackson	-16	-24.2%	McDowell	14	8.3%
Lincoln	-43	-25.7%	Warren	-14	-35.9%	Brunswick	18	8.9%

¹ Facilities in Anson, Granville, and Pamlico did not report data in November.

As noted above, the statewide population hit a low in July 2020 and then rose in August, September, and October before dropping slightly in November. Not surprisingly, at the county level most jails experienced increased populations during this period. Of the 89 counties with open facilities that reported data during that period², only 10 (11.2%) experienced declining jail populations. In terms of persons, decreases ranged from 1 to 15 occupants; in terms of percentage change, they ranged from 2.0% to 14.9%. (Table 2)

Table 2. Counties with Decreases in Jail Population—July to November, 2020

County	Change in Occupants: July - Nov	Percentage Change in Occupants: July - Nov
Onslow	-15	5.3%
Davie	-7	14.9%
Dare	-7	13.2%
Lee	-6	4.7%
Person	-4	6.5%
Surry	-3	2.0%
Transylvania	-2	4.1%
Chatham	-2	3.0%
Alleghany	-1	5.0%
Jackson	-1	2.0%

Paralleling the statewide experience, and as shown in Table 3, 76 counties (85.4%) saw increased occupants in this period. In terms of persons, increases ranged from 1 to 166 occupants; in terms of percentage change, increases ranged from 1.3% to 86%. Three counties (3.4%) experienced no change.

² Beaufort was removed from this calculation as it remained closed from April through July.

Table 3. Counties with Increases or No Change in Jail Population—July to November, 2020

County	Change in Occupants: July - Nov	Percentage Change in Occupants: July - Nov	County	Change in Occupants: July - Nov	Percentage Change in Occupants: July - Nov
Wake	166	16.5%	Columbus	21	17.8%
Gaston	158	39.1%	Pasquotank	21	10.3%
Durham	107	45.5%	Scotland	19	20.7%
New Hanover	97	21.5%	Avery	17	54.8%
Craven	93	43.3%	Yadkin	17	22.7%
Mecklenburg	91	6.7%	Ashe	16	21.3%
Wayne	77	30.6%	Caldwell	16	16.3%
Pitt	66	20.0%	Edgecombe	16	11.3%
Davidson	64	33.2%	Halifax	15	26.8%
Union	63	35.2%	Stokes	15	14.7%
Cleveland	62	31.6%	Alexander	13	24.5%
Iredell	61	29.5%	McDowell	13	7.6%
Lincoln	53	74.6%	Orange	12	23.5%
Brunswick	52	30.8%	Pender	12	22.2%
Buncombe	51	14.8%	Lenoir	11	6.5%
Rockingham	49	34.3%	Hoke	10	11.0%
Sampson	48	27.6%	Cherokee	10	9.3%
Duplin	43	86.0%	Yancey	9	60.0%
Wilkes	41	31.5%	Guilford	9	1.3%
Alamance	41	15.4%	Warren	8	47.1%
Robeson	40	14.9%	Montgomery	8	13.3%
Nash	37	45.7%	Vance	8	7.3%
Catawba	37	16.7%	Forsyth	8	1.3%
Henderson	35	22.7%	Caswell	7	46.7%
Moore	32	29.1%	Currituck	7	35.0%
Franklin	31	21.4%	Clay	7	25.0%
Madison	30	73.2%	Cabarrus	7	3.6%
Carteret	27	26.5%	Polk	6	17.1%
Johnston	27	12.4%	Bladen	6	4.5%
Swain	26	38.2%	Randolph	5	2.2%
Wilson	26	23.6%	Graham	4	28.6%
Burke	26	22.4%	Hertford	3	7.1%
Richmond	24	30.8%	Chowan	2	10.0%
Rutherford	24	15.9%	Haywood	2	1.9%
Northampton	23	71.9%	Washington	1	5.6%
Cumberland	23	4.7%	Greene	1	2.4%
Watauga	22	42.3%	Jones	0	0.0%
Stanly	22	21.2%	Bertie	0	0.0%
Hamett	22	9.1%	Rowan	0	0.0%
Macon	21	29.6%			

* * *

In this report we simply present data on changes in jail populations. A number of factors may account for observed trends, including the halt in jury trials, initiation and current status of efforts to reduce jail populations during the pandemic, and changes in criminal charging to name a few.

We will continue to update this work as new data become available. For more detailed information on county-level populations, see our spreadsheet [here](#). On the spreadsheet’s first tab, entitled “Occupant

Graph,” select a county in the dropdown menu in the upper left corner to get a county-level graph similar to Figure 1 above.

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