

### Changes in North Carolina Jail Populations During COVID-19

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In this report we highlight trends in state and county jail populations, from January 2019 to June 2021. Using the accompanying [data tool](#), readers can explore these numbers in more detail. Instructions for using the tool are provided at the end of this report. Please refer to our April 2020 jail report ([here](#)) for information on data sources and calculations.

#### State Level Trends

As seen in Figure 1 below, in 2019—before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic—monthly statewide jail populations fluctuated between a high of nearly 20,000 to a low of 15,000. Early 2020 monthly populations topped 2019 levels, but with the onset of the pandemic in the Spring of 2020, monthly statewide populations started dropping, hitting a low in July 2020 before beginning a general rebound. Monthly numbers for January through June 2021 fluctuated within a relatively narrow band. 2021 numbers were higher than 2020 months impacted by COVID (April through June) but remained below numbers for the same months in 2019.

**Figure 1. Number of individuals detained in jail statewide—January 2019 through June 2021**

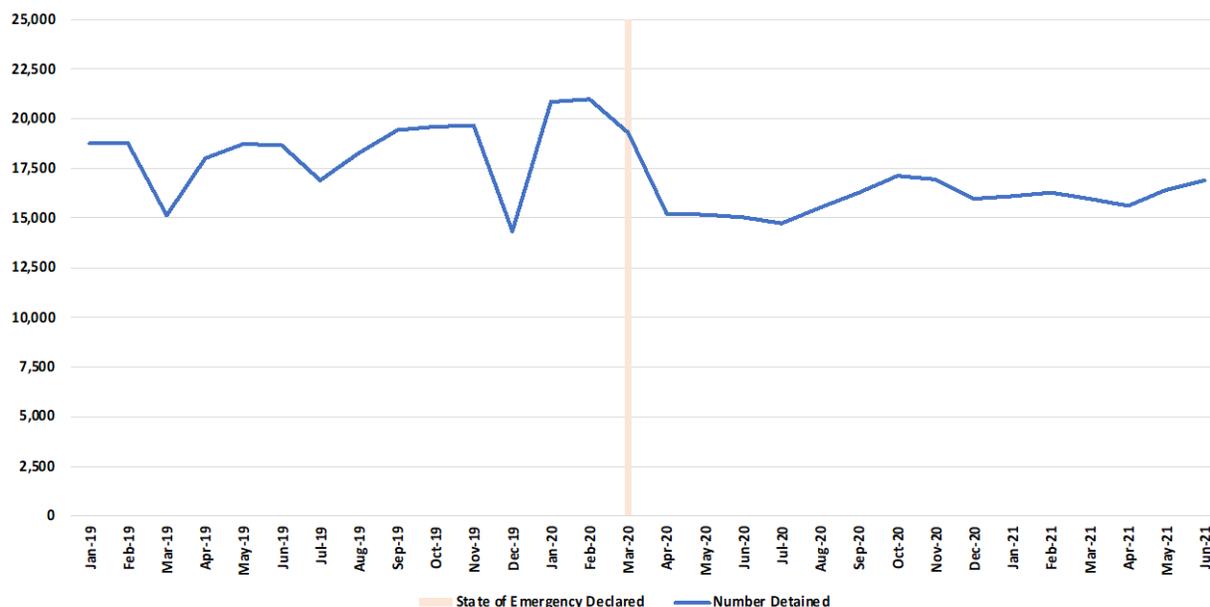
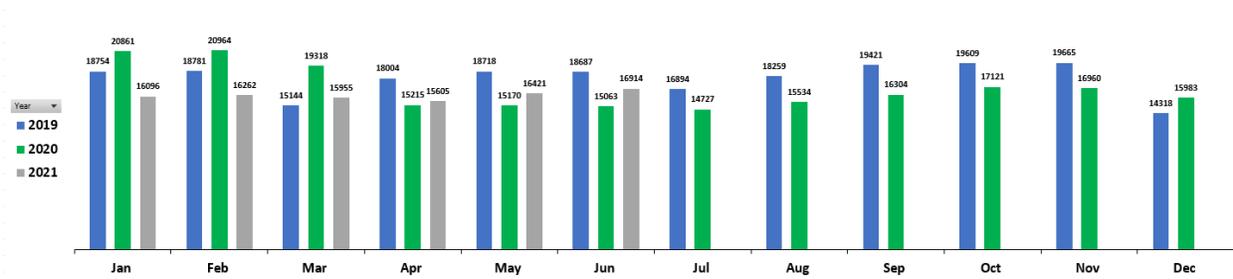


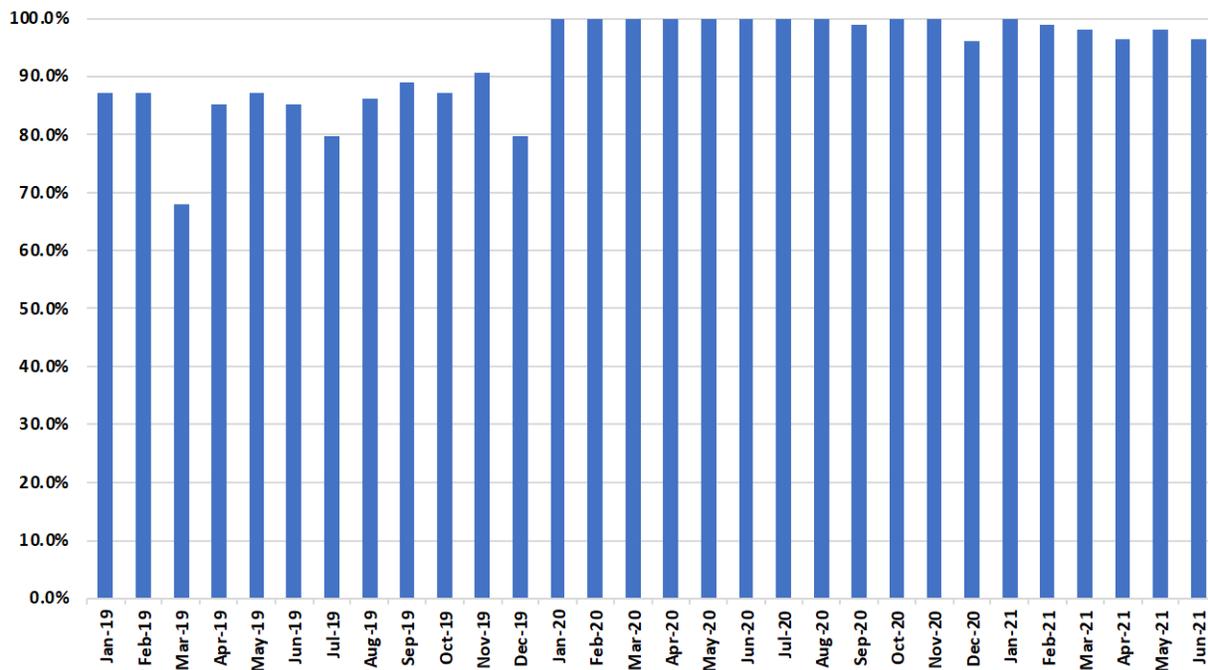
Figure 2 shows these numbers in the format of our data tool: a bar chart of monthly populations.

**Figure 2. Monthly statewide jail populations—January 2019 through June 2021**



We offer one cautionary note about 2019 data: Because a significant portion of facilities did not consistently report monthly data in 2019, numbers for that period likely understate the actual population. For example, less than 70% of facilities reported data in March 2019. As shown in Figure 3, a greater percentage of facilities reported data in 2020 and 2021. Thus, 2020 and 2021 totals should closely align with actual jail population numbers, but 2019 numbers may significantly underreport total occupancy, particularly in those months when many facilities failed to report data.

**Figure 3. Share of Confinement Facilities Reporting Monthly Data—January 2019 through June 2021**



## County Level Data

Because statewide data can hide variation at the local level, we also looked at county jail populations. Overall, we found that the vast majority (83%) of counties had lower jail populations for the first six months of 2021 as compared to the same period in 2019 (pre-pandemic). When comparing 2021 to 2020 (pandemic to pandemic years), the percent of counties with lower numbers in 2021 fell to 70%. As shown in Figure 2 above, there was a jump in statewide population numbers in May and June of 2021. When we looked at this period at the county level, we found that, consistent with statewide numbers, most counties experienced increased populations in those months of 2021. There was however a wide range in those county level increases.

When comparing the first sixth months of 2021 to 2019 (pre-pandemic), 83% of counties reporting data had a decrease in average populations. However, fourteen counties had higher populations in the first six months of 2021 as compared to the same period in 2019. Those counties are displayed in Table 1. As shown there, Graham County was an outlier in terms of percentage increase. We contacted that facility and learned that this increase was related to a change in housing during the pandemic. Specifically, that in the pre-pandemic period, the county housed the majority of its detainees in out-of-county facilities. However, during the pandemic those transfers ceased and the county was required to house all detainees locally. We remind readers that counties report only detainees physically held in-county; detainees housed out-of-county are reported by the facility that houses those persons. But even when Graham County is removed, the range of percentage increases is wide, from a low of 1.6% to a high of 26.6 %.

**Table 1. County jails with population increases in the first six months of 2021 as compared to the same period in 2019<sup>1</sup>**

Counties	2019 Average Monthly Population	2021 Average Monthly Population	Percentage Increase
Graham	8	28	250.0%
Stokes	94	119	26.6%
Catawba	188	238	26.6%
Pender	52	65	25.0%
Chowan	20	25	25.0%
Bladen	102	124	21.6%
Lee	118	143	21.2%
Chatham	64	74	15.6%
Surry	151	171	13.2%
Pasquotank	180	199	10.6%
Jackson	49	50	2.0%
Harnett	255	260	2.0%
Craven	296	301	1.7%
Madison	63	64	1.6%

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<sup>1</sup> In this table and the following tables, average populations were first rounded to the nearest single digit (e.g., 85.3 rounded to 85). Percentage changes in jail populations were then calculated based upon these rounded figures.

When comparing the first six months of 2021 to 2020 (pandemic to pandemic years), 70% of counties reporting data had lower average jail populations in 2021; 29% had higher average populations. Counties that had higher populations in 2020 as compared to 2021 are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. County jails with population increases in the first six months of 2021 as compared to the same period in 2020**

Counties	2020 Average Monthly Population	2021 Average Monthly Population	Percentage Increase
Graham	10	28	180.0%
Beaufort	21	42	100.0%
Granville	55	81	47.3%
Pender	47	65	38.3%
Madison	50	64	28.0%
Lee	113	143	26.5%
Halifax	62	74	19.4%
Anson	48	53	10.4%
Franklin	148	163	10.1%
Swain	78	85	9.0%
Craven	278	301	8.3%
Durham	317	340	7.3%
Watauga	69	74	7.2%
Harnett	243	260	7.0%
Columbus	144	154	6.9%
Clay	29	31	6.9%
Iredell	259	276	6.6%
New Hanover	497	528	6.2%
Moore	137	145	5.8%
Chowan	24	25	4.2%
Surry	165	171	3.6%
Catawba	230	238	3.5%
Cleveland	255	262	2.7%
Rockingham	170	174	2.4%
Carteret	130	133	2.3%
Jackson	49	50	2.0%
Nash	108	109	0.9%

Although most counties had lower average jail populations in the first six months of 2021 compared to the first six months of 2019 and 2020, Figure 2 above shows a notable increase in the statewide population in May and June 2021. This was not, however, a consistent trend at the county level. 35% of counties that reported data had lower average jail populations in May and June 2021 as compared to earlier months of the year. 64% had increases, and there was a wide range of those increases, from 1.2% to 52.2%, as shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Counties with increases in jail populations, May-June 2021, as compared to Jan.-April 2021.**

Counties	January - April Average Monthly Population	May - June Average Monthly Population	Percentage Increase
Granville	69	105	52.2%
Caswell	24	34	41.7%
Davie	33	46	39.4%
Orange	72	97	34.7%
Alexander	66	87	31.8%
Alleghany	20	26	30.0%
Polk	35	45	28.6%
Columbus	141	180	27.7%
Randolph	182	231	26.9%
Haywood	96	121	26.0%
Ashe	77	94	22.1%
Warren	19	23	21.1%
Jackson	47	56	19.1%
Rowan	252	299	18.7%
Sampson	172	203	18.0%
Caldwell	112	132	17.9%
Cherokee	92	108	17.4%
Rutherford	162	190	17.3%
Chatham	70	82	17.1%
Wilkes	150	175	16.7%

Counties	January - April Average Monthly Population	May - June Average Monthly Population	Percentage Increase
Bertie	61	70	14.8%
Watauga	71	81	14.1%
Henderson	156	177	13.5%
Dare	54	61	13.0%
Richmond	81	91	12.3%
Lincoln	102	114	11.8%
Yadkin	82	90	9.8%
Transylvania	43	47	9.3%
Iredell	268	292	9.0%
Hertford	46	50	8.7%
Catawba	231	251	8.7%
Cleveland	255	277	8.6%
Surry	167	181	8.4%
McDowell	144	156	8.3%
Davidson	231	249	7.8%
Clay	30	32	6.7%
Union	199	212	6.5%
Rockingham	170	181	6.5%
Cabarrus	205	218	6.3%

Counties	January - April Average Monthly Population	May - June Average Monthly Population	Percentage Increase
Durham	333	354	6.3%
Edgecombe	133	141	6.0%
Washington	17	18	5.9%
Bladen	122	129	5.7%
Wayne	323	340	5.3%
Onslow	297	312	5.1%
Duplin	81	85	4.9%
Alamance	292	306	4.8%
Person	66	69	4.5%
Mecklenburg	1,400	1,450	3.6%
Gaston	486	503	3.5%
Brunswick	195	201	3.1%
Pasquotank	197	203	3.0%
Halifax	73	75	2.7%
Buncombe	387	396	2.3%
Guilford	676	691	2.2%
Wake	1,113	1,132	1.7%
New Hanover	525	533	1.5%
Harnett	259	262	1.2%

\* \* \*

A number of factors may account for observed trends, including the halt in and reduction of 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 report every six months. As noted, the data tool associated with this report is [here](#). When you go to the data tool, it will show bar charts for statewide numbers. To see those results for a specific county, open the dropdown menu in cell B1 (upper left-hand corner). Click twice on the “All” checkbox and then choose your county of interest. Click “OK” and the bar chart will automatically update. If a bar is missing for any month, that means the county did not report data for that month.

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