

Rural jail responses to COVID-19 in Colorado

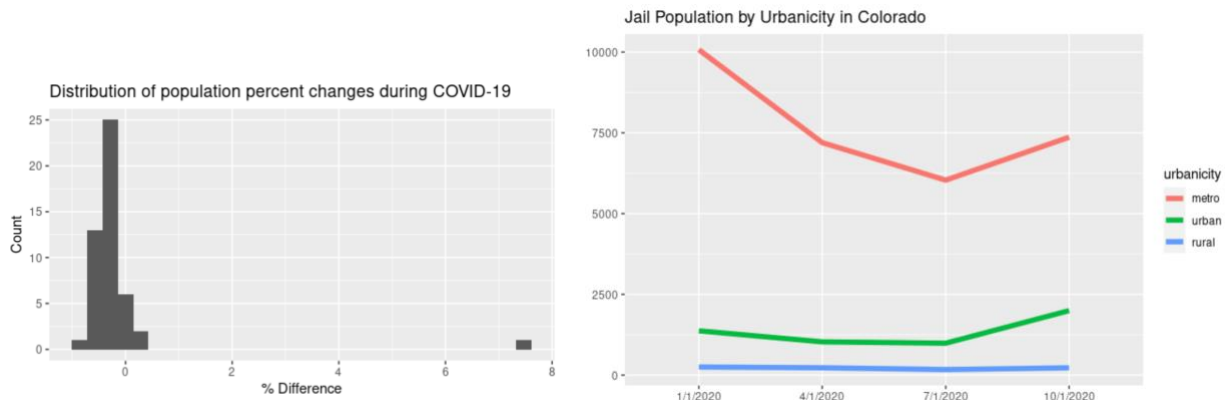
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Motivation

Given the strong link between jails and the spread of infectious diseases such as COVID-19, this report investigates how Colorado's data collection efforts can understand the state's response to COVID-19 and what kind of disparities exist in the release of these jail inmates.

Research Question

What factors are correlated with a county jail decreasing its jail population at the outbreak of and during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Method

We used regression models to fit our data to understand the drivers of reduced jail intake/outtake rates during COVID-19. We looked at variables such as percent race, gender, and other demographic variables that may have motivated jail population rates to decrease.

Conclusion

In Colorado, we found that the biggest predictor for whether a jail decreased their jail population was its urbanicity; urban jails decreased their population by 12 percent more than rural jails on average, all else held constant.

Discussion

We found that rural incarceration is resilient to even COVID-19, which fits with larger national trends. According to the Vera Institute of Justice, there's been a "jail boom" in rural incarceration rates across the country where rural county budgets are allocating more money toward building and expanding new jails instead of housing, transportation, and public health. Further research should be done to see whether the same fiscal incentives that are driving the jail boom are primary causes to our findings about why rural jail populations were so resilient to COVID-19. This type of analysis would not be possible in North Carolina, because North Carolina doesn't have a regularly updated jail database. Frequent data collection and information about inmates' race, gender, ethnicity in North Carolina will allow us to fit a more complete regression model to understand the correlation between urbanicity and willingness to reduce population. Our final report and code can be found here: <https://github.com/albertyusun/colorado-jail-data>