

BLACK-WHITE DISPARITIES IN ARRESTS IN THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH

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Introduction

The report of the Pittsburgh Community Taskforce for Police Reform (October, 2020)² provided racial disparity data for arrests and many other police activities in 2019. The source for arrest data was Pittsburgh police annual reports. The population estimates used to calculate arrest and other rates by race, gender, and age 19-29 in the city were annual averages for 2014-2018 from the Census' American Community Survey (ACS).

This new report provides an update on race, gender, and age 19-29 disparities in arrests for the city of Pittsburgh. The source for arrest data is a Pittsburgh police online dataset with daily records for the years, 2017-2020 (see link under each table below). The population data used to calculate arrest rates are 2015-2019 annual averages from the ACS, released in December 2020. The 2015-2019 annual population averages are used for arrest rates for all years in this study, 2017-2020. Single-year population estimates are not used since the data for detailed groups vary too much from year to year. Note that the Pittsburgh arrest data are for ages 10 and over.

Two racial groups, blacks and non-Hispanic whites, are included in this report. The number of arrests of other racial groups in the city tends to be very small.

This report has two main findings: 1) there was a large decline in number of arrests by race, gender, and age in most years from 2017 to 2020, and 2) racial disparities in arrests increased each year and are now at extremely high levels. To help guide the search for solutions to the disparities, this report discusses two major reasons why blacks are arrested at higher rates than whites and identifies actions that should be given careful consideration in Pittsburgh.

Although policing has a role, there now may be better ways of providing public safety. This includes investing much more in black neighborhoods and organizations, reducing police traffic stops and searches, directing police to ignore minor offenses, and using social work and other professionals instead of police for mental health, substance abuse, domestic abuse, and homelessness.

Black and White Male Arrests

As shown in Table 1, Pittsburgh police arrested substantially fewer black and white men in 2020 than in any of the prior three years. However, more than 10% of the black male population was arrested in 2020. Further, the ratio of black and white male arrest rates steadily increased from 4.5 in 2017 to 6.2 in 2020. The city's racial disparities in male arrests are a serious problem.

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² https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/11740_Community_Task_Force_on_Police_Reform_October_2020_Report.pdf

Table 1. Black and White Male Arrests, City of Pittsburgh, 2017-2020

Year	Black Males Arrested	White Males Arrested	% of Black Male Pop. Arrested	% of White Male Pop. Arrested	Ratio of Black/White Male Arrest Rates
2017	5295	3256	16.0%	3.5%	4.5
2018	4899	2772	14.8%	3.0%	4.9
2019	5013	2567	15.1%	2.8%	5.4
2020	3883	1746	11.7%	1.9%	6.2

Source for Pittsburgh police arrest counts:

https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/12507_Public_Datasets_Dashboards_and_Annual_Report_Links.pdf

Notes: White refers to non-Hispanic white. Arrest and population counts were extracted by Chris Briem at UCSUR/Pitt. Population data are 2015-2019 annual averages from the American Community Survey. The black male population in the city was 33,096 in 2015-2019. The non-Hispanic white male was 92,098.

Black and White Female Arrests

As shown in Table 2, Pittsburgh police arrested substantially fewer black and white women in 2020 than in any of the prior three years. However, a much higher percentage of the black than the white female population was arrested in 2020. Further, the ratio of black and white female arrest rates increased from 3.0 in 2017 to 4.3 in 2020. Black-white disparities in female arrests are a serious problem in the city.

Table 2. Black and White Female Arrests, City of Pittsburgh, 2017-2020

Year	Black Females Arrested	White Females Arrested	% of Black Female Pop. Arrested	% of White Female Pop. Arrested	Ratio of Black/White Female Arrest Rates
2017	1731	1474	4.5%	1.5%	3.0
2018	1623	1235	4.3%	1.3%	3.4
2019	1709	1085	4.5%	1.1%	4.1
2020	1220	733	3.2%	0.7%	4.3

Source for Pittsburgh police arrest counts:

https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/12507_Public_Datasets_Dashboards_and_Annual_Report_Links.pdf

Notes: White refers to non-Hispanic white. Arrest and population counts were extracted by Chris Briem at UCSUR/Pitt. Population data are 2015-2019 annual averages from the American Community Survey. The black female population in the city was 38,095. The non-Hispanic white female population was 98,273.

Black and White Male Age 19-29 Arrests

As shown in Table 3, Pittsburgh police arrested substantially fewer black and white men age 19-29 in 2020 than in any of the prior three years. However, more than 20% of black males age 19-29 in the city were arrested in 2020. Further, the ratio of black and white male age 19-29 arrest rates steadily increased from 6.5 in 2017 to 10.2 in 2020. Black-white disparities in male age 19-29 arrests are a serious problem in the city.

Table 3. Black and White Male Arrests, Age 19-29, City of Pittsburgh, 2017-2020

Year	Black Males Age 19-29 Arrested	White Males Age 19-29 Arrested	% of Black Male Age 19-29 Pop. Arrested	% of White Male Age 19-29 Pop. Arrested	Ratio of Black/White Male Age 19-29 Arrest Rates
2017	2124	1087	29.3%	4.5%	6.5
2018	1903	824	26.3%	3.4%	7.6
2019	1911	722	26.4%	3.0%	8.8
2020	1574	512	21.7%	2.1%	10.2

Source for Pittsburgh police arrest counts:

https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/12507_Public_Datasets_Dashboards_and_Annual_Report_Links.pdf

Notes: White refers to non-Hispanic white. Arrest and population counts were extracted by Chris Briem at UCSUR/Pitt. Population data are 2015-2019 annual averages from the American Community Survey. The black male age 19-29 population in the city was 7,247 in 2015-2019. The non-Hispanic white male age 19-29 population was 23,981.

Black and White Female Age 19-29 Arrests

As shown in Table 4, Pittsburgh police arrested substantially fewer black and white women age 19-29 in 2020 than in any of the prior three years. However, more than 8% of black women age 19-29 were arrested in 2020. Further, the ratio of black and white female arrest rates increased from 5.1 in 2017 to 10.2 in 2020. Black-white disparities in female age 19-29 arrests are a serious problem in the city.

Table 4. Black and White Female Arrests, Age 19-29, City of Pittsburgh, 2017-2020

Year	Black Females Age 19-29 Arrested	White Females Age 19-29 Arrested	% of Black Female Age 19- 29 Pop. Arrested	% of White Female Age 19- 29 Pop. Arrested	Ratio of Black/White Female Age 19-29 Arrest Rates
2017	706	556	11.2%	2.7%	5.1
2018	633	430	10.0%	1.7%	5.9
2019	668	334	10.6%	1.4%	8.0
2020	525	206	8.3%	0.8%	10.2

Source for Pittsburgh police arrest counts:

https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/12507_Public_Datasets_Dashboards_and_Annual_Report_Links.pdf

Notes: White refers to non-Hispanic white. Arrest and population counts were extracted by Chris Briem at UCSUR/Pitt. Population data are 2015-2019 annual averages from the American Community Survey. The black female age 19-29 population was 6,311. The non-Hispanic white female age 19-29 population was 25,270.

Reasons for Black-White Disparities in Arrest Rates

The above data show that black males in Pittsburgh in 2020 were arrested at 6.2 times the white male rate, black females were arrested at 4.3 times the white female rate, and blacks age 19-29 were arrested at 10.2 times the white rate. Nationally, blacks were arrested at five times the rate of whites in 800 communities in 2018 and at 10 times in 250 of these communities.³ Two of the major reasons for these disparities in Pittsburgh and in the nation are:

1. A much higher share of blacks than whites live in extremely disadvantaged neighborhoods, which leads to higher black crime and arrest rates.

In the city of Pittsburgh in 2019, the poverty rate was 27% for blacks and 15% for whites.⁴ In 2019, 19% of blacks and 7% of whites in the nation lived in poverty.⁵

In the city of Pittsburgh in 2017, 76% of majority black neighborhoods but only 6% of majority white neighborhoods had poverty rates of 30% or more.⁶ In the nation in 2017, 26% of blacks and 5% of whites lived in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 30% or more.⁷

High-poverty black neighborhoods also have other types of disadvantage, such as racial segregation, joblessness, and low-quality schools. Differences in neighborhood disadvantage explain most of the difference between black and white crime rates.⁸

2. Blacks are arrested for drug-related offenses at much higher rates.

Whites have a higher rate of illicit drug use and the same rate of drug sales as blacks in the nation, but police arrest blacks for drug-related offenses at 2.7 times the white rate⁹ and at 3.7 times for marijuana possession.¹⁰ Blacks are arrested at higher rates for drug use and sales because police target public marijuana, crack cocaine, and other drug transactions, and a higher percentage of black than white drug transactions are in public spaces.¹¹ Eighty percent of drug arrests are for possession, and drug offenses account for 15% of blacks in state prisons and 50% of blacks in federal prisons.¹²

³ <https://abcnews.go.com/US/abc-news-analysis-police-arrests-nationwide-reveals-stark/story?id=71188546>

⁴ ACS 1-year estimates. Note that poverty rates in the city are increased due to the large number of college students. For a reference on this, see <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/10/off-campus-college-students-poverty.html>

⁵ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/09/poverty-rates-for-blacks-and-hispanics-reached-historic-lows-in-2019.html>

⁶ <https://pittsburghneighborhoodproject.blog/2019/02/14/residential-segregation-by-race-and-income-in-pittsburgh-neighborhoods-a-data-brief/>

⁷ https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Neighborhood_poverty#/

⁸ Desmond and Emirbayer, *Race in America*, 2nd edition, 2020.

⁹ https://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/rates_of_drug_use_and_sales_by_race_rates_of_drug_related_criminal_justice

¹⁰ <https://perma.cc/G4QP-9K9P>

¹¹ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2580416?origin=crossref&seq=1>, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2003.tb01002.x>, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07418820300095441>, and <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2006.00044.x>

¹² <https://drugpolicy.org/resource/drug-war-mass-incarceration-and-race-englishspanish>

Remedies

Solutions should, at a minimum, address the two major causes of black-white disparities in arrests highlighted above. My recent report, *Pittsburgh's Deplorable Black Living Conditions* (Feb. 9, 2021), contains recommendations directed at the poor socioeconomic conditions of blacks in the Pittsburgh area, police targeting of blacks, and other criminal justice injustices. The recommendations, which also apply here, are:

1. The low employment, wages, and income of African Americans negatively affect all aspects of life, including crime and violence, education, housing, and family life. Employers need to: 1) end the segregation of African Americans in low-wage occupations and contract jobs, 2) increase minimum wages, 3) hire more African Americans in jobs paying over \$40,000 and jobs paying over \$100,000 a year, and 4) create thousands of quality jobs for African American youth each summer. One way to proceed is for the CEO of every major organization in the Pittsburgh area to form a committee of department heads to work continuously on designing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives.¹³ These efforts would cover training, hiring, retaining, and promoting African American adults and youth and awarding prime contracts to African American-owned firms.
2. African American people know their needs best and how to address them. Government agencies, foundations, and corporations should invest tens of millions of dollars each year in African American organizations so they can provide employment, income, food, education, healthcare, housing, and public safety services and assist with procuring income-support. This investment should include African American political, labor, and community entities that can obtain adequate responses from local, state, and national leaders by organizing, getting out the vote, and demanding change. Research has shown that in a city of 100,000 residents, adding one new community organization to fight violence and strengthen the community reduces the city's violent crime rate by 1%.¹⁴
3. Massive reform of criminal justice in the Pittsburgh area is needed. We need to end police targeting of African Americans for traffic stops, pedestrian stops, searches, and arrests. Ban all consent searches and minimize probable cause searches. End arrests for low-level offenses, such as possession of small amounts of illicit drugs. Use social workers for mental health, drug addiction, homelessness, domestic conflict, and other behavioral problems. End pretrial detention and cash bail. Reduce spending on police, jails and prisons, and other parts of the criminal justice system and invest the savings in the African American community.

¹³ For the effectiveness of this strategy and others, see https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail?cm_sp=Magazine%20Archive-_-Links-_-Current%20Issue.

¹⁴ Patrick Sharkey, *An Uneven Peace*, 2018.