

Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on Arrests in California

February 9, 2023

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COVID-19 significantly affected the criminal justice system

- Property and violent crime declined in 2020, but certain crimes, like homicide, increased
 - Californians grew more concerned about crime
- In response, policies and legislation have been proposed and implemented to address public safety concerns
- Discussions of policing, crime, and public safety should be informed by an understanding of the impact of the pandemic

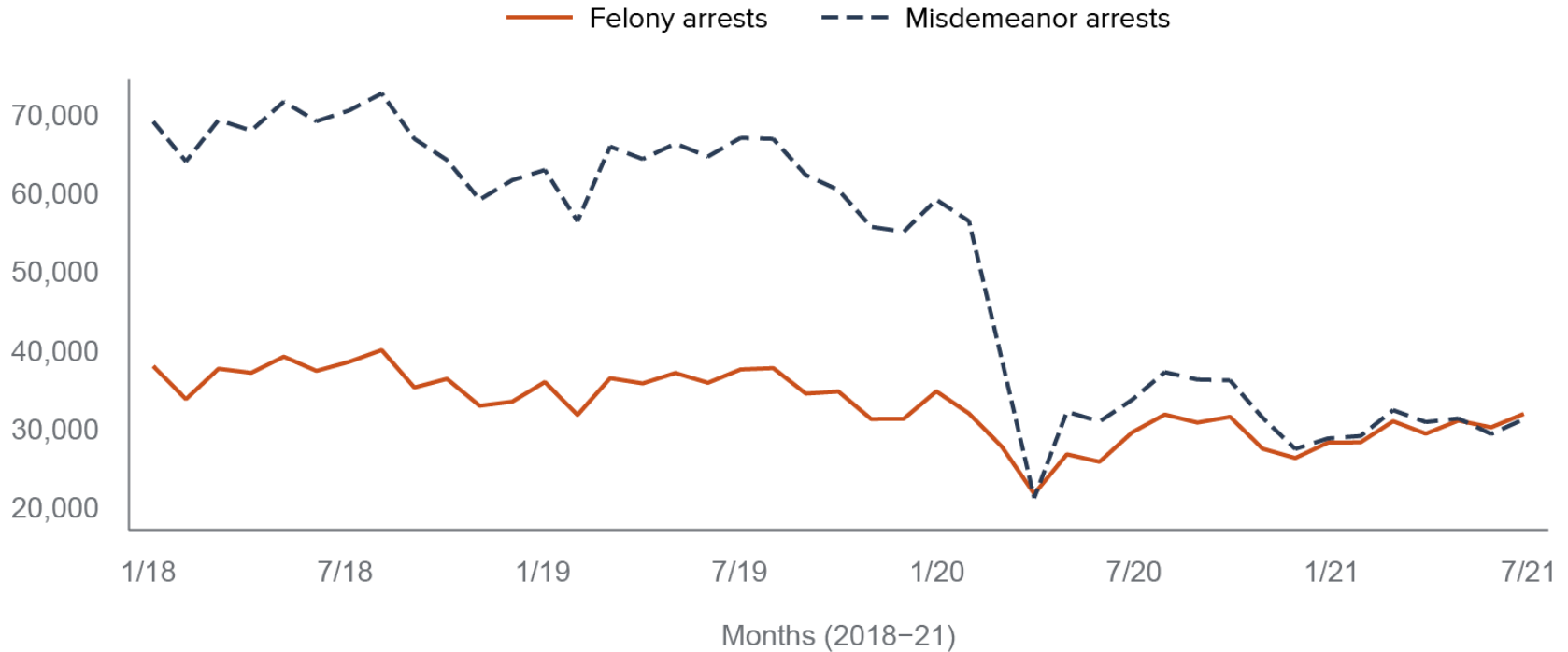
We examined arrest trends during the first part of the pandemic

- Tracked changes in arrests and jail populations from early 2020 through mid-2021
- Identified policies and events that affected the criminal justice system
 - Shelter-in-place policies
 - Law enforcement directives
 - Zero-bail orders
 - George Floyd protests
- Analyzed correlations between changes in arrests and the timing of these events and policies

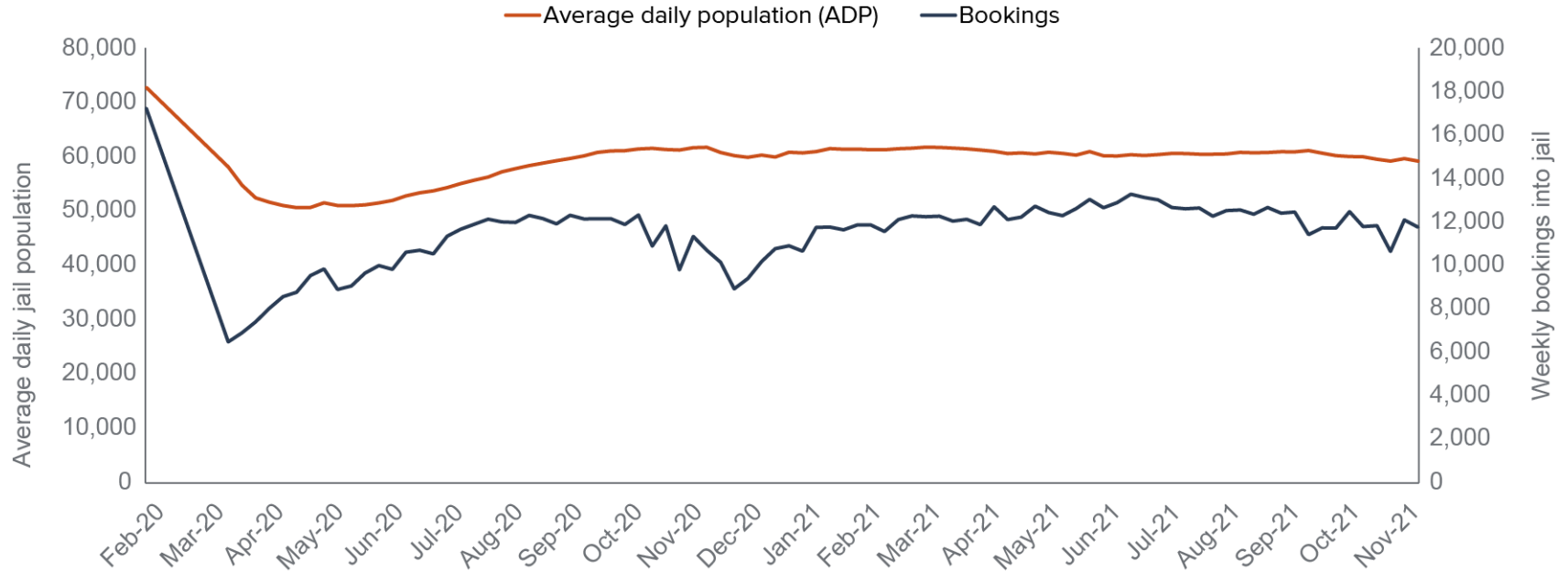
Data from multiple sources

- Arrest data from California Department of Justice (CA DOJ)
 - Arrest Criminal History System (ACHS)
 - All arrests from Jan 2018 to July 2021
- Mobility/public movement data from Apple Maps requests
- Stop and enforcement behavior from CA DOJ's Racial and Identity Profiling Act (RIPA)
- Local and statewide zero-bail orders

Arrests plunged in early March 2020



Statewide jail population declined



COVID caused Californians to stay home in 2020

- Gov. Newsom declared state of emergency on March 4, 2020
- Statewide shelter-in-place order on March 19
- By mid-April, Californians made 50% fewer trips to work, shops, and restaurants compared to late February
 - 20% fewer trips to grocery store
- Drops in larceny, residential burglary, and robbery
- New directives were issued during the winter COVID surge, as hospitalizations and deaths peaked
 - Mid-Nov: Statewide curfew and non-essential businesses closed
 - LA and five Bay Area counties enacted shelter-in-place orders

Local law enforcement set emergency policies

- In mid-March, officers began to limit interactions with community members
- Some agencies also implemented cite-and-release policies to reduce jail populations
 - LA County (March 16), Alameda (March 25), Santa Clara (April 1)
- Early release of jail and prison inmates began in late March

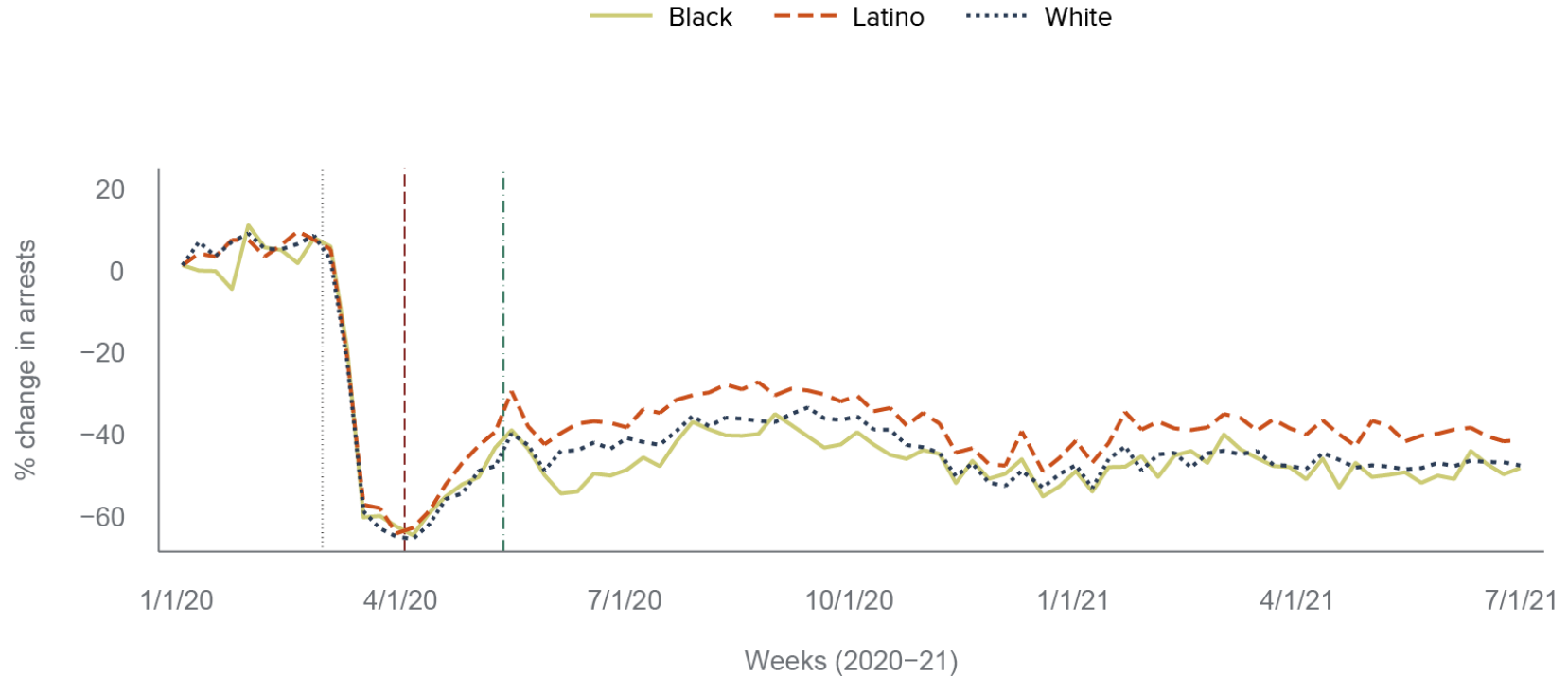
Statewide zero-bail order issued in mid-April

- Set \$0 bail for most misdemeanors and lower-level felonies
 - Exceptions for most serious, sexual, and violent crimes
 - But included some serious felonies, including some assault charges
- Reduced flow into county jails
 - Limit people held pre-trial detention
- Statewide mandate from April 13 to June 20, 2020
 - A few counties adopted early
 - About half of counties kept zero bail in place
- Some were concerned that these policies would have a “revolving door” effect

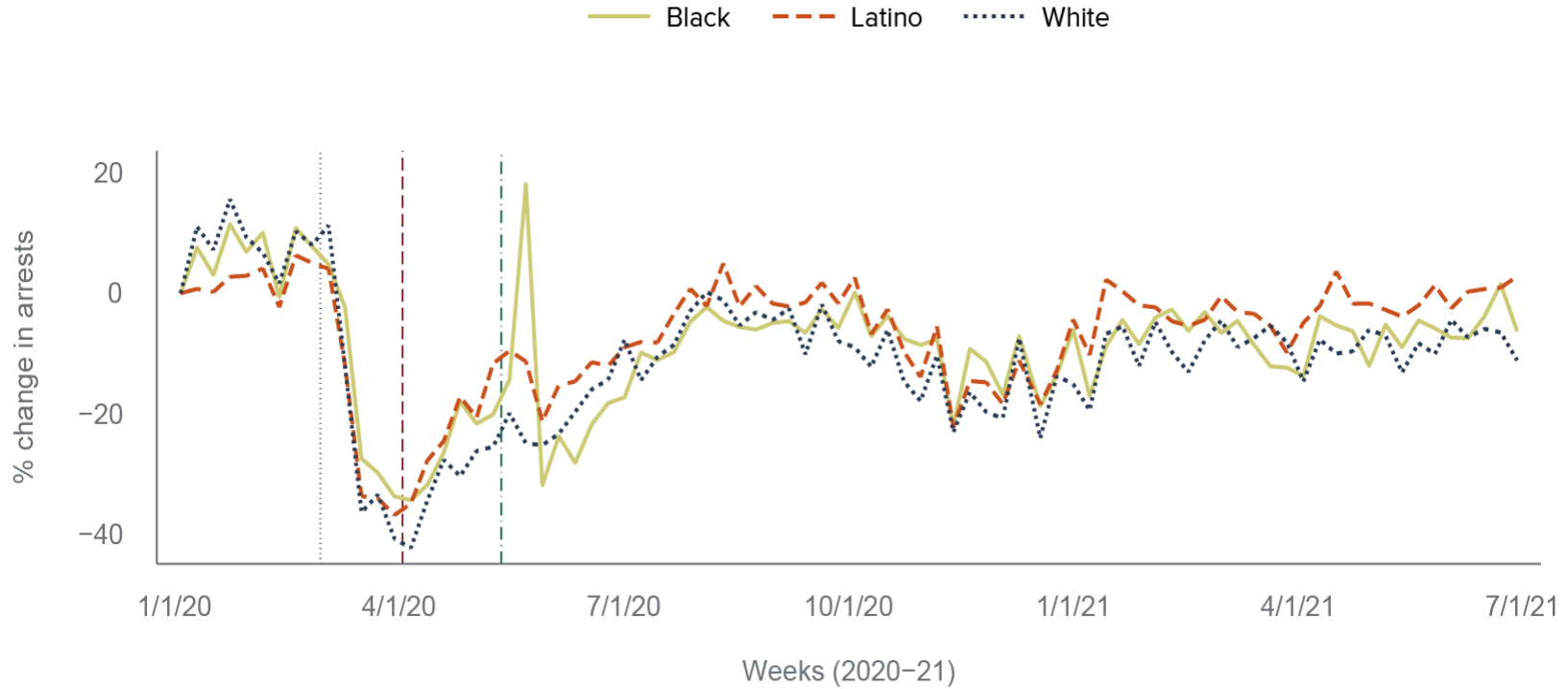
Aftermath of the George Floyd murder was a key event

- Spurred mass nationwide protests in late May and early June
 - Estimated as largest demonstrations in US history
 - Confidence in police fell to historical lows across country and state
- After high-profile police killings, low-level arrests usually decline
 - Police stops also decline
- Violent crime often increases in cities where these deaths occur
 - Increases may spill over to other cities
- Community reporting of crime decreases

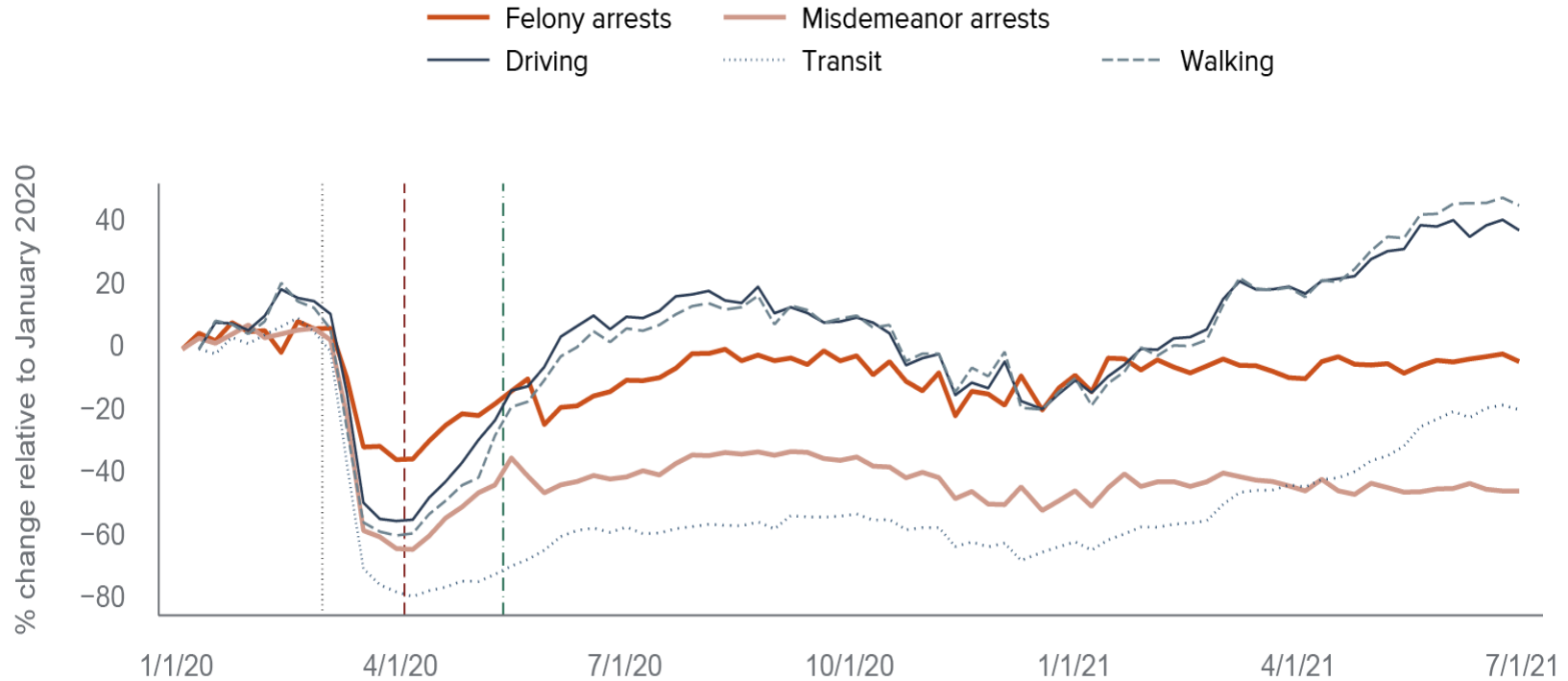
Misdemeanor arrests dropped as much as 60% across racial/ethnic groups



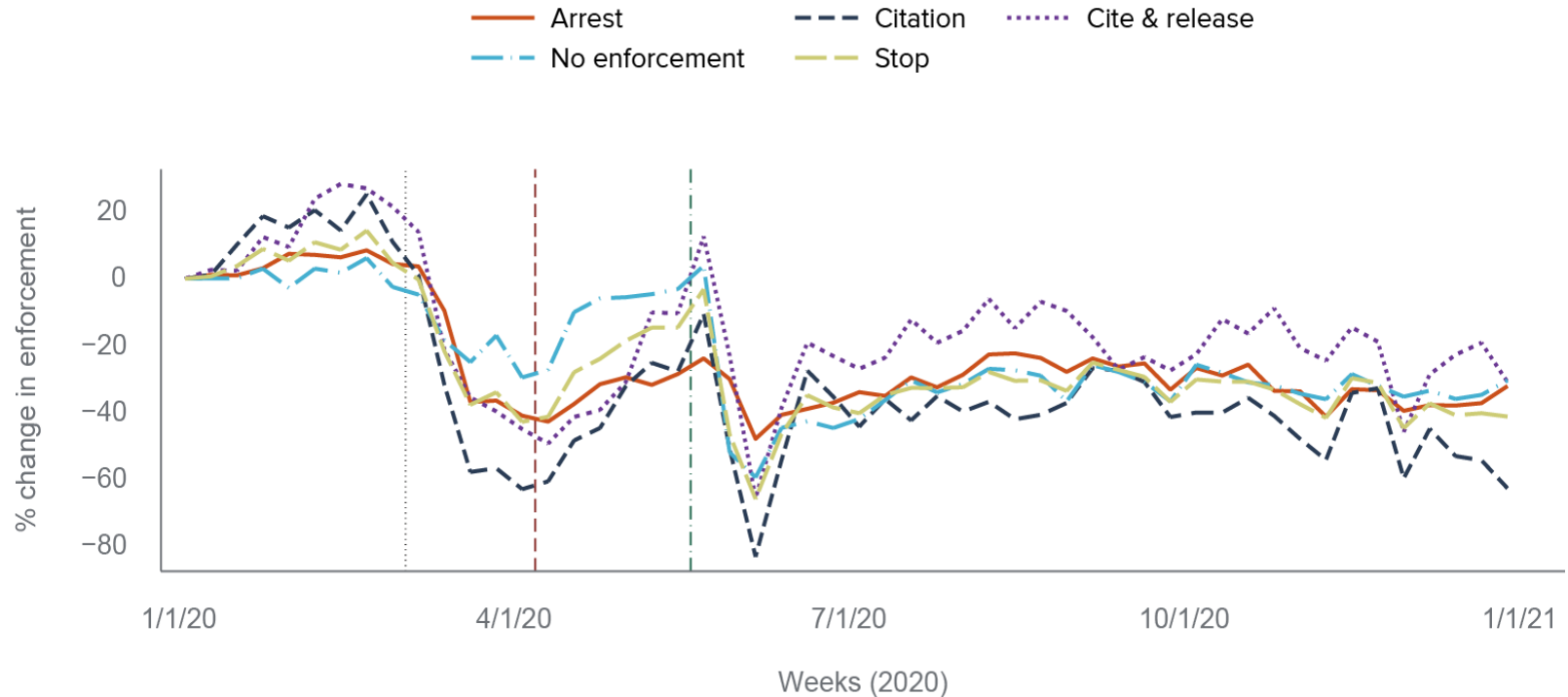
Felony arrests fell sharply but rebounded quickly



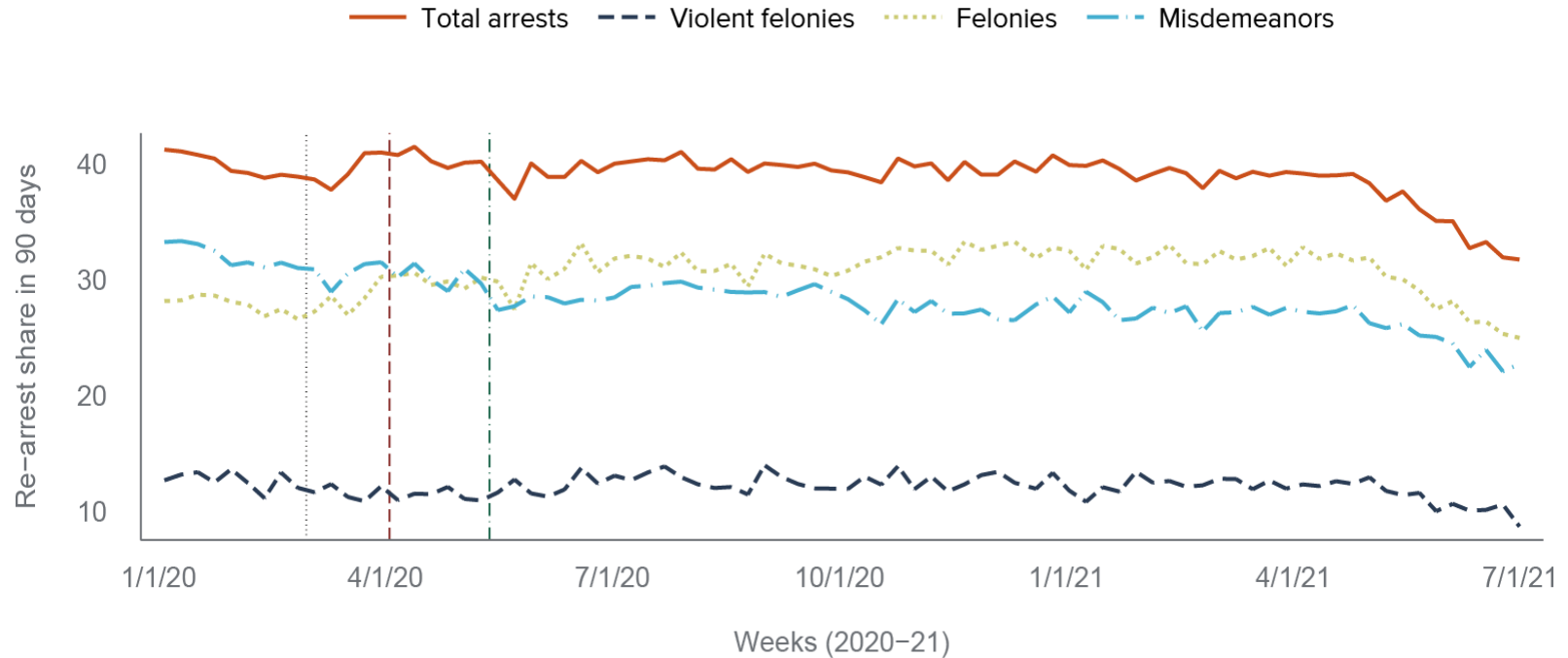
Arrest trends mirrored changes in mobility



Shifts in policing strategies contributed to arrest declines



Re-arrests as a share of arrests remained mostly stable



Key takeaways

- Arrests declined sharply at the onset of the pandemic; declines persisted at least through July 2021
- Mobility patterns appeared to be primary driver of arrest trends in 2020
- Shifts in policing strategies may have had an impact
- Murder of George Floyd had a temporary but significant effect
- Re-arrest shares did not change substantially

Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.