Arrests are a critical but understudied topic

- Arrests have wide-ranging consequences
  - Risk of injury, use of public resources
- Racial disparities are a key concern
- We examine statewide arrest trends as well as differences in arrest rates and racial disparities across counties in California
  - Crime rates
  - Recent criminal justice reforms
  - County-level factors
Arrest and crime rates in California have both declined substantially.
Statewide trends in arrest rates are largely driven by crime rates

- All arrests
- Felony - violent
- Felony - property
- Misdemeanor - violent
- Misdemeanor - property

% of variation explained by crime rates
Arrest rates decreased in the wake of recent criminal justice reforms

- After public safety realignment in 2011:
  - Drop of about 7% in overall arrest rate
  - Driven by decrease in misdemeanor traffic- and alcohol-related arrests

- After Proposition 47 in 2014:
  - Drop of an additional 11% in overall arrest rate
  - Driven by decrease in felony drug and property arrests
Arrest rates vary significantly across counties

- High-arrest counties arrest two to three times as many suspects per 100,000 residents as low-arrest counties
- County crime rates play a significant role in this variation
- A range of other factors likely contribute:
  - Demographics
  - Poverty and labor market conditions
  - Jail capacity and law enforcement staffing
Counties with higher arrest rates tend to have poorer economic conditions

- Counties with the highest arrest rates tend to have:
  - Poorer economic conditions
  - Lower shares of nonwhite residents
  - Higher shares of young adults
  - Lower population density

- The ratio of law enforcement officers to residents does not appear to affect arrest rates
Racial disparities in arrests also vary across the state

- Statewide, the African American arrest rate is about three times as high as the white arrest rate.
- Counties with the highest disparities have, on average, an African American arrest rate about six times higher than the white arrest rate.
  - In counties with the lowest disparities, the African American arrest rate is about two times higher.
Racial disparities tend to be greater in counties with lower poverty rates.

![Graph showing the relationship between poverty rate and African American–white arrest rate ratio for various counties such as San Mateo, San Francisco, Del Norte, and others.](image-url)
Counties with larger racial disparities have lower shares of African Americans and lower poverty rates.

*Data available only for the 41 largest counties.*
Conclusions

- Crime rates are a major factor in arrest rates
- Arrest rates declined substantially after public safety realignment and Proposition 47
- Counties with the highest arrest rates tend have poorer economic conditions
  - But counties with the largest racial disparities tend to be relatively affluent
- Efforts to reduce racial disparities in arrests should include wealthier areas
Key Factors in Arrest Trends and Differences in California’s Counties

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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.