

New Insights into California Arrests

Trends, Disparities, and County Differences

December 4, 2018

Magnus Lofstrom, Brandon Martin, Justin Goss,
Joseph Hayes, and Steven Raphael

Supported with funding from the Laura and John Arnold
Foundation



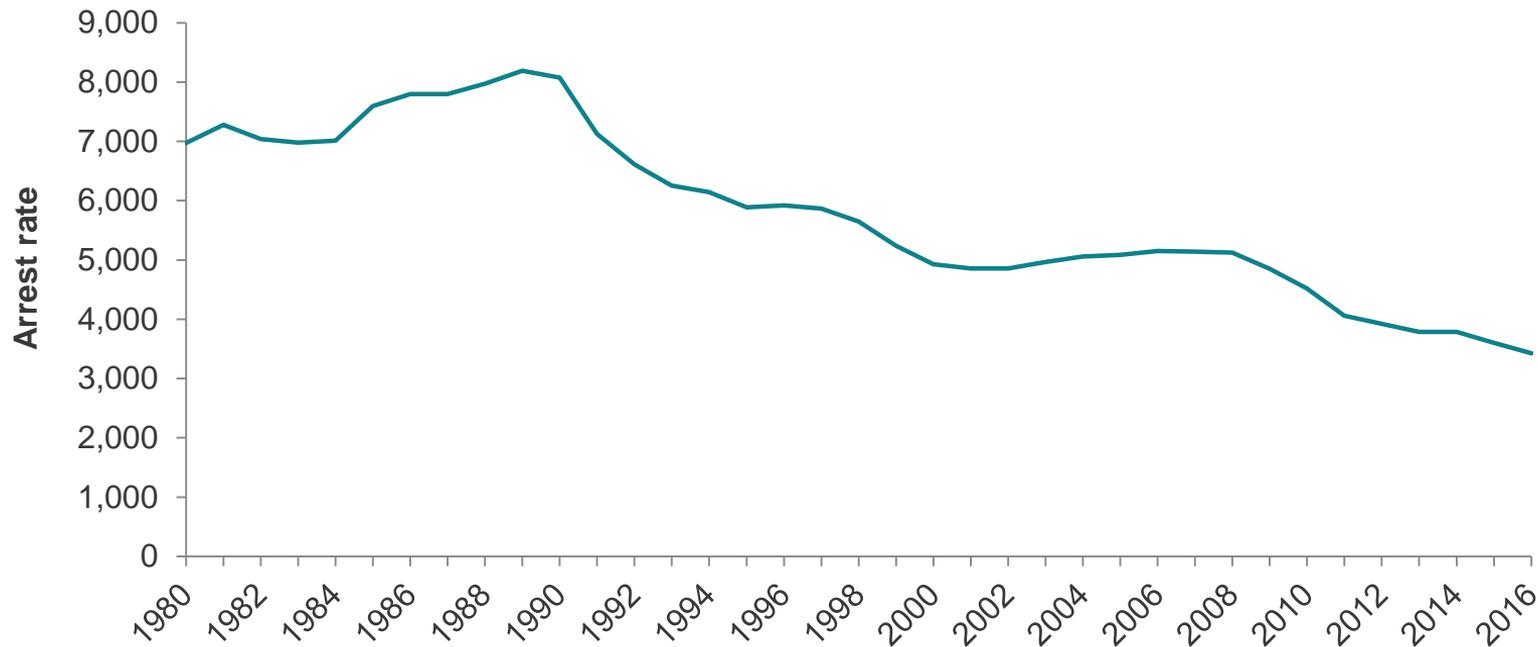
PPIC

PUBLIC POLICY
INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

Arrests are a critical but understudied topic

- Heated discussions about policing and community relations
- California's criminal laws are determined by the state's legislature and voters
 - But local agencies and officers have considerable discretion around arrests
 - Not closely monitored by the state
- Our goals
 - Answer key questions: trends over time, demographic disparities, differences across jurisdictions
 - Create a shared understanding of the facts and frame constructive, solutions-oriented discussions

Arrests in California have dropped dramatically in the past few decades



Misdemeanor arrests have changed markedly...

- Decline in misdemeanor arrests accounts for three-quarters of the decline in total arrests
- Misdemeanor arrests accounted for 66–70% of all arrests from the early 1990s through 2014
 - Jumped to around 74% after Prop 47
- Declines in traffic and alcohol-related arrests are key contributors
- Misdemeanor drug arrests went up after Prop 47, but misdemeanor property arrests were roughly unchanged

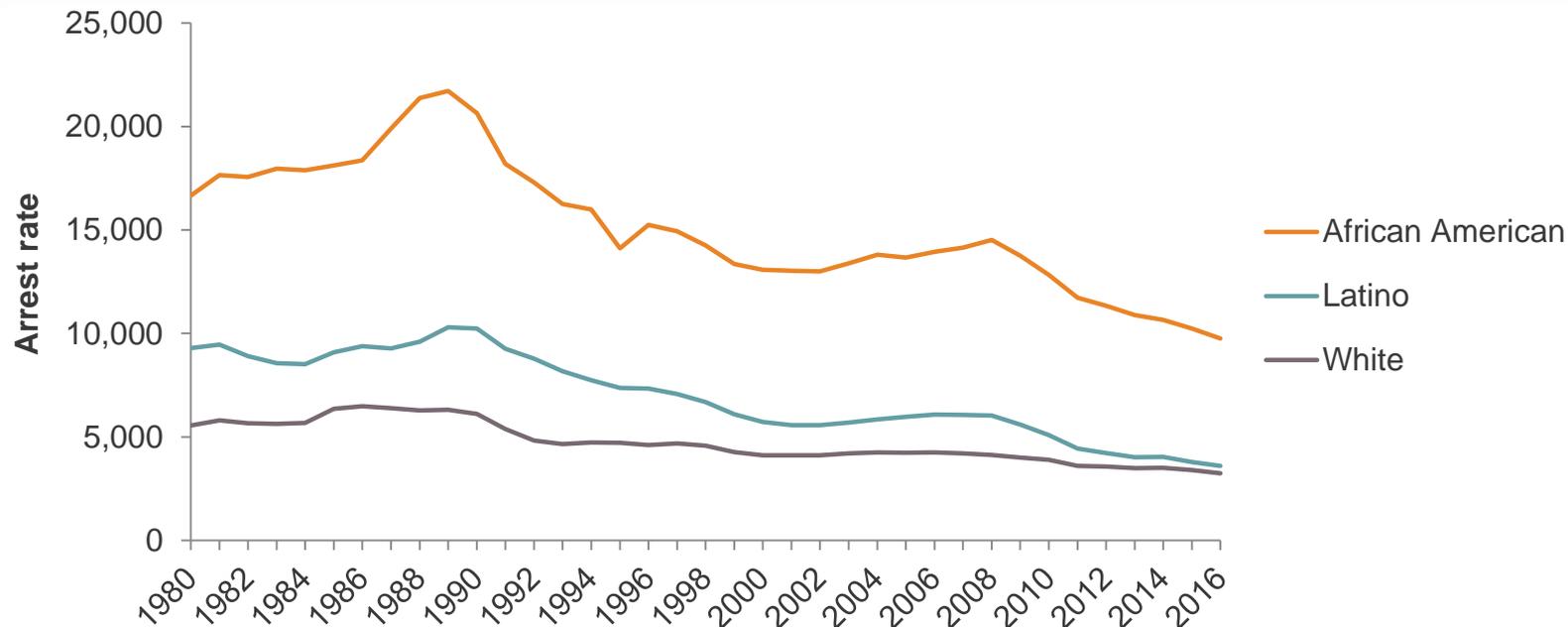
... as have felony arrests

- Declines in felony property arrests stand out
 - Arrest rate dropped from 750 in the early 1980s to about 190 in 2016
 - Share of felony arrests went from 45% to 21%
- Felony drug arrests are also down sharply
 - From about 600 in the late 1980s to about 100 in 2016
 - Share of felony arrests went from about 24% to 11%
- Violent offenses are now roughly one-third of felony arrests
 - But violent arrest rate is at a historic low since 1980
 - Decreased at slower rate than the drop in total arrests

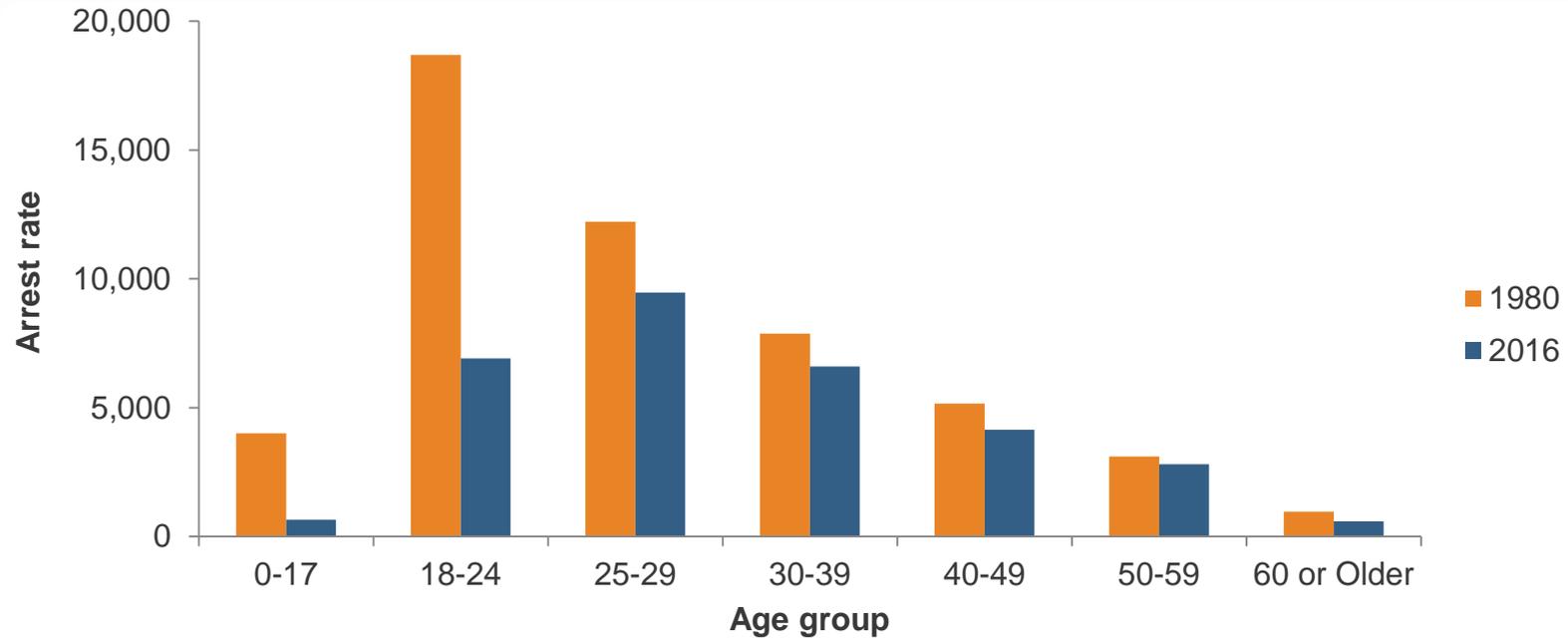
Arrestees tend to be nonwhite, younger, and male

- In 2016, 41% of all arrests were of Latinos, 36% were of whites, and 16% were of African Americans
 - African Americans were highly overrepresented (6% of population)
 - Latinos were slightly overrepresented (39% of population)
- Individuals ages 18–39 accounted for two-thirds of arrests
 - This age group made up less than a third of the population
- Men accounted for three-quarters of arrests

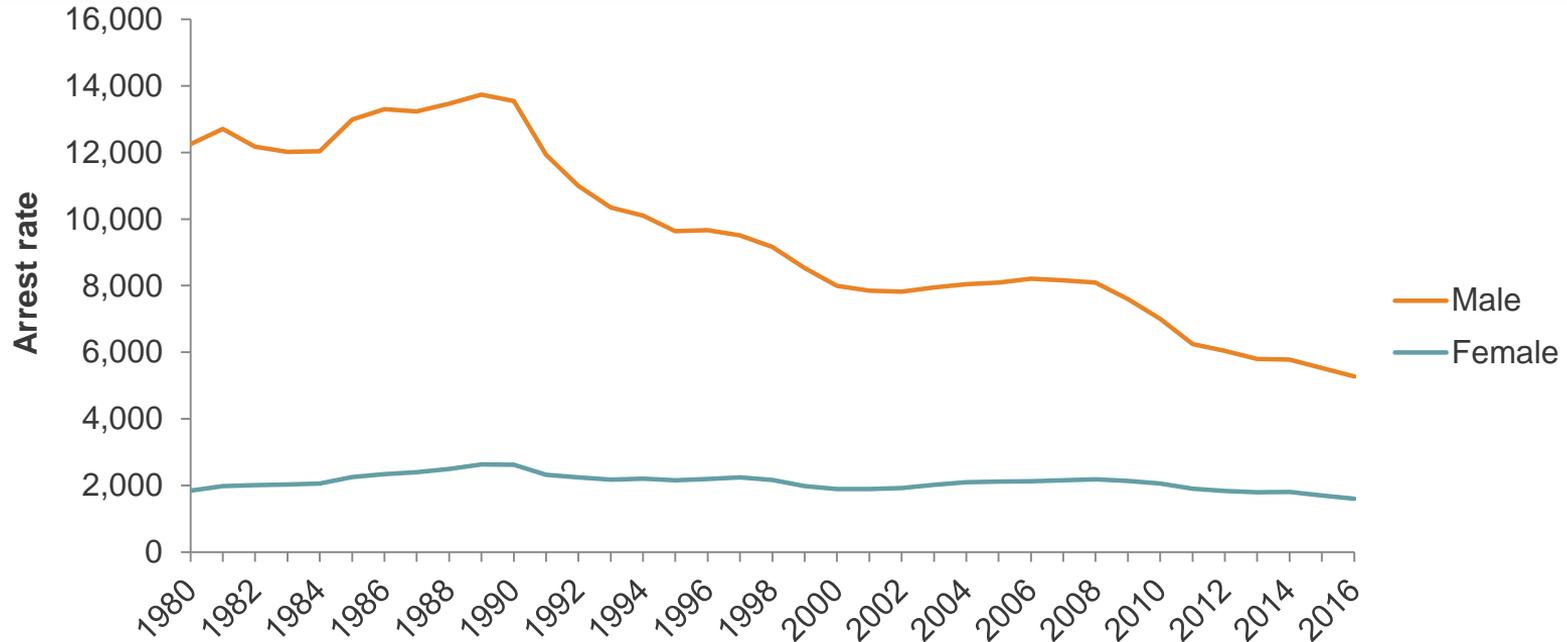
Racial disparities have decreased, but significant gaps remain



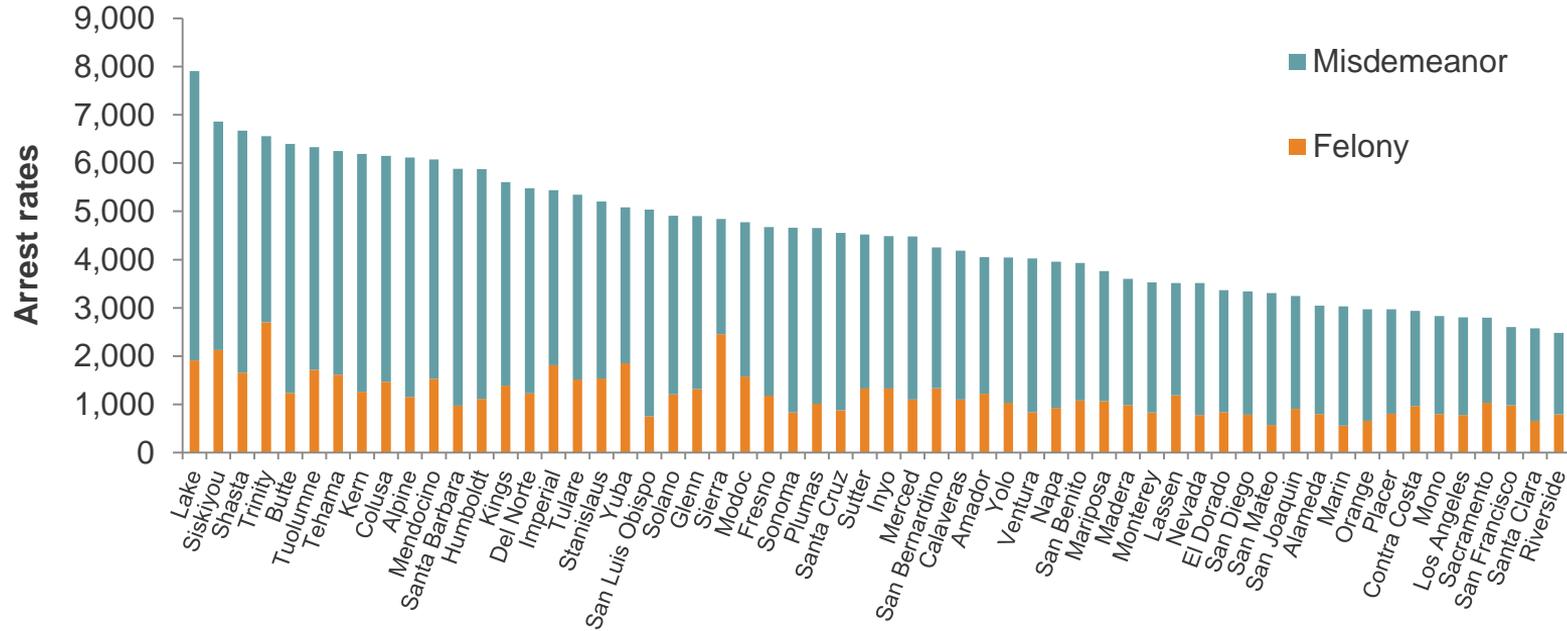
Arrests of juveniles and young adults have dropped dramatically



Male arrest rates are substantially higher than female arrest rates, but the gap is decreasing



Arrest rates vary significantly across counties, with the lowest rates in urban counties



Counties differ widely in the offenses and demographics of arrestees

- Drug and violent crimes drive differences in felony arrests
- Traffic and failure to appear in court/warrant crimes drive differences in misdemeanors
 - Highest arrest rates for these offenses are in rural counties
- Higher arrest rate for African Americans than for whites in almost all counties
 - Latino arrest rate higher than white arrest rate in almost half of the counties
- Highest arrest rates of women are in rural counties

Conclusions

- Despite significant declines, the African American arrest rate is still three times greater than the white arrest rate
- Decreases in arrests are almost entirely due to declines in arrests of juveniles and young adults
- Women now account for about 24% of all arrests, up from 14% in the early 1980s
- Decrease in felony drug arrests after Prop 47 almost offset by increase in misdemeanor drug arrests
 - Not true for property offenses
- Notable differences between urban and rural counties

Next steps

- What factors contribute to these trends and differences?
 - Future research will explore demographics, crime rates, economic conditions, fiscal status, jail capacity, and law enforcement staffing
 - We will also examine the impact of criminal justice reforms as well as cite and release practices and booking rates
- Recent state legislation to collect data on all initial police interactions has been implemented (RIPA)
 - But data will not be available for statewide analysis until 2023 or later

New Insights into California Arrests

Trends, Disparities, and County Differences

December 4, 2018

Magnus Lofstrom, Brandon Martin, Justin Goss,
Joseph Hayes, and Steven Raphael

Supported with funding from the Laura and John Arnold
Foundation



PPIC

PUBLIC POLICY
INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

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:

Magnus Lofstrom (lofstrom@ppic.org; 415-291-4454)

Thank you for your interest in this work.