

WSJ ANALYSIS RACIAL DISPARITIES

Analysis: Blacks in Madison arrested at more than 10 times rate of whites



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A black person in Madison is over 10 times more likely than a white person to be arrested, according to data analyzed by the State Journal that showed African-Americans — who make up about 7 percent of the city's population — account for 45 percent of arrests.

The vastly different rates of arrest are the latest statistical measure of racial disparities in Wisconsin's capital city, a place where, data

have shown, blacks are much more likely than whites to struggle in school, live in poverty and be arrested and incarcerated.

A State Journal review of two years of Madison Police Department arrests found authorities arrested whites at a rate of 2.6 arrests per 100 white residents annually.

African-Americans, meanwhile, wound up in handcuffs at a rate of 27.6 arrests per 100 residents each year — more than 10 times the rate of whites. Hispanics were also more likely than whites to be arrested.

Brandi Grayson, a co-founder of the Young, Gifted and Black Coalition and an outspoken critic of Madison police and local disparities, said the extent of the difference in arrest rates was a surprise.

"It's worse, in a sense, than I expected," Grayson said.

Madison Police Chief Mike Koval called the disparity "stark" and said he supports efforts to reform aspects of the criminal justice system that disproportionately burden people of color as one way to reduce the city's black arrest rate.

But Koval also said the high rates were in part the result of disparities that exist in "each and every element of our society."

He pushed back against the idea that the differing arrest rates were the result of racism on the part of police officers, or that police were the only actors responsible for the disparity.

"That's just not the case," Koval said.

Erica Nelson, the director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families' Race to Equity Project, said that while it's true factors outside MPD's control influence arrest rates, the department must also work to address the disparity.

"It's the responsibility of everyone in every department to try to reduce, through reforms, these disparities that are disproportionately impacting the African-American community here," Nelson said.

Disparity far wider than national average

Madison is far from the only city in which African-Americans make up a disproportionate share of those arrested. The difference here, however, is just how large the gap is between black and white arrest rates.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, African-Americans nationally were arrested at a rate of 7.9 arrests per 100 people in 2012, the most recent year for which data were available, compared to a white rate of 3.4 arrests per 100 people.

The data the State Journal analyzed — which covered every Madison Police Department arrest from 2013 and 2014 — showed the city's black arrest rate was more than three times higher than it is nationally.

The national numbers are not directly comparable to the rates of arrest the State Journal found, as they do not take into account arrests of people who are of Hispanic origin — a distinction of ethnicity, not of race.

Most Hispanics are instead counted as white in the national data.

In Madison, Hispanics were arrested at an annual rate of 4.3 arrests per 100 residents, meaning they were 1.65 times more likely than whites to be arrested.

A city's arrest rate can be affected by several factors, such as people who are arrested more than once or residents of other cities who are arrested there.

While Madison's difference in arrest rates is large, Nelson said it was not particularly surprising given the gaps between white and black Dane County residents showcased in the Race to Equity project's influential 2013 report.

"In many ways, it is in line with lots of the other disparities we found in the report," Nelson said.

Koval: Many factors lead to arrests

Koval said his department's high black arrest rate is in part the result of those other disparities, noting the many measurements that show blacks faring worse than whites in Madison.

The police chief listed several categories in which black Dane County residents have been shown to lag whites, starting from birth.

Black children are far more likely than whites to be [born into poverty](#), more likely to live in a family that cannot meet their medical needs and more likely to fall behind in a school district [beset by its own racial disparities](#), Koval noted.

As teens and adults, they are then more likely to **have trouble finding work** and more likely to live in less desirable housing, he said.

Police are often left to deal with the results of those other disparities if a person shaped by them goes on to do something that leaves officers with no choice but to arrest him or her, Koval said.

“Poor choices and poor opportunities that occur at a socio-economic level can then translate into what’s important for those officers,” he said.

Department data showed that nearly all of the incidents MPD officers respond to are the result of calls from the public for police services, Koval said. Officers self-initiate less than 2 percent of incidents, he said.

Nelson agreed that other racial disparities play a role in Madison’s high black arrest rate.

But she said what police do can perpetuate those disparities as well.

Someone who gets arrested and has a criminal record, for instance, is much more likely to have trouble getting a job in the future.

To address racial disparities, Nelson said, people have to take action where they can.

“You can’t say, ‘I can’t do this until someone else does it’ because then no one’s accountable for making any progress,” she said.

Looking for solutions

Koval said he knows his department can unintentionally contribute to those disparities and mentioned several initiatives he supports to reduce the impact of an arrest on a person’s future.

The department has pushed for more diversion programs that keep cases out of criminal court and leave defendants less likely to re-offend, Koval said, noting that MPD was a major force behind a new restorative justice court for young people on the city’s South Side.

Wherever possible, Koval said, officers try to handle low-level offenses with tickets rather than criminal charges, and the department is looking into how it can better handle juvenile offenders so they don’t wind up in trouble as adults.

Koval also said he supports several changes aimed at making the criminal justice system more fair to people of color, such as limiting the information that appears on Wisconsin’s online court records system and decriminalizing drug possession.

“We’re willing to talk about anything,” Koval said.

But Grayson contends the disparities in arrest rates ultimately have their roots in institutional racism at MPD and in society more broadly, saying they won’t change unless the department takes the uncomfortable step of acknowledging that and working against it.

“The reality and the depth of racism is what it is — I didn’t create it, you didn’t create it, it is what it is,” Grayson said. “So are we going to accept it or excuse it? Or are we really going to do something about it?”

It's the allegation of racism, however, that Koval has most fervently denied.

"That's not who we are, that's not what we do," he said. "It's gotten old, it's self-serving, and it allows other partners in the community to take a pass when we're the easiest target."

Report shows deep racial disparity in arrests in Madison

By [Journal Sentinel staff](#)

Aug. 30, 2015

A black person in Madison is over 10 times more likely than a white person to be arrested, [according to an analysis published Sunday by the Wisconsin State Journal](#).

The newspaper reviewed two years of Madison Police Department arrest data and found police arrested whites at a rate of 2.6 arrests per 100 white residents annually, compared to arresting African-Americans at a rate of 27.6 arrests per 100 residents. Hispanics also were more likely than whites to be arrested.

The disparity is "stark" and is, in part, a reflection of disparities that exist in "each and every element of our society," Madison Police Chief Mike Koval told the State Journal. He said he supports efforts to reduce disparities in the criminal justice system.

The disparity in arrest rates in Madison was highlighted earlier this year after the fatal police shooting of Tony Robinson. [The shooting, many said, forced Madison residents to address simmering racial disparities](#).

At the time, a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article reported African-Americans made up about 7% of the population in Madison, but African-American adults were nearly 11 times more likely than white adults to be arrested.

Find this article at:

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/crime/report-shows-deep-racial-disparity-in-arrests-in-madison-b99566831z1-323373621.html>

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