



College of Liberal Arts

Center for Public Safety Initiatives

Race and Crime in a Rustbelt Suburb: Irondequoit, NY

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Introduction

In the first of a three-part series of working papers, we explore race and crime in Irondequoit, NY via arrest data over a 30-year period. We chose arrest data because it is the only data source that tells us about the race/ethnicity of arrestees. While arrest data is beneficial to us for this reason, we also recognize its limitations. Arrest data does not include instances where police officers used their discretion and did not arrest an individual who they knew engaged in criminal activity, and it does not include crime that did not come to the attention of the police. The second paper in this series will focus on the race/ethnicity of individuals arrested for felony offenses and the third paper will focus on the race/ethnicity of those arrested for misdemeanor offenses. These papers use data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS).

Irondequoit Demographics

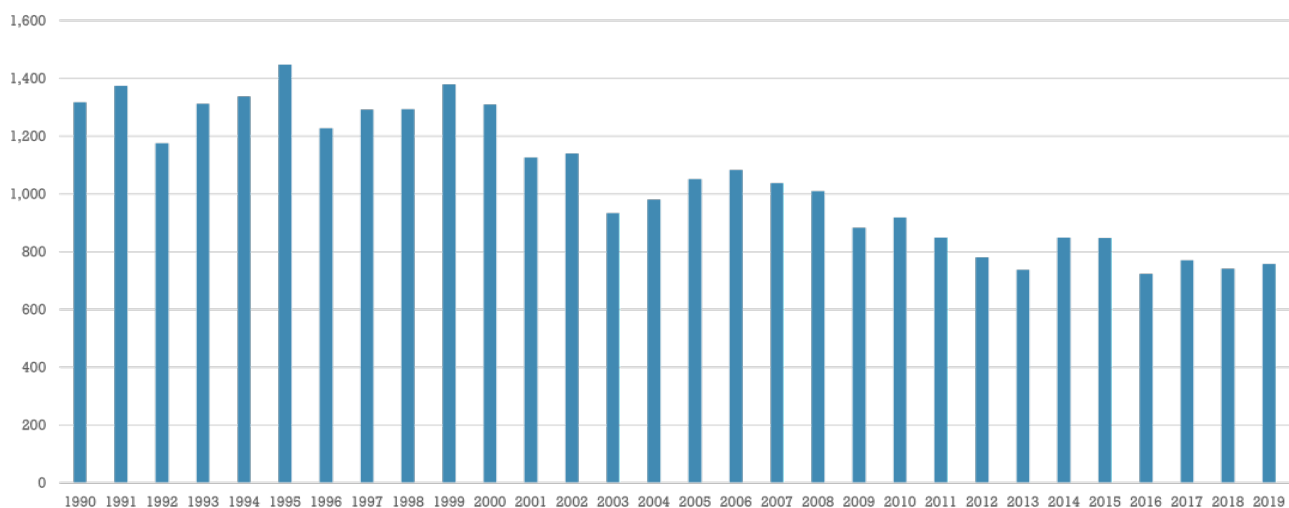
The town of Irondequoit is bordered on the north by Lake Ontario, the city of Rochester buttresses the town on its west and south sides, and the towns of Webster and Penfield lie to the east. The Irondequoit Police Department (IPD) is colloquially referred to by some as the “Border Patrol” implying that their primary concern is (or should be) the border between the city of Rochester and the southern border of Irondequoit. The term “border patrol” also implies that crime is something that emanates from the city. The city is often code for Blacks and other racial minorities who make up much of the population in the neighborhoods on the town’s southern border. Additionally, the increasing diversity of the town is often referenced as an explanation for the town’s supposed rise in crime. While Irondequoit has always been a white majority suburb, census data reveals that the town has become more racially/ethnically

diverse over the last several decades. Census data from 1990 shows Irondequoit having a population of 52,377 people of which roughly 97% of people were White and a little more than 1% were Black and Hispanic. The population remained relatively stable over time while it diversified. The 2019 census reported a total population of 50,302 people of which roughly 78% were White, 9% were Black and 9% were Hispanic.

Irondequoit Arrest Data

Anecdotal evidence from social media indicates that some town residents hold the perception that Blacks and Latinos are especially prone to criminality and thus constitute the majority of those arrested by IPD, however, the data will show this belief is misguided. As the town of Irondequoit has become more diverse, crime (felonies and misdemeanors), as measured by number and type of arrests, has decreased significantly. Figure 1 shows total arrests by the IPD from 1990–2019. Consistent with national crime trends, arrests peaked in the mid-1990s and have generally been decreasing since.

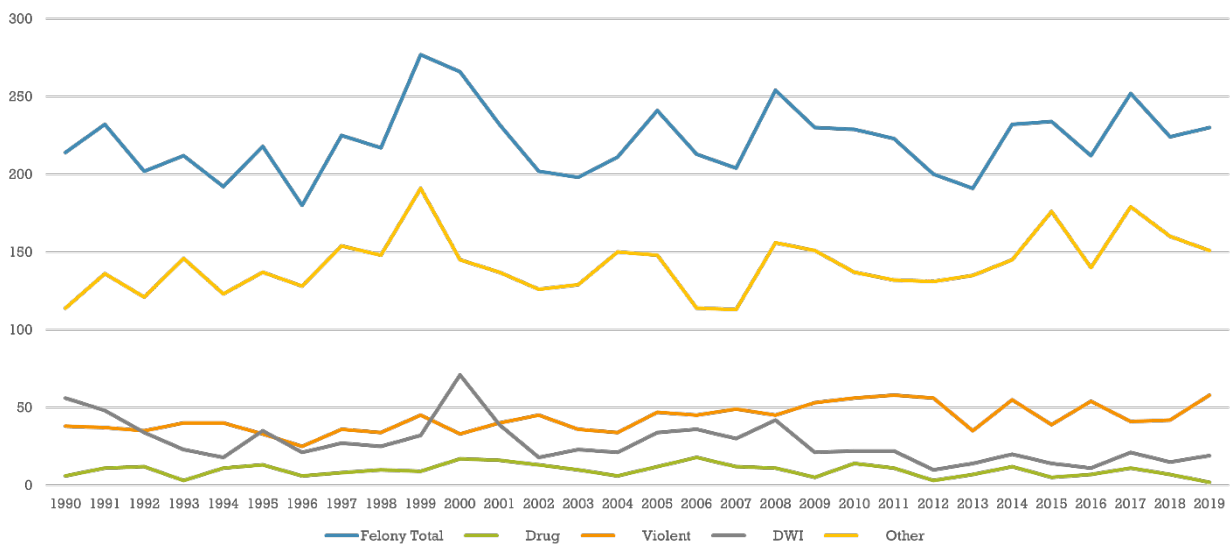
Figure 1. Total IPD Arrests: 1990–2019



Source: New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services

Figure 2 illustrates the total number of arrests by felony charges from 1990–2019. Over the 30-year period, no year yielded more than 20 drug related felony arrests. Comparatively, in the same 30-year period the number of arrests each year for felony DWI offenses generally decreased. From 1990–2000 there were roughly 35 arrests for felony DWI offenses each year. From 2000–2010 there were roughly 32 arrests for felony DWI offenses each year. From 2010–2019 there were roughly 17 arrests for felony DWI offenses each year.

Figure 2. Total Arrests by Charge: Felony, 1990–2019

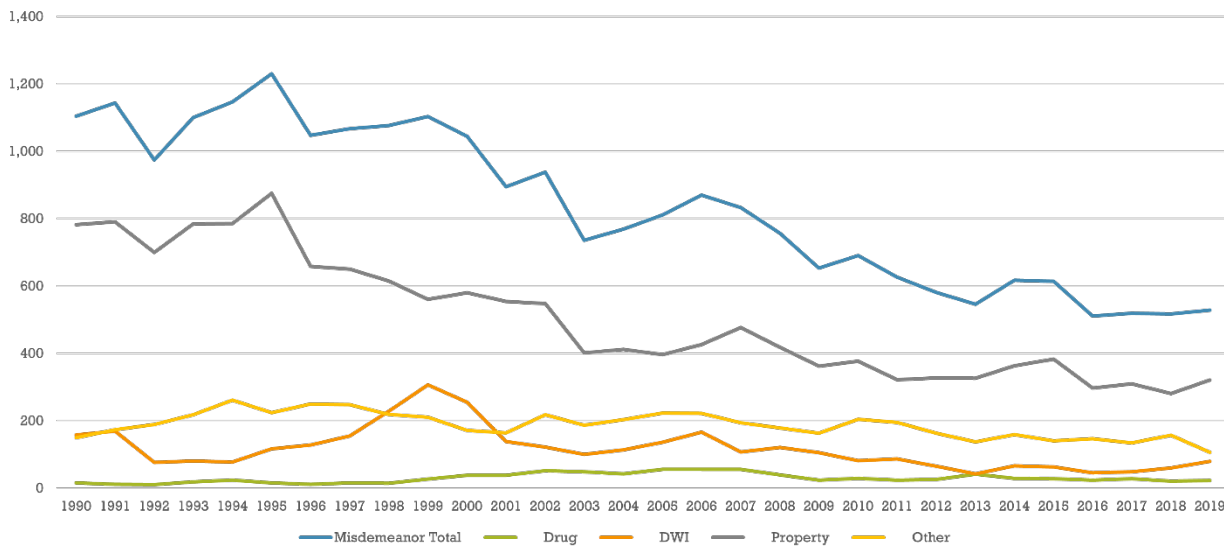


Source: New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services

The total number of arrests that came about because of a violent felony offense slightly increased throughout the 30-year period of observation. From 1990–2000 there were roughly 36 arrests per year for violent felony offenses. From 2000–2010 there were roughly 44 arrests per year for violent felony offenses. From 2010–2019 there were roughly 49 arrests per year for violent felony offenses.

The total number of arrests for offenses under the category of ‘other’ was never less than 100 in any given year during the 30-year observation period. Included in the category ‘other’ are a wide variety of felony offenses, such as criminal trespassing in the third degree, burglary (first, second, and third degree), and conspiracy in the first degree. Arrests in this category peaked in 1999 when there were 191 arrests, and after that point there was a downward trend. The total number of combined felony arrests during the 30-year period followed the trend of the individual felony arrest data, peaking with 232 total arrests in 1991 and 277 total arrests in 1999. Changes in the overall total number of felony arrests are largely due to changes in ‘other’ arrests.

Figure 3. Total Arrest by Charge: Misdemeanor, 1990–2019



Source: New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services

Figure 3 illustrates the total number of misdemeanor arrests for each year over the 30-year period as well as the number of arrests each year for each misdemeanor type. Like arrests for felony drug related offenses, arrests for misdemeanor-related drug offenses remained

stable over time. Over the entire 30-year period there were never more than 60 arrests for misdemeanor drug-related offenses in any given year. Comparatively, the number of arrests for misdemeanor DWI offenses decreased over the period of observation. From 1990–2000 there were roughly 158 arrests each year for misdemeanor DWI offenses. From 2000–2010 there were roughly 131 arrests each year for misdemeanor DWI offenses. From 2010–2019 there were roughly 64 arrests each year for misdemeanor DWI offenses.

Arrests for property-related misdemeanors made up the largest group of arrests with the peak arrest year being 1999 which saw 191 arrests. After 1999 the number of arrests each year declined steadily and remained relatively stable. The number of arrests for property-related misdemeanors that fall under the category of ‘other’ peaked in 1994 when there were 261 arrests. After 1994 the number of arrests each year trended downward and continued to do so until 2019—apart from 1996 which is an outlier with 250 arrests happening that year. As a whole, misdemeanor arrests peaked in 1995 with 1,230 arrests that year. After 1995 the number of arrests each year declined steadily. The decrease in the number of misdemeanor arrests is largely due to the decrease in property arrests over the 30-year period.

Conclusion

While arrest data is limited in the scope of what it can tell us about crime in a particular community, it confirms that overall crime decreased in the 30-year period covered by this data. This decrease in crime as reflected in arrests occurred while the town became significantly more diverse, which problematizes the arguments that crime has been increasing in Irondequoit as a consequence of the influx of racial minorities as residents and

because of the town's proximity to the city of Rochester. In the next three working papers we will delineate the race/ethnicity of those arrested over the 30-year period. Subsequent to the publication of these working papers, we will analyze more granular data, such as where individuals were arrested, and whether or not arrest was officer-initiated.

About the Center for Public Safety Initiatives

The Center for Public Safety Initiatives is a unique collaboration between RIT's **Department of Criminal Justice**, the City of Rochester, and the criminal justice agencies of Greater Rochester including the Rochester Police Department and Monroe County Crime Lab. Its purpose is to contribute to criminal justice strategy through research, policy analysis and evaluation. Its educational goals include training graduate and undergraduate students in strategic planning and policy analysis.

The foundation of the Center is the practice of action research in which relevant data and analyses are brought to bear on the day to day decision-making processes of organizations. The Center serves the practice of policy development and implementation in real-time.

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