

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CRIME, ARRESTS, AND JAIL POPULATIONS

Expanding Analysis to 21 Months Post Pandemic and Beyond



Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

*The JFA Institute*

Denver, CO • Washington, D.C. •

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beginning in March 2020, local and state criminal agencies became concerned that people arrested and booked into local county jails would be unduly exposed to the COVID-19 virus. To address these concerns, a variety of policies were enacted to reduce the number of persons held in jails. These policies were designed to 1) mitigate the number of people being arrested and booked into local jails and 2) reduce the length of stay (LOS) for those admitted to jail. Concurrently, public safety concerns were raised that by lowering the jail populations, crime in the community would increase.

To address these concerns, the JFA Institute (JFA), through resources provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC) program, began tracking and analyzing six cities and counties participating in SJC (jurisdictions) and their jail and crime data in real time to monitor the impact of these mitigation activities. In October 2020, the study was expanded to five other jurisdictions and data collected through December 2020. This report serves as a second expansion to include data through the year 2021, though with a slightly altered set of the eleven jurisdictions.

Analysis of the eleven jurisdictions:

- Jail populations declined in the months immediately following the pandemic, yet crime and arrests declined as well, giving indication that declining jail populations did not compromise public safety.
- Jail populations typically increase in the summer months then decline towards the latter half of the year. When comparing the monthly jail populations in 2019 to those of 2021, a similar seasonality can be seen. However, although the seasonality in 2021 greatly mimics 2019, 2021 still saw greatly decreased jail populations, month-to-month, compared to 2019. Decreased jail populations coupled with total reported crime in 2021 remaining at levels at or below those seen in 2019 is further indication that declining jail populations did not compromise public safety.
- Overall, total reported crime was 20% lower in December 2020 when compared to December 2019. The total number of reported crimes for calendar 2020 versus calendar 2019 was 13% lower. Continuing to 2021, total crimes rebounded overall but remained 9% lower than calendar 2019.
- When combining all jurisdictions, there was an average 38% decrease in jail bookings between 2019 and 2020, which equates to over 140,000 fewer jail bookings in a one-year time frame. Jail booking decreases were fueled by the decrease in property crime and arrests, primarily for misdemeanor and lower-level felony charges. Bookings continued to decline in 2021, down 42% compared to 2019 and down 7% compared to 2020 equating to an additional 19,000 fewer jail admissions.
- As a result of the change in jail bookings, the composition of the jail populations in 2020 changed post-COVID-19, with a higher proportion being male and charged with or convicted of violent felony crimes. This new jail population composition was maintained through 2021.
- The LOS for people in jail increased in 2020 due to the changing make-up of the jail populations and a slowdown in the disposition of criminal charges (court case processing). This trend continued into 2021, as the LOS for persons released from jails continued to lengthen. By the end of 2021 LOS for jails was 25 days longer than in 2019.

- After the historic initial decrease, jail populations rebounded somewhat but stabilized in October 2020. These populations remained stable through mid-year 2022 with no additional sizeable rebound.

The response to COVID-19 revealed that measures designed to safely reduce the number of persons held in jail can be successful. The challenges to maintaining the post-COVID-19 lower jail populations without compromising public safety began in earnest in 2021. “New normals” blanketed the criminal justice system and several short-term mitigation measures were proven to be safe long-term solutions to reducing jail populations. The 2021 trends for the eleven jurisdictions examined in this report indicate that long term jail reduction population reductions are possible without compromising public safety. Arrests, reported crimes, and jail bookings remain at or below pre-pandemic levels. However, the continued increases in length of stay show there is still work to be done, especially in expediting criminal case processing in the courts.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Beginning in March 2020, local and state criminal justice agencies took several actions to mitigate the rising number of people in their facilities being infected with the COVID-19 virus. There was considerable concern that people arrested and booked into local county jails would be unduly exposed to the virus, become infected, and then spread the virus to those also confined to jails, employees, and/or to others in the community once released from confinement.

To address these concerns, a variety of policies were enacted to reduce the number of persons in held jails. These policies were designed to 1) mitigate the number of people being arrested and booked into local jails and 2) reduce the length of stay (LOS) for those admitted to jail. Concurrently, public safety concerns were raised that by lowering the jail populations, crime rates would increase. To address these concerns, the JFA Institute (JFA), through resources provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC) initiative, began tracking and analyzing six SJC jurisdictions and their jail and crime data to monitor the impact of these mitigation activities. This culminated in a preliminary report issued in late 2020 with data and observations covering a time frame of January 2019 to June 2020<sup>1</sup>.

Results of this first-stage analysis found an emerging trend in which jail populations declined, yet crime and arrests declined as well, giving indication that declining jail populations did not compromise public safety. As the pandemic continued into its second, third and even fourth wave, some mitigation measures were modified, but most continued. To build upon the findings gleaned from the first analysis, JFA expanded the study to eleven jurisdictions and collected the data through December 2020. This report serves as a second expansion to include data through the year 2021.

As with the previous expansion, eleven SJC jurisdictions have generously shared their monthly aggregate jail, reported crime, and arrest data for analysis. Additionally, some jurisdictions were able to share case level data to augment this report’s findings.

It should be noted that the eleven jurisdictions contributing to this report are not the exact set from the eleven that reported data for the first extension report. Thus, statistics quoted in this report are not comparable on a one-to-one basis with the previous but overall trends and findings remain the same.

The eleven participating jurisdictions for this iteration of analysis are listed below. New jurisdictions are indicated in italics.

1. Allegheny County, PA (Pittsburgh);
2. Charleston County, SC (Charleston);
3. Cook County, IL (Chicago);
4. Lake County, IL;
5. Los Angeles County, CA;
6. *Milwaukee County*;
7. *Multnomah County\**;
8. Pennington County, SD (Rapid City);
9. City and County of San Francisco, CA;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rest.edit.site/filestorage-api-service/0898e1c10c5b56a8c1a76c80b5b5b247/the-impact-of-covid-19-prelim-final.pdf?dl=1>

10. Spokane County, WA; and,
11. St. Louis County, MO.

\*The data provided by Multnomah County pertains only to arrests that fall under the jurisdiction of the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office. It is estimated that less than ten percent of arrests in Multnomah County are enacted by the Sheriff's Office, as evidenced by booking data.

## II. DATA COLLECTED

For each of the eleven jurisdictions, JFA collected a wide array of aggregate- and individual-level data for both pre- and post-COVID-19 timeframes. In terms of aggregate-level data, the following counts were provided by each jurisdiction for each month from January 2019 to December 2021:

1. Reported UCR crimes or NIBRS (murder, rape, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft);
2. Adult arrests (UCR crimes, total felony, and total misdemeanor);
3. Jail bookings; and
4. End-of-month jail population.

These data were used to assess the impact of COVID-19 on crime, arrests, and jail populations. By collecting data back to January 2019, one can control for traditional seasonal fluctuations in these metrics (crime, arrests, and jail populations tend to rise in the spring and summer and decline in the fall and winter seasons). The crime and arrest data were provided by the major individual law enforcement agencies for each county (a minimum of 75% of all jail bookings). Appendix A has detailed lists of each jurisdiction's law enforcement agencies that contributed to data in this report.

In addition to aggregate-level data, JFA collected individual-level data for the following populations both prior to and after the implementation of COVID-19 restrictions:

1. Snapshot of the jail population at the end of February 2020 and the end of December 2021; and
2. Jail releases from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021.

These individual-level data demonstrate how some key attributes of people comprising the jail population have changed beginning with the declines first seen in March 2020. The jail release files allowed for a more detailed comparison of how people are being released from jail and, more importantly, their length of stay (LOS).

## III. ANALYSIS

The following pages present the analysis of the data collected. JFA pooled the data for all eleven jurisdictions to analyze overall trends. Where there are significant differences in the overall trends for specific jurisdictions, these are noted and commented on, emphasizing the individual jurisdictions' impact on the overall trend. JFA examined data for the entire pre- and post-COVID-19 period. For this second expansion of the analysis, specific attention was paid to changes between trends in 2020 and 2021 (which we are considering the first year of the societal recovery period). Also examined are the differences between the pre-COVID period and 2020 (the pandemic period) versus the pre-COVID period and 2021 (recovery).

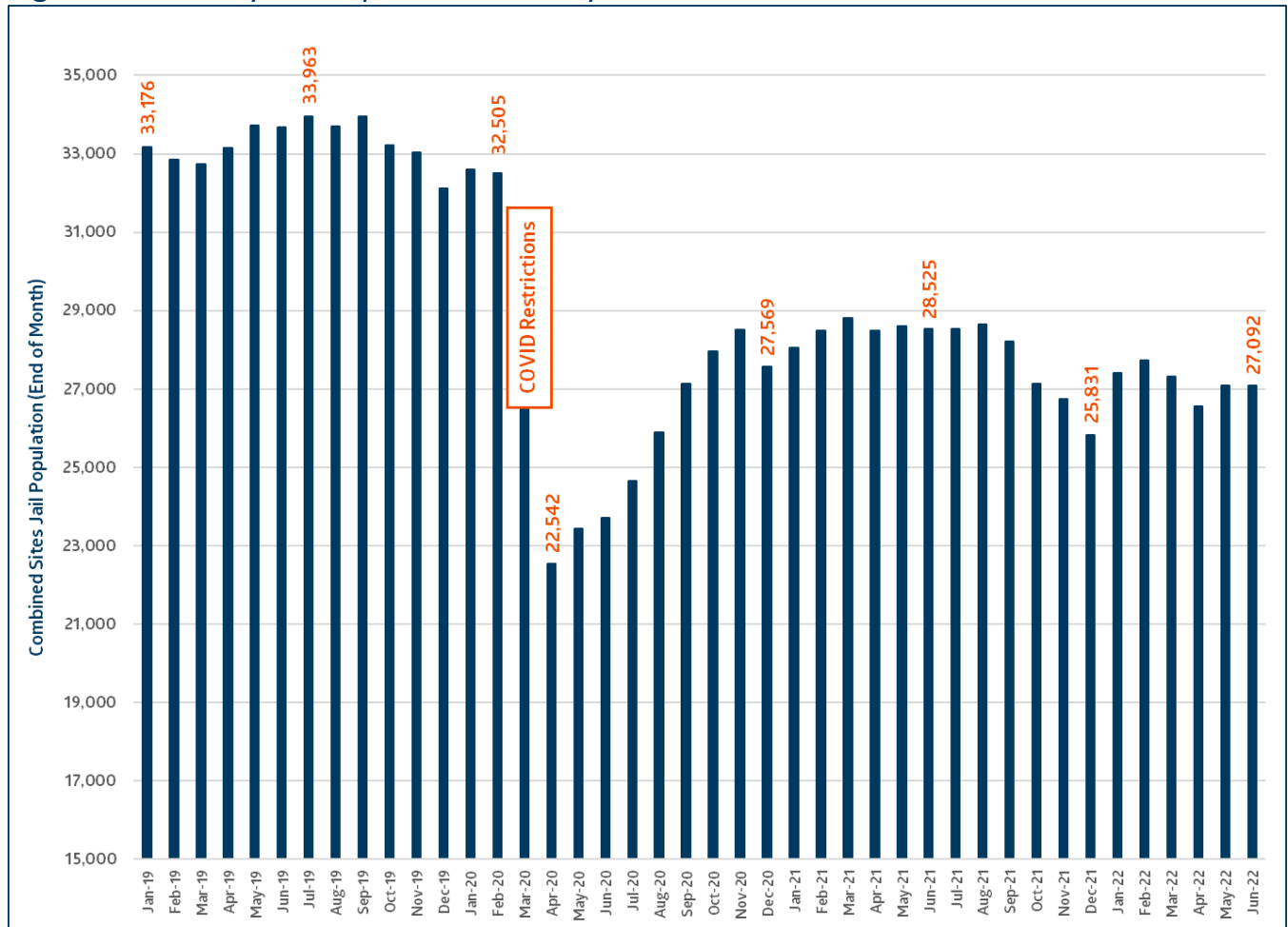
### A. Jail Populations Stabilize in 2021 at Reduced Levels

Restrictions imposed by jurisdictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 had an immediate and dramatic effect on jail populations across the country. Mandated jail population reductions to allow for social distancing resulted in a variety of policy measures across the jurisdictions studied. Nearly all jurisdictions enacted the use of virtual hearings and suspended or postponed court cases/hearings. Further initial reduction measures ranged from early release for sentenced offenders, increased use of release-on-recognizance (ROR) and pre-trial release, changes to bail/bond schedules and rules, and suspension of arrest for misdemeanor and traffic offenses.

These swift actions sizably reduced the jail population in all eleven jurisdictions examined in this extension. Pooled data for all jurisdictions showed a pronounced decrease in the jail population from the end of February 2020 to the end of May 2020. Jail population decreases ranged from 14% to as high as 40%. The average decline across all jurisdictions during the initial three months was 27%. Beginning in June 2020, jail populations rebounded somewhat and continued to grow through the fall of 2020, then stabilized.

This stabilization has continued through 2021. For the jurisdictions in this study, the latter half of 2021 jail populations were an average 7% higher than the lows seen in 2020. However, comparing 2021 to 2019 month-to-month (all 12 months), 2021's jail populations were an average of 20% lower. These data indicate that, while a rebound in the jail population occurred in late 2020, it has stabilized to a level below pre-pandemic numbers.

Figure 1. Monthly Jail Population January 2019 – June 2022

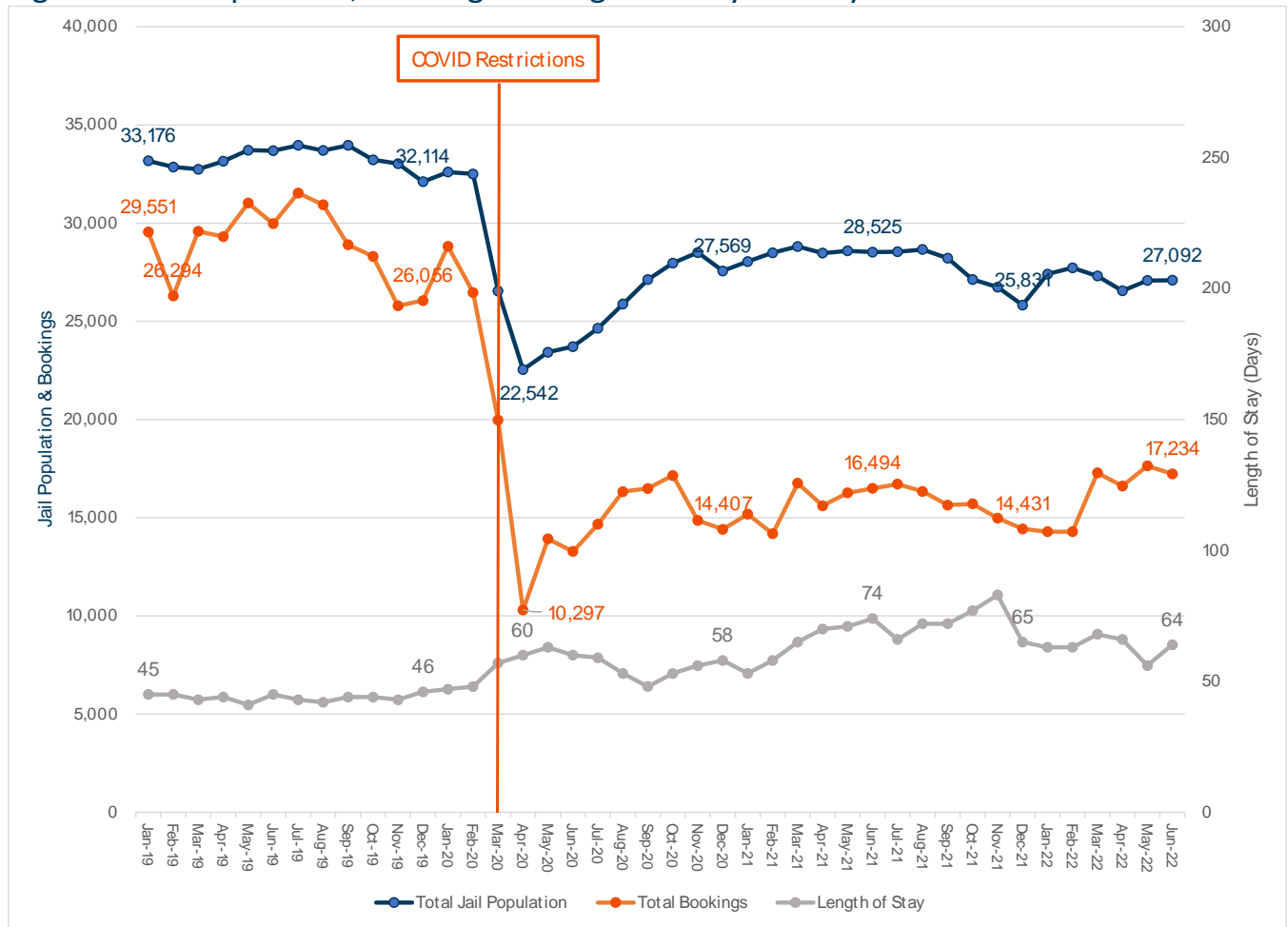


The initial jail population reduction in 2020 was fueled by a decrease in jail bookings for property crime and arrests, primarily for misdemeanor and lower-level felony charges. When comparing jail bookings for all eleven jurisdictions from February 2020 through May 2020, the number of bookings declined on average 36% from the same period in 2019.

In the latter half of 2020, jail bookings began to increase and fueled the rebound in the jail populations previously mentioned. The change in total bookings (all sites summed) between 2020 and 2021 saw an additional decrease of 9%. Bookings in all eleven sites in 2021 were 46% lower than 2019, pre-pandemic. The lower volume of bookings through 2021 is another indicator that the jail populations have stabilized at levels lower than pre-pandemic. Figure 2 compares the three-year trend of the jail population and bookings for the eleven jurisdictions studied.



Figure 2. Jail Population, Bookings & Length of Stay January 2019 – June 2022



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, Lake, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Multnomah, Pennington, San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

## B. Reported Crime has Stabilized at or Below Pre-Pandemic Levels

Any discussion about trends in crime rates needs to be seen in context with the overall crime trends since the 1990s. Since the early 1990s, the numbers of crimes, in particular murder and other violent crimes, have plummeted. In 1990, the overall crime rate was nearly 6,000 per 100,000, the violent crime rate was about 750 per 100,000, and the murder rate was 10 per 100,000. Since then, crime rates have steadily declined. By 2019, overall crime rate was 2,490 per 100,000, or less than half the 1990 rate. The 2019 violent crime rate was 380 per 100,000, and the murder rate was 5 per 100,000 – again about half the 1990 rates.<sup>2</sup> These dramatic declines in the crime rates were not driven by larger jail or prison populations but by demographic and economic factors.<sup>3</sup>

Put more succinctly, any one-year annual “percent changes” in crimes post-pandemic are based on crime levels that were already historically low in 2019. Any increase observed over the last two years does not accurately represent major changes in one’s risk of being victimized. Finally, crimes rates fluctuate seasonally within a year (rates are higher in the summer and lower in the winter) and can fluctuate during a downward or upward trend year by year. Given this, caution must be given to sudden increases or decreases that have occurred since COVID-19 in lieu of the longer established trends.

Overall, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, declines in both jail bookings and populations have not translated to overall increased reported crimes or arrests. Across all eleven jurisdictions, there was a sharp decline in the number of serious crimes reported to police beginning in March 2020 and continuing through May 2020. Most of this decline was attributable to declines in larceny-theft, which traditionally comprises over 60% of the total UCR crimes.

In totality, reported UCR crimes in the sites studied, like the jail populations, have stabilized at levels at or below pre-pandemic levels. Total reported UCR crime declined by 14% between 2019 and 2020. For that same period, violent crimes saw an increase of less than 1% while property crimes fell by 17%. Between 2020 and 2021, reported UCR crime increased by 1% yet 2021 crime numbers remained 13% lower than 2019<sup>4</sup>.

Eight of the eleven sites studied each individually have the sum of indicators at or below 2019 numbers. Pennington and Milwaukee have higher total UCR reported crimes in 2021 than 2019. Of these two sites, both have lower jail populations and annual booking in 2021 than 2019.

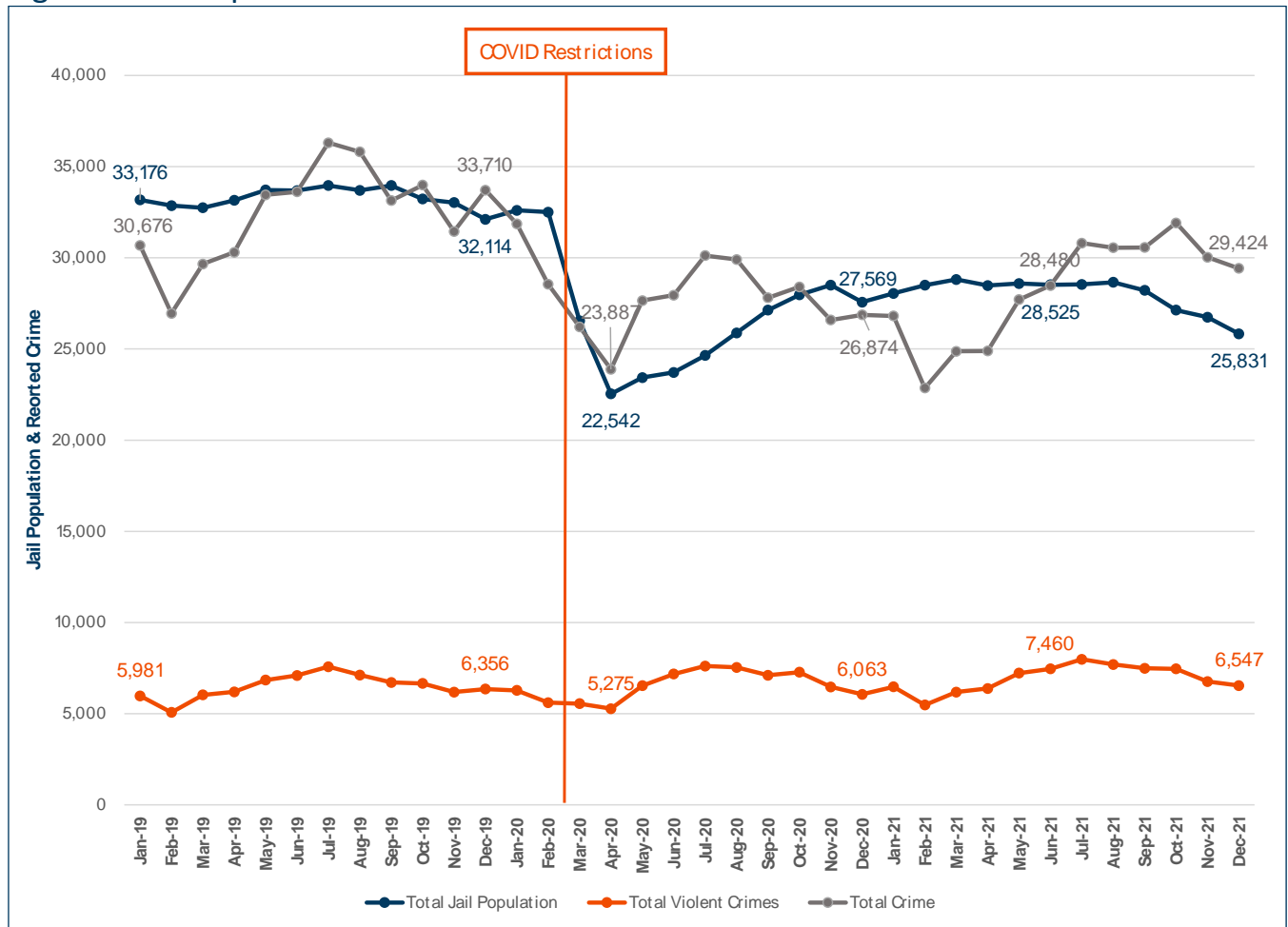
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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>

<sup>3</sup> James Austin, Todd Clear, and Richard Rosenfeld. 2020. **Explaining Past and Projecting Future Crime Rates**. New York, NY: The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. [hfg.org/crime\\_forecasting.htm](http://hfg.org/crime_forecasting.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Due to changes in reporting methods in 2021, reported motor vehicle theft for San Francisco has been excluded from crime analysis.

Figure 3. Jail Population and UCR Crime 2019 - 2021



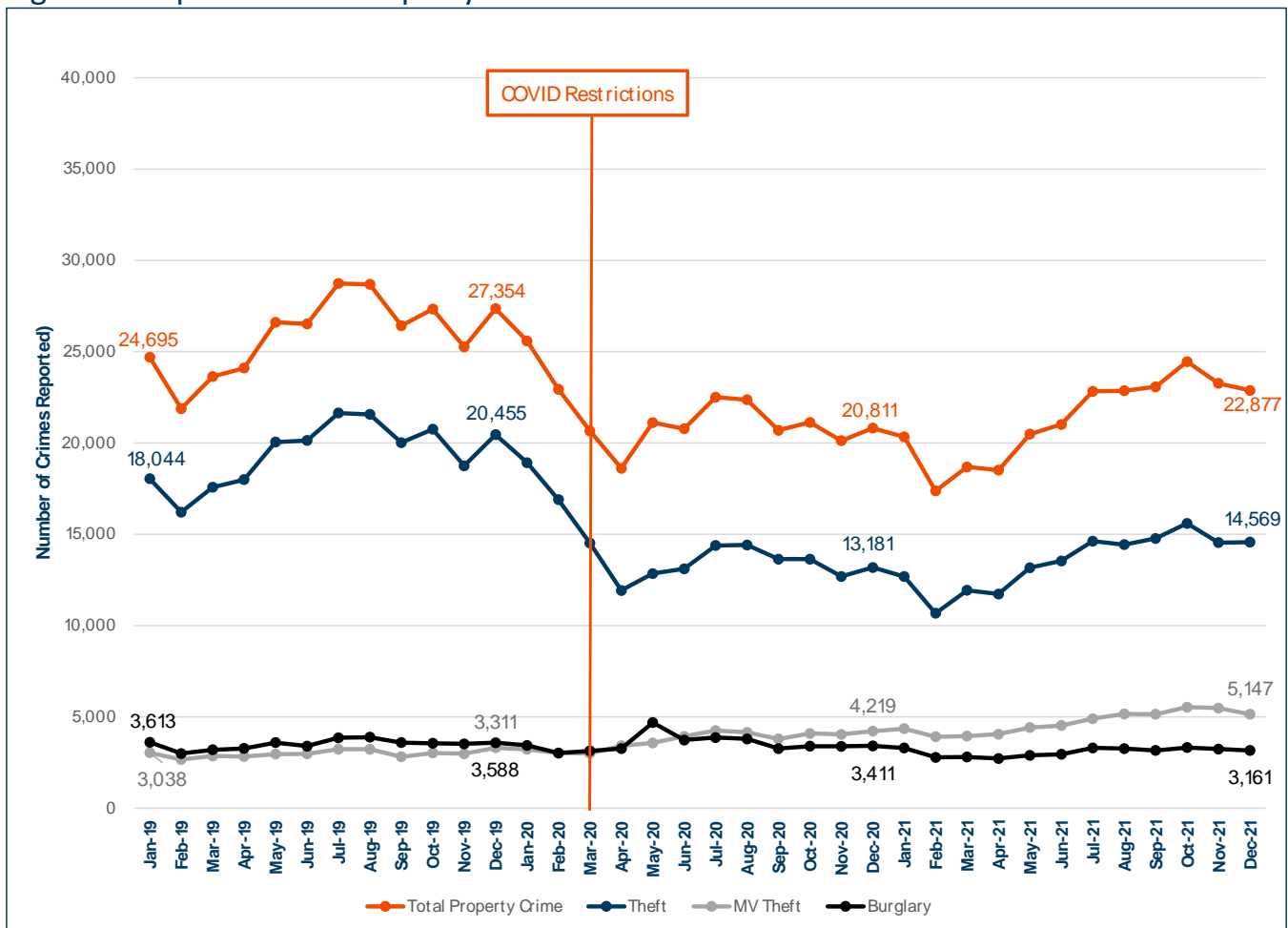
Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, Lake, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Multnomah, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

## Property Crime

Three crime types make up the UCR property crime category: larceny/theft, burglary, and motor vehicle theft. As noted earlier, property crime, particularly larceny/theft, makes up over half of all crimes reported and thus has a considerable influence over the overall reported property crime trend. All jurisdictions studied reported huge declines in reported larceny/theft crimes, both initially (March to May 2020) and longer-term (2019 versus 2020 through 2021). There were 27% fewer larceny/theft reported crimes in all of 2020 over 2019 and 30% lower in 2021 versus 2019. Burglary showed mixed results with a slight 1% increase when comparing 2020 to 2019 but a 12% decrease when comparing 2021 to 2019.

The exception to the overall property crime trends is that motor vehicle theft greatly increased for most of the ten jurisdictions studied (less San Francisco), following the highly publicized national trend. The majority of jurisdictions in our study initially saw only moderate increases in reported motor vehicle theft in 2020 but these crimes increased more substantially through 2021. The only exceptions were Spokane, Charleston, and Allegheny counties where reported crime for motor vehicle theft numbers decreased in 2021 when compared to 2019.

Figure 4. Reported UCR Property Crime 2019 - 2021



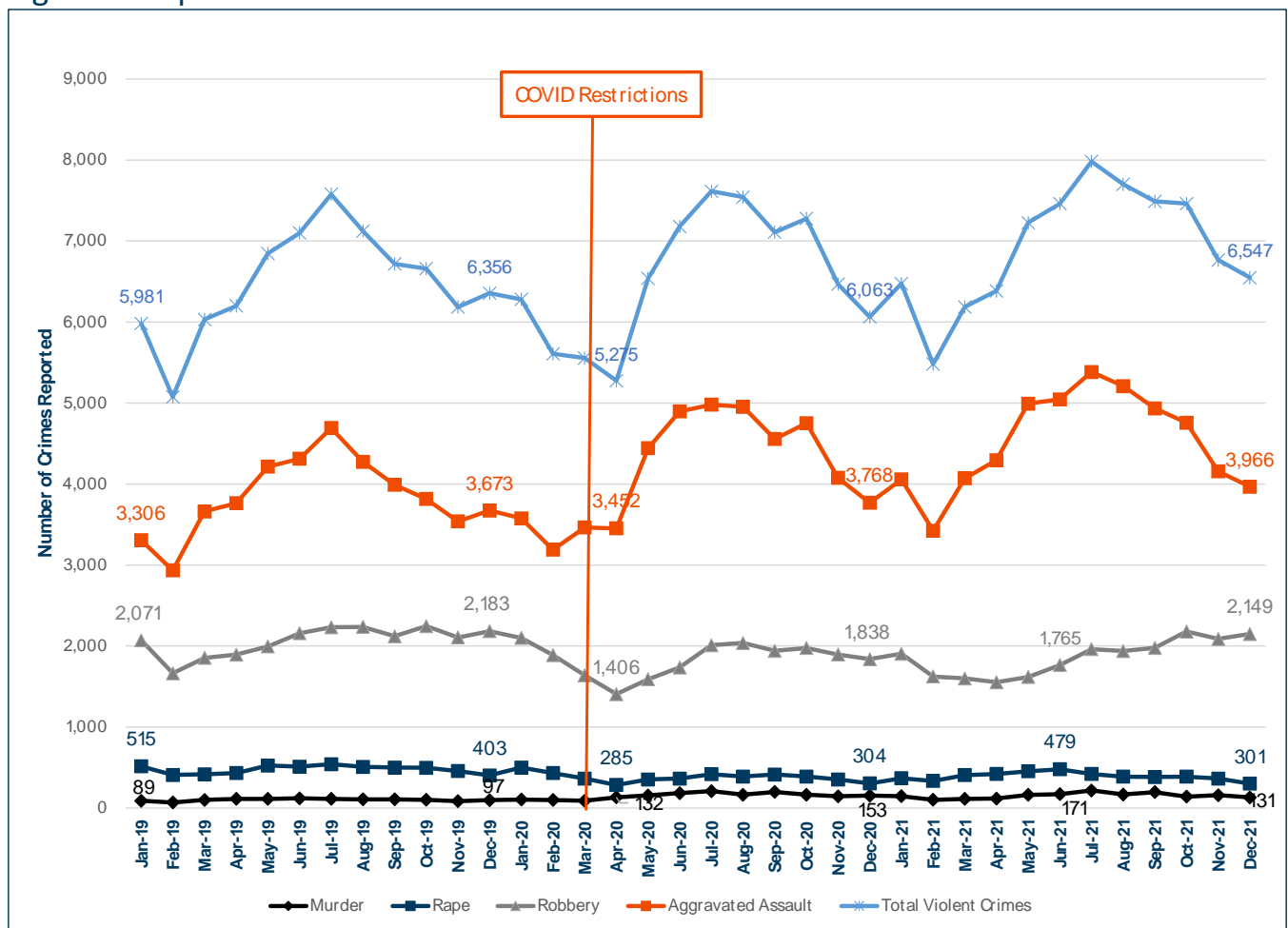
Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, Lake, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Multnomah, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

## Violent Crime

After the initial post-COVID-19 decline, data showed an increased number of reported murders and aggravated assaults beginning in May 2020. Increases in murders during the summer of 2020 in certain cities were widely reported in the media, which were anecdotally linked to reductions in jail populations and/or demonstrations against police violence. This report solely focuses on trends and provides data analysis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data available currently is not sufficient to establish a causation of increases in certain violent crimes (murder), while other violent crimes (rape and robbery) remain at or below pre-pandemic levels. Year-on-year totals show that the increased number of reported murders seen in 2020 was mimicked in 2021. Reported murders in 2020 were 48% higher than 2019 while 2021 reported murders were 50% higher than 2019- indicating reported murders increased substantially in 2020 and have maintained that higher level in 2021.

The total number of reported robbery and rape crimes in 2021 remained at the reduced levels seen in 2020. Conversely, the total number of reported aggravated assaults for the eleven jurisdictions were 18% higher in 2021 when compared to 2019. Reported assaults had increased 9% between 2020 and 2019. Aggravated assaults comprise the bulk of reported violent crime and are driving the overall increases in reported violent crime.

Figure 5. Reported UCR Violent Crime 2019 - 2021



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, Lake, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Multnomah, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

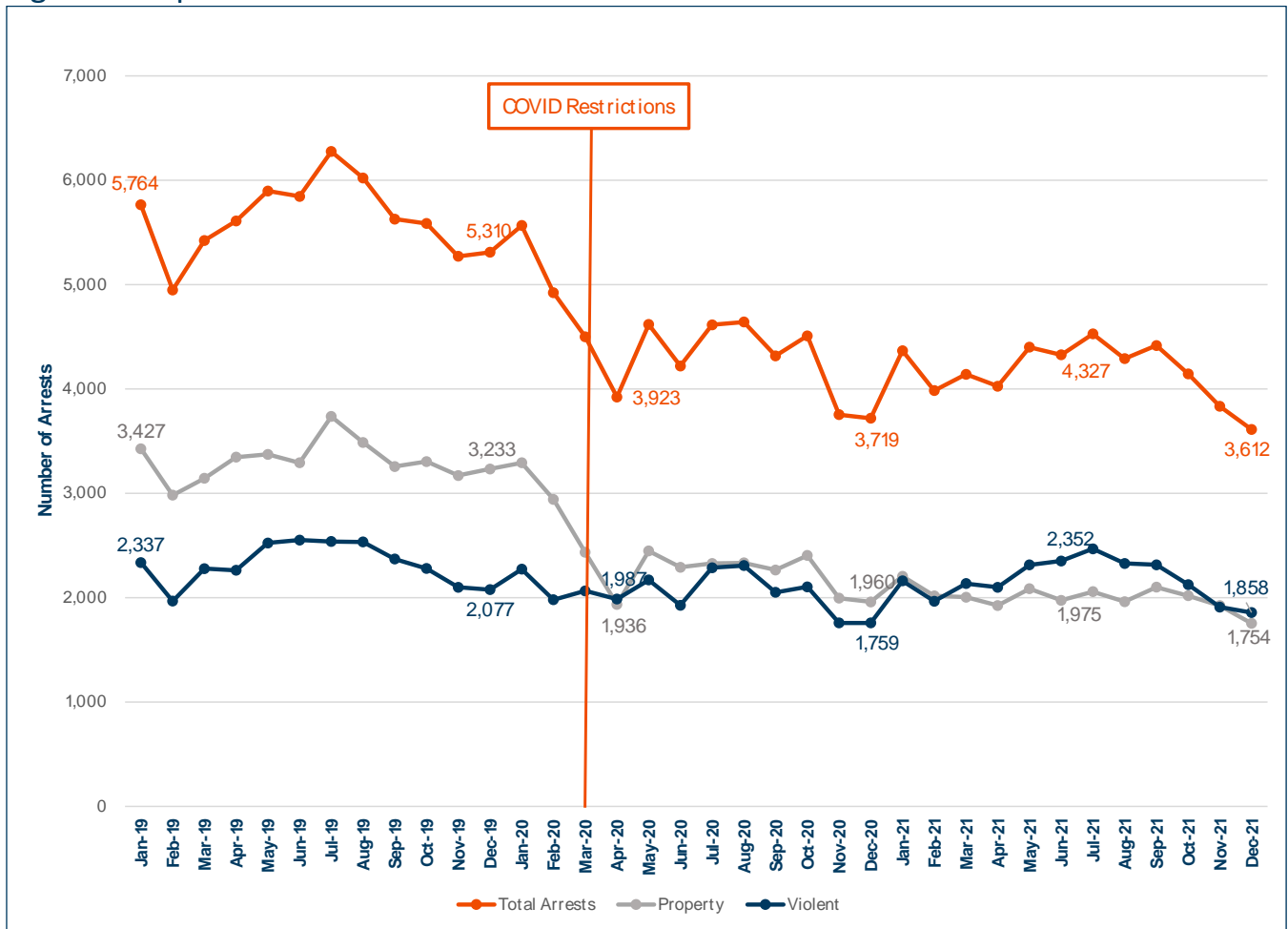
### C. Adult Arrests

In the early months of the pandemic, the number of arrests decreased sharply after COVID-19 restrictions were imposed. Then, like reported crime, arrests rebounded slightly beginning in the summer of 2020. Total UCR adult arrests for the eleven jurisdictions declined 21% when comparing 2020 to 2019. When comparing 2021 to 2019, arrests were reduced 26% post-pandemic. Both UCR violent and property arrest numbers declined substantially when comparing 2019 to 2020, 11% and 28% respectively. However, when comparing 2019 and 2021, the decreases are even greater for property arrests, 40% lower in 2021 than 2019. UCR violent arrests were 6% lower in 2021 when compared to 2019.

As with reported crimes, UCR motor vehicle theft arrests increased post-pandemic. The sum of motor vehicle arrests for all eleven jurisdictions increased 1% when comparing 2020 to 2019 and 25% when comparing 2021 to 2019. It should be noted these increases are sizably lower than the corresponding increase in motor vehicle reported crime.

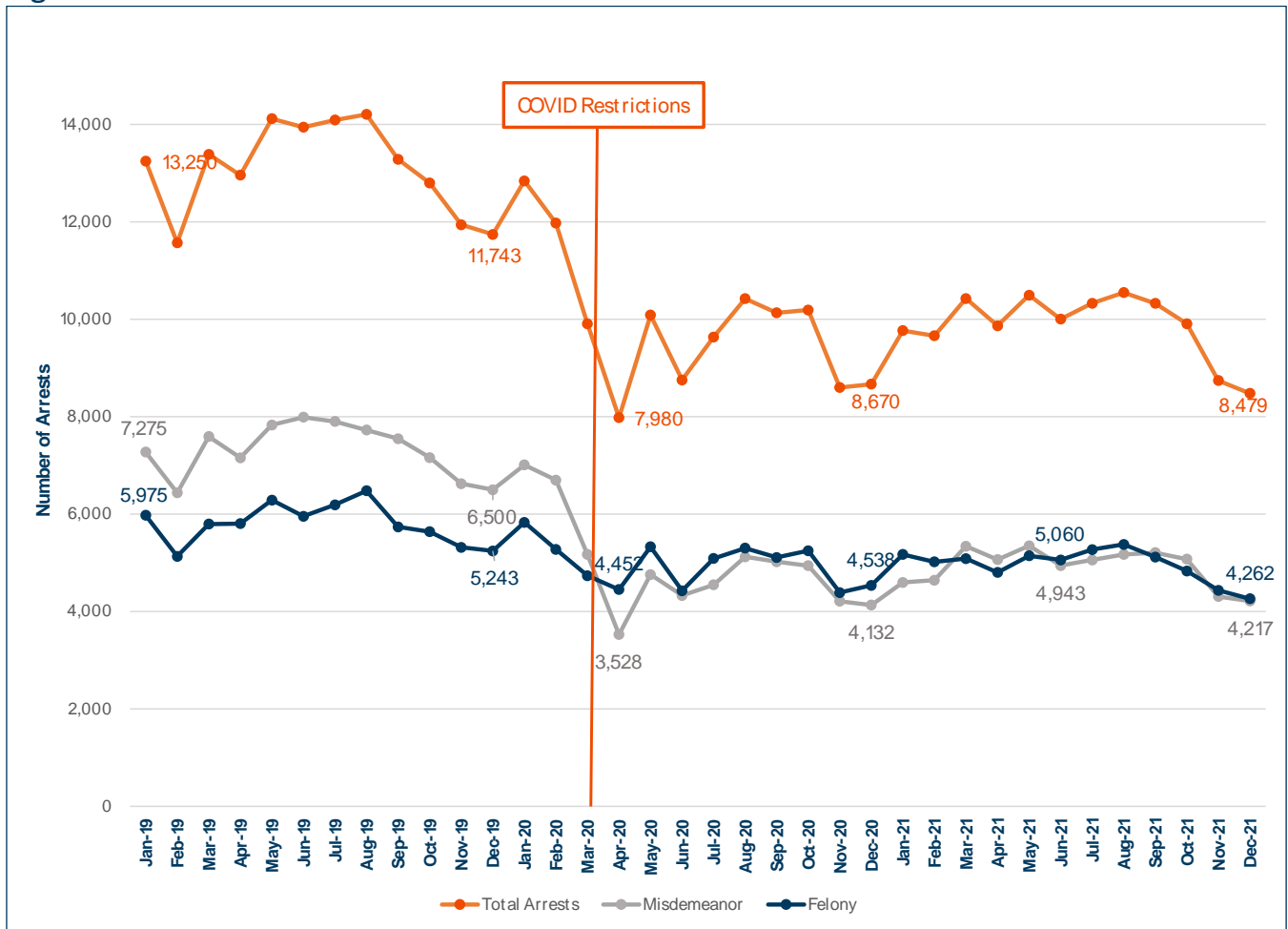
Eight of the eleven jurisdictions were able to report aggregate total arrests by charge level (misdemeanor versus felony). Comparing total arrests for 2019 to 2020, 2020 arrests were 24% lower. Decreases in misdemeanor arrests outpaced felony decreasing by 32% compared to 14% for felony. Lower total arrests continued through 2021 with numbers very similar to 2020 and maintaining a lower level than pre-pandemic 2019.

Figure 6. Reported UCR Arrests 2019 – 2021



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, Lake, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Multnomah, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

Figure 7. Total Arrests 2019 - 2021



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Lake, Los Angeles, Multnomah, Pennington, San Francisco, Spokane

## D. Comparison of Jail Releases

### Jail Length of Stay

The most significant development impacting jail populations post-COVID-19 is the increasing length of stay (LOS) for persons released from jail (see Figure 2). Beginning in March 2020, across the eleven jurisdictions studied, the LOS made a sharp increase to 57 days compared January 2019 and February 2020 when the average monthly LOS for the jurisdictions collectively was 44 days. For calendar 2021, the average monthly LOS for all eleven jurisdictions collectively rose even more to 67 days. The two reasons for increased LOS for those released from jail post COVID-19 are: (1) reduced bookings for low-level offenses causing an increased proportion of jail bookings for more serious felony charges that traditionally have a longer LOS, and (2) a slowdown in court case processing.

Figure 2 uses monthly calculated LOS compiled from SJC reporting. Table 1 below provides an alternative view of LOS using case level data for seven of the eleven jurisdictions. These data show a similar story. The average length of stay pre-COVID-19 was 27 days. This increased to 34 days in the initial months of the pandemic (April 2020 to



December 2020) and to 35 days for calendar year 2021. While the LOS presented in Tables 1 -4 are noticeably less than the average for all 11 sites, the change in LOS pre and post pandemic is proportionally the same.

### Comparison of Jail Release Attributes

As seen in Table 1, increases in LOS for males drove the overall increases in jail length of stay post-pandemic. Blacks and Hispanics experienced a greater increase in LOS than whites. These trends continued from the initial pandemic period through calendar 2021. Table 2 examines jail releases by most serious charge (with a reduced cohort of five jurisdictions). The proportion of persons held in jail with violent felonies increased post-pandemic as did the average length of stay for these persons. The proportion and LOS of releases charged with a misdemeanor remained constant pre- and post-pandemic.

Table 3 compares jail releases by release reason. The proportion of releases to bail/bond increased post-pandemic as the proportion of transfers to other agencies decreased.

**Table 1. Comparison of Release Attributes (7 Jurisdictions)**

Attribute	Pre-COVID-19 (Jan.2019-Feb. 2020)			Post-COVID-19 (Apr. 2020-Dec. 2020)			Post-COVID-19 (CY 2021)		
	Number	Percent	Average Length of Stay (days)	Number	Percent	Average Length of Stay (days)	Number	Percent	Average Length of Stay (days)
Total	144,503	100%	26.7	45,637	100%	33.6	67,104	100%	35.2
Gender									
Female	33,723	23%	17.1	9,757	21%	16.7	14,541	22%	15.8
Male	110,779	77%	28.2	35,880	79%	38.1	52,563	78%	42.0
Race									
Black	63,359	44%	33.9	20,180	44%	43.7	30,277	45%	48.2
Hispanic	10,166	7%	25.4	3,304	7%	32.0	5,064	8%	33.8
White	61,469	43%	21.2	18,376	40%	25.9	26,271	39%	26.7
Other	9,509	7%	15.8	3,777	8%	17.7	5,492	8%	19.5
Current Age									
Under 18	1,087	1%	16.4	398	1%	14.6	429	1%	18.6
18-24	27,000	19%	28.7	8,812	19%	34.3	11,908	18%	39.7
25-34	54,147	37%	27.2	16,836	37%	34.7	24,926	37%	37.5
35-44	34,573	24%	25.3	11,083	24%	32.7	17,120	26%	34.5
45 and older	27,695	19%	25.9	8,508	19%	32.6	12,721	19%	34.8

*Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Lake, Milwaukee, Multnomah, Pennington, St. Louis*

**Table 2. Comparison of Releases by Most Serious Charge (5 Jurisdictions)**

Charge Category	Pre-COVID-19 (Jan.2019-Feb. 2020)			Post-COVID-19 (Apr. 2020-Dec. 2020)			Post-COVID-19 (CY 2021)		
	Number	Percent	Average Length of Stay (days)	Number	Percent	Average Length of Stay (days)	Number	Percent	Average Length of Stay (days)
Total	97,174	100%	31.1	29,633	100%	39.7	46,634	100%	41.4
Total Felony	45,848	47%	49.6	17,719	60%	50.8	26,636	57%	55.5
Felony violent	13,796	14%	78.6	6,248	21%	79.1	8,935	19%	91.3
Felony drug	8,359	9%	29.3	2,800	9%	29.6	4,119	9%	29.8
Felony property	8,280	9%	48.3	2,794	9%	46.7	4,112	9%	48.3
Felony other	15,413	16%	35.3	5,877	20%	38.1	9,470	20%	36.0
Misdemeanor	28,021	29%	12.7	8,250	28%	13.0	13,136	28%	12.9
Other/unknown	23,304	24%	16.7	3,664	12%	45.9	6,862	15%	39.8

*Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Lake, Milwaukee, Pennington, St. Louis*

**Table 3. Comparison of Releases by Release Reason (7 Jurisdictions)**

Release Reason	Pre-COVID (Jan.2019-Feb. 2020)		Post-COVID-19 (Apr. 2020-Dec. 2020)		Post-COVID-19 (CY 2021)	
	Percent	Average Length of Stay (days)	Percent	Average Length of Stay (days)	Percent	Average Length of Stay (days)
Total	144,503	26.7	45,637	33.6	67,104	35.2
Bail/bond	15%	9.6	20%	19.8	19%	16.2
Charges dropped/withdrawn	3%	8.9	5%	10.3	4%	13.1
Court order	11%	29.1	13%	46.0	12%	37.4
Transfer to DOC	7%	86.7	5%	117.7	8%	145.3
Hold lifted	1%	73.2	1%	86.5	1%	89.5
Other/unknown	22%	21.4	24%	22.1	25%	23.5
ROR	15%	9.9	16%	5.9	13%	7.9
Time served/expired	10%	44.0	7%	75.0	7%	55.2
Transfer to another agency	16%	32.0	9%	52.8	11%	48.8

*Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Lake, Milwaukee, Multnomah, Pennington, St. Louis*

## E. Changes in the Composition of the Jail Population

As jail populations have declined, several of the key demographic and offense attributes have shifted. Attributes of a subset of the jurisdictions examined are shown above in Table 3. Specifically, populations have become increasingly male, charged with felony and felony violent crimes, and are experiencing longer LOS. This in part is expected as the people that used to be admitted to the jail for less serious crimes are no longer being booked and/or are gaining release more expeditiously. The longer LOS is also a reflection of delayed court processing, which has continued through calendar 2021. Also of note, the proportion of Black and Hispanic persons in the cohort of jails examined has increased while the proportion of Whites has decreased.

**Table 4. Comparison of Jail Population Attributes (7 Jurisdictions)**

Attribute	Pre-COVID-19 (2/28/2020)		Post-COVID-19 (12/31/2021)		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Total	8,438	100%	6,737	100%	-20%
Average Length of Stay to Date (days)	140		228		63%
Gender					
Female	1,082	13%	694	10%	-36%
Male	7,357	87%	6,043	90%	-18%
Race					
Black	4,413	52%	3,703	55%	-16%
Hispanic	453	5%	384	6%	-15%
White	2,579	31%	1,869	28%	-28%
Other	993	12%	781	12%	-21%
Current Age					
Under 18	62	1%	254	4%	310%
18-24	1,630	19%	1,663	25%	2%
25-34	3,174	38%	2,293	34%	-28%
35-44	2,048	24%	1,634	24%	-20%
45 and older	1,524	18%	893	13%	-41%

*Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Milwaukee, Multnomah, Pennington, Spokane, St. Louis*

**Table 5. Comparison of Jail Population by Most Serious Charge (5 Jurisdictions)**

Most Serious Charge	Pre-COVID-19 (2/28/2020)		Post-COVID-19 (12/31/2021)		Percent Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Total	6,429	100%	5,226	100%	-20%
Total Felony	4,269	66%	3,932	75%	-8%
Felony violent	2,132	33%	2,336	45%	10%
Felony drug	472	7%	230	4%	-51%
Felony property	619	10%	581	11%	-6%
Felony other	1,046	16%	785	15%	-25%
Misdemeanor	737	11%	540	10%	-27%
Other/unknown	1,423	22%	754	14%	-47%

*Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Milwaukee, Pennington, Spokane, St. Louis*

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

Data from this research showed that in all eleven jurisdictions there is a clear, consistent pattern of both crime and jail populations declining in tandem with one another since the on-set of the COVID-19 restrictions that served to greatly restrict the U.S. economy and “every day” social and economic activities. Unemployment rose which, contrary to public opinion, is traditionally associated with lower, not higher, crime rates.<sup>5</sup> While this may seem counterintuitive, it is consistent with prior research. Unemployment surged during and after the recent Great Recession (2008-2009); however, crime rates continued to decline. Sociologists observed that when unemployment suddenly increases, people who have led traditional law-abiding lives do not suddenly become criminals. Additionally, a downturn in the economy curtails normal social activities, which reduces the opportunities for individuals to become victimized. Lastly, lower inflation and interest rates can negate the short-term effects of unemployment.<sup>6</sup>

With a similar to lower number of people committing crimes, there were fewer arrests and fewer jail bookings, which lowered the jail populations. At the same time, local jurisdictions were also implementing policies that were designed to restrict the arrest and subsequent bookings of people charged with non-violent crimes. For people who were detained, there were efforts to make it easier for defendants to be released by lowering bail requirements or increasing the use of non-financial release mechanisms.

The year 2020 saw a historic reduction of jail populations unlike any other in U.S. history. Never had jail populations declined so much in such a short time frame, universally, across the country. In the latter half of 2020 and all through 2021, the pandemic restrictions and mitigation efforts on society eased or were ended. The jail population responded with a rebound from its historic 2020 lows. For the 11 sites studied in this report, a full scale rebound to pre-COVID 19 levels for both overall reported crime, arrest and jail bookings and average daily population (ADP) has not occurred. Across the sites studied and from what we hear nationally in the media, there are exceptions where pocketed specific crimes (murder, aggravated assault, and motor vehicle theft) have increased regardless of the trends of booking and jail populations. More research and in-depth analysis are needed to explore the underlying causes of those trends.

## APPENDIX

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<sup>5</sup> James Austin, Todd Clear, and Richard Rosenfeld. 2020. **Explaining Past and Projecting Future Crime Rates**. New York, NY: The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. [hfg.org/crime\\_forecasting.htm](https://hfg.org/crime_forecasting.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Rosenfeld, Richard, and Aaron Levin. 2016. Acquisitive crime and inflation in the United States: 1960 - 2012. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 32: 427-447.

Jurisdiction

Allegheny County  
Charleston County

Lake County  
Milwaukee County  
Multnomah County  
Pennington County  
City and County of San Francisco  
Spokane County

St. Louis County

Case Level Data Source

Allegheny County Courts  
Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council  
(Note: Data reported for Charleston contains raw/unofficial numbers that are subject to change throughout the year as cases are cleared. The only official numbers would come from the FBI source.)

Lake County Sheriff's Office  
Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office  
Multnomah County Sheriff's Office  
Pennington County Sheriff's Office  
San Francisco District Attorney's Office  
Spokane County Regional Law and Justice Dept., Spokane Police Department, and Spokane County Sheriff's Department

St. Louis SJC Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

Allegheny County Jurisdictions Reporting

Allegheny County District Attorney  
Allegheny County Police Department  
Allegheny County Sheriff  
Allegheny County, Housing Auth  
Allegheny Valley Regional PD  
Animal Control MP, Municipal  
Aspinwall Borough Police Department  
Avalon Borough Police Department  
Baldwin Police Department  
Baldwin Township Police Department  
Beaver PSP  
Bedford PSP  
Bell Acres Police Department  
Belle Vernon PSP  
Bellevue Borough Police Department  
Bethel Park Police Department  
Blawnox Borough Police Department  
Brackenridge Borough Police Department  
Braddock Hills Borough Police Department  
Braddock, Borough of Police Department  
Brentwood Borough Police Department  
Bridgeville Borough Police Department  
Butler PSP  
Carlow University PD  
Carnegie Mellon, University PD

Moon Township Police Department  
Mt Lebanon Police Department  
Mt Oliver Borough Police Department  
Munhall Police Department  
N Braddock Borough Police Department  
N Fayette Township Police Department  
N Huntingdon Township Police Department  
New Stanton PSP Turnpike  
North Versailles Police Department  
Northern Regional Police Department  
Oakdale Police Department  
Oakmont Borough Police Department  
Office of Attorney General  
O'hara Township Police Department  
Ohio Township Police Department  
PA Fish & Boat Comm, Southwest  
PA State Police, Gaming Enforcement  
Penn Hills Police Department  
Penn State, University PD  
Pennsylvania Office of State Inspector General  
Pitcairn Police Department  
Pittsburgh Police Department  
Pittsburgh PSP  
Pittsburgh School Police Department  
Pleasant Hills Police Department

## Allegheny County Jurisdictions Reporting

Carnegie Police Department  
Castle Shannon Police Department  
Chatham University Police Department  
Churchill Borough Police Department  
Clairton City Police Department  
Collier Township Police Department  
Connellsville Police Department  
Coraopolis Borough Police Department  
Crafton Borough Police Department  
Cranberry Township Police Department  
Crescent Township Police Department  
Dormont Police Department  
Duquesne Police Department  
Duquesne, University PD  
East Deer Township Police Department  
East McKeesport Police Department  
Edgewood Borough Police Department  
Edgeworth Police Department  
Elizabeth Borough Police Department  
Elizabeth Township Police Department  
Etna Police Department  
Fawn Township Police Department  
Findlay Township Police Department  
Forest Hills Police Department  
Forward Township Police Department  
Fox Chapel Borough Police Department  
Franklin Park Police Department  
Frazer Township Pd Police Department  
Game Commission, Southwest  
Gibsonia PSP Turnpike  
Glassport Police Department  
Greensburg PSP  
Greentree Police Department  
Hampton Township Police Department  
Harmar Township Police Department  
Harrison Township Police Department  
Heidelberg Borough Police Department  
Highmark Health PD  
Homestead Police Department  
Indiana PSP  
Indiana Township Police Department  
Ingram Borough Police Department  
Jefferson Hills Police Department

Plum Borough Police Department  
Point Park University Police Department  
Point State Park  
Port Authority Police Department  
Port Vue Police Department  
PSP, Bur Criminal In  
PSP, Emer & Special  
Rankin Borough Police Department  
Reserve Township Police Department  
Robert Morris Police Department  
Robinson Township Police Department  
Ross Township Police Department  
S Fayette Township Police Department  
Scott Township Police Department  
Sewickley Borough Police Department  
Sewickley Heights Police Department  
Shaler Police Department  
Sharpsburg Borough Police Department  
South Park Tn Police Department  
Springdale Borough Police Department  
St. Clair Hospital PD  
St. Clair Hospital Police Department  
Stowe Township Police Department  
Swissvale Police Department  
Tarentum Borough Police Department  
Trafford Borough Police Department  
Turtle Creek Police Department  
Uniontown PSP  
Univ Of Pittsburgh Police Department  
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center  
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center PD  
Upper St Clair Police Department  
Verona Borough Police Department  
Versailles Borough Police Department  
Veterans Medical, Admin  
Washington PSP  
Waynesburg PSP  
West Deer Township Police Department  
West Homestead Police Department  
West Mifflin Police Department  
West View Borough Police Department  
Whitaker Police Department  
White Oak Borough Police Department

Allegheny County Jurisdictions Reporting

Kennedy Township Police Department  
Kittanning PSP  
Leet Township Police Department  
Leetsdale Police Department  
Liberty Borough Police Department  
Lincoln Borough Police Department  
Liquid Control Enforce, District  
McCandless Police Department  
McDonald Borough Police Department  
McKees Rocks Police Department  
McKeesport Police Department  
Millvale Police Department  
Monroeville Police Department

Whitehall Borough Police Department  
Wilkins Township Police Department  
Wilkesburg Police Department

Charleston County Jurisdictions Reporting

(Note: Data reported for Charleston contains raw/unofficial numbers that are subject to change throughout the year as cases are cleared. The only official numbers would come from the FBI source.)

Charleston Police Department  
Charleston County Sheriff's Office  
Mount Pleasant Police Department

Cook County Jurisdictions Reporting

Chicago Police Department

Los Angeles County Jurisdictions Reporting

Los Angeles Police Department

Milwaukee Jurisdictions Reporting

TBD

Multnomah Jurisdictions Reporting

The data provided by Multnomah County pertains only to arrests that fall under the jurisdiction of the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office. It is estimated that less than ten percent of arrests in Multnomah County are enacted by the Sheriff's Office, as evidenced by booking data.

Pennington County Jurisdictions Reporting

Pennington County Sheriff's Office  
Rapid City Police Department  
Box Elder Police Department



National Park Service

City and County of San Francisco Jurisdictions Reporting

San Francisco Police Department  
San Francisco Sheriff's Office  
San Francisco District Attorney's Office

Spokane County Jurisdictions Reporting

Spokane County Sheriff's Office (which does law enforcement for the unincorporated areas of the county as well as the following incorporated towns/cities: Deer Park, Millwood, Latah, Rockford, Fairfield, Waverly, Spangle, and Medical Lake)  
Spokane Police Department  
Spokane Valley Police Department

St. Louis County Jurisdictions Reporting

Ballwin Police Department	Lambert International Airport Police Department
Bel Nor Police Department	Manchester Police Department
Bel Ridge Police Department	Maplewood Police Department
Bella Villa Police Department	Maryland Heights Police Department
Bellefontaine Neighbors Police Department	Moline Acres Police Department
Berkeley Police Department	Normandy Police Department
Breckenridge Hills Police Department	Northwoods Police Department
Brentwood Police Department	Oakland Police Department
Bridgeton Police Department	Olivette Police Department
Calverton Park Police Department	Overland Police Department
Chesterfield Police Department	Pagedale Police Department
Clarkson Valley Police Department	Richmond Heights Police Department
Clayton Police Department	Riverview Police Department
Country Club Hills Police Department	Rock Hill Police Department
Crestwood Police Department	Shrewsbury Police Department
Creve Coeur Police Department	St Ann Police Department
Des Peres DPS	St John Police Department
Edmundson Police Department	St Louis Community College Police Department
Ellisville Police Department	St Louis County Police Department
Eureka Police Department	Sunset Hills Police Department
Ferguson Police Department	Town & Country Police Department
Flordell Hills Police Department	University City Police Department
Florissant Police Department	University of Missouri - St Louis Police Department
Frontenac Police Department	Velda City Police Department
Glendale Police Department	Vinita Park Police Department
Hazelwood Police Department	Warson Woods Police Department
Hillsdale Police Department	Washington University Police Department - St Louis
Kirkwood Police Department	Webster Groves Police Department
Ladue Police Department	Woodson Terrace Police Department

St. Louis County Jurisdictions Reporting  
Lakeshire Police Department

This report was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge which seeks to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. Core to the challenge is a competition designed to support efforts to improve local criminal justice systems across the country that are working to reduce over-reliance on jails, with a particular focus on addressing disproportionate impact on low-income individuals and communities of color.

More information is available at [www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org](http://www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org)



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