

A PRELIMINARY LOOK AT ILLINOIS ARREST TRENDS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN 2020



ILLINOIS CRIMINAL JUSTICE INFORMATION AUTHORITY

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Abstract: Jurisdictions across the United States are seeing a reduction in reported crime and arrests coinciding with COVID-19. This article offers a preliminary look at arrest trends during the COVID-19 pandemic across Illinois. Researchers examined arrest data from the Illinois State Police Criminal History Record Information database to identify arrest trends prior to and after the state's stay-at-home order was issued in March 2020 and compare them to trends recorded in previous years. Statewide, arrests recorded over the duration of the stay-at-home order, which lasted from March 21 to June 25, 2020, were much lower than those recorded during that period in 2019. Researchers also identified a drop in homicide, drug possession, drug manufacture and delivery, and domestic violence arrests in the two weeks preceding Illinois' stay-at-home order. Finally, while arrests increased statewide from May to June 2020, arrests dropped in Chicago

Introduction

As COVID-19 infections began to rise across the United States, affecting the day-to-day lives of citizens, a number of cities experienced another impact: a decrease in arrests.¹ A reduction in crime was noted in California (Los Angeles, Oakland, San Diego, and San Francisco); Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Washington, D.C.² While overall crime appeared to be down, some cities reported a rise in homicides and domestic violence.³

While the reasons for these trends may be complex and largely unknown, scholars and others have speculated on potential causes. Potential causes for *reductions* in some crimes may include:

- **Change in policing behaviors**, such as fewer police stops and increases in the use of citations or tickets in lieu of arrest.⁴
- **Stay-at-home orders⁵ and social distancing** resulting in less opportunity to commit crimes. Many were ill or not out in public, lowering the risk for robberies, aggravated assaults, illegal drug selling and use).⁶ Because people were more likely to be at home, the risk for residential burglaries, car theft, and similar crimes also was lower.
- **The closing of schools** resulting in less reporting of child abuse and neglect.⁷
- **Reduced trust in police**, making citizens less likely to talk to police, which could have helped lead to arrests.⁸ This lack of trust may have been exacerbated by the death of George Floyd by police during the pandemic.⁹

Potential causes for *increases* in some crime, such as homicide and interpersonal violence, may include:

- **Historic racial and economic disparities** remaining in primarily urban communities, while the pandemic exacerbated economic struggles due to job loss.¹⁰
- **Reduced or altered behavioral health services**, leading to changes in treatment (e.g., telehealth)¹¹ and the under-treatment of those issues. Some turn to self-medicating and/or harm to self or others in the absence of treatment.¹²
- **Stay-at-home orders**, increasing opportunities for domestic violence.¹³

In May 2020, George Floyd, a Black man, was killed by a White police officer,¹⁴ resulting in protests and civil unrest in cities across the country. This event and the ensuing social discord may have affected crime and arrest trends.¹⁵ Therefore, we examined the impact of George Floyd's death on arrest trends during the COVID-19 pandemic and attempted to answer the following research questions:

- What were the arrest trend surrounding the stay-at-home order and the death of George Floyd in Chicago and statewide in 2020?
- How did those trends compare to those recorded during the same time period in 2019?

Methodology

We obtained arrest data from the Illinois State Police Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) System. The CHRI System contains information required by statute to be submitted on each arrested person by arresting agencies, state's attorney's offices, circuit courts, and state and county correctional institutions for the purpose of creating a cumulative history (rap sheet) of such events. Upon arrest, an individual is fingerprinted using a paper card or the electronic Livescan system. This record is then forwarded to the Illinois State Police (ISP) for processing and posting in the individual's criminal history record. About 95% of all arrest cards in Illinois are submitted electronically via Livescan. ICJIA has access to most information in the CHRI System through ISP's off-line, ad hoc database, which allows for the extraction of complete CHRI records for research purposes.

Data was collected to help identify arrest trends in Illinois (excluding Chicago) and in Chicago, the state's largest urban city during the time periods of January 5 to June 27, 2020, and January 6 to June 29, 2019. We examined arrest trends prior to the COVID-19 stay-at-home order (March 21, 2020) and through mid-summer. We also compared 2020 arrests to those of the previous year. For the exact dates and weeks examined, see Table 1. Homicide arrests were compared by month due to low totals.

We examined aggregate arrests and arrests within certain offense categories. Offense categories was based on criminal offenses were noted in literature and by news outlets for having potentially higher or lower arrest variances during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two researchers determined the exact Illinois criminal statutes to include in the analysis collectively and in agreement for reliability. Based on available data, we hypothesized that arrests may be affected for these offenses during the period examined:

- Drug possession (related statutes under 720 ILCS 550.0 cannabis, 720 ILCS 570.0 controlled substances, 720 ILCS 646.0 methamphetamines)
- Drug manufacture and delivery (related statutes under 720 ILCS 550.0 cannabis, 720 ILCS 570.0 controlled substances, 720 ILCS 646.0 methamphetamines)
- Domestic violence (720 ILCS 5.0/9 aggravated domestic battery, 720 ILCS 5.0/12 domestic battery)
- Homicide (720 ILCS 5.0/9)

Table 1*Weeks 1 to 25 in 2019 and 2020*

	2019	2020
Week 1	1/06-1/12	1/05-1/11
Week 2	1/13-1/19	1/12-1/18
Week 3	1/20-1/26	1/19-1/25
Week 4	1/27-2/02	1/26-2/01
Week 5	2/03-2/09	2/02-2/08
Week 6	2/10-2/16	2/09-2/15
Week 7	2/17-2/23	2/16-2/22
Week 8	2/24-3/02	2/23-2/29
Week 9	3/03-3/09	3/01-3/07
Week 10	3/10-3/16	3/08-3/14
Week 11	3/17-3/23	3/15-3/21
Week 12	3/24-3/30	3/22-3/28 ^a
Week 13	3/31-4/06	3/29-4/04
Week 14	4/07-4/13	4/05-4/11
Week 15	4/14-4/20	4/12-4/18
Week 16	4/21-4/27	4/19-4/25
Week 17	4/28-5/04	4/26-5/02
Week 18	5/05-5/11	5/03-5/09
Week 19	5/12-5/18	5/10-5/16
Week 20	5/19-5/25	5/17-5/23
Week 21	5/26-6/01	5/24-5/30 ^b
Week 22	6/02-6/08	5/31-6/06 ^c
Week 23	6/09-6/15	6/07-6/13
Week 24	6/16-6/22	6/14-6/20
Week 25	6/23-6/29	6/21-6/27

^a Illinois stay-at-home order issued March 21, 2020.^b George Floyd died May 25, 2020.^c George Floyd protests started May 26, 2020, and continued through early June 2020 in Chicago and other Illinois communities.**Data Limitations**

One limitation to this analysis was that only a single data source was available. Another limitation was that arrest data often reflect policing decisions and crime reporting versus actual criminal activity, as some crimes never come to the attention of law enforcement. Second, many possible drivers of arrest trends cannot be examined. Information on criminal activity during pandemics is limited¹⁶ and this analysis could not explain all the potential causes for arrest fluctuations. We cannot definitively conclude from the data that the stay-at-home order, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the death of George Floyd and related protests were the direct or sole cause of arrest fluctuations. Increases surrounding the protest may be due to protests themselves, other unrest, reaction by law enforcement, or heightened arrests occurring during holiday

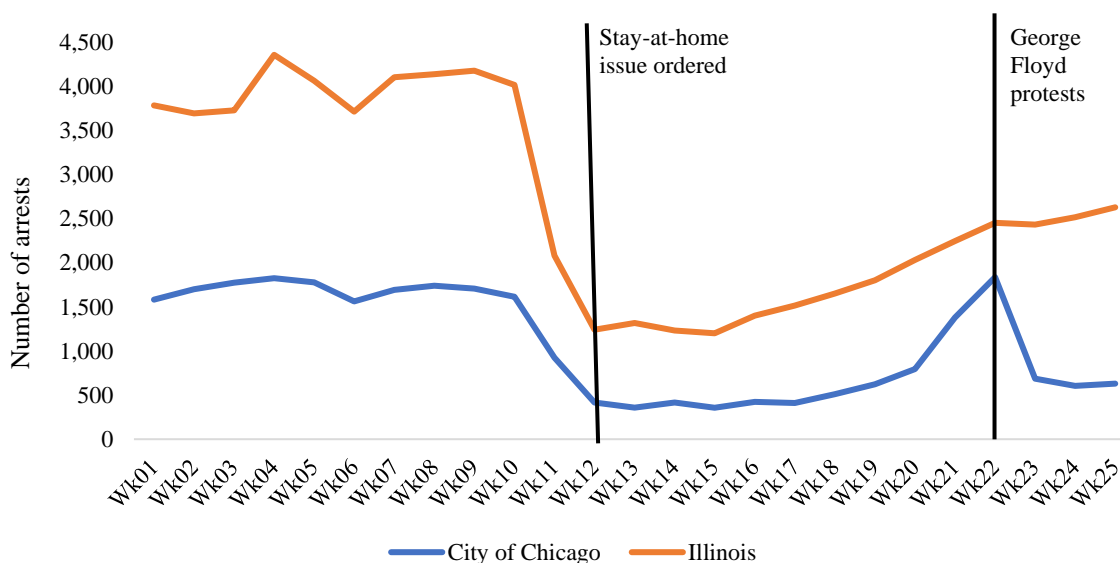
weekends. Third, the pandemic continued beyond the period examined; this is only a preliminary look at basic crime trends during a specific period of time in Illinois.

Illinois Data Trends During COVID-19

We examined all state arrests in 2020 from Week 1, starting January 5, to Week 25, ending June 27 (Table 1). Data showed a reduction in arrests preceding the stay-at-home order (beginning March 21), with a 69.1% statewide decrease (excluding Chicago) and a 74.3% decrease in Chicago in the early weeks of March (Weeks 10 to 12). The data also revealed a 111.9% increase in arrests in the state and a 51.4% increase in arrests in Chicago from Weeks 12 to 25 (Figure 1).

The data also showed a 65.7% decline in Chicago arrests following the protests for the death of George Floyd, beginning on May 26, 2020 (Week 22 to Week 25). Arrests increased statewide by 7.2%, however.

Figure 1
Illinois and Chicago Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2020

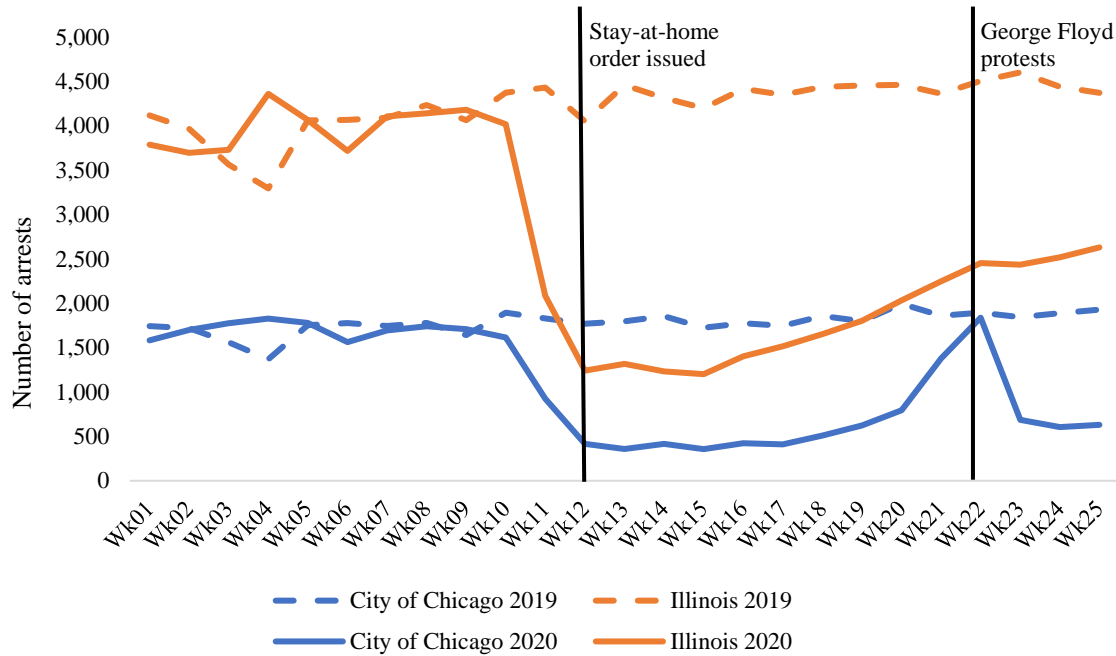


Note. Week 1 started on January 5, 2020, and Week 25 ended on June 27, 2020. Arrests included misdemeanor and felony offenses, but excluded city ordinance violations. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

We further examined arrests occurring from January to June in 2019 and 2020, taking into account the “seasonality” of crime, in which warmer months tend to have higher rates of crime than colder months.¹⁷ The data showed a sharp reduction in overall statewide arrests in 2020 beginning in Week 10 and plateauing after the stay-at-home order took effect in Week 12 (Figure 2).

In comparison to 2019, Chicago saw a 62.6% reduction in 2020 arrests. This reduction occurred after the George Floyd protests from Week 22 (1,839 arrests) to Week 23 (687 arrests). Statewide arrests remained the same during that period in comparison to 2019.

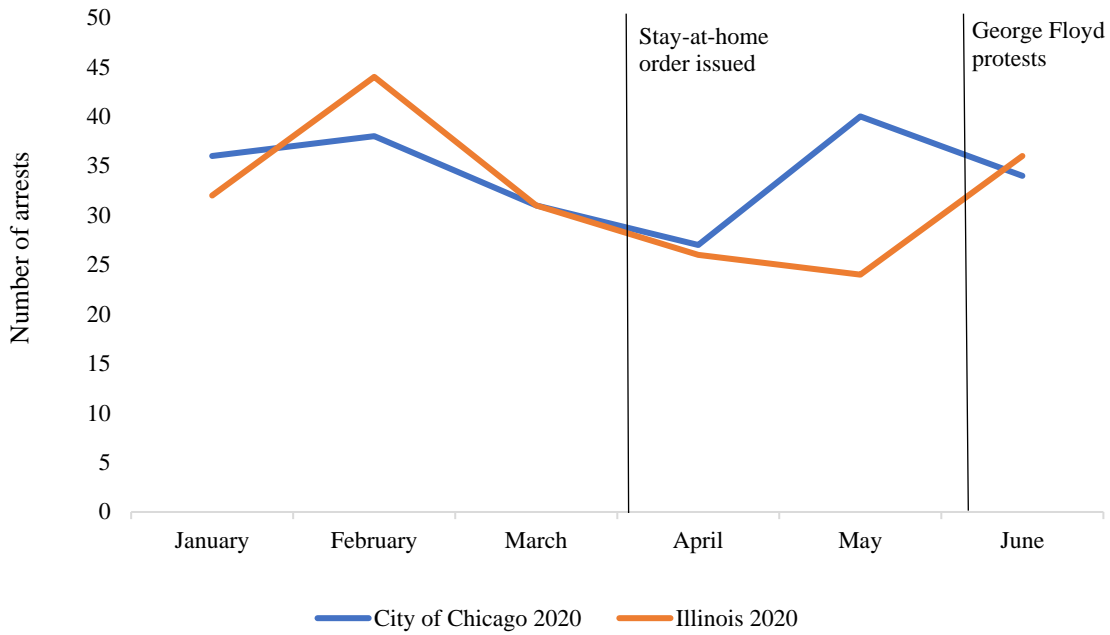
Figure 2
Illinois and Chicago Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2019 and 2020



Note. In 2019, Week 1 started on January 6 and Week 25 ended on June 29; in 2020, Week 1 started January 5 and Week 25 ended June 27. Arrests included misdemeanor and felony offenses, but excluded city ordinance violations. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

Additionally, we examined state homicide arrests (excluding Chicago) from January 2020 to the end of June that year. Data showed a reduction in homicide arrests following the issuance of the stay-at-home order from March to April in Illinois and in Chicago (Figure 3). Illinois experienced a 16.1% decrease in homicide arrests; Chicago saw a 12.9% decrease. In Chicago, homicide arrests preceding and following the George Floyd protests increased by 53.8% from April to May (from 27 to 40 arrests) and decreased by 15.0% from May to June (from 40 to 34 arrests) In comparison, Illinois data (excluding Chicago) showed a 50% increase in homicide arrests from May to June (from 24 to 36 arrests).

Figure 3
Illinois and Chicago Homicide Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2020

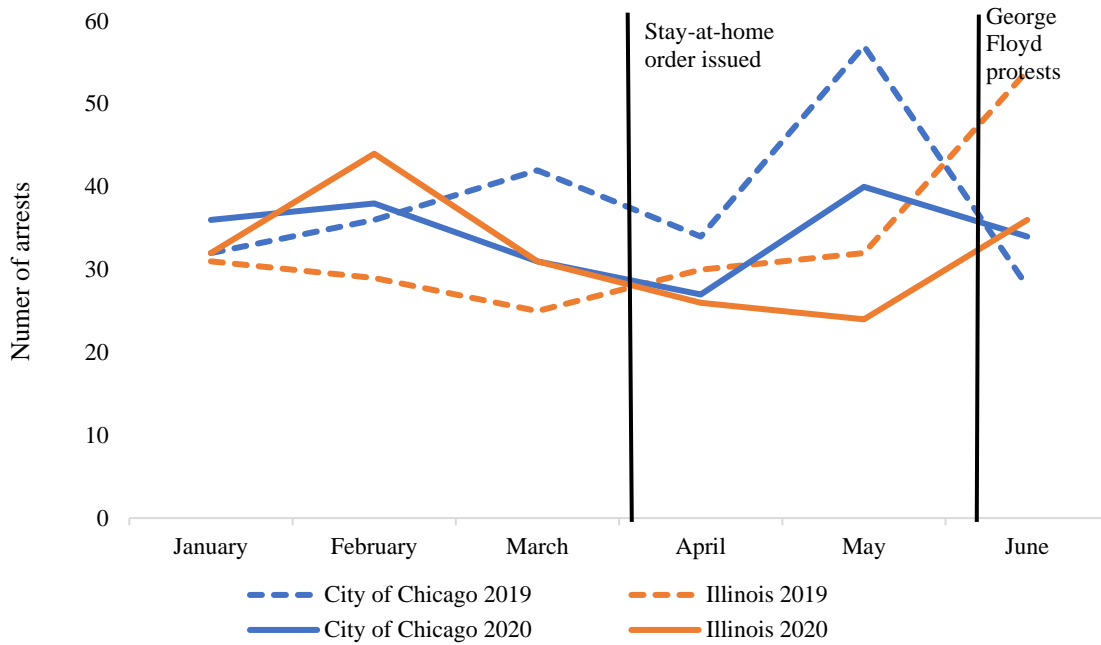


Note. Week 1 started January 5, 2020, and Week 25 ended June 27, 2020. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

We also examined homicide arrests occurring from January to June in 2019 and 2020. Overall, homicide arrests in the first half of 2020 were down in Illinois and Chicago compared to 2019 (*Figure 4*). Chicago homicide arrests were 10.0% lower in 2020, dropping from 229 to 206 arrests, and Illinois homicide arrests were 4.0% lower, dropping from 201 to 193 arrests.

Figure 4

Illinois and Chicago Homicide Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2019 and 2020

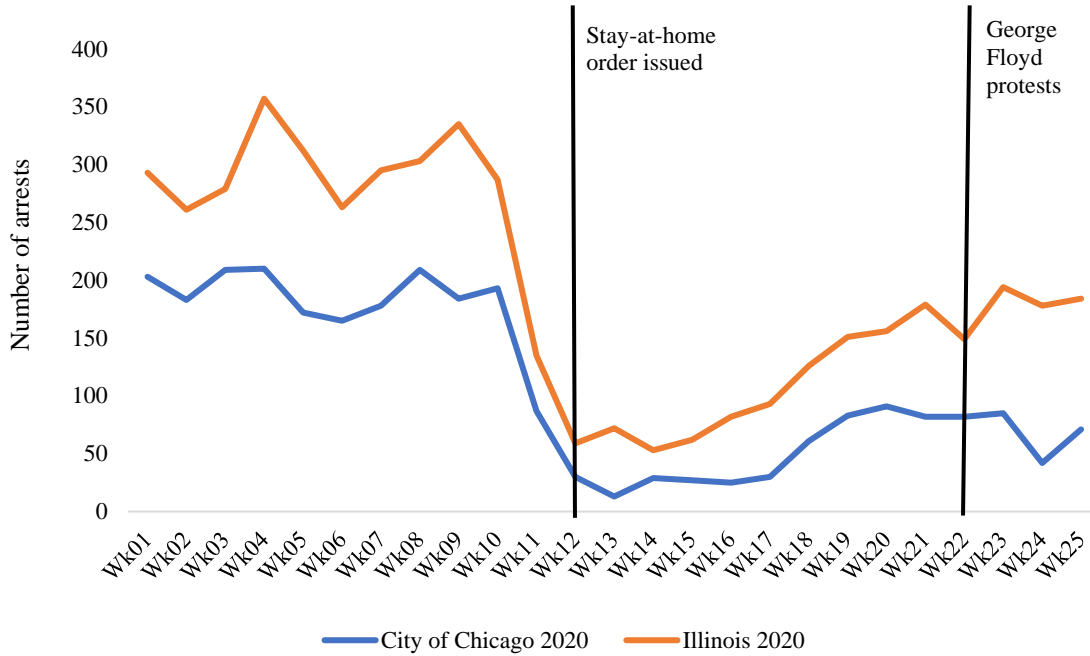


Note. In 2019, Week 1 started on January 6 and Week 25 ended on June 29; in 2020, Week 1 started January 5 and Week 25 ended June 27. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

In addition, we examined 2020 drug possession arrests in Illinois and Chicago (Figure 5). In keeping with overall arrest trends during the period examined, data showed a reduction in drug possession arrests in Illinois and Chicago from early to late March (Weeks 10 to 12), just prior to the stay-at-home order. Drug possession arrests decreased by 79.4% in Illinois and by 84.5% in Chicago during this time. However, from Weeks 12 to 25, Illinois saw a 211.9% increase in drug possession arrests and Chicago saw a 136.7% increase.

Illinois experienced a slight decrease in drug possession arrests from Weeks 21 to 22, from 179 to 149, but arrests increased again in Week 23 to 194 arrests. In Chicago, drug possession arrests decreased from 85 in Week 23 to 42 arrests in Week 24.

Figure 5
Illinois and Chicago Drug Possession Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2020

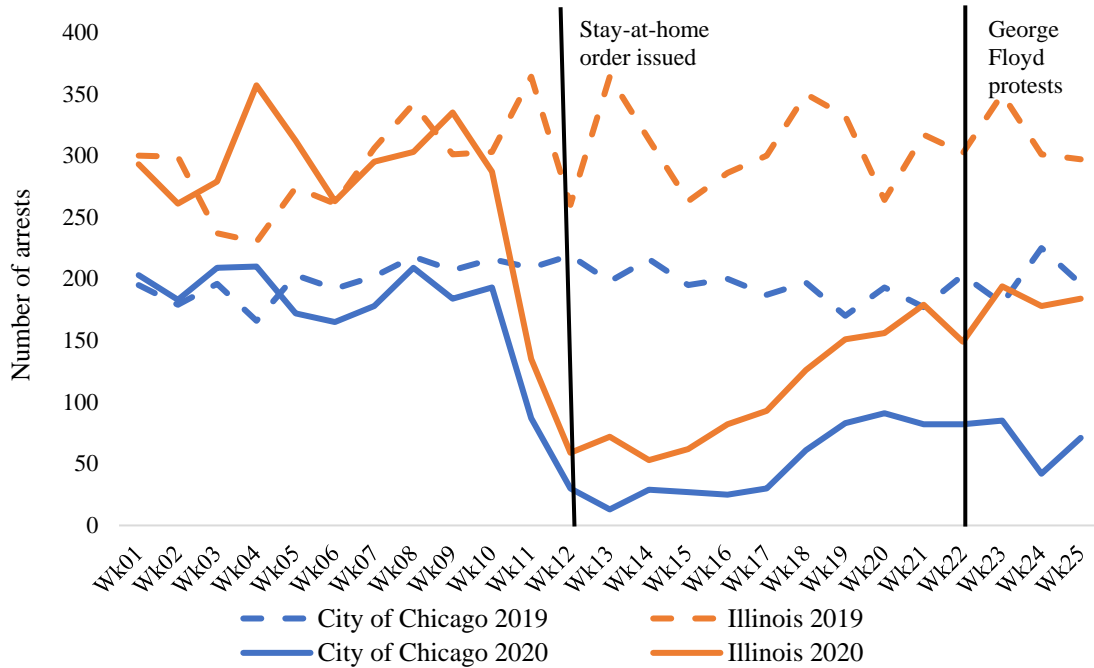


Note. Week 1 started January 5, 2020, and Week 25 ended June 27, 2020. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

We further examined drug possession arrests that occurred from January to June in both 2019 and 2020. Data showed large reductions in drug possession arrests in both Illinois and Chicago beginning in mid-March of 2020 that were not seen in 2019 (Figure 6). For example, in Illinois in Week 12 of 2020, police recorded just 59 arrests—much lower than the 260 arrests recorded in 2019. Similarly, in Week 12 of 2020 in Chicago, police recorded 30 arrests, down from 219 arrests in 2019.

Figure 6

Illinois and Chicago Drug Possession Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2019 and 2020



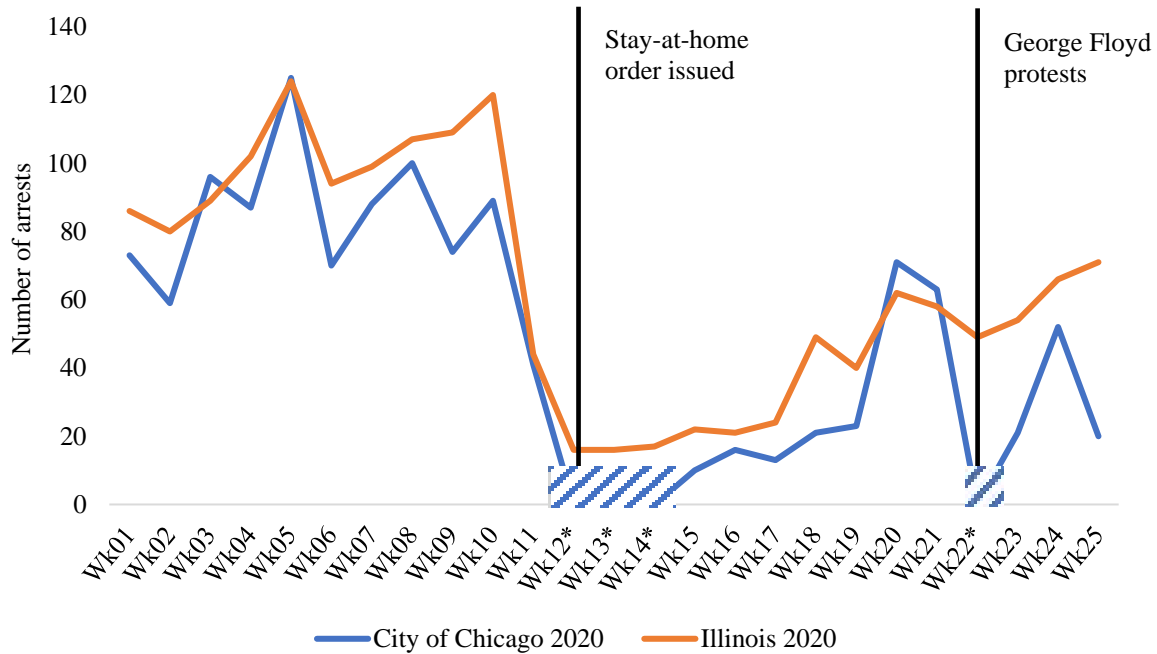
Note. In 2019, Week 1 started on January 6 and Week 25 ended on June 29; in 2020, Week 1 started January 5 and Week 25 ended June 27. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

We examined drug manufacture and delivery arrests in Illinois and Chicago in 2020 (Figure 7). The data showed a notable decline in these arrests in Illinois and Chicago from early to late March. From Weeks 10 to 12, data showed an 86.7% decrease in Illinois arrests and an approximate 94.4% drop in Chicago arrests. The total decrease in Chicago is unknown because weekly arrests totaling fewer than 10 are masked from view in the database to address privacy concerns. Therefore, a proxy number of five arrests for Week 12 was used.

Data also showed a reduction in drug manufacture and delivery arrests in Week 21, from late May to early June, following the death of George Floyd and preceding the protests in Week 22. Chicago experienced a 92.1% decrease in these arrests, from 63 arrests to a proxy of five arrests. In comparison, Illinois experienced a smaller, 15.5% decrease in arrests during this time, from 58 to 48 arrests.

Figure 7

Illinois and Chicago Drug Manufacture and Delivery Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2020



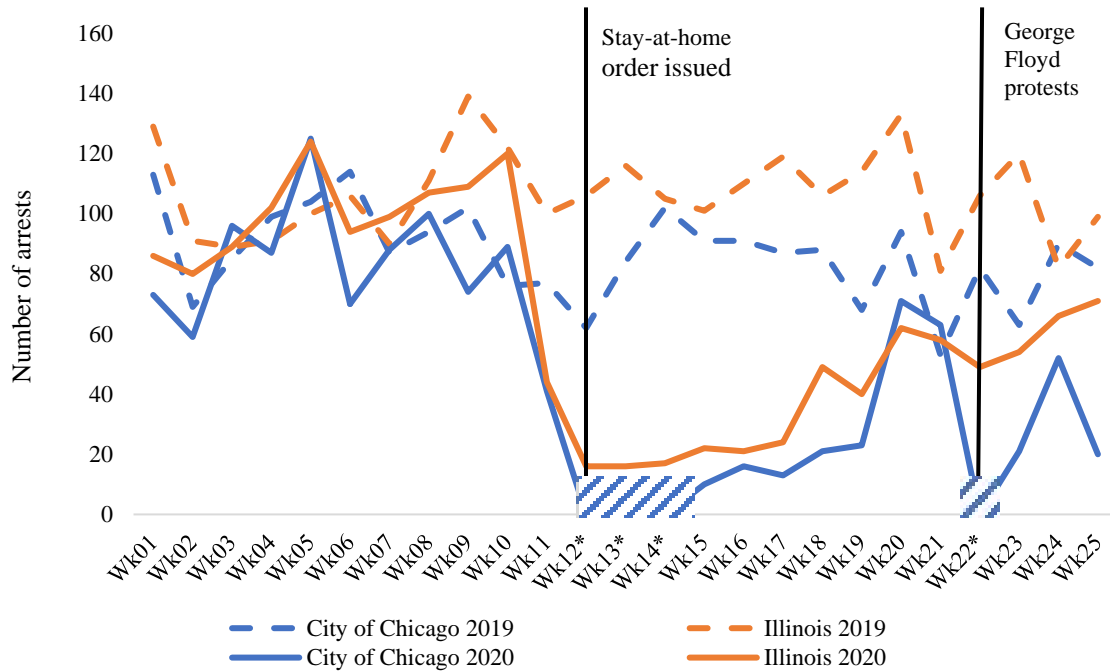
Note. Week 1 started January 5, 2020, and Week 25 ended June 27, 2020. *Week 12, Week 13, Week 14, and Week 22 had less than 10 drug delivery arrests in the City of Chicago. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

We also compared drug manufacture and delivery arrests between 2019 and 2020 (Figure 8). In 2019, Illinois data showed a 13.1% reduction in these arrests between Weeks 10 and 12, at 122 and 106, respectively. The state saw a much larger, 87.4% reduction in arrests during the same weeks in 2020, at 120 and 16, respectively. These trends corresponded with issuance of the stay-at-home order. Chicago saw a similar decrease, at 18.4% in 2019 and 94.4% in 2020 (a proxy of five arrests for Week 12 in 2020 was applied).

In 2019, data showed slight increases in manufacture and drug delivery-related arrests from Weeks 21 to 22 (Figure 8). However, in 2020 during the same time period, Illinois and Chicago saw arrest decreases of 15.5% and 92.1%, respectively. The death of George Floyd and subsequent protests may have been related to the reduction of manufacture and drug delivery-related arrests during that time.

Figure 8

Illinois and Chicago Drug Manufacture and Delivery Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2019 and 2020



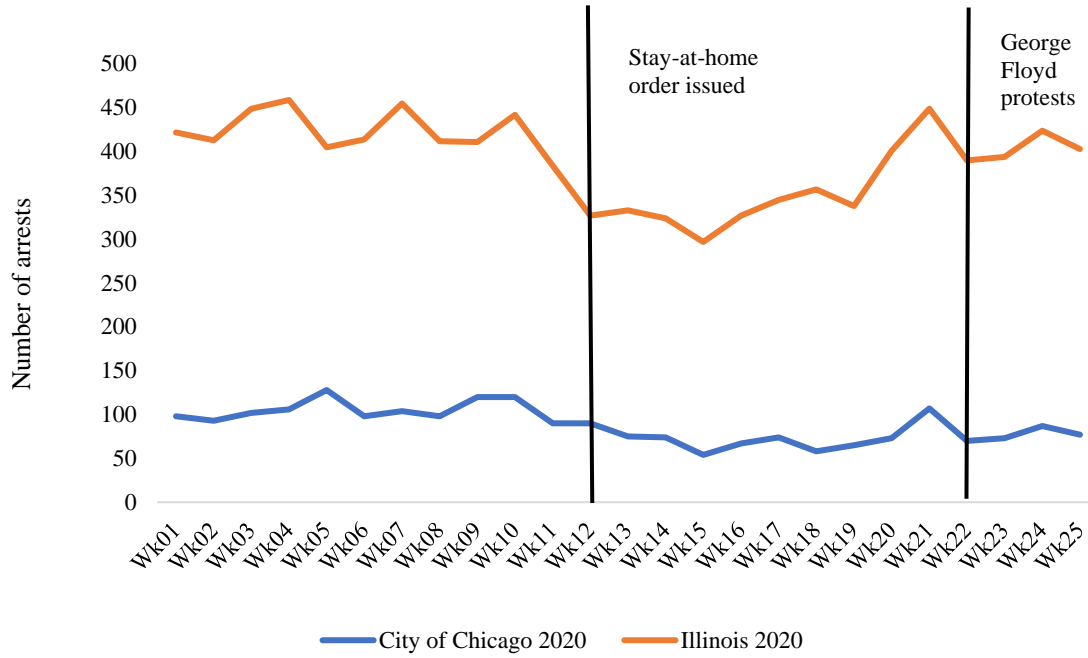
Note. In 2019, Week 1 started on January 6 and Week 25 ended on June 29; in 2020, Week 1 started January 5 and Week 25 ended June 27.

*Fewer than 10 drug delivery arrests were recorded in Weeks 12, 13, 14, and 22 in the City of Chicago. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

Finally, we examined domestic violence arrests in Illinois and Chicago for 2020 (Figure 9). Data showed slight reductions in domestic violence arrests both statewide and in Chicago prior to issuance of the stay-at-home order in Week 12 and after the death of George Floyd (Weeks 21 to 22). However, domestic violence arrests in Illinois increased by 23.2% from Weeks 12 to 25, while Chicago domestic violence arrests decreased by 14.4% during the same period.

Figure 9

Illinois and Chicago Domestic Violence Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2020

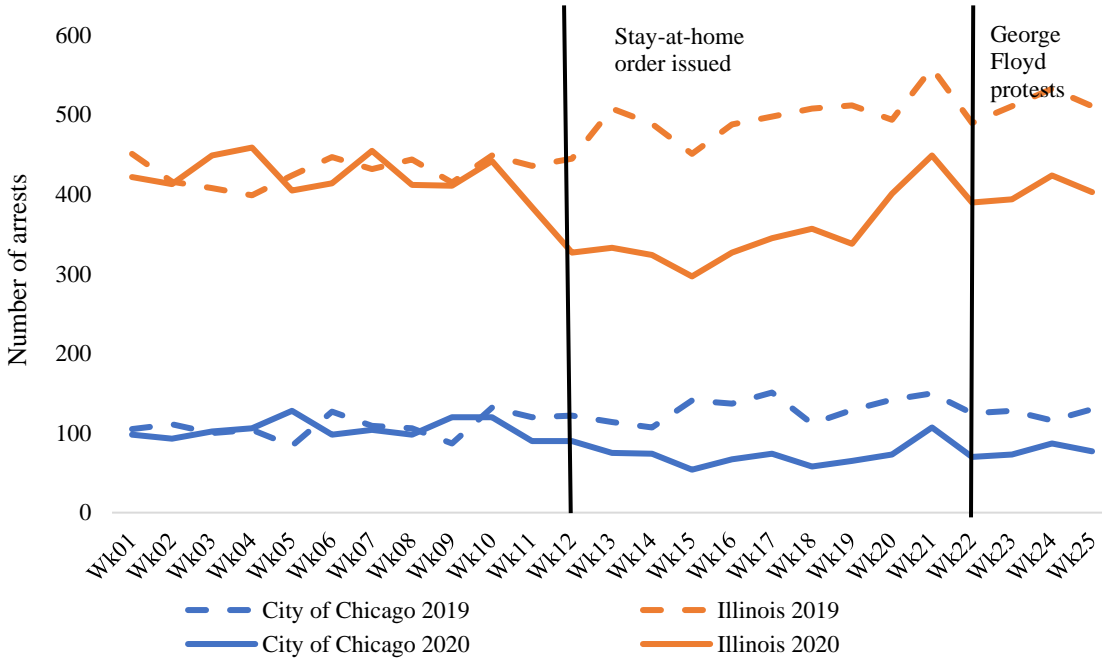


Note. Week 1 started January 5, 2020, and Week 25 ended June 27, 2020. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

We also examined domestic violence arrests in 2019 and 2020 (*Figure 10*). Overall, domestic violence arrest totals were higher in 2019 both statewide (excluding Chicago) and in Chicago.

Figure 10

Illinois and Chicago Domestic Violence Arrests, Weeks 1-25, 2019 and 2020



Note. In 2019, Week 1 started on January 6 and Week 25 ended on June 29; in 2020, Week 1 started January 5 and Week 25 ended June 27. “Illinois” arrests excluded Chicago arrests.

Overview of Arrest Trends and Conclusion

This was a preliminary look at arrest trends that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. We examined arrest trends in Illinois (excluding Chicago) and Chicago for 2020 from January 5 (Week 1) to June 27 (week 25) and compared arrest trends to these corresponding weeks in 2019. This study is not without limitations, but the analysis may be informative as to the changes in arrests that occurred during this time period. This examination revealed that Illinois arrests were down from 2019 and 2020; there were reductions in arrests around the stay-at-home order, and little arrest changes following the death of George Floyd.

Illinois Arrests Down in 2020

We found Illinois (excluding Chicago) and Chicago arrests from mid-March to late June 2020 were much lower than those recorded in 2019 during the same period. These findings were supported by the Marshall Project’s data analysis of Chicago arrests in March and April.¹⁸ This suggests that at the onset of the pandemic, law enforcement shifted priorities and scaled back on arrests, particularly on arrests for low-level offenses.¹⁹

Declines in Arrests Preceding and Following the Illinois Stay-at-home Order

We found declines in Illinois (excluding Chicago) and Chicago arrests in the two weeks preceding issuance of the stay-at-home order, occurring March 21, 2020, in response to the

COVID-19 pandemic. The data showed decreases in arrests for the offenses of drug possession, drug manufacture and delivery, and domestic violence.

While the stay-at-home order issuance date was the date of interest, much had happened globally and in the United States surrounding COVID-19 in the two weeks prior that may have affected law enforcement arrest practices and individual behaviors, activities, and events. They included:

- March 11 — WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic.
- March 13 — Former President Trump declared COVID-19 a national emergency.
- March 13 — Travel ban enacted for non-US citizens traveling from Europe.
- March 15 — CDC recommended no gatherings of 50 or more people in the United States.
- March 17 — Trump Administration asked Congress to fund Americans direct financial relief.
- March 19 — California was first state to issue a statewide stay-at-home order²⁰

The analysis showed some changes in the number of violent arrests that after the stay-at-home order was issued. Data indicated homicide arrests decreased in Chicago, but increased in the state. Additionally, in Chicago, the analysis showed a decrease in domestic violence arrests, which was similar to examinations by others of Chicago arrest data during the pandemic.²¹

Little Change in Arrests Following the Death of George Floyd

Arrests in Chicago declined following the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests in late May and June of 2020. Drug manufacture and delivery arrests declined approximately 92.2% from the week of Floyd's death to the week following his death and homicide arrests decreased by 15.0%. However, this contrasted with 28 cities that reported a rise in homicide arrests during this time.²² Additionally, statewide arrests showed little fluctuation in the time surrounding his death and protests, with the exception of homicide arrests, which increased by 50.0 % from May to June.

These analyses offer a preliminary look at arrest data in Illinois (excluding Chicago) and Chicago during the first half of 2020. More will be learned as more information becomes available on the commission and reporting of crime, as well as changes in police practices. In addition, ongoing efforts to address the pandemic, reduce crime and violence, and enact police reforms throughout the state and the country may affect future crime trends.

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