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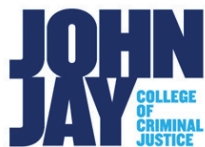
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NEW YORK CITY POLICE REFORM AND REINVENTION COLLABORATIVE

Racial Disparities in New York City Civil Summonses, 2019-2022

STEPHEN KOPPEL AND ANNA STENKAMP
DATA COLLABORATIVE FOR JUSTICE



DATA COLLABORATIVE FOR
JUSTICE AT JOHN JAY COLLEGE
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APRIL 2024

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REPORT HISTORY AND FUNDING

In 2021, the [New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice](#) (MOCJ) contracted with several research centers at John Jay College of Criminal Justice to support research and/or technical assistance related to 6 of the 132 reform initiatives contained within the [New York City Police Reform and Reinvntion Collaborative Plan](#) ("the Plan"). The Plan was the result of more than 85 listening sessions, roundtable discussions, town halls and stakeholder engagement meetings conducted by NYPD and community partners. In March 2021, the NYC Council adopted the Plan via [Resolution 1584](#) pursuant to [State Executive Order Number 203](#). The City's [Reform Implementation Working Group](#) was tasked with implementing and monitoring the progress of the 132 reform initiatives within the Plan. This report is aligned with reform initiative 78 of the Plan as directed by MOCJ.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to David Kim, Olga Statz, and Frank Ng at the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH) for providing data on civil summons cases. This Data was provided by and belongs to the New York City Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings. Any further use of this Data must be approved by the New York City Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the New York City Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings.

We thank our former Data Collaborative for Justice colleague, Andrew Taylor, for his work designing the research and engaging OATH and MOCJ about our data needs.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to assess racial and neighborhood disparities in civil summonses issued by the New York City Police Department (NYPD) under the Criminal Justice Reform Act (CJRA). The report serves as a companion to a parallel study of [criminal summonses](#). The New York City Council commissioned both reports in March 2021 as part of the [Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Plan](#). The goals of this plan included increasing public safety, while reducing racial disparities in law enforcement and mitigating potential adverse effects of over-policing on low-income communities.

CONTEXT: CIVIL VS. CRIMINAL SUMMONSES

On the continuum of policing tools, summonses generally involve minor misconduct, with a *civil summons* yielding less onerous consequences than its *criminal summons* counterpart. Uncontested civil summonses result in a fine that can be paid online. Criminal summonses typically result in an in-person trip to court; a higher fine in cases of a conviction; warrants for missed court appearances, and the risk of a criminal record. To avoid these penalties, the [Criminal Justice Reform Act](#) of 2016 diverted most cases involving five common offenses to the *civil system*: public consumption of alcohol, public urination, parks offenses, noise, and littering/spitting.

CIVIL SUMMONS TRENDS

- **Spike in Civil Summonses in 2022:** The NYPD issued 27,673 civil summonses in 2022—nearly four times the total in 2021 (7,252) and 22% above the pre-pandemic level in 2019 (22,662). By comparison, criminal summonses also increased from 2021 to 2022, though by a much smaller magnitude (up 62%, from 22,603 to 36,621).
- **Predominance of Public Consumption of Alcohol:** The most common offense was open container of alcohol in public, making up more than four out of five civil summonses (83%) in 2022. Public urination was the second most frequent at 11%.
- **Growing Enforcement in Manhattan:** Up from 27% in 2021, Manhattan accounted for 41% of civil summonses in 2022, while only comprising 21% of the City's population. (Not all people live in the borough where they received a summons.)
- **Mainly Low Fines:** In 2022, citywide civil summonses accounted for \$443,879 in fines, with the most common amount being \$25 or less (84%).

RACIAL DISPARITIES

- **Disproportionate Issuance to Hispanic People:** Hispanic people received over half (53%) of civil summonses in 2022, while making up 29% of the City's population. The NYPD issued 24% of civil summonses to Black people in 2022, while issuing 44% of the more serious *criminal* summons type to Black people.
- **Declining Racial Disparities Since 2019:** In 2022, police issued civil summonses at a rate 1.9 times higher for Black than white people, compared to 3.8 times higher in 2019. The Hispanic-white racial disparity ratio fell slightly from 4.0 to 3.6. By contrast, racial disparities were considerably *larger* for criminal summonses, and these latter disparities grew in 2022 compared to the immediately prior years.

IV

KEY FINDINGS

- **Growing and Disparate Failure-to-Appear Rates:** Failure to appear (FTA) means the individual neither paid the fine online prior to their scheduled hearing date nor appeared in-person. From 2019 to 2022, FTA rates grew from 48% to 54% overall. In 2022, FTA rates were 64% for Black, 57% for Hispanic, and 31% for white people.

NEIGHBORHOOD AND INCOME DISPARITIES

- **Disproportionate Summons Issuance in Low-Income Neighborhoods:** In 2022, the NYPD issued one-third (34%) of civil summonses in zip codes within the bottom quintile of household median incomes in the City.
- **Wider Racial Disparities in Affluent Areas:** While the NYPD issued fewer summonses overall in high- than low-income neighborhoods, among people receiving a summons, racial disparities were largest in affluent neighborhoods (top income quintile), where Hispanic and Black people were 7.5 and 5.5 times, respectively, more likely than white people to receive a summons.

CONCLUSION

This study points to growing police enforcement of minor misconduct in 2022, a change that is ostensibly at odds with the goals of police reform. Civil summons issuance increased nearly fourfold in 2022 compared to 2021. Our [companion study](#) indicates that criminal summonses also increased in 2022 (though to a lesser degree). While the results point to continued racial disparities in civil summons issuance, their magnitude declined from 2019 to 2022. By contrast, racial disparities in criminal summonses were both increasing and significantly larger in the first place—underscoring that major trends for these two types of low-level cases are not identical. There is, lastly, a need for further research concerning racial disparities in failure to appear rates as well as the ramifications of over half of people from all groups neither paying their fine online nor appearing in-person for their hearing.

Chapter I. Introduction: Police Reform and Civil Summons Practice

The purpose of this study is to assess racial and neighborhood disparities in civil summonses issued by the New York City Police Department (NYPD) under the Criminal Justice Reform Act (CJRA). The report serves as a companion to a study conducted by the Data Collaborative for Justice on racial, income, and neighborhood disparities in [criminal summonses](#).¹ Both reports were commissioned by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice pursuant to New York City's March 2021 [Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Plan](#). Created in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd and ensuing public demonstrations in 2020, the driving goals behind the City's reform plan included increasing public safety while promoting greater police accountability, reducing racial disparities in law enforcement, and mitigating potential adverse effects of over-policing on low-income communities.^{2,3}

BACKGROUND CONTEXT: THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM ACT

Effective June 2017, the Criminal Justice Reform Act (CJRA) made five types of low-level misconduct eligible for a civil rather than a criminal summons: **consumption of alcohol on streets, public urination, parks offenses, noise, and littering/spitting**.⁴ These civil summonses are adjudicated by the City's Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH).

Reflecting a similar perspective to the City's more recent police reforms, the aim of the CJRA was to reduce the penalties and collateral consequences associated with these common low-level offenses. **In contrast to a criminal summons, a civil summons carries no risk of incarceration, imposes lower fines that can be paid online, eliminates the possibility of an arrest warrant for missed court appearances, and leaves no record on a person's criminal history.**

Notably, the NYPD retained discretion to issue a *criminal* summons for the five CJRA offenses under specific circumstances outlined in their guidelines. Examples include situations where the individual has an outstanding warrant, has accumulated three or more unanswered civil summonses within eight years, has two or more felony arrests within two years, is on parole or probation, or when the police officer asserts a legitimate law enforcement reason for a criminal summons approved by a supervisor.⁵

Prior research found that after passage of the CJRA, the overwhelming majority of the targeted offenses resulted in a civil summons. For a more in-depth analysis, see the Data Collaborative for Justice's previous study of the [impact of the CJRA](#).⁶ However, recent trends indicate a shift in practices in 2022 and early 2023, with police reverting back to greater use of criminal rather than civil summonses for CJRA offenses.⁷

QUESTIONS FOR THE CURRENT REPORT

This report addresses several research questions about overall trends and racial disparities in civil summons practice:

- 1. Citywide Trends:** What are the overall citywide and boroughwide trends in civil summons issuance from 2019 to 2022?
- 2. Racial Disparities:** Are Black and Hispanic people disproportionately impacted by summons practices, and has the magnitude of racial disparities changed since 2019?
- 3. Offense Type:** How do the trends differ across civil summons offense types?

INTRODUCTION

4. **Other Demographic Characteristics:** Do racial disparities differ when also accounting for gender and age?
5. **Geographic Differences:** Are certain neighborhoods disproportionately impacted?
6. **Fines and Failures-to-Appear:** Do the consequences of a civil summons differ by race or ethnicity?

In answering these questions, the report begins with *trends* in the issuance of summonses (Chapter 2), before turning to racial disparities (Chapter 3), neighborhood-level disparities (Chapter 4), and outcomes, including fines and failure to appear (Chapter 5).

DATA, METHODS, AND DEFINITIONS

Data

The data used in this report, covering the period from 2019 to 2022, was provided by the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH). Although various agencies have the authority to issue a summons for a CJRA offense (e.g., Parks, Sanitation, and Police), for the purposes of this analysis the data were limited to those issued by the NYPD, which accounted for the large majority of summonses for a CJRA offense issued during the study period (70%). The data includes information recorded by the issuing officer about the nature of the offense, location of the offense, and demographic characteristics of the person who received the summons.

Racial and Ethnic Groups

People were divided into three main racial/ethnic groups: non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic white. For simplicity, throughout the report these groups are referred to as Black, Hispanic, and white. The small number of people not within one of these categories were classified as “Additional Groups” (4%).

Offense Types

The civil summonses covered in this report fall within five sections of law: public consumption of alcohol (Admin. Code § 10-125), public urination (Admin. Code § 16-118), parks offenses (56 RCNY), noise (Admin. Code § 24-218), and littering/spitting (Admin. Code § 16-118). Instances of parks offenses that were more accurately characterized by one of the other four categories were reclassified appropriately (e.g., incidents of littering in a park were reclassified under “littering” offenses).

Geographic and Economic Differences

Geographic differences were examined by location of the offense. Additionally, to explore possible economic disparities in police practices, the analysis was broken out by median household income quintiles based on estimates from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey.⁸ For example, the bottom 20% (quintile 1) encompasses zip codes where the median household income was approximately \$55,000 or less.

Measuring Racial Disparities

The primary racial disparity measure used in this report are disparity rate ratios, calculated in two steps. First, population-specific rates were generated by dividing the total number of civil summonses for a particular group (numerator) by the annual population size for that race/ethnicity (denominator).⁹ Next, racial disparity ratios were calculated by dividing the Hispanic rate by the white rate (Hispanic/white ratio) and the Black rate by the white rate (Black/white ratio).

Caveat. By benchmarking solely against population size, this methodology has the benefit of capturing racial disparities resulting from the broadest possible range of factors (e.g., bias in policing, poverty, educational disadvantage). However, attributing racially disparate outcomes to any particular cause would require a more complex analysis.¹⁰

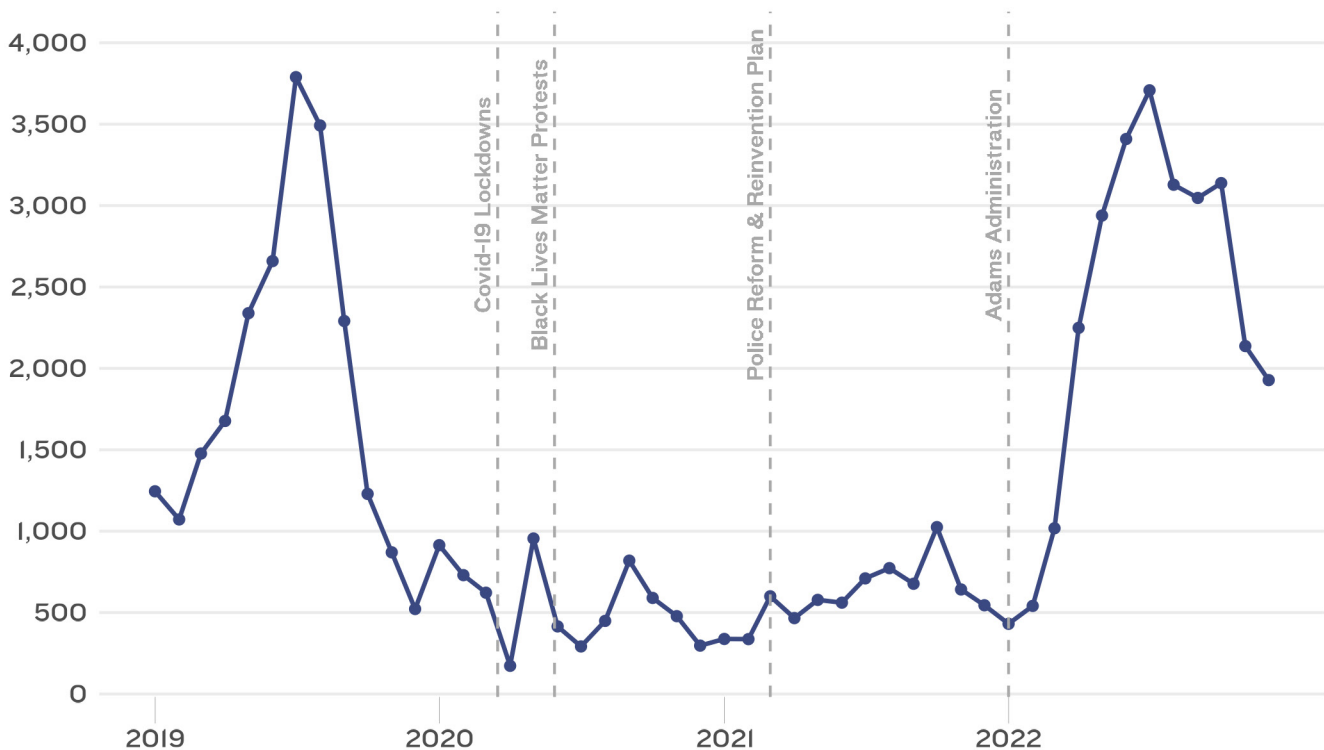
Chapter 2. Citywide Civil Summons Trends

In 2019, the monthly volume of summonses for a CJRA offense followed a seasonal trend, peaking in the middle of summer and declining for the rest of the year (**Figure 2.1**). This pattern was disrupted in 2020 during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, with civil summons issuance remaining low throughout the entire year. Following the height of the pandemic, summons issuance persisted at low levels in 2021 before increasing considerably in 2022. **Overall, the annual total for 2022 was 27,673, nearly four times higher than the previous year (7,252) and 22% above the 2019 total (22,662) (Figure 2.2).**

The sharp increase in civil summonses observed in 2022 was driven by open container of alcohol violations, which rose to 22,981—representing nearly four times the total in 2021 and 36% above the pre-pandemic total in 2019 (**Figure 2.3**). Over the four-year period, open container of alcohol accounted for approximately four out of every five civil summonses (**Figure 2.4**).

Examining boroughwide totals, Manhattan accounted for 41% of the summonses issued in 2022—twice its proportion of the citywide population (21.5%) (**Figure 2.5**). The boroughwide distribution fluctuated, with a decrease in the Bronx's share (from 31% in 2019 to 13% in 2022) and an increase in Manhattan's share (from 24% to 41%).¹¹

FIGURE 2.1
MONTHLY CIVIL SUMMONSES



CITYWIDE CIVIL SUMMONS TRENDS

FIGURE 2.2
ANNUAL CIVIL SUMMONSES

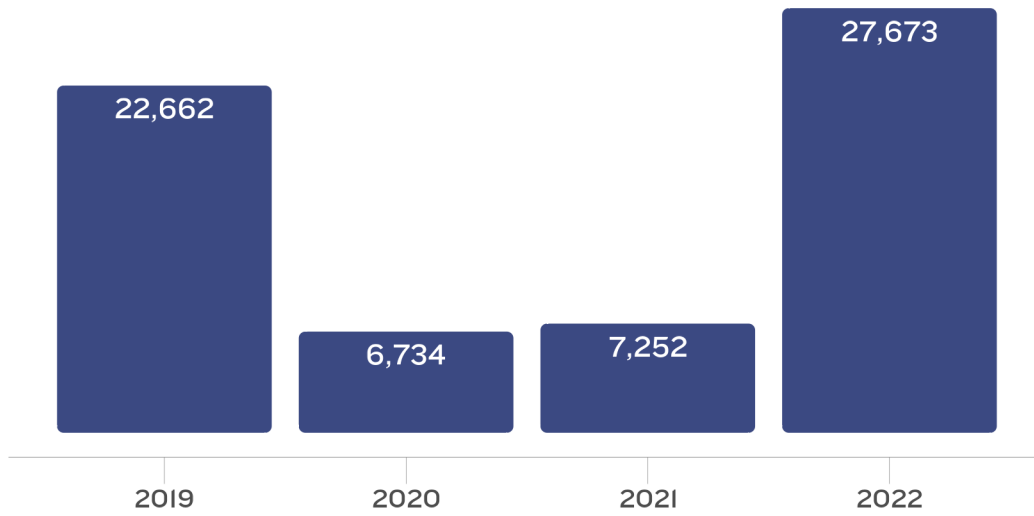
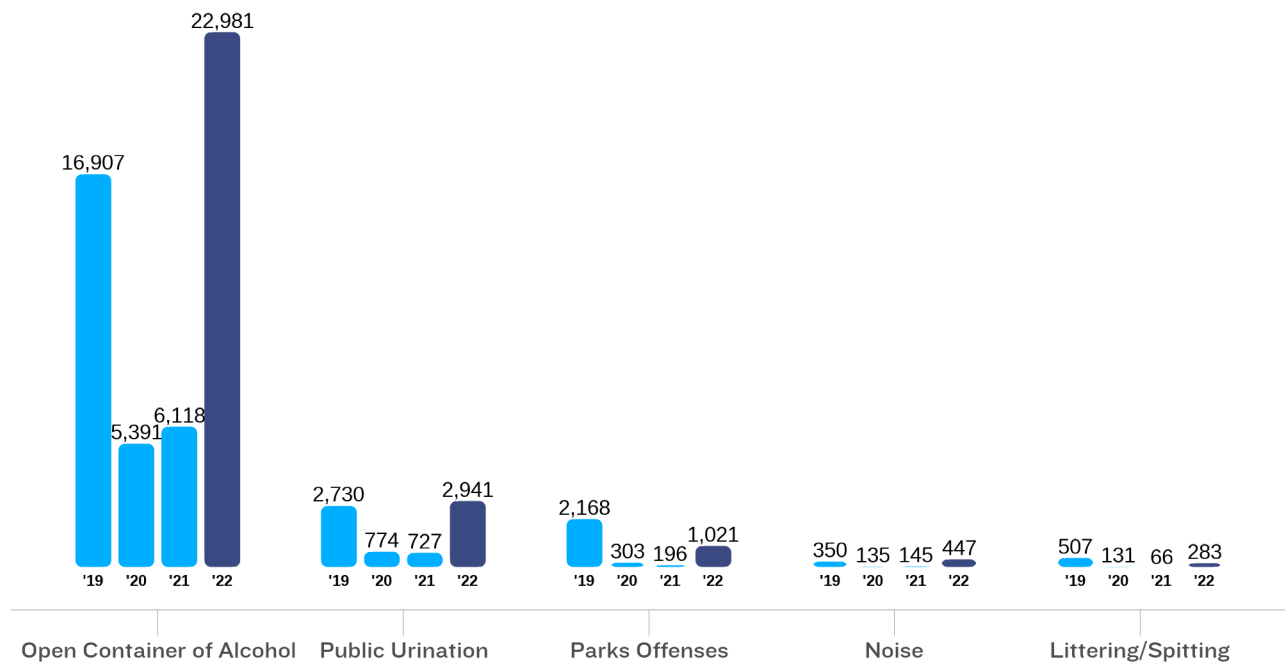
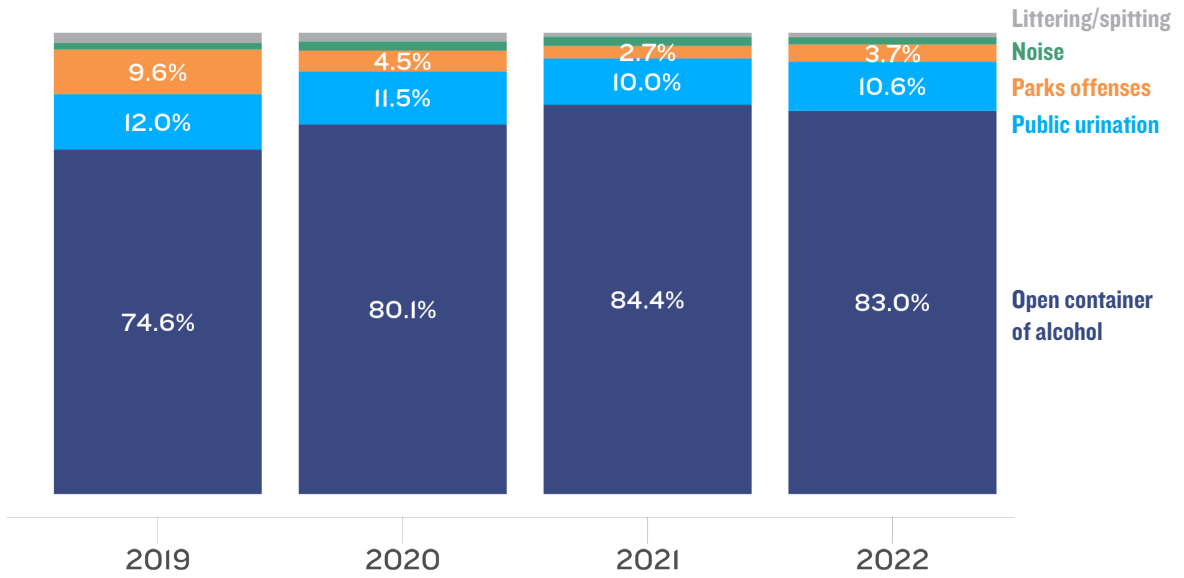


FIGURE 2.3
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY OFFENSE TYPE



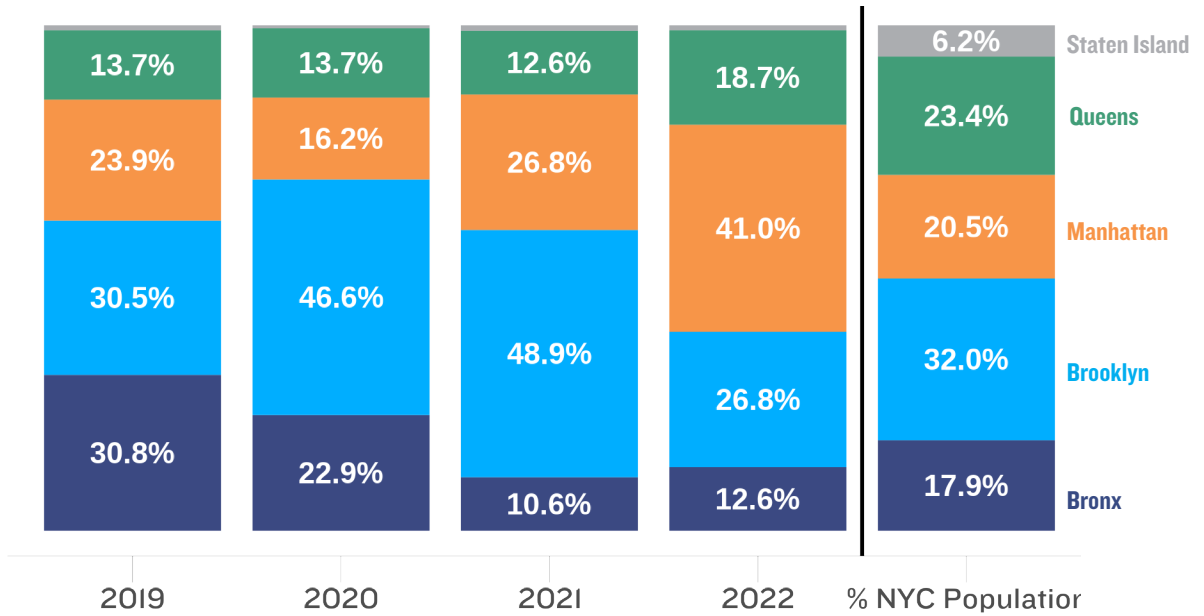
CITYWIDE CIVIL SUMMONS TRENDS

FIGURE 2.4
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY OFFENSE TYPE, %



Note: Noise and littering/spitting accounted for 3% of civil summonses issued over the four-year period.

FIGURE 2.5
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY BOROUGH, %



Notes: Population figures are based on the 2022 Census estimates. Staten Island made up less than 1% of all civil summonses issued over the four-year period.

Chapter 3. Racial Disparities in Civil Summons Issuance

CITYWIDE AND BOROUGHWISE RACIAL DISPARITIES

In 2022, Hispanic people received 53% of civil summonses (up from 45% in 2019), while Black people received 24% (down from 36% in 2019) (**Figure 3.1**). Accounting for population size, Hispanic people were 3.6 times more likely than white people to receive a civil summons in 2022 (down marginally from 4.0 in 2019). Black people were 1.9 times more likely than white people (down by half from 3.8 in 2019) (**Figure 3.2**).

Hispanic people also made up the largest proportion of people issued a summons in every borough, accounting for about seven out of every ten in the Bronx (73%), Queens (73%), and Staten Island (70%) (**Figure 3.3**). Over the four-year period, the Hispanic-white disparity rose in every borough except Manhattan, while Black-white disparity either fell or remained the same in every borough except Staten Island (**Figure 3.4**).

Notably, racial disparities in civil summonses were substantially lower than those observed for [criminal summonses](#). For instance, in 2022, Black people were 9.1 times more likely than white people to receive a criminal summons (vs. 1.9 for civil summonses), and Hispanic people were 6.8 times more likely than white people to receive a criminal summons (vs. 3.6 for civil).

RACIAL DISPARITIES BY OFFENSE TYPE

In 2022, Hispanic people made up the largest share of violations issued for noise (68%), open container of alcohol (54%), public urination (48%), and parks offenses (34%), while Black people made up the largest share of those for littering/spitting (45%) (**Figure 3.5**). For open container of alcohol—the most prevalent offense type—the Hispanic-white disparity was twice as high as the Black-white disparity in 2022 (3.6 vs. 1.8) (**Figure 3.6**).

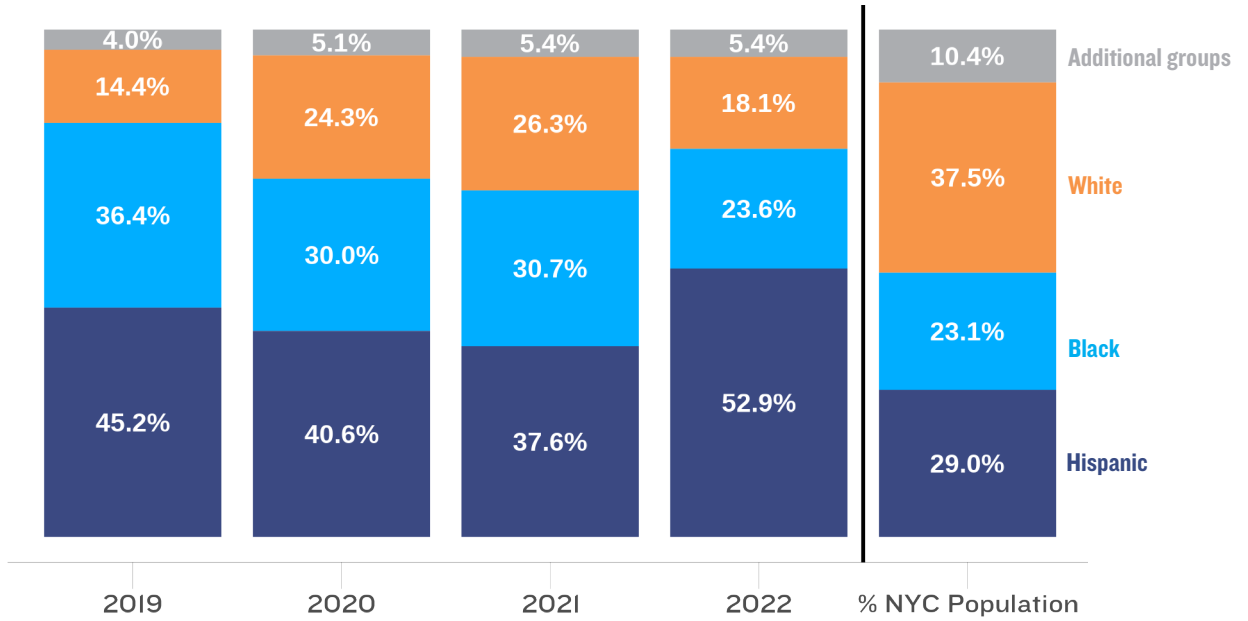
RACIAL DISPARITIES BY GENDER AND AGE

Men accounted for 90% of civil summonses in 2022, with a range of 85% to 88% over the three preceding years. Within gender groups, Black and Hispanic people combined made up a larger share of civil summonses among men (73-83%) than women (44-70%) (**Figure 3.7**). In 2022, among women the Black-white and Hispanic-white disparity ratios were below one, indicating a slightly higher population-adjusted rate for white women (**Figure 3.8**). On the other hand, Hispanic and Black men were 4.5 times and 2.3 times, respectively, more likely than white men to receive a summons.

Overall, people aged 25-44 received over half of all summonses (53-61% over the four years examined).¹² Racial disparity ratios were lowest among those under the age of 25, and highest among those 45 or older (**Figure 3.9**).

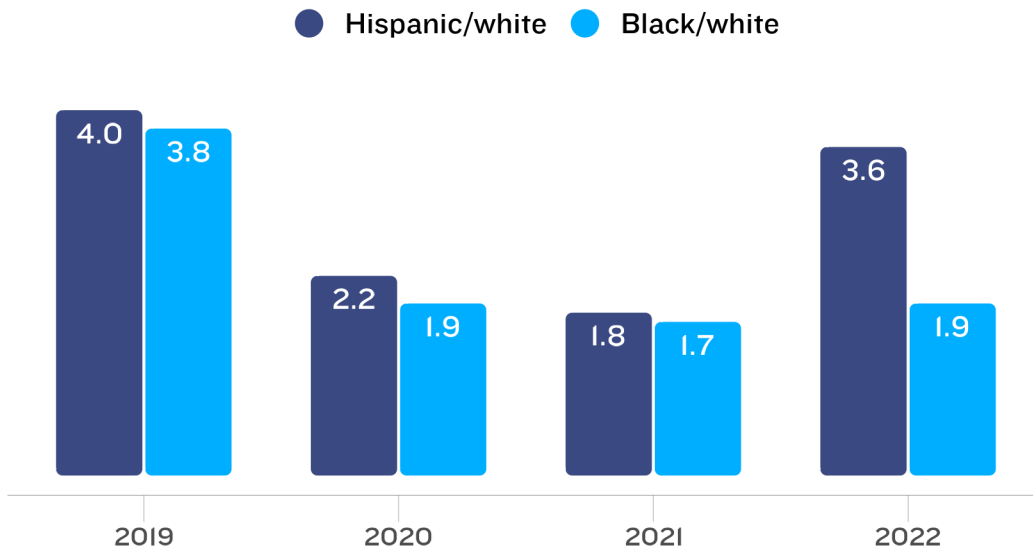
RACIAL DISPARITIES IN CIVIL SUMMONS ISSUANCE

FIGURE 3.1
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY RACE/ETHNICITY, %



Note: Population figures are based on the 2022 Census estimates.

FIGURE 3.2
CIVIL SUMMONS RACIAL DISPARITY RATIOS



RACIAL DISPARITIES IN CIVIL SUMMONS ISSUANCE

FIGURE 3.3
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY BOROUGH AND RACE/ETHNICITY, %

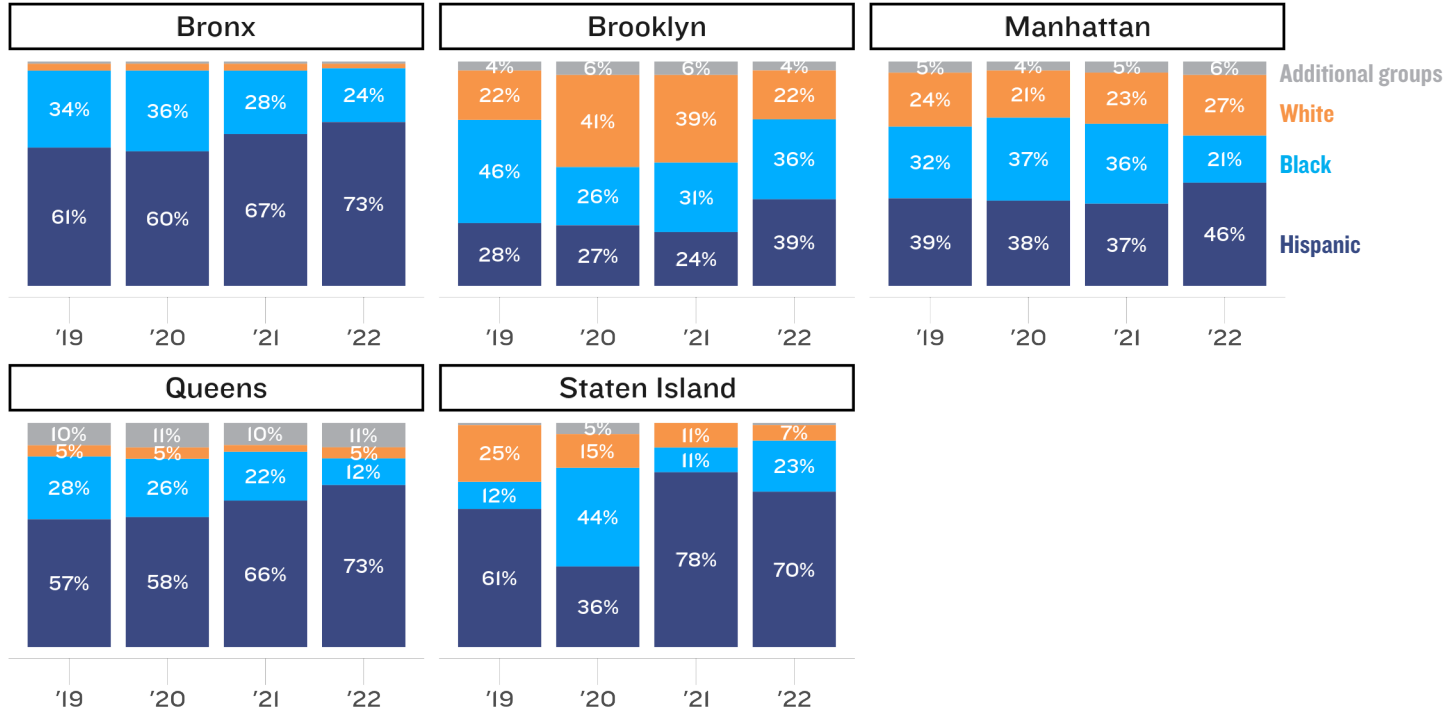
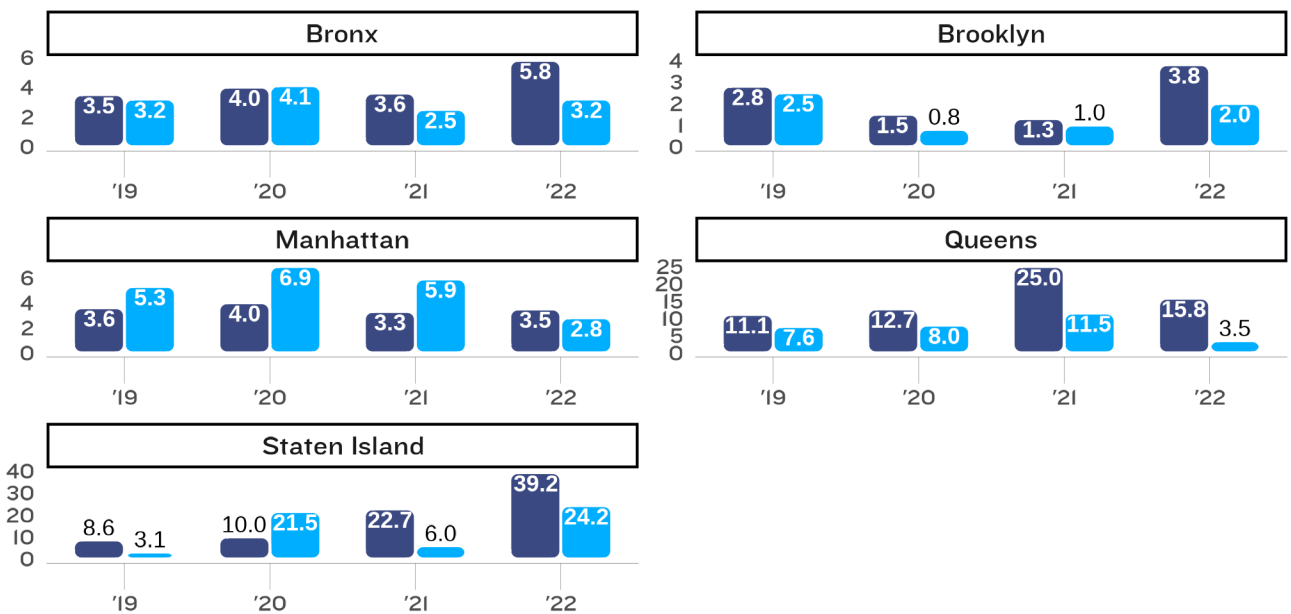


FIGURE 3.4
RACIAL DISPARITY RATIOS OF CIVIL SUMMONSES BY BOROUGH AND RACE

● Hispanic/white ● Black/white



RACIAL DISPARITIES IN CIVIL SUMMONS ISSUANCE

FIGURE 3.5
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY OFFENSE TYPE AND RACE %

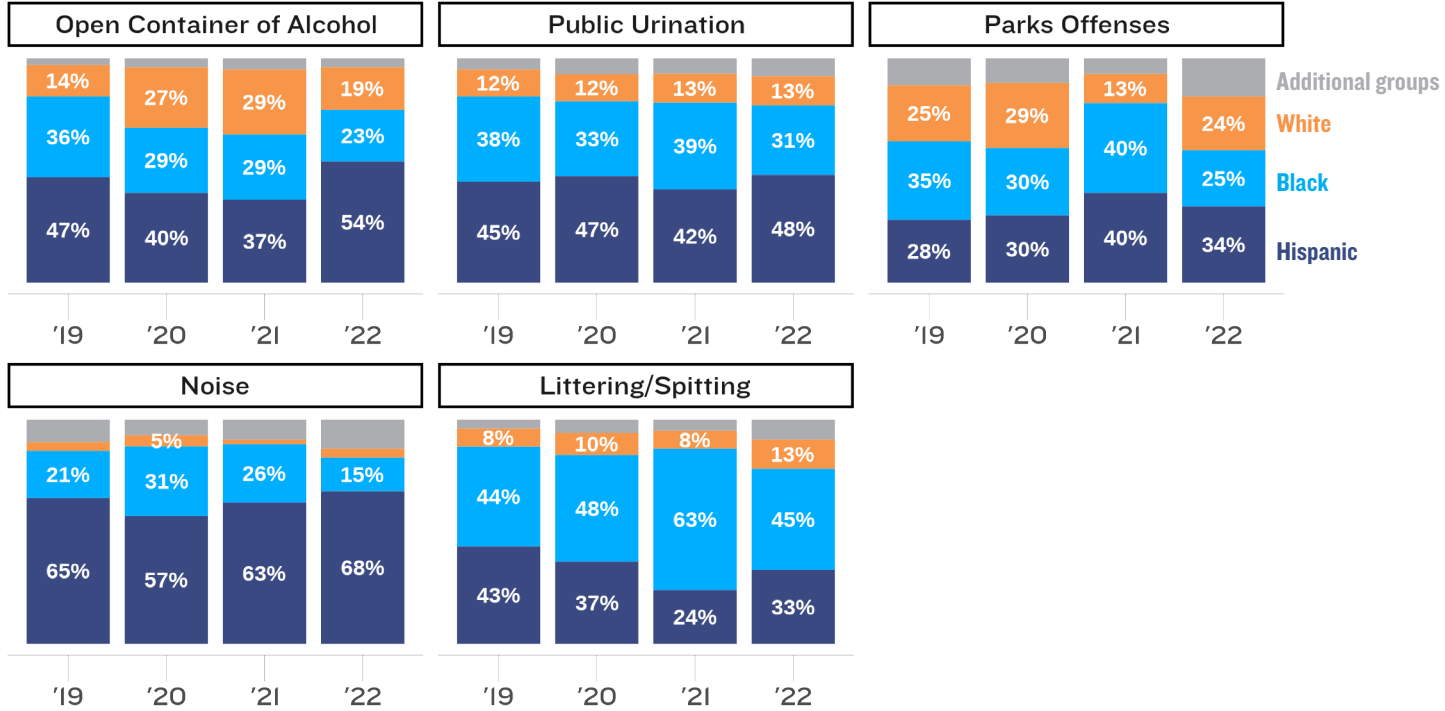
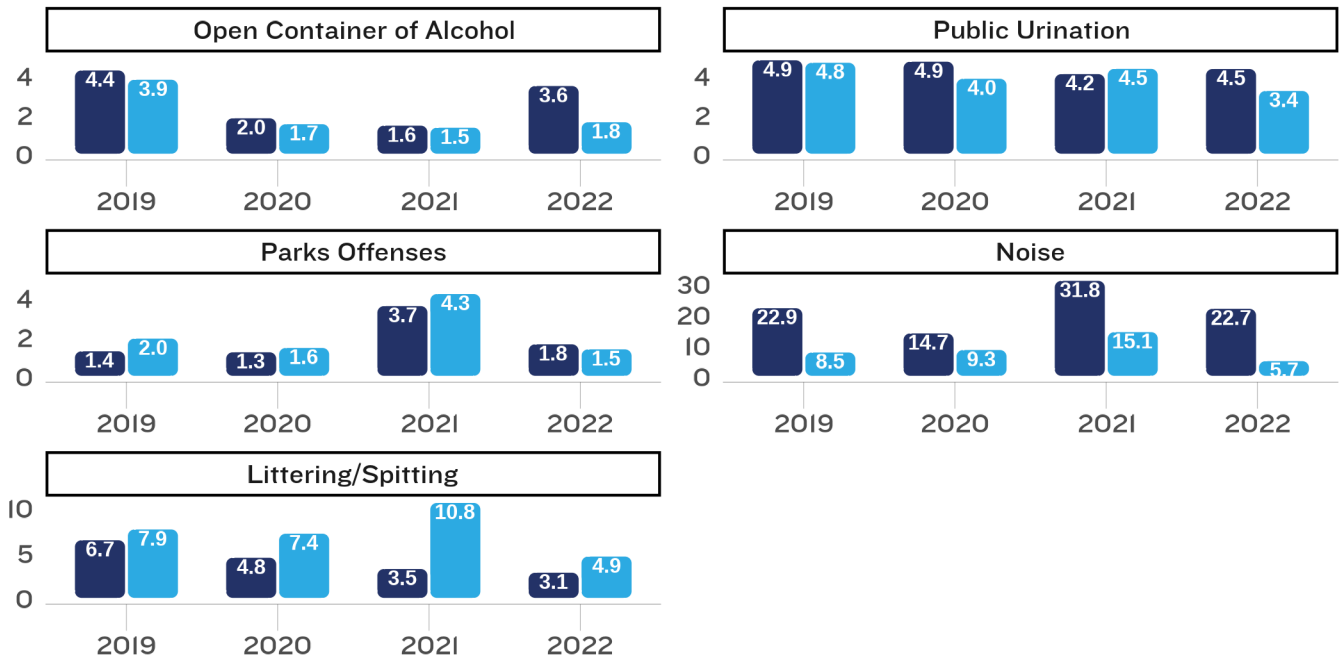


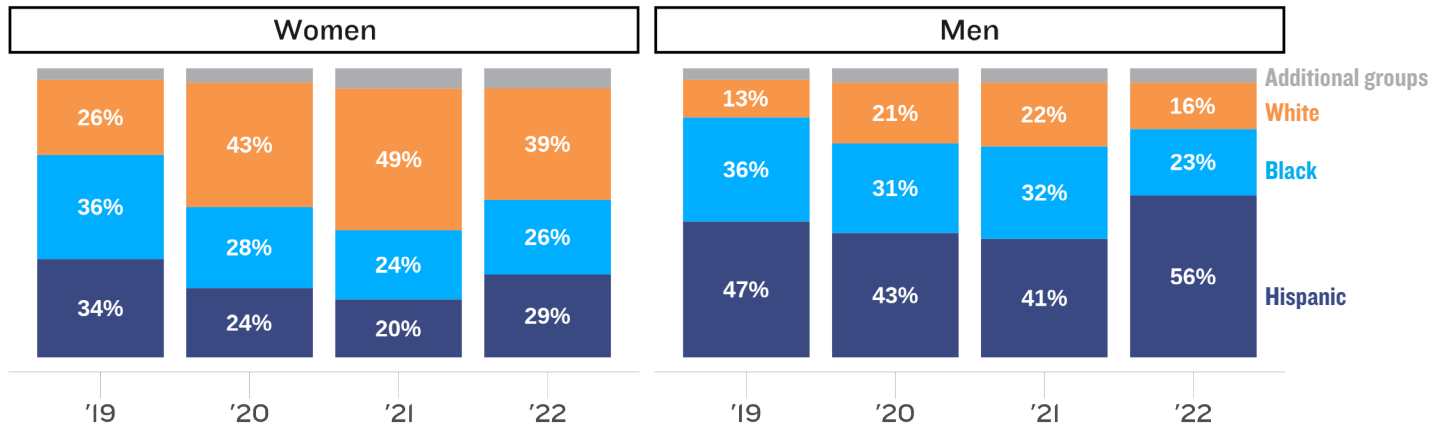
FIGURE 3.6
CIVIL SUMMONS RACIAL DISPARITY RATIO BY OFFENSE TYPE

● Hispanic/white ● Black/white



RACIAL DISPARITIES IN CIVIL SUMMONS ISSUANCE

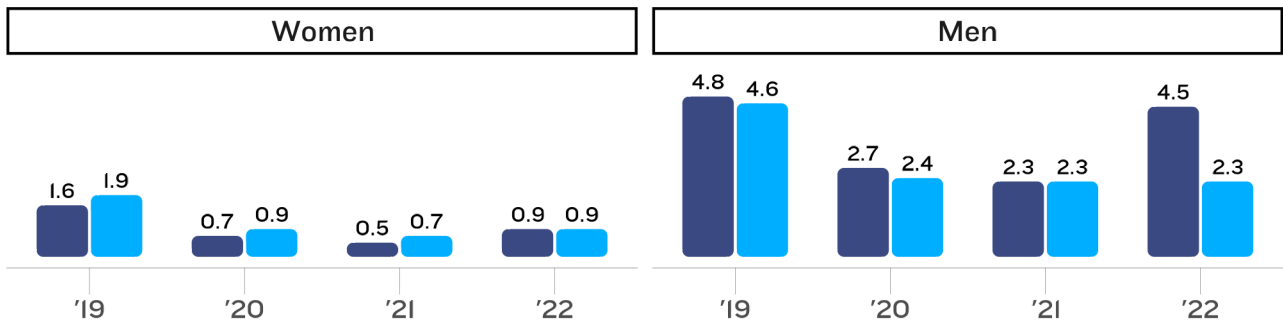
FIGURE 3.7
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY GENDER AND RACE, %



Notes: Among men and women, less than 5% of civil summonses issued were to those in additional racial and ethnic groups over the four-year period. A small percentage of cases with missing information about gender were excluded from the analysis (1.8%).

FIGURE 3.8
CIVIL SUMMONS RACIAL DISPARITY RATIO BY GENDER

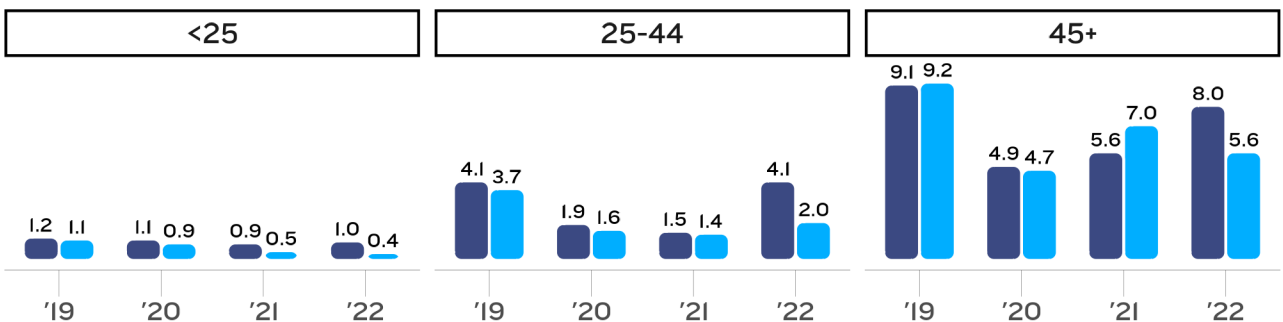
● Hispanic/white ● Black/white



Note: A small percentage of cases with missing information about gender were excluded from the analysis (1.8%).

FIGURE 3.9
CIVIL SUMMONS RACIAL DISPARITY RATIO BY AGE

● Hispanic/white ● Black/white



Chapter 4. Neighborhood and Income Disparities

In 2022, the neighborhoods with the largest volume of civil summonses issued were Williamsburg, Brooklyn (11121), Corona, Queens (11368), Flatbush, Brooklyn (11226), East Harlem, Manhattan (10029), Chelsea, Manhattan (10011), and Jackson Heights, Queens (Figure 4.1).

Zip codes were divided into quintiles based on median household income, with the lowest 20% (quintile 1) including zip codes with a median below about \$55,000 and the top 20% (quintile 5) including zip codes with a median above about \$110,000.

In 2022, police issued about one out of every three civil summonses in communities with a median household income below \$55,313, a decrease from one in two in 2019 (Figure 4.2). Adjusting for the population size of each racial/ethnic group within the quintiles, the largest racial disparity ratios over the four-year period were observed in the most affluent neighborhoods (those with a median household income above \$109,934).¹³ In 2022, Hispanic and Black people were 7.5 times and 5.5 times, respectively, more likely than white people to receive a summons in the highest income quintile. Within these neighborhoods, this represents a substantial decrease in the Black-white civil summons ratio (down from 11.7 in 2019). At the same time, Black people remained overrepresented in criminal summons issuance in high-income neighborhoods, accounting for 47% in 2022 (similar to the previous two years) while making up just 16% of the general population.¹⁴

FIGURE 4.1
2022 CIVIL SUMMONSES BY ZIP CODE (>500 LABELED)

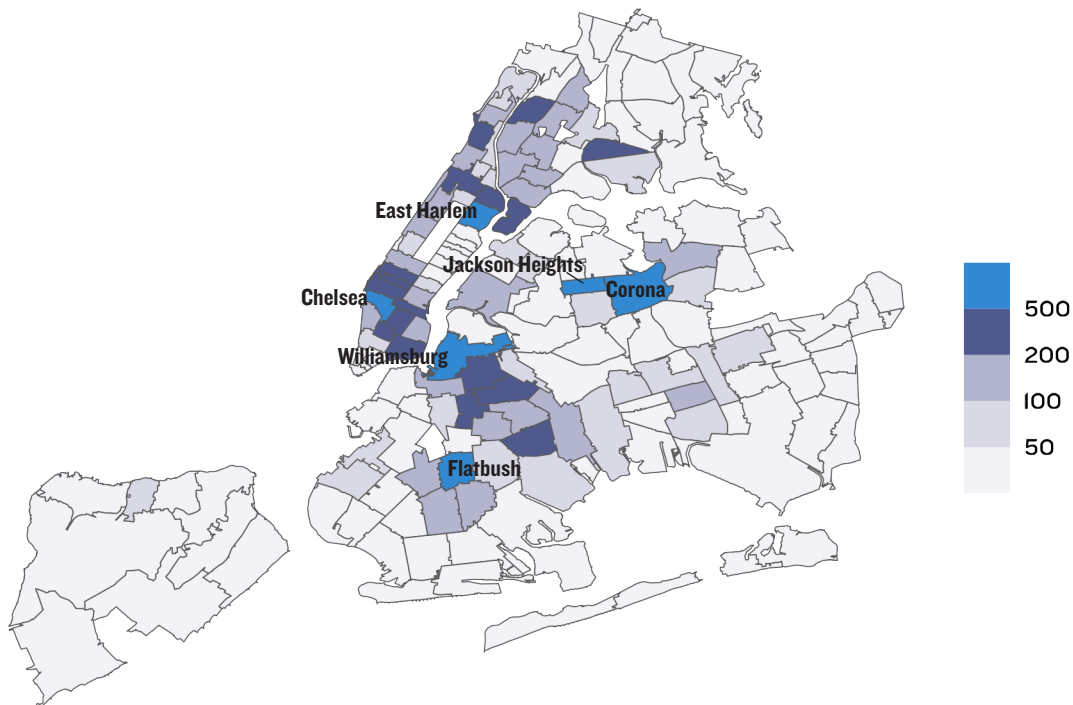


FIGURE 4.2
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILE

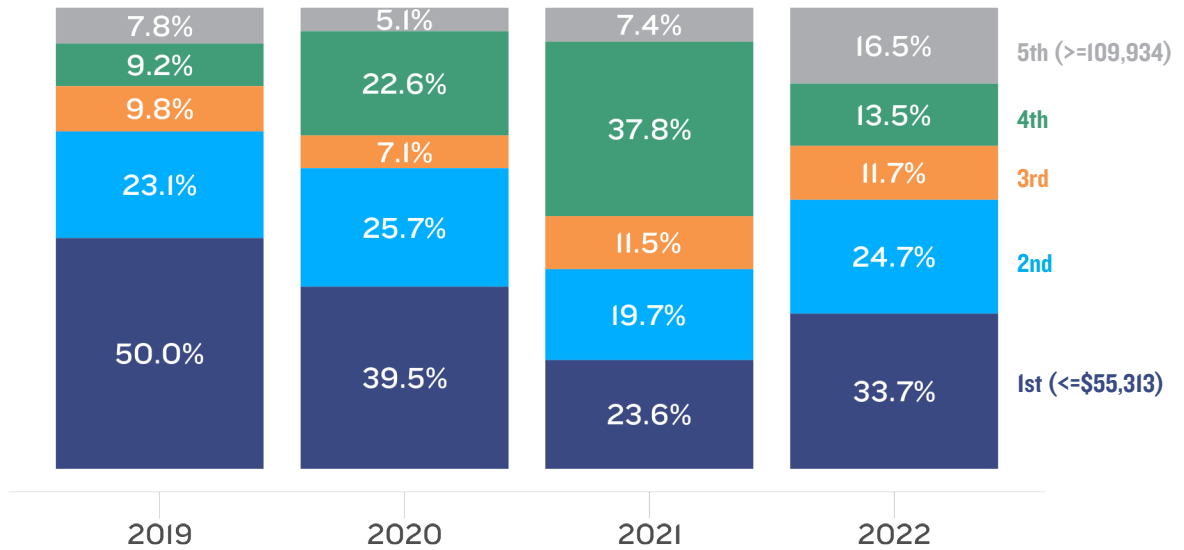
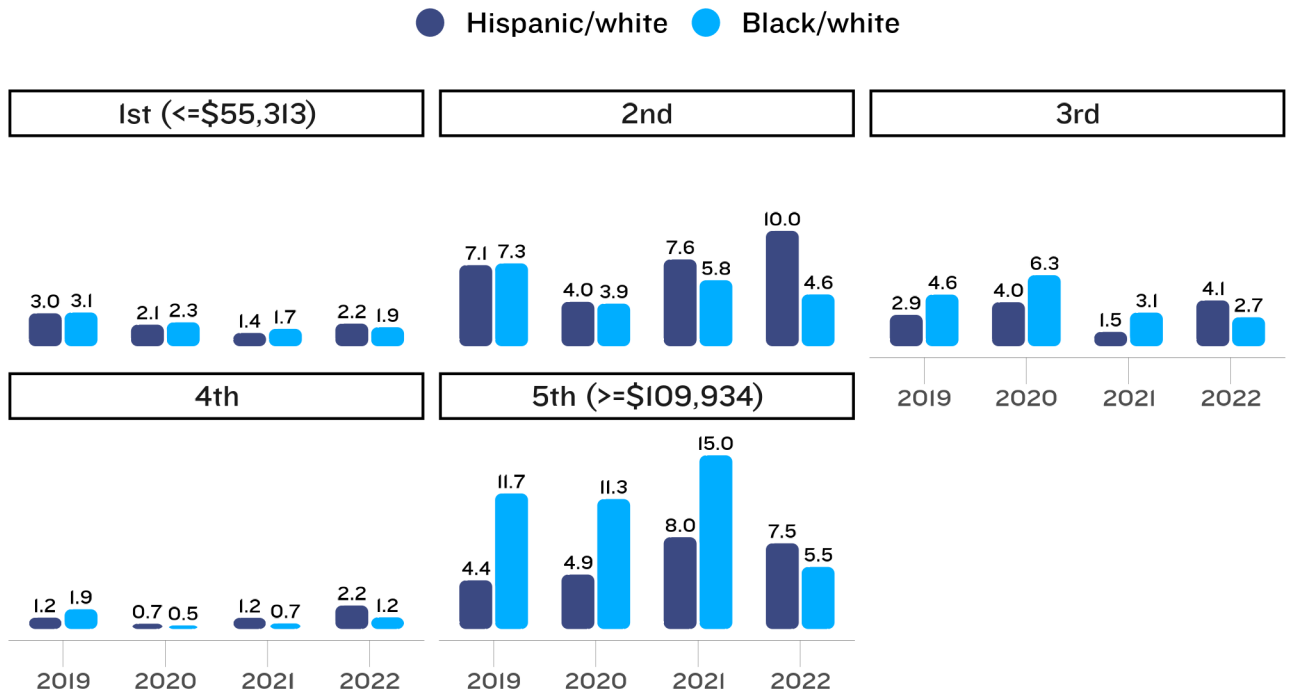


FIGURE 4.3
CIVIL SUMMONS RACIAL DISPARITY RATIO BY MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Chapter 5. Disparities in Fines and Failures to Appear

Fines of \$25 or less were by far the most common, accounting for more than three out of every four civil summons (Figure 5.1). In 2022, fines above \$25 made up a somewhat larger share among Black (22%) and Hispanic people (14%) than white people (12%) (Figure 5.2). In 2022, a total of \$443,879 in fines were imposed citywide, up 4% from the pre-pandemic total in 2019 (\$427,952) (Figure 5.3).

In the civil summons context, a failure to appear (FTA) means that the individual neither paid the fine online prior to their scheduled hearing date nor appeared in-person at the City’s Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings. From 2019 to 2022, failure-to-appear rates grew from 48% to 54% overall. FTA rates also varied by race/ethnicity. In 2022, FTA rates were 64% for Black, 57% for Hispanic, and 31% for white people (Figure 5.4). Compared to 2019, this represented an increase of 8.7 percentage points, 8.1 percentage points, and 1.0 percentage point for Black, Hispanic, and white individuals, respectively.

FIGURE 5.1
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY FINE AMOUNT, %

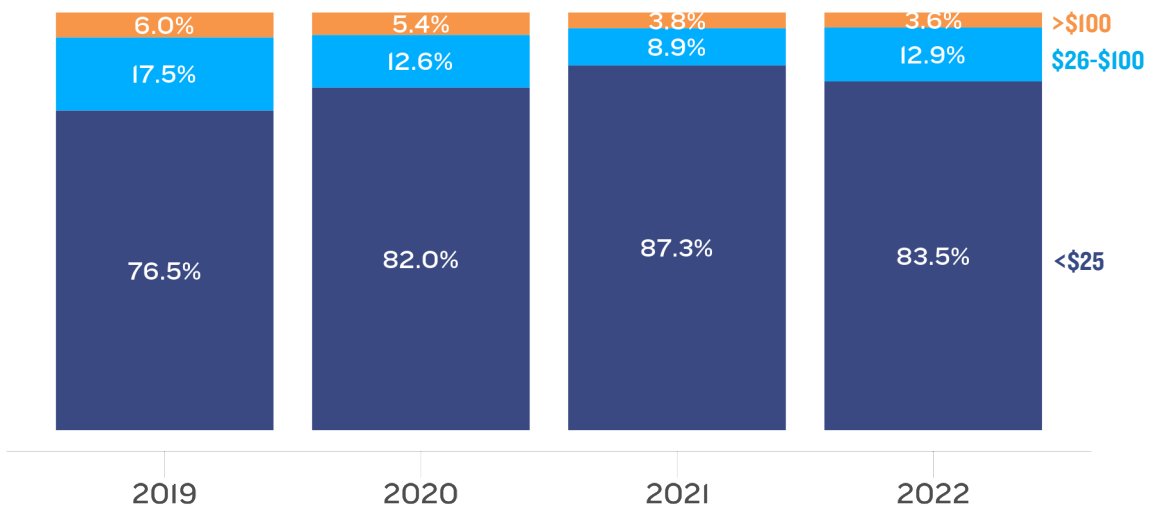
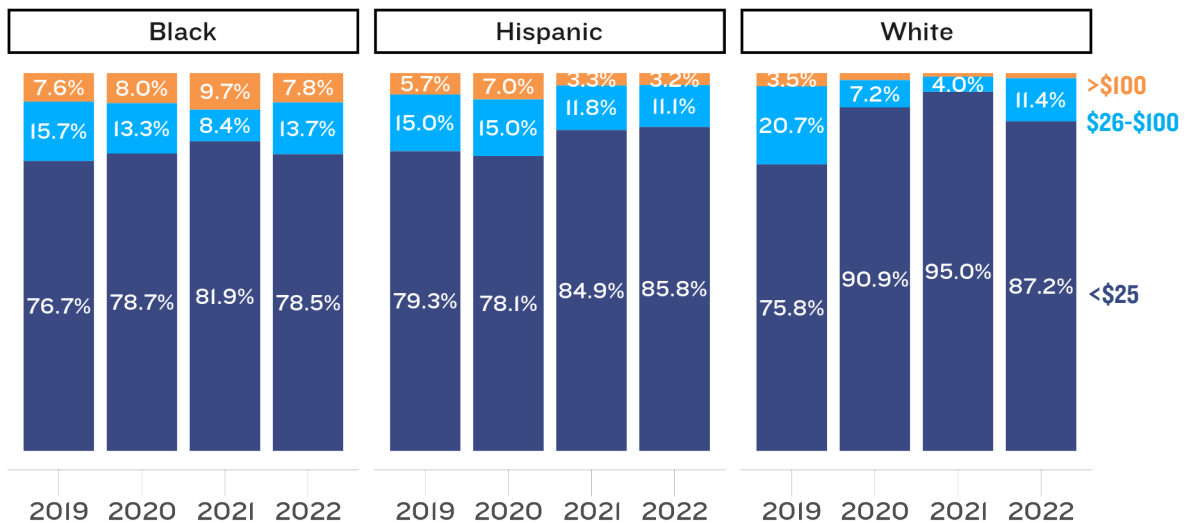


FIGURE 5.2
CIVIL SUMMONSES BY FINE AMOUNT AND RACE, %



DISPARITIES IN FINES AND FAILURES TO APPEAR

FIGURE 5.3
TOTAL SUM OF CIVIL SUMMONS FINES IMPOSED BY RACE

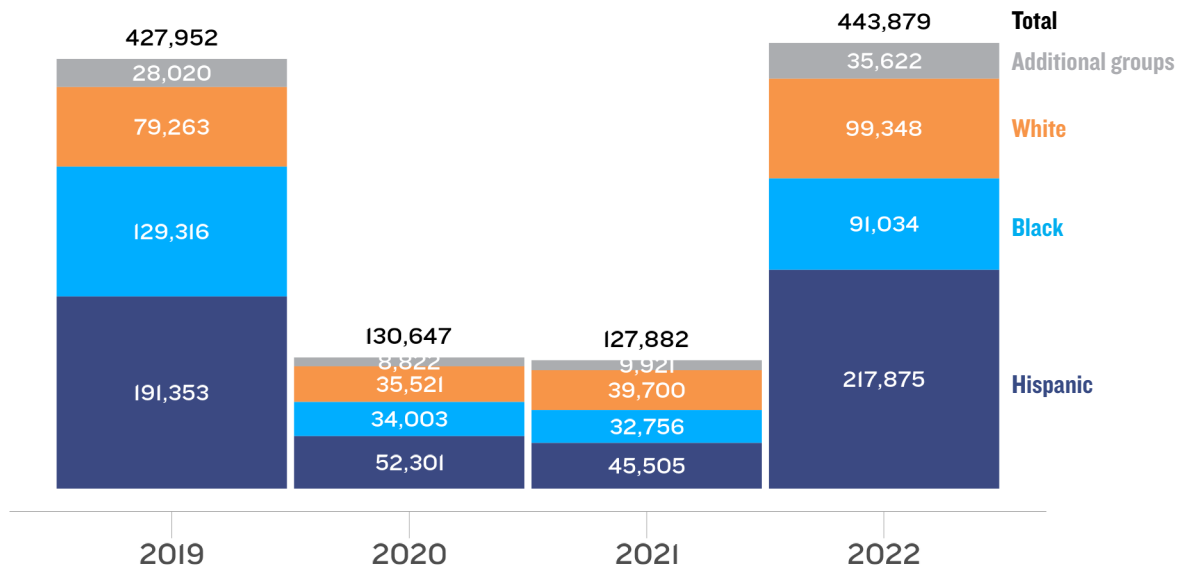
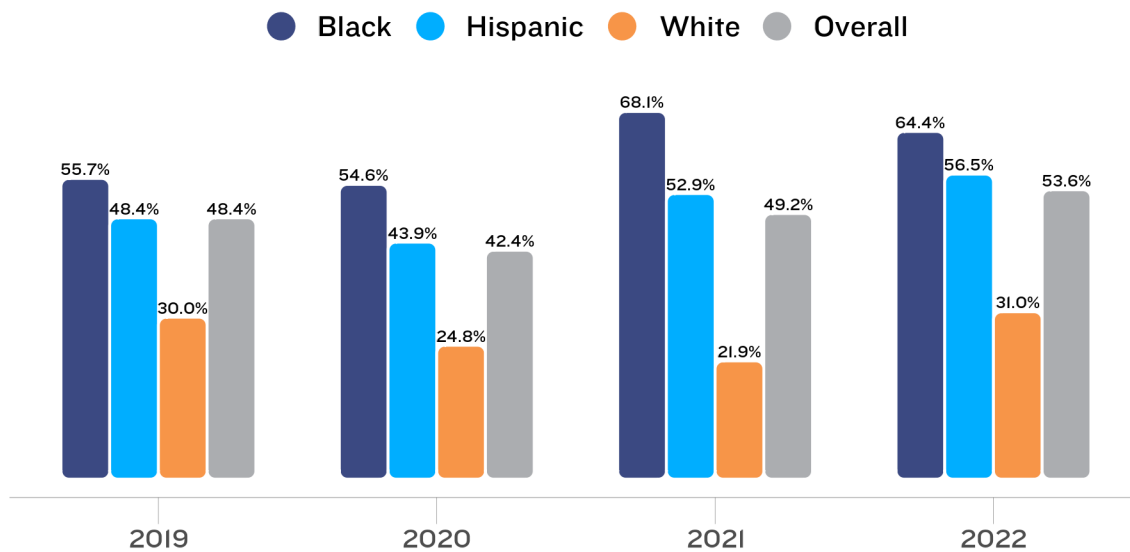


FIGURE 5.4
FAILURES TO APPEAR BY RACE, %



Endnotes

- 1** Stenkamp, Anna and Rempel, M. (2024). [Racial and Neighborhood Disparities in New York City Criminal Summons Practice](#). New York, NY: Data Collaborative for Justice.
- 2** Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative: [Police Reform Home Page](#). (n.d.). New York State.
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- 7** Estimates of median household income from the Census Bureau's [American Community Survey](#) were matched to [Modified Zip Code Tabulation Areas](#) in New York City.
- 8** Bhat, Suhail. (September 12, 2023). [NYPD Quality-of-Life Crackdown Sends Thousands to Criminal Court, Undoing Landmark Reforms](#). The City.
- 9** Annual population estimates were obtained from the Census Bureau's Population Estimate Program (PEP) database; namely, the county-level Population Estimates by Demographic Characteristics dataset, which includes population estimates broken down by county, age, gender, race, and Hispanic origin. Estimates exclude children under the age of 10.
- 10** While there is no consensus on how to best isolate racial bias in law enforcement, prior research has attempted to rule out alternative explanations for racially disparate outcomes by comparison to various "internal benchmarks" at the officer level (e.g., racial composition of enforcement actions for "similarly situated" officers) and "external benchmarks" at the precinct level (e.g., prior criminal recent activity, racial composition of the residential population, racial composition of crime-suspect descriptions). See: Fagan, Jeffrey. (2010). [Expert Report in David Floyd et al. v. City of New York et al.](#), U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, 08 Civ. 01034 (SAS); Gelman, Andrew, Fagan, Jeffrey, and Kiss, Alex. (2007). [An Analysis of the New York City Police Department's "Stop-and-Frisk" Policy in the Context of Claims of Racial Bias](#). Journal of the American Statistical Association, 102, 813-823; Ridgeway, Greg. (2007). [Analysis of Racial Disparities in the New York Police Department's Stop, Question, and Frisk Practices](#). Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- 11** While Manhattan did experience a large jump in the volume of civil summonses issued, it is unclear what led to this sudden uptick.
- 12** Age was measured as the time between date of birth and summons issuance. A small percentage of anomalous ages were excluded from all breakdowns by age (1.8%).
- 13** Population totals were calculated by aggregating zip code-level estimates from the 2021 American Community Survey within each quintile.
- 14** Stenkamp, Anna and Rempel, Michael. (2024), [Op Cit](#).