

Montague Arrests & Population Data Chart, with Commentary

~Submitted by Jeff Singleton, May 2, 2021

Total Arrests*			Resident Arrests		Population Data**	
	# Arrests	% of Total	# Arrests	% of Total	Category	% of population
White	1106	89.27%	800	91.01%	White only	90.40%
Black	121	9.77%	70	7.96%	Black or African-Amer. only	1.90%
Asian	8	0.65%	5	1.02%	Asian only	0.20%
Pacific	4	0.32%	2	0.23%	Pacific Islander or Hawaiian only	0%
Native Amer.	0	0%	0	0%	Native Amer. or Alaskan only	1.5%
					2 or more races	3.8%
					Race not identified in Census	2.2%
TOTALS	1239	100%	877	100%	Est. Population	8212
						100%

*Police data: MPD Arrest Data 2017-2020, 2nd page [2017 to 8.1.20] at <https://www.montague-ma.gov/g/77/Police-Equity--Use-of-Force-Advisory-Group>

**2010 U.S. Census, modified by the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS):
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/montaguetownfranklincountymassachusetts/POP010210#qf-headnote-b>

NOTES

--Racial/ethnic categories and reporting methods used by the Montague Police Dept. (left column) differ from those used by the Census Bureau (right column).

--ACS is a process used by the Census Dept. to estimate updated numbers between Census years (2010, 2020).

--ACS estimates show only percentages, not exact numbers, in each racial category it reports.

COMMENTARY

The Table above compares the data on arrests by the Montague Police Dept. (MPD) with the percentages of Montague residents identified by the U.S. Census as belonging to specific racial or ethnic groups. My goal was to get this on one relatively easy-to-read page.

One of the problems is that the racial or ethnic categories are reported somewhat differently by the police department and the census, but I do not think this is catastrophic.

The arrest data is from the MPD numbers sent to the Police Equity & Use of Force Advisory Group for the period from January 1, 2017 to August 1, 2020. The break-out of resident and non-resident arrest numbers was provided to the committee as separate tables for each year, so I added these up to be consistent with the total arrest data.

The census data is from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS). I have been in touch with the census bureau to try to get a better understanding of where the 2019 numbers actually come from and what their methodology is, but that is a work-in-progress. I used the 2019 ACS total population estimate, but the racial/ethnic percentages appear to be from the 2010 census.

The Census/ACS racial/ethnic percentages do not add up to 100%. This may be an issue of how "hispanics" are counted, or it may be that some respondents did not fill out a racial category.

The identification of “race” in the police reports derives from an individual’s records in various state departments, such as the Registry of Motor Vehicles and the court system. The MPD says that it is rare for an officer to note race or ethnicity based on visual observation.

The categories in the census forms are self-reported. These are: white, black, Asian, Pacific Islander/Hawaiian, and Native American/Alaskan “only, and “2 or more races”. These are shown in the Population Data in the chart. It is certainly possible that those who self-reported “two or more races” in the Census may be classified in state RMV and court records as white or black.

This uncertainty is unfortunate, because I think all of us would like up-to-date population data, and for this data to be more consistent with police data. And that is why the ACS was in fact created. I am continuing my dialogue with the census bureau and others on this.

That all said, it appears that the percentage of “black” arrests by these data sets is 9.84% of all arrests during the last three-and-a-half years and 7.96% of all “resident arrests.” The “black only” percentage of the population from the census is only 1.6%, although some recorded as black by the police are probably in the “two or more” census category or among those who did not report a race.

One could argue that this is evidence of an extreme lack of equity or perhaps even “institutional racism”. I understand that, but would point out...

1. There are relatively few blacks in the population, so relatively small increase in total black arrests can produce very large percentage increases. There are also questions about multiple arrests of a few people.
2. The high percentage of black arrest could reflect social class and the neighborhoods where blacks live.. The response to this might be that there is still an equity or racism problem when such a high percent of African-Americans still find themselves in the working class and in low income neighborhoods so many years after slavery. This historical reality tends to be part of the definition of “institutional racism.” But others would argue that the historical reality is hardly the fault of the Montague police department.

My personal opinion is that there are potentially different ways of interpreting this data, as there usually are, and the data is imperfect, as it usually is. But we should not throw the data out the window, because it is central to any discussion of equity or institutional racism. Just my opinion of course.

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