

Proposition 47 has been blamed for rising crime in California since it took effect in 2014, yet no research has evaluated this claim. Using a novel method of policy analysis to compare crime rates in California pre- and post-Proposition 47, our findings suggest that the blame is misplaced.

-Charis Kubrin (professor of criminology, law and society) and Bradley Bartos (Ph.D. student in criminology, law and society)

**California's Proposition 47**, approved by voters in 2014, reclassified certain nonviolent drug offenses from felonies to misdemeanors. It also required a variety of property crimes involving less than \$950 of stolen or damaged property to be sentenced as misdemeanors.

**The goal was to lower prison populations** by reducing low-level drug and property crimes from felonies to misdemeanors, while also allowing incarcerated individuals to petition for re-sentencing.

**There has been no systematic analysis** of Proposition 47's impact on statewide crime rates following its implementation – **until now.**

### **2015 VIOLENT AND PROPERTY CRIME RATES IN CALIFORNIA:**

We compared California's 2015 crime rates to those of a manufactured control group called "synthetic California."

Our findings suggest Proposition 47 **is not responsible** for increases in homicide, rape, aggravated assault or robbery (see Figure 1).

While our findings appear to show that larceny and motor vehicle thefts increased following Proposition 47's enactment (see Figure 2), **these findings don't hold up to additional testing.**

### **SYNTHETIC CONTROL GROUP STUDY DESIGN:**

We constructed a synthetic control group to approximate California crime rates had Proposition 47 not been enacted. This "synthetic California" was a weighted combination of other US states' crime rates that closely matched California's for 44 years from 1970 to 2014. None of the states that comprise Synthetic California enacted Proposition 47 in 2014, so the difference between its 2015 crime rates and California's 2015 crime rates reflects the impact of Proposition 47.



*This fact sheet is based on a forthcoming study in the journal *Criminology & Public Policy* by researchers at the University of California, Irvine's School of Social Ecology. Co-author Charis Kubrin, professor of criminology, law and society, has studied crime trends for 20 years, while co-author Bradley Bartos, Ph.D. student in criminology, law and society, has co-authored a leading text on the synthetic control method. The data source was state-level Uniform Crime Report Part 1 offense frequencies from 1970 to 2015.*

Contact Charis Kubrin at [ckubrin@uci.edu](mailto:ckubrin@uci.edu). For more information, visit [socialecology.uci.edu](http://socialecology.uci.edu).

Figure 1. Synthetic control group estimates for violent offenses

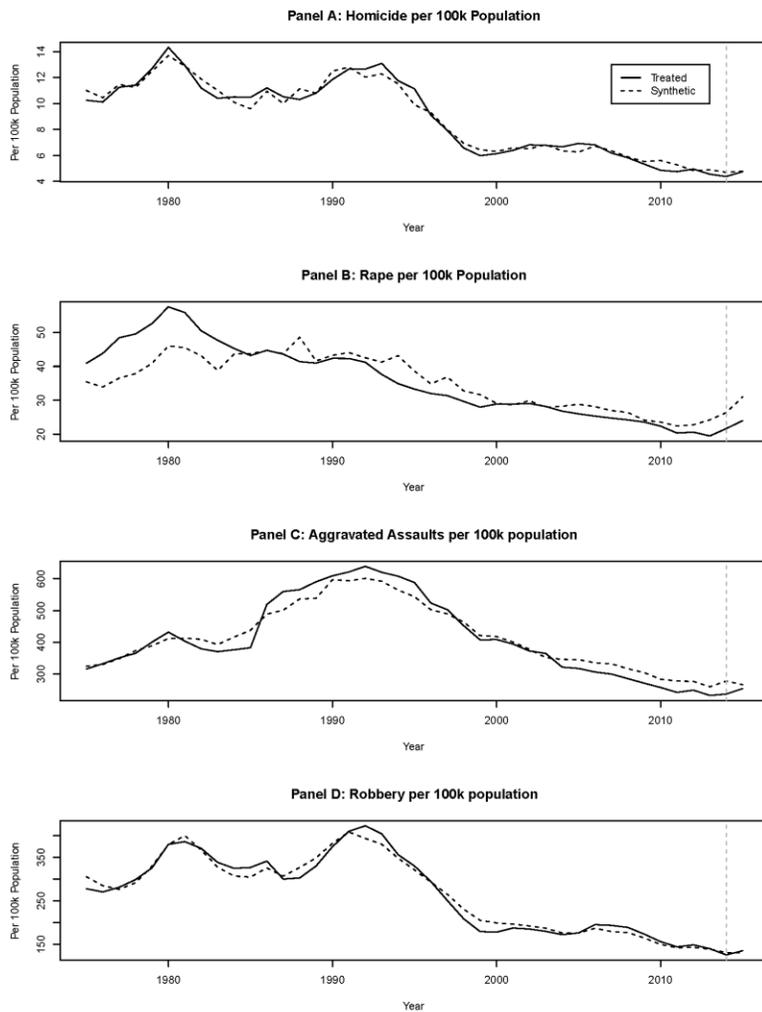
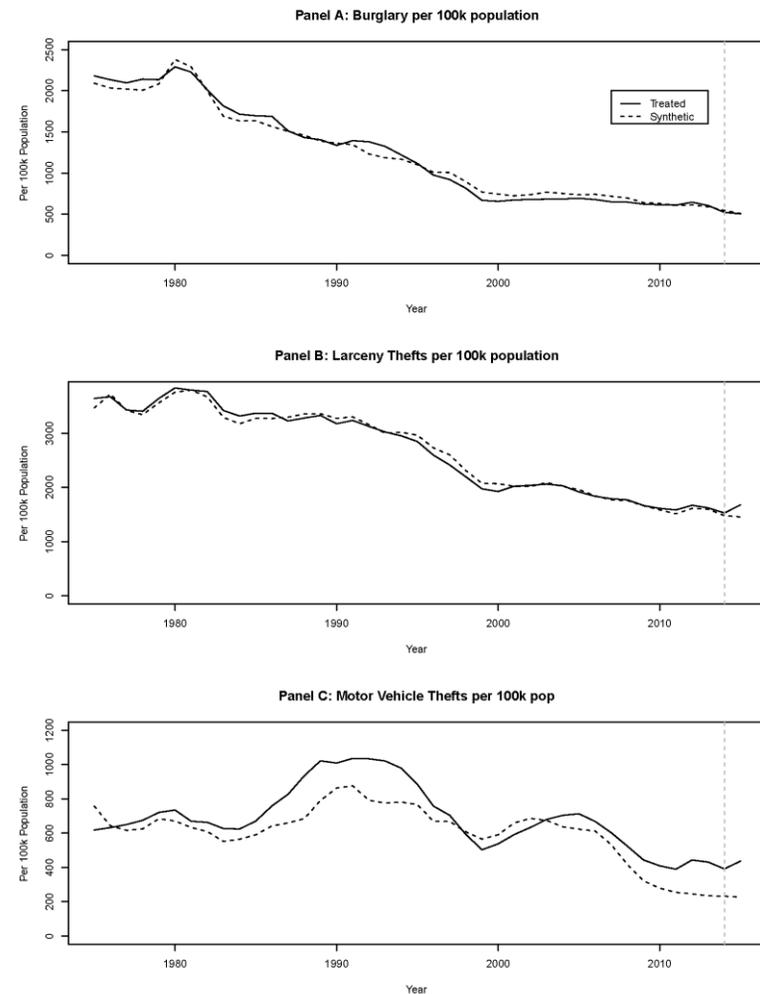


Figure 2. Synthetic control group estimates for property offenses



*Homicide, rape, assault, robbery and burglary trends for treated (actual) California and synthetic California closely matched each other after Proposition 47 was implemented, suggesting the measure is not to blame for increases in those crime types. Property crime trends appear to show Proposition 47 caused an increase in larceny and motor vehicle thefts, but these findings do not withstand sensitivity and robustness testing.*