Has the Crime Drop Ended?

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Overview

• Long term decline in US homicide rate (1960 – 2014)
• The 2015 homicide rise in big cities
  – Magnitude (~17%)
  – Concentration (cities with larger black populations)
  – Explanations (expanding drug markets, returning prisoners, “Ferguson effects”)
• A one year increase has not ended the crime drop
• We should not have had to wait nearly 10 months to find out if crime went up last year
Figure 1. Homicide Rate per 100,000 US Population, 1960 - 2014

56% decrease from 1980 to 2014

Source: Uniform Crime Reports
Figure 2. Percentage Change in Homicide in 56 Cities, 2014-2015

Source: Rosenfeld (2016)
Data Needs

• FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports disseminates crime and arrest data 9-10 months after the collection year – too late to address *emerging* crime problems

• FBI should return to a practice it abandoned 80 years ago and release *monthly* crime and arrest data
UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS
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AND ITS POSSESSIONS

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Conclusions

• One year increase does not spell the end of the long-term crime drop
• Still, 2015 homicide rise in large cities was real and nearly unprecedented
• Rise concentrated in cities with larger African-American populations
• Explanations
  – Why the time lag in drug market and prisoner effects?
  – De-policing claims attribute too much significance to policing effects on homicide
Conclusions, cont.

• Circumstantial evidence favors police legitimacy hypothesis
  – Timing is right
  – Squares with evidence on cities with largest homicide increase
  – Abrupt crime increases imply “exogenous shock”
  – Reservoir of minority mistrust of the police activated by recent events
References
