Bail Reform, Crime, and Violence In Harris County

What everyone needs to know

Commissioners Court, February 9

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Background

Trends in Crime in Harris County, 2015-2020

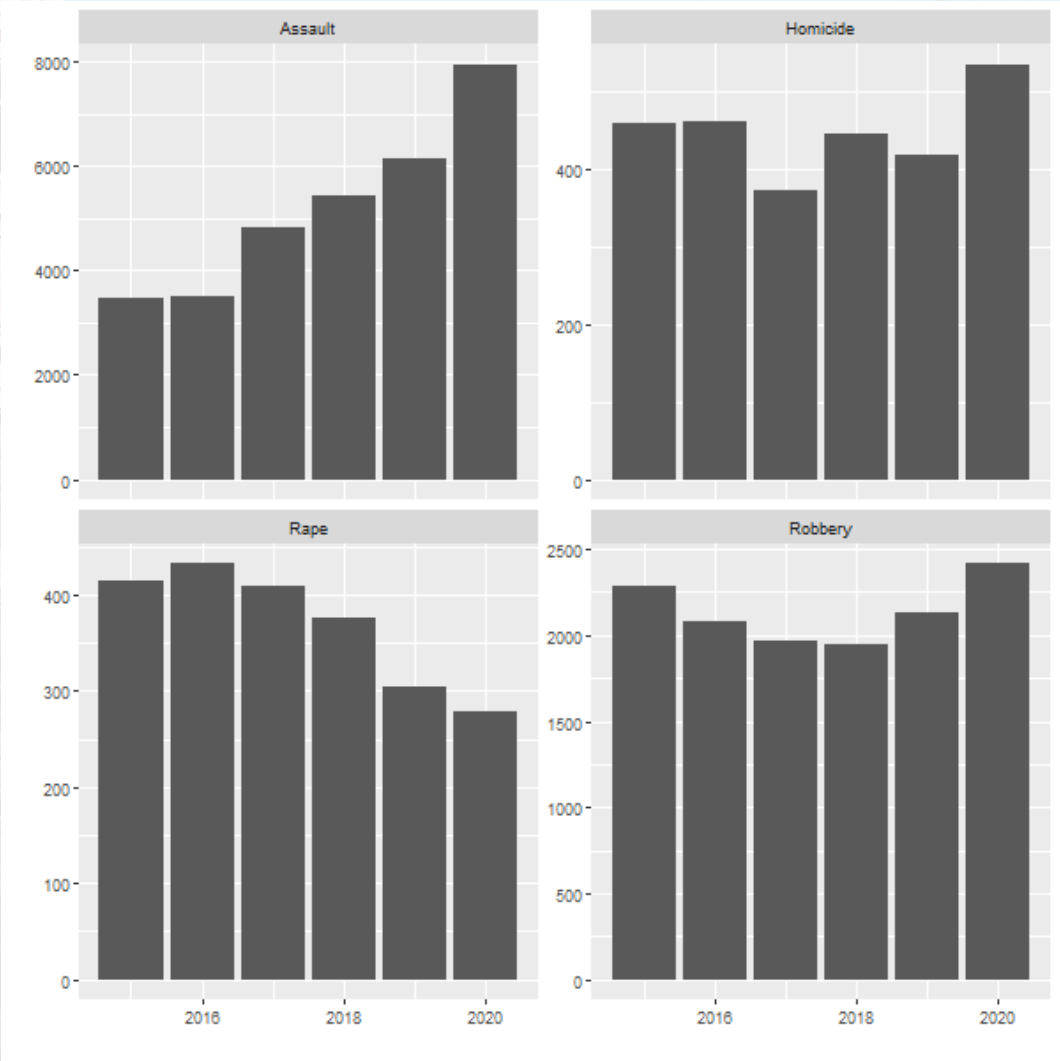
A Complicated Picture

Assault up ~100%

Homicide up ~25%

Rape down ~25%

Robberies up <10%

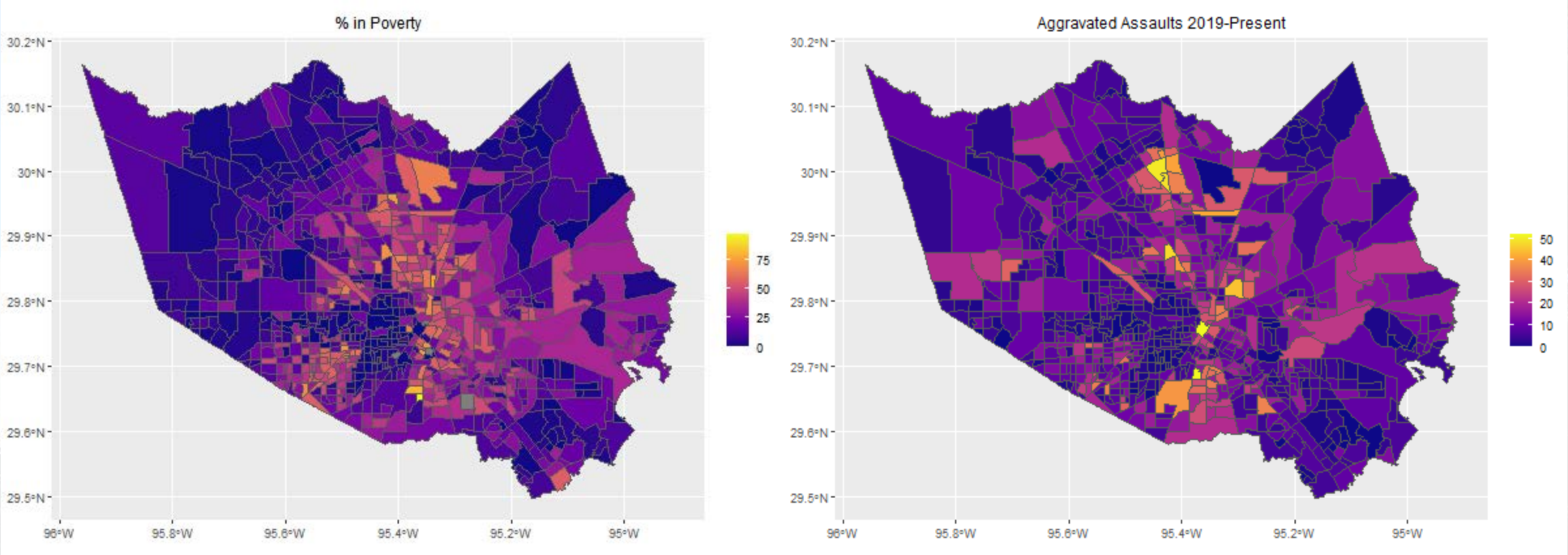


2020 Spike in Murders Across the Country

The National Context

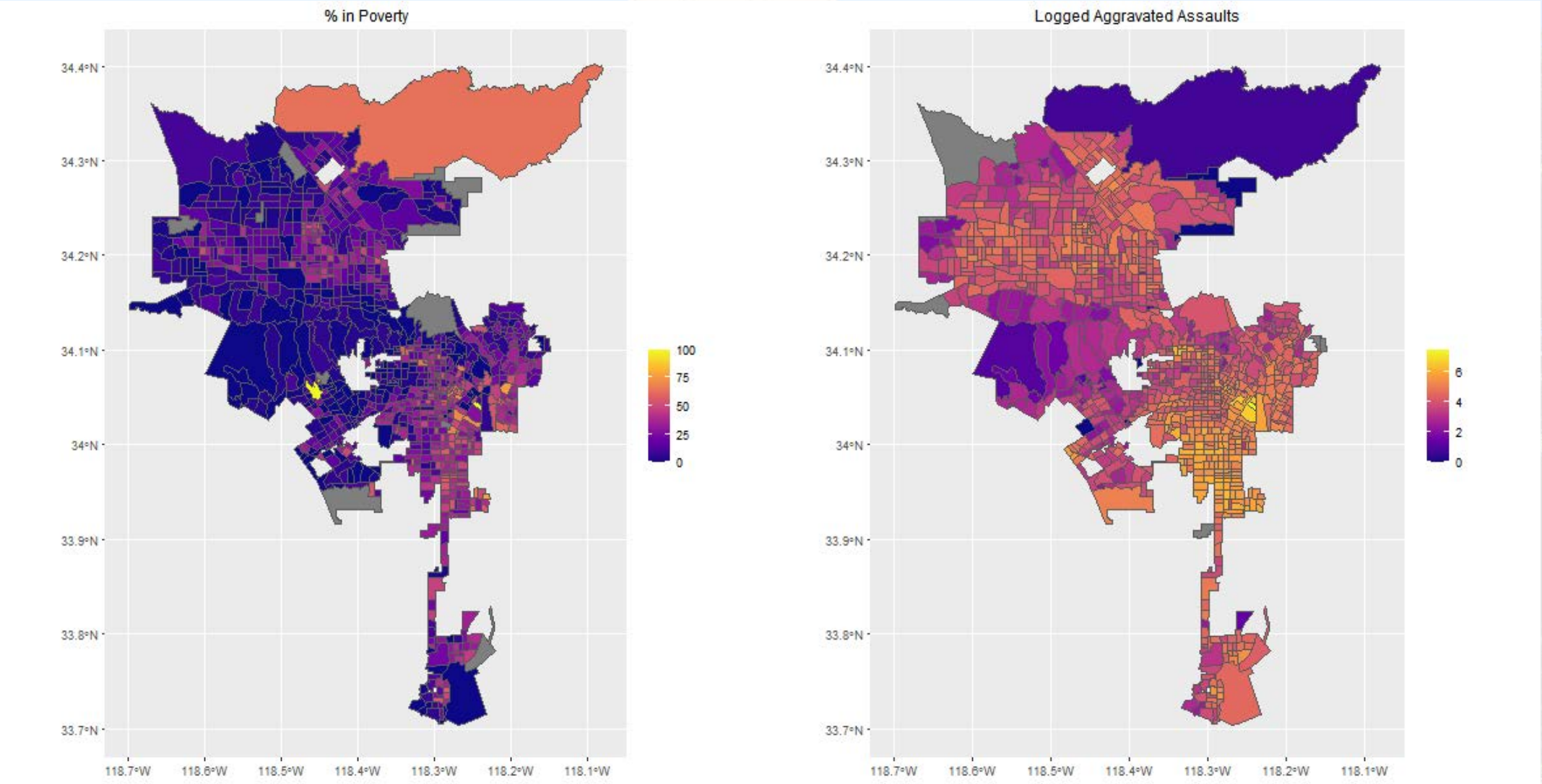
- Socioeconomic pressures are causing crime to rise across the U.S.
  - Job loss, evictions, lost income, and increased on-the-job danger are adding to this pressure.
  - Working class communities of color in Harris County are hardest hit.
- Public health pressures caused by COVID-19 are not shrinking—they are **as destructive now as at any point in the past 12 months**.
  - The grief, stress, and isolation associated with the pandemic may also be causing increases in road rage and family violence.
- JAD is currently researching these pressures and will provide recommendations for addressing them.

Economic and Public Health Pressures on Harris County Residents Produce Violence



Source: 2019 American Community Survey estimates; Harris County criminal case detail data

The Same is True in Los Angeles



Source: 2019 American Community Survey estimates; Los Angeles PD Incident Data

Is there evidence of a link between crime increases and bail reform?

No: there is no clear evidence.

How do we know?

1. The “who” is wrong.
2. The “when” is wrong.
3. The “where” is wrong.

The “Who”

- Who has been impacted by bail reform?
- Misdemeanor bail reform has impacted how Harris County treats low-level, non-violent offenders.
- We know this from the provisions of *ODonnell* and Rule 9.

The "When"

Table A1: Impact of Social Pressures and Bail Policy on Monthly Counts of Murders

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Err.	z	p<|t|
Unemployment Rate$_{(t-1)}$	0.0443351*	.017993	2.46	0.014
Unemployment Rate$_{(t-2)}$	-.0449856*	.0204223	-2.2	0.028
ΔProportion Secured Bonds	1.608225*	0.6797375	2.37	0.018
Harris County COVID Cases$_{(t-1)}$	0.0000154**	0.00000599	3.19	0.001
Constant	3.144368**	.0880886	35.7	0.000

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Source: Poisson Regressions. NIBRS City of Houston Publications and BLS data for the Houston metro area. COVID Data based on New York Times GitHub.

- Crime responds to criminal justice policy *and* to socioeconomic pressures.
- In Harris County, the unemployment rate, COVID cases, and use of secured bonds are all *positively* associated with monthly murder counts.
- This presents preliminary evidence that bail reform may have *slowed* increases in crime.

The “Where”

- As we showed earlier, violent crime has increased in major cities across the country.
- Those increases occurred in cities that recently implemented bail reform, and those that did not.
  - Cities that did not recently implement bail reform are highlighted in blue.
- Across the country, there is no relationship between bail policy and murder rates.

Next Steps

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- Any increase in violence requires a strong response.
- JAD is developing responses to violence in Harris County.
  - Violence interruption and prevention programs.
  - U-Visa model policy
  - Nonpunitive solutions memo.
  - Memo addressing family violence
- Research into the relationship between crime and pretrial policy is still in progress.
  - JAD will continue that research and is working to develop public-facing dashboards to track progress.

THANK YOU!

FOR QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:

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