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Economics of Crime
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Project #3

Understanding crime trends in the United States requires a comprehensive analysis of both historical data and regional patterns. This study utilizes crime data from the FBI Crime Data Explorer, covering the years 1960 to 2022, in order to examine changes in violent and property crime rates. Through the usage of interactive Tableau visualizations, we explore murder rate trends across different U.S. Census regions, track changes in crime rates by state, analyze property crime trends in South Carolina, and add in a region-based interactive legend for further exploration. By comparing these findings with insights from John Gramlich's article *What the data says about crime in the U.S.*, this analysis looks at crime trends within broader social and political discussions. Additionally, it demonstrates how crime reporting methodologies impact public perception and policy responses. This report presents a data-driven perspective on crime, specifically looking into both long-term declines and regional disparities while addressing key limitations in crime measurement.

The dataset used for this analysis is sourced from the FBI Crime Data Explorer, which compiles crime statistics from local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. The key variables examined include murder rates, violent crime rates, and property crime categories such as burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. To provide an easier/broader comparative framework, states are categorized into U.S. Census regions, to allow for regional analysis. While the dataset is extensive, it is important to note that limitations occur due to crime measurement methodologies. As Gramlich highlights, FBI data primarily captures crime reported to law

enforcement, leaving out unreported incidents that may have significant impacts on overall crime trends. In contrast, the Bureau of Justice Statistics relies on victimization surveys, capturing both the reported incidents and the unreported ones. The discrepancy in data collection methods leads to differences in crime rate estimates, which can have big effects on public perception and policy decisions. These challenges illustrate the complexities of measuring crime accurately and emphasize the need for cautious interpretation of statistical trends.

Gramlich's analysis reveals key insights about crime trends, public perception, and statistical challenges when trying to accurately measure crime. My visualizations support his claim that crime rates have significantly declined since the 1990s. The FBI data confirms that violent crime decreased by 49% and property crime by 59% from 1993 to 2022 (Gramlich, 2024). This trend is clearly captured in my scatterplot and becomes most apparent in the early 2000s. Additionally, Gramlich highlights that larceny-theft is the most frequent property crime, followed by motor vehicle theft and burglary. Gramlich's statements are evident in the property crime trends in South Carolina graph where the vast majority of theft is larceny-theft (Gramlich, 2024). Regional disparities are also evident, as Gramlich notes that states such as New Mexico and Alaska experience higher violent crime rates, while states like New England have lower rates. My regional line chart supports this, showing that the South consistently leads in murder rates. However, my analysis also highlights data limitations, similar to those raised by Gramlich. The FBI dataset excludes unreported crimes, meaning my visualization primarily reflects crimes officially recorded by law enforcement agencies. The Bureau of Justice Statistics survey, which captures unreported crimes, provides a broader perspective but is not incorporated into our dataset. This discrepancy between reported and unreported crimes highlights the challenges in fully understanding crime trends and the need for more integrated data collection methodologies.

Gramlich emphasizes that “Most violent and property crimes in the U.S. are not reported to police, and most of the crimes that are reported are not solved” (Gramlich, 2024). This statement further illustrates the limitations of relying solely on law enforcement data and highlights the potential underrepresentation of actual crime occurrences in my analysis.

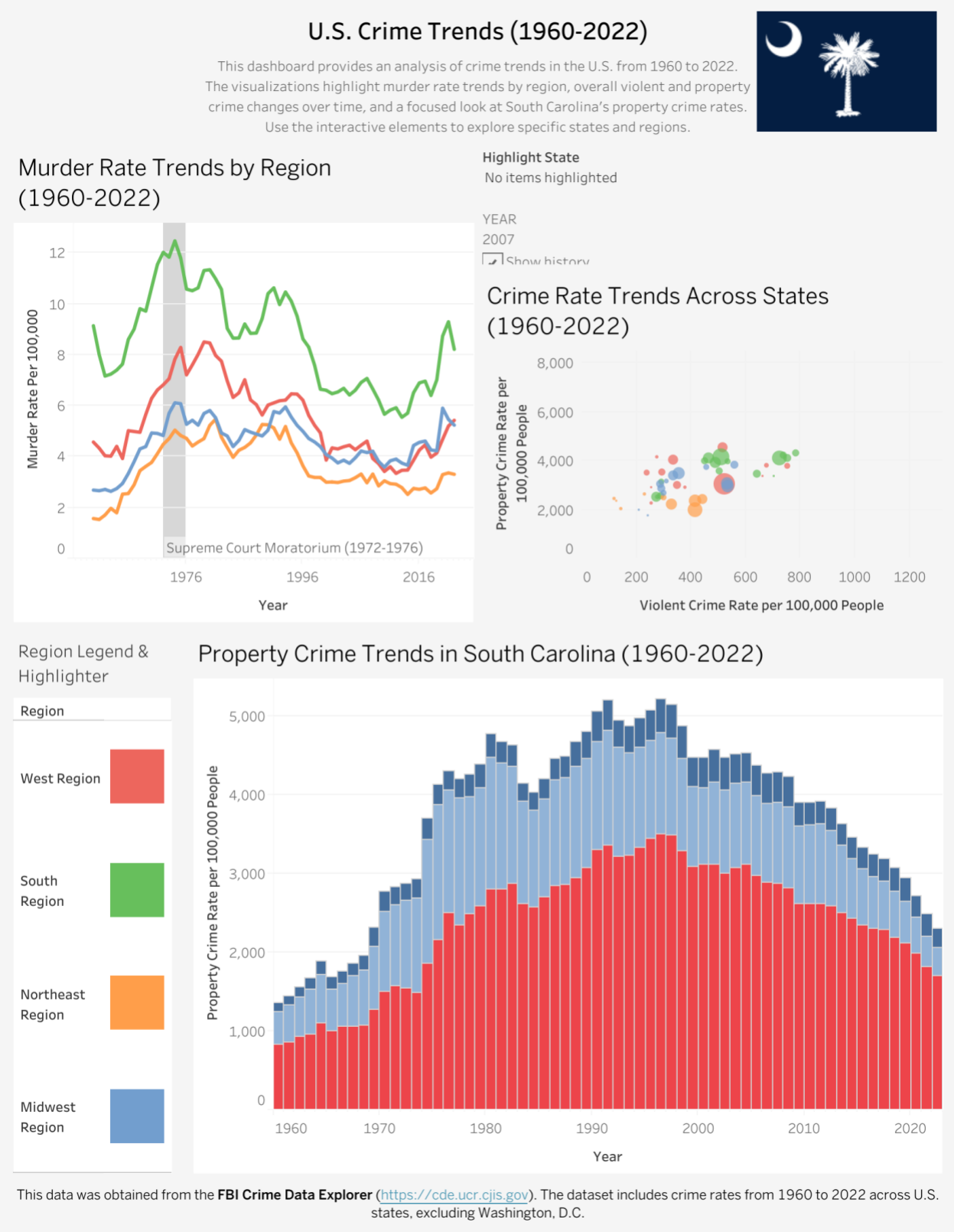
The relationship between crime trends and the death penalty is important context for analyzing South Carolina’s approach to criminal justice. As explored in the lecture on death penalty, one of the most contested debates in criminology is whether capital punishment serves as an effective deterrent for violent crime. South Carolina has historically maintained one of the strongest pro-death penalty stances in the country, with numerous executions and upholding strict laws regarding capital punishment. However, empirical evidence remains mixed on the effectiveness of capital punishment. The Supreme Court’s moratorium on capital punishment (1972-1976), marked by a reference band in my visualization (Murder Rate Trend by Region), provides a natural experiment to examine whether the absence of the death penalty led to a surge in violent crime. My analysis of regional murder rates suggests that the South, which has consistently had the highest rates of execution, also experiences the highest murder rate. This is in direct contradiction to the deterrence theory. The lecture similarly explains that states with higher execution rates do not necessarily exhibit lower homicide rates. Overall, my crime trend analysis suggests that the death penalty may not be an effective tool in reducing violent crime. Rather than serving as a deterrent there may be other political factors, such as poverty, education, and policing strategies, that have a more significant impact on crime rates.

Works Cited

FBI Crime Data Explorer. "Crime Data Explorer." *U.S. Department of Justice*, 2023, https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov.

Gramlich, John. "What the Data Says About Crime in the U.S." *Pew Research Center*, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/.

"Death Penalty Lecture." *Course Material on Capital Punishment and Its Impact on Crime Trends*, 2024.



This data was obtained from the **FBI Crime Data Explorer** (https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov). The dataset includes crime rates from 1960 to 2022 across U.S. states, excluding Washington, D.C.

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