

**Date:** March 26, 2021  
**To:** Moe Clark  
**From:** Charlotte McClintock  
**Subject:** methodological foundations of ACLU crime analysis

## 1. OVERALL COLORADO CRIME TRENDS

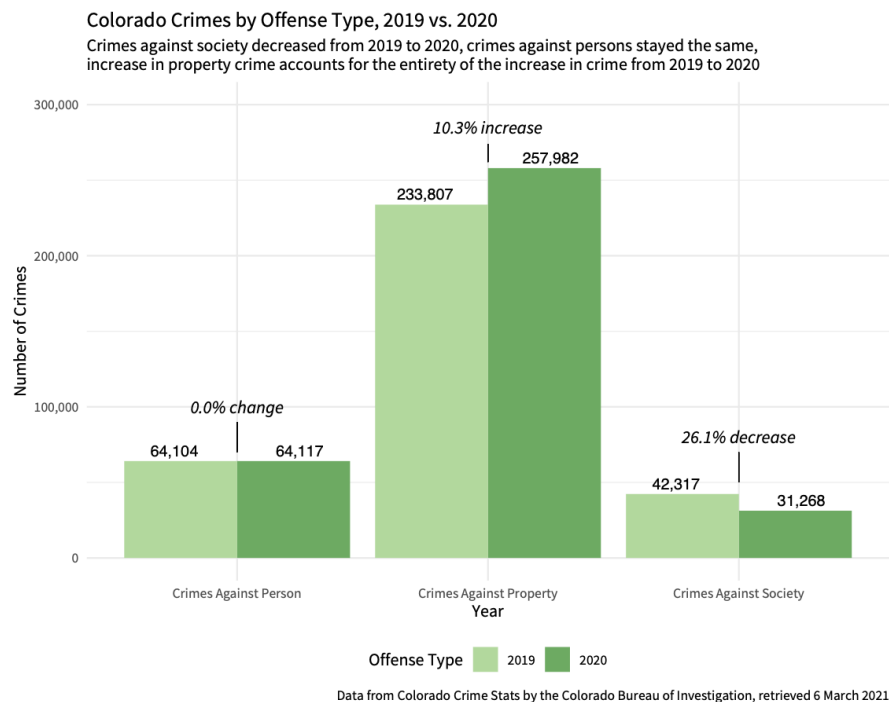
From 2019 to 2020, overall crime in Colorado increased by 3.8%. The overall increase in crime is entirely driven by a 10.3% increase in property crimes statewide - crimes “against society” decreased by 26.1 percent, and violent crime did not meaningfully change.

Violent crimes (described in the database as “crimes against persons”) did not change from 2019 to 2020 across the state. The Colorado Department of Public Safety press release reported a 6.5% percent increase in violent crime by using on the [FBI Uniform](#)

[Crime Reporting definition of “violent crime”](#)<sup>1</sup> which includes murder, aggravated assault, non-consensual sex offense, and robbery, but importantly **does not include simple assault**.

There are many alternative federal definitions of violent crime which include simple assault. The Department of Justice includes assault generally in [their definition of violent crime](#)<sup>2</sup> and [the Bureau of Justice Statistics](#)<sup>3</sup> and [the National Crime Victimization Survey \(NCVS\)](#)<sup>4</sup> specifically include simple assault. A [recent report](#) from the Division of Criminal Justice within the Colorado Department of Public Safety from November of 2020 included simple assault in the definition of violent crimes.<sup>5</sup>

Selectively including aggravated assaults (but omitting simple assaults) in the definition of violent crime leads to a misleading interpretation of the trends in data. Aggravated assaults are



<sup>1</sup> “Violent Crime: 2019 Crime in the United States”. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division. Retrieved from: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/violent-crime>

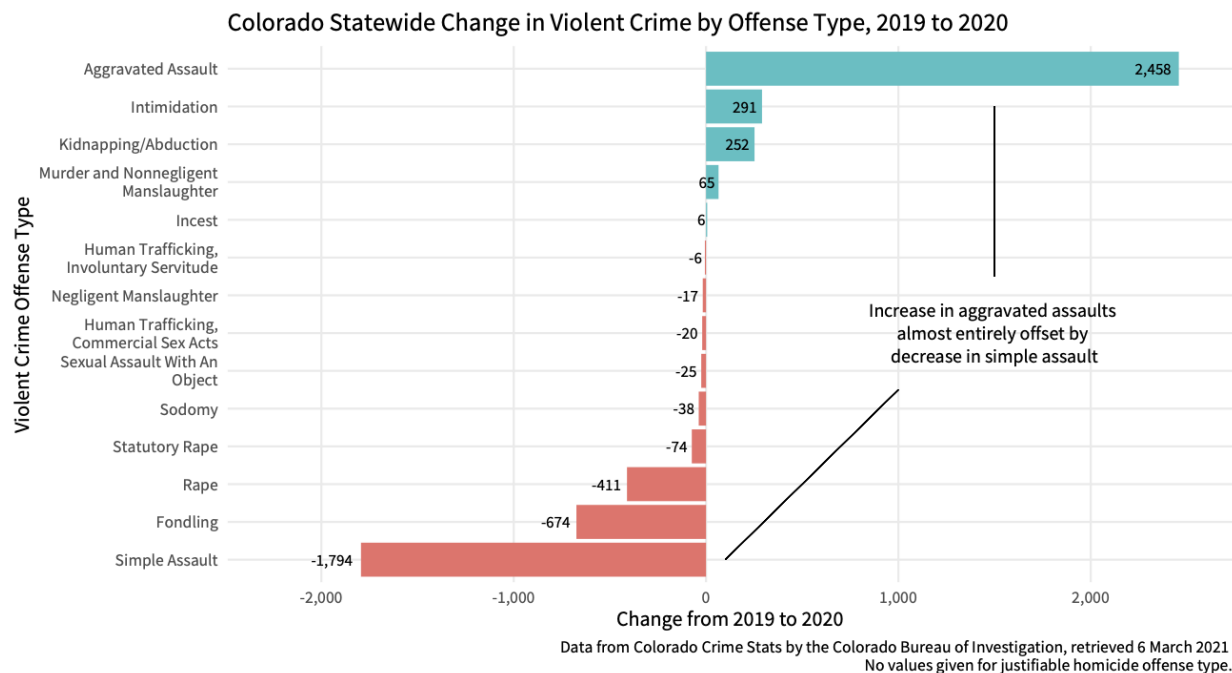
<sup>2</sup> “Violent Crime”. National Institute of Justice, Department of Justice. Retrieved from: <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/crimes/violent-crime>

<sup>3</sup> “Violent Crime: Assault”. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from: [https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=316#terms\\_def](https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=316#terms_def)

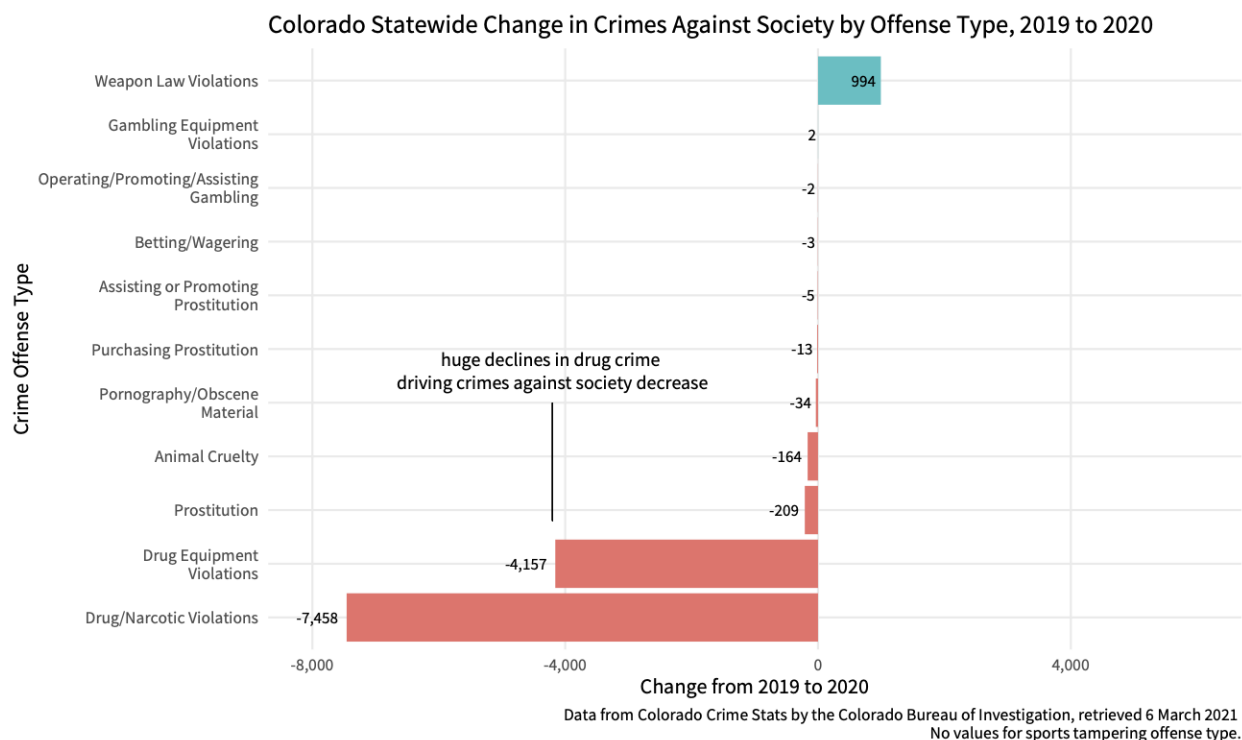
<sup>4</sup> “Criminal Victimization, 2012” U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. October 2013. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv12.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> “Crime & Justice in Colorado / 2009-2019”. Office of Research and Statistics Division of Criminal Justice Colorado Department of Public Safety. November 2020. Table 3.6 Colorado criminal convictions in 2019: Filing and conviction charges, p. 37. Retrieved from: [https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/ors/Docs/Reports/2020\\_CJ09-19.pdf](https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/ors/Docs/Reports/2020_CJ09-19.pdf)

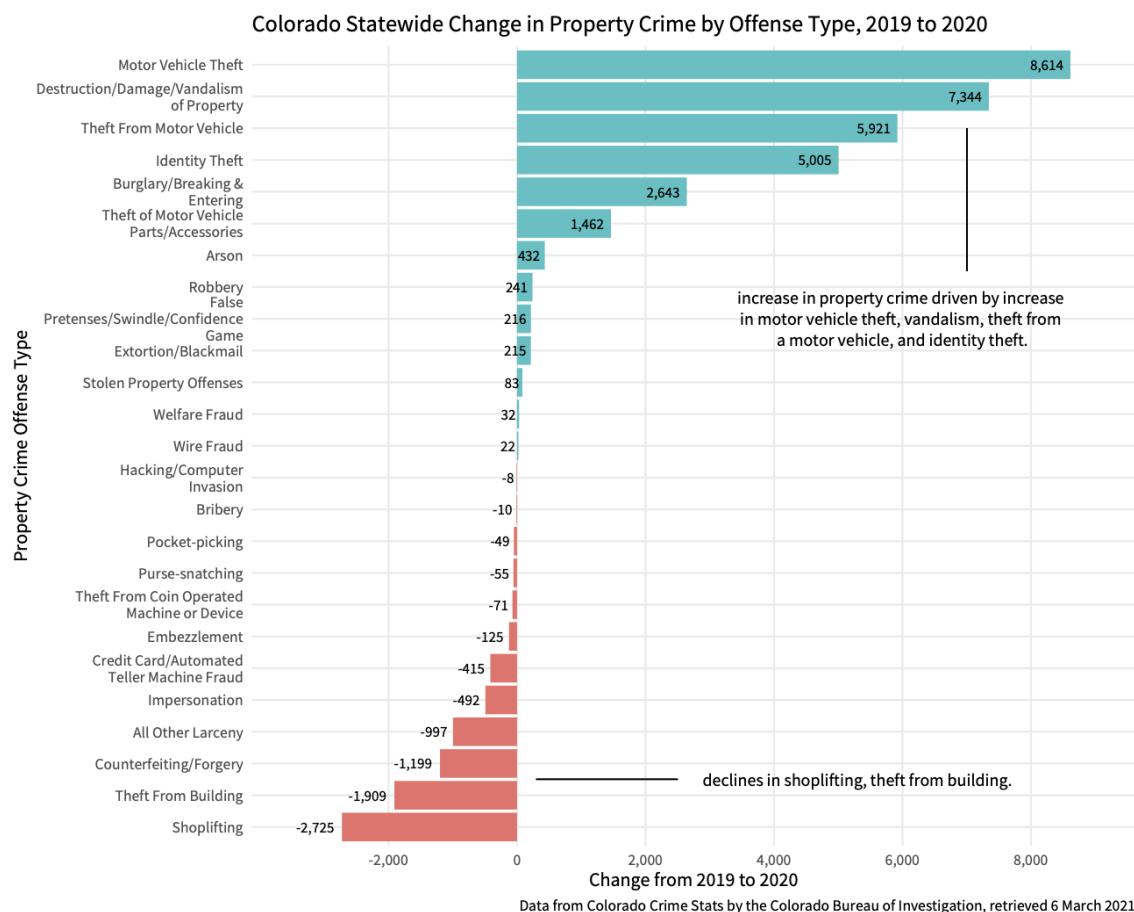
overwhelmingly responsible for the 6.5% increase by the CDPS definition. Simple assaults (which declined by 5%) would eliminate that effect.



Crimes in the “crimes against society” database category declined by 26% statewide from 2019 to 2020, with the decrease driven by substantial decreases in drug crime.



Property crime increased by 10.3% across the state, driven by major increases in motor vehicle theft, vandalism/destruction of property, car break-ins, identify theft, and breaking & entering. Shoplifting and theft from a building decreased most significantly from 2019 to 2020.



## 2. JAIL DEPOPULATION AND CRIME

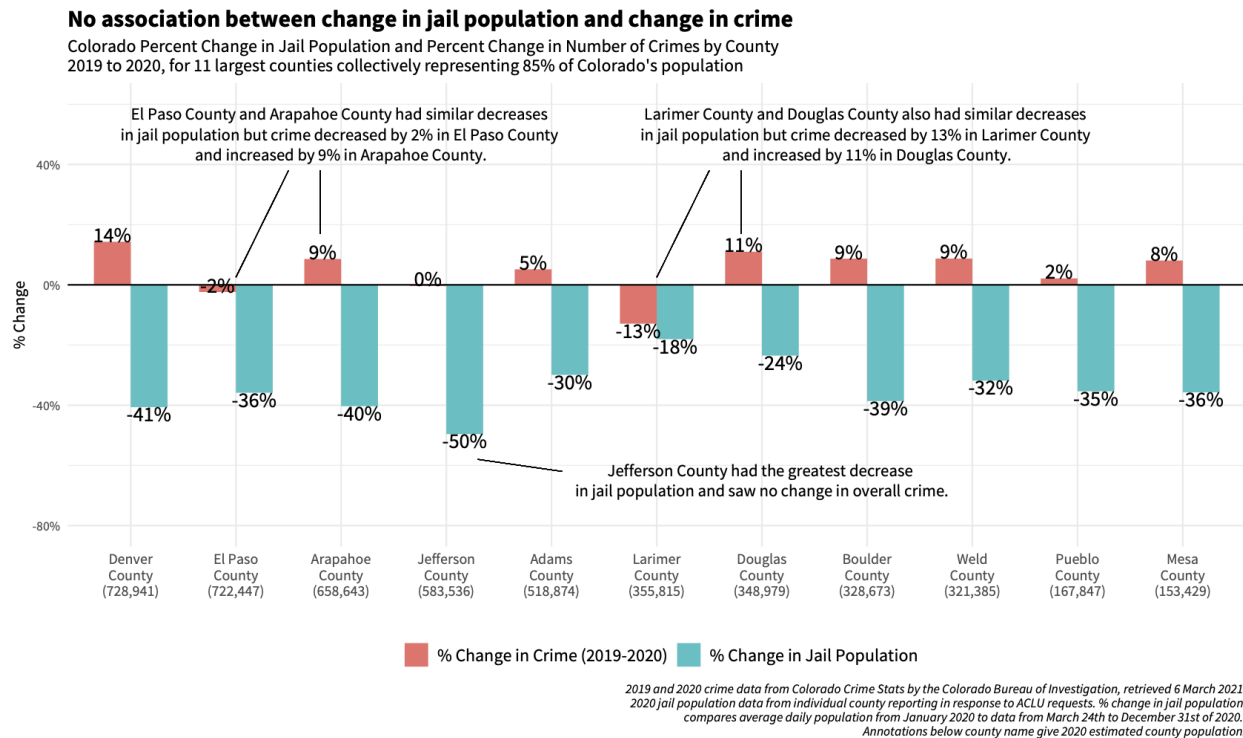
Data under study is 11 largest Colorado counties with population over 100,000 residents including Denver, El Paso, Arapahoe, Jefferson, Adams, Larimer, Douglas, Boulder, Weld, Pueblo, and Mesa where both change in crime from 2019 to 2020 and change in jail population measures are available of of suitable sample size for analysis. These 11 counties represent 85% of Colorado's population.

- **% change in crime by county from 2019 to 2020** was retrieved directly as reported by the Colorado Crime Stats database on 6 March 2021 and includes all crime types reported.
- **% change in jail population** compares average daily jail population in each county from January of 2020 to the average for the pandemic (defined here as March 24th to December 31st of 2020). All jail population data derived from ACLU-CO weekly calls and records requests to all county jails from March through December 2020. This data was compared to the average daily population in Colorado jails in January 2020.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> January data pulled from the Division of Criminal Justice here:

[https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/ors/Data/Data\\_Instruments/HB1297/Dashboard/HB19-1297.html](https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/ors/Data/Data_Instruments/HB1297/Dashboard/HB19-1297.html)

**RESULTS:** The data shows no meaningful association between percent decrease in county jail population and percent change in crime. All eleven counties saw decreases in jail population during the pandemic (by between 18% and 50%), but some saw increases in crime and some saw decreases. The magnitude of the percent change in jail population is not strongly correlated with percent change in crime.<sup>7</sup>



### Counties with similar jail population decreases did not see similar changes in overall crime.

Douglas County and Larimer County are an illustrative example - the two counties had similar decreases in jail population (24% and 18% respectively) and overall crime increased by 11% in Douglas County and decreased by 13% in Larimer County. Douglas County had the second highest increase in crime of the counties under study (11%) but had the second lowest jail depopulation. Similarly, El Paso County and Arapahoe County had similar decreases in jail population (36% and 40% respectively) and overall crime decreased by 2% in El Paso County and increased by 9% in Arapahoe County. Denver County jail populations declined by 41% and crime increased by 14%, but Jefferson County jail populations declined by even more and had no change in crime.

This finding also holds when comparing percent decrease in jail population to crime by offense type: there is no meaningful association between percent decrease in county jail population and percent change in violent crime, property crime, or other crime subtypes.

<sup>7</sup> The Pearson's R correlation between the two measures is 0.29. The sample size under study (11 counties) is too small to undertake any complex modeling, so descriptive statistics are emphasized.