Crime in Baton Rouge

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Background

Baton Rouge is a city plagued by inequity. The lingering effects of systemic racism are alive and well in a place still largely segregated. Wealthy, white neighborhoods have a history of succeeding from the city to form their own towns or school districts, effectively concentrating tax funds away from where they are needed most, thereby increasing income inequality throughout the parish (Marques).

It comes as no surprise that relations between Baton Rouge citizens and the city's police force are often strained. The Baton Rouge Police Department (BRPD) has faced multiple lawsuits and federal investigations; the largest scandal in recent memory involves the "alleged use of a former narcotics unit facility that lawsuits have claimed became a warehouse for violent interrogations" where suspects were allegedly beaten and strip-searched after police officers turned off their body cameras (Merchan).

Tension between police officers and the Baton Rouge community came to a head in 2016 after police fired six shots at close range, killing a black man named Alton Sterling on July 5 ("Alton Sterling - Spotlight at Stanford"). The city erupted into protests, leading to the arrest of nearly 200 protesters and a series of civil rights lawsuits culminating in a federal trial (Bruce) and (MacArthur Justice).

On July 17, amid the aftermath of Sterling's death, a black man and former Marine named Gavin Long shot six police officers in a targeted attack. Three were killed, including two Baton Rouge police officers and a sheriff's deputy for East Baton Rouge Parish. Of the wounded officers, one was in a coma for four months following the incident (Hanna).

Distrust between police and civilians continues to linger as a result of these events. In an effort to better understand policing and its effectiveness in communities in and around Baton Rouge, we chose to explore crime data in three different dimensions: geography (where is crime most prevalent?), time (how has crime changed over time?), and systemic analysis (where is data missing?).

Dataset Description

Louisiana is unique from other states in that it uses the term "parish" to refer to its civil divisions, rather than the more popular term "county". Thus, East Baton Rouge Parish is equivalent to what would be called a county in a different state. The largest city in East Baton Rouge Parish is Baton Rouge. Other cities include Zachary, Baker, Central, and St. George, among others. While Baton Rouge has its own police force, its ties to East Baton Rouge Parish are more than simply geographical. According to Baton Rouge's government website, "East Baton Rouge Parish and the City of Baton Rouge have a consolidated form of government. The head of the executive branch serves as both the president of the parish and the mayor of the city" (BRLA.gov).

We conducted our exploratory data analysis using three primary datasets: two specific to Baton Rouge, and one encompassing all crime reported in East Baton Rouge Parish (including Baton Rouge). The Baton Rouge-specific datasets, when combined, contain data from 2011-present, while the dataset for East Baton Rouge Parish only contains data from 2021-present but covers a larger geographical area. We chose to explore both of these datasets in order to look at crime from two different angles: crime trends over time, and crime trends between different cities. Additionally, the East Baton Rouge Parish dataset enabled us to compare two different reporting agencies.

Primary Dataset:

We combined these Baton Rouge City-specific datasets (2011-20 and 20211-present) into one dataset:

Legacy Baton Rouge Police Crime Incidents (2011-2020)

- ***On January 1, 2021, the Baton Rouge Police Department switched to a new reporting system. This dataset contains data starting on 1/1/2011 through 12/31/2020.
- Crimes reported in Baton Rouge City and handled by the Baton Rouge Police Department.

Baton Rouge Police Crime Incidents (2021 - present)

- Crime incident reports beginning January 1, 2021. Includes records for all crimes that occurred within the City of Baton Rouge and responded to by the Baton Rouge Police Department.

This dataset covers a larger geographical area, but does not include data prior to 2021:

East Baton Rouge Parish Combined Crime Incidents (2021 - present)

- Combination of crime incident reports from the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office and the Baton Rouge Police Department, beginning January 1, 2021.

Secondary Dataset:

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Climate Data

- Weather data for Baton Rouge from 1/1/2011 - 7/19/2024
- Join on date of weather conditions and offense date

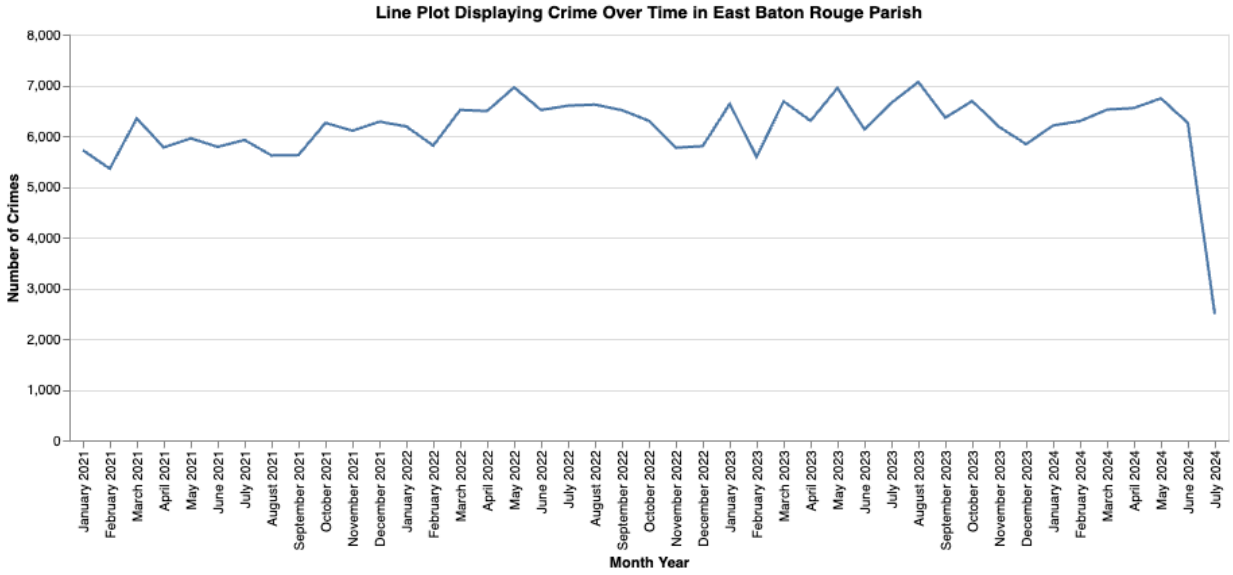
Data Cleaning Process

One major step in cleaning the data specific to Baton Rouge was combining the datasets. We had one dataset with information from 2011-2020 (referred to as “legacy”) and another dataset with information from 2021-present (referred to as “current”). In order to combine these datasets into one spanning 2011-present, we had to drop columns that made the datasets incompatible. During the planning stages of our analysis, we decided to omit information related to specific location, such as street address, geolocation, latitude, and longitude in order to focus on larger areas, such as zip code or district, in order to identify crime hotspots . This approach, in addition to removing redundant columns, culminated in dropping 'ADDRESS NUMBER', 'STREET DIRECTION', 'STREET NAME' ,'STREET TYPE', 'ZONE', 'SUBZONE', 'COMPLETE DISTRICT', 'GEOLOCATION' from legacy and 'ZONE', 'SUBZONE', 'CHARGE ID', ‘STATUTE TITLE’, 'REPORT DATE', 'APPROVED DATE', 'SUBADDRESS', 'CRIME AGAINST’, 'NIBRS CODE', 'NIBRS DESCRIPTION', 'CENSUS BLOCK GROUP', 'NEIGHBORHOOD', 'LONGITUDE', 'LATITUDE', 'GEOLOCATION' from current. In order to make the datasets compatible, we also had to typecast date and time columns as datetime, ensure zip codes were formatted correctly, and other similar routine cleaning tasks. Then, we renamed the remaining columns in each dataset for compatibility and combined the datasets. In the end, our cleaned combined dataset had the following columns: 'report_number', 'offense_date', 'offense_time', 'crime_type', 'attempted_or_committed', 'crime_description', 'street_address', 'city', 'state', 'zip_code', 'district', 'council_district', 'crime_prevention_district'.

One assumption we made during our cleaning process was that cities listed as “B.R.”, “BATON ROGUE”, etc should be Baton Rouge. We also assumed that street names in Baton Rouge that were mistakenly typed into the city column should be Baton Rouge, and we made the decision to allow LSU (Louisiana State University) and Southern University to be designated as cities, since both of these universities have their own police agencies and reporting mechanisms separate from the Baton Rouge Police Department.

In order to clean the dataset that contains data on the crime incidents in East Baton Rouge Parish from 2021 onwards, we began by cleaning the column names and filtering out any extra cases reported prior to 2021, as the bulk of the data recorded begins after 2021. We dropped the columns that reported very specific location data ('STREET_ADDRESS', 'SUBADDRESS', 'NIBRS_CODE', 'NIBRS_DESCRIPTION', 'CENSUS_BLOCK_GROUP', 'LONGITUDE', 'LATITUDE', 'ENFORCEMENT_AGENCY_ID', 'GEOLOCATION'). Our assumption is that we will not be able to draw very actionable results by comparing the specific locations of the crimes, and rather looking at larger areas as a whole will enable a clear analysis of crime hotspots. Many of the rows that were supposed to be documented as Baton Rouge under the city name were misspelled, so we cleaned up those rows. This does assume that these were misspellings and not intentional inputs. Finally, we converted the date columns to pandas datetime objects and added columns for the month of the crime and the year of the crime.

Overall Trends

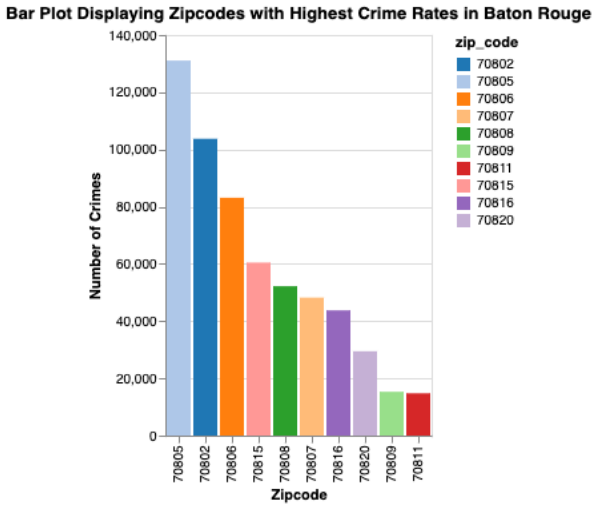


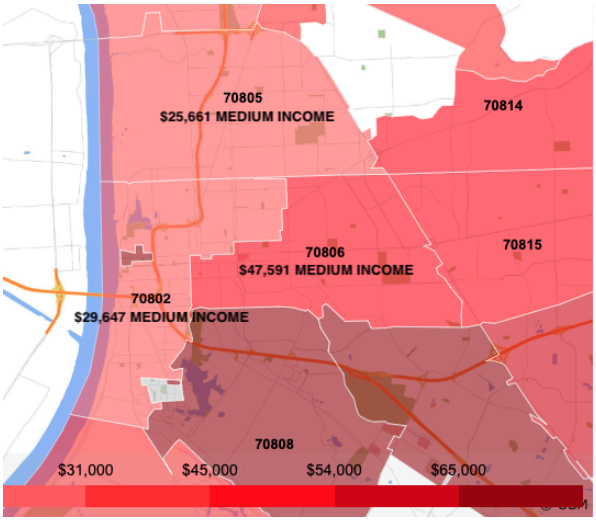
As time goes on, when grouping together all of the cities in East Baton Rouge Parish, we can see that the trend in crime incidences is increasing gradually. The graph above highlights the overall trend in crime incidents in East Baton Rouge Parish since 2021 to currently available data of July 16, 2024. The sharp decline in July 2024 is not actually a decline in crime, but instead illustrates that we do not have data for the entire month. Month to month, the number of crimes ranges between 5,000 to 7,000 crimes with varying statute types and level of intensity. This visualization provides us with the context that crime rates are increasing, and it is critical to understand which areas are getting impacted the most and why. The trends we found helped us get insights regarding our main question: *What are the contributing factors to crime in East Baton Parish?*

Examining the Rate of Crimes in Baton Rouge City and East Baton Rouge Parish Based on Geographical Location

East Baton Rouge Parish is the most populous parish in the state of Louisiana, with a population of about 450,000 people as of the USA 2020 census. When exploring the data related to crime rates incidents in East Baton Rouge Parish, we were particularly interested in uncovering patterns related to location within East Baton Rouge Parish. Our key questions are outlined below:

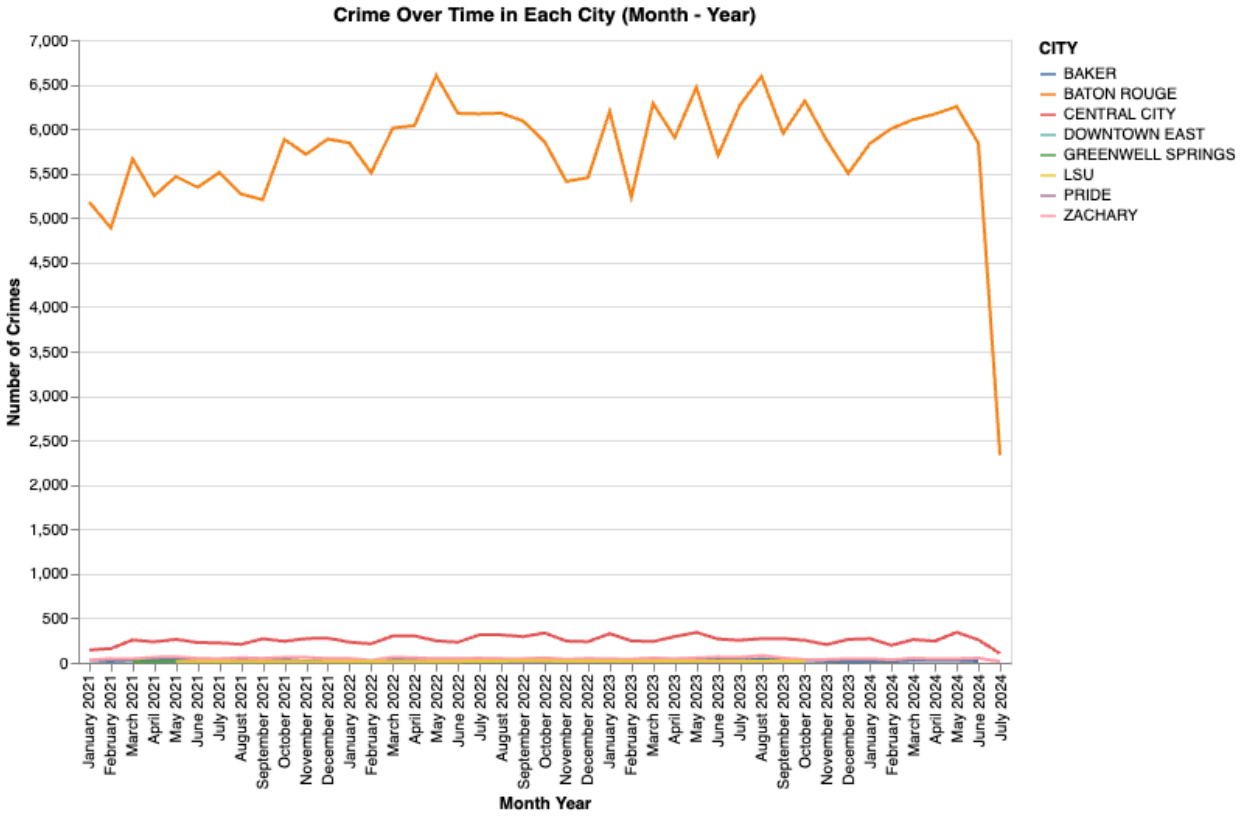
i. *Which zip codes have the highest crime rate?*
ii. *How do the number of crimes in different cities, districts, and zip codes change over time?*





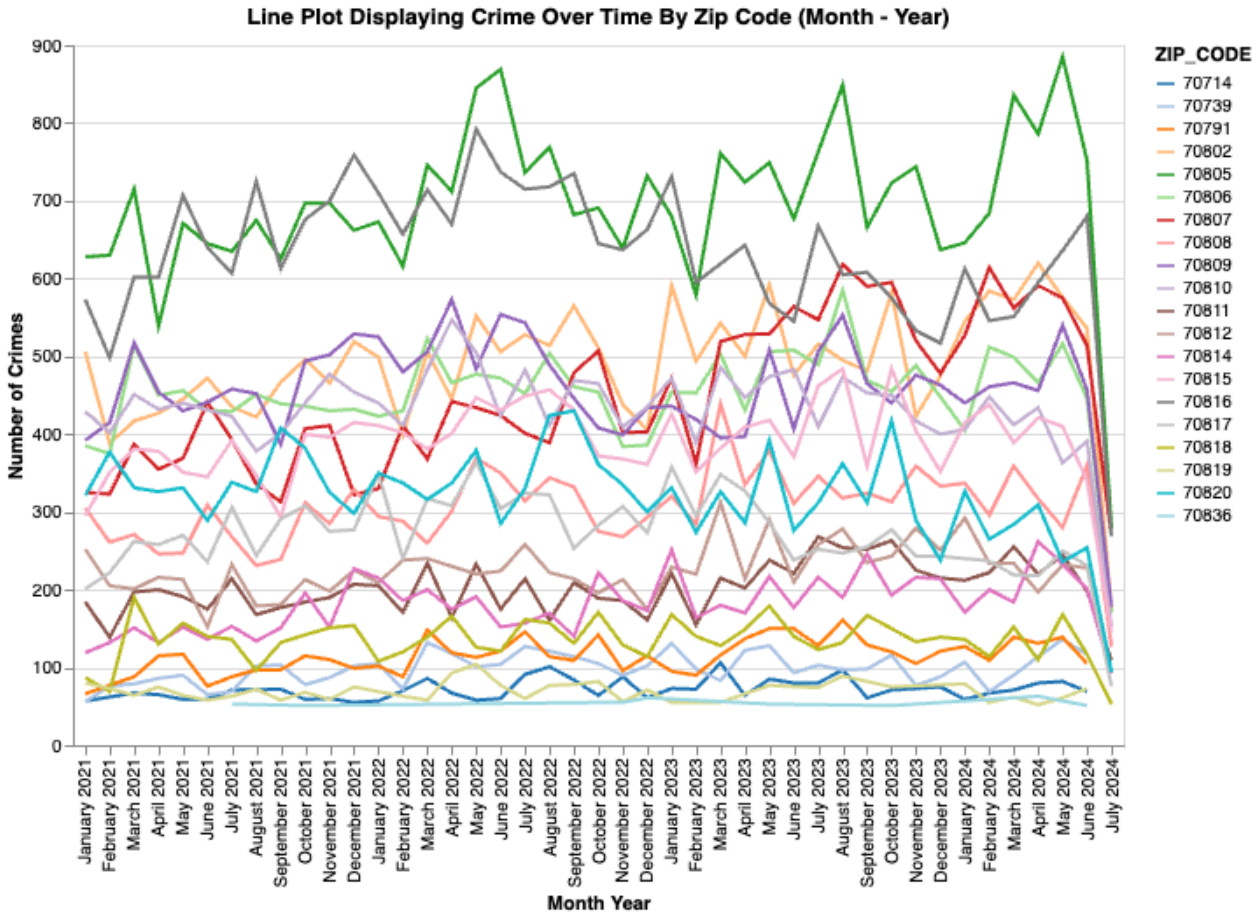
In many cities, crime incidents are often centralized in certain areas, or in other words "crime hotspots". To understand the scope of the crime in Baton Rouge since 2011, it was critical to find the zipcodes in which majority of the crime was occuring to identify the "hotspot" for criminal incidents. In the graph above, we are utilizing the dataset that only includes the crime incidents in the city of Baton Rouge (rather than the whole of East Baton Rouge Parish). The bar plot displays the number of crimes that have occurred since 2011 in each of the zipcodes. In order to make the plot more legible, we have included the zipcodes with the top ten number of crimes in the barplot, although in total there are about 20 different zip codes in Baton Rouge.

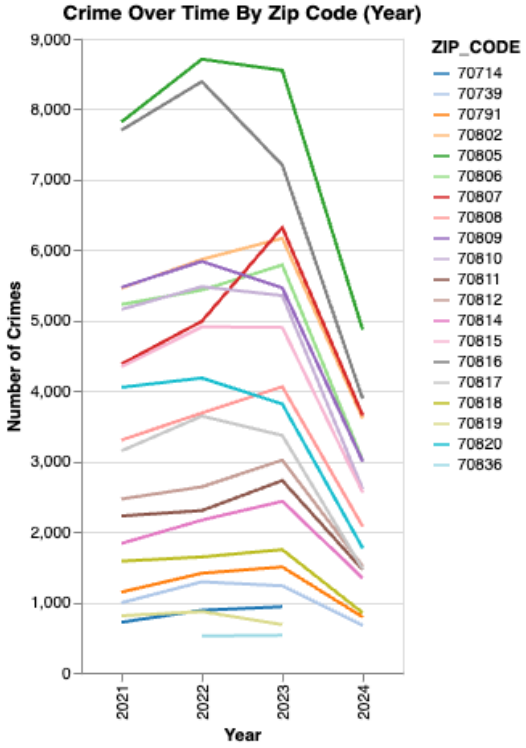
When looking at the location of these zip codes in Baton Rouge on the map, it is apparent that the top 3 zip codes with the highest crime rates are all next to each other comprising a region of about 6 miles squared. According to a study called "The impact of socioeconomic factors on crime rates" published in the peer reviewed journal *Addiction & Criminology*, there is a link between crime rates and socioeconomic conditions, specifically poverty, unemployment, and inequality. From the source SimpleMaps.com, we have included a map of the medium income for the top three zip codes with the highest number of crime incidence. As the shaded regions display, all of the medium incomes are on the low end of the median income spectrum, indicating that the socioeconomic status in these regions is poorer than others. Given that socioeconomic factors typically impact crime rates, the data for the crime incidences support that this region in Baton Rouge may be a crime hotspot.



Additionally, we were interested in adding in the component of time when looking at crime incidents in various locations in East Baton Rouge Parish. The graph above uses the dataset for all of East Baton Rouge Parish since 2021, and it indicates that between all the smaller cities in East Baton Rouge Parish, the city of Baton Rouge has had the highest number of crimes consistently over the past 5 years. The year of 2024 has limited data given that the latest crime reported is from July 16, 2024.

Finally, in respect to districts, District 4 and 3 in East Baton Rouge Parish have had the highest number of crimes over the past couple of years as illustrated by the charts below. Although, with respect to zipcodes, the zipcodes with the highest number of crimes over the past 4 years are 70805, 70816, and 70802. The line plot for the number of crimes over time by district is interesting because District 4 consists of the zipcodes 70814, 70815, 70816, 70818, 70819, 70739 and 70791 and District 3 consists of the zipcodes 70810 and 70820. These districts with a higher number of crimes seen in the visualization do not necessarily align with the zip codes that have a reported higher number of crimes over time. The discrepancy in the analysis becomes clear when looking at the number of missing values in the zipcode column versus the district column. The column for zipcodes has 0 missing values whereas the column for district has a total of 66,319 missing values. Hence, we can conclude that zipcode is the most accurate column to use to understand hotspots for crime in Baton Rouge Parish. The top three zipcodes are all located in the city of Baton Rouge, and follow a similar pattern seen with the highest number of crimes in the zip codes in the dataset containing information on Baton Rouge only.


Line Plot Displaying Crime Over Time By Zip Code (Month - Year)
Number of Crimes
Month Year
ZIP_CODE
70714
70739
70791
70802
70805
70806
70807
70808
70809
70810
70811
70812
70814
70815
70816
70817
70818
70819
70820
70836


Crime Over Time By Zip Code (Year)
Number of Crimes
Year
ZIP_CODE
70714
70739
70791
70802
70805
70806
70807
70808
70809
70810
70811
70812
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70815
70816
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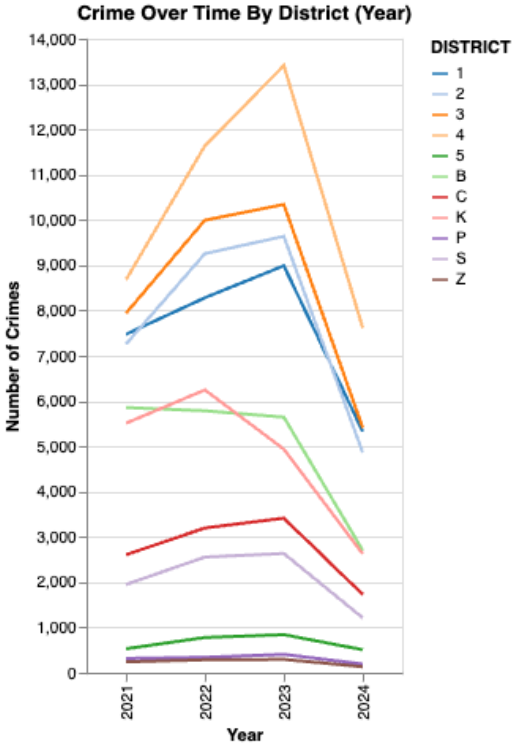

Crime Over Time By District (Year)
Number of Crimes
Year
DISTRICT
1
2
3
4
5
B
C
K
P
S
Z

Systemic Analysis

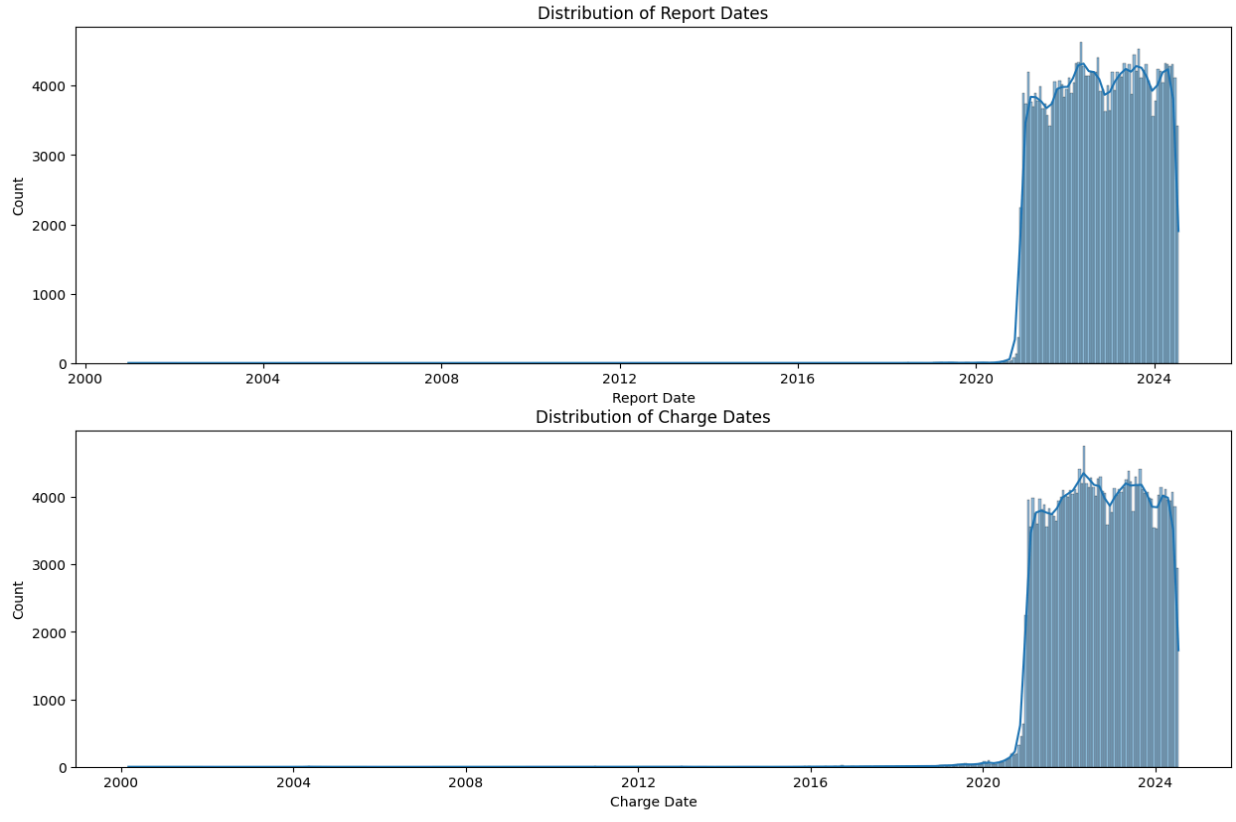
This section presents a systemic analysis to focus on operational aspects of law enforcement in East Baton Rouge Parish. Unless otherwise noted, the larger geographic dataset for East Baton Rouge Parish Combined Crime Incidents is used throughout this section. The goal is to examine distributions and trends between two different agencies: Baton Rouge Police Department (BRPD) and the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office (EBRSO), particularly in the domains of temporal data and data quality. The extracted insights from the following questions serve to examine the effectiveness of the local criminal justice system.

iii. Which agency reports the most crimes?

iv. Are there any discrepancies between charge date, report date, and approved date?

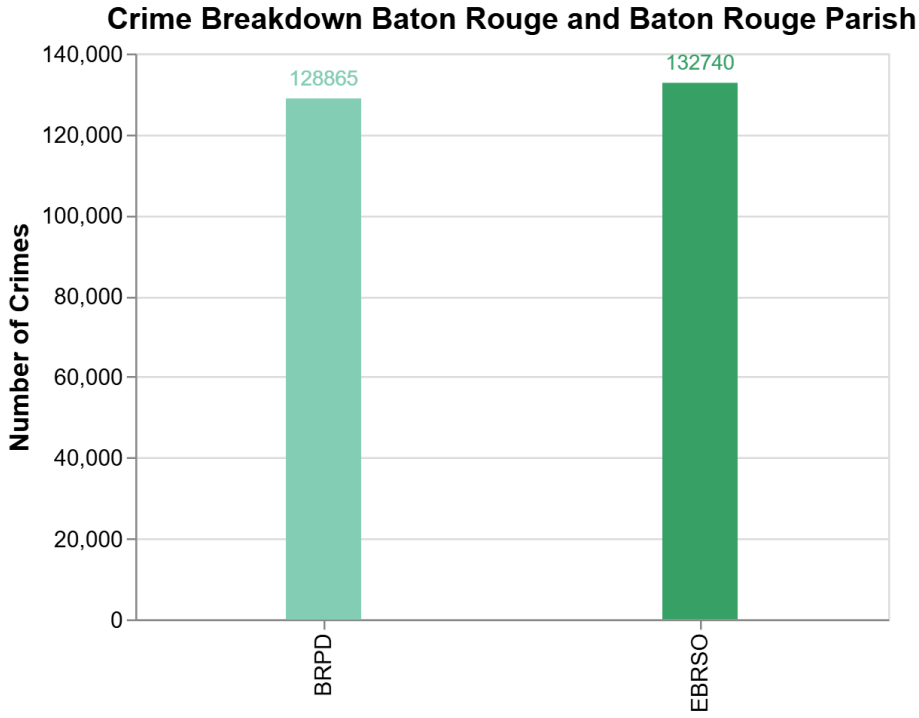
v. What data is missing?

Checking the distribution of dates data (for charge date and report date), the best data quality is for 2021 onwards. Hence, the data used for the systemic analysis portion will be filtered for that period.

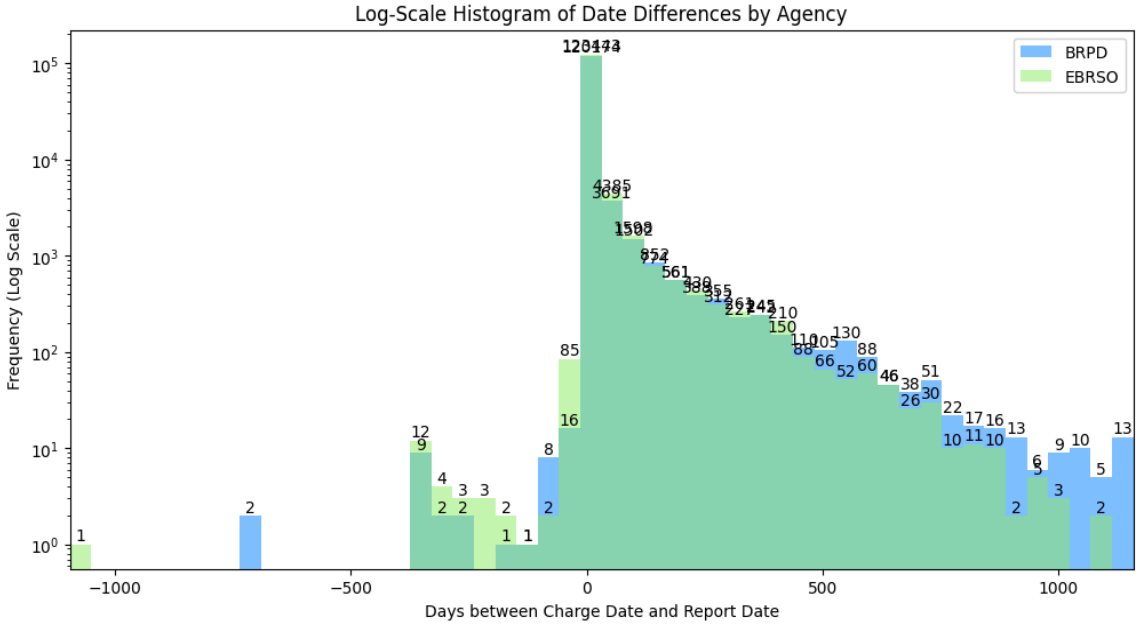


Which agency reports the most crimes?

It is important to ensure that the data distribution is balanced between BRPD and EBRSO agencies before any further comparative statistical analysis. The bar chart below shows the number of crimes reported by each agency. It illustrates the even proportion between crimes handled by each agency, and therefore, no further normalization of data was required. The reported number of crimes reported by the Baton Rouge Police Department (49%) was slightly lower than the East Baton Rouge Sheriff Office (51%).



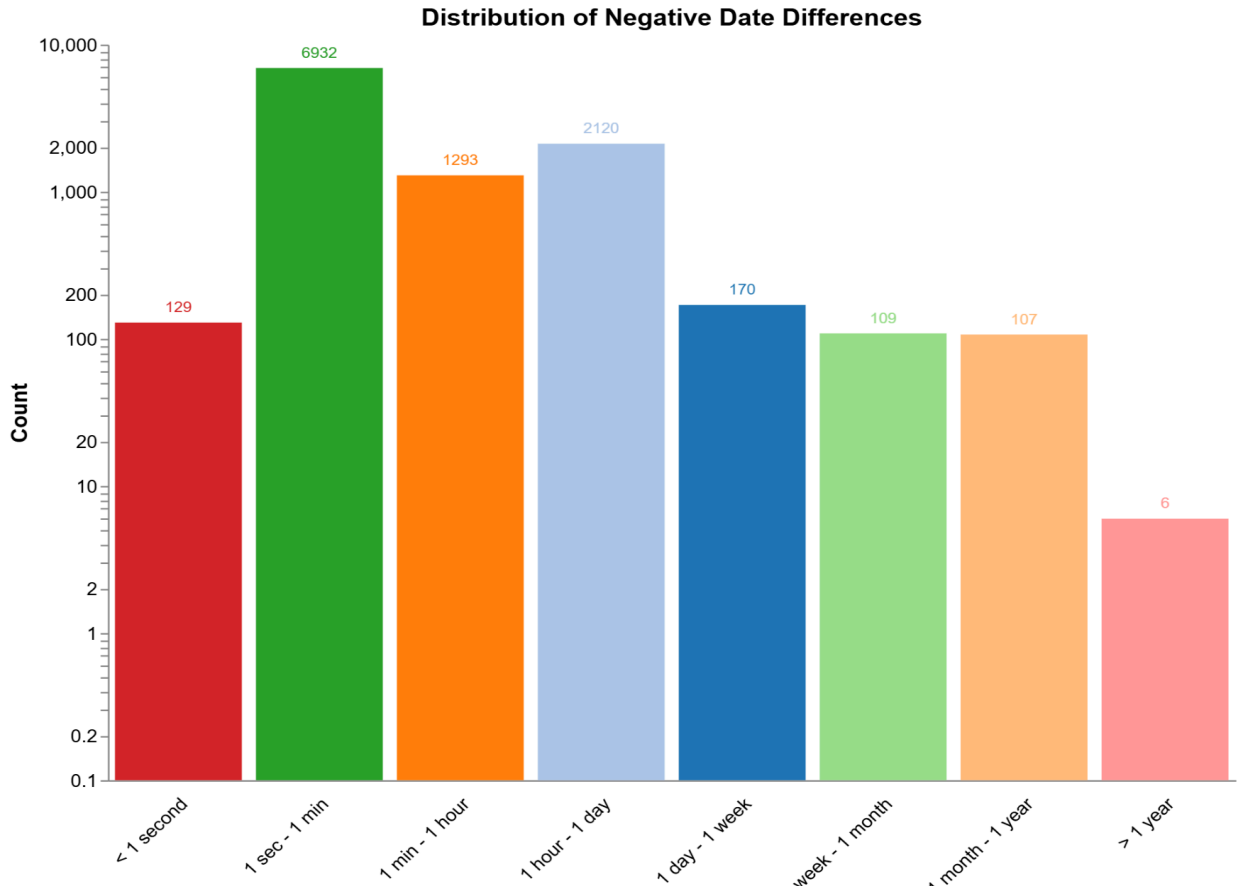
Is there a difference between charge date and report date?



The above graph explores the average delay between the charge date and the report date of each incident for each of BRPD and EBRSO. According to dataset documentation, the charge date is the month, day, year, and time of day when the charges for the crime incident took place, and the report date is the month, day, year, and time of day when the police officer filed the crime incident report.

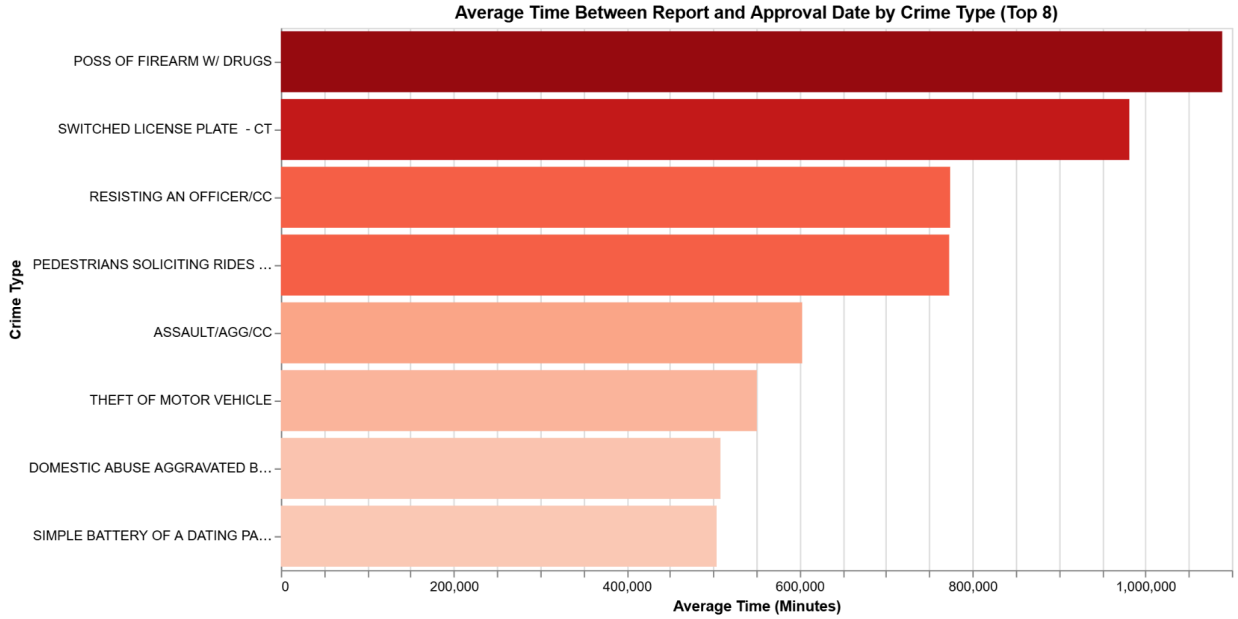
Visualizing this data can show the efficiency of the criminal justice system in terms of processing time between city and parish law enforcement agencies. Due to the large number of datapoints, a log scale histogram is used to demonstrate the distribution of the delay. The figure shows the entire distribution, including negative values. This is interesting because a negative value means the report was filed before the incident took place.

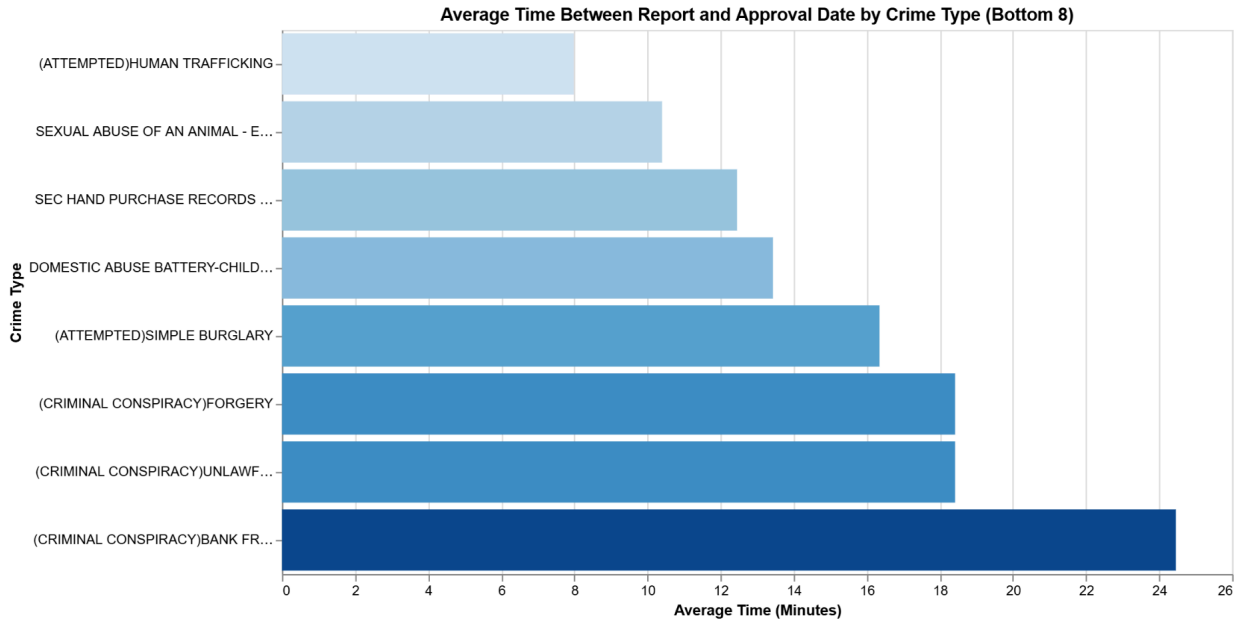
This led us to investigate the data in the negative values. The statistics of the negative values showed over 10,000 occurrences, of which EBRSO had 5,859 and BRPD had 5,007. This led us to check the scales of these negative differences. Around 7,000 negative values showed a less than one minute discrepancy between when the report was filed and when the incident took place. 3,400 crimes had a discrepancy between one minute and one day. The ~390 crimes with larger discrepancies might be considered data entry issues, system errors, batch processing of data, or retroactive charging.



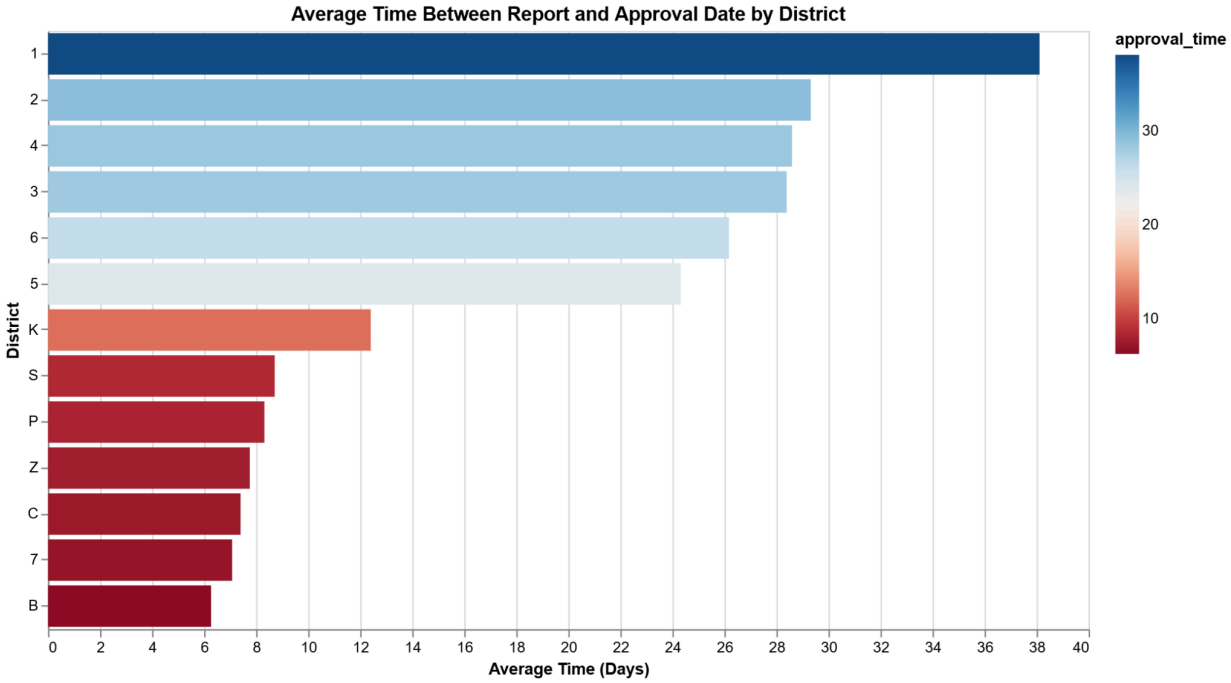
What's the average time between the report date and the approved date, by key categories?

We plotted the top and the bottom 8 crime types in terms of the average delay between the report date and approved date to assess if there are any trends. According to the data documentation, the approved date is the date that the report was reviewed and approved by the supervisor. We found that most of the delays occurred due to complex cases, such as firearms, drugs, and vehicle-related crimes. There was a maximum delay of over 2 years (red colored bars).





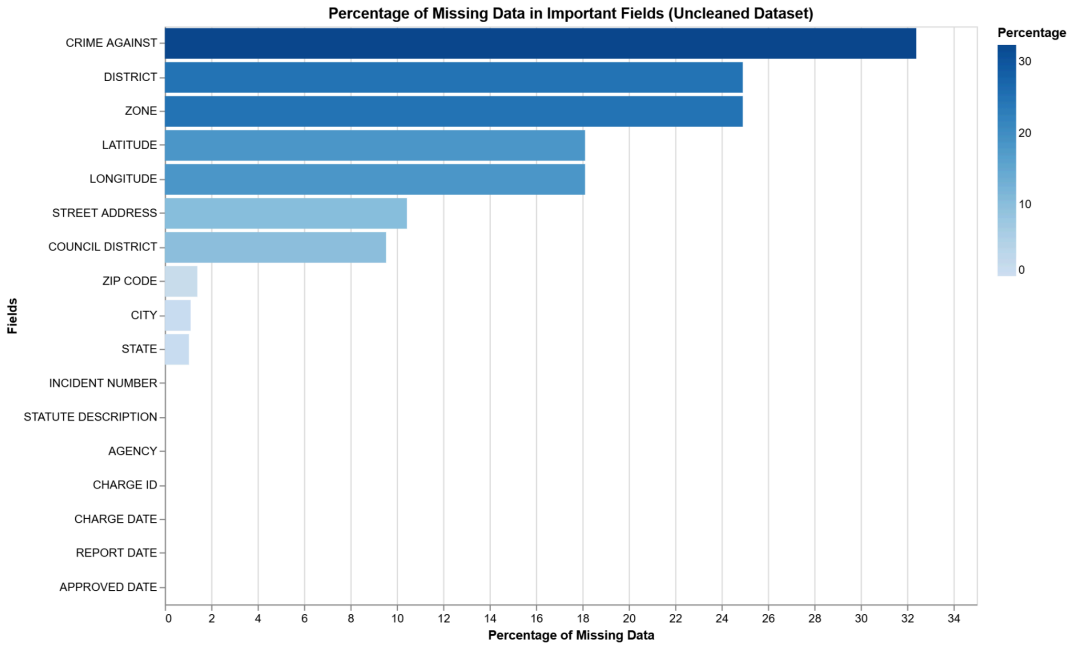
The types of crime that took the least amount of time to approve are represented by the blue bars in the graph above. These crimes, which took less than 30 minutes to process, are generally less complicated cases, such as attempted crimes. There are other cases that can be considered complex, but those can fall under prioritization policies, such as domestic abuse and human trafficking.



It also seems that the average delay varies between the districts, with a maximum average delay of 38 days for district 1. Due to the observations for the delays due to crime types, we suspect that the districts may exhibit specific common types of crimes that leads to this trend. This conclusion would require further investigation.

What data is missing?

One important analysis we performed explores missing data for important fields from the original unfiltered, uncleaned dataset for East Baton Rouge Parish. While the overall completeness of important fields (mainly those used in our analysis and others) is over 91%, some important features lack significant amounts of data.



The “Crime Against" variable had the most missing values, clocking in at over 32%. This variable illustrates whether the crime was harmful to a person, society, or property. One possible reason behind this variable’s missing values is that it could have been left blank if a crime falls under multiple categories, or if the harm is unknown. Another possible reason is negligence during data entry. Location-based missing values, such as District, Zone, Latitude, and Longitude, could be due to an issue in the GPS or in location-related data entry. Temporal data such as the approved date, charge date and report date are complete, along with the incident number and other identifier-based data. This could be due to a system-based data entry that automatically fills in this information, or required fields.

Upon further investigation of the “Crime Against” nan examples, it turns out that many of those crimes are non-criminal acts or that there is no clear victim or target for that type of crime.

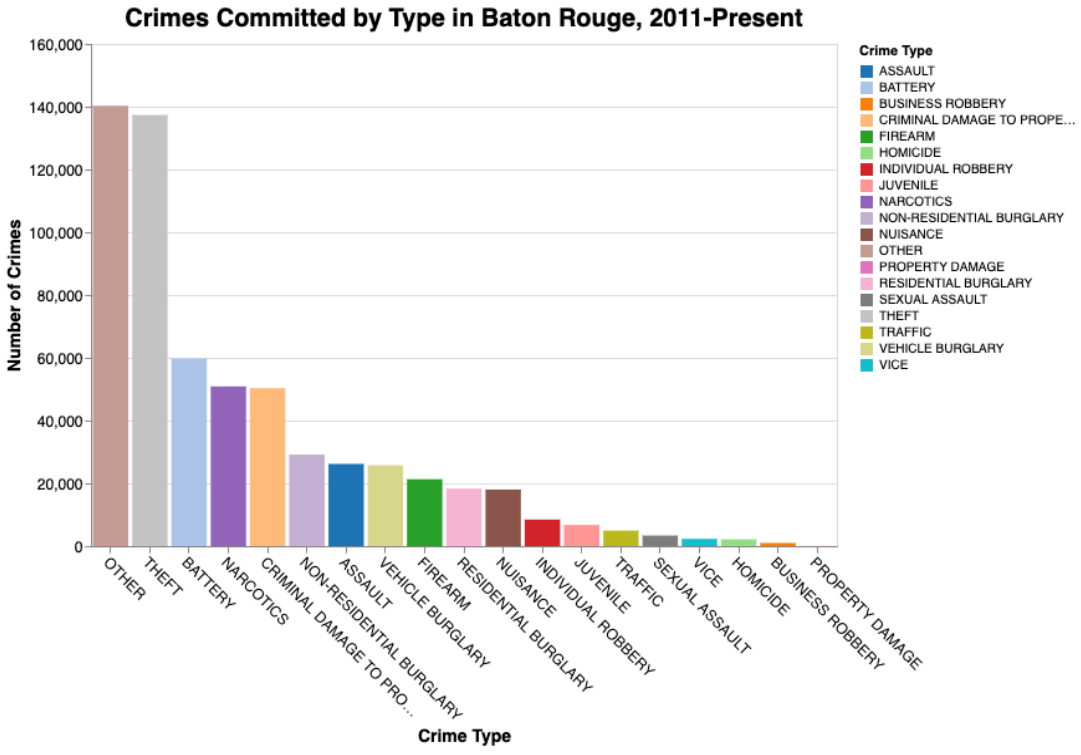
Types of Crimes

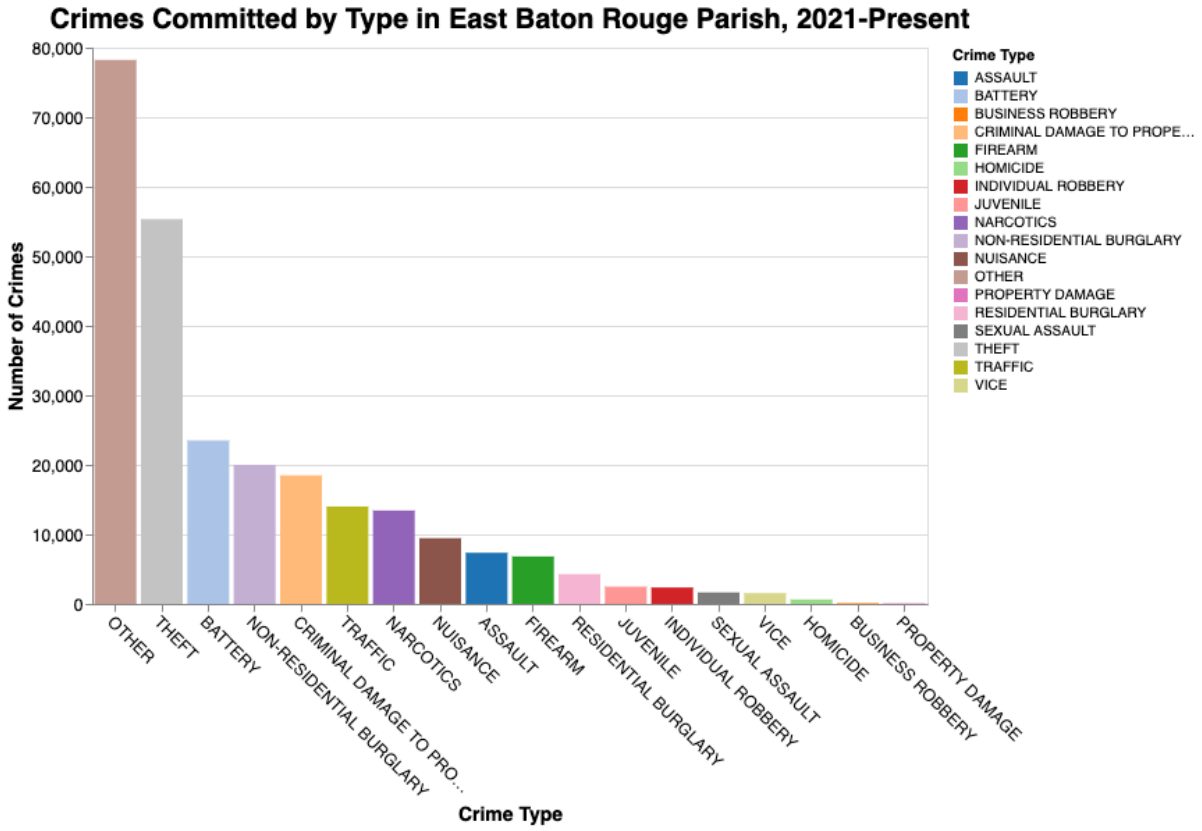
When looking at different types of crimes in Baton Rouge City and East Baton Rouge Parish, our key questions were:

vi. *How many crimes of each type were committed? Which crimes are most common?*
vii. *Are there any noticeable changes over time in a particular type of crime?*
viii. *How many crimes were attempted vs committed?*

Which crimes are most common?

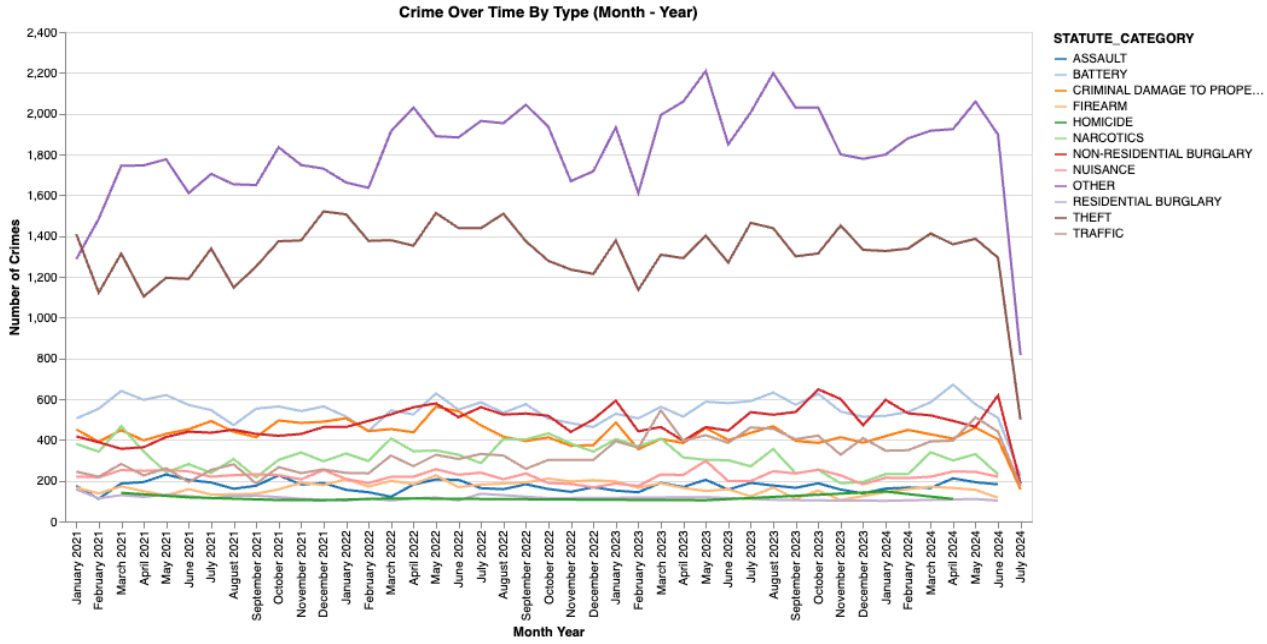
First, we wanted to understand how often each type of crime has occurred in Baton Rouge since 2011, and compare that to the same categories for East Baton Rouge Parish since 2021. To answer this question, we grouped both datasets by statute category. A statute category is one of eighteen general codes used to classify crime in Louisiana. As we can see from the graphs below, crimes classified as “OTHER” are the most prevalent in Baton Rouge as well as the Parish, followed closely by theft.





Are there any noticeable changes over time from 2021-present in a particular type of crime for East Baton Rouge Parish?

When looking into the types of crimes that occur over time across East Baton Rouge Parish in the graph below, we can see the most common is theft consistently, after the category of "Others". In fact, as time goes on, there are naturally fluctuations in the number of crimes that are reported month to month, although the overall trend is increasing. The scope of this data is until mid July 2024, which is what explains the major drop seen in July 2024. The documentation of the dataset does not provide a clear explanation for what the "Other" types of crimes are, although it is interesting to note that these are what dominate the graph. This indicates that there may be additional descriptions that need to be created, so that the broad category of "Others' remains at a minimum usage.



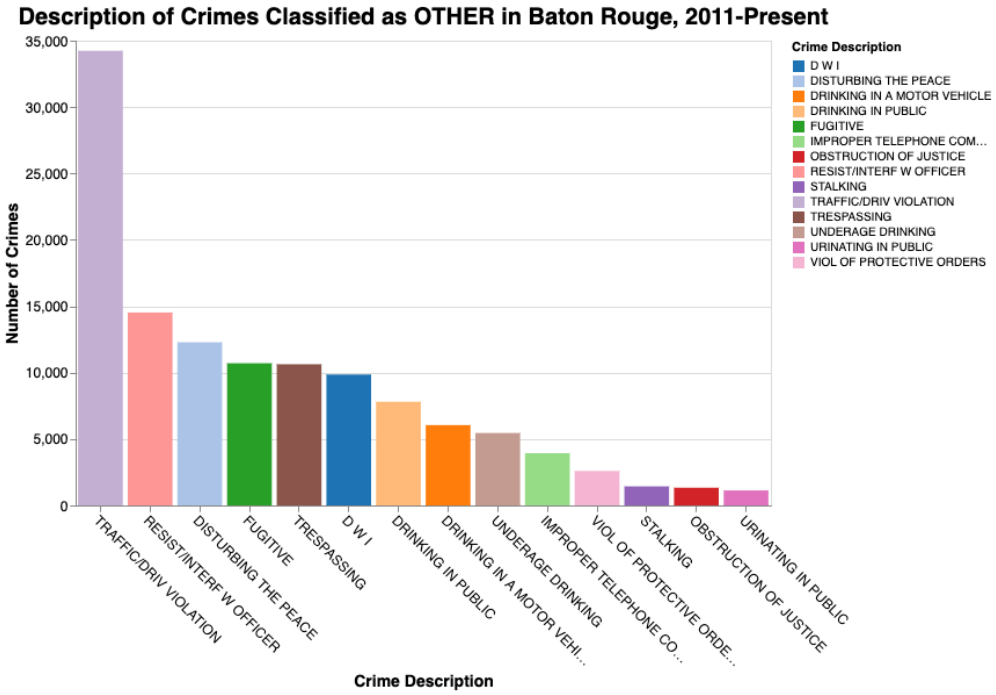
What crimes make up 'OTHER'?

Of 606,359 crimes committed in Baton Rouge since 2011, over 23% - almost ¼ - are classified as "OTHER." What crimes fall into this miscellaneous category? We used the dataset specific to Baton Rouge to get more clarity.

653 subcategories of crime (prior to data cleaning) make up this miscellaneous category. The vast majority are related to traffic and driving violations, which includes everything from reckless driving to not having the proper car seat to having an expired driver's license. Subcategories with over 1,000 entries (after data cleaning) are included in the graph, but other subcategories also include more serious offenses, such as arson, kidnapping, and stalking.

As we can see below, alcohol is a prevalent theme in 'OTHER' - particularly driving while intoxicated, drinking in public, open containers in motor vehicles, and underage drinking or providing alcohol to persons under 21. This is no surprise given Louisiana's "laissez le bon temps rouler" attitude and the pervasive drive-through daiquiri joints stationed in practically every neighborhood throughout Baton Rouge.

If we had more time to continue exploring in this direction, we would create a similar graph to determine if similar trends are present in miscellaneous crimes within the parish as a whole.



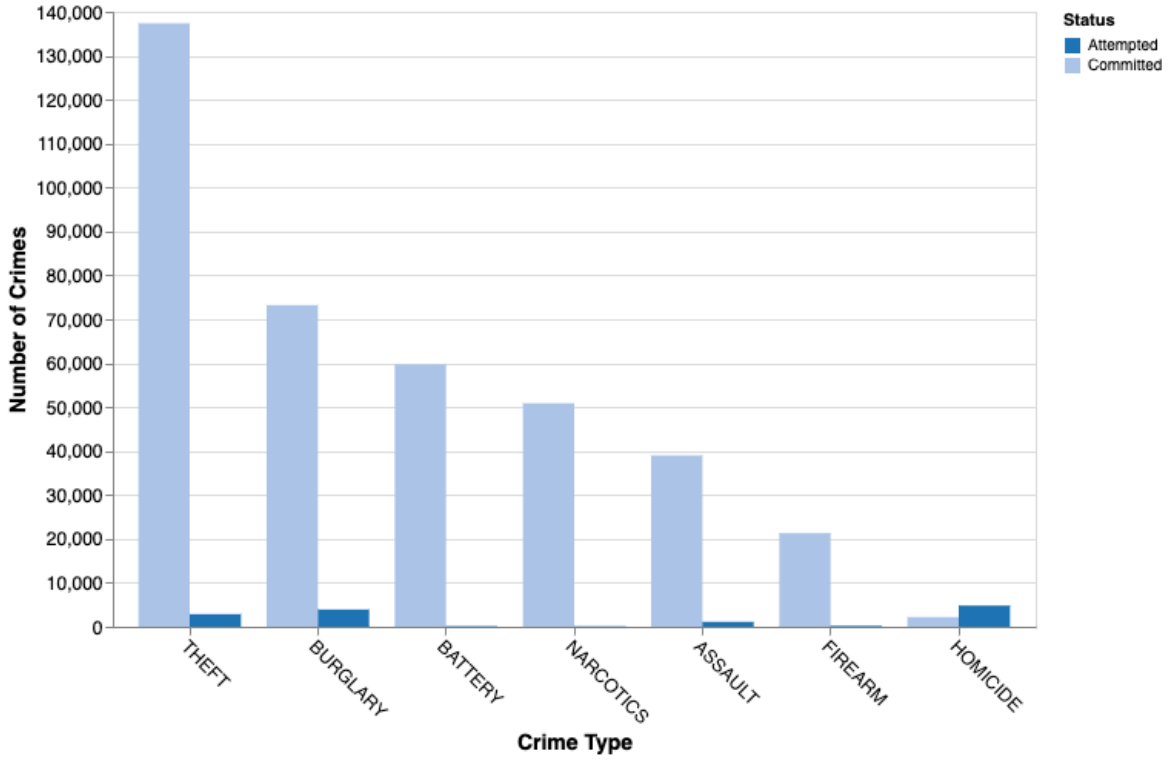
How many crimes were attempted vs committed?

In order to explore crime status - whether the reported crimes were attempted or committed - we decided to make similar graphs of both datasets. To distinguish the graphs, the dataset specific to Baton Rouge is represented in blue, while the one for East Baton Rouge Parish is green. It is important to keep in mind that while Baton Rouge is a smaller geographical area within East Baton Rouge Parish, the city's crime counts are much higher than the parish's due to the difference in data collection periods.

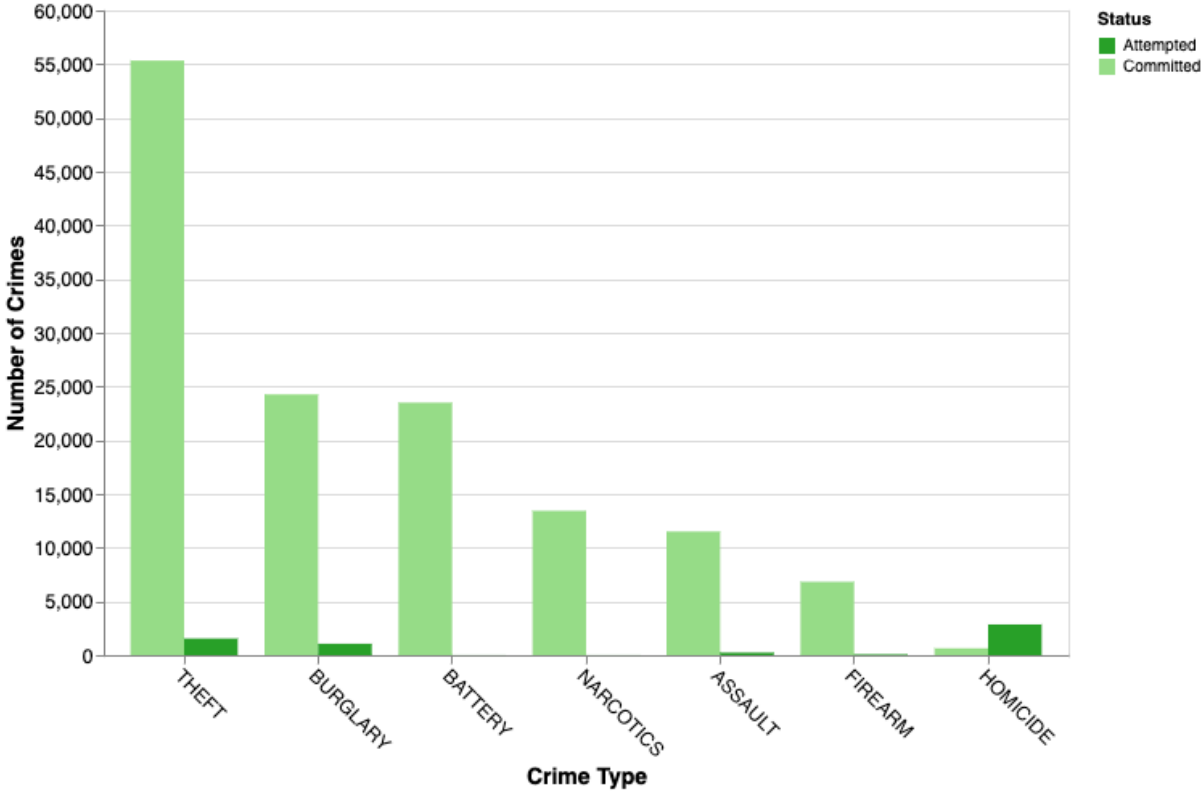
To improve data quality and graph readability, we decided to condense our crime categories by not including crimes classified as 'OTHER'. We also combined similar statute categories so that non-residential burglary, vehicle burglary, and residential burglary are all classified as 'BURGLARY' in the graphs below. Similarly, 'ASSAULT' is made up of assault, sexual assault, individual robber, and business robbery. While combining robbery with assault might seem counterintuitive at first, we made this decision after research showed us that robbery is more akin to assault than to either theft or burglary due to the threat of force or violence that is inherent in robbery.

Based on the data for both Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge Parish, theft is clearly a huge issue. Interestingly, homicide is the only crime category where attempts are more prevalent than actually committing the crime. The discrepancy between attempted crimes and committed crimes in every other category makes us wish we had more time and data to look into police response time and crime prevention strategies.

Committed vs Attempted Crimes in Baton Rouge, 2011-Present



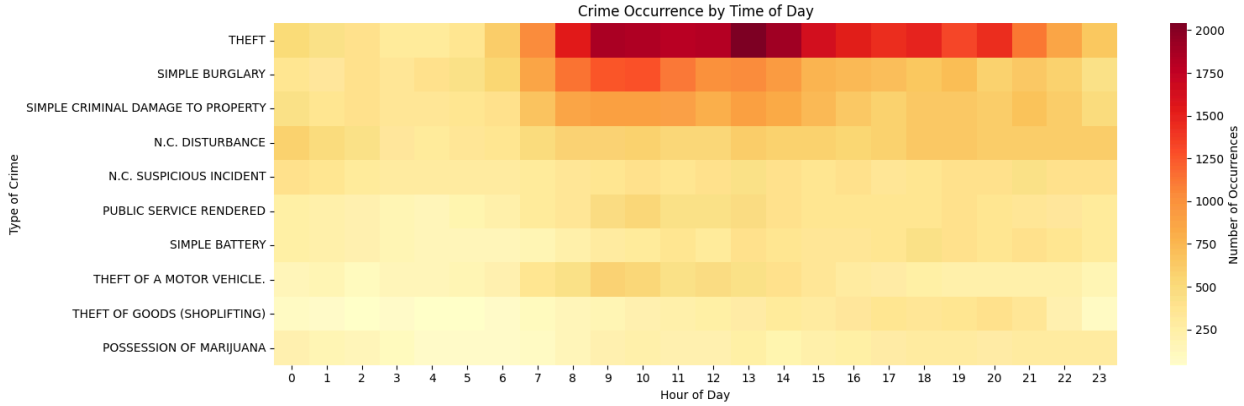
Committed vs Attempted Crimes in East Baton Rouge Parish, 2021-Present



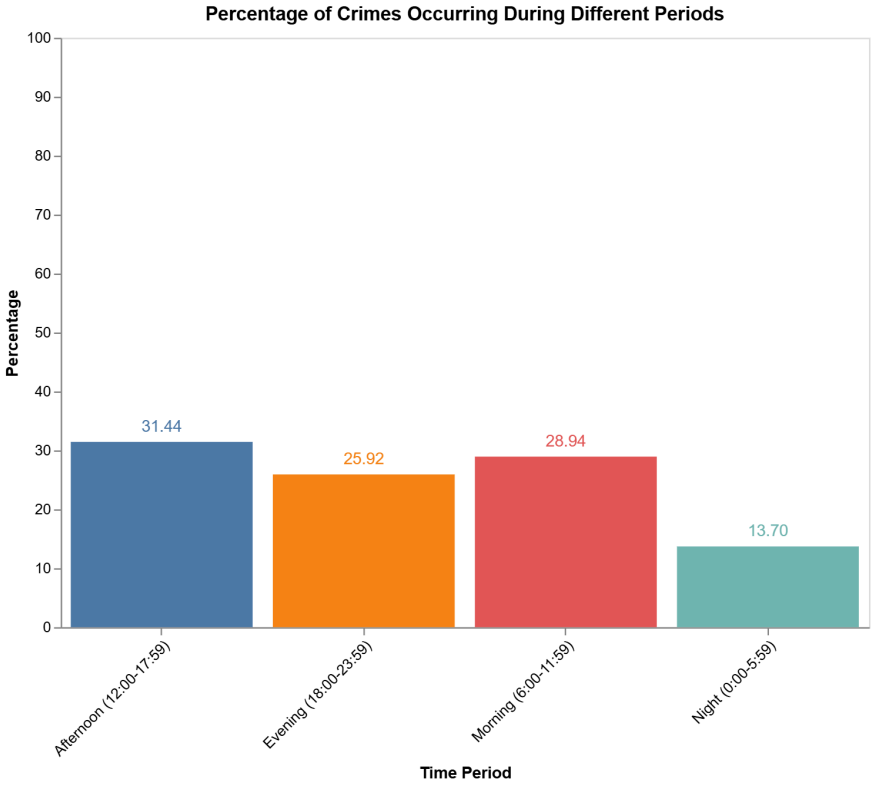
Time of Day and Weather Conditions

At what times of day do different crimes most commonly occur?

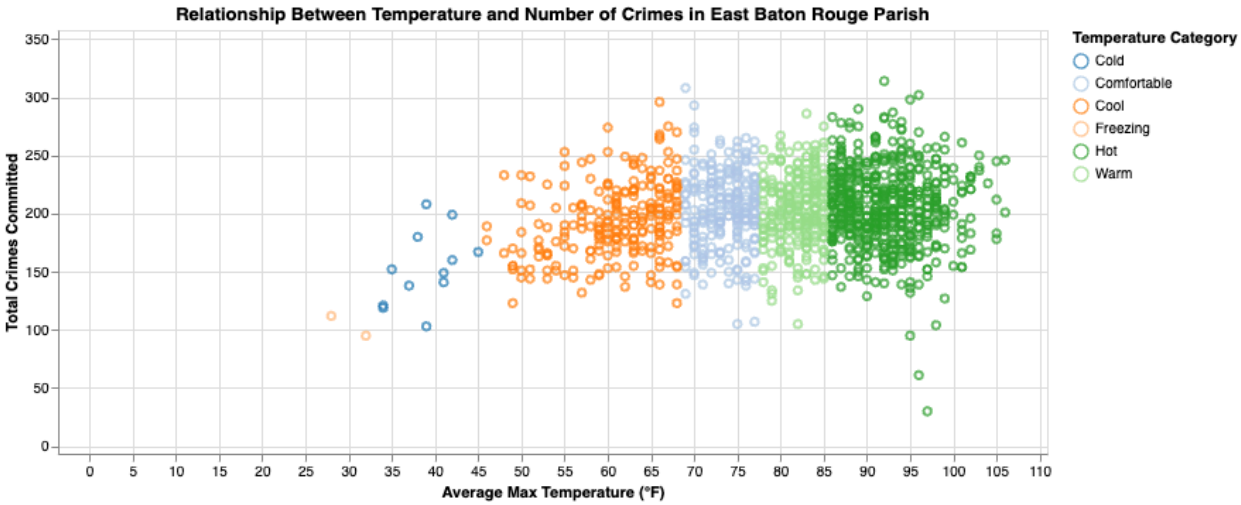
Although late-night is typically expected to be the most dangerous time of day, a heat map of the top ten crimes in East Baton Rouge Parish shows otherwise. Theft, the most prevalent type of crime, occurs heavily from 8 am to 8 pm, with the most theft occurring at 1 pm during peak daylight.



We then plotted the peak hours for each crime type, none of which were before 9 am nor after 8 pm. Breaking down these crime occurrences as percentages, as shown on the plot below, most of the top crimes occur during the afternoon time, followed by the morning time. If we had more time, we would attempt to determine if this unexpected finding is a result of when the crime is actually committed or if the data is measuring something different, such as when the crime is called in.



Do higher temperatures make people more likely to commit crimes?



We decided to explore this question after wondering if higher temperatures might make people feel more aggressive, and therefore more likely to commit crimes. The scatterplot above, which uses the East Baton Rouge Parish dataset for crimes committed since 2021, shows that while temperature does have an effect, it could be for a different reason. The number of crimes committed seems, for the most part, to have a similar concentration in comfortable temperatures (68-77 °F) through hot temperatures (>85 °F), while gradually increasing as the temperature rises. However, the most notable trend in the data is that relatively few crimes are committed when it's cold outside.

If we had more time, we would create a similar scatterplot to see if these trends are also present in our longitudinal dataset specific to Baton Rouge, which contains data from 2011-present. Additionally, another weather-related question we wish we had time to explore is if hurricanes have any impact on crime.

Conclusion

In an effort to better understand policing and its effectiveness in and around Baton Rouge, we explored crime incidents in this area looking specifically into the following dimensions: geography, time, and systemic factors. In East Baton Rouge Parish, we found that since 2021, the number of crime incidents month by month has generally been increasing. Within the city of Baton Rouge, the general area encompassing the zip codes 70802, 70805, and 70806 have the highest number of crimes overall since 2011 and have had consistently higher numbers of crime per month compared to other zip codes within Baton Rouge. The medium income in these zip codes is on the lower end of the spectrum ranging from about $25,000 to $47,000, indicating that this area may be a hotspot for crime due to a lower socioeconomic status in this community. It is no coincidence that these zip codes are geographically situated in northwest Baton Rouge, a region plagued by decades of disinvestment. According to the 2020 census, 93% of 70805's population is Black, as well as 69% of 70802. Systemic racism is indeed alive and well in Baton Rouge.

In terms of weather and timing, generally the most number of crimes occur during daylight hours, and the number of crimes generally correlates with temperature – more crimes occurring in hot to warm weather and less crimes occurring in cold to freezing weather. Since 2011 onwards, theft and "other" types of crimes are the most commonly committed in both the city of Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge Parish. The high number of crimes categorized as "other"indicates that this category should be further looked into and additional categories should be added to the reporting options.

Notably, we uncovered large systemic delays in the time between crime reporting and crime processing, with gaps as large as two years, as well as negative values which imply that crimes were reported before they happened. Additionally, the discrepancy in numbers between attempted and committed crimes indicates a poor track record of intervening before or during a crime. Overall, the inequality and police corruption within East Baton Rouge Parish is a complex issue with many contributing factors. We can conclude that areas that have typically had a higher crime rate should be further analyzed so necessary methods are implemented to mitigate the crime in these areas.

Additionally, the reporting of commonly committed, less complex crimes needs to be done in a more efficient manner to bring justice to those wronged within a reasonable time frame.

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