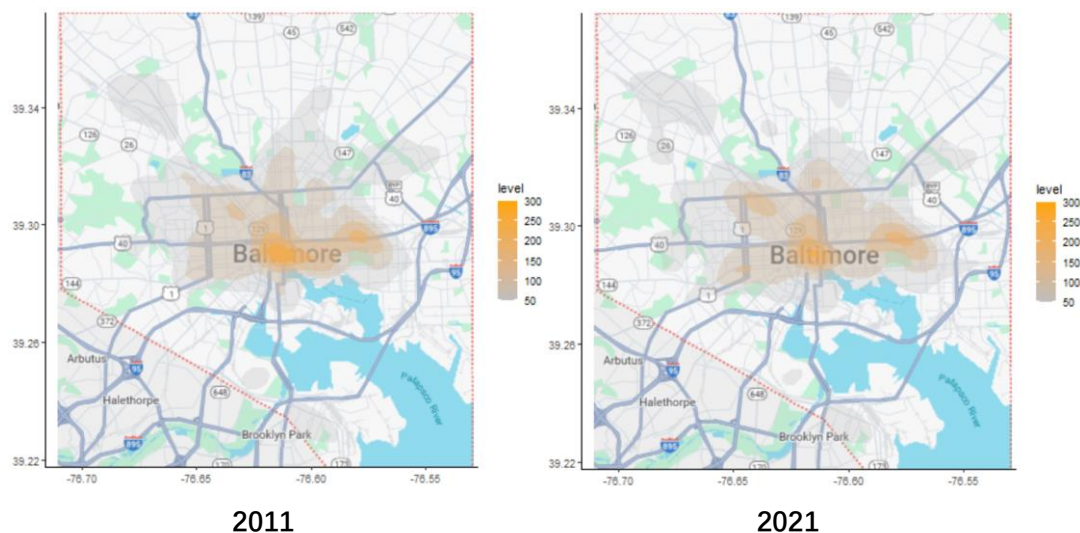


Shifting Crime Rates in Baltimore: A Decade in Review

Ying Xiang



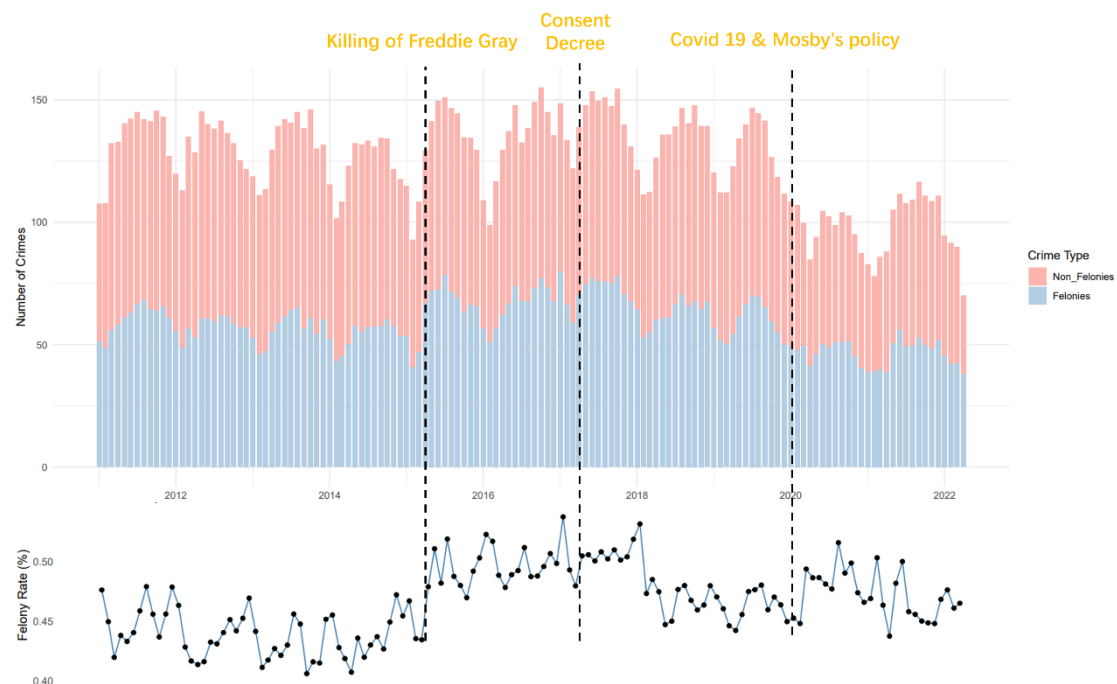
Baltimore's infamously high crime rates have been a notorious issue for years. The Baltimore government has continuously experimented with various strategies to tackle crime, but have these methods been effective? Perhaps a closer look at the data could reveal the truth.



The first and second images illustrate the distribution of crime cases in Baltimore for the years 2011 and 2021, respectively. Overall, it is evident that the number of crimes in 2021 was slightly lower than in 2011. However, the distribution of crime hotspots remained roughly the same over the decade, predominantly located in West and East Baltimore.

Although there has been a noticeable decline in the number of crime cases in recent years—a testament to the government's efforts—the question remains: how exactly has this reduction been achieved? Does the data truly reflect an improvement in local security?

Baltimore's severe crime issues have long necessitated unique policy measures. For instance, the Safe Streets initiative launched in 2007 aimed to mediate potential criminal activities through the intervention of ex-offenders. However, these measures didn't initially yield significant results, as indicated by a stacked barplot showing no substantial change in crime rates until 2012, with a slight decline in 2014.



Regrettably, the situation deteriorated in 2015 with the high-profile **death of Freddie Gray**, leading to severe riots. This incident strained police-community relations and led to increased scrutiny of law enforcement strategies, with frequent clashes between Baltimore gangs and the police. Subsequently, there was a surge in overall crime rates, with violent crimes exceeding 50%. In 2016, Baltimore's violent crime rate peaked.

The national outcry over the Freddie Gray incident and subsequent protests spotlighted longstanding abuses within the Baltimore Police Department. A federal investigation unveiled numerous violations of constitutional rights, including unjust treatment of African Americans, excessive use of force, and other forms of misconduct, which were prevalent long before but were exacerbated in 2016.

In 2017, Baltimore implemented a plan known as the **Consent Decree**, which included several reforms aimed at improving relations between the police and community, enhancing transparency and accountability in policing, and strengthening police training and oversight. The Consent Decree played a role, and though the overall crime rate only decreased slightly in the following two years (2018 and 2019), the proportion of violent crimes saw a notable reduction.

The total number of crimes in Baltimore saw a sharp decline from 2020 onwards, dropping by a third on average compared to previous years. This significant decrease was primarily due to two factors: the onset of the **COVID-19** pandemic, which reduced the frequency of both civilian and criminal activities, and a well-known policy introduced by **Marilyn Mosby**. This policy, which halted the prosecution of low-level drug possession and prostitution cases, aimed to reduce COVID-19 transmission and alleviate the burden on the judicial system.

Opinions on Mosby's policy were mixed. Some praised it for significantly lowering case numbers and easing tensions between law enforcement and the community, especially under the pandemic's peak, suggesting that it effectively lightened the judicial system's load. Notably, the policy managed to reduce serious crimes alongside misdemeanors, highlighting its positive impact. However, others criticized the policy as a surrender to gangs and criminal behavior, arguing that merely reducing crime statistics does not equate to eliminating criminal behavior and could lead to further deterioration in community conditions over time.

In conclusion, while Baltimore's various crime policies have generally been somewhat effective, their impact has often been modest. Mosby's policy, though significantly impactful, also faces criticism for potentially 'gaming' crime data.