Spatial distribution of the COVID-19 lockdown crime drop in England and Wales

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**Abstract**

Studies from international case study sites have documented the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown policies on crime. Restrictions on mobility and social interaction have brought about widespread falls in police-recorded crime, swiftly followed by a resurgence as lockdowns were lifted. Less is known about the localized spatial patterning of these macro-level trends. This study uses police-recorded data on notifiable offences to decompose the nationwide lockdown trend in England and Wales. We find that local, meso-level areas did not experience the decline and subsequent ‘bounce back’ in unison. Rather, most areas remained remarkably stable, with a small number of meso units contributing a disproportionate amount to the macro-level trend. We find that these areas often occupy city centers, had plentiful opportunities for crime pre-pandemic and were dominated by theft and shoplifting offences.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, clustering, kmeans, routine activities, opportunity theory, pandemic.

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**Availability of data and materials:** The data are publicly available and retrievable from the open online data portal for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Code to replicate data downloads, handling and analyses is openly available (<https://anonymous.4open.science/r/46199882-cc5a-449d-9946-300b3132ab2e/>).