

The Unintended Consequences of Policing Technology: Evidence from ShotSpotter

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Motivation

Technology in Police Departments:

- Substitutes → License plate readers,
facial recognition
- Complements → predictive 'hotspot'
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- Technology changes officer time
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- Gunshot detection
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- 150+ cities world-wide

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Research Question:

How does the implementation of ShotSpotter technology affect 911 call response times?

- How does a police officer's time allocation change s.t. it affects response?

Why would ShotSpotter affect response times?

Resource-Intensive

- Chicago: ~70 daily dispatches, 20 min.
- High priority: same as active shooter
- Ineffective crime tool (Connealy et al., 2024; Ferguson and Witzburg, 2021; Manes, 2021)

Police Scarcity

- Fixed resources ⇒ trade-offs

Unintended consequences?

- Ex-ante ambiguous; does proximity or time allocation prevail?

On an **average day** in Chicago,

there are roughly
**70 ShotSpotter-initiated
dispatches** that take **20
minutes** to investigate,
resulting in **75 hours of
officer time**.

Does this result in **unintended consequences**?

Why do we care about response times?

“If police can arrive within one minute of the commission of an offense, they are more likely to catch the suspect. Any later and the chances of capture are very small, probably less than one in ten.” - (David H. Baley 1996)

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Evidence

- Lower response times results in
 - Higher crime clearance (Blanes i Vidal and Kirchmaier 2018)
 - Less likelihood of an injury (DeAngelo et al. 2023)
- Rapid response → important component of investigation (College of Policing 2013)
- Health implications
 - Delayed treatment → worse patient outcomes (Wilde, 2013, Avdic, 2016)

Summary of the Paper

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 - 2nd largest police force
 - 3rd largest city

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 - Police shifts
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- Staggered difference-in-differences
 - Variation: ShotSpotter rollouts across police districts

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Main Results:

- When a civilian calls 911, a call experiences:
 - +1 minute Call-to-Dispatch (23%)
 - +2 minutes Call-to-On-Scene (13%)
 - Lower arrest probability (9%)
- No benefits outside 911 system

Contribution

In-depth, causal analysis on the unintended consequences of a wide-spread police technology.

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Related Literature

ShotSpotter Specific

Police Technology

Rapid Response

Technology in Workforce

We unpack the effects of this wide-spread police technology.

- Economics:
 - Use ShotSpotter as data for alternative crime/mistrust measure (Carr and Doleac 2018; Ang et. al 2021)
- Non-Economics:
 - Better accuracy, little crime impact or case resolution (Piza et al., 2023; Mares and Blackburn, 2012; Choi et al., 2014)

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Unlike others, we find costly unintended consequences of a police technology.

- Benefits of Police Technology:
 - Body Worn Cameras → lower use of force/complaints (Zamoff et al. 2021; Braga et al. 2022; Ferrazares 2023)
 - Predictive Policing → less crime (Mastrobuoni, 2020; Jabri, 2021; Heller et al., 2022)
 - Tactical Equipment → less crime (Bove and Gavrilova 2017; Harris et al. 2017))

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Related Literature

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We identify a determinant of higher response times, and can quantify at a micro-level.

Police Technology

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The results imply that technology should be rigorously evaluated prior to implementation.

- General Workforce Productivity:
 - Technology is an effective workforce tool (Hoffman et al., 2018, Bhatt et al., 2023)
- Implementation and Allocation:
 - How resources allocated → important for desired outcomes (Ba et al., 2021; Kapustin et al., 2022a; Rivera and Ba, 2023; Adger et al., 2023)

Background on Chicago Policing

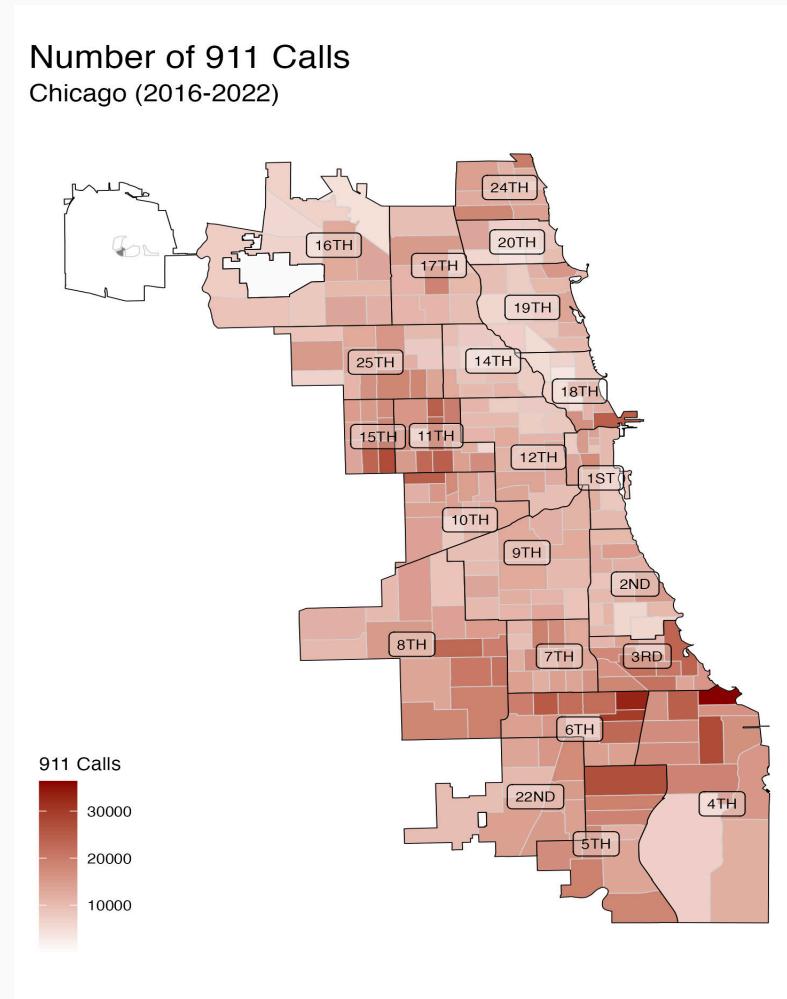
Chicago Background

Chicago Geography:

- Chicago subset into 22 police districts (population ~100k)
 - Within districts are beats
 - Officers generally assigned within districts/beats to patrol

Chicago Crime:

- Chicago crime is localized
 - Gun-crime is localized to South/West sides



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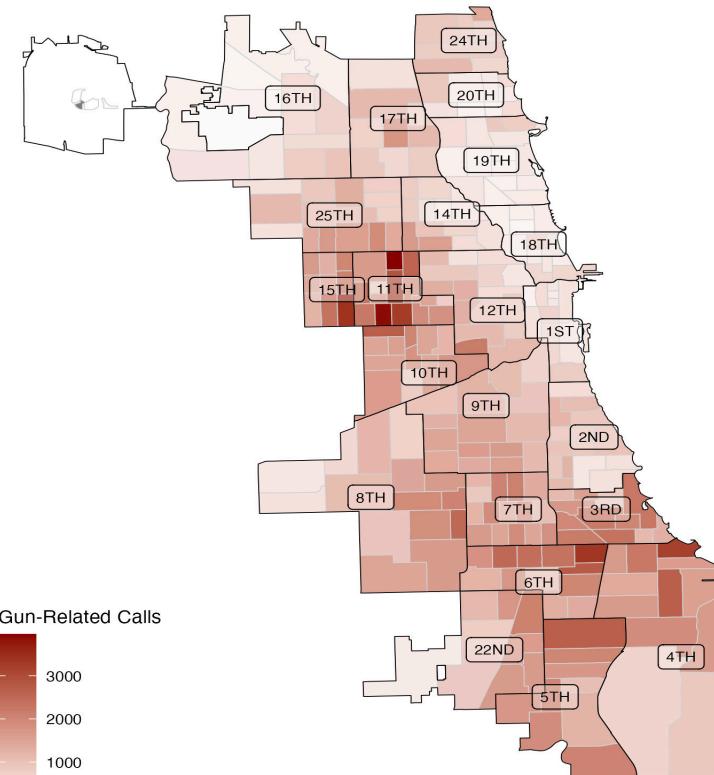
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Number of Gun-related 911 Calls
Chicago (2016-2022)



Policing in Chicago

Police Officer Responsibilities:

- Patrol, respond to incidents, make arrests/stops, complete written reports
- Gathers info at traffic scenes—preliminary investigation
- Direct traffic
- Appear in court/give testimony

Police Time Allocation:

"From the minute you start your shift, radio is non stop calls until backlog. The whole shift you chase radio calls." - CPD Police Officer January 2023 (Indeed.com)

"Very busy be ready to answer up to 50 calls for service specialy during Summer season." - CPD Police Officer February 2023 (Indeed.com)

911 Dispatch Procedure in Chicago

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911 Dispatch Pipeline:

Call-to-Dispatch:

Call-to-On-Scene:

Arrest Made:

911 call ⇒ Dispatcher Assigns ⇒ Officer Travels ⇒ Officer Arrives

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Call-to-On-Scene

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Arrest Made:

- Only arrests in the 911 call pipeline: implication of rapid response

911 Call Priorities in Chicago

Priority 1 (immediate dispatch):

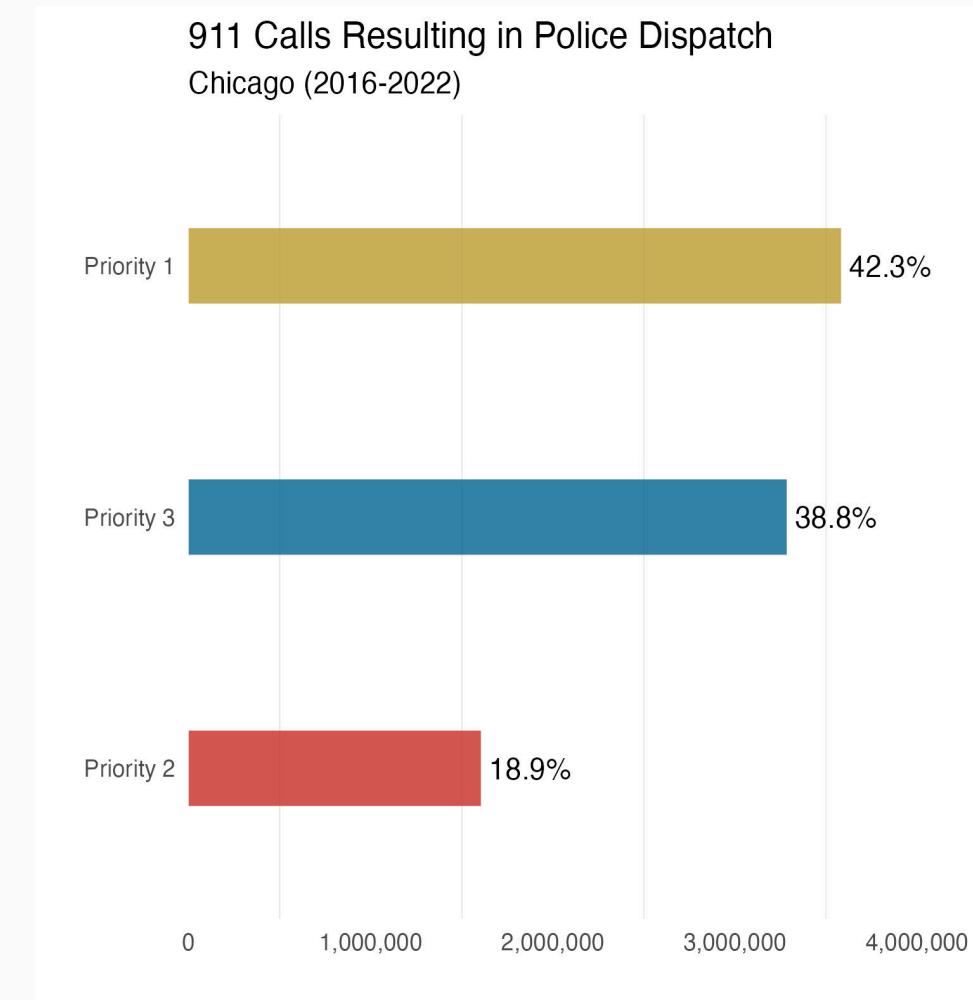
- Imminent threat to life, bodily injury, or major property damage/loss.
- Example: 'person with gun,' 'domestic battery'

Priority 2 (rapid dispatch):

- Time-sensitive, no threat to life.
- Example: 'suspicious auto'

Priority 3 (routine dispatch):

- Not time-sensitive.
- Example: 'parking violation'



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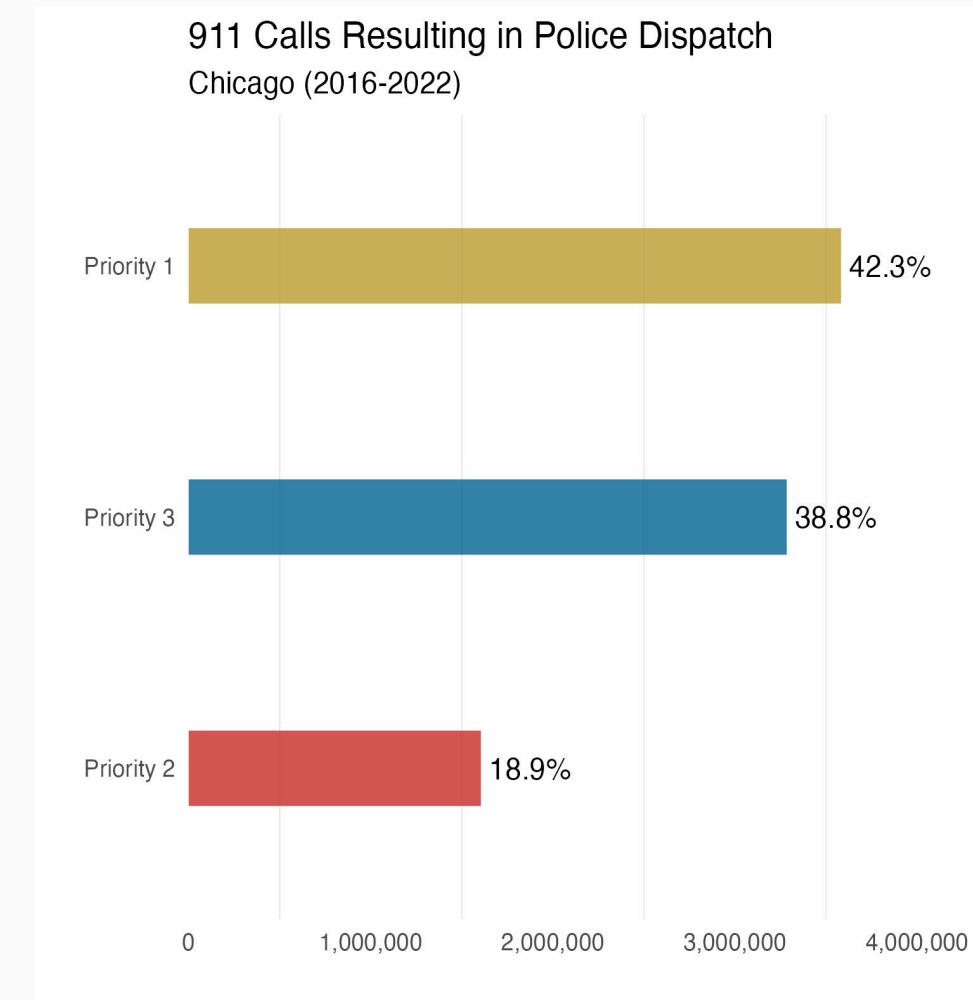
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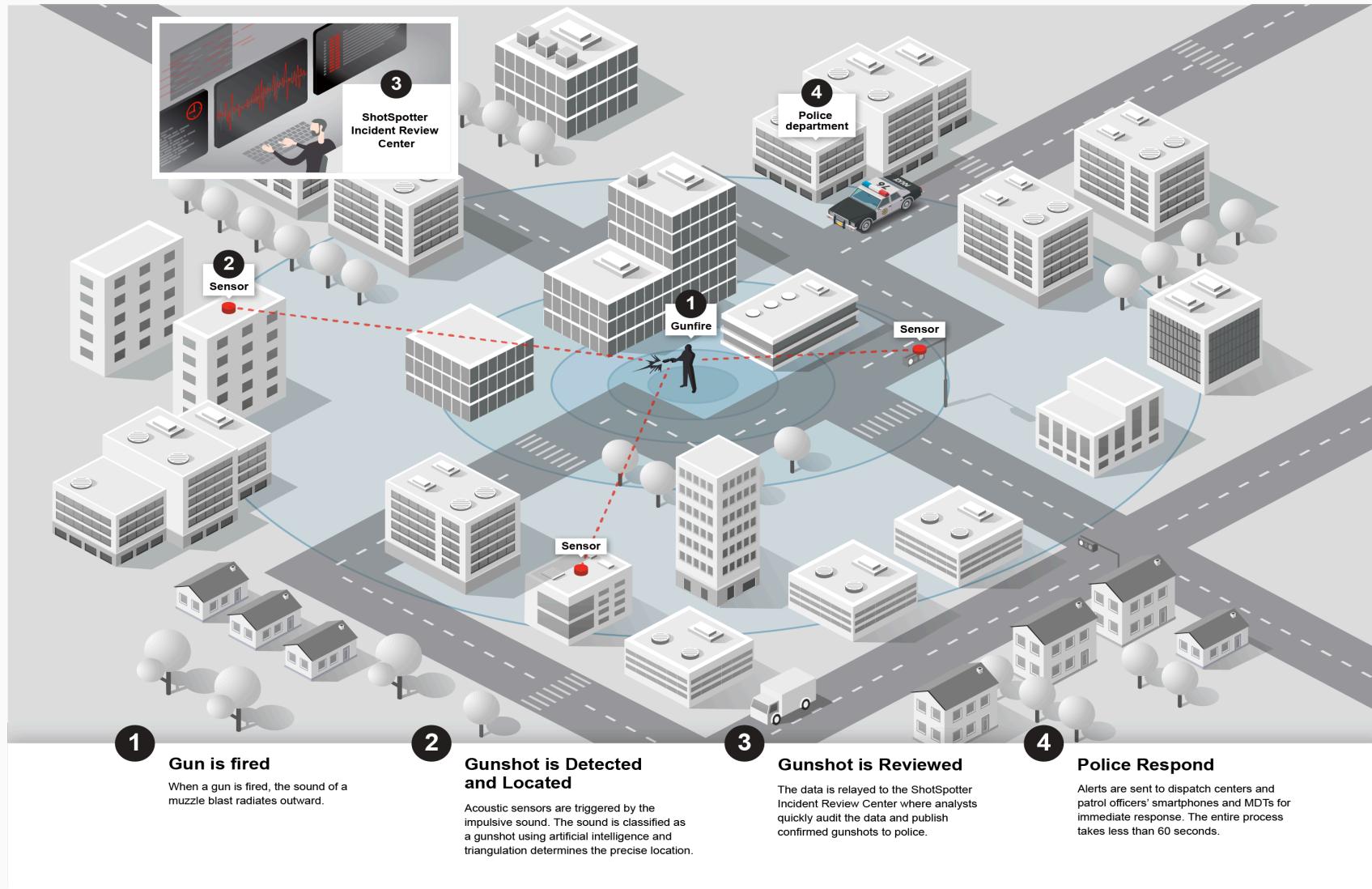
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ShotSpotter Technology in Chicago

ShotSpotter Functionality



ShotSpotter in Chicago

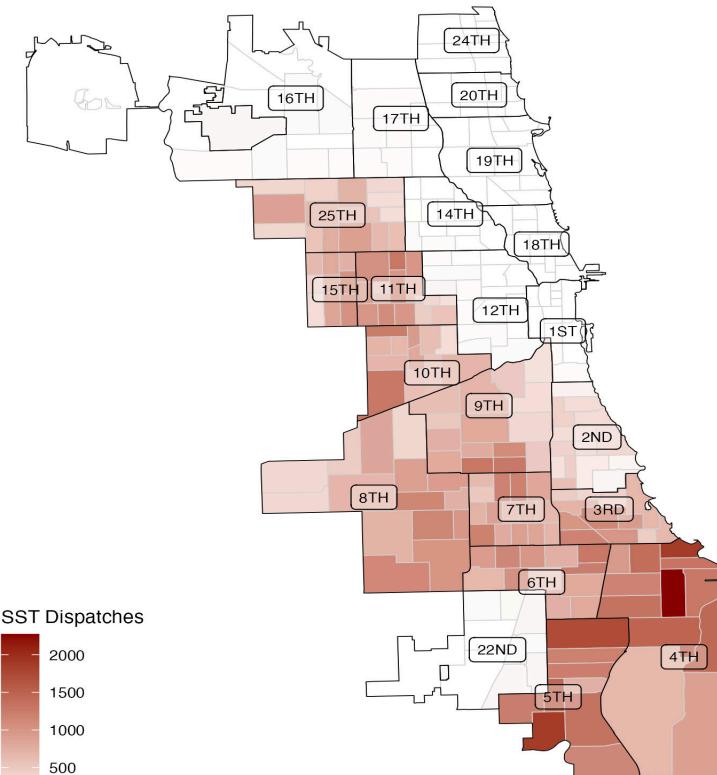
Staggered Rollout

- 12 of 22 police districts in 2017-2018
- Implemented with full coverage across districts
- Rational: respond to high gun-crime

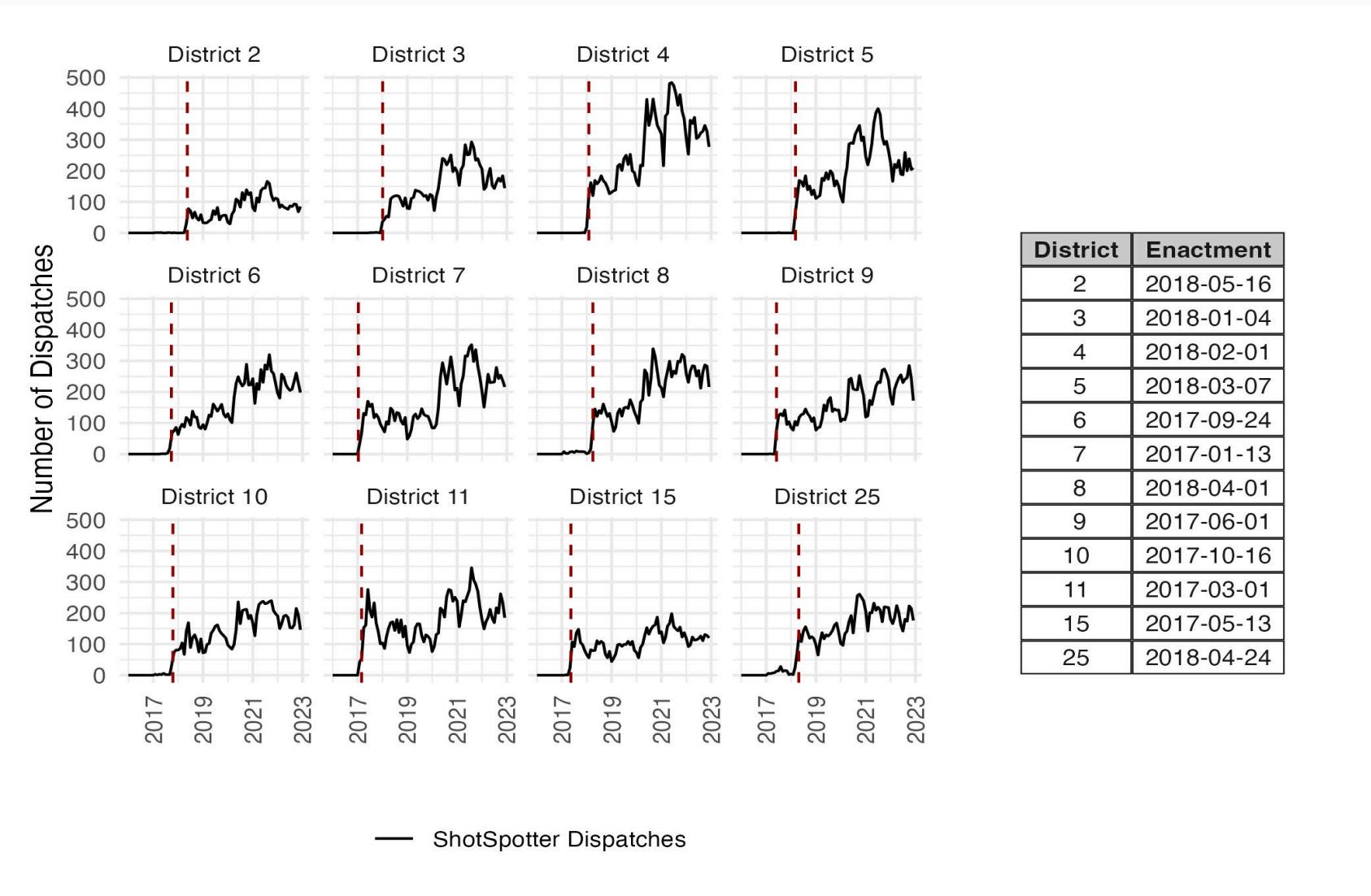
Administrative Background

- Priority 1 - same as active shooter
- Same officers responding as 911 call
- Additional: canvass 25 meter radius, add information

Number of ShotSpotter Dispatches
Chicago (2016-2022)



ShotSpotter Dispatch Trends (monthly)



Data and Empirical Strategy

Data and Sample Restrictions

Data Overview:

- Priority 1 911 Calls (2016-2022) with police dispatch
- **ShotSpotter dispatches \neq 911 call**
- Freedom of Information Act: 25 requests, 100+ emails/phone calls, 1 **lawsuit** against CPD

Sample Restrictions:

- Response time outliers 3+ Std.Dev. from mean (~1.7%)
- Negative response times (.03%)
- Days with celebratory gunfire: January 1/July 4/December 31
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	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min	Max	N
Call-to-Dispatch (seconds)	287.25 {4.79 mins}	440.55 {7.34 mins}	2.00 {0.03 mins}	3,111.00 {51.85 mins}	3,453,655
Call-to-On-Scene (seconds)	779.21 {12.99 mins}	786.87 {13.11 mins}	11.00 {0.18 mins}	7,671.00 {127.85 mins}	1,935,142

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Estimation Strategy

Specification (OLS):

$$\text{ResponseTime}_{cdt} = \beta \text{ShotSpotterActivated}_{dt} + \eta_c + \delta_d + \gamma \mathbb{X}_{f(t)} + \varepsilon_{cdt}$$

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- $\text{ResponseTime}_{cdt}$ is call c in police district d in time t .
- $\text{ShotSpotterActivated}_{dt}$ is the binary treatment
- η_c is a call-type fixed effect
- δ_d is a police district-specific fixed effect
- $\mathbb{X}_{f(t)}$ is a vector of time-varying controls:
 - Hour-of-day and day-by-month-by-year
- Standard errors clustered by police district
- Intuitively, estimation of parameter β gives the average change in response times on days with ShotSpotter accounting for expected differences in districts/time/call-types.

Potential Threats to Identification

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3. Other policies that coincide that may affect response times:

- Strategic Decision Support Centers (SDSC) and Body-Worn Cameras (BWC)

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4. OLS with staggered rollouts:

- Two-stage difference-in-differences (Gardner 2021) similar to Borusyak et al. (2021)

Results

Effect on Response Times (seconds)

	Call-to-Dispatch		Call-to-On-Scene	
	OLS	Gardner (2021)	OLS	Gardner (2021)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
ShotSpotter Activated	64.074** (22.648)	71.696*** (22.620)	102.394*** (28.649)	121.020*** (27.646)
Mean of Dependent Variable	287.246	287.246	779.213	779.213
Observations	3,453,655	3,453,623	1,935,142	1,935,116
Wild Bootstrap P-Value	0.018	X	0.007	X
Clusters	22	22	22	22

Note:

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Standard errors clustered by district. Fixed effects include hour-of-the-day, day-by-month-by-year, district, and call-type.

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Mean of Dependent Variable	271.420	271.420	779.213	779.213
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Effect on 911 Call Resolutions (percent)

	Most Frequent Final Dispositions			
	Arrest Made	Other Police Service	No Person Found	Peace Restored
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
ShotSpotter Activated	-0.238*** (0.068)	1.056* (0.592)	0.751** (0.316)	-0.558** (0.217)
Mean of Dependent Variable	2.553	41.047	21.367	6.283
Observations	3,453,655	3,453,655	3,453,655	3,453,655
Wild Bootstrap P-Value	0.002	0.039	0.002	0.001
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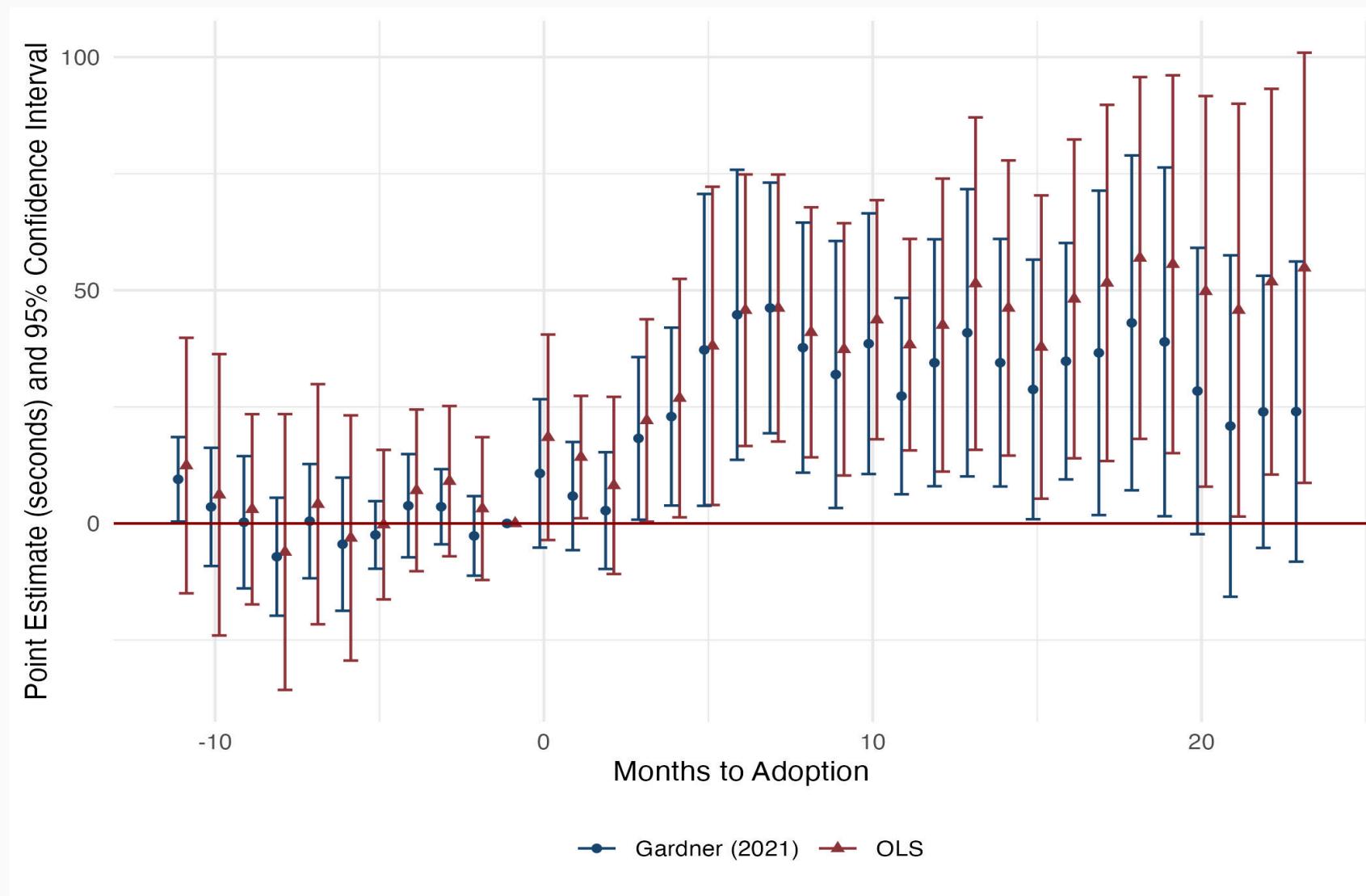
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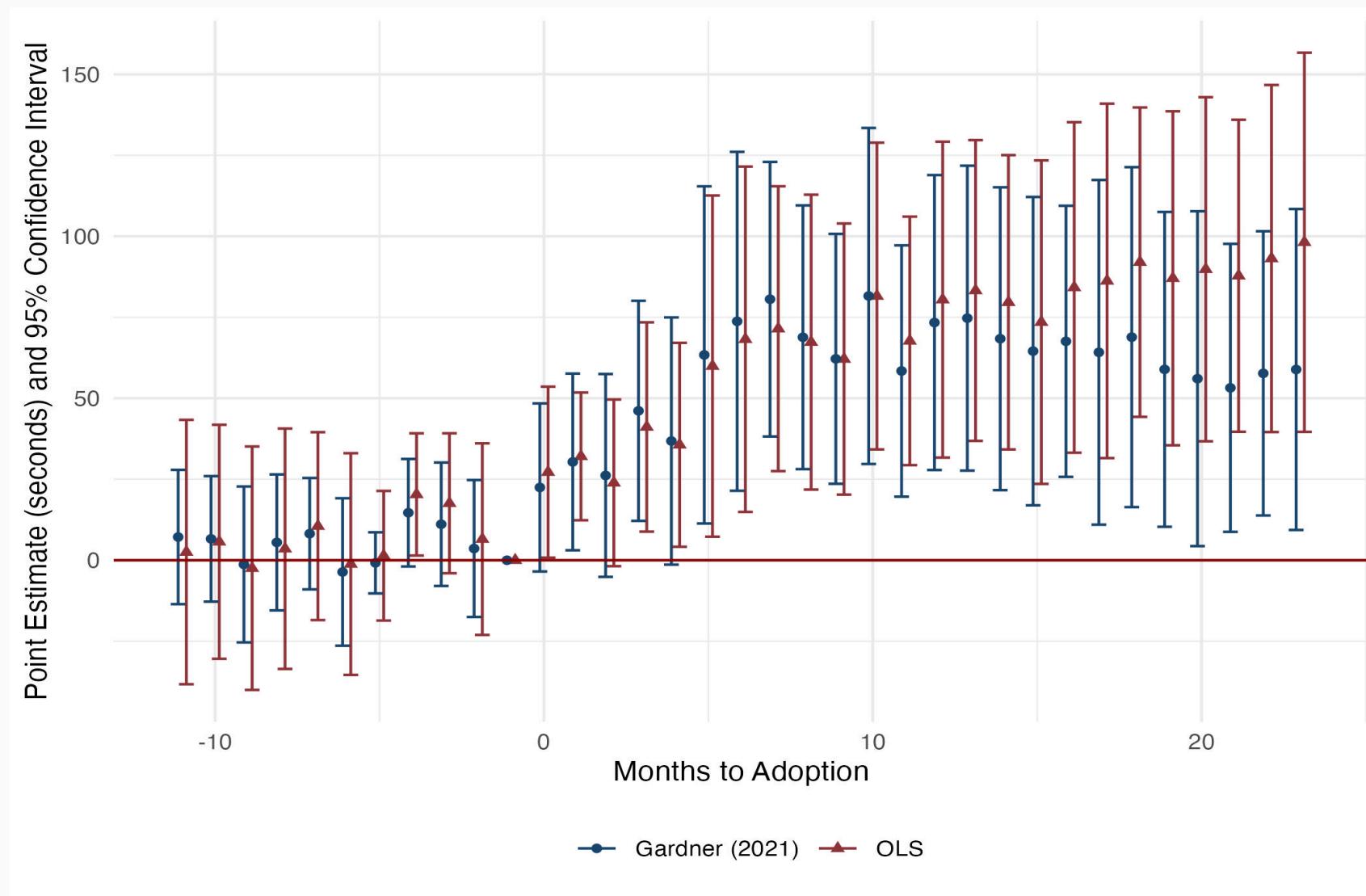
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Dynamic Effects: Call-to-Dispatch (seconds)



Dynamic Effects: Call-to-On-Scene (seconds)



Robustness

Several Tests of Robustness and Sensitivity:

- Not driven by 1 district - [See Figure](#)
 - Leave-one-out analysis
 - Both OLS/Gardner (2021)
- Sample Restrictions - [See Figure](#)
 - Omit 'Shots Fired' calls
 - Reintroduce outliers
 - Reintroduce omitted days
 - Omit 2020 (Covid-19)
- Consistency across estimators (arrests):
 - Logistic regression - [See Figure](#)
- Coinciding rollouts - [See Table](#)
 - Control for CPD initiatives:
 - Body-Worn Cameras
 - Strategic Decision Support Centers
- Sensitivity analysis - [See Figure](#)
 - Rambachan and Roth (2023)
 - Allow for linear extrapolation of pre-treatment trend

Mechanism: Resource Constraint of Police Officers

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1. Extensive Margin: Estimate most resource-constrained times

- Separate by shift-type
- Split by police-district median number of officer hours (see paper)

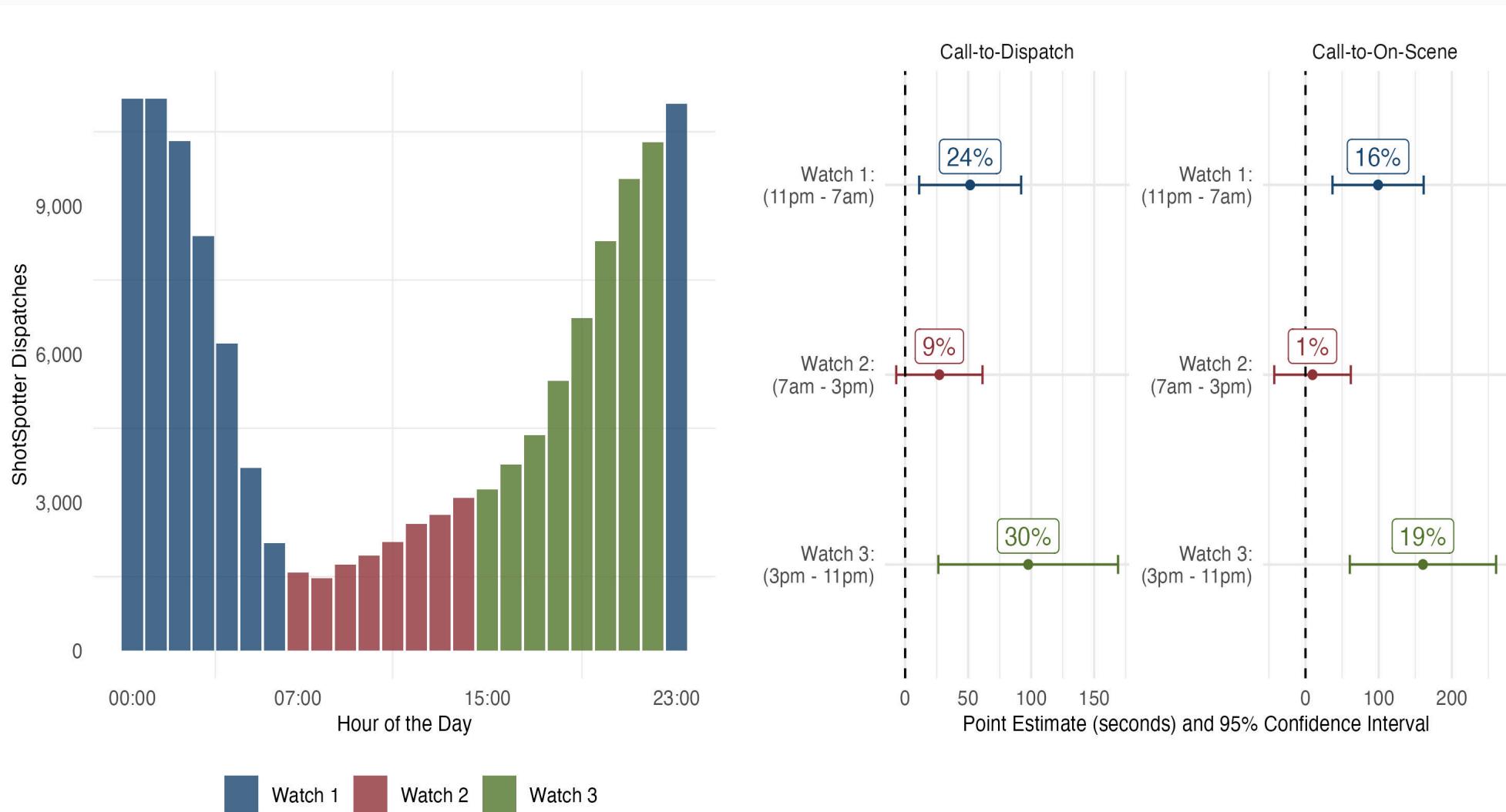
2. Intensive Margin: Use ShotSpotter dispatches as intensity measure (see paper)

- Using the number of ShotSpotter dispatches as our identifying variation, we estimate the marginal effect of an extra ShotSpotter dispatch:

$$\text{ResponseTime}_{dt} = \beta \text{NumberSSTD} \text{Dispatches}_{dt} + \delta_d + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{dt}$$

- $\text{NumberSSTD} \text{Dispatches}_{dt}$ is number of ShotSpotter dispatches in a police-district
- Restrict to only treated periods
- **Increase** of **6 (8) seconds per dispatch** for Call-to-Dispatch (On-Scene)

Extensive Margin: Shift Times



Is ShotSpotter an Effective Gun-Violence Reduction Tool?

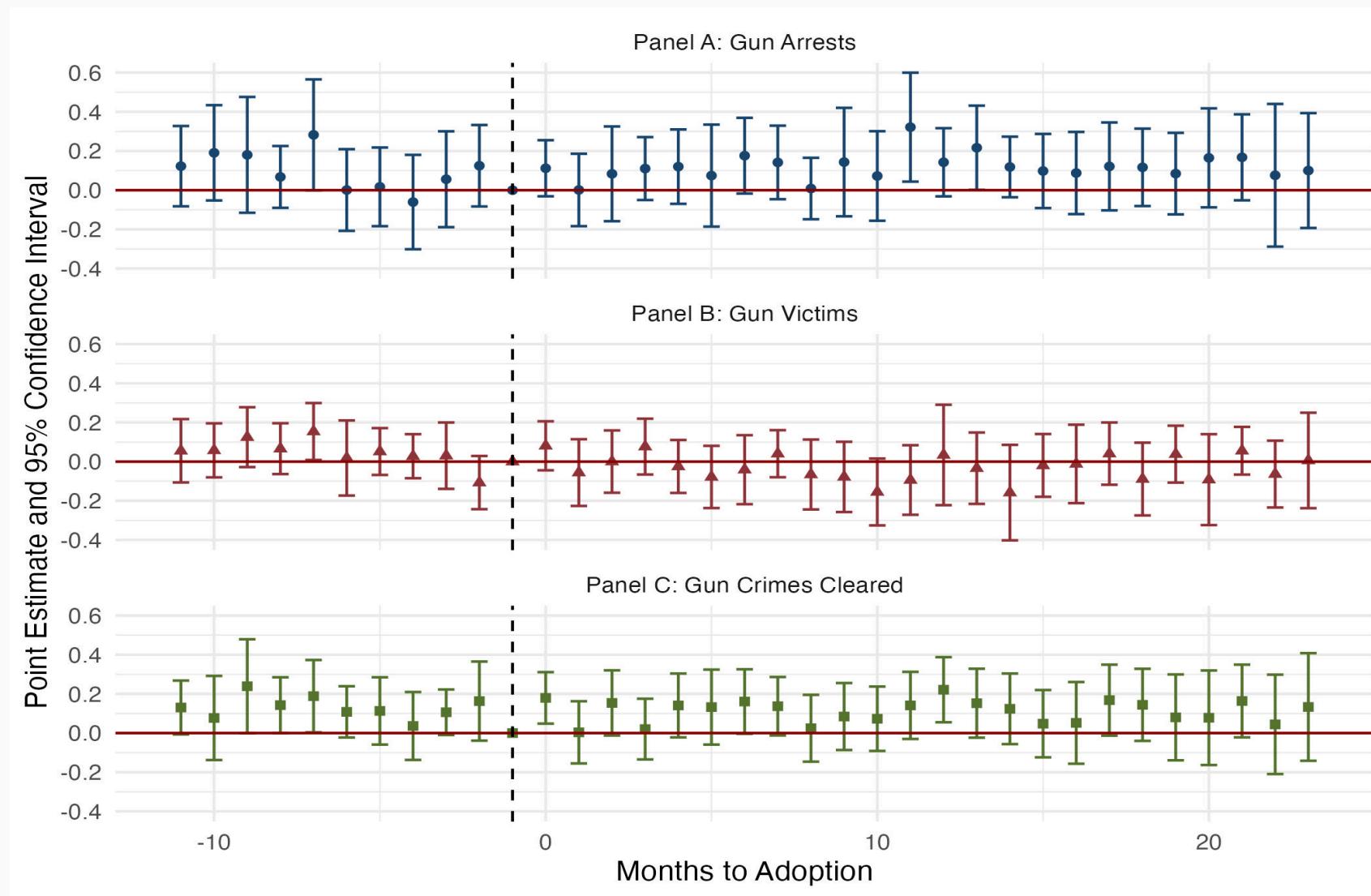
Effective Gun-Violence Reduction?

Are there benefits that outweigh the costs?

1. Use aggregate-level counts of gun-related arrests/victimization/clearance
 - Event-study analysis (Poisson Regression)
 - Little evidence of ShotSpotter reductions → no clear 1st order benefit
 - Corrobates with other Chicago studies (Connealy et al., 2024; Ferguson and Witzburg, 2021; Manes, 2021)

2. Productivity of ShotSpotter Dispatch vs. Gun-related 911 Calls
 - Descriptively compare arrest likelihoods
 - Data limitations: 2019-2022 (post-rollout)
 - **2.2%** of ShotSpotter end in arrests, **3.5%** of 911 calls (pre-rollout)

Event Study: Gun-related Outcomes (Poisson)



Conclusion

Contribution:

- An in-depth analysis on unintended consequences of ShotSpotter
- Workforce technology: prior evaluation for desired outcomes

Main Findings: Longer Response

- Call-to-Dispatch (+1 minute/ 23%)/ Call-to-On-Scene (+2 minutes/ 13%)
 - Longer response times ⇒ lower arrest likelihood (9% decrease)

Mechanism: Resource Constraint

- More officers needed to mitigate unintended consequences

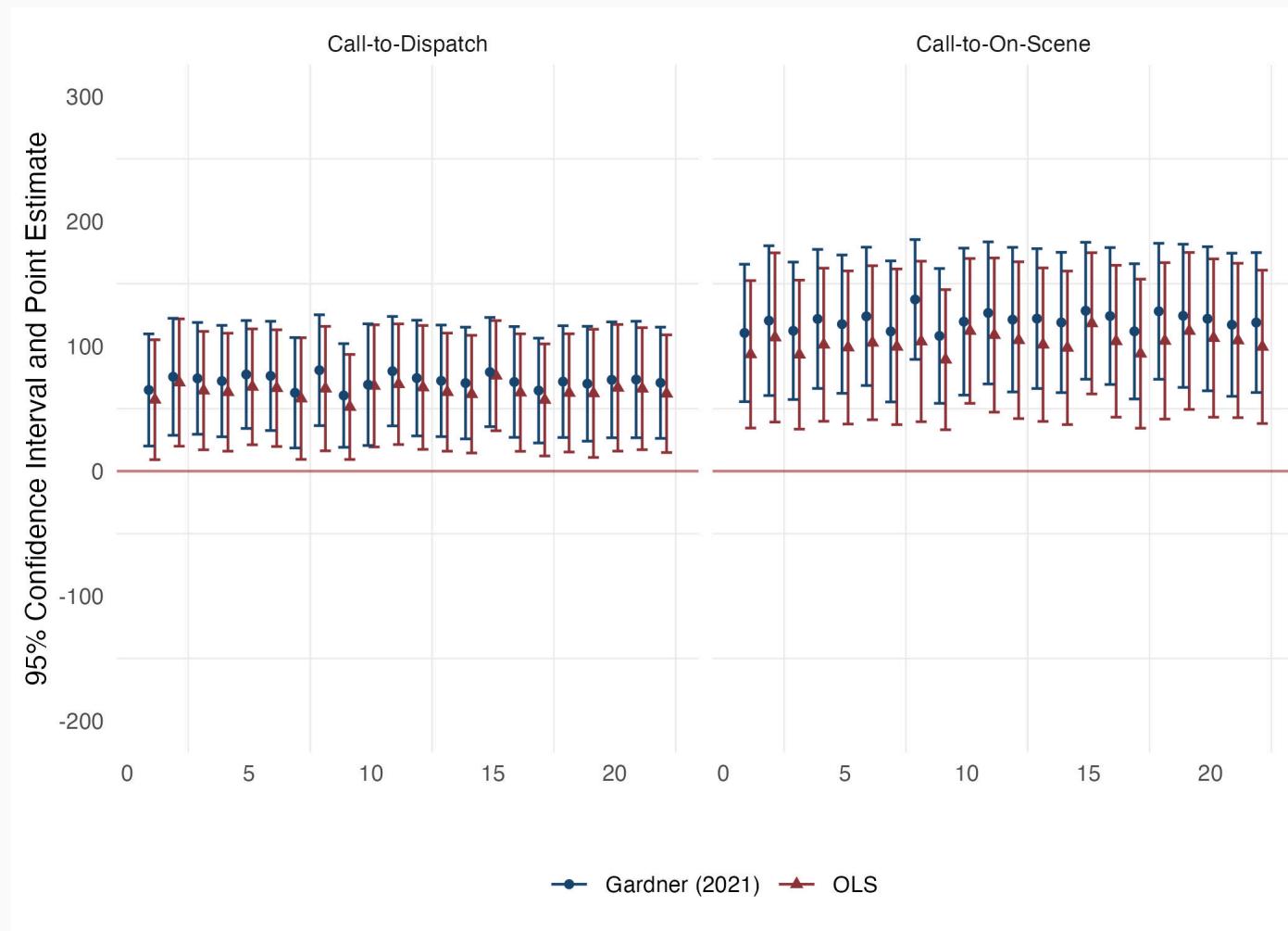
Thank you

Lawsuit

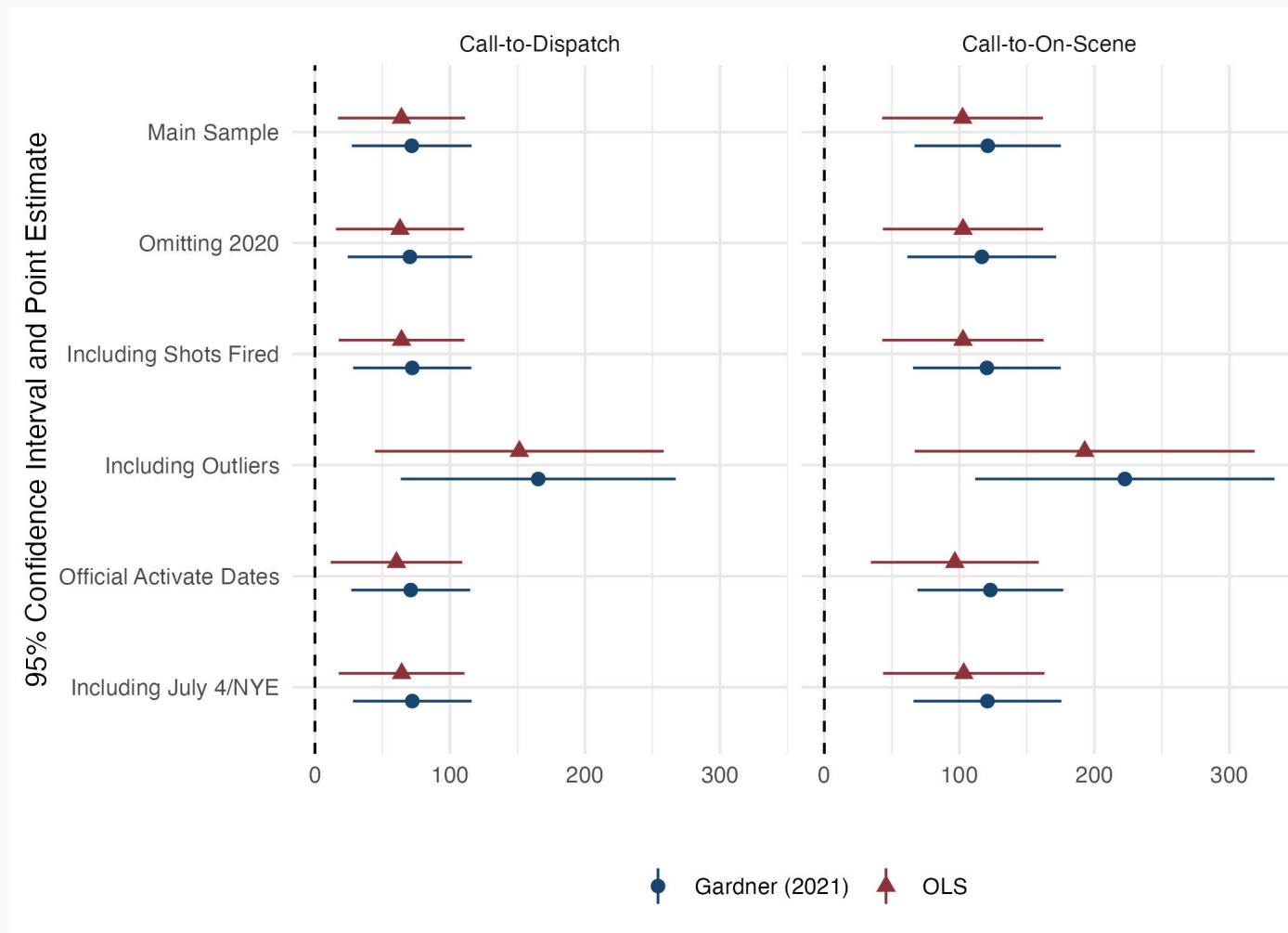
<p>Hearing Date: 9/21/2023 9:30 AM Location: Court Room 2402 Judge: Price Walker, Allen</p> <p>FILED DATE: 5/24/2023 2:20 PM 2023CH05086</p>	<p>FILED 5/24/2023 2:20 PM IRIS Y. MARTINEZ CIRCUIT CLERK COOK COUNTY, IL 2023CH05086 Calendar, 3 22865224</p> <p>IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS COUNTY DEPARTMENT, CHANCERY DIVISION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2023CH05086</p> <p>MICHAEL TOPPER,)) Plaintiff,)) v.)) CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT,)) Defendant.)</p>	<p>COMPLAINT</p> <p>NOW COMES Plaintiff MICHAEL TOPPER, by the undersigned attorneys Loevy & Loevy, and brings this suit to overturn CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT's willful violation of the Illinois Freedom of Information Act. TOPPER made a FOIA request to CPD for arrest records. Even though TOPPER provided CPD multiple opportunities to remedy its noncompliance, CPD refused to comply with FOIA. In support of the Complaint, TOPPER states as follows:</p> <p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>1. Pursuant to the fundamental philosophy of the American constitutional form of government, it is the public policy of the State of Illinois that all persons are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts and policies of those who represent them as public officials and public employees consistent with the terms of the Illinois Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"). 5 ILCS 140/1.</p> <p>2. Restraints on access to information, to the extent permitted by FOIA, are limited</p>
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Leave-one-out



Robustness Across Samples



Effect on Arrest Likelihood (Logit)

	Effect on Arrest Likelihood (Logit)					
	Gun-Relation			Most Frequent Final Dispositions		
	Pooled	Gun	Non-Gun	Other Police Service	No Person Found	Peace Restored
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
ShotSpotter Activated	-0.085*** (0.023)	-0.053 (0.059)	-0.091*** (0.025)	0.050* (0.026)	0.045** (0.021)	-0.101*** (0.033)
Mean of Dependent Variable	0.025	0.035	0.024	0.418	0.213	0.061
Observations	3,575,901	312,613	3,257,964	3,582,487	3,582,140	3,580,087
Clusters	22	22	22	22	22	22

Note:

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Standard errors clustered by district. Estimates are not scaled by 100.

Back to Robustness

Controlling for BWC and SDSC (Dispatch)

	SDSC Controls			BWC Controls		
	Omitting Districts 7 and 9					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
ShotSpotter Activated	75.429*** (25.028)	71.817*** (22.497)	84.736*** (26.894)	90.334*** (22.057)	61.256*** (20.988)	71.856*** (22.523)
SDSC Activated	-36.742** (16.585)		-48.221** (16.930)			
BWC Activated					-30.735 (20.755)	
Mean of Dependent Variable	281.890	281.890	289.018	289.018	281.890	281.890
Observations	3,582,560	3,582,528	3,198,525	3,198,500	3,582,560	3,582,528
Wild Bootstrap P-Value	0.006		0.004		0.010	
Gardner (2021) Robust	X		X		X	

Note:

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

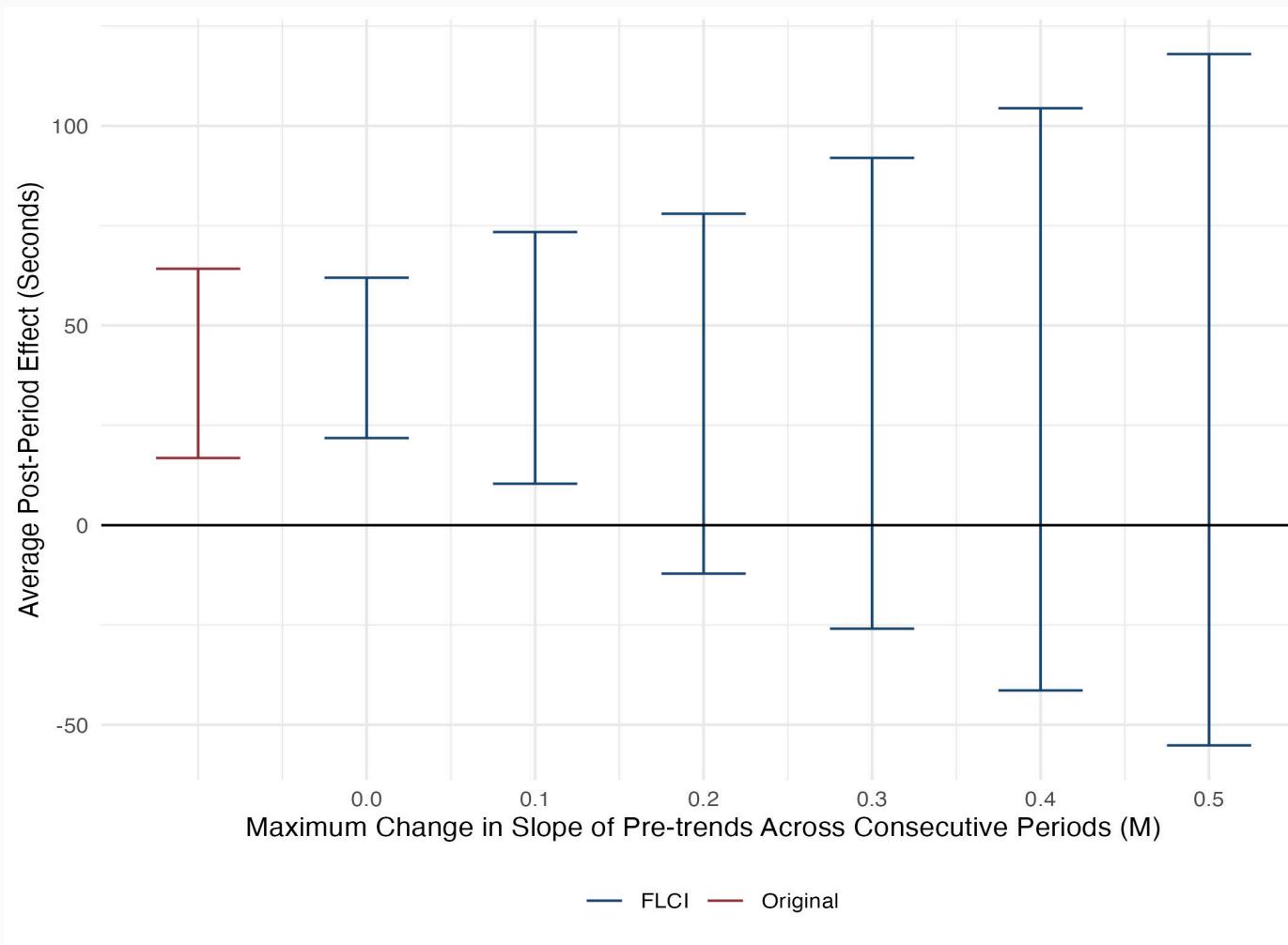
Controlling for BWC and SDSC (On-Scene)

	SDSC Controls			BWC Controls		
	Omitting Districts 7 and 9					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
ShotSpotter Activated	120.530*** (30.436)	120.080*** (28.141)	127.822*** (32.875)	145.931*** (24.339)	98.403*** (27.843)	120.214*** (28.246)
SDSC Activated	-60.324*** (18.978)		-71.208*** (20.381)			
BWC Activated					-40.821 (26.223)	
Mean of Dependent Variable	770.863	770.863	790.897	790.897	770.863	770.863
Observations	1,997,102	1,997,076	1,762,676	1,762,656	1,997,102	1,997,076
Wild Bootstrap P-Value	0.002		0.001		0.002	
Gardner (2021) Robust	X		X		X	

Note:

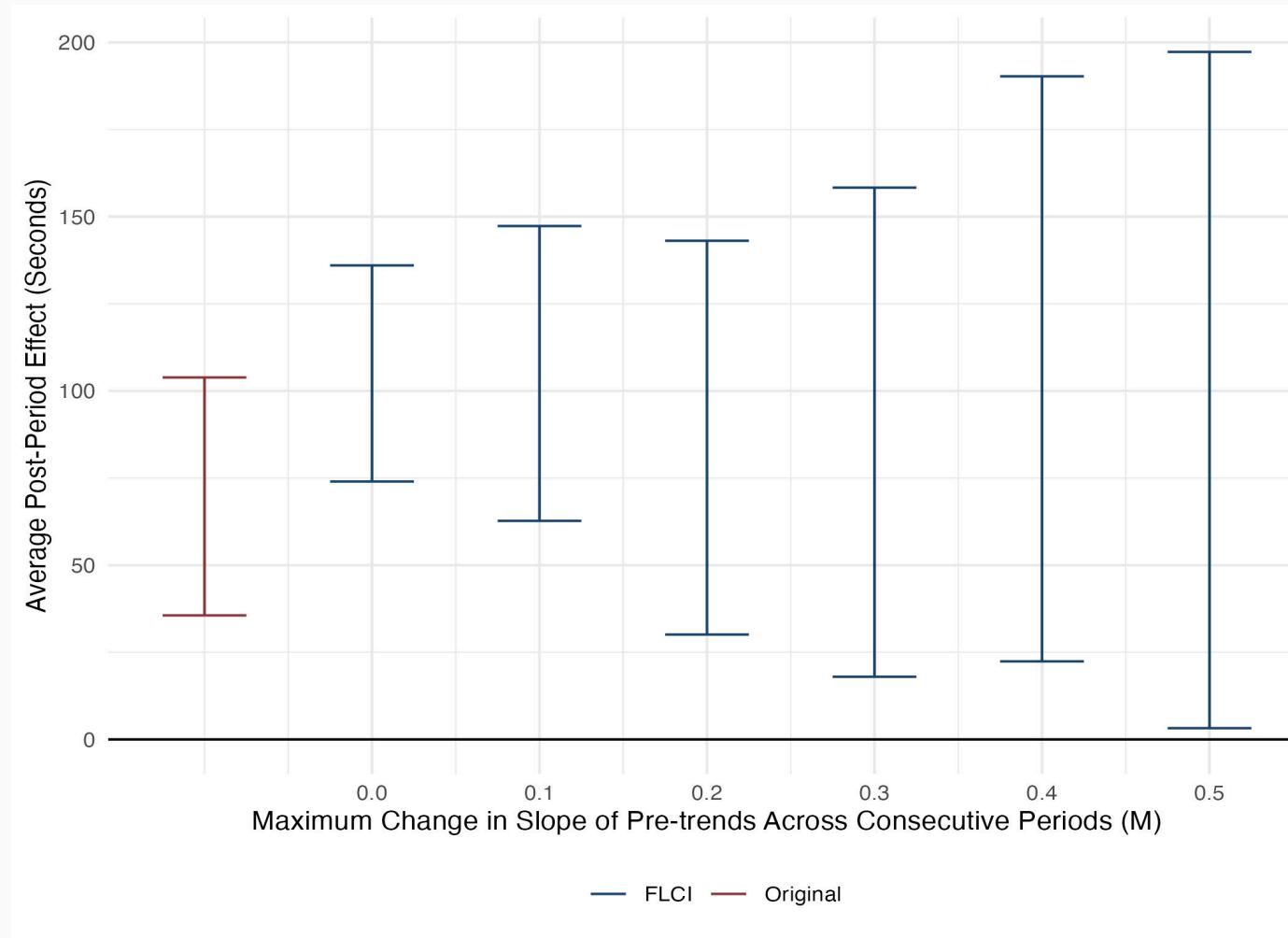
* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

Rambachan and Roth 2023: Sensitivity Analysis



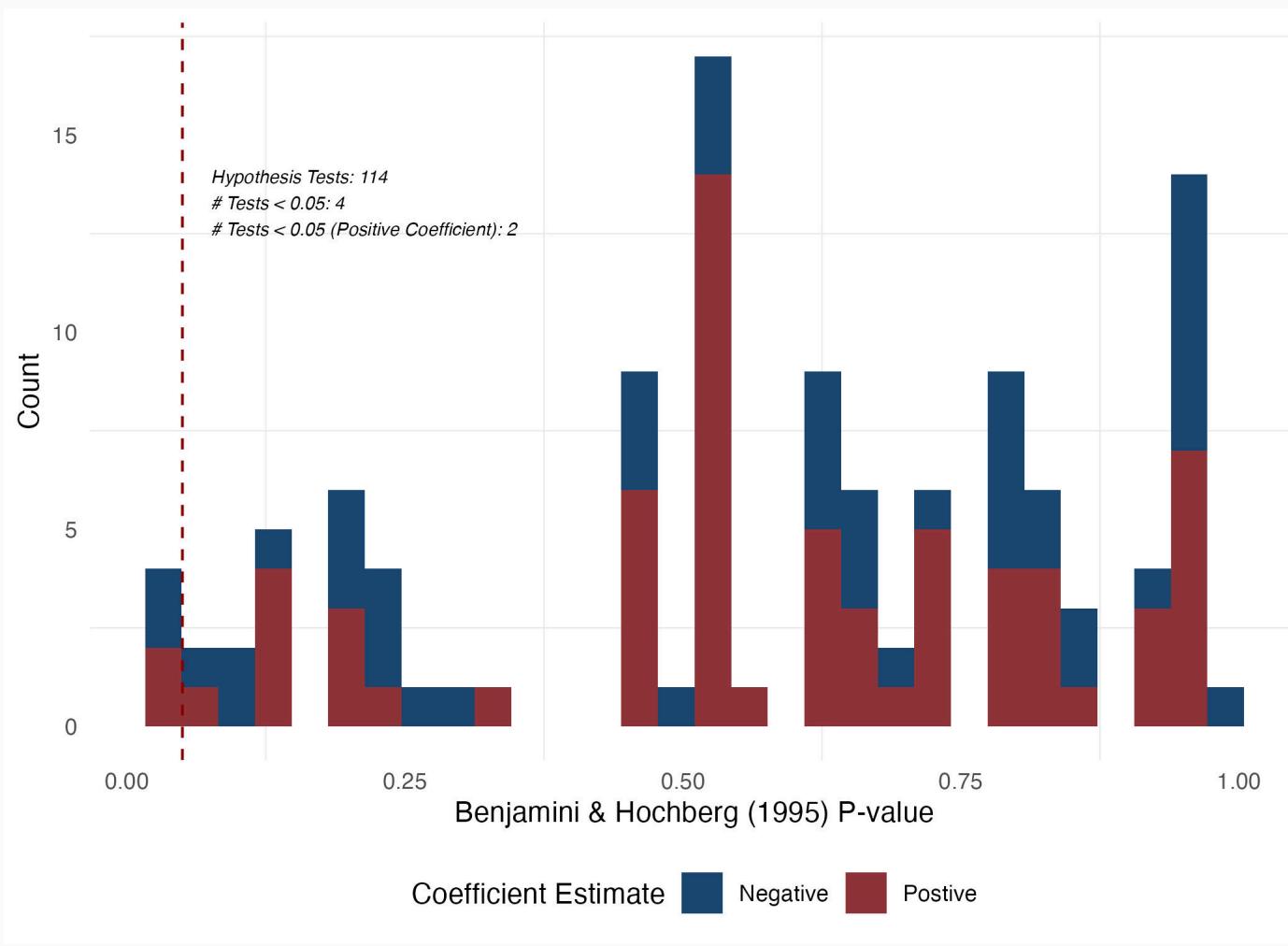
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Rambachan and Roth 2023: Sensitivity Analysis



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Call Composition Test: FDR P-values



Back to Assumptions