

Fact sheet: CA Senate Bill 54 and Crime

UCI School of Social Ecology

Senate Bill 54, which made California a sanctuary state in 2017, has been blamed for rising crime, yet no research has evaluated this claim. Using a novel method of policy analysis to compare crime rates in California with and without SB54, our findings reveal this policy did not have a significant impact on crime.

-Charis Kubrin (professor of criminology, law and society) and Bradley Bartos (Ph.D. candidate in criminology, law and society)

California's Senate Bill 54, enacted in 2017, limits local officials' involvement in enforcement of federal immigration law. It includes:

- 1) **Don't Ask Policies:** limit but do not completely prohibit local officials from inquiring about immigration status.
- 2) **Don't Enforce Policies:** limit local officials' involvement in arrests, detention of immigrants for immigration law violations.
- 3) **Don't Tell Policies:** limit sharing of information with federal immigration authorities.

Proponents believed SB54 would create greater trust and cooperation between law enforcement and immigrants. Opponents claimed crime rates would rise, arguing sanctuary policies encourage illegal immigration and undermine federal enforcement efforts. What impact did SB54 have on crime in California? This study, the first of its kind, addresses this question.

STUDY DESIGN:

We constructed a synthetic control group to approximate California's crime rates had SB54 not been enacted. This "synthetic California" is a weighted combination of other states' crime rates that closely matched California's from 1970 to 2017. None of the states that comprise Synthetic California enacted a state-level sanctuary policy prior to 2017, so the difference in 2018 crime rates between California and its synthetic counterpart reflects the impact of SB54 on crime.

2018 VIOLENT AND PROPERTY CRIME RATES IN CALIFORNIA:

We compared California's 2018 violent and property crime rates to those of Synthetic California.

Our findings suggest **SB54's impact on statewide violent and property crime was null**. That is, SB54 did not have a significant impact on either violent or property crime (see Figures 1 & 2).

Synthetic control group post-estimation tests confirm the findings, indicating that the estimates of SB54's impact were unlikely to be spurious and were not sensitive to changes in Synthetic California's composition.



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This fact sheet is based on a forthcoming study in *Justice Evaluation Journal* by researchers at the University of California, Irvine's School of Social Ecology. Co-author Charis Kubrin, professor of criminology, law and society, has studied crime trends for 20 years, while co-author

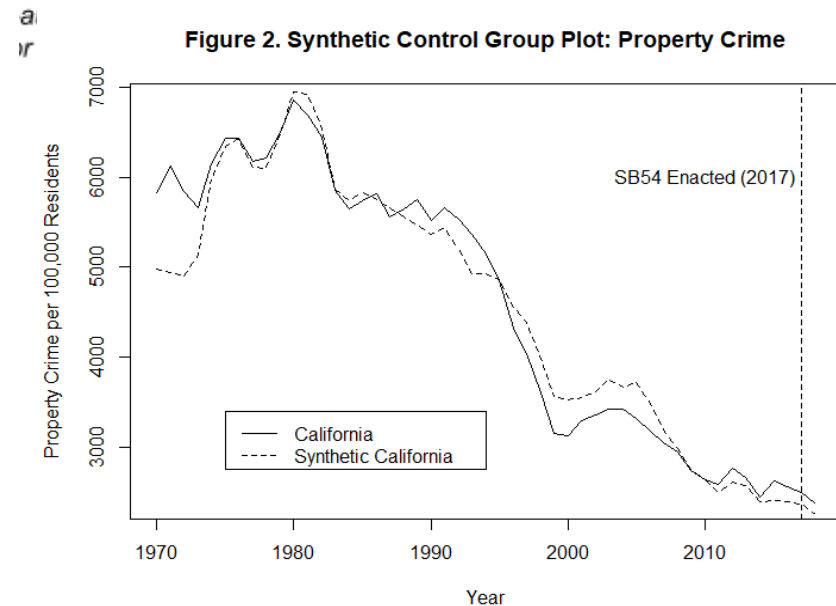
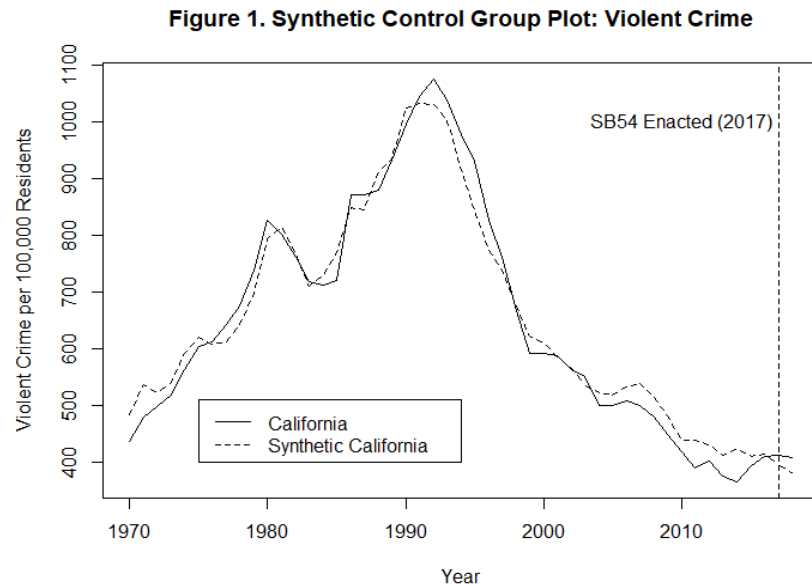


Figure 1 plots California's observed violent crime time series (solid black line) against Synthetic California's (dashed black line), with a vertical reference line at 2017, which breaks the figure into pre- and post-intervention segments. As evident Figure 1, the two series track quite well throughout the pre-SB54 time period, and while small departures from their parallel relationship occur, the fit is strong enough to detect even a moderately-sized impact. Following SB54's enactment, California's observed violent crime rate in 2018 remained almost equal to its 2017 rate, while Synthetic California declined slightly. The gap between California and its synthetic control in 2018 is smaller than the average gap of the pre-intervention time series, indicating a null impact of SB54 on violent crime statewide.

Figure 2 displays the results for property crime. Unlike the violent crime model, the matching algorithm struggled to fit a synthetic control unit that tracks with California in a handful of time periods. At the same time, California's property crime rate and its synthetic control track closely through the end of the time series. As Figure 2 reveals, property crime in California and its synthetic control declined by a similar amount in 2018, once again suggesting a null effect of SB54 on property crime statewide.

In sum, SB54's impact on statewide violent and property crime was null. These findings were confirmed in post-estimation tests.

Findings from this study and research on immigration and crime more broadly suggest that major reductions in crime in the United States are unlikely to follow from any proposed changes to immigration policies.