Discussion of: "Impact of Focused Deterrence on Lived Experiences With Gangs and Gun Violence: Extending Effects Beyond Officially Recorded Crime"

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Views expressed here are my own and do not represent those of my employer.

Research design

- This paper considers the effect of a focused deterrence program on the number of shootings in the targeted neighborhood
    - 28 repeat gun offenders in the target area invited to meeting; 24 showed up

- Uses a "before-and-after non-equivalent control group quasi-experimental design" 🤔

    - **Primarily a pre-post design**
    - Predicted post-treatment shootings based on pre-treatment shootings
    - Compared actual post-treatment shootings with that predicted number

- Repeated this exercise in two comparison areas:
    - Comparison 1 was another high-violence (but safer) neighborhood
    - Comparison 2 was the rest of the city

This is not a strong research design

- **This research design does not plausibly measure the causal effects of this intervention**

- What should they have done?

- If they expect a sudden effect of the intervention on gun violence, conduct an **event study** — essentially an RD with time as the running variable
    - Predicting post-treatment trends is weird; let the actual data speak

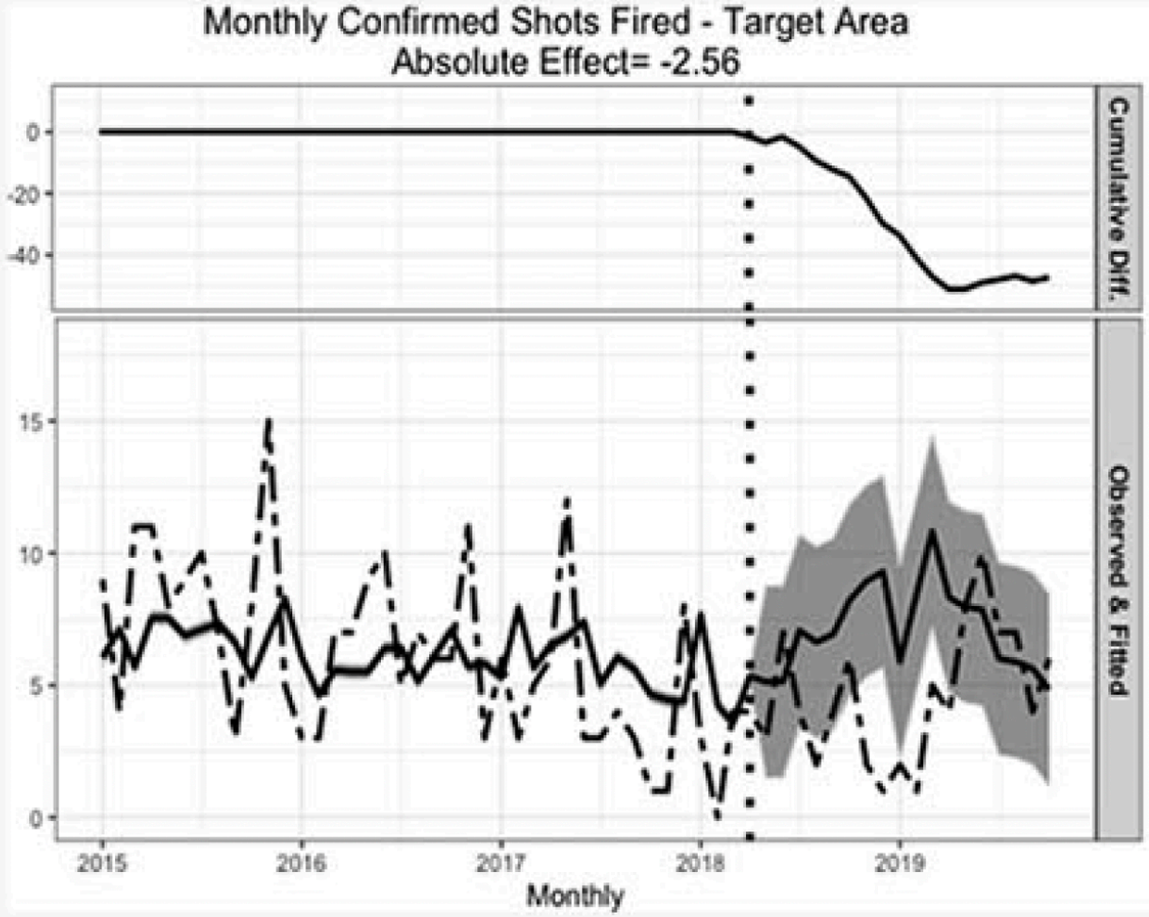
- Even better: Conduct a **difference-in-differences** analysis with the Comparison 1 area as the comparison group
    - Show that pre-trends in shootings before the intervention were parallel across these areas

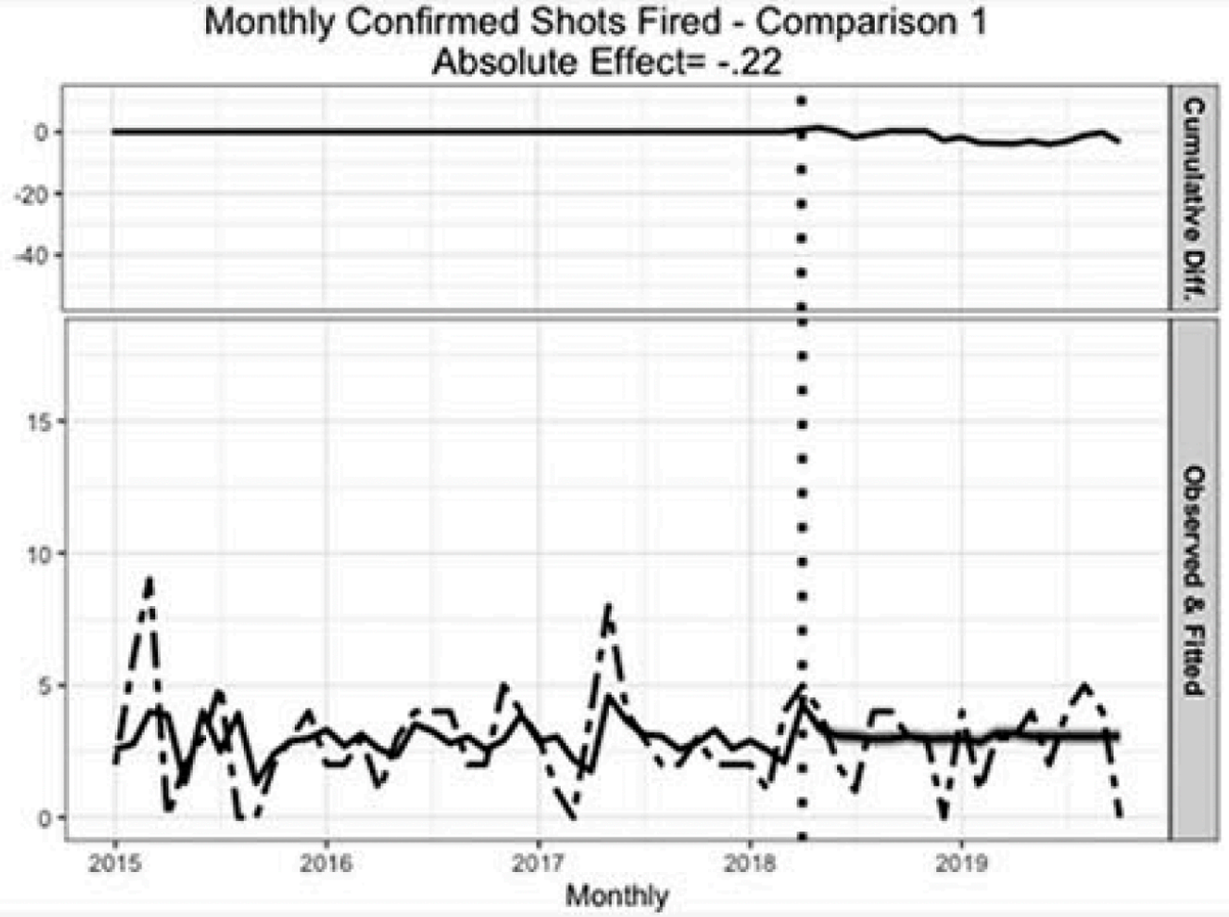
Potential confounder: increased policing!

plain-clothes detective) went door-to-door and spoke to residents about violence in the area and provided a brochure about the FD program. FD project staff also participated in two community barbeques in the area to share information with residents about the FD program and discuss violence and safety, in summer 2018 and 2019. In response to three high-profile shooting incidents during the implementation period, in October and November 2018 and September 2019, week-long enforcement actions were imposed. Enforcement actions entailed saturation patrols in the target area and intensive surveillance of FD targets and their gang-involved associates. As Kennedy (2009) suggests, these geographically focused efforts were designed to not only alter the choices of repeat gang-involved shooters but also change perceptions among the community residents where the shootings were happening.

Results

- Dashed lines are actual shootings
- Solid lines are predicted shootings
- Entire difference is driven by predicted rise in shootings based on pre-period trend(?)
- **If you just look at the dashed lines, it doesn't look like anything is happening here**
    - If there's a downward shift, it begins before the intervention





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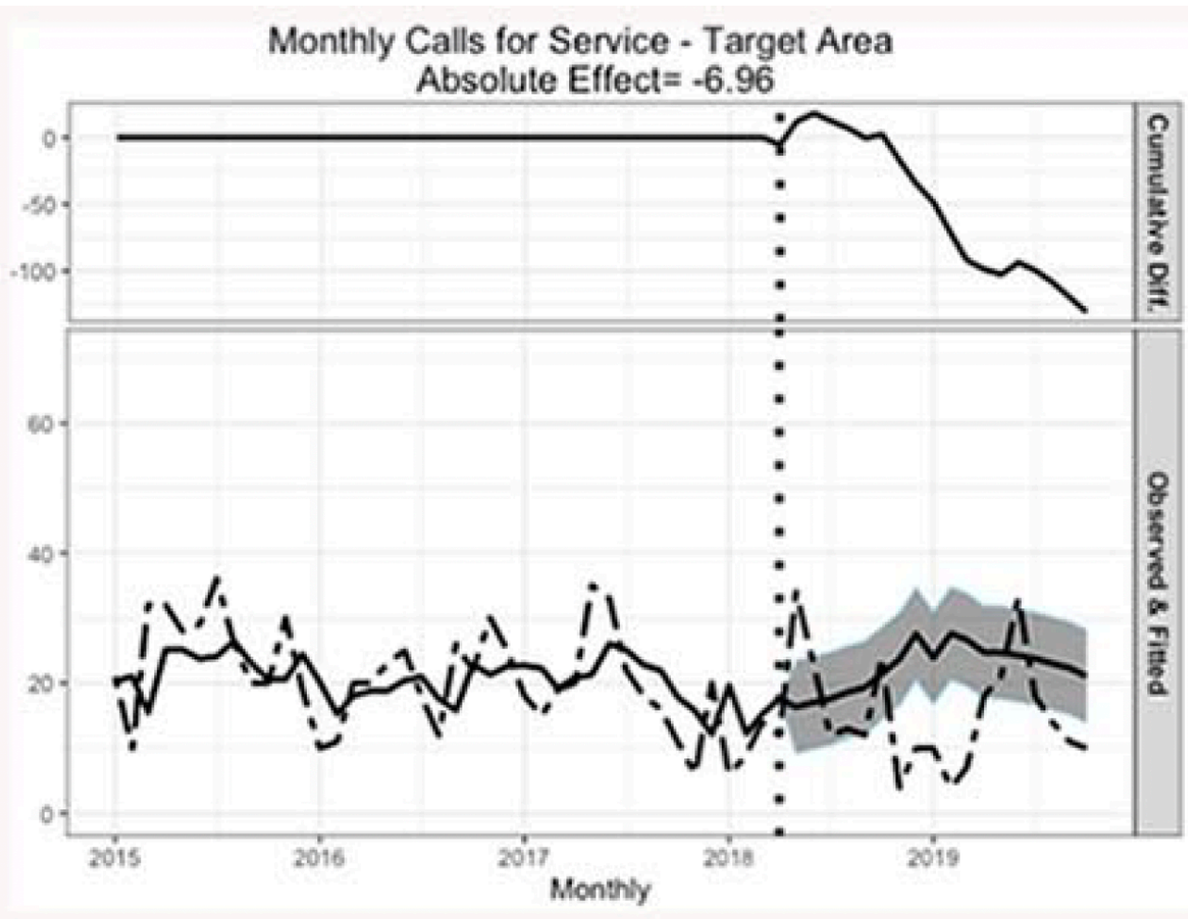

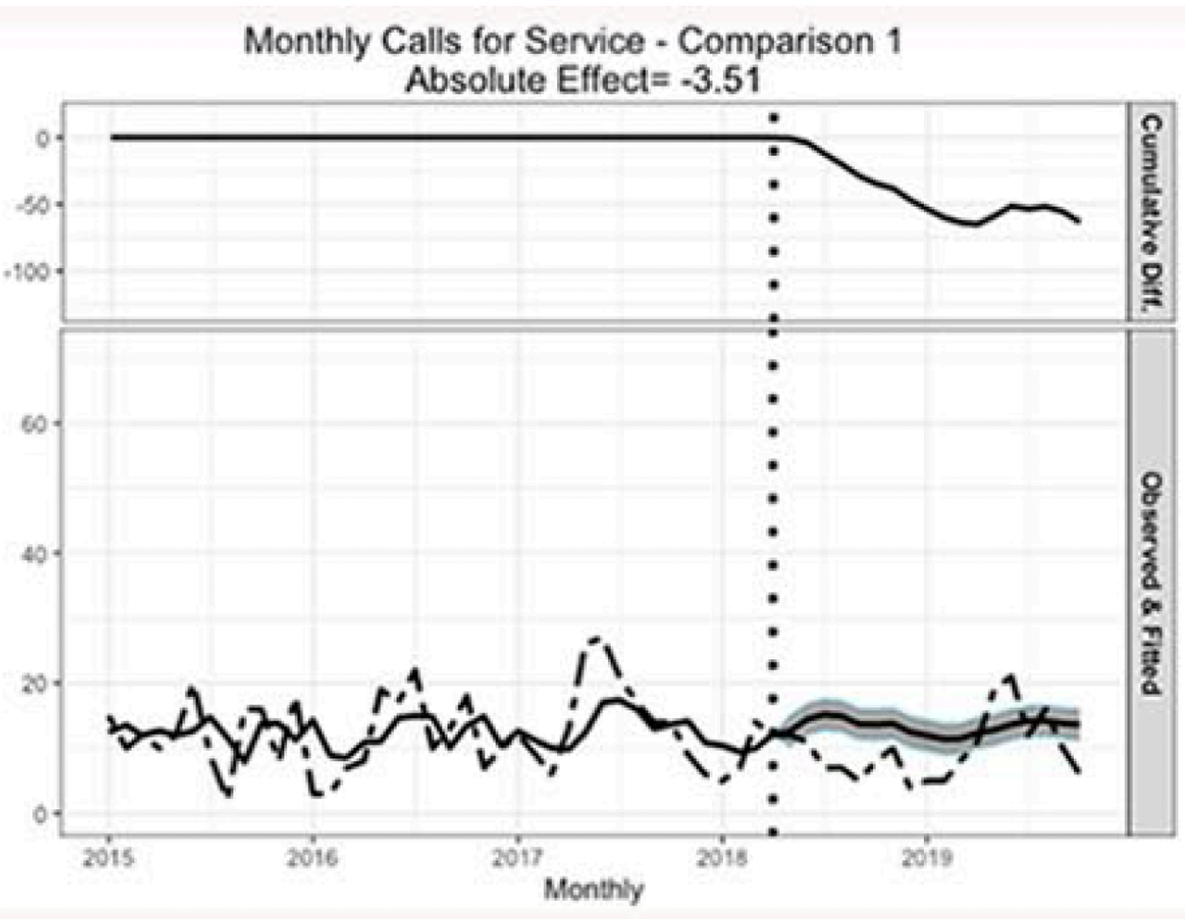

CrimeSolutions rating

- CrimeSolutions rated this intervention as "Promising" based on these results

- **My recommendation would have been: "No evidence"** (not an option!)
    - This study should not have been included in this database, due to the weak research design

Broader comments on CrimeSolutions

- Rating options are Effective, Promising, or No Effects
    - Is anything with a weak design or imprecisely-measured outcomes rated Promising?
    - What if an intervention has detrimental effects?

- The current panel of rates does not have strong causal inference expertise
    - Change the pool of raters
    - They don't need to be economists, but having some economists in the mix would help!

- **My view is that CrimeSolutions in its current form is counterproductive**
    - Numerous studies are inaccurately rated, either because reviewers don't understand the methods, or their rubric leads them astray
    - I don't trust the website as a source of information, and advise policymakers to ignore it
    - **Please take it down and start from scratch**