

CRIME, QUARANTINE, AND THE U.S. CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC*

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*Lopez, Ernesto, and Richard Rosenfeld. 2021. Crime, quarantine, and the U.S. coronavirus pandemic. *Criminology & Public Policy* 20: 401-422.

Rosenfeld, Richard, Bobby Boxerman, and Ernesto Lopez. 2022. *Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities*. Washington, D.C.: Council on Criminal Justice.

Overview

- Pandemic, crime, and criminology
- Prior research
- Our study
- Changes in population mobility, routine activity, and crime
- Crime trends during the height of the pandemic and since
- The role of post-Floyd social unrest
- Data access and limitations

Pandemic and Criminology

“The largest criminological experiment in history.”

Stickle and Felson (2020)

Prior Research and Current Study

- Most studies limited to a few weeks or months after beginning of pandemic
- Studies returned mixed results depending on place, time, and offense
- Current research
 - Longer time period (January 2017 – December 2020)
 - More offenses (homicide, aggravated assaults, gun assault, domestic violence, robbery, residential burglary, nonresidential burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, drug offenses)
 - More cities (N=31; not all offenses available for each city)
 - Direct measure of population mobility (Google cellphone location data)
 - Interrupted time-series analysis and fixed-effects panel models

Routine Activity Hypothesis

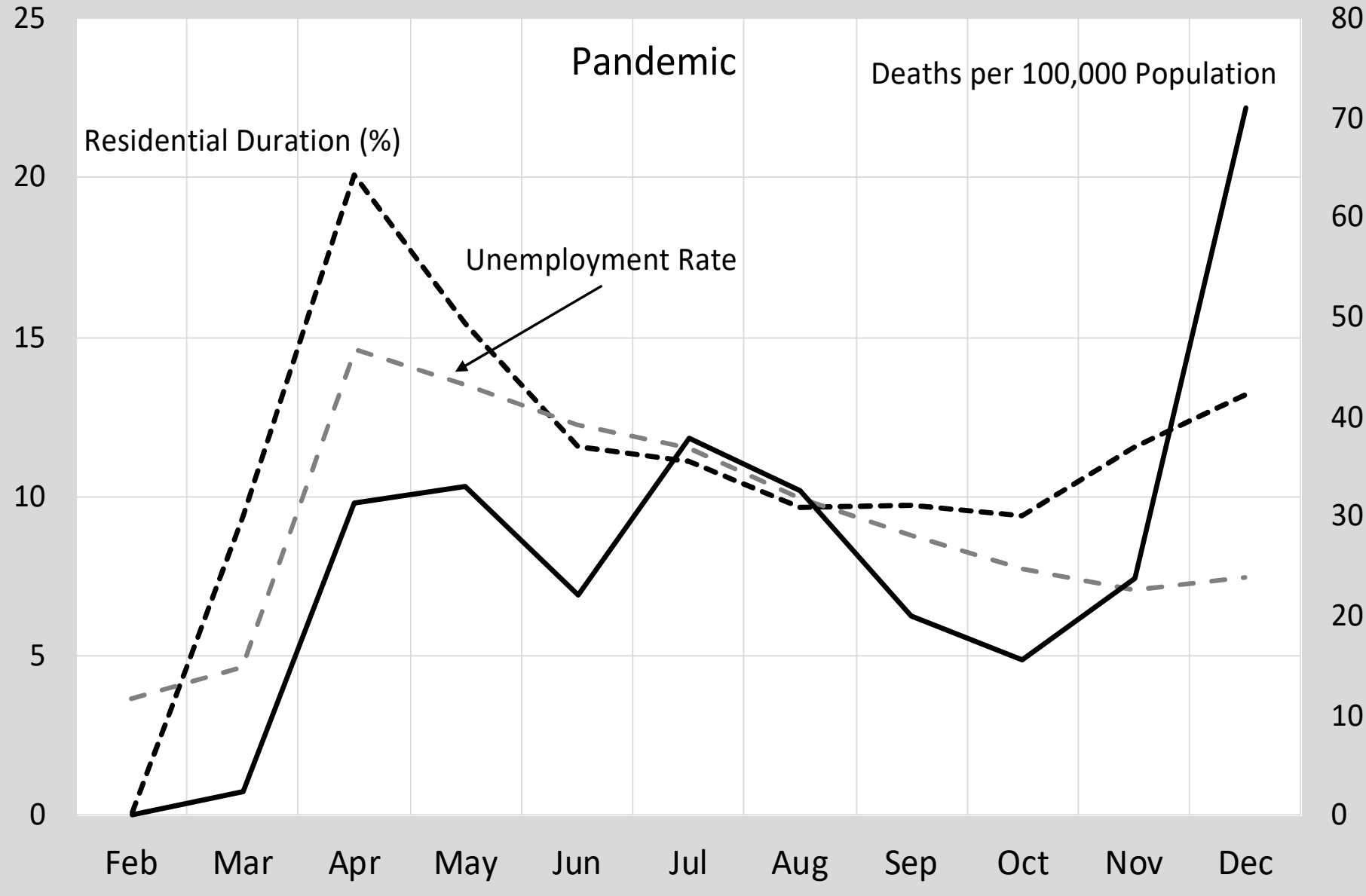
“The dispersion of activities away from households and families increases the opportunity for crime and thus generates higher crime rates”

Cohen and Felson (1979)

Residential Duration,* COVID Deaths, and Unemployment in 31 Cities, 2020

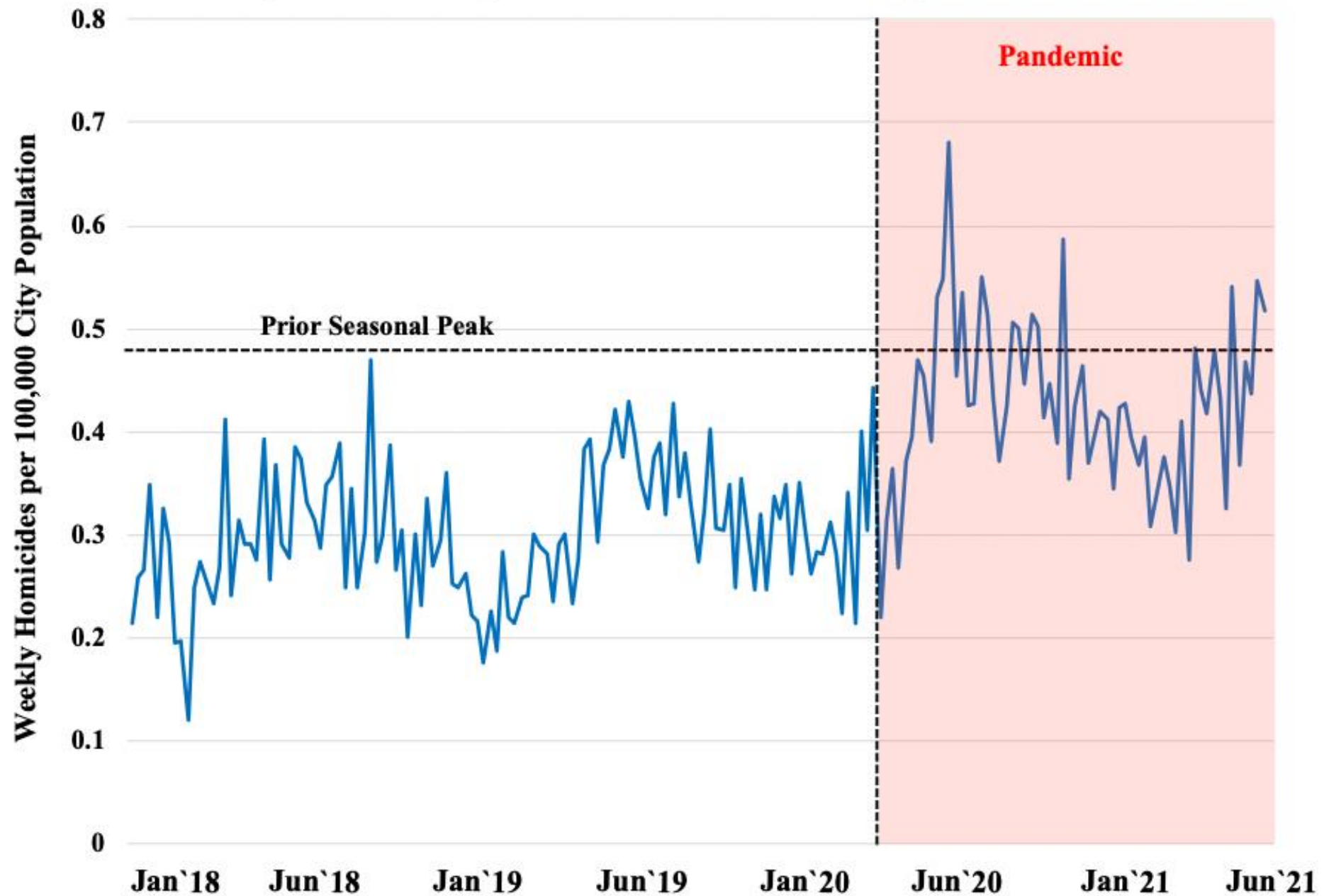
*Percentage Change in Time Spent at Home
Since February 2020

Figure 11. Average Monthly COVID Death Rate, Unemployment Rate, and Residential Duration, 2020 (N=31)



Crime Trends

Figure 1. Average Homicide Rate, January 2018 - June 2021



**Figure 5. Average Domestic Violence Rate,
January 2018 - June 2021**

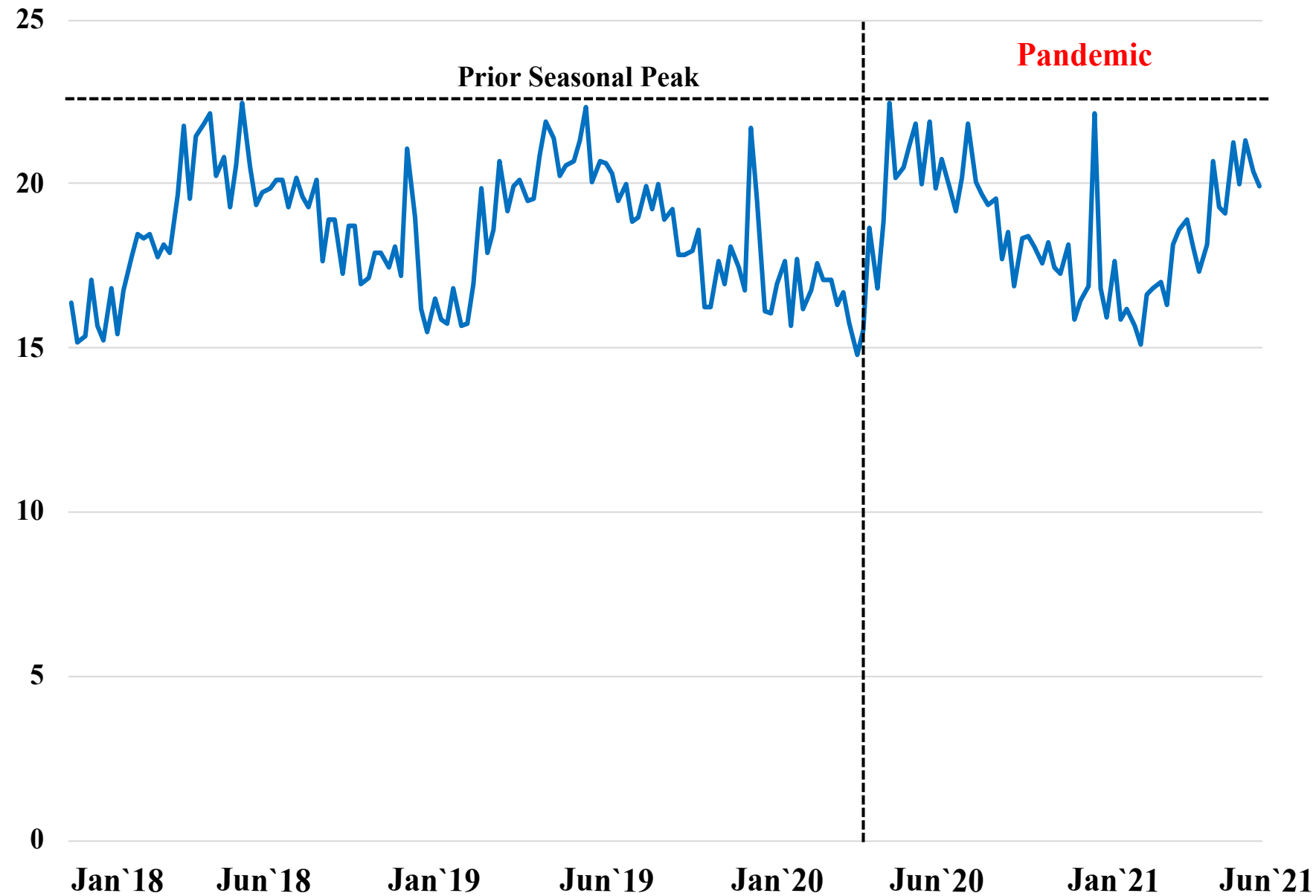


Figure 6. Average Robbery Rate, January 2018 - June 2021

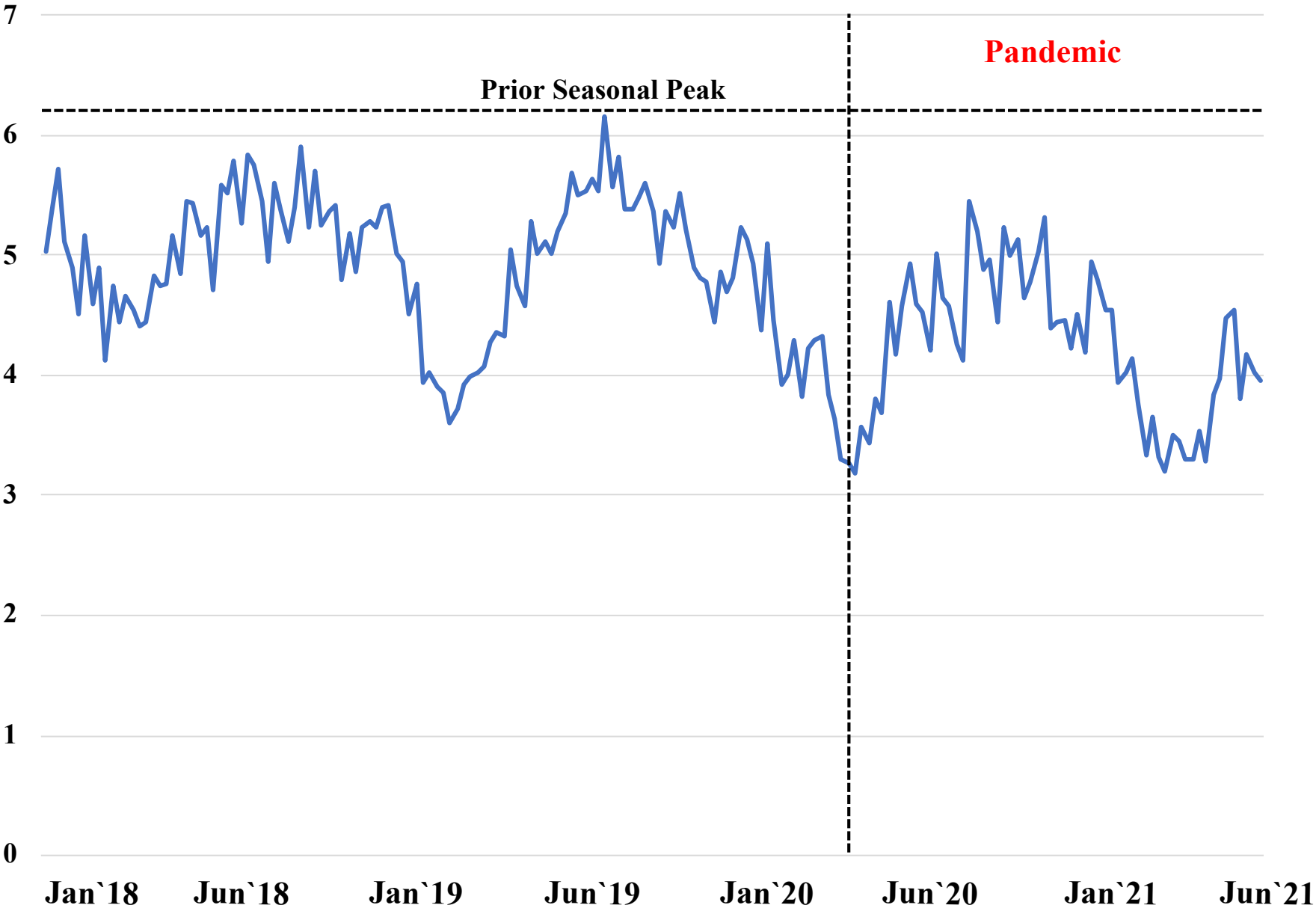
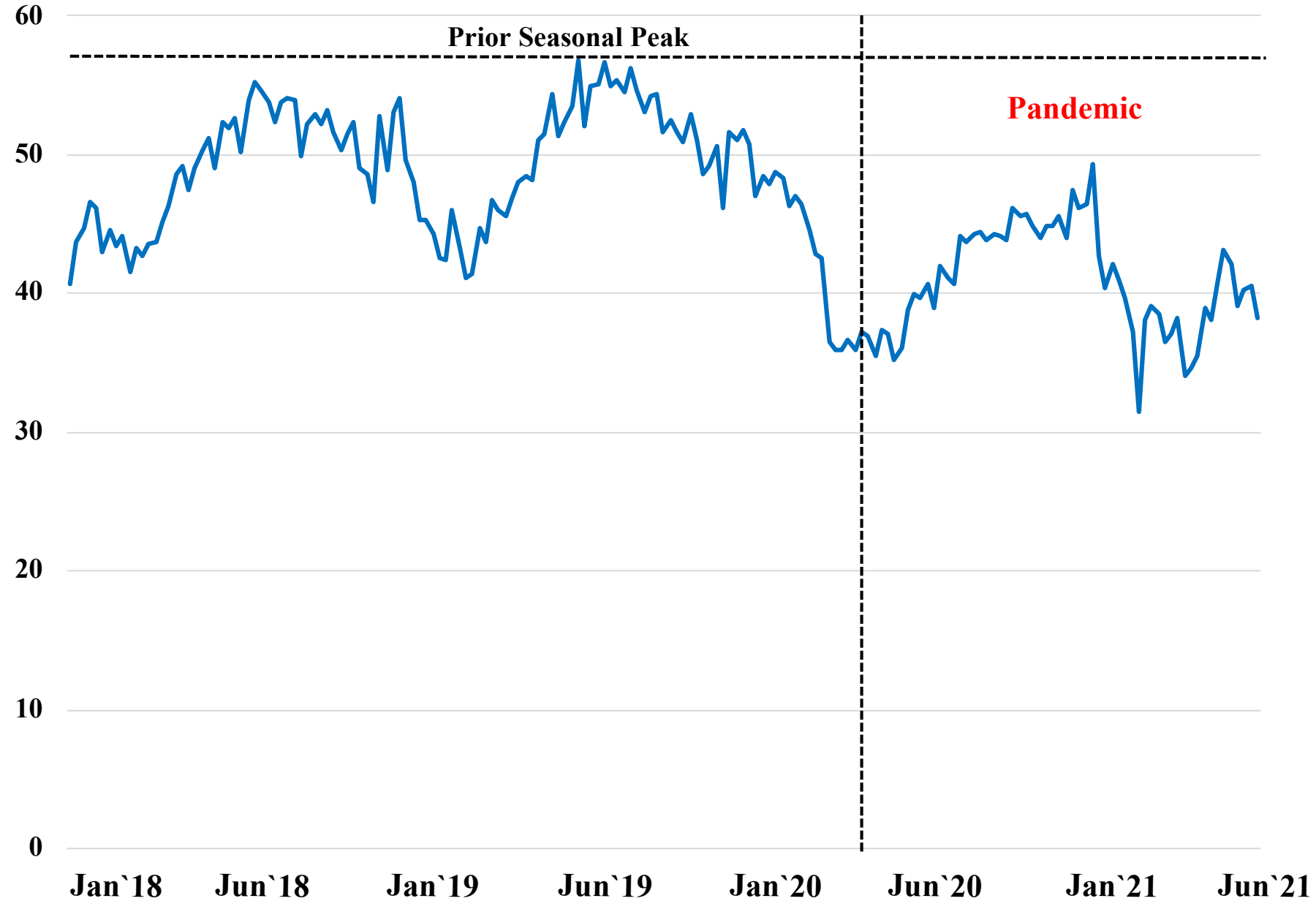


Figure 9. Average Larceny Rate, January 2018 - June 2021



Crime Trends and Residential Duration During the Height of the Pandemic

- Expectation: As time spent at home increases, crime rates decrease (domestic violence an exception)
- Fixed-effects panel model results with controls for seasonal and period effects
 - Full support for aggravated assault, robbery, and larceny
 - Partial support for homicide, gun assault, burglary, and drug offenses
 - Little to no support for domestic violence and motor vehicle theft

Trend Reversals Since the Height of the Pandemic

Figure 2. Percentage Change in Homicides
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022

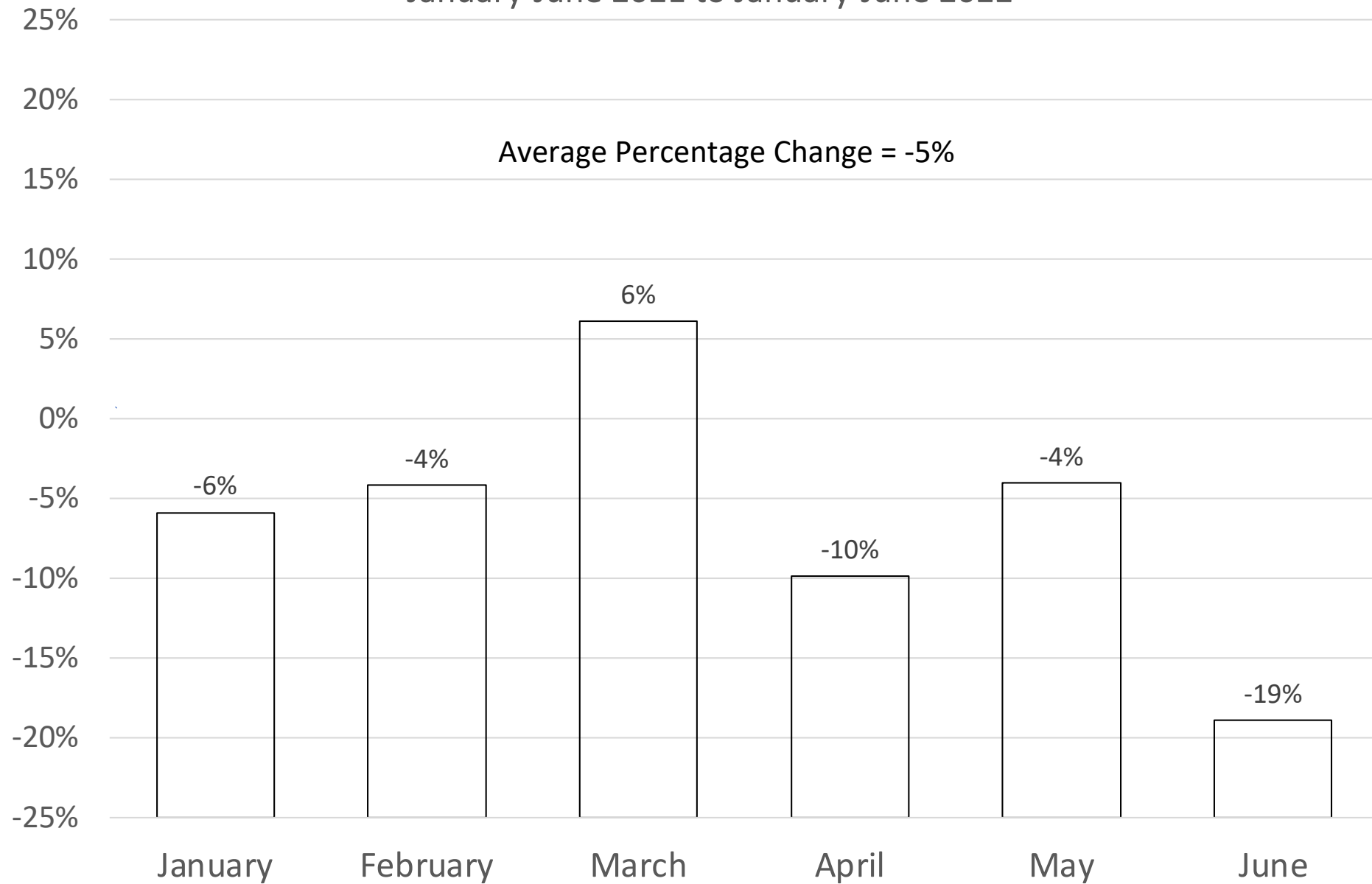


Figure 11. Percentage Change in Robberies
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022

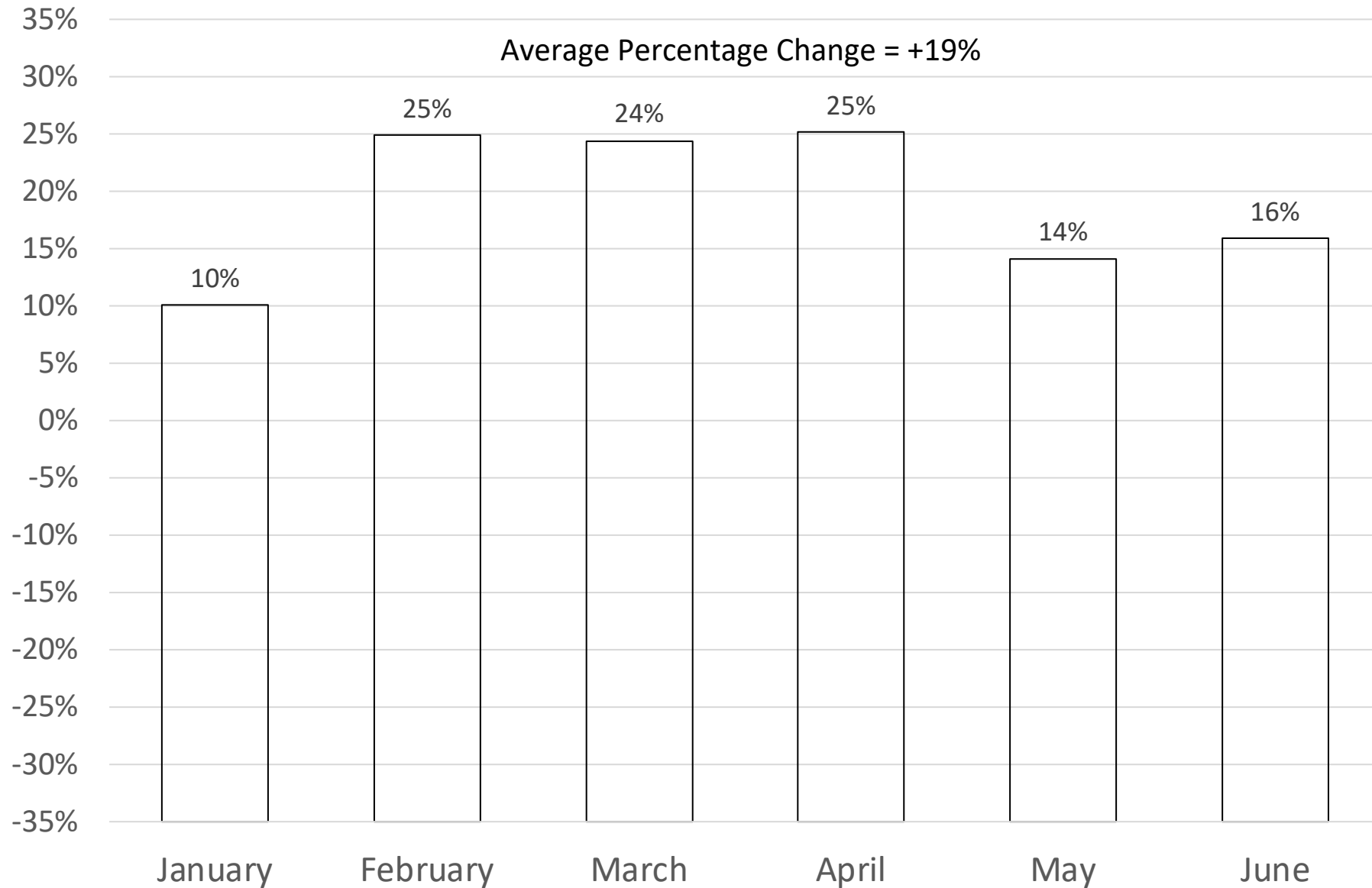
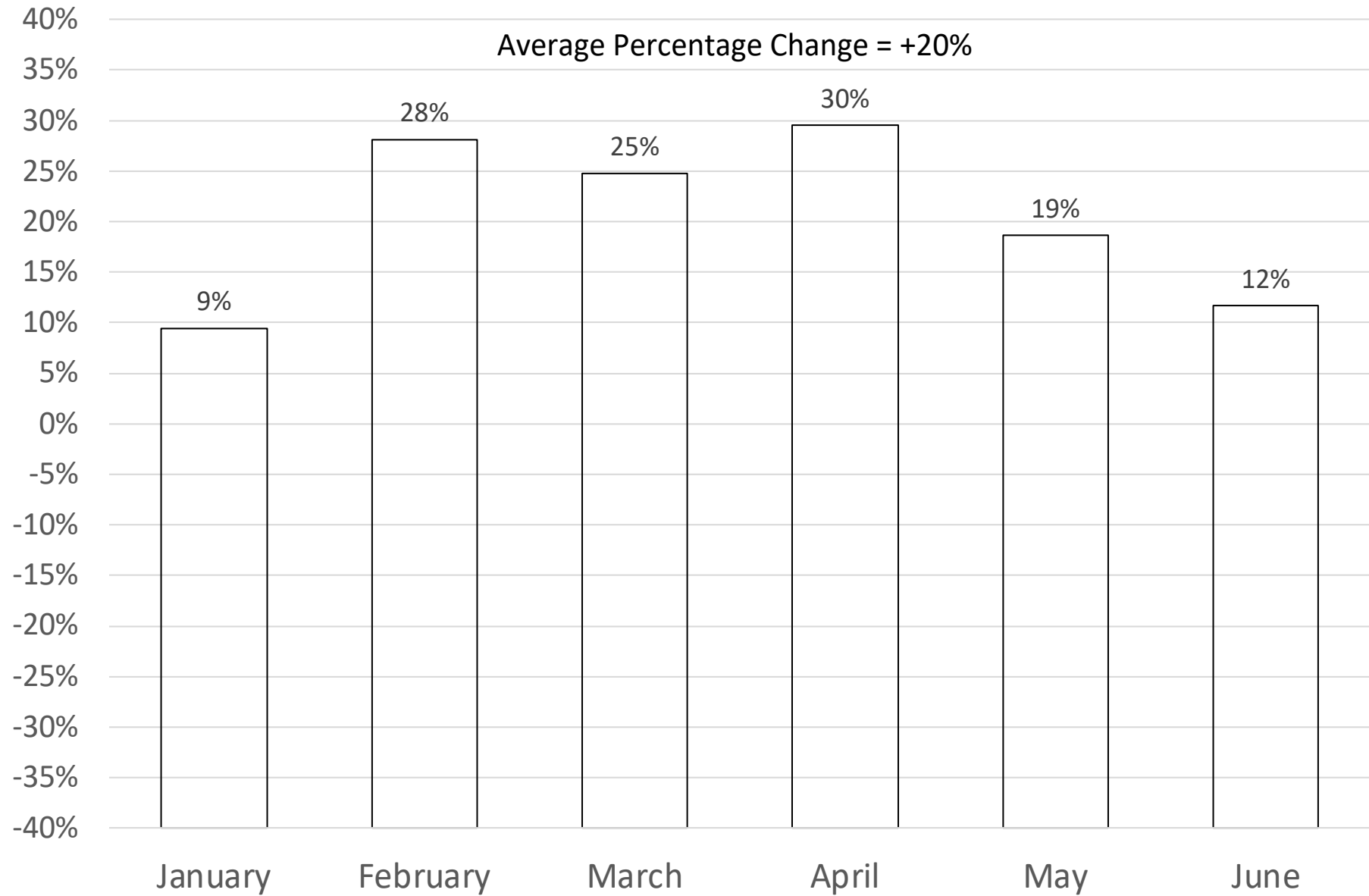


Figure 17. Percentage Change in Larcenies
January-June 2021 to January-June 2022



Data Access and Limitations

- We use incident-level crime data accessed from the open data portals of local police departments
- Advantages
 - Timeliness
 - comprehensiveness
- Disadvantages
 - Data may change over time (e.g., aggravated assault reclassified to homicide, criminal homicide reclassified to justifiable)
 - Data not regularly updated

Summary of Results

- Homicides and serious assaults rose immediately after the murder of George Floyd, well after the pandemic had begun
- Robberies and property crimes--except motor vehicle theft--dropped at the beginning of the pandemic
- Since the height of the pandemic, robberies and property crimes climbed substantially; homicides dropped slightly
- The changes support the routine activity hypothesis, *even those for homicides and assaults*
- All else equal, decreases in these offenses were associated with increases in residential duration
- But all else was not equal during the summer of 2020
 - COVID reduced police presence and response
 - Declining police legitimacy and rising legal cynicism after George Floyd's murder

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