

# National Recorded Crime Data

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## Summary

The Australian Bureau of Statistics publishes data on crimes recorded to police. The data is of limited use for policy purposes because (a) the level of spatial aggregation is too high and (b) the data are not released in a form that would permit meaningful time series analysis.

## Detail

The fundamental challenge in policy evaluation and in determining the influence of a factor on some outcome lies in constructing a suitable counterfactual that can be used to determine what would have happened if the policy in question had not been implemented or if the factor in question was not present. The federal nature of Australia's system of government, and the fact that law and order policy is largely a state responsibility, provides a unique opportunity to identify factors that influence crime and evaluate policies designed to prevent it. The adoption of mandatory minimum penalties by some States (e.g. NT and WA) and not by other States (e.g. VIC), for example, means that it ought to be possible to conduct a difference in difference (DiD) analysis to determine whether and to what extent mandatory minimum penalties reduce crime. Similar arguments apply to the investigation of factors that influence crime, such as unemployment, police numbers etc.

## The problem

Although it should be possible to carry out these sorts of analyses, in practice it is not possible (a) because recorded crime data is only published annually (b) because the lowest level of spatial aggregation at which it is available is State/Territory and (c) because of frequent interruptions to the time series (e.g. assault rates were not published for some years). This means there are simply too few observations to carry out meaningful multivariate analysis. This situation stands in marked contrast to NSW, where recorded crime data can be downloaded free of charge, broken down by month, offence and LGA.

## Solution

At a minimum: publish a national dataset of recorded crime broken down by offence, month, and jurisdiction. Ideally: publish a national dataset of recorded crime broken down by offence, month, jurisdiction and LGA.