



Crime drop in Ghana? Some insights from crime patterns and trends

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Abstract

This study examines crime rate trends in Ghana in the context of research into the international crime drop. Ghanaian police-recorded crime data are imperfect, but crime rates appear to have increased to the early 2000s then to have declined significantly. However, the national trend for all crime types masks significant variation by crime type and region. The national trends appear, broadly speaking, consistent with long-term crime increases and decreases in high-income countries, but with a lag that may reflect Ghana's economic development trajectory. This may be consistent with the routine activity perspective if both crime opportunities and economic development increased in parallel, followed by a crime decline that reflected increased security measures or other change. The study raises many questions that require further research, and some suggestions to that end are outlined.

Keywords Crime trends · Crime drop · Ghana · Police

Introduction

It is clear from the literature that crime rate has dropped over the past three decades. This paper attempts to chronologize crime drop in Ghana by shifting the argument from a purely Western theoretical disposition to an African notion of criminology. The crime drop thesis has been disproportionately indicated by Western theories dominating this small but growing 'sub-group' of criminology. Sociocultural and structural factors are primarily linked to explain the patterns of crime drop in Western countries. For instance, Tonry (2014, pp. 2–3) explained how major shifts in the demographic characteristics affected crime patterns in most developed countries.

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The idea of an African criminological pattern, on the other hand, is often reduced to the narrow linkages between authoritarianism and crime. More specifically, the attention to homicide rates in Africa (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2009, 2010). Similarly, Cross (2018) stressed the absence and marginalization of Nigerian scholars in global online fraud literature. Tankebe et al. (2014, p. 4) and Agozino (2004) remind us of the need to diverge criminological debate beyond the West and include African countries in understanding the nature and causes of crime. While the universality of certain explanations of crime drop holds for most geographic regions, the applicability, at least, in African criminological debate, requires some serious reflection. The primary objective of this article, therefore, is to examine the general trend of crime in Ghana in the context of research into the international crime drop.

Overall, Ghana is considered one of the most stable and secure democracies in the Sub-Saharan African region (Wegener 2011). Although crime rates in Ghana are lower than most advanced economies (Wegener 2011), crime is considered a major problem in Ghanaian society. Appiahene-Gyamfi (2011) asserted that there is a growing perception of crime among Ghanaians. Temporal anecdotal records further suggest a relative increase in crimes such as robbery, murder, rape, and defilement in Ghana over the past decades (Brammah and Mbowura 2014). The overall crime trend in Ghana is strongly influenced by significant political, economic, and cultural transformations after independence in the late 1950s. Furthermore, crime is highly concentrated in urban areas, especially in the cities of Accra and Kumasi (Appiahene-Gyamfi 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2011; Frimpong et al. 2018; Owusu et al. 2015).

International crime drop in retrospect

Much of what is known about crime drop can be traced to the general decline in crime rates in the Western world in the 1990s (Berg et al. 2016; Bernasco 2009; Ouimet 2002; Rosenfeld and Weisburd 2016; Tilley et al. 2015). The general drop in crime was, however, not confined to developed countries. In fact, studies such as The United Nations World Crime Surveys conducted between 1970 and 1994 and the International Crime Victims Survey found evidence to suggest that crime drop is an inherently global phenomenon (Aebi and Linde 2012; Farrell 2013; Tseloni et al. 2010; van Dijk et al. 2008, 2012; van Dijk 2008). After decades of high crime rates, the USA witnessed a historical decline in violent and property crimes in the early-1990s (Aebi and Linde 2012; Blumstein and Wallman 2006; Farrell et al., 2014a, b; Levitt 2004; Tonry 2014; Rosenfeld and Messner 2012; Zimring 2007). Accordingly, serious crimes such as homicide rates in the USA fell from 9.8 per 100,000 in 1991 to 5.5 per 100,000 in 2000 (Levitt 2004). Similar drops in homicides were recorded in the UK and other European countries (Tonry 2014). The crime drop in the USA was, however, temporary. According to the FBI National Press Office (2011) and Rosenfeld and Oliver (2008), crime rate, specifically, homicides went up in 2005 before reducing between 2007 and 2011. The drop, however, short-lived came as a surprise to criminology scholars, law enforcement agencies, and policymakers alike.



Retrospectively, the 1960s and 1980s were regarded as the ‘golden age’ of crime in many parts of the industrialized world characterized by disproportionately high crime rates. This trend was dramatized in television shows, music, movies as well as gained widespread media coverage. A wide range of hypotheses was proposed to explain the high crime prevalence in the 1960s and 1970s (Clarke 2020). Featuring among these hypotheses is the routine activity theory proposed by Cohen and Felson (1979) and Felson (1986). According to Cohen and Felson, the rise in crime is mainly caused by unexpected consequences of advancements in technology, transportation, and domestic life (Tilley et al. 2015, p. 59). Cohen and Felson (1979) theorized that crime situations increased as a consequence of the dominance of consumer culture centered on economic modernization, the women liberation movement in the 1960s, and the availability of employment opportunities. Crucially, the modernization debate has long dominated crime behavior studies (reference can be made of the seminal works of Simmel 1971; Durkheim 1951, 1964; Tönnies 1957) but rapidly intensified with the rise in population, industrialization, rapid urbanization, and social disorganization in the early 1960s. The routine activity perspective revolves around the interaction between a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen and Felson 1979). This is especially true for cases involving burglaries. Cohen and Felson (1979) tested their theory by examining how improved economic conditions and social changes after World War Two affected crime pattern behavior (Wortley and Mazerolle 2008). Felson (2008) noted that the risk of victimization increases in areas such as bars and pubs where alcohol and drugs are common. The application of routine activity framework ranges from cyber and terrorism-related crimes to domestic violence (Tilley et al. 2015, p. 59).

Four underlying conditions form the basis for the contemporary idea of crime drop. These conditions are the cross-national test, prior crime increase test, e-crime, and phone theft test, and the variables trajectories test (Farrell et al., 2014a, b). For instance, the cross-national test examines the comparability of the hypothesis between countries. This test specifically applies to countries in the developed world exemplified in empirical studies by (Ouimet 2002; van Dijk 2007a, b; Rosenfeld and Messner 2009; Zimring 2006). With these conditions in mind, Farrell et al. (2014a, b) firmly prescribed 17 hypotheses for explaining why crime drop (Table 1). Before the aforementioned determinants, Levitt (2004), Blumstein and Wallman (2006), and Blumstein and Rosenfeld (2008) had provided some deep insights into why crime reduced. In his paper exploring why crime reduced in America, Levitt (2004) found out that the legalization of abortion, the number of police officers, the high incarceration rate, and the decline of the drug epidemic contributed to the reduction in crime in the 1990s. As well, Dezhbakhsh et al. (2003) found that capital punishment has a strong deterrent effect on murder rates. Levitt (2004), however, disputed the correlation between economic growth, demographic changes, the improvement in policing strategies, gun control laws (a politically contentious issue in America), the carrying of concealed weapons, and the implementation of capital punishment in explaining crime reduction in America in the 1990s. Using state-level panel data from the USA, Katz et al. (2003) also found a negative correlation between death rates among prisoners and crime rates.



Table 1 Summary of the crime drop hypotheses. *Source:* Farrell et al. (2014a, b, p. 438)

Hypothesis	Summary
1. Strong economy	General economic improvement reduced crime
2. Concealed weapons laws	More concealed weapons increased deterrence
3. Capital punishment	Increased use of death penalty induced greater deterrence
4. Gun control laws	Gun control reduced crime due to gun control laws
5. Imprisonment	Increased imprisonment reduced crime via incapacitation and deterrence
6. Policing strategies	Better preventive policing reduced crime (i.e., Compstat and its progeny)
7. More police	Police staff increased, so crime fell
8. Legalization of abortion	Abortions in the 1970s meant fewer at-risk adolescents in 1990s
9. Immigration	Immigrants commit less crime and promote social control in inner cities
10. Consumer confidence	Strong economy shifts consumers away from stolen second-hand goods
11. Declining hard-drug markets	Decline in hard-drug markets reduced related violence and property crime
12. Lead poisoning	Lead damaged children's brains in the 1950s on, causing crime wave from the 1960s when they reached adolescence; then cleaner air from 1970s caused crime drop of 1990s
13. Changing demographics	Aging population means proportionally fewer young offenders and victims, so crime rates fall
14. Civilizing process	Institutional control weakened in the 1960s, causing crime increase, then strengthened in 1990s, causing crime drop
15. Improved security	Improved quality and quantity of security reduced crime opportunities
16. The Internet	Attractive displacement of offenders to e-crimes and changed lifestyles of victims
17. Phone guardianship	Portable phones spread rapidly in the 1990s and provide guardianship

Recent approaches for explaining crime reduction have focused on the security hypothesis. Drawing on the work of Clarke and Newman (2006), van Dijk (2006), Felson (1998) and Farrell et al. (2011, p. 151) observed that the general drop in crime in many parts of the industrialized world was based on significant, differences in the quantity and quality of security. Farrell et al. (2011) applied the security hypothesis to explain why motor vehicle theft fell in the USA, England and Wales, and Australia between 1991 and 2007. According to Farrell et al. (2011), advancements in technology, specifically the improvements in security devices such as locking systems, alarms, mechanical and electronic immobilizers have contributed to the drop in vehicle theft in the above-mentioned countries. Using the situational crime prevention approach, Bässmann (2011) also found that vehicles fitted with electronic immobilizers substantially reduced vehicle theft in Germany. Furthermore, significant improvements in household security in recent years have reduced home burglaries (Tilley et al. 2015; van Dijk and Tseloni 2012). Farrell et al. (2011, p. 151) went further and argued that improvements in security measures either, increase actual or



perceived risk, reward, and/or effort for the offender. That said, however, situational crime prevention strategies often fail to explain the root causes of crime (Wortley 2002). Similarly, Albanese (2000), Brey (2017), Galeotti (2004), Ekblom (2017), Clarke (2004), Stephens (1987), and Wall (2010) espoused views about how criminal opportunities have evolved with technological change. For example, a study of cybercrime by Wall (2010, p. 89) found that the internet has become a conduit of crime, creating a culture of fear.

Most recently, scholars have empirically examined the macro- and micro-level factors associated with crime drop. In their systematic review and meta-analysis of 34 empirical studies, Hinkle et al. (2020) found that Place-based Problem-oriented Policing (POP) interventions are associated with a significant reduction in crime. Braga and Weisburd (2020) also found support for the hypothesis that Place-based POP strategies reduced crime. Furthermore, a growing body of empirical studies has emerged concerning the role of period and cohort effects in the decline of crime (Dixon and Farrell 2020; Griffiths and Norris 2020; Kim et al. 2016; Lu and Luo 2020; O'Brien 2019; O'Brien and Stockard 2009). For example, Kim et al. (2016) found that cohort effects rather than period effects seemed to be a more important predictor in the decline of age-specific felony arrest rates in New York State.

An entry point for the strategic conceptualization of crime reduction in Ghana relates to the crime recording system utilized by law enforcement agencies. The lack of national statistical systems in African countries appears to constitute a significant obstacle for the advancement of criminology research (Arthur 1991, p. 499). The discrepancies inherent in official crime statistics are exemplified in the problems of omissions and bias. Marsh et al. (2006, p. 10), suggested that the problem of omissions is the deliberate attempt to only include the 'proportion of crimes and offenders in official figures,' while the problem of bias, on the other hand, prioritizes certain crimes and offenders over other categories. The poor data and criminal record-keeping system in Ghana (Appiahene-Gyamfi 2011, p. 89) reinforce the problem of omissions and bias. The low reporting of crime offers further clarity on the nature of crime trends in Ghana. The underreporting of crime is common in instances of rape, homicides, and domestic violence (Feldman et al. 2017; Myers 1980; Gingerich and Oliveros 2018; Loftin et al. 2003). A 2011/2013 Afrobarometer survey found that 75% of victims of crime in Ghana did not report the crime to the police (Wambua 2015). Reasons provided by the respondents included police performance issues such as bribery, the complicity of the police in the said crime, the reluctance of the police to listen to the victims, fear of reprisals from the perpetrators of the crime, and the lack of police station in the area (Wambua 2015, pp. 7–8). Trust in the police significantly influenced the decision of a victim to report a crime (Adinkrah 2005; Aning 2002; Appiahene-Gyamfi 2011; Tankebe 2010, 2011, 2013). Trust and public confidence in the Ghana Police Service are at a record low. For instance, a survey commissioned by the World Bank on governance and corruption in Ghana in 2000 found that 70.4% of households did not believe the Police helped in issues relating to corruption (CDD-Ghana 2000). The report also found that 66.8% of households made unofficial payments to the police in the form of a bribe (CDD-Ghana 2000). Appiahene-Gyamfi (2011, p. 89) argued that the pervasiveness of bribery and corruption within the GPS has resulted in devastating



consequences. Additionally, the capacity of the police service centered on the number of personnel, availability of finance, and equipment are relevant for explaining contemporary crime trends in Ghana. More fundamentally, the Ghana police service is under-resourced and under-staffed. For instance, the Ghana Police Service personnel stands at 23,702 with a police–civilian ratio of 1 to 1054 (Boateng and Darko 2016). Moreover, the Ghana Police Service is still recovering from the influence of colonialism on the overall criminal justice system of Ghana (Boateng and Darko 2016; Tankebe 2008). Furthermore, the reputation of the Ghana Police Service has suffered greatly in recent years. According to Boateng and Darko (2016, p. 14), torture, brutality, corruption, negligence, and abuse continue to dominate the activities of the Ghana police.

Data and method

The study analyzed crime trends at the macro-level. According to Brantingham and Brantingham (1991:21), a macro-level analysis of crime distribution occurs between or within countries, states, provinces, or cities. Eck and Weisburd (1995) further asserted that macro-level studies examine wider geographic units and their aggregate characteristics. This research adopts the regional boundaries of Ghana as the unit of analysis. At the regional level, the Ghana Police Service has twelve administrative regions namely Accra, Tema, Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Volta, Eastern, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Central, Western region, and Railways, Ports, and Harbors. These regional command centers oversee the administration of the various division and district commands. The Ghana Police Service in pursuance of its core mandate collects and compiles statistics on crimes in the country. Marsh et al. (2006), argued that crime statistics are often seen as ‘hard facts’ by governments and other state institutions to make informed decisions and recommendations regarding issues of criminality. Official crime statistics in Ghana are reported on an annual basis. This shows the total number of criminal offenses recorded. Crime data between 2000 and 2015 were derived from the Statistical and Information Technology Unit of the Criminal Investigations Department (SITU). This period coincides with significant sociopolitical, economic, transformations in Ghana. For instance, Oteng-Ababio et al. (2016) traced the transformation of criminality in Ghana to significant political and structural changes in the country between 1980 and 2010. In this study, crime rates were calculated per 100,000 population. Crime trends and patterns were analyzed using line graphs and tables. The analysis also shows percentage changes in crime rates during the period under review.

Results

Broadly speaking, total crime rates in Ghana dropped sharply during the three and a half-decade of analysis. More specifically, total crime rates declined from 1250.3 per 100,000 population in 1980 to 675.4 per 100,000 in 2015 representing a 46% drop over that period. Furthermore, crime rates quickly rose by 32% between 1990



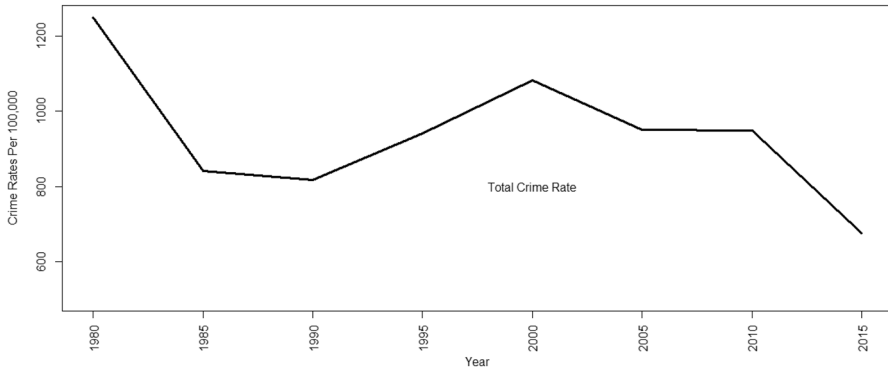


Fig. 1 National crime rates per 100,000 population, 2000–2015. *Source:* Derived from the Statistics & Information Technology Unit (SITU), CID Headquarters, Accra

and 2000 after a steady decline over the previous decade (Fig. 1). The rise in total crime rates between 1990 and 2000 coincided with Ghana's transition to democratic governance and the rule of law. With the exception of the year 2000, total crime was down more than 37.7% between 2000 and 2015, reflecting a major reduction from the previous decade. To put things into perspective, crime rates remained relatively stable at 950 per 100,000 population in 2005 and 2010 before declining further, reaching 675.4 per 100,000 population in 2015.

The analysis of the broad categories of crime reveals some rather interesting dynamics of crime trends in Ghana. Figure 2 shows a general year-on-year drop in the selected categories of crime. For instance, murder rates remained stable at 2 per 100,000 over the period of analysis. A more distressing dynamic of the crime trend in Ghana, however, relates to the recurrent rise in the robbery rate over the years. Robbery is a major problem in Ghana. Thus, the robbery rate rose by 136% from 2.1 per 100,000 population in 2000 to approximately 5 per 100,000 population in 2015 (Table 2). Furthermore, there appears to be a sharp contrast between the year-on-year and long-term changes in theft rates. On average, the theft rate was significantly low, declining by 36.3% between 2000 and 2015. However, the theft rate jumped significantly from 282.7 per 100,000 in 2000 to 300.1 per 100,000 in 2002 before stabilizing between 2008 and 2014.

Regional variations in crime drop

The regional distribution of crime in Ghana conveys a much different pattern from the overall national trend. The crime rate was expectedly uneven across geographic space evident in the clustering of crime in the southern part of Ghana comprising the Greater Accra, Ashanti, Eastern, Central, Volta, Western, and Brong Ahafo regions. The three Northern regions, on the other hand, recorded lower crime rates (Fig. 3). Total crime rates in the Greater Accra region were high in comparison to the regional and national average despite yielding a 40.2 percent fall over the fifteen



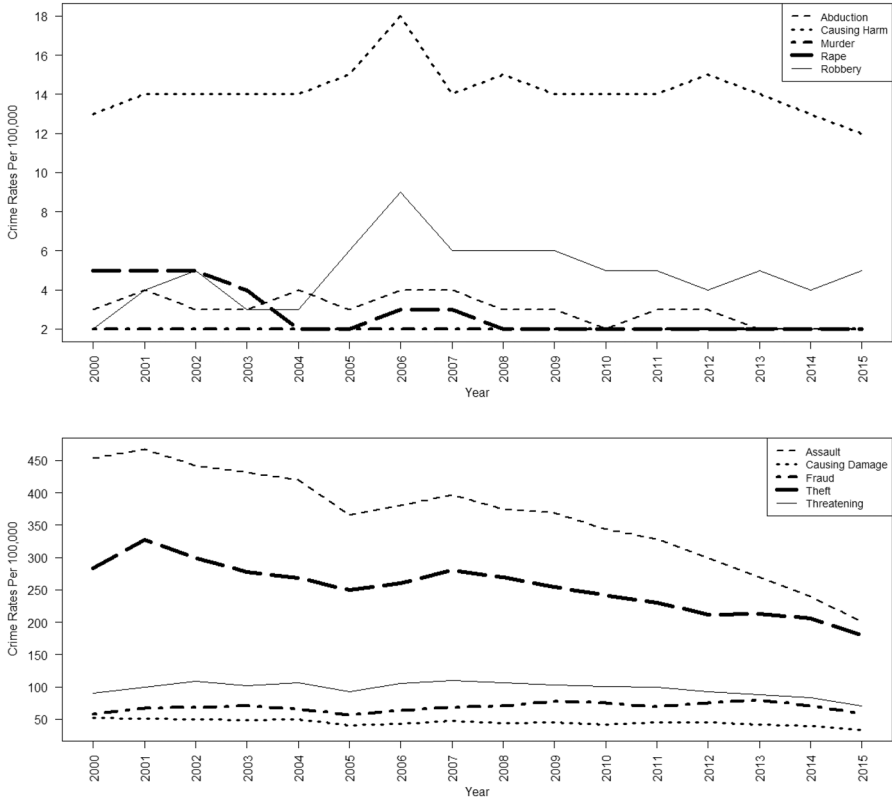


Fig. 2 National trends in crime type, 2000–2015. *Source:* Derived from the Statistics & Information Technology Unit (SITU), CID Headquarters, Accra

Table 2 Rate (%) by specific crime types, 2000–2015. *Source:* Derived from the Statistics & Information Technology Unit (SITU), CID Headquarters, Accra

Offense	2000–2005	2005–2010	2010–2015	2000–2015
Abduction	+6.6	-22.9	-19.9	-34.2
Assault	-19.5	-6.0	-41.3	-55.6
Causing damage	-21.6	+2.7	-17.4	-33.5
Causing harm	+10.4	-2.0	-16.8	-10.0
Fraud	-0.8	+30.1	-20.5	+2.7
Murder	-12.3	-4.6	+10.9	-7.3
Rape	-66.2	-1.2	-10.1	-70.0
Robbery	+204.3	-20.0	-3.0	+136.0
Theft	-11.4	-3.5	-25.5	-36.3
Threatening	+2.8	+9.3	-29.7	-21.0



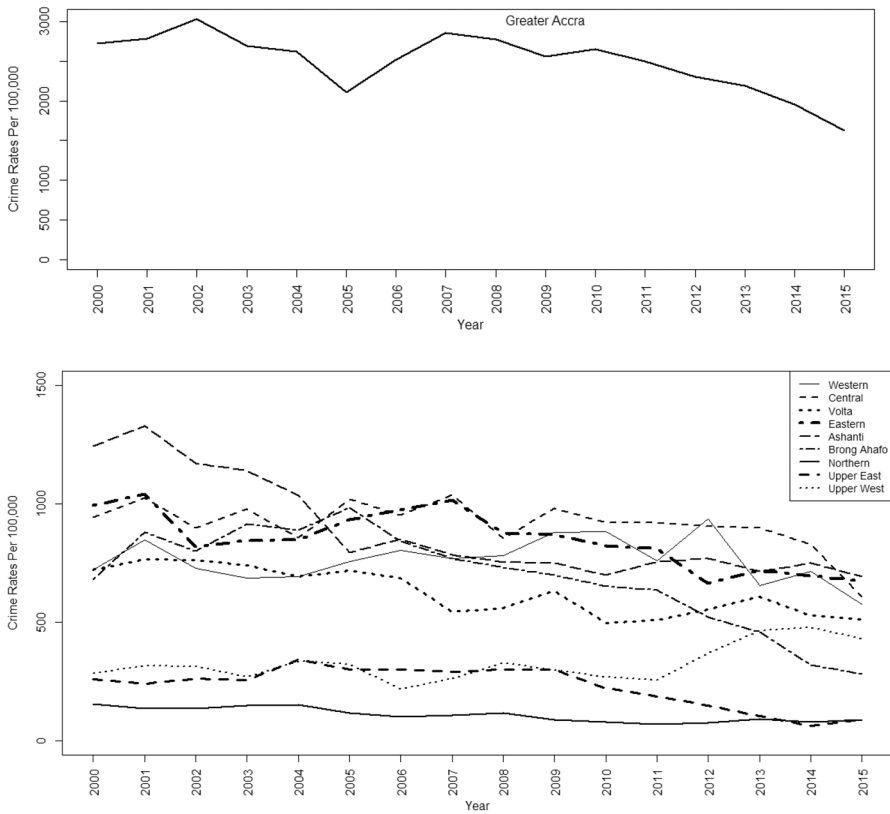


Fig. 3 Crime trends in the 10 regions of Ghana. *Source:* Derived from the Statistics & Information Technology Unit (SITU), CID Headquarters, Accra

years. The total crime rate in the Greater Accra region increased exponentially, peaking at 3030.4 per 100,000 population in 2002 before averaging at more than 2411.8 per 100,000 population between 2003 and 2015. In the Western region, especially, the overall decline in total crime rates was offset by a steady rise between 2000 and 2010.

Furthermore, the Upper East region recorded the lowest crime rate spurning the period of analysis as shown in Table 3. Specifically, total crime rates in the region averaged more than 278.6 per 100,000 population from 2000 to 2010 before dropping substantially to 87.7 per 100,000 population in 2015. Total crime rates in the Upper West region, surprisingly, increased by 50.8% between 2000 and 2015: crime rate stood at 284.1 per 100,000 in 2000, 268.2 in 2010, and upward to 428.5 in 2015. On a lighter note, overall crime rates in the Ashanti and Central regions declined, rapidly spurning the period of analysis, as shown in Fig. 3.

Robbery rates were unexpectedly high in all the regions. A spike in robbery rate was reported in the Greater Accra region, reaching 14.2 per 100,000 population in 2015 and up from 7.4 in the year 2000. Evidently, all categories of crime in the



Table 3 Rate change (%) of regional crime, 2000–2015.

Source: Derived from the Statistics & Information Technology Unit (SITU), CID Headquarters, Accra

Region	2000–2005	2005–2010	2010–2015	2000–2015
Western	+4.6	+17.0	–35.0	–20.5
Central	+8.1	–9.6	–34.2	–35.7
Greater Accra	–22.6	+25.7	–38.6	–40.2
Volta	–0.7	–30.8	+3.3	–28.9
Eastern	–6.3	–11.8	–17.8	–32.1
Ashanti	–36.2	–11.9	–1.0	–44.4
Brong Ahafo	+44.8	–33.9	–56.9	–58.8
Northern	–24.8	–33.1	+13.5	–42.9
Upper East	+16.9	–26.6	–60.4	–66.0
Upper West	+13.9	–17.1	+59.8	+50.8
Ghana	–12.3	–0.1	–28.9	–37.7

Greater Accra region declined except for robbery. Also, robbery rates increased exponentially in the Eastern, Volta, and the three Northern regions. For example, the Upper West region recorded a significant rise in robbery rates from 0.9 per 100,000 population in 2000 to 3.8 in 2010 and reaching a level of 7.9 in 2015. Similarly, other serious crimes such as murder increased remarkably in the Upper West region jumping by about 297.2% between 2000 and 2015. The Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions recorded the lowest rise in robbery rates over the same period. Furthermore, fraud rates in the Western region peaked between 2000 and 2015, gradually rising from 41.2 per 100,000 population in 2000 to 76.8 in 2010 before dropping by 28% between 2010 and 2015.

Discussion

This study examined the long-term trend of crime in Ghana. The data show a sharp rise in total crime rates in the early 1980s which is explained by the political instability and general insecurity that emerged in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution (Appiahene-Gyamfi 1998). For instance, Asamoah (2014, p. 304) recalled how lawless revolutionary activities such as the harassment of civilians by soldiers and looting increased the crime rate. Appiahene-Gyamfi (1998) equally noted that the political revolution of 1981 orchestrated by the PNDC unleashed social unrest, economic and political instability which resulted in a surge in robbery and murder rates in key urban centers. The high crime rate in the 1980s coincided with a weak governance system and institutional capacity, and the militarization of the state (Hutchful 2003). Surprisingly, the murder rate dropped over the period of analysis. The relatively low murder rate is reflective of the rarity of homicide crime (Arthur 1991, p. 504). Ritualistic killings constitute the majority of murder cases in Ghana. A notable example of murder cases relates to the ritual and gruesome murder of over 30 women in Ghana between 1993 and 2001 (Browne 2000). Over the years, the front pages of major newspapers in Ghana have been inundated with reports on the surge



and scale of robbery. Robbery either armed or unarmed manifests at the workplace, in residential areas, on major highways and streets. Handguns and machetes are the popular weapons of choice for the perpetration of robberies (Ebbe 2011). For this reason, high robbery rates over the years have resulted in the emergence of vigilante homicide. For example, Adinkrah (2005) recorded approximately 46 vigilante homicides in Ghana between 1990 and 2000 based on the analysis of newspaper reports. Pejoratively, 13% of these vigilante crimes were recorded in 2000 alone (Adinkrah 2005). The contemporary conception of crime and punishment in Ghana is reminiscent and a direct consequence of practices in traditional Ghanaian society. Abotchie and Ebbe (2000, p. 54) argued that serious crimes such as rape, incest, and homicide are taboos and curses in traditional Ghanaian society, 'which must be expurgated.' Accordingly, offenders are exorcised or executed to avoid incurring the wrath of the gods (Abotchie and Ebbe 2000, pp. 54–55). Arguably, violent crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, defilement, assault, and abductions in Ghana is comparatively lower compared to other Sub-Saharan African countries despite few isolated incidents of violence during the 2000 elections which saw the transfer of political power from the main governing party to an opposition political party. Subsequent elections also recorded isolated cases of violent crimes such as assault and causing harm. The decline in violent crime can be attributed to a stable democratic governance system, an independent judiciary, and a reduction in police corruption (Ebbe 2011).

At the regional level, crime trends in the Western region between 2000 and 2010 coincided with the discovery and exploration of oil and gas in commercial quantities. For example, Obeng-Odoom (2014b) found a correlation between crime rates and oil production in the Western region. In addition, the upward trend in fraud rates in the Western region can be attributed to the high demand for land and real estate in the oil and gas industry. The urban center of Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western region, in particular, reported a sharp rise in armed robbery, theft, prostitution, and fraud offenses (Obeng-Odoom 2014a, b). Furthermore, high rates of robbery in the three Northern regions can be linked to the migration of Fulani herdsmen from neighboring West African countries (Atta-Asamoah and Aning 2011). These seasonal migrants have been accused of a spate of highway robberies, rape, and the destruction of property in these regions. Atta-Asamoah and Aning (2011, p. 88) reported cases in some parts of the Upper West region where economic activities were disrupted by herdsmen for fear of crime and victimization.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in the study, there appears to be a remarkable reduction in total crime rates. This trend, however, raises more questions about the paradox of the decline: What are the reasons behind the crime drop? Are the reductions in overall crime rates a product of an efficient and comprehensive situational crime prevention strategy? Or better yet are the reductions a consequence of improvements in the macroeconomic structure of the country? Addressing these questions will require the examination of some underlying contradictions of crime drop in Ghana. A crucial area of contention concerning the reduction in total crime is the disparity



between crime victimization surveys and police-recorded crimes. Crime continually fell in the backdrop of heightened public concerns about crime and poor macroeconomic performance (Asiedu and Arku 2009; Ghana Statistical Service 2010; Owusu et al. 2015; Wambua 2015; Wegener 2011). Moreover, the proliferation of private security companies in key Ghanaian cities reflects the growing public perception of crime (Owusu et al. 2016).

From a qualitative perspective, the study finds that in making theoretical assumptions, mainstream Western explanatory paradigms tend to diminish the sociopolitical and cultural context of crime and punishment in Africa. For instance, without rigorous statistical testing, the idea that national-level macroeconomic indicators such as a strong economy, changing demographics, and imprisonment, account for crime drop is untenable in Ghana. The research evidence, instead, found support for the social control and routine activity perspective to explain the crime trends and patterns in Ghana. More importantly, the popularization of formal social control measures, such as the rule of law in the early 1990s, underpins the crime drop in Ghana. Specifically, the transition from the tumultuous years of military rule in the early 1980s which, coincided with high rates of crime, to a law and order policy in the early 1990s provides anecdotal but useful evidence explaining the crime drop in Ghana. There has been significant literature in recent decades highlighting the role of various social control mechanisms on the reduction of crime opportunities (Bennett et al. 2006; Black 2014; Chen and Zhong 2020; Cohen and Felson 1979; Eck 1995; Groff 2015; Sampson and Laub 1990; Wadsworth 2006). The study unavoidably succumbed to the reductionist interpretation of the role of systems of governance on crime trends and patterns in Ghana and Africa in general. These substantial analytical limitations are explained by the lack of sufficient datasets on crime and socioeconomic covariates. A true picture of crime drop in Ghana, however, requires paying substantially more attention to the politicization of crime and punishment, public confidence in the criminal justice system, neighborhood effects, and the impact of religiosity (African traditional beliefs and practices, Islam, and Christianity) on the fear, control, and prevention of crime. For instance, a sequence of events in recent years, such as the 2015 Judiciary Scandal, shuttered judicial exceptionalism and solidified the perception of systemic corruption in Ghana's criminal justice system (Rahman et al. 2018). The idea that the criminal justice system and social institutions contribute to crime trends is elaborated in recent literature (Rosenfeld and Weisburd 2016). Furthermore, the result reinforces a broader narrative of the need to redesign Ghana's crime records keeping system to effectively monitor trends and patterns as well as efficiently deploy limited police resources.

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