

Homicide Trends in America: 1850-1950

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Introduction

Modern mass communication plays a large role in solving today's most violent crimes. Televised news stories, newspaper articles and law enforcement databases all aid in spreading information about crime, and today's police departments across the country are more able to work together. In the 1800s, however, technologies that we take for granted today had not yet been discovered or widely used in solving crime. Innovations like fingerprinting, ballistics, hair and fiber analysis, and blood evidence had not yet been developed, and crimes were solved quickly or not at all. As America became more urbanized, crime rose steadily, with only a few noteworthy increases or decreases in the national homicide rate. In response to the rise in violent crime, the U.S. spent more money on law enforcement in the 1840s than almost any other country in the world.ⁱ Despite this increase in funding, these systems were unable to curb the steady rise in violence that continued until the late 1930s. I will examine many of the trends in homicide and attempt to assess popular theories on the changes in homicide rates.

Motivation

In some studies, the terms "homicide" and "murder" are used interchangeably. In this paper, I will consider "homicide" to be broadly defined as "any killing of one human being by another that cannot be clearly identified as accidental," ⁱⁱ which is the general definition applied by coroners. Murder, on the other hand, is the legal term used to refer to a homicide committed by a perpetrator who has been legally convicted of the crime.

Since the early 1900s, the homicide rate has been on the rise in America. Today, Americans have a higher risk of being murdered than do any other citizens of first-world democracies.ⁱⁱⁱ Figure 1 on page 30 represents the national homicide rate according to the U.S. Census of those years per 1000 people. This shows a steady increase in homicide rates after the turn of the century until roughly the 1930s when it falls off and then rises again dramatically by the late 1960s. Although this paper will focus as much as possible on the time period between 1900 and 1950 to explain this dramatic fall in homicide, it will also expand to roughly ten years before and after this time period in order to put these observations in perspective.

If the upward trend represented at the national level were to continue, it would be important to look at demographic, cultural and societal influences on the increases and decreases of homicide rates in different parts of the country. The ability to predict what factors are important for reducing homicide rates can have tremendous public policy implications for the future and may provide valuable information for law enforcement officials to reduce or deter homicide. Additionally, societal factors that are correlated with rising homicide rates can be useful in indicating future violent crime waves and may allow for preventative measures to be taken. While homicides are frequently attributed to one main conflict between two individuals, the larger national context of these disputes is important to consider. People have conflicts with each other every day, but the data represented here will examine whether these conflicts end in death more frequently at certain times than at others, depending upon the societal forces at work. This would lead one to believe that the context in which the dispute

occurs matters, and this paper will look at some specific contexts like the New Deal Era to examine how they affect homicide rates.

Process

In this paper, I first wanted to put homicide into a historical context by looking at the changes that occurred socially and geographically before the turn of the century. My research consisted of examining historians' accounts of what life was like in pre-1900s America. I then documented the trends in historical homicide rates from roughly 1900-1950 based on the available national data I collected from the Historical Statistics of the United States online archives. I examined more specific state level data, which made the homicide trends in each specific region more clear. I used Stata software to create scatter plots, and I compared these results to national level data, which show the homicide trends on a larger scale. This helped me determine how much of the national variation is explained by each individual region. Theories on homicide from historians Randolph Roth and Gini Graham Scott gave me an idea of the societal factors that can affect spikes in homicide rates, and I have also attempted to scrutinize the explanations advanced by these historians.

I have used an econometric analysis of the data to determine whether demographic factors like urban area population, the foreign-born status of a population and the composition of race are significant indicators in determining rates of homicide. Based on the empirical explanations for the homicide trends that have been given by historians, I have chosen to examine economic factors from the New Deal Era to help determine whether such empirical explanations for homicide trends are valid. I will

show the results of these regressions that have helped me determine whether government economic influence is significant to the national homicide rate. I personally funded all parts of my project.

Homicide in Pre-1900s America

The beginning of the twentieth century in America was a time of transformation for many regions from rural towns into small cities. The old farm ideals were being replaced by the ideals of the Gilded Age; people at this time admired capitalism, Wall Street, and changes in music and entertainment. Before the urbanization of America in the mid-1800s, towns were only loosely organized into close-knit communities, and murder was relatively rare. It was much harder for perpetrators to hide or escape the law because there were no cars and towns were spread far apart. Since most people had roots in their area and most murders arose out of local quarrels, institutions of law enforcement were largely underdeveloped as compared to the systems of today.^{iv} People in small towns knew each other well, and it was unlikely that an individual could commit a crime like homicide and not become a suspect. There were no paid law enforcement officials at this time, and murderers were apprehended by local citizens who had witnessed the crime firsthand or who had strong suspicions of who could have committed the murder. ^v It wasn't until the 1830s-1850s that formal police departments began to appear in major cities. Officers, however, still had no formal training and were appointed to these jobs mainly because they had friends in the dominant political party of the time. ^{vi} Detectives at this time were hired mainly to recover stolen goods. The

city's coroner, rather than a detective, was typically responsible for identifying a killer, and the coroner relied heavily on public opinion in order to identify potential suspects. Local district attorneys did little investigation into cases where the killer was not immediately known, and there were few trials to convict the perpetrators. If there was a trial, it generally lasted for a few hours or as long as a week for a serious case.^{vii} As cities grew and expanded into the 1900s, people became less familiar with each other, and it got easier to resolve conflict with violence. Roth notes that by the late nineteenth century, "the homicide rate for adult relatives was 0.3 to 0.6 per 100,000 adults per year in the rural North, 0.4 to 1.8 per 100,000 in the rural South, 0.8 per 100,000 in rural California, and 0.6 to 1 per 100,000 in northern, southern, and southwestern cities."^{viii} Roth also notes the increase in the rate of intimate homicide during this time, otherwise known as homicides perpetrated against family members.

Data and Analysis

I used a few sets of data in my analysis, but I will first discuss the main state level homicide data. This data set represents 49 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. (See Figure 3) The data includes the number of homicides in each state divided into rural and urban regions. This data set also includes demographic variables for each state for every ten years. The variables that are of interest to me are "fborn," which represents the proportion of the population that was born outside of the U.S., "white," which represents the proportion of the population that was white, and "nurbanten," which represents the percent of the population that lived in urban areas, in decimal form. It is important to

note that at this time, the foreign-born population was largely European, and there may have been some overlap with the percentage that was considered white. When any of the values of these demographic variables were unavailable for a particular year, I estimated them using Stata interpolation. This made sense because population values tend to increase exponentially as time goes on, and thus the demographic variables would increase similarly.

Next, for the purposes of the scatterplots, I broke this large data set down into four geographic regions that I have examined, and the states are grouped by region in order to try to control for societal changes that happen in each area, like population swells or epidemics that may be localized. For example, southern states like Georgia and South Carolina were more prone to outbreaks of deadly diseases like cholera and yellow fever in the late 1800s. To put the gravity of these outbreaks in perspective, historian Margaret Humphreys notes that yellow fever killed an estimated 5,000 of the 33,600 people who lived in Memphis, Tennessee in 1878, or about one sixth of the total population in just one year.^{ix} Epidemics like these that dramatically affect the population of individual cities or regions may make it harder to interpolate these values, since Stata does not account for instances like these. Additionally, homicides in regions where epidemics took hold may have mistakenly been attributed to diseases like this instead of to homicide.

The population values that I use in this analysis begin in 1850 and end in 1950, with data for every ten years. The state homicide values I use start in 1900 and continue to 1950, but the values are not available for every year in this time frame. Alaska is not

included in this analysis because it is not geographically close to other states and I was unable to find a complete set of observations from this time period for Alaska that would be reliable. In order to observe the trends in different states over the course of the time frame, I used Stata software to generate a scatterplot of each region. (See Figure 2) I then compared these regional trends that I created to the national trends I have observed from data available through the Historical Statistics of the United States website.^x The national data that was used was gathered from descriptive information on all death certificates filed in all the states in the United States and the District of Columbia.^{xi} Currently, it is believed that over 99 percent of deaths in the United States are reported. However, data for the years before 1933 are known to be missing or incomplete for three reasons. First, they are based on death certificates only from states in the U.S. Death Registration Area. The first six years of the published national level data from 1900 to 1905 represent only ten states and the District of Columbia. Texas was the last state to enter the registration area in 1933. Second, admission to the registration area required initially only that at least 90 percent of deaths be recorded. Third, prior to 1907, deaths by homicide were often very underreported within the official death registration states themselves, since they were often recorded incorrectly as accidental deaths.^{xii}

From plotting the national data, it is clear that the homicide rate is lower beginning in the early 1900s and rises steadily with only a few spikes in the mid 1910s and early 1920s. Despite this rise, there is a significant drop in the national homicide rate that begins in the early 1930s and continues into the late 1940s before the rate recovers slightly and rises steadily again. (See Figure 1) After examining the four

national regions and three major cities individually, I will relate these trends back to the national picture of homicide and try to account for some of the variability.

New England

The first region includes the states in the New England region. (See Figure 2, Regions 1.1 and 1.2) This scatterplot shows only a slight downward trend in homicide beginning in the late 1920s. The median homicide rate starts at about 0.0025 per capita and ends just below 0.002. On the scatterplot, the points do not seem to be clustered closely together, which tells us that there is a lot of variation from state to state in this region. Major cities in these areas like Boston, New York and Philadelphia would account for much of the homicide counts. The relatively stable nature of the mean homicide rate indicates that the north region does not account for much of the variability in the national rate that we observe in the late 1930s.

Mid West

The second region includes the Mid West states. (See Figure 2, Regions 2.1 and 2.2) The graph shows that the homicide city rate begins at about 0.0024 and continues to rise steadily up to the late 1920s. The peak of this rate is at about 0.004. The rate then falls gradually until it hits about 0.003 by the end of the data period. This is similar to the New England region in that there is a steady increase in homicide rates up until

the late 1920s and then there is a decline in this rate at that time. Again, the rates between the states in this region are not really closely clustered together, meaning that there is more and more variation between the states as time goes on.

South

The third region represents the southern states. Overall, this graph shows an upward trend in per capita city homicides with only one obvious brief decline at the end of the data period. This region's homicide rate starts at about 0.0035 and continues to rise up to just under 0.01 by the end of the time period. There is generally less variation in per capita city homicide rates between the states in this region, and the scatter plot shows a rather clear upward trend. The role of lynching that has historically taken place in this region in relation to homicide trends will be discussed later in further detail.

West

The final region represents the western part of the United States. There is a gradual up and down trend in the rates, and there are no sharp increases or decreases. The average homicide rate begins high at about 0.005 in 1910 and fluctuates gradually until it ends at about 0.004 by the end of the data series. This region has the smallest variance in homicide rates between the states, and the scatter plot shows a clear pattern with only a few outliers.

From the data I have, it is clear that the south and west regions of the United States had overall higher rates of homicide during the early 1900s than did the New England and west regions. Looking at the national trends, the southern region does seem to follow the national pattern, with a gradual increase until about the mid-1930s when there is a drop off in the homicide rate. This pattern is less obvious in the New England and Mid West regions. The West region does show a similar drop in homicide rates in the mid-1930s but there is not a similar rise in the rate before this time. The most notable trend in the national data is the large drop in the homicide rate in the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s. This trend is reflected most clearly in the southern region of the U.S. In his writing, Roth observed a similar drop in homicide rates during this time.^{xiii}

In order to further examine the state level data, I ran a regression of the overall homicide rates of each state against the demographic variables to try to determine how much of the variation in the rates can be accounted for by the changes in the demographic variables in each region. Instead of breaking these states down into regions for the regression, I chose to run the regressions with all of the states included. This would help me optimize the number of observations used in the regression, which would give a more accurate estimate of the trends. I ran a total of four sets of regressions, numbered one through four. Each main Regression group includes four sub regressions, which are parallel to each other. As stated above, I interpolated the missing values of the variables for “nurbanten,” “fborn” and “white” using Stata software, and these interpolations are noted in the regressions by a slight change in the variable names

to “nnurbanten,” “nfborn,” and “nwhite” respectively. I tested the “nnurbanten” variable in Regression group 1, Regression group 2 tested the significance of the “nfborn” variable, and Regression 3 tested the “nwhite” variable. (See Appendix, p. 27) Finally, Regression 4 tests all three of these variables together in predicting homicide. As previously stated, within each of the four main regression groups, there are four sub-sets of regressions that are grouped in pairs. The first set regresses one of the chosen variables against homicides in cities and then against homicides in rural areas. The last set does the same, but accounts for a time series analysis of the state identifier. (See Appendix for all Regressions) The outputs of the regressions include information about the number of observations, mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum of each of the variables. The chart of the mean, standard deviation and minimum and maximum are listed under Regression 1, although they are the same for all four groups. The results of the regressions show values for the coefficient and the standard error, and I will discuss the results of the t and P tests and the confidence interval for each of the variables.

Overall, the mean of the homicide rates per capita in the city is 0.0043 and the mean of the homicide rates in the rural areas is only slightly lower at 0.0039. To analyze the results of the regressions, I will first examine the Regression 1 group. (See Appendix, Regression 1) In this set, the only variable tested is “nnurbanten.” For the city regression, the R-squared value, which measures the goodness of fit of the model to the data is acceptable, at 0.8155. The next regression shows the rural area regression, and the R-squared value is slightly higher at 0.8881, which indicates that this model fits the data slightly better. For the confidence intervals of the state dummy variables in the city

regressions, zero is not included in the interval, which indicates that the variables are likely to be significant. All of the state values for the city regression are significant, as their P-values are below the “rule of thumb” of 0.05. This is not the case for the parallel rural regression, which includes several states that are not significant, as indicated by high P-values and zero within the confidence interval. As expected, “nnurbanten” is significant for the urban regression with a P-value of 0.000, but this variable is not significant in the rural regression, at 0.267. In the time series set, the R-squared values are also desirable, at 0.8769 for the city region and 0.9317 for the rural region. The number of states that is significant to the regression is more evenly split between significant and insignificant values. In these regressions, “nnurbanten” is not significant in either the city region or the rural region, since the P-values are 0.090 and 0.775 respectively.

The Regression 2 group analyzes the impact of only the “nfborn” variable. In both the urban and rural regression, the R-squared values are good, at 0.8343 and 0.8931 respectively. Here, it is important to note that all of the state dummy variables are significant in the urban and rural regressions, and that “nfborn” is significant in both regressions, since the P-value is 0.000 in the city regression and 0.022 in the rural regression. With the time series regressions, again both R-squared values indicate a good fit of the model, but few states are significant in either regression. The variable of interest is not significant for either the rural or urban regressions since the P-values are too high and zero is included in the confidence interval, which would indicate that there is no effect of the variable on the estimate.

Regression group 3 measures the impact of the “nwhite” variable. The R-squared values of 0.8072 and 0.8874 for the urban and rural regions respectively are good. As with the last two regression groups, the impact of the states is observable in their low P-values. The “nwhite” variable itself is significant in the city regression with a P-value of 0.003, but not in the rural regression, with a high P-value of 0.883. In contrast, the output shows that “nwhite” is not significant for either of the time series regressions because the P-values are so high and zero is included in the confidence intervals.

The fourth regression group includes all three of the previously discussed variables in the regressions. For the regular urban and rural regressions, the R-squared values are 0.8412 for the urban and 0.8970 for the rural region. Based on the P-values I found, the only variable that is not significant in both of the regressions is “nwhite,” but the others are significant. This is not what I expected to find, as I expected that race would play a more important role in homicide rates than it seems to. The R-squared values for the time series regressions are higher, but the variables of interest are not significant for either the urban or the rural regressions. I believe that there might be some multicollinearity between the variables “nfborn” and “nwhite” because most of the people who were considered “white” were in fact foreign born as well, due to European immigration trends. This would mean that using both of these variables in the same regressions counts the overlapping effects twice.

Theories

There continues to be debate as to the causes of the major drop in homicide rates during the late 1930s to the late 1940s. Different historians cite different major sociological factors that may have influenced this drop. Randall Roth, author of *American Homicide*, maintains that

“...homicide rates among adults are not determined by proximate causes such as poverty, drugs, unemployment, alcohol, race or ethnicity, but by factors that seem on the face of it to be impossibly remote, like the feelings that people have toward their government, the degree to which they identify with members of their own communities, and the opportunities they have to earn respect without resorting to violence.”^{xiv}

This is a major theory about homicide advanced by Roth that relies mainly on an empirical analysis of the evidence. Roth notes that after the worst of the Great Depression in 1929, between 1934-1937, the government began to provide those who were unemployed with financial relief and new jobs, and the National Recovery Act was enacted to help stimulate the economy. Additionally, the government began to recognize the rights of unions, issue loans to businesses that were struggling, and grant subsidies to farmers, all of which helped to ease tensions that had been rising along with the homicide rate in the decades earlier. As the government began to gain the trust and confidence of the people, the homicide rate fell dramatically. Roth would associate these factors with the drop in homicide because he claims that as people feel more confident in the stability of the government, they are more likely to resolve conflict in peaceful ways.

Author Gini Graham Scott makes similar remarks on homicide trends in the 1930s when she notes that “many of the day-to-day homicides reflected the struggles of

people to survive hard economic times...many of the more highly publicized murders of the day were the big bank robberies that turned deadly,”^{xv} even though they were rare. Scott also notes that there was an increase in crime solving technologies in the ‘30s, such as the establishment of an FBI ballistics lab in 1932 and the National Police Academy in 1935. ^{xvi} Despite these advances, Scott offers little evidence that improved methods for identifying murderers actually deterred homicides, and there are few quantifiable indicators that could confirm this hypothesis. In order to test Roth’s and Scott’s idea that economic pressures influence homicide rates, I want to examine data from the New Deal Era regarding state level government aid to determine whether a correlation exists between homicide rates and the amount of aid provided to individual states.

From his website, I used Price V. Fishback’s data on the economic aid that was distributed by the New Deal programs that were implemented between 1933 and 1936. ^{xvii} The data was reported at the county level and consisted of 3,068 counties or county/city combinations, but I aggregated these county values to get state values to compare to my original state level homicide rates. Fishback cited New Deal spending information from the U.S. Office of Government Reports (1940). I chose to eliminate many of the variables from the original data set, but kept those that aggregate grants, loans, relief grants, and public works grants. (See Figure 6 for list). While the Fishback data is concerned with data from 1930, I included the years 1929-1932 in my regression because the effects of the government programs would need time influence the homicide rates, if they do at all. It is unlikely that the effects of the spending that Roth proposes, like a reduction in tension and increased confidence in the government, would be felt

immediately in local communities. I expected that there might be an effect after the first year of funding, but that this effect would have diminished by 1932.

In order to see what kind of effect the New Deal government spending had on the homicide rates from 1929-1932, I used the data on total government grants, loans, relief grants, Farm Security Administration loans, and public works grants from 1930. I used this data with city data from each year that I had compiled from my previous analysis at the state level. (See Appendix, New Deal Regressions) In 1929, it is clear that this model does not fit the data well, as the R-squared value is only 0.2263, and only the Farm Security Administration loans variable seems to be significant based on its P-value. The results are similar for the year 1930, with an R-squared value of 0.1842 and the same significant variable. The 1931 model is also not a good fit to the data as indicated by the low R-squared value. However, the P-values of the "Fsalo," "pubwor" and "ndexp" variables are slightly significant. Only "ndexp" would have a downward effect on the homicide rate, since its coefficient is a small negative number. The 1932 regression shows that all of the variables are significant because they have extremely low P-values, but again the R-squared value is low and the model is likely to be somewhat unreliable. The results of these regressions show that it is unlikely that just government aid can be a very good predictor of homicide rates.

Immigration

The immigration factor in the United States in the early twentieth century is one of the most important things to consider when surveying the population. To help explain the drop in homicide rates in the late 1930s to 1940s, it would be important to consider major changes that are going on with respect to immigration in the early 1900s to see how the demographic factors of the population are changing. The chart on immigration from the Historical Statistics of the United States database shows the trends from 1850-1959. (See Figure 5) The graph shows that there is a large downward fall in immigration overall between 1913 and 1916. If immigration were found to be an indicator of homicide rates, it would be important to note that there could be a lag between the effects of admittance of a low number of immigrants and a drop in the homicide rate that occurs ten to twenty years later, as observed in the data.

According to historian Roger Daniels, immigration dropped sharply from 241,700 in 1930 to only 97,139 in 1931. The average annual rate of immigration from 1925-1930 was 293,768 and this rate fell off to only 46,619 between 1931-1945.^{xviii} The post World War II years also saw a drop in European immigration, from about 90 percent of all arrivals before the war to just over two-thirds of all arrivals after the war. This was coupled with an increase in immigration from Canada and Mexico. Daniels argues that the Great Depression in 1929 significantly altered the U.S. patterns of immigration, and that there were two main causes for this decline. First, people began to feel the economic impact of the Great Depression and immigration decreased as a result. Second, there was a drastic change in government enforcement at the time. In 1930,

President Hoover signed an executive order mandating that government immigration officials interpret the “LPC clause” more rigidly. In 1882, this clause had been written to deny “paupers or persons likely to become a public charge” from entrance into the United States, and it wasn’t until the early 1930s that the standards for admittance became more stringent. As a result, many were denied entrance, and even though the order was revoked in 1936, the effects were still felt. I was unable to find data as to how many immigrants were turned away or denied entrance, but Daniels argues that this number is probably quite high.

It is doubtful that immigration is the sole factor in predicting changes in the homicide rate, but the effects of immigration on the changes in the population are important to note. Empirically, the changing compositions of cities could be conducive to more violent crimes like homicide, since race quarrels and discrimination were not uncommon. However, there is little data available regarding crimes that were racially motivated, as these crimes were largely unreported at this time.

Lynching in the American South

In an examination of homicide trends in the United States between 1850 and 1950, it is important to consider and account for the impact of racially motivated lynching crimes in the American South before and after the Civil War. Lynching at this time was usually carried out by a group of people against an individual in order to incite fear or intimidation in the surrounding community. As racial tensions grew in the South

after the Civil War, lynching African Americans and Caucasian people who supported them became more common.

In order to be defined as “lynching” for this chart, the death must meet the following criteria; (1) there is legal evidence that a person was killed, (2) the action was illegal, (3) it was performed by a group of three or more people, and (4) the group acted under the pretense of service to justice, race, or tradition. These statistics were compiled by Douglas Eckberg and archived to the Historical Statistics of the United States online database. They were compiled largely from newspaper accounts of lynchings and from The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the Department of Records and Archives at Tuskegee University. The numbers depicted are considered incomplete because scholars have learned that early lists of lynchings overlook some instances of lynching, include events that are not considered lynching, and even place lynchings in incorrect locations. Unfortunately, there has as yet been no comprehensive review of all of the data that is available. Only lynchings of blacks and whites in the south are listed in this table, as they are most prevalent at this time. However, there are reported accounts of lynchings of forty-five Native Americans, twelve Chinese persons, one Japanese person, and twenty persons of Mexican ancestry between 1882 and 1903. ^{ixx}

The data set represents lynchings based on a few states in the south, including Virginia, Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, Georgia, Arkansas, Florida, and Alabama. Even though there is not a complete set of data available for all of the lynchings that occurred across the country, there has been some

effort to construct this information for individual states. It is difficult to compile this data because there are frequently inconsistencies in reporting the events. Lynching was usually very public, as it was meant to inspire fear and cohesion among those committing the crime. However, it is almost certain that some incidents have not been identified or reported, and I was unable to locate any information about an estimate of the number of unreported lynchings.

The major source of data collected here is from newspaper accounts, from both national papers and local papers. Even though some accounts can be extracted from coroner's reports, for example, relatively few of these exist from the period in question for several Southern states. Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck provide the figures for ten Southern states, and W. Fitzhugh Brundage provides counts for Virginia and has, in addition, constructed a lynching series for Georgia that is very similar to that of Tolnay and Beck. George C. Wright has developed a data series for Kentucky that counts twenty more lynchings than reported by Tolnay and Beck.^{xx} The state of Texas is conspicuous by its absence.

The chart on lynching represents the number of victims of lynching based on race from the years 1882-1964 in America. (See Figure 4) This data is broken down by year and each year is split between the white and black victims of lynching. As expected, this data is higher before the turn of the century and falls dramatically by the 1920s and 30s. The peak of this activity seems to be in 1892 with 230 total lynchings reported that year.^{xxi} This drop is important to consider in the context of changing homicide rates in America because it shows the downward trend of a major form of homicide that is often

hard to estimate. Since slaves were not included in the population of the time, it would not make sense for me to have put these numbers in terms of per capita rates because it is likely that they would artificially inflate the homicide rate, since much of the population rate is not accounted for. Additionally, it is important to account for this type of homicide because these instances are often similar to each other and share common motivations. It is also possible that even people who commit these crimes are repeat offenders and influence this type of crime in their local regions. This would mean that fewer outside social or demographic factors affect a person's tendency to commit homicide, but rather this person's beliefs and past behaviors influence this as well. Due to the sparseness of the data, it is nearly impossible to estimate how many lynchings were committed by repeat offenders. The dramatic decline in the number of lynchings in the south coincide with a drop in the overall national homicide rate.

Conclusions

As previously stated, it is important for law enforcement officials to recognize and understand changes in homicide trends in America in order to deter violent crime more effectively. This kind of analysis is also important for law makers and public policy experts who are responsible for influencing societal factors like government aid that I have discussed. The data I have examined make it clear that the overall homicide rate is not always constant, and that each geographic location in the United States has experienced different increases and decreases in this rate over time. Despite the high homicide rate in the U.S., the data I have examined highlighted a significant drop in this

rate, and this was of primary interest to me. Although Roth and Scott provide good empirical insight as to the causes for the sudden drop in the U.S. homicide rate, it is unclear whether any theory on its own is enough to explain the drop that occurred during the late 1930s-1940s.

In my examination of demographic variables that could affect the homicide rate, I saw that when urban demographics, race and foreign-born status were combined, race is the only factor that does not seem to have a significant effect on the homicide rate. This was somewhat unexpected, but I explained that multicollinearity may exist between the “nwhite” and “nfborn” variables, which may have affected the significance of the “nwhite” variable. In examining New Deal Era data to determine whether government aid affected the homicide rate, I found the R-squared values to be low, indicating that these values alone accounted for very little of the variations observed in the data. This made it clear that although these values may be significant predictors of homicide, the overall model of aid itself to predict homicide rates is not reliable. Instead of looking at only a few variables to predict changes in homicide rates, it is more likely that a combination of several of these factors influenced the fall in the homicide rate during the late 1930s-1940s. I discussed the changes in immigration and the drop in lynchings that occurred at the same time as this large drop in homicide rates. These variables should be considered in conjunction with Roth’s and Scott’s ideas about the significance of societal factors like government aid and national morale. While it is difficult to quantify morale in order to examine it with my regressions, it could prove to be an important factor in homicide rates. Additional factors may be public perceptions of the likelihood that a person will be arrested for murder, as a result of an increase in crime fighting

technologies. However, it is difficult to know whether such advances in technology actually deter crime, since homicides are only measureable after they have been committed. Although a comprehensive predictive model for homicide rates is not yet available, I have shown that it is important to consider demographic information about a region as well as changes in that region's societal factors when predicting changes in homicide rates.

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- xi. Eckberg data on HSUS
- xii. Eckberg documentation of data,
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- xv. Scott, p. 72
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APPENDIX

Regression 1





Regression 2



Regression 3**Regression 4**

New Deal Data Regressions

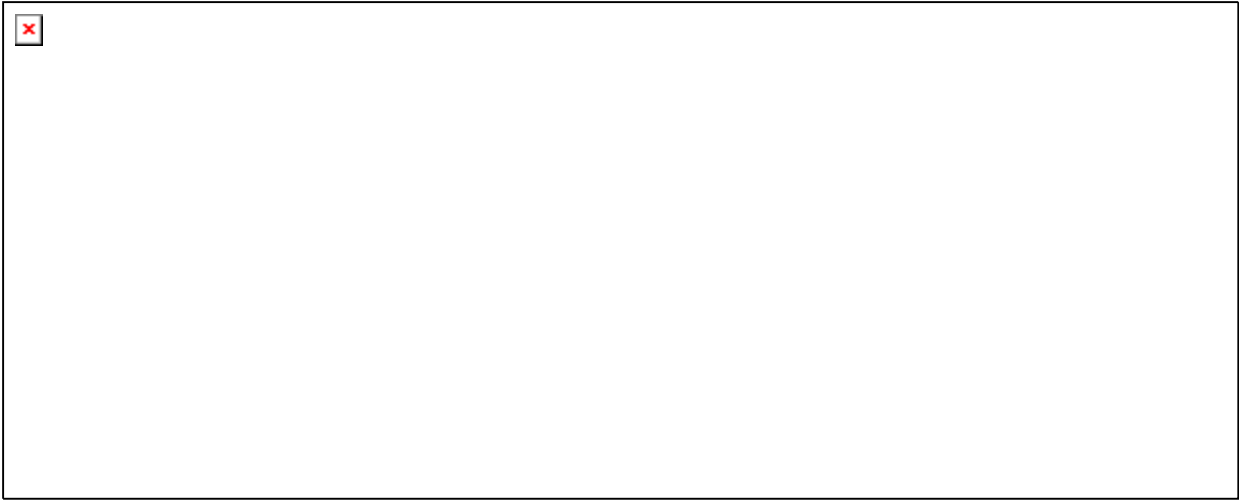


Figure 1

National Crude Homicide Rates, per 1,000

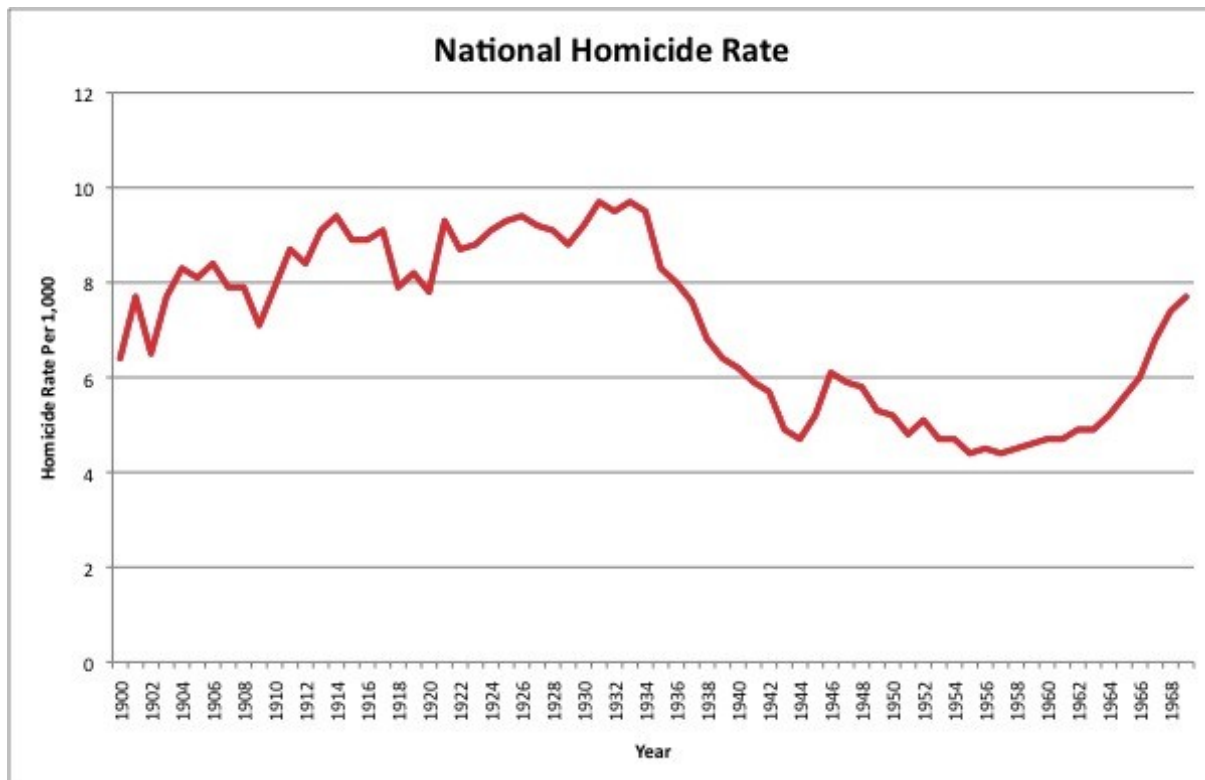
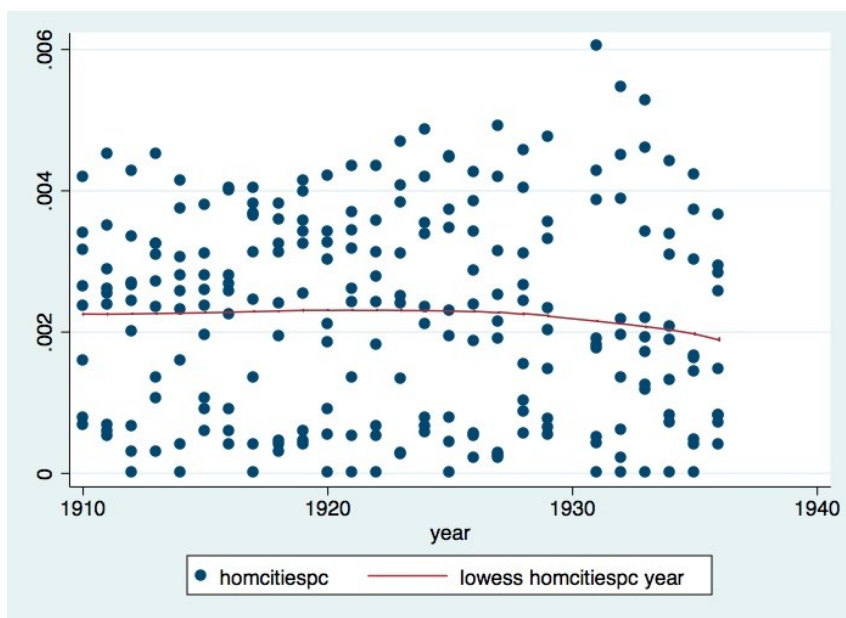
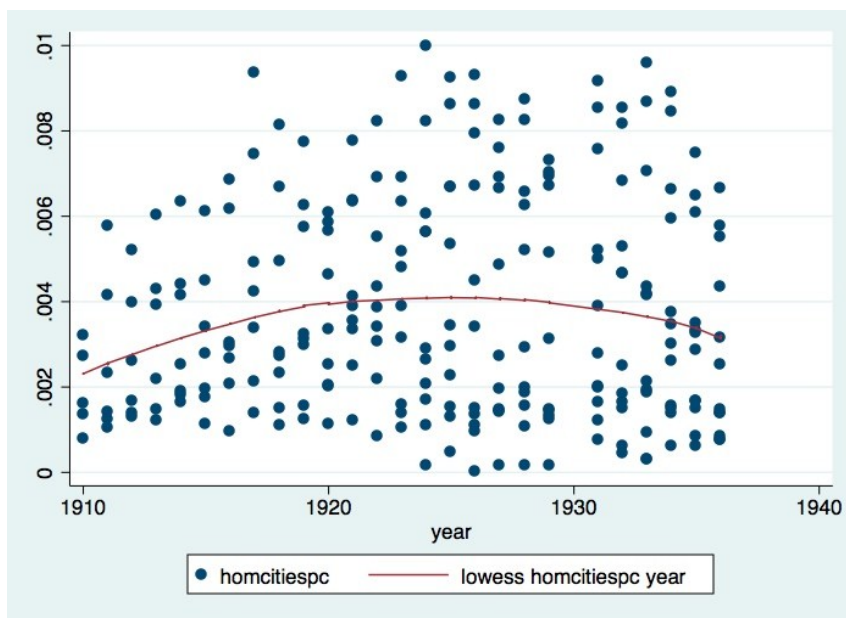


Figure 2

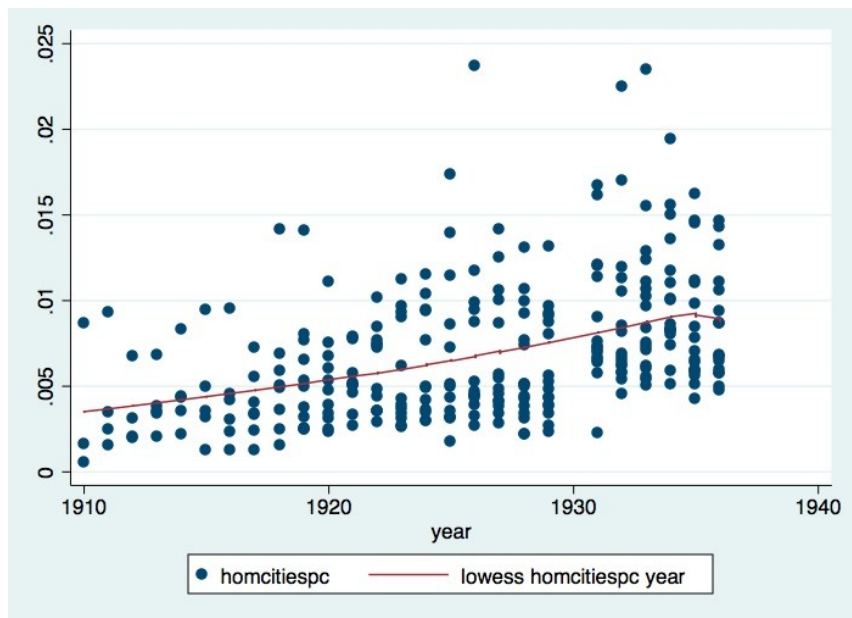
Regions 1.1 and 1.2, New England



Regions 2.1 and 2.2, Mid West



Regions 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, South



Regions 4.1, 4.2, West

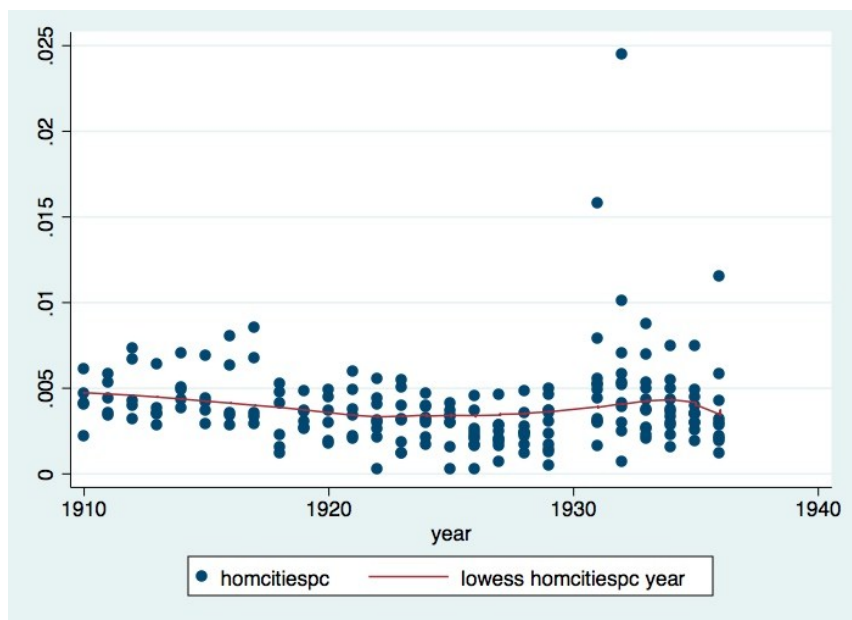


Figure 3
List of Regions and the States included,
coded for use in regressions

Region 11 (6)

7 Connecticut
 20 Maine
 22 Massachusetts
 31 New Hampshire
 41 Rhode Island
 47 Vermont

Region 12 (3)

32 New Jersey
 34 New York
 40 Pennsylvania

Region 21 (5)

14 Illinois
 15 Indiana
 23 Michigan
 37 Ohio
 51 Wisconsin

Region 22 (7)

16 Iowa
 17 Kansas
 25 Minnesota
 27 Missouri
 29 Nebraska
 36 North Dakota
 43 South Dakota

Region 31 (8)

8 Delaware
 9 District of Columbia
 10 Florida
 11 Georgia
 21 Maryland
 35 North Carolina
 42 South Carolina
 48 Virginia

50 West Virginia

Region 32 (4)

1 Alabama
 18 Kentucky
 26 Mississippi
 44 Tennessee

Region 33 (4)

4 Arkansas
 19 Louisiana
 38 Oklahoma
 45 Texas

Region 41 (9)

3 Arizona
 6 Colorado
 12 Hawaii
 13 Idaho
 28 Montana
 30 Nevada
 33 New Mexico
 46 Utah
 52 Wyoming

Region 42 (3)

5 California
 39 Oregon
 49 Washington

Figure 4
Crude Lynching in the U.S. by Race

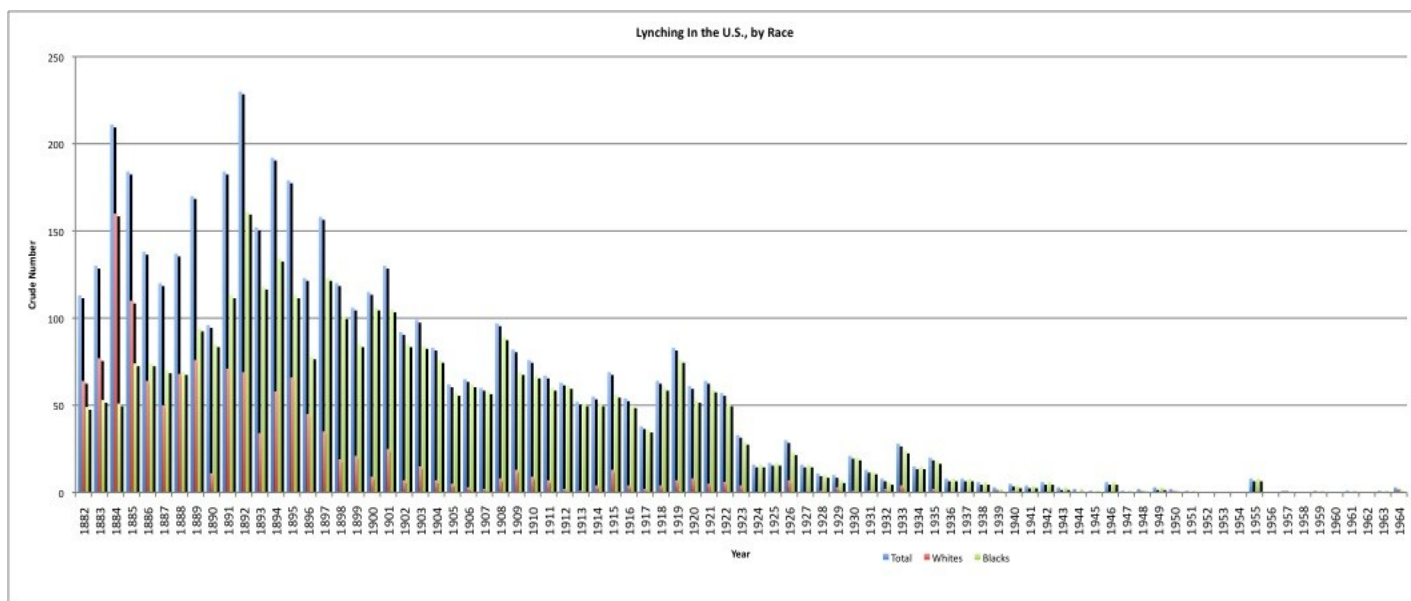


Figure 5
Immigration in the U.S.

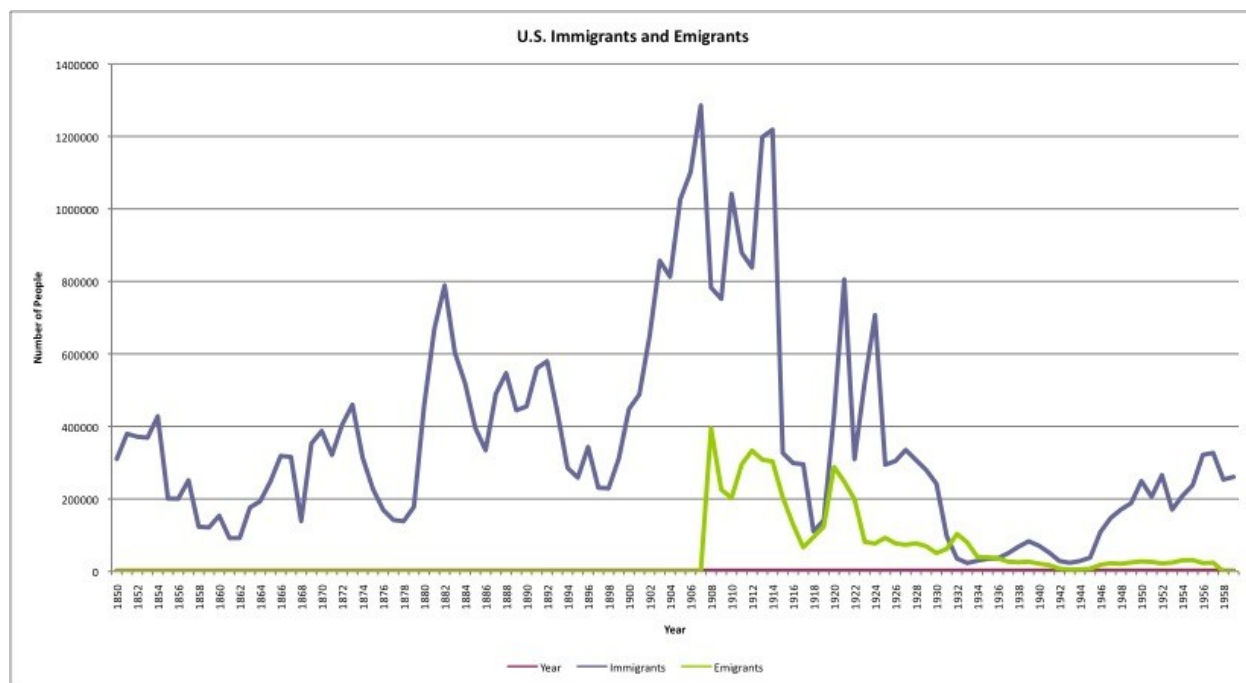


Figure 6**List of data used from Fishback New Deal dataset**

- pop30 = 'population in 1930'
- ndexp = 'total Grants'
- loan = 'total loans'
- relief = 'total Relief grants'
- fsalo = 'Farm Security Admin. loans'
- pubwor = 'public works grants'
- rtsapc29 = 'retail sales per capita, 1929'
- pctblk30 = '% black in population, 1930'
- pctill30 = '% illiterate in population, 1930'
- pctunem = 'unemp. as % of gainfully employed, 1930'
- mean9628 = 'mean % voting democrat, 1896-1928'
- roosmmn2 = '% vote for Roosevelt minus mean 1896-1928'
- std9632 = 'std. dev. of % democrat, 1896-1928'
- pctvt32 = 'pres. votes 1932 per population 1930'