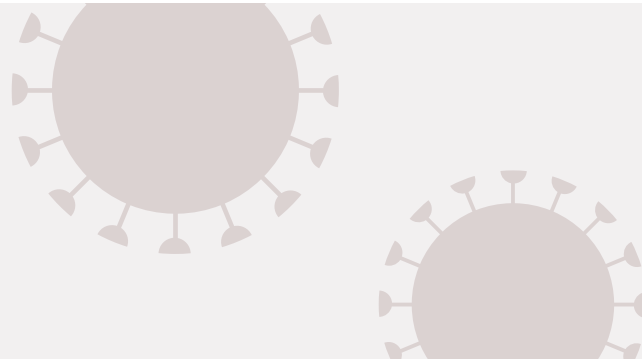


The pandemic changed the way people worked, shopped, socialised and travelled. Patterns of crime and policing changed too.

**Shubhangi Agrawal, Tom Kirchmaier** and **Carmen Villa-Llera** reveal how different parts of the UK are faring.



# Covid-19: the impact on local crime rates

The Covid-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns had an immediate impact on the number and types of crimes recorded – and this change could be long-lasting.

During the two years since the first lockdown in the UK, our analysis reveals that acquisitive crimes such as burglary and shoplifting fell – and have remained low – but the level of violent offences, which had been rising for several years before the pandemic, has remained high. Within this general pattern, there is substantial variation across crime categories and geographical areas.

During lockdown, people worked from home and non-essential shops were shut. As a natural consequence, burglary and shoplifting rates fell sharply and even after the lifting of lockdown restrictions those crimes remained at lower levels.

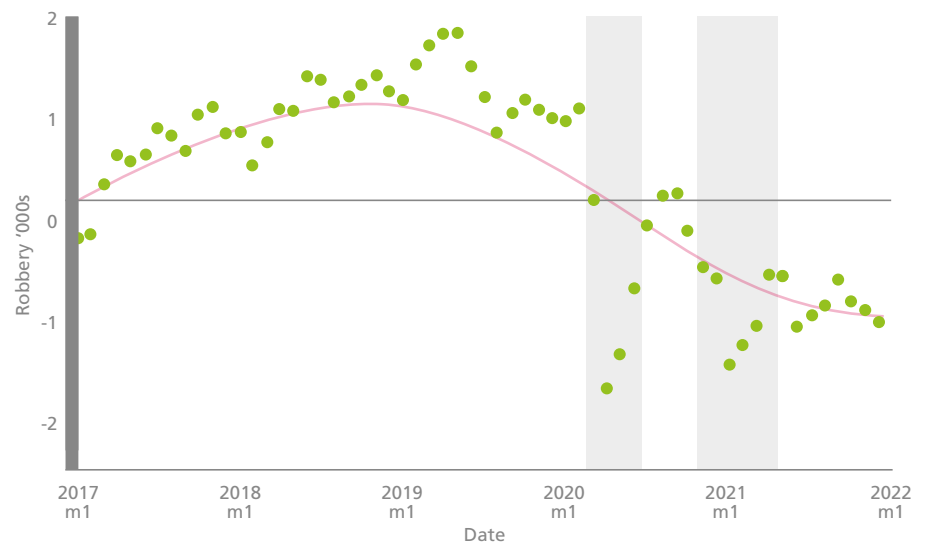
Figures 1 and 2 show the number of acquisitive crimes compared with the average for the period 2010 to 2017, at the same time of year. Rates of robbery and burglary are now lower than they were pre-pandemic. Months in which crimes are below zero mean that crimes were below expected levels after considering seasonal characteristics. De-seasonalising the data allows us to

control for the particularities of each month that affect crime. For instance, some crimes are more prominent during warmer months.

The charts relate to crimes that appear in the Police UK database, and which are attributed to a particular location. These local crime data do not allow us

to assess trends in cybercrime and online fraud, but the recent Office for National Statistics’ Crime Survey for England and Wales shows a large increase in those two categories since the beginning of the pandemic. This suggests there has been a shift from in-person acquisitive crimes towards online offences.

Figure 1: Change in number of robberies (de-seasonalised, thousands) 2017-2022



## Acquisitive crimes appear to have shifted from being in-person to online offences



### Crime gap between areas widens

But the pandemic did not slow down violent crime. In fact, it has increased in the poorest areas of the country. Crime rates tend to be lower where the local economy is stronger, but these differences have now widened.

Areas with higher than median Jobseekers' Allowance or Universal Credit claimant rates and a higher than median increase in claimant rates during the pandemic had 1.28 more violent crimes per year (per 1,000 population) before the pandemic, than the richest areas. As of 2021, this difference has become 1.33.

Violence has been on the rise since 2014, and lockdown periods haven't changed this. Lockdowns reduced overall crime rates, but violent crimes remain at high levels – and so make up a larger proportion of the offences that police are now dealing with. Public order offences

– crimes causing public fear, alarm, or distress – were on the rise pre-pandemic, and the trend has since accelerated.

While the police have recorded fewer crimes in each of 2020 and 2021 than in 2019, this is not homogeneous across the country. More than a third (37%) of the areas in the country recorded more crimes – and anti-social behaviour incidents – in 2021 than in 2019.

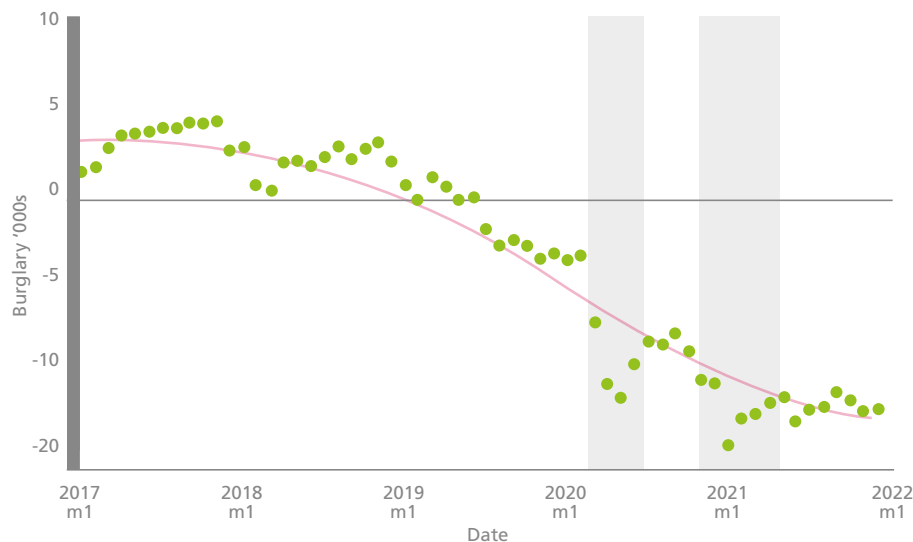
Labour market indicators appear to be significant predictors of higher crime in 2021 in all crime categories. Across all categories, areas with higher proportions of lone parent families, lower educational attainment, and a population with worse health on average are more likely to have recorded more crimes in 2021 than in 2019.

As the UK has lifted pandemic restrictions, some types of crime that had increased during pandemic (such as

anti-social behaviour and drug offences) appear to have returned to their pre-pandemic levels. Violence, which was at very high levels pre-Covid-19, remains at very high levels. But acquisitive crimes have remained at lower levels – even after the lifting of lockdown restrictions. And as more people will continue to work from home (at least partly), we believe that these lower levels of acquisitive crime are likely to remain.

Since crime rates tend to be higher in areas with high unemployment, policies to reduce unemployment would have a positive impact on reducing crime. The pandemic has highlighted increasing inequality in wages, education and health. Crime is yet another area in which spatial differences are large. Our analysis shows that while the pandemic has reduced crime overall, it has done little to reduce these gaps.

Figure 2: Change in number of burglaries (de-seasonalised, thousands) 2017-2022



This article summarises 'Covid-19 and Local Crime Rates in England and Wales – Two Years into the Pandemic' by Shubhangi Agrawal, Tom Kirchmaier and Carmen Villa-Llera, CEP Covid-19 Analysis Series No. 27 (<https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-027.pdf>).

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**Notes:** These charts shows monthly crimes in England and Wales as reported by Police UK after adjusting for monthly trends. We include only areas for which we have non-missing data since 2017.