

# The Effect of Casino Gambling on Crime\*

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**T**HE LEGALIZATION of gambling has attracted a great deal of attention from a large number of cities and states within the last 20 years. Lured by the potential for new sources of revenue that do not involve increases in income, property, or sales taxes, many states have opted to legalize various forms of gambling. Since 1963, 21 states have begun state lotteries, 3 states have permitted wagering on the game of jai alai, 2 states have legalized off-track betting, and 1 state has established casino gambling [Fowler, Mangione, and Pratter, 1978; Moss and Loftus, 1985].

Although legalized gambling has not produced the revenues anticipated by its proponents, the net financial gain has not been insignificant [Task Force on Legalized Gambling, 1974]. In New Jersey, for example, casinos paid the city, county, and state \$200 million in fees and taxes during 1981.

Since 1978, moreover, they have paid more than \$265 million—8 percent of their gambling winnings—into a state fund to help elderly and disabled people. This year, \$125 million is budgeted for distribution in four programs that give qualified people an average of \$187 for medical prescriptions, \$175 for utility bills and \$275 for property tax relief [McFadden, 1982].

The success of casinos in producing revenues in both Nevada and Atlantic City has drawn increasing scrutiny by government officials, city planners, and the public.

Unlike most other forms of legalized gambling, casinos have the potential to improve a wide range of social and economic problems, rather than merely raising needed funds. In Atlantic City, for example, the casino industry has not only produced substantial revenues for the state, but has also provided for 28,500 new jobs, over \$2 billion in new construction, and a 16 percent increase in new housing starts in the industry's first year of development, when the national figure had dropped by 13 percent [Woodruff, 1979; 1980; 1980a]. In addition, the city's taxable property has tripled from \$312 million to over \$1 billion since casinos opened. It is expected to double again as new construction continues [McGowan, 1983].

The first casino opened in May 1978 following a successful state referendum that permitted casino

development only in Atlantic City. In 1984, Atlantic City had 10 hotel-casinos in operation with another four under construction [Seglem, 1984]. As a result, the tourism trade has been extraordinary.

There are about 52 million people living within 300 miles of Atlantic City and more than 19 million of them visited Atlantic City last year, while only 11.8 million went to Las Vegas. This year, the number of tourists in Atlantic City is expected to soar past 22 million [Jankowski, 1982].

In 1983, nearly 27 million people visited Atlantic City, making it the most popular resort in the United States. It is clear, therefore, that the impact of casino gambling can be significant in many areas.

For this reason, a number of cities and states are now considering proposals to authorize casino gambling. Although these proposals are in varying stages of development, New York State, Pennsylvania, New Orleans, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Florida have all expressed more than passing interest in casino development [Lenehan, 1979].

The advent of legalized gambling casinos outside of Nevada has not been without its critics, however. Primary among the concerns expressed has been the threat that casino gambling will greatly increase crime in formerly "safe" cities. When Florida rejected a proposition to legalize casino gambling in 1978, fear of increased crime was acknowledged as the most significant reason for its defeat [Bumsted, 1982]. This concern was fueled largely by reports from Atlantic City that crime had increased markedly since the introduction of casino gambling [Marks, 1980]. In spite of these claims, however, the link between casino gambling and crime has yet to be conclusively established.

## *Officials' Views of Casino Gambling*

The connection, if any, between casino gambling and crime is significant for several reasons. First, the existence and extent of such a relationship should be carefully established before making any decision about the desirability of casino gambling. Second, if no such link exists, those objecting to legalized casinos would be forced to abandon their arguments to oppose them or else to resist casino proposals on other grounds. Finally, regardless of the findings of the study reported here, the debate over the casino issue will be simplified through the elimination of a controversial issue which has, to date, been addressed only through questionable data and conflicting opinion.

Surprisingly, relatively little serious attention has been given to the effect of casinos on crime. In 1976,

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the U.S. Commission on the Review of the National Policy Toward Gambling recommended that casino gambling *not* be expanded outside of Nevada. The grounds for this recommendation were not based on the Commission's concern about crime, however. Rather, the view was based on questionable evidence regarding the high rate of compulsive gambling in Nevada and the fact that casino gambling might result in heavy land speculation if introduced into nonurban areas [Reuter, 1979]. With regard to crime, the Commission concluded that Nevada's casinos had no problem with organized crime.

Although organized crime once was a significant factor in some Nevada casinos... the presence of organized crime in Nevada today is negligible... On the whole [Nevada] regulations are sufficiently stringent and enforcement is effective [U.S. Commission, 1976: 78].

Therefore, concern about crime played little or no role in the Commission's recommendation regarding casino gambling.

In 1979, the Governor of New York State appointed a Casino Gambling Study Panel to report on the problems and prospects for legalizing casino gambling there. After evaluating casino operations in Atlantic City, Las Vegas, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Martinique, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, the Panel recommended that four areas of the State be given the opportunity to vote on a referendum to decide whether casino gambling should be established at these locations. The areas selected were: the Catskills, the City of Long Beach (on Long Island), the City of New York (Manhattan, the Rockaways, and Coney Island), and the Niagara Frontier (the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls). It was felt that these areas were most likely to benefit from casinos because of tourism, convention business, and economic activity. It was also found that local interest in these areas was the highest and that casino-hotels could be absorbed "without adversely affecting the local community's character and overall environment" [1979: 18].

Similar to the conclusions of the U.S. Gambling Commission in 1976, the Casino Gambling Study Panel found that organized crime is no longer a significant factor in casino gambling.

The Panel is very aware of the widespread public perception that casino gambling and organized crime are invariably intertwined. The Panel recognizes that there is a historical basis for this belief since organized crime did infiltrate and control some casinos in the early days of Las Vegas. We have investigated the development of the casinos in Nevada since the 1950's and have concluded that casinos have substantially moved toward a professional, regulated industry, largely devoid of an all-pervasive influence by organized crime. The movement into the industry of large, publicly held companies, under the supervision of the Securities and Exchange Commission, has brought about a substantial improvement in the integrity of the casino business [1979: 10-11].

The Panel also interviewed law enforcement officials involved in investigations of organized crime and found that they agreed with this conclusion.

The Panel went on to note, however, that "Experience in Nevada and New Jersey suggests that prostitution and street crimes, such as robbery, will increase as a result of casino gambling." They concluded that law enforcement agencies "will require additional resources" to monitor the incidence of these crimes. Unfortunately, no data are provided to substantiate these claims.

### *Opposition to Casinos Due to Crime*

In 1981, the New York State Attorney General released a report in which he opposed the introduction of casino gambling in New York State. His opposition was based entirely on three arguments: (1) Legalized casino gambling would result in a "debilitating upsurge" in crime in those areas; (2) Gambling casinos are a "magnet" for organized crime for which New York State lacks the "sophisticated" law enforcement system required to prevent its infiltration; and (3) Legalized casino gambling poses a "danger to the integrity and credibility" of government through corruption. In 1983, the Twentieth Century Fund published a similar report focusing on problems with casino gambling in Atlantic City [Sternlieb and Hughes, 1983].

Both the Twentieth Century Fund and the Attorney General's reports attempted to support their arguments in several ways. Unfortunately, the potential threat of organized crime infiltration and official corruption are based entirely on isolated examples and innuendo. The justification for these allegations are fraught with phrases such as, "Although organized crime activities are extremely difficult to detect and impossible to quantify..." and, "In the land of hearsay and 'authoritative' newspapers stories, it is difficult to maintain a perspective." No legitimate evidence is presented, such as convictions of organized criminals involved in Atlantic City casinos, to support their views.

The reports illustrate the upsurge in street crime, however, by relaying increases in the number of Uniform Crime Reports Index Crimes (i.e., murder, rape, robbery, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft) that occurred in Atlantic City from 1977 to 1980. In 1977, for example, 4,391 Index crimes were reported to police in Atlantic City. By 1980, this number had risen to 11,899. What this comparison fails to accomplish, however, is the accurate presentation of the risk of crime to citizens in Atlantic City. That is to say, crime statistics can be extremely misleading when they fail to account for: (1) changes in the population at risk, (2) changes

in criminal opportunities, (3) changes in law enforcement resources and priorities, and (4) changes in crime elsewhere in the State.

For example, a city with a population of 100 citizens might experience 10 reported Index crimes in a year. Therefore, the probability that any one citizen will be the victim of one of these crimes is 1 in 10 (i.e., 10 in 100). If the population of this city suddenly doubles to, say, 200 citizens, it is likely that the number of crimes that occur there will also rise—simply because there are more people to be offenders and victims. If the number of crimes also doubled, to 20, it would appear as if crime increased 100 percent. However, this is not the case. If 200 people are now at risk and 20 crimes are committed, the probability of being a victim is *still* 1 in 10 (i.e., 20 in 200). Therefore, the risk of being victimized by crime can remain the same when *both* population and crime increase together. Both the Attorney General's and the Twentieth Century Fund's reports failed to account for this possibility.

Likewise, the opportunity for certain crimes undoubtedly increased in Atlantic City from 1977 to 1980. For example, as part of New Jersey's casino legislation, casino operators are also required to build an attached hotel of at least 500 rooms. Currently there are 10 hotel-casinos in operation there. This means that since 1978, the number of rooms able to be burglarized may have increased by as many as 5,000 rooms. Obviously, if there are 5,000 more dwellings (possible victims) to burglarize, this incredible rise in opportunity will undoubtedly lead to more burglaries. Only through a statistical examination of the percentage change in total hotel rooms during this period (as well as other dwellings and businesses that can be victimized) can it truly be said that the risk of burglary has increased.

Similarly, if the Atlantic City Police Department were significantly enlarged, it would likely uncover evidence of more crimes—not necessarily because more crimes are occurring, but because more police are available to uncover them. For example, if the division responsible for the enforcement of prostitution laws is provided with increased manpower, police will likely uncover more cases of prostitution—even though the behavior itself may not be any more common than it was previously.

Finally, increases in crime in Atlantic City must be compared to trends in the rest of the State. If crime elsewhere in the State increased as it did in Atlantic City (without the benefit of casinos), a rising crime rate cannot properly be attributed to casino gambling. Rather, Atlantic City's increase would merely be a reflection of crime trends throughout New Jersey, and not an aberration caused by the introduction of casinos.

Therefore, although the Twentieth Century Fund's and the Attorney General's conclusions about the casino-crime link may be correct, their data do not provide adequate information to justify the conclusions they make. It is the purpose of this investigation to gather additional data that will either substantiate or set aside these conclusions.

#### *Investigating the Casino-Crime Link*

This investigation assesses whether the relationship between casino gambling and crime truly exists or whether it is a spurious one resulting from previously unconsidered factors. The variables included in the study are: (1) the number of Index crimes reported in Atlantic City from 1978 to 1982, (2) changes in manpower of the Atlantic City Police Department during this period, (3) changes in the average daily population of Atlantic City over this period, (4) changes in the number of hotel rooms, apartments, homes, and businesses during this period, and (5) the number of Index crimes reported in the rest of the State from 1978 to 1982. The last four variables have not been studied previously with regard to their effect on the crime rate in Atlantic City.

It is the aim of this investigation to develop timely evidence that confirms or rejects the most common argument that has been put forth in the debate over casino gambling and crime. As noted earlier, a growing number of states and cities are currently considering casino proposals. It is important that the evidence upon which these proposals are enacted or defeated is both valid and reliable. The findings of this study will also aid citizens in more confidently weighing the views of public officials and lobbyists on the casino issue.

#### *Findings*

The crimes in Atlantic City for which information was systematically collected during the period 1978 to 1982 were: murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. The FBI refers to these offenses as the crime "Index" because they serve as a barometer of serious crime in the United States. Opinion surveys have also found them to be crimes that the public fears the most [Albanese, 1983].

Crime statistics for this 5-year period were available only year-to-year, as were population and police manpower data. Furthermore, reliable counts of visitors, residences, and retail establishments were not available prior to 1978. As a result, a before-after examination of monthly or quarterly fluctuations through statistical techniques such as interrupted time-series analysis or multiple regression was not possible, because these methods re-

quire large numbers of observations [Cook and Campbell, 1979]. Nevertheless, it was possible to conduct a preliminary examination of the significance of the casino-crime link through more comprehensible correlation statistics. Although data for only the last 5 years are presented (and more conclusive, long-term findings emerge as times goes on and more data become available), the findings reported here help to provide an early indication of the strength and direction of any casino-crime link.

With the use of correlation statistics it is possible to determine whether the introduction of casinos is related to the increase in Index crimes, or whether the rise in crime is due, instead, to increases in population, police, or increasing crime in the rest of the state. Fortunately, correlation statistics are easy to understand. A perfect correlation is +1 (like the relation between rain and dampness), while a perfect inverse correlation is -1 (like the relation between temperature and ice formation). When there is no relationship between two variables, the

TABLE 1. EFFECT OF CASINO GAMBLING ON STREET CRIME

	A Number of Atlantic City Index Crimes	B Average Daily Population	C Number of Police Employees	D Number of Statewide Index Crimes	E Number of Casino- Hotels
1978	3,996	102,407	343	270,801	0.5
1979	5,511	113,747	426	303,135	1.5
1980	10,277	128,551	451	321,936	3.7
1981	11,369	149,012	469	308,079	7.0
1982	12,952	159,634	534	302,871	9.0

Column A = Index Crimes known to police in Atlantic City (less burglary). Source: State of New Jersey Division of State Police, *Crime in New Jersey*.

Column B = Includes residents and visitors to Atlantic City arriving by car, bus, and airplane. Source: Atlantic County Division of Economic Development, New Jersey Department of Transportation, Municipal Airport Utility, New Jersey Expressway Authority.

Column C = Police employees in Atlantic City. Source: *Crime in New Jersey*.

Column D = Index crimes (less burglary) known to police in New Jersey (less Atlantic City). Source: *Crime in New Jersey*.

Column E = Decimals indicate that some new casino-hotels were open for only a portion of the year.

Table 1 displays the information required to determine the effect of casino gambling on street crime. As column A of Table 1 illustrates, Index crime in Atlantic City sharply increased from 1978 to 1982. As Column E indicates, the first casino opened in 1978 (at approximately the year's mid-point) with the total number of casinos reaching nine in 1982. At first glance, therefore, it appears that Index crime rose sharply as the casinos opened between 1978 and 1982. However, further examination of Table 1 shows (in Column C) that the number of police employees also rose from 1978 to 1982, raising the possibility that crimes known to police may have increased because more police were available to uncover them. Likewise, the average daily population also rose sharply during this period, creating the possibility that crime may have gone up simply because more people were around to be offenders and victims (i.e., this is why crime is generally higher in cities than in rural areas). Finally, serious crime in the rest of the State also increased during this period, leading one to wonder whether Atlantic City's increase in crime may just be a reflection of a general rise in crime everywhere.

correlation is zero. As a result, all correlations fall somewhere between -1 and +1. Correlation statistics are of great value in scientific applications because they tell you precisely *how strong* the relationship is between two variables.

Based on the information in Columns A and E in Table 1, the correlation between casinos and Index crime in Atlantic City is +0.96, which is a very strong correlation. The use of *partial* correlation statistics allows us to *control* for the effects of additional factors that might be giving us misleading results. In this investigation, we wish to see if the casino-crime link remains or disappears when we control for the effects of police manpower, population, and Index crime in the rest of the State. If the observed correlation between casinos and crime remains the same or increases, we can conclude that casinos appear to have an *independent* effect on serious crime in Atlantic City, and that other states and cities should keep this in mind when considering legalization of casinos in their jurisdictions. If the observed correlation is significantly reduced (when we control for the effects of police manpower, population, and statewide Index crime), it can be

concluded that casinos have no direct effect on serious crime in Atlantic City, and that crime has risen due to factors other than the casinos themselves.

When average daily population is controlled, the correlation between casinos and crime *drops* markedly from +.96 to -.34. (Increases in police manpower and statewide crime trends had little effect on the casino-crime relationship.) This means that increases in Index crime are best accounted for by increases in the average daily population of Atlantic City, suggesting that growth in the number of visitors to Atlantic City has surpassed increases in crime to the point that the personal risk of victimization is declining to some extent. Therefore, the increase in serious crime in Atlantic City has been more than offset by an increasing population there. The results has been a slight *reduction* in the likelihood of being victimized there.

#### *A Separate Effect for Burglary?*

Burglary is a crime against property and not against individuals. As a result, only homes, apartments, hotel rooms, and business establishments can be burglarized. Table 2 lists (in Column A) the number of burglaries known to police in Atlantic City each year from 1978 to 1982. Column B shows the number of residences and commercial establishments (the only possible victims of burglary) over this 5-year period. Column D illustrates burglaries in the rest of the State during this period. A separate correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether the risk of burglary had changed in a different manner from the other Index crimes since the advent of casino gambling.

The correlation between known burglaries and casinos was found to be a negligible -.05. When a partial correlation was computed that controlled for

the effects of changes in residences and commercial establishments and burglaries elsewhere in the State, the original correlation dropped dramatically from -.05 to -.92. (Increases in the number of police employees had only a small effect on this decline.) Similar to the earlier analysis of the effect of casino gambling on the Index crimes of murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, larceny, and motor vehicle theft, it appears that the slight overall increase in the number of burglaries between 1978 and 1982 actually masks a sharp *decline* in the individual risk of being burglarized. That is, the apparently negligible correlation between casino development and burglaries actually suppresses the true change that occurs when increases in residences and retail establishments and a general decline in burglaries across the State are accounted for. As a result, the risk of residential or commercial burglary has *decreased* in Atlantic City as casinos have expanded.

#### *Conclusions*

Although this study has found that increasing crime in Atlantic City is not due to casino gambling, this conclusion should not be construed as minimizing the significance of increases in crime there. In fact, the lack of any direct casino-crime link may be due to the intensive crime prevention effort that was written into New Jersey's Casino Control Act.

In order to insure the public's confidence in the ability of the State to effectively control legalized gambling, New Jersey established, under the supervision of the State Attorney General, a Division of Gaming Enforcement which is responsible for investigations, recommendations, and supervision of the licensing of casinos and their employees, operations and audits of casinos, and the licensing of all ancillary companies doing business with the casino-hotels. The Division is staffed by nearly 500 attorneys, accountants, investigators, and state police

TABLE 2. EFFECT OF CASINO GAMBLING ON BURGLARY

	A Number of Atlantic City Burglaries	B Number of Atlantic City Homes/Business	C Number of Police Employees	D Number of Statewide Burglaries	E Number of Casino- Hotels
1978	1,742	4,804	343	105,001	0.5
1979	1,499	4,906	426	115,745	1.5
1980	1,622	5,331	451	136,334	3.7
1981	1,225	7,990	469	127,053	7.0
1982	1,837	7,694	534	104,610	9.0

*Column A* = Burglaries known to police in Atlantic City. Source: State of New Jersey Division of State Police, *Crime in New Jersey*.

*Column B* = Includes new dwelling units authorized, mercantile licenses issued, and new hotel rooms. Source: Atlantic County Division of Economic Development, Atlantic City Mercantile Tax Office, New Jersey Department of Labor and Industry.

*Column C* = Police employees in Atlantic City. Source: *Crime in New Jersey*.

*Column D* = Burglaries known to police in New Jersey (less Atlantic City). Source: *Crime in New Jersey*.

*Column E* = Decimals indicate that some new casino-hotels were open for only a portion of the year.

detectives to carry out these tasks—all of whom are paid for by a tax on the casinos. Therefore, the Division of Gaming Enforcement is financially self-sufficient and does not depend upon general tax revenues paid by the citizens of New Jersey for its support.

As a result, states having support for the legalization of casino gambling should not fail to consider legalization due to fear of increases in serious crimes against persons and property. Based on this analysis of the Atlantic City experience, the advent of casino gambling has no direct effect on serious crime. Such finding suggests that any city which undergoes a significant revitalization (whether it be casino-hotels, theme parks, convention centers, or other successful development) that is accompanied by large increases in the number of visitors, hotels, and/or other commercial activity, may experience **increases in the extent of crime but a decrease in the risk of victimization--due to even faster increases in the average daily population of the city.**

Although crimes known to the police have increased in Atlantic City since the introduction of casino-hotels, this increase has been more than offset by changes in the average daily population of the City and a general statewide increase in crime. States that follow New Jersey's example in providing a significant crime prevention effort as part of their casino legislation are also likely to experience success in introducing casino-hotels to revitalize a local economy, without an increase in the risk of victimization of its citizens. As this investigation has found, the average visitor to Atlantic City in 1982 was less likely to be the victim of a serious violent or property crime than he or she was before casinos were introduced there.

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# Federal Probation

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## This Issue in Brief

**Probation and Felony Offenders.**—Author Joan Petersilia summarizes the major findings of a recent Rand study designed to discover whether felony probation presents unacceptable risks for public safety and, if so, what the system could do to overcome those risks. To this end, the study sought to establish how effective probation has been for a sample of felony probationers, to identify the criteria courts use to decide whether a convicted felon gets a prison or probation sentence, to discover whether the prediction of recidivism could be improved, and to see if the system could develop a felony sentencing alternative that poses less risk for public safety. The results show that two-thirds of those sentenced to probation in Los Angeles and Alameda, California, were arrested during a 40-month followup period. Given these findings, the author concludes that the criminal justice system needs an alternative form of punishment intermediate between prison and probation. The article recommends that programs incorporate intensive surveillance with substantial community service and restitution.

**Prosecutors Don't Always Aim To Pleas.**—Barbara Boland and Brian Forst examine a new data base on prosecution practices across the county, focusing on the prevalence of guilty pleas relative to trials. They find substantial variation in the number of pleas per trial from jurisdiction to jurisdiction; they also find evidence that this variation is driven substantially by differences in prosecution styles.

**Explaining The Get Tough Movement: Can The Public Be Blamed?**—This article assesses the common assertion that the current movement to get tough with offenders is a reflection of the public will. Through an analysis of data collected in Texas, authors Francis T. Cullen, Gregory A. Clark, and

John F. Wozniak discovered that citizens do indeed harbor punitive attitudes. However, the data also revealed that few citizens are intensely fearful of crime (a supposed cause of punitive attitudes) and that support for rehabilitation as a goal of corrections remains strong. Taken together, these findings suggest that the get tough movement can only partially be attributed to public desires. Instead, a full explanation must attend to the changing social context that not only shaped public views but also en-

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