

MGC Research Snapshot

Assessing the Influence of Gambling on Public Safety in Massachusetts Cities and Towns: Crime Comparison Analysis of Changes in the MGM Springfield Region 2013-2022

January 2024

What you need to know

This report is an analysis of changes in activity in the communities surrounding MGM Springfield during the past decade and after the opening of the casino. Findings include that overall, crime in the region continued to drop for the entire decade with a slight uptick in 2022. Distinct summer-time seasonality occurred each year with the exception of a lag that occurred during the COVID-19 summer closure.

What is this research about?

MGM Springfield opened on 24 August 2018 in the midst of a dense, urban area with a historically higher-than-average, but decreasing, crime rate. This report covers changes in crime statistics for the surrounding cities and towns during the past decade and after the opening of the casino, with a particular focus on 2022.

The primary purpose of this report was to conduct an analysis of the crime distribution throughout the region surrounding MGM Springfield since the casino opened, to identify which changes in activity might be attributable to the casino, and to triage trends for more detailed analysis and response among the participating agencies.

What did the researchers do?

Data was collected from eight (Springfield, Agawam, Chicopee, East Longmeadow, Holyoke, Longmeadow, Northampton, and West Springfield) of the eleven agencies within the region and the Massachusetts State Police. Crimes, calls for service, and collisions during the period of the last decade (2013-2022) were utilized. The report also contains information about impaired driving as a follow-up to a previous report on this topic. 33 FBI crime offenses were grouped into six categories and tracked for patterns over the study period.

The analysis focused on the larger pattern of crime in the past decade and the seasonal patterns that it represents. Researchers also examined hotspots to determine the geospatial patterns of crime distribution. Ten distinct hotspots in the region were identified and compared to the area around MGM.

Tableau visualization software was utilized to discern the six study periods (Pre-Open (2/3/17-8/23/18) / Open (8/24/18-3/14/20) / Closed (3/15/20-7/11/20) / Restricted (7/12/20-5/29/21) / Reopen (5/30/21-12/21/22) / Full Decade) for which these activities occurred. Weekly averages were calculated and graphed to illustrate the fluctuation of activity over the entire period and within each study period. Any significant increases were analyzed in more detail with available quantitative data. An on-site assessment was conducted to view the area and police personnel were contracted to gain insights into the contributing factors for hotspots.

This report does not generally attempt to answer broad questions about whether MGM "caused" crime increases or its closure caused decreases in the area. It simply identifies the trends across focused periods of pre-opening, open, closed, restricted and reopened cycles and looks for contributing factors and geographic explanations for high and low activity throughout the decade.

What did the researchers find?

An important finding is that there was a significant increase in crime before MGM Springfield reopened after the mandated COVID-19 closure. This chronological ordering suggests that the casino is not a primary cause of crime, but that other social, economic, or psychological factors have played a role in changes in crime patterns.



Major findings:

- The City of Springfield has aggressively engaged in an urban redevelopment plan in refurbishing Union Station, beautified parks and outdoor space enticing public use, and has invested in police technology and a real time crime center that proactively addressed crime problems and prolific offenders.
- Crime in the MGM-Springfield area consistently followed a summer seasonal pattern of increase during warmer weeks. This pattern could guide proactive strategies in the summertime to address this regular increase in crime.
- Crime clearly reduced in frequency when establishments in the region were closed due to COVID-19 but started to climb before the casino reopened. Once the casino did reopen, the crime levels did not return to levels before COVID-19 occurred. The fall in crime during the closure was less because of MGM's closure and more because of general societal changes during the period. In future analyses, it will become very difficult to untangle any MGM-specific influence from the changes brought by COVID-19 and other societal factors.
- Overall crime in the region steadily declined over the past 10 years, with a slight uptick in 2022.
- The City of Springfield was impacted the most by crime in the region, ranging between 33% and 62% of specific crime categories in the area. Overall, Springfield accounted for 62% of the crime in the region.
- MGM Springfield research findings aligned with social disorganization theory and concentric zones, that is, crime is more prevalent in the core center areas and diminished as it got further away from Central City. This pattern most likely has a spurious or intermittent relationship with the casino, more likely dictated by socioeconomic conditions. Several other crime hotspots exist with as much crime as found in the Central City-Springfield area, and thus, illustrates that other criminogenic factors are at play other than a casino.
- Fraud—specifically the fraud code that includes “swindles” and “con games”—was the only crime in the immediate MGM area to show both an unexpectedly high value and a value out of alignment with what the rest of the state experienced during the same period.
- While drunk driving arrests were down 8% in the MGM Springfield Region, the area did report a 10% increase in traffic collisions that resulted in a drunk driving charge. "Last Drink" reports attributed to MGM Springfield had a slight increase from the historical average of 5.8 per year to 7 in 2022.
- The surrounding communities saw some increases and decreases but very few consistent trends to which MGM Springfield serves as a clear source. There were several common trends among the agencies for which no direct MGM nexus could be identified, but which had a logical connection, a spatial connection, or both.

About the researchers

This report was prepared by Justice Research Associates, LLC, crime analysis consultant to the Massachusetts Gaming Commission. For more information about this report, please contact Noah Fritz at njfritz@gmail.com.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Overall, crime around the MGM Springfield Casino continued to drop for the entire decade with a slight uptick in 2022. Developing mitigation strategies and collaborative initiatives appears to be feasible, given the shared similarities in crime types and temporal patterns.

Future research goals include:

- An expansive analysis of trends by working with the agencies to look at the full reports, including narratives.
- An analysis of changes in the MGM Springfield area compared to control areas and the rest of the state.
- A comparative analysis of traffic collisions in the Springfield area versus control areas whenever a public statewide crash dataset is available.
- A comparison of MGM Springfield with other casinos, normalized by the number of annual visitors by facility.

Citation

Justice Research Associates (2023). Assessing the Influence of Gambling on Public Safety in Massachusetts Cities and Towns: Crime Comparison Analysis of Changes in the MGM Springfield Region 2013-2022.

<https://massgaming.com/about/research-agenda-search/?cat=public-safety>

Key Words

Public Safety; Springfield

Acknowledgements

Financial support for this study comes from the Massachusetts Gaming Commission through the Public Health Trust Fund.

About this Snapshot

MGC Snapshots are intended to translate lengthy and sometimes technical reports into an easily understandable overview of the research. The findings and recommendations in the Snapshot are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the position of the MGC.

