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The Consequences of Welfare Bans of Drug Felony Convictions on Crime

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The Consequences of Welfare Bans of Drug Felony Convictions on Crime

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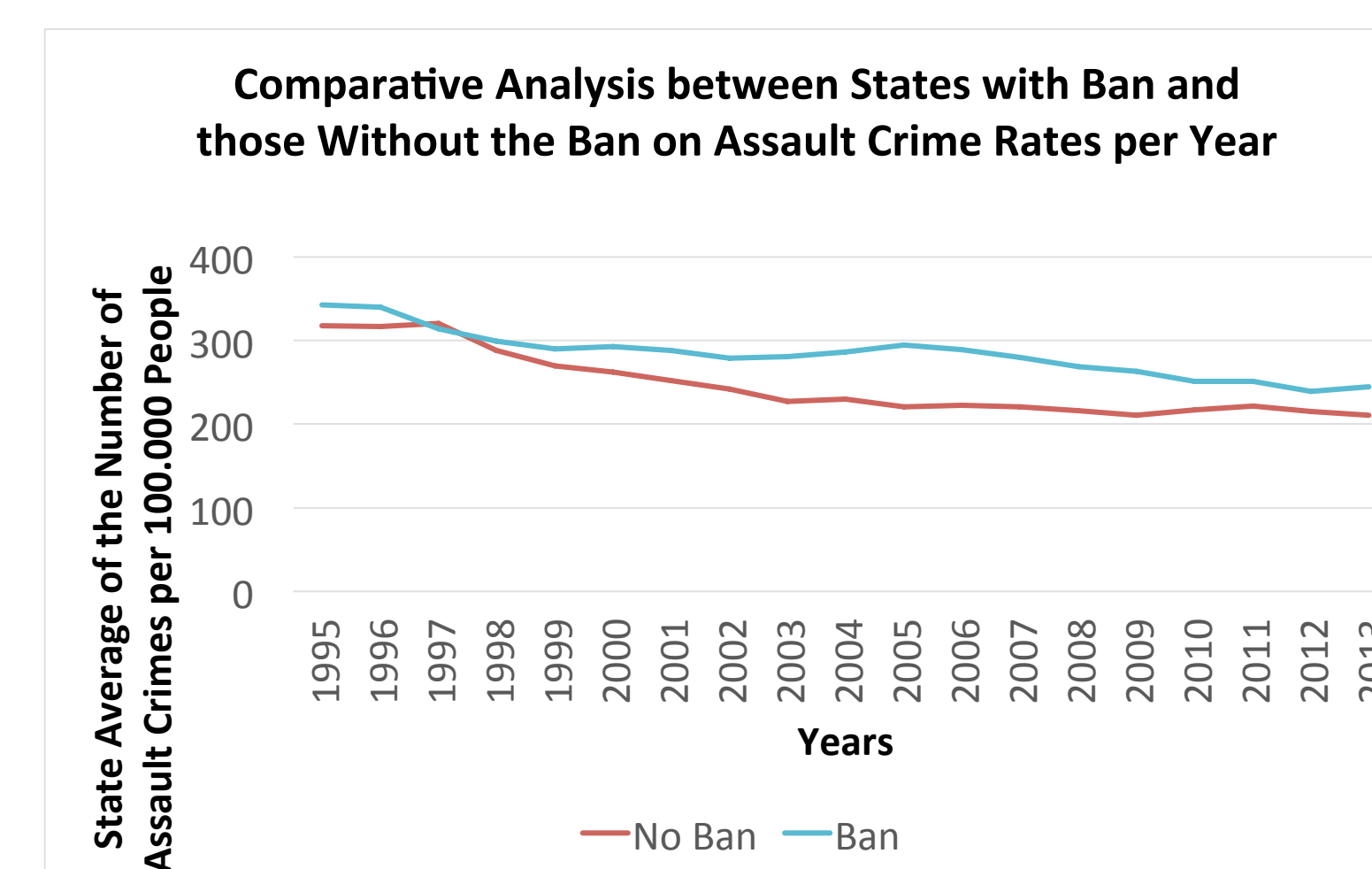
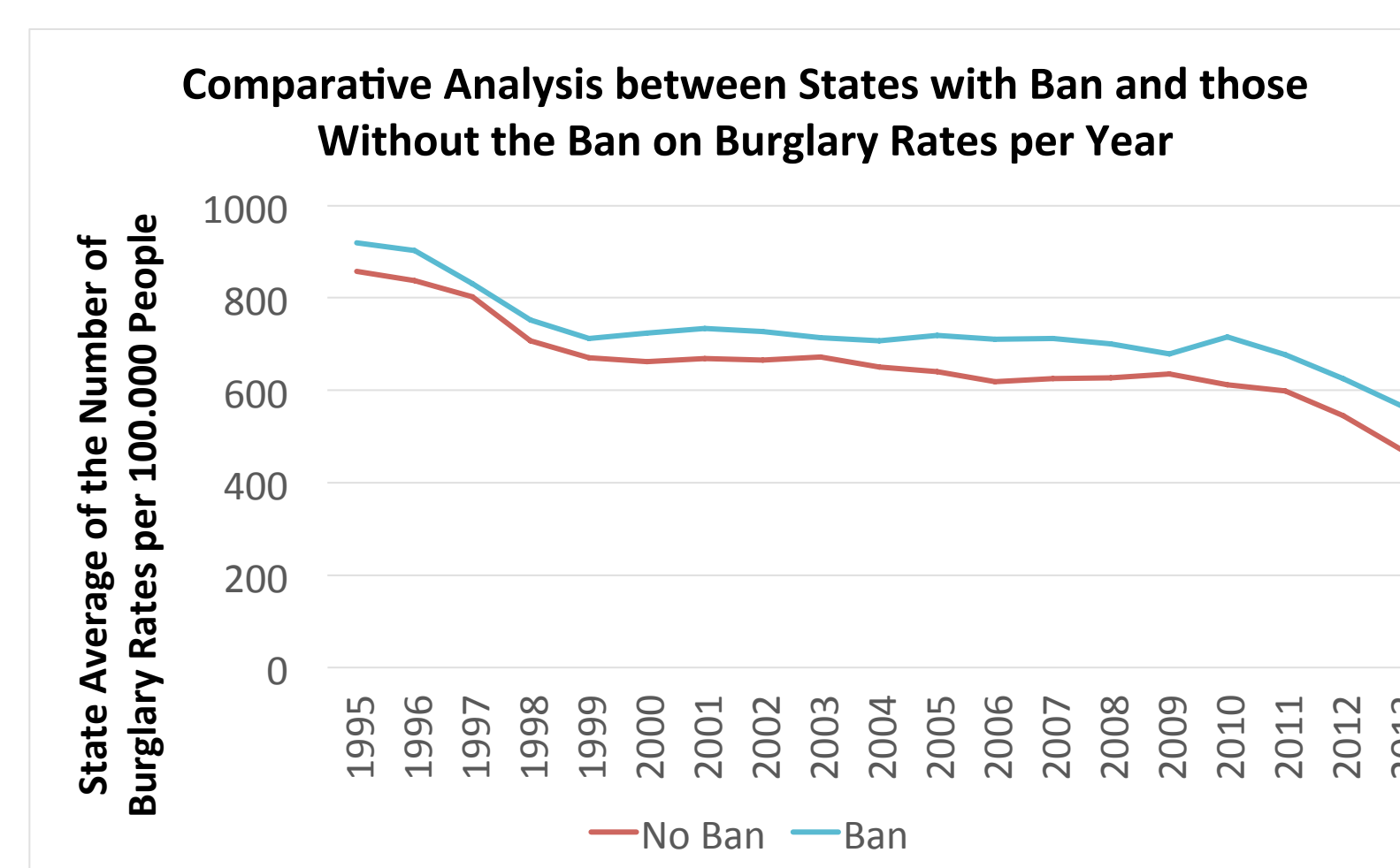
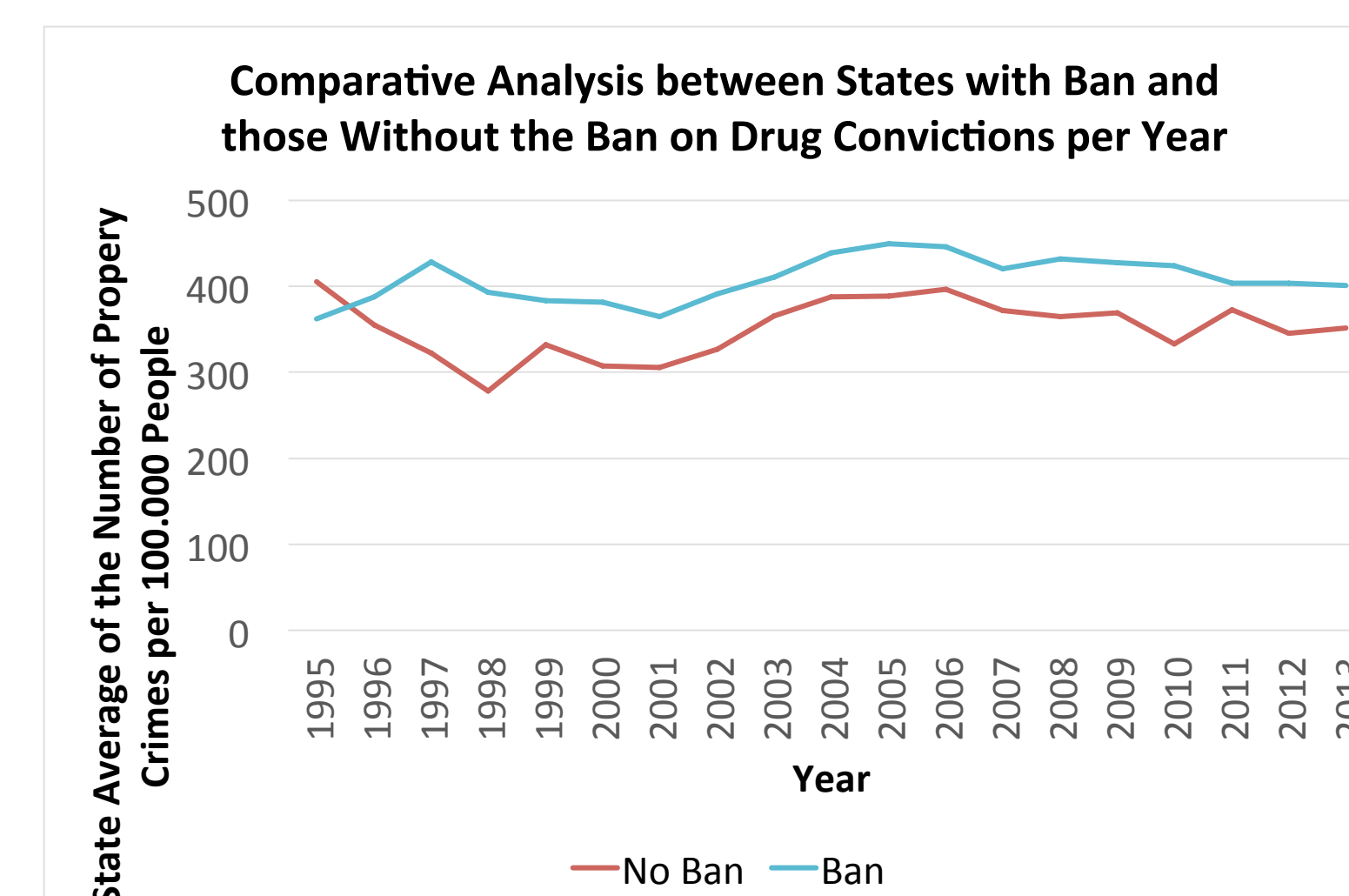
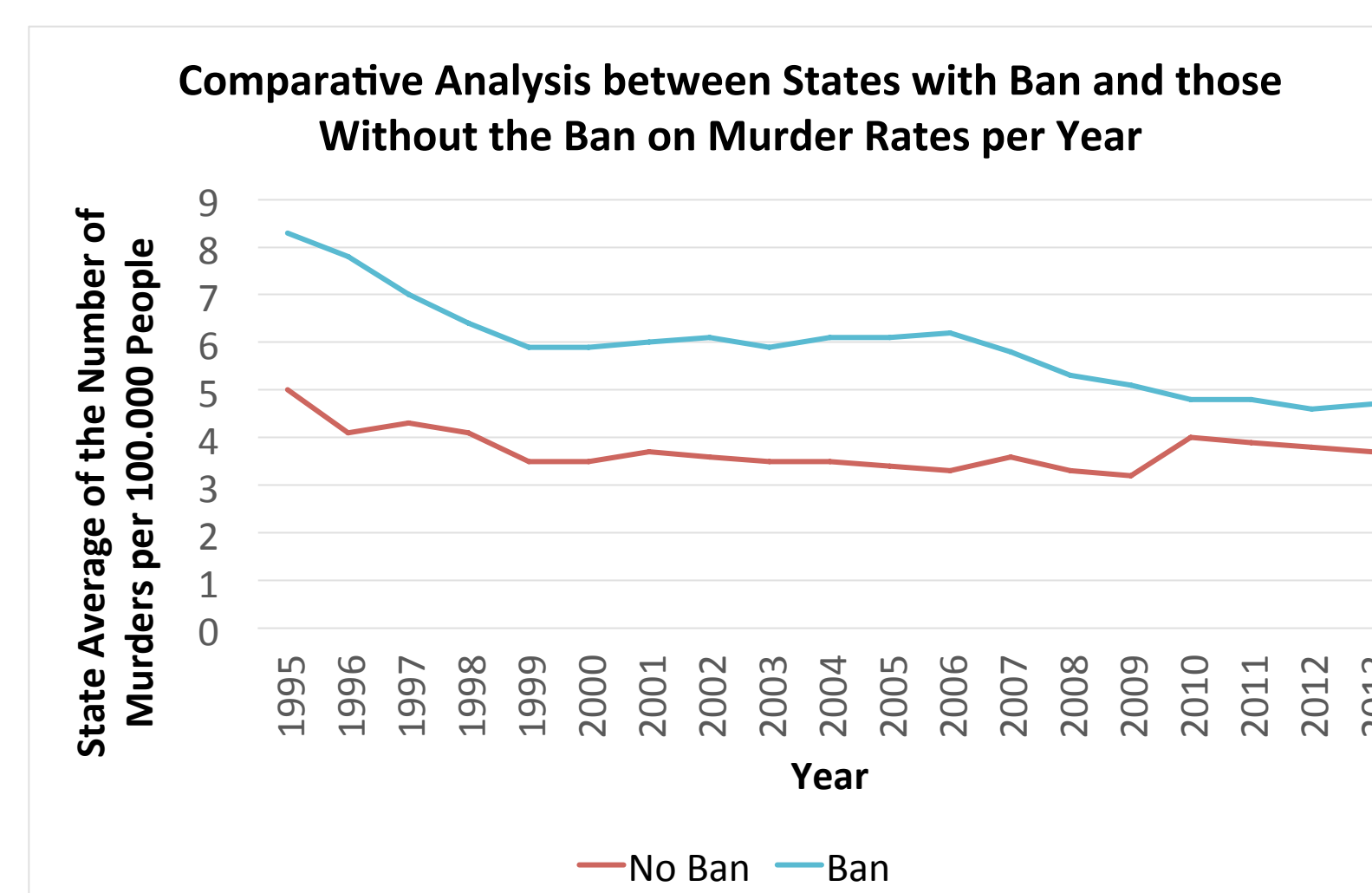
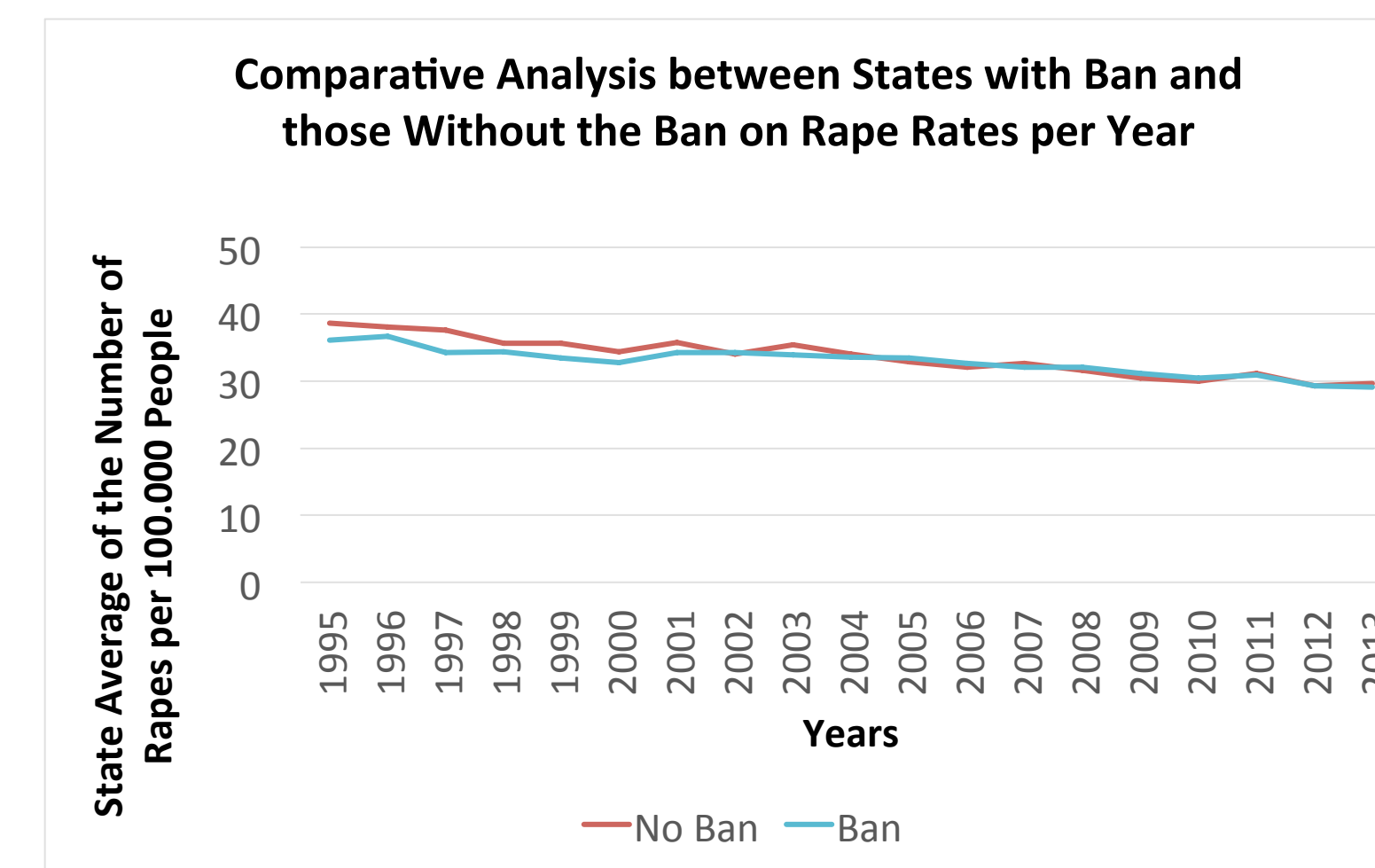
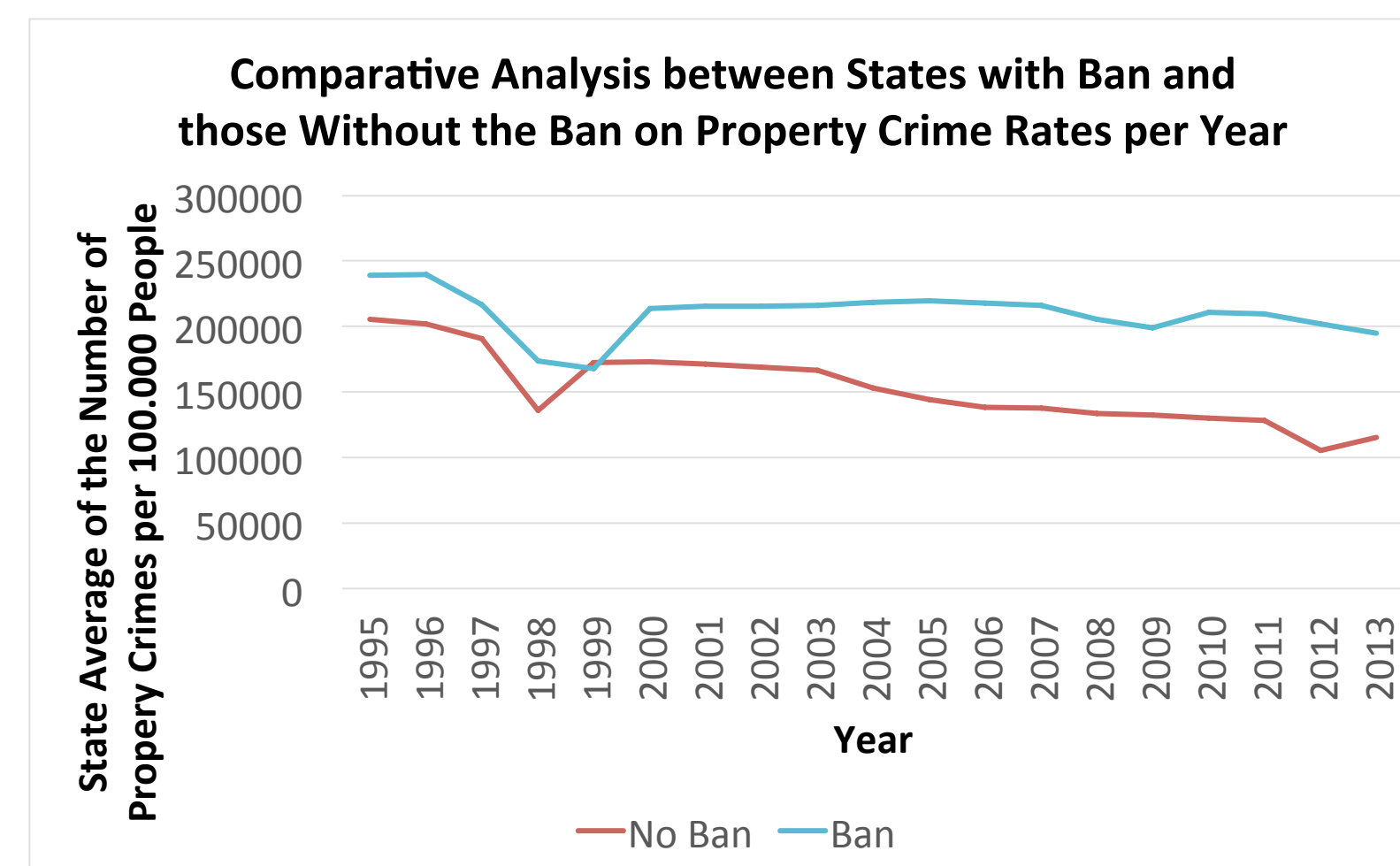
Introduction

- The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was enacted in August of 1996, causing a major transformation in the US welfare system (1).
- This study focused on one of the provisions, Section 115, which places a lifetime ban on receiving welfare through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) for those who are convicted of a drug felony in the states that adopted the provision.
- About half of the states opted out of the ban.
- The intention of the provision was to cut down on drug use and drug related crimes (1).
- However, critics argued that the provision unfairly penalizes ex-drug felons and is a misguided effort for cutting down drug crimes (1).
- The goal of this research project is to determine the impact of the welfare bans, from Section 115 of PRWORA, on crime rates.
- The research is significant because it has important implications for US welfare policy in order to improve it.

Methods

- Quantitative data was collected at the state level in a longitudinal format for years 1989 to 2014 (2).
- Crime rates and number of arrests yearly per state were aggregated as the dependent variables from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for various types of crime, including: violent, property, murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle, arson, and fraud (2).
- The key independent variable is whether or not the state has a ban on welfare (SNAP) for drug felony convictions.
- The study compared the average crime rate between states with bans and states with no bans.

Results



Discussion

- On average, the states with no ban were found to have lower crime rates as compared to the states who adopted the welfare bans due to drug felonies in Section 115.
- While states with no bans appear to have lower crime rates, trends in crimes over time were similar between the two groups of states (except for property crimes).
- Confounding variables that could affect the results include but are not limited to: unemployment rate, income per capita, minimum wage, substance abuse prevention, criminal justice expenditures, and poverty rates.
- In conclusion, the research indicates that the welfare bans on drug felonies enacted in Section 115 of PRWORA have little to no effect on crime rates.
- Further research is necessary to account for differences across states to determine whether the bans have unintended consequences.

References

1. Mauer, M., & McCalmont, V. (2013). A Lifetime of Punishment: The Impact of the Felony Drug Ban on Welfare Benefits. The Sentencing Project.
2. Uniform Crime Reporting. (n.d.). Retrieved May 28, 2016, from <https://ucr.fbi.gov/>.

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Supplemental Nutrition Program (2016). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supplemental_Nutrition_Assistance_Program.