Homicide Declines, 600-2060 AD: A Generalising Framework

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16 Theories of the Crime Decline

1. Incarceration
2. Better policing (Sherman, Zimring)
3. Demographic trends (Blumstein)
4. Abortion
5. Lead/environmental neurotoxins (Nevin)
6. Unemployment, consumer sentiment,
7. Inflation (Rosenfeld)
8. Self-control (Eisner/Pinker)
9. Psycho-pharmaceuticals (Finkelhor)
10. End of crack/cocaine epidemic
11. State legitimacy (Roth/LaFree)
12. Divorce – family stability
13. More effective public health/crime prevention policy (Finkelhor)
14. Changing norms and values
15. Dissipation of effects of cultural revolution (Pinker)
16. Technical Crime Control (Clarke et al.)
Methodological Approaches

1. National Case Studies
   - One period, one country:
   - Typical answers: Compstat; drugs/crack epidemic, abortion, incapacitation

2. International Trend Analyses
   - Several places, on period
   - Typical answers: anomie (Messner/Rosenfeld), loss of legitimacy (LaFree), Postmodernity (Young).

3. Historical Cross-cultural Generalising Perspective
   - All violence declines, at all times, in all places.
Is there a limited number of universal mechanisms behind all major declines of interpersonal violence in all societies at all times?

i.e.

How do societies become less conflict-ridden and homicidal places?
A Homicide Scale

Violence as Politics

Violence as Pathology

Murders per 100,000 pop

> 200 per 100,000
- Iraq after Invasion
- South African Townships
- Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

10-100 Violent Societies

1-10 Semi-Pacified Societies

< 0.3 per 100,000
- Japan in 1970-90s
- England, 1920s
- Denmark, 1950s

< 1 Pacified Societies

> 100 Civil War

Unrelated men in public space
- Organized and functional
- Private justice & revenge
- Violent entrepreneurs
- Fights over goods and territories

Large % domestic, female victim.
- Disorganized and dysfunctional
- Individual pathologies
- Marginal groups
The Evolutionary Perspective

What purposes does violence amongst men serve?
- adaptionist, strategic, functional view informed by evolutionary theory
  (Archer, Pellegrini, Pinker, Buss/Shackelford, Tremblay)

• Proactive instrumental violence
  Violence as a means of gaining access to scarce resources, particularly goods, power/status, sex
  - Examples: raids, robberies, private taxation, piracy, staged fights, attacks on same-sex competitors.

• Reactive retaliatory violence
  Violence as a means of defending against aggressors, producing protection, maintaining norms of reciprocity
  - Examples: vendetta, revenge killing, vigilantism.

Under what circumstances does killing (a group member) becomes a strategically less attractive option?

Some hypotheses:

– A high availability of law reduces the chances that people perceive the need to use violence as a means of self-help (retaliation and revenge)

– A high legitimacy of social order increases the chances that people believe they can fulfil desires in cooperation with others

– A high level of protection from risks increases the chances of investing into building up durable relationships

– A cultivation of self-restraint and manners reduces the chances for friction resulting in violence
Decline 1
Elite Violence, 600-1800 AD


Why?
- The involvement of elites in intra-societal violence is not a constant.
- Theorists such as Elias, Cooney, Black expect a decline in elite violence.

What?
- All monarchs of all major dynasties across all of Europe from 600 to 1800 AD (N = 1820).
- Coded for cause of death and further particulars.
Trend in Regicide Rates, 600-1800 AD
50-Year Periods

Note:
Average Regicide Rate
1060 per 100,000 (ruler-years)

General Population Today
1 per 100,000 (person years)
Regicide Rates by Region, 600-1800 AD

- **East:** Byzantium, Ottoman Empire, Russia, Bulgaria
- **North:** Scandinavian Monarchies, England, Scotland
- **West&South:** All others
Why did Regicide Decline?

- Fewer internal rivals with sufficient military power to challenge royal authority.
- Decreasing probability of successful acquisition of power through usurpation/murder.
- Power transition becomes more law-bound (e.g. inheritance laws).
- Change in elites’ conduct of life (“from warriors to courtiers”).
- Higher stability and legitimacy of state institutions.
Decline 2
Homicide in Europe, 1300-2000


Homicide Rates across Europe, 1300-2000

Why did Homicide Decline?

• Increasingly stable state monopoly of power

• Growing protection decreases necessity of violence as self-help

• Interdependence and social complexity increase benefits of self-control

• Disciplining institutions promote impulse control

• Growing legitimacy and integration of state
Any way to test a theory empirically?

How about this hypothesis:

The decline was a result of regular frontal-lobe training in self-control by means of reading books?
Book Production in Europe

The Books-Murder Connection, 1500-1800

Note: All available pairs of 50-year estimates of book production and homicide rates, 1500-1800
N = 46.
... this looks like an elasticity

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Empirical Observation:
Parallel to the development in Europe, Homicide rates among unrelated adults in New England, New Netherlands, Virginia and Maryland fell from over 100 per 100,000 to about 1-5 per 100,000 between the early 1600s and around 1790.
The Core Roth Hypothesis

• Both in the USA and in Europe there are four correlates of declining homicide amongst unrelated male adults.
  1. The belief that government is stable and that its legal and judicial institutions are unbiased and will redress wrongs and protect lives and property.
  2. A feeling of trust in government and the officials who run it, and a belief in their legitimacy.
  3. Patriotism, empathy, and fellow feeling arising from racial, religious, or political solidarity.
  4. The belief that the social hierarchy is legitimate, that one’s position in society is satisfactory and that one can command the respect of others without resorting to violence.
Decline 4
The Victorian Success Story

• National series available in many countries
• Victorian decline of homicide much studied by early generation of criminologists (Boschi, Durkheim, Ferri).

The bad drunk husband

The Victorian ideal of the family
Explaining the Victorian Success Story

• Cultivating character

• Social/national/political Integration

• Rise of control bureaucracies

• Temperance, self-control movements

• Elimination of collectivist honour (i.e. self-help) cultures.
  – Durkheim, Emile (1957 [1899] *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*
  – Gallant,
Decline 5
The Homicide Decline Since the Early 1990s

• Are some of the mechanisms associated with declining homicide also present during the past 20 years?
  – Is it broad rather than a locally limited phenomenon?
  – Is it significant?
  – Does it share characteristics of larger and longer declines?

• Homicide data for 22 Western countries from 1950 to 2008,
  – Based on WHO and LaFree Dataset
Mean (1950-2006) = 100 for each series; $Score_t = \frac{\text{homicide rate}_t \times 100}{\text{mean}}$
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## Timing of Peaks and Troughs, 1950-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Peak Year</th>
<th>Trough Year</th>
<th>Peak Year</th>
<th>Trough Year</th>
<th>% Increase T-P</th>
<th>% Decrease P-T</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>2.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.29</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>3.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>1.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>0.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>10.20</td>
<td>5.33</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.07</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>1990</td>
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<td>0.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England and Wales</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The Homicide Decline Since the Early 1990s

- Similar periodicity across Western countries
  - Mean Trough: 1959
  - Mean Peak: 1992
  - Mean Trough: 2007

- TSFA (time-series factor analysis) from 1950 to 2006:
  - About 50% of the variation across all countries shared by one underlying factor.

- Similarity holds across countries with very different national trajectories in
  - Policing
  - History of substance abuse
  - Unemployment
  - Imprisonment
  - Left/right political tradition
Decline 6 Looking into the future

- Understanding = controlling mechanisms = predicting outcomes.

- We know that liberal democratic capitalist countries have homicide rates of about .3-.4 per 100,000.

- How do we get there in the next 30 years?
To conclude: some problems

• How many cases are we looking at?
  – 22 cases with 22 explanations
  or
  - 1 trajectory with 22 (or more) variations

• At what level of disaggregation do we need to look for explanatory variables?

• What explains the commonalities in
  – Timing of trough, peak, and decline?

• What are those commonalities and are they similar to previous declines?
  – Increasing political stability (the ‘victory’ of the capitalist/democratic model of society)
  – End of ‘self-fulfilment’, laissez faire parenting ideals
Some final thoughts

• **Necessity of theory**
  – A theory that doesn’t contradict consolidated developmental, situational, biological, etc. knowledge is not a disadvantage.

• **Contextual Meaning of Predictive Indicators**
  – All macro-level indicators have multiple meanings. Moreover their meaning can change over time and between contexts.

• **Limitations of Quantitative Models**
  – In most cases the conditions for rigorous causal tests (e.g. TS analyses of Granger causality) are not given
    • Lack of precision of outcome and predictor measures, lots of noise
    • Multiple meanings of indicators
    • Unknown ‘transfer function’ between cause and effect.
    • No data to test micro-level ‘thread needle’ of macro-level hypotheses