

Social Change and the Future of Violent Crime

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This chapter examines some of the forces which account for increasing levels of violent crime in the United States over the past 25 years. Prior to the turbulent 1960s, levels of violent crime had been relatively stable for more than a decade; murder rates even declined by about one-third during the two decades following World War II. Then, beginning in about 1963, violent (and property) crime rates began to spiral upward. Between 1963 and 1967 the violent crime rate doubled.

This explosive growth in crime did not go unnoticed. President Lyndon Johnson named a special national commission to investigate the causes and prevention of crime, and presidential contenders like Barry Goldwater and George Wallace attempted to capitalize on the issue. By a number of measures, crime rose to the top of the public's agenda, and opinion surveys pointed to increasing levels of fear of crime all during the 1960s and early 1970s. Researchers have addressed the growth of violent crime as well. Their explanations for events in the post-war era reflect all of the great traditions of research on violence. This chapter focuses on three of them: *demography*, *economic hardship*, and *family and community social disorganization*. Like most fundamental features of American life, discussion of these factors inevitably involves another one—race. Most of the factors which seem to lead to crime are disproportionately concentrated among black Americans; and, as a result, the condition and experiences of this relatively small group (perhaps 12 percent of the U.S. population) disproportionately affect the crime problem facing the nation as a whole.

Trends in Violent Crime

For the United States as a whole there are perhaps 40 years of data on the national rate of violent crime, depending on the information needed

and how far into the past one is willing to trust the figures (see chap. 10 by Margaret A. Zahn).

Those data portray steadily increasing rates of violence in the United States since the mid-1950s. The rate of violent crime rose slowly between then and near the middle of the 1960s, but it rose without interruption every year. Between 1955 and 1975, levels of violent crime increased by a factor of more than four; the property crime rate followed almost exactly the same pattern. Then, there was a three-year respite in this trend, a brief period during which both violent and property crime rates leveled off at nearly their 1975 high; this was followed by a climb to a new high in 1982, and again in 1986. Between 1955 to 1986, the violent crime rate rose almost exactly 600 percent and the property crime rate 400 percent.¹

The components of this increase might appear somewhat less alarming. In general, the more serious the type of crime the less common it is: Less life-threatening violent crimes are more frequent than deadly ones, and most kinds of property crime are more common than any violent one. In 1986, homicide constituted 1.4 percent of all violent crimes; rape followed at 5.5 percent; robbery (theft using threats or force) and aggravated assault (personal attacks involving either injury or the display of a weapon) were the largest components, at 38 and 54 percent. There were more than twice as many burglaries (thefts from inside homes or businesses) as there were violent crimes of all kinds. The homicide rate also grew the least over this period—between 1955 and 1986, it was up by “only” 150 percent.

There has been a great deal of research on how to explain these trends. This research has linked fluctuations in crime to some of the most central aspects of American life—its population, the economy, and how people live. These factors also provide a basis for predicting the future. To the extent crime is related to features of society which are themselves predictable, their future course can help us forecast the future of crime.

However, there is some question whether the measures of crime upon which all of this research is based can be trusted. Until recently, almost all we knew about the frequency of crime came from official statistics which local police agencies collected and filed with the FBI. Across the country, they voluntarily forward to Washington the number of incidents that citizens have reported to them, and that they in turn have investigated and determined to be crimes. It is clear, however, that both decisions by victims to complain to the police and decisions by the police to make proper records of those incidents are subject to a number of influences which disguise the “true” level of crime lying behind them. Victims often fail to report incidents to the police because their losses were slight or they were not insured, because they see no chance that the offender will be caught or that the police can do anything to help them, and sometimes because they fear retaliation by criminals or their friends. Surveys show that about one-half of all personal crimes are not reported to the police.² On the police

side, it appears that professional police departments and those with more resources tend to investigate and record more thoroughly all of the complaints brought to them by citizens.³ The frequent need for top administrators of police departments to point to decreasing rates of crime undoubtedly plays a role in shaping crime statistics as well. Field studies of how official crime data are collected reveal that to an important extent they reflect the organizational arrangements and politics of the collecting agencies.⁴ One study found that the Chicago police understated robbery by about 35 percent and rape by 25 percent in 1982, and that this undercount had varied widely in prior years.⁵ After this practice was revealed on television by an investigative reporter, Chicago’s violent crime rate more than doubled.⁶

The tremendous concentration of violent crime in large cities means that only a few instances of serious misreporting (or correcting for such practices when they come to light) can shift the national rate of crime as reported by the FBI by several percentage points, which is its typical yearly level of change. For example, the post-1982 shift in the robbery count for Chicago described above increased the U.S. national robbery rate by 2.1 percent. Events in other cities can have similar consequences: New York City, which reports notoriously suspect crime figures and occasionally is chastised for this by the FBI, alone accounts for 15 percent of the national total for robbery, and together the eight largest U.S. cities account for 36 percent. What happens in these cities can account for more than most other sources of yearly variation in national crime rates.

This does not mean that official statistics are useless for any purpose, but it does give us reason for skepticism about apparent fluctuations in crime. It is not clear that the trends depicted by official statistics are even pointing in the right direction. While it would be convenient to conclude that these local perturbations cancel themselves out, and that in the aggregate the official national crime rate is fairly accurate, there is irritating evidence to the contrary. Since 1973, the U.S. Department of Justice has been monitoring crime trends using monthly national surveys which independently measure the incidence of victimization. In the surveys, people are questioned about their recent experiences with crime, whether they reported them to the police, and who they saw committing the crime. As measured by the surveys, crime rates have tracked a somewhat different course than that taken by official figures.

For example, official rates of aggravated assault rose during the 1970s, declined a bit during the early 1980s, and then jumped to new highs in 1985 and 1986; however, national survey measures of the same offense have declined almost every year since 1974. The dramatic differences between trends in the two sets of figures are illustrated in Figure 11.1. Like serious assaults, robberies measured in the surveys have dropped steadily since 1981, while the official robbery rate took off upward in 1984. In

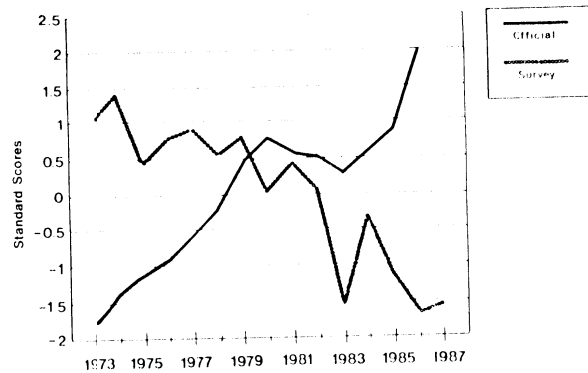


Figure 11.1: Official and Survey Rates of Assault, 1973-1987

1986, violent crime in the surveys stood below its 1973 level, and was off 20 percent from its high.⁹ But, as we have seen above, the official total was at its post-war peak in 1986. Attempts to explain fluctuations in survey-based crime rates would point to much different factors than those based on official figures, and presumably would produce more optimistic forecasts for the future.

Age and Crime

Any consideration of the distribution of crime must begin with age, for crime is largely the domain of the young. The strong affinity of young males for getting into trouble with the law has remained fundamentally unchanged over the 150 years or so for which there is data of some sort on the issue. The age-crime nexus is virtually identical for different times and places, under various social and cultural conditions, and for different subgroups. Youth almost seems "pathogenic."¹⁰ Cohen and Felson calculate that "indices of the prevalence of teenagers and young adults in the population alone account for about 58 percent of the year-to-year change in the murder series."¹¹ The typical age of arrest varies by type of crime, but lies between 18 and 21. The median age of arrest for property crime is 16, while the arrest distribution for violent crimes is "two humped," peaking concurrently at ages 18 and 21. What happens after about age 21 is a subject of great interest to criminologists. Sharp declines in offending after age 21 appear to be due to a combination of factors, including imprisonment (generally reserved for older, multi-

ple offenders sporting long records), death ("life in the fast lane" is decidedly dangerous), reintegration into the community through employment and marriage, and "spontaneous burnout" (a concept which bundles together a substantial number of "unknown causes").¹²

The effect of age is so strong that by itself the total number of youths (actually young males, but the numbers go together) in the population is an important determinant of the crime count. The age structure of the U.S. population has taken a roller-coaster ride during the past three decades, and this often is used to explain the 1960s-to-1970s explosion in crime of all kinds. The first wave of the post-World War II baby boom hit age 15 in 1963, the year before the explosion in crime was evident. Baby Boomers made their largest contribution to the pool of high-risk youths in 1973, when the largest number aged into the risky 15-year-old category. Between about 1963 and 1973, each year saw more youths age into the 15-to-21 group than grew out of it. The importance of age was apparent to the President's Crime Commission as early as 1966. They estimated that between 40 and 50 percent of the 1960-65 increase in crime was attributable to changes in the age composition of the population.¹³ Recent data for homicide (extending through 1984) set that figure at 58 percent.¹⁴

Thus, other things being equal, shifts in the age distribution should affect the U.S. crime rate even if the rate at which youths commit crimes (youth crimes per thousand youths) are stable. However, there is evidence that rates of youthful offenders also rose during the 1965-70 period. Not only were there more of them, but they were getting into trouble more frequently.¹⁵ In addition, a study of two groups of Philadelphia youths—all those born there who were 15 years of age in 1960 and those who entered that high-risk category in 1973—uncovered "qualitative" differences in their criminal behavior as well. When they got into trouble, males in the 1970s cohort committed more serious violent offenses, the general seriousness of everything they did went up, their use of weapons in violent crimes went up, and they were more likely to harm or kill their victims.¹⁶ Between how much more they did and how viciously they did it, the more recent cohort of youthful offenders provided a "double dose" of trouble.

There is also evidence that offending members of the Baby Boom cohort are not following patterns of the past. They are not "dropping out" as rapidly as expected.¹⁷ Violent offenders are getting older. For example, between 1975 and 1986 the proportion of those arrested for violent offenses who were under 18 dropped from 32 to 15 percent, and for property crimes from 50 to 33 percent.¹⁸ The emergence of this graying group of unexpectedly high rate offenders should make forecasts of the future of crime more gloomy than past demographic patterns would predict.

Age effects also interact with economic conditions. We shall consider below the effect of fluctuations in the economy which affect labor force participation and unemployment; here it should be noted that the highest

levels of unemployment are concentrated among younger job seekers, and that when recessions hit they often are the first to be laid off. Any criminogenic effects of macroeconomic changes thus could be amplified by both the relative size and the underlying (higher) propensity of youths to get into trouble.

The rising rate of youth crime during the coming of age of the Baby Boom in the late 1960s (which multiplied their cohort's effect on the overall crime rate) raises tantalizing questions about the impact of historical events on crime. Demographers speculate that the unique size of the Baby Boom generation will shape its development. They argue that the lives of members of that cohort will always be more competitive—for housing, jobs, and advancement—and that their large numbers will multiply the effect of peer-group pressures upon them throughout their lives.²⁷ James O. Wilson contends that their numbers have spoken in the marketplace, leading Americans in the 1960s to celebrate dysfunctional aspects of youth culture, including unfettered self-expression and spontaneous behavior.²⁸ In addition, many Baby Boomers entered their political consciousness during the divisive period of the Vietnam War, and (just as significant for many black Americans) came of age during the large-scale urban riots of 1964–1969 and the galvanizing appearance (in the summer of 1966) of “Black Power” rhetoric in American politics. At the same time, the Vietnam War did not appear to have had any short-term crime control effects. The sharp declines in arrest rates experienced during World War I and World War II were probably due to the sheer number of young males conscripted for service during those periods. The Korean and Vietnam Wars, however, did not mobilize enough youths to have a similar effect on crime. In fact, indicators of the extent of mobilization for these conflicts are associated with *higher* national rates of homicide, a finding some researchers attribute to the dislocation of careers, family formation, and family stability caused by those wars.²⁹

Race and Crime

Race is another important element in the dynamics of crime in the United States. Racial differences in offending are well known. Blacks are arrested for violent crimes in numbers that are vastly disproportionate to their share of the population. In 1986, they constituted 48 percent of those arrested for murder, 46 percent for rape, and 63 percent for robbery. Since the mid 1970s, black-white differences in youthful arrest rates for violent crimes have averaged about 6.5 to 1. These arrest statistics closely parallel other ways of detecting offenders. They closely resemble profiles of offenders as described by their victims in victimization surveys, and similar black-white differences appear in self-report studies in which people recount

their own past offenses in anonymous questionnaires.³⁰ Only in a few arrest categories—principally those involving alcohol abuse—do whites and blacks appear in numbers proportionate to their share of the population.

Race is also clearly linked to crime at the neighborhood level, where residential segregation and the tendency for victims and offenders to get into trouble near home produces crime rates for neighborhoods which are very highly correlated with their racial composition, and places black Americans at the highest degree of danger.³¹ As a result, blacks are much more likely to be victimized by violent crime. In the most recent national victimization survey, blacks were two-and-one-half times as likely as whites to be robbed, and three times as likely to be raped.³² Black victims also are more likely than whites to be seriously injured, and they are much more commonly threatened, robbed, and raped by criminals carrying guns.³³ Fortunately, blacks have shared with whites the declining rates of violent crime revealed by those surveys. Since 1975, violent victimization (and burglary) rates have been slowly declining for both blacks and whites.³⁴

However, the distribution of the population along racial lines cannot do much to explain fluctuations in crime nationally, for the complexion of the nation as a whole changes only at a glacial pace. Statistical studies reveal that at this level the most important feature of the black population is age. In the aggregate, blacks are younger than whites, and since 1960 there has been a steady increase in the non-white proportion of each new high-risk age cohort. Untangled from other factors, blacks' over-representation in the 15-to-24 age category has contributed to increases in the national crime rate over time.³⁵

Explanations for this confluence of race and crime abound. In addition to their relative youthfulness, blacks are disproportionately concentrated in the hearts of big cities, where violent crime rates are higher than in rural areas with similar populations. In addition, they disproportionately suffer from several factors to be considered below—poverty, economic inequality, and family and neighborhood disorganization. These problems also are concentrated in big cities, where conditions and events have a substantial impact on national rates of violent crime. Other explanations for high levels of offending among blacks point to cultural factors emerging from those objective conditions of life. For example, the “subculture of violence” explanation for black criminality highlights how values supporting personal toughness and exploitation of others are adaptive to life in oppressed urban ghettos.³⁶

Hardship and Crime

The role of economic hardship as a cause of crime has been the object of close scrutiny for at least 150 years. Population criminology, everyday observa-

tion, and official and survey measures of crime all agree that crime problems are much greater in poorer areas of town. The causal linkage between hardship (reflected in high unemployment or low wages) and crime is intuitively obvious in the case of theft, while it takes an indirect, multi-step set of assumptions to link violence to economic conditions.

Most explanations of changing rates of property crime follow Becker's classic application of rational choice theory to crime.³⁷ An economist, he emphasized the comparative costs and benefits of participating in legitimate and illegitimate enterprises. Becker posited that for each individual the balance of those costs and benefits of crime (for example, what mix of activity "maximizes their expected returns") determines their propensity to rob and steal. This is a powerful rational-economic model of human behavior. It takes into account the threat of sanctions and the opportunities lost while sitting in prison, as well as a comparison between anticipated earnings on the street and those from a lawful job. Research on the effects of hardship use measures of employment and wage rates to index how easy it is to find jobs in the legitimate sector and how lucrative they can be. These studies support common wisdom about the distribution of the inclination to steal, for local levels of employment and real income have been strong predictors of property crime rates.³⁸

The theoretical linkage between hardship and violent crime is provided by the "structural strain" approach to understanding violence. In this view, violence is rooted in structurally induced frustration. This frustration stems from the inability of individuals to achieve the lifestyles to which they aspire; the structure is supplied by social forces which shape both their aspiration levels and the likelihood that people will attain them. Violence should therefore be endemic, for the operation of capitalist (and, in practice, probably most other) economies ensures that some to most will never achieve their goals.³⁹

However, a large body of research indicates that at the national level there is no clear connection whatsoever between changes in the level of criminal violence and measures of the level of hardship.⁴⁰ This may be due in part to the fact that the link between hardship and violence is contingent upon mediating factors. For example, in a study of individual and neighborhood factors leading to victimization, Sampson found that area poverty was linked to the incidence of violence only in cities.⁴¹ This finding is in line with the general view that rural poverty is different in character than that concentrated in metropolitan areas. There is also evidence that strain may be better indexed by year-to-year *changes* in unemployment and wages, rather than in their level. In bad times, these measures are lower than last year, signaling that people are not doing as well as before. Changes in homicide levels are related to yearly fluctuations in unemployment, perhaps due to economically induced stress.⁴²

Measures of *inequality* in the distribution of hardship also are linked to

levels of crime. Most notably this includes factors like the ratio of black-to-white income and black-to-white unemployment. In 1986, the percentage of black Americans living below the poverty line (31 percent) was almost three times the poverty rate for whites; that year, the median income for adult black males was only 60 percent of that for whites.⁴³ In 1985, black unemployment (15 percent of those in the labor force) was two-and-one-half times the rate for whites.⁴⁴ Race-linked inequality is particularly exacerbated by economic recessions, when blacks lose more than others, are the last to regain their old status, and profit most slowly from "trickle-down" spending by government. Between 1978 and 1986, real wages for white families declined by only 0.2 percent, but for black families the figure was 4 percent, and for Hispanic families it was 5 percent.⁴⁵ Across cities, inequality in the distribution of income is related to arrests for violent crimes among blacks, but not among whites. This may be because income inequality reflects concrete conflicts of interest between the poor and the better-off; this generates a sense of discrimination, deprivation, injustice, and hostility among the losers (disproportionately black), which in turn leads to violence.⁴⁶

There is also inequality in the distribution of hardship across generations, a fact which confounds the impact of economic conditions and the age distribution on crime. The youth unemployment rate is one of the factors linked to changing national levels of homicide.⁴⁷ The highest levels of unemployment are concentrated among younger job seekers, and when recessions hit they are the first to be laid off. Any criminogenic effects of macroeconomic changes thus may be amplified by both the relative size and tendency of younger segments of the population to get into trouble. Further, patterns of labor force participation are changing: structural changes in the U.S. economy are channeling youths into low-skill, low-wage, unstable non-union jobs.⁴⁸ Being trapped in this kind of work has been characteristic of high-risk populations.

The analysis of hardship effects is further complicated by the fact that they may be mediated indirectly through social and family factors considered in the next section. Declining real wages, unemployment, and business instability are related to indicators of a number of social pathologies, including suicide, illegitimacy, divorce, mental illness, and alcohol and drug use.⁴⁹ To the extent to which they then contribute to crime, these pathologies provide an indirect causal connection between hardship and crime. These indirect effects doubtless take some period of time to appear. Even strain-related crime appears only later, for the downward mobility, financial stress, discontent, frustrating social comparisons, and political alienation induced by economic decline also must have time to show its effects.

What does research on the effects of hardship tell us for the future? Forecasting crime based on economic factors is difficult, because forecasting

economic trends is itself an elusive art. There is evidence that business recessions set in motion social processes which stimulate national homicide rates over the next few years.³² However, what business failures and unemployment will be like even a few years from now is difficult to predict. It may even be that in the long run, short-term fluctuations in economic factors like unemployment cancel themselves out, and that we should look for predictions from more stable social and economic factors. In this regard, it may be significant that the real wages of American workers (indexed for inflation) have been stagnant or declining for the last decade, and the position of the United States in the international economy does not suggest that they will rebound significantly. Shifting regional economies have made unskilled jobs increasingly inaccessible to the inner-city poor in Northern cities, and this too does not seem likely to change. The percentage of Americans living below the poverty line has been growing, and now stands at about 14 percent of all persons. We have seen that this percentage varies predictably by race, but between 1978 and 1986 it has grown for whites, blacks, and Hispanics alike.³³ All of these trends portend badly for the future of crime.

Social Disorganization and Crime

The extent of social disorganization is another important determinant of rates of crime. Social disorganization is not the same thing as poverty, although the two often co-exist. In the not-so-distant past, many Americans were ill housed and illiterate, wages were almost universally low, and levels of cyclical unemployment were often extreme. However, crime rates remained low where the traditional agents of social control were strong: families, churches, schools, traditional values, and ethnic solidarity. Crime problems became worse when those agents lost their hold on the young. Many urban neighborhoods now are disorganized because the informal control once exerted by families and local institutions has largely disappeared.

It is easy to point to figures that signal alarming decreases in the capacity of families and communities to provide opportunities for their young or to exercise control over them. Levels of family abandonment, illegitimacy, divorce, single adult (usually female-headed) families, teen-age mothers, young mothers in the labor force, school dropouts, and the proportion of children living in households below the poverty line, all rose steadily during the 1960 and 1970s. Currently they stand at their highest point in modern U.S. history. For example, about 25 percent of U.S. children now are living in families headed by single adults, and 22 percent of young children live below the poverty line.³⁴ These indicators point to a decreasing quantity of "parenting", growing family discord and disruption, and decreased adult supervision of youths.³⁵ These indicators of the extent of family disor-

ganization are strongly related to neighborhood levels of crime,³⁶ and national trends in violent crime are linked to such factors as the changing proportion of families with only one adult at home and the divorce rate.³⁷ Decades of research indicate that a crucial factor in the development of delinquent careers is the early replacement of parents by peers as the figures who set the standards for youthful behavior. This facilitates the development of autonomous neighborhood delinquent subcultures which persist for generations. They can influence the behavior of local youths whose personal family situations are quite stable.

Not surprisingly, family factors which are linked to crime also differ widely by race; the most recent figures paint a stark portrait of the different worlds of black and white families. In 1986, 80 percent of white children were living in two-adult families, but only 41 percent of black children;³⁸ in 1982, 12 percent of births by white mothers were recorded as illegitimate, while for black mothers the comparable figure was 57 percent;³⁹ and in 1984, 16 percent of white children and 46 percent of black children were living in poverty.⁴⁰ These percentages are changing for all groups, however. Illegitimacy, broken families, and child poverty have grown for blacks, whites, and Hispanics during the past decade.

What does research on family and community factors suggest for the future? There have been few serious attempts to forecast most of them, and without knowing their future course one cannot be precise about their effects on crime trends. The Urban Institute tracked the size of the "underclass" in American cities, and found that it quadrupled between the 1970 and 1980 censuses. It continues to grow. The underclass is made up of persistently poor families, chronically on welfare, who live in neighborhoods with high concentrations of unemployment, high rates of school drop-out, and many families headed by lone women. They account for a vastly disproportionate share of teen-age pregnancies, drug addicts, and homicide victims.⁴¹ It seems unlikely that the strength of families and urban communities indexed by this trend will rebound significantly. They reflect a complex of problems that have come to be known as "social poverty," to distinguish them from the more tractable financial problems linked to aging, widowhood, physical disability, chronic illness, or factory layoffs.⁴² Families caught up in this web of pathologies do not seem to respond to traditional social service or income-maintenance strategies. The United States faces a deep intellectual crisis about how to deal with social poverty. In addition, the lagged effects of this cluster of variables probably are strong. As Cook and Laub point out, family factors play important roles in the socialization of the very young;⁴³ this implies that we will see the effects of the current state of American families perhaps 15 years from today, at just the time when the age structure forecasts reviewed below indicate that the proportion of teenagers in the population will be growing again. In this light, the fact that indicators of so many family

pathologies now stand at historical highs does not bode well for levels of crime in the early twenty-first century.

Crime in the Twenty-First Century

We have seen that crime is firmly rooted in many fundamental aspects of American life. Some of those factors have been changing rapidly and some more slowly, but they all have implications for the future. Those implications are easiest to draw out for the most predictable aspects of life in coming decades, those which involve demography. Almost all of those who will be filling the high-risk age categories during the first decade of the twenty-first century have already been born; we know their numbers, and who they are. *What* they will do is less predictable, but some research suggests they will engage in more and more serious acts of criminal violence than generations in the immediate past.²¹ The influence of poverty, racial and generational inequality, and family and community disorganization also seem clear, and while it is less certain that those forces will worsen, there seem to be few reasons to be particularly sanguine about their near-term trends.

What do changes in the age structure of the U.S. population forecast for the future? They seem to portend well for the remainder of this century. This can be seen in Figure 11.2, which displays on the same scale both the reported rate of violent crime between 1950 and 1986 and U.S. Census Bureau estimates of the proportion of the U.S. population aged 18 to 21 (the high risk years for violent offending) from 1950 to 2010.²² The early, pre-1957 dip in the relative size of the 18-to-21 group displayed in figure 11.2 was due to the very large number of births taking place during that period; later, as the birth rate subsided and early Baby Boomers aged into their late teens, their population share soared. The violent crime rate also rose noticeably every year following 1960, lagging behind the rate of population change by just a few years.

Just as dramatic as the size of the Baby Boom cohort is the tremendous decline in the relative size of the youth population forecast by the Census Bureau for the following decades. The proportion of the U.S. population in the highest risk category for violent crime peaked in 1977, and through 1995 will drop as rapidly as it rose. Thereafter it should rebound a bit, while 18 to 21ers born in the peak year of 1977 are having *their* children. However, no reasonable assumptions about the fertility rate in the near future reproduce the post-World War II Baby Boom, which should serve to reduce levels of violent crime. In nations where the collapse of the post boom birthrate has been even more extreme than in the U.S., those declines will be even more dramatic. For example, age structure changes forecast a decline in German robbery rates of 28 percent by the year 2000, reflecting that nation's extremely low fertility rate.²³

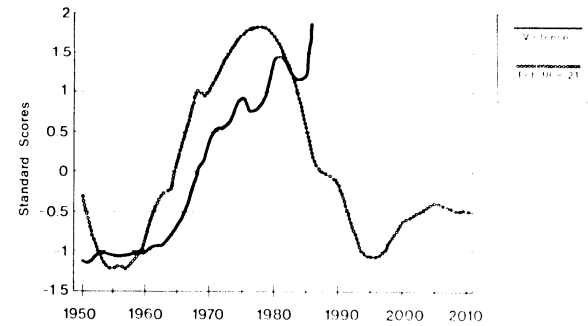


Figure 11.2: Violent Crime and the Age Structure of the U.S. Population, 1950-2010

These projections may be tempered by other factors. One is the apparently tenacious criminality of Baby Boomers, who we saw may not drop out of crime as rapidly as anticipated. Also as long as race continues to track the distribution of other hardship and family problems, the relative size of the youthful black population will add significantly to our expectations concerning future rates of crime. In 1963, when rates of violent crime began to climb sharply, blacks made up 12 percent of the 14-21 year old age group. The same Census Bureau projections cited above forecast a steady increase in that percentage every year through 2010. In 2010, when the youth share of the population will again have risen, blacks are projected to make up 21 percent of that then-larger group. This should boost the youthful offending rate, canceling some of the gains otherwise attributable to their smaller numbers.²⁴ Also, none of these projections take into account the growth of the Hispanic population. Hispanics evidence many of the problems facing American blacks. However, because they are not a "race," they are not accounted for separately by most local police departments (either as victims or offenders), nor have their numbers in the population been projected separately by the Census Bureau.

On the other hand, we also saw evidence above of worsening economic conditions and family disorganization among whites as well as blacks and Hispanics. They all face declining real wages, increasingly fall below the poverty line, and show evidence of family disruption. The diffusion of hardship and disorganization throughout the population will multiply its effects on crime by a much larger at-risk group, also to the detriment of future social order.

Notes

1. For an exception, see Eric Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America, 1860-1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
2. In this discussion, "violent crime" refers to the sum of murders, rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults. The figures from which these trends were calculated can be found in yearly editions of the FBI's *Uniform Crime Report*.
3. Wesley G. Skogan, "Citizen Reporting of Crime," *Criminology* 13 (Feb. 1976): 535-49.
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5. Richard McCleary, Barbara C. Nienstedt, and James M. Fleen, "Uniform Crime Reports as Organizational Outcomes: Three Time Series Experiments," *Social Problems* 29 (Apr. 1982): 361-72; David Seidman and Michael Couzens, "Getting the Crime Rate Down: Political Pressure and Crime Reporting," *Law and Society Review* 8 (Spring 1974): 457-93.
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7. Wesley G. Skogan, "Crime and Public Safety," *Chicago: The State of the Region* (New York: Associated Faculty Press, 1988).
8. Michael Rand, *Violent Crime Trends* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, 1987).
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10. Travis Hirschi and Michael Gottfredson, "Age and the Explanation of Crime," *American Journal of Sociology* 89 (Nov. 1983): 552-84.
11. Lawrence E. Cohen and Kenneth C. Land, "Age Structure and Crime: Symmetry Versus Asymmetry and the Projection of Crime Rates Through the 1990's," *American Sociological Review* 52 (Apr. 1987): 170-83.
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14. Lawrence Cohen and Kenneth Land, personal communications, 1987.
15. Philip J. Cook and John H. Laub, "The (Surprising) Stability of Youth Crime Rates," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 2 (Sept. 1986): 265-78.
16. Paul E. Tracey, Marvin E. Wolfgang, and Robert M. Eglio, *Delinquency in Two Birth Cohorts* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 1985).
17. David Klepinger and Joseph G. Weis, "Projecting Crime Rates: An Age, Period, and Cohort Model Using ARIMA Techniques," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 1 (Dec. 1985): 387-416; David F. Greenberg, "Age, Crime and Social Explanation," *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (no. 1, 1985): 1-21.
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