

Public Responsiveness to Declining Crime Rates in the United States and England & Wales

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Abstract

During much of the second half of the twentieth century, public opinion in both the United States and Britain became more punitive as crime rates rose. These shifting public attitudes had a profound influence on criminal justice policies. What is less understood is how public attitudes in these countries have responded to declining crime rates since the early-1990s. To understand how the public reacts to declining crime rates, we focus on crimes recorded by the police as well as data on actual victimisation. We also draw on more than 4,000 national survey questions to construct measures of public concern about crime and support for punitive criminal justice responses. Our analyses illustrate parallels in the crime drop measured by victimisation surveys in the two countries (with recorded violent crime in England and Wales the exception to this overall trend). The over-time patterns in public concern about crime and punitive sentiment are more complex, with the U.S. public becoming less punitive (in line with declining crime rates) while the British public's *concern* with crime appears more in tune with actual crime rates. Given the distinct social, political and institutional settings offered by the two countries, the parallel dynamics of crime and the mixed response of public opinion help illustrate the importance of the comparative analysis of crime and its effects on society as well as the importance of considering multiple measures of public opinion related to crime and punishment.

During much of the second half of the twentieth century, public opinion in the United States and Britain became more punitive as crime rates rose. These shifting attitudes had a profound influence on the criminal legal system in these two countries (Enns 2014; Enns 2016; Enns and Shanks-Booth 2015; Jennings et al. 2017). What is less understood is how public attitudes in these countries have responded to *declining* crime rates since the early-1990s.

Some evidence suggests that the public noticed the decline in crime rates in these countries and adjusted their attitudes accordingly (Enns 2014; Enns 2016; Jennings et al. 2017). Others, however, are sceptical of this conclusion (Koerth and Thomson-DeVeaux 2020; Gramlich 2020). O’Hear and Wheelock (2020) argue that crime attitudes are largely expressive, and not tied to crime. Shi’s (2021) work goes even further in the other direction, finding that exposing individuals to accurate information about declining crime rates *increases* punitiveness. Further complicating our understanding of the public’s reaction (or lack thereof) to declining crime rates is research that finds crime rates have little influence on crime salience in the U.S. context (Beckett 1997; Cheliotis 2020; Shi et al. 2020),¹ that the public reacts to national and local crime rates differently (Ramirez 2013), and the influence of “moral panics” in the British context (Jennings et al. 2020).

Given these mixed findings, our goal is to evaluate the relationship between declining crime rates and public attitudes. Our analysis focuses on crime rates in the U.S. and England and Wales.² This cross-national approach enables comparison of how publics in two major advanced industrial democracies have responded to falling crime rates. Perhaps surprisingly, crime rates and punitive attitudes in these countries have not received in-depth comparative analysis (van Dijk et al. 2012).³ While other cross-national comparisons are important, we focus our attention on these countries for several reasons. First, the country selection allows insights on whether public responsiveness is influenced by distinct criminal justice policy regimes. Specifically, the existence of capital punishment, the world’s highest incarceration rate, and high rates of gun ownership in the U.S. case versus no capital punishment (abolished in 1965), lower rates of incarceration (though still high relative to West European countries), and low rates of gun ownership in England and Wales. Second, high quality long-term victimisation data are available in both of these countries which allows us to disentangle differences in crimes reported to and recorded by the police versus actual victimisation rates. Finally, these countries offer a large volume of survey data on public attitudes towards crime and criminal justice via long-running social, political and victimisation surveys. Our analysis is thus able to draw upon over 4,000 individual survey questions to construct measures of both public concern about crime and support for punitive policies.

Given the data available, we focus on crimes recorded by the police as well as actual victimisation data. We consider both types of crime data because victimisation and police reports do not always align (Jennings et al. 2015; Lynch and Addington 2006; McDowall and Loftin 2007). This allow us to test whether the public in each country has noticed falls in crime rates and whether or not public opinion has become less punitive in response.

The findings carry several important implications. First, they offer a clear conclusion to a largely disjointed set of findings about the public’s response to falling crime rates. It turns out the distinction between crime concern and punitive attitudes is critical for understanding how the public has responded to declining crime rates in the U.S. and England and Wales. Second, they speak to broader debates about the public’s awareness and ability to update its attitudes in a systematic manner (e.g., Enns and Kellstedt 2008; Jerit and Zhao 2020; Page and Shapiro

¹ See Enns 2016, pp. 20-23 for why this may be the case.

² The legal system of England and Wales is separate to that of Scotland, as is the reporting of recorded crime statistics. Likewise, Scotland ceased to be included in the British Crime Survey (now the Crime Survey for England and Wales) in 1988. For this reason, we consider England and Wales rather than Great Britain as the focus of analysis.

³ Important studies have considered criminal justice policies across these countries in a comparative framework (e.g., Garland 2001; Howard, Newman, and Freilich 2017; Miller 2016), but they have not examined crime rates and punitive attitudes together, and if crime rates have been considered, the focus has primarily been on violent crime (Miller 2016).

1992). Although exceptions exist, we find much more evidence of public awareness and responsiveness than not. Third, these results hold implications for the future of criminal justice reform. In particular they highlight how public demand for punitive policies may depend on future trends in crime rates. Finally, by focusing on the U.S. and England and Wales, this article offers a unique cross-national perspective. The U.S. is typically viewed as an outlier both in terms of crime rates (e.g. Miller 2016; Gallo et al. 2018) and criminal legal policies (e.g. Reitz 2018). However, focusing on the cross-national and over-time analyses of this particular time period highlights both commonalities and differences across these countries

Understanding Crime Rates in the U.S. and England & Wales

Our primary goal is to understand the relationship between declining crime rates and public attitudes related to crime and punishment in the U.S. and England and Wales. Figure 1, which plots crime rates in these countries from 1960 to 2019, helps illustrate why we focus on the early-1990s to present to evaluate declining crime rates. In both countries, the rate of total recorded crimes per 100,000 people underwent a relatively sustained increase from 1960 until the early 1990s (in the figure we rescale each data series to common maximum and minimum values to allow for direct comparison of trends). Crime conditions changed in both countries after this period, as the U.S. experienced a steady decline in crime while England and Wales saw both sustained decreases and increases in crime since the early 1990s. Importantly, however, the seeming crime increase in 2002-3 is linked to adoption of the new National Crime Reporting Standard in 2002 (Simmons et al. 2003), and the increase in 2015-20 has been partly attributed to significant expansion in crime recording and reporting practices (ONS 2021).⁴ Indeed, as we will see, victimisation data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) show that crime has continued to fall since the early 1990s despite rises in the recorded crime rate we see in Figure 1 during the later years of this time period, suggesting the overall crime trajectories in the U.S. and England and Wales were much more similar than Figure 1 suggests.

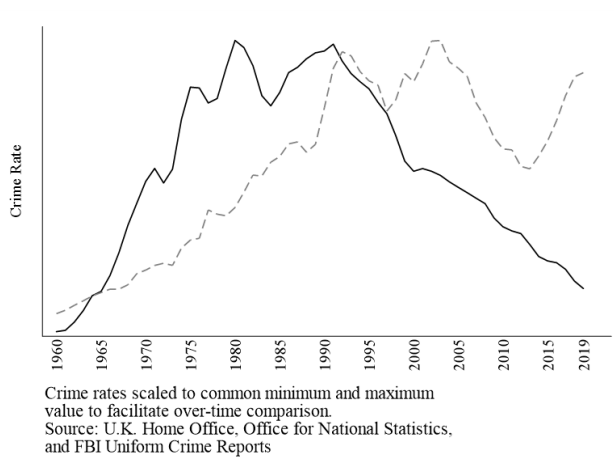


Figure 1: Total Crime Recorded by the Police in the U.S. and England and Wales, 1960-2019

While substantial scholarly work has focused on the rise of crime from roughly 1960 to the early 1990s shown in Figure 1 (e.g. Enns 2014; Enns 2016; Enns and Shanks-Booth 2015; Jennings et al. 2017), the decline in crime rates since the early-1990s, though almost as pronounced, has received much less scholarly attention (though see Rossenfeld and Messner 2009; Farrall 2017; van Dijk et al. 2012). Further, as noted above, the

⁴ There was also a change in Home Office counting rules in April 1998, which had the effect of increasing the number of crimes recorded by the police. Separate counts were produced for the 1998/9 year enabling us here to adjust the recorded crime series a multiplier calculated from the data available from the transition year, based on which we deflate the number of crimes recorded from 1999 onwards. The trend shown therefore understates the degree to which recorded crime increased.

research that has focused on this period has often reached conflicting conclusions about its effects on public opinion and offered a multitude of explanations for its causes. Thus, we focus our analysis on the last thirty years, which have mostly seen declining crime rates.

Different Crime Data Tells Different Stories

Before we turn to our analysis of public attitudes toward crime and punishment, we first need to understand variation in crime rates across reporting type and crime type. Consistent with the discussion above regarding changes in crime reporting in England and Wales, our subsequent analyses show that the *type* of crime data analysed holds large implications for what we conclude about whether crime rates are increasing or decreasing. The different patterns we observe are consistent with research highlighting concerns with the reliability of certain crime data (e.g., Walby, Towers and Francis (2016) on under-counting of domestic violence in official statistics and Buil-Gil, Medina and Shlomo (2020) on geographical variation in the ‘dark figure’ of recorded crime rates in England and Wales, and Wilson (1975, 14) on the Uniform Crime Reporting in the U.S.). These reliability concerns also validate our analytic strategy. Specifically, our analysis of the effects of crime on public attitudes exploits the variation between types of crime and crimes reported to and recorded by the police versus actual victimisation rates to better understand what influences public attitudes in these domains.

We start by disaggregating the data above, which reflect crimes recorded by the police, by various crime types. Figure 2 presents the homicide rates in the U.S. and England and Wales from 1993 to 2019. The U.S. data come from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), which document crimes recorded by the police. The UCR program was first established in 1930 and was the only authoritative source of national crime statistics in the U.S. for several decades. It was not until 1972 when the National Crime Victimization Survey, a nationally representative survey of American households (which we analyse below), provided an additional metric for analysing crime trends (Ansari and He 2015). The data for England and Wales come from the U.K. Home Office, the government department responsible for crime and policing. For most of the twentieth century there was relative consistency in measurement practices. Recent years, however, have seen a number of significant changes in police recording practices (as discussed above and in Appendix 1).

Several patterns stand out that are important to our analysis of public opinion. The consistently higher homicide rate in the U.S. suggests that if the public becomes more punitive in response to the murder rate, we would expect more punitive attitudes in the U.S. relative to England and Wales. However, if it is change that public opinion responds to (Enns 2016), then we might expect to observe declining punitiveness in the U.S. during this period and relatively consistent levels of punitiveness in England and Wales.

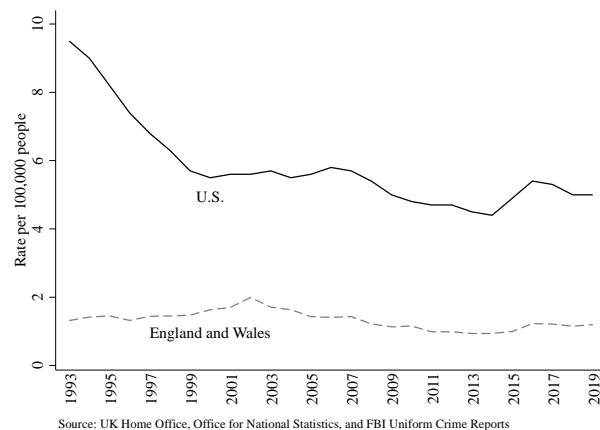


Figure 2: Homicide Rates in the U.S. and England and Wales, 1993-2019

Of course, homicides are relatively infrequent—at least when we consider the public as a whole (Miller 2016)—so it may be that other types of crime have a bigger impact on public attitudes. Figures 3 and 4 report the rate of property crime and violent crime, respectively. In both the U.S. and England and Wales, property crimes decreased during the period of analysis. This parallel shift is especially evident in the right panel where we rescale the series to have a common maximum and minimum value. Rescaling the data this way makes it easier to evaluate the extent to which the two series move in tandem or distinctly.⁵ What is remarkable here is that despite distinct social, economic, and policy contexts, the property crime rates in the two countries tracked each other extremely closely over this period.

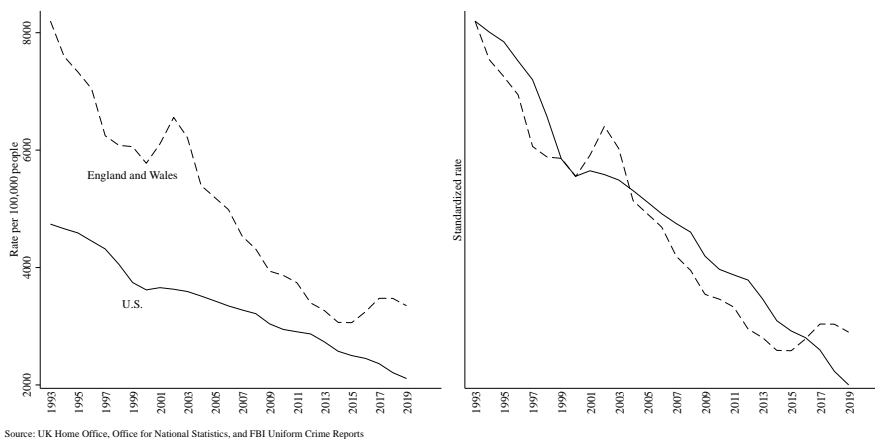


Figure 3: Property Crime Rates in the U.S. and England and Wales, 1993-2019

Note: the left panel reports actual rates, the right panel rescales the series to a common minimum and maximum value to aid over-time comparison.

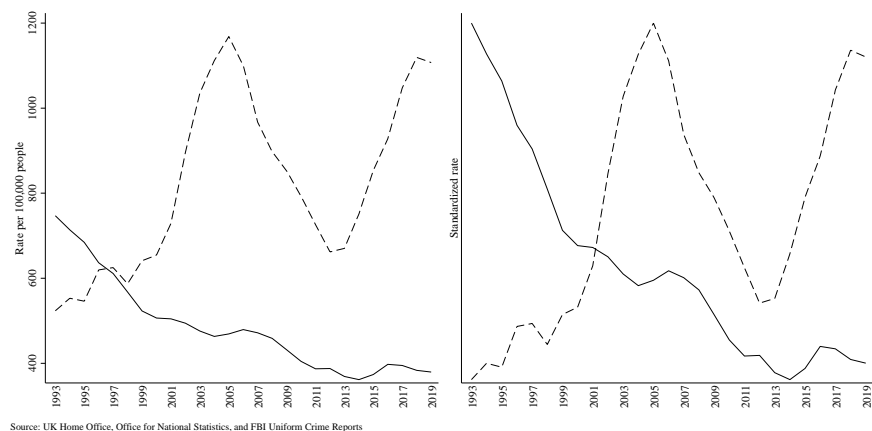


Figure 4: Violent Crime Rates in the U.S. and England and Wales, 1993-2019

Figure 4 presents violent crimes recorded by the police, again with the left panel reporting rates and the right panel rescaling the values to facilitate overtime comparison. The U.S. measure of violent crime includes murder/non-negligent manslaughter, aggravated assault, rape, and robbery, while that for England and Wales

⁵ The variables are normalized to range between values of 0 and 1 by subtracting the minimum value from the raw value and dividing by the range of values.

$$z_i = \frac{x_i - \min(x)}{\max(x) - \min(x)}$$

includes homicide, violence with injury, rape and robbery. The different definitions of “violent crime” in the two countries, as well as shifts in reporting practices in England and Wales (see Appendix 1 for a full discussion of these changes), give rise to very different trends. In the U.S., the violent crime rate has declined steadily since 1993, whereas in England and Wales it rose until 2005, then fell sharply until 2012, before undergoing an upturn in violent crime that has continued to the present day.

The changes in crime reporting in England and Wales offer both a challenge and opportunity for our analysis. The challenge, of course, is that the rates are not directly comparable across time because the definitions for crime and how crimes are counted has shifted. In other words, while crime has actually declined (as we show below), because more offences are now counted in the data, it appears that crime rates have increased substantially. This reporting change also presents an opportunity, however, because we are ultimately interested in the relationship between crime rates and public opinion. One mechanism by which shifting crime rates can influence public attitudes is through media coverage of crime (Enns 2016; Rosenberger and Callanan 2012). If this is the primary mechanism involved, even when the actual crime rate remained steady or declined, if media covered the *increased* crime reported to the police, we would expect the public to become more punitive in England and Wales as crime reporting changed to be more encompassing. However, if crime influences public attitudes directly based on experience with crime, or if media cover victimisation (not crimes recorded by the police), we would not expect such a relationship. We highlight this possibility in more detail below.

Crime Victimisation Rates vs Crimes Recorded by the Police

The data above focused on crimes reported to and recorded by the police. In this section, we introduce measures of crime victimisation based on large high-quality government surveys of the general population. These victimisation surveys offer an important complement to the data above because they measure actual victimisation rates—not just crimes recorded by the police. We begin with data from England and Wales and then present victimisation data from the U.S.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, officials working in the U.K. Home Office became interested in a national victimisation survey that might provide a more comprehensive assessment of the extent of various crimes, independent of those recorded by the police (Mayhew and Hough 1983). These developments were significantly influenced by the National Crime Survey programme in the U.S. (Mayhew and Hough 1992). The first ‘British Crime Survey’ (BCS) was fielded in 1982 (asking about victimisation in the previous year) and found property offences were four times more common than suggested by official statistics and five times more for violent offences. In the early years the survey was fielded periodically, in 1982, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998 and 2000, before switching to a rolling annual basis in 2002.⁶ It was renamed the ‘Crime Survey for England and Wales’ (CSEW) in 2012, to better reflect its geographical coverage (which had ceased to include Scotland in 1988). The sample size also increased considerably through this period, with the early surveys interviewing around 11,000 people while those conducted in the 2000s expanded to a sample of 35,000 and above (for an extended discussion, see Flatley 2014).

In Figure 5, we plot the measure of property crime victimisation alongside the property crime rate analysed above (again reporting rates in the left panel and standardised series in the right). The figure reveals a peak in 1993, at almost 37,000 property crimes per 100,000 people, and a decline in rates of victimisation ever since. This pattern aligns closely with the trend for recorded crime discussed previously, also shown. While the rate of crime in the CSEW is over twice that for recorded property crime, the standardised series on the right show the two series fall largely in tandem over the period since 1993.

⁶ The survey asks people whether they were a victim of crime in the last 12 months and in light of this we report each wave of the CSEW against the previous calendar year.

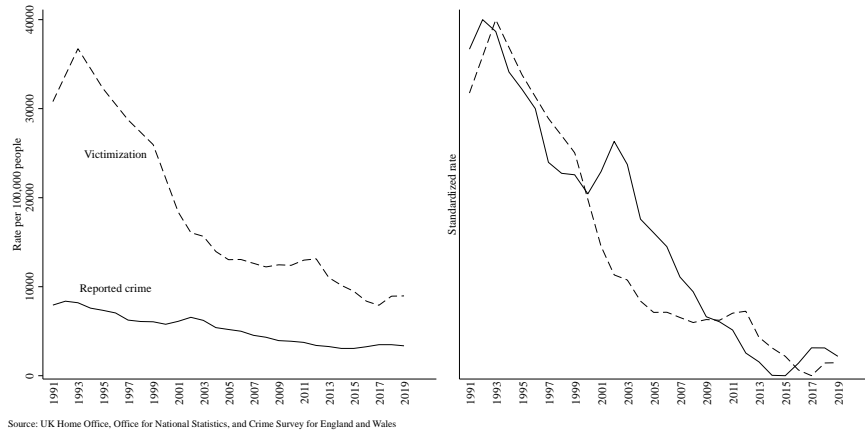


Figure 5: Property Crime Victimization Rate (number of crimes per 100,000 people) in England and Wales, 1991-2019

Turning next to violent crime, plotted in Figure 6, we see a more significant divergence between victimisation rates and recorded crime rates. When we consider victimisation, measured in the CSEW as the number of times individuals have been hit, kicked or had a weapon used against them as well as being *threatened with* force or violence, the rate of violent crimes per 100,000 people in England and Wales peaks in 1995 at over 20,000 per 100,000 people (over one violent crime for every five people in the general population). This is clearly a much more encompassing measure than recorded violent crime (which has never exceeded 1,200 crimes per 100,000 people, reflecting its focus on more serious incidents, even allowing for the expectation that recorded crime will tend to under-count the true extent of victimisation). After 1995, the victimisation rate drops steadily stabilizing at around 8,000 crimes per 100,000 people in 2019. While the rate of reported violent crimes (shown in the left panel) is therefore consistently much lower, actual victimisations have declined while police reporting of violent crimes has increased (right panel). The absence of steep upturns in victimisation in 2002-3 and after 2015, in contrast to the police data, provide evidence that the uptick in crime rates in Figure 1 and Figure 4 are due primarily to changes in counting practices—not actual increases in British crime during this period.

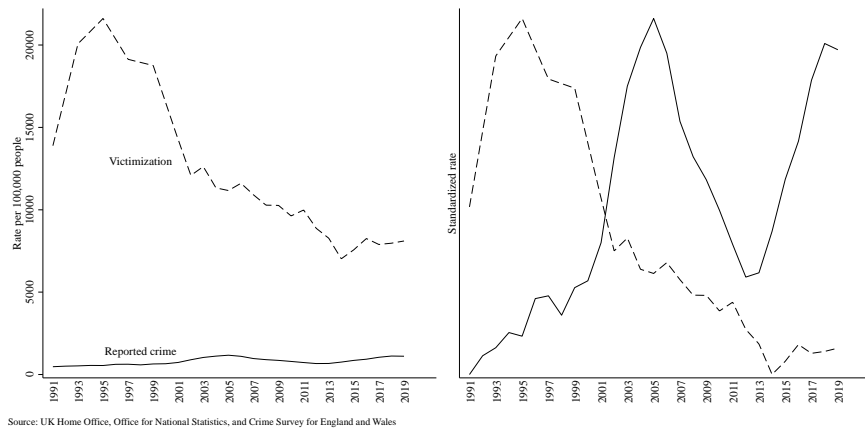


Figure 6: Violent Crime Victimization Rate (number of crimes per 100,000 people) in England and Wales, 1991-2019

Next, we report U.S. crime victimisation data, which come from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The NCVS collects data on a nationally representative sample of U.S. households on nonfatal victimisations against individuals 12 and older (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2021b). Households selected for the NCVS are interviewed biannually over a three-year period. Each

initial interview is conducted in person with the majority of follow-up interviews conducted over the phone. Since 1993, an average of 94,000 household and 166,000 personal interviews have been conducted each year (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2021b). One unfortunate complication of comparing U.S. victimisation trends over time is that the NCVS made major methodological adjustments in 1993 that make comparisons to pre-1992 rates tenuous. Some of the most significant changes include more direct questioning about sexual and violent crimes, questions specifically designed to aid victims in recalling past victimisations, additional sexual victimisation measures beyond rape and attempted rape, and a greater number of interviews conducted using computer assisted telephone interviews (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2021b). Together, these changes served to detect higher levels of victimisation and improve the validity of the NCVS moving forward. Because our focus is on the crime *decline* in the U.S. and England and Wales, we eschew the difficulties of using U.S. victimisation data before and after these changes and focus exclusively on NCVS data from 1993 and forward.⁷

Figures 7 and 8 consider property crime and violent crime, respectively. Each figure contains two measures of crime victimisation from the NCVS, overall victimisation and victimisations that were recorded by the police. This second measure offers a more direct comparison between the NCVS victimisation data and the UCR data based on crimes recorded by police (described above) which we also include in these figures.⁸ The data show that victimisation rates greatly exceed official crime data recorded by the police (UCR dashed line) for both property crime (Figure 7) and violent crime (Figure 8). However, when respondents in the NCVS are asked if they reported the crime to the police, the NCVS data are much more closely aligned with the UCR data. With violent crime (Figure 8), the UCR data actually exceed the NCVS police reported statistics for property crime and the two series overlap in many years starting in 2007, a pattern that is consistent with research documenting a growing convergence between the NCVS and UCR crime rates since 1993 (Ansari and He 2015; Catalano 2007; McDowall and Loftin 2007).

In addition to similar rates once we account for what is reported to police, we see that NCVS victimisation data and UCR police report data suggest the same overall trends—declining violent and property crime since the early 1990s. These similar trajectories are especially noticeable in the right panels of Figures 7 and 8, where the series are rescaled to a common minimum and maximum value.

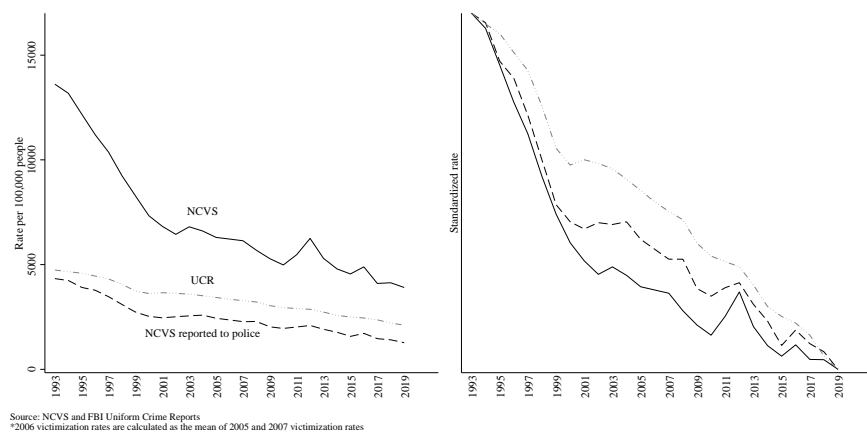


Figure 7: Rate of Property Crime Victimization, Victimization Reported to the Police (NCVS data) and Violent Crime Rates based on the UCR, 1993-2019

⁷ NCVS data is taken from the Bureau of Justice Statistic’s NCVS Victimization Analysis Tool (2021a).

⁸ To aid comparison across crime data, we followed previous research and adjusted the NCVS property crime rates (which are based on households) to reflect the rate per individuals as recorded in the UCR (Biderman et al. 1991; Blumstein et al. 1991; McDowall and Loftin 1992; 2007). Additionally, because UCR counts arson, murder, and manslaughter but the NCVS does not, we removed these measures from our UCR rates.

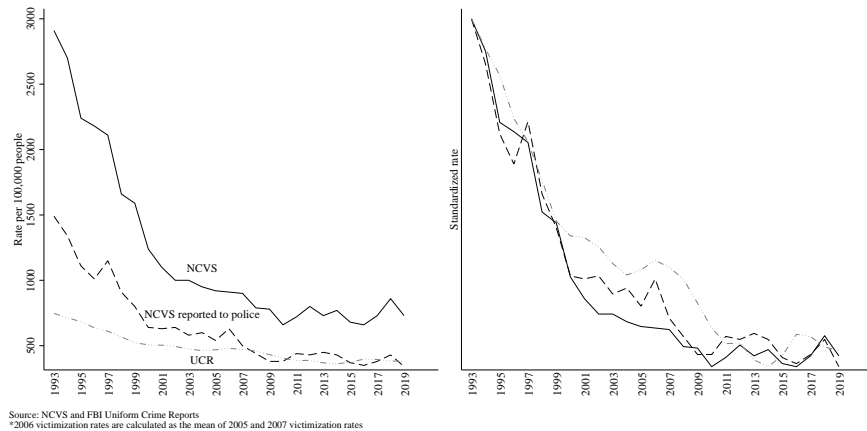


Figure 8: Rate of Violent Crime Victimization, Victimization Reported to the Police (NCVS data) and Violent Crime Rates based on the UCR, 1993-2019

Together, the victimisation data from England and Wales and the U.S. (Figures 5-8) produce two patterns with implications for analysing public attitudes toward crime and punishment. First, consistent with past research, in almost all cases, victimisation rates greatly exceed crimes reported to the police. However, much of this difference appears to stem from crimes *not* reported to the police. The U.S. data allow us to analyse victimisation among crimes reported to the police, and the data are much closer to actual police statistics. Second, with the exception of violent crime in England and Wales, despite the cross-sectional differences between victimisation and police data, both measures show declining crime rates. The similar over-time patterns are especially evident in the right panels of the previous figures where we scaled each measure to a common minimum and maximum value to facilitate over-time comparisons. These similarities mean that in most cases, it is not possible to evaluate whether the public (or news coverage of crime, if news mediates the crime-opinion relationships) responds to shifts in crimes reported to police or shifts in actual victimisation—over time, the two are nearly perfectly correlated. The one exception is violent crime in England and Wales, where police data have moved in the opposite direction to the trend of actual victimisation in recent years. We exploit this variation in our analyses below.

Public Reactions to Declining Crime

Although an emerging consensus finds that public attitudes were responsive to rising crime rates (Enns 2016; Jennings et al. 2017), there is no such consensus regarding the decline in crime rates observed above (e.g. Enns 2016; Jennings et al. 2017; Koerth and Thomson-DeVeaux 2020; Gramlich 2020). In addition to these mixed conclusions, several theoretical considerations complicate our expectations. Public opinion does not always respond to positive and negative information symmetrically (Soroka 2014). It is possible that the public becomes more punitive as crime rises, but support for being tough on crime does not recede when crime goes down. Or, the public may respond to increases and decreases in crime symmetrically, but negativity bias in media reporting (i.e., more focus on crime increases than decreases) may produce such a pattern. The increasingly polarized nature of politics in the U.S. since the early 1990s presents another complicating factor. It may be that the process of updating political attitudes—particularly among different partisan groups—has changed during our period of analysis, leading to a reduced relationship between crime rates and attitudes. While our own prior research, as well as many others, have found that political attitudes in these countries tend to follow objective conditions in this and other policy domains (e.g., Enns and Kellstedt 2008; Jennings et al. 2017; Enns 2016), we recognize it is possible that this relationship may be weaker than we might otherwise expect in the subsequent analysis.

To evaluate these various considerations, we follow Enns (2014; 2016) and Jennings, Gray, Farrall and Hay (2017), and use Stimson’s (1991) ‘dyad ratios algorithm’ to combine all available survey questions (that have been asked at multiple time points) related to criminal justice attitudes into two over-time measures: public concern about crime *and* punitive attitudes towards crime and punishment in the U.S. and Britain.⁹ Our measure of crime concern is new and captures perceptions of the crime rate and the degree to which the public is fearful or concerned about crime. Our measure of punitive attitudes captures the degree to which public opinion supports being tougher on crime or supports less punitive and more rehabilitative policies.

Stimson’s method offers a solution to the irregular and infrequent availability of nevertheless informative survey data at different points in time. The principle behind the algorithm is fairly intuitive; the ratio of aggregate-level survey responses to the same question at different points in time provides meaningful information about the relative state of public opinion – telling us whether, on average, the public has become more or less concerned about crime or whether it has become more or less punitive in its opinions. Every survey item can be expressed as the ratio of attitudes on crime or punishment at two points in time: a ‘dyad’. This ratio provides an estimate of the relative opinion, for a given question, in years $t+i$ and $t+j$. For example, if 30 per cent of respondents say they are worried about crime in 1995 and 60 per cent say they are worried in 2005, this indicates that the public has become twice as concerned about crime between these two points in time, according to this survey measure. Of course, in practice there are multiple dyads and considerable variation due to survey sampling error.

$$P_{ij} = \frac{X_{t+i}}{X_{t+j}}$$

This method enables recursive estimation of the index of crime perceptions and punitive attitudes for each survey question for each time period based on all data available. As such the algorithm extracts the underlying tendency of all survey items relating to crime and punishment, analogous to a principal components approach. Because there are multiple estimates of public opinion (i.e. there are multiple survey question series) and they are not all equivalent indicators of the latent construct, the dyad ratios algorithm estimates the squared correlation of each series with the underlying dimension and uses this to weight the series (Bartle et al. 2011, p. 269; Stimson 1991). This item-scale correlation is interpretable as a factor loading, and is reported below for selected question series.

While this method is somewhat inductive, avoiding prior assumptions about weights assigned to items in the extracted index, decisions do need to be taken regarding which survey items satisfy face validity requirement for inclusion – simply, the items need to be credible measures of public concern about crime and serve to measure the public’s preference for more (or less) punitive policy with regard to criminal justice.

Crime Concern

We start by considering whether public concerns about crime reflect changes in the rates of recorded crime and victimisation in the two countries. Some researchers have suggested a divergence in perceptions of crime between local and national levels, suggesting that in terms of perceptions of national trends there is no public responsiveness (Gramlich 2020; Koerth and Thomson-DeVeaux 2020; Mohan et al. 2011). Our analysis differs from past work in both the U.S. and England and Wales, however, in that we consider property and violent crime, as measured through victimisation and police data, and we generate measures of crime concern based on all available data.

⁹ Historical survey data from pollsters such as Gallup and Ipsos (and also more recent data from YouGov) measured public opinion in Great Britain, rather than England and Wales, as do those survey items obtained from Bartle et al.’s (2011) database of public policy preferences. It is not possible to disaggregate this data and so our measure of public punitiveness corresponds to Britain as a whole. Note that the combined population of England and Wales makes up over 90 per cent of the total population of Britain, meaning that changes in our measure of punitive attitudes are unlikely to be driven by Scottish respondents.

The U.S. measure relies on five survey questions about crime concern, which were each asked repeatedly since 1965--giving us five time series (though we start our analysis in 1993 to match the crime data reported above). The data were obtained from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University. Table 1(a) reports the questions and the relationship between each series and crime concern index generated with Stimson's dyad ratios algorithm. Four of the individual series load at 0.93 or above and the fifth series loads at 0.80. These values show that all series are related and contribute to the overall measure. The high proportion of variance explained (88%) offers another indication that assessments of whether crime is going up and fear of crime are measuring the same underlying concept.

Table 1(a). Factor Loadings of Question Series and the Overall Measure of Crime Concern, U.S.

<u>Survey Question (survey organisation)</u>	Cases	Loading
There is more crime in this area than there was a year ago (Gallup)	33	0.97
There is an area near where you live where afraid to walk alone at night (Gallup)	34	0.93
Is more crime in the U.S. than there was a year ago (Gallup)	26	0.96
Feel the crime rate in your area has been increasing in the past year (Harris)	10	0.93
Don't feel safe and secure when at home at night (Gallup)	10	0.80
<u>First dimension</u>		
Proportion of variance explained		88.0
N of question series used to estimate the overall measure		5
Total N of survey items		120
Start		1965
End		2021

The measure of crime concerns for England and Wales uses a number of series in the CSEW and the British Election Study (including its 'Continuous Monitoring Survey' that ran monthly between 2004 and 2013 and its Internet Panel fielded at periodic intervals since 2014), plus questions asked by YouGov. Since 1982, the CSEW has asked people about their fear of crime, using a question asking how safe respondents feel when walking alone in their area after dark (as with the U.S. opinion data, we again focus our analysis on the period that aligns with the previous crime data). Research has found that this measure tends to capture diffuse anxiety about the risk of crime more than everyday personal concerns over safety (Gray et al. 2008). We include this series and a number of other survey questions capturing worry about crime and belief that the crime rate is rising (2,939 items in total), and find that mostly these items load strongly onto the underlying dimension of public concern about crime. The single estimated dimension accounts for nearly 80 per cent of the variance in the component measures of public opinion. Although the measure of crime concern in England and Wales includes more survey questions than the U.S. measure, we see that the proportion of variance explained and relationships between each series and the resulting index are very similar to what we found in the U.S in Table 1(a).

Table 1(b). Factor Loadings of Question Series and the Overall Measure of Crime Concern, England & Wales

<u>Survey Question (survey organisation)</u>	Cases	Loading
Crime rate in area going up (YouGov)	3	1.00
Crime rate nationally going up (YouGov)	3	1.00
Worry about being mugged and robbed (CSEW)	26	0.99
Worried about being attacked (CSEW)	16	0.99
Worried about having car stolen (CSEW)	26	0.99
Worried about having your home broken into and something stolen (CSEW)	26	0.98
Worried about having things stolen from car (CSEW)	26	0.98
Don't feel safe walking about in the dark (CSEW)	24	0.93
Crime situation getting worse these days (BES-CMS)	10	0.92
Worried about being raped (CSEW)	26	0.92
Crime makes feel angry (BES-CMS)	10	0.91
Crime makes feel afraid (BES-CMS)	10	0.90
<u>First dimension</u>		
Proportion of variance explained		79.9
N of question series used to estimate the overall measure		19
N of survey items		2,939
Start		1981
End		2021

Note: Given the large number of survey items in the series, the threshold for inclusion in the table is a correlation of greater than ± 0.9 and more than two cases (i.e. cases are survey-years, so one case can include multiple surveys). Thus, the total number of series (19) is greater than the number of series listed in the table.

Figures 9 and 10 plot the resulting measures of public crime concern for the U.S. and England and Wales, respectively. In the U.S., we see that concern with crime declined from the early 1990s to about 2001. This aligns with the declining crime rates observed above. But from 2003 to 2007, crime concern moved *opposite* declining crime rates. Then, since 2007, concern again declined—in line with actual crime rates—though to a much lesser extent than the decline in the 1990s. The patterns in Figure 9 are thus somewhat puzzling. On one hand, the public was less concerned with crime in 2019 than in 1993, which aligns with the declining crime rates during this period. On the other hand, the increase in concern during the early 2000s does not align with actual crime rates. This increase is a particularly important puzzle for future research to engage.¹⁰

¹⁰ One possibility is that the uptick in concern with crime reflects broader safety concerns related to the September 11 attacks on the U.S.



Figure 9: Crime Concern in the U.S., 1993-2019



Figure 10: Crime Concern in England and Wales, 1991-2019

Our measure of crime concern for England and Wales (Figure 10) aligns much more closely with declining crime rates than we saw in the U.S. in Figure 9. Concern about crime peaked briefly in 1991, but has been in decline ever since – with just the occasional slight upturn. This highlights how in the British context the ‘crime drop’ has translated into an easing of public fears and concerns over crime. Further, the patterns in Figure 10 strongly suggest that concern with crime in Britain follows victimisation, and not the increase in violent crime reported by police, offering evidence that the public (or the news, if news coverage mediates the crime-opinion link), follows victimisation much more than actual police data.

Analysing Crime Rates and Crime Concern Together

Although crime victimisation has declined in both the U.S. and England and Wales, the figures above show that only in England and Wales have crime concerns declined consistently as we would expect based on falling crime rates. Table 2 offers a more precise evaluation of these patterns. We report the bivariate correlations between the five crime measures we have presented for the two countries and the crime concern measures depicted above. We limit our analysis to bivariate correlations given the short time series and limited degrees of freedom. While this means we cannot control for potentially mediating factors, such as news coverage of crime or political rhetoric around crime, bivariate correlations are ideally suited to quantify the empirical

relationships described above and to evaluate our core questions about the over-time relationships between crime rates and public opinion.¹¹

Consistent with visual impressions, only a weak relationship exists between crime perceptions and actual crime in the U.S. This is true regardless of how crime is measured, though we note that the estimated relationship is roughly twice as large for the homicide rate as the other crime rates. By contrast, the British public seems highly in tuned to shifting crime rates, with the exception of the rate of recorded violent crime – where the correlation is strongly negative (-0.57) and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This, however, reflects the fact that the recorded rate of violent crime has significantly diverged from the public’s experience of it, as measured in victimisation surveys. The differences between U.S. concern for crime and crime concern in England and Wales suggests an important avenues for future research, which we discuss in the conclusions.

Table 2: The bivariate correlation between crime rates and crime perceptions in the United States and England and Wales, 1993-2019

	Crime Perceptions	
	U.S.	England & Wales
Homicide (Police Reports)	0.21	0.65*
Violent Crime (Police Reports)	0.09	-0.57*
Violent Crime (Victimisation)	0.11	0.93*
Property Crime (Police Reports)	0.04	0.96*
Property Crime (Victimisation)	0.12	0.90*

*= $p < 0.05$; $N=27$, except for victimisation rates in England and Wales ($N=23$), due to CSEW surveys every other year early in the analysis.

Punitiveness

We turn next to our measure of punitive attitudes held by the public in relation to crime. As before we use the dyad ratios algorithm to extract the underlying trend in around 900 survey items across the two countries. These items are included on the basis that they measure the public’s support for approaches to crime and criminal justice that are harsher or more lenient. Our U.S. measure extends previous work by Enns (2014; 2016; also see Ramirez 2013), adding ten years of data. Our measure for Britain draws heavily on survey data from the CSEW, British Election Study (including panel studies and internet panels), the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, and polls conducted by Gallup, Ipsos-MORI and YouGov. This provides us with 548 survey items relating to the criminal justice policy over the period between 1981 and 2021. The primary difference in the estimation of punitive attitudes across the U.S. and England and Wales relates to how we treat questions about the death penalty. We will see in Table 3(a) that in the U.S. attitudes toward the death penalty correspond closely with the overall measure of the public’s punitiveness. Perhaps not surprisingly in the U.S. context, increases (decreases) in support for the death penalty correspond with increases (decreases) in other measures of

¹¹ While our primary goal is to evaluate whether the overtime patterns in the figures are related, in the Online Appendix (Table A2) we also report bivariate correlations for first differences. Not surprisingly, these analyses reveal a more varied pattern of results, but most associations parallel the findings above and in England and Wales the correlation remains significant for victimization rates for violent crime and property crime (the latter only at the 90 per cent confidence level).

punitiveness, such as support for punishment, the view that courts have been too lenient, and support for spending on law enforcement.

By contrast, previous research on the UK (Jennings et al. 2017) has shown that public support for the death penalty has undergone sustained long-term decline, reflecting steadily increasing social liberalism on the issue. This differs from aspects of criminal justice policy other than support for the death penalty, where punitive attitudes are subject to greater fluctuation. We find the same here, and exclude items on the death penalty from our measure of punitive attitudes. The two versions of the series (i.e., with and without questions about the death penalty) are correlated at just 0.13 ($p=0.429$). Thus, our decision to exclude death penalty attitudes in the British measure of punitiveness is not without consequence. But we believe it is theoretically appropriate. The death penalty was abolished in Britain in 1965 and there has been little serious prospect of its reinstatement since. As a result, in contrast to other survey items measuring support for a more or less punitive direction of criminal justice *policy*, questions about the death penalty capture are distinct from the policy debate and more likely reflect the degree to which British citizens hold socially conservative *values*, without strictly capturing a meaningful preference for policy. For this reason, to keep our measures of public punitiveness theoretically consistent across the two countries, we should not use death penalty questions in the British measure.

In both country series, we depart from previous measures of punitive attitudes, and exclude questions about confidence in policing and criminal justice. In practice, this decision has little influence on our final measures, but this decision reflects important theoretical considerations, particularly in the U.S. context. Previously in the U.S., a lack of confidence in the police reflected concern with crime and a desire for the police to do *more*; i.e., confidence was low because police were not doing enough (Enns 2016, Ch.2). More recently, however, a lack of confidence in the police in the U.S. can reflect the view that the police are *over*-policing. Because police confidence can now mean different things at different time points, we exclude these measures from the updated series.

In Tables 3(a) and 3(b), we report factor loadings of selected survey items, as well as the proportion of variance explained by the underlying factor in the USA and Britain respectively. Here, we see a substantial proportion of variance loads onto a single underlying dimension, indicating the central tendency in the public's punitive attitudes. This accounts for 67% of all variance in survey questions on crime and criminal justice in the U.S., and 66% in Britain. The loadings reported in the tables further indicate that widely accepted measures of punitive attitudes load strongly onto the extracted measure.

In the U.S., questions about the death penalty consistently load strongly on the resulting measure of punitiveness as do support for more spending on police and law enforcement, the belief that it is important to punish people in prison, and the belief that the criminal justice system is not tough enough.

In the case of Britain, survey items asking if 'people who break the law should be given stiffer sentences' correlate at 1.00 (BES Internet Panel), 0.94 (BSA) and 0.87 (BES Panel Study, 1992-7). Strong loadings are also observed for items concerning whether sentences are 'not harsh enough' (1.00, YouGov), 'too lenient' (0.92, CSEW), whether young offenders are dealt with too leniently (0.94, CSEW). Survey items asking about perceived causes of crime also correspond strongly with this measure of punitive attitudes. Believing that poverty and poor housing is a 'very important cause of crime and violence' (Gallup, -0.99) is negatively correlated with the measure, while belief that 'general breakdown in respect for authority, law and order' (0.94) loads positively. Our measure therefore seems to have face validity in terms of how it corresponds to existing measures of the public's support for more or less punitive policy.

Table 3(a). Factor Loadings of Selected Question Series and the Overall Measure of Punitive Opinion, U.S.

<u>Survey Question (survey organisation)</u>	Cases	Loading
Favour “much more” government spending on police and law enforcement (GSS)	5	0.99
Believe it is more important to punish people in prison for their crimes (Gallup)	4	0.98
Believe the criminal justice system is not tough enough in its handling of crime (Gallup)	4	0.97
In favor of the death penalty (Harris)	3	0.97
In favor of the death penalty for a person convicted of murder (Gallup)	42	0.97
Believe the main purpose of prisons is to punish (Roper)	3	0.96
Prefer the death penalty as punishment for people convicted of murder (ABC News)	7	0.95
Feel the courts are too lenient in dealing with criminals (Harris)	4	0.95
Favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder (GSS)	30	0.95
Favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder (ABC News)	12	0.92
Favour the death penalty as the penalty for murder (Gallup)	18	0.92
Feel that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to the commitment of murder (Gallup)	6	0.90
Believe the death penalty is imposed not often enough (Gallup)	16	0.90
Favor the death penalty for individuals convicted of serious crimes such as murder (Time)	6	0.90
<u>First dimension</u>		
Proportion of variance explained		67.4
N of question series used to estimate the overall measure		27
N of survey items		380
Start		1953
End		2020

Note: threshold for inclusion in the table is a correlation of greater than ± 0.9 and more than two cases (i.e. cases are survey-years, so one case can include multiple surveys). Thus, the total number of series (19) is greater than the number of series listed in the table.

Table 3(b). Factor Loadings of Selected Question Series and the Overall Measure of Punitive Opinion, Britain

<u>Survey Question (survey organisation)</u>	Cases	Loading
People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences (BESIP)	4	1.00
Sentences that the courts hand down to people who have been convicted of crimes are not harsh enough (YouGov)	4	1.00
Poverty and poor housing a very important cause of crime and violence (Gallup)	4	-0.99
People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences (BSA)	29	0.94
General breakdown in respect for authority, law and order is a very important cause of crime and violence (Gallup)	4	0.94
Young offenders are dealt with too leniently (CSEW)	19	0.94
Sentences are too lenient (CSEW)	21	0.92
<u>First dimension</u>		
Proportion of variance explained		66.0
N of question series used to estimate the overall measure		25
N of survey items		548
Start		1981
End		2021

Note: threshold for inclusion in the table is a correlation of greater than ± 0.9 and more than two cases (i.e. cases are survey-years, so one case can include multiple surveys). Thus, the total number of series (25) is greater than the number of series listed in the table.

Figures 11 and 12 report our updated measures of punitiveness in the U.S. and England and Wales, respectively, plotted against our measures of crime concern and the victimisation rate for violent crime. We analyse victimisation because, as seen above, shifts in crime reporting lead official statistics to deviate from actual crime rates in England and Wales. In Figure 11, we see that the U.S. public has become steadily less punitive since the early 1990s. While concern with crime decreased following the initial crime drop, these series became disconnected around 2001. In contrast, punitive attitudes have declined largely in parallel with declining crime rates, with something of a lag. This helps resolve conflicting findings in the U.S. context. While both concern for crime and punitiveness declined as crime fell in the 1990s, only public punitiveness continued to decline during the entire period of analysis.

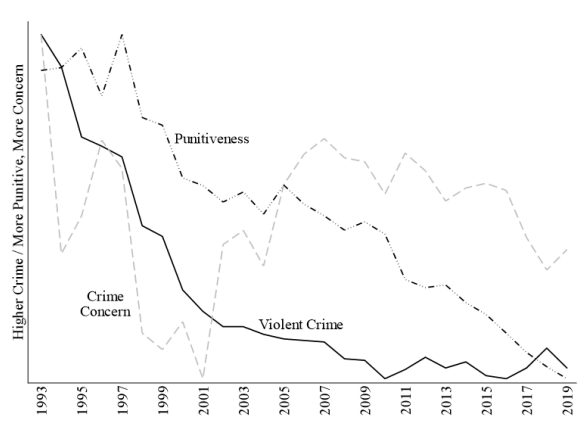


Figure 11: Punitive Attitudes in the U.S., 1993-2019

Figure 12 shows the measure of public punitiveness in Britain. We see the British public maintained support for punitive policies for some time after crime rates dropped, but public concern for crime dropped as violent crime rates fell. In fact, public attitudes became slightly more punitive from the early 1990s through about 2010, when the British public’s support for tough on crime policies finally dropped substantially.

Together, these figures show that in both countries crime concern and punitiveness broadly reflect actual crime rates (measured by victimization), but the relationship appears more direct for punitiveness in the U.S. and more direct for crime concern in England and Wales. Our evidence arguably provides a corrective to claims that public opinion has been completely divorced from declining crime rates.



Figure 12: Punitive Attitudes in Britain, 1991-2019

Analysing Crime Rates and Punitive Attitudes Together

Our next step is to test the degree to which the public’s support for punitive policy corresponds with the recorded crime rate or victimisation. We again turn to bivariate correlations. We are primarily interested in comparing relationships across crime types and across countries. The correlations in Table 4 offer an useful summary of this information. Consistent with the visual patterns above, the relationship between all crime rates and the public’s punitiveness in the U.S. is strong. As crime rates have declined, the U.S. public has become less punitive. The relationship is much more constrained in Britain, where there is a modest positive correlation. As with our analysis of concern with crime, to the extent the British public follows crime rates, it is actual crime, not shifts in police reporting, as evidenced by the negative relationship between police reports of violent crime

and punitive attitudes. It therefore seems that falling victimisation rates of violent crime have been associated with declining public punitiveness on the issue.¹²

Table 4: The bivariate correlation between crime rates and punitive attitudes in the United States and England and Wales, 1993-2019

	Punitive Attitudes	
	U.S.	England & Wales
Homicide (Police Reports)	0.79*	0.47*
Violent Crime (Police Reports)	0.91*	-0.30
Violent Crime (Victimisation)	0.85*	0.52*
Property Crime (Police Reports)	0.98*	0.56*
Property Crime (Victimisation)	0.91*	0.46*

*= $p < 0.05$; $N=27$, except for victimisation rates in England and Wales ($N=23$), due to surveys every other year early in the analysis.

Conclusions

This study has sought to understand how the crime drop experienced by the U.S. and Britain since the early 1990s impacted public concern about crime and support for punitive measures on crime. We have not sought to explain the crime drop itself, a debate that is ongoing (e.g. van Dijk et al. 2012; Farrall 2017), though it is interesting that the two countries have seen such parallel declines in offending in relative terms, if not absolutes. And these parallel declines have occurred with property and violent crimes, and to a similar extent, homicides in both countries. Though in the British case, because of shifts in police reporting of violent crime, this decline is only fully evident when analysing victimization records. This is despite significant differences in social and economic context (not least in terms of the welfare system), the nature of policing and the carceral system.

We have shown that in England and Wales the public recognized falling rates of crime, reflected in decreased concern about crime, while the correspondence is considerably weaker for the U.S. – based on original measures of public opinion that are estimated using thousands of survey items. In contrast, the public’s support for punitive measures on crime in the U.S. is highly responsive to both recorded crime and victimisation rates while in England and Wales there is similar responsiveness with the exception of recorded violent crime. That public support for tougher action on crime is not responsive to recorded violent crime rates in England and Wales is not surprising when one considers that counting practices for police recorded crime statistics have been subject to a number of significant changes during this period, which have led the recorded rate of violent crime (and total crime) to diverge significantly from victimisation measures. This finding is notable in that it suggests that public concern about crime does not just stem from the official publication, or media reporting of recorded crime statistics (which can mislead about the underlying trend in crime), but instead from societal experience of crime.

¹² Although this analysis is designed to capture over-time trends, in the Online Appendix we report bivariate correlations of the first differences model, which, not surprisingly given the short time series and trends in the series, does not reveal statistically significant relationships between changes in punitive attitudes and change in crime rates during this period.

One lesson from our analysis is that even across countries subject to distinct economic and political conditions – and very different legal systems – crime can shift in similar ways across decades. A second lesson is that when seeking to understand public responses to shifting crime rates, if victimisation rates and police data diverge, at least in recent decades, victimisation data should be used. A third and final lesson is that public concern about crime and punitive attitudes are not necessarily equivalent, and these measures relate to crime differently in the U.S. and Britain. While explaining the reasons for this difference is beyond the scope of this paper, it sheds some light on conflicting accounts of the crime-public opinion relationship. Those studying public concern about crime will tend to reach different conclusions than those studying public support for punitive policies when the two series diverge, as they do during the period of our analysis. In the U.S. context, punitive attitudes are strongly related to criminal justice policy and outcomes (Enns 2014; Enns 2016), so the connection between falling crime rates and declining punitiveness is particularly important.

By developing and extending measures of crime concern and punitive attitudes, we have also offered a novel perspective on the response of public opinion in America and Britain to falling crime rates since the 1990s – making the important distinction between responsiveness to recorded crime and victimisation. We believe there is potential for further application of our approach, both in terms of the method proposed for estimating over-time public opinion towards crime and in its comparison of recorded crime and victimisation data. Further there remains potential for exploring how public responsiveness differs between different subgroups (e.g. between low and high income populations, or between younger and older people). For example, does public responsiveness to crime rates reflect a general tendency or is it a function of responsiveness of groups who are more exposed to crime? Lastly, given the importance of victimization on public attitudes, what is the role of media coverage of crime in mediating public responsiveness?

This research also holds implications for reforming the criminal legal system in these countries. First, despite somewhat different trajectories, concern with crime and support for tough on crime policies have declined substantially since the crime apex in the early 1990s. Enns (2016) has shown that in the U.S., the decline in punitiveness has led to some corresponding shifts in the legal system (e.g., Baumgartner, De Boef, and Boydston 2008; Karstedt, Bergin, and Koch 2019). Similar shifts have occurred in the UK (Jennings, Farrall, Gray, and Hay 2017). Unless crime rates increase, from a strategic political perspective, it seems that now is an optimal time for continued socially-minded criminal justice reform in both the U.S. and U.K. Given our empirical findings, a further implication is that in the U.K. criminal justice reformers would be advised to focus on the historically low rate of crime concern while in the U.S. reformers should recognize that punitiveness has been declining steadily, and a focus on reforming particular policies may gain the most traction. Finally, although the strength of the relationships varied, in both contexts, the public has responded to declining crime rates. If crime were to *increase* in the future, unless media coverage unusually focused on understanding the roots of crime and on debates over holistic solutions to crime, we would expect to see a resurgence of punitive attitudes on the issue.

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**Public Responsiveness to Declining Crime Rates
in the United States and England & Wales**

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Appendix 1. CRIME REPORTING IN THE U.S. AND ENGLAND & WALES

Note on crime recording in England and Wales

The U.K. Home Office, the government department responsible for crime and policing. It began to produce a regular bulletin of national crime statistics in 1857 derived from annual returns from local police forces and courts (Maguire and McVie 2017) and these have continued to be produced ever since. For most of the twentieth century there was relative consistency in measurement practices. Recent years, however, have seen a number of significant changes in police recording practices. Specifically, in April 1998 a change in Home Office counting rules, placing a greater emphasis on recording one crime per victim, had the effect of increasing the number of crimes recorded. While it is possible to adjust the data based on the impact during the transition year itself (an increase of around 5% for violent crimes),¹³ subsequent years saw sharp increases in the number of violent crimes recorded, which as we will see are at odds with victimisation data. Soon after, in April 2002, the National Crime Recording Standard was introduced which also had the effect of increasing the number of recorded crimes (some police forces had adopted the standard before this date). While this led to a significant jump in many categories of offences, it is not possible to precisely estimate the size of effect. As a result, the official crime statistics from this period must be treated with care

For a while the crime survey was viewed as a complement to recorded crime statistics, but it has increasingly been seen as a more trusted measure of trends in victimisation, not least due to some of the changes in recording practices noted above creating discontinuities in the official statistics. As a sign of this shift, responsibility for the CSEW moved from the Home Office to the Office for National Statistics in 2012. Concerns over the quality and consistency of crime recording led police recorded crime data to be evaluated against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics in 2014 and were found to not meet the required standard to be considered as ‘National Statistics’.

Note on crime recording in the U.S.

The U.S. data come from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), which document crimes reported to the police. The UCR program was first established in 1930 and was the only authoritative source of national crime statistics in the U.S. for several decades. It was not until 1972 when the National Crime Victimization Survey, a nationally representative survey of American households (which we analyse below), provided an additional metric for analysing crime trends (Ansari and He 2015).

The NCVS collects data on a nationally representative sample of U.S. households on nonfatal victimisations against individuals 12 and older (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2021b). Households selected for the NCVS are interviewed biannually over a three-year period. Each initial interview is conducted in person with the majority of follow-up interviews conducted over the phone. Since 1993, an average of 94,000 household and 166,000 personal interviews have been conducted each year (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2021). One unfortunate complication of comparing U.S. victimisation trends over time is that the NCVS made major methodological adjustments in 1993 that make comparisons to pre-1992 rates tenuous. Some of the most significant changes include more direct questioning about sexual and violent crimes, questions specifically designed to aid victims in recalling past victimisations, additional sexual victimisation measures beyond rape and attempted rape, and a greater number of interviews conducted using computer assisted telephone

interviews (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2021). Together, these changes served to detect higher levels of victimisation and improve the validity of the NCVS moving forward.

Ansari, Sami and Ni He. 2015. "Convergence revisited: A multi-definition, multi-method analysis of the UCR and the NCVS crime series (1973-2008)." *Justice Quarterly* 32(1): 1-31.

Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2021. (Participation rates). Generated using the NCVS Victimization Analysis Tool (NVAT) at www.bjs.gov. (14th June 2021).

Maguire, Mike and Susan McVie. 2017. "Crime data and criminal statistics: a critical reflection" in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology 6th Ed.* Eds. Alison Lieblich, Shadd Maruna, and Lesley McAra. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Appendix 2. Measures of Crime Concern and Punitive Opinion

Table A1(a). Factor Loadings of Question Series and the Overall Measure of Crime Concern, U.S.

<u>Survey Question (survey organisation)</u>	Cases	Loading
There is more crime in this area than there was a year ago (Gallup)	33	0.97
There is an area near where you live where afraid to walk alone at night (Gallup)	34	0.93
Is more crime in the U.S. than there was a year ago (Gallup)	26	0.96
Feel the crime rate in your area has been increasing in the past year (Harris)	10	0.93
Don't feel safe and secure when at home at night (Gallup)	10	0.80
<u>First dimension</u>		
Proportion of variance explained		88.0
N of question series used to estimate the overall measure		5
Total N of survey items		120
Start		1965
End		2021

Table A1(b). Factor Loadings of Series and the Overall Measure of Crime Perceptions, England & Wales

<u>Survey item (source)</u>	Crime Perceptions	
	Cases	Loading
Crime rate in area going up (YouGov)	3	1.00
Crime rate nationally going up (YouGov)	3	1.00
Worried about being mugged and robbed (CSEW)	26	0.99
Worried about being attacked (CSEW)	16	0.99
Worried about having car stolen (CSEW)	26	0.99
Worried about having your home broken into and something stolen (CSEW)	26	0.98
Worried about having things stolen from car (CSEW)	26	0.98
Don't feel safe walking about in the dark (CSEW)	24	0.93
Crime situation getting worse these days (BES-CMS)	10	0.92
Worried about being raped (CSEW)	26	0.92
Crime makes feel angry (BES-CMS)	10	0.91
Crime makes feel afraid (BES-CMS)	10	0.90
Crime makes feel disgust (BES-CMS)	10	0.89
Level of crime is getting higher (BESIP)	6	0.88
Worried about being attacked because of skin colour (CSEW)	23	0.85
More crime in area since two years ago (CSEW)	24	0.83
Crime makes feel uneasy (BES-CMS)	10	0.80
Worried about being insulted or pestered by anybody (CSEW)	14	0.79
More crime nationally in last two years (CSEW)	22	-0.02
<u>First dimension</u>		
Proportion of variance explained		79.9
N of question series used to estimate the overall measure		19
Total N of survey items		2,939
Start		1981
End		2021

Table A2: The bivariate correlation between the first difference of crime rates and crime perceptions in the United States and England and Wales, 1993-2019

	Crime Perceptions	
	U.S.	England & Wales
Homicide (Police Reports)	0.22	-0.11
Violent Crime (Police Reports)	0.28	-0.19
Violent Crime (Victimisation)	0.26	0.53*
Property Crime (Police Reports)	0.23	0.07
Property Crime (Victimisation)	0.16	0.44†

†= $p < 0.1$, *= $p < 0.05$; $N=27$, except for victimisation rates in the U.S. (26) where the first observation is lost due to differencing and England and Wales ($N=18$), due to CSEW surveys every other year early in the analysis.

Table A3(a). Factor Loadings of Selected Question Series and the Overall Measure of Punitive Opinion, U.S.

<u>Survey item (source)</u>	Punitive Opinion	
	Cases	Loading
Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please indicate whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say "much more," it might require a tax increase to pay for it. The police and law enforcement (GSS)	5	0.99
In dealing with men who are in prison, do you think is more important to punish them for their crimes, or more important to get them started 'on the right road'? (Gallup)	4	0.98
In general, do you think the criminal justice system in this country is too tough, not tough enough or about right in its handling of crime? (Gallup)	4	0.97
Suppose it could be proved to your satisfaction that the death penalty was not more effective than long prison sentences in keeping other people from committing crimes such as murder, would you be in favor of the death penalty or would you be opposed to it? (Harris)	3	0.97
Are you in favor of the death penalty for a person convicted of murder? (Gallup)	42	0.97
There are different opinions about the main purpose of prisons. Which one of the statements on this card comes closest to expressing your point of view on prisons? (Roper)	3	0.96
Which punishment do you prefer for people convicted of murder: the death penalty or life in prison with no chance of parole? (ABC News)	7	0.95
Generally, do you feel the courts have been too lenient (too easy) in dealing with criminals, too severe, or do you feel they have been treated fairly? (Courts)	4	0.95
Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder? (GSS)	30	0.95
Turning to another subject, the death penalty: are you in favor of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder? (ABC News)	12	0.92
If you could choose between the following two approaches, which do you think is the better penalty for murder--the death penalty or life imprisonment, with absolutely no possibility of parole? (Gallup)	18	0.92
Do you feel that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to the commitment of murder--that it lowers the murder rate, or not? (Gallup)	6	0.90

In your opinion, is the death penalty imposed -- too often, about the right amount, or not often enough? (Gallup)	16	0.90
Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for individuals convicted of serious crimes such as murder? (Time)	6	0.90
We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. . . . are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on law enforcement? (GSS)	22	0.86
In general, do you think the courts in this area deal too harshly or not harshly enough with criminals? (Gallup)	6	0.83
In general, do you think the courts in this area deal too harshly or not harshly enough with criminals? (GSS)	32	0.82
Which of the following approaches to lowering the crime rate in the United States comes closer to your own view--do you think more money and effort should go to attacking the social and economic problems that lead to crime through better education and job training or more money and effort should go to deterring crime by improving law enforcement with more prisons, police, and judges? (Gallup)	5	0.75
Generally speaking, do you believe the death penalty is applied fairly or unfairly in this country today? (Gallup)	17	0.73
Do you believe in capital punishment (death penalty) or are you opposed to it? (Harris)	8	0.66
(Frequently on any controversial issue there is no clear cut side that people take, and also frequently solutions on controversial issues are worked out by compromise. But I'm going to name some different things, and for each one would you tell me whether on balance you would be more in favor of it, or more opposed to it?)...Harsher prison sentences for those convicted of crimes (Roper)	3	0.62
If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which (1986 AND LATER: of the following) programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased: Should federal spending on dealing with crime be increased, decreased or kept about the same? (ANES)	10	0.57
We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. . . . are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on halting the rising crime rate? (GSS)	31	0.56

(We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount on halting the rising crime rate? (Roper) 15 0.44

All systems of justice make mistakes, but which do you think is worse? To convict an innocent person or To let a guilty person go free (GSS) 5 0.40

Some people are primarily concerned with doing everything possible to protect the legal rights of those accused of committing crimes. Others feel that it is more important to stop criminal activity even at the risk of reducing the rights of the accused. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? (7-POINT SCALE SHOWN TO R) (ANES) 5 0.20

There is much discussion about the best way to deal with the problem of urban unrest and rioting. Some say it is more important to use all available force to maintain law and order -- no matter what results. Others say it is more important to correct the problems of poverty and unemployment that give rise to the disturbances. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? (7-POINT SCALE SHOWN TO R) (ANES) 6 -0.55

First dimension

Proportion of variance explained 67.4

N of question series used to estimate the overall measure 27

Total N of survey items 380

Start 1953

End 2020

Table A3(b). Factor Loadings of Selected Question Series and the Overall Measure of Punitive Opinion, Britain

<u>Survey item (source)</u>	Punitive Opinion	
	Cases	Loading
People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences (BES Internet Panel)	4	1.00
Sentences that the courts hand down to people who have been convicted of crimes are not harsh enough (YouGov)	4	1.00
Bad idea that non-violent prison sentences should be shorter (CSEW)	2	1.00
Bad idea that non-violent offenders should get community service (CSEW)	2	1.00
Bad idea that non-violent offenders should pay fines instead (CSEW)	2	1.00
The police should be armed more often (MORI)	2	1.00
Convicted criminals need to be rehabilitated rather than punished (BES)	2	1.00
Think that reducing crime is more important than protecting the rights of people accused of committing crimes (BES)	2	1.00
Violent criminals deserve to be deprived of some of their human rights (BES)	2	1.00
Sending more people to prison an effective way of helping to prevent crime in Britain (BSA)	2	1.00
Bad idea that prison rates should be reduced (CSEW)	2	-1.00
Poverty and poor housing a very important cause of crime and violence (Gallup)	4	-0.99
People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences (BSA)	29	0.94
General breakdown in respect for authority, law and order is a very important cause of crime and violence (Gallup)	4	0.94
Are young offenders dealt with too leniently? (CSEW)	19	0.94
Are sentences too tough, about right or too lenient? (CSEW)	21	0.92
People should obey the law without exception (BSA)	8	-0.88
People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences (BES Panel Study)	4	0.87
Laws too lenient and not letting the police do their job is a very important cause of crime and violence (Gallup)	4	0.83
The police should be allowed to question suspects for up to a week without letting them see a solicitor (BSA)	5	0.68
Worse to let a guilty person go free than to convict an innocent person (BSA)	6	0.66

Every adult in Britain should have to carry an identity card (BSA)	8	0.55
The police should be allowed to question suspects for up to a week without letting them see a solicitor (BSA)	5	0.68
Worse to let a guilty person go free (BSA)	6	0.66
Level of unemployment is an important cause of crime and violence (Gallup)	4	-0.29
Even wrong laws should be obeyed (BSA)	27	0.13
Disapprove of moves to go easier on people who break the law (Gallup)	3	0.12

First dimension

Proportion of variance explained	66.0
N of question series used to estimate the overall measure	25
Total N of survey items	548
Start	1981
End	2021

Table A4: The bivariate correlation between the first difference of crime rates and punitive attitudes in the United States and England and Wales, 1993-2019

	Punitive Attitudes	
	U.S.	England & Wales
Homicide (Police Reports)	0.03	-0.11
Violent Crime (Police Reports)	0.14	-0.13
Violent Crime (Victimisation)	0.21	-0.09
Property Crime (Police Reports)	0.15	-0.21
Property Crime (Victimisation)	0.06	0.24

**= $p < 0.05$; $N=27$, except for victimisation rates in England and Wales ($N=23$), due to surveys every other year early in the analysis.*