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CRIME DYNAMICS

Why Crime Rates Change Over Time

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Crime Dynamics

Why Crime Rates Change Over Time

Elements in Criminology

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Abstract: This Element reviews and augments research on changes over time in US crime rates during the past several decades. Major topics include the data sources for studying crime trends; the relationship between homicide rates and rates of property crime, imprisonment, and firearm availability; trends in crime by sex, race, and age; the relationship between crime trends and economic conditions; crime trends and social institutions; abrupt changes in crime rates and exogenous shocks; forecasting crime rates; and the future of crime trends theory and research. The study of crime trends is as intellectually rewarding and practically important as any topic in criminology. But attracting scholars to this field of study of crime trends will require significant advancements in theory, methods, and policy application.

Keywords: crime trends, homicide trends, crime and social institutions, forecasting crime rates, crime trends and exogenous shocks

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Memoriam

Richard Rosenfeld

(1948–2024)

Richard Rosenfeld was one of the most important and impactful criminologists of the last half century. He was recognized as a leading light of criminological theory and research by his receipt of the Sutherland Award in 2017, the most important honor for criminologists in the United States. But he was also elected as president of the American Society of Criminology in 2010, suggesting that he was not only one of America's leading criminologists, he was also respected for his leadership of criminology as a discipline. For me, Rick was simply one of the most thoughtful people I ever worked with. He was always on the cutting edge, and always asking questions that we hadn't answered yet, and in some cases had not even thought about. I served with Rick on the Crime Trends workshop he chaired of the National Academy of Sciences which is where I saw how far ahead he was of traditional criminologists in his thinking about predicting crime trends. His decision to include me on the workshop, was itself an innovation, since I had not really done much work in this area. But Rick saw the study of place at the micro geographic level as a new way of thinking that could add insight into how traditional crime trends researchers understood patterns over time. Again, Rick was on the cutting edge exploring the boundaries of what we knew and could know. This Element developed out of this life long interest of Rick's. I asked him if he would be willing to produce an Element that would summarize what we knew and suggest where we ought to be going in trying to understand crime trends. I was excited when he jumped on the idea, and told me that he had been thinking about this and wanted to go ahead with writing something. The result is this Element, which lays out a turning point in understanding crime trends, which only someone with Rick's long history of leadership in this area could have produced. Suggesting how important Rick saw the Element, he completed it shortly before his passing. We are enriched by his commitment to telling this story. "May his memory be a blessing."