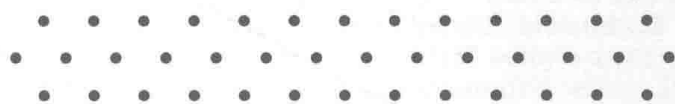


CRIME AND PUNISHMENT— CHANGING ATTITUDES IN AMERICA

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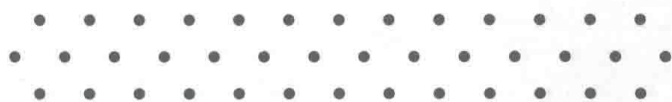
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Preface



This book is directed to those who investigate public opinion, criminology, and social change. The Social Change Project at the National Opinion Research Center, funded by the National Science Foundation, is primarily designed to report on changes in public opinion. It has produced a large archive of repeated poll questions since 1948, a series of papers on routine methods for dredging in this mass to find social changes, and a series of reports on changes in public opinion in recent times.

A large flow of new facts of this kind creates a number of puzzles, and this book is about one group of puzzles we found. It reports on changes in public opinion about crime and punishment, and to some degree it tests theories and hypotheses as would a monograph on the theory of public opinion. But most of the simple theories one might derive from the literature on public opinion turn out not to be true. The relative dominance of reporting over theory is partly a result of the failure of theory and partly reflects our belief that theory has been

considerably oversold as a method for advancing knowledge. We are not therefore dismayed that our work is of a "puzzle expanding" rather than a "theory testing" sort.

Perhaps the most fundamental puzzle that started us off is that punitive attitudes, favoring capital punishment and harsher courts, moved in the opposite direction over time from other "illiberal" attitudes. Being lenient with criminals is traditionally correlated with liberalism; less racist or more civil libertarian people, for example, are less harsh on criminals. But while public opinion has been getting more civil libertarian, more feminist, less racist, more sexually liberal, and more supportive of abortion, it has been getting more punitive toward criminals. The obvious explanation seemed to be that crime and fear of crime were increasing (Chapman, 1976; Greenwood and Wadycki, 1975). But fear of crime does not correlate strongly with punitiveness, and there are massive exceptions to that correlation. Blacks and women, who are much more afraid of crime, are less punitive than whites or men.

During the various stages of development of this book, the Social Change Project was directed by James A. Davis, Arthur L. Stinchcombe, and D. Garth Taylor. Most of the writing and analysis was done while Stinchcombe directed the project.

The chapter authors took pieces of the puzzle and tried to make sense of bits of data in first drafts. The puzzle pieces were distributed as follows: Chapter One, Arthur L. Stinchcombe; Chapter Two, Tom W. Smith and Rebecca Adams; Chapter Three, Rebecca Adams and Carol A. Heimer; Chapter Four, Arthur L. Stinchcombe; Chapter Five, Tom W. Smith and Kim Lane Scheppele; Chapter Six, D. Garth Taylor; Chapter Seven, D. Garth Taylor and Arthur L. Stinchcombe. Allan McCutcheon, A. Wade Smith, and Mark Reiser also participated in the project and in the discussions of the chapters.

Stinchcombe prepared a first draft of the book from the chapter drafts. Details often appear in places not intended by the original authors, supporting arguments written by someone else. In this process, what were originally chapter drafts were

often turned into chapter fragments distributed in several chapters—an occurrence which the original chapter authors view as economical but not at all satisfactory, as it renders their work means rather than ends.

With helpful criticism by James A. Davis, Ben Page, James Q. Wilson, Kenneth Prewitt, Frederic L. Dubow, David Seidman, Andrew Greeley, and others, three further drafts were prepared by various people. Chapter Six is based on the article "Salience of Crime and Support for Harsher Criminal Sanctions" (Taylor, Scheppele, and Stinchcombe, 1979) which grew out of this revision process; we thank the publisher of *Social Problems* for permission to use some of that material here.

A preface is supposed to express also the sentimental ties that held the enterprise together and that tied its participants to the world. We quite often hurt each other, got angry, and were ashamed when it turned out that we had been wrong. We were, in short, an ideal-typical work team. Our main difficulties were the conflict between scheduling our collective work and our individual professional lives and the lack of match between status, salary, and contribution. But, within reasonable limits, we still like and respect each other.

It seems to us that the principal purpose of institutions is to enable people in them to do what they think wise or desirable. The National Science Foundation, the National Opinion Research Center, and the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, can be counted successes on that ground. We thank them for their support.

Tucson, Arizona
August 1980

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ARTHUR L. STINCHCOMBE is professor of sociology at the University of Arizona. He received his A.B. degree in mathematics from Central Michigan College (1953) and a Ph.D. degree in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley (1960). Stinchcombe is a former professor of sociology at the University of Chicago and senior study director at the National Opinion Research Center. He is a member of the American Sociological Association.

Stinchcombe is currently working on research in historical methodology, quantitative methodology, social and cultural change, and deviant behavior. He is the author of numerous books and articles in these fields, including *Theoretical Methods in Social History* (1978), *Creating Efficient Industrial Administrations* (with R. Marder and Z. Blum, 1974), and *Constructing Social Theories* (1968).

REBECCA G. ADAMS is research associate at the Education Resource Center and research projects specialist at the Social

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At the Education Resource Center, a community-based teacher's center in Chicago, Adams and her colleagues are conducting an organizational case study of the Center. She is also researching relationships between concurrent and developmental family characteristics and social and psychological outcomes; recently she has focused on the consequences of teenage motherhood.

CAROL A. HEIMER is an instructor in sociology at the University of Arizona. She received her B.A. degree in sociology from Reed College (1973), a M.A. degree in sociology from the University of Chicago (1976), and is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Chicago. She is a member of the American Sociological Association and Sociologists for Women in Society, and has worked as a research assistant at the National Opinion Research Center.

Heimer is currently interested in the fields of social stratification, formal organizations, deviance and social control, and the sociology of risk or uncertainty. She has published articles and presented papers on various aspects of crime and on racial and sexual attitudes in America; her book reviews have appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology* and the *Newsletter* of the Midwest Sociologists for Women Society.

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Her research in public opinion includes work on feminist attitudes of men and women. In keeping with her interests in

crime and in the sociology of women, she has worked with Pauline Bart of the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle on a study of Chicago rape victims and rape avoiders. Scheppele's book reviews and articles have appeared in such journals as the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Problems*, and *Contemporary Sociology*.

TOM W. SMITH is associate study director of the General Social Survey at the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago. He received B.A. degrees in history and political science (1971) and the M.A. degree in history (1972) from Pennsylvania State University, and he received his Ph.D. degree in American history from the University of Chicago (1979). He is a member of the Organization of American Historians and the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research.

Smith has written extensively in the field of social change and social indicators, including works on capital punishment in *Studies of Social Change Since 1948* (1976) and on gun control in the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* (forthcoming). Smith is currently studying trends in the most important problem over the last thirty years and serving on a National Academy of Sciences panel on Survey-Based Measures of Subjective Phenomena.

D. GARTH TAYLOR is assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago and senior study director at the National Opinion Research Center. He earned a B.A. degree in psychology from the University of California at Berkeley (1971) and a M.A. degree in social sciences (1973), and a Ph.D. degree in sociology, both from the University of Chicago (1978). He is a member of the Section on Survey Research Methods of the American Statistical Association and of the American Association for Public Opinion Research.

Taylor is currently working on studies of urban politics, crime, busing, and neighborhood change. He is also a principal investigator in the national consortium that is evaluating and

redesigning the National Crime Survey, sponsored by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. He has written about American racial attitudes for *Scientific American*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, and *School Desegregation: Past, Present, and Future* (forthcoming).

1

The Public as Victim of Crime



Americans generally do not walk on dangerous streets at night, and this decreases their probability of being robbed. But they would rather live in a society in which one could stroll at night. They may concede that street lights are necessary for crime control, but they sometimes wish they could see the stars. Changing the lock whenever one misplaces a key is a realistic adaptation to the probabilities of burglary, but is one of many minor irritations resulting from crime.

Social science research has emphasized that victims often participate in the interaction that leads to crimes like assault, murder, and rape (Amir, 1971; Curtis, 1974; Hindelang, 1976; von Hentig, 1948; Wolfgang, 1958), but a battered face or death is a disproportionate punishment for the crime of insulting one's husband, and a society in which flirtation commits a woman to sexual intercourse is an unfair society. Victims often do contribute to the crimes in which they are victimized, but in a less violent society one does not risk one's life in every dispute or assault in every flirtation.

It is traditional in every major civilization that crime is treated as a problem that damages the well-being of the entire public. The public interest in crime reflects the common sense observations made above: the public is damaged if it cannot see the stars because of crime-preventing streetlights, if it cannot get angry without risking death, if it cannot flirt without making love.

The high violent crime rate in the United States affects the quality of life of people who are not directly victimized. We will present evidence that the public knows this and knows that crime creates public policy problems, as well as private problems of locks and staying in at night. The basic subject of this book is how the public reacts to high crime rates and what they think should be done to protect the public's interest in domestic tranquility.

Data on Crime and Punishment

Polls and surveys, for all their difficulties, provide the most useful data on public opinion. We have regular poll measures on how important the crime problem is since 1946, on fear of walking at night since 1965, on capital punishment attitudes since 1936, on whether courts are harsh enough since 1965, and on gun registration since 1959. Therefore, poll data on some elements of public reaction to crime are available before, during, and after the recent large increase in the rate of violent crime. This enables us to observe the effect of a change in the crime level on public opinion on crime and punishment.

However, when using time-series data, it is usually the case that too many things change at once for causal inferences to be solid. Although it is true that we have data from low-crime years and high-crime years on attitudes toward capital punishment, there were many other things that distinguished the late 1960s and early 1970s from earlier, low-crime years than simply increases in violent crime. For example, the later years were after the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war and their related protests; were generally characterized by higher per-capita income; had higher educational qualifi-

cations for many jobs and a higher youth unemployment rate, especially among poorly educated youth; and was a time of much greater public support for liberal positions on race relations, civil liberties, feminism, and abortion.

One advantage of well-designed surveys on crime is that they measure many features of the lives and attitudes of people along with their attitudes on crime. We can find out, for example, whether people who live nearer ghettos are more punitive. (They are not.) We can also find out whether people who are more prejudiced against blacks are more punitive. (They are.) Then we can supplement differences between years with differences between people in various situations (for example, near or far from the ghetto) to determine whether people who are more afraid of crime *both* in recent years *and* near ghettos are more punitive. When we find that people are more punitive in recent years but not in more dangerous neighborhoods, we are confronted with a new problem; but we would not know we had this problem without several ways of measuring the effect of exposure to high crime rates—some over time and some between individuals at one point in time.

The advantage of supplementing time-series data with surveys measuring many variables is perhaps even clearer in the relation of prejudice to punitiveness. During recent years, the level of prejudice of the American white public has been declining while the level of punitiveness has been increasing, possibly leading to the inference that liberals on racial questions are becoming more punitive. However, in the cross-sectional survey, when we study differences between people, we find that liberalism leads to lower punitiveness. To avoid false inferences from the time series, then, we need a survey with measures of both prejudice and punitiveness.

The General Social Surveys (GSS), conducted by the National Opinion Research Center under the direction of James A. Davis and supported by the National Science Foundation, are ideally designed for establishing connections between time-series and cross-sectional analysis. Most of the questions are adopted word for word from previous polls, with the time series for many questions extending up to the present. These