Crime economics

with Professor Tom Kirchmaier and Dr Magdalena Domínguez

Talking *points*

Comprehension

1. Why might an economic recession lead to higher crime rates?
2. How do police departments benefit from econometric models of crime occurrences?
3. What are the pros and cons of studying crime from a purely sociological or economic perspective? What benefits does a combined approach bring?

Synthesis

4. "In comparison to the US, street gangs in Europe tend to be smaller, newer, less hierarchical, less violent and more specialised," says Magdalena. What social, economic, cultural and historic factors do you think have led to these differences in organised crime groups?
5. How would you design a study to understand the economic factors driving the current global increase in cybercrime?
6. Punishment methods, such as imprisonment followed by a life-long criminal record, may cause criminals to return to crime. What alternative methods, or adjustments to current methods, could prevent this while still discouraging first-time criminals? How could you test the effectiveness of these methods?

Evaluation

7. Do you think a crime-free society is possible? If so, what conditions would need to be met to make it a reality? If not, what insurmountable obstacles do you think stand in the way?

Activity

Imagine a fictional individual who is considering committing a crime. What crime are they tempted to commit, and why?

Throughout this exercise, remember the importance of robust and unbiased evidence in the field of crime economics and, indeed, throughout science and society. You should never allow prejudices, stereotypes or other unfair or offensive perceptions to influence your work.

Write a list of the broad range of factors that are influencing this person's decision, from employment opportunities to peer influence. For each point on your list, write short informative statements about that factor, followed by 'inner thoughts' of how this factor is persuading or discouraging your person from committing the crime. Then, list the data sources that crime economists could use to include this factor in their analysis. For example:

Job opportunities
- [Person]'s community has few job openings for people without good educational qualifications.
- "I struggled at school. Now, if I can't find a job, how will I pay my rent?"
- Data: Employment statistics, unemployment trends, community educational levels

Once finished, think about what policy measures could be taken to influence this person to decide not to engage in criminal activities. Examples might include the creation of community spaces and changes to policing in the community. In your opinion, which of these measures do you think would be most effective, and why?

More *resources*

- Find out more about the Policing and Crime Research Group: **cep.lse.ac.uk/_new/OUR-WORK/Community/Crime**

- The National Crime Prevention Council has a wealth of resources for teenagers: **www.archive.ncpc.org/topics/by-audience/teens.html**