

***Understanding the international falls in crime;  
or why burglary rates dropped less steeply  
in Germany than in The Netherlands***

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## **Understanding the international falls in crime; or why burglary rates dropped less steeply in Germany than in The Netherlands<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

In 1905 a young Dutch sociologist, Willem Bongers, defended his PhD thesis on the economic conditions of crime at the University of Amsterdam. He was shortly thereafter appointed as the first professor of criminology in The Netherlands. His thesis was translated into English and other languages and has become a classic in sociological criminology. In Bongers' view criminologists should study not the personal pathologies of offenders but the societal causes of crime. He studied the macro determinants of crime by analyzing inter-country differences and trends in official criminal statistics. His work stands in the 19th century epidemiological tradition of Quetelet, Guerry, Von Mayr and Lacassagne. Bongers' criminology was strongly policy-oriented. Criminology should, in his words "before anything else show mankind the way how crime can be effectively combated and, most of all, prevented" (Bongers, 1932). He used to underline his preference for policy-oriented criminology with a quote from the French, positivist philosopher Auguste Comte: "*Savoir pour prévoir et prévoir pour prévenir*". Loosely translated as "Knowledge with the aim of prediction and prediction with the aim of preventing". In other words, Bongers preached and practiced evidence-based crime prevention *avant la lettre*.

In his PhD thesis Bongers asserts that "the economic conditions of the common people exert a preponderant, even decisive impact on levels of crime" (Bongers, 1905). He would stay faithful to this Marxist view of the root causes of crime throughout his professional life. Since he liked to express his convictions in strong, sometimes polemical statements, he might, had he lived in our days, have paraphrased the famous dictum of Bill Clinton in his electoral debate with Bush sr.: *It's the economy, stupid!*

As key evidence for the predominant links between economic conditions and levels of crime Bongers submitted the correlation between changes in the price of a loaf of bread and in the numbers of people arrested for theft in the German state of Bavaria during the 19th century. When the bread prices went up, so did the numbers of people arrested. People were in Bongers' view driven to crime by extreme poverty. Figure 1 shows these statistics, collected and analyzed by the German criminologist Von Mayr.

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<sup>1</sup> This lecture presented at the Deutscher Preventionstag 2013 is largely based on my unpublished acceptance speech of the Stockholm Award 2012.

### Figure 1 Parallelism between bread prices and arrested offenders in Bavaria (1835-1861)

source: W. Bonger (1905), *Criminalité et conditions économiques*, diss. University of Amsterdam



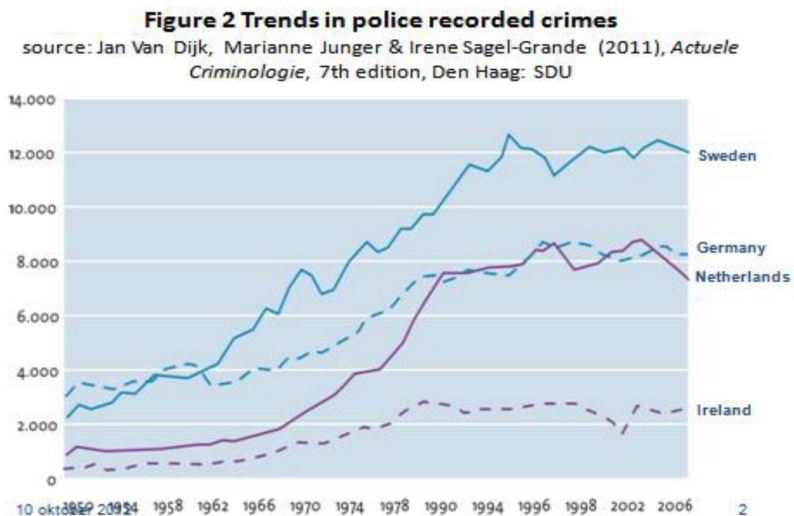
The remarkably strong correlations between the price of bread and the numbers of persons arrested for theft, begging and vagrancy suggest indeed a causal link between economic conditions and levels of crime. Bonger has referred to this analysis in many subsequent publications. It also received, together with the notorious cranial measurements of Cesare Lombroso, a prominent place in the opening chapter of a Dutch textbook on criminology (Van Dijk, Junger & Sagel-Grande, 2011/7<sup>th</sup> edition). During classes, students sometimes raise their hands and say: the parallelism is very impressive indeed but what happened after 1860? Does Von Mayr's law still hold? Did crime continue to track bread prices ever since? A pertinent question, indeed.

As convinced Marxist and social democrat, Willem Bonger held the firm belief that most forms of crime would automatically disappear as soon as a more just and egalitarian society was established. In one of his latest publications, just before the outbreak of World War II, he compared the numbers of persons convicted for various types of crime per 100.000 inhabitants of twenty European nations (Bonger, 1937). He proudly noted that the Netherlands showed a relatively low rate. Even lower rates were shown by Sweden, Denmark and England/Wales. For Bonger the favorable ranking of these nations confirmed once more the link between economic conditions and crime. Relatively affluent and egalitarian societies such as The Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries and England/Wales would in Bonger's view of necessity enjoy relatively low levels of crime as a kind of bonus for their welfare policies.

The question that comes up is whether developments after World War II have born out Bonger's criminological optimism. Are economic conditions and levels of crime still as closely linked as they apparently were in 19th century Bavaria? In other words, does the criminology of Bonger still provide a useful theoretical frame to understand, predict and prevent the crime problems of today? Or, to be more to the point: are trends in the level of crime of countries still tracking variations in "bread prices"? And specifically are the affluent, egalitarian Dutch still enjoying a relatively low level of crime?

When reflecting on these pertinent issues, the first consideration that comes to mind is that today's criminologists no longer, as in Bonger's time, use numbers of arrested or convicted persons as a measure of the extent of crime. Criminology has lost its methodological naivety. No serious criminologist believes in administrative statistics as reliable indicators of the levels of crime. Crime is nowadays preferably measured with sample surveys among the population with questions about victimization experiences or about self-reported offending. Unfortunately, these new, survey-based measures have only become widely available over the past two, or at most three, decades. To determine trends in crime since the end of WWII, there is no other option than to use the numbers of crimes recorded by the police as our default measure of crime.

Figure 2 shows the numbers of crimes recorded by the police per 100.000 inhabitants since 1950 in Sweden, Germany, The Netherland and Ireland.



The first feature that catches the eye is that recorded crime has boomed in all four countries, most notably in Sweden. Between 1960 and 1990 levels of crime tripled or quadrupled. Analyses of police figures of recorded crime of the USA, France and most other Western nations show similarly steep upward trends over the same period (Gurr, 1977; Van Dijk, 1992).

Between 1960 and 1990 all Western countries experienced unprecedented booms in crime. During these three decades, known in France as the *Trente Glorieuses* (the Glorious Thirty), GDP per capita boomed. In addition, in most Western nations, and most notably so in Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom and The Netherlands, welfare states, as imagined by social democrats like Bongor, were actually put in place. During these years most Western nations not only became more affluent, but wealth was also distributed more equally across the population. During the Glorious Decades the Gini coefficients- the most commonly used measure of economic equality- dropped considerably across the Western world (Wilterdink, 1995)<sup>2</sup>.

The upward trends in volume crime between 1960 and 1990 in most Western nations cannot be easily reconciled with conventional criminological thinking about the root causes of crime in the tradition of Bongor. Post war trend data on crime fly squarely in the face of the Bongorian notion that crime is driven by poverty and economic inequality. Lagrange (2003) demonstrated for France, that wealth and levels of crime were not inversely related during this period in his country. Norstroem (1988) described Scandinavian crime booms as a side effect of economic prosperity. Using British indicators, criminologist Gloria Laycock made the same point in her inaugural lecture as director of the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science in London (Laycock, 2001). The bulk of the British population was in many respects much better off in 1990 than probably ever before<sup>3</sup>.

To make sense of the prolonged post war crime booms some criminologists started to take a fresh look at the determinants of crime, thinking out of the (Marxist) box. In 1975 British criminologists Ron Clarke, Pat Mayhew and Mike Hough, at the time in-house researchers of the Home Office, published a report called *Crime as Opportunity* (Mayhew, Clarke, Sturman, & Hough, 1975). Crime, they argued, is driven by the extent of viable opportunities of crime in the here and now. Some years later, in 1979, American criminologist Marcus Felson ascribed the boom in volume crime in the USA to the increased availability of suitable targets for theft (such as cars and

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<sup>2</sup> According to the literature, income inequalities in Europe have always been significantly lower than in the USA and have declined significantly between 1955 and 1980 in tandem with economic growth (Wilterdink, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> "Recorded crime in this country has reached epidemic proportions. (...) The rise was not caused by an increase in poverty – we are, by any measure, better off now than we have ever been. Nor was it caused by a lack of education; even the worst educated members of our population spend more time in formal education than did the average child of the early 20th century. Nor is there any evidence that 'parenting' has been in catastrophic decline throughout the period, or that the population has grown proportionately".

durable consumer goods) and a dispersal of activities away from family and home, eroding natural guardianship. In this equally seminal publication the term *routine activity theory* was first coined.

In a similar vein I myself surprised the audience of my inaugural lecture at Leiden University with the assertion that high levels of volume crime were the price to be paid for living in an affluent and modern society. A high level of crime such as that of The Netherlands, I commented tongue in cheek, should not necessarily be seen as a bad sign (Van Dijk, 1990). Some years later British economist Simon Field explained at a conference of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg that in the long run thefts and burglaries are linked to the stock of criminal opportunities, represented in his model by the sum of real consumers expenditures in the recent four years (Field, 1994). In other words, also economists now agreed: the more consumer goods- the more cheap bread around- the more crime. Criminal opportunity theory had arrived as an alternative theoretical frame.

The empirical evidence presented by Felson for the causal relationships between routine activities and crime was largely based on an analysis of data from the National Crime Victimization Surveys of the USA. This analysis confirmed the weakening of informal social control exercised by American families. My own ideas about how criminal opportunities shape the nature of crime were likewise grounded in analyses of results of victimization surveys, in this case the first rounds of the Dutch victimization surveys (Van Dijk & Steinmetz, 1980). Our analyses showed that numbers of vehicle theft were related to ownership and that criminal victimization at individual and macro level was related to the amount of time spent by citizens outside their homes. In the UK, the authors of *Opportunity of Crime*, just mentioned, would later become the main protagonists of the British Crime Survey. Results from the BCS would be used in numerous articles testing hypotheses derived from what had by then become known as situational crime prevention theory. The links between the launch of victimization surveys in the 1970s and 80s and the elaboration of various versions of criminal opportunity theory around that time are not coincidental. The same circle of criminologists was involved. And from a theoretical perspective these links seem almost self evident. The data on arrested and convicted persons used by criminologists of the generation of Bonger were by definition offender-oriented. In most European countries criminal statistics could be disaggregated according to offender characteristics such as age, gender, religion, profession or alcoholism (Bonger, 1937). Results of victimization surveys are by definition victim-centered. They give no information on the motivation of the offenders but a wealth of information on vulnerabilities of victims. Analyses of the new crime data show which groups of the population are most at risk to be criminally victimized, for example yuppies leaving their houses replete of consumer goods unattended most of the time. Victimization surveys have taught criminologists to look at the other side of crime. That's how the empirical reality of criminal opportunity theory came into their sight.

In order to analyze empirically possible relationships between characteristics of national populations and levels of victimization by crime, comparable, cross-country data on victimization are needed. The international criminal statistics examined by Bonger must be superseded by results of victimization surveys. In 1987 Pat Mayhew, Martin Killias and myself launched the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS), a standardized victimization survey modeled after the Dutch, British and Swiss national surveys (Van Dijk, Mayhew & Killias, 1990). The survey went into the field for the first time in 1989 in thirteen nations<sup>4</sup>. The surveys have since, with some adjustments, been carried out in 80 or more countries in five subsequent sweeps, with intervals of four or five years.

The ICVS provides comparable data not just on victimization rates but also on reporting of crime to the police by victims, satisfaction of victims with their treatment by the police, the reception of specialized victim support, fear of crime and opinions on police performance and on sentencing. In this paper, however, I will focus on the primary aim of the ICVS, the collection of comparable data on victimization by crime across countries. Initially, the survey results were mainly used to simply compare levels of victimization. Figure 3 gives an overview of the ranking of nations in terms of overall levels of criminal victimization around 2002.

### Figure 3 World ranking on ICVS victimization rates

source: Jan Van Dijk (2008), *The World of Crime*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE

Fifteen Countries With the Highest Rates								
1	Colombia	48.7	6	Peru	41.0	11	Tunisia*	35.9
2	Zimbabwe	46.8	7	Mongolia	40.6	12	Namibia	35.1
3	Costa Rica	43.5	8	Bolivia	38.9	13	Paraguay	34.5
4	Swaziland	43.4	9	Mozambique	37.7	14	Zambia	34.4
5	Cambodia	41.3	10	Tanzania*	37.6	15	Slovak Republic	32.4
Fifteen Countries With Medium-High Rates								
16	United Kingdom	32.0	30	Ireland	25.7	39	Norway	21.5
19	Argentina	31.2	31	New Zealand	25.9	46	China*	21.6
21	India	29.7	34	South Africa	25.7	51	Switzerland	20.1
26	Lesotho	27.3	37	United States	23.3	53	Canada	19.1
28	Netherlands	27.0	38	Russian Federation	23.1	56	Brazil	18.4
Fifteen Countries With the Lowest Rates								
58	Turkey	17.9	63	Italy	16.6	68	Japan	10.8
59	France	17.8	64	Spain	13.7	69	Portugal	9.7
60	Austria	17.2	65	Greece	13.5	70	Philippines	9.1
61	Australia	16.9	66	Croatia	12.9	71	Hong Kong, China	7.8
62	Korea, Rep.	16.7	67	Hungary	12.6	72	Azerbaijan	7.7

Source: ICVS, 1992, 1996–2005, latest survey available.

\*Countries with data from ICVS, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> To reduce costs, sample sizes were kept at a modest 2,000 per country, just enough to allow a comparison of the level of the main types of volume crime. Data were collected with the efficient means of computer-assisted telephone interviewing.

As can be seen in figure 3, the United Kingdom stands at the 16<sup>th</sup> place and The Netherlands at the 28<sup>th</sup> place in this league table of conventional crime. Sweden, not included here, stands at 26<sup>th</sup> with a victimization rate of 22,6% in 2005. These three countries are clearly no longer at the bottom of the rank, as they were in Bonger's table of arrested offenders per 100.000 inhabitants dating from the 1930s. The medium high levels of crime of the United Kingdom, Sweden and The Netherlands seem more in line with criminal opportunity theory than with Marxist determinism. In comparatively affluent countries with their abundance of durable consumer goods, levels of crime tend to be comparatively high, regardless of whether they are egalitarian or not.

The conduct of the ICVS in 80 nations including all main Western countries allows for cross sectional analyses of relationships between characteristics of nations and national levels of various types of crime. Analyses of the ICVS datasets have consistently refuted the notion that levels of crime are systematically lower in more affluent nations<sup>5</sup>.

The ICVS has, as said, been repeated five times, namely in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2005 and, in a more limited number of countries, in 2010. The availability of these trend data allows analyses of relationships between changes in characteristics of countries over time and changes in the levels of victimization. In the next section I will present the trends in crime between 1987 and 2005/2010 according to the ICVS and some results of time series analyses.

### **Crime trends and some time series analyses**

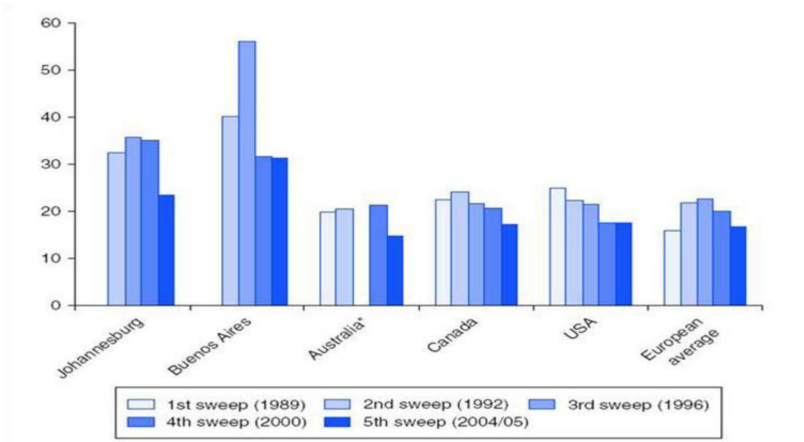
As said, the ICVS was carried out in 1989 for the first time and repeated four times till 2005 in a large group of countries. For Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Australia, Canada and eleven European countries data are available from four or five sweeps of the survey. See figure 4 for results.

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<sup>5</sup> results have been presented in a series of research reports with extensive documentation on the survey's methodology (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren & Smit, 2008; Van Dijk, 2012). A summing up of key findings and analytical results is provided in Van Dijk (2008).



**Figure 4 Trends in total crime experienced by national or city populations per year during 1988-2004 (ICVS 1989-2005); source Van Dijk, 2008**



The results depicted in figure 4 show that levels of conventional crime have in Europe and most other parts of the world continued to rise between the first and the third sweep of, that is up to the mid 1990s. Thereafter crime has fallen significantly everywhere. The results in figure 8 also show that in 1988 levels of crime in the USA were still somewhat above the mean of other Western nations. The level of crime in the USA subsequently started to fall between 1988 and 1992. During these years crime was, as said, still increasing in the other Western countries. From 1992 onward the level of crime in the USA has therefore no longer been above the level in Europe or Australia. Since the third sweep in the mid 1990s crime has dropped significantly nearly everywhere in the participating nations. The steep falls in crime appear not to be a unique American phenomenon as suggested by Blumstein and Wallman (2006). Far from it. The falls are near universal in the industrialized world, including some middle income nations.

The full multi- year ICVS datasets were reanalysed by a team of British criminologists. Graham Farrell, Andromachi Tseloni and associates conducted a multilevel analysis of the trends in incidence victimization rates of 26 nations which participated in the ICVS three times or more (Tseloni et al, 2010). Their results confirm the international nature of the crime falls. Of special interest is their analysis of the *timing* of the falls of rates of victimization by various types of crime. Their results on the sequencing of the falls of various types of crime is depicted in figure 5.

**Figure 5 Victimization incidence trends of five types of crime (ICVS 1989-2005); source: Tseloni et al, 2010**

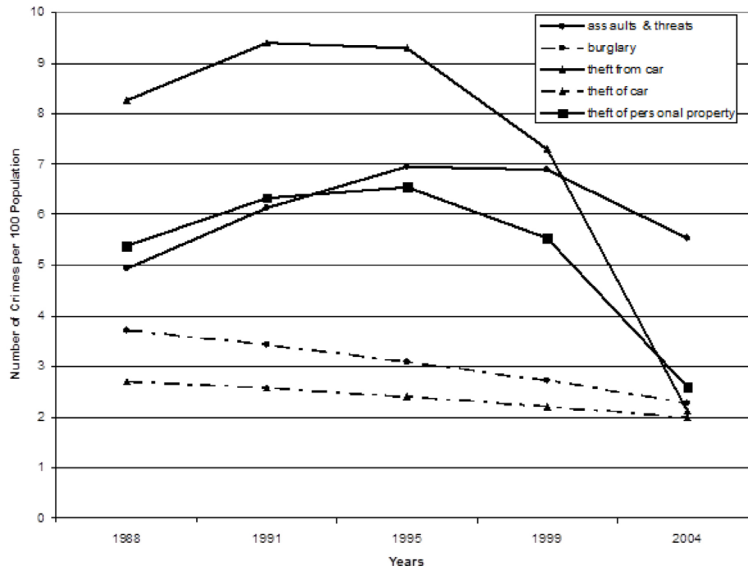


Figure 5 shows that burglary and car theft, represented by the dotted lines at the lower end, fell steadily from the late 1980s onwards. Next it were thefts from cars and other thefts from people which began to fall in the mid-1990s. And, finally, assaults started declining around the turn of the century. This sequencing was, once again, fairly universal across individual nations. We will revert to the uniform sequencing of the falls of different types of crime in the concluding section.

Now that the international nature of the falls in crime has been established, the key question to be answered, is how these fortunate changes in the seemingly entrenched problems of crime can be explained. Which macro factors may have caused the universal falls in crime during the final years of the 20th century? Let's first examine whether the recent falls could perhaps be seen as a vindication of Bonger's economic determinism. Has post war prosperity and reduced inequality finally, with a delay of four decades, delivered the expected bonus of lower crime rates? This interpretation seems farfetched. Especially so, since economic growth over the past twenty years has been much more modest than between 1960 and 1990 and economic inequalities have in fact deepened. This has especially been the case in the USA and the UK, where Gini coefficients have gone up. Levels of crime dropped precisely at the time when the good economic times were over. Between 2008 and 2013 the Western world even experienced an economic recession. The falls of crime, however, seem to have conti-

nued unabatedly (FBI, 2012)<sup>6</sup>. There has up to 2013 not been any sign of a recession-induced surge in total crime. The crime cycle and the business cycle are totally out of sync. Whatever factors may have caused the international falls in crime, it cannot have been “just the economy”.

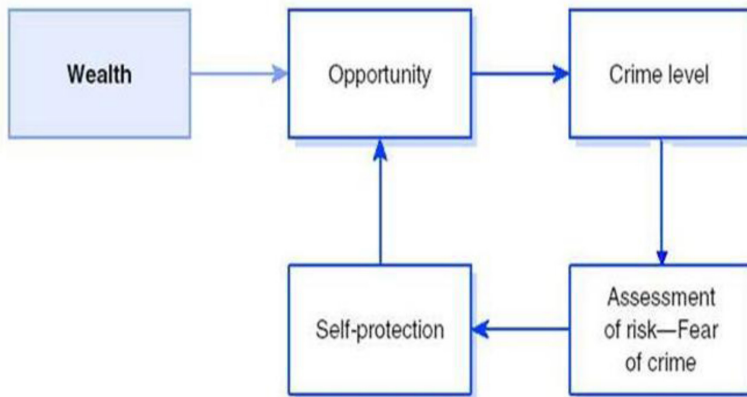
Many other explanations for the crime decline have been advanced by American scholars (Blumstein and Wallman, 2001; 2006). The USA falls have been explained as resulting from respectively massive incarceration, the ending of the crack cocaine epidemic, the use of computerized crime data (Compstat) and zero tolerance policing. Economist Levitt added an imaginative hypothesis to the list of post hoc explanations: violent crime was reduced by the legalisation of abortion in 1976, reducing the cohort of unwanted young males (Levitt, 2006). As demonstrated above, the falls in volume crime are a global phenomenon for which a global explanation must be sought (Van Dijk, 2006; 2010). The American factors simply do not fit the bill. In most European nations, Canada and Australia prisoners rates have remained modest compared to those in the USA, there never was a crack cocaine epidemic, Compstat was never practiced and zero tolerance policing remained a slogan of some politicians at best. And yet in all these countries with their highly varying criminal policies, crime started to fall around the same time and with the same magnitude as in the USA. All explanations mentioned in the American literature on the crime drop may have some validity for the USA but can be duly eliminated from the list of possible explanations of the international drops. This argument was earlier convincingly made by Zimring (2006) regarding Canada. The question to be answered is not why crime has fallen in the context of the criminal policies of a particular country at a given time but why different types of crime have fallen, regardless of national contexts, at around roughly the same time and with the same sequencing nearly everywhere in the developed world.

Let's now turn to criminal opportunity theory for a possible explanation of the falls in crime and examine whether ICVS data can be used to test relevant hypotheses. As I have suggested elsewhere, rates of victimization are determined by interactions between the rational choices of offenders and victims on a market of crime (Van Dijk, 1994). As long as the benefits of crime outweigh the costs of offending, the pool of offenders keeps expanding and crime rates will continue to go up. Resulting rises in the losses of crime incurred by victims, will trigger more investments in self-protection by potential victims. When the proportion of well-protected potential victims expand, criminal opportunities will be reduced. When the scale of such *responsive securitisation* reaches a critical level, potential new offenders will be discouraged from entering the criminal market. The pools of offenders will shrink and crime rates will start to fall. The key dynamics of the post war crime waves are represented in figure 6.

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<sup>6</sup> There was no change in the level of crime according to the BCS in 2011 compared to 2010 (Home Office, 2012). Results of the annual Dutch national surveys show a continued downward trend in both property and violent crime in recent years up and including 2011 (Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie, 2012).

**Figure 6 Understanding the crime epidemics in the west: criminal opportunity and responsive securitization; source: Van Dijk, 2008**



The theoretical perspective of *responsive securitization* is obviously informed by criminal opportunity theory (Felson & Clarke, 1998). It is also informed by the economical notion of markets of crime whereon offenders and victims interact (Becker, 1986; Cook, 1986). Especially in Europe, the new theoretical perspective was geared towards practical applications to reduce criminal opportunities through situational crime prevention. In the Netherlands criminal opportunity theory was adopted by the government as the policy theory underpinning its national crime prevention policies launched in 1985 (Ministry of Justice, 1985).

If levels of crime have, as supposed by Felson, been driven up by expanding pools of suitable targets of crime, improved security reducing these pools will eventually drive crime rates down. From this perspective criminal opportunity theory is intrinsically optimistic about long term trends in crime. It has always held the promise of drops in crime when criminal opportunities are contracted by forms of responsive securitization.

But if this is the case, have any protagonists of criminal opportunity theory then predicted this reversal of fortunes before it had actually started to take place? The answer to this sceptical question can be positive. Following the logic of situational prevention theory I myself predicted in 1994 in the *Festschrift* for Wouter Buikhuisen, my predecessor at Leiden University, that opportunistic criminality in the 21st century would, and I quote “no longer be a mass phenomenon due to more and better situational prevention” (Van Dijk, 1994). On similar grounds British criminologist Ken Pease predicted in 1997 falls in amateur thefts. He predicted a bifurcation of future offending into either clever e-fraud or predatory violent street crime (Pease, 1997). Responsive securitization, then, is not a post hoc explanation of observed falls in

crime. That potential victims would take action to reduce their risks, follows logically from criminal opportunity theory and the international falls in crime have on this theoretical basis been duly predicted years before their onset.

In a keynote at the European Society of Criminology conference in Bologna in 2007, Ron Clarke addressed the key issue whether situational crime prevention can reduce the overall crime rate, considering that at the micro level displacement is always possible (Clarke, 2007). His first argument is that investments in self protection have since the 1970s grown phenomenally, impacting on almost every aspect of society. A prime example are the huge increases in private security guards and alarm centers. In 'Western' countries private security guards now outnumber police officers (Van Steden and Sarre, 2007)<sup>7</sup>. If public policing is widely supposed to impact on levels of crime to at least some extent, it would, according to Clarke, be strange if private security with its exclusive focus on crime prevention, would not. But responsive securitization is not limited to human surveillance by the private security industry. A wide range of different measures to prevent crime have become mainstreamed into modern society. Harnessing new technology, security provisions have been built into homes, cars, stores and parking lots, public transport and public/ social housing, schools and hospitals, offices and other work places, entertainment venues and sports stadiums, airports and seaports, and to warehouses and transportation terminals (Clarke and Newman, 2008).

The universality and pervasiveness across 'Western' countries of the security response, and thereby its potential impact on trends in crime, seem difficult to dispute. The ICVS database shows upward trends in home security across the world with very few exceptions (Van Dijk et al, 2008). Trends in home security show much greater communality than the criminal policies pursued by governments. The security response also fully meets the requirement of synchronized timing across countries. The lasting rise in private security started in the seventies in the USA and somewhat later everywhere in Europe (Cullingham et al, 1991). It is likely to have reached critical mass around 1985 in the USA and around 1990 in Europe, just in time to have had an impact of the subsequent falls in crime. The pervasiveness and timing of the boom in private security make it a promising contender as explanatory factor of the international falls in crime at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will now examine whether empirical data including from the ICVS can be used to put the security hypothesis to the test. We will first look at the type of crime which, as we have seen, started to fall first, namely car theft. What has been the role of improved security in the falls in car thefts?

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<sup>7</sup> Worldwide more people are employed as security guards (348 per 100.000) than as police officers (310 per 100.000) (Van Dijk, 2008). According to the latest figures collated by Jaap de Waard, the number of private security employees in Western Europe has over the past ten years increased further by 90% (De Waard, Berghuis, 2010).

### **Security and the falls in car thefts**

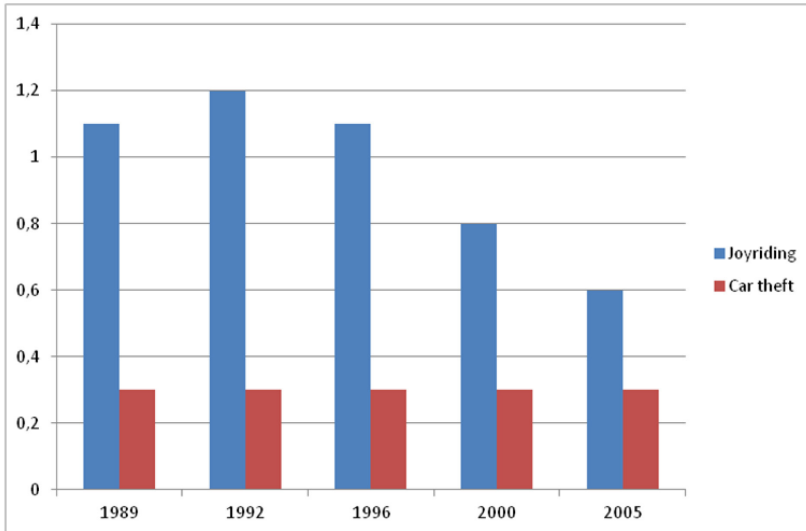
Vehicle crimes provide an important testing ground for the hypothesis of responsive securitization. Car thefts used to make up ten percent or more of the total costs of volume crime in Western nations (Mayhew, 2003). Levels of car theft have gone up universally in Western nations from 1960 onwards in tandem with rates of car ownership. Considering the costs of car thefts, responsive securitization among owners stands to reason. Although car ownership levels are stable or still rising, thefts of cars have gone down considerably since the 1990s in all Western nations, sometimes by more than 50% (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren & Smit, 2008).

In Germany rates of car theft had already fallen by almost 50% in 1961. The story about the German falls in car theft has been documented by Pat Mayhew and Mike Hough in the Home Office publication *Crime as Opportunity*, just mentioned (Mayhew et al, 1975). In 1960 the federal government passed legislation which made high quality steering column locks mandatory in all cars. Car thefts dropped already the same year. In this case responsive securitization was promoted by legislative measures. In the USA and Britain similar legislation was passed ten years later but limited to the fitting of steering column locks in newly sold cars. As was to be expected, the impact of these regulations was less immediate than in Germany (Webb, 1994). In Britain it took almost ten years before over 80% of cars were fitted with steering column locks. It was indeed around that time that rates of car theft per 100 owners started to stabilize. In the USA the impact of the new regulation manifested itself sooner, probably because of a faster renewal of the vehicle population. The critical penetration rate of 80% was reached earlier than in the UK and car thefts rates started to fall accordingly. Studies into the impact of state-of-the-art security measures against car theft have since been conducted in many countries, often using data from victimization surveys. Electronic immobilizers became the new preferred security measure to prevent theft of cars. In Australia, the USA, Europe and Canada the falls in car theft have tracked increases in the penetration rate of new anti-car theft security (Mayhew, 1992; Farrell, Tseloni & Tilley, 2011; Fujita & Maxfield, 2012). Electronic immobilizers were made mandatory in 1998 for all newly sold cars within the European Union. Within ten years after the regulation took effect, it had reduced car thefts by 70% in The Netherlands and by 80% in Britain (Van Ours & Vollaard, 2012).

Traditionally a large part of car thefts are committed by juveniles for temporary transportation, known in Britain as joyriding. A smaller part is committed by professional thieves for resale or sale of car parts. If the recent falls have indeed been caused by improved security, this effect is likely to have been stronger on theft for temporary transportation by opportunistic juveniles than on theft by experienced professionals. In the ICVS victims of car theft are asked whether the stolen car was ever recovered. To test the hypothesis that drops in thefts in car theft have been most pronounced among the category of theft for temporary transportation, we have looked at trends

over time in recovered and non recovered car thefts in thirteen Western nations. Figure 7 shows results.

**Figure 7 Trends in one-year victimization by joyriding and car theft (ICVS 1989-2005); source: van Dijk, 2008**



The trends in figure 7 confirm the hypothesis. In the thirteen Western countries together rates of joyriding dropped by 50 % (from 1,4 % in 1988 to 0,6 in 2005) while rates of car theft remained stable at a one year victimization rate of 0,4%<sup>8</sup>.

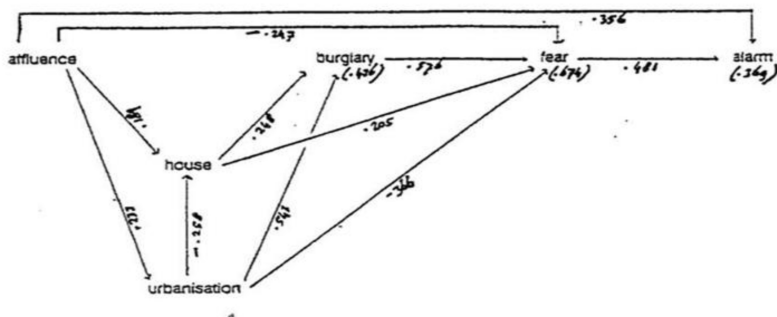
### Security and trends in household burglary

As discussed, the second main type of crime which started to fall across Western nations is household burglary. As car theft, household burglary makes up a considerable part of the total costs of crime. For many victims the experience to see once house burgled is also highly traumatic. Responsive securitization is to be expected. Over the years several forms of household security have been introduced such as high security locks and bolts, burglar alarms, outdoor lightning etcetera. Analyses of results of national victimization surveys in The Netherlands and Britain have shown that individual houses equipped with such security have a reduced risk to be burgled. For example in the Netherlands houses without any special security run an 8 times higher risk to be burgled than houses with a comprehensive package of security measures in place (Van Dijk, Junger & Sagel-Grande, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> From 2010 onwards total numbers of car thefts are rising again in Germany and The Netherlands. This new upward trend seems to be caused by the improved capacity of professional car thieves to circumvent electronic security measures.

In the ICVS respondents are asked about the installment of basic security measures such as a burglar alarm. Using data from 114 regions in Europe and North America, collected in the first two sweeps of the ICVS, we analyzed the relationships between regional levels of affluence, degree of urbanization, burglary victimization rates, fear of burglary and the use of burglar alarms with the help of path analysis (Van Dijk, 1995). Figure 8 shows the results in the form of a model explaining a fair amount of the variation in levels of burglary victimization and burglar alarm ownership.

**Figure 8** main drivers of the use of burglar alarms; a secondary analysis of the (ICVS 1989-2005); source: van Dijk, 1994



The model shows strong links between the level of burglary in regions and fear of burglary and between such fears and the purchasing of burglar alarms. This causal path reflects the first stages of responsive securitization regarding household burglary. The model also shows that people living in relatively wealthy regions are more likely to invest in burglar alarms, regardless of their situation in other respects. This results demonstrates that well off households can more easily afford investments in such devices. Finally the model shows that people in wealthy and urbanized regions more often live in detached houses and experience more burglaries. Obviously responsive securitization takes place in a multi-factorial setting.

In wealthier regions more people live in detached houses which offer ample opportunities for burglars. In such regions rates of victimization by burglary are higher. The negative experiences of victims generate increased awareness of risks to be burgled and this promotes investments in self-protection, including in expensive measures that normally only very rich people can afford. The model, first presented at a conference of the Council of Europe on Crime and the Economy, covers all stages of responsive securitization except the final and crucial one. The statistical model shows that responsive securitization as such takes place but it falls short of showing that ensuing reduced opportunities of burglary actually result in lower rates of burglary victi-



mization. For a test of the final step in the model longitudinal data are needed. In 1995 the ICVS had only been repeated once and no longitudinal data were yet available.

In The Netherlands the installment of basic household security measures has been actively promoted by the central government since the mid 1980s (Ministry of Justice, 1985). In 1999 basic household security was incorporated in the Building Regulations and since then such security is mandatory for all newly built houses. Ben Vollaard of Tilburg University has analyzed results of the Dutch national victimization surveys to determine the impact of the new building regulations upon burglary victimization rates. He compared burglary victimization rates of owners of newly built houses with those of older houses. His analysis shows that risks to be burgled of newly built houses were reduced by 50%, controlling for the impact of external factors (Vollaard & Van Ours, 2010). Supplementary analyses found no evidence of displacement to houses in other neighborhoods or cities or to other types of theft. According to the authors the new building regulations had been responsible for almost a fifth of the total drop in burglaries in The Netherlands in recent years. The one off costs of the security measures were found to be a fraction of the benefits in terms of losses prevented over the years.

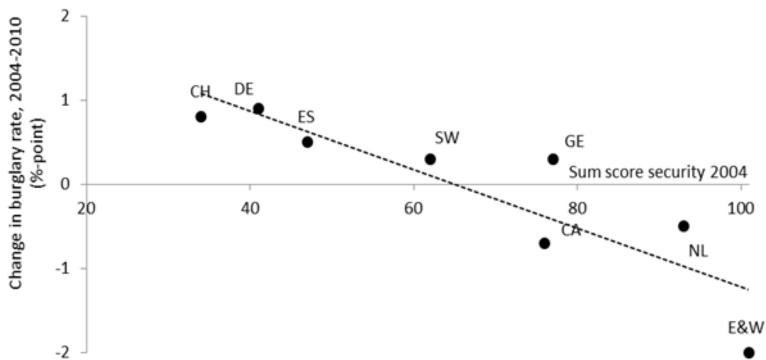
The litmus test of the impact of responsive securitization on burglary rates is whether national trends in rates of victimization by burglary can be predicted by the penetration rate of elementary security measures. In other words are countries with a higher penetration of household security rewarded by lower burglary rates in the years ahead. The repeats of the ICVS in 2005 and 2010 allow us to explore this issue empirically. In 2005 and 2010 the ICVS was repeated in just eight Western nations, Canada, Denmark, England/Wales, Estonia, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland (Van Dijk, 2012). Fortunately these eight nations, however similar in many other respect, show considerable variation in the penetration of household security in 2005. The data therefore allow us to put responsive securitization to an empirical test by examining the possible link between security penetration at time 1 (2005) and the changes in burglary victimization between time 1 and time 2 (2010). The next figure shows results.

**Figure 9 Levels of home security and burglary victimization in ten Western nations (ICVS 2005 and 2010); source: van Dijk, 2012**

	High-grade door locks, 2004 (%)	Burglar alarm, 2004 (%)	Burglary rate, 2004 (%)	Burglary rate, 2010 (%)	Change burglary rate (%-point)
England and Wales	60	41	3.5	1.5	- 2.0
Netherlands	78	15	1.3	0.8	- 0.5
Canada	48	28	2.0	1.3	- 0.7
Germany	63	14	0.9	1.2	+0.3
Sweden	46	16	0.7	1.0	+0.3
Estonia	40	7	2.5	3.0	+0.5
Switzerland	29	5	1.1	1.9	+0.8
Denmark	32	9	2.7	3.6	+0.9

In this table we can see that trends in burglary victimization between 2005 and 2010 have been divergent. In England/Wales, The Netherlands and Canada rates have fallen, in Germany and Sweden rates remained stable and in Estonia, Denmark and Switzerland they went up. The results are graphically depicted in the next figure.

**Figure 10 Levels of household security in 2004 and (sum of high grade locks and alarms) and changes in burglary rates between 2004 and 2010**



This figure depicts the statistical significant relationship between the levels of security in 2004 and the changes in burglary victimization between 2004 and 2010. During this period rates of burglary victimization went down in countries with the highest penetration of home security and went up in countries with the lowest penetration. In

2010 the burglary victimization rates in Denmark was 3.6%. In Estonia it was 3.3% and in Switzerland 1.9%. These rates are twice as high as in The Netherlands and Sweden, countries similar in many other respects, including open borders with Central and Eastern European countries. The results suggest that the active promotion of household security in Britain and The Netherlands has indeed paid off and that Denmark, Estonia and Switzerland and to a lesser extent Germany are paying the price for their government's policies of *laissez faire* on the security market. The European experience with burglary rates over the past ten years underlines the wisdom of the universal saying that opportunity makes the thief, pointedly expressed in the Spanish version "Open doors make thieves even of holy men"<sup>9</sup>.

### In conclusion

We have presented evidence from the ICVS and other sources supporting the hypothesis that falls in car theft and household burglary have at least in part been security-driven. As discussed many other types of crime, including violent crime, have also fallen. Farrell, Tseloni, Tilley & Mailley (2011) have suggested that these falls might not be unrelated to the preceding falls in other types of crime. Falls in car theft might have had a knock on effect on other types of crime. As mentioned above many thefts of cars are committed by juveniles, in fact the typical starting age for this type of criminality is 14 or younger. According to the authors young boys are typically initiated into a life of delinquency by participating in acts of joyriding with peers. Car theft is so to speak their *debut crime*. The first successful acts of car theft act as *stepping stone* to their involvement in subsequent, more serious types of crime. This stepping stone hypothesis could readily be extended to burglaries in the neighborhood, also mainly committed by young teenagers. Improved security may have reduced opportunities for easy crimes such as car theft and burglaries and this may have blocked access to the first stages of a criminal career for new cohorts of would be delinquents. Others have observed that the early introduction of steering column locks in Germany, mentioned above, may have had a lasting impact on levels of car theft in the country by preventing the emergence of a subculture of joyriding among juveniles (Clarke & Harris, 1992). From this perspective, the fact that the post war crime boom seems to have been less severe than those in the UK and The Netherlands may have been the unintended side effects of the early adoption of car security legislation. In a more general sense improved car and home security may have blocked the emergence of new delinquent subcultures in vulnerable neighborhoods across the Western world around 2000.

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<sup>9</sup> The original title of the lecture was Closing the Doors, a reference to a now largely forgotten book by Ron Clarke, called Suicide: Closing the Exits. In this book, and in a follow up article from Clarke and Pat Mayhew, empirical evidence was presented showing that changes in the composition of household gas in Britain and The Netherlands in the mid 1980s had caused abrupt falls in the numbers of people committing suicide by gas without major displacement to suicides by other means (Clarke & Mayhew, 1989). If highly motivated acts such as suicide can be reduced by simple situational measures, why, the authors argued, not various acts of opportunistic thieving such as joyriding or burglaries in the neighborhood? Why not indeed?

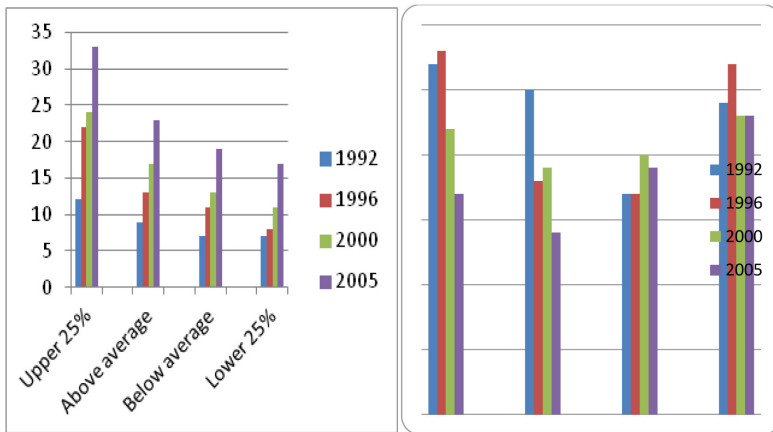
As discussed earlier, the international falls in crime started with car theft. Then burglaries went down as well, followed by thefts from car and other types of personal theft. Finally, crimes of violence started to fall belatedly too. This uniform sequencing of the crime falls according to ICVS results is in line with the stepping stone hypothesis. In many other respects too criminal acts seem to feed on other criminal acts. Victims of bicycle thefts are known to be more prone than others to become bicycle thieves themselves (Van Dijk, 1986). They are also more prone to buy stolen bicycles, thereby driving up demand. If levels of bicycle theft are somewhat reduced by improved security, chain effects will act as negative multipliers and the market of bicycle theft may fall into a deep recession. Responsive securitization is as yet more an hypothesis than a proven theory. The falls in crime may have had many other causes besides improved security. But it certainly seems an hypothesis suggesting interesting new directions in criminological research (Van Dijk & Tseloni, 2010). It may even prove to be nothing less than a new agenda for comparative international criminology.

In the introduction I have referred to Bonger's thesis of 1905 about the close links between economic conditions and recorded crime. Official crime statistics are no longer taken at face value as measures of crime. And although economic conditions surely impact on levels of crime, the relationship is far from straightforward. Crime seems to pursue to some extent its own cyclical course, largely independent from the business cycle.

The availability of data on crime collected by survey research among the population has opened new theoretical perspectives, focusing on the roles of victims rather than solely on those of offenders. These new data have also opened new avenues for international comparative research on the societal causes of crime. Both methodologically and theoretically criminology has made great strides. Some fundamentals of the discipline have remained the same, though. As in the days of Bonger theoretical ideas about the societal determinants of crime are tested by analyzing international criminal statistics. Also, this new epidemiological criminology is, just like the work of Bonger, no purely academic exercise. The comparative analysis of trends in security and trends in burglary rates has obvious policy implications. In this political context I want to stress that situational crime prevention is not just a matter of individual or collective efficiency. It is also a matter of social justice.

Results of the ICVS show that across twelve Western nations the lowest income groups have stepped up their household security to a lesser extent than the middle and upper classes. They simply cannot afford to protect their houses as well as the others. As was to be expected, the survey shows that the lowest two quartiles have benefited less from the falls in burglary victimization than the rest of the population (Van Dijk, 2008) (see figure 11 for results).

**Figure 11 Trends in the use of burglar alarms (left side) and trends in burglary victimization since 1992 (rights side) by income quartiles in twelve Western nations, including the USA (ICVS 1989-2005); source: van Dijk, 2008**



When left to market forces alone, responsive securitization is bound to increase the security gap between the haves and have nots. Our hypothesis is that in countries where the government has actively intervened in the home security market, such as the UK and The Netherlands the security gap will have been grown less sharply than in for example the USA. Regrettably in several countries, including The Netherlands, the UK and Belgium, the government has in recent years stepped down its efforts to promote household security.

A topical issue these days is the theft of cars by highly professional groups that can circumvent electronic security measures. In Germany the numbers of car thefts seem to edge upwards again. There is solid research evidence at the individual and collective level that the technique of parts marking can effectively curb professional car theft against relatively small costs (Van Dijk, 2014). Proposals for the introduction of an EU Directive on parts marking have been shelved due to opposition from the (German) car industry<sup>10</sup>. In recent years the first steps of young people of what might develop into a criminal career are typically made on the internet. Once again, these petty e- offences such as hacking, harassment and stalking are met with a *laissez faire* attitude by governments. The may later prove to have been the stepping stones to an online crime boom.

<sup>10</sup> BMW has published on the internet the results of a small comparative study on the rates of car theft among cars with and cars without parts marking. In Taiwan parts marking was made mandatory in 2006 for all cars and motorcycles resulting in an immediate drop in thefts of around 70-80 percent ( Van Dijk, 2014/ forthcoming)

The ultimate aim of our criminological work is to gain knowledge about crime with the aim of designing interventions which can help to reduce the costs and suffering of fellow human beings, be they victims or offenders. *Savoir pour prévoir, prévoir pour prevenir*. Or, in modern jargon: evidence-based crime prevention. Proud to stand in that century-old, Bongesian tradition, though with a twist.

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