

Chapter 2

Trends in violence

Why study trends

- The purpose of this chapter is to explore trends in violence over the past several centuries and up to the present. This exploration is critical for at least a couple of reasons.
 - in order to make meaningful progress in better understanding the phenomenon of violence our discussion must be based on fact.
 - it is critical to examine trends in violence so that we are able to ask meaningful questions regarding its variance.

FACT VS. MYTH

- Is the world more violent today than ever before? No.
- Is the U.S. more violent today than ever before? No. In fact, as will be discussed below there is evidence that suggests trends in violence have been declining since around the year 1200 in Europe and the early 1600's in the United States (Gurr, 1989).
- Is the United States more violent today than most other countries? Yes, especially in relation to homicide.
- Who is most likely to perpetrate violence? Young, minority, males.
- Who is most likely to be a victim of violence? Young, minority, males.

Reliability of the data

- The Uniform Crime Report (UCR)
- The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

HISTORICAL TRENDS IN EUROPE

- For many, the actual trend in violence may be somewhat of a surprise. Based on data provided by both Gurr (1989) and Eisner (2003) there has been a steady decline in the overall rate (number of incidents per 100,000 population) of violence across Europe from about the year 1200 all the way through the late 20th century.

Variation in the declining rate of violence

- Generally, the overall decline in violence throughout Europe did not take place simultaneously or evenly throughout the past centuries.
- Rates in Italy moved very little from late medieval times, a trend that was even more exacerbated in the Southern regions of the country including the islands.

- The question is why? Why did the trends differ not only across Europe but also within countries?
- One possible starting point is to approach these questions from the theoretical framework of ecology. Ecology is the study of how people interact with their environment and provides a foundation for better understanding some of the variations.

- In the mid to late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century rates of violence are lowest in the regions of Europe that are most industrialized and urbanized.
- “Center-periphery dimension”
- Elevated levels of violence were found throughout the peripheral areas with high birth rates, high illiteracy rates, and predominantly rural population.

- contradictory to what we are experiencing today, at least in relation to urbanization in the United States.
- In modern times rates of violence are much higher in densely populated inner cities than in the outer regions and suburbs.
- Today there are higher birth rates and higher rates of illiteracy within the centers of major cities across the United States.

HISTORICAL TRENDS IN AMERICA

- Similar to that of Europe there has never been a time in the United States where one could argue we were free from violence
- In fact, historically America has been among the most violent of nations throughout the world.

Examples of American Violence

- Native American wars
- Revolution,
- the Civil War,
- two World Wars,
- Vietnam and Korean Wars,
- more recently the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

- What do we know about violence in America?
 - Important to remember the concept of the “melting pot.” This makes the American phenomenon different from that of Europe.
 - Europe consisted of regions or countries that were made up of people who were mostly alike and shared many of the same cultural values, heritage and language.

- In essence, it is likely that differing groups forced to assimilate based on one set of values and cultural expectations experienced an amount of strain that was significantly higher than that experienced by people in other parts of the world.
- Europe and especially England did not (to the extent of America) experience the plight of one particular race, African Americans, who were forced to endure horrendous circumstances of slavery

- Trends in violent crime in the United States seem to trend downward historically but at a much different rate than that of Europe. And, much more importantly one could argue that there have been two different rates of violence that need to be illuminated- one for White Americans and one for Black Americans- both separately and also collectively.
- In other words the United States has been and continues to be much more violent than Europe and all other first world civilizations.

- Irish immigrants
- Civil War
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- desensitization

Violent Crime in America Post 1900

- Around the turn of the century European rates, especially in northern Europe were quite low.
- In America, however, the homicide rate increased from approximately 5.1 to 10.3 per 100,000 population between 1900 and 1924

- Auto industry
- Prohibition
- Economic market (immigrant populations not fully versed in the means of production)

- The most perplexing aspect of violence in America, however, and, that which supersedes any European group is the consistently high rate of violence that takes place among African Americans.

- In the 1800's the homicide deaths among African Americans was 7.5 per 100,000 population in the city of Philadelphia. This is almost three times higher than the White rate of the same period which was 2.8 per 100,000 population.
- Moving into the twentieth century the rate of white victimization continued to decline. This was not the case for African Americans as by the 1950s the homicide rate had climbed to an astounding 64.2 per 100,000 population.

- **Murder Victimization Rates**

- **Whites Black**

• 1852-1860	6.5	19.3
• 1866-1875	5.4	10.7
• 1881-1890	4.2	10.2
• 1901-1910	4.2	12.7
• 1921-1930	4.8	22.2
• 1931-1940	4.2	31.3
• 1945-1953	1.9	24.3

- **Homicide Arrest Rates**

	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Non Whites</u>
• 1890-1899	2.9	9.1
• 1910-1919	5.1	20.0
• 1930-1939	6.3	36.1
• 1960-1970	5.0	25.4

- The question concerning this series of rates is what contributed to the exceptionally high rates of violence among African Americans for sustained periods of time especially as they compare to the rates of Whites?
 - Poverty
 - Civil rights movement
 - Crack cocaine

THEORETICAL POSITIONS CONCERNING CHANGING RATES OF VIOLENCE

- Civilizing process- not as significant in America as in Europe.
- Modernization
- Times of war

PREDICTING VIOLENCE

- antisocial personality disorder (ASPD)
- borderline personality disorder (BPD),
- the comorbidity of ASPD and BPD,
- childhood adversities,
- alcohol consumption,
- age,
- the monoamine oxidase A (MAOA) genotype.

- Severe personality disorders and childhood adversities increased the risk of recidivism and mortality both among offenders and in comparison to the controls.