

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317277495>

# Criminology's Dirty Little Secret: How Dutch criminologists almost completely failed to pick up on the decline in crime...

Working Paper · June 2017

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.29731.04640

CITATIONS

0

READS

239

1 author:



Jaap De Waard

Ministry of Security and Justice Netherlands

87 PUBLICATIONS 200 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Private security [View project](#)



The fall in juvenile crime in The Netherlands and other industrialized countries: background and explanations [View project](#)

**Criminology's Dirty Little Secret: How Dutch criminologists almost completely failed to pick up on the decline in crime** (this article was originally published in Dutch in: Liber Amicorum Gerben Bruinsma, Publisher: Boom Criminologie, Editors: Catrien Bijleveld, Peter Van Der Laan, pp.333-345

The Hague: Ministry of Security and Justice, 1 June 2017 **Jaap de Waard** ([j.de.waard@minvenj.nl](mailto:j.de.waard@minvenj.nl))

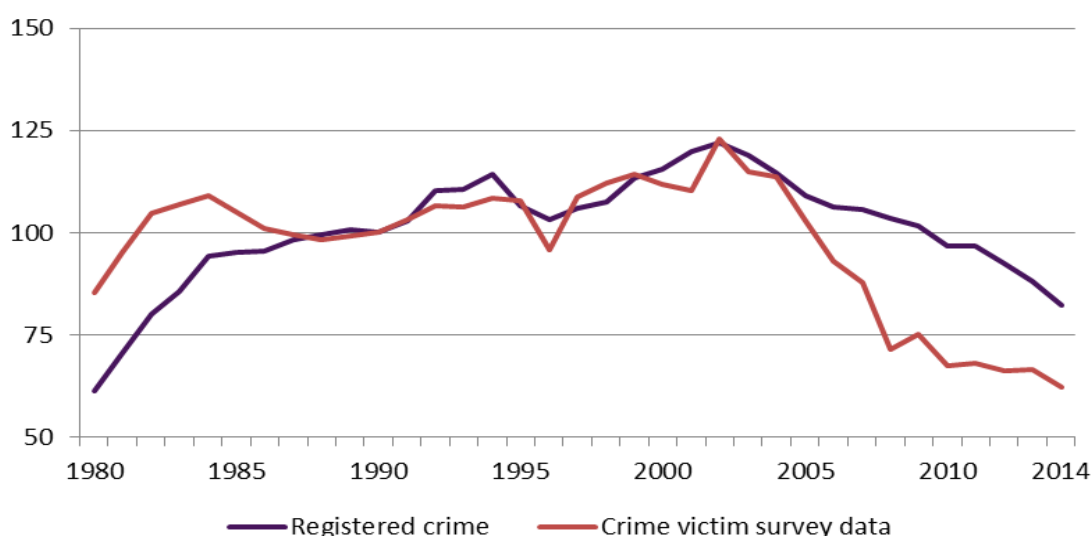
## Introduction

*'It is pretty embarrassing to criminology as a profession that nobody has come close to explaining the huge drops in crime experienced in industrialised countries in the last decade or so.'* This lament by Farrell et al. (2008) has set the tone for the following discussion. The international science of criminology has clearly been remiss when it comes to explaining why crime rates have declined. Only a small number of criminologists have focused on this subject in the last few years. The present contribution to Gerben Bruinsma's Festschrift seeks to address the following points: (1) Have crime rates declined? Where did crime decline, and to what extent? What types of crimes have declined? What statistical resources allow us to say anything on this subject? (2) Why did crime rates decline? What plausible explanations can we provide for this reduction? We will assess several hypotheses on the basis of existing literature. (3) We will pay special attention to the so-called 'security hypothesis', which operates from the premise that the main driving force behind the crime reduction observed in many countries has been the increase in, and improved quality of, large-scale security measures such as immobilisers, burglary prevention measures, private security teams and crime opportunity-reducing measures. (4) Finally, this chapter presents several key conclusions.

## Getting our facts straight: have crime rates actually declined in the Netherlands?

This section presents a summary of trends in crime reported in the Netherlands. The summary is based on an extensive exploratory study carried out two years ago (De Waard, 2015). For the purposes of this chapter, we have updated this study with the most recently published data. We will start this section by discussing long-term trends. Figure 1 below shows that there was a significant increase in crime in the Netherlands between 1980 and 1990. This observation is borne out both by victimisation surveys, in which people were asked whether they had experienced any crime, and by police records on crimes. These two trends run parallel: on balance, an upward trend can be detected until the year 2002. A reversal can be observed in 2002, from which time both crimes reported to the police and self-reported victimisation rates drop by approximately 30 per cent.

**Figure 1: Trends in crimes experienced and reported in the Netherlands, 1980-2014, index 1990=100**



Which types of crimes have seen a decline? In 2015, Dutch police recorded more than 960,000 felonies, down from 1.3 million felonies in 2007. This means that the total number of recorded felonies was reduced by over 26 per cent during an eight-year period. Judging from the figures currently available for 2016, recorded crime rates declined by 5 per cent in 2016. Figure 2 below shows that this decline can be observed in nearly all types of crime, ranging from acquisitive crimes such as vehicle theft, burglary, theft from cars, shoplifting, mugging and pickpocketing, to violent crimes such as abuse, sexual assault, rape, murder and manslaughter. In 2016, 110 people died in the Netherlands due to murder or manslaughter. This figure constituted the lowest number of victims in 20 years, compared to 239 violent deaths in 1996. In other words, the murder/ manslaughter rate has been reduced by more than 50 per cent in the past 20 years.

**Figure 2: Recorded felonies categorised by type of felony, 2007-2015, in thousands**

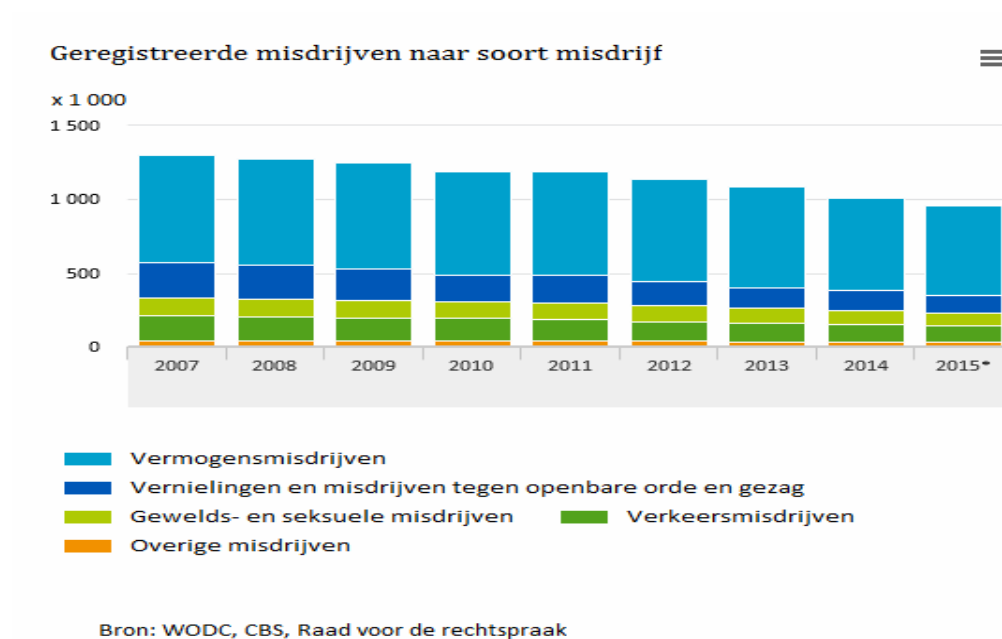
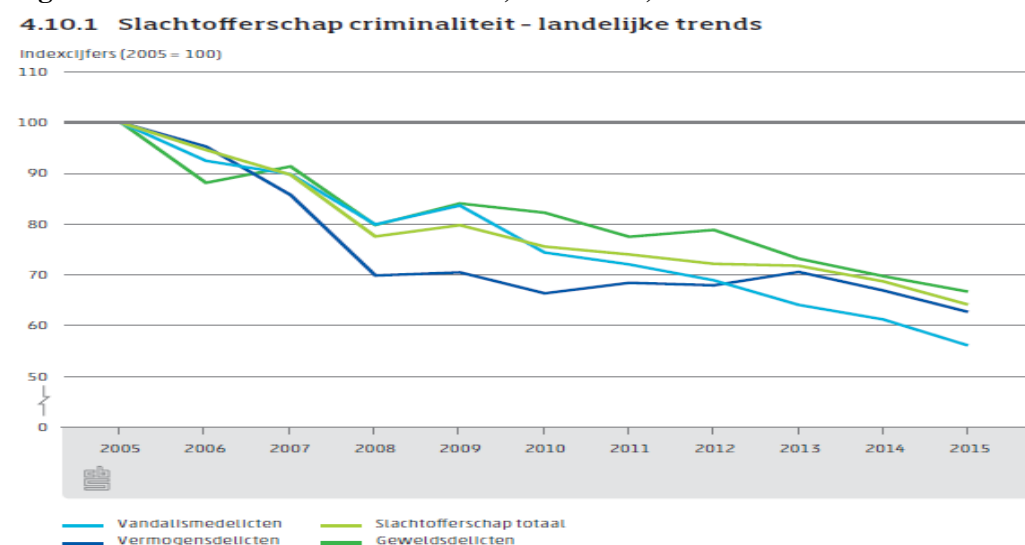


Figure 3 below shows that the number of people indicating that they have fallen victim to crime has seen a similar reduction across all types of felonies. It is clear from this chart that the total victimisation rate dropped by almost 35 per cent in ten years' time (Statistics Netherlands, 2016).

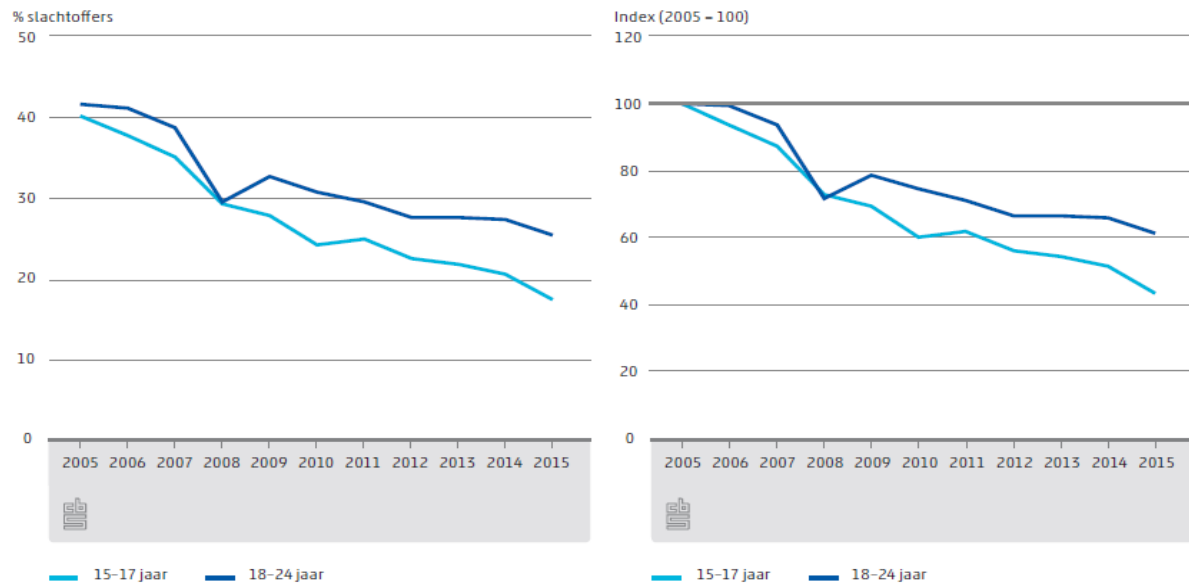
**Figure 3: Trends in crime victimisation, 2005-2015, index 2005=100**



The reduction in self-reported crime victimisation was the most significant among adolescents. If we look at self-reported crime victimisation among Dutch adolescents in the period between 2005 and 2015, we can make the following observations from Figure 4 below (Statistics Netherlands, 2016). There was a crime reduction of more than 55 per cent in the 15-17 age group, as well as a crime drop of almost 40 per cent among adolescents aged 18-24 years.

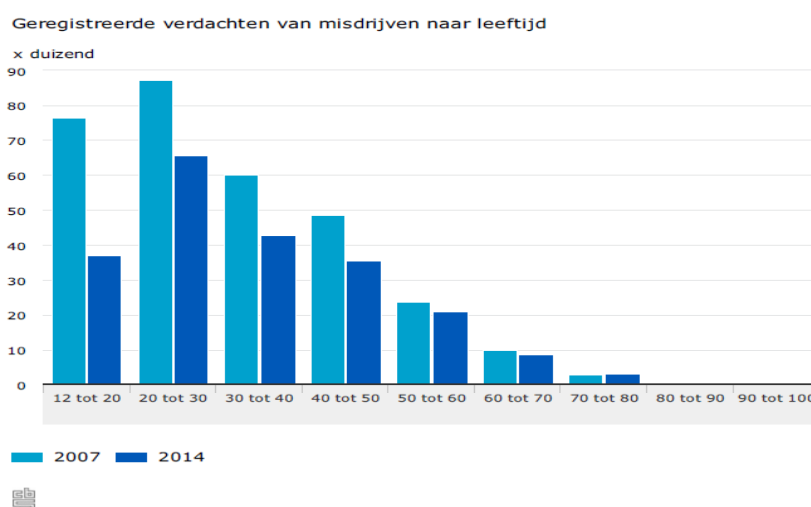
**Figure 4: Victimisation among Dutch adolescents, 2005-2015, in %**

#### 4.12.3 Slachtofferschap jongeren, 2005-2015



Looking at trends in the total number of suspects recorded by Dutch police, we can observe that the number of suspects was reduced by over 40 per cent between 2007 and 2014 (497,000 and 284,000, respectively). During the same period, an even more significant decline (more than 50 per cent) can be observed in the number of under-age suspects, both among native Dutch adolescents and among adolescents from a migrant background. Figure 5 below shows that the number of adolescent and adult suspects is declining in the Netherlands.

**Figure 5: Trends in the number of adolescent and adult suspects in the Netherlands, 2007-2014, in thousands**

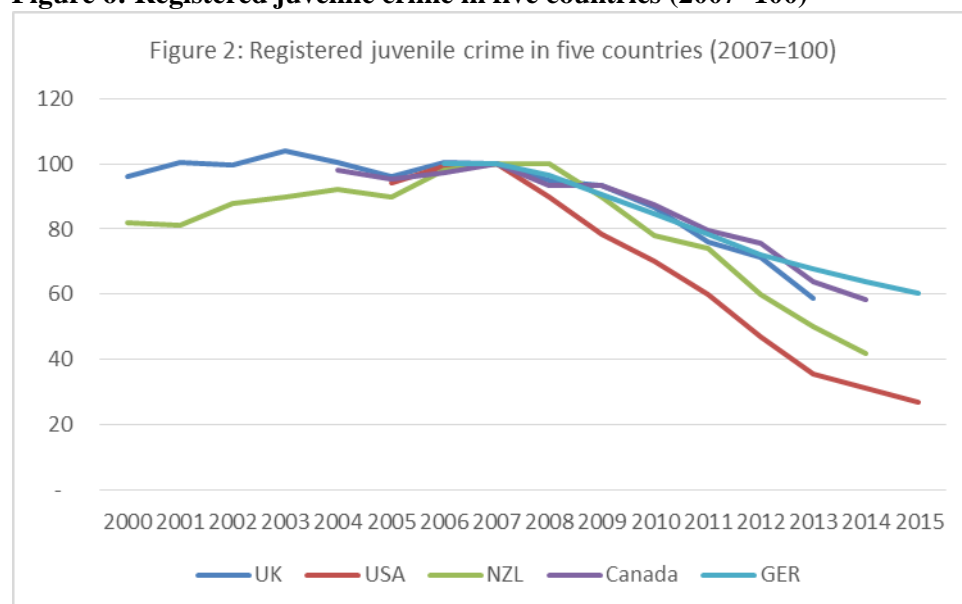


Due to this reduction in the number of suspects, the number of adult inmates of prisons and detention centres declined by 8 per cent between 2014 and 2015. This reduction was observed across all age groups and ethnic backgrounds, and among women as well as men. For its part, the number of prison employees declined equally rapidly. In 2015, a total of 39,800 adults were being detained under Dutch criminal law. Between 2005 and 2015, the number of prisoners was reduced by more than 20 per cent. This development is in line with the trend of declining numbers of recorded crimes and suspects (Statistics Netherlands, 2016a). Basically, the Netherlands has had a declining prison population for over ten years now. This situation puts it in a unique position on a global level, particularly since this reduction of the prison population has been quite significant.

### Reduced crime rates – an international phenomenon

Reduced crime rates are being observed all over the Western industrialised world. Unfortunately, paying a great deal of attention to this phenomenon is beyond the scope of the present contribution to Gerben Bruinsma's Festschrift. In brief, the following can be said on the subject. There is increasing evidence and consensus among academics that there has lately been a considerable reduction in crime (for recent review studies, see Van Dijk, 2012; Van Dijk, Tseloni & Farrell, 2012; Van Dijk, 2013; Farrell, Tilley & Tseloni, 2014; Tonry, 2014; WHO, 2014; Roeder, Eisen & Bowling, 2015; Pease & Ignatans, 2016). This reduction concerns both acquisitive and violent crimes, such as murder and manslaughter, sexual assault, vandalism, and crimes subject to the Opium Act. To illustrate this trend, De Waard's review study (2015) presents a recent overview of trends in crime in a large number of countries where crime rates have dropped. Said study is an overview of statistical data obtained from individual national victimisation surveys, the International Crime Victims Survey and trends in crime recorded by the police. All these separate sources present convincing evidence that there has been a reduction in crime on an international level. The period during which the reduction in crime can first be observed differs from country to country. It commenced in the early 1990s in the United States and Canada, to be followed in a large number of Western countries some five years later. There are great similarities between the degrees to which crime rates fell in the various countries. During a period of over 20 years, total crime levels were reduced by an average of 30 to 50 per cent in many countries. Certain countries recorded much higher percentages, such as the US, where violent crime fell by 70 per cent, and England and Wales, where the number of burglaries fell by 65 per cent. As a result, quite a few countries are now back at the crime levels which they had in the early 1980s (Van Dijk & Tseloni, 2012). In closing, we would like to point out the considerable decline in juvenile delinquency in a large number of countries (Berghuis & De Waard, 2017). As Figure 6 shows, the recent Dutch trend of significantly declining recorded juvenile delinquency is far from unique.

**Figure 6: Registered juvenile crime in five countries (2007=100)**



## A few side notes with regard to reduced crime rates

The trends outlined above are happy tidings, so there is cause for celebration, or so one would think. In actual fact, there is less reason to celebrate. Quite apart from the institutional interests held by the various parties making up the criminal law chain (they cannot, may not and do not wish to believe it), a few side notes should be stated here. First, let us begin with a profit warning of sorts. It is impossible to make reliable predictions on how trends in crime will develop over the next few years on the basis of current reduced crime rates, as these have very limited predictive power. What we see here is so-called *dynamic crime* rather than *static crime*, because new types of crime arise due to developments in society and technology; for example, certain types of online crime, the ongoing internationalisation of crime and organised crime, an increased risk of subversion of intellectual property due to the scope of the Internet, or business crime (such as the manipulation of money flows in the financial sector). Basically, this dynamism means that the criminal world must be permanently scanned for new threats and developments. By anticipating such new developments, we can make our preventive government policy more innovative, creative and effective. This approach is how we can expect to bring about large-scale preventive effects. Basically, recognising potential problems and suggesting solutions to these in good time is the best way to prevent crime.

As far as the relative value of predictions is concerned, the Security and Counterterrorism report drawn up in 2010 as part of the National Reviews, still states: 'We cannot expect the decline in crime to continue – for instance, prognosis models are not ruling out the possibility that this trend will be reversed.' As it happens, this prediction was completely unfounded, as proved by currently available data. The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy was also completely wrong when it expressed the expectation in its *The Next 25 Years* report, published in 1977, that the future would be determined by ideologically motivated crime against 'obsolete societal structures' rather than by regular crime – which would actually be reduced. This expectation was expressed when we were on the cusp of a significant increase in crime. Last, over a decade ago, the well-known criminologist Timothy O. Wilson said that we were heading towards a society that was like a battlefield. He was forced to retract these words and said that he would from now on stick to predicting the past, which was hard enough in itself.

Second, we would like to say something here about the value that can be attributed to the decline in reported crime as outlined above. It is generally agreed that we are really seeing a significant long-term crime drop. This downward trend can also be observed in victimisation surveys, in which individuals and companies indicate to what types of crime they have fallen victim. However, the data come with several major limitations. As it happens, the total amount of crime includes much more than just those cases recorded by the police or reported by individuals through so-called victimisation surveys. There is a large 'dark number' of crimes that are never reported to the police. The data we have at our disposal relate to crimes recorded by the police. These data barely, if at all, reflect crimes that are also being addressed by special detective agencies, inspectorates or governing bodies, including (but not limited to) crimes in the fields of fraud and environmental crime. Increasingly, our response to crime (e.g. fraud, organised crime, juvenile delinquency) consists of an integrated approach in which many government agencies collaborate. Activities thus undertaken by the police and public prosecutor do not necessarily result in criminal investigation and prosecution, but also allow us to enable administrative agencies or inspectorates to do their work. In such cases, these activities will not be reflected in data on recorded crimes. In addition, victimisation surveys and police records do not provide much information on so-called victimless offences, such as the use of narcotics, illegal possession of weapons, handling of stolen property, tax fraud, improper use and abuse of public funds, illegal sexual and gambling practices, environmental crimes, violations of the law, bribery and any form of corruption, tampering with products and intellectual property, and violations of construction guidelines. At present, relatively little is known about the incidence of such offences. This lack of information makes sense, since illegal activities, more than any other activities, are characterised by the need for anonymity and screening. Another reason why we have little information on this matter is because we are unsure whether the quality of crime is changing or whether crime is shifting to, for instance, the digital world. After all, certain phenomena were

completely nonexistent, or barely existent, until recently (e.g. certain types of cybercrime or high-tech crime such as ideologically motivated crime, victim grooming, computer hacking and identity fraud). The extent, severity and background of online crime have been identified only partially and to a very small extent. Last, even in the field of organised crime, records are inconclusive. According to the data currently available, some 40 per cent of criminal groups known to the Dutch police are currently being addressed.

### **Interim conclusion**

On the basis of the data presented above, we can draw the following key conclusions, always taking into account the aforementioned side notes. The Netherlands has really become a safer place. There has been a significant decline in crime in the Netherlands since 2007. The total number of reported crimes fell by over 26 per cent in eight years' time. The total victimisation rate dropped by nearly 35 per cent in ten years' time. The decline in the total victimisation rate is even more pronounced among adolescents. This incline can be observed in both acquisitive crime (vehicle theft, burglary, theft from cars, shoplifting, mugging and pickpocketing) and violent crime (assault and battery, sexual assault, rape, murder and manslaughter). The observed decline in crime was preceded by a strong increase in crime between 1980 and 1995, during which period recorded crime rates rose by 73 per cent. What is notable is the considerable decrease, between 2007 and 2015, in the number of adult and adolescent suspects in the Netherlands and elsewhere, by 40 per cent and more than 50 per cent, respectively. This decline in crime can be observed in a large part of the industrialised world, with the various countries displaying a large degree of similarity in terms of the percentage by which crime declined and the reasons for said decline. For instance, major similarities can be observed between the Netherlands, England and Wales, and between the United States and Canada. Given the amount of available evidence of declining crime in a large number of different countries, it is extremely unlikely that we are dealing with a random coincidence that independently occurred in several countries at once. In other words, there must be a causal connection that links all these countries.

### **Why did crime rates decline – what explanations are there for this trend?**

As we mentioned in the introduction, Dutch criminologists have definitely been remiss in terms of explaining the decline in crime. What has caused crime rates to drop? What factors explaining the decrease are being presented in academic literature? Proper criminologist research attempting to identify explanations was not carried out until recently ([Van Dijk, Tseloni & Farrell, 2012](#)). It was almost as if criminologists were having difficulty recognising the decline in crime for what it was. This appears to have been '*criminology's dirty little secret*'. It has since transpired that criminologists tend to focus mainly on models explaining the rise of crime, and that they have great difficulty explaining the observed decline in crime. It is easy to draw this conclusion from professional criminology literature and from the annual programmes of the European Society of Criminology and the American Society of Criminology. There have only been a few Dutch articles describing and explaining the decline in crime. Jan van Dijk was the first person in the Netherlands to do so. In addition, we would like to refer readers to Berghuis & De Waard, 2008; Vollaard, Versteegh & Brakel, 2009; Bervoets et al., 2014; De Waard, 2015; and De Waard, 2015a.

What is remarkable is that criminologists explaining the drop in crime tend to focus exclusively on the situation in their own countries. Take, for example, the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology's* recent issue on the subject (Rosenfeld & Weisburd, 2016), which pays no attention whatsoever to similar trends outside the USA – another missed opportunity. Many of the available analyses focus on the question as to whether a single factor is responsible for the upward and downward trends observed in crime, e.g. economic factors such as prosperity and unemployment, demographic factors such as the size of high-risk groups, immigration or age, and policy-related factors such as higher prison sentences/punitiveness and an approach targeted at selected offenders. However, just as there is no one-size-fits-all answer to the question of what caused the increased crime rates which were observed a few decades ago, there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for the subsequent decrease in crime.



Given the similarities in the way that crime trends developed in a large number of countries, it seems likely that explanations will be identified which apply to all these countries. In other words, if crime rates decline in a large number of Western societies, there must be *common* causes for this decline and we must try to find a universal explanation. Through comparative studies, we must identify *common factors*, with variations in these factors signalling variations in increased and decreased crime rates. To date, very little criminologist research has been done in this field, exceptions being Tseloni et al., 2010; Van Dijk, 2012; [Van Dijk, Tseloni & Farrell, 2012](#); and Farrell, Tilley & Tseloni, 2014.

### **A miscellany of differing explanations**

Read extant literature and you will soon encounter a great many possible explanations, as the boxout below demonstrates. The number of proposed explanations for the decline in crime is almost as large as the number of proposed reasons explaining the amount and severity of crime, which does not really help us in terms of practical solutions and policy.

#### **Boxout: A selection of possible explanations for the observed decline in crime**

- Selective inclusion effects/approach targeted at selected offenders.
- Cultural factors/Different uses of leisure time/'New decency'.
- Personal impressions, operational policing practices.
- The saturated market for luxury goods (less need for stolen goods).
- Increasingly affordable luxury consumer products (the 'Amazon effect'), causing sales in the amateur-run market for stolen property to collapse.
- Shifting types of crime due to shifts in drug addictions (e.g. crack users are more likely to need cash, so they will rob persons in the street, meaning the number of burglaries will be reduced); hard drug addicts are getting older, meaning that they are simply no longer able to commit crimes; number of heroin and crack addicts is decreasing.
- Abortion legislation/blood lead levels/immigration waves/firearms legislation.
- Maturing out/accelerated burning out of offender cohorts.
- The increasing effects of situational crime prevention and the scope of measures, thanks to the building code, police certification of safe homes and mandatory installation of immobilisers, as well as tracking and tracing of luxury consumer products.
- Truth/honesty in sentencing (increased deterrent). Selective inclusion of 'top-10 offenders', selective incapacitation.
- Increase in average prison sentence (incapacitation effect)/death penalty/perceived increase in likelihood that criminals will be caught.
- Stable imported crime rate (i.e., ratio of criminals from immigrant backgrounds versus native criminals).
- 'Golden combination' of repressive and preventive approaches (e.g. in the event of robberies, muggings and the prevention of burglary (prevention of repeated victimisation).
- More advanced applications of crime situation analyses.
- Increased effectiveness due to improved collaboration between the government and the business community, and due to the implementation of several targeted programmes (prevention/repression).
- Increase in implementation of 'evidence-based' interventions (criminals, victims and situations).
- Increase in willingness to take preventive measures/prevention awareness/risk awareness/effectiveness of preventive measures.



## **Farrell, Tilley and Tseloni's research synthesis of available hypotheses**

For pragmatic reasons, we will use Farrell, Tilley and Tseloni (2014)'s recently published research synthesis of available hypotheses, in order to present readers with a more systematic approach. In recent years, this research group has made a great contribution to the search for common comparative explanations for the decline in crime. Table 2 below provides readers with the most complete overview of currently available hypotheses, obtained from a large number of previously published studies. In order to assess the validity of the seventeen aforementioned hypotheses, the authors used four tests which the hypotheses had to pass:

1. The cross-national test. Can a hypothesis be applied to several countries? This test was founded on the previously drawn conclusion that the decline in crime occurred in a large number of countries and that this trend was not a coincidence.
2. A test that includes a prior period during which crime rates rose for several decades. This test was founded on the previously drawn conclusion that there was a long-term increase in crime before the eventual crime drop in most countries.
3. The so-called test for e-crimes and mobile phone theft. Is a hypothesis consistent, or at the very least not inconsistent, with the fact that certain types of crime are on the rise while many other types of crime are seeing a simultaneous drop in incidence? Take, for instance, the increased theft of items such as smartphones, iPads and laptops, or alternatively, crimes in which the Internet is used as the modus operandi such as identity fraud, purchase or sales fraud, or computer hacking with a view to financial gain.
4. The so-called test of variable trajectories. Is a hypothesis comparable to, or at least not inconsistent with, the variation in duration and throughput times of the crime drop across the various countries and types of offences?

We refer those readers who are interested in the description and outcomes of this test of the seventeen aforementioned hypotheses to the original article, as it would be a little excessive to provide an extensive description of the seventeen individual tests as a part of this article.

TABLE 2  
Crime Drop Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Summary
1. Strong economy	General economic improvement reduced crime
2. Concealed weapons laws	More concealed weapons increased deterrence
3. Capital punishment	Increased use of death penalty induced greater deterrence
4. Gun control laws	Gun control reduced crime due to gun control laws
5. Imprisonment	Increased imprisonment reduced crime via incapacitation and deterrence
6. Policing strategies	Better preventive policing reduced crime (i.e., Compstat and its progeny)
7. More police	Police staff increased, so crime fell
8. Legalization of abortion	Abortions in 1970s meant fewer at-risk adolescents in 1990s
9. Immigration	Immigrants commit less crime and promote social control in inner cities
10. Consumer confidence	Strong economy shifts consumers away from stolen secondhand goods
11. Declining hard-drug markets	Decline in hard-drug markets reduced related violence and property crime
12. Lead poisoning	Lead damaged children's brains in 1950s on, causing crime wave from 1960s when they reached adolescence; then cleaner air from 1970s caused crime drop of 1990s
13. Changing demographics	Aging population means proportionally fewer young offenders and victims, so crime rates fall
14. Civilizing process	Institutional control weakened in 1960s, causing crime increase, then strengthened in 1990s, causing crime drop
15. Improved security	Improved quality and quantity of security reduced crime opportunities
16. The Internet	Attractive displacement of offenders to e-crimes and changed lifestyles of victims
17. Phone guardianship	Portable phones spread rapidly in 1990s and provide guardianship

Table 3 below provides a brief summary of the findings. Considering the similarities in international crime trends in a large number of countries, it made sense that researchers tried to identify explanations for this fact which applied to all of these countries. Judging from the overview, only one hypothesis passed all four tests: improved security, also known as the 'security hypothesis'. In other words, this hypothesis applies to many countries. Ten hypotheses passed only a single test, while three passed two and one hypothesis passed three tests (phone guardianship).

TABLE 3  
Findings from Four Tests

Hypothesis	Test			
	Cross-National	Prior Crime Increase	E-Crime and Phone Theft	Variable Trajectories
1. Strong economy	✓	X	X	X
2. Concealed weapons law	X	✓	X	X
3. Capital punishment	X	✓	X	X
4. Gun control laws	X	✓	X	X
5. Imprisonment	X	X	X	X
6. Policing strategies	X	✓	X	X
7. More police	X	✓	X	X
8. Legalization of abortion	X	✓	X	X
9. Immigration	✓	X	X	X
10. Consumer confidence	✓	X	X	X
11. Waning hard-drugs market	X	✓	X	X
12. Lead poisoning	✓	✓	X	X
13. Changing demographics	✓	✓	X	X
14. Civilizing process	✓	✓	X	X
15. Improved security	✓	✓	✓	✓
16. The Internet	✓	✓	X	X
17. Phone guardianship	✓	✓	✓	X

NOTE.—✓ = pass; X = fail.

### Summary of explanations with regard to the crime drop

Several conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing discussion. Proper international research of explanations for the reduction in crime did not materialise until recently. It seems that criminologists mainly focus on models explaining the origins of crime and have great difficulty to explain the observed crime rate drop. An inventory of factors which may have played a part in the international crime drop presents a highly diverse view, ranging from reduced lead poisoning to approaches targeted at selected offenders, from changing demographics to legalised abortion, from shifts in drug addiction to the administration of the death penalty, and from economic factors to improved security and reduced crime opportunity. Just as there was no one-size-fits-all cause for the increased crime rate, there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for the subsequent crime drop. Explanations for the decline in crime tend to focus exclusively on the situation in the researcher's own country. As a result, such explanations tend to be country-specific and inapplicable to other countries. Since the international development of crime trends is so similar in so many countries, we should seek to identify key explanations that apply to all countries. When we attempt this identification, it turns out that the so-called security hypothesis is the most valid hypothesis. There is sufficient empirical evidence that the driving force behind the internationally observed decline in crime has been the increase in, and improved quality of, large-scale security measures such as immobilisers, measures designed to prevent burglary, private security and measures designed to reduce crime opportunity.

### Further elucidation of the 'security hypothesis'

The foregoing discussion shows that it is impossible to present a 'hard' and uniform explanation for the downward trend in crime. Studies of the downward trend operate from the premise that the decline was caused by a combination of factors. Judging from presently available knowledge (Van Dijk, 2012, 2013; Farrell, 2013; Farrell, Tilley & Tseloni, 2014; Pease & Ignatans, 2016), the security hypothesis is the most promising and robust explanation. Generally speaking, people, government agencies, the business community and manufacturers in many parts of the world have displayed an increasing willingness to try and prevent crime. In addition, crime prevention measures have improved and the financial investments in these measures have increased. We have improved the

security of cars, bicycles, homes, companies, company premises, shops, banks, city centres and places where people go out (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren & Smit, 2007). In addition, the quality of security measures has improved considerably (Tilley, Farrell & Clarke, 2015). The international private security industry has proved to be a growth market par excellence (De Waard and Van Steden, 2012). For instance, the total number of people employed in the private security industry in the fifteen 'original' EU Member States rose by 86 per cent between 1996 and 2010 (592,050 employees in 1996 versus 1,102,300 employees in 2010). In 1996, this figure amounted to an average 140 employees per 100,000 people versus 274 in 2010. Therefore, the opportunity structure in recent years has offered considerably less of an occasion to commit crimes easily and without being noticed. This is the so-called 'security hypothesis', which operates from the premise that the driving force behind the observed international decline in crime has been the increased use and improved quality of security measures such as immobilisers, burglary prevention measures, preventive measures built into production processes by default, certification/standards, crime effect reports, CCTV and face recognition (Home Office, 2015, 2016). It is increasingly hard for potential criminals to commit crimes, as there are increasingly few opportunities for people to commit crimes.

## Conclusion

Have crime rates actually gone down? If so, what plausible explanations can we provide for this trend? These are the two main questions that we have answered in this contribution to Gerben Bruinsma's Festschrift. The first question is easily answered. Yes, there has been a long-term decline in crime in a large number of countries, with regard to both acquisitive crimes and violent crimes. This decline is clear from recorded crime trends, data gleaned from national victimisation surveys, Eurostat records, World Health Organization records, records of A&E departments and data obtained from the International Crime Victims Survey. In sum, there has indeed been an international decline in crime.

The second question is considerably harder to answer. What plausible explanations can we provide? This question did not receive serious attention from the academic community until quite recently. In other words, the answer to this question is still a scientific work in progress. Even so, there is quite a significant number of available explanations for the decline in crime. Our inventory resulted in a wide range of explanations. As was to be expected, there is not one single explanation that can be presented as a one-size-fits-all answer. Explanations for the decline in crime tend to focus exclusively on crime within one single country. As a result, such explanations tend to be specific to one country and its particular crime issues. Under those circumstances, it can be hard to make general statements on explanations that can plausibly be applied to several countries. Nonetheless, considering the similarities in how crime has been developing in a great many countries, we must seek a core explanation that can apply to all of these countries.

One hypothesis had a strong showing in a recent research synthesis (Farrell, Tilley and Tseloni, 2014) of the most common hypotheses of the available explanations. We are referring to the *security hypothesis*, which operates from the premise that the driving force behind the observed international decline in crime has been the increased use and improved quality of large-scale security measures such as immobilisers, burglary prevention measures, private security and opportunity-restricting measures. These measures mainly relate to acquisitive crime and to a lesser extent to violent crime. It is clear that more research will be required to help us arrive at more robust explanations, particularly with regard to violent crimes and declining juvenile delinquency. Prevention continues to be an essential precondition for reducing the opportunity to commit crime easily and repeatedly without being noticed. Such preventive measures must grow in tandem with social trends. The emphasis will increasingly be on the social changes arising from technological developments and internationalisation, which will require timely investments in prevention. These investments are needed to help prevent a situation whereby people and companies have excellent locks on their front doors, only to be robbed of their money online. In realising this aim, we can learn a great deal from the current insights that provide the most valid explanations for the decline in 'classical' crime.

## References

- Berghuis, Bert & Jaap de Waard (2008). *Trendverkenning ontwikkeling in de criminaliteit en de handhaving in macroperspectief*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Justitie, DGR, afdeling Strategische Beleidsontwikkeling. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303549821\\_Trendverkenning\\_ontwikkeling\\_in\\_de\\_criminaliteit\\_en\\_de\\_handhaving\\_in\\_macroperspectief](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303549821_Trendverkenning_ontwikkeling_in_de_criminaliteit_en_de_handhaving_in_macroperspectief)
- Berghuis, Bert & Jaap de Waard (2017). Verdampende jeugdcriminaliteit: Verklaringen van de internationale daling. *Justitiële Verkenningen*, vol. 43, no. 1 For an English version see: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314101302\\_Declining\\_juvenile\\_crime\\_-\\_explanations\\_for\\_the\\_international\\_downturn](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314101302_Declining_juvenile_crime_-_explanations_for_the_international_downturn)
- Bervoets, E., H. Ferwerda, B. Bremmers, D. Keijzer, & T. Appelman. (2014). *Daling jeugdige verdachten in Amsterdam: Op zoek naar mogelijke verklaringen*. Rotterdam/Arnhem: Lokale Zaken/Bureau Beke. [http://www.beke.nl/doc/2013/Daling\\_jeugdige\\_verdachten\\_Amsterdam.pdf](http://www.beke.nl/doc/2013/Daling_jeugdige_verdachten_Amsterdam.pdf)
- CBS (2016). *Veiligheidsmonitor 2015*. Den Haag/Heerlen/Bonaire: CBS. <http://download.cbs.nl/pdf/veiligheidsmonitor-2015.pdf>
- CBS (2016a). Minder gedetineerden in gevangenissen (persbericht 8 december 2016). <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nieuws/2016/49/minder-ge-detineerden-in-gevangenissen>
- Farrell, Graham (2013). Five tests for a theory of the crime drop. *Crime Science*, vol. 2, no. 5, pp. 1-14. <http://www.crimesciencejournal.com/content/pdf/2193-7680-2-5.pdf>
- Farrell, Graham et al. (2008). The crime drop and the Security Hypothesis. *British Society of Criminology Newsletter*, No. 62, Winter, pp. 17-21. <http://www.britisoccrim.org/newdocs/bscn-62-2008-Farrell.pdf>
- Farrell, Graham, Nick Tilley & Andromachi Tseloni (2014). Why the crime drop? In: Michael Tonry (Ed.). *Why crime rates fall and why they don't* (Crime and Justice, Vol. 43, no. 1). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 421-490. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273692757\\_Why\\_the\\_Crime\\_Drop\\_in\\_M.\\_Tonry\\_Ed.%29\\_Crime\\_and\\_Justice\\_vol.\\_43\\_pp.421-490.\\_Chicago\\_University\\_of\\_Chicago\\_Press](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273692757_Why_the_Crime_Drop_in_M._Tonry_Ed.%29_Crime_and_Justice_vol._43_pp.421-490._Chicago_University_of_Chicago_Press)
- Home Office (2015). *Opportunity/Security as a driver of crime*. London: Home Office. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/398865/Opportunity\\_security\\_final\\_v2.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398865/Opportunity_security_final_v2.pdf)
- Home Office (2016). *Modern crime prevention strategy*. London: Home Office. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/509831/6.1770\\_Modern\\_Crime\\_Prevention\\_Strategy\\_final\\_WEB\\_version.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509831/6.1770_Modern_Crime_Prevention_Strategy_final_WEB_version.pdf)
- Pease, Ken & Dainis Ignatans (2016). The global crime drop and changes in the distribution of victimization. *Crime Science*, vol. 5, no. 11, pp. 1-6. <https://crimesciencejournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40163-016-0059-4>
- Roeder, Oliver, Lauren-Brooke Eisen & Julia Bowling (2015). *What caused the crime decline?* New York: Brennan Center for Justice. [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/analysis/What\\_Caused\\_The\\_Crime\\_Decline.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/analysis/What_Caused_The_Crime_Decline.pdf) <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/the-many-causes-of-americas-decline-in-crime/385364/>
- Rosenfeld, Richard & David Weisburd (2016). Explaining recent crime trends: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, Vol. 32, no. 3, September, pp. 329-488. <http://link.springer.com/journal/10940/32/3/page/1>
- Tilley, Nick, Graham Farrell & Ronald V. Clarke (2015). Target suitability and the crime drop. In: Martin A. Andresen and Graham Farrell (Eds.). *The criminal act: The role and influence of routine activity theory*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 59-76. <http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/the-criminal-act-martin-a-andresen/?K=9781137391315>

Tonry, Michael (Ed.) (2014). *Why crime rates fall and why they don't*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Crime and Justice, vol. 43, no. 1). <http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/C/bo19335432.html>

Tseloni, Andromachi, et al. (2010). Exploring the international decline in crime rates. *European Journal of Criminology*, vol. 7, no. 5, pp. 375–394.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249752256\\_Exploring\\_the\\_International\\_Decline\\_in\\_Crime\\_Rates](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249752256_Exploring_the_International_Decline_in_Crime_Rates)

Van Dijk, Jan J.M. (2013) Hoe komt het dat de criminaliteit de laatste tijd enorm daalt?  
<http://www.universiteitsvannederland.nl/college/hoe-komt-het-dat-criminaliteit-de-laatste-tijd-enorm-daalt/>

Van Dijk, Jan J.M. (2012). Deuren op slot: Naar een verklaring voor de internationale daling van criminaliteit. *Justitiële Verkenningen*, vol. 38, no. 7, november, pp. 7-44. <http://wodc.nl/onderzoeksdatabase/jv201207-deuren-op-slot.aspx?cp=44&cs=6797>

Van Dijk, Jan J.M. & Andromachi Tseloni (2012). Global overview: *International trends in victimization and recorded crime*. In: JJM van Dijk, A Tseloni, & G Farrell (Eds.), *The International Crime Drop: New Directions in Research* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Van Dijk, Jan J.M., Tseloni, Andromachi, & Farrell, Graham (Eds.). (2012). *The International Crime Drop: New Directions in Research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.  
[http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/?sf1=id\\_product&st1=502193](http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/?sf1=id_product&st1=502193)

Van Dijk, Jan J.M., John Van Kesteren & Paul Smit (2007). *Criminal victimization in international perspective: Key findings from the 2004-2005 ICVS and EU ICS*. The Hague: Boom Juridische Uitgevers.  
<https://www.wodc.nl/onderzoeksdatabase/icvs-2005-survey.aspx?cp=44&cs=6798>

Vollaard, B., Versteegh, P., & Brakel, J. van den (2009). *Veelbelovende verklaringen voor de daling van de criminaliteit na 2002: Onderzoek in opdracht van de Commissie Politie en Wetenschap*. Den Haag: Politie en Wetenschap.  
[http://www.politeewetenschap.nl/cache/files/54d1f6aa06d15verklaringen\\_daling\\_criminaliteit\\_na\\_2002.pdf](http://www.politeewetenschap.nl/cache/files/54d1f6aa06d15verklaringen_daling_criminaliteit_na_2002.pdf)

Waard, Jaap de (2015). *Daling van (geregistreeerde) criminaliteit: Trends en mogelijke verklaringen*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie, Directie Rechtshandhaving en Criminaliteitsbestrijding.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301624820\\_Daling\\_van\\_geregistreeerde\\_criminaliteit\\_Trends\\_en\\_mogelijke\\_verklaringen](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301624820_Daling_van_geregistreeerde_criminaliteit_Trends_en_mogelijke_verklaringen) For an English version see:  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287759866\\_The\\_crime\\_drop\\_in\\_The\\_Netherlands\\_and\\_other\\_industrialized\\_countries\\_Trends\\_and\\_possible\\_explanations](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287759866_The_crime_drop_in_The_Netherlands_and_other_industrialized_countries_Trends_and_possible_explanations)

Waard, Jaap de (2015a). *Verslag van de expertbijeenkomst over de verklaring van de geobserveerde daling van (geregistreeerde) criminaliteit*, 28 april 2015, 12:00 – 16:30, gebouw van het CAOP, Lange Voorhout Den Haag.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303973771\\_Verslag\\_van\\_de\\_expertbijeenkomst\\_over\\_de\\_verklaring\\_van\\_de\\_geobserveerde\\_daling\\_van\\_geregistreeerde\\_criminaliteit\\_28\\_april\\_2015\\_1200\\_-\\_1630\\_gebouw\\_van\\_het\\_CAOP\\_Lange\\_Voorhout\\_Den\\_Haag](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303973771_Verslag_van_de_expertbijeenkomst_over_de_verklaring_van_de_geobserveerde_daling_van_geregistreeerde_criminaliteit_28_april_2015_1200_-_1630_gebouw_van_het_CAOP_Lange_Voorhout_Den_Haag)

Waard, Jaap de & Ronald van Steden (2012). De opmars van de private veiligheidszorg: Een nationaal en internationaal perspectief. *Justitiële Verkenningen*, vol. 38, no. 8, december pp. 9-23.  
<http://wodc.nl/onderzoeksdatabase/jv201208-privatisering-en-publiek-private-samenwerking.aspx?cp=44&cs=6797>

WHO (2014, page 12). *Global status report on violence prevention 2014*. Geneva: World Health Organization.  
[http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/status\\_report/2014/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/status_report/2014/en/)

WODC, CBS, Raad voor de rechtspraak (2016). *Criminaliteit en rechtshandhaving; Ontwikkelingen en samenhangen*. Den Haag: Boom Criminologie. <https://www.wodc.nl/onderzoeksdatabase/2735-cenr-2015.aspx>