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Review Symposium

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The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice: Exploring the Lived Reality and Enduring Legacies of the 1980s Radical Right.
By Stephen Farrall and Emily Gray (Abingdon, Routledge, 2024, 252pp., open access)

Reviews by Bianca Bersani, Danny Dorling, Glen O’Hara,
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REVIEW ONE

The life course paradigm brought a focus on continuity and change in offending across the entire life span to criminology. Early research evolved to capture individual-level variation and the events, experiences and opportunities that functioned to spur change and alter behavioural trajectories. Though the notion that ‘lives change in a changing society’ (Elder *et al.* 1994: 11) is fundamental to the life course paradigm, the principle of historical time and place has received relatively scant empirical attention in criminology. This is largely due to the lofty data and analytic demands required for this sort of inquiry. One must have a long breadth of data to capture different moments in history and then have longitudinal data on individuals to model changing people in changing places. However, with the creative rethinking of data and the adoption of innovative methodologies, criminology is experiencing an upswell in research aimed at locating people in historical moments and investigating how history shapes the criminal offending trajectories of individuals. Clearly, when you are born matters, but why? Are the dimensions of the criminal career altered by changing age norms (Bersani and Doherty 2024), unstructured socializing (Baumer *et al.* 2021) or social change linked to legal system practices (Neil and Sampson 2021)?

In *The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice: Exploring the Lived Reality and Enduring Legacies of the 1980s Radical Right*, Farrall and Gray argue that much can be learned about variation in criminal careers by looking to the political context. Steeped in a deep historical and interdisciplinary analysis, *The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice* makes the case that the particular political ideology of the Thatcherite era, and the resultant macro-level economic and social policy reforms, are implicated in rising crime at the individual level and increasingly punitive system responses. Ideas have power, giving rise to consequential and radical policy reforms that fundamentally altered the social context in ways that affected the offending behaviour of individuals. In this way, crime and criminal justice system responses were outcomes of non-criminal justice-related political discourse and policy reform.

To empirically examine the impact of political ideas on the individual life course, Farrall and Gray leverage a multi-birth cohort approach, following individuals across key developmental

stages during different historical periods. Whereas one cohort of individuals from the National Child Development Study were born in 1958 and whose first decades of life were unaffected by Thatcherism, a second cohort from the British Cohort Study, born in 1970, grew up and reached their peak years of offending during the Thatcherism era. The extent to which offending differed across these youth speaks to the imprint of differing political ideologies on criminal careers. This type of methodological approach has echoes of Elder's classic work that observed and documented age-graded effects of the Great Depression on different birth cohorts of youth who experienced its associated deprivations at different ages.

As someone removed from the particularities of the UK context, my reflections on this contribution are from the perspective of a life course criminologist and how this thoughtful inquiry holds bearing for advancing scholarship in the field. There is a lot to like in this book and space constraints allow me to elaborate on just a few of the features that I find most interesting. But this limited discussion does not do justice to this contribution to life course scholarship nor to the impressive effort that this kind of theorizing and empirical inquiry demands.

CASCADING CONSEQUENCES

As Farrall and Gray describe, Thatcherism represented an amalgamation of neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideas with broad social and economic policy implications. The consequences of these policies were manifold, increasing inequality, unemployment and social polarization. *The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice* captures the nuanced ways that these policies function much like tossing a pebble into a pond where the singular event sets in motion a recurrent wave with long-term and diffuse impact. This framework is critical as it extends the concept of the interdependencies of lives to include the interdependencies that exist in macro-level contexts. Farrall and Gray challenge existing literature that they describe as having 'tended to "silo" policy domains... [neglecting to] consider the "knock-on" effects of policy changes in one arena for another policy arena' (p. 34). The Thatcher era set in motion a series of interlocking changes across social welfare, housing, education and employment domains that fundamentally altered the circumstances of individual life courses.

In doing so, the authors make the case for how changes in legislation across multiple policy areas have cumulative and cascading consequences for crime and the criminal justice system. Drawing on historical accounts, the authors meticulously describe how economic and housing restructuring led the way to changes in social welfare, education and health, which created stressors for individuals (i.e. unemployment, widening inequality, spatial concentration of crime, school disengagement). These 'everyday struggles' encouraged, changed and amplified the level and nature of crime. A by-product of the rise in crime was the growing public fear of crime and an increasingly punitive criminal justice environment aimed at cracking down on youthful offending and increasing the use of incarceration. Though the Thatcherism era paid nominal attention to crime and criminal justice policy, changes to adjacent policy arenas set the stage for significant crime and criminal legal system reactions.

MACRO- AND MICRO-LEVEL INTERDEPENDENCIES

One of the most impressive features of this book is the linking of processes occurring at the macro level (social and economic policies) to micro-level outcomes (criminal careers). Farrall and Gray comprehensively explain how radical policy change has spillover effects on the state, the criminal justice system and the individual. The recognition that individuals are embedded in particular social contexts is fundamental to the life course paradigm, but this type of inquiry has thus far largely been discussed in an abstract way. This book presents a conceptual model that explains how historical context and the wider social world shape individual outcomes, but then couples that with empirical inquiry to test these ideas.

Take, for example, the discussion of how the changes to welfare and housing policy trickle down to affect the outcomes of individuals. In brief, the late 1970s witnessed the undoing of social security and housing policies that had long functioned as social safety nets for individuals and families experiencing hardships. Through a series of legislative changes, increasing privatization led way to a polarization—spatial and social—between those who could purchase their homes and those remaining in rental housing. These reforms set in motion a domino effect whereby children of the social welfare reform generation (Cohort 2 or ‘Thatcher’s children’) inherited a social world with diminishing sources of social protections, placing them at a significantly greater risk of experiencing homelessness, unemployment and criminal justice contact compared with the earlier generation (Cohort 1). Because arrest begets arrest and subsequent criminal legal system contact, these policies are allied with the lengthening of criminal careers and the alteration of offending trajectories. This example also demonstrates how economic and social policy reforms have both immediate (social polarization) and distal (detrimental outcomes for the next generation) effects.

Though the bulk of the discussion in *The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice* is on the directional relationship demonstrating how the legacies of macro-level economic and social policies give rise to features occurring at the individual level, the authors also share, albeit briefly, how the policies of the Thatcher era did not arise in a vacuum but instead where an outgrowth of ideas and discourse decades prior. As [Ryder \(1965\)](#) argued, individuals and their collective contributions are the preamble to macro-social change. Societal transformation is fuelled by demographic metabolism—the death and life of new cohorts—and the ideas that arise and take hold by each birth cohort’s constituents. In this way, the book presents an argument that accounts for the iterative and reciprocal interaction between macro- and micro-levels.

LEGACIES

The concept of legacies forms the backdrop for thinking about the lingering imprint of the Thatcher era. Or, as Farrall and Gray define, ‘a trace *in* the present *of* the past’ (p. 35, emphasis in original). The concept of legacies spurs interesting theoretical and methodological questions for life course scholars. By their nature, legacies unfold over long periods of time, yet they hold consequences for individuals living in particular historical moments. Life course scholars have tended to theorize about relatively discrete events. Take for instance the work on the marriage effect. Though signing one’s name on the dotted line (getting married) may be a salient life event, its turning point potential is in the investment processes that it ignites that take time to unfold and mature (being married). Is the passing of legislation akin to this sort of process? In this way, do political eras and the legacies that they leave in their wake represent turning points that alter the trajectory of history? If so, how dramatic or radical does the macro-level change need to be to alter the life course at the individual level?

A related question concerns how we analytically identify the impact of macro-level changes that are gradual in nature, building over time, and whose effects are likely delayed or lagged. The effect of discrete events such as economic booms and busts, or time-limited epidemics may function similarly to turning points and may be analysed in ways that capture the effect of an event on an outcome. In contrast, the gradual and reverberant nature of shifts in political eras, or things like changing age norms or the long growth of mass incarceration, presents a challenge to the application of the turning point concept and traditional analytic tools.

A final point. Farrall and Gray make clear at the start that the model they present is not universally applicable and will not work for every country. The Thatcher era is unique in many respects, but her length of tenure in office sticks out as particularly distinctive. Perhaps this means that the stark and widespread impact of radical policy changes such as those documented in *The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice* necessitate prolonged oversight. Yet, I wonder if Farrall and Gray are overly

conservative with their caution about generalizability. It does not take too much of a stretch of the imagination to see how parallel radical reform efforts in places with markedly different political structures would have similar ramifications to those of the Thatcherism era. This begs the question of whether political eras that are shorter in duration but similarly radical in their nature of change have the capacity to have comparably reverberated effects and what this may mean for the current context witnessing the progression of radical ideology in varied countries across the world?

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REVIEW TWO

Why did crime rise in Britain in the 1980s? Was it rising economic hardship, rising greed? A bit of both and something else? Was it the adoption of the mantra that there is 'no such thing as society, just people and their families'? In which case—why not? Emily Gray and Stephen Farrall have been asking these questions for some time, as they say themselves, for a much longer period than the key decade in which so much appeared to change. And they ask questions about the questions. Why was it that the response to crime rising was different because of the perception of why it was rising? And, in turn, did that feedback and further fuel the rise?

The authors acknowledge that 'some see Thatcherism as being of limited impact' (32). But in many social studies, this era stands out as a sore thumb. It led to a new kind of politics in Britain emerging later, one epitomized by the Conservative Party becoming the most economically far-right of all political parties in all the rich and medium-income countries of the world (Figure 1).

The Conservative Party of Britain became unmoored from its social base, as the graphics which the Financial Times began to produce by the 2020s made clear (Figure 1). All this was seen as having been inspired by Thatcher. Every new Conservative leader played homage to her (as did Tony Blair and Keir Starmer). The politicians who came to power in 2010, and then ruled without the aid of the Liberals after 2015, were all Thatcher's children—teenagers when she was in power. And the shift that occurred at that time is very clear to see in the most important social indicator of all—the gap between people in terms of how much freedom they each had and—in effect—how they are respected, which is best measured by what they are allowed to live off—what inequalities are tolerated. That graph is shown in Figure 2—which deals with economic inequality in disposal incomes before and after housing costs are paid. It is very simple in what it depicts—and housing is something I want to focus on in what I have to say, because after the huge ramp-up of inequalities in the 1980s the two lines in Figure 2 are further apart.

Before Thatcher came to power the cost of housing yourself was a similar proportion of annual income for rich and poor alike. Because of this, the two lines in Figure 2 run almost

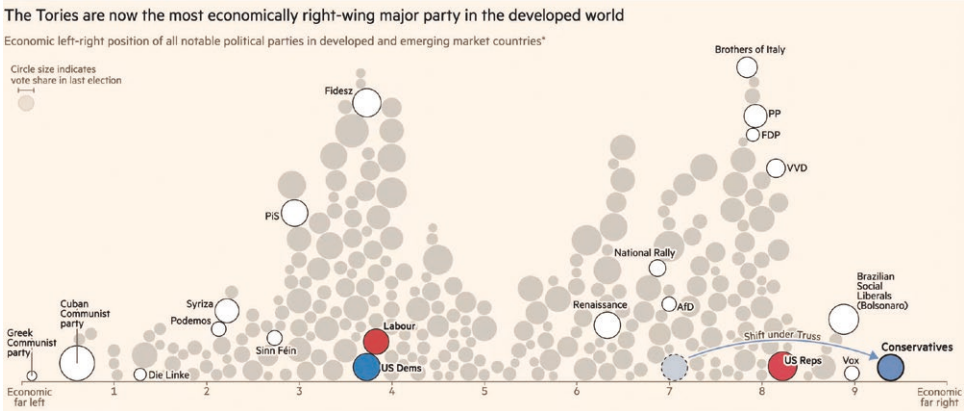


Fig. 1 Analysis of the conservatives that came after Thatcher and Major

Source: John Burn-Murdoch (2022). The Tories have become unmoored from the British people, *The Financial Times*, 30 September.

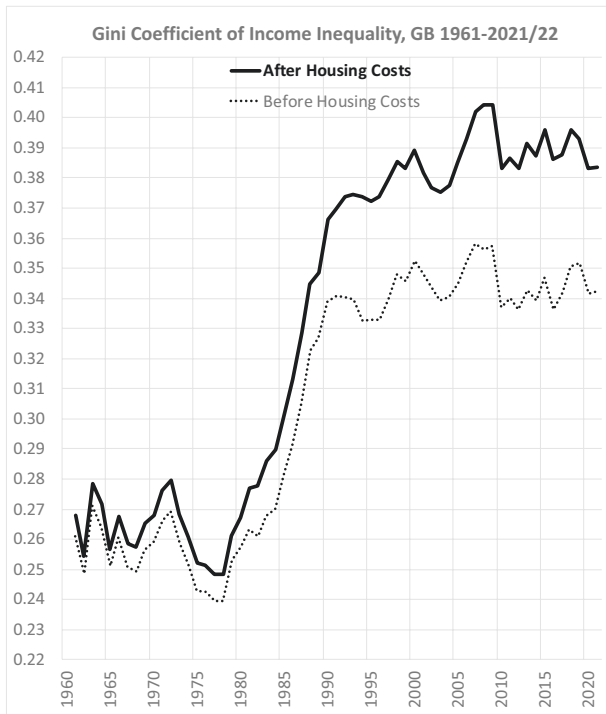


Fig. 2 The Rise of Income Inequalities Before and After Housing Costs 1961-2021/22

Data source: Institute for Fiscal Studies, Living Standards, Inequality and Poverty Spreadsheet: <https://ifs.org.uk/living-standards-poverty-and-inequality-uk>

along the same line prior to 1979. After then they begin to diverge. The cost of housing themselves became higher and higher for people who were poorer as rent regulation was abolished by Thatcher and council housing was sold off without replacement. The poor had to increasingly turn to the tiny but growing private sector. By the early 1990s, economic inequalities after

housing costs were much higher than before housing costs. Housing had not become cheaper for the best-off, other than those who owned outright; but it was much more expensive every month and year for the poorest; taking up a higher and high proportion of their income, and income which was relatively lower compared to the national average each year.

Emily Gray and Stephen Farrall chart the changes in housing policy from the 1980 Housing Act through to various increases in means-testing and the reduction of rights, including destroying almost all British rent regulation, which coincided with an increase in the importance of being on means-tested benefited in 1981 at age 23 being associated with an increased chance of 'adulthood contact with the criminal justice system' (77) as compared to an earlier birth cohort. Initially unemployment 'was not a predictor of criminal justice engagement', but it was in 1996 for those aged 26 (78). Poorer households used to be burgled less than richer ones in the United States in the 1970s (we do not have the same data for the United Kingdom). However, by the 1980s, and especially in the late 1980s people in social rented accommodation were 1.7 times, initially, to 2.4 times, eventually more likely to be burgled at home as compared to those who owned their home or who had a mortgage. Making life harder in poorer areas increased the chance of burglaries in those areas.

Increasing the cost of housing also increased the chances of homelessness, and rising homelessness was partly associated with some of the rise in crime (87). The feedback loops can look complex (91), but they are also logical. Finding it hard to start a family, or otherwise settle down because you could not afford a home because Thatcher's policy was to allow the market to increase the price of housing for those who were poorer meant that '...the delayed transition to adulthood resulted in an increasing number of young people moving into or being "held" in aversive, crime-prone situations and lifestyles, such as "sofa surfing," working and claiming benefits, or working in the "cash" economy ...' (p. 91). That description carries on to describe a feedback loop that strengthens over time and into particular places and social groups in this era. So, how does this end? It certainly is not over.

Figure 3 shows how unusual the United Kingdom remains. Among all the countries shown in that figure, it has the highest rates of inequality bar, occasionally Bulgaria. That inequality level and the huge amount of poverty associated with it is almost entirely due to the rising inequalities of the 1980s and the fact that they were never reversed, not even slightly in the 34 years after 1990. Yes, there were some small changes of tact with the new government of 1997, and that of 2010, but those slight changes in direction were too small to show up in Figure 2, and the crime, housing, welfare and many other regimes that had become entrenched by 1990 remain what is considered normal for the UK today.

This, however, does not mean that nothing changes. For a start detailed age-cohort-period analysis shows that the group that did best out of Thatcherism, the 'golden cohort' born between 1925 and 1934 did worse of all in their very old age. Margaret Thatcher herself was a member of this cohort, born on 13 October 1925. Her age cohort saw larger improvements in their health and well-being than that which came both before and a faster improvement than that after, until around the time she died in 2013. In the years around her own death, and through to the start of the pandemic that began in Britain in early 2020, all of that advantage of that cohort was lost and they suffered unprecedented rises in poor health associated with austerity and especial cuts to adult social services for the very elderly (Hiam and Dorling 2024).

At the very same time as Thatcher's contemporaries began to die far more quickly than older people had died for some time, especially the affluent who used to live longer, their great grandchildren began to show signs of being stunted in height. This was a trend that began for those born around 2005 (NCD Risk Factor Collaboration 2023).¹ It will be for future researchers to

1 Data: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-023-05772-8#MOESM1> (accessed 6/2024).

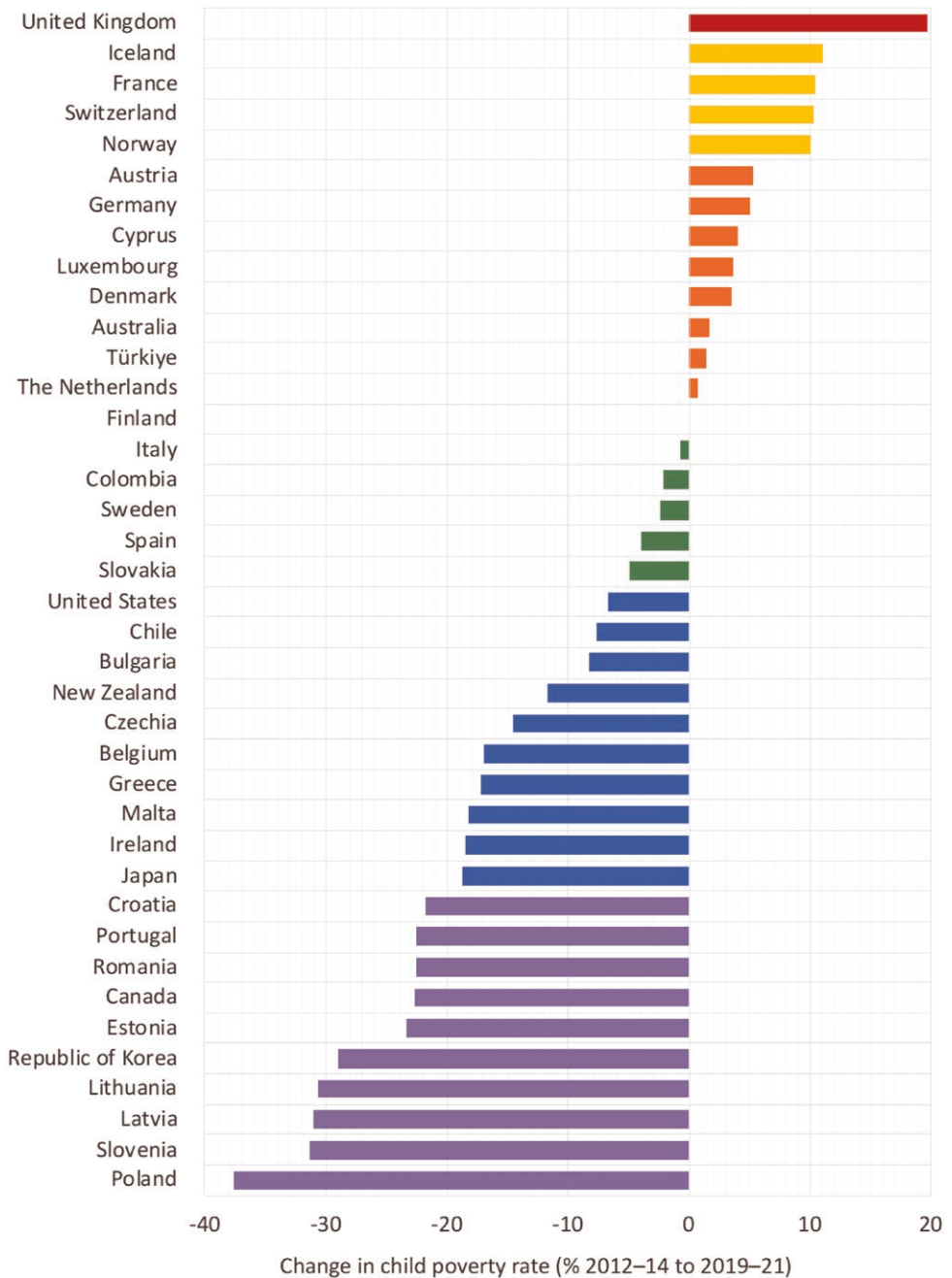


Fig. 3 The rise in child poverty in all counties assessed by UNICEF from 2012 to 2021

Source: UNICEF Innocenti—Global Office of Research and Foresight, Innocenti Report Card 18: <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/child-poverty-midst-wealth> (accessed 10/2024).

pull together and try to understand these new trends—rising mortality among the very old not appearing to come to an end, a stalling of progress in health in the young—possibly the first for over a century, and the stunting of the grandchildren of Thatcher’s children and rising mortality rates for all children, but especially for those aged 1–4 and the very poor ([National Child Mortality Database 2023](#)).

The most recent rise in child mortality that has been reported for England is not associated with the ending of the worse of the pandemic because that would not be expected to result in rises in the age group 1–4; the same age group that have been becoming stunted and smaller in height. Individual news stories tell of tragedy, such as of a 2-year-old boy who starved to death in December 2023 or January 2024 next to the body of his dead father ([BBC News 2024](#)). The same newspaper that broke that story tried, 2 days later, to blame the death on social services ([The Sun 2024](#)). But, of course, what social services are available and how much they are needed depended on a legacy that stretches right back to what happened in the 1980s.

What happens next could be a break in the change in trend established in the 1980s, or it could be something new, and worse. Cohort analysis is generally used to look backwards, but it might now make sense, with this much evidence collected in this new book, to now look forwards. *The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice* is about much more than its title implies. It uses techniques developed first in studies of health to examine age-cohort-period effects using many large datasets, including synthetic cohorts. It is analytically sophisticated and draws also on the huge literature that has emerged since the 1980s to examine the enduring legacies of the far-right that took power in Britain then. I was a teenager in those years. My memories include the National Front, Britain’s fascist party, shrinking in size because—if you wanted black people to be ‘sent home to Africa’ you knew that the Tories, after 1979, might do this. However, it was not until 2024, 45 years later that the Rwanda Act was passed in a form that might make it feasible to deport a tiny number of desperate asylum seekers. It was Margaret Thatcher who first talked of ‘swamping’. That is just one example of the enduring legacy of her party’s transformation under her leadership. A particular kind of racism was partly legitimized (although most people know this is a racist policy). The book also touches on truancy, education, de-industrialization and much more. In all these areas, we are still seeing the legacy of the 1980s play out, but now in accelerated form. The United Kingdom has more children not at school and with location unknown than anywhere else on the continent of Europe. The British school system is an uncanny mess of academy chain corruption, private school social segregation and collapsing school roofs on a scale that again is not seen anywhere else in Europe. And, as I analysed in detail for the work I did for the book ‘Shattered Nation’ ([Dorling 2023](#)), there was as much if not more de-industrialization in the period 1999–2019, as there was between 1979 and 1999.²

One state in all of Europe had to have the worse political, economic, social, education, health, imprisonment and housing records across all of the continent. It need not have been the same state that ranked lowest on all these counts—but it was. The blame cannot be laid solely at Mrs Thatcher’s feet. The men who propelled her government to power are equally to blame, as were those who failed to unite the opposition at the time and those who did not fight back later but acquiesced to the mantra of there is no alternative. British history became a sad, even pitiful, story. This book helps to document the decline because one day we will have to accept what so many got so wrong.

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REVIEW THREE

This is a very wide-ranging and ambitious book on the legacies of crime and changing policies towards it in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Throughout it is erudite but accessible, opinionated yet judicious, focussed but balanced. It is all the more impressive because the amount of prior knowledge required before picking up the book is perhaps less than other volumes in this field: the first section of the book covers the way in which Criminology as a discipline has both grown and perhaps exploded into many fruitful research agendas and perhaps even deeper meanings. Stephen Farrall and Emily Gray argue persuasively and thoroughly, how these many agendas have their roots in social science and social policy investigations in the later 1960s and 1970s, before becoming even more important after the 1990s and the rise of a more punitive state—at least in the Anglo-American world that is the focus of their book.

The three approaches that they begin with—'Parliamentary Narrativism', 'Sociological and Political Science Narrativism' and 'Macro-Economic Perspectives' are all instantly recognizable and worthy of analysis on their own terms, though they are subject to rigorous and justified criticism here. Approaches that focus on law-making are very centralizing and in the UK context Westminster-centric. Ideas from political science allow any number of confusing variables to become key parts of the system, without much sense of why different authors treat them that way, as a series of figures laying out the causative chain makes clear. Economists may appeal to deeply rooted processes such as the reorganization of work or the rise (and fall) of structural unemployment, but the roles of social policy and individual agency are unclear at best. The tone of sceptical engagement is exactly the right one.

On the other hand, it may be questioned whether this three-part schema is anything more than a convenient set of black boxes. Even allowing for the present author's own bias towards the first two approaches, the overlaps and similarities between those constellations might be more prevalent and influential than that painted here. They are different, especially given the 'scales of magnitude' Farrall and Gray refer to them working at, but they do have things in common. All these ideas work at the interface between social and economic policy, political outlooks, moral ideas, popular opinion, social change, urbanity, rurality and the like.

These overlaps are implicitly accepted in the text, especially where the different but shared failings of each approach are analysed together in Chapter 1, but perhaps never quite summarized for the reader. Many authors focussing at the 'top' level, or on the supposed 'base' of economics, leave collective *politics* and *mobilisation* out of account, for instance. Farrall and Gray are therefore able to treat as one of the first and third types of analysis in their account. But we

never quite get the sense of the literature as involving fuzzy continuity, even confusion, as well as contrast.

The authors are however sceptical, and rightly so, about authors who throw around words such as 'neoliberalism' and 'late modernity' with abandon, without ever quite applying covering laws to those concepts as explanatory variables. Individuals disappear when you do that. So does the electorate, evoked as a kind of stage army with entrenched opinion. This book is a good counterblast to such approaches. Instead, Farrall and Gray propose a more synoptic model, which focuses on *specific* initiatives and effects, starting with general ideas before moving forward to political discourses, through to the crime and justice system which is then affected in its turn by feedback from changes in actual crime (figure 1.14, 27).

Legacies of different policy agendas are, for them, formed at many different levels—legislative, ideational, as policies, as effects—and remain stronger or weaker among different groups. The effect of crime, justice and policing on different birth cohorts across their life spans sheds as much light on governments' impact on real people as it does on systems. Then, for Farrall and Gray, these discourses and effects affect the preferences of those cohorts later on: these are the main legacies that are the focus of this book (figures 2.1 and 2.2, 36, 45). Again, a coherent strategy is offered for trying to see policy upheaval and social change in the same frame, difficult as that remains. The effects of the welfare state's restructuring on people born in either 1958 or 1970 are shown to be complex and multi-faceted. Men remained more likely to commit crimes throughout, and both groups were drawn into the criminal justice at similar rates during economic and social 'shock therapy' in the early 1980s, while the homeless were more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system in the later cohort—perhaps reflecting the experiences of a group who emerged into adulthood as the rough sleeping crisis reached its height (tables 4.1 and 4.2, 74–77). Similarly, the relationship between being alienated from school, truancy and crime was much stronger for the latter group than the former (figure 5.6, 110).

In this way, the book seems to offer a satisfying and convincing account of how crime and punishment policy is actually made, unmade and remade, taking into account structures, processes, actions and ideas (to read the authors' three-part typology backwards). The sketch of Thatcherite politics offered might sometimes be seen as insufficiently sensitive to nuance, though the way in which it is constructed as a fusion of conservative and liberal ideas is welcome after the usual appeals to 'neoliberalism' alone. That helps to explain big-state authoritarianism on individual rights, or policing, at the same time as the state privatized most of its economic functions at least. On the other hand, there is still perhaps an over-emphasis here on the liberalism part of the mix. It was not, perhaps, that the market *always* 'knew best', but that individual free choice would *usually* be the right goal to pursue outside of certain core state services. Conservatives' long-established emphasis on rules, processes and standards might make the apparently rights-enhancing elements of the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act rather less of a puzzling delay in harshness than it seems here (57).

That said, the limits on Thatcher's power, Conservative in-fighting, the Right's 'issue-hopping', and the need to address in its view, economics first, are all covered well here. The authors wisely avoid the pitfall of taking Thatcher always at her word on crime. Still, not every public policy covered perhaps played the role assigned to it here. The welfare state was always very parsimonious and threadbare, rather than just being subject to means-testing and cutbacks when costs rose. The multiple breakpoints in social policy between the late 1960s and the early 1980s might be just as notable as those in the early- to mid-1980s, though the former is rather out of the scope of the generational analysis here.

Elsewhere, the idea that successive Westminster governments since Michael Howard became Home Secretary in 1993 have been driven by vote chasing and focus grouping is at least

questionable. Many others have taken this view, from within the ‘narrativist’ approaches Farrall and Gray analyse and which take different in-depth looks at the development of policy—as this book makes very clear. Although never naïve about the mix of policies which in fact characterize the 1980s (‘tender’ as well as ‘tough’, as David Owen and the Social Democratic Party of the time would have had it), Chapter 6 makes very clear that Farrall and Gray believe that the constant evocation and fear of crime that was a hallmark of those years had a longer-term effect. This was, of course, one reason behind New Labour’s punitive rhetoric in the mid-1990s, as the public shifted towards the traditional Right under the pressure of both rising crime and a great deal more talk about how that crime should be tackled. *The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice* shows conclusively that as the years went by, people growing up under those prevailing ideas became more punitive (table 6.3, 137). All the more reason, perhaps, why one would be ‘tough on crime’ as well as ‘tough on the causes of crime’.

That emphasis on public opinion undoubtedly tells us some of the story, but not all of it. Labour in power after 1997 did blame and imprison more, but also intervened decisively on rough sleeping, drug rehabilitation, child protection and probation. The extent to which the public in the end forces politicians into an authoritarian shape in their own image is very complicated indeed, and politicians have agency too. This counter-argument perhaps threatens, but still does not break, a key link in the argumentative chain: the idea that governments were reacting to the change in views during the years examined in this book. There is clearly a vast amount of room for debate on the extent to which political leaders are subject to, or insulated from, public pressure—which is never one-dimensional or lacking in countervailing trends anyway.

This book is, in the end, a very welcome one, for it sets theory, evidence and implications alongside each other within the same covers. It exposes some of the ‘hidden wiring’ of each approach to crime by comparing them all with others. It is crystal clear, comprehensive but at the same time thoughtful. The tone throughout is one of questioning, testing ideas and suggesting themes for inquiry: the book itself reads as far less authoritarian than most of its subject matter. For pointing us towards the life courses of crime over the long run, and at new and innovative ways of thinking about and testing out the links between social change, crime and policy, Farrall and Gray should be thanked indeed.

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REVIEW FOUR

The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice: Exploring the Lived Reality and Enduring Legacies of the 1980’s Radical Right takes on the role of right-wing political ideas on crime, the criminal justice system and attitudes towards punishment in Britain. Focussing largely on Thatcherism and the 1980s New Right, they powerfully articulate how policies shape crime, its control through the criminal justice system and views of punishment. By the end, we have a clearer understanding of how the political aims of the Thatcher government, through social and economic policies, affected individual Britons growing up in the 1980s as they draw upon the life course perspective, and the development and implementation of key policies that followed over four decades. Their book is rich in data, drawing on two cohort studies, and theoretical insights. Let us highlight what we believe are the foundational qualities of this unique book.

There are two aspects of this book—the time frame of interest and the influences of the political right on crime and justice—that, when combined, advance an important contribution to research. In fact, the specific period of history for the book is as relevant as its ability to contribute to ongoing debates about crime and punishment. Focussing on the late-1970s through

the 2000s, tremendous shifts and changes in crime rates were well established, including the largest crime drop in US history and elsewhere. While they spotlight Britain, they acknowledge similar patterns were happening in places such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand. By focussing on this specific period in history, we get a look at the location and patterns in crime, along with changing attitudes. That, along with the emergence of life course or development criminology, makes this particular period one of the most important and carefully debated in the field. Equally relevant, the authors focus on the role of policies and political ideologies, which have too long been ignored in criminology. While the study of crime generally draws on economic-based arguments, although important, the apex of the authors' attention is on the political process. In so doing, Farrall and Gray advance one of the more critical assessments found throughout the book—they argue that previous approaches to the study of politics and crime (such as parliamentary narrativism, sociological and political science-based narrativism and macro-economic perspectives) possess many pitfalls, such as ignoring the impact of 'specific political administrations' and other subtle differences across administrations by offering 'very macro-level analyses' (p. 22). Acknowledging such limitations required the authors to propose a new model (Chapter 1, figure 1.14 specifically). After thoroughly advancing this new conceptual framing, what follows in each chapter is a deeper dive into the major connections and linkages outlined by their model. This can be easily illustrated in two different chapters.

In Chapter 4, *Social Welfare, Housing Policies, and Changes in the Social Location of Crime*, Farrall and Gray aptly illustrate the ideology of Thatcher's governments. A decade-long movement away from the belief that the state is responsible for the well-being of all its citizens, characterized by the Beveridge Report (1942), towards the idea that social welfare causes a spread of laziness, dependency and condones criminal behaviour. Combining changing attitudes with policies and generational surveys creates a unique picture of what living within the NewRight period of the 1980s and 1990s meant to the young adults of that time. Along the way, they highlight the breakdown of housing policies, welfare changes and changing levels of contact with police, as well as harsher sentencing. Farrall and Gray conclude that young adults, particularly the BCS70 cohort, experienced higher rates of homelessness, instability and criminality during their young adulthood. Thatcherite policies were meant to decrease the role of the welfare state in the United Kingdom, and to make private market incentives of profit solve the housing and employment issues of the lower economic class. This shifted how the state perceived itself, instead of a calm harbour, the state became an authoritarian and punitive force. Throughout their thorough quantitative analysis, we gain a better understanding of the factors that impacted the lives of the study cohorts, particularly evidence of how the political attitudes of Thatcherism enhanced and contextualized this narrative. This included the so-called 'right to buy' legislation that reduced the amount of council housing available as requirements to access social welfare increased (see pages 68–70 for details).

Chapter 6, *What Does Radical Social and Economic Change Do to Popular Opinions on Crime?*, turns our attention to popular views of crime among Britons, and how attitudes towards punishment were affected by the social and economic changes during the Thatcherite era. With the shift towards 'tough on crime', crime and need became twin pillars of moral failing under this policy. To quote Tony Blair, 'We cannot exist in a moral vacuum. If we do not learn and then teach the value of what is right and wrong, then the result is simply more chaos which engulfs us all' (Farrall and Gray 2024: 138). However, the weight of these policy changes did not fall equally on the shoulders of all in the United Kingdom. Farrall and Gray's use of cohort studies aptly illustrates the unequal impact of policies on those born around and after 1970. For these youth, policies resulted in increased homelessness and contact with the criminal justice system. Just as Thatcherite policies changed the role of the state, it is impossible to detach Thatcher's policies from the belief that the Beveridge Report had failed the UK populace. The welfare state had grown too large and become too much of a limitation on the ability of capitalism to prosper

in the United Kingdom. The authors wisely demonstrate how changing the political attitudes of the dominant party is crucial to understanding the role of welfare and the criminal justice systems present in 'Thatcher's Britain'. For example, they document how criminal justice terms take on political framing, such as 'anti-social', whereby these terms have an elastic and more nebulous political connotation when used in official policy and political discourse.

These two chapters lay out the thought-provoking and at times argumentative style that Farrall and Gray use throughout the book. Our understanding of social and policy trends is heightened by the evidence presented via the two cohort studies, where these two studies detail the impact of Thatcher's policies, and its larger legacy, on the criminal activities and careers of individuals. We gain an excellent view of the economic and political realities of this particular period of time as well. It is no surprise the book so deeply covers how key areas of policy and practice intersect to impact criminal careers, attitudes towards punishment and larger crime trends given the considerable body of empirical work produced by Farrall and Gray on these topics. What they offer in the book, which is much more difficult to fully articulated in peer-review articles, is the larger framework that brings these critical issues together in a comprehensive and systematic way. That is, this book offers a detailed look, both theoretically and empirically, at how Thatcherism and the 1980s New Right fit with the life course perspective, and later to significant policy changes in economics, housing and the criminal justice system throughout the United Kingdom. The utilization of political policies and actions is not only reflected in the criminal justice system, but also in wider societal attitudes towards crime and punishment. The combination of Thatcherite policy with the economic and social realities of this period creates an excellent picture of the immediate and long-term effects of the change in attitudes present in the United Kingdom. In sum, the path taken by Farrall and Gray in this book, specifically the investigation of political processes, through both political administrations, their policies and political ideologies, is long overdue in the study of crime and punishment. As we reflect upon the political climate in both the United States and the United Kingdom, along with the administrations and policies of the last decade or so, we are left questioning why the politics of crime and justice have not received more attention in criminology as a field. Farrall and Gray not only challenge us to take on these connections but also provide a path forward when doing so.

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REVIEW FIVE

The Politics of Crime, Punishment, and Justice is an ambitious book. Farrall and Gray aim to reorient criminological research towards a more holistic understanding of the relationship between politics, crime and punishment. Specifically, they explore how political values about society and the economy (Thatcherism and the New Right) led to specific policies (erosion of state support for welfare, housing and labour), that generated specific political behaviour (increased criminal offending), leading to a more punitive public and more punishment in the criminal legal system. This is a tall order, but a very worthy intervention.

The book's broad literature review synthesizes the vast and sprawling scholarship on the politics of crime and punishment. I could quibble with some of the summaries, but these would be friendly amendments. In broad terms, I think Farrall and Gray get the main theoretical frameworks right and, in doing so, they illustrate major gaps in the literature. Few scholars have explored how concrete, time-bound yet dramatic shifts in socio-economic values and subsequent policymaking shape both crime and punitiveness over time. Drawing on the life course approach, the book uses a clever set of cohort studies to trace the long-term effects of Thatcherism on criminal behaviour, punitive policies and public attitudes.

One of the most interesting dimensions of the book is the authors' efforts to show that the transformation of British crime politics is, in fact, rooted in Thatcherism, even though, by their own account and that of others, the Thatcher government was not particularly interested in crime policy. In the United States, a similar anti-statist ideology went in two somewhat contradictory policy directions, to both deep cuts in social spending, as well as massive increases in police and prisons. At least the New Right was more ideologically consistent. Thatcherism had the economy and welfare systems in her sights and criminal justice was virtually a non-agenda item. However, Farrall and Gray argue that the legacies of Thatcher's economic and social policies were three-fold: the policies themselves led to an increase in criminal behaviour; subsequent governments, including John Major and later Tony Blair and New Labour, embraced some of the individualistic and worthiness frameworks from the Thatcher era; and that both of these contributed to a hardening of public attitudes towards crime and a growing set of punitive crime policy reforms. This effort to both *theorize and track* the long-term criminological effects of major changes in economic and social policy domains across governments is a major contribution to the literature.

I also appreciate the way Farrall and Gray sought to assess the range of criminal justice policies over this roughly 20-year period (table of punitiveness, 165). The concept of punitiveness is under-theorized in the literature and, while Farrall and Gray do not attempt a conceptual analysis *per se*, they do offer a useful framework for analysing changes to punitiveness over time. They categorize both decreases and increases in punitive policies, as well as the rise of situational crime prevention. The near absence of decreases in punitiveness after the Thatcher government stands in stark contrast to the uptick in punitive policies over time. By my count, the Thatcher years resulted in a near-even split between increasing (eight) and decreasing (seven) punitive policies. Subsequent years, by contrast, had just two policies reducing punitiveness and 22 increasing it. This is a straightforward yet sobering depiction of the vast changes in criminal justice over several decades. I did sometimes wonder if the models are asking too much of the data, but I will leave it to others to determine how well the survey and other data match the complex causal stories the authors want to explore. Regardless of whether each of their empirical findings is justified, Farrall and Gray's framework is a dynamic model for assessing the effects of policy change over time that subsequent scholarship will need to reckon with.

Any project of this scope is likely to provoke as many questions as it aims to answer. For me, several stand out. First, one of the challenges of an ambitious project is that it invites the reader to wonder whether there are even bigger causal forces operating. Though the authors want to examine the specific policies that emerged from Thatcherism, they also want to situate Thatcherism in the larger context of New Right economic and social transformations that were not unique to Britain (as the authors duly note in Chapter 2). It is easy to attribute these wider changes to a 'group of economists, which were translated into a political movement' (p.30), but the rise of Thatcherism is significantly more complex. It's true that the book aims to explain the effects of Thatcherism, not its cause, but in glossing over the wider global changes that were taking place, Farrall and Gray risk over-stating the impact of Thatcherism on both crime and punitiveness. The 1980s marked the consolidation of a set of neo-liberal ideologies that had been percolating since at least the early post-war years, if not earlier (Gerstle 2022). I appreciate the authors' efforts to assign blame—as the authors note in their introduction, the agents of criminal justice policy transformation are often an afterthought in many analyses. But the burden is high for demonstrating that changes of interest were primarily a function of Thatcherism, not broader global transformations and/or evolving policy preferences on the part of politically engaged groups. The book's findings, in other words, attribute a lot to Thatcherism at a time when a dramatically shifting global political economy was emerging on a larger scale.

Second, though the authors want to explain the role of ideas and ideology on both institutional and policy change as well as on individual behaviour, the bulk of the analysis uses

standard regression models of survey data, which are not well suited to teasing out the role of ideas in institutional change over time. To be fair, the authors do an excellent job of illustrating the path dependence of institutional decision-making on criminal justice that led the Thatcher government to delve only modestly into that policy domain. But understanding the impact of specific ideas on a range of political institutions, not to mention broader societal norms and attitudes requires a lengthy archival process tracing that is largely absent from the book. I am not trying to suggest that the authors should have written a different book, but to simply note that, in my view, some of these claims would require a different epistemological approach.

Finally, I am broadly persuaded that Thatcher's policies had some impact on criminal behaviour, particularly in relation to the specific communities that were affected by the transformation of housing, welfare, industrial relations and so on. That the uptick in criminal offending would have put some pressure on subsequent governments to produce more punitive policy reforms is also compelling and consistent with work by myself and others about the role of public concern about crime on actual crime policies (Enns 2016). I am less convinced that growing punitiveness about the appropriate legal consequences for crime was a result of generational political socialization stemming from Thatcherism. Violent crime in Britain was on the rise at least 10 years before Thatcher became Prime Minister, as it was in many post-war Western nations. It is not clear whether the effects on public attitudes that Farrall and Gray find are due to marginal changes in crime generally, the long and steady rise of violence, or other national and global changes. Though neither political party in Britain seemed particularly interested in addressing rising violence through policy reforms until the late 1980s, my work does show that Conservatives consistently included more law-and-order language in their party manifestos than Labour from as early as 1964. The transformation of Labour to a more law and order set of policies was not simply a response to the effects of Thatcherism but to a long neglect of rising criminal victimization, including among the party's own constituents. Farrall and Gray argue for a generational attitudinal change owing to political socialization and that New Labour's new criminal and civil interventions took place 'despite the evidence that crime was falling and had been since the mid-1990s' (130). But this overlooks the fact that homicide rates were three times as high as they had been a generation earlier and that criminal offending had been steadily rising for decades. Perhaps the effects of Thatcherism were the final straw, but I'm not sold on the idea that Thatcherism was the primary cause.

The point is not that my interpretation is correct, but simply that there are other possible causal stories here for changing public views. The authors do not generally disaggregate types of crime in their models, which is unfortunate because violent crime is an important driving force of public concern about criminal offending. That the book has much to praise yet also draws challenges is illustrative of its magnitude. I appreciate Farrall and Gray's long hard work on this project and I expect that it will have its own transformative effect, forcing those of us who care about the political dynamics of crime and punishment to think more systematically and holistically about the relationship between ideas, policy, crime and criminal justice.

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AUTHORS' RESPONSE

Trans-disciplinarity

These reviews, from experts across various social science disciplines indicate that our book resonates with multiple audiences, and we are gratified to see it recognized as filling a significant gap in their respective fields. We have sought, as Bianca Bersani acknowledged, to unveil the interdependencies between people, places and politics and to consider how crime is situated within these moving parts. With this publication we intended—and the reviews indicate that we have been able to—answer some important questions about how, exactly, policies play out in the lives of individuals and across the country. Notably, both of us authors might be considered members of the ‘Thatcher’s children’ generation, having spent our formative years in the 1980s, but as our book demonstrates, ‘Thatcher’s children’ are not a homogenous group. In fact, one might allude to both favourite and forgotten children (or ‘winners’ as well as ‘losers’) of this time.

Disrupting criminal careers research

What we have tried to do in *The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice* is to try to locate individual-level offending careers in a wider, structural context; a structural context which was itself altered by emergent and radical political and economic ideologies (the New Right). In part, and perhaps controversially, we were attempting to unshackle the study of criminal careers (and by implication, research on the onset, maintenance and cessation of offending) from rampant individualism.³

Since the 1950s and 1960s when many of the now-famous criminal careers studies commenced, there developed a style of explanations of onset, etc. which highlighted the importance of individual choices and the influence of familial and (more recently) community processes. These, as we have argued elsewhere (Farrall 2021), had research designs that now appear to be if not flawed, then containing key deficiencies. One of the most serious of these deficiencies was that in almost every case, those recruited into longitudinal criminal careers studies lived in one city or one area of a city. While defensible in terms of cost and ease of fieldwork, this had the result of producing studies in which all the respondents shared the same micro and macro environments. If the national economy faltered or started to produce outcomes that were spatially structured, then studies with the above designs would not be able to capture regional variations. In the 1950s and 1960s, the possibility of emerging regional inequalities brought on by social and economic policies probably never entered anyone’s minds, since it would have appeared to be so unlikely to ever occur. After all, most major institutions (schools, housing, families and employers) were part of a series of national projects associated with modernity and improvements in national social and economic circumstances.

All of that, however, was called into question in the 1970s and 1980s—and arguably ever since. Regional variations in the underlying economic base of the United Kingdom were brought into sharp focus by a series of social and economic policies that produced sudden shocks to the employment, welfare, schooling and housing systems. Some of these policies created a rise in crime, while others helped to concentrate it in particular communities. Communities which then became referred to as ‘sink estates’ or ‘problem areas’. And so, the need for a criminology that had the research tools to recognize and respond to these emerged.

However, criminal careers researchers did not have access to nationally representative, longitudinal studies to any degree. Indeed, to complete our project, we have needed to look beyond studies such as the Cambridge or Peterborough or latterly the Edinburgh studies (as good as

3 An individualism, we ought to note, which infected social and criminological theorizing also. During the 1980s and into the early 1990s rational choice theories suddenly became all the rage and were promoted as explanations for criminal decision-making and desistance from crime among other things (Cornish and Clarke 1986).

these are) and employ data collected under the auspices of more generic research projects such as the National Child Development and 1970 Birth Cohort studies—since, being national-level samples, these were able to help us document the regional and community-level economic and social inequalities unleashed by Thatcherism.

In this respect, we see *The Politics of Crime, Punishment and Justice* as being a disruptive influence in terms of criminal career thinking and scholarship. We are not interested in identifying which types of individuals or their families or communities are most strongly associated with offending. Such attempts, as Pat Carlen and her colleagues (1992) pointed out several years ago, are simply attempts to further pathologize those who had lost most during the 1980s and the decades since. These are not, we contend, ‘wicked’, ‘feckless’, ‘lazy’ or ‘bad’ people, but rather people who have, in some cases by dint of the temporally and spatially mediated birth lottery, been born in the ‘wrong’ places at the ‘wrong’ time. As we note in Chapter 9, we have explored how citizens who experienced a variety of *ordinary struggles* with housing, school and employment found themselves increasingly excluded and isolated from multiple social protections. Our analysis of temporal variations (year of birth: 1958 or 1970) and spatial differences (former-industrial heartlands versus less downtrodden areas) highlights how government actions and policies create and perpetuate conditions that trap ‘ordinary’ men and women in various adverse and unethical situations, including crime.

Forwards as well as backwards

Danny Dorling cogently noted that multi-cohort studies, such as ours, have the theoretical and empirical power to look forwards as well as backwards. Certainly, research such as this can help us acknowledge how the past stretches into the future. We think this point also highlights that while although our contribution focusses on the particularity of Thatcherism in the 1980s and 1990s, its relevance is not interned in that period. We hope the work accentuates the generality of holding politics and policies close when trying to understand patterns in crime and justice. Primary debates on the manner with which social policies ‘trickle down’ into the lives of citizens remain important for researchers to incorporate in future work. These include considerations of realistic timescales appropriate to long-term political periodization, concern of the secondary impact of social policies on future generations, as well as a commitment to understand how social policies might entangle some people into the criminal justice system—which as our work suggests is possible to demonstrate empirically.

Researching integrative relationships

Evidently, scholars in criminology are increasingly turning to analytic methods that afford a greater insight into the dynamics of crime (see Heimer 2019; McVie *et al.* 2020; Neil and Sampson 2021). Relational paradigms shift the focus to longer-term processes, transitions and other ordered developments. In the United Kingdom, we are fortunate to have access to high-quality birth cohorts and repeated national survey data, as well as new techniques and software for maximizing its potential. Our book has presented a hybrid framework that has sought to utilize several different approaches to exploring the connections between citizens and the socio-political world. This kind of methodology may be adept at identifying particular insights (such as the United Kingdom in the 1980s), but also identifies significant ‘common threads’, *per se*—the relational structure of crime.

We would like to close by thanking the reviewers for devoting their time to reading, thinking about and reviewing our book, and for the additional insights which they have afforded us through their critique. They have each given us further food for thought which we will continue to digest and appraise as we continue to explore long-term trends in crime and punishment.

Stephen Farrall and Emily Gray

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