

**University of Chicago
Winter Quarter 2024**

CRIME PREVENTION (PPHA 37103)

Instructor:

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Teaching Assistants:

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Class meetings:

Friday 9:00-11:50am
Keller Center Room 2112

Course Objectives:

The goals of this course are to introduce students to some key concepts in crime policy and help develop their policy analysis skills, including the ability to frame problems and policy alternatives, think critically about empirical evidence, use cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis to compare policy alternatives, and write effective policy memos. The course seeks to develop these skills by considering the relative efficacy of different policy approaches to controlling crime and reducing the harms of the criminal justice system. While the policy choices society makes on these questions will inevitably involve a range of legal, normative, political and ethical considerations, the focus in this class will be mostly on answering what economists term ‘positive’ (that is, scientifically testable empirical) questions about the consequences of different policies.

Course Requirements:

Students are required to:

- Carefully read all of the assigned papers
- Attend and participate in class discussions
- Write four policy memos during the course of the quarter
- Complete a final take-home exam

The first meeting will discuss the key objectives of the class, provide background on how to think like a policy analyst, how to read an empirical paper, and how to write a policy memo.

***All students* are then required to write a memo for the second class meeting.** The memos themselves should be no longer than two double-spaced pages (one-inch margins all around, 12 point font), and

should be written in plain English without jargon for a client (decision maker) who should be assumed not to know much social science.

These memos will be graded on the following criteria:

- *Critical evaluation of the conceptual claims being made on both sides of some policy question or debate, and critical evaluation of the empirical evidence that is available.* While every policy memo will make a recommendation, arguably the most important contribution of each memo is to highlight for the decision maker what we know about the benefits and costs associated with different courses of action, and how confident we can be in those conclusions. Doing a good job will require playing devil's advocate and trying to see where holes might be poked in the arguments of all of the papers that provide relevant evidence on the larger issue.
- *Quality of the memo writing.* All two-page memos should start off with a one paragraph summary that lays out your entire argument very briefly. The body of the memo should elaborate on those key points; the first sentence of each paragraph should summarize the argument of that paragraph. Condensing complicated policy analyses into two double-spaced pages is incredibly difficult, so you will also need to think very carefully about how to prioritize the arguments you make in your memo. I myself typically find it helpful to write a longer version of my paper first to lay out the basic argument, and then spend a considerable amount of time once the key ideas are on paper thinking about whether I have the basic argument and overall structure right, then go through and cut out the least essential points and condense presentation of those points that are most central.
- *Objectivity.* Your job (in these memos) is to help a decision maker get as realistic and honest an assessment as possible about the benefits and costs of different policy or programmatic decisions. I have heard repeatedly from people in policymaking positions (even those who have very strong ideological views themselves) that the most useful people on their staff are the ones who are able to be most dispassionate in assessing the arguments on all sides of the issue. It's fine for you to have strong political views that shape how you personally weight the consequences of different courses of action, but for purposes of writing these memos it is important to be able to assess the claims and counter-claims in as objective manner as possible. The policymakers will usually have little difficulty understanding the value tradeoffs associated with different courses of action, so your greatest value-added is to help them critically evaluate the different empirical claims about the costs and benefits of different policy options.

The remaining eight class meetings will each also be built around a memo writing assignment. Students are required to *select three of the remaining seven classes for which they write memos* (so every student will write **4 memos** over the course of the quarter, plus take the final exam).

Course grading:

Course grades will be calculated as follows:

- The first two memos will each count for 10 percent of the final course grade (week 2 plus the first one you choose to write for one of the other weeks)
- The last two memos will count for 20 percent each of the final course grade (a weighting system intended to reflect the fact that we expect everyone to get better at policy-memo writing over the course of the quarter and the thing we care most about is proficiency by the end of the quarter)

- The final paper at the end of the quarter that will count for 30 percent of the course grade.
- Constructive class participation will count for 10 percent of the course grade.

Main Texts:

Readings are all available either online or on the course Canvas site.

For those who haven't yet taken program evaluation and/or are looking for some additional reminders about some key program evaluation ideas, I would recommend as an optional reading:

Mastering 'Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect, by Joshua D. Angrist and Jorn-Steffen Pischke. 2014, Princeton University Press.

Syllabus:

Week 1: Introduction (October 4)

Betsy Powell, "Has mass incarceration failed?" *The Toronto Star*, July 23, 2008.
<http://www.thestar.com/SpecialSections/Crime/article/460767>

James Q. Wilson, "Do the time, lower the crime," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 2008.
<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-op-wilson30mar30,0,7917289.story>

Kessler, Daniel and Steven D. Levitt (1999) "Using sentence enhancements to distinguish between deterrence and incapacitation." *Journal of Law and Economics*. 42(1): 343

Cheryl Marie Webster, Anthony N. Doob, and Franklin E. Zimring (2006) "Proposition 8 and crime rates in California: The case of the disappearing deterrent." *Criminology and Public Policy*. 5(3): 417-448.

Steven D. Levitt (2006) "The case of the critics who missed the point: A reply to Webster et al." *Criminology and Public Policy*. 5(3): 449-460

(Optional reading: Mastering Metrics, chapters on randomized trials and regression)

Week 2: Juvenile justice (October 11)

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle has in the past raised the possibility of closing the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, which is where youth who are deemed to be public safety risks (or who do not have a home to go to after they are arrested) are held in detention while they wait for their cases to be adjudicated in juvenile court. Some people believe that this will be more humane and have no harmful effects on public safety, because they believe that the threat of punishment does not do much to deter criminal behavior by adolescents, and that incarceration actively harms youth and so creates additional criminal activity. Others have expressed concerns that this plan will further undermine the deterrent effect of the juvenile justice system on the criminal behavior of teenage offenders, both because of the possible ripple effects of closing the JTDC on the likelihood that youth are sent by judges to juvenile prisons after

adjudication, and because for many youth the time they spend at the JTDC is the only detention they will receive as a result of their arrest (relatively few juveniles adjudicated delinquent get sentenced to prison; most get probation or some other sanction). Prepare a memo for President Preckwinkle about what you think the most likely net effect would be on public safety if the JTDC were closed.

Erika Slife and Duaa Eldeib “New goal for juvenile center: clear it out” *Chicago Tribune*. December 9, 2011.

Steven Levitt (1998) “Juvenile crime and punishment,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 106(December): 1156-1185.

Lee, David S. and Justin McCrary (2005) “Crime, punishment, and myopia.” Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 11491. *Can just focus on the empirical results for this paper, no need to get bogged down in the conceptual model.*

Anna Aizer and Joseph J. Doyle, Jr. (2013) “Juvenile incarceration, human capital and future crime: Evidence from randomly-assigned judges.” Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 19102.

(Optional reading: Mastering ‘Metrics, chapter on regression discontinuity designs)

Week 3: Do we have too many or too few people in prison? (October 18)

Suppose that you are an advisor to California Governor Gavin Newsom, who is worried about both the financial costs and the larger human harms associated with the large number of people imprisoned in California – both also appreciates that crime is an important problem, particularly violent crime, which disproportionately victimizes people in disadvantaged communities of color throughout the state. A lawsuit in federal court filed several years ago requires the state to reduce its prison population from 150,000 to 100,000. Governor Newsom is wondering whether the state should abide by that decision or instead try to appeal it. What can the best available empirical evidence tell us about whether the public safety benefits to the people of California from the marginal 50,000 prisoners outweigh the marginal costs?

Steven D. Levitt (1996) “The effect of prison population size on crime rates: Evidence from prison overcrowding litigation.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 111(2): 319-351.

John J. Donohue, “Assessing the Relative Benefits of Incarceration: The Overall Change Over the Previous Decades and the Benefits on the Margin,” in Steven Raphael and Michael Stoll, eds., “*Do Prisons Make Us Safer? The Benefits and Costs of the Prison Boom*,” pp. 269-341 (2009).

Patricio Dominguez and Steven Raphael (2015) “The role of the cost-of-crime literature in bridging the gap between social science research and policymaking.” *Criminology & Public Policy*. 14(4): 589-632.

Andrew Garin, Dmitri K. Koustas, Carl McPherson, Samuel Norris, Matthew Pecenco, Evan K. Rose, Yotam Shem-Tov & Jeffrey Weaver (2024) “The Impact of Incarceration on Employment, Earnings, and Tax Filing.” Cambridge, MA: NBER working paper 32747.

(Optional reading: Mastering 'Metrics, chapters on differences in differences and instrumental variables)

Week 4: Policing (October 25)

In 1991, at the peak of the crack epidemic in the U.S., the homicide rates in New York City and Chicago were nearly identical (just over 30 murders per 100,000 city residents per year). Today New York's homicide rate is about one-third of ours (around 5 or 6 per 100,000, compared to a rate of 15 to 18 per 100,000 in Chicago). Much of the NYC drop is often attributed by criminologists to different sorts of policing strategies: some combination of data-driven management accountability (Compstat), the use of targeted anti-gun policing ("stop, question, and frisk"), broken windows policing, and hiring more police (the city's police force went from 30,000 to 40,000 over the course of the 1990s). At the same time there is also growing recognition of the harms that policing can impose on communities as well, in terms of not just the physical harms from police misconduct or use of force but also in terms of reduced legitimacy. Suppose that you are an aide to the Chicago mayor, who is considering which (if any) of the policing innovations adopted by New York City over the past 20-30 years should be adopted here in Chicago. Please write a memo outlining your best assessment of the effects of different NYC policing innovations on crime, as well as the likely consequences of each of these innovations on the local jail population as well.

Aaron Chalfin, Benjamin Hansen, Emily K. Weisburst and Morgan C. Williams Jr. (2022) "Police force size and civilian race." *American Economic Review: Insights*. 4(2): 139-158.

James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, "Broken Windows." *The Atlantic*.
http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/_atlantic_monthly-broken_windows.pdf

George Kelling and William Sousa (2001) "*Do police matter? An analysis of the impact of New York City's police reforms.*" Manhattan Institute Civic Report Number 22

Lawrence W. Sherman, James W. Shaw and Dennis P. Rogan (1995) "*The Kansas City Gun Experiment.*" Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice.

Week 5: Community corrections and re-entry (November 1)

The average prison spell in the U.S. is on the order of two to three years, which means that almost everyone who spends time in prison in America winds up re-entering society at some point. Recidivism rates tend to be quite high, which has generated growing policy concern about identifying ways to improve the re-entry experience for ex-offenders to reduce their risk of recidivism and increase the likelihood they can become economically self sufficient and lead healthy, productive lives. This policy issue is particularly important here in Chicago, as over half of all people leaving prison in the state of Illinois each year return to a Chicago neighborhood. Illinois Governor JB Pritzker is receiving a great deal of pressure from advocacy organizations to spend more on helping ex-offenders improve their labor market outcomes (with many people believing transitional jobs to be the most promising approach there). Other advocates point to high rates of substance abuse among ex-offenders and suggest people exiting prison will struggle to re-integrate into the labor market, or society more generally, without first addressing issues with substance use, and so

argue for prioritizing state funding for things like the Hawaii HOPE model. Please write a memo for Governor Pritzker outlining what we know (or don't know) about which of these approaches seems to represent the most cost-effective way to reduce recidivism rates.

Angela Hawken and Mark Kleiman (2009) "Managing drug involved probationers with swift and certain sanctions: Evaluating Hawaii's HOPE." Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/229023.pdf>

Cook, Philip J. (2016) "Behavioral science critique of HOPE." *Criminology & Public Policy*. 15(4): 1155-61.

Kleiman, Mark A.R. (2016) "Swift-Certain-Fair: What do we know now, and what do we need to know?" *Criminology and Public Policy*. 15(4): 1185-1193.

Francis T. Cullen, Travis C. Pratt and Jillian J. Turanovic (2016) "It's Hopeless: Beyond Zero-Tolerance Supervision." *Criminology & Public Policy*. 15(4): 1215-1227.

Cindy Redcross, Megan Millenky, Timothy Rudd and Valerie Levshin (2012) "More than a Job: Final Results from the Evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) Transitional Jobs Program." MDRC final report to the Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation, US Department of Health and Human Services, OPRE Report 2011-18.

Jacobs, Erin (2012) *Returning to Work After Prison: Final Results from the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.
http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_626.pdf

Week 6: Root causes (November 8)

Every time there is an increase in the crime rate, particularly the juvenile crime rate, public discussion focuses on how today's teenagers are "worse" than yesterday's. These usual concerns become compounded when we have demographic bulges like the Echo Boomers (the unusually large birth cohorts born in the 1980s into the 1990s who are the children of the Baby Boomers). Suppose Mayor Lightfoot is aware of these demographic realities and has expressed some concern about the problem. Please come to class prepared to discuss the evidence for and against this hypothesis of "cohort effects" as an explanation for the increase in crime rates in America during the late 1980s, and the potential for both changes in cohort criminality and cohort size to cause crime rates to increase in Chicago in upcoming years. Every mayor of Chicago is also always under a great deal of political pressure to figure out ways to steer funding towards religious organizations in the city that have a great deal of political power. So please also include in your memo a discussion of what we know about the potential benefits, costs, and implementation challenges of policies designed to address the "root causes" of crime, specifically increased government support for religious institutions (as suggested by DiIulio's *The Weekly Standard* essay) and efforts to reduce youth violence.

DiIulio, John J. (1995) "The Coming of the Super-Predators." *The Weekly Standard*. November 27. pp. 23-28. <http://www.mscm.org/predator.html>

Cook, Philip J. and John H. Laub (1998) “The Unprecedented Epidemic in Youth Violence.” In *Youth Violence*. Edited by Michael Tonry and Mark H. Moore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 27-64. www.jstor.org

Colin J. Baier and Bradley R.E. Wright (2001) “ ‘If you love me, keep my commandments: A meta-analysis of the effect of religion on crime.’” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*. 38(1).

Paul Heaton (2006) “Does religion really reduce crime?” *The Journal of Law and Economics*. 49(1).

Week 7: Social policy as crime prevention (November 15)

Disparities in measured rates of aggression between children growing up in poor versus non-poor households have been measured at ages as young as 18 months, and are predictive of later rates of criminal involvement during adolescence and early adulthood. This has led to a great deal of interest in increasing investments in early childhood education as a way to reduce crime rates over the long term. As gun violence rates rise across the US in 2021, there have been growing calls for US Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra to expand federal support for investments in early childhood education. Please write a memo outlining the relative benefits of investing in three different candidate early childhood programs: Head Start; more intensive early childhood education programs like Carolina Abecedarian; or, under the theory that any early childhood program might already be too late, nurse home visits.

Garces, Eliana, Duncan Thomas and Janet Currie (2002) “Longer-Term Effects of Head Start.” *American Economic Review*. 92(4): 999-1012.

Deming, David (2009) “Early childhood intervention and life-cycle skill development: Evidence from Head Start.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*. 1(3): 111-34.

Campbell, Frances A., Craig T. Ramey, Elizabeth Pungello, Joseph Sparling, Shari Miller-Johnson (2002) “Early childhood education: Young adult outcomes from the Abecedarian project.” *Applied Developmental Science*. 6(1): 42-57.

David Olds, Charles R. Henderson, Robert Cole, et al. (1998) “Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on children’s criminal and anti-social behavior: 15-year follow-up of a randomized controlled trial.” *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 280 (14): 1238-1244.

Week 8: Gun control (November 22)

In June 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the city of Chicago’s handgun ban by a 5-4 decision (*McDonald vs. Chicago*), after striking down Washington DC’s handgun ban two years earlier (*District of Columbia v. Heller*). Suppose that we are five years into the future and the composition of the Supreme Court has changed, so that the fifth (swing) vote on the court is now someone who is politically neutral, whose vote on a given issue is hard to predict just on the basis of the political party of the president who appointed her. The city of Chicago is considering whether to try to get the Supreme Court to overturn the McDonald decision. Please prepare a memo for the city’s corporation counsel about whether a repeal of the

ban on the ban (that is, the ability to legally re-instate the ban) would substantially improve public safety in Chicago.

Loftin, Colin, David McDowall, Brian Wiersema, and Talbert Cottey (1991) "Effects of restrictive licensing of handguns on homicide and suicide in the District of Columbia." *New England Journal of Medicine*. 325: 1625.

Chester Britt, Gary Kleck and David J. Bordua (1996) "A Reassessment of the D.C. Gun Law: Some Cautionary Notes on the Use of Interrupted Time Series Designs for Policy Impact Assessment." *Law & Society Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 361-380. www.jstor.org

David McDowall, Colin Loftin and Brian Wiersema (1996) "Using quasi-experiments to evaluate firearm laws: Comment on Britt et al.'s reassessment of the DC gun law." *Law and Society Review*, vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 381-392. www.jstor.org

Philip J. Cook, Jens Ludwig, Sudhir A. Venkatesh and Anthony A. Braga (2007) "Underground gun markets." *Economic Journal*. 117: F558-588.

November 29 – No class (Thanksgiving break)

Week 9: Race in the criminal justice system (December 6)

The current US Supreme Court is scheduled to hear cases bearing on the future of affirmative action in higher education (such as the Harvard admissions case). It is not hard to imagine future cases revisiting the question of policy efforts to increase diversity in other areas of American life as well, including the criminal justice system. Suppose the court does eventually hear a case bearing on affirmative action in one area of the criminal justice system that has been of particularly high priority in recent public discussions: efforts to diversify big-city police departments. Please write a short memo outlining for the court what the current evidence can tell us about the effects of affirmative action policies in policing to reduce the prevalence of the most serious forms of police misconduct and use of force.

Justin McCrary (2007) "The effect of court-ordered hiring quotas on the composition and quality of police." *American Economic Review*. 97(1): 318-353.

Joshua Correll, Bernadette Park, Charles M. Judd, Bernd Wittenbrink, Melody S. Sadler and Tracie Keese (2007) "Across the thin blue line: Police officers and racial bias in the decision to shoot." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 92(6): 1006-1023.

Fryer, Roland G. (2019) "An empirical analysis of racial differences in police use of force." *Journal of Political Economy*. 127(3).

Mark Hoekstra and Carly Will Sloan (2022) "Does race matter for police use of force? Evidence from 911 calls." *American Economic Review*. 112(3): 827-60.