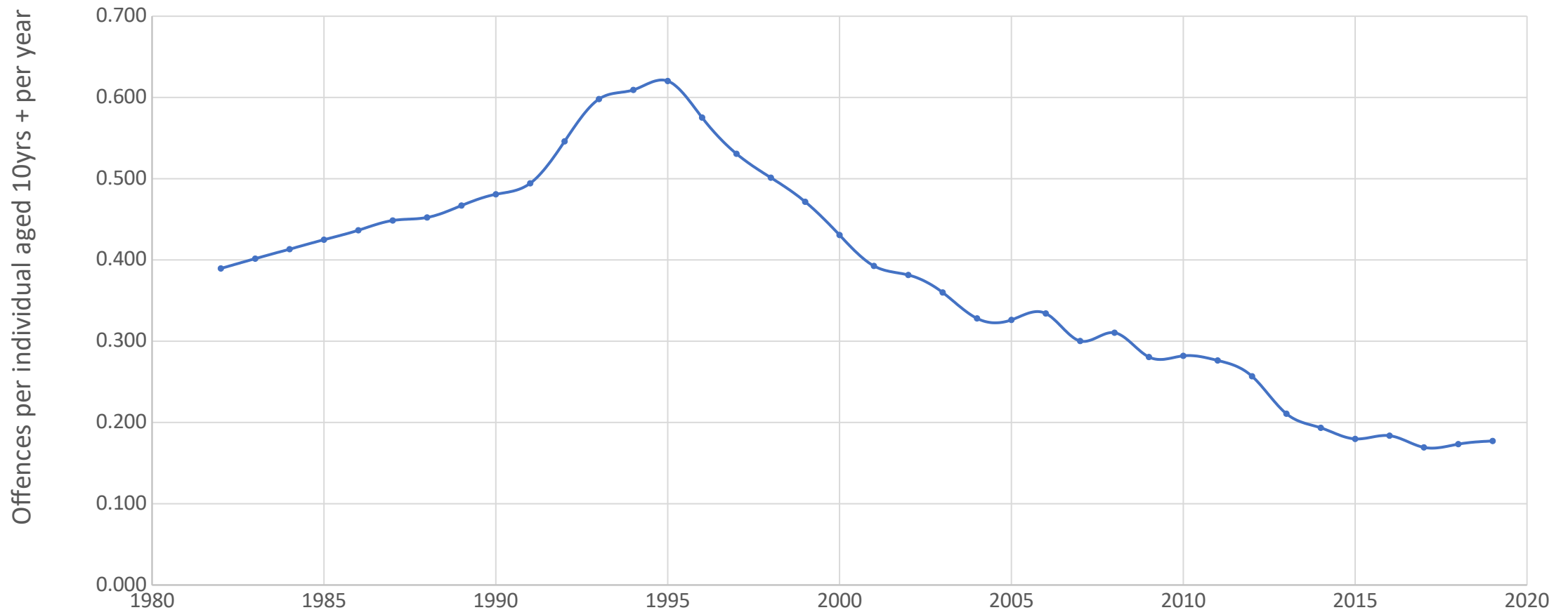


**“Breaking the law” – What factors could explain the increase in crime in the UK in the 1980s and early 1990s and its decline post 1995?**

**Gwyn Griffith**  
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# WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO EXPLAIN/UNDERSTAND?

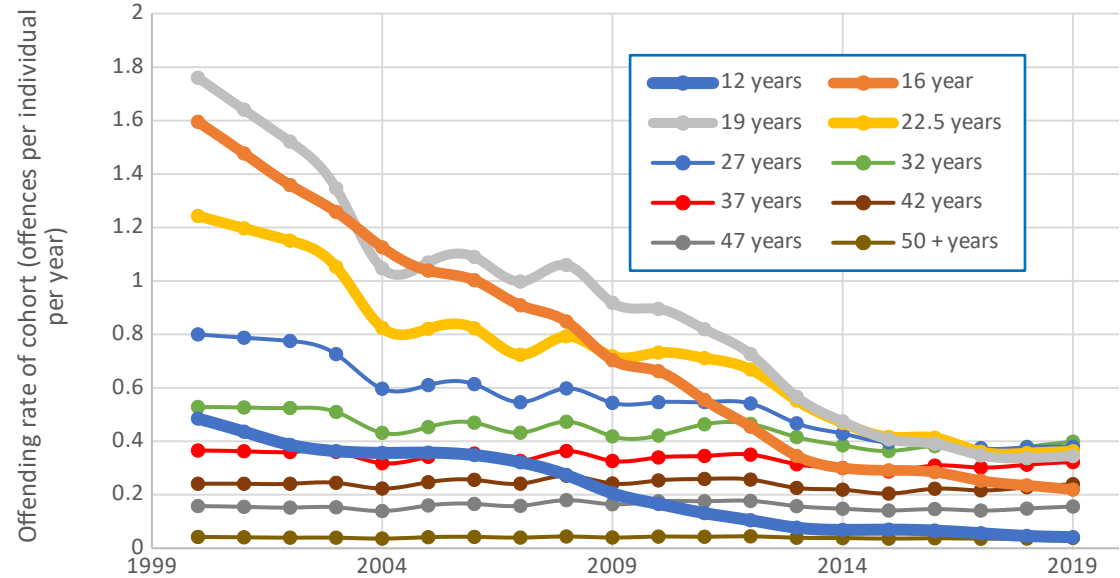
Trends in prevalence of offending in England and Wales 1982 to 2019 (based on CJS, CSEW and ONS statistics).



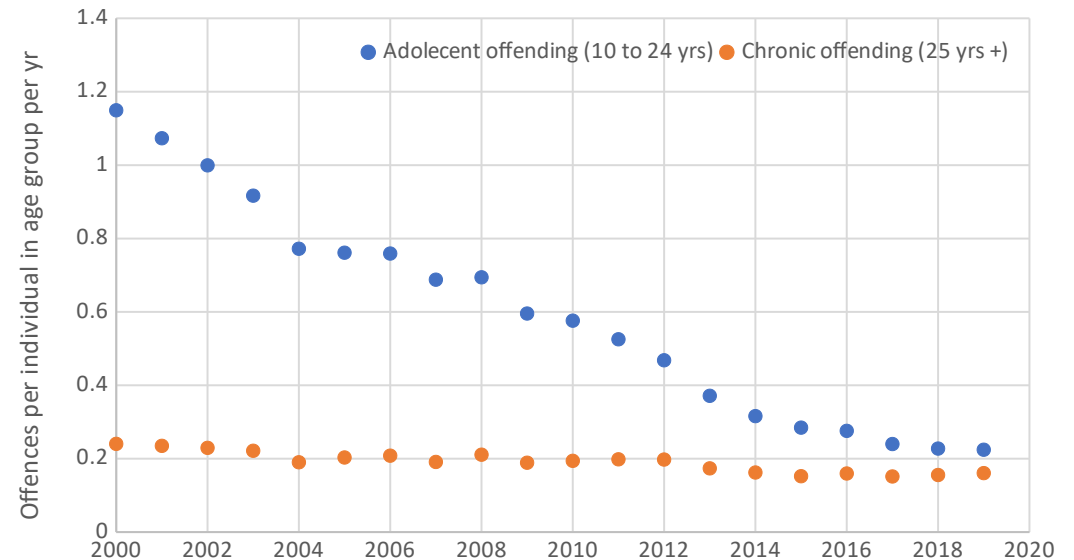
- The post 1995 reduction in the prevalence of offending in England and Wales mainly due to a reduction in offending by adolescents (aged 10 to 24 yrs).
- The prevalence of offending by adults (25 yrs +) has remained more or less constant.
- Two distinctive types of offending – “Adolescent limited” and “Life Time Persistent or Chronic” (re: Moffitt’s dual taxonomy).

Moffitt T. (1993). Adolescence-limited and life-course persistent anti-social behaviour: a developmental taxonomy. *Psychological Bulletin*, 100: 674-701.

Trends in the offending rate of cohorts of different mean ages (2000 to 2019)



Change in the prevalence of offending, 2000 to 2020



# Longitudinal study – Ceredigion YOT/Aberystwyth University: 204 children (aged 10 to 17 years) who committed at least 1 proven offence between 2014 and 2018. (Gwenann Jones, 2023)

## Adolescent limited offenders – 184 individuals (90%)

- Committed less than 4 proven offences and none post 18 yrs.
- On average 1 proven offence per individual.
- No violent offenders.
  
- Mean onset age 15 years
- 75% male
- 15% high vulnerability
- On average 11 out of 50 risk factors

## Potential chronic offenders – 20 individuals (10%)

- Committed 4 or more proven offences including at least one post 18yrs.
- On average 24 proven offences per individual.
- 7 violent offenders (3 or more violent offences on separate occasions)
- Mean onset age 13 years
- 95% male
- 55% high vulnerability
- On average 23 out of 50 risk factors

Poor emotional control/impulsiveness

Poor consequential thinking skills

Poor Empathy

Attachment disorders

## FACTORS THAT MIGHT INFLUENCE CRIME RATES

Measurable, state level, availability of accurate time series for 1980 to 2020, a range that covers both criminal justice system related and socio-economic conditions which have been shown to be criminogenic under at least some circumstances.

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### CRIMINAL JUSTICE FACTORS:

Number of police officers (including PCSOs and SCs) per head of the population aged 10yrs+.

Number of offences proven per police officer.

Punitiveness of the CJS (seriousness, duration and intensity of criminal sanctions). Proxy measure - % of offenders subject to immediate custody by courts.

Prevalence of offending behaviour (actual number of offences per head of the population aged 10yrs+).

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### ECONOMIC FACTORS:

Mean net household income (equivalised and adjusted for inflation).

Absolute poverty (net equivalised household income below 60% of 2010/11 median).

Income inequality (GINI coefficient).

Unemployment level (% of individuals aged 16yrs+, seasonally adjusted).

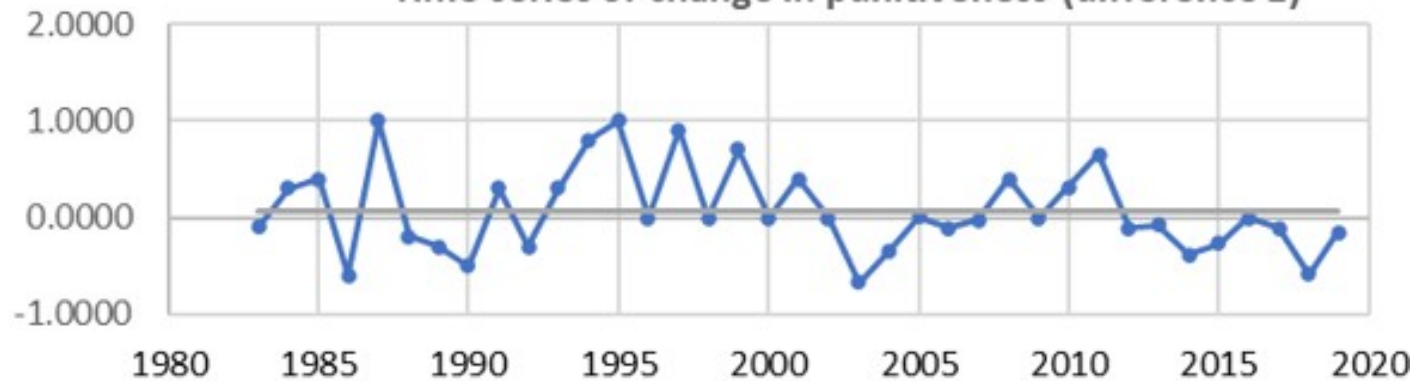
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## Independent variable: Punitiveness

Punitiveness (% of all offenders sentenced to immediate custody).



Time series of change in punitiveness (difference 1)



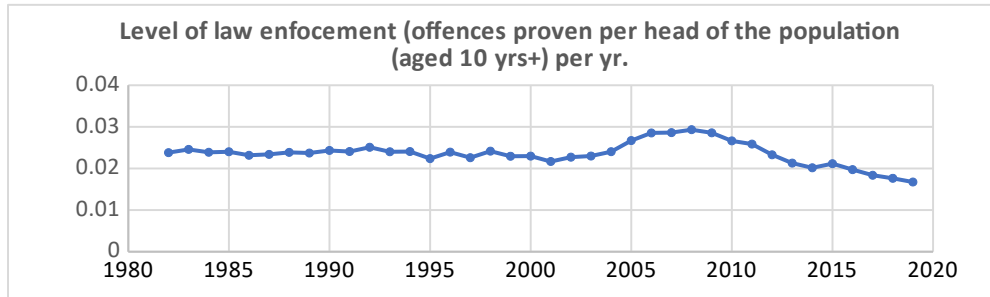
## HOW DO WE IDENTIFY POTENTIALLY CAUSATIVE FACTORS?

### TIME SERIES ANALYSIS

- Compare each potentially causative factor (independent variable) with the offending rate variable (dependent variable).
- Remove temporal trends (temporal correlations between variables) to produce approximately stationary time series. By differencing (and if necessary, transformation).
- Perform a Cross-correlation analysis (taking into account autocorrelations).
- Look for statistically significant correlations between changes in the causative factor that precede or are simultaneous with changes in the offending rate (causes always precede effects).
- Check that the observed potentially causative factor is not correlated with other potential causative factors.
- Establish if there is a plausible mechanism that can explain how the factor changes the offending rate.

# Factors that were not potentially causative with respect to offending rate in the UK over last 40 yrs.

## Law enforcement and overall levels of policing



Number of offences proven per police officer has remained more or less constant for last 40yrs as has the total number of proven offences.



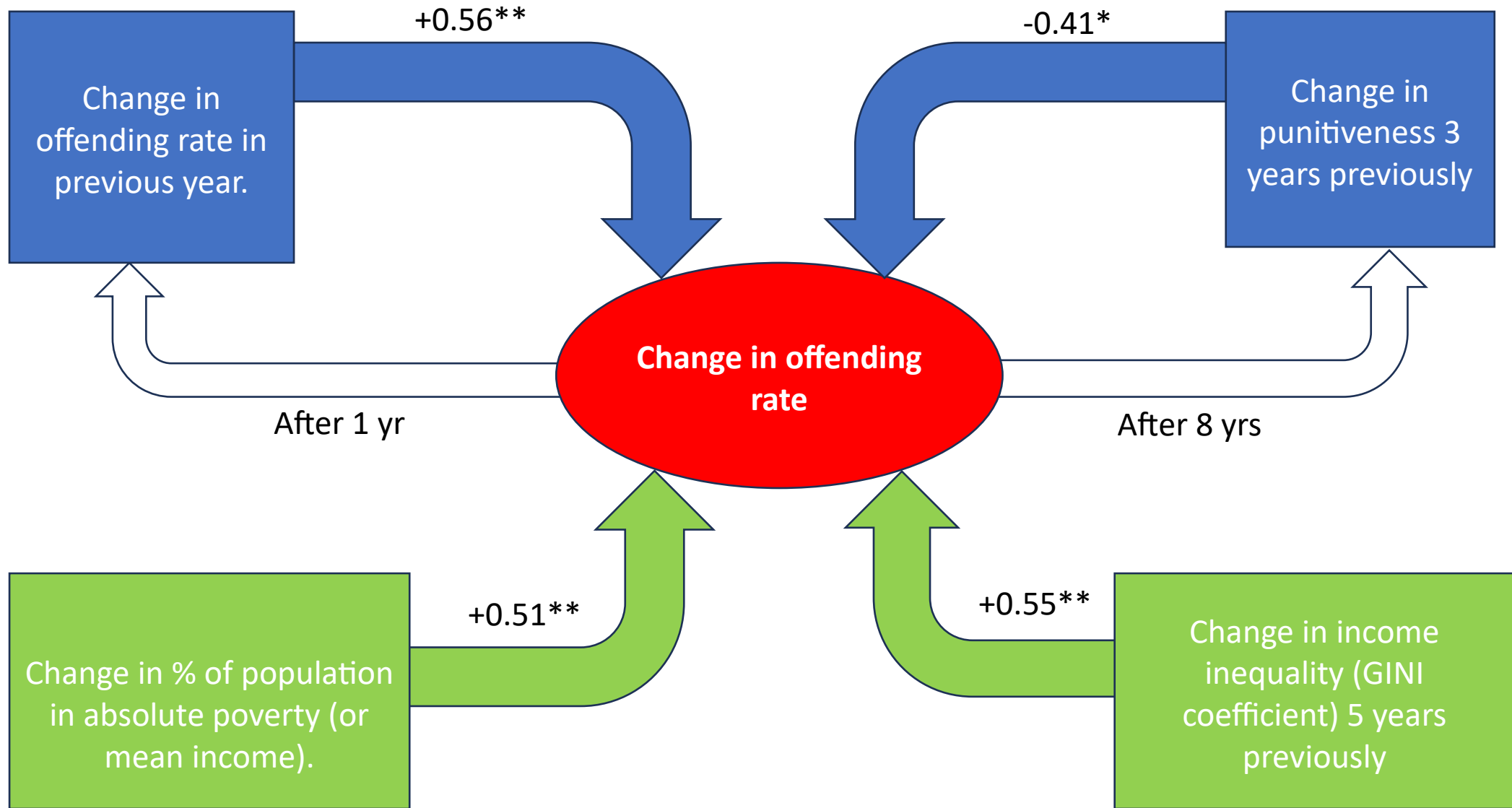
So, the observed changes in the offending rate in the UK cannot be a result of changes in police numbers or the efficiency of law enforcement.

## Levels of unemployment

We found changes in the level of unemployment had no effect on offending rates.

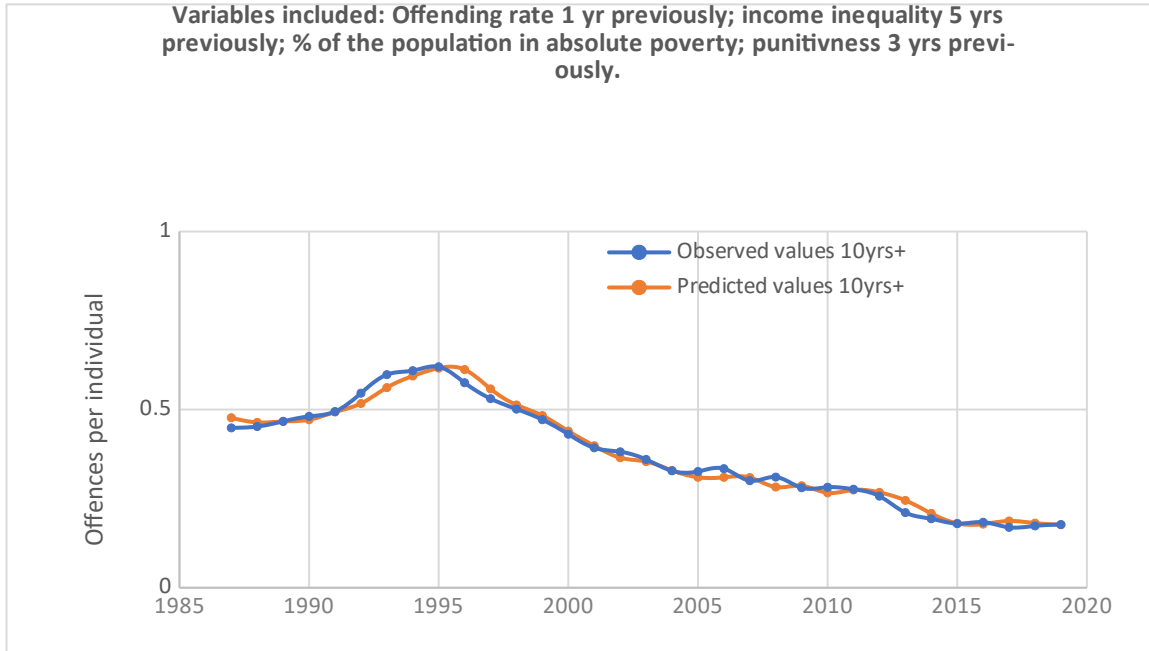
# POPULATION AGED 10YRS+

Simple linear regression model - around 60% of variation in change in offending rate. Factors not correlated with each other.



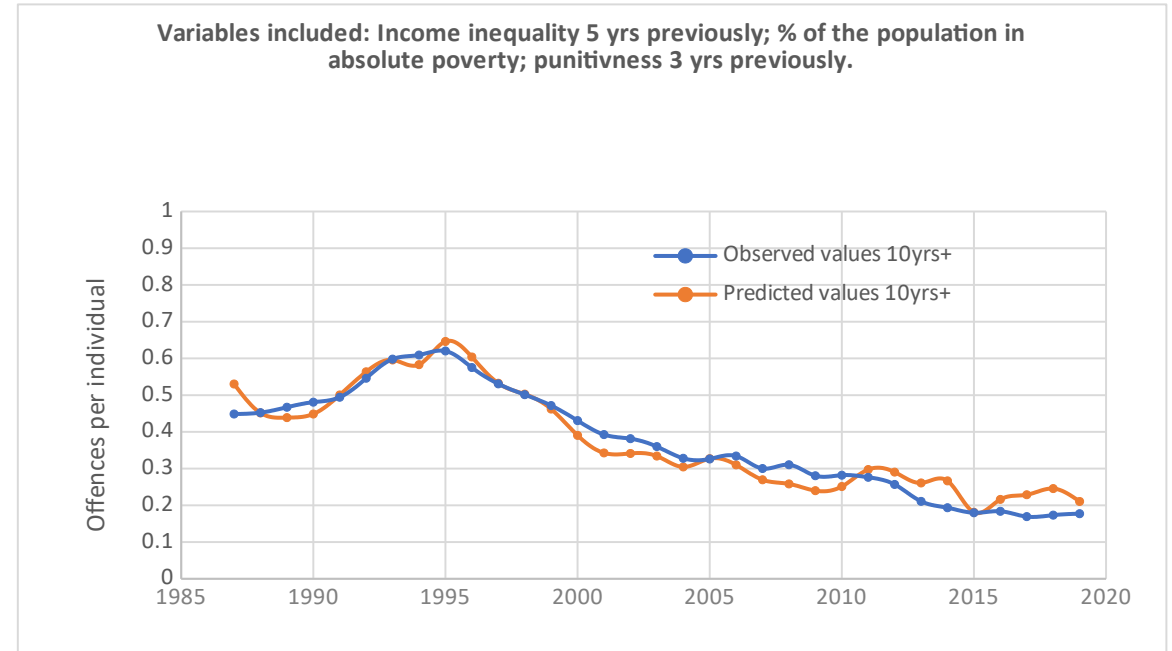


## Predicting offending rate of individuals aged 10yrs+ from identified potentially causative variables (linear regression model)



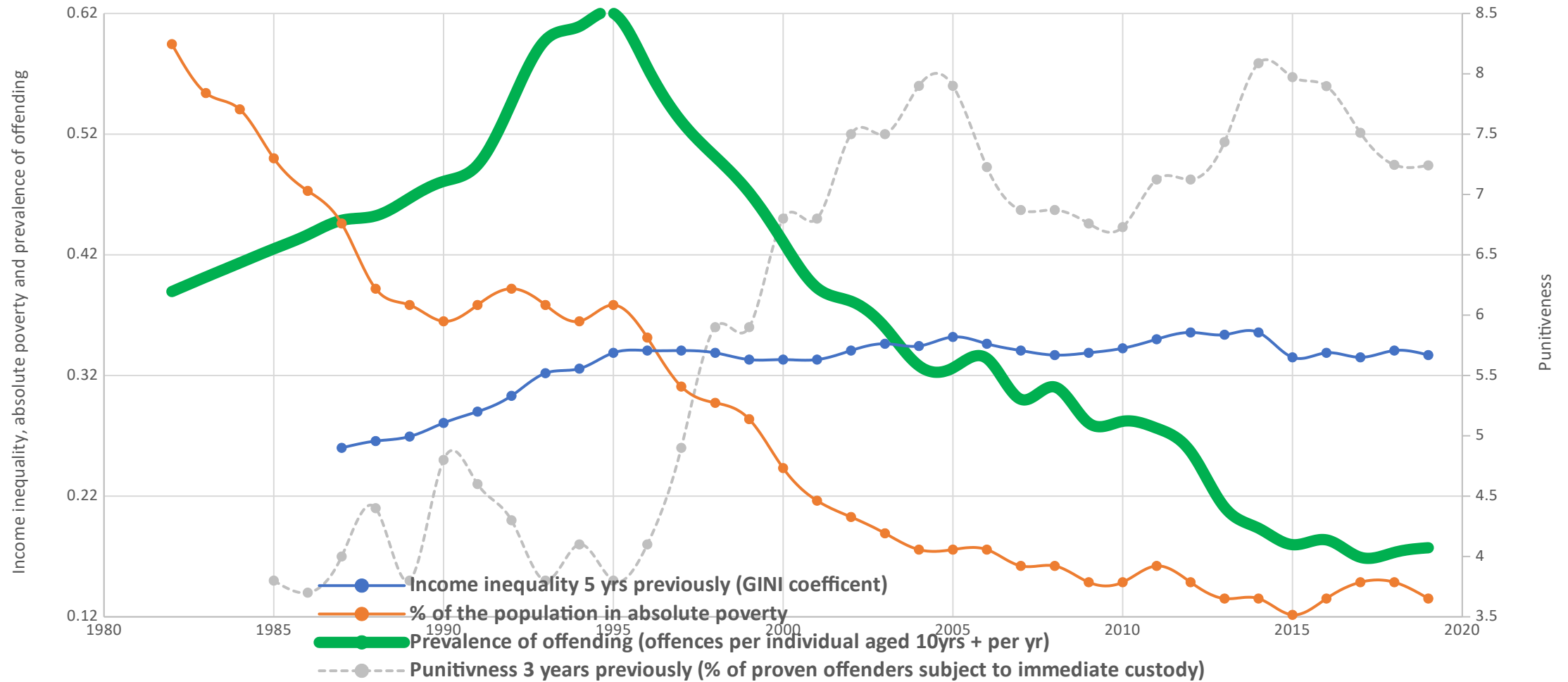
Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.982$  (98% of variation in offending rate accounted for).

**The prevalence of offending in the previous yr serves to reinforce and perpetuate existing trends.**



Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.923$  (92% of variation in offending rate accounted for).

## 1980 to 1995 - Increase in prevalence of offending driven by delayed effect of increasing income inequality (interacting with level of absolute poverty/mean income).



## Predicted effects of Income inequality (Strain Theory; Social Disorganisation Theory; Subculture theory)

- Increases in income inequality result in a gradual build-up of feelings of frustration and unfairness especially amongst **adolescents** in disadvantaged and or discriminated against sectors of the population. Some people's ability to achieve expected goals by legitimate means becomes blocked generating "strain" and "anomie". Disadvantaged individuals become disengaged from mainstream society. Alternative anti-establishment subcultures expand. Eventually the pent-up anger and frustration spills onto the streets and crime (especially violent crime re cognitive specificity) increases.
- The impact of income Inequality may be off-set by increasing levels of mean income and reducing levels of poverty.

The 80's and early 90's were a period when there were major civil disturbances in the UK and a proliferation of alternative cultures

1981 1<sup>st</sup> Brixton riot (82 arrests),  
1981 Toxteth Riots (500 arrests, BBC News, 2021),  
1985 2<sup>nd</sup> Brixton riot (200 arrests; BBC News, 1985),  
1985 Battle of the Beanfield (537 arrests; Thompson, 2005),  
1985/86 civil disturbances associated with the miners' strike  
1990 Poll tax riot (339 arrests; Burns, 1990).

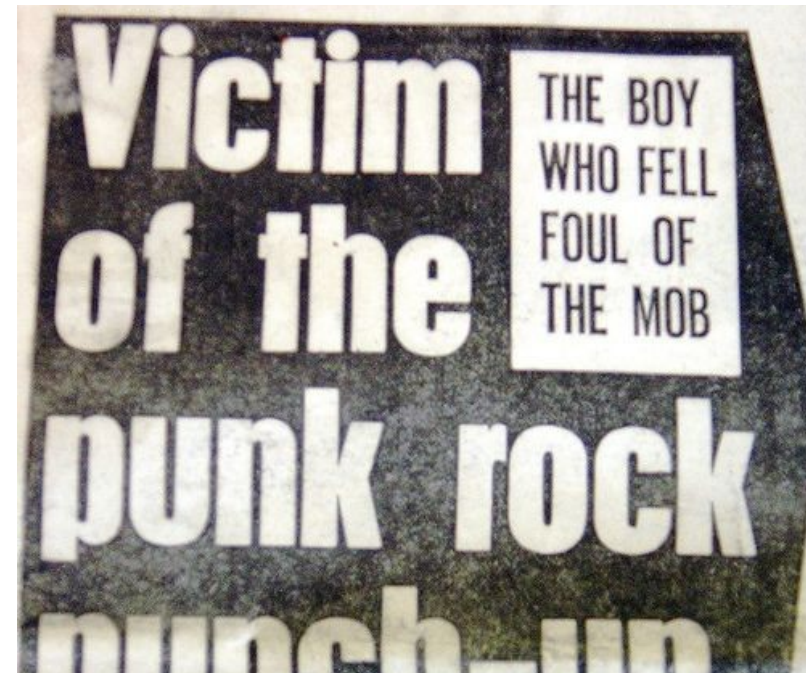
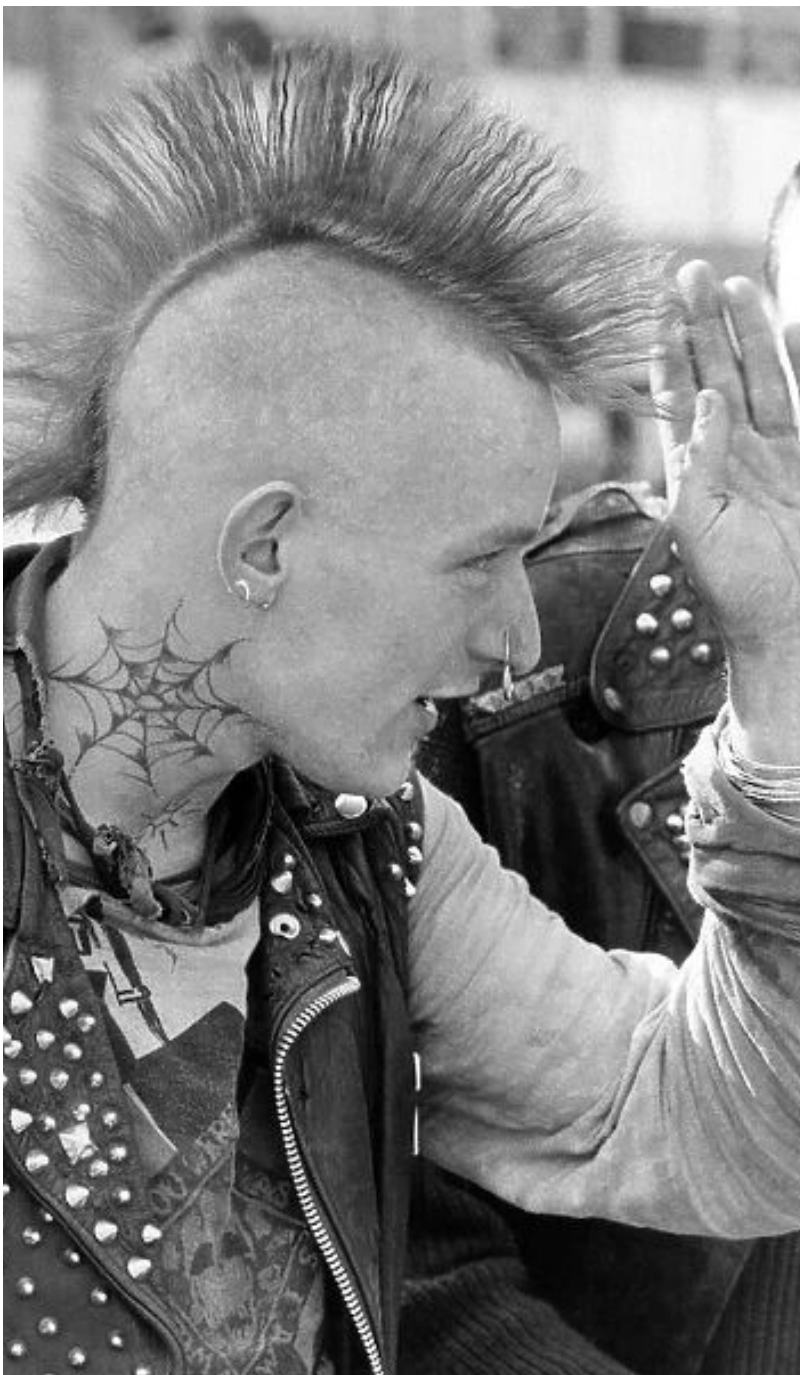
Shaw, C. and McKay, H. (1942). *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[The stark relationship between income inequality and crime \(economist.com\)](https://www.economist.com/2021/05/14/the-stark-relationship-between-income-inequality-and-crime)

Merton, R. 1938. Social Structure and Anomie. *American Sociological Review* 3, 672–682.

Cohen, A. & Short, J (1958). Research in Delinquent Subcultures. *Journal of Social Issues* 14, 20–37.

De Courson, B., Nettle, D. (2021). Why do inequality and deprivation produce high crime and low trust?. *Sci Rep* 11, 1937.



# STREET TERROR AS SKINHEADS GO TO WAR



**PENSIONERS** leaving a whist drive on Friday night were terrified by skinheads rampaging through their Aveley old folk's complex.

It was the second night running that the youths had invaded The Sunnyside complex, in Dawn Avenue, and on both occasions the police were called. Warden at the complex Mrs Josephine Cohen said the gang was chasing two young boys on Thursday night who hid in the grounds of the complex. "They were absolutely

...and the police are making the cause of one of the boys...  
 ...The...  
 ...They have...  
 ...the possibility of a...  
 ...The...  
 ...During Friday's...  
 ...He, the...  
 ...One...  
 ...Bricks...  
 ...Youth...



## BEASTS!

### Boot gang savages a victim

A SUNNY Easter holiday exploded into violence yesterday at seaside resorts.

The invaders wore different labels — skinheads, punks, rockers, mods—but their aim was the same: Aggro.

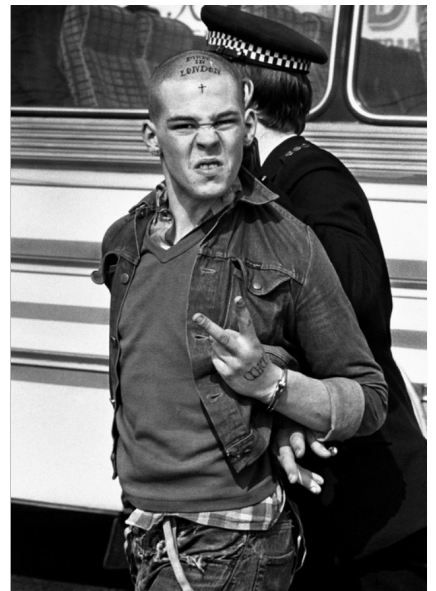
They left their mark all over Britain, from Scarborough to Brighton and Weston-super-Mare.

Police dogs rounded them up in a race against sunset, as one brawler got it made there were hundreds of arrests and remarkably few serious injuries.

But the family holiday-makers it was a terrifying experience.

**COMING IN**

This is the story of the riot... London's...  
 ...The...  
 ...In...  
 ...In...  
 ...GOING OUT



# SOCIAL COMMENTRY?



Breaking the Law - 1980

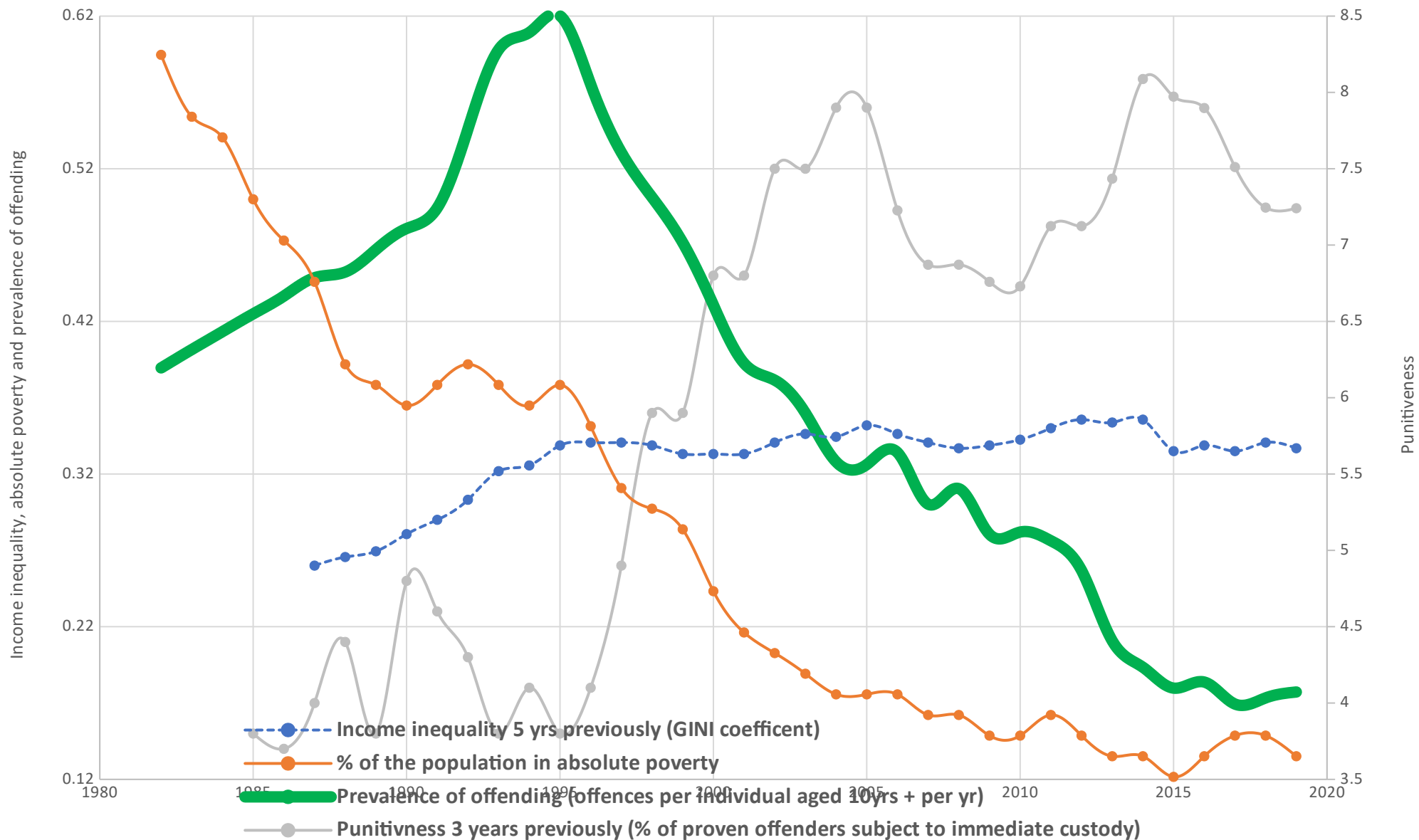
There I was completely wasting, out of work and down.  
All inside it's so frustrating as I drift from town to town.  
Feel as though nobody cares if I live or die.  
So I might as well begin to put some action in my life.

Breaking the law, breaking the law.  
Breaking the law, breaking the law.  
Breaking the law, breaking the law.  
Breaking the law, breaking the law.

So much for the golden future, I can't even start.  
I've had every promise broken, there's anger in my heart.  
You don't know what it's like, you don't have a clue.  
If you did you'd find yourselves doing the same thing too.

Breaking the law, breaking the law.  
Breaking the law, breaking the law.  
Breaking the law, breaking the law.  
Breaking the law, breaking the law.

## 1995 to 2020 - Decrease in prevalence of offending driven by reducing absolute poverty levels and increase in punitivness from 1995 to 2005.



## Predicted effects of increased punitiveness (Rational Choice Theory, Deterrence Theory)

- If punitiveness increases the consequences of being caught become more serious. This acts as a deterrent and leads to reduced offending.
- Incapacitation can be ruled out as a mechanism as this effect should be immediate not delayed 3 years.
- Increased punitiveness leads to increased intensity and duration of offender contact with criminal justice agencies such as probation/YOTs.

Increasing punitiveness - delayed response to increasing public concerns (amplified by moral panics and political rhetoric). The delay being a result of the time to draft, enact and implement new legislation.

## THE PUNITIVE TURN IN THE UK (1995-2005) – “Condemn a little more and understand less” J.Major 1993; “Prison works” M.Howard 1993; “Tough on crime”

- 1993 Criminal Justice Act – Tougher sentences made available; offender history to be taken into account when sentencing (not just the offence).
- 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act – Secure Training Order for **12 to 13yrs** for 3 imprisonable offences; Length of custodial sentences for **15 to 17yr** olds doubled. New laws relating to public gatherings.
- 1994 Home Office Circular – ends repeated cautioning.
- 1997 Crime (Sentencers) Act – Name and shame, extended use of curfew and Tagging.
- 1998 Crime and Disorder Act – YOTs rather than welfare services to supervise **children** that have offended, Doli incapax for children **under 14** abolished. One-time Reprimands and Final Warnings replace cautions for **children**; ASBOs introduced (breach of ASBOs an imprisonable offence).
- 2003 Criminal Justice Act – Indeterminate custodial sentences for **children** and adults.

Abramovaite, J., Bandyopadhyay, S., Bhattacharya, S., & Cowen, N. (2023). Classical deterrence theory revisited: An empirical analysis of Police Force Areas in England and Wales. *European Journal of Criminology*, 20(5), 1663-1680.

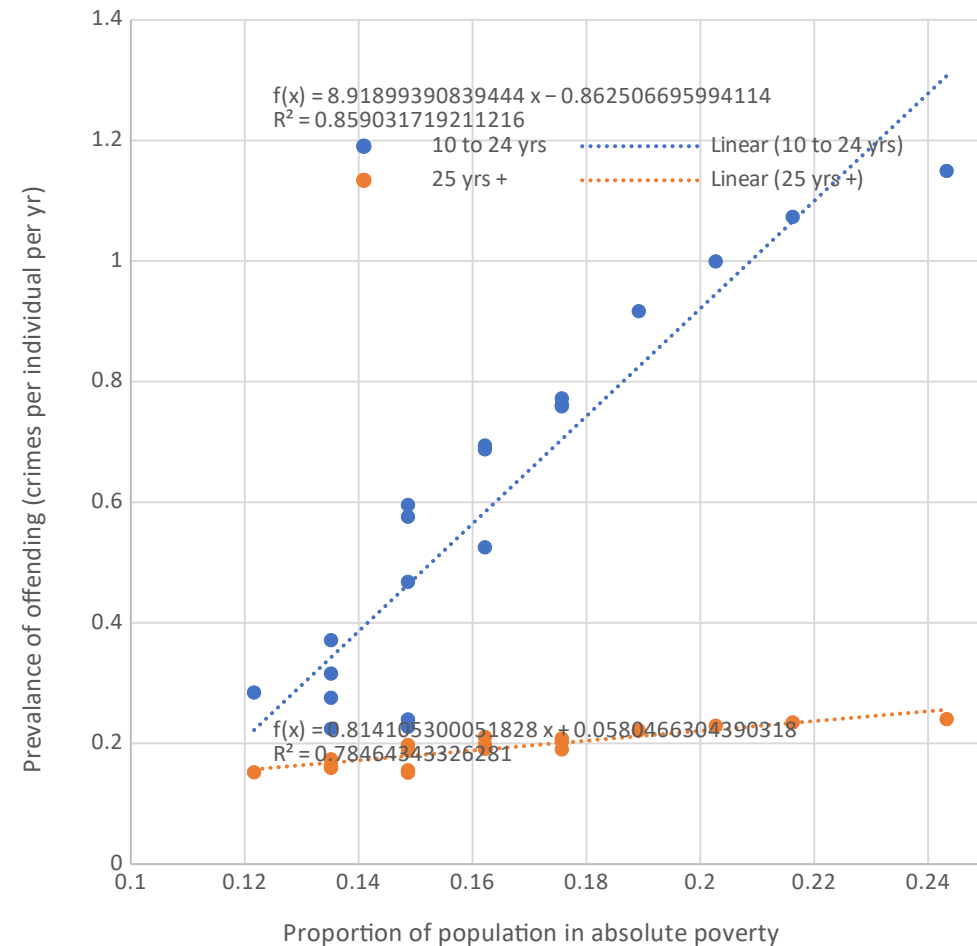
Cornish, Derek B., and Ronald V. Clarke, eds. 1986. *The reasoning criminal: Rational choice perspectives on offending*. New York: Springer-Verlag.



## Predicted effects of Mean income and absolute poverty levels (Rational choice theory; Economic theory of crime)

- Absolute poverty is closely correlated with mean income levels (inverse correlation).
- If absolute poverty levels increase the benefits of committing crime (especially property crime) will increase for some individuals.
- The primary impact of absolute poverty is on adolescents not adults.

Raj, P. and Rahman, M. M. (2023) 'Revisiting the economic theory of crime A state-level analysis in India', *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1).  
 Becker, G. (1968). Crime and punishment. *Journal of Political Economy*, 76(2), 169–217.



# CONCLUSIONS

Changes in the prevalence of offending in England and Wales over last 40 yrs mainly due to impact of socio-economic factors and state intervention on the behaviour of adolescents (10 to 24 yrs).

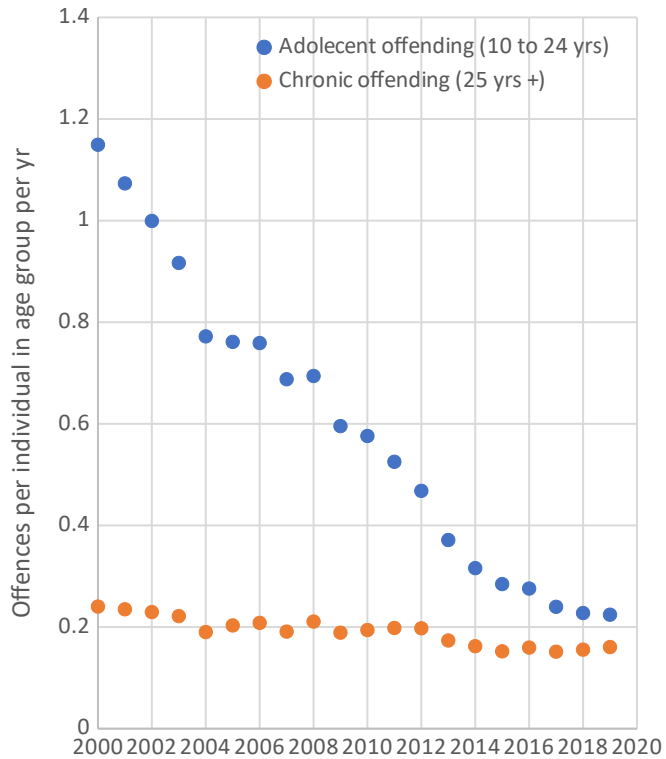
The prevalence of offending by adults (25 yrs +) has remained more or less constant for the last 40 yrs. Neither state intervention nor socio-economic factors appear to have had any impact on the prevalence of offending by this group.

Everything changes. Existing Risk assessment tools (e.g. OASys, ASSETplus) and evaluations of intervention effectiveness do not discriminate between the different offender groups. Yet current CJS caseloads are dominated by chronic offenders.

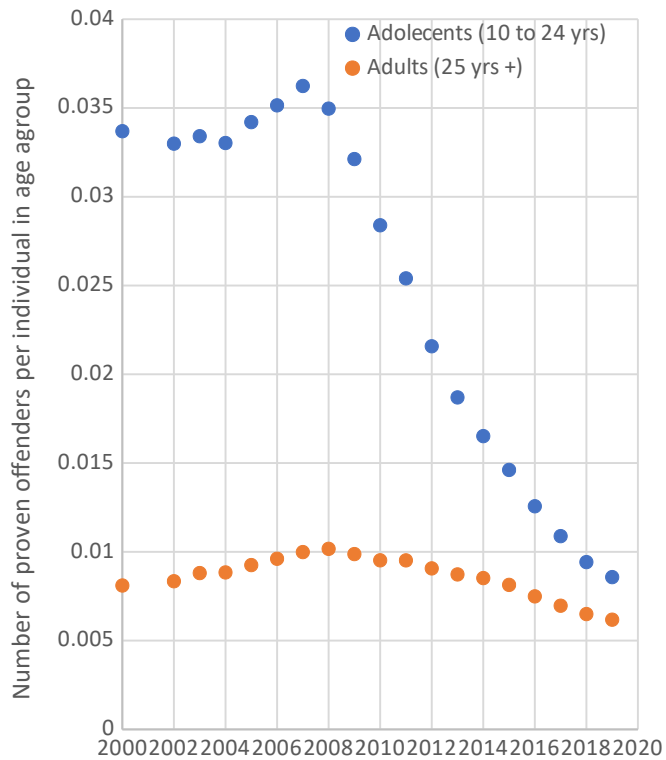
Current modelling predicts an increase in adolescent limited offending (property offences) in response to the increasing levels of absolute poverty. If income inequality is also increasing an increase in violent offending is to be expected.

ADDITIONAL SLIDES

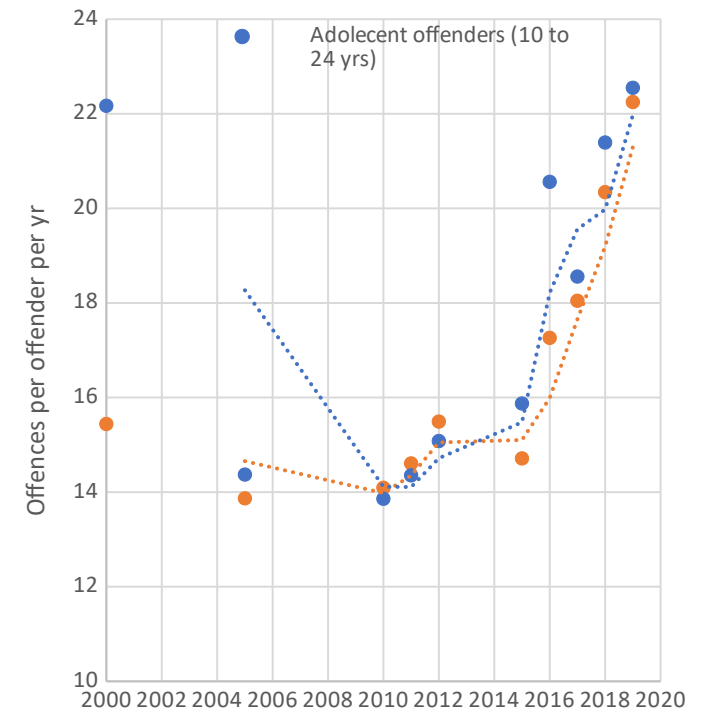
Change in the prevalence of offending, 2000 to 2020

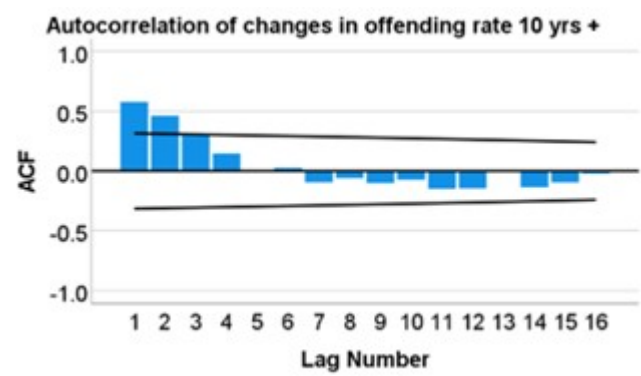
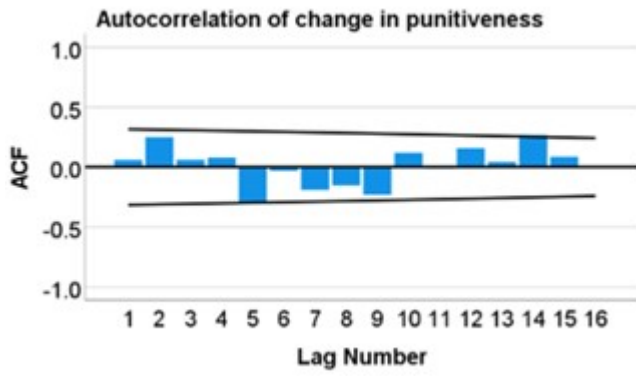
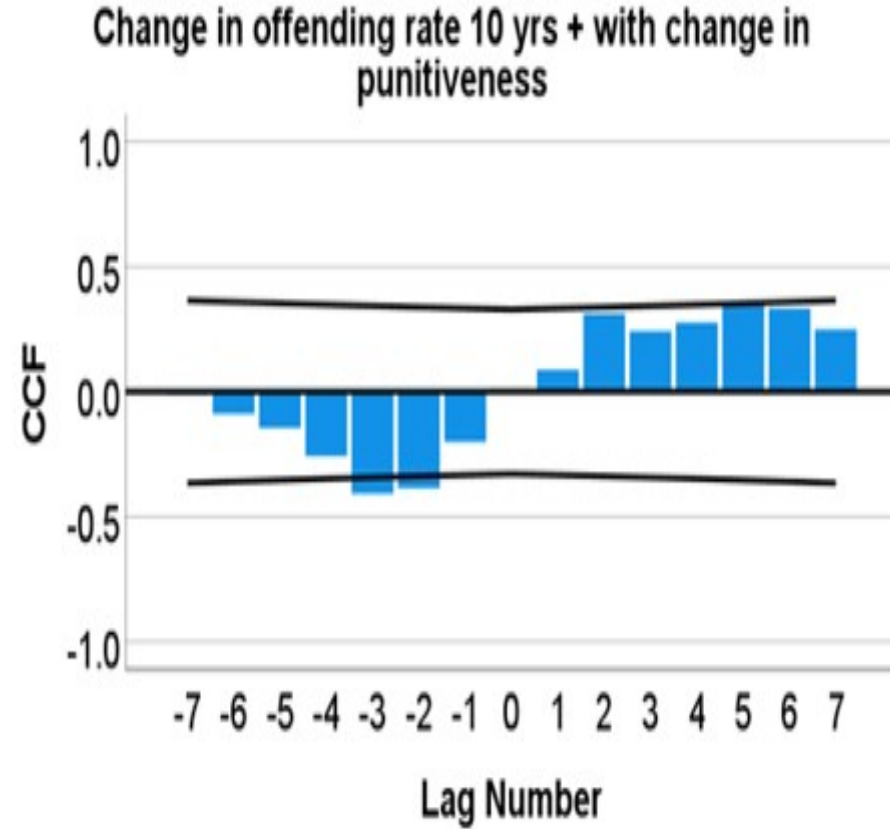
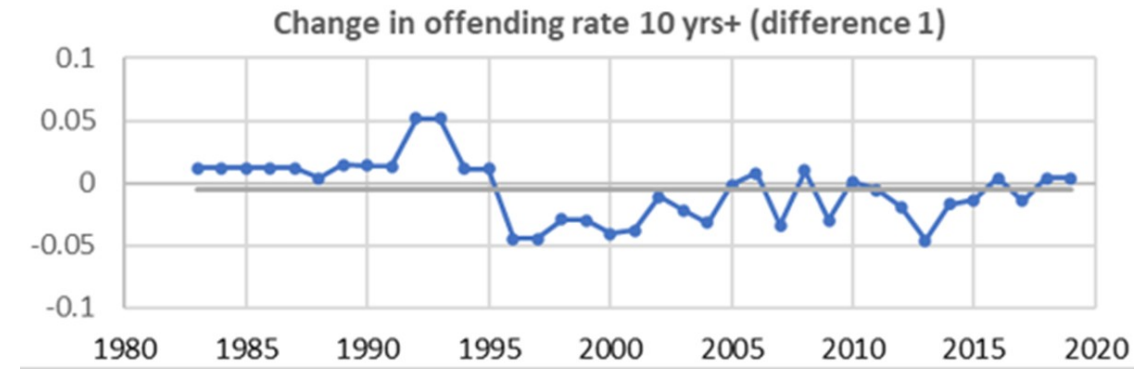
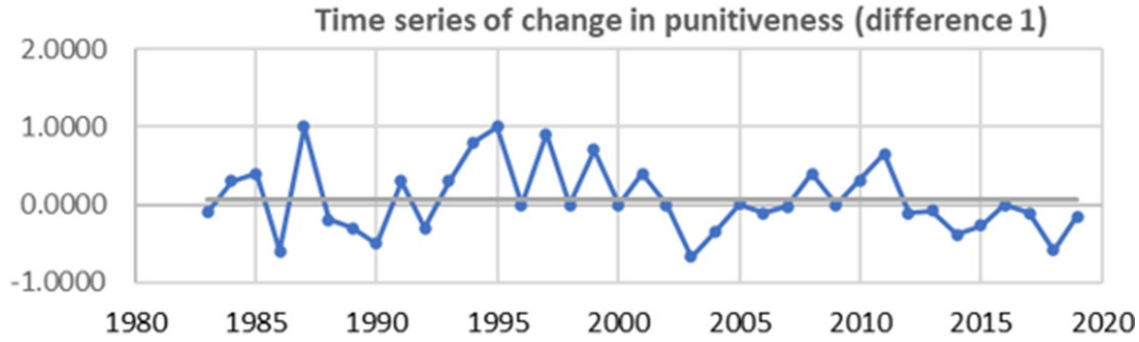


Change in the prevalence of offenders, 2000 to 2020



Change in the frequency of offending by offenders, 2000 to 2020





Change in punitiveness not autocorrelated or correlated with changes in other independent factors

## Offending Rate t-1: Effects predicted by Social Learning Theory, Differential Association Theory, RCT

- If the offending rate increases the probability of individuals being exposed to “models” engaging in offending behaviour increases. More individuals are therefore likely to “learn” and engage in offending behaviour. **SLT/DA**
- Because the number of proven offences remains constant an increase in offending behaviour will result in a decrease in the probability of offences being proven. Therefore, the risks associated with committing an offence will decrease and more individuals will offend. **RCT/DT**
- These mechanisms would act to reinforce and perpetuate any existing trends, but they would not bring about a change in trend.

Bandura, A., Ross, D., & Ross, S. A. (1961). Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63(3), 575–582.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Matsueda, R. L. (1988). The Current State of Differential Association Theory. *Crime & Delinquency*, 34(3), 277-306.