The Economics of Crime

John J. Donohue III
Stanford University & NBER

Jens Ludwig
University of Chicago & NBER

Overview

This course will provide an overview of core issues and recent advances in the economics of crime. The class will cover standard law and economics topics related to the criminal justice system, including incarceration, policing, the deterrent effect of the death penalty, gun policy, drug policy, and racial bias within the criminal justice system. The class will also consider the role that social factors play in affecting crime and violence, such as abortion policies, social programs and other social conditions such as education, poverty, family structure and even environmental factors (such as lead exposure). Lectures will also emphasize methodological advances in the economic study of crime, including issues related to identification, meta-analysis, randomized controlled trials, accounting for multiple comparisons for statistical inference, synthetic controls, behavioral economics and crime, and machine learning.

Instructors

John J. Donohue III is the C. Wendell and Edith M. Carlsmith Professor of Law at the Stanford Law School. He is one of the leading empirical researchers on the economics of crime over the past 25 years, whose work includes studies of the death penalty, drug policy, gun control, and the effects of abortion legalization on crime. He is the former editor of the American Law and Economics Review, president of the American Law and Economics Association and an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He earned his PhD in economics at Yale and his JD from Harvard Law School.

Jens Ludwig is the McCormick Foundation Professor of Social Service Administration, Law and Public Policy at the University of Chicago and co-director of the National Bureau of Economic Research’s working group on the economics of crime. He is also director of the University of Chicago Crime Lab, which partners with cities to carry out randomized trials to learn more about how to prevent crime and violence, and directs the new crime initiative launched by JPAL at MIT. He is an elected member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences and received his PhD in economics at Duke.
Syllabus and (partial) reading list

Lecture 1: Imprisonment (Donohue & Ludwig)

1. More prison, less crime? (Donohue)


2. Estimating costs and benefits of crime prevention (Ludwig)


3. Do we have too many or too few people in prison? (Donohue)

Lecture 2: Policing (Donohue & Ludwig)

1. More police, less crime? (Ludwig)

http://eml.berkeley.edu/~jmccrary/chalfin_mccrary2013.pdf


2. Policing strategies (Ludwig)


3. Studies of racial bias in policing (Donohue)


Lecture 3: Death penalty (Donohue)


**Lecture 4: Gun policy** (Donohue & Ludwig)

1. More guns, less crime? (Ludwig)


2. Gun control (Ludwig)


3. Right to carry (Donohue)


**Lecture 5: Drug policy** (Donohue)


Lecture 6: Social conditions and crime (Donohue & Ludwig)

1. Poverty and crime (Ludwig)


2. Abortion and crime (Donohue)


3. Lead and crime (Donohue)


4. Education and crime (Ludwig)


**Lecture 7: Behavioral economics and crime** (Ludwig)


**Lecture 8: Machine learning and crime** (Ludwig)


